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Expressions 2003-2004

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DES MOINES AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

2003

2004

EXPRESSIONS

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Arianne Robinson ^

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is a student literary/art publication
of Des Moines Area Community
College.

< Cover – Painting by Toni Sarcone



^ Adam Clarke



The Gambling Turtle

The Gambling Turtle
KAY Holdefer

It's a scared-kind of rush
Like a train-wreck.
But not-
More like winning a million bucks,
And leaving it in the hands of uncle Ray
Who's a nice guy,
But has a bit of a gambling problem.

That's love-
Or love my senior year
When all bets were off.

How could I be so stubborn
About something so fickle?
When I set my heart on something,
I'm like a snapping turtle
I don't let go 'til it thunders,
Love stamped my soul while I sank my teeth in,
And in a blur of red cars and Marblo Lights
Changed the shape of me forever.

[BEST POEM IN THE DMACC CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST]



^ Candy Ecker



for all the britney's

For All the Britney's
VANESSA Dauterive

As the concave slope of pre-mature abs rounded in to
Satisfaction? The Satisfaction of who?

Is the mask coated to a thick aging crust so the outer
glimmer is that of greasy embarrassment other than
that sparkle of neon lights? There's a mask?

Is the midriff a flauntable compliment to the clicking
keys that invented the most popular beats today? That
isn't their real voice?

Is the whip-crack criticism slicing an ambivalent ego
to a bloody river of thick crusting humility worth
the publicity? Is it all about the benjamins?

Is the sweet young promise scented rosy enough to
Over the nostril collapsing bombarding stench of
A cha-ching-eyed lie? Who are you?

Sucking in through a pearly vent of white light reflecting teeth the
shape suffices to the hoots of approval that stifle the hunger pain
rolling along the concave edge

Pubescent pores open similar to flood gates when
The heat lamp of a camera crew smooshes itself against
an image that heeds to Oxy cleansing pads when the dressing
room door is latched

Crisp breeze prompts the miniscule follicies to raise like tiny pins as
crackles pop the speaker out-put that never carbon copies the digital
shake of a mouse quite like the weak shake of the uvula

Mascara dribbling into unblinking eyes that glazed never saw the
pornography of their true innocence exploited only to be subjected to
hungry mouths so stuffed with dollar bills they're in too deep to admit
they're choking

The bubblegum is maliciously sweet to a salty tounge that's offered a
quick lick but once the gum is raunched to its final stale card-board
thick chew the jaws are tight tired and smile automatic and the taste
that of a melting pot brewed with a deceitful promise that's too revolt-
ing to swallow



^ Jane Zantow



^ Amanda Eastin



Andy Knew
HEATHERWargo

The summer sun reflected in an eye-watering glare off the cement sidewalk as Andy light-heartedly jogged to the park. It was the first week of summer vacation and he was eager to get to the Clearfield pool. This was the first summer he was allowed to be at the pool unsupervised, and no one had looked forward to June 3rd as much as Andy had...not for the presents and the birthday cake, but in anticipation of the summer freedom he would enjoy because of the nine candles he blew out. No more waiting for Mama to have a day off from the cleaners, no more having to go with their neighbor, Mrs. Willis, and her bratty 5 year old twins when Mama was too tired after work. Mrs. Willis always expected Andy to entertain the girls the entire time at the pool, while she sat gossiping with her best friend Myra Tindale and scarfing down Ho-Ho's, widening her already substantial bottom.

Andy smiled in delight. No sirree, just me, myself and I. Not that he would've objected to his mother being there if she could. Andy loved his mother dearly and wished she didn't have to work so much. He just hated having to wait and hope that she wouldn't be so tired when she came home that she couldn't go to the pool. His father died when he was a baby, so Mama worked full-time to support them. Sometimes Andy indulged in fantasies

where a black Ford Mustang (Andy's favorite car, he once almost got to sit inside of one at the Ford dealership when he went with Mama window shopping, but Ren refused to allow Andy to sit inside, saying Val spoiled the boy enough as it was), would pull up and park in front of their small house, which sat in the shade of two spindly maple saplings Mama planted last spring in hopes they would take attention away from the peeling paint and shabbiness of the half-attached shutters. A well-off, clean-cut man with blond hair, dazzling white teeth, and blue eyes like the Columbia River would emerge from behind the factory darkened windows—sprung from the leathery confines of the interior. In Andy's reverie, the man would march up their crooked front steps and say, "Valerie, please marry me! I love you, and I want to be Andy's daddy!" Mama would giggle and her pretty little face would redden, which would only underscore the deep jade of her eyes and the fire of her hair. She would scoop Andy up in a hug, kissing his blonde hair and looking into the eyes, mirrors of hers, and they would follow the handsome man to his Mustang, leaving the house and everything in it behind. If I am patient, maybe something like that would happen one day...Not for now though...because of Ren.

He scowled without knowing it when he thought of his mother's boyfriend. His jogging slowed to a walk. The man's name was Loren Dupree, and Andy despised him upon first sight. The feeling was mutual. Mama introduced him as "Loren, but call him 'Ren'." When Andy had asked why he wasn't called Loren, Ren gave him a piercing look and told him to ask ol' Dwight

Perkins down at the Red-Checker Diner what happened to people who called him by that name. He then barked out a harsh, dry laugh to show Mama he was just kidding, and put a meaty hand on the back of Andy's neck, clamping down with a vise-like grip and squeezing it a touch harder than a friendly squeeze would warrant.

Ren worked as a debarker for Pacific Logging and Timber Company. His upper arms were as big around as Andy's waist, and his forearms looked as big as the hams hanging on the rack at Mr. Karl's butcher shop, corded with veins and tendons. He had teeth stained from Pall Malls and a headful of shaggy black hair. His eyes were the

color and warmth of freshly mixed mud. Andy had no idea what his mother was doing with someone as loathsome and uncouth as Loren Dupree. One day after Ren had grounded Andy for walking in front of the TV while Ren was watching wrestling, he asked his mother why she stayed with the man. How frustrated he had felt! Standing with his hands balled into little, preadolescent fists, facing his mother and seeing the sad resignation in her face while she explained away the rude manner in which Ren constantly treated him. Yes, Mama, I know he doesn't hit us. Yes, Mama, I know he helps out with the bills. Andy had nodded his head like the hula girl on Ren's truck dashboard, feeling smaller and smaller while a small pit of white heat in his belly wanted to shout, "HE HATES ME, Mama!!" How does a boy explain to his mother that the boyfriend who helps with

money and is gracious enough not to hit them makes him feel like a mouse being watched avidly by a cat? How does a boy look into his mother's face, a face becoming prematurely worn by struggle and poverty, and tell her to make a choice?

Andy kept his mouth shut and stayed far out of the path of Ren. When Ren came over, Andy went to his room or outside, lest he stay in Ren's course and become



^ Amina Ali

a target. Though Ren had not laid a hand on Andy or his mother, the boy could sense it coming, could sense the violence in Ren like a buck senses a doe in heat. It was a vibe, an aura, something about Ren that warned of pain and pledged to be a personal deliverer. What puzzled Andy more was that Ren could be decent, even nice, to him at times. He sometimes would take Andy fishing and seem genuinely proud when Andy caught a fish. Once in a while, he would play catch with Andy on Saturday afternoons in their front yard and try to coach Andy on his pitching techniques. All these things warred with each other in doubtful, cynical ways inside of Andy, and the nice stuff would always be pushed clean away when Ren lost his temper. When Ren shouted, Andy could see the rhythmic pulse of Ren's overexcited circulatory system in the hollow of his thick neck and watch the flush of anger take over his face. Just in the hint of this transformation, which reminded Andy of Bill Bixby's evolution from an ordinary man into the Incredible Hulk, terrified the boy into obedience. Ren's temper rarely, if ever, boiled over onto Valerie, and for this Andy was grateful. Usually it was because of her son that Valerie would argue with Ren.

"You SPOIL that boy Val! He is a pussy, a mama's boy! You give him too much goddamn attention. It isn't right!!!!" Ren would rage, and Valerie would tell him to back off in a voice of absolute ice. "If you don't like it, you can always leave, Ren. He is all I have, and I am all he has. This is the way it is going to be, so get out if you can't handle that," his mother would say in a frigid, unyielding tone. Ren would sulk, and then he would leave the house for a while, peeling down the street in his truck. In a few hours he would be back, usually with an apology and "a little something" for Valerie. The bed in his mother's room would creak in an excited, frenzied way for most of the night, and Ren would be genuinely nice to Andy for days afterwards. But most of the time Ren didn't say much in the way of meanness to Valerie. In fact, he seemed to be in awe of her. He was usually soft voiced when he spoke to her and always commented on her beauty. He made her sit and tell every detail of her day, of every person she saw or spoke to, and listened covetously with great interest.

Probably the dumbass didn't know how he lucked into getting Mama's attention.

As Andy neared the park entrance, he thought excitedly of what his mother had said to him the night before. He had been sitting on the red beanbag chair in their living room, reading H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (his favorite), and Valerie had sat down beside him on the floor, staring at him so intently that he felt as though he was popping out with mysterious bumps all over his face, or something equally strange like that. He put his book down and smiled at her, asking her what was wrong. She sighed loudly and said nothing to him at first. She just stroked the blond waves away from his temples, like she did when he was sick, and stared sightlessly at the cracked yellowed plaster on the walls. When she did speak, she asked Andy if he was happy. Yes, oh yes, I am Mama, sure. Like most boys in his position, Andy lied frequently to his mother so that she had less to worry about. After she studied his face in a manner that made Andy blush, for he knew she knew he was not being entirely truthful, she seemed to want to go on, but then abruptly switched gears. She told him in a cheerful voice that the both of them were "going to spend the entire day together on my day off—the day after tomorrow". Andy had blurted No Ren?? and Mama had confirmed it. Just you and me, my sweet, she said with a wink and a nod.

Thinking about it now, Andy laughed aloud, startling a few gulls scavenging alongside the park gate. He couldn't wait until tomorrow! His mom was spending the whole day with him! Ren would just have to suck it up, Andy thought with glee for what must be the hundredth time. He walked up to the admission desk and paid the \$1 fee with the paper route money he had been hoarding all year in miserly eagerness for summer vacation. The clerk, clearly bored, took his money and stamped Andy's hand with a fluorescent waterproof ink stamp while yawning loudly. As soon as his hand was free of the stamper, Andy darted toward the pool, shucked his T-shirt and sneakers, and jumped in cannon-ball style. He swam and frolicked for about two hours, his sun warmed body beginning to pink up, his strong arms and sturdy legs bobbing in and out of the greenish, chlorine scented water.

At last he exhausted himself and pulled his body reluctantly out of the pool. He glanced up at the big clock installed for the lap swimmers. Crap, it's almost 5! Andy hurriedly got his shoes on and pulled his T-shirt over his damp skin. Mama should be home any minute. He hurried down the path and out the park gate. He jogged most the way home, forgetting his earlier exhaustion, hoping that Mama would be home when he got there. He wanted to plan their day with her, every minute of tomorrow. Andy also privately admitted that the eagerness was also in part because he wanted to know how she had appeased Ren, and how Ren handled being not wanted. Andy giggled. He wished he had the courage to walk up to Ren and say meanly, "I'm sorry Ren, you just aren't wanted here." Just as a payback for all the times he had hurt Andy's feelings with his loves me, loves me not manner. He snickered fearfully at the thought of what Ren's face would look like. He would probably surpass the Incredible Hulk



on that one...Andy smiled hugely.

His face still carrying the remnants of his humor, Andy rounded the corner that turned onto his street and began up the sidewalk. He glanced 3 blocks up toward his house and stopped dead in his tracks. His head snapped around, back to the street sign. Yes, I am on the right street, Kennedy Avenue. He stared at the sidewalk for a moment, willing his head to look up again. He slowly lifted his chin until it was parallel to the street, his eyes tightly screwed shut with his hands covering them. Look again you idiot...you were just seeing things. He inched his eyelids open into slits, and then wider, wider, until they were open so wide they ached. His hands dangled uselessly from his wrists.

Parked in front of his house was a
.....black....Mustang!?

Andy raced so fast up the street that he couldn't recall how he got to the front stoop. It was as though a gigantic hand propelled him, lifted him up there and placed him gently here. He stood studying the door, wondering whether he should go in or not, and opened it. A man with thick honey-blond hair and brilliant blue eyes stepped out of Andy's house. He was wearing a dark charcoal pinstriped suit, with shiny brown leather loafers and a red paisley print tie. He was impressively built, with arms bigger than Ren's and a belly considerably smaller. He looked as though he should be surrounded by a halo of light, like the Greek gods in Andy's old picture books. Andy's heart leapt into his throat and he felt a wave of excitement so intense he almost fainted. It was him!

The man smiled tightlipped at Andy, so Andy couldn't see if his teeth were as white as he had dreamed they would be. Andy bet himself that this man didn't chain smoke Pall Malls. Andy felt relief at this, because he knew Mama hated smoking, and she had always made Ren go outside. Oh God, Ren!! How are we going to get rid of Ren??

"Hi. I am John," the man said. His voice was a rich baritone that made Andy think of a radio DJ his mother listened to. "Who are you?" He studied Andy intently.

Andy frowned a little at this. Surely he knows who I am. "I'm Andy," the boy said expectantly.

"Is this your house, Andy?" John asked in a tense voice.

"Yes, it is...why?" Andy asked. Uncertainty flooded into him as he contem-



^ Micheal Miller

plated the man before him. Why is he asking me all these questions?

"Well, Andy, why don't we have a seat here for a few minutes?" John asked with another tight-lipped smile. "Do your mom and dad live here with you?"

Andy was getting a little nervous. "No, just me and my mom." John looked away for a moment, looked down at the pavement, and then looked up again at Andy. His eyes seemed a little brighter and a little redder, like he had just sneezed or had taken a bite of a bitter lemon. Andy heard a siren wail from a distance. He shivered and realized he still had his wet swimming trunks on.

He jumped up onto the middle step of the stoop and said, "John, I'm going to go change into dry clothes. I'll be right back."

John jumped up like he had sat on a pin and shouted, "No!" He grabbed Andy's arm tightly. Andy winced and tried to get down off the steps, instinctively away from John.

John attempted a calmer demeanor, taking a deep breath and relaxing his grip on Andy's arm. Andy slowly pulled his arm back from John's hold, rubbing the area that was dotted deep red with John's fingerprints. He looked up and John with total confusion clear in his eyes. "Why not?"

"Uh, not right now, kid, ok" he said without looking at Andy. "Just... not... right now," he repeated in a gruff voice. The siren came closer. John ran a hand through his thick crop of hair, rumpling it. He sighed and closed his eyes for a long moment.

Andy looked at John. John glanced at Andy. Andy knew.

Andy's throat felt hot, scratchy, and swollen. He coughed and coughed, but it wouldn't stop being scratchy. Tears welled up in green pools and spilled over onto his snowy cheeks.

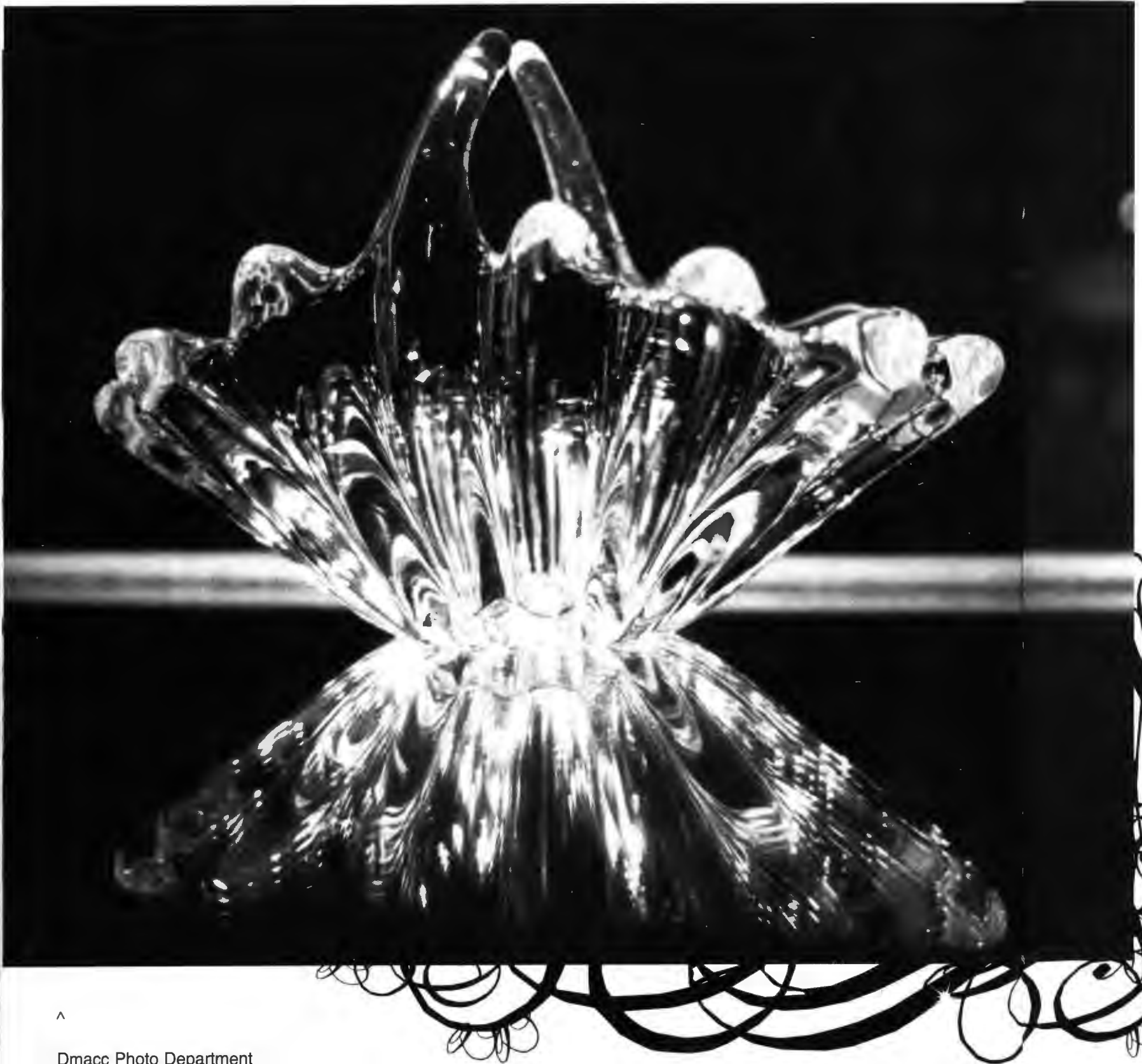
Andy knew. Just like he always knew... he knew it was there waiting... He looked down at his beat up sneakers for a moment, trying to dispel the dizziness engulfing him. The tears dripped steadily off his chin onto the concrete at his feet and, in the heat of the day, seemed to sizzle and hiss up at him. He looked up at the flashing lights silhouetted against John's Mustang. John gave him a squeeze on the shoulder and opened the passenger side door. "Want to sit inside?"

[ONE OF HEATHER'S PIECES THAT EARNED HER
RUNNER-UP, BEST OVERALL WRITER IN THE DMACC CREATIVE
WRITING CONTEST]





^ Matt VanGinkel



^

Dmacc Photo Department

First on the Scene

First on the Scene

ELIZABETH **Scott**

Charm school seemed like a waste of time during my teenage years. By now I was pretty sure of it. Life seldom included polite conversation and perfect etiquette. Fashion was not a consideration. I wore a uniform.

I was a cop. I was divorced. And I had a college degree. Those were all the signs of failure in a woman, according to my mother. I was the scandal she never mentioned to her friends.

I liked my job. It was valuable work. I could make a difference. Stress was often high. The pay was always low. But that went with the territory. Each day was a different. Some were unforgettable.

One of those unforgettable days began as a beautiful, sunny autumn morning. Nothing out of the ordinary was going on. No one was even on a call. It was quiet.

The weather didn't change. Everything else did.

"214, traffic stop." That was Mike Saunders. He'd been on the force for about 20 years. And he still did a good job. He wasn't a burnout like the rest of the old guys.

"214," the voice on the radio acknowledged.

"Providence Road south of Kerrigan Boulevard. Late 70's Ford van, gray in color, no plates."

It was the slightly uneasy edge in Saunders' voice that caught my attention. I turned to go that way. It was standard procedure to back up each other on traffic stops. His district was right next to mine. I wasn't far. I was a few blocks away when the communications operator, Carol Blair called him for a status check.

"214, status check." He'd be out of the car by now. He didn't respond. That often meant trouble.

Carol called again. "214, status."

Saunders didn't respond.

"224, are you close?" She was a good communications operator. Everything that was potentially anything always had her attention. And she knew how each officer on shift operated.

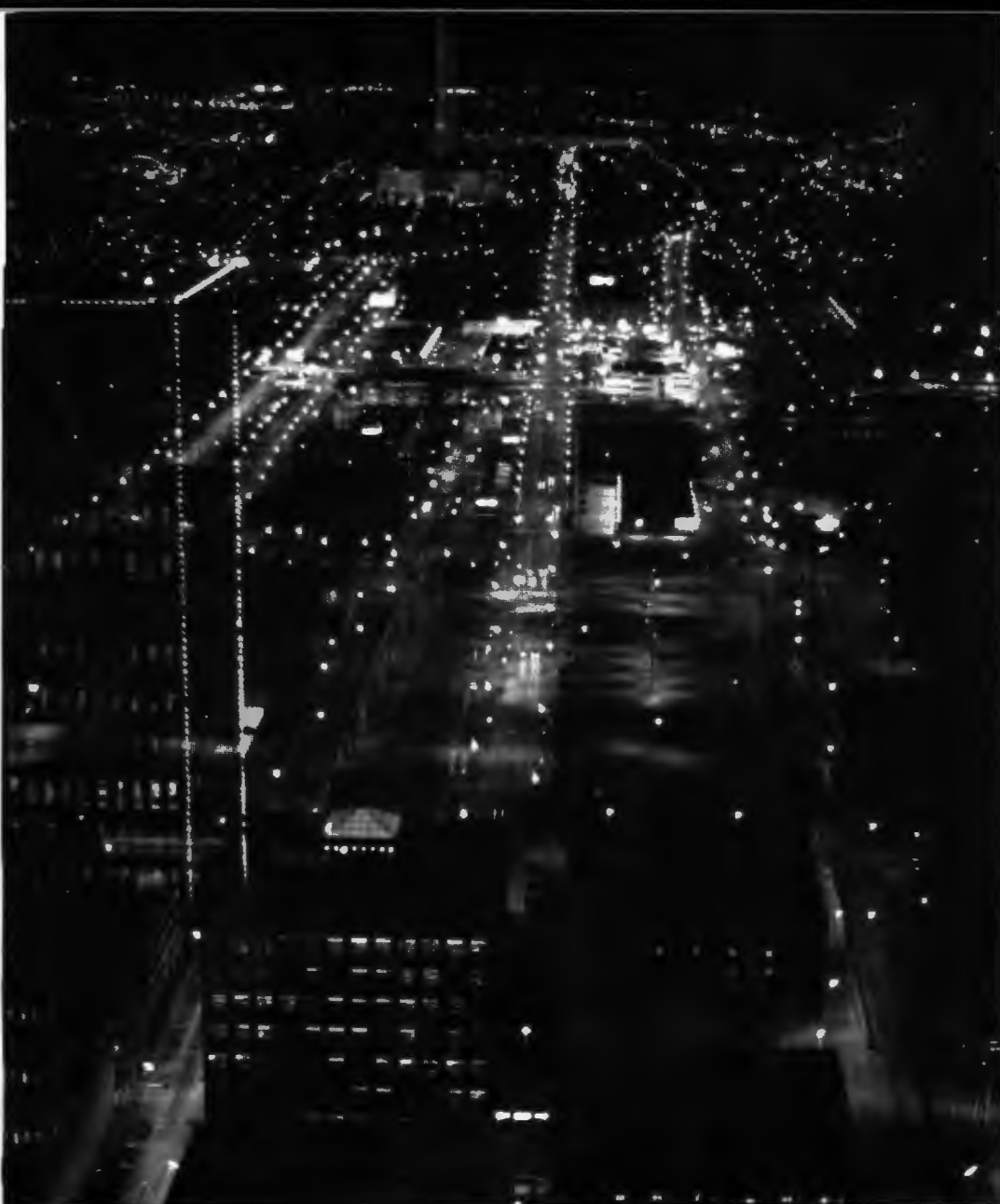
"I'm en route about four blocks away," I responded.

Traffic on the radio quieted. It always does when the other officers listen for trouble, especially when one of us may be in the middle of it—alone.

I sped over the top of the hill on Providence Road and saw Saunders' car a short distance ahead. The top deck was on. No old gray van. I couldn't see Saunders. Not good. My heart fell. Adrenaline pushed it back up. My top deck went on as the car slid into felony stop position behind Saunders' unit. Part of the outside, southbound traffic lane was now blocked.

"224's out," I keyed the radio as I opened the patrol car door. "Stand by."

No one wants to see what I was sure I would. I could feel it.



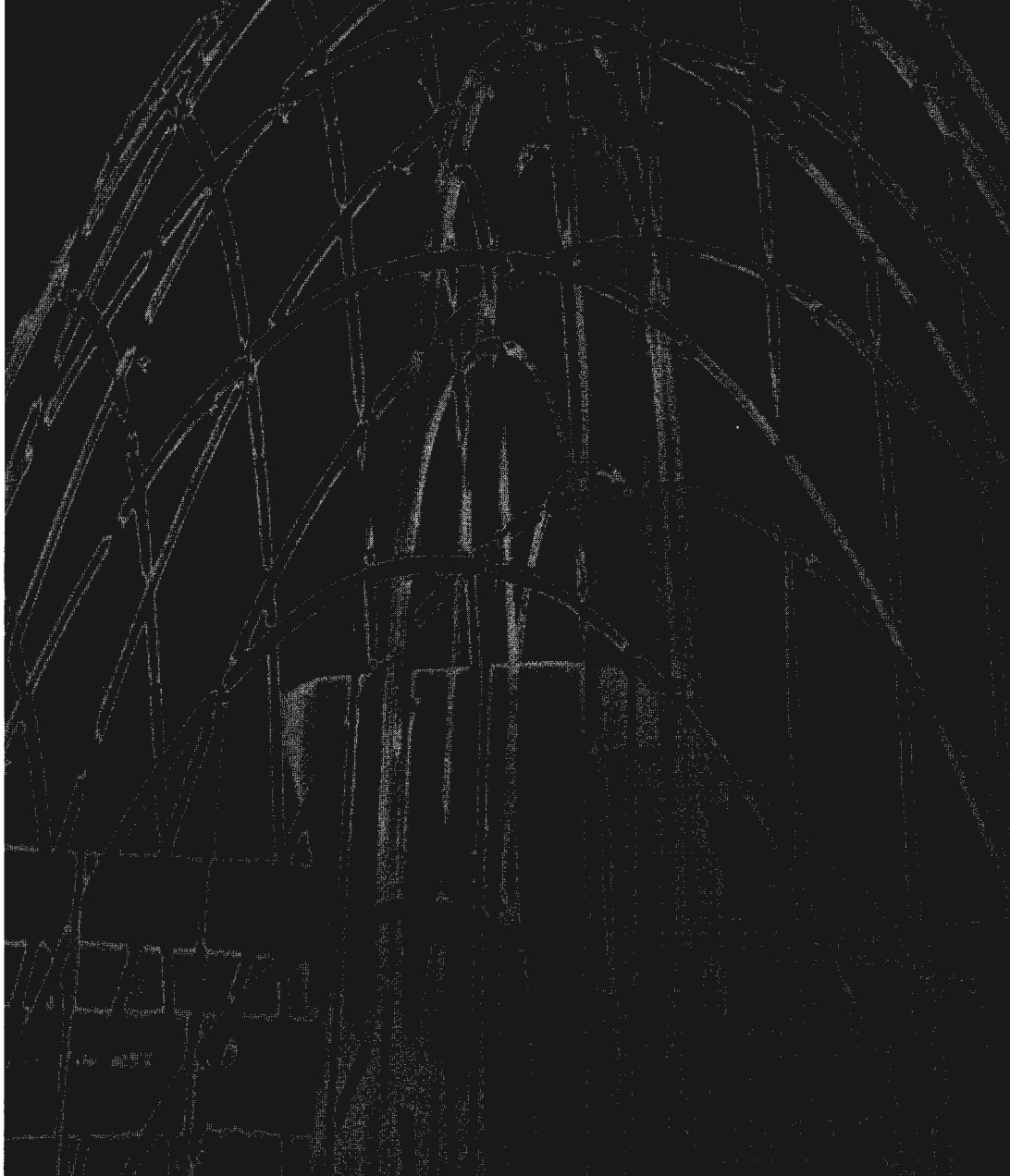
Cautiously and quickly scanning the area while approaching Saunders' car, I saw a highly polished, black shoe in front of the driver's side tire. It was his shoe. He was in it. He was down.

It's at these times the seconds pass so slowly that every detail is committed to memory for life, but so fast when everything that has to be done comes to mind in rapid-fire order. I looked at Saunders lying on the gravel roadside in front of his car, under a shower of tinted safety glass. Obviously someone had fired at him. The fatal shot went in just above the top of his vest. Tire tracks in the dusty gravel plainly showed where a vehicle had left the roadside and met the pavement at a high rate of speed.

That powder burned, blood stained hole looked out of place on Saunders. His uniform was always perfect. No button or bit of brass went unpolished. Leather always shined. Gig line always straight. Military pleats where his shirt tucked beneath his belt.

He couldn't be down. It shouldn't have been real. But it was. Spent gunpowder and the smell of fresh blood hung in the air.

And there was that other smell. We never really knew what it was. We just knew it meant that there was someone dead on the scene. Saunders and I discussed it one time. We usually knew it from working traffic accidents. If it was a fatality, we could tell from the smell of it even before we were right at the vehicle. It wasn't always there; only when the



DOA must have seen it coming. We thought it must have something to do with adrenaline or the endocrine system during the seconds before death.

So, maybe Saunders did see something coming. His holster was unsnapped, but that is a typical precaution when approaching a vehicle. Somehow, I was tempted to ask him. I'd probably never know.

Ever since I called out a moment before, all radio traffic on every channel had stopped. Everyone was listening.

Training works. Adrenaline works. And experience is the best of preparations for such circumstances. This was a crime scene. Any of us would know what to do.

I called Communications from my hand radio; one just like Saunders had on his belt. Carol responded right away. No doubt she had been hovering on top of the transmit key.

"214 is down. Broadcast description of suspect vehicle, last known to be southbound on Providence Road from Kerrigan at a high rate of speed, approximately four minutes ago. Suspect vehicle is likely to have at least two occupants who should be considered armed and dangerous. Suspect vehicle is likely to have heavily tinted glass and rear or side window shot out." I gave her a moment to acknowledge my transmission. When she did, I continued.

"Also request supervisor and detectives at this scene." My voice was heavy and full of dreadful knowing. I'd never heard it sound that way. That tone left no question as to what had occurred. Everyone knew.

Carol was right on it. The broadcast was perfect. Then she asked, "224, do you request an ambulance?" She was good. She neither wondered if I had forgotten to ask for the obvious, or wanted to make the circumstances perfectly clear to everyone else responding. Both are valuable tactics. Besides, I think she wasn't prepared to accept that one of her officers was down and gone.

"Negative," I responded after hesitating a moment. I could feel her heart sink as the adrenaline level of every officer on duty in every jurisdiction within radio distance kicked every one of them into more finely honed focus.

I knew every officer within broadcast range was looking for that van. Everything else would wait. All I could do was stand there-with Saunders-and protect the crime scene.

Saunders' radio and mine came to life. Officers from three jurisdictions stated their positions and directions of travel in a coordinated effort to locate the suspect van. Sirens approached, under engines wound up tight. Patrol cars from two different departments topped the hill behind Saunders and me, and screamed past us.

The first was a Deputy Sheriff. I knew him, but not well. From the look on his face as he passed I could tell he knew he was looking for a cop killer. I realized he knew because of the look on my own face. There is a particular look that an officer wears when he or she finds another officer fatally down. I'd seen it. I'd never worn it until now. He glanced at Saunders as he shot past.

The second officer to rocket past was a State Trooper. He didn't look. Deadly determination was all over him.

Saunders hair blew out of place with the wind force of those two passing. He would have hated that. He would have run his fingers through that salt and pepper hair to smooth it back in place. I wanted to do it for him. I wanted to tidy his shirt, brush off the glass, rub that scuff off his shoe. But I couldn't. This was a crime scene.

I wanted to reach down and turn off the radio on his belt. I wanted to turn off the lights on his car. He shouldn't have to work now. He should rest. What thoughts come at such times. I couldn't alter a thing. This was a crime scene. And he would have wanted everything done by the book. For an instant, there was a fleeting image of him watching us all.

I found myself thinking of Saunders. He had been good for us newer officers. He had honor and integrity. He had humor. And he knew when to act and when to let things go. Occasionally, he found people in the middle of horrendously stupid, dangerous behavior that posed a threat to no one else, and wasn't illegal. He just smiled and shook his head. "Nature's way of weeding out the idiots," he used to say. "Let the Paramedics pick up the pieces."

Once I thought he was going to kill a guy right there at the station. We were interrogating a child abuse suspect. A little boy had shown up at school with some most telling bruises. The guy had been Mirandized when for some reason Saunders asked him if he had ever had sex with his own daughter. The suspect looked at Saunders and with no shred of guilt said, "Well, yeah. When my wife is sick I gotta get it somewhere." The guy seemed to think Saunders would understand that sort of thing, being another man and all. Saunders just looked at the man with every bit of contempt and rage a human being could hold. As he slowly stood I just knew his hand would soon be at the suspect's throat.

I remember saying, "We need another form." Saunders looked at me as if I had lost my mind. "For additional charges," I clarified. Saunders understood and left the room.

I didn't do it for the suspect. He nauseated me. I did it for Saunders. Beating the crap out of suspects in interrogation rooms tends to end careers. The suspect was too stupid to realize his errant penis had just been spared. He began to say something as Saunders left the room. "Shut up," I said with at least as much contempt as I felt. "Just shut up." I silently vowed to let Saunders have him if he ever appeared anywhere near us again.

And I remember that once Saunders had mentioned that in his early days in uniform he had found another new officer down. He didn't really talk about it much. It was like the guys who mention some experience from Vietnam. They wore a look that never tempted questions. I let it alone.

The Sergeant must have been at the station. His car pulled up behind mine. The Captain was in the passenger seat. Their faces were grim. I saw the Sergeant call out at the scene, but I had stopped listening to the radio. I barely heard it. There was slow purpose in the way they moved as they left the vehicle. I walked toward them.

"How is it?" asked the Captain.

"Not too bad," I responded. We both understood Saunders was dead. What the Captain was asking was how messy it was.

"Is the scene clean?" Leave it to the Sergeant to ask a stupid question. He wanted to know if the scene had been disturbed. Did he think I was a moron?

"It's clean," was all I said. And I hoped he left it that way.

Neither of them went too close. They preserved the scene. Looking at Saunders wasn't easy for them, either. Perhaps they were thinking of their own history with him, or how easily that could be any of us lying there.

The Captain walked back, with the Sergeant half a step behind. "They've taken two suspects into custody," he said. Surprise hit me. Even on a good day, so little preliminary evidence would fail to produce much.

"Lucky break," he continued. "Holt was headed this way down a gravel road from Harrisonville when he saw two guys who couldn't get an old gray van into a barn fast enough. When the description came out, he and a few others went back. The suspects met the guys on the lawn and surrendered before anyone got out of their cars."

No doubt, I thought. First off, that way no one has probable cause to enter the house without a warrant. Secondly, if they had put up and hint of resistance, no one would have been able to find a spoon small enough to scoop their remains into an evidence bag. Cops arresting cop killers is a volatile sort of thing.

"The van?" I asked.

"The Detectives are with it," the Captain said. "It's about to go to impound. Full of guns and drugs."

No surprise. It figured. A couple of dealers, who ride around in some old vehicle that won't matter if it is ever confiscated, but have to protect the illegal contents with guns. Sometimes the street value goes into the hundreds of thousands. Sometimes the drugs fund the purchase of guns, as with the various militia groups in the area. Either way, cops are the enemy. And if the bastards had just bought a license plate, Saunders might be here now.

"A couple more detectives are on the way here. They should arrive in a few minutes. Then you can go write your report." The Captain's voice was firm but somehow quiet and almost gentle. He seemed to be measuring me inside and out. I didn't know why. I didn't know if he was wondering about how the younger officer might be taking all this, or if it was another one of those times when the older guys didn't quite know how to interact with one of us who were part of the relatively new trend of women wearing the same uniform. I didn't care. I'd think about that later.



^
Doyle Sigler



The Sergeant looked at the Captain. "What do you think we should do?" he asked. Neither the Captain nor I had any idea what that question was about. The Captain wore a look of confused irritation. I imagined he was mentally preparing the Sergeant's next performance evaluation.

"Find his wife," I said. Both men looked at me, eyes and mouths open slightly wider. They hadn't thought of her. Knowing Carol Blair, the address would be ready for them. "She should hear about this from one of us, before someone with a scanner finds her." Saunders loved his wife. They deserved at least a decent Notification of Next of Kin.

The Captain's head went down. No one wants that duty. A moment later when his eyes met mine, I could tell he'd shouldered that harness. I suggested that the communications operator would have the address. He nodded and turned to go back to the car that brought him. The Sergeant was looking for a rock that might be over a suitable hiding place.

They left. I was alone with Saunders again. The Detectives would be here soon. I didn't want to leave him so alone and moved back to the front of his car with him. Nothing had changed. It would have been nice if this had all been a bad dream. It wasn't. The adrenaline I had so needed before had drained. The tasks I had been so determined to perform were done. I had nothing to do but wait a few minutes more.

To my frustration, my emotions began to catch up with me. My throat tightened and my eyes began to fill. What an annoyance to have that happen just before the detectives arrived. I wanted to wait until the report was done and I was home. I took a few deep breaths. It helped. It bought me some time.

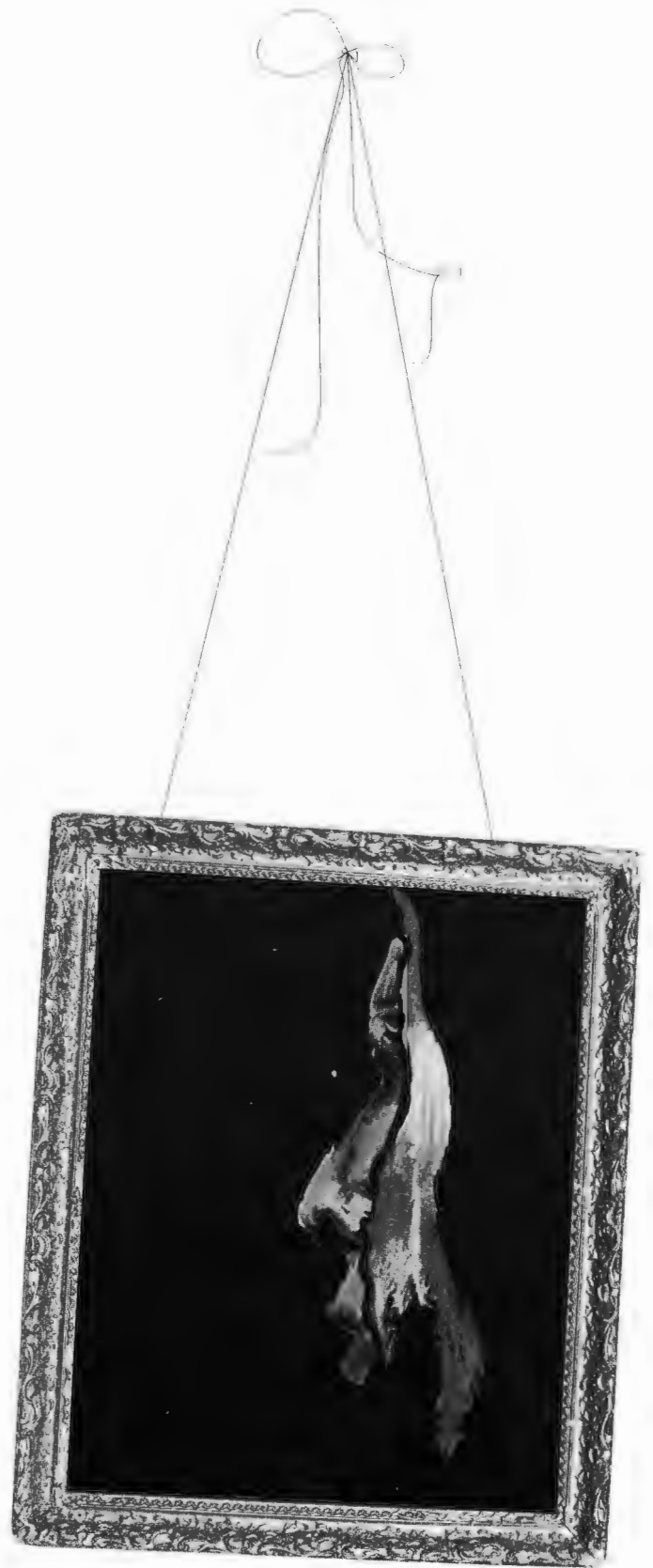
So I stood there, with Saunders. It was the last time I would see him. Tomorrow he would not be at shift meeting. Never again would his voice be on the air. His patrol car would be empty.

Empty. I knew the feeling.

[RUNNER-UP, BEST STORY IN THE
DMACC CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST]

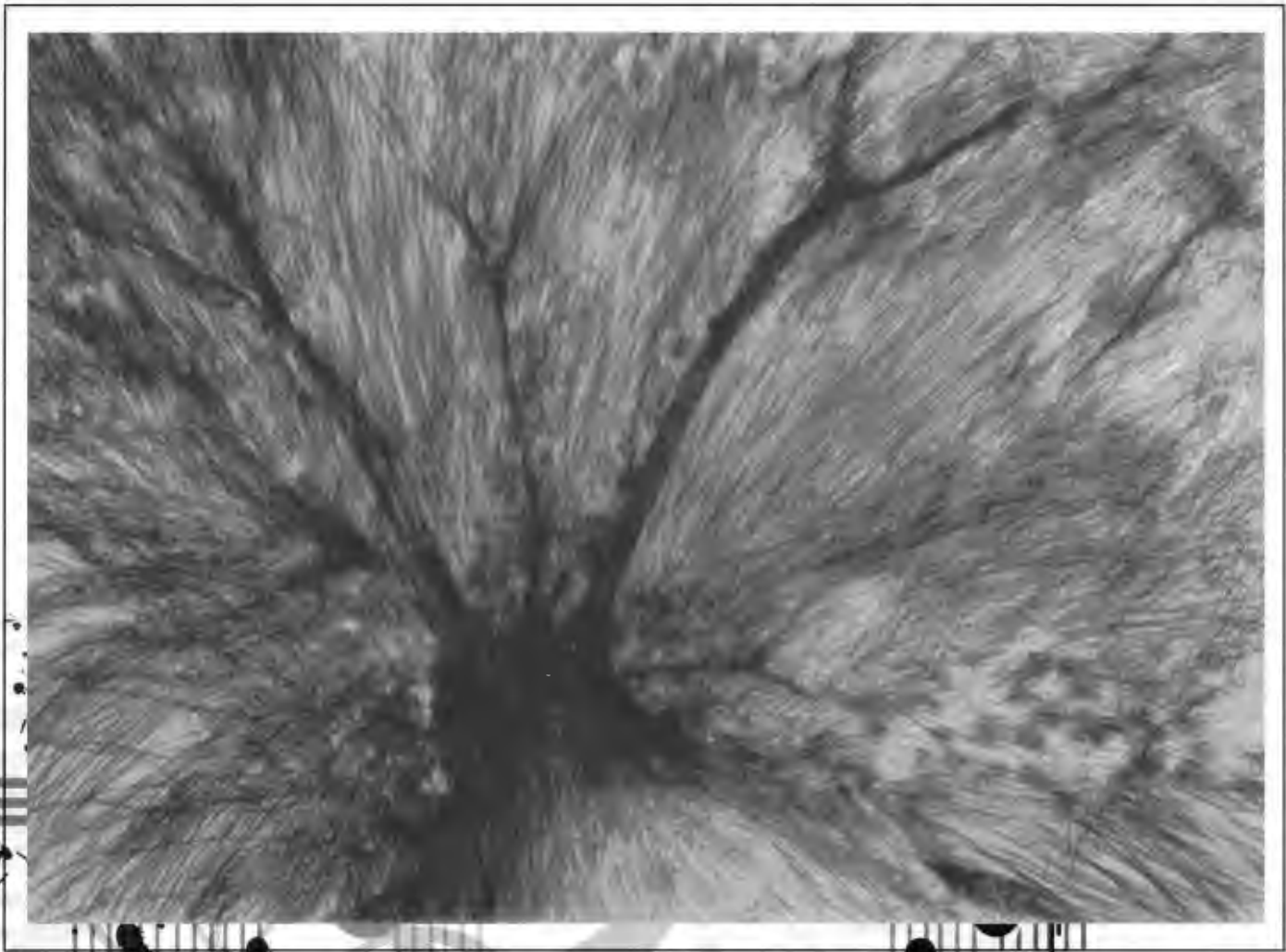


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DMACC Illustration Department



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Toni Sarcone





^ Adam Clarke



the bench

TIM VanDerkamp

Memories are strange she thought to herself as she sat alone at the bus stop. Several buses had come and gone, but Julia remained sitting on the bench. She could remember all the benches in her life. Hard, cold, damp, and even a few with splinters.

The baseball stadium her dad had taken her to when she was a child had seats that folded down, but they were benches, too. He'd tell her that only the poor players had to sit on the bench. If you were good, you always got to play. "So you better always be good Julia, you don't want to sit on the bench."

Her hair had a little grey mixed with the blonde. She had been pretty once, but time had turned her blue eyes into steel gray. Lines trailed from them now. Permanent tears marked her life like a road map to eternity. She would be five foot six if she stood straight and tall but her meager 105 pounds would stretch the limit. She preferred to sit. Sit in wonder at the world passing by. A spectator to the game of life.

She wished she'd gotten just one chance to play, but she was too old

now. She had been a great student in high school. Straight A's in every class all her life, except art class. She'd never been very creative. She'd wanted to attend Princeton or Harvard and become a lawyer. She would have made Perry Mason shiver with fear in the courtroom. When the judge said, "Approach the bench," Julia would snap, "My father said only losers sit on the bench," spin on her high heel and storm out of the courtroom. Oh, yes, she'd have been the greatest lawyer ever, if she had only gotten the chance.

Julia shivered as a gust of wind rustled the leaves around her. It would be snowing soon and her coat wasn't heavy enough for the cold Seattle winter. What day was it, she wondered in silence? The Goodwill store wasn't open on weekends. She had a little money left from her social security check. Maybe she would walk the few blocks through downtown and see if they were open. Coats were cheap there. She'd bought a Harvard sweater there last week for one dollar. She wished she could have seen Harvard or Princeton.

She had, however, seen the inside of a courtroom. She hadn't been wearing

high heels, though. The silver shackles had worn blisters into the back of her ankles. The chains that bound her handcuffs and shackles together had rattled on the hardwood bench every time she moved. It had been an eerie sound in the vast silence of the courtroom. Tears had trailed down her smooth skin as the judge sat on his bench deciding her future.

There were things in life Julia would remember forever. Like the sound of chains rattling on the bench, of the four hour bus ride that followed. The green bus with no seats, just benches with rings welded to the sides. Perfect for offenders to be chained to. Or the concrete bench at the end of the bus ride where she was forced to sit naked with fifteen other women waiting for clothes.

Julia shivered again, but not from the cold. She tried to block out the visions, but they invaded her thoughts like a thousand horseback warriors charging over the valleys of her mind. Her palms were sweating, and her long bony fingers trembled. She quickly reached inside her shirt pocket and downed the two purple pills she found



^ Andrea Markowski

there.

She hunched over, rocking back and forth, waiting for the visions to pass. Life hadn't been easy on the bench, but the pills always helped.

Cherry Point State Penitentiary had had plenty of benches. Concrete benches in the processing area, laminate wood benches in the mess hall, and round stainless steel benches that had been bolted to the wall in her cell. No matter where you went in prison you were always on the bench. Julia had left tears on most of them, she'd shed blood on a few.

That first year had been the worst. She cried and cried until the last tear ran out. They dried up like a river in the desert of her life. The other women had nicknamed her "baby," it started out as "bawl baby" and got shorter. The other inmates didn't like her, this beautiful, young, snotty brat that cried all the time. They hadn't grown up in nice neighborhoods or went to private schools. To them, Julia represented everything they'd never had and were never going to have. They'd made life very hard for her that first year. They made her look like them. She'd been beaten in the shower several times; other women had worse things happen to them, but she didn't like to think about that. She simply considered herself lucky to have been beaten and nothing else.

Julia felt the knot in her stomach relax as the pills began their work, clearing the wreckage from her mind. Feeling a little better, she reached in her front pocket and removed a tiny gold heart shaped locket. She carefully unsnapped the clasp to reveal an old black and white photograph of her father. She had always been daddy's little angel. But he was gone now. Gone like everything else she knew on the outside.

She had been at Cherry Point for almost seventeen years when she was summoned to the warden's office. A staff counselor Julia recognized sat patiently outside on an oak bench. Julia wondered why she was there. She was a grief counselor Julia had seen her a few times when she first arrived in prison.

The warden at the time had been a heavyset woman. Julia couldn't remember her face, only the way she paced back and forth when she talked, holding her hands behind her back. "Mrs. Leonard, I'm

afraid I have some bad news, your father passed away three days ago, his funeral was held today, I'm sorry," she said. "He left this for you," and flopped a brown manila envelope on the desk. Julia's fingers began trembling for the first time that day as she opened the small brown envelope, they never stopped. Inside she found the small heart shaped locket. No note, no will, just his picture and a notice from the Department of Prisons, stating that this item must remain in a secure storage locker until the inmate's release. "We have provided a special grief counselor for you, she's waiting in the hallway," then the warden said, "That will be all, Miss Leonard."

Julia stared at her father's picture for a few seconds, snapped it shut and put it back in her pocket. Her father had been a wonderful man. Even after all these years, she could still see his face, and hear his soft voice. Losing him had been worse than death for her. He was the last real thing in her world. Tears welled up in her eyes and she glanced up at the cold gray sky and mumbled, "I miss you, Daddy."

He had been there in the courtroom while she sat on the bench during her trial. He was there when the judge sentenced her to thirty years for manslaughter. He always stood in the back of the courtroom. He never sat on the bench.

He had taken out a second mortgage on his house to pay for her attorney. Every day he would tell her not to worry, it was an accident. "They don't put people in prison for accidents," he'd say, and she'd believe him. Her father had always been right, but not this time.

The vice-like grip that always punctured her panic attacks finally loosened its grip on her body. Julia leaned back on the bench at the bus stop and stared at her new shoes. Well, second hand shoes, but they were new to her. Her father had left her a one million dollar life insurance death benefit, but she hardly ever touched it. She'd found out about it the day she was released from prison. Even in death he had taken care of her.

Julia stood and shook off the cold. Her legs had fallen asleep and she winced as her own blood brought pins and needles to her feet and thighs. Pins and needles, she thought, just more splinters on the

bench.

As she began to trek toward downtown she thought about the girl. "What was her name?" she mumbled to herself. Robin, yes. Robin something or other. Julia always had trouble remembering her name. She felt bad about that. She had killed her after all. She felt obligated to at least recall her name. Robin, the prom queen. Robin, the class president of her Catholic high school. Robin the salt of the earth. Robin the senator's daughter. Julia had never seen or heard of her until the beginning of the trial. Julia's lawyer had recalled it a tragic accident, but an accident nonetheless. The district attorney called it vehicular manslaughter.

Julia had been taking some anti-depressants to help her deal with her parents' divorce. Her mom had run off to California with a doctor and left her father behind. Her father felt it was best if they both attended counseling. The counselor had suggested medication that would help with her insomnia.

"I specifically told her not to take these if you had to drive or operate any machinery, it's written on the prescription bottle itself," the councilor had testified during the trial. "She knew it would make her drowsy, that's what it was prescribed for," he said.

It must have been horrible for her, Robin what's her name. Her car had run out of gas on the side of the highway. There was no moon that night and she had been wearing an all black evening dress. Julia could still remember the police photographs. Black and white pictures of a body in a black dress, face down. Forever on the bench.

Julia couldn't remember the accident. She'd woke up in the hospital after spending three weeks in a coma. A detective had come on the third day and asked her if she remembered anything about the night of the accident. All she could recall was her dad calling just before bedtime, asking her to come pick him up at work because his car was broken down.

"Do you remember what time that was?" the detective had asked. She did remember it was almost eleven, her regular bedtime. It was Saturday night, her father always worked Saturdays.

"Do you take any medication, Miss Leonard?"

"Yes," she said, "sleeping pills." "Had you taken your medication the evening of the accident?"

"Yes, that's probably why I fell asleep at the wheel."

He had immediately read her her Miranda rights. Her father hadn't told her she'd hit somebody. He felt it was too early, and she'd been through enough. She could still remember the torn look on his face when he walked in her room while she was being read her rights.

Two days later a young woman had come from the county jail and told her the doctors had released her. She was transported by the county sheriff to jail to await trial. Her dad promised to bail her out, but he spent all his money on her attorney. She didn't take another free breath for another seventeen years. Life hadn't been easy on the bench.

Her father had blamed himself for years, but it wasn't his fault. She'd tried endlessly to ease his pain and guilt through letters and during their visits. He was right, she thought as she neared the Goodwill store; accidents do happen, but she felt he may have been wrong about poor players sitting on the bench.

She tugged on the door bearing the blue and white Goodwill sign. It was going to be a long winter on the bench.



^ Jami Bennett



^ Sara Timmons



the snow pants

The Snow Pants
ROSALIE Blakely

"Crud!" Paul yelled. "Why can't you take care of yourself? Now I'm gonna be in trouble because you act like a baby."

Out of breath and weighted down with winter clothes, Ginny had stopped in the backyard of the house on the corner. This yard was Paul's "shortcut" he used when they were late for school. Her brother had run ahead, and she couldn't keep up.

She dropped to her knees to catch her breath. "Wait for me, Paul."

Paul paused on the sidewalk on the other side of the yard, hands on the sides of his corduroys; a wrinkled Dodgers cap pulled down tight over his heavy brown hair.

"Ginny, that's the second bell, he yelled. C'mon now or I'm leaving you here."

His warning was too harsh. Tears filled her eyes and flowed down her seven year old cheeks, but she still sat in a little heap without moving.

"Ginny, you little brat." Paul tossed a look back over his shoulder as he sprinted off toward the school.

When she raised her head slightly to look, he was gone. She knew he would be, and couldn't stop the soft sobs.



She was sure her brother hated her. He called her a “tag-a-long” to let her know he didn’t want her around, and made fun of whatever she tried to do. Paul was four years older, and Ginny thought he knew everything. He read thick books and radio manuals, and could make model airplanes from paper, tiny sticks, and glue. When planes flew low over their house, she and Paul bounded out the door. Squinting into the sky, he would yell, “It’s a P38, or, It’s a P48.” Ginny was sure he was right.

Almost everyday Paul worked on his World War II scrapbook. He had started the book after their dad left for the war almost two years ago. Ginny watched as Paul pasted long headlines and pictures onto the black paper pages, adding his own drawings of planes. He knew the names of faraway places of war and could find them on maps in the dictionary. Names she couldn’t pronounce. Once he wrote in heavy, black ink above a faded newspaper picture, “Where Dad Is At.” When Ginny asked her brother what that meant, he told her she was stupid. All she knew was their dad was on a Navy ship on the ocean.

Kneeling in the yard, Ginny could feel the wet patches of melted snow soaking through her pants. A fresh earth smell combined with the early April sunshine made Ginny wish she was free of school and could stay there all day. She sullenly pulled at the new, green growth of grass, picking at the clovers through the blur of teary eyes. Sitting in the damp yard, she made a child’s discovery. If she removed one of the petals from a green, three-leafed clover and separated each of the other two petals in half, it became a four-leafed clover.

Ginny’s tears subsided, and after making several more special clovers, she got slowly to her feet and started walking the last block and a half to school. She knew she still had to go through the embarrassment of being balled out by Miss Mortensen for being late, but now she didn’t care.



Walking softly through the quiet, empty halls of the school, Ginny reached the open door of her second grade classroom. Everyone was seated, and Miss Mortensen was standing with her back to the door talking to the class about buying war bond stamp books. Ginny thought she might be able to hang up her coat and sit down without notice.

As she headed for the back of the room to the coat closet, Miss Mortensen stopped her.

"Virginia, why are you so late?" Before Ginny could answer, Miss Mortensen said sharply, "And, Virginia, hang up those snow pants at once. They're leaving wet streaks clear across the floor because they're too long."

Ginny looked behind her and saw this was true. Her actions caused an outburst of laughter from the class.

Her face felt hot and her arms and legs felt like heavy weights as she sat in the back of the room struggling to get out of her coat and snow pants.

She sat down at her desk wondering why did she have to wear those snow pants. Everyday she begged her mother to let her go to school now without them.

"It's warm out now, she pleaded. I'm the only girl that has to wear ugly snow pants.

"Too bad, her mother said. Remember how sick you were at Christmas with the flu? You have to take special care to stay well."

Ginny persisted, "The other girls in your class didn't have the flu, so they don't have to wear snow pants. But you do, and that's that, Ginny." Her mother's voiced softened, "Ginny, honey, we have to take good care of ourselves while Daddy is gone."



^ Bo Belinsky

Her older brother had stood nearby, arms folded, watching Ginny lose the battle with their mother. He gave a small "ha" under his breath and left the room.

This past year had brought changes in everything Ginny wore. An older cousin had given outgrown clothes to her, which sometimes were sewn to fit. But most of them hung too long and too wide off her shoulders.

Paul's clothes were old too, but Ginny watched him take the time at night to press the crease in his pants under books, and smooth out his stripped polo shirt over a chair. When he had to take the buckets of cinders out in the morning and add more coal to the stove, he would put on old coveralls over his school clothes. Paul liked to have his hair slicked down now, and she watched as he worked with a comb and water in front of the mirror to get his wave just right.

Sometimes, Ginny would ask her mother if she would put her hair in curlers for school the next day. But by night, her mother was writing letters to her dad and uncles and aunts, and seemed too tired and far away to remember the curlers.

At 3:30, Ginny came out the primary grade door, struggling to walk in the dragging snow pants. Kids were tearing around her, pushing and shoving each other, in a hurry to escape into the sunny, spring air. She knew Mom had told her brother to wait for her after school, but she could see he was already halfway down the block with his friend, Bobby. Paul was throwing imaginary strikes from his pitcher's windup.

Her brother loved baseball. Dad had written he would bring Paul a new glove when he came home, and they would play catch again. Sometimes when Paul tired of throwing balls at a marked "strike zone" on the old garage across the alley, he asked Ginny to catch for him.

She stood at a distance away from him, trying to hold the heavy glove up while he threw the ball to her, or at her, she thought. She wanted to catch for him, but as the ball came toward her she couldn't help squinting her eyes and ducking behind the glove. After several tries, Paul would give up. Grabbing dad's old glove from her, he would call her a Fraidy Cat or a chicken.

Ginny was hollering Paul's name now, pushing to catch up to him and Bobby. When she reached them, she pulled the four-leaf clovers from her jacket pocket.

"Look, what I found in that yard this morning. Four-leaf clovers. They're good luck."

Paul picked several from her outstretched hand.

"I'm going to have Mommy press them in the Bible," Ginny said.

"Oh, brother," Paul laughed loudly, and showed them to Bobby. They both laughed even harder. "Mom won't do that. She'll know you made 'm. Besides, your mommy's not even home now. She went to the ration lines, and that'll take a while."

"Do you think she'll get canned peaches and sugar?" Ginny asked, stuffing the clovers back in to her pockets.

"No," said Paul. "They'll probably run out of everything again, and Mom will just stand in that line all that time for nothing." Paul punched his fist into a pretend glove on his hand. "It's gonna be navy beans over bread again."

"Four-leaf clovers." Paul shook his head. "What a drip," he said to Bobby, as they ran off and left Ginny to walk home alone.

When Ginny reached home, Paul was sitting on the front porch staring at his crinkled, black and white photo of their dad in his navy uniform. She startled him as she climbed up beside him on the steps.

"What are savings stamp books for?" She asked. "Some of the kids get to buy them at school."

Paul shoved the photo back in his pocket. "You save stamp books until you have enough to buy a War Bond, but you have to have dimes to buy the stamps. We don't have dimes, dummy."

"You mean War Bonds like the movie stars talk about?" she asked.

"Why don't you ask your teacher all this junk?" Paul said.

"I can't. I'm afraid of Miss Mortensen. She gets mad sometimes."

Paul rolled his eyes in disgust and started into the house, "You just get under the bed or table and cover your head with your hands."

"But what if..." Ginny started to follow him.

Paul stopped her, "They won't bomb here. That's overseas in England and Germany, okay? Now leave me alone."

He threw his jacket on the chair and went directly to the corner of the living room where he had his crystal radio kit set up on a card table.

Ginny was glad to be home. As she sat on the floor kicking her way out of her old boots and snow pants, she chattered to Paul about her bad day at school...the class laughing at the wet streaks on the floor, and what Miss Mortensen had said to her. Paul kept his head down, working silently on his radio.

When Ginny gained freedom from her snow pants, they lay on the floor in a heap, and she gave them a kick. She wanted to hide the pants or burn them.

Paul looked up from his work. "Hey, get those things out of here. They stink!"

Ginny looked up in surprise as he suddenly crossed the room. He grabbed the snow pants up by their suspenders and swung them around his head, filling the room with the smell of wet wool. Opening the front door he ran off the porch. Still whirling the pants by the suspenders, he slung the pants out across the yard and into the street. Brushing his hands together, he turned slowly and came back into the house.

Ginny had watched from the doorway, frozen in disbelief. As soon as Paul came through the door, she closed it with a hard, final slam. She turned around with a triumphant look on her face.

Ginny twirled around in a circle twice, "Thank you, thank you." She stopped and grinned at her brother. "I won't tell Mom. Paul, I would never tattle on you."

Paul stood looking at Ginny for several seconds. "No, you aren't a tattle-tale, that's true."

"When dad comes home, he will never make me wear those stupid old snow pants and ugly clothes, will he?"

"No, Paul told her quietly. Dad wouldn't want you to have to do that."

Paul returned to his radio set in the corner. But instead of working, he sat quietly looking at his dad's picture he had propped up on books.

He turned to his sister, "Ginny, I remember Miss Mortensen when I had her in second grade. She's a mean, old bat, and she shouldn't have said some of those things to you. Never mind if the kids laughed, cause they'll laugh at anything."

"Well, I wasn't a cry baby at school in front of all the kids anyway," she said. She was reaching to put her coat on the closet door hook.

"Good, said Paul. You'll get over that crying stuff one of these days."

Paul turned back to his radio, then looked up again. "Come over here, and you can help me work on my radio."

Her steps were hesitant as she headed toward the corner chair. She sat down carefully beside him. He handed her a wire to hold.

"I'm going to stop by Elaine's house in the morning so we can walk to school together, Ginny said. You don't have to wait for me, Paul."

She held the wire out in readiness for him. "If Mom gets sugar today, maybe she'll make us some fudge tonight."

"Maybe she will." Paul said, reaching for the wire Ginny offered.

[BEST STORY IN THE DMACC CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST]

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