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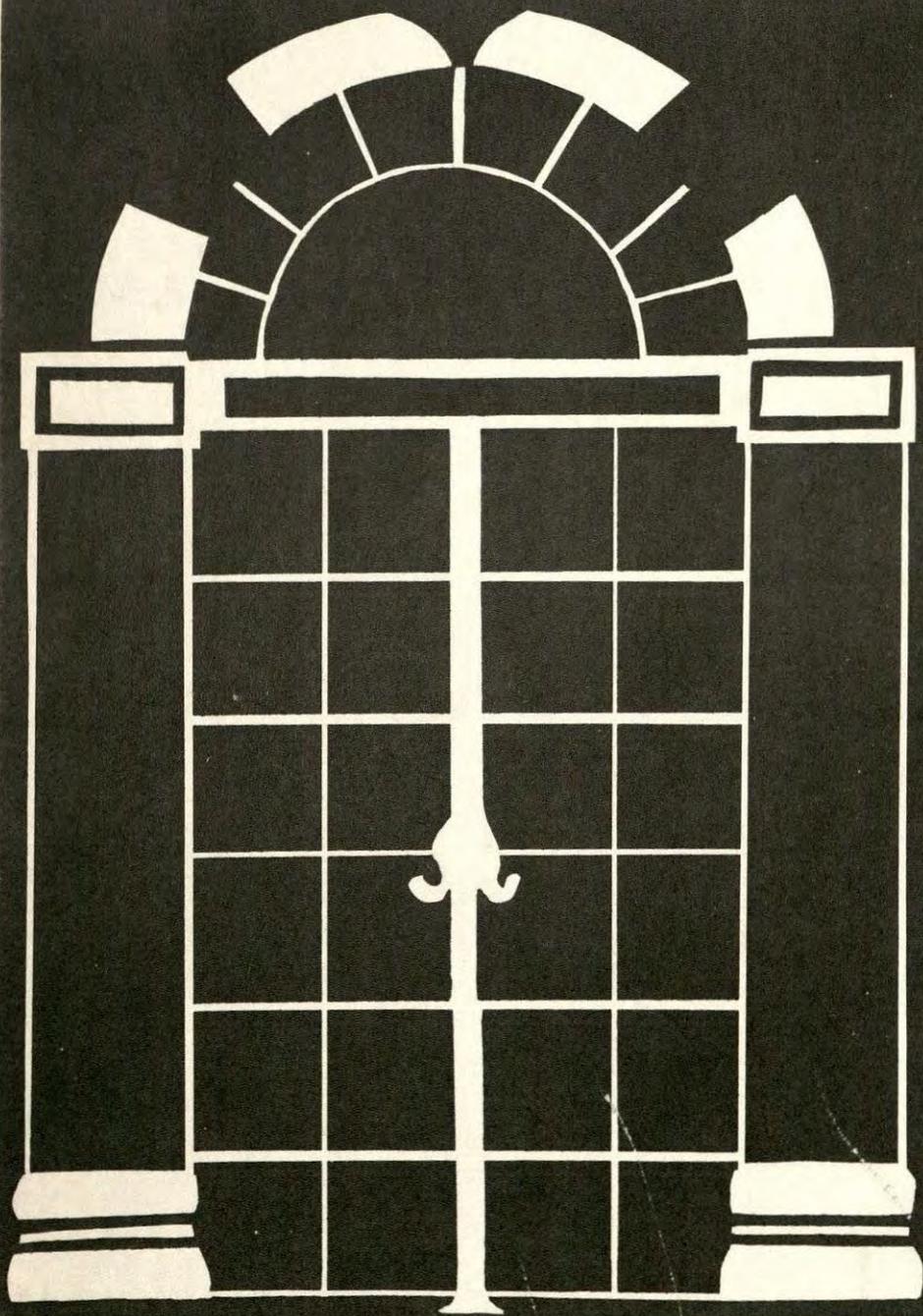
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The Gallery

THE GALLERY —

Connecticut College Literary Journal

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This is the first issue of The Gallery, a student literary journal to be published three times during the school year at Connecticut College. The Gallery contains poetry and prose selected from the works of many talented students. We thank all those who have helped start this publication, especially Mr. William Meredith whose enthusiastic support spurred our initiative.

We hope that this journal is well received and will successfully continue in the future as we feel it is a necessary part of the college community.

the editors

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KINDLERS

i.

They come with eager hands and wood to burn.

You speak first,

You say the ground's not yet been cleared.

They lack a safe and suitable place,
and the steps must be followed
exactly.

Flat stones must encircle the earth.

A fire must be contained.

ii.

All summer you and I have been gatherers of wood.

The pile's well-stacked and high.

Tomorrow's tarp, though, won't keep dry

a store like ours. Rain's forecast.

Tonight, we'll firebuild.

iii.

Before you leave, you cite clear facts.

All woodpiles are undone

by fire, or by rain.

You press your hand (farewell) to the
pane of glass, Amtrak-installed.

We've chosen fire well.

But our ground's unclear. We lack flat stones.

A fire must be contained.

LOST VALENTINES

Did neon please you more,
child through puddled streets?
What cannot be held,
flashes: color on still air.

Over tar-veined pavement
all your hearts, unflashing.
float. Paper, lace, and red
words blurring.

The martyred saint could not have bled
as much.

ACUITY

Unsneakered,
she finds crushed granit.

Greyness foot-felt,
and sharp as the hard, clean air

or the cheddar on the pie
she left inside when she stepped out.

Mornings like this,
it is not hard to get the mail

and walk back to a husband
smiling only at the cat

or over coffee

TIGER LILY

i.
Sometimes it would sway
against Maine's tangled grass.
In wind, its orange was proud
and bolder in that pride

Than pumpkins at the harvest
or crazy Rita's lipstick.

Was it lily brought the sway
and tiger, pride?
It never mattered.
No one asked.

ii.
Her daddy's father
sweat at the Bath Ironworks.
When the noon whistle blew

he'd find her waiting,
every day cradling his lunch pail:
chipped black in suntanned arms.

iii.
Once, he ate his second pear
then hurried her away,

home along the warm, still tracks,
same ones she'd followed down.

Underfoot, the numbered spikes
flaked rust chips in the heat.

At home, outside the cottage,
tapered petals, orange, fell.
She wished the evening whistle would sound
so they could grow new lilies.

—Julia Hewitt

FISHING FOR BASS

Fishing for bass, little brother and I
Two young boys from an arid land
Aliens on a lake in tropical Mississippi
Watched with incredulous eyes, as a great curtain of rain
Raced towards us across the still warm water frothing
Like a sudden electrical current gliding on a chain reaction
On still water it came

As certain as death, our forced baptism came upon us with
The steady eyes of a rattlesnake, venomless
It engulfed us in warm surprise, strangely comforting
Like the peace of dangling lazy feet in the thick green water while we
Talked of Bluegills and bobbers warily cursing
The cloud of mosquitoes that enveloped us in satisfaction, laughing
At foreign Indian names, echoes of a southern road map
Bogallosa - - Shuqualak - - Pascagoula - - Biloxi
Two young boys, lonely pontoon boat and

He, four years younger than I, already showing the rudiments
Of his now adolescent muscular build, dark trusting eyes
Innocent of jealousy and grudges unlike
The defensive and insecure character he had for a fishing partner

I probably felt a lot of animosity in those days
Entering the torrid world of young adulthood yet always
Coupled with him at kiddy tables and conversations
My resentment carried like a chalice before me

Crossing that painful abyss now, he begins to see
Through a different set of eyes

He, back home in New Mexico while I far away
Think of what I should have said
As a curtain of rain
Met two boys fishing for bass
Aliens on tropical waters

—Gordon VeneKlasen

GIRAFFE

A labyrinth of
yellow
on coffee
velvet. Wrinkled
stockings,
Leopard style,
hold the
knobby legs
in place.
The quilted
neck flows
with the
synchronized steps:
Right-right
Left-left.
The spine hair,
like a
level hedge,
ripples with
the strides.
Above, the
heart-shaped
head bobs,
and the
thick eye-
lashes flutter.
Four horns
impress even the
Unicorn, and
the tongue
beats the
Cobra. The
speckled
ballerina
curtsies.

BAT

Sleeping wings night-black
Folded like dry umbrellas,
Shield red dreams of blood.

—Jennifer A. Roecklein

FEVER

From my bed
I hear voices
like rain on a metal
gutterpipe.
The burlap sheet is twisted
binding knee to ankle
I seem to remember a black rabbit
in the closet

I should get up and check

but then I see an hour's passed
it must be gone by now
these animals get in
without you noticing.

—Lesley Freeman

MRS. GALLAGHER'S PRISMS

In Portland, where I did most of my growing up, people were usually only friendly with neighbors whose yards met a dividing fence or hedge. Sometimes families several houses apart would visit, but you never paid attention to anyone living more than three houses away in either direction.

I had a friend named Kathy whose backyard adjoined mine. One of our favorite time-fillers was a swinging contest; she on her swingseat and me on mine. We would sit on our swingseats facing each other, the fence between us, and see how long it would take us to pump to maximum dizzying height.

We'd balance our bottoms firmly against the plastic-ridged rectangle, grip the thick chains that hung from the top bar, and retreat to the point where, if we inched back any more, we'd fall forward. Poised on tiptoes, legs and arms ramrod strong and straight, we'd call a challenge, count to three and shout "GO!" With a burst of power to send us backward off our toes a tad, we'd dive forward in reverse, legs pointing down to the ground, then paralleling it, then striving for height, aiming toward trees. "Pump, pump," I'd chant to myself, rocking my body to the right rhythm of swinging. In a very few passes we'd both be soaring with stomach-sucking sweeps and pauses. When I flew forward I could almost forget that I was attached; when I was dragged backward I got dizzy, and sometimes had to close my eyes. Too soon our swingsets would start that scary thumping, tilting their ends off the ground in an effort to stop us from breaking free. That was the signal to slow down; in my imagination I could see myself tipping over, tangling arms and legs in the bars and chains and iron knobs.

To make the slowing motion more suspenseful, at a certain pass you loosen your hands at the farthest point backward, and momentarily, at the farthest point forward - when Kathy and I were closest to each other, sometimes perfectly even - you leap off, and gracefully float to the grass. Thud, "I went higher!" you call.

So Kathy and I were good friends, good swing friends. We don't keep in touch any more, but I think about her sometimes, and wonder if she gets as much pleasure, and awe, from our common memories as I.

Like the afternoon of rainbows. In Portland, where quality growing and swinging take place, July afternoons are burned, buzzing and lazy. Kathy and I might wander to the field at the end of the street and look for praying mantises camouflaged in green stalks of Queen Anne's lace, or we might ride our bikes and run our dogs up to the windy cemetery that must have been the highest point in town. Or, we might round up a few more kids and head for the town playground. Whatever we did,

we'd do it outdoors, browning, dusty, happy as drowsy bees in the warmth; and wherever we went, we'd always head down the street toward the field, not up to where it met another, busier street. Adventuring this way, we'd pass a very old and very big gray mansion.

This imposing house in neutral tint tantalized us with its size, its occupant and its wide porch which displayed a large hanging seat, always empty. My eye lingered on that swing each time we passed the house. I was sure that the porch would be peerless in afternoon thunderstorm enjoyment. A porch extended my house a bit, but it was skinny, screened in, and jumbled with kid toys and dog toys and dad tools.

A porch can be indispensable during an afternoon thunderstorm because you can sit in it and listen and smell and quiver and scream, and not get wet. Also, tall glasses of icy lemonade are essential for proper afternoon thunderstorm thrills. All the kids in my neighborhood, and occasionally a few brave parents, would pick a nook on my porch and settle down sipping lemonade whenever tell-tale steamy grayness oppressed the day. When bolts and rumbles moved on and only rain remained, the changelings of the crowd donned bathing suits and cavorted in the street, grinning and beckoning to those safe and lemonade-sated in rocking chairs. Of course I danced in the street; I would not be rendered moderate.

The porch attached to the great house down the street was wasted. We knew that an old lady lived there, but she never spent time in important, linking conversation with her neighbors. She never rocked and smelled the creeping honeysuckle on her porch, and she never worked in her yard which grew ragged and weedy. My mother didn't mean to color the inklings, the notions, that I had about the old lady in the mansion, but she frequently cautioned me to pass it quickly and never approach her if she called to me. Naturally, the kids fancied mysteries about her: she was a witch flown forward from the Dark Ages, she was a madwoman who kept Hansels and Gretels chained in her cellar, she ate eels, she wept to the full moon, she never cut her fingernails. We imagined all sorts of evil things, and why? Because we could not endure a mystery in our midst? I cannot answer the question, even now, because I still dream visions when I am in the dark.

The only times we got a chance to inspect the old lady were when she passed from house to car or car to house once a week, and we assumed she got supplies. We could barely see her behind the wheel of her Plymouth, and by the time the car paused at the end of the street, waiting to turn onto the bigger, bustling road, we couldn't see her at all. It looked like the car was driving itself. She was not frightening to look at; in fact, I thought she looked rather frail as she carried various packages and bags through her front door. Kathy and I agreed that her spells probably did not encompass the whole house. With that in mind, we promised each other to explore the stronghold of the sorceress. We never engaged in such delinquency, but that's not to say we didn't discover the truth about the lady and her castle.

One July afternoon in my twelfth year, the humidity was breaking records. The barometer needle pointed as far to one side as it would go, and the dog had dragged himself to the cool, dirt floor of the cellar to pant and drool unceasingly. It was hot. The weather had to break soon, because we kids couldn't endure too many more hours of Monopoly in front of the fan. "Humidity soon to be 100 percent," the weatherman told us. "Thunderstorms predicted over most of the county." Grateful, eager, we packed up Monopoly and ransacked our rooms in search of bathing suits.

The lemonade was ready, the junk was piled in a corner, and the neighborhood soon gathered behind my screens. The sky loomed darkly, lowering, waiting for the incantation which would allow it release in droplets. Just as Kathy scurried up my steps and let the porch door bounce, a flash of lightning provoked a scream from the entire street.

What terrifying black magic we shrieked, what thunder and lightning pageantry! Power flaunted in sound and light made us muffle our ears and eyes in terror, and jubilantly guzzle our lemonade between frights. The game to play during a thunderstorm is a counting game: you reckon the seconds between lightning and thunder, and the closer together the two happen, the nearer the heart of the storm is to you. When an explosion and flare are almost simultaneous, the storm is at its greatest power over your head. We counted and whooped, we waited and quaked, we wallowed in dread. Gradually, the storm subdued the spectacle, and contented itself with fat drops of rain.

Kathy was first out the door and I was a footstep behind. My frosty lemonade was only half gone, but I didn't need a cooled gullet, I wanted to wash the sweat off my body. Some of the other kids followed us. While most of the parents returned to the living room, we frolicked down the street.

At the entrance to the field we paused. Some wanted to frisk in the grass, but I didn't like the feel of wet grass sticking between my toes. As we debated there, a low rumble disrupted the background noise of plopping raindrops. We all stopped talking and stared at each other with wide eyes. Another sound came a few seconds later, but this was more like a muffled detonation than a rumble. Just as the lightning flashed, all the kids except me and Kathy darted back up the street. For reasons we never discussed, the two of us stood at the field's entrance for several minutes, stock still, unappalled at the violence raging around us. What can some children discern in nightmarish visions that their parents cannot confront? A child will not suppress a bad dream; he will fly in leaps to his parents' bed to be comforted, curling to the curve of his mother's body. An adult's nightmare has no such antithetical comfort into which it can disperse. A mother cannot run half-asleep and sweating to her child's bed when she wakes in terror, and so the nightmares accumulate, each bad dream a bit more frightening. An adult has much more fear within him than a child. This is why our parents will not cavort with us in the street on a rainy afternoon, or search wild, weedy fields for tiny monsters.

Kathy and I were not frightened. I didn't feel my usual dancing elation, though; I felt strangely serious, as if I was close to an epiphany in this darkened world of wind and noise and wetness.

Kathy touched my arm sometime later in the din. We began to walk slowly toward my house, two little girls in tank suits who flinched at particularly loud crashes, but who never quickened their step.

As we passed the mansion, our heads swiveled in habit to take in its drab facade. The swing was swaying back and forth, pushed by the wind. My route toward an old and unexciting screened-in porch suddenly deviated. With my friend beside me, I stepped fearlessly onto the wide, dry porch, made footprints to the swing which had beckoned to us, and sat. It was delightful. Here sparkled the elation that had been stricken from me in that first onslaught of the relapsed storm. Kathy and I were suddenly giggly, pretending terror at a possible witch's trap. Thunder boomed and lightning zipped in jagged bolts, and elated, we pumped the swing to the porch's ceiling. The sound and light broke at closer intervals. We forgot to count, and we also forgot to keep silent; we screamed in the exhilaration of near flight in such fury.

We should not have forgotten ourselves as we did. When the simultaneous crash/flash burst, we had the swing at its highest forward position. Up we had reeled to the ceiling and then, breathless for a motionless instant, we were startled witless at the unleashed power climax. I clutched Kathy, she grabbed for me, and we tumbled out of the swing, falling, falling out of thoughtlessness to land with a bump on the floor. We both lay for a moment, stunned.

I wasn't hurt, but I was ready to shed a few shocked tears. I sat up, drew a quivering breath, and then nearly collapsed again at the sight of a face at the window behind the swing. Before I could tell Kathy, the curtains had swung back into place, the front door had opened, and a small lady in a long dress was kneeling next to us. Caught sprawled on her front porch, I could not deny trespassing. What would her punishment be?

She gathered us upright, and with a strangely gentle arm around each shoulder, shepherded us into her home.

It was dark outside, but it was darker inside. The door thudded shut behind us and the noise of the storm muffled to a dream. The lady led us through a dim hallway papered with ancient, browned patterns. We passed a black and glowing staircase on the right and several doorways with no doors on the left. The caverns beyond the doorways were all in shadow. As Kathy and I ventured on, steadily pressured by the arm in lace resting along our shoulders, we stared and swallowed. We were mute, but the lady was not. In a soft murmur she spoke to us, allaying our initial fright with her gentleness.

"That was quite a crash - you two and the thunder and the lightning at the same time! I know you're not hurt, but might you not be a bit chilly? I shall find some towels for you in a moment. When I was a girl, I danced in the rain more than I do now."

Her long dress swished against a petticoat that I saw in frothy moments when her steps flipped her dress up. Her house was as quiet as it was dim. We walked on a long oriental rug runner. "My lovely old swing hasn't rocked its creaky chains in years. I'm very glad someone remembered and wobbled it back to its purpose. Do you girls practice the art of swinging often?"

Kathy and I looked at each other. I asked a silent question with one lifted eyebrow - was this lady seriously glad that we'd crept onto her porch and wavered illegally in her swing? Kathy twitched an I-don't-know message back to me with a minute shrug. I noticed a lighter area at the end of the hallway. We neared it; it broke from a doorway on the right. "Shy little things aren't you? Well, my name is Mrs. Gallagher and here is my sun-room. Find a comfortable chair, girls, I'll be back immediately with towels for you."

She swished away. Kathy and I stood in an octagonal room whose walls were glass on five sides. Some of the glass rippled in dizzying swells, some was bubbled, some lay clear and true as air bound between wood, some was broken into intricate mosaics, edged with lead. Rain wavered in rivulets on the other side of the glass; drops were drawn to the invisible barrier and when they hit it, they raced downwards to find the ground. Beyond the glass seemed to be a garden; all I could see were blurs of green and brown, and brilliant patches of color. Little pieces of glass hung at different levels from strings attached to the ceiling near the windows.

Kathy and I dripped whatever bit of fear was left in us onto a polished wood floor. This was a quivering green and friendly room she had left us in. Sansevieria, maidenhair fern and jerusalem cherry burgeoned in lush gusts from baskets on the floor and on assorted tables and stools. Ivies crept on wood and glass, begonias bloomed in wild riots everywhere, and hanging pots of wandering jew, coleus and boston fern crowded the air. My father had taught me names of many of the plants in our living room. A thick and healthy rose geranium sprang up near us and I knew to rub a leaf between my fingers to release its perfume.

"Melissa, what are you doing?" Kathy hissed at me when I touched the geranium. Perhaps she was still a little scared.

I didn't answer. I inhaled and identified a few more plants - there was a mammoth jade tree occupying a position of honor between two papyrus plants. Palms of all sorts waved thin leaves, and I thought I recognized an exotic philodendron. Flowers bloomed profusely.

The rain had lessened to scattered droplets. It was almost as bright outside as the room was inside. I searched for sources of electric light and

found odd lamps with burlap shades nestled here and there in the greenery. Wind bottles filled with bits like baby pinecones and peach jingle shells served as bases for some bulbs; others had curlicued cast-iron stands. The effect of the magical octagon in which we stood was of ageless romance. The lady in the long dress returned and handed us each a gigantic thick towel. "Come, sit," Mrs. Gallagher said, motioning to low, green-cushioned chairs. While we snuggled into our warm towels, she spoke, easing us into conversation. I studied her: she had short, wavy, white hair, but she didn't seem old. Her face wasn't wrinkled, it was soft and smooth. She was slender and her eyes were blue, pretty. She probably visited a professional manicurist on her weekly outing. I tuned in to her words.

"... like my plants? One of my hobbies is indoor gardening. I shall make a cutting for you if you see a plant that you like, and then you can root it and grow it in your own homes. It would remind you of your kind visit to my house."

Kathy and I exchanged another look, and in both our faces smiles confirmed enlightenment. This lady was enchanting! I turned to her and finally responded:

"I'm Melissa. Is that a philodendron?"

Surprised that I could identify the plant, our new friend was encouraged to talk about her sun-room. Kathy and I commented and questioned, and we spoke of other hobbies: swinging, Monopoly and rain-dancing. Very gradually, the drops outside dissipated to mist and then to fog; the afternoon's obscurity shifted, clearing. At one point, when we were laughing as three long-time friends might, Mrs. Gallagher rose and said it was time for a cup of tea and some biscuits.

Kathy looked at me when she left the room and sighed a huge sigh. "I'm bewitched," she whispered. She pointed over our heads. "Did you see that?"

I bent back my head. I hadn't. Above us hung a glorious chandelier, a precarious gathering of geometric baubles and jagged shards. I could not detect electric bulbs in all the crystal finery, or candles, or even candle holders. I wondered what kind of light gleamed from it. A fragrant cinnamon smell wafted by my nose as I rested my head on the green cushion, dreaming of crystal life in a prism, and I realized Mrs. Gallagher stood between us with a plate of thick, round, brown cookies, a pot of tea, and cups and saucers on a tray.

"I only drink cinnamon tea," she said. "I hope you will enjoy it. I think the taste is delicious, and it is certainly beneficial to the digestive system."

I knew Kathy was hiding a grin. Seriously I looked up at Mrs. Gallagher and said, "It smells lovely. Thank you."

She poured cinnamon tea for us. Steam chased itself upward, floating romance among green leaves. The smell of cinnamon had always made me think of rose potpourri and long dresses.

"Melissa, Kathy, I believe the sun will burn through this fog soon. You both seem the type of person who finds magic in rainbows."

I didn't follow her thoughts, but each sentence made sense. I nodded. Kathy and I had often discussed what caused rainbows, and what rainbows portended. We knew there were omens to be read when a spectrum arced in the sky, but we had not seen enough rainbows to decide on the meaning.

Mrs. Gallagher moved to a window and gazed out. Her slender figure was outlined against a brightening sky, framed by plants. "I dance, not in the street, but in my own garden, on hot summer afternoons when it rains. Today, however I was tending to my poor beasts in the cellar. When the humidity is this high, Newfoundlands are terribly uncomfortable and they cannot romp in the garden as they usually do. Their names are Mab and Oberon. They keep me company."

She did not speak for a few seconds, silhouetted there against window glass and little glasses.

"I do not fear the ignorance of my neighbors."

A beam of sun crashed through the fog and the window and fell into a crystal sliver. On the floor near the door, a tiny rainbow flickered to life.

"Now that you are my friends, perhaps you will come to visit me on odd Tuesdays."

She turned to take us in, smiling.

"At least you must put my porch swing to good use. I rock in my backyard garden swing, you see."

The fog was nearly gone. The octagon began to sparkle and shimmer.

"A rainbow is a nightmare's antithesis. I have always believed that one should let the dark be dark, but when a mystery occurs, walk carefully to its solution with optimism. My rainbows blink the mystery of nightmares to vibrant colors, and fade maleficent illusions."

The room was agog with color. Faceted glass caught sunlight splintering through the windows, reflected, refracted, and tossed pieces of rainbow at the floor, the wall, the ceiling, and back out the window. The plants caught colors and bordered spectrums in green. Light captured by the hundreds of window prisms flashed and seared my thoughts.

The chandelier acted as a ballroom silvery globe that spins and twinkles light in the darkness. It wasn't dark, and we weren't in a ballroom, but the chandelier seemed to manufacture memories of lightning, glittering startling pieces of white light about the room; and I wanted to waltz.

Later, Kathy and I recalled our lives, our families, and our dinners, and we had to hastily excuse ourselves to race home. We did stop in to see her often after that, but no one else ever accompanied us. We told our friends and our parents that we'd met the old lady of the mansion, and we were chastised roundly for it. We begged that she was not bad or strange, that she was magical, but I don't think people took us seriously. I didn't care. I decided that I wanted to be just like Mrs. Gallagher when I grew up. Before I finished the learning that I needed, though, Mrs. Gallagher disappeared, and with her, her prisms. I suppose she died.

Now, I am an adult, to children. I don't swing as high as I used to, and I will not put on my thick bathing suit any more on thundercloud afternoons. But I do hang prisms in all my windows and I recall colors when I am in darkness.

I never warn my children away from the unknown, and I may be seeing through the rose color of the rainbow when I say this, but I believe that when they see visions in the dark, there is no maleficence in their thought. Mysteries are not always dark, and in darkness, mystery is often an illusion. I learned this in an afternoon of swings and thunderstorms and rainbows in Portland, where I did most of my growing up.

—Alison Rogers

THOUGHTS OF THE YOUNGER LOOKING UP

How soon 'til I can reach up
and touch the rim,
or follow his even strides
without a scuff,
not worrying if a crack is stepped upon.

The streams and round rings of smoke,
that quiver as they thin,
roll from his mouth, sculptured narrow.
The same tear my throat, crowd my head, and burst
in premature dark clouds.

He often wears a hat
tilted, of black felt and a feather
that seems to rest innately in conclusion on his head.
The one I buy swells my head
and forms a ring,
a childish dent of hair.

His he flips, just to the right
and silkened strands run upon each other
unlike my roughened lengths,
molding as they will.

In practiced flair, his hands
respond to every up and down of song;
conducting, strumming, as a drum.
His eyes close and lift,
answering the angle of his neck,
easing back in fluent gyres.

With folded arms
my feet, tap time.

— Peter Craig Engelman

BARS

Leaning heavily against iron,
leaning to be close
to the beasts
leaning heavily against iron,
leaning to be close
to me.

Noses strain to catch the other's
scent,
paws to find fingers,
skin to feel fur;
they reach to touch
the thing they cannot know.
But bars forbid.

Eyes see one
another -
bars cannot restrain this.
We, meet,
and understand
something that suffers
no logic,
that speaks
no sound,
that creates
no motion,
and knows
no bars.

And I lean back
and think:
Do not feed the animals.

DIVINING

Someone said
God called for waters and found them
good.
When I called, none came.

I walk a gritty beach
swaddled in blues
and greens nature did not teach
I, a begging lightning rod,
upright on either slope,
exchanging sea for sod.

I know coral deep down,
blood red beneath the blue green.
Stillness is the deepest down,
whatever churns above.
I dive for spectre laces
my dreams are framed of,
pushing down against the salt
salvation of other men.

My fault,
nature wants me light
but I want dark, where coral grows
the smallest more each night.
When she tires, the water will come in easily,
and I will hang too,
coral crosses bearing sin.

WOLF

The winter plain reaching all before me was folded up to the sky
and everywhere it was snowing
growing a whiteness so brilliant
the landscape glowing;
white heat blurred any smaller flaws.
My vision was snow and my heart numb,
but then at my feet,
silent scarlet spread
as vibrant -
the warmth of it collapsing
the frail porcelain; a delicate network
thread with crimson veins.

Some life bled from a bulk of fur; I found
it lay heavy, heavy on my snow-white soul.
Grey shades change the white.

The tail was still
air-soft, stirred in the slight breeze
of an unnamed wind, that could not free the grounded weight
of an animal death.
It must be stepped over.
Nothing disturbs the second fall of whiteness.

DAISIES

When we were younger, we knew daisies
because we lay often in the grass, in summer,
with them exalted at our noses.
We played and plucked them, bare,
and said in our singsong way:
"He loves me, he loves me not."
The daisy then was tossed away,
stripped, as our attention skipped
off to some other thing. The petals lay
scattered in the grass, in summer.

And having gotten older, through
no choice of my own, I now know love
and seldom daisies. You brought me that
white flower spread around a yellow spot
the other day. It brought me the garden
and smallness again. Only now
does the old play make perfect sense.
Only now, remembering, do I know why
I believed
some simple blossom could tell secrets.

JoAnn Elizabeth Coppola

THE BEGGAR AND THE HARLOT

She disapproves of him.
His torn shoes and broken clothes
appall her.
Her eye-shadow shines
flourescent in the neon light
from the bar window
across the darkened alley.
She casts him an up-and-down look
while he stands frozen,
chained to his spot
by the gold-plate chains
dangling over her unbuttoned blouse,
skintight. She advances,
abandoning her turf

for the moment, to inspect him,
to judge him. He fascinates her.
She creeps along the wall
to him. He shrinks back,
she scares him so,
he doesn't know why,
she scares him so,
as if she will take
a sharp bite of him,
spit him out,
and fix her hair.

TINTYPE

dance
dance again
re-dance
swirling on a huge checkered floor
grasping his ironed white shirt
fingering his stiff collar
stroking the back of his neck
gently
his hair
familiarily soft
romance
romance again
re-romance

— Daisy Smith

No. 2 THE JACK POEMS

I.

It is my wedding day.
Jack gives me a
tinderbox full of
rice. To my veiled eyes
the aisle of this church
seems a gaming field
where I am the
shuttlecock knocked up
and around tossed from
player to player
hand to hand I am
moved through the dance
music pushes and
rolls me on relentless
I lose my feet in
its current

But at this
the crest of my career
my tongue trips me and
I can't play any-
more I am tangled
in nets frozen in
the shadow of a
dead saint who stands sure
above me his glass
face cracks a grin to
where I'm pinned in my
travail oh Jack I
have spilled the rice the
seeds your precious seeds
are gone and you are
done for.

II.

Now your eye your blue
glass eye rolls on me
and passes me up
you Jack Sprat must
retrieve your seeds or
there'll be no sowing
no reaping no death
nothing you could live
for

I turn and leave
the saints there graceless
and mundane picking

up their precious seed
those god-like Men those
reverent Fathers
those pious Sons pure
glass statues posing
low where I will throw
my first stone oh my
pitiful heroes
my marooned saviors
I turn and leave you
my tears stain my
satin shroud.

—MaryEllen Potts

CLAMS

Sitting on the floor with his back to the couch, which was not more comfortable, but more secure than sitting on it, he carefully positioned one of several slices of cheese on a triscuit, folding it so none hung over the edge of the cracker, and took a bite. Next he took a sip of rusty-gold cognac he had transferred from his father's Couvoisier bottle into a snifter from his father's cupboard. In his mouth the brandy softly glowed; the cheese caused it to linger there. At one a.m. there would be a Bogart movie on channel six, so he scooted forward and turned on the t.v., then moved back to rest his back against the couch.

When the old color set had warmed up, Alan moved forward again and rotated the antenna dial north through west. Failing to achieve more than shadows behind gray and black dots, Alan abandoned Bogart and turned to the full color of The Tommorrow Show, where a frank-looking man with pudgy cheeks was interviewing the editor of a pornographic magazine. The television was a tolerable companion at that late hour, though inescapable for Alan was the conclusion that he was indulging in a totally passive pleasure. 'Indulging' might even have been too active a word. Maybe it wasn't even pleasure. After a long workday and many hamburgers and steak dinners cooked, he measured his exertion in smaller increments.

Dana and Ronnie often asked Alan to join them for a beer or a card game after the restaurant closed at twelve a.m., but he usually declined. When he did go out with them he felt a great distance between his life and theirs. He was living alone at his father's, and they were his only friends, though more out of circumstance than choice. They never talked of politics, literature, or philosophy, and when he tried to, it was not appreciated.

He sipped the last bit of cognac and returned to the kitchen to refill his glass.

While three hamburgers and a steak sizzled on the grill before him, he gazed down the narrow space behind the counter to where Ronnie was furiously lifting and dropping baskets of breaded food into the fryolaters. "Remember to cross those steaks" Dana said as he passed behind Alan on his way to the closet-sized dishroom. Alan turned the steaks approximately ninety degrees to create a criss-cross pattern on one side - - a ritual he saw no need for and often forgot. When he finished his orders he turned his back to the grill and looked out over the dining room. Only eight or ten people were there. It looked comfortable, decorated mostly in red, and everyone sat in a booth. Every night for the past month the owner had been working to re-do the inside of the restaurant. Alan thought he should spend his time on the outside, where the bare, unadorned red brick gave the appearance of a stockade. A customer walked towards the far end of the counter with his check. Alan travelled through

the narrow space where the cooks worked in full view of the customers, to the cash register, where the man was waiting to pay for his meal.

Returning to his seat between the couch and the color t.v., Alan sipped from his refilled glass. Insecurity leaked from the interviewer like sweat from his skin. He was the star of a popular all-night show. His hands shook whenever he held them forward to emphasize a point. He tried to be chummy with the porn publisher, frequently asking him to 'be on the level.' Gadgets were the pornographer's hobby; the host wanted Alan to see the human side of his guest. Alan ate his cheese and sipped his brandy slowly, paying little attention to what the two men on the television were saying.

During his break from the grill, Alan ate salad and read the paper, while Ronnie, across the small table, wolfed his fried clams and looked anxious. When Ronnie finished he reached his pudgy hand over Alan's paper and tapped him on the arm. Alan looked up into eager eyes, which seemed closer and more intense in the cramped booth. "I bought a ring yesterday" Ronnie said. He was sitting on the edge of the bench, his hands clasped in front of him, his chest pressing against the table edge.

"You what?" Alan asked, reluctant to ask the questions he knew Ronnie wanted to hear.

"A ring. I bought a ring. For my girlfriend." Ronnie did not seem disturbed that Alan was slow to respond correctly. His eyes were still expectant. Indirectness bothered Alan, and if Ronnie had not looked so innocent and childlike Alan would have remained aloof in protest. But he did not want to appear superior, so he said the right thing, "Are you and your girlfriend getting married?"

"It's an engagement ring. I haven't asked her yet. But she wants to marry me. I know it." From his pocket Ronnie drew out a small green case and handed it to Alan. "Open it. Go ahead. You can look at it. It's real gold. I paid seventy dollars for it." Alan did not think he should be looking at an engagement ring before it was on a woman's finger. He did not know Ronnie well enough to be included in his plan. "Impressive," he said, thinking that it was the wrong word for an engagement ring. He could not say what he really felt, that Ronnie was too young and irresponsible to be getting married.

From the dishroom came the sound of Dana's angry voice, and Alan knew he was berating the dishwasher again. The dishwasher would be cowering and mumbling weakly in defense of his ignorance. No one could be as abrasive as Dana when he was impatient. How someone with Dana's skinny build, freckled face, and fish-like lips could intimidate another puzzled Alan. Perhaps it was because Dana's thick glasses obscured his eyes.

After turning off the set Alan remained in his place and continued to stare into the blank screen while he sipped his cognac. The interviewer

reappeared with Dana and Ronnie as his guests. All three looked as if they had been standing over hot oil for several hours, except the interviewer wore a suit and tie instead of a white short-sleeve shirt and white pants. They slouched in comfortable chairs.

"These two men I have here tonight," began the host, "may look disheveled and layered with grease (and to be totally honest, ladies and gentlemen, they also smell of fish and you wouldn't want to be where I am now), but they work in a field crucially important to the growth of the nation's shopping malls, and indirectly, America. They work long, hard, sometimes risky hours in the food service industry. Their restaurant is only a parking lot away from an eight-theater movie complex." The interviewer turned to his guests, whose eyes were fixed on the camera. Ronnie was looking at the wrong one. The interviewer continued, "Dana and Ronnie, welcome to the show."

"We cook fried clams," Ronnie said to the host, "You forgot to tell them that."

"Well, I did. Indirectly," the man in the suit and tie said, hurriedly and softly. In a louder voice, he continued, "Now tell me, is it true that you men serve over two thousand pounds of fried clams a day to thousands of housewives with tired feet, businessmen with hemorrhoids, and teenage movie-goers who believe shellfish the key to sexual prowess?" Dana's eyes, blurred by his thick glasses, were still fixed on the camera. Assuming an authoritative posture, Ronnie responded, "Sure T _____. You're right about the teenagers, which probably accounts for the ravenous consumption of our featured product at eleven o'clock on weekend nights. But don't forget the hamburgers. We serve twelve kinds. Alan cooks 'em: Chili burgers, Texas burgers, Gourmet burgers . . . Hey. How come Alan isn't here anyways?" Dana took his eyes off the camera and hit Ronnie on the arm, "You forgot smelts. We got smelts on special real cheap." Turning up his sweaty nose in mock-disgust, the interviewer said, "Aren't those the ones with the little bones in them?"

"Well, yes," Ronnie said, "They're kind of like big sardines. And some people don't like the crunch. Alan don't. But then Alan don't like to drink beer with us, or go to the races, or play whist."

"Would you say he's narrow-minded?" the host asked.

"He's the narrowest guy I know," Dana answered. He had ceased to look for his girlfriend and mother in the camera lens. "All he ever eats is salads." The host let out a restrained "Ha Ha Ha," and turned to Ronnie, then back to Dana. "Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us tonight, and most of all for confirming that Alan lives in a narrow world."

It was time for bed, so Alan picked himself, his glass, and his dish up from between the couch and the television. In the kitchen he set his plate in the sink, then carried the little bit of cognac he had left to the bathroom.

As Alan looked in the mirror, trying to imagine someone else looking at his face, he saw its inadequacies. In an effort to look resolved and mildly threatening, he tightened his lips and narrowed his eyes, but it was not the appropriate expression. His face fell out of focus and he could see more clearly the closeness of the red tiles on the wall behind.

He threw off the cushions that transformed the small bed in the corner of his father's study into a couch. Once under the covers he adjusted his body to the lumps and sags in the old mattress. A bed in which he felt more comfortable was back in his very own room in his mother's house. The old room was a memorial to his adolescence. Someone had replaced the screen on the window he and his friend used to crawl out of late at night. During his last visit the room felt smaller, and the new screen sealed it off from new and unpredictable things. Once he and Pete Friedrichs climbed out the window on a clear, moonlit night, and rode their bikes down to the golfcourse where they hid in the sand traps, ducking low just before the sweep of the spotlight reached them. A man with a flashlight spotted Pete and Alan and chased them down the fairway. At home, they hid their bikes inside for fear the man with the light might come looking. They spent the rest of the night wondering whether the police were after them, even though all they had done wrong was to ride their bicycles on the golfcourse.

Thinking of Pete and the old room made Alan restless, and he decided to go for a drive.

There were no other cars in sight from the entrance to the highway, though the reflective cat's eyes imbedded in the road made Alan feel not alone – the tiny eyes watched him, and created a track to tell him where to go. The trail led through a tunnel formed by the roadside reflectors and the stars above. After driving a mile south he could see the lighted sign of the all-night restaurant on the street where he worked. All the other signs – for the steakhouse, the toy store, the car wash, and McHugh's, where Alan worked – were unlit. The mall across the way was closed; the vast parking lot empty except for a single car parked near the mall's entrance – probably the night watchman's. Alan's car was drawn from the highway by the sweeping curve of the exit and onto the strip, where the huge, darkened CLAMS sign atop McHugh's seemed to hide behind all the others. Between the side of the road that Alan found himself on and McHugh's, was a guard rail, so Alan passed the restaurant, made a u-turn at the break in the rail, and came back on the same side of the road as McHugh's. Inside the restaurant, working underneath a portable lamp, the owner was hammering away at something. Alan executed another u-turn, drove up the road again, and passed McHugh's once more, traveling slowly so he could get a long look at the man under the light. Several times he passed the restaurant, carefully observing the amateur carpenter at work. Eventually, Mr. McHugh noticed the car and poked his head out the door of the brick structure. He yelled, "Hey you!" and Alan increased his speed. As he headed for the highway, he scanned the road in back of him, wondering if McHugh was following in his car.

He wasn't sure whether he had yelled, "I hate clams!" or not as he passed McHugh. Even once he was well up the highway and alone on the road, he continued to check his rearview mirror.

— Frederick Hooven

DIALOGUE

For Adrienne Rich

He says
*Most women make me feel like shit,
but you make me feel
really good inside*
and I reply
*It has been a long time - -
so many months dead - -
I had forgotten how good it feels
to be alive.*
I never knew anyone
could stare life back into an abandoned shell.

There's something you missed, Adrienne,
ten years widowed and
ten years lesbian.
It doesn't matter
if sex is an illusion,
if I am not myself
in a man's arms.
It doesn't matter
how the body I shift against
is constructed,
or whether the green-glass eyes
are his or hers.
Naked we are all alike - -
during sex, small children,
not knowing enough
to come out of the rain.

He says
*Nickel for your thoughts - -
inflation*
and I reply
*I know, even now,
that there is doubt about these things.*

(Note: This is a response piece to Adrienne Rich's *Dialogue*; lines 16, 32 & 33 are echoed from that poem.)

CHRISTMAS MORNING

(after the death of a friend)

I come out to the tree early,
mother and father still wrapped
in snow - like slumber - -
only the cat is awake with me.
blinks her slow gold eyes
before the embers
of last night's fire.

I slip by the branches
and the tiny white lights
come to life - -
ornaments kiss skins
where I brushed past.
I stir the fire, put on
new logs - - the cat stretches,
runs to the kitchen,
rolls over to be fed.

I start water for coffee,
put away the dishes
mother and I stayed up washing
last night, after the guests had left
and father had gone to sleep.
We spoke as girlfriends,
tongues loosened by Christmas wine
Uncle Owen made in October
with dried woodruff - -
she hardly aware of the gap
she could not fill.

Last night she said, half hearing
the beating of my heart
*You're getting so suddenly old these days - -
sometimes I can't imagine you my daughter - -
but some adult I somehow know
living in the front bedroom.*

She's lonely, strives to touch me,
but I live a life she can't know - -
so she washes and I dry.
It's often like this, the similarity
between mother and daughter - -
the silence, near-misses,
numb tongues.

The cat and I wander back to the living room
where the tree shines regardless of
the presence and absence of admirers.

I remember you and me complaining
of waking first on Christmas morning - -
I, a child, ordered to stay in bed
until at least 9:30 - -
you going to church, thinking of
*(May the souls of all the
faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace. Amen)*
foil-wrapped packages and weighted stockings,
Last year, college freshman at last,
we both slept in - -
you finally wakened by three impatient
younger brothers,
I by my mother,
frightened by my sudden preference for sleep
over gifts.

This year, I alone am awake,
though I can feel your brothers
waking slowly in their rooms - -
lying still, listening to the silence of the house,
the emptiness of your bed,
the beat of their hearts
echoing in their ears.

— Kaci Kinne

ONION HARVEST

The onions have come up
again, the bulbs deep purple
and white. The brown earth
grows fragrant with its own
motherhood, an honest woman.

Stems reach out toward
the air, waiting for the gardener's
thick hands. On worn knees,
before her offering, he dreams
of pale, translucent skin
and gentle layers of flesh.

Such kindnesses are few -
these forward meetings
where there exists no hesitancy
in sacrifice, and few regrets
save for tears.

— David Craig Austin

CELLARAGE

Grandmother, cellar-aging
like wine
in a rotting cask
your smile
splintered
or a bottle fading
paled with dust
your hands spotted, frosted
with quicklime
your veins, uncovered
pipes. But 1906
was a good year, you laugh
for a vintage me.

WAITING AT THE OB/GYN

with amber jars as calling cards
size 40 polyester pants
bloat-bellied madonna
proud of your bloodless reign
license to swell, to command

mutual recognition floods over
didn't we wash by the waters of Babylon
spell each other cupola-waiting for Hellas sails
disembowel boars by torchlight
share the blushing dawn of this
our civilization

no hemispheres, no time
only an umbilical clothes-line
stretching into eternity

To think I used to feel sorry
for you in the supermarket

— Sara Townsend

KAREN'S PAINTING

White trellises and pink climbing roses
the third from the left, the dormer - -
that's my room.
Blue shutters and those pine trees that drip pitch
the maple with the tire swing
a swing you didn't know to paint in
just as you didn't know me.
That shadow is the apple tree
that Dad cut down
after you died.

Grandpa gave me your jewelry
the bracelets that say
your name your initials your love
I wear them all the time.
The tire swing is gone now
and nothing hangs in its place.

You still hang in the shadows
of our dining room
the light on the paint
drawing out the golden flecks
in your gown.

— Abbey Rhines

THE BOG AT BALLYHAUNIS

The bog simmers, a warm brown mass
of long, long twisted tree roots
cellar-smelling of rotting peagreen moss
and bubbling up Viking treasures or farmers' boots.
Stretching around house, shed and rock wall,
the bog sucks in any unwatched thing;
stray shovel, notebook or wedding band, all
submerged in turf and lay in waiting.
Today the bog gives up a treasure
a moss encrusted amulet, some Dane's trinket.
In sunshine I see a deep plum gem set in its center,
wonder who had worn it around her neck.
After, I gently toss it back to the turf.
Reclaimed, it goes seeping into warm wet earth.

CHILD OF GOD (for Maria O'Kelly)

When I first saw you
scrawny and pale
with your tongue hanging out
"like a puppy dog,"
I was frightened.

Your thin skin seemed to glow
with a ghoulish light as you
watched me watching you.
I was so nervous then.

The Irish people think
you're a blessing.
Your father's butcher shop
sells more meat since you've come.
They're convinced.

"Such fools," said your mother,
"When Mia was born, God was
looking the other way."
Her tired blue eyes tell me
that she wishes you were
healthy like the other six.

But you listen to the radio
and dance to pop hits.
Each night on the blue carpet
you wrestle with your sisters.

When I came home from Paris
you ran and hugged my knees,
declaring how much I was missed.
Your sisters gave polite greetings
and then fought over the French chocolates
I'd left on the table.

That day I brought the empty suitcase
down the stairs, you ran to your mother
crying. You thought I was leaving for good.
I wept all that afternoon, loving your innocence,
Wishing for such a blessing.

THE SUN UNDER SOIL

Underground, where the sun doesn't shine,
At least not the yellow star we rejoice
In eastern mornings and applaud in evenings
West after the brilliant day's performance,
Things grow still.

Beneath reliable soil, moist like coffee grounds,
Sprout rooty crops among the worms and quick,
Wet-loving beetles. Carrots, turnips, potatoes,
Old or new, and beets, though dull and dirty,
All when sliced or bitten burst into color
In the world above.

Crisp carrot orange, like sight when staring sunward
With eyelids down and turnip yellow, the edible
Sunflower and potato white, the canvas
Before the painter's brushstroke.
And the beet's luscious purple stain.

— Allie Lyons

