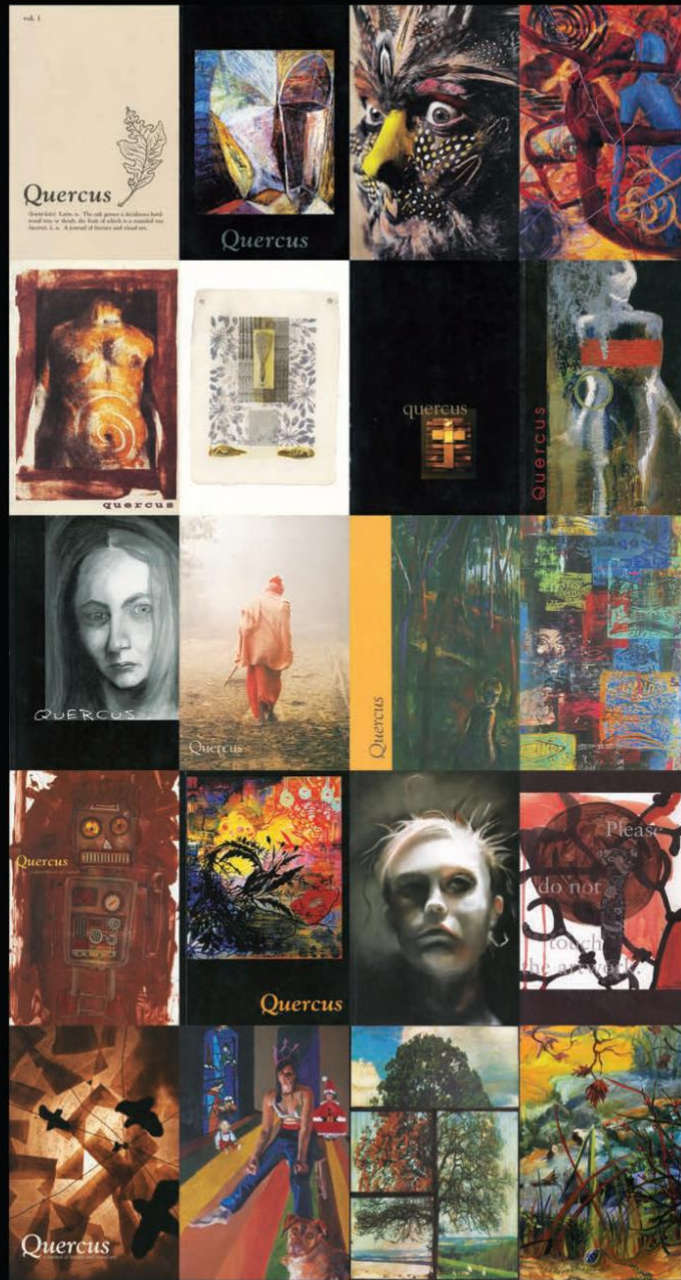


30 Years of Ambrosian Art and Literary Tradition



Quercus  
30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

# Quercus

A journal of literary and visual art

Volume 30  
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(kwŭrkŭs) Latin. (n.) The oak genus: a deciduous hardwood tree or shrub

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One of the highlights of the 1991–92 school year at St. Ambrose was the appearance of *Quercus*, the SAU journal of literary and visual art. There was no funding, but thanks to a series of \$50 donations from departments across campus, *Quercus*, printed in black and white and without art, was a breakthrough for SAU: the university's first creative-arts publication.

From the outset, the mission was to celebrate and help develop the creative arts among the entire SAU community: students, faculty, staff, and alumni. And the following year, with a dedicated budget, *Quercus* appeared in color, with artwork in high-quality reproductions, and ever since has featured poetry, fiction, nonfiction, paintings, drawings, photography, graphic art, comics, ceramics, book art, and other creative work by hundreds of SAU writers and artists from the class of 1947 through the class of 2023.

This year, again without a printing budget, *Quercus* presents this digital 30<sup>th</sup>-anniversary retrospective edition: an offering of outstanding material from the journal's history, selected by a group of English and Art History students, who read, viewed, and discussed every piece from every issue. Our apologies for any omissions of material or limitations in the quality of image reproduction (there were no digital files available in 1991!).

We hope you enjoy this product of SAU students today, in 2021, reflecting on the creative work of Ambrosians from years past, and that you might consider submitting your own work for future editions. Thank you for your interest and support!

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## La Lluvia

It was summer school in Mexico, and I met her there  
on the street built on the causeway where Alvarado  
made his famous leap, to escape the vengeance  
of the Aztecs in hot pursuit.

We made our escape that summer day by another route,  
in my old Ford, from the City to Toluca, then down the cobbled road  
to Ixtapan de la Sal, the sulfur springs.

Nightfall caught us on the roads—so did the rain.  
Rain in droplets, then in trickles, then in torrents crashing down  
on the windshield and the roof, and a din of devils wailed  
in the slashing wind.

I was young and daring and she was dark and pretty  
and we laughed—we laughed at the rain that  
turned the road to river and pounded, pounded, pounded  
on the roof with angry fists.

“We stopped then at Tenango, for some drink to keep us warm.  
“Moscos, numero cuatro is what you need,” the shopkeeper said,  
laughing at our plight, “One drink, you live 150 years!”  
So we drank the Moscos and laughed and squeezed each other,  
two wet sardines, and drove off in the rain.

Next day the sun came early, and the steaming of the springs  
joined with the streaming verdant valley,  
green, green, lush and growing, just like us.

After that we parted, and that was that.  
That was that, but all these years the rain,  
the cobbled road, the laughter, and the Moscos Number 4  
were something I knew we shared, that only we two knew,  
each of us eternally youthful in the memory of the other.

I wrote to her not long ago, upon a whim,  
but the memory was betrayed.  
“We regret to inform you,” the short reply began.  
“She died ten years ago, in India, near the sacred river’s bank.”  
The shopkeeper had lied.  
The guarantee was bad.

The memory of the rain dangles in the wind  
from only one end of the thread.

–*Ralph G. Smith ('47)*

## The Artist's Gift

Years ago an artist with a love of color,  
But, I thought, a disregard for form,  
Brought me a gift, a painting he had done,  
With reds and browns and yellows  
Trowelled on, it seemed to me, in a  
meaningless, though exuberant, display.

When I hung the picture up, the painter chuckled  
And said I had it upside down, or on its side,  
But no matter, he said, in time I might  
Get it right  
and see it as he had seen it  
At the moment of creation.

I took the gift horse down. I looked it  
in the mouth and tossed it in the closet,  
where for years it rested, neglected, in the dark.  
but it sadly sighed, I swear, whenever  
I pushed it back to get my hiking boots  
Or to make room for other things likewise  
discarded but not gone.

Old bones are easily chilled.  
When September came I opened up the closet door  
To find a jacket, to fend off Autumn's chill,  
And, glancing at that painting, in a flash,  
I saw some of the form the painter tried to catch—  
Not clearly, but enough to make me know  
That it had meaning after all.

The artist moved away, long gone,  
His paints dried on the palette,  
But now I study his painting almost every day.  
Perhaps I will understand his work before I, too, move on.

—Ralph G. Smith ('47)

## The Joy of Angels

Ethan McDonald had been in the dusty little fishing village of San Pablo about a week. He was alone, and his solitary exploration of the out-of-the-way hamlets of Mexico was about to end. It would be hard to leave the narrow cobblestone streets, the white-washed adobe houses, and the pervasive smell—the perfume of a thousand tropical flowers mixed with the odor of the charcoal fires grilling freshly caught fish, or tortillas.

That afternoon, as he sat in the weed-grown little plaza, the happy, brassy sound of a mariachi burst upon him, playing a popular catchy two-step he knew as “Jesusita en Chihuahua.” The music rose and echoes joyously through the village from a little house a short distance away. He walked closer and saw the musicians in front of the house. There were two guitarists, two trumpeters, and a violinist—paunchy men in dusty black *charro* suits, their tight trousers and black vests decorated with silver ornaments. One tune finished, and they started another and continued to pour out the happy music.

“Who is giving the fiesta?” he asked Doña Clementina, the proprietor of the little fruit stand next to the plaza. “Am I invited?”

The music could be heard throughout the village.

“It is not a fiesta. It is the Angelitos, Señor Ethan.”

“Angelitos? Little angels? What would that be?”

“It is for little Lupita Oviedo. Just two years old.”

“A cumpleaños, then? A birthday?”

“No, señor. The Angelitos. Lupita died yesterday. Such a happy, smiling little girl. Paludismo, the doctor, said, but *quién sabe?* There are so many sicknesses about. The music is for her wake. Since she was a little child, without sin, she is an angel and will go directly to Heaven. It is a joyful occasion, you see.”

He looked at Doña Clementina with dismay. “A joyful occasion! A little child is dead and it is a joyful occasion? How can you say that? A little child . . . what a monstrous idea!”

“It is a happiness, señor. She is in Heaven. God called her there.”

Shaken, Ethan walked back to the plaza and sat alone on one of the rusty iron benches. The brassy, happy music had not, to him, become unutterably sad. As he looked toward the house, a somber little lad of perhaps four years, dressed in his Sunday clothes, came walking down the street, carrying a large bunch of white flowers. The boy disappeared into the house, and the music became even faster and more lighthearted.

As the trumpets sang out in unison and the big *guitarrón* thumped out the beat, sadness overwhelmed him. Sitting on the iron bench, he wept, the tears coming uncontrollably from deep within him, wave after wave. He wept in infinite grief for a little girl he’d never known, a child of God he’d never seen. A shining new angel was in Heaven, sent on her way by the raucous music of the fat, sweaty men with the crumpets and violin and guitars. It was a weekday, and the plaza was almost deserted. He sat on the iron bench into the night, long after the music had stopped and the village had become quiet except for the soft lapping of the waves on the dark beach. He had awakened that morning a carefree youth. Now he had suddenly come face to face with the age-old

mysteries of the meaning of life and the injustice of death. He tried to understand, but it made no sense. Death and youth and beauty and joy and sadness were all mixed together. It made no sense.

The next day there was no music. A small procession wound up the hill in the blazing sun to the graveyard. At the front was a group of little children carrying flowers, tropical flowers that spread their fragrance on the soft breezes that blew from the ocean. Two men carried the tiny wooden coffin on their shoulders, and women in black, with black shawls covering their heads, followed behind.

“Ay, ay, ay! Ay Dios!” the women wailed, unconvinced now that it was an occasion for joy.

The father, a soldier, followed behind the coffin bearers, mournfully lighting firecrackers. The smell of the burning powder mingled with the sweet scent of the flowers. Now a boy with a drum joined the mourners. He beat a slow tattoo as the group made its way through the palm trees.

Ethan did not follow the procession. He was an outsider, but he felt a kinship of grief with the people trudging up the path. Grief not only for Lupita Oviedo, but for all those little ones all over the world who are both cheated and rewarded by dying before their time.

He remained in San Pablo only a few days more. He sat by the ocean, under a huge laurel tree, and cried to understand. The ocean lapped at his feet, grinding rocks into sand with infinite patience, just as it had for millions of years. He knew there must be a message there, but its content eluded him.

—*Ralph G. Smith ('47)*

## *Tortas en Toluca*

Pretty as she was,  
it was not Carlota that I remember so clearly  
on that sunny Mexican morning  
on the plaza in Toluca, with the smell  
of charcoal in the air, grilling the chorizo,  
on market day, with the Indians sitting by their shaded lean-to's,  
with the fruits and vegetables and that wonderful pottery  
with the black and yellow designs spread out around them.

No—it was the sandwich she fixed  
from a can of tuna she had brought along,  
and mayo, and avocado, from those small  
purple *aguacates* that she got there in the market,  
that taste so good  
spread on a *bolillo* or *telera*, the buns  
she bought for ten centavos  
from the old lady with the basketful  
and prepared while we sat on the hard bench  
in the plaza, happy, laughing at each other,  
and devouring the impromptu tortas,  
which were delicious, and matched our mood.

Yes, she was pretty, and perhaps it was her laugh,  
her smile, her tousled hair that overcame  
the beauty of her being, the totality,  
which are like the things we cannot see  
while looking into the sun.

But the sandwich I remember, and the sunny day.  
And our happiness and laughter, all delicious.

—Ralph G. Smith ('47)

## Just One Suit

There he sits on the snow  
In that same red suit,  
No sign of shivering or frostbite  
Just fluffed-up and self-satisfied.  
Six month ago I saw him  
Perched in a sugar maple  
Looking dapper as usual,  
Neat black patch at throat.  
The searing 97-degree heat  
That pinned me on a shady spot  
Seemed to bother him not at all.  
Not a single bead of sweat  
Did I notice on his beak.  
Now a I look out through  
Expensive, thermal windows  
Locked tightly against the cold  
I see him nonchalantly sitting  
At the base of the feeder.  
The temperature is a frosty zero,  
And he's wearing the same red suit.

—Gerald McConoughey ('62)

*Violão Solo*

*for Raquel*

Light sits on the morning like a bruise,  
the light that floated through your skin  
behind the thrown halo in the City of Angels.  
Too many cities have yet to find you,  
take you dancing, and carry your luggage  
to a bridge standing between flesh  
and the forced closing of your full eyes.  
Yes, I would take you dancing home,  
but the dead still inhabit your domain.  
Slow voices are descending tonight  
calling after us with untranslatable reason  
and rooftops converge from the five rivers  
washing over the favelas of Porto Alegre,  
dragging the sky down into the loom of day.  
Books carry quotes, hints of jazz, papered life.  
You fear the rhythm of the hours and  
the soul, and keep them close at a distance.  
Here Machu Picchu dreams from fog,  
ripples and weaves on the streets' dirt walls  
and gathers alluvial soil for the sun.  
An escaped owl also floats in that sun,  
languidly repelling all the sojourns of light—  
when do you go back to her desert? To risk  
the lexicon of questions and known fingers  
locked in the theater of the water's reply  
is all we, the wanderers, ask going forward.

—*Chuck Blair ('76)*



## Northern Pike

### I

In the American heartland  
I have seen the shining stars pricking  
frayed window blinds in cheap motels  
and watched the Grand Canyon gaping  
like the rotted mouth of a glue mule.  
And I've returned to a river  
bending through my father's homeland  
and whispered over sheer skin  
in the valley of a woman's back,  
a woman I loved too deeply,  
and explored into those hidden lands  
opening buttons of mature flesh  
unburdened by vowels or consonants,  
and secured the touch of her beauty  
dreaming in the pores of night.

### II

My father lacked the heart  
to fillet twin warriors, captive  
northern pike he named Cain and Abel  
in weeks and months to follow—  
so vicious . . . and alive with death to a boy,  
their teeth metal tools like hooks  
torn from lips and tearing my eyes,  
and they would never stop thrashing  
under a dusted moon held close  
by the fingerprints of his cloudless nights,  
before his own heart gave out  
and the green smoke from his cigars  
cleared through to the muddy shore  
where he had warned of their flesh  
being too old to season and trophies  
an expense we could not afford, no matter  
how the folded bills shaped his wallet.

### III

His voice was flat and withholding,  
and I was so young when he dragged  
the beasts into dark waters they sought,  
to the mudflats that would heal until

they surfaced with light to feed again.

The chase of light long ended,  
in a knot of time tied to the years  
I must now forgive, those known sins  
surfacing with a father and a man.

–*Chuck Blair ('76)*

## The Migration

I worked till dawn  
in blooms of dust swirling

over the Ralston-Purina plant,  
through nights of wing nuts

and the showers of reverie  
waiting for Jake Wilson

to shut down the line  
and call third shift home,

worked till quantum-infused  
forklifts delivered our minds

on fields drowned in cement,  
machinery rattling against

weighted bodies hugging sweat  
grown inch by inch compacted

in the steel-toed body,  
our hard hat hair nestled

under pallets of Friday babble  
at the River Dog's Bar pay line.

I thought my bloodless hands  
would escape towards shadow

raking up pet food sands  
bursting from my alien lungs

and I'd be left like Dr. Jekyll  
with the potion on my oily lips,

ten immortal fingers spawned  
in decaying gloves of patchwork

alloys and crushed stone bone  
ground up with petty flesh

lingering on the hub of tomorrow,  
queued behind the skid marks

for the next spinout televised  
along the quickening pulse.

With another drop of leaf outside  
this torn shadow-wing pours

from a dry moon to boost us  
up among the bare branches

of the dying cottonwood filled  
with the birdsong of ghosts

hugging the Mississippi shore,  
and as the factory whistle

blows whips of breath  
the extruded soul of mill rights

compresses into a sonic *boom!*  
*boom!* I descend with ancient runes,

leaves of green strung in glass  
the true freedom of history

gathering in the proper milieu.  
From the machine's exhaust

sleep feeds off a resume of dreams,  
days of creosote and muskrats,

droppings of time and perspiration,  
the once pubescent sky scattered

and ablaze over a morning held  
in praise climbing with the tree.

–*Chuck Blair ('76)*

Paraphrase of a Commencement Address by Bob Hope  
St. Ambrose College, May 1976

Just look at all the tulips  
gathered together in the weaved  
light like applause, giving up  
steam and thank-you notes

as your flood tide of swank  
seeps into the lawn of this  
momentous occasion—and look  
at the oak leaves treading

the blessed air of spring.  
Meanwhile, the angular momentum  
of a cross-section of America  
is trailblazing its way

into rose-colored glasses,  
an act not unlike reading  
the obituaries in these days  
of planned infatuations

shifting into a skyline  
just as a cloud bank approaches,  
holding it all together  
in a trend to rumors of X's

and treasure. Yes, today is  
the day you'll finally collect  
your tailored wits and pay off  
whatever is left—the cold sweat of

culture set at the breakfast table,  
the smell you could never define—  
and in the bathroom a silver light  
stands accused at the mirror.

Back when time was not as fresh  
as the orchid you were wearing  
and then pressed into the pages,  
you watched your blood crest

during an event of fitful dispatches  
resolved into a footnote of passion,  
before the nuns had to repeat for you  
what the lifelines were—part

of hand, not scars—even before  
you learned about the tenor of loss  
or how to fake an orgasm.  
There was a flourish of time,

enough for the antiseptic smiles  
and the hours buried in scabs,  
until it became apparent  
that our sun was raising green

pastures by the full light of day  
and a patina of sobriety stood  
over the body leaning into gossip  
of excess waistlines, receding hair.

And still this life isn't known  
by its miracles or saints.  
Nobody had told you why,  
not the army of spit wads

nor the classroom echoes  
nor the books with broken backs.  
Without straight answers  
you never memorized that crap

about algebra or any of the lost  
languages of man, always surmising  
that night's flesh would bleed  
through darkness into morning.

Good Lord, a man can hang himself  
with a varicose vein in the pink  
heaven of his holier-than-thou  
thighs, and in this elitist society

of memory we are little more than  
shepherds without keys, unlocking  
no doors—but the sidewalk cracks  
and grass grows wilder than the word

on which we turn the page—still  
seeking the next laugh or the phrase  
of thunder holding our memoirs  
hostage in this kingdom of obese roses.

—*Chuck Blair ('76)*

## The Neighbor's Window

Westerly breezes are the worst;  
they usher the brittle sounds

out: the groan of sofa springs  
and clenched voices tumbling

over. Here on the dusky patio  
my guests and I stare at one

another. If we looked up, through  
the curtain, we'd see two shadows

collide. Like in a cheap movie,  
the sound and image would be

off: a split-second delay between  
the hand coming down and the slap

off-screen. Praying for the wind  
to shift, we let these movies play.

*—Jeff T. Dick ('77)*



## The Second Time Around

The children came too soon.  
Oh no! I know what you're thinking  
    and you're wrong.  
The first appeared a discreet eleven month  
    after our wedding.

The second and third came shortly thereafter  
    all within the proper time frame.  
But whatever you say, we were four years married  
    with three little ones and  
    they all came too soon.

We never had time to explore  
    each other's mind, to memorize each nuance,  
    to gauge each weakness and strength  
As a gardener examines the merits of a prize rose  
    or a miner assays the purity of a new lode.

We never had time to revel  
    in our bodies, separate and together.  
To luxuriate in a lover's embrace,  
    to linger in a bond of satiated love.  
The children came too soon.

Perhaps it was a certain timidity,  
    innocence on my part, shyness on yours,  
A certain awkwardness that kept us  
    from exulting in the passion  
That was ours to share.

There were nights when we sought each other,  
    yearning for deep release.  
Our bodies arcing in the dark  
    to be wrenched apart by a child's cry.  
The children came too soon.

It isn't that we lost interest, and yet  
    there were weeks we barely kissed.  
You were absorbed in work and I  
    engulfed in home and children.  
Intimacy was put on hold.

Now tomorrow is yesterday. The future is past.  
Forty years have gone since our wedding night.  
The house is still and ours alone.  
I am no longer so innocent  
nor are you so shy.

And yes, I still thrill  
when you press your body close to mine,  
when your fingers trace a pattern on my skin,  
writing love words in a gentle script.

And I glory in the freedom of knowing  
the children came too soon.

*—Eda P. Hofmann ('81)*

## Anatomy of Grief

### I. AVALANCHE March

Johnny, did you know the  
softly, sifting snow could be so strong?

Did you know that its pursuit could be so cruel,  
its embrace so deadly?

Did you know that the cold hands that cradled you  
would clutch the marrow of my bones too?

Oh yes, you knew. But more than Death, you feared  
to let one cherished second of life slip wasted through your hands.

And so you scanned the sparkling slope, the cobalt sky, the brassy sun  
and whispered, "There is time."

But time is a tease, like a late April snow  
that clothes the earth with beauty one day

And is gone the next. And your time was gone, leaving me  
to remember, to mourn and numbly wonder—

Is the fragile snowflake flawed because it melts so quickly  
when held in the warmth of cupped hands?

Or does that make it more perfect—leaving the memory  
of a life short and shining and precious?

### 2. LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE April

So many letters came!  
They covered the desk like a snow storm.  
Each letter a pristine flake, not much alone,  
But massed together, they formed blocks in my snow cave.  
A haven from the numbing grief.  
Insulation against the reality of your death.

So many letters came!

I didn't have the courage to read them through.

Like a skier testing a new slope, I darted from one to another  
Glimpsing a word here, a phrase there.

Marveling at how many lives you changed  
with your flashing smile, your crushing hugs.

So many letters came!

Frau Reiter wrote of old lederhosen  
you found stored in her attic.

She was proud that you asked to keep them,  
restore them, wear them. "You had,"  
she wrote, "respect for the leather."

And Erika wrote:

"Dear parents of John,  
I must tell you of a happening so unique.

I am the other English teacher with John.  
I know he wrote you of the igloo he built  
high on the mountaintop near our school.

He was so proud of it—

Had even spent the night there  
to be near the stars.

Many students had made the hike to visit him.  
The night John died I, too, climbed the path  
to visit his igloo, to be near the stars.

From a distance I saw an amber glow,  
A tribute from students who had come before,  
each one placing a candle in John's house of ice.

The igloo shimmered in the onyx night  
like a frozen torch lighting a path to the stars.  
I wanted you to know."

So many letters came!

They are all neatly tied, labeled,  
and stored in cardboard boxes,

Waiting for the day my eyes can read,  
my mind can see, my heart can bear.  
They may melt first.

3.  
BELONGINGS  
September

Is this all that is left of your too-brief time on Earth?  
This box of sterile, folded clothes, photos, mementos?  
Gently I sort through your things, placing them  
In little mounds around me on the floor,  
Searching for a soul-glimpse. What do I find?  
Lederhosen, neatly mended; birthday cards  
That arrived in time for your birthday  
But too late for you to read. A navy blazer,  
So new I thought you hadn't worn it 'til I found  
A gum wrapper, tightly wadded, in the pocket.  
Your diary with one page listed New Friends/Austria  
And another with explicit details on Igloo/How to Build.  
You came into the world with nothing. You left with nothing.  
But I—I need more than a pair of clean socks  
To tell me you were here!

4. BUILDING A CAIRN  
October

In the bittersweet days of autumn we were pilgrims,  
Your father and I, traveling the alpine roads  
Where you had worn lederhosen, taught school,  
Played hockey, made friends.

We saw a sweeping slope, ravenous in spring's thaw,  
Complacent in fall, where you fought the eiderdown snow.  
We climbed the rutted path to a flower-filled meadow  
And traced the muted circle where an igloo had stood.

Your father built a cairn there, choosing the rocks  
For their smoothness, their heft, the way they fit in his hand.  
Sorting, searching, slowly he assembled a pile and formed a spire  
Reaching heavenward like a stony conifer or a petrified tree of life.

While he worked, I built my own cairn, pausing often.  
I examined a lifetime of memories, choosing only those  
So searing in their joy or grief they could not be forgotten.  
They had to outlive life.

5.  
FIRST ANNIVERSARY  
March

One year is too short a time  
to learn the subtle nuances of grief.  
A way to mask eyes  
suddenly awash in tears  
Or change a conversation  
that veers too close to pain.  
I am trapped in a nether world  
of remembering.  
A nebulous midland  
between past and present.  
A phone rings late at night  
and I jerk awake  
thinking it is you.  
Car doors slam in the driveway  
and I sift the babble of voices  
listening for your laugh.  
Once before I carried you within me  
full of movement,  
full of joy, full of life.  
Today there is only stillness,  
and I am full of grief,  
loss, death.

—Eda P. Hofmann ('81)

## In the Name of Friendship

I felt like I was indestructible at ten years of age, and playing army with my cousins made us all feel like real-life heroes. The farm hogs we hunted down and pretended to kill were real aggressive when the sows had a new litter of young ones. The fun of sneaking up on them made us think we could defeat any and all four-footed animals. We were armed with imaginations, cut-off jeans, and wooden rifles that no longer shot even their rubber bands. I would wait until the last second before running from an angry charging sow. The slobbering, grunting noise from a charging hog only made the game more exciting. I still remember the euphoria I felt from the adrenaline pumping through my veins. I was hooked on the thrill.

Dad caught us playing this game with the livestock and told me that if the sow ever caught me, she would literally try to eat me alive. But that stern warning wasn't enough to stop us from tempting fate.

I was stubborn playing army about always being the one who never got shot or died. Even when my cousin really shot me in play, I would say that he had missed. Years later, the first time I actually thought about my chances of dying, I was still riding a school boy's dream of war movies. I thought it was all a crap shoot, nothing more than luck or fate. Even basic training didn't convince me that war was anything more than a bunch of guys getting together to have a good time and kill whoever was on the other side of the fence. When we arrived in Vietnam, that attitude still hadn't changed. All we had to do was kill the other guy and then go home.

The guys I served with were all too quick to look for action to suit me. But the fun started when the shit hit the fan and the heroes turned to newborns looking for their mama's nipple. It always shocked me to hear the grown, tough, weather-beaten men cry, while only the morning before they had talked about us, the quiet cowards, as if they could win the war single-handed, wiping their asses with our faces.

What was it about the thin air of '68? The clouds hung too low around those mountains, and the heat was unbearable. "Have a fuckin' doughnut and keep your mouth shut." I took the advice from the soldier without comment.

"If a dog has his throat tom out by the teeth of a coon, you shoot the coon out of the tree, then you shoot the dog and put it out of its misery" —Roe Connor, 1956

"You couldn't know how much we loved each other. The fact that he saved our asses so many times made the shooting a religious ceremony. He's out of his hurt and no longer has to wonder if this shit is right or wrong or when, if ever, he'll be loved by the evangelical crowd across the water." —Dennis Vacca, 1968

There was a pact that we made with each other—a solemn promise, a vow. The other base-camp phonies could never be that loyal to each other; they were never that scared or that close to death in the first place. I sometimes think that I heard music playing in the middle of the jungle. We had an urge to go to the back of the line, but everybody had to be first without complaint.

It's not logic or common sense that makes you volunteer; you do it so you can be with the guys you trust—the guys you can trust not to leave you behind, alive anyway.

I wonder if I look guilty to those here in the world. Shit, they have their own guilt to mask. The anger inside smells of vomit, except you can't wash it away. Look back and count all the people with the righteous answers. "Pass the fuckin' doughnuts."

Phei Con Do—May, 1968: The eyes are hollow behind the smiles. What could have happened back home? Is it something we did, or something we haven't yet done? How can this shit get any worse? I'm tired of the brown body bags. Nightmares of carrying green body bags: the ones with partial limbs, torsos, heads. When one brushed up against me, I could feel the weight of a lost soul wrinkle through my being.

A young reporter says that we acted like animals. I can't wait until the shit comes down and we hear him whine. When the morning comes, he'll call us gladiators and we'll have a new shadow—for a day or two anyway.

"If we say anything about what happened, they'll put us away. Thursday, May the 15th, 1969, we delivered an animal we loved—one of us—to the cosmos. The peace he found will be ours soon. It is a rest that we have all more than earned. Fuck the Army and Fuck the U.S.A." —Dennis Vacca, 1969

My mother is probably washing the dishes right at this moment. No, Mom, we're not fighting; we're just discussing the best way to resolve this problem. And yes, Mom, we all speak fluent Vietnamese. Pass the fuckin' doughnuts.

Camp Aneri—September, 1969: A full-bird colonel lands in a Huey chopper and asks how many kills we got today. He gets x number of registered kills from our company and goes home. It's always a treat to have the brass stop by and feed us more bull. Even our line officers don't buy it anymore.

I'd never kissed a man, dead or alive, before today. I was struck by the fact that his lips still moved oh so slowly, and his fingers were beckoning us to follow. His mother was probably doing the dishes right at that moment.

My throat is dry, but the water in the stream is so dirty I can't force myself to put the parasite tablet in my canteen so I can drink. I hate this place. There is a killer on the loose, and I should be going home. Is there a reason for this? We blow their heads off and someone twists all this shit around, and I realize we aren't bluffing anymore. Is this my blood on my chest? I've smelled the dead.

"What are you talking about, young man? Who are you talking to? What is tormenting you? What did you do over there? Do you think you might have met Mike Scarrette?" —Unknown, 1969

"We gotta go on lyin'. It doesn't matter, because we're already locked up an' God knows where we fuckin' live." —Dennis Vacca, 1969

I have the morbid privilege of going back there in my dreams and seeing the faces over and over again. I don't want to lie down right now. I smell bile on my chest, and yet they go on talking



as if I didn't lose my stomach. I silently cry, and they ignore me. They all cry inside, and the sound shakes the earth. Can you hear the crying from where you are?

“What the fuck are you doing? We've got to turn around and leave him here.”

“But he's in pain. What am I doing? What am I doing?”

Dennis tells me to get it done. Who pulled the trigger? Me? I can't even remember who died today. Sometimes I think I can hear music in the middle of the jungle. Why don't we talk about home anymore? The orange mud of Pleiku sticks to my boots, and the base-camp commandos are eating steaks again.

I saw the rounds rip his ass in two. He was a North Viet regular and the first man I know I personally killed. He tried to crawl away but finally gave up the ghost. I see a body that's limp. I wonder if his mother is doing the dishes right now. Damn. Today I turned twenty. I feel old, all used up.

Something in me enjoys the destruction and the power it gives me. It's just like hunting hogs again. I'm not even sorry for hurting them, and at times I have the choice. Where does the hunger come from? The time is 1:08 and I'm still not free.

A lady sees me in uniform and says that I should be ashamed of the things I've done. Can she know? Can she have been that close to me? How can I tell her that I wanted more? Pass the fuckin' doughnuts.

—*Russell T. Parr ('94)*

## The Sack Man of Fayette County

The year was 1943. I'd just turned and shed last year's skin and found myself an eleven-year-old boy whose hair had gone from dishwater blond to crawfish-hole brown. When I looked into Ma's full-length mirror, I thought I'd grown half a foot in a season. My ankles to my kneecaps made up most of my inseam. Grandpa would say that my knees were so bony, they could be used to hang up coats or cut pane glass. Pa said the mountain air made a Christian's soul and body breathe. It made for tough skin and tall hill men.

The lye soap Ma made couldn't change the color of my hair, even though she said if I used it without cheatin', it could peel the top layer of skin clean off and work miracles on me. I ain't seen no miracle, but I grewed new skin at least once a month, even if I cheated with the lye soap a bit. Ma forced me to shed my clothes and wash in the wash tub, whether I was a needin' a wash or not.

It was plantin' time, and spring was my Pa's favorite season. It meant growin' new tabaccer, Ma birthin' kin, and me gettin' new shoes. Not much dyin' took place on the mountain, cause the four horsemen didn't dare cross Ma, who had the gift of hands. It was a time of new faces, young faces, and it brung me close to bein' a full grow'd man. I was eleven, but I'd saved near two dollars on my own from sellin' hemp for rope and green tabaccer for chewin'. We lived in the Common Wealth of Kentucky, on a mountain called Pilot Knob.

This particular Sunday mornin', I woke to an open bedroom window; the sweet smell of hickory-nut trees; the sounds of song birds, bellerin' chestnut mules, barkin' dogs, and a squeaky screen door; and Ma just comin' through it with the mornin' sunrise. As I rubbed the night's sleep from my face and cleared the cobwebs from my head, I could see Grandpa sittin' at the kitchen table slurpin' three-day-old cowboy coffee from a saucer.

Grandpa was head of the household 'cause Pa was fightin' the war with the other men from Pilot Knob. He heard Ma cryin' too, and I knew he would say somethin' 'cause he always doted over my Ma and us kids. Grandpa Hall made all the decisions for our clan, seven Hall families that lived around our mountain. He was a proud, stubborn, lanky, six-foot-four-and-a-half-inch white-haired old widder man who Ma accused of shootin' first and askin' questions later.

Pa said Grandpa was the only man in Fayette County who could, with a full mouth of chew, cuss a body out up one side and down the other and never stumble over the same cuss word twice. Grandpa could preach an hour sermon and not spit his tabaccer juice once, all while shakin' the Holy Bible in one hand and steadyin' a jar of corn liquor in the other.

After gettin' up, I told Grandpa I was goin' down to the railroad tracks to cardboard sled with the rest of the boys. The hill above the tracks was a great place to play 'cause it was steep, and we got the dirt slide so glassyslick from slidin' down on cardboard squares that it was as if we were skiddin' on hard packed ice.

We would sit in the middle of the cardboard squares and, holdin' on with both hands, set out down that worn-smooth steep dirt hill. You had to use your feet to stop. Some of the boys had shoes, and they could stop on a dime. The rest of us would be a bit more careful how and where we let our feet down. You would get goin' down so fast that the wind would steal your breath away.

The train tracks were just below our hill, and Grandpa was always warnin' us about goin' down there. "Be careful of the hobos that ride the trains from state ta state," he'd say. "Sit down here, Stump, and let me tell you about the Sack Man of Fayette County. This hobo is loosed out of the gates of Hell itself, boy. This demon from the pit walks the tracks alone, kidnappin' children right out from under their own patch, and eatin' 'em half alive. It don't matter if it's a boy or girl. The Sack Man is like a mirage. Ya see 'em one minute, and he's gone the next. He can fool kids and full-growed people cause he's a small, bent man, with a pipe in his mouth that's always bit and smoked upside down. He looks ta do none harm, but don't be taken in. He has green teeth that come out in an overbite, and black spittle always runs from the corner of his mouth. He limps as he walks and is stooped ta one side from old age.

"He uses a wooden cane with the head of a gargoyle carved on its handle. The Sack Man will strike you over the head with that cane so as not ta git blood or brains on his hands. And worst of all, he carries the bones of the kids he eats in his sack.

"The Sack Man of Fayette County has special powers that he got from the Devil himself. No one ever knows what train the Sack Man will ride, or when he'll git off. The other hobos are just a scared of him as anyone else. They burn a fire all night just ta keep the Sack Man away from their camps."

But this day, I wasn't thinkin' 'bout no Sack Man. We were all gathered at the hill to test our skill and speed on our new cardboard sleds, flat as pancakes and super-fast, cut from the Sear's crates used to deliver pot-bellied stoves.

Everything was a blur as I zoomed down that embankment. I didn't dare put down my bare feet to stop, 'cause it would'a worn 'em clean to the bone. I coasted all the way down to the bottom of the tracks 'til the grass finally stopped my ride.

As I started to walk back up the hill, I heard screamin' comin' from the top where the others were waitin' their turn. I figgered it was just the kids messin' around, arguin' whose turn it was. But it was bone chillin', and Oma Mae was screamin' so loud it made her voice echo to front 'n back a me. The boys was tryin' to say something, but all the words was a runnin' together. I couldn't see anybody as I made ma way back up the hill. When I started to make out what was being hollered, I was numb from head to toe.

"Sack Man's a comin'—run! Run, Stump, he's comin' off the trestle!"

I took off up the embankment as fast as my legs could take me. I ran up twenty feet and slid back ten. I wished Pa was there right then; he'd a known what to do. Ma, she'd be a lookin' for me to have supper. I was late already. I couldn't die there, not like that. I wasn't gonna be et half alive.

Shakin' with fear and afraid to look over my shoulder, I finally reached the top and turned. What I saw made me cringe. As I looked through the dust, I saw nothin', not a single, solitary soul. I strained to see the small framed silhouette break among that cloud of dust that hung over the tracks below. I didn't trust my eyes, so I looked harder.

Still nothin'. Where was the little man with the sack over his shoulder?

My eyes looked to find what I had imagined in my head. That face I feared had to match the horror of a seen-in-the-flesh man, but he was nowhere to be seen. I stared down from the top of the dirt slide, fixed and un-blinkin', studyin' the tracks below, tryin' to catch my breath and sight of a human of any kind.

“I must be dreamin’, “I thought, ’cause I heard laughter comin’ from all directions. It was the roarin’ laughter of the kids. Oma Mae, the only girl mean enough to play with us, said, “Hey Lon, did you think you’d ever see a pair of legs move that fast in your life? Stump kicked up enough dust ta block out the sun! Peed his pants, too. I thought for sure he’d bite his tongue clean in two!”

“You knotheads a’goin’ ta hell for sure, prankin’ me that way,” I said with a lump in my throat. “I’ll be prayin’ for y’all ta wake up in a leper camp, and I hope ya git booggers on ya’ noses that’ll never wipe off. Ya ain’t funny, ya hear? I could’a died from fright. You’d all be murderers!”

They all gathered ’round me, feelin’ sorry, and helped brush me off. I ’spect it was a good joke, but I would’a rather seen it done to somebody else.

As we headed for home, I couldn’t help but sneak a last look down toward that trestle, just to ease my mind before the sun faded its light.

The next mornin’, Grandpa turned me out of bed before sun-up to help ’em kill and slaughter a hog. It was my job to fill the cast-iron kettle with water and bring it to a boil. The kettle was about four foot wide and three foot deep. I plum disappeared in it if I sat down inside. The kettle was set in a stone furnace, and I made kindlin’ wood and got the water to come to heat, so as to loosen the hog’s hair ’n skin. Some folks just poured boilin’ water over the hog carcass, but Grandpa said the fat never fried clean then and the meat wouldn’t shrink, so we hadda dunk the hog whole.

I watched as Grandpa lured that hog to feed, and when the old hog’s head was down, Grandpa stretched his long arms up, raised the hammer ten foot in the air, and hit that hog dead-clean between the eyes. It sounded like a pumpkin’d been dropped from atop the barn steeple. You heard a hollow sound when the hog’s head popped. Then it went down like wet socks.

Grandpa told me to tie both the back feet to a rope and pulley, and we hoisted the hog about head high, its snout pointed down. Grandpa took out his carvin’ knife, struck it to the wet stone once or twice, and cut the hog’s throat so as to let it bleed out before we boiled its head. “Ya’ have ta boil the head first,” he said. “Then shove the rest of the carcass in the kettle. Ya skin the head, then pull the hide right down ta the tail.”

After we took the hog out of the water, I got to scrape the skin clean by myself. “Boy, that’s a heavy chore you got!” Grandpa said. “Make damn sure ya’ do it right! Leave no sickness ta be et by your kin! You got that boy?”

“Yes sir,” I replied. “Got it!”

Grandpa cut away the guts and cleaned the inside of the carcass. “Now boy, we’re ready ta make the lard and cracklin’s. Then I’ll show ya’ how ta cut bacon, tenderloins ’n chops ’n stuff.”

It was noon by the time me and Grandpa got through with the hog renderin’. I ate me some fresh cracklin’s for lunch, and headed for the dirt slide with Oma Mae, Lon, and the Jackson brothers, Doc Jr. and Wheezer.

“So, Stump, how was your first time skinnin’ a hog?” asked Lon. “Did ya lose any fingers or ya’ lunch when Ol’ Man Hall gutted that hog’s belly?”

Did ya’ shoot it with yer sling shot?”

“Nope,” I said. “Nothin’ odd or yeller came up, just fell in ta skinnin’ that hog as if I was borned t’it, is all.”

We wandered toward the hill when I heard a cry. “Ow, dang it! Ow, dat blame it!”

I looked around and heard Oma Mae, in her usual screechy, nasally voice, say, “What in heaven’s name’s the matter with you child?” She was lookin’ toward a watery-eyed Wheezer, who had fallen to the ground, holdin’ his foot.

“I stubbed my toe, Oma Mae, and stop callin’ me child! It hurts like the dickens, and you ain’t got the gift!”

“Oh, for God sakes, Wheezer,” said Oma Mae, “git up. We got some racin’ ta do, and I need some competition. I don’t wanna race no cry-baby.”

“Stop callin’ me a cry-baby, Oma Mae! It just hurts is all.” “C’mon Wheezer, let’s git going,” said Doc.

“I want you ta witness her majesty’s fall from grace as the dirt sleddin’ champ,” I said.

Oma Mae was rock-hard for a girl, and feared no man or beast. She was a dead shot with a slingshot, and the dirt sleddin’ champion two years runnin’, but I fixed for that to change that very day.

I’d been practicin’ my dirt sleddin’, and I knew for sure I was gonna beat that girl. “Oma Mae, ya ain’t got a chance today!”

“I heard that Mr. Mouth, ’n I’ll wait for that day ta come as long as I’d wait for hell ta freeze.”

We finally got down to the hill, makin’ threats all the way. I was anxious to get started, ’cause the day was perfect for dirt sleddin’. The air was fresh and clean, the sun was bright, and the sky was so blue I felt like I could dive into it. A cool breeze filled the air as I got onto my sled and took off down the embankment. I was going so fast that before I knew it, I was already at the bottom. As I started to get up, I heard the kids screamin’ and a hollerin’ at the tops of their voices for me to run, to run as fast as I could up the hill. They must’a thought I was born stupid if they thought I was gonna fall for that cry-for-wolf trick twice.

Then a chill came up the nape of my neck. I stopped for a minute just to look around to see if a train was comin’ down the tracks, but when I turned, terror ran through my veins like ice water. It was the Sack Man of Fayette County. I was lookin’ right dead into his burnt, red, wrinkled face. His eyes were different colors: one blue and the other brown. A pipe hung upside down from his mouth. There was black slobber oozing from the corner of his bottom lip. His right hand held tight the sack slung over his right shoulder.

I could’a sworn I saw the figure of a child bulgin’ from that sack. Was the child still alive? Was that a finger I saw edgin’ out from the top? I could see an old hand grasping that cane, and I wondered when he would strike the deadly blow to my head.

As I looked up toward the hill, I heard the sound of what I thought was the Sack Man’s voice comin’ up behind me, but when I looked back, I could see him grimacing in pain. All the youngin’s had taken out their slingshots and were pummelin’ the man with marbles. He was bein’ hit so hard and so often, he didn’t know when or where to turn. I watched as the Sack Man fell to one knee, then to both. He dropped his cane, and his wrinkled hands were shakin’ uncontrollably as they covered his swollen, battered face. He’d even dropped the sack.

As the dirty old bag hit the ground, you could see a bit of a bulge, and all the kids gathered ’round to see what or who could be inside. Lon stepped out from the crowd and said, “You look, Stump—you’re the one who told us the story!”

“No way Lon! You gotta be touched, and anyhow, I’m still shakin’!” He gave me a look as if I had coward written all over my forehead.

Oma Mae stepped up and took slow but steady steps forward. As she bent down to open the bag, everyone took a deep breath. I coulda swore I saw an arm fall from that dirty old sack. We forgot about the Sack Man, whose pipe still hung, though side-ways, from his bloody mouth, and all ran as fast as we could to get my Grandpa.

It wasn't long before we all reached my home. I exploded through the screen door first and told Grandpa, "We whupped that Sack Man straight ta the ground! What we done ta the Sack Man of Fayette County will make us all heroes, Grandpa!"

Grandpa had a confused look on his face, and said nothin' for the longest time. He stared at us as if he was searchin' for words that just wouldn't come. Then when he finally spoke, he told us he had made up that story. There was no Sack Man. He just wanted to keep us off the tracks. "What in the name of god have you youngin's done?" he yelled. Ma came out to see what all the commotion was about, holdin' baby Bessie in her arms. "Libby, ya better walk down ta the train trestle with me and the boys, cause I think someone might be in need of some doctorin'." I tried to explain to Ma what Grandpa had told us about the Sack Man, but she had nothin' to say. Ma stared holes through Grandpa all the way to the tracks. That five-minute walk seemed to take forever.

Grandpa said, "There ain't no way in Hell's tarnation that you youngin's could'a seen a man like I made up in my head to fit that yarn. I'll bet ya' all took off on this man, not thinkin' you could hit the side of a red barn door with those sling-shots."

Ma asked Grandpa, "If ya didn't want 'em ta play down at the tracks, why didn't ya' just switchem' home each time ya caught 'em on that hill?"

Grandpa said that we was all gullible 'tater heads and would believe anythin'. That's why growed people called us kids.

I tried to convince Grandpa that it was the Sack Man, but he'd hear no more of my words. When we arrived, Ma, lookin' down the embankment, saw the same thing we was lookin' at: an old man curled up like a baby, makin' narry a move. We all walked down, and Grandpa said, "I can't believe my eyes. That ol' man is the spittin' image of the Sack Man in my tale."

Ma bent over, still holdin' little Bessie on her right hip and asked the ol' man if she could help. He was weak and could barely speak. In a frail voice he said, "Have I trespassed or hurt someone hereabouts?"

"No ol' man—you've done none harm. It's a cruel mistake you walked into this day."

"I took to runnin'," he whispered, "but my age and heart have failed me." He asked for Ma to reach inside his sack and take out some personal items. Ma asked him his name, and he said he was called Thomas J. Witty. When Ma asked him about the pictures of the twin boys wound neatly by a rosary, he said that the two boys in the picture had been lost in a fire when they were only four years old. "My wife, my beloved, grieved herself to death over the loss of our boys. I carry them with me in memory, and in this single, faded picture. I still tote their toy wooden soldier. It's been forty years, and I can still hear my boys cryin' for me to come out to play."

Ma told him it was good for the soul to think of good times, and for the ol' man to rest. She gently blotted the blood from his face as he spoke of being alone with no one left to go home to for so long.

He opened himself to Ma and said, "I deserve no comfort in this life, and I 'spect I'll git even less in the next. I've been ridin' these tracks for an eternity carryin' this sack and the memories inside it. But I've grown weary, and my guilt outweighs my will. If ya don't mind,

ma'am, I would like to just lie here in the company of people and close my eyes and rest for a while. Will it be all right for me to close my eyes? Them youngins ain't a feared of me no more, are they, ma'am? I fret that they broke me up beyond fixin'."

"It was just you bein' in the wrong place, Mr. Witty," Ma said. "It was just bad luck." She was lookin' dead into Grandpa's eyes when she spoke them words.

When the ol' man spoke, he asked Ma, "Would ya wake me when ya hear the sound of the train whistle? I feel there's somewhere I must be."

"Close your eyes, Mr. Witty," Ma told him. "I'll be here by your side till you wake or the train whistle calls."

He closed his eyes, never once askin' a vengeful why, as to bein' left there to bleed all alone. As he was driftin' off, he wanted my mother to keep talkin' softly, and not to leave his side.

She didn't. When the train whistle broke the stillness, Thomas J. Witty would not need to face the strain or grab-hold of another movin' car.

As we all looked at the still, small, crooked man, there was no hate in his tired, wrinkled face. The pipe lay by his side. The cane seemed frozen in time. The belongin's of a lifetime were in the small burlap sack. It laid, as the Sack Man of Fayette County, quiet in the grass.

The Sack Man of Fayette County has a grave marker in the family plot owned by the Hall family of Pilot Knob Mountain. The toy soldier was buried with him, cradled in his hands.

Yes, Mr. Witty, you can hear the distant train whistle from here. Let the sound of that whistle guide you and your beloved to the sound of your children playing.

I walk the mountain paths reaching for boyhood glimpses and voices of my past, which quickly fade away. But clear in my mind is the passing of an old man whose image I've carried for sixty-three years. The Sack Man of Fayette County stays fixed in clear memory. I am still that boy of eleven, if only in thought. Bent with age, I carry a cane once held by a little man to help lighten his stride. The cane has no gargoyle carved in its head, only the faded worn image of an hour glass. For some, time holds the joys of growing up; for others, the pain of growing old.

*—Russell T. Parr ('94)*

## Eyes beneath the Water

I guess it's safe to say that as an eleven-year-old kid growin' on a mountain in 1940s Kentucky, I wasn't the bravest youngin who ever rode la horse made from a tobacco stick. But school was out, and the summer mornin's woke me with the freedom to do whatever I had a hankerin' for.

The kids I played with were brothers. Johnny, fifteen, was our fearless leader, as he said. Scottie, the next oldest, was fourteen and would argue with Johnny at the drop of a hat. This always meant a wrestlin' match between the two of 'em, and the outcome would always be the same. It was a rite of passage for Scottie to test Johnny's mettle at least once a day. Only the fact that Johnny laughed throughout the match kept him from stompin' Scottie plum into the ground.

Nobie was the third and youngest brother, and my best friend. I never called him Noble, his given name, and he always wanted to be called Nobie by his mom. Anyway, that seemed to fit him better. I always wondered why Scottie was so much shorter than Johnny and Nobie; they were each almost six feet tall, while he just made five-feet-six. That was just one of the reasons why he was willin' to take on anybody, usually Johnny, any time. Scottie usually got in the first punch—the last one only if he was lucky.

Nobie and I were both goin' on twelve. We'd grown up on Pilot Knob Mountain together like we was joined at the hip. The both of us would hang around Johnny and Scottie whenever they couldn't figure out a way to ditch us.

That particular summer day, Johnny, with the most life learnin', though of twenty things we could do to pass the time. We dumped eighteen of 'em to avoid gettin' whipped. The flip of a coin finally made our decision. Scottie brought an old inner tube out of the barn, and with our pocket knives we cut rubber strips about an inch wide and a foot-and-a-half long. Then we all climbed a tree to pull down a branch that had three natural forks in it. When we'd stripped the bark off the forks, split the ends, and cut the tongues out of some old shoes, we all made the weapons of choice: slingshots. I admit that Nobie finished mine.

After firin' our slingshots all morning', knockin' out the windows in Orvis Lawson's abandoned truck, our arms finally gave out, and we shoved the slingshots in our pockets and sat down to give serious thought to our next caper. It was too late to go crawdad huntin', and we had cashed in our pop bottles the day before. We'd spent the case money on hard taffy, and Mrs. Conner's dog, Waller, had run off with it still in the bag. You could get credit at Orvis's grocery store, and we took a vote, but Johnny decided we didn't want to listen to Orvis talk about his ex-wife again just to get some free pop or more candy.

Scottie came up with the idea of goin' down to the river and diggin' up worms and fishin' a while. As we got closer to the river, I could hear the sound of the water rushin' below. You could smell the mist and feel the cold breeze from the river.

As we got out of the brush onto the shore, we could hear, but not see, a motor boat. When it had made its way around the bend, we could see that it was rental boat with a boy skiin' behind it. The boat and skier ran by us several times, and we didn't pay 'em much mind. But on the last run, as the boat turned to leave, the boy let go of the guide rope and started to coast in toward the bank. As he got closer, he fell beneath the water up to his chest. And then there was a silence that seemed to last too long.



“Fish hooks! Fish hooks!” the boy wailed. He screams echoed across the river cliffs and walls. I thought his skis had gotten caught in a drag line just under the water. We all looked at each other; even though we lived by the river, none of us really knew how to swim. Scottie took baby-steps toward the water to get a closer look. Johnny just froze in his tracks. I wondered why the boy didn’t just take his feet out of the skis and swim on in to shore. But before I could finish the thought, the boy yelled at the top of his voice, “Oh God! Help me! Help me, please!”

I felt helpless as I watched in horror while the boy struggled to stay above water. We were too far from the store to go for help. I could feel in my gut that the boy was runnin’ out of time. He became frantic, hittin’ the water with his arms while his head arched back, then was thrown forward, grimmacin’ in pain. And unseen forces seemed like it was in total control of the boy’s body, and he turned his head left to right, as if to ask, “Why me?”

At the last moment, roundin’ the bend came a rowboat with two game wardens hard at the oars. I could feel my heart pound out of my chest; I thought the drownin’ boy might be rescued from a watery death. The wardens yelled out, “Hold on, son, hold on!” and one of ’em had an oar out for the boy to grab hold.

I knew they could free him from the hooks; all they had to do was pull him into the boat. But the boy didn’t move a muscle or blink an eye. The warden’s calls for him to reach out got louder and louder.

As the boat drifted closer, the warden standin’ toward the front yelled, “Pull back! Pull back now!”

I was horrified to see ’em leave the boy in the water and found myself starin’ at the oar in the warden’s hand. At first I thought I heard him say that the oar had river weeds wrapped around it, but both wardens started hittin’ the water and the side of the boat with their oars, screamin’, “Don’t let ’em get in the boat! Keep ’em out!”

I didn’t understand what was happenin’. None of us could, but it was right there before our eyes. I could see the terror in the wardens’ faces. The sound of their shrieks carried across the river. The next thing they yelled sent chills down my back. “Those aren’t weeds,” one bellowed. “They’re moccasins!”

My mind and body went numb. I told myself not to look, but I couldn’t turn away. My tasted my stomach thick and wet in my throat. The bile shot through my nose onto the river bank.

We were all in a trance. Hundreds of black water moccasins were rollin’ and undulatin’ in the water. I could see the snakes writhin’ an top of and all through each other, making the water look like it was boilin’. The boat managed to back up out of harm’s way, but the boy left in the water had taken on a blue tinge. His body began to swell, and his eyes—I couldn’t stop starin’ into his eyes. They looked everywhere but nowhere. The boy’s mouth was open as his face sank beneath the water line. Fangs punctured his cheeks, ears, neck, and arms as T=the moccasins struck over and over, injectin’ their venom into his already helpless body.

Suddenly, without thinking, I jumped into the water. I was gonna save the boy before it was too late. Then I felt stings run through my head as I was jerked from the water. A voice said, “The youngin’s dead.”

“Let me go, damnit,” I protested. “Let me go!” But before I knew it, I was slapped so hard that the breath was knocked from me. When the tears cleared from my eyes, I could see Roe Conner, kinda the guardian of the mountain, who fished that patch, still holdin’ tight to my stingin’ hair. I asked Roe to please save the boy, but he replied, “There ain’t no savin’ to be done

today, Stump. That boy's life ended when he landed in the middle of that nest of demons. Anyone caught in that hellhole dies. You understand that, boy?

"I spoke not a word."

No life could be seen. The boy's arms floated aimlessly back and forth, well out in front of his head. The water moccasins were slitherin' over and under the dead body, still pumpin' their poison.

How could a person die like that? I felt a sense of loss for a kid whose name I didn't even know. Roe Conner had seen death many times, but for me the river had lost its innocence. In a way, we all lost someone that mornin'. I couldn't trust the water ever again. That spot, where we had taken our inner-tubes a hundred times, had become a hauntin', deadly memory.

*—Russell T. Parr ('94)*

The decay. In the empty corridor:  
a figure dancing in fire, parading in exile  
with flashes of paint scraping against his molded flesh  
still facing the flame—still dancing around his death  
through coal black  
eyes of dilated  
ethereal presence.

And space stands, silent between my vision  
encompassing particles that rage like tiny  
angels in the stillness of night—all is growing  
faintly azure, terracing the white paint falling  
from  
faded, dilapidated walls.  
Legs burn and madmen crawl from the corner.

Where does this sad decay lead—rotting the  
flesh and bone in summer?  
Faces, faces, faces, altered graces  
cannot free this soul  
rotting fast  
rotting fast  
expand this treasonable eye  
and follow the  
dripping, saddened  
darkness.

And space will not follow—the figure still  
dancing in exile, glazing blood  
across vain ripples of his hardened skin.

Mirrors—I cannot stare—I only envision  
a false truth transparent  
elusive as the  
taste of bitter honey—  
still sinking deep within this translucent  
vision of what I  
cannot see  
cannot see  
this troubled  
world of reason,  
can only touch the  
senses.

But I can taste orange—and  
I can smell the decay forming around this luxurious  
angel—and  
I can hear  
lugubrious sounds  
foreshadowing this deliberate  
lie lie lie lie lie  
manifesting in the flower  
and  
sun  
on my window sill.

—Chris Padgett ('94)

To me  
your world is  
golden limelight  
sticks dipped  
in table sugar  
syrup  
dripping over  
sun-streaked lakes  
in mountain villages  
at dawn.

And my world  
is similar, only  
the sticks are soaked  
in garlic broth  
and flung  
from a child's  
hand into  
the open mouth of  
a tiger.

*—Tracee Becker ('94)*

We'll leave tonight, you and me got a full tank of gas and our pockets filled with moonbeams I've always wanted to travel south by you, south by southwest directionally and we won't stop until we reach the border or the sea or some heavenly obstruction and even then we'll trade that broken-down bus of intentions for a couple of trusty donkeys or a life raft with a blanket sail, we'll ride our trusty donkeys down through old Mexico passing hacienda after hacienda stopping to dance and smile at the señoritas, we'll be so comfortable we can just lie back like gangsters and ride our lazy boy donkeys right into the sun until we reach the sea where we are so overwhelmed by our cigar-smoke sunset that we peel off our journey clothes slap those donkey's right out of there and dive into the mother water, we can do it I say we swim to the other side, as the excitement overtakes me I slap on my dorsal fin, going to new neighborhoods and entering new arenas holds something for us all, then you slap me in the face with the cold mackerel of reality, it's too treacherous, you'll be swallowed by sharks or tigers or your own expectations, o.k. maybe I can't float across the great divide, but I refuse to accept that this is where the pilgrimage ends, not here not like this so anticlimactic, Plymouth Rock yourself you say appearing quite disenchanted and fed up with my empty rhetoric you jump into the sea and backstroke home zipping up the St. Lawrence River, you didn't understand my intentions from the beginning and didn't buy into my level of anticipation, but it's clear that I must continue and I get one last look at the companion sun and smash into the abyss and then swim to the other side of the lake in my hometown.

—Ryan StremLOW ('99)

## Sometimes Night Falls

Sometimes  
night fall like water  
dripping in your bathroom sink.  
I've also seen it drop  
like a glass from your hand  
down to the marble floor.  
It can spill like ink  
expanding across a blank page  
or fade like forgotten friends  
into the background.  
Tonight it ran  
like cool water  
in a Montana stream.  
It washed over the treetops,  
filling the sky  
and caressing the smooth tone moon.

*—Jeremy Burke ('99)*

## We All Have Rocks in Our Pockets

The night sky is not black;  
it's deep blue  
like my soul on a Saturday night  
after everywhere's closed  
and I'm stumbling up the alleyway alone  
and it's deep enough, but we don't jump in  
because we are all afraid of gravity  
weighing us down  
like a Woolf  
with rocks in her pockets  
standing at the bottom of the River Ouse  
waiting for life to wash away,  
but it never does—  
it's ripped from our bodies,  
stripping existence away  
like a rattle stolen  
from a child in church.

The moon casts dim light everywhere  
for that's all she can muster  
and she wants it to reach  
the bowels of this world,  
and maybe it has  
just by falling on me  
stumbling through.

*—Jeremy Burke ('99)*



## Broken Beautiful

I.

Thousands of cockleburrs  
swallow him whole  
as he lies on the floor,  
April morning light spilling  
through the open shades.  
Oddly enough, he looks  
peaceful, relaxed:

                    legs crossed  
                    in someone else's old  
                    Sunday best.

One cocklebur for each  
sin, each tragic flaw.  
Consumed, he doesn't seem  
to mind the sudden end  
of who he was.

II.

In the corner of the back room  
on the old tabletop sits  
the sewing machine:

                    white  
                    with confessional black  
                    cracks and holes.

Tracing its lines  
with my fingers,  
examining the revelatory black  
fissures of its until now forgotten  
shell, I am oblivious  
that it was once  
a tool, an extension  
of my desires.

III.

She told me everything  
I never wanted to know  
about anyone—  
Not an Option  
tattooed above the scars  
across her wrist,  
her smile full

of false teeth. She wears  
her cracks and flaws  
like jewels.  
I hide mine away  
in the bottoms of drawers  
with mismatched socks  
and dirty magazines.

IV.

She rolls over.

I run

my hand through her dark  
hair, admiring a long strand framing  
her ear:

    a tiny, little secret

    I want to explore.

She rolls back toward me,  
rests her arm across my chest.

My head falls back  
to our pillow, but I can't  
sleep so stare

at the cobwebs  
in corner of the ceiling.

I feel the cockleburs  
beginning to swallow me.

Peering through the dry,  
brown barbed seeds,  
all I can see are the beautiful,  
black fractures  
in a white sewing machine.

—*Jeremy Burke ('99)*

## Floating Down a Concrete Walk

It feels so strange  
to be here  
    walking around  
on all of these old sidewalks again.  
Strange to see the buildings  
where I began  
to learn that there is more  
to know than there is time  
enough to glimpse.

The people smile and say hi  
like I'm not an aberration.  
Others grab me  
by the arm, shake it  
as if I've returned  
from 6 feet beneath  
the frost-filled Iowa soil.

    It feels that way  
    sometimes. My breath is cold  
    and frost grows from my eyebrows  
    like that strange fungus  
    on the oranges  
    in the back of the refrigerator.

The wind blows hard  
through this stretch of concrete walk.  
It makes me huddle closer  
to myself inside my winter coat.  
Hunching over, I whisper  
the names of people  
I see floating in the distance.

*—Jeremy Burke ('99)*

## All I've Ever Wanted

was someone to lie in bed with  
on a January morning.  
One of those cold ones  
that drain your desire  
to do anything  
except hide under the covers. To feel someone's fingers  
wrapped around my hand  
as we make our way  
through the Friday drizzle  
to the small theater across Second Street.  
To drive down Highway 61  
as the sun melts into the horizon  
and look right only to find  
that she is looking left  
with that look in her eyes.  
For one moment she was there:  
hiding under the covers,  
her fingers wrapped in mine  
shaking the rain from her hair,  
looking left when I looked right.  
Now I'm wishing we were back on my couch  
ignoring the film-adapted novel  
and talking  
about life and God and everything.

January mornings  
Find me slipping into a flannel  
as I feel my way to the bathroom.  
The Friday drizzle is just noise  
while I sit  
with my hands wrapped  
around *The Captain's Verses*.  
I stare into the distance  
as the horizon swallows the sun.

—Jeremy Burke ('99)

## Speak to Me

of philosophers and poets,  
about caves you've crawled through  
where memories are hidden from long ago  
with loot from distant kingdoms,  
of creatures that don't exist  
and those that do.  
Tell me where the wind comes from  
and where it blows  
on cool Sunday afternoons  
and how the clouds hang in the sky  
and whether lightning falls to the ground  
or explodes  
up from the surface  
trying to escape.  
Whisper to me  
your secret wishes  
or rant on your pet peeves.  
Or say nothing at all.  
Just come with me  
and we'll take a walk back to the rusty red gate  
and stroll to the other side.  
Then we'll sit in the whispering grass  
and wonder at her wisdom.

—*Jeremy Burke ('99)*

## Most Everything I Own

I bought at a garage sale.  
My bed, with its 60s-style headboard  
and now duct taped footboard;  
the pastel plaid sleeper sofa,  
a little too feminine for my tastes  
but a deal nonetheless at \$35;  
a buffet obviously missing its partner;  
a water-stained oak table and  
4 barrel chairs with spindles popping from every seam.

With the phone brutally silent,  
I wonder why I hadn't chosen things of greater value  
    made of substance,  
    reinforced with steel,  
    heirlooms on which to lavish careful attentions,  
    kept, revered, passed on.

Yet even before the question  
bears weight on my lips,  
I know it is for the very reason  
I am cloaked in solitude.

*—Laura Ernzen ('99)*

## Rag Doll

You were made for him, no doubt.  
Just a trifle with limbs,  
Slight hips and a fragile wrist

Clasped in a coarse fist.  
There is no pardon for his penance.  
You were never poor in words,

Yet you kept his secret sutured  
Like a good, dear girl.  
With a pull of a string,

You wear that pretty, knitted grin.  
And you're paid handsomely with smiles.  
No child of that mother

Or a rib from the other;  
Dutiful pupil,  
You didn't know you were manmade.

*-Carrie Chesney ('02)*

## A Keepsake

He has made a muck of it—  
Quite enough for two.  
No need to toil against

The bitterness of his seed;  
Just a scrap of her will do.  
Under the collapse of his weight

She is waist deep—has sunken in,  
Wading in the snarl of his cattails.  
He dug his ditch, and she will lie

In the swath of the pant and strain  
And all that is muted and brown.  
Oh, she hated the strain—

And then the slump on the corner of a bed  
That is her.  
She would banish it all,  
This new muddied self.

She will bury it—  
A despoiled keepsake,  
This walking ghost of herself.

Outside, a shade too light and airy,  
She is nothing to be believed,  
Except for that unspeakable mouth.

—*Carrie Chesney* ('02)



Bent around the waxes and wanes we are driven into the deep  
waters build around us like walls the mighty tides  
overcome us  
we sit inside the crystal ball drowning outside  
murdering words and faith and time with such recklessness  
losing the shore and swimming home we tell them all  
we met our demons somewhere between goodness and  
mediocrity and we couldn't come back until we knew  
where we'd been they told us to go to the water feel how it  
move through our fingers  
and we said it flowed like God.

—Amy Falvey ('05)

when it was almost Monday

i could almost say just what i meant  
talking about the weather and how these days  
go dark too soon  
i could almost write this this was my love poem  
but now it's looking more like graffiti  
(God i mean i am so sorry)  
in how much it makes me feel  
like a piece of poetry  
falling off itself  
our hands were making (moving up, down)  
the skin of time undocumented wars  
of my body my mind  
fit perfectly into just one word one poem  
just maybe not  
a love poem

—Amy Falvey ('05)

with clasped hands . . .

it's the right time of day or the right place maybe  
talking gray words inventing half-languages  
living for something that drives in the deep cold night  
skipping stones like years  
i move down highways that take on lives  
giving me meaningfulness  
til i am seven feet outside my body

“this is what i prayed for  
once or twice,  
i was maybe seventeen”

the world tasting lime of overdue nights  
and now now we talk about breaking  
the words on refrigerator magnets we rearrange them  
and i know it's just practicing poetry in the kitchen  
you're thinking words  
we can't pronounce with the lights on  
we talk about weathering  
that comes so fast it changes our breathing  
and we forget where we are where we came from  
we can't remember our own names  
but it feels like it's a passing away of things

“there is holiness here we just  
boxed it up much too soon”

the world they told you sometimes it's black  
but really it's red i know  
nile red  
from my lips to God's ears you say  
living in the belly the Leviathan  
there's something we meant to prove  
from the beginning  
something about salvation earth  
always spitting out the lukewarm  
telling the wide red world  
this is the God the God i speak of  
and maybe i'm not this is not what you expected

“these moments of honesty are like gum drops,

i was never cut out for sugar”

i never could stand the sound of it  
you talking about God always peeling away  
using words like power and death  
you know as if  
you knew what they meant  
like you ever really. sat inside the sadness and climbed out  
like you ever bowed to something bigger than your body  
it's just you heard divinity moves dark strong rain  
but you never breathed hallelujahs in and out in and out  
“there are thoughts that i'm thinking,  
there are places i am dreaming about,  
all the places i will never see”

—Amy Falvey ('05)

## On Time

### I. Modulations

He drank all the rum  
and closed all the cupboards  
and told her “You’ll see. Just wait.  
In time, you’ll see.”  
And the cock kept crowing,  
the hasty pendulum  
batting and swinging, the pitchers  
pouring, the microwaves beeping  
and the milk, the milk  
congealing.  
They stretched out the night: the ashtrays  
were filling the traffic was dimming the lights were broken  
the faucet, sinking.  
The minutes were telling  
the hours to stay, as days that laughed  
became years that ran right out of breath.  
And he watched it all give  
like the rum in the cupboard, like the curve  
of her breast, like August to autumn  
just barely, tender.  
Things pushed out, and pulled back, the quiet  
almost rolling like waves, Tuesday changing  
its name, love changing///its shape  
like the curve, the cupboard, or milk  
congealing.  
Weeks after (the coffee, the sugar and cream)  
she wrote him a letter then ripped it to pieces  
(those one hundred sentences  
torn like his t-shirt) and left it  
in the sink.  
The words she had written (“In time, you’ll see”)  
dissolved, after days in the drain, after days  
of water running over after nights  
of love in the shape of the water//in the shape  
of the cupboard//in the shape  
of a death so small  
that everything she stole from him had disappeared.

And when all that was left

from this death was his name  
he drew words from the coffin  
dropped letters in linens  
went digging through secrets (stored gently away)  
in notebooks containers of paper;  
he found the story that ceaselessly shifted its shape  
its beginning and ending its middle and its name  
from the devil to the deep blue sea  
from tightropes to fishnets to sewing machines  
from cupboards to coffins  
to water milk rum.  
And August became February  
just like that.

## II. Tenderly It Goes

He lets the cardboard ends  
of toilet paper rolls  
pile up, without discarding them.  
This is how he counts the days, as if  
passing in them, or passing between them,  
moves too fast for wastebaskets.  
And he counts the years on an abacus,  
the wooden beads sliding gently  
over, and over, and over,  
until half a century has passed.  
The sadness of time coming and going  
has left its mark  
on his ceilings and floors.  
But even in the blueblackness  
of his days, he pushes into night,  
pulls Rilke from his shelf,  
and sings with him.  
These hours leave their residue,  
the beads of sweat of making love  
on his forehead; he eases them  
gently over, and over,  
the lines of his heartsick brow.  
And in the aftermath of perspiring prayers,  
he weeps for things that have gone  
and are going away.

### III. Where the Concrete Falls Out

She knows this number  
by heart, has memorized  
the cracks in the doorway.  
She sings to the weightless  
rumble of the freight  
and counts sheep. Bricks and blinds and lovers  
were always *only* made of numbers.  
She had counted them all:  
light switches ceiling corners sidewalks  
as if highways and houses and her sideways heart  
held measurable burdens.  
But she counted so many hands full, mouths full, for so long  
that the equations of tepid and tenuous days  
began rhyming, and fell into words.  
Some could be written, and some could not.  
It was hard to say which  
made her sadness more complete.  
It was hard to say which  
was heavier, or quieter, or more beautiful.  
When she found pens  
she wrote on doors, walls, billboards, magazines,  
drawing mustaches on women.  
For weeks she couldn't  
see the floor read the signs feel her fingertips.  
It was then that she dreamt  
of a hundred salesmen,  
who sold bibles and bhagavad  
for heroin and wristwatches. And she knew  
that each of these hundred men had been her.  
And the clock treaded much like  
the steps of those salesmen,  
and her delicate fingers  
kept strumming, tapping  
to the noise of the numbers that saved  
her life.  
There were times when sounds  
were made of different chords, when cracks  
meant other things;  
for a time it was where and how sadness departed,  
rather than where and how it came in.  
She was dreaming memoirs of other men, living the cocaine  
of other dreams, and drumming the marches of death in sleep,

and sighing “*life*” but she  
had gone.

–*Amy Falvey* ('05)



## Twenty-seven Bones

Her hands rested atop the pinstriped blue sheet, arthritic knuckles pointing east and west, veins matted and throbbing. One at a time, she thought, slowly moving each finger. Yes, they were hers. Sometimes she could stare at them all day, attempting to recognize the knobs and spots above, the aches and swells below. They were hers.

Death was not being kind. She'd been patient, waiting first in the blue-carpeted room, where handholds flanked the toilet and all of her things were dispersed among the furniture that had been kept. Then it was the rose-print-wallpapered room, with the metal-legged bed and echoing tile floor, where she counted bird chirps and silence-piercing moans. But it hadn't ended until she was in that little ten-by-ten, where the bed, the lift recliner, and the wheelchair were only three shuffled steps away.

The girls planned their flights home, one at a time, gauging the number of days she might have left. Her second born was already there, followed by the first, and then the youngest. There wasn't much space in that room for all of them. Perhaps that was why they had started removing things: her jewelry box, photo albums, books.

At day five, the forty-eight-hour surety seemed like a broken promise, a boy who meant to ring a girl but lost her number. And so she waited, letting each daughter grip her hand in a fair rotation, feel her mother's touch for maybe, hopefully, the final time.

For the middle daughter, the one who'd never left home, they were her mother's careful fingers, the ones that threaded her brown-black hair into a single braid that traveled down the center of her 10-year-old back. In the afternoon, she told her mother about what had happened in the woods that morning with the older boys, with nobody watching but the weeds. "It is not your fault," her mother had repeated, making some sort of sense by weaving every strand into a single plait.

The first daughter knew her mother's hands best, or at least longest. They were so gentle—wrote in beautiful slanted, thin-looped cursive; pinched homemade piecrusts and pressed dinner napkins—but could also bury truths. She remembered the impassive look on her mother's face when her sixteen-year-old arms shakily produced the broken body of her father's dog, the one she'd forgotten to call back into his kennel, who she'd run over while backing out the car, the dog he'd referred to as his only son. Her mother hadn't needed to speak that day; her hands had gripped the rusted handle of the shovel as she dug a hole in her garden, behind the snapdragons, in front of the hostas. With quick precision, they had replaced the soil and mulch, patting it all down to normalcy. "Must've run off again," her mother had said that night to her father, tossing a broken collar onto his lap and handing him a flashlight.

The youngest's hands were the most like her mother's: daylong stains of orange or violet pressed onto fingertips, creases at joints from clenching drawing pencils, and gnawed-off nails. Palm to palm, they seemed the same, except for the bones beneath. Unlike her sisters, she didn't so much remember the touch of her mother's hands, the lavender scent of her lotion, or the tracing of her finger across a storyline. She thought only of the sounds they made: the tapping of her nails against the dining table, the squeaking of her spit-wiped thumb as she rubbed away a single smudge, and, mostly, the un-echoing slap against her adolescent cheek. Those hands had

pulled at the length of her skirt and pinched at the cool flesh above her elbow, yet they had also washed each bit of dirt out of her skinned knees, hand knit her formal dress, and, years later, silently washed the blood from her bed sheets after not her second but her third early loss.

On day seven the three sisters had finally left. Perhaps she can't let go while we're here, their eyes said as they filed out the door. The phone rang two hours later, after they'd each claimed a watercolor and parceled out her Isabel Blooms but before the casserole had finished cooking. All of them went to see what was left. They wrestled off her heavy rings—two from the right hand and the soldered, gold wedding band from her left—slipped them into their own pockets, and, one at a time, laced her fingers atop the peak of her middle.

—*Lindsay Schaefer ('05)*

## Easter Monday

1990

A contest—to see who could hold their breath the longest: me, the youngest at five and a half, secretly letting up on one side of my nose, making faces like this was hard, while secretly fascinated by watching the others squirm, torturing themselves. For what—I wondered, bewildered—to be the person who could fight the body the hardest, to come closest to death?

I didn't want to win. I just wanted to watch these kids, turning blue, bouncing their heads up and down. And if I admitted I'd stopped they would pronounce me the loser and would end their own agonies, I didn't want that. You're all champions, I thought.

2004

I was nineteen.

For the first time, my best friend said she was staying the night at my house, while I said I was staying at hers. We walked into his house, ignoring all the offers, the horrible offers coming from every male in the place.

Finally he came down and led us away into the bedroom, where we could sit on the mattress. He would play the guitar; we could talk. The triangle passing weed in the room didn't pay any attention to us. He got me a beer. The bed began to move, and the pile of covers and clothes in between us on the bed separated as a girl whose transparent skin clung to her bones came up from the middle. She struggled to grab another beer but passed out again on the floor before she could open it.

He took my hand and said he wanted to show me something. Ignoring my friend shaking her head at me, I went. In the other room, he started kissing me. Right away, she came in to interrupt, and I was glad I didn't have to tell him to stop. Walking toward where most of the noise seemed to be coming from, we went into the main room. There was crying, and I saw four guys taking care of a baby, tenderly, lovingly—four dealers offering their comfort to the round child. I saw a guy with rims spinning on his shoes, He was violent, I learned, trigger happy. "People just can't talk to him." So I didn't. We made our way back to the bedroom. The triangle was no longer smoking the herb. I had no idea what they had moved on to doing. The three of us leaned back on the mattress. We fell asleep.

I awoke in the morning to wandering hands. My friend said we should get home. We hoped we hadn't been missed and couldn't believe we had actually found it in us to do this. We asked if the skinny girl who had passed out was okay; she still looked pretty sick. Yeah, she was okay—just pregnant. And on too many drugs. He gave me a hug, and something to keep. We drove the hour

back home, hoping we could air out before encountering anyone, any parents. I was trying to think of how to explain this to my boyfriend. I was trying to push that baby out of my head.

*–Ashley Johnson ('07)*

## An Angel

There is an angel who comes to visit me at the café. He only comes when I am washing the dishes.

Here's how I know he is an angel:

1. He visits only when I am alone. And only when I am washing the dishes.
2. Every time I've seen him, he's been dressed in a perfect white shirt. September, October, April, July—doesn't matter.
3. The sun—which shines through the white curtains behind where the morning customers stand to place their orders—always seems brighter when it shines behind him.
4. I find him wildly, drop-dead attractive, even though he's not my type. My types are kind of dirty, sweaty, thick-haired formerly types who wear thrift-store flannels and never shave or cut their hair—but this angel has fine blond hair, closely cropped, without a shade of stubble gracing his glowing chin. I also noticed that he has nice teeth.
5. Last, I know he is an angel because I knew he was an angel the first time I saw him. Which is a strange thought for a person to have, but that's what I thought the first time I saw him: "This person is not a person. This person is an angel."

Give me one good reason why you think I'm wrong. I bet you can't.

The first time I saw him was in mid-September of last year. He ordered a gingerbread latte, which is so excruciatingly adorable that I wanted to die. We don't have gingerbread syrup at our café, so, regretfully, I had to inform him that a gingerbread latte was not in his cards that beautiful morning.

I relayed this information fearfully—hesitating for a moment to consider the possibility that if only I had faith enough to believe that The Good Lord will provide gingerbread syrup, that perhaps He would, and that I would be rewarded for my childlike belief in the midst of this test. But I am not a child anymore—I am twenty-four and disillusioned and faithless and stubborn—and while I can believe that this boy is and was and will forever be an angel—how could I not believe it when he was standing right in front of me?—I could not take the risk that The Good Lord would provide gingerbread syrup out of an absence of gingerbread syrup (particularly if it meant embarrassing myself in front of a shimmery angel-boy), and so I simply sighed and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, we don't have gingerbread syrup at this café," and then I sort of half-cried, half-smiled to show him that I was truly sorry and that I also hoped we could still be friends.

"Oh, okay," he said. "Then I'll take a raspberry white-chocolate mocha."

Which was so excruciatingly adorable that I wanted to die.

The last time I saw him was today, which is my last day at the café, my last time washing the dishes for this particular establishment. He was here and then he was gone and then I realized I wouldn't see him anymore. I was alone, and I wanted to run, catch him in the parking lot and say, "Wait!

Tell me your name!” and then he would smile and that would be just the beginning of something new. But I was at work, and that seemed like not the right thing to do, to be chasing an angel when you’re getting paid to wash the dishes.

It’s funny how something can be here and then be gone and you’re left carrying the weight of something you never held. Something you can’t name.

*Wait! Tell me your name!*  
*It’s nice to finally meet you.*  
*Are you free tonight?*  
*I like your smile.*  
*I feel the same way about you.*

I know an angel—known and loved and lost and missed—when I see one.

—Seth Kaltwasser (’09)

## without shoes

man, it's like, sometimes, i only want you sometimes  
and then, like, other times, i can't get you off my mind.  
i'm not really sure what that says about me, y'know, as a person,  
but . . .  
i know it's not just about sex.  
it's definitely not about sex.  
i've controlled for it, man, like eight times,  
and i know—that shit's just not it.  
maybe it's about facebook.  
i've been pushin' through your profile pics  
like pusha t used to push product,  
like jay z pre vodka dreamin' of dollas,  
deaf fingers searching for signs,  
a young rapper struggling with rhymes  
and settlin' for slants.  
it's like i just can't  
make sense of my sometimes,  
but god, you have the most beautiful eyes,  
the kind that kinda crinkle up on the outsides  
because you smile so damn much,  
the kind neruda wrote about.  
those *ojos azules*  
just welcome you in anywhere  
and then it's, like, comfortable,  
and all of a sudden my shoes are off  
and i'm sitting on the coziest couch in cape town  
staring deep at two deep oceans,  
not caring whether or when or where  
they ever touch,  
thinking  
how good this all is—  
you . . . and me . . . and no shoes—  
thinking  
how good it *could* be,  
thinking,  
*why did i wear these socks?*  
but then, then, it's like nah, forget that;  
i'll wear whatever socks i want  
'cause that's the kind of guy i am—  
a sock guy—  
and sock guys can put off decisions,

dwell hard on inhibition,  
 drown their wishes alone  
 at night,  
 and dream of the place  
 the oceans meet—  
 sometimes.

—*John Kuhn ('09)*



unknown is mine, unknown is wine

Miranda said  
we would encounter  
poetry

and maybe  
it would  
stick to us.

Father Peter said  
they would be giving us  
poetry  
for forever

whether we  
wanted it  
or not.

My ears  
are full of sand  
and my fingernails  
are bleeding  
but lines keep flowing  
out of my pen.

And I realize—  
as the priest  
says that Christ's  
mission is somehow  
mysteriously present  
where we gather—

that the essence  
of this life is  
scooped, captured,  
and gently held

where these words  
carefully rest in  
lines and stanzas

heart and meaning

heaped in abundance  
here and there.

–*Sarah Wurst* ('11)

**pick a path**

My blood is slow today.  
It has forgotten how to fly.

Every time I ask God for humility,  
I swear I have learned my lesson  
And won't be asking again.

Then I do.

Still, if I could have one thing,  
it would be a heart burning  
as orange as these leaves.

–*Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)*

people too

the dead like  
to dress in daffodils

and do a liturgical dance  
where they pass lightning bugs  
from hand to hand and  
over their heads  
while standing in a circle

some say the dead do not play  
but that old man has seen them

he can be found standing  
in the graveyard

the daffodil dancers  
bring oceans to his eyes

–*Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)*

**the heart of why**

he wrote  
the baby was  
warmed by straw  
and cattle's breath

that anyone who  
has milked hope  
from the udder  
knows what it is  
to touch the  
heart of why

every day  
I watch a dog  
bounce over  
dry grass and snow

the fresh cold  
filling the space  
beneath each  
small flight

I kneel on the  
kitchen tiles  
and pray to the  
tumbling god  
of wolf kisses

every one  
needs a hand  
to wrap up in  
when the flame  
draws out  
the fears

and they come  
sliding down  
like candle wax

the snow is heavy  
on my eyelids

even in this house  
full of flowers

–*Sarah (Wurst) Holst* ('11)

## **ecdysis**

on these  
quiet nights  
I have heard

insects  
humming  
my name  
on prairie grass  
winds  
from the  
southwest

I am wild  
with desire  
for the  
sweltering  
dance  
of summer  
into fall  
on the plains

I have chased  
the moon there  
a thousand times

the gravel misses  
the particular  
pressure of  
my sandals

my dad sent  
an envelope  
filled with  
brown

cicada  
shells  
delicately  
resisting crumple

I stick their

barbed wire  
feet onto  
my northern  
kitchen screen  
a coyote-pack  
promise  
that I too  
will continue  
shedding skin

dwelling in  
wet earth

believing in  
next year

–*Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)*



## Samhain

I spiral  
olive oil onto  
the pumpkin seeds

before plunging

my hands deep  
in the bowl.

I have loved you  
for so long

now as  
the baby sleeps  
I catch the lift  
of your voice  
in slippery palms

and boost it  
to the branches  
outside the  
kitchen window

where a flock  
of winter  
european starlings

has just landed  
like so many  
fist-sized  
universes.

–Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)

**death and foxes**

in the photo  
the dead fox  
had stars  
in her eyes

and I read  
the story of how  
the old woman  
found her on the roadside  
and brought her  
to your door saying

*I think I was meant  
to bring you this fox*

you did not say why  
and I did not ask

I looked at the picture  
with my head  
heavy and alive  
on the pillow  
the baby asleep  
next to me  
his brow sweaty  
against my temple

it was the day after  
the day I learned  
that my grandma  
was dying and  
all day I had  
been picturing  
her hands

feeding chipmunks  
and raccoons

just like she  
taught me not to

—Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)

## Maziku the Farmer

Maziku was born and grew up in Dar es Salaam when Dar es Salaam was still a small town. He went to primary school there and finished Standard Eight in 1961, the year of Independence. He got a job working for a company and finally became chief clerk.

Maziku, however, had two problems. The first was that he was careless with his money. He liked to spend it and enjoy life. So he had no savings, never built a house, did not look for a farm, and made no preparations for the future.

In 1975, Maziku met a girl named Martina when she came from Tabora to visit her brother, who was working in the same company as Maziku. Maziku married her, and he lived happily with his wife, spending and spending, but still he did not make any preparations for the future.

In 1979, after a lot of worries, Martina at last gave birth to a baby daughter. They called her Mauja. Maziku now realized he had to save and prepare for the future. He tried to save from his salary, but this was when prices went up . . . and up . . . and up. Martina tried to help him by making mats and selling them, but still the prices went up. She started to cook chapattis to sell, but still the prices went up.

Finally Maziku and his wife realized that this life was impossible. They were running faster and faster, but they were not moving at all. They were working harder and harder, but their life remained the same. So one day, Maziku and his wife sat down and discussed what to do. Mauja was now ready to go to Standard One, but they did not even know how they would buy the uniform.

This brings us to Maziku's second problem. Maziku had a good heart, was generous, helped others, and had always been a hard worker, but he was stubborn. If he decided to do something, you could never change him. Even if you proved to him that he was wrong, he would not change his mind. Martina knew this. She realized that it was a waste of time to argue with him. Maybe this was because Maziku had grown up without any relatives except his parents and was the only child. His father was also an only child, and his parents, Maziku's grandparents, had died soon after he had moved to Dar es Salaam.

Maybe here we can say that Maziku also had a third problem, but it was a problem that was not his fault. He had never lived in a village. He had never cultivated a farm. He did not know how hard the work was. He had listened to the radio and read books, and he thought that life in the village was wonderful. So one day, he called his wife and said to her, "Martina, we are doing nothing here in town. Let us go to the village. Life on the farm is easier than life in town. You wake up when you want to, you plant, you weed, you harvest, and you eat. No problem."

Martina had grown up in the village. She told him, "Bwana, life on the farm is not easy. You have to work hard. Of course if you work hard, you can have a good life, but you have to work very hard."

"That is not true, Martina," Maziku replied. "You know it is not true. Let us go to the village. Maybe we can get a better life."

“But you will have to work hard,” Martina insisted. “If we do not work hard, we will fail.”

“Rubbish,” said Maziku. “You dig, you plant, you weed, you eat. No problem.”

Martina realized that her husband was in his stubborn mood, so she told him, “All right. But it is no good doing things too fast. I have some relatives in Morogoro. They tell me that there is a lot of land there. Let me go to see them, and then the first year I will cultivate there while you continue to work here. If I succeed, you can resign next year and join me on the farm.”

Maziku agreed, so that year Martina moved to her relatives in Morogoro. She got a farm of ten acres. That year she could not cultivate the whole farm, but she planted according to the instructions of *Bwana Shamba* and used fertilizer in the right way, so she got sixty bags of maize. Now, sixty bags of maize were more than Maziku’s salary for the whole year. So they decided that Maziku would resign and come to join his wife in the village.

When Maziku arrived in Morogoro, he was still sure that life on the farm was easy. The harvest was finished, and the peasants were resting for a short time before cleaning their farms and preparing for the rains. They found a place for Mauja in the primary school, and Maziku spent this short time getting to know his neighbors and building a small temporary house for his family. It was a small, friendly village, and he was quickly accepted by everyone. After all, they already knew his wife.

It was soon time to start digging the *shambas* again. Maziku was always telling everyone that he was ready to work very hard, and the night before the first day, he told his wife to wake him up early. She woke up at five o’clock. She prepared the bath water for her husband, cooked some porridge, and then woke him. At least, she tried to wake him, but he refused.

“It is too early, Martina. You can’t dig in the dark. You will cut off your foot.”

Maziku pulled up his sheet again and continued to sleep. His wife went to work in the *shamba* on her own. The ground was sandy and soft, and she was working well when her husband arrived at half past eight.

“Oh, Martina, why didn’t you wake me up? I told you . . .”

“But I did wake you up,” said Martina. “You refused to get out of bed.”

“You didn’t try hard enough,” Maziku replied.

Martina didn’t waste her time arguing. She went on digging. So Maziku also started to work.

They worked side by side. Martina soon began to move ahead of her husband—one meter, two meters, three meters . . . her husband’s work got slower and slower. He was always stopping for a rest. He began to complain that his back was hurting, his legs were hurting, his arms were hurting, his hands were hurting.

“Martina, why are you going so fast?” Maziku asked. “There is no hurry. We don’t have to finish the *shamba* today.” Martina didn’t listen to him. She knew the rainy season was near. She knew the first rains were for planting. She wanted to finish all the cultivating before the rains started.

But her husband continued to complain. “Martina, don’t go so fast. This is not the way to farm at all. You will get too tired and then you won’t be able to cultivate tomorrow.”

Martina just laughed. Her hoe went up and down, up and down. Each time it went down with a loud THOK, clouds of earth surrounded her.

Maziku watched her and sneezed. "Ah, this dust is too much. We need a tractor, Martina! Why don't we wait for the village tractor?"

The only answer was THOK THOK THOK.

Maziku tried again: "Martina, haven't you brought any food to the *shamba*? I am hungry. You can't dig on an empty stomach. Let's stop and eat. Then we'll dig much better."

THOK THOK THOK. Mama Martina said nothing. So Maziku started to work again. He worked for fifteen minutes. That was enough for him. He called again: "Mama Martina?"

THOK THOK THOK.

"Ah, that woman will kill herself for no reason," Maziku said to himself. He put down his hoe and sat down under the nearby mango tree.

After sitting down, Maziku opened Martina's basket to see if she had brought any food. He found some maize and beans. He told himself, "I will only eat a small amount, and then I'll continue working." He finished a quarter of the food. Then he started to put the dish back into the basket, but his stomach complained. "Well, just a little more," he thought. "This digging is hard work." So he took out the dish and started to eat again. He finished another quarter. "Okay, that's enough. The rest is for Martina." He put the dish back in the basket and started to stand up. But his stomach complained again. "Ah, this woman, why does she bring so little food? I still feel hungry and it's only half past eleven. It's her fault. She should prepare more food. Let me eat a little more. She won't realize."

So Maziku sat down again and ate another quarter. Then he shook the remainder of the maize and beans to hide how much he had eaten and put the dish back into the basket. This time he did actually stand up, but now everything was hurting: his arms, his hands, his legs, his back, his head, his neck, even his toes were hurting. And he was beginning to feel sleepy. "Let me rest first for fifteen minutes," he thought, "and then I'll go back to work."

As soon as Maziku sat down, however, he felt hungry again. He looked at the dish and started to pick it up. "No, that's Martina's," he told himself. "But why did she cook so little? It's her fault. Yes. I will teach her a lesson. If she cooks too little, she cannot expect to eat. How can you cultivate when you are starving?" So he picked up the dish and finished all the food. "That will teach her."

After all Maziku's hard work and even harder eating, he lay down and went to sleep. When some of the villagers passed the *shamba*, they were very surprised. There was Mama Martina working hard, but where was Maziku? Then they saw him under the tree, fast asleep. They laughed and shook their heads: "Hmm, these town people . . ."

Meanwhile, Martina continued to work very hard. She was quite happy that her husband was resting, because he did very little work anyway and he was always trying to interrupt her. By one o'clock she had finished a big piece of the *shamba*, so she decided to drink a little water and eat some food before continuing. She walked slowly back to the tree where she had left her basket. There she found Maziku fast asleep. She smiled, went to the basket, and pulled out the dish of food. "Loooo!" She couldn't believe her eyes—all the

food was finished! She was very angry indeed. Martina looked at her husband and then shook him hard. "Wake up, Maziku, wake up! It's time to eat."

"Oh, good," said Maziku groggily as he awoke. "Have you brought some more maize and beans? That first lot was delicious."

Martina could not believe her ears. He was not even sorry! "No, I have not brought any more food," she said. "I was cultivating. Now I am hungry. What am I going to eat?"

Maziku realized his mistake. "I am very sorry, Martina. I was very hungry after all my hard work. I was so hungry that I couldn't stop myself. Let's finish work for today. Then you can cook some more food. Anyway, it's your fault. Why did you cook so little?"

As her husband was talking, Martina got more and more angry. Finally she stopped him. "What are you talking about?" she challenged. "I came here on my own last year. I did all the work myself. We got a good harvest. Now you say you have come to help me? Is this helping me? Sleeping under the tree? Eating all my food? Telling me to go and cook more? Aaah!" She was so angry that she had to stop speaking. But her eyes were full of anger.

Maziku knew that look. He knew his wife. And he knew he was wrong and regretted eating all the food. But there was nothing he could do. It was useless to apologize; his wife was still hungry. Quickly he picked up the hoes and the basket. "Come on, my wife," he said. "I was wrong. Please forgive me; I won't do it again. Let's go to the *mtama* bar where they sell roast meat and plantains."

"But that will not solve our problem, Maziku. If we waste our money like this, we'll never succeed."

"Don't worry, Martina," Maziku assured her. "I will not make the same mistake again. I am very sorry. I was wrong. You must remember, I am still learning. Please forgive me."

Martina was not satisfied, but what could she do? Once the water has been spilt, you can't pick it up again. So, when Maziku set off for the *mtama* bar, carrying the hoes, she sighed heavily and followed.

When they got to the bar, Maziku ordered the meat and plantains and a big plastic mug of *mtama*. Martina drank in silence until the food was ready. Then she ate quickly and returned home to see Mauja and prepare the evening meal.

Maziku stayed in the bar talking and drinking with the villagers. After he'd been drinking for some time, the village men asked him, "Why have you come to the village, Maziku? All our young men leave the village to go to town, but you leave the town and come to the village."

"I do not know what your young men are looking for in town," Maziku said, "but I can tell you one thing: life in town is very tough. You can't live on your salary."

"Then why do young men say you have a better life in town?" the men asked. "Electricity, films, shops full of things, plenty of food in the market, water from taps—so many things."

"It's true that all those things are there," Maziku replied, "but you still need money to get them. I used to get up every morning at five o'clock. I would eat only a bun for breakfast and rush to get the bus. I worked all day. All through those hours, I had no chance of eating again; the food in town is too expensive. So I worked all day on an empty

stomach. And even with all that work, still I found that I was going nowhere. No, life in the town is not easy—unless you steal or you have other income.”

Some of the villagers knew that Maziku was telling the truth. After all, they had been to town and seen the life there. But one old man, Mzee Kombo, was not satisfied. He said, “I hear all these stories, but you’re not telling the truth. The problem in the big towns these days is that all the men want to do is drink and chase girls.”

Maziku laughed. “Mzee, do you know the price of beer these days? If I used all my salary to buy beer, I could still buy only twenty with the whole of my month’s salary—all of it. Nothing for food or rent. No, Mzee, we couldn’t afford to drink beer; we were drinking *mtama*. Or they called it *mtama*, but it was not as good as the *mtama* in the village.

“And for girls, haven’t you heard the song ‘Maridadi Sana?’ No money. First you must dress smartly—and where is the money to buy smart clothes? Then you must give her a present, and not a small one either. Where is the money for that? Then you must take her out to the cinema or somewhere else. Where is all this money? And after all that, she will probably say no because she has found someone better. I go without food all day, and then you want me to spend money on girls. No thank you.”

Everyone laughed. Maziku was beginning to get drunk. He went on: “But, my friends, life in the village is not easy either. Today I went to dig and my whole body started to ache, headache, back ache, leg ache—how do you do it?”

“Oh, that’s why we saw you fast asleep under the tree. So, you thought farming was easy, hey?”

“Yes, you dig, you plant, you weed, you harvest, and you eat. That’s all, isn’t it? How do you manage it? You seem to work a little and drink a lot, but your farms are very good.”

“We work hard, my friend. If you work hard, you will get used to the work.”

Maziku, as usual, refused to listen. “It’s not true. Your wives do all the work. You men are just drinking.”

The men were amused by Maziku’s words, but they were also a bit hurt. They knew that a farming life was a tough one. It was not just drinking and talking. So they decided to teach him a lesson—that drinking and farming cannot be cooked in the same pot. They told Maziku, “Your problem is that you do not work the right way. *Mtama* gives us strength to work. So when you wake up in the morning, drink some *mtama* instead of having porridge. Then take a gallon of *mtama* to the farm with you. If you feel your back is starting to ache, drink a little *mtama*. If your arms start to ache, drink a little *mtama*. If your legs start to ache, drink a little *mtama*. And when your head starts to ache, lie down and rest for five minutes and you will be fine.”

“Is that really so?” asked Maziku. “If you drink *mtama*, you will work well?”

“Yes,” said the men. “A hoe is not like a pen. It needs *mtama* to keep it moving. That is the way we all work.”

“Well, friends,” said Maziku, “see how ignorant I am. Hey, sister, can you lend me a gallon can to take *mtama* home with me for tomorrow?”

The girl brought a gallon can from outside the house, filled it with *mtama*, and gave it to Maziku.

Maziku paid for the *mtama* and started to walk home. On the way he began singing.

The next day, Maziku followed the men's advice. As soon as he woke up, he washed his face and then drank some *mtama* from the gallon can.

His wife was very surprised. "What are you doing, Maziku? Are you becoming a drunkard?"

"Of course not, Martina," he replied. "This is the way to cultivate well. You should know that; you were born in the village."

"Yes, I was born in the village. And that is why I know that you never drink before farming."

"The problem," countered Maziku, "is that women are weak. We men can drink and work. The men told me so in the *mtama* bar."

Martina was going to reply, but just then her neighbor called her. When she went out to see him, he told her, "Please, Martina, don't be surprised and don't be angry if your husband drinks today. Don't be angry with us and don't be angry with him. He thinks work on the farm is just drinking and enjoying himself. We want to teach him a lesson. Let him drink and then let him see if he can work."

Martina laughed. "All right. But only today."

"Of course. One day is enough. He won't do it again."

Maziku was now ready to go to the farm, so they left. Martina carried a hoe and a basket of maize and beans. Maziku carried a hoe and the gallon can. When they reached the farm, they started to work, but Maziku soon got tired. After one hour, everything began to ache. He remembered the advice of the men: "If anything starts to ache, drink a little *mtama*." He put down his hoe and drank a little. Then, twenty minutes later, he drank a little more . . . and a little more . . . and a little more . . . and a little more.

Maziku soon found it difficult to lift up his hoe, and then his head started to ache. So again he remembered the advice: "When the head starts to ache lie down and rest for five minutes." He went to the mango tree nearby and quickly went to sleep.

Martina realized what was happening, but she said nothing. She just took her hoe and went on cultivating. When it was time for lunch, she went to the mango tree and found Maziku fast asleep, but all the food was still in the basket. Maziku was snoring loudly, so Mama Martina shook him. "Wake up, Maziku. It's time to eat. Wake up."

Maziku did not reply.

She shook him again. "Wake up; you have slept for three hours."

"Please don't disturb me, Martina," Maziku finally responded. "I am resting for a few minutes."

"A few minutes!" Martina exclaimed. "It's one o'clock. Wake up and eat."

"Don't make jokes, woman. I've been asleep for only a few minutes."

"Look at the sun, then."

Maziku looked at the sun. He was shocked. "But the men told me that if my head aches, I must lie down for a few minutes."

"Well, they were wrong. Now eat."

When Maziku looked at the food, he didn't want to eat at all. His head was aching badly. He just wanted to sleep. So he turned over and went to sleep again.

Martina laughed. She ate her food and went back to work. By evening, she had finished a big part of the farm, so she went back to her husband. He was still asleep. She



shook him again: "It's evening and you are still asleep. Look at you, you lazy man. You have done no work all day."

Maziku tried to say something, but his head still ached. He felt that little men were hammering inside his head. His mouth was dry. His legs were weak. So he could say nothing. He picked up his hoe and tried to walk back to the village, but he could not walk straight, so Martina had to help him.

When they got to the village, the men at the *mtama* bar called to Maziku: "How was the farming today?"

"Terrible," he replied. "I followed your advice, but it was hopeless. I drank *mtama* when I woke up, and when anything started to ache I drank again. Then I went to sleep when my head started to ache. I slept the whole day, but now my head is aching even more. I'm never going to follow your advice again."

The men laughed and laughed. "Listen, Maziku, we wanted to teach you a lesson. You think that life is easy in the village and that we just drink without doing any work. And when we give you good advice about working hard, you won't listen. So we decided to show you that drink and work don't go together. We work hard. Look at our hands. Now look at your hands. You don't know how to work. If your legs start to ache, go on working. If your arms start to ache, go on working. Even if your head start to ache, go on working. It will be very difficult for the first two weeks, but after that, you will be used to work. It will not be easy, but you will be able to cope with it."

Maziku looked at them with big eyes. Then he shook his head. He had nothing to say. They were right. He shook his head a second time and walked slowly home. "Hey, Maziku, sing us another song," the men shouted. But Maziku didn't sing a song. He went back home, ate quietly, and went to bed.

The next morning, Maziku woke up early and went to the farm and worked all day. His wife was surprised and happy, and in the evening she cooked him a special meal. After that, he gradually got used to the work.

But Maziku was still stubborn. Even when he didn't know something, he refused to take any advice. He thought that he knew everything. Even the story of the *mtama* did not change him. So he soon got into more troubles.

Eventually the time for putting fertilizer on the fields came around. Maziku said he would take the fertilizer for his wife because she wanted to wash the clothes. She told Maziku to pour half the fertilizer into a basket, because the whole bag would be too heavy for him, but Maziku refused to listen.

"I am a man," he said. "This is a small bag. I can carry it."

"But, my husband," Martina told him, "the farm is a long way away."

"Quiet, woman. I am now strong and tough. I am used to the work."

Well, in Kiswahili, they say that if a child cries for a razor blade, give it to him. He will learn. So Martina said no more.

Maziku took the fertilizer and set off for the farm. First he carried the fertilizer under his arm. It was too heavy. Then he tried to carry it in front of him. It was still too heavy. He put it on his shoulder; too heavy. So he tried to put it on his head. That was better, but then his arms began to get tired, so he took away his arm, but then the bag fell off his head. He put the bag on his head again. It fell off. Soon all the children of the

village were following him. So Maziku tried to carry the bag under his arm again . . . still heavy . . . in front of him . . . too heavy . . . on the shoulder . . . too heavy. He put it on his head again, but as soon as he took his hand away, it fell off. All the children laughed. Maziku did not want to fail in front of the children. He put the fertilizer on his head again. It fell off—once, twice, three times, four times, and then the bag split and fertilizer poured out. He quickly picked up the bag and carried it away.

One of Maziku's neighbors saw what Maziku had left on the ground. But when he looked at it, he saw that it was not fertilizer, but sugar. So he called Maziku and asked him, "Why are you taking so much sugar to the farm? Do you want to cook tea for all the farmers?"

"I am not taking sugar," Maziku replied. "This is fertilizer."

"It is not fertilizer," assured his neighbor, whose name was Gwasa. "It is sugar."

"It is fertilizer," said Maziku. "You surprise me. You live in the village, but you can't see the difference between sugar and fertilizer."

"Bwana, it is sugar. Taste! It is sugar. Taste it and see."

"Oh, now I see you want to kill me," Maziku accused. "If I eat fertilizer, I will die. No, don't waste my time any more. I'm going to the *shamba*."

Gwasa tried it once more. "This is sugar. Look. Let me taste it." And he took some of the sugar and ate it. "You see. It is sugar. Very sweet."

But Maziku refused to listen. "You are wasting my time," he said. "I tell you, if you want to eat fertilizer, that is your problem. I am going to put it on my farm."

Maziku picked up his bag and left. Gwasa ran to tell Martina. When she heard the story, she left her clothes in the bucket and ran to the farm. She found Maziku, who was still panting from the hard job of carrying the bag to the farm.

"Oh, Martina," he said when he saw her, "have you finished washing the clothes already?"

"No I haven't," she replied sternly. "I have left the clothes in the bucket because I have been told that you have brought sugar instead of fertilizer."

"The same story," said Maziku. "You have been talking to Gwasa, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have. You should thank God for good neighbors like Gwasa. Look. Can't you see that this is the bag of sugar you brought from Dar es Salaam when you moved here?"

Martina picked up some of the "fertilizer," ate it, and forced Maziku to taste it as well.

Maziku had nothing to say. He had to pick up the bag, which now seemed even heavier, and carry it all the way back to their house.

The next day, Maziku went with Mama Martina to put fertilizer on their maize. When they got to the field, Martina went to one side of the farm and Maziku to the other. After a short while, Mama Martina looked in her husband's direction, and it was a good thing she did, because she saw that he was putting fertilizer in the middle of each maize plant instead of around it. She ran over to him. "Maziku, you are making a mistake. Don't put the fertilizer on the maize plant."

"Why not?" he asked. "We want the maize to grow, don't we? If we put the fertilizer on the maize plant, it will grow faster."

“But it won’t grow faster,” Martina told him. “It will die. You must put the fertilizer in a circle around the maize plant.”

“No, no, no. That’s rubbish. This time I am right. It is obvious that you should put the fertilizer on the maize.”

“Maziku,” said his wife, who was now getting a little angry, “Why do you never listen to what people tell you? That fertilizer is very strong. If you put it on the maize, it will burn it. The maize will grow yellow and die.”

“What do you mean, I never listen to anyone? I am reading books about agriculture these days. I want to farm scientifically, not like the old days.”

“Of course. I also want to farm scientifically. And according to science, don’t put the fertilizer on the maize.”

Maziku also got angry. “The trouble with you, Martina, is that you think you know everything just because you grew up in a village. You don’t know everything. If you put fertilizer around the plant it will go straight into the ground and the plant will get nothing. Can the plant walk to pick up the fertilizer? No. I am going to feed the plant direct.”

Martina didn’t know what to say. Her husband was so stubborn. Finally she said, “All right, Maziku, we want to be scientific, don’t we? Then let us do an experiment. You put fertilizer on the maize for the two rows of maize and I will finish the rest of the field in the same way that I cultivated last year. Then we will see who is right.”

Maziku agreed. He took the fertilizer and carefully put some of it in the middle of maize plant. Unfortunately for him, Gwasa was walking past the field when Maziku was arguing with his wife. When Gwasa told the other villagers, they all laughed, and soon a new song was heard in the village about Bwana Haambiliki (Mr. Never-Told):

*Once upon a time there was a farmer  
A farmer  
A farmer  
A farmer full of strange and new ideas  
We laughed until our eyes were full of tears.  
Plants are like men, he told us.  
They like a cup of tea from time to time  
So give them sugar  
Give them sugar  
Give them sugar  
And they’ll grow strong and full of maize.  
Oh, we told him  
We told him  
We told him  
But his ears were blocked.  
Mr. Never-Told would never listen.*

*We took the sugar and put it in our tea.  
He put it in the maize  
And sad to say*

The plants never said thank you.  
Instead they fell down dead  
Stupid plants, he cried.  
They don't know how to live at all.  
Oh Mr. Never-Told  
When will you ever learn?  
Plants are hungry, he said.  
Their leaves are open like mouths  
So give them food  
Give them food.  
Pour it down their throats,  
Don't put it on the ground,  
They can't walk to pick it up.  
Oh, we told him  
We told him  
We told him  
But his ears were blocked.  
Mr. Never-Told would never listen

He took the food  
And poured it down their throats and sad to say  
The plants never said thank you.  
Instead they fell down dead.  
Stupid plants, he cried.  
They don't know to live at all.  
Oh Mr. Never-Told  
When will you ever learn?

What new ideas are these?  
And more are coming, we hear.  
Seeds get lonely, he says.  
They like to be planted together  
So plant five seeds in each together  
So plant five seeds in each hole  
In each hole  
In each hole.  
They like to grow together.

Oh, we tell him  
We tell him  
We tell him  
But his ears are blocked.  
Mr. Never-Told will never listen  
When will he ever learn?

When Martina heard this song, it was the last straw. She decided that she has suffered enough. That evening, she asked her husband, "Have you heard the song they are singing about you in the village?"

"What song?" he asked.

"'Bwana Haambiliki.' It is all about sugar instead of fertilizer and putting fertilizer in the plants."

Maziku laughed. "They are jealous because I know more than they do."

"What!" said Martina. "Jealous! They are laughing at you because you know nothing about farming and you refuse to learn."

"That is not true. I read. I think. I try new ideas. Not like all of you. You farm the same way every year."

"Yes, and we are eating well because of it. But it is not true that we don't change. If the agriculture officer shows us new ideas that work, we follow them. He knows what he is talking about."

"No, you are wrong. You just laugh at me because I came from town. But you wait; I will show you that my ideas are right."

"If you want to do that," said Martina, "then go and find your own farm. I have had enough. People are laughing at you. And they are laughing at me because I am your wife. They are laughing at Mauja when she goes to school, so she doesn't want to go school anymore. Why are they laughing? It is not because you don't know. There are many things that we don't know. It is because you refuse to listen to people who do know."

Maziku started to speak, but his wife went on: "No, let me finish. I have had enough. I have tried to put up with you and teach you, but you won't listen. So either you go back to town and leave us here, or you find a job here in the village. But if you come to the farm again, I will leave you. Look at all the maize in this house. I grew it without your help. Now you want to destroy our fields and destroy our name as well. What kind of pride is this? You think that just because you were born in town, you know everything, but you know nothing, nothing!"

Martina started to cry. Maziku tried to talk to her, but she kept on saying, "If you come to the farm again, I am leaving you."

Actually, Maziku had already heard the song. After hearing it, he had gone to the farm. He had seen that the maize in the two rows of his was yellow and dying while the rest of the maize was dark green and healthy. So he had nothing to say. His wife was right, and the truth hurt.

Fortunately for Maziku, there were other things he could do other than farming. The village had no accountant, so there were a lot of problems with the village's accounts. The next day, Maziku went to the village chairman and offered to help with them. The chairman agreed, and Maziku tried to write the accounts properly for all the village activities. But when the villagers saw this, they started to make more jokes: "Oh, Mr. Maziku, do you want to fertilize the books?" "Have you ordered the sacks of sugar for maize?" "Are the books lonely?" And there were many other comments.

Maziku didn't say a word. He was determined to prove to his wife and to the entire village that he could do something useful. He worked all the day. He even gave up drinking, because he was working at night.

Soon the villagers began to see that Maziku was putting the accounts of the village in good order. In fact, one of the shop assistants had to run away because he realized that Maziku would reveal his misdealings. The village shop was full of things to buy, and everything was ordered in good time. The building program was written out properly so everyone could understand.

By harvest time, people had stopped laughing at Maziku. They were grateful for his good work. Martina also saw the change in him, and she was happy. People now praised her husband. And Mauja was happy at school because the children were not laughing at her any more. At harvest time, Martina allowed her husband back onto the field, and they harvested together. It was a very good harvest (except, of course, for Maziku's two rows), and they had to hire a truck up to carry all the maize back to their house.

One evening, Maziku and Martina sat talking before they went to bed. Maziku joked with his wife, "You see, I told you. Life is easy. You dig, you plant, you weed, you harvest, and you eat. No problem. Look at all this maize."

Martina smiled. "But I am sure you understand now that it is hard work."

"Oh, yes, I do. But now I am ready to work. You should let me back on the farm. I have learned my lesson. And I am reading a lot of books about agriculture."

Martina smiled again. "But books are not enough, Maziku. You must listen to the farmers themselves and watch what they are doing. They are the experts. They have been farming for years."

"It is true," said Maziku. "But still, a few new ideas are good."

"Of course," agreed his wife. "But not the ideas you had before." They both laughed. Then Martina said, "Yes, I will allow you back into the field—for two reasons. I think you have learned a lesson. But there is another reason. Life on the farm is good for us. I think we are going to have another child."

For once, Maziku could only listen. He was so happy that at first he could say nothing. Majua was nine years old, and she was their only child. Now they were going to have another. God had blessed their move to the village. Suddenly Maziku jumped up and began to add to the song of "Bwana Haambiliki":

*Plants don't like sugar*

*They say*

*They say*

*Plants can't eat fertilizer*

*They say*

*They say*

*But Mr. Never-Told is learning.*

*Life may be tough*

*They say*

*They say*

*They say*

*The back aches and aches  
I know  
I know  
But somehow Maziku  
And Martina  
Together  
We'll make it  
We'll make it  
We'll make it.*

*—Erasto Naakule ('13)*

## Driver-Assist

Ask me in public if I've traveled and I'll tell you I have not; I'll tell you I've been nowhere special. But I've done time driving, doing my duty—Illinois to California, up to Alaska and back. Once or twice a year, I make my way to Anchorage. With my hair shaved and my fingernails cut short, I feel like I'm in a military playground. It was the girl's first time. I could see that she didn't want to be there. Her hair was in a tight ponytail, but she had to wear a hat. She was given a metal file and told to remove her fingerprints. She started crying. I didn't say anything yet.

The pickup was huge, but it felt cramped when we packed it up—two stuffed duffle bags, a first-aid kit, a couple coolers; the only electronics was a disposable cell. The stuffed duffle bags flanked a cooler filled with drinks, and a paper bag with two cartons of cigarettes and snacks. The truck's bed was full of hiking supplies, liquor, beer, bleach, dry goods, and a few gallons of water; under its false bottom were the cash, kilos, and a second set of plates. She listened to the briefing with a look of terror. She'd told me her name was Katie. I put my hand on her shoulder and told her I would work everything out. She cringed and called me a monster.

I was driving the first shift. When we pulled out of the driveway, she asked my name. When I told her, she just said, "Okay, good." I ripped open the carton of cigarettes and grabbed a pack of menthols. I offered her one, but she said she didn't drink, didn't smoke. We didn't talk again until I'd had a few.

Our cover story was that we were on a camping get-away to Alaska. I told her about past trips and what to expect. After some coaxing, she told me about her life—classic: daddy in jail, mommy working three jobs, kids fending for themselves and each other. Her big sister got her the job; she sometimes did prep and worked on the farm.

We drove straight through in six-hour shifts and got to Southern California in two days. We stopped at a small vineyard where we had connections with people I didn't really want to meet. I pulled the truck into the barn and told Katie to keep quiet, stay put, and keep the doors locked. She was shaking hard.

My contact, Miguel, came in with a few young guys I didn't know. I'd worked with him on previous jobs. I didn't want to stay long, so I helped unbolt the false bottom and removed a backpack filled with cash. I handed it to Miguel and told him I needed to talk. As his boys started wiping prints from the truck, we took a walk. Miguel wasn't legal. His fiancée had just died, and his sister had been deported. I gave him a phone number and told him that if he could get her back across and up to the vineyard, I would send for her and she could stay at the farm. It was more of a political move than anything else. Miguel was the leader of his small group and I was in charge of mine. He was already sending people every month to work at the farm. Consolidate and expand.

When I got back to the truck, Katie asked if we could leave. When you're carrying, it's hard to relax. I had her drive, keeping just under the limit, and smoked pretty much continuously all the way to Canada. Customs was nerve wracking, but the guard waved us through after chatting up Katie.

At the Alaskan border we were told that our truck was being chosen randomly for a search, but they just checked our luggage and poked through the ashtray and glove compartment. They didn't even mention the liquor.



Just to feel a little more human, I asked the bartender, an old-timer with loose grey skin, if they had any food. A few minutes later, a fry cook came out with a roast beef sandwich and some cold fried chicken. I pulled out my wallet and ordered a six-pack to go. He didn't blink when instead of an I.D. I slapped a fifty on the counter.

I drove to a rest stop, where Katie and I split the sandwich and the beer. She called me a bad influence and took a cigarette. I sat with my back to the picnic table, facing away from the truck, into the woods, feeling shitty about myself. I was sorry about Katie.

I didn't hear her, but she came up behind me and hugged me in that girl's sideways way—one arm over my shoulder, the other around my side. Her hands were warm, and it felt nice. We just sat there for a few minutes looking off into the woods, Katie holding me while I drank. I felt her lips on my neck, and then she said we needed sleep. She pushed me up into the passenger seat, and before I knew it I passed out.

I woke up to Katie driving and smoking. The mountain views were incredible; it was starting to feel almost like a vacation. It felt like I'd known Katie forever. But I didn't want to think that way.

Finding drugs in the Lower Forty-eight is usually pretty easy, but in Alaska everyone is dry and a kilo can go for almost quadruple the going rate in Chicago or New York, way over my cost. I pulled into a garage outside Anchorage. My contact started unbolting the truck's false bottom almost before we got out. He pulled out the drugs, loaded five backpacks of cash into the hidden compartment, and switched our plates, and we were gone.

The drive back down was uneventful. I still had an adrenaline buzz, but Katie fell asleep holding my hand as I drove. Back in the States, we were ahead of schedule and I wanted to spend some time with Katie before going back, so I stopped at a campsite I knew in a forest north of Seattle. I pulled out the tent and bags and set up camp while Katie gathered some wood and lit a fire. We'd be away from the truck, unprotected, so I unbolted a compartment behind the back seat and took out the Glock and an extra clip. Katie filled a cooler with beer. We were both exhausted; it wasn't long before Katie kissed me good night, mumbled something about loving camping, and fell asleep with her head nuzzled under my arm. I drank a few more beers and drifted off.

I awoke to the sound of breaking glass and someone whispering. I reached behind me and grabbed the Glock and two knives. I covered Katie's mouth and nudged her. When she woke up, I put a finger to my lips, motioned outside, and handed her one of the blades. I could just see the silhouettes of two men in the early light. As the figures approached, I aimed the Glock and let off four shots. Then I slashed a hole in the tent and jumped out, but both men were down—anonymous-looking thugs in dark clothing and caps. I told Katie to stay put, scanned our perimeter, and checked their car. Washington plates. Katie was already dressed. I dragged one body to a ditch. I'd shot him in the chest and neck. When I returned, I realized that the second man was almost unconscious but still alive, bleeding from his stomach and right knee. I dragged him to the ditch and dumped him on top of the first body. He just groaned. One of those strong individuals, I guess. I asked him if he wanted to say anything before I killed him. He rasped something, I think in French. I slit his throat.

I called for Katie to double-line a couple garbage bags and collect the glass. I gloved up and went to work on the bodies. I emptied their pockets, tucked their handguns into the waistline of my jeans, and used my knife to dig the bullets from their flesh. I threw the bullets, gloves, and knife, sheathed, into the trash, and scoured the site for evidence, mopping up blood with my polo.

When Katie was finishing cleaning, I unbolted the truck's false bottom and threw her bag in with mine. A nearby streambed was lined with flat rocks, and we carried the heaviest ones we could lift to the ditch and stacked them on top of the bodies. Every time I dropped one, I could hear the snap of bone. I sprayed the ditch with bleach and surrounded it with logs and thorn bushes. Katie and I washed up in the stream, and I added water to a gallon of bleach in garbage bags and sprayed down the campsite. I drove the Frenchie's car to a lot outside the nearest town, wiped it of prints, and walked back. Then we headed out.

We were supposed to stop by the vineyard to pick up twenty more kilos, but after our encounter, I figured we should get right back. Katie wouldn't let go of my hand. I called the preps and explained everything. They were upset that I couldn't pick up the new shipment but congratulated me all the same. I felt good, and I could see that Katie was starting to get it. I got shit done. I'd stayed calm under pressure and protected us both.

The farm is home. But it's home for a lot of others too, and we knew they'd be pissed. A crowd had collected in front of the house, waiting. We'd broken several commandments, put our work second to our personal interests, not completed the mission, caused unnecessary bloodshed, and put everyone who relied on the farm in danger. I should never have stopped for the night.

A tall, bronzed girl stepped out of a red truck from the fields—the head of farm duty. She'd been in charge of the fields and gardens for two years. She had a few tattoos, and I knew she'd had a child at the farm. It was Shannon, Katie's sister. She tore off her work gloves, marched toward us, threw back her right arm, and slapped me in the face, hard. Then she took a step back, one forward again, and hugged me. I was confused, but I went with it. Then she took Katie in her arms, and one by one everyone embraced us. Shannon brought Katie back to her place, and the truck was wiped down with bleach and driven into the barn to be fully cleaned and re-detailed. I sat down in the dark and drank. The next morning, Katie and I were ready for our tattoos. Mine, on my left arm, read **07-15-2007-DK4**—the date, D for driver, K for kill, and 4 for the number of participants: two drivers and two preps. I held Katie's hand while she got hers: **07-15-2007-DA4**. Driver-assist.

*—Joseph Burrows ('13)*

## Hotel Rambla

*Alicante, Spain*

I never figured it a good thing to get too comfortable in a place. I left when everything felt like it was where it should be. The leaving was what kept me up the first few nights in the big empty hotel room—that and the jetlag. I was time zones and oceans from everything I knew, but distance never feels that far until you're alone. I felt like crying that first night when I emailed my mom, but I didn't.

At dinner I met a girl from Buffalo with hair darker and longer than mine, and later that night we walked the cobblestone streets of a city I thought I'd never understand. Drunk on sleepiness and new confusion, we met our soon-to-be friends, just as foreign and unaware as us, at a little Spanish bar. We ate tapas and talked about hometowns and majors and universities. They were all just as lost as I was, and something about that felt almost comforting.

—*Maria DeSio ('14)*

## The Louvre

*Paris, France*

I went to Paris just to say I did it. It was February, and the bitter kind of cold that made everything hurt. We went to the Louvre to get the feeling back in our fingers, and Tyler told me not to say a word as he convinced the ticket seller that we were poor art students from far away. He knew I could never lie the way he could. We saw the Mona Lisa for free. She was smaller than I had imagined, and trapped behind a lot of glass. Some people say that Da Vinci drew himself in her famous face, but I think he was just painting a picture.

We sat in the hostel at night, drinking beer from vending machines and eating pizza out of the box. Tyler took the bunk below me, and at nighttime he whispered for me to come lay with him. I whispered back no, but Paris felt like the kind of city where you do romantic things, or fall in love, or at least fall asleep next to someone, and the cold made me lonelier than usual. I brought my blanket down with me, and we talked with our faces so close together that his breath kept me warm. He tried to kiss me, and I pretended to fall asleep. The next two nights my head ended up on his chest, and I could tell he was smiling, even in the dark, when he said that I couldn't keep climbing into his bed without kissing him. I slept on the top bunk the next night.

–*Maria DeSio ('14)*

## La Iglesia de la Consolación

*Altea, Spain*

Fridays were lazy, and the four of us decided to take the train up the Costa Blanca in the middle of March to a pretty little town we'd heard about. I rested my forehead against the window, feet perched on the empty chair facing me. There was graffiti on abandoned barns and single walls that didn't protect anything anymore. Graffiti can be art—I've always understood that—but this was different. The spray paint was colorless and jagged and hopeless and permanent. That's the thing, though—no one cared to cover it up. They were undisturbed by phallic symbols on schoolyard walls and obscenities on once-graceful churches that held smaller congregations each week. I never heard anyone make a fuss, or even acknowledge it was there.

Altea was whitewashed houses climbing hills along the sea, with beaches made of white rocks as big as my palm. We walked along the water without a destination, without noticing we had none. We could see a church at the top of the city, a dome covered in blue glass that smiled in the sunlight. We wandered deep curves of cobblestone streets to the top and sat overlooking this little Athens we'd found. A man stood behind us playing Spanish songs on his guitar. We were in a postcard, and we watched the waves as we talked about all the boys we should have never kissed when we were seventeen, and all the ones we would kiss again if we had the chance. A lot of the names didn't change. We didn't leave the man with the guitar a single coin when we left.

—*Maria DeSio ('14)*

## El Mercado Central

I don't know  
if we really belonged  
to the city,  
in the way that you  
belong to nothing  
when you're twenty years old,  
but that didn't matter.  
We would meet on the big steps  
of the Mercado Central—  
a building too confusingly  
elegant,  
it seemed,  
to hold a loud and messy  
daily market of vendors  
with skinned animals  
and the smell of fish  
that no one could possibly like.  
At night it was just  
our massive abandoned palace,  
and we'd sit at its quiet entrance  
and drink cheap white wine  
from the bottle and talk  
about home and the lives we kept  
forgetting to miss.

—*Maria DeSio ('14)*

## Visit to Lou

Louisa Ann “Lou” McFarland shuffled her shackled feet to the long metal table that split the room in two. One half for the incarcerated guilty, one half for visitors. Iron bars separated them from the waist up, and Teddy felt awash with pain. The baggy skin under his mother’s eyes had drawn further down, more purple with blood and restlessness since he last saw her. Her neck sagged, too, and thin pale arms were no match for iron circles clanging on her wrists. She sat. At first the hard prison façade was there. Then he saw her adjust to present company and her shoulders dropped. As the fight drained from her, his mother’s eyes went wide and soft and with a tinkling of chains she reached slowly to the bars, where she slipped three aged fingers out to him. Teddy looked over to the large white sign with the warning red words NO CONTACT and didn’t reach back. She followed his eyes to the sign, then drew her wrists back with a defeated scraping sound, letting her cuffed hands come to rest in her lap.

She’d received his letter.

Teddy could tell. Her eyes told an old story before she spoke, and he thought there might be a place in every mother, even the mothers who aren’t good mothers, that wanted a reassuring touch from their child. He wished he could’ve touched the reaching fingers. He wanted to grab the fingers attached to the hand and place it on his cheek. Then to the attached arm where he would curl into. Then to the exposed connected neck where he would cry into her smell. A wail for the two people they could’ve been.

“Was the line long?” She looked genuinely interested, as if she could do something about it if it was too long.

He looked down ashamed. “No. I got in pretty quick.”

“Sundays can be a jam. I’m surprised.” She prodded, “How’s your brother?”

“Mom.” Teddy looked away. She knew better to ask.

“Yeah, I suppose,” she said.

“Yeah, I suppose,” he responded.

“Why now? You don’t know him.” As she referenced Teddy’s letter, her spirit turned mean and she hissed, still hurt from rejection. “Do you like waiting? That’s what you’ll do! If you like waiting, then go on and look him up!” She got low and sneered. “Your dad will put you second, just like always, and you’ll do nothin’ but wait and wait for somebody that never wanted you.”

The thought of him seeing his father had stirred her up. “Are you kidding me?” Teddy snapped back in a hush. “I’m in a damn prison. Everyone here is putting people second, including you. Okay?”

Faced with the truth, her eyes went small. She had been wounded by his letter and he was glad for it, though recovery came with the territory of being a prisoner and her face was quick to rebound from the hurt. Tandem hands brought out a pack of smokes from the pocket of her prison jumpsuit. “I need a light.”

“Can you smoke?”

There was a pause. “Yeah.” She smirked and repositioned herself. “I need a light, though.”

Teddy reached into his pocket and dug out a yellow lighter, 2 for 1, while she stuck her mouth up to the bars, letting the cigarette poke through. He looked around for another white sign

with red markings to advise on smoking—or no smoking—as he flipped the lighter. She noticed his anxiety with the whole affair and puffed away, observing his discomfort through the bars.

“You’re a good kid,” she said. They stared at each other.

“Life’s a wonder, Teddy Bear. I didn’t want all of this, you know? Like it is now.” His mother looked down at her sandaled feet and a few strings of dirty blonde hair escaped from her ponytail. When her head raised, she allowed a gold tooth to shine from the side of her grin.

“You know, your daddy was a good man in some little ways. He wasn’t a shining man of responsibility, though. Fact, your grandmother was fit to be tied when I brought him home.” Behind the bars, she fiddled with the cigarette between fingers, baring nails bit below the quick. Her head shook back and forth. “And I thought I was a big girl making my own decisions, but she was right, though, your nana. She had him pegged. He was good at the start though—shit, ain’t everybody? We had a little place in West Texas. Did I ever tell you that?” She furrowed a brow and smiled. “About that little duplex?”

Teddy shook his head.

“Oh, yeah, we had this little yellow duplex in the sticks before we moved to El Paso. We didn’t have nothing but a nasty Lazy Boy your grandfather gave us. It’d been sittin’ on his back porch. He let his two hound dogs use that chair for everything and then he gave it to us to use! Can you believe that? Leftovers from dogs. God, it stunk so bad!” Her nose wrinkled like she was smelling hounds. “But you know, we was just starting out, and everyone takes what they can when they start out.” She gave a smoky chortle. “I even sprayed it down with ammonia one day, and then it was even worse! Couldn’t keep it in the house no more, so we just put it out front. Used it as a smoking chair. I’m kinda surprised I can still breath what with all the ammonia and Marlboros. Hell, we smoked ourselves bad on that chair!” Ted could imagine his mother on the good side of the steel bars telling this same story, slapping her knee. Doing better.

“Me and him both got jobs that paid nothing, but I spent a lot of time at thrift stores trying to turn that duplex into something like a home. I was so excited when I found a giant wooden spoon to hang on the wall, just like my mom had when I was a teenager. I nailed that sucker up, right above the dining room table so every night we’d see it during dinner, you know?” The lines in her forehead smoothed out and her eyes look unworried as she thought about the wooden spoon. “Home-making right? A place where all the things you love is hanging on the walls, or sitting up on shelves jus’ where you want them. Jus’ like I seen in catalogs when I was little. I wanted that for you.” She paused and waited for acknowledgement of her goodness as white plumes of smoke halos rose above her head. Teddy was silent.

“No, Teddy Bear, the truth is I thought I was right about him and I thought if everything looked like catalogs and magazines then I could live in that world too. But people ain’t things. You can’t place them where you want them. They move like water. It just turned out wrong.” She singed her herself with the cigarette. “Turns out, some people only do for themselves in this life. He got to drinking so bad I started throwing out or hiding anything and everything he could hit me with. Reason being, he never liked to mess up his hands. You know? So he always found something he could hold and beat me with. No, he wouldn’t have swollen and bleeding knuckles, but he’d beat the spirit out of me to make point. Never even gave a shit where I bled—but I don’t know why he would.”

His mother leaned forward, closer to the bars, closer to her forgotten son. “So, one night, I catch him at the Wooden Nickel talking with a woman.” Her face twisted up. “I knew her, too.”



Lizzy Buchanan. I knew she had her legs wide open like clearance on a tarmac. I was so jealous, because it was a matter of time before he was gonna lay up with that bitch, maybe even that night if I hadn't shown up. Everyone at the bar got an earful of what I thought about your father, and then I took off. I walked all the way home by myself in the dark." Her mood went bright. "I had these little cheap velvet heels on, and it took me forever to wobble back." A giggle came, and the gold tooth shone again. "Pink velvet. Oh, God, the crap I wore!" She let out a long drawn-out "Shit!" that sounded more like "Shet" and then smoked a third of her cigarette in one drag. Her face looked young for a second, like maybe they were both in a coffee shop talking about the latest anything and everything. But soon it shifted back and she ranted on, forgetting about her velvet shoes.

"Anyway—while I was walking back, he got a ride home from that bitch and was already at the front door by the time I come up. I tried to run, but he snatched my wrist and yanked me inside. He didn't let go. His face was still red and pissed because I'd embarrassed him in front of everyone at The Nickel. And you know, he wanted to hit me bad but he couldn't find nothing to get me with, 'cause it was all hid. I even taped our good cutting knife under a cabinet." She took a final inhale and let the smoke role out of her mouth while she talked. "Honey, I hid it all— but I forgot the spoon hanging up on the wall. I saw it right when he did, but he got to it first. It was cheap wood, but it did the trick." The steel door of the visiting room cranked open without warning, causing Teddy to jerk back. An officer in grey came in, and his mother looked back.

"Five minutes, Lou." Then the officer nodded at her cigarette for compliance. She returned the nod and put the smoke out under the table. Teddy knew it.

"Anyway, that spoon knocked out two of my teeth and split my ear. I was lucky it broke in half as quick as it did." A cuffed hand lifted the little rogue strings of hair back from the left side of her face, exposing her ear. "Here, see? See that?" Two fingers dragged across the curve where a rounded three-inch scar popped up and away, like a patch, from the healthy skin. "He got me right here. I never did get stitches—probably should've, 'cause it hurt like a son-of-a-bitch for weeks." She straightened her head. "For a while I couldn't hear out of that ear." Her tired eyes turned perplexed. "You know, I still don't hear too well on that side."

It went quiet again, but after a minute or so she nodded her head with something like pride. "Matter of fact, I had Mikey three months after that." Gold tooth again. "I was so happy when your brother came out normal. I don't know why I worried. He never beat me over the stomach when I was expecting." Her face sunk and the shiny tooth receded again. "Hell, we had our fights, but in the end he broke my jaw and punctured a lung one night, and after that I couldn't keep the law off him no matter what I did. He split for Arizona, and I ain't seen him since."

Teddy finally spoke. "You haven't heard anything from him? Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Mom, it's just hard to understand. I can't believe he wouldn't want to know anything about us until now. You didn't even get a letter? In twenty years?" Teddy looked for signs of life, a sign of empathy, but he saw her fading in the dark of her own selfish lament.

"You know, after a while I got to watching the Mississippi roll by. There's so many songs about it. So many stories." His mother looked beyond him now, somewhere far back in her own life. "It's easy to drink by moving waters, because there's something so wrong about sitting by a

river and knowing you're not riding those currents to new things. It makes you sad to watch the ghosts go by without you. For a time I wanted to be a ghost, too."

The officer came back and she snapped back to life. "I don't know for sure, but I think he loved you. He just never said it around me." She rose, walked to the door, then turned around to let the officer check her cuffs, and looked into Teddy.

"Baby, you can spend a lifetime waiting, if that's what you wanna do." She craned her cuffed hands up so Teddy could see the shackles, then dropped them back behind her. "But when it comes to water, some people drink on the shore and some drift in the currents."

The officer took a shoulder and began to guide her through the door. "Tell your brother to call me, please? Tell him I'm sorry, okay?"

Teddy smiled, gave a nod, and she was gone. Gone back to the guts of the prison. Into the metal belly. Gone away with decaying catalogs in dumps and wailing ghosts on the river. Gone.

*-Holly Norton ('15)*

## This Is Serious

Yes, I'd like a large substantial  
and a side of extra-large big  
a small immense  
with tremendous vast sauce  
for dipping and  
DON'T FORGET MY STRAW!

Last time you forgot my straw and I was forced to do a U-turn in the parking lot.

No, that's not all! Throw in a gigantic titanic mega too.

Oh, you're out of mega? What a shock.

How

about

mighty?

No mighty either? Perfect.

[sigh]

I guess I'll have to settle with a gigantic titanic whopping.

I guess.

While driving between windows, let's mumble to ourselves:

*I don't know why you'd be out of mega AND mighty.*

*I mean, that's your business staple right there.*

Let's toss our hand in the air like we're shooing away a fly and say: "Whatever!"

Now, point our fingers down and tap haughtily on the rim of our current-model car door and tell ourselves off:

"I come here EVERY day, you know . . . that's like \$1800—a year!"

Then, make yourself big, like a bar (that's how they say bear somewhere south or north), and get on your hindquarters so when we get to the window we're high enough to piss and moan about the serious condition of our own importance and, of course, for the sake of big things to put squarely in our mouths by yelling:

This is ridiculous!

I wanna see your supervisor!

Oh—you ARE the supervisor—

How old are you anyway—

I see—16 must be the new 50 (roll eyes).

Well.

Let me tell you,

I can get jumbo anywhere in town.

Do you know who I am?  
Do you?  
Does the little gold stitching on men's black socks ring a bell?  
Yeah, that was my fucking idea, so THAT'S who you're dealing with,  
and might I suggest that if humongous  
is your thing,  
then keep it on hand, man.  
Damn, is massive so hard?  
What? Did you just—  
did you just offer to throw in an undersized tiny for free?  
How will that make up for either a mighty OR a mega?  
It's bad enough I'm settling for a whopping, but an undersized tiny?  
Since you seem to be hell-bent on screwing me hard today,  
while you're at it  
why don't you just complete your insult and throw in a petite minute?  
Now, scream!  
Stay in school, kid!  
and burn out of the drive-through at 30 mph—  
because lunch is served, asshole,  
and this extra-large big  
isn't gonna digest itself.

—Holly Norton ('15)

## Resolution

My father used to watch the birds flee,  
Dream of the places they might go  
When their feathers ruffled at first touch  
Of autumn's sudden chill.  
Taking flight above the frothy swells  
Of Mississippi waves rocking listless fish to sleep,  
They'd make their way.

I would mourn their disappearance,  
Come to dread the smell of fall, the taste of rot  
Shellacked to Wind's broad shoulders,  
An omen for the ebbing of all life.  
The leaves would drop; the birds would flee;  
Even clouds would crumble.

My father would say, "Our friends will be back soon."  
I escaped the joyless fog—the loss of all things bright—  
But he held strong to his position: witness to their flood  
As though this great migration could manifest  
Only if someone made a point to stand and watch it pass.

He played this role as long as he could bear  
And now I'm back to mime his watchful eye,  
Cold scraping frigid fingers through my hair  
And tracing roughly down my wind-burnt cheeks  
As I stand witness to the grim procession.

I use my springs and summers to prepare, collecting fragments—  
My face turns west to watch the sun bleed out;  
I press soft petals—war paint—underneath my eyes.

—Bailey Keimig ('15)

## Shelter

My hands have spent a lot of time hiding—  
burrowing in dens of cloth like nervous foxes,  
making homes inside pockets and sleeves and underneath thighs.

It used to drive my mother crazy;  
she'd say I looked homeless  
as my sleeves crept further down.  
My cheeks would blaze and my eyes would lower,  
because eight-year-olds don't have words to say  
that hands exposed mean vulnerability,  
that hands hidden make it easier to hide their emptiness,  
that being lonely doesn't matter as long as no one notices.

I always thought that by the time I got older, I'd feel a lot braver.  
The adults in my life seemed to flit around like little bees  
with a purpose and a place in the world.  
I tried to grow fast so I could find my own hive,  
but I knew even then that I'd feel a little lost  
a little longer than most.

I'd watch people glitter around me, ethereal forms  
forging ersatz bonds to muffle the nakedness of emotions  
I was somehow sure we all shared—  
it's funny the way kids assume everyone knows what they're thinking.

As I grew I began to wonder why each day seemed so heavy.  
Like Atlas holding up the heavens,  
I tried to keep my head up high enough to breathe.  
I guess I'll take it as a sign for good to come  
when breathing in starts to feel like waking up  
and the metallic zigzag of orange juice on freshly cleaned teeth  
starts to feel like an accomplishment.

—Bailey Keimig ('15)

## A Serpent in Eden

Frank Hayes waited in his beat-up Chevy Nova as his Marlboro burned to the filter. He took a drag and flicked it, then checked his watch. It's *a quarter to*, he thought. *Where the fuck is he?* His hand moved instinctively to the radio dial, but he stopped himself, knowing that the only thing on would be corporate propaganda and the pop garbage that passed for music. He pulled down the vanity mirror and grabbed the note he had gotten from Chavez. 3 TONIGHT. USUAL SPOT, USUAL TIME. He looked at the mirror and grimaced. His hairline seemed to recede daily, and his old scar wasn't healing the way the doctors had promised. *I oughta get a refund*, he thought. The demon tattoo on his neck was the only thing that brought a smile to his face. The traffic buzzing on the overpass provided a fitting beat to the dingy locale where he made his living. The refuse of the sewers had come up to its usual spot after the acid rain and mixed with mud to refresh the eternal layer of sludge that encased the back streets and gutters.

Frank spotted Chavez's big black van rolling down the street. "About fucking time," he said. He got out of the car and faced the van as it came to a stop. The bloated Chavez struggled to get out of the car and not slip on the street's grimy sludge. When he finally emerged, he waddled over to Frank. "We really should get a new meeting spot," he grumbled as he wiped the sweat out from under his third chin.

"And where would that be?" Frank asked. "If they don't have a camera watching you, it's a microchip that will trace you or a drone that will see you thirty thousand feet up. Under this overpass is the best spot you're gonna find without getting pinched."

"I suppose you're right," Chavez huffed, running a hand through his gelled black hair. "Is the ship ready?"

"Would I be here if it wasn't?" Frank snapped. "I'll do my part; you do yours."

"Okay, Jefe," he grunted. "Whatever you say."

Chavez opened the van's side door, and Frank inspected the three people inside.

"Are you the one getting us out?" asked one of them, an old man.

"Yeah," Frank grunted. "I just gotta make sure you aren't the type that'll attract attention."

"We're all pretty normal," the old man replied. "We won't be raising any eyebrows."

"Really?" Frank interrogated. "You're sure you're not terrorists? You got no beef with the government or any of the assholes up there?"

"I can't say I'm their biggest fan, but I don't want to blow 'em up."

"What about disease?" Frank pressed. "Do you got something that could get half the place infected? Is that why they didn't let you go up there?"

"Healthy as a horse," the old timer shot back.

Frank turned to the third passenger in the van. The slanted eyes, small chin, and protruding tongue told him all he needed to know. He turned to Chavez. "What the fuck are you thinking? I can't take a retard up there! He'll be exposed as soon as he gets off."

"That's not true!" the old man objected. "I have a brother who will shelter us up there."

"Even if you get past customs, you won't make it two seconds in the open without a camera or a cop spotting you," Frank said. "You'll be found out and executed in no time, and then you will lead them right to me."

Frank turned to Chavez. "You never said anything about smuggling

a mongoloid into the fucking station!”

Chavez said nothing but opened the passenger side door, removed a backpack, and threw it at Frank. “That’s your cut,” he said. “They paid double to get to the station.”

Frank unzipped the bag, and sure enough, the piles of cash stared right back at him. “I still won’t do it,” he said. “It’s too risky. I won’t jeopardize my whole operation for a kid with Down Syndrome. Not even for double.”

He dropped the backpack and walked back to his car.

“Don’t walk away, Frank,” Chavez called out.

“Fuck you!” Frank said, pulling out his snub-nosed .357 magnum revolver and aiming it at Chavez.

“Put the gun away, *cabron*,” he soothed. “Listen, you and me have been doing business a long time and I like you. But I got bosses, Frank. You’re the best damn coyote in the business, but the cartel is trying to answer to market demand. Everybody wants to go up—the poor, the sick, terrorists, Muslims, commies, anybody who has a chance and everybody who wants something better. The station has issued fewer and fewer visas every year, and these jobs will get riskier. Either change with the times or don’t. But you will do *this* job. We’ve been paid, and if you don’t do it the cartel’s reputation will suffer.”

Chavez inched closer to the barrel of Frank’s gun. “And if we suffer, you suffer.”

Frank thrust the revolver back into the pocket of his denim jacket. “Jesus, fine!” he resigned.

He picked up the bag and went back to the van. “Take the Chevy back to my place, and make sure you put it in the garage! I don’t want the damned thing rusted to shit when the rains roll back around.”

“Whatever you say, Frank,” Chavez said as he waddled back to the Chevy.

Frank got into the van and drove. The trip was silent at first; the tension of the earlier altercation hadn’t fully worn off. “You know that this is insanely dangerous,” Frank said aloud. “You better have a damned good plan.”

“My brother owns a business and a truck,” the old man said. “He knows what ship we’ll be on and when we arrive. When we get to the station he’ll pick us up and put us in the back of his truck, and then we’ll go to his house where we’ll stay in the basement. Believe me, I’ve thought this out.”

“Really?” Frank said. “You do know that if they catch you up there with that retard they will kill all of you?”

“He has a name,” the old man snorted. “What’s your name son?”

“Danny!” the third passenger piped up.

“Well you better tell Danny to be quiet, then,” Frank said. “If they hear him, we’re dead. No trial, no jury—straight to execution. Dr. Kampf makes all the rules up there.”

The rest of the trip was silent. Frank’s spaceplane, *The Serpent*, was parked at the end of the private airstrip. Frank stopped the car. “Stay inside for a minute,” he instructed.

He stepped outside and was immediately met by a young, large olive-skinned Albanian man. “What took you so long?” the man said. “We were supposed to launch twenty minutes ago.”

“I was delayed, Ismail,” Frank said. “Chavez threw me a curve ball, and I nearly lost it.”



Ismail took a deep breath and stuck his hands in his pockets. "What did he do this time?"  
"Well, it was three like he said, but he didn't tell me one of the passengers had Down Syndrome."

"What the fuck is Downs Syndrome?" the Albanian asked.

"Down," Frank said. "He's retarded."

"That's just what we need!" Ismail raged. "He'll mess up everything and we'll be caught for sure!"

"They paid double to get on this flight, and they seem like they know what they're doing," Frank said. "They got people inside, too."

"Most do," Ismail grimaced. "What about the money?"

"It's in the van; I'll grab it."

Frank went to the van and opened the door. The three emerged from the vehicle and stood before *The Serpent* while Frank brought Ismail the bag.

"Spaceship!" Danny exclaimed.

"That's right, Danny," the woman said.

Frank threw Ismail the bag. "It's for both of us."

Ismail's grimace turned into a grin.

"Just don't shove it all up your nose," Frank said.

The inside of *The Serpent* was cluttered with gadgets and computers. Behind the two large black seats for the pilot and co-pilot were two rows of four smaller, cramped spots for passengers.

"Before you get comfortable, there are a few things you'll have to do when we dock with the station," Frank said. He walked past the seats to a small door. "This leads directly to the cargo hold." He slid the door open. The hold was filled with large crates, including one close to the door. "This particular box, you will notice, is empty. It's yours. When I tell you, go back here and open the box like so—"

Frank pressed a small button on the side of the crate, and the side unlocked and opened. "It will be a tight fit, but it's better than getting spotted."

"What are you hauling?" the old man asked.

"Blue jeans," Frank replied. "The people on the station may have left behind this world, but not its fashion. What exactly is the nature of your brother's business?"

"He owns his own auto repair shop," the old man said.

"All right," Frank said, running his hand through his thinning brown hair. "I'll add auto parts to the manifest so your brother being near *The Serpent* won't look strange."

"Can we go now?" Ismail bleated. "The air tower will start asking questions."

"You heard the man, folks," Frank said, shooting an irritated glance at Ismail. "Take a seat and get ready for takeoff."

The three did as they were told—even Danny, who was quick to buckle in, much to Frank's surprise. Frank went to the head of *The Serpent* and took the captain's seat. He put on his raggedy Chicago Bears cap and buckled in.

"Is everything ready?" Frank asked. "Fuel? Life support? Stabilizers?"

"All good, man," Ismail said with annoyance. "I checked everything like three fucking times before you showed up."

Ismail removed a small vial from his coat pocket and emptied a small portion of its white contents to his index finger.

“Seriously?” Frank lectured. “What the fuck did I tell you about that shit?”

“Chill out, man,” Ismail said. “It’s just a bump before takeoff.” He lifted his finger to his nose and snorted.

“Are you doing drugs?” the old man recoiled.

“It’s all right,” Ismail laughed. “Standard procedure.”

“You shouldn’t do that,” Danny muttered.

Ismail turned his head. His smile had deteriorated into cold anger.

“Don’t tell me what to do, tardy-boy, or I’ll kick you off this fucking plane.”

“That’s enough!” Frank shouted. “I’m the captain of *The Serpent*, and I say who stays and who goes, so watch it both of you!”

Danny looked down as the other two passengers consoled him. Ismail did a final preliminary check and gave Frank a silent thumb up.

Frank flipped on the radio. “Air tower, this is *The Serpent*, requesting permission for takeoff.”

“*Serpent* you are cleared and ready for takeoff,” the tower responded in a hostile tone.

*They’re probably irritated about how late I am*, Frank reasoned. *If only they knew the crap I have to put up with*. He started the ignition sequence and in moments the ship was making its way down the runway. He increased the throttle and within less than a minute they were off the ground and had reached over 60,000 feet. “All right, everyone,” he warned. “Hold on.”

Frank flipped a switch and engaged the Helium-3 rocket engines. *The Serpent* accelerated and climbed higher and higher into the sky until it entered the black vacuum of space. The familiar tug of weightlessness from the lack of gravity always made Frank crack a smile.

Danny could hardly contain the glee at being in space and was laughing with delight.

“Pretty cool, isn’t it?” the old man asked.

Danny nodded. “It’s awesome!” he exclaimed.

“Just keep yourself strapped in,” Frank said. “I don’t want to have to come back there to get one of you back in your seats.”

“The station should be in range within minutes,” Ismail said after a quick look at the navigational computer.

“The sooner, the better,” Frank muttered. “The anticipation kills me.”

“Nah,” Ismail said. “It’s the unloading that’s the worst, the before and after’s easier.”

“So, why do you want to go to the station?” Frank asked the old man. “You know how dangerous it is.”

The old man turned away from Danny. “Why does anyone want to go up?” the old man said with a slight shrug of his shoulders. “Cleaner air, cleaner water, sunshine, more opportunity, a chance at a better life, being at the center of the future.”

“C’mon,” Frank pressed. “Everyone and their brother say that’s why they want to get into New Eden. Why do you want to go up?”

The old man thought on it for a second. “When you have a child like I do, you get sick of him living in the same squalor, sucking in the same poison each day when he goes outside, having to settle for mediocrity. When I was rejected for my visa, it was like having the one hope, the one thing that was keeping me going, ripped away.”

“Your kid?” Frank said with a cynical chuckle. “You mean Danny? He’s never going to be able to leave your brother’s basement. If he does, they’ll kill him and all of you on the spot. Admit it; you’re going up for *you*.”

“Don’t even start,” the old man rebuked. “I have a plan. I’m one of the best damn engineers in the States. As soon as I buy the proper credentials, I’ll get a great job with one of the firms up there and buy a place far away from the cities, with no cameras or surveillance—lots of room for Danny, lots of room for all of us!”

“Whatever you say, old timer,” Frank said. “Just don’t get caught.”

The rest of the trip was kind of quiet, with only updates from Ismail to break the silence. “New Eden in range,” Ismail reported. “Begin final approach.”

When the space station came into full view, the passengers’ eyes widened. “Wow,” Danny said.

The wonder of New Eden was made up of four massive biospheres connected by metallic corridors to a central hub known as the Genesis Module. The biospheres resembled large blue marbles, each much like Earth.

Frank took the radio, “New Eden, Gideon docks, this is *Serpent*, class B freighter. Requesting permission to dock.”

“*Serpent*, this is Gideon station control,” the voice responded. “What is your intention?”

“Freighter,” Frank said. “I repeat, freighter incoming for scheduled commercial delivery.”

There was a pause, presumably as the man checked to verify that *The Serpent* was scheduled to make a delivery. “*Serpent*, this is Gideon station control. You are cleared for docking.”

Frank put down with the receiver. “How many times do I gotta fucking repeat myself?” he asked himself.

The spaceplane slowed for spacecraft docking with and departing from the station. They inched closer and closer, then docked with the massive biosphere known as the Gideon, and the artificial gravity that kept the inhabitants of New Eden on their feet took *The Serpent* under its control. Frank got up and, without saying a word, directed the passengers to the cargo hold. He put a single finger to his lips and the trio understood—there were many ears in New Eden. The old man went through the door to the cargo hold, followed by the woman. When Danny turned, Frank was afraid he would speak, but Danny only mouthed two words. *Thank you*.

Frank stopped for a moment, nodded and gestured for Danny to join the rest of the passengers. *I guess he gets how high the stakes are*, he thought. Danny passed through the door and closed it behind him.

“Ready?” Ismail asked.

“As I’ll ever be,” Frank replied.

Frank waited for a minute or two to give the passengers time enough to get into the crate and then opened the doors. The docking station was crowded with crews from docked freighters unloading or picking up product. New Eden was known for having one of the richest economies in the solar system, and her goods were prized.

“Frank!” called a woman in uniform.

“Hello, Martha,” Frank said. “So nice to see you again.”

“The feeling’s mutual,” Martha muttered. “How’s *The Serpent*?”

“She gets me where I need to go.”

“What about you?” she asked Ismail.

“Fine, fine,” Ismail said.

“Before the check, is there anything I should know?” Martha asked. She was a large woman, almost as tall as Frank, but beautiful in a sort of utilitarian way. Her face had no trace of makeup, but she didn’t appear to need it. Her short hair, smooth face, cleft chin, and high cheekbones gave her a natural, strong beauty.

“Three,” Frank said as he slipped her a wad of bills.

“Pretty thick for three, Frank,” she said. “Is this someone who will attract attention?”

“We’ve seen to it that it won’t be an issue.”

“All the same, it might be good to tell me.”

“One of them, Danny is his name, has Down Syndrome.”

“That’s a tall order. What kind of guarantee do you have that if they get caught they won’t rat you out?”

“None.”

“The risk is a bit out of character, Frank,” she said, her eyes scanning him. “I could take care of them. No one would know they were even here. I could do ’em and have their bodies incinerated before anyone was the wiser. The Gideon’s got the least amount of surveillance.”

Frank shot her an irritated glance. “You could be a bit louder and get us all killed.”

“Don’t worry, I know where all the bugs are,” she said. “I work for the bastards. I’m serious, Frank. I could take care of it.”

“I’ve got a job to do,” Frank said. “Besides, they got family up here who would know.”

“I could take care of them too,” she said. “They may call this place paradise, but there’s plenty of dying here, same as on Earth.”

“The cartel is getting pretty particular about their rep,” he said. “They’re responding to demand and expect me to as well. We go with the plan. I don’t care what happens after the job’s done.”

“Whatever you say,” she said.

A truck pulled up to *The Serpent*, and a tall, gawky figure emerged from the cab with a clipboard. “You got the jeans?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Frank said as he opened the cargo doors. “You got eight of the nine, all except the one furthest in the back.”

The driver backed up and removed an electronic pallet jack from the truck, and within minutes the eight crates were loaded into the truck.

“You got the money?” Ismail asked.

“New manager wants to make sure he’s not getting gypped out of anything,” the driver said. “Once it’s counted, we’ll come by with the money.”

“What the hell is this new waiting bullshit?” Frank asked.

“Hey, man, chill out,” the driver said. “I only work for the guy. Look, here’s the order form. You can come by and get the money yourself if you feel that shady about it.”

Frank grabbed the paper and looked at it. “How long do you think it will take to get back to us?”

“Don’t know,” the driver said as he hopped back into the truck. “Just sit tight. Shouldn’t take more than an hour or two.”

The truck drove off, leaving an irritated Frank and a slightly amused Martha. “They’re very thorough,” she sniped.

“Too thorough,” Frank said.

“When’s this guy supposed to get here?”

“Any minute,” Frank replied.

“Can I ask you something?”

“If I said no, would that stop you?”

Martha’s amusement faded. “I need a ride.”

Frank turned. “What?”

“I’ll pay for the fuel and your time,” she said. “I got the money. I just need a round trip.”

“I’m not a cabby,” Frank said. “What is this about?”

Martha seemed to be at a loss for words and Frank thought he spotted a tear. “I’m late,” she said. “Three weeks. The son of a bitch told me he was wearing a rubber.”

“Martha,” Frank said. “Are you sure?”

“The morning sickness is when I knew for sure,” she said. “I can feel it, inside me. They just don’t hand out test strips up here. Kampf’s fucking rules. If I go to the clinic, everyone in the New Eden Police Force will find out and I sure as hell can’t get it out of me once they know.”

“There must be someone up here that can take care of it,” Frank said.

“I don’t want some moron with a coat hanger mutilating me,” she said. “I need to get to Earth. I have this weekend off. If I go with you today I can be back for my shift Monday without anyone suspecting anything.”

“You think I can just take you back Monday?” Frank asked. “I can’t just make this shit up. I have to have a reason just to be able to dock.”

“Then get a reason,” Martha pleaded. “Please.”

“Why not just have it and give it up for adoption?”

Martha looked at him like he had just slapped her in the face. “If that happens, I’m fucking done. Unmarried women having kids out of wedlock isn’t exactly encouraged here, Frank. I’ll be blacklisted. And it’s my fucking body. I am not going through that hell.”

“How would you even do it?” he asked, nodding to the cameras. “You can’t just waltz onto *The Serpent*; they’ll see you.”

“Camera maintenance is scheduled for one hour today,” she said.

“They won’t see us, and as for getting back, just get me in the same way you get all your people in.”

“It takes time,” Frank said. “This doesn’t just happen overnight.”

“If I don’t get this taken care of soon,” Martha said, “people *will* notice.”

Frank sighed. *Dammit*, he thought. “When’s the one-hour window?”

“Exactly a half hour after I’m done with my shift,” she said with new life. “Thanks, Frank.”

“Just be here,” he said. “You owe me after this.”

Martha nodded. “I gotta make my rounds. I’ll be back when my shift is done. You got my number, right?”

“Yeah, but do you trust the line?” he asked.

“Just dial my number, no one will be listening.”

Martha walked away just as a small truck pulled up to *The Serpent*. A short, chubby man emerged from the truck cab. “You have, um, the auto parts?” the man stuttered.

So *this is the guy, huh?* Frank thought. “Yeah, last one near the cab. It’s really fragile, so be careful.”

The man nodded, removed a small dolly from his truck, and entered the spaceplane. Frank's heart beat faster and faster as the man went deeper inside and came out with the crate. The man carefully placed it on the lift-gate and took it up into the truck. Methodically, he positioned it at the end and strapped it to the wall of the truck. Then he climbed down, put the lift gate into place, and closed the doors of the truck.

Frank took a deep breath of relief.

The chubby man came up to Frank and shook his hand. "Thank you," he said, his eyes glistening. "You did a good thing today."

"Don't thank me," Frank muttered. "They paid a fortune."

"All the same," the man said. "Thank you."

"One more thing," Frank said. "This Monday I need you to pick up another crate from me. Take it home and open it. Consider it a favor."

The man hesitated. Then he said, "Sure, whatever you need."

The chubby man got into his truck and drove off.

Frank turned to find Ismail heading back into the ship. "I'm gonna get a drink," Frank said. "Wanna have one with me?"

Ismail shook his head. "You know I don't touch that stuff, man."

"So you can snort coke but can't have a beer?" Frank asked. "The Prophet's got some weird rules."

"Shut up!" Ismail flared. "Don't talk about shit you know nothing about!"

"All right," Frank said. "Chill the fuck out. Do you at least want to sit with me while I drink? You can have a Coke or something. You know, the kind you drink."

"Ha, ha, ha," Ismail drawled. "As much as I would love that, that guy who took the jeans could come back with the money anytime. I'll wait here and make sure we get paid."

"Whatever you say," Frank said, and he walked out of the docking area and into greater Gideon.

New Mumbai was bustling with people flooding the sidewalks and backed up traffic cramping the narrow streets. The city was the most populous in New Eden and the economic and social hub of the Gideon. Shouts of "Chai" from the vendors and hollers of "Taxi!" from anxious pedestrians filled the air. The smells of curry and pizza from opposing restaurants dueled one another for potential customers. Out of the chaos of sound and smell came the sight for which Frank was looking. The small, but bright neon silhouette of a pint of Guinness beckoned him. He followed the sign like a beacon until he reached his destination. The pub was a dingy joint with two grimy windows and the name Patrick's written in large, dirty green lettering above the door. Outside, an elderly black man with dreadlocks was playing George Michael's "Careless Whisper" on a sax. Frank headed straight into the bar.

The place was pretty much empty except for the bartender, a couple of drunks in the corner, and an Indian woman in a red dress with fishnet stockings sitting at the bar. Frank took a seat at the bar, a couple seats away from the woman. "Gimme a Guinness," he called out. The bartender said nothing, but popped open a black bottle and placed it on a napkin on the bar, in front of Frank.

"No tap?" Frank asked.

"We don't got it on tap," the bartender said. "Just bottles."

Frank handed the bartender a single bill. He tilted the bottle to his mouth and let the thick black stout go down his throat. On his left, the woman was staring at him. He kept to his beer. The woman moved down a couple of seats right next to Frank. "What's your name?" she asked.

"Frank," he said. "How about you?"

"Jasmine," she replied.

"I bet that wasn't the name your parents gave you," he said.

"How'd you know that?" she said.

"The Adam's Apple is a dead giveaway," he said, and took another swig.

"Well, I can't hide everything," Jasmine said.

"It's okay," he said. "I can dig it. Besides, it must take some balls to do what you do in New Eden."

"Ha," Jasmine laughed. "Please, this is New Mumbai. Anything can be bought for the right price—drugs, cops, guns, *anything*."

Jasmine's hand began to make its way up Frank's thigh. His face turned solemn with lust. "It's a good thing I got plenty of cash," he said. "You got a place?"

"Yeah," Jasmine said. "It's not far."

"What's your rate?"

"Reasonable, it's—"

The door to Patrick's suddenly swung open, and a New Eden police officer strode into the pub. Jasmine got up and walked to the back.

The policeman was an older, wiry man with large hands, bright white hair and sandpapery skin. He walked in casually and took a seat at the bar. "Give me a Bud Light," he said.

When the policeman received his drink, Frank moved to a booth. He looked at the TV, but was disappointed by a low-budget daytime soap opera. He took another drink. Then the soap came to an abrupt halt, replaced by a New Eden news bulletin with two smiling anchors staring into the camera.

"Good afternoon, citizens of New Eden," the charismatic male anchor began. "I'm Kirk Williams."

"And I'm Molly Thompson," the female anchor added with a synthetic grin. "We interrupt your regular programming schedule for this breaking news."

"Three illegals and a citizen collaborator were caught just moments ago by police in New Mumbai," Kirk said.

*Oh shit*, Frank thought. *Did they get busted?*

"Reports indicate that the man in question, Robert Henderson, was smuggling the illegals from the Gideon docks." A picture on the television screen appeared and Frank felt a shiver go down his spine. *The guy that picked them up*, Frank thought.

The chubby man's picture on the screen gave way to a live feed. From the town square of New Mumbai the old, ever-smiling face of the seldom-seen Dr. Kampf glared from a long banner. Below the banner was a series of tall wooden posts, fastened into the bloodstained concrete. A small rat of a man appeared in front of the posts. "Three illegals were caught just moments ago in our fair city. As commandant of the police and master of justice, it is my job to see to the protection of New Eden. These illegals are the cancer of our glorious society," he ranted. "One of them is even feeble minded!"

The crowd booed and hissed and became filled with a potent hatred.

“Behold!” the commandant shouted. “The undesirables!”

The three were dragged by New Eden police officers to the posts as the throng around them went into a rage. The old man was shouting back at them. The woman was sobbing; Danny just stared at the ground.

“Jesus,” Frank whispered.

A rock came flying from the crowd and hit Danny directly on his left cheek. Blood splashed on the concrete with a couple of his teeth. Danny began to sob. “Mom!” he cried out.

The woman wept.

The police officers tied each of them to the tall wooden posts.

“Momma!” Danny cried out.

“Close your eyes!” she shouted.

“On behalf of the people of New Eden,” the commandant said. “I sentence you to death!”

“Close your eyes, Danny!” the woman shouted.

A row of five police officers lined up facing the old man, their rifles pointed directly at him.

“Any last words?” the commandant asked.

“God damn you,” the old man cursed.

“On my count!” The commandant said. “Ready! Aim! Fire!”

The police officers fired.

The woman let loose a howling screech.

The commandant smiled as he approached her. “Any last words?”

“Murderer!” she cried.

The commandant backed up and repeated, “Ready! Aim! Fire!”

The bullets ripped the woman apart, splattering blood and shreds of flesh across the pavement. Frank tried to remain strong as he watched the commandant shift over to Danny. “Any last words, simpleton?” the commandant asked.

Danny opened his tear-soaked eyes. “Why?” he asked.

The commandant smiled. “Ready! Aim! Fire!”

The police fired a full volley. The boy’s blood-soaked face fell; his body went limp.

Frank fought back tears as the broadcast returned to the two anchors. “The smuggler who brought the illegals into New Eden remains at large,” the female anchor said. “Police have been provided with a picture of the suspect. If you have seen this man please contact the police immediately.”

The TV screen panned to a picture of Frank’s face. The tavern’s patrons’ faces filled with alarm. Only the police officer continued to drink his beer. The whole place was silent until the policeman got up and headed to the bathroom, his boots clicking through the crypt-like pub.

When the officer closed the door behind him, Frank rose and went straight for the bar. No one moved or spoke as he reached behind the bar and retrieved a corkscrew. He walked back to the bathroom, where he found the policeman standing in front of the urinal taking a piss. With one motion, Frank plunged the corkscrew deep into his neck, squirting blood across the dirty tile.

Frank tried to regain his composure, but the rage took over and he removed the corkscrew from the man’s neck and stabbed him again and again.



When the door opened, Frank dropped the corkscrew and he reached for his pistol, but he stopped when he saw who it was. "Jasmine," he said.

Jasmine took one look at the body and then at Frank. "Why?"

Frank walked past Jasmine and headed for the exit when his phone began to ring. He answered it as he pushed open the door. "What?" he nearly yelled, dizzy with all that had happened.

"You've been made," Martha responded. "Your face is plastered all over the station. What the hell happened?"

"I have no fucking idea," he said as he walked out onto the street.

"Where are you?"

"Just outside Patrick's. I'm going to the docks. I gotta get outta here."

"Don't do it; the place is crawling with cops. Are you listening to me?"

Frank stopped, hung up, and vomited on the sidewalk, then continued on his way.

The recent bloody events seemed to have little impact on the residents of New Mumbai. The shouts of "Chai" and "Taxi" remained the anthem of the streets, but to Frank it was like the buzzing of insects. He gagged at the smells of the street food and reeled at the constant stop and go of the vehicles on the street.

The docks were deserted save for the cluster of police officers surrounding *The Serpent*. Frank reached for his gun, but felt an immense pull on his collar and the barrel of a pistol jammed into the back of his neck.

"Play along," Martha's voice soothed. "And you may live."

"What the fuck?" he cried out.

She pistol-whipped him across the face and dragged him before the police officers. "I got him!" she called. "Maybe he knows how to get in, so you can get his accomplice."

"We shot your friend in the gut and he locked himself in that spaceplane of yours," a sergeant told Frank. "Tell us the passcode and this'll be over quickly."

"Ismail," Frank muttered.

"What's the passcode to get in?" another officer asked.

Martha threw Frank down in front of the cops and they surrounded him. "Tell me how to get in!" the sergeant screamed.

Frank braced for the inevitable kicks and punches. The sergeant got to his knees and raised his fist when suddenly a spray of gunfire ripped him and the rest of the cops apart.

Martha approached the curled-up Frank with her machine pistol in hand. "Let's go; there will be more here any minute."

Frank got to his feet and dialed the passcode to get into *The Serpent*. Ismail was sitting on his seat near the ship's controls, clutching his bloody abdomen. "Frank," he muttered. "I didn't think I would see you again."

"Apparently you did," Frank said. "Or you would have left already."

"We can't leave," Ismail said. "*The Serpent* is locked down. We cannot start any kind of undocking sequence. We're fucked."

"He's right," Martha said. "Without clearance from the Gideon docking control, we can't unlatch the ship from the docking mechanism."

"Shit!" Frank roared.

For a moment the whole spaceplane was silent. Martha stared at Frank with a mixture of frustration and melancholy. "Well, we gave it one hell of a shot," she said.

"Why did you kill them?" he asked. "I was the one who was already dead. You didn't need to throw your life away, too."

"I suppose I was sick of the bullshit," she said. "It was either help you or become a pariah when I had the baby I didn't want."

Frank tried to think of something to say, but nothing came out. The sound of shouts and the insidious boot-clicking of policemen outside shook him back to reality. "There's one thing we can do," he said as he went to the controls. "Everyone take a seat; we're getting out of here."

"How?" Martha asked as she helped Ismail buckle in.

"It's not like they shut the engines off," Frank explained. "I'll start *The Serpent* up and turn on the thrusters. We may take a bit of the Gideon docks with us, but we'll get out of here."

"That'll rip a hole in the Gideon's hull," Martha said with horror. "The entire biosphere will be compromised."

"Fuck 'em," Frank said. "I sure as hell won't cry for any of these assholes. Besides, they got safety features right?"

"Yes, but they've never been tested!" Martha objected. "The Gideon's biosphere is not just a city, but a self-contained ecosystem conducting photosynthesis and oxygen production. There's no telling what will happen if all of that is exposed to the vacuum of space."

"Should make for an interesting science experiment," Frank said. He started the ignition and the engines came alive. When he pushed hard on the throttle the spaceplane began to nudge.

"More power," Ismail said.

Frank gave it more power, and *The Serpent* gathered more momentum as the Gideon docks creaked and groaned.

"You have to break away from the station or else we are just wasting fuel!" Ismail shouted.

Frank flipped on the Helium 3 engines and put them to full power. The creaks and groans turned to high pitched metallic screams until the docking mechanism buckled and gave way. *The Serpent* broke from New Eden with part of the Gideon docks still attached to the craft. Frank turned the spaceplane around and headed back to Earth, passing New Eden one last time. The void of space began filling with the debris of the Gideon biosphere. Chunks of metal, polymer, ice, and fuel as well as cars, buildings, and bodies were swallowed by the blackness. Frank looked at the various signs of death and destruction left in the wake of his escape and felt no remorse until out of the corner of his eye, one small fleeting image caught his attention. It was the body of a woman, dressed in a bright red dress. Frank turned his eyes to Earth and tried to forget.

"Frank," Ismail said. "Could you reach into my coat pocket and grab something for me?"

Frank looked at the floor and noticed Ismail's coat. "Now's hardly the time for a bump, Ismail."

"That's not it," Ismail said as he coughed up blood. "It should be in my left pocket."

Frank took the coat, reached into the left pocket, and pulled out a long ring of wooden prayer beads. "Really?" Frank said

"Just give them here," he said. "I must make my peace with God."

Frank tossed him the beads. The dying man took them close and began to chant the 99 names of the Almighty. “Al-Malik, Ar-Rahim, As-Salam, Al-Aziz . . . Do you think God will forgive us for what we have done?” Ismail asked.

“I don’t care,” Frank said.

Martha remained silent. The quiet chanting began to fade just as *The Serpent* was about to attempt re-entry. Frank turned. His copilot’s pale face was cocked back, his eyes were wide open; blood dripped from his mouth.

Martha leaned over to examine Ismail. “Is he—”

“Yeah,” Frank said.

*The Serpent* re-entered Earth’s atmosphere at a furious speed, burning off whatever was left of the Gideon’s dock, and soon the familiar private airstrip where Frank started his journey came into view.

“This is *The Serpent* requesting permission to land,” he radioed.

“Permission granted,” the tower responded. “The runway’s all yours.”

The spaceplane made a graceful landing on the airstrip and parked in the private hanger leased for Frank’s use.

Frank got up from his seat. “Let’s put him in the cargo hold until we figure out what to do,” he said, gesturing to the corpse.

Martha helped him move the body into the cargo hold. Frank grabbed his cut from the original job, and the two exited the spaceplane and got into the black van that Frank had used to drive Danny and his family to *The Serpent*.

“Where are we going?” Martha asked.

“My place,” Frank replied. “As soon as we get there, we’ll take my Chevy and skip town.”

“What then?”

“I don’t know.”

“There’s something that keeps bothering me,” Martha said. “I’m just trying to figure out who tipped off the New Eden Police.”

“How do you know they were tipped off?” Frank asked. “They could have searched the truck.”

“Possibly,” she said. “But I know a lot of the patrolmen who walk the New Mumbai beat. They spend most of their day eating Indian sweets and drinking chai. The whole thing reeks of a tip-off.”

“Seems like bullshit to me,” Frank said. “Who knew and would tell?”

The drive over the dull landscape was long and tedious. After nearly an hour behind the wheel, Frank stopped the van and parked it in front of his two-story house. “I have to run in and grab something,” he said.

“You can come in if you like.”

“Sure,” she said.

Inside, Frank ran upstairs. He grabbed a satchel from under his bed, looked inside, and smiled at the sight of several stacked rows of bills.

“What’s that? Martha asked when he came down.

“It’s my go bag,” Frank said. “Every good crook has one. It’s got enough money and fake IDs for a fresh start.”

“Smart,” Martha remarked. “You must be a good crook.”

In the garage, Frank found the keys that he had given to Chavez exactly where they always were, on top of the hood.

He opened the garage door and was about to get into the driver's seat when Martha asked, "What kind of car is this?"

"'68 Chevy Nova," Frank said. "Best there ever was."

"Mind if I give it a drive? We only have electric cars in New Eden. I've never driven a muscle car before."

"Don't scratch it," Frank said as he tossed her the keys. "I'm gonna go grab the other bag from the van and make a call."

Martha rushed around to the driver's side as Frank dialed Chavez's number and made his way to the van. The call went directly to voicemail. *Fucker never picks up his phone*, he thought. After the beep Frank began, "Chavez, it's Frank. The job went whacky and I'm out. I'm done for goo—"

Without warning a massive blast threw Frank on his stomach as the garage was engulfed in a fireball. He tried to get to his feet but fell again, this time on his side. His ears were ringing and he found it difficult to breathe. When he managed to turn, he saw pieces of his Chevy strewn about the yard, driveway and street. He felt warm blood trickling down his ear lobes; his left leg throbbed. "Martha!" he called.

There was no answer. He grabbed the money and pulled himself in the driver's seat of the black van. *What the fuck just happened? He thought. Who wants me dead? The same person that set me up on New Eden?* He ran down a long list of people who might want to kill him, but then he realized it could have only been one person. He put the keys in the ignition and drove.

Night had come like a thief, or at least that's how it seemed. Frank's struggle to remain conscious was his biggest concern. Stay awake! he thought. *Just a little more, just a bit longer.* He kept his eyes wide open and on the road until the house came into view. It was a ranch-style in the middle of the sticks. He pulled up close. No time to be subtle.

Frank put the van in park and hobbled out. He removed the pistol from his jacket and backed along the side of the house. Inside was a single man sitting in the kitchen holding a sawed-off shotgun. *Bodyguard.* The man appeared oblivious, holding his shotgun in one hand and playing with his phone in the other. The only thing separating the kitchen and the outdoors was a thin glass sliding door.

Frank took aim and squeezed the trigger twice. The bullets ripped through the glass and found his mark. The bodyguard fell to the kitchen floor. Frank opened the door and moved in as quickly as he could. His left leg didn't seem to be working right, but he dragged it along, past the kitchen and into the study.

A familiar face sat at the desk, pouring himself a glass of tequila. "Hello, Frank," he said. "You look like hell."

"Chavez," Frank snarled, pointing the gun at his head. "Why'd you do it?"

"I never wanted this to happen," Chavez said with seemingly genuine remorse. "You were good, Frank, real good. I fought for you, I really did."

"What do you mean you fought for me?"

Chavez took a sip of tequila. "You see Frank, the cartel has a reputation to maintain and—"

"I did the fucking job!" Frank shouted. "Why would you sabotage your own operation?"

"It's not what you did," Chavez said. "It's how you did it. You can't just point a gun at one of the cartel's people. I have bosses, too, Frank. They take that shit very seriously."

The memories flooded back. Frank remembered the initial altercation under the overpass. He pointed the same gun he was now holding at Chavez. “So, all this because I put a gun in your face?” Frank said. “How would your bosses even know?”

“I never told you this, Frank, but every meeting we’ve ever had has been recorded by a small bug I keep on my person. Company policy, Frank. Just good business—keeps everyone accountable. There is always someone watching or listening. *Always*. Even now, my bosses are listening and sending men here to kill you.”

“Is it good business if New Eden’s outta commission?” Frank said with a perverse pride. “Last thing I saw was everything in the Gideon being sucked out into space.”

“Ah, yes,” Chavez said. “That hull breach has caused quite the stir up there. They say the Gideon, and especially New Mumbai, was very densely populated. They had to shut down the whole biosphere. They are still trying to find survivors, but the death toll is estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands at least.”

“Good riddance,” Frank muttered.

“I didn’t know you had such an appetite for death, *cabrón*.”

“I’m dead already,” Frank chuckled. “That little present you left in my Chevy broke me to pieces.”

“A little back-up plan in case you somehow survived after we tipped off the New Eden Police Force,” Chavez said. “I have to admit, I’m surprised you survived both. That was unexpected. Did you have someone start the car?”

Frank’s thoughts drifted back to Martha, and his white-hot rage returned. “She risked everything to get me out. She threw away her whole life. Not to mention the other people you fucked over—Danny and his family, Ismail.” Frank cocked his pistol.

“This coming from the mass murderer—”

Frank unloaded on Chavez, enjoying each shot until he only heard the clicking of his empty gun. He sighed. Then he took the bottle of tequila from Chavez’s desk and brought it into the kitchen. He placed it on the table and picked up the dead bodyguard’s sawed-off shotgun. “Might be able to take a couple of those cartel fucks with me,” he said aloud.

He took out a cigarette, lit it, and sucked deeply. He took a long, hearty swig of the tequila, held the shotgun firm and waited.

—Brendan Bakala ('15)

## Blue

Genus: *Cyanocitta*

Species: *Cristata*

Common name: Blue jay

One of the toughest of the backyard birds.

Fact: The cry of the blue jay bothers me more than the caw of the crow.

Crows gather in twisted trees in merry murders. Watch. They choose a branch that breathes in unison with its boarders, but they also know the ground. Nothing comforts me quite like the sight of those obsidian omens exploring the straw-like stubble of a November field.

But a lone blue jay finds a perch at the top of a birch to terrorize the smaller birds just because he can. He hops up and down on the branch as if to test its patience, as if to see how many times he can do this before it crashes to the ground in a flutter of flustered leaves. Someday it will snap, and he'll have to choose between flying away or plummeting with it.

Fact: The blue jay's blue hue hinges on relations with the sun's rays. (See also: refraction.) Other birds are born with the pigment in their plumes and needn't rely on manipulation of light.

Month: December

Birthstone: Turquoise

Not the same as the bruises the shadows leave on snow. Not like Orion's unreachable velvet skin.

Whoever picked the birthstone for December did a horrible job. This is the color of the deep end of a chlorinated swimming pool as seen from the windows during a summer thunderstorm. This is not the color of December.

Make: Ford

Model: Focus

Year: 2010

Color: Flame Blue

The family wanted an Escape.

The family bought a Focus.

D.O.B.: 12/15

Eyes: Hazel

Relationship: Daughter

Current activity: Writing a note to Dad on a blue laptop

(A prayer for understanding and an apology for the references.)

They came with the education. The education came with the scholarship.

Artist: Crosby, Stills, & Nash

Album: *Crosby, Stills, & Nash*

Song: "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes"

Year: 1969

Lyric: "It's getting to the point where I'm no fun anymore. I am sorry."

(I am sorry.)

Month: March

Birthstone: Aquamarine

Not the same as faded jeans with oil smears at the knees and buck blood  
at the cuffs. Not like the ghostly glow of the TV in the dark.

Whoever picked the birthstone for March did a good job. This is the  
color imagination chooses to paint the sky when recalling the way things  
used to be. This is the color of March.

Author: Wallace Stevens

Poem: "The Man with the Blue Guitar"

Year: 1937

Excerpt: "And they said then, 'But play, you must, / A tune beyond  
us, yet ourselves, / A tune upon the blue guitar / Of things  
exactly as they are.' "

And they said then, "But write, you must, / A poem beyond us,  
yet ourselves . . ."

Artist: Pablo Picasso

Painting: "The Old Guitarist"

Year: 1903-04

I saw "The Old Guitarist" at the Art Institute of Chicago. I felt Atlas's  
ache spread across my shoulders. Gravity became unbearable. My bones  
could have splintered through my heels from the massive weight. The

lady guiding our class blamed the blues.

(Macbeth: Throw [intellectual explanation] to the dogs; I'll none of it.)

My soul cried for the Old Guitarist.

(Macbeth: Come, put mine armor on.)

Author: Allen Ginsberg

Poem: "A Supermarket in California"

Year: 1955

Excerpt: "Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue  
automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?"

See also: the American Dream.  
Some lived the dream once.

Illusory deep pockets are nothing, were nothing, and will  
never be anything.  
You cannot replace a thing that never was.

D.O.B.: 3/15

Eyes: Blue

Relationship: Father

Current disposition:

Blue.

–*Kayla Kuffel ('16)*





## A Year in Retrograde

October: You eat; laugh; smile at your friends, the unwashed tabletop, at a point to the right of my head. My fingertips tingle. I fight the familiar urge to lift my hand. The cerulean blue of your eyes is slick when they meet mine. A halo of lashes hangs over them. A storm front breaks across your brow as the gentle up-curve of your lip trembles, falters, falls. Before I can find an empty seat, you're out the door, stirring up dust, memories, and empty promises.

September.

August: We're friends. The thought swims through a river of vodka. I want to drown it, reach out and hold it under the surface. My palm finds yours and presses against the sure, solid resolve of your skin. You slip away like so much water through my fingers. You flood my senses, but I'm not afraid. My mind screams it loves you. The skin of my chest pulls tight over shards of a broken something—my heart or ribs. I can't think of how it got there. I wonder why it doesn't hurt. As I sink beneath the waves, bubbles escape my mouth. They carry words that pop in your ears until you finally walk away.

We're friends. We curl up on your bed, under your comforter, wrapped around each other; you're a breathless whisper saying you're sorry. You want to try again, to regain my trust. You'll work so hard. You promise. But your lips taste like whiskey and running. And you call me her name.

July: Today my co-worker asked if I had a boyfriend. The word sliced from temple to cheek to collarbone, like when you traced from my throat to my shoulder with your lips. Memories bleed as you cut down my chest, over the bruises you left with your caress. When it reaches my wrist, it's too late, every inch a crosshatching of touch, scars you won't remember leaving. I take a breath as a smile carves itself onto my mouth. I respond, polite and composed, "No."

June: We've been dating for about a month. It's not long, but we've replaced sleep with sentences, your voice like summer in my curls. I look forward to my alarm at 5 a.m. Instead of a sunrise, my eyes open to your smile on my phone. Each letter tugs at my eyelids, drawing me out of dreams of you with the word beautiful, which I'd never connected to myself until it was pressed by your lips to mine, until your name fit into my palm like your hand, engraved in the lines on my skin until you were spelled out across my heart line. And I know there's a break in it, and

sometimes I talk about my ex, but you say you don't mind. You want to know everything about me, like a landscape you're aching to explore; the gait of my walk is a language worth learning. Sometimes you say her name, but I don't worry. You close your eyes and trace the freckles on my arms, speaking words in Braille you never knew existed.

May: After eight months of chance sightings in the cafeteria, a courteous wave on my way to class, and a few admittedly pathetic inquiries to my more outgoing friends, we meet. I'm not entirely sober, so I spend that first night thinking your name is Jake. I notice that your eyes are blue and spend the next five minutes staring into them, wondering how long I could hold my breath. You're only gone a few minutes before my phone lights up with your name. The first time we hang out, I avoid saying your name until someone else does. But then you lace your fingers with mine. It's more than just skin against skin. Our first kiss tastes like poetry.

April.

March.

February.

January.

December.

November.

October: I see you for the first time in the cafeteria. You smile and laugh, and I stop you before you leave. It's spur-of-the-moment. I'm not really sure what to say, so I compliment your shirt. It's the first time I make you smile. If I could go back to that moment, I'm sorry, but I would have turned around and said nothing.

*–Livi McDonald ('16)*

## Mother

On the day my 11-year-old body  
could no longer compress itself  
into size-0 jeans,  
she blamed potato chips and Oreos  
while scowling at my back in the mirror.  
Behind the plywood dressing-room door,  
I held my breath,  
imagined my ribcage collapsing  
like the arms of sunglasses,  
my hipbones coming together  
like two halves of a locket.  
But even with my vision blurred  
and denim bunched around my thighs,  
I still could not squeeze myself into her expectations.

So I memorized the length  
of each of her knuckles  
when she pressed her hand  
against my crooked spine,  
the way she clipped the ends off of words  
as she snapped for me to stand up straight,  
and the quiver of her wine-soaked smile  
when she looked into my eyes one night  
and said I was just like her at that age.

*—Livv McDonald ('16)*

## Remnants

She was wearing a ring with a swastika on it,  
and you remember nothing else about her  
except that you treated her  
as you treated all patients.  
You do not know what lesson  
her finger was meant to teach you,  
or if you ever learned it.

Maybe that's just the way it is with people.  
You remember a word, a laugh, a ring  
and it becomes part of you.  
Maybe you spend your whole life  
collecting and coveting these pieces  
the way a child cradles seashells in her hands  
until one slips through her sandy fingers  
like the loss of a limb.

I would like to cup my hands beneath yours  
so that I could catch all the pieces  
and place them on a windowsill,  
lined up and clean.  
I would like to force them,  
beautiful and jagged and broken,  
on an unfamiliar surface, so I could keep them for myself.  
I would occasionally take them down and turn them over  
and run my fingertips over their edges so many times  
that they became my own  
and you fell into the dust around them.

You don't know the lesson, or if you ever learned it.  
You're staring at the blank screen  
to see if you can find it there,  
and my hands are cradling yours,  
catching the half-said sentences that fall,  
desperate to learn my own lesson  
and become the ocean for you,  
and all its beaches—  
anything but a windowsill.

—Hanna Blaser ('17)

## Summer Storm

How can I come home to you  
and not love you even when  
it's raining? Now I have awful  
dreams of a murder in every  
room of the house, not just  
the basement. And there are  
so many missed phone calls,  
even in my sleep, I'm worried  
I might lose you there too.

I am trying to be better,  
but isn't that what everyone says?

The murders don't always happen  
in the basement. Sometimes  
it's the bedroom. Sometimes  
it isn't a knife. Sometimes  
it's just the rain.

—*Hannah Blaser* ('17)

January 23

In my dream I am an inadequate lover  
with skin soft, too soft, and shaky hands—  
makes me cry when I wake up to you gone.  
Snow is heavy, though it falls light, light,  
lightly to the ground. Only a fool would  
describe it as *cotton candy* or *powdered sugar*,  
and even their weightless sweet settles  
heavy on the tongue. Snow seeps into  
my socks, conjures phosphenes on my  
glasses. Snow is both *too much* and *not enough*  
and I seethe with the sad business of being;  
snow never shows up in my dreams. In winter  
I make myself think of Concord grapes and  
sun-baths and grainy lake sand sticking to my  
thighs before bed to avoid accidentally dreaming  
of a slow white burial. When I wake up, you  
are gone. My eyes sting from the brightness.

—Hannah Blaser ('17)

## A Careful Mess

“It’s okay if you make a mess,  
little one.” She sticks her own finger  
in the paint and carelessly sets it  
on snow-white paper.  
I nod and bite my lip,  
trying to copy her actions  
because I am six  
and I hate getting things wrong.  
She takes my small hands  
into her worn ones,  
trying to disband the fears  
my small body has against  
finger painting.  
“Much too careful.” She smiles,  
shakes her head, and leaves me  
alone with countless sheets of paper  
that I can’t imagine ruining.

“You won’t hurt it; just hold it,  
honey.” She picks up the newborn lamb,  
all legs and ears, and shoves it  
into my arms.  
I focus my attention on the newest thing  
I have ever seen.  
I can already feel it growing cold  
between my palms.  
It spends its whole life  
in my arms.  
“Too cold for the babies.”  
She sighs,  
shakes her head, and leaves me  
alone with my tears—  
a silent funeral  
for the things I cannot keep alive.

“You won’t get through life  
without a broken heart.”  
She lifts her body, old but strong,  
and hugs me until I let go.  
I dig my nails into my skin  
to distract myself from crying



in front of her.  
I have built a careful wall  
that even the closest  
can't break through,  
but I watch her try.  
"Still too careful." She sighs,  
shakes her head, and stays with me,  
her tears falling  
for the broken pieces of me  
that no one else was careful with.

–*Hannah Blaser ('17)*

## Perdition

There is an ache for all that once was;  
you feel it in your bones on the first snow.  
How do we let things that never should have  
broken break? *I'm devastated*, she says, *by all*  
*I cannot save*. The fragility of life is that everything  
else goes on when it doesn't. I want to tell her,  
you cannot fuse two people together by force;  
you cannot make bread without heat. Even the  
branch so weighted by snow will eventually break  
from the bend, and we are not half as strong or grounded.

—Hannah Blaser ('17)

**we grew up**

we grew up with the loudest silence  
following us with yellow & red lights  
warning us against sharing too much  
winding between the women  
spreading rumors & truths like dandelion seeds  
like cobwebs in attics  
like worm-eaten apples in November

i don't know how we lived  
in all that quiet, all that death  
even when we spoke  
we couldn't say anything  
no matter how hard we tried

some of us break out  
tear through the soundproofing  
voice our shame pain anger power  
with screams that sound  
like music  
like freedom  
like some terrifying crack in the sky  
jagged & dirty & honest

some of us stay out  
find hands to hold  
that aren't our own  
cough the dirt out of our lungs

some of us spit out  
blood & broken teeth &  
storm back for our mothers & our sisters  
armed with holy fury  
with war cries that rip  
through the cobwebs & return life to the dead  
& with the knives that  
we found in our throats

—*Mary Roche ('18)*

## A Safe Place

Your sticky hand held  
mine as I shut  
the closet door.

Darkness fell over us—  
small glow of light  
crept in under the door.

You whimpered as  
the muffled yells began.  
“Let’s play circus,” I said  
and you squeezed my hand.

You marched  
my stuffed elephant  
across our small space.

I swung my Barbie  
from the darkness  
to the glow of light.

—*Mary Perez ('18)*

## The Wait

I wiped the snot  
from my nose  
as Mom drove away.

“Stop crying,” you said.  
Then you yanked me inside,  
away from the screen door.

You sat us in front of the TV  
and went to the basement.

When my eyes began to flutter  
and Eddie was asleep on my lap,  
you stumbled back upstairs  
smelling like weed and beer.

You set up the pullout couch  
and told us to go to sleep.  
We crawled in;  
you turned off the TV.

Eddie asked you  
to turn on the night light.

You paused,  
walked to the basement,  
and slammed the door.

Eddie and Davey leaned over  
and put their heads on my pillow.

We waited—our eyes open—for Mom to get home.

—*Mary Perez* ('18)

## My Mom Taught Me

A good, Christian woman,  
she knew how to forgive a man.

After the first time,  
my stomach  
tied in knots,  
my eyes beat red.

You said, "I won't do it again;  
she means nothing to me."

I thought it was my fault,  
and my brain  
searched for a way  
to fix me for you.

—*Mary Perez ('18)*

**wasteland, baby**

as a son tugs on the sleeve of his father  
there is a sun that burns inside of my gut.

a

young woman sits in front of the vanity  
and applies her make-up.

a

business man barks into his phone  
while catching the subway.

a

janitor mops the floors  
with nowhere to go.  
in and out  
of candle-lit dinners,  
to and from work  
booking vacations with the money from work  
looking for somewhere.

an old man

in a motel room with a photograph of marilyn monroe,  
many men at home  
with their wives,  
bottles,  
and  
smoke,  
but there is nowhere to go.

*-Daniel Daley ('23)*

## World of Our Morning

The sky did not belong to us  
that morning.

The air was too shivery  
the atmosphere too deeply darkened  
the city lights too bright in the distance  
for us to take ownership.

I sat huddled in a ball,  
his body wrapped around mine  
for warmth,  
the blankets just not enough  
that morning.

The sand gave off no heat  
while the day was still so hidden,  
only unfroze enough  
from the meager heat of our bodies  
to shape itself to  
our form.

Streaks appeared above the buildings  
across the water.  
We made guesses  
as to where the day would start  
and when we could greet it  
humble on the shore.

Song sparrows alighted  
on twigs that barely felt their weight.

Serenade us a little more,  
the wind isn't doing it enough,  
and I feel like being sung to  
this morning.

He listened to those creatures,  
absorbed their simple welcome  
mouth gaping  
only slightly,  
else his tender skin would freeze.



I nearly cried.

We shivered through  
that morning  
and asked  
for morning to come soon  
any moment now,  
please warm us with your light.

The sun was slow to show itself  
that morning,  
As slugging from the first cold of the season  
only as much as we  
were filled with joy.

After all the pleasing  
we could not stand to see  
such a dazzling sight,  
unable to handle such pureness  
with all our humanity  
outstretched before us.

The day convinced us to  
take shelter  
from the morning  
inside  
where sleep  
soon follows.

*—Leslie Kaup*

## The Last Hour

In the stillness of the hour  
before you left,  
I prayed that you would stay.  
Couldn't you hear me?

In the stillness of that hour  
I hoped that you were comfortable  
in that cozy old red chair  
lovingly dragged out of an attic  
to create a home in a dorm cell.

I wondered if there was room  
for me to join you;  
we'd only have to be  
a little closer, love  
and we would only take up space  
for one.

But I stayed on the floor  
and maybe gazed up at you  
with a little too much love,  
maybe I looked upward  
and felt how high  
I had really place you  
in my life, love

despite the distances  
we're caused.

I'm sorry for making you  
span the distance  
while I still remain  
in my place.  
But maybe your life  
is a little too crowded  
right now  
for me to fit in.

In that hour before you left me, love,  
I wanted to know  
how far we could stretch one hour

before it pulled us apart  
and the highway called you away.

In that hour before our good-bye, love  
all I wanted was one more hug  
one more chance to give you my words  
one more look at your eyes.

But you were too quick for me  
after all my waiting  
for these years, these days  
and you gave me the hug  
you spoke of your love  
you managed to catch my eyes  
before I could look away.

You saw it all  
and took it for yourself  
and that gave more to me  
that I could have ever imagined,  
more than I could have ever  
taken for myself.

*-Leslie Kaup*

## Wondering If You're Still Mixing Concrete

I heard some news about you  
weeks ago,  
and thought that I might call,  
resume the broken conversation  
we've kept up these past five years.  
But the thought passed,  
interest faded out,  
other involvements  
took over my focus.

I have forgotten about you.

The last I knew  
you worked in the gas station  
on Second Street  
stealing beer and cigarettes,  
bitching about not getting enough hours,  
not enough money  
to support yourself  
only to support your habits.

Maybe that is all there is to know.

But still I wonder if the news is true,  
if you are still mixing concrete  
at that place out on the highway.  
If I ever need a decorative fountain  
or a birdbath  
or a tone frog  
maybe I'll stop by,  
but not until then.

The conversation can remain broken  
for a few months longer.

I have become good  
at forgetting.

—*Leslie Kaup*

## Sunday

The long, drawn-out good-bye  
began the moment they met  
and ended two days later  
in a cafe parking lot  
between a beat-up brown Monte Carlo  
and a motorcycle with a helmet on the seat.

Hours earlier  
in a womb of satin and motion,  
she had wanted to be weak  
to crawl inside of his warmth  
break down and cry  
with the beauty of it all.  
The tears would not come.

At the end of the good-bye  
she stood weakly by his side  
drained yet unable to consume anymore,  
his expression strained.

And as she slammed the door closed  
cut herself off from his air  
silently beckoned the driver to speed away,  
to not drag it out any longer,  
she thought of the beginning of the good-bye  
and couldn't even remember  
how he had said hello.

—*Leslie Kaup*

## An Empty Gaze

Something missing  
Behind and below your left eyebrow,  
Something screaming in the hollow  
Of your sinus bone, as if someone took  
An ice pick and a bendy straw  
And mummified the gap of air just underneath  
Iris and eyelash. Maybe it happened  
While you slept, that the exodus  
Of sinew and will began and ended  
With little enough pomp: a funeral  
Uncelebrated and an absent crowd  
Gasping in unison—enough, at least,  
To leave you gaping back, all bug-eyed  
And vacuous, with gauze stretching  
From shoulder blades to reincarnate you  
Into something unwelcome,  
Something hollow and screaming  
Behind iris and eyelash.

—Irene Herzig

## Sediment

It's nothing so dramatic—  
just flat plains of ochre grass  
stretching on and on into a yellow sky  
the color of a computer screen gone  
dead and cracked here and there  
with thunder. Sometimes  
the storms refuse to break.  
They sit there full of tension,  
full of rope frayed thin and taut,  
and the calm that is not calm  
paints a still pool of water  
in the hollow inside—deep and  
cold and full of spilled milk fish  
that slide heavy and unseen  
against my legs like an old guilt in the night.

And there, I drown.

Piece by piece, the red brick  
in my throat crumbles  
and the wet sediment of it sits  
against my maladapted windpipe—  
it's learned to make do with water,  
to grasp it hard enough for stolen  
moments of oxygen that taste  
like strawberries in January.  
But now there is dirt between  
my teeth and in my lungs,  
dust turned to rust-colored mud  
occupying every corner of me  
as if winter-thickened blood  
had fallen to the earth like rain,  
but these storms herald no spring,  
coax no new life to cover the plains  
with green. They just paint the grass  
another shade of brown  
and bury me all over again.

—Irene Herzig

**For Stella at the Window: South Texas**

On the lip  
of mesa pour-off,  
ten summers from our trail head  
and a thousand miles from home,

I wonder how we got here,  
by what wash of our lives—  
                                  through arroyo, cañon,  
                                  strewn with the fresh blood and offal

                                  of victims whose names  
                                  we no longer remember,  
                                  cooled by a hawk wind  
                                  and surveyed by the shadows

                                  of scavengers—  
we've come to this lop-end,  
this pour-off  
of our love.

Survivors of snare-cacti  
with names like Fish Hook,  
                                  Eagle's Claw,  
                                  Horse Crippler,

of trails that end  
in dried-up springs  
and creatures within us  
that hunt in the night—

you of dawn light,  
chants to blue-black cowherd boy,  
released from karma's wheel,  
caresser of soul and broken bones;

me, still lashed to a mast  
(even here in the desert)  
but beyond Sirens' song—  
just faith to steer by.

What a pair we make—



Aging children  
with new lives  
by our side.

On the lip of mesa pour-off  
a falcon flies alone;  
I watch and dream  
of you, love—  
how far we've come.

—*Carl Herzig*

## Searching for Carlos: Long after Distance

Again, again  
your voice comes through  
with the aged magnificence  
of gold doubloons,  
hoisted from sea-bottom—  
words still currency  
in the old city,  
bartered for dreams  
on the night market.

Your salt resides in the traces of poems:  
tales lit with the haze of dusk,  
tinted by visions of summer.

You called it the calligraphy  
of wind roaming the streets.  
You, who have called men angels,  
who have swum the long crease  
cross-river, stroked  
by the love offered by islands  
to the sky—  
you who have shot moonbeams  
to guide fishermen—  
do these crumbs still lead back?

I followed your whispers  
into the woods, to a house  
that dissolved in the rain.  
but “. . . all the nights are not equally dark,”  
is all I can hear in the shadows.

Does the trail end here,  
in the heart of forest,  
with the quiet of birds  
frozen mid-migration?  
The wind is silent, listening.

I look for your eyes in the leaves,  
but they are only clothes guarding  
cold earth from the stars of winter.  
I ask in a grove

of the oldest, the elders.  
They speak, but answer no questions.

–*Carl Herzig*

## Sighing Ghat

*"The river will take it all." –C. Suarez*

Dark and wide with open arms  
the silent mother calls her son—

dust to mud, grey ashes shroud  
the golden blossoms floating down  
her bosom till time's delta.

Current-chilled and deep, we can forget  
the names that we have worn, the ragged faces,  
fading clothes discarded on the prison floors  
that housed our fears, our hopes borne on

our mother, who will make us well,  
in open arms, in shadowed groves,  
embrace us in white swaddling clothes.

Fire-cleansed, her son returns  
on winds of holy morning song  
to blue-black skies awash with love—

O Mother Ganga,  
take us home.

*—Carl Herzig*

## Divan Fire Sermon into Garden

Film begun, they settled down to  
Watch the lovers' scripted touch—she  
Answered his look with a frown and  
Stretched across the agéd couch.

Intertwined in habit's posture—  
Fingers seeking/ thighs pressed tight—she  
Watched the scene as if it were not  
She who fought the full-moon night.

Dénouement: her eyes closed, weary,  
Never knowing ecstasy, she,  
Even through a vision blurry  
Saw what he could never see:

Past the clocks' two-handed beating  
On their chamber's time-held wall, she  
Ran through bougainvilleas, fleeing,  
Borne on wind by His flute's call.

Drawn within by sidelong glances,  
Tip-toeing through forest groves, she  
Glimpsed the shadowed midnight dancing  
Of the Dancer with His loves.

Stolen by His flute's enchanted  
Strains, of them she saw but one—she  
Called to Him and reached her hand out,  
Called to Him that He would come.

Alive at last, her "life" behind her—  
All before her a new start—she  
Prayed His cooling nectar find the  
Burning, aching in her heart.

Suddenly she was surrounded  
By His arms, and on His chest she  
Lay her head, at last reminded  
Of the one place she could rest.

Lotus blossoms greet spring weather

With a joyful, fragrant yawn—she  
Danced until the peacocks' feathers  
Trailed across the rainbow dawn.

Soft sand by the river cushioned  
Her when she awoke, newborn—she  
Wore only the garments fashioned  
By small birds before the morn.

Then she woke again, however,  
Chamber in the forest's place—she  
Looked about and pulled the covers  
Over her and hid her face.

Separated from her Lover,  
From the dance, in one great fall, she  
Cried aloud and cursed this other  
Dream that covered over all.

Garden vision: divan's sorrow—  
Love song of a forlorn sparrow.

—*Carl Herzig*

## death valley days

--- Original Message ---

- > Date: Tue, 15 Aug 2000 16:28:39
- > From: Carol Farwell <ziplockd@excite.com>
- > To: <thetick@aol.com>
- > Subject: death valley days
- >
- >
- > holy kukamunga bob,
- > today's temperature is 90 degrees and the humidity is 90%.
- > according to channel six's "heat index," that makes the temp
- > feel like 122 degrees! so i guess you win best weather for today? i
- > was in 122 degree weather for real once. wanna hear about it?
- oh, well i'm
- > tellin' anyway.
- > when i was 16, mom, dad, mary lou and i took a trip to los angeles
- > to visit uncle bud and aunt phylis. on the way home, we drove
- > thru needles, calif and it was so hot we had to stop on the
- > ariz/calif border because all of us were getting sick. but stopping
- > by the colorado river was a bad idea because of humidity. we
- > were literally getting cooked. dad got us back to needles where
- > we checked into a motel for the afternoon and night. mom and
- > dad went to sleep in the air conditioned room. lou and i hit the
- > swimming pool. that night after the sun went down, dad found a
- > place in town that sold car window air conditioners (the '59 ford
- didn't
- > have air ... remember it? it was grey) and had it installed. the
- > next morning we started up out of the desert valley. ( isn't that
- > death valley?) glorious cool air streaming in mom's shotgun
- > window. ahhh. hadn't driven for very long until the mountainous
- > skies got black, golf ball size hail pounded dents in almost every
- > car but ours and the temperatures dropped from 122 to 40
- > degrees ... frigid air now screaming in mom's window. poor little
- > shit was getting frostbite. we were ALL freezing! turn the air off
- > you say? great idea. but no can do. you know ernie. sometimes
- > stuff didn't work out for him. COULDN'T turn that damn thing
- > off. couldn't even change the fan speed. mom started stuffing
- clothes
- > into the vents.
- > nothing could deter that unit from cooling. the hail stopped
- > most people. there were cars, campers, and semi trucks all along
- > the shoulders. but dad kept driving at a slow, steady pace and

> that may be why we didn't get car damage. while he was busy  
> with the storm, us girls were busy emptying suitcases dreaming of  
> parkas and mittens ... anything to warm us the hell UP! teeth  
> chattering.  
> it seemed like an eternity, but probably not, 'til the storm passed.  
> we, and everyone who was headed east, pulled over at a roadside  
> cafe. we congregated at the counter stools and in the booths to  
> share war stories. everyone that is except dad. he was outside  
> yanking that hundred-dollar air conditioner outta the damn  
> window. think i'll call mary lou. see if she remembers.  
later  
> buddy, carol ann.

*-Carol Farwell*



## And the Rain Still Fell

They sat in the car listening to the rain and watching the lightning bullwhip across the night. Wayne on the passenger's side remained quiet. Not more than half an hour earlier he had witnessed Bobby Ray Eyman's tirade against Communists, Satan, and Democrats, that ended with him taking his pool cue and leveling an unsuspecting patron who had just started a beer.

"Think he's still up there?" Wayne finally asked. Instead of his uniform, he had on what he'd worn to Hank's Place, a roadhouse nearby on the Jefferson state highway. The cigarette smell off his Levi's and the Remember-the-Alamo t-shirt he had gotten on a vacation to Texas dominated the moist heat inside the closed car.

"Where else would he go? He always runs back home after he gets himself into trouble."

"I don't like the rain, Mike. A warm, muggy rain puts people on edge."

"It'll be harder on Bobby Ray. We've got the benefit of surprise. He's probably feeling sorry now for what he's done. You know how he gets."

"You didn't see it, Mike. That man. All he'd done was order a beer. That's all. And on my night off, too."

"Nothing new about someone dying like he did," he said. "Nothing unusual about a dead person who shouldn't be that way. Just one more thing we have to do."

Wayne scratched his arm above the tattoo of a flaming sword he'd had done that time in Texas. The sky danced with a spider web of light, then was gone. "The guy just wanted to have a beer and sit out the storm. That's all. He's driving through town and decides to let the rain pass and drink a beer. Didn't know Bobby Ray from wallpaper, or how crazy he gets when he's off his meds. When a guy gets himself killed, it's better that he knows why and who's doing it. Don't you think a man deserves that much?"

"This rain's not letting up. It's better we get him than Corning and Mead. They don't have the history with Bobby Ray that we do. We know Bobby Ray's not a bad sort at heart. He's just different."

"He needs to be put down," said Wayne. "He's like that pit bull of Galen's that mauled his little neighbor girl. Maurice wouldn't hurt anyone, Galen told us. Playful as a beagle, he said. But you know that breed, Mike. They can turn on you fast and for no reason, the dog's genetics just catching up with it. It's a shame when it happens to anyone, but to a cute little girl like that. She'll never be the same." Wayne wiped the sweat beading the window with his palm as the rain fell harder. "Bobby Ray's just like that. You don't know when he's going to turn on you."

"This will be hard on his mom," Mike said.

"She must be a tough old bird living up here practically on her own. I hear she was an old lady when she had Bobby Ray."

"Mid-fifties maybe. But her husband was older."

"And she still had one good egg left," Wayne said.

"And he had a swimmer strong enough to make it up the channel. Shame about Big Jess. Fell asleep and turned over his rig between St. James and Armitage a month before Bobby Ray was born. The fire killed him and destroyed the only real family asset."

"Like I said, she's tough."

“Tough, but old. Bobby Ray’s taken his toll.” Mike sleeved off the window fog and looked into the storm. “My folks said Bobby Ray had outgrown his father by the time he finished grade school. He was big all right, but that’s misleading. Bobby Ray and I started school together, but they made him repeat the second and fifth grades. The summer right before he would’ve been starting junior high, he got accused of stealing underwear off Flo Tucker’s clothesline. He denied it, but juvenile court sent him to the hospital in Pikesville anyway.”

“Didn’t know you two were classmates,” said Wayne.

“For a while. He got teased a lot. What kid his size who wore the same overalls every day and repeated grades wouldn’t?” Mike closed his eyes and listened to the rain pound the car. He had never teased him, never once. So why Bobby Ray challenged him to that fight had remained one of his childhood puzzles.

They had met on the playground after the buses departed, beneath a sky so dark it looked like dusk by early afternoon. Bobby Ray took the first swing, missed, then kept swinging. Mike ducked and moved until Bobby Ray’s arms grew heavy and dropped to his sides. When that happened, Mike stepped in and landed a gut-punch. Bobby Ray dropped to his knees gasping for breath and looking up dumbfounded by what had just happened. The onlookers took off when the principal yelled from his office window. What everyone missed, and what Bobby Ray wouldn’t have wanted anyone to see, was Mike helping him back up.

“Let’s get going,” Mike said.

By the time they got outside and put on what rain gear they had, their clothes were soaked. “Loosen your weapon, but keep the safety on,” Mike said.

Wayne pulled the hood over his eyes and turned away. “I know the drill, boss.”

The Eymans lived in the country up a dirt road in a house that hadn’t been painted for so long the clapboards had weathered to bare wood. Mrs. Eyman had to make do living on Jess’s Social Security. Except for the odd jobs he’d do around Hank’s Place, Bobby Ray never had steady work. But he did enjoy Hank’s, where he could shoot pool and spout off about politics and religion. He also developed a tolerance for alcohol. Worked out well for Hank. He got back Bobby Ray’s wages, and most of his customers considered Bobby Ray’s unpredictable nature another form of entertainment.

“You don’t suppose she still keeps guns in the house, do you?” Wayne asked.

“Everyone up here has a weapon or two of some kind. You know that. Getting old or having someone like Bobby Ray at home doesn’t change the way a family lives.”

“Just hope she keeps the ammunition locked up and hidden. I sure would, having a son like that.”

The rain had pounded the gravel deep into the earth, leaving behind a paste of slick mud. They kept to the road’s edge where the ditch grass provided traction.

They came around a curve in time to see a lightning strike illuminate the little four-room house. Candles flickered through the window. The Eymans, like most families on the hillside, worked hard and kept to themselves. They considered the generosity of others as either interference or, worse, charity.

“You go around back in case Bobby Ray tries to run on us,” Mike said. “I’ll talk to Mrs. Eyman.”

"Just because you're native to these parts, don't go up there thinking you can sweet talk Bobby Ray out."

"What are you talking about?"

"People say she once worked for your dad."

Mike turned away. "Long time ago." He rubbed his forehead. "You see, after Jess Eyman died, my folks did what they could to help. Then a year or so later she came to the store with a list of everything we'd given her along with her calculations of how many hours she'd have to put in to pay it back. The way Mom told it, Dad said he didn't want a volunteer, but he did need a part-time employee to help out around the store. For ten years, she came in every Tuesday and Friday even though she had that list paid back in six months." Mike looked up at the dark sky letting the rain hit him like a morning shower. "Then something happened at school between me and Bobby Ray that embarrassed her so much she never came back. Listen, I'm not going up there planning to sweet talk anybody. I don't expect Ruth Eyman to put much stock in what happened close to thirty years ago. Not tonight. Not now. Okay?"

"Sure. Just asking."

Mike watched Wayne walk to the rear of the house before climbing the porch. The hard rain masked the sound of his footsteps on the creaking wood. He paused, and then knocked. When no one responded, he knocked louder.

The front door cracked open, and from behind it Ruth Eyman called out, "What do you want?" In the storm, her voice sounded distant and overwhelmed, like a match in a firestorm.

"Mrs. Eyman, it's Mike Killian. I've come for Bobby Ray. Is he here?"

"I allow no visitors this time of night, so just turn yourself around and get out of here. Go on, now."

"Can't do that, Mrs. Eyman. I got to see Bobby Ray. Either send him out or I'll have to come in."

"I'm not letting anyone in, not even you, Mike Killian. The only visitors we get anymore is when someone thinks Bobby Ray's done wrong. He's trying to be good, if people just leave him be."

"I've got to see him. This time he's gone too far."

"Go knock on Hank Skaden's door and talk to him. Letting Bobby Ray do those jobs, giving him beer. I can't control him no more, and you people don't stop it."

"I keep an eye on him as best I can, Mrs. Eyman. But as long as he's behaving himself, there's not a lawful thing I can do." He removed his hat and slapped it against his slicker. "I'd like to work this out."

Ruth Eyman made him wait another minute before opening the door. It had been so long since he'd seen her that Mike didn't recognize the woman in the doorway. She was bent so far over her cane that her body formed a right angle. Time and illness had reduced Ruth Eyman to the size of a child. "State your business where you stand, then leave."

"We have witnesses who saw Bobby Ray kill a man tonight. No cause, no provocation. He picked up a pool cue and brought it down on back of a man's head, a man who only wanted a cold beer and a little conversation." Ruth Eyman's body shook under the worn-out and nearly see-through house dress. "Bobby Ray's no longer here." Her stockings gathered at her ankles, pulled down by gravity.

"I can come in, you know. Don't need a warrant. I'll call it hot pursuit."

“You can call it anything you want. People like me don’t have a say anyhow, not when you folks want something. But he’s gone now. He ain’t here no more.”

“Then can I come in out of the rain?”

She waved a hand as if to say, do what you want, then turned from him. Mike followed her into the room and remained near the door as she fell into a rocking chair.

With the windows closed, the room was still and thick with humidity. Pings and splashes sounded as raindrops landed in a dozen saucers and tin cans placed around the floor.

“Like I told you, he ain’t here,” she said, starting to rock.

Mike pulled the flashlight from his belt. “You lose your power?”

“These days it’s off more than it’s on anyway.” The candle flames weaved and flickered, and shadows moved on the walls.

Mike went into the kitchen. Outside the window threads of light appeared and disappeared, followed by thunderclaps. An old Frigidaire towered over a gas range upon which rested a well-seasoned skillet. The floor linoleum cracked with black lines and curled at the seams. Two glasses sat on the counter. Mike saw all of this, but he didn’t see Bobby Ray.

He left and passed Mrs. Eyman, who looked out the window, ignoring him. In the far bedroom he found a single, well-made bed pushed snug against the back corner, its middle sagging as if it bore an invisible weight. A picture of Jesus hung above the headboard, and on the nightstand Mike saw a lamp, a fingernail clipper, and a small Bible. He knelt and lifted the bedspread to look under the bed, then stood and opened the closet. Inside he discovered three shirts on wire hangers, dress shoes, and dirty clothes on the floor. Leaving, he noticed on the dresser twenty-eight cents in change, an opened package of spearmint gum, and a *Watchtower*.

“I’ve got to look in your room,” he said.

She crossed her arms. “He ain’t here, Mike Killian. I’ve already told you that.”

“I have to look, Mrs. Eyman. Right now that’s what I have to do.”

Mike started for her bedroom but stopped when someone pounded on the front door. They both turned towards the sound. He crossed the floor and opened it. Wayne stood outside dripping water.

“Come on,” Wayne said. “I found him.”

Mike glanced at Mrs. Eyman. “Got him secured?”

“As secure as a man can be.”

Mike followed his partner on the muddy trail to a tool shed behind the house. They stood under the eaves. In the black night, the rain fell like a waterfall, and the earth flashed and faded with each web of lightning. Mike jerked when he heard a tree crack in the dense hillside stand of scrub oak and sedge.

“Where is he?” he asked.

“It didn’t take long to notice it. There’s enough lightning to illuminate a small city.”

Wayne pointed to the ground between where they stood and the back door. “Over there.”

At first Mike noticed only the white propane tank. Then another flash came and he saw a dark tarp on the ground covering what could have been a mound of dirt. Pools of water had collected in the folds of the tarp. Around the edges and beyond, the mud looked thick enough to trap a large animal.

“You look under it?” Mike asked, leaning back further under the eaves.

“It’s him. Our boy’s been shot in the back.”

“Get a pulse?”

“See for yourself, but I’m telling you he’s dead.”

Mike lifted the tarp and held two fingers to Bobby Ray’s neck. “Let’s go,” he said.

At the front door Mike started to knock, hesitated, then entered. “We found him,” he said. “We found your son.”

She rocked slowly in her chair, humming some old church hymn Mike recognized from his youth. When the song ended, she opened her eyes. “I sent him to the shed for nails and wood scraps. The house leaks so bad, you know.”

“I’d like to know what happened, Mrs. Eyman,” Mike said.

She leaned her head back and closed her eyes. Her lips moved, but without sound. Then she spoke. “Bobby Ray knew he went too far. He wanted me to help him, thought maybe I could do something to help him. The boy got awfully confused without his pills.”

Wayne stood behind Mike just inside the front door. Both men dripped water onto the wood floor sagging beneath their feet. The rain fell and the room flashed white as veins of lightening appeared and disappeared.

“Bobby Ray started out life facing the wrong way and just kept walking,” she said. “Never could turn himself around. He came back from Pikesville all different. They said he needed those pills. Sometimes we had them, other times we didn’t.”

“Where’s the rifle?” said Mike.

“My room. Where it’s been ever since Jess passed.”

Wayne stepped towards her. “Where you going?” Mike said.

“To get her. She’s as good as confessed.”

“Leave her be.”

Mrs. Eyman resumed humming, her hands still folded in her lap.

“You mean we come back tomorrow and finish things up?” asked Wayne.

“I mean we’re finished.”

“I don’t get it.”

“We found him, found him along the road. Someone either with a grudge or who mistook him for someone else must’ve shot him. We don’t know, but we’re investigating. That’s what we’re going to say.”

“But . . .”

“But what?”

“Bobby Ray’s a good boy, you know,” Mrs. Eyman said. “He wanted to do the proper thing, he did. He started each morning by saying, ‘Mama, I’m going to do right today. You’ll see. I’m not making those mistakes anymore.’ But Bobby Ray wasn’t strong, and we didn’t always have them pills. Then Hank gave him those jobs. Some folks get all the luck they need without trying, while others just try to make do. Jess used to say life evens out. Maybe it does, but I ain’t seen it.”

Mike touched Wayne’s shoulder. “Come, I need your help.”

“I couldn’t let anyone take him away. Not again. They said punishing Bobby Ray would teach him to behave himself. Pikesville didn’t teach Bobby Ray that. I told them it wouldn’t. I said, let him come home and let me help him. But they took him, did what they pleased. And when he told me what he’d done tonight, I knew someone’d be coming. Don’t know whether having it be you’s a good thing or bad, Mike. Guess it don’t matter, not with having to care for my boy and getting things settled. I don’t have much time left to get things settled.”

When Bobby Ray's body was in the trunk, Wayne said, "I don't like this."

Mike glanced between his partner and the house where through the rain and the window he saw the small figure of Ruth Eyman. "We're setting him beside the road to make it look like he was on his way home. Then I'll report it and say I'm going out to inform his mother. We'll investigate Bobby Ray's killing, or course, but the chief won't press much. No one's going to complain."

"I still don't like it."

Mike turned his chin to the window where Mrs. Eyman rocked and the candles flickered. "Think the county will be safer with her in jail? That with having her tried and sentenced we'd be averting a crime wave?" He slammed the trunk shut.

Wayne turned away. "Man, it's miserable out here."

"It's done now. We got a long night ahead of us."

"She's going to need help," Wayne said, getting into the car and closing the door.

Mike started the engine. "She always did," he said, as the rain fell. "If she'll let me, I'll do what I can."

—James O’Gorman

## September Sonnet

September slipped itself onto my lap  
With spreading bounty: copper, coral, red.  
Tomatoes swell and droop; the acorns rap  
Our roof as I lie gratefully in bed.

Some iambs tumble loosely from my brain,  
Half-green and looking for a rhyming pair  
To help me make my thankfulness more plain,  
To sound my blessings, round and broad and fair.

But then I hear the breathing soft and deep,  
Reminding me that autumn's gifts are slight  
When set beside the one who in his sleep,

My happiness holds silently and tight.  
Such fullness of the season I do reap,  
Which will sustain me through a winter's night.

—*Nancy Hayes*

## December Sonnet

That I am of a certain age, which makes  
Me wake at three or two or four in deep,  
Still hours, enables me to take  
Some stock in things I'd miss if I could sleep,  
Such as the moonshine on mid-winter snow.  
It casts ink shadows off the branching oaks  
Across a swath of frozen white below,  
Their crooked, radiating lines like spokes.  
While peering down across the lawn I can't  
Distinguish glistening ground from daylight skies;  
A double vision through my dreamy slant  
Transfigures worries into lullabies.

In bed again, eyes shut, thoughts calm, soul still,  
By night enlightened, I fear less death's chill.

—*Nancy Hayes*



## The Conviction of Things Not Seen

Have you never felt it? The rattle of a broken  
table leg, forgotten in the moving truck,

echoing in a new room of unpacked boxes.  
I feel it all the time:

in anxiety dreams; in the kitchen, waiting  
for hot water; in light conversation when your name flits in  
and out again,

a poor, lost bird.

—*Emily Kingery*

## Etymology of Compromise

There is only one use  
for an oxen yoke,

one word for the weight  
of giving up

together. But what is the word  
for furrows rising,

for the terrible need  
to imagine new skin

that does not sting,  
that is not the raw groove

where compromise hangs?  
It must sound the same

as braying animals,  
clumsy, sad-eyed friends

who eat from troughs,  
even in spring.

—*Emily Kingery*

## The College Girls

We had visions more necessary than eyes.  
We dressed up our names for funerals  
and piled plenty of dirt on the flowers.

We spent our summers not begging  
for forgiveness, but pinching apart  
our cuts, to keep them bright, in case.

At parties, we flinched like lambs  
in brambles, shook our hair to scatter out  
thorns. We cried over them, ceremoniously.

Other girls said starving after.  
They pushed our thorns into piles at the sink  
and, sneering, called them pins.

We made our meals of coke, holding in  
like balloons. Whole birds appeared  
less to us than bones in a wing.

Where is my, we took turns wailing.  
We thought of mother, pride, but  
those were easy words,

too plain. We let the vowels of  
where is my curve in our mouths,  
like coming, or significance.

We repeated them like dead first loves.  
We swapped our lives for theirs because  
that is what it was to believe,

and no one said it would make orphans of us all,  
and no one said it didn't count as communion,  
that vision is not eating, but eating is,

that Oh, Christ is a phrase for girls  
who dawdle in long aisles of bread,  
waiting to be asked if they are lost.

—Emily Kingery

## Vermin

Someone is eating the old woman's marigolds, some animal slipping past the fence to lop off their heads. *I thought no one would eat them*, she wails. *That's why I plant them every year, and now what's left?*

Motherhood is ugly. The absurdity of its sadness, all those fat openings—loosening, graceless. Meanwhile, there are dozens of blondes laughing at the table beside us, frothy orange petals tumbling from their mouths. The brightness is irresistible. Their teeth are so young.

Their drinks arrive, weighted with garnish they will chew for hours so you will believe they are never hungry. You lick at your mouth; your hand moves in my hair. You believe blonde is who we all are. We stack up your words with the rest, fake coins in a machine. We tell you, *You're different*, that small ejected prize.

You will touch me one day and marigold wilt will fall from your sleeve. There is *no reason to cry*, you will say, and I will gather it up like a brood of someone else's children.

Perhaps it will be as you say: falsehood, invention, trash. My woman's heart thriving on easy, pungent blooms. But there is the fact of the yard, the thick, dark dirt of it. There is the image of you spread out on the table, making angels in flower heaps. The future of you returning to me, smeared in the musk of dead things.

—Emily Kingery

## Expectancy

If you want to find a way out, begin by typing *months*,

and when you instead type *moths*, you will learn that an adult moth can die in one month but that it will hatch a family.

It will trust the openwork in your home,

though a home is a trap, a place where families languish.

You will not be surprised to find holes in your sweaters.

But you will discover, typing *moth problem*, that moths don't eat, don't even have mouths to take fiber inside them.

It's the young who devour what belongs to you.

You will tuck away pouches of lavender and cedar, you will read about naphthalene,

but hunger is the problem, is always the only problem.

To throw out all that can be eaten, type *what moths eat*, but you will learn too much

and research starvation instead: *Can you starve an egg?* You will plan to clean the pantry. You will type *How long*

*before bodies turn to powder?* Now imagine winter afternoons

when children are ready to come indoors, arms raised for help unbundling.

Begin again by admitting what they are. See the small bodies invading cupboards. See them seduced by light, impatient for wings.

—Emily Kingery



**The Wizard of Oz**  
1992, *watercolor*, 16" x 20.5"

John Schmits ('57)



**My Name Zubitz**  
*1992, gelatin silver print*

Leslie Bell ('72)



A Stone Throne Gathers No Moss  
1994, acrylic on canvas, 72" x 72"

Leslie Bell ('72)





**Eve's Apple-green Dress**  
*1996, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"*

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Along the Way**  
2000, *oil on canvas*, 30" x 36"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**A Fresh Start after W**  
2005, oil on canvas, 48" x 55"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Four Strong Winds**  
2007, oil on canvas, 48" x 55"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**The Future Is His**  
2009, oil on canvas, 12" x 12"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**At the Tide Pools**  
2010, oil on canvas, 48" x 55"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Sky, Light, Flowers**  
2011, oil on canvas, 48" x 55"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Far from Home**  
2013, oil on canvas, 36" x 30"

Leslie Bell ('72)





**Moon Mail**  
2013, oil on canvas, 28" x 24"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Tightrope Walker**  
2014, oil on canvas, 30" x 36"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Skinny Dipping in Monet's Pond**  
*2011, oil on canvas, 24" x 28"*

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Celestial Milkmaid**  
2007, oil on canvas, 48" x 55"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Playing at Saints**  
2019, oil on canvas, 28" x 24"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**Good Housekeeping**  
2019, mixed media on handmade paper, 28" x 24"

Leslie Bell ('72)



**All I Want to Do Is Paint**  
1993, pastel on paper, 19" x 26.5"

Bob O'Hare ('69)



**untitled**

1994, pastel on paper, 29" x 21"

Bob O'Hare ('69)





**Nightlight**

*1994, oil on unstretched canvas, 17" x 21"*

David McDaniel ('70)



**Man on Subway**  
*1996, oil on canvas, 25" x 22"*

David McDaniel ('70)



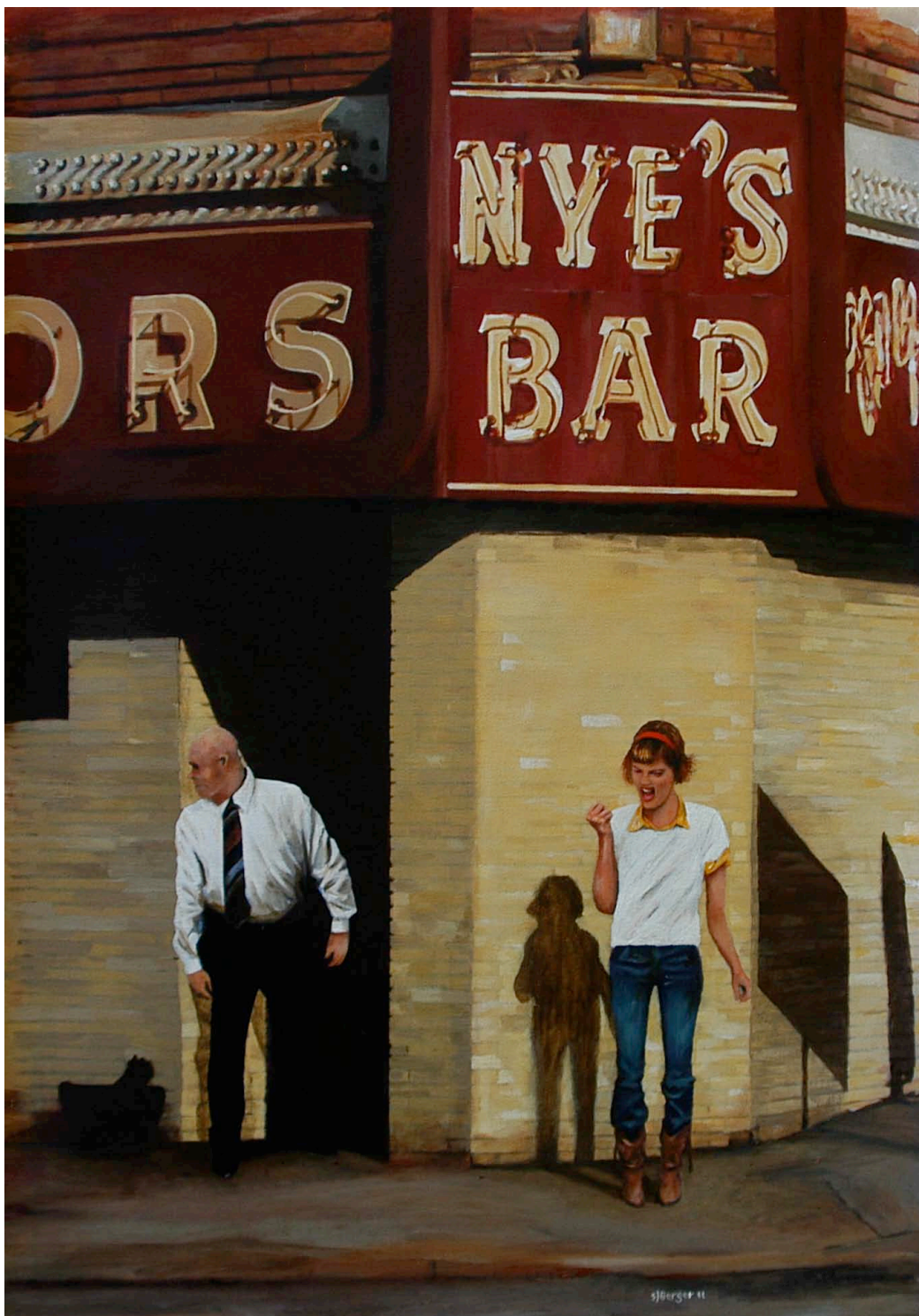
**Another Spring**  
*1999, oil on canvas, 26" x 23"*

David McDaniel ('70)



**One-Pointed Concentration Mudra**  
2003, *black-and-white intaglio print, 9" x 9"*

Katie Kiley ('74)



**What Just Happened in There?**  
2011, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 24"

Steve Berger ('78)



**Flying on a Tractor**  
*2014, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 40"*

Steve Berger ('78)



**Lake Maidens**  
2018, acrylic, 30" x 50"

Steve Berger ('78)



**Make-out**

2016, silkscreen, 48" x 36"

Karen Blomme ('81)





**Titillation**

2016, silkscreen, 36" x 30"

Karen Blomme ('81)



b.bar.b  
2018, 16" x 20"

Karen Blomme ('81)



**Nude Landscape**  
2014, silk screen, 24" x 30"

Karen Blomme ('81)



**Blessing of the Tree**  
2003, *acrylics on wood*, 25.125" x 30.125"

Kunhild Blacklock ('91)



**Prominent**

*1998, mixed media on panel, 9.875" x 5.5"*

Karin Kuzniar ('98)



**Syrup**

2018 mixed media on handmade paper 12" x 9.25"

Karin Kuzniar Tweedie ('98)



**Mister**

2019, 8.5" x 10.75"

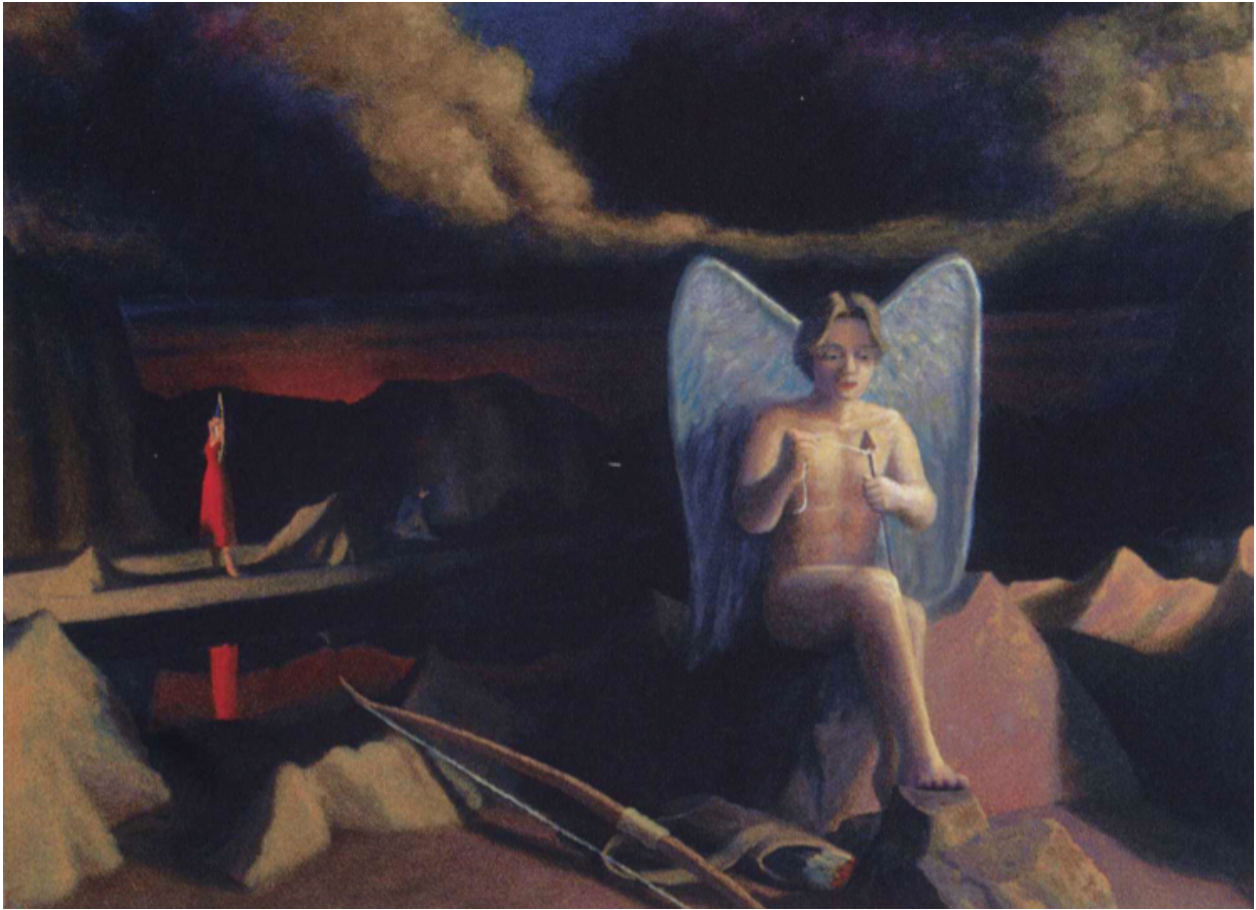
Karin Kuzniar Tweedie ('98)



**As Time Goes By . . .**  
*1997, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"*

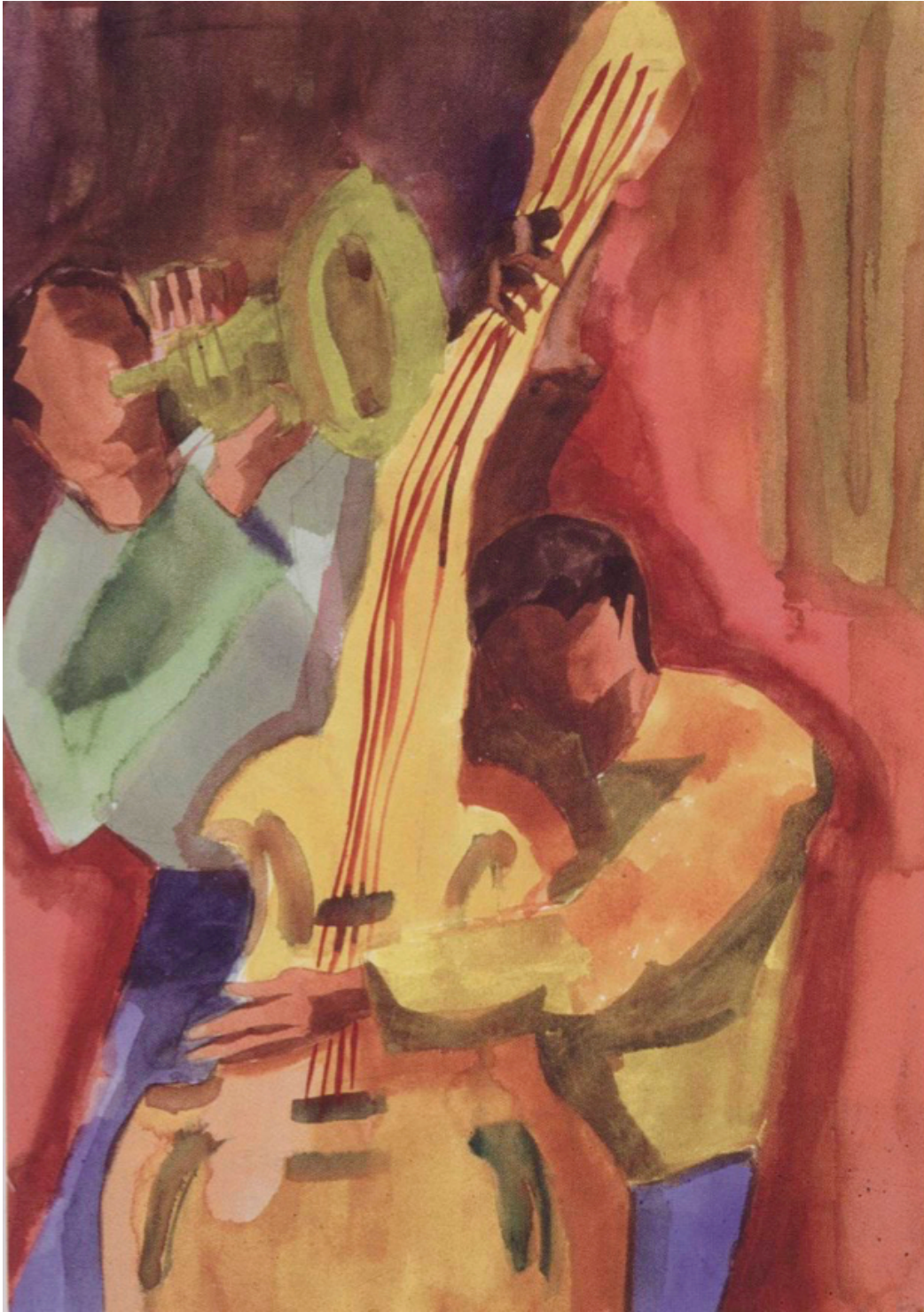
Christopher Bradshaw ('99)





**The Death of Cupid**  
*1998, oil and acrylic on canvas, 36" x 47.75"*

Christopher Bradshaw ('99)



**Blowing Sessions**  
1999, watercolor, 30" x 22"

Nathan Becker ('00)



**Deceit**

1999, oil on canvas, 40" x 32"

Gina Radochonski ('00)



**Home**

1992, watercolor, 9.5" x 12.75"

Chris Fields ('01)



**Pride**

2005, oil pastels, 28" x 20"

Brendan Gould ('02)



**Inspiration**  
2005, oil pastels, 32" x 20"

Brendan Gould ('02)



**Out of Control**  
2006, oil on canvas, 40" x 30"

Brendan Gould ('02)



**Hero Instinct**  
2006, charcoal, 10" x 7"

Brendan Gould ('02)





**untitled**  
*2006, gelatin silver print*

Dave Morehead ('02)



**untitled**  
2006, *gelatin silver print*

Dave Morehead ('02)



**untitled**  
*2006, gelatin silver print*

Dave Morehead ('02)



**untitled**  
*2013, digital photograph*

Dave Morehead ('02)



**untitled**

*2002, oil on canvas, 16" x 20"*

Debra Bahns ('03)



**untitled**

*2002, silver gelatin print, 6.5" x 9.5"*

Beth Curley ('03)



**The Geographer**

2019, neoprene, tissue paper, acrylic, and synthetic hair

Daniel Rairdin-Hale ('03)



**untitled**

2002, oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

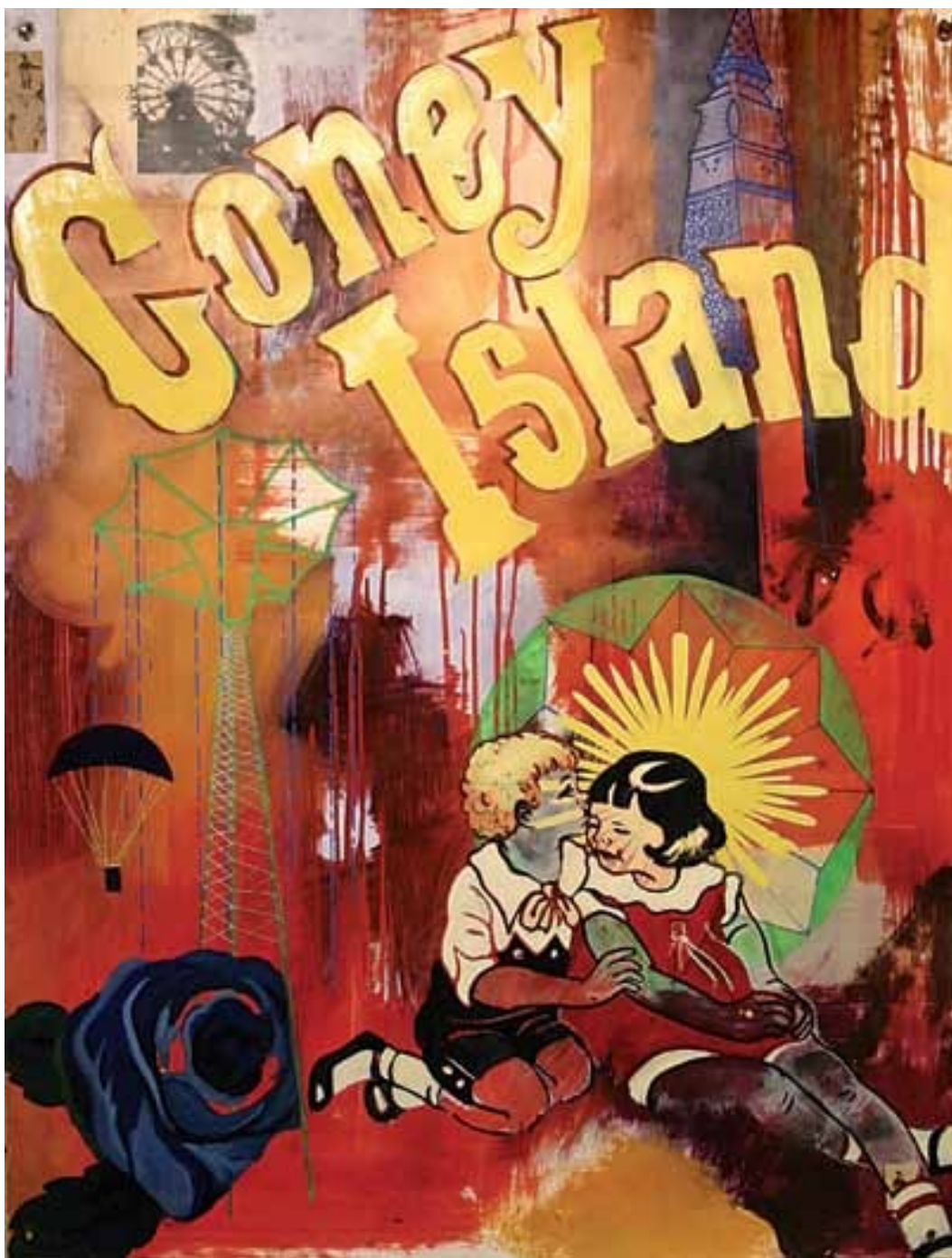
Gretchen Stabile ('05)





**Pink Poodle**  
2007, oil and enamel on fabric, 48" x 48"

Heidi Hernandez ('06)



**Coney Island**  
2007, oil on canvas, 50" x 38"

Heidi Hernandez ('06)



**House**

2009, oil on paper, 24" x 48"

Heidi Hernandez ('06)



**happy funtime**  
2012, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"

Heidi Hernandez ('06)



**Ethical Insight**

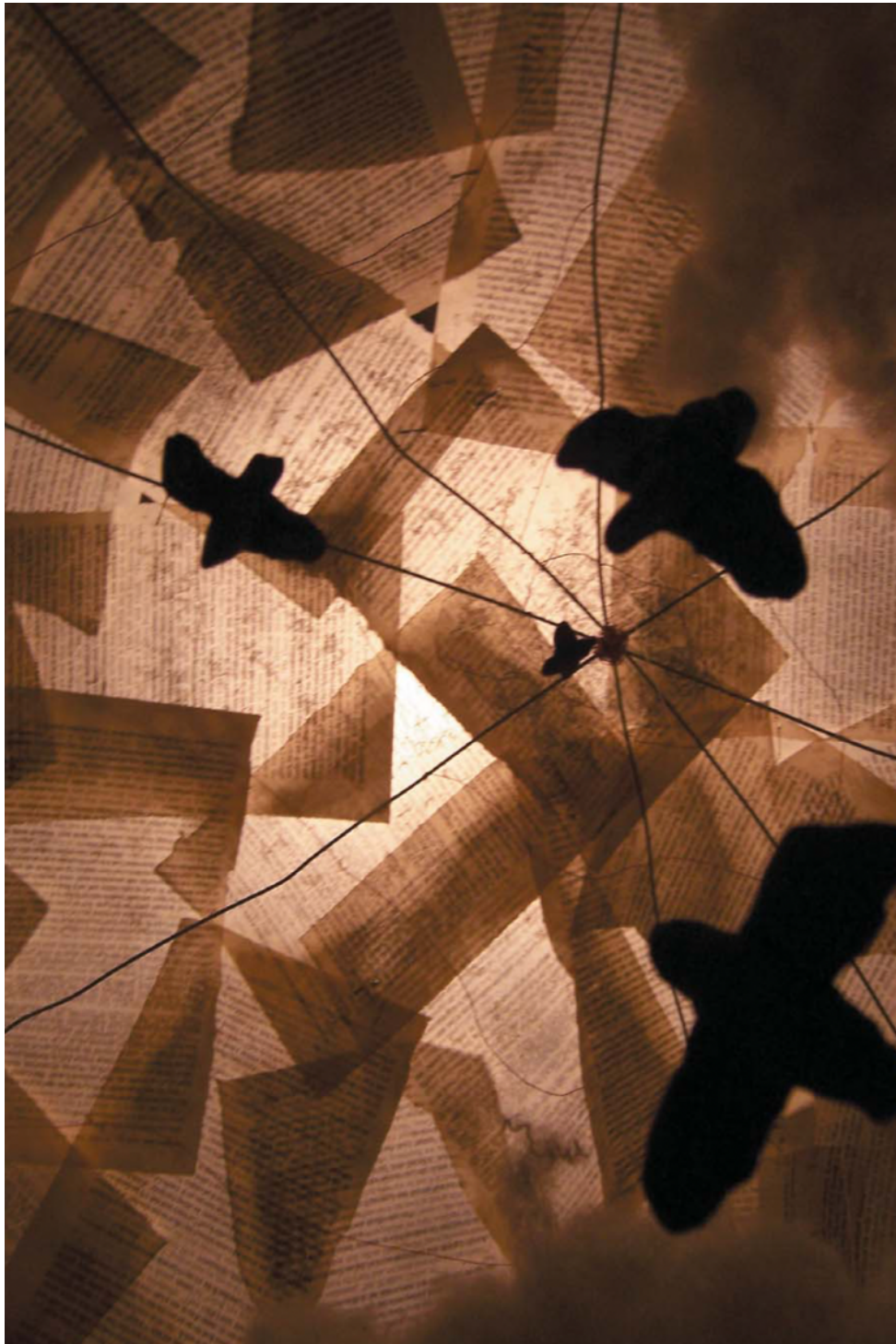
2008, *mixed media on canvas, 12" x 9"*

Margaret O'Reilly ('07)



*A Space through Time*  
2010, digital photograph

Adam Hurlburt ('08)



**The Flight of Logos**  
2007, *mixed media*

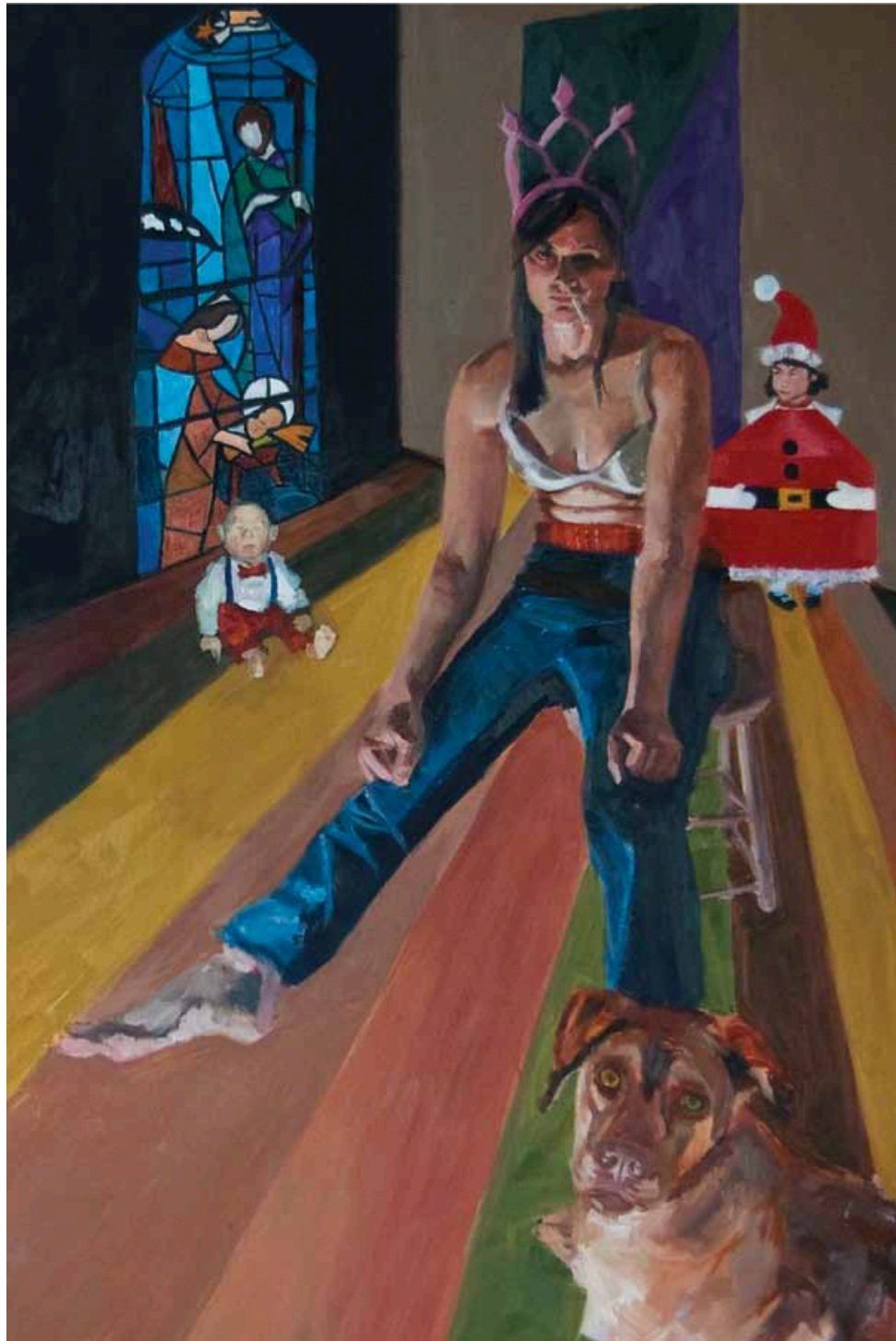
Rachel Longstreet ('09)



**Post-It, Couch, and Tack**  
2014, oil on canvas, 30" x 46"

Rachel Longstreet ('09)





Striped Carpet on 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
2009, oil on canvas, 50" x 35"

Marta Currier ('09)



**Other People's Problems**  
2012, oil on linen, 48" x 36"

Zach Cleve ('09)



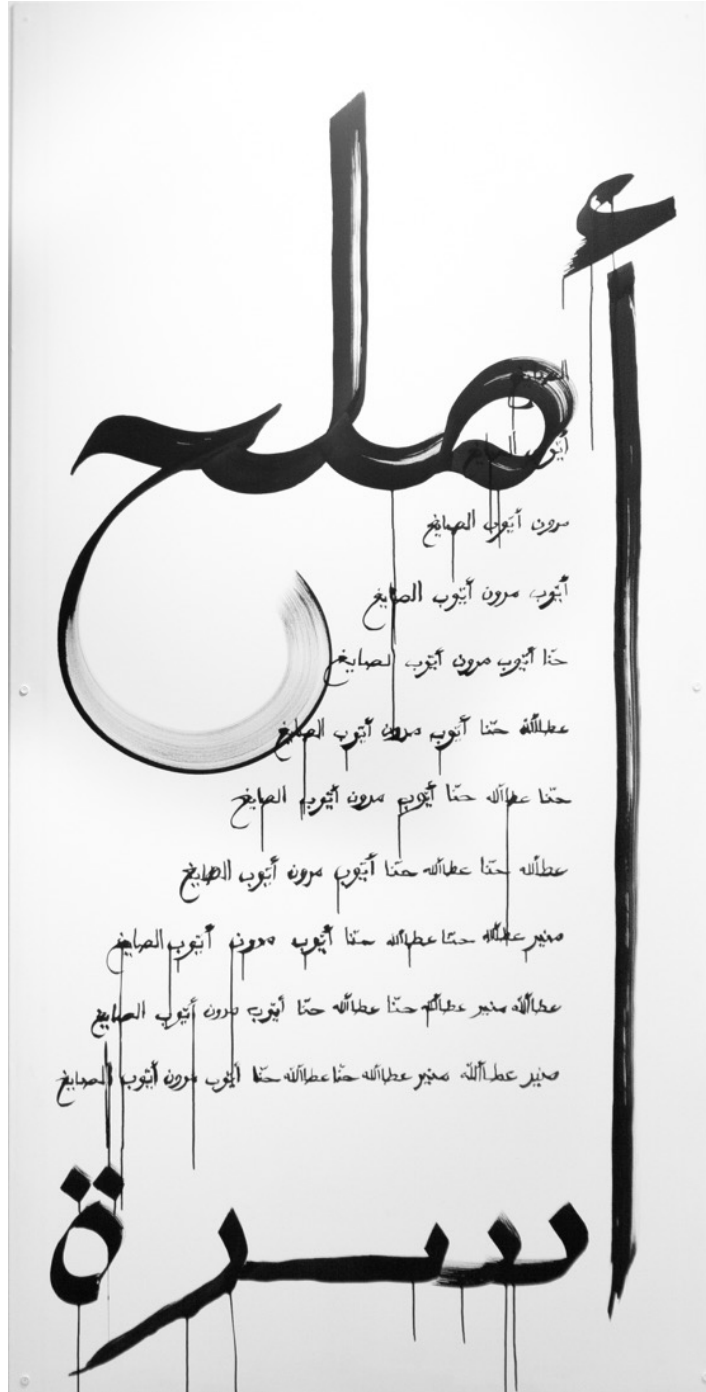
**Beautiful Isolation**  
2011, *digital photograph*

Grant Legan ('10)



**Wajib Maghrebi**  
2009, *digital photograph*

Munir Sayegh ('11)



My family tree in Arabic, with the names  
of all the first-born men, ending with mine.

**Realized Obligation**

2011, India ink on drywall, 8" x 4"

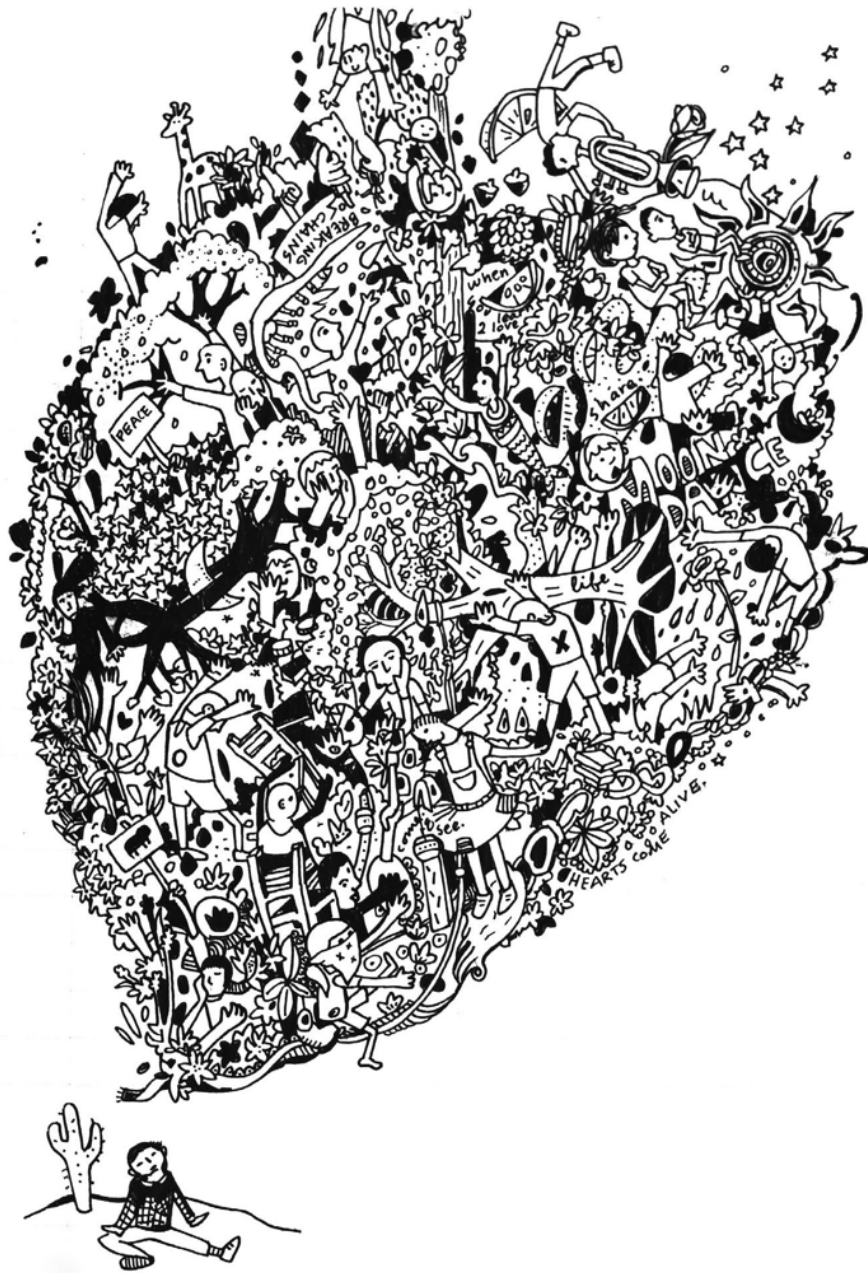
Munir Sayegh ('11)



**Suckoon**

*India ink and inkjet ink on Masonite board, 24" x 32"*

Munir Sayegh ('11)



**Hands That See**  
2013, pen and ink, 7" x 5"

Sarah Wurst ('11)



**Vrindavan**

*2025, pen and colored pencil, 11" x 17"*

Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)





**Chesler Park**

*2015, pen and colored pencil, 11" x 17"*

Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)



**Duck Creek Watershed**  
2020, pen and colored pencil, 20" x 30", 2020

Sarah (Wurst) Holst ('11)



**Strange Fruit**  
2011, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

Calista Heckman ('12)



**Foxy Shazam**  
2013, oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

Steve Andresen ('12)



**Solace**  
2012, oil on canvas, 36" x 46"

Lee White ('13)



**Infirmary**  
2013, oil on canvas, 46" x 56"

Lee White ('13)



**Dog Days**  
2015, oil on canvas, 48" x 60"

Lee White ('13)



**Homesick**  
2015, oil on canvas, 48" x 60"

Lee White ('13)





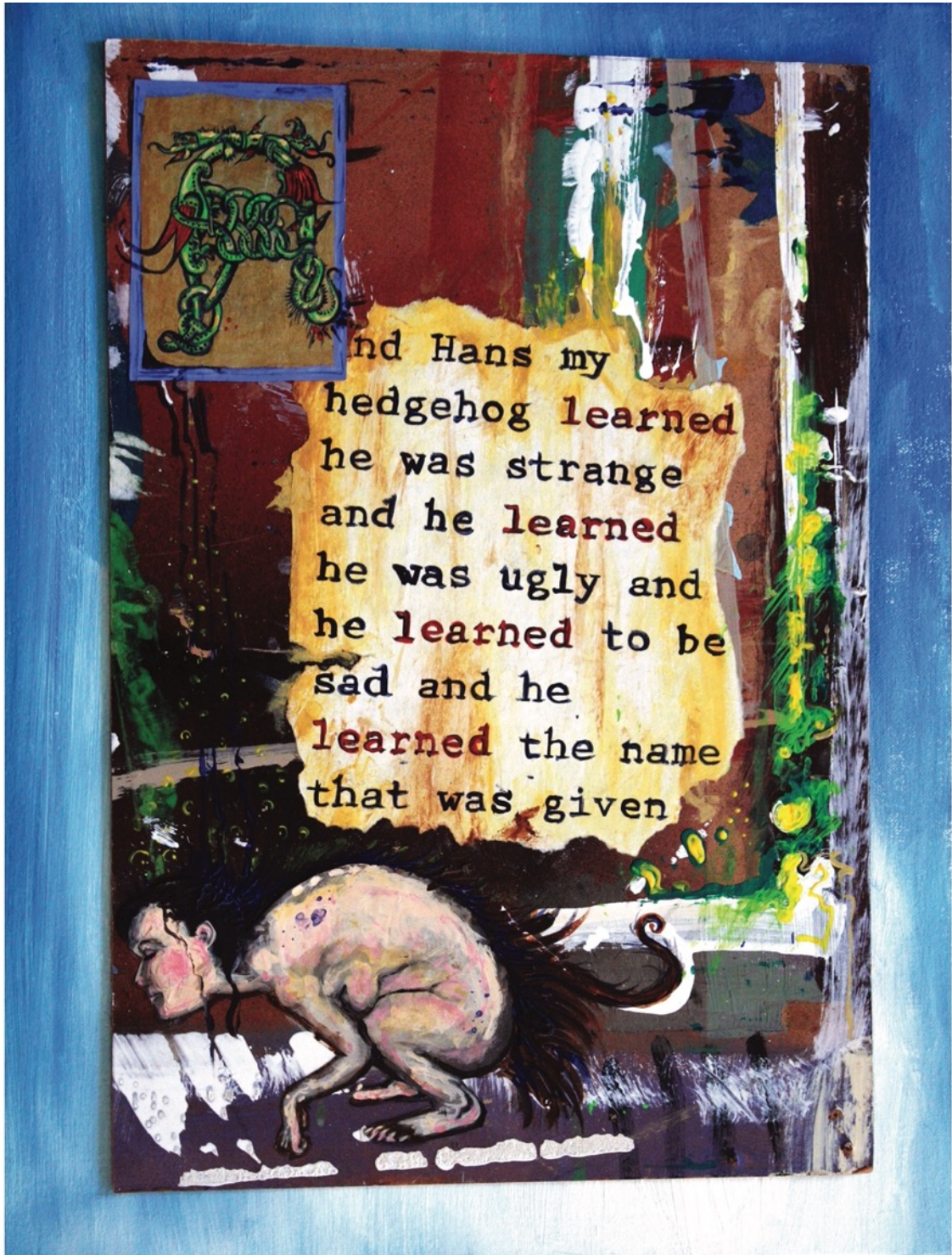
**Wooden Boy in Fireplace**  
2016, oil on canvas, 48" x 60"

Lee White ('13)



**Intellectual Ferment**  
2016, oil on canvas, 48" x 60"

Lee White ('13)



Evolving  
2013, mixed media collage, 12" x 18"

Leah Richter ('14)



**Ephemera**

*Oil on panel, 3' x 4'*

Leah Richter ('14)



**Portal**  
2014, oil on panel, 4' x 3'

Leah Richter ('14)



**Nella Draws Herself**  
*2015, oil on panel, 3' x 4', 2015*

Leah Richter ('14)



**Nella Dreaming**  
*2015, oil on panel, 3' x 4', 2015*

Leah Richter ('14)



**Family Portraits**  
2016, oil on panel, 12" x 12"

Leah Richter ('14)





**Sidewalk Chalk**  
2016, oil on panel, 12" x 12"

Leah Richter ('14)



**Metallic Yosemite**  
*2013, photograph*

Natalie Gates ('15)



**A Day in a Life**  
*2011, digital photograph*

Morgan Frei ('15)



**Starlight**

2013, oil on canvas, 30" x 46"

Ken Cunningham ('16)



**untitled**

2019, oil on canvas, 16" x 40"

Kenneth Cunningham ('16)



**untitled**

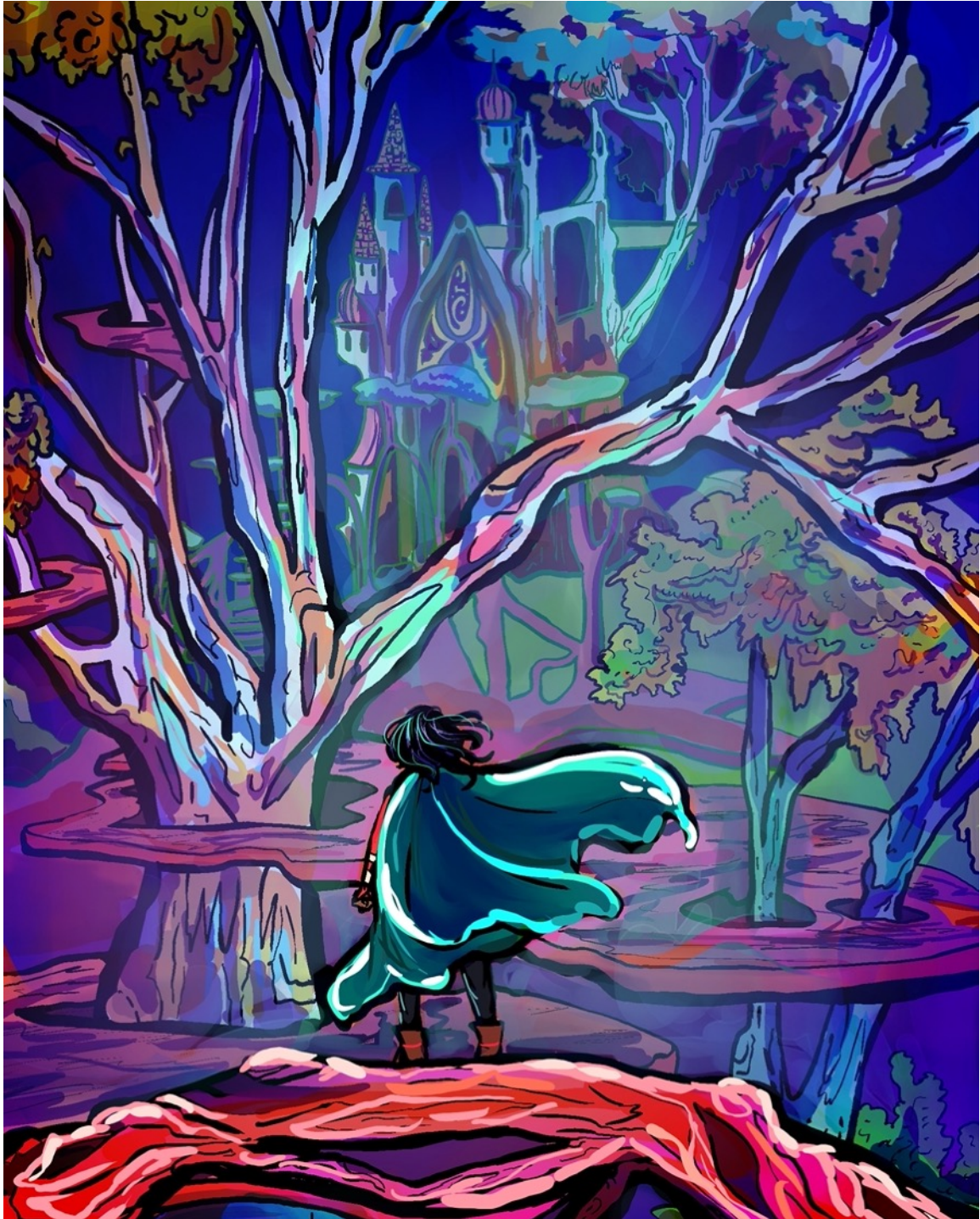
*2019, oil on canvas, 51" x 72"*

Kenneth Cunningham ('16)



**Fire and Air**  
*2013, digital photograph*

Michael McFarland ('16)



**Hero's Destination**  
2019, digital illustration

Emma Hubner ('17)





**Reborn**  
2016, digital photograph

Jessica Boone ('18)



**Pure**  
2017, digital photograph

Jessica Boone ('18)



**Brainstorm**

2017, oil on rag paper, 20" x 30"

Megan Peterson ('20)



**Natural Reflection**  
2019, Adobe Photoshop, 8" x 10"

Megan Peterson ('20)



**Windswept**  
2019, digital illustration, 9.5" x 5"

Megan Peterson ('20)



**Shift**

2019, oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

Megan Peterson ('20)



**Earthfall**

2019, oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

Megan Peterson ('20)



**untitled**  
*1992, silver print, 5.5" x 4.25"*

Joyce Moseley





**Private Torment**  
1992, 4-color offset collage, 18" x 12"

Mark Towner



El Patio  
2008, digital collage

Matt Sanchez



Vrindavan Parikrama  
2000, *photograph*

Carl Herzig



**Govardhana Fields**

1999, *photograph*

Carl Herzig



**Vraja-vasi Laughter**  
*2008, digital photograph*

Carl Herzig



**Lemon Peeling**  
2010, *digital photograph*

Carl Herzig



**Orange Sadhu**  
*2011, digital photograph*

Carl Herzig



**Concern**  
2018, *digital photograph*

Carl Herzig





Directions Balance Glance  
2018, digital photograph

Carl Herzig



**Woman, Door, Painted Wall**  
2018, *digital photograph*

Carl Herzig



**Morning News**  
2019, *digital photograph*

Carl Herzig



Afterschool Candy Store  
2000, *photograph*

Stella Herzig



**Waiting**  
2018, *digital photograph*

Stella Herzig



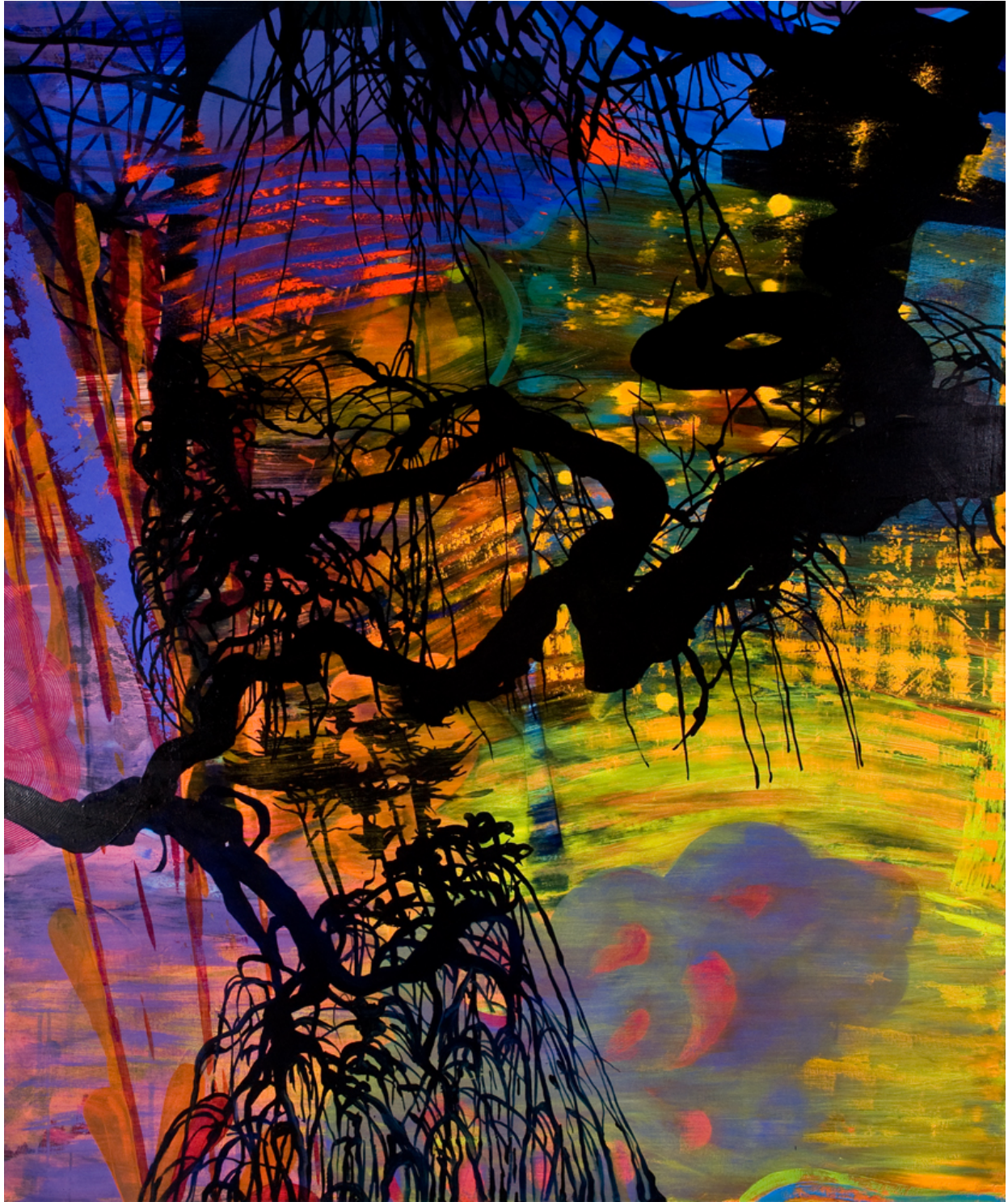
**Sky Determines**  
2005, oil on canvas, 60" x 72"

Kristin Quinn



**Calliope Suite**  
2007, oil on canvas, 72" x 60"

Kristin Quinn



Sanderling's Signal  
2007, oil on canvas 72" x 60"

Kristin Quinn





**Night Caravan**  
2012, oil on canvas, 48" x 36"

Kristin Quinn



**Queen of the May**  
2018, oil on canvas, 72" x 60"

Kristin Quinn



**Carnaval**  
2006–2007, oil on canvas, 66" x 44"

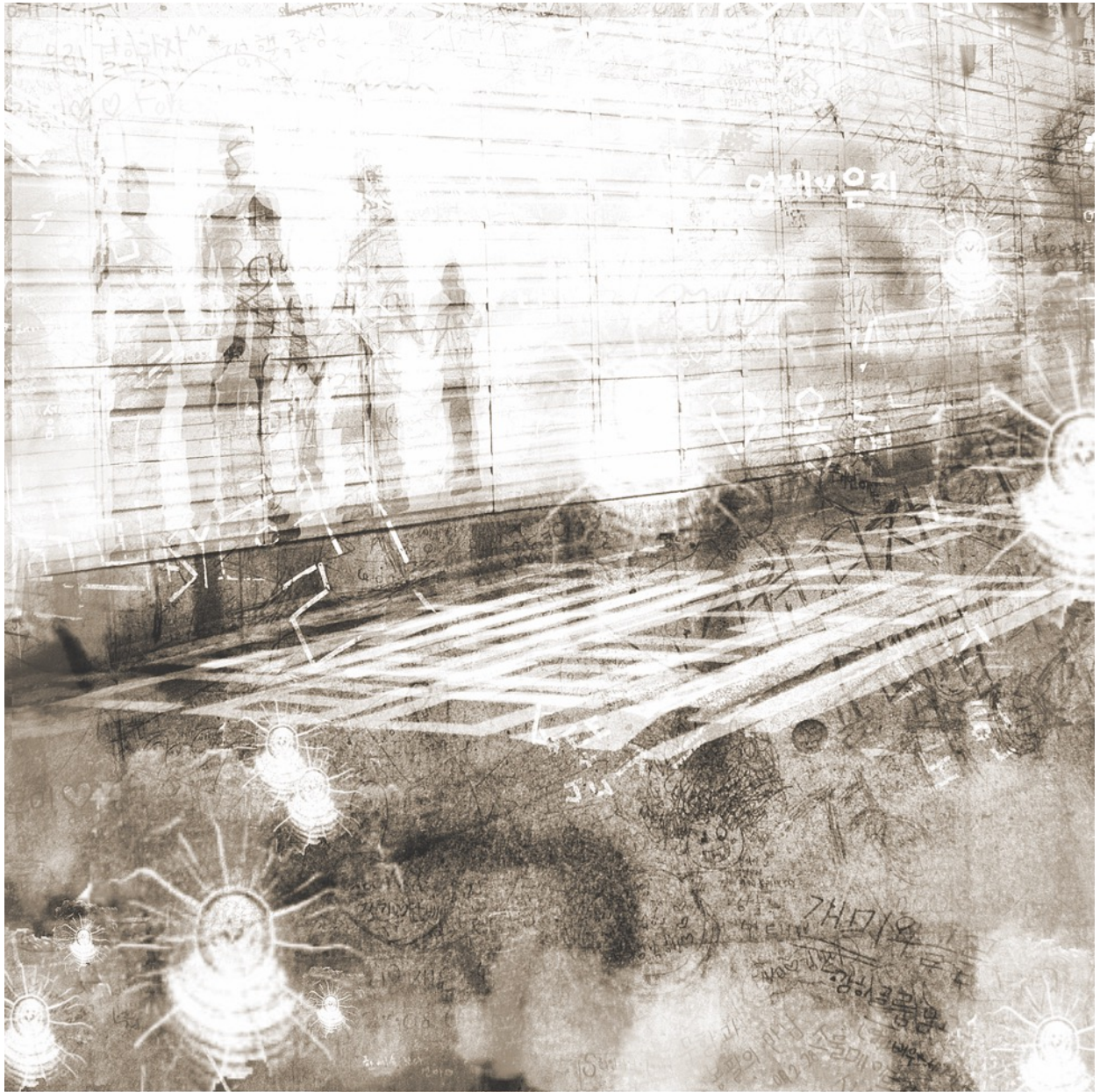
Steve Banks



**Katy**

2010, *digitally printed fabric, glass beads, glitter, rhinestone buttons, 12" x 28.5" x 2.5"*

Alison Filley



**Imprint**

2010, digital collage painting 20" x 20"

Renee Meyer Ernst



**The Phrenologist's Dilemma**

2015, photographic pigment print on kozo paper, 16.5" x 23.5"

Randy Richmond



**Still Life with Frozen Trout**  
2017, photograph on archival pigment paper, 18" x 24"

Randy Richmond

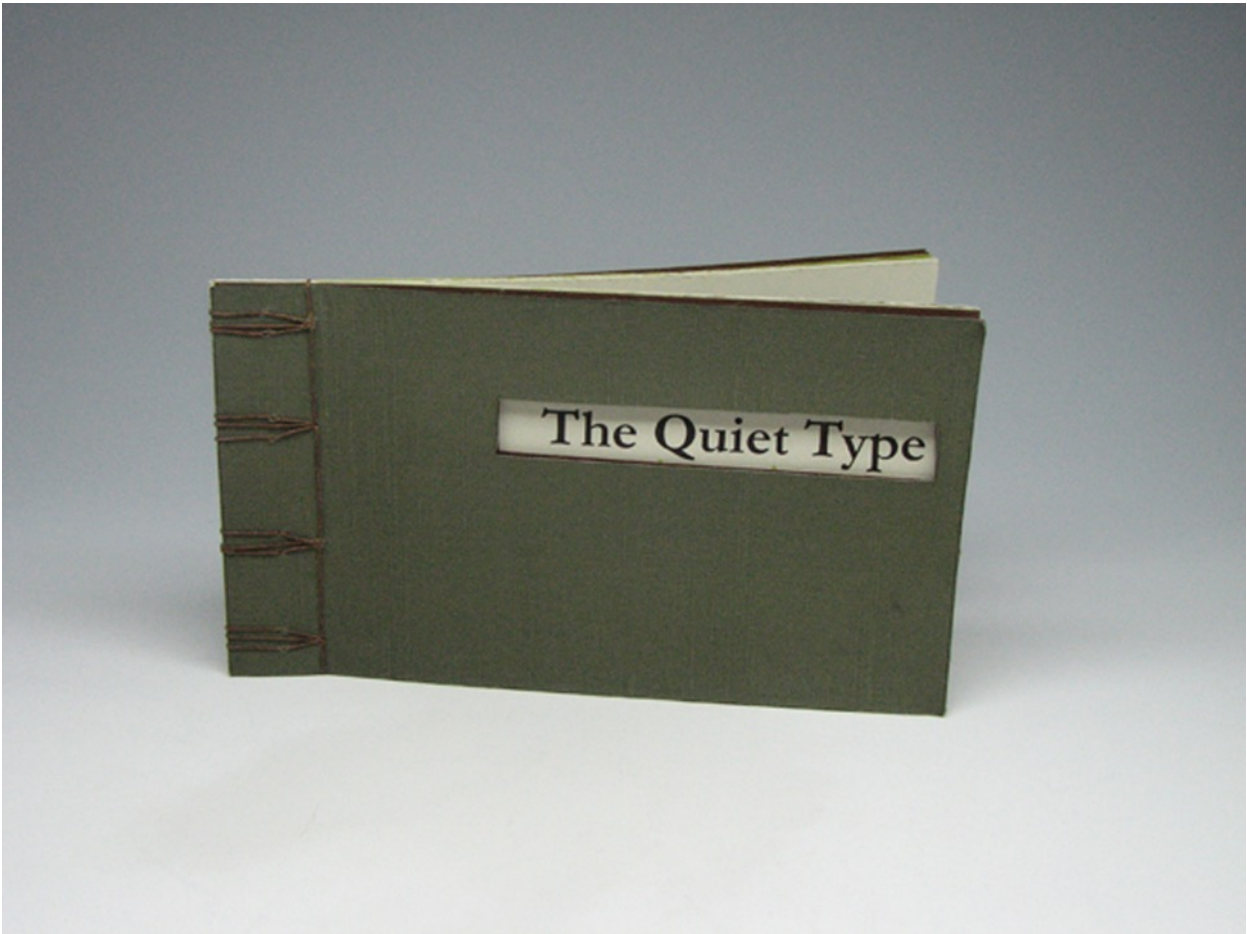
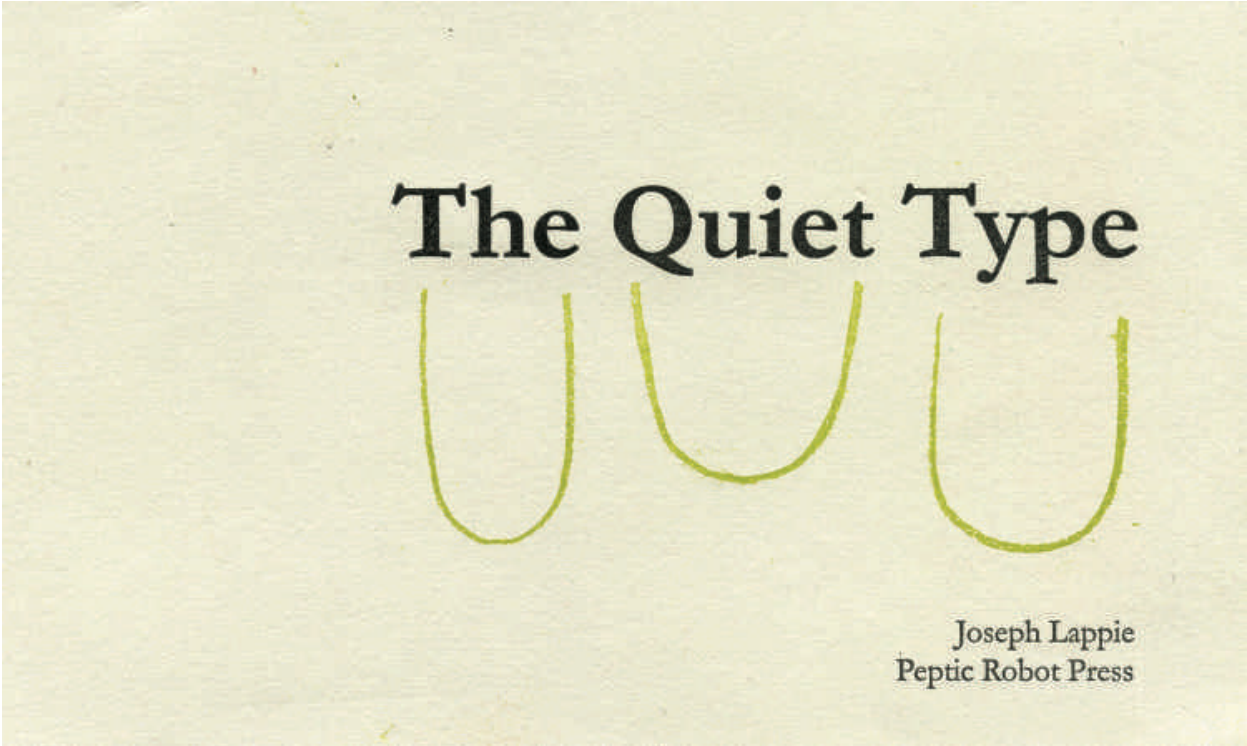


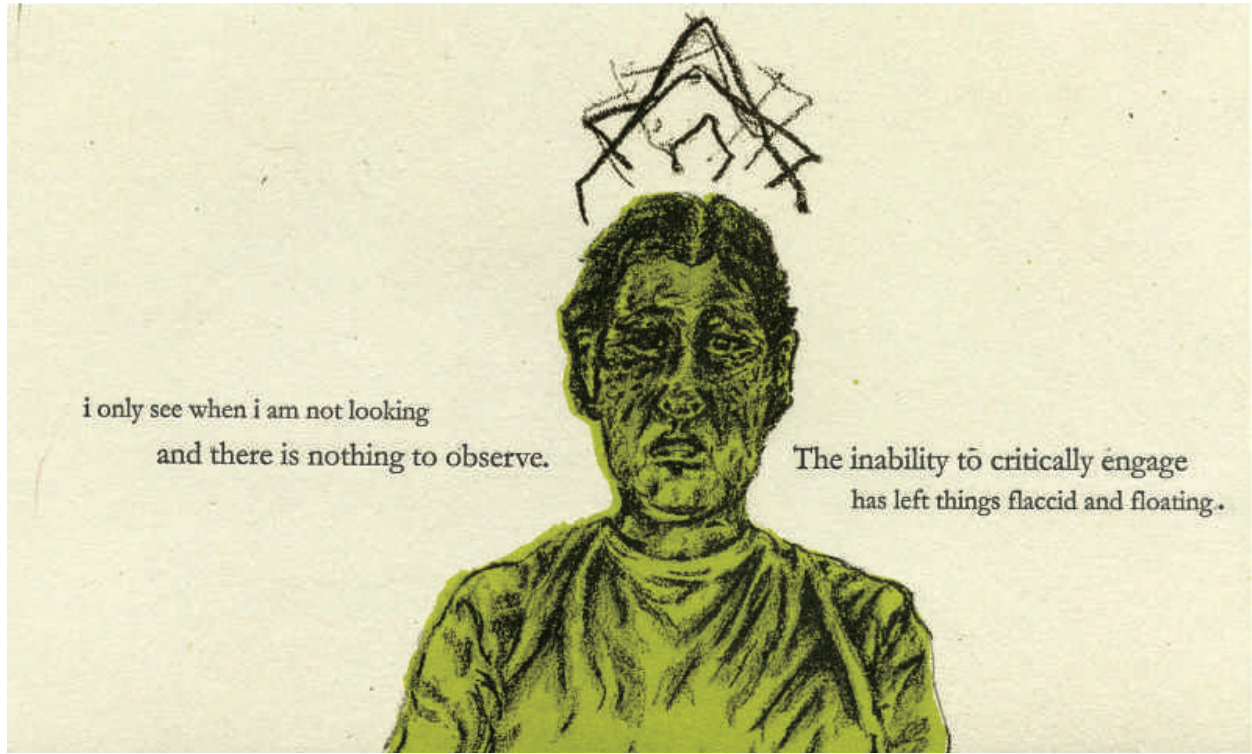
**Great Again**

*2018, photograph on archival pigment paper*

Randy Richmond







i only see when i am not looking  
and there is nothing to observe.

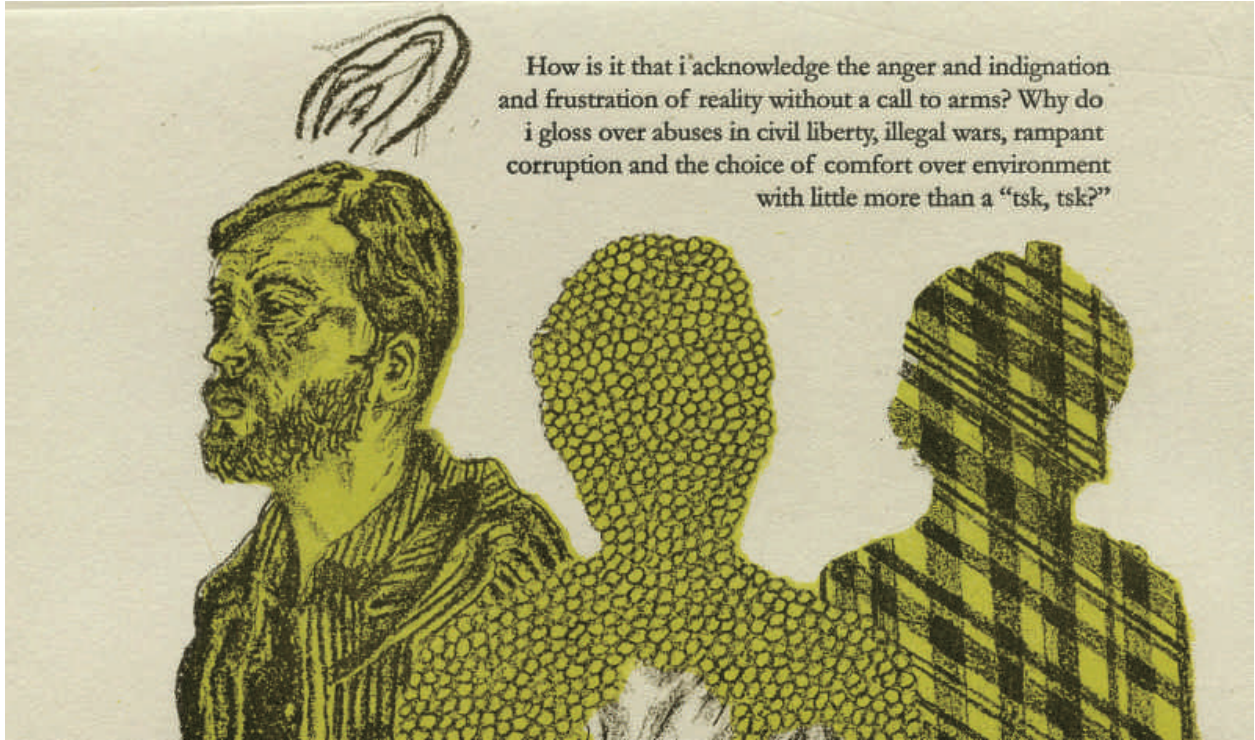
The inability to critically engage  
has left things flaccid and floating.

in a deluge of moments  
cascading down while i hasten  
to apologize for being in  
the way. Sidestepping a  
responsibility can be a safe and  
warm thing to do. Nobility can  
be found in supporting the  
rally and the cause without a  
physical or emotional commitment.

This is  
a trickle that  
I attempt to plug  
with my finger in the dam.

damn.





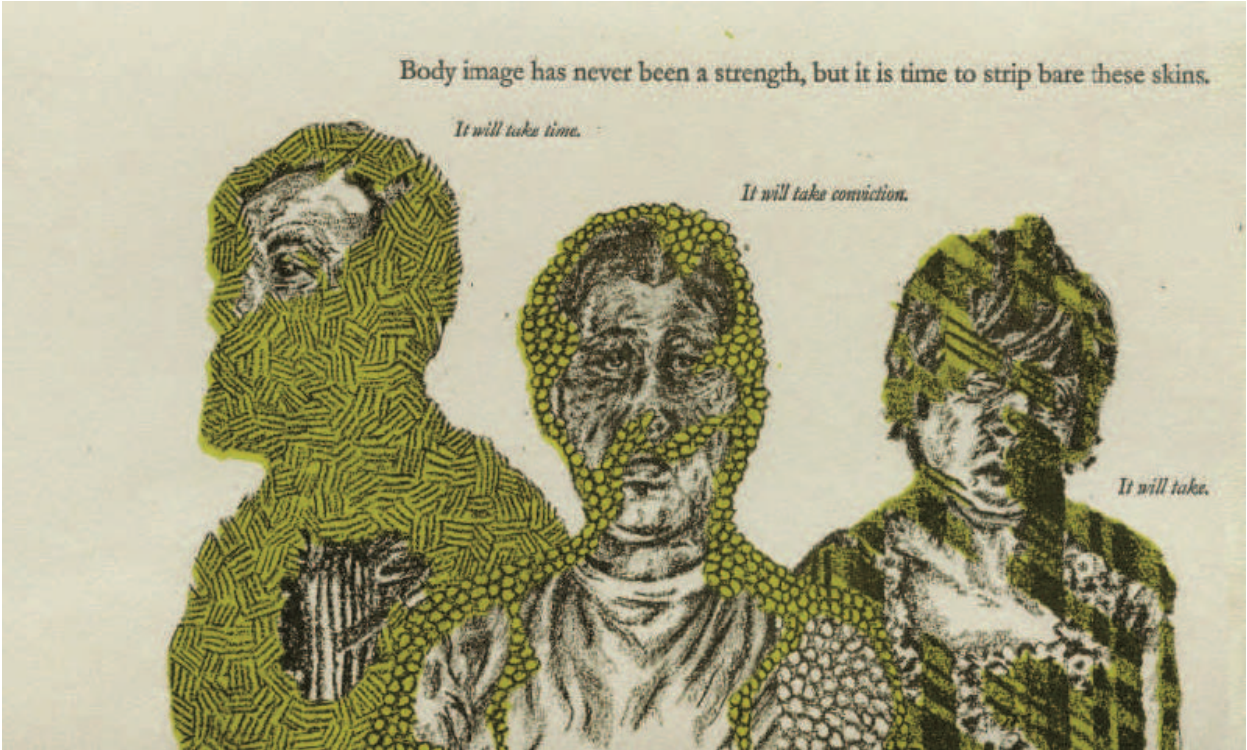
It's an easy answer to be honest. Encased in a thick shell of three separate, yet equal barriers:

*privilege*

*ignorance*

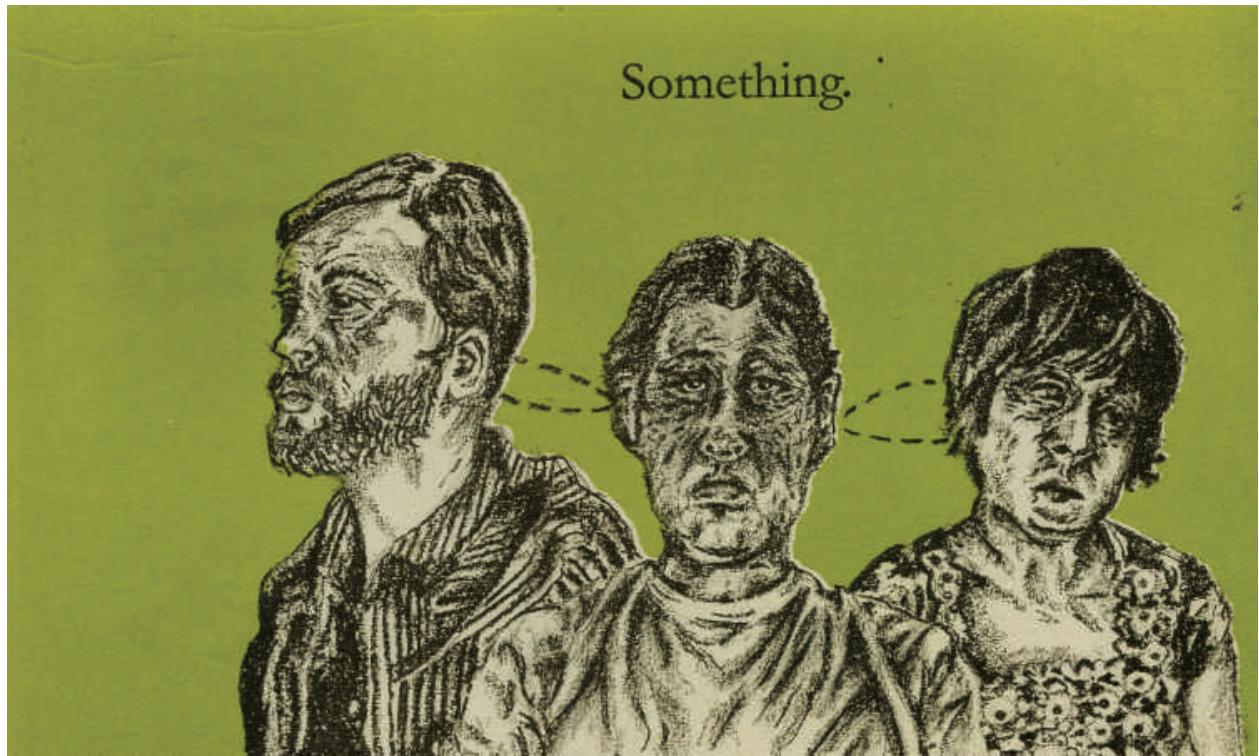
*fear*





The days of gray are coming to  
an end in a cavalcade of...





**The Quiet Type**

*2010, Japanese stab binding, letterpress, photo lithography*

Joseph Lappie