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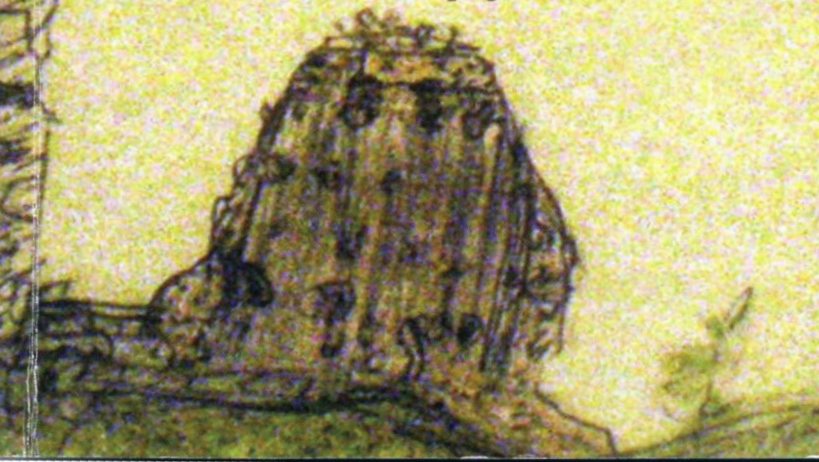
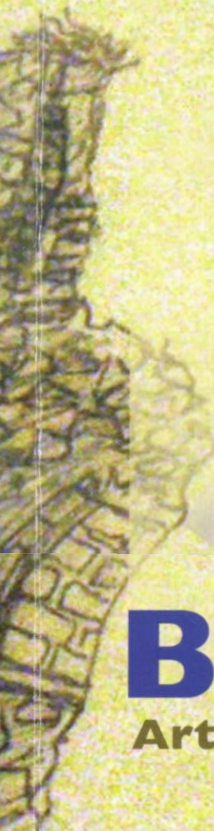
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Castroalbón.  
En las Minas de  
Cada, se encuentran  
familias, por lo



# Brushing

Art & Literary Journal



# Brushing

ROLLINS COLLEGE  
ART AND LITERARY JOURNAL  
VOLUME XXXIV, 2006

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## Editor's Note

A campus-wide literary journal has been part of the Rollins College tradition for many years in many incarnations, and I feel honored to be at the helm of publishing this year's edition of *Brushing*. Despite my immensely busy schedule, it was nothing less than a privilege to assist in offering a taste of the enlightened creativity that our student body has to offer.

I couldn't have been more delighted with the influx of submissions we received this year. Although judging the pieces was somewhat of a demanding task for the editors and myself, the alacrity with which Rollins students were willing to share their creative expressions made our exhaustive efforts worthwhile.

As always, the written submissions went above and beyond what we expected. With more and more talented writers and poets submitting each year, we become more engaged in the process of selecting exemplary pieces; this year was certainly no exception. We incorporated a new category, the Personal Essay, in efforts to broaden the scope of expressive arts. Our hope is to exemplify how resourceful and imaginative students at Rollins extend their inventiveness to more formalized means of written expression. If this category goes over well, it's my hope to incite more people to imbue an augmentative originality into works that may not necessarily fall within their perception of "creative writing."

We also received a profusion of art submissions from immensely gifted students. This year's entrants put forth works in all mediums, and I was truly inspired by the unique perspective that each artist presented. We had a difficult time narrowing down our selection this year, and I hope that the readers appreciate the exceptional works we've published.

I would like to thank the wonderfully astute *Brushing* staff for offering their critical talents and their discerning eyes; the faculty advisors, Dr. Nordstrom and Dr. Musgrave, for helping to get the ball rolling and allowing us our own measure of responsibility and creativity; and to all of you who took an interest by submitting your work, because your support enables *Brushing* to continue the tradition in the true spirit of creativity.

Faithfully,  
Genesis Whitlock

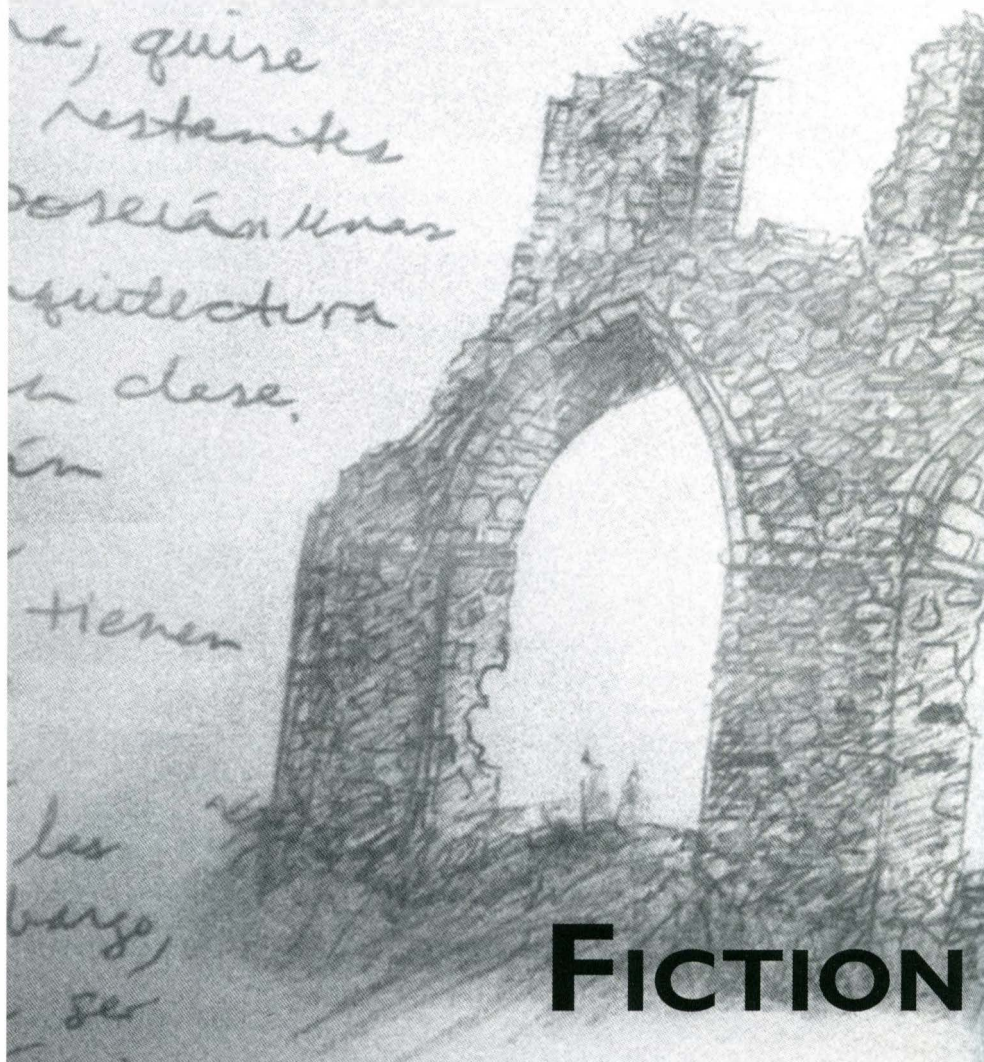


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**FICTION**

# The Jazz Vein

## Shaun Cricks

Just a pencil and paper;  
You don't need a gun or knife-  
A little old letter  
Can take a person's life.  
-L.H.

And when she changed, although just slightly, and in some ways that favored his darker intentions, it dramatically altered his view of her: With new behaviors--she again became one that required observation. An-other: Up until that point, for forever it had seemed, he had thought of them as one, without subjectivity. Her eyes his mirrors. This latest variation, a joiting reminder that he was, indeed, a man, and she a woman, both caught in the unrelenting sway of the metronome. Theirs was again a relationship. Maintenance required.



It's concrete, glass, eroded street brick,  
Lester Young deep in your brain.  
It's fruit stands and speakeasies,  
heroin killing the pain.

It's Dizzy's swol-len-God-like-jowls,  
drains and cock-a-roaches.  
It's trying to play like "The Pres,"  
splashed by motor coaches.

It's the clankin' modal whole tones of Monk,  
a job washing the dishes.  
It's listnin' in on Bud Powell from the kitchen,  
and wonderin' what that piece is.

It's Lady Day's blue note masquerade,  
but using the back door:  
It's Oscar Pettiford walkin' him home,  
the siren call of whores.

This  
is his  
setting.



Charlie had loved Iris since the first time she stuck her tongue out at him in their second grade class. She had played him a raspberry. His first serenade. To Charlie, she was a cross section of all that was delicious in the world. A mouth watering slice of life. And throughout their days in and out of elementary, middle, and high school, the streets and alleys with their quarreling poor; they had become so close that Charlie could no longer distinguish the flavor of her love from his own.



The pulsing light from the lamp on 125th Street and 12th Ave. The implosion of her pupils. Thick black night air dotted by thick white flakes. White tourists. The static of 1940's Harlem. Time pauses. Angel eyes turn to Venus. She tilts her head back and makes a large O of her mouth, then sticks out her tongue to form a Q.

An inch above her open mouth, the snowflakes meet her heat. There, they are converted to droplets of water that pause, then splash into her mouth. The cool water soothing swollen vocal cords. Soothing strange fruits. Iris removes her tight black pumps. Feet and soles now unbound. Nylon webs straining street slush. And just as she has done each night since she won the Club talent contest, she giggles at herself, skipping to the station barefoot and grinnin'. & 1&2& 1&2&.



Is this the right night rhythm?



It had been a great thrill to be "discovered," to win that first contest her girlfriends had begged her to enter, although they had never heard her sing. Charlie had never allowed it before. But every night since, she would serenade strangers, loaning her syncopation and range to black-tied boozers bending behind cigars, and their trophies slinking behind dirty martinis. She seemed, to them, a siren. But what no one knew, not even Charlie really, was that every note, every scat, every wail, was for performed just for him. If she could have had one wish, it would have been, for her tones to continue out the cracks of the club doors, to 125th street and up to their 3rd story apartment window, to ease the needle from his hand, and pick the shards from his heart.



A Harlem lullaby.



Red blood  
White breath  
Blue moon  
Black fate



3 am. Musty, whiskey, room. Small worlds of manuscript paper lying balled on the floor. In the basket. On the desk. Each a discarded universe. Worlds scratched. Unfiltered Camel smoke rising from his mouth, silver strands twisting like fingers around his ears, then spiraling away along tight black curls. Seeking a hole in the wall. Finding one. He places the cigarette back in the tin ashtray and loosens his tie just enough to slip it over his head and down around his wrist and up his arm. A motion that has become ritual. A squeeze above the bicep. Return cigarette to lips. Deep inhale. Then, a tightening of the tourniquet. Retract the syringe. A quick bloodletting while the camel smokes itself in tin ashtray. In cut time.



This is why I never let you come to hear me sing, baby. This is why.  
Small tears trailing from swollen eyes.  
Two of the overstuffed door thugs had grabbed Charlie under his elbows and were carrying him, reeling and twisting, through the artificial palms and mirrored halls to the door in the back. The door that one didn't want to be carried in-to or out-of, for any reason.  
No one treats you like that  
No one but you, right? Everyone treats me like that. I just make sure you ain't here to see it. And that puts food in your loud mouth.  
The guy that Charlie had cracked in the head with the bottle, the guy who, just a split second before, had grabbed Iris' ass during her closing number, now lay in a pool of his own quietly throbbing blood. Red that was blue till it hit the air. Blue till it was free. Two three piece suits leaned over him, hands fumbling golden watches in pockets.  
Get him outa here.  
What the Fuck?  
Do something!  
We'll clean this up, but I've had enough of him. Your 'Lover Man' is a fuckin' idiot. I want his Cabaret Card.  
Charlie honey, tell him it won't happen again.  
It won't-  
Heard it before..I want his card.



Cotton Club, Birdland ... it was these shiny, fancy joints he did not miss. But the White Rose, Onyx, The Sugar Cane, Minton's—this was exile—this was hell.



3 AM, splintered window  
panes framing his world.

Street lamp stares  
through a silver threaded fog.

true confessions then  
tongue to thigh  
crocheted fishnet fantasies  
a stiff wet reed

She is not with him now.

Her view; un-  
splintered.

She is dancing  
on the dewdrops.

She is weaving  
a dream web tapestry

where truth marries fiction,  
which penetrates everything,

even the street lamp's silver tinted stare.



Ain't no use in cry in' babe, got to write it in a song.  
Ain't no use in cry in' babe, got to write it in a song.  
But if that ink it keeps a bleed in'  
I'll be re-write in' all night long.



Iris pulls her pomegranate lips from his. Caramel smack.  
You sang almost as sweet as you taste tonight, baby.  
You ain't so bad yourself.  
She wipes a bead of sweat from his brow and a trace of powder from below his nose.  
Come home with me tonight, Iris. Let's make more music together:  
But what about Charlie!  
Look baby, one monkey don't stop no show.  
No, you look, baby. You play the ivory, I sing the melody. I done told you, I love you,  
but I got Charlie. So words as far as it goes. You well aware a that.  
So you goin' on home to that no-account husband, even after..  
Good night, Gene.  
For him, maybe. Until tomorrow, angel.





Despite the pain, however; despite the cymbals crashing in his ears, despite the pounding bass behind his eyes, Charlie cherished Iris. He still would have waded a mile through the sweat of the NY summer afternoon, simply to stand in her cool, black shadow. To rest in her rhapsody. And even then, when, her love for another man surfaced on the beige note, even then, when, he resented even the curl of her lips, Charlie would have done anything he could have to have kept himself from killing her the following evening



Another empty glass.



As passionate as Charlie and Iris both were about each other, as deeply as they felt that their partnership was predestined, that they were designed with the other in mind, as convinced as they were that marriage was inevitable, as deeply as he had probed his eyes and mind into hers and knowing that he could have, and the thousands of opportunities that had presented themselves throughout the years, they had still agreed to wait until the night of their senior prom to make love. The brush of the back of arms, a kiss on the cheek. A lifetime of pretense and foreplay. Shaky palms pouring into crushed velvet. Gravity battling her hand during circular slow dances. A sweating suit. The smell of basketballs and perfume. Charlie had the evening well planned, so just after they stuck their good kids pose for the obligatory prom photos he took her behind the stage, grabbed her waist firm and kissed her mouth gently. Tracing her O with the tip of his tongue. Then, sliding his hand down into hers, he took her fingers and lead her out of the emergency exit, out of the gymnasium, and out into Harlem night. A clear, perfect, prom night. A walk to the river through sunset's hues where conversation bounced counter melodies. Classic, like Bach, but with swing. Charlie marveled at the tiny hairs on the back of her neck dancing to the rhythm of his breath. By the time they had finished their stroll on the river, she was more than ready for him, and he, being ready, and as hard as patience, was having difficulty in walking now at all.



hot tongue curls  
saffron & pearls  
teasing hair twirls  
saffron & pearls  
and the saxophone bays at the moon

black plunger growls  
saffron & pearls  
passerby scowls  
saffron & pearls  
and then the trumpet paints it all blue



The insertion of a key. Tumblers align and give way. Footsteps, dance steps, and giggles. Charlie had rented the room for the night, and planned to maximize every moment. He wanted to be warm in her; she to be filled. A city of candles. Playful kisses, smacks. He started with her forehead, her precious mind, kissing down to her lobes and neck. Then, he laid her down, in slow motion. Hands trembling, struggling to unbutton confidently. He traced the curve of her shoulder to her clavicle with the lightest touch of his fingertip. Smack. His finger spiraled up and around her cotton breasts, lightly twisting at their peaks. He tasted her cotton candy. Charlie had heard, on the streets, that the first time can be painful for a virgin, so when he did finally enter her, after many more tickles and smacks and rolls and rubs, his hips moved in only the smallest of increments. And as gentle and romantic as he was, as much as he held back in order to keep from hurting her, despite the tones of pleasure moans floating from her instrument at the time, later, in the bathroom, he saw red. He washed, and returned to their bed, leaning over to kiss her: Tears dropped from his eyes. He had failed her: Had hurt her: Iris opened wide and caught his tears. Salty absolution. You make me feel so good, Charlie. I love you. I'm sorry, baby, I'm sorry. I'm not.



Sunset's red and orange hues  
to candlelight their walk  
Sunset long before their blues  
The lullaby of talk

Ice Cream dripping down her hand  
to elbow soft and young  
Harlem River's musky band  
caught on tip of tongue

Prom Night's best-pressed-tailored-suit  
A borrowed velvet gown  
Juices run from stranger fruit  
All over Harlem town



But some nights bear the blues. And one particular Harlem night in January brought a chill so cold, that it, combined with the discovery of a little old letter that he was never supposed to see, managed to freeze the energy between them. A cold set in that was so extreme; the be-bopping friction of atoms between them, which once had produced a burning heat, stopped cold. Bone draggin' cold.



Charlie had always been resigned to sharing her with the world. Almond eyes, Christmas bough mouth, absolving laugh. These things he could not, and did not, attempt to hoard. Then he knew when he was powerless. These were a field of wildflowers pushing their way through the clouds. These were the worlds. It was her light night velvet melodies he coveted most. The New York streets could riot, the Empire State building fall to the ground. As long as that lullaby voice lifted him up at night, in their bed, he would fold his arms behind his head while he drifted above it all. A refuge in blue notes.



Staccato.



The creak of an old wooden door echoed by sagging floorboards. He is startled from his preternatural purple haze. Eyes synchronize. Two smoking barrels that could blow her goddamn head off.

Hey, Charlie, baby.

Where you been so long?

She bows to wipe the crust from his lips and kisses him. She is brown sugar.

Who was at the club with you?

Just me and you, boo.

That's my girl. Come here.

He pats his sweat soaked lap. She sits.

Listen, Charlie, I'm not gonna be home till real late tomorrow. Gene and me, we got us a party to sing at on Long Island. Long Island.

But-

They gonna pay us a hundred dollars a piece. For one night.

But that's-

I know, our anniversary. But a hundred dol-

What you doin' for that money?

Sing-in'.

What else?

What you mean what else?

I'm goin' with you. I'll stay, and play. What a deal. The Bird, for free. I don't need no Cabaret card to play there. It ain't no cabaret, is it, baby?

No boo. And no. You can't go.

I'm goin'.

No. It's a white party. I'm sorry, but no, you can't go.



Where's King Kong when you need him?



The smoke from his joint and his cigarette hold different frequencies. They rise and fall in the air, up and down the scales. Seeking resolution from their dissonance. Lifted by the vibrato of breath. Carried away by rhythm. Both do, however, hold the same color patterns. While burning, in an ashtray, or his lips, they would produce grey smoke, with blue tint. During inhalation, Charlie reasoned, the blues were absorbed into the body, resulting in a purer, greyer exhale. Once Charlie made this discovery he smoked as often as his body could.



The agony of artistry. Becoming the blues. The Jazz vein.



It is here, where the black meets the blue. Here, in the rush of the pin prick, in a strained metaphor: In the unholy apparition of bruised veins. Here, in an old rocking chair that his father made for his mother, that Iris would find Charlie, the nights that she sang at the Club. She would find him always in the very same pose: one eye rolled back in his head in bliss, the other, more restless and jealous eye, red and half open and aimed at the door. Arms falling to the floor at his sides. Crucified. Tonight was no exception.



That night when they lay together, there was no pretense. No foreplay. No grace notes. No kissing. What was present, that night in their bed, Charlie would later refer to as making love. Iris found it hard to view such acts as love. The deep purple bruises he left on her wrists and shoulders and thighs and calves would never, sadly, have time to heal. Slap. And that night when he held her down, and entered her, he did so for the first time ever with intent to inflict pain. Smack. That somehow his cock would swell up wide enough with his rage that it would tear her apart. Smack. That maybe if he lifted her legs high enough into the air, and if he forced himself way up into her, through her intestines, piercing her stomach and her brain. Maybe her blood would wash him clean. For the first time in his life he wanted to hurt her, bad. He desired, that night, in fact, to fuck his love to death. And he almost did. Smack.



Tenuto.



It is not the Charlie that she is afraid of, it is his disease. A disease that, in fact, that she carries in her purse from time to time. And since that first time he teased her about her bony knees, and she liked it, she knew they belonged together. The times she cherished most with him now seemed without refrain. Late nights burned. Smoked and sweated. But her voice was a lullaby, that she cast into the air, a satin patchwork word tone quilt, that drifted in 3/4 time, over to fall, and swaddle them whenever she sang.



She can pass for white.



Dark man descending darker stairs. Confronting the blinding brilliance of bright white day. This is not his hour. These are not his days. And soon, these will no longer be his charts, his melodies, or his blues. This is, his ass, sittin' on the back of the bus, being carried across the tracks to midtown, where creatively starving young white musicians, salivate. His pain their profit. This now, is how he supports pricey habits, delivering along with each chart, some packets. Mmmm- China White. The itch is awakened in Charlie now, it begins at the point of entry, then yawns, and uncurls its thousands of tentacles, which sting up into his brain. Scratch scratch. His disease requires medicine. His disease has required a lot of him lately. And right now, his disease is screaming for the fucking bus to speed up and get him to his appointment. Where he can stop the I-tch.



Iris Lies, stretched on her side, on a grand piano. Gene's glossy grin a mirror of his keys. Around them; the crystal tap of toasts, white pearls, fox furs, Cabernet. Diamonds. Inside: the envy of their hosts, other worlds, his are hers, put away. Old Friends. They are synchronized. He plays her emotions and, in turn, she sings his angst. For he desires more. Much more. Gene would, if he could, with the back of his arm, sweep all of the aristocrats out of the room, through the patio doors and onto the lawn, and simultaneously, with the other; he would scoop Iris up and bring her to his chest. Then, he would stand, head smashing through crystal chandeliers and up, up, up through the roof of the house. Now as big as his frustration, he could smash the rest of the walls away, and hold tight to Iris, pressed up against his giant chest. Next he could carry her away into the ocean, while taking great care not to squeeze out Iris' chewy-gooey center as he stomps on cars and kicks over telephone and electric poles. But he cannot. And when the set is over, when he is snapped out of his fantasy by that familiar wink and the cessation of her sweet vibrato, he wants to keep on playing. For her; however; the party is over; and It's time to catch the train back home. Stay with me. Here. Tonight. There's an extra room for us, and it's four o'clock. Catch the train home with me, Gene, that was the deal. Ok baby, let's go.



An Accelerando.





Train's steel wheels crushing the skins on the back of the tracks. 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4.  
 1 2. Charlie and the car he has stolen lie as silent as the tracks he has parked on. He  
 improvises a melody as the crossover gets closer:  
 When that freight train gets here, you know that I'll be dead and gone.  
 Oh, When that freight train gets here, you know that I'll be dead and gone...  
 Then, from the corner: the flash of brass. The punch of a snare. Swing. It's then he sees,  
 under the trees, the street lamp halo and a Jazz night trio. Rubbing red eyes. Rubbing  
 itchy red eyes. Then reopen. There, before Charlie, is Louis Armstrong on horn, who  
 bows to Charlie and begins to jam. Then, the image changes, as Louis becomes  
 Coleman Hawkins, who takes the line. God knows who that is on drums.  
 The squealing of a car door. Footsteps on frozen soil. Charlie approaches his oasis.  
 Coleman Hawkins becomes Roy Eldridge. On piano, piano? it's Earl Hines -no- Art  
 Tatum -no- Teddy Wilson -no- Thelonious Monk, and Herbie Hancock with a Cheshire  
 grin. Coleman Hawkins changes into Miles Davis into Chic Corea. 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4. 1 2.  
 The gathering of the collective consciousness. Charlie leans like a hunchback in front  
 of them all, sweating and heaving. Lester leaps. John Coltrane steps forward. He pauses,  
 then hands Charlie his sax.  
 Play this, dig? We need you, Bird. We need you. 1234 1234 1234. 12.  
 Charlie brings sax to his mouth. A stiff wet reed.  
 1234 1234 1234 12. Charlie's tone spirals free like a genie bursting from a brass lamp.  
 Genie dissolves into fireflies and lights the night jazz sky. Charlie bays to blue moon  
 and builds a melody to accompany the chords of the horn of the passenger train  
 returning from Long Island. Steel wheels grappling at frozen track. Contact.  
 Derailment. Shriill screams and black smoke. Charlie plays on, tall and free.  
 Born-again-Be-bop-baptized.



Ritardando.



The Negro  
 With a trumpet at his lips  
 Whose jacket  
 Has a fine one- button roll  
 Does not know  
 Upon what riff the music slips  
 Its hypodermic needle  
 To his soul  
 -L.H.



\*please note that the two poems labeled (-L.H.) are sampled from previously published poems  
 by Langston Hughes.

# She Had Often Gone Without Him

Leigh Lowry

I ran faster than her, because I could. I heard her short, rapid strides pounding the fresh cemetery grass, trying to catch me, her black Mary Janes sliding on the damp morning ground. I laughed because I was winning. She shrieked, pleading with me to slow down.

Behind us, a collection of gloomy adults huddled above an old grave, hunched and hopeless. Timory and I could only take their game of loss and longing for so long before the wide cemetery distracted us. We waited for that somber nod, that signal we could. Sprinting past the older, crumbling tombstones to the newer metal markers, the cleaner looking ground, I ran straight for a row of graves. Timory cried for me to wait, wait for her. But I had to get there first. Leaping over the imagined boundaries that held the dead - two, three, four in a row - I heard her plead with me. "Slow down, Christopher! Don't step on them. They'll haunt you forever!"

Past the double graves, husband and wife, ashes to ashes together forever. Past the single graves, lonely souls. No one to keep them company, even now. Past the rows of entire families, children lost to house fires and car accidents before they could walk. We would wander among these graves slowly as we walked back to our family, hesitating until our names erupted harshly from their throats. We never even looked at the ones they spent time with, and since we didn't respect their game they wouldn't respect ours. She was trying her hardest to catch up to me, but she was younger and in a dress and I always won.

We knew children were intimidated by cemeteries, by the dead; by huge iron gates and faded fabric flowers. But the buried bodies never asked anything of us and it was all a game, we were never scared. There was a lack of judgment among the graves and it pulled us in deeper, made us run harder. We flew with the pent-up energy of a long Sunday service and had to get to her.

I sprinted past the vast woods we were not allowed in, where Timory would linger and imagine movement among the tangled branches. Trees here never had any leaves, we assumed because their roots were wrapped around the coffins and had absorbed the death. I followed my memorized path to our favorite grave, in the back row under the empty limbs, and patiently knelt by the shiny bronze nameplate. I watched her face move across the dewed landscape, both glistening in the morning sun. Timory would never admit that she was too slow, but would always complain that I was too fast, screeching it at me while she gasped and flailed. She lined the toes of her shiny shoes up with the edge of metal she had worked so hard for. The headstone had a locket-style picture on it, passive and fascinating.

"Open it," Timory ordered, and I quickly lifted the tiny door.

She dropped to her knees to get a better look, the girl's face memorized but always fresh. Timory told me she must have been a model. Or a beauty queen. Everyone loved her; you know. They still do, see the flowers? So pretty.

Young and easily exhumed, she was kind of like us. Not like old people, not like putting a bag of unfamiliar wrinkles in the ground. She would never decompose, would always be beautiful in her Glamour Shots soft portrait, stiff red hair still attempting to blow in a breeze and her lips permanently parted in a pout of seventeen-year-old temptation. I assumed that was how she looked at the moment of her death and during her funeral, edges fuzzy and wrapped in angora.

Sitting on the grass, we looked back towards our relatives on the far end by the entrance, seeing just how much distance we covered and barely noticing the

figures that stood unsure around the gates. I watched Timory's profile, the weak blonde wisps around her pale forehead like a brittle, wavering halo as her eyes passed over the concealed corpses, rotting beneath lush lawn and epitaphs. The ground swelled with them in the sunlight – the cancer patients, brain aneurisms, failed livers, broken hearts. So many opportunities for death to take you out, and here we were. Living and breathing, with no effort at all. How easy it was, to live, and they had all failed. That cemetery was huge and full of failures.

Timory stood up and grinned down at me, revealing the gaps left by recently lost teeth. She was ready to race to the next one and it was her turn to win.

I walked into her house my first day back and they were all there waiting, occupying every inch of upholstery cleared of dust and food stains in my honor: They hovered in loose circles sipping from white Styrofoam cups, held sentry by the wide glass door and boxy kitchen windows looking for me. They waited for me to walk through the door before grabbing the bright, plastic plates and converging on the fried feast that dripped from the dining room table. The ham had already been picked at by sharp, peach-polished fingernails.

They had congregated to celebrate me, but my return luckily coincided with the date of another viewing, and we would be leaving for the funeral home after lunch. "Four years is a long time, son. I'm glad I made it longer than Buster. Got to see it. He woulda liked ta." Uncle Marlon smiled at me, empty gums shining in the lamplight. He taught us how to shoot birds when I was seven and Timory had whined about how I got to go first, it was her backyard and all. She cried when I finally shot one and raced into the trees wailing while Uncle Marlon chased after her: I could hear the hollow sobs and heavy boots as I approached the lifeless animal and poked it with the barrel of the gun. Timory's shrieks, rapid shouts, and I began to cry too. I had already learned to keep quiet, but it took her a while. We would bury my casualty in the woods later on and count the steps from that spot to her door so we would never forget where to find it.

They settled into the ancient couches and easy chairs with mountains of food on their laps, commending me and reminiscing about Uncle Buster: I didn't have anything to add, and they wouldn't really have listened to me. I was their pride, but I was not one of them. Everything they celebrated – my ambition, my momentum – invalidated my connections with them. I talked to everyone, smiled and nodded, did everything I was supposed to, and they said they were so happy to have me back. I was the brains. I was courageous. I was what they raised me to be. And since I did everything right, I was nonexistent. I hide behind my good behavior, important and invisible. And then we saw Timory pass outside the sliding glass door, walking away from us towards the gray trees. Her head was down and matted hair hid her profile. I had a clear view of her stiff frame and broad shoulders from the couch, sucked into the limp cushions between Aunt Babe and Aunt Stell.

"Stell – there she goes." Aunt Babe motioned towards the glass with her fork, dripping ranch salad dressing on the brown carpet.

Aunt Stell raised her pencil-drawn eyebrows, astonished. "I didn't see her come downstairs! Lord help her!"

"I tell you what!"

"Lord help her!"

I smiled to show the women I understood, then excused myself and headed towards the door. Timory's figure had stopped by the old vegetable garden, now a cold rectangle of bare brown dirt. She seemed so far, the only person I had wanted to see and the only one who avoided me. The wind lifted the edge of her snarled hair, displaying the red tip of a pointed ear. Had she been lurking outside since everyone

started showing up, scowling and avoiding their fake smiles? She could so easily have come inside and gotten me. I heard them whisper behind me.

"Whatta nice boy. After all she done, still tryin ta get on with that girl?"

"Lord help her:" I could hear the gooey mixture of corn and barbecue sauce on top of Aunt Stell's tongue.

The door was collaged with greasy fingerprints, and I took care to open it with the handle and shut it without slamming it. The air was wholesome and penetrating; I was so heavy with that house - the faded yellow wallpaper smelled of hairspray and burnt sausages, the tan linoleum glared at me and curled with age. It had all deteriorated before our time; I remember nothing new as they do. They still talked to me like I was sitting at the kiddie table, blowing bubbles in my chocolate milk to make Timory laugh. We listened to them speak and only heard words we would never understand, never wanted to. The sounds that erupted from them always startled us, disappointing like exhaustion. They hung their heads in exaggerated grief, coughed with false laughter, and Timory and I ran from them to desolate open spaces where the bodies were invisible and didn't try to trick us.

She stood at the undetectable line that separated yellow yard from damp forest, suddenly so tall and tangle. Ignoring me. My steps were loud, crunching delicate leaves beneath them, but I reached her side unacknowledged and couldn't stop grinning. Her silence was her treachery, had been for so long now, but it never bothered me. She held her breath and stared at the tress while I scanned her pursed mouth, colorless cheeks. Please, Timory, welcome me home.

"They was talkin 'bout me. You walked out here 'cause they was talkin."

Her voice was so sluggish and hushed, a drowsy statement made only because she was finally exhaling.

"I was looking for you. Where were you?"

She sighed again and rolled her eyes. I knew she had missed me then, angry she had thought of me so much.

"I guess - well, you can hide in the woods with me for a while."

"Hide."

"Hm."

"You mean from them?"

She was growing impatient, anxious to be out of sight. I watched the muscles in her crossed arms tensing and my biceps tightened. Her crooked teeth slid into a grind and my tongue was tight against my palate, my jaw would not relax. I was holding her back.

"If you want." She walked forward, leaving me alone in the yard. I could feel their eyes, hear their speculations about what I would do next.

I waited for a shout of encouragement, a "Come'on, Christopher!" to draw me in among the hazy branches. But I only heard her fading steps and ran the short distance it took to catch up. I wanted so much to push her; jar her arms apart, to send her off balance when I was beside her again. I knew she wouldn't talk to me until I could no longer see the house over my shoulder, and she never looked over hers.

Timory brushed a knotted chunk of hair from her face, tucking it behind her tiny ear with grimy fingernails. I thought of the wrenchingly floral perfume her mother wore, the scent preceding the scrape of bargain leather heels against the driveway as she walked to our front door on a Sunday morning. Timory trailed behind in her pressed pink dress with the steadfast grass stains, rubbing a stale yellow bruise on her arm.

She displayed no sign of interest in my presence now, but she knew where she was going and had a purpose I was eager to be a part of. She was so at ease and

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silent, moving like I was not there. I felt unnecessary and finally spoke, only to hear noise. Just like one of them.

"So-uh. How's stuff?" I sounded condescending and ridiculous, like I was dumbing myself down for her; and became very, very afraid of her reaction.

She didn't say anything. We walked on and on and she didn't say anything, didn't look at me like she hadn't seen me in years, didn't even move her mouth or her head and I was suddenly calmed. I would have lost all sense of myself if I had come home to find Timory suddenly genial and caring. I was the good one. If she was suddenly nice, what would that make me?

I laughed, because she made me feel so awkward and it was comforting.

"I just asked you to walk with me." She snapped, like a sick animal hissing as you tried to help it.

"I know. But I missed you."

She abruptly stopped walking, the mazy woods silent without our footsteps. We stood separated by intricate forest and I turned my head to see her finally looking back, confronting me with hard, thirsty eyes. The hollow skin around them shone with apathy, and I wondered what she did to fill her time. What she was doing before she passed the sliding glass door. She looked like she knew drastic secrets, like how to burn the forest down. Acne scars lined her cheekbones like indented embarrassment. Her blonde eyebrows were faint on her flat face, and the cleft on her chin would have been intimidating if she were a man. But it just stood out on a face so jaggedly feminine, like a crack on white porcelain or a brown petal on a clean flower. Her choppy blonde hair fell forward again, and I thought about faceless squirrels, hit by cars and all bushy tail.

"You should have come to Boston, you know. I really wanted you to." She rolled her eyes. She always looked like she was concentrating on what to say next, preparing to defend herself. But she kept her lips pressed and lifted a scarred knee.

I had delivered that line so many times that day, each time a lie to brighten a tired, sagging face. It was so rehearsed and processed and sounded the same now, the one time it was true. I so badly wanted to be responsible for Timory's awakening, to save her; to fix it all. I knew I could do it, I thought it out so many times: Timory arriving at my dorm in her painfully ancient car; looking her typical style of alienated. Being dragged to every bar; party, and philosophy class. Dancing. My girlfriend taking her shopping, doing her make-up, teaching her social theory and how to beguile. Suddenly, she knew Latin. Suddenly, she was graceful. She lit up rooms and had ideas and was sleeping with all of my friends, blatantly using them, confident and supple. Leaving Boston and smiling. She would thank me. But now she was looking at me like I had wounded her again.

"Some of us can't drop everythin for you."

You think she would have been grateful. I wanted to help her. I gave her a chance to get out and was the only one who ever would.

"Well maybe next year. Think about coming to New York."

"So you are goin. To that – grad school."

"Yeah."

"Hm." She was indifferent. Anywhere I went, I wasn't there anymore.

I looked at the ground and moved closer to her; so as we walked my elbow grazed her sleeve. She reinstated the distance between us. What the hell did she want, anyway? I could fix everything for her if she would just-

"So think about driving up to New York." I lifted my face to look at her profile, again hidden by the swing of dirty hair; and sliced the edge of my forehead on the end of a sharp twig, heard the wood snap. "I know you've never been." I rubbed my face to rid it of tree, the cut stinging. "You should."

She sighed. Timory hated being told there were things people should do, like talk gently to old people and children or bathe. Even worse, she hated being told there were things people should not do, like grimace or act superior.

We had reached the creek that had been our old boundary, the one we were never to pass by order of adults and always did. My forehead throbbed. We stepped across it in one stride, and Timory's voice mingled with the placid drip of the water:

"Member? When we followed this all the way 'round? An' thought we had found a new town, but really went the wrong way and were back to the house again."

She was playing my game and I smiled at her. She couldn't sit still back then. One of them was always hovering around us when we were inside, putting a hand on her shoulder to press her tightly into a chair, then a knuckle against the side of her knee to close her energetic little legs. They were the ones that kept her in dresses, I had thought, why did it matter how she sat in them? Fidgeting in the stiff church pews, on the sagging orange couch, she was always moving her hands and swinging her feet, audibly plotting until someone told her to behave. Then came her frustrated whine, so memorized and predictable, just like the small talk they gave each other but friendlier on my tiny ears. Her defense began before she even spoke, with that silent syllable prior to the screeching. For that moment I felt uncomfortable, like that pause was there for me to fill. Like I wasn't doing what she needed. I wanted to protect her and apologize for her; I wanted them to leave her alone. They were talking to her, but I always shared the words just like I shared everything else.

"Yeah."

And even though I ran faster, it was always she that led. Timory created the games, I just bested her at them. Her misdirected energy made the time seem like rebellion, and I always felt like we were doing something wrong. She lacked the bravery to be reckless, but had enough sense to know they couldn't like the things she did because they were hers. I didn't notice she stopped defending herself until she was avoiding me too, in the distance with her head down.

She stopped walking and blocked my path, so I was stationary and startled just beyond the rocky creek bed. I could hear the water fighting its way through, independent and unhelped.

"You're bleedin." She lifted her left hand to the cut and pressed her thumb against it, absorbing the blood. I felt infected.

"Thanks." I lifted my own hand to cover the scratch, hide it so she wouldn't touch me again. She ran her hand through her hair and I watched my blood on her thumb as it moved past her ear:

"Um. When was the last time you saw Uncle Buster?" I asked, checking my fingertips. They were blank and bloodless but caked in her:

"Went to the hospital."

"Oh. How's Aunt Ruth? She wasn't inside."

She snorted. "Aunt Ruth died. Two years ago."

My mouth dropped with guilty surprise.

"It don't matter. I wouldn't know who was still around if I hadn't watched them all die."

Her callousness made my shoulders weak, and then there was a road. I didn't remember ever walking so far that we came to a road before, and maybe we hadn't, as child-sized legs and attention spans only carry you so far. I hesitated with the last of the last of the trees, but Timory continued ahead of me to the dead center of the smooth dirt. She turned her greasy head in each direction and I could see dimples littering her thighs where skirt met flesh. Inflated blue veins crisscrossed the backs of her knees and the red, flaky patches on the loose skin above her elbows made my

upper arms itch. I forced my hands into my pockets and imagined a screaming truck shooting from my peripheral vision into her, separating her into coarse chunks of flesh, launching her wrecked body into the frail arms of the tall trees. I would bury her in the woods and count my steps home.

"You don't know where we are, do you?" She called, abruptly eager and composed.

"No."

Timory looked back at me and I shook my head. She silently uncrossed her arms, then turned in the dirt and followed the road up a high hill. She led me, hunched over and breathing heavily while I thought of them chewing and mumbling and looking at the bare fireplace back in the crowded living room. Preparing to leave. Waiting on us. I tried to place this road in my memory, unable to imagine what she would consider worth her effort.

And then I saw rows of rounded, grey stone mingling with evenly spaced metal rectangles on the decaying lawn. A black metal gate, rusted and always open. It spread before us on top of the hill, hushed and crowded with the shadows of creaking trees. I hadn't been there since just before my high school graduation, when my mother drove me to my family straight from school, insisting I tell everyone where I was going and thank them. I didn't mind, by then I felt constantly propelled by the energy of being very nearly gone. Timory had been hunched and curled so long, her face stiff and dismissive when I managed to catch it.

I was related to everyone around me in some twisted fashion, some marriage or line of genealogy or decrepit friendship that made me recognize a name that stared at me, unfocused and unassuming. Timory should have stayed in the woods. There was no place to hide from them here.

I walked straight ahead and scanned the voiceless hills for Uncle Buster's fresh grave. A crumbled mountain of fresh dirt stood beside the vacancy, softly bleeding into the harsh grass. I walked to it, the dark hole deepening with my approach until I could see the bottom, smell the warm earthworms and tears. Timory moved with me and continued walking to the other side of the rigid gap.

Squinting in the unforgiving sunlight, she seemed translucent. If I stood at the correct angle I'd see everything on the other side of her as if looking through a filthy lens. She met my eyes and I felt rushed, like we were about to be berated and there was no hope of excuse. I threw a handful of bland dirt at her feet and she looked like she would push me in.

"Come on," she said, turning away.

I followed her to an empty headstone, a loose pile of sun-bleached flowers strewn nearby, lifted by the wind. She lined up her toes with its edge. Beside them, the tiny hinged oval was spotted with rust, like a drowning victim's locket ebbing towards Timory's feet.

"Open it," she demanded. She crossed her arms again and I bent my rigid knees.

The metal door clicked against the line of dates and Timory blinked, ends of her hair blown into her eyes.

"I feel like we should pray for her." Her words were clear and dry.

"You pray?"

"Nah. But I would. For her."

I laughed. "Why?" The unflinching dead girl stared at us, persistent and charming.

Timory looked to me and smiled. Her lips were thin and her teeth, yellow.

# Fruits of Much Grief

Fay Pappas

He is four years old. His father has asked him to go and bring back a sack of rice. Why a four-year-old boy would be asked to do such a thing and how it is possible that such a child could do this have little to do with the known fact that he has left his father's general store and is now walking down the street to the rice dealer. It is early afternoon. The burning rays of the sun have yet to extinguish the lives of rain puddles formed in the ruts of the red clay street. The rare August rain shower that formed them left two hours ago, but aided by the amount it poured down from the mountains on this coastal town and the lingering high humidity; the puddles keep on living.

Of course, a four year old does not consider the reasons for; but accepts the existence of. He leaps from puddle to puddle. He had seen his older sister do it two days before. Then the town was inundated by the heaviest rain shower this season; even rarer than the one aforementioned; two days ago it was July.

His fat mother had disappeared, and in her place were two preoccupied female neighbors who had a habit of rushing from one task to the other. They must have been neurotics. The only times they would recognize the existence of the little urchins were when they seemed about to jump to their death from a window or bolt out a door destined never to return, regardless of whether either might have been a good twenty feet from even a mouse hole.

"Let's go and see," was all his sister had said. He had first resisted, mutely but firmly shaking his head. Out there were beasts and devils. Out there were terrible pixies who gave you feet as flat as a shovel for just looking at them. Out there was the woman who stuffed little boys she caught in large hemp sacks and threw them in the river. Out there death never really happened; just really bad things while you were alive. And this seemed worse.

So he resisted, but his sister was twice his height and had a strong grip on his bony wrist. He reasoned that if she could get him in trouble for stealing the Christmas walnuts (the walnuts that their mother had diligently been saving so that the family could have their holiday cookies in the winter) which she herself took, then she could beat him up then and there. Smart boy. So the sister led him to the back of the house where there was an abandoned dresser with a well-used washbasin atop it and above that a curtained window; it was now latched but not bolted. The three-foot high dresser proved to be like a mountain to the boy, but just a mole-hill to the girl. Once she had pulled herself up on the right end of it, she squatted down on top of the dresser and steadily, with palms opened outward, pushed the basin carefully to the left. In the storm's darkness the splashing dirty water in the basin looked like burgundy holiday soup, stee-fa-though, with the floating pieces of their mother's homemade soap standing in for the venison cuts and its bubbly residue for the virgin olive oil in the crock-pot.

She had made just enough room on top of the dresser for her little brother. Thinking ahead, the girl stealthily lifted the small stick that held the two wooden plank shutters close to one another, unleashing the thunderous sound of the rain and the rush of the wind. She lost her grasp of the stick and it hit the ground with a clatter. The shutters, happy to be free of each other's company, began to rattle and bang against the wall they missed so much.

Sensing they had little time left until they were discovered, the sister extended her hand out to her brother, thinking she could grab him by the front of his shirt and hoist him up like a rag doll onto the dresser. She couldn't remember then exactly where she had gotten this idea, but I can tell you it was from catching a glimpse of a movie screen as a toddler set up in the town square by the Italian soldiers. It was a last treat before, as they knew in their starving bellies, they would be retreating, but retreating to what?

Her brother recoiled from her outstretched arm and in a final effort to protect himself from the evils he knew were out there, violently shook his head, tightly wrinkled his brows and wound his face into a fierce expression. It may have ended there with nothing coming out of his sister's acrobatics on a dresser; but the sound of the rain began to get lighter and allowed them to hear a noise more terrible than any outside evil. It was, it must have been, one of the neurotic neighbors moving down the narrow hallway to the kitchen or dry storage room or maybe even to the back mud-room the children were in, but probably not. She was probably just going to gather their breakfast scraps and give them to the chickens, whose coops were set up under a broken table in the garden and who were now pecking at the insects under the canopy of a large fig tree. No one ate its figs anymore; too many things buried out there that its roots fed off. But then again there may not have been anyone moving down the hall at all; but there certainly was a sound.

The boy's fright directed his actions. As his sister looked in shock towards the hallway, he put his hands at the top of the dresser, one foot on the protruding knob of its second drawer, and tried to push and pull himself up. The girl grabbed him from the back by his shirt and tried to hoist him up, but he proved to be no rag doll, so she put her outstretched arms haphazardly around his waist and tugged until he stood next to her.

There was no way back now. The noise was coming closer, the window was open, the rain was subsiding and mother was close enough out there. It was only a four foot drop, but to both of them it would have seemed like a jump to their deaths in any other circumstance. "Thud, scuff, thud, thud;" the sound was almost on them, almost swallowing the rain that had dared compete with it not too long ago. At least this is what it sounded like to the children, not that they thought in these words, but if the children could feel their hearts racing, they could certainly feel this.

She was the first to jump. She landed straight up on her feet without calamity, her knees bent, her arms stretched out before her as she made contact with the ground. It was a good thing she was a tall girl, for as she stood out in the rain, barefoot in her light linari frock and skirt her father had brought back from their store for the May Easter celebrations, her head peaked into the window in time to see her little brother jumping out on her.

Fear can dictate. Once his sister disappeared from the dresser, he moved over to the window, closed his eyes and jumped, or really just let his body fall from it. She could only partially catch him. The girl took an instantaneous step back, cupped her arms around the waist of her now flying brother and held as tight as she could, but he still slipped out quite a bit from her grasp, so both hit the wet clay with a thud.

The girl laughed. She laughed through the rain, through her mud seeped clothes, and through the pain from the impact. She laughed loudly and without restraint even as she brought her whimpering brother to his feet. It was her buttock that was bruised, her stomach and thighs that had been pinned to the clay, yet the boy was the one on the verge of tears even though he had the benefit of such an unlikely cushion.

Maybe, just maybe, this was because she was no longer his sister but a pixie. I've heard she sprouted wings, right then and there, that her body rose above the ground, that the mud and water on her clothes vanished and that her linen outfit became a sparkling white tunic tied with a gold sash. She is supposed to have become the size of a bar of soap ( not the rough blocks of olive oil, but the machine made, perfumed soaps the GIs carried with them when they liberated the town) and buzzed around her little brother; consoling him and leading him down the muddy road to their mother:

I don't believe all of this, but I do believe some. For instance, if she could fly above the ground the size of a bar of soap, I doubt she could be jumping barefoot from puddle to puddle leading her young brother on through example. But I know for a fact she did this. I know that she sang as she danced as she laughed in those puddles; that her head, swung back, streamed curly ash blond hair; quite rare in her family. Maybe this was how she flew. I know that her brother, still in a kind of shock from the unanticipated escape, saw his tall sister run up ahead of him on the road and become a smaller and smaller figure as her giggling grew more pronounced until it seemed all that she was now was in that laugh.

He has crossed the street. Barefoot and somewhat disheveled he thinks, or, no, he doesn't actually think of it like this, it is more like he believes, he hopes, that after he goes to the rice dealer for a task lost to time and young memory, he will be able to run in the dry creek that separates the town from the mountains. He will kick up the dry, red silt; throw the smooth white and black stone-eggs at daring lizards whose low bodies can cling to miniature precipices of flint and lava layers better than any mountaineer. He will fling those stones down towards the summer sea, the great Mediterranean, whose deep, yet clear blue stares back at him from not too far off; the sea that accepted many a sailor and when their bodies became a burden to her she would give them back for burial. On their graves would be stacked her stones; those that had been part of the earth, or once were the raw material that is this world, formed by their true creator the sea, the water; the rain maker; but now adorning the graves of everyone. But the boy would not do this today. The rare summer rains have turned the dust to mud then to a stream of mud that carry with it all the life that had collected on it through the summer down to the sea.

For now he passes the patisserie, the telegraphio, a cafenio, then another one, then the family house of an aunt, where two men, unrelated, play backgammon facing each other, but never seeing one another on the worn straw-weave seats of stools. He leaves this and crosses the by-street leading to the stone-faced apartment city-dwellings, from where these two men probably are from and continues parallel to the main causeway. The dealer has set up shop on the bridge over the stream of mud. This man has a large umbrella, originally brought to shield him from the fierce summer rays, but one that has found its true calling in life to repel rain from the helpless varieties of rice, which by now had turned their husks on the rice paddies that raised them.

In the man's pockets is virulent long grain Spartan. In his valise rests temperamental short grain cyprite and the beautiful foreigner, jasmine. In fibrous sacks, slumping over by the elderly folding cane and canvas chair the dealer has had the foresight to bring is the high-strung and rather religious Basmati. But the boy will not get this far to see, today at least, the varieties of rice the dealer has. Today there will be no talk of how far the Basmati has come to be with the boy, a special boy, whom,

if he is good and wants more rice, should tell his father to stock just Basmati, the world's finest, he says, the rice that has traveled on all waves of all oceans to have the honor to be sold in his father's store, for which he would give him, the very good boy, a honey roll.

The little hill is waiting for him, though. It is sweet, this hill, yet it holds the sorrows of a nation, a world and a universe. Its color is reddish, more in some spots than others. On its rim, if you will call it that, the sand seems wetter, yet whiter. This is where its soil is closest to the ground, you see. In the middle it is pink, or rather a pink mixed with orange, not even this, it is the red of the sun that paints the clouds as it sets and the good sailor can look up into the sky and say tomorrow will be a good day because the sky is red, even though a storm comes the next morning and drowns the man. Who can tell the true color at its peak? Through the fog of time and borrowed memory I can't really see it from here. Perhaps this is because its hue is made darker than it really is by the shade of a young olive tree. It is six years old, this tree. Its first fruits have begun to develop a little late, but are good enough. For now they are nothing but the miserable pits that their fruity flesh will soon warm and comfort in the temperate cold of the winter harvest.

I need to tell you what happened here. I'm finding it very hard to do. Don't believe it if you want. Ignore the message. Keep your eyes closed. Be like everyone else. But keep in mind that I believe it. You see, I haven't told you everything about this hill, in fact I've made most of it up. But accept what you can of this: There is an old woman, a ya-YAH, the boy's grandmother. She is kneeling down on the clay mixing her clear tears with the redness of tainted earth. If you were to walk up to her from a distance, you would first see, as the boy does, a ominous black mass comprising a long, dark layered skirt, a black buttoned blouse and the pained profile of a pitiful, aged head, wrapped in the same mournful cloth. There is no reason for such darkness. Grandfather is still alive, in fact he is, right now, lying outstretched under a wild pear tree; his hands neatly folded on his chest, his white banded hat covering his content face, and his muzzle-loader cocked and waiting for the moment the old man is ready to bring back the fowl he promised, up in the mountains.

No, there is no reason, the grandson feels, as he tries to juggle his swirling emotions. His grandmamma seems to simply be crying oblivious to him; nothing more. He approaches her:

"Ya-HAH, you ok?" She still sobs.

"Ya-YAH, you OK? YA-YAH!" he shouts as he edges up to her little hill.

Who knows if she has seen him before he saw her; or if through her stifling wails she could hear or just pay attention to the high-pitched voice of the little boy? But now she turns her mournful profile and looks at him. The boy shudders. Somehow, in his young mind, a signal has gone off. She is not looking at him, she cannot be, yet her body is twisted towards him, her face, facing him, hazel eyes are meeting gold, yet she cannot be. It is as if in her grandson's eyes the old woman has found a portal to years ago and gazes back at the atrocities through him. This is precisely her action: through him she is gazing, as if no longer capable or interested in seeing the present.

She rises. The boy's heart is racing. This isn't the grandmother who knits with extra-long steel needles and large, chunky wool, this is not the old woman, smelling of oregano, sage and chamomile who sings to him in bed when mother is too busy with the store or cleaning or cooking or paying attention to her older sister or hidden away with father—yet it is.



"Will you remember me, my child" her sad deep voice speaks. The boy is frozen. "Will you think of what times we could have had, what we could have learned of each other if I were with you when I cannot be? You have come for some other reason, little one, yet you are now forced to see this, what you didn't want to see at all, yes?" her voice nearly a whisper: "I suppose, though, that you did not know where you were going today, but know this: to understand is to remember, my love, regardless of whether it is your memory or not."

"Come," the old woman says and extends her pale, wrinkled hand out to boy. The tears have begun to flow from his face and he slowly, quietly, moves to the little hill, takes his grandmother's hand and walks with her back to the town, the coastal town, that just two hours ago was being besieged by a rare rainstorm, but now is finally drying.

Whether they came in the day or in the night, it doesn't matter; except for the fact that they did come. The Italians had not done their job. The rebels were strengthening and their extensive patriotic support throughout the country had forced the fascists into complete exposure whereby the guerillas were easily able to cut off their supply routes. The Italians began to starve. It is said that not a single cat was left in the villages after these soldiers had occupied it. The Italians, by all accounts that I know, were not typically savage. I've heard they gave a man information in interrogation so that the Nazis wouldn't have reason to take him and gas him for not cooperating. I've heard that, once they occupied the town, their greatest offense, beyond the mysterious lack of cats, was using mines to fish in the reefs.

I suppose this is why they had to come. I still wonder how they could have done it, though. I believe the town was marked as rebel territory, that there were patriots there, but are not all countrymen patriots in the eyes of an aggressive invader? The men were sent to the mountains or were already there, or were being hidden in the mountains by the women. I wouldn't really know. The old women and children were left in the village. What would they want with them? They could rape the younger women and slaughter the men. Killing the yayas and babies would be pointless. But, I suppose there is a point to everything, no matter how absurd.

They said it was their punishment for aiding the rebels, the scum of the earth, who dare kill them, the mighty. I imagine, sometimes, that the man who said this was quivering as he shouted; that he understood the absurdity of his actions, but was helpless facing his guilt from past crimes and the muzzles of the guns behind him. Yes, maybe he recognized, I'm sure he did, or at least thought, that there was no way an old woman and a toddler could legitimately aid the rebels, besides knitting them socks and comforting their fathers. Did these villagers even know who they were? God, the woman in the front even looked like his grandmother; the one who had sent him a tin St. Nicholas last Christmas, the Christmas he watched two soldiers smash the head of a young boy with a little yellow star on his sleeve. He had buried that boy. No one else would.

But now he aided in corralling the guiltless to add to his guilt. They brought them to the place where you can see the mountains and the sea equally well. They brought them twenty paces away from bridge and lined them up in front of a fresh trench the commander had had the foresight to know they would have to dig themselves. The machine gunner; the man who wished himself to hell the moment he realized what his job really entailed, took his post. Why did they do it? Why is it ever done?

I have to tell you something: the boy's grandmother was there. She was there, the last in line to the gunner's right, standing tall for the short woman she was and beyond the point of feeling fear in her many skirted Manhatico dress. She was not fat then, really, it is just that if you were to see her out in the street maybe, or on a casual visit to her husband's tavern, or going to wash her clothes in the sea, you would think she was rather chubby, let's say, because of the ten-layered traditional skirt she wore. Underneath those many layers a girl about four was hiding. She had awoken, maybe without knowing where her parents were and only greeted with more shock when the old woman forced her to hide under that stifling skirt. Yet, this is how the miracle happened: the gunner began. One grandfather gone, then little Mary, then little Mary's brother, George, his grand-aunt, then her husband, then little John, then toddler Jonathan, Georgie, Maria, ten, twenty, three hundred others, does it matter how many if they murdered them all? Why? It seems pointless. What I can tell you is that she fainted and fell, child in skirt and all, into the pit and on top of the other bodies. Maybe she didn't miss the bullets. Maybe, the gunner, seeing her start to fall, miscalculated and believed it to be from his fire, so he stopped to reserve his bullets. Maybe he was sick of this whole business and stopped with regard to his deep sickness of soul, no longer caring about the duties he mistook for something more glorious.

Then the earth shook. The soldiers grabbed their rifles, the gunner turned his gaze behind him, to the mountains, and the man who recognized the absurdity believed God had come to punish them and would have applauded, if he thought he could. The earth below their feet began to tremble, slowly, quietly at first, but soon the rumbling was knocking the surest-footed to the ground and throwing the red clay dust and dirt into the pit. They thought that it must be mortar fire; that the rebels were attacking a unit in the mountains just ahead of them. What would they know of earthquakes; how much did they remember about God? Anyway, this was reason enough to leave, to run in fact. And so they did. They didn't even give time enough, those whose rifles were knocked from their hands, to pick them up. No one helped the fallen, of their own number that is. They simply ran out of the town as if in that tremor all the horrors, all the atrocities of the universe had merged into a deadly tide of tears, stained blood-red by the day.

It had begun to rain. The little girl, who had gripped the inner folds of the skirt once she sensed that they were falling, emerged from it after all sounds had subsided. Somehow she had felt no quake or she had no fear of it, because there wasn't a single heartstring in her body that quivered, not through the shock of the morning, not through the machine gun, not through anything. She was a brave little one. She crawled over the bodies of lost loved ones to the face of her savior: The rain began to beat down on the two of them and the little girl stretched her hands out over the yaya's face to keep it dry for her. The old woman then awoke from her slumber and gazed up at the falling curls and child eyes upon her. They had lived. Why? Together they crawled from the pit and walked back to town. The world's tears fell upon them, consoling them, letting their eyes stay dry and the running blood keep beneath their feet.

*It is time for the end. I have put you through enough. Just let me say that, she sang, as she danced, as she laughed and that her head, swung back, streamed curly ash-blond hair, quite rare for her family. Her brother raced to catch up with the laugh that had become his sister. They traveled in the light rain, jumping from puddle to puddle, running twenty paces then soaking up the next, or at least the puddles in it. The*

location of wherever they were going seemed lost. It seemed that they had chosen to become sprites of the mountains and the sea, never reaching the liquid sky, never really touching the muddy clay of the earth. But there was a destination. If you continue straight ahead to the edge of town you will come across the hill, now memorialized, pregnant with olives, lifeless with the bodies of hundreds. Then you will cross the lonely bridge, waiting for the jovial rice-deal to set down his umbrella in its softer clay and slump the bags of basmati by the chair he will have the foresight to bring. Beyond the river of mud that bleeds life into the deep, yet clear blue Mediterranean is a hospital.

It wasn't there six years ago, but after the war the Red Cross set it up, built it in fact with the aid of the GIs sent there by General Marshall to rebuild everything. The girl knew her fat mother was in there. She had overheard the talk the neurotic neighbors received by her father, who was anxious that this child be born in whatever tiny bit of happiness was possible and that all his possessions, including his two children be looked after. The boy followed the girl to the big white building, now a pictorial watercolor and a graffito at the same time. It was new, yet a thousand years old with the cries, horrors, and hope of all who entered. He had forgotten they had to go somewhere and when she got to the entrance, she turned back and noticed that her brother was standing motionless, quiet, and staring at her with a look of disappointment (the puddles had come to an end) twenty paces away.

The children were soaked to the bone, yet they felt none of the cold and shivers they should have. It was a young nurse, twenty-something, who spotted the back of a curly blond, now simply brown because it was so wet, head and little body in flooded rags.

She calls out to the child and the girl turns back to the hospital and sees a woman in a short starched white dress, opaque white stockings, white laced shoes, a blanched nurses' cap stained by the presence of a red cross, and an expression of both shock and astonishment on her face. The girl sashes towards the woman, who realizes that she must remove herself from her temporary paralysis to prevent this child from dying of a cold (she had seen it happen). Quickly she takes a large skeleton key from her pocket, moves over to a door (probably of the storage room or extra sickbed), opens it and rushes inside, whereby she emerges with a large dusty-blue blanket in one hand, while the other closes and locks the door. The key returns to its pleasant quietude. The nurse wraps the little girl up in the blanket and as she is about to begin the barrage of questions (who are you, where did you come from, how did you know to come here, how long have you been out in the rain, can you feel your fingers, your feet?) sees notices the sudden appearance of the young boy, maybe around four or five, also soaking wet, but there is something mournful in his eyes, the poor child must have lost someone. She tells the girl to stay put and moves towards the boy fearing that he would run from her like the boy who smashed the windowpane with a stick, like the man who said he would marry her but took what he could and left, like her father who just walked off into the mountains one day leaving her to fend for an ailing mother and four young siblings. He not only does not leave her, but moves towards her:

They are both in bed now. Side by side they rest, finally dry in the starched white robes of the hospital, under the white and dusty-blue blankets of their wrought iron beds. They're lucky. The flow of patients was slow today, virtually nonexistent

really, for the first time in six years. It was only them, a man who had stepped on the exposed nail of a rotten wooden plank, an old woman who was inhaling and exhaling with that raspy crew-crewing of pneumonia, and the glowing smile of their now thin mother over the face of a little new born baby girl; their little sister. It was just the two of them in that the section of sickbeds, though, just them and the light pitter-patter of the rain, softly touching the scorched red clay shingles on the roof, softly rolling down the rafters, softly humming them to sleep...softly.

And above their heads was a plaque made and mounted by the Chief American Army Surgeon, a literary man, a part-time genius, who, upon completion of the hospital shortly after the war, hung up a verse of poetry to commemorate the achievement. Somehow, when I look back on what others have looked back on, it doesn't seem that that verse's purpose was simply to comfort the ill or inspire the doctors, the nurses, the staff, and bring hope to the hopelessness of the loved ones to be left behind. It seems to mean more; to say, to be everything.

*Fruits of Much Grief They Are, Emblems of More*

# The Ace of Change

Jamie Snead

Wednesday:

Juan is not a Mexican. He is also not French, although his middle name is Pierre. The last thing Juan Pierre is not is Jewish, despite the last name of Lebowitz. What Juan Pierre is exactly is unknown to him, but he believes he has the nose and cheekbones of a Cherokee warrior.

Juan Pierre has two jobs. His day job is head-sandwich constructor at Fleischmann's All Kasher Deli, a large, well-known establishment near the Boardwalk. Juan Pierre has worked for old man Fleischmann, who not only owns but manages the deli, for three years, even though he makes Juan wear his nametag with only his last name, Lebowitz, stamped across its plastic surface. Mr. Fleischmann claims this makes the older customers feel more comfortable. "It's more kosher" he says with a wink.

Mr. Fleischmann was standing by the dishwasher station when Juan walked through the door: "Where's your nametag, Lebowitz?" He said as he eyed the front of Juan's apron.

"Right here, sir!" Juan reached in his front pocket and grabbed the nametag, pinning it on as Mr. Fleischmann turned once again to the dishwasher.

"Look, amigo, you have to actually scrubo the disheso. Get it?" Mr. Fleischmann held up an imaginary pan and made large rotations on it with his other hand.

"Ah si si, circles." Luis the dishwasher mimicked his boss's motions.

"No, not circles--scrubbing, washing." The boss heaved a sigh and turned to Juan. "Can you get through to him?"

"No, sir. I don't speak Spanish, remember?"

"Yeah, yeah, I forget. Your mother must have been crazy to give you that name of yours. Is the pickle Wop done back there?" Twice a week, Fleischmann's received a delivery from Lombardi's pickles.

"Marco?"

"No, the other pickle Wop I gotta deal with."

"Yeah, he's done."

"Did he put the buckets all the way in the back or am I gonna have to push them back there again myself?"

"No, he put them in the back."

Juan turned to walk to the shiny metal meat-slicer. Looking at the list above the slicer he noted which meats in what quantities needed to be sliced for the day and decided the order to cut them in. Choosing smoked turkey first he headed for the freezer. On the metal door each employee had a magnet, an idea old man Fleischmann got from a book on how to improve employee moral. Juan would have suggested decent pay and benefits, but the book said magnets so magnets it was. Juan's own magnet was a plastic royal flush poker hand that his mom had stuffed in his stocking at Christmas.

Juan Pierre's second job is gambling. He considers himself quite the card player and can be found every week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday evenings at the Sunshine River Casino in Atlantic City, because those are the nights when his girlfriend Samantha works. Samantha is Juan Pierre's new girlfriend, they have only been together a month. On these nights he wears his best suits, both of which he purchased on sale at the Goodwill down the street from his mother's house. One of these suits

is purple, although Juan calls it eggplant, and the other is cream. He has only one tie, a silky brown one, which he ties meticulously each evening before leaving to drive to the casino. Once there he heads directly for the ten dollar minimum table and never bets more than ten dollars.

At the tables, Juan hardly ever speaks to anyone except the dealer. He prefers to spend these nights in near silence and instead of conversation, he fills his time by making up stories in his mind about his fellow bettors. When Juan Pierre plays cards the Sunshine becomes a haven for international spies and criminals on the run looking to make a quick buck. The first time he saw Samantha working, his imagination had gone into overdrive. She had looked as out of place to him under the garish lights of the casino as a flamingo in a drainage ditch. He fantasized that she was perhaps only working at the Sunshine as an undercover FBI agent who had been sent to infiltrate the mafia through her casino connections. He imagined that beneath her red velvet cocktail uniform laid a small handgun that pressed into her creamy flesh with each bend and twist that her undercover work required. Her long sculpted legs incased in black fishnet had gained their definition through relentless hours of early-morning running through Quantico as Samantha single-mindedly pursued her quest to bring down all organized crime in the Atlantic City area.

Juan had not been disappointed to discover that Samantha was really just a cocktail waitress. It would have been nearly impossible to get an FBI agent to agree to go out with him. As it was it had taken him three weeks just to get Samantha to go for a cup of coffee.

The cooler air felt good against Juan's arms as he loaded them with deli meat and blocks of cheese. He sliced the turkey first and tuned in to the kitchen talk around him.

"It's gonna be Friday," Rickie, the junior sandwich constructor on duty, said to Ralph, the bus boy.

"Friday, huh? Well, that should make for a big pain in our asses tomorrow."

"No kidding man. You know how Fleishmann is on a normal day, anyway. But with this guy coming in, he's gonna be ridiculous."

"No shit. What's he want to sell the place for, anyway? I thought he liked running the deli."

"He says it's time to retire." Rickie picked up a white kitchen towel and mopped his face. "He's got no sons and he wants the money. This guy's serious, though, been by twice already. Friday's his final look-see."

"Great. Looks like we might have to find new jobs, huh?"

"Maybe; don't know. Depends what this guy wants to do, I guess. I say good riddance to Fleishmann, new job or not. That dick's been ripping us off for years. Piece of shit boss."

Juan moved the slicer methodically, tuning out the conversation. He was remembering his dream from the night before. In the dream, Juan was tied to a casino stool with a pair of black fishnets. His mouth was gagged with crushed red velvet and he was sweating profusely as a large Italian man stood over him beside Fleishmann who was pointing a gun to Juan Pierre's head.

That night, Juan was playing blackjack. He was seated between an older woman with bleached hair who Juan imagined was a rich widow bored with her inheritance. On his left was a tall drink of water in a large gray cowboy hat. Juan envisioned that he was a down-on-his-luck aging rodeo star who had his heart

stomped by some buxom buckle bunny. It wasn't long before the cowboy bottomed out and stood to leave.

"Good luck, ya'll." He said to the table as he tipped his hat and made for the door. Juan took another card and went bust when he felt Samantha standing behind him. He knew it was her by her musky sweet smell.

"Baby, could you do me a little favor?" Samantha ran her fingers lightly up Juan's spine.

"Anything."

"I found a wallet under one of the tables and I am swamped. Could you run it upstairs to lost and found for me when you finish your hand?"

"No problem."

"Thanks, angel!" Juan watched as she walked away, delighted when she turned to give him a wink before taking a drink order.

The second floor was much like the first, but with more slot machines. It was nearly deserted when Juan came upstairs. He crossed the diamond print carpet with the wallet in his hand to a door that said Office on the outside. The door was ajar and Juan poked his head in and emitted a timid "Hello?" Nobody answered him and he pushed the door open. He entered a large empty room with grey walls. Across the room was another door also ajar. Juan could hear men's voices from inside the room. There were two men speaking and they seemed to be arguing about something. Juan stood for a moment debating whether or not he wanted to interrupt them when their voices got louder.

"We can't let her off the hook, Leon. It looks bad."

"Come on, Joe, who's it look bad to? No one's paying attention to this broad. Why can't we just give her the kid and be done with it?"

"Because that isn't how this business works. She owes us ten grand, Leon. Who the fuck is gonna pay that for her? You? I didn't think so. It's real fucking easy to point the finger when it isn't your money, now isn't it?"

"Look, I'm just sayin there's a kid involved."

"Booh fucking hoo. I don't care if the goddamn Pope is involved the bitch owes us ten grand and she ain't getting her daughter back till she pays it."

"So we're just gonna leave the kid with Christopher? He's a fucking nut job, Joe."

"Leon, the kid is fine. I promise you. Christopher may be crazy, but he isn't stupid. He knows if he harms one hair on that kids head I'll have his nuts in a sling. Now I know you got a soft spot for Samantha, but I ain't cutting her slack just because you got a hard on for her. She works here till she pays off her debt and until then the kid stays with her father nut job or not. End of discussion." A chair scraped across the floor jolting Juan into practically running out of the first room and onto the casino floor. He went into a restroom and shut himself in a stall. He needed to think about what he had just heard. Obviously Samantha had a daughter she hadn't told him about, but more importantly whatever she was mixed up in wasn't good. He wanted to talk to her, but wasn't sure how to even bring up the subject.

Downstairs, Samantha was standing at the bar when Juan came down.

"Did you return the wallet, baby?"

"No. No one was up there." He handed her the wallet. "I need to talk to you when you got a minute."

"I'm almost done." Samantha yawned. "You want to get a cup of coffee after my shift."

"Yeah. I'll meet you at the diner."

Carol's Diner was down the street from the casino. There were only a few patrons, mostly truckers grabbing a quick bite before they got back on the road. Juan found a booth in the back and waited. He didn't know what to think. He knew one thing for sure, Samantha needed his help. The bell above the door jingled and Juan looked up as Samantha walked to him. She kissed him when she reached the table, but Juan could barely respond. She looked at him for a moment.

"What's wrong?"

"Do you have a daughter?" He hadn't meant to blurt it out that way, but he couldn't take it back now.

"Shit." Samantha dropped her purse on the bench and slid in across from him. "Who told you?"

"I lied to you before. There was someone in the office. Two someones actually and they were talking about you and your daughter and some guy named Christopher. Do you really owe these guys ten grand, Samantha?"

Samantha bit her lower lip. "Yes I have a daughter and to make a long story short her father is not a good man. In order to get her back from him I had to do business with other bad men and now that I have I owe them some money. Juan look, I like you and we've been having a good time, but this is none of your business."

"Let me help you."

"How, Juan? You don't have the money and believe me you do not want to mess with these people."

"I don't know, but there has to be something I can do. Maybe I could win it or something."

"No offense honey, but I've seen you gamble. Look I'm serious this isn't your business. I think it's best if you just leave me alone for now alright. Stay out of it." Samantha grabbed her purse and stood up. "You're a sweet guy, but you don't know anything about my life."

"Samantha, wait." Juan stood up and searched in his pockets for money for his coffee, but Samantha was already out the door and in her car by the time he found it.

Thursday:

It was Big Joe who approached Juan Pierre with the plan to put a chunk of someone's finger in the matzo ball soup at Fleishmann's. Juan was playing blackjack Thursday night. He had been there for three hours drinking bourbon and watching Samantha sling drinks at the tables, wondering if she was going to speak to him, when the fat man lumbered up beside him and sat down with a whoosh.

"How's it going, kid?" Big Joe wore a vest of silver and purple threading with buttons that strained against themselves as he hefted his weight onto the casino stool.

"Not bad. I'm doing all right."

"Good, that's what I like to hear. Maybe some of your good luck will rub off on me, or mine will rub off on you." Big Joe changed in his cash for chips and began fluttering them with one hand combining two stacks into one and then separating them and doing it all over again. The chips made a clicking sound each time one fell into place.

"I got to tell you though I've never been particularly lucky myself." The man said without glancing at Juan. The chips fell click, click, click.

"No? Me neither."



"Really? Young good-looking kid like yourself?" You should be getting lucky all the time, if you know what I mean."

Juan wondered if there was a single person over the age of eighteen who wouldn't know what the fat man meant.

"Now take me for example. I'm just an old man trying to make a buck off the young lucky kid beside me because, lets face it, we could all use a little extra money couldn't we kid?" Click. Click. Click.

"I guess so."

"You guess so? Sure we could. Tell me kid have you got everything you want? Everything you need?" He indicated that Juan should turn and look behind him. Juan followed the man's gaze and caught sight of Samantha making her way through the tables her drink tray balanced on her left hand.

"She's a beaut, isn't she, kid?" Juan said nothing. He had never been this close to Big Joe before and was noticing for the first time the fat man's eyes. They looked like beach pebbles, dull and gray. "Yep she's a beaut alright. I've seen you two together:"

Beneath the table Juan's knees started shaking like a tambourine. Click, click, click went the fat man's chips.

"Yeah, but I've seen you somewhere else too. Fleischmann's Deli, right? The big place on Dexter? You work there, don't you? Yeah, I've seen you there. You look like a good worker: Like you follow orders well. Do you follow orders well, kid?"

Juan looked at the fat man for a moment, but the man said nothing else and did not return Juan's stare. "What do you want?"

"Well, I just want to have a little chat. I've got a way for you to make some money if you're interested. Which I think you are." Click. Click. Click. "Now I don't know what she has told you, but I am gonna guess that it's both too much and too little so let me help you out. You need money. More importantly, your girlfriend really needs money. Now I and the people I work for have a way of getting you that money and with very little effort on your part."

"I'm listening."

"Good, kid. That's good. Now you listen while Big Joe tells you a little story and let's see if maybe you can work out the end for me alright?"

The fat man began his story.

The plan is this: Juan will pick up the piece of finger early Friday morning behind the Blockbuster store near his mother's house. He will then take it to Fleischmann's Deli when he goes to work. That afternoon, the buyer (What's his name? Don't worry about it kid. Why don't we just call him Mr. X) will come in to speak to Mr. Fleischmann about purchasing the deli. Mr. X isn't a real buyer; but one of Big Joe's less obvious associates. When Mr. X is in the restaurant, another of Big Joe's associates will come in and order the matzo ball soup. (Will call her Ms. Y. You can't miss her, she's a knockout) and will find the piece of finger in her soup. Ms. Y will then proceed to make a big stink about it, crying and threatening to go to the papers and sue. Mr. X in turn will act horrified and withdraw from the restaurant taking his bid with him. As Fleischmann watches this (I wish I could see this part kid) it will occur to him that no other decent offers will be forthcoming once the finger story gets out. He will then call Big Joe who has previously made him a lower offer than Mr. X, an offer that was refused due to Fleischmann's intolerance for "dirty wops." (Little Jewish bastard if it were up to me I'd take care of him the old-fashioned way.) If he doesn't call, Big Joe will call him personally and let him know that he heard Mr. Fleischmann has had some

trouble, trouble that could all go away if he lets Big Joe and his associates take care of it. This offer would only be good if the restaurant was theirs to buy at a lower bid than the one they placed before (I can't offer him what I did before kid, it's a matter of principle.)

For his trouble, Juan gets thirty-thousand dollars and Samantha gets her daughter back debt free. Big Joe gets the restaurant to resell later. (Why the deli? Let's just say that this particular piece of property is going to be worth a lot more very soon. I couldn't give a fuck about the deli.) And Fleischmann? Well, the way Juan sees it, Fleischmann gets what he deserves.

Friday:

Outside the casino, Juan sat in his red Cavalier and waited. A Lincoln Towncar pulled up next to him just as he was trying to decide between a classic rock station and the oldies. Big Joe lumbered out of the car and tapped on Juan's window. Juan cranked the handle and the glass pane slid down between them.

"You did good today, kid."

"Thanks." Big Joe handed Juan an envelope.

"You know you can't play here anymore, right?"

"I figured." They were both silent a moment. Then Juan asked, "Samantha?"

"She's all paid up."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"Do you know where I can find her?"

"As far as I know, she's gone. I told her she should stay and say thank you, but she was in a hurry to get outta here. Kind of a rude bitch, if you ask me. I tried to help you out, kid, told her the plan was all your idea." Juan looked up at him.

"My idea?"

"Yeah, I told her how you asked me to let you help her, how the finger thing was something you had thought up when you were working for Fleischmann. To tell you the truth, kid, she looked kind of disgusted, asked me if I could keep you away from her and her kid. Like I said, rude bitch."

"I don't understand."

"Did you think you were getting a happy ending here? You know I used to have a thing for her myself so I can see where you're coming from. She didn't like my work so much, though. I think she was really into you kid, but you know ladies, their unpredictable. She was always kind of dumb anyway, she didn't even question me when I asked her to give you that wallet, although she was a little pissed later on when she realized what I was up to. That's why I had to let her know the finger thing was your idea, I couldn't let her give me all the credit. Anyway, she left town far as I know. I think I might track her down soon, though, and find out how she's doin, make sure that kid of hers is alright. Heard she got a U-haul and loaded it up. Had to be pretty tough on account of the bandages and all."

Juan's stomach clenched. "The bandages?"

"The ones on her hand. She wasn't to thrilled with the idea you had to use her finger, but I told her you figured it was only fair since she was getting her kid back and all." Big Joe smacked the top of Juan's car twice. "Get the fuck out of here, kid. Don't let me see your face again."

Juan sat immobile as Big Joe got back in his car and pulled out of the parking lot. He stared down at the envelope in his lap. Inside was a stack of Monopoly money and a Polaroid of Samantha's left hand, the third finger missing its top half inch. Juan barely made it out of the car before he puked. His stomach heaved over and over.

He looked around the parking lot of the Sunshine. Rank puddles of god only knows what had gathered from the earlier rains. Amateur gamblers walked in and out of the glass doors filled with hope and their dreams of hitting the big score. They were a sorry lot, Juan thought, as he watched them come and go. A sad bunch who spent their evenings feeding the belly of an evil beast. He got into the Cavalier and left the Sunshine behind him.

That night, Juan dreamed again. This time he was tied to the casino stool with a pair of black fishnets but he was not gagged. There appeared to be no one near him, but from behind him came a small manicured hand where a chocolate covered strawberry was perched on the tip of a French-manicured finger. He leaned in for a bite, but no matter how hard he tried he could not reach it.

## Psalm 23, Verse 5

Gregory Pyne

He is the type of boy who says confidently to his mother that he has absolutely no need to go to the bathroom before they walk into the cavernous sanctuary of the large church they attend in Boston. Even when his mother raises one eyebrow in a doubtful manner and purses her lips, giving him another chance to be quickly escorted to the men's room by his father before the service begins to relieve his bladder; he waves his hand in a dismissive, slightly embarrassed and hurried manner and assures his mother once again that no such trip is necessary. Chin held high with his confidence, and relieved that the image of his father tapping his brown loafer impatiently against the tile while he commenced at the urinal was just that- and image, and not an actuality- he walks into the sanctuary with his parents, absorbing the bass and treble strains of the enormous pipe organ belting out "My God, Oh King On High," and calmly reassures himself that there is no way one single glass of Mountain Dew during Sunday School Snak Time would affect him whatsoever.

With charm that was partly inherent in his personality, and partly parentally instilled, he greets the elder folks that share the seemingly endless center pew that he and his family situate themselves in, towards the front, but not so far towards the front to appear overzealous. "Leave that to the Baptists," he heard his father chuckle once, and the boy joined in the laughter; not knowing exactly what it meant, until his mother rapped both their legs with the service program.

The organist sustains the last chords for five measures before lifting his hands in an utterly ignored flourish. A hush falls over the church, a group hush the boy had never been fully able to fathom, but what he imagined was the instinctual silence sought after by every grammar school teacher in the nation: an immediate silence that signals the beginning of the service. Like a good little man, the boy rises with his parents for the opening hymn, this time holding his own hymnal, and joins in the chorus of heavenly voices singing "Twas Your Light I Saw Upon The Hill." With the seven verses complete, the congregation sits down in a rustle of dresses, coughs, sneezes, and sighs and gaze expectantly at Reverend Danny, who steps up to the pulpit.

The boy smiles. Rev. Danny is new to the church, and miraculously under seventy years old. The boy had never seen a pastor that young before in his life. In addition, Rev. Danny's sermons were short, so whatever worries his mother had of him "lasting through the service without a fuss" were unsubstantiated and irrelevant. He finds to his dismay, however, that he once again has tightened his belt too much this morning, in an effort to make sure his white shirt, which is getting far too small for him and has started to pinch him harshly in the armpits, securely tucked in. The effort failed, for under his suit coat, what with standing and sitting, then standing again, his shirt tails are bunched up and revealing small triangles of peachy skin by his waist. Therefore, he finds himself stuck with an untucked shirt and a belt that is squeezing him too hard and nipping at his belly.

Adjusting his belt out in the open is out of the question, as is fixing his dilemma under the blanket that his mother usually brought with her to warm her legs, which would look even weirder; so the boy straightens his back to relieve some of the tension.

He looks at the service guide, a break down of the service folded once, twice and thrice times over listing hymn numbers, organ interludes, sermon titles, benediction recitations, and church news. From the look of it, the service is already half over. They have sung two hymns, recited the Apostle's Creed, welcomed their neighbors, and... the boy groaned as he saw that slated for baptism are not one, not two, but three

infants. That usually took one hundred years. His mind drifts back to Sunday school that morning. Had he had one glass or two glasses of Mountain Dew? He suddenly could not remember; and that is when he feels the chills.

He almost thinks "goddamit," but quickly changes it to "rats," which in his quick little mind turns into "god rats," which doesn't make any sense at all, even sounds funny, and he sniggers a bit earning a reproachful glare from his mother:

The chills come again, vaguely stronger this time, and his smirk leaves him. This is impossible. He couldn't have to go now. He had tried to, by himself, before the service, standing like an idiot at the small kiddie urinal downstairs: even, seeing that nobody was there in the bathroom with him, flicking it around a bit and making "Peooo, peooo, peoo" noises. If he didn't have to go then, why the h--- did he have to go now?

A third wave of chills starts at his crotch and tingles up and down his legs and spine. He looks to his left and right, up and down the pew: their position is unfortunate. The pew holds at least sixty people, and he and his family are smack dab in the middle. To his left, he sees four elderly people, nodding their heads either in agreement or with Parkinson's disease, leaning on their folded walkers, the gray sticks blocking his path. To his right, three women had apparently brought their entire knitting station with them; huge wicker baskets nestle at their feet. There is a baby in a portable carrier that has been making little muffled cries all through the service; each sob now becomes a jarring vibration.

His mother looks at him intently. He smiles back a confident, almost smarmy smile, but inwardly begins to panic. He flexes his calves, which do little to relieve his tension. The baptisms are finally ending. He averts his eyes as Rev. Danny dips the children in the small, white, pristine porcelain baptismal pool and brings the babies up dripping and crying.

The sermon is next after another hymn. Sitting down slowly, the boy feels pricks of sweat on his brow. He hopes Rev. Danny's sermon will be super short and sweet today. Perhaps a small lesson on a single verse, with two minor anecdotes thrown in and a small call to look spiritually inward. The boy braces himself. He can do this, he knows he can. He grabs a Bible from the pew, preparing to concentrate on anything, anything but this internal trembling.

"Our guest pastor today," Danny begin, waving his hand behind him, and the boy looks in shock at a tiny, wrinkled form nodding his head from the massive red chair behind the pulpit.

Oh no, thinks the boy, as the old preacher takes a full minute to get out of his seat.

The preacher grasps the podium and, trembling slightly, begins by thanking the church for having him in a voice that reminds the boy of the gopher from Winnie the Pooh: a high whistling voice that also sounded like a group of broken bagpipes consoling each other; "and eshpeshially to Pashtor Daniel Sarashhhsan for his hoshpitality." He then speaks the words that break the boy's heart, that crush any hope of escape, that threatens the inward dam.

"Today'sh shermon wash going to be on the Shecond Chapter of the Book of Matthew, ash you can shee titled in your program "Matthew'sh Faith and Fishhhrs of Men." However, that is a mishprint. I do apologize, but the shermon I have ready dealsh with Geneshish, and the onshet of the Great Flood and Noah'sh Ark.

The boy tingles all over at the mention of the earth flooded with water through God's rage, and though he usually loves the story of all the animals walking two by two aboard the big ship, he now wonders seriously at which level of Hell he was to be cast down to, from the sin of pissing all over the Good Book that rests on his shaking lap.





# Stalking the Mechanical Bride

Scott Chisholm

Her name doesn't matter as much as what happened to her: Or, at least, what I consider to have happened to her. A strawberry blonde with blueberry eyes, she inhabited the upper levels of high school strata, realms reserved for the privileged in the looks, cash, and popularity departments, a heightened positioning tagging her, in the correct detention vernacular, "out of my league." Only after foolishly pursuing the hallway telegraph chatter, talk of her harboring a crush in my name, did I discover the crucial criteria for this "league" that would've shot me relatively nearer her orbit, a criteria with no chance of my possessing. I looked on in familiar, almost disinterested dismay as her face obscured itself into a black dot, her features gradually melting into a darkened void swallowing her entire frame as I told her I was unable to drive. She vanished from my life, like others before her, and I shuffled away into another sunset like Chaplin's Tramp, an icon I have come to inexorably identify myself with. Magritte had struck again.

Rene Magritte haunts me. Or, more specifically, his artistic creation does the haunting. My first encounter with the French surrealist's little black dot, long before its engulfing of potential girlfriends, occurred between the hair-littered confines of a barbershop, waiting for my turn in the big chair. Inhaling the acrid tonics and talcs of the place, I casually flipped through an art-book I'd found, oddly placed among the comics, Highlights for Kids, and National Geographics. Perusing the largely incomprehensible pictures, the dot's sudden appearance assailed me. Spooked, I shut the book and picked up an Incredible Hulk. In the sixth grade, during Mr. Wilcoxsen's art class, a film we watched displayed the black dot vividly enough to flood my olfactory senses with the aromas of the old barbershop. I strangled back a potentially embarrassing sneeze, forcing nasal backwash back into my head, a move rewarding my field of vision with a small congregation of eerily mocking black dots. Years later, at a Ramones concert, the black dot found me again, stretched out on a tight t-shirt against the busy frame of a spiky-haired punkette, distorted but far from camouflaged. Through all these encounters, Magritte's *The False Mirror*, home of the ominous black dot, seems intent on not leaving me alone.

For the uninitiated, *The False Mirror* is an oil-on-canvas close-up of a human eye, a right eye judging from the shadow cast by the ridge of the nose in the lower left-hand corner. The iris of this eye has been replaced with a view of a blue sky populated with white clouds. Smack in the middle of this tranquil image hangs a black pupil like a hole punched in the fabric of reality itself, the black dot, threatening to spread its blackness over the entire field of blues and whites. There it remains, hovering in the peaceful, blue sky, a cyclopean idiot void, an obstacle blocking the openness beyond it.

Why is it that Magritte's black dot should throw spasms of freakiness down my spine? A raging case of congenital glaucoma has made my eyes a playground for all manner of surgical frolicking. For much of my life, the years have been measured against a masochistic parade of lasers, diamond knives, organic sutures, intraocular implants, a formidable array of specialized pokers and prodders, and tiny searchlights the intensity of supernovas. These intrusions are interspersed with recuperations in the inner sanctums of antiseptic fortresses, my mouth full of beach-sand, joints

crammed with ball bearings, disembodied voices muttering the incomprehensible in sterile darkness. Symbolic of all the puncture-wounds inflicted for the cause of rescuing my eyesight is the black dot, its very blackness mocking the fate of my visual field unless penetration of my violated orb is repeated ad nauseum. The lucid nightmare of surgery plagues my existence, in the round shape of the dot. But the constant threat of surgery is not the sole reason the dot haunts me. Over the years, I've come to learn the black dot obscuring Magritte's sky represents my inability to acquire the freedom of the mechanical bride.

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan created the term "mechanical bride" as an aphorism for the automobile. McLuhan enumerated his point thusly:

Although it may be true to say that an American is a creature of four wheels, and to point out that American youth attributes much more importance to arriving at driver's-license age than at voting age, it is also true that the car has become an article of dress without which we feel uncertain, unclad, and incomplete in the urban compound. (217)

Sure enough, as I neared my sixteenth birthday, I discovered the socially debilitating symbolism behind the black dot. Its perfect roundness represented the wheel, a shape excised from my existence, cut out and replaced with the round black void, an obstacle to the openness of the blue sky representing freedom. Turning sixteen, a driver's license stolen by faulty optical wiring, I was quickly made aware of my uncertain, unclad, incomplete position. Culminating in the losses of high school dates to those with licenses and wheels intact, I learned the mechanical bride would forever leave me jilted at the threshold of freedom.

She has mocked me through her absence, this mechanical bride. I've been left to sit on bus stop benches peppered with mounds of sun-dried gum and nearly-fossilized cigarette remains, frequently suffering bombings of the oddly chalklike waste of birds who use telephone wires as toilets. She's passed by under the fury of thunderstorms, sometimes deliberately swerving to displace a muddy puddle against my soaked, shivering frame, bent as it is in a hopeless talisman against lightning strikes. At other times, aggression is doled out with the fear of mortality, as I carry the scars of rearview mirrors and the bruises of bumpers. Perhaps most telling, a two-car collision I was involved in resulted in my retinal detachment; doped up on a surgeon's table, the remembrance of screeching tires took on the laughing cadences one would associate with *schadenfreude*. And what more appropriate injury for the bride to mock me with, dealing out a punishing black dot of her own, eating away my eyesight like an optical cancer; further blackening the path to freedom, just as in Magritte's painting. Small wonder remains why I have often felt like Ted, the lone survivor of Harlan Ellison's nightmarish "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream," wherein rampant technology has left him a useless, immobile organism, a lump of flesh and blood, a man reshaped into what amounts to a black dot, in much the same way these mechanical brides seem bent on molding me.

And what a commendable molding job these brides have wrought upon me. They have allowed me to experience my own altered version of America's love affair with the automobile without ever having gripped a steering wheel, without ever completely evolving into McLuhan's "creature of four wheels." They fostered within me a tryst with the automobile's history, design, and other graspable tangents of the



mechanical bride that could be entertained without the aid of a license. I self-taught myself the history of Daimler's internal combustion engine, Adolf Hitler's involvement in the Volkswagen's success, the controversies behind Ford Motors, the aerodynamic trademarks streamlining Alfa Romeo, the styles of Bertone and Pininfarina, and schooled myself in the exotic automotive obscurities of Cisitalia, Delage, Locomobile, Lorraine-Dietrich, and Panhard. As a result, I developed a fondness for the aesthetic heyday of American automotive engineering, when the bride resembled a chrome-and-steel, tailfin-bedecked starcruiser straight from the pages of an *Amazing Stories* pulp. Distractions, however, are a temporary balm, and I soon recognized such interests were casting me in the mold of a slave forever fantasizing over a symbolic freedom, a freedom I could marvel at and desire for; but always be occluded from. Yes, the mechanical bride is quite the crafty sculptress.

More so, she is a worthy tauntress, considering her talents at taunting me with the freedom of wanderlust. I've often considered it a cosmic joke that I should have an appetite for travel, yet cursed with a distance between myself and those mechanical brides capable of affording what I consider the great elixir of life. In the opening passages of *Moby-Dick*, Melville's Ishmael admits his wanderlust as this life-affirming elixir:

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off – then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. (23)

Like Ishmael, I've endured many a "damp, drizzly November" of the soul. Although I didn't resort to assaulting pedestrians on the street or fantasizing of my own demise, I hopelessly imagined miracle cures for my troubled eyesight, cures extracted from exotic Mexican flora or culled from a shark's bladder; cures that would erase the black dot forever from my field of view, winning me my own mechanical bride. Unlike Ishmael, I had no Pequod to escape to, no vessel to aid my depression by washing it away out in the "sea" of adventure I so desperately craved. Instead, I resigned myself to my room, wallowing in deepening pools of my own constantly lowering self-esteem, knowing another groggy stint atop the operating table the grand destination my futile wanderlust would eventually lead me back to.

In my room, I embraced the kind of lonely angst I'm surprised didn't have my family and friends scouring the telephone pages for head doctors. Blinds drawn around the clock, I held private screenings of Bergman films and listened to The Cure and Joy Division, the films and soundtracks of the chronically isolated. Depeche Mode's "Blasphemous Rumours" became a popular tune for mindless whistling, with its choral refrain of "I think that God's got a sick sense of humor" a darkly soothing ode explaining away the cosmic joke, my inner puzzlement of harboring wanderlust without the means for its appeasement. Whistling this synth-pop dirge, I occasionally took late-night strolls through the neighborhood. My thoughts were always more at ease during these walks, and at the time I attributed this to seeing all the mechanical brides slumbering in their driveways, still, vulnerable. I imagined the great black dot

of the small hours, swallowing the world as night fell, robbed them of their freedom. Rarely did I leave for a nocturnal trek without my pocketknife, and rarely did I return without paint flakes decorating the blade.

My delinquent years progressed. My small victories in severing hood ornaments with bolt-cutters, wearing them like a cannibal adorned in human bones, grew into another, larger black dot: that of destructive, mock-apocalyptic pleasures. I entered into a more intense phase of Melville's "damp, drizzly November" of the soul through my association with Mike, a demolition and explosives fanatic whom I met through loose acquaintances. Mike's underworld comprised the Dunes, a deserted no-man's-land of Saharan sandhills and berms pocked with the skeletal remnants of burned-out cars: a graveyard of violated mechanical brides. Here, I watched Mike and his cronies shower the metal corpses in homemade variants of nitro-glycerine, scarring the brides in liquid fire over and over again, dancing around the smoldering wreckage like minions worthy of Hieronymous Bosch. I remember regret at not seeing the Alfas, the Panhards, the shiny, sharp, chrome Buicks and Chryslers buming in the sand, the sultry shapes the brides had seduced me into hopelessly pining for. I believed myself engaging in a soul-cleansing ritual, fooling myself into thinking the immolations I witnessed and admired were somehow purging my soul of the desire for the mechanical bride. This illusion shattered itself as soon as Mike's group began pondering stealing cars from the street for fresh explosive kicks. Knowing I had hit rock-bottom with this gang, I disconnected myself from Mike's party, feeling for the first time guilt at my ongoing nocturnal excursions, pocketknives and bolt-cutters wielded, through my neighborhood. I felt great remorse for my surface scratchings, knowing those petty criminal moves could lead me into Mike's contagious dementia. I no longer felt any desire to violate the mechanical bride, and perhaps I have Mike to thank for that, his volatile demeanor helping me to see the truth in Raymond Chandler's sentiment that "All men must escape at times from the deadly rhythms of their private thoughts" (12). I let go of whatever "deadly rhythms" I might have had toward the mechanical bride before such rhythms awarded me a jail sentence or worse. Still, my desire for her freedom dogged my days.

My days desiring this freedom were soon given a chance to be sated. After graduating high school, leaving behind ranks of superficial car-hungry girls and the fiery derangements of autos-da-fe, I received the opportunity of a road trip to go see the West Coast with some friends. I had hoped this trip would work to diminish my pangs for freedom at the wheels of the mechanical bride. This did not happen, the trip quickly devolving into a rolling cockfight. Matters of every kind erupted into argument. Everything from where to stop, where to eat, get gas, ask directions, and what road tunes to play became subjects of animosity under the maroon Pontiac's roof. What's more, I detected disgruntlement at my inability to share in the exhaustive drive-time. I found out later that the prime reason I was asked to go along had to do with splitting costs in gas and hotels, a ploy worthy of the mechanical brides themselves, placing me, once more, in Ellison's literary predicament of having to scream, but having no mouth. This discovery, however, paled in comparison with my reinforced wanderlust, strengthened by the constant bickering and snapping contests accompanying the trip. Perhaps the rivalries resulted from too many grooms jammed into one bride, but it nevertheless nailed into me harder than ever the desire to experience the road without the distractions of others. This is something I will never know. Decisions of

where to eat, gas up, or whether to listen to either Creedence Clearwater Revival or the Gore-Gore Girls will never be mine alone. I am forever fated to the role of co-pilot.

Through the years, I'd made an unofficial career of walking away from the unpleasant conditions arising from my situation. From the disappointment in a girl's expression dissolving into the black dot of unattainability, the displeasure at seeing mechanical brides burning for no purpose beyond psychotic glee, or the deceptive mirage of freedom offered in a bitterly overcrowded automobile, my recourse has always equaled that of Charlie Chaplin's alter ego, the Tramp, shuffling away into the setting sun during the film's final reel. My superimposing of Chaplin's character over myself has afforded me the strength to come to terms with both Magritte's cursed black dot and McLuhan's mechanical bride. Perhaps this association first rang true realizing the Tramp's never having commandeered a mechanical bride in any of Chaplin's films; in this, I might have subconsciously found an alliance in character, if not in circumstance. With Chaplin's help, I have learned to view Magritte's obscuring blackness as not an obstacle, but its reverse. Instead of seeing the black dot as a hindrance to freedom, I now see it as the end of a tunnel, an escape hatch, delivering me into freedom. This freedom I escape into is freedom from the mechanical bride. Help seeing this reversal came in Chaplin's *Modern Times*.

In *Modern Times*, Chaplin foreshadowed the effects suffered by, it seems, a great many automobile owners. In the film, the Tramp, upon release from his factory duties, continues to act the role of a machine, a role drilled into him through the repetitive tasks of the assembly-line. Chaplin's Tramp eventually becomes a robot amok, running rampant through the city streets, fastening nuts and screws that aren't there. In these scenes, I came to realize access to the mechanical bride didn't necessarily guarantee the kind of freedom important to me. For too long, I'd been longing for a freedom, baited with wanderlust, which amounted to a form of slavery. In these scenes, I see the crippling effects of those inextricably wed to their mechanical brides, becoming a part of the machine, unable to operate the same way they did before fusing with the automobile. Mechanical centaurs, if you will, whose fuel, drive, and energy seem leached out the moment they leave the bride's embrace. I cannot speak for the tiresomeness of driving, being free from the bride's wedlock, but I can't imagine it compares with pedaling a bike across town. These mechanical centaurs seem bent on achieving the precision of a machine, pleasing the bride's demands, their enslavement timed to the demands of gas gauges, oil gauges, and odometers. I see the freedom I escape into, the blue sky surrounding the portal of Magritte's black dot, as a release from the dehumanization of mechanization, a release from the dominance of the mechanical bride herself.

This is the freedom first experienced as I took my midnight walks through my neighborhood with my violating pocketknife. My mind's ease didn't originate in seeing the mechanical brides silent and penned up, but from a deep, echoing promise, like the whisper of my troubled soul, that these mechanical brides would not thief my humanity. The black dot, it seems, has attempted to communicate this message to me in barbershops, art classes, rock concerts, several surgical procedures, and many a "damp, drizzly November in my soul." Chaplin's irreverent antics helped me in realizing this, along with seeing the freedom the automobile represents as not tailored to my wants. I have also since discovered there are plenty of girls whose interests go deeper

than in my attachment to a set of four wheels. Great relief comes without the whip-crack dealt by the mechanical bride's enslavement. Old habits die a begrudging death, as a result. Walking past a dealership, sometimes it is difficult to suppress whistling Depeche Mode.

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# A Walk Down Mammary Lane

Jamie Snead

Perhaps the biggest fear women allow themselves is an overwhelming self-consciousness about their bodies. No matter which of my friends I am talking to they always express a sense of dissatisfaction about their shape. I don't mean the physical aspects that a woman can change with diet or exercise, or by getting a different haircut, or by wearing contact lenses. I mean aspects that cannot be altered without painful surgery or that cannot be changed at all.

I played basketball in junior high school one year. When I tell people this now they laugh, I am neither athletic nor graceful. Sometimes I fall for no apparent reason. If asked about my season as a Southwest Bronco, I cannot recall what position I played. I usually joke by saying "benchwarmer." It is an accurate description. Looking back, I suppose I played because I wanted to be part of something, and one thing was as good as the next, though basketball was hell. I hated the exercise, the running and jumping, the panting and sweating. I hated the boy's basketball team who sat on the sidelines and watched us run drills while they snickered and jeered.

I can remember with painful clarity the most embarrassing thing to happen to me while practicing basketball. We were doing suicides, a repetitious and exhausting exercise that involved running quickly back and forth while picking up erasers off the floor. Suicides were the worst for me, at thirteen I was already big busted and the movements were painful. I was doing my drills when I noticed a few boys on the sidelines watching me. When I finished one of them called me over and when I reached him, dropped to his knees in front of me, grabbed my arms and shook them while tilting his head back and opening his mouth shouting, "Milkshake! Milkshake! Come on boys get your milkshake!" The students laughed. My teacher freaked out and pulled the boy away from me. I did not cry, but I wore baggy sweatshirts for a year and learned to sit bent over in a slump to hide my chest - a habit I still have trouble breaking to this day.

Although my fashion sense won out over my embarrassment eventually, I did not learn to appreciate my breasts until my junior year of high school. When it came to romance I was a late bloomer; and so it was a surprise when I did start dating, that my breasts were an enormous asset. To put it frankly they made me popular with the boys. This was a new feeling compared to the ridicule I had experienced when I was younger. My breasts were still embarrassing but at least they were no longer a joke. They also proved extremely useful in helping me land lead roles in the spring musicals, and made it easier to cut in line. I learned, quite quickly, that when it came to mammary glands teenage boys were idiots. I put them to use and started thinking of them less as an embarrassment and more as an inexhaustible natural resource.

My senior year I displayed them proudly, much to my parents chagrin. The boys loved it, the girls called me a slut or big-breasted whore, depending on their level of creativity. It did not matter that the B-cups sitting beside me in the cafeteria were encased in less material than what made up most of my bikini tops, my chest was large and therefore I was easy. This is basic high school mentality; anything different is taboo and when most girls are still trying to turn their buds into flowers, big is

different. I ended up being the last person I knew to lose my virginity, so wary was I of rightfully gaining the bad reputation I had already required. Out came the sweatshirts; gone were the tank tops and halters.

Once again, it was an interesting problem for me; finding the balance between modern fashion and good taste. At nineteen, when I moved to New York, I learned to show them off at night and cover them during the day. Like CIA agents my breasts were living a double life. I began to consider a reduction; I was just so tired of always having to consider what the general reaction would be to how I dealt with my chest from day to day. It seemed better to lop them off. It would certainly have been easier in a lot of ways. Shopping would be a new world. No more frustrated glances at cute shirts I would never be able to wear. No more paying forty-five dollars for any bra that didn't look like a plain, white hammock. String bikinis could be mine and I could throw out all the under-wire torture traps I had purchased over the years. Determined, but broke, I made an appointment for a consultation and went to see a doctor I could never afford.

On the subway that morning I began to notice, perhaps a little too boldly, the women around me. It seemed that for years I had been so obsessed with the problem of how to dress my own breasts I hadn't paid enough attention to how other women dressed theirs. They were all so different, the flat-chested women with their tiny shirts and big necklaces, the large girls whose under-sized bras made their breasts look like mushrooms under their tee-shirts, the business ladies with their concealing jackets. There were slumpers like me, and women who looked like they had rods glued to their spines. I wondered if they were as aware of their breast as I was. Did they notice if people stared? Did they sometimes get halfway to work and wish they had worn something else, something a little less conspicuous maybe?

Outside the building, I smoke a cigarette and watch girls go inside the clinic. I try to guess what they were there for, reductions like me or breast implants, possibly a nose job, or a face lift, maybe a tummy tuck and a little liposuction. It suddenly strikes me as ludicrous that some of the women are here to have their breasts cut off and some are here to have breasts added on. I wondered why it matter to us, and I think that a lot of the women are probably here because of men; either to impress or dissuade them, to keep them or lose them. I find myself suddenly disenchanted with the whole idea of a reduction and I promptly go back home. My breasts and I take a cab.

Over the years I have had weeks where I forget about the issue of my breasts. I go about my daily routine the same as everyone and for the most part, they don't seem to matter. Inevitably, though I am reminded of their presence, sometimes in the rudest manners possible. Men stare, which is fine because it's a normal reaction, but sometimes they say things that I can't imagine they would want said to their wives and daughters. I was walking through the mall one day with a friend of mine when a man walked by pushing a stroller. As he passed me he hissed between his teeth, "nice titties" then chuckled and kept walking. My friend was horrified, I shrugged it off. Other times, usually at gas stations (a phenomenon I assume has something to do with fumes and testosterone,) men will walk by and say loudly, "Wow, she had huge tits! Did you see that? She had a rack on her! What do you think she was a D? A double D?" I have learned to not complain if something is said, especially if I am wearing anything that gives me cleavage. Complaining to people, especially women, means them listening, laughing, looking, and then saying, "Well you put them out there what do you expect

If people say now, "Your breasts are gorgeous!" I don't cringe, I say thank you and I mean it. If women call me a big-titted bitch or a big-breasted whore when I piss them off, I chalk it up to a lack of imagination. I now wear what I feel like and don't worry so much if people will find it offensive. I think it is sort of funny how much time I have spent worrying over two glands and a deposit of fat cells. If they bother other people, I let them worry about it.

That said, I will always be aware that my breasts are larger than average. They will always be an issue when I dress. After all, I have not gone without a bra since I was thirteen. Now though my awareness has changed and I find my feelings changing as well. Some days they are funny to me, these large orbs swinging from my torso. Some days they are frustrating; I can't run well and I haven't seen my feet while standing up in years. But most days they are just a piece of me, like my hands or my eyes, my hips or my back. They are a part of who I am, be it the worst or best, and I am glad to have them because they have helped shape the woman I am, both inside and out. I no longer fear my breasts and neither should the women around me.







# A Bridge to Nowhere is Just a Pier

Jonathan M.Vick

ACT I

SETTING:

The end of a short pier on a lake. Two patio chairs. A cooler. The pier exits toward the house, right. Left, it is a peninsula into the lake. Evening.

AT RISE:

CALEB, a man between the ages of 25 and 35, is sitting in a patio chair tossing rocks into the water from a small pile. ADARA, a woman between the ages of 20 and 30, enters down the pier with a half-full bottle of wine and a wine glass in one hand and a six-pack of beer in the other. She puts the bottle on the cooler and tosses the glass to CALEB.

ADARA

Heads up.

CALEB

Do you remember that old wall-paper we used to have when we were kids?; all the cowboys on it and cattle everywhere.

ADARA

You sure you don't want a beer?

CALEB

I hate beer. You know that. It's got all the ingredients of liquid bread. I'll stick to the wine. Liquid grapes don't make you fat.

ADARA

I'm not fat!

CALEB

You haven't finished your beer yet.

ADARA

Do you have to drink it out of a fruity little wine glass?

CALEB

They're your glasses! What do you care, anyway?

ADARA

I've got neighbors around this lake. I don't want them thinking' my older brother's a fag.

CALEB

There's not a chance they'll think I'm a sophisticate?

ADARA

I doubt it.

CALEB

Would you rather I drink out of the bottle?

ADARA

Then they'll think you're a wino.

CALEB

Well, until they start putting wine in cans, it's either the bottle or the glass.

ADARA

They put it in boxes.

CALEB

They need to start marketing it in juice boxes. Little individual sized boxes of wine.

The Cabernet Fun Size Wine Box! Perfect for picnics, school lunches, or a little moment of relaxation while you're stuck in traffic.

ADARA

Maybe that's why they don't.

CALEB

I still think there's a market for it. They could cure a lot of road rage. I'd be less apt to care when I get cut off if I'm sucking on a box of Chianti.

ADARA

I see you've decided to go with the bottle.

CALEB

If my choices are wino or fag I have to go with wino. At least a wino can get himself into some kind of rehab.

ADARA

Why are we talking about wallpaper?

CALEB

What?

ADARA

You asked if I remember that wallpaper we had when we were kids? Had cowboys and horses and stuff all over it. I remember. Why?

CALEB

I don't know. Just been thinking about a lot of stuff like that lately.

ADARA  
You've got cancer, haven't you?

CALEB  
Why would I have cancer?

ADARA  
AIDS? You have AIDS.

CALEB  
I don't have AIDS.

ADARA  
How do you know?

CALEB  
I'm drinking out of the bottle; not the glass.

ADARA  
Anybody can get AIDS. A wino can get AIDS.

CALEB  
I don't have AIDS.

ADARA  
Then what's the matter with you?

CALEB  
Nothing's the matter with me!

ADARA  
Then why are you thinking about wallpaper?

CALEB  
A lot of people think about wallpaper. People without cancer or AIDS think about wallpaper.

ADARA  
Not with cowboys and horses on it.

CALEB  
Why in the world did we have wallpaper with cowboys and horses on it? Do you remember ever being into cowboys?

ADARA  
I liked unicorns when I was a girl. They're kinda like horses. I didn't get around to liking cowboys until I got older.

CALEB

So why did Mom think we'd like the cowboy wallpaper?

ADARA

I don't know. We were American kids. I guess she figured all American kids liked cowboys.

CALEB

But we had an Australian Mother. We liked what she liked. That's how genetics works.

ADARA

They didn't know about genetics back then.

CALEB

That wallpaper concerns me.

ADARA

We haven't even seen that wallpaper since we were little kids. How can it disturb you?

CALEB

Because it's further proof that, despite the fact that we sprung from her loins –

ADARA

Do you have to put it that way? "Sprung from her loins". It sounds dirty.

CALEB

It sounds better than "clawed our way, breathless and bloody from her twisted gaping glory-hole".

ADARA

Sprung from her loins. Continue.

CALEB

She gave birth to us. She raised us. She has been our primary influence throughout our entire lives. Yet, she bought us cowboy wallpaper because that's what American kids like.

ADARA

And that disturbs you.

CALEB

She doesn't know who we are, Adara. She never has. She always expects us to be something ... I don't know. Something else. Not us.

ADARA

I think you're reading too much into the wallpaper.

(ADARA throws back the remaining beer in her can, then smashes the empty can on the table. She stands up, arms out stretched at her sides and turns a circle)

ADARA (Continued)  
Does this beer make me look fat?

CALEB  
You know what she said when I told her I was moving into the city?

ADARA  
"You're an idiot and you'll come crying back home before the end of the month."

CALEB  
Actually she said I'm a nincompoop and she only gave me a week. How did you know?

ADARA  
She said the same thing to me when I went to college.  
(ADARA takes another can and opens it.)  
C'mon, man. You're falling behind. I'm already on my second can.

CALEB  
When did you turn into such an alcoholic?

ADARA  
You've been away for a while. A lot about your little sister has changed.

CALEB  
I haven't been away that long.

ADARA  
Eleven years. I've been asking you to come visit me for eleven years; you never once made the trip out here.

CALEB  
Money is scarce, Adara. It's hard to take time off work and go half-way across the country ...

ADARA  
But I leave one message on your machine to tell you about Mom and you drive all night to get here the next day.

CALEB  
You know when you really need me I'll always be here.

ADARA  
I didn't need you. I could have handled this by myself.

CALEB  
Then why did you call me?

ADARA

I wanted you to know what I was doing. I like to keep in touch. What I want to know is why, after eleven years, you decided to come visit me now?

CALEB

Maybe I needed you.

ADARA

Bullshit. You've never needed anyone, Caleb. You're just a control freak like Mom who wasn't about to let me do this without your input.

CALEB

Then why did you call me?

ADARA

I don't know.

CALEB

You needed me.

ADARA

I didn't need you!

CALEB

Needed.

ADARA

Did not!

CALEB

Me.

ADARA

Shut up! God, you're such an ass!

CALEB

There's no need for name calling. The eleven year streak is broken and I'm here. You may praise me now. For your king has returned.

ADARA

My king?! Do you remember when that little doggie chased you out into the parking lot in high school, oh mighty king?

CALEB

Why do you have to bring that up?! I swear, the only reason you ever bring up that story is to humiliate me!

ADARA

That's not true! Sometimes I bring it up to shame and cajole you.

CALEB

I'm not ashamed! I could have been killed that night.

ADARA

I know! Tell me the story about the night the cute puppy attacked you!

CALEB

It was a massive starved wolf, Adara! Obviously you've never been challenged by a rabid dog.

ADARA

Tell me the story. Please?! C'mon, Caleb! I want to praise my mighty king! You're sitting on my pier, drinking my wine. Tell your little sister a bedtime story, like you used to when we were kids.

CALEB

Fine! But I think it's sick the way you find pleasure in my humiliation.

ADARA

I just like hearing about your life, Caleb. Is it my fault if it's laden with disgrace?

CALEB

It's not laden with disgrace! It's fraught with unfortunate circumstance.

ADARA

Just tell the story, Jack London.

CALEB

It was October. It was cold. And, as it so often does, it was raining.

ADARA

Are you going to stand up and do the skit, or are you just gonna sit there like Garrison Keillor?

CALEB

I'm gonna do the—can I tell the story?! Do you want to tell it?

ADARA

Can I?

CALEB

Seriously? Be my guest.

ADARA

Okay. It was October. It was cold. And it was raining.

CALEB

Very nice introduction.

ADARA

Thank you. You were a senior in high school, president of the student council, a pillar of the academic community and full of shit.

CALEB

HEY! I never told the story that way!

ADARA

It's my story now. Drink your wine and listen. You may learn something.

CALEB

Can I drink out of a glass now? This bottle keeps banging against my teeth. I feel like it's gonna knock them out.

ADARA

Isn't that how Mom got her front teeth knocked out?

CALEB

Yup. She was drinking out of a bottle and somebody pushed the end of it to make her spill. Knocked out both her front teeth. That's why she has the false ones.

ADARA

Remember when she used to threaten us with the Evil Mom when we were bad?

CALEB

Yes. Then she'd go in the other room and take out her false teeth and come back with that hideous gap in her mouth! We'd scream and she would grin and cackle and chase us around the house as Evil Mom!

ADARA

Why did we let her get away with that?

CALEB

We didn't know any better! We thought there was an Evil Mom hiding in the house, waiting for us to be bad. I still sleep with the bedroom door closed and the closet door open, to make sure there isn't an Evil Mom hiding in there.

ADARA

I can't believe you're gonna use the glass.

CALEB

Oh for crying out loud! For the sake of your neighbors I'll pour the wine into your empty beer can. Will that make it all right? Tell the damned story and get my humiliation over with.

ADARA

October; cold; raining. You were a senior in high school. You had just finished a very productive meeting of the Student Ecology Club.



CALEB

God, I was such a geek.

ADARA

You were headed to the parking lot to drive home. It was dark, and the parking lot was deserted. You came out the school doors into the rain, and paused to close your Member's Only jacket and take out your keys. That was when you saw him.

CALEB

A hybrid wolf/coyote from the depth of Hades!

ADARA

A little doggie.

CALEB

Doggie, my ass! It was a freakin' Doberman Pinscher, with tattoos and a pierced tongue. He was wearing a leather jacket he chewed off the Hell's Angel he ate for lunch. And I think he had rabies. Probably got them from the Hell's Angel.

ADARA

Having a natural fear of all things more conceited than yourself, you froze.

CALEB

You can't reason with a dog, Adara. My fear of them is well founded.

ADARA

The dog, cold and wet, standing in the rain had only to sneeze.

CALEB

He snarled and barked a clear warning! If you're not going to tell the story correctly—

(ADARA demonstrates the story as she tells it, using various items she finds on the pier as props and using the cooler to represent the car)

ADARA

And the race was on!! You threw your backpack in the general direction of the dog – meaning West – and it fell with a book-heavy thud to the ground a mere foot and a half from where you stood. You turned tail and ran. In the night air there was only the sound of the rain hitting the pavement, the slap of your feet against the ground, and the heaving panting of the puppy playing a game of tag. All of this, however, was drowned out by the shrill piercing screech coming from the depths of your inner child which was, as it turns out, a panty-wetting little girl.

CALEB

As humiliating as this story is, it's never been quite this humiliating.

ADARA

At some point during your palsy sprint across the parking lot, you cunningly devised a plan to pull ahead in the race by dropping your heavy ballast! With maniacal glee you threw your keys!

CALEB

I lost my grip on them in the confusion.

ADARA

They sluiced across the puddled pavement—

CALEB

Sluiced?

ADARA

--where they rested stealthily beneath a car. Unburdened by heavy metal, you continued to run with the renewed vigor of a headless chicken. You got to your car; the dog only inches from your heels, and with a mighty flight you leaped onto the roof of the car; rain and tears stinging your eyes, but victorious in your safety!

CALEB

When you're finished I think I'll tell the story about when you got your head stuck between the railing on the stairs.

ADARA

There you sat on the roof of the car; huddled, cold, and heavy with rain. The dog paced hungrily around the perimeter, waiting for you to tire and come down. But did you?!

CALEB

No! I screamed for help!

ADARA

Help! Somebody please help me!!

CALEB

I don't like this story.

ADARA

An hour later the dog got bored and sick of the rain and wandered off. This should be the end of our story.

CALEB

God, why can't this be the end of our story?

ADARA

Because some moron had thrown your keys beneath a car!! You couldn't remember which car; and it was dark and you couldn't see! So what did you do?!

CALEB

I went back into the school and called Mom?

ADARA

Don't be stupid!! You crawled under each car; through the puddles and oil, looking for your keys!!

(ADARA is nearly crying with laughter. In spite of himself, CALEB laughs as well)

CALEB

I did find the keys.

ADARA

After Mom came out looking for you 'cause you'd been gone so long.

CALEB

Do you remember what she said when I told her what happened?

ADARA

Of course! If you're gonna be dumb you've gotta be tough.

CALEB

If you're gonna be dumb, you've gotta be tough. And somewhere in that statement was all the compassion we ever came to expect.

ADARA

Yeah. Well ... Mom has never been big on compassion. Suck it up, walk it off and let it heal, or die quietly, 'cause nobody likes to hear a complainer.

(Pause. ADARA sits on the edge of the pier, dangling her feet in the water, and drinks her beer)

CALEB

Very nicely told, by the way.

ADARA

Thank you. I like to tell it at parties.

(Silent and uncomfortable pause)

CALEB

What's the matter?

ADARA

Nothing.

CALEB

A minute ago you were laughing so hard there were tears coming out of your eyes. What's wrong?

ADARA

Just thinking about Mom. If you're gonna be dumb you've gotta be tough? What a rotten thing to say to someone; especially your own kid.

CALEB

Yup. But on some level she's right. I mean, would we be where we are today if we'd spent our lives whining and complaining? We go through a lot, Adara, but we're tough! We keep fighting, no matter what. I guess we have to be tough. We keep being dumb.

(Pause)

ADARA

Did you know I had an abortion?

CALEB

What? When?

ADARA

Three or four years ago. It was no big deal. Some guy I met at a party.

CALEB

Who is he?

ADARA

Just a guy I met in college.

CALEB

I want to know who he is! Did he make you get the abortion?! Where does he live?

ADARA

Calm down, Caleb! He's gone. It was as much my fault as it was his.

CALEB

I'm sorry.

ADARA

It was no big deal.

CALEB

I'm sorry I wasn't here.

ADARA

You're never here. I've learned how to survive without you.

CALEB

What did Mom say?

ADARA

If you're gonna be dumb –

BOTH

You've gotta be tough.

CALEB

Why doesn't that surprise me? I'm sorry I wasn't here.

ADARA

You haven't been here for a lot.

CALEB

Are you okay?

ADARA

I kinda wanted to keep the baby. I mean, there was no way I could have. I was still in college. But it would have been nice to have a little baby that loved me.

CALEB

I wish you'd told me. We could have figured something out.

ADARA

I did figure something out. I couldn't keep the baby.

(Pause)

As soon as I told the guy he went ballistic; told me he never wanted to have sex with me in the first place, and it wasn't his kid; called me a slut and that if I had the baby he wasn't gonna pay for it and he hoped it died inside me. Told me if I didn't have an abortion he was gonna push me down a flight of stairs so it would die. Typical asshole behavior.

CALEB

Who the fuck is this jerk ?! Get me a flight of stairs and a baseball bat!

ADARA

Sit down, Caleb. He's gone. He disappeared a few weeks after I told him and I haven't heard from him since.

CALEB

You don't treat women like that! It's not – you just don't! God, I wanna take every guy who treats women like their own personal playgrounds, with total disrespect, and bash their heads against the ground until they can't even feed themselves anymore!!

ADARA

Chill out! He didn't treat me like a playground. He wasn't even any good at it. And I had as much sex with him as he had with me. Like I said, it was both our faults.

CALEB

That so untrue, Adara! He never stopped to think about you! All he wanted to was to fuck the pretty girl and get away with it!

ADARA

I didn't want much more than that myself, Caleb. The baby was a surprise for both of us. He didn't handle it very well, but it wasn't his fault it happened.

CALEB

Pisses me off!! Goddammit!!

(CALEB throws the empty wine bottle into the lake)

I'm sorry I wasn't here. I should have been here.

(Pause)

ADARA

Can I ask you something? Are you still a virgin?

CALEB

What?!! Why would you think I'm still a virgin?!!

ADARA

I don't know. I never hear about you seriously dating anyone. And your reaction to my abortion is ... a little over the top. Not that it's bad! It's just ... it doesn't sound like you've done a lot of wild oat sowing; doesn't sound like you've woken up after a party next to someone whose name you can't remember. You know?

(CALEB takes a long drink from his wine can, and considers, looking out at the water)

CALEB

No. I'm not a virgin.

ADARA

Okay. I was just asking.

CALEB

But had you asked me that six months ago there'd have been a different answer.

ADARA

Really? Why? I mean, what took you so long?

CALEB

Remember when Mom told us that if she ever caught us smoking she would break all our fingers so we couldn't hold the cigarettes? Think about it. Pre-marital sex ... with the Evil Mom hiding in the closet, just waiting to break something.

ADARA

Seriously.

CALEB

I don't know. I guess I've always figured that if a woman was willing to have sex with me there must be something wrong with her – low self-esteem; poor self-image. I'm not the type of person who can take advantage of someone like that. So, I try to help; show her that she's worth spending time with without needing to give sex as a reward.

ADARA

Very chivalrous. I'm sure you've helped a lot of girls improve their self-image.

CALEB

I doubt it. I'm sure I've just left a lot of women thinking I'm gay, or impotent, or incapable or something.

ADARA

Are you not interested in sex? I mean, do you think about it?

CALEB

Of course I do!! I'm not dead!! All the parts work just fine, as far as I know, and they frequently like to wake me up in the middle of the night to remind me!

ADARA

Then what's holding you back?

CALEB

I don't know. It just seems ... wrong; disrespectful. I mean, without some semblance of love; truly caring for one another; what is it? Two animals slobbering and grabbing and fucking in the dark; thousands of years of intelligence and civilization reduced to blind, base instinct. Of course, by the time a woman gets to know me, she's not interested in sleeping with me anymore. She goes out and finds other guys for romance. And when they break her down and destroy her self-esteem, she runs back to me and I build it back up ... so she can run off and try again with some other guy.

ADARA

But you're not a virgin anymore. Obviously someone came back.

CALEB

I finally got sick of it all and ... took advantage for a while. It only lasted a few weeks before I couldn't stand myself anymore. She still doesn't understand what happened. I just stopped calling. It's not something I'm proud of.

ADARA

I can't decide if you're sweet, stupid or gay.

CALEB

I'm not drinking out of the glass.

ADARA

So you've never had those hedonistic rebellious years? Nights of drunken debauchery and shameless fun? Getting drunk; getting stoned; getting laid. Anything? You didn't rebel even after you moved away?

CALEB

What would I rebel against?

ADARA

Mom!! The Evil Mom who's gonna break your dick off if you use it!

CALEB

When Dad died and Mom had her breakdown I was nine years old and you were only six. She was too shattered to look after herself, and you were too young. Somebody had to take responsibility, so I did what was necessary to keep us all going. You know? I grew up fast and I took care of the family and I tried to set a good example. Wine, women and drugs have never really fit in. You were six years old, Adara, and as you grew up I just couldn't bear to see any guy treating my little sister the way most guys treat women; the way Dad treated Mom. I couldn't be that guy, you know? So, I decided when I grew up I wasn't going to be like most guys.

ADARA

And now you treat every girl like she's your little sister.

(CALEB finishes his wine, crushes the can and throws it into the water)

CALEB

I'm gonna go get another bottle.

ADARA

You feel like you raised the whole family, don't you?

CALEB

I DID raise the whole family!

ADARA

Then why did you leave us; and not come back for eleven years?

CALEB

She took everything away from me, Adara! Everything!! She's always been too overbearing and controlling to ever let me become an adult; and she's just too fragile and needy to allow me to have a childhood. What else was I supposed to do?! When I left everybody was all grown up ... except for me!!

ADARA

I wasn't. I still needed you.

CALEB

I was sick to death of being needed! What about what I needed?!

(Pause. ADARA sits on the edge of the pier looking down into the water. After a long silent moment:)

ADARA

I'm sorry, Caleb. I didn't know.

CALEB

It's not your fault.



(CALEB and ADARA sits side by side on the pier; dangling their feet over the edge and looking out at the water. ADARA takes CALEB's hand and rests her head on his shoulder. There is a faint thumping sound of something in the water washed against the posts of the pier)

ADARA

Are you really going to move into the city?

CALEB

I don't know. I'm sure I will one of these days.

ADARA

We keep building these bridges to nowhere. One of these days we're going to put the past behind us and live the lives we want to live with the people we're meant to find. Except "one of these days" never comes. How do we build a bridge between "today" and "one of these days"?

(Pause)

Here I stand, on my bridge to nowhere ... looking across the moonlit waters for another abandoned bridge. Looking for someone like you ... standing on a pier ... looking across the waters ... for someone like me.

CALEB

There's nothing holding us back, is there?

ADARA

Not anymore. Only ourselves.

(The waves wash hard against the pier and there is a louder thump)

CALEB

Do you hear that?

ADARA

Yeah. What is it?

CALEB

I don't know. Sounds like something's bumping against the pier:

(CALEB goes to the far side of the pier and looks over the edge. ADARA hands him a flashlight as she tosses the remaining beer cans in the cooler and clears up)

ADARA

Do you see anything?

CALEB

Hand me the shovel. It's just Mom. She must have floated to the top again.

(CALEB picks up a bloody shovel from behind the cooler and pushes it down into the water)

ADARA

I told you she wasn't heavy enough.

CALEB

I weighed her down with all the rocks I could find! What more could I do?

(ADARA grabs a hand-axe from inside the cooler)

ADARA

Small pieces, Caleb. Just let the fish have her. If she's gonna be dumb, she's gotta be tough.

CALEB

I'll just push her to the bottom. I'll cut her up in the morning. I'm not in the mood tonight.

ADARA

Caleb, are you okay?

CALEB

I'll be fine. Why?

ADARA

I appreciate you coming out to help me with this. I appreciate you always trying to protect me. But I'm a big girl now. You don't have to take care of your little sister anymore.

CALEB

I know.

ADARA

No, you don't. Caleb, look at me! It's time for you to have a rebellion.

(ADARA holds CALEB and pushes his hair from his eyes, caressing his face as she does. Slowly she leans in and kisses him passionately on the lips)

ADARA (Cont.)

I love you, Caleb.

(CALEB and ADARA look into one another's eyes, holding the moment while they both consider and decide. Finally:)

CALEB

Lemme just push Mom back under.

ADARA

Caleb?

CALEB  
Yeah?

ADARA  
Let's do it in her bed!

(ADARA bites her lips seductively and exits. CALEB pushes the shovel deeply into the water.  
FADE TO BLACKOUT.)

END OF PLAY

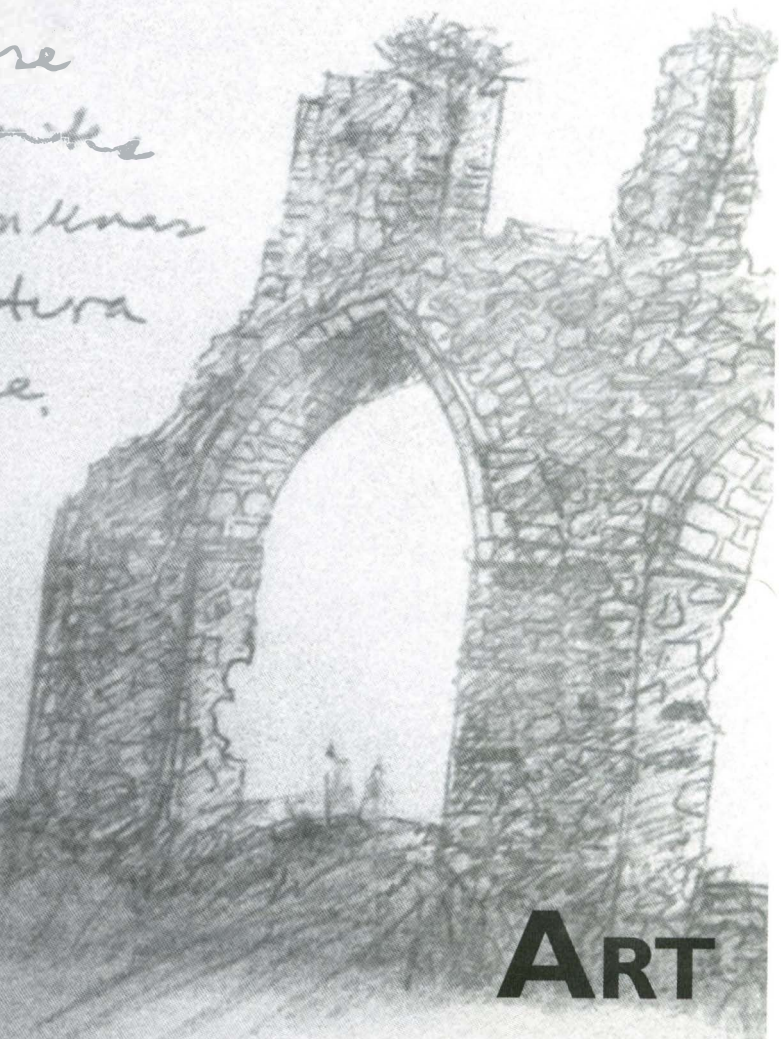
Copyright © 2002

sitio es una ruina  
de moros. Por casualidad  
la casa de mi fam  
r.

ya, quiere  
restaurar  
serían una  
arquitectura  
en dese.

En  
tienen

les  
surge,  
ser



**ART**



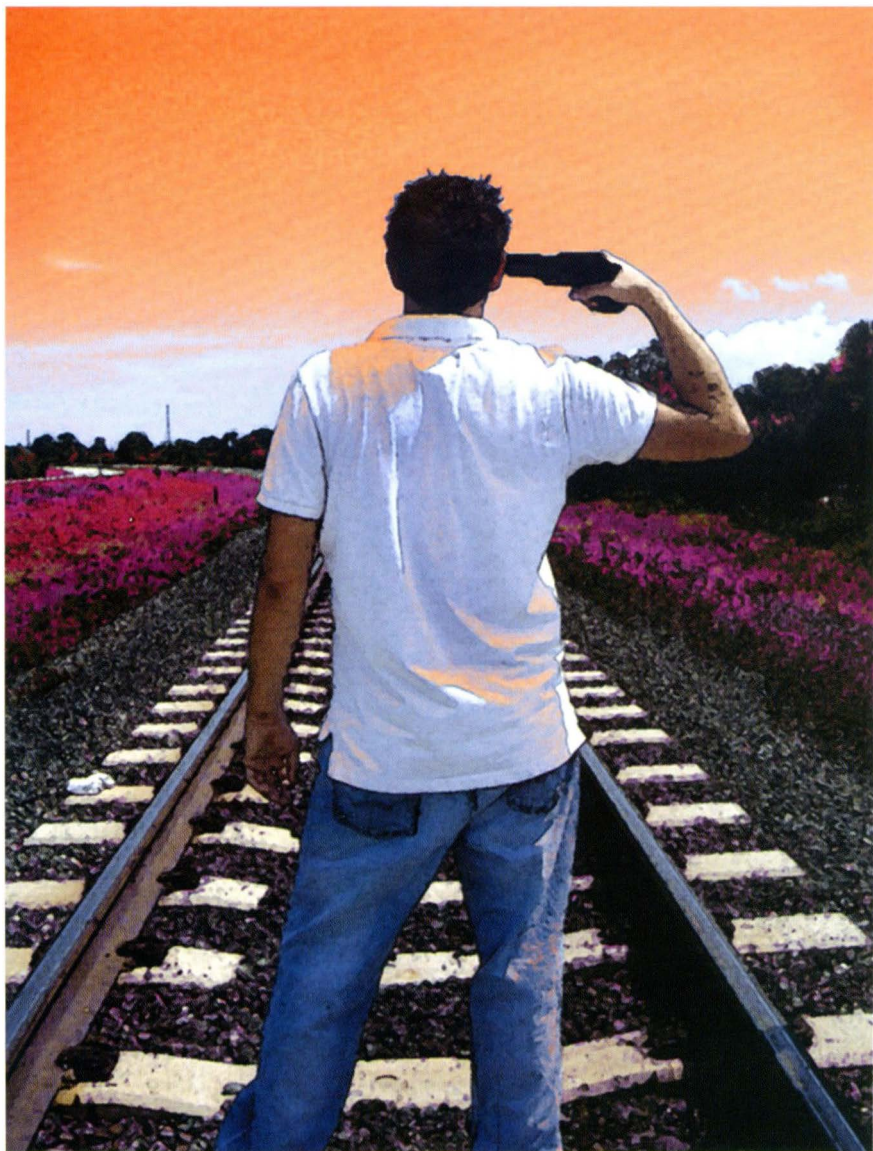
***Hesperidium Sun***

date unknown

**Ana Stroup**

Acrylic on canvas, 10" x 14"





## ***The Last Sunset***

2005

**George Sciarrino**

Digital photography manipulated in Photoshop, 18" x 24"



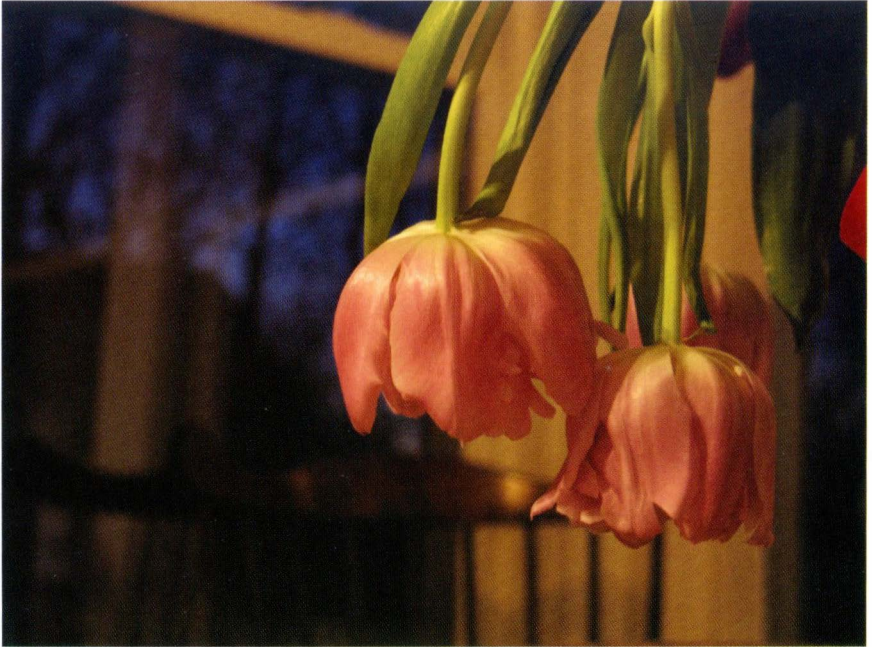
## ***Unity***

Playa Rodiles, Asturias, Spain, 2005

**Cherie Ramirez**

Digital photography





***Dying Tulips***

date unknown

**Christina Jeffrey**

Digital photography, 8" x 10"



**Portrait**

date unknown

**Caitrin Merrill**

Oil on canvas, I



## ***Tree Frog at Pinehurst***

date unknown

**Conrad Winslow**

Digital photography



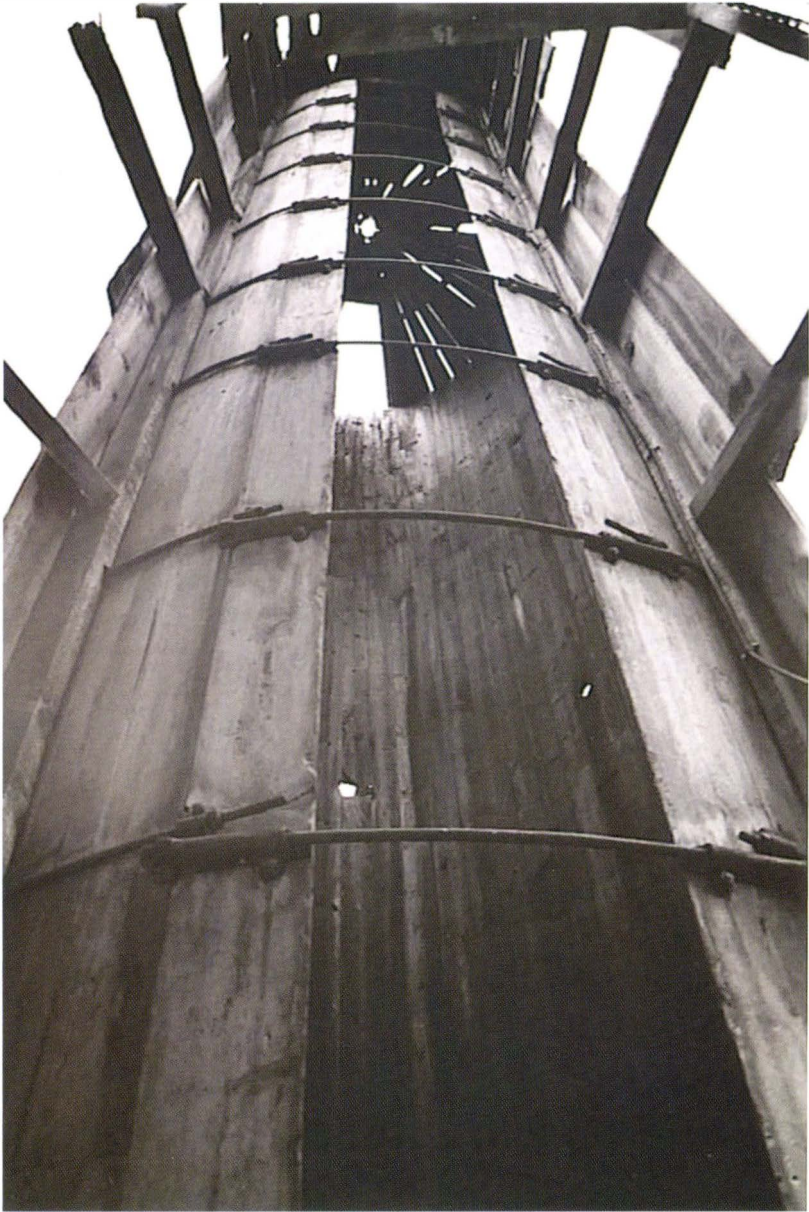


***Honeymoon Lighthouse***

Bahamas, 1998

**Vicki Long**

35mm film, 10" x 14"



## ***Crumbling Silo***

Triadelphia, West Virginia, 2005

**Alec Troeger**

35mm B&W film, 4" x 6"



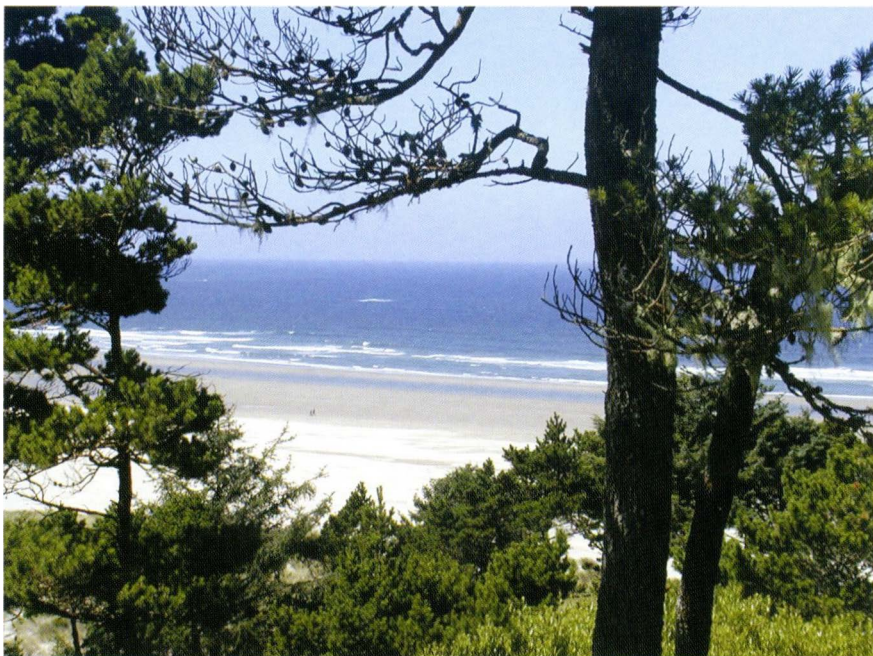
***Life Will Find A Way***

Colegiata de Santa Juliana, Santillana del Mar, Spain, 2005

**Cherie Ramirez**

Digital photography





## ***Oregon Pines***

Lincoln City, Oregon, 2005

**Kimberly Moorehouse**

35mm film, 4" x 6"





## **Chair**

date unknown

**Priyanwada Ekanayake**

Mixed media, 5 1/2" x 5 1/2"



***Sunflowers***

2002

**Morgen Culver**

Digital Photography 22" x 17"



***Are You In or Are You Out?***

2005

**Danielle Lunger**

Pencil, charcoal, and sumi ink on paper, 18" x 24"



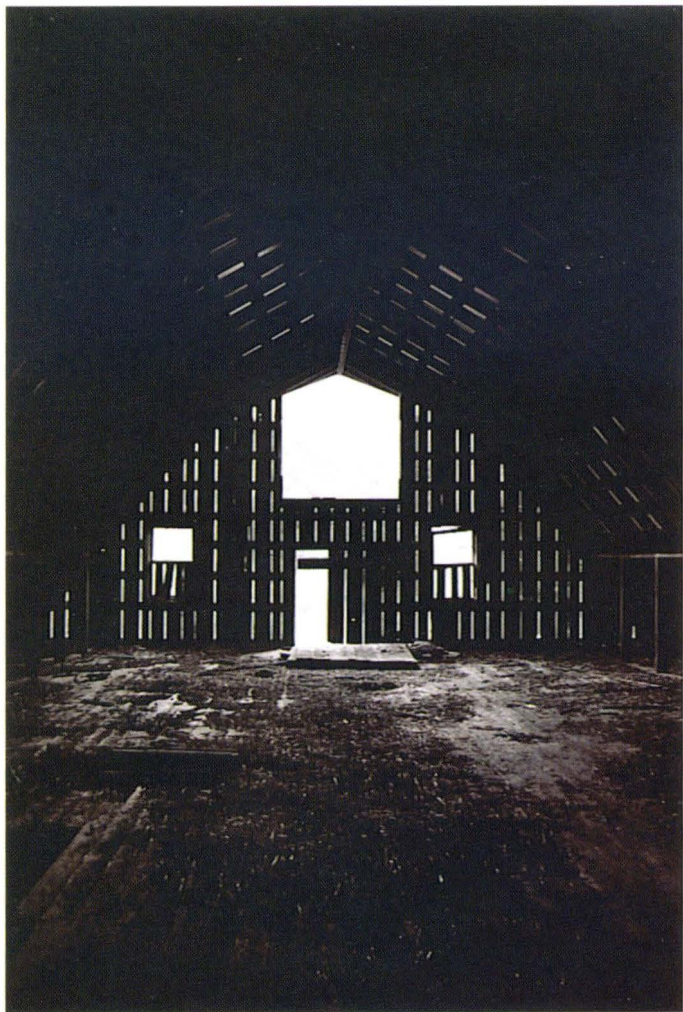


***Untitled #1***

Spain, 2005

Brooke Harbaugh

Digital photography



***Triadelphia Barn***

Triadelphia, West Virginia, 2005

**Alec Troeger**

35mm B&W film, 4" x 6"



**Blue Cat**

2005

**Rachel Gentile**

Acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24"



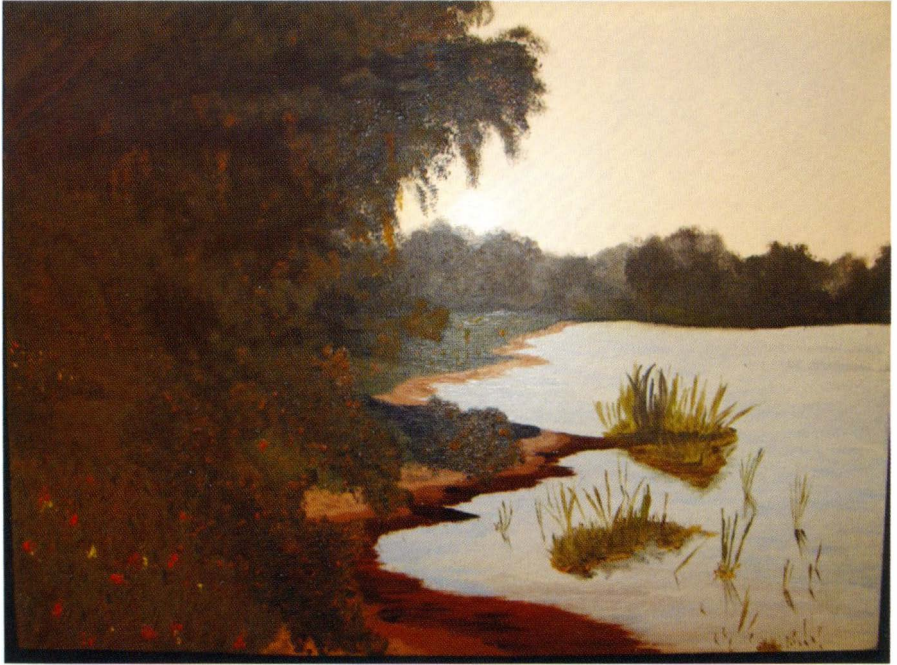


## ***Ice Queen***

2005

Jasmine Parker

Mixed media



***Before the Dinky Dock***

2005

**Maria Petrakos**

Oil on canvas, 14" x 18"





***Fairville Lake***

2005

**Danielle Lunger**

Oil on canvas, 15" x 20"



**9 A.M., *Irish Standard Time***

October 2004

Sarah Waibel

Digital photography



***Butterfly Feeding***

Scottsdale, Arizona, 2005

**Kimberly Moorehouse**

35mm B&W film, 4" x 6"





***Untitled #2***

Spain, 2005

**Brooke Harbaugh**

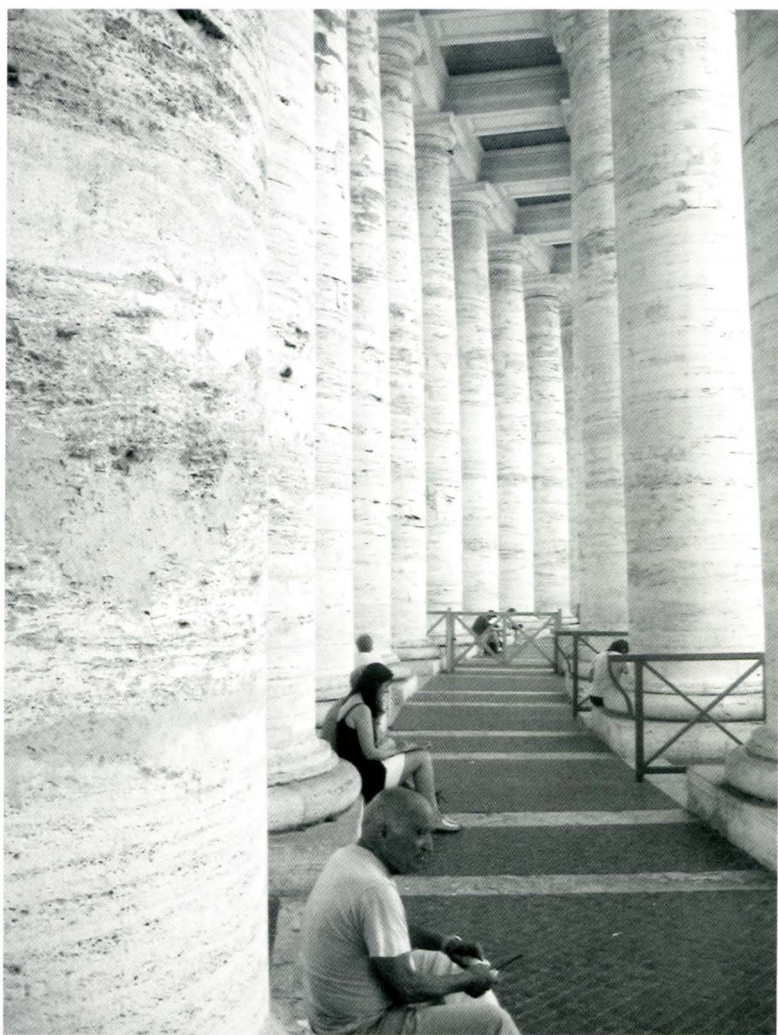
Digital photography, 5" x 7"



***Building***

Priyanwada Ekanayake

Mixed media, 5 3/4" x 8"



## **Columns**

2001

**Morgen Culver**

Digital photography 7" x 9"



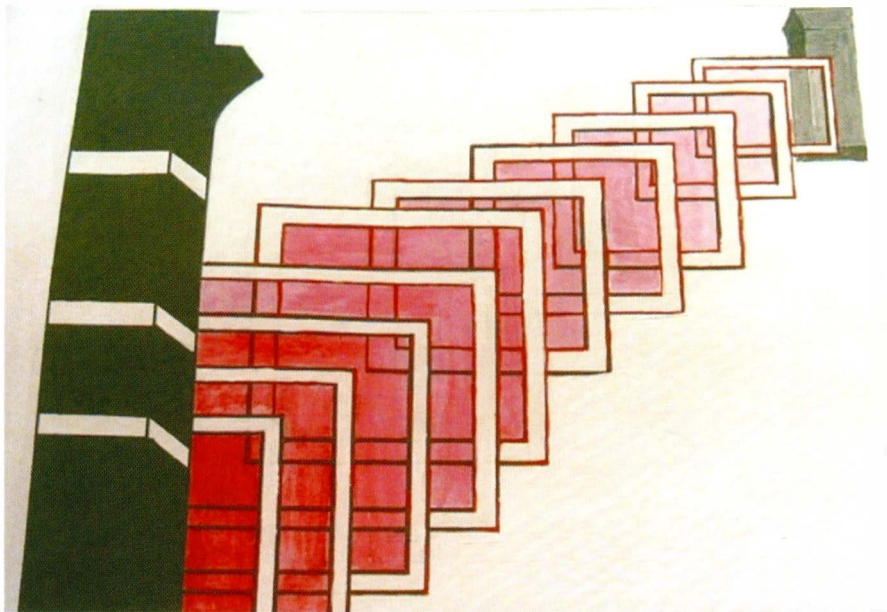
***Artificial Horizons***

2005

**Marcela Wanderley**

Digital photography





***Windows to the Soul***

2005

**Jasmine Parker**

Pencil and ink on paper





## ***Imagined Transgression***

2005

**Marcela Wanderley**

Digital photography manipulated in Photoshop



***Spiral Hatteras***

Cape Hatteras, 1990

**Vicki Long**

35mm film, 5" x 7"





# Lonely, Beautiful Beast

Jess Drew

My name is Picasso and I am perfect.  
I have teeth and gums stuck to the soles of my feet  
So I can put my foot in my mouth with every step I take  
And I've got a heart in my nose that spills onto my sleeve whenever I sneeze  
So that all men can see that I'm just not the right girl  
My eyes are Martian at the fore of my face  
But are stony and blind to anything but snake oil

My cerebellum gushes in my fists  
So I can cram it up my nose when I think I feel love,  
To crush the rogue happiness  
And bleed the magic out through my eyes

But, oh, what a smile!  
Painted black and blue for you  
Tying knots  
Around the fizzled electrical wires that spring from my eyes  
So that I can't hear anything but a connection that doesn't exist and plenty of white noise  
My name is Picasso and I am perfectly something to somebody else

## Hush!-

Suzanne Michelle Jones

Hush!-  
You discordant downpour  
You never ending attack of action  
You bustle of life  
Hush!-  
And leave me here  
Enrobed in downy solitude  
To contemplate what Thoreau drew  
In his notebook by the pond  
(He and I, we both have known  
The sacred rush, the vertigo  
That accompany sensation)  
So hush!-  
And listen  
For these Are  
Super-saturated slices of ecstasy:  
The velvet kiss of the sea on your face  
The balm of a garden pregnant with warm rain  
The sun's slow dive and the last golden ray  
Before it flickers, then dies  
At the end of the day

## To: My California Co.

Nicole Shaffer

round rim carelessly crusted with salt and sugar  
lime slush and liquor filled majesty made to punch  
you drunk in a cheap tequila sunset with a muck of august  
sweat 'n' slurs shared with sun spotted boys you meet on the  
street and one drink's only a half hour's minimum wage  
pay as we sips and sits till moments  
slips away  
tills  
happy  
hour  
blurs  
one  
more  
meaningless daze

## Haikus

Carolyn Shealy Freligh

### ***Dress-Up***

Lily-laden spikes  
Surrounded by long, smooth leaves  
Green satin dresses

### ***Expectations***

Elm green lizards watch  
From the winter branches bare  
Matching leaves burst forth

### ***Surprise***

Sentinel cypress  
Adorned with love, moss, and time  
Silent and waiting

### **Zen Haiku**

Zen is the calm, cool  
water of the mindful soul;  
vase full of empty.

### **Satori Haiku**

Bursting like fireworks,  
Dark cleaved Light; illuminate.  
Nature of the Tao.

## **Poem for a Paper Crane**

Sarah Kathryn Moore

Let her be tattooed behind my ear:  
Embroider her with silver thread  
to the inside of my ear; to the base of my palm.

Let her be embedded as green glass  
above the inside of my wrist. For a love-wound I would  
let her be tattooed behind my ear:

Let her be wound like a pink ribbon  
around my throat. Sew her  
to the inside of my ear. To the base of my palm

affix her like a kite.  
She will wish to nest herself into my hair—  
let her: Be tattooed behind my ear;

small as a pinkie-nail. Tie her to my feet when I dance  
(I will take her dancing, cigarette smell wound  
to the inside of my ear; to the base of my palm)

Change her into an itch on my inner thigh.  
Into my eyebrows sew her with silver thread.  
Let her be tattooed—behind my ear;  
to the inside of my ear; to the base of my palm.

# Connect the Dots

Katie Lamie

I told you.  
I told you not to love me,  
and then I caught you looking at me  
as if I held some secret to your happiness  
tangled up in the knots of my hair  
scribbled into the lines of my palm  
etched in the design of my winter coat.  
Naively you fumbled towards me,  
you fell into fiction ignoring all the telling signs.

I always had a little part of you  
under my skin, scraping nails against a chalkboard.  
You loved me.  
I couldn't connect the dots  
the beautiful notion of love simply,  
from one to two to three, lost on me.  
such hostile insecurity, self-conscious fury,  
unable to see in me the angel, the woman that you saw.

I tried so damn hard to free you from me.  
Then I loved you halfway,  
gave you one one-thousandth of what you deserved,  
a glimpse, a taste, of my attention,  
genuine emotion.

With every sunrise,  
came the hope that I could follow the numbers, connect the dots,  
understand the directions, love you.  
With the sunsets came the realizations,  
the overwhelming truths—  
that I could only let you down.  
Break your spirit, make you bitter;  
Brutalize your heart.

Perhaps I knew it all from the beginning  
the dots could never quite connect—  
into the arching shape of passion,  
the shape of loving you back.  
I know. I know I broke your heart.  
I told you not to love me.

## Poem Somewhat in the Manner of Charles Wright

Shaun Cricks

The Half-full Sun dutifully penetrates,  
both celluloid and epidermis.

Earthworms glisten with Antifreeze.  
Specific excrement,  
Poignant note-taking. Reflection's solvent.

Go on, reach under, and overcompensate. Then  
Write. Rinse. Repeat.

The Half-Empty Moon-Refuses to limit herself- to originality..

Talons of the tar feathered Albatross  
scrape stories in the Sea's glass membrane.  
Scattered anthology.  
Earth shattering ripple.

As creative as its first telling, the silent story,  
Write. Rinse. Receive.

## Memorial Park

Darlyn Finch

I lost your grave today.

I stood, perplexed,  
turning in slow circles  
where it should have been,  
reading unfamiliar names  
on the stones  
again and again.

Clutching a handful of Easter lilies,  
I walked,  
faster and faster;  
up and down the silent rows.

Realizing  
I couldn't remember your face, either;  
or the sound of your voice.



Feeling as if you'd left me once again.  
Or maybe like you'd never really been.  
Ashamed, I called Mama on the cell phone.

"They cut down the cedar tree  
we planted," she said.  
"Look for the big pine, then walk four graves in.  
There are new ones now;  
he's not the first in line."

There it was:  
your double marker:  
Our family name in the middle;  
your first name on the left, hers on the right.  
Together Forever underneath.

But you're not.  
She's married again  
and I'm glad.  
She could never be alone, and  
I love him very much.

Now the memories came rushing back:  
the feel of your whiskers on my cheek  
as we rocked in the early morning hours.  
The sound of your harmonica  
blowing Arlo Guthrie's train songs.  
The dance of your karate kata  
in our dim living room.

Your laughing dark brown eyes  
that live on in mine.

## **Theta Chi Forever** Sarah A.C. Webb

I remember how you came to terms  
with the backs of my legs.  
Walking on the beach,  
my white flesh forcing realizations that  
diminished your frat boy dreams.  
Your woman

Your girl

Your love

came with saddle bags  
and a lackluckster ass.

How could this be?  
Surely destiny had chosen  
another woman for you.  
A girl with razor straight legs  
and acid blonde hair:

Who is this girl you chose?  
a girl who sometime forgot to brush her hair;  
who sacrificed keg stands for Salinger  
and top 40 for acid jazz?  
I remember how you came to terms with me,  
hastily tying a sarong around my waist

## **Will Razor** Sarah Kathryn Moore

Will Razor's got a dangerous name. At school we know Will Razor's face. Know he's got it in for us. Will Razor watches blonde girls press against the wall when he walks by. Watches their pink lips make frightened O's. He smiles his pointy smile. Will Razor's got a coat that chums around his ankles soft as poison gas. Will Razor likes creepy music and chains. Likes thin thin girls that come white wrapped in black. Will Razor's got a wish for everyone. A specific wish for everyone. Meathooks racks and shackles, nightshade needles fangs. Will Razor's badass and we know it. He smells like ice and we know it. We don't mess with Will Razor: He's got a dangerous name.

Bet you won't guess Will's wish for Will. He wants to hear; will you touch me, Will, my life is needing yours.

Will Razor wants to die in theory. Wants to slit his wrists in theory. Will Razor's trapped in black and doesn't know how come. Will would never guess that there's a blonde girl pressing her sweet self toward his body. See her mouth a perfect longing O. See her princess curls and white skirt shift to see him. Will's alone and always talking killing. Will she tell him? Will, she's willing.

Will Razor's got black blinders on his ice-blue eyes. Will Razor walks right by. Later, bored and drifting high and hopeless, Will plays a danger game because we always knew he would. Will razors himself right off the earth, past her hands fluttering as doves, out of the atmosphere, beyond the new moon, Will the cosmic rock star, the beloved shining, and here we're singing, Will, we're sorry, singing, Will, we never knew, but Will is off and out, he's wide and wider, Will the reaches of a vast and undead blackness, Will Razor the infinite green ocean singing itself to sleep.

## The Split

Monica Hickey

My Mother decided to kill  
two children with one stone,  
the night she told my Brother and  
I she was leaving.  
It was a Tuesday.  
The same day when twenty-five years prior  
she had married him under  
the winter moon.  
Her hands were all I could see and  
hear. Her voice floated above us,  
like the whirl of the wind when  
leaving the Maine coast.  
The next day I decided to write the eulogy.  
Peter and Michele Hickey  
May their union Rest In Peace.  
I gathered my Brother and my writing.  
We walked into the woods and buried  
The paper next to the skeletons of my  
two hamsters, who had eaten each other  
a year before.

## narcissus in his (not-so-)green room

ariel bui

Selfish emotions—  
which according to man and his own notions are of magnanimous proportions—  
make him feel alive  
and important.

Mothers' embryo—  
A primal collection of neural networks and wires, spinal cords and spires  
Of ribonucleic towers,  
chutes & ladders.

King Amoeba of Panagea  
Serotonin, Frontal Lobes,  
and  
Fallopian Sea,  
and  
Gruyere Moon—

give them names to be like you.

YOU.

You, whose superior thumbs and inferior size lead to Earth's demise.  
You, who (invented time) & (discovered fire) &  
(claims a phallic form for a God above)...  
yet still cannot learn to love.

Fetus with flesh-covered eyes  
Tries to define ( \_\_\_\_\_ ).

## **Babylon** Robert Hoffman

The fires burn in Babylon  
The wheel turning ever faster  
And soon we will not miss the sun  
Its light carried far away.  
Shades roam these dark streets,  
Shadows cast by the clouds' hard wall.  
What dissonant songs sing we now?  
A stream of poison from our tongues,  
So far from the praises that once we lifted.  
You become an it, and I  
Become a ghost within the me  
Both of us, our dreams forgotten  
All our hearts no longer free.

## **Nobody sees her binge like I do** kristen stone

She dreams in calories-  
Sugared, flowered skin  
Encasing thanksgiving-rich insides  
Mashed potato breasts  
Peanut butter hips-curves of fat  
And fiber;  
Pie crust elbows, cookie knees.  
Meaty organs simmer  
As she pops open a diet soda:  
She gulps aspartame  
But bleeds gravy.

## Here's to you, Mr. Daniels. Sarah Waibel

A guilty silence and eyes unmet.

A circumstance finds you  
when your certainly aren't looking  
and non-sensically seems...  
an experiment.

A spiteful door stands steady, a selfish soldier  
between you and the cold-cutting night,  
your only savior from suffocating;  
while through dim window glass  
you can see  
but can't taste, can't swallow the chill  
that in any other place  
at any other time  
you'd battle to keep from your skin.

Blurred thought becomes action  
before Reason and its reasons  
can ever crawl into consciousness.

This happenstance blade of hope  
promises to dull the torrent-

an unbridled ache  
that rages and seeps  
and slashes and creeps  
from deep after deep after damp, sullen deep.

A guilty silence and eyes unmet.

## The Aeneid

Robert Hoffman

How to begin, I cannot know,  
for each time, yesterday, tomorrow,  
all is different.

But the end is already set,  
and I, resigned before I start  
to be just a story,  
to be the silhouette of a man.  
What is it that calls to me  
silently from places unknown?  
What poison exists  
that might explain why  
the young die  
for the politics of old?  
What else but the Dharma of man?

My life is not my own, but neither  
does this loyalty bring peace.  
Duty demands sacrifice  
without explanation or hope for one.  
Left with a faith I cannot believe:  
that my actions  
are for the good of man.

But how can I be good when  
I leave you broken behind me?  
You are not the first,  
and despite my prayers,  
you will not be the last  
that my vows will destroy.  
Oh God, is this what it is to be man?

## Long Drive

Kimberly Lyon

The grey was tinted orange  
in the cloud dense sunrise.  
Fresh cool blew through my damp hair,  
sending nervous chill to my extremities.  
We joined the worker bees  
in the carpool lane, dabbling  
at impersonal conversation  
to abate the clumsiness of silence.  
I counted mileposts along the turnpike  
through the open passenger window,  
my body finally relaxed in the leather seats.  
Slipping out in a light sleep, I reconciled  
with the dream I forgot in the rush.

## The Bass Beat

Nicole Shaffer

She paces slowly by my side  
And rolls her hips from left to right  
Hard heels poking the dark concrete  
Moonlight chocking the moonlit street  
Pouting her famed seductive frown  
Stiletto steps are slowing down

Takes a drag from amber fire  
Struts the street with no desire  
At nighttime when the flowers bloom  
Fingers fondle familiar tunes  
We hold hands in Manhattan light  
There's one more gig to play tonight

## My Revolution

Jess Drew

I like peanut butter sandwiches better than I like sex because peanut butter makes me feel the opposite of empty

Am I up the alley of emotional masochism, or is it up mine?  
Let's break a champagne bottle over my head  
In due time  
In honor of everyone who thinks I'm too dumb, too here, too gone  
And worthless  
Before I deflate myself and recede back into the womb,  
A tomb of echo and empty space,  
Because I can't be your hero and you can't be mine

Kurt Cobain told you it's okay to eat fish because they don't have any feelings  
So try me  
Try to eat me now that I'm done taking the bait  
And I will peek out from inside myself and watch you fail  
And you will roll your eyes and get tangled up in subliminal messages that will tell you  
the funny thing about subliminal messages:  
That you don't care and neither do I  
Because you have no idea what you are and I've pretended I don't either

When even peanut butter sandwiches don't fill me enough I know it's time for a new diet so hold the fish and hoard the peanut butter and crack a champagne bottle over my head



## Dubious Resurrection

kristen stone

My hair is gone  
-my head, near shaved.  
And last night, I drank three beers  
(nearly)  
And I didn't cry  
(almost)  
And I didn't think about you-  
Except I did.

Like my hair;  
You are gone; unlike your departure,  
I didn't cry at the scissors  
Precariously close to my ears and my eyes,  
or the metallic snipping.

I know you'd miss it-  
I fancied filling an envelope  
with the slippery clippings-  
Signing your address, licking a flag  
and sending them to you:  
If you can't have me, do you want my leftover locks?

Bitter beer; and my own hand on my unfamiliar scalp-  
I guess I've birthed myself anew.

## The First Night in the Castle

Marji Howell

The massive door slammed shut,  
booming through the cavernous room,  
enveloping the merchant's daughter:  
Stone met stone in floor to wall to ceiling.  
Oil lamps hung from brass hooks,  
smoking a black stream to raised roof.  
Flame, a flickering shadow-light,  
created a ring of dancing ghouls and phantoms.  
Her senses reeled with each gutter  
of oil to wick to flame.  
One small window high above the floor;  
greasy with residue,  
opened to the night and lucid moon.  
The dry, coarse strands of hay  
stretched from one corner

to nearly the next,  
a rug of musky fodder:  
The girl sat at the spinning wheel,  
thick dust coating the rough timber surface.  
She clutched a handful  
of the makeshift carpet  
and pushed it through the wheel,  
the foot pedal thrusting.  
The yellow fibers drifted, unchanged,  
landing on her cowhide shoe.  
She removed her foot from the pedal,  
listened to it slow—then stop.  
She should have kissed her father good-bye.

## **Control** Chelsea Suzanne Stonerock

She had no control of her life,  
She noticed  
Or at least she observed it  
In a way that a 5 year old can.  
Her world shifted between playgrounds and lemon drops  
But only with mom's permission  
She wasn't in control but she liked it that way  
It was the only way to be

She had no control of her life,  
She noticed  
And this time she noticed it well.  
She tried to rebel and she tried to please  
The way a 13 year old does  
Her world revolved around movies  
And dates with the cute boys  
But she wasn't in control of her life  
Though she desperately wanted to be.

She wasn't in control of her life,  
She noticed  
Though everyone expected her to be.  
The way an 18 year old is.  
Her world was absorbed with learning  
Mistakes followed by choices  
Yet she wasn't in control of her life  
Confused, wondering if she could

She wasn't in control of her life,  
She noticed  
It was slipping through her fingers  
Since she was 21 and young.  
Her world revolved in parties and fun  
And moments she meant to forget  
She wasn't in control of her life  
And this time she didn't care

She wasn't in control of her life,  
She noticed  
Too many things stood in her way.  
As life seemed to do at 32  
Her world faltered between work and love  
Though money seemed to stilt them both  
And money was not there to spare  
She wasn't in control of her life  
But wasn't sure how to be

She wasn't in control of her life,  
She noticed  
And hadn't been in years  
But that's the way it goes some times  
For someone at 55  
Her world was family  
Running as though she had all the answers  
But never really did  
She wasn't in control of her life  
She questioned if it mattered

She wasn't in control of her life,  
She noticed  
The end was soon to come  
And peace settled in her heart  
As acceptance came at 71  
Frail was her world now  
Filled with quiet memories  
And while she wasn't in control  
She saw her life as complete  
Because in her soul  
Control never really mattered.

# Unsaid

Roberto A. Pineda

Of course I recognize those tears dropping from my favorite pair of eyes

Of course I can understand the breaking of your spirits

Remember, you have always been a part of me

Your pain is also

My own

Of course I myself am in pain

Of course I will never forget how you completely destroyed my own soul

Remember, you have always been in my mind

My love for you

You kept at bay

And I look at your mascara streaking on your face

And I hear the stuffed up little sighs and whimpers

And all I can do is hand you my tissues

And all I can do is wish I could hug you

Without breaking into waterfalls

Myself

And I look at the pictures of Him on your wall

And I hear your weak voice tell me of how it all ended

And all I can do is squeeze your hands ever so slightly

And all I can do is wish I could kiss you

Without seeming like all I care about is

Myself

I don't want to remind you of all our phone conversations

Until six in the morning

Until the sun broke through my curtain-less windows

I don't want to remind you of how I told you to stay away from Him

Until my voice was hoarse from the warnings

Until I thought I had repeated myself a million billion times

I don't want to sit here and hear of your issues with him

I want to make some issues of my own

I want to complain of some of my own pains

I don't want to make your life harder; I don't want to complicate things farther

I want to just love you and be loved in returned

I want to just tell you how much you mean to me

But words cannot express my pain and my love

And my metaphors, as much as you may admire them, can only create impostors of my devotion

And your tears cannot be dried by wishes, nor your pain be forgotten by a kiss

But can't you at least allow me to try? Can I not at least attempt to make you happy?

I can understand that you are scared

I can see how my words of love and devotion create doubt in your mind

I can see how a low self-esteem can create a wall between the two of us.

But allow me to try to climb it, allow me to try to destroy it

Allow me to cure your pain with my love

Allow me to just caress your tears away

Allow me a chance to succeed at what He failed  
Allow me to sing to you at night, watch you sleep, and make you  
tingle all morn  
So you sit here in front of me  
So you reach up to me and hug me tight  
So your face lands on my green cotton shirt  
    And your tears create watermarks that will never completely wash out  
    And you look up at me, the tissue crinkled in your hands, your hair stuck in  
the back of your neck  
    And you ask me what to do  
    You ask me how to go on  
And all I can say, is  
    Just take my hand  
    Just take my hand and I'll guide you through

## **Again!** Darlyn Finch

Summer sand between her toes,  
the little girl squeals, "Again!"  
suspended between mom and dad  
as they make their patient way up the beach.  
Over and over they swing her,  
changing arms when they get tired.  
"One, two, three, Whee!"  
Like the seagulls she soars.  
"Again!"  
"One, two, three, Whee!"

Later, big brother dives from dad's shoulders,  
into the crashing surf.  
"Again!" he sputters, surfacing.  
Dad kneels and waits - a tolerant human ladder,  
launch-pad to joy.  
Over and over the boy flings himself,  
limbs akimbo,  
his grin as wide as Heaven,  
splashing like the pelicans  
diving for their dinner.

That night at home,  
kids asleep, sunburns tender;  
Mom and Dad share salty kisses,  
and laugh as they brush sand  
from strange places.  
Together they swim the waters  
of their marriage bed, like  
sandpipers tangled in the foamy sheets.  
He turns to her in the dark.  
"Again," she whispers into his ear.  
He laughs, "Whee!"

## **We are all descendents of Eve** Marji Howell

You were the youngest V.P.  
of the Savings and Loan  
and he was everything you thought  
you wanted in a man when he walked  
through your office door: With his two karat  
promise you overlooked the drawn out s  
in his 'yes'. Side by side you worked  
in the sun and side by side you played  
beneath the moon. He hid behind a quick tongue,  
watching you with lidless eyes  
when the nights got shorter.  
He offered the fruit of the coca plant  
to blur your vision and slow your wits  
until you realized you'd begun to forget his face  
after watching the back of his head for so long.  
His berry-thorn fangs festered the flesh  
where they sank into the clay of your heart  
and it took almost twenty years before you noticed  
your diamond could be scratched.  
So let him slither away in the muck he created.  
You are not responsible for his fall.



## Kaleidoscope Chameleon

Michael Trottier (with Heather DeLancett)

Sweeping winds rush forth  
in a sudden breeze,  
whips on a sullen heart  
flee into panicked reprieve.

The glorious colors shed  
due to the death of me;  
they fall - one by one,  
sometimes some,  
and I watch the moments  
that I have been in awe.

Artemis,  
Winds are whistling down  
The lonely ways. At  
Times like these  
We all miss Lola  
And her colored-glass shattering manners.  
She came and went, having made impression.  
We're. Did she go?  
All quiz air and moving scent. What hunt?  
Give me an autumn's changing.  
Wheel produce a fearsome  
Feast in this temple wood and twine.

Selene,  
Winds are whistling down  
The lonely ways. At  
Times like this  
We all miss Lola  
She visited, having made  
Best impressions.  
We're, she's all quiz air;  
Moving scentlessly, treading along  
As silently as a deer's hooves. What does she hunt?

A fall from heights seems a gathering hope.  
Wheel produce a satisfying  
Feast of bright colors and twine renewed.

If anyone needed a look in the mirror  
Before the advent of hearty parties,  
Arriving in costume and unknown,  
It would be me.

Yes, that's the image, but every fiber  
And bronze-boned inner quality is  
Known only to someone.

That would be me.

If anyone ever needed to pause to think  
About mirrors and how the angle of  
Incidence, reflected imperfectly, breaks  
Many laws of physics,  
It would be me.

That's the riddle, my melted silicon,  
Thin-silver image.

I've no dimmer switch to control the  
Medium times. It's  
Flash or despair regulated  
By good humor  
Superseding the  
Sad  
And the future holds no medium course.

She's here; she's there, or not, leaving remembrances.

Mirrors, mirrors,  
Whose is the most beautiful face,  
Fairer than a man could imagine?

A crazily kaleidoscopic, crystalline  
Wisely-feathered friend flying  
Across windy autumn skies  
Shatters into a thousand sharp,  
Attractive owlets, all asking,  
"Who, whom, who?"

With quartzite chaos  
Going upward in our differing directions  
Without space we intersect immediately.  
All I can hope to do is slumber watchfully in the sun  
Hunt by the moon and sleep past noon,  
Blending in...  
When I was a child dragon  
Hopes and dreams rested on me  
Weighty mammalian suspense  
Cautious and logical  
Semi-magickal natural in pulse  
To change to plaid and implode  
As a journeyman Chameleon.  
Just like that and those that surround me  
When I grow up I'm going to explode  
Into prisms of shattering fun house mirrors  
Myself.

When a certain room's prepared  
And the decisive moment is at hand  
With red buttons to slam that say with  
Authority, "Do Not Push."  
I will.

It's all shrapnel, friend, in our frazzled  
Emotional state what colors we'd like  
To be and see.  
Smell the rain, hear the thunder; trust your bones.  
There's the highway and passing  
Close by a thousand needy sharpsters  
Making themselves  
Obvious.  
I'm the first of my kind  
Since I'm always new to my surroundings.  
Argue about whether my self can  
Be seen or invisible as never been  
Lizard, but Rhino.  
Fish, but predator  
Dinosaur:  
They found my fossil after  
I moved on life-energy  
Up currents and hurricane winds  
Woke me and  
Added  
A thousand explosions  
Uninhibited romps  
Each a million pieces  
Of brilliant glass that cut  
Never scratching surface of  
Poet's writings  
Below as above  
Musing all the while  
Every event and sense  
Alive for a participating saint.

sweeping brooms brush shards  
in a sullen calm of  
time past the sudden start  
into piled jeweled reprieves  
the structural inner cracks  
forth for the birth of me  
they spread, little by much  
sometimes such  
and I watch the breakings  
that I have been writhing.  
lighten up eventually  
brisk winds pick-up  
driving morning take it all away

## bathed in blueblack

Sarah Waibel

relentless rain unmercifully pounds at frail window panes,  
like an infant he cradles me.

I have to leave- leave my shoes, leave my umbrella,  
leave myself; unrecognizable.

tears stream from a starless black expanse,  
raindrops cascade in echo  
from these sad eyes.

overcome by guilt and disgust,  
losing me to the worlds I most abhor:

solid, steady steps carry my heavy heart; cold,  
slowly saturated by the drip-drip-drops  
enveloped, trembling from damp and despair.

moments when life could be a movie...  
a melodrama too perfect, too cinematic  
to be real.

I'm glad it's raining and I wanted to leave my shoes  
and I needed to leave my umbrella.

staring into a liquid eternity, the same stinging rain  
slithers down my skin  
dragging with it a shameful self.

soft-soaked leaves pad the twiggy torn sidewalk beneath bare feet  
while inside, the rain tags along.

It will always be with me.

## **Denouement for hardy**

Sarah A.C. Webb

Your breath- rhythmic and raspy accompanied  
by the dissonance of a blaring television.  
Sitting besides you on my father's bed,  
each moment a blessing counted.

The room is filled with light  
but the elongating shadows remind us  
of the inevitable failure of a human heart.  
Shared genetic codes finally revealed-  
a fear of heights  
the Eiffel tower in '52  
in '98.

This is my denouement  
a winding down  
an untying  
a resolution.  
Each breath a countdown  
each moment a blessing,  
as we race to recapture time  
we never knew we had.

## **New Age**

Chelsea Suzanne Stonerock

World so confused with question  
People trying to solve the solved  
Close the closed door  
End what is already ended  
A box filled with answers  
And we refuse to accept  
So we beg for more  
Refusing that too  
Do they ask with hope?  
Making whole of the broken earth?  
Would complete knowledge water their thirst?  
Or push them to fill their mouths with sand?  
In attempt to create  
When answers lead to questions  
Do we truly desire answers?  
When questions are more exciting?

## **This** Donna Gibson

It's nothing really  
But it's everything  
It's breathing  
And  
Silence  
It's waiting  
While busy living  
It's filling every moment  
With no regrets  
But the ones staring back at you  
From the future  
It's believing without  
Seeing  
Hearing  
Touching  
Without knowing for sure  
It's feeling foolish  
Afraid to wake up  
It's wanting proof  
And not really  
Needing it  
It's the journey to hope

## **Sonatine's Jealous Dreams** Michael Trottier

Remember our wedding  
In your dreams and  
Within all that talk in your sleep!  
Please,

Speak low in your sleep of rumored jealousy.  
"Do not leave!" you scream.  
I know you fear:

Consider my standing  
By your side and  
Telling all that watched I was yours!  
Know,

If I could, I would tell you, gently shake you,  
Say, "it's not goodbye  
That way at all!"



Wandering the landscape  
Of your mind is  
One who wants to take me from you!  
That

Far gone, deep in sleep of rumored jealousy...?  
Why can't you wake up  
Right now for love?

## Unreachable

Lily Velez

The oldest among them was no more than thirteen years  
And even so a premature adulthood had been  
Thrust upon them.  
Most came from broken homes where fathers adored  
Bottles more than sons, and where mothers were lovers  
To more than one man.  
They ate what they stole.  
With ink-stained, frail fingers they'd snatch a warm roll or  
Pretzel and greedily  
Consume the scarce meal before  
Caught by the cop on that beat.  
Their oxygen was the smog of Brooklyn's steel factories  
They donned threadbare clothes coarser than the coat of a dog  
Beaten to death, carcass strewn across the back alleys  
Of the misbegotten borough.  
Some were underweight, many were sick, all  
Dreamt of a better life.  
Of a life where the life expectancy  
Was past 32 and the building next to their tenement  
Wasn't a bordello. Of a life where the poor  
Were remembered and the gentry  
Kind enough to cast a glance to the street rats.  
Of a life where the cradle of a loved one  
Wasn't found in the ones who cornered them  
Down forgotten passages for a five-cent high,  
Where peddling papers could be a leisure hobby and  
Not the sole means by which to survive.  
Of a life where dreams came true.

# The Octavian Mentality

Clayton Ferrara

Today I am going to die!!!

Back! Back to the earth, back to the feeling atomic.

To blackness, to peace, to the numb still between sleep and consciousness,  
to the rocky crags and valleys

I have never known that lie in the grey valleys of the other side.

Back to the sea, to the depths of Leviathan's Ink, to the sky of gaseous explosions and  
industrial crap.

Back I go to the soil tilled and soaked in the blood of  
one hundred million billion born in the form  
of life.

Back to cobwebs and the chum of microbial life.

Back to the tombs and mounds and pyramids and blood stained ruins  
of all races and tribes and gangs to ever set foot on this great and wide earth.

Back, to re-dissolve the mystery of love and time.

Back! Back from the dead, back from the dead triumphantly.

But why? Oh to go through life feeling invincible!

Six years written in the lines of my face

Dredged furrows of joy explosion meteorites cast spinning into the night.

blood shot eyes that would not subside for three years,

music of the encrusted fields of dead

split between gargantuan nights of sleepless record player repairs.

Why oh why to rise from the dead not from rebirth but from refusal to be born again  
into the greatest lie of all!

The world, beautiful jewel, gorgeous beyond all words and notes.

In years of life I have seen you raped beyond

your anatomy, your face

scarred and misshapen under the weight of concrete jungles laced with vines of dispar-  
ity.

Your arteries of rivers and sea cauterized and shut by landfills, condos, docks, marinas,  
boats, ships, tankers, oil tankers, oil, spilled over garbage, dead bodies, and rotten stink-  
ing algae.

Mankind- Poisoned from original sin? or chosen by nature,

to point the gun back on the creator and bite the hand that feeds.

Thank a lot guys.

The eyes of a man are not open until he has seen everything with them shut.

Oh that journey, that journey of gold silk, sequin after party glow, the journey of grit,  
and blood and shit and money and joy and highways and nuclear war and the will to  
live and titanic unbearable joy and there burning in streetlight fancy of cobblestone  
pathways is the point.

The reason of it all.

Cast away the world of static television dirt,

modern apocalyptic stereotype advertisement filth.

Slough off ignorance and the cancer cells of predestined genetic defeat.

I AM ALIVE.

Off into the night, hysterical high of wonder drifting through days.

Resurrection plans scream

art! art!

Then Vomit, eat the Vomit and do it again.

Destroyed by the world poisoned by the mind days spent awake wandering through streets filled with garbage while bitch dogs vomit yellow liquid before being captured by minimum wage tyrannical dog catchers high off social security and gassed in tax dollar torture chambers of black soot back-wash barbarian.

Alcohol consumed in Herculean amounts, parties with hundred year old books for seventy-two hours or more intertwined with chaotic images of academic destruction spread across the page by watercolors of cool caffeine.

Success stitched in the fabric of wandering and random with friends of insane caliber smart enough to bring on the destruction of men.

Wild night rides to Pahoekoe contemplating the meaning of life at three thousand miles an hours, drunk.

And then to do it all again, nevermore.

## **My Father, the Lampshade**

Steven Milling

The jaundiced glare,  
and unique markings,  
make the lampshade  
a relic,  
not soon  
to be forgotten.

A Steinowicz  
or Feldstein,  
or maybe  
not even a Jew.  
But what's in a  
name really?  
It's all about the numbers.  
Geneweinian accounting,  
it seems  
where  $1 + 1$   
equals  
6,000,000.  
This one is numbered  
6-4-7-9-4,  
one of the first  
indeed.

"ARBEIT MACHT FREI".

But who are

you--  
A number;  
one of many  
or none,  
depending on  
how you  
approach it.

A family history,  
obliterated  
in the noxious gasses  
of Birkenau  
or Bergen-Belsen.  
And now all that's left  
is  
6-4-7-9-4,  
and a  
lampshade.

If you dare to look  
a wee bit closer;  
past the numbers  
and the  
flaking skin,  
you might just notice  
a freckle or errant hair:

## **Sublime** Kimberly Lyon

When I dive into the water I am caught  
at my waist in a moment between states -  
legs and feet ultra-violet warmed,  
face and chest stung by the shock of cold.  
And in a fraction of a second  
the transformation is complete.

It is safe beneath the surface  
where life takes on a pristine azure.  
The wake from the bridge of my nose  
streams across my shoulders

bringing tears more than

Laughter. Lazy and lonely,  
more so since Mom left forever:

Masking tape, martial arts and milkshakes --  
"make mine mocha!" if you ask what he likes, (// - stanza break)

Not to mention his lifelong addiction to tropical  
fish, his companions in lonely times.

Often wishes he had a girlfriend,  
or even just more friends.

Prefers sci-fi, fantasy, and super  
hero films; the action helps him forget "I

Quit, I quit, I quit,"  
the self-talk his record player's stuck on.

Rarely a smile anymore, only occasionally  
when he watches children at play.

Stuck in his head, he wants to be back  
in his imagined past, when it was all better than now.

Twice under the knife, at age six  
and later in his twenties.

Unless the Lord blesses the work,  
it cannot succeed. Still,

Victory is uncertain;  
a lack of blessings or of faith?

Why can't he remember to take  
his lousy pills four times a day?

X-rays and other tests don't show  
anything new, but he's losing ground.

Yelling seems to trigger  
his seizures at times;

Zoned-out zombie, he's searching  
his pockets for who-knows-what.

## the Circle

Scottie Campbell

after all these years  
not sure what i believe  
now i know my years are short  
there is some power  
higher than me  
why am i afraid to call it god?

i almost died  
i didn't know  
i was in the Circle

my Family are Friends  
my Friends are Family  
                  this is a truth i have known  
linked in thoughts and prayer  
oh, the power of Them  
                  to this truth, i was blind

i almost died  
i had no idea  
i was in the Circle

"think of beautiful things"  
the gentle Godfather advises  
                  by god, that saved my life  
"breathe the sickness out"  
every breath blew away evil  
                  i worked to live for beauty

i almost died  
i didn't know  
i was in the Circle

fact is almost doesn't count  
but lessons learned are forever  
                  i had never noticed the Circle  
unworthy me, i think  
overwhelmed, i feel

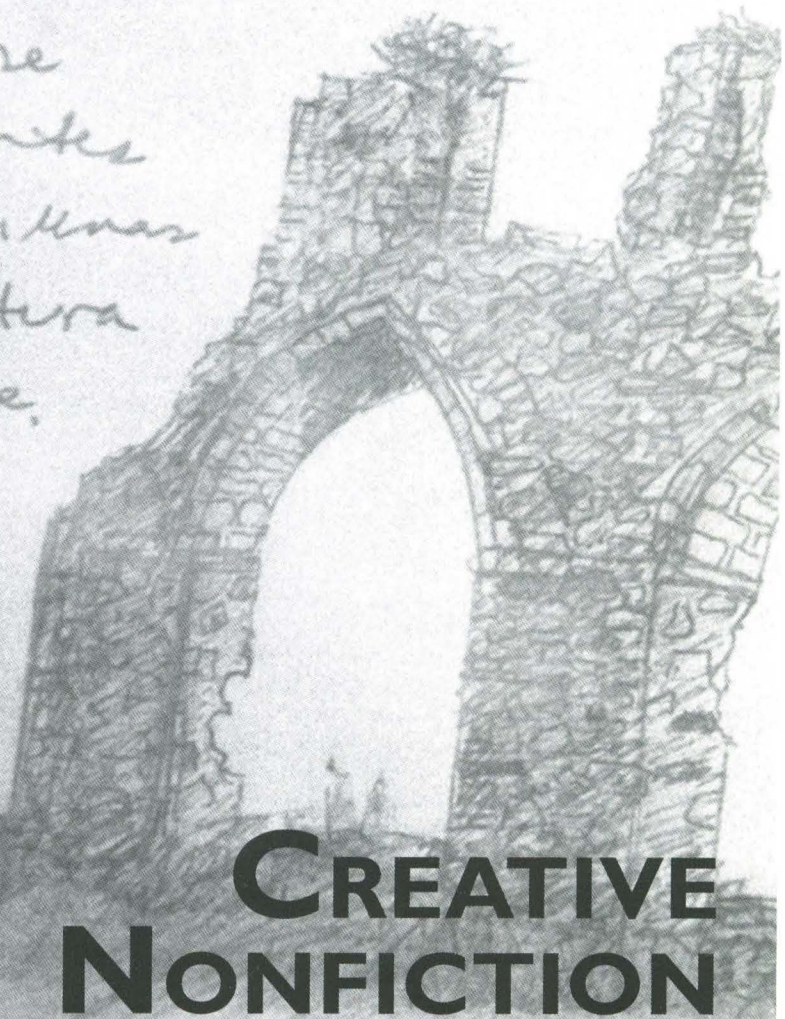
i am so loved  
i didn't know  
but now i live  
within the Circle

...nana  
sitio es unas pequeñas  
moros. Por casualidad  
la casa de mi fam  
r.

a, quiere  
restantes  
señalan  
arquitectura  
de ese.

Tienen

les  
argo,  
ser



**CREATIVE  
NONFICTION**



# Balance

Arthur Martinot

We all try to escape reality in one form or other; to abandon the self. There are a million and one ways to achieve this. One of my favorite kinds involves letting go into another being, a beautiful, charismatic and honest being. I try to see her as much as possible; skipping work or school if she calls, traveling hundreds of miles just to spend time in her world. To be honest, it's probably not the most productive kind of relationship, but she's got a hold of me.

When I first arrive, she's out there waiting for me, with all of her beautiful curves. She peels off her layers ever so carefully, and I watch from a distance. Coming closer to get a better look at her, she shows me if the elements have been kind, or if she's been battered. Her behavior changes every day, every hour. She's so elusive, sometimes temperamental; it's nearly impossible to get used to her. I take my clothes off, get ready, jump in, and get to work right away.

I've grown to love her salty taste, but only if she's clean. Without a common language, we've still managed to get to know each other quite well over the years. I bring my six-foot translator in order for us to interact. It is the only way we can fully communicate, and the only way I can fully show her my love.

I have to respect her and understand my limits, for she constantly reminds me that she's rather unforgiving. I am in her element and have no business pretending like I own her; she calls all the shots. With a little luck, I'll get a piece of the action.

I'm rarely alone. There are always at least a dozen hungry souls begging at her feet, depending on the time and on how good she looks. Everyone here has a common goal, and it's sometimes unifying, sometimes terrifying; like a pack of wolves suddenly realizing that they're all wolves and all love to eat meat—that realization is bound to be short-lived, and turn into a fight for survival when it's time to eat. I don't let that bother me though; my relation with her is unique.

It's funny; she seems to respond to the ones who want it the most, the ones who know her better than anyone else, and who can actually dance. She loves a good dancer; she puts on her best show for the guys, or girls, who can really move with her. I can hold my own, but hate fighting for her; it changes the nature of the relationship. Keeping it organic and natural is more satisfying; she comes to me and I say let's do it.

I've been jealous; I've been hurt, scared and humiliated. This is a constant reminder that I have almost no control over her behavior. I sometimes have to fight for her; but sometimes can share her with an open heart. She'll never hate me for it. Occasionally, when I ride her; she lets me caress her lips, which I never do gently. She always tries to knock me off when I do, but I've learned to duck, then I ride her deeper, and she wraps her arms around me. If I'm not careful, she could suffocate me. I have to try to keep the balance between us and remind myself that she's in charge. I'm just lucky to be here. She then spits me out, closes her arms and folds over. If it was good, I smile like a giddy schoolboy. If I feel like I could have given extra, or if she was greedy, I come back for more.

She never misses me. She never calls or wonders where I've been. She's never jealous. We have a very solid relationship, one that's been the product of my endless fascination for her, my constant attention, rain or shine. When seeing her, I

spend most of my time waiting in silence. This has taught me patience. She most often teases me, coming closer and then backing away at the last second. It doesn't bother me, I then chase her a little and eventually, she opens up. I can never get enough, but eventually, my body screams for a break. She, on the other hand, never stops; infinitely moving in ebbs and flows, continually pushing, pulling and pushing again.

Even from a distance, she's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Her power; her grace and her subtlety entrance me. When she's having a good day, I watch her raise her majestic mounds into the sky and my jaw drops. Her skin is smooth, I love to touch her; inside and out; run my hand down her body as I ride her again and again.

I often wonder what will happen when I'm too old to do this. At a younger age, the excitement was hardly containable. Time has taught me patience and respect, knowing I've only begun to appreciate and understand her. As the years go by and she becomes more abused from all that we've done to her; I wonder what will happen; will I still love her? Will there be artificial versions of her? Will we start paying? The future is uncertain, and the more we learn about her complex existence and even more complex relationships, the healthier she will remain.

The warm water gently caresses the skin of my arms as I plunge them forward, one after the other; in an endless repetition, arching my back to keep the nose up. Balance is the name of the game, both in paddling and standing up. Before I make it out beyond the break, I first have to get through a series of white walls, under which I carefully duck, pushing my board ahead. This is the ritual, for every human being who decides to stand on water:

# You're Such a Jew

Shaun Cricks

## Author's note

Who am I? What am I? How much of identity is constructed by the self, and how much is left to society and the media? Do archetypal and stereotypical labels accurately define a person? These and related problems and solutions are explored in the following three chapters of a critical autobiography which examines the construction of identity and its influences.

Within these pages, I have attempted to illustrate how my identity was formed, in part, by societal stereotypes and pressures, their inherent inaccuracies and misconceptions and their direct and vicarious roles. External labels have proven to contain false identity. The following labels of man (dick), crazy, and Jew are three separate but equally influential labels that I have been forced to reject, accept, redefine or integrate. Now, in place of these classifications, is a well balanced and true self image. The chapters are linked by this theme; however each chapter addresses a separate and distinct label. They are intended to be read either individually, or as three chapters of a memoir addressing the identity construction of a young man in America. Since the events explored contain intense moments of tribulation, it was difficult at times to relive.

I was forced to recall painful emotions and low moments. Exploring these rites of passage, however, became rejuvenating once I discovered moments in which my "self" prevailed. My hope is that readers of these chapters will look into their own self-identity to determine if they are their own person, or who society claims them to be.

So be you, and please enjoy.

The Hamilton Holt School application lies spread out on the table before me. The first few pages prompt me to answer what I have done, and who I am. These questions I fly through: What's your name, how old are you, where are you currently attending school? But, inevitably, like most other official forms I have been required to fill out in my lifetime, the form contains small boxes to fill in regarding not only who, but also what I am. Scanning the boxes, I play process of elimination to narrow it down. African American? No. Hispanic? No. Asian? No. Other? I guess.

As usual, I do not fit in the official box, so the process of elimination brings me to one conclusion; if I am not black, Hispanic, Asian or Indian, I must be white, or other. I fill in "other", knowing full well that this will probably be altered by a well-meaning, quick glancing, bureaucrat to white. But the fact is; I am a Jew, a member of a race that in our country is denied to be a race, a denial that is evident not only in the paperwork in the United States, but in its policies as well. After all, it was not the slaughter of Jews by the millions that prompted our involvement in the Second World War; but the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7 in 1941. At least our government is consistent in one thing; the Jewish people do not exist.

Sarah is sitting next to me in our Statistics class. She is a pretty good friend, the type that will lend a sympathetic ear, a hand, and even her notes from time to time. She is an education major; and works currently as pre-school teacher at the Jewish Community Center; and knows far more Hebrew and Jewish culture than even I do. She is telling me of scholarship opportunities that could benefit my daughter; Autumn Rain, who is now attending 4th grade honors classes and is only seven years old. These scholarships, she reminds me, are not exclusively for Jewish children; but it helps.

Is Autumn Rain Jewish?

I don't really know; I know I am.

Well, does she go to Synagogue, or not?

That's not what makes someone a Jew, Sarah.

Yeah, right, then what does?

It's not a just a faith, it's a race.

No, its not.

Look, my mother was a Jew, which makes me a Jew. But I don't practice the faith, therefore I am not a practicing Jew, but I'm still a Jew. Autumn Rain has Jewish blood, but I don't know if she has enough to consider her a Jew.

Sarah laughs a laugh that has cut me too many times before. It's a cut that seems to go deeper when it's inflicted by a friend. The discussion then turns into a short ping pong match of yes it is and no its not. Thankfully, my professor overhears our conversation, which is rising in volume and probably disrupting the class and the group projects we are all supposed to be working on. Professor Lienhart chimes in.

Sarah, I see where you are coming from in your argument, however; let me ask you this; If being a Jew is not a race, how did Hitler choose who to slaughter? Did he just post his Gestapo by synagogues and Delis and write down who went in? Shaun has a point, Jews are not only a faith, but a people, and maybe you should respect that.

In my experience, the only times that my race is recognized is in a joke or when it is held in contempt. It would seem that the only characteristics of a Jew recognized, even in our "politically correct" culture, even by those closest to us, are the negative. About a month after my initial separation from my ex-wife, her true feelings about my heritage became evident. Each text message she sent was preceded by two chimes of my phone. These chimes began to send chills down my spine, as I knew that when my ex wasn't getting everything she wanted, I would be insulted and berated.

One sequence went as follows:

I need 30 dollars for Autumn Rain's dance class.

I just gave you 400 in child support. Use that.

That's for bills, this is different.

But I just got laid off. I have no more money.

Everyone was right about you. You're nothing but a fucking Jew.

When she and I were together we went through some hard times. Deidra was injured in 2001 and her back was operated on. The surgery was a moderate success, but her back still bothered her; and we had a young child, so she, who had a double masters in communications and was an executive when I met her; stayed home and schooled our toddler while I worked what jobs I could find without a degree. Through tough times of shopping at food banks, applying for government assistance, and even living in a tent in my friend's backyard for a month, she never referred to me

as a cheap or a Jew. Back then, when she felt I was on her side, hard times were understandable, a fact of life, not a result of heritage. But as shortly following our juxtaposition, when it was to her benefit to exploit me, out came the dehumanizing insults. I was no longer a man with a low income and health problems; I was a proponent of some secret Jew agenda to screw my own daughter out of a good life. I find it amazing how quickly those who claim to care for you can sway toward anti-Semitism. But Maybe it's like Hitler said in Mein Kampf, "With the Jew, there is no coming to terms, but only the hard 'either-or'!"

The YMCA locker room reeked of feet, chlorine, and spray deodorant. My closest friend, Greg Labelle, and I, were changing from our school clothes into the Speedos we were required to wear for swim team. This is what we, and most of the other low income kids, did every afternoon after middle school, since the Y offered financial assistance to those who qualified. My mother, who was single at the time, worked nights as a maid and attended College during the day to complete her bachelors in accounting. Greg's mom worked in a bakery all day ever since his father had passed away from cancer. Greg was Spanish, he was quick to point out, not Hispanic, as his parents had emigrated from Spain when he was a baby. He was light skinned, and mistaken for white most of the time. In our free time together we co-authored short fiction stories and he taught me Spanish. The Barrio we lived in was one of low income families, mostly Hispanic, who struggled daily to meet even the most basic of necessities.

While we were changing, two Puerto Rican guys that were new in town were changing at the lockers behind us. As I unclipped my walkman from my belt and placed it into my locker, I could overhear the boys discussing, in Spanish, our ridiculous suits and stealing my walkman from my locker once I left.

Just wait here until he goes to swim. I think I can just break the lock and we'll just take it.

No, let's just beat him up and take it now.

But he's with that other white guy. They could probably put up a good fight.

Why bother?

They're not white. I heard they are Jews. Have you ever heard of a tough Jew?

They can't fight for shit. Let's take it now.

No. We wait. Then we'll take it while they swim. If he's a Jew he can probably just get a rich uncle or someone to buy him another one. He probably won't even notice it's missing.

Greg and I were still pretending to talk, but really we were listening to them. We both knew what we had to do. As if we had rehearsed it, we turned around to the boys, dropped the clothes from our hands, jumped the bench, and pounced on them. The boys were caught off guard, so by the time the Y counselor in the corner could react, we had beat them up pretty bad. I remember being dragged away from the fight, my legs kicking, spitting, and calling out every curse I knew in Spanish.

When we were sat down in the director's office, I tried my best to explain the situation, but we had little chance of getting out of it. Greg was so mad he kept muttering "fucking spics." The director evidently took this as evidence that

his was a hate crime, and we were put on notice that if we ever beat up anyone because of the color of their skin he would call the police.

Hate crimes will not be tolerated in my Y.

That's right, I responded, they sure as hell won't

Greg and I turned our backs to him and walked out of his door back onto the streets.

Looking back, I suppose that the director assumed that since we had thrown the first physical punches that we were the instigators. The way Greg and I saw it, though, it was just the right time and reason for a revolution. Greg plugged the Y splitter his brother had handed him down into my Walkman so that we could both listen. Greg smiled, punched me playfully in the shoulder, and we walked back toward our houses, not as the Jew and the Spaniard, but as Greg and Shaun, ordinary people, jamming together to Aerosmith's "Dream On."

# I and Sorrow Sit

Bethany Pritchett

Sitting on the front porch steps on a stifling evening in late July, I tuned into the crickets rhythmic drone. My mom and I peered across the street at the empty lot where my dad, two brothers, and some boys from the neighborhood played catch. As the sun baked itself away, I felt mucky and damp in the Florida humidity. I noticed my mom staring, lost in thought it seemed.

"Are you in love with dad?" I asked.

Why did I ask that? I must have picked up on her disconsolate mood. She'd been struggling with something for a while— since my dad was asked to put in his resignation at work the year before.

My dad was the pastor of a successful church. The denomination was called Charismatic or Non-denominational, the fundamentalist kind. It was all my parents knew, all they had. After fifteen years of his employment, some of the Elders decided that my mom's advocacy for female leadership in the church should be squashed, and so they pointed the finger at my dad who was trying to appease both sides. The conflict led to the demise of their passion. Without the church as their common goal, they faced an emptiness that had been growing between them. Our family was breaking down, but the tension was disregarded and internalized until that moment on our porch.

My dad went into a terrible depression after he resigned. It took months for him to get out of the house and find a new job. Courageously, he tried different positions with a few companies, anything that was available really, but took to none. Money was tight. He would come straight home, shut himself in the bedroom and mull over the life he lost with the church instead of living the one he still had with us. In the meantime, after having worked part time for years as the church secretary, my mom took full time job in a crummy lawyer's office, while continuing to manage the household and keep our family operating normally. But what was normal?

My brother, Matt, just two years older than me, worked at an Italian deli down the road and would bring home left over bagels and pizza for us to eat. The job was great at first, but he got stressed, hooked up with the wrong crowd from the store and started doing hard drugs. Seemingly overnight he became difficult to live with and rebelliously broke all of my parents' house rules, like respecting curfew and doing chores. My mom and dad butted heads for solutions to dealing with his condition. My dad gave him an ultimatum, either straighten up or get out, and my mom wanted to protect him, maybe enroll him counseling.

It was clear that my mother's respect for my father was dwindling. Their differing stances with our family's recovery overwhelmed her. Her drastic transformation was a microcosm of our circumstances.

"I'm not sure if I have loved him for a long time," she responded, leaving the conversation at that. Her eyes slowly faded beneath her furrowed eyebrows as she rested her chin on her knees, holding herself in a tight hug.

She was beautiful, the most beautiful of all the moms I knew. I have an impression of her dark hair; soft skin, almond shaped face, impenetrable black eyes; her smile was approving, knowing. I cannot explain her qualities except to say she was as vibrant as a mother could be. She would speak in a sing-songy way, like a bird, drawing



out vowel sounds when she was happy. When we were kids, my brothers and I would play and read and create art with her. At the park she would encourage us to explore and ask questions about nature, and she would strum her guitar in the living room as we sat on the floor below her, singing and clapping. With my mom around, life was a cinch. She was warm — desperately warm.

I remember her concealing bottles of wine in the grocery cart. Afraid that a church member would catch her and be ashamed or think ill of her habit, maybe spread a rumor about alcoholic tendencies, she would have the bag boy quickly wrap it up and stuff it at the bottom of the large brown bag. I didn't judge her for it. She was also on lots of medicine, including Cortisone, a steroid to relieve itchy allergies and migraines. It made me sad to watch this bright person become quickly agitated and angry because of discomfort in her body. All the joy left our home when she was overcome with sickness.

I think "losing the church," as she would say, was the final blow to her stability. After all, my parents' relationship began at that church. In the mid-seventies a group of recovering hippies and burnt out surfers made up the congregation of "Community of the King," at Cocoa Beach, Florida. It was a joint effort to have Christian fellowship and follow Puritan guidelines after running wild in the revolutionary sixties.

The few leaders were older, sober, and authoritative among the vulnerable, freethinking young adults. They advised my mom to stop smoking marijuana when she became a member there.

"For the life of me, I couldn't understand what was wrong with pot!" she shared with me one day. "It was a staple of my generation and it didn't cause any harm," she snickered, realizing her youthful naivety. "I didn't really want to quit, but I went along with their request, accepting that it was the best thing for me." She limply tossed her hands up in the air, regretting her first step of submission.

The laws of Christian etiquette were laid out. Banishment of alcoholic beverages, no more long, dyed hair; modest clothing, clean language, and no secular music! These guidelines did not suit their rebellious natures, but the weight of religious dogma convinced the whole group that they were facing an eternity in Hell if they turned away.

Early on, the pastor told my dad "God told me you should marry Lynn Barrs," so my parents heeded the call of the Lord, went on two dates, got married within six weeks, became part of the church staff, immersed themselves in it, and had three kids in five years.

I wonder if she was ever in love with him.

I recall very few details of my mother's hasty departure. One scene, about a week after her acknowledgement on the porch, I walked into her bedroom to find that she had removed the familiar jewelry box and bottles of perfume from her dresser. On her side of my parents' walk-in closet were packed boxes, and on his side clothes still hung in place and shoes lined the floor. Peering around the closet door, there was one lamp turned on next to my dad's big cushy chair, by his side of their bed. The room was dim with little sunlight coming in through the blinds, and I remember shadows of them pacing back and forth, tensely sighing and pausing between each movement and step. Their voices were muffled; I couldn't make out what they were saying. There wasn't yelling or aggression, just a sense of helplessness, and the dull yellow glow of the light bulb.

My bare feet quietly skimmed the cool hard wood floor as to not disturb their important conversation. I looked around in disbelief. Was this really happening? My breathing became heavier to quell the soreness that welled up in my chest.

During those few days, I scrambled to learn how to manage the house in her absence. I would be taking over. I was about to turn sixteen, and they were about to have their twentieth wedding anniversary. Cooking and cleaning would be no problem and I was almost allowed to drive by myself. This would come in handy when my dad needed help running errands. My brothers and I were within walking distance to our high school and I had a job at the Merritt Island Mall, so I could pay for clothes and lunch money and dance lessons. My younger brother, Aaron, took the event in stride. He was reticent and didn't seem too affected, but I knew he would have a delayed reaction. Matt had recently been kicked out of the house and wasn't around to grasp the state of emergency.

My mom invited Aaron and I to move away with her, but I chose to stay because I only had two years left until high school graduation and my grades were finally up. My teachers were excellent and Algebra was finally making sense. I just started a new jazz class and liked a few boys, plus Aaron would need me to show him the ropes in school. I wanted to be around when Matt stopped by the house, to make sure he had enough money and food, since he was now living on his own.

Growing up in the limelight of religious moral principles, my family maintained a feeling of tightness and closeness. We not only appreciated family values, we exuded it, and at times we were falsely recognized as the epitome of it.

Once my dad wrote a Sunday morning sermon called, "The Family that Plays Together, Stays Together." He talked my mom, brothers, and I into helping him teach the sermon by acting out parts that reflected our daily lives together at home. I dressed up in my ballet shoes and leotard and came dancing up the aisle when he gave me my cue. I was pretending to dance around the house. Matt rode in on a bicycle and Aaron on a skateboard. We all happily greeted my dad and left the "stage" as he told the congregation about the importance of taking time to nurture and share in family activities. He said it would yield longevity.

We even looked like a family. My mom and dad could have been siblings. All five of us with thick, dark Italian hair; tanned skin, shapely bodies and short, we were each other's profile. I knew nothing of being separated. I knew the structure, as it was, too well to detach myself.

"Are you going to be okay? Are you okay with me leaving?" my mom asked.

"I know you have to do it," I said.

I knew that if she didn't leave then, she would never be whole. She had to flee, out of desperation, out of a last attempt to find her self. As a girl, a female, a woman, who watched her mother struggle for recognition, I understood that she had to make this move. Her cause was freedom; freedom of spirit, and it was realized so long after she'd been repressed by the church. I let her go without resistance and let both of us think that I was okay. But the core of me wanted her to stay. I didn't know it then. I was numb. Out of my mind. Not thinking.

I remember standing out front waiting for her silver Volvo to slowly back out of her side of the garage. The sky was so blue. The concrete in our driveway was split down the middle by a huge live oak that shaded our house. Her window was rolled

down and she leaned out to say goodbye while I stood at the car's side. I think Aaron was watching from the lawn or maybe hanging off of the porch light post. My dad must have been at the front window inside.

Both hands gripping the steering wheel, bracing for an irreconcilable move, my mom's shoulders were uptight and I noticed her mouth quivering in a frown, trying to hold back tears that begged to burst through her exhausted eyes. I placed my hands on the car door, bent down to be closer, and clinched my teeth to restrain a swelling knot in my throat. Both of us managed a pinched smile, to give each other a morsel of reassurance before parting. It was all we needed to say. She kissed me on the lips for the first time, it was the last day I would live with her again.

# Coffee Before Work . . . and During . . . and After

Alanna Ritchie

People always snicker when I say I wake up at four twenty, but honest, it's gives me just enough time to shower, dress, drive, and get to work by five. Five, yes, in the AM, when it's still dark, when your body is too shocked from being disrupted to react negatively. You are in wake-up and go mode. Luckily, caffeine can help.

So, naturally, I go right to Starbucks. For one cup of coffee. Some espresso. Another cup. And hours later, a frappuccino. Yes, I stay there all day. It's what I do. I am in the coffee business.

Getting out of my car, the morning smells new. I tie my green apron as I walk to the door.

"Good morning."

The shift on duty, Brad, grunts a response. He stumbles around and makes noises in the morning. While Jason doesn't have remarkable early morning behaviour, he does have remarkable hair. Stocky, with giant blonde dreads and a giant grin to match, this huge surfer dude is pretty chill.

"Pastry case?" I ask, eagerly waiting to hear my place on the duty chart, yet cautious about bothering Brad with questions so early.

"Yes." It's settled.

Jason will do drive-thru, Brad will count tills, and I will put the pastries out. This means Jason has to lug the heavy metal tables and chairs out, and I have to accidentally break some crumble berry coffee cake. I smile. I nibble on this sugary excuse for breakfast.

It's very frustrating, because I never know which pastries go on what shelf. It's an enigma. Asking doesn't help. I do my best to follow the old chart. Top shelf: blueberry, cranberry orange and banana-nut muffins, cheese danishes, and croissants. Yes, corporate is intent upon having pastries that are difficult to spell, and coffee drinks that are even more difficult to pronounce. I'll speak generally. Middle shelf: scones and coffee cakes. The most confusing shelf, in case you were wondering, is the bottom. A bavarian cream turnover rumbles in. Iced lemon pound cake gets cozy. Marble loaf. Then, there's three empty spots. The enigma!

"Brad, what else should I put out?"

"I never do pastry case." His voice is deep and gravely this early.

I hazard some cookies, then he looks.

"You can't put those out. Bagels. Do bagels."

He could have said so in the first place. Oh well.

Five thirty, and I've done a simply appetizing job.

I used to hate COW, The intense smell of the grinding coffee beans used to make me nauseas. Now, it makes me want to eat the beans raw. Mmmm, espresso. COW, better known as, coffee of the week, means grinding and weighing nine filters of grinds for each of the four buckets. We all refer to this as COW, but no one finds this quite as silly as I do. So many COW jokes in my head waiting. Just waiting.

Now, everything is ready and I get to work with people.

I have to get this out in the open, once and for all, I am not a good barista. (Barista: person who works at a coffee shop.) We have a principle task to complete.

I fail at this task. I'm not saying I spill hot liquid all over the pseudo-intellectual coffee consumers. But, no, I just cannot remember people's names or the drinks that go with them. Lilette has it down to a science. She writes descriptive notes to herself, so she's ready. Then, with a keen eye, she watches the blond ultra-toned woman walk in.

"Can you get a grande extra hot vanilla latte for Diane started?"

And every time she does this I die a little inside, knowing I'll never be that good.

From seven to nine everyone's getting their fix on their way to work and dropping their kids at school! The occasional business man takes twenty for a lowerfat cinnamon walnut coffee cake and a paper. And I think about how I don't know prices for the drinks.

I'm a failure. A failure.

But, can you beat this, can you honestly beat my sincere good morning, my generous offer to leave room for cream, my inquiring after the status of your day? Can you? Because I am smiling. I'm smiling because Frank Sinatra is singing. I'm smiling, because people can only get so mad about a messed up drink.

So, the atmosphere is purple, brown and green soothing colors. The coffee siren reigns over the patio, while my manager smokes, Frankie wants a refill, and Mike's enjoying his day off.

Okay, so I know a few names. I have a vague idea of a grande-mocha-frappuccino-with-an-add-shot-in-a-venti-cup, of a 6 AM venti-vanilla-cappuccino. Well, sometimes Miss 6 AM comes in at 8 AM, if she goes to the gym first. What is it with gym people and caffeine? But worse than gym people are picky people.

If you hadn't figured out, or aren't already one of these people, I'll have you know that we don't have customers, but connoisseurs. Picky people. People, like Tom.

"grande-non-fat-140 degree-no-foam latte." If you don't know his drink, and

you're holding a cup, staring at him blankly, waiting to take down his order; then-  
"My regular." Huge sigh. World off balance. Tom, then, slowly spelling out what you should have read all over his face. Do I not look like a latte? Are you stupid?

So, yeah, it's tough. I work hard. Maybe I'm not sweaty, but hang out with me afterward and you'll be craving the caffeine. My mocha covered, sumatra smelling, foam spilt clothes.

I'm Alanna and I froth milk. I blend beverages. I pull shots.

All day I hear: We need ice! Coffee's expired. How many caramel pumps? Where's the leaf cookies on the register? Make UBB. Charge the whip creams. She wants it 2 percent. Chantico only gets 140 degrees. Decaf frappuccino last forty eight hours. Did you mark'em? Pull up to the window. Kill the shots. More white chocolate mocha. Eight-sugars-just-checking. Double cup? Of course! ... and so on. That's the lingo. Jargon. Music. The music of a coffee shop.

Meanwhile I ponder my questions. If someone orders a half of a sweet and low (which they do), does that mean their only getting the sweet? Or only the low? Why don't they call half-and-half the not-so-redundant "half?" Does it really make sense to have a frappuccino light WITH whip cream? Would Mary Lou notice if I put six, instead of seven pumps in her extra-hot-no-water-no-foam chai? Would she?

So, the job requires some existential delving. Some big questions. Most importantly, what do I want to drink?

"Nonfat-sugar-free vanilla-120-degrees-extra-whip-caramel-macchiato, please?"

# Take Me Out

Sarah Anne Collier Webb

The lights swirl transforms the dull grey smoke into a strange and beautiful fuchsia haze. A motley crew of goth kids and punks creates a rainbow colored sea of dancing heads moving to the pulsating rhythms of Morrissey, Depeche Mode and an eclectic mix of modern bumping rock. All smiles I turn to a hulking six foot five Dexter in Buddy Holly glasses. Our opening shift at Starbucks in three hours seems light years away. Dexter passes me a ruby slipper, sparkling and enchanting in the smoky vibrancy of the club.

"Drink it! It's tequila. I have a thing for drinking out of shoes," he murmurs in my ear. His hot breath tickles my earlobe. Wondering where he managed to steal such a remarkably decadent shoe, I close my eyes and take a swig, grimace, then contribute my tribal yell into the escalating chaos surrounding me.

"That's my girl," he shouts. I feel his eyes drift down the pale pink tank top which reveals the small mole two inches above my right nipple. He smiles. "You look different out of uniform," he growls. I reply with a coy smile, enjoying his lusty gaze.

Turning away from Dexter my eyes lock on Justin leaning at the end of the bar and for one moment the world ceases to spin. All the blood in my body is redirected between my legs. He's here. He's fucking here. For the past few weeks I have done nothing but cast longing gazes at him from across the espresso machine... silently hoping for a chance. Tonight he will notice me, I vow under my breath. Clutching the peeled labeled beer in my hand and just inebriated enough to approach him, I slowly strut to the end of the bar to find a dark and brooding Justin moving his head to the beat of the new Modest Mouse single. He is breathtaking beneath the blue and red glow of the bar. He's kinetic-smoldering. He languishes his Camel light. Man. He even smokes my brand. Get it together, Sarah. Just stay cool. Silently reaching into the right pocket of his black button down, I retrieve a cigarette, bringing it to a pouted mouth meant to tempt.

"You want me to light that for you, sexy?" he asks. I stand there frozen for a millisecond, then find my voice and new born self confidence.

"You don't look so bad yourself there, killer," I say, offering up my cigarette for his lighting pleasure. He grabs my hand, not saying a word, and drags me into the hallway. Adrenaline pumps in rhythm to the throbbing guitar riffs as Franz Ferdinand's "Take Me Out" begins. Before I can stop myself, inspired by the punchy guitar, I push him against the black wall behind him and press my freshly glossed mouth on his. Our cigarettes drop to the floor in unison.

So if you're lonely. You know I'm here. Waiting for you.

We kiss deeply and for one perfect moment I forget the newly abandoned house and dog and ring and life I used to call my own. This. This perfect-beautiful-crazy-chaotic-horny-drunken moment stands as my reward for a year's worth of lonely masturbation and frustration.

I'm just a cross hair. I'm just a shot away from you.

His hand finds his way under my sheer cotton tank. My lips encapsulate his right ear lobe. His tongue eases its way up from the nape of my neck. Feverishly I pin his arms behind him.

"You better be careful," he hums into my ear after coming up for air; "I like pain."

I sparkle with a devilish grin. "I really don't think that will be a problem."

I know I won't be leaving here. With you.

We dive back into the wet chaos of each others mouths. Hands in vulnerable places. Shameless. Gasping. Instant.

"We could get fired for this you know," I rasp into his ear. "After all- aren't you kind of my boss?" He doesn't reply, instead brings his hand back and slaps my ass.

My tight jeans allow the sting to burn and tingle. I gasp in pleasure again.

I say don't you know. You say you don't know. I say...Take me out

I disentangle myself from him. Empowered by my newly affirmed sex appeal, I place his hand in the back pocket of my jeans and guide him through the sea of club kids into our very own corner of the dance floor. Our torsos pulsate to the jumpy guitar riffs as our mouths dodge and weave, a sexy game of cat and mouse.

If I move this could die. Eyes move this could die. I want you to take me out.

The song draws to a close. I step away from him. "Thank you for the dance," I say suddenly and slink across the club towards the door, leaving him mouth agape and pants bulging. As I step out of the club into the hollow orange streetlight I spark a cigarette.

I inhale deeply tasting the sweet Turkish tobacco, head held high. Man it's great to be single, I murmur as I find my way through the maze of strangers towards home.



# The Safe Spot in the Corner of the Ceiling

Joyce White

"Mrs. White?"

"Yes, Dr. Campisi," I say, wondering why this handsome, young Italian doctor sitting across from me isn't smiling.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. White, but there is a ten percent chance you have cancer..."

*It's August 23, 1981. All of a sudden the temperature inside the doctor's office seems to have dropped about ten degrees. Maybe it's cooler because of this strange haze that is settling in the room. I look at the doctor through the fog; his lips keep moving; but all I hear is the "wha whaaa whaa" sounds that Charlie Brown makes in the Peanuts made for television movies.*

*Dr. Campisi keeps talking, but he is getting smaller. Looking down from the top right-hand corner of the ceiling, I see myself sitting like a little mechanical doll in the chair in front of his desk. This can't be happening. It was only a year ago that I found my way to the corner of a ceiling for the first time.*

"Here. Give your husband some of these pills. He probably has a relapse of the malaria he caught when he visited us," said Mr. Pearce, standing on the front porch of our Nyack, New York, home. The tall, slim, middle-aged missionary's voice was full of hope. The Pearce family had just arrived home on furlough from Africa's Ivory Coast, and they always carried "the cure" for malaria where ever they went.

It was the beginning of August, 1983. The love of my life, my gorgeous red-headed, blue-eyed husband, had just come back from his latest trip where he photographed the professional husband and wife ballet duo in Argentina. Initially, we thought Tom might have picked up an intestinal virus in South America; but once the family from Africa heard of his symptoms, they were convinced that their pills would do the trick.

At first, the pills seemed to work. Sunday night, August 7, Tom got out of bed, put on his suit and tie, and drove to Nyack College's Simpson Hall, which was up the hill on the college campus where we lived. When he arrived, a group of the missionaries led him to a chair in the middle of a side room where they gathered around Tom, laid their hands on him and prayed for healing, so that he would be able to get through the training session. This was Tom's passion; he was going to train the missionaries on how to take more effective pictures, write narratives, and incorporate their photographs, scripts, and music into multi-media presentations. The group represented families that had just arrived in the States for a year's furlough. They had come from around the globe and would be together for one week before they spread out across the country to be with their families.

Amazingly, Tom made it through his presentation, drove home, and promptly threw up in our driveway. Sunken eyes met mine as he walked up the steps; his tie hung loosely around his splattered, open-collared white shirt. When he turned the corner and started up the steps to our bedroom, he said over his shoulder; "Call the doctor; I need to go to the hospital."

Picking up the phone without hesitation, I made arrangements with the doctor to meet us at Nyack Hospital the next morning. Then, I called our best friends, Lee and Darlene who rented the other half of our duplex, to see if they would watch our two-year old daughter, Kathryn.

*"Mrs. White?" Dr. Campisi says.*

*Dr. Campisi's voice summons me to leave my safe spot, but I still can't quite understand what he is saying. All I can think of is Kathryn—my beautiful, sweet, little girl whose golden-brown eyes light up in her cherub face, framed in soft, blonde Shirley Temple curls. She has already been abandoned once when her biological mother gave her up for adoption. I can't abandon her, too. She just turned three and a half...today.*

Early Monday morning, I drove Tom to the hospital. After the physicians examined him, one of doctors came out and told me that they were going to admit Tom for further testing.

For the next nine days, the doctors performed various tests. At first, they thought he had picked up some strange bug during all of his travels. That made sense to me; after all, Tom had covered many photographic assignments in China, several countries in Africa, South America, and Europe. Certainly the doctors were going to isolate whatever Tom had in his system, give us some pills, and we would be on our way.

Upon my arrival to Tom's small, sterile-smelling, private room Wednesday afternoon, August 17, I found him sitting up in bed holding his head between his hands. "God help me!" he screamed.

Dropping my purse on the floor, I turned and ran down the hall to the nurses' station.

"Please, come quick," I pleaded with the group dressed in white as they poured over their charts.

Without waiting for a response, I turned and ran back down the hall to my husband's room. The scene that greeted me sent me over the edge. Somehow, Tom had managed to get out of bed and was crawling to the bathroom on his hands and knees, his body racked with dry heaves. I looked towards the door for the nurses and wondered why they hadn't come to help.

I ran back down the hallway screaming, "Please help us. Somebody please help us."

This time, two nurses dropped what they were doing and ran down the hall with me. They cleaned Tom up, got him back in bed, and gave him a strong dose of pain meds. The pain had finally subsided when the young doctor walked in, carrying the films from the CT scan. I was sitting at the foot of Tom's bed, rubbing his legs. The doctor sat by the window across from us. His voice was kind, but his face had that worried look, as if a storm was brewing.

"Mr. and Mrs. White, we have located a mass in the center of Tom's brain," the doctor said as he fidgeted in the beige tub-chair. "We have contacted Presbyterian Hospital, in The City, and are making arrangements to have him transferred there as soon as a bed is available..."

The doctor kept talking, but a strange, loud, one-note humming noise coming from somewhere inside in the middle of my head drowned out what he was saying. In slow motion, I pulled away from my body to seek shelter in the far corner of Tom's room—over by the top of the door:

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I watched myself from a distance as I sat calmly on Tom's bed, asking the doctor questions in a voice devoid of emotion.

"How soon do you think we will be able to get a bed?"

"Probably sometime the middle of next week," said the physician.

"Then they'll be able to operate and remove the mass?" I asked, waiting for reassurance.

"They'll be able to give you that information once they have performed more sophisticated tests down at Presbyterian," he said. He wished us luck and left us alone to process the information he had just dumped on us.

"Do you think God's going to let me die?" Tom said. The freckles that covered his face and hands were barely visible, as if fear had drained the color right out of them.

"No, of course not," I said empathically. Up until that point, the thought that my thirty-five year old husband could die had never entered my mind.

*"Mrs. White! Mrs. White?"*

*Once again, Dr. Campisi's voice bids me to come back. I feel myself slowly pulling away from my safe spot. The mist is lifting, and I can understand what he is saying.*

*Are you okay, Mrs. White?" Dr. Campisi says.*

*"My husband had cancer. A tumor wrapped around the center of his brain. He died of complications from the surgery." I say with disbelief. "I buried him...one year ago...today."*

## Contributors

**Ariel Bui** is a freshman Music major and Honors student at Rollins. She served as a Poetry Co-Editor with *Brushing* this year and hopes readers enjoy her published work.

**Scottie Campbell** Joining the staff of the Department of Theatre & Dance in the summer of 2004 brought Scottie Campbell back home — having graduated from Rollins in 1996. He has been active in theatre for over twenty years and has participated in virtually all aspects of the craft. His writings have been published in *Watermark*, *Orlando Weekly*, *Orlando Arts* and *Orlando Leisure*, among others. Scottie hosts a weekly theatre-focused radio show on WPRK 91.5FM each Monday at noon called "Life in Stages." He makes his home in Orlando with his partner, accomplished artist Paul Horan, and their two dogs, Dexter and Morton.

**Scott Chisholm** is in his sixth semester at Rollins, valiantly pursuing an English degree, eagerly awaiting a full Holt degree in Film Studies--powers that be, listen here do ye? His statement: Science fiction is the dominant cultural phenomenon of the twentieth century. His motto: Ideas Are Sex. Ideas Are Drugs. Ideas Are Rock n' Roll.

**Shaun Edward Cricks** is an English major and Creative Writing minor who is almost sure of what he wants to be when he grows up. He is pleased to once again be published in *Brushing* and gives big-ups to the *Brushing* staff and to the professors in the department whose wisdom and energy inspire him.

**Morgen Culver** is a Sophomore at Rollins who is originally from Philadelphia. She is an English major with a minor in Theatre. She participates in Habitat for Humanity and hopes to join the Peace Corps when she graduates. She also likes to paint, read, and do photography.

**Jess Drew** is a freshman from a small town on the Connecticut shoreline called Westbrook (Not to be confused with Westport!). She is a sister of Alpha Omicron Pi and is a lifelong beach bum who loves music and values meaningful relationships above all things. Thus, it is no surprise that most of her inspiration comes from past relationships and often from music. She loves writing poetry but is too shy to ever read it out loud!

**Priyanwada Ekanayake** has named art as one of her interests for many years. She has experimented with a variety of media and took a liking to mixed media--especially the alteration of images. A common thread running through her works is the representation of memory and conflict between light and dark.

**Crystal Englert** is a graduating Senior and a member of Alpha Sigma Lambda and Sigma Tau Delta. She currently works as an assistant editor at a national magazine, and as a freelance writer and editor. She thanks her parents for their indulgence of her insanity.

**Clayton Ferrara** supposes, currently, that the majority of his thoughts are with his academic schooling (though he is doing his best to not let that distract him too much from his actual education). He is a sophomore Music and Biology Major at Rollins College because science and music are his loves. He intends on attaining a PhD in Zoology and will continue to write poems on scraps and napkins 24 hours a day.

**Darlyn Finch** has an English degree/Writing minor from Rollins College. Her newspaper articles have appeared in the *Florida Times, Union/Jacksonville Journal* and the *Orlando Sentinel*. She was interviewed and read her poetry on "Poetic Logic," part of the Arts Connection Show on National Public Radio. She has won prizes in poetry and creative nonfiction at the Mt. Dora Festival of Art and Literature. Her short story, "Wings", was published in the book *Shifting Gears* in 2003. She writes *Scribbles*, a periodic e-mail newsletter for and about writers and literary events in the Central Florida area.

**Carolyn Freligh** is a Senior majoring in Organizational Communication. She is a fourth-generation Floridian and longtime resident of Winter Park. She is a backyard gardener and nature lover who listens to the land, seeks the sun, and revels in the rain. She likes to write before dawn, travel every chance she gets, and watch the sunset on the Gulf of Mexico.

**Rachel Gentile** is a Senior Mathematics major and Art History minor in the Honors Degree Program. She is from Seminole, Florida. She loves to paint, and her favorite mediums to work in are acrylic and watercolor.

**Ted Greenberg** is excited to be juggling parenting, a "day job," and full-time studies; the Holt school program is enabling him to pursue completion of my decades-prolonged degree. He finally knows a large part of "what I want to be when I grow up" -- an English major, with a minor in Writing! As a Junior at Rollins College, he finds the growing intensity of his coursework is being tempered by glimpses of the light at the end of the tunnel: he wishes to pursue a career path that will permit him to further develop his writing skills, and he looks forward to again having leisure time for camping, kayaking, and sailing.

**Donna Gibson** is a Junior at Holt, majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing. She enjoys taking road trips, observing people in airports, buying new journals, and interpreting weird films for her friends. She prays her poem "This" will encourage you to keep your hope no matter what "reality" throws at you.



**Brooke Harbaugh** is currently a Senior English major. Her pictures were taken in Spain during her semester abroad last Spring. Aside from her passion for traveling and for foreign languages, she loves the arts, music, theatre, and ... well, much, much more.

**Monica Hickey** is a third-year English major in the Holt School. She enjoys stimulating conversation, stimulating coffee, and stimulating movies and music. Occasionally, she finds herself breaking in her running shoes while listening to NPR. She is treasurer of the Kung-Fu club at Rollins.

**Robert Hoffman** is a freshman Honors student. He is an English major with minors in both Writing and Philosophy. During his first year at Rollins, Robert contributed to the *Sandspur*, worked as Fiction Co-Editor for *Brushing*, joined both the Philosophy Club and EcoRollins, and is MVP and rising Captain of the varsity Cross Country team. He also served as an intern for the recent Winter with the Writers program, an experience that helped to advance his writing style and experience.

**Marji Howell** is currently in her second semester of the MLS program. She was a Creative Writing major for her undergraduate degree and has tried to continue writing in her spare time. She has had three poems published in anthologies through Poetry.com.

**Christina Jeffrey** is a senior Psychology major at Rollins College. She picked up an interest in photography while traveling overseas last year. In addition to photography, she loves to write and is hoping to go to graduate school for journalism.

**Suzanne Michelle Jones** graduated from Rollins in December of 2005 with a degree in Spanish. Born in Austin, Texas, she grew up in the south, but loves to travel and experience new places. This summer, she plans on moving to Los Angeles to pursue her career.

**Katie Lamie** is currently a Sophomore at Rollins, and she lives in the Chi Omega house. Her major is English; her minor is Business. Currently, her favorite book is *The Girls Guide to Fishing and Hunting* by Melissa Bank. And she loves everything Boston.

**Vicki Long** works in the Department of Psychology. She moved here from North Carolina, has been at Rollins for three and a half years and LOVES everything about Rollins College. Currently, she is majoring in Psychology. One semester she will take a fun course, and the next a serious course. She has been taking photographs for about thirty-nine years and had never taken a photo class until this semester.

**Leigh Lowry** is a senior English major who thinks you're pretty rad for reading her story and hopes that you enjoyed it.

**Danielle Lunger** is from Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. She is currently in her last semester at Rollins. Deciding to become a Studio Art major is one of the best decisions she has made. It has taught her how to recognize, learn and grow from her talents. She has become versatile in almost all mediums such as drawing, painting, and design. She is looking forward to continuing making art a part of her life. In the near future, she hopes to broaden her studies further; by learning new techniques and experimenting in new mediums.

**Kimberly Lyon** A second-year international student from Jamaica, Kimberly is an International Business major and a double minor in Writing and Economics. Her hobbies include sailing, writing poetry, and the occasional work of fiction. She hopes to establish a career as a representative of her country in the foreign services while continuing to work as an amateur writer.

**Arthur Martinot** is a Senior in Environmental and Growth Management Studies here at Rollins. He was lucky enough to have chosen to write about his passion, and the outcome was far from displeasing. He is currently living in Los Angeles, where, aside from writing and surfing, he intends to begin his Urban Planning career after May of this year.

**Caitrin Merrill** is a senior Studio Art major from Rehoboth, Massachusetts. Painting and printmaking are her preferred mediums of artistic expression. Travel is a passion for her. Much of her art is inspired by her memories and experiences abroad.

**Steven Milling** is a junior at Rollins College majoring in English. He hopes to pursue a graduate degree in Rhetoric and eventually teach in the field. Though this is his first published poem, his interviews and essays on pop culture have been published in numerous magazines and journals over the last decade. He lives in downtown Orlando with his partner and their three Jack Russell terriers.

**Sarah Kathryn Moore** is a senior Honors student with an interdisciplinary major focused on the arts and minors in Writing, Religion, and French.

**Kim Moorehouse** is a graduating senior in the Hamilton Holt School. Her major, Communicating Through Creative Expression, has allowed her to combine communication, writing and art classes and explore the ways different media contribute to successful communication. A flower or a tree can be described through the written word, portrayed in oil on canvas or captured through the eye of a camera. All of these mediums will give the viewer or reader a different experience.

**Fay Pappas** is an Honors freshman at Rollins. For three summers, she lived in a small, remote town in southern Greece at her grandmother's home on the waterfront. Her experiences there, not only of the blue Mediterranean waters outside her window and the great mountainous forests she would hike through at dawn, but of the people and their sometimes sad pasts, have left their marks.

**Jasmine Parker** is a second semester Senior and will graduate this May. Her major is Studio Art, but she has also taken classes in Psychology. She plans to attend graduate school in the fall and study Art Therapy. Her hobbies include mixed media art, reading novels, dancing, having fun and spending time with family and friends. She loves working with children and so whatever it is that she does in life, she wants it to involve working with children.

**Maria Petrakos** is a junior and a Studio Art Major at Rollins College. She has been drawing and showing interest in art all her life. She would like to pursue a career in art, and eventually fashion design.

**Roberto A. Pineda** is a Sophomore Theatre major and Psychology minor. Other than writing poetry and the occasional short story, he is also very involved backstage in the Annie Russell Theatre productions and can be found singing karaoke every now and then with the FORKS club on campus.

**Gregory Pyne** is a Senior at Rollins College, graduating in May 2006 with a B.A. in English. He is not particularly religious, but he does believe God created bladders as Nature's alarm clocks, although he has not come across any sound theological argument for this belief.

**Bethany Pritchett** is a Humanities major and Philosophy/Religion minor at Rollins College. She is honored to be published in *Brushing*.

**Cherie Ramirez** will be graduating from Rollins in May as a Molecular Biology and Classical Studies major. She highly recommends studying abroad (especially in Spain!) to anyone who wants to learn more about himself and the world. She will sorely miss Rollins and her last months of freedom when the rigors of graduate school begin.

**Alanna Ritchie** is a Junior at Rollins college and a thriving English major. Perpetual caffeination is a vital part of her daily life. Starbucks is the glue that holds her together: paying the bills, providing the espresso, entertaining the customers and interacting with a top-of-the-line staff. Her goal: embrace the life of a coffee shop guru, write creative non-fiction, wear hats and make people happy. Willasprings Starbucks forever!

**George Sciarrino** is currently a Junior at Rollins College majoring in Theatre and minoring in both Writing and Communication. Prior to college, he attended the A. W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts, where he majored in Visual Art with a concentration in Photography and Graphic Design. He intends on continuing his education by studying film production at the graduate level. He has worked on several film, television, and commercial productions and is always looking to gain more experience to fulfill his long term goal of becoming a successful director/producer. To contact him, you can email him at [gsciarrino@rollins.edu](mailto:gsciarrino@rollins.edu).

**Nicole Shaffer** is a senior at Rollins majoring in Organizational Communications with a minor in Writing. When she's not writing poetry, creative nonfiction, songs, or screenplays, she is usually sleeping or going to yoga. She has contributed to Maxim, Sync, WaterSki, and Windsurfing but this is her first time being published in a literary journal (yeh). Other time-fillers include researching bizarre subcultures (like the Mole People), walking down unfamiliar paths, playing guitar, meeting strangers, overanalyzing simple life tasks, watching music documentaries, balancing, and developing strength in her relationships with God, family, and loved ones.

**Jamie Snead** is a Senior at the Hamilton Holt School, where she is an English major and Writing minor. This is her second year being published in Brushing and she is proud to be in the company of such talented writers. She likes long walks on the beach at sunset, quiet nights spent by the fire, and anything made with a Bedazzler.

**Kristen Stone** is busy learning about anthropology and feminism when she isn't writing. An enthusiastic WPRK DJ, one of her goals in life is to subvert media homogeneity by harnessing the populist power of the internet. This Daytona Beach native loves caffeinated beverages, porches, and taking pictures.

**Chelsea Stonerock** is a sophomore majoring in Art History. She was born and raised in Orlando. She has been writing poetry since she can remember and is really happy to have work published in Brushing. She would like to give her love to her mom and Daddy, Socrates and Little Kitty (her cats), and Alphonse (her dog). She would also like to thank all those people out there who gave her something to write about. She hopes the Brushing readers enjoy her poetry and that it helps to heal or expand their hearts.

**Ana Stroup** is an eighteen-year-old freshman who enjoys drawing, eating chocolate, and getting down and dirty at chalk festivals. Some of her artwork has been displayed in the Orlando Museum of Art. She can usually be found the Off-Campus Student Lounge playing ping-pong, watching tv, working on chemistry labs, or sleeping. She is glad to be included in Brushing.

**Alec Troeger** is in his sophomore year at Rollins College and is completing a double major in Psychology and Music. He plans on focusing his studies on animal behavior but enjoys writing music and playing the cello as well.

**Lily Velez** is a Junior at Rollins College, where she's pursuing a major in Religious Studies with a concentration in Jewish Studies. She plans to further her schooling after graduation by aspiring toward a Master of Divinity degree, and eventually a Doctorate of Divinity. Aside from an affinity toward ancient history, she loves writing, and authored a 250-page novel over the course of four months in 2005. Her passion for the creative arts has resulted in her desire to pursue a career as a novelist.

**Sarah Waibel** After four years of wielding power tools and appearing on the Annie Russell and Fred Stone stages, Sarah will graduate in May with a Theatre Arts degree and take a running leap into the world of professional theatre. An avid fan of lawn gnomes, thunderstorms, Bob Dylan and William Shakespeare, she also has a propensity towards precariously dangling from rafters and causing general mischief. When she's not in the theatre, she enjoys playing outdoors, making up constellations, or getting lost in the soundtrack of her life and/or words of her favorite poets. Cheers!

**Sarah Webb** is an English major and graduating senior. Upon graduation, Sarah plans to teach in hopes to inspire her students as much as her professors have inspired her. She dedicates her poem "Denouement" to her late grandfather, Dr. Hardy Webb. Sarah would also like to thank her mother for all her encouragement and support.

**Joyce White** moved to Orlando, the home of her late husband Tom, in 1984. Joyce works full-time in the Administrative offices of Orlando Regional Medical Center and is in her Junior year at Hamilton Holt as she pursues a Bachelors Degree in Organizational Communication. Their twenty-five year old daughter, Kathryn, now lives in Altamonte Springs.

**Conrad Winslow** is a junior music major at Rollins College. He is interested in music composition, acting, drawing, photography, and lizards.

We would also like to extend our thanks to **Michael Trottier** and **Jonathan M. Vick**, who have also made valuable contributions to the content of this year's edition.

## Colophon

Brushing Art and Literary Journal is published annually at Rollins College, 1000 Holt Avenue, Winter Park, Florida, 32789. The journal is funded by Rollins College and is distributed free of charge. It is edited by students and welcomes submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, one act drama, and art. The Brushing office is located on the student media floor of the Mills Memorial Center. For more information, the staff may be contacted by phone, (407) 646-2171.

Thanks to the Rollins College English Department for their continued support and to The Baker Press for publication of the journal. The Baker Press is located at 3606 Silver Star Road, Orlando, Florida, 32808.

Set in Gill Sans, Century Schoolbook, and Times Roman.

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... es una  
los moros. Por caso  
de la casa de mi  
... iner.

... edra, quire  
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