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STAFF

Editor/Creative Design: **Mark Jetté**

Assistant Editor: **Krys Ragland**

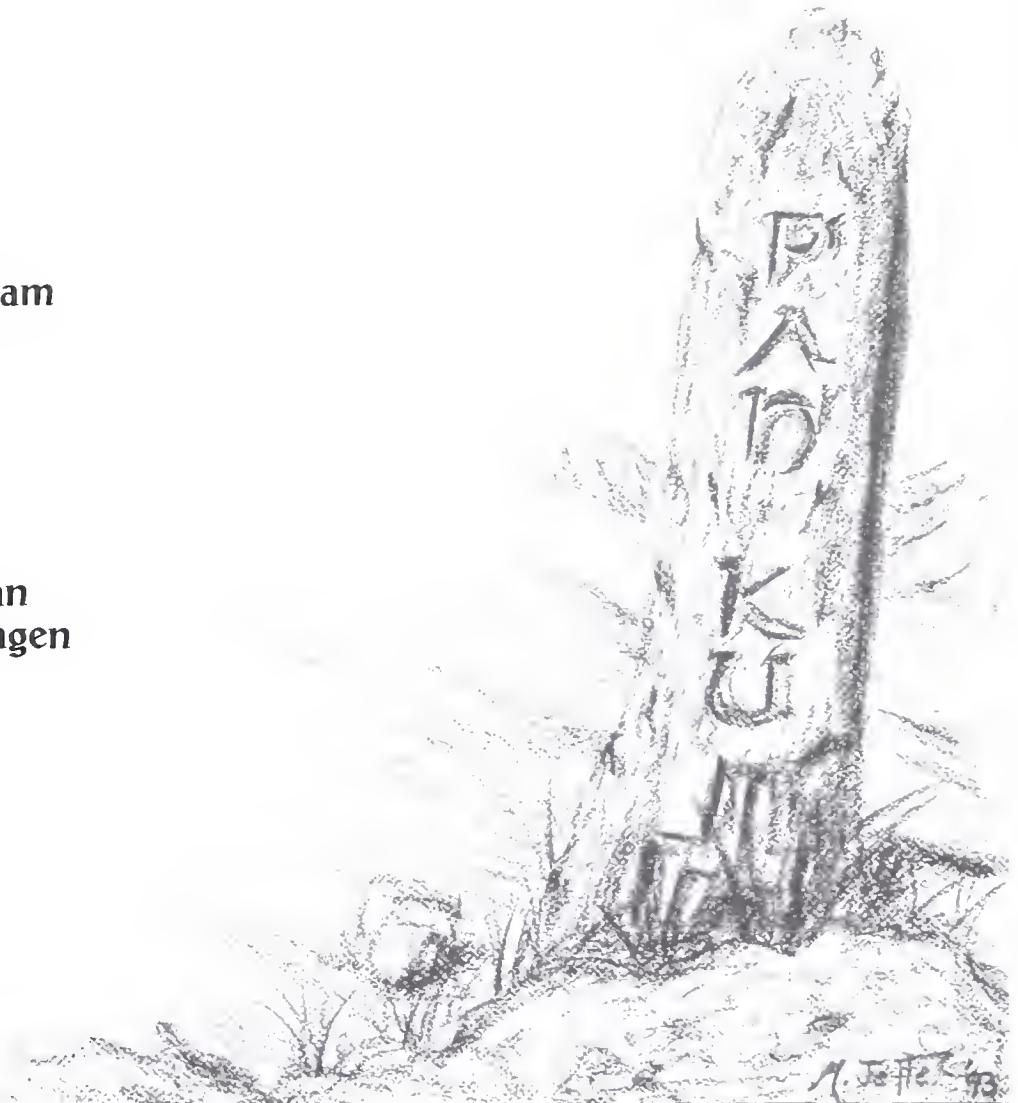
Art Editor: **Pia Davis**

Advisor: **Patrick Ellingham**

Patron Saint of
Literary Magazines: **Betty Owen**

Additional Staff: **Vivian Valvezan**
Marc Rollenhagen
Bryan Reed

Special Thanks: **Elisa Albo**
Christopher Clement
Elsy Curtis
Osmond Duffis-Sjögren
Deborah Hiller
Trish Joyce
Adrian Mesa



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Cover Photograph: "Apparition"
by Pia Davis

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P'an Ku [pān koo] n (Ch.) Ancient Chinese Divinity. From P'an Ku we derive Ying and Yang. He is the primeval man born from the egg. One day the egg split open and the top half became the sky and the bottom half the Earth. After 18,000 years, P'an Ku died and split into a number of parts. His head formed the Sun and the Moon. His Blood, rivers and seas. His hair the forests, sweat the rain, breath the wind, and voice thunder. His fleas became the ancestors of mankind.

Is A Hot Dog A Hot Dog A Hot Dog?

by

Joan Behrends

hot dogs are as American as baseball, mom, and apple pie. Though there are many kinds of hot dogs- long ones, cocktail franks, bigger-than-the-bun, Kosher and turkey. But what I find most interesting is the people who sell them. Hot dog vendors come dressed and undressed, indoors and outdoors, young and old. The most fascinating of all hot dog vendors are outdoor, curbside vendors, indoor/outdoor sports events vendors and the vendor that hawks franks in the lobby of Xtra.

Let's start with my biggest challenge, an indoor vendor: the middle-aged, dark-haired woman in the blue "Xtra" jacket who stands in the lobby daring you to leave without a purchase. She's always there. That is to say, I've never been there when she wasn't there. I've come to count on seeing her there, and when my daughter Emily is with me - and she usually is - I can count on the argument her very presence inspires. Our family does not usually eat the proverbial "tube steak", so Emily seizes her opportunity presented to beg, wheedle, or nag her way into getting one.

Let's face it, without the human element, a hot dog rotating on a machine would not tempt the average person. I blame this nondescript woman who stands behind her counter. I blame the fan she's got blowing out the delectable aromas of Zion Kosher frankfurters and sauerkraut at everyone exiting the store. It's the availability of freshly cooked, hot franks presented with a smile, decked out with relish, onions, sauerkraut, or whatever your heart desires, accompanied by an ice cold Coke, or 7-Up. It's that 5'6" harried looking

woman that's a thorn in my side.

Her hot dogs have that taste of defeat with a tinge of (her) victory. Not only has she successfully separated me from my money, but despite my attempts - be they ever so feeble - I've blown the diet and/or given in to the kid.

Xtra isn't the only place kids, not to mention adults, want to eat weiners. Can you imagine not suffering the incomparable indigestion that goes with baseball, football, hockey, etc. resulting from the ever present hot dogs and beer sold at these games? Hot dog vendors at sporting events, either indoor games like hockey, or open air baseball, and football games, are a special breed. They look no different than you and me, but, oh, their voices! They carry above cheering fans and coaches being heckled. They are loud, distinct, clear. "HOT DOGS HERREE!" They always remember your face and never run out of hot dogs- at least not for long.

They are 18 years old or 50 or anywhere in between. They commonly dress in jeans and a tee shirt and wear the change-laden apron that wraps around their waist and meets somewhere in the back. Hot dog vendors come in all sizes; they are short, tall, fat, and skinny. They have acne and liver spots and craggy faces marked by years of living. Most distinguishing, they are always on the move. Standing still is no way to sell hot dogs and not selling hot dogs is not making money. And money's their prime objective. Clear cut. Easy to see.

These vendors' hot dogs taste great! Full of excitement.

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Also full of promise that you'll be hearing from them (the hot dogs) again.

Our third vendor is also easy to see. Very easy. She is our curbside, outdoor vendor. She, too, sells hot dogs- I think. She wears stiletto heels, G-strings, or underwear, and not much else - unless you count tattoos and hats. Most of them are traffic stoppers. I can't tell you if they're beautiful; I never see their faces.

The highly visible curbside vendor chooses busy, heavily traveled thoroughfares. For instance, the stretch of road on the Andrews Avenue Extension leading to Atlantic Boulevard. On this strip the costumes, or should I say lack of them, are especially daring. Traffic moves ten miles an hour at most. It's usually the car in front of me that contains "kid let loose in a candy store" in men's clothing. Even the vendors who have customers find it necessary to stand on a platform to lift themselves higher so they can bend over lower to lean on their carts, exposing themselves still further to the lascivious

eye. Needless to say, their strategically placed derrieres are aimed at the street. These girls are hot dog vendors. They make the hot dog taste delectable; they also (the vendor's mannerisms) are full of promises of things to come.

While we might agree that all hot dogs are basically the same- they all come wrapped in a bun topped with our choice of condiment; I doubt we would rate the vendor, the dog itself, or the taste, equally. It is true that the way food is presented makes all the difference. When looking from the baseball, mom and apple pie aspect of a hot dog, clearly your choice would be the vendors for something a little more exotic; Americana, a little more provocative, the curbside vendor's the one for you.

It has long been said that the customer is always right. And now we, the customer, have the opportunity to frequent the "right" vendor, and answer the question, "Is a hot dog a hot dog a hot dog?" for ourselves.





"Story Time" B&W Photograph by Jane S. Wirth

Rain

professional madmen
spiritual hysterics

gather your roses before dawn

ectasy in a raindrop
alligator driven whirlpools

While in Mexico
she dreamt twice

to become endlessly obscured
consumed in a glance
forgotten in a memory

to roam in a roomful
of shades.

- Chris DeRosa

The Back Door

Show me. . . your front door,
open porch
curtains fading
in the sun.

Scents of roses
trellised vines,
table set with lemonade
wicker rockers
to rest on.

Invite me in,
to flowered cushions,
piano strings
played by the wind,
fragrant cakes
too hot to eat.

Sunset, we'll part
as others enter.
Let me leave
as I came,
and not quietly
through the rooms
by the back door.

- Margaret Handler

Breakdown

You suffocate
my inspiration.
I lack creative
concentration.
You still berate
all conversation.
Where is the love
we made?

I hide behind
the same illusion.
You search to find
a new intrusion.
I lose my mind
within confusion.
This is the love
we made.

- Cheryl Bringas

Indifference of Love

Each alone, they cry in the night
Longing for the others sight.

From their eyes, tears do flow,
Neither knowing the others woe.

A quiet sob can be heard through the door
Will she see him anymore?

She's gone for good, he does reckon,
Although, for her, his heart does beckon.

The years go by, their hearts grow pale
They meet one day her feelings stale.

She looks at him with no regret
Anger through eyes, "Her outlet."

Bowing his head in morbid sorrow,
He longs to find his new tomorrow.

- Eric Levay

Spotlight:
Helen Krutis

He no longer woos me
now that he's won.
My heart I've surrendered,
thus he courts me no more.
He believes there's no need
does not memory endure?
'Tis true,
but also does waiting
unlike all the others
so silent
I wonder
will he ever imagine
the depth of my longing
or my need to hear the words?

Allusion

I hardly need to be told
or have it pointed out to me.
I know when I have been left.
I can feel it,
smell it clearly as rain
or death.
Its insidious shame echoes through my bones like cold
and haunts my brain
like the archetypal parental taunt
I told you so.

Imprint

Overpowered
the dying light succumbs
and once again
we live together in darkness
he and I.

Beyond the claim of memory
or thought of other lives
we are drawn
by thwarted longings
fate has twisted into need.

Adversarial lovers.
We unite in fury
and are spent,
trembling in the updraft
between defiance
and surrender,
exultant
in the triumph
of having always known
that we are both
the same
here
in the eternal silence
that binds lovers such as
he
and I.

In the light
I am invisible.
My image
will never be reflected in his eyes.
His ear
hears not the sound of my voice,
nor can his heart
claim that love I hold for him.

It lies entombed.

Yet,
even as I am driven back by convention,
I know
each illicit hope,
every lost caress
will unite us across time
creating a bond inviolate
that marks him
as surely as an undiscovered crime.

Daydream

I sleep
warm in his gaze
like a cat on a sunlit window ledge.
safe
beside a heart which overlooks my imperfections
and sees through eyes
that behold me
without fear
as though
I were an amazing reflection
on the surface of the sea of dreams
on the dark side of the moon.

Pedi I-C-U

The angel of death
whispered by as you slept
And paused for a moment
at the foot of your bed.

I could feel the presence
by the chill in the air
And saw your puzzled frown
as I caressed your blond hair.

My heart stopped in mid-beat
as I prayed to keep you here
For it was not the first time
he stood and watched you there.

You opened your eyes
and smiled up at me
As if to let me know
it wasn't yet time - for you to go.

Again he passed by us
I sighed in relief
And the tears started flowing
for another mother's grief.

- Kim Neely

Do You See Daughter?

The wind is ready
The sea is baiting
Hoist the sails steady
There is no waiting

Like many times before
Energies mold together
Strong hands set sheets sure
Delicate hands navigate through weather

Her love for him
Is deep as the ocean
Flying fish skim
Waves caressing emotion

Lighten his heart
Is her endeavor
Help to forget the part
That haunts him forever

Suddenly dead calm
No ripple of water
No sway of palm
"Do you hear daughter?"

Enchanting sweetness of song!
Musical sirens call!
To hear them further I long"
"Father! Only on Thine ears they fall!"

"Do you see daughter?
Upon rocks, out of water
Beautiful maidens
Long hair glistening
Forgive me, dearest daughter
For listening"

- Donna Tschopp

The Honey test

by

Allison Salmon

Ever wonder how long it's been since someone had really sweet sex?

A surefire test: watch them eat honey

Although much of it is subjective, most of it is in the timing and the method- how long do they draw out the whole experience? (And, by the way, if it's not an experience for them, don't bother- the kind of sex they've had doesn't count as sweet.)

First, how do they put it in their mouth? A spoon? Only if they hold it over their mouth, tilt their head back, and let the honey drizzle onto their tongue.

Or do they dip their fingers in the jar and lick-suck it off? Lip smacking noises earn five points. If they close their eyes, ten points. Do they roll back into their head? Ten more. Fluttering? Twenty.

And when they open their eyes, do they look right at you? Or do they look away, hiding as if you've just caught them with their hand in their pants?

Fifty points for red cheeks.

If they go back for seconds, forget the points, jump on them! It is your moral imperative as a fellow honey dripper to LET THIS VAMPIRE DRINK YOUR BLOOD— HE'S PARCHED.

Silent Fire

Ox-eye daisies, thistle and hawthorne twine through
the rocks of cotton lavender,
fennel follows the english ivy knitting the garden.

This wreath spins a meridian of plaited wisteria,
parting orange hemispheres of parched Chinese Lanterns.

- Sidney Brown

Metamorphosis

In the darkness
she sits tight
within herself.
Her brittle bones
a slate colored mantle.
When morning comes
rich juices ooze
from her rounded body.
Her colors blinding
all who can see.

-Jan Parker



"Dance of the Palms" B&W Photograph by Pia Davis

Depression

I have laid in my room through my life,
and I have seen the horror of the world through my window.

I feel the torment and I have felt the hatred.

I have seen an old woman's anger, and I am not fazed.

I have seen a young child's death and I am not brought to tears.

Of all these things, nothing hurts me more than to see a
sick bird looking up at the sky with nothing but despair
and a dying dream, which was filled with memories of
the skies that it once flew.

"The 
Cause"

Frustration

Tormenting the mind, inner
frustrations must be voiced, as
they may be leading to madness.
But personal problems are petty
to most people. No matter what
they are, each person needs time
to be recognized, to let their pain
be known.

"The 
Cause"

Apartment 780A

by

Sidney Brown

He'd keep promises with the cats.

For them he would pour thick white milk down the edge of small clay bowls. While they lapped from the center, he would fluff their day beds. "He'll be a Doctor." "Like his brother." "Animal Husbandry," they'd say. "He'll be a Veterinarian someday."

He never did use the Brooks Bother's umbrella they gave him.

He like the way his body quenched rain and counted on the gray clouds' habit. So they bought him a London Fog with instructions on how to keep the collar up. "our Eccentric," they'd say.

He disliked the mechanics of driving a motorized vehicle.

So they provided him with a plastic gas card to keep him off the bus. The card generated the right mail but the balance was always at zero. "An unassuming Philanthropic," they'd insist.

He wrote poetry and lingered often-

sometimes forgetting to eat or speak. He preferred rocking chairs and arm chairs and on Sundays he'd rock the hard maple and listen to the Lincoln Live. "Our Intellect," they'd claim.

But when he told us he loved the gentle man below 780B,

the man who potted geraniums on the stoop and read Chechov through yellow light, they disowned him. His mother and brothers should have known. I knew.

Lately all I see are collisions at intersections where someone turns

left slowly into the path of someone traveling straight and in slow motion and no one can stop.

Silver Blue

It's slowly, but surely,
beginning to end.
The pages are almost complete.
The ink still continues
to flow from my pen,
as colors that no longer meet
go their separate ways —
despite yesterday's
promises.

It's slowly, but surely,
beginning to fade.
There's no longer a heart to enfold.
Have you forgotten
the love that we made?
Now the feelings that we cannot hold
have gone their separate ways —
despite all the ways
I tried to hold on —
despite yesterday's
promises.

It's slowly, but surely,
beginning to die.
Walk away before my misery starts.
Turn away from my tears
and whisper good-bye.
Let me mourn for the death of two hearts
that went their separate ways —
despite all the days
I spent in your arms —
despite all the ways
I tried to hold on —
despite yesterday's
promises.

- Cheryl Bringas

Love's Consequence

The serpent resides in my heart.
It coils itself around
my emotional valves,
fraught with malicious intentions.

My blood cells are demons —
evil spirits who
control my thoughts
as they pump through my brain.

The scars are but skulls —
remnants of lost souls
who once dwelled within me.

The blind eye of impulse
corrodes my laughter.
I see everything
and yet, nothing.

The evil ones escape
from their abode
through my tears.

- Cheryl Bringas

Moments of Doubt

by
Patty M. Smith

daylight finally arrived like a long overdue visitor. Chris had been awake for hours, sitting in the dark listening to the sound of her husband's breathing. Before the day ended, she would become a part of history.

Mother Nature, seeming to understand the importance of this morning, responded with a brilliant display of colors bathing the sky in soft shades of rose and pink before gradually allowing golden rays of sunlight to emerge from the horizon. But the sunshine was not expected to last; weather forecasters had been predicting a storm. Looking out over the still sleeping city she'd be calling home, Chris watched as light grey clouds slowly crept into view. Apparently, this was going to be one of those rare occasions when the forecasters were correct!

The threat of snow did not bother her. She had always enjoyed the snowfall, recalling how tiny flakes gently wrapped the houses and streets in a peaceful white blanket. Could this be an omen, she wondered; a sign, perhaps, of what the future held for her? Or just wishful thinking?

For a few moments, Chris thought about trying to slip out, unnoticed, into the cold crisp air, but realized it would be next to impossible. The days of waking at dawn and going for long solitary walks were gone forever. Now there were few places she'd be able to go alone. She tried to concentrate on the events taking place later in the morning, but longed for a taste of the freedom she had given up willingly; a freedom lost to the past.

She walked in the bathroom and stared at her reflection in the mirror. The years were beginning to show. The tiny lines around her eyes had become more noticeable; her dark brown hair had traces of grey. Still, she had aged well and had retained much of her youthful beauty which had always been a liability rather than an asset.

"What if I... fail?" She asked the image looking back at her.
"What if I..."

The word stuck in her throat as if it were deliberately trying to choke her. Failure was not an option Christine O'Brien-Braddley considered. Always successful, she never had any reason to doubt her own ability. Now, the possibility of failing haunted her like a bad dream. She didn't know how to deal with it; how to rid her mind of the doubts. She splashed her face with cold water hoping to break free from the spell of uncertainty that had suddenly cast itself upon her, but she couldn't. And the ominous question still remained, what if she failed? The answer was unthinkable.

Chris dressed quietly, so as not to wake her husband, and left their bedroom. As she walked down the hall, she was sure she heard the footsteps of those who had been here before her. For a moment, she thought she saw their images in the shadows. A handful were considered great. Most were simply mediocre. A few were long since forgotten.

How would she measure up? She was breaking new ground; treading where no woman had gone. If she succeeded, would she be remembered only because she was the first woman elected President? And if she failed, would people then believe that a woman simply wasn't capable of handling the job?

She stopped at the stairs, again considering the possibility of leaving, but turned instead toward the room where her brother and sister-in-law were sleeping. Chris knocked softly on the door.

The door opened, and Michelle, already dressed, joined Chris in the hall.

"I wasn't sure whether you would be awake yet; is Bill still sleeping?" Chris asked, relieved that Michelle was awake and not really interested in whether Bill was asleep.

"Yes, he is, but you know your brother has never been a morning person. How about Michael?"

Chris hesitated before answering. "He was asleep when I left."

"Do you want to go for a walk?"

They often went for long walks in the quiet early hours of the morning.

"No!" Chris frowned, "you know we can't go out alone."

"So, we'll have company. It won't be the first time!"

They walked out into the chilly winter air of a city just opening its eyes. The sound of early morning traffic echoed in the distance, and the ground cracked beneath their feet as they strolled across the frozen lawn. It was one of the rare moments when Chris enjoyed even the slightest bit of anonymity. No cameras recording her every move; no reporters asking the same questions repeatedly. Even the Secret Service agents, while still with her, seemed to be farther away.

"Did you see the sunrise this morning?" Chris asked.

"Yes, I did, and I couldn't think of a more perfect beginning for this day."

"It looks like it's going to snow after all. I guess the forecasters were right for a change."

"It does seem that way, but I don't think you really want to discuss the weather, do you, Chris?"

"No, not really, Michelle."

"What's on your mind?"

"This is everything you and I have ever worked so hard for. I should be thrilled. What is it they always say, be careful what you ask for because you might get it."

"Are you having second thoughts about this?"

"I . . . don't . . . know."

"What's wrong?"

"Do you realize that my life has become an open book, and I have no control over who turns the pages! I cannot go anywhere or do anything without someone, somewhere, documenting my every move."

"Chris, you knew this would happen."

"But, Michelle, I never thought it would involve

sacrificing all my privacy. You and I can't even go for a walk alone, and it's not just me; this has affected my family as well. They will never be able to lead normal lives again!"

"They will be fine, Chris. Your children are adults, and they knew what they were getting into; so did your husband. They all supported your decision."

"I didn't exactly give them a choice. This hasn't been easy for them. The traveling, the constant exposure. . ."

"Christine, you don't really expect me to believe that this is what is bothering you, do you? You have spent most of your adult life in the public eye and never expressed any concern over it. Now, what is wrong?"

Chris stopped. She looked everywhere except at Michelle, and wished she could have found a place to hide; but there wasn't any. Finally, Chris turned and faced the woman who had guided her to this day.

"What if I can't handle it, Michelle? What if the pressure is too much? Do I just give up. . . admit defeat and walk away. . . forget about how hard we worked to get here?"

"No, you know you can't do that."

"Then what do I do?" Chris's voice trembled with uncertainty.

"You will get through it, Chris." Michelle replied softly, aware that Chris needed reassurance. "This isn't the first time you've had to deal with pressure, and it won't be the last. You have always handled it!"

"You cannot seriously compare the past to this, Michelle!" Chris stared at her in disbelief, and wondered how Michelle could possibly justify the comparison. "This is hardly the same thing!"

"Why isn't it? The game hasn't changed! You're just playing on a bigger field!"

"And you are the master of the understatement!"

Michelle did not respond immediately; instead, she took a few moments to collect her thoughts. She placed her gloved hands on Chris's shoulders, and chose her words carefully. "I know you have doubts, Chris. You wouldn't be human if you didn't. I also know how difficult it is for you to talk about them. Everyone is afraid of failing, but you cannot allow that fear to stop you now. You never would have

gotten this far if you had given in to every doubt you've ever had. And I have never known you to back down from a challenge regardless of how hard it was! Or have you forgotten all the problems you encountered twenty-five years ago when you were just beginning?"

"No, of course I haven't."

How could she? Chris had fought an up-hill battle for acceptance in a predominantly male field throughout her political career.

"And do you remember how determined you were to succeed; to prove everyone wrong, which is exactly what you did?"

"Yes. But, Michelle, there is more at stake here; more to lose. Do you know how many people are going to be watching me, just waiting for me to fail?"

"Don't fail!"

"MICHELLE!"

"Chris, I know that you're worried. You have every reason to be concerned about whether you are the right person for this job; but do you think I would have encouraged you if I had any doubt as to your ability to handle it?"

"No."

"This is your chance to make a difference. A real difference. To accomplish the things you want to accomplish. Everything leading up to this moment has been a struggle. There were never any shortcuts, easy answers or stars to wish on. This road has been the most difficult one you have had to follow, and no, it isn't going to get easier. Yes, there will be people watching your every move, waiting for you to fail; but that's nothing new. They have been waiting for the past twenty-five years, and they are still waiting!"

"Michelle, what would I do without you?"

"Oh, I think you would do just fine."

"No, Michelle, I don't think so. You are the reason this is a reality, not just a dream!"

"You are giving me far too much credit, Chris."

"I couldn't give you enough credit. I can't even begin to thank you, or tell you how much it means to know that you will be by my side today."

"There's no place I'd rather be, and I think it's about

time we headed back, don't you?"

"Yes." Chris replied softly.

Neither spoke again until they were standing midway between their rooms.

"Well, Michelle, I'll see you in a couple of hours."

"Yes, Chris, you will."

Chris turned in the direction of her room, paused and turned back toward Michelle.

"Michelle. . ." She whispered.

"I know, Chris," Michelle answered as she hugged Chris. "I love you, too, and you're welcome."

Chris rarely displayed her emotions; Michelle understood.

"How can I ever thank her?" Chris asked herself as she watched Michelle walk down the hall. "What words could I possibly use?"

This could have been Michelle's day if Michelle hadn't made the decision long ago to work behind the scenes. She was the one who was more qualified. The one with a Doctorate in History and Government. The one who knew more about the political system of the United States than most so-called political experts. But Michelle had always tried to avoid the spotlight whenever possible and was content to let Chris bask in the limelight. Michelle never sought recognition; that wasn't her style.

Chris walked into the bedroom and greeted her husband with a quick kiss. "Good Morning!"

"Good Morning!" Michael replied, putting his arms around her. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm going to take a shower."

"Do you want some company?" Michael raised his eyebrows and smiled mischievously.

"Not now, but tonight I will!"

Chris slipped out of her husband's embrace and walked in the bathroom. As the hot water slowly massaged some of the tightness out of her muscles, Chris quietly went over the speech she'd give. She and Michelle had worked on it for several weeks, constantly writing and rewriting until they were satisfied. Although she had delivered numerous speeches over the past twenty-five years, few, if any, measured

up to the importance of this one.

She got out of the shower, dressed and joined her family for breakfast. Her youngest, a daughter named Michelle, would be graduating with a Master's Degree in History in the spring. Jillian, the eldest, had already begun to follow in her mother's footsteps and had been re-elected to a second term in the House of Representatives. Jimmy, second oldest, had pursued a career in law and worked with his father. Ann, who had the distinction of being the middle child as well as having the strongest resemblance to her mother, taught high school English. John was on his way to becoming a major league baseball star.

"Chris, the car is here."

"Okay, Michael."

The car her husband referred to was a white stretch limousine. Tinted bullet-proof windows hid Chris and her family from view, while a contingent of Secret Services agents protected them. Michael held Chris's hand as the motorcade slowly weaved its way through the city streets.

A large crowd had gathered, more than had been anticipated. The sound of cheers roared through the air as Chris stepped out of the limousine. Hundreds of reporters from around the world were focused on Chris. Photographers and cameramen made last minute checks of their equipment to record this moment for future generations.

As Chris placed her left hand on the Bible her sister-in-law Michelle held, tiny snowflakes, acting almost on cue, started falling. Chris raised her right hand, took a deep breath and spoke the words which insured her a place in history:

"I, Christine O'Brien-Bradley, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of the Presidency and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."



"Untitled" Watercolor by Judy Rose Bleich

Garbage

Should have flushed her
down the drain
mother said
under her breath
just loud enough
for me to hear.

Push that lever
watch the filth
swirl around
in the water.
Get that stink
out of my house.

Twice a week the
garbage men come
lift those cans
so easy.
Their muscled arms
all shiny with sweat
licking their lips
when they look
at mother,
slide their eyes
when they look
at me.

- Jan Parker

Samurai

Spiral into darkness
Search for release
Beyond the brutal world
Reality crease
Blackness
Infinity
Welcome me
Thoughts in a void
All matter destroyed
Nothing is real
Dreams of a future
I never feel
Past is dead
Cryptic silence
Oppressive dread
Suffocate
On nightmare's kiss
Defying fate
Warrior's death
I cannot wait

- J.W. Burns

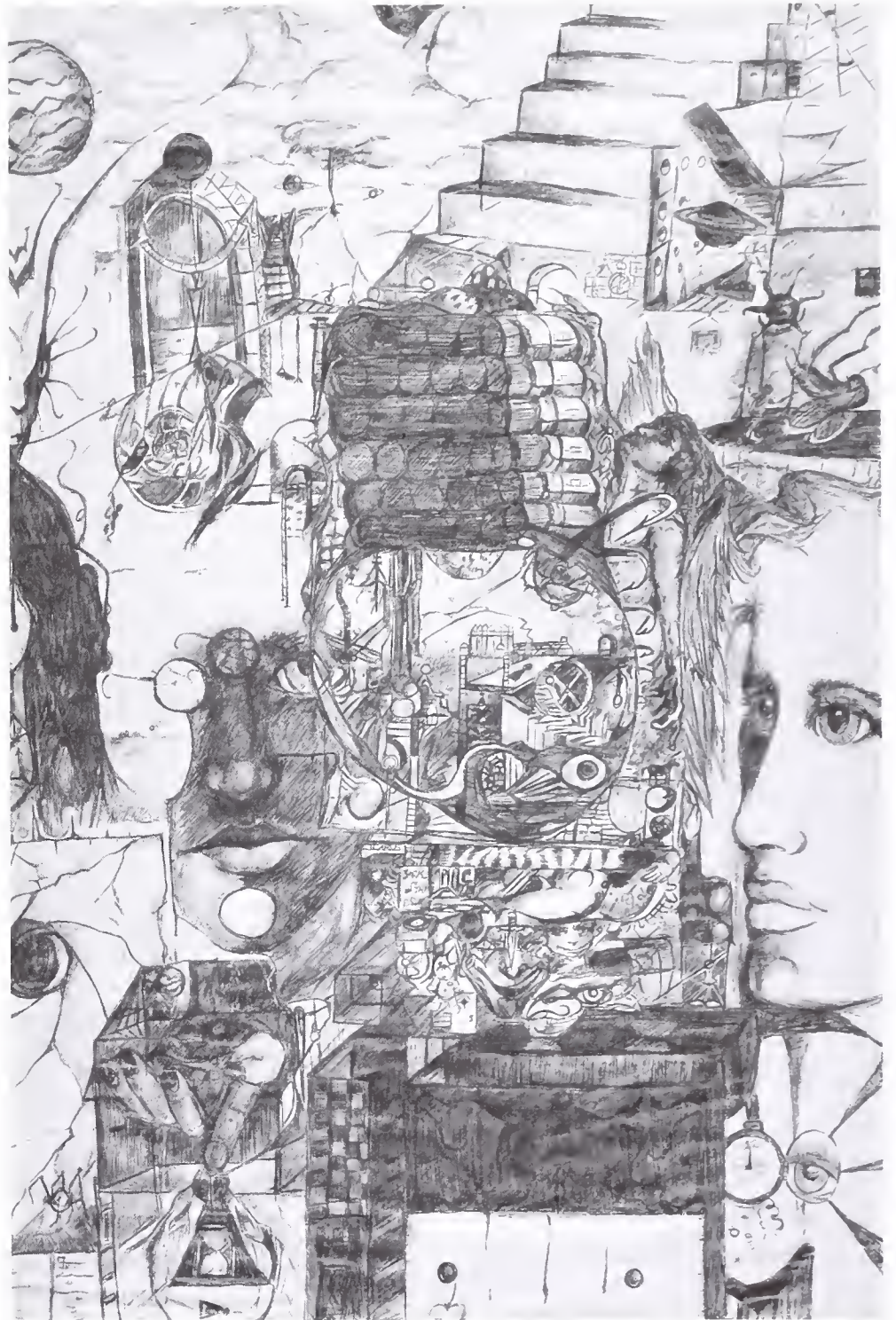
Cerebral Demons

I am overflowing with thoughts
that go nowhere.
They spin spherically
inside my brain
and race in a frenzy
to grasp at the tail
of what they are.

With fangs bared and
souls possessed,
they screech like rabid eels,
aching to escape
from their cauliflower abode.

Their slimy, sperm-like bodies
writhe in pain,
brought on by a hopeless desire
for release.
The mad creatures endlessly long
to emerge
ripped and torn
from their home
and splatter helplessly
on paper
so that mortals may read
their souls and weep.

- Cheryl Bringas



"Icarus of 'Eye Candy'" Pen Drawing by Dolly Veronica Lasher



"Listen Without Prejudice" Ink Drawing by Donald G. Schallick

Hide

A sorrow there is that knows no name
That hides in the surface of the glass-
That bides its time from day to day;
It knows my time shall come to pass.

And where should I turn, when that time arrives,
And to whom should I look, when so befalls
My fate, that I should ask
Why me? of the destiny which calls?

And would you respond to my need?
Indeed, would anyone, looking upon my sodden face-
A countenance drowned with tears-
Submit to give me comfort, succor or swift embrace?

I know the heart of love is hidden
Beneath these many a twist and turning.
But love transmutes to hate
Even as loathing does form yearning.

So I ask not that you confess great love
Nor even ask for you to stay awhile.
I only ask that you hold in memory close
Images of me from day to day, through every mile.

- Fey Boss



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Mark Jetté

Threshold

by

Helen Krutis

Some-
/ ifetimes have I spent in rooms like this. The path is always the same, though portals that with each passing wear away fragile layers of waning hope. Each time, each printed form, every unanswerable question is so familiar that answers are automatic. Introspective responses are futile and no longer the point. I have stopped trying to understand why and can not begin to conjure how.

Here the silence, though foreboding, is filled with ironic peace. It is not unlike waiting in a crypt. A pallid layer of dust left by those who came before covers everything. It rests on the colorless floor. Over time it has infused every surface with the texture of silt and invaded the cracks in the ancient Naugahyde slab that rises against the wall before me. The top has been swept clean and shrouded in stiff white paper, anticipating the next one fate will lay upon it.

The walls have no color. No hue occurs naturally that would serve as a backdrop to the vivid drama that assaults its audience here. Perhaps the shades are of individual imagination and too lurid for the innocent to behold.

My thoughts remain my own. The idea of their birth into words terrifies me. I deny them with silence, mock their existence with denial. Only a heartbeat lies between unmoved facade and the surging fear that roars beneath. Its shriek is amplified by the loneliness through which it races. I feel anguish crash against me, demanding that I confess my weakness. But I am still in control, resisting surrender, empowered by rage.

Precisely crafted ornaments adorn the spaces that surround me. In their stages of completion, they elevate the grotesque to an art form. With plaster saturated gauze, the shapes of limbs are preserved in a ruthless death mask that spares none it embraces. Disembodied extremities in various moments of loss gather along the shelves and spill over into every unoccupied place.

A pair of infant's shoes stands empty in a corner. An infrastructure of steel soars upward from their soles, awaiting union with the child they were designed to enfold. My hand is drawn by a strange, unconscious need to touch the smooth, polished slats. They are cold and unforgiving. I recoil defensively, superstitiously refusing to transfer any of my own warmth lest I too be captured and held fast.

My eyes are drawn to work after work in horrified fascination. The display with its infinite number of shapes and sizes is riveting. Each is unique, individually splendid as the finger and toe prints that no longer exist. I am seduced by a malevolent force that will not let me look away. Surely a euphemistic afterthought the term "artificial limbs". There is nothing artificial in the journey that led here.

I want to run, but I no longer can. Rescue is a hope remote, and escape denial's dream. I ache to be comforted, for permission to acknowledge what is real. I never feel the comfort others enjoy from pretending I don't mind. I know only how demanding the illusion is to create and feel little else than the burden of having to maintain it. I have, it seems, honed my craft far too well. I am trapped within my perfect lie, sealing away behind an image of acceptance I have arduously refined and turned against myself so that no one will ever know.

I am not alone. He sits without offering comment or judgment, his back resting against a disposable covered pillow. He has seen everything in this room, this stuffed bear. At one time, I am sure, his fur was white, not soiled with the perspiration of clutching hands. It is difficult to tell now, but I imagine he once was fluffy and soft to hold, before the touch of mouths and tears matted his coat and wore patches of his fur away.

Anyone can see he has endured much. It is the price extracted from the offerer of solace, the giver of hope. I believe when they cut his legs off below the hip and fitted him with acrylic legs, (not those of a bear at all), he felt in his heart he would arise transformed through sacrifice to give still greater things.

I wish I were small enough to wrap my arms around him. I wish I were young enough to be comforted by holding him. I wish my heart was clean and unafraid. Even more, I wish my mind was open enough to believe that everything was going to be all right. I long for time and things forever lost, for the faith that would allow me to think I would again be the same as everyone else.

He, of course, says nothing. I look into his eyes that are blue as the ceiling of heaven. In his clear bright gaze I see only compassion, because he knows that now I have seen the future.



"Untitled" Mixed Media by Savita Singh

Desert Pictures

by

E. Santo-Miguel

The little town of Andersville (not far outside of Little Rock) was a very quiet and dreary place. The Joe Bidwell Home for the Aged (named for a past mayor, himself long since a victim of the ravages of old age and resulting death) was one of the few relatively noteworthy buildings in town. Its architecture hinting at a time since past when buildings were equal parts artistic expression and practicality. The drab grey and white paint that covered the exterior, dry and peeling, contrasted sharply with the beautiful, elaborate design of multi-tiered roofs and large rounded windows. The lush surroundings of tall junipers whose branches spread out unrepentantly across the sky and small wooden benches that were placed at various spots on the green landscape gave the impression that this was a pretty good place to relax, to unwind, to take it easy. But, Bill Calvin, a resident of the old people's home, found things to be not quite so relaxing as he sat in the main hall watching TV.

"Ya know, Arthur, y'all's gettin' on my nerves with your damned yappin'. Kint you shut up? Look at Verne over there, sleepin' like a baby, while you an' Cyrus jus' keep on talkin', talkin' talkin'. A guy kint even watch a little TV in peace. Why do you talk so much? You crazy? Kint you shut up? You couldn't shut up if'n yo' life depended on it, could you? I tell you what. I think y'all needs to be gagged, that's what. Nothin' else'll stop you. Damned crazy people. Y'all needs to be gagged. Gagged, hog-tied an' thrown in the river back yonder. That'll shut y'all up."

"Mr. Calvin?"

"Huh?" His train of thought had been derailed.

"Mr. Calvin, it's time for your walk," the nurse said politely, leaning over him with a pleasant smile.

"Yeah, okay," came his weary reply. She took his hand and helped him straighten his tired, old knees. Once to his feet, after a deep sigh, he trudged off, her arm in his, the elderly man's slippers flopping noisily.

On the table around which Bill and his friends had been sitting, Bill's lunch was left virtually untouched. He didn't feel like eating,

and he resisted any attempts by anyone to goad him into it. He was stronger than they all thought. In fact, he could get up and walk right out if he wanted to, and they couldn't stop him. But he knew he couldn't leave Arthur and Cyrus alone; they couldn't handle the orderlies and nurses like he could, they didn't know how to get their way like Bill could. (He had learned some time ago that persistence mixed with a little belligerence had its merits.) They weren't as strong. If he did leave, how could they smoke a cigarette anytime they wanted? Or how could they stay up past their designated bedtime to watch "The Beverly Hillbillies" re-runs whenever they wanted? He had to stay. They needed him.

It was Saturday now, the day relatives were allowed to come visit. Every Saturday morning, Bill would wake up quite early, get dressed (better than usual, which generally meant wearing a tie, a neatly pressed shirt, and shoes instead of slippers), and slowly make his way from his room to the meeting area. He would always take the same seat, next to the wall, from where he could see all incoming relatives. He wore his most amiable expression.

One by one, in pairs, a trio or more once in a while, they trickled in, sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, an in-law or two, all smiling (usually somewhat usually), loquacious and congenial to a fault. Bill thought they seemed as if they were afraid of their elderly hosts to get in a word edgewise, perhaps fearing something in the nature of a rebuke: "Why the hell'd you put me in here?! The nurses are ugly, the food stinks, and the rats are so big they could scare Sylvester the goddamn cat to death." And after receiving no response from the bumbling lot, they'd then maybe conclude, "Get me the hell out of here! Or I'll haunt you, goddamn son-of-a-bitch!" Bill knew they would never say it, though. They weren't strong enough.

Bill's hair was mostly gone now, but what little covered his head he combed neatly from front to back, the grey wisps giving way to a suppressed gleam beneath. His eyes were a deep green, shadowed by a pair of messy grey eyebrows. His handsome

features belied his seventy-one years, and though besieged by wrinkles, his face held a dignity one might not expect to find in a man who had been living in a nursing home for eight years and subject to the instructions of "little girls", and ignominiously abandoned by a lone daughter no longer willing to see to his care. His tall frame had become noticeably less impressive in recent years, his weight having dropped from a sturdy 170 to what he considered a "lean" 123 pounds. He knew he was the strongest guy in there just the same, and no doctor or nurse could tell him otherwise by way of stethoscope or tests. "I don't feel like a day over forty," he was given to proclaiming on occasion. The one shortcoming he acknowledged was his lack of a high school education. This he regretted, but never let hinder his willingness to express himself, read the paper, or anything else. He made do; he could handle anything just by trying. His mind was every bit as strong as a body.

As Bill sat looking at the anxious faces of the visitors, his mind a sea of pointless wonder, his thoughts drifting wildly, a little boy of about six or seven approached him.

"How are you doin'?" Bill greeted, observing the little man with his stoic demeanor, who had evidently wandered away from his family. Getting no response, Bill continued, "Are you here with your mom and dad?" The little boy nodded. They continued to eye each other a while longer until Bill offered, "Would you like to hear a story?" Again the little boy nodded.

"Ever heard 'bout the world war?" Bill asked. His young friend shook his head. "Well, I fought in the second one - there was two of 'em, you know." As Bill spoke, the little boy climbed into the chair next to him. Bill continued, "Anyways, I spent most of my time in Africa, in the desert. Rommell was the guy in those days, the main German tank commander. I signed up near the end of the war. We were winnin' and I wanted to get my piece of the action, so I enlisted and then got shipped over there a couple of weeks later

"Anyways, we had them Germans on the run and the Fox- that's Rommell's nickname, "the Desert Fox"- well he decided to throw everythin' at us in one last shot. He figured it was all or nothin'. I was jus' a Private, but me an' the sergeant got on well, so he gave me the chance to do certain things. Even though I wuz jus' a country boy, he put me in command of a group of guys. Even had a corporal under me, I did."

The little kid sat attentively, his eyes fixed on the yarn-spinning old man next to him. "So the sergeant tells us to go out as a scout

party to find the Germans, and radio back and tell him 'bout their position and size and such. We heard they wuz broken up into three battalions, and they wuz gonna come after us right where we wuz holed up. General McArthur had sent out a call for more troops, but the sergeant figured we didn't have time to wait for 'em, and we jus' had to save our own selves.

"We went out lookin' and sho' 'nuff, 'bout three days by jeep from where we wuz, here comes Rommell an' company. Me an' the boys decided that we wuz gonna radio the guys back at headquarters an' then attack the Germans by ourselves. It was a crazy idea, but hell, we got bored jus' watchin' 'em.

"The fifty of us came pouring out of the cover, guns blazin', jeeps kicking up sand. It wuz crazy. All hell broke loose. The fifty of us against three hundred Germans. It was all Rommell had left after the poundin' he'd took earlier, but they wuz mean. Damn near killed us all. But the jeeps wuz so much faster than them old tanks, we wuz able to hit 'em an' run, hit an' run all day. Finally, after a whole day of fightin', we'd taken all but one of their tanks. Only seven or eight of us wuz left. Ed wuz killed, Moe, too, mos' everybody."

Bill now leaned closer for dramatic effect, his eyes sharpening slightly as he stared at the little boy. "I looked over at the two other guys and said, "Okay, this is it. Them or us." An' again we charged outta the ditch we'd taken cover in during a little break in the fightin', all of us yellin' an' screamin', five of us in the jeep, an' two or three on front, chargin' at 'em through the sand. Charlie wuz a real show with the bazooka an' he hit the tank dead on a couple of times befo' they could fire on us more than once." Bill's arms were flailing a little, the consummate storyteller in peak form.

"Anyways, we killed 'em all except for Rommell an' a couple of other soldiers. Then, Martin remembers he's got an old camera back in the jeep, and he goes and gets it. So we take some pictures, you know, standin' on tanks, an' stuff like that, an' since I knew how famous this guy Rommell wuz, I told the guys to take a picture of me an' him standin' side by side. He was a proud guy, you could tell, an' he didn't talk or nothin', he jus' stood there with a kind a scowl on his face, not sayin' a word. I took his officer's cap an' his coat from him, an' gave him my helmet to hold while I put his stuff on. I threw my arm over his shoulder an' gave a big smile, an' somebody took the picture.

"That's my favorite one. I don't know what happened to all of them, but that one's my favorite. I still have it. Got it an' a couple

others back in my room. I could go get it if you'd like to see it." The little boy didn't answer, he only climbed out of the chair and after smiling shyly, he ambled aimlessly.

"Mister Calvin's telling stories," one nurse said to another.

"Must be that one he likes to tell about him and the war and Rommell, or whatever," the other one said as she laughed.

"Old guy thinks he's some famous war hero who knew General McArthur personally. He's really beginning to lose it." Bill overheard them, but didn't say anything. "Mr. Calvin, you need to calm down. Don't get too worked up. You know it's bad for you."

"They think they knew everythin'," Bill thought to himself, "and nobody else knows nothin'. They think 'cause I'm a little older than them, and I never finished my schoolin', that I'm nobody. 'Ptth!' he blew through his lips scoffingly. It occurred to the nurses, as it had to anyone who had ever been within earshot of Bill's storytelling, that such a seemingly uneducated old man could never possibly have been a soldier, not one of any repute about leading a group of men into battle and capturing a great soldier like Rommell. Poor, deluded old Bill, they thought.

"I'll tell all the damn stories I want," Bill fumed quietly. Storytelling was everything to Bill, a lonely man by any admission but to his own. He "preyed" on others' visitors, having none himself, his drive to entertain like a fire inside him.

As the clock chimed six, Bill jumped a little; he hadn't realized the time had passed so quickly. He looked around and saw the final visitors leaving, and searched for the audience of his latest story, but in vain. He grumbled to himself and then slowly got up, the plastic chair wobbling a little as he braced himself against its back. Bill was feeling a little down and wanted a cigarette, and after getting to his room and locking the door behind him, he tried to remember where he'd put his pack. He pulled open the first drawer in the side table. Nothing. Only a little orange bottle with pills he'd been told to take for his heart, seal still unbroken.

"Damn!" Bill muttered. "Wonder if one of them nurses found 'em." He opened the second drawer. Bingo. He smiled mischievously and removed one of the cigarettes from the box, and then fumbled through his pockets for his matches. The smoke filled his mouth and then curled up through his nostrils. A look of meager content was etched on his face. "Phoo," he slowly exhaled.

His left arm had begun to hurt a little, and it felt a little numb, so he sat on the edge of his bed. Suddenly, Bill thought he saw

Arthur standing in the room, and though he was feeling progressively worse, his head now in a bit of a spin, he was still willing, as always, to talk to anyone who would listen.

"It really doesn't matter what they think, does it, Arthur?" Bill said in a self-assured manner. "'Course not. Them believin' somethin' doesn't make it so, an' them not believin' somethin' doesn't make it not so, either. To hell with them." Bill looked over to where he thought he saw Arthur standing. "Hey, Arthur, will you come over here," he said, almost annoyed. "I've got a cigarette," he then said in a softer, enticing tone. "Come on," he encouraged. "Okay, if you don't want it right now, I'll just leave it for you over here." He leaned to his right, resting his elbow on the bed, and placed the half-smoked cigarette on the edge of the ashtray. "Don't take too long now; it'll burn out."

A strange pain had crept into his chest, and the severity of it caused him to lose interest in his conversation with Arthur. "I'm gonna lay down for a while, Arthur. I'm feelin' kinda tired. Go ahead an' read if you want, the paper is over there," he said, pointing to the floor at the foot of the bed.

The darkness was falling fast. Bill's chest felt afire as the cigarette sat burning away at itself. As he lay in his back, Bill could see the cigarette shortening, and he felt his chest getting tighter and tighter, his muscles contracting forcefully. The cigarette gasped for oxygen, something to sustain its stay, but inexorably the flame burned; the room seemed devoid of essential air to Bill, for his lungs felt empty. His chest was flaming, his guttural moans and grunts the only result of his effort alert someone. The stick of tobacco was now almost dead, its fire both giving it purpose and yet killing it all at once. The creeping darkness engulfed the room almost entirely, all except for a still weakly waning light, lingering, lingering, and then finally surrendering to its flame. The final spark was gone.

The next morning, the orderlies came in to clean out Bill's room. After throwing out all that needed to be thrown out, they found a shoe box filled with pictures. "Seems to be pictures of some soldiers or something," one commented. "Here, look at this." The picture was old and faded, its edges ragged, its face yellowed. And there in an officer's cap and coat stood Bill, his right arm extended around someone's shoulder, smiling like mad.

I Want...To Be Alone

I want to live next to a creek
And wear my hair in pigtails
Wear clothes only in winter
No phones, no clocks, no television, no microwaves,
no vacuum cleaners...none of it.

I want to build a log cabin next to the creek
Just me, my hands and no one else's
grow fruits and vegetables
And flowers—lots of flowers.

I want to spend my days writing
And listening to music
Sucking on the honeysuckle
Listening to the crickets waiting for the whipper whills to
eclipse their melody.

I want a sage who lives just over the ridge
Who I go see to both learn from and teach
Some days we'll sit and smoke the pipe and drink the
mushroom's nectar
And some days we won't
He gives me knowledge and, above all, peace.

I want a lover who visits by surprise
Sometimes at midnight, sometimes in the afternoon, morning
He looks at me right in the eye, his smile as warm as the sun on my
shoulders, his head cocked to the side while he's plunged and
moving to my rhythm
He listens to my jokes, my poems, my tears
He never gets up out of bed without kissing my neck
And he understands when I want to be alone...

- Allison Salmon



"Untitled" Hand Colored B&W Photograph by Stacy Rogers

Un Matin Mi-Ouest

De rosée, somnifère, rêveur, ce premier matin de printemps
Où, fraîches et rafraîchies,
Nous avons vérifié le temps de la campagne
Et moi, nue et juteuse comme un melon,
J'ai traversé dans le prairie;
Et je t'ai fait signe:

"Tâte mon existence entiere pour la première fois
comme les vents ont fait déjà."

Je me suis ouverte, lentement et continuellement,
Relachant une rosée fraîche
Tu es entré dans mon monde et nous nous sommes émus au
même rythme comme les énergies invisibles autour de nous.
Mon corps, épais et succulent,
Nageait dans mes jus propres,
J'ai mis au monde mon monde intérieur, et j'ai soupiré.

- Vashti Braha

De Poetas y de Locos

Como quisiera hoy al mundo por otro cambiar
yo quisiera que este otro tan solo supiera
de amar y soñar, de dar y olvidar.

Que tan solo aprendiera como del mal el bien
separar y que ni siquiera supiera el significado
de odiar.

Si yo un dia al mundo pudiera cambiar, haría
que nadie volviera a llorar, que todos sus
sueños pudiesen algun dia alcanzar.

Como yo pudiera todo esto finalment realizar?
O sera que es tan solo de poetas y locos querer
a este mundo cambiar.

- Cecilia Chiok

En Busca de un Nuevo Amor

Un día en busca de un nuevo pero verdadero amor saldré
quizás sobre un blanco corcel o tal vez tan solo sobre
una nube de papel.
Mas en mi estrella no dejaré de creer, pues ella me
dice que un dia te he de conocer y al fin por siempre
tener.

Un dia en busca de mi amor saldré
por los aires como pájaro volaré y hasta a la luna si es
preciso llegaré y una a una sus formas recorreré.

Ese día en busca de mi amor saldré y sobre una barca
de cristal quizas navegaré, pues al mar no tempré y en
sus frías y bravas aguas, si es posible me sumergiré.

Hoy en busca de ese gran amor saldré.
No se cuantas clases mas de caminos atravezaré, pero si
sé que al final por fin mi destino conoceré.

- Cecilia Chiok

Plegaria

En la cumbra de un peñasco escarpado,
donde el viento era impetuoso y el mar desenfrenado,
hallabáse hincada, bajo posteros fulgores luna,
una mujer desgraciada, una mujur sin fortuna;
con rodillas ensangrentadas sobre la áspera roca,
sim emitir una palabra, enmudecida su boca.

Su belleza era de Venus, su frescura de la brisa,
mas su rostro temeroso carecía de sonrisa,
el rubor de sus mejillas era de rojas rosas,
y en su azabache cabello se posaban mariposas,
una bata azucena delineaba su figura,
y a pesar de ser ramera parecía Virgen pura.

Y así, con labios temblorosos empezó en sordos murmullos
a confesar todos sus vicios, todos los pecados suyos:
"Perdoname Señor, ya que he pecado," comenzó ella,
y entonces en los cielos relampagué una centella,
mas osada continuó, ya sin miedo, con mas bríos:
"Tienes que perdonarme todos los pecados míos.
Perdoname Señor por ser como las bacantes
que cambian besos por zafiros, cuerpos por diamantes,
por dejar que el deseo me subyugue y sea my dueño,
por ser el fúlgido oro mi mas profundo empeño,
por no tener en mi ser ni principios ni pudor,
por matarle a la inocencia todo su candor,
por vivir sin venerarte, sin seguir tus mandamientos,
por desafiar a los mares, a los cielos y a los vientos,
por robar de otras mujeres tesoros y amores,
por entregarle mi cuerpo a infames pecadores.
¡Oh Señor misericordioso! ¡Oh Señor puro y divino!
Búscame sendero nuevo, búscame recto camino.
Ya no puedo caminar por mi senda tortuosa,
ya no puedo continuar esta vida tenebrosa.
¡Oh te implora, Padre santo, me perdones, ten clemencia!
¡Oh envuélveme en un velo de pureza e inocencia!"

Al terminar su plegaria se alumbró el horizonte,
y los mares y los vientos se calmaron en el monte,
y en su rostro iluminado se esfumó toda su pena
pues sintió ser perdonada como lo fue Magdalena.

- Maria Porta

"Entre el pensamiento y la palabra algo se va muriendo" (Pablo Neruda).

Cuando la nostalgia oprime el alma
y ella llora dolorida, canta y gime el alma.

Cúantos misterios esconde el cofre de los sentimientos
Cúantas sombras oculta el horizonte.
Todos son deseos incoténibles, deseos profundos que socavan
profundas heridas, y surcan uno a los caminos de la vida.

Brotan frutos de amargura, hondas tristezas, aún desconocidas,
cada vez más vividas.

Llora el viento
casi siempre, llora o canta?
Huye dejando incertidumbre y pena
todas mis angustias brotan de la tierra
del profundo abismo de mi soledad.

Quién habita mis delirios?
Danza al son de mis pesares?
Toma todo lo que puedo darte,
consumete en mis profundos placeres
Amor; calma, silencia todos mis pesares.

- Luz Yadira Escobar

Spotlight:
Foreign Language



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Nancy E. Anderson



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Kaveh Askari



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Chris DeRosa



Never Mind the 60's

Spotlight:
Dwayne T. Drayton

Have mercy on	Forgive	Exonerate
Eight track tapes and Afros,	Jim Crow and J.F.K.,	The 14th Amendment and Harlem,
Clinched fists and Marvin Gay,	Sputnik and Mr. Ed,	Hemingway and Meridian,
Bell-bottoms and Peace signs.	Vietnam and The family.	Sellouts and thee.

A Note In a Bottle

What up on one fifty one.
Last night ain't clear
Was we at the Palace or what?
I need a time tunnel
Hook me up.
That tight skirt.
She wanted me?
Remember, I Can't
Hook me up.
I'm
Dirty water down the drain,
I smell like time.
I wuz Zuited.
Did I crash on her dress?

Damn, this headache.
Who bust my lip?
My shirt's ripped
My eye.
What's that ringing?
I's late for work
Fuck it,
I's sick.
Can't make it to the corner
I need some Lovin'
I'm weak,
Come on, Sweet
I need cha'.
151.

Blue

Lollipop suckin', gripping, stickin', and poking
Ain't my thang

All you wanna do- is make me Blue
Your way

I can't make Blue to you like a Jasper
Cause I ain't a Jasper

They have streets named after you
It ain't one-way

I ain't pink- jus' cause I don't think-
Blueing two- at the same time-
Is the right for me to do

The arrow can't go both ways no-more
I know you Blue me- that's truly making me Blue

So what you gonna do Blue

Go for what you know in your red
Stop thinkin' with a wet cat

I Blue- Blueing you cause I Blue You

The Palace

by
Dwayne T. Drayton

You've gotta aspire to be a preacher, a teacher, a comedian, a doctor, a thief, a lawyer, a psychic, a judge, a good liar, a fighter, a writer, a prostitute, a pimp, an alcoholic, a mother-father-sister-brother, and God to sing like Toni Decatur. She was all that. Her voice couldn't carry a note— she didn't need to— she could scream and holler, moan and preach, complain and criticize in a way that can make a person want to get naked and crawl back into their mother's womb. She could sing nowhere else but at The Palace—a fitting room for her demise. A juke joint make out of thin wooden planks and a patched tin roof. A dirt floor that was so hard it was thought of as dusty stone. There were more tables than chairs and neither were sturdy or matched. Liquor was homemade and served in tin cans- for fifty cents. There were no windows, the only door had no hinges- it had to be picked up and moved behind the outhouse daily before the night was to begin. The room was usually packed Sunday through Saturday with back sliding Christians, not yet Christians, and people who didn't give a shit about anything other than their own pleasure. There was always non-stop drinking and playing, day or night. This was Toni's Kingdom come.

The thick smoke made Toni's squint her eyes. She put both hands on her ample hips and slightly leaned forward looking into the heckler's general direction, but not focussing on anyone in particular. She said in a slight Creole- country accent, "It's one thang Toni can't ssssstand — and that's a man who's not a gentleman. Didn't your Daddy teach you how to talk to a lady baaaaby - or do both of y'all need the benefit and experience of one." The crowd began to shuffle with a little laughter.

"Somebody give Toni a fan- you know how you people draw heat- and Toni need to see who she talkin' to."

Big, Black, Bald-headed Jake squeezed through the crowd and handed Toni a fan made of duck feathers- she immediately fanned herself hard and fast, clearing the smoke from around her person.

"Daaaamn, it's a lot of y'all in here." she rubbed her hands up and down the side of her full-figured frame- still holding the fan, "What y'all gonna do wid liddle ol Toni if she don't entertain y'all to y'all's expectations tonight."

The crowd began to retort- *Go ahead girl -Be easy baaaby -take your time girl.*

Looking in the direction of Big Jake- Toni nodded her head a couple of times and said, to the crowd, "Y'all know what to do wid dis baaaby." He brought her out a clear drink still warm from the still and in her usual shot glass. She took a quick sip, wrinkled her forehead and swallowed hard.

With one hand on her hip and all her weight on one leg, she held up the only empty glass in the joint and said, "Toni can't stand a man who ain't thorough- you know what I'm talking 'bout ladies," *You know that's right girl - Mumm Hum.*

"Not you Huuuney?" Pointing at a man sitting up front, his processed hair tied in a ponytail and with his legs crossed, "I'm talking to the real ladies." Jake nervously shuffled back to retrieve the glass.

Be easy girl. Laaawd have mercy.

"You know, ladies", she continued, "I'm sick and ass tired of being sick and ass tired, au dese tired, half-ass men."

Gone head girl - I know what you saying - show you right.

"But I keeps mines even though he the shit that shit rejects."

Tell us about it girl- Be easy girl- Don't be so hard on that man girl ...lest you got one.

"Yeah, Toni got herself a man but he don't do shit for her- Let me tell you 'bout his sorry ass."

Toni's voice slowly blended in smoothly with the playing piano, and together they made a slow, deep, moaning, almost crying, crackling tone.

Clean water flow

To the same place shit goes

*But it stays on the Bottom
Like me to my man.*

*He puts on my rouge with his back hand
But he's a gentle man.
He uses my back to shine his shoes,
But he's my man.*

*His love last to less than ten minutes
but divided into two other women
He's our man.*

Bodies temporarily stopped their sinning and started to swaying to the confessions of the only life more miserable than their miserable own. Fingers were popping and swinging in the air- asses wiggled slowly to the rhythm in their seats, shouting advice between each verse, and offering solace. And there was Toni, baring her blues.

Big Jake would shake his head in contempt at the simple pleasures these people got out of the blues and liquor. He never let liquor touch his lips, but the blues, especially Toni's blues, was another subject all together. Jake usually got his pleasure from making money, and getting people drunk. He watched Toni sing about her pitiful life for years.

He didn't lust for her no more, or even feel sorry for her sorrow. But he more than loved to watch her sing. She had this way of throwing her head back while she fluttered her eyes closed and purring smoothly for a few seconds just before she raised her voice three octaves into a smooth desert tone. It was something about the sultriness her minimal movements while in what seemed to be complete emotional agony.

"If this wasn't so pitiful it would be emotionally moving," Jake said under his breath. "I offered her everything a woman could want," he added in grief. Toni could have been with Jake. He tried to give her more than the world, without asking anything in return. Jake treated her with nothing but respect, and never once tried to dupe her into his bed. He wanted her because of what she represented. Toni always appeared to need somebody- and she would have been perfect for Jake who needed somebody to need

him. With his sleepy hawk eyes he looked at her with disgust. "Sure her man sleeps around, but she's an even bigger ho than he is," he said to a crack in the wall.

Twenty years had passed since he had confessed to Toni how he would dedicate his life to making hers worth living. Look at her sorry ass now. He had wanted to take her out of Pitfall County and lay the world at her feet. He had wanted to present her to God as His most perfect creation and forever acknowledge His infinite wisdom. Instead she was singing her blues in a dirt floor jut joint with a bunch of po' horny drunk niggers grabbing at her ass. "She got what she deserved," he thought.

"Women make no sense. That's why God put them here- to add confusion and conflict to the world," talking to the same crack.

While Toni paused for another drink, the piano player continued to play. He was weak- yielding to the inebriety in the air. Like a newborn canary waiting for puberty he wanted to be heard. He was lonely from the temporary divorce from his decaying partner, he begged for reconciliation- nevertheless, he continued to play. The sound was faint. It was as if he were running into tears, and no one listened. He had his own blues to sing. He had his own lost dreams, his own disappointed lovers- he too had been abused by life and belonged nowhere else, but at The Palace.

A man with a ragged beard was holding Toni down in his lap and feeding her a drink while the crowd hopped and hollered it up. She was kicking her legs and fighting as though she didn't want to be there. She did. She wanted the drink. Afterward, she broke loose and resumed her position next to the piano.

She and the piano player pitied themselves once more

*The best dreams I have is when I fly
But when I wake I wanna cry*

Toni always sounded better when the depression from the alcohol flowed continuously through her veins.

"Sssweet. Sssweeter than sugar and watermelon," Sammy said with his eyes closed as he rocked from side to side.

Sammy was drunk, like everyone else- but he was not like everyone else. He was here nightly to make love to Toni's voice.

His ears would graciously accept each word, each grunt, each moan, and without examining it found the ripest spot in each. He then bit slow and hard- Letting the juices flow down his tongue like a Jamaican water fall- tasting it over and over in his mind- anticipating more. A few strands from the seed got caught between his teeth, so he sucked them out- they mixed gently with the current moving its way down his throat. He wanted to bite it, swallow it, sip it, chew it, gulp it, and admire it all at the same time. To savor the moment wasn't good enough. He took his time and voraciously devoured it well.

*Your joke
Buried me in the nothingness you gave.*

After about his fifth drink, Sammy completely forgot about the wife's constant bitchin', the kids tearing apart the shack they called a house, and being laid off two weeks before. For the moment he could forget about all his problems and overindulge himself into Toni's voice. The music got better after each drink. The plan was to drink and listen until the angels guided his soul to its permanent place in eternity.

*They have streets named after you
They call 'em- one way.*

Sammy hadn't spoken to Toni since she ran off and got married twenty-two years ago. She was nineteen then.

They grew up together like brother and sister, until the painful feelings of adulthood turned playfulness into desire. At fifteen they lost their innocence with each other, and soon after they promised to experience the rest of their life together.

The lies Sammy was incapable of telling Toni- another man told, and enticed Toni away. For years Sammy watched Toni go from man to man. He learned the ways of the world by watching Toni and listening to her songs- and he wanted to understand. Never again did she look in Sammy's light brown eyes. He would have taken her back if only she had come to him. He was still burdened by the love he had for Toni when he decided to marry Melissa. Three children were eventually born and still he had painful, stifled feelings for Toni.

Four hours into the morning- smoke and dust consumed The Palace and overwhelmed the drunkest of the drunks. In groups they staggered outside to continue their sinning under the pitiful stars over Pitfall County.

Big Jake, Toni, and Sammy remained inside. Toni was straddling the piano stool, her head bobbing back and forth while she shuffled, with her foot, the dust on the ground.

There they were, three lost souls in The Palace all aware of the others presence.

Without looking up, Toni asked politely, "Jake, could you please get me some water." There was a slight pause before she continued, "I can't remember the last time I had an ice-cold drink of water. Could you please get it for me, Jake? I don't have the strength to give myself that pleasure."

Jake didn't move. He could see the liquor pouring out of her pores. He just scoffed at her and said, "Why don't you get yo own damned water." His top lip sneered at her when he added, "It makes me sick to my stomach just to look at you- look at the type of woman you've come to be- a common rag."

Toni's head was almost between her legs, and in a deep, heavy whisper, she said, "And what type of a woman would I've been with you Jake? Remember you wanted to own this common rag- so what does that make you?"

She cried out to him again, "Please, Jake!"

But still he wouldn't move to help her. "You make me sick," he said as he moved toward the door.

Neither Big Jake, or Toni, had noticed Sammy leave the room until Sammy bumped into Jake as he was leaving.

Sammy returned, breathing heavy, holding a tall blue glass of ice-cold water, and presented it to Toni. Toni looked at him, not in the eyes, but in the face, and smiled. This was the first time he had ever seen her smile since they were together, and it felt nice to him. Her smile moved Sammy the way her voice had. Then he remembered her blues, Melissa, the children, and a time twenty-two years before. Sammy returned her smile and helped her.

*I entertain the thought of knowing you
soft-pedaling through yesterday.*



"Kiana" B&W Photograph by Joy Christina Kateri DeMatteo

Bebop

Two for one is over,
Gimmie something stronger,
Color it with the Blues.

Brass,
Blast that
treble clef.

Exercise my grove.

Sax,
improvise for me,
repair my soul.

Bass,
Check out the huchie with the big onion,
Make the earth quake.

Tell that bebop to keep blowin'.

Bibi,
teach my lady
to run her fingers over me.

Jam
yo scale
Scratchin' cats.

Color
My highs and lows
With your sound.

- Dwayne T. Drayton

The Safe Light of Morning

by
Tom Smith

It is common for people with severe lung disease to wake in the middle of the night, very short of breath. Anyone who has ever "had the wind knocked out of them", understands the panic of fighting for air when you cannot breathe.

Deep in the night,
in the hush and peace
of a world asleep,
comes creeping once more
through darkened halls,
some evil thing on
nightly rounds to
steal my breath from me.

Finding me now with soft embrace
enveloping, pulling me
deeper down
in a spell the specter weaves
to lull me into
a dreamland dance
and pull the breath from me.

My will begins to follow
but then, somewhere deep
in the shelter place that
hides me when I sleep,
the sentinel cries
"Hold out! Don't go!
It already has
most of your breath
and part of your soul."

Then we struggle, grim wrestlers
in unsafe night,
until arm-weary and tired
somewhere before dawn
I rouse, wild with fear
that I'll lose this time,
for now it's late
and my breath is gone.

Desperate for the air I
fight to steal back,
with bulging veins
and straining heart,
and begin to win,
and begin to breathe,
and pull my soul
back home to me.

And then, falling back
in weary victory
in a troubled bed,
I pass in wary drowse
through the fading night,
while waiting the signal
of haven again
in the welcome window-light.



"Beyond the Barrowlands" Computer Art by Mark Jette'

Tomorrow Never Came

by

Joanie Cooper

death is a thief who robs randomly without a motive. The telephone rang, startling me as if someone had brushed up against me with a lit cigarette. In a tired voice, Rick's mother said, "Ricky is asking to see you. Can you come quickly?"

"I'm on my way," I said, as my eyes focused on the gold ring that held my car keys.

It began to drizzle. I turned on the headlights and windshield wipers. My thoughts were perplexed like a broken clock suspending time between the past and the present, drifting back to when I first met Rick in junior high school.

He rode into the park popping a wheely on a black Huffy ten speed. He fell spread eagle on the cross bar and slammed into the Jungle Gym. I knew we were meant to be friends. He was the comedian and I was his best audience.

My hands gripped the steering wheel while my stomach tightened. I thought about telling him how his presence has always calmed me like being lost and seeing a familiar face in a crowd of strangers. I stepped on the accelerator, not wanting to waste any time.

I recalled our first date in high school. He was dressed in a black leather jacket and tie. He appeared to be so tall and handsome that night. His dark, shiny, shoulder-length hair accentuated his deep blue eyes. His large and athletic frame didn't hide his soft and gentle features.

I came to a screeching halt, just missing the car in front of me. The horror of reality hit me like the feeling of wanting to wake up from a nightmare, only I wasn't dreaming. The light turned green and I cautiously resumed my journey.

Pictures of parties, holidays and wild roadtrips in the middle of the night were flashing in my mind like a kaleidoscope in fast motion. My heart was a dam on the verge of breaking, gushing a river of tears. I pulled into the parking lot armed with a twenty year history of our friendship. I felt the urgent need to tell him of the significant role he had played in my life.

I walked steadily down the spotless and disinfected corridor, passing faceless figures dressed in white. The elevator doors opened. "Eight, please," I whispered to a blurred being in the corner. Leaning my head back, I thought of last year's James Taylor concert we attended in celebration of his remission. He grabbed my hand, and said with a smile, "Only the good die young. My chances of beating this are pretty damn good, don't you think?"

The elevator doors opened. I walked down the hallway, passing the nurse's station, to room 826, which had a sign that read "Please Enter Quietly". I pressed the silver handle and moved in slowly, closing out the rest of the world behind me. The hour of dusk dimly lit the room through open blinds. I could hear his labored breathing over the gentle hum of the silicone bed. His sister, Donna, was at his side reading a bible. She looked up through hurtful eyes and smiled, then turned away toward the window.

Propped upright with pillows, he sat clutching the oxygen mask with one hand against his ashen and drawn face. His eyes were crystal clear as he concentrated, fixated on each breath. He looked over at me and closed his eyes as he lifted his other hand. I took his into mine and pulled him close to my heart, "How ya doin', Ricky?" I said softly, while caressing his shoulder. Rick nodded and without a word I was aware of his fear as well as his determination to live.

I stayed by his side a few hours that evening, searching for the right words to comfort him. I stood by and watched his mother and sisters scrambling for better pillows and more blankets, and checking the morphine dispenser. I wanted to tell him that it was okay to let go and that we would be together again some day. Instead, I leaned forward, kissed his cheek, and said, "I love you, Rick. I'll see ya tomorrow, okay?" He forced a smile as I turned to walk out of the room. I looked back and he seemed as if he wanted, needed, to say something to me. I waited for a moment and waved goodbye. Rick died that night at 4:30 a.m.



"Everett and I" Acrylic Painting by Ginevra

The Ball

I will never love again
love is hopeless pain,
understanding, caring
done all in vain,
love can kill.....
as swift as any blade
in the wonderful game
we call life,
love may be stronger than,
HATE.....
but which is more deadly
in the game,
love is an illusion
we use as a disguise
in the masquerade ball,
the guest list is long
not everyone is strong,
to avoid the temptation,
the sirens call.....
to fall in love and have it all,
but as the clock strikes twelve
and reality falls,
heavy on our hearts
like a funeral pall,
the hologram of life
grandeur of it all,
vanishes once more
until invitations go out,
to announce the next ball.

- Faith

Words

Words from everywhere
cut out of magazines and newspapers.
Paste them on colored construction paper,
and all of your secret dreams and desires
are revealed.

The face that you show to the world
is cool, calm and serene, but
the words that you embrace are
red-hot, icy-cool, and black,
black with desire. Desires that you consume
with your tight lips and closed eyelids.

Now that you know
you are being watched,
the game is over.
So now you carefully pick,
chew, and swallow.

- Jan Parker

Secrets

by
Dianne L. Zeller

The room was cool, and comfortable. The only light that illuminated the room was a beam of early morning sunshine. I was laying in my warm, cozy bed trying to count the dust particles dancing in the beam of life. I could smell coffee brewing and hear Mama singing the "Good Morning Song", and the rustling of Bumpa's newspaper. It was Shabbos, a day of pride and ritual in my little family. My family, by the time I was nine, consisted of myself, and my Grandparents.

My senses were invaded with childlike visions of the last few days and my best friend Elena Gonzalez. As I stretched like a lazy cat, my thoughts turned to Elena and our forbidden secrets. I tried very hard to remember her teachings, and the words I were to remember. With my eyes tightly closed, and body very still, I could envision the statue of a gentle woman and her child, a lovely necklace made of seeds, and a table with white, fat candles. I could hear Elena's voice evoking secret words that captured my imagination. Suddenly, I felt the tender touch of Mama and heard her sweet voice announce of the day's upcoming agenda.

"Good morning Dianne, hurry up and get dressed. Bumpa is ready and is waiting for us to have breakfast together." She said as she was busily setting out my clothes. Her voice startled me out of my reverie, and my guilty thoughts put me into motion quickly. Perhaps if I was getting dressed she wouldn't notice my blushing or read my thoughts.

Sitting at breakfast was a painful affair, as I was convinced that my preoccupation would be discovered and elicit a barrage of questions. So I ate quickly and silently. Bumpa was dressed in his finest suit, and Mama was in her green eyelet dress with matching shoes. I was in a dress that had a white pinafore and matching green eyelet. We were dressed to go to Saturday morning services. Both Mama and Bumpa noticed my pensive mood. Bumpa even remarked, "Princess, are you still dancing with the Sandman? You're so quiet and somber this morning."

I gingerly replied, "I'm still tired from last night. Maybe I should stay home and go back to bed."

His reply was no surprise to me, "No, we have to go to Temple, but you can take a nap with me while Cantor Glantz is singing."

We all chuckled, and finished our breakfast with discussions of what else we were going to do for the weekend. I couldn't go into

detail about my plans with Elena lest my secret get out. So I just listened and ate.

As we made our way to the car, we saw Elena at her front door. I glanced nervously in her direction, as my family and her exchanged greetings. She gave me a knowing look and winked at me, which made me blush hurriedly out the door.

In our car I was told that today's services would be very special because Bumpa was invited to read from the Torah and give the sermon to the congregation. Mama was especially delighted about Bumpa's honor, as she was always so proud of the man she loved so dearly.

At Temple we took our seats which were in the front row, and the first three seats from the aisle. This was a position of honor, and everyone in the congregation was aware of our status. We were the "Singer" family, co-founders of the first temple in Miami, Florida. Bumpa was considered to be an important member of our congregation, as he was the first founder of the Temple. Even the Rabbi would ask for Bumpa's opinion on religious matters, and the congregation always deferred to his opinions.

My Bumpa was a tall, handsome man, he looked even taller and more handsome to me that day. The Rabbi called Bumpa up to the pulpit, and in his rich baritone voice, my Bumpa began to read the Torah. Even though I didn't understand the words he was saying, I knew he was wonderful. The congregation thought so, too. Some people were reading along with him, some were nodding their heads in agreement, and others seemed to be memorized by him.

After several amens, the Rabbi then reintroduced Bumpa and told them that he would deliver the sermon. Again my Bumpa took the pulpit, and again my heart swelled with pride. His powerful voice began to ring in the subject of his sermon.

"Should we as victims of intolerance be ourselves intolerant? Should we cast judgment against differences as it has been passed on us? Or should we be enlightened and tolerant of those that are not like us? What is the definition of a true Jew?"

This brought the congregation into a riveting gaze and captured everyone's attention. And this I understood, this topic had my total interest. Then, it dawned on me that this subject was hitting too close to home. Did he hear me at Elena's, or could he read the secret of my mind? I was very worried, and yet, somewhat relieved. As

I was sure my secret was out and that he was going to expose me as the blaspheme that I was. I knew that I would have to explain myself, and had better do so quickly. I was found out.

Every Saturday, after services, my family had a ritual. It was to go to the local Deli and get our lunch to take home, to our guests and enjoy the rest of the Sabbath with family and friends. It was not only a ritual, but a treat for a well-behaved young lady. The gifts of wonderful food at the deli were used as a reward for my good grades of the week, the clean room, and respectful manners that were expected of me. But on that day I didn't feel so deserving and very respectful. I felt as if I were cheating. I thought that I had betrayed the ones I loved, and the religion that they had educated me in.

Uncle Saul's deli was a wonderment of smells, tastes, sites, and conversation. There were two large wooden pickle barrels guarding the entrance to this magical place. The wooden floor was stained with splashed of pickle brine, and littered with sawdust. The left side of the room had white deli cases stuffed with Jewish fare, like pickled herring in sour cream, golden chubs, and lox that when sliced looked like ribbon candy that Mama and I made. The left side of the room had the aroma of freshly baked bagels, rugelah, and honey cakes wafting under your nose with an enticing aroma. But, best of all, in the back of the store were huge cases that were as tall as Bumpa that held the true treasures of every Jewish princess. There were large bricks of cream cheese, some plain and with chives and some with vegetables. Also, large bricks of butter, both sweet and salted. Best of all, there were large bricks of Halavah. Halavah is a candy made of sesame seeds, honey, and sometimes marbled with chocolate. If Uncle Saul liked you he would stop all business and get down to business of giving you a free hunk of Halavah. He would slide open the glass doors and wield a huge ominous looking knife. Then he would look at which kind your mouth would be watering for, and quickly slice off a piece that would be just big enough for you to hold. As he wrapped your candy in deli paper, he would ask in a jovial thick Yiddish accent, "Have you been a good little Maidela today?" Then he would ceremoniously hand you your reward. But that day no one noticed me, the focus was on Bumpa, and his riveting sermon. And frankly I was not in the Halavah eating mood. I too was preoccupied by my grandfather's words, and the task ahead of me.

Later on that day, after our company had left, I knew that my time had come to confess my sins. Pensively, I asked to talk to my Grandparents. By the seriousness of my tone, we naturally gravitated to the hub of our family discussions, the dining room table. I began my confession with a question, a habit that has

remained with me to this day.

"Bumpa, did you really mean what you said about being tolerant of other people's differences? I mean, is it okay to be Catholic, and to have Catholic friends. . . is it okay to know about their religion?" By this time, my questions were being asked through a watershed of tears and hiccups. I was so upset that I didn't even notice that I was enveloped in his arms and Mama was wiping away my tears with her rose-scented linen handkerchief. There was a long, painful silence. As I anxiously awaited his answer, I desperately tried to catch my breath.

Slowly, he began his answer, "Of course, Princess. If we want to eliminate prejudice in our world, we have to educate ourselves about differences of race, religion, and creed. Prejudice is nothing more than fear and ignorance. Why do you ask? What has my princess upset?"

Now my tears really began to flow, stinging my already aching eyes, staining my blushing cheeks. I slowly told my beloved Jewish family about how I betrayed them. That Elena taught me how to say the rosary, to bless myself by doing the sign of the cross, and to pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I told them how the Blessed Virgin Mary looked like she loved me, she had such a sweet smile and loving eyes. Just like Mama would look at me. That the Catholics had to light candles every night, instead of just Friday nights, and holidays.

After my purge of sins, I was expecting to hear those dreaded words, "I'm so disappointed in you, Dianne." Instead, I saw and heard my Bumpa's approval, with Mama nodding her head in agreement. Bumpa explained to me that I had done nothing to be ashamed of, nor something to keep secret. He then said something that I will never forget, and that I try to live by, and have hopefully passed on to my two sons.

"Religion is a private matter between you and your maker. We are all God's children, and he loves us no matter what our color or religious beliefs. God would want us to know how to pray, and that there is no right or wrong way to say your prayers, as long as your prayers are said."

This day has had and will continue to have a profound effect on my life. As I grew up in very intolerant times, and have fought for more tolerance in this world. I truly believe in what Bumpa told me that day, and sincerely wish that the hate mongers of the world had my Bumpa as their guide into tolerance. Bumpa was truly a holy man, a man of God.

Jasmine

by
Cheryl Bringas

Once again you have invaded my dreams. Your presence engulfed my emotions in a cloak of warm pressure.

There I lay, bound by your love and helpless with longing. The pound of my racing heart broke the silence as it beat your name over and over again.

I felt your breath in my ear and your whispered words enraged my senses. My entire being burned with a need that only you could fill.

Your eyes pierced my soul and your kiss branded your name on my heart. Resistance nonexistent, I surrendered to the fire and soared through a conflagration of passionate desires that no other but you could ever make me feel.

Your presence surrounded me and filled me, and yet I yearned to have

you closer still. Your touch sent me higher and higher, and my flesh burned hotter and hotter until I lost all control, and then suddenly our souls were joined. I screamed your name and the sound echoed loudly in the darkness.

Then, as you held me tight in your sleep, you smiled and kissed my hair. I snuggled closer, secure in your warmth. I knew I had found all the happiness I could ever hope to feel.

Moments later, reality returned. With all the violent ferocity of lightning, it slammed into my world with the morning light. I was jolted awake to find myself shivering and alone.

You were gone. You were never here. It was only a hallucination of my heart, and I cried — unable to comprehend an existence without you.

Little Girl Lost

I had you once.

I never should have let go of you.
You never should have separated from me.

You were me and I was you.

You taught me how to be free.
I taught you how to trust.

We shouldn't have been so careless.

You never should have asked him.
I never should have stayed there.

Now the damage is done.

I can no longer trust.
You can no longer be free.

Now, you're you and I am me.

Totally separate and no longer as one.
One still barely alive, the other one dead.

I had you once.

You never should have separated from me.
I never should have let go of you.

Little girl lost!

- Dania Rodriguez



"Innocent Fear" Oil & Enamel by Donald G. Schallick

The Daily Routine

by

Danae E. Bergman

She sits by a stove filled with burning carbon,
warming her gentle hands,

Imagining the stove is her husband filling her with
warmth. There is a shy glow on her tender face—
memories of an unforbidden night— when their bodies
had strength to melt lumps of snow in the windiest
blizzard of all.

She tosses her hair to the other side and strips to just
a red negligee, awaiting her husband's arrival— like a
child waiting for dessert.

Her wait becomes longing and she's tempted to
look in the mirror.

Damn mirror— can't keep a secret and spills out the
hurting truth:

She's a flower at the end of her journey—with petals
too damaged to even use as bookmarks.
With tears she puts on her clothes and sits back by the
stove.

Her gentle hands now seem rough— You can see the
burned spots stained on her skin:

All those years of trying to keep warm.

Her thoughts are paralyzed— and what follows is
the daily routine.

Her husband storms in with a bottle of rum, yelling
"Let's Celebrate."



"Unconditional Faith" Pencil Drawing by Carol DeNunzio

Why Eve Ate The Apple

by

Shane A. McCammon

for someone who has been raised on meat, it isn't easy to wake up one morning and decide to become a vegetarian. But when I thought of all the things beef raisers do to meat, I was quickly appalled at the notion of being a meat-eater. All of my friends were attempting to become vegetarian, so I thought "why not? It's a very chic thing to do. Very European and sophisticated." On top of all these reasons, there was the deadly outbreak of E. coli running rampant through western Washington, caused by tainted meat. These reasons started a chain reaction that led to self-torture.

In the beginning, it was easy. I devoured fruits and vegetables like a snake eating a rat. Whenever my friends and I went to a restaurant, we always ordered salads. Everything was great, until one night. My friends and I decided to go and eat at the Hungry Lumberjack Cafe. We all ordered the usual; salad, coke, maybe some fried zucchini if we were in a daring mood. Scott was last to order. When he thought we weren't listening, he whispered to the gum-chewing waitress that he wanted a burger. The curtain of silence that fell after that fateful decision dropped simultaneously with our jaws. Scott's eyes quickly darted to the floor in a feeble attempt to escape our damning stares. When the waitress bounced away from our table, Brian, sitting next to Scott, tapped Scott's shoulder. "What do you think you're doing? You don't really want that burger. Just think about where it came from, how it got here, what they did with it once it got here! You know what they do with it, don't you? What about E. Coli?! I can't believe you," Brian argued. It was a desperate attempt by Brian and it fell on deaf ears. The waitress returned with our salads, the epitome of health, albeit the Italian dressing, and she also brought Scott's burger. There it was. Meat. Right before our deprived, crazed eyes. As it sat upon the toasted sesame bun, it beckoned me to partake of its delicious juices, to rip through it like a Neanderthal. I looked shamefully down, my eyes resting on the salad placed before me. I hesitantly picked up my fork and gently pressed the prongs through a cherry

tomato.

After a few months, my mother got hysterical and thought I was going to die if I didn't get some protein. So she ran to the nearest GNC and bought me some supplements. I faithfully took the pills and continued to stick to my "torture" as I later referred to it. One by one, my friends began partaking of the forbidden juices. I was determined to "beat the meat", especially since my father teased me, saying I couldn't do it. So every night, I sat at the kitchen table and reluctantly gobbled up salad and vegetarian spaghetti, while my family feasted on roast beef, pork chops, chicken breasts, and salmon. It seemed that they were having the best meals of their lives.

One night, I awoke from a sound sleep. My bedroom window was slightly ajar, allowing a cold breeze to warm itself in my 85 degree room. I rolled out of the bed and stumbled onto the cold tile of the bathroom. As I walked back to my bedroom, a voice pierced the darkness. "Eat meat! Eat meat! Eat meat!" It was relentless. I couldn't handle it anymore. I ran down the carpeted stairs, skipping three at a time. I ran across the arctic linoleum of our kitchen and lurched for the refrigerator door, tearing it open. Right at eye level, illuminated by fluorescent light, were the leftovers from my family's dinner. Barbecued spare ribs laid upon the plate like a sacrificial lamb upon an altar. I ripped the plastic wrap off the plate, exposing the ribs in full nakedness. I ceremoniously lifted a rack of ribs from the swamp of grease. "Beat the meat" echoed in my throbbing head. I ignored it as I savagely tore the cold meat from its bone with my teeth. I smiled as the mixture of barbecue sauce and grease trickled down my chin.

When I awoke from the sound sleep that fateful night, I was resurrected. Resurrected from stupidity. Resurrected from so-called sophistication. And most of all, resurrected from a lifetime of cherry tomatoes, fried zucchini, and salads drowning in Italian dressing.



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Stacy Rogers

A Celebration of Memories

by

Dianne L. Zeller

as I awaken from a fretful sleep, my mind focuses on the date and day. Today is a day to remember, reflect and rejoice.

The morning sky is clear and blue; there is a slight breeze rustling the palms; butterflies are dancing lazily over the garden. It looks like a special summer day outside. But in my mind, sitting in my room, I feel an air of sadness. The rest of my family is up and about, seemingly unaware of my melancholy, and why today is special.

My husband coaxes me out of our room with loving and reassuring words, and leads me to our living room. On the piano sits a yellow rose in a delicate hand blown bud vase, beside it is a golden oval frame. Nestled inside is a photograph of a woman standing; she has perfectly coifed auburn hair, bright brown eyes, and a peaches and cream complexion. She is wearing an elegant black-beaded evening gown that accentuates her porcelain skin. Her brilliant brown eyes sparkle enough to rival the large diamond poised on her right hand. The woman's precisely manicured hands are resting gently upon a white upholstered chair. Her posture is straight and correct, almost queenly. The royal line of her body is accentuated by the white satin drapes hanging in the background. However, the most striking feature in this portrait is the woman's exquisite smile. It warms the entire room.

As I am mesmerized by that feeling of warmth, my husband brings me back from my reverie with a gentle hug. We sit together and realize that this is how we will celebrate this woman. This is how we will always remember her, this is how she still warms our hearts.

Happy Birthday, Mama.

Eyes Of A Mother

by

Monique Laclé

I went to the woods when my mother died, to a thicket of blackberry brambles shut off from the rest of the world. When the preacher came to find me, I pressed my face deep into the thorns and was still as stone. Hide for long enough, I thought, and the world would return to normal. The preacher would stop calling my name, and my mother would come home.

My mother had been ill with multiple sclerosis for twelve years of her life. My four brothers and I lived in constant fear of not knowing when my mother was going to pass away. Then, one September day in 1984 it happened: mother's heart stopped.

I hid in the woods for hours, thinking about how, suddenly, everything had changed. Without a mother, I had no compass, no one to guide me over the unfamiliar ground between the child and the woman. Who would find the forgotten places? Who would light the candles by my beside at night? I clenched my eyes and wished the world away.

A month later, on a cold icy morning with low cloudy skies, Cherise pulled me aside in church and asked if I would like to go hiking next Saturday. Cherise was the choir director and head of the Sunday school program. With a mischievous manner, she would return from hiking trips with the tales that held us spellbound. To a thirteen year old who had just lost her mom, this young woman was a genuine hero.

And so it began, the first of countless days afield. We would find a fallen oak on which to perch and scrape the leaves underfoot. I can still see Cherise sitting motionless on a tree trunk, eyes trimmed with the shadow of sleep and face rough with a half-day's grit. She'd point to the trees overhead, and my eyes would follow.

"There," she said, "in the crook above the second branch. See the knot? The knot has eyes."

The woods were an open book, and Cherise was my teacher. Once a bushytail squirrel skittered across the carpet of dead leaves in front of us and sped up a tree. We stalked to the other side of the oak where the squirrel remained riveted to the trunk. I believed I'd just witnessed one of the natural wonders of the world.

One winter morning as we were walking along, Cherise suddenly knelt beside a ribbon of pockmarks in the snow.

"Look," she said, "a fox was here. His tracks are narrower than a dog's, and he walks in a straight line. See how he puts one foot in front of the other?"

I studied the prints, four oblong pads topped with claw marks. The tracks crossed a rutted farm road, passed a small gully and disappeared into a fallow field. We followed the trail to a little nest, where we saw blood stained snow kicked up in a struggle. As we left the field, I felt a strange kinship with the fox. I realized, in the life chain of nature, man is only one of many hunters.

From bear in the Great Smoky Mountains to deer in the Uwharries, from half-day jaunts to four day adventures, we hiked North Carolina from end to end. In time, the woods became a place of peace and not escape. In time I lost my fear of the woods at night, and Cherise no longer walked with me to stands a half-mile into the dark forest. As one thing led to another, Cherise and I no longer hiked together. Now a hundred miles lie between my home and the woman who taught me how to hike.

I have grown in the woods, and I have learned not to measure a day in the field by the weight of a bird in the hand. There are better ways to judge those days: by the squeal of wood ducks at dusk, the feel of crunching frost underfoot, the breathless few moments before a dappled fawn fades forever into memory.

Perhaps, Cherise only finished what my mother started, or perhaps she was a landmark on a larger trail, one stalworth oak at a fork in the path. Now, Cherise has a daughter of her own, and the little girl in me is envious of the days they are destined to share afield.

I doubt if I could find the squirrel woods today. Still, when the autumn woods begin to lure me from my home, I can still see Cherise motionless on a fallen tree trunk, and I still follow her gaze into the branches for the eyes hidden there. Sometimes I find that bushytail. Other times I find the eyes of a lost young girl. And sometimes, some very special times, I find the eyes of a mother.

Home Care Versus Day Care

by

Ruth E. Montalvo

I always praise myself on being a good, loving mother. Making difficult decisions is something I had to learn to do when my daughter was born premature and almost died. I was forced to put her in a special school when she was one year old, but that decision was easy to make because she needed the intensive therapy and special care that the Easter Seal school had to offer. When I had my second child, I had the opportunity to spend quality time with him. I enjoyed the fun part of having an infant at home. I had become so attached to my son that when I decided to go back to school, I thought that it was going to be impossible to leave my son in a day care school, but it was something that I had to do. Now I know the difference between home care and day care and when I compare these two types of care, I consider safety, psychological adjustment for the child, and the cost for these services.

When I think of day care school, I think of a safe place to leave my son. I think of a happy environment surrounded by educated and responsible adults. It could be that I am one of the lucky people, who have found a good place to leave my child or that I looked hard and carefully for the kind of place I wanted for my child, but according to James M. Henslin, a sociologist, the reality is that each year between eight hundred to nine hundred children are sexually abused at about one hundred day care centers. These children are not only physically abused, but they also suffer irreparable mental damage.

On the other hand, home care is supposed to be safe. The child is supposed to be loved and cared for in the best possible way because the mother or father is the one at home with him, but in some of the cases the child is physically abused by the parent. The risk of a child being abused at home is high, and the adjustment to this type of situation is difficult, but the child will always feel safer at home.

Starting in day care can be one of the most difficult transitions a child can go through. It is the first time the child is away from his parents. It is equally painful for the child to be separated from the mother as it is for the mother to be separated from the child. For example, as soon as the child realizes that the mother is about to leave, he will begin to cry, and as a result, the mother begins to feel guilty and anxious for leaving the child so upset or for not spending

enough time with him. Eventually, mother and child will overcome this feeling of loss and adjust to the new situation.

In contrast, taking care of your child at home will not need any adjustment for the child or the parent, but it can cause many problems. For instance, the child can become overprotected, shy and withdrawn. He can have problems adjusting to school life and can develop social problems. This is one of the reasons why many mothers who do not work enroll their three and four year olds in day care. These mothers want their kids to experience school life at this age to avoid problems of adjustment and prepare them for kindergarten. But to be able to enroll the child in private day care, the parent will have to pay tuition.

One of the biggest problems the parent confronts when she is looking for a good day care is the high cost of tuition. The normal rate is eighty dollars a week for infants and sixty dollars a week for children two through five years old. These schools also charge for absent days and half of the tuition for vacation weeks. If a child is absent more than two weeks, his place can be given away to another child. The child's name will be put on a waiting list and the parent will have to pay a penalty fee.

On the other hand, taking care of a child at home does not cost any money. Lunch money is not a consideration because the mother will prepare the food at home and will make sure that the child is eating right. The parent will not have to spend extra money on school clothes either.

It is difficult to choose which method of care is best or most appropriate. Some people are lucky enough to find what is best for them and to make a right decision. Some others are not and they have to regret this decision for the rest of their life. The sad part of this is that the one most affected is the one who cannot defend himself: the child. Children are still being abused today and this nightmare is not going to stop. The solution to this problem is hard to find. Organizations in charge of solving this problem, like H.R.S. and Children Medical Services or C.M.S., are corrupted and they work badly and slowly. Children are being abused and neglected at day cares and it is distressful to see that there is often little that we can do to help.

The Reunion

Remember Old Spotty she said to me...
an blowin' bubbles through a spool?
Breakin' my arm..."Don't climb a willow tree"
and Grandpa actin' a fool.

Ah damn roosters crowin' at sunrise
and Grandpa's sweet by and by off-key tunes.
Eggs, country ham, n' homemade biscuits
stuck to our ribs till noon!

Oh and when the wasps stung my face
and I swelled so round my eyes.
Grandpa said I looked like Jacqueline Kennedy
or the calf, he couldn't quite decide.
Oh, and mowin' hay in mid-July
Grandpa gave us such a shock
crowed Aah Choo...so loud the echos flew
and ricocheted off the rocks!

Pickin' blackberries in the thicket,
playing war and apple fights.

Sharin' cane poles at the blue hole.
Catchin' lightning bugs at night.

Oh, remember the Carriage House
those Union bridles from the war?

God wouldn't you love to have them
and who got the Captain's sword???

- Nona Rauch

The North and The South

Northern people are different! If you are ever tempted
to become one-Reconsider!

Northern people are too organized! They get engaged and
plan for retirement in the same week!

Southern folks are more laid back. Their blood is thinner.
If it ain't broke, They don't fix it!

Northern people have budgets, savings and pension plans.
They squirrel away acorns for rainy days.

Southern folks have style. They move really slowly and
kind of shuffle their feet. They sip a little Southern Comfort
and cook-up southern fried chicken. They like to just "sit
a spell".

Northern people have seasons! Their seasons have seasons!
They have hunting season, fishing season, planting season,
growing season and of course,(snap those beans) canning season!

Southern folks are basically plain folks, "just gittin' by".
Scarlett O'Hara's missing from the veranda, but not forgotten.
"The South's gona' rise again!" (But not today...it's too hot.)

- Nona Rauch



"Coming or Going" Pencil Drawing





"the Toilet Seat" Pencil Drawing

ht:
edonia



"Last Night's Dinner" Pencil Drawing

Spotlight:
Vivian Valvezan

Mother Glory

She's careless because she's tired.
 She doesn't mean to ignore the life
 outside her window.
 The children play hopscotch and
 draw smiley faces on the sidewalk
 with colored chalk, their bicycles
 abandoned on the lawn.
 It's a beautiful day.
 All she sees is the pain she feels within.
 No one can convince her to let it heal.
 She can't convince herself.
 So, she sits,
 her chin cupped lightly by her hand,
 looking out of her window.
 Trying to find a reason to enjoy
 a beautiful day.

in transit

the strongest wind blew through my back door,
 whistling and calling my name.
 if you follow me you will go places
 you have never seen.
 do i follow, or let it be?
 it surrounds me, beckoning.
 i let the past slip through my fingers
 and i crawled aimlessly.
 it touched my fear and held my laughter
 and explained it all to me.
 had i've known it before,
 would i've changed?
 would i've done it differently?

it left me in the darkness, warm,
 with the secrets of a lost child-
 who knew it was all so simple.

Rhyme on a Rampage

Crissy is in a hissy to have an affair
so she can be debonair
and hide from her mother the lover
she knows will not go far without her.

Tall trees they hide behind so no one can see,
how they are kind to one another and want to be free.
The lover knows no other, as sad as it can be,
because he envies Crissy's other but knows it cannot be.

But to his surprise,
before his eyes,
Crissy decides enough is enough
and feels it's time to be tough.
She will tell her mother and the other
about the lover
and run to have fun
in front of the sun.

So now the mother and the other
know about the lover and that the lover can't be beat.
But to the lover's fright, Crissy might cheat!

For Crissy is a sissy,
who was in a hissy,
afraid of her mother
and unhappy with the other.

Now her lover is the other and he will see,
Crissy will be in a hissy to have a lover,
and another,
and another,
till all her lovers want to become her other.

Poor Crissy's other
who was her first lover
never knew the score.
He loved her and loved her and even gave her more.

Now Crissy is old
and the other with his heart of gold
left when he had the chance,
without even a second glance.
Her lovers up and left
when they got what they came to get.

So Crissy who was in a hissy,
and no longer is a young missy
is forever in regret.
Because her lover
who became her other
won't ever come back,
and never will forget.

Spotlight:
Vivian Valvezan



"Bloom" Pencil Drawing by David Stiffler

Life Inside A Ping Pong Ball

Secluded...
Peaceful...
Secure...
Boring...
OW! OW! OW! OW! OW!...
One serving zero.

- Michael Thomas McHale

There's good hot coffee
in the polished chrome pot.

Super-detecto percolator
Automatic Mr. Caffeine
Stream-lined aerodynamic
Fresh-ground Columbian bean
Brewing machine.

non-stop
quick-drip
filter-flo
Cup a joe to go
Please.

- Anthony D'Agostino

...But You Don't Even Know Me

by

Joseph Persico

It was a typically steamy summer night in Key West. Only the slightest breeze could be heard rustling the leaves above us as we walked the dimly lit street leading back to our hotel, the last leg of a pleasant evening spent with friends sharing music, laughter, and more than a few jovial afterthoughts about the past three days. This was to be the final night of a long weekend at this picturesque seaside resort.

I felt blanketed by a sense of peacefulness and good will. How does one convey such a feeling with words? Perhaps I may liken it to returning home at the end of a blistering winter day to be welcomed by the rising steam from a boiling kettle of chicken soup. Thoughts of restful dreams and an early morning start home lay only steps away.

As we neared our destination, still engrossed in silly chatter, we barely noticed the big white car appearing in the distance. Its headlights, the sparkling eyes of a prowling tiger, slowly ascending in our direction. The pace of the tiger's progression is oddly cautious, as if careful not to disrupt the silence of the surrounding night.

When the driver's face fell into view, I felt struck by the sense that he appeared to be looking right through me. His dark, piercing eyes shadowed by a strong brow, projected depth and intensity. His glistening, mocha colored arm rested pensively on the window ledge, creating an aura of certain beckoning. Was I just another invisible stranger traversing his path? I'm not sure, for eyes as expressive as this are undoubtedly begging to be held captive by the magnetism rapidly escalating between us.

Still sheathed in my glow of contentedness, I felt the muscle of my face mildly contract, producing a warm and acknowledging smile. For one glorious moment, time stood still. As I anticipated his equally cunning expression in return, I could feel the chills of passion quickly enveloping my entire body. Alas, what followed would instead take me entirely by surprise, a rebuttal so furious the repercussions haunted me for months to come.

"MUTHA FUCKIN' FAGGOT MUTHA FUCKA!"

In an instant, the expectation of spiritual bonding was grotesquely replaced by the ugly head of humiliation. The manifested itself as a hatred so fierce, I can only liken the rage in his eyes to the flames belching from the mouth of the imaginary dragon in a childhood fable. The words spit from his soul to the stream of venom released by the rattlesnake about to close in on his kill. As the adrenalin raced through my veins, I could feel the surface of my skin becoming wet with the horror of what appeared to be the inevitable. Surely this isn't really happening!

"YOU MUTHA FUCKIN' FAGGOT SON OF A BITCH!"

Every letter, every word, every last syllable of his assail, a rhythmic swipe of the flailing dagger, tearing into the very fabric of my being.

I know, this is just another cruel hoax staged by the mischievous Mr. Sandman. Things like this don't really happen to people like me; it would defy logic. A gesture propelled by love cannot be rebuffed by a gesture fueled with



"Keep Cool and Be Gay" B&W Photograph by Cigi LaValle Foland

hate.

"Sandman, Sandman I command you, retrieve me from this evil prank at once!"

Suddenly the tree bearing the fruit of tenderness, compassion and humility, shriveled before me. Its bounty now lay on the ground, the stench of helplessness rising from its rotting flesh now filling the air.

"Sandman. Do you hear me, Mr. Sandman?"

Left to occupy the place of this grand old tree, only the hollowed, lifeless trunk of despair. A maggot named Bigotry laughed fiendishly in my face, standing proudly, triumphant once again in his mission to repress, salivating over the carcass of his kill.

A moment encapsulated in time, forever to remain cloaked in the dense fog of uncertainty.

I never got to know you, man in the big white car. Do I hate you? Should I hate you? No. I refuse! For the unwelcome tenant of hatred would occupy precious space in my life, space too precious to sublet to the most putrid of human emotions. I can only pray for you, in the hope that you may one day drink of the cool water that fills the flask of kindness and humanity. For it will be then, and only then, that you might squelch the fires that burn deep within your gut.

Had you taken the time to understand me, you could have realized that I am a warm and sensitive spirit; never meaning anyone harm. But instead you chose the path of negative direction, a path which will only lead you to self hatred and, ultimately, self destruction.

What hurts the most, man in the big white car, is that you don't even know me.



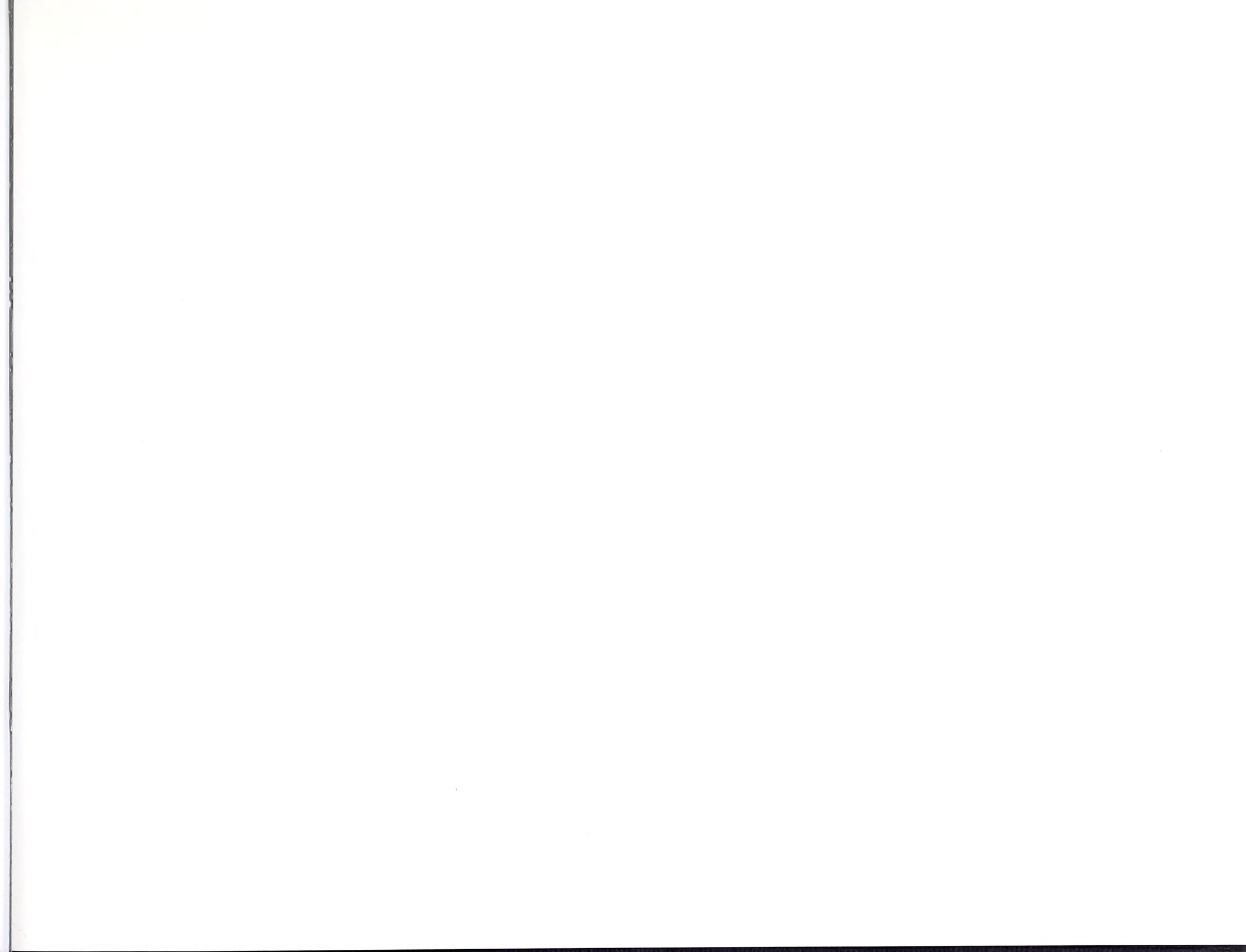
"Horsey, Horsey, Horsey" B&W Photograph by Gigi LaValle Foland

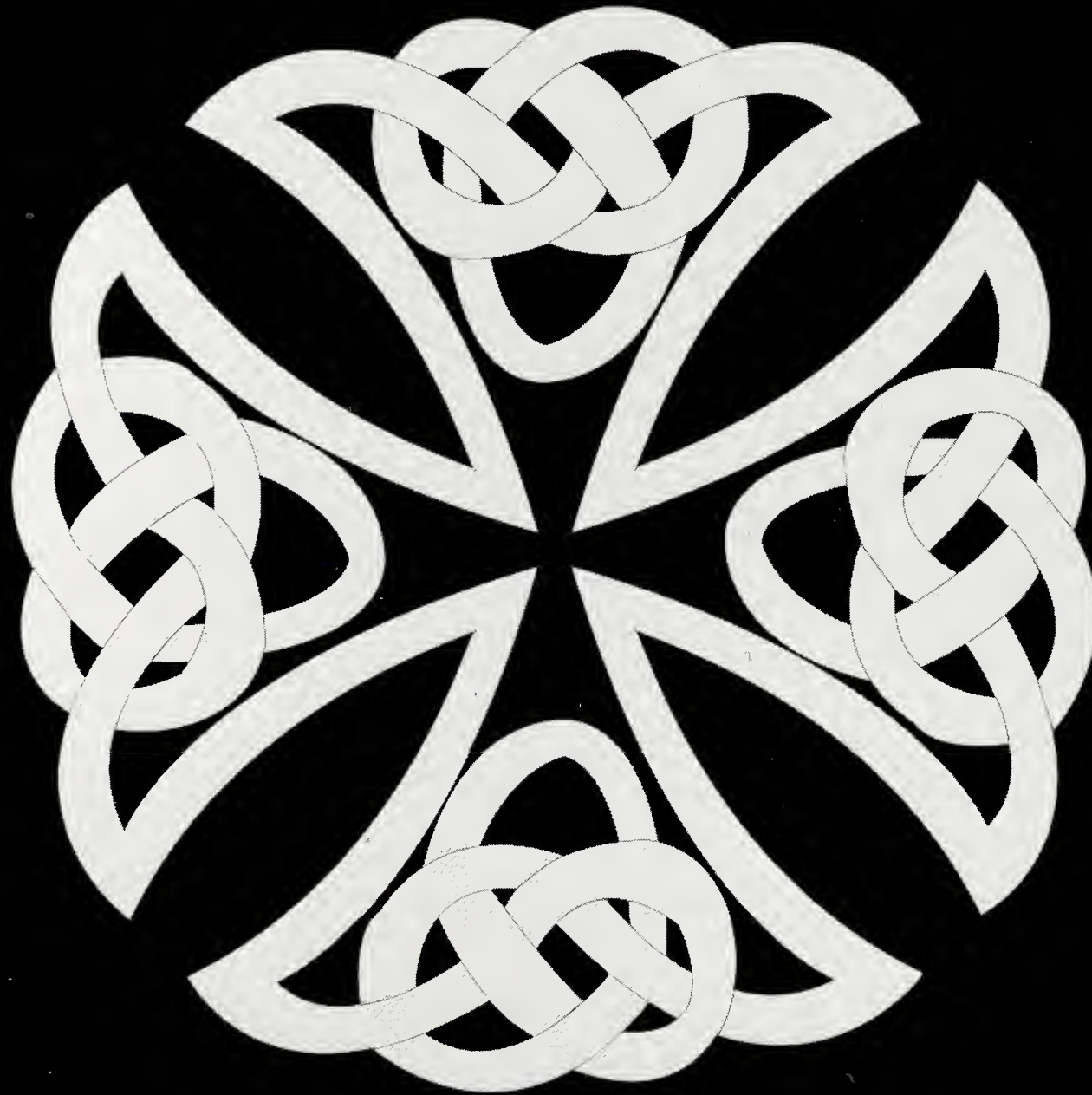


And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

- William Butler Yeats







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