

The Scrivener - Spring 2014

The De Smet Jesuit High School Literary
Magazine

Editor

Michael Andrus

Moderator

Robert Hutchison

Special Thanks to

Laurie Kohler and Emily Dames

FACES

Faces dominate our landscape. Every year a new group of students arrive at DeSmet. We familiarize ourselves with their faces. Some faces bring a smile to our own face. Sometimes we bemoan seeing a person's face. Some faces stick with us throughout time. Some faces fade into the shadows of our memories. As a teacher I cringe when these faces reappear unassociated with a name lost amongst the new set of faces I have to learn for the year. I love it when former students come back and say, "Mr. Hutch, I'm Jim Somebody." It's comforting putting names with faces.

Senior Jonathan Salter's artwork dominates the landscape of this issue of *The Scrivener*. The faces and eyes Salter composes are provocatively haunting. There is a darkness about them, not only in the shades he uses, but also in their gaze. It is a gaze that provokes empathy. Their gaze is always off somewhere beyond the reader and I wonder what they see. Are they yearning for something different? Are they looking to the future? Does it bring them redemption from their pain or is it what they see that evokes the struggle in their faces?

One of my favorite aspects of Salter's art is that they are not faces I recognize; yet, there is something familiar about them. His art reminds me of Mother Theresa's statement: "Without mirrors we are forced to see ourselves through the eyes of others." What a beautifully challenging idea for us as a Jesuit institution. There's the old joke that asks, "What's Jesus in his least recognizable form?" The answer: "A high school student." Mother Theresa's words remind us that we are challenged to see God in all, not just those we know and appreciate.

This year her words echo with particularly poignancy. Not only are we saying goodbye to the class of 2014 and welcoming the class of 2018; we are also saying goodbye to some wonderful faculty members. As these faculty members move on, as DeSmet continues to evolve, may we be reminded of the ways that these faculty members saw Jesus in the students, how they lived out the Ignatian standard of a "preferential option for the poor" through education, and may current faculty members live up to the precedent they have set.

Robert Hutchison
Moderator, *The Scrivener*

EXPLANATION OF THE VARIOUS WORKS

100 Neediest Cases

The 100 Neediest Cases is an annual competition amongst artists in the St. Louis area as a way to visually bring awareness of social justice for others during the holiday season. Ed Berns began the tradition of having DeSmet students submit artwork to the 100 Neediest Cases. He began the project as a way for students to use their gift of art given to them by God as a means to better all. Typically DeSmet students submit artwork under the categories of Elderly, Babies, Poverty, and Illness.

Parables

The parables come from an assignment in Mr. Place's sophomore class. To build their understanding of a parable, students are asked to write their own parable that uses a familiar idea to explain something unfamiliar about the Kingdom of God. Students are asked to follow the basic format of a parable: introduce the difficult concept, question, or idea; tell the story; and, challenge the listener to connect with the parable's message.

Abstract Design

Submissions under the category Abstract Design are the first assessment of students transitioning from the world of relationships and representations to the realm of abstract art. It is a test of their observation skills. Students start with a representative image and manipulate the shape in positive and negative space. The process helps students learn to select lines to portray a particular idea. Essentially, students are learning to express their own voice in through their artwork.

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NEPTUNE'S BATTLE

by Alex LaBarge

September 1st was not a day to reminisce

It was the day that someone had challenged King Neptune to a duel.

With the omniscient sky and water blacker than straight coffee, no one had

thought of doing anything worth regretting. Until one vessel decided to cause havoc amongst the people.

Her black bottomed boat came tearing through the waves, forcing men and women to get off the water unless they want pain.

But old Neptune would not stand for it. He thrashed and slashed but the day sailor just shredded through She bounced around but wouldn't budge.

The mighty sea spit on the captain salty face as he Attempted to maneuver around the upset water.

With a mighty blow, Neptune's trident pierced her side.

Filling up with water, the boat gave a final retreat, But sadly figured out why no one challenges Neptune to a dance.

As she rode her last wave the Wild One's reign came to a skid Neptune was victorious and Davey Jones found another victim The captain had signed the deed to his life to the waters that claimed it.

artwork by Timothy Nguyen



THE UNKNOWN

by Matthew Hebda

Alone.

I sat alone, with nobody to be with.
I was lonely, with nobody to talk to.
I thought idly, with nobody to think about.
I was alone.

Chance.

You found me, and you were curious.
You met me, and you were interested.
You asked me, and you got to know me better.
You took a chance.

Together.

We learned more about each other, and we were satisfied.
We spent time with each other, and we were occupied.
We found things to do for one another, and we were grateful.
We were together.

The Unknown.

It isolates us from our feelings, and we feel Alone.
It fast approaches us, and we must take a Chance.
It very well may separate us, and still we stand Together.
As we hurl toward The Unknown.

THE THEATER

by Ben Gliedt

“Oh my god Daniel you are sooo adorable.”

Danny clenched his hand into a fist. Joseph was very close to crossing the line. Danny had always had a temper, and Joseph was setting it off. He'd been in the green room backstage laughing with the other actors about Ariel. Danny had intervened, saying something to the effect of ‘If you don't like her leave her alone.’ Joseph had given one of his looks at the others, and they'd all cleared out so it was just Danny and Joseph in the green room together.

“I mean, you actually think I'm dating her because I like her.”

“If you don't like her why would you keep up a charade like that for weeks? Just to spite me?”

“Partly. I'll admit it right now, Daniel, I loathe you. You're smug attitude, the way you always whine about not getting cast (even though you suck at acting), your stupid spiky haircut. I loathe you right down to your stupid blue eyes. But it's not just that. You know what it is? I always get what I want. I get the roles, I get the grades, I get the friends, anything I set my mind to. And right now, my mind is set on getting what you want. Capiche? Ariel means nothing to me. She's just a fat, ugly who-”

Danny's fist struck right on the nose, cutting Joseph off mid-sentence. He'd finally crossed a line that Danny couldn't accept. He could listen to Joseph mock him, he could put up with Joseph taking the lead, could deal with him telling Greg not to cast him in the shows. He could even put up with it when Joseph would insult his family, because Joseph didn't actually know anything about his family. The one thing Joseph wouldn't stand for was insults against his friends.

Joseph fell to the green room floor, and Danny dove on top of him. Danny's fists rose and fell, striking at Joseph's arms as he blocked his face, all the rage of three years of animosity between the two pouring out at once. The others heard the commotion and immediately ran in.

Danny's best friend Steve dragged him back and held him down, trying to calm him down. Joseph was trying to stem the blood pouring from his nose, looking utterly shocked. Father Greg was backstage in an instant.

"What the hell is going on here?" The old priest's voice boomed out.

"Danny was back here wailing on Joseph!"

"The kid's crazy! He was just hitting him for no reason!"

"Danny, my office! NOW!" Father Greg turned and stormed off. Danny followed, fists still clenched, but already regretting his outburst.

Father Greg sank into the chair behind his desk, letting out a long sigh. He crossed his hands on his ample belly and just sat there, looking at Danny. The seconds stretched on into minutes, Danny shifting uncomfortably from foot to foot and rubbing his aching knuckles. Finally Danny couldn't take it anymore.

"Look sir, I-"

"Danny, what am I supposed to do about this? You and Joseph are both extremely important to the theater, but I can't let something like this go." He held up a hand to cut off Danny's excuse, "I don't know what he said to deserve it, (although I'm sure he did deserve it), but I'm sorry, you went too far. It doesn't matter what he said, you have to learn to control your temper. I'm sorry Danny, but I'm going to have to take you off of the crew. I hate to do it, but you're just lucky I'm not reporting this to the disciplinarian."

Danny was speechless. One moment, and he'd fucked it up. He'd let Joseph win.

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Danny couldn't sleep that night. As he lay in the dark he considered how this had all started. When it came to theater Danny had one dream: to be a star. He'd never been great at acting, so when freshman year rolled around he was cut from the first show very quickly. Danny

joined the tech crew immediately, but he always really wanted to act. Now, why did he want to act so badly? Danny didn't really want attention, that wasn't it. He didn't want a higher position in the theater; in fact, when he'd been offered the stage manager spot he'd declined because he enjoyed being on the stage more than he would like being in the booth. The best Danny could figure was that the acting role had become his 'white whale' in a way. He had been after it since freshman year, but all chasing it did was put him in Joseph's path, which never ended well.

Danny didn't know why Joseph picked him to hate, but ever since auditions freshmen year they'd been enemies. Joseph took every opportunity that came his way to mock Danny, laughing at his clothes, 'accidentally' knocking his lunch off the table as he walked by, basically just being a typical bully. The worst was that Joseph seemed to want to make sure Danny couldn't have anything that would make him happy. Joseph was the star actor of Cranston Prep's theater program and used his position to make sure Danny never got cast in a show. Danny was fine working with crew. In fact, he'd gotten quite good at managing affairs behind the curtain and had been assistant stage manager for his sixth straight show (the school did three shows

artwork by Matt Lindy

a year, two plays and a musical). But he couldn't even get a minor role in a show. There were other instances of Joseph ruining things for Danny. Sophomore year, Danny had joined the debate team at Cranston. To his great surprise, so did Joseph, who immediately started to sabotage his cases until he quit. The same happened when Danny joined an intramural basketball team and Joseph started one, seemingly just to beat Danny's. It seemed that no matter what Danny did, Joseph followed and tried to



make sure he couldn't enjoy it.

There was one thing even Joseph couldn't take from him though, and that was Steve. Steve was Danny's best friend, and had been since Danny had moved to town in the seventh grade. His first day of class he had picked two fights and had his money taken before lunch even started. He was sitting alone in a corner when the biggest kid his age he'd ever seen, easily six-foot-three and over two-hundred pounds, shuffled up to him. Danny, expecting another attack, jumped to his feet ready to fight. But the kid just sat down and introduced himself: "Steve Parker". Steve gave Danny half his lunch and from that day on he always had a friend.

Danny's mind drifted to Ariel. Ariel. Danny's perfect girl. Now Cranston had an outstanding theater program, ranked among the best in the country, which was pretty good for an all-guys private high school. Of course, they had to import the girls from other schools around the area, but getting volunteers was never a problem because of the reputation they had.

That reputation was what brought Ariel to Cranston on the first day of tryouts for the musical. She, like many of the girls who tried out for Cranston musicals, had been in a theater practically since she could speak. When Danny saw her on the first day of auditions, he thought someone had knocked the wind out of him. He thought she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen; tall and graceful, with long orange hair, green eyes and a stunning figure. As much as he tried to be a gentleman, Danny couldn't quite manage to keep his eyes above her neckline for long. Not only that, but she stunned everyone at auditions and was immediately cast in the lead female role.

Of course Danny was after her from day one. He'd never been one to back down from a challenge and quickly attempted to get to know her. However, there was one problem: he was, as always, cut from the cast and ended up in his usual spot on crew. The thing is, the crew and cast of the shows at Cranston were extremely separate. Led by Joseph, the cast considered themselves to be the important ones in theater and therefore disregarded the crew by and large. The crew has a certain animosity toward the cast as well, mostly sprouting from the snide comments the cast makes during tech week, the second to last week of rehearsals in which

the crew comes in to learn and perfect just about everything they have to do in about five days. The actors simply see this as an inconvenience, having to slow down the scenes they have worked for weeks on just to get the crew up to speed. Regardless Danny was diligent about getting to know Ariel.

As usual, however, Joseph had to get in the way. Danny thought back to the first day he and Ariel met. After auditions Danny went up and introduced himself to her and they began to talk quite amicably, when Joseph jumped in.

"Hey! It was... Ariel right? Nice to meet you, my name is Joseph. I see you've already met Danny. You know, Danny's a great crew member. He's been assistant stage manager for the last five shows in a row! We couldn't do the shows without him!"

He was doing it again. This was what pissed Danny off the most about Joseph. Joseph did this all the time. When he saw you alone, he was a complete asshole. Put him in a group with people he didn't want to alienate and he acted like he was your best friend. He made it hard for anyone who hadn't seen it firsthand to believe that he was actually a jerk, ever. This method was what made him a teacher's favorite, even though all his classmates hated him. It was why Father Greg, the grouchy old theater director at Cranston, loved him so much. And he was pulling it on Ariel. Within the week, Joseph had a date with Ariel. He'd managed to take dating her off the table, but try as he might he couldn't keep the two from becoming good friends over the course of the next few weeks.

A tap on the window snapped Danny out of his musings. Steve's dark face was haloed by the glow of the street light outside. This was a common occurrence for the two of them. The two lived down the block from each other, so Steve had made a habit of going to Danny's first floor bedroom late at night when they needed to talk. Danny opened the window and Steve, with no small amount of difficulty, climbed in. Danny's aunt was away on business again and his uncle was such a deep sleeper that they barely had to lower their voices in order to not be caught.

"I just can't do it Steve. Joseph has had that coming for years and you know it. I can't believe Greg would believe all of them over me! He



artwork by Jonathon Salter

didn't even give me a chance to defend myself! This is absolutely ridiculous. Ooh I wish I'd gotten a recording of that conversation. Ariel would have dumped him on the spot for what he was saying. He had everyone else leave so no one but me would hear, because no one would believe just me..." Danny's rant continued for several minutes unabated. Steve just listened quietly, as he was wont to do. This trait was one thing that made the two such good friends. Danny had a temper, and was liable to blow

up and rant at the drop of a hat. Steve on the other hand was slow and considerate in his speech, and had a well of patience that seemed to never run dry. That well was what had kept him with Danny when so many others had gotten sick of his volatile behavior. And their friendship was what had in turn curbed that violent nature. He'd been Danny's rock when Danny moved in with his aunt and uncle, leaving his old city and his old friends behind. Now he tried to give his friend some more advice.

"You should go talk to Greg. I doubt you'll get your gig back, but he deserves an apology. He really likes you Danny, and you really let him down. You're definitely going to have to talk to Ariel. She deserves an explanation. She won't believe you if you tell her exactly what happened, but you did kick the crap out of her boyfriend."

The fire in Danny's voice died down when he replied. "Yeah, you're right. I'll go apologize to the old guy. I'm not looking forward to this talk with Ariel though. She's going to kill me, or never speak to me again. Or both, probably. Something wrong?" Steve had his brow furrowed in his familiar 'I had a thought' expression.

"You need to talk to Joseph too."

"What?!? No way. No way in hell am I talking to that fucking--"

"Hear me out. He hates you, and we both know you've never given him a reason to. He's not that much of a dick to everyone you know. He's got some reason for hating you. You just said yourself that he told you he's dating Ariel to spite you. Why would he do that? Have you ever considered asking him what it is that you've done to earn his hatred? I'm just saying, you owe it to yourself to find out why he hates you."

Danny didn't want to discuss Joseph, so he gave a noncommittal response and changed the subject. The two stayed up for another hour just talking, never again touching the subject at hand before Steve climbed out the window and headed home. Danny finally fell into an unsound sleep, troubled by dreams of angry priests and Joseph's laughter disturbing him all night.

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Despite agonizing all day, his apology to Father Greg went smoothly. Of course, he didn't get his position back but he decided he didn't need it. He merely wanted to set things right with Greg, because he'd always liked the old theater direct and didn't want him to think badly of him. He was just heading for the parking lot so he could finally go home when he heard what he had been truly been dreading all day.

"Daniel!" Ariel's voice cut across the lobby like a knife that lodged itself in Daniel's back. Daniel winced and, heart sinking, turned to face his doom. Ariel stalked across the lobby, her face looking particularly menacing ringed by her bright red hair.

"Oh shit." He muttered under his breath.

"What the hell happened Danny? I need to hear this from you, because everyone is saying you beat up Joseph for no reason. I can't believe that Danny, I want a straight answer from you."

Danny froze. He wanted to tell her so badly, tell her everything Joseph had done and said, but he couldn't. Steve's warning about her not believing him was true. Ariel was smart, but she was under the same spell as everyone else when it came to Joseph. He had her completely fooled.

"There were, uh," Danny said, "Some... words exchanged. We had a... significant disagreement. My temper got the better of me and I hit him once. Or twice. But it wasn't at random, I swear!"

Ariel glared at him, trying to decide if he was lying.

"Alright. I believe you. Joseph was trying to convince me it wasn't that big a deal, so I guess other people blew it out of proportion. I'm still pissed at you though! You should go apologize to Joseph, you owe him that much."

She turned and stalked off, leaving Danny completely bewildered. Joseph had downplayed the story? This was going to require an investigation.

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artwork by Matt Wahle

Danny stood outside of Joseph's house, marveling at its size. He knew Joseph had money but he'd never imagined that his family was this rich. He could easily have fit his own house as well as Steve's inside, and still had room for a garage. To be fair, he and Steve both lived in an area with pretty small houses. Steve was only able to afford Cranston because he played football for them, and Danny's aunt and uncle used the money his parents had left him to pay for his education.

Danny walked up the long drive and rang the bell, shifting nervously from foot to foot. He'd never even seen Joseph's parents before, but if they were anything like Joseph was he didn't want to.

The man who answered the door was nothing like Danny expected. Joseph was always dressed casually, almost flamboyantly. His father looked like a Mormon doorknocker, his starch-white shirt buttoned up all the way and his black shoes flawlessly polished. He looked down his nose like Danny was an animal that was about to track something unpleasant into his house, rubbing his fist like he wanted to hit him.

"Um, I'm looking for Joseph?" Danny said, peering nervously

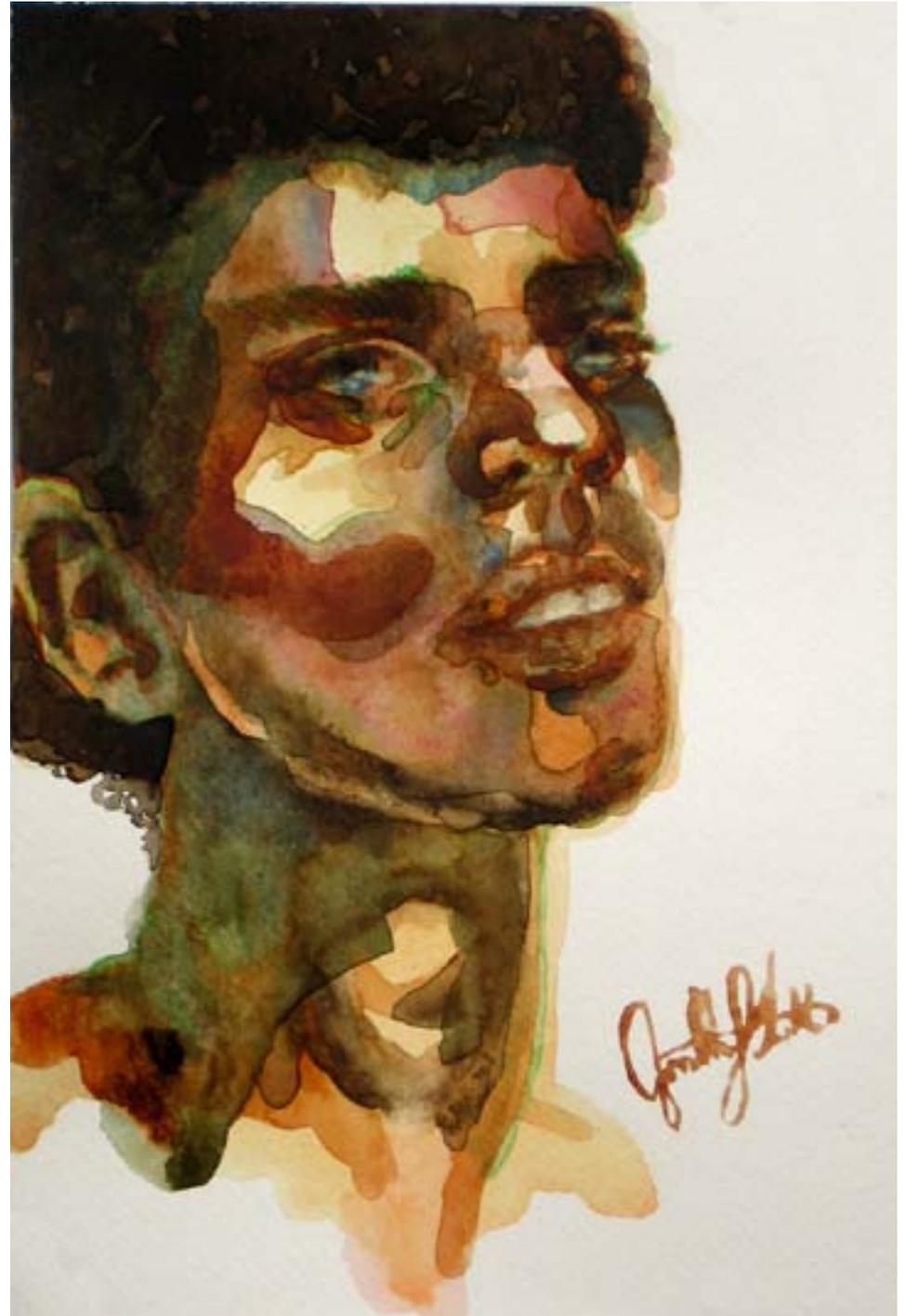
around the man into the house beyond. What he saw fit his initial impression of Joseph's father. The furniture inside looked expensive and looked like it had never been used. The whole place looked spotless, as though it was cleaned hourly. The beige carpet was as clean as it was boring, the white walls minimally decorated with crisp paintings and photographs. To the right was a living room, where there was a large crucifix on the wall where most families would have a television. To the left was an extremely modern kitchen, the appliances all gleaming as though they had been polished. Directly across the hall where a set of stairs with the same beige carpet running up, neatly hung pictures hanging above the polished wooden banister.

Joseph's father simply jerked his thumb towards the stairs and stepped aside to allow Danny to pass. Danny nervously made his way up the stairs. There were pictures of the family hanging up all along the stairs. There were two rather attractive girls that had to be several years Danny's senior, as well as pictures of the stern man Danny had met at the door and an equally stern-looking woman who was clearly the mother. Interspersed with these family images were pictures of various saints. Finally, at the very top of the stairs, Danny found a single picture of Joseph. It was a full family portrait, with his sisters standing behind their sitting parents, all looking rather stern. Joseph stood to the right, not really with the rest, looking angry. The picture was clearly several years old, as Joseph was younger than when Danny had first met him.

"What are you doing here?" Danny jumped. He'd been so caught up in the picture that he hadn't even notice Joseph approach.

"Um, do you have a minute to talk? I think we need to hash some things out." Danny said.

"Fine, let's get this over with." Joseph led Danny to his room, which was at the end of the hall and rather large. Danny was again impressed by the wealth that must be in this family. Joseph had a full king-size bed and a walk-in closet, a TV with an Xbox, and a high-end desktop computer by the window. The thing that struck Danny most though was the stark contrast the room posed to the rest of the house. Joseph's room was a wreck, dirty clothes strewn about the floor, clean ones in a pile by the closet, Xbox games stacked by the TV and a bed that looked like it



hadn't been made in several years. The only thing he had on his walls were posters from the shows he had been in, signed by the entire cast and crew. Joseph flopped down on the bed, crossed his arm, and glared at Danny. Danny took it all in, the room, Joseph's bruised face, the posters on the wall, and suddenly was at a loss for words. He'd had this whole speech prepared, he was going to lay into Joseph and really get going, but something in threw him off. He couldn't quite place it, but he couldn't bring himself to.

"Ariel wanted me to apologize."

"I don't suppose that's really why you've come."

"No. Not really. I guess I really just wanted some answers. Like, why do you hate me so much? Since freshman year you've had me singled out for no apparent reason. I can't figure it out. What have I ever done to you??"

Joseph just sighed and shut his eyes, the one swollen almost shut. Danny's brain clicked suddenly, and he understood why he'd hesitated.



artwork by Jonathan Strickland

He'd only gotten one solid punch in on Joseph's face, the strike to the nose. Joseph had blocked the rest with his arms. How then did he have a black eye? With a sinking feeling Danny recalled how Joseph's father was rubbing his knuckles when he'd answered the door.

"Look Danny, could we do this another time? I'm kind of busy at the moment."

"Joseph, are you okay?"

"Daniel, I'm fine. Leave. Me. Alone."

"I didn't mean to, uh, give you a black eye. Sorry about that."

"Fuck!" Joseph suddenly exploded. "You didn't do shit, okay? You didn't do this, it was that fucker!"

Danny recognized what was happening. He'd unleashed like that on Steve on more than one occasion, simply letting everything out at once. He also knew there would be more to come. Once an outburst like this started, everything that had built up would likely come rushing out, and it seemed like Joseph had a lot built up.

"You wanna know why I hate you Danny? Fuck, I don't have a reason, okay? I just DO. I don't fucking know why I hate you and let's leave it at that. Now get out of my house."

Danny wasn't quite done yet. He could tell that Joseph needed to get something off his chest, and he wanted to know what was up. He'd come for answers and he'd get answers.

"Joseph. What the fuck is going on? There's no way you've hated me this much for three years without knowing why. I don't buy it. I want the whole story, I want-"

"You want the whole story?!? Let me tell you a fucking story. There was a little boy, growing up in an ultra-Christian family. Never allowed to say a bad word, or miss church on a Sunday, always having to say his please and thank you's and never getting to go play like a normal fucking kid. Now this kid grew up to discover something about himself,

see? When he was about twelve years old he realized he was different, and that if his parents found out they'd probably hate him. He kept this discovery secret for two years, but one day in eighth grade our hero decided he had had enough. He was going to tell his parents his little secret, consequences be damned! And so he did. He went to them, sat them down, told them he loved them and announced 'I am a homosexual! I hope you can still love me!' And you know what?"

Joseph took a deep breath before continuing.

"Spoiler: they couldn't. They beat him, telling him he was going to hell and that if he wanted to live in their household then he'd better straighten up and fly right. They sent him to a fucking 'pray the gay away' camp for the summer and refused to speak to him when he got home. They informed me they wouldn't be considering me their son until I repented my 'wickedness' and fucking apologized."

"Joseph, I had no idea..." Danny tried, but Joseph wasn't finished.

"And then I got to high school" He was using first person now, the story pretense completely forgotten. "And I found out I was good at something: acting. Even before theater, because I was able to convince everyone that I was normal. And then you came along. Fuck, I took one look at you and that was it. You're beautiful blue eyes, the way your hair won't quite stay in line, your passion for everything you set your mind to. I fell for you immediately. I have the biggest fucking crush on you Danny, you know that? I have since freshmen year. There. That's why I fucking hate you."

Danny just stood there, utterly speechless. It was as though a bombshell had gone off in his brain. Of course Joseph was gay, it explained so much. The way Danny would catch him looking at him during class, the constant comments about his appearance, and his eyes, everything. Sometime during his ramble Joseph had started crying, Danny couldn't remember exactly when. They were like that for a few minutes, Joseph sobbing quietly and Danny just standing, until Danny finally decided to do something. He sat down on the bed next to Joseph and put his arm around him, letting him cry on his shoulder.

Joseph pulled away and wiped his eyes, suddenly hard again.

"I'm sorry I dumped that load on you."

"Don't be." Danny said, "Is that the first time you've told anyone?"

"Other than my family, yeah. And if my dad knew I brought it up with anyone he'd kick the crap out of me. Again. I'm expressly forbidden from 'speaking of such blasphemy.'"

Danny paused. He thought of all the times Steve had been there for him. Even after his parents' death he'd had a friend to vent to, always a shoulder to lean on. Here was Joseph, whose own family had rejected him. Danny knew he couldn't leave.

"Joseph, do you know why I moved here? When I was in sixth grade, there was this car accident. My parents were killed by a drunk driver. I came to this town knowing no one, but I found a friend. Steve Parker, you know him. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had that rock. And I'm not going to judge you for how you've behaved, not after hearing that. I wouldn't have been able to handle that alone. Just know that, if you want, you don't have to do it alone anymore."

Joseph sat there, nodding just slightly. Danny stood up and headed for the door, but he stopped and turned.

"You coming man?" Danny asked. Joseph looked shocked, but got up and followed him out of the house

GHOSTS

by Jonathan Strickland

Cold, wet, anxious, I stood on the precipice of human destruction, rifle in hand. A sea of rotting skyscrapers stretched onward into the void.

“Who . . . *what* did this?” Alice muttered as she examined the labyrinth of skeletons that lay only feet from us. “My helmet’s display is picking up a hundred potential bodies.”

“Who knows?” I replied, slowly stepping through the horrific scene. “Come on, a storm’s moving in and we’ve got to find a good shelter before it catches up with us.”

“Yeah, definitely wouldn’t wanna be stuck in that crap. The stuff’ll melt clean through our suits.” She quipped while staring up into an obsidian wall of clouds that lingered above.

The two of us moved at a brisk trot down the nightmarish streets of what once was a great city; we looked cautiously at every blown out window or melted car for danger. A thick layer of ash floated down from the clouds, mixing in with the sweat and grime of our radiation suits until we resembled nothing more than a light fog being swept along by a gust of wind.

“You think anyone made it out?” Alice’s voice crackled in my helmet’s earpiece.

“Out?” I asked

“You know, before the bombs fell.”

“. . . No, probably not.” I sighed, “They were built to ensure that.”

A long moment of silence followed until we came across a small and relatively intact two-story house. I motioned towards it with my head and Alice readied her rifle; we crept up the front steps and approached a thick oak door.

“Think we should knock?” Alice smirked, “Maybe someone’s home.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it; the place is in good shape, like someone’s been taking care of it.” I noted while scanning any neighboring windows. A pit grew in my stomach at the eeriness of the place. “Maybe we should reconsider.”

“Oh don’t be so paranoid. This is the best we’ll find out here, and I

don’t wanna end up sleeping under a truck again.” She grasped the door-knob, “Ah hell, it’s stuck.”

“Not stuck, locked.” I whispered. “Turn around, slowly.”

“Wha-“ Alice turned towards me and saw what I was staring at.

A woman clad in rags and leather-strap shoes stood frozen at the bottom of the concrete steps. Alice instinctively leveled her rifle at the stranger’s chest.

“Who are you?” She demanded more than asked.

“Al, put the gun down, she’s not dangerous.”



artwork by Michael Andrus

“Says you. She managed to sneak up on us without so much as a blink from our radar.” Alice kept her rifle trained on the woman.

I clicked a button on the side of my helmet, switching to my helmet’s loudspeaker. “Ma’am, is this your house?” No response. “Ma’am . . . we’re not going to hurt you. Is this where you live?”

“Live?” the woman whispered almost inaudibly.

“Yes, is this your home?”

“No. No more home; no more live. Only run.” She rambled. “No name, no one, no house, no home, nothing, nothing, nothing.” Her hands began twitching incessantly as she repeated the same word over and over again. “Nothing, nothing, nothing...”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, calm down. It’s alright, you’re safe now” I



shouldered my rifle in an attempt to defuse the situation and motioned for Alice to do the same. A reached an arm out to take the woman's hand. "Let's go inside, it's dangerous out here."

"What the hell are you doing?" Alice spat.

I turned off the loudspeaker for a moment, "Just follow my lead and get that door open." I continued to motion for the woman to come with us inside. She remained motionless. "Won't you come in?" I asked again.

"No, can't stay, they find me, take me back, the ghosts, they find me and kill good man. Kill good girl to." The woman stuttered as she pointed at me and then Alice. "Can't stop, no rest."

"Who's chasing you?" I questioned, "Who are they?"

"Ghosts!" she was yelling now, "White face come and take me from good man! Take me way, into dark!" Her voice grew louder with every word.

"Shut her up or she'll wake up the whole damn city!" Alice interjected.

"Ma'am please calm down, we can protect you. Please be quiet." I tried to reassure her as I slowly walked down the front steps, my arm still outstretched. "Come with us and we can make the ghosts go away."

After a decade, the woman slowly raised her hand towards mine. She held it for a moment, and fell silent. I began to step towards the house, but the woman's ears perked up as if she could hear something in the distance. "They're here," She breathed, "White face here, no time, run!" She ripped her hand from mine and with incredible speed took off down the ashen road.

"What the hell?" Alice stared down the street.

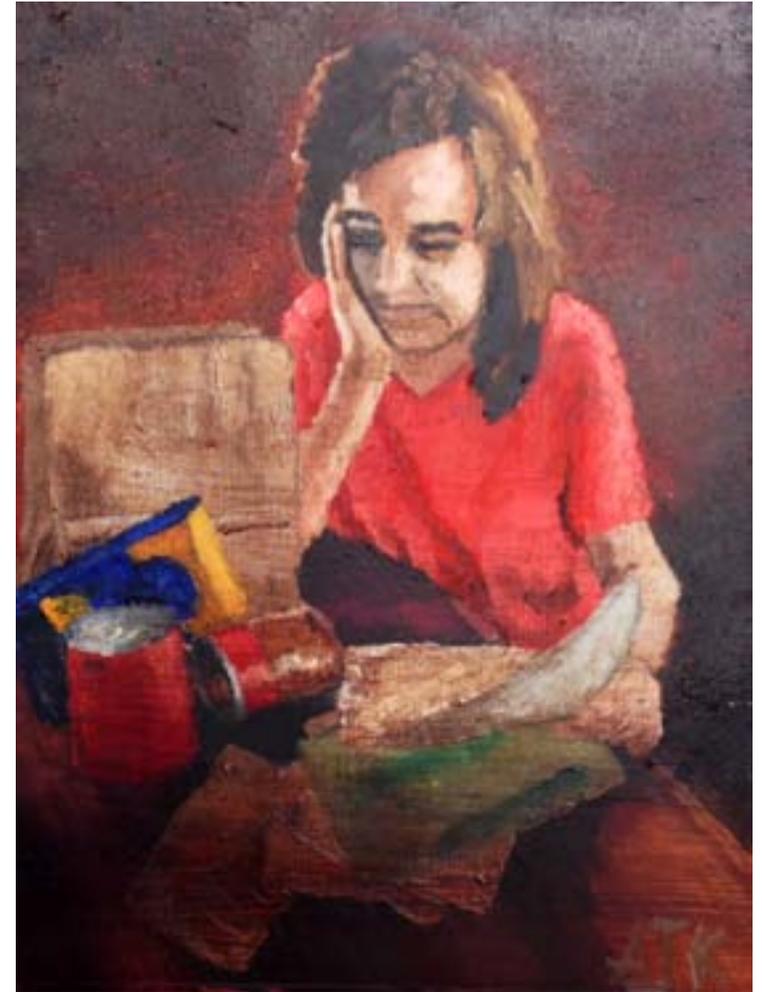
"I can't even begin to guess." I replied. "Whatever it was that spooked her, I don't want to stick around to find out if it was her imagination or not. Let's get out of here."

"For once, I agree with you." Alice said nervously.

The two of us ventured on in complete silence, still trying to grasp what had happened. An hour passed before the silence was broken, and how I wish it hadn't been...

"Contact 300 meters northeast." Alice reported. "I count one dot on radar, not moving." Her breathing grew heavier.

"I see it. Relax; it's probably a dog or something. We'll wait here



artwork by Andrew Kramer

and see if it moves on." I murmured.

One hour passed, then two. The dot never moved an inch.

"Maybe we should go check it out." Alice suggested.

"Alright, but stay low." We slunk closer until we could make out what it was, but couldn't see a thing; nothing was there. We stood exactly where the radar reading was from. Nothing.

Slowly, Alice looked up, "It's her. My god it's her." Alice gasped. The woman from earlier now hung from a light post that loomed high over the street. "She's dead."

A bolt of paralyzing fear shot down my spine. "Alice, we need to leave. Now." I stared in horror at the pavement below the body. There was

a circular area perfectly clean of any dirt or rubble. Alice looked down and her face turned pale. There on the ground, was a painting of a ghostly white face. At that moment, the one dot on our radar snapped out, and eight more went up behind us.

PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN

by Andrew DeGreeff

One night, Jesus appeared to a religious CEO named John who had all the money in the world. John awoke from his sleep and started to talk to Jesus. Jesus listened to John but he could not help to realize that John was sort of depressed. The CEO asked, “Jesus, homeless men live outside my building. They beg for money but I do not feel obligated to give them anything because I have earned my money and I feel like they will use it for drugs. Every time I pass them I have a sense of pity for them but I cannot give them money because of how I feel. They appear inhumane to me. Should I give them money?”

And so Jesus replied to John saying, “Let me tell you a story. The CEO of a company, Mr. Cambiado, ruled a manual labor company. His workers worked hard but were not treated with respect, and very inhumanely. No one knew that they were treated inhumanely because they had to lie to keep their job. The pay was low and not enough for a person to live on. One day, Mr. Cambiado came to watch over his workers and could not help but be moved. He realized his workers were very unhappy and in pain. They had not had a water break or any food since the day started. The CEO, now changed, decides to change this. The CEO gives water to the workers and is moved by the respect and love he gets back. Mr. Cambiado was moved by how happy he made people with such a simple gesture of kindness.”

Jesus paused for a moment, he then continued to say, “John, to fix your state of depression, do what the CEO did. You see, the CEO in the story was moved by his simple thing of generosity did. What you need to do is give. We are all human beings, no matter how great you appear in the social class or how inhumane someone appears. Give to the poor, for you will be satisfied.”

THE PARABLE OF THE WEREWOLF AND THE TWO HUMANS

by Griffin Morgan

In the small, ancient village of Tula, lived an old wise man, who was observing a young group of boys making fun of another boy who looked different to them. He decided to call the group of boys over. When he had them all together and had all their attention, he sat them down and told them *The Parable of the Werewolf and the Two Humans*.

Long ago lived two great hunters named Kiazar and Tevinter. Both were worthily praised for their renowned abilities to hunt the malevolent creatures of the night. On a cold, dreary night, they were given a contract to hunt down an infamous vampire, called Eu-Sunt by the Tula villagers. Eu-Sunt lived far out, off the paths, in the great forest surrounding Tula. They set out both carrying their blades and bow and arrows.

As they traveled through the forest, Kiazar and Tevinter became lost due to the smoke from a wild fire. Traveling alone, Kiazar found a small hut and knew it was the vampire's lair. Walking straight to the door, Kiazar was ambushed and was severely injured by the sharp claws of the vampire. He would have been killed if it hadn't been for a mysterious werewolf that joined in and fought off the vampire. With the vampire's retreat, Kiazar laid defenseless for two days and would have died of infection and hypothermia if the werewolf hadn't cleaned his wounds and laid beside Kiazar to keep him warm.

After journeying for two days, Tevinter found his way to the hut and saw Kiazar and the werewolf. Tevinter pulled his bow and arrow out and aimed at the werewolf as it slept, thinking it was an evil monster. Kiazar, awake, yet too weak to yell, desperately tried to raise his arm to signal Tevinter to stop, but was too slow. Tevinter shot the werewolf in the neck, creating a lethal blow and killing the creature that saved Kiazar's life. Tevinter carried Kiazar back to the village and Kiazar made a complete recovery.

After Kiazar told him the whole story, Tevinter was unable to forget what he had done and unable to forgive himself. Tevinter learned a miserable lesson that day about judgment that haunted him until his death.

PARABLE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES

by Eric Boland

Jesus spoke to a crowd about two high-school football teams who both had great talent. “The first team was the Lemons, and the second team was the Pears. These schools were rival schools and were often called enemies. The Lemons were a sour group and thought they were the hotshots. They played with vigor and usually won on the field. The Pears were a sweet, humble group who always helped a teammate and even an opponent. The teams played a game one night against each other. They were head to head throughout the game, until the Pears fumbled and the Lemons were able to gain possession. The Lemons pulled ahead and beat the Pears. After the game, the Pears went over to congratulate the Lemons, who proceeded to degrade the Pears. They returned to their bench without saying another word to their opponents. God does not want us to become the Lemons, a fruit that tastes very sour and is ignored by many people. In the case of the high-school team, a careless team who degrades their opponents. God wants all of us to be like the Pears, a type of fruit that is sweet and fulfills anyone’s needs. In this case, a humble team who congratulates their enemies.”



CEMETARY MAN

by Kevin Adams

A violent wind swept across my face, sending my unzipped coat fluttering behind me and ruffling the fabric of my T-shirt turbulently. The March weather seemed at war with itself. A nearly-intangible warmth permeated the air, but a paling chill upset the calm with startling ferocity. Sunlight poured through the heavens as rain sprinkled sporadically. Unsettled clumps of rain clouds, dark in the center and brightly outlined by the sun, sped across the skies, carrying with them the dying remnants of winter. I felt my face numbed by the cool breeze, yet underneath my light-weather coat I was perspiring. I slipped the coat off, and I felt the cool breeze chill my damp skin as the sunlight simultaneously warmed it. Still, after a minute or two, I felt unpleasantly cold again and slipped the coat back on.

I stood lost in the center of Rosewood Cemetery, a place also lost in the middle of Nowhere, Illinois, about ninety miles outside of Chicago. I had spent a better part of the day searching these endless rows of death for a long lost uncle, but so far all I had found was a lot of mud and rain.

For years I recounted the time spent I spent with Uncle Jeff. His famous phrase “Now go have some fun” could lighten any situation, and the childlike glimmer in his eyes could brighten any room. I can remember many afternoons as a young child spent with him, inventing games and turning the ordinary into the extraordinary. But, Uncle Jeff left me when I was ten, and only later did I learn that he had passed away. My memories of him faded over the years, but when my parents both passed away a few years ago, I began a new search to rekindle my memory. When I decided to visit his burial site three years ago, I discovered that I had no knowledge of where he was actually buried. Thus began a three year search through hundreds of documents to discover the secret of his grave. Only yesterday did I finally stumble upon the answer, and that answer led me here to Rosewood Cemetery, where I could only hope I’d find it. I’d taken a leave of absence from everything in the middle of the week, including work and my girlfriend, to find my answer.

But, so far, I’d wasted the entire wet morning wandering aimlessly from section to section, hoping I would stumble upon my answer through luck. I couldn’t find any records of grave sites, and I seemed to be the only person on the expansive stretch of land comprising Rosewood. I carried on, increasingly tired and frustrated, worried I had hit yet another dead end.

“Dang it, where is that grave?”

As I murmured to myself, I had failed to notice a man approach me from behind. As I turned around, my gaze fell upon him, only about twenty feet from me. Noticing me, he responded with a smile.

“Excuse me, son, you seem to be having some trouble. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

I stared at the man intently. He seemed about sixty to seventy years old with the beginnings of wrinkling skin and greying hair. He wore khaki pants and a rather dull brownish dress shirt which wrinkled in the wind. The image that came to my mind was that of the stereotypical old country folk, exceedingly plain and down to earth.

I offered a half-smile back, barely pretending to disguise my frustration.

“Well, sir, I’ve spent the last four hours searching every dang grave in this cemetery ten times for someone. It’s funny, you’re the first person I’ve seen here all day. But, unless you’ve got a grave list on paper or photographed in your head, I’m not sure how much you’ll be able to help.”

“Ah, but I can try. What’d you say the name you were lookin’ for was?”

“The name was, ah, Jefferson Goodmann. He was a distant uncle of mine, should be buried somewhere here.”

He smiled at the name as though he recognized it, and for a brief moment his eyes looked to the ground with a distant expression on his face. After a second or two, his attention returned to me.

“Jefferson Goodmann? Well, believe it or not, I knew someone by that name a long time ago.”

“Really? Surely it’s not the same person though?”

“Well, he worked at the same company as me some forty years before retiring about thirty years back. Tall, lean fella, married to a woman named Susan. Had a distinct look to his eyes. Always liked to say ‘Now go have some fun.’ Sound like him?”

“Oh... oh my God. Yeah, that’s exactly who I’m looking for. You wouldn’t by chance happen to know where he’s buried?”

“Actually, I believe he’s in the northeast side. Near the road in section C. I can take you there if you’d like.”

“Thanks, I’d appreciate that. I don’t think I could stand having to search

one more row of graves. I’m starting to get really tired of this place”

But, before I had finished stating my complaints, he had already taken off in the right direction. He moved surprisingly-swiftly for his age, and I struggled to push my aching feet to keep up. We walked for about ten minutes in silence, and as we crossed the road into section C, he turned and spoke to me.

“So, what brings you out to these parts? I take it you live near the city?”

“Yeah, I’ve got an apartment just outside it. Work as a software engineer at a technology firm.”

“Ah, all that technology stuff doesn’t make much sense to me. But I guess I’m just a dying breed, huh?”

“Hmm, I don’t know,” I responded uncomfortably.





artwork by Michael Hodapp

“Well, no matter. So, I take it you came out here to find your uncle’s grave, maybe even visit some family?”

“No, I’m afraid I’m just here to see the grave.”

“Ah, well, I take it the man meant quite a lot to you?”

“Indeed.”

Scanning a few of the markers, he eventually stopped in front of a small stone tablet in the grass, etched simply with the words “Jefferson Goodmann: 1931-1998.”

“Well, here we are, young sir. Seems my memory served me right.”

“Wow, finally!” I remarked, ecstatic. “No more hopeless searching in the mud and rain! I’ve been trying to find this grave for nearly three years!”

“Well, son, I was glad to be able to help you.”

“I can’t tell you how thankful I am for the help, sir. I guess it was pretty lucky that I ran into you. Well, thanks for everything. Take care, sir.”

“Ok,” he laughed. “You too, son.”

The man gave me a goodbye wave, and I responded in kind. Having finally found what I was looking for, I turned my head to the gravestone.

“Well, you’re pretty simple,” I thought, “but at least I found what I was looking for. So here it finally is! Man, I haven’t seen you since I was a little kid. Ever since my parents died a few years back, I’ve been trying to find you. It sure has taken a long time. If only I’d asked them while they were still alive, well, I guess I wouldn’t have had to go to so much trouble to find you. I sure have searched a lot of records and databases. Man, I still can’t believe how I didn’t find about your death until a few years after it happened. My parents had told me you’d moved away, and I can’t believe I had believed them! But I’m here now.”

Aware that my thoughts were turning into a rambling conversation with a dead person, I decided to bring myself back to reality by calling my girlfriend, Sharon, to let her know I had found it. She had declined to come on the trip due to work conflicts, but she seemed happy that I was taking more interest in my family heritage.

Despite the spotty weather and far-out location, I managed to receive a decent cell-phone signal. It looked like I was getting another break. I dialed her work number, knowing that she would be on lunch-break. After three rings, she picked up.

“Hello Dale, nice to hear from you. How are things going down there? Did you find the grave?”

“Well, not exactly. I spent several hours searching probably a couple hundred tombstones in the rain, but I didn’t have any luck.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“No wait, it gets better. So, right when I was about to give up, this old man comes up to me, the only other person in the entire place, and asks me if I

need any help. I tell him that I'm looking for someone, and when I give him the name, he instantly knows who it is. Somehow, this guy remembered my uncle, and he was able to help me find the grave. Isn't that crazy?"

"Actually, it does sound kind of weird. You said he actually knew your uncle?"

"Yeah, isn't that bizarre? He mentioned something about knowing him at work?"

"Wait... but hasn't it been like forty years since your uncle worked?"

"Well, yeah, I guess your right." I was a little surprised that my girlfriend seemed to know just as much about my family as I did.

"Doesn't it seem a little odd that some stranger would show up who just happened to know your uncle from that long ago? I mean, I guess it's possible, but that seems like quite the coincidence."

"You know, it did seem kind of strange. Wow, now that you put it like that, that does seem really, really odd. I guess I was so happy to find help that I wasn't really thinking about it that much."

"Did you by chance get a name? Maybe any more information about how he knew your uncle?"

"No, shoot, I should have asked. Maybe I can still catch him before he leaves."

"Good luck with that. Tell me what happens."

"I will. Talk to you later."

"Bye."

My uncle's grave had suddenly become a forgotten memory. After stowing away my phone, I trotted off in the direction I thought the man had gone. The weather had worsened, however, and the threatening dark nebula of a thunderstorm approached overhead. Though no rain was falling at the moment, I could feel the threat of a downpour coming on any minute. Knowing that the man would likely be leaving very soon, I knew I had to hurry. I broke off into a brisk job, no longer concerned with the mud splashing on my shoes and the water dampening my socks.

The direction I was following soon led to a paved path through a more wooded area. Swatting away dozens of gnats and a few mosquitoes, I jogged

along the path for a short while and soon came upon another open field of graves: Section B. I remembered this area from driving around earlier. Yet, as I scoped the field, I caught no sight of the man.

"Crap!" I thought. "He must have left by now. Well, it looks like it's about to pour. I should probably get back to the car. Maybe I'll find him if I drive around."

Having practically memorized the layout of the cemetery, I decided to take a route across the field in the hope that I might still find him. As I jogged, I could hear thunder at my heels, only a few miles away. Despite the sore and soggy state of my feet, I broke into all-out sprint to make it to my car. As I ran, I scanned adjacent fields of graves but still found no sign of the man.

Another burst of thunder sounded, this one rattling the earth slightly. "Shit, that was close," I murmured, out of breath. I could see my car a few hundred feet away, the lone vehicle in the parking lot. Could I make it to my car before the rain started?

Of course not. Just as I ran onto the gravel parking area, I felt a raindrop on my face. A second later, a downpour showered me in lukewarm water. Instantly drenched, I grabbed my car keys from my pocket and fumbled to unlock the door. I stepped inside and shut the it, feeling like a dismayed, soggy mess. Taking a minute to catch my breath, I turned on the ignition and windshield wipers. About four minutes later, the downpour slowed to a moderate drizzle.

Not willing to give up the search, I pulled out of the parking and started driving aimlessly, hoping I might still catch sight of the man. I circled the entire cemetery twice, but, seeing only empty rows of graves, I finally decided that I missed him. I pulled to the side of the road to call Sharon again.

"So, any luck, Dale?" she answered.

"I'm afraid not. I ran after him, but he had disappeared. I had a nasty thunderstorm come through right then, though, so I wasn't able to search for very long."

"Everything ok?"

"Yeah, I got pretty soaking wet-- and probably the car seat as well-- but I'm fine. I drove around the place a few more times, but he was definitely gone."

"You know, if I didn't know any better, it sounds like you're chasing a ghost."

"Tell me you don't believe in that."

“So, do you think it was just a coincidence?”

“Well, it certainly wasn’t a ghost. That’s ridiculous.”

“Tell me, did you see any other cars in the place?”

“No, I drove around the entire cemetery several times and there was nobody else.”

“And are there any houses nearby, any chance someone might have wandered in?” she persisted.

“I don’t think so, I didn’t see any.”

“So how did the man get there in the first place?”

“Look, I don’t know. But you can’t seriously think this was some ghost or angel. There has to be an explanation. I mean, maybe we’re making a big deal out of some silly coincidence.”

“You said it yourself how crazy it is that the man knew your uncle some forty years ago!”

“Goddamnit your right! But, what the hell, this makes no sense at all!”

“I hate to say it, but maybe something special really did happen. The man did help you find your uncle’s grave, after all.”

“Well, then nothing makes sense to me anymore. I’m sorry, but I don’t believe in miracles. I can accept that some things happen for a reason, even if it’s just a result of luck. But this guy, there has to be an explanation.”

“Maybe there isn’t. What if this really was some kind of divine intervention to help you find your uncle, and instead of being thankful, all you’re doing is sitting there bickering about what’s possible and not possible.”

“Oh please, Sharon, don’t do this me! Do you have any idea how absurd that sounds?”

“Well, you have to admit, you don’t have a better explanation. But, of course, you get all defensive whenever I try to give you my opinion on these things.”

“Look, I’m sorry, but I don’t believe in miracles. Ok?”

“I don’t think you’d believe in a miracle if it slapped you in the face. Besides, I think you’re missing my point. You’re so obsessed with explaining

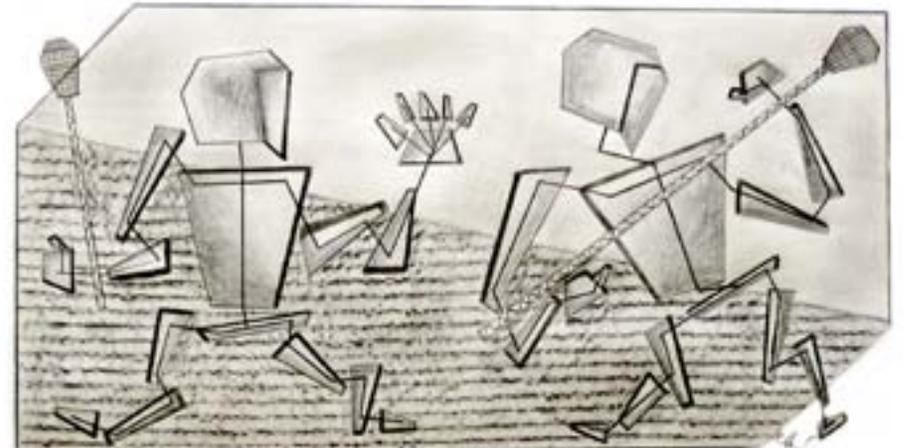
everything that you’re missing out on the more important things. I think you’re being really close-minded right now.

“Come on, I thought you had my back here! Now you’re just pulling some wild theories out of your...”

“Look, all I’m saying is that you should be open to new possibilities. You got what you’ve been looking for for years. But now that you’ve finally found your uncle’s grave, it’s like you don’t even care.”

“Well, yeah, now that you’re trying to suggest that everything I’ve ever believed is wrong, that I’m some nutjob for *not* believing in nutjob miracles.”

“The man helped you find what you were looking for! Isn’t that enough?”



artwork by Connor Larson

“No, it’s not! When something doesn’t make sense to me, I find an answer. If I decided to stop looking for the truth, then maybe I could call things I don’t understand miracles too!

“That’s enough, Dale! Look, I think you need to let this go.”

“Are you kidding me! An hour ago, heck, three minutes ago you wanted to know the truth just as badly as me! But, unlike you, I’m not giving up just so I can support some feel-good illusions of mine.”

“I really can’t believe I’m hearing this from you! You have a serious problem right now, and if you can’t walk away from this, you’re going to get into deep shit!



artwork by Jonathan Salter

“Screw that! I’m going to figure out who that man is. I’ll never be able to live with myself if I let this one slip through the cracks.”

“Well, call me back when you find what you’re looking for...”

“Come on, Sharon... Sharon... don’t you hang up on me. Are you there? Sharon... god-fuckin-damn it!”

I slammed my fist as hard as I could into the steering wheel. “What the fuck is wrong with her?” I thought. “Why is she being so bitchy about this? All I want are some answers, someone to tell me I’m not crazy. And she actually *wants* me to think I’m crazy! Crap, this relationship was going so well! Goddam-

nit!”

I sat in the car for the better portion of an hour, fuming. I tried to eat the ham sandwich I had packed for myself, but it just made me feel sick to my stomach. Trying to calm myself down, I watched the rain splatter off the windshield and the windshield wiper rhythmically sweep it off. As the minutes passed, the rain seem to subside from a drizzle to a sprinkling once again.

The possibility of a breakup would have seemed inconceivable before today. Now, it seemed like my only option. I knew I wouldn’t be able to let this go, no matter what Sharon wanted. It would still be there, haunting me with no hope of resolution. I could pretend to let it go, but it would become taboo in our relationship, slowly poisoning me from within. Maybe she can live with illusions and half-truths, but I can’t.

A part of me wanted desperately to walk away, to drive out of that cemetery and never look back. But, if I was ever going to find any kind of resolution, I knew it was going to be here, now. If I could only find that man, then maybe I could have my answers. Or, if I didn’t like what he told me, I might just punch him in the face for ruining my relationship.

“Well, what the hell,” I thought. “Might as well drive around and see if he came back. I don’t have anything better to do than chase invisible men.”

And so, I once again found myself driving aimlessly through the graveyard labyrinth, feeling deeply lost. Truthfully, I expected to see no one, and my expectations were met. Not a living soul besides me wanted anything to do with this place today, not even the old man, and least of all, Sharon.

Another hour or so passed, and now the sky was beginning to clear. The turbulent storm front of the morning and early afternoon had passed, leaving only a few scattered clouds. The sun now rested low in the sky, soon ready to abandon the sky and my last hopes.

I had searched every last inch of this colossal cemetery, and I found nothing. It dawned on me that, in all this searching, I had nearly forgotten about the one thing I had actually found: my uncle. Locating his grave had perhaps been the only upside of my day, but even then, I had barely stopped to think about it. So, for one last time, I set my course for Section C.

I didn’t take long to relocate the gravestone. Unlike me, it hadn’t changed at in all in the few hours since we last met. I stooped to the ground, held my hands against the cold stone, and closed my eyes. Was all this drama really worth finding something so simple and plain? I started to question why it had been so important for me to find this in the first place. Was it really worth

skipping work on a Wednesday just because I finally figured out what graveyard my uncle was buried in? Was there even any point coming out here at all? Everything about this man that mattered to me were memories; I could care less about a piece of stone marking a dead body. My uncle was gone; I could never reclaim that childlike glimmer in his eyes. I could never again hear him offer me his famous advice: "Now go have some fun." And soon, I realized, I might lose much more. Breathing heavily, I took a deep sigh, opened my eyes, and stood up.

And then I saw him. Walking about a hundred feet away from me, it was definitely him. Feeling a sudden lurch in my chest, I checked to make sure I wasn't seeing things. Realizing I was, in fact, not hallucinating, I sprinted after the man. I wasn't going to let him get away a second time. Breathing heavily, I approached the man, and he turned to face me with a genial smile.

"Excuse me, sir," I began. "We met earlier today. You helped me find the grave of my uncle."

"Oh, hello. Of course I remember," he responded, still smiling cordially.

"I never caught your name. You said you knew my uncle?"

"Ah, Mr. Goodmann, yes, we were good friends back in the day. We worked together for nearly twenty five years. Wow, how long ago it was! Reminds me of old times, back before all this crazy stuff in the world today. Anyway, we would head up to his land in Cotterville and do a little fishin' and huntin'. Ha, one time he got stung in the hand by five wasps on the hunting stand, but just wouldn't quit, your uncle, and we ended up gettin' ourselves the biggest buck we'd ever seen that day. Maybe you've seen that deer taxidermied up at his place?"

"Uh, well, I think so. Listen there's something I need to ask you about, sir."

"Ah, let me wager. You want to know how I just happened to know your uncle and where he was buried?"

"Wait, how did you...?"

"Son, it's not so hard for me to figure. I see that frightened look in your face about me, not knowing what to think. Crazy thing, chance is, that we would meet. I wager you can't stop thinking about it, like lots of you young folks. Always looking for some explanation."

"But do you really think this was coincidence?"

"I'm not sayin' you have to believe in coincidence or miracles or any of

that. But things happen you can't explain, and you could waste your life trying. Is that why you're back here?"

"Look, I just want to know what's going on. Strangers don't just show up in a graveyard knowing your dead relatives."

"Well, son, you're probably right. It is awful crazy. But do you really think I have the answers you're looking for? I'm just a regular old fella. I mean, I'm not sure what you're expecting."

"Look, I just can't let it go. I need to know I'm not crazy."

"Son, I frankly don't know if I can help you. Well, maybe I can give you some advice. But I can't give you the answers you're looking for."

"But you have to have some idea! Why were you at the graveyard earlier today?"

The man chuckled somewhat, as though amused at my probing. "I don't think my answer will do you much good."

I didn't think I could stand his calm disposition for much longer, and I felt like beating the answer out of him. But something about him held me back, and I tried to remain polite.

"Please, I just need to know."

"Son, I could tell you how I come here when I'm searching for myself, when I'm trying to reconcile my past relationships with who I am today. How I want to recover time and friendships lost to the years. How I wish I could have



artwork by Edward Cody

done more and sought the right things. But those aren't the answers you're looking for. No, you want something more, some kind of revelation that will solve all your doubts for you. I'm afraid I can't give you that. You could spend all your life searching and still not find the answer."

"So, you really have *nothing*? Look, there has to be some explanation. I'll always regret it if I let this go!"

"Then son, you're going to have a lot of regrets in your life. You may not believe me, but there are some things so wonderful, so crazy they can't be explained. So many people these days think there's no mystery to anything. But where's the fun in life if you know everything?"

"The fun in life is that I'm able to get happily married to my wife, who doesn't think I'm a lunatic for telling her I don't believe in goddamn miracles!"

"I see. And perhaps you'd prefer if I'd never stopped to help you out, never helped you find your uncle's grave? All because it challenged your basic understanding of life?"

"Look, I don't know," I responded dejectedly, as though all my fury had suddenly dissipated.

"I think you do. And you're too scared to admit it. Too scared to admit that you don't have all the answers."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Do you remember the time you spent with your uncle?"

"Uh, yes, of course I do." I was taken aback by this sudden flank and wondered how he intended to use it.

"Is there anything about him you can remember that really struck you as special? Why do you think it was that you looked up to him *so* much that you journeyed all the way out here in the middle of the week just to find his grave?"

I responded feebly. "Um, well, I haven't seen him since I was about ten or so. I guess I used to spend a lot of time with him when I was a kid."

"And why did you enjoy being around him so much?" he continued.

"Well, I guess because he had a lot of neat stories and games. I mean, he used to seem so smart and wise to me."

"Do you still feel that way about him?"

"Umm, well, I guess so. It has been a long time. I guess I wasn't the best judge of wisdom at ten anyway. My parents used to say he was the most childlike grown-up they ever knew. They said it was a compliment, that he never lost that sense of imagination and wonder from when he was a kid."

"Indeed, that sounds just like the man. Always had a knack for lookin' on the bright side, never afraid to confront new struggles because, at his core, he was a strong man. He was the kind of man you looked up to, the kind of man you wanted to be but aren't."

"Excuse me?"

"Jeff Goodmann was never afraid to believe in what he couldn't explain. He never lost his sense of wonder for the world no matter what it threw at him. He didn't pretend to know everything, and so he learned to adapt and make meaning out of experience. I look at you, and I see a man scared to face his complete ignorance of the world. You're too afraid to acknowledge that you don't have control over everything, no matter what fancy technologies or ideas you may have. You keep getting stuck on the questions, and you've forgotten that the answers don't always matter. Some things need to be felt and cherished rather than buried with meaningless questioning. I suspect that you look so fondly back on the time with your uncle because it reminds you of yourself before you lost your faith in the wonders of the world. Now, you're prepared to bury not just your past, but also your future, because you can't explain how I happen to be here? The point is, it shouldn't matter who I am. If you're going to let that drive a wedge between you and your wife, then perhaps you aren't ready for a relationship. But, if you think you are, then maybe you should set this experience in the past so you can begin living your present and future. You've got a life to live. Don't spend it in a graveyard."

I took a heavy sigh and stared the man deeply in the face. Returning the gaze, he placed his hand on my shoulder, smiled, and said, "I think I've said all that needs to be said. Don't let it get you down. Now go have some fun."

I returned the smile, turned around, and walked away. I looked back only once, and when I did, our eyes met one last time. For a second, I thought I recognized that childlike glimmer in his eyes. But maybe it was just a coincidence.

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

by Matt Barkofske

As the clouds roll onward, the impending storm foreboding, there is a strange sense of calm over the area. Suddenly, a shot rings out, throwing everything into madness and disarray. As quick as I can react, I take off, trying to get ahead as quickly as I can. I look around to see my fellow fighters, kicking up mud and slop as we all move forward as fast as we can. Several around us slip, but we beat forward, determined not to be left in the carnage behind us. Nobody knows exactly where they are going, but they just know they have to keep moving. I look around, and notice the flag flashing between bodies ahead of me, indicating the path for forward advancement. Move Up! Keep going! Don't Stop! These cries fill the air in efforts to keep morale and focus up. Several people slip around me, caught in the rush and the mud around them. The peaceful rest of nature is shaken from its slumber by the thudding and flying of people and pieces of land in every direction. Rain starts to fall, but we hardly notice. There is too much more going around and within us.

Remember why we do this.

After several minutes – although it seems much longer – all are ready for the end. The fight has been exhausting and agonizing, ears ringing and pain over the entire body. We continue to urge each other on, but those efforts fall flat. The only support at this point is the knowledge that the fight is almost over. All I need is to make it one more time and I will be out of the fire, out of the struggle, and able to breath. But it becomes harder. Each breath hurts more than the last. But I cannot stop now. Not after making it this far.

When it hurts.

Stumbling, I make it up the hill, and see the line ahead. People wearing jerseys of dozens of different colors are stumbling all around me,

and the finish line is there. I pick up. It hurts now more than ever but it is right there. The finish is right in front of me. Cross that line and it's over. I start to go faster now. Faster. Faster. I yell from the pain in my side, forcing more air into me while the crowd cheers in one incoherent roar. I look around, but everything is a blur. Finally, I make out a shape. Across the finish line, one of my teammates is there, waiting for me to finish. Falling into his arms after crossing, beaten with exhaustion, I realize that it's over. The fight is finished.

Surrounded by my teammates, I know that we have done all that we can. Seeing them all together, laughing and talking, enjoying the company of one another, reminds me why I do this. It's not because I enjoy the pain. Not because every day is a joy or because every race is a personal best. A sport whose entire purpose revolves around personal pain infliction is the game for a crazy man. But I have to do it. I see the friendships I have formed, the lifelong bond and the unbreakable brotherhood that you can only experience when you spend a lot of time together and know each other. It may not be the most popular sport, or one that every really feels good. But when the work is over, and the fighting is done, look at the people you share it with, because that's what makes it fun.

When it hurts, do it for each other.

Run.

