

Tualatin High's Electronic Publication of Art and Writing



Volume 3, Issue 2

March, 2011

# THE PAW



Chris Liu

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# DOORWAY TO REALITY

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THERE'S A DOOR. IT'S NOT FAR.  
YOU TOUCH THE SMOOTH, ALLURING HANDLE,  
AND THINK ABOUT THE EXIT,  
OR ENTRY, AS IT WERE—  
ITS BECKONING PROXIMITY,  
ITS COMFORTING AVAILABILITY.  
YOU CAN'T HELP BUT REACH LONGINGLY FOR THE DREAM.  
YOU HOPE, YOU PRAY.  
MAYBE THERE'S A LIFE  
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT DOOR—  
A CHANCE  
TO STEP AWAY FROM YOUR PAST  
AND WELCOME AN UNBURDENED FUTURE  
WHERE NOT ONLY WILL YOUR LIFE BE DIFFERENT,  
BUT YOU YOURSELF WILL BE NEW.

YOUR FINGERS WRAP AROUND THE ENTICING HANDLE,  
AND YOU TAKE A SECOND TO BREATHE DEEPLY AS  
EXCITEMENT SWELLS INSIDE YOU WITH THE  
IDEA OF SO MANY OPEN POSSIBILITIES FOR  
YOU AND YOUR FUTURE.

SO YOU GRAB THE HANDLE, AND  
TURN IT AS SLOWLY AS YOU DARE.  
YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES AND OPEN THE DOOR,  
DREAMING, BELIEVING.  
BUT YOUR NOW CLEAR EYES CAN SEE ONLY  
DARKNESS.  
WHERE'S THE LIGHT? YOU'RE SCARED NOW.  
YOU CANNOT SEE THE HOPE ANYMORE, AND  
THE BLINDNESS IS UNSETTLING.  
THE DREAM IS DEAD.

SO YOU TAKE A STEP BACK,  
FUMBLING IN THE ABSENCE OF LIGHT.  
YOU SHUT THE DOOR QUICKLY, TURN AROUND, AND  
LEAVE. FLEE.  
YOU DON'T PAUSE TO SAY GOOD BYE.  
❖ BECAUSE NOW YOU UNDERSTAND—  
THE GATEWAY TO CHANGE WAS  
NEVER REALLY THERE AT ALL. IT DIDN'T EXIST.  
THE DOORWAY TO REALITY IS  
WHAT YOU FOUND, AND  
WHAT YOU RAN FROM.

# A SECRET

ANONYMOUS

The numbers dwindle.

Hands,

dangling like lynchings,

are slowly taken down.

My pulse is rough

heavy

and sour

as the last mumble of an opinion is shared.

The air is silent.

I am all that's left;

the worst for last.

Hoping to be forgotten.

Time slurs.

The whiteness of my face leaves chalky residue

as fire consumes it

as sweat dances softly on my surface.

Do you have anything to say?

I know nothing

I know nothing

I know nothing

Say it.

The words are right there.

Say them.

My heart curls in my mouth

my tongue freezes in my chest

and for a moment, I feel normal.

Theories and themes

and deaths and definitions

crowding my eyesight float into the space

between

here and there.

I know the answer.

I always do.

Please, pick me.

Don't hold back.

I'm so much more.

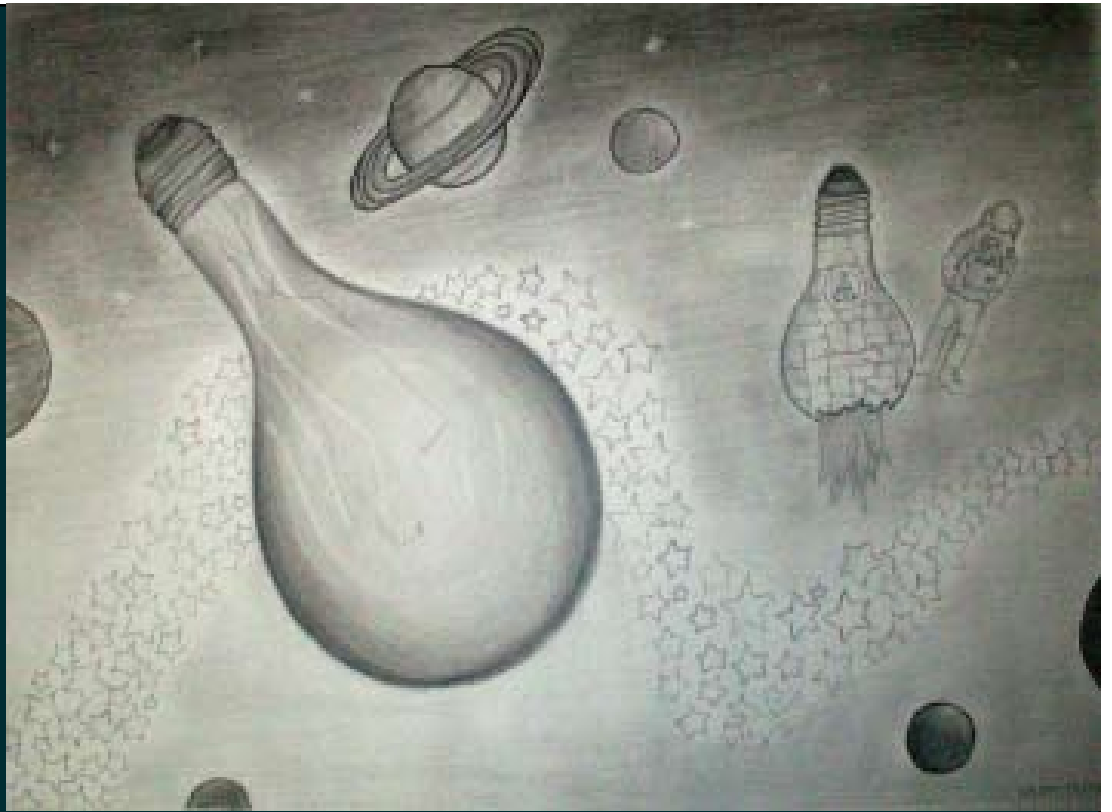
Please, let me speak.

But it doesn't happen.

I shake my head fervently.

And the world continues on

until second period.



Malory Turner

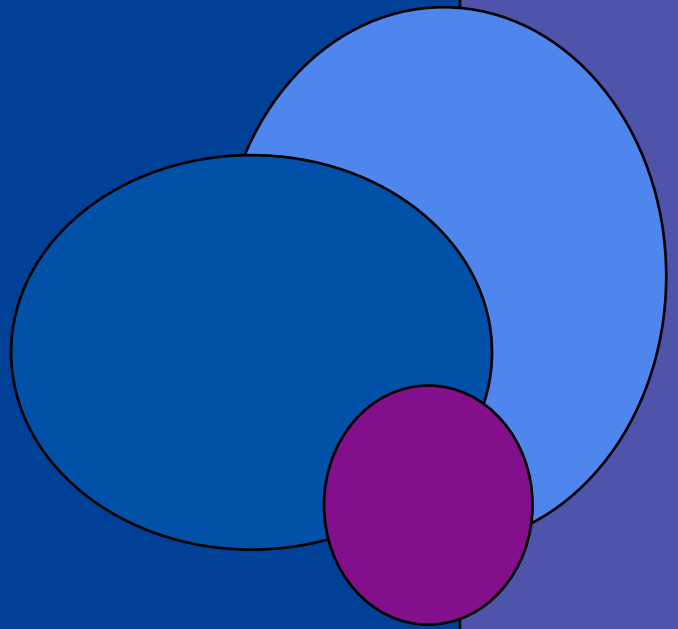
*"Alone"*

Ships set sail from my neurons  
Bilges filled with broken glass  
Sent to fight the Moby Dick  
within my skull  
He's writhing in the dark mass  
Of water  
Oh, God, it bucks like a wild bull  
And I find myself growing full  
Of hate for those who let me  
fight  
Alone.

But every night, I lie awake,  
In a heated and angry state,  
Wishing for a little warmth  
But only bitterness bubbles forth

My brain is full to burst  
And you all hate me  
Because I durst  
To say the things I do  
To tell the truth  
Which you don't want to hear  
For fear  
You'll lose your youth

So you wallow in the lies  
Fed to you by everyone else  
You all lie in garbage, covered in  
flies  
And hate me because I point out  
How much  
You  
Smell.



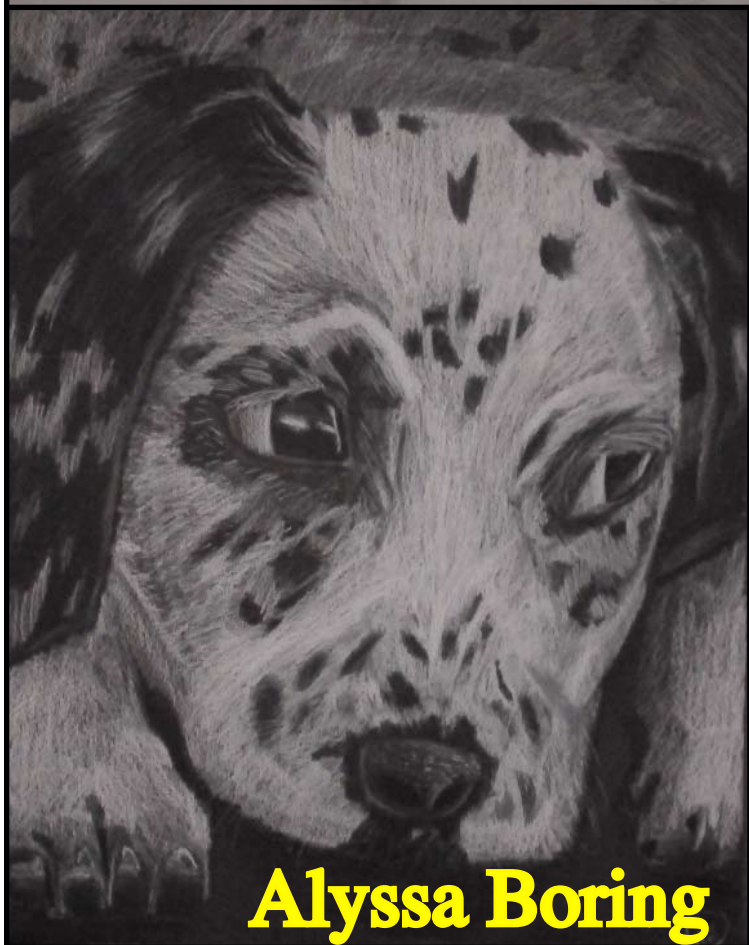
*Hayley Leeper*

*"Base Creatures"*

Tell me honest  
And tell me straight:  
Are human beings too human  
To outgrow  
The feeling  
Of hate?



**Kenny Osborn**



**Alyssa Boring**

# THE FIGHT TO BE PERFECT;



## TRUE BEAUTY IN THE EYES OF A WORLD UNABLE TO SEE.

BY: Gracie Howard

“What is the basis of that grace of outline and contour which makes a body pleasing and attractive to the sight instead of commonplace or ugly? The essence of beauty lies in internal well-being, wholesomeness and harmony.”

-Harrison



I have always perceived the school newspaper as funny, informative, and witty. But I was extremely disturbed when I read an article that talked down to its readers. The article was about obesity in America today and the author revealed some pretty shocking statistics. Even though obesity isn't very healthy, I was still perturbed, and it got me thinking, "Why are we so sickened by bigger men and women?" We all know it is not healthy to a certain extent, but as a curvier student at Tualatin High School, I felt struck down when I read this. (No offense to the author, their work was very well put together. We don't realize how much it hurts people when we talk about how obesity is disgusting and unhealthy when there are kids walking around our school feeling terrible because of our words. I myself went through that stage when I thought being "fat" was gross. But after some research of my own, I learned some pretty intriguing information.

Did you know that over 24 million people of all ages and genders suffer from an eating disorder in the U.S? What was really interesting to me was that six to ten percent of people with eating disorders are males. One million boys and men suffer from anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, and dietary disorders. I was surprised because you only really ever hear about women having eating disorders. In a study of girls ages 8-10, 50% said they were unhappy with their bodies. In a similar study of women 9-15, 65% said that they exercised to lose weight, nearly 50% claimed that they reduced food intake to lose weight, and 5% said they stole parent's laxatives or diet pills. This made me angry, these girls were ages eight to fifteen. Why are we making them feel this way? After I looked up statistics, I decided to study the different "ideal body" images from the past decades.

In the 1960's and 70's women wanted a "tall, thin, willowy" look. For men, big muscles and a lean mid-section was the desired body image. When in the 1940's and 50's, women were idolized for the curves and men were all shapes and sizes with no shame. Nowadays, women and men in America strive for the "perfect body." For males, lean muscles and a tight mid-section is what fits in. For women, big breasts with an extremely tiny waist is what satisfies the status quo. But this image becomes hard to obtain for the select few of us who cannot reach the standard, no matter how hard we try. So, then what happens? America diets. America starves itself. We overwork our bodies to achieve this image that IS NOT US. Compromising yourself to become what the world wants is crossing the line. You probably asking yourself, "Why should I care?" or "How does this apply to me? I'm not overweight."

It applies to you because you become the prejudiced voices of the world when you talk down about someone who looks different from you. Tualatin High School needs to understand that this image that American teenagers are striving to achieve is unnecessary. What I'm saying is everyday at Tualatin High School, I see handsome, beautiful, wonderful, people. I just don't understand why we try to hard to impress others with our body's image when the most attractive trait that you have is the hilarious, amazing, charismatic, personality I see everyday. Some say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but beauty to me, true beauty, is how you decide to define it for yourself.

Sources:

[www.anad.org](http://www.anad.org) National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders

[www.anad.org/get-information/males-eating-disorders/](http://www.anad.org/get-information/males-eating-disorders/)

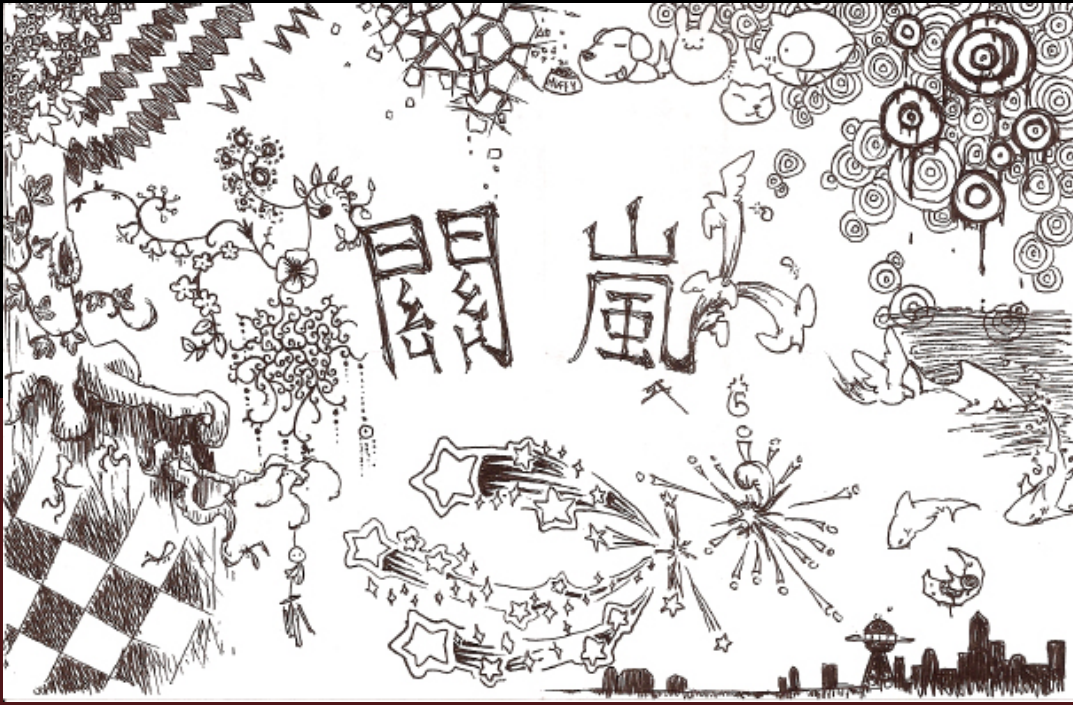
[www.annecollins.com/eating-disorders/statistics.htm](http://www.annecollins.com/eating-disorders/statistics.htm)

# A Cold Night ~ Anonymous

Don't tell her this is life  
 It will only hurt more  
 See the long ago wounds  
 They are still so sore  
 She's tired and lonely  
 She wants to go home  
 Crying herself to sleep at  
 night  
 Thinking she's so alone  
 There's pain in her heart  
 But you don't see  
 She just thinks about it  
 You hope that's all it will  
 be  
 She doesn't know that  
 anyone cares  
 She doesn't know why  
 she's so scared  
 She just knows she's all  
 alone  
 And she's gonna find a  
 way to go home  
 She says she wonders  
 What it would be like  
 To die alone  
 On some cold dark night

But you just hug her tighter  
 Telling her everything's  
 alright  
 Hoping it will be enough  
 On this cold, dark night  
 Tonight she's so cold  
 And she's all alone  
 She's gonna find a way  
 A way to take her home  
 Because she doesn't know  
 that anyone cares  
 She doesn't know why she's  
 so scared  
 She just knows she's all  
 alone  
 And she's gonna find a way  
 to go home  
 Watch her struggle along  
 Not even noticing  
 Too wrapped up in your  
 own problems  
 To see what she is becom-  
 ing  
 And then one night  
 You wake up alone  
 And somehow, you just

know  
 She has found a way to go  
 home  
 Tonight she's so cold  
 And she's all alone  
 She has found a way  
 A way to go home  
 She didn't know that any-  
 one cared  
 She didn't know that you  
 were so scared  
 You wanted to tell her she's  
 not alone  
 But it's too late now, she's  
 already home



*Lan  
Kuan*

Shubhika Prakash



Across  
 A vast expanse of nothing  
 A dreary plain of dreams that lay  
 Dying  
 Their souls suffering to this day  
 Alive, you say?  
 Alive, I say.  
 These bits of souls where nothing lay  
 Dying, Dying, to this day.  
 Hear them.  
 A caress of wind that blows across the plains  
 where nothing lay. a soul.  
 Yours. **The Graveyard of**  
 A soul. **Dreams**  
 Mine. *Hanaa Masalmeh*  
 Hear it.  
 Fondle your gentle dreams  
 And with a sigh  
 Crush them into oblivion.  
 Gently, gently.  
 To the pain where nothing lay  
 A graveyard of dreams.  
 On each headstone a simple name.  
 Mine. Yours. Commemorate the souls that  
 here once lay.  
 Hear them suffer  
 Hear them die  
 Until you reach with a simple step  
 The sloping curve of a road  
 Into the aching woods it bends,  
 To the simple home of the groundskeeper  
 And see the word.  
 See it scratched.  
 See it carved.  
 See it written.  
 See it there.  
 Look gently; you dare not disturb what here  
 still lay.  
 See it resurrect the dreams that you had slain.  
 And sent to this graveyard far away.  
 Forget, you thought.

## **Unspoken Advice**

### *Karen Ortiz*

*Forget the fact that there's no  
 past,  
 Forget the shadow that you cast,  
 Ignore that person that creases  
 your fold,  
 Shout to the empty, wide open  
 world,  
 Control your mind from within,  
 Hear the voice that won't let you  
 give in,  
 Every step counts on the clock,  
 The ticking beat, the thing you  
 forgot,  
 Feel the memories beginning to  
 form,  
 Remember the fact that you  
 were born,  
 Believe that you're here for a  
 reason,  
 And feel your time coming any  
 season,  
 At any moment time will come,  
 To make you forget where you're  
 from,  
 Leave the people that left you  
 behind,  
 And cherish those that led you to  
 shine.*

Forget not.  
 Watch it dust away the simple  
 word  
 You had tried to raise in vain.  
 Hope.

Lan Kuan



# Black

by David Rios

Black so dark

It can freeze you to the touch

As bitter as horse radish

It will leave you depressed and confused

We all fear the dark

We fear it because we don't understand it

Instead of facing it

We use it to hide

Hide our fears

Hide our dark emotions

Hide our lust

Hide our hatred

But why?

Why do we hide them in the dark

Where they can haunt us

In the night

In the shadows

In our dreams

Why not let them be shown

Why keep them shielded

Why keep them in a prison of all the colors

Let these things go

Because as much as you hate them

They're you

And you alone

# CRAZY

ANONYMOUS

Don't judge me  
When I go crazy  
Because if you knew the backwards logic  
Of why my mind is unwinding  
You would think differently.

Don't judge me  
Because this is your fault.  
You split your attention  
And I got the weaker half  
And now there is a fissure  
In my consciousness.

Don't judge me  
Because you know it all now  
And I'm falling apart  
And everyone is falling away  
And I'm in solitary  
And I'm lost  
In the dark and broken recesses  
Of my own mind.

Don't judge me  
Because judgments are the roadmap  
That led me to this place  
And even I  
Don't want this for you.

# TIC TOC by tyger patton

Tic toc, tic toc.  
It's interesting how  
We wait  
For the best times in life  
To come.

We wait,  
We get left behind.  
The world never stops  
Spinning  
And time slips by  
Faster and faster.

It's easy to see  
How the things we want  
To happen  
Never do.  
Because we're waiting—  
And no one else is.

Tic toc, tic toc  
Goes the clock.  
How can you expect  
Things to happen  
If you just sit and wait—  
While life passes you by?

I hate to say it,  
And you're not gonna like it,  
But we can't wait—  
Not anymore.  
We can't afford to waste  
Anymore precious time.

Our time is now!  
We must take action!  
And gather the courage  
To say what should've been said  
A looong time ago.



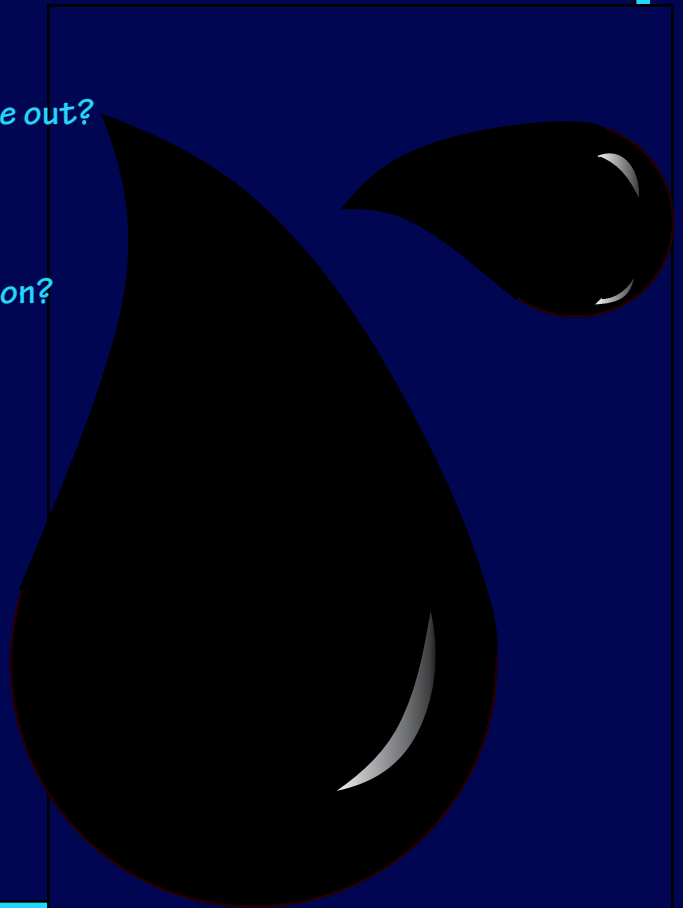
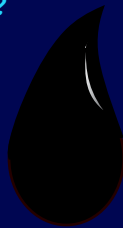
## Hoping I'm Wrong

You think  
That you have tabs on her?  
You think  
That you have tabs on me?  
Were you aware of me  
When I felt the press of guilt?  
When shiny black tears dragged me down like an anchor?  
When he walked away?  
Are you aware of her  
When she chooses to go hungry?  
When refuses to acknowledge the pain inside?  
When her heartbreaks?

Am I  
Blowing this out of proportion?  
Am I  
Taking this too far?  
Did I push myself  
To the point of breaking?  
To this sickness rotting me from the inside out?  
To the precipice of do or die?  
Did I push this pain  
Into a preconceived image?  
Into a theatrical perception of her situation?  
Into something she's really not?

I sure hope so.

-Anonymous





**Chantal  
Chalumeau**



# Pencil Mark

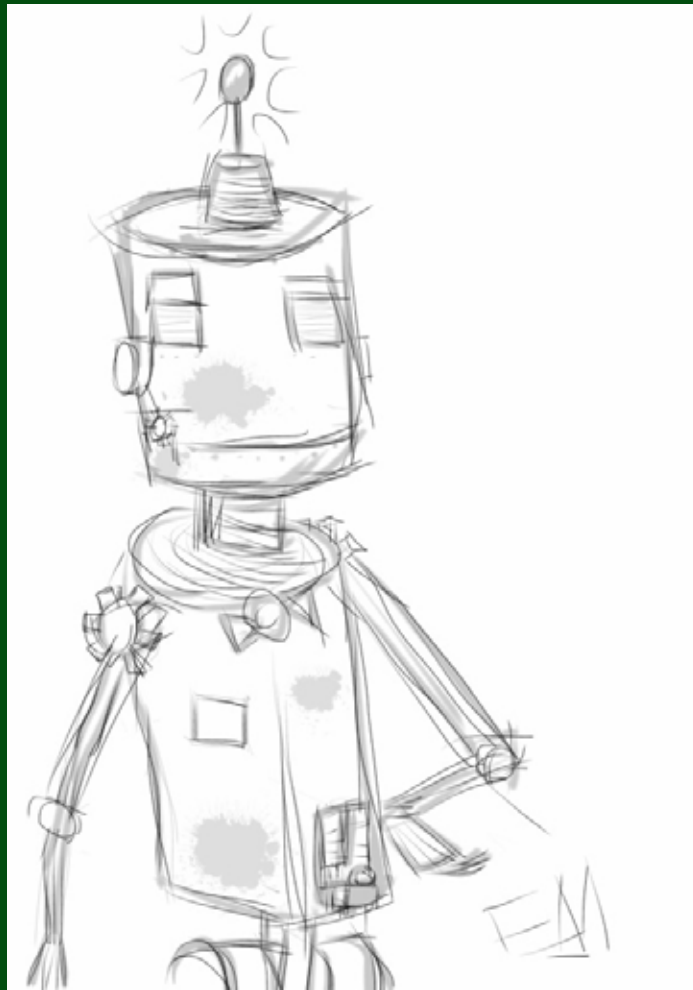
Melissa Aust

There's a mark on the classroom desk-  
It's just a little design, really.  
When my eyes find its carefully-made  
Components, I don't feel lonely anymore.  
I look at the intricate lines  
Drawn first with a pencil, probably, and  
then  
Carved by others as it matured so that  
It emerged in full life as an  
Irreversible symbol that will  
Exist, survive, live, remain, endure  
On this desk forever.

As I run my finger along the  
Endearing little mark, I can't help but  
wonder-  
Where did you come from?  
Born out of mindless boredom,  
Or maybe from a need to just draw?  
Perhaps it was meant as a secret code-  
A hidden message from one class to the  
next-  
Or could it be that it occupied the mind  
Of one who felt the need to share it?  
I like to think, though, that this symbol,  
Whether its origins lie in accident  
or purpose,  
Was helped to grow by everyone who sat  
At this desk, each person carving  
A little deeper, adding a little change so  
that  
Together, united in their distracting  
purpose,  
They made this design what it is today.

And those who helped the process along-  
I think of them too. How they must have felt.  
What was happening in their life?  
Was there a recent death in the family?  
Did they just earn their driver's license?  
Was their mind consumed with guilt from  
a recent wrongdoing,  
Or was filled with joy at an accomplished goal?  
Were they half of a recently-split couple?  
Did they just find out about a dark secret of a  
friend?  
Were they  
Happy, sick, calm, distraught, energetic, quiet?  
Angry, bored, hungry, excited, heart-broken,  
stressed?  
Preoccupied, emotional, tired, talkative, or in love?  
Or maybe they just saw this little mark, like I did,  
And couldn't help but trace it with their pencil,  
and  
Help create the beautiful carving that  
Brought all of us together, united,  
In a way that nothing else could.

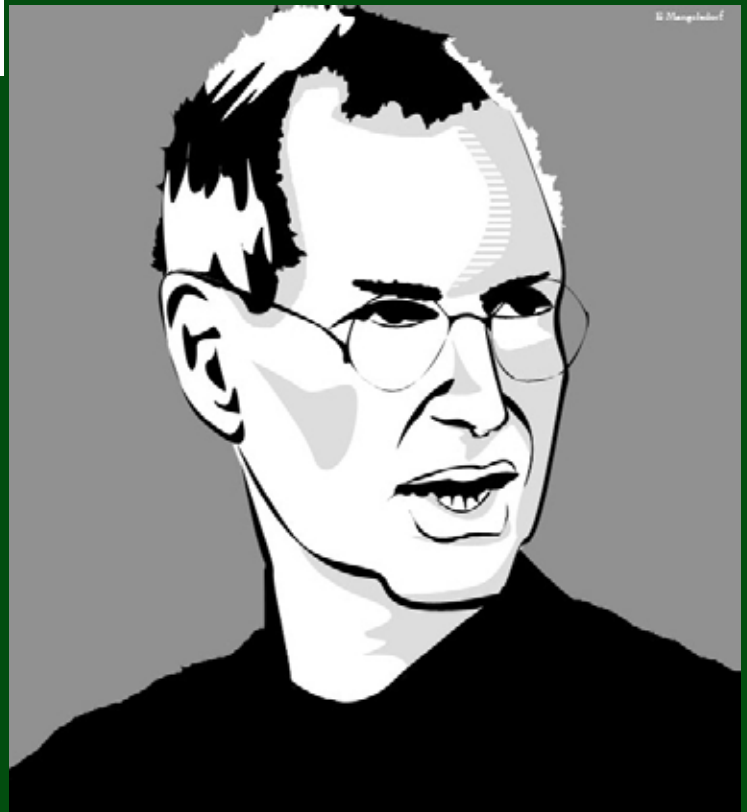
I look idly at the beautiful scar on my desk,  
And I think about all of this.  
I don't know who began this pattern, or who  
Helped it grow step by small step,  
But I like to imagine about all of them  
When I look at the little pencil mark that lives  
On my desk. And then I realize that  
I am not alone.



**“TIN MAN”**

**EVAN  
MANGELSDORF**

**“STEVE JOBS”**



**THINK  
DIFFERENT**

# Out, Out

Empty room  
with a lone candle  
burning bright.

There's an  
open window: curtains blow  
as the wind whispers  
tempting thoughts.

The little  
candle flickers,  
fighting to

stay lit-  
to keep

shining for

the world.

Keep fighting,

brief candle.

The candle  
struggles.

Darkness spreads

as cold

loveless air

poisons the

life of

the candle.

Keep

fighting.





alyssa boring

Vivian Kim



# Planet of Suffering

## Robert Black

Kralstard-5 had been a major economic and military outpost since the Madelle began colonizing planets. The major weapons manufacturer Empetar mined Rylithium on its moons and extracted antimatter from Gas Giants farther away from its sun, and they had set up a distribution center on the planet. It was not a huge mass like Tahien or Samosen-4, but it had been one of the most populated planets in the Federation.

It was also the sight of one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the war.

The Drantless targeted the Kralstard system not only for its supply of raw materials, but it was near the Myvarr system and had decent sized populations of Threnianel on some of the smaller planets that they could use for slave labor. The force that hit Kralstard-5 was the same size as the one that attacked Earth fifty years later, and even though the Madelle were able to kill many invaders, they had brought females and children. Thus, the Drantless population was growing faster than the Madelle could kill them, and for over a century the two races battled for control and neither side could make any headway in driving the other away. The arrival of human forces to support the Madelle had not broken the enemy; if anything, it had only made the death count rise astronomically.

Sergeant Robert Friedman stepped off the shuttle and looked at what was once a bustling city. Now it was a bombed out wasteland, with the only building that had not been

rendered to Swiss cheese the small command center, machine shop, and barracks that were in front of him. The whole place had the air of a graveyard, and he hoped the sign that read Kralstard-5: last stop on the road to Hell was only a joke.

The base was in bad shape; all the buildings looked like someone had scorched the sides and the only vehicles that he could see that were still working were some M1A4 tanks, including a few that had been modified to carry Drantless Heavy Pulse Lasers and only a few handfuls of soldiers were moving around.

Friedman was being assigned to the 223rd Infantry Division; he had served before on Titan near the beginning of the human's involvement, but he had been seriously injured when his company had been hit by a High Battle Group with tank support and was discharged before seeing any heavy fighting. After fighting on Kralstard-5 got worse he was rejuvenated, given back his rank of Sergeant and sent to rejoin his old unit.

He grabbed his things and walked towards the command center. About two dozen others had come in on that last shuttle, and they were hurrying because it was reported that there was a very good chance of aerial attacks.

Friedman was not in a big rush, but he still wanted to get out of the slight drizzle that was coming down.

"Sergeant Friedman?" a lieutenant waiting on the tarmac asked. Friedman nodded.

"First Lieutenant Marcus Long. I'm your current commanding officer."

"Current?"

"Long story. You've probably not gotten a chance to get a feel for where things are, so I'll be showing you to your quarters." The lieutenant started off towards one of the smaller buildings to his right "You've ever been in combat before?"

"Yeah; did a tour on Titan."

"You're that old?" Long gave a short whistle "Damn, you're the one that should be the lieutenant here, not me."

"Not really; I had my arm blown off by a 20-pound machine gun on my first combat mission, so they got rid of me because they didn't think I'd do any good. Then they need more guys, so they yank me out of retirement, rejuvenate me and send me here."

"Tough luck. Well, at any rate, meals are whenever you can get them. We move out in two days."

"Yes sir."

"Please, don't start with all the 'sirs' until we actually do something."

"Do you usually meet up with new soldiers under your command?" Friedman asked



when they reached the barracks.

"No, you're just the third sergeant I've had in four days." Long turned and left. Friedman pushed the door opened and entered. The air was thick with cigarette smoke and low talking, and the mood was less cheery than a funeral. He shifted his pack to his shoulder and began towards his room. He found it in the back next to another that had a slightly drunken soldier sitting in front of it.

"You sure you should be drinking?" he asked.

"Hell, nobody's stopped me." The man replied "You the new sarge?"

"I guess... what unit are you in?"

"Dunno; I've had so many COs I kinda lost track." The soldier took a swig from a bottle sitting next to him.

"I haven't actually been in the loop, but are things as bad as they say?"

"Hell, they're worse; us grunts are dropping like flies. There've been four different guys that have lived in your room in less than a week." He pointed to another room down the hall "Buddy of mine used to be there. Got his head blow off by a railgun last night. That guy there," he pointed to another man sitting at a table "His brother got deep fried by plasma three days ago."

"Shit."

"It gets worse." The soldier motioned to a man with his arm in a cast "he's had that arm broken in six different places and had his left leg grown back twice. Met a guy who had lost his wife when her tank detonated; had his head taken off by a 20-pounder

on day one." he took another drink

"The list goes on. The only way you get out of here is either in a casket, being atomized, or in a straightjacket."

"People go insane?"

"Shit, those are the lucky ones. Heard one guy drew smiley faces on the walls of his barracks with his own blood; said someone would smile when they got him. Another guy took up knife tossing: bigger problem was that he tossed them at tall people and blacks, saying they were those red-skinned bastards in disguise. 'S why I drink."

"To drown everything out?"

"Nah, it's the only way I can think straight any more. The only guys that haven't cracked around here are the Madelle, or what few there are."

"Why aren't there more?"

"They get hit worse than we do at times, and it takes longer for them to get new guys, slow reproduction rate and all," he shrugged and took another drink "The Drantless don't run out; they've got so many females dropping babies it's not funny. They're ready to come out shooting in ten years." He looked at Friedman "You better go report to the supply sergeant and get some guns; the Drantless don't participate in fist-fights."

After dropping off his gear, Friedman headed to where the armory was located. It was next to a machine shop, and he could see mechanics scurrying about and repairing several M1A4s and a single M3A2 that dominated the entire complex.

"Sergeant Friedman?" a rough looking soldier asked when

he reached the armory.

"Yes."

"Sergeant Pierson, supplies. I'm here to get you some weapons." He went to a locker and opened it. Inside Friedman could see a wide variety of weapons from small caliber pistols to heavy anti-tank missiles. The sergeant selected a few guns from the center of the group and laid them out on a table.

"This," Pierson said, holding up a rifle "Is an M-140, what the Madelle call a Main Assault Rifle type 18. It fires 800 rounds per minute and has twice the ammo capacity of an early model M-120."

"Range?"

"Lethal at six hundred yards, but I doubt you'll ever get to use it at that range."

"Six hundred?"

"Friedman, this is basically a watered-down version of what the Powered Combat Suits use."

"Why aren't there any here?"

"Dunno, but I bet that even the Iron Maiden Sharon Michaels herself couldn't break this." he put the rifle back down and picked up a shorter gun.

"This is the Madelle equivalent of a twelve-gauge, but it's a lot better. The slugs it fires are heavier and travel faster, and it has a better ammo capacity."

"Why do I need this?"

"When you run out of ammo for the M-140, you'll thank me. For a side arm you'll be getting a rail pistol that's been upgraded to fire

faster and also has a higher ammo capacity, and from what I know your unit doesn't have any Madelle and you're not recon, so you'll be getting a standard combat knife." He pulled out a very large knife "single-piece monomolecular Ry-lithium; will slice through anything you want." He put the knife down "All this is yours now; you can take it back to your bunk and do whatever you want with it except blow it up."

"I wouldn't do that." He took the assault rifle and inspected it "There's a blood stain here; looks new."

"It is; the guy that had that rifle died yesterday."

The next day Friedman's unit was moving to the front. The company was being transported there in five Marshal Personnel Carriers, which could transport more soldiers than the pre-war Bradley APCs. Still, conditions inside the transports were cramped and the vehicle's suspension was not the greatest, so jostling into another person was a given.

Friedman also noted the quiet and somber mood; no one was speaking to each other, and the only noise besides the engines of the APC came from another soldier who was fidgeting with his rifle.

"We're closing in on the front line," the driver called from ahead "Get ready to disperse as soon as you get out." Friedman picked up his rifle and made sure that all his other equipment was in place.

"Hey, lieutenant," one of the other soldiers in the APC said "What's the mission now?"

"Standard; we stay on our section of the line for a few days

and kill any enemies that stray into it."

"Or they kill us, whichever comes first." Another person said. This comment was noted with some form of nodding. Friedman said nothing, feeling any comment of his would not be well received.

"Hey, new guy," one of the other soldiers said to him "you don't talk much, do you?"

"Shit, he's just being quiet 'cuz he knows we're all screwed as soon as we step out of that door." The conversation was cut off when the APC shook violently.

"We've been ambushed!" the driver said "Two Battle Groups and a light tank! Everyone get out of here!" the doors opened and the soldiers rushed out to the nearest cover they could find. Friedman barely made it clear before the APC caught fire from being hit.

He made a quick survey of the situation; most of his squad was pinned down behind a large pile of rubble near the main road, and three of the original five Marshals had been completely destroyed. The Drantless light tank, nicknamed "Cheese Boxes" due to their clunky shape, was well situated behind a fallen building, as were the other Drantless that had come with it. He hurried over to the rubble and took his place amongst the troops.

"Welcome to scenic Kralstard-5," one of the soldiers said when he got there, not even looking at him but concentrating only on the Drantless "The Devil's Favorite Vacation Spot." Friedman looked over his shoulder just as one of the men was hit. The railgun shard tore into the man's

shoulder with enough force to completely shred his entire right side and decapitate him, splattering his blood as far as twelve feet.

"Baker's dead! Someone get his gun!" the man that had spoken to him on the APC scurried over and grabbed the rifle before ducking back behind a wrecked building, barely dodging fire from an enemy machine gun. The APCs that had been supporting them had moved to find better cover and the remaining soldiers had only managed to slow the Drantless down for a little.

"We can't hold this position," Long said "Fall back; we'll find better cover and call for an artillery strike."

"But it's only a two Lower Battle Groups." Friedman said.

"Higher Battle Groups; there's more that you can't see. Fall back."

Eventually, the humans found a more defensible position and beat the Drantless back, but Friedman's squad alone was down to less than half the original number of men. Everyone was battered and bruised from collisions with offset terrain and rubble blasted up from near misses.

"Okay, rest for a bit, and then we'll head back to base." Long said.

"Lieutenant," one of the other sergeants said "What about the wounded?"

"If they can be moved, get someone to move them. If not, leave them." Friedman was shocked; he'd never heard

of people leaving wounded men behind.

"Sir, they might live if we call for evac." Friedman said.

"The Drantless have air superiority and enough anti-aircraft guns in this sector alone to make a Destroyer seem under gunned; if we call for a shuttle or some choppers they'll get shot down before they have a chance to land and then the Drantless will pinpoint our position and we're all dead. I can't take that kind of risk."

"But they can be patched up in the rear."

"Again, the risk of having the Drantless spot us is too great, and also the nearest hospital is the one back at the base."

"But if you—"

"Damn it Friedman, what don't you understand? That almost every soldier here, including me, has had to watch more friends and loved ones die than you can possibly imagine? That the only reason we're here is because some politician thought it'd be nice to help our allies when they didn't need it? Or that every decision I make can and will cause the deaths of more people? This isn't Titan, and this isn't Hell; this is worse than Hell, because people that go there deserve the torment and pain, but not here. We should have never been here in the first place, but we are, and I've lost more men trying to get wounded out of situations like these than I have in straight up fights, and I cannot risk that again." he turned to the rest "We move out in ten minutes."

Although meals were being served almost all the time, Friedman didn't feel like eating. He tried to sleep a little, but ultimately

gave up on that. None of the men in his barracks were willing to give up their alcohol or cigarettes, and he watched as ten rooms were cleaned out because their occupants were no longer living.

This seemed to happen every four hours, until Friedman got sick of counting the number of dead. He grabbed his rifle and walked outside, trying to get a focus on where this planet was in comparison to Earth. But a soft rain had started and he couldn't see anything. Except more men going into the barracks or climbing into APCs headed for the front.

"Friedman." He turned and saw Long coming up to him "You should probably be getting some rest."

"I don't feel like sleeping. Why are you here?"

"I never sleep at night if I can help it. That's the best time to be out on the front; the Drantless have some weird superstitions about flying at night, so they rarely do so. So we never get attacked at night, unless the conditions are very bad."

"Are they?"

"They're a lot worse than they were two weeks ago. If I'm lucky, I'll get killed tomorrow so I won't have to keep doing this."

"Have you asked for a transfer?"

"Where would I go, and where would they want me to go? Once you come here, you're stuck until your division is savaged so badly that it's impossible to get fresh troops to fill in the losses without pulling the division off the front. Hopefully, you're one of the survivors when they do so."

"Why don't the Madelle

just nuke the Drantless from orbit?"

"Nukes have a funny effect on the weather, and it'd be pretty damn cold here for a couple of decades if they nuked the Drantless." Long turned to leave "Nice having this chat with you, Friedman; hopefully we'll have some more another day."

Two weeks later, Friedman was back at the front. This time they had half decent artillery support and some tanks, and the Drantless were not all that organized to begin with. So standard attacks came and went, and no real heavy casualties had been accounted for.

But the day was young, and there never seemed to be enough Drantless.

Friedman's squad had set up a killzone between two knocked out buildings and a large pile of rubble and the bodies of Drantless had begun to accumulate. He had so far only lost one man and had had two others take minor injuries, and with Long's help he had actually been able to take some ground back from the Drantless.

"Machine gunners, set up on that rubble pile and start shooting. I want riflemen to accompany them. Snipers and anti-tank specialists take up positions to adequately cover them from all angles." Friedman traded his rifle for the shotgun and took up position closer to the first line, a machine gunner and a rifleman

on either side of him.

The Drantless began advancing in their standard columns, blocks of fifty soldiers in a 2x4 formation. Small mortar fire and snipers managed to kill a few. Friedman ordered his gunners to hold fire for just a little bit longer.

That hesitation might have cost him his life; the Drantless were the first to fire, and all he could see was the bright flash as the first rank of aliens fired their weapons. Plasma, lasers and railgun shards tore into men and fallen buildings, splattering their comrades with blood and dust. Friedman pushed a dead body off of him and fired back, the heavy slugs from the shotgun dropping five Drantless in the center block.

“Arnolds, call for more artillery.” He shouted to a nearby soldier.

“I’m trying, sir, but the signals are getting jammed.”

“Friedman,” Long called in over his Artificial Intelligence Unit “I’ll try and get to your position as soon as possible.”

“Thank you sir.” just then, the shooting died down and was replaced with a slow metallic crunching. Friedman looked over the top of the rubble pile and saw two Drantless heavy laser tanks below them.

And they were preparing to fire.

“Everyone, get out of here! Now!” Friedman fired one last time and started running, with the rest of his men behind him, but they did not make it out fast enough. The tanks fired, bright red beams arching from their massive particle lasers. The pile of rubble was blown to pieces by the first shot, and the second one exploded amongst the humans, killing almost everyone standing nearby.

Friedman was flung into the air and hit a fallen building nearby. The explosion did not kill him, but

the shockwave had thrown him into the wall hard enough to paralyze him from the waist down. He regained conscious and looked out at the field below.

All of his men were dead, killed either by the first few volleys or the tanks. Long and his soldiers had arrived at just the right time to be incinerated by the attack. One or two men were not killed, but were burned so badly they resembled living skeletons more than men. He tried to move, tried to get up and run, but his broken spine would not allow it.

“So this is what death is like,” he mumbled “it’s neither quick or painless.” The Drantless had begun to march towards him, believing all the humans there were dead. Friedman raised his shotgun one last time, and pulled the trigger.

Before he realized he’d actually killed anyone, he was hit by no fewer than fifty railguns and completely atomized.

End

**Mark Roth**



Because paltry confrontations  
Leave me drained.

Because time for sleep is restricted  
When precision is at the top of my list

Because blood, sweat, and tears  
Evaporate over time.

Because ink is eternal,  
And I never want to forget why I resent  
you.

Because words seem to calm  
The solar flares of my nearly imploding  
heart.

Because I need a voice,  
And screaming was always the lesser  
option.

Because I'm not good  
At tying down my thoughts.

Because I don't really want your atten-  
tion  
And I know you will never read this

# Your Answer

Anonymous

Jess Geers





“HEART”

WESLEY BUCKLES

“LILY”

