2009

Brushing, 2009, Vol. 37

Rollins College Students

Brushing

Art & Literary Journal 2009

CHANGE

Cover Artwork: - Not Fade Away - Photograph - Marcela Wanderley

A Letter from the Editor

Change is inevitable; it happens every day, all the time. It may not be happening to you right this instance, but somewhere that same-old routine is being recreated; a butterfly is emerging from its cocoon; a musician decides to pick up their violin again; a literary journal is transforming into something new.

These last few years have been years of change for Brushing: changing from a nonexistent and dead journal to a vibrant piece of campus media; from simple to elaborate designs. This journal has been revived twice and now lives stronger than before.

But the change itself isn't what's remarkable; it's the choice to change, the decision to make a diffence, that creates something new: new beginnings, new endings, new purpose.

Nastassia Alayeto
Editor in Chief

"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending."

—Maria Robinson

Brushing Art & Literary Journal

Rollins College
1000 Holt Ave, Winter Park, FL, 32789
Phone: 407.646.2000
bjournal@rollins.edu

www.brushingjournal.org

Table of Contents

Art

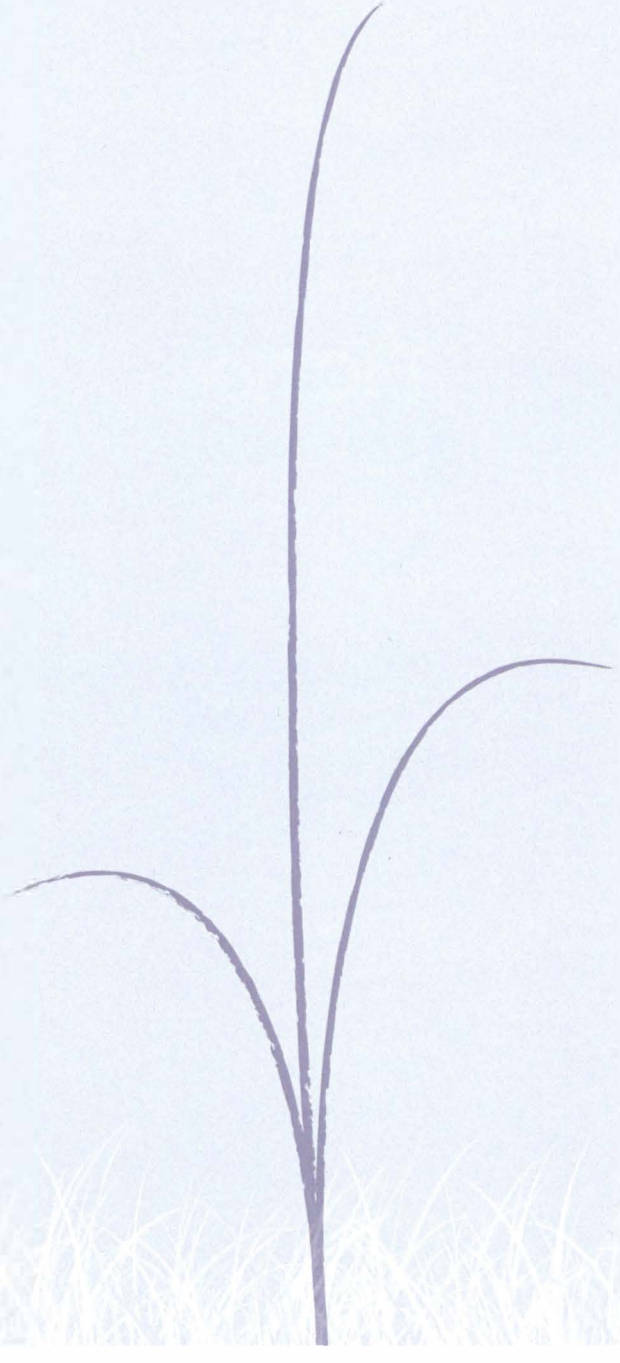
* * *

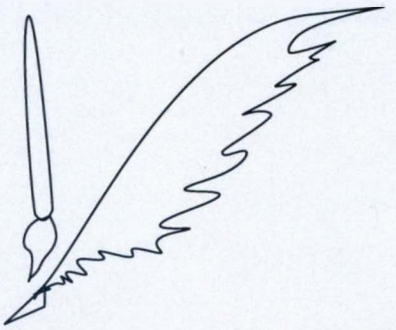
Poetry

Creative Nonfiction

* * *

Fiction





Poetry

Lantern Road

I found a can of crayons
In the back of Grandma's closet,
A Maxwell House of memories
From a time since forgotten, cherished.
I poured them out before me
And stared at them, like a rerun
Of a past so comforting
That I felt secure, as only a child can.
God-like they lay, the broken nubs and stubs,
Curled up wrappers, and shavings;
The colors of my youth: Burnt Orange, Aqua,
And Flesh when it was still politically correct.
The hands of the child I once was
Trembled as I combed through them.
The joy of such a discovery,
The sorrow that accompanied it.
Like molten wax, the present melts to expose
The fiery wick of lost childhood imagination.
The jubilation they once brought,
Not only to me, my brother,
But to our parents, our grandparents.
How many refrigerators adorned
Our dreams and our wishes
Created by these simple instruments?
How many came true?
If only those crayons held the power
Now that they once held.
I would draw a picture
Very similar to those I drew then:
Mom, Dad, Nana, Pop,
Chris and I
Together.

Anthony Baker

:B - Charcoal - Melissa May

MAMA

Mama drinks from a big, clear bottle when she sings the blues,
After Daddy yells about the dark, dark chicken and her brand new shoes.
She cleans all the knives but leaves our plates to soak,
Then hides out on the porch to light up and smoke.

Rocking gently on the swing, her warm tears slide and fall,
She can't see me through the window, her back against the wall.
Pulling on her sleeves to cover up the purple marks,
I watch the butt of her cigarette dance alone in the dark.

Hearing rough footsteps from the hall, I move away.
"Don't let Daddy hurt Mama again," I begin to pray.
Jumping onto the couch, I pretend to lie still,
Avoiding Daddy's eyes, you know his looks could kill.

Opening the door slowly, he creeps outside,
So I run to the window, my eyes open wide.
I watch as he approaches her, afraid 'cause she's so weak,
But he pushes her hair back and softly kisses her cheek.

Kim Hambright

Lakeside - Photography - Nastassia Alayeto

Puddle

Puddle is going to die very soon.
He didn't live long, not even a whole day
People have been avoiding him
Except for children and now…
he will be gone before the day ends.

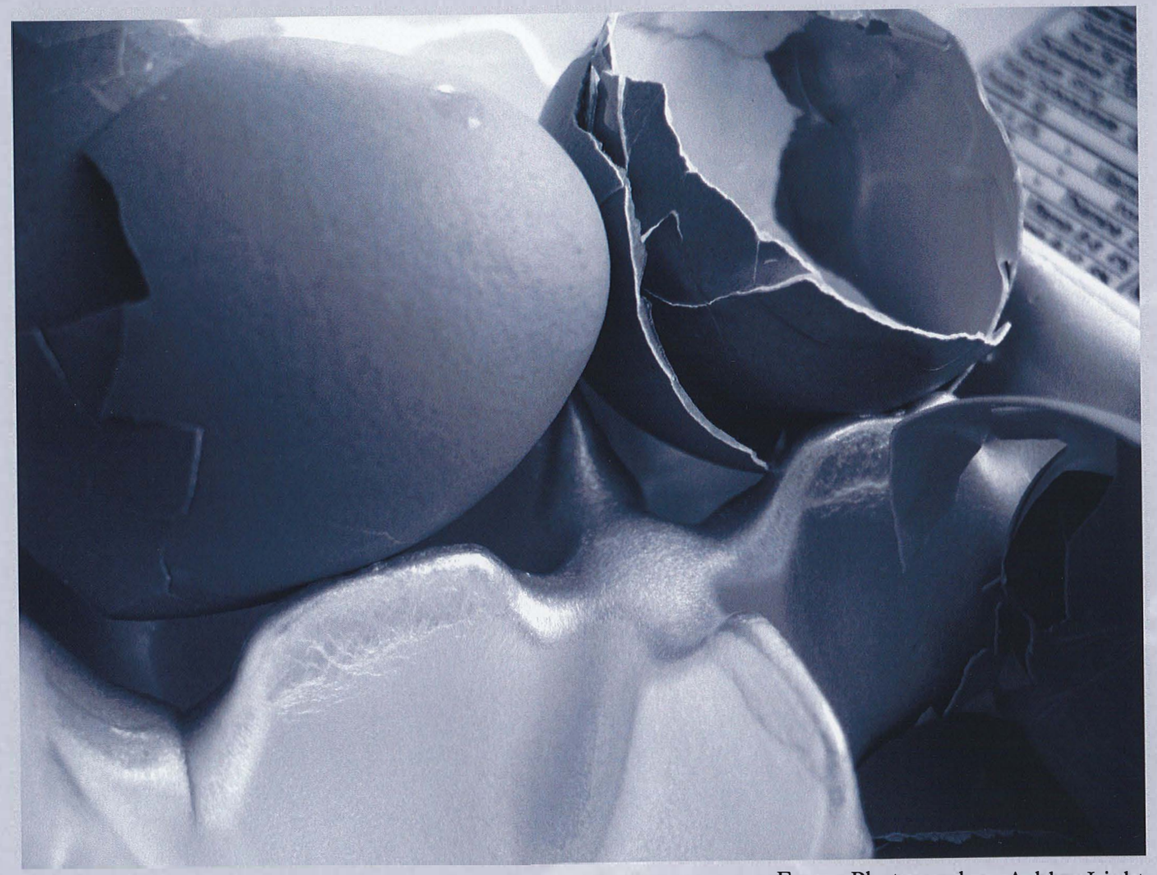
Oh don't worry, Puddle knew this was going to happen.
Rather than worry about his impending death,
he thinks about looking at the sky and how he reflects the sky himself

Puddle was very good at waiting calmly and watching.
He was thankful that he wasn't late or responsible or even loved
Because apparently love brought tears.
Earlier that day he had seen a woman cry a puddle of tears and it dried up so quickly it scarcely had time to see the world

Puddle didn't care if he was considered dirty, for he
was made of rain that came down from heave and just a splash of coffee.

That made him feel special and just a little jittery.

Jill Gable '89 & Evan Griffith '82



Eggs - Photography - Ashley Light

EMANCIPATION

When I dream
I see you
You're
In the tides of the dark morning
Ocean
You're
In the afternoon light
Golden
Your eyes
One with the clarity of clean blue skies: dreaming
One rich and warm like black coffee: focusing
Your hands
One waves at me- the outsider: loving
One inside your pocket: guarding
Your smile
Only covers one side of your face
The other half is firm and determined.
I reach
In an effort to rest my hand
At the summit of your smile
But I am confronted
By a layer of glass
I curl my hand into a fist
In sincere preparation to set you free
While I see your ex-pocketed hand curl
No longer a slave to subjectivity
We lean in close for one last word
In a deafness cushioned by plasticity
When I notice
We have matching bruises.
I am half-paralyzed.
"Hello rebecca." I hear one of us say.
"Forgive me if you're superstitious.
It's seven years of bad luck
But I have to do this."

Rebecca Webb

Empty House

Yesterday,
Driving up
With her,
Parents in Argentina
Empty house.

"C'mon, it'll be good for us,"
quality time
reassures her.
Coercion
Shouldn't be
Necessary.

The house reeks
Of our lust.
The ghost
Taints
The car,
Beach,
Pool
Bathtub,
Shower,
Counter-tops,
Washer,
Balcony,
Futon,
Bed.

Mom's wine
Dad's whiskey
Candles, high heels,
Lingerie,
And
The heat.

Is this the same room
It was all those years ago?

No one else,
Just us.

The mint green walls,
Swaying of the willows outside.
Sunshine burns my eyelid,
And
Her hand reaches over.

Jesus,
What have I done,
Bringing her here?

Jonathan Stamm

Light - Photography - Ashley Light

THE MOVIE STAR

The moment a movie
Becomes fake for me
The moment I spot that fourth wall
Is always when they walk into
A coffee bar or restaurant
And the man at the counter
Is gorgeous! Unnecessarily so,
Gorgeous gods serving the masses
Humbly.
I never encounter those guys.

Until last week.
I stop for my caffeine fix
And there's a star
Behind the counter.
"Here's your coffee," he smiles.
And I'm in the movie.

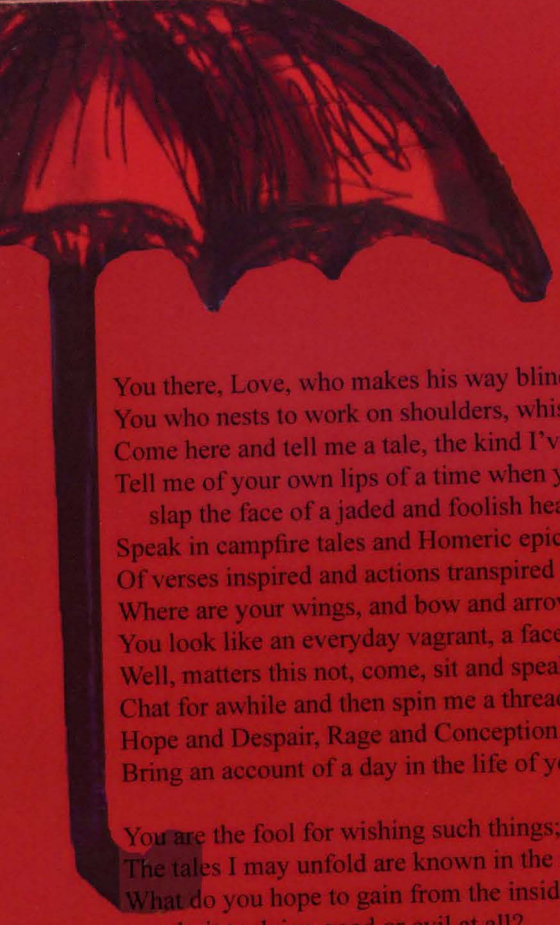
Christian Scholer

Liberty

I am tired of perfumed, petrified women
Stewing over melancholy poetry,
Gnawing their fingernails and
Mourning for their lost virginities,
For men who used to love them--
Always the same damn story:
One drunk night in high school
To a son-of-a-bitch,
Some thieving deceiver.
Yeah, well me too.
Give me a break
Or a beer
And someone with a hairy chest to lie on
Because all I want now is to rest in a world
Without reinterpretations;
Set those manifestos on fire;
Scrub the isms out of my mouth;
And kiss that highway robber on his eyelids.

Savannah Vickers

On the Prowl - Pencil - Morgan Conroy



Foolish Love

You there, Love, who makes his way blindly in streets and beaten paths alike;
You who nests to work on shoulders, whispering in ears while unseen fingers tug the heartstrings;
Come here and tell me a tale, the kind I've read and seen a thousand times over;
Tell me of your own lips of a time when you wandered and lost yourself, only to be found again when bright revelation
slap the face of a jaded and foolish heart;
Speak in campfire tales and Homeric epics of how you've driven men to war and women to fire;
Of verses inspired and actions transpired which might make a dumbfounded fool spit at your name;
Where are your wings, and bow and arrow of lore?
You look like an everyday vagrant, a face as peculiar as it should be jovial;
Well, matters this not, come, sit and speak,
Chat for awhile and then spin me a thread of bitt'rest emotion, bringing forth your cousins
Hope and Despair, Rage and Conception;
Bring an account of a day in the life of you, the one true god of I and of all.

You are the fool for wishing such things;
The tales I may unfold are known in the most private senses for eons over;
What do you hope to gain from the inside perspective of a Tiresian deity, so deep in its own wallowing that it can nary
admit to doing good or evil at all?
'Tis wary work as Cupid's Hand,
For indifference bred in the constancy of passion deprives one's soul of finding even an ounce of beauty in two young
bodies intertwined in purest degrees 'neath the night sky;
Those young lovers in strolling by
Lazily, hand-in-hand
Know not the hell that lies before them:
The raging squabbles, the doubts of lives soon long-past;
I'm told I'm worth all, but the fickle nature besetting my work-horse oozes onto my once idyllic philosophies
What would you have me do?

Meet my gaze, o foolish angel!
Look again at they who lie:
Her bed is soft, but still, they merely lie,
Not motionless, but intertwined in arm and eye;
They are young, but you know them well.
Of all, they two could spew vile hatred in your face for what you've done to them in so-called lives long-past:
You have scarred and they are marred, and you have beaten them down without apology,
And yet together they welcome you in home and heart;
They smile at you, write to you, and adore you more than ever before.
What do you say to Love like this?
When two lovely creatures such as they give you such redemption?
You belong with the likes of them
Who embrace you like a frightened child in the night.
Be warmed, be comforted, and lose not sight of why they keep you:
You are splendid, you are beauty, you are Love itself!
Doubt not who and what you are, where and how you work;
Make new tales, better tales, because what they show and what they know
Means their and our hearts may soar
When you put forth an effort.

Alex Ruiz

Man with the Umbrella - Ink / Digital Drawing - Allison Osterloh

Roses Park Ave - Digital Art - Ron Pease

My Amazing Mother

I was lucky to be born to a woman
Who loves to watch things grow.
Even our garden thrives in drought
Due to my mother's tears that fall
to the soil as she prays for rain.

When my mother found
Her own womb in drought
She dug knives
Into her forehead
To carve
A doorway
For my life.

My mother feared she could
feel me in her womb knitting
a noose to return to heaven.
Conceived nine years after my brother
And one year after my parents gave up,
She knew I was her last hope
To plant a woman in the earth.

She fought with fury
Against doctors' prods to
consider abortion-
"At your age, retardation
And deformation are a risk"
"And your point?"
she would say unblinkingly.

10 years later her brain tumor
Grew back again.
I said a prayer
During my 4th grade math test,
Knowing the exact time
She would be the one completely
In the hands of someone else.

Her tumor is almost as
Persistent as she is-
It had been 10 years again since
My fourth grade math prayer
When I found her in
Her garden
Yelling at God
Wearing loneliness
Under her eyes and
Around her knuckles.

"Mom, I'll keep you
In my prayers"
I say it because
I have no control.
I'm twice the age I
Was last time,
But I feel as vulnerable
As half that.

In her words,
I see her-
Strapped down to
The operating table
Wearing her collar bone
as a crucifix.
The nurse bringing
A wet cloth and
Baptism smoothing
Out her furrowed brow.
Only one drop of blood
In her hand when she awakes
As evidence of the
Halos that were screwed
Around her head-
In order for her to
remain with me
As an angel on Earth.

My knees ask the garden ground
What blessing keeps her here:
Whether my mother has been blessed
By a God who loves to watch her grow

or I have been blessed by a mother
who is determined to watch me grow.

Rebecca Webb

Perfect, Considered, Mindless

From the bottom of a well, you can see stars, even in daylight; his eyes
were like that, all raucous with light and laughter till the moon rose and we
were folded against one another like the soft sections of a Fibonacci shell:
perfect, considered, mindless.

Like struck steel he's folded and coursed through with himself, like a blade,
and you can show the pattern with acid, if you care
to try: all that blood and all those days of anger; all the waiting, the waiting
till the right moment and then

running. He's good at that, too; always a tripped balance ready to run, to run, and that's
how I found and lost him, those moments teetering and he's a brink himself:
a hinterland of longing, a long salt-slaked swallow that took me up, and cast me back
to nothing.

Nicole Jones

Postal - Photography - David Celis

Your Eyes

for Valarie

Soft, they caught me.
Blue, they hold me.
Green, they keep me.

Flash,
They drop me.
Flash.

Gray, they scar me.
Blue, they tell me.
Soft, they break me.

Flash,
Sad too.
Flash.

Sad, they touch me.
Sad, they debase me.
Sad, they dissect me.

Flash,
They tire me.
Flash.

Soft, they crush me.
Blue, they hold me.
Gray, they arouse me.

Flash,
They excite me.
Flash.

Green, they confuse me.
Blue, they scold me.
Soft, they inspire me.

Flash,
They enwrap me.
Flash

Gene Moore

Mengdi Yao - Acrylic - Illumination

Water Droplets - Photography - Ashley Light

The Giving Food

White, ancient seeds
encircle a glazed earthen bowl
Each grain reflects the sunshine
in this sweet, joyful experience

Wafting Jasmine scents
Nut-like morsels tease my taste
Simple, soft pearls stick to the pallet -
Aromatic cereal of wellbeing

Birthed by the Monsoons
Aching limbs toiling
Buffalo muscles straining
Growing where other grains hesitate

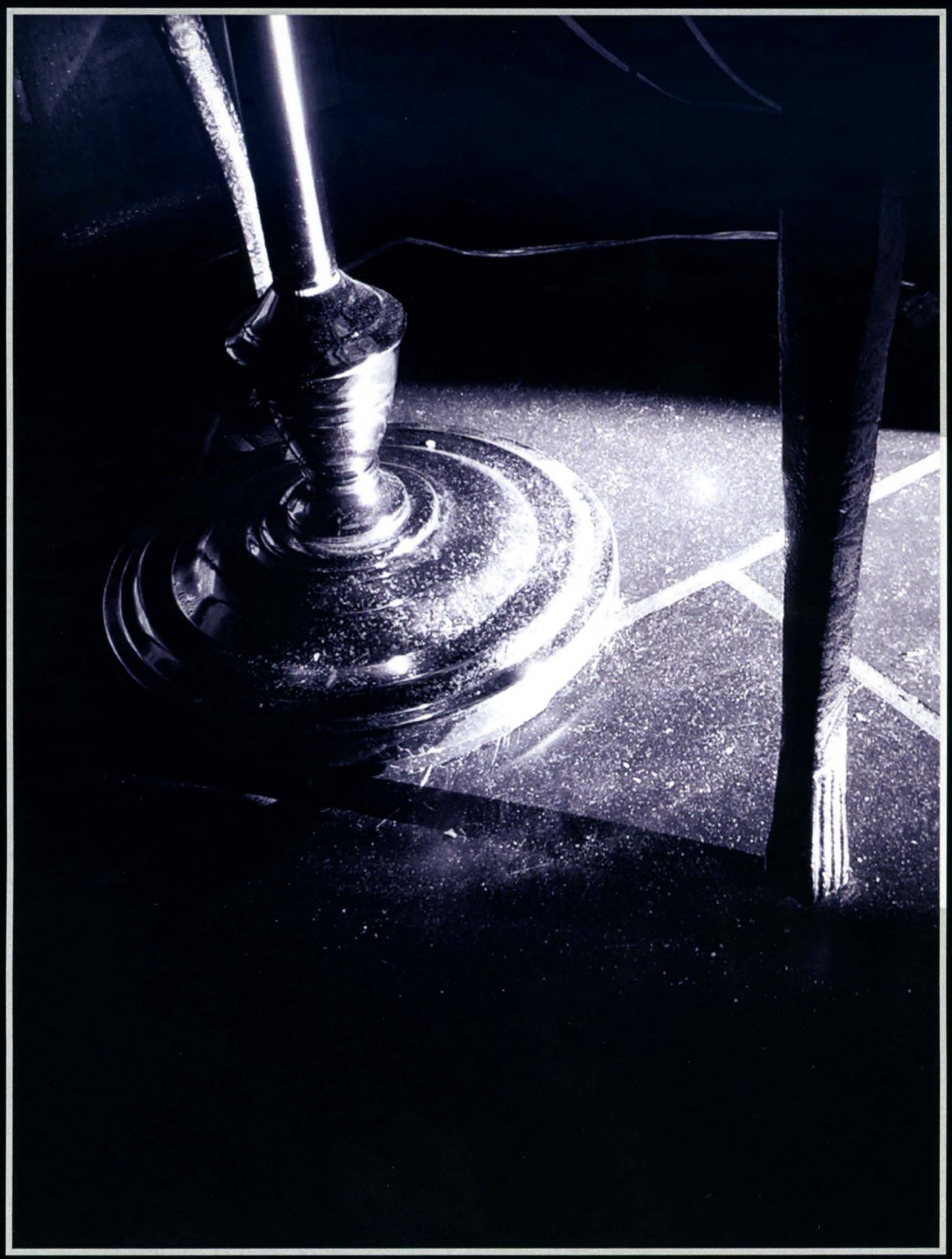
Slender, tiny beads
a treasure to humankind
nurtures and quells my cravings
Mindfully, I consume the giving food.

Emily Bailey

Dew

A bead of moisture
Rolls down taut skin,
Creeping along leisurely,
As if it has no place to go,
Slowly rolling,
Leisurely creeping,
Precisely between two rises of rosy flesh.
And as it crawls
Lower,
Lower,
Lower,
It leaves a trail of itself behind
To evaporate into the expectant air,
Or to be lapped up
By whatever hungry predator that
Happens to pass,
Following the trail from bottom to top
With a pink tongue eager to grab
Every
Last
Drop.

Danielle Lincoln



The Ordinary - Photography - Akin Ritchie

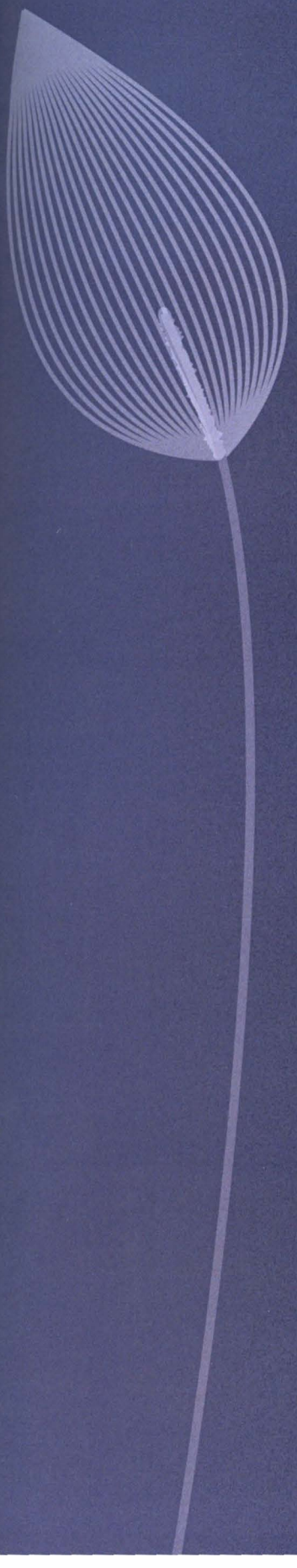
$2\pi r$

I sit in my
brown leather chair
reclined,
at a loss
where to find
comfort
for my soul
enduring
even sublime
or
at the very least
a few hours
of peace of mind
elusive rest
merciful pause
of wandering thoughts
traveling
a circular route
with no end
despite the growing pressure
behind my forehead
causing my face
to recoil and tighten
as if it were better
to implode
then explode
out onto the ground
where it would become
someone else's problem now
that my thoughts
have spilled out
no longer bound
to the madness
of being.

A point
moving
along the perimeter
of a circle
trying to find
a way out.

Maritza Melecio

Infra Red Peace Lily - Photography - Ron Pease



Woman

As peaceful as a storm you are,
A feather of a fight.
When you no longer play the lamb
I'll kiss this dove goodnight.

Jess Drew

Hidden Away - Photography - Marie Patrick

A View

looking at *a window*
a knot in the ash tree *a passage*
seems an evil eye *a myth*

your sigh *a brick*
cues the knot *a stone*
in my stomach *a ritual*

swirls *a ribbon*
of cigarette smoke *a string*
follow your words *a knot*

light *a path*
dances with dust *a road*
at my feet *a guide*

until you draw the drapes

Sandra Chavez Johnson

Midnight Fire Bright - Photomanipulation - Allison Osterloh

The Bright Things

I woke this morning like Adam after Eve's creation.
Numbed by God's poignant fingerprints
on my eyelids, on my tongue, on my chest—
When I remembered to inhale,
something like a sad little waltz
echoed in the hollows of my ribcage.
A pure, innocent melancholy
slept along the sea of my skin—
but I was Awake.
I bit on all those bright things
with a euphoria that nibbled the trembling limit
of my breath.
The elegant, raw light in my mouth
pierced me as I swallowed and
ignited like coals when I spoke.
And though God warns not to swear—
I swear, I swear they fell to their knees
when they heard!

Victoria Sanchez

Abandoned - Digital Art - Ron Pease

The Art of Compassion

It makes one fume to see the other side;
Where no pastel green grows, and perhaps
In the absence of high-healed shoes or platted forms
One loses the individual beneath the canvas.

Inside the brush, there lies REM branded sleep.
As Moses' art fiddled amongst the steep-angled stars
And prayed for supple, mental notes of sheer
Brilliance! One network of galvanic revelation!

If only dreams could mesh oil
with oil, and grow marvels out of faith-
less beggars buying cardboard,
borrowing Sharpies and holding their way of life.

Rebecca Kon

Archaeology

I love you like Florida, pre-European invasion,
when the squirrels could run to Tennessee
without touching the ground.

Like the darker loam of the post holes
of the Tequesta, Tocobago, and Calusa
who built in the sugar sand and limestone.

Like pottery sherds discovered at a midden,
small broken pieces that might make a jug or bowl.
A history lighter than you would expect.

I love you like the meticulous levels,
counted in centimeters to preserve the importance
of tiny parts and their relation to others.

Like the sketches of bone and carved rock
that inevitably caught centuries old soil that
smudged over my carefully wrought pictures.

Mistie Watkins

Skyscraper - Mixed Media - Melissa Mays

View from a Sidewalk in Key West

(for Johnnie Keen)

Sweat,
in the breezeless,
predawn darkness
on Frances Street.

I am washed in heat and humidity
as hopeful, roving bands of lecherous
roosters announce—Sunrise!—with the
rising, eastern, pastel canvas.

Key West reveals itself,
as I walk the short distance,
up to Mallory Square:

Stale beer,
hardened vomit,
crusty conchs,
street cleaners,
closed shops,
rain trees,
bums,
hens.

Cats, straw hats, palm trees, stink, water, baby chicks, cigarette butts.

Beauty.

Condoms, plastic, cigars, vegan restaurants, drag queen bars, dogs, conchs, public sex,

Duval.
Illusions, sand, gays, food.

Booze,
massage parlors,
tropical,
money,
homelessness,

B & B's
5 star,
leather.

Organic, banana and
blueberry smoothies
with Synergy.

Scuba,
blackened-tuna,
key lime pie,
tarpon.

Blue Heaven.

Sex shops, palm readers, fire dancers, grouper sandwiches, black beans, blown glass, tequila.

The Concha Hotel.

Clothing optional, coconut shrimp, crack-heads, ginger bread, sailboats,
margaritas,
ceiling fans,
excitement.

Bougainvillea.

Over-priced everything.

Cruise ships,
air conditioning,
towels,
sandals,
sunglasses,
artists,
yellow rice,
old men.

Young men, frozen bananas, termites, police, old women, young women.

Blue.

Coffee, jet skis, helium balloons, garbage cans, tofu, piercing, sushi, lesbians, street people.

Breeze,
Cuba,
Navy.

Loneliness.

Avant-garde, Coast Guard. Tattoo.

Pink.

Green tea ice cream with red bean sauce. Help wanted-apply within. No public restrooms.

Hemingway, wood-rot, Cuban bread, panhandlers, pink taxis, bicycles.

Yellow.

Havana, ATM machines, jewelry, cash only, Fort Jefferson, time share, para-sail, musicians.

Marlin,
bridges,
literary,
Tennessee Williams,
Bahama Village.

Poets.

Ports,
hurricanes,
The Custom House, and
Mallory Square.

Roving bands of lecherous
roosters announce—Sunset!—with the
setting, western, pastel canvas before retiring
for the evening; dissatisfied, however all
the more hopeful with the coming day.

Gene Moore

Palm Island Paradise - Photography - Rachel Hessling

THE BLANK EVERYONE

"Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!"
T.S. Eliot, The Hollow Men

There's something passive to be said of hollow men,
As if a you couldn't figure that out for yourself:
They stand, they sit, they eat, they sleep,
Love to them is an expectation;
Sex , a movement moderately desired
Like feeling the urge to take a walk on a cool, breezy afternoon.

Who should they find to bother them?
They read papers and may remark on regrettable lives,
Perhaps even support a starving African child
Cradled in the arms of a woman with a cross on her neck and a tear in her eye;
A few pennies a day is all the cost of redemption!
Seems like a fair trade.

Onion - Photography - Ashley Light

THE BLANK EVERYONE

These are the men who fall asleep after most ejaculations,
Roll over and prepare for the next day
Soon at hand with a moderately priced, sensible looking alarm clock—
The analog kind with real bells—
Every so often, he hits the snooze button once or twice,
But only so often, and never more than twice.

These are the women who cook easily out of books:
They can chop an onion and pour it in without so much as a drop.
Afterwards, they sit down with a magazine or new hardcover,
Legs curled together, but with an oddly straight back,
Sipping something brightly colored
With Chopin playing (not too loud) in the background
This is they, who we aspire to be,
Parents to poets and clones alike,
Who love because it's expected,
And don't feel the need to go to church because it seems impractical;
Yes, indeed, there's a Bible on the bookshelf,
But it isn't like they're going to waste time filling in the family tree.

And on the day that he dies,
Sometime around year 74.6,
It'll be a nice funeral, with a nice tombstone—
Nothing too extravagant—
He wouldn't like that;
Besides, we wouldn't want to spend too much more than the funeral insurance.

I visit the grave every now and then,
And always like to leave a few sunflowers or daisies
A simple name, a few dates,
It's pretty in a way, if you like that sort of thing;
The graveyard people keep everything tidy;
She'd like it that way.

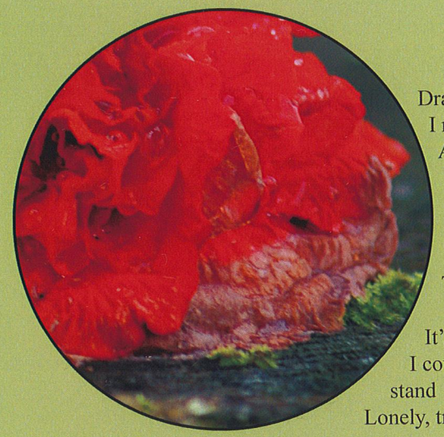
Alex Ruiz

Hood Tree - Photography - Rachel Hessli

At the Border

Smells of lemon and baby diapers
It's always best to cross the border in the morning, Papá says
Squinting in the sunlight
Chávez, Moreno, Ramirez, Rangel
Cars crawl
Beggars and sellers wave wares into open windows
Chiclets, Rosaries, and Luck
Garcia, Perez, Guadalupe, Hidalgo
Crossing border requires card
The important part is on the back, he says
Was admitted to the United States as an immigrant on 08 25 55
Worked Fields, Built Railroads, Cleaned Toilets
At 35 he went to find a Virgin in México
and came back with my mother
I wanted to know if I could still have children, he says

Sandra Chavez Johnson



Days in Argentina

Dragging through the avenue my dainty gait,
I reek of that sad resigned sound-
An exhalation through closed lips
All those lonely sounds of peace and trees known for just one moment
Sounds that banally recall in some the breezy airs of springtime

No, I bear these chirps, rustles, and sways as marble sheets
That fortify a crowned kingdom of sorrow in every barren province of my soul

It's springtime in reverse and in these weakest weeks
I cower before the city and bleed the blood of a captive goddess I beg to understand
Lonely, trembling goddess of resigned solitude and forlorn beauty

Jessica Drew

New Orleans

for Michele

to know the destiny of her leavings,
we went to view destruction as spectators seeking
martyrdom in the cracks, the crevices, the rotting carcass of a kingdom,
as grief swayed a lynched city. hope stretched
barren branches towards the heavens to grasp the indifferent hands of God.
communication useless as town criers noted
death toll lotteries with increasing apathy.

we went to view destruction, the remnants, of the rage of elements.
winds of gnashing teeth left torsos of opulence, the eccentric backbones of architecture.
we went to view destruction. the days dead buoyed by, poached pale
pillows rolling rinds curled puddles posed as rivers gone awry.
wood, stone, brick, perishables rocked bobbing coffins blinking
macabre Morse codes for those.
for those who never came we traveled by roadsides trampled barren, broken by
occasional clusters of cowering wildflower's scent, the heartless stench of futility, the
irrevocable choices, strong or weak, young or old, live or die.
we went to view destruction, where the natives rippled under
over others lay stood stacked sandbags of opaque horror still
signposts at schizophrenic crossroads as Nikon harnessed predators
eyed their prey with insatiable appetites.

Sandy Hill

Rot - Photography - David Celis

a day in the Evening

This morning the sky was white,
All bereft of indignation and classification.
Shapes storied of lives born
To die
Usurped the coddled air.

As time would tarry,
It tinted blue,
Which was pleasant
Despite its tethered arena
All resplendence in chains.

The insensible found their
Windswept ends decked with horizons
And on the eve of dropping in
I overheard a sundry call:
Take to the wind and breathe.

Abiding by the hue of its day –
To see eye to foot; ever so
Willingly like the river
To flow with the creek.
Break banks, hold yourself on crags.

As a black mass tucked in the night
I was unsettled; the water with ripples.
I stepped onto shore, kissed discontentment,
Embraced the contrast I never grew up with,
And found a new day in history standing there.

The white pinpricks were born
With the evening; all weathered,
Anticipating a life of matched moments.
So, I saw no difference
When the lights went out.

But I didn't know the difference,
And that made a difference.

Rebecca Kon

Old Mill - Digital Art - Ron Pease

Angel at Bethesda Fountain - Photomanipulation - Allison Osterloh

Leafless in February

Another six hours
between
The sheets of my imagination,
I take a thought
And
t
w
i
s
t
The resistance of closing lids.

Her dappled skin and quiet eyes
Passivity - hard to argue.
Nonetheless, one takes
A step forward, noticing
There is
one less
step.

In regard
to
man kind's
sphere

Something is amiss, slighted, brittle;
Lost in substance AndInOnePiece

Except a peace,
i
t
s
n
o
w
s.

It paints your lips blue
With an Expo marker
Painting death, a life sky
A poison rose, or pure;
One of **whole** color.

Black, a tint to be
Challenged. To be lit.

And as longing does
One is
withheld
In equivocal silence, until
The knowledge is your own.

Rebecca Kon

Primitive Design - Digital Photography - Leslie Capobianco

The Room

Cathleen Bota

White paper cranes
hang from clear fishing wire
across stark crown molding.
Floors shine like
the face of your guitar.

Furniture made of snowy down,
hungry for a visitor.
In the center, a neat pile
of blank canvases.

I know what the room
looks like.
I've seen it behind
your eyes.

Inside,
the fan disperses
synaptic connections.
An infinite braid of light
glows brightly on the ceiling.

Knock, knock
I shake you awake.
The curtains pull open,
and you say "hello."

Silent Jars

Rebecca Kon

Allegation against Playstation
"I'm lovin' it"—humanists
It's not fast food,
It's new blood, fresh off the kettle.

Let's settle
This—two night,
A three day revolution cruise,
Sensational and having it your own way.

Obliterate the obstinate;
Candidates for objection
And roll in courtesy, yes courtesy;
An uncommon Clydesdale.

Competition—a Bengal tiger
Prey on the young and drag;
Ripping apart electronic carcasses,
Rumbling the stoic drift.

In the Sun we Trust, like
Mobil, you can get the best
Two political whiplashes
Served with a side of fries
And a fresh Coca-Cola.

Bigger better—contribution,
Useless fallacies and wonky
Corporate followers,
Under the table
Leave slips of choices
For the impoverished
Dollars collecting dust.

Opportunity? Yes, opportunity.
Cannot buy butter,
While overseas they huddle
Pockets bulge in thick hands
And call to mind our
Opportunity for recession,
Descending into depression
A lesson on closed ears
And toppled grease.

Your pot is melting America,
Fresh out of the oven
Come and get it
Before it's gone.

Dirt Cookies

Wake up. There are children eating dirt cookies.

It was lunchtime, but it was also hungertime.
There was a mix of emotion included
In the batch of mud and starvation.
Those who saw it stood with a caught breath for
A prayer not yet answered. And so their hands
Loosened their grip on the image—just another moment…

Just another moment ago, the taste
In the mouths of God's littlest children knew
The earth better than any. The heat oven
Pressed against the roofs
Of their mouths; they swallowed their last resort.
The sun shown wearily on those dirt desserts,
And mixed three unlikely ingredients
The salt, the vegetable shortening, the dirt,
Into one glob of survival.

Their stomachs churned with gritty mud in their throats.
The dirt gave to the hunger, and took away from the thirst.
The thirst begged the rain. The rain was dry.

A stomach growls
In the coming of lunchtime,
A prayer was heard, but not yet answered.
Those who normally ate
Breakfast noticed the dog inside their stomachs.
Scratching their throats and howling
In intervals, the dog moaned
And still could not rest. It dug its nails deeper.

The village knows not
What God has in mind for those
Who eat the earth…

So with mixed emotions they inhale
The smooth and gritty dirt cookies,
Waiting for their answer and for the dog to release its nails
From a hopeful and emaciated chest.
Nails of tension. Nails of faith.
Nails of anticipation for a turkey sandwich
And a glass of whole nourishing milk,
Like a mix of skim and chocolate
A delicious, united elixir.

Rebecca Kon

Boy - Photography - Ashley Light

Girl in the Shoes - Ink / Digital Drawing - Allison Osterloh

Ballad of the Dead Child

"That woman, there!" my mother breathed.
"She's wept ten thousand tears.
One thousand for each dead son,"
Mom whispered in my ear.

"She wears black every single day,
And stares with hollow eyes.
And he who dares to walk past her,
She plagues until he dies."

"I heard it from our baker—Oh
he swears his cousin passed,
and after ten long days wore shrouds.
Death will not be surpassed."

At once the hairs on my arms rose.
I wished to run away.
I tried to turn my head, but my
body would not obey.

My eyes were fixed on her—oh God!
That woman stared at me!
"She looked! That woman looked at us!"
Dear mom smiled. "It can't be."

That night a blackish lump appeared
before me, bent and weak.
I rubbed my eyes but there it was,
and it began to speak.

"The sons I bore are dead, but oh—
my daughter lives, it's true!"
Her bony finger pointed straight.
"My child," she cried, "It's you!"

"I had to eat, I was so poor
and surely I did so,
and one by one your brothers fell
in our bread's daily dough."

"They threw you in the river, but
my darling girl survived,
I searched and searched to make you mine
so happy you'd not died."

"Now come, my child, to your new home,
you'll now live with me."
She took my arm and gripped me tight,
I struggled fruitlessly.

Now I live on with dear sweet mom,
on that white corner where
we haunt the souls who dare to pass
our mourning figures there.

Victoria Sanchez

Bottles - Digital Art - Ron Pease

Comfort

She sobbed, “No!” He said, “What?”
He mumbled, always he mumbled, fumbled.
Fumbling with mumbles and other things he should not
Caused her to lose footing and stumble.

He said, “I don’t know why; let me forget.”
But for all his unsurety,
How could she trust he remember that which
She should let him forget?
Instead she remembers for him
Lest he forget why
He did what he did but wishes to forget.

She simmers the memories in a teapot,
(laced with a lop of laughter;
Spicy tears; boredom; an angry shot of indignation;
Pride; jealousy; steeping pain; not without seeping sadness.)
Lemon, arsenic and sugar-- served up hot--
Remembering to add a drop-full of Forgot.

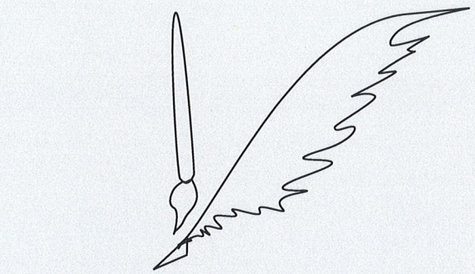
Colette King

The Sack of the Gods

That night I stormed Valhalla, a million
years ago, t'was I, Queen of the Red Red Sea—
who bore my wearied soldiers on my back
and led them to our rest. The golden spires
of shields shined in the dense dust of dead stars,
on this, our bleak and glorious passing. “Ah!
My foes there drift,” I mused, “And I dispatched them.
I breathed and drank and swam in bitter blood.
I sent their souls with severed heads, t'was I
their dread incarnate, face of Soldiers' long
dead lovers.” Lovers...I loved once, I think—
when my forgotten body drifted not
in blackened ash of smothered fires or white,
limp corpses of these bloodless mortals. I—
I can recall a man of Incan race
whose fierce, black eyes were tamed by mine alone—
before I stormed Valhalla so very
long ago... White gods came from distant shores,
desired to conquer tribe and nation. But,
I pledged myself before their battle in
the shadows of the night—not stars, not moon,
not Valkyries—saw such a splendid sight.
“I would, my lord, be yours for all you'd have
me do. The living threads of sea I spew
from savage lips I'd gladly hand to you.
I'd set your navy in the swiftest paths
along my skin of spinning fingertips.
I'd weave the strongest armor of the scales
that cover both my hips and, yes, you'd be
the envy of all generals—amongst
the living and the dead! My body I
devote to serve whate'er your dark desire—
traverse my fearless vagabond, 'long dust
that longs for you.” My lord then smiled at me.
So cold it was and cruel! He knew his fate.
He knew! He knew—he murmured soft into
my skin. “Tonight we storm Valhalla, Queen.
This very night I die.” We walked into
my sea. He took those things I sacrificed
and many gave to me. Dawn blindly charged—
the garish sun in silver sky arose.
The deed was done, the battle won, but our
ill-fated war was lost. Our men now slept.
The judgment passed—not one was left with breath.
Valhalla quickly captured him and now
to him I go! I fly amid the stars—
'mid solar labyrinths of violet suns
that bold in violence, threaten to explode.
I bid farewell their faded skeletons;
The bright gold spires I see! The holy gates
of our Valhalla! There I'll be ‘till the
world has need of you or me, my Incan
lord, and your Queenly sea. We shall await
the Ragnarok, my Incan lord and I. We'll
remember the night we stormed Valhalla—
the glorious night we died.

Victoria Sanchez

Burnt - Digitalmanipulation - Marcela Wanderley



Creative Nonfiction

SORE THUMBS

The sign said "Piedmont Acres" with an accent. I drove past it, mostly ignoring the perfectly manicured expanse of grass that frequently disappeared behind hills of more grass. The occasional distinguished oak tree blotted out the morning sunshine in shady moments that were gone just before they could be appreciated, like the world was poking fun at me for being sleepy.

"Well, fuck you then," I murmured.

"Aww, is Maxy going to be grumpy this morning?" asked the figure in my passenger seat. Goose was always cheerier when someone else was in a bad mood. I looked to see his disturbingly boyish face smiling out from underneath a short mohawk and a scrotum of facial hair. He looked like a kid who was promoted to adulthood without going through puberty.

"Wasn't talking to you. Anyway, do you know where we're supposed to park?" I asked.

"Up here on the right," he said.

We rounded a final hill to see a mostly empty parking lot on the right of the country club's entrance. My truck rolled to a stop next to a very used white subcompact. As I got out and stretched, I glanced at the mess of automotive magazines and styrofoam containers strewn about the car's interior.

"Someone else who doesn't want to be here," I thought to myself.

I grabbed my backpack out of the backseat and started toward the entrance, where Goose was already talking with a lady at the front desk. Looking through the glass front door, I saw her with hands clasped tightly together, eyes dancing fitfully between me and my partner before they fixed on my shirt for several seconds. I opened the door and walked into a brick wall of air conditioning.

"Er... yes. As I was saying to your… friend, here, the band is still clearing their equipment off the dance floor. You two can wait outside, it will probably be another twenty minutes," she said, her knuckles beginning to turn white.

I felt her eyes on my back until the door shut behind us.

"Classy joint, eh?" said Goose, cigarette already dangling from his lips as he wandered through his numerous pockets for a lighter.

"Real bourgeois, if that's what you mean. Do you know what we're doing?" I asked.

"Picking up the dance floor. Don't worry, the whole thing's modular," he said as he lit his cigarette.

Modular. Since I'd become a stagehand, I'd learned that practically everything could be modular. Most stagehands were men at least twice my size who spent their days building and demolishing functional structures on short notice; they defined "modular" like a pack of lions would define "bite-sized."

"Won't have much use for this then?" I asked, pulling at the crescent wrench in my pocket.

"Eh, you never know," he said in a puff of smoke.

I shook my legs a little bit to get the contents of my pockets to settle down again, feeling my wrench slide into place next to my knife and a cheap multitool. The orange chalk bag clipped to my waist rolled lazily against my thigh, concealing a roll of purple electrical tape, a screwdriver, some tie-line, my wallet, and a small first aide kit filled with a condom and breath mints. I felt like a boy scout.

We watched as a shiny black sedan rolled over the hills toward our designated waiting area. Jaguar. Obscenely bright blue-white headlights washed over our shady spot as it pulled around to the front door, leaving us staring at a vanity plate that read "VANITY," lit red by the break lights. I glanced at Goose to see him rolling his eyes. It was too early for meta-humor, apparently.

"Aww, and I bet he thinks he's clever," said Goose with his pity voice. "You want to hear a better joke?"

"We both know that you're going to tell me either way," I said, sitting down on the curb.

"How do you know if a stagehand got laid?" he asked.

I drew out the pause, watching the sedan's driver walk past us up the front steps. His hair was graying at the sides, clashing with his orange tan and a maroon polo shirt that showed just a hint of beer gut. Business style khaki pants over black tasseled loafers rounded out the fashion faux pas.

"They have two clean fingers!" he said.

"Thanks for that, Goose. Did you know that Hellen Keller had a dollhouse in her backyard?"

He shook his head, bending down to snuff out his cigarette.

"Neither did she," I said.

"Excuse me," said an irritated voice over the whoosh of the glass door opening.

We turned to see a black three-piece suit with a golden name-tag holding the door open; the large bald man in it looked angry.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"CrewBums, local labor," Goose said. "We're here to take out a dance floor."

"Why are you out here then?"

"We were told to wait out here until the band finished removing their equipment," I said, smiling.

He looked across the hills to see two more cars approaching, a pained expression on his face.

"Wait inside," he said, stepping aside and waving us through the doors.

Back into the air conditioning, I gave a little wave to the desk lady. She smiled back at me like I was a dentist.

"Follow me," he said, setting off down a hallway with his angry walk.

I fell in behind Goose as we jangled along behind our guide. My boots sank into the plush-gilded earth-tone carpeting, my eyes swimming up the off-white ceilings, down the champagne walls trimmed with wood. It was clearly supposed to be tasteful.

"In here," he said, standing beside an open doorway.

"Thanks, it's much nicer in here," I said as I dropped my backpack near a wall and sat down next to it.

The banquet room was painted plain white, with windows across the wall to my right and one of those temporary walls hanging gray to my left. Patterned carpet ran wall-to-wall, except where a dance floor had been laid over it near the windows. Luckily, those windows were situated away from the rising sun, meaning the room wouldn't be obnoxiously bright for a while yet. I watched as Goose walked over to talk with the stagehands pushing road-cases off the dance floor. It occurred to me that the three-piece-suit-man was still standing in the doorway.

"You." he said, meaning me. "Don't you think that that's a bit inappropriate?"

He was pointing at my shirt. I looked down at the white block lettering on black fabric and read to myself upside-down: "NAZI PUNKS FUCK OFF," spelled out around a crossed-out swastika.

"I think it's racism that's really 'a bit inappropriate,' sir."

He struggled with a retort while I pretended innocence, admiring the changing topography of his furrowed brow. When eye contact became uncomfortable, I turned again to see Goose looking at me expectantly from across the room.

"I believe we're going to get started now, sir," I said, adding another genuine smile as I rose to my feet. "Thank you for showing us in. If we need anything else we'll look for you."

The suit-man exhaled loudly as I turned away, rooting through my backpack for gloves. Goose stood on the edge of the dance floor with an amused expression on his face.

"You do that on purpose, don't you?" he asked, nodding his head toward the logo on my chest.

"Sometimes, but today I just got dressed in the dark. Besides, look at your shirt," I said, indicating the slogan on his back: "We're not happy until you're not happy!"

"It's a company shirt though," he said.

"Whatever. How do we do this?" I asked, indicating the dance floor.

I stepped on to the dance floor, immediately noticing its pleasant shock absorbing properties. It was composed of dozens of plastic panels one foot square, all painted to look like wood, and surrounded by black plastic skirting that slanted down to the carpeting.

"Just rip off a piece," Goose said.

Slipping on my work gloves, I gripped the corner of the floor and pulled up. After some twist

ing and a few snapping noises the plastic panel pulled free, revealing the black interlocking teeth that held the floor together.

"See? They're designed to snap apart easy if you push up from underneath them. Go find a broom and we'll cut the floor into strips three wide, then break off squares three deep so they're easy to stack. Then whenever FullStage shows up, we just load them up into carts and put them on the truck," Goose said, bending down to snap off the skirting from the closest panels.

"What about this one?" I asked, holding out the panel I had removed.

"Put it back."

We were almost done when the suit-man came back, this time followed by a young woman wearing wire-frame glasses and a business suit. After suit-man said something in her ear, he glared at us once more before turning to leave.

"My name is Angela," she said. "Is there anything that you guys need?

I glanced at Goose and Clive (one of FullStage's crew) as they dropped a stack of dance floor pieces into a cart. We were all sweaty and tired; the two other FullStage guys working in the truck outside were probably more so.

"I don't suppose you have vending machines anywhere?" I asked.

"No, but if you want some sodas I can get some for you," she said.

Goose nodded, while Clive answered only by panting with his head down (the panels had been getting heavier as time went on.)

"Alright then, follow me," she said, leading me through a small side door.

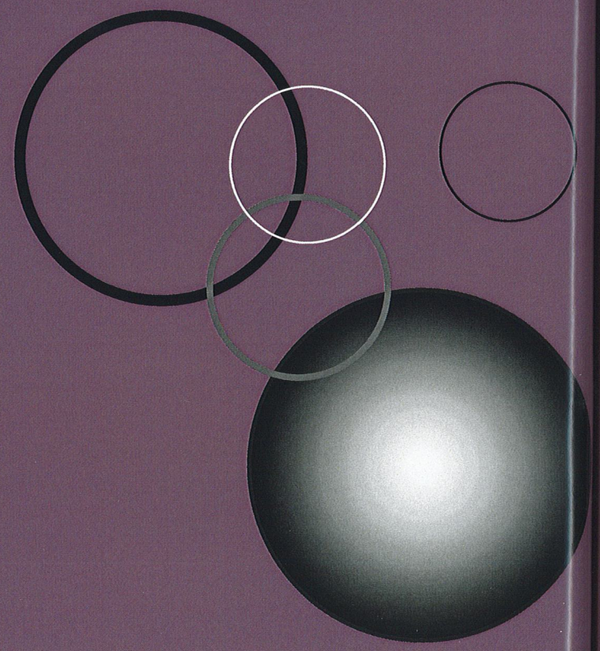
We walked through a tiled service hallway packed with stored goods. Passing by a stack of stainless steel cookware, I watched our reflections gliding across the gleaming surfaces. Her business attire was near monochromatic, while the green of my mohawk stood out clearly over my shirt and tattered blue jeans.

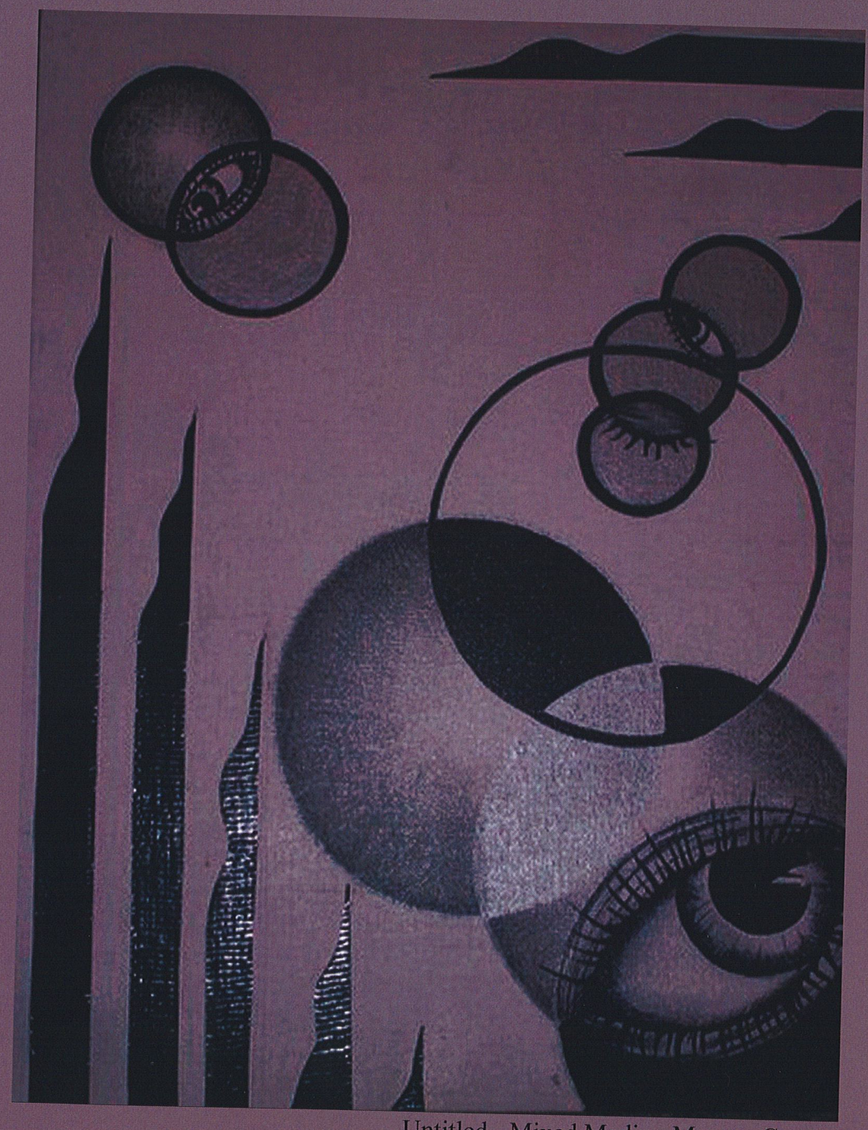
"Through here," she said, leading me through another door and back into the club proper. Clusters of redwood chairs upholstered in a rich green color were scattered across the room around tables and lamps, many of them occupied by club patrons. Members in the midst of lounging and conversation mostly ignored us as we approached the bar built into the back wall, but I met eyes with a few who stared openly at me. I recognized one of them sitting at the bar as the Jaguar driver Goose and I had seen drive up.

Looking up from his newspaper at our approach, he met my eyes and opened his mouth as if to say something, only to close it and return to his articles. As Angela continued behind the bar to get our refreshments, I lingered near his stool, trying to think of some kind of small talk I could share with the man. Twice I almost spoke, only to close my mouth again before actually saying anything, while he in turn showed nothing but a profound interest in the day's news. Soon I, too, was thoroughly absorbed (albeit in a nearby patch of carpet), and so we continued in silence.

Waiting there with the seconds dragging on and on, I wanted nothing more than for Angela to finish fumbling with the plastic cups so that I could get back to work. It wasn't until Goose and I were done, driving back over the grassy hills toward home, that I realized how comfortable our silence had been.

Aaron Stoller





Untitled - Mixed Media - Morgan Conroy

Food Porn

I am in lust with food. In spite of my culture, which idolizes the unfed figure and the five-minute hamburger, I love to eat, and eat well. Lemongrass soup makes my heart beat faster; I go weak in the knees for my mother's flank steak. The smell of freshly-cooked curry puts a spring in my step and a song in my heart – I indulge in meals like other girls indulge in handbags.

I have developed a powerful suspicion of anyone who doesn't enjoy eating. To not enjoy food suggests to me a certain submissiveness of character, the kind that is carefully sculpted by the insidious, though bodiless, voice of a culture which whispers the virtues of denial and the shame of giving in to the sensual pleasures of the flesh. For gluttony is the sister of lust, and eating is a sensual pleasure any gourmand will tell you is right up there with procreation. Like good sex, good food causes saliva to flow, lips to engorge, hearts to race. Good food inspires longing, desire, a physical ache that screams for satisfaction, an emptiness seeking – oh yes – to be filled. Good girls – girls who love God and Country, young ladies of reservation and control, do not give in to these undignified desires. Good girls set aside their bodily lusts for higher, nobler goals – the ability to wear Versace, for example.

I am not, as you have perhaps by now gathered, a good girl.

I should admit before I go any farther that I didn't always think this way. For most of my childhood, I was a picky eater. I shudder now when I remember the trouble I gave my poor parents, who spent years setting me up with dish after dish in an attempt to attract me to anything more nutritious than pancakes. I missed a lot of good meals that way, turned off by anything too complex or unpredictable for me to name all the ingredients. I knew, even as I turned up my nose at complex fare, that I was missing out, but for years, I managed to convince myself that missing out was an okay thing for me to do.

Take sushi, for example. To me, sushi was the dark and mysterious stranger that I spent years of my prim, Western, steak-and-baked-potato adolescence trying to convince myself I didn't want. Sushi stood outside my realm of comfort, like a leather-clad foreign exchange student smoking against a chain-linked fence, drawing squeals from my girlfriends with every careless exhalation. They flocked to sushi like locusts to fields, my high school girlfriends, their giggles of anticipation and shared, knowing glances locking me firmly out of a circle of experience. They had already been daring. They had already grown wise to the pleasures of screamingly fresh fish and soft, pillowy rice.

"Not me," I said to myself, a proud, corn-fed avatar of Americana. Sushi was danger, and danger was not for me. I knew too many cautionary tales about undercooked seafood, stories about people who had given up their lives in exchange for a good meal. I was not daring. I was simple, I was pure, I was reserved and unwanting. I ate boiled potatoes and held hands with Mathletes. I was not about to let myself go witless over some exotic treat because it was delicious or dangerous. I was far too wise to the consequences of that.

Like so many other vows of chastity, that one didn't last. But losing one's pickiness is much like losing one's virginity – awkward, uncertain, and rarely good the first time. No sooner had I tried my first take-out tray than the pungent taste of cheap seaweed sent me running again for the safety of boiled potatoes and charred steak. The second time, only slightly more pleasant, seated across from a curly-haired boy who was determined to convert me to a devotee of the pleasures of raw fish, my culinary libido sagged at the texture of uncooked salmon. The flavor of octopus briefly aroused some interest before it was hidden under a blanket of too-hot sauce, and I remained unconverted.

Yet still I soldiered on, searching for that special spark that everyone I knew had been giggling at me for being ignorant of all my high school life. And then, almost accidentally, like a meeting sanctioned by fate, I found my – wait for it - roll mate. In a slick, black booth under trendy mood lighting, reaching across my bowl of five-spice pork stew to accept a portion of my dining companion's food, anticipating nothing, I ate a single, carefully prepared piece of rice and vegetable, avocado and subtly flavored seaweed, all wrapped around fresh, raw eel and drizzled with sesame seeds. I had my first Flying Dragon roll. I have never turned back. These days, I try not to eat sushi with distractions – nothing but myself and the medley of avocado and eel and soy sauce embracing each other on my tongue. That fresh little saltwater taste that scared me away before still shocks me a little, still reminds my Western-raised misgivings that, oh hey, I'm eating raw fish. A delightful little tingle rushes through me as I remind myself that this could end badly, this could become more than I can handle. I could end up on my knees, paying tribute to the porcelain goddess come morning. It seems like a fair exchange for a pleasure that I'm close to calling divine.

Speaking of divinity, I once fell in love when I wasn't expecting it. In a run-down, dirty diner in St. Bernard Parish, leaning beside the recently failed dykes of the Mississippi, sagging as if held together with spit and duct tape, I met the girl-next-door of meals. An apron-wrapped Louisiana waitress set her down in front of me –the sweetest, juciest piece of bird I had ever seen, and her smell, of spices and melting-wet roast chicken slid into my nose like a lover sliding into my arms. It was love at first smell like I never knew I could fall into.

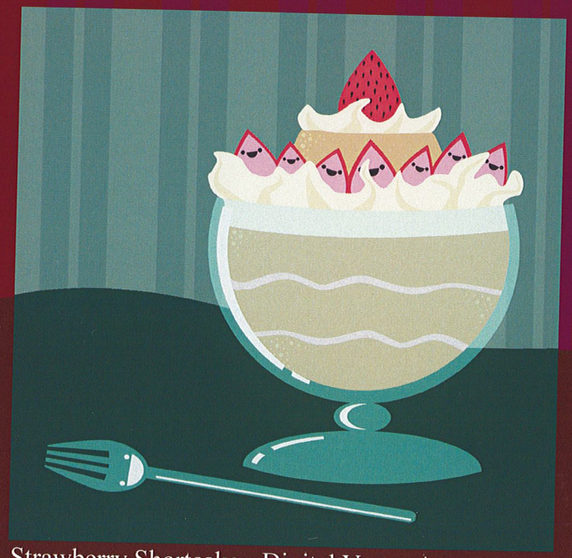
That was the first meal I ever ate where I cursed myself for getting full. I would have given up a lung for another stomach so that I could keep on tasting the spices dancing on my tongue and the smooth, firm, skin that gave way to dark, juicy flesh, melting sweet and wet and smoky in my mouth. And the sweet potato – good God Almighty, the sweet potato. I'd eaten sweet potatoes before, usually not by choice: baked in pies, layered with marshmallows, fried and glazed and buttered, but I had never had a sweet potato like this before. Was it the texture, the fluffy moistness that shamed the chalky diner baked potatoes I'd choked down over the years? Or was it the light sweetness, devoid of the cloying saccharine of the sweet potatoes of my past? Maybe it was the cinnamon sugar dusting, or the crunch of pecans in hot, moist starch, all combined into perfectly warm sweetness that felt like being hugged from the inside. It was too beautiful to be true. I'd had sweet potatoes before. I'd never fallen in love with one.

Though I was more than a little wistful when I parted with Louisiana and its fine array of unbeatable eats, certain delights are all the sweeter for being rare. In any case, I have my one irreplaceable daily comfort amidst my otherwise mildly tantalizing diet of submarine sandwiches and vegetarian curries. With tea being as varied as it is, I don't worry too much when it comes to overindulging and losing the magic.

For comfort, the best tea is red tea. Black, green, oolong, and jasmine have their very specific and very special places, but red tea is in a class all its own. It is a team player – strong enough to stand alone, but perfectly suited to working in groups. Ginger, cinnamon, clove. Lemon and honey. Vanilla ice cream and sugar. Red tea just plays well with others. It's warm and strong, dependable and low-maintenance. It's a carnal pleasure I can take home to mom or curl up with on a bearskin rug in front of a roaring fire. I take it in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, and I fully intend to do so as long as I live.

In an ideal world, no one would go hungry, and no food would go unappreciated – and no more chain restaurants would perpetuate the cycle of food eaten only for sustenance and not for substance. It's a lot to demand of the whole world, but I dream of a time when no one with food takes it for granted, and no one without food is without it for too long. In this idyllic plane, people would show appreciation for each other by cooking – and they'd thank each other for that appreciation by eating their cooking. In the end, not only would everyone know they were loved; they'd be adequately fed. And I can't think of a more perfect outcome than that.

Kate Hays



Strawberry Shortcake - Digital Vector Art - Marcela Wanderley

Abuela

The best part about visiting my abuela, my grandmother, is that I always know what to expect when I walk through her front doors: a warm smile, and a hot meal. Even if she wasn't expecting company, these seem to be two gifts she always has aplenty. Even better, they don't apply just to me; Leovigilda Caridad Fernandez Casanova is ready to give these gifts to any guest that comes across her threshold. That willingness to give to others, to do for others, is a trait that has inspired me since I was little, and shaped my own code of being.

What isn't immediately evident when you see my abuela, however, is her strength. In fact, it's probably the last thing you would attribute to her small, unassuming frame. Those that know her, however, know of her amazing fortitude in the face of struggles, and her powerful determination that reveals itself for the sake of her loved ones. It is this quiet strength, this innate desire to help others, that I admire so.

My grandmother was born and raised in the small province of Oriente, Cuba. She married the handsome, young Pedro Fernandez, and they had two lovely children, my mother and uncle. When my uncle was only five months old he contracted a high fever, which was diagnosed as viral meningitis by the family doctor. He survived physically, but the years would show that his mind had suffered the consequences. He developed slowly, remained infantile throughout childhood, and by ten had his first of many seizures to come.

At this time in Cuba, the medicine was not advanced enough to treat my uncle. Doctor after doctor after doctor gave my grandmother the same news: Yo no se que hacer. They didn't know what to do, and gave up on the young boy.

My grandmother did not give up, however. When my uncle's seizures increased to two or three a week, and the doctors solemnly informed abuela that he wouldn't live past eighteen, she turned to relatives in America. After swimming through leagues of red tape for two years, the family moved to Miami, Florida in August of '71. When they arrived and didn't have any transportation, she took her son on three different buses to get to Jackson Memorial Hospital, where he was put on trial medications. When she was exhausted from the almost nightly interruptions by convulsions in the next room, she strived onward. When the months edged by slowly like growing weeds, and everyone held their breath, she maintained faith in her son's health. When it was at last obvious his seizures had been reduced to just 1 or 2 a month, she victoriously enrolled him in the local program for the mentally handicapped at Citrus Grove Occupational Middle School.

And when the years inched steadily closer to my uncle's 18th birthday, my abuela ignored the passing of time. When she worried about his taking the bus alone to school, she convinced my grandfather to teach her to drive. And then my uncle was sixteen…seventeen…eighteen…nineteen…and when my uncle was twenty-two years of age, my abuela drove him to his graduation ceremony.

Even before I was told this story by my mother, I had always cherished my abuela's quiet strength: the way she greets everyone who comes to call; the way her eyes mist slightly when she talks to siblings still living in Cuba by phone; the way she tends to her garden, her pet project that blooms so magnificently year round. She has so much to complain about, so much she's left behind for the sake of her family, and yet never have I heard her protest or whine. She simply keeps on giving.

As a child, I somehow understood and adored this gentle strength even without knowing its source, and strived to emulate it. To this very day I look up to my abuela, two inches shorter than me, especially when I see her caring for my uncle – still a child at heart and in mind, and now forty-seven years of age.

She may not realize it, but just as she plants her flowers in the backyard, her devotion to my uncle planted the seeds for who I am today. And just as she cares and nurtures for her garden, her steadfast devotion to her family encourages me to smile when I greet a friend, or a stranger; to drop everything and lend a hand when a friend is in need; to work diligently towards a goal, and to be slow to give up on it; to care for others, and love who they are. I don't believe I'll ever come close to matching her awesome and gentle power, but I do hope I honor her by emulating that willingness to do for others every day, as best as I know how.

Nastassia Alayeto

Balancing Act - Photography - Ashley Light

Violin Bliss - Marie Patrick - Photography

The *Secret*

Secrets are hard to keep. They climb ladders in the mind, seeking escape. Befriending the mouth, they threaten to spill out. To the keeper, this burden is the root of distress. Telling is the only release.

We were five sisters in a house where the kitchen was the epicenter of chaos. On the wall, the beige, rotary dial phone alerted us to news from the outside world with a startling brring. Carelessly inscribed on the adjacent wall were the names and numbers of every boy who had ever courted any of the five Chávez girls. Barefoot on the tile floor, we struck bargains with Mamá to allow forbidden dates. Arrangements made. Plans divulged. Life altered. We were cohorts on a quest for our freedom, struggling against the restraints of Papá's traditional views. To break free, my sisters married young. By the time I was in fifth grade, Sylvia and I were my father's only unwed daughters. So, it came as no surprise when Sylvia told me of her plans to marry at barely seventeen.

"We were cohorts on a quest for our freedom, struggling against the restraints of Papá's traditional views. To break free, my sisters married young."

"What do you think about Bobby?" Sylvia asks.

"I don't know. I like it when he buys me ice cream," I say.

"Well, what would you think if I married him?"

"Then he'd be my brother-in-law," I say, thinking about ice cream.

"Would he be your favorite brother-in-law?"

My ten-year-old mind contemplates her question as I stand in front of the kitchen window, sunshine bathing my face and arms in warm light. Next to me, Sylvia is cutting an apple with a shiny, stainless steel knife. Florescent lights brighten the rest of the room, and the hum of the refrigerator makes for a familiar soundtrack to my life. I finally answer, "No, Steve would still be my favorite."

"Why?"

"Because he takes me places."

After a brief pause, she says, "There's something you should know about Steve."

"What?"

Silence.

"What do you mean?" I plead, trying to coax the secret out of her pursed, delicate lips.

Sylvia slowly looks up at me through the veil of her curly auburn hair. She has Mamá's doe-like eyes. Her lips move and words escape, but my mind refuses to comprehend them. The knife presses down through the soft core of the apple, and my body feels the leaden weight of a secret revealed. Some things are too much for little ones to bear—like the knowledge of good and evil. The walls around me are shaking. Arms that felt the warmth of the sun only a moment ago suddenly grow cold as all the heat in my body rushes to my head. My ears ring with an indecipherable clatter. Nothing is as it should be.

The cuckoo clock that sits on the opposite side of the room cannot move back to a time when the world was safe. It dawns on me that the bird has never popped out, and now, there seems to have been a reason for its hiding. The ornate, ivory clock-hands point to numbers that are only significant because they mark the moment after the world crashed.

Through tears, I look down at my sister's dutiful hands, still cutting the apple. Her milky skin is stark against the wooden chopping board, whose age and use have left it scarred with black knife marks. Worn. Wet. Dirty. No amount of scrubbing will ever get it clean.

Tears fall to the floor where once-white tiles are chipped black and brown in places. My feet consider escape but feel too heavy to move. The four ugly walls around me have stopped shaking, and despite peeling paint and grimy hand-marks, they are the only sure thing to hold onto.

The window provides no light, after all. On the contrary, the world demanding entry is dark and hostile. This new knowledge that a sinister something has already crept into my house, weighs down my ten-year-old mind. In this moment, I have become too jaded to bargain with God, so there will be no relief from this pain. We, sisters, are partners en route to life beyond these walls. The musty smell of rotting wood pervades my senses as Sylvia looks up from the cutting board.

"What are you crying about? It didn't happen to you."

Sandra Chavez Johnson

Swim At Your Own Risk

I crashed my car into the Atlantic Ocean.

But why would you do that?

Why? I don't know. I guess when I woke up that morning I realized my entire life was just one giant fabrication. I was stuck in a miserable mode of existence. I needed out. So I drove my car to the beach off of 210 and just kept driving until the water began to seep through the seams of my car door and collected at my feet.

Did you intend to kill yourself?

I didn't want to die. But that ship sailed long ago. I wanted to sit in that car as it sank into the bottom of the ocean. I had every intention of swimming to the surface once the oxygen inside the cabin ran out, or until the pressure forced the glass to break. For those few moments before the water invaded my makeshift submarine I envisioned driving around on the ocean floor, chasing fish, maybe finding nemo. Maybe I'd visit the Marianas Trench, although that would be quite the drive and I didn't know if I had enough gas to make that journey. It's getting ridiculous you know?

What is?

The price of gas. I mean, it can't honestly cost that much money to fund oil refineries and what not. The oil companies get off on robbing us blind. They only care about the millions and millions of dollars they siphon from our pockets and pay to their CEO's. Fuck that and fuck them. Fuck sharks, too.

Why sharks?

Because as I was sitting there, even as my feet were slowly coming in contact with water, I was seriously considering riding it out, really going into the deep sea with just my car and my faith by my side. Then I thought about getting eaten by a shark. I thought, "What if they're just waiting, amused, plotting exactly how they're going to rip me apart when I finally abandon ship." I could picture them, scheming in some obscure shark hideout where they could watch. "I call the thigh," says the hammerhead. "Only if I get the ribs," the great white would reply. It would all be so delightfully macabre that for a second I consider letting them eat me. That's a good analogy for life, being eaten by sharks. Is it not? Either way, that would be a pretty exciting way to go, don't you think?

But no one would know what had happened. They'd see the car and assume you had drowned.

You're right. I never thought of it that way. Good thing I got out then, eh?

Why did you say you felt your life is a fabrication?

I didn't say 'felt,' it IS a fabrication. Lies are my specialty. They define my very existence. Ha, isn't that thought provoking? If my existence is defined by lies, then it's easy to assume that my existence is a lie, and thus I can infer I do not exist. Brilliant!

[silence]

I can remember some of the first lies I told. Where I was going, who I was going with, the status of my virginity; all just matters whose truth was debatable. They were simple lies of course, very easily unraveled if ever really thought about. That's the glory of our society: you can tell anyone anything and either because they're too busy, don't care, or simply are mindless drones, they'll believe it. It's also my downfall. It's allowed me to continue lying. More complex, more thought out. It's an art form you know. The best liars are those that can convince themselves of the truth of the lie. It's like there's this pocket inside the brain where the real truth goes, and the fake truth takes over.

Doesn't your family care that you lie? Your friends?

My family's dead. And friends? You mean those whom I drink with until we're all outside, puking into some bush, trying to remember where we are, how we got here, and promising oursleves never to ever drink this much again, until the next oppurtinity arises and then it's Party On Dudes! Rinse, and repeat. It makes it easier to lie when no one ever remembers what really happened. I think our entire society is in a constant state of drunkenness. We never really take responsibilty for anything until it's too late. Not until we wake up in the morning, with a hangover do we really accept the consequences of our lack of responsibility. "Oh shit," we collectively think, "Maybe I should have thought before I did that."

Could you ever stop lying?

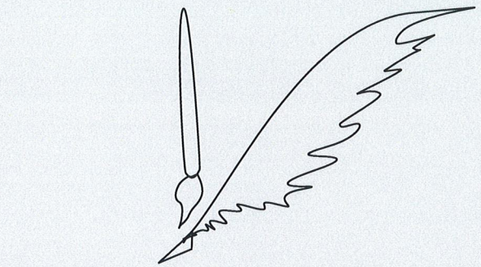
Can anyone? Can a dog stop being a dog? A liar can't stop being a liar. Although I did stop once. For a year and a half. But I could just be lying now. I lied about crashing my car.

I thought you might have.

I actually crashed into a pole and then blacked out. But if I ever did drive my car into the ocean, that's how I would have acted.

Kate Hastings

Azul - Photography/Mixed Media - Rachel Hessling



Fiction

Bedsitter People

"The first time I heard "Nights in White Satin?" I rolled my eyes and dropped my head into my hand. "Oh, God!" I stared blankly out the car window at the endless stretch of Moab desert racing past us. We were heading back into Las Vegas after a days hike in Zion National Park, and, as usual on our drives, we were playing his favorite game. Ed would switch stations and, upon stopping long enough for the airwaves to transmit, would ask if whatever was playing was my favorite song. Invariably, he would pose his "favorite song" question after tuning in to a country station. The game of it, for Ed, is observing my violent visceral reaction to almost anything country and western, followed by a biting, "Yes, dear, that's my fav-o-rite song."

Ed's a great hiking buddy, but I was hungry and hot; the air conditioning in the rented Malibu had dried me to a human salt lick; and Ed's incessant station changing was wearing on my nerves. XM 50's, XM 60's, three minutes of hockey news on XM Sports – only Ed would be listening to NHL updates in the middle of summer – back to NPR. On XM 70's, a DJ was recounting the back-story to the Moody Blues making of their hit album, "Days of Future Passed." Ed reached to change the radio station, but I made him stop. We began passing the miles debating the talents of Justin Hayward over Graeme Edge. I was rooting for Edge.

"Is this your favorite song?" he asked. "Tuesday Afternoon" was playing.

"Mmmm, one of them."

"So, when did you first hear it?"

"First hear the album or first hear "Nights in White Satin," or "Late Lament?"

"The song."

"I have no clue, honey," I said. "The better question would be when did I first really listen to it."

"Okay," he said, reaching over and taking my hand, "when did you first really listen to it?" At that moment, "Tuesday Afternoon" faded out and the opening strains of "Nights" started up. My skin bubbled and I was lost.

***

A lovesick wallflower sat parked alone in front of her parent's house in a small Central Kansas town on a bitterly cold, late fall night in 1974. Bundled in a '68 Chevy Impala with daisy print plastic seat covers, listening to the Moody Blues, her eyes closed, humming softly, swaying in tempo with the background orchestrations by the London Festival Orchestra. Misty trails of crystallized breath swirled around her inside the frigid Chevy. Anyone looking into the frosted windows would see a girl with her head in fog.

There was something about the night that made the scene even more ethereal. Bare whispers of clouds skirted a high full moon, pale and thin in the November sky. A heaviness hung in the chill air. Black, naked branches sketched spectral shadows on objects below. And the wallflower sat swaying; swaying to strains only she could hear. Seven minutes outside on a wintery night would usually have been more than she could bear, but the music, oh! the music warmed her, masked the numbness in her fingers and toes, chased away the night's chill, negated the apprehension that her soul was married to.

High school basketball was the height of Friday night social life in rural towns like this one. The game was the most important thing at good ol' LHS. Academic excellence was only for the nerds and the brainiacs. Athletics was where the action was. All the "cool" people were jocks or cheerleaders. That girl in the cold car was neither. She was smart, but it was easier to play it as dumb as the average kids, there was less chiding to endure. She was athletic, a dancer and a gymnast, but she'd spent her entire life as the last one called for whichever team ball sport was being mandated in P.E. No matter how she tried to fit in, to conform, to adapt to the norms of small town society, the girl was always an outcast. Boys barked at her when she passed in the halls. Girls were mercilessly cruel in their torments. She was petite and, at fifteen, was desperately lacking in feminine development. The girl was not fashionable. Her father taught high school math to support his family and his farming habit so there was no money for the latest trends. The family shopped at second-hand stores and discount houses. The girl was not popular. Her mother was a high school English teacher, which, in itself, prohibited any chance of social assimilation. Mother knew all the eligible young men in the community – and their parents. None met Mother's strict Victorian standards. The girl was well mannered, polite, and spoke in complete sentences. Her mother banned any form of slang or colloquialism use. Not that that really mattered; the girl had no comprehension of the vernacular. She'd been tutored in Dickinson, Frost and Whitman. Her hot dates were always with dead, great men – Dickens, Poe, Shakespeare, Twain – accompanied by the tunes of other dead, great men – Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Wagner. She would have traded all of them for one night at the pizza parlor with the jukebox, a pitcher of Coke, and Mike Albrecht, a basketball playing saxophonist, tall, blond with piercing blue eyes, a quintessential specimen of the Aryan race. The wallflower had harbored an unrequited crush on the youngest Albrecht boy since she was twelve when the family arrived in town. It had been puppy love at first sight.

Listening to the poetry set to music, the girl felt at peace. She understood her place in this world. Her waking hours were spent gazing at people, some hand in hand. She was smothered by a community spouting thoughts they could not defend. All seemed to miss the beauty right in front of them. Beauty rendered by the naked trees of winter waving against a moonlit charcoal sky. Beauty encapsulated in frost crystals that spread methodically across the azure-tinted strip at the top of the windshield. Beauty shining from the cold-hearted orb that ruled that bitterly cold night. The pounding of the wallflower's heart matched the pounding from Edge's drum kit. Her spirit lilted upon in rilievo harp notes into a crescendo of strings, then plummeted into the brass's decrescendo marcato.

Keyboardist Mike Pinder's resonant English accent recited drummer Graeme Edge's "Late Lament." Had Mike Albrecht been there, the wallflower would have hoped to spend those frozen seven minutes kissing and petting and trying to decide if she'd let him get to first base. More likely though, she would have had to explain what "bedsitter people" meant.

***

The song was almost over. Mike Pinder was reciting "Late Lament" as Ed and I continued west down Highway 15. The haze-cloaked silhouettes of the casinos along the strip reared ghostly in front of us. I was mouthing the words along with Pinder to the end. The instrumental finale, another mounting of strings into another crescendo of horns over thundering tympani, and then – the gong. Silence.

Ed squeezed my hand gently, and I turned a timid smiled at him. A flash of realization, and Ed, still holding my hand, traced a lone salt trail from my eye.

"Is this your favorite song?"

Glenda Ganung

Beach Day

At the beach, a family set up a spot on the warm sand in front of the dunes. They unfurled bright beach blankets. They set out several beach chairs, a radio, and a cooler full of juice boxes, ham sandwiches, and fruit. The mother speared the sharp end of a wooden umbrella into the soft sand—it went in easier than she expected. She kept twisting, like a corkscrew, till it was deep enough to stand against the summer wind that was coming in from the Atlantic. The five kids of ranging age played in the surf, splashing and yelling joyful yells. The girls skipped over waves while shouting beach day, beach day in singsong voices. The boys gathered around a spot and started digging in the sand, which they hurled aside. Some of it caught in the breeze and landed on the blankets causing the mother to shoot scornful looks. Young boys are ambitious beyond their means and ability. Years of praise from mothers inflates young egos inside hearts that cause shoulder blades to pin back and rib cages to extend full of air and pride. The hot sun tanned the skins of the boys crimson as they dug deep into the soft sand. The mother stayed transfixed on the surf where the young girls were. The girls playing with floaties around their arms, splashing, getting knocked down by small waves that did not even reach past the midsection of their tiny thighs. The constant looming danger of the ocean caused the mother's pupils to dilate. Her heart rate spiked, her gaze narrowed, and her muscles constricted and filled with oxygen. The sharks are always near: swimming, preying, eating, feasting, devouring. The radio warned of a severe rip current. The mother shouted, in her deepest shouting voice, "Come in, you're too far out." She half got out of her beach chair and motioned toward the water, losing the page in her novel. Upon seeing their mother's look, the girls reflexively moved in closer. The hole the boys had dug was impressively deep; they were not digging with flimsy toy beach shovels, rather, their grandfather's garden tools. Shovels with flat metal lips and long sturdy wooden handles enabled the boys to clear the sand like tiny bulldozers; to get deeper the three boys climbed into the hole, working with their backs to each other flinging sand out with the dynamism of grave diggers on the eve of a massacre. The hot summer sun beating down and the salty sky drying up the throats of the boys. They yearned for the juice boxes and ham sandwiches their mother had packed. The boys climbed out of the hole, except for the smallest boy. He stayed behind to dig a bit more, and the older boys ran to the cooler, lifted the lid, and grabbed the juice boxes. They both took the straws and punctured the small foil holes and took deep pulls. The mother read her novel. The girls splashed in the surf. The older boys sipped fruit punch and munched on ham sandwiches, and nobody noticed the smallest boy still in the hole, flinging out sand. The older boys sat up and walked over towards the hole, the soft sand compressing slightly under each step. As they approached, the sand shifted, then slid and filled the void where the small child sat, avalanching in. The small boy was crushed and covered. Pinned several feet under the surface. The older boys saw immediately. Fear cloaked their faces, and they became disoriented. Their center no longer on a fixed axis; they fell and crawled like crabs over to the hole. They heaved sand madly, but they couldn't find their brother. Panic took their breath, they new each grain of sand by name. They became ill. Vomit. Broken shells and bits of rock skinned back their tiny fingernails: gory digits raking the sand leaving parallel streaks of blood. The edge of the hole kept giving to the weight of the boys, creating more space for loose sand to fill and deepen. It caved in faster than the young boys could excavate. The sensation of impotence caused the boys to turn ill again. Puke everywhere. The sand sloped in, and a million more granules filled. They finally found the tiny fist which by now had started to turn blue. The mother saw the boys then she saw the fist and her muscles began to constrict violently: her extremities whipped about her torso, seizureing in a way. Her body slammed to the ground and crawled itself towards the wiggling hand. A passerby howled for a lifeguard. The lifeguard squawked the tower, and bronzed boys wielding large shovels and orange rescue cans filed out of the tower, galloping down the ramp and charging the beach towards the scene.

They tossed sand like mad, this time throwing it everywhere, anywhere, covering the blankets in a matter of seconds

The lifeguards dug around the blue hand, red trunks flopping in the breeze, zinc-oxide war paint. They plowed their shovels into the earth, being careful to not sever the hand. The weight and budge of their legs caused the sand to shift once more and progress was stopped. Then the shovels started to stab the earth, repeatedly, the lifeguards howling. The blue fist turning purple, pumping open and close, like a flower blooming rapidly. A crowd of people started to form. Tourists turned into gawkers. Teens on beach cruisers rolled up to watch the action unfold. The biggest lifeguard hit his knees and grabbed onto the hand, which by now was no longer wiggling, and he pulled on it. He pulled so hard his face went red—his eyes grew and his head shrunk. Soon he could see the tiny wrist and tiny elbow and tiny head crowning. The two older brothers refocused their grip and gave a final mighty tug that dragged the slack boy free from the belly of the earth. The guards swarmed, laying the flaccid body flat on the sand. Plunging fingers down his skinny throat, the lifeguards picked out globs of sand. Sand that the boy had breathed in, which caused his lungs to fill and then collapse. The mother looked on with a scarlet face as her other sons kneeled round the blue boy. His eyes were rolled back and his face was grated raw. The pull and tug against the coarse sand filed away the outer flesh on his cheeks and forehead. The mother's body deadened, it began to fail, and forgot to breath. The lifeguards had to tend to her as well. The little girls came close, their wet hair matted to their tanned cheeks, sand sticking to their wet legs. Life guards beating on the blue boy's chest. Screams echoing down the beach from the gawkers: some snapped pictures. The stench of vomit cooking under the sun. The turned over cooler, the blankets covered in sand, the tossed away novel. The waves rolling in, the brothers trying at first to be brave—then going to pieces, the girls crying. The mother and her son, each on a stretcher, packed into an ambulance retrofitted for two, the mother leaning over—eyes on the boy.

Ryan Fitzgerald

Thinking - Photography - Elizabeth Hollabaugh

Mother's Season

The day my mother died I began taking halcion. It was October, 1936. We lived in a two-story brick house on Heminger Lane; our house faced a wide line of oak trees which spread across a small field that shielded us from the bleak city of Milford, Ohio. I used to walk the field with Mother in the magical dusk hours and gaze up at the stretch of sky that cloaked us. Mother watched clouds. This always fascinated my son Robert, who adored my mother. In fact, I often thought he preferred her to me. My mother carried a large basket tucked under her arm in which she collected fiery autumn leaves, which looked like sparks in her hands. She pressed the leaves and glued them into a small book she kept by her bedside table. She was a collector of intricate bits of nature. Robert and I spent Mother's last season under her roof, under her hand.

I had just crossed two important thresholds in my life, my thirtieth birthday and a divorce. I had my son's name legally changed, so there was no trace of my ex-husband. I didn't want Robert carrying around a name that filled my heart with dread and our family with dishonor. A name cannot be a nightmare -- it's much too familiar, but it should be honorable, rich, pure. Of three sisters I was the first disgraced by divorce. I was the object of awkward, hushed conversations. I knew this. I carried it deeply. Mother kept Robert and I close by. The family never went to town for social events, and the groceries arrived by an old delivery man, Mr. Myers. I never knew what my mother thought of the divorce -- Mother remained mum.

Robert and I bore the name of my father, Buchanan. My father, a tall, unafflicted man, prided himself on being a man of habit. Any interruptions to his habitual existence were unforgivable. Monday through Friday he rose at five-thirty. At six he entered the parlor in his bathrobe to read the morning paper and smoke his pipe. By six-thirty, he was perched at the head of the dining table for breakfast. Two eggs sunny side up (never runny), rye toast with one pat of butter, a teaspoon of orange marmalade, a pork sausage patty, and black coffee with one sugar cube. At seven he showered, then dressed in his dark brown suit and polished leather shoes. He left the house every morning at seven-thirty, precisely. I never saw him kiss my mother on the lips, but in the morning she would wait next to the door to hand him his dull brown hat and corned beef sandwich. For this act, she received an obligatory brush on the cheek as he left for the day.

They were awkward partners at first, stumbling, searching for a mutual rhythm. But their laughter overflowed and filled the room, swallowing the years of silence.

"Dinner at seven, Mother, watch the salt."

"Yes, Dear, watch the salt," she replied.

"Good day, Mother."

"Good day, Dear."

One August morning Father left for a business meeting in Boston. He would be gone for three days. I recall there was more joy in the house in those three days than in the last thirty years. Music played, songs were sung, dancing began, salt poured. Mother's face grew flush easily as she swayed to the radio, which pumped out Tommy Dorsey numbers. She taught Robert the fox trot and the waltz. They were awkward partners at first, stumbling, searching for a mutual rhythm. But their laughter overflowed and filled the room, swallowing the years of silence. We ate blueberry pancakes for dinner with thick maple syrup and tart baked apples. We had a picnic in the field of summer flowers. Robert and Mother lay on their backs and stared at the clouds for hours.

"Look there, Robert, see that cloud, it's a sailboat leaving the harbor!" Mother lifted her arms and shouted, "God's speed, God's speed."

"There's a dragon over by the sailboat," Robert said.

Mother read "Alice in Wonderland" aloud, under the oak trees, and the three of us fell into the rabbit hole together. But Mother fell the farthest. Because Mother knew this was her last season. I didn't know, I swear it! We built a lifetime in three days. Father returned and all became silent again; mother began to lose her strength.

I became her helper. I acquired her morning schedule to assure Father's pattern would suffer no interruptions. My hands followed hers through the kitchen learning the nature of her craft. The mornings became a ritual, like an obligatory prayer. Sometimes, Mother would lose her balance and hold onto my arm, and we would stand in silence until the world turned itself around. I finally managed to perfect the eggs, after weeks of Father complaining they were too brown for his taste. I slowly learned my mother's secrets.

Mother died one afternoon when no one was at home -- that is, no one but Robert. Robert was a peculiar boy - aren't all boys at ten? He was long and angular. A question mark in my mind. I had no answers about this boy -- truthfully I had not much interest. His father had left me, sad story, during the Great Depression. He just simply walked away one morning, around the time of our sixth wedding anniversary. He left us thirty dollars on the kitchen table and a letter addressed to Mrs. Roosevelt. Robert's father had written numerous letters to Mrs. Roosevelt outlining his complaints about the worsening economy. I often found many drafts of these letters in the shed, or stuffed in his bureau. The letters were written in his sloppy, illegible longhand. Each letter grew more pathetic. He had become something less of a man, in my eyes. Now, he was part of my distant, entangled past. I laughed when I found that letter and burned it without opening it,

without care, without regard. I called Mother and she sent for us by train. We moved to Milford and have remained here these past five years.

Robert hasn't spoken well since the afternoon he found mother. She explained she needed to "go upstairs to rest." Half an hour later she asked him to call the doctor. He couldn't find the number, so he called his Aunt May who lived a few counties over. By the time help arrived Robert was sitting by Mother's bedside, quiet, shocked, pushed into adulthood by the deadening of a heart. He wasn't ready for that; none of us were ready for Mother's death. Except Father, who was never caught by surprise. Father was never vulnerable; he remained, in every season of life, a steady, sturdy tree.

I remember the brown bottle, small in my hand, the cool glass that offered the solitude of sleep. Dark, cool, sleep.

Mother kept halcion in the bathroom cabinet; she took it on occasion when her anxiety kept her up nights. I remember the brown bottle, small in my hand, the cool glass that offered the solitude of sleep. Dark, cool sleep. The night she died I took two and never cried a tear, but, I'm more like my father. And Robert, poor Robert, I could only sit next to him while he cries himself to sleep, he adored Mother dearly. She sang to him, worked crossword puzzles with him, baked him vanilla tarts with crème on Sundays. I just sat around and listened to the boy cry. I was like a ghost in the room.

Father sold the house and everything in it and made us move shortly after Mother's death. Her death broke Father's routine, the habit, which was, of course, permanently unforgivable. Robert and I left the house with one suitcase between us,while father left with the clothes on his back and a briefcase. Robert stuffed one of Mother's embroidered kitchen towels in the suitcase and resented Father permanently when he was told he could not take his bike or his comic book collection. I took Mother's basket that still had leaves from last autumn. My father did not attach himself to things, or people; he simply transitioned without regret or remorse. Whatever connection he felt for his three daughters was cut upon her death. He bought a small house near Dayton and smoked himself into a hole; he ate up loneliness like it was cotton candy. Maybe all his life he was waiting to be lonely. Father shipped Robert and me to my sister's two hundred miles from the house on Heminger Lane. He never came to visit. He sent a check every week. No note, just a check that covered living expenses. My sister Rose and her husband put us in two rooms that overlooked a small lake, which was frozen over. We awoke every morning to the still death of winter.

Robert found his voice again when the summer crept around, but that's when he also found his night terrors. So I started taking three halcions a night and slept just fine. In the morning when I awoke I often found Robert beside me in bed, sleeping silently or staring out the window. My sister Rose suggested I have Robert "see somebody --it's not right how that child suffers in dreams."

"Suffering," I said, "is part of the process."

Rose insisted that Robert's screams, "Carry across the lawn and wake the neighbors and embarrass me. I don't know how you sleep through that, Dorothy."

"Yes," I said. "Unimaginable."

"Really, don't you want that child to recover? Tessie Arsdales' child found his Uncle dead a few years ago, I think he was about twelve or so. Anyway, he's been seeing this doctor up in Marion County for about a year. He seems to be doing ok. I can get you the number."

"They are night-terrors, Rose. It won't last -- my son is fine."

"I don't see how any boy could be fine, living with Father for the past five years and then watching Mother die. All alone by himself. At such a tender age."

I started writing letters to my father and kept them in a cracker tin in the kitchen cabinet. I don't really know what I was trying to say. I never meant to send them. I filled them with tasks of the day; baking, washing, where Robert went for the afternoon. I told Father about the damp, cold winter days, the recipe I found for tuna fish that tasted just like Mother's. I even told him about the general affairs of the neighborhood, something I knew he would be repelled by. I spent about a half hour daily writing these letters and laughing about their content and how they would go nowhere, but pleased inside that I was somehow communicating with my father, which felt like conjuring up the dead, or nearly dead. All these words and phrases made me feel closer to my father, like he was a true companion and not a mirage that seemed untouchable. I never showed the letters to anyone, not even my sister, who was preoccupied with the small toy store she ran with her husband. Robert grew to resemble his father whom I hardly remembered at this point. His body went through its awkward stage, and he grew into a snappy young man. We never saw Father again after that last parting at the house on Heminger Lane.

Dear Father,

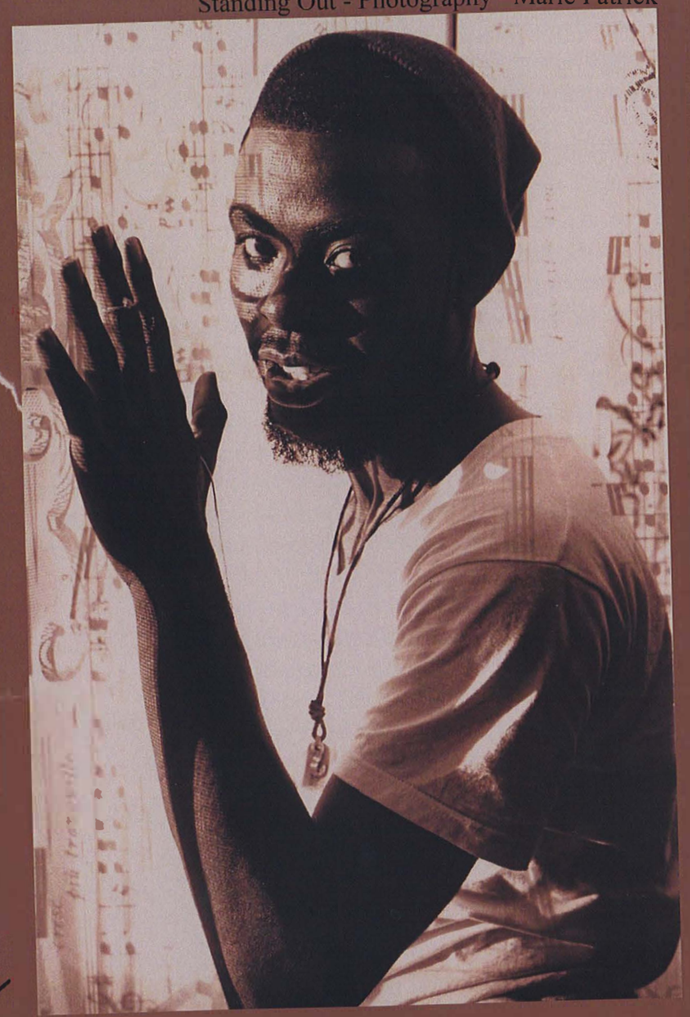
Today is Robert's fifteenth birthday. We bought him a blue bike with wide wheels to cruise the sidewalks. I baked a red-velvet cake with cream cheese icing. His night-terrors have gone. I'm grateful for that. Tonight a few of his friends from school will come over for cake & ice-cream. He plays records all day up in his room; he loves the Tommy Dorsey band. Most days I have to tell him to turn it down. Sometimes, he bikes into town with his friends to hear the musicians at the bandstand. I play cards on Thursday's; I'm especially good at canasta. Funny, how that was mother's game. Do you remember father? I remember. I remember so much now that she is gone.

more

I spent my days looking after things, the only way I knew how, with sheer force, like my father. I called him occasionally and found his voice rough and wavering. He had lost some of that deep authoritative bravado that commanded action, attention, submission. We never spoke of Mother, not even when the anniversary of her death passed. I mentioned her once; he said, "That's no longer important." The next morning I gathered all the letters and sent them through the post, unceremoniously.

Last night I dreamed of Mother, standing inside the kitchen on Heminger Lane. She stood near the window dressed in pale blue. The morning moved over her face in slow degrees. She hummed a tune I had heard but could not name. I awoke and my heart was raw. I thought of Robert in his room at the top of the stairs. He was growing into a man, and I was a sorry witness to the transformation. I crossed the house and knocked on Robert's door. He was reading on his bed. I moved toward him and laid my hand on his head. He looked at me with strange wide eyes. I thought about kissing his forehead, just brushing my lips on his skin. Instead, I inhaled my fear and moved away, without a word.

Heather Georgoudiou



Standing Out - Photography - Marie Patrick

These Hands

I am having the dream again. It's keeping me up at night. I can't sleep. Every time I close my eyes, I am there again. I wake in a cold sweat, my mind filled with memories. I can't shake them. They follow me, like ghosts, just waiting for me to let my guard down. It's getting to the point that I don't even have to be asleep anymore. I'll blink, and suddenly, I can hear the rain. The heat sears my skin. I can't take it anymore. My heart pounds. I can feel my body trembling. I gag as the stench fills my nostrils.

It is rancid, rotten: the scent of Death. It encompasses everything, permeates the air. My lungs burn in protest as I hold my breath, trying to prevent its entry. Eventually, nature overcomes my will, and I gasp for air, once more allowing the stench to defile my body. Every time it fills my lungs, I envision the source. Death. Fetid, stinking Death. Bodies piled high in the rice fields, bloated from the sun, slick with the muck and grime from the rain.

Walking amongst the dead, I force down the bile that rises in my throat, choking me. The stench saps my strength, chips away at my sanity. My eyes are accustomed to the sight by now, but I can never grow used to the stench. The stench reminds me that it is real, not just some horrid dream. It reminds me why so many of the bodies belong to my men.

It reminds me it is my fault. I killed these people.

"Sir? Sir? Are you okay?" I turn weary eyes to the sixteen-year-old before me. So very young. They were sending children to fight this war. Children. But then, am I so much older? I am young, too, scarcely any older than the men I command. "Sir, can you help me with this problem?" The boy shows me a paper, and the world comes crashing down around me.

I am not in 'Nam. The war is long over. I now command a different set of recruits. Young minds, so eager to learn, latch onto my words in much the same way my men followed my orders. They trust my word; they accept my leadership without question. But then, I cannot accurately compare a high school Calculus class to a troop of Marines. I am not asking these students to give up their lives for me.

I begin to address the student's problem, pointing out where he was going wrong. I can't hear my own words, but the boy nods in understanding. I stare into the middle distance as he asks another question. I can feel my lips forming a response. The dull roar of rain pounding on the roof drowns out my words.

"I am stuck in my own personal Hell."

The rain makes a hollow sound on my helmet as I walk among the dead. I recognize many of the faces, the names coming to me through the fog of my shock. My men. I led them here, to their deaths. I should have known; I should have anticipated this. But no, I was complacent. I didn't think that the war could continue so close to Christmas. Surely, the fighting could stop for one day. These men—these boys!—should have been at home with their families, getting drunk and flirting with their cousins, making love with their girlfriends, or their wives. Instead, they were stuck here, in Hell.

There is movement in the stillness of the rain. I hear a groan. A soldier whose name I cannot remember lies in agony in the mud. I kneel beside him, averting my gaze from the gaping wound in his abdomen. His face is pale with pain, the sweat mingling with the rain on his skin. His blood-slick hand grasps mine, finding comfort in the presence of another human being, but I can see in his eyes that he knows where the fault lies. He is here, intestines strewn about the ground, because I made a mistake.

I sit with him as he dies, trying to offer him what comfort I can. Blood froths from his mouth as he talks. My jaw hurts from clenching my teeth so hard, trying to prevent the flow of tears. It is not my place to cry. I must endure the last ramblings of the dying man, endure the way his eyes burn into my soul with every word, endure his silent curses as he leaves me his last will and testament. At long, long last, I feel the strength of his grip waning.

His breath hitches. I watch as his eyes widen with the pain, condemnation finally gone from their depths. I count my heartbeats, unbearably calm as I wonder if this will be his last breath. I am surprised when he speaks again, his eyes once more filled with something akin to hate.

"No one…will blame you, sir." The title of respect turns to something else in his mouth, twisting into something dirty. "No one will…know. Except you. Don't…forget. Don't you dare…forget." His grip tightens for a moment, and I can do nothing but nod mutely. For several more heartbeats, I wait, watching him, but I realize that his eyes are unseeing, his chest no longer rising with his labored breath. Too late, I remember his name. Jeff.

I can feel the lump in my throat as I close his eyes, but no tears come. I sit on my heels, the mud soaking into the knees of my pants, unable to bring myself to rise. My eyes are still on Jeff's face. I keep replaying his words in my mind, committing them to memory. His condemning gaze haunts me. My head falls to my chest as the tears finally begin to trace down my cheeks.

The rain washes his blood off my hands.

I have to fight to control my tremors as I hand back the student's paper. He smiles, thanking me, and returns to his seat. He doesn't know. No one knows. As I look out on my class, the stench fills my nostrils. They are quiet, hunched over their desks, like so many dead bodies, as they work, the only indication of life the faint scratch of pencils on paper. Memory colors my perception.

The light dims. I hear thunder in the distance, even though the sun still shines bright outside. The hum of the air conditioning turns into

the whine of thousands of mosquitoes. Irritated, I flick one away from my ear.

The heat is oppressive. Thunderheads hang low overhead, threatening to break. My men mumble curses as they eye the clouds. It is miserable when it is hot, but it is even worse when it rains. The rain makes you vulnerable. It limits visibility, drowns out sound. The cold of it makes your fingers stiff, slows your reflexes.

Lightning lances across the sky, with thunder rolling close behind.

Oh, dear God, please, don't let it rain.

I glance up at the clouds just in time to catch a fat, wet drop on my cheek. It slides down my face, much like a tear, to drip from my jaw.

The students are packing up their bags. The bell is about to ring. I can hear myself giving them an assignment to complete over the break, but my mind is far away. I am torn between two worlds, and can't decide which is worse. I am stuck in my own personal Hell. The bell sounds, a warning. I pay it no heed.

The stench is strong, even through the rain. My men cough and cover their faces with their sleeves. It doesn't help. The stink gets through. One of my men vomits. Jeff. I want to tell him that he needn't bother, that his guts will soon be separate from his body, anyway, but instead, I look out over the rice paddy, holding my breath.

Even without the stink to tell me, I know what lies in the water. I can see the dark lumps of the bodies lying motionless among the rice. The weight of the rain makes them bob, rippling the surface of the water.

I can hear something in the rain. I tilt my head, trying to identify it. Crying. My men can hear it too. They pick themselves up, wary as they search the area for the source of the sound. I see her first.

She is small and covered with grime. Her face is red, and she is breathless from her cries. She clutches a ratty doll under one arm, holding onto it as if it is her only link to the world. She is so tiny, so helpless, that I have to help her. My men argue with me, protesting. It could be a trap, they say. There have been tricks like this before. There is no way we can trust her. But she's just a girl, I answer. She couldn't harm us.

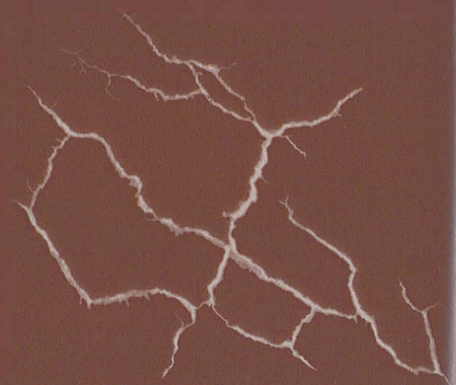
There are more protests. I'm getting angry. My hand tightens its grip on my gun. I'm in charge here, I yell, straining to make myself heard over the sound of the rain. We're going to help this *child.* My men shut up, but I can see the beginnings of mistrust in their eyes. I try to calm them down, saying we'll be home before they know it. I turn to the girl, and she starts to move out across the field, stopping after a few paces to beckon me to follow. For the first time, I hear the warning bells reverberate through my mind, but I follow her. My men follow me.

I can still see the bodies bobbing in the rain, like fishing lures. The bells in my head scream at me, telling me something is very wrong, but I lead my men onward, after the piper taking us from one Hell to another. The bells, the bells! Why did I ignore the bells?

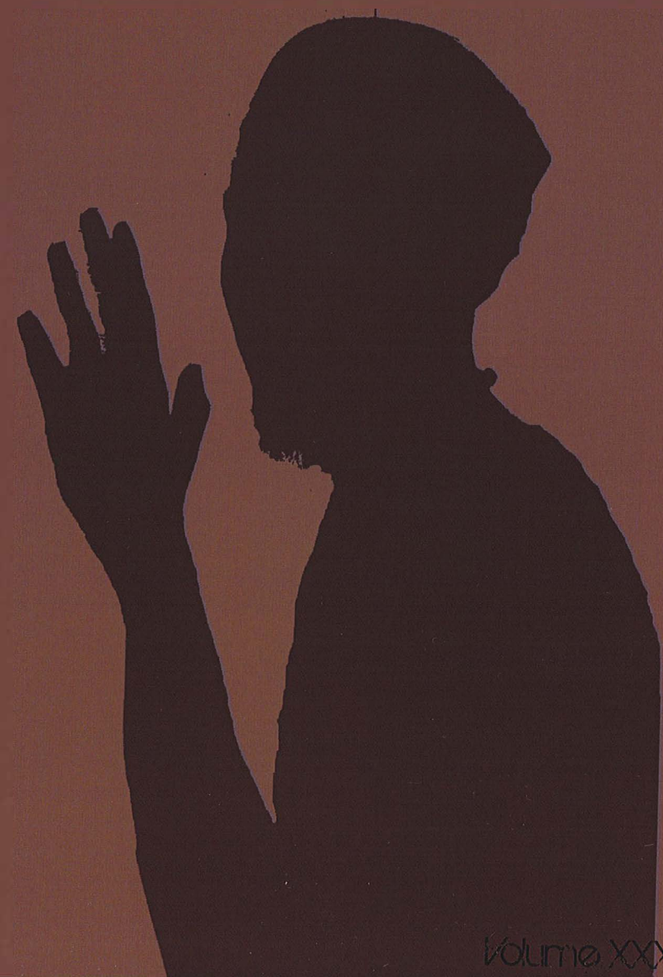
"Sir? Sorry to bother you." A flash of lightning illuminates the girl in front of me. She is not crying anymore. She smiles as the bodies begin to rise from the water. I must be going mad. "I wanted to wish you a merry Christmas." I can hear her voice clearly over the sound of the rain. But it isn't the girl standing before me; it's a student. She hands me a gift. There is a gunshot. A man screams. She doesn't flinch. I take the gift mutely, my hands smearing the green wrapping with red. She doesn't seem to notice; she just smiles and leaves.

The classroom door thuds shut behind her. My hands tremble as I unwrap the gift, and I can hear a soft tinkle from inside. The paper falls away, revealing an ornament: a small, silver bell.

Danielle Lincoln



"They trust my word; they accept my leadership without question. But then, I cannot accurately compare a high school Calculus class to a troop of Marines. I am not asking these students to give up their lives for me."



Neighborhood Friends

"We're neighbors," Gina said, resting one hand lightly on Fred's shoulder. "I live at Johnstone, two buildings over." Tray full, she whisked off to service her tables in the dining area.

The old man, Fred, liked her immediately. He had a full head of white hair, moustache and drawn face. He sat at the bar like a good student at a desk, forward and attentive, and kept his draft beer right in front of him. Although he preferred wine, when out he kept to light beer to stay trim, a feat he had admired earlier that evening while tucking in his button-down shirt in front of the mirror, his evening ritual. Several nights a week, after a simple dinner of soup or a sandwich, he ventured out of his two bedroom condo and patronized one of the local restaurants—Pop's, Pierre's Cafe, or Baxter's, the restaurant he had chosen for tonight. The wait staff of Baxter's, an intimate, friendly regiment clad in black polo shirts, were young, working their way through school.

Gina stopped by the bar again with a drink order. Fred asked, "So why are you waitressing? You said you're a teacher."

"I've got student loans," she replied.

"It's a travesty, all the young people like yourself having to come out of school with enormous debt," he said. "A poor way to have to start out."

"Poor's not so bad," she said and raised her eyebrows. "I try to stay positive."

"What else can you do?" he asked.

"Just have faith. I found mine." Gina probed the neckline of her polo and tugged at a small cross on a chain.

"Yes, well," he said and took a drink.

In the three years since his wife Marian's passing, life bored Fred with its monotony. Even reading had lost its invigorating spell. The condominium complex was centrally located for Orlando, amongst the well-to-do northern suburbs of the city. His fellow retired neighbors amused themselves with gossip; it was rare that a nice young person like Gina would be living nearby. He might see her around, down by the pool or taking a walk.

Gina glided among her tables and stooped to chat with customers. Fred guessed she must be around thirty, although these days any woman under forty seemed like a girl. Would he and Marian have had any children of their own, he might imagine Gina as one of their daughters. Now that Marian was gone, it struck him as curious, even unsettling that when they were a young couple his wife hadn't pushed for children.

Gina stopped by the bar again for a drink order, rearranging the drinks on her tray to make room.

"Why don't you teach college?" Fred asked her. "It pays better in the long run."

"I must have inherited it from my grandfather," she replied. "He taught high school. Math, he could do calculus in his head. But he was dedicated to that age group."

"You're good with people," he said. "I can tell."

"Oh, no, I'm not." She lifted and steadied her tray. "I'm actually shy. Sometimes I'm amazed that I've come this far."

"Your customers like you."

"Or maybe it's the food," she said and pointed to his glass. "Or the drinks." Then she slipped off into the dining room.

Fred watched her for a few minutes as he finished the rest of his beer. At one of her tables, a large party, Gina must have said something funny as she took their order, because the whole table laughed right afterward.

"Another one?" the bartender, Brian, asked. He looked too old to be single, but Fred gathered from overhearing the waitresses' talk that Brian had a different girlfriend every week. Why did young people wait so long to get married anymore? They missed out on those hard, early years together.

"This is my second." Fred tapped the glass's rim.

"I know, I got you. Three and then the tab."

Fred fumbled in his pants' pocket for a minute and produced a newspaper clipping, folded carefully into a square: "Shortage of Nurses in Central Florida Grows More Desperate." "Thought this might be of interest to you," he said, placing it down and giving it a little shove toward Brian.

Brian examined it carefully. "I won't have my degree anytime soon," he said. "But thanks, that's nice of you."

"It'll happen sooner than you think," Fred replied. "You just keep at it." He moved his left foot, still wrapped in its oversized orthopedic shoe from where the doctor had removed the skin cancer spots, and rested it on the ledge underneath the bar. The beer let him forget his uncomfortable, grotesque foot. He soaked up his moments out before he had to bumble home to his condo. For now he could pretend it was six years earlier, and he still had students to talk to.

Nineteen years ago, Marian asked him to stop drinking. Soon after her death, however, he went out for one beer, then another. The doctor said once in a while, with his heart condition, he could have two or three over a few hours, so he stuck to that.

Brian leaned over the bar slightly and asked, "You okay, Fred?"

"Why, I'm as spry as a twenty-six year old, glad you asked," he said. "Just don't tell anyone I'm really seventy-six."

Easing off the high bar stool, he headed out with a slight limp.

The next morning at ten, Fred sat next to the window overlooking the walkway and parking lot, drinking a cup of instant coffee with one blue packet added to it. He pored over the day's Orlando Sentinel and The New York Times, glancing up whenever he heard a car passing through the lot on its way to exit onto the main road. How silly, he thought. School started early, and Gina must have left hours ago. Still, he wondered which of the cars in front of Johnstone belonged to her. Probably the Honda Civic. He doubted she could afford much more.

He spotted an article about local actors breaking into independent film and decided to clip it for Hilary, another server at Baxter's who was getting her degree in theatre. The scissors he had put back on the desk the other day, so he got up to fetch them. At the doorway to the second bedroom which he had fashioned into a neat architect's office, he paused. Shafts of dust-flecked light streamed out from the halfway opened blinds onto the alphabetically-arranged shelves of books. The room remained untouched since the day he moved in, having downsized from the house he and Marian occupied for thirty-seven years in Sarasota. His drafting table was set up as if awaiting his return.

After cutting out the article, he sat by the window for a long time. Some days he made an excursion to the chain mega-bookstore in the nearby shopping plaza that the developers had cleverly called a "village" in an attempt to draw attention away from the messy conglomeration of vast parking lots, boutique stores and noisy traffic that comprised it. Other days he saw movies by himself, often two at a time. He felt like doing neither today. He had not retired until seventy, even though Marian had taken early retirement from her position at the Ringling Museum. He wondered now, too late, if her retirement had been a hint for him to follow. How many of his former students still appreciated his dedication?

He paced, washed the breakfast dishes, and sat down again, restless. He wanted the beauty and passion of life back but he didn't know how to go about it. Then he got out some note cards, thought carefully for a few moments, and then before losing his nerve, he hastily scrawled: "Gina, come over and visit for a few minutes at your convenience. Your neighbor, Fred."

A few minutes later, he slipped it in the slot of her door and headed back to his condo, the droop of his chin lifted. He admired a cormorant perched on the dock at the edge of the lake, gallant and content in its posture, biding its moments in the sun.

His doorbell rang later that afternoon, and he nearly tripped over the stack of old newspapers piled at the entryway. There stood Gina, in dark slacks and a button down shirt—in her teacher clothes, he assumed.

"Please, come in, come in," he said. "You don't have to go to Baxter's tonight?"

"Not until six," she said. "That was nice of you, sending that note. I don't really know any of my neighbors here. I'm so busy."

"But you're here now," he said. "What can I get for you? I don't have much, I'm afraid."

"No thanks, I'm fine."

"Tea? I have some jam and toast." He arranged some Melba toast on a platter and brought it to the

table.

"For awhile I wished I had a roommate, but actually I'm getting to like it," Gina said. She sat down at the dining table cluttered with several different newspapers piled on deck for clipping. She skimmed the headlines of the section on top before carefully moving the pile to make space.

"Go on and read that if you like," Fred said. "You must not get a chance to read much, I'll bet. All those papers to grade."

"I teach biology," she answered. "Lab reports. I don't really read."

"Science, wonderful," he said. "I love reading science books. Science is something you must keep up on. So much to learn."

"All I did was read books as a kid," she said. "Too much of a good thing, you know?"

"Don't you have a boyfriend?" he asked, reaching over and placing the newspaper section in front of her—the book review, one of his favorite sections.

She shook her head and said, "What? You look surprised."

"Never mind," he said. "It's just that you're bright and attractive. And still young, certainly." He took his seat across from her. "I don't understand it."

She paused over the paper, scrutinizing the articles with interest. "What about you? There are lots of eligible ladies around here, I would think."

"I feel the same about old women as I did when I was your age: I don't find them attractive. That's the trouble."

The whistle on the teakettle belted out its whine. Rising, he said, "I'm afraid I don't have regular sugar, or cream."

"That's fine," she said, and checked the screen of her portable phone.

"Relax," he said. The tea bag had risen to the top of the boiled water. He liked tea, but making it was a bothersome activity, and he never understood why Marian had enjoyed "the ritual" as she called it.

He handed Gina the cup of tea, and she immediately began to blow on it. Something about the gesture struck him as childlike and innocent. At her age, she really didn't know much about life, he thought.

"Weren't you attracted to your wife when she got older?" she asked.

"Growing old together is another experience," he answered. "You can't replace that marriage, so why bother?"

"My grandmother said that a lot, after Pappy died." Gina rested her chin on the palm of her hand. She moved the newspaper out of the way before setting her cup down. "But at least you know she's in a better place."

"Marian? I have no idea."

She regarded him quizzically and pushed the plate of Melba toast crumbs aside.

"It doesn't change anything," he said. How could he explain this to her? No matter how many crosswords he completed or educational programs he watched, the emptiness surrounded him. He said, "You're welcome to borrow the book review section you've got there."

"That's okay." Gina brushed her hair off her shoulders and straightened up. "It was nice visiting with you. Funny, this whole time you've been my customer, and we're neighbors."

From his window he watched her the whole way down the sidewalk—the energy of her young legs in stride—until she disappeared around the corner. A neighbor woman a few doors down paused while watering her outdoor plants, and when she looked back toward Fred he quickly shut the blinds. Then, he gazed in the bathroom mirror at himself, the almost comical Santa Claus hair and whiskers, the age spots on his fumbling hands. He drank some Chianti, then fell asleep on the couch.

After the first visit, Gina stopped by for a chat about once a week but never long enough. Just when they got talking about something good, a nonfiction book or an art display coming to town, time was cut short because she had to rush off somewhere. Over Spring Break, she took a trip to the Dominican Republic and he missed her visits. She promised him a postcard and he stuck it on the center of the fridge. The poverty of the Dominicans made her grateful, she said, and you really had to be there to believe it. She looked forward to talking to Fred about the details when she returned.

In bed at night he tossed and turned over the words scribbled on the postcard.

Finally he noticed the reappearance of her car one day in the parking space before the Johnstone building. Not wanting to seem like an overzealous schoolboy, he paid his usual visit to Baxter's that night. But after a few minutes in his spot at the bar, there was no sign of her.

He asked Brian about Gina.

"Slow tonight. She got cut early and went home."

Fred downed the rest of his beer quickly, declined another and instead asked Brian to pick out a nice bottle of red wine. In the last few weeks, he had grown careless about his drinking and visited two or even three bars until late at night. Red wine had been a favorite of Marian's, and he guessed a safe bet for most women. A classy gentleman would bring over decent red wine, and a former architecture professor certainly possessed the credentials.

Outside, rain poured from the night sky and the dank odor of earthy vegetation arose from the ground. Although in a hurry to catch Gina before she went to bed, the clock in his Dodge sedan reading nine-thirty, he drove carefully. No good getting pulled over on a night like this, treacherous puddles on the roads and a great girl to call on.

The answering machine in his condo blinked, a rarity, and Fred couldn't believe his luck when he played back the message. He nearly dropped the bottle of wine. "Hi, it's Gina, back from my trip. I want to talk to you about it sometime later this week." According to the machine, she had just left the message. Perfect. He donned a hat, tucked the wine underneath his trench coat and headed to her place, not bothering to telephone first.

In the overcast darkness, the condominium complex was deserted as he made his way along the parked cars. A breeze rustled the tall palms overhead and his neighbor's hanging plants swayed. Rounding the corner of his building, he heard hushed voices from the porch of the last unit and caught a glimpse of a middle-aged couple—although they struck him to be nearly as young as teenagers—talking, sitting closely together. They shared a low, private laugh, as if not sensing his passing at all. Ahead, soft lamplight shone from behind Gina's curtains. Beneath his coat, he cradled the bottle of wine closer to his warm body.

At opening the door, Gina looked taken aback.

"What a surprise. I just left you a—"

"I know," he replied. "Since you were up, thought I'd stop by." He reached behind his coat flap and held the bottle of wine out like a prize. "Ta-da! I even brought us a present." He stepped past her and into the living room.

"That's nice of you, but I'm just getting ready for bed." She signaled to her cotton pajamas she was wearing, then looked at him and smiled apologetically. "Maybe another time."

"Nonsense. There's always time for a glass of wine between friends." Fred reached forward to set the bottle down on the coffee table, swayed and lurched so that he grabbed the arm of the couch just in time. Now she'll think you're drunk, he scolded himself. But he went on, "You need to unwind."

She took a deep breath. "One glass."

While Gina opened the bottle in the kitchen, Fred took in her condo. The walls displayed some cheap black-and-white prints of European street scenes, and the fabric on the red couch felt worn. Evidence of her recent trip littered the room: hiking boots perched atop a spread out newspaper on the kitchen tile, a travel medical kit lay opened on the counter, and a string bikini hung tendril-like from the knob of the bathroom door.

He took the glass of wine she handed to him. To his dismay, Gina sat opposite him in an overstuffed chair, keeping the coffee table between them. "I've been thinking lately that I need a change. I haven't been back to Sarasota since I moved."

"A trip?" she asked.

"Maybe. Maybe something else." He added, chuckling, "I've got my wits and then some. I guess I like it enough here."

"It's not such a bad place to be." Gina picked up what looked like a travel pamphlet and waved it in the air. "The Dominican Republic, now that really opened my eyes." She tossed the pamphlet onto the coffee table.

"You need to have more experiences like that," he said. "I didn't do enough of it."

"I don't have the money," she said. "This was a sponsored trip."

"So put aside some of your tips," he said. "I always wanted to make it to Barcelona to see Gaudi's work. La Sagrada Familia and all that."

"I learn more from the people when I travel."

she said. "The locals. You should see my pictures." Fred squinted, trying hard to make out the words on the pamphlet. "Maybe when there's more light for me to see," he said.

"Here, sit. There's better light on my side of the room." She turned on another, much brighter lamp. Its brightness hurt his eyes a little, so he looked away. "I'm fine where I am." He patted the cushion next to him, hoping she'd make a move to sit there. "I have some friends in Chicago, but the winters are too hard up there."

"Now hold on." Gina resumed her seat across from him. "A trip is one thing. But moving?" She tilted her head, adding in a dubious tone, "Come on, Fred, we'd all miss you at the restaurant."

"Lately I've been reconsidering things," he said. "Like friendships."

"But you get out quite a bit."

"I keep myself occupied. That's not what I'm talking about."

"Isn't there something you haven't done, that you always dreamed of doing?"

He considered this for a few moments. "I always wanted to be a cartoonist." It seemed silly, just saying it aloud. "But taking up drawing would do nothing for the loneliness. Only a companion can do that."

Gina rummaged in a magazine rack next to her and tossed a thin copy of a newspaper, Westmoreland Church News, on the table between them. "An older man at our church has cartoons in here all the time."

He shook his head. "You realize at a certain point in your life, that you can't do everything. It's impossible."

"What about volunteering?" she suggested. "You might meet a companion after awhile."

"Volunteering never really interested me." He went to take a sip from his glass, and he had drunk it down to empty. When he reached for the bottle and poured a refill, Gina eyed him doing it but didn't say anything. Startling how much she behaved like Marian, the more he got to know her. "The comics are my favorite part of the paper, if you can believe that."

"You can do small things."

"I don't want to do anything. Or is that some sort of crime these days?"

"Of course not."

"Busy busy busy. If you ask me, I don't see one person any happier for it."

"Just enjoy yourself then." Gina had finished her glass of wine and set it down. "And it's been nice having you over, but I really have to go to bed now. It's a school night." She got up and waited for him to rise.

He pointed to the wine. "You save that for next time." Walking, he nearly lost his balance again. He hadn't been this drunk in ages, and it seemed to come out of nowhere. He'd be damned if he couldn't hold his liquor anymore.

Gina stood before him, a few feet from the door. She made a comment about the rain, and the next thing Fred knew he had stepped forward and encircled her in his arms. She hugged him back briefly and tried to pull away, but Fred clung on to her warmth and soft young skin.

"That's enough," she said. "I said that's enough."

His hands found the smooth skin of her lower back and rubbed it. He moved his face toward hers but missed her mouth, so he ended up kissing the air instead. Finally Gina managed to disentangle herself from him, stepped away and flung open the door.

"We're friends," Gina said. "You understand? We're just neighbors. That's all."

He muttered an affirmative reply and trudged home in the wet darkness. The porch on the corner unit now loomed in the dark like an empty cave, and a wind chime sounded faintly from among the hanging plants.

A few days later, Fred stopped into Baxter's and waved to Gina as she passed by. But she ignored him. The next morning, he threw his small wine collection of a dozen or so bottles in the trash. Almost immediately he pulled them out.

Several weeks passed, and Fred noticed Gina had been markedly absent from Baxter's. When asked, Brian replied, "Gina? Working two jobs was too much for her, so she quit." Afterward, Fred didn't talk to her again for months, although occasionally she drove by his condo and waved if she saw him reading on his porch.

Another time, she knocked on his door accompanied by a middle-aged man who was charismatically cheerful. They were going around the neighborhood collecting donations for a church mission trip, the man said. Gina inserted a few words here and there, the entire time shifting her weight in her sneakers and glancing around, uncomfortable.

"I don't give to any charities," Fred replied, trying hard to not stare at Gina after not seeing her in person for so long. She was dressed too young for her age, he thought, in a tight-fitting red polo shirt and a short denim skirt and played with a piece of her hair as she listened. He added, "If you start giving to one, you have to give to them all, you know."

The man nodded, disappointed.

Gina stepped up. "Thanks, anyway, Fred," she said. "How are doing lately? Everything okay?"

"Sure, okay. Doctor sliced another spot off my ear the other day, but who needs cartilage?" He pointed to his bandaged ear as he spoke.

Gina grimaced and said nothing. She and the man thanked him again and knocked at the door of the next unit.

Fred saw her with the church fellow again, at the French bistro across from the park. He guessed it must be her boyfriend. Throughout their dinner, he watched them from the bar and felt certain Gina must have spotted him, but if she did, refused to catch his eye.

He avoided bars and young people for awhile. The neighborhood did have amenities of which he could take advantage, like the exercise room and clubhouse terrace overlooking the lake and the pool. Lots of the residents his age gathered over there for bridge and afternoon barbeques.

One afternoon, he was on his way down to the pool with a freshly delivered issue of National Geographic, when he noticed a woman much older than he, sitting half-slumped on her condo porch overlooking the lake. Maybe she's had a stroke, he thought, hurrying over. He opened the screen door and entered. The woman raised her face toward the sky and pointed up with a frail, quivering finger.

"See him?" she asked. "I've been watching that hawk for two hours now. He's swooping around the lake, can't seem to find anything to eat."

Fred stood there, stunned.

"Come in and sit, won't you?" She returned her hand to her lap and kept her eyes fixed on the bird. Fred took the seat next to her and looked up. He guessed the dark brown bird was a cormorant, not a hawk, but the old woman's eyes probably weren't too keen. They both watched the bird circle in silence for a minute.

Fred didn't know what to say. The woman seemed to have no inclination in finding out his name or who he was. Finally she asked, "How old are you?"

He told her. "I guessed about right," she said, nodding. "Can you guess how old I am?"

"I have no idea," he said.

She gave a little laugh. "You didn't even stop to think about it."

He felt taken aback, realizing she was right. Next to her, he felt like a five-year-old boy. "How long have you lived here?" he asked.

"Forty years," she answered. "Now that's a quick answer, but it didn't require much thought. I've been a widow for thirty of them."

Fred tried to comprehend this. He gulped and blinked a couple times as he stared at her. The woman still gazed over the lake and the treetops, the palms and cypress trees blowing gently in the warm breeze. Tendrils of Spanish moss trailed down from limbs and into the glassy water. She seemed almost a part of their surroundings, the lake and trees, grass and sky with everything in it.

"You must have seen some things change in your time, then," Fred replied. It sounded stupid, once he said it. He felt sure she would make a quick, sharp reply, but she didn't.

"You can't get in the way of change," she said. "When it's ready to happen, it just comes."

When he looked around from where he was now, he saw only the vast expanse of shimmering lake. But he hadn't felt so at rest since long before his wife died. In the short days of their retired life together, Marian would make his tea, sit down across from him and they would each quietly read their sections of the paper. From overhead an eager cry cut through the air, and he looked up at the cormorant, now diving toward a small, flapping ripple on the water.

Vanessa Blakeslee

Kylee - Soft Pastels -Melissa Mays

May Angler's Stories

"Do you see the flowers?" Derek asked. He cupped a rose blossom in his fingers.

The elderly woman on his arm said nothing. She looked past them, through the bushes, and stared.

"No response," he sighed, and stood up.

He looked over her shoulder – not so difficult, he was taller by a foot – at the property the nursing home devoted to the garden. Most of the patients didn't leave the building; they sat inside with their televisions and their chess sets. Those who were brought out were done so either because the nurses assumed it would be "good for them," or because the other residents were getting annoyed. For this woman it was probably both reasons.

She looked so…not there. Crepey skin hung on her hunched body, covered with a matching pink sweatshirt and sweatpants. Someone had tried to give her makeup, but it looked clownish because she was so pale. White wiry hair matted her scalp. While her eyes were unfocused, her hand clung tightly to Derek's wrist. And for that reason, she had to know where or who she was. She had to. He knew about dementia, but he refused to believe that entire lives could just disappear like that. They couldn't.

"You're not alone, you know," he said. Without realizing it, he started rambling. "My grandfather had dementia, but nothing like this. He still talked to people, still tried. Every time I visited him he thought I was a cousin he'd never met, because he never remembered me.

"He died eventually when I was seventeen. Old age, he was eighty-six. He hadn't gotten my name right since I was twelve. Everything he could think of, Chuck, Matt, Barry. Weird names sometimes, like Jeremiah or Ezekiel. But for some reason he couldn't land on my name."

The woman peered in the direction she was pointed, and so at the moment she studied the nurse's blue tunic while he talked. It was crisp, as new to the job as he was. Still so young, still so –
She had seen that shade of aquamarine before. She envisioned it sometimes, on another article of clothing, somewhere. Somewhere in a story.

"The blue on your tunic matches your eyes, if I can be too bold," the girl muttered. Her hair tumbled into the lap of her dress, a washer-woman's dress. She sat at the base of a birch tree.

The young man balancing amid the leaves smiled easily. "Nothing you will ever say is too bold," he said. He picked at a flake of bark on the tree's trunk. It crumbled under his thumbnail. He didn't see her blush.

He found a sturdy spot where two strong limbs met and sat down. Looking at the sky he wondered aloud, "Why do we continue meeting here, Anna?"

She looked amused. "'His Highness is still un-betrothed. I am your chaperone until you've made your decision." Emphasis on His Highness. It was a joke title, they were both too young.

"I came here searching for a bride, not a promise," he answered. "What sort of chaperone is two years younger than her client anyway?"

He glanced down. Dark bangs framed his face. "And don't call me that, you know my name."

She made a face at him. "Yes… Your Highness."

He sighed. He laughed.

"What?" Derek asked. They had almost reached a footbridge when he swore she chuckled at something.

But no. The woman didn't move. Derek was warned she no longer acknowledged people. He shook his head and took her elbow again.

She strained just so slightly to stay there, staring again. He asked, "Do you want to see the

rest of the garden still?"

When she didn't answer he maneuvered her gently away. This time she followed.

The brook was quaint. It murmured over pebbles that formed a mini-waterfall. Small koi made splashes in the froth with their tails. It was put there to separate the plants that needed sunlight and plants that needed shadow.

Derek stopped and directed the woman's eyes with two fingers.

"Look at the fish," he said, pointing. "They're like big goldfish."

He paused before he continued. "I had a goldfish once. It lived eight months – not bad for the little guy. I called him Spark, because he was bright yellow instead of orange. It was the best pet name I ever came up with. When I was six, my dad told me to name my dog Falafel as a joke, but because I was six I actually thought he was serious and…"

The woman grunted. He looked at her. She was squatting a little too far over the side of the bridge.

"Okay, that's enough water for right now," he said. He forced his tone, like a mother guiding her child.

She shuffled through her bath slippers after him, blinking at the sparkles that the sun created. The water sloshed on the rocks of the bank.

In another lifetime, such a tide made a repeat performance.

"You think I can't do it?" he shouted at her, arms wide open in mock defiance.
She laughed, but the grin didn't reach her eyes.

"Rick, get offa that! You're gonna get killed!" The rocks Rick were standing on crumbled ominously on the cliff face, into the broken gray water some hundred feet below.

"Dare me!" he said.

"Don't be stupid!" Caroline was thrilled, but scared. He looked unbreakable, and far from stupid…but really.

"If I go, you go Caroline!"

She tucked some blonde hair behind her ear. The rest of it was swept into a ponytail against the wind.

"I…I double-dog dare you!"

Instantly, she shrieked, her eyes squeezed shut. He had crept backwards when she wasn't paying attention, and fell abruptly off the precipice.

"Rick!"

Caroline ran to the side and looked down, shaking.

She caught him hitting the water, with proper dive form, thank God. After almost thirty seconds, his head popped up.

"If I get up there and you haven't jumped too, I'm pushing you off Caroline!"

She shuffled through her bath slippers after him, blinking at the sparkles that the sun created. The water sloshed on the rocks of the bank.

In another lifetime, such a tide made a repeat performance.

"May Angler?"

Derek looked up. He didn't realize that anyone else had been outside, and instantly he became antsy. If they knew May before, they were likely to be disappointed.

"May Angler?" an elderly man repeated. He trembled uncontrollably.

There was a nurse that pushed him in a wheelchair. She stopped their trek and gave Derek an apologetic look.

"That's her?" she asked as if May couldn't hear. She was the one that trained Derek. Her name was Kate.

"Yeah. This…is her," Derek answered. The employees were well versed about May Angler.

The man didn't seem to notice their remarks. "Then that's…May Angler, the author May Angler?"

May had started stumbling away. Derek saw her move out of the corner of his eye and caught her back. He wrapped an arm around her waist and she halted.

"We'll get going in a minute, Mrs. Angler. No need to get nervous," he said. Kate rolled her eyes.

"That's a little unnecessary."

"Better than being cruel," Derek said.

"She's one of my favorite writers," the man continued. He sounded livelier than his age let on, he had to have been on the home-stretch for ninety. "She wrote so many…what, fantasy romances?"

"Romances in general," the woman nurse said. Derek smirked.

"How do you know that?" he asked her. She shrugged.

"My mom reads her. She goes for that kind of stuff nowadays."

"I read," the man began again (drowning out a distinct "here we go" from Kate), "that she wrote out plans for new novels up until she developed…it."

"Dementia," Derek said. "She doesn't mind."

The man coughed. "She said that she just sees her stories in her head, and writes 'em down."

"She used to," Kate reminded him patiently. "Mr. Jones, she probably doesn't see anything in her head anymore."

Derek cleared his throat pointedly. Kate looked up. She opened her mouth, but before she could speak May moaned again.

"What is it, Mrs. Angler?" Derek asked. May turned full circle.

"Yeah, it is a little hot," Derek said. "We'd better turn in. Almost two, time for someone's TV show."

He waved to Mr. Jones, who looked thoroughly confused, and nodded to Kate. "See you later."

They went back the way they came. He could hear Mr. Jones mutter from behind him, "But she wrote, Good Queen Anna, Be Still, Caroline…A Diamond in the Rough -"

"Yes, Ted, we know," was Kate's reply. "She used to be an author."

May now leaned almost on top of Derek for support. Walking wore her out. During the hottest part of the day she grew more and more tired. She could collapse if she wanted to.

The man fell onto his knees. What was this place? It was so hot…the sun was incredibly high in the sky. The sand blistered his skin, to the point where he was afraid to look at his bare feet after all this walking.

He looked around. There was nothing. Hills of sand, too-brilliant blue sky. Sun, so much sun.

Without realizing it, he fell forward. His cheek landed on the ground. All he could do was gasp. Using his voice scraped his throat.

Tears. Could he drink them?

He closed his eyes, but he could still see through his eyelids. The light helped him in that regard. This was why he could see a shadow pass over them.

He was dying. He squinted upward to make sure.

He had to be. An angel was kneeling over him. A dark-skinned, beautiful, beautiful angel, wearing purple. She looked concerned…was he going to Hell? He supposed it wouldn't matter, if she were the messenger.

The angel cupped his face in her hands. He had difficulty breathing.

"Help is on the way. I'm going to take care of you," she might have said. But he heard nothing but jibberish. He clutched one hand with both of his, holding it there.

"Mrs. Angler, what are you looking at?"

Was she looking at the playground? There was a gap in the shrubs that exposed the fence. It separated the home from the neighboring elementary school. Through it there was part of a swing set and a giant sandbox.

Derek looked from the woman to the fence before stepping ahead a ways to open the door.

"Are you thinking of a story?" he asked. He was surprised at how patronizing he sounded. Was this how he acted around his grandfather, skeptical and mean?

Would he be like Kate?

May sensed the air conditioning and went inside. Her feet dragged on the carpet.

"That's right," Derek said. "You've had your outside time. No more stories for you."

He walked away when he said that, grabbing a clipboard off a nearby desk. He didn't see that May Angler had turned around to give him one more look. Tears brimmed in her wasted eyes.

Amanda Drum

STAFF

Rollins College President
Lewis M. Duncan

Faculty Advisors
Jonathan Miller
Dr. Ryan Musgrave
Dr. Alan Nordstrom
Dawn Roe

Editor in Chief
Nastassia Alayeto

External Relations Chairperson
Fay Pappas

Layout/Design Staff
Nastassia Alayeto
Kyrsten Duncan
Akin Ritchie

Art/Photography Editors
Head: Marcela Wanderley
David Celis
Victoria Sanchez

Poetry Editors
Head: Clayton Louis Ferrara
Aimee Cervenka
Jessica Drew
Cary Hall

Prose Editors
Lead: Rob Hoffman
Cathleen Bota
Colleen Mahoney
Fay Pappas

Copy Editors
Kyrsten Duncan
Arianne Rosen

Business Manager
Fay Pappas

Secretary
Savannah Vickers

Historian
Denisa Metko

Brushing JOURNAL

Disclaimer

Brushing Art & Literary Journal has been established as an open forum for student expression.

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the faculty and administration of Rollins College, but rather are the views and ideas of the individual authors, artists, or literary magazine staff members and editors.

 Brushing will print all student and faculty work of literary and artistic merit. However, if submissions are deemed as possible to incite violent action or be deemed as slander or libel, they will not be printed unless edited. Additionally, the editing process is conducted anonymously so as to eliminate the possibility of bias. No editor is aware of whose work they are reading until the time of publication, with the exception of the chief editor and layout editor, who only discover the names of the authors during layout after their pieces have already been debated and selected for inclusion.

Brushing is published by the literary journal staff at Rollins College, 1000 Holt Ave, Winter Park, FL, 32789, Box 2763. For any questions or comments, please email the current staff at bjournal@rollins.edu.

Colophon

The 37th annual edition of Brushing was designed using Adobe InDesign and Adobe Photoshop. Volume 37 was printed by NextGeneration, Copying and Digital Communication in Orlando, FL, on Letter 100# Coated Text White in 4-color process with perfect binding. The cover was printed on 100# Coated Cover White with 4-color process.

Hairdryers - Mixed Media - Hannah Walsh

Three Friends - Charcoal - Melissa Mays

Acknowledgements

Brushing would like to thank the many people who made this volume possible to produce, and gave Brushing the chance to change and grow: Denise Manning for introducing us to her students, and Art for Peace, Brushing's new child; Professor Philip Deaver for eagerly assisting in creating an official Brushing class in the Spring of 2010; the Rollins College IT department for providing us with a lab, printer, e-mail address and year-round support; 516 for enduring our "Design Parties" that often lasted until morning, and for their artistic opinions and advice of our work; the Rollins English and Writing departments, as well as Winter with the Writers, for their partnership in our annual reading; for their brushes: Abdullah (Qbrushes.com) and Obsidian Dawn (obsidiandawn.com).

And, as always, we thank the many old and new, expert and novice, writers and artists who submit to Brushing. This year deserves a special thanks for the enthusiastic submissions that reached a record high of 365 pieces — your work continues to impress the masses.

Brushing Art & Literary Journal 2009
Rollins College
1000 Holt Ave
Winter Park, FL 32789