

Squatter's Rites



2016

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Squatter's Rites

2016

Volunteer State Community College
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Gallatin, TN 37066

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Squatter's Rites is an annual student publication produced by Volunteer State Community College every spring. The magazine, founded in 1995, features student art, poetry, and fiction.

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SQUATTER'S RITES 2016

Awards

Each year, *Squatter's Rites* chooses two winners from the submissions received from Volunteer State Community College students. The 2016 winners of the literary and art awards are as follows:

John MacDougall Literary Award

The John MacDougall Award for Literary Excellence is awarded each year to a student writer who is published in *Squatter's Rites*. The award helps us remember a beloved teacher who set very high standards for both his students and his colleagues. This year's winner is Zachary Trouy for his story, "The Man Who Laughs," which is featured on page 28 of this issue.

Fusion Art and Design Award

The Fusion Art and Design Award is awarded each year to a student artist who is published in *Squatter's Rites* who portrays excellent use of the elements of art and design. This year's winner is Zachary Joubert for his photograph, "Encased in Ice," which is featured on page 12 of this issue.

***Squatter's Rites* 2015 Awards**

Squatter's Rites received a first place American Scholastic Press Association award in 2015 for community/junior colleges with a population over 2500. In 2015, a Volunteer State Community College student Cheyanne (Crista) Johnson also won Outstanding Painting overall (including 2 and 4-year campuses) for her work, "Moonlight." Cheyanne's work is also featured on pages 24 and 44 of this issue.

RENEE PITTS

She is Mine

I have loved many times, but each time that love is for the same woman, my woman, my Kendra. This angel of a woman, Kendra, has always been my first love, and I plan to keep her as mine forever. No matter how many times I lose my Kendra, I always seem to find her yet again, though she may not seem exactly the same each time, I know it is still my true love. Though the pain that I go through after losing her is blinding, I still somehow find my way to her again and again. I suppose it is simply fate that binds us together like this; after all, we are soulmates.

I didn't always have to seek out the keeper of my heart like this. No, it was she that had found me first. I had been sitting at the some dive bar, that served horrible coffee and food that looked as run-down as the restaurant, when she approached me. Kendra's long, ebony hair fell to the small of her back, looking as if it were silk. Her dark brown eyes sparkled with youth and wisdom, and her natural olive skin was a strange sight in Seattle. Her face bore no make-up, a testimony to her inherent beauty, and glowed despite the gloomy weather. She was very petite in nature, but had enough life in her soul to overpower any darkness that would try to cage her. I had fallen for her the instant she spoke, her voice like that of honey, and asked my name. I knew then and there, that nothing could come between this woman and my love for her, and that she would belong to no one else.

Kendra and I were together for a year and three months, living as happily as we could. She and I got into altercations with one another, but what couple didn't? She often told me that I was too controlling, and that she needed space and time to be with friends, but she was mine and mine alone. I couldn't lose her to those people, she belonged to me, and I made sure that every one of those "friends" knew it.

After the first nine months of having her, I had her move into my home with me. She needed to be with me at all times, so that I could watch" and "controlling nature" was too much for anyone to handle.

She is Mine

She thought we were done, and that I would disappear from her life, but I would never do that to her. She never knew it, but I was with her when she moved from the gloominess of Seattle and moved to the warm sun of Los Angeles, California.

From a distance, I would watch her every move, waiting for the right moment to show her that I was still there for her. When the moment finally came though, she did not embrace me into her warm, welcoming arms. Instead, she screamed to the world to take me away. How could she do that to me? Rage bubbled from within and I could do nothing to contain it as I reached for her neck and squeezed. I watched as she struggled against my grip, but soon enough she stopped her struggling and I watched as that spark of life in her eyes slowly dissipated. I had lost my Kendra for the very first time.

A year after losing my Kendra, I found her yet again. She was sitting in a Los Angeles café, reading a book. Her silky hair was no longer cascading down her back, but cut into a simple bob at her shoulders. Everything about her was the same though, her eyes, skin, even voice were the same. I decided that instead of coming out to her like before, I would simply watch from afar. I would be content just watching her as long as she was still mine. I would watch her as she slept, ate, worked overtime at her job, not once did I leave her.

Six months after I discovered her though, I found that she was yet again trying to leave me. She had been seeing another man. Why did she keep doing this to me? This man was nothing compared to me.

He was tall with a muscular build that wasn't showy, but was noticeable. His eyes were a dark hazel, which had no spark meant for my Kendra. His smirk was crooked, it was nothing compared to her radiant smile that lit up everything around her. His skin was too pale for the sunny atmosphere around my sweet Kendra. He didn't belong next to her, everyone saw it, he was too different from her, and yet she chose him. How was he better than me in anyway? Doesn't she realize that I am her soulmate? As I watched her with this man, my rage began to boil once more. I could hear

nothing but the beating war drum that was my anger. The animosity I held towards Kendra leaving me for another man only grew as I waited in her bedroom, seated on the queen sized bed of her Victorian-styled room. Once she finally entered the doorway, I leaped towards her, once again aiming towards her throat and squeezing until the life left her eyes again. I kept losing my angel, at least 13 more times I did, but after each time I lost her and went through all of my emotions, I would somehow spot her yet again.

It is not as though I like to lose Kendra over and over again, like some horrible rerun that keeps playing on the television, even though people have seen that same episode thousands of times. It was just that my rage couldn't be contained at the thought of her trying to replace me or leave me for some pitiful excuse of a man. I always regretted it though, or the feeling after losing Kendra because of my anger always left a raw feeling in my heart. That feeling of being torn throughout my being would only intensify as my sorrow clawed its way at me more when Kendra was lost. I would feel an emptiness that not even an oasis filled with many beautiful women could fill, because none of them would be my Kendra. The pain that followed the sorrow would stay with me, reminding me of the fact that she was gone yet again, and nothing could heal it until I saw her face once more. Of course, once would never be enough, as she was mine, and only I could admire her beauty.

Kendra is an angel on this planet that belongs to only me. She will always be the first love of my life, and she shall continue to be the only woman on my radar until the end of time. Although we go through rough times, and I lose sight of my Kendra, I know that eventually I will stumble upon her beauty again. The sorrow and rawness of losing that beauty guides me to where she is, and I will continue to follow it every time as if it were my lifeline. She and I were meant to be you see, and I will do everything to keep her as mine, even making sure that I am the last one she sees before she is lost yet again.

VICKI MASON

Sunrise Over Obey River



Photography

DARYA STEIN

First Embers of the Final Flame

There once was a small town just outside of the capital. A young boy lived there and he had big dreams, but he didn't know how he was going to get there. Knights bored him. They were always the same muscular meat-heads in shiny, flashy armor. Scholars interested him, but no one became famous for their knowledge. Assassins were feared, but they weren't supposed to be known. It wasn't until the little boy was twelve, which was too old to start any apprenticeships that he knew what he wanted. A magician had visited town one day and the boy was mesmerized. He watched as the magician made dragons out of fire that spun around the crowd and made dogs and cats, birds and bunnies disappear. The magician could do anything the boy had decided. This was the way he was going to make a name. He went up to the magician. The magician looked to see the boy and smiled. The boy did not smile back, a determined look in his eyes. He demanded knowledge from the magician. They seemed surprised by this demand, but pulled out a simple leather bound book.

"Use this to gain what you want," the magician said.

The boy read the entire book in a week, but did not gain any knowledge. He felt cheated and ran to the magician's carriage only to see it leaving. He ran after it determined to learn what he wanted to know.

"Take me with you!" the boy shouted.

The magician stopped hearing the small boy's voice. They saw the boy.

"Are you willing to leave your family behind," they asked when the boy had caught up.

He hesitated for a second, but the determined look never left his eyes. He nodded once.

"Are you willing to leave your mother behind? You will never see the fields

First Embers of the Final Flame

that you grew up in and play with the other children,” they said. “I have been travelling for over fifteen years and have never seen the same village twice.”

Again, the boy hesitated, but nodded. “I want to learn what you do,” he said.

They seemed surprised, but helped him up. “We leave now,” they said.

The boy was about to protest, but knew this was what he wanted. He would never see his mother again, the only person he ever cared about. There was a pain in his chest as he watched his childhood disappear into the horizon. He thought this would disappear in time, but he was wrong.

The boy trained with the magician and by the age of twenty was considered better than the magician. He missed his family thinking about them every day, but he knew he had made the right decision. He was making a name for himself with his mentor, but his mentor had contracted a deadly illness and didn't have much time left. Despite this, they taught the boy as much as he could.

The man's mentor was changing. At first, it was simple things. They would forget where they put an ingredient for a potion or they would accidentally mix the wrong potion, but it got worse. They would forget his name or who he was. They would forget the acts for a show and use a wrong spell almost hurting pedestrians. By the end of their life, they had become a different person completely. They were violent, insane. They would attack him. They had no memories and couldn't remember anything. The magician had turned and he knew he had to put them out of their misery. With a simple fire spell, he watched as his mentor screamed. Their flesh charring, blood boiling, eyes melting. He knew this pain was better than the hell they were living. He thought he would feel good helping his mentor, but all he felt was empty. He had no family and now no friend. He thought of going back to his house, but he was now twenty-three years and knew he couldn't. The sickness that killed his mentor was still run-

his mentor was still running rampant. It had probably killed his mother as well.

Without his mentor to chain him down, he had finally made a name for himself. He was Straid. He taught at the school in Olaphis, the most prestigious school in the country. He was not safe here though and with his new found position people were willing to do anything for his position. He wasn't worried. He was strong enough to take them. Soon he would become the headmaster since the old one had the sickness. One thing he didn't count on though was to become sick himself. He could feel it in his bones that he, like everyone else had contracted, but he didn't show it. He was Straid of Olaphis. This small illness wouldn't stop him. He would survive.

Straid had to leave the celebration early. The sickness was worse than usual. He walked down the silent streets of the city. Everyone was either at the party or asleep. Shadows followed him from the tavern and if he hadn't been so sick he would've noticed them. It wasn't until invisible hands grabbed him and started to drag him that he noticed the shadows. He tried to cast a spell, but they were behind him and they had hold of his hands. They dragged him for an unknown amount of time until they shoved him into a long hallway with many cells. Looking around, he saw a group of his students running away. From behind, he heard claws scraping against the stone. He turned around to see a giant lizard with large bulging eyes. A basilisk was walking toward him. He still didn't panic as he tried to cast another spell. A sense of nausea washed over him though as he tried. His only weapon couldn't help him now. He was defenseless. Running to one of the cells, he reached for one of the doors. He felt the metal door against his palm as the basilisk released its poisonous gas. He felt its effects immediately. His skin grew cold and gray as stone, his muscles stiffening. He knew this was his end. He accepted his fate as the petrification entered the final stage turning him to stone.

ZACHARY JOUBERT
Encased in Ice



Photography

HEATHER KERNS

Paper Flowers

I walk through fields of faded blue
Filled with blossoms that shimmer gold
Purple skies lighten above me
Wet wind brushes my skin
Birds whisper secrets as they fly around me
Spiders smile as they see me pass by
Orange rain falls from cotton candy clouds
I hear the crack of lightning in the distance
I am not afraid
I run,
Past paper flowers
Against the bellowing breeze
A laugh escapes my lips
I can think of nothing better than this moment
The freedom
The peace
This beautiful world, all my creation
I fall backward into the fields of blue
Arms outstretched, eyes closed
Anticipating the caress of the landing
Then, suddenly
I wake up

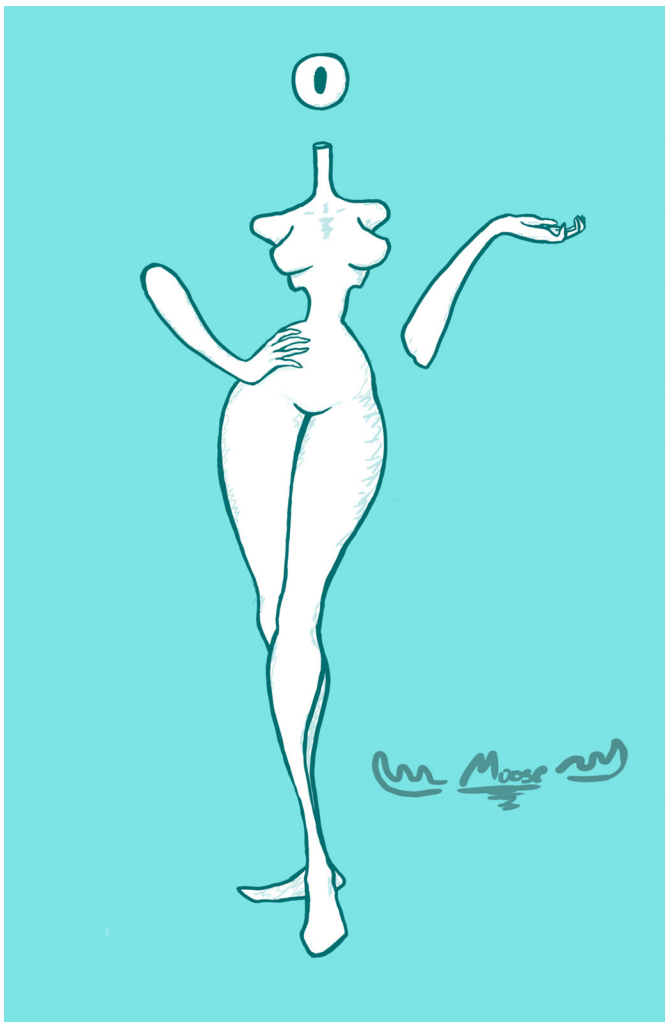
DAWN STILES-MCMILLIN

Message to a Child

I loved you from the moment I discovered I was pregnant
I loved you from the moment I felt you move
I loved you from the moment they laid you in my arms
I loved you from the moment you reached each milestone
I loved you the first time you broke the rules
I loved you the first time you disappointment me
I loved you the first time you said you hated me
I loved you the first time you wished you had never been born
I loved you when you made your first adult decision
I loved you when you made your first adult mistake
I loved you when you when you need my help
I loved you when you when you said you could do it by yourself
No matter where life takes you
No matter what path you choose
No matter how much you push me away
No matter who you are with
I will love you with every piece of my heart
I will love you with every ounce of my being
I will love you with every nuance of my soul
I will love you until my dying day

LUCAS “MOOSE” WILLIAMS

Eye Eye Eye!



Digital Art

KYLE WILSON

Grandma's Message

I heard a whisper today
It was Grandma asking about my day.
She asked about my family—
And I asked about hers
I said all is well
To this she replied, “That is swell.”
Grandma said her family is sight to be seen;
She feels like a queen.
She told me she died without pain
And she told me “Let your emotions drain.”
She has witnessed many things.
And yet she hears us sing!
Grandma wants us to know
The clouds are white as snow.
She sits and speaks with those gone before
And they are filled with memories galore.
The angels are so sweet;
As Grandma relaxes, they rub her feet.
Her work on Earth has not gone in vain;
It has earned her an eternity free of pain.

HUNTER APPLE

A Letter to My Birth Mother

Dear Birth Mother,

I don't know you. I never wondered if the person I passed by on the street was you. Sure, there was a couple months stretch where I really wanted to meet you. But mostly I'm fine never knowing you, and that's because you did the best thing you ever could have done for me as your child. You gave me up. You made the hardest decision you ever made and gave me up. And I may not love you, because as soon as you gave me up you gave your title to someone else, but I will never not love your love for me. And for that I thank you.

ROSS ARMSTRONG

The Crucible

Coming from a family of “military short-timers” I always felt that it was a moral obligation to serve my country. However, this decision was very tough for me to follow through with, especially since I really had no idea on how to approach the “real world.” Now I am a 23-year-old veteran after having served four years in the Marine Corps. With this decision came many great life experiences and some maybe not so great. One experience that I will share with you is one I look back upon and was one of the greatest obstacles I encountered during recruit training at Parris Island, South Carolina.

Platoon 1042 less than 2 weeks away from graduating boot camp, all of us eager to get off this “shutter island.” We were all aware of the final test that must be completed before we were allowed to leave the island; the Crucible, which takes place over a 54-hour period and includes food and sleep deprivation and over 45 miles of hiking. Here it is the beginning week of June 2011, the heat is almost unbearable and the notorious sand fleas are in their prime, we begin the initial hike with what seemed our 200-lb packs.

The first day was in the books. We hiked, ran, and crawled. All of us seemed to be hesitant to admit it, but every single one of us was exhausted, except for my friend Dalton, who had already ate all of his food rations within the first day, so he was ready for anything.

Close to bed time, we were ordered by our instructor, “Alright everybody up! Get your packs on!”

Everyone began looking around at one another dumbfounded. It was 10 o'clock at night and there we were hiking through the woods, I was somehow tasked with carrying a stretcher in case anyone passed out. Now that I look back, I cannot recall any memory of that seven-mile night hike. It seems as if I was sleepwalking the entire thing. Once we finished our hike, we returned back to camp for some much needed sleep, but

soon realized I was assigned the first hour of night watch, which I have no memory of or which I can't recall. Assuming now that I was sleeping standing up, a high caliber rifle in my possession.

After about three hours of sleep on the rock solid ground we're woken up by our instructor again.

"Alright everybody get up! Get up right now!"

As I'm rising off the ground I start noticing immediate pain in my feet and legs as if I had been ran over by a train. I began thinking to myself, *Wow I have another two days of this, how much more can my body take? How much more can I take?*

We begin day two off with more hiking and running. At this point, everyone was dealing with dehydration or heat exhaustion. Some guys faced both from the help of the South Carolina heat. Day Two comes to a wrap, and we all head back to camp for some much needed rest.

Roughly about an hour into my sleep, I am woken up by my friend, Ray. Ray proceeds to explain how I was yelling in my sleep and how my leg was cramping since I was so badly dehydrated. I didn't inform any of the medical personal with this issue due to the fact that I may get held back from training. I was determined to make it through, I wanted to graduate with my brothers, I wanted off this island, and I was going to do whatever it took.

Day Three was finally upon us. The final event, the last deciding factor if you were meant for this program, the last and final 12-mile hike. We stepped off first thing in the morning, already within the first three miles guys are falling out of formation. I immediately begin feeling the blisters on my feet, formed by the hikes we made on our previous days.

At mile seven or so, we take just a short break, and I approach my friend Dalton, who's malnourished since he ate all of his food within the first day. He then explains how he may not the last few remaining miles, I soon

The Crucible

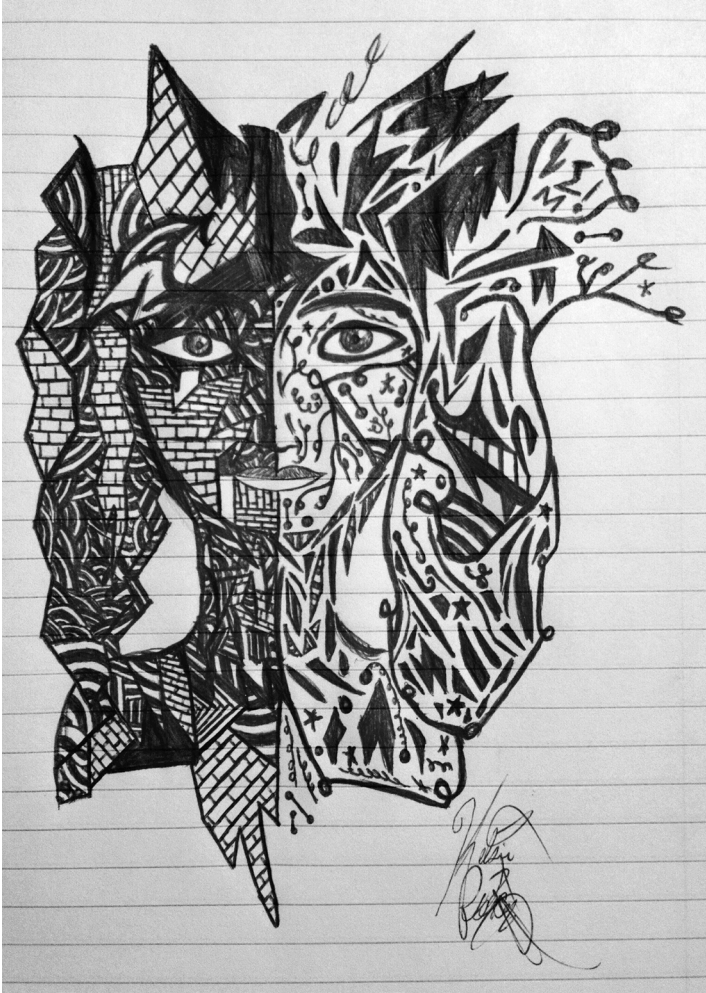
then realize I had a whole untouched meal, where I then gave it to him since he was needing it so much more desperately than I did. Our break ended very quickly, and we continued our last and final portion of the hike. Many of the guys were suffering. Some guys' feet were even bleeding through their boots. We could all see the finish line. We were short about 200 yards, and I saw my friend Ray cramping up and beginning to fall out of formation. Dalton then waves me over there towards Ray, and Dalton and I carry Ray the last few remaining yards. We were going to finish this together.

As we approached the ceremonial grounds we hear the order, "Drop your packs! Form up!"

At that moment we knew we made it. Everybody was broken, yet stood tall and proud. This is one moment of my life where the obstacle was almost unbearable, but was soon overcome. The upshot of all of this is that no matter how exhausted you are from what life throws at you sometimes just give it one more mile, one more foot in front of the other and eventually the pain will subside.

KELSIE PIERCEY

Control and Freedom



Drawing

CARRIE THOMPSON

The Pain of Getting Older

Hobbling, tripping, stumbling,
Bearing heavy load and chronic cough,
She can't be more than sixty,
Yet her achy joints force her to stop.

Panting, groaning, grumbling,
Seeking to recover from her rigors,
She takes a gulp of wisdom,
And glassy eyes pierce drawn-on vigor.

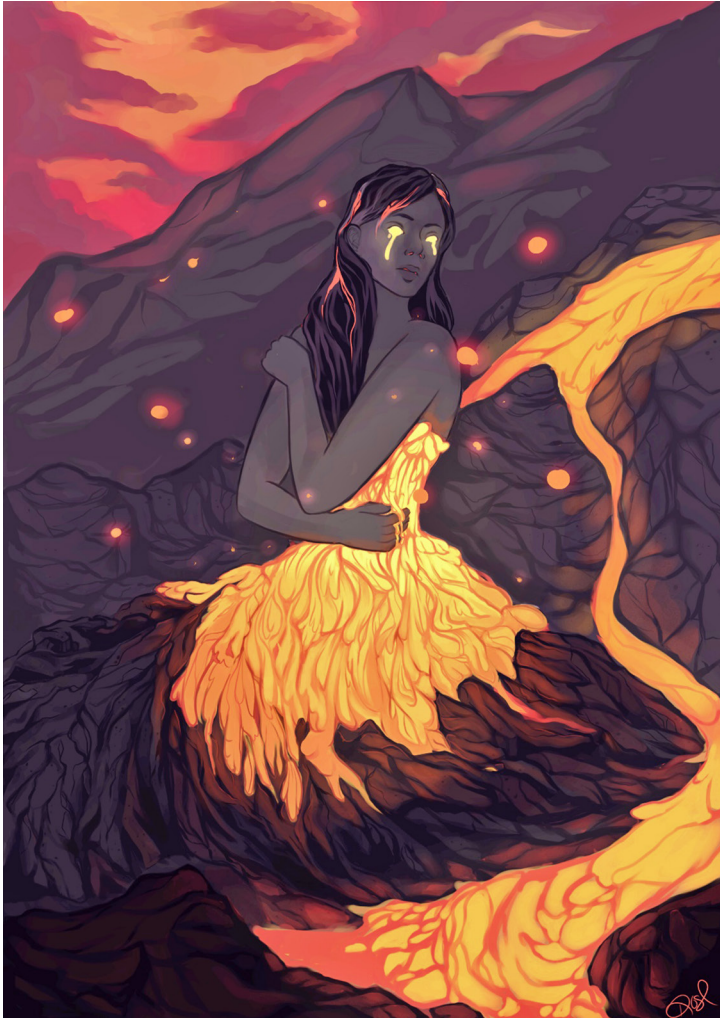
"Don't get old," she says.
Like she knows I'd like to try.
"The sick and pain ain't worth the risk."
"You kids don't know what old is like."

"I guess I don't," I say.
And hope that that will be the end.
"Don't get smart." She's in my face.
"You'll never know the pain I'm in."

Going, leaving, mumbling,
Knowing she has caused a thought or two,
She fails to see my trembling,
Or that the young can get sick, too.

STORMIE TIBBS

Frozen



Digital Art

Cheyanne (Crista) Johnson

Lovely Night





Painting

GINGER PAHL

My Baby and I are Blue

My Baby and I are Blue.

Oh, but the days when we burned white-hot!
Never minding the wick, how high or low.
Days of lightning, of flush and glow.
Folks saying “I want what they got!”

Then came the warmth of yellow days,
My Autumns melted by your Springs
Of tenderness that love can bring.
No cloud dare touch our golden rays!

But gray crept in while unawares,
Indifference the color of cold, wet ash.
And behind it, blue ascends the stairs
Of my heart and yours, whose time has passed.

ALEXIS LONG

I Will Look Over You

I will look over you.
Like angel without wings,
I will walk by your side.
I'm drawn in by your need,
But also by your strength and light.
You shine so bright how could I not know you?
You do not see the greatness you hold.
For you my dear are the greatest treasure of all.

ZACHARY TROUY

The Man Who Laughs

After Onisakiakika

Flanked by ancient oaks on all sides stood reinforced stone walls, towering ten or more men in height, and sat as thick as a man on his side. Housed within the walls lay a city, populated with brown and angular buildings scrunched mere feet apart, windows perched to the left of their front door and directly above on each consecutive floor. Near one of the walls loomed an impressive pile of wooden pillars, detached from a vast section of wall, the air hot and laden with the deafening groans of the now mainly unsupported section. A crowd of men and women – clothed in grime suffused attire that had seen better days – stood around the pile of pillars as a man pulled himself atop a platform, raised only a few feet above the ground.

The man peered into the eyes of all those surrounding him, and after clearing his throat, shouted,

“The time is nearly upon us!”

A little ways away, beneath one of the few remaining support beams, a man slowly lowered his tools to the ground before attempting to subtly sneak over to the crowd. He managed only a few steps before his endeavor was halted, his arm forcefully pulled back.

“Tom! Where do you think you are going?”

Tom spun around and laid his eyes upon Connie, the woman stationed adjacent to him. He gazed at her for a moment before craning his head back towards the crowd and muttered, “I just wanted to figure out what Dustan was saying. From the looks of it, he’s giving another speech or dealing out more instructions.”

Connie sighed in defeat and gazed over towards Dustan as she pondered her response. As her eyes focused on Dustan, she noticed that his clothes

no longer resembled the tattered garbs he and everyone else wore, instead featuring ornate swirls and vivid greens that pulled her in. It reminded her momentarily of how he had simply appeared one day. While he had seemed strange at first, he quickly grew into the citizen's favor due to his radical ideas of breaking free from the walls. Tearing her eyes away, she turns her head towards the sky for a brief moment before turning back to Tom.

“Look, I get that you're tired of doing the job that was assigned to you, but please hold on for a little longer. Just look at how close we are to finishing this! We'll be in and out of here in no time, just like Dustan says. Then we'll be free to do as we please.”

“What if he says something important and we miss it because we're over here?” Tom retorted. “I just want to make sure we're up to date.”

Connie's determination deflated slightly after realizing the depth of Tom's own determination. She hesitated a moment before piping up with renewed vigor.

“Apophos can't work on anything after straining his arm. Why don't we send him over to find out what's going on?” She grinned as she continued, “That way, your section can be finished, and we'll still figure out what's going on.”

Tom's face fell immediately, eyes wide and mouth agape. He stood there for a moment, trying to come up with some argument, but Connie had already called out for Apophos.

“Hey! Apophos, could you go see what's going on over there?” A loud grunt in response came from a thick set man before he got up and trudged towards Dustan and the crowd.

Despite the seemingly simple request, the actual task was easier said than done, as Apophos attempted to shoulder through the thick crowd of people all trying to get to the front. Eventually, due to his strength – commonly referred to being equivalent to that of a bull's – he made his

The Man Who Laughs

way to the front of the boisterous crowd. As he maneuvered through the cluster of bodies, he considered to himself that pushing people was far easier than relocating the pillars of the wall, his arm aching in agreement. The moment he reached the front, Dustan's voice rang through his ears as the man stood upon the raised platform, his arms spread wide after waiting for the crowd to grow in size.

“It’s almost time! We’re nearly there! Just outside these walls lies the means to more food and space than your mind could even perceive. No longer shall you settle for small rations or permanently assigned jobs, or small houses, or being at the beck and call of the more privileged. All shall be equal outside of these walls, with our destinies in our own hands, rather than the hands of another.”

The citizens, upon realizing that the fall of the wall was so near that intervention from the upper class citizens could no longer impede them, roared in riotous agreement, their intent echoed throughout the city. In the midst of the commotion, seven men stepped forward baring flint and set ablaze the thick pillars that lay from the confining wall. Upon seeing this, many other citizens were swept up in the excitement and began rummaging through the surrounding area for any loose, flammable objects and threw them into the hungry mouth of the flames.

Hearing the fevered commotion, one of the upper class residing in a nearby building is jarred from his routine and urged to peer out the window. The man, with hair as gray as pocket lint, slowly sauntered his way to the window and stared out at what was once a large obelisk detailing their history after the walls were constructed. He was sickened to see the monument no longer; in its place, the crumbled remains slowly seating themselves upon the surrounding road.

Watching the destruction for a long moment, he teetered backwards and distressingly called out, “Synder, get over here!”

A man with skin resembling that of leather ambled over, clearly unamused with the sudden summons. “What is it Rowl? I was in the middle of something,” Snyder asked, frowning as Rowl directed his

his attention out the window.

Snyder reluctantly looked out and fell quiet for a moment before glancing at Rowl, as if hoping that he would disprove what he had seen. As the reality of what was occurring settled over the two, they turned back out the window, faces aghast.

When the smoke from the debris had settled, the two were able to see what lay past the obelisk's remains. As if the position of Dustan's stand had been planned, him and the surrounding crowd were in plain sight, along with all of the supports that had been pulled from the wall.

A few moments passed, before Snyder whispered, "Th-They've destroyed too many supports..."

Rowl straightened his back ever so slightly before he gasped out, "What were they thinking? Have they forgotten all our creeds, become deaf to all our warnings?"

"What coerced them into doing this? Who?!" barked Snyder, his voice raised in distress.

Rowl rested his weight against the window frame as they continued to stare out, leaning in closer to try and get a better view. After he scanned the area for a moment, he asked, "Who's that on the platform, do you think it might be his doing?"

Snyder squinted his eyes to get a clearer view, and upon spotting Dustan replied, "Possibly." Not a moment later, Snyder's eyes widened and he said "Wait, I recognize the style of his clothing, that's..." Snyder inhaled sharply, covering his mouth as he stepped back, his gaze filling with fear.

"Is he from one of the nations we conquered before our fall?" Rowl questioned.

Snyder backed up into a chair and fell into it, trying desperately to take everything in.

The Man Who Laughs

“Precisely... and I can only imagine what deeds they wish to inflict upon us if he is indeed one of them.” Snyder choked out, his face as pale as the socks on his feet.

Another long pause passed before his composure slowly returned, whereupon he hysterically called out for his aides.

Outside, the citizens had not been standing by idly and were ravaging the last remaining support structure from the damaged portion of the wall. As they tore down the last piece, the wall creaked and groaned loudly, masking the sound of the town’s guardsmen flooding the area.

However, before the guardsmen could reason the citizens into fixing the supports, the wall let out a final, thunderous groan, before collapsing in on itself, kicking up a cloud of smoke and dust that reached high, high into the sky, past even the rooftops of the tallest buildings.

Dustan, still standing upon the platform, turned to the newly made opening, and threw his arms wide once more and yelled, “Welcome, my brothers!”

The citizens howled in excitement in parallel with Dustan’s statement. Slowly, however, the yells died down, as one by one, the citizens realized that Dustan was no longer speaking with them, but instead, the large collection of men on the other side of the wall, clad in metal with weapons in hand.

LUCAS "MOOSE" WILLIAMS

Witchsona



Digital Art

ZACHARY JOUBERT

The Hidden Golden Gate Bridge





Photography

JEREMY STEVENS

The Battle for Sanders Ferry Park

“You know, I wrote a book once! If you can dig up the name of it, I’ll give you 100 points of extra credit...” It was 1997, long before you could just ask Google for the answer to a simple, but obscure question like that. The only thing the Internet was good for back then was, well—I guess you could call it research. The clock on the wall ticked and ticked... Coach Reynolds was going on about something English-related; but, who could listen? There was an excitement that could almost be felt on the air on this afternoon, and every second that passed brought the students one second closer to freedom. But this was a different kind of excitement than on any other day of any other week because this was Homecoming week. In the 90s, during that one special week, every single year, the Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior students of Hendersonville High School battled the Seniors to the death every night. Ok, maybe not to the death, but it was pretty serious business nonetheless.

David, a Junior, owned two shirts. One was his football jersey, and the other was a plain t-shirt except that it said “Weezer” across the chest. This day, he was wearing his Black-On-White/Gold football jersey, number 40. He had long-since tuned out Coach Reynolds. Bored almost to the point of laying his head on his desk for a nap, he started drawing little football plays on the inside cover of his English book. These were the plays that he wished they would run on Friday night against Brentwood, instead of that same Sweep/Waggle shit over and over again. Hardly the second-coming of Phillip Fulmer, David just wrote the same 3-4 plays over and over again, until that became boring, too. And there was still 35 minutes left in class! David was struck with an idea... He could play some paper football! That would spice up his time in class, it had been a couple of months since he had done that. As an added bonus, it would give him an excuse to talk to Erika.

Erika was absolutely the spitting image of Joey Potter from Dawson’s Creek, and this was not by mistake. She spent hours perfecting the hairstyle and the clothes, all the way down to the overall-shorts and strappy

summer sandals. David didn't watch Dawson's Creek, but he knew what he liked—

“Hey can I borrow some paper?”

“Again? That makes every day for like two weeks now,” said Erika.

David could see this wasn't going well, “Come on, I want to make us some paper footballs so I can kick your ass,” he said with a smirk. David was nothing if not a smooth talker. But he saw this was going nowhere, so he changed the subject.

“Hey did you hear that the Seniors stayed up all night filling 5,000 water balloons with piss?”

“Ewwwww, they did not,” she said.

“Yeah they did, my brother Phil told me. He saw it with his own eyes.”

“Oh my god,” she shrieked, “he watched people pissing into balloons? How does that even work?”

“Oh, they didn't use real piss, that wouldn't be right. They bought hygienic deer piss at a Hendersonville Sporting Goods. Phil said it was more expensive than they expected though, so they only got enough to fill up 100 balloons. The rest were just plain water.” He added, “Hey I was thinking, you wanna ride with me and Jeremy to Sanders Ferry tonight?”

David didn't need to expand on why he was going to Sanders Ferry that night. Everybody in the City of Hendersonville knew what was happening at Sanders Ferry that night. It was to be the end-all water balloon battle to beat all previous water balloon battles. They battled every day of Homecoming Week. Some battles were planned out, such as the one at Stark-Knob Boat Ramp the night before. And others were more impromptu, such as when Seniors saw Underclassmen at a red light, got out and pelted their cars with water balloons. But, this particular night was the big one. It was Thursday, the day before the Homecoming Game,

The Battle for Sanders Ferry Park

so it was the last night of the water balloon wars. Unfortunately, the Seniors had an almost insurmountable advantage. They had early dismissal, except for the football players, of course, but their numbers were few compared to the entire Senior Class. They had an extra hour and a half to prepare for the night's battle, meaning they could set up positions and have people ready early. Rumor had it they would have flank points all over Sanders Ferry Park, and they planned to have dozens of Seniors with balloons hiding in the only entrance point to the park, waiting to hit all the underclassmen as they entered the park.

“Jeremy who?”

David answered, “Stevens, we’re taking old blue out to the park. It’s good luck. Last year, we drove it up to a Senior’s house where he and his buddies were playing basketball outside. Everybody in the bed of the truck started pelting the Seniors. It was fucking legendary.”

“Well,” she said, “alright. What time?”

Hook. Line. Sinker. “We get out of football at 3:00. We’ll go change clothes, and fill up balloons, but we’ll be there by 5:00.”

Old Blue was Jeremy’s 1960 Ford F-100. It looked pretty good for an antique, except that the bed was rusted. It was a piece of junk, but for Homecoming Week, it was perfect as the bed was used for transporting additional people, as well as coolers, to the battlegrounds. The kid behind the wheel- Jeremy, was the dumb guy in the group. Every group has one. Picture Steve Stiffler, but dumber.

At about 3:00, David and Jeremy were taking a knee with the team. It was the end of practice, so as always, the coaches were giving speeches. Coach Lassiter liked to mix his Copenhagen with his chewing gum. The combination of dip-spit and additional saliva from the gum resulted in tobacco flying everywhere. This practice, he was screaming like a lunatic, spitting pieces of chewing tobacco all over the place, so that it landed on the helmets of the players on the first row in front of him.

“You oughta be pissed off now boys! This is it, you’re finally playing somebody richer than you are! Buncha’ pussies!”

Of course, any time a coach cursed like this, it was met with thunderous applause from the team, and this day was no different.

After practice, Jeremy and David had made their way over to Jeff’s house, “Come on, man. The Seniors already have an hour-and-a-half head start on us. Can we fucking go?” Jeremy pleaded with Jeff to hurry, but as many times as he had picked him up at his house, he shouldn’t have been surprised. Standing in his living room in only his underwear, brushing his teeth, it was enough to make Jeremy rage. David sat and watched a Weezer music video from Jeff’s couch.

Eventually, the three of them made it to Erika’s. Her parents were more than a little suspicious of sending their daughter out with these idiots. It never occurred to Jeremy that the six-foot tall water balloon slingshot he and David had built in the back of his truck out of inner tubes and a baseball mitt would look bad to her parents. But, eventually, they relented and Jeff got into the bed of the truck to make room. He rode with the coolers out to Sanders Ferry. They had managed to fill up close to 500 water balloons between them, and there were three coolers in the back of Old Blue.

Imagine a small, hilly golf course, lakeside, with a circular driveway surrounding it. Then, instead of putting greens, imagine a dozen small shelters for family picnics and birthdays, with dozens of acres in between each shelter. There is only one entrance available to the public (there is another but it’s gated and locked), and it’s a winding, mile-long stretch through the woods. That’s Sanders Ferry Park. On a night like this night, the tactical advantage the Seniors had couldn’t be overlooked. In fact, Old Blue was hit dozens of times making their way through the entrance. This was expected, so the windows were already up. But, poor Jeff in the bed of the truck wasn’t so lucky, and had been hit multiple times, so he laid as flat in the bed of the truck as he could, yelling, “Hurry up!” Note that Jeremy slowed down.

The Battle for Sanders Ferry Park

Once the group made their way in, it was getting close to dark, and there were already close to 100 underclassmen grouping together, trying to come up with a game plan. This wasn't an unwritten rule or anything, but generally the fight began when it was full-dark outside. The scariest sight at the park was a lumbering giant weaving in and out of the crowd. Chad, the Right Tackle on the football team, was 6'5 and 250 pounds. His face was painted like a demon with white and neon yellow paint, and his head floated in the dark above the rest of the crowd.

There was much conversation about how the underclassmen outnumbered the Seniors 2-1, so this should be easy! Jeremy, David and Jeff decided that it was time to make a bold move. Strike first! The idea was to take out their coolers! The two groups were separated by a hill, right in the middle of the park. So there were essentially two ways to reach each other, straight on, over the hill, or to go around and try to sneak up on them in a maneuver that is still referred to in some circles as the great suicide run of 97. Tired of losing every battle this week, Jeremy made up his mind and shouted, "Anybody want to go take it to them first this time?"

I mentioned that Jeremy was stupid, but what he did next was next-level stupid. Along with Jeff, David, Erika, his little brother Jody (who had met them at the park) as well as multiple others loaded into Old Blue, the battalion made their way around into Senior territory. They were hoping to catch their flank unaware, as the Seniors were still working on the details of the attack. Jeff would man the Slingshot in the back, and Jody would man the coolers, handing off to Jeff. Once they were about 100 yards away, they slowed to a creep and aimed directly at the coolers. The goal? Leave them without any ammo! Jeremy reached up to the gear-stick on his manual transmission (which was on the column in Old Blue) and put it in neutral, and hit the gas to rev the engine. He did this to get their attention. He didn't want to hit any humans, just coolers. As soon as the Seniors turned to look, he threw Old Blue into first gear and stepped on it. The tires squealed magnificently and he made a direct line toward the coolers. Most of the Seniors started running for cover, but a few could see that if they moved, they'd be left helpless, and refused to move out of the way. Among the reckless Seniors playing chicken with Old Blue were The teams Wide Receiver and Quarterback, both named Matt. Jeff was

doing his part in the bed of the truck, firing the slingshot at them, but they had a strong resolve. They were firing back with their own balloons. No Senior class had ever been embarrassed before, and they were going to be God-damned if they were going to be the first. So at the last second, Jeremy was forced to swerve left. Disappointed, they headed back to the Underclassmen side of the park, and what was worse, Jeremy was afraid he had screwed up his truck because he heard something dragging underneath the chassis. When they got out to inspect the damage, David got underneath the truck and discovered that there was no damage, only two coolers. They hadn't completely failed after all! He got out from underneath the truck, face red as a beet. 'Fired up' doesn't even begin to describe his demeanor. He held the coolers over his head and screamed at the top of his lungs,

"We got the coolers!"

The crowd, which had now swelled to over 500 underclassmen, absolutely erupted at this announcement! But instead of fizzling out, the sound just got louder, and louder... Until eventually, the sound felt like an earthquake, and sounded like a tornado. It was coming from the other side of the hill. But what the hell were they doing? If you've ever seen the movie *Braveheart*, you may be able to picture what happened next. In the movie, the Scots, led by William Wallace, came pouring down the hill, a massive congregation of warriors. Well, this is exactly what happened at Sanders Ferry Park, except it was a bunch of pissed off Seniors, led by Quarterback of the football team! The earth shook as they came streaming over that hill like ants, hundreds of them. Every one of them were armed with balloons, and they were **PISSED!** Some dumbass had just tried to run some of them over with a truck! The Seniors proceed to wipe the floor with the Underclassmen. The Underclassmen start to spread out, break the lines and make a run for it. Jeremy, characteristically, runs toward the action, and before having the chance to hit one person with a balloon, is spotted by the football team's Wide Receiver, Matt- and is struck directly in the face! Everything went black for what seemed like 2-3 minutes, and he tried his best to walk in the opposite direction since he was completely helpless. Since he couldn't see, he was worried he was walking directly into Senior territory. He suspected he had been hit with

The Battle for Sanders Ferry Park

one of the often-accused, but never proven, ice balloons! But, that didn't matter now.

He knew that they had lost, regardless of his own issues. And he was right, when he regained his sight, he spotted Hendersonville Police Department cars making their way through the entrance point and blocking off the park. No way in, and no way out. The second thing he saw was David making out with Erika in the bed of his truck, but that's not pertinent to the story.

Mercifully, the police announce over their loudspeaker that the fun is over, and that they were going to be checking every car on the way out. But, there were only a half a dozen of them, and a thousand of us, so while the students waited in line, they all proceeded to hide their coolers in the bushes. Looking back, the police probably didn't give a damn about coolers full of balloons, but were probably looking for cases of beer. But, if that was the case, they would have been disappointed. There was no alcohol in those coolers because that wasn't the game. The game was teenage suburban warfare, 1990s style!

TAMMY HAMMOND-LOTH
My Milkweed Heart



Photography

Cheyenne (Crista) Johnson

Lovely Night



Painting

AIDEN WALKER

After Van Gough

The stars shine,
 glimmering with anxiety

Notice me, the stars
 pleaded

No, the earth replied

The stars lost hope,
 one by one,
 their inspiration
 twinkled out

The night sky slowly
 engulfed the Earth
 just as it had done
 every night

This time, the earth noticed
 the sky was empty

SQUATTER'S RITES 2016

Contributors

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HUNTER APPLE is a freshman at VolState who plans to major in creative writing. She writes poetry and is currently working on a short story and a trilogy. Her interests include fashion, writing and cosplay.

PAULINA LITTLE is a freshman at VolState and is an English major who hopes to be an established author someday. She writes novels and poetry. She is an avid reptile hobbyist and enjoys horseback riding, horror films, writing, and painting.

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ADVISER

MELISSA TYNDALL is a writer, bibliophile, caffeine addict, and *Supernatural* fangirl. She holds a BS in English, an MA in Corporate Communication, and an MFA in Creative Writing. Her poems and award-winning articles have appeared in *Number One*, *Prism international*, *Red Mud Review*, *Words + Images*, *Sixfold*, and various newspapers. She was also nominated for Best New Poets 2015. Her work is forthcoming in an essay collection examining The CW television series *Supernatural*. She is an assistant professor of communication and the adviser of *Squatter's Rites*.

SQUATTER'S RITES 2016

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SQUATTER'S RITES 2017

Submission Guidelines

Volunteer State Community College students interested in being featured in the 2017 edition of *Squatter's Rites* should submit poetry, fiction, memoir, artwork, and other creative works to vsccsquattersrites@gmail.com by Friday, March 31, 2017.

All entries should include contact information, a brief biography, as well as the title and medium for the work. Creative writing should be submitted in a .docx format. Works of art should be submitted as high-resolution jpg. All submissions are automatically considered for the John MacDougall Award for Literary Excellence or the Fusion Art and Design Award.

Students interested in volunteering as an editor or taking *Squatter's Rites* as a 1, 2, or 3 credit hour practicum/humanities elective class should contact the Humanities Division Office at 615.230.3200 or come to the Student Publications office (in the new Humanities building).

Class information: ENGL 290P (may be listed as English Practicum) Practical editorial and/or layout experience while producing literary publications. The amount of required work varies with credit hours. Emphasis on soliciting, reading, and critically evaluating submissions, copy-editing, layout, arrangement of material for literary effect, and collaboration with staff to meet publication deadlines. Designated primarily for vocational and career programs. This course may be accepted as transfer credit by some colleges and universities, but that decision is made by the receiving institution. This course is collegiate level work, but has been developed with a purpose other than being a university parallel course. Prerequisites: Permission of Instructor. Credits: 1-3

For more information, contact the *Squatter's Rites* adviser, Assistant Professor Melissa Tyndall, at melissa.tyndall@volstate.edu

SQUATTER'S RITES 2016

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