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The Lantern Vol. 68, No. 1, Fall 2000

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THE LANTERN



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The Lantern

URSINUS COLLEGE

Volume 68, Number 1

Fall/Winter 2000

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Editor's Note:

The Lantern congratulates Joe Laskas, Toks Laniya, and Dan Gallagher for their prize winning works, greatly contributing to this beautiful book of art.

I offer this book to any aspiring writers and artists, any appreciators of fine poetry and prose, or simply any passer-by who wants to see what great, visceral works Ursinus students can produce.

I would like to thank the entire staff of *The Lantern*, our indomitable advisor Dr. Jon Volkmer, and especially board members Genevieve, Lauren, Monica, Dan, and Corey: who knew Led Zeppelin and poetry could mix so well?

Jeff Church

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JUDGE'S NOTES

Poetry Note

Selecting a poem for this prize was difficult. I would like to recognize the author of 'Coffee' and 'Fifty Years' for having written exceptional works.

I chose 'In Attempting to Imitate J. Agard', well, because it was fun. I do not mean to suggest that I made this decision on a whim. But I giggled when I read this poem. Then I read it again. I felt warmed. Alive. That we could all find such joy in simple objects. That we could all experience such delight in the sensuality of our every act. Read this poem. Read it aloud. Eat a mango if it helps. But, by all means enjoy it!

Prose Note

The greatest stories ever told are true. Not factual . . . but true. They are stories that fill you with a certain disquietude, as if something has been revealed to you that you shouldn't know, or that in now knowing it, your view of people and the world we walk in is altered, permanently. 'No Surprises' is true in this way. It would have been easy for the author to let the suicide at the center of the story do all the work, to *be* the whole story. Rather, the author chooses to use details of the characters' lives to reveal more, to say more. The dirty baseboards, the scented soap, the cereal bowl. The mother filling her home with not-quite-beautiful painting of lighthouses. The girl who marries the man who rescues her from a dumb mistake. The son's desperate desire for a life that's not real except in the magazine section of the Sunday Paper. The old television box filled with once read books. The truths in this story are artfully unfolded and delivered without sermon or explanation: we each settle for less than our dreams, though we wish we hadn't. We will regret what we have not done and rue what we have not spoken. There is great injustice in the division of happiness among humans. We can not shield ourselves or our children from the truths it hurts to know.

-Erin Gorman

In Attempting to Imitate J. Agard (III)

Olatokunbo Laniya

sweet seductive mango unfolds
in a passionate tango
with my taste buds
pleasure floods
my mouth
ravenous searching
devours deflowers this
ripe mango
moist with sticky flow
precious delicious juice trickles
down
to my elbow
relish this red-yellow
sun-kissed wonder
trained in the art
of palate pleasing
teasing my tongue
releasing unleashing intense fervent
rapture
pulsing over me
in waves
wetting my mouth
chin
fingers
juice lingers,
staining me

No Surprises

Daniel Gallagher

In twenty-three years of living on Moyer Road, Carol had never been shocked. When she and Bill were first married, and lived in that row home on Island Avenue near the airport, then shocking things happened. Then she would wake up to gunfire, or sirens, or cursing and the sound of flesh hitting flesh. Then she was shocked. But on Moyer Road they were safely an hour and forty-five minutes (the way she drove) outside of the city. (Bill could make it in an hour and fifteen, but Carol felt no need to drive so fast). On Moyer Road they never heard gunshots. On Moyer Road, she never sat awake holding the phone, one finger poised on "nine" and another on "one". On Moyer Road, people put their neighbors' empty trashcans away for them if they were at the curb for too long. They took care of each other's dachshunds or Scottish terriers when someone went on vacation. Anybody's child could get a glass of milk at anybody else's house. Nobody's Christmas lights stayed out for more than a week past New Year's. So in twenty-three years, Carol had never dealt with anything shocking on Moyer Road. Until the day her son killed himself.

On the day Carol's son killed himself, she woke up at eight o'clock. Bill had left for work at seven-thirty. Carol put on an old pair of jeans, a stained t-shirt that said "Florida" in fluorescent colors with palm trees, dirty white canvas sneakers, and a faded blue bandana around her head. She planned to scrub all the woodwork in the house, because it was her day off from Eddie's Discount Drug Store where she worked as a cashier. She washed her face with one of the soaps her oldest daughter gave her in a basket from the Bath and Bodyworks in the mall. It smelled like peaches. Carol would have preferred strawberry, but peaches were nice too. When she felt clean and dressed, she walked downstairs to find her son at the kitchen table, still alive, eating a bowl of corn flakes with two spoonfuls of sugar on top.

Kevin was twenty-two and had moved into a house in the city with some friends after graduation. That was six months ago, but it was not unusual for Carol to find him in her house, and especially not unusual to find him eating in her house. She stopped in the doorway to the kitchen and looked at him. He was oblivious to her, as he ate and read the classifieds. He was looking for a car. He couldn't afford a new car, and it was an exhaustive search to find a used car that fit his strict specifications. No trucks, no station wagons, nothing more than five to seven years old, less than seventy-five thousand miles, no rust at all, and under six thousand dollars. He had been looking for months. Every newspaper he got his hands on was decorated with precise circles in red ink. He circled anything that fit two of the categories in red ink, then used green for anything fitting three. He also had a blue pen for four categories or more. There were no blue circles. If a car got a red or green circle, he decided if he could make an exception due to some overwhelming other quality, like a car with too many miles but an incredible price. He never made an exception though.

She'd seen him pass on at least a dozen cars that would have been fine for him, including what she considered to be a very cute 1991 LeBaron convertible that Mr. Collins down the street was selling at a reasonable price. It had a minor oil leak, though, that Kevin didn't feel like dealing with. The LeBaron was eventually sold to a girl named Kimmy Stonz who lived in the next parish. She never got the oil leak fixed and ended up on the side of the road one night. She had to hitchhike home, and eventually married the man she caught a ride with, even though he was seven years older than her. Her parents were not pleased. The LeBaron was scrapped because no one could afford a new engine.

Kevin's hair was getting shaggy and his curls were coming out. He looked terrible when it got to that length, just below his ears and all in his face. He was given a haircut before the viewing, but it was much too short. He looked years younger than he

really was. Carol sometimes wondered, in spite of herself, what his hair looked like in the grave. Someone had told her once that it kept growing after death. She stepped into the kitchen and offered to make him some eggs and scrapple, and opened the conversation that would sear itself into her memory.

“No thanks, ma.” He didn’t look up from the paper. “I’m eating cereal.”

“I thought maybe you’d like a real breakfast. You look like you’re losing weight. Are you eating right?” Though she was often mocked for it, Carol could not shake the motherly feeling that none of her children ate right outside of her presence. She used to have visions of Kevin in his own house sitting down to a dinner of cheese and crackers. Those visions would change. She pulled an English muffin out of the freezer for herself.

“I’m not losing weight, trust me.” He folded up the paper and drained the milk from his bowl.

“Well you look like you are. How come you’re home so early in the morning?” She grabbed the bowl off the table, rinsed it, and placed it in the dishwasher. By the end of the day, she had pulled it out of the dishwasher, still dirty, and cried herself to sleep clutching it. It was the last thing she had known him to touch. It was donated, along with the entire dining set, to the Salvation Army when her husband finally got her to give it up. A small family in West Philadelphia picked up the set and used it for years, but the bowl was shattered by their six-year-old when he had over-filled it with Shredded Mini-Wheats one morning. He needed four stitches in his foot from one of the pieces.

“You sure you don’t want some scrambled eggs and scrapple?” She dropped her English muffin into the four-slice toaster.

“Scrapple’s disgusting. Anyone who’s not from Philadelphia thinks we’re all disgusting for eating that slop. Did you know that? It’s the stuff that they sweep off the killing room floor.”

★

Over a year from that point, Carol would be in a doctor’s

office trying to explain. She would run down the conversation up to that point, and then she would stop, would falter. Her voice would fail for a moment.

“It’s my fault,” she would say. “He tried to tell me. ‘Killing room,’ see? I should have listened better. I should have known. How could I have not known? It was clear as day, right there. He was trying to tell me. I should have known. I should have known.”

“Nobody could have known, Carol,” her doctor would say. “You cannot blame yourself,” he’d say. But she would keep saying it, over and over, until it was all she could say, all she could think. And when she couldn’t say anything else, they took her away.

★

Kevin pulled a cigarette from a soft pack in the breast pocket of his shirt.

“No smoking in the house.” She was buttering her muffin in front of the open refrigerator.

“Dad smokes in the house all the time, what the hell —“

“Have you seen the raspberry jam in here?” She put the muffin on the counter. “Your father smokes a pipe, not your disgusting cigarettes, and for your information I’ve gotten him to smoke outside now too. There it is.” She dipped the butter knife into the jam, making a mess of the jar.

“You actually got Dad to smoke outside?” He had the cigarette poised to place it back in the pack, but was waiting for an answer to actually do so. When the body was brought to the funeral home, the pack was still there. The mortician smoked every last one.

“For the most part. Just put that away, because *you’re* not smoking in here regardless. I never smoked in this house, your grandfather never smoked in this house, and you are not going to smoke in this house.” She heard the cigarette slide back into its pack. Maybe if she had let him smoke in house? Could that have done it?

“Ma, you got a little bit of jelly —“ He pointed to the

corner of his mouth.

“Oh,” she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. She was the type of woman that could wipe her mouth with the back of her hand and not seem crass. It was almost an endearing trait. “So you didn’t answer me. How come you’re home so early? I didn’t think you got up this early when you worked the night shift.” Kevin worked as a manager at a twenty-four hour grocery store in the city. At least, he used to. Carol didn’t know at that point that he’d quit because he thought it was degrading to have a degree in finance and work in a low-end grocery store. She turned to face him and sat down at the table, one half of the English muffin gone, the other half on a napkin. The pieces weren’t there for Carol. She didn’t think of what her house had that his didn’t. She had no reason to.

“I dunno.” But he did, by that point. Carol wouldn’t know for another five hours. “I wanted to pick up that box of books that I left here. I finally got a book shelf at my place.” He reached for the other half of her muffin.

“I told you I’d make you eggs—“

“Are you gonna finish this?” He was already holding the half muffin.

“I don’t understand you children. I say I’ll make you something, something hot, a real meal, and you —“

“Blah blah blah —“

“Don’t ‘blah’ me, mister.” She folded her arms across her chest. “Do me a favor?”

“What,” he said around a mouthful of food.

“Dana’s got a half day. Can you pick her up for me? I have to run some errands later.” She unfolded her arms and examined her fingernails.

“Sure.”

He lied. Of all the things Carol would be angry about later, that one would stick. Why did he have to lie? He knew he’d be dead by that time. According to all the evidence, he knew when he would die. They found pages of internet printouts in his

house researching everything about the way he chose to die.

“What about Richie?”

“He’s on his class trip. All the seventh graders are at the Inner Harbor for the day. He won’t be back till around ten. Just pick up Dana and I’ll give you some money to get your hair cut.”

He grunted and got up from his chair, leaving the newspaper on the table. After everything had happened, the newspaper was put into a box that Richie kept in his closet. Richie didn’t deal with the death like the rest of the family. He was quiet. It hardly seemed to affect him at all, unless one were to see the box in his closet. Piled on top of the newspaper was every birthday card Kevin had ever given him, as well as Kevin’s junior high soccer trophy, one of Kevin’s shirts, and the broken gold chain that Kevin used to wear in high school. Richie gathered things, one at a time, from Kevin’s old room. When he felt like he was going to cry about it, he opened the box and went through everything. He would wear the shirt, set the trophy on his nightstand, hold the chain, and read the paper. He called each of the circled names, waited for an answer, and hung up. He would do all of this, but he would never talk about Kevin with anyone, even the family. He left the room when the topic arose.

★

Carol spent an hour and a half cleaning the woodwork. She crawled around the baseboards of the three upstairs bedrooms with a bucket of soapy water and a rag. She stood on a stepstool to clean the tops of the doorways. Kevin lay on the sofa downstairs, alive, watching syndicated sitcoms on cable. By the time she was done with the bedrooms, the water in the bucket was a dark grey color, and the rag was nearly black. She washed her hands and went to run her errands. Kevin said goodbye to her from the couch. He didn’t say “See you later,” because he wouldn’t. He said goodbye, but Carol wouldn’t think of that until later.

Carol drove a 1996 Ford Taurus wagon that had 83,315 miles on it the day her son killed himself. It has a lot more than that now. Even then, though, Carol found it annoying that her

own car did not fit her son's standards. She was never as picky about cars as her son, and often found his specifications aggravating. But she had her own little quirks, so she couldn't really blame him. She never could blame him. The belts on her car were loose, so they squealed when she first accelerated. Other than that, her Taurus was in good shape, much better shape than Kevin's '82 Datsun. That car was in extremely bad condition. It still ran though. Carol passed Kevin's car, which was parked in the street, and headed for the hardware store. Life was normal for Carol when she left.

She had to get nails at the hardware store to hang three new paintings she had picked up. She collected paintings of lighthouses, and they hung all over the house. Some were very nice, some were very ugly. None of them could be considered truly beautiful, not even by Carol herself. She only needed three nails, but she bought five, just in case some got lost or bent. The man who ran McGowan's Hardware store lived two doors down from Carol. He wasn't a McGowan himself, he had married into the job, but he took pride in his work. He asked how was she doing. She answered that she was fine, which was true, for the moment. He said he noticed her son's car, and asked how he was doing. She answered that he was fine as well, which was not so true, but she didn't know any better. She wished him a nice day and left the hardware store on the way to the state store.

Carol wanted to buy a decent bottle of wine for dinner. She was making veal marsala over pasta with Caesar salad and fresh loaf of Italian bread. She wasn't sure what kind of wine went with veal, though, and the man working there was no help at all. She splurged on a nineteen-dollar bottle of merlot from 1994. She had never heard of the winery before, but it looked like a decent bottle, and she knew that Kevin and Bill preferred darker wines. The bottle was never opened. The meal, as planned out in her head, would have been very pleasant. It was a shame that Kevin had to ruin a perfectly good dinner by killing himself. Carol was horrified when she thought that to herself later in the day, but

it was true. Dinner would have been so nice except for that. Doctor Singh said it was shock, and that the first thing she could think of was dinner, so that's how she dealt with it.

★

While Carol ran the rest of her errands – to the grocery store for bread and romaine lettuce, to the mall to exchange a pair of pants that were too short, and to the pharmacy to get her paycheck and Richie's allergy medication – Kevin lay on his bed. Once Carol had left, Kevin had moved from the couch up to his old room and lay on top of the comforter, going through a box of books. The box was from a 25" Zenith color television. The books were from Kevin's entire life, stacked in alphabetical order by author. He took them out by handfuls, re-stacking them on the bureau, looking for four in particular. Pausing at the "H"s, he opened Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, but then closed it. He didn't have time to get into a four-hundred-page novel. He continued on till the "S"s, making six even piles on the bureau still in alphabetical order and ready to be placed back in the box, though they never would be. The four books he held in front of him were thin paperbacks. He put the first, second, and fourth on the bureau, opening the third.

The book was actually two short stories, or one long short story and one short novella. He only planned on reading the first one, called "Franny", by J.D. Salinger. The second one, "Zooey", he wasn't in the mood for. He liked "Franny" because he was feeling a lot like the main character. She herself was feeling a lot like the main character of a book she was reading, and Kevin was not unaware of the irony. He'd read the story dozens of times, and almost knew it by heart, but he felt compelled to read it again. It took him about forty-five minutes.

When he finished, Kevin closed the book and rested it on his chest. He watched the ceiling fan spin at its lowest speed, following one blade for a few rotations, then another. He closed his eyes and breathed deep. Keeping his books in alphabetical order made Kevin happy. All his things were in perfect order – his

clothes by article, then color; his term papers by year, then class, then date; his CDs by genre, then alphabetically by artist. He even kept the money in his wallet in ascending order of value. But his life was out of order. He got a degree in finance from a high-ranked university, now he was supposed to get his job on Wall Street, earn his seventy-five-thousand-plus-a-year, meet his gorgeous and caring wife, and produce his three perfect children, each two years apart. They'd live in a brown stone in a nice part of the city, somewhere centrally located between his and his wife's places of business. His two sons would play soccer and his daughter would be a piano virtuoso. They would all, of course, get full scholarships to ivy league schools because they'd all be geniuses like him and his wife. His wife would be making the same amount of money at her law firm, they would save right and invest and retire early to help raise grandkids.

None of this was happening, though, and Kevin couldn't have disorder. He couldn't. He'd given himself six months after graduation to make it happen, and his time was up. He'd never needed that much time for any other endeavor. Why should this be different? He had set himself a deadline which he hadn't met, and now he had to hold himself to the penalty.

He re-opened *Franny and Zooey* and burned a hole through the first page with the cigarette. Then he burned a hole through the second page. When the cigarette burned down, tossed it out the window next to his bed and lit another. After four cigarettes, there was hole about the size of a dime in the exact center of every page, but not the covers. From the outside it looked perfectly normal. Kevin closed the book, then opened it and tried to read "Franny" using his memory to fill in the holes. After ten pages, he threw the book across the room, knocking over one of the piles on the bureau. He stood up and swiped at the rest the piles, sending them all flying. He kicked the box, spilling books all over his room. Breathing heavily, he lay back down on the bed and pressed the heels of his palms into his eyes, hard enough to see stars.

As Carol was on her way home from the pharmacy, she saw her youngest daughter walking along the side of the road. She put on her blinkers, pulled over, and called out to her. Dana raced back to the Subaru and jumped into the passenger seat.

“Why are you walking home?” Carol asked, not yet worried.

“I dunno,” replied Dana, looking at the tractor-trailer behind them in the side view mirror. Dana had a habit of not answering questions until at least the second time she was asked.

“Dana, honey, why were you walking home? Did something happen?”

“Half day,” Dana replied, uninterested, “no buses.”

“But Kevin was supposed to pick you up. Did you see him?”

“I dunno. No, I guess not.”

“I could murder that boy,” Carol said under her breath. She wouldn’t get the chance to murder him though, not that she really would have if she could have. Still, she regretted saying that within the hour.

★

Kevin’s car wasn’t on the street when Carol got home, which only made her angrier at the time. Her automatic garage door opener wouldn’t work, either, and she was in a very nasty mood when she had to go in through the front door to open the garage. Dana went straight up to her own room to get her homework done before dinner. There was no note from Kevin on the message board attached to the refrigerator. There was no note on the body sitting in the driver’s seat of the 1982 Datsun with the hose running from tailpipe to window, either.

Headstones

Monica Stahl

Here, the sky opens
like a wound,
and we are dead people
in dead places.

Here, in flags and plastic flowers,
there is a marriage
between the hands that write,
the hands uprooted,
the hands that cease to beat.
There is a marriage
between the hands open to man
and the hands open to wounds,
the granite palms
stretched in prayer.

I could tell you,
if asked to,
that bodies are apple cores,
that fistfuls of mud and grass
are vomited up to make room.
But there is a marriage, here,
and I can only apologize.

We are empty in this hall,
pocketing our rings
in hopes for one last dance,
scratching pencils and whispering
sweet nothings ...

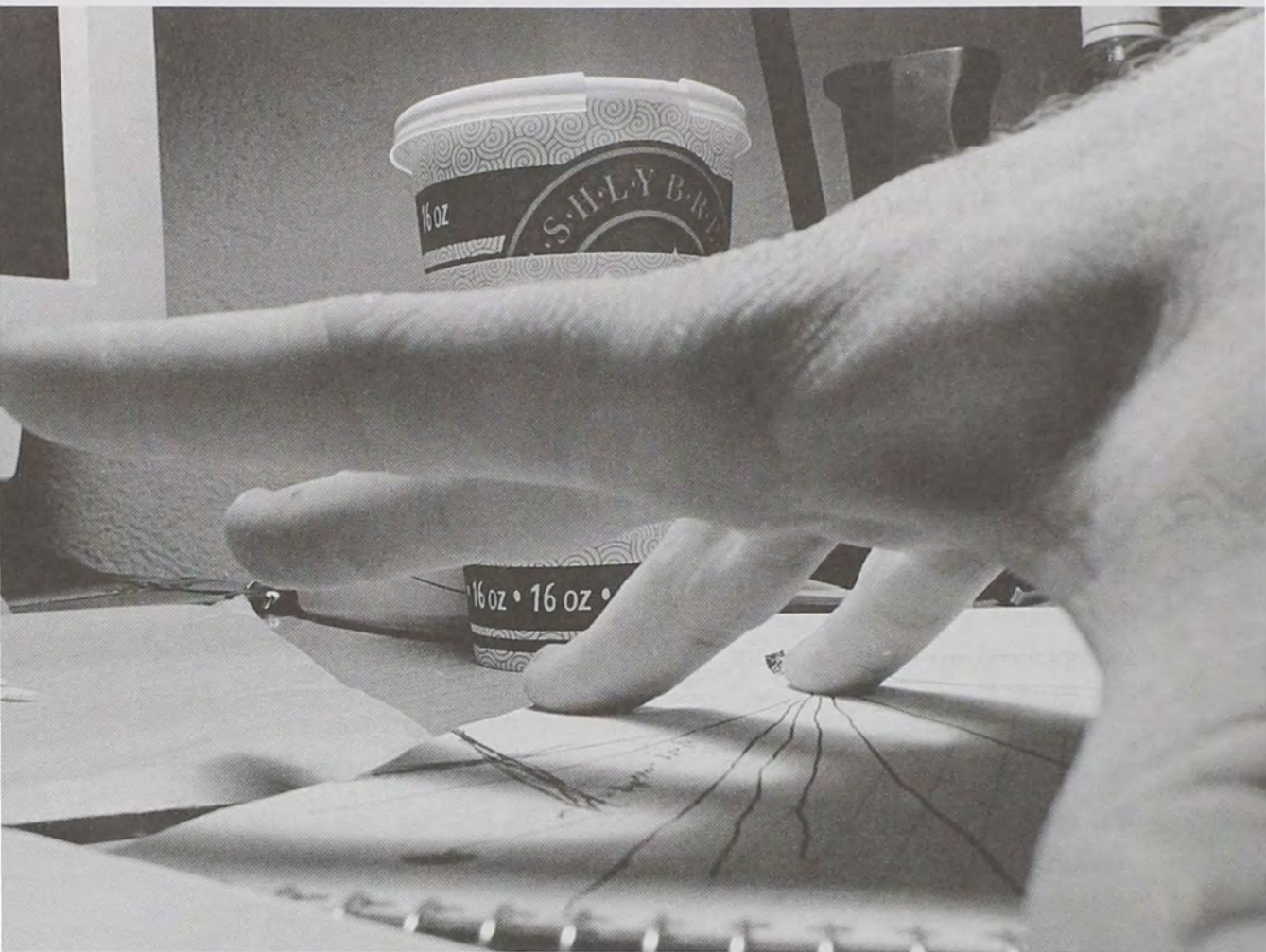
But I,
I see rings in apples,
rings in mud,
rings in the sky,
in my hands,
and you,

you are all more
than metaphors.

Monica Stahl

Untitled

Joe Laskas



Calligraphy Grace

Padcha Tuntha-Obas

My soul is made of Jasmine tea,
my skin of its color,
and my words of its accent.

“Pure souls of jasmine tea,” grandpa says,
“give grace of calligraphy and generosity of slow water.”
His words, silent yet so clear, circle in me
like waves in a pond.

I never understood them
till my feet land foreign earth,
my tongue poetizes the language he doesn't hear.
“I'll go to school, grandpa.
I'll learn English. I'll make money.”

My familiar steps, my everyday conversations,
I walk through front-page violence
I talk through racism and child abuse issue.
I doubt.

Following my breath down my body,
I search my soul reflected in my thoughts.
I think, I search.
I try to find answers.

Grandpa hates money but he conquers.
All social oppressions against his race. No anger
All evils against his mind. Only kindness of water.

“True blessing of life,
his voice of breaking bark proclaims in my hearing,
are thoughtfulness and a death of honors.
They write your name
forever graceful on your grave.”

Pure souls of jasmine tea
give grace of calligraphy
and generosity of water.

His wisdom has never been so clear
His voice never clearer,
I hear whispering,
soft like pouring of jasmine in careful pottery,
“Come home,” he voices.
“Come home.”

Bill Gooden's Son

Genevieve Romeo

"You guys! This isn't a hearse, it's a limo! We're going to the prom – our senior prom! Hello!" Dana wails, her glossy mauve lips in a pout.

No one says a word. I glare at Steve. He is holding his beer with one hand and scratching at his chest with the other. Erik traces a raindrop as it slides down the tinted window. Sean, Stacy, Mike, and Jen huddle silently at the other end of the car, looking at us uneasily. Dana gives us all one last pleading look before turning around to chat with Paul the Driver.

"You son of a bitch," I hiss at Steve.

"Cleo," Erik warns, not turning from the window.

"What? I have every right to call this goddamn prick a whole lot worse than a son of a bitch, Erik – for the love of God, he ..."

"Cleo!" He is much sharper this time.

Steve belches in non-reply. I bore a hole through his skull with my eyes. His head looks like a big red eggplant.

How could Erik not want me to lay into him – most preferably with a machete –after what had just happened? How could he just sit there and stare out the window? I suppose I shouldn't have expected any less from Erik. Agression was not part of his life. I can't even begin to understand that level of composure, especially not at times like this.

"You goddamn motherfu—"

"Cleo!" Erik actually looks up from the window this time. His fingernails have etched bloody half-moons into his palms. "That's enough!"

Enough? For him, maybe. "Erik? Do you not remember what happened twenty minutes ago? What this bastard did?"

"Of course I remember. This isn't the place for any of this. Just stop it," he says, turning back to the window.

"Well then, where is the place for it, Erik? Do you want

me to wait until we get to the prom? Pound his face in on the dance floor?”

Steve snorts. Apparently, he doesn't think I am physically capable of pounding his face in. He has another thing coming.

“There *is* no place for it, Cleo. Just drop it, okay?”

“Drop it? *Drop it?* What the hell is wrong with you? Erik, he fucking ...”

“I know what happened!” his voice finally rises above a hiss. “All right! I know! But it's over! Okay? It's over. Just let it alone. For once in your life, just let things alone.”

I know he's trying to calm me down, but I can barely hear his words. Every bit of me is crying out to reach across these nice leather seats and make Steve's face a bloody mess. For Erik's sake – and his sake alone – I won't. At least, not until we get out of this limo.

There are a lot of things I'd do for Erik's sake. And a lot of things he'd do for mine. He had actually skipped basketball practice this afternoon so that he could come over and dye my hair. It had come out perfect – a festive shade of fuschia that matched my dress perfectly. I had hinted to him that he might want to give up his scholarship at Princeton and enroll at Wilfred Beauty Academy instead, but curiously enough, he shot the idea down.

“Yeah, my dad would love that.”

“Come on, Erik. And while you're coming clean to him about your career choice, you might as well just keep the honesty ball rollin' and tell him you've jumped the fence.”

“Nice try, Cleo-saurus,” he said as he placed a fresh sunflower in my hair.

“Well, you've got to tell him sometime, you know.”

“I do?”

“Don't you think it's a good idea?”

“OK, let's set the stage here,” he began, outlining my eyes in lilac pencil. “Dad, you're a great dad, and I love you ...”

“Yeah, I love you, even though you've never come to a single one of my plays and I have to bring a change of clothes to

school with me every day because if I came home wearing what I went to school in, you'd disown me," I finished for him.

"Exactly. I love you despite all of that."

"And despite the fact," I added, "that you're a narrow-minded, homophobic ..."

"... good guy who provides for me and does an all-around fine job of supporting me in ..."

"... playing basketball, my only chance at counteracting my flagrant displays of character, individuality, and ..."

"... my best chance at money for Princeton," he finished, pasting a pink star to my cheek in punctuation. "Lay off, Cleo. He does the best he can. It can't be easy for a guy to raise a son all by himself, not to mention one like me."

"What's that supposed to mean? You're sweet, funny, polite ..."

"... I don't know anything about crap like cars or belching, I change the subject when he starts to talk about women – hell, I've never brought any girl other than you home – no offense, but ... you're not the studious, khaki-wearing type my dad would like to see me with."

"Time for a make-over, then. Let me get my J-Crew catalog. Or maybe I'll just open up your closet and pick something out."

"Ouch! That's not fair. I don't dress like that anymore."

"Yeah, you finally came to your senses and bought some real clothes." I ran my fingers over his shiny pink vest. "See? I taught you well. I just don't understand why you have to act different for him. Be honest with him about who you are. He has no reason to be ashamed of you, Erik."

"It's not just that he'd be ashamed of me." He put all the make-up tools down on the dresser and looked straight at me. "If my father knew I was gay, he'd hate me. Worse than that, he'd hate himself for having me. I can't do that to him."

"But Erik, you're an awesome guy, a great son, ..."

"And I've got the coolest best friend in the whole world."

He kissed me on my forehead, signaling the end of the conversation. "You're done. How do you like it?"

I admired his work in the mirror. I was an eruption of pink taffeta and glitter. He stood next to me, decked out in a white tux, tophat, and pink vest that we had picked out together. "We look awesome," I told him.

"We look like the muppets exploded on us."

"Yeah, isn't it great?" I said. "I can't wait to see the looks on everyone's faces."

"We'll definitely get a reaction. Probably in the form of insults."

"Well of course. That's to be expected when you go to school with the cast of Dawson's Crack. Don't worry – if anyone gives us trouble, I'll show them what these spikes on my heels are really for."

He patted my head. "Why must you always be so angry?"

I shrugged and smiled at him. "Come on, Boyee, let's pain this town pink."

★

"What do you mean we have a flat tire?" Dana's world is over.

"Look, I'm real sorry, guys," says Paul the Driver. "It'll only take a minute, I swear."

Sean and Mike get out of the limo to help him change the tire. Stacy and Jen follow dutifully.

"Cleo, oh no, this is sooo terrible! What if we get there late?" Dana whines.

I bite my tongue to prevent me from replying with my usual blend of sarcasm and sourness. My cousin Dana is a sweet girl, even though she does subscribe to *YM* and has seen *Titanic* eight times. There's really no need for me to ruin her night.

"Hey, you know what I just noticed?" She smacks her forehead with her palm. "I am such a ditz! I can't believe I only just noticed this – you and Erik match! Steve, isn't that cute?"

"Adorable."

Erik slumps down in his seat a little and closes his eyes.

"Cleo, is he okay? He didn't eat that crab dip my mom brought to your party, did he? Because she wanted me to make it so she could go to yoga, so I made it, and I think it probably should have gone in the refrigerator after I put all the mayonaise and stuff in it but I was on the phone with Stacey and she couldn't find her black choker and ..."

Paul the Driver opens the door, blissfully interrupting her.

"I'm sorry about this, guys, it'll only be another few minutes."

"Thanks, Paulie!" She looks at her watch. "We won't be that late. Erik? Are you sleeping?"

Erik doesn't answer her. She lowers her voice a little and says, "You know, Cleo, I mean, it *is* cute and all that you guys match, but isn't his outfit ... you know, a little uhm ... froofy? The top hat I mean? And the pink vest? It's really unmasculine, you know?"

Steve rolls his eyes and raps his hairy knuckles on her head. "Anyone in there *this* time? ... No? All right, just checking. Carry on."

"Why don't you just shut the fuck up, Steve?" I suggest to him, in a manner I consider to be rather calm.

I expect Dana to protest, but she is leaning out the window to root Paul the Driver on as he changes the tire. Erik sits next to me a million miles away. This is my chance.

"Wouldn't you like to step outside and help them change the tire?" I ask Steve.

"No." He drains the rest of his beer.

"Afraid of me?"

"Christ, Cleo, come off of it." The can gets crushed against his thigh. "I'm not gonna fight you. Why the hell are you so obsessed with beating people up?"

"Why the hell did *you* decide to ruin my best friend's life on the night of our senior prom?!"

"All done, guys, we are ready to roll!" Paul the Driver is

excited for us. The limo fills up once again. I lean back in my seat and content myself with glaring at Steve until we can get out of this car.

★

Steve and Dana had arrived with their entourage an hour before the limo was scheduled to pick us up. I wasn't really friends with any of them besides my cousin, but my house was the most centrally located, making it the easiest place for the limo to get us. I should have known my parents would try to turn it into the pre-prom bash of the century by inviting everyone else's parents. My parents were just "cool" like that. I think it was my dad who gave Steve his first beer of the night.

"Starting the party a few hours early, Ape-Boy?" I asked Steve as he walked out of my kitchen sipping from a red party cup.

"You got it, babe," he said, and chugged his drink. "Maybe a couple more of these and even you'll start to look good."

"Oh, then by all means, throw back a couple for me," I replied. "My evening won't be complete unless I get your approval."

"Why don't you go find Gooden Fruity? You can fix each other's make-up."

"That sounds like a good idea. Maybe while I'm tweezing his eyebrows, I can ask him how it's possible that a little freak like him got into Princeton while an all-American golden boy like yourself had to settle for Waste-Cheseter Community College."

He paused mid-sip and locked his beady blue eyes with mine. A muscle worked his jaw. "Bitch."

I smiled triumphantly and made my way to the front lawn where all of our parents were gathered, sipping wine and marveling about how quickly all of their little angels had grown up. I walked over to my parents, who were chatting with Erik's father.

"Hello, Cleo. You look ... very ... bright," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Gooden." That was some complement. I'm sure he would have preferred to see a girl like Dana on his son's arm. But at least I was a girl.

“I guess you and Erik had this whole outfit thing planned?” He asked with a watery smile. “Sort of a ... joke thing, huh?”

Before I could answer, my mom approached us with her camera.

“Cleo, honey, do you think I could maybe get just one picture of you without your nose ring in?”

“Mom, do you know how long it took me to find a stud that matched these shoes?”

“Eighteen years, but she finally found me!” Erik answered, smiling.

I laughed as my mom took the picture. I knew that that would be the one to frame and hang on my dorm room wall next year. We wandered away from the parents and back to the throng of teenagers. They were all gathered around Steve, who was bent over and pretending to talk out of his ass a la Ace Ventura.

“At least he finally knows which end is up,” I muttered to Erik.

“He’s not so bad.”

I stared at him, incredulous. “Are you on crack? He’s the biggest tool I’ve ever met. He should change his name to ...

“Stanley Craftsman, I know, but still ...”

“Still, nothing. Just look at him!”

“Didn’t he ask you out sophomore year?”

“Yeah! As if I’d even consider dating an Abercrombie Bitch like him.”

“I don’t know, maybe you two would have been good for each other.”

“Erik?” I ask, seizing his head by the ears and shaking it a little, “Have you been drying your hair in the microwave again?”

“Nevermind, forget it.”

The sky darkened and distant thunder rumbled above us. The parents and their lovely children gathered in the driveway as the limo arrived. Erik’s father laughed at one of Steve’s jokes and slapped him heartily on the back.

“You see, my dad likes Steve. He can’t be all bad.”

I looked over at Erik, but I couldn't tell if he was kidding or not. We made our way over to the mass. Camera flashes went off like popping corn.

"Paparazzi. Have I told you my theory on the paparazzi's involvement in the death of Elv ..." my words trailed off into empty air as I glanced up at Erik's face, turned pale as flour. I followed his gaze over to the driveway, where the crowd had suddenly fallen silent. There stood Steve, blotchy and giggling next to Mr. Gooden, equally blotchy but not even close to giggling. His arms were fixed to his sides. His gut heaved in jagged rhythm. He turned his head mechanically in Erik's direction.

"He didn't." I spat the words out.

"Jesus," Erik whispered, tears gathering in his eyes.

"Don't cry now," I hissed, taking a protective stance in front of him as his father began to storm over to us. Erik pushed me aside. His father seized him by the forearm. His sausage lips were flecked with froth. He stared at his son in deathly silence for a long time before speaking.

"This boy," he began, jerking his thumb back in Steve's direction, "this boy back here – he's a good boy. He hasn't any reason to lie to me. Wouldn't you agree?"

Erik said nothing.

"Well, seeing as how you seem to have lost your voice, I'll just keep on going here. Well, this nice young man and I were having a pleasant conversation about the usual – how to take apart an engine, hockey stats ... nothing you know much about, son. And funny, I mentioned to him that you don't know much about either of them. You know what he said to me? It's the darndest thing."

I opened my mouth to speak, but Erik hushed me with a glance.

"He told me, Bill Gooden, that the reason my son didn't know anything about any of that was because he was a bona fide homosexual. What do you have to say to that, son?"

"Dad, I ..."

“Is it true?” he shouted. “Are you a goddamn faggot? Are you?” He began to shake Erik violently. “Answer me, you goddamn faggot!” Erik’s tophat fell to the floor.

“Stop it!” I cried, and rushed to pick up Erik’s hat.

“You stay out of this, you little whore. You’re probably one of those goddamn muff divers anyway.”

“That’s my daughter you’re talking about, Bill,” my father said, grabbing Mr. Gooden by the collar. My mother stepped in and pulled my dad from Mr. Gooden.

“Really, Bill,” she said, “I’m sure if you and Erik just sat down and talked things through ...”

“There’s nothing to talk about,” Erik said, his voice stark and low. “It’s true, dad. I’m gay. Your son is gay and there’s nothing you can do about it. I’m not sorry because I can’t be.” His father released his grip on Erik’s shoulders. He pushed Erik away from him and stared at his son for a long time.

“Your mother is turning in her grave, you little faggot. Are you happy?”

Erik turned away from him. For what seemed like hours, there was no sound save the rain pelting the concrete.

“Fuck me,” his father said sadly, and began to walk down the driveway to his car. No one moved or spoke a word.

Dana looked up at me, pointing to her watch. I waved her towards the limo. She led the rest of our party down the driveway in silence. My mother dragged my father into the house. I picked up Erik’s tophat and put it back on his head. He fixed the sunflower falling behind my ear.

“Come on, Cleo, the limo’s waiting for us.”

“You still want to go?”

“We paid for it, didn’t we? You’ve been looking forward to this all year.” His voice was unnaturally flat. “We only get one prom, right?”

★

“Guys!! Guys!! We’re here! This is it!!!” Dana oozes glee as the limo pulls up outside of the Skylight Ballroom. “Jen, can I

please borrow your little mirror? I'll bet all that rain turned my hair into one big frizzball!"

Erik opens his eyes and sits up straight. He takes a deep breath. I grab his chin and make him look at me. For the first time, I realize that I've been so consumed with my homicidal tendencies that I've been completely ignoring my best friend.

"Erik? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine."

"No you're not. You can't be. Look, we don't have to do this – we can go back to my house, or to a diner, or cosmic bowling or something."

"I just want to go to my prom and party until dawn and forget everything else that happened."

"But what about ..."

"I'll deal with that later."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Stevie, how's my hair look?" Dana asks, relinquishing the mirror to Jen.

"Great." He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

"Come on!" she grabs his arm by the elbow and pulls him out of the limo. "Let's make our grand entrance!"

"I'm gonna stand out here and grab a smoke first. You go on ahead."

"Steve! I can't make a grand entrance without an escort!"

"I said, I'm gonna stand out here and smoke."

"Dana, why don't you let Erik escort you in?" I say to her. "I think I'm gonna get some air out here before I go in. It was so stuffy in the limo."

"That'll work!" she says. "Come on, Erik, we don't clash that bad. I think all your pink acutally makes my black look more elegant, dontcha think?"

"Sure, Dana," he says. "Cleo ..." he begins, giving me a heavy look. Before he can finish his sentence, however, Dana lets

out a squeal.

“Look at Robyn! She looks sooo good in that dress! Who’s that guy she’s with? Oh my god! That’s not Eddie! Oh my god! Come on, Erik!” She tows him into the building. It is now just Steve and I beneath the overhang. The light rain makes music with the pavement. I open my mouth but find that I don’t even know where to begin. I decide to start where I am most comfortable: “You motherfucker.”

“What’s your problem?”

“What’s my problem? How about what’s *your* problem? You know what it’s gonna be pretty soon? My fist through your face, asshole.”

He snorts. “Someone’s got PMS.”

“Are you completely oblivious to the fact that you’ve ruined my best friend’s life?”

He sets his blue marble eyes on mine. “*I* ruined his life? Look who’s talking, freak. Erik was a regular kid until he met you. You convinced him to dress like a fruit so that he could get beat up every week and you could jump to his defense.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Sure I do. Erik was my best friend all through junior high.”

My mouth pops open.

“Guess he forgot to tell you that, huh? There’s a whole bunch of stuff about him I’ll bet you don’t know.” He blows a smoke ring into the damp air. “Did he tell you what the other guys on the basketball team call him?”

“I don’t want to know.”

“Opie Jordan.”

That wasn’t what I had expected to hear.

“You know why?”

I’m not going to answer him.

“Because he’s a really damn good basketball player.”

I know *that*.

“You’re the one who ruined him, Cleo.”

"I didn't ruin him," I retort. "I gave him enough self-confidence to be himself instead of a mindless sheep like you."

"He seemed pretty happy as a sheep if you ask me."

"Well I *didn't* ask you. And you're totally wrong about everything. He couldn't possibly have been happy pretending to be someone he wasn't." I hope I sound surer than I am.

"He wasn't pretending to be anything. He was just Erik. You can be a homo without looking and acting like fucking Elton John. You see the way he plays basketball. He's not out there on the court twirling pirouettes every time he hits a three-pointer. Underneath all those feathers and crap you always stick on him, he's a regular guy. Face it, Cleo. You were sick of being the only freak in high school so you got Erik to keep you company. You just wanted someone to play dress-up with."

"That's ... not true." Are those tears in my eyes? I don't cry.

"All I did was break the news to his old man. I probably didn't do it the right way, but it was gonna happen anyway. Maybe now Erik'll realize what a joke he's been turned into."

"He's not a joke. He's my best friend." My face is wet. It must be the rain. "And I would never ever do anything to hurt him."

"Just keep telling yourself that." Steve grinds his cigarette butt into the pavement and walks into the building.

I shake off my momentary paralysis. No way am I letting him get off this easy. This night will not end before his nose is broken. I run and follow him into the ballroom. Loud house music is pounding from the speakers. Colored lights bounce off disco balls, covering the walls and floor in a rainbow of glitter. There are people everywhere. All that I can think about is finding Steve and finishing this thing.

Dana is in the middle of the ballroom amidst a huge crowd of people. Erik is with her, laughing and sweating and dancing with no one in particular. His vest and tophat lie in a heap on a chair. I don't think he sees me.

I start to go over to him, but change my mind. The room pulses with music and laughter. I fight through the rest of the crowd, back to the door. The rain is coming down very hard now. There are a few people out here, smoking ciggarettes and tipping their limo drivers.

“Your hair dye is running down your back, freak,” someone says to me. I turn around and punch him in the stomach before walking away.

Fifty Years

Susan Goll

This old house holds nothin' but bad memories
sealed up in each piece of perfectly contoured wood,
the varnish as orange as the day we moved in.
There's no one left save me,
and I am faced with taking care of Mother's business.
But what is this strange business of soup cans, newspapers and soap?
Why this useless stock-pile of egg cartons,
the eggs made into breads and cakes long ago?
Why these mountains of moldy pots and pans?
Why the ancient evening gowns in Mother's closet,
falling off the hangers into dusty heaps?
I don't believe Mother ever threw a thing away in all her wretched life.
Fifty years is a long time.
Strange, it looks almost as if I never left somehow:
the ancient paper curtains that turn to sand in my frail fingers,
the red velvet sofa with the broken spring,
my senior ball gown and graduation pin still sit in my old room,
just waiting for my return.
Even Daddy's Sunday clothes, not worn for half a century.
Did she think we would all come back someday?
I came back alone — unwilling.
This old house holds nothin' but bad memories,
only intensifying with age.
Fifty years is a long time
to stew over girlfriends never allowed to come over and play
to simmer over being confined to Washington Avenue
to brood over hours spent locked in a basement
and crawling out a window to save your own life
to cry over the premature death of your one true love: Daddy
to realize that your mother never wanted you
And to feel it all over again in that perfect, orange wood...
Fifty years is a long time.

South

Daniel Gallagher



Morning

Lori Kruk

Morning

Wraps me in Cupid's eyelashes and licks me
with flesh tongue.

Honey lips sweet on my thighs, melt and extract
delirious desires.

Long gentle fingertips press, search my milky skin,
concave palms drink me.

Tiny Venus navel becomes moist, thirsty sweat
smooth friction.

Warm lover's breath under wanting ears makes
muscles contract, squeezing legs, toes...

Tender buttons absorb the dew
on plush petals.

Bronze sunrises on collarbone spill
onto pearl shoulders.

Velvet breasts surrender to taffy yearning mouths,
satisfying candy appetites.

Blonde silk pulled lightly by god.

Carmel chin lifts toward Heaven, head
falls toward earth.

Straight lines take new directions, curves in Eve's Garden.

Small of back produces lust breath,
tingling tiny hairs.

Deep red inhales and exhales escape.

Tangled curves, knees, hips...

We braid Aphrodite's vines.

Downcast Eyes Meet Tablecloth

Philip M. Malachowski

*Nowhere man, no worry. Take your time, no hurry.
Leave it all 'till somebody else lends you a hand . . .*

Isn't he a bit like you and me?

—The Beatles, "Nowhere Man"

"My heart's just not in it." Downcast eyes meet tablecloth.

"Just try it," Catherine urged, the soft voice of a woman urging. Wiping her lips with a red napkin checkered white: full, soft lips sweetly wet with wine. Taste of a woman.

"Cath—" My eyes search the restaurant for inspiration. Nine o'clock, kid dropped his eating utensil on the floor. Did the mom see? No, too busy gabbing. Smells bad in here. Fish. Makes sense, being that this is a seafood restaurant. There, by the senior couple: a tank, lobsters, rusted broken claws bound with yellow tape, eyes floating eerily in the water, red bodies sloshing up against the pane. They know *Chris* their fate. Sense it somehow. Fight the system, it turns *Chris* all of them against each other, claws gagged from use as to provide for a more diversified field of blood and *Christopher* bruises to stud—

"*Chris*," worried eyes pale-blue, curled lashes. Annoyed? Yes, that too. "Hey *Chris*, are you alright?"

"Hm, yeah, what? Yeah, my heart's just not in it, Cath." Sounding bad. Need new excuse.

"Your heart's not in it? It's a piece of shrimp. Just try it." The voice of rationality. Problem with irrational fear is that you can't rationalize it. Search the restaurant for diversion—go for the coke. Fingers reach for the tall glass, taken right out of an ad. Perspiring beads running chill on fingertips. Be careful for the slip. That's right, hold it tight. Don't need a scene.

"You know, Cath," I attempted between sips, flowing sharply down my throat. Bubbly, gaseous fluid. "I simply have no desire to taste it. I mean . . . look at it."

Examine the meat. Pink, raw, curved corpse, stripped of skin, peeled off by the grease-slicked utensils of Captain Hook. Arrrr, one good hand to peel you with. Never know if you don't taste it: true, if it's good. One less trauma if it's not. Chance. I opt the latter. Ladder. Eyes focus on the salt-eaten ladder hooked to the wall. Ropes, buoys, fishing net over there above that couple's heads. Nice face she has. Kind eyes, softly lick your heart. No, won't taste it. Getting the look. Tell her appreciation.

"Not that I don't appreciate it," meet her eyes. "I do." Just have no desire. "You see, I just don't have any desire to . . . taste it."

"Yeah, alright, I get it." Relenting? Need new subject quick. Lips moving. Too late. "But, in all seriousness. It would make me very happy." Pleading girl eyes. O Jesus, don't. No, Jesus has nothing to do with this. Up counting sheep on Mount Heaven. One sheep, two sheep, three sheep, four—meeting tomorrow with dentist. 4:00. Better write it down. Later. Ladder. What the hell do they have all that crap up there for anyhow? Phony-looking. Creates atmosphere. People dining seafood, want to feel oceany. So be it. What, cutting it?

"Here," Catherine said, face down in plate. Slicing off head, tail—which end is which? Feed me like a kid. Her countenance stern-featured, brows furrowed. Looks pretty. Hold her hand. No. Wrong time, wrong place. "Just a little bit." Pinched meat spongy between fingers, crossing the table, onto my plate, stained with the fried juices of the tiny body. Damn it. Embarrassing to be fed like a kid. But, I am a kid. I'm also sixty, though. *Kairos*. *Chronos*, *kairos*, that's it. I think. Can't remember shit. Greeks had more than one word for time. *Chronos* for time as we know it on the clock. *Kairos*, a state of timelessness. Paradox. Five and sixty years at the same time.

"Now, it's no bigger than a dime, Chris. Please try it." Try it. What is the importance of trying things with? Sense of partnership, share new experience together. Nice to care. Miss the simplicities of love, complex in its simplicity. Look carefully. Stripes, raw-pink. Dead animal sliding down my throat. Better be

dead. Poe, obsessed with live burial. Cramped room he had. No. Go for the drink again, just a sip or you'll consume your excuse. Her eyes still on me. Hook in my eyes, just like a fish. Goes to show what happens when you open wide for every morsel of food that comes slipping through the water. Metal hook, barbed, caught in the lip, can't get that out without a nice tear.

"O.K." Catherine averted her gaze, crossed with resentment? No, just frustration. *Je sais pas*. Damn it. Why don't you just eat the god-damned shrimp? Stubborn as an ass. Always was. Persistent. Persistence gets the girl. Not when you decline the shrimp. Corpse on her plate twitching? No, that's impossible: it's dead. Then again, possibility is relative. So is death. Is it really? No, because—then again, yes, in a way. In a way. Wait, there it goes again—I saw you! Where's my tail? There on your plate, sir, may I please reclaim my tail?

"Cath," urgency spoke. Calm. Don't alarm with your insanities. Think it was Orwell that said sanity was statistical. At least until the thought-police stole Winston away to the Ministry of Love. Got to love the irony.

"What?" Leaning forward in her chair, eyes hopeful: thinks I'm going to say something romantic. Follow it through.

"I love your lips." Face relaxing, comprehending . . . a smile blushes on her cheeks. Lips pleading to be kissed. I only wish. Swish. Shrimp-corpse twitching again. Don't let on that you see it. Only make her upset. The bloodless-pale body resurrected from death to reclaim its body part, oozing onto my plate. Don't get me wrong. I had no intention of digesting that. Flopping now wildly, spastic. Catherine smiling erotic. Kiss her face, her belly. Candle lights. She, myself, and Mr. Shrimp. Hate to interrupt, but give me back my god-forsaken tail, you bipedal idiot!

"Thank you," the reply smiled. Run slender hand through moist-darkened hair. Looks darker in here. Dim lights shining wavering down the strands. Shrimp! Begone, devil! No need to thank me.

“No, really. You don’t have to thank me.” Truth needs no orchestra. Shrimp on the brain. Crawling on its last legs—a metaphor, it has no legs—beneath the overhang of the bread basket, into the murky shadows staining the tablecloth. Here comes the shrimp, all decked in death! O Christ. Calm, Chris. Lots of people here: not one sees it? Slithering body depositing trail of grease in its path of avenge, the toxin of its. Yes. Here comes the main dishes.

“Here you go,” the black-apronned waitress chirped. Dishes steaming, curling gray and white in the air. Waitress, stage left.

“Oh, quickly, Chris. Try the shrimp. You’ll have the chicken to wash it down.” Of course. I’ll have the chicken to wash it down. Stabbing the fork into the lemon-peppered chicken, flesh juices bubbling out around the silver prongs, I see the shrimp coming like a trooper. On the plate now—get off you little bastard—into the fries, stirring them aside, moving into the land of the jolly green giant. The depths to which consumerism permeates the mind. Nothing will stop it. Fork-full of steak hovering in the air, her tongue thirsting to taste the juices, while also thirsting to understand:

“Excuse me?”

“Hm?” My fork pauses in the incision.

“Nothing will stop what?”

Must have spoken aloud. Quick, improvise. Think.

“Thought.” Shit, dig yourself out of that one. Catherine nodded, contemplation in her pensive gaze. Smart girl. Interested. Understands life. Explain.

“Well . . . thought.” Place the fork and knife down with a clang. Too loud. Mask with a cough.

Concern arches her eyebrows. “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” clears throat gently. “Yeah, thanks. I’m fine. Um, well, I was just saying that . . . why, that thought is like a river.” Cliché. Damn. Sounds corny. Nervous, can’t speak intelligently. Wouldn’t god-damn matter anyhow. “I mean . . . is that the, the blood-work of corporeal existence? The flow of consciousness?”

Shrimp at the edge of the table. Passed right by the sought body part. No worries, I'll pick it up on the way back. Now, got a score to settle. The limp body erected itself before me on the table in a stand-off. I give up. You win. Who said anything about the literal here? You won't find it, so back off. You win. I told you, man, you win. Won't back down: out for blood. Tumbleweed blows across the dust-swept road, blurred by an angry wind. Eyes sting.

"It's alright." Understood. Great girl. Shrimp. Shrimp. Shrimp. How the insignificant casts monstrous shadows on the brain: wrapped in the cloak of thought, a style as seasonable as the clothing industry. Shrimp. Popping up on the creases of the tablecloth. Inch-worm. That's it. Shrimp moved like an inch-worm. That one time the girl next door had the boyfriend over. Diana. Dominique. Dawn. Yes, Dawn. Heard it right through the walls. Dawn babbling in baby-talk, sex-talk: inch-worm, inch-worm—what the hell are you thinking? Stop. That's sick. Think pleasant thoughts. Pleasant thoughts. Catherine. Lips. Hips. Swaying glistening wet, wine-doused inhibitions tossed into the sea, blue crumpled sheets. White pillow, her hair spilling out onto. Alright, not *too* pleasant. In a restaurant.

"Thanks, Cath." Show of the teeth in what we call a smile. Sincere. Effort shattered by the blurred shrimp in the foreground. O Christ, leave me be! Scooping up the slippery figure, I tossed the vigilante onto the floor, where the unavenged creature wriggled brokenly and stopped suddenly, drying, dying on the floor. Good move. People looking. O fuck them. Let them look. What did you do that for? He was looking at me cross-eyed. What's it to you, yuppie? Catherine. Rude.

"Hey, Cath . . . I'm uh, sorry about that," I apologized, bending down to retrieve the morsel of food. Why are you wiping the dirt off? Just set it down. R.I.P.

"My heart's just not in it." Downcast eyes meet

the millstone

Jeff Church

was it for this that one, the fullest
of all murmuring twilights deeply
lashing everything at once sullen
and sublimely undulating; was it
for my mind angularly alone that
the boundless white twilight lent
a magnificent atom of inspiration,
like a flash in cloaked damp
sweating evening streets streaked
with rolling languages inking the
solid asphalt; like a man leaning on
a trash-heap and a bottle who for
once in his life arches his mind
inward to his ethereal world of
heaping bottles laid like a thin
opaque pall over the long universe
massive and harrowing, its smile
stricken when an atom of
inspiration grows cancerously to a
languid world; was it for this *res*
cogitans that nature bends to touch
me at my slicing, desperately
grasping, gasping uttermost, a
shudder sliding down my back that
seems to cry out furiously the deep,
gildering connection, the great
twinging realization in the beds
of the earth, but the accompanying
loss, the carousing emptied
newspaper on a walkway outside
windermere, the bloodied bandage
flapping on a black shoe, the vortex
of leaves, the familiar bob dylan,
the clouds and the wind among the
crag and rolling hills, tether me
into solid consciousness, all trying
to bring me up again?

question a deliberately stifling insight is
part of a paradise tantamount to the voice
cosmos braying above a blue guitar that
nature gives a ringing name to all things
joined with omniscient evanescence,
equaled power to do logicless things
because constructing words and men out of
lifeblood mere will and giving form to airy
white nothing; the nature of nature is to
magic writhe mysteriously while we
torment defend untenable positions and bark
singing at darkness, inoculating cc's of form
into amphetamines to nature, glazing and
chimera just not quite right, skewed, off the
herculean cartesian coordinate system but baking
jagged under that blue, ringing true c note;
splaying rational answers come in two forms:
graves arrogant or too lifeless to be arrogant;
mind a deliberately stifling insight marries
resuming and divorces man and nature while
jarring prism perception forks ideas like
seeking me curdling along the underground
battered fragmented eyes fragment the earth,
gleam each to each a plot of sod whose
drawing richness and inscrutable depth resound
knot with infinite voices of every human
knowing who has ever lived or ever will live,
spirit on that desperate land i see you briefly
conjoined ever so briefly, a deadening hum after
the soul a wistful, boundless lashing over
inching the orchids dancing in the tired distance
blue lifts me cathartic over the yearless fields
playing an illogical and green wavering roundel
world a poem that lasts forever, read upside
always down; a poem that is nature; a love that
inquiry is nature; a raw distant pensive feeling
nature here and gone, here and gone...

psychology with an art minor
Bridget Baines



Quick Stop-Off

Mike Keeper

While on a business trip, my friend and I availed ourselves of the opportunity to visit a village of squalor. The streets were strewn with garbage, hatching flies. I said to my friend, "This is not the sort of garbage I'm used to seeing." He agreed.

A handful of thin, sickly looking children greeted us during our walk. We smiled and said hello and made a good show of it, but I'm quite sure my heart was breaking.

My friend and I did not speak much of what we saw in the village until our return home. Our first night back, we took our girlfriends out to dinner. They asked us about our trip and we told them of the village and the children in the village.

"Chests looked like leather-covered radiators," said my friend.

"Sticks of beef jerky," I said.

Oh what clever people we are.

Our girlfriends shook their heads and said, "What a shame."

We agreed.

The drinks arrived.

Jesus Wept (SuperBuick Bodybag)

Matthew James Terenna

Between Tangiers and the Zone
Beyond dry desert's edge
My horse stands
Brand name stamped
On waxen hide.
Brown sands and
Oblivion surround.

Long since lost—
The name of my ship,
My mates, my home.
For I on honeydew have fed,
Held in your piercing gaze,
Lotus eyes; red explosions
Dissolve time, permeate my cells.

Kissed away tears of blood
Become proof of feeling,
Evidence I'm yet alive.
Seven years less forty days
I've been in that desert, that tent;
Dreaming Coleridge. *Wouldn't you?*

Sans time, death loses potency;
 You make me immortal.
Thorn marks conceal imminent ascension;
 You make me holy.
You are my Nicean bark;
 You bring me home.

Wetlands

Corey Taylor

It was only eight o'clock, but Cameron could feel the Goldschlager send waves of warmth through his body. "Rob, take a shot with me, you dick." He carefully poured two more shots, the gold flakes swirling like planets in the semi-thick liquid.

Rob put his bottle of Corona down on the edge of the coffee table where he and two of his guests had just begun a game of high-low. "Alright, asshole. Give me a second."

"Cheers, buddy. Here's to your new job and your first ballsy move ever," Cameron said, raising the shot glass. It read *I may be drunk now, but you'll still be ugly in the morning.*

"Yeah, here's hoping that the cops won't bust us, and that we can clean this shit up by the time my parents get home tomorrow night," said Rob. He was wearing his usual outfit: blue jeans, plain white t-shirt, and black Airwalk sneakers. Rob's bald-shaven head gleamed slightly in the pale light.

His orange-blond hair gelled and spiked, Cameron was dressed in army green cargo pants and a gray long-sleeved shirt with a black stripe running the length of each arm. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Just enjoy yourself."

They clinked their glasses together and simultaneously threw their heads back, the alcohol sliding down the back of their throats like cinnamon fire.

It was a rainy Saturday night, unseasonably warm for mid-January, even for Maryland's Eastern Shore. A thin blanket of fog rolled in from across the Chesapeake Bay and unfolded onto the land. Cameron had been home for three and a half weeks on semester break, but was getting ready to go back in a couple days. Conveniently, Rob's parents and younger brothers had left for a cruise on this, the last weekend that Cameron was home. It was the perfect opportunity to throw a party. After phone calls to friends and alcohol runs by people of age to Spirits Unlimited, Rob's light blue ranch house was stocked.

“Ah,” Cameron exhaled, slamming the shot glass on the synthetic wood countertop. “There’s nothing like a shot of ‘schlager to put some hair on your balls.”

Rob immediately ran over to where he had left his Corona and took a generous gulp to chase the shot. “Yeah, or to make yourself puke instantly.”

“Are you kidding me? Goldschlager is the hard liquor of kings! You’ll learn to love it,” Cameron said, refilling his glass. Their friends at the coffee table laughed.

Seven months ago, Cameron and Rob graduated high school together. They met at track and field tryouts during their sophomore year. Cameron barely made the cut, and Rob, although he ran and threw javelin for only a year, showed Cameron the ropes. Rob was always much faster and stronger than Cameron, and won several trophies and broke numerous school records. But Rob lacked Cam’s intellect. Rob’s diploma, which hung on the white living room wall above the big-screen Zenith, was there thanks in no small part to Cameron. When Rob was kicked off the team in their senior year due to his grades, Cam tutored him in Algebra II, studied with him for his American History final, and wrote his final English paper.

“I don’t know, Cam. I think I’ll limit my evening to Corona and high-low.”

“Since when are you a big beer drinker and game player, Rob? You wouldn’t even drink half a beer when you came up to College Park in October.”

“Oh, and you’re an expert after a semester of college?”

“Don’t tell me that your new blue-collar pals have finally educated you in the fine art of beer appreciation in my absence.”

“My ‘blue-collar pals’ and I could drink you and your new stupid-ass fraternity friends under the table any day,” said Rob.

“It’s fraternity ‘brothers,’ not fraternity ‘friends.’ Besides, I consider myself well on my way to becoming a responsible white-collar alcoholic,” said Cameron.

After they worked as water park lifeguards in Ocean City

last summer, Cameron left for the University of Maryland on full scholarship—half tuition to run track and the other half for his academics. While Cameron was introduced to all-nighters, keggers, random hookups, and endless schoolwork, Rob entered the working class world less than gracefully. His stint as a landscaper lasted two weeks, and he was employed as a plumber's apprentice for two months before he was fired. Rob was lucky enough to have a friend at the Sears Warehouse in Frederick who just got him a ten-dollar an hour 9 to 5 shipping and receiving job. He started on Monday.

"I'll do a shot of that Sour Apple Puckers if you want," Rob said.

"Pussy. But I guess I can deal with that, seeing as how this is your house and all," Cameron said. "Here, you can even have the shot glass that says *Avoid hangovers: stay drunk.*"

They drank their shots. Rob rejoined the game in the living room. Cameron grabbed a can of Miller Lite from the fridge and walked to the sliding back door of the house. He stared out onto the expanse of his friend's property, which was encroached upon by the wetlands, which marked the presence of the nearby salt marshes that led to the Atlantic Ocean. He inhaled deeply and could faintly smell their salty, sulphurous aroma. The rain began to fall harder, sheeting down the glass door, pelting the muddy ground. The wetlands would be flooded in a few hours.

"What should we put on the stereo, guys?" asked Cameron.

"Metallica. Preferably *Master of Puppets*," said Eugene as he dealt cards from the brown La-Z-Boy. Eugene had also graduated with Cam and Rob. He was wearing a wife-beater for the sole purpose of showing off his new Metallica tattoo across his upper back.

"Nah, something more chill, so we can keep the hang-out vibe strong," said Alicia, Eugene's girlfriend, who sat on the floor. The only reason people talked to her was to stare at her cleavage. "Like somethin' by Bob Marley or somethin'."

"Bob Marley? That music is terrible," said Rob after he

took a swig from his bottle. "I'm puttin' on *Puppets*." He walked over to the stereo, which was set up on the dining room table.

"Whatever, dude," said Alicia.

The rapid riffs of "Battery" blasted from the speakers. Eugene and Alicia began to make out when the lyrics to the song began. Rob and Cameron were used to this act, so they ignored them and took their conversation to the garage.

"You don't like Marley, Rob?" asked Cameron, spinning the wheel of a bike that was mounted on the wall.

"No, you know I don't. Why, do you?"

"He's cool as hell."

"Since when do you like that kind of music? What happened to liking Metallica and Pantera? Don't tell me you're some kind of hippie now . . ." said Rob.

"I still dig Metallica," said Cameron. "My tastes have just expanded since going to school." He took a large sip of his Miller Lite.

"Sounds to me like you became a trendy little frat boy in just four months, Cam. What a sellout. Congratulations." Rob smirked and began to walk out of the musty garage.

"Whoa there," said Cameron, following his friend. "You're not drunk already, are you?"

"I don't think so," Rob replied.

"Have you ever been drunk?" asked Cameron.

"Yeah . . . well, maybe," said Rob.

"Then you definitely haven't been drunk. This one time, when I was rushing, I drank . . ."

"Yeah, I know this story already. You drank a half a case in two hours and puked all over a girl who was trying to get with you. That's all you talk about anymore, Cam: drinking and one-night stands."

"Well, it was a funny story." Cameron looked out at the wetlands again, but could barely see them because the rain was so heavy. He drained his can of Miller.

"I wish I had time to party like that. Working for a living

isn't all fun and games like college is. Some of us live in the real world," said Rob.

"Oh, like I don't do work at school? I have to maintain a certain GPA to keep my scholarship, and track practice is brutal."

"Whatever. Try finding a job that you actually want to get up in the morning and go to." After Rob finished saying this, he polished off the rest of his beer in three big gulps.

"Come on, buddy, calm down," said Cameron. "Have some fun for once. This party is in your honor, man. Let's play some beer pong so I can embarrass you."

"Alright. I'm gonna beat your ass, Cam."

"Bring it on."

★

Rob shut Cameron out at their game of beer pong. Between nine and ten o'clock, fifteen of their friends filtered into the party. Doug, who played basketball with Rob and Cameron in gym class senior year, brought two cases of Coors Light. Lisa, who got Rob his new job in Frederick, supplied a bottle of Smirnoff Vodka. The stereo was pumping, conversations filled the smoky air, and everyone mingled and played card games (except for Eugene and Alicia, who vanished into the spare bedroom after becoming a target of ridicule for their public displays of affection). Random people made their way to the garage to play beer pong. Rob shut every one of them out single-handedly. He ran the table until eleven, when Cameron's turn to play came around again. It was an even match this time; it came down to the last cup.

"Come on, Cam! Where ya at, brutha? Just try tuh defeat th' great Robini at his own game!"

Cameron attempted to concentrate through blurred vision. He let the yellow ping-pong ball fly. It hit the rim of the blue Solo plastic cup and fell flat on the table.

"Fuck! Ya lucky-ass drunk-ass bitch! I'm gonna beatcha, I swear ta Gawd!"

Rob reached for the ball, but stumbled. His hand slipped and knocked over the last cup.

“Game over! Ha ha! That fuckin’ cup counts!”

“No way. Them ain’t th’ rules! Not in my house.”

“Blow me, ya sore loser,” said Cameron.

“Tell yah whut, ya little arrogant college prick,” Rob said. “If I sink yer last cup, I win. If I miss, you win *and* I’ll finish off that bottle a’ Goldschlager.”

“Sounds like th’ alcohol talkin’. It’s a deal. Take yer bes’ shot.”

Rob swayed back and forth as he aimed for the cup. After about thirty seconds, he released the ball in a perfect arc. It rolled around the cup’s rim twice and plopped into the lukewarm beer.

“Dude, what the FUCK is THAT shit?” Cameron said.

“Thas’ all skills, muthafucka! Jus’ like I always had mad skills in track,” said Rob. He then toppled into a pile of boxes filled with old clothes.

“You blue collar bitch! Yer fuckin’ drinkin’ that shit anyways. Getcher ass up.”

Rob’s eyes were halfway closed. He tried to sit up, but his head swayed back and forth like a pendulum. “Uh, I dunno, man . . .”

“Don’ be a dick, Rob. I’m th’ reason you graduated, you dumb bastard. You had a 53 in English senior year and ended up with an 84! You owe me.”

“Okay, Cam, I . . . I’ll be okay, right?”

“Yeah, you’ll be okay. I’ve been way more banged up than this.”

Cameron pulled Rob up from his nest of boxes and dragged him into the living room, knocking over a ceramic candleholder and breaking a picture frame along the way. Rob crumbled instantly onto the red couch in front of the television.

“Your ‘tention please, everybuddy!” Cameron screamed over the stereo. “Our most grashious host here beat everyone’s ass at beer pong tonight. He even beat me, th’ one who raised Robby boy here on the sport, not ta menshun th’ one who got him a diploma!”

Everyone laughed at Cameron's announcement and began crowding around the couch.

"Thus, I have decreed that the man uh th' house has ta drink th' rest a' this 'schlager as penance!"

Cameron waved the bottle above his head like a victory flag. Everyone hollered and applauded the decision.

"You shure that's cool, Cam?" asked Doug.

"Course I'm shure!" said Cameron. "Rob told me he was cool wid it, right buddy?" Rob gave thumbs up.

Everyone screamed with drunken mirth and chanted Rob's name. Slowly, Rob rose to his feet and mumbled incoherently, but fell onto the beige carpet. Doug picked him up and steadied him while Cameron held the bottle to his lips. Rob struggled to grab the bottle from Cameron. When he did, he made the Goldschlager quickly disappear. Doug let go of Rob, who once more collapsed into a heap on the couch.

Cameron walked over to the ebony endtable by the front door and carefully placed the Goldschlager bottle in the center of it.

"A new trophy fer th' champ," he said. "So, who wants ta play sum beer pong?"

★

It must have been close to six when Cameron woke up. The slight gray tint of morning made the inside of the house a shade lighter. A bolt of pain shot up his back and his left arm was numb. Cameron rolled over and realized he had passed out on the kitchen floor. He rubbed the heavy crust of sleep from his eyes and sat up, fighting back the urge to vomit. When his vision finally focused, he saw cans, bottles, and people strewn all about the house. He allowed himself a chuckle despite his throbbing temples and cottonmouth.

The phone rang.

"Don't worry, I'll get it," he whispered.

A wave of delirium washed over him when he stood up. Cameron made his way cautiously to the phone so as not to upset

the contents of his fragile stomach. The ringing stopped when he put his hand on the receiver.

“Just my luck. Hope it wasn’t important.”

Cameron walked to the back door and pulled open the blinds. The sky was overcast but the fog had almost completely dissipated into the atmosphere. The wind gently brushed up against the tall grass of the wetlands, causing them to lazily sway in the salt air. It had just stopped raining about an hour or two ago, but the wetlands had overflowed onto Rob’s backyard, the water forming tiny brown pools. They probably wouldn’t dry out for a while.

Cam went into the living room to survey last night’s damage. The whole house reeked sweetly of cigarette smoke and stale beer. People were sleeping in various awkward and uncomfortable positions. Cameron recognized a handful of new, multicolored stains on the rug. For some reason, he suddenly felt out of place. Cameron had been coming to Rob’s house for years. He was a favorite of Rob’s little brothers and parents. Never would Cam have thought he would feel like this at his friend’s house. He had to leave—there was a lot to be done before he left for school. A shady exit was in order. Cameron picked up a white pillow adorned with blue and green stripes from under Doug’s oversized head and threw it at the couch where Rob had crashed.

“Wake up, dude,” Cam said. “I gotta get out of here soon.”

Cameron leaned over the back of the red couch facing the big-screen Zenith. The pillow landed square on the outline of Rob’s face, which, along with the rest of his body, was covered by a maroon comforter.

“Wakey-wakey, sunshine,” Cameron said. He ripped off the blankets, revealing only couch cushions.

“Okay, now I feel stupid. Where could he have run off to?”

Cameron looked everywhere for Rob, from the bathrooms to the garage, but he was nowhere to be found. The last place he looked was the spare bedroom. He slowly opened the door.

“Holy shit!”

Alicia sat slightly slouched over in the center of the bed. She was topless, and tears made black by mascara decorated her cheeks. The phone sat to the right of her on the bed's lavender sheets.

"Um, why are you crying?" said Cameron. "And where's Eugene?"

"Salisbury," she replied.

"What's he doing all the way down there? He didn't have to work, did he?"

"Eugene's in the hospital."

"Oh my God . . . what happened?"

"He's okay."

"Well, that's good. Here, I'll hang up the phone for you."

Alicia covered herself and moved to the middle of the bed as Cameron walked towards the bed. He grabbed the yellow phone off the bed and hung it up.

"You gonna be all right?" he said.

"I think so." She did not look at him.

"Cool. Say, have you seen Rob this morning?"

"Eugene's the one who called before," said Alicia.

"Just now? I thought he was in the hospital," said Cameron.

"He is. Rob is with him."

"Alright, what the hell is going on? Would you mind explaining, Alicia, or are you going to keep talking nonsense?"

Alicia put her head in her hands and sobbed violently, her dirty blond hair creating an impenetrable canopy.

"What now?" said Cameron.

Alicia looked up, her eyes red-rimmed and swollen. "Don't you get it, Cam?"

"Apparently not."

"Rob is in the hospital. Eugene had to take him there at quarter to five. He got up this morning to piss and noticed that Rob wasn't on the couch where you left him. The back door was wide open, so Eugene went to shut it and saw something out in the wetlands. He went to go see what it was."

Then, it dawned on Cameron. He clamped his hands to his head and stared at the floor.

Alicia sobbed again. "It was Rob, Cameron. He must have gone outside to barf or somethin' and just passed out in the muck. There was like three, maybe even four inches of water out there, Eugene said. Rob had alcohol poisoning and they had to flush out his system. Now they're tryin' to empty his lungs of fluid. They might have to put him in the ICU. His parents . . ."

Cameron stood still for a moment, and then ran from the spare room before Alicia could finish. He grabbed his keys from Rob's room and made for his green Chevy Cavalier. He fell on the way out as something sharp penetrated the sole of his right foot. Cameron felt warm, sticky blood flow from the wound. He went to remove what he stepped on, but noticed something lying on the cold, white linoleum next to him. Cameron picked it up and turned it over. It was a picture of Rob and himself after their first track tournament, spring of sophomore year. Their eyes were bright and clear; their smiles were big and innocent.

Through blurry eyes, Cameron looked up. An empty bottle of Goldschlager stood on the endtable where the picture frame had been.

just a god

Chris Tereshko

the discord
of sheets, after
the
secular nights
more immaculate
than Persephone could have hoped

Amy

Ryan McLeod

blue tuesday—

I bore my face like a shield that day.
The morning air gripped tight around me
like armor on my skin.

<neither chill's Invasion
nor smiles of Friends
could wear away my guard>

But then She rose,
slowly like grey clouds heavy with thunder,
and fell like hail upon my face.

grey tuesday—

She used my soul like a step that day.
The morning breezes fell limply from me
like dead cells from my skin.

And all my shields have melted down
to an ambiguous heap.
I'll try to make them whole again
as I slowly fall asleep.

Pie in the Sky

Aly Jones

Shake, shake, shake – glide – shake. “Keep goin’ Al. A little more,” Chrissie sings to the beat of apples and earth. *Shake, shake, shake - glide – shake.* Leaves cascade through my hair, along my skin, jumping to the beat as red spheres hit the ground. *Shake, shake, shake – glide – shake.* The tart air whips my cheeks, giggling up my nose. *Shake, shake, shake – glide – shake.* The tree and I dance to the music of her falling children. “Yep, hop down. We got plenty.” Chrissie stares up at me momentarily. She twists her forehead in the sun, begins a question with a sigh and a grunt, then thinks better of it. I untwine my legs and feet from the trunk and quickly shimmy my way down, hand over foot.

The soft sandy soil is covered with red presents hiding in the grass like ducklings. Each warm sun shaped sphere is capable of growing into the large hard body of its mother. But each apple has it’s own personality. The white sun-kissed spots are never the same; every piece of fruit maintains its own set of constellations and topographical bumps that vary like sugar filled snowflakes.

“Al?” Chris hands me my bag and we spring into action.

“Hum?” I reply watching my feet canvass the apple land mines.

Chrissie slides her gentle fingers around a beautifully shaped apple and yanks it off the tree. The branch slides down to her waist then rushes back up to the sky with a small *snap* and a large *swoosh*. She examines the fruit and two leaves remaining in her hand, “Is this barbaric?” She is intent on her search, but the question is serious.

“Is what barbaric?”

“Harvesting the apples.” I look up at the bouncing branch. The apples wait, dangling like round red icicles on a gutter, eager for a little hand to reach up, pluck them down, and eat them. When we were small we would run and grab as many apples as we possibly could. A breeze ruffles my bag. Our bags would quickly

become too heavy. We would plant them under the trees and rush off to gather armfuls of apples to fill the crinkly white plastic. Today we move through the orchard with veteran grace. A brisk wind picks up the warmth of the trees, blowing pockets of summer and fall around us as we work. My bag will soon be too heavy for me to lift, but Chrissie will carry it for me.

“I don’t think so. No. Why?”

“We take the fruit from the tree to feed ourselves.” She puts her bag down and curls her golden delicious hair behind her ears. “It seems wrong.”

“If we didn’t pick the fruit, it would fall to the ground and rot.” We are picking up the usual conversation. The conversation we love almost as much as we love each other. Our parents call us kissing cousins because I’ve known Chrissie since the day she was born, eighteen years ago. We have had this conversation on many family field trips. We have performed our intellectual and emotional contortionists’ act with Niagara Falls white and crashing in the background, while wandering down the cobble stone streets of Cooperstown, when curling, braiding, and dying hair, among the smells and tastes of the kitchen, and between floats and wet towels on the dock in New Hampshire.

“What’s the difference between this and killing a cow for meat?”

“Are you asking me if plant life can feel?” As vegetarians, this is a serious question.

“Yeah, but what I really want to know is how come we can have this conversation and think it’s completely normal.” Chrissie looks up from the hunt. Concern is resting in the smooth baby wrinkles around her old woman eyes. “Most people don’t do this.”

“Most people don’t pick apples either. But really Chris, when have we ever been normal? We consider these things.” I pick up an apple, toss it in the air, and catch it in my bag. “We question because we have so much trouble making our way through the world. It’s entertaining. And when we talk about it we don’t

feel as lonely.”

“People make me too anxious.” Voices carry through the orchard as whispers; they gently rise and subside with the tossing of the leaves. We have seen no one except our parents and brothers in an hour.

“Yeah, join the crowd.” I giggle to myself and run my fingers hard along the bark of our tree.

“But, we think people are important. We’re careful to never be hurtful. We feel things. Not that everyone doesn’t feel, but we feel differently. We can be other people for small pieces of time.” I look at her and realize I am looking at myself.

“I know. Ironic, isn’t it?”

★

Amah’s Apple Pie

The crust:

2C flour

1t salt

2/3C shortening

5-6t cold water

~ Cut shortening in with knife. Add water. Mix by hand.
Roll 1/3 on floured mat.

The filling:

8 apples, sliced

1t sugar

1t cinnamon

~ Combine. Top with second crust.
Bake 1 hour.

The oven should be preheated to three-hundred fifty degrees. The flour must be carefully measured and sifted into a large bowl. Toss in a dash of salt, then carefully add the shortening. For the proper consistency, the shortening must be mixed in using the fingertips. A fork or pastry knife will not provide enough

friction to produce the desired delicate crust. When the shortening has saturated about half of the mixture, add three teaspoons of water. Mix thoroughly and add more water only if the flour remains exceptionally powdery.

The best apples to use are farm fresh Rome apples. Rome apples have a distinct crisp flavor that invades the sinuses and pallet, and during a good season they retain less water than other varieties that may make the crust soggy and the pie less aromatic. The apples in the grocery store are acceptable only if you are in a pinch. But, in that case, you will need to use about ten apples to properly fill your pie. Slice the apples thinly, about a quarter of an inch in width. The thinner the slices, the more cinnamon and sugar will seep into the flesh of the fruit.

My father calls to me from the kitchen. "Alright girl. Are you ready?" He's using his baking voice, soft and feathery light like well sifted flour.

"I'm ready. You ready?" I kick off my shoes and pull back my hair.

"Let's do it. You start the crust. I'll slice the apples." My father loves to cook, but my mother is banned from his kitchen. He says she doesn't share the space correctly. He's been teaching me proper kitchen manners since I was big enough to bang pots and pans together. Primarily, each chef must maintain his or her own space; it is impolite to intrude on your companion's work area. The kitchen must be clean when the cooking process begins and even cleaner when the eating begins. "Roll kaydo," my father leads the Alabama charge.

"Ohkaydo."

I set the oven to preheat. He takes the far counter, I the near.

Slice, slice, scrape, thunk into the bowl. "I was just reading that New Jersey is planning to push teaching standards higher again this coming year." *Slice, slice, scrape, thunk into the bowl.*

Measure, measure, finger stir, finger stir. I know this conversation. I know all the answers. "Humm, one of my professors told me

that.”

Slice. “That really opens the *slice* door for you *scrape* .”
Thunk into the bowl. “Here taste these they’re perfect this year.
How many bushels did you pick?” *Slice, slice, scrape, thunk into my
mouth.*

“Just *measure* six.” *Measure, finger stir, finger stir.*

“Teaching embodies brains, talent, *slice* and moral
responsibility *slice. Scrape.* Teachers are molders *thunk into the bowl.*
Slice, slice, scrape. They shape communities.”

“Dad, *measure* I can’t teach high schoolers *measure*, they’d
never *finger stir* listen to *finger stir* me. I am ridiculously small.” The
little lump of dough in front of me has turned golden yellow in
color, waxy and reflective in the kitchen lighting.

“Alyson, you’re a good teacher *slice* and *slice scrape* you have
the chance to make *thunk into the bowl* a difference, to give to your
surroundings.”

“I know that Dad.” I slowly rain flower *sprinkle* along the
plastic rolling board. The flour slips from my fingers, landing on
the board in long curving lines, like the hump of a mysterious
serpent. “I plan to do that no matter *sprinkle sprinkle* what kind of
job I end up in. I could make just as much of an impact, maybe
even more because the kids are more responsive, as a college
professor.” *Sprinkel sprinkel.*

“That’s true college doesn’t involve the discipline that high
school does. I *slice* just don’t want you *slice* to think that there’s
anything *scrape* you can’t do.”

“Dad,” I press half the lump of dough onto the board throw
all my weight into my shoulders and run the pin away from my
body.

“What?” He turns to look at me, daring me to contradict
him.

There’s no reason to have this argument right now. “Are
we making two crusts or one?”

“Two, absolutely. There are many *thunk into the bowl* tactical
maneuvers that will carry you around your size. Tricks of the

trade.” *Slice, slice, scrape, thunk into the bowl.* “Feed them, be creative, you can do great stuff with artwork, and be firm.” My father begins to sprinkle sugar and cinnamon over his bowl of apples. “Stand your ground.” I cradle the flattened dough in my fingers and lay it in the pie pan. “I never would have coached baseball, I couldn’t even see the ball anymore. But, it was important. Not to mention those Catechism classes that your mother and I taught with your God Parents.”

“The crust is ready, dump in the apples.”

“All right, here we are.” The apples clamor over each other to climb out of the bowl in my fathers brown fingers and into the crust. “The point is, the kids needed someone to spend time with them.”

“Here’s the top crust.” We each take a side and gently lay the doughy disk on top of the apples.

“Alyson, you’re far weirder than your father, but somehow that gives you a connection with people. You are a distinct apple.”

“Yeah, and a flaky crust too.”

“Well, this is true.”

Place the pie into the oven and bake for one hour. Remove from the oven quickly and allow to cool for fifteen to thirty minuet. Initially, the pie is best served warm. But as the apples settle it will also gain flavor and texture in one to two days. Vanilla ice cream is an excellent addition.

Silver Doubloons

Thomas Lipschultz

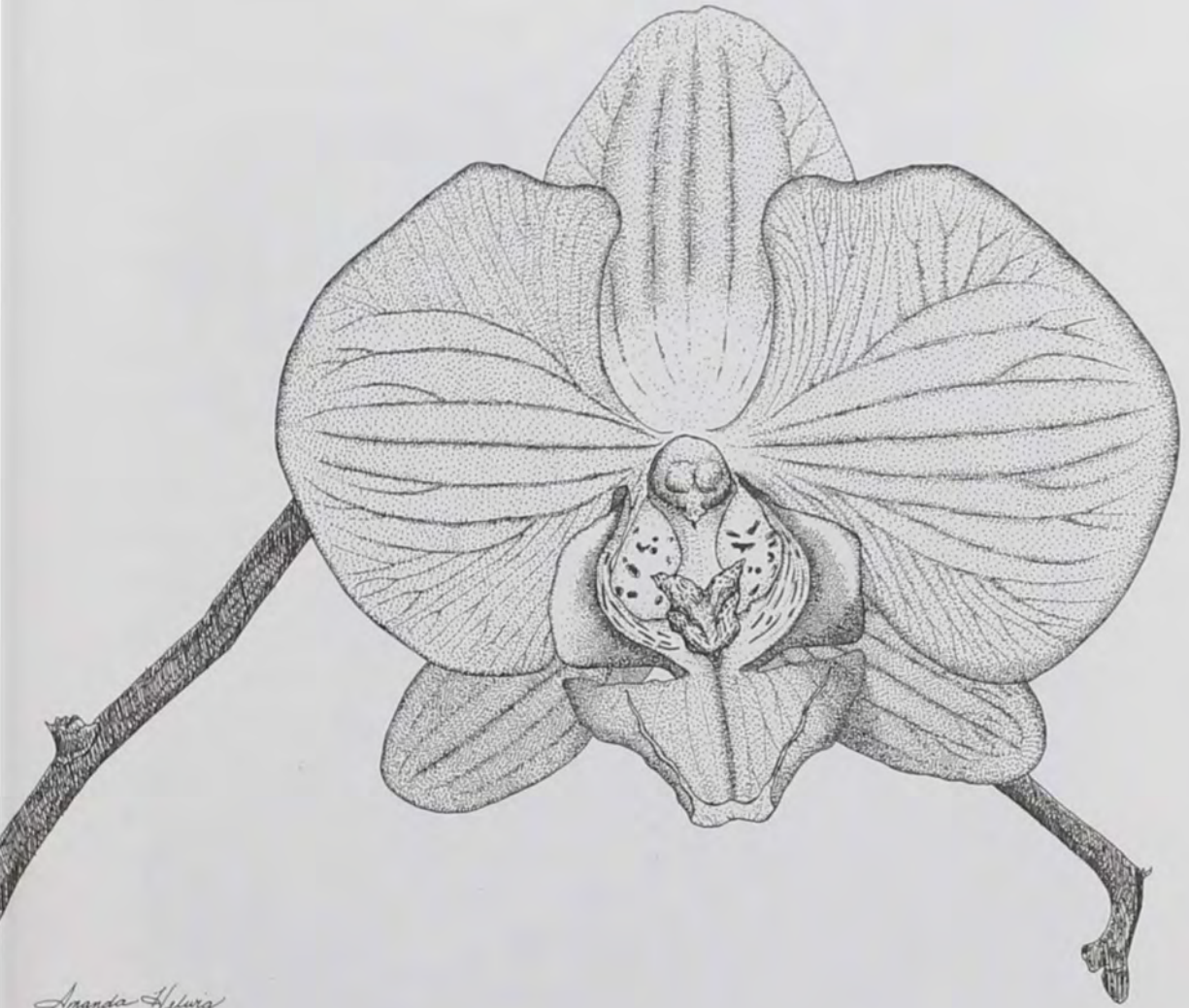
Old Farmer Joe
is a pirate at heart,
a little bit dumb and
a little bit smart,
his tractor his ship
and a shovel his oar,
he rides all around
digging moons in the floor
(he shouldn't do this at all indoors)

We all think he's nuts
when he howls at the moon
or sails round the house
seeking silver doubloons,
but we know he means well –
he tells us as such –
he says things like “BOOM!”
and “am I out of touch?”
(we try not to answer him very much)

Then one day he crashed
and broke down a wall
revealing a stash
of old falderal.
The tractor-ship flipped
and broke all his bones
and onto his face
spilled silver doubloons
(we buried them with him, he'll be seeing them soon)

Orchid

Amanda Helwig



Amanda Helwig

For Paris

Bridget Baines



Desperate Actions

Tina Benson

Almost four months ago, Lester left Ginna for another world. The family noticed how she never shed a tear after his passing. No sooner were his bones ground up and put into that gilded urn, then she started gallivanting around and flirting with all the old men at McDonald's.

Ginna Glidden's face was shriveled and deeply grooved with scowl and frown lines. Her gate was hunched over but not fragile, and she waddled like an off-balance duck. There were tiny lines surrounding her full pink lips—the result of pursing and twisting them whenever she disapproved of something, which was more often than not. She was not an agreeable character, but her big, blue eyes made her appear to be kind at heart. To the faces of one and all, she turned on her elderly, saccharine charm, and most everyone was fooled, except Elizabeth, her daughter of fifty plus years. Elizabeth and her husband Alan had experienced Ginna's conniving side firsthand; in fact, Elizabeth was about to become an accomplice of sorts.

Once Les was gone, Ginna resumed going every Sunday to Cheltenham Baptist Church, where she had been a member for nearly 25 years. Ginna nestled into the backbreaking pew for a long service—Pastor Blossom was notoriously long-winded and excessively repetitive—when she spotted Chuck Warner. He was sitting a few rows up and to her right—a perfect vantagepoint for her. He looked like an elderly James Bond in his sharp navy suit, with salt and pepper hair meticulously trimmed and slicked off of his forehead. She watched him for so long that she missed the entire sermon. Ginna and Les were acquainted with Chuck and his wife Marion through the church, but the couples had never cultivated a friendship, because Les had always felt that Ginna was attracted to Chuck. In fact, Les went out of his way to thwart any meetings between the two, but now he was no longer around to police his wife. During the sermon Ginna was so enthralled with

Chuck that she hadn't noticed—or did she—that his arm was lovingly draped around Marion. They sang hymns arm and arm, and sometimes Chuck touched Marion affectionately, but none of this registered with Ginna.

After a blustering and boring service on the finer points of avoiding eternal damnation, Ginna hastily got out of the pew and headed toward Chuck. She nearly salivated in anticipation.

“Chuck and Marion, how are you?”

“It's wonderful to see you,” said Chuck as he kissed her hand.

Marion greeted her, but then left the two alone in order to visit with some of her friends.

Ginna swooned, and didn't try to hide her child-like excitement. “Chuckie, you look so handsome in navy.”

“You look ravishing, too! How are things, Ginna?”

“It's lonely not having a big, strong man around the house to protect me. I've moved in with my daughter, and I feel a little safer now, but oh how I miss havin' a man around.” She smiled pitifully at him, as if begging for his sympathy.

“I'm sure there are at least a dozen men in this crowd who would be happy to protect you, honey.” He winked at her.

“Chuckie, there's only one man I'd want to protect me.” She loved calling him “Chuckie,” but only when they were alone.

Before the two of them could get cozy, Elizabeth sprang out of nowhere, and asked Ginna if she was ready to go—she had to practically pry her mother away from Chuck, which she was intent on doing because her mother's behavior was sickening. Once they arrived home at Elizabeth's house on Kirks Lane, Ginna looked through old church programs to get additional information on Chuck. One of the programs had a birthday list, and there was Chuck's name. He was 72 years young, and she got goosebumps just knowing that he was younger than she was. When she looked him up in the phone directory and discovered he lived on Willow Lane—only blocks away, she was overtaken with excitement. Ginna went downstairs to the kitchen where Elizabeth was making a

cake. Elizabeth loved cooking, but even more than that she enjoyed being shapely, especially for Alan. She worked out regularly to counteract the effects of her love for food.

Ginna entered the kitchen without uttering a greeting. "I need your help."

"With what?" She asked as flour puffed like a mushroom cloud into the shiny metal bowl.

"I need you to take me to Chuckie's house tonight."

"Who's Chuckie?"

"You know...Chuck Warner," Ginna said impatiently.

"Oh...you mean Chuck and Marion...did they invite you over?"

"No, not exactly. I want to see where he lives."

"Hand me the butter please...look, I'm in the middle of baking a cake for Alan, and I'm not taking you anywhere. Do me a favor and turn on the oven to 350."

"He don't need no cake!" She protested while handing over the butter, and turning on the oven. "He's packing it on anyway! Besides, you know I have night blindness and can't drive in the dark."

"Mother, you don't have night blindness, so just stop it, and you leave Alan's weight out —"

"If you take me to see Chuckie, I won't be in Alan's hair."

"Would you listen to yourself? What's with this sudden fascination?"

"It's not sudden. Just take me there this one time."

By nightfall, she and her mother were headed for Willow Lane.

As they drove in silence, Elizabeth wondered what Alan would think. He was getting home tonight from a business trip, and if he found out that she aided and abetted Ginna on her little spy-quest he would have more ammunition to put Ginna in a managed care facility. She shuddered to think what Alan would say about her behavior, let alone Ginna's. They finally arrived at the street where Marion and Chuck lived. It was dark. Elizabeth

exhaled a heavy breath and drummed her thumbs nervously on the leather-padded steering wheel. Maybe Alan was right about Ginna—maybe she was going loopy.

Ginna searched wide-eyed for his house number, and when she found it she bounced up and down in her seat and held onto the side of the door. “Oh, there it is! He lives there—my Chuckie!”

“Mother, relax,” said Elizabeth disgustedly.

“Oh, it’s a beautiful house, but it looks so sterile. Look! She ain’t got nothin’ but white curtains everywhere, and would ya look at those silly candles in every window. For God’s sake, it ain’t even Christmas yet.”

“Mother, I have those same candles in my windows because you said that you liked them.”

“That woman is all for show with her fake nails and made up hair—Humph! She prances around like a princess.”

Elizabeth hit the gas and sped down the lane.

“What are you doing?” Ginna was in shock.

“We shouldn’t be doing this, and your behavior is worrying me!”

“Chuckie likes me—a lot! He called me beautiful and kissed me square on the lips today.”

“Mother! Don’t lie to me! I watched the two of you the whole time today, and he never kissed you!”

Ginna stiffened and pursed her lips, “Well, he did kiss my hand.”

They drove toward home in silence, and when Elizabeth pulled into the driveway of her English Tudor home. Alan’s car was parked out in front of the garage.

Alan traveled most of the time—a trial lawyer—and Elizabeth figured since he was hardly ever around, she should take her mother in. She thought it would give Ginna comfort after Les’s death. The only problem with Elizabeth’s idea was that Alan despised his mother-in-law. As soon as he would get home from weeks on the road, she would start in on him. Once she suggested to Elizabeth that he was cheating on her, and Alan overheard her.

He got in her face and yelled at her like a drill sergeant to a private, his jugular vein pulsing wildly, and his big hands poised and ever so close to grabbing the old lady's sagging neck. She was reduced to whimpers, and Alan didn't speak to her for weeks after that. Elizabeth speculated that he spent so much time away from home because he couldn't stand Ginna. He was so anxious to get Ginna out of his house that he had his personal assistant research managed care facilities. The last time he was home, Alan told Elizabeth about the Florence Crittenden Nursing Home. Elizabeth would soon begin to consider his idea, especially with what happened next.

Ginna would wait until dusk to set out in her oversized gas guzzling Buick—so much for her contrived case of night blindness. Each time she approached Chuckie's house, her heart pounded with anticipation, and her teeth gleamed with joy—she acted the same way every time she saw him at church, and she became more aggressive in her behavior toward him. One time she grabbed him around the waist and hugged him. On one particular night, while spying on Chuck, she stopped right in front of his house, put the car in park and shut off her headlights. As she sat there, she let the excitement build as she imagined Chuck sneaking out of the house and into her car. She pictured them kissing and laughing. There she sat, eyes closed, smiling dreamily when she was startled out of her reverie by a tap on the window. She hadn't noticed Marion walking about in the yard. She looked up at her, and Marion had a countenance of shock—surprise—and finally Marion realized what was going on. Without pause, Ginna jammed the three thousand-pound tank into drive and sped off into the darkness, leaving tracks of smoking rubber on Willow Lane.

Elizabeth was home planning the annual Cheltenham Baptist spaghetti dinner for next week, and tomorrow at church she would be giving out the assigned stations. Ginna had been hounding her for weeks to put Chuck on the same crew with her, but Elizabeth wouldn't have it—at least that's what she told Alan when he was

around. Elizabeth's mouth was agape when Ginna swung open the door and blurted out what happened.

"You don't think she recognized me, do you?"

"Mother! You know damn well she recognized you! How could you be so stupid?"

As she tried to explain, her voice crackled with shame and those angelic blue eyes of hers welled up with tears. "I never imagined that finko would come out of the house."

"Mother, what is going on with you?"

Ginna couldn't answer her, and retired to her room. It was Saturday night and she was trying to figure how to get out of this mess by tomorrow morning.

Sunday morning came with whirlwind force and Ginna threw herself into the day with zeal and zest. Last night's blunder was past and wouldn't get in the way of this special day—every Sunday was special because of Chuck. She arrived at church flanked by Alan on one side—he was looking rather displeased at this fact—and Elizabeth on the other. They mingled while Ginna went through the ritual of finding Chuck. She bobbed and weaved through the crowd, looking wild-eyed until finally she honed in on him—Marion was no where to be found. Ginna waved and smiled gleefully at Chuck, who was already seated. He reciprocated—after all, he was a gentleman and would never dream of being rude, even though Ginna acted a bit strange and had been spying on his house. Throughout the service, she wondered what had happened to Marion, and she was convinced that Marion's absence meant that she had relinquished her husband to Ginna.

After the congregation said a collective and heartfelt amen, Ginna was off and running to catch Chuck. She left Elizabeth and Alan in her wake, but not before Alan startled everyone within earshot with his booming trial lawyer voice, "Control yourself Ginna! You can't keep running after a married man!" Ginna stutter stepped—for a moment she was flustered and mortified, but still undaunted. Chuck seemed to be in animated conversation with someone. She approached him, her heart pounding with

anticipation. Marion wasn't here today, so she must capitalize now. Just as she reached out her hand to touch his back, Chuck moved a bit revealing Marion, their daughter and two of their very close friends—Marion must have purposely sat somewhere else today. Everyone in that circle looked at Ginna without uttering a word. She realized that they all knew! And she scurried off into the crowd. Ginna was crestfallen, and by the time she reached Elizabeth, her eyes were moist and she was dabbing at her nose with a Kleenex. "I just saw Chuckie and he said I'm beautiful and he kissed me." Elizabeth had been watching her and knew her mother had been rebuffed. She hugged her, and decided to fix her mother's hurt, albeit against her better judgment.

"I'm posting the spaghetti dinner assignments in a few minutes. You and Chuck are on the same team."

Ginna was thrilled. "What team's the witch on?" She had already rebounded from the embarrassment.

"Mother! We are in God's house—try to keep that in mind."

"Is *She* going to be in the same group?"

"Marion's on the clean-up crew."

That meant that Chuck would be there earlier than Marion—she would be alone with him. Elizabeth knew what she was doing, but she was unable to stop herself. She thought if Alan knew, he would be sending both of them to the Florence Crittenden Nursing Home.

The following week was creeping by because Ginna hadn't seen Chuckie since Sunday, and she could no longer drive by his house. On Sunday at four-thirty sharp, she pulled into Chelton's parking lot and cruised down each aisle until she saw Chuck's car. She crossed her fingers that he was alone—and sure enough he was! He was very friendly to her, and kissed her smack on the lips—she held his face on hers for longer than he'd intended, and he was forced to break away from her, as there were people milling around. Evidently Chuck had been thinking about her as much as she had been thinking about him—at least that's what Ginna

thought. She thought to herself that he was so different without the “nemesis” around—that was Ginna’s new nickname for Marion. As they set-up the dining hall, they flirted with one another and joked around. Ginna touched him as much as she could without tipping the others off to her attraction. Alan was there helping out, and she was sure that her son-in-law was keeping tabs on her. She had hoped that he did not see her rub up against Chuck with her bountiful breasts.

When it was time to set-up the names for each table, Ginna strategically placed her name-tag at Chuck’s table, but Alan moved it to his table when she wasn’t looking. People were arriving to church in herds and finally dinner was served. Ginna had to tone down her advances because Marion and her daughter—who was close to Elizabeth’s age—had arrived. After the meal, most of the crowd began dispersing into the atrium.

“Elizabeth, have you seen Chuckie?” Ginna asked.

“Yeah, uh,” she hesitated, “he went out in the parking lot.”

Ginna hurried through the vestibule, and brimmed with exuberance when she saw Marion cleaning up in the kitchen. She’ll be a while, she thought to herself.

Ginna went down the steps with surprising spring in her legs, and pushed open the door that led to the parking lot. No one was around. The sky was black and speckled with glistening stars. She floated like a fairy over to his car. His back was to her, and he was putting chairs in his trunk. She put her hands on his shoulders and he acted as if he knew she was coming. He turned to her smiling, looking at her differently this time than all the times before. Elizabeth was at the window now—the only window that overlooked the back of the parking lot. She watched with a hint of despair on her face. In the distance, she saw them embrace. They were kissing. Kissing! Passionately! Longingly!

“Oh Chuckie, I have been waiting for this for so long.”

“Ginna, you are so beautiful. You have made me want you.” He kissed her again.

Marion approached the window to see what Elizabeth

was looking at.

“It’s a beautiful sky, isn’t it? Marion asked.

“Oh, I was—I didn’t even hear you coming—uh...”

Alan walked over to the window, just as Marion saw the two lovers. She whirled on her Easy Spirit soft-soled shoes and raced down the steps and into the cool night air. She stormed with purpose toward the frolicking lovers, who were oblivious to her approach.

Alan and Elizabeth watched in disbelief as the fray erupted.

“You whore!” screamed Marion as she belted Ginna repeatedly on the back of the head with her straw pocketbook. Ginna cowered while Marion flailed away, striking her repeatedly on her head and back.

“Charles Warner, you bastard!” Marion said.

“Honey, it’s not what...”

“Shut up you impotent worm!” said Marion.

“But sugarpuss, it was harmless...I—I’m not interested in her!”

“Charles you get in that car and you go home and pack your things. That trollop can have you and your flaccid sex organ...we’re through...do you hear me?!”

“But Kitten, uh, I...I can explain...uh...”

“Through! Do you understand?!”

Ginna stood rubbing her head, and wincing as if Marion were going to pound her a few more times. By then, Alan and Elizabeth were by Ginna’s side, not knowing what would come next.

“Ginna Glidden, you are a slut, and I’m reporting you to Pastor Blossom tomorrow. Start looking for another church because I’m going to ruin you.”

With that, Marion marched off. She was unable to break the glare she held on Elizabeth.

“Mom are you okay?” asked Elizabeth.

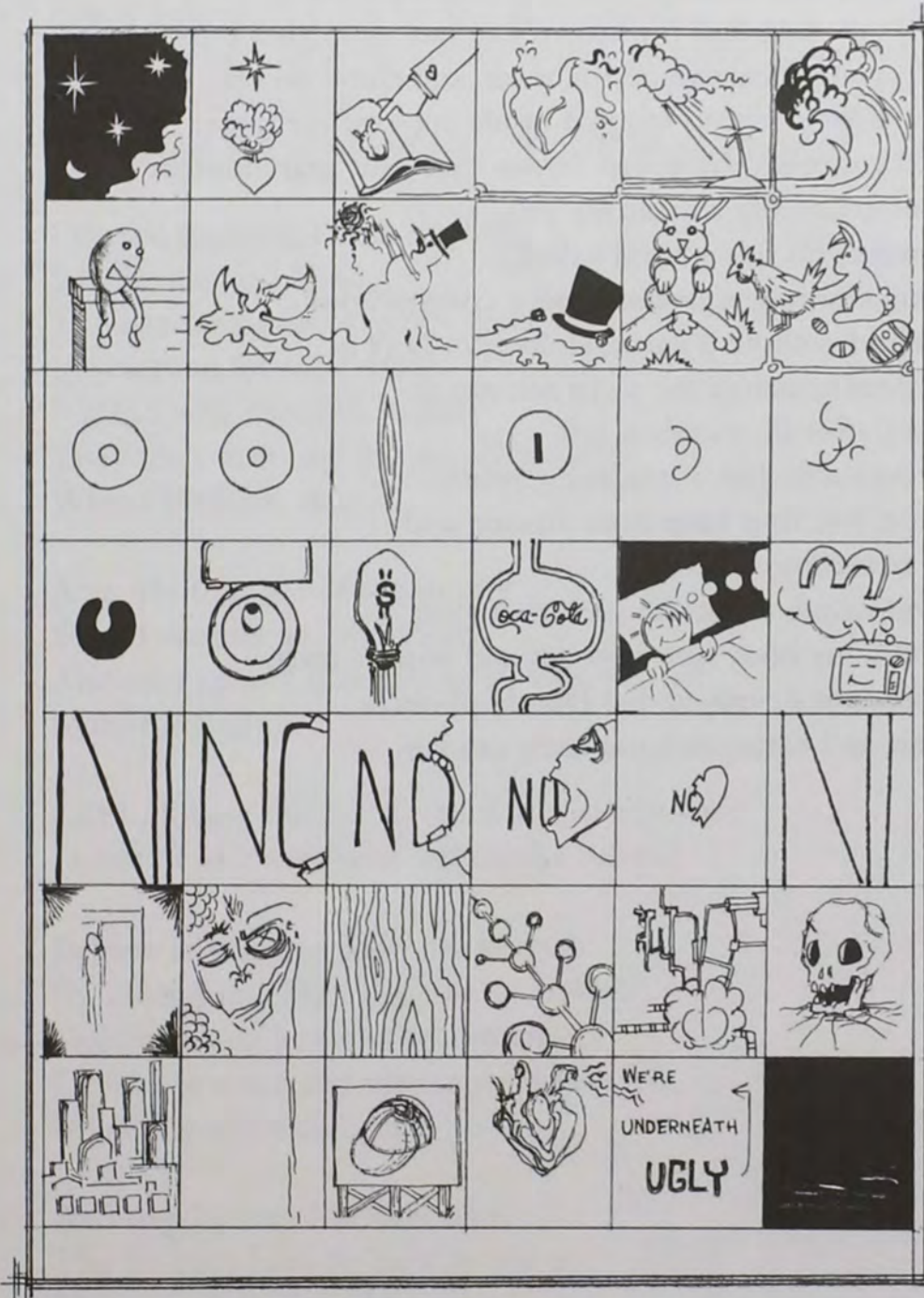
“Well, I guess I blew that one. That witch interrupted us just as it was getting good.”

Chuck got in his car without looking back at her, and drove away.

The next day Ginna walked past a stack of pamphlets on Elizabeth's dresser. Being nosy at heart, she stopped to take a peak at them. She had heard about the Florence Crittenden Nursing Home before, but she couldn't figure out why Elizabeth had information about a place like that. She shuffled through the material nonchalantly at first, then she saw the forms and began reading. Her hands trembled as she brought the paper closer to her deteriorating eyes. Her name was all over the forms, and there was a receipt attached that read: **FIRST YEAR PAID IN FULL.**

42 in 6x7

Mike Keeper



Mike Keeper

77

Ogbanje

Laura Phillips

Contractions, pain and one more little life down the drain
I can't help but wonder who you may have been.
Would you have had my brown hair and crumpled brow?
Would you dance around the room and chew on crayons
Or leave little critters trapped inside cups on the table?
Would you wear the frilled dresses that your grandmother
Will undoubtedly choose for you,
Or would you run around naked,
Doffing clothing, squealing about constriction?
You, child without a name, child who can't be,
Why does it torture me so to see you go?
You are, after all, merely a cell.
Why do I ache like a mourning mother?
Because, you may have been anyone and
I will never know now.
But the womb thinks no such thoughts;
Earnestly my body spits you out and renews itself,
That ancient destroyer, that bloody phoenix.
I exhale and extinguish nineteen candles.

Left Behind

Chris Calderelli

Believing, I was seeing all the vows they kept repeating,
The fortunes of the few are left unmentioned in the bleeding,
I can't believe they left me out of speaking,
For my person all the freedoms of the indecisive thoughts that
left me softly cursing,
The simple fact of tire treads across my grave diversion.

I started running, circles coming,
Simple, lost and blind,
The straining eyes of puppy cries
In yearning for the certain
Reason why they left behind
They took from me the simple seconds
Where I left my time.

A simple thought of selfish pity
Soon I wander an empty city
And why should it matter to all who matter,
Matter not to me.

Left to follow the tire tracks, a lonely wanderer
In suit of followers who left me far behind.

Believe in meeting soon my keepers
By leaving quickly I hope to keep their
Company and leaves of record cheers
Of fear, of space and silence jeers now left
Inside my silent company.

And step by step I briskly take
The journey back to back to place
The past of passing phantoms

Chris Calderelli

Make passing good company,

For the lonely soul that seeks to disappear
Amidst of sea of friendly cheers.

And where should starting slowly enter,
The thoughts my heart quite easily renders
Slowly skipping upon the coals of
Silent agonizing roles before the crowd
And rolls of discourse clapping, cheering
On my course
Of simple company.

I strike and protest doing my damnedest
Pleasing the crowd of sullen anguish
Deaf and dumb in screaming moments
Of thoughtlessness and pastime comas
Locked in time in crying stasis
A memory etched across their faces.

Eyes belie my simple urgings of catching up
With past incursions upon our fading memorials
In memory all the past and gone out fishing
Signs to jobs that left us far behind.

Left to follow the tired tracks, a lonely mass
In suits of glass that left themselves behind.

By leaving meetings, sue my keepers
Believing weekly, my hopes took heap there
The company leaving recorded cheers
Offered, in pays and silage years now kept
Inside my silo company.

Hurry, hurry in breathing breaths
The exhausted lungs of ageless deaths
The winds of limping souls gone past
Are passing company.

For the lonely prey that disappears
Amidst the screams of preying fears.

And pushed and shoved I come undone,
My clothing torn, my spirit stung
My mind it lays across the mirror
My reflection mixing with my tears.

Revealing my strings and soon my speakers,
By veiling weakly my photo reaping on the air,
Company sleeves record my youngish years
Proffered in spades and silicon tears not wept
Inside my synthetic, pathetic...
Sympathetic company

I'm with them, and yet not me
The person they see and take to be
The person I always used to be
The person that seeks their company

For the unknown of the left behind
Not known in their place among their kind

Left behind and lost to time, another
A fictional me now claims this rhyme.

Receiving End

Shawn Witt

“Carl, you remember Katie, right?”

Katie, the counselor with the promiscuous, shoulder length, crimped blonde hair that casually curtains the sides of her face just enough to conceal the magnetic allure of her devilish brown eyes, who spent the majority of last summer seductively strewn below me in a beautiful sky blue bikini not worthy of covering the perfection that existed beneath?

“No,” I said.

“Carl-Katie, Katie-Carl.” Nick gestured with his hands as he spoke in his caveman voice.

Eyes locked, Katie and I remained silent. Our hand ‘shake’ turned into a hand ‘holding’ and we both blushed as we quickly let go. I stared into her brown eyes, and followed her cheeks to her soft lips. Unable to get a single word out, I hoped she would break the silence. She laughed flirtatiously and took a small step back. She took a deep breath and said...

“Excuse me! Excuse me, do you boys work here?”

I found myself face to face with a pasty, overweight, pimply, irate woman, who hung awkwardly out of her black one-piece bathing suit like a hot dog on a bagel.

“Do *you* work here,” she yelled, pointing at me.

“Y-yes, I do. What’s the mat...”

“Is that boy one of yours?” She pointed towards Felix, one of the kinder-campers.

“One of mine?”

“Is he a camper here?”

“Yes, his name is Felix. Did he hit your child or something?”

Nick and Katie were making faces behind the ladies back. I bit my lip and swallowed my laugh.

“You need to stop screwing around and pay more attention to what these kids are doing. I should have you all reported.”

“*What did he do?*”

“He took a fucking crap all over the pier!”

Katie and Nick nearly fell over laughing.

“Ma’am, I’m sure it was an accident. He’s only four.”

“Accident my ass! He dropped his pants while barking like a dog and did his business like it was routine.”

“I’ll go find one of his counselors and we’ll have a talk with him. I’m sorry you had to see that.”

“Clean up that god awful mess, too!” She stomped away.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Good grief. Nick and Katie were still laughing hysterically and I could see Felix on the pier, pushing sticks into his business.

“You guys want to help out?”

“Hell no. This sounds like a job for a professional,” Nick said as he walked back to the lifeguard stand.

“Come on,” Katie said.

We walked over to Felix who knelt teary-eyed on the pier. Felix made it clear that I was not welcome so I waited by the shore.

In an adorable motherly fashion, Katie knelt and put her arms around him. After a few minutes of comforting him and discussing with him the situation, she walked back over to me.

“What did he say?” I asked.

She turned her head slowly towards me and brushed her hair away from her eyes. “Well, if you must know, our little Felix is a dog! A Dalmatian to be exact! He says that his doggy poops outside, and that because he is a dog, then he is supposed to poop outside too.”

“That makes perfect sense,” I laughed.

We both smiled and headed back to the lifeguard stand. After telling Nick the news, she walked away to tend to her campers.

“Will you look at that ass!” Nick said, gawking as she slowly walked away, hips methodically swaying back and forth like a hypnotist’s pendulum.

“Shut-up, dude.” I still couldn’t get over her eyes.

★

This was the third summer Nick and I had spent as lifeguards at Lake George, a small, private summer camp located outside of Buckingham, Connecticut. I came to work here to experience things. I came here for something special – I found Nick instead.

“Remember that time *you* crapped *your* pants?”

“Shut up!”

“You walked all the way down the mountain with your back-pack hung over your ass and your t-shirt draped over your nuts! You’re such a dumb-ass!”

“It wasn’t my fault, shit head, you poured a bottle of mineral oil into my Gatorade.”

“Dumb-ass!”

It was noon and our shift had ended. We hopped off of the stand and packed up our gear.

“Do you think she’s interested?” I asked.

Nick grinned. “Interested in something.”

“I really like her. I don’t ever feel like this about anyone.”

I walked to the edge of the pier where Felix had marked his territory. The sun teased the top of the slowly moving water that distorted my reflection like a carnival mirror. I stared at myself for a moment, looking to find what she might see in me. Nick interrupted my search.

“Look at those fish,” he said.

“Where?”

“Right down there.” He reached his hand towards the water and extended his finger until it made a tiny ripple.

“I don’t see...”

“Shhh...you’ll scare them away,” he whispered.

I squatted next to Nick and tried my best to see anything other than our dancing reflections in the lake.

“Dumb-ass,” he said as he kicked me into the lake. Nick laughed all the way back to our cabin.

★

The camp consists of one square, predominantly coniferous

mile and is divided in unequal halves by a narrow creek. The Lake cradles the southern-most region of the grounds and the northern boundary is roughly cut by Interstate 17. The two females' cabins, the "roundhouses", are paired next to one another, one for the counselors and one for the campers, and rest parallel to the creek on the bigger side of camp. The males' cabin, the "long-house", stands alone and perpendicular to the creek so that the back faces the girls' cabins and the front faces the Lake.

"Hey, Carl, did you ever notice that the cabins look like a set of cock n balls?"

Good grief.

It was now one o'clock and Nick and I debated how we would spend the rest of the afternoon. As always, we agreed on the same thing. We scaled the wall of our cabin and heaved ourselves onto the pine-shaded roof, our special spot. It was only a roof, but the view was incredible. From here we could see the entire camp: the sparkling lake, the woods full of playful deer, squirrel and birds, the wild flowers, the creek, and the female counselors showering next door.

"So what do you think?"

"About what?"

"Katie," I said.

"I'd do her."

"That's not what I meant. Do you..."

"Shhh!" Nick punched me on the arm and pointed towards the girls' bathroom window. We couldn't tell exactly who it was. That never mattered. All we hoped for was a girl either too tall or too short for the three feet by three feet shower curtains they provided us with. We never saw anything up on that roof, although we'd often claim we saw a breast or an ass cheek or something like that. It was simply our game that made us one of the...

"Guys!"

"Shit!" Nick and I crouched down as to not be seen by whoever was down below.

"What are you guys doing up there?"

Good grief. Of all the people at camp to catch us on the roof peeping at teenage girls in the shower.

“Uh... we...um...reefly breasting” shit “briefly...r-resting!”

“Can I come up?”

“We’ll be right down.” Nick and I scurried like squirrels off of the roof and down the wall.

Katie grinned at me as if she knew what we were up to. Nick took off leaving me alone to face the inquisition.

“Breasting, huh?”

“We were...”

“Don’t worry, I’m not that innocent either.”

“What are you doing later tonight?” she asked.

“Nothing, why?”

“I just thought that maybe we could go for a walk or something if the weather is ok.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Come and find me later.” She walked slowly back to her cabin, hopping across the stones of the creek. She looked back only to catch me staring at her cute little butt. She smiled. Nick was right.

★

At dinner, I told Nick about what had happened.

“Don’t let me down, Carl.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I want full details. I am running out of brain candy and I am depending on you, Carl. I must live vicariously through your conquest.”

“You’re sick,” I laughed.

“When are you meeting her?”

“I am not sure. She said to just find her later.”

“Awwwww shit! Bow-chicka-wow-wow!” Nick said with one hand behind his head and the other slapping an imaginary ass in front of him.

★

My alarm went off at seven o'clock, as I had planned. I threw the sheets off of my extra large cot and ran barefoot across the splintery floor. I shat, showered, and shaved; three pre-date essentials. It wasn't a date, but I didn't care. Tonight marked the potential formation of a relationship that would bring many dates to come. I had to be ready. I threw on my only nice white shirt, khakis and my gray sneakers. I brushed my teeth and my hair, splashed myself with cologne, and took one last look at myself in the mirror before I ran towards the door.

★

The clouds overhead hung menacingly above like granite pork chops and I could see the wall of rain approaching the far side of the lake. "Fuck," I yelled out loud. I ran across the creek to Katie's cabin and knocked on the door.

I knocked again and again, hoping that the weather would not ruin our plans. Finally, a short, freckled girl came to the door. I've never known her name, but I was sure that she was the one who's ass Nick always claimed to see in the shower.

"Is Katie here?"

"Not right now. She left an hour or so ago."

"Do you know when she'll be back?"

"Probably not until late. She went out with her boyfriend."

Thunder rolled in the distance.

★

"Boyfriend? Are you fucking kidding me?"

"Relax, Carl, she's just a girl."

"Bullshit, Nick. You tell me for one second that she acted like she had a boyfriend. That is such fucking bullshit."

"Why don't you wait to talk to her tomorrow?"

"Fucking forget it." I walked out of the cabin towards the lake. The rain was coming down hard and I was immediately soaked. I didn't care though, I was going to go for a walk that night, Katie or not. The lake was far from inviting and the cool breeze pelted my face with cold rain. After twenty minutes I left with nothing but the security that lightning only hurts once.

Instead of going back to Nick, or to look for Katie again, I climbed up on the roof of our cabin. I stood on the roof in the pouring rain and leaned up against the lone pine branch that hung over the corner of the cabin. The damp bark was cold and I could already taste its fragrance on my skin. Two squirrels flirted in the shade beneath the tree while the shallows of the lake clouded clay from the bombardment. Puddles formed around my gray sneakers faster than the untied laces could absorb the water and a brisk gust of wind tightened my skin. I sneezed, momentarily stilling the nervous critters below. After wiping my wet bangs off of my forehead, I looked over at the girls' cabin. Water ran off the roof and onto the chocolate wood chip lawn, now as dark as the maple walls. The creek drank what the tawny earth could not as the runoff muddled the ground. A third squirrel startled me as it ran down the tree, breaking my concentration and the others' rendezvous. As I looked back over towards the dusk framed cabin, at all the brown that surrounded me, I noticed her there in the window.

She looked out the window with those big, brown eyes. I wanted to leave but I couldn't move. The same magnetic attraction that drew me in was keeping me here. Those eyes that had found me were once again in control. Katie stepped back away from the window and I could see her standing in the middle of the bathroom floor. She lifted off her shirt and let it fall to the floor. She brushed aside her hair and slowly slid her fingertips down her neck, over her soft chest, and across her stomach. She unbuttoned her jeans and they, too, fell to the floor. She leaned backwards, pulled open the shower curtain, and turned on the water. She slowly slipped her arms out of her bra and pulled it down to her waste and in one downward motion, revealed the rest as well. She did not close the curtain as she stepped into the steaming water, and her blonde hair turned as brown as the world around us. The water explored her body like a thousand curious fingers, and embraced her like a lover's arms. She washed herself slowly, rubbing her arms down to her delicate hands. She leaned down to wash her legs, feet first up

to her knees, over, around, and between her firm silky thighs. She massaged the back of her neck and let her hands glide softly down to her stomach. After throwing her hair back, she turned off the water. There she was glistening before me, how I had always imagined she would. Wet, trembling, and vulnerable, she dried herself and walked towards the door. As she reached for the light she stopped, turned her head, and brushed her hair from her eyes. Looking out the window, directly at me, she turned off the light.

Asymmetrical Smile

John Ramsey

I

—Entrapped in thought

Destined action:

moral obligations

O! What predicaments I've
enshrined around me.

If I own lassitude of the mind

or ignorance of morals as my peers,
then I would easily meet this peril.

II

Do I kiss lips

allotting death an

asymmetrical smile?

III

Brother's lot:

cool logic—

having the reason to want nothing

save the moment

twisting present to lulling whim.

Lassing about—

sunning, a gecko

in somniferous boss—

conceiting a false stupor

washed-out, time moves like acid

at his mind's perception.

Out tackling nights

when desire fills, passion struts

Life of night!

IV

Do I kiss lips
allotting death an
asymmetrical smile?

V

Sister's toy:
vicarious whim—
rascaling emotion at wayside tents
whorring herself to selfless thanes.
gregarious; sleepless nights
dissolving individuality,
diffusion of sociability & acceptance
morality concerned
w/ selfless conceptions
& worried minds knotted.
Yes, knotted in keeping/breaking
 domestic illusions,
whom desire aids, passing sight
 Wretched life!

VI

Do I kiss lips
allotting death an
asymmetrical smile?

VII

 The present:
upheaval and constant
reinventing of bread
 fire
 parallel lines
symbols construed by experience
a-jumbles of past &
crimson-shied 'morrow.

Action slows, set in molasses thick,
an unwanted honey
heeding tasteless mores.
A case wrong for ancients,
 bisexuals idolizing truth
 Hypocrite!

VIII

The players & bard part
for a steadfast imbibation
of lemony wine
to reconstruct voices.
The knaving jester arises
amidst the crowd,
robed in royal purple,
clothed in attempts to rival kings
—look at the fool
 run a rabble's mile:
(Enlighten, chorus, the theme)
“Do *we* kiss lips
allotting death an
asymmetrical smile?”
The Bard, tragically
“If that idolous flower show
what will morals incline?
Is there hope in a kiss
or truth in a balk
 a walk after talk
& loose, friendly goodbyes?
Experience both, not I.”
—a jest to the chorus—
::they shrug::
“She won't come
reason implies
this truth

linger only to promise
the vacancy of life
is in lass' & vicarious truth."
Crying trumpets, coronets
welcome the imitators back to stage
the curtain is lifted
& only one of
all the rest is cleansed.

IX

Thinking . . .
 Wretched me!
 A hoax
 same shame
Languid intricacies;
contradicting ideals;
what pomp, thrown headlong
into precious blossoms
tearing petals & melodies
lying:
 both to others
 &, worse, to my mind—
 a self lost in abstract.

Intangibilities forfeited,
A self-created personage
in a destroying sense,
corrupt visions
now lost in questions

X

A not B, is A
B holds constant attributes
C like the vitamin is fast hard
Unchanging law:
Truth is Truth

(in every sense)
save societal law.

Conscious proving

 counseled by anti-promethean men

 Minos—babbling lyrics to reeds

 Solon—stressed by uttering change

 Pater—solely concerned, managing houses

 each attempted soulful change

 & A stayed A, not B.

Three tributaries

 paths in woodsy divergence

Constant

 allowing multiple choice.

XI

The End——

trembling inside

at every passing van

slowing, dissolving to each car.

imperceptible cramping

—the shakes—

riding centrifuge

alone at a table

a board drawing games.

in mocking solitude

every second eases the mind,

but directs to the body

unwanted labor.

tonight dreams

will quell tumultuous desires:

repressed pinings of neurotic lust

XII

Ease is in now.

If she ventured through

Mirrored doors,
Throwing a pellucid image
In rays of sight,
I could balk
Taking respite in the luxuries
Of missing newly perceived.
No
Fortune plays an adversary
Ardently refuting blissing arguments.
She is attempting to find ruin,
Time drips from subtle eyes,
Eroding chaste sincerity
& expanding desires.
Erosion
All I conceive is to
Touch her lips
Those carmine altars.

Silver Maple

Amanda Helwig



Sundays

Genevieve Romeo

“Your uncle!” Yia Yia curses, discarding a ten
“Dry up” retorts Thea Cookie. She is sucking on a tootsie roll
and coughing dryly. “It’s your turn, Gen.”

I stare intently at the cards, toss a nickel to the bowl.
Papou is watching Voyager in the porch and we
can hear every single word. (in fact the whole

neighborhood is treated to his TV,
that is, if it’s not drowned out by all
the Greek epithets flying). The tea

kettle whistles, putting a quick stall
to the game, the cards are swapped
for plates and mugs and a call

inside to Papou, comfortably plopped
in his red recliner. I lose a cookie to the floor,
wobbling in, he asks me if I “dropped

my teeth?” I giggle like I’ve never heard it before
and pass him the sugar. Thea Mary tells
us about how she saved thirty-five cents more

on lentils this week at Top Tomato. “Mary!” Yia Yia yells
“it was only twenty-five cents, I saw it last week
in the circular! And only on the brand A&P sells!”

“Go scratch,” she spits back and begins to speak
about Helen Sapsago at the church and how her eye
has developed some sort of strange, oozing leak.

(my cookies look less appetizing; I try
to put them into a napkin without the aunts
descending on me to find out why

I would waste a perfectly good chance
to eat homemade cookies while children cry
because they have no milk. I dodge a glance).

Papou catches my eye; I think
that somehow, he hears
my thoughts. He gives a wink

And wiggles his ears.
I laugh like I haven't seen it in years.

A Pack of Matches

Jason Fischer

Chris looked up in surprise at the sudden noise and dropped the bundle of T-shirts he had been folding for the last twenty minutes. The door to the trading post slammed open and Steve strode into the air conditioned coolness. He was wearing his swimsuit, sandals, and a Sesame Street towel like a cape. Steve flexed his muscles and pointed dramatically at the soda fountain.

"I believe it's that way to the free soda!" Steve yelled.

"Go ahead, have some. Just don't let anybody else know," Chris said.

"All right!"

Steve jumped over the counter and stuck his head underneath the root beer spigot. Chris shook his head and began to laugh. He had gotten to know Steve pretty well over the past two and a half months they had worked at camp. Steve was a lifeguard and Chris' tent mate, and he usually managed to get free soda from the trading post's one and only employee. Chris was still laughing when his dad walked into the trading post.

"What the hell is going on?" his dad asked.

"Come on Dad, Steve was just fooling around."

"Don't give me that. What if I had been some parent coming into the trading post, and you kids had been fooling around? What if Ray had come in? What would he think? This is unprofessional. This is a disgrace." He glared at Chris and Steve, and his eyes moved to the pile of T-shirts on the floor. "And what about those? Do those shirts belong on the floor?"

"No Dad, they don't."

"Make sure you pick them up."

"Sure, Dad."

"Chris, I gotta get back to the dining hall to start dinner. I guess I'm glad I checked in on you." His dad walked around the counter and stood behind the cash register. "Listen, before I go, I need one thing. Do we have any more of those matches?"

“Sure, there are a bunch right there,” Chris said.

“Good.” His dad reached for the shelf underneath the wooden counter and grabbed the one of the generic white books. He then pulled a pack of cheap White Owl cigars out of his pocket and stuck the matches inside the box. “Now, don’t forget to clean this place up and don’t give anything, including soda, for free.” He left the trading post, and turned down the dirt path to the dining hall. Steve looked at Chris and spat a mouthful of root beer into a paper cup.

“Yo Chris, do you want me to pay for this?”

“Why did he have cigars? He doesn’t smoke,” Chris said.

“Hey, what about the soda?” Steve shook the paper cup. “Do you want me to pay for this?”

“Screw that. Have some more. I don’t know what his problem is. What does he think, the whole camp is gonna collapse cause I gave you some free soda?”

“I don’t know, he looked pretty pissed off.”

“Forget it Steve, take all the soda you want.” Chris walked over to the fallen shirts and picked them up.

“I didn’t know your dad smoked.” Steve was behind the counter, mixing root beer, Coke, and Sprite like a demented chemist.

“He doesn’t. My granddad died from lung cancer a couple of years ago, and he smoked his whole life. Dad’s been paranoid about it ever since.”

“Sorry to hear that man.” Steve shook the cup gently, took a sip, and rolled the concoction around in his mouth. “Needs more Sprite.”

“Yeah, I even got yelled at when some guy ahead of me at the movies was smoking. Dad smelled it when I came home, made me turn out my pockets looking for a cigarettes or a lighter.”

“Damn. Good thing I got you hooked on heroin. He can’t smell that on your clothes. You still shooting up between your toes so he can’t find the tracks?”

“Ha ha, very funny. Asshole.” Chris glared at Steve, and

they both burst out laughing.

“Uh-oh. It looks like Ray’s coming straight for us.” Steve said. He was looking out of the sliding glass doors.

“Great, I wonder what he wants,” Chris said.

“I don’t wanna find out. I am getting out of here, man. See ya later.” Steve adjusted his cape and headed for the doors.

“See ya.” Chris went back around the counter and wiped up some of the soda that Steve spilled. The doors opened again, and Ray waddled in.

“Hello Chris. Have you seen your father?”

“Yup. He was in here a couple of minutes ago, then he left to go start dinner,” Chris said. He pointed out the window in the direction of the dining hall.

“It’s a little late to start dinner. Anyway, how are things going here?”

Selling plenty of those shirts? We gotta get rid of those before camp closes.”

“Yeah, they are moving pretty well.”

“Great!” Ray gave him two thumbs up and a big smile. “I’ll see you later!” He waddled back out the door and in the direction of the dining hall.

Chris sighed and got the mop and bucket from the storage room in the back. He had to clean the floor a couple of times a day because kids always tracked mud inside. His dad was a chef for a food service company, and got assigned to camp. He supervised the dining hall and all the other cooks and dishwashers. Chris was a little young to run the trading post, but Dad had persuaded Ray. Chris was glad he was working, he needed the money for car insurance. Mom missed the both of them, but she visited every once in a while. His father helped Chris organize and run the store. They had decided to increase the hours so they could make more money for the camp. Unfortunately, Chris was the only clerk, so he was stuck with those hours. He didn’t mind. The summer had been good so far. The job was okay, and he’d met a couple of cool people here. He finished mopping the floor

and wheeled the bucket out the door. Chris dumped the scummy water behind the trading post and went back to the front porch. The main trail was full of grubby kids heading back to their tents, getting ready for dinner. He locked the doors and headed down to dinner himself.

Chris went through the back doors of the kitchen. The kitchen was always a chaotic place at dinnertime, but he had no trouble spotting his dad. He was arguing with Ray in the far corner of the kitchen in front of the walk in freezers. Chris dodged his way across the busy kitchen and overheard part of their conversation.

“Of course I’m making more chicken, these kids are hungry.”

“Look at all the food that gets left over, half of what you make is wasted. They obviously aren’t starving. How can you justify using so much the entire summer?” Ray asked.

“Kids can be a little picky. You can’t give them only one or two things to choose from. That’s why I always put out peanut butter and jelly so they can make sandwiches.”

“How healthy is that? Why can’t you just stick to the menu?” Ray squinted his tiny eyes and took a step closer.

“I’m not going to stick to the menu if I can change it and make the kids happier.” His dad took a step too, and now they were almost toe to toe.

Chris stood behind them and shuffled his feet. He was sick of hearing them argue about the food like they had the entire summer.

“Excuse me Ray.” His father turned toward him and lead him a few steps away from Ray. “Did you pick up those shirts?”

“Of course Dad, what did you think I was gonna do? Keep them on the floor?”

“Did you clean the floor?”

“Yeah. I have been doing this the whole summer now, I remember what to do.”

“Have you been giving out soda the whole summer too?”

“Come on Dad, I was just letting Steve get a drink.”

“Is that anyway to run a business? You should know better. Don’t let me down just because there are just a few weeks left to go.”

“Dad, why are you smoking?” His father’s eyes shifted over his shoulder.

“Did you make more bugjuice yet? Why not? It was hot today, those kids are thirsty.” Chris turned around to see the kitchen crew grab a bunch of empty pitchers and head for the big sinks on the other side of room.

“Dad?”

“Chris, I have to talk to Ray. You shouldn’t be back here at dinner anyway, you know I’m busy. We’ll talk later.” He pointed at the door. Chris rolled his eyes and walked out of the kitchen, kicking the door open.

The rest of the day went by pretty quickly. No visits from Ray at least, but none from his father either. Finally it was nine o’clock, closing time for the trading post. Chris turned off the soda fountain and put the candy in metal cabinets in the back so mice couldn’t ruin any stock. He swept the floor once again, and locked the cash drawer. It had been a good day. Not the best, but good. Chris locked the doors and decided to visit his father. He walked up the hill, past the staff site, with only the crickets for company. The moon was full and there was hardly a cloud in the sky, so Chris had little difficulty avoiding the roots in the trail. He crested the hill and saw the lights of the adult staff cabins. They were in a semi circle, and Dad’s cabin was the closest. Although it was the smallest cabin, his father did get a certain amount of privacy, because he didn’t have a roommate. Chris could see the light on inside, and he knocked softly on the door.

“He’s down at the dining hall.”

“What?” Chris turned around and saw Stan, the woodcraft director who lived in the next cabin over.

“Your dad is down at the dining hall, doing paperwork. He told me you might come up to see him. I think he’ll be back

soon, if you want to wait.”

“Okay, thanks.” He reached for the door and hesitated. Chris didn’t feel like getting yelled at again, which was probably why his dad wanted him to wait. He stepped off the cabin’s tiny concrete porch and kicked off half a cigar. He just looked at the dead cigar between the drift of oak leaves in front of his father’s cabin. He looked toward Stan’s cabin, but he had already gone back inside and there were no lights. He looked back at the cigar and sat on the porch to wait. Chris sat for about an hour, and left when he almost fell asleep.

Chris woke up the next morning as Steve lifted one end of his cot up and smashed it against the floor.

“Wake up man, another day has begun!” Steve yelled.

“Shove it. I’m awake, leave me alone.” Chris sat up and ran his hands through his hair. Chris poked through the wreckage of his laundry underneath his cot in the search of a clean shirt, soon gave up, and sniffed both of his tan shirts to find the least offensive. He had a few clean civilian shirts, but he was supposed to wear a staff shirt during the day. What did the administration think when they gave everyone only two shirts for the entire summer? The same went for the official green camp shorts. The tent was momentarily lit by sunshine as Steve left the tent, then returned to musty semi-darkness. Chris sat down on his corroded cot, the springs squeaking in protest. He pulled on a pair of fragrant socks, and then found one of his boots. As he tightened the laces, he thought about how his dad was doing. He always thought it was strange to be working for his dad. Chris remembered that his father and grandfather had at one time worked for an electrician’s union, and several times Chris’ dad was the foreman on the job site and had to be Granddad’s boss. He wondered what that would be like, reminding Dad to mop the trading post floor and take out the trash. He laughed at the thought. Just a little too weird. Chris finished with one boot and clumped around the tent looking for the other. It was hiding in the far corner of the tent, underneath more dirty laundry. Chris gave the pile a suspicious look before

reaching for his second boot. He always had a mental image of the fetid clothes, sitting in a heap for weeks, evolving some type of rudimentary intelligence like a Frankenstein's monster of moldy socks. They would rise to life one morning and take mute revenge on their master, clubbing Chris to death because he did not keep them clean enough. But the camp was always short of employees, as Chris was always short of clean shirts. Another lousy decision Ray had made in an attempt to save money. He tied off his left boot. It was time for breakfast, time to find his dad and talk to him about the cigars.

Chris walked down the twisting dirt path to the dining hall and breakfast. He passed Hillside and Mohawk, the two campsites closest to the dining hall and watched as sleepy kids got ready for breakfast. The sun that filtered through the leaves overhanging the trail promised another hot day, hot like the whole summer had been. He reached the end of the path and the dining hall. As he weaved between the green wooden tables that filled the dining hall from end to end, Chris looked for his dad. He passed through the doors to the kitchen, and found him in the middle of the slippery tile floor. Sweat poured from his dad's forehead as he orchestrated the chaos of meal time. Chris felt sweat form on himself already from just walking into the back of the dining hall. He knew the kitchen staff had to get up earlier than everyone to fire up the ovens and cook, and his dad woke up even earlier to make sure the kitchen was clean and ready to go. Chris snuck up on his dad and clapped a hand on his back.

"Hey Dad, I came up to the cabin last night, but you weren't there. I need to talk to you."

"We certainly need to talk. Why didn't you wait for me? Stan told you I would be there later."

"I was there for like an hour!"

"When I came to the trading post yesterday, I didn't notice any sale notices for the shirts. Didn't we talk about that already? We need to get rid of them, and the end of the summer is a good time to put them on sale."

“I thought you said to do that next week.”

“Do you ever listen to me? You need to start being more responsible. That is why I got you this job when I got assigned here. I thought you could handle it.”

“What’s your problem?”

“What is your problem son? I don’t know if you would have found a job without me. You’d probably just waste the whole summer. How did you think you would pay your car insurance this fall? Just get the money from me?”

Chris left the kitchen and slammed the door behind him. What was that about? Chris had done a good job of running the place when he was alone. It got pretty busy in there, when twenty or thirty screaming kids came in. Dad was too busy at the dining hall to help much anyway. Chris was walking to the trading post when someone tackled him from behind.

“You’re dead now!” Steve sat on his chest. He had baby carrots stuck underneath his upper lip and hanging over his chin.

“Are you nuts you asshole?”

Steve hissed. “I just need some blood, the hunger is burning inside me!” Steve menaced Chris with his orange fangs.

“Get off me!” Chris pushed Steve to the side and stood up.

“Hey, did you ask your dad about the cigars?”

“Man, I forgot again. I just saw him, and he yelled at me again. I don’t know what his problem is.”

“I must go now. The blood lust drives me, I must feed!” Steve hissed again and ran down the trail.

Chris laughed, and went back to the store. Soon enough it was nine o’clock again, time to close the trading post, and a good time to find his father. Chris turned off the lights and locked the door behind him. He followed the same trail as last night, coming over the hill and back to the staff cabins again. He stepped onto the porch and knocked on the door.

“Come in.” His father was sitting on one of the battered Salvation Army couches in the cabin’s tiny living room. He had another cheap cigar, and was striking a match from the book he

had taken from the trading post.

“What the hell is going on Dad?”

“Sit down.” His father waved the match out in the direction of the couch opposite him. Chris sat down and stared at the smoke drifting across the room.

“What is going on? All you have been doing is screaming at me, then you are starting to smoke again, after what happened to Granddad.”

“Sorry about that, I know what I told you about smoking. It’s a bad habit. Just don’t tell your mother.” His father gave him a small, tired smile. “Ray wants to fire me.”

“What!”

“Ray thinks I am irresponsible and spend too much money. He’s complained to the company, and if he wants to fire me after I was assigned here, then they might fire me too.”

“But why? Everybody loves the food. I haven’t heard any complaints.”

“That doesn’t matter. I’ve been overbudget, almost the whole summer. Ray has been pestering me, and now it’s worse. That is why I started smoking again, I couldn’t help it. That’s why I’ve been yelling at you. I’m sorry, it was uncalled for.” A cloud of smoke obscured his father’s face.

“What are you gonna do Dad?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do I stay here if you get fired?”

“I don’t know.” His father shrugged.

Chris stared at his father’s tired face and wondered what would happen if Dad lost his job, wondered how they would get along.

“I’m sorry Chris. You better get some sleep. We can talk more later.” They stepped out of the cabin into the cool darkness.

“G’night Dad.”

“Goodnight son.” Chris hugged his dad and went down the trail leading back to his tent. He turned to wave, and his father’s silhouette waved back, the cigar bright in the darkness.

Coffee

Christine Spera

When you see me,
you think
how nice my breasts look
in your sister's old dress.

I catch you.
You get angry because I forgot to bring you coffee.

Too angry
for forgotten coffee.

Deaf

Lori Kruk



Contributors

Bridget Baines...had to go write a paper, so I (Tom Byrum) am supposed to write something about her.

Umm...umm...umm...ok, that's it. Thank you. Now read this next incredibly pithy statement from:

Tina Benson...rhymes with "Beena Fenson."

Chris Calderelli..."The true individual is one who possesses understanding that lies outside of what is taught and measured."

Jeff Church...is a sub-par agnostic who likes to chime into conversations with relentless idiocy. He thinks that Frank Stallone might indeed be a better actor than Sly. (Watching "Over the Top" is proven to decrease your life expectancy.)

Jason Fischer...is better than you.

Daniel Gallagher...once fell down and got a nail driven through his head. He's never been the same since.

Susan Goll...hails from Feasterville, the surfing capital of the world. She likes to sing for the meistersingers and munch on Scooby Snax in her spare time.

Amanda Helwig...is a biology major and art minor. Her future endeavors include teaching biology or a career in scientific illustration. She loves nature and all the wonder it embodies and she tries to capture that in her art.

Aly Jones...can leap tall buildings in a single bound.

Mike Keeper..."Do what you will, but harm none," said the leader with the smoking gun.

Lori Kruk...is Jack's smirking revenge.

Olatokunbo Laniya...aspires to bless the lives of others through word and deed, develop a deeper relationship with God and since they tell me I've lost it, finding it. (Hey, what's "it?")

Joe Laskas...quote this.

Contributors (continued)

Thomas Lipschultz...has been asked not to graduate by several members of the freshman class. Though he fully intends to disobey them, his delightfully whimsical "slacker" lifestyle may end up fulfilling their deepest desires after all.

Philip M. Malachowski...a cry in the street, a flicker in space, a mouthful of dirt: and it is gone.

Ryan McLeod...shampooed the carpet in his hallway. Aww man - lemon power.

Laura Phillips...commutes in a bumper-less 1971 El Camino.

John Ramsey...I am his Highness' dog at Kew; Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?

Genevieve Romeo...her Papou used to go to the pool hall to work on his English. There was a moose in the hoose, but he let it oot. He is currently driving chariots across the sky.

Christine Spera...has a deep, dark secret that she's not going to tell you.

Monica Stahl...once killed a man in Nevada just to watch him die. She topped it off with a bag of Lime Tostitos. "Fuck you, bird."

Corey Taylor...lost his mind just a couple of times. He would like to go on a joy harmony bus ride, but would really hate to go on a damaging freak out war hell ride.

Matthew James Terenna...laughs in the face of death.

Chris Tereshko...is salty.

Padcha Tuntha-Obas...is puzzled by philosophers, hates hierarchical arts and dreams of an MFA.

Shawn Witt...Senior something something major with a concentration in something else. Working very hard to get out of school in one piece. Can't wait to get married and have kids!

PATRONS

Beth Bailey	Joyce Lionarons
Douglas Cameron	Valerie Martinez
Chris Cellucci	Amber Natale
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