

East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

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Contest Winners



First Place
You Know How Bad Girls Get
By: Daisy Bentley

Second Place
The Priest and The Dying Soldier
By: Eleanor Bishop

Third Place
Three Poems
By: Lauren Wright

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You Know How Bad Girls Get

By: Daisy Bentley

There's a round, brown cigarette burn on the shoulder of Pat's football jersey. He asked me to wear it today and I obliged 'cause no guy ever asks me to wear his jersey but it smells like a health textbook statistic and I'm regretting saying yes. Pat is kind of nice I guess but he's not bright and he's a bit of a racist Disney animal when it comes to culture. Mr. Caldwell is nothing like Pat. He's smart, sexy, wears nice glasses straight from a Calvin Klein ad, and has these tired hands from taking care of his Seven Year Old Daughter Who Has Epilepsy. I want them all over me. He's the school counselor and I pretend like I'm depressed or making myself vomit or something so I can go talk to him on Fridays. I walk into his color-blocked office and he flashes his coffee-stained smile at me. I pretend like I can't see the picture on his wall of him and his fatass wife. Fatass, that's what I'll go with today. Last week I was "having nightmares about death-slash-dying."

"Hi, Olive," he says to me as I plop myself down on the weird seventies combo of beanbag and actual stable chair. I imagine him saying my name like I'm his nymphet and he's Humbert squared.

"Hi, Mr. Caldwell."

"So how are you today?"

"Good I guess. Except I couldn't bear to look at myself in the mirror today."

"And why's that?"

"Because I'm so fat and it makes me want to kill myself. But I'm fine, really. Don't worry about me, Mr. Caldwell."

"Why do you think you feel that --"

Mr. Caldwell's McDreamy voice is interrupted by the lady cop-esque principal over the intercom, sounding panicked.

"Attention: an armed intruder has entered the building. He is on the English floor moving towards what seems to be the cafeteria. Begin armed intruder procedures."

The pulse behind Mr. Caldwell's trick-or-treating eyes begins to quicken as he mutters shit under his breath. I think I had a dream about this once. This is so hot.

"Come on, Olive. We have enough time to get out of here," he says, maintaining composure but not without the throbbing vein in his forehead coming out to tease me. I feel his warm, slick palm wrap around the entirety of my twig arm and pull me with so much force towards the hallway that I feel my inner thighs burn into Mount Vesuvius in its heyday.

"Where are we going, Mr. Caldwell?" I say, starting to make tears come out of my eyes. Sometimes he puts a hand on my shoulder when I cry. I can hear all these entitled kids on the stairwell screaming and frantically calling their mothers on their iPhones and I wish they would shut the hell up.

I'm trying to hear Mr. Caldwell's hot breath so I can remember this moment forever but I can't tune into it over all of the noise. I hear a gunshot close by and Mr. Caldwell almost screams but holds back and pulls me in tighter as we continue to push forward. I'm crying heavily now after years of practice, and Mr. Caldwell is all over it. This is delicious. The principal is shouting something over the intercom but I can't understand it and then the elevator at the end of the hallway opens to reveal a tall man with a black glock in hand and a ski mask over his head. I feel Mr. Caldwell gulp as we are at the front of the pulsing crowd facing the shooter.

"Hey, man, who do you --" Mr. Caldwell raises his rich voice. It is met with fire and bang.

"Mr. Caldwell!" I shout in the dramatic cry I've rehearsed in the mirror a million and one times and drop to the floor like a penny out of a loose grip. Blood is spilling out of his white shirt pocket all over the concrete-pretending-to-be-carpet. He looks good in this shade of red. Really good. The mob is trying to run around Mr. Caldwell and I on the floor but there is no room to escape. Bang. Bang. Bang. The kids are shrieking louder now and the gunshots are so loud that I can hardly focus on soaking up how sexy Mr. Caldwell looks dead. I'm honestly going to be so sad when he has to get buried and I'll never see his face this heroically slack and bloody again. Bang.

"Oh my god, literally shut up!" I shout at the shooter for ruining my Bond girl moment and bang the metal fills my brain like pancake mix on a hot skillet.

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The Priest and the Dying Soldier

By: Eleanor Bishop

The man gripped his arm, unable to stand. He held on to him with a strength reserved for the desperate. And the dying.

His legs were a mess, riddled with bullet holes. Even more pressing was the wound in his chest, rapidly spreading a deep red stain across his dark green uniform. A few words escaped from his lips.

"Father... please..."

His voice was raw and wavering, like a child on the verge of tears.

He was hardly more than a child, his youth marred by dirt and blood.

Father Sanchez had seen dead men before. One of his earliest memories was peering into the casket at the wake of a distant uncle. He had held his father's hand and cried because it seemed to be the thing to do. He had seen it afterwards, death and the mess it leaves behind, in the waves of disease that swept through his village; in screaming mothers cursing him and his God when he visited the homes of the deceased, and in the quiet, decided way his own mother had left him, her hand in his when she passed.

In the last few months, as the civil war that had enthralled his nation spread its gnarled, bloody hands across the countryside, and he grew familiar with the sound of gunfire, he began to know a new kind of death. This was not the slow, fevered withering of disease or the silent departure of old age. This was blood and bullets. This was instant and loud. Undoubtedly there were still mothers screaming somewhere, still cursing God and Man, but their cries were drowned out by the sounds of war:

Gunfire. Then silence. More gunfire. Silence.

A conversation for when things have elevated beyond words, far beyond any sort of reason. The young man was coughing up blood, his grasp on the Father's arm beginning to weaken. There was fear in his eyes. Fear, but also a resolute understanding. He knew what was happening, and what he wanted.

"Please... before..." A silver cross hung around his neck, glinting in the overbearing sun.

He was asking for his last rites; a final blessing to prepare his soul for death.

In the last few months Father Sanchez had given these to countless boys where they lay, shot in the street or in makeshift army hospitals, performing it the way he had been taught at seminary many years ago. But this was different. In the past he had always come to them; the wounded and dying, to offer what comfort he could give. He was prepared. Composed. He felt he could process the death; compartmentalize it in a way that wouldn't haunt him, if it was on his own terms. He hadn't been ready for it; the blood and death, not this time. It—he grabbed him as he was making progress to the shelter a few doors down, seeking protection from the impending gunfire that could be heard from off in the east.

Father Sanchez hadn't seen the man until a firm hand grasped his right arm, so hard that he could feel their nails through the fabric of his shirt. The soldier had used the last strength in his legs to half-stagger-half-crawl to the priest from where he laid up against a wall, abandoned by the rest of his men.

The Father looked around, furiously searching, thinking that there certainly must be more men, more wounded, maybe someone who could help. The man at his feet seemed much more alive than any other dead man he'd ever seen, and despite the deep, reddening wound in his chest he refused to believe that he was beyond saving.

"Please..."

When he asked Father Sanchez, his eyes red and swollen, face stained with blood and tears, to give him the last thing he would be likely to ever receive, the Father felt as if he had become frozen in place.

Here was this man, a dying man—dead for what?

For war. Hate. Hunger. Anger; the kind that builds and builds until it explodes, until the only way to get it out is to lash out, until nothing is left but empty, scarred streets and the sound of gunfire. He was learning that it was not evil men who go to war, who shoot each other from behind crumbling buildings, but desperate ones, doing the only thing they know to cause a change in the lives they lead.

He found himself fixating on the man's silver cross; it remained untarnished despite the general grime and desolation surrounding it, shining with an almost blinding glare that seemed to aim directly into the Father's eyes. It struck him, not for the first time, to wonder how many of the men on the other side of this battle wore crosses of their own. How many prayed to the same God when they came face to face with death's cruel reality.

The sudden sound of nearby gunfire broke Father Sanchez from his state of shock. Closeby, the shots rang out like a hammer striking against a tin roof. He could feel every one of them reverberating in his chest, over and over, like a second heartbeat.

Instinctively, he hit the ground, pressing the wounded man and himself up against the concrete. Bullets chewed up the pavement, but they didn't seem to be directed in their general area: farther to the left a group of men had hidden behind a building to avoid the gunfire, their own weapons out and ready.

Father Sanchez lay on the ground, hearing nothing but the commotion around him and the labored last breaths of a dying man, remembering his uncle's funeral. That day, the faces around him had told him to cry, to proclaim his sorrow. A sorrow he did not yet know to feel.

He needed no direction now, no one to govern his emotions. Father Sanchez wept, for the man at his side, for the men crouched behind the buildings and the ones shooting from the rooftops.

Picture:
Lovera, Hector R. Aid From the Padre. 1962. La Republica, Venezuela. Rare Historical Photos. Web. 1 Feb.

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Three Poems

By: Lauren Wright

The Easiest Life

It's this constant cycle of fueling the fire,
Trapped in the burning routine of yearning
The keys have been offered to you once again
But in this hell you don't seem to be learning
Rattled in a prison cell, the tides never turning
Did it ever occur to you it mayn't be a game
As you swerve past the water quickly into the flame?
Yes, there's a lot of sweat down here
And it's paired with a lot of shame.
This life is a disease and it's common to catch
You'll find yourself and Your Faults in a wrestling match
And it is with ease that you let Your Faults win
Because how can you break out when your world is caving in?

5-7-5

They were all so good
I crumbled from where I stood
I'd laugh if I could

They spoke fluently
Eloquence was all I heard
Wouldn't they abhor

What I had written?
Mock each word by word by word
Solitude in crowds

So I trembled, scared
Folding the paper on which
I wrote my haiku

Then, I was up next
Barely alive, muttering
"Five, seven, and five."

To Tree or Not to Tree

In the center of a forest cut off from the world,

A sapling grew to be as tall as her sisters and brothers
Those trees were mighty and strong
And so was she...

But still, she envied the others

By each branch and each leaf

The tree felt worthless—so she held firm to that belief.

She yearned for their alluring flowers or their appetizing fruits

So as far as she was concerned,

She was **worthless** to her roots.

As the tree wished for, she withered

Until she resembled a tree **no longer**.

While the robust woods surrounding her seemed to grow quickly even stronger.

A storm

Passed

through

away her leaves *down*

The tiny plant with her barren branches watched her garland soar.

Until the snow fell softly, like a quaint familiar song

And the melancholy tree was

no more.