

# CALLIOPE









# Calliope

## Vol. XXX

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Since 1984, *Calliope* has been featuring student-authored works of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and visual art. Published annually in the spring, students submit their works throughout the fall semester for consideration by the editorial board. The Lillian Spencer Awards are voted on by the editorial board and presented for outstanding submissions in fiction, poetry, and art. For more information on submitting or working on the *Calliope* staff, contact Dr. Christopher Baker in the Languages, Literature and Philosophy department.



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# Art

*Gabriel Amadi-Emina*

I see the lines that create the sentences,  
which have constructed an entire generation.  
I was told being a symbol of hope was  
my goal, my vision . . . my destiny . . .  
In all honesty, all I have ever wanted to be has been  
depicted in movies, written in novels, and voiced in orchestrated  
symphonies.  
I have seen moving emotions and from the tears  
of a mother, I have witnessed the heart dropping smile of a baby,  
which was a sign of pure relief . . . or maybe confusion.  
I have been the person to tell sweet words to a woman  
because I rather not tell her the truth . . .  
I am a walking working disaster; I resemble every color or hue  
of beauty and darkness.  
I am the reason for liars, deceivers and vampires  
I am the oblivious decorum of unfinished works  
that have been bastardized by their unforgiving makers.  
I am the science of immortality.  
The ultimate end of infinity.  
I am the sudden pause in a sentence,  
that makes you gasp for pleasure, hatred and  
unbelievable lust  
I am every lie that has ever been told,  
I am every heart that has ever been broken.  
I am the sensation you feel,  
when you touch the one you truly love.  
I am God's first true creation,  
Art.

# The Creation of Adam

*Gabriel Amadi-Emina*

Photography/digital art





# Sight

Annelies Carl

Digital photography



# A Couple of Proud Sore Thumbs in a Tired Atmosphere

*Jennifer Crumpton*

Dancing thumbs collide,  
left coiled like an organized mess  
of thoughts on conversations.  
Our hands are trading secrets  
with each other as the screeching  
of the train stumbles to a slow stall.  
It's time to walk the plank.  
Swimming suddenly seems unnatural  
now, I've finally gotten used to the oxygenic  
atmosphere filled with carbon toxins  
that are just waiting for the chance to fill my lungs.  
Sinking seams of threaded cotton  
feels more automatic;  
we are weighed down with deep red wine stains  
intended to ease the chaos.

The town is filled with false identities  
and hollow promises plastered  
on every sidewalk corner  
as if just part of the scenery.  
Old bureaucratic believers constructed  
by new age aristocrats sit struggling,  
trying desperately to sustain control.  
Morally corrupted minds  
are creations built from misconstrued  
convictions of what life is, really.  
Like a pair of old new boots  
that never fit quite right, this place  
is unforgivingly uncomfortable.  
We both feel the need  
for a new arrangement.

The art of living is so fragile;  
yet, it continues to be manhandled  
with madness.  
I hear the whistle blow,  
loudly reminding us of the time.  
You motion for me to follow you onto the platform.  
I smell like burnt coffee, you taste like old smoke.  
Presiding in this condescendingly  
covert state of living, your skin  
feels scared just like mine. My tongue  
hears the sweet melody  
you have started to roll  
inside my mouth:  
I am a thinker,  
a doer,  
a shot at the future,  
meaningful, vibrant, and alive.

# Horsehair Lidded Jar

*Dawn DeFrank*

Ceramic, horsehair fired on porcelain





# Untitled

*Susan Pugh*

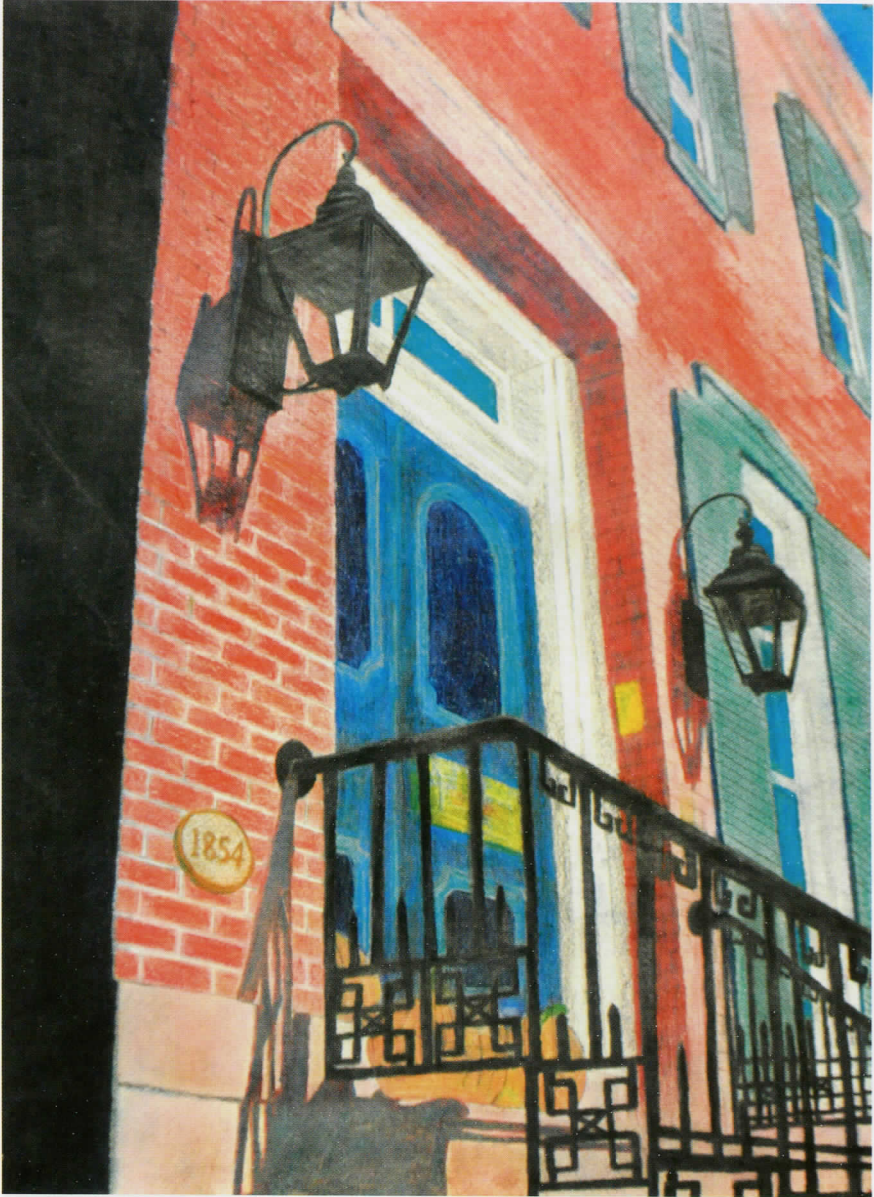
35mm film, black and white print



# Downtown Savannah

Donny Williams

Colored pencil



# Drum

Ana Strother

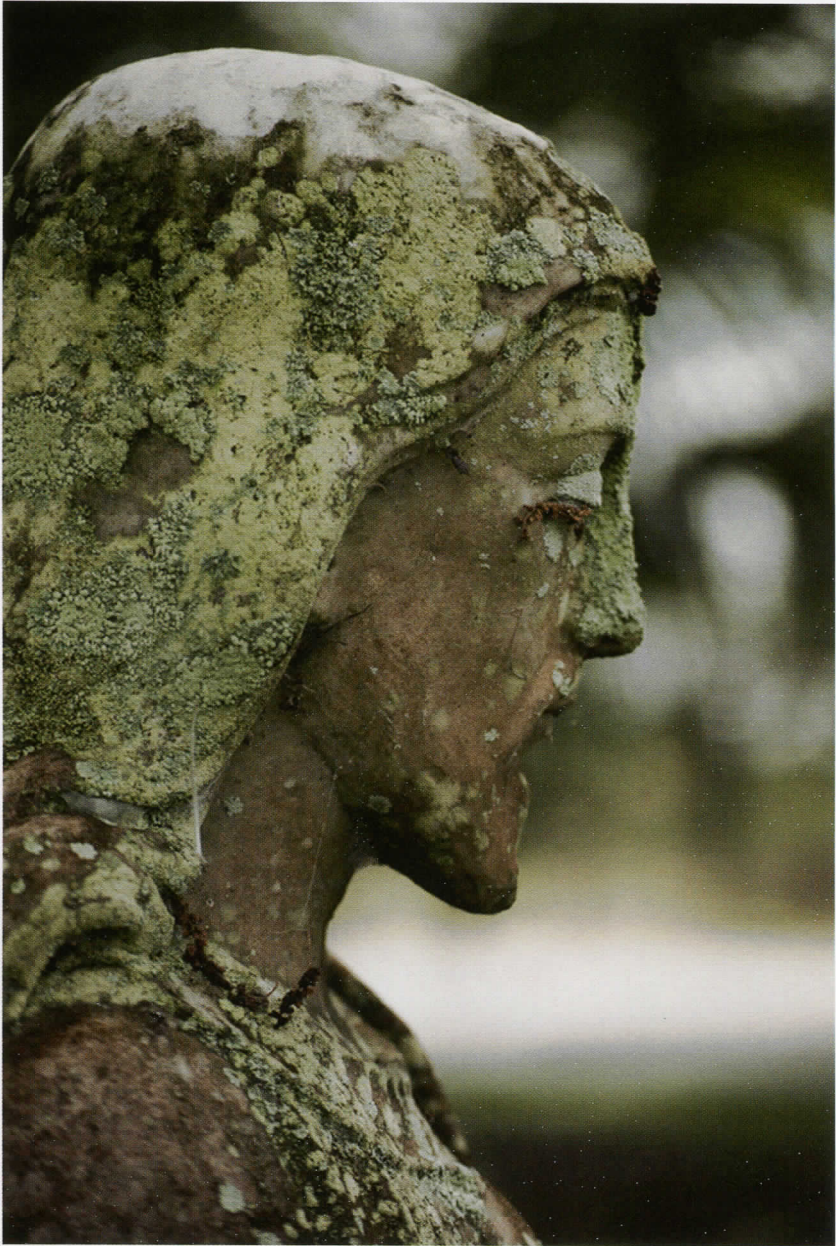
You cannot escape the pounding drum  
That calls for blood and truth  
You cannot try to drown it out  
With ignorance or youth  
For when you think the sound is gone  
And peace within your grip  
Like a wrathful god, the drum beats down  
Snatching breath away from lip



# Overgrown

Shannon Hurlebaus

Digital Photography





# Writings for Winter

Llana Samuel

On a day as cold as your heart  
After the one you loved  
Shatters it like glass  
I'll reach for a piece of paper  
To mend your battle scars

I'll write for a winter you've yet to  
Experience  
One rare in chill,  
Exact in ethereal beauty.  
A winter we both know  
My writings can endure.

But winter doesn't last  
An entire year  
Nor do all relationships  
Or heartbreaks, dear.

So when I pick up the pen  
And etch my remedy into the fabric  
Of your heart  
Don't be astonished  
At the way the pieces go back  
Together  
Spring is around the corner  
And this writing belongs to winter...

# Mose

Charles Norton

## I

A brawny, leather-skinned mountain of a man paused briefly at the stoplight in front of Comeaux's Feed Store in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. A beautiful, petite, black-haired woman sat close to him on the bench seat of the man's well-worn Dodge Ram pickup truck. The man turned right at the light, then made a left turn down a well-worn dirt road a quarter of a mile later.

"Ooo-wee. Looka' that, boys!" exclaimed Huey Trahan, rocking back and forth rapidly in one of the rocking chairs on the porch of the feed store. "They ain't hidin' no shit from no one."

Dudley Gaudet and Jean Mouton, the other two men sitting in the remaining chairs on the porch, stared straight ahead and pretended, without success, not to notice the pickup truck or its occupants.

"That's one thing about ol' Mose Ducet. That Acadian don't never leave his gator farm less he needs sumpin'. Mostly keeps to hisself since he took over the gator raisin' business after that old buck gator kilt his pop las' year. Take a fearless man to do what he do. Mose ain't even stop to catch his breath after the funeral 'fore he back to messing with those gators. He been known to poach a few in the Lake Martin Swamp, too. Gotta machete big enough to slice right on through a cypress stump he keep razor sharp just fer killin' gators. For true, I don't even step two foots on his land 'less it be to buy gator tail meat from that crazy cajun. He don't even think for twice about takin' another man's wife out from under him."

Suddenly, the screen door on the feed store swung open with a banshee-like screech and Jonny Ray Thibodeaux exited with a bag of chicken feed slung over his left shoulder. Jonny Ray was a quiet, nervous man that always seemed like he wanted to say something, but never could work up the courage to speak. His T-shirt was smeared with a combination of chicken shit and sweat. Jonny Ray never lifted his gaze from the ground as he passed the old men.

"Hey there, Jonny Ray, how the chicken egg bidness treatin' you? How your pretty little wife doing? Look like y'all gonna have gator tail for supper," Dudley said teasingly as Jonny Ray started to toss the

bag of feed into the bed of his truck.

Jonny Ray paused. He softly let out his breath and his whole body seemed to sag like a deflated balloon. After a prolonged silence, he gently placed the feed sack onto the lowered tailgate of the truck and began to pick nervously at the twine that bound the end of the feed sack with his fingers. He raised his head to stare at the dirt road leading to Mose Ducet's farm. Two minutes later, he lowered his eyes to the ground and shuffled over to the men.

"Ain't no man s'posed to take nuthun tain't his," Jonny Ray said softly. "Delta my wife. She ain't no little toot-toot to Mose, so I'm goin' go to Mose' farm and take her back home. He done push over his limit as a man an' this rukus gone stop today."

"You talkin' like a real man now, Jonny Ray. A man gotta stand up for what his. 'Bout time someone gave Mose a taste of his own troubles," Dudley said.

Jonny Ray stood at the stoop of the porch as if he was about to say something else, but a few seconds later, he turned silently and walked to the driver's side of his truck and opened the door. He reached inside and picked up a ten-inch Bowie knife from the seat of his truck and clipped the sheath of the knife to his belt before climbing into the cab of the truck and starting the engine. As he slowly drove out of the parking lot of Comeaux's Feed Store in the direction of Mose Ducet's alligator farm, the bag of chicken feed that he had placed on the tailgate of his truck rolled onto the concrete pavement and split open, spilling its contents. The three men sitting on the porch of the feed store watched silently as the truck made a right turn at the red light and then turned onto the dirt road leading to Mose's farm.

"Goddammit, Dud, you one dumb coon ass. Why you want to stir up Jonny Ray's gumbo pot like that? Cain't you see the man done tore up 'bout Delta?"

"Ooo-wee, Jean. We all know what time it is. It time for Jonny Ray to grow some balls and take back what rightfully belong to him. 'Sides, Johnny Ray ain't a man known for causin' any potain. That pee-shank prob'ly tuck his tail 'tween his legs fore he even get all the way up to Mose' place," Dudley said.

"Yeah, but if the two do tangle up, Mose will for true kill Jonny Ray. That little pig sticker Jonny Ray got ain't no match for Mose' machete. On toppla all that, Mose a good foot taller and got a hundred pound on Johnny Ray," Huey said.

"Them boys ain't gonna do nothin'. Jes like they ain't do nothin' the other day at Fly's Coffee House. Mose an Delta was sittin' in a booth drinkin' a cup of chicory, sittin' so close to each other that anyone with eyes could see she done give up her pouchat to Mose. They was all smiles an' laughs and didn't give a shit who saw 'em together. Well, in walks Jonny Ray, shufflin' and starin' down at the floor like a couyon. Jonny Ray sit down across from them in the same booth and starts pickin' at a paper napkin. He don't say nothing for about two or three minutes, just keeps tearin' at that napkin. Delta never look at Jonny Ray, and she don't move away from Mose's side neither. Finally Jonny Ray say in that quiet whisper of a voice to Delta that he her husband and she his wife and for her to turn a loose of Mose and come home with him. If anything, she try to scooch a little closer to Mose. Before she could answer, Mose lean forward to Jonny Ray and tell him that Delta ain't never goin' home with Jonny Ray. Mose turn to Delta an' say, "You got more with me than Jonny Ray can ever give you. You mine now and I'll give you anything you ever need from now on. I ain't never gonna give up something that belong to me, and I'll kick an' scream an' fight an' kill to keep you." You could see it in Delta's eyes that she was in love with Mose, and what he say be for true. It was like she had put a spell on both those boys, causin' em to fight over her, but Jonny Ray don't say nothin' else. He finish rippin' up that napkin, then he clutch the side of the table with his hand and pull himself up to his feet like he liftin' something real heavy and he shuffled out the door."

## II

Jonny Ray Thibodeaux's truck never left Mose's farm. The late afternoon sun began to cast long shadows, signifying the approach of dusk. The streetlight began to make a buzzing noise as it automatically turned on for the evening. The artificial light, yellow at first, became bright white as it warmed up, and moths began circling around its glow. The headlights of Mose's pickup could be seen leaving the property, and shortly, it pulled into the parking lot of Comeaux's. The windows were rolled down and lively Zydeco music could be heard from the truck's stereo speakers. Mose exited the truck and stretched casually before approaching the men on the porch. Delta remained in the truck. Her black hair, which had cascaded over her face, now had the appearance of an eerie black veil.

"Jonny Ray tried to stab me in my back," Mose casually announced. "I ain't had no choice but to kill the man. He'd a kilt me too if



I didn't see him out the corner of my eye first. I was feedin' my gators, not payin' much attention when I seen something behind me. That yella coward had his knife lifted over my head, and I swung my machete out of instinct and pretty near cut him in half," he bragged. "I'm gonna tell the sheriff to get that little bastard off my dock. Jonny Ray can do the Fais-do-do in hell now for what it worth." Without another word, Mose leisurely got back into his pickup truck and drove to the Saint Martin parish Sheriff's office.

No charges were ever brought against Mose Ducet. The investigators determined a clear case of self defense. Mose was a free man. Free to travel the streets of Breaux Bridge. Free to live and work on his farm. Free to return to the loving arms of Delta. All these things he did without remorse. Delta did not attend Jonny Ray's funeral.

### III

Word travels quickly in a small town. There were rumors that Mose and Delta were preparing to marry. All of her belongings had been moved from the house that she and Johnny Ray had once shared. In public, she never left Mose's side.

"Who they think they are? All that struttin' round the town like nothing ever happened," Huey said to Dudley. "Jonny Ray ain't been dead three week and they go on actin' like two happy peas in a pod."

"I put the dare to anyone want to say somethin' to Mose 'bout it to his face now. You hear bout that big white caimon Mose said he see around his pond?" asked Dudley.

"White caimon, my foot! I ain't never even see a white gator in real life except at the zoo one time in N'Orlans," replied Huey.

"Well the way Mose tell the story," Dudley said, "he was standin' at the end of his dock cuttin' up and feedin' what was left of Jonny Ray's chickens to his gators when somethin' caught him out the corner of his eye. He spun hisself around and saw a big white gator standin' on the dock, blockin' any way of escape for Mose. Mose said it must have been at least twelve foot long. Mose hollered, "Chat!" at the gator, but the gator don't move a inch. The gator starts to make this low rumble growl at Mose and when Mose lift his machete, aimin' to kill the white gator, it just all of a sudden turned and jumped over the side of the dock into the pond. I ain't never seen Mose scared of nothin' in his life, but he got all nervous and said the gator wern't a real animal. He said it was Jonny Ray, reincarnated so he could get revenge for Mose when he make the misere between Jonny Ray and Delta. 'Nother thing he say is that after

the gator went in the pond, he couldn't find him anywhere he look. Mose say that when he went back to feeding his caimons, somethin' he couldn't see pushed his arm down and tried to get the gators to jump up and eat his hand. If you ask me, I say Mose was just bein' careless, but I don't say that to him. Best to leave Mose alone when he in that state of mind. No tellin' what he might do."

#### IV

Mose and Delta had not been heard from for over a week. Dudley finally gathered the courage to check on them. He nervously turned onto the dirt road leading to Mose's farm and drove down the winding driveway to Mose's ramshackle house and parked in the unmowed front yard under a moss-covered oak tree. The hairs on the back of Dudley's neck bristled as he knocked on the front door of the house. A deafening silence had seemed to envelop the farm. Dudley walked around the house, hoping to find Mose at his pond. Mose was standing on the end of the dock, looking down into the murky waters, swinging his machete madly at the air as if trying to kill something only he could see. He suddenly began shouting, "Goddam you, Jonny Ray! I done kilt you once, you mutherfuckin' coward. I ain't afraid to kill you dead again, you sonofabitch! Delta's mine 'cause she weren't NEVER YOURS! Show yourself, you coward, so I can send you back to hell!"

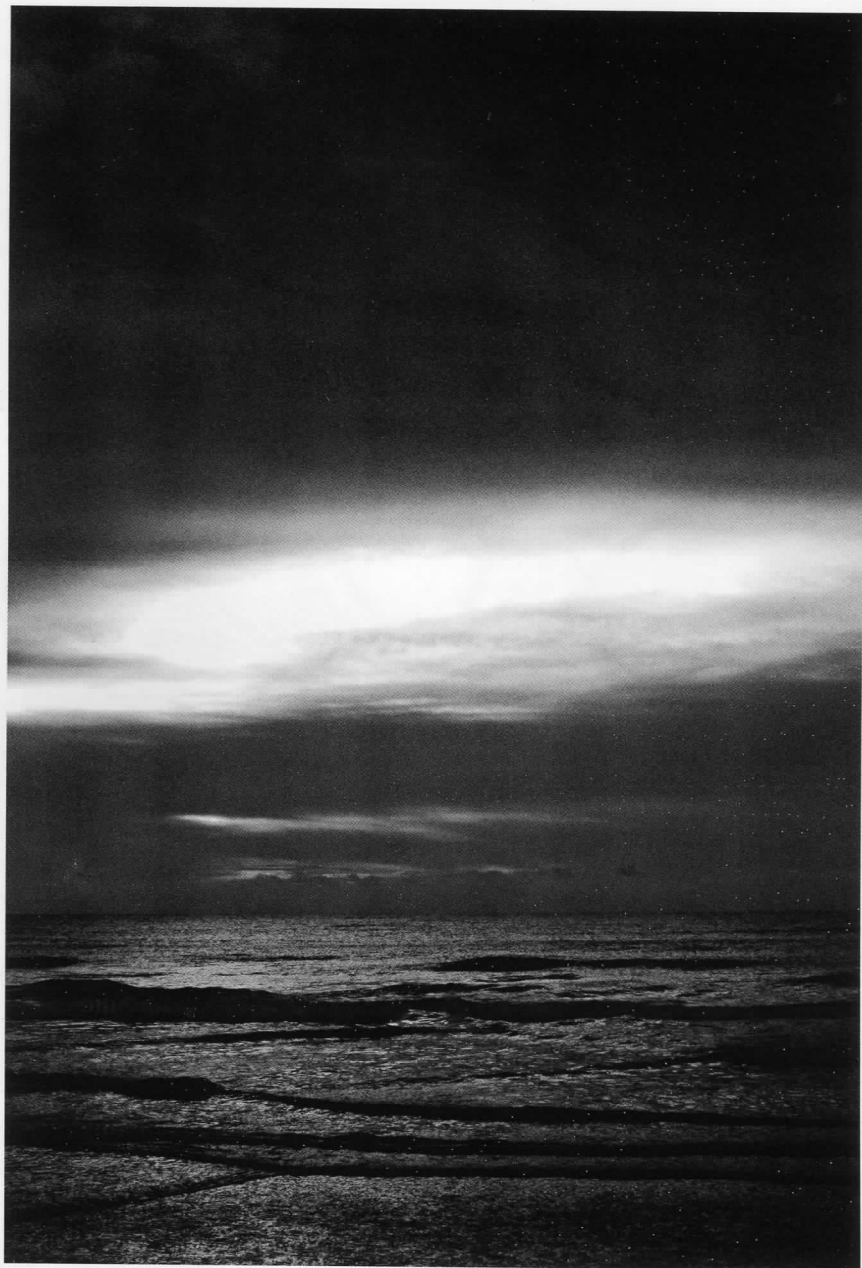
What occurred next happened so fast that Dudley would later question if it had actually happened. Mose suddenly noticed Dudley standing on the end of his dock and turned around so quickly that he almost lost his balance and stared madly at Dudley. Before Mose could take a step, a huge white alligator explosively leaped from the pond at the end of the pier, its jaws opened wide in an enormous, hideous grin. Its jaws snapped lightning quick around the midsection of Mose. Mose never had time to scream before the alligator rolled off the dock with him and disappeared into the depths of the pond. Dudley fainted.

Memorial services were held for Mose Ducet. His body was never recovered. Delta was never heard from again. Some attendees of the service speculated that she had left Breaux Bridge when Mose became unstable. Others wondered if she had met the same fate as Mose. After weeks of searching the pond and Lake Martin Swamp, the game warden failed to find the white alligator.

# Waves of Sorrow

*Christina Farmer*

Digital Photography



# Self Portrait

Christina Farmer

Printmaking



# Untitled

Henry Ancheta

Air and wind,  
Without the breeze force behind it,  
It inhabits a soul at a time,  
And it can be with many at once;  
No one ever experiencing the same thing.  
Discernment is man's sixth sense,  
A divine gift lent to humans  
If only for a brief moment  
Granting them insights of life beyond this one  
Of things besides the visible ones  
For all men live in darkness  
And the Earthly lights that guide them are but mere illusions.



# Leaving

Kathryn Miles

Watercolor

*\*Lillian Spencer Award winner, visual art*



# Snakes in My Boots

Dayna Anderson

Ceramic Sculpture



# In Nana's Arms

Ana Strother

We sat on the tarmac in Kuwait, over one hundred of us, packed into buses that looked like something out of a bad '80's movie. The curtains were drawn and the windows were shut. The only air that moved in the bus was out of one person and into another. We were hot, tired, and more than a little ripe. Little spats cropped up and bounced from section to section like a pinball fueled by a year of uncertainty. Foreign music pelted us from unseen speakers. It took several songs to realize that they were not foreign in origin, but in time. These were the popular songs from America. They were probably on the lips of countless country men back home. The driver had turned the radio on in hopes of easing some of our stress, but it was only now set to drum machines. We had been deployed a year but the metamorphosis was drastic. Being the objects of such change, we didn't notice until it was assaulting our ears. The songs felt like books that we had opened in the middle, fully expecting to understand the plot, but clearly we had missed the intent.

At the sound of engines outside we opened our curtains in unison to see the plane lining up. I was overcome with gratitude. After what seemed like a lifetime, I was going to escape the heat, hyper-vigilance, and loneliness of Iraq. I was going home. In a disbelieving fog we dutifully marched up the stairs and took a seat, careful to fill the plane from back to front. The deafening silence was matched only by the nervous glances. Eyes screamed "Is it possible?" "Are we really leaving . . . unharmed?" into familiar faces who only echoed it back. As the plane began to move, the collective sigh of relief turned into roars of applause and cheers. Songs were sung and seatbelt signs were disregarded as soldiers danced and made lewd gestures to the country they were leaving behind. Finally we said "amen" to a prayer that had been in progress since November of the previous year. Just as quickly as the group began celebrating, we began one by one to fall into the kind of slumber that is only known to babies and soldiers. It was the sleep of being cradled in protective arms, the boogiemans far away.

After hours in the sky, we began our descent into Bangor, Maine. Stewardesses informed us of a group of older women that

would be there to greet us. We were told to expect hugs and warm wishes from these women. Again, collectively, we protested. The thought of a stranger touching us felt like an unwanted violation. Having lacked human contact for so long, we had become untrusting children. The idea that someone was waiting to comfort me on the other side of the door was as frightening as any mission and far less reasonable. Who were these women?

With my right foot striking American soil, I decided not to let those bitches lay a finger on me. My grandmother was dead – I didn't need some pathetic old woman to stand in for her for the three seconds I stood there. I laughed at the idea of these women lined up, ready to show their patriotism by hugging someone else's children, battle-hardened warriors, no less.

They were lined up on either side of the doors, staggered so as to allow for a natural pairing of nana and child. My mind raced. I couldn't decide if I wanted to politely refuse or laugh in her face. There was no time. My nana stood a foot shorter than me, her face a warm fire after a night in the cold. It promised comfort, but I had to get closer. Before I could berate her, dare her to undermine my experiences with a fucking hug, I was inside her arms. Her small arms were deceptively strong; as she held me I was sure that she could lift me if she needed to, if I was in harm's way. Time stopped.

I melted into her tiny body. Instinctively, my arms wrapped around her and I squeezed her back. Inside her earnest cocoon my mind wandered. This woman set her alarm the night before with the intention of traveling unknown miles to the airport. She laid her clothes out gingerly on a chair in her bedroom. Was it hard for her to step in and out of the tub? As I pictured her dressing, her body bent, slowly returning to the earth she sprang from some 70-odd years before, I wondered what she was thinking. Was she fueled by the memories of a dead lover who collapsed into her arms after some forgotten war? Did the strength and vulnerability of his grip on her young, naive body leave her hungry for other such encounters? Was it possible that through his sun-baked embrace, this lover told her of countless lonely nights interrupted only by nearby coughing or choked sobs? Could she have felt the awful weightlessness that soldiers at war are suspended in, the inability to prove the carnage before them is just as real as the promises to stay true whispered in their ears at the moment of climax the night before boarding that fateful plane, and vice versa? Or did

she nurse a wound of her own? A son perhaps, left to nourish the soil of some ungodly land? Whatever her motives, she dressed. She made the trek. She stood in a neat line, quietly waiting for an asshole with a chip on her shoulder to come and possibly dismiss her. Did she cover that situation, my nana? Was she prepared to be laughed at or had she known that what she was offering was too beautiful, too necessary?

These thoughts swept through me, and all the while she held me. Through my shame at wanting to hurt her, she held me. As I worked through the awkwardness of skin on skin, bodies pressed against each other, she held me. Even as I gently tried to pull away, she held on, knowing I didn't mean it. "Welcome home, sweetheart," were the only words my nana said. She didn't have to elaborate. Her heart told me a story.

# Lake Sunset

*Bentley Boatright*





# Bleeding the Earth

Brian Dascall

The rig will shut down for good at day's end,  
joining the desolate echelon  
of the other lifeless oil fields in town.  
Earth is dry and fruitless here,  
but we bleed her for the final drop.

I seek beyond the brink of the obsidian wells,  
and further on past the great derricks  
and sluggishly bobbing stocks,  
all casting their boundless shadows  
over the rusted tenné  
of cracked western terrain.

My jaded, lethargic eyes gaze  
upon the far horizon,  
a line between earth and cerulean sky  
that God once forged  
with the pearl nail of his little finger.

Baptized in ebon I was,  
grandfathered in by a man once like me,  
a young vagrant in search of a craft.  
It shows in the wrinkles of my weathered hands,  
made craggy and charred with onyx.

The steam horn shrieks over the tract,  
an emphatic call to final hours of labor.  
Veiled by hard-hats, we saunter back to the drilling site  
like worker ants bustling through the motherland.  
Together we jab the gravel  
and collect blood from the oleaginous gush.

I mind the main pump at the heart of the rig.  
The almighty drill plunges into the clay floor at my command,  
roaring and rupturing to expel her profitable nectar.  
And rupture it does until she is drained and exhausted,  
granting only grimy smog from the frayed wound.

When the sky goes pale and dims to dark,  
we shut the place down and lay it to rest.  
I collect a last bitter paycheck  
and silently bid farewell to the field.

Tomorrow is blank, but all men need their craft.  
Green streaks of muddled fumes in the sky of dusk  
lead my way on to another nowhere-place.  
Drive I will, until the tank goes dry.  
Walk I will, until my soles wear down and feet bleed.  
I'll stop when the power lines run out.

# Untitled

Christian Hood

*\*Lillian Spencer Award winner, fiction*

"A clown."

"A monster truck."

"A sunflower."

"A boxing glove."

"A dog."

"A pirate ship."

"A submarine."

"A pear."

"A lemon tree."

You turn your eyes from the clouds, to look at me. Your hair falls across your forehead; I reach over to brush it away.

"I see you," you say, looking at me in that way. That way no one ever has before you and the way no one will after you.

The clouds are perfect today; big and fluffy. They are creating all sorts of crazy pictures in our minds. The grass is soft and the air smells clean. I would never swear to have seen a more beautiful day. And of course it was just me and you, as always.

Your hand isn't as bony as it once was under mine. And my toes wiggling against yours aren't caked with the mud of childhood summer fun, but are instead painted with the lime-green nail polish that you gave me.

I smile at you in that way. The way I never smiled at anyone else before and the way I'll never smile at anyone again.

"And I see you," I say, because I do. I always have and I always will.

A last summer together, a last look up at the charade-playing clouds, a last chase across our favorite wheat-covered field, a last hug to go with a last goodnight; and of course, I don't think either of us could live without that inevitable last kiss.

We both look back up at the clouds. What else is there for us to do? We still have this afternoon, even if it is the last. So it will just be me, you, and the artistic clouds.

"A guitar."

"A dinosaur."

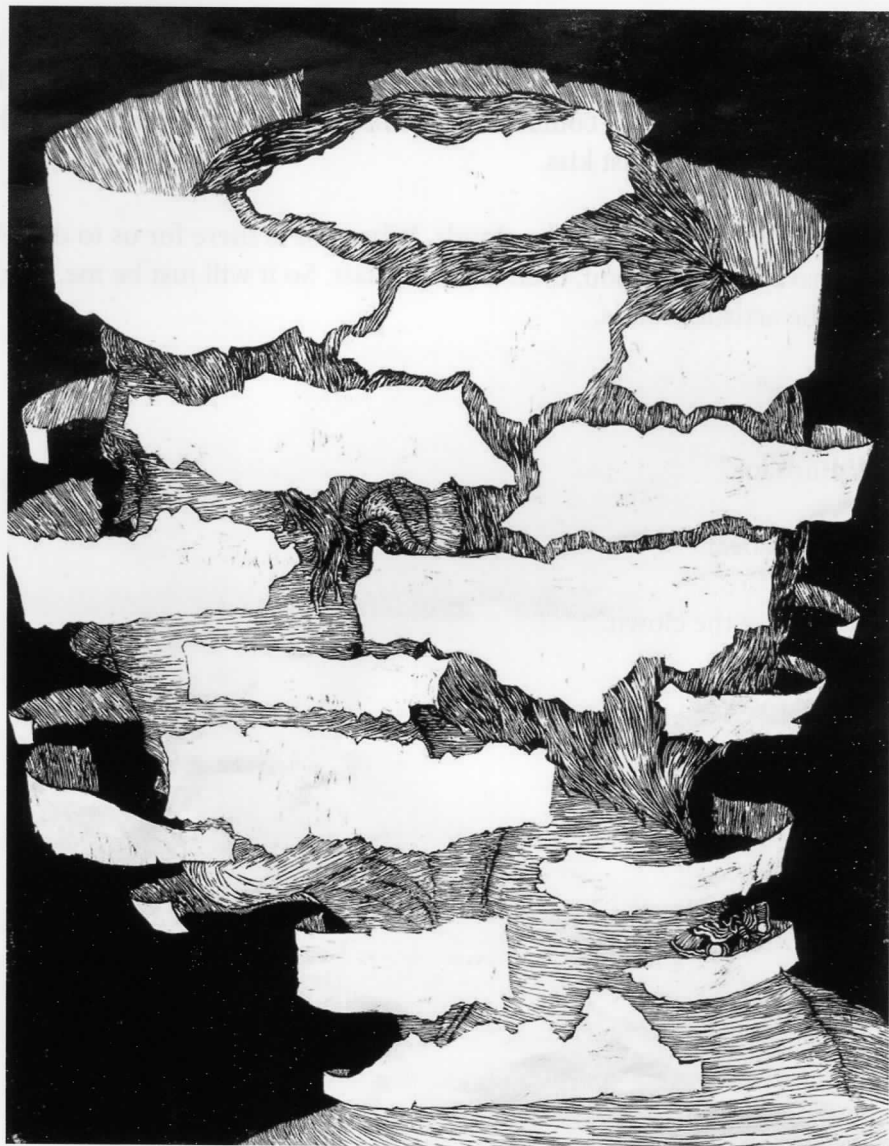
"A panda bear."

"Now, I see the clown."

# Cocoon

Lisa Co

Woodcut



# Dancing Woman

Diana Gonzalez

Acrylic





# Amelie

Diana Gonzalez

Acrylic



# étoiles oublié

Avery Meagher

*\*Lillian Spencer Award winner, poetry*

je ne suis pas le soleil.  
my touch will never grow a garden.  
i will never place a gentle fingertip  
upon the soft skin of a shoulder and  
warm your soul.  
you will only wither under my shadow.

je ne suis pas la lune.  
illuminating the night sky,  
providing comfort, depth, and direction.  
i will never gracefully pull the tides  
and carry lost sailors home.

think of that forgotten star  
placed haphazardly  
in the corner of the cosmos:  
anonymous,  
nameless constellation.  
beautiful, forgotten, waiting.

# Squatters

*Samantha Stuck*

Silver gelatin mordancage print



# Vanity Faded

Brian Dascall

Once more, vanity found her way  
to the brink of the river.  
Yet when she gazed in as always,  
it was not first herself that she saw,  
but the true azure of the endless sky.

Her gaze upon him stretched long with the current,  
upon the treetops catching gusts  
and soaring creatures paying no mind.

Below to the basin,  
and the veneer of countless pebbles,  
each different from all others.

The ripples show no gloom  
swaying and dandling as they will,  
clashing softly and dancing on after  
to their boundless ends.

Vanity gazed on and about,  
searching ever for a mystifying depth  
and the unheard of within her,  
queerly emancipated by all outside.

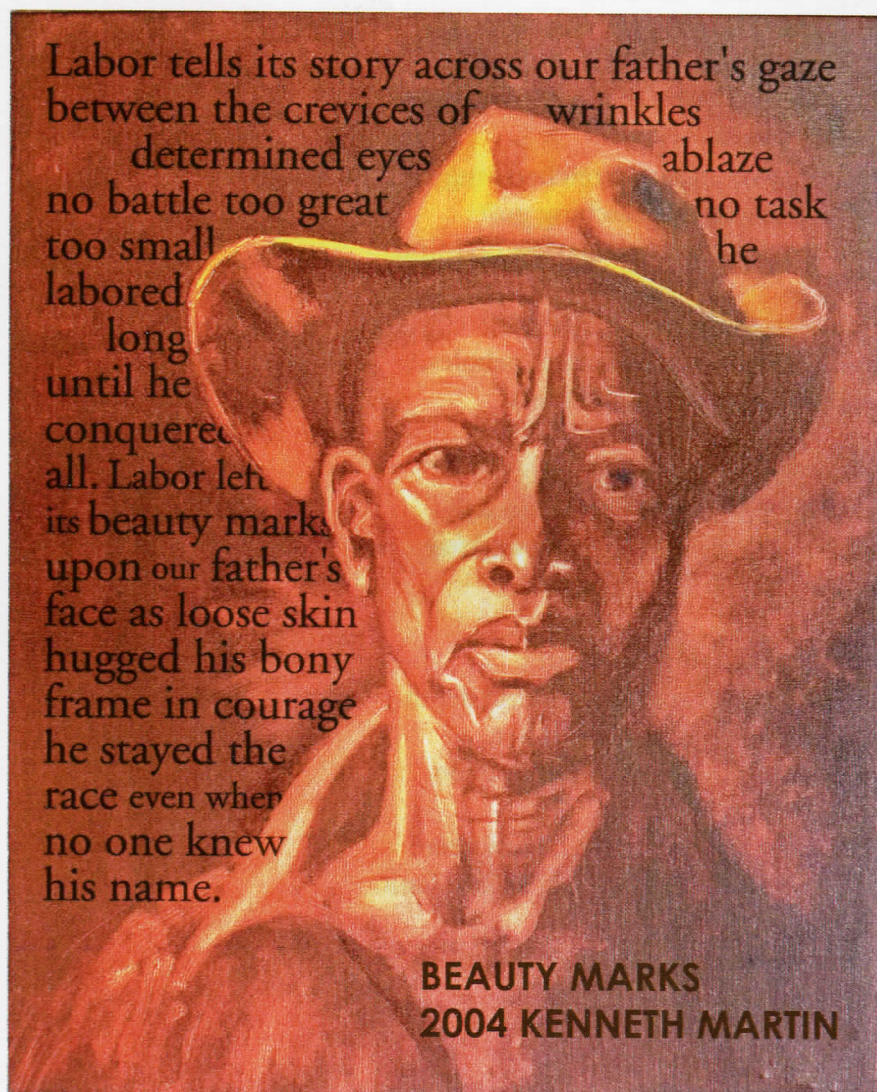
The unsightly monster's beauty seen,  
the all-else unveiled by her saving fault.  
She is herself,  
a particle amid the infinite realm,  
and his allure peerless.

By faded habit,  
she searched for her face among the river's caress,  
glimpsing into her open eyes,  
and looked away.



# Beauty Marks

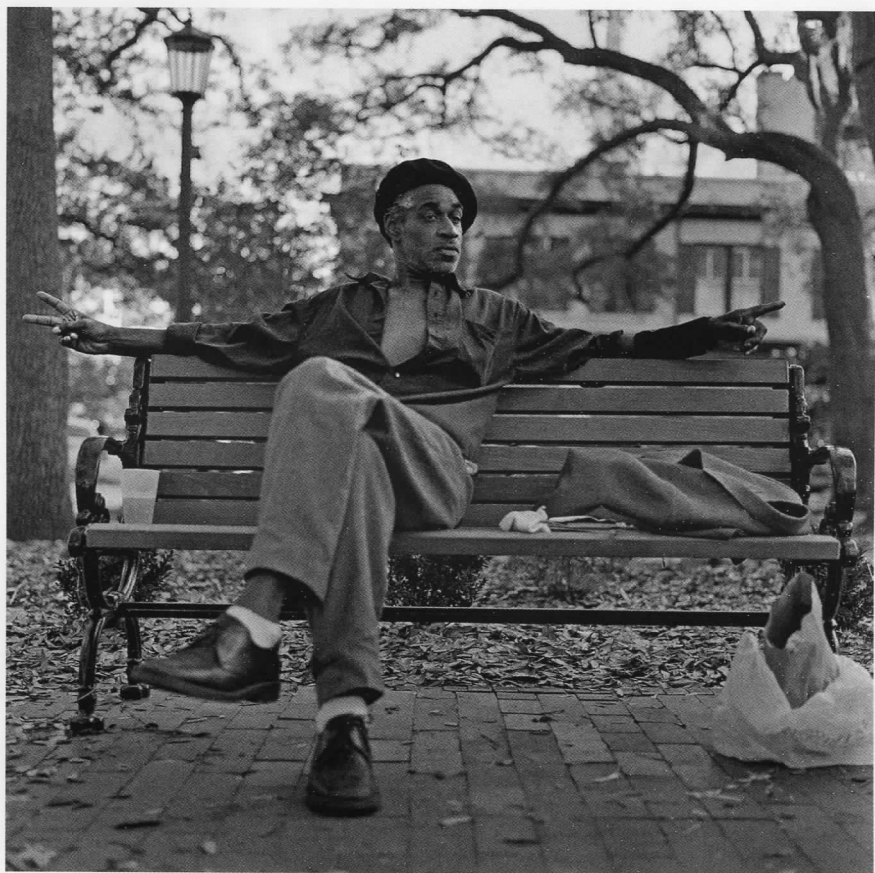
*Oil by Kenneth Martin; Poem by Thelma Theresa Martin*





# Jeffrey

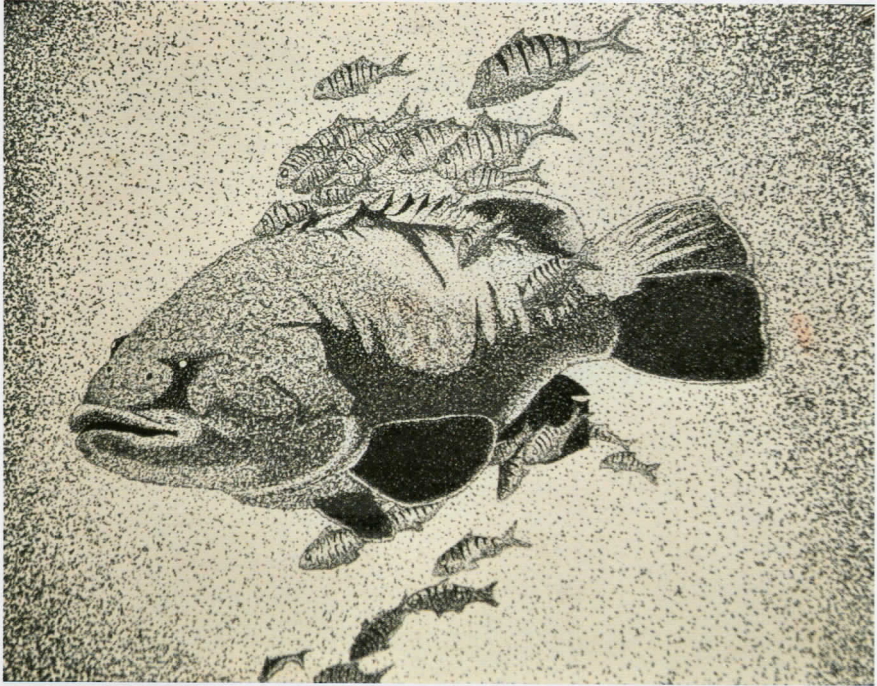
Hoyt Ramey  
Film photography



# The Grouper

*Donny Williams*

Scratchboard



# Day of the Dead

Ashley Norton

Black and white photography



# Nostophobia

Brian Dascal

Seven in the morning is wake-up time, immediately followed by first medication. Friday's breakfast is dry wheat toast, scrambled eggs, boiled ham, and tasteless bran muffins, all shabbily picked apart by blunt plastic sporks. Eight-fifteen is the day's first heart-rate check, then morning group therapy at eight-thirty. One of two weekly showers comes at eleven o'clock, with lukewarm water and non-toxic pink powdered soap that smells of bleach and itches in the tender crevices of each palm. A hundred milligrams of Zoloft at eleven-thirty, then dominos and Parcheesi in the recreation room. Lunch is served in Styrofoam boxes: sandwiches wrapped in wax-paper with a side of runny Brunswick stew. They hand out cinnamon squares if there are any extra from the ICU in the next wing; sometimes people expire in the night and there are leftovers. Meditation therapy comes at one o'clock, the Zen sounds of tranquil nature playing softly through the ward. Fifty milligrams of Buspirone at the medicine door soon after, with a mild tranq to take the edge off. Two o'clock to three provides time to nap and stare through barred windows into the civilized world. Pet therapy is cancelled again, so the care-takers hand out the stuffed animals. Some sit in the circle, petting air to relieve the stresses of the day.

Slowly coming down from the pleasant, mellow void of artificially induced sanity, Zeke pays notice to the outlandish design on the opposite wall. The peculiar pattern of the wallpaper displays numerous illustrations of dogs, all posed alongside pieces of elegant ménage furnishings. Lined from floor to ceiling is the display of canine rank, including an Alaskan malamute atop an Italian silk daybed, a distinguished-looking pug sitting aside a mauve linen armchair, a bulky English mastiff sprawled over a Persian Tabriz carpet, and an old greyhound mutt settled in the fluorescent gleam of an antique rosewood floor lamp. The azoic hounds gaze across to Zeke as he slouches in the corner of the bathroom between the toilet and towel rack, his head leaned against the wall. The deep umber of each iris returns



as his dilated pupils shrink back to form. The Sarafem is wearing down. As he anxiously scratches away tiny white paint chips from the floor molding, Zeke jumps at the sound of another persistent knock on the door.

"Mister Cochran, it's time to go," says the raspy, irritated voice of Nurse Rita. She is a short, wrinkled woman who always wears thick glasses and flowered pink scrubs. The other patients call her the "pill mistress," as she distributes the medication.

"I said I ain't goin'," responds Zeke, sliding back deeper into the corner and scratching more impulsively. "Put me in the rubber room for all I care!"

He speaks in reference to the padded isolation cell on the far end of the behavioral health wing, which he has visited on a few occasions for fighting and stealing. Rita curses quietly from the other side of the door. Her feet drag sluggishly on the floor as she walks off. Zeke lets out a deep sigh of relief. His eyes wander back down to the baseboard and his fingernails flay at a strip of paint. After a few moments, there is another knock on the door.

"C'mon Cochran. State's givin' ya the boot, ya hear? Your insurance gone and run out," says the deep, grating voice of Lamar, the daytime sentry of the facility.

Zeke shakes his head impetuously. "I ain't goin', ya hear?" he mimics. "I'm stayin' right where I am. N' y'all can give my room to someone else, slide my dinner under the door for all I care."

Outside the bathroom door, Lamar leans in close and speaks into the rift of the rusted hinges. "You want us to go call your folks then?" he asks, his tone light and audacious.

They always know what to say. Zeke hesitates for a minute before pulling himself to his feet, mumbling vile words under his breath and using the towel rack for support. He opens the door and stares at Lamar, who smiles smugly. The burly black man in azure blue scrubs stands at six-foot-one, weighing at least three-hundred pounds. Outside, Zeke's bedroom is as vibrant as allowed by the policies of the asylum. Comic strips from the Sunday newspaper and clippings from a Victoria's Secret spring catalogue are taped to the wall next to his bed, a firm twin inner-spring mattress atop a steel platform frame. The sheets that cloak it match the dull remainder of the space: the white tile floors, the ragged and unprimed eggshell paint on the walls, and even the sheen ivory of the wire window guard.



Following behind Lamar, Zeke steps out into the main corridor, which stretches far down to the exit of the wing. Sloe shoe-marks along the floor line the way. On the left side are the doorways to each patient's room, spaced closely and linked together by thin slabs of sheet rock. On the right is the recreation room, a plainly furnished area where everyone gathers twice a day to play board games and watch local access television. A short walk down is the medicine closet, with a Dutch-door at which the patients line up five times a day to get their fix. The cafeteria on the other end of the hall is coupled with the group therapy room, a wide-open space with creaking wooden chairs positioned in a big circle. For the past eighteen months, this place has been what Zeke refers to as home. The psychiatric offices are one door down. Twice weekly, he visits them to increase his medication or complain about a meal from the day prior.

One shrink called him a schizoid, another called him a misanthrope; but those fellow defectives among him, wandering between the walls of the Crestview Behavioral Health Facility, would call him "the prophet," as a consequence of his Christian birth-name, Isaiah. Being of gaunt stature, with brown sable hair down to his neck and sandpaper scruff covering his cheeks, not to mention the clinic-issued white robe and slippers, Zeke is seldom liberated from the bothersome nickname. An old senile man named Edwin, with scruffy gray hair that makes him look like Albert Einstein, entered Crestview a few months back. He keeps to his odd daily avocation of standing motionless before a black smudge on the wall next to the medicine door. Passing by, Zeke facetiously taps him on the shoulder. The old man slowly turns around to face no one, as Lamar leads on through a door into the psychiatric unit.

Zeke sits for a time and twiddles his thumbs in the office of his latest psychiatrist, Dr. Levinson. He stares behind the desk at a collection of framed certificates and shiny plaques, accompanied by a warped sheet-copper swordfish. After another thirty minutes, Dr. Levinson arrives from lunch and plops down behind his desk. He hands over a manila folder, an envelope of travel money from the insurance company, and a short stack of prescription slips. Zeke takes them and feignedly shakes his hand.

To conclude the exit party, Nurse Rita supplies Zeke with the few belongings he had entered the facility with those months before. One is a white, netted laundry bag filled with withered clothes and spi-

ral notebooks. The other is a black, molded case with silver edging. Zeke opens it up and releases the heavy, intoxicating essence of brass polish. He views an old saxophone with spots of corrosion all down the shaft. Thinking back, he recalls buying the instrument from a flea market years before, and playing it only on a few occasions. Mother and father must have sent it, he thinks. Shoe laces, sharp or potentially harmful objects, outside clothes, outside food, outside drinks, and outside drugs have always been prohibited from Crestview. A few years back, the ward administration made an exception for a manic-depressive record album collector who absolutely refused to step foot inside without his mint-condition 1969 King Crimson vinyl. Within a week the record ended up being broken, and he used the shards.

"Leave the robe and slippers on the bed," says Rita, giving Zeke a stack of his folded street clothes.

Zeke changes into his Travis Bickle attire: brown Reebok sneakers, blue jeans, and a green military tanker jacket with mirrored-lens aviator sunglasses in the breast pocket. There are black splotches up the pant legs, and the shoes are glossy at the soles, the rubber on the edges melted and softened. Lamar uses his master key to unlock the door at the end of the wing. They take the elevator to the first floor and go out the front entrance. Zeke cautiously steps through the doorway and squints under the light of the sun, peeking over the treetops on the front lawn.

"Cab'll be here in a few minutes," says Lamar.

Staring out into the world, Zeke seems distraught and overwhelmed, benumbed by the feel of the outside. He flinches and shakes away Lamar's hand as he gives an encouraging pat on the shoulder. Zeke paces around nervously before the parking lot as Lamar goes back inside. Within a few moments, Zeke tries to pull the door open. He struggles and gives up as the taxi creaks to a halt before the sidewalk. The driver loads the bags into the trunk before they drive off from the asylum. Zeke stares through the back window for a final glimpse before they turn a corner, onward to the bus station.

"So, where you heading?" asks the cabbie along the way.

"Texas," responds Zeke, dishonestly. "I'm gonna be a roughneck."

The true destination is back home in Monroe, North Carolina, where his family awaits. The issue, which makes Zeke so resistant to returning, is that they don't expect him. Having not spoken to his

parents since they had him committed, the reunion is bound to be disastrous. After all, they never called or visited on even one occasion. Stated simply, they disowned him. Personally, he has no intention of adapting to the outside all over again or rehabilitating himself to suit the subjective eyes of society. More than anything, he wishes to persuade his folks to sign whatever documents necessary to send him right back to the institution. As the stern voice of the circuit court stated months back at the trial, "Harold and Martha Cochran are granted legal guardianship and majority sovereignty over the rehabilitative efforts of an undoubtedly unstable young adult"; or in other words, Zeke's parents could decide between keeping him in the loony bin or watching over him under their own oblivious system of house arrest – that is, following his voluntarily delayed release from Crestview.

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Mother's criticisms and father's belt are what shaped Zeke into the person he is. Those many months before, he had something of a different life. Zeke faced tuna casserole three nights a week and beatings six nights, as father would usually take Sundays off. To his parents, he was nothing more than a quiet, cryptic child in need of constant discipline to set his head right. They didn't remove the outside lock from the attic door until he was twenty-one. Soon after, mother packed away her teaching supplies and father honored Zeke with a job at the accounting offices downtown. For six years, he woke up at five in the morning to organize countless envelopes, documents, and memorandums in a cramped mailroom.

The old man had a corner office a few floors up. Each day was a sort of endless cycle, every minute until quitting time spent filing papers and passing out mail to hundreds of people in cubicles. He would often take the stairs, avoiding elevator conversations with the blank-faced workers. The longest he ever went without saying a word was eighteen days. Father would take most of the money from each of Zeke's paychecks to cover rent. The rest he would put into a bank account that Zeke couldn't access, otherwise he would have used the money to get away. The days were like an endless hourglass, each grain of sand dropping away along with his slowly fading wit. One day, a Wednesday, Zeke woke up numb. He took a bottle of lighter fluid from father's tool shed and packed it away with his work supplies. During lunch hour, he went into the supply closet on the

eighteenth floor and shut off the valve for the fire sprinkler system. As people gathered in the conference room for a Christmas party, he pulled the alarm. After waiting for everyone to evacuate, Zeke filed one last letter for his father, telling him every contemptible thing he had never before had the grit to say. He doused the stacks of folders and filing cabinets until the bottle was empty, then sat down and lit the dark place up.

A firefighter dragged Zeke out, kicking and screaming, past his father and all the workers at the firm. They dragged him on to the courts, where the judge granted his almighty pardon to a sick-minded arsonist, sending him past the big house and through the doors of Crestview. For the first night, he screamed so much that his throat bled. By the end of the first week, he was sedated nine times for trying to escape. By five weeks, Zeke had given in and taken to the new daily agenda of therapy sessions and waiting restlessly for his happy pills. And by two months, he was afraid of the outside, clinging thankfully to the loving walls of the institution for saving him.

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When they arrive at the station, Zeke looks at the timetable for departing buses. Driving through three states will no doubt be a long trip. Zeke notes a noon departure to Greenville, halfway home. From there, he can take a later bus the rest of the way. After buying a ticket, he takes a seat in the very back of the bus, away from the remainder of the passengers in the front. The seat smells like cheap perfume, the kind old women churchgoers wear far too much of. An empty bottle of peppermint schnapps in a small brown paper bag is tucked between the seat cushions. Zeke pulls it out from under him and sets it on the floor, then tries to buckle himself in, only to find that the strap has been shredded apart and sucked into the retractor. For the entirety of the trip, he tries to sleep. Yet every time someone uses the bathroom, he awakes, wishing he had some savior-tablets of Ambien. To drown out the sounds of a ceaselessly wailing infant and teens playing handheld video games at full volume with no regard for fellow patrons, Zeke stuffs each ear canal with wetted tissue, a tactic he picked up in his first weeks at the institution to remedy night screams and distant pounding on walls.

As they near Greenville, driving through a final remote stretch of placid backcountry woodland, Zeke suddenly snaps awake at a brief thud and sharp forward thrust from the driver's blunt slam on the

brakes. He looks out the wide dusk-veiled windshield, smirched with the dispelled remains of mosquitoes and fireflies, as a few curious travelers follow the driver off the bus. Zeke watches a young white-tailed deer stagger away from the front of the bus before scurrying hobblingly into the dim timberland, a thin line of shimmering red following under the glint of flickering hazard lights. The driver, a portly bald man with a Van Dyke-styled goatee, glances around for bystanders before wiping down the front bumper with his sleeve. For ten minutes, people stand outside in the brisk November air, smoking and walking about the edge of the forest as the driver calls in the incident. All the while, Zeke gazes into the tangled, labyrinthine shadows of the soaring shortleaf pines, searching for a glimpse of the carcass.

From the view of a side-window, Greenville seems to Zeke like the small town setting of an old 50's sitcom. The layout of the midtown district is a monotonous compilation of homemade ice cream shops, tourist traps, a few monument buildings of Richardsonian-style architecture, trendy clothing boutiques, towering office buildings, and countless antique outlets. The main street is lined with gas lamps, relics of old-time grandeur within an otherwise hollow and tediously conventional community.

Zeke steps from the bus when they arrive, taking in the murky incense of exhaust whirling among the entrance of the station with an airy breeze. He makes his way through the near-empty terminal and takes a look at the departure board. The train to Monroe isn't set to leave until one o'clock in the morning, five hours from now. Zeke steps up to a service counter and pulls out the stack of blue prescription slips. A thin, mousey woman with a white tea rose tucked into the pocket of her red blouse stands behind the desk, pinning a luggage pass to a handbag.

"I need to get to a pharmacy," Zeke says.

"You can't take a bus to a pharmacy," responds the woman, not looking up from her work. "But we are offering discount seats one-way to Jefferson City."

Zeke scolds himself for not remembering how to speak to people.

"Sorry ma'am. Uh...I mean, is there a pharmacy close by?"

"There's a drugstore next to the five-and-dime on Wicker Avenue. It's eight blocks that way," she responds, pointing left.

At the next counter, a family of four waits with luggage in hand. Zeke glances at them. He watches the mother lean over and grab

the hands of a young boy who keeps biting at his fingernails. After thanking the ticket clerk, Zeke plops down with his bags into a row of unoccupied seats. He sits for a time, bouncing his knee anxiously and massaging his temples. He hesitates before going to a bank of payphones next to a restroom. The tile walls around are tainted with graffiti and obscene images. Zeke wipes down a phone with a tissue and tries to remember the digits as he dials each, allowing a last skeptical moment to pass before firmly pressing the last button. He clears his throat and breathes heavily between each ring-back tone, until the line clicks just before the fifth.

"Hello?" says his father's voice, half-asleep on the other end of the line.

Zeke goes mute with panic. "Da—," he starts to say before his voice cracks.

"Who's calling this late?" Zeke hears his mother mumble groggily from the other side of the bed.

The receiver taps against the nightstand as dad sits up. "Who is this?"

Zeke lets out a feeble gasp and immediately hangs up. He tensely back-steps away from the phone box, as if his father might crawl out through the coin slot and attack him. With his pulse racing so fast that his carotid artery spasms in the side of his neck, Zeke hastily takes his bags and heads for the exit. He whimpers softly under his breath, dwelling on the sound of his father's voice echoing in his head. A group of drunken, laughing people with nametags and formal dress step through the front entrance, likely homeward bound from some sort of business trip. Zeke erratically shoves between them toward the exit, desperately trying to block away the thoughts of inevitably returning to Monroe. His head begins to buzz and his vision goes woozy. Even one of the drunken men reaches out to support him as his head spins, making him stumble. Is this what a panic attack feels like? Zeke shudders out of the man's grasp, knocking his hands away and rushing through the exit.

A homeless man in shabby winter-wear sits on the ground outside the entrance, his back leaned against the station aside a grocery bag of empty soda cans. He stares at Zeke, emerging outside and throwing down the bags, his eyes shut tight as he breathes heavily and leans against the wall. A black hornet flutters down from a nest over the



steel doorframe, landing on Zeke's wrist. He yelps and tries to swat the bug away, then feels the stinger puncture his skin. The sudden pain alleviates his current mental anguish.

"Ah!" he screams, swiftly sending his other palm down on the insect. It drops to the concrete, flapping its broken wings in an attempt to fly off. "I hope it was worth it y' little bastard!" exclaims Zeke.

He dramatically leaps into the air and stomps on the minuscule perpetrator, all the while rubbing the tiny red sore on his wrist. After a bitter double-tap of his full body weight upon the trampled creature, Zeke looks up to meet eyes with the homeless man, who stares aghast at the absurd scene of violent delirium. They stare at one another for a long, maladroit moment. The homeless man appears frightened by the seemingly crazed vagrant before him. Zeke calmly composes himself and catches his breath, then takes his bags and walks off.

An eight-block walk away from the station is Wicker Avenue, bare and empty without a single inhabitant roaming the sidewalks, nor a car driving along the road. The sight reminds Zeke of an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, the one about the man who awakens to find that he is alone in the world, hopelessly searching an abandoned town for another human. Smitty's 24-Hour Drugstore is a mom-and-pop kind of place, exclusive to the anti-franchise provincial atmosphere of the town. Zeke makes his way past an aisle of cleaning supplies and kitchen appliances. He stops at the pharmacy counter in the back of the store and stands motionless, half-expecting by habit of routine for Nurse Rita to slide him some pills with a tiny paper cup of water.

"Can I help you?" asks the pharmacist, an old man in a white coat with thick, bushy eyebrows that are barely shielded by the upper frame of his glasses. He frowns at Zeke, who looks back at him absently, then snaps out of his aloof stupor. He pulls the lightly wrinkled prescription slips from his coat pocket and extends them over the counter.

"I need to get these filled," Zeke says.

The druggist takes the stack and shuffles through, noting that they are all for tranquilizers and antidepressants. Zeke taps his fingers against the counter, eyeing an array of condoms and love-pills on the back wall. The pharmacist peeks over his frames at Zeke and arbitrarily looks him up and down. Zeke perceives the repugnant stare and glares back in return. The old man sets down the papers and

speaks with a rigid tone.

"We'll need an hour for all of these."

Zeke gives a spiritless, irked nod and turns away. Walking down the aisle, he glances over his shoulder and sees the old druggist dialing a number from one of the prescription slips, likely calling Dr. Levinson to see if they are authentic. A short walk away is a movie theater, where Zeke catches the late Friday matinee to kill some time. The showroom is empty, except for a young couple fervently making out a few rows ahead. He naps through a two-hour kid's movie about talking animals and is awakened at the end credits by a teenager in a classic usher's uniform. After returning to the drugstore to collect his meds, accompanied by yet another hostile gawk from the surly pharmacist, Zeke makes his way back toward the station. He glances at his watch and sees that the next bus to Monroe won't arrive for another two hours.

On the northeast corner of the fifth block is a small diner. Zeke stops in and sets his bags down in a booth of maroon pleather upholstery and a sheen elm cherry wood tabletop. A rich scent of French vanilla-bean coffee fills the air. The place is classy, with stainless glass outer-walls all around, though it's not so over-stylized as to unavailingly fit the trendy dining fashions of the fifties. With only a short line of booths on the left side and the counter lined with backless oak-wood barstools, the restaurant is rather small. For the most part, Zeke is alone. He glances around and sees a nicely dressed middle-aged couple at the far edge of the counter, whispering quietly to one another and touching hands. The server, a very thin bald man sporting a white apron, black bowtie, and paper chef's hat, restocks plates and silverware under the counter. Another man in casual dress slouches over a cup of coffee, staring into dancing swirls of cream. A young and pretty blonde-haired waitress appears from a door into the back kitchen and approaches the booth. She's cute, thinks Zeke, but it's strange seeing a girl without carved arms, nor a white frock.

"Hey there, what can I get you?" she asks, revealing a Minnesotan accent with long I's, O's, and a delicate stress at the end of each word.

Zeke takes a menu from behind a shiny, silver napkin dispenser and quickly glances over it.

"Just a ginger ale, no ice, please," he responds, shutting the menu. "And do you have any saltines?"

He orders the meal, reminiscent of evening snack time back at

the institution. The waitress jots down the odd request and shows an award-winning smile.

"Be right out," she says, stuffing the notepad into her apron and striding back behind the counter.

Shuffling through his pockets, Zeke finds two quarters: one minted from 1984 and the other from 2009. He pockets the older coin and slides the other into a tabletop jukebox. Zeke shuffles through the selection of oldie hits and selects "There'll Be Another Spring" by Monica Zetterlund. The music plays smoothly over the sound of clanging silverware. Zeke scratches his scalp and stares out the window onto the empty street. He repeatedly flicks a packet of Sweet & Low until the waitress returns with his soda and crackers.

"Thank you," he says, tearing open a packet of saltines.

"Anything else?"

Zeke begins to meticulously stack each of six crackers on a pie plate. "I'm fine, thanks," he responds passively.

The waitress stands by for a moment, watching the intricate procedure with masked amusement. She takes a seat at the counter and cracks open a tragic romance novel. As Zeke stacks the last cracker, he notices the laminated band around his left wrist with his name and "Crestview Behavioral Health" printed in bold black letters. He quickly glances around, then takes a butter knife and uses the dull ridges to shred away at it. Zeke buries the severed band into his coat pocket and massages the clammy reddish imprint in his pale skin. He opens the paper bag of orange pill bottles and rewards himself with a Zolof, washing it down with a swig of fizzy ginger ale. Continuing on with his cracker ritual, Zeke starts deftly biting away each corner, trying to form thin white-wheat octagons. To conclude the meal, he devours the remains and washes them down as quickly as possible, pretending to race with imaginary mental patients on the opposite side of the booth. Zeke slams down his cup and the waitress looks over her shoulder. She returns to the booth with a tray.

"So, what are you reading?" Zeke asks, using the small talk to practice his conversation skills.

The waitress smiles as she collects the empty packets and plate. "Jude the Obscure," she says. Zeke nods, disinterested. "You're not a regular," the waitress says. "Are you from around here?"

"No ma'am, I'm just passing through."

"Oh? Where you heading?"

“Home. A place called Monroe.” Zeke stares glumly at the table, dispirited by the unnerving reminder.

The waitress takes up the tray. “No place like it,” she says, turning back to the counter. The words settle on the surface of Zeke’s mind before sinking in.

After paying the bill, Zeke starts toward the station. The bus will arrive in half an hour. Along the way, he stops occasionally to look through shop windows. Peeking in at a group of faceless mannequins arranged within a luxurious kitchen backdrop, Zeke imagines how his parents might react when he steps through the door. In no scenario does he see them embracing him or offering a drink after his tiresome sojourn. With the bus arriving in Monroe at the first light of day, he will likely meet them at breakfast. Zeke envisions their startled faces ogling at him, shaping him up as a remorseful son, and fading back into their old, atrocious ways of nurturing him. Crossing the street to the bus station, Zeke realizes that Monroe is the one place in the world he can never again go. On the sidewalk before the entrance, he slumps down to the ground with his luggage, taking the place of the homeless man from before. His eyes lie fixed upon the street, lethargically illuminated by the gas lamps trailing out of town.

Zeke opens the black saxophone case and pulls out the imperfect instrument, a final gift from his parents. His lips press around the mouthpiece to play a cool, rhythm-less melody. As he blows out soft E-notes, faintly blaring in unison with the night sounds of chirping crickets and passing cars, Zeke ponders sweet memories of his family. His father, Dr. Levinson, and his mother, Nurse Rita, and all the many misfit brothers and sisters back at Crestview, taken in with open arms to the oddball palace, by means of “cries for help” and their impotence to partake in socialite engagements. He dreams of never again returning home to Monroe, and imagines the deer stumbling away into the thicket. He hopes for his own sake that it survived the hit. The charter bus to Monroe appears from around the corner, the blinding blaze of its lights shining onward down the long main street. As it roars toward the station, Zeke sets the saxophone into its case and clamps it shut. Instruments of any outside nature, along with any potentially harmful objects, are prohibited where he is going. The bus roars closer, starting down the block toward the last turn into the passenger dock. Zeke pockets his pills and tightly grasps the patient wristband in his coat, then stands to face the charging headlights of the bus that will take him home.









# ARMSTRONG ATLANTIC STATE UNIVERSITY 2014