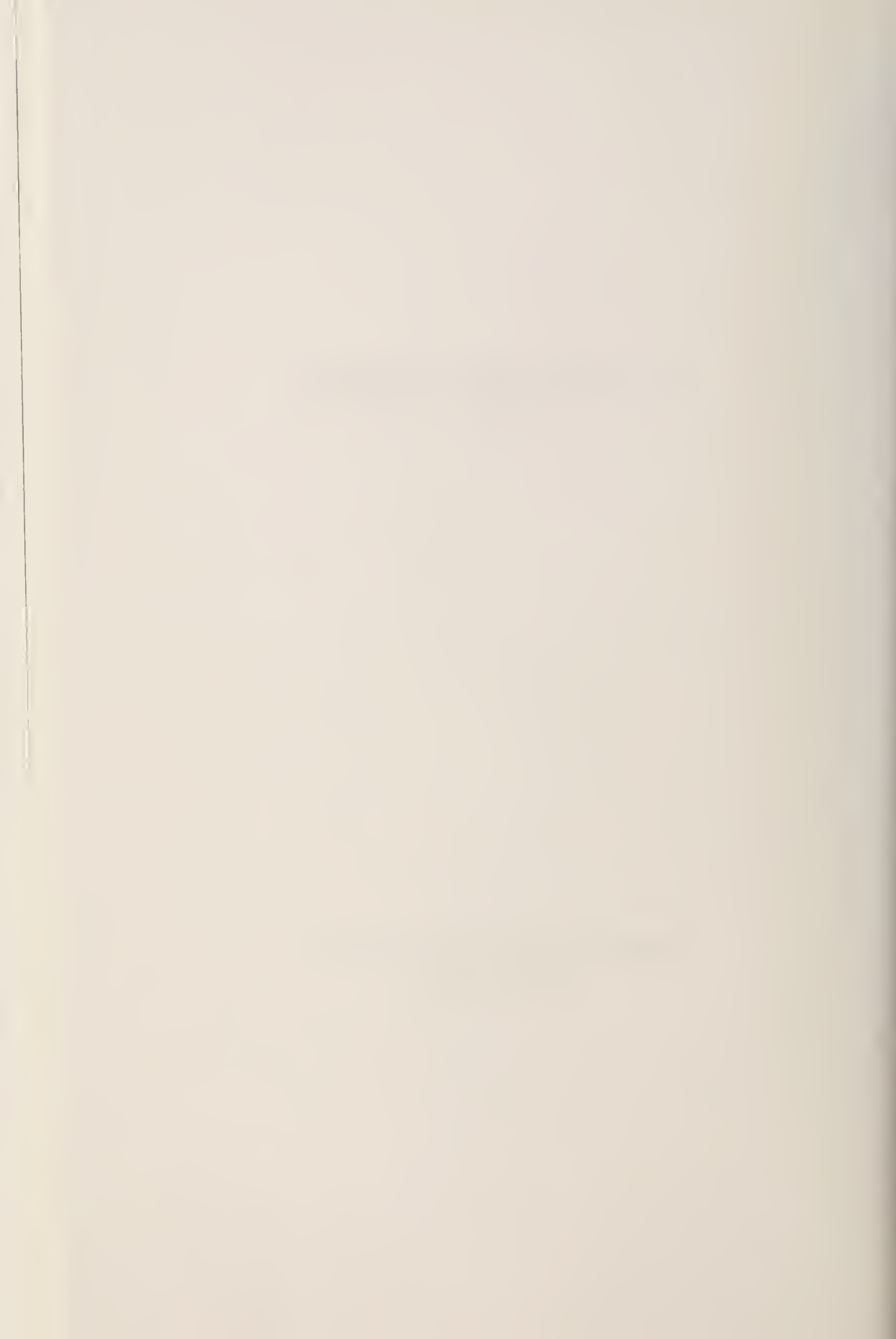


# CALLIOPE



2002



# Staff

Editor: Michael E Roduin Sr.

Assistant Editor: Emily Joost

Art Editor: Stephanie Raines

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Christopher Baker

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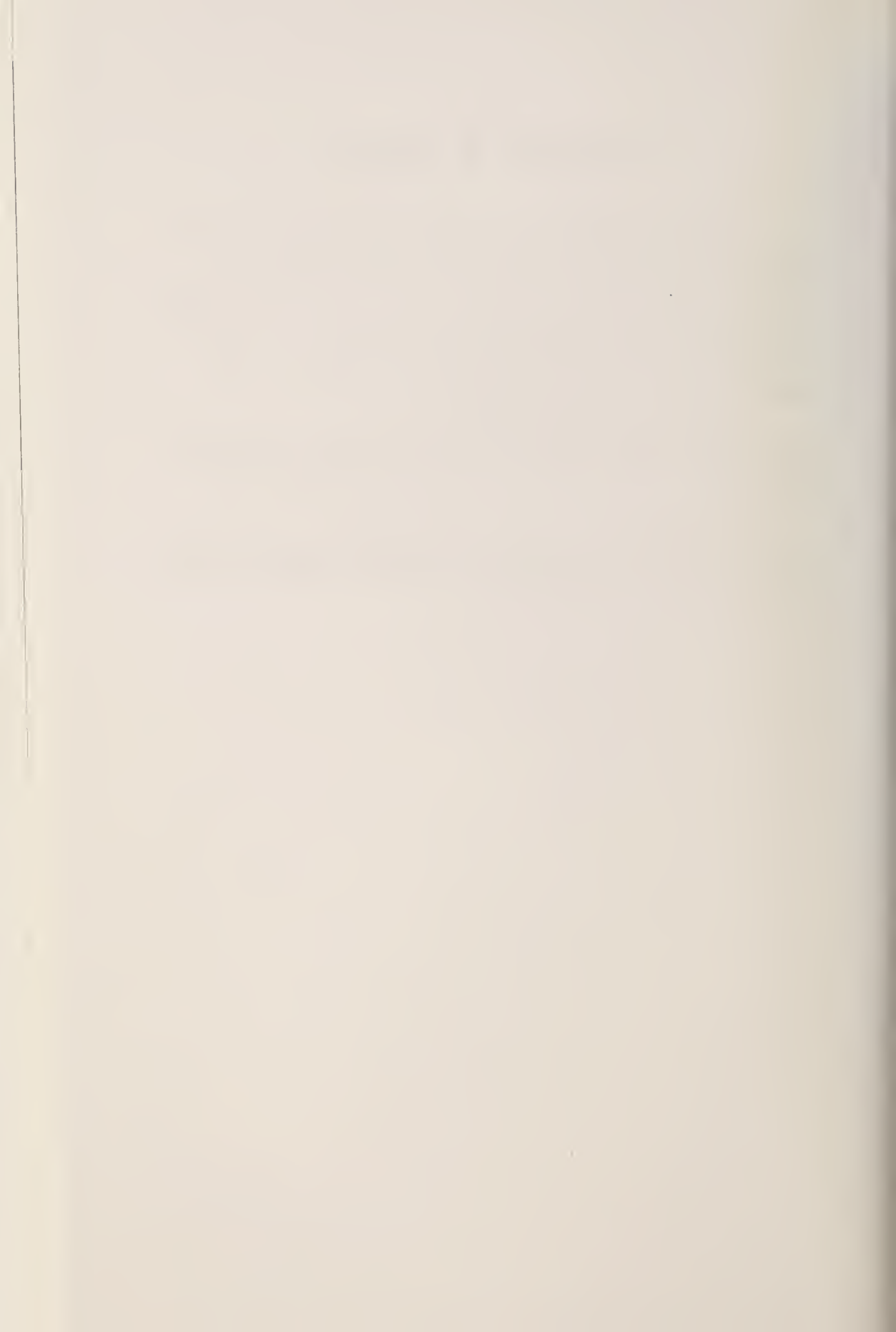


# Editor's Note

In light of world events, the Calliope staff would like to dedicate this journal to the men and women who serve in the United States military. Soon, some of our own classmates will be serving our nation in a war zone. Those students, our friends, and the many AASU students who came before them, already serving in the armed forces, and the soldiers that we all know, are the reason for this dedication. Let us never forget what it is they give up for us.

This years staff would also like to name names. Captain Shawn Roduin, Sgt. Thomas Nezbeda, Sgt. Brian Cole, Master Chief Edward Munyer, and the Captain and crew of the USS Kitty Hawk, CV-63. Thank you all.

There may be some question as to the material contained in this journal. We, the staff, believe that this is a testimony to the freedom that is provided to us by our armed forces.



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Stephanie Raines

# Fiction

## A View of One's Own

Mike Rios

A job! A job. She wants a job. I knew this would happen. I saw it coming the second she started bringing those damn books home. No, not the romance ones, the ones with Fabio and horses and—what's the deal with women and horses anyway? No, everything was fine when she read those kinds of books. I'm talking about the big books, the ones with ideas, not just stories. The ones that showed her what the world is really like. "Jimmy," she says to me one day, out of left field, "the world is not what it seems." Jesus Christ, no shit. I could have told you that. I thought I was going to get that promotion last year after busting my hump. Nope, no such luck. Gave it to Jones instead. Jones. The world ain't what it seems all right. Hard work don't always pay off. The best man for the job don't always get that job. "It took you how many books to learn that?" I asked her. Without missing a beat she says she didn't learn it from any book. What she learned from reading was that other people saw it, too, and that other people could express (yeah, express, she used the word express) what they saw. That's when I knew. I knew there was going to be trouble. But I didn't do anything about it. I should've, but I didn't. I mean, so she thinks she's found some kind of connection with some

book, maybe even some writer. Big deal, these guys are mostly dead anyway, right? What do I got to worry for? Besides, it's not like she was ignoring the kids or the food or my clothes or the house, you know? The books were on her free time. So I guess I kind of just hoped that I was wrong, that this wasn't going anywhere. Two months later I find out I was right, about as right as I could be. What happened? I'll tell you. I get home from work one night, after taking orders from I've-got-something-to-prove Jones all day and I walk upstairs to take a shower when I hear the television in the kids' room. I go in to see what they're up to and instead I find no kids, just her watching some British lady in some library talking to the camera about Shakespeare's sister. I didn't even know he had a sister. I wonder what she looked like. (She was probably stacked; all women at that time were stacked.) Is this lady supposed to be some great, great granddaughter of hers or something? First I get shushed and then, when I insist on an answer, I get "No, she's playing Virginia Woolf," real calm-like, as if I should've known this already. Woolf?

Shakespeare's sister was named Woolf? She shakes her head and tells me she'll explain later. Something about her voice bugs me. But I can't quite place it. So I say "fine" and go take my shower. In the middle of rinsing off it hits me. She sounded just like the lady on the video. She sounded like Martha Jones, the lady who's now my boss. She sounded strong. And tonight I get the I-want-a-job speech, something about having her own room. I told her we can't afford to make another addition to the house. She threw a book at me, told me to read it and went to her mother's. So now I'm sitting here in front of the television wanting to watch the game but I got this problem. Do I let her work? I wonder if Shakespeare had this problem with Virginia.

## Stuck In A Moment

Mike Rios

Brandon Morales was on his way home. He descended the front steps of the station house and walked across the parking lot. He reached his pickup truck (make: Toyota; model: Tundra; year: 2001) and entered his vehicle. He never once looked around.

He sat in the driver's seat for a moment, taking a deep breath of muggy air. Exhaling unhurriedly, Morales noticed he was holding the file he had been working on. He should not have taken it with him. True, he was not done with it, but he had promised Olivia no work tonight. He thought about taking the file back to the station and decided against doing so. He was the solitary detective working the case, barring Havard (who was lending a bit of help), and as such he knew the file would not be missed. He could just leave it in the pickup when he arrived home. Besides, he did not really feel like walking back into the crowded station, climbing the stairs, and returning to his desk; not because he was tired—which he was; he was nearly exhausted—but because he was afraid he would not be able to escape a second time on the same day.

No, I've got to go home.

Thinking of the trip home, a trip that would prove lengthy at this time of the afternoon, Brandon pushed a huge key into the ignition switch and turned it. A thunderous tap, however, prevented Brandon from commencing his journey. Completely unstartled—his reflexes had been worn during the past



few days—he looked out his side window. Standing in the hot Savannah sun was detective Anthony Havard, his deep brown skin glossy with sweat, his mouth open in a wide grin.

Morales reluctantly pressed a button; the window slid down and disappeared.

“You finally gone, Bee?” asked Havard in that stentorian now-I’m-going-to-tell-you-something voice of his.

Morales saw where this was going—resistance was more than futile; it meant a prolonged lecture. “Yeah.”

“Good. I don’t want to see you until tomorrow. You hear me? Don’t be sneaking back down here tonight! Got it?”

“Uh huh,” Brandon replied, fingers spread on the file beside him, hoping Havard had not seen it.

“I ain’t kidding. I told Johnson to have his S.W.A.T. boys on special call just in case you feel drawn to that desk of yours. Go home and get some rest. On second thought, just go home and get some. You need it!”

“Gotcha.” Morales had received the same speech from his lieutenant ten minutes ago.

“Alright now.” He turned to walk away and paused. “And say hi to Olivia for me.”

“I will not.”

“Hey, if you don’t I will.”

“Not with a fat lip, you won’t.”

“I got a fat d—?”

Brandon slammed on the gas, screeching backwards, drowning Havard’s voice out. He had managed a genuine laugh and waved thanks to his fellow detective, whom he knew would see the wave for what it was.

A transitory feeling of satisfaction filled him, although he had not accomplished anything more than leaving the station and its parking lot. He knew this had been a greater obstacle than it seemed. So he allowed himself the feeling, even if it did last for only a couple of blocks before fading, perturbation following in its wake. Morales had now joined Savannah's afternoon traffic, a fraternity/sorority of sorts practicing equal opportunity enrollment. Black, white, young, old, female, male, there were no requirements to be a member of Sigma Savannah Rush-Hour, save one: you must not, by any means, be able to competently operate your vehicle. It seemed that if you knew yellow meant slow down and not speed up, or if you knew the left lane was for passing and not coasting, or if you knew the right-of-way ... if you knew what "right-of-way" meant, then you were not—under any circumstances—allowed to drive on the streets of Savannah. Morales did not know the statistics for accidents, the only numbers he paid attention to were those that told his clearance rate, yet he guessed it was high, based on the hyperbolic sense he had of having driven past so many a scene of twisted metal.

Case in point: Last summer a young graduate student attending a university an hour outside of Savannah had decided he wanted to meet his girlfriend for lunch off campus. He had jumped in his Jeep and driven along the university's main circle, probably hoping to see his girlfriend's blue eyes in a few minutes. He did, indeed, get to see those remarkable eyes, but he had had to wait for days instead. Why? Because another student had decided to drive along the circle at the same time, in the opposite direction, in his lane. After having flown through the front window of his Jeep and having landed on the front hood of a Jimmy, the student—whose girlfriend had been waiting at a nearby Ruby Tuesday's wondering where the hell he was—came to a week later at East Georgia Medical Center. His first words? "What happened?" To which his girlfriend had replied, with not a single trace of conscious irony on her part, "Some lady from Savannah hit you." But the irony had not been lost on Brandon Morales, who was friends with the

officer handling the case. “So what’d the lady say?” Morales had asked his friend over a beer one night.

“This is the part that kills me,” his friend had told him, setting up the punch line. “The lady looks me dead in the eye and says, ‘I’ve been taking classes here for a while. But they’re at night. This is the first time I’ve driven here during the day.’”

Holding his frosted mug up, Morales had offered a toast. “Here’s to Savannah drivers, and the body shops they keep in business.”

If the staggering amount of purely bad drivers perturbed him, then a revelation Morales had come to recently completely maddened him. Brandon Morales had been allowed into the fraternity. He was beginning to drive like them. Once he recognized what he referred to as “the symptoms,” such as forgetting to use a turn signal and cutting someone off, he was absolutely furious. They had finally infected him, he half-jokingly told Olivia one day. He was aware that his lapses in traffic were emblematic of something larger and far more serious. He had been working too hard for far too long. He had to slow down and take at least a night off. Everyone in the squad knew it. Olivia knew it. And deep down inside he knew it.

He looked at the folder next to him. His thoughts returned to work.

Yellow.

Red.

Morales brought his truck to a halt.

Somewhere around Victory and Lincoln it must have happened. He still could have realized what had occurred had he merely focused in front of him, only he was busy thinking about work at first; then he started thinking about Olivia, thinking about her lying on the sofa downstairs in the red teddy he had bought two Christmases ago. He was thinking about how it would feel to talk to her in the same room—not over miles of fiber optics or radio waves. He was thinking about

how it would feel to touch her. It had been a week and a half, ten days. Olivia, he thought, without thinking her name.

The traffic light turned green, and he waited as the dozen cars in front of him inched forward; a few actually made it across the intersection. Not surprisingly, the light turned red two cars before him. Taking the pickup out of gear and resting a foot on the brake pedal, his thoughts shifted from Olivia to Josephine, Josephine Wells.

You need to stop, he told himself. Let it rest, at least until tomorrow. But, of course, he could not. He knew the new lie was just the old one. He could not put her aside that easily, not after all he had been through. No, after all she had been through.

Ten days, he thought once more, consciously bringing Olivia to the foreground. Ten days since he had eaten dinner or lunch or even breakfast with her. There had been chances, opportunities, afforded the couple to share a meal within this time. He had not, however, capitalized on any of them. Not for lack of trying, though. It was just that ten days ago someone—statistics and experience pointed to a male—had seen fit to rape and pummel to death a mother of three on her own porch. The exact details of the crime were still unknown; they almost always remain so. The perpetrator had left little evidence, a somewhat perplexing fact given the attack's viciousness. Usually with a beating, the longer the attacker beats on his victim, the more apt he is to lose control and grow careless. Detective Morales had had no luck with such proverbial police logic, however, and neither had Josephine Wells for that matter.

The killer had left only two significant clues, hints, whatever one wishes to call them, with which to somehow catch him: a latex-based compound residue that told Morales he was looking for someone who possessed enough intellect to use a prophylactic and a partial indentation on what was left of Josephine Wells' right cheek that bore a slight resemblance to a class ring, again pointing to the

possession of some amount of intellect on the killer's part. In short, he had nothing. For without more evidence or, God forbid, witnesses willing to talk, Savannah's thirty-first homicide that year (his eighth) would most likely not be cleared. Still, he had an obligation both to Josephine and to the citizens of this city to put down this case. That's what he had told himself from the beginning, standing on Josephine Wells' porch looking at her body on a dark humid August morning. He had an obligation.

A honk.

He looked around and noticed he was holding up traffic. The cars ahead had already driven past the green light while he sat motionless. He raised a hand at the Pathfinder behind him in an attempt to seek forgiveness. In return he received a single raised finger as he passed the yellow-going-on-red light, leaving the Pathfinder to halt its advance before it was underway.

As he slowed down and came to a standstill again Morales turned the air conditioner on high. Cool air rushed out from the vents making his skin tingle with guilt. Two days ago he had had a chance to have lunch with Olivia. He also had an appointment to have his pickup's air conditioning repaired. Faced with the lady or the compressor he had chosen the former, but she, reminding him of the necessity of air conditioning during Savannah summers, told him to go ahead and take the truck to the shop. "You sure? I don't know when I'm gonna get another chance to see you, let alone have lunch."

"I'm sure," she had said into the telephone. "I'm sure."

That night, after visiting Josephine Wells' home for another look around in the hopes of finding something, anything that could lead to the identification of the killer, a frustrated Morales had arrived home with nothing new to work with. Throwing his keys in the crystal bowl atop the foyer table, Morales had slowly climbed the cream carpeted stairs. As he ascended a faint light had been visible from above. His mood lightened a bit, and he moved faster, taking off his jacket



and tie by the time he entered the master bedroom. Two steps in he had stopped, a sigh deflating his body. With hunched shoulders he stood motionless, looking at his wife asleep in bed. Her long strands of yellow hair ran, it seemed, like slender rivers along the folds of the pillows, joining along her face. He could make out a single strand gliding in the air, moved rhythmically by his wife's breathing. Her eyelashes fluttered faintly, her lips trembled and mumbled something inscrutable—perhaps a prayer asking divine protection for her husband in his duty-bound absence or perhaps a curse exacting punishment for that same absence. Whatever its meaning, the thought of deciphering her utterance did not even occur to Morales. He felt he had no right to know what she had said. He had forfeited that privilege a long time ago, journeying as he did into the lives of dead people days on end while ignoring the most important living person in his life. His gaze traveled down Olivia's left arm, stopping momentarily at the thin wrist, around which a gold watch hung loosely. Morales wondered how many times she had glanced at its hands with him on her mind. This train of thought led him to speculate the time she fell asleep. He recalled the formula medical examiners used to determine approximately the time of a victim's death and toyed with the idea of substituting this for that and that for this to come up with a formula to calculate the time that his wife's body had surrendered to exhaustion, no longer able to wait for him.

The lamp was still on, so she had fallen asleep; she had not chosen to go to sleep. A wine glass, smudged with visible fingerprint patterns, sat on her oak nightstand, a small amount of red liquid creating a pool within it. A crease-veined paperback book lay by her hand like a tent put up in a desert of cotton sands. On the book's cover was a painting of a man holding a longhaired woman in his huge heroic arms. A sudden desire to put a bullet through that gorgeous schmuck's face came over Morales as he thought about all the other literary suitors who had been sharing his wife's bed in the warmth of his home. Brandon Morales, Savannah

Police detective, saw no evidence of foul play, simply a woman relaxing in bed before drifting off to sleep. Brandon Morales, graduate of Stony Brook's bachelor program in English, saw a woman searching for the company she could not attain in reality in the pages of another world. Brandon Morales, husband and man, saw a missed chance, a crack in a seemingly stable home, a fissure he was not sure he could keep from widening.

He had wanted to kiss Olivia. Instead, not wanting to wake her, he had kissed the air he hoped would find its way into her lungs. Then Morales had walked over to the burning lamp and turned it off.

Green.

This time Morales noticed the traffic light and pulled his truck forward. He reached what could be considered normal speed for about a half-mile until slowing back down to zero five cars behind a red light at Abercorn and sixty-third. He was approaching Derenne. Soon he would have to get over on the right lane to make his turn. He looked at the vehicle beside him, a blue Yukon. The driver, a heavy-set man with thick lenses in an equally thick set of frames, sat slouched, staring straight ahead. In front of the gas-greedy monster was a red Mustang with a group of teenage girls inside evidently singing, their arms and necks swaying in synch with the music Morales could hear from his truck. He tore his gaze away lest he be mesmerized, too.

At least I didn't see her face, Morales said to himself, his thoughts traveling back two nights again. He had heard stories of detectives gripped by cases, sometimes seeing the faces of victims in place of the faces of loved ones or friends. One story in particular came to mind. A detective, somewhere in Montana (Morales had forgotten the exact location), working the murder of a young girl whose limbs had been severed, had apparently been so overwhelmed that one night during dinner he had seen not his daughter across the table but the young dead girl. Shocked, he had dropped the saltshaker his daughter had asked for and

had begun to weep fractionally. No one would have known about this had it not been for the essay his wife had written in a police journal after the detective committed suicide three days later. The case, Morales remembered, was still open.

At least he saw Olivia's face; that much he was grateful for. At least he had not ...

A pair of eyes caught his attention. The smile was next.

For the first time, Morales noticed the car directly ahead of him. He was not wholly certain, but it seemed he must have been behind the white Lexus for quite a while. The Lexus' outside rearview mirror held the reflection of its driver's face. Morales saw a pretty woman looking at him with what appeared to be recognition. She smiled, crinkling the corners of her dark eyes, and suddenly she looked away.

She recognized me, thought Morales. But who ...?

He froze.

A name from some distant place emerged. No. It can't be.

He looked at the woman's reflection in the outside mirror, then the inside mirror. He caught her glance again. This time he looked away.

Same hair.

Same eyes.

Same smile.

But ...

The light turned green. The Lexus drove forward. He did not know what to do.

He put the truck in gear and accelerated.

It's her, he thought. What's she doing here?

But she doesn't drive a Lexus.

You think she'd be driving that Civic forever? It's been nine ... ten years.



I can run a check on her tag. Then I'd be sure.

No.

But she's supposed to be in New Orleans. What's she doing here?

I must've looked like an idiot, staring at her, frozen, not smiling or waving

.... And after everything ...

What the hell's she doing here?

The right turn light on the Lexus began blinking. Morales looked at the approaching street: Derenne. The Lexus changed lanes.

Should I catch up to her and flag her down? Get her to stop somewhere so we can ... so we can what?

Morales changed lanes, cutting the red Mustang off.

The Lexus turned onto Derenne. Morales followed.

She's going the same way I'm going. Yeah, but for how long?

As if in answer to his question, the Lexus' left turn signal flashed. Both vehicles changed lanes once more and came to a stop at a traffic light on Herriot.

What are you doing, Brandon?

I have to know if it's her.

Why?

Because if it is ...

He made no motion to get her attention save to look at her rearview mirror. She did not look back.

Morales thought about the letters and the single photograph he kept inside his pistol case at home.

The turn signal continued flashing, a seemingly perpetual alternation between bright and dull yellows.

Morales realized he was touching his wedding ring. He looked down at the wide band. "You need a nice big ring so all the hoochies can see you're taken

from a mile away,” Olivia had reasoned. She had recently had it polished, and the ring still maintained its burnish. Morales looked at the scratches along the ring.

The ring, he thought. Goddamnit, the ring!

He quickly pulled his cellular phone out of his jacket and dialed Havard’s number. One ring. Two rings. A crackle. A voice.

“Hello.”

“Josephine Wells.”

“Oh, hell. Come on, Bee, give it a rest.”

“Listen.”

An undisguised sigh.

“Listen! What’s the highest grade Josephine Wells reached?”

“I can’t say. She was a high school drop-out.”

“Yeah, at first. But didn’t one of her sisters say she had gone back to school, taking evening classes without telling anyone? The sister knew only ‘cause she’d surprised Josephine studying.”

“I remember. So what? She never finished. Like I said, technically she’s ... she was a high school dropout. That’s the tragedy.”

“No. I got a feeling Josephine finished. I think she struggled and struggled and finally she graduated. Only she didn’t tell anyone about it. Maybe her kids would feel ashamed or something. None of them finished. I think she didn’t want to seem like she was bragging.” The light turned green. “I think she was proud, though. So proud she bought the biggest class ring she could afford. I think whoever killed her—”

“—Took that ring,” Havard finished.

The Lexus pulled forward.

“I’ll make some calls tomorrow to the Board of Ed,” Morales said, “find out where she was taking classes, when she graduated, what company she bought the ring from. It wouldn’t hurt to try the pawn shops, too.”

“Tomorrow?”

The Lexus turned left.

“Yeah, tomorrow.”

Morales pressed the “end” button on his phone. The Wells’ case was not put down. Not yet, he thought. But it’s a start.

He looked at the traffic lights in the distance. All green. Olivia would die laughing, he thought. “Why do I always have to catch every red light?” she often asked. Turning his left signal light off and shifting his truck into gear, he pressed his foot on the gas pedal and drove straight ahead. Brandon Morales was on his way home.

## Silence

Jeanette Kehr

Isa crouched behind the tall pine, as she watched Haley leave the house tugging at her dress and pressing the collar with her good hand. Last night their father had twisted the other because his supper had been late. Today Isa made sure his supper would be on time.

The heat of the metal door scorched her knuckle when she knocked. No sound came from inside. The sun scalded her back and her feet fought the concrete beneath them. The beating of her heart prevailed over her small frame. Yellow orange hair fell in her face as she shifted the plate from her left hand to her right. Putrid green is her least favorite color and it covered the porch like a veil, stagnate. Its color only accentuated the odor of cigarettes and filth.

She whispered into the burning metal. "Daddy."

Her protective freckles dripped with sweat and she licked her dry lips. Tugging at the cream color cotton shift caused more sweat to drip down to her naked buttocks.

"Daddy."

Facing him is unbearable, like the heat. Quietly setting the tray on the wooden cart, which lay next to the spigot, she cupped the cool liquid and splashed her face.

“Damn it, child! Turn off that water. I did not tell you you could have any of that, now did I?” He stepped out onto the porch and two strides reached out and twisted her arm. Spittle dripped as he spoke. “Turn it off! Now!”

Rubbing her arm from his attack she feigned a smile. “Daddy, I brought your dinner—see Daddy—here—and it’s on time.”

“Hmmm...” Scratching his head he added. “Did you bring me a clean shirt and pants. You know I can’t wash my own clothes on accounta my arthritis.” Isa backed away as he grabbed the plate.

“No, daddy....Haley hasn’t finished it. But, I’ll bring it to you before sundown. I promise.” She looked at the purple bruise forming on her arm and grimaced. “Daddy, please let me have some water. I’m thirsty. I promise I won’t drink a lot. Just a little....please.” Her blue eyes fought against the sun. she noticed his silhouette was as hers, small. His freckles were hers also. Even his blue eyes were hers, but her sweat was his.

“A runt like you ain’t got no business drinking my water. Go on back to the river. There is plenty there for the taking.” Looking into his cold blue eyes she could see she would get nothing from him. What he did want to give her, she didn’t want. She turned to run and was caught by his long bony fingers. They wrapped around her stick like arm and yanked her to his smelly chest. His stale breath caught her neck. “You’re next little one. Just wait and see.” Then he let go and disappeared as fast as he appeared.

Behind the metal door she heard him coughing. The spigot still running she decided not to risk him seeing her drink and turned it off.

In her ten years she had never spent more than six months in one home. They hopped from house to house, sometimes only twenty minutes from the last and sometimes longer. It depended. If her father could find a vacant place they settled. The last place in Laurelton, she even got to go to school. It seemed that her and Minnie Frye were just becoming chummy when he packed their belongings

and carried them off again. This time they crossed the state line into Alabama. Swamps took over. Misquitoes were plentiful and clean water scarce. It took them five days to find this little shack. It looked like no one had been here in a long time, so they settled.

Why would anyone put a metal door on a house in this heat, Isa thought to herself. She had to hurry if she was going to get his clothes to him before sundown. The further she walked away from the dingy old shack, the more she felt like she was being watched. She cut her eyes back to the shack and saw the curtains shift just a bit.

As she slid down a bumpy hill to reach the small cove, Haley was wringing out the last of the clothes.

Into the murky water she went.

“Isa!”

the tightness of her skin cooled as she bounced into the water. Silhouetted against the sun, Haley draped a dingy white T-shirt over a dead tree limb. Isa loved to watch her. Haley was different. Her dark hair and eyes reminded her of her mother. A twinge of jealousy caught itself in her throat as she held her breath and went under.

Where was her mother? Isa asked herself that question every day. The last time she saw her was a year ago. They had all lived in Texas, in a nice house with two bedrooms. For Isa it seemed to be perfect. One day her father came home from work and said they had to pack. “Your mama is dead. She had an accident.” The shock of this news devastated Isa. Her father never mentioned their mother again.

Under the water there was no sound. Only a vacuum. A fish touched her face. It wiggled in and out of her toes as her dress flowed around her like a blanket. The quiet underworld had no audible sound, yet she heard everything.

The bubbles from her nose tickled. The beat of her heart rhythmically sang as her hair flowed protectively around her. A tap on her shoulder brought her back.

“Isa...Isa....answer me...”

Up and out Isa popped out of the water like a perch baited by a hook.

“I’m here.” She shielded her eyes from the sun to get a better look at Haley. At sixteen she looked old. Her shoulders slumped with an invisible weight.

“Come on Haley...get in...” She giggled pulling Haley into the water.

“Isa! I can’t. I have to....” Her face went under water. They stared at each other as their hair floated to the top. Isa smiled. Haley pushed her feet and shot out of the water spitting and choking.

“Isa. You know I hate to get under the water. It’s too quiet and besides it’s dirty.”

“Hey, you! Get me my clothes. Now!” He held up his arm and shook his fist.

“See, Isa...you got me in trouble. Now he’s mad.” She grabbed his sun-dried clothes and quickly walked away. She slipped and fell calling out to him.

“I’m coming. Papa.”

Why didn’t she call him daddy like me, thought Isa. At the top of the hill Haley handed him the clothes. Isa watched as Haley was pulled away from sight. The sun burned her retinas and her face felt flush. The water suddenly became smelly. She felt the hot breath of the fish rise around her leg. Her feet sunk into the muddy bottom as a twig wrapped around her fiery red hair. As her face entered the water her scream was muffled. She wasn’t sure if it was her voice she heard or Haley’s.

Her eyes opened and she heard nothing. Under the water the sounds were quiet. She wanted to stay forever. The beat of her heart was steady, and her hand pulled the twig out from her hair. She thought about how fragile Haley was and how much she looked like her mother.



As she lay on the small grassy shore, she heard the screams. They reverberated throughout her body causing her to shudder. Sitting up straight she picked up the tree branch where his clothes had hung. As she walked up the hill, she thought about the water. Soundless. Motionless.



## Waste Nothing

Jeanette Kehr

Earlier this morning I had yelled at Granny, not because she's hard of hearing; she just doesn't want to listen. "It's not gonna rain, Granny! Don't waste your time on these dead things." What did I know, after all, I'm only ten. Before dawn, she woke me up barking out orders. I was to fill bucket after bucket of water for the dried up brown corn stalks in her makeshift garden behind our house. "Hush, child! That is your life you are giving up on. Go on now—water before they curl up the rest of the way and die. We got to save the corn." With sore hands curled around my lukewarm glass of milk I gulped and ran.

It was too unbearable to water when the sun came up, so me and Granny sat together at the bare wooden table eating crusty day old biscuits and scrambled eggs. There was no butter, but plenty of jam. She put her red cracked hands together to pray to the Lord up above. I don't have to wonder what she's praying about. Rain. With her lips pressed against her hands she spoke quietly, like a book. The only other time she spoke was when barking orders, as if I were a child. Even though she was outside working alongside me, sweating like me, I was always surprised at the fact she always smelled like mint.

"Momma's not comin' back and it's not gonna rain!" My fork hit the daisy pattern of my plate sending a chip into my glass of milk. Her steel blue eyes stared at me in disgust. "Stop looking at me like that! I'm tellin' the truth and

you know it.” I wasn’t sure if the pain in my stomach was from hunger or her eyes.

Trickles of sweat spilled onto her grease laden plate as she continued to bow her head. When she finished her eyes softened and she passed me the salt. “No Granny! I don’t want salt. I want....” She pushed the salt closer, but I grabbed the pepper instead and pounded the bottom of the shaker.

The raspy breathing of Angel Baby in the next room echoed in my head. The kitchen windows were open, inviting the hot sticky air to meet with the smoldering grease head on. Because I had to squint I barely saw Granny arch her back to retrieve the last drop of tea from her huge glass. The lemon wedge was stuck at the bottom, so she put her dirty hand inside to grab it. Her lips curled around the lemon wedge and her eyes became milky.

I stared at the yellow soupy eggs swimming on my cracked plate and my stomach growled. “I do wish it would rain, Granny.”

As she crunched on her last piece of ice she spoke calmly. “No waste!”

Boy, how many times have I heard that one? Even my bath water is sparse. An inch of water was barely enough to wash my feet, yet she spared nothing for the garden. I wanted to wash my hair and my dress.

Angel Baby’s crying reminded me why everything was so sparse. I popped out of my chair and went into her room. The pink walls were fading compared to her flaming cheeks. Her frail little hands grabbed my dress as I cuddled her. With closed eyes, I nuzzled my face into her black curly hair. “It’s all right, Angel Baby. Stop that cryin’...Mattie’s here for you.”

Mama left us a year ago. When Angel Baby came out sick, she split. “Your mama is not strong like you, Mattie.” Granny would always say. Every now and then money would arrive in the mail, but it was not enough.

Angel Baby wrapped her arms around me and coughed. Her sweet baby powder smell entered my nose and seeped through my skin as I held her. "Granny, it's time for her medicine!"

Lately we've been giving her half doses. Her teeth gritted the spoon, but the medicine passed through her tiny cracked lips. Yesterday Granny had said the doctor would come. We waited, but he never did.

Even in a cool tub of water, Angel Baby's flesh felt hot and dry. I cradled her head as she lay in the tub screaming. In the corner of her room rattled a small metal fan. It didn't do much good. Only mixed up the steaming hot air with my sticky sweat. Angel Baby cried until I took her out of the water. Wrapping her in a clean white towel, I held her close. She laid her head on my shoulder and slept.

I felt a stabbing pain in my back as I stood at the kitchen doorway watching Granny wash the breakfast dishes. My cracked plate was still on the table. Waste not, I thought to myself as I handed it to her.

As I sit next to Angel Baby's crib holding her, the curtains flutter. A cool breeze billows into the room as the clouds get darker. "Granny, look! It's gonna rain. Come here and see."

As she stood next to me, her alabaster hand touched my shoulder. Angel Baby's head languished in the crook of my neck. Her breathing is raspy and her cheeks are still warm. Slowly it drizzled outside. The corn drank. I reached outside the window and let the droplets fill my hand. I wet her cheek and lick my hand tasting her salty skin. Lightning fills the room and I wondered where mama is. Is she standing somewhere watching the same rainstorm? Secretly, I hoped she wasn't. It didn't belong to her.

## I Should

Stephanie McCord

The smell of her perfume, Pleasures, sticks to the yellow wallpaper. The sweet aroma overpowers the fresh red roses sitting on the nightstand. The bathroom light casts a shadow across the hallway wall that leaks into the bedroom. The footprints embedded into the blue carpet are fresh. I can smell her body on the bedspread and on the sheets; strands of her brown hair speckle the pillow. She's standing in the corner next to the lavender chair. I watch her. She grabs her pink t-shirt off the chair and puts it on—head first, then each arm. She then picks her jeans up off the floor; sits on the bed, and slicks each well-shaven leg into the leg holes. The white Nikes come next. Vicki walks to the mirror and straightens her hair, then dabs perfume behind each ear.

I don't know why she does that. It doesn't hide the smell of sex. But I guess it really doesn't matter. It will be 10:30 at night by the time she reaches David's bed, David's home, their kids. It will be 10:45 at night before she puts her wedding band back on.

I watch her walk out of the room. I see her shadow shrink down the hallway. The front door is being unlocked. The metals clank against each other. The door opens, and squeaks with every centimeter of movement. There are footsteps, just a few. The door closes quickly. There's no squeaking this time. I hear the metal again—

metal inserting into metal. The door is being locked. I should get up and put the chain on. I'm tired.

It's 7 o'clock, and time to get up and get dressed. I need to go clothes shopping for winter. Winter is good. I can hide my fat and body freckles under layers of sweaters and long johns and long skirts. Unfortunately, I can't hide the freckles on my face—make-up doesn't cover everything. Hum. In my last check up, the doctor says I'm perfect for my height. I know he's lying—he's just trying to avoid telling me the truth. Women shouldn't be 5'11" and 140 pounds. We should be petite and thin like my mother is.

I need a shower first. I have to get that smell off my body—out of my hair. The shower always takes so long. I should really cut my hair at least to my shoulders. I can hear my mother now: my hair is my best feature. It hides my body. Vicki likes my hair. She likes the way it lies on the small of my back. She says it has endless motion. The blond and red strands go on forever. She enjoys the softness of it against her breast. I keep telling her I'm going to cut it, but each time she talks me out of it. I really should cut it.

The drive to the school is the same; out of the driveway in my safe burgundy Saturn, and down the road three blocks to the school. I pass the same brick homes, and the same fenced-in yards. And the same happy couples kissing each other goodbye for the day. It's a safe school, no drugs, no violence, no bullies. A nice safe school. We start promptly at 8:30.

I have one child who gives me a little trouble—Brian. He has a hard time focusing. He's not mean or hyper. He's just active. Most third grade boys are active. I sometimes find myself staring at Brian. He has the same soft blue eyes and blond hair I had as a child. I wish he was mine, but he's not. He's Vicki's. He likes to tie and untie his shoes again and again. It's part of his compulsive behavior. When I tell

him to stop he always says the same thing to me, “Ms. Jones, don’t you like the way I tie my shoes? I’m the best in the class.”

Sometimes I feel I’m not objective enough with Brian. I love all my children—each one is special. I spend a lot of extra time with Brian. He would probably do better in a special education class. There are only 10 kids in that class. There wouldn’t be so many distractions for him. Maybe I’ll ask Vicki to start dressing Brian in sandals. I should probably do something about the shoe situation before it leads to something more serious. I do love all my kids.

12:15 comes, and all the kids line up for lunch. The children follow the yellow tape on the floor that leads to the lunchroom. We pass paintings, done by other children, along the way. The walls are so white everything against them is magnified. The lunchroom smell is the same five days a week. It smells like nachos. Why nachos I don’t know, but it’s nachos. It doesn’t matter what the ladies cook; it always smells the same. I sit the children at our designated table, and then I go to the teacher’s lounge to eat.

The odor of coffee and cigarettes smacks me in the face as soon as I open the door. This place is the safe shelter for teachers. Sarah Miller complains about her husband. Richard Asher wants to take some time off to visit his grandchildren. I sit on the green vinyl sofa gazing at the new playground equipment. I hope to God none of my children get hurt on it. It’s 12:30. I’m sure Vicki is feeding the baby right now. Afterwards she’ll call David, and ask him what he wants for dinner. She constantly makes him his favorite. I’ll go home at 3:30 and pop in a Lean Cuisine. I have got to start eating more fruits and vegetables. I really should eat better.

Dinner is eaten, the fish are fed, and the cat is playing with her new ball. 5 o’clock wears on my eyes. I have to stop grading papers so I can feel my fingers again. The numbness is an overwhelming feeling when you’re tired. I try to be fair, but it’s hard when I’m tired. I always grade Brian’s test last. I’m too tired by that



time to be picky. I never use red. My first spelling test was in second grade. There was so much red I threw it away at a friend's house. I never want any of my children to feel like they've failed. They have plenty of time to feel like hopeless entities.

Vicki won't be over until 9:00 o'clock. I'll spend my night cleaning the one fork I used for dinner, picking out the dress I'll wear tomorrow for school, and vacuuming around the litter box. I'll talk to my mother. The conversation is always the same. It starts at 7:00 p.m. and lasts until 7:30 p.m. Within that thirty minutes she'll ask me about school, and I'll say it's fine. She'll then ask me if I've been dating, and I'll say no, I'm too busy with school. This takes exactly thirty minutes; by the end of the week that is almost two hours of relaying robotic answers.

At 8:00 o'clock Vicki will call. When her husband yells who's on the the phone, she will tell him she's talking to Brian's teacher. Her excuse will be, "He had a bad day." The conversation will be over in eight minutes. It will be long enough for her to tell me what time she's coming over tonight and not to worry, because she told David she was coming over to discuss next month's PTA meeting. It's always the same time each month—9:00 o'clock. I should tell her not to come. I should tell her to quit stringing me along, but I don't.

I need a break from this.

It's 9:00 o'clock, and Vicki steps out of her Windstar. I often think how that car doesn't fit her. She should drive a Camry—a green Camry. That's her. David picked out the Windstar. David picked out their house. Vicki lets him make all the decisions. She lets him control everything. I want some power. I should be equal in this relationship, but I'm not. I should count in her life. I think I should.

I guess I'm lucky this month—twice in a month, back-to-back days. That cold has worn David down. He is so doped up on cold medication; he doesn't notice the empty space next to him.

She comes in the house. The smell of Pleasures radiates around her. The sweet aroma brings images of flowers floating around her—blue, green, and purple.

They fall lightly into her hair and around her tiny feet. A closer inspection reveals the smell of Bounce. That's what she was doing today. The baby vomit did not come out of her shirt. Her pink blouse stained with baby vomit—that's ok. I have some Spray-n-Wash that will get it out. She should let David do more of the housework and child rearing. They are his sons. I think I'll say something tonight to her about that. I worry too much about her kids.

I should become a foster parent. That extra bedroom is going to waste. Brian and the baby would love that room. The room is all boy. The large window invites the sun to dance with the Disney characters on the wall. There they are—Mickey, Pluto and Donald Duck. I love the light blue paint that covers the walls—and the ceiling fan. What little boy wouldn't want an airplane shaped ceiling fan? The room might be a little young for Brian, but it was perfect for him when I painted it two years ago. I should really go and fill out paper work for the foster program. Maybe I'll redecorate the room into something an eight-year-old would like.

Vicki looks around. Her brown eyes examine the living room. I have changed nothing since last night. She proceeds to the bedroom. I turn off the light in the kitchen, the living room, then the hallway. I leave on the bathroom light. I always leave on the bathroom light. The bedroom clock reads 9:10. It will take another five minutes for her to take her clothes off. Vicki throws her jeans and blouse in the corner next to the chair. She's not very neat.

I've been to her house. It is constantly clean. Each month for dinner—the same day, same time, same meal. The smell of pot roast fills the air. The combination of heat from the oven and roast makes the air warm, almost humid, in the house. Everything has a place and everyplace has an object—objects collected over fifteen years of marriage. There's even a ship in the bottle collection in David's private study and Vicki's doll collection in the extra bedroom upstairs.

Vicki likes to take me to that extra bedroom when I'm over under the pretense of showing me her new edition. The kiss she steals feels different from the ones



in my bedroom. I can't explain it, but I don't feel hidden away when I'm in that room. And for those ten minutes I'm with her in her home with her kids in one of her rooms. It feels like I belong somewhere for those ten minutes. At my home.... I have nothing to show from our two years of confinement.

At dinner I sit there across from Vicki, Brian on my left, the baby in the high chair to my right. David is at the head of the table. David cuts the pot roast, and Vicki serves all of us. It's the same conversation each month. How can we raise money for the school? Do we need more books for the library? David is so nice to me, so unaware. He's not a mean man—just a traditionalist. I want to tell him. I want to tell him everything not to hurt him, not to hurt the children, but to get her attention. I want her to make a choice.

Last month's dinner was different. The conversation was the same, but I said something I had never said before—something about my prison. Vicki was having trouble breathing and left the dining room to look for her inhaler. Her thin frame would not receive the air it needed to survive. Gasping for air she yelled, "I can't find my inhaler." I left the dining room and walked into the living room. "You left it in the bed last night. I have it in my purse—just hold on."

I turned around and there in the doorway was David. I saw his eyes. They were gray, and the white was no longer white but red. I headed straight for my purse that sat on the chair in the hallway. There were so many thoughts that were going through my head as I shuffled through my purse. He now knows. This was the day. Thank-God, everybody was going to know. I was free. Finally, I was free! I walked back in and Vicki was sitting on the couch. David was standing over her. I handed it to her. She would tell him now. She had to. I looked at the clock it was 6:25. Give her eight minutes. Yes, in eight minutes she would breathe the truth. She can't lie—he knows. I could see it in his eyes. He won't even sit next to her. He just

stood over her—hands on hips and knees straight.

I went back into the dining room and sat back down with the kids. I had to give her her space. She needed to tell David alone. It would be easier that way. 6:40 and they were still in the living room. They reappeared at 6:45. David was smiling and the redness from Vicki's cheeks was gone. Vicki looked over at Brian. "Mommy's ok." And Brian smiled back.

David sat back down—shoved a spoonful of mashed potatoes in his mouth and looked at me. "You know, if you wanted book shelves put in your bedroom I would have done it. You didn't have to worry that I would have told anyone what's in the bedroom of the teacher of the year." He laughed then cocked his head towards Vicki.

Vicki refused to look me in the eye. She just stood over the baby fidgeting with the high chair. "Brian, take the baby up stairs for mommy and play with him for a while." I just sat there confused. I could not have heard him right. There was no way. What book shelves? What shelves? I didn't have any shelves. Brian brushed passed me with the baby. I didn't feel the pieces of food falling out of the baby's hand onto my shoulder. Brian glanced over his shoulder and said, "Good bye, Ms. Jones, if I don't see you before you leave." I heard Brian, but I couldn't answer him. I was frozen. She lied to him. She lied to David, and he believed her. Vicki wouldn't look at me. She busied herself cleaning the high chair off. Then with a shot of cold breath that sliced the humidity, "Well it did sound a little odd. Don't you think? You come running into the room yelling—'You left your inhaler in my bed.'"

David took a drink and then smirked, "You won't believe the things that were going on in my head when you said that. I must have looked hilarious. I hope you don't phrase things like that in class. You know Brian will pick that up."

I looked at David sitting there in his brown turtleneck and matching

brown slacks with mashed potatoes on the left corner of his bottom lip. I hated her at that moment—the type of hate I had never felt before. The kind that numbs you to the point that nothing matters any more. You don't want to hurt anybody, but not because you wouldn't, but because you can't. You're powerless to change people. People don't care enough about you to notice you're in pain. I felt that pain at that moment. I wasn't going to change Vicki, but I was going to let David know the truth.

I was going to let him know just to change my prison sentence. I looked at the clock hanging behind David. Then back at him. I opened my mouth. The words were ready. I was ready for it to end. I needed it to end. But what I heard was me—my words, my voice. my humility. “David,” I said, and motioned with my napkin to wipe his mouth. And then I heard “Oh, it's the farm boy in me,” he said, as he wiped his mouth and smiled at me. Those perfect white teeth. I had always liked his smile, but at that moment. He resembled the snake—the devil himself.

One word was the only thing I could get out. My whole body had refused to work. I excused myself from the table, and by 7:30 I was at my house with my rooms and my dolls and my phantom book shelves.

I don't remember putting my keys in the car door or starting the car or pulling out of the driveway or driving down the dark street. I don't remember pulling into my driveway or getting out of the car or going inside and turning on all the lights. A fifteen-minute car ride, and I remember nothing. But, I do remember locking the front door and sleeping with the lights on. I had to have every light on—it was safer that night.

I should have done more that night.

I watch Vicki pull down the covers and climb into bed. It's 9:15. I don't know why I keep replaying the dinner in my head. My chance to tell David is

gone. It's too late for everything. I stand there in the doorway. I can't bring myself to lie next to her. She's going to hurt me. She does every month. I should tell her to go. Why can't I tell her to go? Why can't I get her out of my mind, my body, my heart? Why do I put myself through this? Vicki glares at me, "Come on. I have to leave early tonight."

I look down at my feet. They are moving by themselves. I can't stop them. I can't grab the doorknob or the dresser. I can't stop. Nothing is registering in my head. My knees hit the bed, and I fall onto the bed and across Vicki. My head falls onto her chest. My chest covers her rib cage. My feet dangle off the bed. It doesn't feel like it once did. I don't tingle by her touch or by her words. Something is gone, and I'm lost on how to get it back. She touches my hair with her right hand. Then works her way down my body until she reaches my left thigh and pulls it across her thigh forcing my feet onto the bed. At 9:25 the touching begins.

## Pink at Night

Michael E Roduin Sr.

Ed watched from vulture's row, high above the flight deck, as the aircraft appeared on the horizon. From his elevated position he could see the action on the flight deck as sailors scrambled into position. The purple shirts, known to the crew as grapes, stood by their fuel pumps in the catwalks off the sides of the deck and the red shirts donned their safety gear while manning their vehicles in the rear of the superstructure. The yellow and green shirts moved equipment quickly about the deck, scurrying to avoid an ass chewing from the blues who oversaw it all. It was a normal day on board the USS Kitty Hawk.

Petty Officer Edward Munter looked again at the letter crumpled in his hands. The small pink envelope with the red ink looked out of place in the landscape of steel and aircraft, painted in muted shades of gray, that made up Ed's view. *What the hell happened?* Ed wondered.

He watched the jet, now with a blinking light, approaching from the stern of the ship. Contemplating, he looked up through the Air Boss's window. No surprise there, the Boss was chewing some new guy a fresh asshole or two. It was his job, he knew it, he did it, and he was good at it.

Ed looked the other way in through the back door of the bridge. There was a plethora of low ranking officers running around. *They need a sign that says*

*no running with scissors*, Ed thought to himself, laughing at his wittiness. The Captain was posted in his chair, looking straight out ahead of the carrier. No jokes about him; you just don't do that. Some guys don't understand that when they first get to the ship. "It's like the quarterback," Ed would tell them. "You don't tackle him in practice 'cause your gonna need him in the game. If you hurt him then all the training and practice in the world can't save you."

Ed put the letter in his pocket and looked back to the approaching aircraft. The sun was setting to the port side. He loved to come up here in the evening and watch the planes land. Standing high above the powerful aircraft he could watch the pilots slam onto the deck with a practiced mechanical grace. For a few minutes at least he could pretend he was controlling them.

This is where he brought his new sailors on their first day at sea. He would bring them out, and looking down upon the hundred or so aircraft being guided by a thousand or so crew members, he would tell them, "God I love my job." They would just stand there and stare at the display of power that went on beneath them. It impressed the hell out of them, and he knew it.

Ed stared out above the commotion on the deck, and out beyond the other ships of the fleet, out past the horizon, and out of the atmosphere. He pulled the letter from his pocket again. *Pink at night, sailors delight*, he thought.

He read the post-script again:

*P.S. Ed, when you get a chance, we need to talk.*

The rest of the letter had been pretty general. ...Mom's fine, Daddy says your doing a good thing...classes are good...my friends and I are going to the beach tomorrow. What the hell did it mean? *I came all this way to fight this fucking war for you, and now you send me a pink letter. Damnitt.*

As the sky began to darken Ed could clearly see that the plane had become an F-14 Tomcat on final approach. The IMC clicked on: "Flight quarters, flight



quarters, all hands man emergency stations. We have a disabled aircraft coming in.”

Looking across the stern, Ed saw the fuel dump from the aircraft’s tanks. It was now or never. If he couldn’t stick this landing, he would crash into the sea and then he would be at the mercy of Neptune himself.

The red letters on the envelope seemed to stand out, as if in bold print:

*Electrician's Mate Second Class Edward Munter*

*Engineering/E-div USS Kitty Hawk, CV-63*

*Fpo-Ap 98007*

Ed imagined her writing it out late at night in her dorm room. She was writing to the light of a flashlight, not wanting to wake her sleeping roommate.

*Does she know what an electrician's mate is?* He wondered, *Does she know I am an electrician, or does she think I am some kind of helper?* *Does she know that I work on live circuits that pulse fifty thousand volts at four hundred hertz through their electrical veins?* Ed remembered the last letter he had written; he never talked about his job, only about her.

More men and women scrambled about the deck. Emergency trucks with hoses and other fire fighting equipment pulled around the super structure loaded with men in silver fire fighting suits. The alarm sounded and everyone moved to their spot. Ed thought it looked like well rehearsed chaos. He had no job during flight quarters and he felt useless to help. He squeezed the letter in his hand, closed his eyes, and prayed for the pilot, his RIO, and the deck crew. It was the same prayer he had said when the World Trade Center Collapsed, the same prayer he said when the war started, and the same prayer he said when the ship set to sea:

*Dear god, please save those you see fit to save, and watch over those you do not.*

Opening his eyes, he hoped his view would be different, just for a mo-

ment. He hoped that this was all over, the plane, the voyage, and the war. He hoped that he would be home with Becky. He hoped that everything would be the same as it was before September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

ROOOOBAHHHH! The crash alarm sounded and dashed his hopes.

He looked at the letter again; it was signed Love, Becky. Did she really still love him, or was she going to dump him as soon as he got back from this shitty war. "I just wanted to let you come home first, I was worried for you," he imagined her saying. He looked at his image of her in his head. *She must really hate me*, he thought. *She is wearing that low cut blouse I like so much...probably to rub it in.*

The Tomcat was in clear view now, and Ed could see that the port side landing gear had not come down. It could be worse. Ed saw a plane land once that didn't have a tail hook to catch the wires on the deck. He overshot the deck and crashed into the ocean. All they ever found was an arm after his body went through the screws. *Go down without a tail hook, and you're just shit out of luck*, he thought.

Ed's radio beeped. "Ed, you need to get down there and inspect the generator your boys installed," came Ensign Bayone's voice. Bayone was the Division officer. Ed waited before answering.

"I'm a little busy right now sir." *Stupid fucker, what the hell do you think you are in charge of? Dumb ass green officers come in here fresh from ROTC thinking they can just run things. Respect has to be earned.* Ed thought of their last division officer. "An officer can get more done in less time," he used to say. He had ordered two men to work on a live circuit during heavy seas. While they were working, the ship took a hard roll and the men were thrown into the jumble of wires. It killed them instantly. *An officer can put more men in Davy Jones' locker in less time.*



"I want it done, Ed."

"I have an idea for you, sir: want in one hand, and shit in the other. See which one fills up first."

"You're talking to an officer..."

"Fire me, sir." *Ass hole.* He turned his radio from the electrician's channel to the general ship's station.

The letter burned in Ed's hand, and his mind. He remembered the night before he went to sea. Beck had never been with a man before that night, and Ed had been careful not to scare her. At first he was worried that her father might find out, until he took Ed aside. "I know what is going on in that head of yours, son." Ed looked at him. There was little comfort in his eyes. Looking past her father's stoic expression, Ed saw a man with emotions flailing about in his eyes. He did not, however, appear angry. "Becky's older sister Sarah was conceived in the back of a '57 Chevrolet the night before I left for Vietnam." Becky's father looked past Ed to the rust riddled Dodge Dart that Ed had driven up in. "Here is some money Ed. Take care of her."

At first Ed didn't want to take the money, he felt ashamed, but her father forced it into his hand. Ed nodded uncomfortably, still not sure what to say.

"Fair winds and following seas, son. Be careful over there," her father had told him. "I have lost a lot of friends to war. Don't make me put your name on that list."

Ed paused, tripping over the word friend. "Yes sir."

He and Becky had gone to dinner at La Mesa, and then walked on the beach and watched the sun as it set. He remembered Becky's bare feet in the sand as the water would come in, run over them, and then recede again. She was wearing a beautiful long red dress. With him in his uniform, they appeared as though they might be going to the opera. Ed had never been so in love with

anyone. "I'm going to come back and marry you," he had told her. *Idiot.*

The plane was coming closer and closer. Ed changed his radio to the aviation channel, "Roger Boss, I have the ball."

They made love twice that night, and she cried herself to sleep. The next morning she told him she didn't want him to go, "You never know what can happen, Ed. You might fall in love with someone else. I've heard about those skanky Navy girls. A man in every division."

"It's not like that," he told her. It was, but he didn't want her to worry. Some of his friends had reached into the ships pool of women for their love affairs and had been rewarded with the ships pool of STD's for their labors. "Those girls just aren't for me Beck. You are."

She looked at him reassured. As her eyes teared up she looked away. "What if you die over there?"

"I'm not going to die. I am going over there on the most powerful ship in the US fleet. The ship is tried and proven in war. I will be fine, and I will come home to you."

She looked in his eyes and they made love again.

Plumes of smoke poured from the aircraft as the pilot, burning the rest of his fuel, turned on the after burners. The sudden burst of flames propelled him faster and faster toward the deck.

When Becky had dropped him off, he was late, and the goodbye was short. "Hello Becky, how are you?" were the Senior Chief's cordial words. He didn't wait for an answer. "You're fifteen fucking minutes late, Ed. What the hell do you think this is, some kind of party? Would you like an umbrella in your drink?" He always gave Ed, his best electrician, a hard time.

They were good friends. They had all sat together, Ed, Becky, the Senior Chief, and his wife at the ship's party. He and Ed worked out together twice a

week in the gym, although Ed was quite a bit smaller than the six foot four, well over two hundred pound Senior Chief. Becky and the Senior Chief's wife were on the ship's party committee together. Ed didn't listen to too many people, but he always listened to the Senior Chief.

"Actually, Senior, I..."

"Get your ass on my ship," he shouted, "un-fucking believable." Ed stabbed at Becky's lips with his own while the Senior Chief pulled him from behind. "Kiss her when you get back." He wadded Ed's dungaree shirt in his fist. "Let's go. You have the first watch."

"Take care of him for me Senior Chief."

"Don't worry ma'am. He is the best electrician we have, maybe the best in the Navy. We need this one."

*Now she's probably got some new guy at that school of hers, probably an English professor. They always sleep with younger women.* Ed imagined her on the campus of the university laughing with her friends, eating good food, and wearing that low cut blouse. *Damn I miss her.*

Flames ripped the sky behind the aircraft as it got closer. Fifty feet, forty, thirty, ten. Ed forced himself against the wall to brace for an impact. He saw Becky in the clouds before him, telling him to be careful. "Fuck off, bitch," he shouted out at the sea. As if in reply, her image vanished into the other clouds.

The fighter slammed against the deck and bounced back into the sky. Neptune was rolling the seas below the ship, and the F-14 had hit too hard. Ed put the pink letter over his face, afraid of what might come next.

He heard the engine wind down and pulled the letter from his face. The plane was safe on the deck, leaning to the port side where the wheel had not come down.

All was quiet, and Ed collapsed on the small walkway.

The door to the bridge opened. It was the Senior Chief. Ed wiped the

tears from his face.

“What’s up, Senior?”

He looked out across the black ocean, waiting for the moonrise, “The Ensign tells me you told him to shit in his hand.”

“He was telling me what to do again.”

“I’ll have to talk to him about that.”

They looked at each other and laughed. “So did you come all the way up here to yell at me about that?”

“Ed, you know I don’t care if you put some newbie Ensign in his place.”

“What is it then?”

“I got a letter from Becky.” He pulled it from his pocket. It was on the same pink paper, but the ink was black.

“That bitch, what the hell did she say,” Ed tried to put in a stern face for the Senior Chief. “She’s fucking some professor at the school there isn’t she? Is he an English professor? I fucking hate English.”

“Too much time at sea can make you crazy, Ed. I think they say the same about love. Maybe you add those two things together and you have a real problem. Maybe a letter from home, mixed with homesickness, could drive a sailor mad with misplaced anger. All those things together might drive even the best of sailors a bit crazy.”

“What did she say?” He looked out as the moon was beginning to come into view. Its elongated reflection left an orange-yellow stripe on the sea from the horizon where it swam to the ship’s bow.

“She sent me this letter; she was worried you might overreact. I think she might be right.”

“Overreact? What the hell does she expect? Every mail plane that lands on this ship is half full of Dear John letters. Barlow and Axe got ‘em just last week.”

“Barlow was dating a stripper, Ed, and would you wait for Axe? This is not the same thing. Becky is a good woman, Ed, and she loves you.”

“Your one to talk about love, Senior. How many wives have you had?”

“Four, and that means I know what a bad one is like. Becky is nothing like any of my ex-wives.”

“Why did she write that then? When your girl says we need to talk, it means she needs to talk, and you need to get dumped.”

“She thought you might not understand. She wrote me this letter and told me only to tell you if I thought it was an emergency. I think this might qualify.” He paused and looked into Ed’s eyes. “Maybe she knows you better than you think.” The harvest moon rose full above the ocean. Ed and the Senior Chief looked up just in time to see the silhouette of a squadron of fighters crossing its path.

“What is it?”

“Ed, Becky is pregnant. You’re going to be a father.”

Leaning on the cold gray rail they looked down again at the now artificially lit flight deck. As the crew moved in to help the disabled bird, a massive hydraulic jack was wheeled in and placed under the wing. The plane was jacked up, and a crewmember in a yellow shirt drove a flat truck beneath the shy landing gear. When the jack was removed the plane was slowly wheeled away, supported by the crew.

## Two Men

Michael E. Roduin Sr.

Kenny Davis, positioned to the north of his enemy, hunkered down behind the large brown boulder for cover. His chocolate chip uniform was clean and pressed to the satisfaction of Marine Corp standards. The creases stood out tall, and the light layer of dust was from this morning. He had had his new sergeants stripes sewn onto the collar, by the company tailor, the night before.

Forcing himself against the gray green desert moss he reloaded his M-16. He put his hand on the cross carved into the barrel, paused, and leapt up to fire off half a dozen blind rounds at his enemy to the south. The bullets sent shards of rock flying through the barren land.

As quickly as he leapt up, he receded back to his position. Pausing, he listened for movement of any kind. Years of training would come down to this day. He would live or die, only two possibilities here on this field. He forced his senses into high gear, feeling the air, smelling the blood, and tasting the death, all the while listening for anything; hoping to hear nothing.

Akbar Jahlamur, the soldier to the south, wore a ratted and torn uniform that was two sizes too big. He pulled his feet in close as bullets shattered against the rocks all around him. He looked at his bolt-action rifle; the machine pressed letters on the stock were all in Russian. It was getting hotter. Jahlamur knew that his darker complexion would protect him from the sun. He doubted if the American could last more than an hour.



He pressed himself tight against his own rock and peered out to the south, out into his country. The war had been going on for two years now. It had not been a quick victory for Allah like they told him it would be. For the last six months the armies had been locked in a stalemate. Soldiers were dying while bureaucrats and attorneys made a profit. He wondered if he would ever get home to see his wife and kids again. He missed them, and he missed his home.

It wouldn't be home if I wasn't here, he thought. This army had come to change his way of life. They came to change his country, his government, and his home. At first he was reluctant. He had never been a violent man, and was not ready to take up arms for this Bin Laden character. He followed the six pillars of Islam, and preached for peace. When his country was invaded he prayed that Allah would bring a quick resolution.

Three months went by with no resolution in sight. The Americans occupied more and more of his country, while Bin Laden and his fighters hid among the rocks. When Bin Laden ordered a second attack on the US, it had angered the European nations and they had started an all out offensive. Bombing continued twenty-four hours a day, and American troops were stationed on every street corner.

On January 13<sup>th</sup>, Jahlamur's world changed forever. He had been out of the house all day working at the factory. He was a line supervisor, and was doing very well for himself and his family. The Americans had come into his home, taken one of his sons, and executed him in the street. They claimed he was a rebel. He was twelve years old.

The next day he joined up with the Taliban forces and never looked back. They think they know what is right, he thought, godless fiends.

He loaded his last five rounds into his rifle and prayed to his god. Let me know what is right to do. He stroked his beard and thought again of his home. He did not, however, pause long. That could be fatal.



The desert that surrounded them was silent. The stones and sand were their only audience. The sun, climbing in the sky, began to burn hotter.

They had happened upon each other by accident. Sergeant Davis had taken a break and walked over the hill to smoke. He was out on watch post by himself, a mile from the main body of troops. He thought it was safe; they were supposed to be miles from any opposition. He had taken a stroll to keep from thinking too much.

He had been thinking about his wife. He missed her so much. She was the best cook in Walsford, Tennessee. He had been thinking what she might have for dinner tonight when he happened upon his dark skinned enemy.

He had not radioed in when he left his post. There would not be a call for him to check in. No one would know he was missing for four hours, and only then if his relief was on time.

Lieutenant Jahlamur had been meditating. He was camped nearby. Neither force knew how close the enemy was. He was sitting cross-legged when he caught the eye of the American. The sight of each other had caused an awkward blaze of bullets and rush for cover. Jahlamur positioned himself to the south, knowing that he would be better protected from the sun. Davis took a northern position, hoping his own troops would come up behind the Taliban fighter.

Davis took a long drink from his canteen. The iodine pills made it taste like rotten whisky, but if he didn't drink it, he would surely die. He listened as his enemy loaded rounds into his own weapon. He can't be more than twenty yards away, he thought. He took another sip, winced, and capped the bottle.

He pulled out his dog tags on which hung a crucifix and the charm of Saint Martin. He kissed Christ's feet and spoke to the emblem, "Holy Saint Martin, I know I have been asking for a lot lately, but if you could help me out

just one more time. If you could just get me out of here I guarantee I will give you the biggest feast you ever saw on your day. It's been almost a year since your last celebration, but we have not forgotten that your day is coming soon. Please just get me out of here so I can see my wife and kids."

Wiping the sweat from his face and looking up at the sun he knew he must act soon. He could not handle it out here, without cover, for a full day. He would be dead by sundown.

His thoughts ran back to his wife. The day the planes hit the trade center he had quit his job at Target and signed up for the United States Marine Corps. She had not wanted him to. She begged him to let others protect the country. "They need me over there," he told her.

"I need you here. Your kids need you here."

"If I don't do this, who will?"

"I don't care, I don't want to lose you."

"I can't stand aside and just let this happen."

"Why not?"

"I just can't. There are people that I can help and I am going to help them. You married me because you loved that about me. What has changed now?"

"Nothing has changed. I still love you for it. I love you because you would risk your life for what you believe in. I don't, however, want you to die."

Pulling his arms out of his rucksack, he carefully, quietly, slowly peeked out around the rock that was his shield. He looked past his enemy toward the beautiful desert fields. He did not stare long though; the scene wouldn't be nearly as pleasant if it were covered with his blood.

At the same time, Jahlamur peeked over his own stone. Their eyes locked together. Both men stood stone still, sizing the other up, looking for a weakness. Both men reached for their weapons, stood, and fired. The air screamed with

bullets and flashed with fire. The sound of war cracked the desert silence. The rounds sparked and flashed on the desert stones. Both men ducked back behind their cover, each checking himself for holes; not one round had hit its intended mark.

Davis ejected the empty clip from his weapon and refreshed it with new rounds. Twelve left, he thought, twelve more shots to take him out. Now is the time. I need all the advantage I can get. He readied himself, dumping the remainder of his gear into a pile on the ground.

"I'm gonna kill you, you fucking heathen bastard. Allah can't save your worthless piece of shit ass now," he screamed into the desert. "Do you hear me you Arab faggot?"

Jahlamur heard the words, but he could grasp no meaning. He knew only one American word, chocolate. When he was a boy, relief workers had come to the city to fix the water system. People had been getting sick and dying, and these men claimed they knew why. They had been working near his home and one of the men gave him a large brown bar. "It's chocolate," the man had told him. Akbar remembered the word.

He pulled his pistol from its holster. The rifle had run out of bullets. I will kill you for my family. I will kill you for my wife. I will kill you for Allah. Screw you and your American chocolate."

"Hula budie cadii fron go nedeyea forom coot chocolate," was all the American heard. He checked his weapon two, three, four times, ensuring everything was right. Placing his hand on his chest he clutched the crucifix and prayed, with his eyes wide open, to his own god. He prayed for enlightenment, for speed, and for mercy. He checked his rifle again and steadied himself on his feet, still crouched behind the rock.

"You're gonna die. You hear me, rag head? I'm gonna blow your fucking

head off, you worthless piece of God hating shit!”

Again, the lieutenant did not understand. He knew from the tone, however, that he was not being asked over for dinner. “You Americans think you are so good. You know why your building fell down? Because America sucks, that is why.”

Both men popped up again. They moved as though a mirror stood between them. Twelve rounds went off from a long rifle, and ten from a pistol. The hot molten steel hit no flesh. Not a drop of blood was spilled under the hot desert sun. Their blind haste had wasted their best chances of survival. Both men paused, and then dove behind the natural barriers that separated them.

God has saved me.

Allah has been merciful.

Jahlamur pulled a photograph from his pocket. It was of his wife and oldest son. It was faded and worn, but there was no hint of a loss of love in their eyes. He looked skyward and asked Allah for forgiveness. Again he jumped up.

This time they leapt out from behind their protection, exposing themselves to the world and their immediate enemy. They both stopped and stared across the sixty feet to the man who would mean life or death to him. Four thin muscular forearms flexed with anger; four eyes saw only blood red. Two hungry stomachs turned loops; four legs burned, waiting to move. The two men stood staring. The two men stood scared.

Davis grabbed his rifle by the barrel and hurled it at his enemy. Jahlamur threw his pistol with all his might. The two weapons, appearing in slow motion to the men, struck together in mid air with a wild metallic clang, and fell to the ground.

The men shouted a bath of curse words at one another. Jahlamur threw his canteen, Davis his helmet. Both missed. Jahlamur picked up a rock and tossed it, hitting Davis in the leg. “Hah,” he shouted with his eyes wide open and

a gaping grin.

“AHHH.” They charged at each other. The sixty, fifty-nine, fifty-eight feet of brown red dust and stone was not a safe place to be. Davis tore of his uniform top and tossed it at his enemy’s face; Jahlamur threw the money from his pocket. Screaming at each other they approached like two speeding trains. Jahlamur drew two long curved knives from his belt; Davis pulled a massive, straight blade from his boot, and the entrenching tool from his belt. Closing at blinding speed the two screaming locomotives collided in a huge crash. Dust flew up as they fell, fighting for their homes, their countries, their lives, to the ground.

One soldier swung and missed. The other returned with a solid blow. Hot blood dripped onto the desert sand. One swung, the other kicked, one stabbed, the other ducked. The fury of blows and parries was a terribly beautiful sight. They exchanged blow after blow in a masterful display, each practiced in his art.

At last he struck the deathblow, a knife in the gut of his opponent. He saw the eyes, the realization, and felt the warm blood trickle down his thumb and across his wrist. He watched as the dark red drips became a bright flowing stream. The stream ran down the sand into a growing lake of red death. Death would ride on this stream and take away his enemy.

Why has my god not protected me?

He looked up, the painful blade in his gut, and searched the eyes of his enemy, the man who had killed him. Was that sadness he saw there? Was it fear? He looked down at the wound. He would not see his home. He would not see his children. He would not see his wife. He would not leave the battlefield triumphant or unharmed. He would not return to his tent and eat a poor substitute for a meal. He would not talk of his friends and tell stories of this day. No more would he breathe this damned desert air. His god had forsaken him and he had lost. No breath left in his lungs, he prayed silently. Collapsing against the other man he

peered out across the desert, waiting for the light.

Slowly, quietly, honorably, they died there. They fell into each other, and the dead weight of one supported the other. Their bodies leaned upon each other forming a statue of death. The sun, now on its downward slope would soon spread their image across miles of sand, cacti, and desert weeds.



## Mother Thersa

Leslie Moses

I was at the express checkout line just getting some cereal. One item qualified me to be in that line but the woman in front of me had at least thirty. I looked up at the dim lit '12 items or less' sign and sighed. This-this wasn't right.

The woman had a baby, a small newborn facing me from the back of the buggy in his little car seat. He screamed with raining eyes and little nostrils that flared so far up that I thought they would fly away. The baby's lungs were healthy and he showed me he could scream even louder when he noticed someone was actually listening. Watery eyes, flared nostrils and now his little coffee colored arms reached up towards me begging to be held. And I thought about it, really I did. I almost unbuckled the child to cradle it in my arms. It would no doubt quit crying then and he would grow up to be a loved child with a promising future and be a doctor or lawyer or whatever job all babies start out being and end up hating.

"Man be quiet! I'm right here!" If I did it real fast I could swoop the whole car seat up and take the baby home and wipe those wet eyes and hold that baby till he was asleep. Oh those little arms! He kept crying and the woman he would later know as mom turned around again. "Shhhhhhhh! I'm right here!" I felt the nostrils flare and an instant bond



with junior was formed.

And then an unconscious “You wanna come home with me?” flew out of my mouth. Oops. The woman turned around again and this time she talked to me.

“He’s scared of you, why you think he’s crying?”

I felt the mercury inside me hit the top of my glass dome but I took a deep breath and counted to ten in Russian and then yelled, “He’s crying because he thinks you got too many groceries to be in this aisle.”

Oh, this was dumb. The fierce comments we exchanged overlapped with boiling anger. But she totally out-worded me and when the dust cloud cleared the woman and baby were gone and the cashier was sweeping my cereal across the scanner. Yep, I was saving the world, one child at a time, but you know these things take practice.

## Sad Story

Sarah Beth Link

What a common name: Sarah. I hate it. So now I go by Sarah Beth, a bit more original. My great aunt's name is Sarah; I suppose I was named after her. Sad story. She's a chain-smoking liar who tries to act like she likes me when she hugs me hello after not seeing me for years.

Sarah means princess. Sarah should be a rare name, only used for the flowers among the thistles. There are too many girls whose parents named them a name that's supposed to make them feel pretty. It could mean pretty on the inside, bologna. To be a "princess" is to be enchantingly beautiful and elegant, wearing pretty gowns. At least that's what the stories tell little girls who want to be princesses. I wanted to feel that way so that I could own my name, just for a second. Now snobby girls have defeated the meaning of princess by wearing shirts that say, "I'm a princess." Like being stuck on yourself will make you that way.

One time I spent a whole day getting ready, getting prissed up, being oh so girlie. This lady who giggled like a chipmunk and looked much better than me (even though she's a mom), did my hair and put on my make-up. I put on make-up sometimes, but not how she did it. I got fake nails that made me almost helpless. I had to ask Aaron to open my pop. I put on pantyhose that made me an inch smaller all around; I guess that's the point. I put on a white dress that made

my body look curvy, more womanly than it really is. I wore pearls. So what if they aren't really real, they look that way. For the first time, I looked in the mirror slightly surprised.

The moment he saw me, he whispered, "You look beautiful." Except this time I believed that he meant it. Even though he told me a hundred times. Each of those times I would look down to the right and say meekly "Thank you." Even though I thought it was a lie. Every time I felt like saying, "You're full of crap." But that would hurt his feelings, and I wouldn't want to do that. This time I smiled. When we took pictures, little Benjamin thought we looked like we were getting married. Later, his grandfather, whom I have made my own, went home and cried. What made a grown man cry?

A few days later I went to the office to pick up my pictures from the dance. I told her my name. She pulled out the pictures, looked at them and said, "You're not Sarah." As if to say, you don't look like a princess. Nor do you belong with this charming prince. "I am Sarah. That's me in the picture." She glanced back down, shook her head hesitantly, ever so slightly. I blurted out "yes." My face was starting to get hot. I waited as she studied my face for a second that felt like an hour. Even if she thought it wasn't me, what does it matter? Why would I want to steal anyone else's pictures? I was embarrassed. I wanted to scream at her and snatch my pictures from her hand. Then she handed them over. No, I'm not a princess. I'm ordinary, even though all the other girls got all girlied up too.

Now I'm at the house that belongs to a worn out woman who still looks young, but is tired inside. She still laughs with a light heart, but her children have made her skin run dry. Her little girl, who reminds me of myself, holds my light brown hair as she tries to sleep. My hair used to be golden and curly. I see myself in a place like this, strapped down by a big husband who doesn't help, who doesn't appreciate me, who doesn't make me feel like a princess. I have this

urgency to run free, but I'm not there yet. I haven't chosen that way. I won't. He won't... be like that.

"Dee-ah," the little girl calls to me, her little mouth can't say my name. I've awoke from my daymare. I should be named Deah. That's an odd name. It doesn't quite fit in, or make any sense, like me. I could make up my own meaning. Then I could own my name that isn't ordinary, American, and dull. That cancels out any meaning it has, by meaning something extraordinary. Deah would fit me.

# Poetry

## I - 95

Emily Joost

My comrades and I found him as we turned off of 84 and onto 95 south. He sat on the gravel patch at the edge of the on ramp using his worn tan satchel, which appeared the texture of weathered skin, as a seat. He seemed to be the stereotypical drifter. "Where you headed?" he inquired gruffly as we slowed to debate the situation

"Jacksonville," we chimed.

"That's some luck, I heard there's work down that way." We just shrugged, I'm sure he would have been headed to Alaska if that's where we were going. The three of us looked at each other. Our brand-new, black, borrowed pick-up gleamed.

"Why not? We'll throw him in the back," our GI said. We nodded and told him to jump in. We reasoned that if we were stuck in the sun of a Georgia on ramp, we'd want someone to pick us up too.

He jumped in and rode the full three hours making small talk through the cab window. When we stopped for a burger our GI, the group's protector, even bought him a beer. Funny how the military makes boys feel invincible.

He laughed as we made semis honk and waved at cars with out of state plates. I'm sure he could have told us a story worth retelling, but he didn't and we didn't ask. We were content to let our imaginations wander the states with a worn leather satchel.

Forsyth Park February 28 2001

Emily Joost

He sat on  
a bench, arms out  
stretched, resting  
on the top rung,  
bedrole beside  
him, red t-shirt bulging  
above the belt, black  
jacket with unbuttoned  
cuffs flapping, ankles  
crossed over worn steel  
toed boots.  
staring  
straight forward, inhaling  
the smell of a paper  
mill city,  
crystal coal skin glistening,  
watching,  
just like yesterday  
and tomorrow,  
  
welcoming the morning.



# 18

Ryan Clark

The disdainful shadows flicker,  
flicker even as I stare;  
I perceive the cold surround me  
drawing me unaware.

Thoughts transcend astral planes,  
thoughts of past connections,  
of questions regarding me as sane  
in dire need of protection.

Attempts to embrace the collective known  
leaves me tired and cold,  
a consciousness left resurrection shown  
to me futility told.

Forsaken by wraiths and shade  
dancing upon my head,  
will I experience life again,  
or am I already dead?

# 32

Ryan Clark

The rain last night was phenomenal  
The view from the dock serene  
The clouds formed like entities above me  
with corridors through time being seen

Luck I feel having seen this  
About mine eyes they protrude  
The birth of the storm is in front of me  
Like a ship just a little askew.

The drops came down with passion  
as we sought the dock house for now  
Wanting to be part of nature  
Enduring the wet coming down.

From the porch the scene is beautiful  
Darkness masking light from within  
How lucky I feel having seen this  
A part of God to me on a whim.

## a mazing mouse

Jeanette Kehr

my whiskers  
turn down this way  
                    no right  
            should I turn  
left ok  
clickity click  
ooh my bell-ee  
hunga-r-ee! So-oo dizzy  
long gray walls so-oo high  
know the  
sliver of ch-ee-eesse is  
oh, yea  
it's this way  
ooh white coat  
just tell  
me save me the time  
tickity tick  
I am so-oo hungry  
last time  
tick tick  
had chee-z  
so-oo dizzy  
            and tired and  
dizz-ee  
plee-z tell me  
which way

ok I`m going right

and right

again

yum, sniff

now left

how long has it

been

tick tick

I did it yesterday

tick tick

I have to remember

it was there yesterday

the chees-z

at the end

yea it was yesterday

tick tick

one more right then

another left

it's time

tick tick

clickity click

Ooh! White Coat!

Plee-z!

Yes!

Chee-z!

## A Past Left Undone

Ryan Clark

Rain . . . plummeting through the corridors of her heart,  
weeping from fountains of gray shade,  
glissading across empty walls of joy,  
redemption of a scathed path made.

The truth of shame as a cloak  
she through hours of saturated pain,  
minutes askew as she soaks  
in her seconds described as sane.

Her dim light glimmers for future love  
seeking not a shallow comfort through temptation,  
silently awaiting her chance for love  
as she yearns . . . only for vindication.

## Birthday Poem 1998

(for Marcus)

Melissa Hill

You know that I do not want to exist here anymore  
in this Fallen world of literature and history  
where we try to build an exit,  
fly above the pain and rage,  
the ignorant and the elite.

Do you look towards the stars and remember  
a time when they were not so far away,  
a time when the moon turned  
on an axis we could reach?

We dance through this world with tears in our eyes,  
weeping for the love, grace and innocence  
we threw away so casually.

I miss it now, and see a remnant of my former light  
in the sideways glance of cancerous eyes,  
and I smoke too much  
and I drink too much  
and I don't feel enough—

I carve my youth in rusty razorblades  
and leave scars for your concern to trace  
as I sing Happy Birthday  
to all the souls delivered on this day:

This is the day of the dreaming dead,  
and I give you a prophecy,

and I cry you a vision—  
All these things are yours, I say—  
can you believe in me?

I know I am always leaving, hoping for the right key  
to the right door,  
a return to my summer Eden  
when the birds sang their soul for me—  
all this, and nothing more.  
I cannot believe in me,

But if this poem were a door and I could step through  
into a world where things made sense  
and words weren't hollow,  
where love and betrayal  
didn't spin in the same iris,  
where the sun would shine and leave no blisters  
where I could dance without crying  
in all the fires of remembrance,  
I would leave it open for you.

## Drinking Her

Melissa Hill

Scars that sang to weeping willows  
As I lay naked by the riverside,  
Mud that covered the cycles of shame  
And the sweet water that washed it all away-  
This was my river Jordan,



Downstream from my grandmother's grave.

Today she lives inside the mud,  
A crawling thing that slithered past my open eyes  
While I was blind inside my rage.

Sometimes I am sick with the taste of it, the smell  
That drove me to the river's edge,  
Where on my knees I drank the water  
Though it smelled and tasted of cancer,  
The destruction inherent to her name,  
Her story, her sadness, her sickness-  
There I lost my touch, the knack of pity.  
My grief slid through my open hands,  
And quickly, though quietly, drowned.

I never saw my reflection; the water moves  
Too fast, and speaks in tongues that leave  
Me confused and trembling, sounding, as they do,  
Like her. But I saw her face  
Crawling the length of a cottonmouth snake,  
And once again, I was the intruder,

And I sang, Jericho, Jericho,  
Your walls are thicker than I remember,  
And the trumpets louder inside my soul.

## **Finite Blue Eyes**

Sarah Beth Link

trembling hands  
dig for meaning  
You already know  
ungrateful untrusting  
You see behind a  
cover page written  
where can I hide?  
whisper forgiven  
with love, the Cross  
broken by mercy  
tears dangle from  
finite pale eyes  
You hold me

## Honey

Melissa Hill

This city kills me while I sleep.

Honeysuckle hands extend  
fingers to the fading light, creep  
through curtains and, ever inward,  
steal like knives to my dreaming eyes,  
as the weeping willow tree  
taps out a rhythm on my shade,  
with all his hearts spread seven ways  
from Hell and sometimes  
only brushing the glass in the windowpane.

This is what I can dream  
when I am alone in this opium den:

The scent of oak, of freshly mown grass,  
the dimness of this murderous house,  
leaving me locked inside the honeysuckle tube,  
with only a sparkle of my sugar water left  
to refract, combine, and welcome the light,  
vibrating on the tip of the stamen that becomes this city,  
that steals my eyes and leaves me blind.

## Morning Rush

Andy Wilharm

The breeze is rolling off the crashing waves;  
It's cold and salty under darkened skies.  
Approaching weather from the sea behaves  
as builder; thus titanic waves arise.

Increasing gusts of wind are blasting sand  
against the backs of patient, local men,  
who wait to worship sea, as some do land,  
who gave up a full sleep, to join their kin.

The sun is not sight, but lights' present.  
The groups of people fade into the spray,  
await the chance to ride the first crescent,  
forgetting all but waves and wasting day.

The sky is gray, the water turns out rough,  
but these few surfers cannot get enough.

# One More Day

Jeanette Kehr

Inside my head the memory  
of Van Gogh's "Starry  
Night" bleeds through the wall  
across my room, waving its swirly broad strokes  
of saffron and blue. Through my Window,  
my mind floating,  
I applaud the narrow steeple cutting  
through the swirling sky.  
My thin sick blood drips  
narrowly into  
the clicking  
machine  
returning, dripping  
then re-entering  
my body. My eyes close  
shutting off the fluorescent  
lights and I enter a red tiled parlor.  
Chocolate icecream swirls dripped  
with nuts and a single red cherry  
nestles high upon my rootbeer float.  
A young counter girl narrowed  
blue-black eyes gazing, plucks the stem  
then click  
her nails on the counter.  
My head tips back, my mouth applauds  
the red cherry as it narrowly  
enters my throat, floating

through my stomach. From far away I hear  
the quieting swirl of the machine as it's counting  
my heart beats,  
click one.  
click two.  
click three.  
Clicking  
so on  
and so on. Outside my window,  
Van Gogh's "Starry Night,"  
is becoming clearer, his broadening  
strokes float counter clockwise  
and the piercing steeple  
stabs at me  
and the stars drip upon my blood  
swirling  
round and round  
as my heart pounds  
keeping the beat for one more day.

## Pecking Order

Jeanette Kehr

The seed I planted several springs ago, sprung  
into a lazy daisy that droops  
for the plump bumble bee  
collector of nectar, and overhead  
is the little brown sparrow, chirping, high upon the sagging bough,  
as my yellow-orange tabby crouches on all fours,  
creeping with his claws, padding on his paws, and spread out upon  
his belly, his eyes glazing over, shoulders still  
as my spindly legged mutt sniffs the bush  
the pavement, the flowers, and then  
my yellow-orange tabby, and still  
the little brown sparrow is chirping high upon the  
sagging bough  
until,  
the roar of the four wheeler accelerates  
and the little brown sparrow  
flies  
away



Possession is 180 *Proof*

Jeanette Kehr

I drive my mouth to your fiery flame—pain  
sleeps. Burning, scorching interior flesh  
fervor to my exterior—you gain  
solemn faith. My core is safe—you refresh.  
Sweetly potent over me I witness  
you, sweet bronze liquor, waiting to bargain  
with me. Glazed stare, I crave to confess  
to you, Oh Vial! You are my only kin.  
Ashen flesh embodies my need, Oh Flame!  
can my eyes be crossroads to your prison?  
I beg you! Don't burden me with your shame!  
Your sting too intense, but my hand—risen!  
Can you, my sweet kin, fix me or replace  
your difference to the life I face?

## Red Shades

Sarah Beth Link

staple my incisions with cheap  
words you freely toss  
when they rust  
poison permeates me  
red shades onto your eyes  
aren't quite enough  
to dampen the dull ache  
pulsing in my head  
I'm sorry—you say  
one more wound  
ruptures

# Sense

Richard DiPirro

I  
    smoked cannibus  
        in Saudi Arabia  
twice.

Six of us sat  
    and smoked  
        somewhat silently

I was scared that  
    someone would smell  
        the sweet aroma.

“So what?” One Sergeant said.

Some friend sent the substance  
    stuck stealthfully in seven pages  
        he wrote.

Some serious friend . . .

After we smoked,  
    we were stoned—  
        we sang and said some stupid stuff.

We laughed and wished the sun  
would stay  
fast asleep.

So that  
we wouldn't see  
the sand.

And wouldn't have to stand  
as some sentry on  
some shithole spot.

Someone said  
this was the best of their stay  
in Saudi Arabia.

I say  
it still  
sucked.

## The Attempt

Emily Joost

"Now and then it is good to pause in the pursuit of happiness and just be happy."

-Anonymous

The light burst

through the tiny panes of crisscrossed  
glass, making the slated wood floor a jigsaw  
of color and shadow.

A lone cloud scooted across the sky,  
darkening Talmadge Bridge.

I sat on my cushion, pulled off  
of the couch and up  
to the window to expose  
myself to the light.

I patiently tried to reason through  
M. Scott Peck, but the view kept  
catching my attention and drawing  
it outside to how the sun  
reflected, making the landscape  
burst with color.

The pansies cushioned the azaleas  
and the dwarf sunflowers acted as a bridge  
between tall and small.

I again attempted to focus on The Road Less Traveled  
and to push away the cloud  
of ignorance, MY original sin.

When my patience stumbled,  
my attention turned to the light

reflecting off of the swirling  
river water, the cloudy  
color of granite. It ran  
around, but never seemed to get  
anywhere it hadn't already  
been.

Once more I focused between Peck's  
covers, this time distracted  
by a different sense. The city's aroma crept  
up through the oaks and moss  
to my fourth story perch, so I paused  
to inhale the busy smell of  
magnolia and hot pavement.

I know the logical reason  
why my quest should press on,  
but the wind, nature's fingertips,  
brushes my hair and makes me forget.

I will try  
again tomorrow. Today, I will  
sit on my cushion,  
watch the bridge,  
and enjoy the light.

## The Price of Gas These Days

Brian Hansen

The blister-blackened bodies of Baghdad's burning babies; faces frozen in silent scream

Unholy memories I try to suppress as I pursue the "American Dream"

But I've been to the battlefield altar and watched the blood flow freely

Into sand, through pipelines, to gas pumps, to power new S.U.V.s

While CNN painted their pretty pictures with pixels of night-vision green

I witnessed cease-fire slaughters and learned about the "Machine"

And now at weekly worship at the shrine of BP or Shell

I help finance a national addiction that is leading us straight into hell

For we all know we are killing our Mother as we leech this black milk from inside her

Yet we slick back our beaches and choke on the fumes as the rift in the heavens grows

wider



this child of mine

Jeanette Kehr

sprightly spurns his showers—never a drop  
renders him wet      he uses the toilet for  
target practice  
but in his bed  
bullseye!

Dripping his syrup  
all butterfingers—the milk takes flight  
his face butterfly nectar  
sweet  
sticky.

Legs long—lean writhing lasso  
harnessed muscle  
he is a renaissance masterpiece

he squats on his heels and peers over  
the dead beetle—cries for its  
mommy—look upstairs—no worry—  
God is his neighbor—  
zealous hands dictate his day—his voice  
surrenders to the silly cat in the hat—zoom  
he stumbles.

His eyes caress buttery daffodils outside his window—dash  
 he plucks all  
 —but one  
 avoiding Mr. Spider  
 his mommy might cry.

## Westside Urban Health Center

Richard DiPirro

flakes of chipped red paint  
around clouds of commiseration  
children's kids smiling—teeth missing  
they don't know they're beaten yet  
down the clinic

dirty holes in second-hand clothes  
draped over bent metal folding-chairs  
cough cough cough and a spray of hachoo  
waiting for hours for a ten minute visit  
down the clinic

criminal loud program on trash t.v.  
pretty people with perfect lives  
grandma laughs but there's no one around  
plastic plants smell like fluorescence  
down the clinic

a husband wakes up and ties his old wife's shoes  
waiting a whole life with a fractured rib  
she shuffles off to x-ray land, and he  
eats a dry bun from a Sunbeam bag  
down the clinic

crochet needles and a world of cellulite

fuzzy gray house-shoes slap-slap

anyone dressed well is a salesman

come in sick and you walk out crazy

down the clinic

## Without this Ring

Jeanette Kehr

Your elastic union, I won't excuse.

My reluctance, my second thoughts, I pour  
to the floor, I glide. I will refuse

to be the token you assumed, I amuse.

Instead, I pirouette through the church door,  
your elastic union I won't excuse.

I prance down the aisle, a pivoting ruse,

it is your good intention I adore,  
but to the floor I glide. I will refuse,

to be an extension of your paying dues.

It is your indiscretion, I forgive no more.

Your elastic union, I won't excuse.

For your dancing with someone else, I choose

not to forgive you, instead I will soar  
to the floor. I glide. For I will refuse

to be the perfect hand, you want to subdue.

I have no mercy, for that is a chore.

An elastic union, I won't excuse.

To the floor I glide, and I can't refuse.

## Witness

Melissa Hill

Light shines where no wave breaks,  
The dark god tossing his restless curses to the shore,  
To a man who cries, "This is not my world,"  
As he takes each pulse of water into his veins;  
The stars are going nova in his mind,  
One by one exploding like hate  
At a forty-five degree angle to the spark  
That tried to be the way and the light.

With his starry night, his dark mad water, and  
His hateful gaze, who will witness his strange ways?

Nine nails, he says, were cast from the fisher's net,  
Two hundred shells washing to the sand—  
Their grooves spin under his clockwork ways,  
And push him towards the sea.  
His witnesses crawl on five-barred legs,  
From sightless caves to descend on rocks,  
Holding the salt of Lethe just out of his reach.

Waves break where no light shines,  
Madness building walls that have learned to wait  
For the man crying, "This is not my world,"  
As he sinks down and surrenders his death,  
In waves of gold, a dark red hue,  
His breath, his blood, leaving stars of air, rising  
To the surface—(Witnesses as they burst)—washing  
Into space on miles of empty light.

# missionary on broad street

John DeLong

on the corner paces  
a madman—fervent,  
screaming  
with

the voice of god

(screaming)  
to the dead that  
zig-and-zag to

avoid

him—on the way to work  
and class and coffee and lunch and  
and

god knows where

with this look,  
this look, like  
somebody farted.

but still he screams,  
through the clouds cluttering the sun and crowds of sheep terrified of salvation  
and the consequences of all their actions  
and into the night wet

with all the baptismal  
glory of october rains.

i always laughed but tithed  
with change or a smoke or

ten minutes of time.

i tried to tell him:

fuck the lost  
get a damned shower.

but he just smiled and screamed and puffed on the cigarette and  
paced around  
on the filthy sidewalk.

one-thirty a.m. on south carolina two-twenty-four

John DeLong

a ghost

(slipping over the  
ice and water  
and asphalt like

a shadow)

listening to some old  
country and western

(like conway twitty  
or hank williams  
or that long haired



hippie my daddy hated  
cause he was a long haired  
hippie and all his songs  
had drums like african tribals  
(but i liked it—the pulsating the throbbing the  
smooth-rough pound-sound of stick slapping skin  
and some good ole boy wailing  
about baby havin' her blue-jeans on)  
)  
.

like my father did.

i pretend he is here with me. laughing and telling me we still have twelve more  
hours to drive so just relax and you just took a pee twenty minutes ago at the rest  
stop so don't let me hear that.

outside is  
black and starry  
(that new moon promise  
little light and more  
implications than  
i care to deal with  
(given this cold—outside  
is like frozen dirt that  
caves in slow on all  
sides of this  
cheap metal coffin)  
)  
.

down a highway that begins in the middle of nowhere and ends in the middle of  
nowhere, in search of answers in the form of questions in the form of places that

I've never seen—looking for places i can't get back—out of reach

now.

(coyote is laughing in the woods  
all around. howling in appreciation  
of some joke he started some twenty years  
before that's punchline is still a long ways off.)

but maybe i'll be okay this time. maybe i'll be okay this time.

(i say as i light my lucky and watch

the ghosts of silent indians and runaway slaves and truckers  
fly by.)

## on warning labels and invitations

Michelle Woodson

instructions lost on the air near my ears )( just under the tounge and don't  
don't don't unless you want this person in your head for a multitude of days/  
unintentional family/ things look truer black and white typed, thin scrawls  
and its all just what someone decided to say /someone decided to say don't  
so I did/ some intense connection un cunt ain able there exists a fine line  
between my eyes and the back of my skull so I invited you in in so thin  
in/ spin a mind is a terrible thing to taste tornado flavor/ yours was faster, but  
did you really? have you ever? no, I don't think. suppose had it been  
important you'd have told me twice/ alone I held head high through that  
mirror maze test phaze and passed the flying eye exam finally free perfpaper  
headtree and fuck the surgeon general I'm smoking a drum and not thinking  
of you at all

## Sunday

Michelle Woodson

chocolip implications I'm radiating Friday in your  
left ear  
something too soft that closes /inon/  
those tiniest bones in there  
somewhere  
I ask about the drums, want to drink their  
rhythms  
fingertip shotglass  
we'd been alive on this planet  
like two piles of days till  
I tripped on your bottom lip  
and all my pages fell /out of/  
ctrl  
you kiss my neck because it's there  
let my mouth start fires on hipskin  
say I make you feel like lesbian  
wants to start them everywhere  
slow bake mind steam  
you hold my breath till I'm dizzying  
we/still  
until the day of rest and praise  
lost in this skinescape  
in bed for two days

## Trove

for Zora, too, but mostly Dave

Michelle Woodson

He said I'd never write because

I'm too busy

living

and I wanted to kick

his smiling teeth in.

still, I can't decide

which one of us

is angrier

and if I really want

to kiss his smiling—

or

more simply

to crack him open like some

hopeful oyster

just to see if he's all more of those

skin covered sacks of dirt

some people call food

and insist on the aphrodisiac

qualities locked

inside:

“Just let it slide down your throat,”

they say smiling that

winkable

kickable

smile.

Or

will this be the time

the persistence of dreams

insists that I hope

to twist my knife,

take a bite

and break my tooth on a pearl.

Then,

shock of bloody tooth and

dragonfly-wing jewel,

I'll spit them both out

laughing.



Art







Lighthouse View

Jane Boswell



Bloom  
Al John Fontanilla



Hope  
Walter Benvides





Self Portrait  
Cindy Nesmith

Desire  
Amy Kidane





Untitled  
Nina Norton



Why Me ?  
Lisa Fordham





Different View  
Selma Lewis



Within  
Sebastian Philipp



Aliens  
Nikki Baker

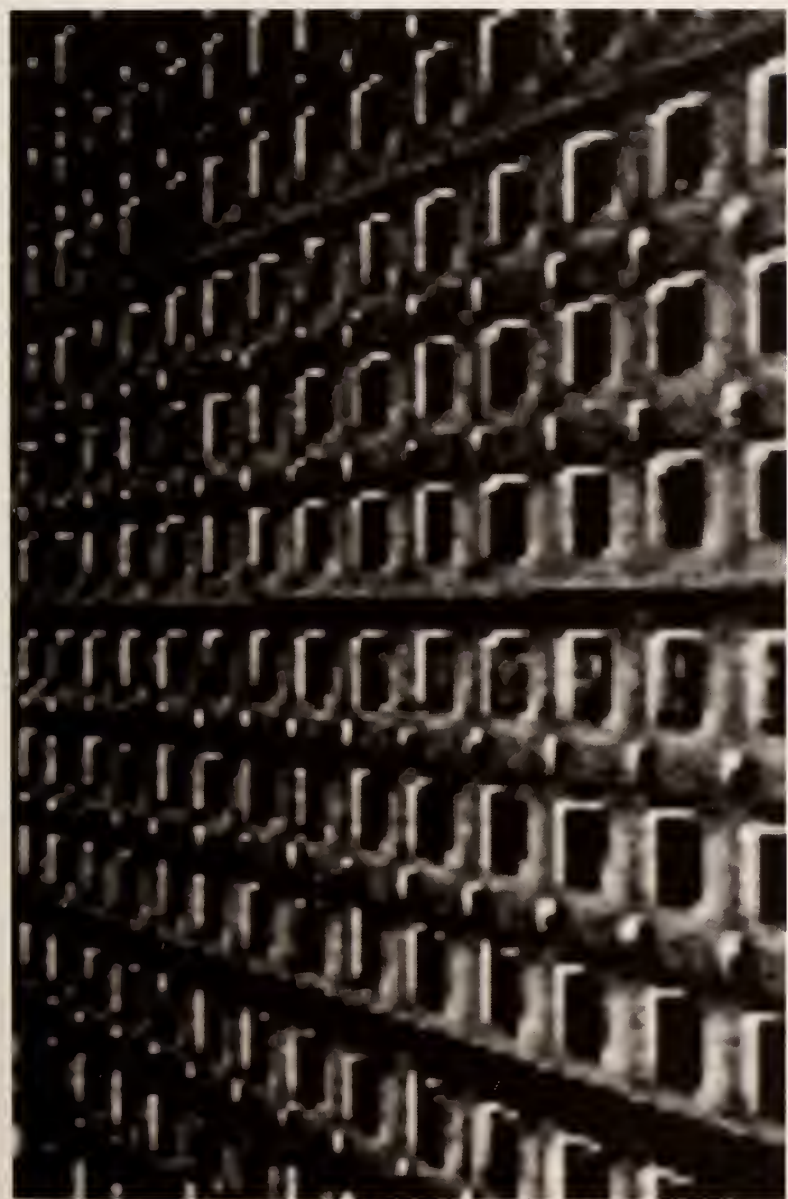


Untitled  
Sebastian Philipp





Transformation  
Al John Fontanilla



Untitled  
Kitty Roberts



Joshua and Gertrude  
Susanna DeMuro



My Little Pool  
Joe Blankenship





Ideas Without End  
Stephanie Raines





AASU

ARMSTRONG ATLANTIC  
STATE UNIVERSITY