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Rollins College

BRUSHING



Art and Literary Magazine

1999

Brushing

Rollins College
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The Sea Remembers...

Chelsea Romans

I know the Sea
My ear, like a shell
Is filled with her song
Innocent brooks babble
Silken streams sing
Adolescent rivers roar
But the Sea, she sighs
Waves build with a gentle
Hiss like indrawn breath
For an instant they still, like the voice in a grief-clenched throat
Then with a gentle sob they break (as I did, as you did)
Upon the sand

Each wave strives with
Hesitant, desperate fingers
Higher and higher upon the beach
And each wave fails (as I did, as you did) with
Wistful sighs as it slides
Back to that pool of tears

I know the Sea
I know what she seeks
For here you walked
Upon the sand
Here your hands slid through the grains
As through beloved hair,
perhaps some of it mine
Here we fought, my heart frozen with a lesser, phantom loss
(So silly to fear that loss, now knowing the true depths of the
slough)
Here we played, ten heartbeats later
Building castles on the sand with mischievous gravity
So proud we were of our medieval village
We walked away,
Hand in hand
Heart in heart
Close to Heaven
So soon before our sequential Hells

Here it happened,
The Sea remembers
She sends her waves shoreward
Searching eternally for
The grains you touched
Gilded by your smile
Tainted by our fear
The Sea sighs, and searches, and
Sobs at the loss
Seeking the thousands
Among trillions
As I seek reasons
Among memories



Dragonfly
Anita Wooten
oil on board
5" x 5"

Four and a Half Butterflies

To my daughter on her first day of pre-kindergarten

Suzannah Gilman

I walk with you this morning
In matching stride
Through the giant gate
Shaped like a butterfly
(Some things never will become
as beautiful as you.)

I remember thinking once before
How you couldn't grow any more
Dear to me than you were then
And here I am again
Thinking the same thing;
It is a familiar ring,
Being caught in the circle
Of a little girl's love.

Watching you, I wonder
At how a bright and flighty thing
Can be the sun and wind and rain,
Pull my heart by a string,
And be the joy that numbs my pain
(You'll never be all mine again.)
You smile, take my face in your palms,
Pull me close and offer alms—
Soft pink lips and a squishy kiss,
Sweet fruit for my soul.
With enough of this I could forget
When your gossamer wings unfold
You will fly off, my love,
Beautifully and
On your own.

On the playground swing
My childhood peaks and
descends
as father pushes me further
and higher.
My toes cling to each other,
the body anticipates the fall
that I will have to jump
on my own
as mother watches from
afar
and meticulously fixes a
strand of hair gone awry.
The continued push for whatever
it is I do not know continues and
mother is now out of sight and
father right behind me propels me
into the cold November sky.
I jump, and all at once I am alone and free.



World War II

Stephanie Tolander

collage

10" x 9"



Out of the Fire

Ernie Gonzalez

etching

7.75" x 9.5"

I pulled the blinds shut against the paling sky of coming sunrise. It would have to be as dark as possible to do it right; I needed the darkness to concentrate. The numbers of the clock an eerie glow over the bed. Five o' clock. Plenty of time.

I fumbled in the nightstand drawer for my Zippo and flicked it open. The pungent, greasy smell of the lighter fluid wafted up to me as I lit it and touched the flame to the wick of a white candle. I lit a stick of incense and climbed on to my bed. I hit the play button on my CD player and sounds of rain and wind through the trees, twittering birds, and barely audible piano music filled the room.

Now I was ready.

I settled back against the blankets and pillows, concentrating hard on my breathing until it became deep and even. I began to feel weightless... numb. I could no longer feel the comforter beneath me. I opened my eyes.

And saw myself lying on the bed.

I watched myself for a moment, the rise and fall of my chest, the flutter of my eyelids. I closed my eyes again and visualized his face, concentrating on the image. I felt a strong, almost painful tug in my stomach. I thought I felt cold wind on my face.

The tugging and the wind ceased, and I tentatively opened one eye. I was in an unfamiliar house, standing in front of a closed door. The walls were adorned with photographs of a boy and a girl, unimaginative school pictures, family portraits. I

studied the pictures, the small brown-haired boy and the girl who must be his sister. Was this him? Was he this freckled, scrawny, pale kid with the crooked teeth and the bowl haircut?

I examined the photos more closely, noting the slow metamorphosis between the junior high and high school pictures. The hair got longer, redder, the teeth were cased in metal braces and straightened. The freckles slowly disappeared, but the eerie pallor of his skin never did. I came to the senior picture, the most recent one, and smiled. I was in the right place.

I reached for the doorknob. I could feel the cold metal against my fingers, and yet I could not grasp it. Confused, I looked down at my body. I saw my arms, hands, torso, legs, and feet, all where they should have been.

Yet not quite there.

Lifting my hand, I stared at it, and through it, to the door beyond. My hand shook slightly as I lowered it and hesitantly drew back my foot. I kicked at the door as hard as I could, watching as it passed through, and almost falling from the force of having kicked so hard and not making contact with anything.

I gulped and steadied myself for what I had to do next. I lifted my hands and pushed them through the door, feeling the soft sandpaper tickle of the wood. I paused again, still uncertain, then took a deep breath and held it as I stepped through the door. It felt faintly like a cat's tongue; rough, but somehow soft. My mouth tasted of sawdust.

The room was not very different than I had imagined it. Movie posters hung on the walls, and half finished comic strips were tacked above a drafting table that was littered with sketches. The dresser top was littered with his wallet, a bottle of cologne, a watch, and a few coins. A television and VCR sat on a makeshift stand in the corner, stacks of videotapes surrounding them. Opposite the TV was the bed, the black comforter raised and crumpled around his sleeping body. The clock on the nightstand read five-thirty.

I stepped closer to the bed, kneeling on the floor beside it. He shifted suddenly, throwing off the covers. His face was turned to me now; lips parted slightly, eyelids twitching. His brow furrowed and released.

I called his name softly. The sound came out like a sigh on the wind, quiet and barely discernable from the sound of his breathing. I waited. Nothing. I called again.

He stirred, his eyes fluttering open. Gazing at me with glassy, sleep-filled eyes, the lips stretched slowly into a smile. His eyelids began to slowly droop, sleep seducing him back to peaceful dreams. I called his name again. His eyes snapped open.

I glanced again at the clock. Five forty-five. Only thirty minutes left. Then I would be gone.

"I don't have much time," I said, "to say what I have to."

He nodded, indicating that he heard me.

"I know you wanted me to tell you when I was leaving. I mean, I know it's been awhile since we last talked, but still... I thought you'd want me to tell you..."

Another nod. Sluggishly he lifted his arm and pointed to the drafting table. I followed his finger and noticed a small black jewelry box with a tiny red bow on top. He smiled sheepishly.

"I'm leaving in half an hour."

Flicker of panic, confusion in the jade eyes as they widened. He sat up.

"I'm not really here," I explained. "I'm at home. There's not enough time to explain it to you... later, you'll think this was just a dream. It will be easier for you that way." My voice caught on the lump swelling in my throat.

Despair filled his face. Somewhere in the house a clock struck six. Fifteen minutes left. Tears on his cheeks.

"Only one thing left to say..."

"Open the box," he whispered, pointing again to the drafting table.

"I can't." I lifted my fingers to his face. They disappeared into his cheek, though his tears clung to my skin like cobwebs. He stood up suddenly, his solid body brushing against my flimsy form. My hand where his face had been was wet.

I watched him walk over to the drafting table

and fumble with the delicate ribbon on the box. He opened the box and I heard the slight squeak of tiny springs. He held the box out to me. A heart-shaped garnet gleamed against a silver band.

I sobbed again. Taking the ring from its velvet cushion, he beckoned me closer.

Quick glance at the clock. Six twelve.

"I love you," I whispered. His fingers on my face, the tears slipping between them.

Six thirteen.

He slid the ring onto my finger, holding it so it couldn't fall from my fading hand.

"I know." His voice raw, eyes tender.

Six fourteen.

He kissed my lips that were not there. I reached for him, my hands sliding through his neck. Faint scent of his cologne as the air stirred.

"I love you, too. Don't go... "

The alarm sang in my ear. There was a brief moment of disorientation, the same tug in my stomach as before, and then suddenly I was slamming back to earth, back to my body. My cheeks were damp.

I rolled over and turned off the alarm. Brought my hand up to wipe away the tears.

I froze. My hand smelled of his cologne.

The ring rested on my finger.



Caterpillar Treat

Brian Sasaki-Scanlon
gelatin silver print
8" x 10"



Cobalt Reaction

Zofia Nowicki

oil on canvas

24" x 36"



Still Life with Pear

Zofia Nowicki

oil on canvas

12" x 12"



Untitled

Nora Beyrent
 photograph
 8" x 10"



Untitled

Nora Beyrent
 photograph
 8" x 10"



Untitled

Nora Beyrent
photograph
9" x 6"

Melodies

Catherine Bacon

Melodies surrounded her;
her own enshrouded her.
She could not revel any more.

The others danced in merriment;
she watched without enjoyment.
How could she? She was sore.

Her voice far beyond dry,
her thoughts twisted and awry.
She knew the pain...

She had seen all they knew now;
Knowing light darkened her brow
and thundered an unwanted rain.

All those days of childish joy,
all that folly, oh-so-coy.
She knew she was a fool.

She heard it in his mockery;
She heard it in his flattery.
He raised her on that stool.

She recalled that callous freeze,
once a light, Summer breeze.
But now, that voice...

Tense, she held her scream,
the intense agony supreme.
How he had rejoiced.

Hadn't she sung before?
What had he hopelessly torn?
What left her vulnerable?

She had lost those precious cords,
all that singing for her vicious lord.
Her melody left her vulnerable....

And—

Adrian Lyne

and your eyes—
with the thick bristles
resembling the rows of venus
that ramble in the moonyards—
and I want you—
to etch me there
 in your eyes
and in the moon—
in the salty seaside somersaults
that caught us on our backs
breathless
gasping upwards at our miraculous destruction
and I want to return to the time—
I was merely beautiful
and not unique—
not a matter of contingency
but merely a matter of fact
and I want you to take me—
there
intense and gentle
to the sound of rain
sliding like silk against the pane
and the heart—
of all simple and young
to beat between us
as all things natural should be.



Process

Lisa Winters
intaglio
7" x 7.57"

2:29 p.m. at the Down Under

Alexii Fierman

tan girls
can't see me
cause their noses are so high
"Aus-
tray-
lian

Gold"

The commercial runs through my head.

"best friend" from Playfair
is sittin' over there...
I'm throwin' my best eyes at 'im
and he's pretendin' not to see.
(who can blame him?)
maybe he likes guys...
after all, he's sittin' with two of 'em.

the black woman,
as she's wipin' tables,
is talkin' to her friend again
(real loud-like)
whom no one else can see.

my foot gets jiggy wit
Will Smith
which is playing
a little louder every second.

as I eat my fajita
(pronouce the "j" with pride)
I wonder why I'm going to
SOC 211 – Social Problems
in an hour
when there are enough of them right
Down Under.



Still Life with Color and Light

Benjamin Scott

lithograph with collograph

12" x 9"



Tea Picker, China

Sylvia Whitman
photograph
8" x 10"

Potato Clocks

Sierra Fordale

As I wait in line, don't think I can't see the brass clock between your eyes. Behind the shock proof plate of your translucent skull, I watch the hands point and jeer at every tick, a sinister reminder of your canned life. Stepping up to the counter, I'm stabbed with your question, "How can I help you?" I wish I could retort to your gray shadow, but it never seems appropriate, there, under the fluorescent lighting.

Hands pound cold and my thoughts drive distant – your abrasive aid congeals, not to mention your starched collar rashes my neck. I wonder why the blinds are always pulled shut. Blinking with confusion under the fluorescent lights, I catch a glimpse of the rusted hinges of your rib cage, there beneath your pressed shirt. I raise my hand to my heart at the sight of your gutted belly, filled with mechanical wires – devoid of all girlish aspirations.

With resentment, you ask "How can I help you?" and grow pale from your ephemeral sacrifice. With the blinds down and locked, neither of us can see the doves. Watching you – cringing under every pressured tick beneath the fluorescent lights, asking me questions with a knot around your throat.

And I remember making potato clocks for the science fair in the seventh grade. They were simple and enduring –

presented and judged upon pedestals, there, beneath the fluorescent lighting. Steadfast and every one tocking the same. Robots judged efficiency, reminding us that Mrs. Shelly had won the previous year.

Now, I see you're just a starchy root pushing through the ground, asking a monoquestion, and ticking under the lights to survive. And I never saw the glamour of multiple eyes – mutating in a dark room, buried beneath the rubbish of discarded hopes. Every twelve hours, a full circle, back to daybreak – all the while you ask me how you can help. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday – ticking and spewing back at the laughing hands.

The potato clocks sat on the windowsill that whole year. Still blinking, I try to shake off the glow of neon lights, and start to tremble. Big pounding hands, swollen with cold blood. I want to ask you, but I see the stuffing pulled through the cage doors, and well; "May I? May I help you?"

You raise your brows and lean across the counter. I remember trying to open the blinds thinking I saw a far off flock of white birds. I accidentally knocked the potato clock off the windowsill, fallen, I couldn't remember how to reconnect the positive wire. You started cursing at me, and I dropped the blue ribbon while you screamed about amputation.

I offered to help, but with a bit of force you pried the cage doors open and gouged at your own heart. I trembled because my awkward hands pulsed, and I was clumsy in the fluorescent spotlight. With shameful eyes, I watched the mess taint the floor, feeling your glare weld my backside.

You asked if I would drill a hole in your head – and, well, I already had to dirty my hands to clean up the last spill. Rolled sleeves, I attempted to gently remove the brass clock. Blinded by fluorescent reflection, I cocked my head and carefully chiseled the carcass clean.

Once you took a step back while I still stood at the counter. With your marbled eyes and laundered clothes, you asked “How can I help you?” I mopped the floor the best I could and searched hard for that blue ribbon. It must have melted in the muck. I still wasn't sure where to connect that positive wire, so I left the dismantled potato clock on the counter below the windowsill, thinking it'd be best to just wait for your help.



Ray, Texas

Sylvia Whitman
photograph
8" x 10"



Fortress of Solitude

Michelle Gongage

intaglio

5" x 7"

Rounded . . .

Kelly Clement

She rubs her belly.
Alone, in her world of two,
Fear kicks inside her



Metamorphosis

Anita Wooten
oil on board
7" x 7"

Trinity...

Suzannah Gillman

The first time I walked that flat gray carpet
to the automatic doors, told them I was there
to see you, they buzzed me through
and I walked the resounding corridor
my soles echoing on the tile
and with each step I became more hesitant
to see you,
each pair of eyes that followed me down the corridor,
each pair that didn't, couldn't size me up
shrank me, and I was a little girl who
didn't belong there, till

I saw you,
lying half naked, half covered,
linking the tubes and needles,
wires and monitors, fluids and screens
on the other side of the gridmarked window
half dead, half alive
and then I cried.

Your beady old eyes were smaller with weakness,
less beady, somehow, searching,
soaking in my youth,
Outside I saw treetops,
large broccoli bouquets shading houses,
I remembered you wouldn't eat broccoli anymore
—too many chemicals you can't wash out—
but you never saw the view anyway;
I made some small talk, you remained silent
with those eyes yelling at the nurses
—I know what you're doing, I'm still on top—
I told you about my new van, blue
you loved blue cars, I didn't
and I bragged it was American-made
I wouldn't have bragged that to anyone

but you
and you smiled,
those crippled old
mechanic's hands twitching at the sheets.

The day I wore my yellow shirt, you perked up,
wanted to talk to me
choked silent by those tubes
you became upset trying to speak
you were always so stubborn (I got
it from you) the nurses charged in
and chewed me out
their lights flashed, their
buzzers screamed

and you lay there and said nothing
till they had gone, and if
I hadn't heard it myself, I
wouldn't believe that stubbornness
could make a sound
but you made it clear—"three"—
I stood dumb, processing it—
my three children? the date? it was third
of July—what did you mean?

And that's the last you said to me.

A day later, you barely
nodded when I asked if it was better
when someone was with you,
and you flailed your arms without knowing it
your hands twitched beyond twitching
I was afraid, but I
stroked your warm forehead,
kissed your sunken cheek,
I held your arthritic hand as best I could,
a cruel knot that could never be undone,

and I held your Popeye arms, swollen
with your fluid weight, without it
I don't think I could have touched you
so easily,

I remembered
the bones beneath your skin
as I helped you to the car
before all this,
bony as death;
When the walls whispered to me
in that small, cerebral room
that knew so much of death and dying,

I held onto you
and the warm, soft skin on your Popeye arms
simply comforted me.

I didn't want to be there when it happened;
Already, the scent of Intensive Care
had engraved itself upon my memory forever—
death decaying as it waits;

I had always thought you would
die in your sleep, but a missed
heartbeat is fleeting—
I wouldn't have been able to cry
at your side, wouldn't have been able to let go
one by one, my memories of the awful things
you'd done—
none to me, but I held them
against you anyway (stubborn),
until I held your Popeye arms
and let every tear fall
that wanted to,
and I was relieved
you didn't die while I was with you.

Died with a tear in your eye;
And I knew what they'd do to you.
I knew.

When we gathered around the flag-draped
coffin, red and white bouquets saluting,
I knew before I touched your arms—
bony as death—
Popeye was gone, and it was just
you, my grandfather, bony and given up,
broken, grandfather's arms in that
blue suit, grandfather's knotted hands

Matthew wanted to touch
you, and I let him touch your sunken chest,
then your hands,
and two years alert, he said
"His hands is cold"—
death's formal introduction to my child.

We drove in my blue van
across muddy brown rivers, through
poverty-riddled cities,
and over green, consummate fields of soy and cotton
to your hometown for your burial;
it was your own grandsons—my brothers—
who hefted the rich brown farming soil and
sent it sailing back into the gaping berth
to rest on you;
the task completed
the three of us stood there,
warm July wind whipping our hair,
and we finally knew
what you had known—
you were going home.



Oedipus Rex, Act II

Stephanie Tolander

set design - watercolor pencil on paper

14" x 11"

"It is almost irresistible for humans to believe that we have some special relation to the universe, that human life is not just a more-or-less farcical outcome of a chain of accidents reaching back to the first three minutes, but that we were somehow built in from the beginning . . . The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless... [Yet the] effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy." —Steven Weinberg

I.

So why resist, I ask, why not believe?
 What comes of seeing human life as farce,
 As pointless accident; why not conceive
 A comedy divine and cross that curse?
 Our pride in knowing scientific "truth,"
 No matter what the cost to dignity
 And meaning in our darkened lives is ruth-
 Less arrogance and wicked travesty.
 For what does science absolutely know?
 Its facts accumulate, its theories change;
 Provisional and tentative, they show
 Perspectives, views, hypotheses that range
 And shift from pole to pole and then embrace
 Their opposites. Try this instead: try grace.

II.

Try grace. Try that absurd hypothesis
 To counter the absurdity of those
 Whose principled uncertainty leads to this:
 That certainly they know what they suppose.
 Suppose instead a universe of care;
 Not random, accidental, farcical,
 But purposeful, intelligent, one where
 We're wanted, loved, and all is meaningful.
 Take that on faith, blind faith, but run your test
 And see what proof your pudding then reveals;
 See whether angels come at your behest
 To comfort you and answer your appeals;
 See whether goodness glows in every place
 And whether blindness sees more than disgrace.



Study in White

Zofia Nowicki

oil on canvas

18" x 24"



Untitled

Nora Beyrent
pinhole photograph
10" x 3"



Untitled

Nora Beyrent
pinhole photograph
10" x 3"

Final Cadence...

Nathan Fyrmire

It was the end of an era. His hard work and practice since age eight had been rewarded—he was concert master for this last concert of his senior year. This night and this last work signified perhaps his final performance. Pre-Med and a finely tuned academic schedule, not including music, awaited him at Johns Hopkins in the fall.

But, as the conductor's baton dropped for the first downbeat of the final concerto he'd ever play, his thoughts wandered. His thoughts were on her. For four years, as a violinist, he'd secretly admired the cellist with the fiery red hair. The two had never really spoken, but whenever she spoke, his ears could hear nothing else. He'd once been in a speech class with her and when it was time to choose which side to take in a debate forum, he chose her team. This ensured that he wouldn't have any reason to interrupt her with an opposing comment. He could sit back and enjoy the soothing tones of her voice. He thought of Fitzgerald's description of "the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again."

Through his four years of concealed observation, he'd learned not only her favorite color (her inordinate number of blouses in lavender and its various shades gave that away), but also, without ever being told, the name of her perfume. For when she walked past or stood near him, he constantly found himself entranced in the "Scent of Spring" that was uniquely hers all year round. To be sure, in his eyes, she was the epitome of femininity and grace.

As the last movement elapsed, he found himself playing the sixteenth note runs and harmonics in tune and with the conductor's tempo, but in a distracted fashion. He began asking himself why he'd never approached her, never done anything so much as let her know he existed. His self-admonition was answered with the same undeniable fact he'd always accepted: he was shy, and courage was something every male on the planet had more of. He told himself every day for four years that tomorrow would be different, that he'd finally have the confidence just to say hi. But it never happened, and time, like the music, was passing with indifference.

With a violent bow stroke he gave vigor to the last note of the piece, the final cadence. And even though the cadence, by its very definition, brought finality to the piece, it left a sense of emptiness in the air.

With the scroll of her instrument resting against her shoulder, she glanced across the orchestra at him, wondering if, by slightest of chances, he had heard the emptiness too.

In a letter crafted last night
everything fit, you see,
a place was found for each wandering thought
— each lonely, wanting wish
each vagrant idea
until a masterful scroll of devotion
was scripted
with the weight of the world
upon each letter of the page.

Now before you it lays
and with each minute that passes
and with your piercing
gaze
my faults are revealed, errors uncovered,
until a crumpled pile
of paper returns to a draft,
an idea in my mind.



Inside the Mermaid

Anita Wooten

oil on canvas

40" x 30"



Night Journey

Anita Wooten

oil on canvas

38" x 28"

Song of a Midnight Triste...

Alexia Brekm

look at me and see my eyes as they see you
you know it's been a while since we've been together
the moon outside hasn't changed much, has it?
the stars all look the same and the sky won't have it.
they seem frustrated in their little worlds, so far away:
so self-absorbed they are.
do they know we watch them?
such a mirror the sky is to the world it sees below.
telescopes can help us see ourselves sometimes.
I feel the wind blow colder than an AC vent
and try to find you in the sky.
you say you look to it often:
for peace,
for love,
for me...
I can't believe I am all that to you.
I'm no astronaut you know.
I don't reside in the sky like the rest of 'em.
you're looking for something where it ain't at.
and I'm looking for you everywhere I can
(stop the bus! I need to see who that was!)
my whole life is a frantic search for that one person
who made it all seem worthwhile for more than two minutes.
you do wonders for my soul...if only you knew.
I tell you and you think I am kidding
or being poetic like you always are.
dontcha know that my heart don't beat the same when you ain't around?
(my palms actually have a dry season)
and I don't always act so clumsy.

I wake to find you staring up and out the window
sayin' how you wonder what it's like to be a star...
I shake my head and fall back asleep—
can't you see that you already are?



How Dreams are Made

Ernie Gonzalez

etching

5.5" x 7"

Goodbye Pothead.....

September 11

Jakie Clarke

Your blue eyes
Behind tendrils of smoke.

Flat reflections
Of a fading stone(d) heart

That has grown
Too heavy
For these hands
To hold.

Could you see me
Through your slow
selfish
haze
As I moved
Faster then further
Into the night?
On a sad
shadowless flight
Out of your world...

When the numbness wears off
And the haunting lesson
Of a newborn regret
Sets in,

I am assured
Your addicted ascension
Will hardly seem worth the sacrifice of two.

...Earth's Vein

Sierra Donatille

The cracked vein of the crust de terra.
Tooth fright and gaping carbon.
It leaches out
with greedy fingers,
plowing through the sanctioned surface.
Full of deadened walls and
other cackling trickery.

The gnarled fault inching towards the roots,
shaking the threat to swallow.
Cramped and claustrophobic in a charcoal cavern.
To sleepwalk, disheartened, in-a-decisive labyrinth.
Footsteps meteor on the surface above.
Muted life, condensed and blue,
cornered in a cracked vein of the crust de terra.



On the Lake in Hunming, People's Republic of China

Sylvia Whitman

photograph

5" x 7"



Face Down in the Living Room

Benjamin Scott

lithograph with collograph

9" x 12"

Augury...

Chésea Romans

It's a hell of a way to live your life
Being swept along by flights of birds
Cowering beneath their left-handed wheeling
On the watch for buzzard feathers
Finding portent in the death of a potted plant

But your favorite method of divination
Was to tear me open
Eviscerate
Vivisect
Gut

My loopy insides spilled out
As I writhed in astounded pain
And made red tracks on the floor

Which you read
Seeking the future
Expecting the past
Seeing that which you expect

You stalked away
Leaving me to gather my inadequate intestines
In embarrassed silence

You returned
I relaxed
You smiled

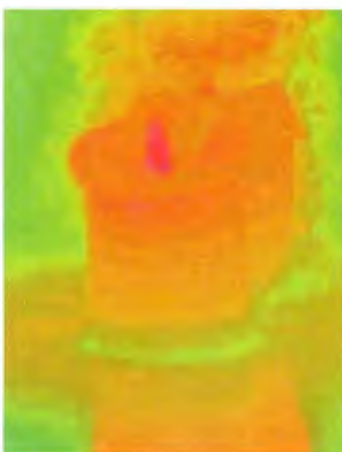
And did it again
(and i let you)
And did it again
(and i let you)
And did it again
(and i let you)

We get out of these auguries
What we bring into them
You read what you wanted
In the red tracks on the floor

Yet the visions you brought with you
Seemed unsatisfying
Did reality cloud your vision?
Did your self-righteousness suffer
Sunspots
Flickers
Fades?

For in truth
There was nothing to be read
In my red
But my pain

It's Mystery versus Rationality
That makes the war between the secularists,
Who trust in science and humanity
To dissipate and clear our ignorant mists,
And spiritualists, insisting there is more
To heaven and earth than our philosophy
Might ever comprehend, as ancient lore
Advises us and wisdom texts decree.
So where does this leave me, ambivalent
Between opposing camps? Is it enough
To count on Reason's being intelligent
And adequate to call religion's bluff?
Or must I cast my lot with Mystery,
With faith and hope in life's divinity?



Imperturbable Interlude
Lesley Gondeck
digital art

Lillian, Robert's wife, met Geoffrey at the Starbucks on 67th and Columbus. She had been reading a literary journal of some sort when he spilled the dark hot contents of a recycled paper cup into the folds of her skirt. He apologized profusely and offered to pay for the dry cleaning, but she declined. Glancing at the journal, which was now lying on the generic gray counter top, he struck up a conversation about commercial authors versus the true art of literature. Grasping tightly to the running gray ink of *The New York Times* sport section, they ran five blocks through the rain to Barnes and Noble together. We never knew that she wasn't happy.

Lillian Rosenberg is a caliber of woman that we have never known. Her romances were fantasies that we wished to live, but everyone knew that she was the only girl who could break free and rescue herself from the dreary, dreamy boredom of polite behavior. Lillian was the first girl from Garrison to fall in "true love." She was five foot five inches tall and extraordinary. It was as though she had stepped out of a Renoir painting. Her beauty came from the softness of her features. An impressionist's dream, light caught her. A feminine air whipped about her, and stung our eyes. She was child-like long after her own child had ripped through her and clawed its way into existence. In actuality, Lillian was shaped a little bit like a plum, but most people never noticed.

When we were young, jealousy kept us from befriending her, even though she lived on the same block as Sally Klein and went to temple with all three of the Swartz girls. No one ever spent any intimate time with her, but even then, each and every one of

us wanted to steal her individuality and strength.

No one ever told us that "true love" was not necessarily found under the circular tan lines on our ring fingers. Our mothers were great actresses, and we believed that daddies were always wonderful. We could not see through the nights at the office and the calls from secretaries at three AM because our mothers never told us to look. Now being mothers ourselves, we have passed on these devastating falsehoods about love and marriage. Lillian didn't.

After Lillian left Robert she stopped coming to temple. Funny how hardly any of us go on a regular basis, but still feel we have the right to condemn her for her lack of attendance. Julia Fisher, who lived across the street, remembers hearing Robert's screaming as Lillian packed her things into their little convertible. He told her that she'd better not expect him to take her back when she realized how ridiculous this was, and then, right in front of Jessica, their daughter, he called her a whore.

Jessica was fifteen then, and she smirked at all of us, as we peaked through our curtains, holding phones to our chins, so we could talk and watch at the same time. Jessica told us Robert and Lillian had fought constantly. She remembered when her mother went back to school to be a lawyer, and how one miserable afternoon her mother had come home, skirt stained with coffee, hair frizzed by rain, plastic bag of books under her arm, and smile on her face. Jessica says she reeked of love's omnipotent stench, but Jessica has always enjoyed exaggerating the truth to make our lives more interesting.

Sally Greenburg once found Jessica in her husband's deli behind the milk refrigerator. Jessica had just turned thirteen, and had not yet developed that adult odor which calls for deodorant. Even so, she told Sally that she was waiting for Richie Greenburg, so that they could do "the wild thing." You can imagine Sally's surprise. The young prepubescent Jessica went on to say that Richie liked to do it in the refrigerator because the risk of being caught in a compromising position heightened his pleasure. Sally made her call Lillian and told Jessica she never wanted to see her in the deli again. Lillian picked up Jessica in the convertible that she later used to make her triumphant escape, and smiled as she drove away.

We couldn't imagine what that smile was. We wanted to see her scream and condemn Jessica for her outrageous behavior, but she didn't. It wasn't until last year that Richie told his mother he didn't even know who Jessica was at the time. We know that her behavior was inappropriate, but young girls can be foolish.

Lillian started dating Robert in our senior year of high school. At the time Robert was the most popular young man at school. His father was very well known and made more money than any of our fathers. Linda and

She remembered when her mother went back to school to be a lawyer, and how one miserable afternoon, her mother had come home, skirt stained with coffee, hair frizzed by rain, plastic bag of books under her arm, and a smile on her face.

Howie Swartz saw Robert and Lillian out behind the gym that night. It was May 16th, our senior prom. No one ever truly trusts Linda's perceptions of what happened because we have to wonder why she was out there in the first place, but it is all we know. According to Linda, Robert had Lillian pinned against the wall. Her face was looking up at the cosmos in delight as Robert grasped at her thighs. By the time the two young people returned to the dance floor there was a glow and mystery about them.

They were married almost four months later. We imagined that he married her because she had gotten pregnant, but Jessica was not born for another two years.

In truth, we wanted to be there. We wanted to feel our backs against the brick wall, and our hearts beating fast because we knew how naughty we were. We wanted to be in love. So in love that you allowed a boy,

pulsating with hormones, to slip his damp fingers up your skirt and calm the intensity of being a young woman. At times we did allow this to occur, but we knew that it was not the same as it was for Lillian. It was not naughty. It was our future husbands, strewn across maroon leather seats, with gearshifts jabbing at our thighs. It was being riddled with guilt and never quite allowing what we wanted most. None of us had the guts; we were good Jewish girls and could never be anything more.

Robert is reluctant to discuss Lillian's departure, but in passing, he has made crude remarks about her character. We know that he thinks she is a disgrace, and cannot fathom how he could have married a woman who would do such a thing.

It is not our nature. Jewish girls never leave their husbands. Jewish husbands leave their Jewish wives for younger Jewish girls. So, when we saw Lillian leave, she had finally performed the taboo, which gave us a reason to disown her from society. We phoned each other at night from our beds, our faces coated in cosmetic wrinkle treatments, our husbands working late, our plates of brownies on the nightstand, and our lips gossiping about her brazen departure. Lillian didn't care about wrinkles.

Lillian and Geoffery Rosenburg live on 83rd and Park. Grace Steinburg saw her at a gallery opening last year. She said that she looked happy, but her dress was horrific. It was navy blue and exposed way too much cleavage for a woman her age. Geoffery could not keep his eyes off her.

We still live in Garrison, and our daughters are starting to get married. They also live here in large

white houses with manicured lawns and pools out back. Each one of us wishes we had Lillian's nerve, but we have reputations to protect and images to uphold. At night, after our phones had stopped ringing, and our minds have forgotten the pressures of current community service projects, girlhood fantasies of love return. Only now they are dreams of husbands who want to warm the space in bed next to ours, rather than husbands who are strong enough to carry us over the threshold.

Full Circle

Jakki Clare

Twelve moons later,
Here I am...

Pinned helplessly beneath devastation...
Stunned and scared,
Searching blindly for answers.
Clawing at butter walls...
While peering
through linen...
Ever awaiting
in vain...
For your unconcerned
return.

A glutton for punishment
I must be,
If I still won't believe
(refuse to see)
How wrong you are
For me.

The last flicker
of any lingering hope
has been smoldered silent...
blackened like firewood,
in smoke-soaked sorrow.

So no,
I don't know you anymore
As we have come
Full Circle...
The moon can no longer alter the mood of us...
The red persuasion in the wine
Is gone.



Untitled

Mary Carol Fitzgerald
gelatin silver print, pinhole image
10" x 8"

Harper's Ferry...

Barbara Leach

My mother died on a Thursday. I suspect we were both equally relieved. But I have to go back before then. Prior to that day, when she lay in her Hospice bed, gnarled as a twig, thin and ossified, we talked. Tuesday, it was.

"Harper's Ferry." She told me, voice sluggish.

I looked up from the magazine I had not been reading, trapped in my mother's deathroom where I did not want to be but could be no place else. "Huh?" I asked, not certain if she was talking to me or the morphine.

"Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Where me and your father had our honeymoon in '56."

My eyes traveled around her room on their familiar path of avoidance. The door was to my right on the other side of her bed. I focused on the eucalyptus swag hanging over the door's casing instead of the tangled afghan Mom had made which now covered her stick legs. I noted how the bow matched the peach in the lampshades. Nice. To the left, immediately across from the door loomed a picture window. Mom's room had a western exposure, so nightly, the fading sun mustered up dying energy and scoured the room with brilliant red orange beams, beams which slashed across her lower body.

For the last month and a half, between the hours of four and six, I wished my mother was a plant. Seeing those red orange rays drape across her body each day, I thought, "If only she could

absorb that. Use it. Make herself healthy." As she dozed in spurts, I found myself pausing over passages of books, magazines, journals, envisioning her a delicate willow, a hardy oak, a quirky crepe myrtle, anything but this forsaken lily.

"Yes. Harper's Ferry is where I want you to take my ashes. I want you to scatter them in Shenandoah River."

"OK Mom." John Denver's "Country Roads" played in my head, and I realized Mom and I were crossing another bridge on our cancer riddled journey. She talked about her death matter-of-factly, and I didn't try to stop her with the requisite Pollyanna bullshit that manifests in the early stages. But of course, the early stages were long gone; else, she would not be here in this special nursing home run by Hospice, special in that these beds had a quick turnaround time. Four weeks. That's the maximum hotel time these vacationers were allowed. Of course, my mother, ever the contrary one, had already extended her stay to six weeks. She always liked vacations.

The Hospice nurses and doctors just scratched their heads. Who knew? They expected Mrs. Carter to have had only a long weekend left in

her. As I watched her suffering miraculously increase daily, I wondered if her extended sojourn was worth it at all.

I continued my inventory. The television sat across from her on a console rather than mounted in the wall. For this I was glad. I was sick of all those damn hospitals of Mom's which had those perched TVs on them. All of them. Watch them for any amount of time, and, unless you were the one in the bed, you ended up with a neckache. Right now, we had the TV muted.

"I think it would be best if both my kids were to do it together. Both you and Dale go to Harper's Ferry."

"Seeing those red orange rays drape across her body each day, I thought, 'If only she could absorb that. Use it. Make herself healthy.'"

"You want me to go up there with him?"

She turned tired blue eyes toward me. I moved on to the Georgia O'Keefe magnolia hanging above the television, its petals smooth, lusty: an alive print.

My eyes wandered over to the sleeve of her teal robe hanging out of the bathroom door. Farce. She had not even been in the bathroom here. For a moment, I was overwhelmed by rage directed at that bathrobe. Stupid piece of cheap terrycloth, probably cost less than ten dollars, and she's had it at least as many years. Why hadn't I bought her a silk

one?

I sighed. "Yes, Mom. Alright. I'll go to West Virginia with Dale."

She stretched her lips tight over her teeth and fell asleep before I realized that her gesture had been a smile. I sat back in my chair, resumed page flipping, knowing I had done the right thing, yet angry with myself nonetheless.

I couldn't abide the feedings, so when I heard the dinner cart clank, bump and stop its way to my mother's room, I knew it was time to leave. 7:00pm. I headed home in the brisk fall air, stopping at Albertson's to pick up a bottle for dinner. Since Mom had entered the Hospice, I had been sleeping on my friend Sandie's couch.

Sandie's cat Kazander greeted me at the door. We're the only two home. I found this pleasing as I opened the bottle of Merlot, poured myself the first glass and eased myself onto her brown tweed couch. I sat in the dark apartment, drinking, mesmerized by Kaz's rumble purrs, running my hands along the wood paneling behind me, feeling the grain scratch against my fingers.

By the time I was fumbling around the dark kitchen for the corkscrew for bottle number two, I realized it was time to call my brother. I turned on the kitchen light and grabbed the cordless phone, dialed and waited, hoping he wouldn't be home. Futile. Dale didn't have a job. He didn't leave the house.

"Hello?"

"Yeah, hi. It's me. Look, Mom wants us to take her ashes to West Virginia together." No desire for small talk.

“When?”

“What? When? Jesus, Dale. When do you think?” My wine glass was still in the kitchen, but I had carried the bottle to the table with me. I grabbed it tightly.

He coughed, long, rough, a smoker’s stoner’s cough. I took a fast, hard drink directly from the bottle and wondered what the hell had happened to my family.

“Look, I’ll talk to you later.” I started to hang up but couldn’t help myself, “Mom’s been asking about you. Wonders if you are ever going to come see her. Wonders if you still love her. Thinks you are too embarrassed by her now. I grow weary of covering your ass. Get down there.” I terminate the call and don’t even think twice, this time, about drinking from the bottle. Who needs glasses? Or brothers?

Wednesday. I knew this because the Hospice cafeteria allows family members to eat with the patients who are still able. Mom wasn’t, but as I walked by the cafeteria doors, I heard the shallow laughter that only comes from helpless family members.

I walked by the cafeteria doors, down the hallway, into room # 15. My lucky number. Ironies abound if we choose to stop and notice them. I couldn’t seem to help myself. Mom was sitting up in bed. Actually, as I stooped to kiss her sweat damp forehead, I realized that she wasn’t so much sitting as was propped up and slouching forward. She reeked of pain, but her eyes were penny-bright. An old hand by now, I knew that she was on the down-side of her last morphine drip. Soon, the

medicine would electronically release itself into her blood. Her eyes will dull then, and the pain will become less tangible, yet never leaving. Her pain reminded me of the cat urine smell that lingers in Sandie’s apartment. Clean it up. Cover it up. It never goes away.

“Barbie.” Those eyes looked up at me. It’s noon, and while the light coming through the window was bright, it lacked the fierceness, the emphasis of the evening sun. It gave her an ephemeral look.

“Yes, Mom?” Her tone was that of yesterday’s. I gave up Barbie in the eighth grade,

“She turned tired blue eyes toward me. I moved on to the Georgia O’Keefe magnolia hanging above the television, its petals smooth, lusty: an alive print.”

right after my parent’s divorce. Right about the time my mother started coming into my room, drunk and crying, questioning, “What are we going to do? What are we going to do now?” But about three months into my mother’s terminal state, I became Barbie again. I hadn’t complained.

“Harper’s Ferry is close to Paw Paw.”

I smoothed the hair off of her brow. “Yes?”

“I think you should go see your father after you get done.”

My hand stilled its caress. "Mother..."

She reached up, grabbing my hand with her emaciated fingers. I tried not to look at them, instead, superimposing the image of her plump, rosy hand over this gray claw.

"Barbie. He's the only family you and Dale have left. You two can't be alone. I want you to see him, love him. Be his family. You need family."

I knew I was screaming, somewhere, What? Need family? Are you kidding? Look where that's gotten me! A drug-addict brother and a dying mother. Sandie's gone all the time, and the only conversation I have is with her cats. I opened my mouth and with horror heard myself say, "Alright Mom. For you." I closed my mouth, squeezed her hand and sat down in my chair, ready to skim over another day's readings. Ready for that blood red light to come and turn my mother into a resilient pine.



Children at My Window, India

Sylvia Whitman

photograph

8" x 10"



Primitive Swiss

Benjamin Scott

intaglio

6.75" x 10.75"

Serenade

Janice Samuels

A tightly strung guitar.
You tensed at the mention of his name.
You let him get inside though.
Serenade you with the music,
he strummed from your soul.
Igniting fire with each touch of a string.
He slipped inside the melody
with his strong *jazz* rhythms.
His instrument attune to each shift of mood.
He made each note cry in anticipation.
And when the sultry ballad climaxed
to its peak.
The music became a lullaby of bedtime love
entreats.

.....Pointed Fingers

Suzannah Gilman

Morning in the lane.
Each step I take unsure
Of where I'm going.
Thoughts of you
Careen from brick wall
To brick wall,
Smearing blue bruises
Into the gray veins
Of my heart,
Aching.
The pages of my life
Cut by the sharp
Words of gossips,
Snipped pat and quick
Into crooked paperdolls.
In the green distortion
Of cracked windowpanes,
The dolls are displayed
Dancing dirty
In the stale, still air.
From somewhere within
The old gossips laugh,
Pointed fingers scraping
Pointed fingers
In lizardskin crosses,
Sipping sherry
From teacups.
I take off
My sandals,
Cross the street
And don't look back,
Abandoning layer
By layer the crumbling
Facades of virtue.
Running now, through
Green, inviolate fields.
I will meet you at the river.

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