

# Bang & Whimper



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# Protecting the Waters

By Nicole Kordonias

(We tend to inadvertently not show kindness to the ocean,  
without giving acknowledging all it's given us.)

the originality the water possesses,  
as the water sways,  
crashing over onto itself.  
rushing into the rocks that lay,  
motionless,  
in its path.

the vivid beauty the water has seen,  
the places it's been,  
and the many lands it's engulfed.  
the water flows in scenes,  
that feel surreal,  
breathtakingly chaotic,

however,  
also calming.

the water flows,  
filling the crevices,  
of the labyrinths of the earth.

always existing,  
holding memories for decades,  
and being a home to many creatures.

while having millions of visitors,  
causing havoc,  
stress  
and pollution.

heavily tainting the waters,  
causing suffering to marine life.

however,  
the water will still sway,  
nurturing those who inhabit it.

Two Words  
By Noel Vasquez

Two words, one meaning  
Two roads, one choice,  
Stay still, no way,  
Right choice, good day.

All work, no play.  
All play, no work.  
Two sides, one coin,  
Two sides, one person.

Head full, heart empty.  
Mind packed, emotions hollow.  
Bright future, dark past.  
In school, in class.

The block, my home.  
The block, my hood,  
Bad place, safe home.  
Leave now, no home.

Two sides, one person,  
One mind, one soul.  
Find peace, be calm.  
Find peace, be true.

Happiness  
By Kat Cohen

If happiness was a color  
It would be orange  
As the sun beating down on you  
If happiness was a taste  
It would taste like a nice hot sugar cookie out  
of the oven  
If happiness was a feeling  
It would feel like summer vacation just started  
If happiness was a sound, it would be the sound  
of harmony from a favorite song



Photo By David Brooks

The Moment with You  
By Jean-Luc Borge

I lived my life,  
One day at of time,  
But then you came in to my life  
And change everything.

I'm falling for you, I don't know what to say,  
All I want to do is  
To live in the moment with you.

I can wake up every morning  
Knowing I have you with me,  
And then when the night time come  
I can go to sleep happily.  
I'm falling for you,  
I don't know what to say,  
All I want to do is  
To live in the moment with you.

Now my future looking bright,  
With you by my side.  
Even though the darkest time,  
You will be my sunlight.

I'm falling for you,  
I don't know what to say,  
All I want to do is  
To live in the moment with you.



Photo By David Brooks

## Fireworks

By Jassmin Guzman

Whenever she thinks of you  
she sees gleams of flashing lights.

The lights are like fireworks-  
The excitement of lighting them,  
The fear of popping explosions,  
The happiness and blissful feeling.

You made her feel that way.  
However now she is only programmed.

She only remembers how you made her feel,  
Because she will never be able to feel  
The fireworks again.

Angry but not at you

By Tiana Ramirez

I feel angry but not at you.  
I understand your hurt and fear.  
I understand the inability to love me right,  
Right now, is not your fault.  
I know it stems from trauma.  
Your mommy and daddy issues.  
I feel angry but not at you  
Although you couldn't love correctly  
I loved what you could give me.  
I hope I reminded you how to feel loved.  
I hope I gave you hope that one day you will love too.  
I hope that I gave you the push you needed,  
To be better for you and for me, even though  
I am gone now.  
I don't regret giving you my care

even though it wasn't returned.

I am angry but not at you.

I am angry because I stuck around for the worst of you.

I am angry because I compromised me for you.

I am angry because I denied self-love just to please  
you.

I am angry but not at you

I am angry at me because I CHOSE you.

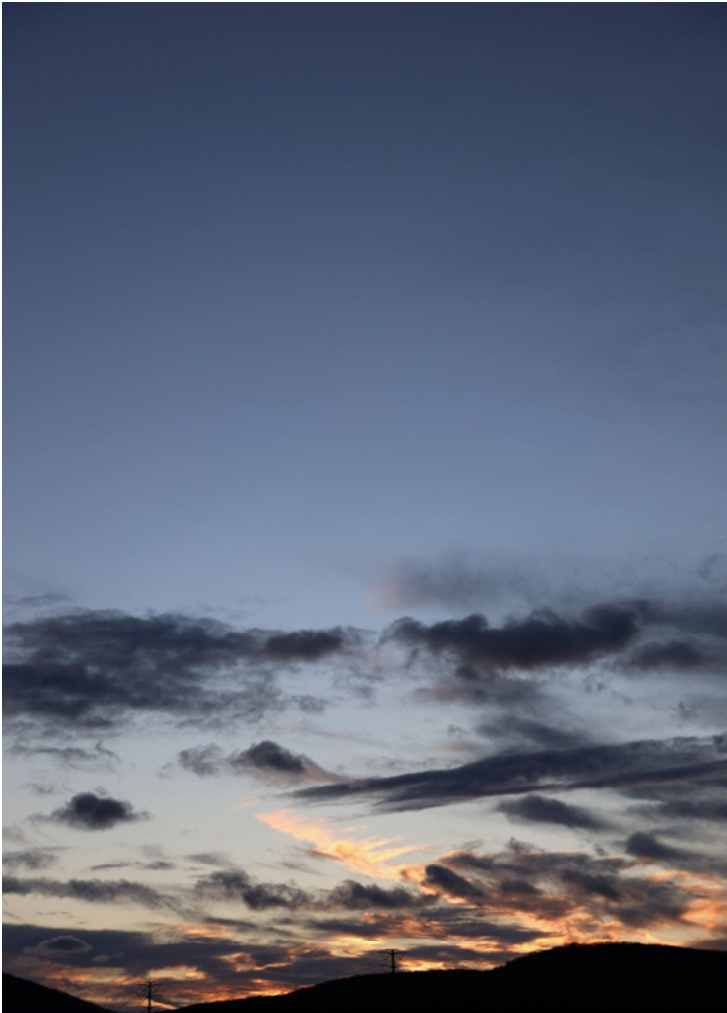


Photo by Anita Oolut

The Heart of Limbo  
By Grace DeStasio

Sitting in the window seat, a young girl tried to focus on the scenery outside the train window. The train was going at a steady speed, but it was far too fast for her to really focus on her surroundings. Her thoughts were slowed, and everything felt a bit foggy. A distant memory of her death loomed in her head. Did I really die? She wondered if the images flashing through her mind were real.

She remembered the car that drove at her on the wrong side of the road. Speeding with its lights blaring in her eyes. The red SUV, the driver's face, the darkness of the rest of the road. She thought about all of it. One minute she was driving home from her college campus, and the next her body was numb, a ringing stung her ear drums, and everything suddenly went black.

"You're stuck here too?" A boy sat down beside her as he asked this. His face was sullen with hollow cheeks and pale lips. Around his eyes was a dark hue with tinges of purple, yet somehow this made the blue color of his iris stand out.

"Stuck here?" Her voice was shaky, she felt as though she had not spoken in a hundred years, yet she knew that to be false. Just before the crash, she was on the phone with her sister, speaking about how they would be getting breakfast together the following morning. That phone call could not have been that long ago.

"All of us are stuck here, at least for now," he looked around the train at the passengers that sat silently, facing ahead. They looked like zombies. Their faces lacked emotion with straight lips and heavy eyes. "I'm Arlo."

"I'm—" she froze for a moment. Her name should have been easy to remember, yet it took her a moment to think of it. "I'm Valerie."

"Welcome to Limbo, Valerie." Arlo let out a heavy sigh as he rested his head back against the seat. He closed his eyes for a moment as a ghost of a smile appeared on his face. Valerie didn't understand why he would be smiling. Limbo didn't seem like the type of place one should be happy about being in.

"Limbo? Like in between Heaven and Hell?"

"If you believe in that sort of thing," Arlo shrugged and turned to face her.

"You don't?" Her eyes were wide, expecting him for an answer he couldn't give her. She wanted to know where her soul would rest when she met her inevitable end, but it was unfair to expect that sort of answer from someone no older than she was.

"I don't know what I believe in but being here is starting to make me think about it."

"I used to believe in life after death," Valerie admitted.

"And now?" he asked.

"Now I don't want to believe it." Valerie wasn't sure why she was actually answering his questions. It wasn't like her to be so forward with her ways of thinking. Perhaps it was her way of coping with the idea of passing on. It didn't really matter who it was, she just needed someone to talk to.

"Why not?" When he asked this, Valerie felt her body tense. It was the first time during that ride that she felt like she could feel her limbs again. It was only for a split second, but that fear made her feel like she was alive again.

"Because that means right now, I am actually dead," Valerie finally admitted. The numbness re-entered her body and the feelings dissipated. That same cloudy feeling was hovering over her, making it hard to feel present in that moment with Arlo.

"Oh, so you know then?" His voice sounded more dismal than before, almost as if he were preparing himself for her answer.

"Know what?" she responded.

"How you died," Arlo's voice was so low it was practically a whisper. His eyes averted her gaze and his hands balled into fists. There was part of him that feared what she would say and another part that was ready to embrace it.

"Car crash," her answer was quick, "and you?"

"Me?" he drew out a long pause with a deep breath before answering, "surgery I suppose." She wasn't content with the answer but forcing a stranger in Limbo to share the secrets of his death seemed a bit cruel.

"You look young," she frowned, scanning the details of his face. Arlo had smooth pale skin and curly blonde hair that adorned the top of his head. Regardless of his emaciated appearance, it was obvious he wasn't very old. Behind that withered face was a hidden glow that was just dying to peak through.

"Seventeen, I turn eighteen in a few months."

"I just turned nineteen." Their ages were the cause of the shift in atmosphere. Neither one of them spoke for a while after their realization of their short-lived lives. Seventeen and nineteen years young. Valerie turned her attention out the window again. They were passing by a city that looked a lot like the one she grew up in. Flashes of her childhood flooded to the forefront of her mind, and tears began to slip out of the ducts slowly, dripping one by one down her cheek and onto her lap.

"I remember everyone now." Valerie wiped away her tears with the painful realization of how much she was going to miss her loved ones.

"Everyone?" Arlo asked, although he knew she wasn't really speaking to him.

"My family, my friends, my boyfriend. I remember the conversation I last had with each of them. It hurts," she admitted.

"I'm sure it does," Arlo agreed, "I hope there were no fights involved."

"No." She shook her head, "Thankfully everything I remember about them is nothing but good."

"So you had a boyfriend?" Arlo asked.

"I did. We had been dating since freshman year of high school. We grew up as best friends and somehow turned into more," Valerie had a small smile appear on her face, but her eyes were welling with tears. The train came to a screeching halt, jolting Valerie and Arlo forward, their faces hitting the seats in front of them. Valerie looked out the window again. It wasn't just a city that resembled her hometown, it was her hometown. She leaped over Arlo and sprinted down the aisle of the train until she made it to the doors. Valerie stood in front of the opened doors and stared at the station before her. She had been to it numerous times when she would go from one town to the next, often

accompanied by her boyfriend.

"Go," Arlo encouraged with a gentle push on her back. Valerie closed her eyes as she took her first step out of the train and onto the platform. She didn't feel the weight of her body as she walked or the hard ground beneath her. She didn't feel winded from the sprint she just did from one end of the train car to the other. All she felt was a longing for a breath that she would never take again.

Valerie felt her body moving without much of her control. It seemed as though her mind was already made up without her even really thinking about it. She then realized where she was headed. The hospital.

Through the front doors, up the elevator, down the hall, and to the right. Her name was on the chart displayed outside the door, and through the small window she saw her mother, father, sister, and boyfriend surrounding a bed where her lifeless body lay.

She walked through the door and none of them looked up. Her disappointment showed on her face, and Arlo, who she didn't know followed her, placed his hand on her shoulder. Valerie turned and saw the apologetic look on his face and she tried to muster up a smile to reassure him she was fine.

"She really loved you, Luke." She heard her mother say to her boyfriend through her streaming tears. Luke gave a gentle nod as his bloodshot eyes shut and his bottom lip quivered. Valerie watched as her younger sister took a step forward and wrapped her arms around Luke's torso. Burying her head in his chest as she let out violent sobs and high shrills that sounded like a cry of a banshee.

"I'm not going anywhere, Lyla," Luke said as he rubbed her sister's back. "I have always promised Valerie I would protect you and that won't stop just because she's gone." More cries came from Lyla as her grip tightened around him, her hands balling into fists as she clutched onto his shirt. But what was more hurtful was seeing her mother agonize over the word gone. Valerie wanted to grab her mother as she watched her dart out of the room in a fit of tears, her father following after her. She wanted to give her one last hug, but as she reached out for her, she slipped through her grasp like running through a cloud of smoke. 10

"I need her," Lyla continued to cry and Luke continued to comfort her. Valerie had tears swelling up just at her lower lashes and slowly trickled down her cheeks.

"Man I didn't know the dead could cry so much," Valerie laughed as she wiped away her tears. "You think they'll be okay without me?"

"You shouldn't be asking me that," Arlo said, his look darkened and his back was towards her.

"What?" She questioned, but Arlo left the room without another word. Valerie stayed there for a moment watching Luke and Lyla. She smiled a painful sort of smile, having a bittersweet feeling over their exchange. Luke was going to be there for Lyla, there was no doubt in Valerie's mind about that, and Lyla would be there for Luke. They would always have each other to mourn and grieve. But the fact they had to mourn and grieve over her made her feel sorry for dying, even though it wasn't her fault.

Valerie walked out of the room after attempting to run her hand along Luke's cheek and through Lyla's hair one last time. Although she failed to truly feel them, it was enough to get her by. In the hallway, her mother was crying in her father's arms. She was glad they had each other. Everyone important to her had someone to lean on. She wasn't leaving them alone.

"Arlo," she looked up and saw the boy waiting at the opposite end of the hall.

"I felt rude not saying goodbye, so I waited for you, but I think you're going to wish I hadn't." Arlo stared at the floor. His bare feet on display and his hospital gown finally catching Valerie's attention.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, trying to push down the grief she was feeling over her own death.

"I'm glad you died, Valerie." Arlo's eyes shot up and locked with Valerie's. There was a seriousness to his voice which made it clear he wasn't kidding, and his lips remained still, not even a shadow of a smile attempting to form.

"You're what?" her voice felt small in that large hospital, bouncing off the walls in the silence of Limbo.

"Or at least I was glad until I decided to speak to you and come here with you. I was so happy that you died because it meant I would live," Arlo began to explain,

but Valerie stood there puzzled. "I was dying, Valerie, but your heart is going to save me."

"My heart?"

"I needed a heart transplant and they thought I would die before a donor would be found. Then, just when everyone was losing hope, you came in from that car crash and the doctors knew you wouldn't make it. You were a registered organ donor. You saved my life, Valerie." Arlo grabbed Valerie's hands, and for the first time in Limbo, she could feel something. She felt the warmth of Arlo's hands within her lifeless ones.

"I'm sorry to say it, but I was really glad you died," Arlo repeated once more.

"And now?" Valerie asked as a single tear slowly slipped down her nose and onto her lips.

"And now I regret seeing you go to your family. I regret recognizing you as a real person that once was alive. I regret knowing that someone had to die in order for me to live." Arlo felt Valerie's hand pull away from his and he felt the pain enter his chest. The survivors' guilt would live with him forever. As long as her heart was beating inside him, he would never forget the life he stole. Valerie wanted to take a deep breath and feel the air fill her lungs as she thought long and hard about how to respond, but her lungs would not fill and there was no air for her to breathe.

"I didn't die in order for you to live. I died because someone chose to drive on the wrong side of the road. Don't live thinking of the dead, then even when you're back with your family, living and breathing, part of you will always be stuck here in Limbo. I don't want either of us to be stuck here anymore." Valerie began walking out of the hospital until she realized Arlo wasn't following her. "It's your time to go now, isn't it?" Arlo gave a small nod. He couldn't face her once again, his eyes remained glued to the floor.

"Thank you, Valerie," Arlo paused as he struggled to find the courage to raise his head, "for dying."

"Thank you for giving part of me a new life," Valerie smiled, putting her hand over where her heart would've been.



Artwork By Diana Leal Moran

The Battle to Fight  
By Sarah Han

There was a time I felt hopeless  
Looked in the mirror and saw disappointment  
Lies stabbing me over and over again  
Hurting the girl who did not deserve this

I allowed it to take control of my life  
Destroying my self worth  
It was never enough

No matter how much weight I lost  
The little pride I felt kept growing  
As the number on the scale kept falling

Loss of energy kept me inside  
Once fainted from the steam of the shower  
Did not go out from the fear of calories  
Felt comfortable with the spoonful of rice

No one ever questioned if I was alright  
I kept receiving compliments for being thin  
The smile I put on felt like it was ripping my face apart  
Because the girl inside was crying out for help

I finally listened to the girl inside  
Healing and restoration was what I needed  
I fought this long and hard battle  
And won with victory against the disorder

If you are stuck in this battle alone  
Know that you are worthy and strong  
Pick up the sword and fight your way out  
I promise it is worth it

### A Wrestling Match with Myself By Hayden Rivera

As I have gotten older, I have not always been super confident in myself. I always wanted to be confident, but I've struggled to be so since I was a little kid. But ever since I started to wrestle, it's like I became a person, and everything about my prior self completely changed for the better.

Since I was a young boy, I hated being in the spotlight. I guess you could say I wasn't extremely confident in myself. When I was in the fifth grade, I remember when the teacher called me while all the kids were sitting on the rug, and I could feel my heart pound as all the kids' eyes gazed upon me. I rarely raised my hand as a kid; I did not feel comfortable. As I got older, I followed that path for myself and never sought to change it, but once I started wrestling in the 10th grade, that's when it all changed. I remember my first practice and how I was nervous just to be in the room. My coach and all the surrounding confident wrestlers seemed excited and so exhilarated to

wrestle that it affected me. It made me want to wrestle as well, even though I had no prior experience. While the practice was going on, I just went with the confidence of the other wrestlers and didn't ever feel self-conscious or nervous. Surprisingly, I found myself very happy and ready for more. Then, my coach revealed when the first match was, and I was back to being a frightened child

On the day of the first meeting we had, I was feeling anxious, excited, and fearful, but I kept it together. Then my name was called. As I was walking forward step by step, I felt more and more nervous watching people look at me. But once I arrived on the mat, I forgot that everyone was looking at me. All I cared for was to win. After completing my goal of winning my first match, I was so happy that it felt like I could accomplish anything. Wrestling made me not care about other people's opinions so much and made me much more confident, whether I won or lost. Ever since I wrestled, I never felt insecure at all. I just pushed forward, and I'm very happy with myself. Once the season was over, I realized that ever since I stopped wrestling, it had grown me more as a person and made me such a more confident individual, and I thank it for that. Wrestling single-handedly gave me confidence and made me look at life from a completely different perspective.

To You, Past and Present

By MC Cadavillo

Past,

From the day we met, I was in love

It was pure like a dove

And I, captivated by you, and you I.

From the day we met, I thought you were the one

It was perfect.

I never realized that I ended up giving you  
the bullet to the gun  
Bang.

I went from being somebody.  
To becoming a body.  
Who was left with no body.

As the time went by  
I had to force myself to say to you, goodbye  
With so many years  
730 days filled with tears

How could I love?  
When it was you who killed the dove?  
Remorseful,  
Past.

Present,  
I went from having no body.  
To not only being a body.  
But becoming somebody.

54 days filled with hoping  
On the 55th, it was filled with wishing.  
That day, I fell in hopelessly in love

On that day, I was in love  
It was soft and warm like a dove  
And I, felt hope because of you, and you I.

As the time continues to ticks  
You still give me the kicks  
With so many years to follow,  
Never will I feel hollow.

Now I could love.  
When it was you who birthed the dove.  
Love,  
Present.

Journal

By Romauld Alexander

Alright today is the day I'm gonna get my shit together. I've been making too many excuses for myself, and not owning up into how badly I'm cruising through life. I've had several weeks to start catching up on my schoolwork and it's almost every day I feel like procrastinating. I need to realize that I'm in college and I'm not getting any younger. For most of my life I've felt stupid or less than my peers when it came to school. Thing is I'm now coming to realize that I am very smart and gifted and when I begin to like something, I'm able to work at it as much as possible just to master it. Yet my real life application of this skill would just be to video games and random youtube videos. Because of this fact I have this constant internal feeling that I'm wasting my time. I have a vast interest in technology which is why I went for an IT major in the first place. Let now that I'm in college chasing that degree, I haven't made a lot of time for me to study code. Once you learn coding language you can pretty much <sup>have</sup> any job within the development field. I'm a very impatient person and I tend to think very logically, my thought process when it comes to anything, I try to do is, is what I'm doing align with my choice in education in my career path? If not then immediately I'm uninterested. but I need to practice patience. Keep my goals in mind with the choices I make daily. It finally feels like I'm at the perfect point to change my life around for my dream. I know exactly who I want to be and how to get there. I just need to cut all distractions and just do it. BECOME THE PERSON I WANT TO BE.

A Man Walks Into a Bar  
By Erin Carr

A man walks into a bar.  
He asks the bartender for a beer.  
The bartender smiles, "It's on the house!" "Gee, thanks!"  
replies the man.  
"Don't thank me," the bartender says, "get a ladder! We  
don't have roof access, you know."

A horse walks into a bar.  
"Why the long face?" the bartender chuckles. The horse  
sighs.  
He's used to this, but he wishes someone would ask for his  
name before launching into microaggressions.

A priest, a rabbi, and John Carpenter's 1985 horror master-  
piece, *The Thing*, walk into a bar. The bartender looks at the  
Thing, and the Thing looks back at the bartender, mimicking  
him. They are completely identical.  
"Why the long face?" the horse sneers.

René Descartes walks into a bar. He orders a beer.  
The bartender gives it to him and the philosopher downs it  
quickly. "Another?" asks the bartender.  
"I think not," replies Descartes, and immediately poofs out  
of existence.

Barack Obama walks into a bar; the Thing mimics him  
instead.  
"What can I get you?" asks the bartender.  
"Let me be clear," starts Obama, and the Thing vanishes  
from sight.

A horse walks into a bar.  
"Why the long face?" asks the bartender.  
"One day, we're all gonna trample you, you racist fuck," the  
horse mutters. "What did you say?" asks the bartender.  
The horse sighs, "two beers, please."

A film buff walks into a bar.

"Why isn't the Thing eating people?" he demands with a frown, "it needs to digest people to mimic them in the movie."

"This isn't a movie, plus, I'm a Sufi mystic now," the Thing says, and eats him.

A man walks into a bar.

"Ouch," he grumbles, rubbing his sore head as he moves around the steel bar and continues down the street.

Descartes walks into Limbo or Summerland or Purgatory or Gehenna or whatever waiting room you believe in.

"Why the long face?" a voice booms.

Descartes turns his head, once, twice, but finds no body to attach to the words. Must be a waiting room thing.

"I think I might be dead," Descartes responds.

"Do you know why you're here?"

Descartes balks, "Gee, I don't know. 'Cause I drank?"

"Why do you drink?" it asks.

"Didn't think the afterlife would be so socratic," Descartes scoffs.

Silence.

"Tough crowd," Descartes says, hoping that the all-knowing being forgot that it asked him a question.

The all-knowing being did not forget.

"I don't know," Descartes sighs, self-conscious, "Why does anyone drink? Sometimes, I think I've forgotten what it feels like to be happy. Could you imagine that? Being so fucking miserable in one way or another for so fucking long that you forget what it feels like to be anything else." A pause.

"Why am I asking you?" he laughs, "of course you know."

"Once you realize how miserable you are, all you do is try to be something else. When I drink, there are moments where I cease to be anything at all. Like I forget to exist. It's not blacking out, per se, although I have definitely done that. It's more like, shucking off all your self-awareness, for one blessed second. I don't know. Is that what happiness is?

Non-existence? Or is that death? I'm dead now, I think. I'm not any happier here. I don't know if I'd rather be alive, but I wish I could see the moon. Can I see the moon from here?"

"I'll be asking the questions," the voice says, but it sounds 19

gentler, almost apologetic, like it understands.

"Do you know where you are?"

"I think so," Descartes answers, and immediately poofs out of the waiting room.

A poet walks into a bar.

Everyone groans.

Descartes poofs back into a bar,

understandably shell shocked.

"Why the long face?" asks the bartender.

"OH GOD FUCKING DAMMIT!" the horse cries.

Barack Obama walks into a bar,

And he orders a round of shots for everyone.

"Thanks, Obama!" the patrons cheer.

A man walks into a bar.

"Ouch," he grumbles, because his wife told him she would leave him if he ever step foot in that god-forsaken bar again, but he doesn't know how to break the habit, doesn't know how to stop reliving the death of his film-buff son, doesn't know how to stop punishing himself, doesn't know how to let go, and it *hurts*, *Diane*, *can't you see how much it hurts?*

One drink can't make it worse.

A horse walks into a bar.

"Why the long fa-" the bartender starts, but never finishes, because the horse brought his friends, and they trample that racist fuck to death.

"I'll have what they're having!" a man hollers from a corner booth.

A man walks into a bar.

He finds the bartender's dead body.

He looks to his left and to his right, and finds no one to serve him.

"Thanks, Obama," he mutters and walks back out.

The man who walked into that bar all that time ago finally 20

finds a ladder.

He slowly struggles his way up to the roof.

Jesus. He's wobbly already and he hasn't even had a sip.

As he finally pulls himself up, he smiles. There really is a beer up here for him.

He screws the cap off and takes a big gulp. The cool breeze kept the drink chilly for him—he's glad for his winter jacket as he lies down to face the sky.

His fingers itch for a cigarette, but he quit those two weeks ago, and he's been good about it. Besides, things are pretty nice right now.

Free beer on a Friday night. Peace and quiet.

It's a new moon tonight, but that's alright too. The man always preferred looking at the stars.

A century and a half later, the ghost of the bartender walks into his old bar.

He floats toward it, but before he can order, the robot-bar-tender who has taken his place puts a hand to his ghost lips.

"Sorry, we don't serve spirits," he says monotone, and the ghost of a horse some hundred ghost-miles away laughs at last.



Artwork By  
Diana Leal Moran

