

s

t

o

i

l

t

c

l

w

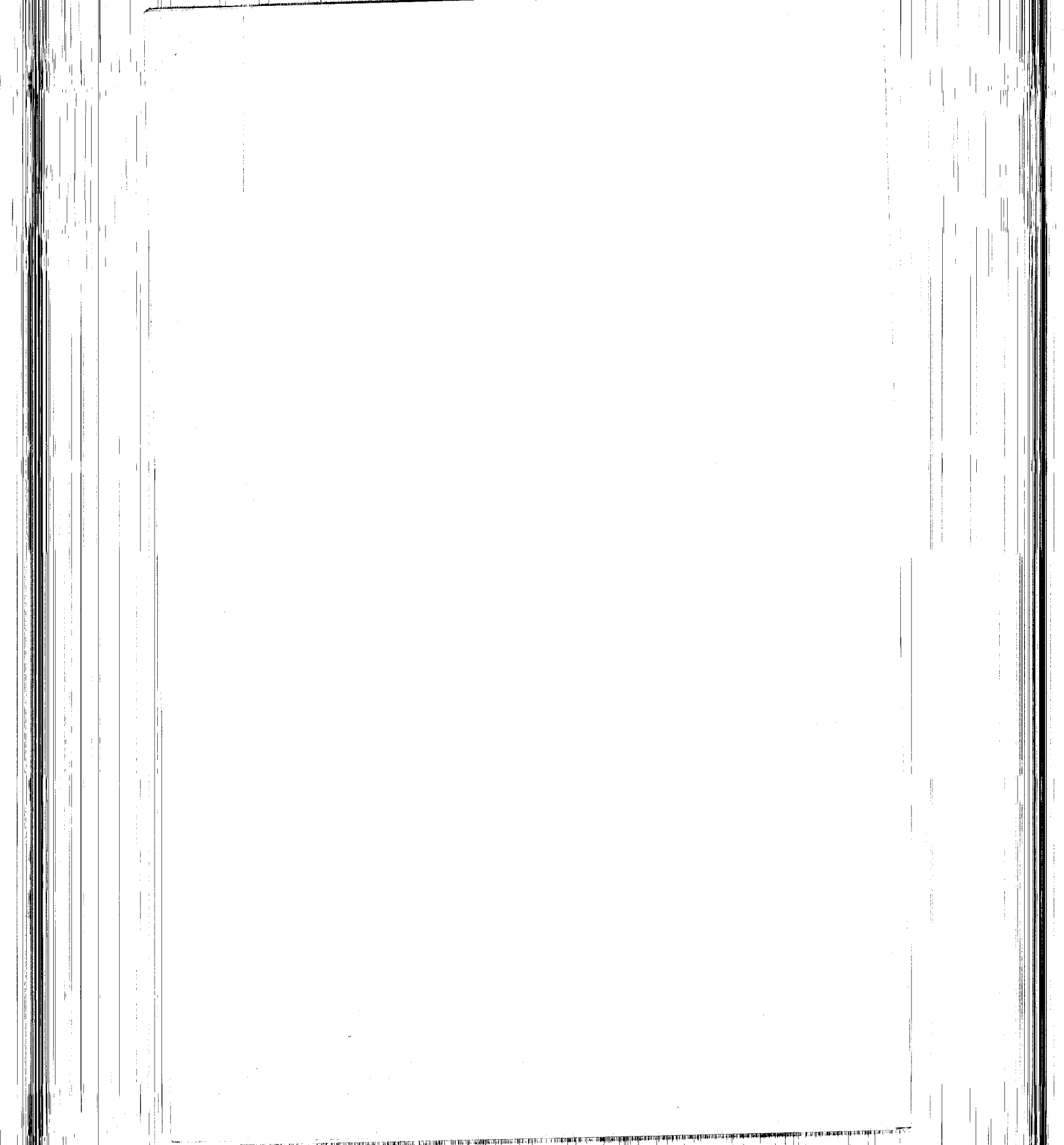
foip

southern connecticut state university

t

l

k



Folio

Josh Gister ~ Editor

Jeffrey Schultz ~ Associate Editor

Jessica Piel ~ Fiction Editor

Sarah Tamulevich ~ Poetry Editor

Jeff Mock ~ Faculty Advisor

Proof Readers

Glenn W. Butler Lois Lake Church

Julia J. Bakes Tory Church

Staff

Danielle Braga Patricia Lafayllve

Kristin Dombrowski Eric Maroney

Lauren Knight Rachel Quish

Student Award Winners

Fiction

FIRST PLACE

Amy Ashton Handy
Simplicity

SECOND PLACE

Julia J. Bakes
Blue Hole

THIRD PLACE

Timothy A. Hanley
Rich's Phillips 66

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Anthony Brano – Landscaping

Eve Cummings Poetry Contest

FIRST PLACE

Whitney B. Gallagher
Return to Waterville

SECOND PLACE

Lisa L. Siedlarz
A Pronunciation Guide to Some Things Polish

THIRD PLACE

Marilyn C. Terlaga
Liebchen

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Joy Mlozanowski – Bitch
Michael D. Rayzer – Garden View
Jean Copeland – Civil Union

Art

FIRST PLACE

Thomas Greco

Internal Conflict

The artist creates a striking contrast between color and mood. The juxtaposition of bright color and a technically clean composition with the raw, dark emotion of the piece shows a certain defiance that captures the mood.

SECOND PLACE

Rebecca LeQuire

Expressions

This piece is almost eerie. Still it is impossible to look away from. The subject matter, textured, distorted faces is arresting in its composition, all in a neat row, protected in their velvet case.

THIRD PLACE

Tiffany Ulrich

In Your Shoes

There is nothing innocent about this boy aside from his face. He even sits close to the edge of the frame, ready to move forward, looking past the edge of the photo, away from the people sitting beside him, watching over him. The artist has used a single frame to serve as what could be a very long narrative.

SCSU Creative Writing Faculty

Jeff Mock

worked in literary publishing for more than a decade, first as the Editor of *Black Warrior Review*, then as the Assistant Editor of *The Gettysburg Review*; he served as the Advisor for this edition of *Folio*. He is the author of *Evening Travelers*, a chapbook of poems, and *You Can Write*, a guidebook for beginning poets. His poems have appeared in *Crazyhorse*, *Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Quarterly West*, *Sewanee Review* and elsewhere.

Tim Parrish

is author of the story collection *Red Stick Men*, set in and around his hometown of Baton Rouge. Parrish is the recipient of a Walter Freund Grant-in-Aid from the Whiting Foundation and was nominated by Tim O'Brien for *Best New American Voices 2002*. His most recent publications appear or are forthcoming in *The Idaho Review*, *Rules of Thumb: 73 Writers' Writing Fixations*, and in the anthologies *Louisiana in Words*, and *Wide Awake in the Pelican State*. He is at work on a memoir tentatively titled *Southern Man* and is Coordinator of Creative Writing at SCSU.

Robin Troy

is in her first year as an Assistant Professor of English at Southern. A Connecticut native, she comes to us by way of Montana, where she earned her MFA from the University of Montana and worked as a staff writer for the *Missoula Independent*. Her first novel, *Floating*, won MTV's Write Stuff fiction contest. She has work recently published in *Narrative* and the anthology *Woman's Best Friend*.

Vivian Shipley

is Editor of *Connecticut Review* and the CSU Distinguished Professor at Southern Connecticut State University, where she has taught since 1969. She won the 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award for Service to the Literary Community from the Library of Congress Connecticut Center for the Book and the 2005 SCSU Faculty Scholar Award. She is a judge for the Connecticut Poetry Circuit and Chair of the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival Committee at the Hill-Stead Museum. She has won numerous awards, including the 2005 Gretchen Warren Prize for the Best Published Poem from the New England Poetry Club. Two of her books, *Gleanings: Old Poems New Poems*, and *When There is No Shore* were nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. She has published five chapbooks, and her seventh full-length collection, *Hardboot: Poems New & Old* was published in 2005 from Southeastern Louisiana University Press.

Judges

Fiction

Liza Ward

published her first novel, *Outside Valentine*, with Henry Holt and Company in October of 2004. Her work has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Georgia Review*, *Angi*, *The Antioch Review*, *O. Henry Prize Stories 2004*, *Harcourt's Best New American Voices 2004*, *Vogue*, and *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine* (UK). She was raised in New York City and holds degrees from Middlebury College and University of Montana. She is currently at work on a second novel.

Art

Katie Matican

has been in the dark room for over 9 years working on her own photography as well as professional gigs. She designs and creates jewelry for her own business. Katie was an Associate Editor for the 2004 Folio, playing a large part in the overall design of the magazine and its cover. She currently does a good deal of graphic design amongst other things for Lincoln Healthcare Events.

Poetry

Diana Der Hovanessian

was born and raised in New England but has taken it as her mission to inform the world of the history of her Armenian ancestors. Most recently she was Fulbright professor of American poetry at Yerevan State University, 1999 and 1994. She has authored 17 books of poetry and translations. She has won awards from the NEA, PSA, PEN-Columbia Translation Center, National Writers Union, *American Scholar*, *Prairie Schooner*, and Paterson Poetry Center. Her work has appeared in publications such as the *American Scholar*, *Agni*, *N.Y. Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Globe*, *Paris Review*, *Nation*, and *Partisan Review*. She is president of the New England Poetry Club.

Folio Community

Folio is an active club on campus with over twenty staffers. The coffeehouse style monthly readings feature poetry, fiction, open-mic, live musical performances, displayed artwork and boast an attendance of fifty to seventy-five people. These student readings compliment and support the Reading Series sponsored by SCSU's Creative Writing Department. The integration of students, faculty, staff, readers and writers of all levels of experience and appreciation foster a supportive environment, promoting a sense of community among local writers.

The professors of creative writing represent the keystone of SCSU's writing community. Folio's expansion as a campus organization and a magazine is a natural outgrowth of the success and support of professors Jeff Mock, Tim Parrish, Vivian Shipley and Robin Troy.

Publication

The literary work appearing in this issue was selected through a preliminary round of judging by volunteer students. Cover-sheets were removed so writers remained anonymous. The editorial staff reviewed the results and narrowed the selections by workshop-style analysis. Independent judges then chose first, second and third place pieces from those chosen for publication. Liza Ward judged fiction and Diana Der Hovanessian judged poetry. Katie Matican judged art from a pool of submitted SCSU art students' works.

Submission to Folio is open to all SCSU students. Manuscripts are accepted from September through the first week of December. Guidelines are available by calling the Folio office @ (230) 392-6936 or through the English Department.

Folio Featured Student Readers
Fall 2005 / Spring 2006

Jesse Efron
Benjamin Kowalsky
April Line
Eric Maroney
Valerie McKee
Michael Rayzer
Michelle Repass
Lisa Siedlarz
Sarah Tamulevich

Folio Featured Artists
Fall 2005 / Spring 2006

Brett Hillman
Amy Richardson
Shizuka Shibata

Folio Live Music

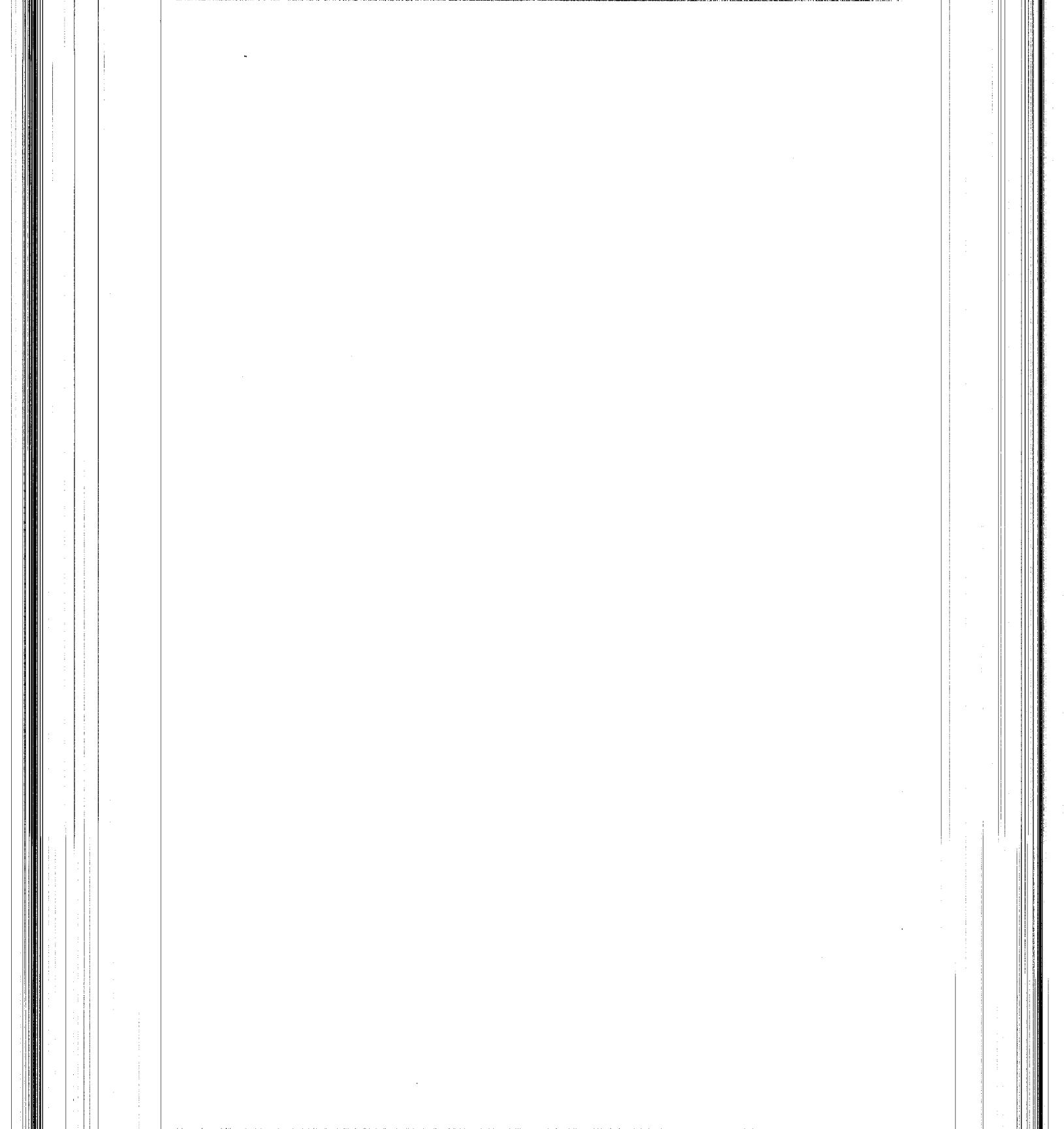
Echoing August
FayRey
Patricia Lafayllve
Kevin Miner

The Folio Staff Would Like To Thank...

Fred Agee
Steve Almond
Denise Bentley-Drobish
Marga Brockhagen
Joy Bush
Ileanne Corona
Brad Crerar
Thomas S. Dorr
Jerry Dunklee
Rebecca Harlow
Will Hochman
Brian Johnson
April Line
Pearl Noelle Line
Ben Martin
KT Matican
Kevin Miner
Jeff Mock
Tim Parrish
Kelly Ritter
Vivian Shipley
Dana Sonnenschein
Charlene Stack
Robin Troy
Rachael Vaters-Carr

The Delaney's Staff
Open-Mic Readers
Student Center Staff
Student Media Board

Mom & Dad



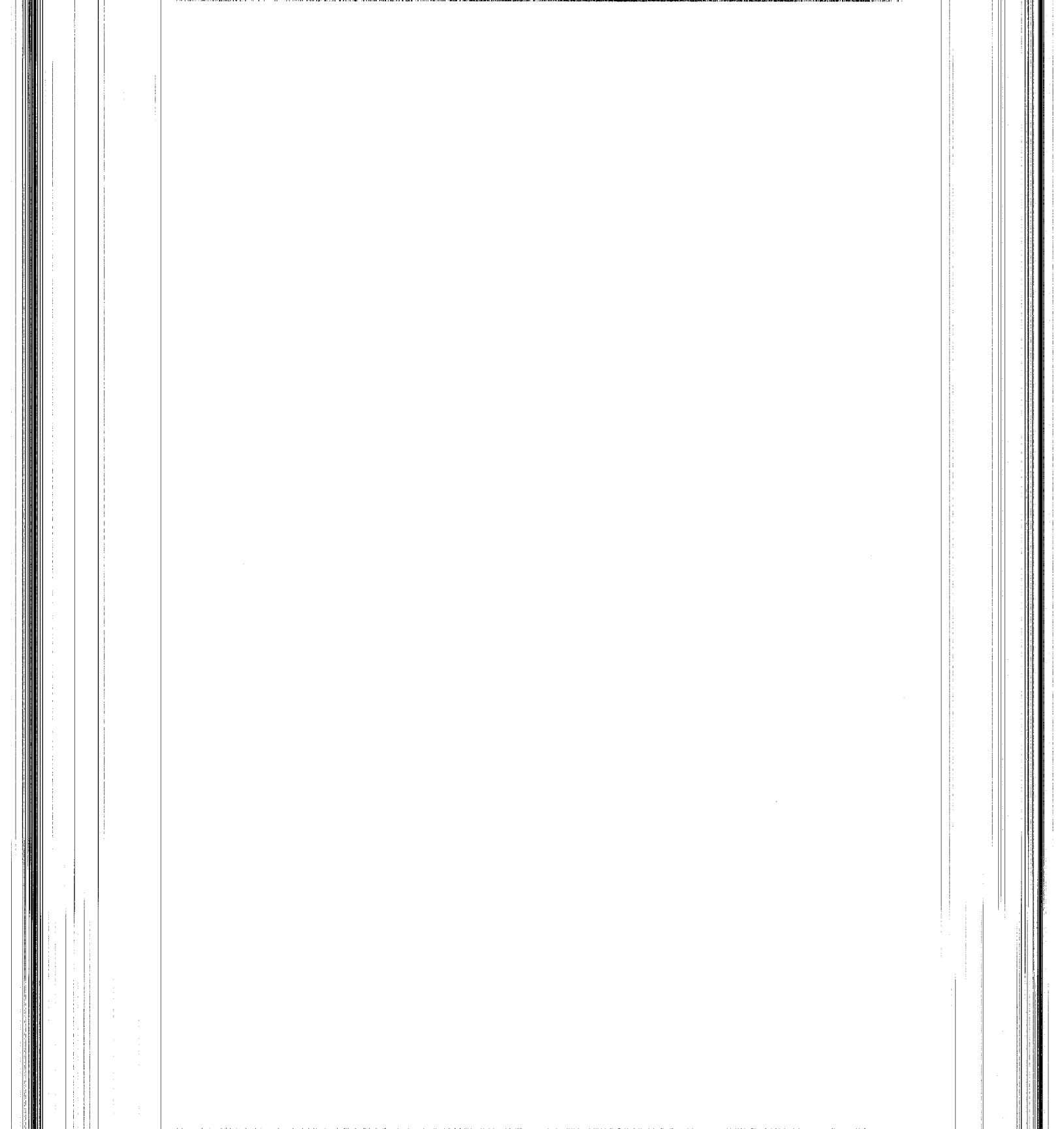
Contents

<i>Julia J. Bakes</i>	
Blue Hole	19
<i>Anthony Brano</i>	
Landscaping	55
<i>Jean Copeland</i>	
Civil Union	34
<i>Nick Dorio</i>	
Self-Portrait	35
<i>Whitney B. Gallagher</i>	
Homecoming	32
Egyptian Street Crossing	81
Return to Waterville	147
Washing the Dishes after the Smallest Thanksgiving Dinner	173
<i>Carolyn Z. Gerber</i>	
<i>then and now</i>	52
<i>Amy Ashton Handy</i>	
Nick's Eulogy for Jay	17
Character Driven	45
Eyelids	88
Simplicity	128
<i>Timothy A. Hanley</i>	
Rich's Phillips 66	3
<i>Benjamin J. Kowalsky</i>	
The Skald of Shakespeare Sings in Joyous Verse	39
The Norseman Speaks of Fjords	72
The Parson Fares to Asgard	105
Isa	148
Naudiz	156
<i>Andrew Lennon</i>	
Small Steps	46
Eís Njömandsson	150
<i>Rayon Dwain Lennon</i>	
Sestina to Patricia	15
Tiny Locks	73
<i>April Line</i>	
What it Would Be Like to Have a Baby with a Turnip	82

<i>Julia Tolstrup Mathien</i>	
Practical Advice	2
Last Rites	80
Bedspread	149
<i>Valerie B. McKee</i>	
Heirloom	18
She is Her Sunday Best	67
Last Will and Testament (Part II)	119
<i>Joy Mlozanowski</i>	
Bitch	126
<i>Michael D. Rayzer</i>	
How This Ends	1
Garden View	117
<i>Lisa L. Siedlarz</i>	
Learning Curve Removed	14
The Personality Extraction of Frances Farmer	69
M. Shelley Steps into Spezia Bay after P. Drowned ...	87
A Pronunciation Guide to Some Things Polish	144
Beneath the Grain	158
<i>Marilyn C. Terlaga</i>	
He Tells Me ...	33
Liebchen	70
Good Friday	118
Your Song	127
<i>Matthew G. Tkach</i>	
In Bloom	53
<i>Meghan A. Trupp</i>	
T.R.'s Bully Shot	161
<i>Jaclyn Watterson</i>	
I Always Tell the Truth Unless a Lie Sounds Better	120
<i>David B. Zeidler</i>	
Cold War	71
Bursting from a Basement Ballroom	146
Three Men Gather around a Street Musician	159

Art

<i>Colleen Conlon</i>	
Paralysis	93
<i>Leo DiSorbo</i>	
Skeleton	90
<i>Thomas Greco</i>	
Internal Conflict	89
Life Passes You By	99
<i>Brett Hillman</i>	
Determination	91
Stripe	102
<i>Sarah Horton</i>	
Untitled	103
<i>Rebecca LeQuire</i>	
Expressions	98
<i>Amy Richardson</i>	
Teapot	92
<i>Shizuka Shibata</i>	
Untitled	100
<i>Tiffany Ulrich</i>	
In Your Shoes	104
<i>Sutton Underwood</i>	
Night in the Light	101



Michael D. Rayzer
How This Ends

This is how dinner tastes:
Fermented and sweet,
gamy, like the flesh between folds,
tart like something you used to love.

This is how dessert ends:
A tangled, slick mass
halfway up the bed,
sheets wet enough to drink.

This is how breakfast looks:
An overturned glass of wine,
a note and bile climbing
the back of your throat.

Julia Tolstrup Mathien
Practical Advice

When someone dies
People always say
How happy and kind
And beautiful they were.
So the secret to life must be
To spend each day
Miserable and cruel and ugly
Then, goddammit, I'll live forever.

Timothy A. Hanley
Rich's Phillips 66
Third Place

Kevin squatted to rest his butt on the edge of the narrow brick windowsill. He placed a styrofoam cup of coffee between his feet and felt a cool summer breeze fill his baggy shirt with air, drying the sweat and stink of gasoline against his skin. His time of the day to relax a bit before rush hour traffic lined Rich's Phillips 66 with cars filling up and heading home. He stared down at the small paperback, *Of Mice and Men*, balanced on his knee.

How great it would be, Kevin thought, to spend life reading, learning, every day. Kevin was never a great student, but now the idea of being a perpetual student had become a recurring fantasy. Instead he was stuck here, pumping gas and "kissing ass." Each morning washing windshields, checking oil, and filling tanks for the wealthy patrons of Rich's.

Kevin didn't mind the older men or ladies. It was the spoiled, entitled preppies that pulled up to the pumps in their daddy's Lincoln Continental or BMW, especially the ones he knew from the basketball team before he quit to take this job. The ones that knew Kevin had kicked their ass on the court but played ahead of him anyway. Their brothers who played before them mapped it all out ahead of time. And so did their fathers, alumni of the team and now major Booster Club members. The dream of college had died along with basketball. Two years ago, Kevin had moved into the outer section of this town commonly referred to as "cardboard heights." It seemed only natural to everyone that he'd end up washing their windshields while they were home for spring break or summer vacation.

"Hey Kid." Steve stepped into the doorway from the office, wiping his greasy hands with a rag. "You got time to sit on your ass and read?" Steve had worked at Rich's since graduating from high school three years before - a smartass going nowhere fast. Kevin didn't have much respect for him, but they got along. The fear that Steve might personify Kevin's future disgusted him.

Kevin turned his head, looking up at the sarcastic grin underneath Steve's black Fu Man Chu moustache. "Matter of fact I just finished," Kevin answered, turning his head back to stare straight ahead at the barren gas pumps.

"You think you're smart cause you're reading them books all the time don't ya?"

Kevin had no time to respond before Rich came around the corner of the building. A lean, hard working man with salt and pepper hair, Rich owned this station for the past fifteen years.

"Kevin you did a great job on the bathrooms. They've never been cleaned like that before," he said, and looked at Steve before walking through the doorway into the office.

"Ha!" Steve blurted, still standing in the doorway. "So the Kid knows how to clean a toilet," and he forced another laugh. "Well I think the Kid deserves a raise, Rich."

Kevin stood up. "Well, you know what Will Rogers said?"

"No. Who? The beef sandwich guy?"

" 'Don't judge a man by the job he does. Judge him by how well he does it.' So, you lose on both counts." Kevin leaned through the door and tossed the book on one of the waiting chairs, then started walking away.

"Hey, where you going?"

"Next door to get a soda. I'm bored."

"Get me one, Kid."

Kevin just waived his hand in the air without looking back as he walked towards the 7-11.

The cooler door swung shut with a thump behind Kevin as he headed down the aisle with two Cokes. His eyes skimmed the magazine rack just in front of the counter. Usually he paid little attention to the adult skin magazines on the top rack. The back room at Rich's had plenty of porn if so desired. The stereotypical gas station trash.

This time one caught his attention. There on the cover of the July 1978 issue was an exact Cherise look-alike. Dark hair in long layers, lightly falling upon soft shoulders. The emerald green eyes. The scent of Cherise's body lotion momentarily filled his nostrils once again. On his last trip to D.C., where her family recently moved, the visit culminated in a passionate

night of foggy car windows and their lost virginity. It was the first time for both of them and therefore convinced Kevin his feelings were in fact real love. God, he loved her. The thought of never being with her again made him feel weak and in a reflexive twitch his finger tapped his shirt pocket to make sure the letter was still there. Holding the magazine in his other hand, he wanted to see more of her. But, he knew he couldn't stand here gawking so instead decided to buy the magazine. He could, he was nineteen.

"Where'd you go, Kid?" asked Steve leaning over an old Chevy, stretching to extend the squeegee across the windshield. "Let's go, we got a drive full of cars."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm comin'," Kevin responded. He walked into the office doorway and tossed the Playboy magazine. It landed on a chair behind the counter. The two of them worked the drive with such speed and rhythm that the dings from the pumps and the bells from entering and exiting cars created music for the boys' dance.

"Howdy Kevin," a little elderly man in a plaid golf-cap said as he strained to push the heavy Cadillac door open. He stood by the door, hands in the pockets of his red plaid shorts, pale skinny legs contrasting with black socks and wing-tip shoes.

"Hey, Mr. Reynolds." Kevin routinely pulled the hose from the Super grade pump and stuffed the nozzle into the car tank. "Check the oil, Mr. Reynolds?"

"Of course, Kevin. Every other fill up. That's the rule."

Kevin could tell Mr. Reynolds was a man of routines. He always got out. In between the fill up with oil-checks came the fill-up with tire checks. A retiree from Armor Foods in Chicago, the old man always gave his advice on Kevin's future. "Get into the food business, Kevin. You'll never go broke, people gotta eat . . . smart kid like you could go far."

With hands clasped behind his back now, the old man stood by Kevin as he lifted the hood.

"Thought about your future Kev?"

"Yeah, a little bit." Kevin wiped the dipstick.

"Well remember, food is the future."

As Kevin aimed to replace the oil stick in the tube, the old man leaned over as well. His breathing whistled through his nose next to Kevin's ear. The boy missed on his first try.

"What's the matter son, can't find the hole?" the old man asked, still leaning, looking into the engine compartment "Put a little hair around it," he said, matter-of-factly.

A bit surprised, Kevin started to grin as he dropped the hood. Mrs. Reynolds appeared in his view. She sat in the passenger seat wearing a floral dress and lifted one of her white-gloved hands to wave at Kevin. Kevin looked back to Mr. Reynolds. He smiled.

Kevin finished taking Mr. Reynolds' signature when Steve yelled out to him. "Hey Kid, look who's here! Porker, your girlfriend."

A beat-up Dodge pulled into the drive with a large teen-age girl behind the wheel. She had become a recent regular at Rich's. Pretty face, low-cut shirts revealing too much breast and excess flesh. As Steve put it, she had the "hots" for Kevin. So Steve enjoyed razzing him every time she came in.

Steve left his side of the drive to start cleaning the car windows Kevin had already started. "Hey Kid, why don't you ask her out?"

"Get real."

"You know what they say, more cushion for the pushin'."

"You know, you're such an asshole sometimes. Give it a rest."

"Come on, you're not still thinking you're gonna end up with Cherise are ya? You need to get real Kid. Her ole' man owns his own law firm. You're not her type," Steve chided.

"Yeah, what the hell do you know about anything?" Kevin answered.

"Christ Kid, they moved all the way to D.C., you don't got a chance."

"You finish this one, I'll take the other side." Kevin snapped the squeegee, sending water across the back window Steve had just finished.

"Ahh, here comes the riffraff," said Steve. Kevin turned his head to see which one. Every day a group of local men gathered

at Rich's for coffee, conversation and banter. Tom Reid pulled his beat up, muddy pickup into the drive and parked alongside the office.

"Look at this, they're finally working for their paycheck!" Tom called as he walked around the corner towards the office door.

"Ah shut up ya 'ol bald headed fart." Steve yelled back. Steve didn't care what he said to anybody and was forever trying to get Tom riled, something Kevin didn't do often but enjoyed watching.

Tom stopped at Rich's nearly every afternoon before going home from work. He was tall and lean, completely bald on top, with long stringy blonde hair and a thick goatee. He always wore a cap with the CAT logo on the front. Every so often Steve would smack the bill of his cap up and run away laughing. Tom would lunge for his cap and quickly secure it back on his head, swearing to kill Steve if he ever got a hold of him. Though only a ditch digger by trade, Tom, like all the locals who met at Rich's Phillips 66, was an expert on all other worldly matters,

"Hey Kid," Tom called to Kevin. Everybody called Kevin "Kid" as if it was his name. He didn't like it, but liked it less coming from Tom so ignored the greeting. Tom didn't seem to notice.

Soon the driveway cleared and the boys walked into the office. Tom was sitting behind the counter with his feet up and the magazine in his hands. "Is this yours Kid? Whataya looking at this trash for?" Tom asked without lifting his eyes from the page.

"Yes, it is so why don't you just hand it here." Kevin reached over the counter for it but Tom brought it up to his chest.

"Wait a minute," Tom said in a teasing way, then lowered the magazine in front of him again. Kevin grew agitated, as if Tom was inspecting his Cherise. Her femaleness only he knew. "This is disgusting," he continued, turning and studying each page. "Playboy used to be good before they started showing snatch shots."

"Well then why don't you just hand it back?" Kevin interjected.

"Hold on, hold on," he wasn't finished with his discourse, or the magazine, yet. "It used to be a classy magazine ya know. Now it's just like the other trash. I mean really, a pussy is ugly."

He opened up the centerfold in front of him, stretching his arm upward, then quickly folded it back together and tossed the magazine on the counter in front of Kevin. "Ah, what do you know about sex anyway Kid."

"What do I know about sex," Kevin said indignantly, looking at Steve. "Who's the guy who thinks pussy is ugly?"

"Well it is," Tom said, now standing with legs spread, knees locked while he adjusted the bill of his cap like some Hollywood cowboy ready to ride away into sunset. Steve's cheeks puffed as if trying to hold his breath, but then blurted out laughing.

"You know what they say about a guy who doesn't like pussy?" Steve asked Kevin then answered his own question, laughing. "You can't turn your back on him!" A short guttural laugh escaped Kevin's mouth.

"Aw shut up! Just shut up!" Tom's tone had changed, obviously annoyed.

"Your poor wife," Kevin saw the opening and didn't hold back. "You probably go to bed with a blindfold and nose plug every night!"

Tom lunged at Kevin, knocking him off his feet into a rack of oil cans. He lay sprawled on his back amidst the fallen, rolling cans.

"Shut up, I said!" Tom stood glaring over Kevin, veins bulging from his neck. He turned and stomped from the office, slammed the door of his pickup, then squealed away in a cloud of dust and smoke.

Steve pointed and laughed hysterically while Kevin rose slowly and began restacking the oil rack. He wasn't laughing.

"Way to go Kid," Steve said.

"Shut up asshole." Kevin walked out of the office and sat back down on the window ledge. Steve came out, trying to make it seem like the big joke everything was to him.

"That was great Kid. That bald-headed fart thinks he knows everything. Did you get the look on his face when . . ."

A Lincoln Continental pulled up to the far pumps and Kevin rose, relieved to leave Steve's recounting of the event. He felt no pride in one-upping Tom. Matter of fact, he felt foolish.

Kevin rounded the front end, lightly touching the austere hood ornament when he recognized the driver, Jeff Bushbo. The

little puckered-mouth wire ass whose name replaced Kevin's on the gymnasium board just before he quit the team.

"Can I help you and . . ."

"What's up Hamaran?" He talked as if they were old buddies while he opened the long heavy door and got out.

"Nothin' much." Stay in your Daddy's car and shut up you little shit, Kevin thought.

Jeff swaggered to the front of the long hood and put his hands on his hips, as if monitoring an employee doing his job. Kevin dropped the squeegee across the windshield.

"So, what's up with you these days?" asked Jeff.

Kevin knew what he wanted to hear. And he was not going to give it to him. He also knew that he wanted the same question in response. He wouldn't give him that either, the chance to gloat and put it in his face.

"Working," was the only quick, non-committal response he could come up with.

The pump clicked. Kevin mechanically removed the nozzle from the side of the car and replaced it on the pump. Jeff slid back into his seat behind the wheel.

"Twenty-two fifty," Kevin said standing at the car door.

The brash young man had the plastic card all ready in his hand, and held it out between his two forefingers. Daddy's credit card, Kevin thought. He walked to the office, card in hand. What a little shit. He had seen Jeff's brother play. Pretty good, tough defense. But this kid was a wimp. He'd throw the ball up where and whenever he got it, on defense he couldn't stop a sixth-grader playing for the Sisters of the Poor. Yet the coaches all coddled him. "Good try!" "Almost!"

Kevin returned and handed the tray to Jeff, card up, slip clipped to the board. Jeff signed his name, tore the top off like a regular and held the tray out to Kevin.

"Thanks," Jeff replied. Kevin turned to walk away as fast as he could.

"Yo, Kevin!" Jeff blurted out. Kevin turned back towards him. "You owe me a dollar."

"What?"

"Yeah man," the kid smirked as he pointed to the pump behind

Kevin's right shoulder. "We guarantee a dollar if our attendant doesn't ask to check your oil," he read the sign like a rehearsed schoolboy.

"Yeah, right man. You're funny." Kevin turned away once again.

"Hey," he leaned his head out the window, arm coming down along the side of the door. "I'm serious. You owe me a dollar."

Kevin turned quickly. "I asked you. C'mon man, I always do." Kevin raised his hand and brushed Jeff off. Jeff pushed the heavy door open and got out.

"Hey, I want my dollar. Where's your boss?" Jeff followed Kevin towards the office. Kevin walked in and saw Steve standing behind the counter.

"He's in the back garage. Go ahead, tell him whatever you want," Kevin continued. With his back towards the trailing complainant, he pointed to the garage off the side.

Kevin stood in the doorway. A few moments later Rich came in from the garage, rubbing his hands on a red rag, preppy boy right behind him.

"Kevin, this kid said you didn't ask him to check his oil."

"I did. I always do. It's habit now."

"Well, he says you didn't."

"Oh well."

"Well, the customer is always right. Giv'em a dollar."

"What?"

"Give him a dollar."

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah. Giv'em a dollar."

The preppy held his palm out with a smirk on his face. The windowed office began shrinking around Kevin. It closed in on his head like a vice, paralyzing him. Robotically, he reached in his pocket and pulled a crinkly dollar out, change from the soda and magazine before. He slapped it into Jeff's hand.

"OK, good. Now that's settled." Rich turned and went back into the garage to finish his oil change. The preppy punk walked past Kevin and across the drive, unfolding the dollar bill before putting it into his wallet. Kevin stood stunned, watching the boy saunter around the elongated hood, slide behind the wheel

and drive away.

"Steve, let me have a cigarette," Kevin demanded, trapped by a sudden, desperate need for escape.

"You don't smoke Kid," Steve replied as he reached into his shirt pocket and handed one to Kevin.

"I do now." Kevin lit the cigarette with the same flame Steve struck for his own, then walked out of the office and across the drive. Kevin sucked the cigarette and exhaled as he leaned against the pump, elbowed propped on top.

"Hey Kid, you know you're not suppose smoke at the pumps," Steve called out. Rich will shit if he sees you."

"So what. Go tell him," Kevin said staring off in the distance.

"What the hell are you doing? Are you nuts?"

"Maybe."

Steve ran into the back of the garage without his usual sarcasm, yelling for Rich to come see "the Kid." The sound of metal clanging in the toolbox above mumbled profanity filled Kevin's ears. Everything was vivid and clear-- the silver chrome back bumper to the car in the garage, the red brick face of the gas station-- like those moments on the court when Kevin lost all self-consciousness and simply flowed in the movement of the game. No thinking, just movement. With the cigarette hanging from his mouth, Kevin lifted the nozzle from the pump. He squeezed the trigger sending a steam of gasoline into the air then slapping the pavement.

"What the hell . . ."

Kevin quickly turned around. Rich stood in the garage doorway, as if looking at a train wreck.

"Give me my dollar back," Kevin blurted out.

"What the hell are you talking about, Kevin?" Rich still had that fatherly tone in his voice. The boss. "Christ sake, put the hose back. It was just a dollar, nothing personal. I have a business to run."

"That's right, it was just a dollar. And it's personal now."

Rich scrunched the rag and shuffled it in his pocket as he started to walk towards Kevin. "Don't be ridiculous, just . . ."

Kevin turned the nozzle at Rich and pulled the trigger sending a stream of gasoline across Rich's work boots.

"What the hell are you doing, Kid!" Steve yelled, jumping back and away from Rich.

"Shut up asshole. This has nothing to do with you."

A long burnt ash fell from the cigarette in Kevin's other hand which he held up in front of the nozzle, "Are you going to give me the fucking dollar or not?"

"All right, all right." Rich's tone had changed as he fumbled in his back pocket, pulling his wallet out. "Here, here take the dollar." Rich held it out with one hand.

"No, come here and put it in my shirt pocket."

"Okay, okay. Just be careful, Kid." Rich's hands shook as he reached between the cigarette and nozzle Kevin held up in front of him. Kevin's eyes remained locked on the fear in Rich's. He pushed the bill down into the pocket and quickly stepped back.

"Keep going," Kevin commanded. "All the way back. Into the garage." Rich and Steve quickly walked into the garage bay and turned to watch Kevin. Now, for the first time Kevin felt his heart pound the walls of his chest. He placed the nozzle back into the pump. Without looking he could see them out of the corner of his eye. Standing, staring, motionless, like defenders he'd leave behind on the court.

Kevin walked off the drive onto the street. He didn't know where he was going, just walking. He flicked the cigarette down. "You're fucking nuts!" Steve yelled out.

At the end of the block, Kevin slid two fingers into his shirt pocket to reclaim the dollar, but now felt a brief surprise at feeling the letter tucked behind the crumpled bill. He opened it, read again.

Kevin,

You are no longer welcome to visit. And your calls and letters will no longer be accepted at our house. Cherise is not permitted to see you ever again.

Signed,

Mrs. Stevenso (Cherise's Mother)

It came two days ago, after Mrs. Stevenson opened Kevin's last letter and learned about that night in the car. He folded the

Timothy A. Hanley

letter in half, then pulled the wadded bill through two fingers to flatten it, folded it in half over the letter, and ripped them both down the middle. He continued tearing the paper into smaller and smaller pieces, letting them fall to the ground. He started to run, lifting his thighs in long strides. The bulky weight of his work boots reminded Kevin of the ankle weights he used to wear while training for basketball.

But his feet felt much lighter now.

Lisa L. Siedlarz
Learning Curve Removed

Fourth grade, I watch Sister Rosetta snap
a ruler across Bogdan's right hand for failing
to speak English. Born in Poland, this is his
initiation to American schools. Bogdan's first
English word in response is *ungh*, learned from
a TV his parents bought so he can study this garbled
noise of language through black and white images
of cowboys and Indians who shove, shoot and grunt.

Sister holds up a picture of a dog and Bogdan whispers
pies. I repeat *P-yes* softly, how my grandparents speak
behind closed doors when they think I am sleeping.
I raise my arm, fingers wiggling for attention. Sister
nods, so I stand and bark *PIES* then smile at Bogdan.
Sister asks if I think it funny, her weapon - a history
book heavy on my head, is a lesson: *THAT* language
is forbidden.

Yesterday Dad said when he was young, the language
spoken in this school was an extension of the land
left behind. Today, I am puzzled over the Nuns' pride
in forbidding connection to their cloistered past. Tomorrow
Bogdan and I will sneak into church, listen to Sisters utter
illicit prayers to *Swieta Maria* and her son *Jezus*. Gnarled
and veined fingers press together in prayer, turning away
from heritage like a rigid back, or a ruler

that burns for another opportunity to snap.

Rayon Dwain Lennon
Sestina to Patricia

Dear Patricia:

I have housed you in my mind these years,
across acres of time and shiny ocean stillness
that merged old age and new innocence.
How you swung hands with me, my love,
the island was summer and we were young
after school on a Friday afternoon, a light breeze,

a moment unfolding in the fluttering breeze
shedding your school-blue uniform, only thirteen years
into your life, kissing me wildly, the young
birds chirping from shady alders, my fingers stilled
electric nerves on your cool night skin, with love
taking you one step farther from your innocence.

Time and tears flooding our innocence
I left you unsung songs in the island breeze
scattering our feelings into a family of fallen leaves. My love
of Jamaica, unlove of America, two aging worlds, years
of cold, warm days, oceans apart, our time still,
ageless, locked away in the sunful days of youth.

This day finds you older, decades past your youth,
a matron, housed in warm incense,
wrestling life and petting boredom, in a still
and lonely countryside, tempted by evening's sultry breeze
to rebuke the cries of your children and dream back years
into hours of riverbed loving.

The grass is golden in my mind. I dig for love
and hope green springs and fresh memories make you young
again, once a scene unfurls in your mind, summer years,

Rayon Dwain Lennon

the way the sway trees giggled, we mocked innocence—
two bodies bonding, sounds knocking on the breeze,
the world rocking until the moment lying still.

I have collected your dimpled smiles, braided hair--still
photos into a tearful lake, and love?

Love can exist that way, framed alive with ease
along a stream squinting sunlight into eyes of young
lovers and jasmines burn their lives for incense.

I have ordained you a goddess, exalting you for years

and praying, praying that the running years can be still
like innocence, and you may not leave my stay, Patricia,
until the ripe old sun falls into our riverbed days.

Amy Ashton Handy
Nick's Eulogy for Jay

Today's lesson began with *The Great Gatsby*, for me.
For Rachel it began with her birth into purple tracked arms —
a fast learner she found
Rachel was a thing
that took care of itself.

Now, slouched at her desk,
small in her armor —black leather jacket, cold silver chains,
camouflage print pants—
Rachel says: "I ain't writing this."
Around her the others scribble fictional bitterness.

Realizing, I crouch beside her desk,
cautiously pry beneath the edge: "Hey."
What she doesn't say is
*It wasn't long ago that I buried my mom
and grieved for her, alone.*

Arms crossed, avoiding my gaze, she smirks. Hard.
Except her eyes begin to leak, and find mine.
"But it's a mad good book," she says,
(apologetic shrug) pretending she can't feel
the stream down her defiant face
splashing, shattering against the shell of leather
eventually leaving wet patches on her tee shirt like
bullet wounds.

At this sight I would say
*I will be your mother.
I will unwrap you and become shelter--
the place where you can grow
curling warm in my fluid devotion and I will never leave.*

My fingertips look alien on the boundary of the desk between us.
With nothing better to give
I say "I'm sorry."

Valerie B. McKee
Heirloom

I never thought my grandmother's hands
were ugly—I just knew they didn't look
like any others I'd ever seen: pale
and knotted, knuckles like cauliflower
rooted to her bones, sprouting at every joint.
Yellowed fingernails had ridges deep
as the Smoky Mountains surrounding her house
and I wondered what beneath would make
them crack down to the surface. Her wedding
band hung at the base of her ring finger, placed
there on her wedding day and never removed—
stuck sliding back and forth like the ball
on an abacus. When she died, they had to cut it off

for me. I twist her ring, watch it dangle
on my bony digit, run my finger tip across
the patched slit in its back, remembering
my hand resting under hers on the church pew,
kneading dough for bread, dealing cards
for gin rummy, brushing hair into pigtails, scratching
the soft spot behind Winston's ears— never
see my hands as my own again.

Julia J. Bakes

Blue Hole

Second Place

Celia Finch chews on the inside of her mouth. It is a nervous habit of hers that Josephine found very unsettling before she'd figured out exactly what it was; she'd at first been under the impression for weeks that Celia was just barely managing to swallow her anger at all times. The delicate, barely noticeable toothwork being executed inside her mouth (as she daintily crops the ragged surface of years of accumulated scar tissue with the very tips of her teeth) is offset by an occasional violent twitch of her lips, as she shifts her jaw for better access. The outward effect, the brief sneer and the quick smoothing of it, strongly suggests someone who is badly concealing her impatience - Josephine thinks that it probably accounts, at least partially, for the flimsier total she collects each night in tips, the customers just as disconcerted by the mocking twitch as she used to be. Celia barely even notices she does it, she says, but it keeps her from feeling so bored all the time, when at least her teeth are doing something. What else can she do while she stands there all day?

-You ought to chew gum, Josephine suggests one night while she folds napkins, watching with detached interest as Celia shoves a knuckle into the hollow of her own cheek and twists.

-Gum is disgusting, Celia says mildly, in her rich accent, when she has gotten whatever it was in there that was evading her. Josephine can't be bothered to challenge that.

When they finish folding the napkins and all the silverware is laid out, Celia and Josephine stumble blindly up two dark flights of stairs and get to sleep as quickly as they can, because they have to open the restaurant at six and already it's eleven thirty. The two of them have shared the cramped loft space two floors above the restaurant for almost a year, the distance between their beds remains respectful - talking distance, but not whispering. There, directly under the tin roof, it's hot as Hell in the summer and cold enough to curl their breath white before

their eyes in the winter, but it is the only home either of them has ever had in the States. When it rains, the room is filled with a cacophony of tinkles and clinks from the pie plates set out on the floors and countertops (which do little good, but who can spare pots?), and Josephine dreams nervous dreams of being trapped in an enormous, untuned music box. When it blows, the wind whistles like a fat train conductor through the imperfections in tin, and neither of them sleeps at all.

It's from those insomnious nights that Josephine has learned all she knows about flying fish, fungee, and cola champagne – when Celia opens her eyes to the ceiling, and, as though inspired by the rust and splinters she sees there, resurrects the warmth and spice of her old life to the tune of a dry winter wind. Josephine always listens, she never offers. Josephine considers the dominating feature of her past to be the fact that she attended Catholic schools as a child – a whole chain of them, one right after the other, as her family moved from province to province – and the slate grays and navy blues of her childhood memories clatter dully against the reds and golds and greens of Celia's life. What Josephine remembers is too much like the room around them, and that's not the idea.

Instead, she provokes. Josephine is never too sure how wide she may open up to Celia, whose abrupt lip pursings still set her off-balance now and then, how ribald she can allow her humor to get. Occasionally she will curse their boss, test the waters, see what kind of reaction she can dig up.

-Someday, I'm gonna drown him, she says, one night. Toss him right off the bridge. Concrete shoes and all. I could make it look like an accident.

She is mostly kidding, cracking her knuckles like a gangster. Celia gives a dry smile over her book, eyes lowered, that tells Josephine absolutely nothing.

-Total accident, Josephine persists, feeling increasingly wicked. Whaddya say, Celia, huh?

-Some real careful accident, Celia says, with those concrete shoes and all.

-Then I'd have to make sure it was off a bridge, Josephine says, pleased that Celia's playing along. Smack! Then it could be an accident, right?

-Or maybe they'd say he done it himself.

-Even better. See, now we're getting somewhere. Drowned himself or drowned by accident, whatever they decide it was, but either way leaves the whole joint to us, right?

-We have a saying about that, where I'm from, Celia says, and puts her book down. About drowning by accident. I mean, you know. Where I'm from swimming is second nature, it's an island, you gotta swim. First nature, even. I mean, if there's no storm and someone up and turns up drowned, first thing everybody gotta wonder is whether we'll be seeing that person in Heaven, you know, when the time comes. That's a tricky thing.

-What? Why? Josephine demands with sudden interest. Like - like because it was suicide maybe? That whole mortal sin bit?

-Sometimes, Celia says.

-Oh suicide, hell, says Josephine. Like you can just drown yourself like that. You haven't got any bridges, you just wade right in and there it is? That'd be like holding your breath till you died, wouldn't it? You can't do that.

-Bad way to go about it, Celia says, but you can do it if you know where to go. I seen it done, I really have. Not the holding the breath, the drowning. They say, my family say, the crucial part is who went to who. My mother say that's how God decides.

She draws her hands to ear level, and chops them down emphatically from side to side.

-Either the water come to you, or you come to the water -

-Nobody just drowns themselves, Josephine scoffs. Not outside lady novels. That's like dying of a broken heart. Drowning's a strict accident.

-An accident's an accident. But either the water come to you, or you come to the water, Celia says staunchly. Makes all the difference in the world.

Josephine makes an indistinct noise of skepticism, and Celia adds, goaded,

-My momma told me a story about a man who drowned himself in a blue hole.

-A blue hole?

-Oh, a blue hole, Celia says, in the half-pained way she always adopts when she pretends to remember that she's speaking to the ignorant. That old thing, her voice implies. Josephine smiles

in the dark; this is ritual by now, a slow unveiling of an artifact, proof positive that life exists beyond the grey borders of New England. The tone Celia's voice has taken on has a Pavlovian effect on Josephine, she has acquired a taste for and savored previous discoveries – plantains, the unlikely green bananas that taste more of potato than fruit; or Junkanoo, the chaotic, epileptic, steel-drum beaten, stilt-celebrated New Year's festival; or nutmeg - as a natural thing, rather than a dull powder in a bottle at the grocer's – shipped to outdoor markets from Grenada, a shiny, dark brown nut covered in a web of red threads that is quite poisonous if not treated correctly, quite hallucinogenic if taken differently. Amazing, golden, cinnamon-scented memories that are better than anything that ever came out of her own mind.

-Picture a blue hole in your head, Celia tells Josephine.

It is exactly as it is named. The shallows around the flat islands of the Abacos are a comforting womb-temperature, and a lazy, hazy, midmorning blue, and so ludicrously clear that a tossed nickel can be spotted, glinting and miniscule, twenty feet down. The ancient, terrible oceans beg visitation like grandparents when they take the time to wash themselves tame through these shallows. There you are in the water, rippled white sand below and the broad blue sky above - the trees, if there are any nearby, creak benevolently in the tradewinds - and you, a baby in your cradle, know with intense certainty that nothing can ever be out of place again. For the effect to be perfect, this is when you might see it.

What could the first person to see one have possibly come up with to rationalize it? – there, in a warm white-sand waterway, where there ought to be nothing but more warm, white sand, is a blue hole – an ink blotch in the ground, no more than a few yards around. It's small, the way a single certain stab from a kitchen knife is small. It is a place in the ancient seams of the world that was just never filled in, a sudden, inexplicable drop, where the color goes from hazy morning to starless, winter midnight, darker even than the nearby dropoff to the real ocean. The water above the blue hole is several degrees colder than the water around it, and those degrees are nearly as discouraging

to swim through as a solid wall. Swim over it, that congealed circle of liquid night, and for an icy moment you have been torn from your shallow haven, from that friendly, pale water that welcomes visitors from the land so easily, and thrust into the cold darkness of open ocean, where old things lurk, and where land-things like you, with your impractical hairs and floundering sets of split legs, are neither welcomed nor respected. It is a humbling thing, perhaps even more than a jump in the real deep-sea, for its unexpectedness, its stealth. Its contrast.

-What are they? Josephine demands.

-What are they?

-I mean, like, how do they happen?

Celia hesitates, and begins to chew on the inside of her bottom lip.

-Volcanoes? Josephine suggests weakly, feeling she should clarify. Maybe? Or gas bubbles? Or whatever. I mean, what do scientists or whatever call it?

They're just caves, Celia explains, the beginnings of caves. But more important to her are the stories. There are stories about blue holes like there are stories about anything that startles. The most Celia knows is that her own mother had declared their island's resident blue hole, out there in the barrier reef, a door straight down to the bad place, a shortcut used by the devil himself. She had strictly forbidden her children from swimming anywhere near it.

-So I done it all the time, Celia adds reflectively after a moment or two.

-Spooky. I thought a guy drowned himself in there. Weren't you scared? Josephine has drawn her knees up to her chin like a little girl, her bare toes curled in the chill.

-Of course I was scared. What would have been the point if I wasn't?

-Who was the guy?

Celia gives a coy smile and picks at the threading hem of her blanket as though Josephine has just inquired about an eligible young man in her recent company.

-That was the story, she says. I don't know who he was, but I know a story with him in it.

Josephine is silent, unnerved by the white crescent of her smile gleaming through the dark.

Once, (Celia says,) on the sun-hot shores of Great Guana Cay, there was born a girl who loved the sea like most girls love boys. Every moment she managed to keep from her family and her chores she spent in his warm arms, and every evening she left him with a reluctant heart and land-heavy legs. The sea was her love and her life, and he knew, in his cold, wet heart, every one of her secrets.

But she was a girl, and God knows all girls have that apple-seed of jealousy in their hearts that germinates best in love. The sea knows everything there is to me, she said to herself one day, as she lay prone in her boat. Why should I not know everything about the sea?

But the sea would only lap quietly against her ankles while she sat in the boat, and would only hold her warmly as she slid from the gunwales. He told her nothing, and while she was disappointed, she was not dissuaded.

Playing hard to get? Huh! she said. Well, it won't fool me. I may not know all your deep, dark secrets, but I know how you work.

So she set out, gliding across his acquiescent back in her little boat, to get to the bottom of her true love. And since she had lived on that island all her short life, the girl's first stop was naturally the blue hole in the great reef, a great big mystery within rowing distance. What better place to begin?

Now it so happens that some years earlier a man from the town had lost a great deal of money and dignity in a bet, and had decided he'd just about had enough of living. He gave the matter long consideration, and knew he couldn't bear to think of any of his old acquaintances chuckling over his bloated old corpse once the deed was done. So what did that old man do, but tie sandbags to his feet and jump off his own little rowboat and into that blue hole?

-If he wanted to really disappear, Josephine interrupted, why didn't he just row out into the real ocean? It's bigger.

-He wanted a home burial, Celia said, of course.

He was not so unusual anyway. Some people always have those bags tied to their feet, shuffling hunch-backed against

them all their days. Some people just need to find the right place to drop themselves, and just disappear forever. He was one of them, and he sank down into the hole and nobody saw him again for a long while, at least.

So finally the girl's boat brought her to the very edge of the cold blue hole and glided to a stop, turning slowly clockwise as she sat and thought. Truth told, the hole gave her shivers, and not just because of the chill, but she was on a mission.

This is for your own good, she told the sea sternly before she jumped in, although it really wasn't.

The hole yawned its navy blue yawn beneath her feet, and she set her teeth in her mouth and scissored her legs. Down, and down, and down she dove, till the sun was a wavering beacon above and the pressure sang in her ears. Yet further still she went, not knowing what she meant to discover, till she thought she could no longer stand it. She paused a long while before admitting defeat, her mouth ballooned with the remains of her air, before with a mighty kick she aimed herself for the surface – because, for all her love, she was no dolphin or fish, and all relationships have boundaries.

Only, upon kicking, her foot was caught up in something rough there in the dark, and she was snapped back into place. She kicked again, and realized her foot had gotten all wrapped up in something strange. For a moment panic flooded her, electric-sharp, and she squirmed in a fury of legs and arms. After a moment or two of airless terror she realized that, though her foot was still tangled, she was rising, and the surface was just feet – inches – millimeters –

She broke the surface with a gasp and a swing of hair, ready to scold the sea hot, until, choking and puffing, she noticed something white and glinting had bobbed up along with her.

Why, she gasped, it's a set of bones! It's a man's bones!

For, of course, the sandbags only carried that old man so far down before lodging themselves in a messy overhang, and so that old man had drowned himself within easy sight of the sun. It may have just been the strange magic of the place, but his old bones weren't scattered or snapped – only a little gnawed in places, but still held fast by those ropes. It was her stray kick that had broken through the frayed, waterlogged threads at last

and sent him shooting for the surface alongside her.

She had a mission to attend to, but first things came first. Old man, she told the bones firmly after a few moments of careful thought, you are coming with me. And she began to push those bones into her boat.

At once the skeleton began to chatter and wail. Oh no, oh no ma'am! it hollered. Oh no, I can't go back, I ain't going back, oh no no no no NO!

Don't argue, the girl said stoutly, as she was getting used to dealing with contrary sorts of menfolk in unlikely forms. You need a proper burial, sir, and that is that.

And so the girl pushed and shoved until the bones slid, wailing, into the bottom of her rowboat -

-That's ridiculous, Josephine says. Skeletons don't stay together underwater with just rope.

-They don't talk, either, Celia points out blandly.

-And what's so special about that guy, that his skeleton talks? That's all a little too convenient. It seems like something's missing.

-I don't know, Celia says, it's magic, maybe. It doesn't matter. It's just a story.

There is a pause.

-So what happened then? Josephine asks.

-Who knows, Celia says. It's just some stupid story someone told me when I was a girl. The wind has stopped, why don't you go to sleep?

Josephine puts her head to her pillow, but well into the night she can hear the anxious clicking of Celia's teeth, all the way across the room.

They celebrate Christmas, then New Years, by eating Boston Brown Bread in spoonfuls from cans, and listening to the radio.

God bless the child, sings Billie Holiday, that's got his own.

-His own what? Josephine demands, scraping the bottom of the can. And why not bless the child who's gotta pay rent on his?

There are no gifts, but to atone Celia asks, after a time,

-So where was I?

Josephine comprehends immediately.

-She pushed the bones in her rowboat, says she.

The girl heaved the bones into her little boat, rope and all, (Celia says,) where they bawled till she could hardly stand it.

Will you shut up? she asked politely. I'm trying to row.

Well, there's your problem! chattered the bones. Oh please, oh you beautiful girl, you wise, wise, brave girl, please don't bring my bones to the land!

Flattery may not win the world over, but it will surely make it hesitate. Why shouldn't I? the girl asked.

I, the skull told her with great dignity, have many sound reasons. Your big concern oughta be your reward for putting me back where I belong.

My reward? the girl asked dubiously. You wanna reward me for that? I thought enchanted things like you were supposed to reward for virtue. And, Mister Bones, what you are asking me to do ain't virtuous.

Girl, the bones said, I was a coward when I was alive, and a vain coward at that, and vain cowards give the best rewards, if it's in their best interest. And who will it hurt? I got no family, and it'll save me the pain of having the laughter of fat old men rattling around forever there where my ears used to be.

Is that all? Is that the big deal? the girl scoffed. What a dumb thing to be so afraid of!

Some things matter more once you're dead, the bones told her. Someday you'll get it.

The girl paused and considered, the bones sloshing in the bilge water.

All my life, she said, I have learned only a few very important things. I have learned how to cook curry, that the sea is good, and that all people need a proper burial in the end.

What, your momma tell you that? the bones said scathingly. These ain't your momma's bones, who's she to say what's best? For the sake of my rest and peace of mind, girl, please put me back!

Well, the girl thought about it -

A sharp snap and a long crackling punctures the quiet; three shapeless boys in winter coats are lighting off roman candles in the alleyway, crowing and whooping and stamping to warm their toes. It's midnight, and Celia and Josephine crowd the

small window, their breath fogging the panes as their eyes fill with sputtering light. It never occurs to them to be angry with the noise, even though their alarm is set for six. On New Year's Day, the boss leaves early, already half-drunk at seven thirty, and Celia continues quietly over three pans of dishes.

The girl thought about it, and picked up her oars.

Oh please, begged the bones, but the girl shushed him right up.

Be quiet, you, she said. I'm bringing you back. Keep your pants on.

The skeleton, finding it unnecessary to remind her about the lack of pants in the general situation, rings out with, Oh, bless you, bless you!

This ain't the kind of thing you bless somebody for, the girl said. Boy, I'll get in trouble if anybody finds out!

But the bones were too busy celebrating to pay attention. Mercy, said that old man, but am I a lucky set of bones!

With a sigh, the girl pulled up to the old blue hole, and tugged and pushed those bones into the water, where they bobbed to the surface. The girl reached for her shelling knife, and took it to the rope that was still dangling from the skeleton's bony ankle.

I'll do it, she said, but all I want is forgiveness for doing it.

The rope tore in her hands, and with a massive, windy sigh of utmost relief, the bones began to drift apart in the water, and smoothly sink. There was a long pause, where the girl thought about what she'd done, before suddenly the voice of the bones drifted to her ears. The skull had floated once again to the surface, its yellow teeth clacking gently in the water.

Girl, it said, with sleepy contentment, virtue is virtue, but not many folks will ever do the wrong thing for the right reasons. The sea and I, we've talked before while I was hanging around down there, and we've decided on what it is you ought to have. When those sandbags you drag get too heavy and take you down into a blue hole someplace, you won't suffer like me. You won't stare at the sun while your lungs become white-hot horseshoes in your chest, and when your body loses life down under the surface, you won't sit around to rot and bloat. No, girl, if you ever drown you'll be right away nothing but seawater and foam instead of brittle bones and heavy meat, you'll be the sea itself!

Then you'll know the sea's true secrets, and in his very own language. And now, if you'll excuse me –

It seemed the skull smiled at her, though it had always been grinning in the first place, before it sank like a stone, a bright white spot fading into the quiet ink-dark of the blue hole, where it disappeared – for good.

Some nights Celia will be cornered by their boss in an irrational rage, or a cocky rum-scented customer with some proposition to offer, and Josephine will only be able to tell by her smile that she has quite lost her temper and it is time to intervene. Then Celia will smolder in the back room over a bowl of cereal, her knuckles going spidery white, without ever quite crying. She quietly spoons cornflakes into her mouth, wiping her face with the tissue Josephine always provided. It's the only exercise the tissue gets.

Josephine sighs one evening and whips her dishtowel over the back of her chair. Celia places another dish in the wire rack, and begins another hard scrubbing.

Josephine rests her heels on the bar of the chair, elbows on knees, chin on palms, and watches Celia's rolled-sleeves flicker in and out of sight.

-When are you going to get out of here? she asks, and Celia's back is still for a moment, the water hissing and steaming.

-How long have you been here, Josephine goes on, a year and a half now? You can't do this forever, Cel.

Celia has begun to scrub again before the words are out.

-I have nothing saved, she says. You know I have nothing saved.

-Maybe you should start, then.

-There's nothing to save. I pay rent, I pay the boss for food, the rest goes home. You know that.

-Why did you even come out here to begin with?

Celia carefully dries a dish.

-Don't start this again, she says.

-Celia, really.

-I came here on my own, Celia says, her fingers tight on the dish, and that's all that matters. They tell me good things about this place, and I come. They tell me it will be easier here, and I

come. I may be sinking, but I come here myself, Josie, and that's what matters. I pay for my own mistakes.

She places it in the rack, and stiffly turns to the vegetables laying on the counter for tomorrow's omelettes.

Josephine raises a detached eyebrow, her fingers curled against her cheek. She didn't think Celia was capable of melodrama.

-Is that so, she says.

-It is.

-Celia, why don't you go home?

-I can't.

-It's where all your money goes, there's someone for you there—

-If I go back there, I'll drown. Celia's lips give a violent twitch.

This is so unexpected that Josephine almost laughs in disbelief.

-I thought everyone from your island knows how to swim.

-What do you think, Celia asks tersely, chopping vegetables in mechanical, indifferent motions, and sweeping them to the side with the flat of her knife. What do you think, there isn't more than one way to drown?

That night they don't get up to bed until half past midnight. The boss keeps them from their work with a long speech; Celia has mysteriously upset another customer, and she may consider this her final warning. Josephine honestly can't see this as a bad thing, past a potential loss of her roommate and half the month's rent – Celia needs a reason to be pushed out of there as far as she is concerned – but she studiously ignores the noises that come from the bed across the room later that night. The hiccupping sound of tears is paralyzingly embarrassing, barely audible above the clattering of pie tins.

In the morning, well before the horizon is even beginning to turn gray, Josephine flings a limp arm with enormous effort toward the table lamp, fumbling for a moment before yellow light floods her wall and her own puffy, pillow-wrinkled face. She lurches to her feet like the movement is an accident, and stumbles into her slippers and across the small room, toward Celia's bed, which is thus far motionless. Her eyes are so gummed with sleep that she calls Celia's name three times in a drowsy, muffled yawn before she bats at the sheet and realizes

two things in quick succession:

The first is that Celia is not there, and the bed is barely wrinkled.

The second is that the bed is wet – soaked, dripping softly on the cold wood floor.

Josephine reels at this before she even quite knows why. She stumbles backwards in a very real panic before she manages to clamp down on her own instinct, nostrils flaring with the effort. She holds the bedpost, tightly, in both hands, heaving for breath as though she'd wakened to find herself hanging out the window. She is being silly. She is being very silly. A wet bed. Why does this frighten her so badly?

It stormed last night. Even as she thinks it, a drop of water lands directly on her scalp, and she breaks out into clammy goosebumps. Another leak, a bad one. Celia must have moved during the night when her bed began to fill up with rainwater. Where has she gone?

-Celia? she calls, still clutching the bedpost. It sounds embarrassingly like a bleat in the silence.

Her pulse uneven, Josephine gives a helpless look around the room, at how enormous, how dirty it is when she is alone. She puts her fingers in her mouth, and tastes salt.

Whitney B. Gallagher
Homecoming

Coming home,
you bear the harvest.
Drop it on my doorstep—
masses of golden fruit,
sea air,
ripe fields,
barnacle and squash blossom.
Unveil for me staggering wealth
I only knew in saltwater dreams,
where we met
in drunken sleep.
Where,
between oceans,
we strained to touch.

Marilyn C. Terlaga
He Tells Me ...

his fantasy is sex
with a young girl - eleven,
twelve. When I wince he says
if there were more honest men
there would be more nymphet
confessions and of course he
would never do it - guilt -
fear of a prison cell.

He opens doors for me,
touches my hair, knows when
to use who and the right time
for whom, the difference
between lay and lie.
We pass a pretty child on the street,
I don't look at his face.

Jean Copeland
Civil Union
Honorable Mention

We are civil
With or without your Union
We are love
With or without your approval
Don't say we don't matter,
Our love doesn't look like yours
It is like yours, just like it
It is blazing intensity, ecstasy and comfort
The tangy taste of bitterness, hopelessness
Dreamy, passionate, true
The fire inside that keeps us alive, all of us
We are free
With or without your rights
We have love from above
No matter how you taint it
We are dreams
We are hope that humanity can embrace
Each other, hopefully
We are everything you are
But we don't crush you like you
Crush us, banish us, bedevil us
We are civil and we have dignity
Whether you understand the need
To treat us that way or not

Nick Dorio
Self-Portrait

The room was small but well furnished. On one side there was an old, unlit fireplace with an oak mantle, painted white and adorned with mementos and souvenirs from a lifetime of travel. Facing the fireplace sat an upholstered armchair and ottoman, worn and fraying, on which lay an old flannel afghan. Next to the chair was a wooden end-table which held up a half bottle of scotch, an empty glass, and years' worth of dust. The floor was a cold and dry hardwood, knotted and warped as it ran from wall to wall. Crooked book shelves filled and burst out onto the torn throw rugs. Against each wall were piled rows of unfinished canvases. Hundreds, perhaps, of discarded pieces. Faces missing eyes or a nose peered and hung over unformed landscapes and half bowls of fruit. The room was mostly dark. The only light came from one flickering candle melted into a windowsill. Outside, a cold December rain washed away the slush and salt of a week's worth of snow. Inside, the comforting rhythm of the rain mingled with the dance of the candle, and an old man sitting at an easel hummed to himself.

The old man was painting his portrait in the dark. He sat on a stool, one foot resting on a crossbar, while the other arthritically tapped the ground. Next to his easel, propped up on an old wicker chair, teetered a large mirror. As he painted, his eyes flashed back and forth from it to the canvas. In the low candlelight of the room, his reflection was a gray landscape of shadows, like satellite photos of the moon. He squinted at long valleys of wrinkles, and a tranquil sea of pock marks. He mixed paints and colors blindly, squeezing and cutting tubes out onto the palette he held loosely in his left hand. He pulled the brush from his clenched teeth, slammed it into the swirl of paint, and slapped it onto the canvas. The easel shuttered and shook with each stroke, and a cane that hung from its wooden frame rocked back and forth to the beat of the candle's flicker.

As he painted his eyes and hands worked on their own; carv-

Nick Dorio

ing out the shape of his brow or the few wisps of hair that still fell across his forehead. It was during these moments of artistic nirvana that he allowed his mind to wander. His thoughts and memories rained down upon him. He traveled this way, to his youth. He skipped stones on lakes and cut through high grasses with wooden swords. He laughed and kicked at his covers while his mother read him bedtime stories. She smiled and patted his head proudly as he painted by the window in his childhood bedroom. He had quickly taken to oils. He loved the way painting smelled, how the paint and the thinner created an odor which demanded attention and excited his imagination.

In the dark room, the old man took a long, deep breath through his nose. In addition to the multitude of unfinished work that littered the room, the walls were covered with completed pieces. Decades of work, a lifetime, hung about the dark room, collecting dust. Dust was the final ingredient to all of his art. The old man stopped painting for a moment to look around the room. He scratched unconsciously at his ticking knee, and stared at the painting that hung above the fireplace. It was a scene of a fenced in backyard. The sun was setting in the background, and on the left, a tire swing hung from a tree branch. Under the swing, a lone black boot sat, unlaced and fallen on its side. He remembered the backyard; it had been his own when he was young. But he couldn't remember when he had painted it. He scanned the walls of the room. He couldn't remember when he had painted any of them, not anymore. All he knew was that it must have been long ago. He hadn't finished painting anything in years.

He turned back to the mirror and peered into his reflection. The candle caused the light of the room to jump around, and his face looked like a blur of shifting shadows. He squinted and looked into his eyes. Without looking away, his hands cut paint out of their puddles with his palette knife, mixing it into unseen hues. He dabbed his brush, and began painting again. The rain pounded about, and the old man was in art school again. He had painted endlessly. Through constant practice rather than professorial instruction, he found his style. He graduated with a smile on his face. He was so confident then. It was this

confidence that attracted women, and he had known many. But he never took them as seriously as he did his painting. His keen eye found too many flaws and not enough paint to fill them in.

Of all the furnishings in the room, there were no photographs of loved ones, no letters tucked into desk drawers. There were plenty of antique clocks and worn flasks and tarnished gold pocket watches and handcrafted wooden nutcrackers. But none of them were inscribed; there were no messages of love attached to any of them. None had been gifts; but purchases, mere souvenirs from his past. They had long ago lost their meaning to the old man. He forgot where he had gotten them, who he had been with, what they had cost. Now they were just things, prizes from a life that had begun not to matter. But there were the paintings, finished or unfinished, and they alone smiled lovingly at him from their corners of the room.

The old man scratched off dried paint from the canvas with his fingernail. His eyes bounded from the mirror to the painting, searching through his work. In the dark, his eyes strained, but his instincts flourished. He wasn't painting his image. He was painting himself. The illumination he needed couldn't come from the flick of a switch. From all around the room the paintings watched him. He felt their oily stares on the back of his head, and he saw their longing looks in the mirror's reflection.

The old man huffed at himself. He bared his teeth. He scowled. He angrily began to smash paint onto the painting. It caked and dripped. He worked swiftly, heatedly, pounding the canvas. He dripped back in time. He began drinking once he started painting for money, rather than joy. He traveled for pride and respect, not adventure. He made fans, not friends. He gained renown. He found success. He lost everything else. The old man thought of all the women he hadn't loved, the opportunities he had passed over. The humanity he had abandoned.

The painting became more and more ferocious, and the old man's quivering leg pushed out from under him. He fell forward off the stool, crashing into the easel. It toppled backwards, with him on top of it. The palette, the brush, the knife, the cane, the paint scattered as the two smashed unto the knotted floor. But the mirror remained, unscathed. Moments passed, and the rain

Nick Dorio

beat and the candle flickered. The old man opened his eyes. He had fallen face first onto the painting. He coughed, and grabbed at his knee. Not broken, but hurt. He rolled off the canvas, and found his cane. Slowly and feebly he hoisted himself off of the ground. He brushed off his pants, and looked down at the mess. Paint and debris had spread out around the small room, but the painting remained intact. The old man sighed in relief, and caught himself in the mirror.

His face was covered in paint. He looked back and forth between the painting on the floor and his image in the mirror. He could see no difference between the two. After a while he forgot which was which. He lifted the mirror off the chair, and limped past the end-table, and the arm chair, over to the fireplace. He leaned it against the mantle, and reached up to remove the painting of the backyard. He unconsciously knocked over the meaningless mementos, and they went crashing and banging onto the floor. The dust that had smothered these trinkets came loose, and it fell all around him. He tore the painting from the wall, and tossed it into the pile of peering disfigured faces. With all of his might, he lifted the mirror onto the mantle piece. He looked into it, and saw.

Benjamin J. Kowalsky
The Skald of Shakespeare
Sings in Joyous Verse

At last with pen and page again I wrought—
or weapons of fashion'd digital, made—
a tale of art and men, and art purloin'd,
and bloodless hearts, and heartless minds so spoke,
of courage 'gainst the hordes of scholars' jeers;
we steadfast fail not purpose, aim, nor god.
No tree of Odhinn made display so grand
in praise of poets past, the Bard, that man;
such tales fantastic crafted Shakespeare!
So hear my tale, you lovers, young ones, hark!

When evening comes with promise sleep and dream,
and bright Orion aims his bow for sport—
he points the way to brighter stars and spheres—
the moon he hangs his face so close to lakes
admir'ing silver glow that pierces pride,
we can begin to see the night uncloth'd,
and bashful maid though she be at times,
she sheds her dress and tells me secrets dark:
of deer, of beast, of shadow'd bird, and soon
revealed were the pale and pallid forms
of what apear'd once men, but white with death.

Oh poem, how weak my skaldic stomach!
We are so soft to beauty, truth, and love
that sight of monsters turns us cowards,
describe, relate, and tell of hideous them,
of course, of course, but never doubt you this:
that creatures vile so do exist!

Some time before, I had to home return'd
from foreign shores in Eastern lands I came,
with treasures, friendships great, and glories won,

Benjamin J. Kowalsky

though far the course, and far the voyage was,
and leaving sweetest lips behind my steps,
still grateful eyes beheld awaited home.
When home I reach'd, the woodland spoke in song:
'Oh travel, sir, beneath our branches green!
In forest lush you shall a homestead make
Among us, Freyr's children fair you'll bide!
Of flesh you'll taste, with honey-mead you'll slake
the thirst of hunters, seekers, prophets, skalds!
Oh come, sire, beneath our bower green!'

Their bower green became their bower white,
and bode within a willow cabin poor,
with neither friend nor foe, but fire burn'd
to light my heart and warm my blood and hands.
I kept Odhinn's mead and drank in daily sips
the dangers of inspiration fill'd me with awe,
and I wander'd drunk into holy night
where wicked things unclean had made their roost.

Unclean they were, those feasting beasts of prey,
nay parasites to artists, poets' bane:
Mackinnon, Marx, Foucault, Derrida, preach'd,
in tongues unknown they esoteric wax'd;
in phrases dark arcane, and black as pitch,
their mouths screaming revolution deep
but only deep as skin, bereft of hearts,
so blacken'd bloodless had their hearts become,
on suckl'd blood from ruddy Bards they fed.
They celebrated seething, foaming mouths
agape for feasts upon the living flesh,
of him, the Bard, the Shakespeare, famous scribe!

I fell upon them, the wolves, in dead of night,
when Mani show'd me ev'ning paths discrete.
I fell upon them drunk with Odhinn's mead,
and drunk with night, adorn'd with arms,
and Mjollnir worn to ward off evil plots

(their spells would have much done harm
had Thorr forsaken oaths he made to men).
The moonlight made them known to mortal eyes,
but mortal eyes and mortal minds perceive
not sickness deep, nor living, breathing wounds,
that walk and talk like men, but men aghast.

One had my presence seen, a formless wisp,
her stare was stone and yellow'd teeth or fangs;
I froze with fear, and clutch'd my heaving chest,
and mutter'd to Bragi, "bless my tongue, oh god
of eloquence and language, give me strength
enough to conquer evil spirits, godless men"
She smiled hungry, desp'rate lust burning black
desires wretched into breathless dreams.

She floated weightless cold and spoke in hush
and whisper quiet, ill thence spoke she thus:
"Oh Skald, I know that fearsome thoughts lie there
in troubled mind, you must be fool to come
upon our feasting lest you wish to join
and whet your tongue with sanguine tastes so sweet.
It was for the love of Shakespeare drew us near,
and we found sweetest flesh and blood so warm,
in paper, ink, and books we reach'd and found
that our hands—our words—so deeply could touch the Bard,
we gave him foreign clothes to wear, our clothes for our tastes:
An evil bard, an unenlighten'd poet,
of forgotten world-views, bawdy, brash, and coarse,
he represents a gender'd consciousness—
the patriarchal qua philistine qua
the phalocratic world of poems and art;
this we have laid to waste, and secrets taste
all sick and sour, soon to sugars made
and swallow'd full, and gladden'd human throats
will seek to praise our names alone as great
(forget bards and poems, and a brave new world comes
with our star guiding ships of interpretations).

Benjamin J. Kowalsky

Where right does not exist, nor wrong, nor love
just cold and pure, distinct, and righteous prose,
when nothing sings, but deathless silence grows."

So spoke she, taking silent breath and pause,
and smiled vicious, malice satisfied;
I was undaunted, brave and bold, and sure
a challenge had been issued, t'poetry
against that cold which whisper'd death and ill.
Mine art, my tongue, prepar'd for greatest war
and swiftest death to deal, by word or ax.
Within my heart and mind, were weapons worse
than conjured magic prose, I spoke my verse:
"Thou wench, usurper, banshee foul, impure!
Mine ire doth inspire verse and jibes
that aim to snap pretension's paltry claims;
thy speech was awful poor, I shall atone
creating verses holy, pure, divine!
Thou hast no style, rhythm, meter, none!
Thy bitter jealousy, and lack of love
for Shakespeare drew thee hither — greed and thirst —
with pure intention shall I drive thee hence!
Destroyer art thou: desolate and dry,
creating nothing, desert dreams of dust,
how couldst inspire works of Shakespeare's kind?
Away, thou filth, away and get thee gone,
from here, from there, from shadow, shade, and night,
from poems and poets, lovers, bards, and light!"

I closed my speech with fiery words and threats;
the witch unmoved, derisive cackle made,
began to call her consorts, demons foul.
And soon, they came by Shakespeare's blood bedeck'd,
their hands and faces soak'd in deepest red,
but baseless thirst cannot be quell'd enough;
I drew my arms, my ax, and pray'd again:
"Oh son of Odhinn, god of thunder-clap,
I pray thou give me strength in heart and arms.

All-father, give me skill and rain down death
and should I fall, then guide me safely home
to halls which house the brave, thy chosen ones,
where valor shall forever live in tales."

They came upon me driven mad with lust,
and strange new smells of skaldic blood afresh,
but teeth refus'd to bite, and pierc'd no flesh —
for Thorr's protection would not fail me now —
my song became the sound of splitting air,
and spilling blood of foes, and broken bones;
like bravest Tyr, my courage rose to fight,
and battle maidens gathr'd 'round to watch.
These beasts were scholars: clever, cunning, sly,
but scavengers are hardly eagle's food
My arm like Mjollnir struck, and shatter'd sense,
with ax detatch'd their heads, dispatch'd them thence!

The witch, that banshee, screaming awful gasps
defended life with curs'd incantations;
she spoke in French and Latin languages
to hide her lack of honor, mask'd defeat:
"Thou skald! Thou hopeless poet, stop, desist!
Thou art too clos'd of mind and stubborn ways,
the tree that bends not, breaks most easily;
and songs thou hast yet t'hear are fallen lost
because thou cast the world into thy mold,
and made thy good the only good and true.
What bloodshed comes from views too hard to bend?
What violence done when civil bonds are loos'd?"

That hateful hag before me cower'd low
and sudden broke the sound of horse's hooves,
but eight fine hooves, and gallop'd fast in haste;
I knew the Lord of Vict'ry had arriv'd,
and Gungnir wielded, spear of Dwarven make.
He thrust the air aside and peirc'd the clouds,
and brought the point to bear upon the hag

Benjamin J. Kowalsky

and wrench'd the mortal life from mortal corpse;
she twisted under Gungnir's weight and lost
her breath, and soon she parted lips and loos'd
the blood from Shakespeare stolen, blood to owe,
so paid she full for gross misdeeds, and died.

Then Odhinn turn'd his head and tipp'd his hat,
and smiled fair upon the battle won;
not resisting giving parting gifts,
the Lord of Hosts so spoke his wise advice:
"A miserable man,
and ill-conditioned,
sneers at every thing;
one thing he knows not,
which he ought to know,
that he is not free from faults. "

So parted Odhinn, god of gods and men;
I tended Shakespeare's wounds and bade him stay,
by skill, dispers'd his ills from sickened veins,
and soon he breath'd the purest forest air.
September came, and Shakespeare parted hence
and left a book of poems as gift and wrote
"to Odhinn's man, thou woodland skald, I praise,
may long thou live and bide among the trees"

Amy Ashton Hand
Character Driven

Write me into one of your stories. I want you
to see me leaning against your office door,
or singing
unselfconsciously alone in my car,
maybe brooding over some hardback as I sit on the library steps at dusk
(don't let me catch you watching).
I want you to collect my presence
in your mind as if I trouble you and you don't quite know why
and later, alone,
conquer your self-doubt and
strip me of surroundings
(make it a tender process of unwinding,
of running your hands over me
until you understand where to reach,
what to take,
how to immerse yourself in what you imagine I feel).
Fascinate.
I don't care what I say or do, and
you don't have to make me beautiful,
just real,
just alive in a fixed point
from which your experience radiates across the page.

Andrew Lennon
Small Steps

Leland Smith works at the law offices of Liva, Kowalsky & Schultz on the thirty-seventh floor of a sixty-story building. Each morning he wakes up at six and walks one thousand eight hundred and twenty three steps to Forty-Second Street and Ninth Avenue. Leland Smith works eight hours a day, forty hours a week, two thousand and eighty hours a year, shuffling and sorting and filing and archiving. Leland Smith is six-foot-two, and a hundred and fifty six pounds, with blue eyes, and dark chocolate hair that is graying despite the fact he hasn't left his twenties. At six thirty this morning Leland plucked thirteen of these hairs from his scalp with a silver pair of tweezers, but thirty-three remain, unnoticed. Leland Smith credits the passivity he feels about his job and his life to a tumor in his brain that doesn't exist, and his project of self-improvement is limited to prayer.

As he walks to work in measured steps he prays that when he gets off the elevator on the thirty-seventh floor, Liva, Kowalsky or Schultz will be waiting with a promotion or a raise when the doors open. Whenever one of the thousands of pieces of paper he files and sorts and archives and shuffles makes a burning slice through his skin he prays that the next time it happens he will have the nerve to submit a salty letter of resignation, and that one of the men in accounting who might have noticed his meticulous attention to detail might recommend Leland to a brother he might have who might work on Wall Street who might be in need of a good man.

At the end of particularly long and tedious days when it takes Leland two thousand three hundred and nineteen steps to walk home, and on absolutely terrible days when the shuffling of his feet allows him, technically, to make the walk home in one very dragged-out step, Leland mumbles a prayer to fall asleep that night and not wake up in the morning.

Leland Smith awoke with a headache between his eyes and in the base of his neck on this last business day before the holidays. He awoke late for work, too. He ran from his bed to the bathroom to the kitchen to the narrow but deep closet beside his bed. There he chose black trousers with thin gray pinstripes, a light blue shirt missing its collar-stays, and a yellow paisley tie. Such is the morning routine of Leland Smith, though on days he isn't running late he relieves himself, showers, boils water, and picks out his clothes with a scuffing of his feet that has more than once led the tenants below to complain to the super about rats in the walls. On this day it took Leland only one thousand six hundred and one steps to arrive sweaty-backed and cold-nosed at Liva, Kowalsky & Schultz on Forty-Second and Ninth. When the elevator reached the thirty-seventh floor Leland's long legs vaulted him out of the elevator and into the chest of Liva.

He had last seen Liva not at work, but outside Macy's on the corner of Thirty-Fourth and Seventh the night before. On that same night, less than an hour before Leland saw him at Macy's, Liva had stood beside a rapidly shrinking four-foot-high pile of honey-baked hams and handed one to each employee as they entered the elevators, until his patience waned and he delegated the task to a secretary with thick glasses and buck teeth.

As he crashed into Liva, Leland Smith thought only of the ham Liva had given him, the woman outside of Macy's who wanted it, what he did about it, and how he felt when he looked up and saw Liva standing there. He tried to block all this from his mind, but the walls he built around the memory were translucent and he was conscious of knowing that he knew.

"Smith!" yelled Liva, "there you are my boy. No time for hugs, going down! You late? And yet here you are!" Liva said, patting him on the shoulder as he sidestepped toward the elevator. "You all right, Smith? You look pale," Liva said as he stepped into the elevator, "what are your plans for the holidays? My wife's parents invited us to the Hamptons, but I'll be in Brazil with my girlfriend. You traveling, Smith?"

"I'm sorry about the ham; I-" said Leland as the brushed aluminum doors closed in his face.

Leland walked past the front desk of Liva, Kowalsky, and

Schultz, and turned left. He walked past the kitchen that smelled of burnt chili, past the empty law library, past the closed door of the conference room, past the rain drops of keystrokes in the accounting office, and entered his door-less office in the western corner of the thirty-seventh floor. Though it was, generally speaking, a corner office, Liva, Kowalsky, and Schultz had decided upon purchase of the space to construct a hallway around the perimeter of the floor, so Leland had no windows in this nine-by-five-foot office. A framed motivational poster, eggshell paint, eight vertical feet of sheet rock, a few two-by-fours, and five feet of red-carpeted hallway blocked Leland's view of the city.

There was no chair in Leland Smiths' office, and it wasn't missing or being borrowed, nor was it being refurbished. "The very idea of your job, Smith," said Kowalsky when Leland was still an intern, "demands your cat-like mobility, your ability to fly here and there around this room; a chair would only slow you down."

Now Kowalsky was hunting wildebeest in Africa, and Leland was sitting on the corner of a filing cabinet, rubbing the bridge between his eyes with the fingers of one hand and the base of his neck with the other. Leland Smith knew that the aching between his eyes was caused by a tumor that was slowing killing him, though he was quite sure the aching in his neck was caused, indirectly, by the woman who wanted the ham.

It was his fault, he knew, for not taking the ham straight home following work, but it was the perfect snowy night for a walk, ham or no ham, and how could he have acted any other way when the woman did what she did? It was nothing to be ashamed of. Clearly. Such was the state of mind of Leland Smith as he sat on the filing cabinet.

After being given his honey-baked ham the night before, Leland Smith rode the elevator from the thirty-seventh floor to the lobby and walked through the revolving glass doors and into the dark. The yellow light of street lamps illuminated gently falling flakes that formed a fluffy layer of cake on the sidewalk. Leland tucked the ham under his arm and walked east down

Forty-Second Street to Bryant Park. He stopped for a moment at the ice rink and felt the subtle warmth of the white floodlights above his head. When a little girl's legs went out from under her and she slid with a thud and a whimper into the barrier in front of him, Leland adjusted the ham and walked out of the park and back onto Forty Second Street. Leland rounded the New York Public Library, walked south down Fifth Avenue, and seven blocks later turned west onto Thirty Fourth Street.

At the corner of Thirty Fourth and Seventh, Leland Smith approached a cluster of people that had formed around one of Macy's window displays, and he snaked his way toward the front to get a better view of the window. Underneath the sleeping Snow White window display a homeless woman sat on a sliver of sidewalk against the building where snow hadn't accumulated. She was holding out her right arm and supporting its elbow with the palm of her left hand, and was wearing a man's pea coat and two or three hats of different colors. Leland Smith didn't notice her until she stood and spoke to him, softly but directly.

"Could I have some change, sir, or perhaps your turkey?" she said.

Leland pretended he didn't hear her and kept his eyes fixed on the window display, until she spoke again.

"Sir, your turkey, could an old woman have it?" she said, and Leland's eyes left the window and focused on her face, grimy and wrinkled and segmented by a few wisps of thin, gray hair.

"It is a ham, and no, I'm sorry, she couldn't," said Leland.

"I meant me, I'm an old woman, could I have your ham?"

"No, I'm sorry, now would you please stop bothering me?" He fixed his eyes back on Snow White and his mind coursed in waves of disgust. This ham, this Christmas bonus, it was his only mark of recognition from a thankless job and he'd be damned if he was going to give it away to someone like her, a street woman. No responsibility, no bills, no Manhattan rent to pay, no job to hate. When the crowds didn't hand over the green in their wallets and their honey-baked hams she could go to a soup kitchen and eat for free. He was almost jealous of those things, but the smell of aged cheese that wafted up from

her face made him cringe and take a step back. He walked to the other side of the window and stood in the back of the crowd, but he still felt her presence.

After a moment the homeless woman walked slowly toward him, but past him, to the next window. Just as she passed behind him, someone other than her bumped into Leland and knocked the honey-baked ham out from under his arm and sent it tumbling into the snow. He looked down at the ham, propped in the snow, and then he whirled around and saw the woman walking slowly away. He opened his mouth to yell but no words came, and he stretched out his long arms and pushed her away from him. She stumbled forward and for a moment nearly regained her balance, but then her foot slipped off the curb and she fell into the road.

Leland Smith stood motionless when the woman fell, but when he raised his eyes and saw Liva standing there, not more than ten feet from him, he felt sick with guilt and tried to help her from the ground. She screamed at him then, and as he backed away he slipped in the slush of the street and fell backwards onto the road. When he stood, Liva was gone.

Leland was still sitting on the file cabinet rubbing his head with two hands when Liva walked in the office, and the sound of his own name startled him.

"Smith!" said Liva, "what are you doing? How was that ham?"

Leland winced.

"Mr. Liva, I'd like to apologize for last night. I know it looked terrible. Truth is I felt someone reaching for my wallet and I spun and shoved her before I saw how old she was. I didn't know-" said Leland.

"Never mind that," said Liva, "you don't owe any explanations, you know the truth of it and that's the only matter. Now what are those Christmas plans?"

"Staying in the city, I suppose."

"Brazil, my boy, that's where you should go! Mangoes and sunshine and naked and cachaça. Five thousand miles from the wife. You don't have one, do you, Smith?"

"No, I don't," said Leland. "Does yours know ab-"

"Not at all. I'm sure she knows, but what would she say? It's not about being a good husband. Good God, if I were the husband she wants me to be I wouldn't even know myself. True to myself. Keeps me happy. Anyway," said Liva as he turned and started away, "didn't mean to disturb you, Smith, Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas," he said as he walked out the door.

Leland stayed on the corner of the filing cabinet for a moment and then stood and walked out of his office and down the hall. He went into the library and put one hand on the back of a black fabric chair with chrome casters and turned and pulled it behind him out the door. He rolled the squeaking chair down the hallway, past the conference room, past the accounting room, and to his office where he spun it in front of himself and wheeled it through the narrow doorway. He backed it against the far wall, sat down in it, opened the nearest filing cabinet, and resumed shuffling, sorting, filing, and archiving.

Carolyn Z. Gerber
then and now

*my tears
condense
to form a pillar
of salt
like lot's wife
frozen
forever
in looking back
saline memories
burn
open wounds
unscabbed
fester
in my old woman's
locked closet
of childhood fears*

aware
is it mindfulness
learned
from other inmates
forced to be
in the moment
no yesterday
no tomorrow
awake
what did i dream
i ran into the ocean
buoyed on salty waves
sins washed away
baptismal font priest
anoints with oil
places salt on tongue

Matthew G. Tkach
In Bloom

Ears wide open.
Hear my breathing slow.
Tease.

Push me away.
Feel me continue.
Touch.

Open your mind.
And watch me lose mine.
Raw.

I'll come, for you.
Don't worry...just dream.
Love?

Almost in bloom.
That's the attraction.
Lust.

Magnetism.
Inexperience.
Crush.

On edge, you push.
Me over when you.
Sigh.

I'll wait for you.
To wake up. You may.
Cry.

Matthew Tkach

Little fawn. Large buck.
Our doe won't have to.
Know.

You'll grow so fast.
But for now, you're still.
Young.

Anthony Brano
Landscaping

Honorable Mention

The summer I was thirteen, I got the idea in my head that I ought to get a part-time job. I didn't really need the money—my father worked construction and made plenty during the warmer months—but some of the guys bragged the last week or so of school that they had jobs 'lined up,' which at the time made getting a job seem incredibly simple. One morning I heard my father fumbling around in the kitchen so I jumped out of bed and tip-toed into the hallway, which opened up to our kitchen. I heard the steady sizzle of the frying pan and the smell of sausage and eggs saturated the air. I crept into the kitchen and quietly took a seat.

Dad stood facing the stove. He crunched an egg against the edge of the counter. Bits of yolk oozed over the counter and he quickly swung his hand over the pan. He crumpled the empty shells in his hand and tossed them onto the counter. He needed to hunch down a little to reach the pan and often complained that the people who built our house built the cabinets six inches too short, but being at least six inches taller than most men certainly didn't help the matter. He was about as wide as the stovetop, and like me, he had dark curly hair. He cracked open another egg and the pan sizzled.

He turned and, with a plate in each hand, sat down across from me at the old oak table. He plopped a plate in front of me. I always preferred bacon over sausage, and the eggs weren't the way mom always made them. With her eggs, you could clearly tell the white from the yolk. Dad's eggs ran together with the two congealed and messy. I took a fork in hand and prodded my food. Dad took his fork and stabbed his eggs. A little bit of yellow bled from them, and he sopped it up with some bread. He ate the sausage with his hands. He stared down toward the table, blankly. He did that a lot, especially when he ate. Even then, he was often preoccupied. Years later he would tell me about how he toured Korea, and about what he saw there—

things he still sees.

He looked up. "So," he said, "you must have something on your mind to be up so early during vacation."

"Well, I wanted to know if I could get a job this summer," I said, staring at my plate. I figured it'd be better to ask him before he left for work, rather than when he got home.

"What's the matter? Your old man don't make enough money for you?" He said this with a smile on his face, but I couldn't tell how much he was kidding, and how much he was offended.

"It's just that a lot of the other guys are getting jobs this summer." I looked up at him and forced a smile of my own. I knew he was probably going to yell at me, and that was what I feared most. His voice had always been a growl, even if he claimed he was just talking loudly.

"You're in for a lot of hard work. All you'll find is shit jobs." He chewed on a piece of sausage, and little bits of grease collected at the corners of his mouth.

"I don't mind working hard; I can do it, really."

"You don't got to prove nothing to me, kid. You should just forget about it. I've been working every day since I was younger than you, and I can tell you it ain't any fun," he said.

"But Dad, what will the guys say? Cheech and Gino are painting houses, and Mickey Zeoli is helping at his father's store."

"To hell with them," he said. "I told you never to care what other people think. You're going to get a good job someday. You're not gonna break your balls every day like me."

"But Dad—"

My father pounded the table and our plates jumped a little. "Look goddamn it, you do what you gotta do. Eat your fucking eggs before they get cold. I gotta go." He tossed his fork onto his plate, and dumped the plate into the sink. He walked to the door, opened it and turned back toward me. "Don't fight with your sisters, and listen to your mother." He slammed the door behind him, and I was alone in the kitchen with my shitty eggs.

'Do what you gotta do.' That statement would seem positive to some people, but in Dad's language, it really meant something more like: 'do what you want, but when you fuck it up; I'll be there to say I told you so.' It meant that I really didn't have his

permission. Dad didn't get much schooling, but he knew things about rhetoric that no professor could teach. I looked out the door and watched his cream-cicle orange '64 Ford pick-up pull out of the driveway. I knew that he must have cared about me, somehow. It was just that he only had one gear when it came to social interaction. He talked to his kids and his wife the same way he'd talk to a complete stranger walking down the street.

Pieces of yesterday's paper occupied the corner of the table, so I sifted through them and found the want ads. Most jobs required some experience. I had never worked in a garage or on an assembly line before, so that ruled out half the paper. At the bottom of the last page, I saw an ad for landscaping. Dad did that kind of work when he was laid-off, and I used to watch him plant and trim things, and water some other things. The job seemed easy enough, so I tore the ad out of the paper.

I dumped my dish into the sink and went to change out of my blue pajamas and into a pair of torn jeans and a green t-shirt. Satisfied that the reflection in the mirror looked like a landscaper, I left my room and went back to the kitchen. By then, my mother was awake and cleaning the mess my father made at the stove. She had on a lime-green nightgown with little yellow flowers embroidered all over it. "Hi honey, what are you dressed so early for?" She yawned, sleep still weighing heavily on her eye lids.

"Going to go out and play with some of the guys."

"You want something to eat before you go?"

"Nope, Dad cooked for me." I closed the door behind me.

The house in the ad was a few miles away, so I got on my Schwinn, and pedaled away from home. I pedaled fast, enthused that I had a job 'lined up,' just like the rest of the guys. A small part of me wanted Dad to be proud, but at the time, I wanted to prove him wrong. I thought of all the things he'd done, all the stories I'd heard. Like how, when he was younger, he wanted to go to California. He just went. He logged for a year and saw trees that he said were 'big as a sonofabich.' I wanted to do things on my own. I wanted experiences that were my own, and not second-hand. I wanted money, and to say that I earned it. Most of all, I wanted to tell my father stories full of curses and

strange metaphors.

After a while, I reached the house in the ad. It was white and bare, with filthy brown spots all over the siding. The yard was bisected by a grey gravel walk-way. I parked my bike at the gate and walked to the door. On the grass to my left, I saw a crooked stack of tires and a muffler. To my right, I saw a white dog house, an almost exact miniature of the big house. The dog didn't seem to be around. I knocked and no one answered. I knocked a little harder, and after a while, the door opened half-way. A pair of dark eyes stared down at me, and a mouth full of yellow teeth took a long drag on a cigarette.

"Whatever you're selling, I don't want any," the man said.

"I'm here about the landscaping job." The door slammed shut, and I heard the man fiddle with the latch. Then the door swung open all the way and carried with it sweet odors from inside the house.

"Name's Mr. Hayes," he said, extending a slender but hairy arm down to me.

"I'm Paul Gespario," I said, taking his long hand into mine.

"Well, I'm going on a job if you want to start. I'll pay you twenty dollars for the day." He disappeared back into the house and left the door ajar. He emerged with a hat and a set of car keys, and I followed him to the garage at the side of the house. Inside there was a rusty Ford with an old lawn mower and some odd shearing equipment in the back. The two of us got in and slammed our doors in unison. This job stuff really didn't seem that difficult. Mr. Hayes started the engine and it slowly sputtered to life. He pulled out of the driveway, and onto the road.

"So, you landscape before?" he asked.

"Well my Dad does it on the side when he's laid off, so I know a few things."

"What's your Dad do?"

"He's an engineer," I said. "He really doesn't want me working."

"Your Dad doesn't know anything about this?"

"No." It seemed a lot worse when I said it out loud.

"Well that's okay. You gotta grow up sometime." Hayes smiled a crooked grin toward me, and stuffed another cigarette into his mouth. The way he made it sound, I was justified in

getting a job. I relaxed into the dirty red bench and watched the road.

"My old man was like that," Hayes said, "everything had to be his way."

I sat up. "What did you do?"

"One day I got fed up with it and said, fuck you—I don't need your shit." He took another drag of his cigarette, and then flicked it out the window.

"So what happened?"

"Well he did what any father would naturally do; he knocked me on my ass, and kicked me the fuck out."

In that truck I imagined what it would be like to say those things to my father, watching his lazy eye droop at me as I cut into his pride. Later I would learn that I could say those things, and that I would. I liked Hayes. He smiled a lot and seemed almost careless about things.

After a while, we pulled up to a big blue house. Hayes got out and I followed him to the back of the truck. He pulled the lawn mower out and I grabbed the shears, which were a lot heavier than they looked.

"Let's start with the hedges, and then we'll mow the lawn," he said.

I walked to the hedge nearest me and cut into it. The shears were dull, so I had to squeeze really hard. Hayes took another pair of shears and started cutting as well.

"Those shears are about as useless as tits on a bull," Hayes said, smiling at me. It took me a second, but I managed to smile back at him. I inhaled deeply, and took in the musty odor of the shrubs. Warm sunlight hit the back of my neck and it tingled. I smiled. I was on the job.

"Mighty fine cutting there, kid," Hayes said.

"Like a knife through butter," I said like a real man. That was my first job experience—making conversation by talking in clichés. My father never praised me whenever we did anything together. He'd always get nervous, take the tool, and show me how to do it 'right.' I wished he could see me in that yard, holding my own with someone much older than me.

I heard a door squeak open and I looked toward the porch. A blonde woman with bright red lips stood on the porch in a pair of cut-off jeans and slippers. She had on a man's dress shirt untucked.

"Good morning, Miss Miller," Hayes said, dropping his shears and stepping towards the house.

"I see you have a new helper. Mr. Hayes, could you come inside, I need a hand," she said.

"I bet you do," he said. "Kid, keep cutting like you are. I'll only be a minute." Hayes put a hand on Miss Miller's hip and followed her into the house.

I cut hedges for over an hour. My clothes stuck to my body and sweat dripped off my face. I waited a few minutes for Mr. Hayes, but he didn't return, so I mowed the lawn. By then the sun was directly over head, and bugs buzzed that high pitched drone. I worked until about two o'clock, and after that, working didn't seem so fun. My stomach gurgled a little, bored with the bits of sausage and egg I had fed it earlier. I knocked on Miss Miller's door, but nobody answered. I turned the knob and to my surprise, the door opened. I crept into the house and saw no one, turned a corner and found my way into the kitchen. The room was spotless. There were no dishes in the sink and I could almost see my reflection in the white cabinets.

I heard quiet footsteps and turned. Miss Miller stood in the doorway, wearing only a bathrobe. She was taller than I thought—much taller than me. Her face was smooth and her cheeks were ruddy. Perspiration collected on her face and her blonde hair was almost completely saturated with sweat. Her robe was a silky beige, and drawn tightly around her body. Her nipples were hard and the robe was thin enough that I could almost see her areolas. I gulped.

"Why, aren't you a sweaty little thing," she said. I was thinking the same thing about her. My pants grew tighter. "Let me fix you something to drink," she said. Her warmth brushed past me as she walked by. I took in a breath of that warm air, but all I could smell was Hayes' mustiness. I watched from behind as she filled a glass at the kitchen sink. Her robe was as sweaty as my clothes, and I imagined Hayes on top of her. She turned,

and I tried not to look past the glass at her body, but I couldn't help myself.

"Thanks," I said. My hand shook but I managed to take the glass. The water was warm but my throat was dry. It seemed like I had lost a lot more sweat than what was in the glass.

"I'm Jan, what's your name?" she asked, retrieving a plastic packet of bologna from the fridge.

I cleared my throat and forced out a quiet 'Paul.' Miss Miller slapped a slice of bologna between two pieces of bread, put the sandwich on a small plate, and sat at the table.

"Have a bite," she said, placing the plate on the table. I slowly moved to the sandwich, never taking my eyes off her. I sat down and bit off almost a half of the sandwich.

"What an appetite," she said.

"Thanks," I mumbled between bites.

"Don't mention it. You should get something in return for all that hard work." I was going to ask her what she meant, but then Hayes entered the room.

"How come you didn't make me one?" Hayes put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed.

"He's just cuter than you are," She said. I looked down at my plate and blushed. "Besides, he was hungry."

Hayes smirked at Miss Miller. "You thought I was pretty goddamn cute ten minutes ago." Miss Miller's face turned as red as mine. "We better get going before Paul cuts me out of the picture," Hayes said. He lightly pulled my arm, and we both moved toward the door. He turned and frowned at Miss Miller, and then we went back outside.

He inspected the hedges and the lawn. "Not too bad. You missed a few spots over there." He pointed, but I wasn't sure at what.

I forced a smile, but I wanted to know why the hell he left me outside, alone. My hands were hard and numb from all the cutting and my throat was dry again, like someone poured sand down it.

We got back into Hayes' truck. "I'm going back to my house, and then we'll settle up for the day," Hayes said, pulling back onto the road.

I looked down at my hands and thought about all the work I had done. I thought Dad would be proud because I didn't quit. I was a working man, just like him. I finished the job, and I couldn't wait to tell him, to prove him wrong. I planned my strategy in my head. I'd tell him it was hot as a 'sonofabitch,' and that the shears were so dull I had to cut like a 'bastard.' I looked at my reflection in the windshield and smirked. Even if Dad yelled at me, I could show him the money I earned.

We got back to Hayes' house, and he backed the truck into the garage. We got out and walked to the front of the house. Hayes turned to me. "I'm gonna be a little short. Here's five bucks." I took the crumpled bill in my hand and looked at it. Lincoln frowned up at me and then I frowned up at Mr. Hayes.

"You said you'd pay me twenty dollars." My voice quivered, and my body shook a little.

"Whoa now. I said I'd pay you twenty for a day's work. We finished up so fast we're a couple hours short," he said, with a big crooked smile on his face.

"You're cheating me?" I asked, but I already knew the answer, and Hayes didn't even respond. He just went back into the house and slammed the door. I heard a chuckle escape from the house before the door shut. My teeth clenched and I balled my hands up into sweaty fists. I pounded on the dirty white door and kicked at the bottom, leaving more scuff marks. I heard a dog barking inside the house.

"I want my money," I screamed.

The door finally opened part-way, and Hayes smiled out at me.

"Look kid, I like you, but that's all I got on me."

"I did all the fucking work." My voice cracked and my eyes had tears in them.

"In case you didn't notice, Miss Miller and I got a different kind of payment plan worked out. Next time, don't work so goddamn fast."

"You're a fucking liar," I screamed into the doorway, and Hayes stopped smiling.

"Get the fuck out of here. Show your guinea ass around here again, and I'm gonna have Buster bite your balls off." Hayes pushed the door open wide and I saw the leash in his hand with

the dog attached to it. Buster was a four-legged nightmare, a black and white pit bull. His legs were short but rippled with muscle. His jaws were half the size of his torso, and his eyes were black like olives. I ran from the porch to the walkway, and onto my bike. I pedaled hard, that goddamn dog's barks fading into the distance. I turned to make sure he wasn't behind me. I pedaled faster, just to be safe.

I got back to my own yard, and collapsed off the bike. My head pounded. Dad had been right—he was always right! I settled, and picked up the bike. I wanted to forget the whole thing, but then I realized my father's truck was parked in the driveway. I don't know exactly when he got there, before me or after me, it didn't matter. He got out of the truck and towered over me.

"What the hell happened to you?" He wasn't smiling.

I didn't want to tell him anything. Not because he'd scream at me, or give me the belt, but because he'd use this experience against me. He'd lock up this event in the back of his head and use it whenever he wanted to make me look stupid, or just fuck with me. He was always like that. I don't know how many times we'd be among family or friends, and he'd pull out some random thing, some silly little thing that happened between us, and use it to embarrass me. My mind scrambled for an excuse. "I got a little tired pedaling home, that's all." The lie came out of my mouth heavy. I hardly ever lied, not because I was morally against it, but because my lies just didn't sound natural.

"What's with all the dirt? What happened to your hands?"

"I fell off my bike and—"

"Don't be an asshole. I can tell you've been working."

"Yeah but—"

"See, I knew it. I told you to stay home. Look at yourself, you look like shit."

We shared an awkward silence. "I did landscaping for this guy, and he didn't pay me what he said he would." He folded his arms across his chest, and his lazy eye started to droop.

"Now do you see why I don't want you working? The world is full of fucked up people." He patted me on the back, and smiled a genuine smile, which he didn't do often. That was it. He had

the moment locked away. I pictured him drinking and playing cards, telling the boys about how little Paul got screwed.

"This guy almost sicced his dog on me," I said.

Dad's jaw scrunched up and his eyes squinted. "This guy threatened you?"

"He promised me twenty dollars. We went to this lady's house, and I did all the work while he went inside. Then he took me back to his place and only gave me five dollars. He told me if I came back he'd have his dog bite my nuts off."

Dad ran his hand over his forehead and to the back of his neck. My mother once told me how Dad got into a bar fight, and eight years later, at a traffic light, saw the same guy he fought on the other side of the road. Dad pulled him out of the car and bloodied him—in front of the guy's wife and children. Dad was never forgetful.

"Get in the truck and show me where this guy lives," he said. He got to the truck before me, slammed the door, and started the engine. I had half my body in the door when he sped off. The force latched my door shut on my shirt sleeve, and I had to open the door and slam it shut again. I wanted to clobber Hayes myself, but I would have been content just hating his guts.

"Look, Dad, I don't care about the money. I just want to go home." I looked up at him. He glanced one eye down at me and the other at the road. His brow wrinkled up and I knew Mr. Hayes was in for it.

"I told you it was better to stay at home in the first place. You earned that money and now we're gonna get it." He fixed both eyes back to the road and sped up. Trees and houses rushed by my window, and my stomach churned. My father would do almost anything to prove a point, a quality about him I didn't truly understand until that moment.

We pulled up to Mr. Hayes' house, and my father slammed on the brakes, put the truck in park, and got out. He walked around to my side and stuck his enormous head in the window.

"Whatever happens, do not get out of this truck. Got it?" He pointed a finger at me and then walked towards the front of the house. He pounded against the door and the awning above him shook.

"Who is it, goddamn it?" Hayes opened the door part-way and peered into the yard. My father moved toward the opening. I quietly opened the passenger-side-door, and crept towards the house. I hid behind some poorly-trimmed shrubs and listened.

"It's Tony Gespario, open the fuck up." Hayes unlatched the door and swung it wide.

"Your son was already here. I paid him what I could."

"That ain't the way I heard it, Hayes. Sounds to me like my son did all the work and you still owe him." My father edged a little closer to the door.

"He only came out here because you told him not to."

"You telling me how to raise my son?"

"This is private property; I don't want any trouble, just go." Hayes slammed the door in my father's face, and it seemed like the whole front of house shook. My father pounded on the door, harder than before, but Hayes didn't answer. He punched it just about where the latch would be. The door splintered open. I moved closer and saw Hayes inside the house. I wished Hayes had had a stronger door, and then I prayed he had simply run out the back. I think Dad would have chased him anyway, though.

Buster ran through the splintered door. I gasped. The dog was vicious, but next to my father, it didn't seem to be full grown, or at least not full-sized. Dad side-stepped Buster and the dog bounced down the steps and slid a little across the gravel walk-way. He landed a few feet from me, and I could smell the sweet odor of his breath like he had his jaws around my face. Buster regained his footing and lunged at my father. Dad lifted his foot and kicked the dog in the mouth. Buster yelped and jumped back up, but Dad crashed his boot down onto his skull. His big leg moved quick and steady, like a jackhammer. The dog whimpered, and its tail shook, but Buster didn't bark again. I vomited bits of bologna and water.

Hayes pushed past the splintered door and Dad. He kneeled by Buster and sobbed. "You killed my fucking dog, you sick fuck." Hayes prodded Buster's side. The dog's leg twitched. Hayes wiped the snot off his face.

"Keep your dog on a leash, next time."

"Next time? You crushed his fucking head in!" Hayes'

voice cracked.

"The money." My father shook his fist at Hayes. Hayes stood up, tears streaming down his face and swung at my father. Dad dodged several fists and kicked Hayes in the balls. Hayes sank to his knees and put his hands over his face. Dad punched him in the temple. Then he mashed the heel of his boot into his face. Hayes fell onto his back and groaned. Blood streamed from Hayes' head.

"Goddamn maniac," Hayes mumbled and crawled toward the house.

"God's got nothing to do with it." Dad followed Hayes into the house. I stood in the yard drenched in sweat. For a second, I hoped Dad would never come out. I didn't even want to see his face, his dark eyes. I hadn't participated, but I panted as hard as the men. I was alone with Buster. I watched his tail twitch and his tongue slither, and then both slowed and stopped. His eyes were facing in opposite directions and blood collected in his nostrils. I heard some furniture topple, and some glass crash, and Dad emerged with dollar bills in his hand. He stepped over Buster and shook his head. "That dog should be on a leash."

"Get in the truck," Dad said, striding past me. I followed him and slowly climbed into the passenger's side. We drove off, and I saw Buster fade into a black and white speck.

"Here," Dad said, flicking the wad of dollar bills at me. The money drifted to the floor. I left the money there and never picked it up. I don't even know what happened to it—Dad probably wiped the blood off it and bought his lunch the next day.

"Next time you figure on getting a job, make sure your boss isn't a bum," he said. I wanted to tell him to fuck off, like Hayes had told his father. But I didn't. I just cried to myself and looked out the passenger window. I don't think he'd do to me what he did to Buster and Hayes, but I was never sure. I knew one thing—I wasn't going to chance it.

Valerie B. McKee
She is Her Sunday Best

I.
Neat little curls
tied back from her face with
pink and green grosgrain ribbon.
Her coffee-dyed tights soften
next to the stark white of the
younger girls,
with their black patent leather
Mary Janes.
She wiggles in her pressed
cotton dress,
takes everything she has to keep
from ripping at the smocking
that leaves a rash on her chest.
She sits.
Ankles crossed.
Waiting for the procession.
Ready to go to Grandma's
for scratch biscuits and red eye gravy.
When she can tear off her dress,
chase salamanders with the boys.
Her mother's eyes never leave her

II.
but also never leave the priest.
She is a perfect woman,
from what it seems.
Everything tidy
from her home to her face.
She keeps hold of her daughter
with nothing more than a stare
and a hand ready
for a swift pinch.

Valerie B. McKee

She looks forward to every Sunday.
Not for the sermon,
not for the show of beautiful, clean children,
but for the quiet.
The time when she can think
without a child or a husband
pulling on her hip.
Fantasizing about the life
she could never live.
Instead she's living the life of her mother,

III.
the woman who attends early service
so she can run home
to finish Sunday dinner-
the one time a week
she has purpose.
A role long lost
and resented by those she cares for.
She watches the clock.
Has timed exactly how long it takes
for them to shake hands,
pile in the car,
turn into her drive.
She pulls the ham from the oven,
tender and bone loose.
Sticks cloves in the fat,
but never canned pineapple.
Runs her fingers under the faucet
and over her curls.
Sits at the kitchen table.
Ankles crossed.
And waits for the doorbell to ring.

Lisa L. Siedlarz
The Personality Extraction
of Frances Farmer

*"In all patients there is a common denominator of worry, apprehension,
anxiety, insomnia, and nervous tension."*

— Nov. 1936, Dr. Walter Freeman, father of the Ice Pick Lobotomy

As they strapped me in,
my pleas were butterflies
caught on barbed wire.
So they yanked the stiff
leather straps to strangulation.
Without the tickle of anesthesia
my limbs went numb under
yellow light that came
in streaks from rectangular
windows above fieldstone
walls above dank and musty
souls. Bright white bandages
dotted with red wrapped
around my head can not keep
out what put me here in the first place.
My melancholy was easily cut out
folded in a white sheet
discarded in a cold steel
trash can.

Marilyn C. Terlaga

Liebchen

A pantoum for Eva Braun (1912-1945)

Third Place

What made you love him, Eva?
Your Adolph, der Fuhrer.
Kissing and caressing
while countless died.

Your Adolph, der Fuhrer,
gentleman monster –
while countless died,
you held hands, whispered vows.

Gentleman monster,
in the bunker, under Berlin,
you held hands, whispered vows;
he took a bullet, you took your poison.

In the bunker, under Berlin,
kissing and caressing,
he took a bullet, you took your poison.
What made you love him, Eva?

David B. Zeidler
Cold War

"And they, since they were not the one dead, went on about their affairs."

Robert Frost — "Out, Out"

Staring coldly at the television screen,
I watch towers tumble to dust.
Men in windows allow air to decide fate,
rather than rubble and flame.
Newscasters weep before a mass
American funeral, clutching
hopelessly at feigned composure.

I claw the dirt of my soul
for appropriate response,
as my mind stumbles
in shameful indifference.
I clutch the concept that my father
was a few names on a short list
from fighting the Vietnamese,
that my uncle still cries
when bullets fly on cinema screens,
and shies from telling stories of
seventy-one to seventy-three.
I imagine my friend Ashton,
slipping in blood-stained sand,
sinking into distress as his child
wonders why Daddy has gone.

Still, as frigid fingers force the remote
to aid my escape to Sportscenter,
with its "brave" comebacks
and "heroic" home runs,
I feel nothing.

Benjamin J. Kowalsky
**The Norseman
Speaks of Fjords**

I was mesmerized by him: the first idol of my youth.
He spoke a language that was not mine,
and yet mine, and yet...
How hard to grasp to me was that Harlem jazz pouring from
his pen!
Or his single typewriter clicking...clicking...whirring.
I practiced myself, to the beats of his 'Fragment', and honed
his craft.
I tore a line from his verse, and carried it in a pocket, and I
remember:
"I play it cool/and dig all jive"

I knew not how he wrote, nor what pain drove him.
Nor knew I of his life, his addictions, my life,
My addictions, my life...
He pointed his finger not at my flesh but at the corners of my
pallid heart
Or the straining faces I made when he spoke of those rivers.
How could I speak like him, my master, my teacher,
Who birthed in me the desire to craft the first poems that began:
"I wonder where I'm going to die..."

I will never be the legend that you are, who touched me deep.
You gave me a voice that became my own,
Yours, mine, but yours always...
When I thought I knew all that there was to know of poesy,
Or that I had bested the masters of the world,
It was by your hand that I learned that I had so much yet
to understand.
The rivers within me are the same as those running through you:
*I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow
Of blood in human veins.*

Rayon Dwain Lennon
Tiny Locks

*"And the millions of tiny locks that will be broken
before you can be released..."*

—Michael Creagan

The night, Marcie waited in the night, the cold December night. She could feel the night. It hung coldly over everything, and everywhere, over places she had been, places she had never been, over people she loved, and people she hated; it hung coldly over her apartment, in front of which she stood, over cars shouting past her on Quake Boulevard, over brightly lit Subways and Pizzerias; it hung coldly over a Greyhound Bus busing her son and ex-husband; it hung coldly over and rested on her thoughts as she prayed, prayed for the coursing Greyhound to find her and deliver her visiting son to her.

Marcie paced the sidewalk, thinking about her seventeen year-old son, Lennox, about the last time she had seen him, which was some four years ago, when she had left him in Jamaica, in care of her mother. Since then, his father had moved him to Connecticut and she had kept in constant contact with Lennox, over the phone and by letters. She couldn't help noting that his letters were a bit detached and pretentious, his voice, over the phone, gruff and dismissive. She had tried then to explain to him that she could not have known that she would be locked in Canada, in Ontario, undocumented for all these years. He had said that he understood it all, though she wondered if he could ever forgive her, at all.

The ex-husband, she did not want to think about the ex-husband. She had long ago labeled him "HAZARDOUS" and locked him out of her heart, for good. He was a polygamist, a shameless polygamist, who had married another woman while married to her, and upset still that Marcie had left him. He was finally allowing her to see Lennox on the condition that he made the trip as well, to make sure, she knew, that Lennox would

return to Connecticut. She also knew he wanted her back, knew he was holding on to Lennox to keep his attachment to her, since as long as he kept Lennox their lives would interlock until Lennox was old enough (in one year when he turned eighteen) to break away.

At ten thirty the Greyhound bus pulled up along the sidewalk. She watched her ex-husband and son emerge from the bus, father before son. Lennox, she realized, towered over his father. Tall, her son was so tall. Her ex-husband, the guard-chaperone, stepped forward, grinning wolfishly. Lennox silently approached her, wearing a bland expression. The night folding around them, Marcie and Lennox hugged and separated. Hugged and separated. Hugged and separated.

Four years of silence stood between them.

"Son," she said, "you must be tired. Tired and hungry." She hugged him again.

He did not reply.

He looked over at his father, who looked away.

She could see that Lennox was crying and hugged him again. The ex-husband paced in front of the apartment, sniffing Canada, looking left and right, up and down, anywhere but where the two stood hugging.

"Say something, son," she said. She needed to hear him, to hear the tone of his voice.

"Nice to see you," he said, looking off onto the boulevard. She smiled at him, but he wasn't looking at her.

The father moved towards them. "Let's take this off the streets," he said. "You live up there?" He pointed to the two-story apartment house.

She nodded, waltzing past him.

In the small kitchen she hugged him again. The ex-husband skipped dramatically around them and went into the small living room.

"You must be hungry," she said. "You must be hungry. I'll cook."

"No, Marcie," Lennox said. "I think I just need to rest."

Marcie? What did he mean by Marcie? The ex-husband was

lying on the living room couch, grinning at her stabbing glance. The apartment was too small, she thought, too small for three people, too small for her ballooning anger.

"Go ahead," she said lovingly, pointing to the bedroom past the ex-husband through the living room. "Go on," she said. And she watched after him, watched as a satisfied grin danced and died on the ex-husband's face, the bedroom door closing behind Lennox.

Alone in the kitchen, and out of view of the ex-husband, she leaned against the refrigerator, the silence stretching outwards. She saw Lennox at six-years-old crying on a clear afternoon, his father leaving with a group of men, leaving for America to work on apple farms. His father staring back at him, one long stare, and Lennox fighting her on the veranda, fighting to get to his father and his father looking down and away and walking away. Years later and Lennox crying again, crying on the night, crying for Marcie, his grandmother comforting him on the veranda, Marcie turning around staring at him with one long stare, then looking down and away and walking away, hurrying away to catch her flight to Canada--Canada, because she could only get a visa for Canada, not America. And she can still feel the guilt, the guilt of leaving Lennox to pursue her ex-husband, her husband then.

"You're a beautiful woman, Marcie," the ex-husband said, his face laced with composure. She hadn't notice him standing there watching her. He shuffled past her, went to the sink, took a clean cup from the tray, filled it with water, turned around, she was still leaning against the refrigerator, he looked down on her, smiled handsomely, "but that look of disappointment disfigures your face."

She needed to be calm. This was not about him, but about her son. She had to be careful; the ex-husband was a car salesman with a gift for twisting lies into truth, for browbeating people.

She took a deep breath. "Thank you," she said sardonically, "thank you for delivering my son in pieces."

"You're welcome," he said, smiling down on her.

"What's wrong with my son?" she asked. "What did you and your wife do to him?" Someone had to be blamed, anyone, God, her ex-husband, his wife, her mother, anyone.

"Nothing wrong with the boy, Marcie," he said. "A bit effeminate, yes. I mean, the boy writes poetry. But otherwise, a fine, intelligent boy. He is aloof just the same in Connecticut." The grin. if only she could slap that grin off his face. The bastard. He and his American wife had altered her son, had turned him against her. Her son who had always loved her, who had loved her like he loved God.

"Excuse me," he announced and walked off into the living room.

Marcie followed behind him and continued on into the bedroom, where she found Lennox lying in bed.

She knelt to one side of the bed and held his hand.

"How are you, son?"

"Never been better," he said. He smiled, his bunny smile like her smile.

"Good," she said. "Good."

It was the silence that she hated. The silence between words, the silence that floated between them.

He smiled again and closed his eyes.

"Get some rest," she said, "church tomorrow."

He shook his head. "I don't have any church clothes," he said.

"It's okay," she said. "You can wear whatever you've got."

"I don't know about going to church," he said. "I haven't been in a while."

Just as she'd thought, the ex-husband and his wife had altered her son.

She stood and looked outside the window at a crowd of black trees along the boulevard, at the thinning flow of cars on the boulevard, the night piling onto everything, falling in threads to the ground. She needed a break, she needed to get out of this house, get away for a while to collect herself. She walked out into the living room, past her ex-husband, who, as she was pulling at the doorknob, spoke:

"You know," he said, sitting up on the couch, "I found him that way. Godless and all."

Memories washed back into her mind. The ex-husband, being then a full-American citizen, had gone to Jamaica to get Lennox a few months after she had left him with her mother. This was about the same time she had set up base in Canada, working to

acquire her green card. She had planned on filing for Lennox as soon as she became a legal resident. No doubt the ex-husband, her husband then, knew what was coming. She had planned to storm across the border, into his life, strewing everything out in the open, everything which included the fact that he was married to her and the American woman at the same time.

She turned to face the polygamist. He sighed, grinning, staring holes in her breast.

The ex-husband had told her that he didn't love the American woman. The marriage, he had told her, was necessary to get his green card, though once he had gotten his green card he remained with the American woman out of fear, he had said, that she could get him deported. She had lost him to another country, to another woman. She had lost her son, too, to that same country, to that same woman.

She looked at him, looked hard at him.

"This is not about us," he said, weighing her silent stare.

She looked away then again at him.

"I can't help that things got complicated," he said. "I remember you agreeing on things. You could have waited."

"For how long?" She erupted, "Another ten, fifty years?"

"You know how it is, Marcie. Without documents, you are a slave to circumstances. Sure it took this long, but you know how it is."

She bit her lip and did not reply.

They looked away from each other when the bedroom door opened and Lennox emerged. He stood behind the couch behind the father who was lying on the couch. Lennox blinked once and looked at his father, who looked away. Marcie saw Lennox looking up, looking at her. She held his stare, a stare much like the long stare of that night when she had left him there on the veranda with his grandmother. She saw him looking down at his father again, then again at her. She held that stare, too. He looked away and went back into the bedroom, the door closing quietly behind him.

Outside in the dark along the shoutless boulevard she stood, arms knotted across her chest, silence settling like dust on everything.

She could feel the night. It rested on her head, on her shoulders. It would seem to her that she was locked inside these Canadian nights, which trespassed on days, soon after noon each day. Canada, she decided, was a big dark prison. She looked up at the big black sky, at the tiny white locks holding it and the night together, a night in which she felt alive, and glad to be alive standing in the night and thinking about the millions and millions of tiny locks like tiny stars that must be broken before she could be released from who and where she was, to who and where she wanted to be, a truly free and beloved mother to her beloved son in the place where so many years ago they had begun.

Behind her, the door slammed shut, and steps echoed forward in the night.

"Somewhere north of here," Lennox began, approaching her from behind, "nights age for six months then die."

She did not move, but listened. She imagined he had been watching her from the bedroom window.

He inched closer to her, both of them facing the empty boulevard. "Just you imagine that," he said. "Six months of darkness. A Polar Night."

His voice, she loved the gentle tone of his voice.

"I don't know if I could manage for too long in that kind of darkness," she said.

"But you would," he said. "If you had to, you would. You would wait for the day, because days last for six months, too," he said. "Could you live inside a day for six months?"

"I don't know," she said. "I guess I don't know much of anything."

"During those days, the sun bobs around the horizon," he said. "I have seen the pictures."

She turned towards him. Not knowing what to say. He was hurting and she didn't know what to say. He looked away. Then again at her.

"But, mom," he said after a long pause, "even in that long, dark night the sun lives on, slowly rolling around the waist of the horizon, shining onto itself, building up energy, waiting to rise again." He smiled and she smiled and they smiled together, facing each other and then the boulevard.

Rayon Dwaïn Lennon

She looked up over the boulevard, over the black houses, over the black trees, over the black hills to the black rim of the horizon, looking for the sun to rise up and face the world. And oh, what a night, when that sun should melt away all its tiny invisible locks, and rise up to dismiss the darkness. A day, forever.

Julia Tolstrup Mathien
Last Rites

Her last gift to me was a wedding cake
Which I purchased
without her keen, diabetic eye
for sweets.
She never had a slice.
While we celebrated
with champagne
and dancing,
laughing
and gifts
she lay in a dimmed hospital room
quietly unaware of us.
Or maybe she knew.
Maybe through the confusion
that made her forget my mother's name
she saw our faces and wondered
who are these kids
eating my cake
looking so in love?
When she closed her eyes maybe she watched us
toasting our friends
or in the buffet line
and smiled at the pageant
of familiar strangers.
When she flickered out
maybe she glimpsed the continuation
of her line through this ancient rite
in someone who resembled
her granddaughter.

Whitney B. Gallagher
Egyptian Street Crossing

In Egypt I crossed the street at seventeen years old.
It took ten minutes to get across the six lane avenue
running up and down the Nile in Cairo, where warm air
stunk of car exhaust, desert flowers and apple tobacco.

Wearing long sleeves, jeans six sizes too big, and
hiking boots, my long blond hair tied back in a knot,
so unaware of my sex appeal, until I stepped up onto the side-
walk,
nine o'clock at night — everything stopped.

One hundred eyes of black and blue and grey-green hazel
turned staring suddenly- all the motion in the busy nighttime
sea of people just halted. Bodies turned and I lit up and glowed.
Money was pulled eagerly from pockets. Men grasped

my arms like small desperate babes hungry for milk.
Felucca boats approached as I swayed this way and that
in a dream, in a haze, in a place I had not been before;
until my eyes focused in on the safety —

a valiant, helmeted police officer in white.
Taking my arm, he stopped traffic with whistles,
pistols draped all over him like Christmas tree ornaments.
Thanking him, I turned to step onto the curb in front

of my gorgeous hotel, when his grip tightened
on my arm. With the other hand he reached
into his pocket, pulled out some amount of
money for me to see — motioned with his eyes

up to my hotel balcony.

April Line

What it Would Be Like to Have a Baby with a Turnip

She is in her sixth month. She has ten weeks to go. Every ligament from her bellybutton to her knees aches and it is difficult to negotiate staircases. Yet all she can think about is deep, velvet penetration. She craves it the way she craved caviar and ice cream in the first trimester. She craves it the way she craves breakfast. Its absence makes her grumpy, makes her cry. She has dreams of squatting over a man – any man – her cocoa-battered basketball belly bumping his abdomen, a parody of the erotic, the scent of chocolate and sweat, collecting slippery. Puffs of air escaping her nostrils, rhinoceros-like.

But he will not touch her, the father of her child, who is supposed to find her swollenness irresistible, or at least indulge her out of a sense of patient obligation. He is worried about “hurting it.” He thinks he will poke it.

She has explained the mucous plug, “The baby is protected, dear.”

“How?” He asks.

“It’s nature’s cervix-condom. It’s called the mucous plug.”

“Gross. What if I break it?”

She would laugh, but she can’t anymore. She thought he would get over it, that something would kick in, that he would begin to want to sleep with his hand resting on her belly – protective like on television. That he would suddenly find all her veininess and puffiness stimulating. That he would want to be with her the way he had before month four. When she was sleepier and hungrier and had less patience.

Before she gets pregnant, even her premature cellulite seems to excite him. She is twenty-six, and her thighs resemble cottage cheese, she’s developing spider veins behind her knees. The women in her family’s legs do not age well. But he tells her her skin is soft, he doesn’t tire of touching it, of passing his palms

the great breadth of her hips and thighs, putting his finger in her belly button despite its dampness, its odor, the trail of dark hairs below it.

They talk about baby making and he is cute and romantic.

He says, "I hope he has your eyes."

She says, "I hope she has your chin."

And then they submerge themselves in each other's air.

She doesn't count on her insatiable sexual appetite during pregnancy. She doesn't count on his reluctance. She wants to resent the baby, but she can't. Somehow, the hormonal circus did not book that side show. Her body will not let her brain be catty. She knows this will be worth it. That after the post-delivery hamburger crotch, she'll have even more cellulite and veins for him to delight in.

And he seems sorry. He brings her jars of Claussen's pickles, the kosher dill ones. They give her heartburn, but she finds them irresistible. The way she found his practicality irresistible: his reluctance to bring her flowers and other morbid expressions of sentiment: chocolate, lingerie. He is the sort of man who would leave batteries for her walkman with the receptionist and a note written on post-it paper as a gesture of love. He made her a necklace out of a stainless steel washer. She wears it every day.

He is fascinated by the breast pump. He plays with it. He examines the contraction of the rubber cone in the manual one, squeezing its lever. Plugs in the electric one just to listen to its whirring. Asks her endless questions about when she will begin producing milk, how that happens. She doesn't know the answers, makes them up. She thinks that breast feeding is going to be one of the easiest parts of new motherhood. She is not worried or intimidated or curious.

She wants to shake him and shout at him to play with her breasts. She is embarrassed that she masturbates every morning after he leaves for work, that she draws a hot bath and pretends the water that laps against her is him, somehow solidifying the liquid in her imagination. She feels the way she did in her freshman dorm, memorizing her roommate's schedule each semester.

She feels a shame that she thought would go away with committed monogamy.

She wishes she were a boring lover, that she experienced the non-interest in sex that she hears other women talk about. That she felt sex to be some kind of cosmic imposition. Wishes that he didn't smell delicious-musky, like a couch that sits out in early April rain and Old Spice. That she could bring herself to get rid of him, that the thought of having a baby alone didn't terrify her. She asks herself what kind of feminist she thinks she is.

She wants him to build the crib. To go shopping for furniture. To be endlessly curious about the sex of the baby, about whether it's a boy and he can teach it to play football or Xbox, or whether it's a girl, and he can push his finger into her tightened fist, and grin with pride as she grows beautiful. But he is disengaged. He doesn't even ask her how she's feeling most days. He comes home from work and has a beer, watches Jeopardy.

One night, in bed, he tries to hold her. She shrugs him off.

"Please don't," she says.

"But why?"

"Because I'm sore." What she means is, because you won't touch me.

"From what?"

"From what?" she looks blankly at him, "You're serious?"

"Yes. Serious as a heart attack." He touches her face, his look is concern.

"I can't believe you." She starts to cry. She rolls farther away from him. He squeaks a few syllables. Gets out of bed. He comes back in a few minutes, long faced. He carries a glass of milk. She doesn't want it.

"Go away." She says.

He goes.

The next morning, she sleeps late. Feels free to do so in an empty bed. Thinks she could get used to this. He has left a note on the night stand. She doesn't read it. She picks it up, turns it over. It occurs to her to hold it up to the light, but she doesn't. She is sure he is leaving her. She looks for his toothbrush. It's

there. She looks for his razor. It's there, too. "Hmm," she breathes through her nose.

She peels foil from a yogurt cup, spoons the revolting consistency into her mouth, tries not to taste it. She wishes she could get calcium and protein another way. She wishes the thing in her belly didn't need calcium or protein at all. She wants to go back to being a vegetarian. But her obstetrician has suggested slowly working meat back into her diet through the pregnancy.

"Begin with chicken. Be sure it's thoroughly cooked."

"That's ridiculous. I vomit everything I eat. I haven't eaten meat for seven years."

"Do you eat beans? Tofu?" The doctor's green eyes judged her, "Your hair doesn't look like you get any protein."

"No. Salad. Cheese. No eggs. Eggs are cruel."

"Well, I suggest starting with chicken."

On the way home, she stops at the supermarket. She buys a tray of skinned, boneless chicken breasts. When he comes home, she is brushing oil on them. Shaking oregano and onion powder. She almost puked putting them in the pan. She imagines they are very large, dense pear halves. It relaxes her a little.

He says, "Chicken?"

She says, "Yes. The OB said so."

"Oh." He says. He goes to the TV, switches on Jeopardy. She wishes he were Alex Trebek. That she could trade him. She saw a taping of Jeopardy once, and Trebek was down-to-earth and funny. She didn't think he would be that way. She thought he would be stuffy and boring. She thought he'd make a good dad.

"Honey, don't you think Alex Trebek would make a good dad?"

"What are you saying?"

She pretends not to hear.

She puts his note in the garbage can. She is annoyed at the passive-aggressive gesture. Besides, her mother's mantra was "actions speak louder than words." She internalized this. She fought it. Now she thinks her mother was probably right. About a lot of things. Her mother makes sense to her in ways she never

imagined possible.

She puts the half-eaten yogurt cup in the garbage can, too. She watches the yogurt spill over the letters of her name on his note. She smiles. Decides to make zucchini bread. Zucchini bread is his favorite.

"Smells great!" he says, when he arrives home.

"Glad you think so."

He gets a knife from the drawer, starts to uncover the bread, "What are you doing?" She asks.

"Having some."

"It's not for today. It's not for you. It's for the shower."

"You don't have to make anything for the shower. You're the one having the baby."

His astuteness astonishes her, "But I did. Please put the knife back."

"This is about last night, isn't it? Didn't you get my note?"

"I got your note. I put it in the garbage." Neither of them yells.

"Why?"

She peers at him in feigned confusion. "Oh, I don't know. Why do I feel sore? Why do I look like a hippo? Why do birds fly?"

"Okay, okay. I get it. Knock it off."

"I really hate you right now." These words surprise her. They surprise him even more.

"Oh, you think you're the only one this is hard for?"

"You're not making it any easier."

"Neither are you."

She brushes her hair which has become thick and beautiful. Some people tell her it is the prenatal vitamins. Some people tell her it is because she carries a boy. The OB looks approvingly at her hair and says, "You've been eating the chicken." She brushes and brushes. Turns her hair upside down, feels the brush tips on her palm through the hair. It smells like morning's shampoo. It makes her feel beautiful.

Lisa L. Siedlarz
M. Shelley Steps into Spezia
Bay after P. Drowned in an
Unexpected Storm

Percy, glacial ice wept when it died,
foreseeing the baptismal pool
of your enchanted boat.
Waters of Spezia spill frigid
thoughts from deep blue currents

that whisper tales of how it begins
and ends. I lean close to hear hope,
but the sea pours thunder on this bay's
shoulders and gulls repeat a raucous
dirge. My only choice is wading.

I am driftwood – empty bones bumping
where land falls away and seaweed
begs wrists to save it. Pea colored blossoms
turn like quick sand. I understand green
fingers are the reaper's caress,

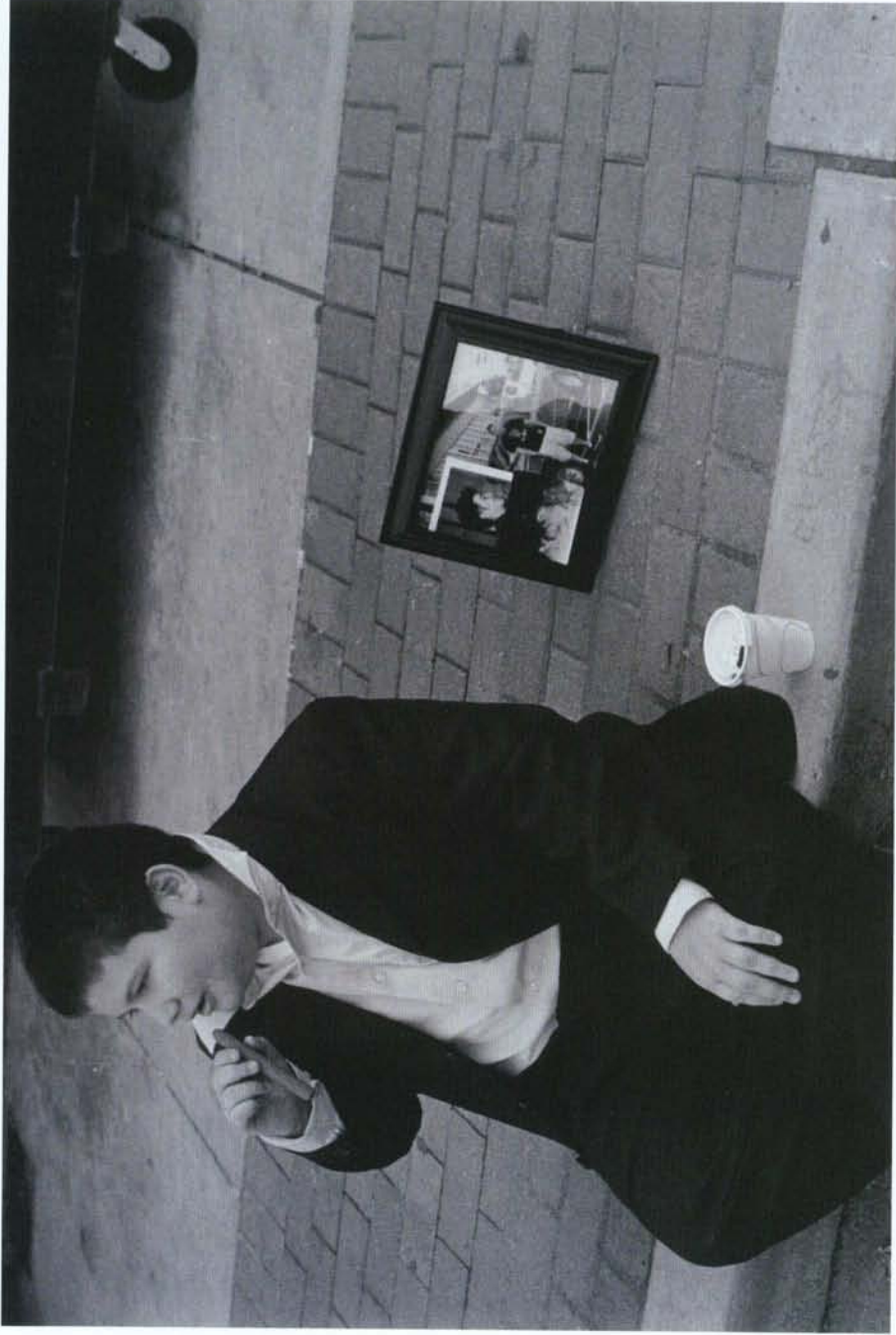
salty air a last kiss filtered through
star fished nose hairs. A slow, steady
immersion guarantees fault
lines will shift. Sultry sun mocks me
with leaden clouds that slingshot

by with invisible Zephyr. Water
crams mouthfuls of shine in my eyes.
Blinded by bright, I mistake dark clouds
for a lone man bound to a rock
I can not reach. Grief blooms a thick

path where waves eat shore. I step
right then left into a biting tide.
This unbound fire is snuffed.
I will sift your ashes to the wind.

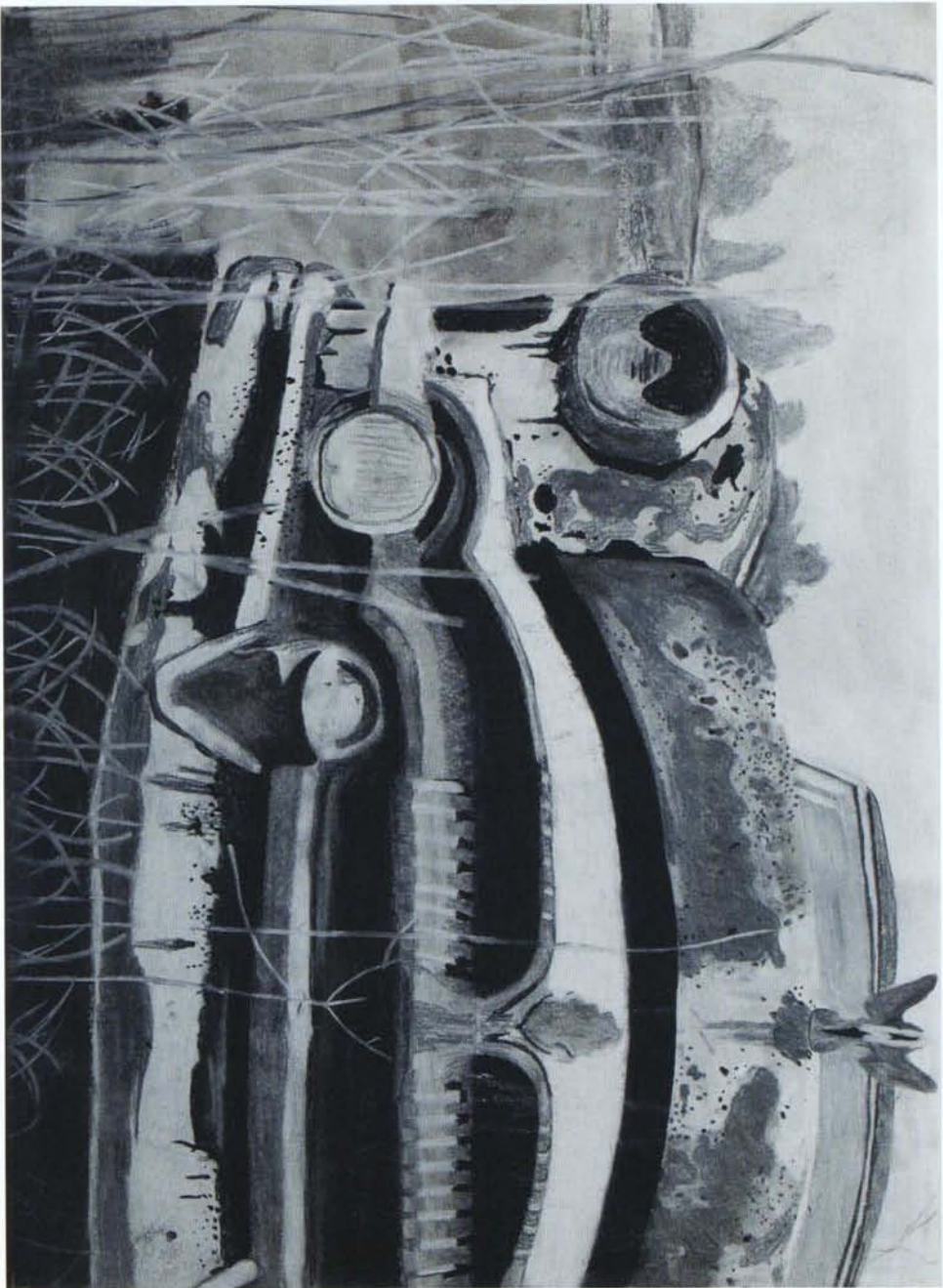
Amy Ashton Handy
Eyelids

Thoughts of the goldfish woke me again.
At sunrise I was thinking how they lived in Lubbock
when I saw them at a party.
posed as decorations,
each one in its own tiny bowl.
Someone had placed them before
electric lights, apocalyptic red,
in the hope, I think, that their golden scales
would fracture the light
like disco.
But they floated.
The light only soaked
into the water, stained it the color of poppies,
and the fish were as if stoned.
I thought:
Do they live?
Are they real?
until, bending forward, eyes wide, I saw.
The twitching gills, the listless flick of a tailfin
revealed — the horror — life;
the water like ink, the fish like blood-dipped gold.
So this morning I woke wishing to believe
that if I were they
I'd have made one dolphinian leap from the bowl,
escaped grapefruit sized hell,
and lain gasping wetly on the carpet
before the revelers.



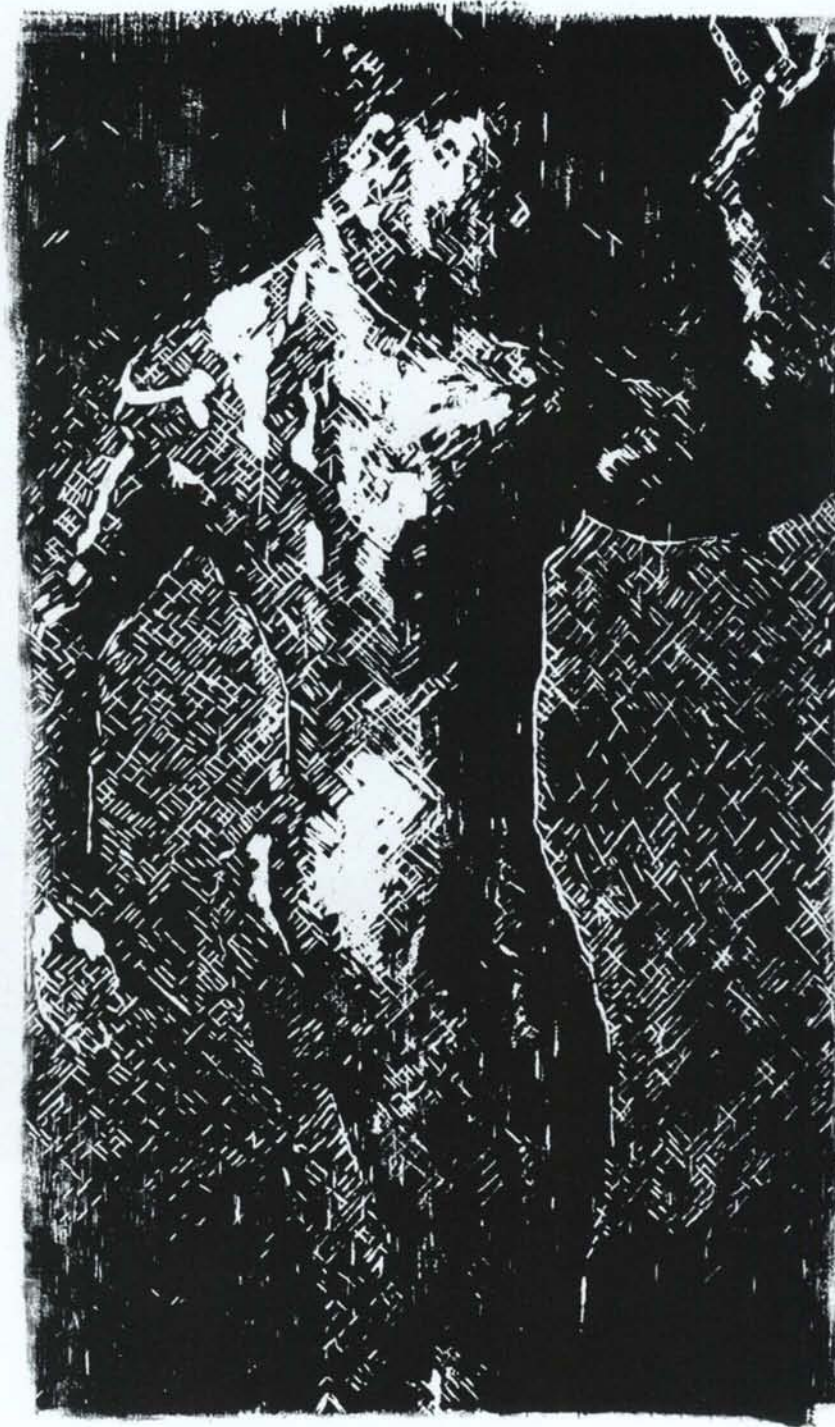
Tiffany
Ultrich
In Your
Shoes
—
Third
Place

*Sarah
Horton
Untitled*

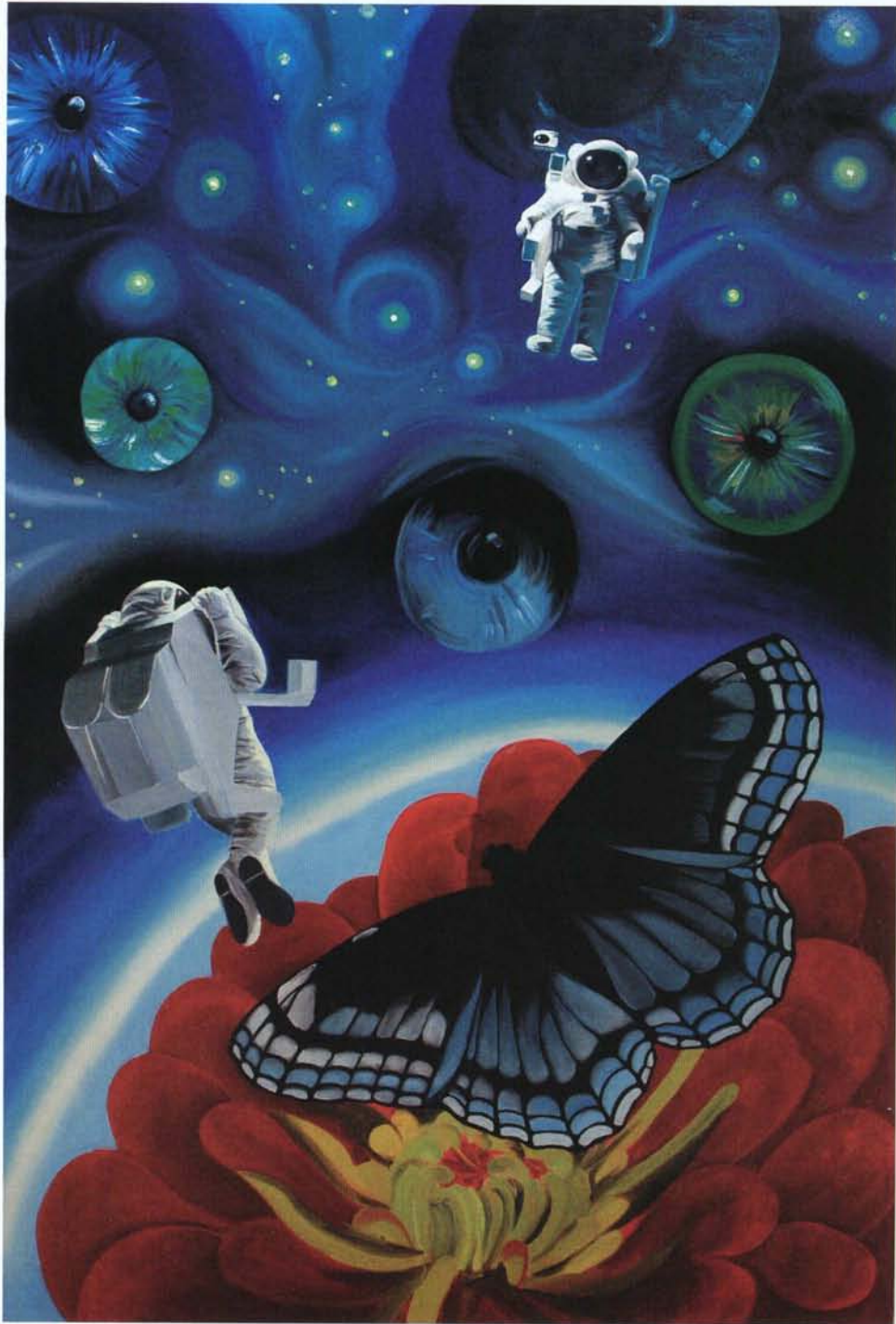


Brett Hillman
Stripe

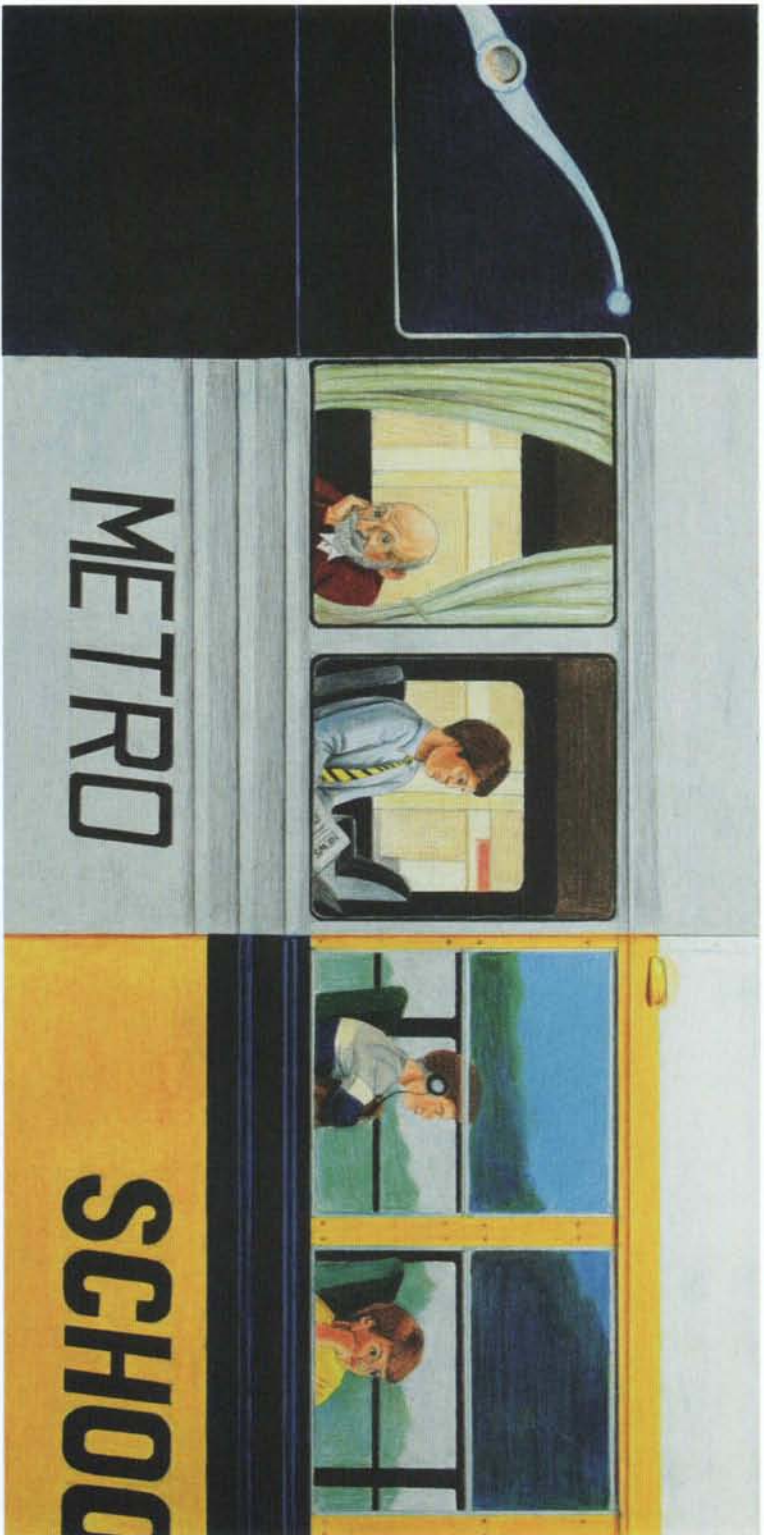




Sutton Underwood
Night in the Light



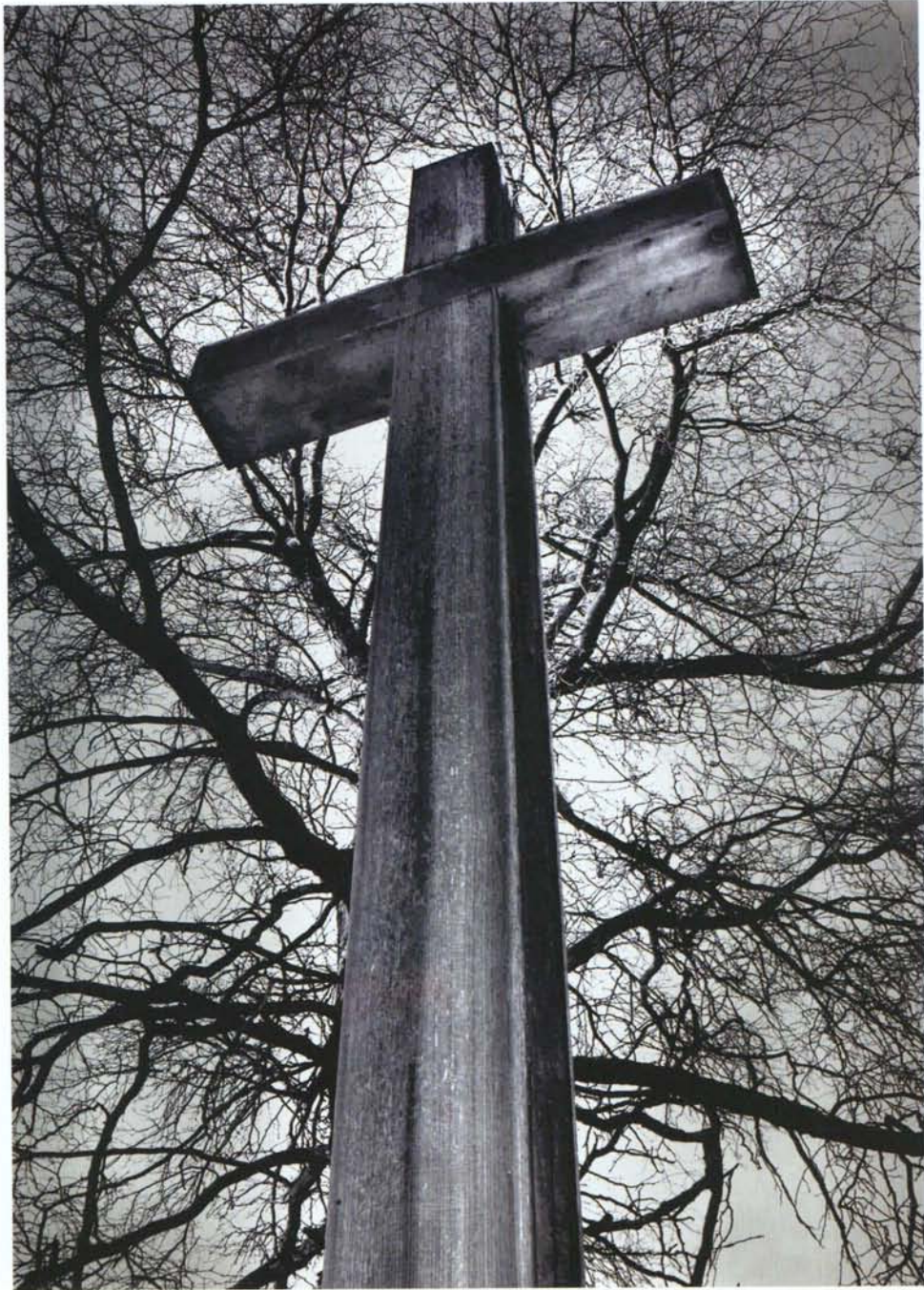
Shizuka Shibata
Untitled



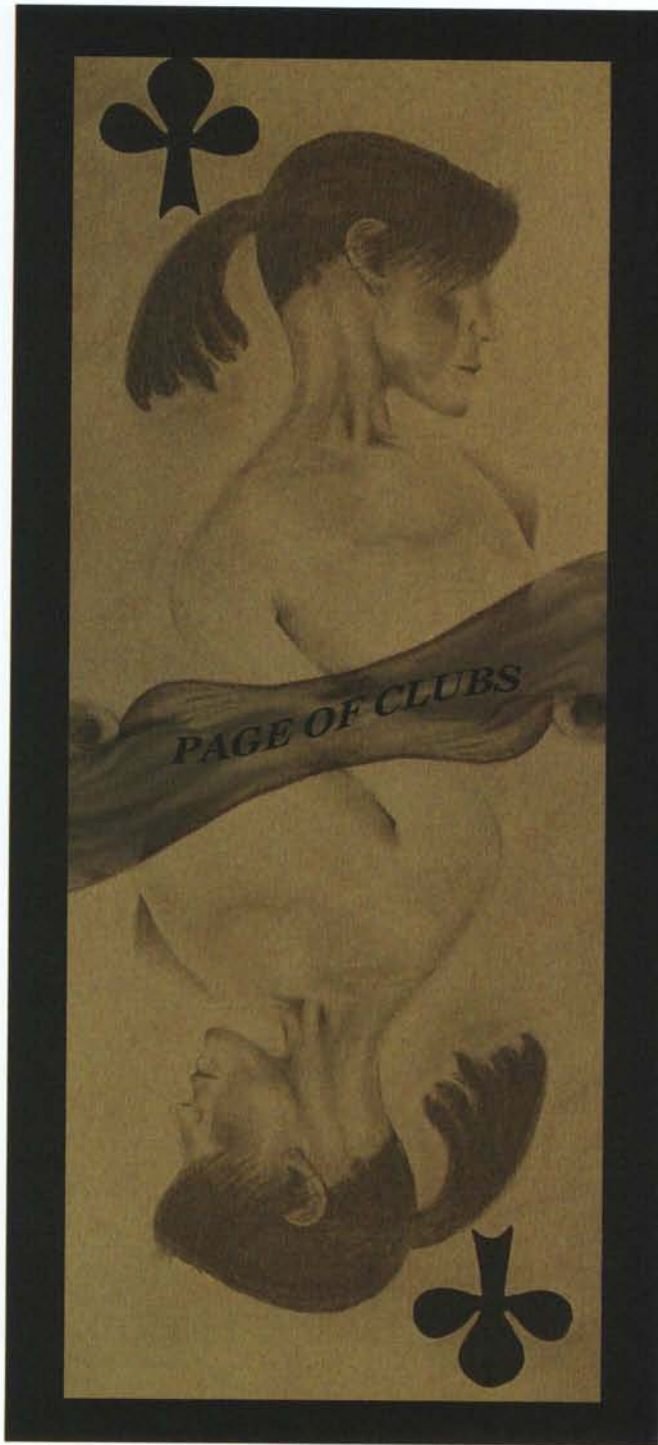
Thomas Greco
Life Passes You By



Alecia Faustini
Ballerina



David LaReau
Cross Too Bare



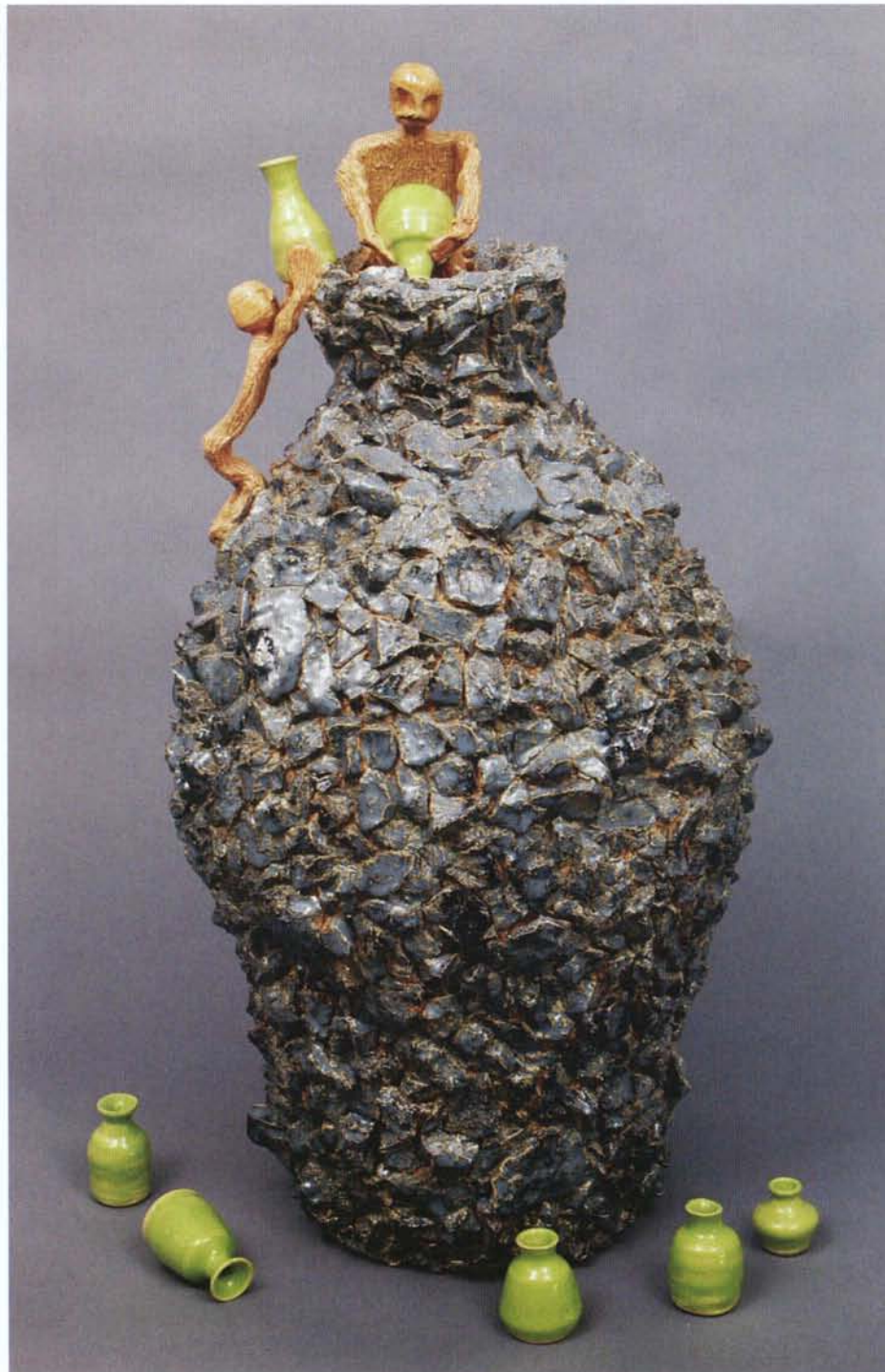
Brian Moreland
Page of Clubs



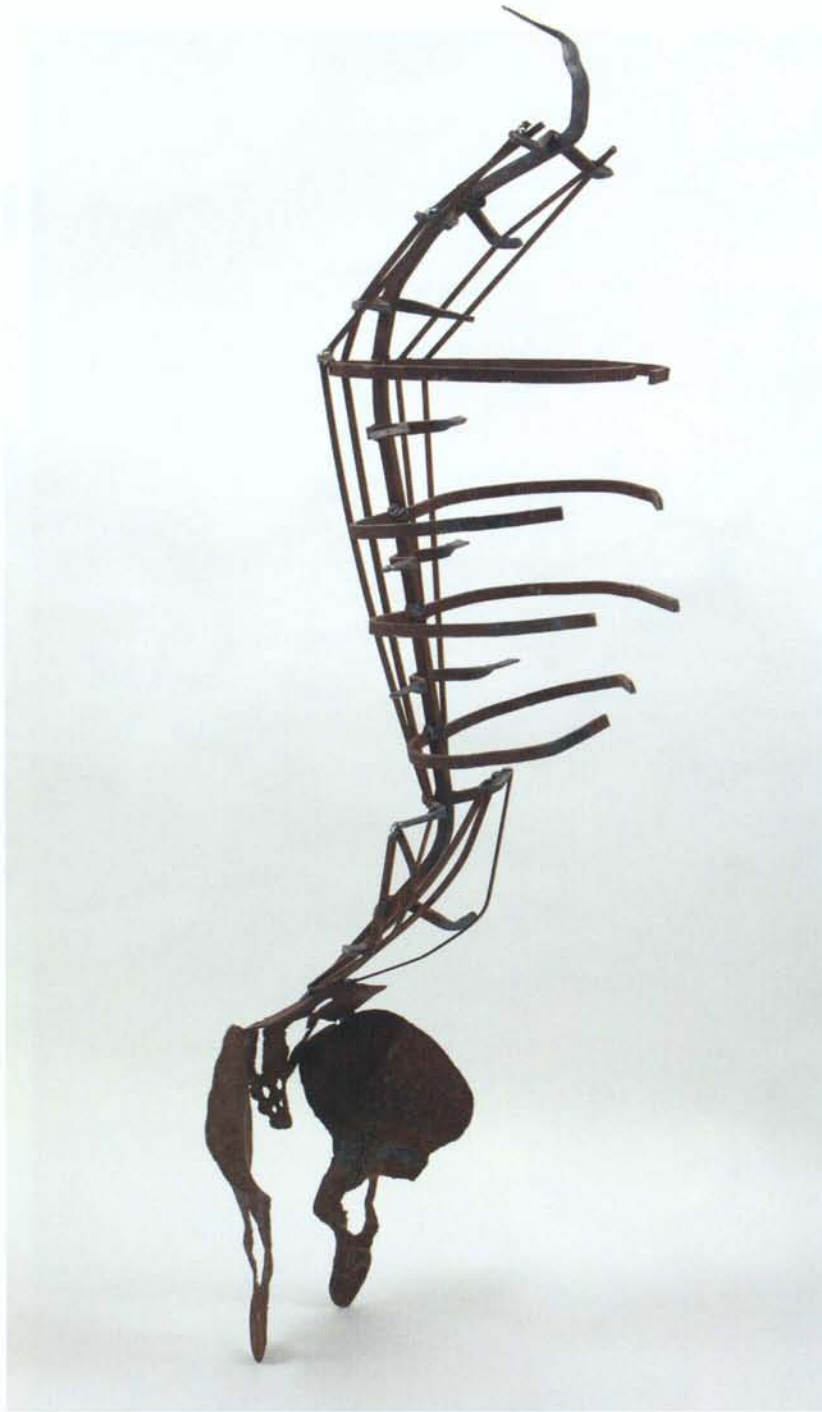
*Colleen
Conlon
Paralysis*



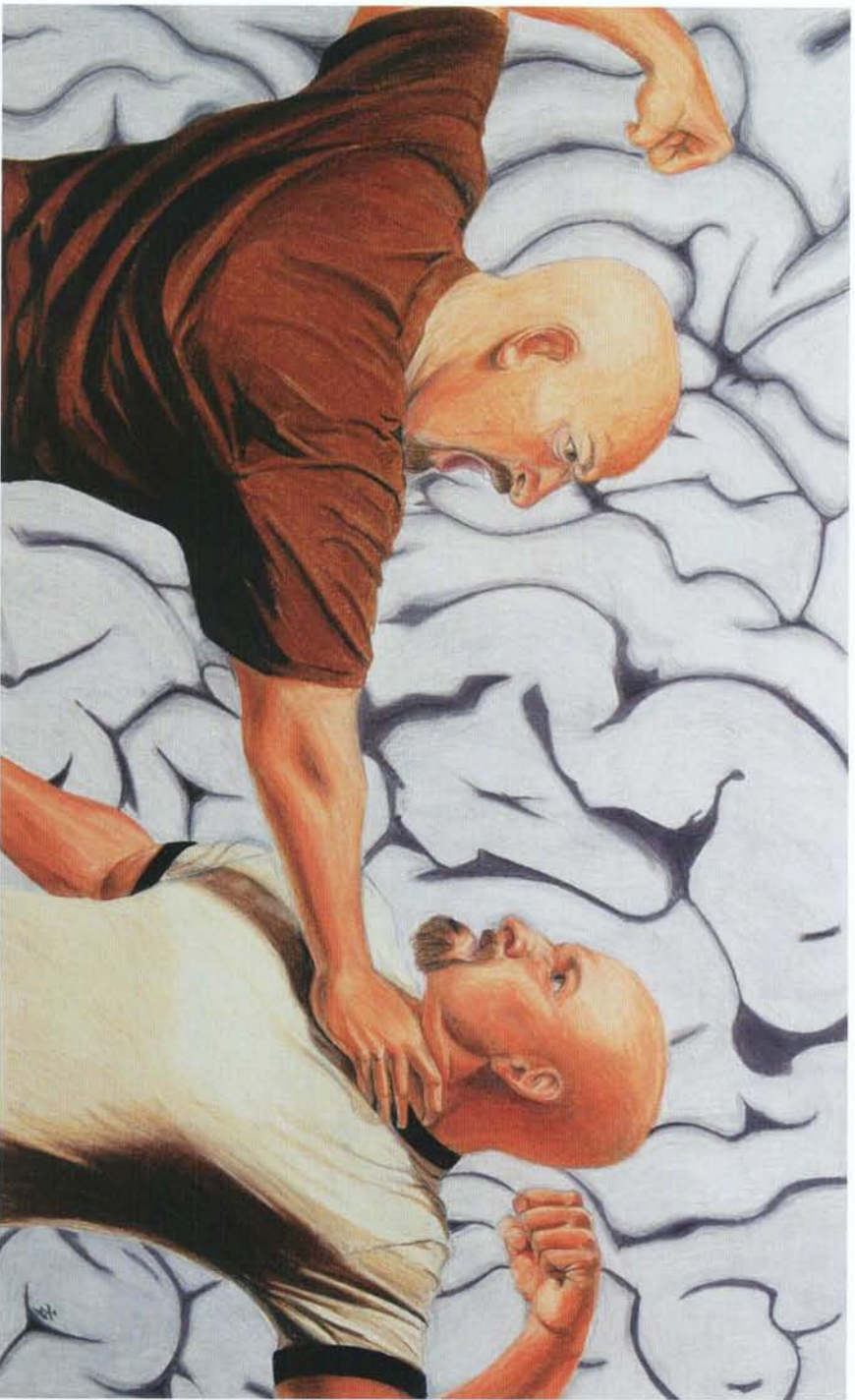
*Amy
Richardson
Teapot*



Brett Hillman
Determination



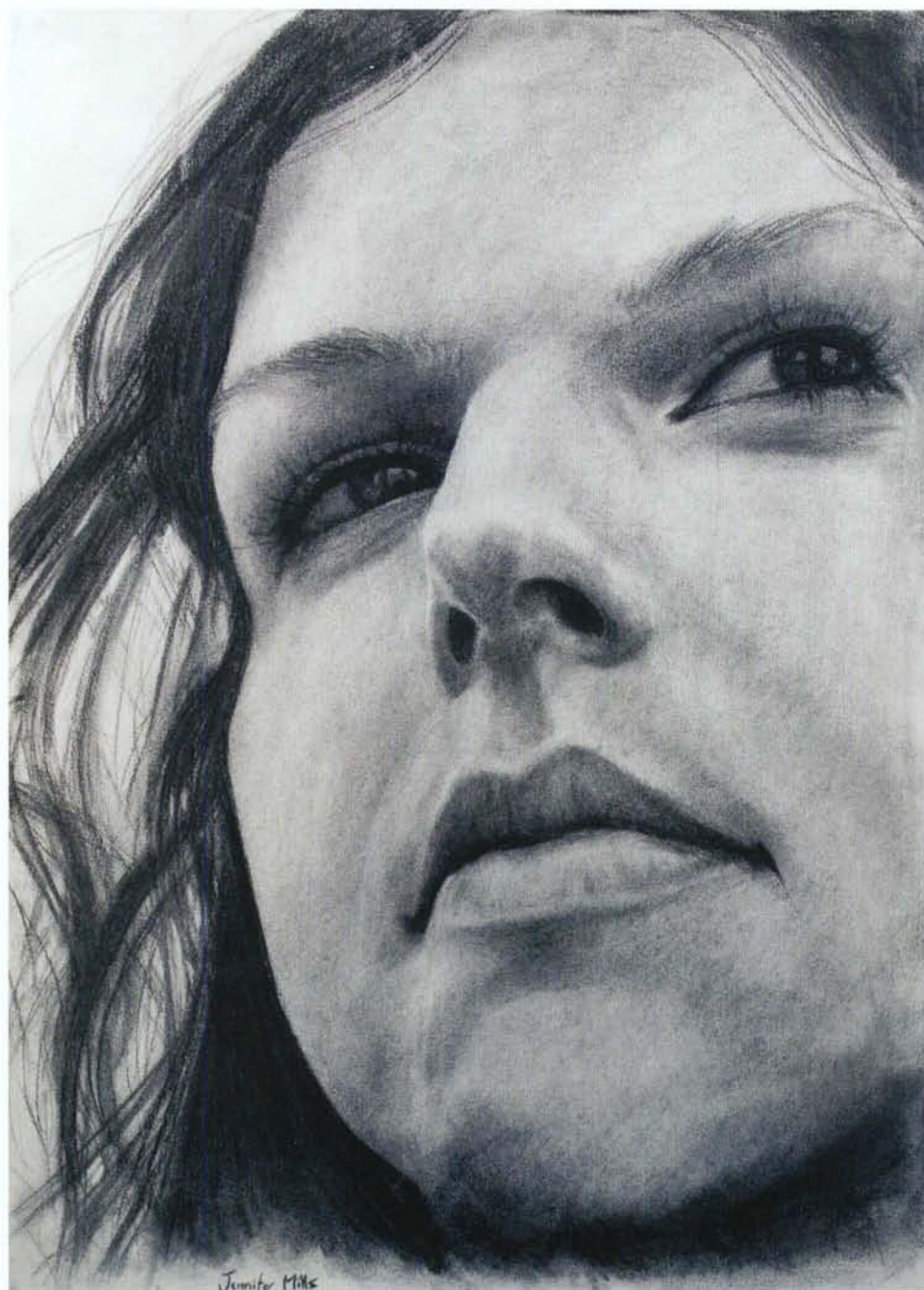
Leo DiSorbo
Skeleton



Thomas Greco
Internal Conflict — First Place



Rebecca LeQuire
Expressions — Second Place



Jennifer Mills
Gaze

Benjamin J. Kowalksy
The Parson Fares to Asgard

Once upon a time, in a small town near Telemark (never you mind the name of the town, for it was long ago) there was a church (never you mind the name of the church, for again, this was a long time ago), and in this church there was a parson whose name has been forgotten, since it was so very long ago when people last saw him. The parson was known for being extraordinarily nasty. It was said that he offended the sensibilities of trees, and made grown men weep for their many shortcomings. However, it was also said that there was no parson more intent on spreading the Gospel than the one in this tiny church. It amazed the people how so much passion could be contained within so vicious a figure. He was also in the habit of strolling all throughout the town accusing people of being heathens, charlatans, hypocrites, and all other sort of nasty things you wouldn't want to be called.

One day the folk had simply had enough of his nonsense, and petitioned the clerk (who will remain nameless, but nevertheless was quite the clever gentleman) to concoct a scheme that would rid the village of the parson once and for all. The clerk was more than happy to oblige them, for he was known to spend many hours in the company of the parson, taking down unbearably droll letters of condemnation against this or that issue.

So, the clerk set to work on a scheme that would rid the village of the parson once and for all.

After many, many weeks of study and thought, the clerk finally came to a conclusion as to the scheme, and set his plan in motion one morning after the service. He gathered a few of the townsfolk together and told them of his plan. They giggled with glee, as it was quite ingenious. The group of them came upon the parson, and one of the townsfolk remarked, "Aye, what a wonderful town we have, that we should have such a magnificent parson!"

"Indeed!" said another voice. "Such a splendid parson, whose voice carries to even the rocks and trees and makes them cry out

in the praise of our Lord!"

"Amen!" shouted a third voice. "Can you believe that even now in our very land that there are some who have escaped the Gospel even from the lips of our wonderful parson?"

The parson was stirred greatly by this sudden outburst of praise; so moved was he that he could hardly hold back his tears of gratitude—he had prayed many nights for God to make his work appreciated on earth by every man, woman, and child in the village. It seemed to him that all of his prayer had paid off, and he basked in the cacophony of voices singing his praises. However, he was also stirred by the thought that there were still those that did not believe in the Gospel, or the divine forgiveness, or the Lord Christ. "How could this be?" he thought to himself. "I am such a parson as could convert the very twigs and berries to praise the Lord! I am such a parson as to make a whole village praise me, the lowly servant of God!"

"Good folk! Goodmen and Goodwives! I, the humble servant on whom you have bestowed such kind words of praise, have heard news most troubling: that there are still heathens among us in our happy land of Norway! This comes as a shock to me, as surely it does to you all. And now I am faced with a decision, to remain as your parson and look after the church, and to give you the sermons which seem to have stirred you all so, or to go out and preach the Gospel to the Godless who still infect our lands with their idolatry..."

The townsfolk all leaned forward in anticipation, and the clerk smiled to himself, for he knew the choice that the parson could not resist. As much as the parson loved to preach the Gospel every Sunday in the church, he loved even more the idea of converting the heathenish masses to the one true God. But this was not the full extent of the clerk's clever plan.

"I have decided," continued the parson, "to go out into the world and bring the Gospel to those who have it not, for they truly need my teachings more than you fine folk do. Though you may be sinners, and though you may be hypocrites, and all other sorts of ruffians, you all have knowledge of your sin. You have, each one of you, heard of Christ's forgiveness and his promise to save us all. How could I, in good conscience, stay here with you while the heathens mire themselves further in sin? How

could I even call myself a servant of God if I let hundreds of ears be deprived of the sweet nectar of the Gospels? Therefore, you must understand, I must go. I know that you may recoil at this news, but I bid you to be strong, and to be of good cheer, for I go to do the Lord's work."

There was then a great cheer from the crowd. But where was the parson to go? Where were these pockets of heathenry? The clerk then executed the final stage of his clever plan to rid the town of the parson once and for all. The parson asked, "Where now, should I begin my quest? Where then, have you heard of the final remnants of the heathen plague upon our land?"

"In Asgard, parson," said the clerk.

You must know by now the name of Asgard? In times before the coming of Christ, the people believed in the heathen gods: Odin, Thor, and Loki to name a few. A great many of these gods lived in a place called Asgard. Asgard was a long way away, but not quite an impossible destination if you had the right means of transportation. For hundreds of years after the coming of Christ, the people had forgotten about the heathen gods and continued as if none of them had ever existed. Therefore, no one ever thought of sending someone there to bring the Gospels to the forgotten gods. Surely this place, if any, held the last bastion of heathen belief in the Christian land of Norway.

The parson coughed for a moment from considering the challenge. The crowd began to snicker and whisper amongst each other; they were not altogether sure that this plan of the clerk's would work. But the parson soon righted himself, and spoke confidently, "Then thither shall I go! And thither shall I bring the Gospels! I shall see Norway and all of her glorious regions, both seen and unseen, bedecked in the glory of God!"

Another cheer went up from the crowd, and the parson was deeply touched. "How they love me," he thought. "Hear how they love me, oh Jesus. See how they love thy willing servant. See how they cheer for mine endeavors." He grinned the widest grin that any of the townfolk had seen on his face, and was immediately prepared for his journey. "They are so eager to help me," mused the parson. "They truly must believe in the goodness of my venture into the world. Oh, bless the little hypocrites, the charlatans, and the deceivers. Bless them all for their support of

the spread of the glorious Word!"

The clerk had studied long nights to find out exactly how to get the parson to Asgard, for if the parson should discover that there was no way to get into Asgard, the ruse would be up and he would return faster than they could shut the gates behind him! So, he applied himself to the ancient heathen lore, and discovered that a tribe of Trolls who lived in the mountains knew the way to reach the ancient gods of Norway. While securing the parson's pack with bread and provisions (the townsfolk certainly wouldn't want to be responsible for sending a parson to his grave, no matter how dull he was!), the clerk told the parson of this tribe of Trolls and handed him a hand-drawn map, which he was to follow.

"Ah, thank you good clerk," said the parson.

"'Tis only a small gift from a grateful servant of such a spectacular parson," replied the clerk.

"Very well, then! I am off! Hopefully if you all change your sinning ways, I will see you again at the Gates of Heaven!" he shouted. And he was not but twenty paces away from the town before the gates slammed shut behind him. He could hear in the distance more shouting and cheering, and this warmed his heart, which was already becoming eaten with loneliness.

He walked for quite some time, through many beaten mountain trails, and followed the hand-drawn map as faithfully as he could. All the while he sung a few hymns to keep him company. It should be told that the parson was entirely tone-deaf, so all of his songs sounded quite awful, and the wildlife in the wood were repulsed by this terrible noise. He therefore traveled unmolested by any manner of giant or beast that would seek to delay his journey.

The Trolls (whom I told you about just a little while ago, if you remember) were startled by this singing, but they were not altogether repulsed by it. Trolls are often said to enjoy the sounds of bad singing whenever they hear it coming from human villages, for it is the singing that most mimics their own styles of music (which, incidentally, are quite terrible). As the parson approached their village on the side of the mountain, they were dancing about to the sound of his horrible hymns. He put a stop to their nonsense immediately with a long sermon on the sin of

dancing. The Trolls were all very displeased and longed to be rid of the parson, but of course they would not kill him. As a rule, Trolls cannot touch holy men, though it is quite unclear why. He asked their chieftain about getting into Asgard. The chieftain gladly pointed him in the direction of a magic ram, who could leap up mountains and from the top of the mountains, leap directly onto the Bifrost bridge, which linked the dominion of men to the dominion of the ancient gods.

"The magic ram is named Salir, and what thou must do is jump upon the ram's back and say in his ear, 'Up! Up! Salir! To Asgard!' and then thou wilt find thyself upon the Bifrost bridge. Simply follow the Bifrost bridge until you reach the walls. I am sure that they will be happy to receive thy company; it has been many years since men have treated with them," the chieftain instructed.

"Very well! I shall go hence to Asgard, and when I have converted every last one of the ancient gods to the true religion, I shall thence return to further preach the Gospel to you, for I see that you are all Godless. It saddens my heart to leave you all so, but I must take one thing at a time! Goodbye!"

A great cheer went up from the Trolls, and the parson thought to himself, "what a fortunate sign indeed! These Trolls cannot wait to get me on my way so that I may make a speedy return to preach the Gospel to them!" And with that, he jumped upon the ram and shouted "Up! Up! Salir! To Asgard!" And oh the ram did jump! The parson held fast to the ram's horns as Salir leapt from the ground to the top of the mountain, and from the top of the mountain made an enormous leap to the Bifrost bridge.

The parson stepped off Salir and thanked him very much with a sermon on the virtues of being human, and Salir found this sermon to be boring. Unlike human beings, rams have a very low tolerance for things that are boring, and thus Salir leapt away as soon as he felt himself becoming tired of the parson's voice. The parson was greatly delighted at this, and thought, "Ah, so my sermon so inspired the ram that he leapt for joy and went out to preach to others of his kind!"

The parson continued on his way on the rainbow of the Bifrost bridge and soon was confronted by Heimdall, the watchman of Asgard, who stood at the highest point on the bridge. It is said

in the ancient heathen lore that Heimdall had senses so keen that he could hear the sound of wool growing on sheep, and the secret conversations of ants. The parson looked upon him and said, "Hail there, old god of Norway! I have come with a message for you and your kin!"

"I know that," muttered Heimdall. "Of course I know that, I hear and see everything that occurs in all the nine-worlds! Oh, and it's just such a racket! But yes, I knew that you were coming, I could hear your footsteps before you even took them."

"Very well then! You know why I have come!" bellowed the parson, and he began to take out his Bible.

"Oh, do put that thing away. I know what's in it. I heard most of the whole thing from up here all while it was happening. I heard Cain and Abel when they first began to cry, and I heard Moses and Pharaoh trading pleasantries, and I heard your vaunted Jesus munching on lamb during the Last Supper! I heard everything. I saw most of it too," huffed Heimdall.

"Well, then! If you have heard it all then you no doubt must have already accepted the Truth and sought your salvation!"

"Ah, I'm still thinking on it."

"Still thinking on it?"

"Well, yes. Think about it, my small friend, I hear all sorts of things. I hear all sorts of people popping up claiming to be the Savior of mankind, one promising an eternity in Heaven, another promising something called Nirvana, and yet another promising a whole lot of bread and fish. I see all sorts of things, and hear all sorts of things, and many of the things I see, I hear are false, and many of the things I hear, I see are false. So yes, absolutely, I am sitting here trying to sort it all out. I am thinking on it."

The parson was quite flustered with Heimdall, but he could see no way in performing his Christian duty upon one who was so utterly confused. So he begged Heimdall leave to enter Asgard to find a better audience for the Gospel. "Very well," said Heimdall, "but don't expect that you will find anyone in that land who will listen to you any more than I have. Well, of course they can't listen better than I can, but don't go in expecting to come out with a Holy Host of devoted Christians."

"We shall see, old god! We shall see!" shouted the parson as

he ran through the gates of the land of Asgard with his Bible in hand and a hope held high in his heart.

Asgard was quite empty and lonely now that few humans came to treat with the gods anymore. True, there were other sorts of spirits that walked about the land, but for the most part, it was not the hustle and bustle that it once was. The parson thought, "Ah, this place will be ripe for the seeds of the Word! Where there is despair, there I will bring hope! Where there is loneliness, there I will bring the warmth of Christ's good company!" He walked along the roads and townships of Asgard, and soon came upon Thor, who was smashing a giant into bloody bits in a fit of rage. As soon as Thor caught sight of the parson, he set his hammer at his belt and warmly extended his massive and bloody hand.

"Aye me! That I should never see one of your kin around these parts again! Oh happy day! I have been here in the company of nothing but giants and other gods and they aren't too terribly much fun after a few hundred years. Oh, the times I've had with your folk! When I would toss you up in the air to hear the glee of your laughter as you fell back into my arms! You're the only folk in the wide world besides my own kin who would treat me as their friend! Oh, so good to see you!" bellowed Thor.

"Well," began the parson, "I see that at least one of the ancient gods has a respect for my mission here. Your kinsman, Heimdall pushed me aside as if I were a foul smelling fish."

"Of course he would! He sees you folk all the time! He cannot help but see you! Were I him, I would probably want to crush your bones into a fine jelly! But that's only me. What mission did you come here on?"

"I came to spread the good news of Christ's promised salvation!"

"Excellent, I love good news!" shouted Thor. "But first, be so good as to wait a moment, for I must squeeze the blood out of my beard and hair, and I wouldn't want to let such a thing get in the way of our conversation!"

"Of course!" smiled the parson, "take as long as you need!"

"Thank you, kindly."

And Thor began to squeeze the blood out of his beard and hair, and the blood of many giants poured out (it had been a long time, mind you, since Thor had to have any sort of conversation

with our kind). So much was the blood that it began to pool around the parson's feet. At first, the parson did not mind this, but Thor continued to squeeze. The giant blood rose up to the parson's knees and he became a bit uneasy, but Thor continued to squeeze. The giant blood rose up to the parson's waist, and he was quite frightened, but Thor continued to squeeze. The parson then spoke up, "Excuse me, good Thor, but perhaps you had better stop squeezing your beard, for I am becoming quite soaked in the blood!"

"Oh, well it simply won't do to have a conversation with a bloody beard! I tell you what, when I am finished squeezing out the blood in my beard, I'll give you a good squeezing out too, so that we can have a decent conversation."

The parson then swam through the blood until he was in the dry, and then ran as fast as he could away from the mighty Thor, who smiled still as he squeezed yet more blood out of his beard. "I shall return to him again when he has finished with that bloody business of his grooming," thought the parson.

He continued to walk a long ways until he came to the Hall of the Slain, which was where Odin was known in old times to hang his hat. The hall was made of giant's bone, and a great tower stretched upwards into the sky. The parson thought "Ah! If I can convince the lord of this great hall to convert to the light of Christ, then surely with his support the rest of the land will follow his example!" The doors of the massive hall opened for him and he was greeted by a torrent of shouts and ale being thrown about. "HAIL!" screamed all the voices from within the hall. The din of voices belonged to great and noble warriors who had fallen in battles far away from home. Odin gathered them all together, and they sat with their faces quite happily buried in their mugs of ale. They warmly welcomed the parson, and he asked to be shown to where Odin would be found. Immediately he was passed from arm to arm until he was face to face with the lord of Asgard.

"Well, my little parson, have ye come to treat with me?" smiled the one-eyed god Odin.

"To treat, nay! But I come bearing a gift for you, oh lord of this fine land! I bring the gift of..."

"The good news? The Gospel? Aye, I have heard of it already,

and so have many of my fellows! Would ye think that me, the seeker of the ultimate wisdom, would fail to catch all sorts of fish in my net? Do ye think that Hugin and Munin, the ravens who gather knowledge for me, would neglect to bring me every morsel that they could find in your realm? Of course not! And I have shared my knowledge with my kin, for who would be so base as to not share such wonderful stories with his own?"

"Has anyone here NOT heard the Gospel of the one true God?" huffed the exasperated parson.

"None that I know of," replied Odin.

"And are you, as Heimdall, still thinking on it?"

"Nay, my good parson, a great many of us have made up our minds about this Gospel."

"And you have decided?"

Odin paused for a few moments, and the hall was silent. There was neither the sound of clinking glasses, nor whispers, nor gossip of any kind. The silence held still in the air until Odin broke it, "No, we do not like it very much."

At this, there was much laughter.

"WHAT!" fumed the parson, "Not like the promise of forgiveness for all of your sins? Not like the idea of a loving father who provides absolutely everything for you to know him? Not like the promise of an eternal life and triumph over death? What more could you want!"

"Oh, it's not that I want any more than that," grinned Odin. "I'm sure that no one could ask for more than something like that. I really have no desire for forgiveness, what need has Odin for forgiveness? All I have done, I have done. There is no more than that," Odin replied.

"But what about Heaven? Surely, you've heard of the glory of God and the promise of eternal life in paradise?" asked the Parson.

"Why, yes. I have, but I do not long for eternity in some heavenly choir, singing the praises of the white light of salvation! What is this Heaven if not this place right here where I am? It is far better to be here in the company of my friends and kin than to arrive in Heaven with a gaggle of beggars!" shouted Odin.

The parson was flabbergasted, and was further flummoxed when the arms of the warriors conspired to throw him out of the Halls of the Slain and back out into the land, where he was again

alone. He dusted himself off and turned a haughty nose up at the ancient battle god. "Hmph! Well, he will see! I'll get at least one god on my side and then all of Asgard will soon follow his lead, but I must keep heart! Soon I will have converted the whole land and the pure light of Salvation will embrace all!"

The parson continued on his way until he came upon a rather strange scene. There stood a god gesticulating wildly at a goddess, while she looked on in confusion. The parson came closer to the two and saw that the god's eyes and mouth were all sewn shut! Another rather peculiar thing about this god was that his hair seemed to be made of fire. Of course, this god was none other than Loki, whose eyes and mouth had been sewn shut by dwarves. The goddess' name was Sigyn, and she is Loki's wife.

"Hail there, old god and goddess of Asgard! I have come to spread the Good News!" shouted the parson.

"mmm mmm mmm?" said Loki.

"Oh sir, you're quite out of luck, I'm afraid. My husband cannot speak," said Sigyn. "Nor can he see you. He lost his head in a wager with a few very ill tempered dwarves. Oh, my poor husband! Now he stands here all day, trying to tell me what he wants by pointing at things that he cannot see. If only there were some way to help him..."

"Mmmm mmm!" said Loki.

"Well then, why does no one cut these strings that bind his eyelids and lips together? Wouldn't that solve the problem?" asked the Parson.

"Mmmm!" replied Loki.

"It is not so simple as all that, my dear sir. We gods of Asgard have sworn to uphold Loki's punishment. He did lose his head fair and square, so we must abide by the terms and conditions set forth by those nasty little dwarves. If I were to cut those little strings, then I would bring down a great dishonor on us all. Oh, if only there were someone who could save my husband!" whimpered Sigyn.

"Mmmm. Mmm mm mmm mmmm" whimpered Loki.

The parson smiled with great benevolence and replied, "Why my dear lady, I am not of the race of the old gods of Norway, I am a man, and I could cut these little strings with no trouble at all, and thus we can avoid any shame being brought upon you

and yours. Ah, the Lord is good."

"Mmm mmm!" said Loki.

"Oh, would you sir? That would be ever so kind of you," said Sigyn.

"Yes, but you must promise me this: that your husband as a god of Asgard will aid me in my travels, and will help me in my quest to spread the Good Word throughout all of Asgard."

"MMMM!" replied Loki.

"Oh yes! Yes! A thousand times yes! He and I shall be ever so dutiful in spreading the Good Word. My husband Loki is the blood brother of Odin, didn't you know? I'm sure that he can convince him to give you an audience!" replied Sigyn.

The parson needed no more convincing, and drew a small knife from his pack. He then carefully and gently cut through each little string that bound Loki's eyes and mouth. "SNAP! SNAP! SNAP!" went the strings, and off they came.

Loki stretched out for a moment while his wife threw herself upon him with kisses and joy. The parson smiled and admired the great work that he had wrought. "And soon," he thought, "the whole of Asgard will be convinced of the goodness of the Lord!"

Loki took his wife in his arms and said, "Well, thank you kindly parson, and thank goodness for your great magic! But I must be on my way, I have many things to do and very little time, so I must say goodbye!"

"Ah, but surely you will stay and journey with me back to Asgard to preach the Gospel with me? There are a few gods in particular I would like you to give a stern talking to: Odin and Thor come readily to mind."

While Loki missed his brother and nephew, and all his other friends and kin in Asgard, he knew that they wouldn't very much care for the Gospel. But he also knew that he owed the parson a favor for helping him out of his problem, so he puzzled for a moment. Now, Loki is a very clever god, very much like his blood brother, Odin. And he is also like his brother in that he can also be quite malicious, if need be.

"Good parson, let us not go back to Thor and Odin. Rather, let us go to the home of the giants, where we may find those more sympathetic to our mission. Then when we return to Asgard, we will have a power more ready to meet the challenges

Benjamin J. Kowalksy

that my fellow gods may present."

"That is a most sensible idea, Loki. Lead me on! And we shall soon have all of Asgard worshipping the cross!"

And so the journey began, in Jotunheim (that is, the home of the giants), the parson preached his heart out to crowds of giants who had no interest in Jesus or Salvation while Loki made love to his wife and several giant women who were not his wife. Every time that the parson became dejected by the rejection he faced from the giants and asked to move on, Loki would encourage him even further in his efforts. The parson would think to himself, "Ah me, that I should have such a stalwart companion in Christ, who pushes me to my very limits when I feel that I can do no more!" Thus, he would continue preaching, and Loki would continue drinking and making love to his heart's content, and so the parson stays, perhaps to this very day: preaching to the masses of giants, far away from home.

Michael D. Rayzer
Garden View
Honorable Mention

I watch your back
Curve like the marbled
Handle of your cane;
And your delicate, wax papered
Hands pick tomatoes so fresh
You can taste the sun.

Marilyn C. Terlaga
Good Friday

This man of the cloth
who dispenses forgiveness
like candy from the plastic head of Christ,
sits late at night
in his leather armchair.
Drinking in Aquinas, reading miracles
in the bottom of his glass of Scotch
until his head rolls back,
his eyes hang on the cross above his bed:

Why have you forsaken me?

Valerie B. McKee
Last Will and Testament
(Part II)

When I'm gone, sprinkle my ashes
like a seasoning on the ground—
but not just in one spot. I'd like
an arm in Portugal, my lips in Greece,
one toe dipped in each of the oceans
(put two in the Mediterranean Sea).
My eyes should be placed at the base
of Kilimanjaro, so that they might
stick to the boot sole of adventure,
carry me to the top, and I'll look
out over the world I never saw,
never once thinking of the height.

Jaclyn Watterson

I Always Tell the Truth Unless a Lie Sounds Better

Last week my nephew, who is seven and much more mature and articulate than other seven year olds, came to my apartment and asked why none of the frames had any pictures in them and I said, "You are just a little kid and you don't know what you're talking about, so you had better shut up." He didn't cry, but I could tell he wanted to.

Once I was walking in a forest and I came to a very tall tree and the branches grew all the way to the ground so that it was no trouble at all for me to step in among those branches and I started going up and could not see the top. I kept going up and up, but I did not come to the sky or the tips of the branches. Instead I found a whole civilization there among the leafy branches, and this place had a reality you have never known. I would have stayed forever among the race of the Tree People, who smiled shyly but said "welcome" when they saw me, and we would have had long and fruitful days. But somehow I lost my footing and fell from that tree and then I was back in the ordinary forest again.

I know a boy whose kisses smell like sunshine streaming through the rain in summers gone by and these kisses feel like lying down on thick wet grass just to feel the shiver in your spine. But I am not faithful.

My grandmother was born in January 1916. Can you believe that? She was born before the czar abdicated, before Hemingway published *The Sun Also Rises*, before the stock market crashed, before the Holocaust or the Beatles or TV, Jackie Kennedy or Malcolm X, before AIDS and Reagan and Sesame Street and even Mickey Mouse. She was born before the twentieth century really got started, so she saw it all. She's still alive.

But I am young.

Sometimes when the sky is blue I put my arms up and my head back and float away into it. Eventually I get so far from

the earth that I am enveloped in blue and I can't see anything. This is solitude, but it is also blindness because after looking at the blue for long enough I can no longer recognize it and then I know I have gone too high.

I don't even have one hundredth of the books I need to have.

I once thought about killing myself. I was at the beach and my head hurt and the sun wasn't going down for another few hours and I had a pen and some paper, so I thought about who I'd write a note to and what I could say. Six people came to mind, and so I wrote to every one of them. It didn't take long, because each note said the same thing, just addressed to a different person. All the notes said Fuck You. I put them on the front seat of my car, where I knew they'd be found, and I walked back onto the beach and I was going to take off my clothes and just walk into the water, which was very cold because it was February, but then I remembered no one but me had found Edna Pontellier very romantic and I would have liked to put the notes in envelopes. So I went back to the car and got the notes and sent them to drift through the water until they died instead and then I went home.

I have not called my mother in three and a half weeks even though she leaves so many messages. I'm not going to call now because I have an idea she might be home and that means she will pick up the phone when it rings.

Other times the sky is not blue and it is hard and I take off my clothes and climb through it and it is jagged rock and it scrapes my skin and I bleed. I climb until I am surrounded by this rock and I can't see anything else and then the blood begins to dry and harden and I know I will be covered in scabs when I go home again.

I say I'm too smart to be happy, but what if I just like being sad? The world is certainly enough to break my heart, but what if I made my heart up and it isn't even real?

For all of these reasons I am a Bad Person. So it is necessary for me to try and redeem myself, even though I never could. I would like to tell you that this idea came to me one night and I awoke in a cold sweat and I knew what had to be done, but this is a cliché and so I think the truth, that I don't remember when I

first started thinking about it, is what I will tell you. I have this idea that I must perform one act of pure kindness, motivated by nothing other than a desire to help someone else. An act of kindness is also an act of bravery, and every morning when I wake up I resolve to be brave, but most days I forget before I get out of the shower. Being brave is not easy, say what you will. I'm not talking about heroic bravery, like saving someone from a burning building or donating a kidney, because we've all got that inside of us. I'm talking about the common, everyday sort of bravery. That is not so easy.

I go to the oldest section of the cemetery and I find the grave of a woman who died in 1706 and you and I both know her life was probably awful and I wonder if anyone has ever left flowers at her grave; did they leave flowers at graves back when there was still someone alive to care that this woman ever existed or that she had a grave? And what do you think she died of? Probably oppression, so I leave some peonies, which are my favorite flower. This feels like a certain kind of love for a while, because probably no one has thought of this woman in two hundred years or more, but then I think, maybe she was important and I have already forgotten her name and maybe some descendents think about her all the time and I am so self-centered so this is not an act of kindness at all, but some form of self-glorification. So I resolve to do better.

I put pictures of my nephew in some of the empty frames and I call my mother, even though I know she is home.

"Hey Mom. What's up?"

"Well look who finally decides to call. But I can't talk. I'm on the other line."

"Fine."

I hang up without even saying bye, because this is painful. But then I remember that I am trying to be brave and kind, so I call back. She doesn't even say hello.

"I'm still on the other line."

"Do you want to come over for dinner tomorrow night though?"

"Well this is pretty short notice," she draws out the words, as if she has anything better to do. "Let me see. I guess I can come, but I have to watch Jimmy. Your sister is working late. So he'll have to come."

I'm glad Jimmy is coming, because just those few words with my mother make me dread the dinner. They come and my mom sees the picture of Jimmy in the frame and she says, "You could have gotten a better picture than that. Look at those circles under his eyes."

Jimmy smiles carefully and says, "How come you put a picture of me in the frame? Because of what I said last time?"

"Because you are mature and articulate. And I should have a picture of that."

"Aunt Nora! I don't know what those words mean!" he says, giggling now.

That night after they leave I am driving home from the video store and I see, for what seems the forty-ninth time, a dirty shopping bag on the corner of the street my building is on. I pull over and pick it up because it has been there for over a week. I tell myself I am doing this for other people, the good of the community, but really it is because I cannot look at that bag even one more time without picking it up.

Dave comes over and when we are lying in bed without any clothes on and he is idly tracing a finger through my hair, I turn onto my side and tell him, "You're a really good kisser."

"Yeah?" he says and pulls my face towards his with both hands.

"But sometimes other people are good kissers too."

He stops and raises his eyebrows. Then he frowns, which is something he has tried to teach me, but my mouth refuses to cooperate.

"I've cheated on you," I say.

Then he does the worst thing. He chuckles.

"Did you think you were the only one for me, Nor?" he asks. Then he turns the light off, and I think he even goes to sleep because he doesn't leave until the morning even though I wish he had never come over in the first place.

When he finally does leave I call Will and we go for a walk. "I told Dave about us and he was furious," I say.

Will holds my hand and says that it's okay and I think it's nice to play along so I tell him about the Tree People and how much they wanted me to stay and how it was almost peace of mind up there in that Tree.

Then he laughs and says, "How do you think of things like that? You have such an imagination," and this is so awful that I let go of his hand and put my arms up and my head back and float away because the sky is blue. When I get up there I don't think about kindness or bravery; I just wait for the blindness.

I go to the bookstore on Clarke Street and max out my credit card; I even buy some books for Jimmy. One is a dictionary and the others are books that everyone should have, fine literature. I go to my sister's house and when he answers the bell I give the books directly to him, still in the bag. I leave quickly, not wanting to go in. But when I walk into my own living room the light on the answering machine is flashing and my sister is angry and she yells, "What were you thinking? Tropic of Cancer is not appropriate for a seven year old! Jesus, Nora. Get a grip!"

You probably know I deleted this message, but I got tired of reading after a while so I decided to call my grandma. "Tell me what it was like when Rasputin was casting his evil spells," I say to her.

"I don't know! I wasn't even old enough to walk, and I grew up in Manhattan," she reminds me.

"Well then what about the Cuban Missile Crisis? Did you think it was the end of the world?"

"No. I thought, 'I hope I never have a fool granddaughter who asks me what this is like, because the answer is obvious.'"

I sigh, but she doesn't say anything, so then I say, "Grandma, I was telling my friend Will about this extraordinary Tree--"

"I think you should look into getting some medication, Nora. There's no reason to suffer like you do. I heard about this rid-dlin they have out now. It makes you think straight..."

I don't even hear the rest of what she says because I am realizing that this is not how I wanted my efforts to be rewarded,

yet this is what happens. I see that my heart is not something I have made up.

I get out a pen and some paper and I write six letters. This doesn't take very long, because all the letters say the same thing. They all say Fuck You. This time, I put them in envelopes and then stick stamps in the corners. I go to the mailbox instead of the beach.

Jaclyn Waterson

Joy Mlozanowski

Bitch

Honorable Mention

the long swipe
of your razored word
is precise and quick—
and meant to be heard.
Not an insult to bones and skin,
but see—
it is deep enough
to make me bleed.

Marilyn C. Terlaga
Your Song

I should write a poem about
the Civil War - red Shiloh, Antietam.
Savaged limbs hacked off,
tossed into the bone pile;
screams echoing like bugle calls.

I should write about Hiroshima, Nagasaki –
blooming mushroom cloud.
Here a man, there a woman,
see the child –
crumbly ash outlines on burnt ground.

And what about Holy wars,
ethnic cleansing, natural disasters.
Suffering and death on the grand scale
should be commemorated
yet all I can think about is you.

Those last weeks.
Tubes, wires, beeping machines.

Noisy rubber-soled silence.

Fingers of your right hand scratching at the sheet.

Amy Ashton Handy

Simplicity

First Place

I approach the front door holding six sweating bottles of Ska's Pinstripe beer in a cardboard carrier. There is no need to knock; from the street I smell the bonfire they've lit behind the Watermelon House and it flavors the air with summertime. This place is known as the Watermelon House because of the pink siding, the green roof, and the fact that no one ever lives in it long enough to claim the place. So this season it's not called Faith's house; it's the Watermelon House.

The music on Faith's stereo pulsates G-Love and Special Sauce. I try not to dance as I walk, weaving through the small crowd in the living room and past the poker game in full swing on the kitchen table. Two guys I've never seen before smile in a way that strikes me as predatory, their teeth framed by shaggy facial hair; I conscientiously look away. The first few minutes at any party make me feel a bit lost, a bit self-conscious as if I'll be asked to leave because nobody wants me there. I recognize that this is ridiculous, but it doesn't make the feeling go away. I'm only here because Faith called me at work specifically ordering me to show up tonight.

I look for her through the kitchen. The sliding glass door is open to the bonfire raging in a pit someone dug in the backyard some other summer. I wonder how long until the cops come and ask us to extinguish it.

"Hey!" Faith calls as I ease out onto the porch. "You made it."

She tips her beer in my direction. I smile at the sight of her. Like always, I'm a little surprised at how well made she is. Faith looks comfortable and earthy, her hair in two shiny black braids that snake down her shoulders to rest on the top of each breast. She's sitting on the wooden railing with her legs, tan and bare, dangling.

Her housemate, Henry David, lounges on the ratty couch that someone dragged under the porch overhang long before Faith moved in. He doesn't greet me or even acknowledge my entrance except to look annoyed at losing Faith's undivided at-

tention.

"Yeah," I say. "Just got out of work."

"Always the working girl. Did you bilk a lot of tourists today?" Faith asks.

"All day long," I laugh.

Somebody yells to Faith from the kitchen and she leaves me with Henry David there on the porch. Faith is cool. She moved to Durango from Raton, New Mexico only four years ago, about the same time I arrived. But everybody knows her. She has this way of attracting people that mystifies me. I never have made friends easily, but Faith sort of adopted me last year when I ran into her somewhere downtown. I like Faith even if some of her friends are pretty annoying. Like Henry David.

"Don't you work in one of those shops on Main Street?" he asks.

"Yep," I say, trying not to be rude and let my distaste for him show. I pop the cap off a beer with the plastic end of my lighter and take a long drink. It was a hot, dry day and the beer tastes so good I could drain the whole bottle, give a huge ass belch, die, and go straight to heaven. But I don't. Instead I savor the malty goodness and do my best to ignore Henry David.

"How can you look at yourself in the mirror?" he asks, flipping a greasy blonde dreadlock off his shoulder.

"What do you mean?" I say, instantly regretting my question.

"Don't you know that all those shop owners go out to the res and buy up a bunch of stuff from the Navajos for a steal, then lug it back here, jack up the prices for the tourists, and make a fortune for themselves, not sharing a goddamn dime with the artists and craftsmen that make it? It's the ugliest form of exploitation. How could you?"

"It's a living, I guess." Henry David is an ass. I don't want to get into this conversation. Farren doesn't need me to defend him from an idiot like Henry David and he would just laugh if he were here right now.

Farren, my boss, is a grisly old guy who hired me to run the front of his jewelry shop after his wife died. He's lived here in Colorado his entire life, so he almost wouldn't hire me when he found out I had come from California. I had to assure him that

I was really from the East Coast and that I'd merely been in California going to school. For the first time since I got it, my degree in Art History paid off when I launched into an intense monologue about the aesthetics of his jewelry design and won him over. Farren designs and makes all of his own merchandise in the back of the shop. It wasn't flattery that did it for me. He knows his work is good, but the five-dollar words I threw in got me the job, so he said later.

"Coming from a good-looking girl like you the Texans will eat that shit up," he had growled. They certainly do. His sales are amazing these days. Summer is the money season in Durango.

"But at what cost?" Henry David continues.

"I don't know, guy," I say, refusing to use his name.

"At the cost of your humanity," he informs me, taking a plug at the bottle of gin he's holding. Some of the clear liquid dribbles from his untrimmed mustache and down into his beard, but he doesn't notice.

I sigh and lean against the porch railing hoping somebody will come along and get me out of this.

"Yeah," he says, "you really gotta open your eyes. You gotta live simple, you know? Live free."

I am about to lose it. I can feel my jaw clenching. He takes another swig of gin. I know they charged somebody for that gin at the liquor store. Probably Faith.

"Live free, huh?" I ask. "Like you?"

"Totally," he says, smiling smugly. "I haven't sold my soul to those capitalist bastards yet. I got no home address. No strings attached. When I get tired of living here, I'll pick up and hitch a ride somewhere else. I'm thinking Telluride or something."

I hate it that Henry David lives off of Faith. He rode into town with some hippies on their way to a Rainbow Gathering. They left him here when he joined a houseful of guys from Dallas who were hooked through the gills on heroin. They lived on the corner of my street. Henry David had gone into the house as the leaves were falling and I'd seen him finally emerge, white and emaciated, just as winter was coming to an end. I remember my surprise at seeing him standing there in the yard, shirtless and barefoot in the snow, staring straight into the sun. Soon

after, he'd moved in on Faith.

"You should definitely go soon," I say. "Telluride is a great place to be this time of year."

"Oh, I will. As soon as my ticket runs out here," he says.

"Ticket?"

Faith comes back outside and sits on the arm of the couch. Henry David winks at me and I want to punch him in his goddamn face. The urge to strike is so intense that I can actually see the mist of red that would erupt when the bones of my fist crunched the cartilage of his nose.

"El Guapo!" Faith cries affectionately to the beastly dog that climbs up the porch. He's panting and drooling and if dogs can smile then this dog certainly is. "Been chasing all those bitches?" Faith asks him, fondling his ears and pressing her forehead to his.

A sharp bark and a series of growls from the darkness in the corners of the backyard cause Guapo to scamper off and Faith shakes her head.

"Typical male," she says wryly. "Love me and leave me."

"You have too soft a heart," Henry David says. She looks at him strangely, and then laughs a short, bitter laugh. I wonder how much loving Henry David has done to make her laugh like that.

"Yeah, lucky for you," she says, grabbing the bottle of gin from him and taking a swig. "Otherwise I'd have kicked your ass outta here weeks ago."

"You wouldn't do that," Henry David says, getting up. "You know you love me."

Faith rolls her eyes as Henry David goes inside to change the music.

"Why don't you kick his ass out?" I ask her once we're alone.

"I don't know," she sighs. "Where would he go?"

"Who cares?"

"That's mean," Faith says. "Some people just don't know how to take care of themselves. He's like a big child."

Her naïveté annoys me just now, so I don't say anything.

"Anyway," she continues, "he says his parents are going to wire him some money soon, and I could use the help with rent."

"Ah, so he really is a Trustafarian." I had a suspicion that he was. It kills me, these kids who ditch their wealthy parents to

wander around, grow dreadlocks, smoke a lot of dope and pretend this makes them Rasta. They know they can be bums because if they bottom out they always have mommy and daddy's trust fund waiting for them, fat and solid in a bank somewhere just a phone call away. I've run into a lot of Trustafarians in Colorado.

"Of course he is," Faith laughs. "And guess what. His name isn't really Henry David either. It's Todd. His mom called here the other day asking for Todd and it took me a minute to figure out who she was talking about. Apparently he calls himself Henry David because he's way into Thoreau."

I find this to be hilarious and I say so.

"So tell me," she says, coming over to lean against the railing next to me, "You still planning to take off to the East Coast next season?"

There is a curious buzzing in my ears and I suddenly can't swallow.

"Haven't decided," I say. "I don't expect too much from Connecticut."

"Why? What's so bad about home?"

"Everything there is..." I squelch the urge to change the subject, "old."

Faith laughs. "I like old. I'm all about the historic shit."

"Not just that kind of old," I say, wishing I had given a more mundane answer. I glance around the porch at the lights, at the doorway, at the mud crusted doormat.

"What kind of old?" Faith presses.

"I mean life-old. Everybody there seems old to me. Everybody is about the idea that Job equals Life. Every conversation you'll have is bullshit. Nasally complaining bullshit about long hours, about traffic, about the weather, always the weather no matter if it's hot or cold, dry or humid, snowing or not snowing. Every trip home I ended up counting the minutes until I could get back to school in Cali."

"If it was so great in California why did you leave?"

I feel a little dizzy. I want to shut up. Somehow Faith always does this to me, gets me going so it's only later that I realize how idiotic I must have sounded; spouting muck, diarrhea of the mouth. I shrug and look at her, then away.

"No really," she says, bumping me with her shoulder. "Why did you come here?"

I take a swig of beer before I answer. It would be rude not to say anything at all. "After I graduated, when I threw my journals in a box and my sleeping bag in the back seat it just hit me that this drive could not be my last adventure before entering the real world. I didn't think twice about stopping here in Durango."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"And you'll leave here just like that too? Even if the people here are a cut above the people back home?" she asks. I can feel her staring at me, and the question looms larger than the context of this conversation.

"The people here are complete jackasses," I laugh. Faith smacks my arm and laughs too. It occurs to me that I hadn't been breathing until now.

We are still chuckling when Henry David comes back outside. I grin at him hoping he can see that Faith and I are laughing together, hoping that he thinks we are laughing at him.

"Something funny?" he asks.

"Yeah," is my only response. Not wanting to screw up the moment, I leave Henry David there to figure that one out for himself.

I step down into the backyard. Pirogue is sitting on a log by the bonfire. He, like a lot of Faith's friends, like the house she now lives in, has an adopted name. Everyone began calling him Pirogue because he comes from Louisiana. Now he's a student up at the college on the mesa, studying philosophy I think, and he spends most of the summer kayaking the Animas. You can see it in his upper body, which looks hard and lean, even through his tee-shirt. I haven't seen him at the Watermelon House before, but I know he works part time at Durango Coffee with Faith and I see him every weekend at El Rancho, shooting pool.

"Pirogue," I greet him, flopping down into the powdery dirt by the log.

"Shh, man," he says, not looking at me.

"What?" I look around. "Tequila Amy?"

Pirogue nods and watches her. She's dancing in the firelight with small authentic movements that almost look choreographed

because of the surety of her feet. But I know it's not choreographed. I know she's practically channeling the music right now and her eyes are closed and her feet are bare in the dirt by the fire where she dances. The ends of her long corduroy pants are frayed from wear and they stir the dust around her feet so that she seems to be dancing in a cloud. Her body moves in a curiously sexy way, as if it's just about the music not about her at all. When she opens her eyes she looks straight at Pirogue and doesn't break her groove. He's utterly captivated.

I'm about to get up and leave them to their erotic little game when Tequila Amy stops dancing and comes over to sit with us. Or, more accurately, she comes to sit on Pirogue's lap.

"Got any smoke?" she asks, smiling.

I try not to laugh at Pirogue's reaction. Tequila Amy is called Tequila Amy because last fall she was riding her bicycle home after a long afternoon of margaritas at the bar in Francisco's when she wiped out, I mean totally ate it, flew over the handlebars and knocked out her front teeth on the cement. Her grin is toothless and haggish and it will be until she scrapes up the cash for some dentures.

"Uh, yeah," Pirogue says, pushing her off his lap in the pretense of searching his pockets for the bag. Tequila Amy sits on the log beside him and waits eagerly for him to get her high.

I look up on the porch and see Henry David standing under the light. He's swaying a little on his feet, and saying something to Faith. She smiles at him and laughs at what he says. I want to look away.

Behind them I see the front door to the house fly open and smash into the drywall so hard it sticks instead of bouncing back. Two huge figures fill the house, rush through the kitchen, and spill out onto the porch.

"Holy shit!" I poke Tequila Amy in the arm. "It's the Stanley brothers!"

"No," she says, wide eyed, her broken toothed smile replaced by a look of surprise. "They were supposed to be gone until the end of summer."

Matt and Jeff are Faith's older twin brothers. They're the kind of twins who look nothing alike, but behaviorally they are

identical. They are both perpetually drunk and loud. They sweep Faith up off her feet and take turns hugging her ferociously as she hits them with ineffectual little fists.

"The night just got more interesting," I say, half to myself, as I tilt my beer bottle back and finish it off.

"No shit," Amy replies, dusting her patched corduroys free from the worst of the dirt they're carrying. She skips through the yard and up the porch steps to greet them. I do not. The Stanley brothers are as predictable as time. Before dawn they'll be drunk and surly and looking to fight. I mean to keep a slight distance and I'm hoping that Faith keeps her distance too. They are erratically protective of Faith; possessive, yet capable of trampling right over her if she gets too close when they go at it. They'll fight anybody. If there is no one else nearby, they'll fight each other. Jeff, squat and blonde, will probably bloody Matt up pretty well despite the fact that Matt has him by fifty pounds and a foot of height. Every time they are in town they end up getting carted off to the drunk tank at least once.

But it's early. For now they are buzzing genially, greeting Faith whom they haven't seen for the months they've been on the road drilling water wells. Faith is glowing at them. I smile to see her smiling like that. She often tells me that she misses them when they are away, as much trouble as they cause when they are around.

"Thanks for the warning," Pirogue finally grumbles. "What happened to that chick's teeth?"

"Amy's cool," I reply, trying not to laugh.

"Whatever," Pirogue says. "Got a beer for me?"

I pass him a Pinstripe. "Share the wealth," I say. I know he will too. I've come to realize this unwritten code since I moved out here. Most people in Faith's crowd don't keep jobs long. During the in-between times everybody shares the wealth. That's probably what makes it so easy for somebody like Henry David to mooch.

Up on the porch they have all begun settling into conversation. Matt separates himself from the crowd when he sees me by the fire.

"What's up?" he asks, taking a seat. "Done any singing late-

ly?" He grins and pushes his shaggy black hair out of his eyes to better gauge my reaction.

Earlier this summer Faith and I sat up in Horse Gulch for the Fourth of July to watch the fireworks. Matt got me ridiculously drunk. We sang the Star Spangled Banner loud enough for half of Durango to hear, our off-key voices ricocheting from the rock walls and rolling out over town like the colored lights in the fireworks show. After we were done I recall a lot of people hooting and clapping just before I began a marathon puking session.

"You sing?" Pirogue asks.

"Not really," I say. "Did you meet Henry David?" I ask Matt, hoping to make a conversational bypass on the whole Star Spangled Banner episode

"I dunno," Matt says, helping himself to one of my beers. "Which one is he?"

"Blonde dreds? Big mouth?" I prompt.

"Oh. Not a fan, I guess?" Matt drains the beer, his Adam's apple jolting violently.

"That dude's been living off Faith since you guys left." Pirogue says, neatly sipping from a half pint of whiskey he's produced from one of his pants pockets.

"What?" Matt barks, looking at me for confirmation. "He's living here?"

I can see the alcohol taking its effect on Matt's mood already, sharpening his edges and heating him up. I realize it wouldn't take much to get him going now.

"Yeah," I say. "And he hasn't paid for a single thing since he moved in."

"The guy is a total leech," Pirogue agrees. He passes the flask of whiskey to me and I take it without thought. I'm watching Matt knit his eyebrows.

"That asshole," Matt says. He looks up at the porch. I tap him on the knee to pass him the half pint, then slip the bottle into his hand when he doesn't respond. Matt unscrews the top, takes a healthy plug, then passes it wordlessly back to me.

"How long are ya'll back for?" Pirogue asks Matt.

"Don't know," Matt answers. He shifts to get a little closer to the fire, looking into the flames. "You hitting the river tomorrow?"

From experience I know that this is the prelude to an involved discussion about the merits of every stretch along the Animas from top to bottom. I take a long sweet sip from the whiskey bottle. The booze hits my stomach fast, shooting warmth to the tip of each limb and up over my scalp in a pleasant explosion. For an instant I see and hear clearly all the background noise I'd missed while getting mixed up in this conversation. The shadows ease open just beyond the light from the fire and I see the dogs playing, their retinas reflecting like red pinpoints in the yard. I can hear somebody laughing, high and shrill. I feel my hair tickle the back of my neck and how cool and soft the dirt is beneath my feet. The moment passes and I am achingly numb where its presence had been. I notice the conversation between the two guys has lapsed and Matt is checking out the porch again.

"I'll be right back," he says, suddenly jerking to his feet and striding across the yard.

Pirogue gives me a funny look and I just shrug, but his look makes me wonder how wise it was to get Matt riled up.

"Me too," I say, my voice rising as if I'd asked him a question.

I follow Matt, but just as I get halfway across the yard the porch erupts. I look for Faith and hear a yelp, then a dull thump as someone gets slammed to the ground. Matt has Henry David in a chokehold; then it's a mass of movement, of flailing arms and hair and clothes as the brawl engulfs a couple of bystander. At least three guys fall down the stairs into the grass. I can't pick out who's screaming; it sounds like a girl. I hear the meaty thwacks of fists on flesh, "fuck"s and "fucker"s screamed from the guys in the fight, and one voice that I can hear distinctly, Faith's, saying "stop! stop! stop! stop!" but I can't tell where she is.

Finally I see her. Faith hurtles down the stairs and I run to catch her, grabbing her by the wrist just in time.

"Goddamn it, let me go," she growls as if she doesn't recognize me.

"Faith, no."

"Get the fuck off of me!" Her voice has gone sharp. With her free hand she pushes me, hard, then wrenches her other arm

from my grasp. My hands are left empty. I feel like a broken creature. My breath hurts, my fingers ache, and right now I think she deserves whatever happens next.

Turning abruptly, I head into the darkness, find the fence, slip quickly over it, and take off down the alley. Behind me the yard is a chaotic mess of light and unfathomable noise.

I decide that these people are idiots. The place where Faith pushed me feels like a pulsing bruise and I run for the bike path to Santa Rita Park. I keep running until I think I might puke. Pushing past the nausea, I keep going until I get to the banks by Smelter Rapids where I can't hear any cars go by, and then I then throw myself down in the grass, glad for the solitude. It's louder than downtown at midnight in the city and I try to fill myself with the noise. This is the kind of noise that makes sense. The violent crashing is water pouring through the rocks in the rapids. That howling sound is wind sheared by tree trunks after it rushes down the side of Smelter Mountain. That thumping noise is the anxiety working its way from my adrenal glands, through my blood, and out my pores. And last I hear the creaking summer crickets sounding so sure of themselves that I begin to slow down.

I'm replaying the fight in my mind and it suddenly occurs to me that maybe Faith had good reason to push me away. I try to recall if she could have seen me talking to Matt right before the fight went down. I remind myself convincingly that I didn't really mean for things to go the way they did, but suddenly the whole thing seems complicated, seems hard, seems pointless. Maybe I'm getting too old for this kind of shit.

I guarantee myself that I can grab my backpack and start walking. Within a couple of hours I will sack out somewhere alone as far as I can see or hear, with the air all cool and dry, not like on the coast where it's as humid as breathing someone else's expelled air. Alone, my space in the world will get bigger and bigger until I feel that if I concentrate hard enough I can sense the far off oceans which are both in front of and behind me. I breathe in the night, fill my lungs until they ache, then breathe out slowly.

Once I'm quiet I hear an out of place noise: the unmistak-

able tinkling of dog tags. Guapo runs and tackles me with glee. From the icy wet feel of him I guess he just finished swimming upstream where the current is slower. He lands right on my stomach.

"What!" is all I can get out and it's more than enough to get him up and running in circles. Faith's damn dog. He must have slipped out during the melee and followed me. Guapo pants happily and licks my jaw with sincere affection.

I know Guapo is smart enough to find his way home. He's been in and out of enough scrapes to prove that I should just let him mosey on back when he's ready. Faith once told me about how he and his mother, a Chow, got into some sheep on a farm up the road. The rancher shot the Chow, and Guapo disappeared for nearly a month. He found his way back to her, I guess after he'd done grieving, even though Faith had moved to a new house by that time. He could certainly make his way the mile back to the Watermelon House. But, there is the highway to cross. And I have to admit I'm hoping Faith is okay.

"All right, buddy," I say to him. "Let's go then."

Guapo seems amenable to the idea and follows me without argument. On the way back I wonder if Matt or Pirogue told Faith what set the fight off. I consider telling her myself, pleading innocent or ignorant of the consequences my words to Matt had sparked. I hope Faith isn't bruised by the incident, which is a stupid thing to hope for someone who has spent most of her life with the Stanley brothers. She's a tough girl. I'm sure she's fine. I pick up the pace just the same.

Guapo and I retrace my steps through the alley. Approaching from the back of the house I hear silence. The backyard is dark although I can still smell the fire, acrid and sharp. I open the gate to the chain link fence and let the dog in ahead of me. At the jingling noise there is a slight movement in the shadows of the porch. Crossing the yard I see evidence of the broken up party; empty bottles glinting in the dark grass, the muddy pit filled with charred logs, too late a pile of dog shit that I step in and which causes me to cuss under my breath.

The movement I saw on the porch was Faith. She's alone on the couch, sitting with her face in her hands and staring out into

the yard.

"Watch out for land mines," she says, her words slurred enough to draw my attention to the empty bottle beside her.

"Hey, thanks," I say, taking a moment to clean my shoe on the bottom step.

Guapo jogs up the stairs, leaps onto the couch, gives Faith a once over sniff, and then heads inside through the open kitchen door.

"He followed me home," I say lamely. It's too dark to read her face.

"Havva seat?" She emphasizes her invitation by patting the couch cushion beside her. "Thanks for bringing him home. I was wondering where you went. I mean he went."

I sit and lean back. "You okay?" I ask.

"Sure, sure," Faith replies. "Stupid Matt. Stupid Jeff."

It occurs to me that she must have finished the rest of that bottle of gin and she's staring out into the ruins of the party as if she's sitting here alone.

"Where did everybody go?" I ask. I can't tell what she's angry at and I bite my lower lip to stop the question. I'm afraid it will be me.

"Faith, should I go?" I ask when she doesn't answer. "I just wanted to make sure you were doing all right. To bring the dog home and all."

"Why wouldn't I be all right?" she asks, turning to face me. In the shadows I can't tell if there is accusation in that question. "They beat the living shit out of him."

"Who?"

"Matt and Jeff. They broke Henry David's nose and threw him into the junk pile," she gestures broadly to a stack of wood scraps near the porch. "When the police tried to pick Henry David up, his hair was stuck on a rusty nail." She giggles, a brief snort of a laugh, and reaches for the gin bottle at her feet. "He was screaming like a girl. I thought at first that the nail was stuck into his head, but it was only his hair."

I picture the scene: Henry David flailing desperately at the policemen as they tried to slide his dreadlocks off a nail that protruded at just the right angle to hook him, but not kill him. I tell myself that he had it coming, that it wasn't my fault, that I

don't give a shit anyway.

"He was covered in blood. Those assholes," Faith mumbles. She holds the gin bottle up to the moon, notes its emptiness, and throws the bottle over the railing.

"It might have been my fault," I say, recognizing the truth to myself as much as to her.

Faith slumps back into the cushions and gives a drunken sigh.

"Nobody's fault," she murmurs. "You don't really know my brothers."

That's all she says and she sounds so defeated when she says it. I don't feel exonerated but I definitely don't want to continue this discussion. Not knowing what else to do, I fish a cigarette, my last, from the pack I've been carrying all night, and light it.

"Oh my god," Faith says. "I will love you forever if you have another one of those."

"I don't," I say, relieved that she's sounding more like herself, "but we can share this one."

I pass it to her like a joint and she takes a deep drag. The cherry end glows orange, offering an illuminated glimpse of her face that is puckered with the effort. The effect is that she looks haggard, her flesh seeming to sag in places it never has seemed to before. She offers the cigarette back but I wave it off.

I don't know what to say. I could tell her that in this instant she reminds me of a thousand nameless bar women that I've seen smoking and drinking themselves into jerky. I avoid eye contact with those women, those bitter looking regulars that nobody talks to even though they spend more time in the bar than most of the bartenders. For the first time I wonder what life-mistakes those women must have made to end up that kind of alone. This thought makes me want to tell her to be a little more selfish, not to give herself away so easily to losers like Henry David and, in a different sense, to her brothers.

She sits, smoking in silence for a moment longer. Then she begins to cry. Not the sobbing cry that most drunk girls have. Just silent tears that she doesn't even seem to notice, except to smoke a little faster.

"Faith?" I whisper.

She drops the cigarette, grinds it fiercely beneath her bare

foot, and then, somehow, she easily tucks herself under my arm. I'm shocked to find her there, as if I'd fallen asleep and woken up in a stranger's bed.

Faith is tiny. I notice this for the first time. She rests her head against me and when I look down at her all I can focus on is her ear which seems as small as a baby's. I resist the urge to touch it, to measure it with my fingers. She looks up at me. In the darkness I can't see the color of her eyes, only black against the whites.

"You know what my problem is?" she asks, her voice a whisper so I instinctively lean in. "My problem is that I love everyone too much."

She is three inches away, studying me with intensity and I'm undeniably aware that I've never been this close to her before. With one small hand she reaches for my face and I know that this is the crucial moment. The palm of her hand rests on my cheek and she brushes my lips with her thumb. I know that I could kiss her now. I can nearly taste the smoky flavor her mouth must have and I can imagine peeling the layers from her one by one until I find myself hopelessly immersed in her.

It strikes me that she might be right. Maybe she does love too much. A claustrophobic twinge sets in as she clings to me, waiting to give, give, give until I am satiated and can't take anymore. And then what would my choices be? Left with the empty girl who's given me all she has, I could give back with the same generosity and become empty myself, or I could leave.

"Faith, I should go," I say, noticing the husky quality my voice has acquired.

She doesn't say anything, but smiles. I wonder what the smile means because it's somehow sad and beckoning and challenging all at the same time. She withdraws her hand and eases up from the couch. Without another word she turns and stumbles into the house, leaving the door open. The lights go on in the stairwell, then in her room, and I hear Guapo's paws skittering up the stairs after her.

Lisa L. Siedlarz
A Pronunciation Guide to
Some Things Polish

Second Place

I. *Pierogi*

It is not pronounced *purr rog ee*.
It is more like peer with a rolled R.
Then add *augi* like *doggy* minus the D.
Peeraugi.

The Italian version is ravioli
except our cheese is farmers
curdled like cottage but firmer,
like grandpa's handshake
how he was taught by his father
a blacksmith from Piwoda.

II. *Glumpki*

It is not *Glumkee*.
It is the GW of Gwen.
The UM when you are searching
for a word -
like grandma in 1912 learning English
making babies at thirteen.
Add a P before key -
Say it: *Gwumpkey*.

III. *Oplatek*

It is communion,
but also *O-pwa-tek*,
The O circular like a family
of immigrants who take the Corona
to live with other escapees

Lisa L. Siedlarz

of Bolshevik oppression.
Who work in factories where
the only language spoken is home.

IV. Dom

It is home, roots spreading like rolled dough,
unfolding like cabbage leaves
in to this new land of opportunity.

Now we sit around the table Sundays
after Polish mass swirling language in two tongues.

V. Ameryka

It is saying I am
one hundred years removed
but know the ingredients by heart,
these words:
Kocham – love
Buzia – kisses
Bog – God
As if the recipes were mine.

David B. Zeidler
**Bursting from a
Basement Ballroom**
(Boston's Best-Kept Secret)

Descending to a den;
brightly painted letters
proudly proclaim passage
into the Middle East

Scenesters and lost souls unite
to revel in anguished screams
feeding back through torrents
of staccato strumming

Sweaty air ripples with buzz
of amplified dissonance
Dropped-D hammers purify
heads, pounding rhythms that
become the soundtrack to this separate life
The beating heart of the bass drum
powers pulses – commanding bodies
to flail ferocious, frozen
in a fleeting moment that will
forever be a snapshot of freedom.

Whitney B. Gallagher
Return to Waterville
First Place

She got old and frail—
forgot everything about the mornings;
where she lunched, which dog was which.
Liked the t.v. on most of the day,
although all the programs ran together
in confusing bursts of light and noise.

We would take turns crawling into bed
beside her-- just lie there a while.
When it was my turn, I asked her how
she'd met my grandfather, the one I never knew.
Eyes closed, she recounted —

The dusty rose of her sun dress
The summer cottage in Waterville Valley
His huge kind eyes and Yale Hockey sweater
The smell of pine needles and
honeysuckles in crisp mountain air.

Benjamin J. Kowalsky

Isa

This is the palate of our verbal privilege:
Neither red nor orange;
We paint in frost and blue,
And hollow gray.
We have not killed lovers with our words;
We have killed a world with a Thorn
And filled its wounds with ghosts —
Memories of a red-faced day.
What we write can be held against us
And will keep us warm
If our words sound like
The rushing of blood.
When was my summer not another's ice,
And are all my creations elsewhere murders?
When did I not speak in axiom and proof;
When was my word not elsewhere a bullet?

I knew when fair Reason
Spoke only of the dirt,
The yew, and the birch,
And the sun.
Adrienne, I know not when our words will melt a stone,
But call on me when the poem is not an act of arson
Against the better saints of our dwindling time,
Or when the world forgets the taste of a mouthful of ashes.
I am responsible for just so much:
A handful of sand and glass
The dying wishes
Of a god.
I have not loved in word but in flesh;
I have bled ink, but only from my hands
When drunk from sweet honey-wine —
Made by the bees of eloquence and madness.

Julia Tolstrup Mathien
Bedspread

This bedspread, bought for twelve dollars
at an import store, beneath which I have hidden
with you and wasted afternoons
tangled in your limbs and laughing,
is the place where my suitcase rested
while I packed it all the while unsure
whether I was bluffing or actually leaving you.

Andrew Lennon
Eís Njömandsson

In the western fjords of Iceland, on the rim of the inhabitable world, the village of Arnarfjörður sits huddled between snow-cloaked basalt cliffs and a sea aswarm with haddock and cod. In these grey days of winter, when the winds of the North Atlantic push snow into drifts as high as the eaves of the clapboard cottages that line the fjord, the villagers sit in the yellow warmth of the houses of the Elders telling tales. They talk of warriors and winters and tragedies and treasures, and of a man named Eís Njömandsson, the prisoner for whom their one-cell jail with wooden walls and iron bars was built. Children gather 'round older children, and older children 'round adults, and they exchange lies told as truths and truths told through lies. On this particular day, in the house of Tómas the Elder, with galinn winds blowing the snow sideways and up from the ground and every way but from the sky, tales of the prisoner flew from unfurled tongues. My ear, however, was focused on the whispered words being exchanged near the door.

Tómas was sweating profusely; the beads dripped down through his white hair, over the sandbar of wrinkles on his forehead, and into his eyes. His jaw quivered as he took quick and shallow breaths.

"I heard that he has resumed speaking," Tómas said softly, placing his hand on the shoulder of the short, round man in front of him and leaning in towards his ear, "It is time to finish this, Magnús. If he were to ferment doubt in the minds of this new generation... if they pushed for a trial... go to the magistrate and tell him to arrange the execution, I want Eís dead."

"Is that necessary? Kill him now, after all of these years? If even he does speak it is from a mind of madness; the solitude surely swallowed his mind decades ago. What threat is he?" said Magnús.

"Quiet! His voice is threat enough. I will do my best to revive

our truth while you are gone. Now, go!" Tómas turned from the door and walked slowly into the clamor of voices in the main hall.

He must have felt my gaze, for Tómas turned toward me and we met in the whites of our eyes. I saw a flame of fear in those eyes, as though he knew I had been watching him from the moment he entered the house, and had heard all that he had spoke to Magnús. His eyes left mine and he continued past me.

"Naked was how they found Eís!" Tómas yelled; the raucous voices in the room settled into silence. He moved slowly into the ring of villagers, shuffling his feet and tapping his cane on the hard wood of the floor. When he reached the middle he turned around and around, slowly, and stared into the eyes of each person in the room before continuing.

"When they walked into his cabin," said Tómas, "a smile of summer spread over his face, they say. A smile that when smiled let trickles of blood seep between his teeth and over his chin in little streams that dripped down his chest, rolled off his hip, and formed a pool on the floor only inches from her body." Still turning in place as he spoke, Tómas tapped his cane in cadence with his words, "down on the quay with her legs locked on his torso, their tongues dancing, was how her father saw them and how the nightmare began. He ran towards his daughter and when he reached Eís' back he struck him down; WHACK with an oar to his skull!" Tómas shouted as he spun around and swung his cane from above his shoulders to just above the face of a young girl. She screamed. He quickly planted his cane back on the floor steadied his balance.

"The two were still kissing when he did this, and the surprise of the blow caused Eís to clench his jaw down onto her tongue as it danced with his, leaving a quick bloody pool in his mouth before they both fell to the earth. The father grabbed her by the wrist then and pulled her scratching and cursing toward the shore. As Eís lay there, with the blood of her tongue forming a sweet ruby crust in his mouth, he dreamed dreams of such evil inspiration that they say he awoke transformed and inhuman." Tómas paused and stood motionless, both hands on his cane.

He bowed his head to his feet and continued almost in a whisper, "when darkness fell, Eís went to the girl's home. He emp-

... tied the parents of their blood as they slept, and then carried the girl out of the house to his cabin in the hills. He assaulted her body and he consumed her soul. Like a dog he lapped up her blood until there was none to bleed, and leaving her icy, blue, naked corpse on the floor he sat down in his chair. They found him like this; smiling, calm, stained with her blood.”

I ducked from the hall, exited through the rear of the house, and started my way east toward the jail. The previous winter, when my father returned to the earth in a dusting of ashes, I assumed his role as watchman of the jail, going twice daily to bring food and water to the prisoner. The prisoner had made a vow of silence in decades past, yet trusted my father and spoke to him and only him. Toward the end, when the wind was stronger than my father’s balance, I would help him to the jail and over these months I came to know the prisoner just as well as he.

As I made the trek through what little wind-whipped snow remained on the ground and was not curved into drifts against the houses or cliffs, I paused in the darkness of the arctic winter afternoon to watch the northern lights high above Arnarfjörður. Clouds of light pulsed in shifting colors in the crisp dark sky. Again and again I lowered and raised my eyes from the moonlit alabaster earth to the river of red and green lights above.

The jail sat apart from the village, inland from the fjord, in the drying fields. In mild months thousands of fish-heads were hung outside to dry on wooden frames, and in winter this was done indoors, the carcasses drying on frames stacked floor-to-ceiling. Over the years the evaporated oils from the fish heads seeped into the wooden walls of the prison, so that in the tepid days of summer the smell bled out of the wood and saturated the air inside with a damp and acrid flavor that clung to the nostrils and tongue.

“They’re killing you, Eís,” I said the moment I opened the door to the jail and stepped inside, “Tómas has heard you’ve abandoned your silence and he sent Magnus to arrange for your execution. What is this, Eís? Why is Tómas afraid of your voice?”

“Ah, my boy, Tómas is more afraid of his own voice than he is

of mine," said Eís. He had been standing at the window when I entered, looking into the darkness, and turned and walked toward me when he spoke, "have you seen the aurora tonight, Björn? She's dancing in her red and green dress; she looks beautiful." His soft grey hair reached his shoulders, and as he stepped slowly towards the iron bars I watched the color of his eyes change from a cool and distant gray to the chalky blue of a geothermal lake.

"Then why has he sent Magnús to the magistrate to arrange for it? He said he wants to 'finish this.' Finish what?" I asked.

"The wind; he wants to keep the wind that weaves itself in and out of our lives, carrying our past, from blowing through this village."

"What of the past?"

"The truth," said Eís, "It is truth that haunts Tómas, and he thought he had hidden it years ago. I've heard the stories the villagers tell of me; the crimes I've committed and the people I've killed. Their reverence for fiction has buried the truth for Tómas, and all he did was plant its seed."

"And this wind would set you free? Why only now do you speak of the past and of truth?" I said.

"Ahh, Björn, the truth is rarely received better than a well crafted lie; for ten years I tried to speak the truth and it fell upon deaf ears. It was a waste of my energy; what good are words that leave the mouth and fall flat on the ground?"

"Then what is this past? Your words will not fall here, Eís, my attention is yours."

"A web of love; a girl named Guðný, myself, and her uncle. In all truth the uncle was just in love with her as I. In me he saw only the inevitability of being cuckolded and so you could say he acted out of necessity, out of love," Eís spoke with clarity and equanimity, his voice void of tension and anger, "her uncle contrived a story that I raped Guðný, and to produce evidence of the crime he did this himself. He brought her to the magistrate, crying and broken, and gave his tale implicating me; but in doing this, he involved himself in a lie from which there was no escape. I don't know the details of this, only he, but on the first night I was detained in the magistrate's cellar, Guðný and her

parents were murdered in their sleep. Implicating me for this was as simple for him as the first; clearly Eís killed them before his arrest."

"In truth, Eís? Sick acts and lies trap you here? I asked you of the past between you and Tómas and you tell me this. Tómas is the uncle then, is he not?"

"He is."

I sat there, quiet and motionless. I stared at Eís with a crease between my eyes and with contorted, wavering lips. My mind somersaulted in throes of disgust, and I felt the need to say something but had not the voice to speak it. My mind was in disorder and I wanted to give him peace, but here he already had it. After a long silence I stood, suddenly, and drew the ring of keys from my pocket.

"I am resolved, then. I am setting you free. Tómas is going to kill you to keep you silent, but hushed lies brought you here, and hidden truths will set you free."

"Oh, my friend, I am free; perhaps more than you. Tómas can not kill me; my mind is where I wish it and these walls do not confine."

I unlocked the cell and, opening it, stepped inside to unlocked the shackles around his wrists and ankles.

"Well then here is freedom Eís, whether it is new or old, and now your body can follow your mind to wherever it has been all these years."

"You're getting there, Björn, now give me one of those cigarettes you roll, will you? Then leave me, please, I'd like to do some thinking before leaving this place; it has been my home, you know."

I handed him a smoke along with my matches. I took off my coat and left it on the table. I had nothing profound to say, nothing to say about the past to crack the quiet, nothing he couldn't say in fewer words. I walked to the door and turned to look at him one last time before leaving. Eís was back on his cot, lying down, smoking the cigarette in long, measured draws, and flipping the matchbook over the backs of his fingers. One of his legs was bent to the floor, and he tapped some tune that I could almost remember. He took out a match and lit it, holding

it up to the wooden wall of the cell for a moment before blowing it out, and then tilted his head back to look out the window. I opened the door, then turned and walked through it, leaving it a little ajar.

I walked toward home, slowly, and just as I approached my street I heard screams stab at the air. I whipped around and on the horizon I saw flames climbing from the roof and the windows of the jail, and my eyes followed tall licks of flame that reached skyward toward the lady dancing in celestial currents in her red and green dress. I ran back across the drying fields as fast as I could, and before I could feel the heat of the flames the caustic fumes of fish and flesh filled my mouth and lungs.

Benjamin J. Kowalsky
Naudiz

We named you in Love and Whisper—
Not sharp like a blade,
But squished like a kick in the ribs;
We named you after meadows
And inside jokes about movies—
Each of which was a gift from god.

We named you in the hush of Dawn—
The grass kissed by mourning dew
That begged tears from weary eyes.
We named you before we knew you,
But all our names are yours
They could belong to no other.

We named you in both pain and joy
When all names lost their meaning
For no name could bless and keep you.
We named you after a weeping world;
A world that we gave you
To call what you will.

We named you in secret giggles
When you spoke in bubbles
Which were felt, but not heard.
We named you after the gods
Which for want of you
We could no longer worship.

We named you in our own fashion:
Out of step with the world—
We were all of us born too soon.
We named you before we felt shame
In all of our work and striving;
It was barely enough to be your shadow.

Benjamin J. Kowalsky

We named you in the deepest places
Where there is no context,
Only the content of a slow heartbeat.
We named you after we understood need
And the wolves of longing—
Each of which was a gift from god.

Lisa L. Siedlarz
Beneath the Grain

The stillness of objects is magnified
by my own restlessness,
incessant rocking in this sunshine
colored chair.
Motion is inherent in nature,
that's why this chair is so
disturbing. It's golden hue
of pine once a tree
swaying and bending in proclamation
of being. What lived in its glow -
flocks of Monarchs flexing birth;
hoot owls spinning their next meals;
catkins and cones biding wind
and wing for procreation
Now without motion, its blond aura
is memory under polish.
I sit and I rock,
bones creaking like this chair
under my weight.

David B. Zeidler

Three Men Gather around a Street Musician

I.

The young man, feeling old, stops when he hears a familiar tune from his days playing gigs while studying Theory at the Hartt School of Music. He recalls his dreams of achieving minor cult status as an avante-punk auteur, before self-doubt led to pain, to self-medication, to poverty. An unknown, with a dusty degree on a lonely mantle that does nothing to dignify his fading hopes and dead-end job. He remembers the package in his hand that must be delivered. Bitterly, he cannot bring himself to toss a coin in the guitar case—to aid a musician already more successful than he.

II.

The middle-aged man, feeling old, stops and loosens his tie when he first hears that haunting C-chord, beautiful yet bittersweet, reminding him of youthful days back home in Boston, when his father would strum an old acoustic, sing the kids to sleep with songs of love and freedom that followed the family overseas when they moved from Germany generations ago. That was before divorce, when father fled and mother had sad eyes that waited for death, before he himself learned love and heartbreak, kids who wonder why Daddy is always working and why the unfamiliar man sleeps in mother's bed, before he learned to bury himself beneath the weight of moneymaking and Wall Street politics.

III.

The old man, feeling young, remembers his Army days in Korea with the only gal who understood the strict regiment it took to craft a life worth living – up at dawn, work all day, fight if you must, but before bed they would steal away to a special place under the stars and dance to a far-off whisper of a sweet song that sounded much like this one. He must fight back these tears now, like a good soldier.

David B. Zeidler

IV.

Just before the final note,
as if anticipating and avoiding a pesky acquaintance,
the men hurry off quickly, quietly cursing
their exploitation by the musician's delicate fingers,
carelessly plucking strings like second nature,
while walking carefully across the fretboard,
appearing to tread lightly, but trampling weak souls underfoot.

Meghan A. Trupp
T.R.'s Bully Shot

Winters in Juneau are eternal, whitening the days and solidifying the earth with a frigidness that halts Mother Nature in her tracks. Life is adjourned on the altar of the tundra, and this: the serenity, the solidity, pleased Tobias, and he grew rather fond of the arctic stillness. He only desired his trade to be as prosaic as the climate that bounded him.

Tobias had been a professor of theater at the local University for nearly four decades, and grew all the more restive with each passing year. He would annually convince himself to retire, cataloging the reasons and calculating his pension as he sat in the back of the auditorium and watched his students belt out manic renditions of Andrew Lloyd Weber songs, while the others garbled stale monologues about broken hearts and drug abuse.

Still, Tobias relinquished his retreat into hibernation, and as the years crawled on, his strides became sluggish, not because he had lost his vigor, but because he had collected a tiresome attitude. His features were still striking, and his age agreed with him most handsomely. His beard had begun to blend seamlessly into the white of the snow and his cheeks flushed a permanent crimson hue, although he read these as further signs that perhaps it was time. Tobias knew that the theater had changed dramatically since the days of Burton and Andrews, and he fought doggedly to keep up. He failed quite miserably.

Every year he would pack his few belongings and stand in the doorway of his office, gazing around and stroking his long whiskers. He would always return. He would fight. He would fail. And so on.

Even so, this side of his life did satisfy Tobias, at least outside of the academic realm. His tastes had become simple and more refined. He preferred to fall into contented rhythms and filled his life with as many predictable scenes as he could. He took up hunting, and re-discovered photography. Sometimes, when

feeling feral, he would even combine the two.

Opportunities for such untamed pleasures were consequently slain by a life directed by professorship. The students that filled his stage were becoming fewer in number each year, but grew increasingly bland. Tobias had begun to detach himself from them just the same. He wasn't so much in love with his job. In fact, you might even say he was beginning to despise his job, bringing him to ban melodramatic nonsense and theatrical baloney in his classroom, along with gum-chewing- repulsive, and bathroom breaks- just plain rude. What he did enjoy was high-quality vanilla-tobacco, his fine wine collection, crossword puzzles from the New York Times, and only the Times, and most recently, Grace.

While he had never intended on marrying, Grace had ensnared Tobias' affection, and he settled into the captivity of wedded life exceedingly well. He had decided they were aging rather gracefully, and together at that. She brought a sense of added consistency to his life that comforted him, and she shared in most of his cultured tastes, aside from the mélange of kitschy keepsakes she dispersed throughout his home, which he had brushed off as feminine futility from the beginning. He had legitimately fallen in love.

* * *

Tobias awoke on a Sunday morning and rolled over on his side, cradling his white wooly cheek in his palm. He stared at Grace, savoring her beauty as he did every morning. He thought Grace to be lovelier than any woman he had ever been with. He thought everything about her to be soft: her honey hair, her soft moon belly, her milky skin, her temper. She had even softened him.

Her delicate silhouette shimmered against the harsh shadows of the Alaskan dawn, and her breath was cool and sweet. The steady rhythm of her chest as it rose and fell, rose and fell, was what Tobias needed. He placed his steady hand over hers so that their gold bands clinked like a miniature champagne toast, honoring their bond.

Grace awoke and fluttered her eyelids, nestling her head into the pillow. Her lips curled into a girlish smirk as she murmured good morning to him, her voice barely a whisper. Tobias took

her face in both his hands and kissed her gently on her forehead. Good morning he replied, his voice bass in contrast. The moment lingered in the air between them, and now they both savored it, knowing one of them would be gone too soon.

Grace had been planning a trip to visit her brother Keller for months, and her suitcase stood like an obtrusive child watching impatiently from the far corner of the room. They sighed in unison, and rose to face the inevitable parting.

As Grace showered, Tobias dressed himself in two very thick Irish-wool sweaters and his hunting trousers. He lumbered down the stairs and began to prepare the coffee in the kitchen. He pulled down two ceramic mugs from the cabinet and set them side by side on the maple countertop. As he waited for the coffee to brew, he peered out the back window at the pallid sunrise, and cursed the day that would bring perfect hunting weather- clear and brisk. He envisioned a herd of deer frolicking past his home, sugary smiles plastered on their faces. He let out a throaty grunt.

He realized that driving Grace to the terminal would take hours, but it was the stack of curriculum papers in his office that loomed in his mind and hassled him to his bones. The thoughts of retirement came on swifter, deeper, and much earlier this year. The semester hadn't even started yet, and already Tobias dreaded the procession of manic mongrels that disguised themselves as aspirant actors. Like the deer, they would prance across the stage in sickening sweet merriment, he in the back, poised to fire. Tobias shook the thought of hunting away, and instead felt more like the prey than the predator as he continued to gaze out the window. The last day of freedom was shot out of him from a close-range barrel and he bit the bitter bullet in disgust.

Grace appeared in the kitchen and jostled him from his thoughts. He continuously felt depraved when thinking about hunting around her. While she never came out and carped about his hobby, she emanated purity-which made his pastime seem monstrous to him.

The two sat down together in the nook overlooking the motionless landscape, and sipped in silence. Tobias stirred his coffee and looked up at his wife, searching her face, and for

something, anything, to fill the vacant moment.

"You'll call?" he blurted out.

"As soon as I arrive", she assured him. "I should arrive in Boulder around seven o'clock."

Tobias bobbed his head and stared into his mug. "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too," she said, resting her chin on her hand and tilting her head. "Whatever will you do while I'm gone?"

He sneered, thinking of his cluttered desk and, of course, the mongrels. "Quentin will keep me company."

Quentin, Tobias' toothless bloodhound, lifted his eyes at the sound of his name. Grace laughed and stood up, collecting their empty mugs.

"I'm sure those students of yours will keep you so engaged you won't even notice I'm not here," she said from the kitchen, carefully rinsing the mugs and placing them upside down on the drying rack.

"Doubtful," he sighed. "One by one they slaughter the art of theater. Unless I've gotten so out of touch I don't know the art any more than they do."

She came over and leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed. "I don't think it's that, Tobias. I just think you've moved on from it."

"Perhaps," Tobias pretended to consider this. "There's just something about it that has latched onto me like a parasite I love to hate. It drains me but I can't seem to shake it."

"Then just see how the first week goes. After all, it's just one class."

He nodded in obedient concession and got up from the table.

Grace wrapped her arms around his waist and nuzzled his neck, taking in his woodsy smell. Tobias embraced her, but his eyes gazed passed her and once again peered out the window. He watched as a herd of deer darted through the yard, their lean, russet bodies gliding gracefully over the frozen terrain. One deer, much smaller and sleeker than the others, glanced sideways and fixed her eyes on Tobias. Her stare was intense and piercing, one Tobias had never witnessed before. So many times he had looked into their eyes before he fired his shot. But she wasn't like the others. She was fierce.

* * *

Tobias paced back and forth across the ashy stage in extended, labored strides, with his hands clamped in tightened fists behind his back. His white brows were furrowed and his mouth flat-lined, compressing his cheeks inward. The thick, red velvet curtain sashayed with his movements as he breezed by it.

"Um...anger?" A timid squeak from the back of the room split the silence of the room like the delicate prick of a pin.

Tobias stopped dead in his tracks and pivoted to face the audience. "Who said that?" he barked.

The room was cool and motionless. Tobias stared out at the ten vacant faces that blinked up at him like mischievous children attempting to dissuade punishment. Blink, blink went their eyes; wide eyes framed by faces that had been seemingly drained of any reasonable response.

"Well?" Tobias scanned them impatiently.

A girl with mousy features and a slight twitch raised her hand just above her heart, her fingers curled in hesitance. She winced like she was anticipating a blow.

"Your name?" he asked, jabbing his pen at her just to see her react to it.

"Demetria." Her voice was airy and barely floated from her mouth.

"Ah, Demetria," Tobias bellowed. "You are absolutely right, Demetria, that was anger. Although the length of time it took for all of you to grasp that ridiculously simple action made the pantomime more genuine than I would have liked."

A gentle laughter filled the hall and the students glanced around at one another, looks of relief swelled on their faces.

"Demetria. A very uncommon name," Tobias declared over their laughter. "A beautiful, but uncommon name. Very dramatic. Means Lover of the Earth."

The students bobbed their heads in enlightened curiosity at Tobias' intelligent revelation. Demetria beamed with pride in her sudden golden moment in the spotlight.

"No, that's not what it means." A strong, womanly voice severed the pleasant atmosphere.

Sitting in the far corner of the auditorium was a student To-

bias had not noticed until now. Number eleven. He was taken aback, and glared at her in disbelief. Every student in the hall turned collectively and they, too, glared at her. One boy shook his head in disgust and Demetria twitched.

"Oh, no?" Tobias finally yelped. "Well, then, Miss, what does it mean?"

"Tessa. Not Miss. And it means Goddess of Fertility." She sat up smugly but didn't take her eyes off of Tobias.

"Well, Tessa, thank you for that clarification. I didn't know we had a name connoisseur in our midst. How lucky we all are."

"Oh, it's my pleasure," she glimmered with self-possession. "And your name, Mister, means God is Great."

"Is that so?" Tobias sounded truly interested, surprising his students. Surprising himself. Tessa, however, was unmoved and narrowed her eyes at him in triumph, but said nothing.

"On that note," Tobias declared. "Follow my word. Meditate on your emotions. Experience them. Illustrate them through your actions. Whatever they may be. Rage, fright, suspicion. The essence of acting lies in trusting your instincts. Do this, and you won't be praying to me about your grade by the end of the semester."

His audience of aspiring disciples snickered and they began to gather their things.

"I'll see you all next week", Tobias shouted over their boisterous shuffling and shifting. One by one, they got up and strode up the aisles toward the exit doors. Tobias watched as Tessa methodically buttoned her jacket. She hoisted her bag over her shoulder and rose to leave.

"Tessa." Tobias bit his tongue the moment her name slipped slickly from it.

Tessa's back was toward him, and before she turned around, she bit her bottom lip and smiled.

"Yes?" She turned around. Her voice flickered with sensuality.

His voice was shaky and he choked the pen he held in his hand. "I just wanted to thank you for that brilliant enlightenment. It's not often I stand on the receiving end. "

"Like I said, my pleasure", she replied.

The two stared at each other for a moment. Her beauty scared

Tobias. Her exotic violet eyes, her sleek auburn hair and long neck, her olive skin that seemed smooth and hot to the touch. She reminded him of some wild creature he would struggle to ever find, let alone catch, in the solitary woods. She emitted a sharpness that suggested she was always one step ahead. Yet something else was radiating from her, and Tobias couldn't place it.

He was desperately focused on smothering the considerations that began to detonate in his body. He looked toward the grand piano, and imagined Grace sitting on the bench, studying him.

"Anything else?" Tessa quipped, cocking her head to the side.

"I suppose that will be it for today." Tobias plodded down the few steps of the stage, which put him at her level. She nodded but remained grounded firm where she was, intently watching him gather his belongings.

"I see you are a photographer," Tessa gently caressed Tobias' black leather carrying bag he had left on the side of the stage.

"I do. I mean, I am." Tobias walked over and picked up the case, holding it gently in his hands like a newborn babe.

Tessa opened her bag and pulled out a case identical to his. She tenderly lifted the instrument and examined it in her palm. Tobias' heart leapt. It was a Hasselblad.

"A Hasselblad Chrome Medium Format Manual Focus SLR. Isn't she a beauty?" Tessa asked, not looking up from her own baby. Her burnished eyes magnified.

Tobias stood silently by and put one hand on his camera case. "Yes," he began.

"Yes, what?" Tessa snapped, looking up at him.

"Yes, she is. A beauty." Tobias replied defensively. "The camera."

"I know," she said, amused. She gingerly set the camera back into the case. "So, Doctor. Can I call you Doctor?"

Tobias ran his hands through his hair and heaved out a laborious sigh. The madness he felt was blistering and she inundated him with the heat of her breath.

"I take it you're into photography then. That's hip of you. I'm just starting to get into it. My mother is a photographer. Well known. You may have seen her book. It involves dancing with

cats. She's not very proud of it. I wouldn't be either. I guess we both know why." She threw her head back and laughed. "Anyway, I'm not so sure about this class Doc."

She chattered onward, not missing a beat. Her eyes darted and dilated with every syllable and she flooded the room with her smooth accented words. "I feel like I have haphazardly crashed in on a junior high drama club. I'm really not so sure how to take all this," she said, sweeping her arm through the air.

Her words began to creep up Tobias' neck and slowly started to strangle him. He reached up and touched his chin. Words drained out lifeless and vacant from his mind, and he stood there, mute as a mime.

"You alright there, Doc?" Tessa asked, ducking her head in concern. "You sound squeaky. I'm a little concerned. You aren't gonna give up the ghost on me, are you?"

Tobias cleared his throat and frantically restored his sanity to respond. "I'm just fine", he replied. "I see you were missing your lens cover." In his composure, he had voted not to address her criticism of the class. She was dead on target with her shot, and he refused to admit this truth to anyone but himself.

"Ah, yes, I am." Somber Tessa wiped away an invisible tear-drop. "I know it's horrendous for the camera. It's a bizarre item to come across though. I bought this little darling at a flea market in Phoenix."

"Is that where you're from?" Tobias asked.

Tessa looked at him guardedly. Tobias wondered if that had been too prying, but as he wondered, she replied cautiously, "Yes, among other places. I'm a bit of a nomad."

Tobias craved her past, and hungered to know more about her, where she had been, why she was here, of all places. Alaska seemed too barren and frozen to fulfill her heat and candor. He remembered in this moment of something that lay in his desk at home, and marveled at the thought of her actually being in his house. She would come to him if she knew what he had. But could he do it? He knew at the very bottom of his soul that there was something about her that was frighteningly tumultuous, but this turbulence captivated him. A crusade of morals and nature waged war within him, his thoughts racing.

What would she think? He wondered. "I'm practically her father's age. Who am I fooling? Grandfather's age. Wait, she smiled. Is that a smile of pity or of desire? Does she think I'm dashing? Does she even use that word? No, she's too young. But look at her. Stunning. No! All I'll do is propose it. She can come to the decision.

Tobias sucked in his breath and made his proposal.

"I have a second lens cover, if you wish to have it." Immediately he chastised himself for making it sound too stiff. Before he could dwell too long on his apparent loss of charm, Tessa pounced on his offer.

"Amazing. Are you kidding me? That would be amazing! Can you bring it in the next class?"

Of course, the next class! His heart sank and he felt foolish to even think that she would consider that an offer to come to his home.

"Unless of course, you'd like to get it on as soon as possible." He felt his insides knot at the sound of this. "The lens! The, uh, cover must protect your lens. It's been awhile without it, right?"

She scowled. "I guess," she agreed with concern.

What are you doing? Everything inside of him agreed with concern. Nothing slowed down.

"I live close by," he bolstered the validity of his offer with a classic bit on geography. "Right down the road." He motioned in the direction of his house as if this mattered any.

Tessa eyed him with her violet daggers and slowly they began to warm up to the idea that hung in the air like an awkward miasma. He felt his entire body soften when he saw her nod, but her voice was nowhere to be found. She placed her quick hands over her body to secure her belongings and proceeded to follow him out the door, to his car, and just down the road to his house.

* * *

Tobias fumbled with his brass bouquet of keys and jammed one of them into the door. Tessa stamped her feet on the concrete porch, which kicked up small whirlwinds of snow behind her. She shivered dramatically and brrrrred her way into the hallway of the house, looking above at the beautiful rustic foyer Tobias

had built with his own hands.

"I built this with my own hands," Tobias announced, taking off his overcoat and hanging it neatly on the rack that stood beside him. He knew he sounded like a teenage boy and he smiled sheepishly at her as she shuffled toward him, not removing her jacket. She smiled and nodded.

"Coffee?" he asked her, making his way into the living room, camera bag slung over his broad shoulder,

"No, I'm okay, thank you." Tessa said, still trailing at his heels. As they entered the room, Tessa's eyes became fixated on the wall that stood opposite from her. Hanging from it was a mammoth sepia photograph, framed royally in gilded gold that shimmered spectacularly in the bright afternoon sunlight. The image was so vast it was nearly impressionistic in its nature, seeming dappled and piebald up close, indistinguishable. From afar, it was a grand, violent photograph. A man short in stature stood proud and rigid above his kill: a massive horned rhinoceros. He wore safari knickers that grazed his leathery knees, and his handlebar mustache dripped from his chin like blood off a predator's mouth. His monocle eyeglass shadowed one of his eyes completely, so all of his heinous focus emptied from the other onto the camera lens and onto the film and onto the wall.

"Theodore Roosevelt. A respectable man." Tobias said, tracking her intent glare to the wall.

Tessa's face had become crestfallen and her eyes drooped down her face like falling petals.

Tobias shifted his pose. Silence prickled the air. The blare of the phone ringing echoed through the house like an alarm, and he ran into the kitchen to answer it.

"What a grisly man." She whispered to herself, staring at the President in his one eye. Her own eyes had now become glazed over in a sugary sheen, and she lifted them to the spot just above the picture. Draped across two wooden paws protruding from the wall was a long black rifle, freshly polished and glimmering with past blasts, carnage, and bloodshed.

Her interest was torn from the dangling firearm. Her ears perked at the sound of Tobias' voice, rising and falling in tone. She gently crept over the creaky cedar floor with her long, lean

legs. Pressing her face against the doorframe, she propped her arms against the wall and closed her eyes, aiming her attention upon Tobias' conversation. She could only make out a few words, which sprang from his mouth and landed like vicious bites on her ears. Shot. Rage. Doctor.

She rolled her eyes back into her head and swayed from side to side. She sauntered back into the living room and accepted the offering that was bestowed upon her from the wall.

* * *

Tobias answered the phone in one swift movement, cradling the phone between his cheek and his shoulder and leaning his chin downward so to soften his voice. He placed the camera on the end of the table, exposed, out of its case.

Grace sounded so far away, yet her voice was melodious and cool to his burning ears. At once, the sound of her comforted his fiery mood. She was his Grace.

"How did your first day back go?" she asked.

"It was fine, smooth." Tobias replied, turning even further, deeper, into the phone and the conversation. He didn't want Tessa to hear this. It was too domestic.

"Anything different about this year? Survivable?"

"Survivable. It's worth a shot, to say the least. I just told them to express their emotions. Their rage, their fear. Too bad I can't show my rage, my fears. Despite the tenure." Tobias smiled into the mouthpiece.

Grace laughed softly a million miles away.

"I'll need to doctor my curriculum a bit, as always. But that's enough about that. Just you come home to me." He ran his finger up and down the windowsill and peered out at the backyard. A light snow had begun to fall, dusting the frozen ground with a delicate layer of powder, mottling the brown landscape.

Tobias whispered his tender goodbyes to Grace and hung up the phone. After a moment, he rose with a weary sigh, picked up his camera from the table, and began to make his way back into the living room.

As he entered, a pungent slime filled his mouth as he saw Tessa perched atop the bookshelf, crouched and cramped in a tight fistful body, with his rifle hoisted on her shoulder. She aimed the

barrel at him and the entire thing shook violently.

"What are you doing?!" Tobias cried out, holding up his arm to block his face. "That's my rifle! Are you insane?!"

"I heard you, you tricky little fucker! You sly bastard! I'm not going, I told them! Who put you up to this!? You bastard, you bastard!" Large, syrupy tears streamed down her smooth skin, leaving white trails that dripped down into small pools on her collarbone. Every limb of her trembled now and her dark hair formed into long thick tendrils that clung to her damp lips. Her tall brown leather boots swayed back and forth unsteadily beneath her, but she clung fiercely onto the rifle and maintained her aim right at his heart.

Tobias slowly lifted his camera to one narrowed eye, and removed the cap. He aimed the lens at Tessa, and focused in on her. She remained tightly poised, rifle cocked and ready. A shot was taken, making headlines all over Alaska as the violent, the tragic, T.R.'s Bully Shot.

Whitney B. Gallagher
Washing the Dishes after the
Smallest Thanksgiving Dinner

I like the water so hot it steams up onto my face;
runs over my hands until they tingle and burn,
killing all that may lurk in gravy on china.
The suds always come from Palmolive,

just the regular green kind, not floral scented or antibacterial—
the heat of rushing water alone sanitizes fine.
Three silver forks that were my great grandmother's
soak in a gold rimmed casserole dish on the counter.

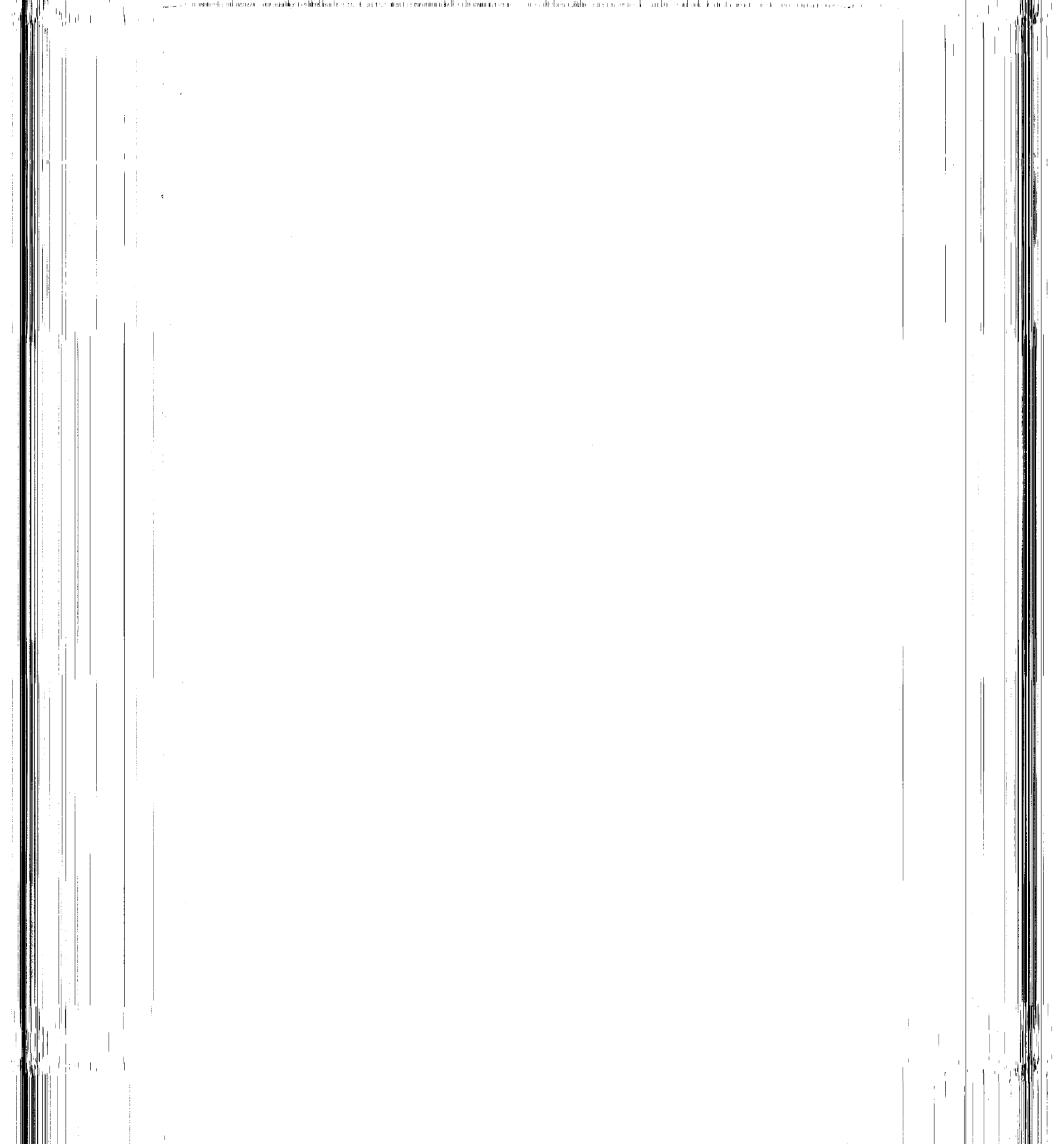
My mother Saran wraps the stuffing and creamed pearl onions.
My sister naps on the couch as I scrape grit
off a roasting pan that held a six pound turkey.
If everything glistens, and bellies are full, we have triumphed.

Water is scalding now, face dripping with steam—
catch a concerned, knowing glance from my mother as more soap
pours over porcelain. I think of throwing everything away
so as to never again bear witness to rotting and molding.

Rising steam distracts, relieves. My mother persists,
hoarding leftovers as my sister dreams.
Dead grandparents and divorce have left us a small clan,
too close for comfort. Holidays magnify this loss in miniature gravy

boats, tiny Christmas trees, laughter spilling from neighborhood homes
overflowing with so much family that no one is left exposed.
I am frantically shoving potato peels, peas, unfinished turkey,
down the garbage disposal with an antique carving knife.

From behind me, my mother reaches,
quietly takes the knife from my hand,
models for me how to clean gently—
gracefully wipes the sink with bleach.



Julia J. Bakes
Anthony Brano
Colleen Conlon
Jean Copeland
Leo DiSorbo
Nick Dorio
Whitney B. Gallagher
Carolyn Z. Gerber
Thomas Greco
Amy Ashton Handy
Timothy A. Hanley
Brett Hillman
Sarah Horton
Benjamin J. Kowalsky
Andrew Lennon
Rayon Dwain Lennon
Rebecca LeQuire
April Line
Julia Tolstrup Mathien
Valerie B. McKee

Art & Literary Magazine

Joy Mlozanowski
Michael D. Rayzer
Amy Richardson
Shizuka Shibata
Lisa L. Siedlarz
Marilyn C. Terlaga
Matthew G. Tkach
Meghan A. Trupp
Tiffany Ulrich
Sutton Underwood
Jaclyn M. Watterson
David B. Zeidler