

***CALLIOPE***



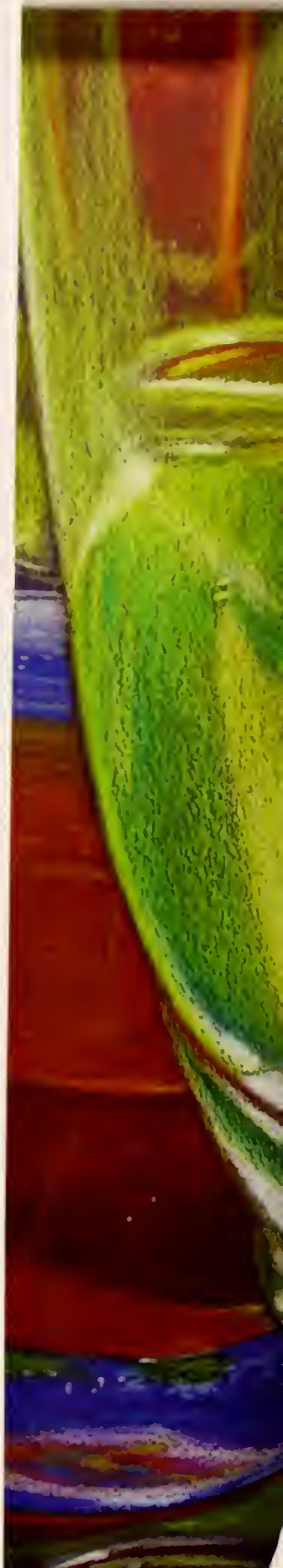
***2000***



# ***Calliope 2000***

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***Armstrong Atlantic State University  
Volume XVII***



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## ***A Note from the Editors***

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For the past sixteen years, *Calliope* has been the medium through which many of Armstrong's students and staff have not only expressed but shared their creative talents with others on campus and in the community. We are confident that in the following pages, you will find that this tradition continues. We understand that many of you may be expecting a wordy introduction to this year's edition, but we feel that the high quality of the poetry, prose, and artwork showcased in this volume more than speaks for itself. So please, turn the page, and enjoy the first *Calliope* of the twenty-first century.





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\* denotes award recipients







*Lindsay's Wolf*  
Mike Rios  
pen and ink

# ***Egesticulation***

Jason Richardson

---

Slowly they move about my interior.  
Kneading my shadows with their tiny wet hands.  
Into an unfeeling phantom that forces me to  
Shed and slough my skin like a  
Venomous snake that discards its  
Tired shell in a quivering  
Dance of transmutation.

My light has seen the darkness.  
My complacent mind has been  
Sundered.  
I'm reeling in a  
Desensitized metamorphosis.

Small voices call to me  
In exacerbating tones.  
My many feet transform into  
Broken wings.  
My shadow is pushed and shoved  
Down a darkening tunnel.

My matter's left crawling shadowless  
In a void full of shadows.  
I'm hollow.  
Echoing back false visions  
Of emptiness.

Finally I rest.  
Cracked and collapsed,  
I curl and spin  
Deeper and deeper  
Into the void.





*View*

Michelle Woodson  
silver gelatin print

# ***The Blind Leading the Blind***

Steve Austin

---

I'm crouched in a room with four walls and two floors. That may sound crazy but floors can be ceilings too from a certain point of view. Here I'm stuck between these walls like a turnip in the exhaust pipe of your hateful neighbors car, or maybe like constipation. These purple walls stand brutally close, but they give me my privacy and protection. I don't usually complain or seem ungrateful, these walls keep me safe from brain sucking snoops, from my landlord that lives next door, and speaking of her, I'm two days late on my 100 dollar per week rent of which I have 100% of fifty-two cents. You see, sometimes my thoughts and emotions leak out of my head, leaving a vacuum of empty space. They float around in the air like radio waves. Anyone near me just has to grab those thoughts and emotions out of the air and interpret them. These walls act like the lead that shields Kryptonite from Superman. But more and more this insulation feels like a vault. A lead vault.

I live in a one-room apartment and it's small. There are five windows on three sides that rise from the chair rail to the ceiling. Thinking about the chair rails, I don't know why they're there. I have no chairs that need railing. And on top of the rails sit the windows, as I've already mentioned, and through these windows gleam thousands of beaming eyes. They watch me. They know me and all I do. I do, I do know they observe my daily routine. A routine that adds up to nearly nothing. Still it disturbs me. It would agitate you too.

I feel bad today. And it's a riddle... or a puzzle... I'm uncertain which, but I speculate that my skepticism is reasonable and more notably, a reality, and a mystery. A mysterious reality. My mind doesn't work like the average mind, not like a machine rotating on a microinterval time slot spitting out information through a revolving door. No, my mind is more like a maze, but not a fixed maze. Every time I find the way the structure of its walls rearranges itself into a new design, a new scheme, with a new way out. I never really get anywhere, like now. I guess I feel bad because I'm in morbid lack of my chemicals... yes, that's it. My Lithium, it's run out on me. Dr. Siecco said, and I quote, "This medicine won't let you down." Well, that's how smart he is! He never mentioned that I would have to do without. He's so calculating, so punishing, so imperceivably malicious. It's not any sort of conspiracy, he works on me alone. And he has his plans.

You must understand that I was in his office yesterday, which waasss... Friday, yesterday, and he was "out of town, out of town, out of



town,” she says. I had to listen to that fat nurse babble her fat greasy lips about how “the alarm system has failed and that they couldn’t fix it till Monday” and that “we’ve already paid them, they should come fix it today and bla bla bla.” You know the kind. And I had to put up with this inanity for twenty-three minutes before she was “sorry to inform me that my medication couldn’t be called in until Monday morning.” I thought, “Monday... Monday!” I wanted to rip that big floppy mole off her face, but I didn’t. I just proceeded to tell her just how fat she was and that she must be crazy to think that the alarm system technician should jump when she commanded. And I meant it.

“Calm down,” I said to myself. Let’s see. Returning my thoughts to the room where there is hardly room to turn around, I opened my eyes to see that these walls think they can push me around, they want to confine me. But I’ll show them. I’m going to Dr. Siecco’s office and I’m going to tell that vastly overweight nurse that I’ll get my medicine whether she, the F.D.A., the F.B.I. or I.R.A. condones, complies, vetoes or denies my actions. It’s a long walk, we’ll talk more when I get there.

Imagine this, I walked all this way and they’re “CLOSED SATURDAYS.” I feel so... I’ll tell you how I feel. I feel like the Wolf in the Three Little Pigs, huffing and puffing. But I won’t, I can’t, I have asthma. Oh but ah-ha, remembering the now very useful information that the maybe not-so-fat-nurse let slip out of her slippery lips—I contrived a plan. Aaaa plan. Through the window and in to the sample room I went. Chemicals chemicals and more chemicals. I should have been a chemist, doing experiments with hydrochloride, everything has got hydrochloride in it somewhere, I’d be making elixirs like neon and nylon and rayon. Synthetics and naturals, it was all there. There were boxes of Xanax and boxes Zolof and “sealed for your protection” packets Tranxine, Transadone, pink Paxile, the “doctor recommended” Prozac and the “wonder drug” Dilanta, my favorite Methadone and... there it is... LITHIUM. Yes! Lithium, my life-line. I felt like the alien in that dumb movie that picked up the hat and cane and burst out with “Hello my baby, Hello my darling.” What movie was that? Anyway, in thirty-three minutes I’ll feel the surge of sanity flush through my veins. Grabbing a whole case of Lithium and Methadone I scooted on out the drug store. As I began my way out, the way opposite of the way in, the phone rang and I’m confident I heard the voice of Andy Rooney telling me to “pick it up boy, it is definitely for you.” I answered it cynically, “Dr. Siecco’s chambers, may I help you” and this obviously mad woman was on the other end screaming in complete hysteria, which is something all women go through at one point or another. She had a deep rasping voice, liked she smoked three packs a day for twenty-two years, or like she had bronchitis the flu and a bad case of hemorrhoids, or like she had been on a two week drug binge. I pictured her with dark hair and overlapping wrinkles, and fat. This lady first stated that she had never been seen by Dr.

Siecco and then commenced to ranting about this and raving about that and crying and blubbing so that I could not make out what she was saying. As she went on the light bulb that was implanted in my head during my lobotomy last spring lit up. I mean my eyes could have been mistaken for a state trooper's mag light. I've contrived another plan.

You see, since my diagnosis I've always wanted to be on the other side of the table, I've always dreamed of getting in someone else's head, scrambling a brain—like an egg. And if you can't have directed power you must get power by manipulation and what better mask to manipulate behind than that of a psychiatrist. It's a perfect disguise. The ambiguously crazy overly friendly face. I said to her, "if you'll shut your hole for a minute I can help you." I must have made a good impression because a burning silence crowded the moment, a gravity that I had not wanted. After I pulled myself together I told her that I was Dr. Siecco, and although I was the only one working today I could see her if and only if she could be here by four o'clock, it was now two-thirty. A genius I must be, I thought to myself, but it would have to be done carefully and would need some preparation. She said that she would come and smashed the phone down on the hook. Her phone fell into pieces and lay abandoned on the kitchen counter—all alone. I really felt for that telephone but I had no time to waste.

"Thank you Andy," I shouted with an exclamation point! I made my way to the men's room and as I gazed into the mirror I noticed I needed some slight cleaning up. I ran home, showered, shaved, and put on a knit shirt and khaki pants, a dress Dr. Siecco often sported. I decided to put off taking my daily dose to add a spark to my personality. Half jogging half walking back to my office, careful not to work up a sweat, I felt a great excitement, a feeling of accomplishment and importance. Once back I scanned Dr. Siec... I mean, my bookshelf for a reference book and by luck I stumbled on the perfect resource. It was titled "Psychiatric Practices of the 19th Century." For a moment I thought the book to be out of date but I considered that being 1999 and the New Year was not for another three months, I could settle with its contents.

The next thing I knew, I had gotten lost in the rather cruel treatments this book had to offer. I'm thankful that my doctor had not yet used these treatments on me. I guess he hadn't read this book lately. But just to be on the safe side I'll take the book with me when I leave."

"What do you know," I said aloud, "it's two and a half minutes after four. On the Mahogany desk is one of those precise clocks that count the seconds and minutes, and hours, and days, and years. It even specifies the A.M. and P.M. A clock that could only belong to a man of science. You probably have to have some sort of scientist license or prescription to get one.

One minute and forty-one seconds later, I heard the woman come

through the door saying, "hello." For the first time today, I felt scared, scared, this is scary. But there is some excitement to speak of and sometimes the two cannot really be separated or split apart or split open. As I began to speak I started to tremble, my heart pounding, sweat secreting, shaking like one of those little vibrating massage things.

"Come on back onto my office" I said maybe a little too loudly. She scurried in the door and sat down across from me in my real leather chair. I was right about the dark hair, it was long and jet black, but I must apologize about the other presumptions. She was tall, about six feet tall and long and slender with no wrinkles at all. She must have been thirty. A good thirty. She was voluptuous and vivacious with only one flaw. She was here, for treatment. "I wonder if she is gay," I said to myself.

"Don't I have to fill out any forms?"

"Ahhh..." I reached for a prescription pad and slid it across the smooth surface of my gorgeous Mahogany desk. "Just print your name, race and sexual prefer... I mean sex and I'll fill out the forms for you."

"Well aren't my sex and race obvious?"

"Oh... yes, yes, yes they are, I mean breasts like yours couldn't possibly belong to a man. I just need your information on that little pad there for ah... administrative purposes."

"What ever. I have no insurance."

"No insurance huh? Well that's a shame but no shame here. I will insur... I mean assure you that I have the lowest reputation... I mean, lowest rates in town. Cheap. Very cheap. Yes, cheap cheap cheap."

"I'll believe that when I see it."

"See what?"

"The low rates," she said.

"They say seeing is believing."

"Yes they do."

"Ah, but do they yes," I said. Quizzing her for attention, cognition, and perception.

"What?"

"No... nothing. As you were saying..."

"I haven't said anything yet."

"What?"

"What? Look Dr. 'whatever your name is,' can we get started?"

"By all means. Start by telling me what I couldn't understand over the phone. Here, take this first, it's methadone. It'll make you tingle inside. And why not a drink? Let's see... how about a whiskey and ginger, my nurse keeps me stocked. Listening to a bunch of lunatics chatter all day can make an alcoholic out of anyone. Not to mention crazy."

"Well speaking of crazy, I think I'm going mad."

"We psychiatrists don't like using the word mad. We like to think of it as a mental disorder. But go on."

"To start with, my husband is acting very odd lately. Him and that damn dog. He loves that dog but I think it's more than puppy love. He adores that dog. Ever since I've been having problems he sleeps in the spare bedroom, with Lovely, that's the dog's name. He won't go anywhere without her and he locks himself up in that room with Lovely and sometimes when I try to go in, he won't open the door. He tells me to leave them alone. Leave *them* alone he says! I think he's having an affair with her. Does that seem unreasonable to you?"

"Hey, who the hell am I to say what's odd and what isn't."

"But it's much more than that, that's only the beginning."

"Yes, go on."

"Well, last week I was in my doctor's office having x-rays taken of my back and I felt them, the x-rays entering my neck and my skin started to tingle and I felt a burning sensation as they passed down my back in a hot tingling strip about six inches wide and then to my waist. Then they disappeared into my stomach which felt cold and numb and solid like it was frozen. It's been keeping me from my afternoon erection."

"I would think a woman like yourself couldn't get an erection."

"Erection! I said reflection. They keep me from thinking. Reflection!"

"No you said erection."

"I most certainly did not, I said reflection."

"You said erect... never mind, either way you are going mad."

"What a minute, you said you don't like using that word."

"No, I said I don't like patients using that word."

"Oh... I'm sorry, I misunderstood you."

"Well that's perfectly normal for a mad woman."

I really felt like we were getting somewhere, like I was helping this woman. I am smart you know. But I could feel the tension. She looked. I blinked. She scowled. I shuddered. The electrons in the air were thick, the molecules in her head were thin. I had to cut through the pressure, so I raised the blade and let it fall.

"To be such a fool, you are very beautiful."

"Well thank you doctor, I really admire you."

"You do?"

"Yes I do. May I ask, Doctor, what do you admire?"

So I thought and I thought until finally, it came to me. "I admire clucking chickens, cud-chewing cows, mostly farm animals, and the wheel, the strength of the triangular shaped triangle, and quicksand... yes quicksand! It's the ground on which nothing can stand. Enough about me, can



you tell me anything else, Ms. Pluto?"

"Sure, I can talk all day."

"Well at forty-two dollars an hour I wouldn't recommend that."

"Forty-two dollars an hour!"

"That's the cheapest you'll find anywhere."

"Where?"

"Where? Here or there. Call around, that's the cheapest, cheap cheap cheap. So go on."

"Well sometimes I hear the voice of Dan Rather from across the street." Now that was odd because Andy Rooney and Mr. Rather work together or at least pass each other in the halls at work. Maybe she's purposely projecting her delusions onto me. That is possible you know. "He reports all that I do. The other day I was eating a banana and I heard him telecast, 'and now she's peeling the banana...I've just learned that she's putting it in her mouth, boy she has a large mouth. She chews her food well ladies and gentlemen. Now she's holding it like a, well I can't say this on national television, but you know what I mean. She has a dirty mind. And now she's throwing it away because she knows that we know what she is up to.' And I did throw it away. That man drives me nuts."

"Yes, yes, I can see that. First of all, I would suggest not watching CBS any more. Try CNN, they've really got it together lately."

"And sometimes I feel like I'm running around like a chicken with my head cut off."

"Wait a minute! I believe I've read about that somewhere. I know I've heard of that. Hmmm...yes. It was 'The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Feather,' a story about a bunch of quacks in an insane asylum who took over the place. Yes I have read some literature on this delusion of yours."

"Well, It's not really a delu..."

"Let me finish, please. Yes, it was an essay by the infamous psychic and psychiatrist, not to mention a world-renowned physiologist Poe...yes, Poe was his name...and he wrote about lunatics who believed themselves to be other things, such as a tea pot and a donkey and one, as a matter of a fact, thought himself to be a chicken. The essay was a nineteenth century document and should therefore apply to you."

"Nineteenth century? No, that was over a hundred years ago. You've got your centuries mixed up. It is the twentieth century."

"First of all, I do not get mixed up. Second, it is the nineteenth century. I can't imagine where you get your information from, but it's wrong."

"No, I'm not wrong. I'm right."

"So then, *Ms. Genius* over there, how is it the twentieth century being that it is 1999. Nineteen hundred, nineteenth century."

"No, the first century 0 A.D. to 99 A.D. was the first, and the year

100 till 200 was the second. That's how I'm right, thank you very much."

"That's ludicrous. What did you do with the lowest number? What's the lowest number?"

"One is the lowest number," she said confidently, but watch, I'll show her.

"No, ma'am. Zero is the lowest number and being the lowest century, labeling it with the lowest number is only reasonable. You can't skip zero and expect to get away with it. Zero is necessary. Can't skip zero. If you forget zero the whole rational world will fall and probably land directly on your head." There was a blank look in her face and her eyes seemed hollow as she pondered upon my words. "Anyway let's get back to your chicken shit problems," I said.

"Not chicken shit, it's a decapitated chicken."

"I know that, and as I was trying to tell you, the essay had a rather unique strategy for handling brain malfunctions like yours. It was said that if one were to treat one as he or she believed themselves to be, that a person would grow out of the delusion. From what I understood, the treatment had a very good result. You see, when one is treated in this way, a certain and specific colloidal effect takes place within the synapse of the frontal lobe of the cranium and has a exponential positive effect on one's state of consciousness, not to mention the District of Columbia's unconscious controlled substance laws, such as opium has a direct effect on one's dreams."

"Hold on a minute. I have not the slightest clue as to what you just said, but it sounds good. So you're telling me that if others treated me like a chicken with my head cut off, then I would stop feeling like one."

"Absolutely," I told her.

"Well, I'll try anything."

"Okay then, I'll prescribe you three and one half quarts of chicken feed a day. I guess you can find it in your local Feed and Seed." I thought for a moment and suddenly I realized, I had made a dreadful mistake, how could I have done such a preposterous thing? I only hope that I can resolve this situation before it gets out of hand or before my cover is blown. "Ma'am, I hate to tell you of my mistake, seeing as how I make so very few. Maybe we can just call it an overlooking."

"Yes yes go on, what?"

"Seeing as how you are supposed to be a headless chicken, chicken feed is kind of a ridiculous idea, isn't it? I mean, shoving the seed down your throat could get monotonous. So, let's see...how about twelve hours a day in a chicken coop, yes that should work fine. But no more than twelve a day and discontinue treatment when the problem disappears but not suddenly. For such strong treatment as this, you must use a "tapering down effect." Such as twelve one day then ten for two days then eight for

two days and so on, and it's very important that you do it in that method. I'm sure your husband will build you a coop, I know he and the dog could use the privacy."

"Don't you think that is a little extreme?"

"NO! Let's move on. I think for your little x-ray/erection episode we should definitely take a Freudian approach. And Freud liked to experiment with cocaine. So I'll write you a prescription for....let's see, one gram per every two days. If the pharmacist gives you any trouble tell him to call my office, and I'll verify the appointment and prescription. Yes, let's do that and I'll give you three weeks worth of Methadone and Lithium."

"Wow, I didn't know nuts could get so much fun out of a visit," she said with a bouncing tone. Maybe like a ball bouncing around inside her head. A necessarily empty head.

"So you should be feeling much better real soon and I hope you can get your ahh...inadequacies and inferiorities filled to a more ah....appropriate level. Thank you Ms. Pluto, keep your nose clean and everything will be okay." I thought to myself, when she tells the pharmacist about her visit, they'll really think she nuts.

"Well okay Dr. Siecco, I guess I'll see you in a month?"

"Yes, call my lovely nurse and make an appointment for any day of your choosing, except Saturdays." She gave me 100% of forty-two dollars and left my office. Seeing as how her paranoia was beginning to make me nervous, I snorted another Methadone. I realized that if I could not come up with \$56.48 that I would soon be a homeless lunatic and the last thing I want is to be put back in that dreadful hospital. But what if—I have contrived a plan. If I gave my landlord all the money I had, I could move all of my belongings to one side of the room and tell her that I promise to use only 42.52% of my apartment, which would mean a drastic cut in space but a much smaller area to keep clean. Yes, that should definitely work.

I left my office through the front door, which was not the way I came in. And I was walking home when I suddenly began to feel a little guilty, but why should I? Do you think what I just did was all that bad? I don't, it's being done all the time, just not usually on Saturdays.



*Persephone's Kiss*  
Elizabeth Pferschy  
silver gelatin print



# ***School of Fish***

Erin Helmey

---

I sat separate and alone, spanning the sea  
of faces who were smiling at violence  
and laughing at death. I wondered  
Did they really know  
what the shattering, spinning, seething  
shots would do to their fresh, delicate bodies?  
but their flashing teeth spelled no; I guess  
horror and loss are humorous.  
salty water welled in my eyes  
as I could see the guilty and innocent blood  
pooling together in this earthy pot  
on cold, lifeless school floors,  
the base of knowledge  
which brings America to its end.  
as my first tear splashed on the sandy floor,  
the bullets rang out, and each of the immature,  
welcoming faces was lost forever in their own  
current of false hopes and dreams.



*Towards the Shadows*  
Pia Kokko  
silver gelatin print

# ***A Word to the Wise***

Laura Bonney

---

Well, the weather was so nice  
That, against all sage advice,  
I packed my gear and headed for the trees.  
Camping out for me is fun,  
Choice of leisure, number one;  
Pitch my tent, go fishing, do just what I please.

I can't say I wasn't warned,  
But their warnings wise I scorned,  
When the old folks said, "You'd do well to remember  
Indian Summer doesn't last  
And by now it should be past.  
You should never  
Go tent-camping  
In November."

All went well my first day out,  
Caught my supper, two nice trout;  
Lovely evening with a mild and gentle breeze.  
With the dawn there came a rain  
But I still could not complain,  
Stayed inside and read, still perfectly at ease.

THEN...a gale began to blow  
And that rain, it turned to snow  
And the mercury dropped down into December.  
I packed up to head for home,  
Indian Summer sure had flown;  
I should not have  
Gone tent-camping  
In November.

Dropped my compass in the snow-  
Didn't know which way to go-  
Stepped into the stream, got wet above my knees;  
Then bronchitis did set in  
With pneumonia as its twin,  
And every cough was followed by a sneeze.

Forest rangers brought me back  
when their bloodhound found my track,  
(But that's the part I really don't remember.)  
I woke here in ICU;  
This is my own fault, it's true,  
All because I  
Went tent-camping  
In November!



*Claw*  
Steve Coward  
silver gelatin print



*Lenny*  
Maryanna Axson  
graphite



I leaned over the counter and waved my hand to attract the bartender's attention. He was a young guy, about the same age as me, and he was hustling. I caught his eye as he finished blending a pitcher of Margaritas for some girls to my left, and after a few minutes I had a nice, cold draft and a fresh shot of Cuervo in front of me. I paid and left him a dollar in the empty shot glass and made my way to a table in the back of the club.

I wasn't as drunk as usual, and it was a nice change. I hadn't been to this particular den of sin for a long time. It was a fast place, with the music pounding, lights whirling around, and multitudes of beautiful women moving and dancing with the most practiced predators in town. Clothes reflected the highest fashion and the attitudes were timeless. Everyone was laughing and smiling as they danced, and yet, the atmosphere was anything but happy. I smiled along as I watched, amused by the spectacle.

I drank my beer and watched the people circulate and interact throughout the club. I could barely see the dance floor through the throng of dependency around and in front of me. People were arriving steadily, and the club was filling quickly.

A flash of twirling black hair on the dance floor caught my eye, and I stretched my neck to see around a couple in front of me. I caught the back of a head spin, and long, straight, shiny black hair tossed itself up into the air and fell down again with the beat. It was a woman, and she moved out of my sight before she could turn again and reveal her face to me.

My eyes were wide and I stood quickly, disturbing the table. I grabbed my beer and made my way down through the crowd toward the dance floor. The music was loud, and the beat thudded throughout my body, entraining with my heartbeat, and leading my mind. I pushed my way forward urgently, holding my beer high so people would avoid me. My eyes darted ahead, searching.

There. She spun again and her hair bounced into my line of vision. I made my way through the last barrier of hounds, and there she was. The music pumped a heavy-metal song with a deep, grinding bass, and she turned with a flip of her head, and there was no question that it was her.

\*

It was her, and I was nineteen again, and the speakers were all blasting the latest dance music. The clubs were smaller, and they were filled with smoke and fresh-washed military men. And for every young, hard-working, American momma's boy on liberty in Subic Bay, in the Philippine Islands, there were ten girls with long or short, straight, shiny black hair who wanted to take him home, or to a motel with them. I had seen her then as I saw her now - dancing; only then she had moved in a bathing suit, on a platform. She was one of four on the runway that first night, and I was mobbed by the "Buy-Me-Drink" ladies, but she flipped her head in turn with the music, and her hair flashed into my eyes.

\*

I watched as she turned and offered her full profile to me now, and any lingering doubt I might have had faded away like a bad dream. It was her, in a tight, black body-skirt which held her body like it was designed for her. Her legs began where the skirt stopped short, and they were hard and muscular from her dancing. Her face was glowing and wet with sweat, and I was glad that her eyes were closed.

My buddies and I had bragged to each other often about the women we had as we sailed throughout Southeast Asia in our prime, but I had never told them, never told anyone about this one. The feelings I had for her, the absolute effect she had on me, were something I was not proud of.

\*

On that night I first saw her, I drank too much, and my friends dragged me to another bar, which I left with another woman. I was thinking about her, though, and on our next stop in Subic I approached her, and offered to buy her a drink. We danced close, and as I looked into her dark eyes I was lost in them, and my homesickness and anxieties about living up to everyone's expectations disappeared in one slow song. She drank my drinks and let me pay twenty dollars for her "bar-fine" for the evening.

We left the club early, and I fed her. She didn't speak English very well, and I knew only a few sordid expressions in her language. This removed the pressure of talking, and we just



laughed and touched each other instead. She threw around some of the regular lies in English, though, and she kept me happy with ambiguous comments about my strength and good looks.

I slept away from the ship that night, with her, in a small bed in a small room. We were tired from the drink, the dance and the sex, and she slept soundly. I lay awake with my eyes open, staring at her soft skin, watching her nose flare as she breathed. When it was time, I woke her, and we made arrangements to spend time together on my next visit, for only a small portion of my paycheck. I kissed her deeply before I left, and we parted without speaking.

\*

My glass was dry, but I couldn't leave her there on the dance floor, convulsing and gyrating her talented body. I knew as I looked around that I was hardly the only one intent on her sweat and compulsive body language. Many pairs of eyes were upon her, and many other brains were occupied with their respective decadent fantasies about her; fantasies I had lived.

\*

I spent my next three visits to P.I. with her. I slept at her place, and she cooked for me and cleaned and pressed my uniforms. I bought her groceries and clothes. I bought her.

We went water-skiing together and had picnics on beautiful Philippine beaches. I taught her the name of my hometown and showed her pictures of my family. She told me stories of her father fighting the Japanese, and taught me how to catch snakes. She told me that the lizards crawling on her walls spoke to her and warned her in their clicking tones when visitors approached. I enjoyed her, and I enjoyed being away from the ship and my thousands of ill-smelling, loud and ugly brother Marines and sailors living there.

We wrote to each other while I was out at sea. Each helicopter would bring a letter from her, written in a Creole of her language and mine. She wrote of missing me, and her desire to travel to the United States. She wanted to marry an American man, she wrote, and work as a nanny, or as a secretary in a big office. I smiled and wrote how I longed to smell her hair and lie between her smooth legs in the warm Philippine sand.

On my last visit, we celebrated the anniversary of our

ship's christening with a huge party at a local resort hotel. She and I were there, and we ate roast pig and squid and fresh fruit, and lost money betting on the cockfights. We swam together in the hotel's huge outdoor pool and dried each other off tenderly. That night, she called me another man's name as we made love, and I bit her hard, on her calf. She writhed in pain and orgasm, and I tasted her blood. I left without a word and dressed in the dark street as I walked back to the ship.

\*

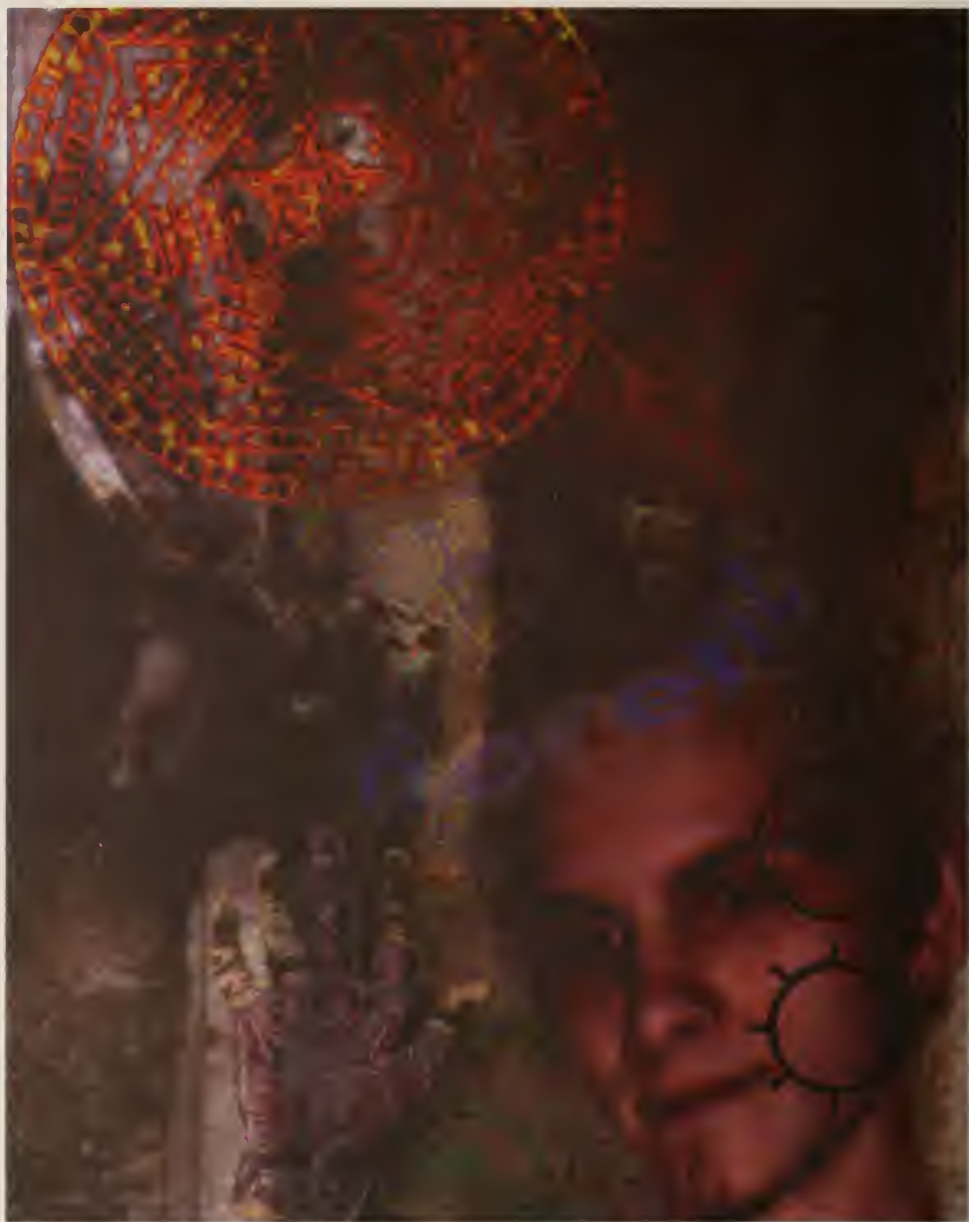
The beat slowed to a steady grinding pulse, and it moved her body with muscular discipline. She danced closer to where I was sitting now and I saw, outlined against the sharp definition of her calf, the slight discoloration of a scar. She spun her head toward me and I felt a droplet of her sweat alight upon my arm. Her eyes were open now, and they were wide and blank. She looked past me, through me, nowhere. She spun again, and long, straight, shiny black hair flowed through the air like water.

I never spoke of her to anyone, and her pictures aren't in any of my photo albums. I keep them separate, in an envelope in my closet. I burned all of her letters long ago; all except one, which I keep with the pictures. The letter is written in her hybrid style, and in it she talks of reptiles and food and American movies. It feels old now, and the writing is fading away.

She was gone. The music stopped, the lights came on, and everyone stumbled toward the door. I looked at my lap and no one spoke to me as they walked past, which was just as well. If anyone had asked me why I was crying, I wouldn't have known how to answer.



*My Monet*  
Bill Bates  
acrylic on canvas



*Heretic*

Andrew Sparrow  
computer collage



*Portrait of "Bob"*

Amy Lyn Kidane  
acrylic on canvas





*Untitled*  
Sharon McCusker  
acrylic on canvas

***UR(2Y)2C***

Patrick LaPollo II

---

OIC

IM1 (2AP) U

IM1 (2T) U

IM1 (2U) U

OIC

IMA (DZZZ) 2U

RU1 (2Y) 2CIMB92U

IM1 (2E) U

OIC

UR (2Y) 2C

# *Heaven*

Robert Lurie

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Phil's backpack and his trudging legs were all I saw during our ascent into heaven. All four of us climbed laboriously, wearing halos of swirling horseflies. After hours and hours of ascent, my mind had gone numb. My body kept slugging away at the climb with about as much efficiency as one could expect from defective machinery.

Charlie led our group, striking an Indiana Jones pose with his rugged physique. Winston followed, desperately trying to keep up. Phil kept his own steady pace, singing gleefully as the sweat ran down the back of his neck, and I panted, puffed, panted, groaned, dying slowly, falling behind.

I began to feel that Charlie was working me, like a drill sergeant would work his new recruits, and I made a silent vow to get in better shape before our next excursion. We didn't stop until we reached the peak. The air was clear and dry at the top, and the bothersome flies were now nowhere to be seen. From the ridge we were able to gaze down into the Holy valley: a fertile, forested land surrounded on all sides by jagged peaks. I collapsed on the grass.

"Power Bar?"

I focused my eyes on Phil's face looming over me. He was prodding me with a sort of granola bar.

"It has the calorie count of a Thanksgiving meal," he said.

"Sure. Thanks."

Winston had broken out a bag of GORP trail mix and was passing it around. Charlie paced back and forth restlessly. I think he was afraid that he would lose momentum if he rested too long.

I gnawed at my Power Bar and raised my canteen above my head, letting the water flow over my face and off the edge of my chin, spattering on my clothes and the ground. Phil sat next to me, rocking quietly back and forth.

"Are we ready yet?" Charlie asked.

"Christ, Charlie," I said, "yer killin' me!"

He stared at me.

"Okay, I'm ready."

The rest of the hike was relatively easy. It was mainly a descent into the valley, sometimes steep, sometimes quite manageable. Charlie took the lead again with Phil following close behind, alternately talking, singing, and laughing. I followed Phil. Winston took the rear.

"Randy, where did you meet this guy?" Winston asked, gesturing



at Phil.

“We met in Minneapolis, in grade school, but I haven’t seen him for a few years. He’s really changed.”

“What do you mean?”

“He seems more cheerful now. He used to be...kind of dark, I guess. He’s also lost a lot of weight.”

“Why did he come out here?”

“I have no idea.”

“He just showed up on your doorstep?”

“More or less.”

Winton laughed. “You know, Charlie’s taken to calling you the Kaaba.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s this sort of shrine in the Mohammedan religion, a kind of central holy place that people from all over the world travel to visit. You’re the Kaaba. You came out here to the Northwest and people from all over the country have arrived at your door, seeking wisdom and shelter. First there was that guy from Athens, Georgia. What was his name?”

“Jake.”

“Jake, yeah. Then there was that van full of guys from Virginia, and now, this guy Phil from Minneapolis.”

“Hmmm. Well, I wish I could trade some of that so-called wisdom for some of Charlie’s endurance.”

“Don’t worry. You’re doing fine.”

Phil and Charlie were already disappearing from sight. Winston and I stepped up our pace so we could catch up. The path had narrowed to a zigzagging causeway, interrupted periodically by rock piles or streams flowing through. We stopped again to take a short break at a miniature waterfall that descended from an unspecified point above, collecting on our little rocky path and spilling over into the depths below. Winston, Phil and I stretched out on the rocks. Charlie remained standing. He stared up at the peaks.

Charlie surprised me by taking the rear when we returned to the path. Winston led, I followed, and Phil walked with Charlie, talking excitedly about his plans to enroll at the University of Washington in the fall.

We crossed through several different terrains during our descent into the valley. We emerged from what had been a jungle-like sheltered path onto an open cliff road that seemed to have been carved by the gods from the rock slate of the mountain. The sun beat down on us, through our heads, through our hearts, through the soles of our shoes and through the very earth. As we got closer to our destination and moved to a lower altitude, the humidity returned, and with it, the onslaught of flies.

“Don’t worry,” Charlie said from behind me, “these flies will disappear by nightfall.”

The rocks on the path were gradually replaced by mud, and our descent finally came to an end. We crossed over a roaring creek, one by one, tip-toeing precariously across a rickety bridge that appeared to be as old as the mountains. We finally reached a small, grassy clearing that was surrounded by trees.

"Here," Charlie said, "This is where we sleep."

I let the frame backpack fall from my shoulders and felt the circulation return to my arms.

We hung the backpacks from the trees and made camp. Phil and Charlie gathered some wood and built a small fire. We sat around the flames and smoked pipes as daylight receded. The light illuminated the faces of my three friends, keeping darkness just a few steps outside of our circle. I could see the outlines of the jagged peaks above, an even darker darkness blotting out the stars.

Phil, the born storyteller of the group, spun tales of Minneapolis mischief and vaguely alluded to family conflicts that had caused him to bolt for the Northwest. The two of us indulged in anecdotes about our common home and the people we had known.

"You remember Carlito Sanchez of course," he said, arching his back and pushing his chin upward, assuming the pose of a peacock. "Hey hey hey," he said in a mock Mexican accent, "Randy Donahower, the stallion, the stallion, le's go git girlies Randy. Oh c'mon, cause I'm the man I have class!"

I nearly fell backwards laughing, "Yes! Yes! Carlito Sanchez. I remember."

"Shit," Phil chuckled, "That guy used to have a new Armani suit every day. And his family was dirt poor. He'd come to class with his hair all slicked back. A real Mexican James Dean. Guess what he's doing now?"

"What?"

"He's a Goddamned school bus driver!"

I started laughing again.

"Can you imagine it?" he continued, "hey, hey little girlie, git on my bus. You lookin' real pritty girlie I'll treat you right cause I'm the man!"

"A fucking bus driver! Carlito Sanchez! Who would have known? Who would have known?"

Winston made his PHFSCHHH sound, which was his way of laughing. If he thought something was particularly funny he would let out a PHFSCHHH which sounded a bit like air leaking out of a cut car tire.

"Why do you do that?" Phil asked.

"Do what?"

"You do this PHFSCHHH thing. It's like you want to laugh but you're afraid to, so you stop it as it's coming out and it just goes PHFSCHHH. Why don't you relax and let it out, man?"

“PHFSCHHH!”

We talked and laughed for hours. Finally, growing weary, we crawled into our tents. Charlie had his own tent, while Winston, Phil and I were sentenced to sleep side by side in a small igloo-shaped tent. This arrangement put Winston at a disadvantage. He tossed and turned, trying vainly to sleep while Phil and I chattered away about Minneapolis. Phil recounted an incident when he had almost run over my girlfriend with his big brown Suburban. This prompted me to recall the massive keg party Phil and his friend had organized, having the nerve to stage it on the Minnehaha Creek bike path at 6:00 AM, before heading off to school for the day.

Much laughter ensued. Winston groaned in agony. We didn't stop until we had exhausted every minor story.

I was the first to wake up the next morning. I was greeted with the unpleasant sensation of being sandwiched between Winston and Phil. Winston's face was pressed up against one side of my head and Phil's was affixed to the other. Both were snoring. I elbowed them in the ribs simultaneously and sat up, breathing in the musty tent air.

“I've slept what, maybe two hours?” Winston moaned, “I thought you guys would never stop talking. Now I know your life stories. I had dreams about the people in your Goddamn stories, and I've never even been to Minneapolis!”

“Ah go fook yerself, me laddy,” Phil said in a mock Irish accent. He burst out of the tent in his long underwear. We could see his legs bouncing up and down outside the tent flaps. “Fook yerself, fook yerself! Ha ha ha!” His voice echoed throughout the valley. Winston labored with the effort of sitting up. His compressed forest of curls jutted straight up from his head in a solid mass.

“Randy, your friend is nuts.”

I crawled out of the tent. Phil was wandering around the campsite. Charlie sat, fully clothed, boiling water over the fire. “You boys slept in,” he said.

I pulled a granola bar out of my pack and sat down next to Charlie. Winston emerged from the tent with his pipe.

We sat around in silence and had a breakfast of oatmeal mash. One by one, the flies began to advance. “We need to get to a high elevation before the flies really set in,” Charlie said. “There's an old abandoned mine at one of the peaks. I say we head for that. It's a good five miles up.”

We hastily got our gear together and started hiking, desperately trying to increase our elevation as the flies emerged in full force. We trudged forward along a narrow dirt path, crossing the occasional stream by hopscotching over the rocks scattered in the water. Eventually, we came to a clearing. The jagged peaks were visible on all sides. Phil's high-

pitched, slightly off-key singing echoed eerily through the valley. I noticed Winston was beginning to loosen up. Occasionally, he would yelp along with Phil. Winston was known as a fine saxophonist; he had a reputation for making his instrument sing with sensitivity and grace. Unfortunately, that talent didn't translate well to his vocal capabilities. He and Phil singing together sounded like two dying coon dogs. Ah, but what the hell, I joined in too. Charlie started walking faster, hoping a more strenuous pace would keep us from disrupting nature in such an unholy manner.

As we progressed higher, patches of snow and ice gradually replaced the streams. I could see now the dark opening of the old mine, a sort of cannon-blast hole blown out of the side of the peak.

I have never been more aware of the workings of my body than at that moment. I could feel every breath, every footstep, the creak and strain of every muscle, every blink of the eyes. For the first time in my life I realized that I had no control over time. It kept moving at that same steady pace, beating down on this body and this mind with an uncontrollable wrath. As we reached the open portal of the mine, I understood for the first time that there is an end.

We had not thought to bring flashlights, but Charlie had a penlight, and so, once again, he led the group. The mine disappeared behind us, finally becoming a little ball in the distance. Phil made "OOO OOO OOO" owl sounds as our little beam guided us. Charlie shone it into alcoves, searching for bats, but there were none. I kept imagining an old ragged man, his eyes corroded from living in the mine for years, his body and face gaunt from a steady diet of bat flesh. If there was such a man, though, we didn't find him. Our descent into darkness was a long stretch of muddy nothingness, which finally ended with a solid brick wall.

"Man, can you believe all the horrible things that must lie beyond this wall?" I said, "too bad we can't see them. Let's go back."

Phil started kicking at the wall.

"Come on Phil," Winston said, "you're likely to get us buried. Let's get out of here."

The penlight reversed direction and Charlie slid past me. We followed him back and out, through our little portal and out into the light.

We stood at the entrance for a few minutes, getting acclimated to the sun.

"Let's see if we can get any higher on this peak," Charlie said. Without waiting for an answer he began climbing. A huge glacier covered the width of the peak, but the foundation had melted out from the summer heat and had become the numerous streams coming down from the peaks, so the inside of the glacier was essentially hollow. I watched as Charlie disappeared underneath it. We followed with slight hesitation. I found I was able to stand upright in a dripping ice cavern with about five feet to spare. The cavern stretched on and sloped upwards for about a hundred



feet to a hole and sunlight. Charlie had already disappeared through this opening. I walked slowly, letting the glacial rain cool my skin. I came out onto a small stretch, which had been exposed by the sun. We were literally at the top of the mountain. Charlie stared out at the massive expanse. He inhaled deeply; it was almost as if he were swallowing up the entire mountain range. There was an affectation of triumph in his stance.

Having found a little nook where I could sit comfortably and gaze at the valley, I let myself ebb out of my body and become part of the land. My eyes, the last remaining physical connection, blinked rapidly, and I was gone.

I flew around the peaks, through the peaks, even, through rock, which had been thrust violently into the world in ancient times. I relived the origin, the collision of the plates, centuries of shift and change in fast forward, the incredible violence of birth and rebirth. I saw myself sitting in my nook. I saw myself in California at the age of six, play-kissing with a girl from up the street. I saw myself years later, walking with another girl across a frozen lake in Minneapolis. I saw myself lying drunk in the grass in Gary's backyard in Georgia at dawn. And finally, I saw Phil, a long-buried memory, Phil ravaged with pain, holding onto his father's arm and sobbing. His father, unshaven, with madness in his eyes, walked down the church aisle. Then, with the splatter of a solitary glacial drop on my forehead, I was back in the nook. My eyes opened. Charlie lay stretched on the ground, slumbering peacefully. Winston sat with his back to the rock face, his head tilted backwards, eyes closed, mouth slightly open. Phil sat cross-legged staring out at the valley and quietly rocking back and forth. The only indication of how long I had slept was the sun hanging low on the horizon.

"Did you sleep?" I asked Phil.

"No. I don't sleep too often. I might miss something."

Charlie opened his eyes and sat up. "Man," he said, "it's late."

Phil walked over to the glacier and scooped up a handful of slush. He knelt down next to Winston and gingerly placed the slush in Winston's half-open mouth.

"WHAT THE...!" Winston was on his feet, jumping around and spitting out dirty snow water. Phil clapped his hands together and giggled.

"Let's get back to our site before it gets dark," Charlie said.

We feasted that night on military rations that Phil had stolen from his older brother. I grabbed an object that resembled a Snickers bar in shape and size. It was wrapped in silver foil and bore the inscription "Turkey Dinner." I unwrapped the fleshy white bar, took a bite, and felt a full course turkey meal expand in my stomach.

"It's staggering what military technology is capable of," I said.

"You know," Phil said, "when I was a college student up in northern Minnesota, I had some roommates who were from Wisconsin. So you know what I did? I went and bought some Wisconsin cheese and every night I would go around and drop little pieces of cheese in front of their doors. Guess what? Every morning I'd look, and, would you believe it? All the cheese was gone!"

Winston frowned. "Why are you telling us this?"

Phil put his face an inch from Winston's and whispered, "I just thought you should know."

Winston gave me a confused look as Phil bounded away yelping "I'm gay! I'm gay! I'm very very very gay!" He hugged a tree.

"Randy," Winston said, cocking his head in Phil's direction, "is he...?"

"Nah, Phil's not gay. I think we could safely say that if he was, though, he probably wouldn't have much of a problem with it."

"Yes, I think we could safely say that."

Phil gradually came out of his giddiness as we settled down for a contemplative smoke around the fire. Charlie led the discussion, which was a meditation on the nomadic lifestyle.

"It could be said, with little doubt, that inertia leads to alcoholism, drug addiction, and eventually insanity. A man must continue moving, if not physically, then mentally. He must grow. He must expand his ideas, his knowledge and his awareness. To fail to do so is death."

"I think that's why I left Minnesota," Phil said. "I felt that inertia coming on. You can really feel it. Your legs and arms tighten up and you don't want to do anything. Yeah...it was definitely time to leave."

"We're sort of unusual in that way," I said. "I mean, here we have Charlie, who goes to school in Tennessee. I go to school in Georgia. I can meet Charlie and have coffee with him in Nashville, and then a month later I'm climbing mountains with him in Washington. Now I'm sitting with him, and a childhood friend from Minneapolis, and Winston, who lives in Seattle. This country is such a small place."

"Your life is just plain confusing anyway, Randy," Phil said. "Don't you have a girlfriend from New Hampshire?"

"Yeah, but she goes to school in Georgia."

"That's just way too complicated for me. I want to live in one place at a time. You live in, like, three different places at once. I was seeing a girl in Minnesota, but I had to let her go when I came out here. There was no way I was going to have a long-distance relationship. No sir!"

"One thing I've discovered about women," Charlie said, "is that they're not all they're cracked up to be."

We sat in silence for a few minutes as Charlie stoked the fire with a



branch.

“Well, I don’t know about that...” I said finally.

“They’re not all they’re cracked up to be.”

Silence.

“Hey, did I tell you guys about the Organtron?” Winston asked from across the fire.

“Organtron?”

“Yeah, it was this documentary I saw at Apple Cinemas. Apparently, around the time of WWII, some German scientist came over to the United States and built this thing called the Organtron. It was this wooden box about the size of a telephone booth that you could sit down in. You would sit down, hit a red button and suddenly, you would experience the most powerful orgasm in the world....”

“Wait a minute,” I said, “How did it work? Did you have to get wired up with all kinds of electrical equipment? How could you have an orgasm just from hitting a button?”

“I don’t know, but you could, all right? That’s how it worked. Anyway, the problem was, he was using government money to do this. Well, when the government got wind of what he was doing with their grant, they shut him down, cancelled the project. He ran off to a small town in Wisconsin and built a laboratory, continued his work. He would recruit men and women to go through all sorts of sex tests. He’d wire them up, monitor their orgasms, watch them have sex, show them porn....”

“Sounds like the UGA psychology department.”

“Well, the purpose of this was so he could build even better Organtrons. At first the people in the town just knew him as the wacky old German guy, but one day some of the farmers got wind of what their wives were doing at the “clinic,” and they headed over to the laboratory with shotguns. They were shocked to find a fully armed, bulletproof bunker in the middle of the woods. It had been built with the profits from the first Organtrons.

“Turns out the FBI had been tracking this guy for a while. The Organtrons had become very vogue with the literary crowd in the ‘50s...I think Norman Mailer had one...and the scientist was making millions. The feds wanted him for several reasons. Not only was he conducting indecent experiments with US citizens on American soil, he had also neglected to pay his taxes. So they sent a crack team of assassins to the bunker and they killed the scientist and his guards in a massive bloodbath. Man, I saw the footage of the blown-out bunker, and it was just unreal. I mean, this kind of stuff went on way before Waco, you know.

“Now there’s only 200 functioning Organtrons left. The government has destroyed all the blueprints. Occasionally, Organtrons will surface at private auctions and sell them for millions of dollars. The people who were filming the documentary tracked down this middle-aged guy

who owned one. He looked really normal, just a working class guy, and he kept it in his garage. It looked like a small pine outhouse. He said it had been broken for about five years. His wife wanted him to get rid of it, but he kept it for sentimental value. At one point his kid came running up to him and said, 'Daddy, what are you doing?' and the guy said, kind of tense, 'Go back in the house, Billy, I'm just talking to the film people.'"

"Winston, you're full of shit," I said.

"No, no. I swear this is all true."

"I don't doubt that you saw the movie, but I can't believe that stuff happened."

"Well, suit yourself."

Charlie stood up. "I'm going to take a bath."

"A bath? Charlie, what are you talking about?"

"In the glacial stream."

"But it's freezing cold."

"Yes," Charlie pulled a towel out of his bag, "but I don't want to smell bad. Besides, it will be refreshing. Do you want to try it?"

"Well..."

"I'll do it," Winston said.

"Swimming!" Phil yelled.

"Randy?"

"Yeah, I guess I'll go too."

We walked down to the stream, which was more like a river littered with large rocks and debris from the mountains. Charlie was the first to go in. He walked in naked, wavering at first but gaining his balance with each step. He walked to the middle, where the water was waist level. Two waves formed around his solid torso. He flexed his muscles, sparring with the frigidity. He threw his head forward and down into the water for a brief second, then, pulling up again and leaning back, he shook the water out of his hair in sweeping arcs. He stood there for a moment, motionless, making peace with the river, then walked back out and began toweling himself, saying, "watch out for that current, it's pretty strong."

Winston and Phil went through less graceful repetitions of the same ritual. I went in last, feeling the chill climb up my ankles. Looking ahead and not down, I didn't see the slippery rock until too late. I watched in morbid fascination as the ground slipped from under me and the water swallowed me up. I felt first the sting of the water as I went under in an ice-cold baptism, then the dirt of the streambed. The current carried me, slow at first and then with building speed, away from the shouts of my friends. I realized that the water was getting deeper and it was becoming increasingly difficult to get footing. I felt the rushing, heard the rushing firing of cannons rumbling over and over. A tree hung out over the water up ahead and I threw my arms up, grasping the branch and feeling my body stretch and almost snap. The branch creaked as I pulled. The muscles in

my arms coiled and threatened to jump out of the skin. The water pulled me one way and my arms the other. Unfortunately, I was too exhausted to work myself along the branch as I had intended. I gave a long throaty howl, which was the most basic form of prayer and proclamation I knew, and let go of the branch.

The water welcomed me back like an anxious mother and I stopped struggling. I saw two large rocks approaching, and I let myself float towards them. One crunched against my shoulder. It spun me around, and I hit the next rock squarely with my back. My crumpled body drifted lazily into a small eddy surrounded by more rocks near the shore. I could feel the ground under my feet again, but I was too tired to move. I held on to one of the rocks and tried to hold on to consciousness. Up above, the lifeless sky promised peace.

“Take me,” I said.

I felt my head starting to sink.

“Take me.”

I was raised up, suspended. The sky opened for me. One by one the levels of existence disappeared: first the water, then the mountains, and then the earth. There was no God waiting for me and no angels in white, no deceased family members or gardens of paradise, just peace, pure and simple: peace of mind and peace of heart. Completeness. All.

My eyes opened for a half-second to see Phil’s face over me. I closed my eyes and returned momentarily to Heaven, but with a nagging urgency my eyes fluttered in defiance. In between the frames of black I saw Phil, and Charlie behind him. Phil cradled me in his arms against his chest. “I thought you were gone,” he said.

Phil, Charlie, and Winston carried me back. They got the fire going again and laid me down by it. As my sensations returned to me, I found that I had not broken any bones. At most I was badly bruised and winded, but Phil told me I had almost drowned.

With the burden of my pack on my back I climbed out of Heaven with my friends the next morning. We rode in my Chevy Blazer down the winding roads and out of the Cascades. In a small logging town, we stopped at a restaurant and had the most delicious earthly meal ever consumed.

The drive to Whitby Island, where Phil was living with his older brother, took two hours. It was raining when we arrived at his house.

I shook Phil’s hand. “It’s been years,” I said, “I honestly didn’t think I was going to see you again.”

“It’s funny how things work out,” he said with a strange smile.

On the ferry back to Bainbridge Island, our home, I stretched myself out on the long, padded seat and looked over at Charlie.

"Phil's really changed since I saw him last," I said.

"For the better?"

"Yeah. Big time. When we were freshmen in high school, Phil's sister committed suicide and after that he just went downhill. He started drinking a lot, doing drugs, and kind of lost his sense of humor. Now it seems like that's all over. He's become the Phil I knew in grade school, but wiser, I guess."

"Yeah, I figured he'd been through something."

"He's a good guy," Winston said.

They say loss of innocence happens when someone has sex for the first time. That's not how it worked for me. My loss of innocence came the day Phil killed himself, not long after our hiking trip. Every morning now I wake up to the sound of a shotgun blast ringing in my ears. I often have the same dream: I'm flying low over Seattle and I can feel the rain on my face. The Seattle Space Needle juts into the sky, and dancing around the top, jumping up and down and clicking his heels, is Phil. His teeth are locked in something between a grimace and a grin. A layer of clouds has settled over the city, and there are just a few small holes where the sun can get through.





*Untitled*  
Paula M. Cates  
silver gelatin print

# ***Dogmatic Method***

Andrew Sparrow

---

My field lays fallow,  
The factory long since abandoned,  
populated only by vagrant ideas.  
No longer hostilities muse,  
nor privy to the virtual life  
I am drifting through a construct  
of my own design.

My field lays fallow,  
strangled with the righteous ideology  
of a thousand men,  
and the pantheons they create.  
The god-head struggles for the status quo  
while possibility claws at me,  
leaving gaps in my words.

My field lays fallow,  
once razed, the ashes lay heaped,  
swirling in the wind,  
plainly visible in the twilight  
against the glare of commerce  
and the perennial bliss of flourescents.





***Feet***

Michelle Woodson  
silver gelatin print

# ***Lost Love***

Erica Bryant

---

The road ahead stretches far and wide  
where am I gonna go  
is there anywhere I can hide

Three hundred miles away  
I continue to watch my rear view mirror  
looking over my shoulder  
wondering  
is he near

Has he come to find that we have gone away  
the children and I  
the house we called home is now just an empty shell  
of ghostly laughter flowing through the halls  
painful memories stuck in the walls.

This wasn't how marriage was supposed to be  
it wasn't supposed to end like this  
everyday was to be happy  
that's how it's portrayed on tv  
fights, abuse, police and heartache  
there is only so much my soul could take

I have to think about my life and the lives I brought into this world  
my future and theirs  
they don't understand why mommy's always crying  
but they don't need to know that inside mommy's slowly dying

So I gathered my bags and hit the road  
with no idea in the world of where I will go  
but I will keep on driving until my heart tells me  
"This is where you belong"



*Untitled*  
Patrick LaPollo II  
silver gelatin print

# ***beast of burden***

Erin Helmey

---

yesterday's lunch trickled  
on the Cosmo as I swore  
my dream would come true.  
but I was happy to see  
cindy's face covered  
by yesterday's lunch.

the mindless clipping secured to my mirror  
was a catalog girl  
with blonde hair and washboard abs  
to remind me of who I was and how  
i wanted to be  
the mindless clipping.

mother slapped my bulge,  
saying suck it up,  
so I did.  
all confidence, esteem, and worth  
were vacuumed, held in a bag  
that mother slapped.



*My Thinking Place*

Natalie von Loewenfeldt

charcoal



# ***Births of Dreams***

Heidi Hogue

---

*The photographer told me to relax, breath deep, have fun, pretend I had just celebrated the greatest day in my life. That's what I did, and the picture was perfect. My laugh seemed to echo on the page all the hopes and dreams I had for myself. And they did in that moment of time with my feet immersed in my favorite stream on the campus, and continued on down that stream forever.*

*Looking at my picture on the front of the newspaper, I realized that I could have everything I ever wanted, I just had to visualize it, and then make it happen, just like I did for the photographer. It was hard for me at first, to let loose in front of a stranger. I have actually always been soft-spoken. I wouldn't say shy, rather modest I suppose, I, Rebecca Hogue, had been chosen as USIU's Thursday girl. The university I attended was United States International University at Ashdown in England, about twenty miles from London. It was one of the best experiences of my life, and it had opened new doors for me to explore; and the thought of my picture for everyone to see unnerved me a bit. Yet, I was flattered.*

This experience of my mother's, the woman whom the picture was taken for East Grisdens's newspaper, has become one of my own as if I, in fact, had experienced it myself. I have the black and white picture beside my bed, and every night and morning I look at with such concentration I feel as though I have merged with it, actually become a part of it in a way.

I know my mother through and through, probably better than I know myself at times. My mother was a very intelligent, gentle person, but at the same time down-to-earth with a twist of quirkiness. She didn't try to talk above you about things that tend to bore. Instead, she came down to your level, took the time to really listen, and communicated accordingly. Her favorite movies were *Babe*, the movie about the runt pig who discovers his purpose in life, and *Toy Story*, the movie about a little boy's favorite toys, Woody and Buzz Lightyear. Every morning she ate Cocoa Puffs for breakfast, and everyday for lunch she ate a bean tostada from El Potro (just an okay Mexican restaurant, but pretty good for Savannah in her eyes). If she wasn't at work, then she was at the movie theaters with my step-dad. She had seen them all. In fact, I called her and my step-dad, Rebecca and Ernest, best movie critics of the Southeast.

No one could ever guess what she did for a living based on first impressions. Becca, as her close friends called her, was a lighthearted modest woman, but also a carefree child who took pleasure in all of life's



simple things. One of these life pleasures is what she did for six years of her life, before she passed away. My mother, Becca, was also Dr. Rebecca Hogue, OBGYN. She delivered over six hundred babies while living in Savannah, helping to bring the miracle of life to hundreds of families.

This dream of hers, to become a doctor, to help people, to make a difference in others lives, did not come to her right out of college. She first worked as a computer analyst at Custom Computers in Visalia, California, where she met my father. They married soon after, when she was only twenty-two years old. My father, Frank Hogue, was also a computer analyst, as well as the manager at Custom Computers. He was eleven years older than my mother, and had a previous marriage in which he had five children. But my mother was not afraid of this fact, so she married him and took the five children in as if they were all her own.

Life was happy and simple. Frank and Rebecca settled into a ranch-style house on a small hill overlooking lots of land with a picturesque view of California's mountains. They had two children of their own, my brother Mark and me, and a cat and a dog. It couldn't get much better.

However, Becca wanted more from life. Working on a machine was not her true calling in life, and she knew it with her whole heart. So, she investigated her possibilities and decided to go back to school for two years to get the prerequisites for medicine. Another door had been opened—She was accepted to Thomas Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

So our family of four, and the cat and dog, packed all of our belongings and moved to the other coast. We settled in a nice suburban town in Marlton, New Jersey, where my mother could commute by train to school. My teenage years were hard, like everyone else's. I was rather clumsy and introverted. I didn't have many friends, since I was the "new girl on the block." So, I stayed at home mostly with my brother and dad, since mom was busy hitting the books. Everything seemed to be fine until one day when we received a phone call that changed our lives forever. We had now hit a whirlpool in the easy stream. Daddy had cancer and a tumor in his brain.

Times got really hard then. Mom had to give dad his shots and take him to his chemotherapy treatments, while at the same time trying to maintain her grades. Grandmother came to take care of us, keeping the family together, and getting us kids off to school. Three long years passed, and my father finally died. It was a relief in a way. Suffering is one of the worst things a human being can witness. Rebecca Hogue was at a stand still in the stream of her life.

*I didn't know what to do. I had two young kids who needed my help. I only had one year of school left, but it would be the hardest yet. I was letting the water take me under, and at this point, who cared? What*

*was it all going to mean anyway? Why had I wanted to do this in the first place? I almost gave up, I almost let myself drown in the misery of losing my love, the one who had supported my every decision. That's when I took that picture of myself out of its hideaway, and took a good look at it. Tears rolled down my cheeks and stained the black and white page that was filled with my laughter. I thought back to when my life had been so easy, and I had everything I wanted. Then I got mad, angry with myself for almost forgetting everything I had always known from that day the picture was taken. I remembered my kids, Frank, my hopes and dreams, and on I trudged.*

My mother made it through the most difficult years of her life, and received her degree as a doctor. After two years of residency she had completed the eight years that it took to pursue her dream. Never once did she complain out loud about how hard it was, or how life has been so unfair. She kept her head high, she still kept laughing, and she never once gave up. My mother, Becca, became the new meaning for determination and perseverance in my eyes.

And how ironic, as I find myself standing here in the same stream of my life at twenty-three years old with all the doors open before me and one year of college remaining. My mother was killed in a car accident, but the water hasn't stopped flowing around me, hasn't taken me under. I have taken all that she has taught me, and I have continued to strive towards my dreams, with determination, persistence, and most of all the joy of living.

At twenty-three you brought me here,  
At twenty-two I lost you...  
Who would have thought?  
Who would have knew?  
At one a.m. I stare at your picture,  
black and white.  
You were twenty,  
young and free,  
clutching your hat,  
laughing in the breeze,  
feeling the water trickle between your toes.  
It is here that you stand  
frozen  
in a moment of time,  
until you give birth to me once again.



*Reunited*  
Heidi Hogue  
silver gelatin print

Have you ever felt  
Like there was someone else  
Within you  
Somebody no one else could see  
This powerful person  
On the inside of me  
Screaming  
Like nobody's business  
To get out  
To show 'em all  
To knock down  
All the walls  
Like an anime character  
So pretty,  
Curvaceous,  
And strong  
With powers  
Way beyond  
Anyone else's  
Imagination  
There inside you  
A part of you  
But no one else can see  
No one can see  
That the person inside of me  
Just might be  
The real me  
But I chose to keep her  
Locked inside me  
Cuz even if  
She came busting out  
Like an alien in my stomach  
They'd never believe  
No one would ever  
Believe  
That she  
Was me

# ***Obedience***

Andrew Sparrow

---

Trained I am.  
Trained to sit up or roll over,  
even trained to beg  
from the wealthy, like some twisted Oliver.

I am trained to adore the exhilaration of blood and sinew,  
and to be absolved by an idea  
while my mind's eye compares its stimulus  
to the hourglass embedded there.

I am trained to accept a world where citizens serve  
and nations enslave.  
Trained to lay trust only in myself,  
though a celebrity might make a fine substitution.

In a sea of suits, uniformed and branded,  
I float listless, drifting,  
looking for the shores of an undiscovered land  
where dogs may roam free.





*Screw You*  
Paula M. Cates  
silver gelatin print



# ***Subtlety***

Jason Richardson

---

We live in a saturated society of  
Fondling fingers and  
Vociferating voices  
That numb and quell us  
Into somnambulant shoppers.

We have been impregnated by their  
Ranting, radio-voices.  
Infused with their haranguing headlines.  
Penetrated by their thundering TVs.  
We have become nothing.  
We are passive, grinning, head-nodders  
With information bruised bodies.

What became of subtlety?  
Will we ever again  
Make our own decisions?  
Will we ever again want to?

Our inner voices have been  
Silenced by the maniacal media  
of modern minutes.



*The Leaf*  
Melvin B. Samuel  
silver gelatin print

# ***Can A Moment Choose Depression?***

Sharon K. Smith

---

Where in the world did you go?  
And what do you have to show  
for your time away?  
Why wouldn't you stay,  
Sane?

What was there? Who was there  
to share—  
the blessings that come  
when you are being you,  
*a moment?*

*What happens in a moment?*

It's always on time.  
It comes (*clap*), it goes.

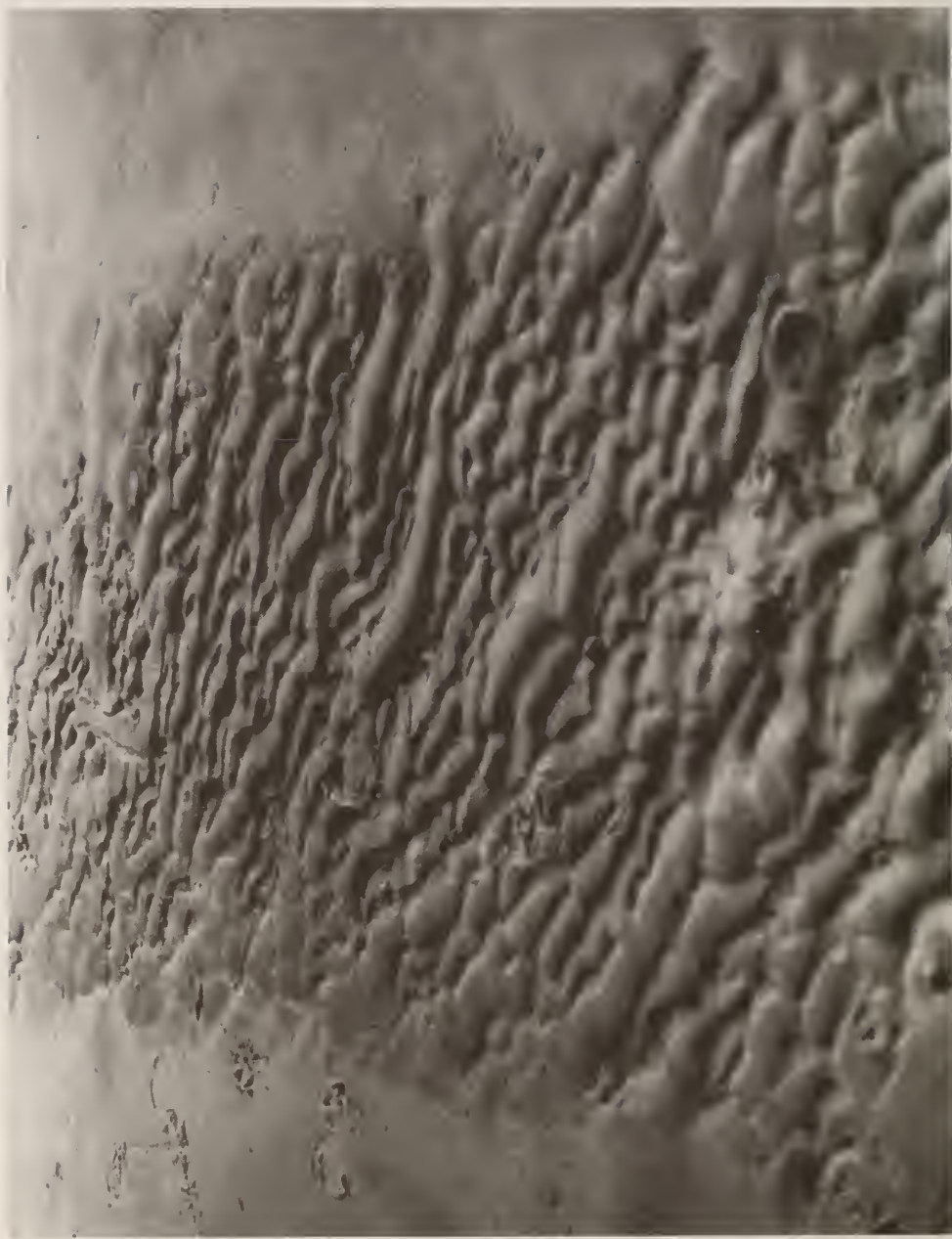
Now, if you were *that* moment,  
would you still be here?  
No, my dear.

Can a moment choose depression?  
What if *it* never comes around?  
Could you choose to frown?  
feel sad?  
sink?  
lose?  
destroy?  
Give up,  
*Your Life?*

Are you a moment?

Yes, my dear,  
I Believe—  
You Are.

(never choose depression)



*Tybee's Thumbprint*  
Rekha Prakash  
silver gelatin print

# ***The Art of Breaking-In New Furniture***

Rob Zanin

---

See, there was a difference between how things were run at my house and at Bryan's house, cause ever since I could remember, he ran the show. It was our eighth grade year, the last year in middle school, so we felt big, smart, and tough, but had enough common sense to realize that we still didn't know barely nothin about what really mattered in life. You know, getting a real job, a degree in business or medicine from mom and dad's favorite college, and eventually findin that "special someone" that you hear about in those anti-premarital sex commercials on TV. Either we didn't know nothin about all that stuff, or we were just having too much fun to care. I mean hell, both of us were looking forward to our ninth grade year, where we'd actually have *real* women in school instead of just girls. That's what his older brother told us anyhow and he was older than us, so why wouldn't it be true.

It was a Thursday afternoon in the middle of March and the snow on the grass was just beginning to melt. It was at least a good fifty degrees outside without any wind. Sorta pleasant for a change in the snowy weather, ya know? Me and Bryan had just stepped off the school bus and threw all our school stuff over on the side of the house, picked up a football and started to toss it around in what we call his "front yard." For the first time in three months, you could actually see some traces of a lighter shade of gray in the New York sky. Jeez, today it almost looked blue! All the snow on the roads was either cleared off or had melted at least two weeks ago, but I guess the plow man had a starving family of twelve to feed or somethin. He'd go up and down the suburb streets salt-salt-saltin away even when there wasn't any ice left. Some of the kids in music class said that if you rode your bike close enough to his plow truck, you could actually hear him bitch at ya from way up there in the cab. I can't say I ever found out for sure, cause I was too afraid of him runnin me over, ya know?

"I'll tell ya what kid," Bryan said with that thick Brooklyn accent that chicks from all over the world seem to love, "My Mudda ain't gonna be back at da house for anotha owa. Whaddya say me and yous get up on da roof and have us a smoke, huh?"

Neither of us would smoke by ourselves, cause that would make us addicted. Smoking with a friend just made you cool. So I agreed, just as anyone would have because Bry (only Bry to the kids he grew up with, ya know, "carriage to coffin" like he used to say) was cool. Now, I'm not just



sayin it cause I was his friend, or cause I lived down the street. Bryan, was *cool*. If you looked cool up in the dictionary, you'd get a definition which would be somethin like "One who looks good in front of his peers, ya know?"; and then somethin like a picture of him leanin up against a lamp post, arms crossed, little smartass smile on his face at about two in the morning cause our curfew was eleven and it was cool to be out past curfew. Almost like somethin you see in those teeny trendy movies. Yeah, Bry was cool. We both wanted to go smoke a cigarette in order to feel a little older, but instead we tossed the ball back and forth seein who could peg the other one with the best spiral. The ball started to sting our hands in the cold weather, but neither of us wanted to be a sissy and put the ball down first.

"Aay, did I tell ya dat my Fadda went out da otha day and bought a tonna new fuyniture for da family room?" Bry asked.

"Naw. So I guess you got a few nice couches now huh." I replied, a little more than disappointed that my mom and dad hadn't went out and remodeled our family room. But what the hell were they supposed to do? Bry's dad ran some hot shot insurance company, and from what I could tell ran more than half the city. And well, my parents taught. You know, school. Mom and dad always told me that "teaching has it's own rewards," but never once had I seen em with a happy look on their face when the check came in. But as far as I could tell they were happy; and so was I and that was good enough for me.

Finally, Bry pegged me just a bit too hard in the right cheek with the football, and could tell that that just put an end to our game by the black and blue mark that began to appear under my right eye. I still knew that I wouldn't get off that easy with just a bruise. After all, I let the ball slip straight through my hands.

"Good hands, sissy." Bry teased, "Aay, it's da new startin wide receive' for da Jets! Look out yous guys it's numba seventeen, wide receive' Buttafingas!"

"S'not funny Bry. How'd you like a black eye too, huh?" I said as I threw a half speed right hook at him. He easily caught my hand, and interrupted my intentions of giving him what's what.

"Come on, kiddo, let's yous and me go inside and get some pop;" and after careful thought, he winked at me, smiled and added "Cuz ya know that I'd hafta hurcha otherwise, ya know?" I laughed sorta half assed along with him cause I think that we both knew how the fight would have turned out any ways. We went in the garage door, past the basement, and through the family room, into the kitchen. I'll tell you what though, don't think for two seconds my eyes ever left that big new expensive fluffy type couch in the family room. It was like lookin at some type of Pharaoh's throne. Just like the ones ya see in the books in history class, ya know? It had to be big enough to fit a good fifteen or twenty people, with at least

twenty-five thousand pounds of fake cotton stuffing in there too. Hell, the couch even smelled expensive. Well, I guess he saw me staring at it or somethin cuz after he threw me the can of pop, he said,

“So what’s da story hea buddy? Ya gonna go check it out o’ what?” And believe me, did I ever. At first I ran my hand slowly over the ocean blue stitching, and then slowly down the fluffy sides and eventually got to the mahogany back. Yeah, it was nice all right. We both spent a good five minutes sittin on it in complete silence, enjoying the way the couch sorta came to life and sucked your body into it until you and your soul became part of the upholstery. I told myself then and there that I was gonna be rich someday and have a couch just like that one; only it was gonna be filled with twenty-five thousand dollars instead of twenty thousand pounds of fake cotton stuffing. I wasn’t prepared, ready for, anticipating, or expecting the next comment that he threw at me. It was out of the blue, and hit harder than the football that he hit me with in the front yard. It was almost like a message from heaven, a symbol of divine intervention proving that anything is possible, a statement of complete and utter defiance to authority, that it almost made me cover my ears...but not quite:

“So what’s the deal here, kiddo?” Bry asked, “Are we gonna jump off da loft onta dis ting or what?” I slowly raised my eyes toward the upstairs and began doing the math. See, at this time, Bry was the only kid in the entire neighborhood whose old man had enough dough to have an upstairs with an open type walkway right above the family room, so you could see the people up there and vice versa, ya know? I figured that if we slid the couch about five feet toward the wall, with a good jump, we’d be set. So, we slid it up against the wall, and hurried up the stairs to get a good look at the situation. We both sat on the banister with our feet hanging down, lookin at what was probably a fifteen foot, but it had to be at least two miles from where I was. The smile on my face was gone. The feelings of defiance and triumph over mom and dad weren’t there anymore, just a terrible realization that I was afraid of heights. For the first time in my life, I had obtained some knowledge of the fact that I wasn’t invincible and two feet to the left, or two feet to the right, really made a difference. But see, the whole problem was that I was too cool to get down and do what I knew was safe. Don’t think for a minute that I wasn’t gonna let him jump though, cause no matter if it was a hit or miss, it was a good laugh for me. Maybe two feet to the right or left would serve him right for peggin me with the football...but I didn’t tell Bry that.

“So what’s da story, sissy? Do I gotsta do everyting foist?” Bry said, and with a little smile, he pushed off and landed on the couch with a soft “Thump!” Now, I knew that there was no way I was getting out of it without jumping off. After all, he first and called me a sissy. I had to go. Why? I don’t know for sure, but I knew that it would make me cool if I did. So, I closed my eyes and pushed. As I fell through the air, I’m still not

sure how long I was between the upstairs and downstairs, but it felt like time had ceased to exist. Then, I realized that my jump had not made the same noise as Bry's. Mine sorta sounded similar to splintering, maybe crackling, but definitely broken wood, and nothin like the "thumpt" created by twenty thousand pounds of fake cotton stuffing.

"Holy shit! Ya broke the friggin couch!" Bry yelled with his accent thicker than I ever remember it. For the first time in my life, I could tell that he wasn't in control. I opened my eyes, stood up and walked across the room to the opposite wall. I turned around slowly, almost expecting to see a firing squad taking aim at my head, and might have rather seen five men with guns instead of that expensive couch lying pitifully in a V shape. The underside beam was certainly broken, and that expensive couch was certainly heading for the city dump. And I could tell we were both certainly headed straight for our rooms the rest of the winter as soon as mom and dad found out. I looked at Bry for some sign of hope, some clever, devious plan in order to make things better, but all I got back was a blank stare that said "I'm screwed." Well, at least that's how I took it. So, quickly and silently, I grabbed my backpack and put my shoes on and started to walk home.

By now it was gettin dark and the semi-blue sky was now covered up by clouds any ways. The only noise on the street was that salt crazy nut in the plow goin up and down the road, putting salt on more salt that was there since last week. I had definitely gotten colder outside too, probably about forty degrees now, and Jeez it was only six-thirty and the sun had already gone down. I realized at that moment that this was the start of the rest of my life. It was as though the couch seemed to collapse under the weight of my childhood ignorance and for the first time I realized that danger was a real thing, and that some actions did have consequences. I put down my backpack, turned and looked back at Bryan's house. I could have almost cracked a smile at the thought of that couch breaking if his dad didn't pull up in the driveway at the same time.

"Kid, I hope ya got a damn good excuse this time," I said under my breath to no one in particular. I turned again, and pulled the pack of cigarettes from my jacked pocket. "three-fifty of my allowance for this?" I thought as I lit one by myself for the first time. I glanced one more time back at Bry's, picked up my backpack, and headed home to see what was for dinner.



*Untitled*  
Kellie Easterling  
polaroid transfer





*Untitled*  
Robert McCorkle  
acrylic on canvas





*Theory of Flight*  
Jennifer Cohen  
acrylic on canvas



*Under the Pier*

Kathy Hutcherson

silver gelatin print, sepia tone

# *Inevitable*

Adrian Godbee

---

The sun rises in your eyes...  
all things living come from your touch.  
Awakening;  
learning;  
caring;  
loving;  
all senses and emotions arise at your command.  
In the palm of your hand  
sets my soul in a cage,  
waiting for me to find the key  
(to your heart).  
I pray that the sun never sets in azure eyes or  
skies,  
and that our love rules this world of light.  
For if the sun sets  
(in your eyes)  
And the moon rises  
(in its full illuminating glory),  
I will cover my heart with that blanket  
that lies at the dark edge of the world,  
and wait for the sun to rise  
again.



*Untitled*  
Keemba Davis  
silver gelatin print



*Electric Eyes*  
Pia Kokko  
silver gelatin print



## ***Dear Mr. Whitman:***

Adrian Godbee

---

I, too, hear America singing -  
But now her song isn't quite as sweet.  
Bloody cries come from the streets  
    Where Red was shed.  
Unborn babes lie in unmarked graves,  
    With their future eliminated.  
Firewords spread around the sphere -  
My Brothers and Sisters take one last  
    Breath of living air.  
The elderly lay forgotten,  
While democracy hangs a flashing, neon  
    "Closed" sign,  
Waiting on St. Paul's gates to open.

Listen!  
Slowly,  
America's singing will  
Die...  
With her past,  
her present,  
her future,  
if we only stand to listen...  
to her last...lingering...notes.....



*Untitled*  
Rekha Prakash  
silver gelatin print

## *sanctuary*

Gregory Vaughn

---

When detached reflecting on my beloved  
I oftentimes become frightened  
that I am not loved the same,  
but the memory of her gentleness  
is enough to pacify my yearning soul.  
I study the moment my eyes discovered hers  
stealing glances playfully,  
but with serious intent.  
But yesterday has passed to what seems an endless time ago.  
her frame, her eyes, her smell...  
All encompass my grasp with the closure of my eyes,  
a treasured memory that no one can steal.  
She is my sun on a cool summer morning:  
The light of her tenderness descending on my face,  
warming me all over.  
So distant, yet near in my heart  
borrowed words echo in my mind,  
whispering the song of love.  
Words beautiful, and yet menacing  
like a scalpel cutting deep, prone to her mercy  
my devotion has no limits.  
Will she come to me and ease my mind?  
Desperate moments clench my soul in times of doubt.  
And I grieve in silence,  
as my fondness for her multiplies.  
She is my essence  
therefore I have no alternative except to love her.  
My world has been infiltrated by the presence of a woman  
in every sense of the word.  
So sensuous and magnificent,  
that I am overwhelmed.



2008

*Union*  
Mike Rios  
charcoal



# ***Mirrored Results***

Erin Helmey

---

Beth's hand quivered as she handed the petite girl her paper. It was probably stress, she thought, but she had taken that diet pill this morning. They always made her stomach a little queezy, but then she could at least feel it working, like her round belly was shrinking already from one little pill. She didn't mind though because the nausea kept her from eating.

That morning, she taped a picture of this girl from a catalog on her mirror. She was beautiful yet casual in these little pink sweatshorts that dipped below her waist with this sweatshirt that was cropped, so Beth could see her flat tummy with that perfect little naval. Beth thought that if she saw her every time she looked in the mirror, it would remind her to stay focused on her goal.

She was hurrying to get out of work, so she would make her doctor's appointment that day. The dreaded physical always plagued her with sweaty palms; it just wasn't a comfortable situation for any party involved.

She pulled up to the office and stepped out of the car; her belly rubbed across the steering wheel as she exited. She approached the automatic doors and thought how much she hated those things; they seemed to magnify her laziness and bring it to her attention as if she couldn't push or pull a door. She signed her name under the list of previously highlighted names; her hand was still wavering, magnified by the pen with the metal chain attached, clanking on the cold, steel clip of the clipboard. She knew she would be next, so it wouldn't be long now. Beth sat in the cushy chair that hugged her already well-padded thighs and watched the fish in the huge tank. Each one kept about its business, not paying the least attention to the other. There was a big one that just hovered over the rest; carefree at the top of the water, he seemed to possess this air of superiority. He was grey, not blue or yellow like the others, just grey and huge in comparison. The fins on his side seemed so tiny against his bulging midsection. "Jones." That was her and what she called her obscure, indistinct, Doe-like name.

The young nurse guided Beth to the first step: the dreaded scale. The harsh, metal contraption seemed to constantly point up before the nurse finally settled on a weight of 235 while the number reverberated through Beth's consciousness. Another reminder of her failure as an American woman served as a push toward her dream.

It was finally over, she thought to herself while backing out of her parking space. Beth hadn't eaten since the night before, thanks to the trusty, yellow pill, so she decided to grab something quick. Pulling up at



the drive-thru, Beth told herself to order the salad but out slipped the number five whose fat content was already accumulating on her lower stomach. Once again, after devouring fries and all, the guilt of another meal hung heavy on every appendage that was larger than the catalog girl's.

After arriving at home, Beth loaded her arms with mail and entered the frigid, dark house. She dropped the mail on the kitchen table immediately and headed toward the bathroom. The walls were papered with a delicate blue and pink, flowery pattern, contrasting Beth's view of herself in the mirror. She stared at herself while letting past comments flow through her mind. She could still hear that guy saying, "You have such a beautiful face if only...."

If only, she thought—if only what? She preached to herself that it was what people didn't say that mattered, and what he didn't say was that her body was ugly. Her mousy brown hair curled around her creamy cheeks, dropping below her developing double chin. Her hazel eyes, barely open, scanned the contents of the mirror, seeing only dimples covering her touching thighs and stretch marks extending from her naval southward and surrounding her breasts like fingers stealing her femininity. Her vibrating hand slowly lifted the toothbrush and prodded her throat as she hovered over the toilet. Her stomach turned every time contact was made with the torn tissues of her throat. It was only a matter of time, and the number five would join the rest of the house's waste, taking with it Beth's pride and esteem. With every nudge of the brush, her stomach turned over atop itself; her mouth began to water in anticipation for the partially digested meal. Then, up it came, defying all laws of gravity and biology, for Beth had taken the law into her own hands, determined to become one of the many, who needn't struggle for acceptance and prosperity in the world of gender relations.

She stared at herself in the mirror, as she always did after that moment when she felt she had some inkling of success, leaving the remnants of the number five scattered about on the crisply white bowl, seat, and creamy, cold ceramic tile. Her cheeks were flushed with a rosy color from the blood that rushed to her head; tears had welled in her eyes, slowly drifting down her strained face, and she saw that once again she had ruptured a blood vessel in her eye from straining to remove from her body that destroyer of quality life. The blood-red appearance in her left eye grew until it had taken over almost the entire inner corner. "Like a demon," she muttered, entranced by her own reflection, disgusted just the same. Her focus became lost in the rapture of the churning blood, for she saw nothing but red, blood red. The welding of her conscious meditations and her inextricable subconscious boiled and assaulted her visual reality. The blood dripped from her eye and overflowed down her full cheeks, now a darker red from blood that flowed outside of her body. It ran down her chins and

across her neck, forming separate streams that seemed to be sharp, glacial fingers grasping at her throat, raw from the regurgitation and scratching fingers. As her lethargic focus shifted to the covetous fingers, Beth became dizzy from the fear arising in her gut at the face of a demon cultivated. Her fall was slow as if drifting on the pillowy air, but the softness came to an abrupt end as her as regret-filled head received a blow from the ceramic bowl. Encircled in the remnants of lunch and blood, Beth remained, a victim of her own illusory ideas of superiority and perfection.



*Untitled*  
Elizabeth Pferschy  
silver gelatin print

# *An Answer to Death*

Heidi Hogue

---

Thoughts scuttling with the wind  
in whirlwinds of feelingless confusions.  
Where are you...  
Where am I?  
Is this real?  
Or a façade of the mind,  
Like the water in a desert,  
Thirsty and setting out to quench,  
yet coming to taste the dry, gritty sand that gets caught in the corners of  
your eyes.  
You're still not here.  
I'm still here,  
Fighting off crazy and lonely tears,  
Staring into the looking glass  
only to see hazy notions of what might be a reunion.  
Tornadoes of emotions—  
Love, Anger, Sadness, Despair—  
rip throughout my numb body (which really means nothing anyway).  
Take the mirror, spin it around, and stare deep into the depths beyond the  
gates,  
in the pupil, that certain Twinkle in the eye...  
It's very clear, you shall not miss it...  
The Soul.  
Dive deep and dare to explore,  
and you will find the effervescent pearl shining within its shell.  
Souls never leave.  
They are interconnected, like enigmatic puzzle pieces fixed in circles of  
eternity.  
Finally I am put to rest.



*Untitled*  
Rachael Dubberly  
silver gelatin print



# ***Searching***

Adrian Godbee

---

I close my eyes  
    soft breezes blow  
    picks up my hair  
I search for your caress  
    I yearn for your soul to touch mine  
A scent from my memory  
    I turn, but you aren't there  
I feel your touch  
    it leaves me shivering,  
    quivering slightly,  
Like the cool night air that  
    caresses me  
    as we count stars in the sky  
I'm staring at a horizon  
    searching for your silhouette  
    against a sunrise  
by a lakeside  
I return to the cabin  
    leaving the night air as it  
    kisses me goodbye  
I open my eyes  
    and find you at last  
lying beside me



*Untitled*  
Elizabeth Pferschy  
silver gelatin print



*Untitled*  
Sandra Gupta  
silver gelatin print

# *Quiet River*

Richard DiPirro

---

The air was still the day he crossed the flowing border of the town. The air was still and the sun leaned on this side of the river as his hiking boots rang the dull timbers of the bridge. The gnats and mosquitoes held their convention along the length of the river and shore, and they swarmed a halo around the stranger, but, I declare, not a one touched down on his dusty ballcap, nor lay tiny feet upon the sweat of the man's face. He came with company that day; a dog the color of dried clay trotted at his side, looking neither right nor left, and moving as a dog would move had it walked a hundred miles in a handful of days.

At the end of the bridge, man and dog hopped down to the river's bank, forsaking the road's itinerary for one of their own. The man walked to the water's edge and squatted so that he leaned out over the soft-running surface. He stayed that way for a while, occasionally stretching out one arm and gracefully dipping his hand in the cool water. The dog drank its fill and lay down in the shade of an old elm. The dog neither panted nor drooled much, as one might expect a dog to do on a day as warm and as humid as this was. It appeared either too exhausted to behave as a normal dog, or it was impervious to the heat and the multitude of insect communities, which loved this land like no other. After a while the man stood and began walking downstream, toward me. He gave a soft whistle and the dog appeared instantly at his side.

The man hiked along the river path with long strides and he approached me rapidly. He wore tired jeans and an olive-green, military-style rucksack. His T-shirt was faded and soiled and his cap was rife with road-dust and sweat stains. I sat upon my favorite fallen live-oak, with my pole out above the shining river and the blue-tinted line running as slack as ever into an arbitrary point in the water's surface.

I shifted myself slightly as I sat so I might view the stranger's face as he drew near. I nodded my head and raised my hand in greeting. "Nice dog," I said to him. He slowed his pace and nodded in return. He stopped and looked at me once. His hair and his face were darker than his arms, and the shade, which fell on the man's face from his ballcap, mixed with the road-tan,

dirt and beard stubble so as to erase any prominent features from view. His eyes, however, flashed into view as he first looked me over. They were a deep, forest green; a green which grows where rain falls more often than not.

He looked down at the dog, as though he had never seen it before. "You think so?"

His gaze moved on to where my line lay dead in the water.

"Sure! She's a Lab, isn't she?" The dog was sitting patiently by the man's side looking straight ahead, down the path. As I watched, she turned and looked at me, the sun falling full on her face and bringing out a beautiful metallic rust color. Her face was rather small, but her eyes were huge—a big, strong brown. She looked at me unblinking for as long as I looked at her. The gnats swarmed all over me, as they always did, regardless of the amount of bug-spray I used, but the dog didn't flinch. She didn't scratch or pant, she just looked at me.

At last, the young man hitched his pack up a bit, touched his cap in my direction and began to move on down the path again. "Good luck," he said as he walked away. I heard him give the same soft whistle as earlier, and the dog trotted off to be at his side.

"Good luck to you, Sir," I called after him, and turned back to my slumbering line.

I sat on my log for a while longer, until I had to admit to myself that the fish were not at home today. I strolled home leisurely, enjoying the bright sun on my face. I put away my rod and tackle, and packed today's earthworm survivors back in their corner of my ice-box. I was starving and, as I had no fish to eat for lunch this afternoon, I decided to walk into town and get something at the cafe.

There weren't many people on the street as I walked through the center of town. It was hot enough to keep everyone behind their fans and their air-conditioning. As I approached Whitaker Cafe down State Street, I could see the young stranger's dusty dog sitting on the porch of the cafe. It was the same dog I had met that morning, and as I mounted the steps to the cafe, I reached my hand out to pat her head. She didn't make a sound, didn't even raise her nose from where it lay on her paws, but she looked into my eyes again, and her look was enough to freeze my hand in mid-pet. This dog did not want to be touched.

I opened the door to the cafe and walked into thick,



refreshing, cool air. The bell jingled as I closed the door, and I took my usual seat right inside, at the counter. I could see the young traveler at the far end of the counter, drinking a cup of coffee and staring into his saucer. George Whitaker gave me a nod from behind the counter and set a huge, cold glass of his home-brewed iced-tea in front of me. "How's fishin', Earl?" He asked me.

"Not a nibble, Whit. Not a nibble." He was standing in front of me, at the very end of the lunch-counter. As I watched him work, he kept leaning back and looking out the front window. From where I sat, I could see he was looking at the dog on his porch. I ordered a ham sandwich, because I was mad at fish. As I ate, I couldn't help but watch my old friend's strange behavior. He would work a bit, cooking or cleaning something, then return to his position in front of me and lean back so he could look at the dog. I noticed that he didn't pay the stranger much mind at all, but the dog had piqued his interest. And every time he looked out the window, his brow became a bit more knotted. Finally, I couldn't stand it any more. "Whit, what the hell is the matter with you?"

He looked at me, shook his head a bit, leaned back, looked outside and shook his head some more. He stared at me for a time without saying anything, just shaking his head slowly. "Earl," he started, "we been friends a long time, yeah?"

"Longer'n I care to admit, sure." I sipped my tea.

"And you know I'm no crazier'n anyone else here. We go to the same church...went to the same school...."

"Sure, Whit. What's going on?"

"Well." He started to lean back again, stopped himself, and looked at the floor. "Earl, it's that goddamn dog!" He looked deep into my eyes, gauging my reaction.

I had no idea what was making him so agitated. He started pacing back and forth in front of me. "What in God's name are you going on about?" I asked him.

"Don't you recognize that dog, you old fart?" His voice was rising, quivering, and we both turned and looked at the stranger down at the far end of the counter, but he just sipped his coffee and stared straight out in front of him, at nothing. I leaned over and looked out the window myself. The dog lay as it had when I first came in, with her nose on her front paws. As I watched, not once did her legs kick, nor her ears twitch. She didn't shift or groan or move the slightest bit. But she was not familiar.

"I don't, actually. I still don't know what you're babbling about, Whit." He rolled his eyes and threw his arms up in exasperation. He checked the stranger again with a dramatic side-long glance and leaned over to whisper in my ear.

"It's the Taylor dog!" He hissed.

I stopped chewing my sandwich and tried to remember who he was talking about. "Whit, the only Taylors I know of around here was Lee Taylor and his family, but ... well...." Now my brow was knitted up and I leaned clear across the counter and looked outside. "Now come on, Whit!"

He was nodding his head at me. "I'm tellin ya"! I know it, Earl. I been chewing it over and over for thirty minutes before you come in here, and I'm telling ya', it is the goddamn Taylor dog!"

"But...." As I tried to understand what I was being told, the stranger stood up from his stool. He pulled a few, rumpled dollars from his pocket and threw them on the counter, picked his rucksack up from where it lay on the floor at his feet, and clumped his way past us toward the door.

"Thank ya', now," Whit called after him. The young stranger nodded at us and jingled his way outside. On the porch we saw him hitch his pack up on his back and make his way south on State Street, back toward the river. I couldn't hear the soft whistle from inside, but the dog hopped up and trotted off, close to the man's left leg.

A few other customers came and went and George Whitaker fed them and watered them and thanked them now. Finally we were alone and he turned the 'Open' sign over to read 'Closed.' He walked up to the counter and sat on the stool beside me. "Well?" He asked.

"Whit, you know as well as I do that Lee Taylor and his family died in that hurricane, what was it? Fifteen...twenty years ago?"

"Twenty, Earl. Twenty years ago. This month!"

"And the dog, Whit. The dog drowned with the rest of them. Drowned saving the little boy, as I recall. What was the boy's name?"

"Lance. His name was Lance Taylor. But do you remember where they got the dog from?" I was beginning to think that my friend had taken to drinking early, or, God forbid, he was beginning to get a bit loopy.

"Whit, this is nonsense. Of course I can't remember that far back, and neither can you!"

"I can, because I gave that pup to Lee Taylor when the

boy was born! Earl, that dog came from the same litter as Petey!” For a little over fifteen years Old Pete had been a fixture at Cafe Whitaker, lying inside or on the porch, greeting regulars and sponging affection from locals and passers-through alike. Old Pete had practically been the town mascot.

“Damnit, Whit, Pete’s been dead ten years now. That dog isn’t even middle-aged yet.” I thought of the Taylors, and their dog. It had been a female, I remembered now. And it was one of the smaller dogs from that litter. I’d only seen her occasionally, with the boy as he grew older. Always with the boy. And the color....

“Come on! You done with that sandwich yet?” I looked at my plate. I hadn’t eaten half of it, but I wasn’t hungry anymore.

“I guess....”

Whit stood up and grabbed my arm. “Come on!” The bell jingled after us and we headed south on State Street.

We walked in silence to the end of State street and took a left on Huntington. George Whitaker walked determinedly. His chin was out and his fists were clenched. I was not as determined, and I had to push myself to keep up with him. I was confused. The color of the dog.... Pete had been a deep chocolate color from head to toe. His fur had been short, with a glossy sheen. And he had been big for a Lab. The stranger’s dog, on the other hand, was much smaller, even for a female. And her coat was lighter, with that brilliant rust color brought out by the sunlight. This dog was much different from Old Pete. And the characteristics that made the stranger’s dog so different from Pete were the same ones that had differentiated the Taylor boy’s dog from a young Pete.

“No, Whit. It’s impossible. We’re just remembering that dog in the form of the one we saw today. This is ridiculous.” We both turned down McCabe Lane at the same time, drawn to the same place. It was a narrow gravel drive, which ran a few hundred yards back from the river, all the way to the next county.

“Impossible...ridiculous...I’m telling you, Earl, I know what I’m talking about.” He stopped walking and turned to look me in the face. “I have it on tape! I have that goddamned dog on tape!” He spun around and stormed off up the lane. We passed a few drives leading off to some newer houses and properties along the river.

The river had just about wiped out the entire town twenty years ago. A hurricane had come early that year, a bad one. It

had crushed the coastal towns and careened inland, pushing more water up the river in one twenty-four hour period than the river would normally see in six months. The rain had barely even begun and the river flooded its banks. It rose ten feet in the first two hours and then the wind got really nasty. The trees, which had sheltered our families and properties for generations, began tearing the town apart. The Whitakers' roof had been ripped away by the wind, and Whit's five-year old son had been crushed by a falling bookshelf. That was but one example, and others had it worse than Whit. The Taylors had it worse.

We were nearing the Taylor's property now. Their house had stood close to the river, elevated on old wooden pilings. Lee Taylor's grandfather had built the house, and he built it strong, but the strength of the winds and the mad gluttony of the river were the highest in recorded history on that horrible day, twenty years past. The Taylor house was rent asunder and sent careening down the furious river in pieces. And the entire family, save young Lance, was consumed by the cool water.

More than fifty people in our small town alone died in that storm. The circumstances which made the Taylors' sad fate so memorable were merely a matter of coincidence. There was a young journalism student visiting that summer, doing a school project about small towns like ours. He rented a room above the cafe, from George Whitaker, for a month or so. On the day of the storm, he had been out hiking on the far side of the river. He had a movie camera with him, and he was filming the river and the thick woods on the far bank. When the storm sprang up, and the water suddenly rose around him, he realized what was happening and he panicked. He floundered toward a small, unoccupied fishing boat that came speeding by, and managed to somehow jump inside, thinking he could make it quickly across the growing river. Instead, he was hurtled downstream, and at the second bend after the bridge, the boat crashed into a growing log-jam and was stuck there, still on the far side of the river, for the remainder of the storm.

The young student looked everywhere for some kind of help and, as he looked across the river from where he was stuck, he could see the Taylor's house come apart. And he had raised the camera to his eye and he had gotten all of it. He and the young Taylor boy had eventually been rescued, and the student's tape had been shown nationally. The student had gone on to become famous at some big-city newspaper, or television station, and Lance Taylor had been sent wherever they send young boys



who are orphaned under traumatic circumstances.

Whit and I stepped off of McCabe Lane and slowly entered the clearing where the Taylor house had stood. “See that!” Whit whispered. The stranger squatted at the edge of the water, much as he had when I first saw him, leaning out over the quiet river, dipping his hand now and again. The dog lay in the shade of an old tree, neither panting nor drooling, just watching the glassy flow of the water. Whit and I bent down a bit behind the long grass and brush that owned this property. “You see, Earl,” Whit was tugging on my sleeve, “It’s that damn Taylor kid!”

“Shhh!” As we watched, the young man stood and turned around. He scanned the property back and forth. I was convinced he had heard Whit’s big mouth and was trying to locate us, but I was wrong. The man’s gaze stopped toward the middle of the property and he walked to the spot he had found, stooped down and stood up with a brilliant purple wildflower in his hand. He walked again to the edge of the quiet river and tossed in the flower. From where we were crouched we could see the sun light up the spot where it landed. Purple spun around twice, hesitated, and then accelerated downstream. The man stood and watched the flower go, then whistled softly and man and dog set off downstream after it.

We waited until they were gone and we walked down to the river ourselves, past the stumps of ruined pilings. At the water’s edge, I squatted as he had squatted and gracefully dipped my hand in the ever-moving surface. The water was cool, but not cold, and the current pulled my hand as if encouraging me downstream.

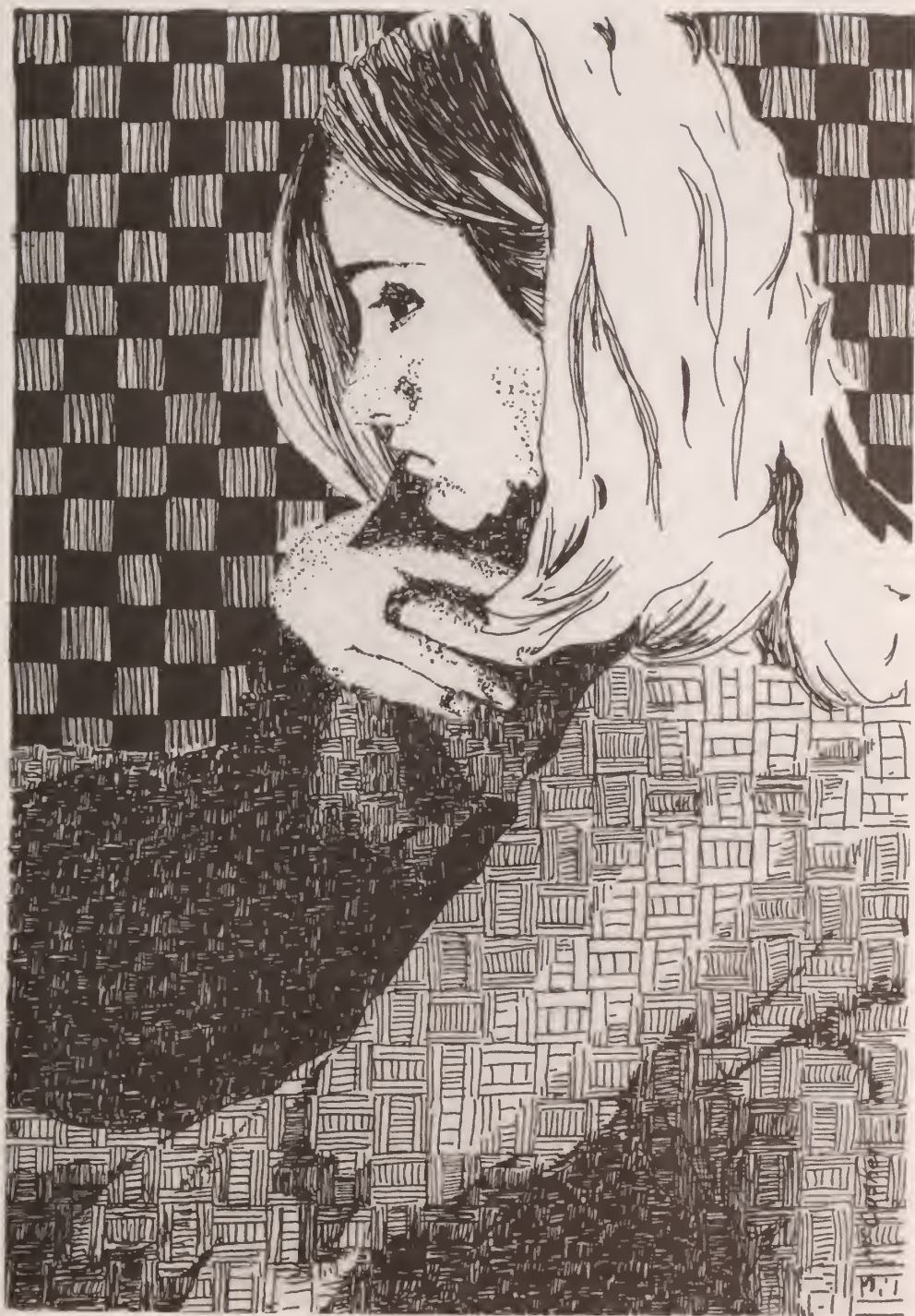
The projector rattled and chattered as it spun its tragic tale. Smoke from Whit’s cigarette drifted up through the black and white images cast on the far wall of the room. We both drank greedily from our cold cans of beer. First a jumble of snow and blank frames of film, then, suddenly, a clear image of the Taylor place through beating sheets of rain. The river was brown and angry, and the water was up behind the Taylor property, inundating everything up to McCabe Lane. The house leaned to the right, slowly at first. As we watched, the pilings gave way one at a time, and the house began to break up. Someone, Mrs. Taylor I assume, fell from an upstairs window and was swept away. The house lost all recognizable form as pieces large and small were carried downstream. Then the camera focused



on a form clinging to the base of one of the pilings. It was Lee Taylor, holding onto what was left of the piling with one arm. With his other he held onto his youngest daughter. The poor girl was buffeted and flung about by the current until finally, she was snatched from the elder Taylor's grasp. He screamed once, I could almost hear it, even without sound, and then let go the piling, to be with his family. As the last vestiges of the family known as Taylor were carried away, a small head broke the surface of the water. It was young Lance Taylor, and as he floundered and choked and was grabbed by the water, the dog could be seen swimming from the direction of McCabe Lane and dry land. As we watched, the dog grabbed the collar of the Taylor boy's shirt and began paddling toward shore. Whit and I both leaned closer to the image we were watching. Remarkably, even through the rain and the spray from the river, one could see the pair, boy and dog, clearly, if only for a moment. It was the boy's dog, Pete's sister, the same dog we had seen this day. We saw them for a moment, then they were gone from the camera's view, and the film was over.

Whit turned off the projector, and flipped on the lights. He looked at me as I took a long swig of my beer. "The boy lived, as I suppose you know. But I saw the body of that damn dog myself. She drowned saving that kid!" I just looked at my beer and nodded my head. Whit sat down again next to me. "Goddamn spawn of Satan, what we saw today."

"I don't know, my friend," I said. "Seems more like an angel to me." Whit snorted and went to fetch some more beer.



*Untitled*  
Sharon McCusker  
pen and ink

# ***Gone***

Kimberly Porter

---

As I watch the flicker of the flame  
my mind begins to wander.  
I begin to wander off as if in a daze.  
I can remember your face,  
but only now while my mind  
is at a repetitive pace.

I know not where I have traveled  
but I have been here before,  
I know it, I feel the glow of my soul  
I can remember your face.  
There is a peace of sweet nothing.  
That is always known.

I feel no physical presence  
only the energy of myself.  
No longer existing as I  
know it...still  
I remember your face.  
No longer are  
you here in this earthly domain  
but no, you are not gone.



*Untitled*  
Jay Solomon  
silver gelatin print



# ***For Want of Slumber***

Mike Rios

---

Everything happened quickly that morning, after Billy swallowed the sleeping pills. At first he had feared nothing would happen as he lay down on his bed and closed his eyes. He hadn't been tired in the least, even after a restless night of contemplation. In fact, he had risen from his bed with an unexpected vigor, which had propelled him on the quarter of a mile walk to the drugstore where the plainfaced clerk had rung up the four boxes of Dozeallnite without so much as a blink. He was surprised at how much energy he had. It seemed to him that he had lacked any sort of energy for a long time. And now that he didn't need it he had an abundance of it. But despite this energy Billy felt calm, extremely calm.

Only a few minutes had passed away when he felt a sting on his toe. It was more like a pinprick, and he hadn't thought much of it until he felt another. And then suddenly all his toes and the soles of his feet were being pricked here and there, culminating in a haphazard tingling. The sensation spread quickly, rising up his calves like an army of charging ants. He sat up and started to rub his legs when he felt a tiny wave of pricks on his fingers. His hands started shaking as this wave, too, began spreading along his palms and across his wrists.

He threw himself back down upon the bed and tried to lie still, realizing at once what was happening. He tried to say it in his mind, to sound out the words in his thoughts. *I'm.... I'm....* He couldn't complete the sentence although he knew that he had to have thought it already. Why else would he be struggling to say it if he hadn't already thought it? *Is this how it feels to...?* he asked no one in particular. *A thousand, two thousand needles?*

*What will they think when they find me?* He opened his eyes and looked around his room. The eighteen by twelve foot space, which had been his world for these past few months, was decorated with empty liquor bottles (from when he had a job), empty beer bottles (from the time after he walked out of his job, never to return to it or any other), dirty laundry (including the only three shirts he owned and one he had stolen), and crushed cigarette boxes (piled in a corner by the pornographic videos). Missing from the room's decorations was a non-existent note penned by a man who wished to no longer exist. *Why leave a note?* he had asked himself. *The body'll explain it all, won't it? Won't it?* But the real reason he hadn't written a note was not that he had felt it unnecessary. He couldn't find something to write the note with and lacking the energy to look for a pen or pencil or marker or crayon or... he had simply given up, like he had



on the playground when climbing the jungle gym had become too difficult, like he had in college when writing papers had become too difficult, like he had in the desert when carrying a bleeding soldier, a bleeding man, a bleeding friend, had become too difficult. *Am I giving up again? Do I ignore this energy inside of me telling me to get my ass up? I thought you didn't want to get up anymore? I thought... you thought... I thought...*

He jumped off the bed and ran into the living room where his roommate was arguing with her boyfriend again. "Elizabeth," he managed to say, "I think I need a ride to the hospital."

The next moment he was standing at the entrance to the emergency room at St. Mark's closing the passenger door of a blue pickup truck. From inside, Elizabeth's boyfriend wished him well while revving the engine. Billy watched him shoot across the parking lot before he could offer his thanks.

It didn't take long for the doctors to see him. They were upon him as soon as he told the receptionist what he had done. He gave them his name and address and social security number and, in turn, they held his arms (which were violently shaking), forced him to swallow the thickest, blackest liquid he had ever seen, and stuck a long tube down his throat. One of the doctors said, "All right, now," and Billy watched as the globbish contents of his stomach rushed through the tube, exiting into an unseen container with a continuous plop, plop. This made him vomit some more until there was nothing remaining in his stomach but the tube. They extracted that with one pull while he let out a long breath. Then they connected him to an intravenous unit and a monitor, and left.

He lay there alone for what he thought were hours, trying to regain a sense of calm, a difficult task given the needle lodged in his arm and the monitor directly facing him like a possessed television he could not turn off. He told himself, however, that the needle was an obvious necessity, that his body surely needed the basic nourishment the intravenous unit was dispensing drop by drop. And the monitor? Another necessity. But why did it have to face him? Perhaps one of the doctors thought it would do the kid some good to watch his heart-rate and blood pressure bounce along a screen for a while. Maybe the kid'll think twice next time.

"Right in there," he heard a woman's voice say.

"Thank you." Another voice, this one familiar.

He turned towards the door and saw Elizabeth walk in. She sat next to the bed and asked, "How are you feeling?"

"Scared," he admitted.

"I can imagine," she said, looking at him with what he first thought to be pity. But there was something else in her eyes, something he had seen somewhere before.

"I see they gave you charcoal."

He just stared at her.

"The black stuff you swallowed. You have some on your lips." She smiled at this.

"Oh," he said like five year-old, wiping his mouth. "Sorry, I wasn't expecting any visitors."

She leaned forward and delicately wiped a finger on the edge of his bottom lip. "Missed some."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome."

Neither spoke for a few seconds. When one of them did it was Billy.

"How'd you know it was charcoal?"

"That's what they gave me."

"Oh," he said, embarrassed again.

"I accidentally drank some anti-freeze once. I know, you're wondering 'How do you drink anti-freeze by accident?' Well, when you have a boyfriend stupid enough to keep it in a bottle of Gatorade in the cab of his truck and you're driving along one day and you get thirsty, it's pretty easy."

He laughed. He couldn't help doing so. But before he could apologize Elizabeth started laughing, too.

"I have to admit, I can laugh about it now, but when they were putting that tube in my mouth I was terrified. I thought I was going to...."

He silently nodded.

"I, uh, I don't know what I'm doing here. I mean, when Brandon came back and I asked him how you were and he said he just dropped you off I was mad. I was furious. I told him we should come see you and he said, 'Why?' I said 'He's my roommate, that's why.' Jesus, what kind of question is that? Some things you just do. You shouldn't have to explain, you know?"

Billy realized what he saw in her eyes. It almost flattened him.

She stood as if to leave. "I've got to get to work. Besides, you need your rest."

He took her hand in his, surprised by the amount of energy it took to do so. His lips parted to ask her to.... He couldn't, he had no right to. Instead he freed her hand and watched her leave the room, all the while listening to the sound of her footsteps fade slowly until it was consumed by the droning hum of the air conditioner. He closed his eyes once again that morning and he didn't open them until later that evening when the sound of footsteps returned, awakening him from something more than his sleep.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi."



*Broken Down*  
Paula M. Cates  
silver gelatin print

**REM**

Erica Bryant

---

Every waking moment  
I think about your beautiful brown eyes  
golden brown complexion  
the holes that appear in your face when you smile.

Every waking moment  
I feel your soft hands caressing my back, my thighs, my breast  
taking me to that special place in ecstasy that only your touch can.

Every waking moment  
I smell your sensual aroma "Ralph Lauren Safari"  
like an African mezzanine  
my body waits for your to explore its genuine beauty.

Every waking moment  
I call your name  
you come to me  
I hold you in my arms and tell you how much I love you  
and you speak the words of love back to me  
then you fade away  
suddenly I realize  
my every waking moment with you  
is in my dreams.





*Untitled*  
Sandra Sumner  
silver gelatin print



# *Scattered Showers*

Seth Riley

---

Maybe they're right. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to talk about it. I tumble the story, of that day I mean, around in my head day in and day out. Like laundry spinning around my mind all the time and I still don't know that I'll be able to describe it. When I'm just thinking, the pieces can just float where they will. You follow? Anyway, I'll give you your logical progression, if you think it'll get us anywhere.

I still think about her every day, throughout of all of the years that we were together, it's the last day that I can't forget. I've found that my memories of her before that day have dulled, but the memory of her that Wednesday is blazed, if you will, into my mind. Six years have passed, but with every day that goes by, I feel like I've moved back closer to it. Almost funny, I think, how the day started out as if it would replicate the stream of Wednesdays that came before it.

Wednesdays. They've always particularly frustrating for me, so you'll have to excuse me if I get carried away. So, here we begin. Wednesday morning. Six forty-five, alarm howling, I roll onto my side and scowl at the oversized red numbers. Around six fifty-three I can't take the buzzing anymore and step out of bed. So begins another day.

Pants go on, left leg first. Slipping into the black dress shoes that still carry the veneer of their spit shine from the night before, I can smell the coffee that's started to brew and send its aroma up the stairs. Don't leave without saying goodbye. Kiss her on the forehead; she won't feel it, but my lips have been there just the same.

She won't be up until the talk show stages are filled and I've already done hours worth of work. With a goodbye firmly planted on her skin, I walk downstairs and pour my coffee. Slip on my black trench coat, cinch the waist, and pick up an umbrella to help the coat in a collaborative effort to protect me from the elements. The elements; now that's where the difference for that Wednesday came into play.

It was god awful outside. The sun never even rose that morning. Autumn rain was pelting the windows and echoing off of the roof, hard at work before the day began. The early November air was frigid, intensified by the mingled chills of morning and the pouring rain. Dart to the car. Turn the key. Along with the roar of the engine comes the chatter of the voices of morning radio. Caller number twelve has just won lunch for two at the Elk Room. Congratulations caller number twelve.

That day's liaison with the morning personalities was unfortunately

lengthened due to the inclement weather. Its not just the disc jockeys that get me. They're bad enough, but then throw in the commercials. Like the car dealerships that tell you about this great deal and then read the little red print really fast and in a different voice. It's like if they just read the statement outright that says, "Okay, so we lied. We'll screw you so hard that you end up paying twice the sticker price but you don't have to pay a dime of it until the year 2000." Just use that quick new voice and I guess they suppose we morning listeners don't get their trick. Sorry, back to the point.

It's raining so hard that I can barely see the road. Not even people to watch in the rear view images that remind you that you're not alone. Innumerable faces, dead eyes focused on the asphalt, counting the broken white lines, smoking their cigarettes and pounding down their coffee before the work day begins. Fueling up their bodies before floundering through another day; pumping in the chemicals that keep the bones moving until the time clock frees them. No, not that day.

Only the water obscuring the view of the streets and the hypnotic dance of the windshield wipers, trying so hard to keep the deluge away. One of those mornings where you hear the wipers scraping against the window for so long that you begin to think there's a tune there. Anyway, at ten minutes until eight I enter the firm.

My wet shoes squeak on the cold marble floors, echoing through the lobby as I tentatively walk towards the elevator. The bell boy touches the button for the third floor and as it lights up he musters up one of the three or four mundane salutations from his repertoire, all of which are dependent on the day's weather. "Good morning, Mr. Weeks. Hope you didn't get too wet out there."

"Like water off a duck's back, Joe," I reply and step off the elevator. If you have nothing nice to say, talk about the weather.

My secretary meets me at the corner, looking uncharacteristically pale, her eyes sallow beneath her long white forehead, topped with a tight gray twist of hair. "Morning Sally. Why so grim?" I inquire.

"Am I grim today, sir? Maybe its the weather. Something in the air. There's coffee made."

I extend my mug, gesturing for a warm-up. "I don't know how I'd get through the day without you, Sal," I say with a wink, noticing as I take my mug from her hand that a glimmer has come to her tired blue eyes.

Past her desk and into my office I walk, ready to start the clock and sit down with the morning paper. When I reached my door, however, I'm faced with a semicircle of chairs, holding the three crusty partners of the firm. In lieu of individual description, I'll simply ask you to draw it from what you've seen hundreds of time on television and in the movies. Crooked, hardened men with noses painted over with broken blood vessels

like a canvas for the stress of years of staying just one step ahead of their game.

There before me sat the cliché, broken into three models, each a decade or so closer to the grave than the next. Three corpulent necks bound tightly by starched collars, with their round red faces above glistening with oil. I cannot even remember their individual faces now, nor even in their presence could I close my eyes and visualize them.

"Weeks, take a seat please. We need to talk to you."

I feel myself flush and my legs going weak, so I walk gingerly to my desk and sit down in my chair, facing them and suspecting that I'm about to play out a tragedy for the amphitheater before me. "What's the problem, gentlemen," I ask in a falsely flippant tone.

"Well, Weeks," says the elder Mr. Drake, "it's like this. While the firm's a family, we're also a business. When a branch of that family tree starts dying, you have to saw it off so that it doesn't spread to the rest. In short, your work's not up to par, Son."

"So you're cutting me off? Four years and I hit my first losing streak. It happens to everyone sooner or later. Besides, all I can do is argue against the evidence."

"It's not about evidence, Weeks, it's about romancing the jury. You used to have it. Your client's hands could be covered in blood and you could win the jury over with just the right smile," replies Mr. Jackson, the eldest of the three.

"Look," I say, "Give me the chance and I know that I can get it back. Let me have a week, come on. God knows, I could use a vacation. I think I just need to clear out the cobwebs."

The junior Mr. Drake stiffens at my words and says, "Six months without a win, Weeks, six months. I'd say that winning smile's gone for good. It's like you don't even give a damn if you win or lose anymore."

"Please, Sir," I say, "I can still care."

"I'm sorry Tom, but this time you lose again," he replies. "Honestly, we're all afraid that your luck is gonna rub off on us. We don't need that here."

With that, I rise, open my briefcase and fill it with the few personal effects scattered about the office, including the picture of my wife from my desk. As I slide her into my bag, I'm struck afresh with the genuine happiness of her smile as it was six years ago when the photograph was taken. Her youthful green eyes, the wisps of auburn hair that broke free of the pearl clamp holding her locks in place. A beautiful face whose fire only lived in pictures and memories.

Only five years of marriage had fossilized the image of her in the frame, keeping it vibrant in spite of time. In reality, the eyes had grown tired from the boredom of watching the four walls around her. Anxiety pills had



preserved the smile, though the happiness behind it had given way to stoicism. Through all the boredom of decorating and redecorating, watching endless hours of television and catalog shopping, the wax smile had kept up the pretense.

Jane. I could sit in the office and stare at her for hours. I felt more passion in the frame than in the cold hands at home. Once the picture is safely at the bottom of my briefcase, I can feel the divorce between me and the woman in the picture. Now I'd sit at home with the real Jane. The one who kept the shades drawn all day, pacing around the house in the robe that she'd slept in and sterilizing the house until night gave way to morning. I could see it as plain as day, sitting with her in our showplace; the love child of her boredom and my money. Funny how, if you install plumbing and hang some paintings on the walls, the monkeys don't even realize they're in a cage. Six years together and now all I could think of were those beautifully damning words. "Till death do us part."

Brought back by the realization that the Misters Drake, Drake and Jackson of Jackson, Drake and Drake sit watching me, waiting in the room as I scavenge about for anything that I may want to take with me, I decide to abandon all but the picture in my bag and the mug in my hand that my nephew gave to me. Its great, you know, it says "Hang In There" and has that pissed off wet cat hanging from a tree limb. Nothing. Four years, I think, and all I'm walking with is a picture and some tepid coffee. Hang in there!

I sling my bag across my shoulder and stroll to the door, past the partners, looking back into the oak paneled office at the barren mahogany desk, turning around only to say, "I'm really gonna miss the family. You men take care. I'm sure there are some great lawyers in hell to help plead your cases." With a squint of my eyes and a smirk disguised as a smile covering my face, I head for the elevator.

On my way, I pass Sally, slinking towards my office with a pot of coffee in hand. Casting her eyes towards me and then back to the floor, she mutters, "We both knew it was coming, Sir. We'll really miss you around here." With a defeated smile, I step into the elevator and am, once again, greeted by the bell hop, who replies, "Leaving early today? Well, Sir, it's still coming down out there. Try to stay dry." Looking him dead in the eye, I try to comment on the rain but decide that silence is much more polite.

Throwing open the lobby doors, I step into the street, leaving no impression behind me, save for the dying echo of my squeaking soles. The sun hadn't yet found its way through the pall of the storm, though the rain seemed like a shelter from the sun's light. Throwing my umbrella onto the sidewalk, I step into my car and turn the key. Well, you don't say. Caller number seven just won tickets to see the Stones. Congratulations caller

number seven.

How can I tell her, I think, as I slowly navigate the car through the flooding streets. What was the slogan, "Say it with flowers?" Though she was normally upset by the invasion of her home by the innumerable pollen particles, she couldn't resist lilies. Lilies were the one guarantee that I'd see the semblance of that old smile one last time before I told her. Traffic was moving so slowly that I seemed to be at a standstill. Deciding to break free of the frozen traffic, I pull to the car over to the curb and put it in park. Stepping forth into the rain, I begin walking west towards the florist.

The door swings open, setting off like five of those little bells that make it virtually impossible to make a quiet entrance. The cold air of the store is magnified by my wet skin and sopping clothing. The walls are covered in lattice with artificial greenery interwoven throughout. Helium-filled balloons hover above the room. The dearth of fresh flowers in vases and the coolers fills the air with that sweet but pungent aroma that could only come from a florist or a funeral parlor.

"Morning, sir," chirps the fat woman behind the long counter, "It's a nasty one, huh? Can I help you with something?"

"I sure hope so," I reply, giving her a glimpse of my winning smile.

Over and over she drones about how wonderful it is to know that there are still romantics out there. Coming through that weather for flowers and all. Being the only customer in the store on such a day, I become the target of her one sided conversation. I stand there in silence, arms folded, and watch her wrap the flowers with a precision that tells me that she hadn't figured out yet that not a damn soul notices the difference.

Staring down at her substantial wrists, watching her motions as she wraps the paper into a bouquet, I notice that she's wearing a thin gold wedding band, nearly obscured by the abundance of the fleshy folds of her skin. Her arms are the same fish-belly white that Jane's slender arms have become; the sign of lost contact with the sunlight and countless hours under fluorescent lamps. That same transparent skin that revealed the hollow blue veins underneath. I figured that gold ring meant that some other poor bastard was probably kicking himself for that same "till death do us part" speech.

"These are going to be just perfect. Your wife's a very lucky woman, but I'm sure she knows that," she says with a smile.

I respond with a quiet smile.

Stepping back into the rain, soaking wet and directionless, I continue walking in the opposite direction of my car. The rain began to come down harder and the stream running down the pavement had risen to the level of my shoes, pouring in and drenching my feet. Trying in vain to shield the lilies, I spot a staircase across the street that leads down to the basement of an immense red brick building. I cross over and look down the stairs to see



the word “OPEN” spelled out in red lights on the solitary window, save for a small porthole in the heavy oak door. I descend the stairs and make my way inside.

No bells on this door, I think as I enter, only to find that this time it’s hard to go unnoticed due to the fact that I am one of only three customers that I see, the other two being a couple hidden in a corner table. No light from outside seemed to make it into the room, leaving the illumination up to the reflection against the brick of the walls of the candles set on each of the tables and the green banker’s lights adorning the bar. After stealing a sideways glance at the loving pair, I scan the room for a bartender.

Aside from my couple, the only other semblance of life in the room seems to be the music coming from the neon bubbling jukebox by the bar. I make my way up to the bar and take a seat, eagerly awaiting the initial sensation of the alcohol infusing my veins. I am still looking around for a bartender when a faceless male voice chokes out, “So are those flowers for me? You shouldn’t have.”

Caught off guard, I crane my head around to discover an old man seated at the end of the bar with a pipe in his hand and a half-empty glass before him. Realizing that he is the source of the voice, I focus my gaze on the man. “You look like you need to find a bartender pretty bad, pal,” the old man says.

“Understatement. How do I get service around here?” I inquire curtly.

“The flowers then, I suppose, aren’t for me. That’s a shame. Bartender stepped into the kitchen. Give him a minute,” he says.

Within seconds, a tall young man with greased down black hair and pale skin rounds the corner. Judging from the young man’s clothing, black pants, a white shirt, and a black bow tie, I gather that he is the bartender and simply state, “Manhattan. Straight up.”

“Coming up,” he replies.

“I could’ve ordered for you,” the old man announces. “All lawyers drink the same thing. I don’t know though. It’s a toss up between that and a vodka martini, so it’s good that you ordered.”

“How did you know that,” I ask, as the bartender lays out a napkin on the bar and places my drink on top.

“Look at yourself, walking around in the rain in a thousand dollar suit, dripping wet and carrying around a bunch of flowers getting beaten down with rain. Didn’t exactly take Nostradamus to predict that you needed a stiff drink.”

“That I’m a lawyer, I mean. How’d you know that?”

“Want a cigarette? I smoke a pipe, but I still have to keep cigarettes on me,” the man says.

“I quit, thanks.”

"That's funny. I thought you were fired," he said.

"What? How do you know about my job?"

"It's hard to carry on a conversation from all the way down here. Mind if I move down there by you?," the man asks, though he stands up and begins to move his drink and ashtray in my direction before I can respond.

As the man comes closer and settles beside me, I'm able to clearly make out his image. Silver hair, slightly feathered at the temples. Long slender hands, smooth with pointed nails. His eyes were ice blue, like crystal pools whose surfaces change with every ripple. Frightfully inviting yet deeper than the swimmer might expect. He wore a dingy white dress shirt, covered by a faded brown velvet smoking jacket, about which hung the aroma of stale tobacco.

His face and clothing had weathered so over his years, how ever many he'd seen, that he seemed to have grown right out of the bricks of the walls and the oak of the floor and bar. The low light of the room played on his features so that at one glance he appeared to be a very old sixty and at the next he seemed to be a youthful 110. His long white face was hairless except for the thick silver brows above his eyes. When next he spoke, I could smell the intoxicating mixture of smoke and bourbon

"Do you need to talk? I'd say you need to talk, but I don't want to jump the gun," he says.

"Look friend, I'm not ready to pour out my soul here. Besides, I don't even know who you are. Who might you be anyway?," I ask, washing my words down with a gulp of my drink.

"I might be anyone, or anywhere for that matter. Something tells me that here is the place to be though."

"Another," I say in the bartender's direction. "So this is the place to be?," I ask, once more directing my questions to the old man.

"Well, let's look at your choices. Sitting in backed up traffic, waiting for the water on the roads to recede? Your office? Oh, sorry, scratch that one. At home?"

"Can't go home yet. Unless my wife's as perceptive as you are, chances are that she doesn't know that I'm no longer employed. Actually, I'm here, I think, to think over how I can tell her. She's a little on the fragile side."

"I wouldn't worry," the man replies, "you haven't broken her yet."

"Me? You think I'm her problem?"

"Slow down, now. I don't even know her."

I sip my drink and try to explain myself. "Sorry. She's changed. I think she is broken, but I didn't break her. Every day I sit at my desk and stare at her picture, and I pray that she hasn't just ended it."

Igniting a cigarette, the man looks at me with an intensity in his eyes and implores, "Why would she do a thing like that? Is it what you want?"

"Jesus! That's rich."

“Well,” says the man, drawing in on his pipe, “what do you want? Surely if that’s what you both want then the two of you can come up with a solution. There are so many ways that both of you could do it efficiently if you’re both so miserable. Most people would cut off their right hand to have what you both do.”

“Are you telling me that we should both kill ourselves? What the hell’s wrong with you? And I’m not so sure anyone would give their right hand to be unemployed, or to go home to a virtually dead woman for that matter.” With this, I lift my drink to my lips and swallow the last drop.

“I’m only saying that, if it’s really so damned bad, you’ve got your ways out. There’s the old car exhaust trick where you just go to sleep. You could jump together from a bridge or something. Now, that should bring back the old romance.”

“Or something,” I repeat. “I never said that I wanted to die, for Christ’s sake.”

“Innumerable windows of escape, and as you sit here she sits at home, watching the bottle of pills on the table and thinking the same thing that you are. Maybe open up the lines of communication there, brother, and you’ll actually get somewhere. It’s the cowardly way, she knows that, but it’s painless. Again, you just drift away.”

In disbelief, I stare up at the man and his lips part in a smile, revealing the crooked yellow teeth lining his graceful mouth. Unable to speak, I rise from my chair, grab the lilies from the bar, and start for the door. “Hey bud, I got your tab,” the old man says with a wink of one of his crystal eyes.

“It’s the least you could do,” I stammer, running out the door, back into the pouring rain.

Shuffling through my pocket for my keys, I realize that my car is parked blocks away. Damn the power of suggestion! Some stranger who’s never seen into my life for a second tells me my wife is at home, ready to end her life. It’s no wonder that I get confused talking about it. Panic takes away your logic. Five minutes feel like five hours and suddenly time doesn’t add up.

My heart is racing as I try fruitlessly to catch sight of my car in the distance, knowing that Jane may be at home, drifting off to sleep. As I sprint down the busy street, rain pelting my eyes, my clothes slow me down from the weight of the water they’ve absorbed and their inclination to cling to my legs. I pull off my overcoat and cast it aside. Next, off comes the sopping silk tie and the black jacket of my suit. Finally, the socks and shoes. Having shed the bulk of my hindrance, I break back into a run, with my white shirt clinging to my chest and bare feet stinging as each foot

strikes the pavement. Clinched tightly in my fist, the flowers flop wildly about as I make my way.

When at last I reach the car, I jump inside and turned the engine. The morning personalities are busy spinning some top-forty music and planning what to give away next to keep people listening. As I turn the corner, I see that, although the rain is still coming down, traffic is once again moving and my chances of making it home are good. For the twenty or so minutes of the drive home, my mind races ahead of me, bringing me images of a number of morbid scenarios into which I might walk.

Fighting the images of my wife, having fallen victim to her own sorrow, dead on the cold bathroom floor, or comatose on the sofa, I try to jolt myself into reality by telling myself that the man was crazy. Maybe I'd been in trial with him and he knew my face. Maybe I was the reason that he went to jail. He was just pulling facts that he knew out of the air to trouble me or plant seeds of doubt in my head. Surely that was it. However convincing my arguments, I never decreased my speed. In fact, I sped up, knowing deep down that, had I ever seen those eyes before, I would surely remember them. Ironical that I could tell myself that I could possibly forget them, for that's precisely what I've spent hours of every day since trying to do.

Passing by the newsstand where I normally stopped in the morning and the cafe where I always stopped for lunch, to eat my turkey on wheat at noon, it hit me that she wasn't my problem. We were the same, Jane and I. Victims of a routine, stuck in the middle of a circle that whirled around us daily. My boredom was a vast desk with her memory staring me in the face. Hers was an empty house with my absence hanging in the cold, disinfected air.

That Wednesday I realized that, if I intended to make it over the hump and on to Thursday and Friday, something had to break the routine. On reaching our home, I notice that the only light in the house is a glaring red blur dancing before the kitchen window. She'd fallen asleep and let the stove catch again, I was sure of it. Throwing open the front door and running through the foyer, my wet feet slip out from underneath me on the marble checkered floor. As I clamber onto my feet, my senses become aware of the smoke, which is instantly burning my eyes and clouding my lungs.

I can smell the mingled odors of burning rubber and hair. As I shuffle into the kitchen doorway, covering my mouth and nose with my wet sleeve, I see that the old man was wrong. The pill bottle on the counter is still full, though alongside it stands a can of lighter fluid and a box of kitchen matches. I drop the battered lilies at my side and stand in the doorway, clutching the frame to support my body, the components of which have seemingly lost their synergy, leaving me unable to move a muscle.



Before me flails the source of the flame in the window. My wife, more awake than I've seen her in years. Her silk robe is nothing more now than a burn covering her steaming black body. The wayward wisps of her auburn hair are nothing more than blackened cinders. As she slumps to the hard tile, I take my last look into her wide open eyes.

So there you have it. And, as I've said, I don't know that any of your questions or mine have been answered. Why she did it, I don't know. Why I didn't get there in time, I don't know. And why anyone would do something so painful to herself, I don't know. I've always told myself that a man should never try to gather up sense where sense is not. Perhaps my doctors should stop and listen to my advice rather than this same old story. If they think that I understand it better than they, well they're wrong. I only know that I'd be free to move on, if only my alibi had told me his name.





*Untitled*  
Kelley Brown  
silver gelatin print





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