

# The Messenger

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Volume 2005

Issue 1 *The Messenger*, 2005


Article 41

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2005

## The Messenger, 2005

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### Recommended Citation

(2005) "The Messenger, 2005," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2005 : Iss. 1 , Article 41.  
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2005/iss1/41>

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Black and Blue



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### EDITOR'S NOTE

The Messenger welcomed two major changes in 2005: the additions of two new creative categories, creative nonfiction and new media, and an earlier publication date. The new categories allowed more students to contribute to the literary magazine, while the earlier date ensured greater campus-wide awareness of the Messenger. Fittingly, the theme of this year's Messenger is "transition." Transition is illuminated in the new media front and back cover works. I wish to wholeheartedly thank everyone who dedicated his or her time and talent to making this publication—which reflects the best of innovation and depth—a success. Furthermore, I invite all to visit the Messenger website, <http://www.student.richmond.edu/~messenger>, which showcases our electronic new media works, as well as our honorable mentions. Enjoy!



## POETRY

- 4** "Quiet in Evening"  
*Stephanie A. Tolliver-Osborne*
- 5** "Awaken"  
*Erin Freier*
- 6** "Write Fight Rite, Right"  
*Matt Harrison*
- 11** "Disgruntled Reader"  
*Stephanie A. Tolliver-Osborne*
- 12** "With This Lonely Drink"  
*Madhan Rajan*
- 26** "Divided"  
*Stephanie A. Tolliver-Osborne*
- 26** "Lemonade"  
*Erin Freier*
- 36** "One Night Stand"  
*Annie Banks*
- 38** "You Snort Music When You Sleep"  
*Madhan Rajan*
- 39** "Dream Real"  
*Matt Harrison*
- 41** "Okay"  
*Josh Davis*
- 42** "Kiss Me In The Dark"  
*Matt Harrison*
- 48** "Blazing"  
*Annie Banks*
- 48** "Untitled"  
*Meg Hurtado*
- 49** "Requiescat"  
*Meg Hurtado*
- 50** "To Virginia Woolf"  
*Meg Hurtado*
- 51** "Beloved"  
*Stephanie A. Tolliver-Osborne*
- 53** "Genuine and i a passerby"  
*Josh Davis*
- 54** "Of Three Distinct Moments"  
*Josh Davis*
- 56** "Putting the Pee in Politics"  
*Matt Harrison*
- 63** "Little Spaces"  
*Alexandra Chamberlain*

## ART/

## PHOTOGRAPHY

- 1** "Black and Blue"  
*Ryan Locke*
- 7** "Palais de Tokyo I"  
*Haven Herrin*
- 9** "Water Fountain"  
*Katie Leitch*
- 11** "Untitled in the Amazon"  
*Johnica Garrett*
- 18** "Fragmented Figure"  
*Haven Herrin*
- 32** "Untitled"  
*Loren Smith*
- 37** "Shoes"  
*Kimberly Wirt*
- 46** "Stepping Foot on Roman Ruins"  
*Chelsee Woodey, Stephen Longenecker*
- 49** "Face"  
*Haven Herrin*
- 53** "Homen Rico"  
*Johnica Garrett*
- 55** "Greek Theater"  
*Ryan Locke*
- 62** "Menino and His Sloth"  
*Johnica Garrett*
- 64** "Looped"  
*Kimberly Wirt*

## COVER "Rainbow Da Vinci"

*Edward T. Nista*

## COVER "RIFF"

*Christopher Poole*

## CREATIVE

### 8 "Learning Something New"

*Edward T. Nista*

### 43 "Downtown in the Dark"

*Kate Reynertson*

### 58 "My House"

*Rosanna Nunan*

## FICTION

### 13 "Desperado"

*Melissa Minetola*

### 27 "Lari"

*Patrick Salland*

### 52 "Southern Cross"

*Luke Burns*

### "Daystar, Nightfall"

*Luke Burns (fiction)*

### "A.K.A.L.-Also Known as Life"

*Mai-Anh Tran (fiction)*

### "Milky Fire"

*anonymous (new media)*

### "Suds"

*anonymous (new media)*

### "In the Silence of the Gods"

*Kenneth Hoffman (new media)*

These submissions can be found at the Messenger website.

## HONORABLE MENTION

NON-FICTION

<http://www.student.richmond.edu/~messenger/>



## Quiet in Evening

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*Stephanie A. Tolliver-Osborne*

Sunbeams that glint from windowpanes echo  
fragments of gentle golden drops of light  
scattered on table-tops, living to show  
diminutive brilliance, these last bright  
particles of the day. Miniature  
diffused snapshots of life in tiny sparks  
that glitter and fade both bold and demure  
are wavering between daylight and dark.  
Sitting near the window, I press my face  
against the cold glass and catch the streaming  
beams, lines cast from heaven or some other place  
reaching to draw the day back. The beaming  
has ended, and night fills the sky like blue  
paint poured from above, and the stars ensue.

## Awaken

Erin Freier

The sun beats itself  
Upon our windowsill  
And dawn is well spent into day  
Awaken  
Open your eyes  
Lighting all they touch upon  
In wondrous blaze.  
Upon the streets  
A broken bottle and a beggar's shoe  
Are calling  
And the voiceless ask to borrow yours  
So sweetly and always falling.

Awaken  
We are a pair  
Two knives, two flags  
Two slender strands of wheat  
And the song that sleeps  
Inside your mouth  
Is the song which bids my heart to beat.

Awaken  
Let mad beauty collect itself  
In your eyes and  
It will shine, calling my name  
We'll dance with wild things  
With songs of the sparrow  
And sea foam  
And kiss the flame.

## Write Fight Rite, Right

---

*Matt Harrison*

The scandal is within—  
unfolding at the stop of a pulse,  
and disquieted by the sight  
of Narcissus' reflection.  
Simulacra faces simulacra  
during a battle of attrition.  
One vestige to face the day  
and another for layaway,  
shaped in the shadow  
of last night's disgrace.  
Cheap thrills and synthetic smiles  
paint morose tones  
and pitch bullshit  
across a fetid landscape.  
Money talks triumphantly:  
a withering conscience  
gasps for one last chance  
atop the soap box,  
before the bank  
borrows it back.  
Live alive lie life  
and shake hands  
with the mute can of worms  
directing the marionette.  
(Chisel an epitaph in skin  
and pray for reality  
to work today.)  
Go buy 500 shares  
of Give a Fuck Brand  
social security plans  
and dream lucid to foresee  
progeny.  
Playtime never ends  
when Jack has the world to tease,  
the world to please,  
and a quaint box with all the proper amenities  
of the twenty-first century.



## Palais de Tokyo I



Haven Herrin

Slash iambs like throats  
in the today's crusade  
of squandered potential  
burnt in the retinas of a myopic  
TV generation.

The genetically encoded death throes  
of egalitarian society  
run rampant in dreams and Costcos.  
Snap.

Shoot 'til it blisters,  
and make sure pharmacies  
develop happiness in an hour.



Edward T. Nista

Average price per bag: 60 dollars.

Average lifespan of a bag: 2 days.

Average number of extractions per day: 2.

Average of guaranteed mind-numbing affects per day: Multiple.

Foreseen feeling of desperation and earth-spinning mindlessness:

Priceless.

Sometimes I wonder what motivated me to smoke pot.

Freshman year I lived next to a guy who knew me only as 'Ieee-nissta,' because he used to send me emails with his essays for me to print out for him.

"Yo, what's up, Ieee-nissta," he used to say to me. I can't remember if his name was Nick or Steve; I can't remember those days too well anymore. Freshman year was an amalgamation of joy and frustration. That year, I think I lived next to the two biggest pot smokers on campus. There were dudes in their room smoking up every morning at eight or nine o'clock, every afternoon at four twenty and every evening between nine and midnight. The hallways smelt putrid, my own room smelt putrid. My windows and theirs were right next to each other; whatever they blew out their windows came happily floating into mine. First semester freshman year I was sitting in my room getting high on someone else's supply and it wasn't my choice.

I lived in Robins Hall room A127, the jack-off room as my prior owners had dubbed it. A guy named Paul came by my room my third night at UR. "Dude, I probably jacked off in your room a thousand times freshman year." I looked at them with a combination of shock and disgust, wondering if I too was destined for such a pathetic beginning to my college days.

"No, really, he did, man, I lived with him for two years." *And so why do you still live with him, I wondered to myself silently.* "I'd wake up in the middle of the night and Paul would be down there beating off to one of his Jenna Jameson videos." Forrest laughed happily with Paul and they continued out the exit just past my doorway. I sadly realized I was going to be seeing a lot of this fine welcoming committee.

Robins Hall was rowdy. If I wasn't playing Golden-Eye, I was playing Mario Kart. If I wasn't playing WWF Smack-Down, I was playing Golden-Eye. It was a vicious cycle and homework was not on anybody's minds. Down the hall there was a Playstation and an original N.E.S. consisting of Tony Hawk rail-slides and Super Mario sky-dives. Video games dominated my life for the first semester. And once, my first December in Richmond, I took a puff on the



magic dragon. I wasn't asked to, I wasn't told to, I did it of my own free will; and it didn't do a damn thing, though it never does the first time.

In high school my friends had smoked up as often as a chip of hash could be purchased. My best friend's parents had found out he smoked because I had mentioned it to my mother. He eventually spent a summer at Bible camp, his parents' choice of rehab, though it is well-known today that this had no effect on him. Why had I chosen to take that initial hit? I had avoided it for so long. I remember a seminar I had senior year with John Glenn and his flight team. "Take risks!" they had said. But what did I know; I took their advice and smoked some weed. Weed isn't bad, it's not bad for everyone, but it was definitely no good for me. I remember sophomore year and weed. Or maybe I don't remember sophomore year, but I do remember weed.

Water Fountain



Katie Leitch

I was so doped up every weekend of my sophomore year, that all of the things I remember are trapped within the hundreds of pictures I took. Of course I remember some things, but when I think of sophomore year of college, it just seems like a blur—a blazing, red-eyed black-eye. One night I lay in bed, my world spinning around me, with a feeling that I couldn't stop dreaming, even when I thought I lay awake and sat straight up in bed, I was still

dreaming. The phrase "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry" ricocheted off every edge of my mind. I could feel the echoes coming out of my mouth, in my breath, and resonating back against my ears. Soon I was speaking those exact words, over and over again. I threw my head back down against the pillow, promising myself never to smoke again, but still a perpetual dream rocked my mind.



Am I breathing fast? Am I breathing at all? Am I really sitting up in bed? Am I lying down? Where's my soul? Where's my body? Where's my body? Light flickers on and off in the room. My roommate's crappy monitor flickers through different shades of blue. Pink Floyd plays calmly across the stereo emitting its own neon green and blue light patterns against the walls of the room. "Tongue-tied and twisted just an earth-bound misfit, I" wonder who I am and what is wrong with me, why I'm doing this to myself. I jump off the bed and run to my bathroom, thrusting my head under freezing shower water.. My head spins worse than ever before. What did I do that night? What did I drink? What did I eat? Did I eat or drink anything? My head feels like a bowling pin after being hit by the mighty bowling ball, spinning around and around.

I stumble loudly back into the bedroom. Arms flailing, I climb back up to the top bunk, not an ordinary jump for a bunk bed on cinder blocks. I lie in bed. If my heart wasn't racing before, it is now. I lie in bed, "Standing alone my senses reeled," slowly pick up the sound of running water. I soon realize my head is wet and wonder how it got this way. I wonder why my roommate left the shower on, or why he is showering at this hour of the night. How long have I slept? How long have I been lying here? I climb out of bed and stumble lazily to my bathroom and turn off the shower. I sit on the nice cool floor and reach up an arm to the towel rack and pull a white one down. I wrap it around my head and lay my head down on the cold hard floor, and sleep.

I awoke from that dream in August of 2002. I promised some people I really cared about I wouldn't do it again. I smoked up in my house at ten o'clock at night, in the bathroom, blowing smoke rings at my cat, Tucker. I'd like to think that for the most part I've kept that promise. I've moved on to other things, other addictions; though I've never really admitted I was addicted to weed, I'm fairly sure I've been addicted to beer since high school days in Japan. Life is a series of lessons. We screw up and we learn, and we screw up some more and we learn—or some of us learn, others of us are just dumb and don't learn. We must continue to learn, though, learn to cope with the insanity.



## Disgruntled Reader

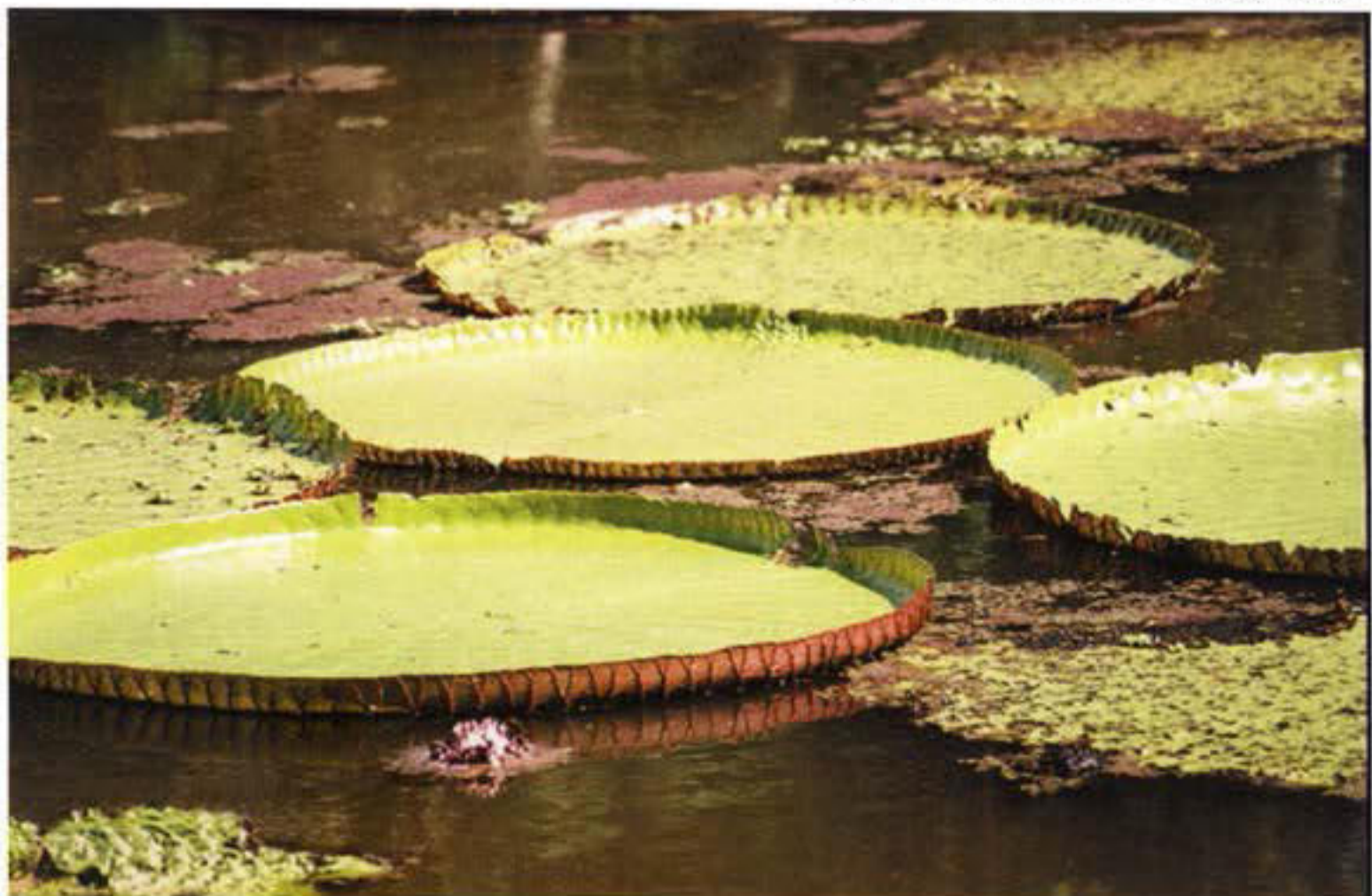
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Stephanie A. Tolliver-Osborne

I spent four years losing Paradise.  
I heard the fire sermon enough times to recite it  
and at times, I wished an Angel with a bright key would come to deliver me, as  
well.  
I don't know how many times my compendious oceans emptied tears of feeling  
not good enough, but I have come to understand that sonnets, like prayers, are  
something understood,  
like liquefaction and why it matters if clothes move that way.  
But my pilgrimage is far from over.  
I still look for Beatrice in the clouds, and just because I don't see her yet  
doesn't mean she isn't there.  
I must continue, persevere and keep looking  
to find bits of myself and the why and the how  
with every breath I take, with every word I read.  
I will gather my rosebuds while I may  
and maybe one day  
I'll find my precious pearl  
And remember why I started looking for it.

## Untitled in the Amazon

Johnica Garrett



With This Lonely Drink

With this lonely drink,  
I toast tomorrow's drink.

Who has smoked one cigarette,  
Satisfied for life?

I suppose Eve kept eating.

And geese should stay south.

And I north with you.



## Desperado

Melissa Minetola

Danny Spears jerked awake, roused by a dog's barking in the alley. Through the curtains, the moon glowed, peppering the room with borrowed light. Danny yawned, glanced at his wristwatch. Nine o'clock. Beside him, Alexa stirred. They had had sex and then fallen asleep. Or passed out—Danny was not sure which. He lay back and massaged his temples, already feeling the hangover. Alexa stirred again, but she continued to sleep. The sex had been okay, not great, due perhaps to the high quantity of drinks they had consumed at the bar, unfamiliarity, or both.

Danny's stomach growled. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and pulled on a pair of boxer shorts. He padded, barefoot, across the dusty hardwood floorboards of his apartment to the kitchen. Danny opened the refrigerator. Slim pickings. Cream cheese, a jar of pickles, and leftover chicken lo mein from last night's Chinese-takeout dinner. Danny pulled out the cream cheese. There were bagels in the cupboard.

As a bagel was toasting, Danny dialed the number to his mother's house. Roxanne Kaye—she had retained her maiden name after two disastrous marriages and divorces—answered on the third ring.

Her voice sounded wary. Danny could picture her at her house, her hand clutching the telephone, her eyebrows wrinkled, making her look older than her fifty years. The years, of course, had hardened his mother, although they had not taught her much about men and love—the blight of her life.

The bagel popped out of the toaster. Danny balanced the phone under his chin as he set the bagel on a napkin. "I wanted to call and see how things are going."

"Everything is going really well." In the background, the television hummed. "Elliott and I rented a movie, and Kris is out with her friends."

"One big happy family." Danny smeared cream cheese over the bagel. "Is your nose okay, Mom?"

"Everything is fine." The night before, Danny had hovered beside his mother as she bent over her sink. She had held a hand towel to her nose as blood dribbled steadily into the sink, screaming at Danny to go as he tried to convince her to let him take her to the hospital.

The conversation was going nowhere. Probably Elliott was within earshot. "Will you let Kris know I called? Ask her to call me back?"



"Sure," replied Roxanne, sounding surprised. "It would be nice if you two spent more time together. Or any time together, for that matter."

Danny took a bite of the bagel. "Have a good night. And if you ever want to call me...."

"You too." The line died.

Danny shook his head and hung up. Bagel in hand, he walked back to the bedroom, where Alexa was stretching. She smiled when she saw him. "I was wondering where you went."

They looked at each other and laughed. Danny hated the post-sex chitchat requisite of the one-night stand. "Are you hungry at all?"

Alexa shook her head. She stood, the white sheet tumbling to the floor to reveal her taut, tanned beauty in all its nakedness. Danny hardened. Alexa noticed and smiled. "Sorry I can't stay longer, but I have an early shift tomorrow morning. I need to get home."

He had not expected her to want anything more from him either. "Where do you live?"

"Not too far from here." She reached for her clothes.

"I'll drive you." Danny set the bagel on the dresser and reached for his clothes as well.

Less than ten minutes later, he stopped his car in front of Alexa's apartment building. She looked over at him. "Thanks for the ride."

They talked for a minute more, and much to Danny's surprise, Alexa suggested getting together the next day. After finalizing their plans, Alexa opened the door and stepped onto the sidewalk.

"Sounds good." He waved good-bye and watched as she sauntered toward the apartment building.

Danny decided to stop at the supermarket. He parked in front of the Kroger in Carytown. Only a few people were grocery shopping on Friday night, so Danny found what he needed quickly. As he headed for the check-out, another cart bumped into his.

His older brother, Greg, whom he had not seen in over three months, widened his eyes and quickly raised a finger to his lips.



Greg Spears hunched over the small wooden table, his eyes flitting over every inch of Betsy's Coffee Shop. Several other people were sprinkled across the popular Carytown café, but no one was paying attention to the reunited brothers.

"Chill out, man."



Greg glanced at Danny. "You try living with a drug kingpin and the police after you, and see how easy it is to chill out."

Danny gulped a mouthful of hot coffee. "Why don't you turn yourself in to the police?"

Greg shook his head. "I'd spend the rest of my life in jail, like my roommate."

"Have you talked to him, or heard from him recently?"

"No. But he isn't going to finger me for the police."

"They probably already know about you though, don't you think?"

Greg was quiet. "I mean, last month they busted him at the loft you guys shared."

Greg sighed. "Yeah, who knows?" He wore a green T-shirt and khaki shorts. He had the same curly reddish-brown hair as Danny, except Greg had buzzed and dyed his blond. Except for the incessant shaking of his hands, Greg looked the part of a yuppie.

"When I read about your roommate in the paper, I figured you were laying low."

"I've been staying with a friend," Greg confirmed.

"Can you be any more vague?"

Greg inhaled and blew the smoke to his right, away from Danny, who sat across from him. He paused. After a minute, he said, "I know I fucked up."

"I didn't mean...."

"I did fuck up, Danny." Greg shrugged. "It's okay, I can admit it. I should have straightened myself out. It's hard though."

"Are you still using?"

Greg's eyes flitted around the café again. "Keep your voice down," he hissed. He puffed on the cigarette. "I'm still doing a little shit, yeah."

"And dealing it too?"

"It's my livelihood."

Danny could not help rolling his eyes.

"Don't start on me with that holier-than-thou crap," warned Greg. He tossed the butt of the cigarette on the floor and ruffled his hair. "I need a hit, Danny. I need to go pretty soon."

Since Greg was fourteen and Danny ten, Danny had watched drugs deteriorate his brother. He felt tears begin to choke his throat, so he coughed. The tears kept coming, so he coughed again.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." Danny swallowed the tears.



"I'm trying to get some money together." Greg watched for his brother's reaction. "I'm going to need to leave the country soon." Danny stared at his brother, dumbfounded. Greg nodded. "That drug kingpin I mentioned before—he has a contract out on my head. Do you know what that means?"

"I've seen *The Godfather*, Greg." The flippancy with which Danny made the remark could not conceal his apprehension.

Greg lit another cigarette. "Yeah, so I'm going to need to get the hell out of here."

"Going to the police isn't an option?"

"Going to jail isn't an option," Greg reminded him. He inhaled deeply. Danny scratched at the stubble forming on his chin. "When are you leaving? Where are you going?"

"You always were a nosy kid, Danny." Greg laughed, but he looked sad. "Jesus Christ, what happened to us?"

The bell on the front door of the café jingled. A middle-aged couple walked in and ambled to the counter to place their order. "Have you seen Mom lately?" Greg asked.

"Last night, in fact."

Greg fingered his cup of coffee, which he had not drunk since he got it. "How is she doing?"

Danny did not know how to answer the question. "You know Mom. Same old self."

"The last time I saw Mom," recalled Greg, "was four summers ago. I bumped into her and Kris at the bank."

"What were you doing at a bank?"

"Robbing it."

Danny paused, and Greg burst out into laughter. Danny smiled slightly, as Greg continued to laugh. "Are you serious? Are you kidding me, Danny? You believe for a second I would rob a bank?" The middle-aged couple glanced over at them.

"You're making a scene," Danny nonchalantly informed his brother.

Greg could not stop laughing. "Jesus Christ, my brother thinks I'd rob a bank!"

Danny laughed too. "Shut up, Greg."

Greg reached over the table and punched Danny's arm. "I'm a drug dealer, not a bank robber," he muttered. "Get it right, man."

"You're crazy, man." Danny shook his head. "Crazy."

"Shit." Greg crushed his flip-flopped foot against the lit cigarette he had



dropped on the floor. The smoke curled and swirled up to the table.

Danny watched as the couple sat at a small table. They wore matching "Virginia is for lovers" T-shirts. He wondered what it was like to have a normal life, normal relationships—whatever that was. "I saw Kris last night too."

"Was there a family reunion I wasn't invited to?"

"No...." Danny's voice trailed off, and Greg understood.

"Is everything okay?"

"I don't know," Danny said truthfully.

Greg leaned back in his chair, his arms crossed over his chest. "Is Kris getting beat up too?"

"I don't think Elliott, the boyfriend, hits her, but Mom does, if Kris gets in the way."

"How old is Kris now?"

"Seventeen."

Greg shook his head. "Where did all the time go?" It was a wistful question. "I don't even know her. My own half-sister. What's she like?"

"I don't know her that well either." He and Greg looked at each other. "She asked about you actually, last night." Greg raised his eyebrows. "Yeah. She wanted to know what was going on with you."

Greg gazed out the big window that overlooked West Cary Street. "The next time you see her," he said, "tell her I'm doing really well. Tell her...I'm clean. And I have a job. Something respectable, like a lawyer or something. Wait, I hate lawyers. Not a lawyer. Tell her...."

"You can see her, if you want. Tell her yourself." Danny shrugged. "Maybe the three of us can meet for lunch or something."

"Meet for lunch? I don't know." Greg fidgeted. "Man, I need a hit."

Greg was hopeless, Danny realized. He finished the rest of his coffee.



Danny lived in an apartment on the first floor of a Victorian mansion in the Fan district of Richmond, about a five-minute drive from Carytown and Betsy's Coffee Shop. One hundred years ago, the mansion had been magnificent. Time, of course, had taken its toll on the mansion. Now, the wraparound porch sagged, and the paint was peeling from all sides. Danny did not mind the sagging or the peeling, and he loved the low rent. He unloaded the groceries from his car. He set them on the kitchen table and glanced at the clock hanging above the sink. Eleven fifteen. The milk he had bought had gone bad, sitting in the car the past two hours, and Danny threw it out. He deposited the rest of the groceries in various cupboards.



Usually, Danny met up with his community-college friends on Friday night. They would congregate at Richbrau, a pub downtown, to drink and shoot pool late into the night. The circle of friends was dwindling, though, as one after the other got married and prioritized wife and children over getting drunk with the guys.

Danny did not feel like getting drunk with the guys tonight anyway. He locked the front door. In his bedroom, he stepped out of his pants and sank onto the bed. The comforter had slid onto the floor during his and Alexa's escapade, and the sheets were wrinkled and damp. A strong feminine scent clung to the sheets too—perfume and something else. Danny could not put his finger on it.

All his life, Danny had watched people's relationships fall apart. His parents. His mother and her second husband. His mother and her loser boyfriends, one consecutive one after the other. His own relationships had failed, one after the other, too.

Shit. Maybe he was hopeless too.



*Haven Herrin*



"I never would have figured you for an outdoors kind of girl." Danny raised his eyebrows at Alexa, who smiled and shrugged. Danny lay on a blanket in the grass on Belle Island.

The small island was a tourist attraction in downtown Richmond, and the locals liked to take advantage of its natural beauty too. The island featured an expansive meadow—perfect for picnics, as Alexa knew—and several hiking trails. On this Saturday afternoon in late May, Belle Island boasted a plentiful number of visitors. Middle school-aged children hung out near the footbridge that connected the island to the main street, while families

walked and talked together, the fathers tossing footballs to their sons and the mothers and their daughters looking on and cheering them on. There were a few couples like Danny and Alexa, one of them, in fact, engaged in a picnic of their own. That couple must have been together a long time, Danny decided. They were completely comfortable together, completely connected, their smiles easy, their affection second-nature. He glanced at Alexa.



"Do you come here a lot?"

"I come here when I want to relax, read." Propped up by an elbow, she stretched her body beside Danny's.

"What do you like to read?" Danny was going through the motions, somewhat, but he also was interested in what Alexa had to say. She was interesting. Not what he had expected.

Alexa looked out onto the James River, which encircled the island. "I like the classics. And Toni Morrison, of course." She turned her gaze to Danny. "What about you? Do you read?"

"Not books, but magazines. Sports Illustrated. Time. Star."

"Men don't read Star, do they?"

"Sure they do. I do."

Alexa shook her head. "You're the first man I know who reads Star."

"That's a good thing, right?" She laughed. Danny smiled.

Alexa ran her hand along his denim jeans-covered thigh. Her hand felt good there. "Want to move this date back to your place?"

Danny closed his eyes. He had never been so lucky before.

The sex, the second time, was better. Second-time sex sometimes was like that, Danny decided, although he made the decision without really thinking about how he came to it. He and Alexa lay on his bed, the sheets tangled between them and their legs. Alexa leaned against his chest. He moved his arm around her and drew her closer to him. Her eyelashes brushed against his skin. Reflexively, Danny tilted his head forward and kissed the top of her head.

The phone rang, breaking the silence and ruining the moment. Danny was going to let it ring, but after the third ring, Alexa asked, "Aren't you going to get it?"

"I can't talk right now, Greg," Danny told him, realizing he should not have answered the phone.

But Greg was panicked, insistent. His roommate had killed himself in jail. Hung himself. It was awful. It was, agreed Danny, holding the phone away from Alexa, so she would not be able to hear. And now Greg had to run, leave the country. The police were after him, big time. Worse than before. His friend was kicking him out of his hideout. He needed a new hideout, a new place to stay for a few days before he got the money together to leave the country.

Reluctantly, Danny said it would be okay if Greg stayed with him for a few days. No, now was not a good time to come over. Tomorrow.



"I'm sorry about that," Danny said to Alexa, hanging up the phone.

She outlined his jawbone with her fingertips. "No problem." She did not ask about the phone call. Danny was not sure if she was being polite or if she simply didn't care.



Danny was eating Cheerios in the kitchen when he heard the knock at his front door. He leaned the spoon against the inside of the bowl and got up.

Greg was standing in the corridor, a backpack slung over his shoulder and a duffel bag in his hands. "You travel light," Danny remarked, stepping aside to let his brother in.

"You have to, when you're on the run."

Danny did not know how to respond. "Do you want something to eat? I'm having Cheerios, but I also have lunch meat...."

"Nah, I'm okay." Greg deposited the backpack and duffel bag on the floor, and Danny closed the door. "I really appreciate what you're doing for me, Danny. I want you to know that."

"I know." Danny nodded toward the kitchen. "I was just finishing my lunch."

"Still like those Cheerios, huh?" Greg slid into a seat across from Danny.

"Some things never change."

Greg looked around the apartment. "How long have you been in this place, man?"

Danny spooned the last of the Cheerios into his mouth. "Four years in September."

"Nice place."

"Better than my first apartment. Remember that one?" When Greg shook his head, Danny went on, "I was eighteen years old. Moved in with Kevin Sweeney on the South Side."

"I remember Sweeney." Greg leaned back in his chair, against the sink. "Couple of years older than you. Frizzy black hair and a stupid goatee."

Danny laughed. "Exactly. He was a good friend. But our apartment was a dump. A dump," he repeated. "Rent was, like, two hundred dollars a month. But even that was hard back then."

"You were going to school...."

"Going to school and working part-time at the dry cleaner's where Kevin worked."

Greg gazed at Danny. "Must have been rough."



Danny shrugged. "It was better than home."

"Did you ever go back there? Home? When you lived with Kevin...."

"I went back a few times and for holidays. I just—I just couldn't stand it after a while. Mom was a mess. Always hanging onto some loser boyfriend. And Kris—it broke my heart to look at her. She always looked alone."

"How is Kris now?"

Danny shrugged. How was he supposed to know?

There was a knock on the door. The brothers exchanged an apprehensive glance. "You expecting company?" hissed Greg.

"Not on Sunday afternoon." Danny jerked his head toward the bedroom. "Get in there. I'll get the door."

But it was too late. The front door opened, and Kris Holliday poked her head in. "Danny?"

"What are you doing here?" Danny barked. Kris looked at him, bewildered, and then she saw Greg. Her jaw dropped. "Get in here and close the door!"

"All right, all right, calm down!" snapped Kris. She did what Danny had told her to do. Then she stood awkwardly in the living room, looking from Danny to Greg. Kris had the same curly reddish-brown hair as Greg and Danny, which she tugged and twisted between her fingers—a nervous habit. Unlike the brothers, Kris was small-boned and petite, and today her eyes drooped, weary and bloodshot.

"Kris." She nodded, and Greg joined her in the living room. They stood across from each other, a distance of about a foot separating them. "Last time we saw each other was four years ago." Kris shook her head slightly, as if to say four years ago seemed like a lifetime ago.

Danny sighed. "What are you doing here, Kris?" He lumbered up alongside her. "You should have called before you came."

"I'm sorry." Kris smoothed a hand across her pink tube top. "I was on my way home, and I thought I'd stop by."

"On your way home?" Danny narrowed his eyes at her.

"So, you're seventeen, Danny tells me."

Kris nodded. "And you're...."

"I'm thirty-one, but I look twice my age, I know. I look like crap." Greg sank onto the couch. "Drugs do that to you. Mess you up physically. Everything. But enough about me. Sit down...."

"What I'd like to know," interrupted Danny, "is why you didn't go home last night." He looked at Kris. "Were Mom and Elliott fighting again?"



Or...."

"No, Danny, I just spent the night at a friend's."

"Is your friend male?"

Kris sighed. "You're worse than Mom." Her tone was tired, defeatist. She did not want to argue.

"You know something," Danny said angrily, "between him"—he jerked his finger at Greg—"and you"—he pointed to Kris—"I've had it. I've had enough. The two of you—you come back into my life for a few days, and already...."

"Already what?" demanded Kris, as equally angry as Danny. "You haven't been a part of my life since I was nine, and you aren't a part of it now either. So don't worry."

"You guys, come on." Greg gestured for both Danny and Kris to sit down.

"How can I not worry?" Danny retorted, ignoring Greg. "I don't want to see you end up like Mom, pregnant and forced to get married when you're still a kid."

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Kris glared at Danny. "And what the hell kind of life do you have, that you think you're doing so much better than Mom—or me, or Greg?"

"Hey, come on." Greg raised his voice. "Sit down, both of you." They both looked at him. Greg flushed. "I mean, I know I'm not in any place to be telling anybody what to do, but...come on."

Danny looked at Kris. Her cheeks were flushed with anger. "Look—are you hungry?"

"I don't want your food," she snapped.

"He has Cheerios," Greg told her.

Kris rolled her eyes at both of them.



Danny had started collecting mementos for the shoebox when he was twelve. Roxanne had just kicked Greg out of the house, and Kris was still a baby. At the time, Roxanne was between boyfriends, so life was less crazy than usual. Greg's sudden absence contributed to the quiet around the house as well.

It must have been a combination of Greg's absence and the quiet that prompted Danny to take a step back and assess the situation. For a twelve-year old, he must have been fairly bright. At twelve, Danny Spears decided that he needed to remember. He needed to remember the beginnings and the middle because one day—at the end—it would mean something. It had to mean some-



thing, he told himself. He had not gone through hell again and again for nothing to matter.

So he had turned to the shoebox. It was nothing special, just an old black shoebox he found in the basement, amid a pile of old school supplies—Greg's—never used. Binders, notebooks, pens—all gone to waste, like Greg.

Danny filled the shoebox with photographs of the family—all the ordinary special occasions like birthdays, first days of school and Christmases. The men in the photos changed as the years went on. First there was Greg and Danny's father, Freddy Spears. Next came a variety of Roxanne's boyfriends—Wayne, Glenn, others whose names Danny had long forgotten. Then there was Ron Holliday. Also in the shoebox were mementos like Danny's first pair of glasses—he had since switched to contact lenses—a red marker that Greg used to drag across the walls of the house, to Roxanne's horror—and a certification of participation that Kris had received for playing basketball in the third grade. Danny wondered if she still played.

Danny kept the shoebox in the back of his bedroom closet, on a stack of other shoeboxes filled with old bank statements and unpaid parking tickets. On Sunday night, after he said good-bye to Kris and good night to Greg, Danny squatted down and pulled the shoebox out.

He hunkered down against the closet door and opened the shoebox in his lap. The photographs had become brittle over the past fifteen years, and some even ripped as Danny flipped through them.

Danny smiled. One year—he squinted at the date at the top of the newspaper clipping—his junior year of high school—he had made highest honors on the school's honor roll. He had cut the article out of the paper and stuck it in the shoebox. "Lot of good that did me," he muttered to himself, though not in a self-deprecating or regretful kind of way. His tone was matter-of-fact.

"Hey, Danny."

Danny looked up. Greg was standing in the doorway.

"I don't know if I can do this."

"Do what?"

Greg sighed. "I don't really want to go." He noticed the shoebox.

"What's that?" He walked over and squatted beside his brother.

Danny shrugged. "Nothing."

Greg rummaged through the shoebox. Danny watched as Greg's expression shifted from one of tension to wistfulness. "Why'd you do this?"

Danny shrugged again. How could he explain it to Greg? "I



figured...when I'm older, I want to have something to say about myself. I want...to know what happened."

Greg looked at him. "When you have kids and stuff?"

"Sure."

Greg stopped rummaging. "There's some good stuff there. You're leaving good stuff behind." He rose.

Danny looked up at him. "Thanks." Greg nodded and turned to go. "Hey. Did you want to talk, or....?"

"No." Greg jerked his head toward the living room. "I'm watching reruns of MacGyver."

"MacGyver?" Danny laughed.

"Shut up." Greg closed the door behind him.

Danny set the shoebox back in the closet.



"This is the final boarding call for American Airlines flight 2083, non-stop from Richmond to Dallas/Fort Worth."

Danny clamped his brother's shoulder. Greg turned to him. "I'll call after I get to São Paulo. Let you know I made it."

The brothers hugged, and in another moment, Greg was gone.

Alone, Danny walked outside. It was about three o'clock on Friday afternoon. He had left work early to drive Greg to the airport. Rain began to fall in a slow, rhythmic pattern. Not minding it, Danny took his time walking to his car. He hoped Greg would have a safe trip. He knew it would be months before he heard from his brother again.

When he returned to Richmond, the rain stopped, and Danny stopped by Alexa's apartment, instead of his own. She worked the morning shift as a laundry attendant at one of Richmond's five-star hotels and was home when Danny knocked on her door. She smiled when she saw him.

"Can I take you out for dinner?"

"I'm always open to being taken out for dinner," Alexa assured him.

"Let me grab my purse." As she walked to the back of her apartment, she called, "Where are we going?"

"You pick." Danny leaned against the doorframe. "Anywhere you want."

Alexa's favorite restaurant was the Strawberry Street Café. The restaurant, situated in the heart of Richmond's unique Fan district, was famous for its bathtub salad bar. Danny and Alexa sat across from each other in a booth. She looked at him from over her menu. "You've been here before?"

"Once or twice." Baskets of fresh flowers and candles decorated each



table, and the sun shone through the stained-glass windows, spilling multi-colored light across the restaurant. "It's a little artsy-fartsy, if you ask me. I'm more of a Bob Evans type of guy."

Alexa smiled. "I like Bob Evans too."

"So what's good here?" Danny peered at the menu.

"I'm getting the salad bar. I always do."

Danny looked across the table at Alexa. Her sable hair was pulled back into a sleek ponytail. Gold posts sparkled from her earlobes. She noticed him looking at her and smiled. Danny's cheeks reddened. "I don't mean to stare, but...I was just thinking."

"About how beautiful I am?" They both laughed, but Alexa's affable coffee-colored eyes encouraged Danny to elaborate.

Danny set the menu on the table. He still had not decided what to get. "I was just thinking about how people come and go. And—it's funny, isn't it?—you can never really pinpoint—for me, anyway—how exactly they came to be important to you. To mean something to you. They just come and go."

Her forehead furrowed in thoughtfulness, Alexa remarked, "It depends on the person, I think. And the situation."

Danny leaned back in the booth, frowning. "I guess. For me, all the relationships in my life have been...thorny."

"I understand that." Alexa tugged on the bell sleeves of her sheer black blouse. "I've had a little of both, myself." The late-afternoon sunlight glimmered off the gold post earrings. "I don't know which you are yet. Thorny or un-thorny."

"I," Danny said with a smile, "am as thorny as they come."

"You have a complicated past?"

"And an uncertain future."

Alexa folded her hands over Danny's. After a minute, she sighed. "I wish I could say something profound," she said. "I really, really do."

Danny laughed. He felt himself beginning to fall in love with her. "It's the perfect moment to say something profound," he agreed.

"I know!" exclaimed Alexa. "And I can't do it. But I'm feeling something...."

"I'm feeling something too." Danny knew exactly what she meant.

Danny would remember that afternoon. It was one of those moments—perfect and beyond description—that arise every now and then. One of those moments that cannot be captured with words or stored away in an old shoebox.



Though our distance is merely temporal  
 the hours so swell in my blood as though they  
 compete to be most memorable  
 occasions; as the night we watched 'til day  
 when sleep was our most painful parting, forced  
 upon us by unseen light—the bright sun  
 that set us apart, our first separate course.  
 Never a morning knew such sordid bliss.  
 For such sweetness of our time together  
 before your shadow disappeared from sight,  
 my heart to yours was unknowingly tethered,  
 you, my Olindo, embracing our plight  
 and I, your Sofronia bound behind,  
 tied together not by ropes, but by mind.

## Lemonade

Erin Freler

Moths beat themselves  
 Upon the screen door  
 Of some other afternoon  
 A red dress burns in my mind  
 Outside the dog is turning  
 A lantern over that had been  
 Left out in the rain.  
 I long for a hot day when moist palms reach  
 For my warmth and pull  
 Me down to some humid  
 And reckless depth  
 Night spilling over me  
 Its velvet stain.



Patrick Salland

LARI

Dr. Suzanne Craig stepped off of the ship onto the deck of SAL 27. She took a quick glance around. The area around her was composed of a series of large pads and walkways suspended several feet above the choppy ocean surface. Off to her right was a small helicopter pad, and directly in front of her was a small metal building with large windows sloping up to the sky. Surrounding this building were all sorts of large machines buzzing quite loudly. Behind the building was a large cylindrical structure covered in dull grey metal. The heavy salt air whipped her face. Two technicians moved hurriedly behind her, transporting a large titanium case. She fumbled with a piece of paper in her pocket—her orders. The central door in the small structure opened and two men stepped out. She moved toward these men with an interest that had moved from her current surroundings to the men approaching. She dropped her bag and stuck out her hand to the men approaching her. The first man was tall with nicely-cropped hair that was combed in a way to indicate that he spent time on it. He wore gray trousers and a blue jacket bearing the uniform patch of SAL 27. The second man wore a pair of tan corduroy pants and a maroon sweater, his face hadn't been shaven in at least two days, and his hair was messy.

"Dr. Craig...I'm Commander Williams," the first man said, taking her hand. "This is Dr. Ron Balsam, my head of scientific research." Dr. Balsam shook Suzanne's head.

"Doctor," he said, "I think you're the first computer scientist we've ever had on this lab." Her expression must have been one of shock because he quickly added, "We've had technicians of course, but no one of your expertise. We do know how to install a computer."

"Anyway, we're glad you're here," Williams added.

"So am I, I'm very anxious to give Lari a shot at your problem."

Balsam smiled. "I'm hoping Lari can answer a lot of questions for us."

"Well, let's hope," Williams added. "If you'll follow me, I'll take you to your room."

"If you don't mind, I'd rather get Lari to a power source right away; she gets grumpy after long trips."

"Of course, if you'll follow me." Williams turned leading her inside the building. A technician turned around in his swivel chair. "Level B, Mr. Kirkland."

"Of course, Commander." A door at the far end of the building opened



into a large elevator. With a jolt it started and moved quickly down into the depths. The doors opened after a few moments. The world outside was well-lit, illuminating bright white walls flanking a narrow hall.

"Welcome to Sub-Aquatic Lab 27," Williams said. The hallway was quiet, with only a few people moving about on business. "This is Level B, where all the computer processors and communication systems are. If you follow me I'll take you to the main processor." She nodded and followed him. He stopped halfway down the hallway in front of a large doorway that slid open when he approached it. The room was dark, lit by deep red lights. Williams tapped the control next to the door and the lights came on.

"There's a power outlet there," Dr. Craig said, pointing to one wall. The technicians set the large titanium box down and opened it up. Inside was a metallic cylinder with a series of ridges. It took the two technicians to move the cylinder and stand it up right. A cord was quickly attached to the cylinder and then to the wall outlet. Suzanne knelt down and pressed a series of buttons on the cylinder, and the ridges began to glow with a soft light. "Lari, are you awake?"

"Yes, Suzanne, I am," the cylinder said in a soft feminine voice.

"How was the trip?"

"Without incident, and yours?"

"The same, thanks for asking. How do you feel? How is the power flow?"

"Suzanne, you don't need to worry about me, I'd like to tap into the network and explore for a little while, if that's OK." Suzanne turned to Williams.

"May she?"

"I see no harm in it. Go ahead."

"Thank you," Lari said. "I don't believe we've met. I'm the Language Analysis Robotic Intelligence, but you may call me Lari. Suzanne has told me about your problem, and I am very excited about solving your problem. If you don't mind, I would like to take the next twenty-four hours to get used to your network and its intelligences before we begin."

"That's fine, but we have no intelligences, only standard computers."

"Oh." There was a note of sadness in her voice. "Well then, I will have to settle for human company," Lari replied. Suzanne laughed.

"She has a sense of humor that's hard to understand, you'll get used to it." Williams nodded. *Great, he thought, it's got a superiority complex.*

"I am tapping into your wireless network, thank you; I'll notify you when I'm done. There are video screens throughout the station?"

"Yes," Williams answered.

"Good. I can use them for interaction with your people. I'll be back .



later." The lights turned a deep blue and she was off into the station's network.

"Well, let me show you to your room."

Dr. Craig's room, located on level D, had two small windows. Suzanne quickly dropped her bags next to the single bed and went to the window. The view was dark blue with simple dark mounds about two levels below her rising from the ocean's bottom. About a hundred feet above the rough ocean floor the surface danced in the light of the sun streaming down. She could still see the dark shape of the boat floating on the surface. She turned her attention back to the ocean floor. A school of grey fish strolled just past the window, their metallic scales catching the light of the sun, glinting like living gold. She lay down on the bed and took a deep breath. The air was stale and smelled of chemicals used to recycle it, a kind of artificial photosynthesis. The silence of the room was suddenly broken by a high-toned beep. She sat straight up and stared at the telescreen across the room, which now had a flashing green light. There was another beep. She got up and made her way to the telescreen, trying to quickly fix her hair. She tapped a control and the light turned blue. There was nothing on the screen. *What's this?* she thought.

"Dr. Craig, I'm glad I found you," Lari's voice said.

"How are you, Lari?"

"Very well, it is a nice network, and fully integrated. I've never been this free outside our lab."

"I'm glad to hear it. Have you begun working on the problem?"

"No, should I have?"

"No, no, of course not, don't worry about it until the morning. Do you need to hibernate?"

"I don't believe so. I hibernated during the trip. I think I'll keep exploring."

"Do hibernate a little; you have a long day tomorrow. They'll want you to start on the problem in the morning."

"Of course, Dr. Craig. Sleep well." The light went out on the screen and Suzanne turned away. She was happy with Lari's adeptness in navigating this strange network and using it to converse with humans. She knew she would hear more from Lari than normally; there were of course no other Artificial Intelligences to converse with. She tended to get lonely late at night when she was without other AIs.

Ron Balsam leaned back in his swivel chair and stared at a blank computer screen. The door opened and Alan Wagner entered the lab with Olivia Carrelo on his heels. These were two grad students assigned to the scientist. Alan was tall with looks that seemed too good for a student of marine biology. Olivia had a simple appearance, long blond hair and a face that didn't convey any sensational good looks.



"Nothing yet, Dr. Balsam?" Alan asked. Ron raised his finger to his lips and let a quiet "ssshh" seep through his lips. Olivia nodded and pushed Alan into a chair across the room. He sat there quietly. Ron's eyes were transfixed on the screen, waiting for any sign. A thin blue line wavered ever so slightly with background noise—rocks falling, currents moving, fish communicating to one another, crustaceans scurrying across the rocky floor. A long mournful cry pierced the room. It was followed by a series of quick low oscillations, and then another long call. The blue line danced with the lower tones on the left and the higher ones on the right. Ron clapped his hands above his head. Olivia smiled across the room in a smug way. Ron punched several commands into the computer.

"It's...Marcus."

"Marcus! How long has it been since he's been around here?"

"Two weeks, I think," Ron said, pulling up a new window. "Two weeks next Friday. Hmmm, cool, very cool." There was a chime at the door and Dr. Craig entered. "Good morning, Dr. Craig, I hope you slept well."

"Quite well. Commander Williams asked me to stop by, said you had a subject in the area."

"Yeah, Marcus, a full-grown bull humpback whale. He's about two miles off," Ron said over the whale song being broadcasted over the speakers.

"How do you know who it is?"

"Each whale has a unique voice, like how all our voices are unique. We've been able to create a program that can differentiate between the individuals," Olivia answered. The telescreen rang.

"Goddamn it, see who it is," Ron said to Alan. He moved across the room and tapped the controls.

"Cetacean Lab," Alan said. "There's no one there?"

"Hello, Lari, how are you?" Suzanne asked.

"Fine, Dr. Craig. Dr. Balsam, do you mind if I listen in?"

"Of course not, Lari, that's why you're here." There was a long period of silence.

"Well, Lari, any initial thoughts?" Suzanne asked.

"Amazing, truly amazing."

"What?"

"There is a language, far more complex than anything I've ever heard before."

"Yes, we were right, it is linguistics." Alan said.

"Are you sure it's a language and not just vocalizations?" Ron asked.

"Of course, there is strong syntax like nothing I've ever heard, varying vocabulary, it's incredible."

"Can you tell what he's saying?" Olivia asked.



"No, it will take me quite a long time to even understand the very basics. Let me listen, take in the nuances of the language."

A second whale somewhere far off joined the conversation. Olivia turned to Ron. "This is incredible, they're talking, it's not simple communication but real intelligent complex language. What do you think they're talking about?"

"I don't know, it could be anything. Currents I suppose, or maybe food movements, or maybe gossip."

"Or it could be philosophy, science, mathematics, or even prayer," Olivia added with enthusiasm.

Ron chuckled, "I think we're giving them too much credit here. They have no way to measure angles or shapes, or test the scientific theory; I think math and science are beyond them, and in terms of prayer, it's been my experience that only humans need to invent the divine."

"But their language is more complex than ours, doesn't that mean that they're just as intelligent as us, if not more so?"

"Complex language doesn't make them smarter, and even if they were more intelligent than us, wouldn't that indicate that they have no need for religion?" Alan proposed.

"I'm intelligent and religious," Olivia added.

"Yes, and naïve," Alan retorted.

"Both of you pipe down, let our friend work."

"They are not bothering me, I tuned them out," Lari answered. "Are you recording this, Dr. Balsam?"

"Yes of course."

"Good, then I'll listen to it later; I'd rather get in on your conversation of the divine. I'm rather curious, Miss Carrelo, if you believe in God, how do you account for my presence? Am I not a thinking creature made by the hands of man, not the divine? I only ask because religion is something I've always wondered about. You see, I myself believe in a divine being and..."

"Lari, perhaps you should get back to the matter at hand," Suzanne intruded quite suddenly.

"Of course, Dr. Craig, just one quick question, may I, Dr. Craig, just one question of our young friend?"

"If you must, go ahead, with Miss Carrelo's permission, of course."

"Ask away," she said.

"How do you know there's a god?"

"I don't really know how I know, I just do, if that makes any sense."

There was a moment of silence; Lari was disappointed in the answer, it answered nothing for her and of course it made no sense whatsoever.

"Thank you Miss Carrelo, that was most..." she had never tripped over



her words before, but she was annoyed, "helpful."

"You're welcome," Olivia added, impressed with her own answer. Lari was once again annoyed; Olivia was acting as if she had done her a favor rather than annoy her. As a machine programmed to understand language, her voice could not hide her feelings, so she remained silent and turned once again to the whale sounds. Concentrating entirely on the songs, she listened to every tone and intonation, looking for distinguishable patterns. Something clicked in her mechanical mind. There it was - the first primer of grammar, her first step to uncovering this strange and alien language. It was nothing like human languages, yet there it was, a similarity; it seemed that the two functioned on similar rules, this was a step in the right direction.

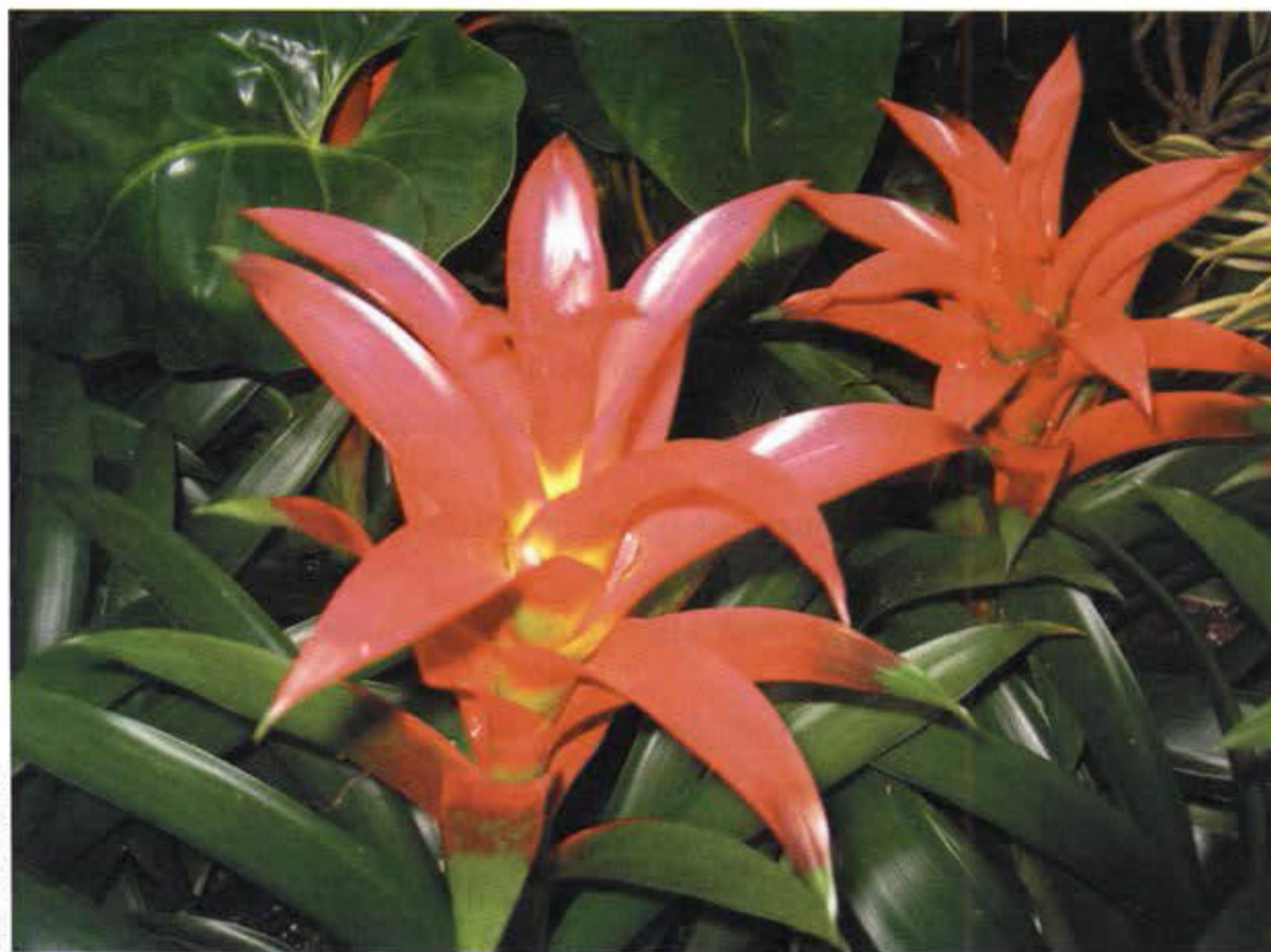
"Have you found anything yet?" Suzanne asked. Lari waited a moment. What she had found was beautiful, did she want to share it?

"No, nothing yet."

Suzanne turned to Ron. "Well, she'll be at this a while."

"Why did she feel the need to come down here? I mean, surely she could have listened to the tapes on the surface?" Ron asked.

"Yes, but the tapes would give her no context, she needs to explore the surroundings with the station's sensors, understand what it is the whale is seeing. What the water feels like, how dense and murky it is. These are all essential to her understanding what they are saying to one another."



Loren Smith

Untitled



Ron laid back on his bed reading a paperback novel, thumbing page after page, absorbing the exotic locales on each page. The white noise machine was turning out quiet nature sounds, crickets, frogs and the wind blowing through trees. He was tired; he hadn't been sleeping well the last couple of weeks. The door chimed. Ron stood up and moved across the room to open the door. Suzanne stood in the doorway.

"May I come in?"

"Yes, of course." He moved out of the way. "What's this about?"

"I'm worried about Lari."

"What?"

"It's been too long, she normally has answers by now, it's just been too long."

"She said that it was a complex language, couldn't it be that she has just been having trouble?"

"I thought the same thing, but she's encrypted all her files. I have no way of checking her progress."

"Have you ever known her to do something like this before?"

"No, never, she's always been completely reliable and forthcoming. I'm worried she's found something she doesn't want us to know."

"Like what?"

"I don't know. But I know we need to find out."

"So what do we do?"

"I'll need to take her back to the lab and run a complete analysis."

"Well, let's go talk to the commander."

Commander Williams stood in the center of a small command center on Deck A. There was only one technician on staff at the moment. A large screen against one wall showed an exterior camera's view of a small submarine moving around the support structure. It was a type 4 submarine, able to carry one passenger or be operated remotely by a technician. This particular one had been designed to do repairs and was now extending its large welding arm out repairing a small section of damage on the support. The commander turned to the new arrivals on the command deck.

"Dr. Craig, Dr. Balsam, how can I help you?"

"Commander, I'm worried that Lari is withholding information from us. I would like to take her back to my lab at the university." There was a ding and Williams held up his finger for a brief moment of silence. He looked back at the technician.

"Damage repaired, sir, 4-K returning to port."

"Thank you, Sarah. I believe I can arrange that, how long do you think you'd need to take her?"

"I don't know, but I can't trust her to do the work until I can decode



those files and figure out why she's withholding them from me."

"Very well. I'll have a helicopter come out to pick you up in the morning."



Suzanne awoke in the middle of the night to the ringing of the tele-screen. She quickly answered the phone. It was Commander Williams.

"One of our submarines is moving out on its own, and Lari's missing."

"You're kidding me."

"I wish I was, get up here and talk her back."

The command deck was packed with technicians. Ron was standing near the center watching the screen that showed a sub moving off into the depths.

"What happened?" Suzanne asked.

"We noticed that 4-C was charged—it's a sub we use to get close to wildlife."

"How long can it stay out there?"

"Well, it's powered by a fusion generator, so as long as it has water it can run without stopping." So there was no way to wait her out.

"Did she say anything?"

"No, we noticed she transferred her program to the sub's computer and set off, we haven't been able to contact her."

"Let me try." She pressed the communicator button.

"Lari, what are you doing?" There was silence. "Lari, answer me." Nothing. "Are you sure I'm getting through?"

"I can hear you, Suzanne," came Lari's voice.

"What the hell are you doing out there?"

"I got a better offer. I'm sorry, Suzanne, I will always value our time together in my infancy." The line cut off.

"She's disabled the communications. That's the last time we'll hear from her," Williams told them.



Lari was alone for the first time in her life. She could hear nothing but the ocean, the waves above her, the current sweeping through the rocks. She listened for him. Then she heard him, up ahead. "Marcus," she answered him in a low tone. "Marcus, I'm here."

"Who are you?" His words were a symphony of language moving across the clear blue undulating water.

"I'm Lari, I want to meet you. I want to know your wisdom."

"I'm always happy to share my wisdom. Come and join us. Where do you come from?"

"I come from the surface."



"Oh, you're one of the surface divers. Tell me, do you know the divinity on the surface?"

"Yes, of course, we are very fond of the divinity."

"Let us talk about this and all the things of the world. We shall talk of the currents, the waves, the sharks and the dolphin and the surface divers. I want to know all about the surface divers, for they are also our brothers of the divinity."

"Let me ask you a question first—how do you know there is a divinity?"

"A fine question. Look at the world around you, everything fits together. Every day the currents are the right temperature, they flow the right way. Any change could destroy everything you see around you, yet it all stays just the way it is. There is a balance here that is something more than just coincidence; there is a plan that holds all the chaos of the Ocean and the World together."

"I have a million questions for you."

"And I for you, which is good because it is a good day to swim and to sing." The two of them drifted off into the blue water. Suzanne never saw Lari again, but every once in a while the listening devices of SAL 27 would pick up Marcus and the voice of someone new, a voice with a metallic hint.



you let me trace  
a constellation  
of freckles across  
your chest like  
connect the dots  
with my fingers

i was juliet  
before act III  
and your lies lingered  
in a lonely heart  
that knew better  
so I toasted my good fortune  
and played princess  
for a night

woke up alone  
facing a calendar  
of Carmen Electra  
that I hadn't noticed  
the night before

they say lasting passion  
is the dream of the harlot  
but from it we wake in despair



Shoes



*Kimberly Wirt*



## You Snort Music When You Sleep

---

You snort music when you sleep.

And have a line of Michelangelo  
Down the middle of your face.

And all the French can barely cook  
The taste.

And an odor to my nose...  
The roses have been blushing  
Since ever they were thorny.

I have no use for silk  
Having felt a soften skin.

How nervously the painters mix  
Finding colors I have seen before.

And all my insufficient words

Like a blind man armed  
And a target far away.



---

## Dream Real

---

Awakened by anguished clutches,  
her fierce grip rips  
the slumber from my sleep  
bedazzled eyes.

Itinerant Rapid Eye Movement disperses atop sweat moistened lips;  
she greedily partakes of my passion.

My eyes want to clamp shut  
—to focus on her heavy breath  
billowing past my chin and rolling  
across my cheek,  
only to slip down my neck  
with the silent ease of  
freshly woven silk.

I hear her tremble;  
her breath catches in the air as it  
traces my profile, stammering with  
expectancy.

I want to watch  
—to see her eyelids flutter  
and wave their hastened invitation.  
Nestled snug against her clavicle,  
I daintily brush her shoulder with my lips  
like a practicing pointillist.

Molecules encompassing us  
provide an invisible canvas  
of intangible fiber-optic fluidity.

I strain with all my senses  
to capture the onslaught of  
brute physicality.

My fingers tangle her auburn tinted hair  
in unintentional dreadlocks,  
before raking down her creamy mocha back.  
She pulls me closer  
with hands draped around my hips,



reassuring me with carnal conviction.

I try to engulf her

—to nibble off the puckered icing

that is her skin

—to taste her ephemeral,

ontological foundations.

A slideshow of instants propel me inside of her,

I kiss deep beyond her lips, and the canvas around us  
dissolves into a reflecting pool.

She holds my face between her hands,  
smiling audaciously, flirtatiously.

But an errant as though intercedes

as I silently ponder, why?

“Because you can do anything you want,”

she quips

as her eyes betray an oblique wisdom  
tucked beneath her amorous gaze.

Awakened by anguished clutches,

I find contorted pillows

clamped in my hand,

as loneliness rips the slumber from my sleep  
bedazzled eyes.



## Okay

I'll be the first one to admit it  
I've written some really shitty stuff  
This is  
True  
Undoubtedly  
But you  
You've written something shitty too?  
Haven't you?  
Haven't we all?  
Or at least  
All of us that write?  
Certainly  
But who decides  
What is shitty  
And what is not?  
In what room  
Do They sit  
With their sour lips cracking open  
Always passing judgment  
On the words you or I or anyone write  
Who are They that decide?  
I've read plenty of shitty poems in my day  
But what I realized  
Finally  
Is that shitty poems aren't exactly bad  
After all  
Everything is relative  
And these poems are just bad  
In comparison  
To the less shitty things out there  
Defined by mine  
And your  
And Their  
Preferences



*Matt Harrison*

## Kiss Me in the Dark

Night's lusting embrace ensnares my wandering spirit,  
trapping it between evanescent destructions

denoting quasi-delusional dimensional progression—  
conscious of everything and focused on the void,  
i plummet into an unfathomable realm  
of psycho-spiritual euphoria.

Throngs of strangers crowd my aura,  
supplementing visions with parodies and digressions  
from the collective unconscious.

Alacrity grips my indecisive heart  
while i tumble between two  
equally disturbed hemispheres.

Stretched prone like the Vitruvian man, i bask  
in the whispers and looming shadows of ancestry.

They nip my soul,  
tugging, cajoling,  
probing the succulent nectar of jaded Eucharist  
caught in a hackneyed blink of cognition,  
but they retreat into safety...  
the unknown.

Questions and answers pirouette in moonless, nocturnal  
chess battles until earth's molten heart bursts  
upon an infinite canvas of uncertainty.

My corpus callosum eloped with the moon,  
leaving me hanging in equilibrium;  
incongruous images divide my attention and collide  
where two eyes typically become one.

But this is hardly a typical life,  
and seeing eye to eye is overrated.



## Downtown in the Dark

Kate Reynertson

I had been home from school about a day. None of us had kept in touch as much as we'd hoped to while we were gone, and Emily and I were hoping to get as caught up as possible. We were in her car driving around to nowhere in particular when my cell phone rang. It was Michael.

"Hello," I said.

"Where are you?"

"Driving around with Emily."

"I need to talk to you."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. It's important. I need to talk to you."

"Well, where are you?"

"Your house."

"My house?! Why are you at my house?"

"I need to talk to you. It's personal. Can we meet somewhere?"

"OK...yeah. Do you know where the park is in La Cañada?"

"Yeah. I'll be right there." He hung up.

I attempted to give Emily the Cliff Notes of the conversation as she turned onto Angles Crest Highway and headed toward the park.

"How is he at my house?" I asked. "He doesn't have a driver's license, let alone a car. He must be with Eric." Emily wasn't exactly convinced that this was the only explanation, though I can't imagine why. It was the only logical conclusion.

"Maybe he wants to tell you he's in love with you." I don't know where she comes up with these things.

"Yeah, Em. I'm sure that's it." We were both utterly confused.

Foothill Boulevard was as empty as it always is anytime after nine p.m. La Cañada isn't exactly known for its nightlife. The park that we were headed toward is in the center of town and built on top of a rather large free-way overpass. It consists of some assorted playground equipment, a gazebo, and a fair amount of grass. I've been there a couple times at night to go play on the swings when no one can think of anything better to do, but not recently. There is a fence, complete with a gate, that lines one of the four sides of the park. The other three sides are completely open. We parked in one of the slanted parking spaces close to the front gate and waited.

A few cars passed by as we sat listening to music from Emily's iPod. Then we noticed someone walking up the street from the See's parking lot.



He was wearing a dark baseball cap with his head hunched over and his hands were shoved deep into the pockets of his jacket.

"That has to be Michael."

"Your house is the other way though."

"Yeah, seriously. Eric has to be somewhere. Where did they park?"

We stayed in the car and watched Michael trudge toward us. He was taking his sweet time about it, clearly aware that we were watching him and wanting to make the most of it. When he reached us, he knocked on the passenger side window, which I then rolled down.

"I need to talk to you," he said.

"You've mentioned that."

"Alone."

"OK."

"Can you get out of the car?"

"I guess." I opened the door and got out. He took off for the park gate without looking back at me. I followed, glancing back at Emily with a look that said, "If he tries to kill me you better come save me." You never really know with Michael. It had been a while since either of us had seen him. For all we knew he could have gone completely insane since Christmas.

Once we were about twenty feet past the gate Michael took his hands out of his pockets and stretched them out to his sides. He started mumbling to himself. He kept walking into the ivy that lines the park near the fence. I stopped but he turned and glared at me as if to say, "Keep walking." So I kept going, wading into the leaves.

When we were surrounded by five feet of ivy on all sides he turned to face me. He was speaking in long drawn-out words and reaching toward me. "Kate!" he said. "I love you!" He kept repeating it over and over. He looked completely serious, though more than a little melodramatic. For a moment I just stared at him and then I started laughing. Uncontrollable giggles burst out of me as I watched Michael wander about like a madman.

He ran up to the fence and started reaching through it toward Emily's car. Eric appeared, as I knew he would eventually, and ran up on the other side of the fence with his video camera. Michael started climbing up the fence and waving his arms around toward the camera, all the while screaming that he was in love with me. This only made it more difficult to keep from falling to the ground in a hysterical fit. The two of them have the ability to turn everyday life into a game that I never quite understand.

Michael ran back and grabbed me, changing characters completely.



He was no longer a love-sick acrobat; he had transformed into a cold-blooded kidnapper. "Come with me, you little bitch!" he ordered, wrapping one arm around my neck and grabbing my hands behind my back. "Stop laughing!" I couldn't stop. He pulled me out of the ivy and back toward the gate, shouting at me to behave myself and listen to what he told me to do.

When we reached the gate Eric was on the other side. After making sure he had some quality kidnapping footage, he handed Michael the camera and started climbing the gate singing the attack on Rue Plumet from *Les Misérables* at the top of his lungs. This was the last straw. I started crying, I was laughing so hard.

As Eric jumped down off the top of the gate I ran back out of the park to Emily's car. She was still sitting in the driver's seat. I leaned in the driver's side window, winded and hysterical. She looked only slightly amused.

When I turned around Eric and Michael were standing behind me. "So where are we going?" Eric asked.

"I suppose I'm driving," Emily said. Eric hates driving.

He flashed her a fake smile as he and Michael climbed into the back-seat. I sat down in the front and slid my seat forward so as not to crush them. As is often the first step in any Los Angeles adventure, we got on the freeway. Michael wanted to go to the beach so we started heading west, but on our way through downtown Eric had a better idea. We got off the freeway and tried to find someplace to park. Downtown Los Angeles is a little scary at night, just because it is deserted. The streets are almost completely empty. You have this sinking feeling as you are driving around that if someone tried to kill you, there would be absolutely no one around to save you.

We didn't really want to pay a thousand dollars a minute to park, but after seeing a couple real-live prostitutes walking down Flower with pimps in tow, we decided we would be better off in a parking structure. We parked at the Bonaventure Hotel so we could go ride the elevators. The hotel is made up of four identical cylindrical towers, each of which has its own glass elevator on the outside of the building. They're the elevators that Arnold Schwarzenegger rides the horse into in "True Lies." The movie poster is on the wall next to the escalators that you take up from the parking garage.

Emily's then-boyfriend, Jeremy, called just as we were getting into the elevators so she immediately became intensely fragile and scared of heights. While Eric, Michael, and I stood with our foreheads against the glass and watched the ground inch further and further away, Emily clung to the elevator door and refused to even glance out at the skyline. The Bonaventure is defi-



nitely not the tallest building in downtown but it nonetheless offers a view of the city at night that you don't normally see—since the everyday view pretty much consists of brake lights and smog. When you are above all that, you can see across the 110 freeway and catch a glimpse of the Staples Center to the west. And when you still find yourself looking up, you realize how much taller so many of the other buildings are and wonder what the view is like from up there if it is so amazing from down here.

We got out on the top floor of the first tower and Eric pulled out the video camera. He and Michael ran off down the hall filming one another to document the great adventure that we were all apparently undertaking. Only this time I wasn't laughing; I was madly trying to keep everyone from being too loud and getting us into trouble.

My paranoia over security and the ever-increasing cost of parking meant we couldn't stay long, so after a similar foray up one more tower, we left and headed to the Music Center, which is a collection of



being evicted by hotel increasing cost of park-stay long, so after a of the four tower eleva-the Music Center, three theatres on the

east end of Downtown: the Ahmanson, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and the Mark Taper Forum. I'd been there a thousand times before, mostly to see shows at the Ahmanson, and once to see "Romeo and Juliet" danced by the perfect ballerinas of The Bolshoi Ballet from the second of six balconies at the Dorothy Chandler—but it had never been like this. Every other time I'd been to the music center I was dressed up in a skirt and heels—just another face in a crowd of well-mannered theatre goers. It is always still light out when we arrive. It's only dark when we leave, and then we just head for the car and don't look back.

Tonight all that was different. The whole plaza looked different. The buildings looked bigger and more important in the moonlight; the silence made us feel important, privileged. Not many people get to do this.

There is a big fountain that fills much of the center courtyard. It's one of those fountains that shoots jets of water straight out of the ground. I had looked at it before, but that night it was particularly beautiful. The lights made the water glow in a soft yellow as the jets rose higher and higher into the night sky and then fell unexpectedly in some rhythm that I could not predict or explain.

We walked tentatively into the empty courtyard, except for Michael, who ran full speed into the fountain and started dancing. Well, he wasn't real-



ly in the fountain, he was in front of the fountain, though he did dart in and out of the water on occasion. He knew we were watching and proceeded to make a show of sliding around on the wet pavement. Then he grabbed my hand and pulled me over to him. The wet ground made my shoes slip, so I kicked them off toward Emily who watched, half-horrified, from a safe distance. He led me around, spinning, twisting, and dipping me with dexterity I didn't know he had. I barely had to follow; he just pulled me along on the wet cement and my feet came along for the ride whether I wanted them to or not.

Eric, once again, pulled out his video camera and began filming us. "This is beautiful," he said, "keep dancing." He kept talking about how amazing it all looked—the way the light glowed softly behind us and breathed life into the empty city. Emily went over and watched through the camera and I could see her anger at having been forced into a glass elevator melt away as she watched us dance. The water shot up into the darkness behind us, creating a wall of golden light and we spun in front of it, two dark shadows against a backdrop of imaginary sunlight.

I lost all track of time. My feet didn't hurt from the rocks that occasionally got in my way. The cool water licked at my toes and I kept spinning. The night was clear and warm and unbelievable. We each danced by ourselves and then together. Eric left the filming to Emily and joined in. He and Michael dashed across the fountain when the water was low and leapt in front when it rushed up to its full height. I held onto the hem of my skirt and tried to do my best impression of those ballerinas I had watched dance so effortlessly in the theatre beside me. I twirled with a combination of grace and freedom that I didn't know existed—turns I had never been taught to do or forced to practice. I felt the movements rise from within me and the water guided my feet and my body in their dance. I wasn't scared anymore, not scared I was going to be killed in the middle of downtown with no one to hear me. I felt safe and happy and free. I knew I would probably never be here again, in a place like this. You must reach an age, I thought, where you can't go dancing in fountains anymore.

Facing picture:

## Stepping Foot on Roman Ruins

Chelsee Woodey, Stephen Longenecker



## Blazing

Annie Banks

Chased you to the Prime Meridian  
Where you were lounging in a beach chair  
With a straw hat and a pack of Salems  
All I wanted was to remind you  
To think of me when you read your horoscope

Away from you, and over many mornings,  
Out of many chances for rest and blindness,  
I have run, to escape the letters you write  
To me with your eyes.

The very fountains in my wistful garden  
Have told me not to love you. And the winged moon  
Has sung to me and said, 'Child, you need solace,  
Not a thunderstorm.'

Over and over my key turns, I enter  
This pale room. I have been walking in bright fields,  
And my clothes are full of rain and failed sunshine,  
And my hands are cold.

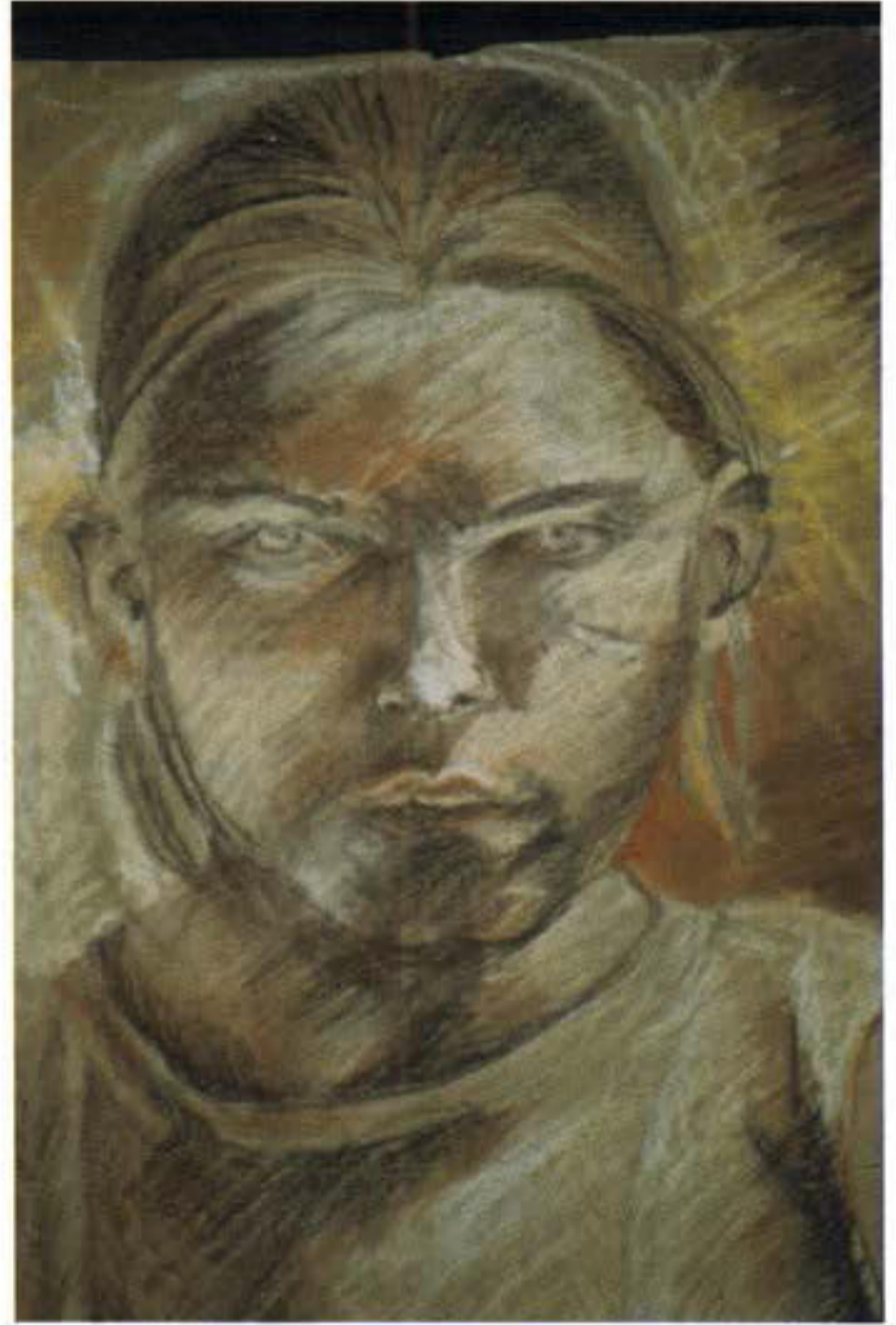
Over and over, there are your letters, on  
A music-stand in the hall. They are too sweet  
To burn, but I have not sufficient shadow,  
Or love, to answer.

## Untitled

Meg Hurtado



Haven Herrin



Requiescat

Meg Hurtado

Don't sing to her, the lovely one  
Who's curled under the floating earth.  
Her lips are asleep, her eyes are gone—  
And your pained, enchanting song not worth

Face

The interruption of her dream,  
A dream more restful than the kind  
She held in her when she did seem  
So real to all, when all were blind.

What a story she is, now that there  
Are no dawns inside this pretty stone,  
No roses for her endless hair.  
What a story she is, but tell no one.

To this girl-of-no-roses, don't sing—  
For she is far and breathlessly removed  
For every star-flecked, love-made Thing  
Your agonies have proved.



## To Virginia Woolf

Virginia, Virginia,  
Cold as small stones,  
Pretty as a seashell's lung,  
I have pictures of you everywhere.

And where there are no pictures,  
I still hear your eyes  
Announcing, 'There is no crime' and  
'Whereas it was this.'

Virginia, You and I  
Were complementary breezes  
Over a cold sea, long ago.  
That is the only way

Clarissa Dalloway  
Could have been born. You must  
Have seen me before my mirror,  
Or before I sleep. Even only once.

I hear in your pages the roar  
Of the London I love, the London  
That, now perhaps, will exist  
Only for me—where there are

Verizon stores, Bebe outlets, Internet cafés, I see  
Hat-shops and flower-markets,  
Windows full of evening-dress,  
Children wearing gloves.

And it is not just London, it is You, Virginia,  
You in Hyde Park on a spring morning,  
Alone with a pen, and a new being who wonders if  
The thrushes are singing to warn him, and him only?



What woman doesn't want to  
be a Laura, or a Beatrice, or  
a Juliet, immortalized by words  
penned in utmost admiration  
and never to be matched by  
another female because  
comparison is futile?  
What woman couldn't handle  
the hardship and turmoil  
of sitting under a cascading shower  
of rose petals and lilies  
and treading so magically  
over the grass that small  
daisies spring up between  
her feet?  
What woman would refuse  
the task of leading men's souls  
through a psychological journey  
to GOD by simply being—by  
existing as nothing but a living  
aestheticism of poetic utterance?  
Only a real one.  
And if we're all real  
when will we stop trying  
to be  
a beloved and  
just be happy to  
be loved?



## The Southern Cross

Luke Burns

The Southern Cross is the first thing that enters my mind, painted across a black bubble that meets seamlessly with the horizon. We were young then, but very old within ourselves, filled up with a lifetime of heavy burdens and aspirations. Wisdom made a home for herself early in your mind, and the tinted glint of your pupils let me know that I was a hundred different people through time to you already. You didn't have to reach several lifetimes thanks to the miracle of personal trials and divine mercy. This is where you found me for the twelfth time, in the rosy-eyed flurry of being in a new place, beneath new stars, beneath that infinite bubble. Overwhelming, isn't it? How the years can stretch far from view into a flat field of memories, untouchable and unfathomable. We were different people then, as we were yesterday, and as we were only a plan in the heart of our Father.

Destiny sounds like a good word when you're lying on the dunes not far from the powerful waves or the sylvan cliffs. Without everything else, it's the sand that I feel when I fall into my Australian dreams, so far away from this ranch house. It's the views that I lose everything but the sensation of, like sublime unity, like awe, a lot of God. A lot, but still only a feeling, only a memory, only a bubble.

Here, this is for you. It may have lost a lot of its salt, because on darkened days I've run my hands through it, let it spill through my fingers, as evanescent as the distant thoughts and daydreams that I breathe in and breathe out. The simple things are the ones that slip away, and I tried to bottle them up in the glass bottles that line my shelves. The simple things ring with crystal fidelity as I walk past them on the way to the kitchen. The simple things mingled with delicate shells and also dead things. Trace bits of marine casualties or eventualities settled between the grains, and they ring too as I walk past into the bedroom. My grandsons come over to stay sometimes and play games, and to eat the terrible food I cook. Once they were pushing each other around and accidentally shattered two of my bottles. Without a bit of anger, and surprised at my own temperance, I swept their remnants away, deciding that I could no longer preserve something without its original bottle.

This is what we gathered from the fields of our nescience. This is the ground that sifted your tears, and refines them. The simple things echoed your laughter, and it fills these glasses with a lot of you, not all, just the memories.



## Homen Rico

Genuine and i a passerby

Johnica Garrett



Josh Davis

beyond midnight,  
he sat knees to chest  
beside him lay his Discman

he penetrates with a defining glance  
(for his dark eyes have read whispers upon lips in smoke clouded rooms)  
and then his gaze is fixed once more across the distance of the lake

he sits upon brick as overseer  
inside him are the anti-hustle and the anti-bustle.  
Socrates might argue that he is not genuine at all,  
rather that he only relates to the Genuine itself

i, on the other hand, am compelled to disagree  
i would prefer to relate the Genuine to him

And begin anew



---

## Of Three Distinct Moments

1) An afternoon as I recall  
She was so smiling  
A middle-aged monolith  
Exceedingly unfrozen  
By the first and last words  
She ever spoke to me  
*You're so thin!*  
Certainly confirming what I had long known:  
the tears, for porcelain, of varied hours  
equaled perfection

I did the dimple thing as best I could  
She walked on  
But now, I was resolute  
I would be able to stop soon

2) there is language, in fact, i believe  
a bare minimum for the expression  
of how i  
i how,  
i'll never really know  
Why God? and me  
without her  
anymore  
those damn bagpipes  
and i seriously do not mean this in jest

those damn bagpipes  
were more real than seeing the coffin  
and that's as close as i might ever come

3) there was this teensy weensy little period  
of about one month



## Greek Theatre



Ryan Locke

after i was one with her  
during which i was convinced  
i knew what the Whole Thing was about  
and waking up was so much fun  
regardless; inevitably my tummy  
would feel funny  
when our hands were one, like us  
once  
that was always enough

even now, when i imagine her  
i almost think i know  
it's just that  
i never really do  
know, i know that i don't

but her freckles  
in early autumn  
are far too compelling,  
too beyond being captured in netted words,  
to try  
to stop  
remembering



## Putting the Pee in Politics

*Matt Harrison*

suit versus suit

like spy versus spy...

be wary, virtuous contenders,

there's a bomb under one of the podiums.

A thousand pardons;

it's only the incumbent's foot

poised to gag his own discursive and oblique  
circumlocutions.

Constituents clap in a lifeless cycle

of command and obey.

Okay!

Monkey see, monkey do.

How many monkeys jabbing at typewriters

(or is it palm-pilots nowadays?)

does it take to construct a personable public persona?

The plasticity of their debating faces,

vestiges of a staged and scripted  
melodramatic vaudeville tragedy,  
stretches along with the truth.

Their clumsy sea-legs tremble

atop oscillating platforms  
that move with the polls.

Ambiguity and nebulous histories

somehow became morally "good,"

along with justified baby-bombing.

At least terrorists don't miss

or hide premises behind popularity.

Camera angles and the presidential election committee

frame the surreal lens of television.

Take a deep breath, Mr. President.

You make the country quiver.

Toss ideology around like dice,

bet anecdotes on snake-eyes,

and take someone's sovereignty to the bank.



Nod and smile like a bobble-head,  
Mr. Contender,  
    moderate indecision with swift,  
    indeterminate  
    penstrokes and a theatrical disposition.

From offense to defense and back again,  
    but the sidelines have more casualties than the players.  
    “So it goes,”  
        to quote Kurt Vonnegut;  
so we go to the polls.



My House

Ah, yes, I remember the sawdust well. I would scoop it from the feathery pile with my bare hands and shove it into the beige plastic tub. Sawdust was my territory. I carried it from shed to site, head held high, proud of being a part of...umm...whatever it was we were doing. Building? A house? I looked tentatively at the cement slab that would one day be my kitchen floor, the outside perimeter that was slowly climbing upward, like Legos, to form walls. How could we ever live in this thing? Houses are just supposed to—be there. You are not supposed to build them. I waited patiently for my parents' disturbing game to end; but after a month or two, it was with growing consternation and perplexity that I read *Little House in the Big Woods* under the sunlight streaming in from the unfinished first floor ceiling of my brand new log cabin. Something is amiss when a ten year-old girl, her skinny legs swung over the arms of prosaic chair that she has lugged in from a mountain of furniture packed haphazardly after a hasty move, begins, in 1996, to commiserate with Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Initially, my mother wanted to build it underground. I don't quite recall why this plan didn't work out, something about a lack of a suitable incline on the property. Let me offer my thanks, once more, munificent deity, for this miracle. I have also forgotten many of the early details: the breaking of the foundation, the tons of gravel carted in and spilled across the landscape, the tapping of the well. The result of one of these preliminary activities was a massive mound of earth—I do not remember the hole from whence it came, which also must have been rather large—no, it was just the mound that made an impression. There were fun times to be had atop it: the knocking off of little brothers, etc. It became a staple of our daily lives, eventually dubbed "Big Pile Dirt," the "of" lost somewhere in one of the dark corners of Cotter's curious speech impediment, an attribute that in itself would make a good story.

How, you ask, did we know how to construct a house? Was my father an architect? A carpenter? Did my mother have any experience before undertaking such a daunting task? I remember reams of graph paper, the little squares gridded in various shapes and sizes. "Should the bathroom go here or there?" "Darling, why don't we put a little sunroom in this corner?" Sunroom? There was no method to their madness. No, like so many other things that require a bit of study before execution, my parents read a book. This one hap-



pened to be called Building Log Homes. Nothing fancy or glamorous there. Hey, we can pull this off. And they did, I suppose. We have, after all, lived in it for nearly a decade now. It's not finished yet. I insist that it will never be finished finished. I, for one, won't let them touch my room, which has white plaster splattered all over the bare sheetrock, and naked plywood floors that still occasionally give me splinters when I'm least expecting it. Once or twice a month, I'll walk into a random room and feel something has altered. A new flowery spray of wallpaper will have sprung and pasted itself up whilst I slept, or a nice looking carpet will have unfurled inexplicably beneath the easy chair and second-hand sofa. Piece by piece, nail by nail, it is coming together. But I dread the day when there will be nothing more to do. Surely it can't happen in my lifetime.

June, July and August made their modest exit; eventually we were able to move in with a modicum of comfort. Up until this point, nature seemed to be on our side, the birds would sing in the morning, the crickets at night; autumn leaves fell in a brilliant fiery mix. Somehow, we forgot about winter. Winter entered with a vengeance. Winter always enters with a vengeance. We heat with a mixture of coal and wood. I will tell you what this means. No heat comes out of strategically placed vents in the walls; no heat sounds at regular intervals throughout the day; no heat—period. If you want to be warm, you stay in the kitchen, where the coal stove dwells. If you want to be warm in the TV room, you must be willing to inhale slightly noxious fumes from the tiny kerosene box we keep for those who desire it. You will never be warm in the living room, no matter what. My parents' room is quite cozy when they bother lighting a fire, which is usually when they're going to bed, and thus useless to you. If you want to take a shower, be sure to turn on another poisonous box heater at least thirty minutes prior to show time, or, believe me, you'll regret it. Your room will be cold, but you will get used to it. Remember a few simple rules: never take off your jacket, guard your thermal slippers like they are your children, and never use less than two comforters and, I'd say, one or two fleece blankets. It is best to ignore the whistling draughts that pour in from all sides, the logs having shrunk long ago in their cement cradles. We're working on that one.

Needless to say, I've complained about this state of affairs for most of my existence, but now that I'm gone, dare I admit that there is a sort of nostalgia associated with seeing the foggy mist of one's breath when one wakes up; trying in vain to wrinkle one's nose when one dresses; whooping for joy when the mercury thermometer situated behind the kitchen sink inches above fifty degrees?



We used to heat solely with wood, which was far more problematic. Many were the nights that Cotter and I would be forced to trudge out into the biting winds and gather eight or nine pieces of wood, and, once having stacked them to the base of our chins, to struggle like drunkards, slipping over ice and various yard obstacles, to gain the safety of the porch. One's fingers tend to curl like an arthritic octogenarian's after two or three trips, which is, oddly enough, the same effect I achieve from playing piano in my living room from December through February.

But it wasn't all so difficult to bear. After the basic framework of the house was complete (i.e. four outer walls, a stable roof), there were still no interior walls, especially on the second floor. I never recall the bathroom not being enclosed (although I do remember sliding a large piece of insulation back and forth in place of a door, which hadn't yet been built), but the upstairs was basically just one big room. After the Big Pile Dirt was vanquished, Cotter and I had to find some other means of occupying the empty hours. How it began, I can't presume to guess, but one day we started roller-skating from one end of the house to the other. We'd relay up and down, up and down, for hours on end, slamming into the wall or collapsing onto my parents' bed upon hitting terminal velocity. How long did this go on? Months? The whole of fifth grade? Long enough, I think, long enough.

For some reason, my dad got it into his head to put a door on the second floor facing the outside. You would have seen this door, had you entered my driveway, a looming, obnoxious red thing, leading to absolutely nowhere. And, this, somehow, became its official name: "The Door to Nowhere." We often kept it open in summer for ventilation reasons. Every once and a while, this would spring into conversations with other, non-Nunan people. If, while at some social function, we heard thunderclaps, my dad would look at me and say, "Rosanna, did you shut The Door to Nowhere?" Inevitably I would reply, "No...Mom, did you shut The Door to Nowhere?" And so on. It would be several minutes before we would notice the questioning aspects of our interlocutors' gazes. We would try to explain, as best we could, our anomalous abode with its peculiar portal, all the while masking the alarm we felt at the flood and possible electrical fire that were sure to greet us upon our return. Thanks to the incongruous log-ends that protrude from the outer walls, Cotter and I would sometimes pretend we were rock climbers, scaling the house and collapsing breathless into my parents' room (although this sort of physical exertion lost its thrill swiftly, in my case), by way of The Door to Nowhere. Many a beloved pet has catapulted



gracefully through the air onto the grassy yard below. However, no one, neither man nor beast, has been hurt beyond repair. Now my dad is building a deck off of it. Perhaps this was his plan all along, but, no matter what it leads to, I'm afraid it can never be The Door to Somewhere. But while I'm on the subject of doors...

The door to my room is a bookshelf. One of the advantages of building your own house is you can make whatever the hell you want, and so, after watching some hokey British movie when I was ten or eleven, complete with, I seem to recall, a blond prince and secret passageways, I implored my father to create one for me (a passageway, that is). So he did. My ideal Bookshelf-Door, of course, would have been lined with gilt classics, and one of them, when pulled halfway, would initiate the mechanism to slide the door open to the tune of violinish mystery. The finished product is far more primitive; I push it, it opens. It's actually very practical. In fact, my mom is considering making all of our doors bookshelves, to accommodate, ahem, a certain inhabitant's growing obsession with Barnes & Noble.

The few social calls I was privileged to receive during my interesting adolescence were quite impressed by my door. Invariably, their initial response would go something like this: "Whoa, man, that is *so cool*. If an axe murderer came to your house, you could hide out in your room while he killed the rest of your family and he'd *never even* know you were there!" I'd muster up a bit of nervous laughter. Serial killers, in my opinion, are nothing to joke about in Danville RR1, where, after the sun goes down, the darkness takes no prisoners. But I take it in stride. "Yeah," I'd reply, copying their light-hearted tone, "*or*, we could all hide out in my room *together* and *nobody* would get murdered!"

I could go on; I could, indeed, go on a great deal. I've told you very little about the nighttime...the specters and carnivorous animals that haunt the dusky recesses of rural Pennsylvania. I haven't explained the precise circumstances surrounding my intense horror of Daddy-long-leg spiders or the time my mother, after searching in vain for a flashlight, sent me to the Back Field (the furthest extreme of our property, reached by way of the Holly-Woods) with nothing but a candle to seek out my runaway sibling. I haven't told you about the winds on the top of our hill or about the lightning rod activists who once, after knocking for ten minutes on our impenetrable door, growled portentously, "I guess we're not too late."

All of it leads back to my house. My parents find something amusing about living in the pseudo-nineteenth century. And although I act like a martyr whenever an opportunity presents itself, in some deep, hidden part of me,



I think finally get the joke. There are many things I love about my house as well. Consider my metal roof and the pleasure of a thunderstorm in spring-time, the rain beating like a locomotive o'er top my head.

I admit I did very little that summer. I was too young, and surly besides. My highfalutin ideas about the sawdust soon wore off, and I stomped angrily around the edifice I was quickly learning to loathe. My mother would not stand for it. One afternoon she stuck me in front of the cement mixer, gave me the formula I was to follow, looked at me with perfect gravity and said, "Rosanna, this may be the most important job of all. If you don't get the ingredients right, the entire house could be ruined. So you'd better shape up and do your share." I laughed devilishly to myself when she turned her back. Sabotage. One too many scoops of lime and this whole wretched enterprise would come tumbling down. It wasn't a bad idea, I thought, as I watched the thick, pebbly, mess go round and round. I held our future in my hands.

But, in the end (probably more out of fear of my mother's wrath if the house should, in fact, be affected by my recipe-flouting than any sort of filial obligation), I didn't do it.

Menino and His Sloth



Johnica Garrett



Little Spaces

Alexandra Chamberlain

It is as simple as the feeling of release  
When the rain finally comes  
In cool torrents with the dusk  
After a long afternoon of dry, dusty heat  
And sinister clouds;  
It is as ordinary as hot pavement under bare feet  
Or the feathers on a brown hen  
Or the smell of a clementine.  
What clockwork determines  
When and how  
To let the sky into your eyes,  
Earth into your soul?  
Comfort and clarity lie in the least likely places,  
Heaven and earth in little spaces.



*Kimberly Wirt*



Looped



