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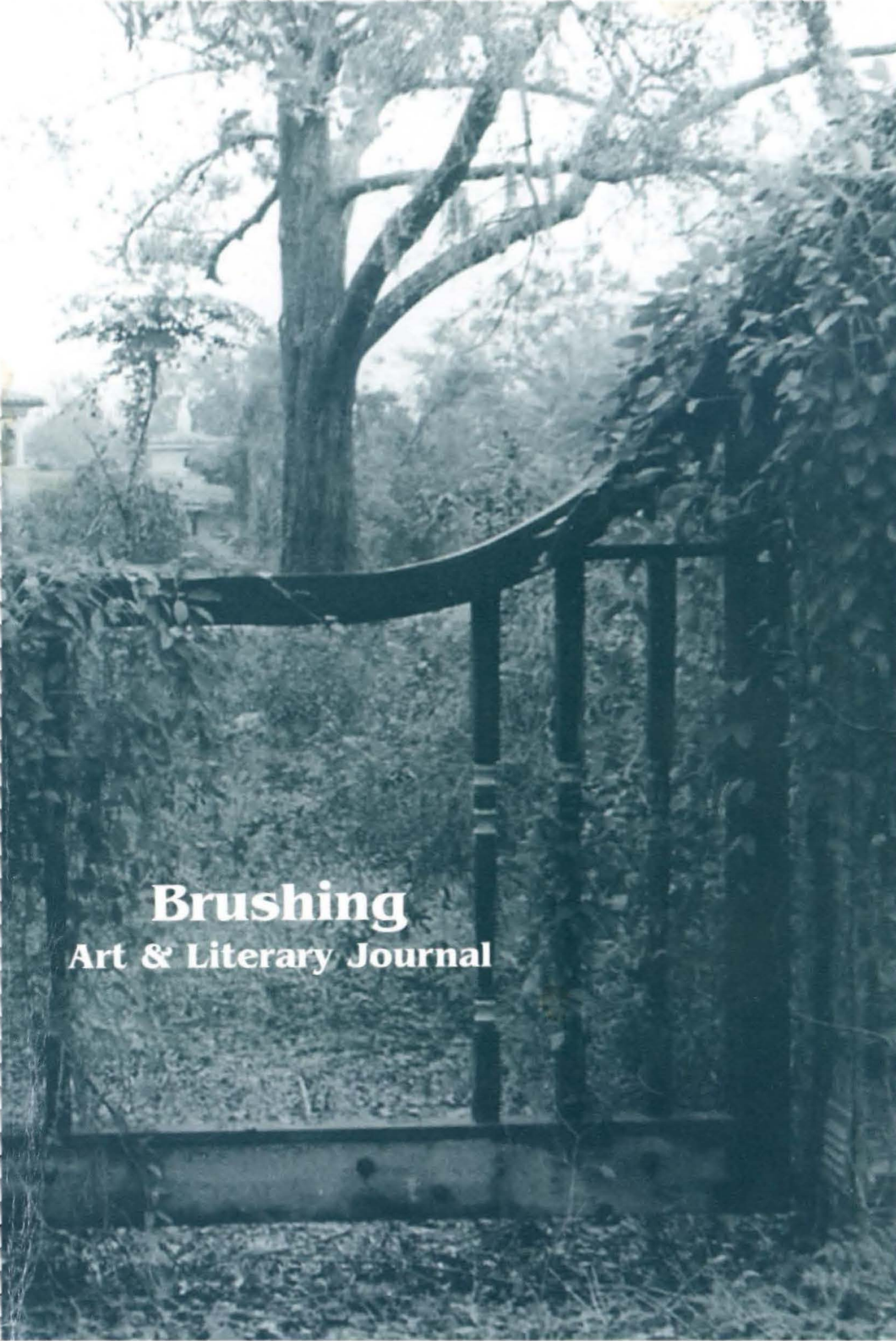
Brushing
Art & Literary Journal

Brushing

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ART AND LITERARY JOURNAL
VOLUME XXXIII, 2005

Brushing

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Editor's Note

The road to the 2005 issue has been anything but smooth. After a disappointing start and resignation of an editor, the journal nearly collapsed. Adoring and appreciating the ability of writing and art, I refused to let this highly competitive journal crumble under the weight of tribulation. Brushing is a splendid reflection of the talents of the Rollins College community of which such a prestigious institution should be proud. I have been graciously honored to work with a group of individuals whose diligence and willingness have saved this journal from extinction. I humbly thank the students and faculty without whose dedication I could not have completed this issue.

Thanks to all who submitted their work. It is because of you that I stepped into this leadership position. I simply wanted to be a part of the incredible talent that Rollins students contribute. On behalf of the Brushing staff, it has been delightful to review your works. I have thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity. Without prior knowledge of tasks or responsibilities, I was not sure what to expect. This was a fantastic learning experience. I just hope that the Rollins community continues to support this journal of literary and artistic accomplishments.

Danielle Lambraia
Editor-in-Chief
Brushing Art & Literary Journal
2005

Works

Creative Non-Fiction

Poetry

Art

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Drama

Stealing the Boat

Katie Beougher

I must have an adventure during Christmas. I blame my cousin Grant for this. Though I only saw him on Christmas and the occasional other holiday, he was a friend whose very mention sent visions of adventures past dancing in my head. We always went to his parents' house in North Carolina for the holidays, and, although the houses themselves changed, they always seemed to have convenient woods out back perfect for children's exploration. To the rather timid young me, Yuletide was the time to join my more rambunctious cousin on missions of great excitement to be imprinted in my memory forevermore.

My last escapade with Grant happened the second year his family hosted the family at their new house in Wilmington. The year before Grant and I had explored the prerequisite "forest." It was more like a couple of trees and a clayey gully. We had seen deer tracks in the gully, and Grant had thrown clay at me.

Now it was filled with water, undoubtedly the reason the depression had been dug in the first place. A suburban running track ringed it. I could not decide whether to be intrigued or disappointed by this change. We walked around the man-made lake until we came to a foundling lake on the far side. Beyond was a greeny area with some sort of monument.
I wished to go on, but Grant disagreed.

"Look over here," he said, calling my attention to an ordinary grey motorboat beached upon the lakeshore. "Let's take a ride."

"How?"

"I can jump-start it. I've done it lots of times before. C'mon, we can go all around the lakes. It'd save us time walking back."

Now, I'm not usually one to go around appropriating aquatic vehicles, but the sense of adventure was fast upon me, and so I readily agreed.

"Okay."

That decided, we turned to the immediate problem of getting the boat into the water. This was more difficult than it first appeared. It was a good five feet from the shore, admittedly down a steep slope, but the boat was very heavy for an eleven- and twelve-year-old. After several minutes of useless pushing, Grant hit upon a downright classical solution. "Look at these," he said, picking up one of the many long hollow white plastic tubes in the boat. "We can use them as rollers to slide the boat down on."

It was backbreaking work. Grant pushed, while the admittedly non-athletic me positioned the pipes for optimal rolling. There was a lot of fruitless shoving, repositioning, and more fruitless shoving. We grew sweaty in the cold winter air. Our hands become callused and dirty, but inch by slow inch, foot by well-earned foot, the boat grew closer to the water.

The distant sound of sirens prompted Grant to ask, "What would we do if a cop came up on us right now?"

"Boat, what boat?" I joked back. "I don't see any boat."

"Oh, *this* boat? This boat is ours. Really. Why don't we have the key? Well, we lost it. Then how are we planning to drive it? Um, we'll just float along. Aren't we a little young for boating? Well..." We laughed, keeping up the repartee as we worked.

Finally, carefully, lest we tip it over, Grant and I carefully eased the boat into the water. We stood back and admired our achievement while it floated serenely.

"We did it!" Grant said.

"You did the hard work," I reminded him. "I was just a pair of helping hands." *Without which you couldn't have done it,* I thought.

"Yeah, but I couldn't have done it without that pair of helping hands," Grant uncannily echoed my thoughts.

Surprised and delighted by this unexpected but deserved compliment, I clumsily got into the boat after Grant. Grant frowned at the keyhole. It had a key in it. He turned the key. A loud raucous roar disturbed the afternoon. We did not move.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Can't you start it?"

"I did." He examined the engine.

"Can't you hot-wire it?"

"We have the key. Which won't do us any good unless we have any gas!" he shouted. We sat silent for a moment.

"What do we do now?"

Grant pulled us back to the shore. Thankfully, we hadn't drifted much. "We can use these," he said again, grabbing a bunch of the tubes. "We'll use them to push ourselves across."

It was an awkward business. The cylinders were at least ten feet long, so they hung off the edges of the boat. With some difficulty and not a little frustration, we managed to get a couple of the pipes in a more-or-less comfortable position. Grant began to pole us along.

It soon became clear that the rods were not long enough to reach the bottom in the deeper middle of the lakelet. "Any ideas?" I asked as we floated along.

"I think we're done," Grant admitted. He managed paddle us to the lakeside and we pulled ourselves out. The boat we left drifting forlornly behind us.

"What if a policeman came up to us and asked, 'Do you know anything about the boat floating in the lake?'" Grant said as we walked along. "'No, nothing', we'll answer." I laughed as we walked back to the house full of Christmas, glad to have had my adventure this year.

Vice Baby

Darlyn Finch

My husband, Charles, had one request about the birth of our baby.

"Please don't have it during *Miami Vice*."

He was a policeman in North Palm Beach, Florida. It was August, 1985, and the television show about undercover vice cops in the exotic tropical city just to the south of us had captured his allegiance. The adventures of Sonny Crockett and Rafael Tubbs were on everybody's must-see list and Friday stopped being "date" night and became "stay at home and check out the latest pastel Versace suits" night. The show had the coolest cars, the hottest music, and the most beautiful women ... not to mention generous doses of drugs and sex. Suddenly, being a cop was cool again.

Charles had dutifully done the whole Lamaze thing with me. We didn't miss a single class, and I was confident that all I had to do was follow the suggestions our teacher had given us about breathing and relaxation, and the baby would come without a hitch, with very little pain.

It wasn't the Lamaze teacher's fault that I was so naive. She tried to prepare us. She told us all about the realities of giving birth. She showed us movies. She gave us books to read. She even told us about the list of dreaded "pain intensifiers": induction, breaking of water, pitocin drip, back labor, episiotomy. She might as well have given us a road map. If something was going to make childbirth hurt more, we were going to do it!

It was my mother's fault that I had the baby when I did. Hers and the doctor's. I was due on August 22, a Thursday, and my mother scheduled her vacation to begin the following day. When the baby didn't come on the due date, Mama took things into her own hands, turning on the guilt.

She called me that evening.

"Is anything happening?" she asked.

"No, Mama. Sorry. I don't feel any different than I have all along."

"Well, you know my vacation starts tomorrow." She was using her *martyr* voice. "The baby will probably come the day after my vacation ends, and I'll have to go back to work instead of seeing my first grandchild."

"I'm really sorry, Mama. I would like to have the baby as much as you'd like me to have it. But you can't rush these things." *I'm sure the baby's holding out, deliberately, to hurt your feelings.*

I had an appointment with my obstetrician at nine the next morning. After Dr. Marks examined me, we met in his office.

"Well, young lady – you're four centimetres dilated, which means that labor could start at any time. In fact, it already has, just not so that you'd notice, yet."

"When do you think the baby will really start to come?"

"It could be today – it could be tomorrow – it could be early next week. First-time mothers are usually slow and unpredictable once the process starts. Now I'm leaving on vacation tomorrow, so I want you to know that the on-call doctor is a trusted colleague of mine, and he'll take very good care of you."

I didn't want any "trusted colleague" to deliver my baby. I wanted Dr. Marks, who had been seeing me for the past nine months. Besides, he was also the Mayor of North Palm Beach, and I wanted my baby to be able to say it was delivered by the Mayor!

"Is there any chance we could go ahead and get this over with today?" I looked at him with a sheepish grin. "My mother has vacation, you see ... and ..."

"Well, I could call the hospital and see if they have any beds available. I don't see any problem with inducing labor – the baby is certainly big and healthy enough, and you have passed your due date, after all. We'll try to squeeze you in before my vacation."

I agreed to go on to work at the bank and wait for Dr. Marks' call. Charles had worked the eleven-to-seven shift the night before, so I knew he had just gone to bed. I decided not to call him unless Dr. Marks said it was a "go."

I drove to Barnett Banks Trust Company in Tequesta, where I worked as a Trust Officer in the Real Estate Department. I tried to focus, tried to stay busy, but jumped about a foot out of my chair every time the phone rang. At long last it was Dr. Marks' appointment secretary calling.

"Dr. Marks would like you to meet him at Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center Admissions office at one o'clock this afternoon. He'll induce labor at that time."

"I'll be there!" I said, with more confidence than I felt.

I told my boss that I was leaving to go have my baby. This man, a total professional, who had never touched me other than a handshake, walked across his office, put a hand on each of my shoulders, and kissed me warmly on my forehead.

"Good Luck!" he said. He looked frightened for me. Great.

I drove home and woke my husband. He made it clear he'd really rather sleep, but I managed to get the groggy fellow up, showered, dressed, and off we went to the hospital.

Dr. Marks had arranged everything, so the hospital staff was ready and waiting for us. I changed into the hospital gown, and enjoyed the hustle and bustle of the nurse scurrying around, preparing me for the induction. Soon Dr. Marks appeared, looking calm and relaxed. He explained what he was going to do while he prepared to do it.

"First we'll break your water ... like so."

He inserted a sort of hook, gave a little tug, and an amazing gush of fluid emptied out of me onto the bed sheet. I hadn't felt a thing.

"Then we'll start the pitocin drip."

The bag of clear liquid was already hanging from the hook beside the bed. Dr. Marks gave a nod to the nurse, who inserted the needle into the vein on the top of my left hand, and secured it with bandages. Little bee sting – no problem.

"What happens now?" Charles asked.

"We wait."

"All I know is, it's Friday. She better not have this baby during *Miami Vice*."

Dr. Marks chuckled and left the room, shaking his head all the way out the door.

The nurse changed the sodden sheets and helped me place the belt attached to the fetal monitor around my ample middle. I settled back against the stack of pillows, feeling regal and in charge. I knew going in that I was a wimp about pain. I also knew that once I got over-excited, I could tend to get loud and ugly real fast. So I had made up my mind that I would not raise my voice, no matter what. As long as I was speaking softly to everyone involved, I figured I could retain control and get through the childbirth process like a lady. Good plan. It even seemed important, at the time.

A short time later, a small, barely perceptible cramp passed across my stomach. *Not too bad. Not bad at all. I could do this.*

A few hours later, I was singing a different tune.

In an exaggerated, frightened stage-whisper, I pleaded with Charles for relief in between contractions.

"Honey ... that was a bad one. I mean, a really bad one. I can't do another one of those, Honey, no way. I can't. I need something for the pain. Can you get me something for the pain? Tell that nurse she's gotta find Dr. Marks and get me something for the pain."

Charles called the nurse, who called the doctor, who agreed that I should have some Demerol.

Demerol. Yes, great, fantastic! When I fell down a flight of stairs that time and dented my coccyx, they gave me a

shot of Demerol at the emergency room and I was loopy for three days. Maybe I'll fall asleep and wake up three days from now with a baby. Good plan. Yes. Demerol, please.

"Nurse, please give Mrs. Finch five cc's of Demerol."

I was absurdly grateful. I wanted to kiss the doctor, kiss the nurse, kiss my husband. But most of all, I wanted to kiss that little syringe holding the pain killer. The nurse gave me the shot.

I sat back against the pillows, waiting for blissful relief.

It didn't come.

After about two more hours of waiting, fighting against increasingly horrible contractions, I asked the nurse when the pain medicine was going to kick in.

"Oh, honey," she said, "that shot has worn off by now. Do you need another one?"

That's when I lost all hope.

OH GOD, I AM GOING TO DIE IF THEY CAN'T MAKE IT STOP HURTING.

I still didn't raise my voice.

"Can I talk to Dr. Marks?" I whispered.

The doctor came into the room a little while later.

"Doctor, we talked about an epidural. I think I'm gonna have to do that, the sooner the better. That Demerol didn't touch the pain. Can I have an epidural now?"

Dr. Marks shook his gray head and clucked like a maiden aunt.

"Now, Mrs. Finch, you are only seven centimetres dilated. We can't possibly give you an epidural until you are nine centimetres. But things are moving along nicely now. It won't be that much longer. Hang in there, little lady."

He turned to the nurse. "Five more cc's of Demerol will be fine." I wanted to slap him.

A family friend told us later that his chiropractor gives him 25 cc's of Demerol every time he adjusts his back. Then our friend drives home afterward. The 5 cc's served one purpose – to shut me up.

Time stood completely still. The clock refused to move forward. The baby wouldn't come. There was nothing in the world but me and the pain. I rode it like a wave, embraced it like a lover, after the love is gone. There was nowhere to hide.

God, what evil have I done in my life to deserve such pain? The worst person that ever lived does not deserve such pain. Adolf Hitler shouldn't hurt like this. I don't want a baby any more, God, let's just forget the whole thing. I won't mention it again, if you won't.

Charles, bless him, tried to help me. He did all the things he'd been told to do. He talked to me; he coached my breathing. He gave me ice chips and told me I was doing great. He rubbed my back, my arms. He changed the channels on the television hanging in the corner of my room, desperate to find something, anything to watch that would distract me from my misery. I vowed silently to sew him up in the bed sheets while he slept and beat him to death with the broom the moment I got him home.

Back labor. Let me tell you about back labor. Most babies are curled up inside their mother's wombs nose to knees, like a little rubber ball. But some babies, like our little gymnast-to-be, decide to curl the other way, in an exaggerated C-formation, with their little heels touching the tops of their heads. This causes the baby not to move very efficiently into the birth canal. It causes the mother to want to throw herself off a cliff. Even if she has to climb the cliff first.

The nurse came into the room and checked my progress.

"Great news, Mrs. Finch. You're nine centimetres dilated."

"OH THANK GOD! I can have my epidural now ...."

"Oh, no, sweetie," she said. "At nine centimetres the baby is nearly here. It's much too late for an epidural."

That low-down, side-winding, scurvy dog of a doctor had LIED to me! His days as mayor of our town were numbered! I made a vow as I laid there fuming ... I'd see

him booted from office if it was the last thing I ever did ... provided, of course, that I lived to vote again, much less campaign for his opponent.

Five minutes till ten. Five minutes till *Miami Vice.*

I'd always heard about "pushing" when you had a baby. There were times you should push. There were times you shouldn't push. The doctor would let you know when the right time came, then you would push until he told you to stop. All very controlled, all perfectly planned. Right.

I was lying back on the pillows, resting between contractions, when the most amazing sensation passed through my body like a wave. It started at the top of my head, as if the hair was standing straight up, and cascaded down my body and out through the soles of my feet. A spasm of astounding power. Totally involuntary. Primeval in intensity. Absolutely awe-inspiring. Absolutely terrifying.

I sat bolt upright in the bed, all pretence of whispering forgotten. In my fear, I literally screamed.

"I'M PPPUUUUSSSSHHHIINNGGGGG!!!"

Charles nearly fainted. Dr. Marks and the nurse came running, colliding in the doorway, looking like Keystone Kops trying to fit through the narrow portal at the same time.

Dr. Marks said it was time to move me to the delivery room. Charles was pissed.

"I knew it! I knew you'd wait all darned day, then have the baby during *Miami Vice*!"

I smiled wickedly at him. That was only step one of my plan for revenge ....

"I'll just stay here," he offered, "close to the TV set. I'll come in when the show is over, and tell you what happened."

"Not a chance."

"It was worth a try ...."

Now that I could see light at the end of the tunnel, a sense of excitement, rather than dread, returned. I was moved from the bed to a gurney, then wheeled a short

distance to one of the delivery rooms. On the way, we were treated to the sound of a heart-wrenching scream from the OTHER delivery room. It was the sound of someone's internal organs being ripped from her body. Past her tonsils. Without anaesthetic.

"Now that inspires confidence," said Charles.

I whimpered.

The most striking sensation I felt upon entering the delivery room was how cold it was. I was told that was to keep germs away. I knew how the germs felt. I wanted to leave, too. They brought me another blanket, since I had to stay.

Dr. Marks explained that, because the baby was in the "back labor" position, he needed to turn it so that it could pass more easily through the birth canal. Anything encouraging an easier passage sounded good to me. I placed my feet in the stirrups. He placed his right hand inside me. Up to his elbow. He grabbed the baby's head and turned it. Slowly. The baby latched on inside me, with arms, legs, tiny fists, little teeth it hadn't even grown yet. It did not wish to turn, thankyouverymuch.

Dr. Marks insisted. I stood up in the stirrups and howled, "DR. MARKS!!!!!" It was not an expression of admiration for his skill.

The baby gave in and rolled over. *Oh thank you, sweet baby. I am going to buy you the prettiest little red sports car ... tomorrow.*

I told everyone within earshot of my urgent, undeniable need for some good, hard pain medicine. If they were out of anything good at the hospital, street drugs from the corner would do just fine. I needed relief, and I needed it NOW. A gas mask appeared, as if by magic. *Praise Jesus!* I grabbed it, clapped it over my nose and mouth and started gasping and gulping as if air was on sale and there wouldn't be any left to buy if I didn't get it all now.

Nothing. I couldn't smell any gas. I couldn't taste anything. I certainly didn't feel one tiny bit better.

What the hell? Was this just another ruse to get me to quiet down? Did they choose gas because the mask would cover my mouth? Who did you have to kill to get some help around here?

I looked up at Charles, stationed at the top of the stretcher, by my head, just in time to see his eyes roll back in his head and his knees buckle. The gas mask had a leak! All that wonderful, happy, feel-good laughing gas was going out a tiny crack in the rubber tubing, straight up in the air to my husband, while I lay there sucking away, getting none.

Luckily, the World's Most Beautiful Delivery Room Nurse was standing beside him, and managed to catch all six-foot-four of him before he hit the ground. She and Charles then went on a little walk to clear his head, back and forth, up and down in the hallway outside the delivery room, her arm protectively around his waist, his arm around her shoulder, while Dr. Marks and I muddled on alone with the business at hand.

I must have hurt the doctor's feelings when I yelled at him for turning the baby. He decided what was needed was a little episiotomy. He pulled out a needle that was six miles long, showed it to me to heighten my terror, then injected me in a place that had never before seen daylight. Then he pulled out the scissors, and *without waiting for the shot to take effect*, cut me as if I were a paper Valentine. I cursed his mother. I cast aspersions on his ancestry. I said things that would make a sailor blush. I used words I didn't know how to spell.

"Mr. Finch," the doctor said, "if you want to see your baby born, you'd better get back in here!"

Every expectant mother has a picture in her mind of what her baby is going to look like. In my imagination, my child was chubby, almost bald, with a little downy blond peach fuzz, and dark brown eyes like Charles and I have.

The daughter they pulled from me at 10:34 that Friday night in 1985 (as the *Miami Vice* theme song played on televisions around the country) was no such Gerber baby.

Her head was covered in thick, curly dark-brown hair that looked so much like her daddy's that it took my breath away. The World's Most Beautiful Delivery Room Nurse wrapped Rachel Shannon in a pink and blue-striped blanket while Dr. Marks stitched me up. Then she laid her in the crook of my arm. Charles stood in awe-struck silence beside us, hovering protectively over his daughter. She opened one eye, to check us out. It was blue-green, like the water in the ocean where the Gulf Stream dips closest to shore, in Delray Beach. I was so surprised at how different she looked than my expectations that my first words to her were:

"Where did YOU come from?"

Charles piped up, "You mean you don't know?"

I lay there, exhausted and spent, but ecstatic that my new baby was a girl. *I hadn't had to name her Crockett OR Tubbs.*

The Repeater

Jamie Snead

I have to admit, I wondered what it would be but I hadn't really thought of this. I thought she would certainly be a talker, but what type? Would she be the kind who mumbles unintelligible words to herself? Would she be a whisperer, tickling my ears with her hot breath? Would she be loud and lusty, not one to care if people overheard her? My French-manicured nails squeezed the chair handles as I dug them in to its red plushy flesh. I bore down with my favorite black, strappy heels and prepared to ride it out. The last time I had done this was with a classmate a few months ago. It had ended so horribly (she was quite a violent kicker) that I had sworn to myself, as I had a hundred times before, that it was the absolute last time. But here I am, every muscle in my body tense, wondering desperately how I will make it through the next hour or so being with the worst offender of all – The Repeater. This might (not counting my first time which is notoriously shocking in its disappointment) be the worst movie experience of my life.

What is it with you people? Is it that impossible to enjoy two hours without hearing, at least in some form, the tenor of your own voice? Is the musicality of your words so intoxicating that the mere idea of not listening to it for one-twelfth of your day terrifies you into believing that it is actually okay to talk right over whatever it is Morgan Freeman is saying? Morgan-freaking-Freeman for Christ's sake. A man who was called "the definition of grace" by Hillary Swank at this year's Golden Globe Awards. A term I can assure you will never be applied to all you gum-smackers, soda-slurpers, seat pushers, cellular phone call takers, and fidgeters, who are out there right now, inflicting yourselves on innocent moviegoers everywhere. But this piece is not for you. It is not for the

convulsing ass-scratchers or those with an overactive bladder, it is instead for the responsible movie patrons who choose common decency and respect as their modes of behavior at the cinema. (Alright, before you get your knickers in a twist I don't necessarily believe over-active bladder sufferers lack common decency and respect – but come on, was a jumbo coke a necessity?) You who take your toddlers to late night horror flicks - Stop Reading Now.

My fascination with films began early on. In the town I grew up in there were two choices for entertainment on a Friday night for people under twenty-one, the movie theatre or the all-night Perkins. There was a period of about four years when I believe I saw every movie that was released. At that time I wanted to be an actress so I watched films with a different perspective than most of my friends. Man, could I sink myself into a flick. My friends however had a different take on the whole idea of what was entertaining and what wasn't. Hurling greased-up popcorn four rows down while giggling uncontrollably was fun, a love-story set during the French Revolution was not. Therein lay the conflict. It was during those years that I became a great advocate of watching movies alone.

Have you ever read a book with a friend? I don't mean in a book club, or even that you and your friend decided to read the same book over a period of time and then talk about it. I mean have you ever sat in an uncomfortable chair next to a companion, eating popcorn and reading a book for a couple of hours? How would this work exactly? Would turn to a page and ready your self to start reading together at a moment in time? "Okay, ready? Page twelve, second paragraph...ready...set...go." Of course not. So why do we feel it necessary to make movie attendance a couples or even group event? Is holding hands that vital?

When I see a movie alone I am doing more than just ensuring a quiet and fidget- free atmosphere to enjoy myself in. I am allowing myself an extreme freedom of

thought. By this I mean that when you watch a movie you are constantly shown scenes that in some way connect to your own life. These almost always lead to insights into the way things make you think and feel. Never are the motivations and reasons for your actions more clear than when you are watching other people make the same mistakes you made, fall in love the same way you did, or take a trip to a place you wish to go. For me at least these personal (and lets face it, somewhat self-indulgent) insights are what make a movie mean that much more. It's hard enough to go deep within yourself and find a part of you that you weren't aware existed, but how can it even be possible when the person next to you insists on showing you her gummy-worm bracelet and matching ring set?

Not that I always go alone. See like most things I do in my life I have a set of people I will gladly attend movies with. They are a group of like-minded individuals who know the importance of actually hearing dialogue. They are tried and true film watchers, my cinema posse if you will. They are vital to some of my movie-going experiences, especially comedies, which I must admit are better enjoyed with someone else. There is only so hard you laugh on your own. However, inevitably when I met someone new, be it friend or love-interest, there comes the time when they will eventually say the dreaded words, "wanna catch a movie?" There is no way to say no, at least not every time. I mean what can I tell them? They know I watch movies, they just heard me pontificate for thirty minutes on whether or not Goodfellas is better than the Godfather, or if the two can even be compared. There is no graceful way out.

This is how I came to sit with The Repeater. Every time a funny line is delivered, (and there are many as we are watching Sideways one of the best comedies I have seen in awhile) she repeats the punch line or one-liner out loud. It is agonizing. I want to gag her with my scarf. I want to get

up and move. I want to say to the people in front of us, "I'm sorry, I had no idea." But I don't. Instead I sit back in my chair, a box of Goobers in my lap, and take a deep breath. Because no matter what a good movie is still a good movie, and besides I can always come back and see it again, by myself.

Gum in Anchorage

Jono Majhanovich

Our deeds still travel with us from afar, and what we have been makes us what we are.

--George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Ch. LXX.

Life is often referred to as a journey, where our learning is only limited to as far as we want to travel. Every bump in the road, choice of path, and change in direction along the way enhances our understanding of where we are going and where we want to go in life. Between each of these junctures occur the thousands of experiences that form us as individuals, which may or may not lead to the aforementioned changes in travel. These experiences, however, aren't always apparent and distinctive. Sometimes they require a little attention and thought on the traveler's behalf.

This last summer, on July 3rd, I was to fly from the Anchorage International Airport to Salt Lake City, Utah, wherefrom, continue the trip in a car another four hours to my hometown of Pinedale, Wyoming. My oldest brother, older sister, her son Daniel of two years, and myself, had been in Alaska for two weeks in a coordinated effort to run my brother's King salmon guiding business. He'd owned and operated it for ten years out of the small town of Gakona, located roughly 200 miles inland from coastal Anchorage. Needless to say, it wasn't the first time any of us had been North; in fact, it was actually my fourth trip. This trip, however, was the first where I actually helped my brother with his guiding. It was a nice change from younger brother the client to younger brother the employee.

During the two weeks, my brother and I spent everyday fishing and guiding on the Gulkana River, while my sister and Daniel stayed at the cabin, who between cooking, cleaning, and frog hunting, managed to squeeze in some

fishing of their own. The weather was great, the runs were unpredictable, and the clients, well, were clients. All in all, the two weeks were a success and a great learning experience.

But on July 3rd, I had a particular experience that left a lasting impression on my life. I was reminded of it after reading Annie Dillard's essay "Living like Weasels," where she tells of a particular experience in her life from which she gains much understanding about herself. As she is visiting a pond one evening which she often visits at this time, she turns her head at one moment and finds herself face to face with an animal she'd never before seen in the wild, a weasel. Their "eyes locked as if someone had thrown away the key", and when the weasel ran off "[Dillard] waited motionless, [her] mind suddenly full of data and [her] spirit with pleadings".

Her unexpected experience leads to her understanding of what is necessary for people to do in their lives. She writes, "The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse". It was through her experience with a weasel that she learns this. She only wishes that her calling is as simple to find as that of her counterpart's "freedom of single necessity", whose most live and tender pulse to life exists in that of the pulse of blood that runs through a rabbit's jugular vein.

In my Anchorage experience, I didn't necessarily figure out how I should live, and I most certainly did not find my calling in life; however, I did recognize that it was worthy of personal attention.

At the last minute before driving to the airport that day, we decided to go downtown to pick up the annual Alaska gifts for family and friends. As we were ready to leave, I went with Daniel to visit another shop. We were to meet the others at the vehicle as soon as we were finished, and after doing just that, Daniel and I found ourselves alone, locked outside the vehicle waiting for them.

While looking around for his mother and uncle, I turned to meet the eyes of a rough man in a fading black leather jacket, probably pushing 50, unshaven, and seemingly confused. He was walking in the direction I came from, and as he was passing, I gave him what I try to give most every acquaintance and stranger I meet, a nod accompanied with a smile. For some reason, the gentle gesture grabbed him. Without hesitation, he stumbled up to me; I could already smell the alcohol.

I was later told that people like him are not uncommon. He was just a drunk, stumbling into the light of day out of the dark bar where he drowns his troubles, and I just happened to be the first person he ran into in his search for a financier of his next drowning victim. So it was up to me to understand that in such a situation, it is right to take him lightly. But I wasn't so young to have not recognized such a situation in the first place.

A conversation commenced, and it escalated to no more than some small talk. He was Irish and trying to make a living as a musician/songwriter. He continually looked at Daniel and commented how much we looked alike. He reached out and touched his face, and said with his harmless accent, "You just let your Uncle John take care of you." How he knew my name, I still am unsure, but it seemed to attract more of my attention to the experience. Upon realizing that he would soon have to go, he looked at me, his eyes a little redder than before, and said, "you have no idea how sad I'm going to be when I leave you two." He looked down in attempt to hide his face, "grown men aren't supposed to cry."

Although his physical attributes had seen better days, and his mouthing and structuring of words also faded as a result of the alcohol, there was no question in the validity of his thoughts, for he was only speaking now what he thought yesterday before his descent into the bar.

But the time came that I had to leave him. Although he tried holding on to the ten or so minutes passing on his watch as long as possible, it still maybe lasted a minute to

him. Before I left, he directed his last words to me, putting his hands on my shoulder and looking me directly in the eyes. "Thanks for taking the time...," as he paused trying to gather himself while a tear rolled down his face, "...out of your life to talk to me. I'm going to be so sad when you leave me."

I sat in the car and gathered my thoughts for the duration of the entire ride to the airport; much like Dillard, the unexpected event left me "full of data and my spirit with pleadings". Still overwhelmed by the whole experience, I recall how strange it was for me to think of gum out of all things to think about at that particular moment. In the midst of everything, I managed to wonder how nice it would be to freshen my breath in Salt Lake City after traveling all night. Nonetheless, after the disappointment hit me that I'd either forget or not have time to buy any, I pushed the thought out of mind.

We arrived at the airport to find ourselves in an hour-long line to check baggage. As we were in line, behind us stood one of the most intimidating men I'd ever seen. I felt uncomfortable looking any direction but forward. His bleached hair was pulled back in a pony tail, and his tanned dimensions were so immeasurable that his shirt was definitely painted on. His burned out gray eyes were looking straight forward, and had I been seven feet tall he would've been staring a hole right through my chest. The steroids added twenty more years to his already forty five. He was a monster; I knew that no chance of my usual gesture could get through to him. But I tried anyway.

I aimed it in his general direction, and it was shockingly recognized and returned with a gentle smile and nod of his own. The next thing I remember, he bent down and began digging through a black bag. He gave me something to hold, and after he was finished digging, I went to hand it back to him. He laughed and said, "No, it's yours." He put a piece of gum in his mouth, grinning, while I looked down at my hands. There lay the summation of every thing I was to learn from the experience. Maybe he read

my mind, maybe I should stop judging books by their covers, but definitely, maybe no good deed truly ever goes unrewarded. Mine was just in the form of eighteen packaged pieces of Freshmint Trident.

The Chair

Issac Stolzenbach

People are like books, they walk around all day and show us nothing but their covers: postal dude, cop, cable guy. When you interact with someone on a first name basis, they'll show you their chapters; I was born in . . . I went to school at . . . I work at . . . . As you get closer to their core, you read their chapters; caressingly turning every page, relishing in their triumphs, squinting at their horrors. While reading their chapters and becoming intimate with their *state-of-character* (in the Aristotelian sense), you might be lucky enough to find your own story mixed with theirs. The reading of each other's chapters is a hallmark of love and life. Now imagine if you will, that the typeset ceased, and you turn one blank page after another; the book of life just stopped: documenting, revealing, living. This is what happened to me, the day I was sentenced to the chair.

* * *

It is a beautiful day today and I just can't stand it. I'm sure, my dear reader, that you are preparing yourself for the ranting of a madman, but you must allow me to explain. As a dialectic thinker, I am bound to a certain method of living life, obliged to listening to the voices in my head. Not multiple voices mind you, just two; my terminology of "dialectics" might make more sense if I put it into the context of Freud's triage. One voice is cemented in the Freudian sense of id. I have (as we all do) certain impulses that flicker in my synapses, demanding the survival of my being. The other is also of Freudian origin, that is my superego, ensuring that the self abide by the rules and regulations of the society in which I live. The combination of these voices (more like the battle between the two) results in the

presentation of my persona to the world around me, or my ego. We will, for the duration of this essay, consider this summation to be one's mental state. This makes up but one of three parts, which execute one's state-of-being for any given day. If you gather nothing else from this précis, you must understand that dialect thinking is both a curse and a blessing, all in the same breath.

* * *

I was finally about to see a picture of what had been making me ache for the past three weeks . . . since the accident. The little Italian man dug in his beard, knocking his glasses sideways, as he closed the door behind him. He seemed to float across the floor, levitating within his floor-length uniform. Out from under the cuff, a slim white hand poked out; it had many purple-veiny-highways. The hand slipped and slithered its way to the wall, eclipsing the x-ray before us, pointing to a fuzzy bump on the film. "For a diesel technician, this is a career-ending injury, sir," the doctor said while taping lifelessly on the x-ray board before us. I had nothing to say, there was no longer blood in my brain for me to say anything, for the first time in my life, my big mouth had nothing to give; I was truly dumbfounded & nonplus. That day provided a revelation–doctors and thieves have much in common—they both wear masks, they steal whatever part of one's life they see fit, they rape indiscriminately.

Someone once told me, "If you feel a second hand on your shoulder just before the doctor says, 'you might feel a slight bit of pressure,' I recommend you run." I felt that bastard-reaper's hands on my shoulders, but I couldn't run for the life of me–I just stood there gaping—allowing my life to be raped away. Cold, clammy, bloodless. I had been raped before, but somehow I knew that there would be no recovering from this one. If only there had been a kiss, or a reach-around first, it might have been a little easier to take.

"These prescriptions will help with the pain and the anxiety," the rapist said emotionlessly as he scribbled out eight prescription notes. "And we have a treatment that could get you better, it has a high success rate in readjusting the herniated disc to its proper position, but in addition to having osteoarthritis . . . and degenerative disc disease . . . ." his words fell silent. Emotion had finally broken through his Spock-like logic; we both knew I was screwed.

As my sentence was pronounced and the gavel fell, my guts became loose like I had just been shot-up with a coffee enema. I took the prescription slips without a word–I was in shock. My hands and feet became cold as all the blood rushed to my core. My id struggled to keep the vitals functioning, leaving just enough blood in my brain to prevent my body from hitting the floor. I wondered quietly to myself–if I choke him, will any of this change?

A certain irony struck me on the way to the pharmacist. Perhaps it was best that I had gotten into a car accident. Even better that I was on the way to my last ASE (Automotive Service Excellence) test to become a Master Technician. After ten years, I could be a technician no more. I got all eight of the prescriptions filled, as instructed, and started strapping myself into the chair, one pill at a time. I felt like the Rock Monster from The Neverending Story; stoical, stodgy, feckless. "They look like big, strong, good hands don't they." Once strong, now powerless. Once healthy, now unfit. The nothing had taken hold.

* * *

The next section that one must be attentive to when observing their state-of-being for the day, is physical health. When you wake in the morning; are you feeling a bit of the chill creeping into your bones, sore from a long workout the night before, hung-over? These are the things to be attentive to when feeling out your physical state, before having your morning coffee the proper way. I have

not mentioned feeling well because our bodies will seem to default to this state; life-long ailments don't rear their evil heads until after breakfast. I will not address dialectics on a body in ill repair, for that is an essay all its own, but you can gather from what is provided, where we are going with this. Two of the three participles involved in one's state-of-being have been addressed, the mental state, and the physical state.

* * *

No one cares about drugs anymore, if one does it's a matter of how to get them, rather than what our government is doing about regulating them. The drugs seem to fill the void from the spiritual malaise that we have all been suffering; it is not the only way of dealing with it, just the easiest. Realizing the ultimate benefit that drugs provide, the ability not to care, I was sold. This was the dichotomy in which I lived for eighteen months, a world in which I had been sentenced to the chair by drugs, and yet the drugs were my saving grace . . . allowing me not to care about the chair (nor the sentence). Now, anytime I think about drugs, I think about that goddamn chair; where I was strapped and shackled, loved and lost . . . where my mind was neutered. Luckily, the mind is equipped with defense mechanisms that prevent me from remembering what happened during those eighteen months of negation. Drugs slipped a slither between the communication links of the dialectics, thus leaving me inept, defaulting to id-like behavior. With superego silent, the only concern was a minimalist's existence, life no longer mattered outside the front door. I began to measure time in the flipping of my mailbox flag, peeking out the window but once a day. The world spun by like I was gazing out the window of a time machine.

* * *

The third portion to one's state-of-being is the most illusive, because it is the one we have the least control over, and this is one's environment. By way of example, to demonstrate the effects of the environment on an individual, I revert back to the last place I had your attention, and that is, "it is a beautiful day and I just can't stand it." The third piece of this would-be puzzle serves as the most erroneous part of the three because we have no control over whether our minds and bodies are in sync with the bright of the day, *or the dark of the day.* This was noted one day while my body was feeling ravaged; my mind filled with vituperation before finally venturing out past my front door to find the sounds of a Florida Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) courting his mate, the waft of Blue Morning Glory (*Ipomoea indica*), and the Sun gently casting his rays at seventy degrees upon my pale face. That day, I would have been more in sync with the world had I caught the sight of a Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) devouring its prey, a whiff of Horrible Thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*) stinging my septum, and the chill of December ebbing through my bones. Since the day I escaped the chair, I have thrived in these darkened days. The doctor's diagnosis was depression, but after a battery of thirteen different anti-depressant medications, I proved him wrong. It was not depression . . . I just did not care. The drugs had made me not care, slicing my central nervous system in half, thus I was mentally neutered . . . there in flesh . . . not in spirit.

This, my dear reader, is the crux; one must be *one* with their environment. For a day that is rainy (one might call it dreary even) coupled with a hangover is a glorious day. A day that your body is in riveting pain, and it's cool and overcast . . . . Instant pleasure can be found in getting the senses attuned to the weather, rather than the chasm of one's pains. Your environment has an impact on your state-of-being, thus a beautiful day to some, is the ache of another. When one does find their mind and body in sync with their environment, then a *perm-a-grin* might be found

on their face throughout the day. The dialectic thinker might reason things out and find a happy mean; the memory of that method now escapes me. What does not escape my mind (I doubt it ever will) is the pain; I have conferred with Webster and he agrees, "there aren't enough words."

The subtle ache that stitched its way in and out of my bones was none other than my vertebral disc becoming unfriendly neighbors with my sciatic nerve. The pain came in waves. At times it was like pure one-ninety proof White Lightening shooting down my legs, every shift in the chair bringing a new root-canal-like jolt. Each pulse flashed a new shade of red before my eyes, not the red of roses mind you, but the kind of red that makes you want to either fuck, or fight. I was incapable of both, but the red burned new places in my mind. A rage that if not checked by drugs would have certainly landed me in jail. Perhaps being doped-up and strung-out is just what one needs while plummeting into the fits and seizures that come with the birth of a new life . . . I became infected with the *need to feel.*

* * *

The words of Socrates spoke to me often, but my morphine-haze muffled his voice. One day like many, I ran out of my drugs before the refill date, the fog lifted and an echo resonated, "an unexamined life is not worth living." From the first day I popped a twenty-milligram oxycontin, nearly two-years ago, I hadn't heard any philosophy come through so clear. I didn't feel the shakes and sweats of my body knuckling-up from the withdrawals, but I did feel that in my present state, my life was not worth living. I tried bouncing ideas off of superego, but they returned silent. *One strap flew from the chair.* I had for years sworn off of watching news, because a tenet to stress management is to not worry about things one cannot control. *Another strap flies loose.*

My hand extended to the television remote . . . 0-1-3-enter. "A man has been found dead in his home from an oxycontin overdose," a reporter wailed tossing her hair side-to-side at the inflective points of her speech. ". . . investigation reveals he was taking the prescribed amount. The Orlando-area doctor who took out a full-page ad in the Orlando Sentinel professing his innocence has refused questioning." *The last strap flies loose.* Seeing my doctor on the news in that capacity broke the final strap, and superego spit at me, "one must examine their life often, with as much precision as humanly possible. This is essential, for you do not want to come to life the same day you die, as Kevin Spacey did in *American Beauty*; nor wake-up in the chair one day with a drug addiction." The straps were free and I started to look around at my life, in the bosom of black-leather and twitching-sweat, my voices returned.

* * *

Now that the dialectic-snapping of my synapse is beginning to regain its fervor, I am left wondering: will the great howl in the core of my ribcage, left by oxycontin ever cease, or will I become a member of the malaise. For I have seen the greatest minds of my time, as have you: snort, shoot, and smoke; pump, pop, and poke; imbibe, impregnate, and invoke anything that will fill the holes in their souls; all in an effort to fill the same void I suffer now. The question remains–will I take this practical wisdom and annunciate my newfound voice, or will I take a shallow breath, and spin the spiral down? The answer lies with you my reader, have you thought about your state-of-being? Are you going to examine your life? If so, then my voice has been heard; if not, then I will see you between the spiral. *~Tschüß*

March Madness

Scot McClamma

The night before my father died, I ate roast pork with grilled onions covered in mojo sauce, with a side of yucca and black beans and rice. My brother, Derek, had a Cuban sandwich with a side of sweet plantains and, of course, black beans and rice. I had heard much praise for Numero Uno Cuban Restaurant that supported the self-proclamation of its name, which offers a pretension that is tolerated only from foreign restaurants, such as China's Best, which was a few blocks down the road.

"So, I guess you're not on the Atkins anymore?" I asked, as I watched Derek take a chunk out of the golden Cuban bread.

"Well, it's more like break," he replied with a full mouth as crumbs dropped to the table below.

"Oh, a break. Is this your first day?"

"Yeah," he answered, nodding his head while still chewing.

"Man, you must really be craving some carbs then, huh?"

He paused to swallow and then to dislodge bread from between his teeth with his tongue. "No, I had some cereal and bagel this morning and sandwich for lunch, and I've been snacking on chips throughout the day."

"Oh, so it's more of a binge than a break?"

"Uh, yeah," he said slowly as he turned his head to look out the big window at the apathetic cars passing in the busy street, offering temporary reflections of the neon signs nearby.

Inside, the small candle-lit dining room was dark and warm. Ceiling fans turned slowly overhead—not fast enough to actually serve a cooling purpose, but nevertheless providing a soothing, hypnotizing effect. Suddenly, I was somewhere else, an island paradise, where old men in white fedoras sit on porches and play dominoes

while senioritas serve sangria, and the sound of children playing in the distance is muffled only by waves crashing on the snow-white beach.

"More bread?"

"Huh? I returned from my mental vacation and glanced over at the grinning waitress who was holding our empty basket.

Derek quickly answered with an enthusiastic, "Yeah that'd be great."

I glared at him sarcastically, condescendingly shaking my head and exhaling a muted laugh.

"What?" he asked in a raised voice.

"Nothing."

"What!?" (in an even higher tone).

"Nothing."

Immediately I became aware of the people around us—the young, Hispanic couple two tables over directly to my left, sitting three tables up from an older, fatter, white couple. Both parties were now trying, unsuccessfully, not to stare at my brother and me. I wondered if they thought we were gay or something. What an odd couple we must appear to be: Derek, short and stocky with short hair and a goatee in a t-shirt, shorts, and Nikes; me, tall and thin, clean-shaven, with hair that curls on the collar of my salmon-colored dress shirt, a loosened tie, black pants and black Oxford shoes that reflected the candle light.

"Here you go," our waitress said in thick Cuban accent while placing a basket of steaming, golden slices of bread on the table. Her smile was even bigger than I had remembered it. She was beautifully petite, with olive skin and long, black hair that made the candy-apple red lipstick jump off her face and burn an indelible image on my retinas. Although she had not given us her name, I presumed it to be something exotic like, Lolita. I imagined that Lolita's past was filled with torrid romantic escapades—sex on the beach with men named Raul and Esteban, the tide washing over their tanned bodies—and that if provoked she would erupt into a sassy tirade of

supersonic Spanglish, moving her neck side to side, her right hand raised with index finger pointed at the unlucky recipient of her raging rampage.

My eyes followed as she walked away from our table and through the doors of the kitchen, when I noticed the small, old gentleman that had greeted my brother and me when we first entered the restaurant. He was now standing by the kitchen doors, giving me a harsh, disapproving glare through large, wire-framed glasses. Coming to the conclusion that he was not fond of the way I had been looking at his waitress, I swiftly but casually turned back to Derek.

"Don't you just love these little, family-owned establishments?" I asked.

Looking over my head, he waved to the stern-faced patriarch and, with the obligatory downward-pointing motion, loudly announced, "We'll take the check now."

* * * *

The day that I learned of my father's cancer, I had been apartment hunting with my friend and future roommate, Dan. It was the Monday after Thanksgiving, and we met up at Barnies to start the day off with cup o' joe and to plan our attack. Armed with highlighted newspapers, we set out towards our first stop: Hidden Pond. Fortunately, the complex was easier to find than the name suggested. As the sales agent led us through the apartment that would eventually become home, I wondered if she thought we were gay.

"Imagine all the chicks we could have over here. Ha ha ha," I chuckled nervously. *There, that should do it.*

Dan stared at me with a wrinkled brow and, showcasing the mark of a loyal friend, offered a courtesy laugh at my absurdly out-of-place statement.

After the tour, we concluded that the place didn't smell too bad, and that the price was right. Read: cheap. This met our predetermined criteria, so we decided to end the

hunt after one stop, breaking the world record for shortest apartment searches. Feeling proud of my achievement, I returned to my soon-to-be former home, and apartment I shared with my mother.

Soon after I arrived, the phone rang. It was my sister, Brandi. With a seriousness not usually found in her voice, she informed me that she was on her way to the hospital. She began to explain why, but the only words that really mattered were "Dad" and "tumor."

* * * *

With our Cuban dining expedition over, Derek and I drove back to Orlando Regional Medical Center where we had spent the majority of the afternoon engaging the stream of visitors that had come to encourage my dad to "get well soon." It was obvious, however, that all of this well-wishing was just a transparent mask for saying last goodbyes.

Unfortunately, a return to the hospital meant a return to the smell—the smell that I have never been able to describe, but have come to understand as the smell of death. It permeated every square inch of the grim building, serving as a constant reminder as to why I was there.

After journeying through a maze of hallways and two-way, swinging doors, we eventually reached room 116. My mother met us at the door.

"How is he?" Derek asked.

"Not good. The nurses had to increase the morphine and now he's unconscious," she replied, rubbing her forehead while her thumb rested on her right temple.

The three of us walked into the room and toward the pale, gaunt vestige of my father. The room was silent, save for the tremulous breathing of the alien body before us. My mom placed her hand on the hairless shell of the man she had loved, forgetting the marital deficiencies of the past and the nearly three and a half years they had been

separated. Looking at him, it was hard to tell where the destruction of disease ended and the carnage of chemotherapy began. Both, it seemed, had wreaked havoc on his body, leaving it a physical wasteland of bruised skin and protruding bones.

When Brandi entered the room, I took the opportunity to escape the claustrophobic chamber. As I made my retreat, I shed the tie and dress shirt, opting to spend the rest of what was sure to be a long night in the comfort of my white undershirt. I made my way down the hall to the waiting area, a large open space with giant fish tank, big screen t.v., and blue and pink floral print couches and chairs, the indigenous furniture of hospitals. After folding my shirt, I plopped down on the couch directly in front of the t.v. and stared at the fish across the room. Derek quickly joined me, turning on the television with a remote he had procured from the adjacent nurses station.

"Let's see who's playing now, " he said.

"What?" I asked, turning my attention away from the fish.

"The tournament."

Oh, right. I almost forgot. It was the first day of the annual college basketball tournament, also known as March Madness. To enhance the excitement of this year's competition—and because, well, this is America, damn it!—my brother and I had entered a pool with several of our friends, whereby the one who came closest in predicting the outcome would receive a handsome sum. Even with this added interest, our mood remained rather lethargic, devoid of the usual animation that results from our viewing of televised sports.

We sat in that room for hours. Watching basketball. Watching fish. Watching nurses. After the games had ended, the night quickly grew restless. We talked. We talked about nothing and we talked about everything. Everything but cancer. Everything but what we knew was inevitable. My sister joined us, leaving the dim lights and heavy air that inhaled room 116, to partake in our

conversational diversions, which frequently led to the reenactment of Seinfeld episodes. There was something about the irreverent humor of that show that made us feel comfortable. We needed to know that it was okay to laugh—that, we could stare into the face of impending death and find irony. While the tears that we were sure to shed made us feel human, the laughter made us supernatural, able to deny fate by mocking it.

But as the late night turned into early morning, we grew weary, our good spirits powerless to fend off physical exhaustion. Brandi left to check on my mom, then, returned upon finding her asleep. Nurses swiftly scurried back and forth, shuffling papers and files and charts until, finally, disappearing down the long hallways. The dialogue with my siblings faded into silence. Each of us played our own game of tug-of-war with sleep, going back and forth between surrendering to it and fighting it off, not knowing the proper thing to do in such circumstances.

Eventually, I awoke and concluded that I had exhausted every effort to get comfortable on the imitation couch. I stood up and lumbered down the hall to my dad's room. When I walked in, I could tell he had gotten much worse. His breathing had become more of a struggle, and the period between breaths was much longer. My mother, who had remained in the room throughout the night, was curled up on a small sofa at the foot the bed. I joined her there, squeezing myself between her feet and the arm of the sofa. After settling myself into the least uncomfortable position, I focused on my father who was lying in front of me, moving further away from life with each quaking breath. In the silence between breaths, I would doze off, only to be startled back to consciousness with every violent inhalation. But, ultimately, fatigue got the best of me, and I finally drifted off to sleep, unaware that the next time I opened my eyes, my dad's chest would not be moving, my sister would be crying, and a nurse would be standing over my emaciated father with two fingers pressed against the side of his neck.

It's all about the glamour

Mary Varouh

"Jesus, I can't even go to the bathroom in this place."

It's eight thirty on Thursday night. I'm taking my first break in the ladies room since coming on the floor at ten that morning. I haven't even reached the button on my pants before my pager begins vibrating on top of the baby changing table. I usually use the handicapped stall where the table's located because it's large and dimly lit, and for a few brief moments I can sit in peace and quiet and pretend I don't hate my job and everyone who comes to this restaurant to eat. I pick up the pager and read the message.

"Manager needed at front."

I clench my teeth and whisper to the pager, "I just LEFT the front! How in the hell could they have possibly found a reason to need me between there and the bathroom?"

In an act of sheer rebellion I decide to risk retribution and continue with my mission.

"I at least deserve to pee," I mumble to no one in particular.

* * * *

You have to understand, I was exhausted. We'd just finished our infamous All -You -Can -Eat- Crab promotion the previous week. I'd spent the last two nauseating months listening to overfed, gluttonous strangers tell me on a daily basis that their crab legs weren't meaty enough or that their refills weren't coming out fast enough. You know how you can rely on Old Faithful to erupt each day without fail? In that same assured way I knew that each shift a server was going to come up to me and say that one of their tables was unhappy. Without even having to ask

which table wanted to see me, I could predict with one hundred percent accuracy where I was going; I'd know because the complainers were always the grossest occupants of that server's section. They were the ones who wore their displeasure on their faces, literally: a thick gloss of clarified butter painted like clown makeup adorned their greasy cheeks. To be honest, I don't remember my future employers telling me at the interview that this job required a high tolerance for nausea.

Of course, I really can't lay all the blame for my exhausted gag reflex entirely at their feet. Along the way there were signs that should have let me know that there was more to this job than wearing cute uniforms and serving dinner with a smile. When I was sixteen I got my first waitressing job at Uncle Tudy's restaurant (home of the World Famous Bacon Wrapped Hot Dog). Uncle Tudy was our next door neighbor. He owned a small Mom & Pop diner in a section of town that had seen better days, and now tried to be closed by seven most nights. Uncle Tudy was a nice man with kind brown eyes and infinite patience. I'm pretty sure the only reason he hired me was because my mother convinced him I was wise beyond my years and eager to learn a trade. In reality, I really think she was just sick of seeing me lounging around the house and hoped I had mastered just enough math skills to accurately make change.

I should have realized what lay ahead of me the day the infamous liver incident occurred. The shift was no different than any other until I went to clear a table recently vacated by one of Uncle Tudy's more elderly customers. With all the gullibility of a novice server I reached over to pick up a napkin laid innocently enough at the edge of the table. As my tender, unsullied hand closed around the crumpled paper, a sensation of warm wetness seeped between my fingers. For a moment I stood there confused, my brain trying to understand why the paper had turned from thin and scratchy to soft and soggy. With rash unwariness I opened the napkin. The sudden

realization that I was holding a golf ball sized portion of post masticated liver and onions produced in me a level of nausea unrivaled by even my worst future hangover. To this day, if forced by circumstance to pick up a disheveled napkin, I use only my thumb and forefinger; a wary eye trained to look for signs of wetness or excessive gristly bits.

But still, as I progressed through the ranks of the restaurant world I held on to the belief that when I became a manager all those jobs would be delegated to the ranks of hourly employees. I believed that managers got to wear normal clothes and spend their days drinking coffee and playing solitaire in the office. I truly believed that after a few years of paying my dues I'd become manager of a chi chi resort somewhere in the Keys or the Virgin Islands. I'd walk around this fabulous tropical property sipping fruit drinks and schmoozing the coconut oiled guests. Forget the liver. For me, it was all going to be about the glamour.

* * * *

The pager's insistent vibrations bring me back from my musings to the quiet of the handicapped stall. With the same resignation I'm sure all beasts of burden feel when they gear up for a day's plowing or sled pulling, I re-attach the electronic yolk to the waistband of my pants. I've started reacting to the vibrations from my pager the same way lab animals do when they hear a buzzer and know an electric shock is coming; with extreme anxiety and a desire to claw out the eyes of the next human they see. "Manager needed at front."

I dry my hands, take a deep breath and head for the front door. Note to self: never a good idea to breath deeply in a public restroom.

* * * *

He's waiting for me at the podium. He's got to be pushing seventy. Before I can even say hello this miserable, pruned human barks,

"YOU TOOK YOUR TIME GETTIN HERE!"

Jesus that voice! It's typical of an irate seventy year old. It's raspy, well worn; probably got that way from a lifetime of yelling at waitresses, bellmen, salesgirls and other people cursed with providing him a service. Either that or the 5000 packs of Pall Mall cigarettes he's smoked since he was nine. There's no mistaking he's angry, and he's projecting at a volume that's meant to make heads turn. At the same time this voice has the odd quality of a forced whisper, like it's coming from somewhere deep in his diaphragm. There's an accent too, New York or maybe Jersey. He's a little stooped, yet intimidating in a wiry sort of way.

Anyone who deals with the general public on a regular basis will tell you seventy is a dangerous age. Seventy year olds have lived long enough to feel they're entitled to say just about anything that comes to mind. Conversely, they've usually lost just enough of said mind to feel no sense of boundary when it comes to either subject or volume.

Before I can even apologize for having the nerve to attend to something as trivial as my own personal comfort he hits me with it.

"YOU SONZ A BITCHES RUINED MY LOBSTA!"

If this had been a scene from *The Matrix* I would have been hurled back towards the kitchen, my body bending in half from the force of the blow. For a moment I'm stunned. The automatic reflex that allows me, with great fake sincerity, to take full blame and responsibility for any displeasure a guest experiences fails to kick in. It's like that helpless moment when you get the wind knocked out of you. You're so stunned you can't make a move. Think, THINK! What could possibly have happened to this guy's dinner? I just checked everyone a minute ago; what could I have missed?

"YOU USED THE HOMOGINIZED BUTTA!" he whisper-shrieks at me. I must look very confused because before I can open my mouth he waggles his nicotine stained finger at me and with unsettling energy demands;

"DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?"

I want to say no and that frankly I don't care, but they advise against that in manager's training school.

"I WAS VOTED THE WORLD'S *YOUNGEST* GOURMET!"

This is the moment I come back to my senses. I know who this guy is! This guy is someone we in the business call an asshole. He's that not- so –rare-breed of guest that lives to terrorize public service peons and finds incompetence at every turn. I realize no mortal will be able to right the injustice and inconvenience this man has endured.

"FIFTEEN YEARS OLD AND VOTED THE WORLD'S YOUNGEST GOURMET..."

There's a contest for this? Is it an annual award?

Jesus I can just picture what a little prick he must have been. Imagine a cheesy resort somewhere in the Catskills circa 1949. He probably entered the rainy day contest that featured a cookie bake off and a blue ribbon that said World's Best Gourmet.

His increasing volume brings me back from my daydream.

"AND I KNOW LOBSTAS AND YOU SONZ A BITCHES RUINED IT WITH THE HOMOGINIZED BUTTA!"

Mind you, all of this has transpired in less than fifteen seconds. Once again I open my mouth and try to say how sorry I am that his experience has been less than orgasmic. He cuts me off.

"AHHHCK! I DON'T WANT TO HEAR NUTTIN FROM YOU!" he rants dismissing me with a wave of his bony, sweater covered arm.

"YOU SHOULD FIRE THE SON OF A BITCH IN THERE WHO DID THIS!"

It's at this point the scene becomes so ridiculous that a sort of wicked amusement comes over me. I decide to take

on the same dramatic indignation as the old man.

"You're right!" I say slamming my hand down on the podium for effect. "I should have gotten rid of that guy last week! He's a bum! You know what? He's outta here!"

The hostesses gathered at the podium look at me as if I've just sprouted a lobster claw out of the top of my head. This is not a protocol maneuver. It occurs to me that they, and the guests who have gathered around to watch this drama are secretly hoping what spectators of NASCAR races or air shows always hope, that there's going to be a spectacular crash any second.

And sure enough, there's a case of whiplash for everyone when instead of getting angrier, his gratified response causes all of us to do a double take.

"GOOD!" he croaks.

Looking triumphant and satisfied, like he's just had a successful bowel movement in my lobby, he turns back for what I'm sure will be one last punch,

"GOD BLESS!"

What the hell? He wants to bless me for promising to ruin a man's livelihood?

It never fails to amaze me, this need so many have to find contentment in the complete degradation of others. The group that had gathered around the podium to watch the scene unfold gives me pitying glances that I can only interpret to mean, "Geez your job really sucks."

I take another deep breath, push my hair back and turn to start my next round of table visits. Before I get three steps the digital irritation I wear on my hip vibrates.

"Someone threw up in the men's room."

What the group of onlookers at the podium doesn't understand is for me, this job isn't just about overcoming the impossible. It's not about mopping up vomit, gutting lobsters, changing fly traps and pushing floods of sewer water back down the dish room drain.

You see for me, someday, it'll all be about the glamour.

Debate Tango

Katie Beougher

Dance with me.
Let us argue all night
About the world and her problems
About the path of the future
And destiny
And free will.

We will yell.
We will scream.
We will learn.

Tomorrow's sores will remain
With too many bandages
And none that work.
But, oh, what a dance was their weaving!

October

Michael C. Trottier

Mother cloud doesn't let blessings fall
Far from the blackberry tree of life.
Her sky fields seem ready beyond the
Insurmountable cliffs where staffs ripen
A cornucopia of chances while down on earth
We can only glean wheat kernel remnants,
Catching the fallen seeds in our teeth as
god's sickle takes the major harvest.

Climb a vine in the atmosphere stealing both
Ripe and unripe, share the sinking weight of someone
Else's converted grapes, heavy Muscat with crushed
Seedy sediment like centuries of Jesuits expanding,
Bowing and scraping along complacently,
Everyone ascending one foothold up and sinking
Down two feet this autumn morning while
planting short grain in a muddy paddy,

In China, perhaps in Yuang Yuan province. Father's threats of Gobi
Banishment, balanced with promises of his smiles,
settle with heaviness
On the only child capsized in one foot of water and beneath that,
Thirteen inches of mucky, diluvial concentrate, thick and rich.
Inhaling and gurgling the liquid soil like old burgundy dregs.
Another minor commotion forgotten in the usual way,
as his heels disappeared,
He recalled in a final moment how October had been warm that year,
praying, show me the harvest.

What The Cards Meant

Michael C. Trottier and Heather DeLancett

I smoked a cigarette and thought
And thought of various things.
Blue smoke and gray smoke
Sought the same personal space.
Philosophy and science argued.
Inside and outside both claimed
To be one and the same.
As the clock continued its pace
Truth kept silent, just for fun.
I knew both sides of my mind
But could not name my highest
Clear idea this time.

On my mind's stage
William James wiggled his nose
And thought it in his best interests
To forgive me for questing up the tree
For his pragmatically loved hierarchy
And so swept a mood upon me
Of good humor stoked by juxtaposition.

To sit, to smoke, to ponder
How so fitted together things in this world are!
So silly, so self-referential, so splendid,
When the act of doing seemingly so little
Creates the truth to surround
The mind, the body,
The inside, the outside,
The passionate, the tragic,
And the lines we draw to map all
Of the pieces and the wholes of it.

Superman Nietzsche,
Please pardon me,
But I've taken your wisdom
Out into the world
And the world does not want me.
Your Grecian dance with taoism does not fit
Among those apathetic to ecstasy.
Besides,
Your lessons are too harsh anyway.
You died a fool, and I will too.

Long-winded Socrates,
You move me so,
Often into revolving argument.
What is the point of it?
In this time, it is hard
For those of us who query
Not to fall into relativism
Which winds itself into
Black holes of empty theory.
You said yourself,
You did not know anything.
Well, now your school is legion.

Cynical Voltaire,
How I would mock thee!
So candidly did I reject
That which now comes back to mock me.
As age and wisdom slows my humor,
Indeed sir,
The laugh of youthful impertinence
Is too quick to flee from me.

Why does philosophy never take into account
The occasional tap on the window pane
That announces love of Love has arrived,
Transferring all that college knowledge into
Music from the tavern down the way, beguiling.
There's always a breeze that travels among
The lively tops of the highest trees, calling us
Fast on the heels of true love, one step behind.
At least
I've found a singularity of purpose in some
Of Aristotle's means. He was almost first,
and nearly best, but never conquered comedy.
Now, within this newly created aftermath,
I don't know why, but I remember, some
Future lover I'm sure to meet. I sit and smoke
Mixing the blue and gray and all the shades
That accompany that one, certain to come,
When I have my ease I sit and think and think.

What now Milton? Should I fear hell?
Dear shy Goethe, should I seek it?
Mr. John Mill, have you no conflict in your heart?
I can not live my life with such utilitarian consistency.
But Walt Whitman, sir, shall I be content to
Contradict myself continuously?
You find life glorious and often
I do not.

Is there one of you, great introspective travelers,
Who has thought and felt differently
In review of your lives and methods
While you sit here smoking, drinking, and pondering
Within me? Or do you still cling to these
Immortal leitmotivs found in angst,
Foolish consistencies, foolish inconsistencies,
Romantic follies, and all such narrow ways?
I know you know and do not wonder,
Why my very heart's divided. Did your hearts break from
The pure pleasure of dying or the pain of being born?

The crowd takes up residence, like quantum bits of me,
Making lists, never understanding
Why the restless feeling persists.

Come to my convocation, I'll whisper in your ears
What the cards truly meant.
Come! Meet the merry piper as he and you and I
Purposefully trample the well-kept beds of
Intuitive violets, and daisies for the making of chains.
Today, we may be chased off.
Tomorrow, unquestionably, we shall be praised oft,
Even when the ghosts of our time's zeitgeists
Have passed to eternity's obscurity.

Cinderella

Jamie Snead

It wasn't really for you, you know,
the threads just too damn fine and shiny.
And I know how you must have felt there,
all trussed up tight and made fancy like
a buttered turkey on thanksgiving.
A tasty little dish to lust after,
raw meat made into something delicious.
And you can't say you weren't tempted
to let them have just one little nibble,
after all you did stay for a dance.
Twirly-whirly you spun around the floor.
But all those big eyes kept staring,
until your shoes felt tight on your feet
and you had to kick them off and make
a run for it. Down the stairs and out
into the big, open, fresh-aired night.
You made a mad dash for your freedom
deciding it was worth more
than gold and silver and filet mignon.
But you left the ball too late baby
and they all found you out anyway.
There's what happens when you're not careful.
Your pumpkin turns into a mustang
that you don't even know how to drive.

The Music Festival

Jamie Snead

The vinyl is torn.
An inculpable red surface
made imperfect by careless hands
staunchly perched on a pedestal of oxidized metal.
A squat, overcompensating throne,
better suited to a bingo parlor
or a pot-luck-over-sixty special.

I harvest the synthetic fibers
with jackhammer hands,
plucking and pulling them
from the pregnant belly of the cushion
with more force than is necessary.

"Stop being such a bitch." You say
to me, spitting on your slurred S sounds,
but the words are drowned out and deadened
in the din of a roaring crowd,
and my mind focuses on the music.
The rhythmic rotations of bars on guitars,
a soulful, sonorous barricade
against your disorder.

I do not trust the open ears near us.
The devouring drums
of the noise-makers and drug-takers.
I do not trust the passive preoccupation
of the not-quite-ripe women behind us
uniform in their various stages of undress.
I do not trust the curious man-boys around us
content to stare at naked bellybuttons
resting on blankets of goose-bumped flesh.

But my tenderness does not stop your obscenity.
And my thigh,
still bruised from your last little love-tap,
shows a purple hickey-like hallmark,
forged in flesh and muscle,
forced by skin and tendon.

Chris's Shoes

Darlyn Finch

We are waiting for the bus
which stops each morning
in front of my house
to take us all to Highlands Junior High:

Kathy, Julie, Chris and me.

I go back inside for
some forgotten book and
when I come out into the sunshine,
someone has thrown his shoes into the road.

That's mean, I think
but then I notice
his clothes are lying in a heap
on the side of the road:
blue jeans, tee shirt, white athletic socks,

and some man I don't know
leaps from the cab of a blue pickup truck
and what he shouts makes no sense.

"I didn't see him! Sweet Jesus! I didn't see him!"

Ohmygoodness,
Chris is in those clothes.
He looks like a scarecrow,
all straw and no bones.

Someone runs to get his sister;
here she comes now,
pale, white face,
blond hair rolled up on orange juice cans
long, slender fingers
bright with pink polish.

Her hands shake and shake
as they cover her face.

Why doesn't someone get Chris's shoes
out of the road?

Swing Dance

Laura van den Berg

In the vacant parking lot
surrounded by lush and pointed pine trees,
he instructed me in the art of swing dancing:
step right, step left, plunge,
hair grazing asphalt,
warm palm pressed
against the small of my back.
I kept nicking the edges of his shoes
until we finally disentangled, laughing.

Before we parted,
I was struck by this image
of us standing deep in a canyon,
our bodies rising up the walls
of rock and red earth,
two unfettered balloons.

St. Petersburg

Laura van den Berg

The black water rippled
underneath the gilded bridge
and cradled the yellow lights
of St. Petersburg. White clouds
covered the red moon, leaving only
a slip of crimson in the sky—
a screen that's been split open.
Green fireworks popped and shimmered
in the square as you pulled me from the crowd—
recognizing me, you revealed later,
in folds of darkness, by the turquoise sweater
draped around my shoulders—and fit your hands
into the grooves of my waist.

360 degrees of separation

Christine Harrison

One more turn at the sun today
one more chance to change-
till midnight casts its curving mast
(the moon into parenthesis).
Cupped in evening's palms-sounds of life retreating,
to the timely calm
of proximity, sleeping.

Under dying spikes of stellar hikes,
still signs of life expiring.
Nurseries bud inside their wake
in sequence, being issued day
in shades of blue-retiring

I could bide my time in places filled
with strangers smiles
in rooms distilled
of season.
By a window framing outdoor views, that inside
I bid not to lose

Watching still-life painted
into conversations,
pooling in times gaping mouth-
with the corners drying slowly,
turning edges towards the south

As degrees pass by and lawn blades rise,
licking skies with ripened tongues
under aerial plains, the daytime wanes
with many wavelengths sifting through
crowning earth-a floating sapphire
in a churning cosmic stew

I could swing on naked power lines-
a modern use for man-made vines
that allow
existence to proceed
and necklace strands for birds to bead

With colors dripping farther west
I could race the clouds
on horizon's edge
for daylight to
survive.
But as nighttime rides, on all bedsides
it whispers expectations,
while my fumbling consciousness,
unbuttoning purposes
lays me still
to think it over:
one more turn at the sun today;
one more chance to change.

Two Worlds Come Together

Gloria Alarcon

Evening at the plaza of the renaissance masterpiece, the Louvre.
City lights cover inter-linked steel pyramid
Sheathed in reflective glass,
Countered by two smaller pyramids.
Fountains on all sides,
Statue of gallant knight and horse
Traditional and modern art causing a stir,
Like a new ethnic group moving into an urban town.
Give it sometime, and this brave concept
Blends harmoniously.

Reminiscing

Gloria Alarcon

It seemed as though this would be a cloudy day.
But as daybreak went on to noon, the
Sun's copper rays began to shine
Extending their bright light through the billows of cirrus in the sky

My hair blew in the chilling wind, the
Rustling sound of the almost bare trees was a pleasant resonance.
Sheer leaves of orange, red, and yellow on the ground.

As with a song heard that brings back the memory of a lost love,
So too these last days of autumn with its trees lonely, stripped.
Before I lost my love I too had leaves and flowers, but as
Summer gave way to autumn and autumn gave way to winter
I too am left lonely, stripped, my beauty lost.

Martha Graham, "Letter to the World"

Sarah Kathryn Moore

if only i could bring you my small body.
i would never need to write again.
i would be still as a shelf for you
    naked
as an artist's model with my upswept hair.
i would not beg or ask you for inspiration.
i would not claim to be your muse.
i would not be the prickle between your shoulder blades
    or the film of sugar on your teeth.
i would not itch like a tear
    inflate like a fear of falling
    or become sticky like
something spilled.
i would not bring my wings with me.
i would eat only oranges
    and crushed ice.
i would drink only air.
i would come unencumbered and
leave if you asked me to.
you would not have to need me.
or ask me questions.
you would not have to answer
    my questions.
i would bring love letters to your lovers.
i would not have lovers of my own.
i would not ask to see you weep.
i would stand outside your door
    while you slept.
i wouldn't peek.
i wouldn't need to sleep.

i would drop cool lengths
of cloth on you
    not satin but

perhaps thrice-washed silk
woven midmorning by the
river, i would
kiss you or not kiss you
drip jewels
on your closed eyes if you wanted that
clothe you in velvet
necklaces
veils if you wanted that
read you every poem ever written
in all the ancient languages
speak to you with soothing sounds
or sing to you
in rolling tones not unlike a river
cultivate circular breathing
cultivate silence. breathe you to sleep
in the stillness of the afternoon
(as if somehow my breathing
could make me beautiful)
i would make myself as liquid
silver if you would only dream up
a mold
i would be five silk scarves
all of the same color
or a set of chimes
or twelve perfectly tuned bells each
an exact interval from the others
until i was old
i would fold myself
like a paper bird like a lotus birthed
from only a square watercolored
an as-yet-uninvented
shade of rose
i would fold for you
i would fold

o holy. o you most worthy.

Miriam

Sarah Kathryn Moore

Miriam was tall, with a good strong stance
and three clean children, and thick
bathroom-towels. Miriam was large,
with wide-spread hands and eyes set far-apart
and deeply. She could sing four octaves.

> She wanted to be thin
> as a clean white wind
> thin as a wrist, as a slit
> throat, as a scar.

Miriam liked precise. And when you told
her she was good, she frowned.
Which good? What good? The telephone
message that (we're told) could save
somebody's life? The singing-to-sleep?

> She wanted to be thin
> as a strip of linen,
> as a frayed string,
> a breath between
> eighth notes.

Miriam sang herself into a pencil-
line on an architect's drawing. She sang
a razor-blade song, she sang a chip of
stained glass, the edge of a white
countertop. She stretched herself into
a thin, thin song, so sharp that like wire
it cut through the many tiers
of the earth. She sang,

Burn my bread
to the song of starkness
Scrape my stomach
and leave me clean.

Arrogant Son

Shaun Cricks

Quit glaring at me, you arrogant
ball of gas. Over-compensating orb.
How dare you stare your preemptory rays
into my pupils, before my first smoke
or cup of coffee. As if it were al-
ready eight o'clock. It's seven, old fool.

It is now man-kind, not you, Helicaon,
that dictates the time. Didn't you notice an
absence of blood-stained stone alters,
the vacuum of prayers, or myths lying murdered
where virgins once lay? Hear the silenced stories?

Our new priests, our pocket protected, white
collared, brown shoed, bow-tied seers have,
through mathematics and quantum physics,
definitions, quantifications, theories,
discovered that it is man who names, so...

It is man who controls. It is man-kind
who granted you the title of Helius,
that's now as passé as your insolent
glare. We strip you of your badge that has read
this. And Apollo, Amen Ra, Shamesh, and Surya.

You are now the sun, heavenly body at
best, marionette of mass destruction
at worst. So halt your high and mighty
hubris. Further, be it well understood,

that in Autumn, (which we named) on a day
of our deeming, the hour shall be reduced
by one. We have named this morning, I declare
that it's seven. And you, you're fucking early.

Damn, you're so beautiful you deserve a soundtrack

Nicholas Sansone

Mandi damn,
without you it'd just be
Charlie Chaplin flicks, pantomime
fandangos and funny hats.

But Mandi, your smile,
a dandelion pinata-bomb

reminds me music lives
in your skin, fattening

cannibals with eye-candy
making them dance.

One day,
when we evolve
so that our ears grow
taste buds,

I want to see menus
at five-star diners
that look like this:

Appetizers:
o Break-beats in Balsamic Vinegar
o Trance Tracks in Onion Sauce

Entrees:
o Mozart's Fifth with Stuffed Quail
o Harpsichord Concertos in Alfredo

Desserts:
o Mandi's Smile

Forgery

Nicholas Sansone

The cover is fields and glitter and balloons.

Clouds spell: Happy 10th Birthday.

Inside the card is blank,
save two words

Love Dad

scribbled in Mom's handwriting.

Jackie Kennedy watching Marilyn Monroe, May 1962

Sarah A.C. Webb

We stand in polar opposition
blonde to black
steamy sensuous nights to tailored Lincoln bedroom days.
Her sequins dress.
My pillbox hat.

I do not have the luxury of
suburban housewives
banishing husbands to
calico couches.

Instead I stand, smile
painted on secretly
gritted teeth, as I catch
the glimmer of her red sequins
dress, clinging to every venomous
curve. Her smoldering voice blowing
embers of humiliation into flame.

I know of secret midnight calls.
Lonely breathless tears
in her bed
and mine. Living life
in polar opposition of life on
the same scale. Our heads sinking
into pillows made solely to
catch our lonely tears.

AWOL

Sarah A.C. Webb

Breathless,
side by side.
My body still
convulsing, your

fingers gently rise
to pull my trigger.
Your bullets graze
my spine just enough

to sever me
into numbness.
Propelled by the urgency
of sworn enemies,

defying company lines.
The soft wet thud
of weaponless hands
in vulnerable places

tearing at temporary
skin, shrapnel to
the heart. We
lie in this field,

a patiently waiting hand
grenade. Electric sparks
fly, ready to ignite as
the isolating smell of

napalm fills the air.
Beautiful poison
surrounding me.
Eyes burning,

lost in a land
so far from home.

There is

Heather A. H. Smith

There is a war in our country.

Ask me how I know, ask me.

Stare at the dark Ackee seeds that are my eyes and ask me.
Ask me!
Go ahead; do not be afraid of the jet black roots that adorn my majestic crown. Step up to the throne and ask me.

Go ahead, ask me!

Listen to the words that kiss my smooth brown lips.
This is no longer my father's war.
I look them in their eyes. I see the fear and hate
and I do care.
Enough to write and speak, and SCREAM.

These are fightin words.

Ask me how I know, Ask me.

It is my war now
along with the putrid disgust of the elite son
and elite daughter
couple in a unity of hate and disillusionment.

Ask me how I know, Ask me!

It is the simple cries of the young black man,
slaving in a Georgia
factory. I.Q. so high it is unchartable.
Witty, sarcastic, challenging, biting words for
the one left cynical.

Ask me how I know, Ask me!

It is the deep-throated screams of a black woman
disenfranchised
the chains drag as she pulls towards the courthouse
doors screaming:
"It is my right! Give it to me or I will take it!"

Ask me how I know, ask me!

Dimpled chads not counted.
Disillusionment in office, leaders forsaken,
Books written, conspiracy mentioned,
Point taken.

Ask me how I know, ask me.

Don't hesitate to wonder how I know.
I insist upon another look at the protected society:
satisfied with greed, power, money,
starvation, insanity, poverty.
Rejections over the train tracks,
Forgotten are they, stupid are we.

The time has come, they are moving up.

Ask me how I know, ask me!

Ask me and I will tell you.

Tribute

Susan Kairys-Courech

Eyes closed
breath gone
blood drained.
What will I look like when I am dead
after the skin is shed
will I gaze down and laugh finally free
where to go
what to do
What then to become?

When I am dead,
will I still need to fill a desire to become
something other than before.
Wouldn't that be hilarious to discover.
Shall I be the soft silver of a moon shadow
the pale pink pigment of a flamingo feather
the smoothness of a river pebble.
What to become after I die
is there a choice?

Perhaps, it's a point system,
Five hundred thousand points for elemental
weather particles
a solar flair
the aurora borealis
glinting off icebergs in the fiords
in a dimension under no circumstances imagined.

These things to contemplate,
once I am dead.

Sisters Take Flight

Susan Kairys-Courech

My women friends escape
lifelong relationships
after seasonal storms strip their souls
sanctioning them to
spill over the edge
like falling water
from a too full urn
grief soaks me with compassion watching
their manic minds scatter
like seeds in autumn airs, adrift on nomadic currents
listening to my sister's voices bearing out secrets
echoing emptiness into the dawn
birthing a life finally lived
decisively their own.
Emerging from the aperture of cocoons riddled with worms
wearing wet wings they take flight
Weeping I fan away
the predators.

Doubting Death

Michael "Ike" Saunders

I have a few words
That I really must say:
I haven't,
I couldn't,
But I think that I may.
Don't tie me up,
Don't lock me in,
For that's how my masochistic thoughts begin.
The pain feels good
As the blood pours out,
But the rivers I create
Cause me to convulse and to shout.
In my gasping for air
And my grasping to life,
You ask how I could go
Slit my wrists in such strife.
I smile and simply
Reply best as I could—
Everyone doubted me
When I said that I would.

Seasons of Love

Michael "Ike" Saunders

The pastel shades,
Of a newborn love;
A blossoming birth.
The growth into a summer's heat--
Passion lit
And set afire,
Burning lust consuming,
Flames kissing flesh.
The laggard sinking
Of perishing memories
To the scorched ember and ash.
A biting breeze.
As the frozen tears lay frost
To our barren earth,
Thoughts and memories--
Icicles adorning
My frozen eyes.
Lashes being the only serenity,
They kiss my cheeks
As they are s l o w l y lured,
To a forgotten eternity.

Fever

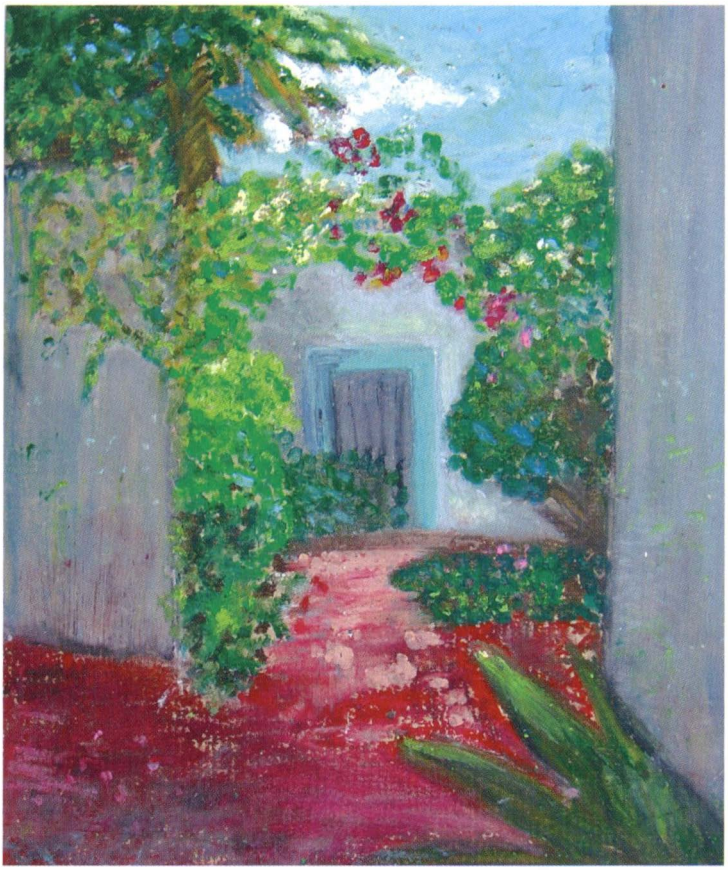
Stella Perez

Oil on canvas

Contemplation

Stella Perez

Pastel on matboard



Maitland Art Center

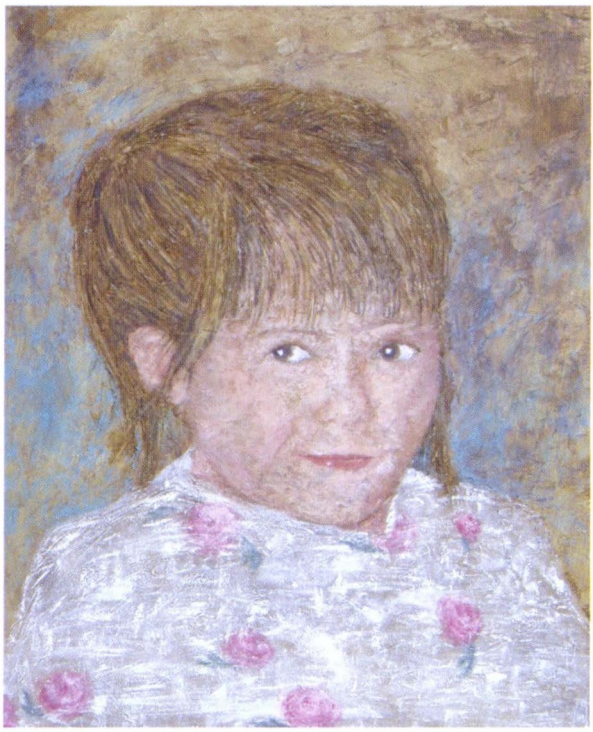
Stella Perez

Pastel on matboard

Openings

Maggie Rhodes

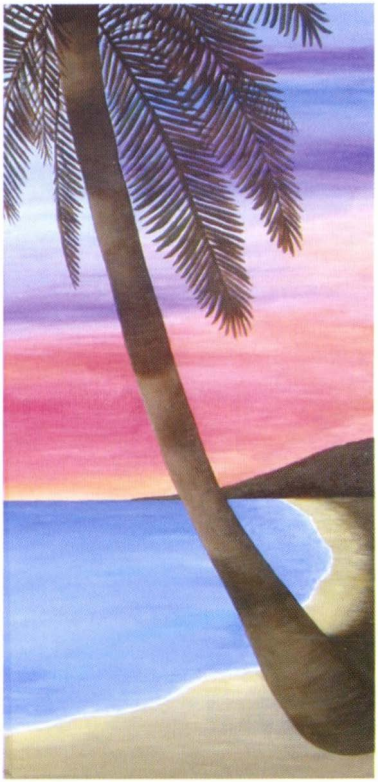
Acrylic Paint



Self-Portrait, Age 5

Maggie Rhodes

Mixed Media



Palm Tree

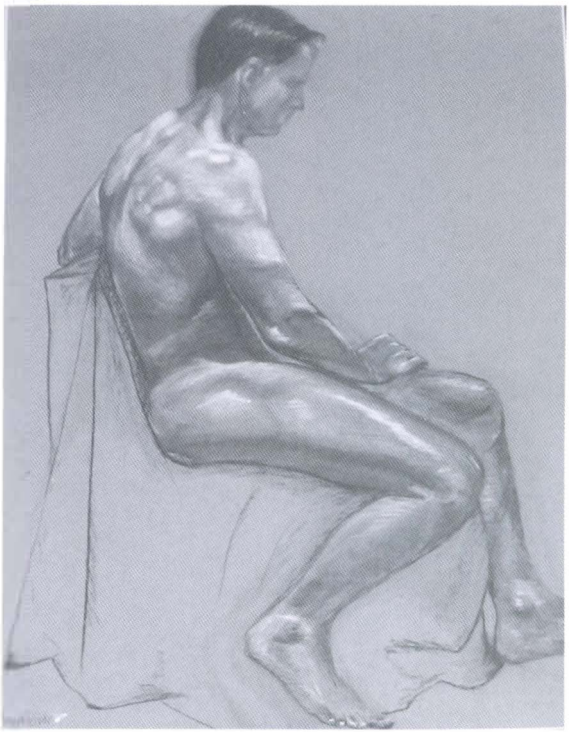
Maggie Rhodes

Acrylic Paint

Will's Eye

Maggie Rhodes

Pencil



Naked Man

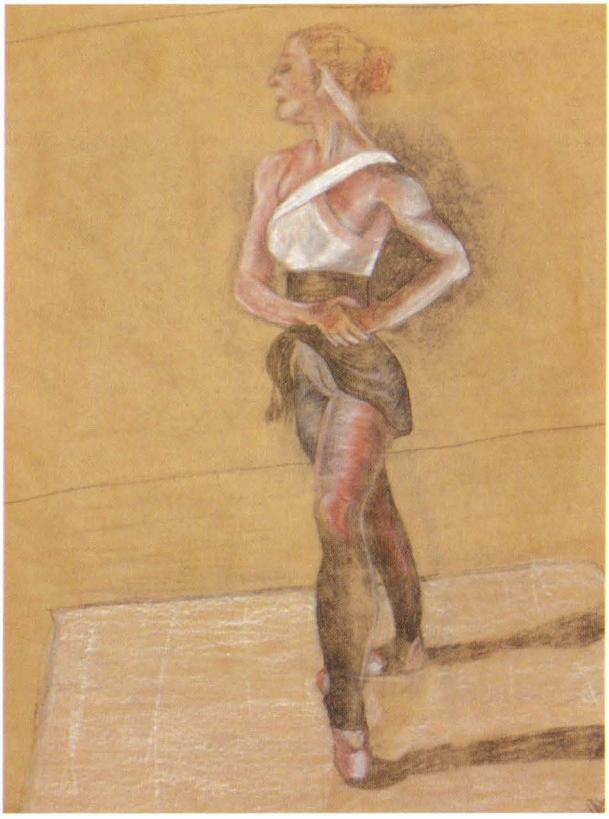
Maggie Rhodes

Charcoal

Naked

Maggie Rhodes

Charcoal



Ballerina

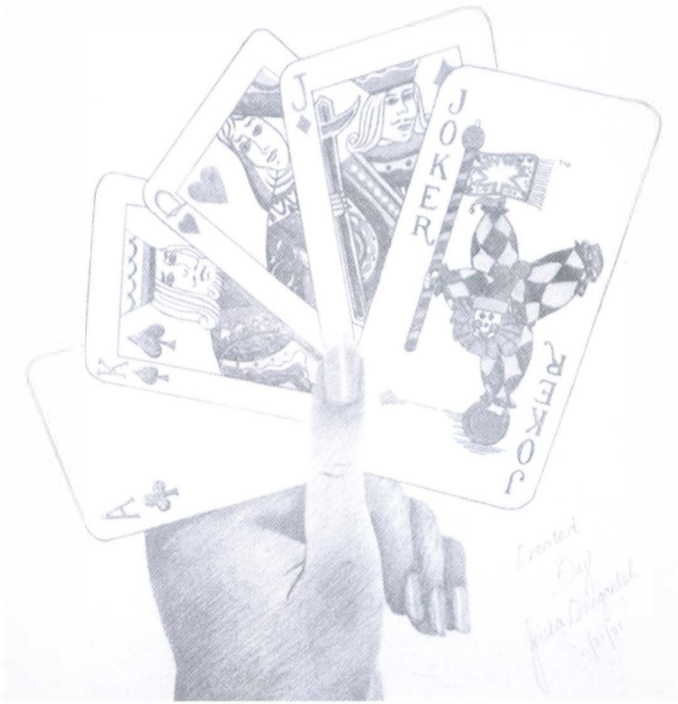
Trisha Chhaganlal

Drawing

Bloody Sky

Trisha Chhaganlal

Painting



Game

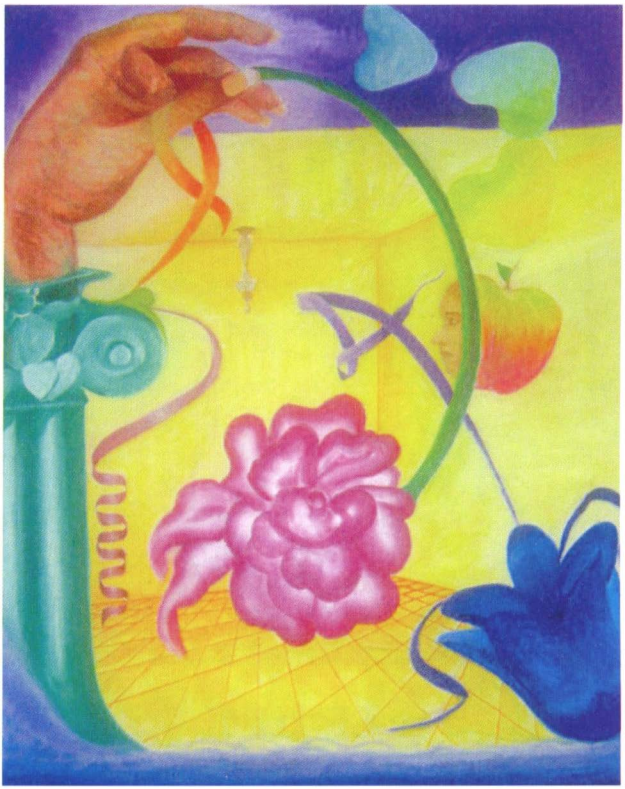
Trisha Chhaganlal

Drawing

Night & Day

Trisha Chhaganlal

Painting



Room of Wonders

Trisha Chhaganlal

Painting

Light

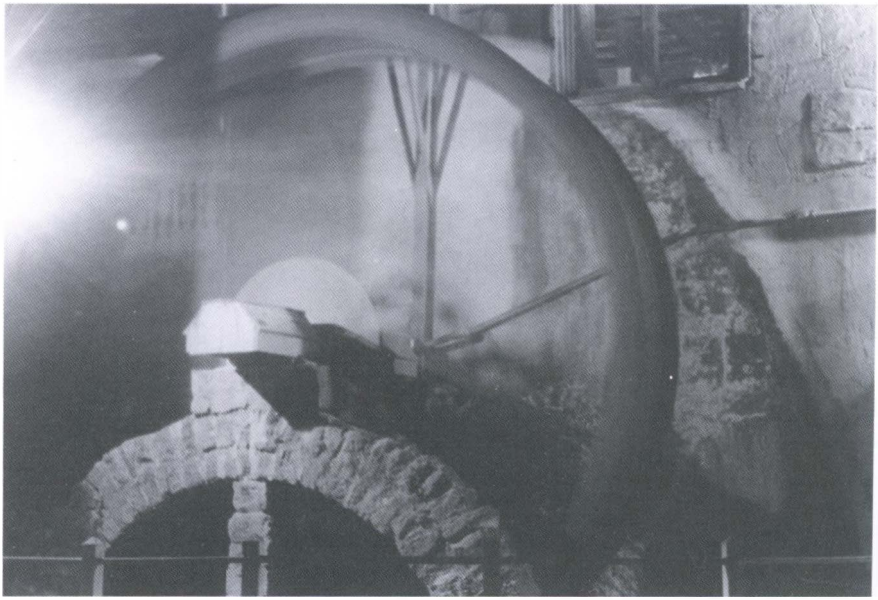
Clementine Gueret

Photography

Mailbox

Clementine Gueret

Photography



Water Mill

Clementine Gueret

Photography

Afternoon Veil

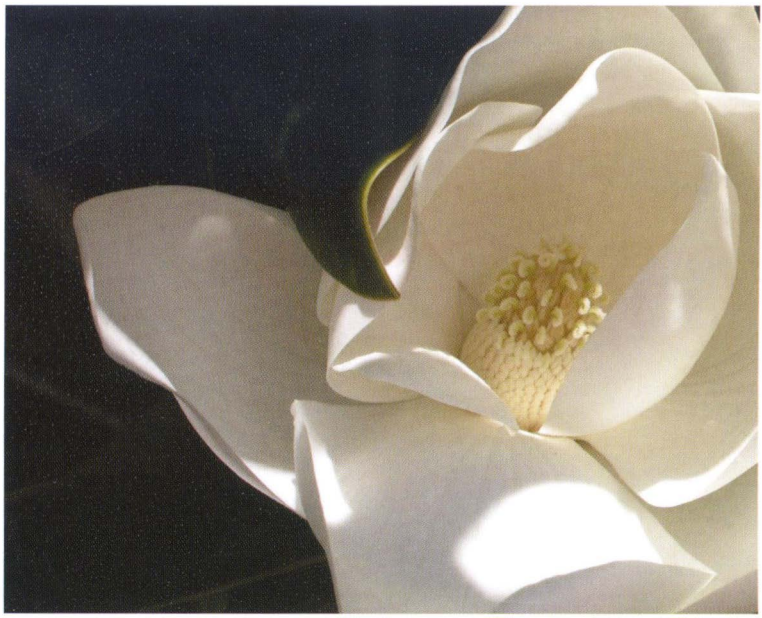
Susan Kairys-Courech

Photography

Yo, Mrs. Rothschild – Ya Home?

Susan Kairys-Courech

Photography



Magnolia

Susan Kairys-Courech

Photography

Women Who Serve

Kimberly Moorehouse

How Reading Serves Us

Kimberly Moorehouse

putting it deep inside a cabinet. "Eww!" She put glasses into the sink.

Walking to the bedroom for a look, she saw her mother lying sideways across the bed. Melissa thought that she had better wait to change the thermostat anyway. Mom might get up soon to use the bathroom and then wander back to either the bedroom or the living room couch. She would wait until the sleeping form turned on its side. Otherwise, her mother might instinctively complain of the cold.

The bay window was a nice place to cool off. The girl's slender fingers felt the cold panes of glass and the slight condensation. The French horn case always sat there while not traveling to school but there was still plenty of room for her. The view was not much, especially at night. Here, at an hour past twilight, nothing could be seen except shadows. Melissa uncrossed her legs and leaned forward the short distance to flip the switch for the feeble bulb outside. After a few moments she rose and turned off the inside lamps, but left the television on, unwatched.

There wasn't any snow. The freezing drizzle dampened the straggle of dead grasses bordering the cracked and stained concrete walk. Melissa never liked that walkway. It was too narrow, as if its maker wanted to be stingy with materials. She liked the little spruce trees however, would sit and think deeply about why they stayed green all the dismal winter. All anyone could spy on was a slice of the street between the corner of the garage and the spruce. If she leaned against the left wall, Melissa could see to the end of short cul-de-sac. In the day, children played and rode their bikes there. At night it was just a few melting snow banks and garbage waiting under the faint lights.

The girl heard the car arrive and knew for certain from its sound that it was Hermann. "Dieseling," he called it. That meant it didn't want to shut off. Hermann often said, "it's such a great car it doesn't want to quit." He always laughed a dry little laugh when he joked like that. Melissa then looked at him, trying to figure him out. There was

nothing to do about the mom being sideways across the bed. The girl did not have the strength to shift her. Hermann would not notice much. He would be as preoccupied as usual, even more so today because he had been to that janitor's funeral alone.

* * *

The mom told Melissa her real Daddy had a nice service. Villagers in the Mekong Delta had all come and put flowers. He was buried there. At school, a classmate had once asked the teacher about Vietnam and pointed to it on the globe, right below China. Mrs. Gibbs was busy and only replied that Vietnam would be studied next year. Melissa knew about that place already. On the wall of her small bedroom was a map of Southeast Asia that her mom had found for a quarter at the used book sale at the library. A yellow stick pin near the coast marked the spot where the mother had told Melissa that her dad was buried.

Now there was Hermann, of whom she thought neither ill nor well. He was like a ghost to her, empty inside and bland, although she never could have expressed it exactly that way. She was watching for him now. She wanted to turn the heat down and was nearly tired of sitting by the window in the only place that seemed bearably cool to her. Her pink finger traced abstract patterns on the damp window. They became simple cartoons and then words. Melissa had compared the length of her fingers to other girls and knew hers were longer. They were graceful, strong and just right for the French horn. Mr. Tolby had said so. "Graceful." The glass felt pleasantly cool. She drew a horse, then a heart, and finally her age and the sign for infinite.

For a few moments she was distracted by thoughts of leaving the rain forests, which she knew were hot and steamy, much like home. While magically arriving on the Tibetan plains, finally so cool and dry. Melissa had the

idea that everyone rode horses there and kept them next to the tents where they lived. Tents were never too hot and stuffy in Tibet. So went her day dreams that didn't include her mother. Still, she noticed her stepfather fairly quickly as he appeared in the narrow space between the spruce and the wall that needed paint.

The thin and bony man had a long face, and dark, drab hair. His borrowed suit didn't fit. He looked lost in it and yet the pants seemed too short. Under his umbrella he struggled to find his keys in one of the many pockets and juggled some cumbersome object in the other arm. The girl went to open the door, which she wouldn't have bothered with normally. She was truly afraid he might drop that stupid thing he was carrying. His jacket was all open. The front of his shirt was wet, as were his pants at the thighs.

Hermann said nothing when he stepped in, sticking the umbrella outside to close it before shutting the door. Melissa enjoyed the cool blast while taking a curious look at the drizzle sheeting past the light for a moment. Still the man said nothing but only indicated the urn he was holding as explanation and greeting. He wanted the girl to ask some question. As she turned back from the doorway, she thought about speaking and nearly did but somehow out-waited him in silence until he finally asked his question first. He took off each shoe by using his other foot and left the soggy shoes near the door. He hung up the thin overcoat after setting down the burden. Deciding where to place it took Hermann a while. Then he glanced at Melissa with hesitant eyes and spoke. "Where is you mom?"

"Sleeping."

"I thought she might have waited up." He said it blandly, with no anger.

The young girl didn't know how to respond to that. She wanted to say that her mom wasn't feeling well again but it didn't come out as sound. Hermann was staring at the urn he had placed on the end table under the lamp.

Melissa was gazing abstractly at his thin mustache and limp hair, watching his introspection.

"Want some dinner? I can make a Swanson's."

He looked at the object he had just put down as if he had not seen it before. Then he met her eyes where she was already moving farther back towards the kitchen. "Sure, thanks Melissa." He actually smiled for a brief moment as he said it.

"What kind?"

"I don't know. Something with corn."

Something with corn. He could be so stupid.

"O.K.," she said.

While he wasn't watching she went to the thermostat and turned it down. Quickly then, she went to the freezer, pulled out a dinner and started it in the microwave. Back in the living room he was sitting now and looking at the urn again. So she asked, "Is that him? Really?"

The old man that had been the janitor at her school had become his friend at some point. Mr. Clemons had constantly given Hermann tracts and religious books to read for the last year or so. The man had no family and Hermann had stepped in to take care of the arrangements for his funeral. Melissa had never understood why he felt responsible. Mom needed taking care of more.

Her honest curiosity would have been rude in a grown-up. "That's a whole man inside that?" He replied with a nod and an expression that extended the solemn moment. She saw hunched shoulders and a dull emptiness in his eyes. Melissa, unaware of his faraway thoughts on matters involving the meaning of existence definitely wondered if Hermann planned to leave that thing there on the end table.

"Did anyone else go?" she decided to ask instead.

His slowness to answer bothered her. "The vice-principal came... and the pastor brought her family. That's it." This information seemed to mean more to Hermann than to Melissa.

In the blank way that he impressed her, she stood slightly mesmerized, watching him eat. He had a demeanor nearly as polite and careful as the girl tried to be always. Hermann ate and the girl leaned against one of the counters, staring at him and planning for next band practice. When they both heard the mother stirring from the other room, Melissa painfully watched this man swallow one bite, suddenly, without chewing. He stopped eating, carefully placed the fork down and stared at the salt shaker. He saw the rice inside the salt and the salt getting low. He thought all this because of avoiding the other thoughts the noises from the other room evoked. Where is the pepper shaker? The tablecloth had a stain and he studied that. One primal thought emerged and if it had been given articulation it would have been, "Hermann Stevens, who are you?"

Melissa felt whatever sympathy an eight year old girl who really would like to be practicing the French horn can feel. The walls almost seemed to be shrinking and tears tried to get into her eyes. She pushed the tears back. She hoped to avoid a headache.

They heard more noises from the direction of the living room now. Mom hit the coffee table with her leg on the way to the couch and a book fell to the floor. She called out, "Hermann? Are you here?"

Then there was a crash. This brought Hermann and Melissa into the other room quickly after an exchanged look. He awoke from his reverie and they rushed in together. The urn with ashes had broken and most of the contents had spilled on the carpet. The mom acted annoyed because her blanket had gotten twisted. A minute later found her fast asleep again. The two others shared an awkward time of silence, lip biting, and introspection. Hermann finally escaped the moment that seemed to last forever. He went to the disordered bedroom where a short search gave him bottle of rum with some left at the bottom. He drank it off, grimacing with a shake of his head. The daughter had moved to the window seat

again and was noticing the rain had ceased. Hermann passed by, out the front door, to the trunk of the car and back into the house holding a razor knife.

Melissa watched him coming up the walk, moving her arm on the music case, feeling the texture. She looked at the empty section of the street and ran her finger down the window's condensation a long and lingering time. She watched him crossing in front of the couch now and noticed he had a curious look for his wife lying insensible.

The look caught Melissa's attention and she turned around to watch him more closely. He leaned over, bending down onto his knees. Herman cut the section of carpet and padding near the kitchen door back towards the area where the ashes had scattered. Then he grabbed the corners of the square and lifted it.

"Melissa! Open the door for me."

She noticed a difference. Hermann never said, "Open the door for me." He would say, "Would you please get that?" gesturing feebly or else struggling to do it himself anyway, even after he had spoken up.

Melissa opened the door. The man brought the carpet outside and returned for the padding. He sought a quantity of rocks from the garden and weighted the bundle with them. He wore no jacket. When he went back into the house to get one, and some rope, he noticed very clearly the young girl seizing the opportunity to turn down the thermostat.

"Thanks, it really is too hot in here," he said. Melissa's surprise showed clearly. "Why don't you put another blanket on your mom."

Hermann went out, tied the ends and then put the foam on top. He put one last rock on top of that. When he returned and finally shut the door for the evening, Melissa noticed an actual smile. She perceived this as odd but not unpleasant. Hermann watched her slightly but steadily until she smiled back. She smiled only a little but that was enough for him.

He asked, "Want to get a pizza?"

They ate the pizza that came 45 minutes later and spent the time beforehand searching the house and collecting bottles, most of them empty. He laid them all in the trash. "No more of that," he said firmly. At the kitchen table they talked and she managed to laugh more than once.

* * *

Early in the morning they went together to borrow a small boat and drove to Lake Grissom. They bundled up. Mom was sleeping in. Melissa believed this to be at least as much fun as a field trip with Mrs. Gibbs. She sat in the middle of the front seat and worked the radio.

The pleasant girl helped her step-dad put the boat into the water. Out in the middle, with the bulky bundle between them, and the cold water slapping the sides, spraying in the brisk wind, he asked her one more time, "You understand now...?" This time he was joking. Last night he had explained it all.

"Yes," she said, exaggerating a pretend annoyance. "You were supposed to scatter him up on that hill. This is our secret. Don't tell my friends. Don't tell Mom. Don't tell anyone. I.. Un..der..stand!" This last part was said with a perfectly cute scrunch while leaning forward towards Hermann and accompanied by a good roll of her eyes.

Burial at sea. Davey Jones. That's what he had talked about that caused Melissa to laugh the previous evening. "It's just the cycle of life." He had said this to soften it, and comfort her.

Now came the moment to be solemn. Hills surrounded them with melting snow and a golden glow on the fallen leaves beneath bare branches. Spring was near. They both saw the landscape and sky and knew this. The girl leaned in his direction to balance the small vessel while Hermann held the piece of carpet containing the broken

urn and ashes over the water and said some final words. "Oswald Melvin Clemens. Good friend and man of faith. God bless you. There are those who will remember you. God's angels carry you to the bosom of Abraham where you belong."

"Amen," said Melissa softly. He didn't drop it. Instead he lowered it gradually into the rough water.

On the way home they stopped for breakfast. They spoke a little about Mr. Clemens and much more about her band practice. Driving the last small distance to the house, she thought to ask her step dad, "What are you going to tell Mom about the carpet?"

"We're going to put some ceramic tile in."

"Can I help?"

"I'd like that," he replied, and smiled even wider.

The Truth About Us

Alisha Corsi

"Happy Halloween!"

I smile, a forced, rigid smile that attempts to conceal the pain of the slow burn that had started small in my chest and is now creeping down my body into my stomach. I walk quickly past the devil who has opened the door for me--he is a devil, dressed in black, his face a grotesque, pock-marked red, a pitchfork in his hand--afraid that he will notice the tears that are building at the corners of my eyes that threaten to trickle down my cheeks if anyone so much as speaks to me.

I push my way through the heavy crowd of witches and fairies, clowns and nurses that have already gathered at the party. My shoulders brush into people, and my elbows, which are sticking out to my sides as I clutch the pie that I carry close to my chest, knock into unmoving bodies. I flinch with each contact, as if scorched by the touch of another human being, even if it were accidental.

The strap of my dress keeps sliding down my shoulder, and I can not pull it up because my hands are full. I remember how it had fallen when I'd tried it on in the costume shop last week, and I'd told you that I didn't want to be Scarlett O'Hara in this dress because I was afraid it would fall down while I was dancing and expose me to everyone. You'd laughed, that loud, kind of obnoxious, yet endearing laugh of yours, and then said that I would wear it, because you wanted to be Rhett Butler, and it wouldn't make sense for me to go as anything other than Scarlett. You've always thought that you look like him, Rhett Butler, with your dark hair and kind eyes. And your big ears too, but I've never told you so.

This morning you told me that you don't love me anymore. But they don't know, the people that are smiling and lifting their cups to me in greeting as I inch through the crowd in my green and white Scarlett O'Hara

dress. And they won't ask. Why should they? It was only yesterday that you and I had been planning our wedding, and I had been shopping for place settings with the devil who had opened the door for me. It was to be a fall wedding--November, next month--with pumpkin colored bridesmaid dresses and autumn centerpieces on the tables. Only we can't agree on the centerpieces, you and I. I want leaves, floating in leaf-shaped crystal bowls filled with water, you know, the kind that you normally put floating candles in. You want Thanksgiving cornucopias. Only none of that matters now, now that you don't love me anymore, now that you broke up with me and the wedding is off. There will be no pumpkin colored bridesmaid dresses or fall leaves floating in crystal bowls.

I finally elbow my way into the kitchen of my parents' house, and I'm happy to find it empty of people, surprisingly empty. I do not want to face my parents right now. They have been married for forty-four years, and they will blame me for you calling off the wedding. Especially my mother.

I set down the pie that I made last night on the island in the center of my parents' blue and white, Martha Stewart kitchen, between the potato salad and the orange pudding Mother made with the little candy corn candies mixed in. It's pumpkin, the pie I made, the same color of my bridesmaid dresses. Last night, after I had taken it out of the oven, you'd dipped your finger in the warm center of the pie, and then I had licked the sweet, smooth pumpkin from your finger and we'd made love. But that was last night. This morning you told me that you don't love me anymore.

I hadn't said anything when you'd told me, maybe because your words had been like a punch in the stomach and had taken my breath away. I'd said nothing, although I'd wanted to scream at you, "What about last night?! What about last night when I let you take me from behind the way you like, the way I hate, and you cried out that you loved me when you came?! What about last night?!" I hadn't said any of that, but after you'd left

with your overnight bag slung over your shoulder, I had run to the bathroom and retched until I felt as though I had emptied my entire soul into the toilet.

The door to the kitchen swings open, and my mother is there, dressed as Donna Reed, carrying a tray stacked with empty punch glasses. As I look it her I have the sudden urge to laugh, seeing her there with her brown hair coifed into perfect tight curls, her cotton dress pressed perfectly without a single wrinkle, her makeup flawless. She's not wearing a costume, really, that's the funny part. It's Halloween, and my mother is dressed as herself at her own Halloween party.

"Why, hello, there, Miss Scarlett," my mother chirps with a fake southern drawl that makes her appearance all the more comical to me. She pushes my pie to the side so that she can set down the tray in her hands, and then she stands there in front of me, her hands on her hips. Her eyes survey me critically, and I wish that I could shrink inside of myself and hide, feeling as though she can read my mind, that she can see every single second of this morning, when you left me, in my eyes. I wait for her to say something, and then she reaches over and pushes the strap of my dress back up onto my shoulder, disapproval in her eyes. And then she says the words I have been waiting for.

"Where's Rhett?"

My heart skips two beats at the mention of you, and I feel my cheeks flush and my eyes tear up again. I know that she can see it, and I turn away from her and busy myself with my pie, taking off the cover and sliding it to the back of the counter top so that there is room to take the dirty glasses from my mother's tray.

I want to tell her. I want to tell her that you don't love me anymore, that last night you did, but that this morning you took your clothes and you left. I want to tell her that there will be no fall wedding with pumpkin colored bridesmaid dresses.

But I can't. Because she will know that it is my fault,

and she will say so. I have not done anything right in all of my twenty-seven years, especially when it comes to relationships. I always screw things up. That's why I'm still single, that's what she will say. That's why he doesn't love you.

I want to tell her. But instead I turn to her with the same forced smile I'd shown the devil who had opened the door for me, and I say, "Oh, he'll be here later. He was called into the office this morning, but he promised he'd make it here later on."

The lie slips so easily from my lips, and I look at my mother, waiting for her to call me on it. Her green eyes stab into mine for a moment too long, and then she nods. She knows I'm lying, I can tell. She always knows. She wants to say so, but she can't. She can't take being disappointed in me one more time.

And so we hold that lie between us, like a warm, comfortable blanket that envelops us. It has always been there between my mother and me, that blanket. The lies are what hold us together. And we smile, Mother and I, even though she knows that you will not come, and I know that there will be no fall wedding with pumpkin colored bridesmaid dresses and fall leaves floating in crystal bowls.

This morning you told me that you don't love me anymore.

Dearly Departed

Jamie Snead

On the day your sister Anastasia died the Indians beat the Yankees thirteen to four, the New York times crossword clue for number ninety-three across read, "An exciting experience in slang," and a man named Ashrita Furman got his name placed in the Guinness Book of World Records for hopping a little over twenty-three miles in twelve hours and twenty-seven minutes on a pogo-stick in Queens. Anastasia had never jumped on a pogo-stick, and the only record she was likely to set now was the Headstone-Most Peed-On, since there were several stray dogs at the Eternal Peace Cemetery where your sister was soon to be six feet underground.

Your father's body was already buried at Eternal Peace and had been for eleven years. He died at work, which was depressing but not surprising, considering that he was a tightrope walker. He was a member of Canterberry's Traveling Circus, a two-bit operation whose tents and such had seen better days. From a distance Canterberry's looked more like a dusty flea-market than a circus, and your father, known professionally as *Ferdinand, the Amazing Stupendous Tightrope Walking Genius*, was its one claim to semi-fame. Ferdinand, who was really named Willard, was actually a very good tightrope walker. He was also, unfortunately, an amazing stupendous drinking genius who never considered that his two skills should not be combined. To date his gravestone had been peed on thirty-nine times.

When your mother, a non-practicing Catholic named Marie, received the news of Willard's death it came as quite a shock. They hadn't seen each other for two years prior to his demise. This arrangement had suited her fine; she loved your daddy in the way that a small girl loves her first dolly, with an out-of-sight-out-of-mind mentality. Still the news was unpleasant to receive. They had, after all, con-

ceived two children together. A fact that was undeniable in the cold reality of the downtown police station the morning after Willard's last walk. When the sergeant had asked her if she would like to go see the body, Marie had turned and seeing you and your sister huddled together on a steel bench had replied,

I would not. There are some things I believe we are better off not knowing. Don't you agree?

Marie, who was never one for public outbursts, cried quietly in her room before emerging, like a butterfly from a cocoon, no longer a wife, but instead an illusive, mysterious creature known as a widow. The title suited her, giving her a handy explanation for her natural aloof-ness. It would not be until thirty years later, while living in the Shady Palms Retirement Facility, that your mother would meet a piccolo player from a local polka band who would sweep her off her feet. The piccolo player, a non-practicing Protestant named Earnest, would eventually give up his fight with prostate cancer and teach your mother what the word widow really meant.

Next to your father's urine-saturated spot at Eternal Peace was a plot for you. The piece of land on the other side was reserved for your mother, and two spots over from him, next to your own, was Anastasia's. As your momma and you stood looking at Anastasia's plot, two days after her unexpected death, you were in such a state of shock that you did not realize you were standing on your own grave. It had to be strange to know that the next day your sister would be buried under that ridiculously green stretch of grass.

You and Anastasia were the kind of siblings who had inside jokes, talked about your boyfriends, and, in the unlikely event that either of your parents were paying enough attention to notice any of your wrong-doings, covered each others asses. She was the only person you would ever have that kind of bond with. She was a part of your family, tied to you by blood and history. There were secrets you kept together – there is comfort in that.

This is what you know:

On the morning that your sister died you awoke at exactly 6:27 a.m., three minutes before your alarm was set to go off. You rose, slithering into the blue satin robe Anastasia bought you last Christmas, and went into the kitchen. You made yourself breakfast, an English muffin with butter on one side and raspberry preserves on the other, and brewed a cup of tea, Earl Gray with two sugars. You ate while you read The New York Times, attempting to do the crossword but quickly giving up, as always, to read a couple of fluff pieces and the sports section. After breakfast was finished, you went in and had a hot shower that took longer than usual, since both shampooing and shaving had to be done. The telephone rang as you were turning off the shower, and in your haste to grab it you ran into the bed frame stubbing your pinky toe. Despite the sharp pain you smiled when you read his name on the caller-id and answered the phone with you sexiest "good morning lover," but the phone disconnected rudely in your ear. You tried to call back but the voicemail answered immediately. Ignoring the nervous twitch in your stomach you left the following message:

1. *Good morning sugar. Sorry I missed my wake up call I was in the shower. Look maybe we should talk later - before we do anything else I mean. I just...I feel... increasingly worse. Guilty pleasures right? Anyway I'll meet you later at our spot. Don't worry...I still love you.*

After you hung up, you went back in the bathroom to brush your teeth and blow-dry your hair, briskly doing your makeup with occasional glances at the clock. On the way out the door you stuffed a pair of black lacy underwear in your purse. The phone did not ring again.

You had a hectic morning at work. There were three meetings to attend, all of them boring and none of them informative, and an interoffice birthday party involving cake at 9:30 in the morning. The party was for Estelle, who sat in the third row of cubicles, a row you couldn't

even see from your office. You liked Estelle, but you noticed that she sometimes smelled like Vienna sausages. As soon as the birthday party was over you went to your office to check your voicemail. The first was from him:

Hey Lisa baby. Sorry about this morning I've got a problem with my cell phone so if you need me call the office. I can't stop thinking about fucking you. See you at 7:30. Don't wear panties.

You felt a kick of anticipation and smiled at the phone. So much for uncertainty. It appeared that the little scrap of black sin in your purse would have to wait for another time. The second message was from your sister:

Lisa, its Anastasia call me.

Her voice was throaty and strained. She sounded almost ill. Taking a deep breath you fought of a wave of guilt. You never felt like a good enough sister. The third call was from your mother who you hadn't heard from in three weeks.

Hi honey, it's your momma, just checking in. Call me when you get a sec, oh, and have you heard from your sister – I can't get a hold of her. Call me. Love you. Bye.

You called both her and Anastasia back but had to leave messages both times, and after some deliberation decided against calling your boyfriend back. The anticipation would be good for him.

At 11:45 you left your office for lunch. You go to eat everyday with two other women from your office – Susie and Rebecca. Susie is an overweight cigarette smoker, and Rebecca has seven cats that she named alphabetically. Everyday you either go to one of two places to eat, the Five T's or Crazy Rabbits, because you are a vegetarian and Susie and Rebecca are constantly dieting. That day you chose Crazy Rabbits and you ordered a Super Summer Salad with balsamic vinaigrette dressing, regrettably the tomatoes were overripe. The conversation revolved mostly around work and men, as Rebecca had a date and Susie was attending a singles-only book club meeting. You

mentioned nothing about your rendezvous, preferring to keep it to yourself – it was your little secret.

On the way back to the office, you passed the Five T's on the opposite side of the street and you briefly considered going in and saying hello to your friend Tina but decided against it knowing you would probably eat there the next day.

Back at your desk you did some paperwork that had piled up. At approximately 2:00 p.m. you left your office and went to use the restroom where you ran into Gina Dupree, a woman you hated but had to be nice to since, at the office at least, she was your superior. While she spoke you stared at her overdone eye-makeup and the roots of her hair which had grown too long since her last dye job. The two of you discussed a few bits of office gossip, only one of which was really interesting, a rumor about a boss getting a blowjob from his secretary. Then, after checking your own roots in the mirror, you headed back to your office stopping only to get a cup of coffee.

When you got back Tina was standing in your office, the look on her face stopped you dead in your tracks.

This is what you don't know:

On the day she died, Anastasia woke up at 5:49 a.m. nauseated and with a bit of a headache. She got out of bed very quietly, trying hard not to wake up the sleeping form of Peter, her live-in boyfriend. She paused for a moment, and staring down at him, smiled. Realizing she was likely to throw up she headed for the bathroom downstairs not wanting to wake up Peter because he had a long day in front of him. Tiptoeing down the stairs and across the living room carpet she entered the guest bathroom where she sat for thirty minutes vomiting. Finally the torrent passed and she rose to wash her face. The sickness aggravated her headache, which she knew could become a full-blown migraine if precautions were not taken.

Anastasia went into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of water. Drinking it in one continuous swallow, she refilled the glass and decided it would be necessary to go upstairs and retrieve her anti-depressant and migraine medication so it could be taken with breakfast. No one but her and Peter knew she was taking anti-depressants – it was their little secret.

Walking through the master bedroom and into the adjoining bathroom, Anastasia opened the medicine cabinet but the pills were missing. It occurred to her that Peter, who was efficient to the point of being annoying, had probably placed them in one of their suitcases since they were leaving the following day for a long awaited trip to Chicago. It would be impossible to determine in the dark where the pills were put. She thought for a moment. Their doctor had given her some samples of both medications, as well as Peter's Zanax which had been prescribed for anxiety. Peter had taken the samples and put them in his work toiletries case, an item he toted back and forth everyday. This fact caused her loving sister Lisa to call him "the pretty boy." Stumbling a bit through the darkness Anastasia crossed the bedroom again where on the dresser Peter's case lay.

Grabbing the bag she headed once again downstairs. At the kitchen table she unzipped the pouch and reaching inside, began to search for her medicine. It was there in between a small travel tube of hair gel and a half-eaten roll of Tums. Relieved she began to close the bag when a bright purple square at the bottom of the sack caught her eye. Recognition skittered across the back of her neck.Gingerly, she pulled out the empty condom wrapper with the enthusiasm of a child eating Brussels sprouts. Peter and her hadn't used prophylactics in over a year. All she could think was – not again.

Carefully she replaced all but her medication in the bag. As an afterthought she took Peter's backup Zanax supply as well. As though in a trance she climbed the stairs to the bedroom and put the toiletries case back on

the dresser where she had found it. The clock read 6:27 a.m. Well aware that Peter would wake in just a few moments she impulsively grabbed his cellular phone from the nightstand and quickly returned to the kitchen to hide it in a cabinet. Drawing a glass of water, she swallowed her pills and two of Peter's as well.

She took her chair in the living room and sitting under her favorite afghan, waited.

Eventually she heard Peter rise, an enormous yawn vibrating through the house. She imagined him stretching beside their bed in his pajama bottoms. He started a shower and began to sing a medley of horrendously off-key Eagles songs. Anastasia had no idea how long he was showering before the water turned off. Moments later he stood at the top of the stairs, a white fluffy towel draped around his waist. He looked at her for a moment before speaking -

What's wrong baby?

She looked up at him and for a moment wanted to rise to kiss his neck and breathe in his clean soap scent, but instead she offered a small smile –

I don't feel good. I think I am going to take a sick day.

After a little more small-talk, and several shows of concern on his part, designed she knew, to make her feel better, he was off to get ready for work. There were a few frantic moments spent looking for the cell phone, but finally he convinced himself he had left it at work. Kissing her briefly on the cheek he was out the door.

Anastasia walked into the kitchen and retrieved the hidden phone. Quickly she began to search his call log. At first everything seemed normal; the usual numbers were there, his office, her office, his mother's cell phone, Anastasia's own cell. She scrolled the list further and noticed something strange, her sister's phone number which Peter had called the day before at 7:30 a.m. He must have called right after he left for work. More curious than alarmed she glanced at the clock, 7:35 a.m. Looking down she dialed her sister apartment and waited.

Good morning lover.

Anastasia hung up the phone and slid to the floor. The shock of her sister's come-hither voice slammed through her and she began to shake. Depression rolled over in her in dark, oily waves. Her head pounded with unshed tears and she lay curled in a ball for a little over two hours. Eventually the fog began to lift and in a wild moment of hope she called Lisa's office and left her a message. The hope deserted her when she hung up, and she headed upstairs for the rest of Peter's Zanax supply. Swallowing one immediately, she emptied the rest into her hand and counted the pills. More than enough she decided. Lying on the bathroom floor she noticed that her head was hot to the touch but eventually the medication had its way with her and she slept for a couple of hours before the phone finally woke her up. She knew it was probably Lisa but she no longer wished to speak with her. It was her mother's voice however, that played through the answering machine. Deciding Marie was the last person who could help she didn't answer.

Her mouth had become cottony and thick with sleep and medication. She felt hung-over and washed-out. She went in the kitchen with the Zanax and poured herself a full glass of water. Filling her mouth with pills she tried to swallow them with the water but there were too many and she choked a little, spitting the pills all over the kitchen counter. Looking at them laying everywhere, she suddenly felt angry and ridiculous. With a burst of energy she ran upstairs and quickly got dressed before she could change her mind and give into the depression. Grabbing her purse she practically ran out the door and headed for the one person who might make her feel better – her best friend Tina, who happened to run her favorite restaurant, Tina Toledo's Tofu Taco Treat, otherwise known as the Five T's.

It was prime-time lunch hour and busy in the restaurant. Anastasia waited for her favorite table, the one by the window that the staff called number nine. She liked

it because there was a lot of interesting graffiti on it written in the markers Tina herself provided for her more creative customers. Table number nine always seemed to have something new to offer. When it was open she sat down and ordered a Santa Fe Surprise and a Diet Coke from a new waitress with a pierced eyebrow and purple hair. Looking out the window she began to think about Peter and Lisa. Rage was upon her and she found she was ferociously hungry. She used to be enormous when she was younger; any negative emotions had always made her gorge. Tina spied her across the café and waved, holding up a finger to indicate she would be there in a minute.

Anastasia's food arrived and she took a big bite, practically shoving the food in her mouth, chomping the delicious blend of spices and tofu with non-dairy cheese. Taking a swig of Diet Coke she ignored a small wave of dizziness, sure it was just residue from the mornings Zanax binge. She took another bite and stared out the window at the people walking by all of them oblivious to the small, sad, green-eyed girl staring at them. Around her the diners were busy, some discussing business, the couple beside her engrossed in a half-whispered argument. As she ate she couldn't stop picturing Lisa and Peter in bed together, when suddenly there she was, outside the window. Her bitch of a sister was weaving her way through the throng of people on the street. Anastasia glared out at her through the glass and ripping another bite of taco off felt a tide of grief wash over her. Sadness gripped her by the throat and she gasped for air. As tears rolled down her face a chuck of ground taco lodged itself in the back of Anastasia's throat and she began to cough. She tried to breath but nothing happened. Frantically she gestured madly at the couple next to her but the girl was speaking angrily now and they paid her no mind. She clawed at her throat and tried to bang on her chest but to no avail. The tofu would not dislodge itself and no one realized what had happened until it was too late. It was right there that

Anastasia, daughter of Marie and Willard and only sister to Lisa, died at a booth with the words FOR GOOD HEAD CALL MICHELLE R. written on it in red magic marker.

She didn't know she was pregnant. Neither did you. Your mother was right – there are things you are better off not knowing.

For example:

On the day you die a small plane crashes in the mountains of China killing seven sumo wrestlers, a young girl in Australia is bit by a shark and receives forty stitches, and two new plays open on Broadway. You had never been on Broadway but on your opening night at Eternal Peace you will receive two standing ovations – one from a German Shepard named Bartow and the other from a schnauzer who Bartow helped run away from home – it was their little secret.

Azalea Lane

Darlyn Finch

Babe Wilder punched the access code for her voice mail into the keypad of the telephone at Rent-It-Right, her property management company. A pleasant male voice, tinged with a hint of the Midwest, said, "Hi. I'm Porter Holland. I'm only in town for the weekend, but I drove by the house you have for rent on Azalea Lane, and it looks perfect for me. The only time I can see it is three p.m. today, because my flight leaves Orlando International at six. Please call me on my cell at 407-555-1234 if you can't make it. Otherwise, I'll meet you there."

Her eye fell on the classified ad she'd run in the *Orlando Sentinel:*

Charming, historic home near downtown Orlando. 3 bedrooms, 1 bath, hardwood floors, fireplace, $2,200 per month. 642 East Azalea Lane. Call Babe Wilder at Rent-It-Right for viewing appointment.

She glanced at her wristwatch: She disliked last-minute appointments with presumptuous tenant prospects; still, a commission was a commission. She glanced at her watch: one-thirty. If she made Azalea Lane her last call of the day, she could get home in time to salvage part of Saturday with her husband, Wayne, and nine-year-old son, Andre. Not that they missed her that much when she was working. Both crazy about baseball, they got along just fine without her.

Professional, as always, she arrived at the appointment twenty minutes early. She was wearing a flaming red suit-dress, little slit in the skirt, long zipper in the back, with red pumps. Her nails and lipstick were deep scarlet. She fluffed her short, feathered blonde hair as she walked up the stairs onto the porch of the Azalea Lane rental. Retrieving the key from the lock-box on the front door-knob, she entered the house and busied herself

turning on the air conditioner and opening all the blinds in the downstairs portion of the house. Afterward, she went upstairs and repeated the process, also lighting several scented candles that were scattered around the old-fashioned bathroom. The house looked bright and cozy.

Babe heard a car in the driveway, footsteps on the porch, and finally the doorbell ringing. She walked down the stairs and opened the front door.

A tall, middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair and a friendly expression stood on the porch, a map of Orlando and a classified page from the Sentinel crushed in his left hand. He stuck out his right hand and shook Babe's warmly.

"Hello, Mr. Holland," Babe said. "Do come in."

"Thanks for seeing me on such short notice," he said.

He walked through the front door, closed it, then turned the deadbolt lock. Babe felt a little thrill of danger ripple through her.

She took him through the downstairs, pointing out the features of the living room, dining room, kitchen, and rear sun porch. She stopped at every window, closing the blinds. Each room, bathed moments before in bright sunlight, became invitingly dark and cool.

Babe stopped at the bottom of the staircase. The prospective tenant looked at her expectantly and smiled. "I like the first floor; what's upstairs?" he asked.

"Three bedrooms and a bath. I think you'll like them," she said. As she turned to walk up the stairs, she could feel the man's eyes on her legs.

They were halfway up when she felt his hand on the upper curve of her right hip. She froze on the stair. She didn't say anything, and she didn't turn around.

He caught the zipper of her dress and slowly lowered it. She closed her eyes.

He put his hands on the back of her shoulders, and slipped her red dress to the floor. She turned around.

"I thought you'd never get here," she said.

He kissed her, fiercely.

She kicked her shoes off and heard them roll down the stairs. Their hands flew over the clothes that remained between them, fumbling with buttons, buckles, belts, socks, and stockings until everything was done to get skin on skin. Their hands and mouths were everywhere.

"Wait," she said, then turned and walked up the stairs and entered the bathroom. He quickly followed, to find her drawing steamy water into the old fashioned claw-foot bathtub. He closed and locked the bathroom door.

He stepped into the water and helped her after. She sat in front, with her back to him, and he soaped it with the French-milled bar from the soap dish. Then she leaned back, and he soaped her breasts. She was little in his arms and he reached around her, slick against the front of him. His large hands caressed her tummy and deep down into the water. He put his face against her neck and ear, feeling wisps of her hair against him.

"You're very pretty in my hands," he said.

She turned and bathed him with her small hands. She gently soaped his chest and stomach, enjoying his firm flesh and the way he strained to reach the secret part of her.

She laid her soapy, slippery chest on his, and they wiggled and squirmed. She had him in her hand, hot and hard. Soon he was inside, where it was soft, and wet, and warm.

They kissed urgently now, seeking, searching. They began to gently ride.

She watched his eyes, laughing softly when he found it difficult to speak.

"What-would-your-husband-say-if-he-knew-about-this-Mrs.-Wilder?"

She nibbled his neck and he moaned. She licked his ear, then whispered in it.

"My husband doesn't care what I do, Mr. Holland." She moved her hips in small circles.

"Your husband must be an idiot," he said.
She smiled, and said nothing.

Dressed again, both with wet, slicked-back hair, they stood in the driveway of 642 East Azalea Lane, by his car. Babe looked at her watch.

"Andre's practice ends in half an hour. You'll just have time to get there, if traffic on I-4 cooperates," she said.
"Are you going home now, or back to the office?" he asked.
"I'll meet you guys at home," she said, and turned to go to her own car. She turned back. "Oh, Wayne?" she said.
He rolled down his window. "Can you pick up some milk on the way home? The slugger drank it all this morning."

Peace Like a River

Sarah Kathryn Moore

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,

When sorrows like sea billows roll;

Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say:

"It is well— it is well with my soul."

Joaquin calls me kid. When anybody else calls me that, I hate it. But Joaquin makes it special. Hey kid, he says, here, and tosses me a coke and winks. I guess I should mention that I'm not really a kid. I'm fifteen. And Joaquin, he's near twenty. His family owns the gas station where my daddy gets bait and where I sometimes buy Janie candy, if she's good. Or if I'm looking for an excuse to go there.

Mama tells me doan hang around there s'much and *don't* get any ideas about th'del rio boy. Annalinn, you doan know where he comes from. Ya'll stay away from there, y'hear? I doan think he's dang'rus but lawd, ya'll jus never know. I doan feel I c'n trust him. And those *eyes*. Gawdahmiity. What's a colored boy doin' with green eyes? Gives me the creeps. Where he gits them eyes? Not from his folks, no, sir. Annalinn, you stay away. And don't let Janie go there neither.

When Mama herself has to go to the store, if we're out of eggs and Mrs. Talbot next door isn't home to borrow from, say, she marches there with tight lips and little lines in her forehead and comes back home in ten minutes holding the eggs tightly to herself and muttering. So you might be wondering why I can go to the store at all. Truth is, I'm not supposed to, ever. So then you might be wondering when I sneak out and go just the same. Well, it's usually when I'm babysitting Janie. We tell Mama

we're goin' to the playground or the ice-cream shop, but we go to the corner store instead. Janie knows how to keep her mouth shut when it matters. Besides, if we get caught, she doesn't get no more candy and we both get whipped. That's not something to joke about, not when Mama's doing the whipping. And we couldn't look to Daddy to save us, no, sir. When Mama goes to cut a branch, he just puts out his cigarette and sidles inside the house so he doesn't have to hear us cry—

Lord. I'm near grown.

The more Mama tells me not to go near Joaquin, the more I want to. I know it's against God to want someone like that—though he's not black like Mama says, mind, he's Mexican or Puerto Rican or something, skin like nutmeg and eyes that'll stop you like the north-Florida-thunderstorm-sky. Sometimes when he looks at me I feel like he's holding me there with his eyes harder than he could with those big arms. I can't tell you how green his eyes are. The swamp after it rains. Miss Mildred speaking in tongues on a Sunday morning, waking me up and giving me shivers. Those birds you see in pairs in picture books when you're little, toucans and parrots. These are the things I think of when Joaquin looks at me. Hey kid, he says, you got gorgeous eyes. And it's like when someone with a real pretty voice tells you you can sing nice. I'm blushing and blinking and pulling Janie away.

One time I had a dream about Joaquin. Jasmine Cruz told me that "Del Rio"—that's Joaquin's last name, Joaquin Del Rio—means "of the river". In my dream, I was at the gas station, and inside the store was a river. The shelves of potato chips and condoms were there, too, but somehow a river fit inside. And when you went into the store, nobody could see inside, and you couldn't see outside the glass either. But the starlight could still get through. And I stepped into the shallows of the river at the edge. And Joaquin was there, but his mama and sister weren't, which should have been a clue that this was a dream 'cause they're always around there too. But it

seemed so natural for us to be alone. And he said, Annalinn, and I just slipped off my shoes and waded right into that river, with my jeans on and everything. And he splashed me, and we laughed. And then I realized he had his shirt off, like he sometimes does when he's working on a car outside the store, and I got real embarrassed and nervous because his body was so beautiful, his arms and chest. And before I could stop myself, I said, I think you're beautiful, Joaquin Del Rio. Then I was horrified because what would Mama think? And what a stupid thing to say, anyway. But he came over to me, real serious, not smiling or anything, and he was real tall so I was kind of embarrassed more because I'd never been that close to him and I felt so little. And he said, Annalinn, I just want you so much, and then he reached out to touch my face but I woke up and I was all tingling and thinking sinful thoughts. So I said a prayer and asked God to forgive me for dreaming such awful things, like a common slut, and I didn't go to the gas station for awhile. But not too long. Hey kid, said Joaquin, where've you been? I scooted off pretty fast again, mumbling something about being busy.

It's stupid to think Joaquin would want me anyway, because I'm too short and skinny and my eyes are boring hazel, and I've got ugly stringy hair, not with pretty blonde highlights or waves like Michelle Corey who's dating Joshua Bentham and it's common knowledge they're doing it. Lots of boys like Michelle. She's real pretty, not like me. She goes to the store anytime she wants. Her mama don't mind. One time I was let out of school early 'cause Miss Caulfield was sick and algebra got cancelled. I stopped by the store on my way home and Michelle was there. Skipping class, making eyes at Joaquin. What kinda chance do I have if I can only sneak in once in a month of Sundays, and Michelle Corey flounces her pretty hair and perky smile in there every day when she should be in study hall? I told myself I'd get there again soon if it killed me. But my mama somehow found out I'd gone, and

it was well near two weeks before she let me out of the house, 'cept for church and school.

When I finally managed to go by the store again I was by myself, and it was pretty late. Mama sent me to church to get the pocketbook she left there after Wednesday Night Prayer Circle. She thought I was gonna walk but I borrowed Janie's bike even though it's way too small for me. On the way back I stopped by the gas station and went inside. My heart was beating real fast and I hoped Joaquin wasn't around. But when he wasn't, I was so disappointed I coulda cried. I asked Julia, Joaquin's sister, if I could get some air in my bike tires, and she said sure, she'd do it. But her mama said, no, Julia, let Joaquin do it, mija. And Julia started to say she could do it just fine but her mama said shush, and swatted her behind and called, Joaquin! And he called back from the back room, yeah? And his mama yelled, ven aqui! And Joaquin poked his head out, and flipped the black silky hair out of his Easter-lily-leaf-green eyes, and said, what, mom?

And then he saw me.

And his mama said, this young lady needs some air in her bicycle tires, and I said real quick, it's my sister's bike, because I didn't want him to think that I had a pink Barbie bicycle, and then I realized how stupid that sounded. But Ms Del Rio smiled, and when she smiled her little black eyes nearly disappeared into her round little face. Claro que sí, Annalinn, she said, and I wondered how she knew my name, because my mama sure never told her, and Joaquin always calls me kid. Joaquin walked out the door and I followed him around back. Ms Del Rio and Julia watched me until I got out of sight of the big glass windows.

Joaquin brought Janie's bike to the air pump. I stood around, shifting my weight from one foot to the other. It was getting cool. I pulled my tanktop down so my skinny belly didn't show. I tugged on the end of one of my braids and tried to remember if I saw any pimples in the mirror

this morning. Joaquin was still quiet. I started to wish he'd say something, so I'd have something to talk about and didn't have to stand there like a fool. When he finally did say something, I was so surprised I nearly jumped out of my skin. He stood and said, this bike needs new tires. I said, it does? He said, yeah. Look here where it's wearing thin. So I bent down and sure enough, the little nubs on the wheel were almost all gone. But I couldn't concentrate on that because Joaquin was so close. My face was right near his right hand, and I thought about how good his arms looked in the white beater he was wearing. I stood again.

I asked him, where are you from, anyway? He looked so good. Wearing the twilight like a tuxedo. He looked so good I stopped being nervous. I think I stopped being at all. He reached out and touched one of my braids. His hand brushed my cheek. His fingers felt like freedom. Me? he said. I'm from here, kid. I'm right here.

Send Word If It's a Boy

Keri Joseph

As he stood starboard he could see in the ocean's soft smooth undulation the way she looked before he left—The tears that welled up in her eyes as he kissed her goodbye, for five long months at sea, away from their small island home. "Send word if it's a boy," he said as he touched her belly and then smoothed the black braid of hair that had fallen in her face back behind her ear. "And only if it's a boy." She smiled knowing he would adore it either way, hugged her husband tight before he turned to make his way down the wharf.

* * *

He stood portside the day the wire arrived. He had immediately begun to rejoice, "I have a son" as his fingers clutched the pallid envelope. The crew drew cigars as the moonlight and lanterns illuminated the darkness. Drinks were plentiful as the congratulations, laughter and clinking of glass reverberated through the still night sky. As the night came to an end the men all set out to their designated cabins. He retreated to his compartment merry and delighted at his newfound status. As he lay on his bunk in the tranquil quite of the night he opened the envelope.

* * *

The gentle sea breeze whistled through the palm tree leaves up the wharf to the abandoned home he had built so that his new family could grow. Between the clangs of the hammer onto the plywood he heard the church bells in the distance, calling the villagers to dress in purple and black to bid goodbye to the newly departed. But he stayed there sealing every entranceway with beads of sweat merging with the flood of tears that streamed down his cheeks. With each swing of his hammer the words he read in that small envelope alone in his compartment rung intently in his ears: Complications Stop. Wife and son dead Stop. Come home soon Stop.

Refraction

Sam Leininger

1.

"Fucking Wetjob." Evan shuffled through the paint samples on display at the hardware store, fingering a strip of progressively browner shades of red. On the next rack, the samples were served on smaller, single-color squares. He picked up a handful of blues, from Cornsilk to Cobalt, turned them over, and examined the paper on which they were printed. Probably the only time those colors would have such consistency, he thought. He turned and walked down the aisle to the main artery, and as he shoved the samples in his front pocket, one stuck out. He retrieved the Cerulean sample and held it up for close examination. He walked back down the aisle and held it up to its cousin blues, and then walked away and looked at it alone: he swore the color changed.

"Soft ... sloppy." Evan put it away and headed past the rowed delineation of house parts (though not in order of construction: garden, then interior, then exterior) to the plumbing section, to find a replacement stopcock. In the next aisle over, a couple was choosing a faucet that would go on the bathtub enclosure they just ordered, which was represented by the upright fiberglass sculpture in the middle of the store, cast with the ugly green of the fluorescent lights mounted high above in caged fixtures.

He wondered if perhaps the ugly visual of Flourescence would be masked by the deceptively erudite phonics, or maybe Halogen, as a good name for an economical line of laminates for less discerning customers. Nothing like Mash Tun. They wouldn't waste cut-rate materials on that, he thought. Or vile paint samples with such simple, non-associative names.

"Where do you come up with the names?" Marianna asked. She squeezed a tube of water into a plastic container to dilute the brown paste and stirred it with a wooden dowel.

Evan grabbed three cylindrical tins and joined her at the table. "Well, it's not only about association, although that's really close to the matter." He opened one of the tins, took a pinch of gold powder, and dropped it in a ramekin. He reached across the table for Marianna's water bottle and liquefied his own color. She used a spatula to spread her thick brown on the thin sheet of plastic. "Direct representation will never succeed. Like Toro. Even though it does look like tuna belly," a filet of which he had brought in to the lab, Marianna not having eaten sushi before, "it will never be that fish, just a mix of colors."

He poured a crooked line of gold on top of the brown paint, and Marianna dried the mix with a hair dryer. She took the sample and ran it through two rollers that evenly flattened the lumpy pigments and blended the edges of the colors together. "Yeah, but at least with that, a person might not know what Toro is, but once they do, it makes sense."

"Which is why," Evan said, "this one will be so much better." He retrieved the sample from the output of the rollers and centered it on the table. The two stood and looked at the combination. "This doesn't look like any mash tun, or really even any beer for that matter, but it's an association I made, one particular time, and as long as the customers understand that it makes sense to someone, then it will make some sense to them, too."

He grabbed the sienna tube and squirted some more paint onto the sample. A light overhead flickered, and Evan and Marianna looked up; they watched the bulb's filament blast bright before blowing out. "I'll get a spare," Marianna said. She walked to the storage cabinet, and Evan turned back to the sample.

"It's still not right."

Last Tuesday, Evan extended his personal happy hour beyond that of his co-workers and ended up in front of a bar he had never been in but had always admired for its sign out front: two images, juxtaposed, of a hand-plow and a gathering of stars too misshapen to be even the drunkest of constellations. He wandered into the empty bar and was given a lesson in beer from the bartender: the types, the tastes, and the brewing methods.

For his fifth beer, Evan's request of "Surprise me" was answered with a Belgian abbey ale and a history lesson. Another employee showed up and propped open the front door to attract patrons. A shaft of streetlight ricocheted off the wet asphalt and through the open door, mixed with the low-wattage beams coming from the recessed fixtures above the bar, and the amalgam of light reflected off the bar and through the abbey ale. The lightwaves penetrated at different depths, but Evan was interested in the bottom ounce of the pint glass: its tint skewed by the angles at which the pitted copper bar reflected the light, and the immediacy of his newest laminate creation.

Evan ordered another beer, which he made sure to set down far enough away from the first, and studied the colors which slid gently as cars drove by outside, cutting off the streetlight's path, and which was gone completely once the bar started filling up with people, some of which sat next to him, one of which was terribly engaging. Orlovksy probably would have pinpointed her lipstick shade, an old bar trick among colorists, and on a more playful night, he had to admit he might have also. She would have been tickled, or maybe thought he was gay, but that night, for Evan, she was just a common species of hues next to the Mash Tun.

2.

"Fucking hell." Marianna grunts as Evan pounds away. Under the regulated incandescent lights of the seventh-floor lab, surrounded by file drawers of dry pigments and open jars of half-mixed colors, Marianna had lost her professionalism. Her shirt's opalescent buttons lay on the floor; and both have their pants bunched at the ankles. Marianna kicks one foot free of her slacks and hops up onto the table. She reinserts Evan and wraps her clothed leg around his thrusting hips. Evan pushes her shoulder back, and she braces herself against the table, elbows locked, back arched; he looks down at her stomach, so flat it's concave, and notices the slight lump protruding and retreating with his movements.

Marianna pushes herself up and wraps her right arm around Evan's neck. Her hand leaves a ghostly doppelganger on the dark, sticky formica. It quickly evaporates, first in the middle, cutting the fingertips off from the circles of the meaty palm, which put distance between themselves as they shrink; and then the individual circles that are left vaporize simultaneously as the real hand digs deeper into the back of Evan's head. She pulls him to her, and he buries his face into her shoulder hollow. Marianna's skin begins to stretch, and the fleshtones separate. They gather into small roundlets, flying apart and revealing the darkness beneath them.

From her shoulder, the fragmenting continues, and the colors separate into small monochromatic drops that pelt Evan's face, neck, and back. He falls through her holes to the table below, momentarily, and then through the table, the floor, and the building into the darkness.

Evan lay on the floor of his shower, forehead throbbing. He knew that re-conjuring his fantasy would be fruitless, so he finished his shower, toweled off, and returned to his bedroom. His mail-ordered weight bench with rubber resistance bands sat useless in the corner, draped with dirty clothes.

3.

Marianna knocked on the glass door at the back of the lab. "Hey, ready to go?"

"Oh, sure." Evan rose from his chair and grabbed the box of props for the demonstration.

"I have another project that I have to work on: can you fly solo on this one?"

"Saving Orlovsky's ass again?"

"Evan..."

"Don't sweat it. I'll be fine."

"Let me know how it goes. You're coming to the party tonight, right?" Marianna asked.

"Yeah, I'll be there. If I don't see you, then I'll see you."

Evan took the elevator up two flights and walked across the floor to the boardroom, past the fabric-covered cubicles: they were predominantly grey, with small red, black, and forest green fibers woven in to hide stains; most employees had covered their walls with personal pictures, though, hanging on to the scattered bits of private universes.

No one had arrived yet, so he set up the display in the middle of the oversized table. He set the laminate sample on a square of white pressboard and propped both up with a small easel, then poured a pale pilsner into a tall glass and placed it on the right of the sample. He spread barley stalks in a half-circle in front and created a conspicuous asymmetry by leaving the left side of the sample untended.

The three marketing representatives filed in and took seats facing the display. "So, Evan, what do we have today?"

Evan began his pitch with a concession. "We've had Barleys and Ales before." He walked around the table and grabbed the full pilsner glass. "And usually, this is what we talk about when we talk about beer. But as you can see, our sample is not golden at all. This goes beyond the beer, but to do that, we have to go back, before the beer."

Evan returned to his original position, leaned behind the display, and produced a new bottle of beer with a golden eagle in front of a stained-glass window on its label. He opened it and poured half of it into an empty pint glass, its dark brown body contrasting the pilsner, the uncooked barley, and the light ash parquetry stripe in the middle of the boardroom table. He slid the glass down the table; it stopped two feet short of the edge.

"Monks have been brewing beer that looks like this for centuries, but before it's beer, it has to go through steps: fermentation, sparging, the wort." He reached behind the display and recovered a small metallic plate and a large metallic flashlight. "Before that, though, the grains have to be cooked and the starches broken down. In some of the earliest marriages of craftsmanship and technology, the monks would cook their grains in large copper kettles, called mash tuns. Imagine having to look down in this mash tun to gauge the color and sweetness of the beer." Evan placed the small square of copper behind the glass and turned the flashlight on. "Imagine looking into the mash tun with piety and gratefulness that your creator provided this for you." He directed the light's beam onto to the copper and through the glass. The beams fought through the opaque beer, some stretching and causing light striations the marketing representatives could witness, others dying out in the liquid.

"Imagine looking into the mash tun, knowing that a spoiled batch meant you had nothing to sell but wet grains for animal feed." Evan picked up the copper plate and set it behind the display and reached over for the half-full beer glass. "And I hope you can't imagine chugging this down with complete disregard for its craftsmanship." He leaned over, took the laminate sample off of the easel, and set it down directly in front of the three decision-makers. "And imagine serving nothing less than the finest on your new Mash Tun countertop." Evan stepped back, swirled the beer in the glass, and took a long (but not voluminous) sip.

While Evan finished his half-beer, the three representatives studied the laminate sample, pointing out the color shifts and gradations. After a few minutes, Rory commented.

"Great presentation, as always Evan. And I don't think I would have picked out those copper tones without a little help; that was a great mix. But you've seen the color schemes we're trying to develop and market right now, and browns just don't fit in."

"Yeah, I know. I just had this idea, that's all."

"Maybe you could pitch it at the winter meeting? It's a strong pitch. Maybe if we change our palette, it will fit right in."

One of the other marketing reps chimed in. "I agree, it was a great pitch, but what about that beer bottle label? Obviously the colors are a little too bright, but they're a nice combination to work from."

"Wanna do lunch, Evan?" Rory asked. He and the others stood up and walked towards the door.

"No, thanks, I have plans already." Evan swiped the bottle, contents slushing a bit inside. He did like the arch, the heavy black lines that mimicked the stained glass construction even on the stylized phoenix, and the shades of yellow that subtly gave the mythic bird dimension; but, he informed them, "the inherent religious associations are too strong." Evan packed the display pieces back in the box as the three left, Rory slightly behind the other two, and shrugging. He finished the beer, dropped the bottle into the box, and went back to his office.

Evan sat with his old roommate Bernard at a table inside the new tapas restaurant that Bernard had been raving about for months. The minimalist tables (clean, aluminum rectangles) and complimentary floor-length light fixtures, wrapped in rice paper and hidden in the corners, contrasted with the decidedly Mediterranean colors—

orange, lime green, royal blue—and made Evan wonder if the owners are Germans who love ceviche or transplanted Spaniards who went to design school.

Bernard grabbed a skewer of beef sate. "So, what do you think?"

"Pretty interesting. You'd think that the hard lines and flat surfaces wouldn't work with the colors, but it almost grounds them more than billowy curtains, or plaster; those just sort of attempt to hide them."

"I meant the food, jackass."

"Oh. Yeah, that's really good too. Another seemingly odd combination, but it makes sense." Evan looked out the plate glass window at the crowded patio tables, patrons marring the monochrome tabletops with dropped globs of dill butter and pureed poblano. The sun shone on the patio, breaking through the light foliage and oversized umbrellas. The glasses of water refracted small spots of the color spectrum onto the tables; a woman bumped her half-full glass of red wine but caught it before spilling a drop. "Outside would've been cool, though."

"Yeah," said Bernard. "Sorry about getting here so late." He pointed to a wall over his shoulder, painted a few shades lighter than the roasted eggplant with sweet miso they had already devoured, and asked Evan for his opinion. "So, Mister Color, what would you call that?"

"Are you trying to get me started?"

"Oh come on, indulge me."

"Well, it looks like a fairly pure indigo. If Orlovsky named it, he probably put 'regal' or 'royal' in the name."

"And yet you can't tell?" Bernard grinned.

"With all these variables, how am I supposed to? Did the namer know what kind of wall this was being painted on? Did he have prior knowledge of the woodgrain, or the primer to be used, or the number of coats? And if he did, even in this one instance here in the restaurant, how can those conditions be met every time someone uses that paint? How can he be sure that it will be the shade he wants it to be every single time?"

"I mean, I guess you're right," Bernard conceded, "but do you have to be so harsh just because the guy names wet paint instead of dry paint?"

Evan gathered the breading left from the stuffed mushrooms and smothered it with the saffron cheese sauce from the polenta; Bernard's nagging receded into the background; someone shrieked outside: Evan turned and looked, but the woman's wine glass sat solidly, if empty, on her table. To his right, Evan saw their waiter in the station next to the kitchen door wiping silverware and placing them in cylinders. He made eye contact and waved his hand with the stroke of a fake signature; the waiter nodded, disappeared into the kitchen, and walked the bill hurriedly to the table.

Bernard counted off the bills before the waiter could leave and handed them off. "We're all set. It was good to see you again, Evan."

"Likewise." Evan grabbed his napkin from his lap, wiped his mouth, and set it on the table. The waiter walked by on his way outside. "Isn't he going to bring the check?"

"Uh ... no, I took care of it." Bernard stood up. "I'm gonna go use the little boys' room."

Evan sat, waiting for Bernard. He studied the wall color and wondered if maybe it was a dark orchid that had been painted over a black or slate wall. He heard a glass crash in the servers' station, and, turning right, he saw the waiter calmly wiping silverware and rolling them in napkins. Bernard returned to the table and Evan stood to leave, still looking for the fallen glass.

4.

Evan lay in bed, thinking about his adolescent summers. He would float on a raft in Lake Nib, just off his grandparents' dock, in a quiet cove away from the main channel of water skiers and fishing tours. The chair

had styrofoam arms with cup holders that floated on the surface, but the seat was webbed and submerged. Evan watched the water flow over his waist, occasionally cupping a handful to cool off his sun-scorched chest. The water was a deep green in large volumes—Evan wasn't sure if it was from the reflection of the current foliage onto the water or the assimilation of all the trees in the valley that was flooded to create the lake—and the pale tint of dry fish scales when cupped in the hands or placed in a bucket to keep bait alive. He paddled softly back towards the dock (as the current had pulled him slowly away) and a houseboat tugged by on the opposite edge of the cove.

The treetops on Evan's shore blocked the setting sun, but the windows of the houseboat gleamed when the long afternoon beams hit, lighting the crests of the ripples emanating from the hull and dying quickly through shades of yellow and orange as the lake rolled back over on itself, swallowed the light, and returned to its calm as if the boat had never disturbed it.

Evan watched the shadow blanket creep across the cove and envelop the slate rocks on the bank. He measured the sun's descent in the braided increments of the rope swing that hung lifeless over the water's edge. He paddled a little closer to the dock, then got up out of the chair, toweled off, and started preparing for the evening.

5.

Evan arrived late. He parked on the edge of the car-lined cul-de-sac and walked up to the house. The gate to the backyard was open, and Evan could see the smoke from the grill rising above the fence line. With six-pack in hand, he entered the party. As he rounded the corner to the back of the house, he spotted Rory at the grill.

"Hey, Evan!" He waved him over with the slotted spatula. "Listen, no hard feelings about today, right?"

"No, of course not. In fact, let's not talk shop at all."

"Perfect. Well, I don't know where Marianna is, but most of the happy hour crowd is here. Hey, is that the beer from today? Can I try one?"

Evan pulled a beer from its cardboard sleeve and handed it to Rory. There were a few people sitting at tables around the pool, but Evan headed indoors to find the refrigerator. He made it to the screened porch and saw the large ice chest; he opened up the right half of the lid and twisted four of his bottles down into the ice. He popped the fifth with his keychain bottle opener and walked inside.

After three-quarters of a beer's worth of niceties, Evan escaped to the restroom. On his way out, he noticed a closed door at the end of the hall. As he approached it, the sounds from the other side were evident: a muffled grunt; a high-pitched, whiny exhale; the shifting of furniture. Evan looked down the hall, grinned, and moved an ear closer to the door.

As the frequency of the sound bites increased, the attention to volume decreased. Soon, the grunts and moans were more distinguishable; the man started his grunt, then hitched, then finished with a guttural rumbling. The bed frame creaked, and Evan could see it, a cosmetic façade with cheap, unattached tongued joists. The two began to squeak with the bed, and Evan imagined their open-mouthed inhales, in sync and drawing in a bit of the other person's breath, their legs tangled, her fingers wrapped around the back of his head, her pressure imploring him to increase the intensity of his ass slaps, barely discernable over the moaning and squeaking and through the solid bedroom door.

Evan spotted another partygoer, a co-worker's roommate he thought, and waved her over to the bedroom door. She leaned an ear in, listened for a moment, and straightened up to leave.

"Man, Jerry and Marianna sure can put on a show, huh?" She ribbed Evan and walked off as the scenario took on too many details for him: her flat stomach, strands

of hair, matted with sweat, falling across her wide lips, her chipped right ring fingernail digging into Jerry's nipple.

Evan took a deep breath and walked down the hall and into the kitchen. He set his nearly empty beer bottle on the counter and opened the refrigerator, looking for nothing in particular. When he closed it, he reached for his bottle and noticed the countertop: it was a collaboration of theirs: Toro. The barely white, almost translucent striations in the muted red were more organic and regular than the random interruptions of fake marble (and judging by the sales, no one had, as Rory had feared, associated the name with lawn equipment). It looked nice in her kitchen, he thought. And then he saw the three light fixtures above the bar. They were three hanging, opaque, ceramic cones in primary colors, and the bulbs inside each were contrasting colors: red bulb in the yellow fixture, blue in red, and yellow in blue. He looked at the Toro pattern under these three lights, and the consistent, repeated pink and white pattern had been doused with a spectrum of unnatural color. He ran his hand under the lights, and when he removed it, the countertop was still an ugly gradient, from red to violet to blue, all impure and reflecting off each other. He could not stand the dissonance.

To his right was a bunch of bananas. He grabbed three, squished them in his hands, and smeared them on the countertop; he poured the remainder of his beer on top of the bananas—they were still too light. He grabbed an avocado from the wire baskets hanging over the sink and pounded it into the countertop. Colors still variegated, he opened the refrigerator and grabbed the chocolate sauce and mustard from the door compartments. He squeezed out first the mustard, a garish bright yellow, and then the chocolate. He spread it even and thin with his palms, but the off-white banana flesh and rapidly-darkening green of the avocado held on to their colors. Two people who were getting drinks from the porch cooler watched through the glass sliding door, frozen.

Next to the stove was a gift basket of gourmet jams. Evan opened the raspberry and scooped it out with his fingers; the tri-colored lights made the small seeds glimmer. He picked up the blackberry and apricot jars and smashed them on top of the mess. The glass shattered, and the pieces threw more light and refracted more color. With the meat of his palm, he ground the shards into smaller pieces and buried the glass underneath the brown, nondescript mess.

Marianna and Jerry walked out from the back, both still a little winded, into the commotion. Evan continued to smooth and smash, and he grabbed his empty beer bottle, turned it upside down, and smacked the bottom, sending it crashing into the pile. His palms already lacerated, he made a fist and pounded the bottle into smaller shards. The large circular base flew off the table, but a sliver from the neck sliced Evan's right forearm. The dark copper blood which had been slowly dripping began to pour out, and he held his arm over the pile and let it commingle with the browner and browner glaze. The color ran from his face as reached for more jam jars.

"Jerry, call 911!"

He smashed the jars and smeared their contents, swaying and stumbling, but never ridding the pile of its colors, the small beads from the jams and the myriad of glass shards catching the light. He smashed through grape, beech plum, quince, and was hardly able to stand. He demolished the crab apple as Jerry made the call.

The Day Judy Garland Died

Robert C. Walker

Cole stood on his roof top balcony and watched the pigeon's graceless ballet. He ran his hand through his crop of dark hair and watched the pigeons swoop, dive, and roll. He watched as gravity threatened to yank them from the Heavens. He watched the nearly averted disaster of two birds, on the same path. Most of all, he just watched them fly. The sun, in its New York summer rage, glared down on him. He squinted and traced one pigeon across the sky. He felt he could stand there and watch that one bird careen from one corner of the sky to the other all day. He wasn't tired. He wasn't hungry. He wasn't anything, expect there watching the pigeons fly.

"Hey, there you are." Dylan timidly placed his hand on Cole's shoulder. "I've been looking all over for you. How was your flight?"

"Fine. Ran into a bit of bad weather leaving Memphis, but nothing major."

"How was everyone?"

"Fine, I suppose. I mean—how would they be?"

"Sorry." Dylan spoke in a whisper. Cole didn't hear him. For a few beats no one said anything. Cole watched his pigeons and Dylan watched him. "How's Josh's mom holding up? Did Sara make it in from California?

"Yah, Sara made it." He diverted eyes from the pigeons to pull a cigarette from a pack that was perched on the railing. He pulled a book of matches from his breast pocket and lit his smoke. There was a timeless pause as he sucked down the cocktail of toxins. "His mom, well she looked like a wreck. Who'd blame her? I mean—I guess I'd look pretty wrecked if I were her. I tried to talk to her. She wouldn't have it. Fuck, she flat out told me to piss off. Who says piss-off? Honestly, she's from Milwaukee, not England. Pretentious bitch." He stubbed the cigaretter out on the railing and pulled another one from the pack.

"You shouldn't smoke so much."

"Okay, mom."

"Seriously, I was reading this magazine and they're discovery all kinds of stuff about how bad those things are and they make your breath taste like ass."

"And that bothers you?"

"Fuck, you're in a bitchy mood."

"Sorry, I'm not in the best mood. The first love of my life, a man I spent four years fucking, just died of some gay blood cancer."

"Sorry. I've missed you the last couple days." Dylan leaned in and wrapped his arms around Cole and propped his head on the other man's shoulder. "What are you looking at?"

"Just watching the birds." Both men stood silent for several minutes. In the past three days it was this silence Dylan had missed most.

"Well, I'll leave you and your birds. I'm going to get something to eat, you want anything?"

"Nah."

"You sure?"

"Yah, I just need to be alone for awhile."

"Okay, kid. I'll be back in a few." Dylan planted a soft peck on his lover's cheek and left the way he'd come. Cole kept watching his pigeon.

The oppressive sun slipped behind the cover of the high-rise buildings. Cole watched as it sank. His pigeons had long since ended their ballet and taken up refuge in Central Park below. Dylan had come home and was in the kitchen cooking. Cole could smell it. The pungent scent of frying salmon fillets. His stomach betrayed his desire to be alone and before his brain knew what his feet were doing, he was inside.

"I thought you might get hungry, so I bought some for you too."

"Thanks."

"I try. You want a glass of wine or a beer or something?"

"Helped myself," Cole said holding up nearly empty wineglass.

"You want to talk about it?"

"What?"

"You know what."

"No—I'm fine. God forbid a man get emotional after a funeral."

"I know how you get."

"Really, how do I get?"

Dylan slid the spatula under the two fillets and slid them onto a plate. He put the spatula in the sink, whipped his hands on a dishrag, and turned to face his partner.

"Well," Cole said. "How do I get? You know me so well—tell me."

"Do we have to do this tonight? I'm tired and you've got to be emotionally exhausted."

"I'm not trying to do anything. You said you know how I get and I want to know how that is." Cole was getting belligerent. He was slightly tipsy. Dylan wondered how much he had to drink. Cole had been moody lately, depressed, and wine never helped matters.

"Nothing, okay, you don't get any way. God, you're worse than your mother." Dylan regretted that utterance as soon as it slipped out. In six years of domestic bliss one thing he had learned, albeit not well, was never to mentions Cole's mother in an argument. He gripped the counter the way a patient grips the arm of the dentist's chair and waited for what was coming.

"What? I am nothing like my mother. You can be a real prick. I think I'd rather eat alone." Cole stormed across the apartment, pulled his coat from its hook, and headed for the door.

"God, wait—stop. I'm sorry, okay. You know I didn't mean anything." Dylan rushed across the room and took Cole by the hand. "Look, you've had shit for a week and my week hasn't been exactly peachy. What's say we eat this fish, drink this wine, and hit the hay?"

"No. Not till you tell me what you meant."

"Nothing. Honestly, kid. I really didn't mean anything. I was just being bitchy."

"Liar. If you didn't mean it you wouldn't have said it."

"Well—sometimes you, like your mother, tend to not do so well with highly emotional situations. You both tend to go to dramatics. Not that that's a bad thing, it's one of your endearing qualities."

"I'm over dramatic?"

"Well, sometimes."

"Whatever, miss 'I can't deal with who I am, so I'm going to jump off a bridge'."

"I was sixteen and had just been kicked out of my house."

"Cause daddy caught you in the sack with the lawn boy," Cole said with a smirk.

"Oh, and what a cute lawn boy he was. If only you could look that good in a pair of cut-off jeans and a tank-top." Dylan offered a coy smile and Cole replied with his usual half grin. "But, seriously, you know I worry about you. You get so worked up and you keep it all inside. I—I just worry."

"You're too good to me," Cole said in a smart-ass tone.

"Can we eat now? You know I slaved over a hot stove for you."

The two traversed the small apartment. Cole took his usual place at the two-person table. He always sat nearest the window. Dylan carried the plates in from the kitchen. They eat half the meal in a strained silence. Both wanting to neither break nor preserve it. This was the way they'd become. Tittering on the edge of something breaking, like a fraying rope. Constantly arming and disarming each other. Theirs was a cold war contained in an efficiency with a roof top balcony.

"I could take tomorrow off," Dylan offered.

"Why?"

"Well, thought we could spend the day together. I haven't seen you in three days and even before you left

you've been so consumed with your writing. I feel like we haven't spent time together in forever. Don't you think so?"

"I guess," Cole mumbled between bits.

"Remember how we used to take picnic lunches in the park." Dylan took a long sip of wine. He sat the glass down and ran his hand along its base, across the tabletop to the table's end before he continued. "I think we're getting bored. I'm worried about us. Where are we? What are we?"

"We're two homos at home, eating dinner."

"That isn't what I was saying. Where are we in this relationship? Are we there? Is this it? Is this what we want? To be two boring gay guys in their late thirties who have an atypical relationship complete with pointless fights? I—just don't know."

"What else is there? I love you and you love me. Isn't that the point?"

"I guess. I just miss the excitement of when we first met. There was a newness, an electricity."

"Well, once you've laundered someone's ragged old underwear what newness can there be? I mean you know where every mole, blemish, birthmark, and scar on my body is. You could map my ingrown hairs and stretch marks. Of course, it isn't new anymore. But we've got love, well I hope we do."

"I love you." Dylan offered, as if in conciliation.

"Well, what do you need? You want me to grow some new birthmarks to surprise you. You want me to get some plastic surgery so you can have some newness. Hell, I could get my balls lowered or my prick expanded, but it'd still be the same old me."

"Could you really do that?"

"How would I know. Are you done?" Cole asked, motioning towards Dylan's plate. He had a way of shifting conversations. They both disarmed each other. They always seemed to talk on the edge of what they were really trying to say.

"Yes, thank you sir."

Cole carried the plates into the kitchen and the two met-up on their new sofa. It was gorgeous soft brown leather. It had been a gift from Dylan's mother. She had taken to buying them high-priced gifts to make amends for Dylan's asshole father. Dylan still hated his dad, but the sofa was greatly appreciated.

"Movies star, singer, and cultural icon Judy Garland is dead at the age of forty-seven. Garland, best known for playing Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, is the victim of an apparent drug overdoes. She is survived by two daughters, Liza and Lorna, and a son, Joey." The two men heard the television news anchor the way one hears a distant echo, just slightly at first and then it builds.

"That's just awful," Dylan said. "Honestly, I can't believe they'd make her out to be some common junky. The media is so harsh."

"Well, it is probably the truth."

"So. They don't have to put it out there like that. The woman isn't even cold yet and they're trying to disgrace her memory." Softly a voice from the television began to croon, "Somewhere over the Rainbow." Dylan leaned into his lover and wept openly. There was no shame in his tears. Cole wanted to weep. He felt he should weep, but no tears would come. He had cried enough this week. He sat there, listening to the song, his boyfriend's tears staining his shoulder, and was silent.

"I've had enough of this day. Let's go to bed," Dylan said. Cole wrapped him in his strong arms and carried the smaller man down the short hallway to the apartment's only bedroom. It was a small room. Mostly consumed by the large oriental style bed. The room had been painted a deep red. Three Asian prints, which Cole had brought back from a visit to China, hung on the far wall. A long narrow shelf ran along the upper part of three walls of the room. The shelving was lined with little white candles, scentless ones (the scented ones irritated Dylan's allergies) and random oddly framed pictures of the two men, their friends, and their family.

Cole couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned to no avail. He climbed from the bed and stumbled to the bathroom. He ran a warm bath in the old claw-footed tub. He slipped into the water and felt himself disappear in its warmth. Waves lapped over the edge and onto the floor. Julian, the down stairs neighbor, would be by tomorrow to complain about the water dripping through the ceiling. He slid his head beneath the water and looked up at the ceiling. He watched his breath, encased in bubbles, slowly climb to the surface. He studied the mural on the ceiling. In one of his rare artistic outbursts Dylan had painted two male angels perched upon on a cloud on the ceiling. The bubbles became less frequent. Cole traced the blurred outline of the shower spout through the water. He was acutely aware of the blood in his veins. Aware of every ounce and how it was conspiring against him. In sudden passive-aggressive rage he thought about ending it all. He could just stop breathing. It was almost as passive-aggressive a means of suicide as smoking two packs a day, though this would be more effective. He could feel his lungs constrict and fought the urge to push his head to the surface. He thought about the blank pages. He thought about Josh, something about the look on his face in that coffin had bugged him. He thought about their pigeons and the summers spent watching that ballet. He could cheat death. He could picture Dylan in a black gown of mourning. In some morbid way this amused him. He started feeling faint. In his mind he saw the pigeons flying. The nearly averted disasters of their flight turned the casualties of life. Josh was smirking at him. That's what it was—that's what had bothered him about Josh's expression. He was smirking. He knew. He had to know. Cole felt his blood course harder. Every drop would kill him and Josh had seen it on him like a badge he wore.

The Philosopher Mechanic

Issac Stolzenbach

There is a mechanic down the street that very few have actually seen his face, the only thing most people ever see of him are his feet sticking out from under whatever vehicle he is working on. He has an intelligence complex and gets offended whenever he has to "dumb-down" whatever it is he's talking about. We join the scene in a typical day of the philosopher mechanic, his feet are sticking out from beneath a car: a customer and his friend come up and ask about the car that had been dropped off the other day. Two high school kids walk up and, not noticing the feet sticking out, talk about how stupid grease monkeys are.

Nathan: [walking up to the car talking over to his buddy] . . and I was like, DUDE, you can't do that! It doesn't matter if he's a choir boy or not!

Ziggy: [laughing] Oh MAN, that's just wrong bro.

Nathan: So where is this knucklehead? I swear, these friggin' mechanics man. . . wait, you can't even call them that–it's more like *grease monkies*. Du-du-dumb-dumb oil change [throws his hands in the air and walks like an orangutan] [both start laughing together].

Ziggy: Man, they *gotta* get your Mercedes done bro, there's going to be **mad** chicks in Daytona this weekend! And you know what that means. . . [starts dancing the 'buffer'] a fine ride and cool booze, equals groovy ladies [starts making smacking motions].

Nathan: [joins him in the dance but is startled]

Philosopher Mechanic (PM): Yeah, they're stupid and all they talk about are their oversized nuts and undersized bolts. [hearing their attitudes, PM tries to practice temperance by biting his tongue, but still aims to smite] Lemme ask you something there slick, do you wish your gas *well* when you put it in your car?

Nathan: Uhh..[sounding like duhh] . . . NO

PM: And do you think that *it* wishes *you* well, sitting there in your gas tank?

Nathan: Dude, what the *hell* are you talking about?

PM: Well you see ma'boy, in the Aristotelian sense of friendship, both entities involved in a *friendship* must acknowledge and reciprocate well-wishing between the two.

Nathan: [finally truly baffled] huh?

PM: Pfffttt. [PM begins to loose his personal fight to keep cool] UggGGggg–OKAY! You are your friend's gas. [brief pause while Ziggy and Nathan look at each other] He does not wish you well, he wishes your CAR well. He is using you for your car; this is what we call a relationship of utility. Once the thing or service that brings your *supposed* friend pleasure is gone, then your friend will be gone as well.

Nathan: [looking at Ziggy] do *you* know what the hell he's talking about?

Ziggy: [trying not to make eye contact] Nah bra, no clue. . .

PM: This is where I tell you that you blew your transmission, from the look of your glazed rotors it was probably from power-braking. Peeling out to impress the ladies were you?

Nathan: Yeah, how the hell. . . how did you know about. . . and how? Wait, that was Ziggy's idea to do that peeling out crap [whipping his head and pointing to Ziggy]

Ziggy: Oh shit, looky there, it's the bus! [Runs off stage]

Nathan: But I. . . wait. . .

PM: Told you. [Pitches a part out from under the car]

Nathan: What was that friendship stuff you were talking about? Utility or something?

PM: You have just experienced the end of a relationship that was at the lowest tier, that of utility, or being used. Next on the hierarchy is what you were hoping to engage in this weekend; a friendship of *pleasure*. This is when you like someone for what they look like, or what carnal pleasures they may provide, but like the former–like when you begin to bore each other in the sack–then the relationship is dissolved.

Nathan: Dude, who the *hell* are you?

PM: Just your local neighborhood *dumbass* GREASEMONKEY!

Nathan: [looking down, kicking his foot around] Ohhh dude, I'm sorry, I didn't mean. . . .

PM: Save it slick. . . you need to hear about the top of the hierarchy. As Aristotle said, the best relationships are based on a love of one's character. These are the hardest to develop, but they also last the longest; because they're not based on what someone can do for you, nor on what they look like. Get it?

Nathan: Not really, but I got the one with the gas. I use the gas to make my car run, if the gas was bad, then I wouldn't have any use for it, thus I wouldn't need it around. [looking very worried] So I'm Ziggy's gas . . .dude??

PM: [sounding a bit smug] Was. . . the key word would be *was*.

Nathan: [looking very depressed now that he gets it] Man, this sucks. How did. . . how do you *know* this stuff?

PM: I don't *know* much of anything; I just give advice where I see it needed. You'll have no problem paying the philosophy charge then? [Slides paper out from under car] I'll need you to sign this estimate for your tranny.

Nathan: [almost in shock he signs away and stuffs it back under the car]

PM: Thank you youngin'. Now here's one on me. Life's like your automatic transmission here. You have all this potential coming at you, and you have to figure out what to do with it or you'll just sit there idle; in park; worthless. So remember that sometimes you'll have to kick life in high gear and use that *potential*, now downshift yo'ass outta here and you'll be a'ight~

(Nathan exists and PM mumbles to himself, a high-pitched squeal starts up as Bambi enters. Wearing sweatpants and high stiletto shoes, with funky colors, teased up hair, and backless top [or whatever]–very high fashion)

Bambi: Hellllooooo, is anyone here. I could really use a man right now, heeeeheee, that doesn't sound right, heee-heeeee.

PM: Quiet please! You sound like a power steering pump on a Ford!

Bambi: [looking around curiously, twirling her hair, and chewing gum] Umm Hello? Is anyone there?

PM: Well obviously if someone is asking you to be quiet, then. . . ugggg. [long pause, then very monotone] Must be Bambi, what can I do for you ma'am?

Bambi: Awww, you remembered me. I was just wondering about my Beemer. My daddy dropped it off for me this morning; did you fix the key thingy?

PM: No ma'am. I'm waiting on parts to fix your *key thingy*, they'll be here tomorrow. Just in case you'd like to tell people what's really wrong with your car, you broke your key off in the i-g-n-i-t-i-o-n s-w-i-t-c-h.

Bambi: Oh man [popping gum as she digs in her purse for her cell phone] I'm going to have to call Jimmy to come pick me up. Well, I guess that's cool [giggling] he'll take me shopping [puts phone up to ear]

PM: Oh boy. . .

Bambi: Hi Jimmy! [giggling] Yeah, its not done yet. . . Sure, but can we go shopping? Oh [sounding upset] Max'ed out *already*? But we've only been shopping twice, Jimmy. [pause briefly] Nooo Jimmy, the skirt was 3,000 and the blouse was 2,000; you had them backwards you big silly. [giggling] That's okay, I'll just wait on the car and call you later. [not waiting for an answer] M'kay, bu-bye.

PM: Don't you remember me telling you that I don't have the parts to fix your *thingy*?

Bambi: Yeah, I know that. Jimmy doesn't have any money to take me shopping so I'm going to call Danny, he just got a new credit card, heehee.

PM: By Kant you're immoral.

Bambi: *Oh My God. . .* what did you just say to me?

PM: Kant, *Immanuel Kant*, he was a German philosopher back in the 19th century. By Kantian ethics, you are utilizing a maxim that fails the second formulation of the categorical imperative; that is, you are not treating your fellow human beings as ends in themselves, but for your own means; ergo, you are immoral.

Bambi: Oh, I thought you called me something else [giggling]. Wait. . . did you just say I was *immoral*??

PM: [his feet fall outwards] Is that all you got out of that??? Ugggggg–okay. Your key thingy right? You use it as a means to an end; you turn the key and *mean* for the action it performs to start the car, yes? Ideally, the end is that it starts the car; if it did not start your car, you would replace it, just as you plan to replace Jimmy with Danny. You are *using* another human being to acquire material possessions for yourself, rather than treating them with respect, as being an end in themselves. [long pause] I'll need you to sign this estimate [slides paper out from under car].

Bambi: You don't know me! How dare you?! I mean. . . you don't know the first thing about me! [kicks the paper] Well, it's not my fault I was born with a silver spoon up my ass! Do you have any idea what it's like growing up as some friggin' TROPHY daughter?! I've been pampered around my whole life, you think I don't know what it's going to be like when *daddy* isn't around? I'm going to drown!!! [starts to cry]

PM: [feet kick up erect, and then relax again] Ah, now we're getting somewhere. From the sound of your tears it would seem that you haven't examined your life lately. Surely you need to speak with your father about this, this will help you to stop seeking negative attention.

Bambi: [still crying] You really think that will help? [sniff]

PM: Sure! That's the ticket! [trying to change the subject] And I tell you what; I'll answer any one question that you have. [short pause] Think hard now, this is genie-in-the-bottle stuff. And don't worry about the philosophy fee. For you, I won't be a sophist. . . the philosophy is free today.

Bambi: Really? Wow, that is so cool [begins clearing up, wiping nose] Hmmm. [long pause] Oh, I know. Will I have a mansion on the ocean, with a yacht, when I get older?

PM: [sighs loudly] See, how did I know. For one, my dear, it is paradoxal to ask questions regarding the future, for whatever I tell you, it may in itself, prevent you from attaining it, because I would have influenced your prior course. Secondly, are you always going to be focused on materialism? Do you truly measure happiness with dollar signs?

Bambi: I thought I was the one that got to ask the questions. Okay, I've got one that's been bothering me. [starts twirling hair, and turns a foot on its toes] My friend at school told me that a pedicure could be used on a *pedophile*. . . like. . . like as a treatment or something. Is that true?

PM: [his feet fall limp] Ugggg–no.

Bambi: See! I knew he was messing with me. [her cell phone rings] Awesome, I can get my feet done again. Hello. [putting phone at chest] I just couldn't do it ya know, it felt gross. [very high pitched] Hi Danny! No sweetie, he said he's waiting on part for the i-g-n-i-. . . i-g-n-i-. . .

PM: IGNITION SWITCH!

Bambi: [quietly] he's kinda weird, you think you can come get me? . . . Yeah, it won't be done until tomorrow. [perky] Awesome, okay. . . see you soon sweetie, bu–bye. [puts phone back in purse, picks up paper and signs it] I'll see you tomorrow then, dude. [walks off the stage]

PM: [very sarcastic] yeah, alright. . . take care now, bye bye then [he begins mumbling about today's youth to the sound of a ratchet]

Pat: Dude. You here dude? [headbanger looking chick walks right to PM's feet] 'Sup dude?

PM: Not much man, how you doing?

Pat: [very relaxed, leans on car] I dunno, you tell me.

PM: Ut-oh, you didn't burn-up your clutch again did you?

Pat: No. Actually, I just wanted to open a philosophy repair order.

PM: You know the routine, grab one off the desk.

Pat: [walks over to desk and starts filling out repair order]

PM: So what's buggin' you?

Pat: This one's not for me, its for you~

PM: [his feet become erect] I don't follow.

Pat: Dude, I heard you make that poor girl cry. What the hell's gotten into you?

PM: Pfffffttt. . . I dunno, I just feel like. . . I dunno. . . I feel like the *catcher in the rye* or something. I see all these things that people can do to improve their lives, but they don't listen; they're just so friggin' close-minded to new things. I can see the path, I mean. . . it's foggy, but I still *see* it. Its like. . . its like, seeing through that little patch your defroster first clears at the bottom of a fogged-up window. You can see the road just barely, and in all reality, all it would take is a small speed bump to make for a *really* bad day. [laughing]

Pat: I don't see what's funny man, you just provided the answer your own conundrum–if your path to enlightenment, so to speak, is not *crystal* friggin' clear, then how the hell are you going to put people on that same foggy path? Throw them ahead to see what speed bumps they hit first; so *you* can avoid them?

PM: Whoa! Ease-up killer. It's nothing like that. There's just something that happens to me when I start wrenching [sound of ratchet], why the hell do you think I would open a Philosophy of Maintenance repair shop. I *flourish* in this pit.

Pat: That's the Aristotelian happiness-flourishing thing, and that's all fine and dandy. But you've become so wrapped up in flourishing in one area you've become stagnant in all others. I saw you over the weekend, walking around alone, staring at the ground; it's like you don't exist outside this shop, man.

PM: [while fidgeting his feet] Choose one thing and do it well, that's what Ari said, and that's what I'm doing. I must be doing something right; I'm hanging out somewhere in the pinnacle of pleasure, because this philosophy stuff is just flowing through me. I still dunno where the hell it all comes from, but I guess it's from that *flourishing* Ari was talking about.

Pat: Yeah, you *may* be content, but you're not *happy* – that's obvious to everyone, you're just a bitter gearhead that gets pissed-off when he's called a gearhead. If you want to be respected as an intellectual you should take your ass to school; instead of puking all over people with armchair philosophy.

PM: [crosses his legs] That was uncalled for.

Pat: Like you've said in the past, the truth hurts doesn't it?

PM: I'm in my element dammit, people come to me for advice and tune-ups, that's what I do. Besides, going to school is too expensive.

Pat: [steps aback] If you think your education is expensive; [flips hand in the air] try paying the price of ignorance.

PM: [Uncrosses legs and holds silent for a few beats, then re-crosses them] (almost pouting) I'M DOING ONE THING AND I'M DOING IT WELL, ERGO I'M FLOURISHING.

Pat: I give you that–you are a good technician. But I believe in what my grandfather told me, 'I'd rather know a little about a lot, than a lot about a little.'

PM: [his voice shows that he is bending a little] This all sounds quite wise, I'm beginning to feel like a fuel system after a good flushing. What do you have in mind?

Pat: Well, I think that we should get you enrolled in college for one, and. . .

PM: I can't go to college! I told you that Pat! I'm not smart enough for that shit! [almost crying, starts giving a quiet confession] The only place I can spew philosophy and stuff is from under a car.

Pat: [laughing] That's the craziest *shit* I have *ever* heard!

PM: Why do you think you saw me staring at the ground while I was walking around the other night? I have nothing to say unless I'm under a vehicle, man.

Pat: If that really be the case then you have developed some kind of complex or something from being a mech. . . .errrr, I mean uh. . . TECHnician.

PM: I guess its true, life is like the differential in your rear-end. Life is coming at you all twisted and you have to figure out which direction to turn it, or you'll just sit there spinning on it. . . [suddenly realizing something] like I have. . .

Pat: [throwing her hands up] Enough already, we'll tackle the school problem later; first thing's first. I know what you need; a little social interaction, [under breath] actually a lot of social interaction. You need a chick, bro–*bad*. I have one in mind for you, too.

PM: [feet crossing this way, and that] Must you force *two* cathartic experiences on me in one day?! Are you my pathos incarnate or what?! [takes a deep breath, then continues in a thundering voice] Again I say, what do you have in mind man?

Pat: Her name is *Heaven*. . . can you imagine that? She's got a great sense of humor, she has a degree in philosophy *and* psychology, she drives a Harley-chopper and wears a leather jacket with a dress, red-hair, blue-eyes, *and* she's an artist; you interested?

PM: Interested?! Hell! I'm ecstatic! I'm married! I DO!!! Where did you come across a beauty like that? [starts to work his way out from under the car]

Pat: Ran into her at the airport, literally. She's from Amsterdam.

PM: [stops getting out from under car] Ahhh MAN! Why the hell you wanna get my hopes up like that?

Pat: [standing aback, appalled and amazed] What the hell are you talking about?

PM: [crossed his feet] If I've told you once, I've told you a million times, I don't do imports, I don't have the right tool, and they cause me nothing but trouble.

Pat: Dude, you need an oil change and a remanufactured brain [fondling a wrench], but there ain't nothin' wrong with your tool.

PM: What the hell does that *mean*?

Pat: You need to change whatever part of that gray matter you have up there that's keeping you so close-minded.

PM: Pffftt. . . .

Pat: See, you may have flourished in this pit, but your philosophic-grasp is a bit elementary. If you would have dove into the pages of John Stewart Mill you would have realized that you are but scratching the surface. Aristotle was correct in stating that a human's ultimate end should be happiness, but there are different levels of pleasures you must experience, OUTSIDE THE BOX, to achieve that happiness. And I would say that you are certainly living within the box, thus you are no longer flourishing.

PM: [is silent and stops fidgeting his feet as Pat's dialogue ends]

Pat: Am I making any sense to you?

PM: Yeah. . . I guess that makes sense. [starts coming out from under the car slowly] Perhaps I am ready for the next step.

[PM looks at Pat and finds that this dream woman discussed earlier was right there under his nose.]

Pat: You uhh. . . still wanting to get married? [smiling from ear to ear and stepping towards PM]

PM: That's *not* the next step I had in mind, these things must be handled carefully. [laughing, but embarrassed, PM starts moving towards Pat with an outstretched hand]

[they walk toward each other, Pat pushes his hand away, and they embrace in an intimate hug]

[backing into an open hug for speech]

Pat: So what is your next step?

PM: What if I were to say I wanted you to educate me?

Pat: I'd say you have a lot to learn. . .

[they smile at each other, embrace tighter, and kiss deeply]

[LIGHTS OUT]

(Pat is Heaven)

Student Biographies

Alarcon, Gloria

Gloria Alarcon is a native of Queens, New York who has lived in Orlando for 11 years. She was a finance major at the University of Central Florida and looks toward creative writing as an escape from the number crunching. She currently works as a consultant for healthcare organizations.

Beougher, Katie

Katie is a sophomore history major, writing minor. She loves reading and writing.

Corsi, Alisha

Alisha is a 24-years-old, and was born and raised in Orlando, Florida. After graduating from Valencia Community College in 2003, she began Rollins in the summer, and will be graduating this May with a degree in psychology. She has been writing novels since the age of 11, and hopes to someday be a published author.

Crick, Shaun Edward

Shaun Edward Cricks is a Hamilton Holt student majoring in English with a minor in writing, which is not entirely his fault. He has an insatiable appetite for beauty, irony and peanut butter cups and enjoys both creative writing and journalism. Shaun is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and is presently obsessed with "the big T."

Finch, Darlyn

Darlyn Finch is an English Major/Writing Minor in the Hamilton Holt School at Rollins College. She has published short stories and poems, and her newspaper articles have appeared in the Florida Times Union/ Jacksonville Journal and the Orlando Sentinel. She was interviewed and read her poetry on "Poetic Logic," part of the Arts Connection Show on National Public Radio. Darlyn serves as Editorial Assistant for Brushing Art and Literary Magazine. She recently won poetry and creative non-fiction prizes at the Mt. Dora Festival of Music and Literature. She writes Scribbles, a periodic email newsletter for and about writers and literary events in the Central Florida area.

Gueret, Clementine

Clementine Gueret is French; she has been living in the United States since 1998. As a senior at the Holt school in an International affairs/business major, she chose photography as a hobby.

Harrison, Christine

Chistine is a senior, majoring in Organizational Communication, with a minor in Writing. Her first publication was "Fire-Flys" in Brushing's 2003 edition. Her top three interests are poetry, piano, and astronomy. "360 degrees" is inspired by the human capacity for hope and change; how life comes full circle giving us the choice to perpetuate one or the other, over and over again.

Joseph, Keri

Keri is a junior Political Science major and Writing minor at Rollins College. She enjoys reading and travelling. Keri is currently studying abroad in the London Internship program. While there is working in the House of Commons.

Kairys-Courech, Susan

Susan Kairys-Courech is a graduating Hamilton Holt Senior majoring in Anthropology with Writing minor. Observing the fleeting world through the camera's lens since a child, she captures the mystery of the natural world on film and digital pixel. Writing became the missing link and a passion, enhancing the artistry of telling a story. Sisters Take Flight was written for her women friends who after the hurricanes fled their significant relationships.

Leininger, Sam

Sam is a Holt student who attends A&S classes and, although he rarely studies, can regularly be found in the library. His other contradictions are far too banal and numerous to print.

Majhanovich, Jonothan

Jono was born and raised in Pinedale, Wyoming until he came to college in Florida in search of sunshine and warm weather. He is a sophomore and although he has yet to declare a major, if he finishes his education at Rollins, it will probably be, at least for the moment, psychology.

Rhodes, Maggie

Maggie Rhodes is from Potomac, Maryland, right outside of Washington, D.C. She is a sophomore at Rollins majoring in Art History with a double minor in Business and Studio Art. She is an active member in Chi Omega and is on the Sailing team as well. This is her second year as art editor for Brushing, but first year submitting. She has always enjoyed painting and drawing as a hobby.

Sansone, Nick

Nick hails from Orlando and is a self-proclaimed native tourist. He is an English major, which is as far from Math that he could get. Once again, his limitations dictate his path in life. He has been published in the Orlando Sentinel, Valencia Source, The Phoenix, MiPo Weekly Print, The Wilmington Blues, and some other ones no one has ever heard of. Why write you ask. He sucks at basketball and guitar-playing. Major: English, or to be more accurate Not Math. Once again, his limitations dictate his path in life...ah.

Saunders, Michael "Ike"

Ike Saunders is an 18 year old freshman in the Honors Program at Rollins. He plans to major in English and minor in Creative Writing with intent to pursue a law degree after graduating. He dabbles in all forms of creative writing, poetry being his favorite. "Never underestimate the beautiful power death and corruption evoke as inferior to that of love and joy. Writing colors the grimmest of pictures with the most vibrant of hues."

Smith, Heather

Heather Anita Smith is a senior Anthropology major and African/African American Studies Minor at Rollins. She is a freelance writer and often performs at open-mic nights and slam poetry.

Snead, Jamie

Jamie is a Hamilton Holt School student. This is her first time submitting to Brushing and she is very happy to be included in its pages.

Stolzenbach, Issac P.

Issac P. Stolzenbach was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, and moved to Florida on his thirteenth birthday. After high school he joined the U.S. Army where he started up company newsletters. His aspirations to become a writer lay dormant for many years until attending Professor Peter Ives' Expository Writing: Informal Essay course; it was after this class that Issac began working for The Sandspur and submitting essays for review. Aside from philosophy, Issac's favorite authors are Hunter S. Thompson, Clive Barker, and Edgar Allan Poe. He is currently double majoring in Humanities and Anthropology and will graduate this spring.

Trottier, Michael C.

A senior at Rollins, Michael is an English major with a minor in writing. He was born in Northbridge, MA. and has lived in FL for the past twenty years. His ambition for the future is to become a freelance writer of fiction and poetry while pursuing a career in journalism or editing.

Van den Berg, Laura

Laura van den Berg is a senior in the Hamilton Holt School, pursuing a major in English and a minor in writing. Laura's short fiction has been published in or is forthcoming from Oasis, The Tulane Review, Byline, StoryQuarterly, and the London based Tank Magazine. After graduation, she plans to enroll in a MFA program. So far, she has been offered admission from the University of Pittsburgh, Emerson College, and Sarah Lawrence College.

Varouh, Mary

Mary Varouh is a recent graduate of the Hamilton Holt School. Ironically, she waited until her last semester to fulfill her composition requirement and re-discover her love of writing. Mary is as a restaurant manager in the Orlando area and is currently working on several stories based on her work experiences which she hopes to publish.

Walker, Robert C.

Robert Walker is a senior English major. He enjoys writing, long walks on the beach, John Coltrane records, and smoothies from tropical smoothie. He writes poetry and prose, mostly about people and the stuff people do.

Webb, Sarah

Sarah Webb is a Holt School senior and plans to teach high school following graduation. She would like to thank Dr. Gail Sinclair and Dr. Sean Butler for their passion and dedication as professors. They will both be missed.

Colophon

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