

# ARTIFEX

This issue showcases some of the winners of SCC's Fall 2011 Writing Contest, in the categories of poetry, fiction, and research papers. Enjoy their talents.

Meaning: Latin, a master of an art, professional human, artist, artificer (used of a sculptor, musician, actor, etc.); a maker, builder, author, contriver

Santiago Canyon College

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## Scout 1<sup>st</sup> Place, Poetry

Your eyes tell me stories.  
I can see right through them.  
that green-gray glass  
you only discover  
while hunting for treasures  
in the sand.  
I've found it.  
I stare inside,  
plucking up memories.  
I absorb each one  
like a greedy child.  
I suppose  
I just don't know any  
better  
than to breathe you in  
like the breeze.

By Tiffany Hosac

## Acquainted with the Day 3<sup>rd</sup> Place, Poetry

I have been one acquainted with the day  
and have longed for the night.  
I have been kicked out into the rain  
and have been denied shelter.  
I have walked towards the clean part of the city  
and was turned back before I reached the farthest light.  
  
I have looked down the saddest lane  
that's where my people are forced to huddle for shelter.  
I have tried to pass the watchman  
whose beat is to keep us away from the filtered part  
of the city.  
My eyes drop as I try to pass  
but I'm always stopped and forced to explain.  
  
I have heard the cries from my people  
who do the jobs you refuse to do.  
They Work in your houses and yards.  
They pick your food in the hard fields.  
You keep them separated, so you can't hear their cries  
form their distant dirty streets.

By Phillip Lisa

## POETRY WINNERS

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Tiffany Hosac | 1 |
| Suzanne       | 2 |
| Munganga      |   |
| Phillip Lisa  | 3 |

## FICTION WINNERS

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Jacob Norr   | 1 |
| Dani Mymond  | 2 |
| Phillip Lisa | 3 |

## RESEARCH PAPER WINNERS

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Amanda Luna | 1 |
| Suzanne     | 2 |
| Munganga    |   |
| Jaimee Dunn | 3 |

## Do Not Befriend the Ones 2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Poetry

do not befriend the ones  
who can't get out  
who eat too little  
and drink too much.

do not befriend the ones  
who make love to their beds  
who seek solace in books  
and friendships in fiction.

do not befriend the ones  
who say *I'm fine*  
who sit in silence  
and cover their eyes.

do not befriend the ones  
who who and  
who who and  
who who and

unless you are one  
who is  
who was  
who has  
And lived.

By Suzanne Munganga

### Winners Receive:

- First Place: \$100
- Second Place: \$50
- Third Place: \$25

## Electric Odyssey by Jacob Norr (1<sup>st</sup> Place)

The soles of my shoes beat against the sidewalk. Not for the first time, I cursed myself for being late. Some things waited for no man, and buses were one of them— especially if you got one of those bitch drivers who seemed to take everything out on their passengers. I careened around the corner, coming to a halt at the redbrick bench, bent over my knees and panting. “Needn’t’ve rushed.”

I looked up. There, sitting like some apparition from times long past, was an old man who looked for all the world like an old-timey prospector. His red plaid shirt was tucked into a pair of ragged over-alls, which were themselves tucked into a pair of black, scuffed boots. He had a lean face, hollowed cheeks barely discernable through a scraggly, yellowing beard. I frowned, and turned away to peer down the street. It was dark enough that I would be able to see the lights of the bus from a good distance.

“That’s the problem with your generation. Always at a rush. Then you get here and find the dagnab bus’s late.”

I might have noticed then how distinctive his voice was, like expensive wine poured over sandpaper, but I was too busy marveling that there were still people who said “dagnab” running around. He stood up from the bench and walked over to the curb. I noticed how the soles of his boots were loose and slapping the ground with each step he took.

“Lookit the world, boy. You’ll break your neck straining for the bus like that.”

I took out my mp3 player. My tolerance for lectures had evaporated in high school when my professors took to ranting about my long hair, and I wasn’t going to find it again half a decade later. I plugged myself in, and the world disappeared in a hush of sound.

Prospector Pete rolled his eyes, an expression that clashed horribly with his face. He walked down a ways and rustled through his pockets, eventually

taking out a dollar bill. I watched him from the corner of my eye, more than slightly put off.

He bent over the curbside, peering down into the gutter. All I could see was dirty water, leaves and dust doing a slow ballet beneath the yellow streetlight. He took the dollar and started folding it. I turned back to my sullen vigil.

A laugh interrupted me, and I turned to look at my companion again. He had folded the dollar bill into a little boat, which was lazily making its way down the gutter and towards me. He caught me looking, and flashed a toothy grin my way. I frowned again, and turned away. If he was offended, he didn’t show it. Part of me wondered when I’d had a stick surgically implanted up my ass, but it was a small part and I ignored it. I could socialize with old men when I was abandoned in leisure world by children who naturally had enough of my complaining about their hover-cars and subcranial rock and roll music.

“Just as well. Bus is here.”

I started. Sure enough, the ten-ton machine had snuck up on me. I held back as it pulled up, so he could get on first. I had some manners, after all, even if they were few and far between. I might ignore a stranger, but bus etiquette was my bible. So, of course, he shambled on and stopped to talk to the bus driver, blocking my way. I shook my head in irritation and sidled up next to the entryway.

Now that I looked around, though, it really was an uncommonly beautiful night. The last bit of sunlight fell with an artist’s touch, making the sculpted clouds light up like islands beyond an infinite sea of darkest blues. I looked down at the dollar-boat, which was bumping against a mountain of black rubber wheel. The Prospector was occupied, so I quickly bent down and snatched it from its dance, placing the whole soggy mess in my breast pocket.

We boarded quickly after that, the prospector sitting at the front where he could talk to the driver. I chose a seat near the rear-exit, with an excellent view of the street. The last time I took this route I closed my eyes and ended up five stops down.

With the interior lights off, the streetlights outside turned the windows into mirrors. I could see my face, sallow and unshaven superimposed over the world flying by on the other side. I reached up and adjusted my glasses so they wouldn’t look so crooked. The bus hit a pothole and the shift in light glared on both panes, my lenses and the windows, making me double-blind. I slouched down in my seat.

The bus turned on Main and the lights moved again, dancing on shadowy feet. A girl sitting behind me was reflected in the glass. She was putting on make-up. I wondered if it was out of boredom or if she had been rushing as much as I had. She was making her cheeks bright pink, a mask to force life back into her body.

The lights changed again and the reflection became clearer on her chest, so I took a moment to ogle her breasts. They rose and fell with every breath she took. The Prospector got off and walked out into the night. I thought of Virgil.

Virgil and I had been friends ever since I made fun of his stupid sounding name in third grade and he beat the crap out of me. He was the manliest man I knew, the Hercules to my Narcissus, hairy as a bear and as likely to kick a man’s ass as he was to kiss him. A preacher’s son once called him a fag, but in high school I found them making out in my room. He liked to describe things as full of “piss and vinegar”, though I suspected it was because his Grandfather used to say it about him and he wanted to keep the memory alive. I wondered what my own Grandparents would think of my making plans to take a gay man out for a night on the town, but then remembered I was probably going to hell for stealing my roommate’s pumpkin pie earlier anyways. They were both equally relevant to the grand scheme of the cosmos.

*“...how distinctive his voice was, like expensive wine poured over sandpaper...”*

Virgil was working on his motorcycle when I finally arrived. He'd been doing that a lot lately, ever since breaking it off with his last boyfriend. They had been dating for quite some time.

"Virgil."

He looked up, his grin spreading faster than the heat of a warm drink after a morning of playing in the snow.

"James. I was just about to head inside and clean up. How was your trip over?"

It seemed ungracious to mention how I'd hurried only to find him unready, so I merely shrugged and made a grunting sound before reaching for some of his scattered tools. Fortunately, I was not known to be the most emotive of men, and the small part of me that protested my needless haste was covered without suspicion. Tonight was about him, anyway. We made quick work of the mess, and I shooed him inside to wash off, waddling in after.

"So, where are we headed?"

Virgil had his back to me, hulked over his kitchen sink. I noticed how small the faucet handles looked in his meaty hands. "If it's quite alright with you, I made a list of some places we could go."

"Not the Tool Box?"

His frown fought the natural expression of his face. "If you want to visit your ex tonight, please, let me know."

The Tool Box was our local gay bar. To be honest, I was always slightly uncomfortable going there. The girls weren't interested in me, and I was pretty enough that I was offered a drink at least once a night. Even polite rejection was awkward, especially when they demanded to know why I was leading them on by coming there. That was not something I would miss though it was always hilarious when the bartenders dressed in shirtless construction worker costumes on Friday nights.

I glanced down at the list. "A strip club?"

Virgil smirked. "It has something for the both of us, don't worry. There's a room with men dancers, and you'll be able to pay a girl to listen to you talk for once."

"Hyuck hyuck hyuck. I'm in stitches," I deadpanned, "I don't recognize any of the other names on the list."

He peered down, over my shoulder. "They're small and out of the way. I figured we could shop around a bit, get a feel for the crowds, maybe go to a different place every Friday until we find one that works. I'm not expecting to pick our new bar in one night." He slapped my back, "Besides, some of us want to do more than look up old high school girlfriends on Facebook and laugh at their baby daddies all night."

I sighed as I folded the list and placed it in my breast pocket. Part of the reason I went to the Tool Box for so long was because I already knew half of the people there, and had someone to talk to while Virgil was off consorting with some hot young thing.

"Alright, but we're skipping Saddle Tramps. I don't particularly feel like letting you lead me amongst the damned tonight."

He sighed, but didn't argue the fact as we headed out the door. "One of these days you're going to learn that Hell has by far the more interesting company." The thing about riding bitch on a motorcycle is that you don't have much room for conversation. Anything able to cut through the haze-noise of the engine is immediately whisked off by the wind before even the speaker can really comprehend it. Virgil said he might put a microphone in our helmets eventually, but I really hoped I would have my own car by that point. Bumming rides from friends was not a good way to get company home for deep conversation. Still, the roar was so pervasive that it turned into a sort of background hush, and I was alone with my thoughts.

Virgil turned us onto a shortcut through the more industrial part of town. The asphalt was pimpled by potholes and cracks, and parts of the sidewalk were more weeds than concrete, half-dead pioneers struggling beneath towers of barbwire-riddled chain link fences. I remembered, back in college, there was a rumor going around about a

*"The thing about riding bitch on a motorcycle is that you don't have much room for conversation."*

student and streets like these.

Because it was, you know, exactly the kind of place you wanted to be walking home alone at night. Sure enough, about halfway home, he heard screaming on the evening breeze. In an alleyway ahead of him, three men were surrounding a downed woman. One of them was rifling through her purse.

The student stepped out into the streetlight. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

The three of them turned towards him, faces hidden in shadow. One of them, a bald man with hungry eyes stepped out into the white light and cracked his knuckles. "None of your fucking business. Fuck off." The biggest of them picked up a bat that was leaning against the alley wall.

"Get the hell away from that woman." They all stepped towards him now, but his stare remained focused on the bald one. His eyes were the most dangerous. The woman was curled into a ball on the ground.

The student was no fool. He knew when he was outmatched in a straight-up fight. This was not one of those times. How could it be? Matches were called fair if the cheating wasn't caught.

"Fine. I know when to keep my nose to the ground."

He turned and walked half a step, before swerving around and yelling at the top of his lungs. Startled, they and all took a step back, and he wasted no time in jumping at them before they could recover. Baldy went down first in a hail of blows. The student pulled no punches, he was afraid of what the bastard would do if he stood back up when the violence was done. The student's knuckles tore open, specking them both with blood.

He saw movement from out of the corner of his eye, and ducked. Death flew over his head and the bat missed him and impacted the third man coming up on the other side. The student didn't hesitate, promptly turning and kicking the bastard in the balls. Both thugs collapsed in a heap.

The bald man was passed out, and bleeding from his nose. It dripped down and mixed where the student's own blood had flecked his face. The student looked down at his own hands, which were covered in both.

Once, when I was the wise-old age of thirteen, Virgil and I made a pact, cutting our palms so we could be blood brothers. The student's shirt was stained with the stuff, a splotch dead center on his chest.

The woman had recovered and was busy calling the police, and the student was relieved. As bad as she looked, it seemed like the damage was superficial. She would make a full recovery.

Why yes sir, I do suppose you could call him a hero, thanks and goodnight. Of course, according to others, none of that actually happened. When the student followed the screaming, he found a woman in an alleyway with a large bald man looming over her. He was beating her with a baseball bat. The student threw himself against the ally wall so he wouldn't be seen, coating himself with its grime. The devil raised the bat over his head like a champion-knight, and in the yellow streetlight, the student could see it had been signed by some forgotten player; the signature gleaming beneath a coat of red.

The student scrambled out of the ally and out of danger, running down the street as quickly as he could. He fumbled for his phone as the stars stared down at him. He couldn't get the woman's eyes out of his head.

By the time the cops got to her, the bald man was long gone. The student caught a glimpse of her as he was being interviewed by the police. The paramedic was telling her that she would be fine, but the look in her eyes made the words falter. It was the no-look of a corpse and, even as she turned away, they knew she wouldn't make it. The sirens called after them as they sped off into the night.

I apologize. I'm not sure why I continue to lie.

The Electric Odyssey was a hell of a club. The bass thudded with every heartbeat, and each light held a god. We were let in by a large, scowling bouncer with an eyepatch.

The bar was raised from the huge dance floor, a writhing sea of people punctuated by, of all things, a pool of water. Fish swam around shifting multicolored balls of light, which were suspended in the water and throwing eldritch patterns on the ceiling and people.

We made our way to the bar, where I forced Virgil to let me buy the drinks. I knew quite well how heartbreak drained the wallet, and told him that he should save it so he wasn't out of cash when he saw a hot piece of ass on the dance floor. His was straight bourbon while I preferred far less raping of the taste-buds. Though really, appletinis were straight alcohol too. The bartender, a dripping wet, bearded man in a toga, seemed to ask something but I couldn't hear him over the music, so I just made vague gestures in a way I hoped indicated a girlfriend.

Virgil was trying to yell something over the music, but I got his point when he pointed at a hairy man who was giving him the eye from across the bar. I nodded and smiled, holding up my fruity drink in salute, telling him to have a gay old time. He flipped me off and wagged his eyebrows in a way that said "not all of us are looking for a woman who'll make love in the ruins of a pillow fort" and sauntered away, content in his victory. As he made off, I leaned against the terrace railing and looked down at the writhing dance floor below, sipping my drink in what I hoped was a dignified manner. After all, I was in the middle of my campaign to be known as James Dignified. Yeah, that was a stupid joke

My arm was jostled, and my drink went flying in an ever so dignified manner and got all over my shirt, soaking my breast pocket. Incensed, I turned and glared at an unabashedly smirking girl.

"You knocked my drink!" My words were lost in the thumping bass, an electronic heartbeat that consumed everything. Her grin widened, and she slunk off into the crowd. I turned back to the rail to brood in an extraordinarily mature and dignified manner.

Virgil looked like he was hitting it off with his friend. His arm movements and smiles were full of the ol' piss and vinegar. The music changed to something I could actually hear human voices over.

"I didn't knock your drink, you know." I turned again. The girl was back. She had another appletini in her hands, with a glass of vodka for herself. Her eyes were clear blue, circled by a band of midnight black. Long black hair pooled around her shoulders, framing her face and flowing down her back. She was wearing something dark, but the lights had changed and all I could see clearly were her eyes.

I accepted the drink grudgingly. "Yes, you did."

She laughed, a living counterpoint to the electronic movement. "No, I bumped you and you dropped it all over that frilly shirt."

I glared at her again. "That's the same thing."

She moved past me, shoulders rubbing against mine as she leaned over the railing. "It's completely different. The words say the same thing, but the meaning behind them couldn't be farther apart." Great. Another crazy one.

"They say you collided with me and spilled my drink." I vengefully sipped my new drink, raising it up higher than normal, so it was at her eye level. Flighty broad.

She laughed at me, again. "Well, yes, but while your words-" she jabbed my chest with an elegant finger, "say I was out to get you my own say that it was a happy accident."

"Yes. A 'happy' accident."

She smiled at me, either missing the sarcasm or taking it as a challenge. "It's important you know, how you say things. A man can be made a hero or villain with a well-placed word. Accidents and Incidents are in the wording. It's all in how you sell it."

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*"The Electric Odyssey was a hell of a club."*

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The music turned back up, so I stepped in so my mouth was at her ear. Her lips were pale with a hint of dark crimson masked beneath them. She shifted her head, and some of her bangs moved and covered an eye, a mask covering up vibrancy. Some subtle smell, a spring day in the depths of winter, rose up to meet me. I reached out and tucked her hair behind her ear, before realizing what I was doing and blushing. She grinned at me again. I scrambled to cover my embarrassment.

“I was a hero, once.”

“Oh?” Her arms came up to my sides.

“Yes. I was walking home from class one day, and interrupted a mugging. This bald guy was beating a woman senseless, so I snuck around him and grabbed this bat that was leaning against the ally wall, and beat him back. She had to go through some therapy, but ended up fine.”

She looked up at my eyes. “Really?” I placed my hands on my breast. “Cross my heart.”

She smiled at me. “You know, your heart isn’t really there. It’s here” she said, tapping my chest. “Putting things to your breast isn’t putting them in your heart, no matter how you try. It’s a misconception we all learn in grade school. It’s up to you what really gets there.”

I was about to say something unimaginably clever, when out of the corner of my eye, I saw wild movement. I turned from her. Virgil was standing in the center of a small circle of people, three men confronting him. His friend was gone. The bouncers either hadn’t noticed yet or were ignoring the problem.

“I’m sorry, but my friend’s about to get into something heavy.”

She looked over and saw what I was talking about. “Go help him, then. But here, in case you can’t come back.” She took out a pen and scribbled something on a piece of paper, slipping it into my breast pocket. “I’ll be on the dance floor, if you need me.”

“I’ll think of something clever to say to woo you off your feet next time. You know, “Is that a pen in your pocket or are you happy to see me?”

She smirked. “Or “Oh baby, we’re terrible people but you and me?”

Let’s be terrible together”. Go help your friend.”

I ran off with a smile.

Pushing through the obliviously dancing crowd, I made my way to the eye of the storm. Virgil was facing three men, obviously confident in the strength of number because none matched up against him on their own. The middle one, a large potbellied man, was saying something. Virgil laughed and rebutted, making the brute burn crimson. They started advancing on my friend. I pushed my way through.

“Problem, gentlemen”

Everyone’s eyes turned to me, motionless as I was against the sea of moving bodies. I raised my head and tried to make all five feet of me intimidating. The thug closest to me, a mustachioed man wearing a stained, yellow t-shirt that had the words “Wife’s best friend” and an arrow pointing to his waist proudly emblazoned on it, stepped up.

“We don’t need fags around here.

He and that other gay were grinding up against each other. They can take their deviancies somewhere else.”

I considered asking him how he had ever learned the word “deviancies”, but settled for rolling my eyes at Virgil, who grinned at me. I raised my hands in what might seem to be a placating gesture, but was in fact a backwards, full-palmed “fuck you”. Something must have clued them in on my disdain, because before I could defuse the situation Wife’s best friend reached out and grabbed my shirt, pulling me forward by my chest. Virgil grabbed his arm.

“Get your hands off of him.”

All hell broke loose. Virgil was jumped by the other two men, pushed back by their combined weight. My own assailant turned his head to look at this, ignoring the man dangling from his arm. Rookie. A swift knee to the groin taught him the error of his ways, and as he crumpled I mentally apologized to his wife for the fact that her idiot husband so endangered her best friend.

Virgil had the mustached thug under one arm, beating on him. The third man was standing up, nose bleeding profusely.

The crowd around us was starting to take note, heads were turning. The lights shone like stars in heaven.

The thug with the bleeding nose moved towards Virgil. I rushed to intercept him, and before he could respond to my sudden appearance I raised my arm and backhanded him across the face. Blood flew into the air as he fell over, splattering the shirt of some unfortunate clubber. The bloody thug got up, rushing towards me. I dove into the crowd.

It would be a lie to say that I was running through crowd, the press of bodies and constant movement made it more akin to swimming through the heart of a storm. I stumbled over dancers’ legs, my face ended pressed into a woman’s arm. The man behind me was yelling something, mouth full of blood.

I dodged an elbow, snatching a bright red top hat from a passing whirlwind’s head. The dancer next to me whirled unexpectedly, accidentally clocking my face and sending me tumbling to the floor. I scrambled to my knees and started crawling through a forest of swaying legs. The thug grabbed my leg and I whirled onto my back and kicked, my foot smashing into his face with all the righteous fear of heaven. He collapsed again, and I disappeared into the waves of people.

I moved on a ways, putting distance between myself and my pursuer. His yells faded into the haze of movement and bass heartbeats. I jammed the hat on my head and took off my stained and bloody shirt, my back undershirt passing in the dim lights.

There, in the corner of the club, was the woman I had talked to earlier. I tapped her on the shoulder. She turned and grinned at me.

“Excuse me miss,” I said, “But I’m here to save the world.”

I kissed her before she could say anything, and the world melted around us. Behind us, bouncers were rushing past, towards where the thug was screaming. I grabbed her arm and pulled her out the back door. Virgil was waiting outside, face bruised, leaning against his bike and smiling.

## Shattered

by Dani Dymond (2<sup>nd</sup> Place)

### Chapter One

When you walk into a room and see a group of ten or so people staring blankly at you from behind masks of faked wellness and glaring brutality and somehow feel like you belong with them, then you know something must be seriously wrong with you.

There's this one close to the door, a stout bald man with sunken-in eyes and a stained white T-shirt that just screams rehab. Oh, God. *Rehab*. I told myself I wouldn't be saying the word in my head, let alone out loud. But the staff here just insists on mentioning it as frequently as they can, as if they want to be sure you understand clearly.

What I want to scream at them is this: we aren't here because we're stupid and don't know it, we're here because we're stupid enough to get caught doing stupid things. But of course that'd just get me into even more unwelcome trouble, and that's not exactly what I need on my very first day here.

A woman with brown hair tied into a businesslike bun stands upon my arrival. "You must be Maddie Green," she says in a papery voice, wincing as she smiles and holds out her hand for me. What, am I going to bite her or something? I shake her bony hand and receive a flinch in response. Great, the group therapist scares easily.

It's not like I look the type to attack somebody. I'm actually too small and clumsy to do any real damage to a person. But that doesn't stop this grimacing woman from turning away from me as quickly as possible and addressing the entire room with that awkward here's-the-new-girl-let's-embarrass-the-hell-out-of-her intro. "Everyone, meet Maddie. Let's all try to make her feel welcome."

Yes, please try. No one here looks capable of succeeding. I wish I could just whisper "Don't bother, I'll be gone in a month," but they won't have any of that at the Graceland Health Facility and Rehab Clinic. Oh, don't let the name confuse you. We're not cozied up in some historical Tennessee town; the clinic is actually stuffed on the outskirts of this dirty city called Westbrook and it's somewhere close to the border between Texas and Louisiana. There's no Elvis impersonators here, let me tell you.

It's this swampy little place with a population of about a hundred, most of which were rumored to be the result of inbreeding or something. Typical Southern stereotype. As much as I dislike stereotypes, I'm beginning to believe said rumors – some of the people working at the clinic all seem to have either the last name "Clark" or "Babcock." That last one makes me laugh; not because of the painful use of an obvious wiener synonym but because my best friend back home has that last name.

I hate thinking about home. That home being Saddle Ridge, Texas. The prettiest place on earth but also the most boring. Its pastures and farm animals are great for any gullible tourist, but in reality, people rot away there. I grew up on a ranch with a demanding father and a frequently-absent mother. Yeah, yeah, there's a sob story with every one of us here.

But none of that sappiness has to do with why I landed myself a one-month prison sentence at Graceland. As I think back to the night that got me stuck in this situation, I can't help but frown at the bright white linoleum floor under my feet. The therapist, whose name I haven't heard yet, sits back in her seat next to the scary bald man and motions to another fold-up chair across the circle from her.

Reluctantly, I leave my escort nurse's side and gingerly walk over to the indicated chair. I take a seat and watch the woman like a hawk until she finally tells me her name. "I'm Francis Flynn, the therapist for this floor of Graceland. I will also be your individual therapist, Maddie, as well as your guidance counselor. Anything you need, just find me."

Ah, so she's the head-honcho around here. I take her in one more time, examining every feature. Her dark pantsuit looks expensive and well-kept, and the deep blue of her eyes may appear to be caring to some but I notice a hint of coldness behind them for some reason. With the intent of her stare I can see that she wants me to understand that she's in charge around here. I nod in acknowledgment, biting back the bitter taste of teenage angst.

Even though I was raised by a devoutly Catholic father, I never dealt with authority well. My mom wasn't really around to make things okay so when my dad made me upset and angry, I just shoved my feelings down deep where nobody could find them. Unfortunately for me, they were eventually found. And eventually unleashed to create the awful person I was curtly before coming to the clinic.

I look around at my fellow addicts and psychopaths, my eyes grazing their distorted faces and jittery bodies until I pass one that makes me do a double-take. There's a guy a few chairs away, who barely looks older than me, dressed in a black hoodie and ripped jeans with an expression of pure defiance on his face. Hey, what do you know? I'm not the only young person at Graceland.

Everyone else is either middle-aged or on their deathbeds. I'm sure the later isn't really that they're old but that the drugs they've experimented with all their lives have probably tripled the rate at which they age. I turn back to the kid with the hoodie.

It's obscuring his face from view but I see the locks of sandy blonde hair sticking out underneath, and his chiseled, been-there-done-that face that is worth doing a once-over on. But suddenly he looks up and I'm stunned to see red-rimmed green eyes and turned-down eyebrows, and I'm reminded that I'm not on vacation, I'm in rehab.

Flynn picks up where she left off after my nurse leaves and I settle in for a long group therapy session. I pass the time by learning people's faces as they speak. A woman named Diana, forty but gorgeous with rippling red hair, tells the story of how she was first turned onto crack cocaine, how her trusted husband of ten years coerced her into it then sold her into a prostitution rig down in LA. She's come a long way, even though that beautiful hair is missing several clumps on her scalp and that delicate face is scarred and pale.

The bald man, who goes by the name of Will, rambles about how much he misses his ex-wife, but then turns around and calls her a "heartless bitch" before muttering something under his breath, falling asleep, and burping, in that order.

An old woman named Olive goes next, talking until she cries about her dead cat. The man next to her, equally elderly and genuinely sweet, pats her shoulder until her sobbing dies down to sniffing. "Thank you, Theodore," Olive murmurs.

Suddenly the assembly of surprisingly heartfelt addicts turns to me. Their faces blur together as Flynn tells me, "Your turn, Maddie. Just begin by telling us how you ended up here at Graceland." I was hoping it wouldn't come to this, especially in front of a small crowd. I knew when I walked through the front doors of this place that I'd be forced to "talk" and get better. That's what rehab is about, I understand.

But if there's one thing I can't stand, it's being put on the spot. I've prepared nothing for this little story-time. My heart jumps up into my throat and that age-old fear of public speaking suddenly mutes me. Never before have I been so terrified to talk to other human beings.

After an awkward pause, I find my bearings, clearing my throat. Flynn raises one eyebrow expectantly, as if challenging me to speak. It's enough to make my mouth move and words pour out instantly. Although I didn't want anyone to hear this gruesome story, I have to start recovering somewhere.

"Well, a few of my close friends invited me to this blowout end-of-the-summer party at the lake near my house. This was a few weeks ago, and I figured that I needed to socialize a little before I went back to school... Senior year is easy but managing to hold onto friends is unfathomably difficult for me..."

"Anyway, my best friend Charlotte really wanted me to go to the party too, so that really got me and I said yes. We all went in this tiny Jeep, there were about seven of us crammed into it..." I feel myself smile faintly, and I look up unconsciously to see that I have the whole room's attention, including the mystifying blonde boy in the corner.

His eyes remind me of spring, I realize, and I lose myself in them momentarily before shaking my head once and continuing. "Once we got there it was a typical summer party: booze, music, and weed. I hate weed, I really do, and I don't really care for beer all that much, either, but this guy... I forgot his name... Vince? Victor? Something masculine with a V, I think.

"He came up to me after Charlotte went off with her boyfriend and I was alone. He asked if I wanted to go outside and smoke with him. I told him how cigarettes remind me of my grandfather, a man I despise, and he kind of laughed. I still don't know why that was funny... But he told me that meth was great and that I'd love it if I just gave it a chance. Just gave him one chance."

My throat suddenly gets thick as the memory of this night floods back and crashes into me. Tears threaten to fall but I blink them back, ignoring the sting in my eyes. "So, like an idiot, I said okay. 'Sure, whatever.' We went out back and he lit up, we spent five minutes out there smoking and it was like... The most amazing rush I've ever felt.

"Nothing like getting drunk or hooking up with some random person... That's actually exactly what happened next, though. We moved from meth to Miller Lite and after what felt like ten minutes he started groping me, and I was conscious enough of it to shove his hand away, but..."

I dare myself to glance up from my knotted hands again, to meet Blonde Boy's eyes. But I can't.

"The drug must've stunted my reflexes though, because before I knew it he was on top of me in that yard, and it was pitch black outside. All I remember hearing is deafening music and this dark guy above me. And pain, really intense pain." Now I can't hold back the moisture in my eyes any longer.

Tears drip down my cheeks and fall off my chin, and I jump suddenly when I feel a comforting hand cover my own in my lap. Diana matches my wavering gaze with her strong one, squeezing my hand gently and urging me to go on with her eyes. I think that she's too level-headed to be trapped here before I finish.

"Charlotte found me around five a.m. the next morning, shaking and practically naked in knee-high grass. She and I agreed not to tell the police about the V-guy because my father would go off, probably would disown me. He thought I was sleeping over at her house that night, so I wasn't even supposed to be at that stupid fucking party." Flynn's eyes narrow slightly, telling me that language isn't welcome, but I ignore her.

"She took me back to her house and I cleaned myself up, cried a lot, and then we did some... research." I swallow past the lump forming in my throat. "Charlotte typed in my symptoms on the internet, we discovered it was crystal meth, I put the pieces together, and for the next few days I slept at her house, handling withdrawals like a pro until the day I tried calling that guy from the party.

"I found his number online and dialed immediately but Charlotte caught me, figured everything out, and gave me this look... You know the look someone you really care about gives you when they're so beyond disappointment that they're practically numb?" I stun myself by asking a question but the group nods simultaneously, like it was choreographed.

“Well, that’s the look Charlotte gave me. She broke down and told her parents, who told my dad, and luckily she left out the part about the V-guy because my Catholic father wouldn’t house an impure daughter like me after a night like that. He decided against kicking me out, though, and punished me instead by sending me here. I don’t *need* to be here, I’m not sick or addicted to meth like some people are. And yet I’m here.”

After I stop talking everyone is silent. The only sound is Flynn’s light tap-tapping of her pen against the clipboard in her hands. I feel nauseous, like delving into that story made me ill. Maybe it’s the fact that I said yes in such an easy situation. A simple “no” would’ve gotten V-guy off of my back. But I crumpled, gave in to the most embarrassing kind of peer pressure: the a-typical drug kind.

Diana gives my hand one last squeeze before letting go and the group disperses into very quiet whispering, everybody sharing something different with their neighbor. The two sitting next to me, Diana and a scrawny tweaker who’s named Alfredo, like the sauce, tell me how brave I am to have shared with them.

I shrug off their well-intended compliments and stare off at the wall across from my chair. My staring is interrupted when a flash of movement to the left catches my eye. The group hushes itself again as the guy my age stands and abruptly leaves the room, slamming the door behind him and stalking off down the hall.

The exasperated expression on Flynn’s face tells me that the blonde guy acts this way all the time, but it feels like my story upset him somehow, and guilt overcomes me. All of the raw emotion in this little circle is getting to me, I realize, and I look to Flynn for an answer to my softly-spoken question: “Can I go to my room now?”

She inclines her head and nods shortly. “That’ll be all for group today, everyone. We’ll meet same time tomorrow, don’t be late.” The room empties pretty quickly, and I’m left alone with Flynn. Her sharp facial features make me feel even smaller as we walk in the opposite direction down the hallway that the blonde ran down. I stop alongside her at a white door labeled “Green.”

Suppressing a sigh, I open it and wander inside, aimlessly sitting myself down on the blank white cot. Everything is blindingly white.

“I can’t help but notice that you’re a little off,” Flynn observes, leaning herself against my doorframe. I chew on the inside of my cheek, watching her. Finally I nod. “Telling that story hurts, that’s all,” I say dismissively. Flynn blinks and presses her freehand against her pencil skirt, flattening it absentmindedly. “Yes. Well, I’m glad you got it off your chest. It was a magnificent start in your program.” My program? She closes the door and leaves me to think in peace.

For awhile I just sit on my bed and stare up at the ceiling, thanking my lucky stars that I don’t have some irritable roommate who sees dead people or something. Then again, this isn’t a mental facility, it’s a rehabilitation clinic. I can’t help but wonder, what’s the difference, really?

We’re sick people who are, against our will, locked up in order to heal. Well, I’d better heal fast, because the emotion in this place is already killing me, and I’ve been here for a mere half-hour. My eyes close and I picture the stupid old ranch that I used to call home until the shit hit the fan, and I feel myself crying again. I’d give anything to rewind, anything to go back and just live quietly on that ranch.

I wake up in the middle of my nap to the sound of faint piano music. At first I think I’m just imagining it, or that it’s part of a dream I’m having. But it sounds close, and real, as if it was coming from down the hall. Before I can investigate, the soft melody lulls me back to sleep.

The second time I wake up, it’s dark outside my small window. A short glance at the analog clock hanging on my wall tells me that it’s 1:47. Must be the middle of the night, I decide through my grogginess. I sit up rigidly in my bed, already cursing Graceland for such shitty living conditions. When I first heard “rehab” escape from my father’s mouth, I pictured the Hollywood clinics that all of those

bimbo celebrities get into, and it didn’t seem so bad at the time.

But Graceland is no Cedar-Sinai. The beds feel like they’re made out of stone and cardboard meshed together. I stretch my arms over my head. Then I look down to find that I’m still in the shorts, tank top, and jacket that I arrived here in. My bag is sitting neatly on top of my other belongings near the door, so I slowly make my way out of bed and into some clean pajamas.

Once I’m comfortable in my red plaid pants and the same black tank top I slept in, I open the door to my room, relieved to discover that it isn’t welded shut or bolted with a huge padlock. I peer around the doorframe, my eyes sweeping the dim hallway. No one’s up at this hour, I’m guessing.

So I take the time to look around. When I arrived here I didn’t exactly embrace my surroundings. That was just hours ago, but I already feel more open to accepting things. Geez, they’re getting to me already. I find a light switch on the wall to the left of my door, and after I flick it on the hallway floods with yellow light. Somehow I feel like I’m snooping where I shouldn’t be but then I remind myself that I’m in rehab, not staying at a stranger’s house... But it might as well be a stranger’s house.

A mall-like wall map at the end of the hall reveals that I’m on the third floor of this four-story facility. Flynn mentioned there were specific therapists for each floor; I doubt we’re allowed to wander down and up into the other ones. My door wasn’t locked but I’m sure access to any floor but our own is forbidden.

Hah, listen to me. “Forbidden.” Just that one word alone reminds me of the scene in *Beauty and the Beast* when he’s giving Belle the short tour of the castle and she asks what’s in the west wing. “It’s *forbidden*.” I feel a lot like Belle right about now... except that I’m not some lovely French girl and there’s no cheery talking candlesticks at Graceland.

I pass a mirror in the hallway as I turn from the wall map, pausing to stare back at the reflection that hardly looks like my own. My hair is usually up in a thick brown ponytail or braid, since it’s pretty long and flows down my

back obnoxiously. But now it's loose and knotted from sleep, with stray strands criss-crossing over my face.

Oh, that face... My own face has changed so much over such a short time that I barely recognize myself. I used to have chronically flushed cheeks, making it look like I wore makeup even when I went natural. My eyes were always complimented because they're this hazel color, a not-so-green-but-kind-of-brown shade that everybody envied. My teeth were white and straight, and always shown in my constant smiles.

Now I'm different. I'm pale, my eyes are dim, and my smile vanished two weeks ago. It may not seem like enough time for someone to completely wreck their life, but trust me, it's enough. One event just spun everything out of control. I couldn't have just said no, like those motivational speakers are always telling us to do. And to think that I blew them off with a roll of the eyes every time they showed up at my school. Real ironic.

But as I memorize the details of my new, sullen appearance, I do what I always do when I'm upset with myself: I bravely face that mirror and I count the freckles that trail over the bridge of my nose. There's seventeen, last time I checked. I don't really remember the last time I was this upset with myself... Probably never.

Counting my handful of freckles never fails to relax me and make whatever situation I'm in feel a little smaller, a little less overwhelming. And it forces me to take a good, hard look at myself in the process, which everyone should do once in awhile. So I start counting, losing myself as I let the familiar ritual wash over me.

Two, three... eight, nine, ten... sixteen... Oh, look at that. I end at nineteen, noting the two new additions to my nose with an uneasy grin that I can't really hold back. After all, I'm alone in this hallway and can be as weird as I want to be. Or, so I thought.

"Maddie? What are you doing up?" An itchy voice floats down towards me and I close my eyes, annoyed. "I sent you to bed hours ago," Flynn mumbles as she nears me. She's dressed in a white cotton robe and ugly gray slippers that must've been white when she bought them but slowly dirtied them over time.

"Sorry," I try stupidly, unable to really explain why I'm poking a trail over my nose like an idiot. "I just couldn't sleep. I woke up and was sort of disoriented."

Flynn nods, shrugging this off. "Probably just a side-effect of your new medication." I'm on medication? Her hand clamps on my forearm but I recoil as if she slapped me. Looking rather confused, Flynn puts the hand on her hip. "Is everything all right?" she asks in that therapist tone of hers. Man, she can turn it on whenever she pleases.

I refrain from spitting a sarcastic answer at her and instead opt for the straight-forward one. "No. I wasn't aware that I was put on medication... Why can't I remember something like that? And what is this medicine *for*, exactly?" Keeping a rude comment buried deep and selecting the more appropriate response was hard for me, which is why I'm unable to hide the frustration and suspicion in my voice now.

There's a dark flash of shadow that crosses Flynn's face, and just like the hint of bitterness in her eyes during the therapy session, I notice it without any hesitation. "Well, to be perfectly honest with you, your father chose to medicate you. For minors it's up to their parent or legal guardian whether or not to put a patient on a prescription and medical regimen, and in this case your father checked the 'yes' box, so you're on several mood elevators until your addiction is satisfactorily cured, Maddie."

Many words stand out to me in Flynn's explanation, but two sting my ears without warning. *Your father*. My dad put me on medication? Is he really that desperate for me to get better? I hear stories about people in rehabs that have daily pills to take, and at some point it becomes the best part of their day; their new addiction. I don't want that, and I'm in total disbelief that my father would want that for me.

I feel Flynn's thin hand rest on my shoulder as she silently guides me back to my room, leaving the silence

*"Oh, that face... My own face has changed so much over such a short time that I barely recognize myself."*

be and letting me digest this new information. Apparently both my parents are fucked-up assholes, including the dad I played off as being just plain strict when in reality, he'd chose to medicate me over letting me get healthy in a safe, ordinary way.

And for one thing, I didn't even know that patients were permitted to receive any kind of medications while in rehab. Isn't the entire point of rehab to get you *away* from substances like that? Guess that isn't the policy at Graceland. Before I can say anything to Flynn I'm alone in my room again, watching her solemnly close my door, and I feel the weight of loneliness in its entirety crush me until I disappear through the floor.

When I wake up that morning I lay in bed awhile longer, fixing my eyes on one specific spot on the ceiling. It reminds me of my own ceiling in my room at home, white and plain and smooth. But then I move my gaze downward and I remember that I'm not at home, I'm in what's basically a hospital that you're not allowed to leave on your own terms.

My thoughts are interrupted when the same plump old nurse who walked me into group yesterday knocks on my door and walks in without pause. "Oh, good! You're up." Her liveliness makes me tired again in one sentence. I sigh and sit up in bed. "So how do my days at Graceland work, exactly?" I ask the nurse, whose nametag says "Katja." She's blonde and in her late fifties, I'd say, with a weather face and gentle smile.

*“I see that clenched in his meaty fist is a freshly sharpened yellow pencil, the lead tip refined to a surprisingly terrifying point.”*

“Cat-jah?” I try to figure out the correct pronunciation of her name by whispering it to myself as she answers my question. “There’s really no set regimen at Graceland. The idea here is to let you all sort of find yourselves, to offer you opportunities like art classes, tutoring, exercise courses... Whatever it takes to wane you from your addictions, really.”

“Cot-yah...?” The nurse laughs when she finally notices me spit-balling random pronunciations. “It’s said like ‘cat’ and ‘yuh’ put together. German-born, makes it tricky for people to say my name. I’m Katja, dear. But you can just call me ‘Kat.’ Most of the patients prefer it.” With one last warm smile, Katja leaves me to get dressed and ready for my first full day at Graceland.

Arriving yesterday evening was obnoxious, because I didn’t have a chance to get a tour from anyone. Thankfully the map at the end of the hallways helps a little. I put on a pair of gray sweatpants and an old Sublime T-shirt that Charlotte lent me before I walk barefoot down that hallway and examine the map. After about ten seconds of this I feel someone breathing behind me, and I spin around. It’s Will, the old bald guy who creeped me out so much yesterday.

“Oh. Uh, did you need to see the map?” I speak clumsily, like I don’t belong here and I’m imposing on this man’s territory. Will doesn’t say anything until I turn back around uneasily, hesitant of how to proceed with the conversation. Then he screams. A long, horror-movie scream, high-pitched and wailing as I’ve ever heard one. My hands clamp over my ears and I face him.

“What are you doing?” I cry over him. Then he stops, licks his lips, and finally replies. “I like your voice,” he growls, almost angrily. I take a step back, bumping myself into the map behind me. A few staff members are hurrying our way, Flynn included. Even Diana and another woman have left their rooms to look into what’s happening.

I take a slow breath and meet Will’s beady-eyed stare, feeling sick just looking at him. Up close he’s even more disturbing, thanks to the deep lines in his face and the scar running down the length of his jaw. One look at this guy and any sensible person would take off running. If only I could.

“William!” A male nurse quickens his pace as Will lifts his left hand, and I see that clenched in his meaty fist is a freshly sharpened yellow pencil, the lead tip refined to a surprisingly terrifying point. Never before have I been so unnerved by the sight of a pencil. “Put the pencil down, Will.” I hear Flynn’s cool and collected voice echo down the hallway. There wasn’t an echo here before... Is it just me? I feel faint all of a sudden.

This can’t be happening, not on my first day here. “Mentally unhinged guy randomly threatening you with the only weapon that the facility has available” isn’t supposed to happen to someone on their very first day, it just isn’t. My stomach lurches as Will moves closer to me, his sour smell filling my nostrils. I wince, biting the inside of my cheek and willing myself to wake up from this bad dream, to bolt upright in my bed at home and laugh at what an unrealistic nightmare this was.

After what feels like an eternity Will moves again, and this time he jumps at me. I don’t have time to yell or defend myself. Then, out of nowhere, something collides with Will and knocks him away from me. It moves at such an inconceivable speed that all I see is a blur. I shrivel back against the wall map and sink to the floor, hugging my arms to my chest and blinking past my watery eyes to find that someone has tackled him.

But that someone isn’t dressed in the boring white uniforms that the staff members all wear; it’s the guy from group therapy yesterday, the blonde one my age. He isn’t wearing that hoodie this morning so I can see him clearly. Well, not clearly. He’s currently wrestling with Will on the slippery hallway floor. How the hell did he move so quickly? And where did he even come from anyway?

“Restrain him!” one nurse calls as they all finally reach us, abandoning the rhythmic method they had of approaching Will to avoid panicking him. They just took their sweet time and tried to murmur calming things to him until he actually tried to stab me with that pencil. I squeeze my eyes shut and tighten my arms around myself.

Flynn drops down to a crouch next to me after a few minutes. My eyes are still closed and I’m holding myself firmly, trying to make myself smaller until I just disappear. “Maddie?” Her voice, for once, sounds caring and not just professional. I inhale deeply and open my eyes, looking up at her and several other staff members. And the blonde boy.

Will is nowhere to be found, luckily. My heart slows a bit until my eyes settle on the guy who tackled Will. He speaks and I have to repress a swoon. “Are you okay?” he asks roughly. There’s a huskiness to his voice that I like as soon as I hear it. I blink once, twice, then reply, “Yeah... I’m fine, thank you.” Flynn helps me to my feet.

“William’s been taken to the infirmary downstairs,” one of the nurses assures me. It’s Katja, standing at my right. She gives me an apologetic look, as if to say, “Sorry that your first day has already gone to shit.”

My breathing feels normal and my heart isn’t racing anymore, but something else is still wrong. Blonde Boy sees it, meeting my eyes with his forest green ones. “Your hands are shaking,” he says in disbelief, frowning down as I stuff them in my sweatpants pockets. Everyone’s attention turns back to me, which I hate. People staring at me makes me uncomfortable, something that most people would agree with me on.

“No, they aren’t. I’m all right, really.” I’m a good liar, but the guy isn’t buying it. He inclines his head and glues his eyes to me. Everyone else seems to believe me though. “Well, good,” Flynn says. “Tenacity’s what you need to make it through your program. And it looks like you have quite a lot of it, Maddie.” She takes a clipboard from a male nurse, the one who was the first to run towards me and Will, and looks at it carefully.

“In the last twelve hours you’ve told everybody in group the reason you’re here, which is challenging for most, and you successfully made it through a traumatic situation.” Flynn smiles, which makes me glare a little. She doesn’t notice, and I almost want to laugh; she’s a psychiatrist, her job is to pay close attention to people. She doesn’t understand me in the least.

But I guess I’ll give her the benefit of the doubt and wait until the end of my “program” to declare her a total failure. Nobody can magically cure me, and already I can tell that Graceland might help my blossoming addiction to meth but it sure as hell can’t change my attitude.

As I make my way through the small crowd that has assembled around me, I catch the guy my age still watching me. When I return his look he takes off, shoving past the staff members and jogging to a room with a door labeled “Music.” I stumble back into my room, shrugging him off and dismissing any lingering thoughts about how fast he was when he tackled Will, or how genuinely concerned he looked when he helped me right myself. I just thank my lucky stars for having narrowly avoided a pencil to the jugular.

It’s past four in the afternoon when I finally emerge from my room, poking my head out the doorway and doing a quick sweep of the hall. Today was supposed to be about learning my surroundings and possibly meeting some people; after all, I want to get as much out of this pointless experience as I can.

Maybe I sound a little hypocritical, accepting my situation while groaning on and on about it.

That’s probably just the unidentified medication talking. Flynn isn’t letting me in on what it is because I’m not eighteen for another month and it’s up to the parent. Always up to the damn parent.

When I see that the hallway’s deserted and silent, I walk out, closing the door carefully shut behind me. I’m not exactly sure where I’m going, but hopefully I’ll be able to just pick up from where I left off this morning. And by that I mean reading the wall map and figuring out what there is to do at this clinic. This is the third time I’ve stared up at this blue and white diagram and yet I haven’t even explored Graceland yet. What a drag.

So I choose indiscriminately and fasten onto the first room I see: art. I’ve never been much of a drawer, but I took a course at school last year for elective credits that taught us how to sculpt and paint. It was unexpectedly enjoyable for me.

The art room is a short walk, just a few hallways and turns from where I stand. I follow the directions and pass by the room that the strange blonde guy went into earlier, the music room. Probably just full of crackpots with triangles and harmonicas, making obnoxious noise. Trying to drown out the voices in their heads or something, no doubt.

I sigh, reminding myself for the thousandth time that this isn’t the psych ward, this isn’t some crazy house or mental institution. It’s rehab. For addicts. My mind clicks back on track and I breeze by the music room without stopping in for a listen. By the time I reach the art center I’ve relaxed enough so that I won’t be peering around corners looking for depressive bald men with sharp objects everywhere I go.

*“Probably just full of crackpots with triangles and harmonicas, making obnoxious noise. Trying to drown out the voices in their heads or something, no doubt.”*

“You must be the new girl. Maddie, I take it?” I’m startled when a lanky older man walks out of the busy art room and closes the door, meeting me in the hall. I look up at this man, all edgy beard and peppered hair and calloused skin. Someone who’s visibly been around arts and crafts their entire life, at least.

“Oh, yeah. That’s me. You’re the art teacher?” I ask plainly obvious questions when I’m nervous. Why am I nervous? The man chuckles and creases appear, decorating the corners of his gray eyes. “Yes. I’m Jude, it’s nice to meet you, Maddie. Come on in, I think you’ll learn to love this room.”

The art room is packed, filled with at least fifteen people, who are all either drawing, painting, or cutting and pasting things. I recognize Olive, the elderly woman from group therapy, sitting next to Theodore at a table off to the edge of the room, chatting with each other and sharing a coloring book. It’s almost adorable enough to make me grin, but I follow Jude quietly throughout the room.

“You’re allowed to use anything you want in here, Maddie. You can sketch, you can paint, you can do whatever makes you happy.” Jude is readying himself for a long explanation of the class, I can tell, so I tune out a little and watch the patients.

The scissors in their hands are all those safety scissors from elementary school, of course, and other than that there isn’t really anything dangerous about the art room. It seems like a nice place to go and get away for these people. A redheaded girl with distant brown eyes and a scattering of microscopic holes dotting the inside of her forearm glances up at Jude and me as we pass.

“Maddie, meet Layne, my most gifted drawing student,” he says with a warm smile, stopping to let me shake the girl’s hand. She’s probably in her early twenties, even though she’s pretty small and would most likely be carded at any bar she walked into. At one point in her life, I think she might’ve been really pretty, and shy. I can tell she’s still shy now.

Layne doesn’t say a word to

me. All I can muster is a muffled hello before Jude whisks me off to a different part of the room. I look over my shoulder at the redhead, who's already begun focusing on her sketch again. From here I can see there's an elegant but leafless tree branching out from the corner of the page, and something else is next to it but I can't quite make it out. Even from here I can tell that Jude's most gifted drawer is the most gifted drawer for a reason.

After the long tour of the art room is over I thank Jude and stare all around me, trying to figure out where to start. My heart isn't exactly pulling me in any specific direction, so I stand landlocked until Jude nudges me with his elbow. The tie-dyed shirt he has on is itchy against my bare forearm. "Can't find what you're looking for?" he inquires in an encouraging voice.

I shake my head. "Junior year I took an art class, and I learned how to sculpt. I mean, 'throw pots.' On that spinning wheel, you know? I was hoping you'd have one here, but..." I trail off, shrugging one shoulder in badly-covered-up disappointment.

Jude looks down at me, thoughtful. At last he replies, "Well you're in luck, kid. I've been wanting to buy a wheel for this place, it's exactly what the patients need. I think there'd be some real talent with this floor's group if I got one. And you know what, I'll order one tonight." I return his gaze incredulously, hardly believing what I'm hearing.

"Are you serious?" I ask him, open-mouthed. Jude laughs a big, hearty laugh, one that's raspy but makes me smile. It feels like the first smile I've displayed since arriving at Graceland. "Of course, I'd never joke about a wheel. You've moved me to finally get off my butt and buy one. I've still got some wiggle room in the art budget so it won't be a problem." He thinks for a moment, rubbing his beard methodically like a detective in an old movie. Except no detective ever had stray dots of yellow paint on his cheek and a paintbrush propped behind his ear.

"It'll probably take a few days to ship but I'm sure by Saturday it'll be up and running. I'll reserve it just for you, Maddie. First customer."

*"Of all people to meet and approve of here at Graceland, I never expected a washed-up art guru to be my first sort-of friend."*

Jude winks and pats my back, wandering across the room to help a patient with a charcoal drawing.

I stare after him, letting myself sort of drown in fleeting happiness. Of all people to meet and approve of here at Graceland, I never expected a washed-up art guru to be my first sort-of friend. But that's exactly what Jude is now, and I leave the art room. I may appear to be empty-handed to most people, but the rare smile on my face assures me that I'm not.

Two hours and a mystery-meat dinner later, I'm walking back to my room. Other than meeting Jude and Layne I haven't done much this afternoon, just hung out in my room some more. It seems like the only thing that would actually interest me here is the art room, and I'll be inseparable from that pottery wheel as soon as it arrives, I can already predict that much. It may not be first choice of activity, but it's better than skulking around the clinic with nothing to do.

As I walk down the narrow hallway that Will cornered me in, I feel someone behind me. I turn to find that the guy my age has shown himself again. If I didn't know better I'd guess that he was following me, but I'm sure that I'm not fascinating enough to follow. However, he stops when I stop, meeting my eyes.

Our faces are just a few feet apart when he speaks. "I wasn't following you, if that's what you're thinking." Mind-reader. A small smile plays on his lips that makes my heart sort of somersault. It's startling, and I can't put my finger on why that barely-there grin gave me such a swift but lingering tingle.

"I know," I reply levelly, trying to read his expression. Something about this guy makes me feel like metal to a magnet; I can't shake the feeling that he's different from the other patients here.

Well, other than the fact that he's a teenager, like me, and doesn't really look like he's had a difficult time with his addiction, like me. Sure, the meth withdrawals were pretty gruesome. I'm still trying to get over it. But other than a small scar under his left eye in the shape of an off-kilter triangle and a gritty kind of persona to match his puzzling attitude, he looks like any regular guy pulled off of the street.

"Are you sure you're okay?" the guy asks me after a long silence that I didn't really notice. "You're staring at me. And you still seem kind of shaken from earlier." He's talking about the incident with Will, I tell myself, taking a breath and trying to orient myself. Yes, I was staring at him. Was I that obvious? Oh, God, how embarrassing.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's... really no big deal." I'm not sure what else to say. My hands are knotted together at my torso, and I'm anxiously playing with my fingers and watching my feet shift. Suddenly I see in my peripheral that the strange kid has stuck his hand out at me, offering a shake. "I'm Seth, by the way. We never formally met." His husky voice feels like a warm blanket around me as he introduces himself.

I shake the feeling away and slowly put my hand in his, as if I'm not sure I want to meet him. And I'm not, really. Like I said, something about him is too mysterious. Not in a bad way, just in a way that says, "It'd be best if you didn't get too close to this guy."

"Maddie," I tell him softly, trying not to shiver as his grip tightens a little on my hand, his forearm muscles tensing and earning my full attention. I'd have better luck avoiding this guy if I wasn't so distracted by him. And I mean distracted as in the ditzzy, girly distracted, the effect that certain guys have on certain girls. I don't want to be that certain girl.

Dropping my hand, I break our gaze and say, "I never thanked you for helping me this morning..." But before I can properly tell him how grateful I am for his little heroic stunt, Seth shrugs a shoulder and says back, "It's no big deal. Stuff like that happens here all the time." For some reason I feel kind of bummed after hearing this, like I'm no longer special for having been saved by him.

I mentally scold myself but then I let my gaze wander back up to meet Seth's entrancing green eyes. Finally I murmur, "Oh. Yes, I'm sure it does," and I turn back around, taking my time in case Seth wanted to add anything. He doesn't. But I barely catch the frustration that crosses his face as I end our brief conversation.

My feet move robotically, like I have to force myself to move away from him. As much as I don't want to, I shut myself up in my room again, closing the door just as Seth reaches for the doorknob to the music room. That must be his version of what the art room is going to be for me, I guess. A haven. It's all I've seen him do here so far. I smile when Seth glances up at me from the knob, his face relaxing as we just look at each other.

Hmm. Maybe I could be friends with him. Friends, nothing more. Though I can't help but admire how strong his facial features are, and how his wild blonde hair perfectly accents those deep eyes. My mind gets all cloudy just looking at him, because suddenly I'm hypnotized by this guy, by Seth. Meeting him might have been a mistake, but for now, it seems like the best thing I've done since coming to Graceland.

*"Every morning for the last twenty-six years and two months, the alarm clock had been as conscientious at its job as Joe had been at his."*

## Free Falling by Phillip Lisa (3<sup>rd</sup> Place)

Joe's eyes popped open as the alarm clock buzzed softly—fulfilling its only job. He reached over to the nightstand, slapped the top of the clock leaving it temporarily unemployed. Joe closed his eyes, turned his back on the nag and came face to face with his wife Mary. Every morning for the last twenty-six years and two months, the alarm clock had been as conscientious at its job as Joe had been at his. In reality, the alarm clock had become pretty much obsolete in Joe's life. He had fallen so deep into the routine of waking up at 6 am, that, alarm or not, he always woke up on time.

*She still looks beautiful.*

More beautiful than the day they married some thirty years ago. She was his world. She gave him purpose, and lately he realized it more than he ever had during their thirty stable years of marriage. Joe sat up; his upper body supported on his elbow, and leaned in close and kissed Mary gently on the cheek. A smile lit her face. Her eyes remained closed. She reached out with both arms and put them around Joe's neck and pulled him close. This routine was as unvarying as the clock, but it always felt fresh.

"Good morning, beautiful."

"Ohh, good morning, handsome." Her eyes opened slowly. They were soft, brown, yet solid as her love. "Did you check your weight?"

"Not yet; I will."

*Her eyes are like an angel's.*

She looked over Joe's shoulder at the clock. "Oh, you are running late. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. I got time."

"Did you look at the clock?"

Joe looked back over his shoulder. He should have been on the road by now.

He quickly shaved and dressed. No time for breakfast so he grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl that was always on the table. Next to the bowl was the stack of bills. Mary now paid all the bills by the Internet, but Joe insisted that they continue receiving the paper copies in the mail—he liked them that way—they were familiar to him. He wondered if Mary had paid them yet.

Joe slid into the seat of his grey Acura. The car was already five years-old—he should be getting a new one soon. Maybe he would give this one to Jessie. He looked over at the window of his daughter's bedroom. The wood that framed the window had some paint missing at the bottom right corner. It was time to paint. It had been a while, since he and Jessie had painted the house. He was proud of how hard she had worked, even helping to scrape off the old paint. She wanted to do it and never complained.

"Why don't you just hire a painter?" Mary asked laughing as she came out of the house, a mirror in her hand.

"Go back in the house. We don't need you arm chair quarterbacking our work. Do we Jessie? Jessie shook her head. "If you are going to be out here with the workers, grab a roller and help."

"Fat chance, mister." Mary held the mirror to Joe's face and laughed. "Didn't anybody tell you, that you are supposed to use a brush, not your hair?"

"What can I say? It was a hard to reach place. I look pretty good with yellow hair."

"Daddy was just using his head."

Joe liked it when she called him Daddy. It made him feel important, strong and needed. That was the last time he remembered her calling him daddy. She was only twelve then, just a skinny little girl with gangly legs, her twelve-year-old breasts only beginning to poke at her t-shirt.

*Ten years ago I was Daddy, now I'm just Dad. My title shortened like our relationship.* Now Jessie was 400 miles away at college—and a million miles away in everything else.

“You okay, Joe?”

Joe looked up, his next-door neighbor staring down at him. The concerned look seemed out of place on his normally jolly face. “Oh, I was just sitting here thinking that it was about time to paint the house again.

“Oh, okay. You usually are on the road by now. Oh, I just saw an ad for paint when I was putting the papers in the recycle bin. They got a sale on paint over at the hardware. Let me grab it out of the can.”

“Thanks but I better get going. Don't want to be late, twenty-six years, and I was only late once when we had the big earthquake, what was it, eight years ago?”

“I remember that. Thought you were crazy to be that dedicated.”

“Only a couple of us showed up that day.”

“Sorry I'm late”

“What the hell you doing here?”

Jim stared at Joe with disbelief on his face.

“I wanted to make sure we stayed on line; I didn't want production to stop. We fall behind, and people will be out of work.”

“Didn't you see on the news, there was an earthquake.”

“Knocked everything off the walls and dumped everything out of the cupboards. Didn't need the news.”

Jim eyed him with suspicion; Joe knew that Jim was always worried about his job. He could tell that the older man thought he was after his position. The worrying never made sense to Joe; Jim was well-liked and he was a productive asset to the company—like he was.

The two of them did their best to keep things going, learning other people's duties as they went. He never worried about Mary. He knew that she would be a fortress.

The morning smelt fresh and new as Joe drove down Chapman towards the freeway. He reached down and turned on the radio.

*“The president pushed Congress, again today, to pass his jobs bill. He was upbeat over the news that the unemployment rate remained at 9 per—”*

Joe reached down and pushed the preset button. All his presets were set on talk shows, news and sports. *Same old crap.* He did something that he had not done for a long time. He pushed the FM band button. The familiar voice of Tom Petty whined through the car's speakers.

“—good girl crazy 'bout Elvis—” Joe rolled all the windows down and turned the radio up. The cool morning air seemed to employ all his senses in a warm way.

As he got close to the Fifty-Five Freeway, the traffic around him began to slow. Then, ahead in the distance, he saw a flashing lighted arrow from a Caltrans trailer forcing the traffic from three lanes down to one. In the next lane, a guy in a white pickup truck began to pound on his steering wheel with the palms of his hands. His face worked itself into a canine like snarl. No one would let him in front of them. The poor guy was late for work. Joe slowed and let him in his lane.

“—I'm free, free fallin,” Petty sang. Joe turned up the radio a little more.

“Turn that shit off!”

“But Dad?” Joe pleaded

“Listen to your father,” his mother said poking her head into Joe's room.

“But Mom, it's Tom Petty.”

“Then, just turn it down a little. Your father is trying to watch the news.

“Mom, seriously, Tom Petty or Tom Brokow? If you want to know what's happening in the world, it's in the music.”

A horn blared from behind. The traffic had moved forward half a car's length.

Joe wondered when he had stopped listening to the music. It had always been such an important part of his life. He sang out with the radio.

“—I'm free, free fallin—”

Maybe that's why he got old because he stopped listening to the music.

“—I wanna glide down over Mulholland—”

Traffic barely moved at all now. Up ahead he saw a Caltrans worker digging a hole while three other employees watched. Their orange vests confirmed their employment.

“Free fall out into nothing—”

The guy in the white truck had his head out of the window and was yelling.

Joe turned the radio down.

“Why don't you assholes do this shit at night or on weekends?”

The men in the orange hard hats didn't even look up. “Yeah, I'm talking to you. People got to get to work, you know?”

The three men continued watching their friend in the hole working the shovel.

“Fuck you! Ignore me, you lazy assholes! My taxes pay your salary! If you had a real job, your lazy asses would be fired! Pick up a shovel and help, you fat, lazy bastards!”

The man in the hole threw down the shovel and climbed out just as traffic began to move. Joe was a bit disappointed; the traffic saved either the worker or the driver, and he would never know which one.

Once on the freeway, traffic labored along as it always did. Joe pushed search on his radio and after a while discovered that once he got past the pop, the music was still good. A band called the Killers was now on the radio.

Joe pulled into the parking lot and sat listening to the music. He had turned fifty only two weeks earlier, but at this moment, he felt young again. He wondered why had he had forgotten about the music.

“Happy birthday, Joe!” the secretary said walking into his office carrying a cake with one candle. “Only one?” Jim asked as he came into the office.

“Don’t want to burn the place down would we? Then what would *you* do?” Joe joked. “No one would hire *your* old ass.”

He had only been at work thirty minutes and already his office was packed with co-workers, fellow employees—people who had become his friends over the last two and a half decades. Although he hardly saw any of them outside of the office, they were all an important part of his life, and this gathering to celebrate his birthday moved him.

“So how does it feel to push the big Five O?” “Sounds old. I don’t feel that old.”

“I remember fifty. That was a good year,” Jim said smiling. “Hell, I still feel same inside as I did when I was twenty-one, I wish my body still felt young. Well, anyway, just six more weeks and I am moving into my boat and living the good life. Happy birthday to you--” He began to sing. “Happy birthday to you—

“—and many more.”

“Did you guys check your e-mails yet this morning?” Todd asked after the singing had stopped. “You really better check it out.” He opened the door and slipped out.

Joe grabbed his computer’s mouse and opened Outlook. The first e-mail in the list said, “Attention all employees,” in the subject line. He opened it and began reading aloud. “It is with sadness, and with great difficulty that I relate this news. As of today Arms and Tobins will be closing its doors indefinitely...”

Joe sat in the empty parking lot near his empty office. The unfamiliar music poured out of his speakers, too late to work its magic. “*Are we human or are we dancer?*”

The office that had once contained his life now stood unfilled, vacant and bare. A loud tapping on the window soon became distinct from the music. Joe looked out and saw a policeman’s uniform. He rolled down the window and looked up into the face of a middle-aged cop. He turned down the radio.

“Is everything okay, sir?”

Joe stared unable to speak at first, then the words unstuck and found their way to his mouth. He blurted out too loudly “How the hell am I going to tell Mary?” He could feel the wet on his face. He was lost. The officer was speechless.

“What am I going to say to Jessie?”

He reached down and turned the music up. “*My signs are vital my hands are cold.*” “I lost it. I should never have let them take the music.

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# Power Hungry: Creating a Better Future Through Clean Energy

## by Amanda Luna (1<sup>st</sup> Place)

Let's paint a picture of the future. We will make it as beautiful as we choose. There's the sweet perfume of seared prehistoric whatnot that hits the lungs like a jackhammer on porcelain, the picturesque water as it burns like some demon that will never be satisfied, then, as the mushroom cloud rises, like a soufflé freshly baked, there's a pause. The future versions of us are kind enough to spare a moment of silence for those that have died—quick and painful—and those that have already been marked for another death—slow and painful. And then there's the gas. That doesn't tempt the nose or the eyes. It just burns like a witch. Not the utopia you imagined? After the bloody rape of the planet, can the bastard child of that unholy union be expected to be anything but monstrous?

While it is impossible to undo the violation our planet has suffered, there is hope for a future brighter than the one described. The ugliness has been done, but a therapy of sorts for the Earth may help to address the violations that occur daily in the name of greed: this mad grab for energy. The old established order of collecting power has done immeasurable damage to the planet, and it is time for a new regime. Although coal, oil, nuclear power, and natural gas reign supreme as energy sources in the United States, other alternatives, such as wind, solar, and new technologies must be developed to protect the environment and human lives.

If one is to look at Earth offending power sources, it is impossible not to examine coal. This foul form of fuel has been proven to be harmful to those who collect it; however, it still "accounts for 22% of U.S. energy [consumed]" (Berinstein 18). This is largely due to the immense amount of coal that falls between the U.S. borders. While the substance is easy to access—no "oil wars" required—the rewards cannot compete with the risks. It is well known that coal is not a healthy energy producer; in fact, "[c]oal produces more sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides than other fossil fuels" (Berinstein 18). It does not take an advanced degree in chemistry to understand that this is harmful to the environment and to human beings. While these secondary cases are alarming, the most serious threat is to those who collect the coal. Incidences of health ailments and lung problems, not to mention cave-ins, are commonplace among miners. In terms of physical health, "coal miners face a wide range of long-term health concerns, including muscle and joint conditions, hearing loss ... and respiratory illnesses associated with dust, fumes and chemical exposure" (Alters 59). The dreaded black lung disease, or pneumoconiosis, is also a real concern for miners. However, black lung disease is not the most obvious health concern: that honor belongs to the cave-in. One of the deadliest incidents that have occurred was the historically infamous Buffalo Creek flood in West Virginia. The accident claimed the lives of 125 people and injured 1,100 more in 1972 (Alters 57). More recent events, such as the 2010 mining accident in Chile, also attest to the dangers of burrowing into the earth and robbing it of its resources. While those trapped in the Chilean mining accident were not mining coal, their ordeal attests to the dangers of mining in general. In this accident 33 men spent "two months trapped underground" (McNeil A1). Thankfully, these men lived, but their survival is the exception, not the rule. The persistence of coal use, despite the proven human risk, attests to the need to reevaluate American dependence on this fossil of a fuel.

Among the most wanted energy sources, oil may be the best known and most popular, but America, in some ways, appears addicted to oil. Unfortunately, this habit will—inevitably—be severed by the decreasing availability of this ever so addictive substance: "The EIA [Energy Information Association]... reports that on January 1, 2007, there were between 1.1 trillion barrels and 1.3 trillion barrels of crude oil reserves worldwide" (Alters 16). While that number seems impressive, and it is, it is a number; by definition it implies that oil is a finite resource. Sooner or later the end of oil will come. Americans, and all citizens of the world, must find a new addiction, and, hopefully, it will be a better choice than the last. In the meantime, however, man will seemingly go to any length to feed his craving for oil, including risking the environment. In May of 2010, British Petroleum (BP) was responsible for "the largest accidental oil spill in history" ("Gulf"). It is amazing to consider that an "estimated 4.9 million barrels (205.8 million gallons) of oil [was] released during the ... Gulf spill" (Schmidt A395). Over the course of 86 days, the rig was relentless in its massive hemorrhage of dinosaur remnants ("Gulf"). At one point in this environmental disaster, those in charge made the futile attempt to burn the oil out of the water. While the fact that there was significant damage done to the environment and to those individuals whose livelihood depended on the ocean and its bounty is unquestionable, the exact extent of the disaster is still unknown. However, "[a] new study published in the journal *Science* [sic] in late August [2010] confirmed the existence of a huge plume of dispersed oil deep in the Gulf of Mexico and suggested that it had not broken down, raising the possibility that it might pose a threat to wildlife for months or even years" ("Gulf"). This giant cloud of oil is essentially stuck beneath the water, poisoning the ocean and all that live in or near it. Those who made a living off of the fish and beaches in the area are left with an uncertain future. While it is understandable that Americans would want to capitalize on the natural features of our country, there comes a point when the expense is too great. The only question is, what is the price? When will we say that price for oil is too much? How many more habitats and lives must suffer before it stops?

While oil is daunting, the most terrifying form of energy production is, without question, nuclear power. Few Americans are aware of the U.S.'s use of nuclear energy; however, it is a major source of power in this country. It is such an integrated part of energy collection that in 2007, 19% of the energy produced in the United States came from a nuclear power plant (Alters 72). As an energy source, nuclear power has many strong selling points. For example, in 2007, "[t]he EIA reveal[ed] ... the average capacity factor for U.S. nuclear power plants was 92%" (Alters 71). This means that a single nuclear power plant can be incredibly proficient at producing vast amounts of energy; however, the dangers of these types of operations can be disastrous. While the occurrences of nuclear power plants "melting down" are statistically rare, the few occurrences in recent history are too big to ignore. In the infamous accident on Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, "radioactive gas was released from the plant in March 1979. Although no [direct] deaths have been reported due to the accident, some researchers have documented a high incidence of

stillbirths and of thyroid and lung cancer in people living in the region” (Cothran 63). However, this event was merely the prelude to “the worst nuclear accident on record. The explosion [in Chernobyl, Ukraine] resulted in the immediate deaths of thirty-one people, and experts project that over 3,400 local residents will eventually die of cancer due to their exposure to radiation” (Cothran 63). This disaster, which recently celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, devastated an entire region and caused health effects that will continue to be felt for generations. The situation was so enormous that one week after the initial explosion, photographs of the hollowed out plant showed smoke still coming off the reactors without remorse. Despite all of these warnings from history against the use of nuclear power, proponents argue that these events only strengthen the safety measures taken at these facilities. However, the people of Japan may differ in that line of thinking. After an environmental disaster—unlike any before—the people of Japan were confronted with yet another terrifying reality: the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant was on the verge of a meltdown. Nine months later, the outlook is still uncertain, as officials admit that a “sustained chain reaction” is still a “possibility” (Obe). The dangers of a possible nuclear explosion in Japan or elsewhere, while horrifying in the short term, may have equally frightening long-term effects. These include birth defects in future generations and “radioactive isotope in the water supplies of Tokyo and neighboring prefectures” (Tabuchi, Bradsher, and Jolly A11). In any industry there is a certain level of acceptable error; however, when dealing with nuclear materials, the impossible is asked: to be flawless. Nuclear power is not safe and should not be permitted to continue because it puts the planet and its people at risk.

Joining the ranks to complete the not-so-fab four is natural gas. When compared to the other energy sources currently employed on a large scale, natural gas is, admittedly, the most appealing. It is so appealing in fact, “[t]he Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and the Energy Policy Act of 1992 encouraged increased use of natural gas because of its low combustion emissions” (Berinstein 23). This is true: natural gas is “[c]onsidered clean compared to fossil fuels” (Berinstein 22). This, along with its low cost and availability, has made natural gas rather appealing to Americans. Natural gas is so bounteous in the U.S. that 18% of the world’s supply of natural gas was produced in the United States in 2006 (Alters 47). It is also predicted, “that from 2006 to 2030 the total U.S. natural gas production [and . . . c]onsumption will increase” (Alters 47). From an environmental standpoint, natural gas replacing the more vial offenders, like nuclear power and coal, for instance, could have the potential to slow down the ecological freefall the Earth has been experiencing since the Industrial Revolution. However, natural gas may just be one small step in a larger, uphill trek. While natural gas is easier to accept and support than the other members of the current energy source line-up, there are dangers attached to this system as well. In September 2008, Texans saw the dangers for themselves when “a natural gas pipeline exploded in McCook [County]. The ball of fire was 400 feet high and over 1,500 degrees. The flames melted everything around them, including the asphalt on the road” (Ripley). While no one was harmed in the accident, there is still a real danger to citizens. A Texas news team covering the story “learned there are literally hundreds of miles of natural gas pipelines, running under thousands . . . [of local] homes” (Ripley). Citizens in Pennsylvania discovered the presence of volatile gas lines the hard way, when a natural gas explosion occurred in a residential neighborhood earlier this year. The blast killed five people, including a 4-month-old baby boy (Seelye). Such devastation as this should not be given license to continue. While the benefits of natural gas are many, the danger it poses to citizens is too great to ignore. Keeping this in mind, natural gas, despite its obvious dangers, is the beginning of a larger trend in a positive and much safer direction.

While America is edging toward a better future with the increased use of natural gas, the persistent abuse of fossil fuels and nuclear energy keeps us tied to the grizzly future described previously. It is an undeniable fact that “[f]ossil-fuel combustion is . . . adding billions of tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere each year, an inexorable escalation that must end soon if we are not to disrupt virtually every ecosystem . . . on the planet” (Flavin 20). This grim outlook, while seeming melodramatic to some, does not even begin to describe the impact energy production has on the planet, and by extension those who live on it. There is a real need to reinvent how and where we as a society collect our energy. The heavy reliance many nations have on the old methods of energy production need to be reevaluated. Currently, “fossil fuels accounted for 86% of all energy produced worldwide, whereas renewable energy accounted for [a measly] 8%” (Alters 12). While it is unlikely that those numbers will flip within this lifetime, small steps are necessary to maintain the only planet we have. To reach this vital end, the employment of wind power, solar power, and new technologies is necessary.

Wind power, while not without its faults, is the better choice, because it is environmentally friendly and infinite in its ability to produce power. Unlike the more widely employed forms of energy described previously, wind power does not produce any harmful emissions and does not risk those who work in the field of harvesting wind energy. While this form of energy production is not widely used today, “the EIA projects that wind power capacity in the United States will nearly quintuple from 0.6% of total generation in 2006 to 2.4% in 2030” (Alters 91). This is no doubt fueled by the growing expense of other fuels, like oil, rather than the obvious advantages for the environment. Regardless of the motivation, the strides taken today towards a healthier energy collection process have met with roadblocks. Opponents believe that wind energy can never become a widely used source because of its dependence on uncontrollable environmental factors, namely wind (Alters 91). The presence of a wind current is the lifeblood of the turbine and its ability to produce electricity. Even the direction of the wind can make a vital difference: “[i]f the wind[’s] direction is parallel to the plane of rotation of the rotor blade for an infinitesimally thin rotor blade, the wind turbine will not provide any wind power” (Fanchi 95). Many who see this information wash their hands of the idea, assuming this is an insurmountable problem. However, countries like Denmark, with their legion of turbines, should be examined as a potential model for America’s inevitable energy renaissance. As a champion of wind energy, Denmark “generates about 20% of its electricity from wind” (“Wind”). Denmark has helped wind power to prove its worth as a viable energy alternative. While Denmark may have some environmental factors that give the country an edge in the collection of wind energy, there are other paths to collection that have potential. For example, a large-scale turbine field could potentially be constructed in some distant locale, possibly another country with ample wind; of course, then the issue then becomes how to effectively transport and store the

energy produced. While the idea of outsourcing anything is not ideal to the minds of many Americans, if it were to be coupled with “home grown” wind fields, it may prove to be reliable. However, the strongest argument in favor of wind power is its infinite ability to produce: while oil and coal will certainly reach an end, wind will always blow.

The necessity to utilize Earth’s renewable resources has driven scientists to investigate not only wind, but also the sun as a source of energy; meanwhile, the financial benefit has driven many to take advantage of this resource. From solar energy’s humble beginnings, it has grown into a resource that is now utilized on a broad scale. Today, “almost all regions [of the United States] have some solar resources” (Alters 92). Despite the meteoric rise in popularity and use, solar power is “not yet competitive with conventional energy sources” (Berinstein 64). The growing availability of reasonably priced solar panels and tax incentives to “go green” has also helped the solar power industry explode over the past decade. In 2008, “[m]ore than 3,400 companies [were] in the solar energy sector” (Bick). This growing industry has also helped “employ about 25,000 to 35,000 workers, including installers, manufacturers, distributors and project developers and materials suppliers” (Bick). The benefit to the economy could potentially exceed the 2001 estimate that boasted, “3,800 jobs [were] created for every \$100 million in solar cell (PV) sales” (Berinstein 67). Meanwhile, in a more recent estimate, a spokeswoman for the Solar Energy Industrial Association saw the number of jobs “grow[ing] to more than 110,000 direct solar jobs by 2016” (qtd. in Bick). Given the current economic climate, a reevaluation of our current energy use and the source of that energy may be the key to helping the economy and the environment in one strategic move. The transfer to more environmentally healthy options of energy collection is inevitable, because many of the resources seen as vital today will eventually run out; now the only question up for debate is when the world will catch up to that reality.

As wind and solar power developed and become a commonality in the mind of the average citizen, new methods of energy production are rising up as the technologies of tomorrow. As one commentator put it, “[t]hanks to a potent combination of advancing technology and government incentives, motivated in large measure by environmental concerns, the once glacial energy markets are now shifting” (Flavin 21). One of the by products of this shift is the up rise of new ideas that would have seemed mere science fiction a few decades ago. Methods like geothermal energy, which would have seemed impossible, are now seen as science fact. Geothermal energy production involves using naturally occurring heat from the earth to create steam; which then heats buildings or works with a generator to create electricity (“Geothermal”). This system “provides heat for 95% of the buildings in Reykjavik, Iceland;” proving that it is possible to use this on a large scale (“Geothermal”). These plants are also incredibly environmental friendly: “Geothermal plants emit 97% less acid rain-causing sulfur compounds than are emitted by fossil fuel plants” (“Geothermal”). Geothermal energy is not alone in the pursuit for the next big thing in green technology; sharing the spot for “bright, up-and-comers” is biomass energy. This refurbished process of old, in the simplest terms, involves the burning or converting of an object, wood for example, to release the energy inside and using that energy for another purpose (“Biomass”). The “mass” in biomass can be any number of things, ranging from crops to garbage. While the burning of large quantities of anything can have negative effects on the environment, due to the release of carbon dioxide, “when the plants that are the sources of biomass are grown, a nearly equivalent amount of CO2 is captured through photosynthesis” (“Biomass”). This idea of catch-and-release means that, “[s]ustainable cultivation and harvesting of biomass can result in no net increase in CO2 emissions” (“Biomass”). While this biomass and geothermal energy are not without their flaws, they offer a new perspective on how we collect energy and where we look for it. This sort of out-of-the-box thinking is what will sustain our energy needs, not fossil fuels.

Coal, oil, nuclear power, and natural gas have served their purpose, but it is time to look ahead. Dependence on a few forms of energy production is not a reliable system, especially when those forms of production rely on finite or dangerous materials to operate. The future offered by these forms of energy production is a dark world where the air is not simply impure but deadly. The need for change is vital if we are to leave the planet somewhat intact before it’s too late. Wind power, solar power, and new technologies will be developed. Renewable energy will replace the old way; but can we awaken to the ugly reality we have brought upon this world before our hunger for power kills the only planet we have?

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## THE GREAT EFFECTS OF THE GREAT WAR by Jaimee Dunn (3<sup>rd</sup> Place)

Throughout history, war had been considered a glorious occurrence often thought of in a romantic frame of mind. People had seen fighting for one's country as an incredibly noble thing to do regardless of the costs. One's homeland and the loved ones who live in it are of the utmost importance, so many people were willing to die for them. However, through the nineteenth century, the only wars that had been fought were fought with old techniques and out-dated machinery. Up until the twentieth century, the world had not yet seen a modern war. World War I had changed both of these by giving the world a massive war between multiple countries that had utilized methods of warfare never before seen, as well as outstanding death tolls and grim war stories. The effects of World War I had trickled down to influence every person of this era, whether it be a direct impact on their lives, a change in the way they view the world, or even an identity crisis. Writers in the early twentieth century had captured this change very well in the work they produced. For example, T. S. Eliot, a prominent British poet of the time, had written two significant poems that express the popular mindset of the time as a result of World War I. T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land" depict how severely people had been effected by World War I.

World War I had been a highly influential and dramatic event for the world's citizens. "The Great War (World War I), fought between 1914 and 1918, was one of the most decisive events of the twentieth century" (Judd). It had involved all of Europe, an area that "seemed to have weathered a century of relative peace after the Napoleonic wars that had ended exactly 100 years earlier" (Judd). The war had also included Eastern Europe and Russia, whose government collapsed as a result of a revolution triggered by the war. One new method of warfare at this time had been trench warfare. In trench warfare, "armies [lived] below ground and use[d] periscopes to observe the other side. Steps in the sides of the trenches were used as platforms for firing at the enemy" (Judd). Soldiers had been stationed in these trenches for extended periods of time – long enough to have to sleep in the trenches, too. They had been exposed to numerous health hazards, such as "rain, cold, poor sanitary facilities, lice, flies, trench foot, and a constant stench. Rats as big as small dogs fed on the dead. Of the casualties on the Western front, 50 percent were directly attributable to conditions in the trenches" (Judd). The fighting had lasted longer than anticipated, much to citizens' dismay. "Four years of war had resulted in nine million deaths, one million of which were civilian. Many more millions of soldiers who lived through the war were crippled mentally or physically" (Judd). All of this upheaval of normal, daily life had resulted in countless lives irrevocably altered by the war.

T. S. Eliot had found inspiration in this new, conflicted era when writing "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ... dramatizes the difference between a traditional love poem and its contemporary equivalent" (Pinsker). This poem is about a man named J. Alfred Prufrock who is attending a party in which he feels very self-conscious. He comes across as a very conscientious person with low self-esteem. He is a wallflower at this party while everyone else is dancing, talking, and living. He would rather stand on the sidelines and question every move he makes or has made. He also seems to regret things he has and has not done. He wants to be able to tell women that he cares for them, but he is afraid of being rejected, so he does nothing. By the end of the poem, J. Alfred Prufrock confesses to the reader his fears of never finding someone to love him. He says that even the most willing of girls would never want to be with him. His self-esteem gets even lower when he says that he is not the star character in his own life; he sees himself as a background character, an assistant, in his life. His low self-esteem and fear of being rejected cause him to be stagnant. As a result of his never progressing, Prufrock dies completely alone in a cave under the sea. While this poem is supposed to be a love song, as suggested in the title, the readers are instead exposed to a theme that is very much the opposite of love. This contradiction is representative of the social contradictions that had been present during the World War I era.

"The Waste Land" is perhaps one of the most well-known post-World War I era poems by T. S. Eliot. This poem includes many references to mythical legends, religious stories, and literature of the past and present. Through these references, Eliot pieces together scenes of a confused and chaotic new world that are just as perplexing as the way in which they are written. This story describes the need to remember those who have died as well as acknowledge the passing of time. With the changing world, numerous people dying, and time passing so quickly, the ability to remember what matters is of the utmost importance. In the second section, the scene changes to one of two people having a conversation in a bar that is just about to close. Someone tells a woman that her husband will be discharged from the army soon, so she needs to get things in order for his arrival. During this conversation, she reveals that she had another child while her husband had been at war. The third section "describes the degeneration of ... passions in the sterile decadence of the modern Waste Land" (Eliot 2084). The world is drastically changed and even "the nymphs are departed" (Eliot 175). This scene also houses a rather cold sex scene, which further emphasizes The Fire Sermon's message of there being a lack of passion in the modern world. The final section "concludes in a collage of fragments reiterating the themes of the whole" (Gish). This section describes a religious quest and the deteriorating state of Eastern Europe. "The legend of the Thunder comes from ... an Indian sacred book... The story of the thunder is a story about

answering the riddle of existence” (Gish). This “riddle of existence” is one that had plagued many people during and after World War I.

The world’s view on war had been changed quite radically as a result of World War I, as depicted in T. S. Eliot’s poems. “The outbreak of the war had at first been greeted with jingoistic enthusiasm. It was not until the combatants experienced a tremendous loss of life in the trenches on the western front that this view was shattered. By the end of the war, pessimism and disillusion were endemic” (Judd). “Pessimism and disillusion” are evident in J. Alfred Prufrock’s character. When he says, “No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; / Am an attendant lord ... At times, indeed, almost ridiculous - / Almost, at times, the Fool,” Prufrock shows his lack of confidence, his disillusion (Eliot 111-19). He sees himself as a background character in his own life, not worthy to be the main character. He even goes so far as to say he is a fool. Pessimism is also the reigning mental belief at the end of the poem when he says, “I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. / I do not think that they will sing to me ... We have lingered in the chambers of the sea / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown” (Eliot 124-31). Here, Prufrock believes that he will never find someone to love and that he will die alone. J. Alfred Prufrock’s pessimism is similar to the pessimism that controlled the world during World War I. The world that people had grown accustomed to, the people who everyone had come to know, and ways of life that had been the norm had suddenly given way to something foreign and negative, thus, pessimism had become the main belief. J. Alfred Prufrock had to have been at least a little confident and optimistic before in his life until something had happened to him to make him change his mind about himself. Wars and other traumatic and overwhelming experiences can forever change a person.

World War I had been the first major modern war, bringing with it a new way of life. “Once the war began, its course was horrifyingly unique to European experience” (“World War I”). No one had expected the war to turn out the way that it had because there had not been another major modern war before it. World War I had caused millions of soldiers and civilians to die and many others to be injured, displaced from their homes, and physically or mentally ill. In “The Waste Land,” T. S. Eliot says, “I had not thought death had undone so many” (63). This could relate to the large number of people affected by this war. Seeing this level of destruction must severely impact a person’s mind. Eliot also mentions in “The Waste Land” a person terribly distraught and unable to answer any questions. “Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing? / I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes. / ‘Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?’” (Eliot 121-26). The line that reads, “Those are pearls that were his eyes” is a reference to a drowned Phoenician Sailor in a Shakespeare play whose eyes started to look like pearls after he died. If this person can only think of a dead man with pearl-like eyes, then he or she must be having a difficult time coping with a traumatic experience. It is common knowledge today that many soldiers who go off to war come home with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of seeing a lot of violence. If this is the case with the person in “The Waste Land,” then the person asking them all of those questions comes across as insensitive. However, if fighting in the war had been a foreign experience, then dealing with its aftermath was an even more foreign experience. The Europeans had had to learn the hard way how to deal with war and its harsh consequences.

Fighting in a war, or simply being surrounded by a society completely submerged in war, can cause a person to question who they really are. The world had imagined noble soldiers going off to fight for their countries and becoming courageous heroes. During the war, the great majority of these soldiers had been hiding in trenches and fighting their enemies while protected by walls of dirt. Hiding is not exactly what one thinks of when imagining what a brave person would do. “Indeed, what did courage, honor and valor have to do with modern war?” (Judd). If soldiers had not been as brave as they should be, and one’s homeland not as safe as it should be, then there must have been several identity crises occurring during this time. T. S. Eliot captures this confused mindset in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” The tone of the entire poem is very insecure and confused because he cannot decide what to do with his life or how he should act. This conflict is apparent even from the beginning when he says, “To lead you to an overwhelming question...” (Eliot 10). “Everything militates against his being able to ask the ‘overwhelming question,’ which some critics argue is ‘Who am I?’” (Pinsker). If this is the “overwhelming question” to which J. Alfred Prufrock is referring, then his identity crisis is one people could have related to in the early twentieth century.

Even the political problems plaguing Eastern Europe at this time had affected Western Europeans and their outlook on Europe as a whole. As a result of all the fighting occurring in Western Europe, Eastern Europe had started to house numerous rebellions and revolutions that had ultimately changed the political geography of the area. “The traditional dynastic empires of eastern Europe disappeared and in their place new, independent nation states emerged” (Morris 38). Western Europe had often perceived Eastern Europe as “a place of semi-Orientalized, backward, and degenerate peoples” (Newsome 39). They had seen this region as one in constant degeneration especially after the war. “After the Great War many West Europeans and Americans looked on Eastern Europe as a naturally savage, war-torn region: the ‘Dead Lands of Europe’ in J. W. Headlam’s depiction” (Newsome 41). This view is very similar to T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” In the final section of his poem, Eliot comments that “three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous and the present decay of eastern Europe” (2088). He also says, “Already half of Europe, already at least half of Eastern Europe is on the way to Chaos, drives drunk in holy madness on the edge of the abyss and sings at the same time” (Eliot 2089). This section itself questions the purpose of life, but it refers to a “city over the mountains” that “Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling Towers” (Eliot 372-74). This city could represent Eastern Europe and the revolutions and reforms it had been experiencing during this time. “Eliot’s epic poem *The Waste Land* ... [is] ... ambitious and ... revealing about the psychological landscape of post-World War I Europe” (Pinsker). World War I and its effects, both physical and psychological, had encompassed all of Europe, just as T. S. Eliot’s poem does in writing.

T. S. Eliot had found a lot of inspiration in the effects of World War I when writing his poetry. “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “The Waste Land” are two clear examples of this. They both show characters questioning reality and who

they really are. While these poems' story lines are very different from each other, they share the common thread of being influenced by the Great War. During such a long period of time when everything had been constantly changing, negative attitudes toward life and the world in general had been the norm. Regardless, some soldiers and their supporters must have clung to the enthusiasm and optimism that had reigned at the beginning of this war. Without this motivation, there may not have been willing soldiers for the following wars throughout history. Even though the world had been covered in a thick shroud of depressing darkness during this time, the light had managed to eventually shine through and inspire soldiers and their supporters for the following years to come.

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- ▽ Participants must be current SCC students enrolled full- or part-time.
- ▽ Students may submit up to one entry per category.
- ▽ All entries must be typed and double-spaced on 8 ½ by 11 white paper.
- ▽ Each entry should have a title at the top of the page but **not** the name of the author.
- ▽ Participants' names, phone numbers, and email addresses must be typed on a separate page and stapled to the **back** of each entry.
- ▽ Entries must be submitted to the box marked "Writing Contest" outside E312 on or before the deadline, or they will not be eligible to win.

**Entries cannot exceed the maximum length for each category:**

Fiction: maximum of 15 pages; Poetry: maximum of 50 lines; Research Paper: max of 10 pages, including parenthetical citations and a Works Cited page in proper MLA format

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For more information, contact Professor Maureen Roe @ 628.4746 or [professorroe@yahoo.com](mailto:professorroe@yahoo.com)

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