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P'an Ku



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P'an Ku - {pan 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 became 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.

P'an Ku is the ancient Chinese god of creation. Anyone who is endowed with creativity is possessed with the spirit of P'an Ku.



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Kawai Laurencin

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Chris Gilbo

Staff Editorial

In preparing for this year's fall issue of *P'an Ku*, we couldn't help but notice how difficult it was to get submissions, both in art and literature. Some of us at times even began to feel as if we were badgering students and faculty alike in order to bring to you the best magazine we could possibly offer. In that respect we were forced to come to two conclusions: either the students do not have the time to be creative without being guaranteed some kind of incentive or, they simply feel they have nothing worthwhile to offer. This is a very sad point indeed. But we honestly hope to be proven wrong on both accounts.

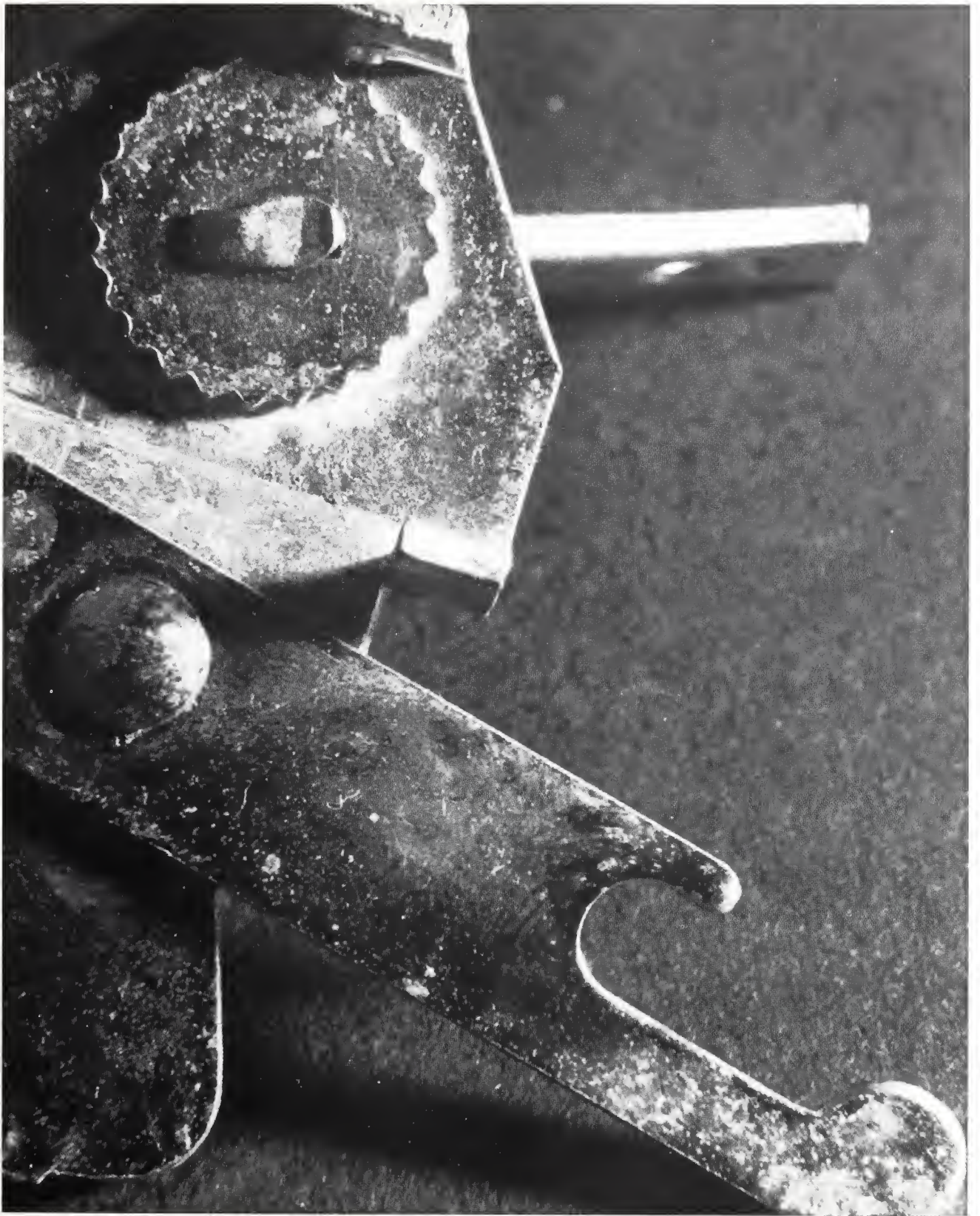
We believe there are many reasons for getting a college education and not the least of which is wanting a decent career, but we also know it should not be your sole reason. For many of us, at no other time of our lives will we have this freedom, this opportunity of spirit to try new things, branch out into as many different directions as our hearts desire, and in particular, to experience what it is like to be uncharacteristically and undauntingly creative. This is your time to grab at that chance.

We do hope that everyone who picks up this issue enjoys it. On that note however, we feel it is our responsibility to provide a commentary on one of the stories we have chosen to print. Although the subject matter of "Where is the Devil When You Need Him" is quite controversial, and the editorial staff deliberated endlessly over it, we truly felt it was one of the best pieces

submitted and thus deserved a place in the school's magazine. Against numerous warnings from our advisor, with regards to potential controversies and repercussions to either the staff, and/or administrative support for *P'an Ku*, we have decided to follow our own judgment and publish a piece we believe our readers will come to appreciate for its true literary merit. Despite the fact that some might feel the story concludes on a moral ambiguity, the insidious nature of the situation and its content remain very clear to the staff and should be so for our readers.

In conclusion, we would like to thank all of the students, from the different campuses, who submitted their work to the magazine and we would want to encourage those who didn't. Let it be known we expect next issue to receive submissions from anyone of you who writes, paints, draws, sculpts or photographs, so that we may give back the very best Broward Community College has to offer. Enjoy the read!





“untitled” Mark McKinley

Will Work For Food

The eyes hit you first.

The monotone walk, the evading glance.

Disgrace.

tattered sign for a nameless face.

Preparing for the future.

Liquored hands fold it over and put it away.

Day...after Day.

You glance at him.

The picture is muted.

Blurred eyes keep him in the background.

Man's ultimate depth

Endured above ground.

*Weak is the roar of the **lion***

Whose flame burns no more.

Pride long vaquished.

What the hell are you living for?



“untitled”
Mark McKinley



"untitled"

Kelly Alcott

Imitation Of E. A Poe's Israfel

"Bob"

*In Seattle a loser does stay
Whose heart strings are a fretless bass
None play in such a loud way
As this fellow, Bob,
And the graggy fans (so tabloids say)
Cease their fighting, and smoke the hay
Of his dealer, Jayce.*

*Wandering around
Hash oil slick
This mellow chick
Stares at the ground
While, when they listen, the fans
(no name brands)
Give a weak hand*

*And they say (that drunken choir
With other detestable beings)
That Bob's a liar
Because he owes that choir
For all their drunken flings
But if they were any higher
They would be with wings!*

*But the bars where rockers dwell
where deep thoughts are an anomaly
Where music always sounds like hell
Where the back rooms are
More full of bologna
Than most sandwiches get, by far.*

*There fore, thou art funny
Bob, who remains
In a rock band without a hunny
She needn't be a bunny!
Stupid fellow, he maintains
Lady-less isn't crummy!*

*The ecstasies of dope
Will thy methods comply?
To snort, to pick, to swallow, to float!
Without it we will die!
Hell must be when my dealer is dry!*

*Yes, this high is mine, but when,
In this world of highs and lows
The brown acid really blows,
And the pink bunnies are coming again!
Out the window my sanity goes!*

*If I could score
Where Bob
Has scored, and he where I,
He might not think it so wildly well
To be without a lady
While I would be exploring the precepts
of hell
While I chill with God, so high!*

- Jennifer Albert -



"Wish You Were Here"

Amy Pomerant

Ave. A is for Aet

Ricky Smith

SCENE ONE

There is an apartment on the fourth floor of a tenement on the Lower East Side of New York City. Inside, are three rooms. They are arranged stage right to left as the bedroom/living room, the kitchen, and the bathroom (very small, with only an "old-style" bathtub and a toilet). Donna, a dark petite woman is just finishing washing the dishes, and sits down at the table. She starts opening her mail. To stage left of the center room, Joey can be seen in the bathroom sitting on the toilet with the top down, naked, but moving slightly. The bath water is running. The bathroom light is very dim.

DONNA: Joey?...Are you coming with me to the opening tonight?

JOEY: *(Yelling through the wall. The bathroom light is gradually getting brighter)* What opening?

DONNA: Down on Mott Street. Penelope invited me. It's supposed to be a good one.

JOEY: *(As the light gets bright enough, it becomes visible what he is doing. He is injecting something into his arm, as he answers through the door again)* They're always supposed to be a good one. *(He finishes his "business," leans his head against the wall momentarily)* Did Miss Penelope say that I could come? Oh, then I am truly honored. *(He then hides the implements of his self-destruction under the tub. He turns off the water, gets in the bathtub, and leans back, very relaxed)*

DONNA: No, she didn't, but I want you to come...Please?

JOEY: *(Lighting a cigarette in the tub)* Of course she didn't! Then why do you want me to come? Donna sweetheart, I don't think that your art friends like me very much...Do you think that it's because I'm from New Jersey?

DONNA: *(She's finished with her mail and now sits impatiently at the table)* Noooo! Shut up...I like you, and that's all that matters.

JOEY: Art is a swindle, sweetheart. A hoax!

DONNA: Can't we just go out like a normal couple, and have fun? C'mon, there'll be lots of people there...Hurry up, what are you doing in there?

JOEY: Just taking my bath, sweetheart. Just a bath...You wouldn't want me to bring the grime of the proletariat into the East Village art gallery, would you? *(He gets out of the bath and wraps a towel around himself, and walks out into the kitchen as she speaks)*

DONNA: Why do you talk like that? You're a musician! You should know better.

JOEY: That's exactly why I do know better. *(He goes over to her at the table and hugs and kisses her from behind)* But when I'm not a musician, which is usually, I'm under a hot Porsche all day long, thinking about you. *(Kissing her)* You know, when Joey cool Village musician is really Joey grease-ball mechanic at the shop.

DONNA: (She takes his hand and turns to him) Why do you say all these things?!

JOEY: (As he walks stage right into the bedroom to get dressed) Don't take it too hard. I just think that there's too much bullshit around here...And your friend Penelope always seems to be in the vortex of it...I mean, how does this woman live? Wait, don't answer that.

DONNA: Joey, she's a painter. She knows people.

JOEY: ...A painter that knows people? Then I bet she sells a good deal of "her art." Alright, we'll go...What are we doing for dinner tonight?

DONNA: (Grinning, she gets up and follows him into the bedroom) I thought we would order in tonight. Then we'll go out. (She turns out the bedroom light) So, you can't bullshit the bullshitter? (They laugh and fall on the bed, kissing) You know, I love you...I just wish...

JOEY: Wish what, sweetheart?

DONNA: Nothing.

SCENE TWO

They are at the "Anti-Gallery" on Mott Street. It is a small storefront with three rooms stage right to left, and a stairwell to a second floor. A few people in black leather and white and pink patent leather pass through, and up the stairs. It is all white with lots of really bad art strewn about. In the first room are old medicine cabinets with Barbie Dolls and day-glo painted babies' heads. In the second room there is just red paint splashed and splattered all over the room with parts of mannequins and butchers' knives in unusual positions. In the third room, which is black, stage left, there is ultra-violet lighting over tacky oil-on-black-velvet paintings, and a woman standing, facing the corner wearing a wedding gown. Donna and Joey enter from stage left, by the stairway.

JOEY: (As they walk in) Jesus Christ! See what I mean? And I thought that musicians were full of shit!

DONNA: Okay, we won't stay long. Let's just look around and see if anyone is here. Just try not to insult anyone, alright?

JOEY: Okay, I know how you like this stuff. Not the art I mean, but the...well, you know...

PENELOPE: (*Penelope enters from stage right, and waves at Donna. She is blond and wearing sunglasses*) Donna, sweetie! Hi!

JOEY: Okay, you girls go flirt with some artists. I'll be right back. Where's the bathroom around here...(*He turns and goes up the stairs*)

PENELOPE: (*She comes to meet Donna in the center room, amid the depicted fake mutilation and dismemberment*) Oh, I'm so glad that you came. Isn't this marvelous? Really important work...I think some very important people are going to be here tonight.

DONNA: (*Turning around to survey the room*) Really? Are you sure?

PENELOPE: Oh yes! My friend Tommy is coming. You know, his gallery is showing some of Basque's work. Maybe Tommy will bring him!

DONNA: I liked Basque when he painted in the subways.

PENELOPE: The subway was a great medium, but you can't expect really great art to stay there. If it wasn't for people like Tommy, who can promote us, how would we exist?

DONNA: I don't know if we're going to stay long...

PENELOPE: I see you brought your boyfriend.

DONNA: (*Giggling*) Oh, don't call him that. He hates to be called a "boyfriend."

PENELOPE: Really Donna, when are you going to dump him? You know you could do so much better.

DONNA: I wish that you two could just get along.

PENELOPE: You know as well as I do. He's just a greasy brat from the suburbs of New Jersey.

DONNA: But I'm from New Jersey...

PENELOPE: Yea, but not the suburbs. You're not contaminated with that kind of perpetual adolescence, like him...Oh, by the way, Tommy and I had a slight argument last night. I think that it's alright now, but just in case, can I stay at your place tonight?

DONNA: Well, um...yea, I guess so, but...don't say anything to Joey.

PENELOPE: I try never to say anything to Joey. By the way, is he still...you know...using?

DONNA: He promised me that he'd stop.

PENELOPE: And you believe him? You know that will never happen.

DONNA: Listen, I just can't leave him now.

PENELOPE: At least you're thinking about it. Why not?

DONNA: He needs me to believe in him. And besides, I do love him.

PENELOPE: I don't know why you are holding yourself back. I know some really great guys for you. My friend Josh is a nationally famous wine taster. He writes for So-Ho Art and Restaurant Magazine...Joey is never going to grow up...You know I saw him earlier this evening. So where is he now.

DONNA: He went to the bathroom. Where did you see him?

PENELOPE: We were at Dahlia's. That place on 4th and Avenue B. As we were finishing dinner, I looked out the front window. I saw him coming out of the building across the street. Donna, you know why he was there, don't you? What do you think he's doing in the bathroom right now?

DONNA: (*Her expression is changed, as she turns away to cry*) You hate him! Why should I believe you.

PENELOPE: Don't believe me, just look into his eyes. C'mon sweetie, cheer up. We'll find you someone new. You need a man who can appreciate your talent, not a boy from the suburbs.

DONNA: Shut up! Leave me alone! No, wait. Here he comes. Don't say another thing! (*She tries to regain her composure, quickly*)

JOEY: (*He comes down the stairs, and crosses to the center room*) Hi, girls. (*He is intermittently scratching his nose. Donna has her back turned to him*) Hi Penny, how ya doin.' (*She says nothing*) Y'know, I just ran into that artist from D.C. Banks, he said his name was.

PENELOPE: (*Looking away*) Never heard of him.

JOEY: Oh come on Penny...look, I know we don't like each other, but can't you and I just bury the hatchet for a while...(*He puts his hand on Donna's shoulder, but she doesn't turn around*) Donna, what's wrong?

DONNA: (*She turns and looks directly into his eyes, crying*) You promised me!

JOEY: (*To Penelope*) What the fuck did you say to her?!

PENELOPE: No, we can't just bury the hatchet! You are a contagion Joey, and you infect everything around you!

DONNA: Where were you tonight, before you came home?

JOEY: Nowhere sweetheart! Wait a minute, what the fuck is going on here?

DONNA: You were seen, Joey! Someone saw you there coming out of one of your dope houses on 4th Street.

JOEY: Who? Who saw me? (*There is a momentary silence. He scratches his nose, junkie style*)

DONNA: Don't lie to me! I can see it in your eyes.

JOEY: (*To Penelope*) What the fuck did you say to her you bitch, you fucking humanitarian?!

PENELOPE: You're just a lying little shit, Joey.

JOEY: (*After a pause*) Alright, then maybe I should tell the truth for once, right?

DONNA: (*Sobbing*) You promised me!

JOEY: I'm sorry baby...It's hard. You don't know...(Pointing at Penelope) She told you that I was there, right? You know why she knows? Because she was there too!

PENELOPE: You liar! I was not.

DONNA: What?

JOEY: No, she wasn't standing in line with the money in her hand. But she was safely having dinner across the street with someone else's credit card while her artsy boyfriends walked across the street for her.

PENELOPE: You lying parasite!

JOEY: (*Incredulous*) Parasite? Liar? Well, you know what? We parasites and liars seem to congregate in common places. You know, (*gestures with his arms out wide*) places like this...and the dope house! So there we were, standing in line with our fifty-dollar bills...me and Sir Tommy, the benefactor of her Ladyship, while she dined on pate. We talked, Tommy and I...Not a bad guy, now that I know him a little better. Don't worry, we saved some for that little Haitian/Puerto-Rican artist friend of yours. Basque, right? Yea, I see him too once in a while, scoring dope from his limo with his friends...all of them smoking crack, ha ha ha...

DONNA: Joey, stop it please.

PENELOPE: Don't listen to him, Donna!

JOEY: Yea, you see there was a long wait for heroin tonight, so we chatted. Oh yea, it turns out that we know each other from the clubs. He's quite a wealthy guy, your decadent art dealer. You should know huh, Penny.

PENELOPE: You son of a bitch!

JOEY: And yours will be the son of a whore!

DONNA: Joey, please!

PENELOPE: Fuck you, Joey. (She turns to leave, but Joey grabs her)

JOEY: Would you? For how much? Let's see who the liars and parasites are, Penny! (Pulls off her sunglasses, revealing the same tiny pupils as Joey's, AND a black eye) How was the dope tonight, Penny? A little weak, I thought.

DONNA: Oh my God! What happened to your eye?

JOEY: It seems that she had an argument with Lord Tommy. He was telling me about it while we were waiting. We discussed "aesthetic validity." Something about artistic discretion and a wine taster...tasted any good wine lately, Penny? Say, do you happen to need a place to stay tonight?

PENELOPE: (*Grabbing back sunglasses, quite upset*) Shut up, you bastard.

DONNA: Joey! Stop it!

JOEY: Bastard?! Stop what, sweetheart? Don't you understand, she's on the payroll!

PENELOPE: (*Screaming*) Bastard!

DONNA: What are you talking about, Joey?

JOEY: That the only difference between we two "artists" is that I spend my own money, earned with my own greasy hands on dope, while her capriciousness spends someone else's. That is, when she's not out whoring for it with someone!...I mean, when we're not all being "artists."

PENELOPE: (*Both women are sobbing now*) Bastard!

DONNA: Joey! That's enough! Leave.

JOEY: Leave? What do you mean, leave?

DONNA: I said leave us!

JOEY: Leave us?

DONNA: Yes...Go...Sleep at the studio tonight.

JOEY: (*Stunned, he turns to go, then stops for a moment*) Donna, please...I...

DONNA: No! I don't want to see you tonight...And maybe not tomorrow, either.

JOEY: (*As he turns to go, a small crowd of trendy, artsy people have gathered to listen from the black-light room, stage left. Joey passes by them on his way out, pushing one of them out of the way, and shouts at them*) What the fuck is the matter with you people, haven't you ever seen conceptual art before? (*He leaves as the two women hug each other and cry, and he never returns*)



"After School Care"

Charcoal

Thomas Nolan

I'm The King of The World

By Walter F. Benenati

We get a bum rap. We really do. No one likes us. But you know what man? We're just trying to survive. I'll tell you what though, we're pretty good at it. We've been around for like a million years or something. Yeah, we're pretty proud of that distinction. I guess that's probably why humans hate us: Because you just can't get rid of us! Face it, you're stuck with us, so deal with it. I guess I might as well tell you my story. It started about a month ago when I first came into this world ... ahhhhh ... I remember it like it was yesterday...

(gunshot) And off they go! Wow, it was awesome. We were everywhere. I was born with 22 brothers and sisters-wait-uh-or was it 24? Yeah, that's right. It was 24. I remember 'cause my crazy uncle came by and ate two of my brothers. Mom was so mad. Oh, we had so much fun back then. It was cool 'cause it was the first time any of us got the chance to crawl up the side of a wall. That was unreal! I guarantee you, every one remembers their first time. Its like, you feel like you're gonna fall but you don't. (chuckle) Don't even let me get into crawling on the ceiling. Now that's fun.

But I'll tell you what. We live a pretty solitary life. I mean, don't get me wrong, we're tight with our own people, but foreigners? I dunno. See, I was born and raised in America and quite frankly, proud of it. I can't stand when these guys come over the boat and think they own the place. It's quite unsettling. I remember this one dude. I think his name was Wong. He said he came over on some freighter from Hong Kong. Already he thought he was big 'cause he came from some exotic city. Who cares? He used to always show off 'cause he could fly. But that was because he was Asian. Yeah ... that Wong, he was a cocky SOB. He would actually fly into peoples' faces scaring the bejesus out of them. (chuckles) All right, I have to admit. That was hilarious. One thing about Wong, he loved to make us laugh. Too bad his reckless bravado turned out to be his downfall. I remember it like it was yesterday...

It was daylight and a couple of us we're sleeping under the stove. It was cozy, and the sleep

was much needed after a long night of activity. We were beat. I was sound asleep when all of a sudden, I heard it. It was faint, but unmistakable nonetheless. Someone got sprayed. Curious but cautious, I slowly made my way to the edge of the stove. Careful not to wake my brethren to the tragedy that occurred, I peered across the kitchen floor. It was Wong! He was writhing on his back in obvious pain. My heart was pounding. "C'mon Wong! Live!" All of sudden a moment of suspense came when he righted himself. "That's it Wong! Get up! I promise, I'll never call you Dumb Wong Dong again!" A violent death spasm ensued when all of a sudden, a huge shoe appeared out of nowhere and crushed Wong like a Cheerio. "The crunch of his oily exoskeleton made me weep. Another fallen comrade. Dumb Wong from Hong Kong, we always told him not to go out during the day. He just wouldn't listen."

Geez, sometimes I feel like every one is out to get us. It's hard to be a roach. The man is setting traps for us everywhere we go. You just don't know. I got battle scars man! I've been flushed down a toilet and almost drowned, I've been poisoned (*twice*), this granny even hit me with a quick sharp blow once. Fortunately, she swatted me with all the power she could muster for an eighty-year-old. She was swift for her age though, I'll give her that.

Yeah, I've earned my Purple Heart. And not on the sidelines either, but deep in the trenches. Yeah, you can't stop me! I'm invincible. I've even been sprayed a couple times. Huh-you won't see me crying for mommy shaking my limbs at the sky. My will to live is too strong! I'll decide when I'm ready to (psssssss) Uh-oh no-uh! I've been sprayed. Okay, remember what mom said. Short quick breaths. Don't breathe it in, Oh man I don't feel so good. My legs! I can't feel my legs! It can't end like this. Wait-I feel it. Death. It's getting closer. My tiny body started to shake. I had to deprive the hulking figure standing over me from witnessing my brutal display of suffering. I stopped moving. Motionless, I started to contemplate my mortality. Death was knocking at my door. The light started to dim. "I guess this is it for me. I wonder, is there a heaven for a roach? Uhh ... I guess I'm about to find out. So long everybody!"

The Wandering Passionate

*Alone on the road of existence
crossing the alley of romance
to look for a perfect stabilization:
where the small birds sing, the trees dance,
and the dragonflies embrace.*

*In a gloomy corner.
I live my life in silence
to hear the regular sound of a rivulet.*

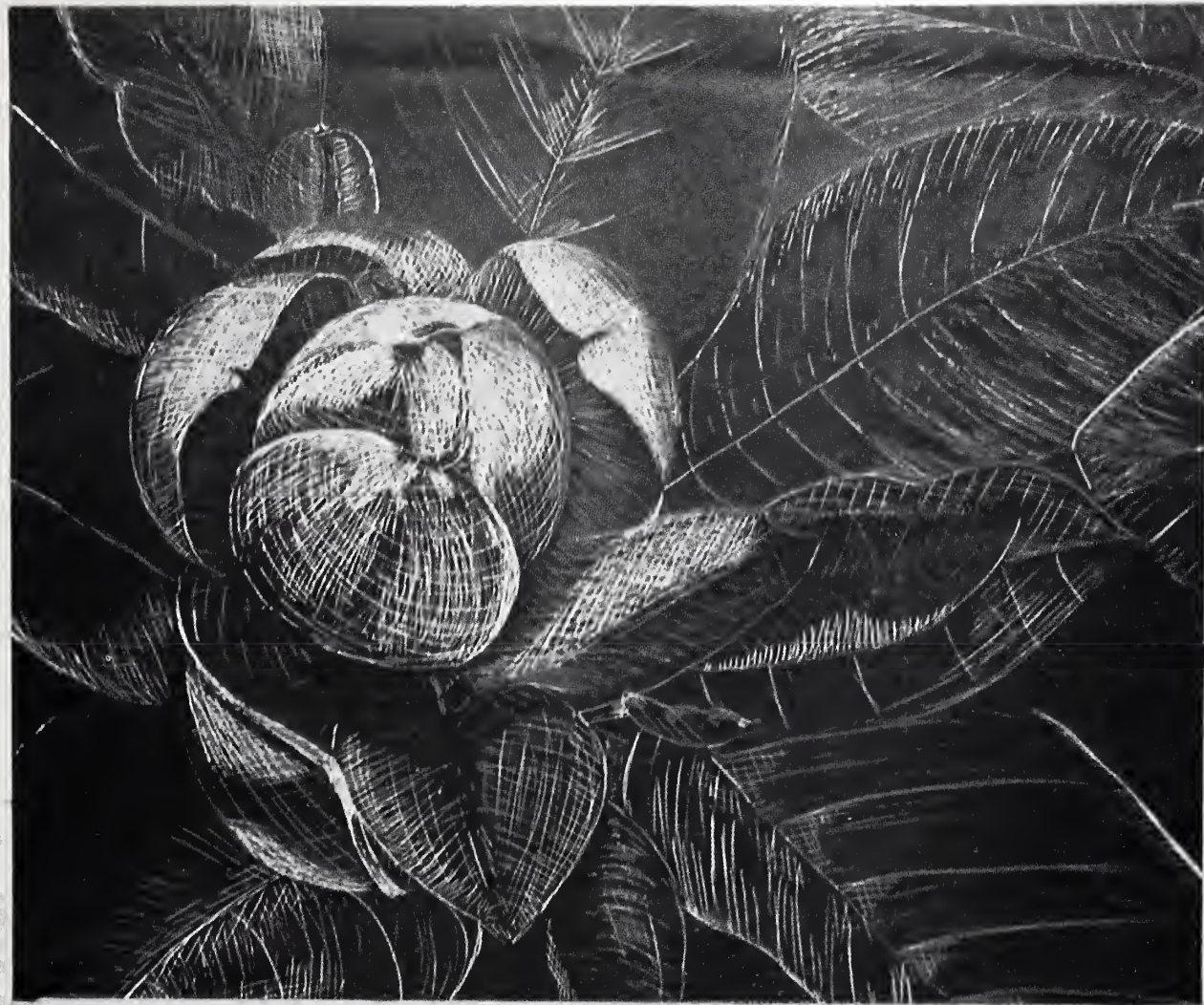
*Across my deserted nights,
I feel carried away by a meager(ly) loving sorrow
that gnaws my heart all over.*

*I comprehend a bizarre beauty
that seduces my soul
till the edge of my being.*

*At the moonlight,
rises a star,
she indicates a ray of an angel
with slow steps she caresses my sandy hair.*

*Into the calm weather,
the birds of the upper immense stones
sing in chorus a song that indicates my destiny.
Their proffer voices counsel of kindness,
affection and cheering.*

*It is the great reward
for the endurance
of all my suffering.*



"Bud"

Scratchboard

Stef Adler

No Night to Remember

Alan Tenore

Suddenly I awaken, terrorized once again by the nightmare that has been haunting me as long as I can remember. My bedclothes are stained with sweat and my bed smells of urine and alcohol. It is dark. I fear to close my eyes. Is it waiting there. With every blink I can feel its presence approaching behind me. No sleep. Must stay awake. I feel it walking around me, waiting. Must stay awake. It laughs! Oh, for all that could be horrible cannot compare to that laugh! Over and over again that continual laugh! It mocks me as I try to stay awake. But I must not fail! I shall endure...It is becoming difficult to keep my eyes open. No, I must stay awake! ... It was only a dream. The monster was only part of my imagination. It is not here now. I can go to sleep without fear. It is not here. It does...not...exist...

I find myself sitting at a bar. I can only drink and be merry. Karaoke Night; all I think about is how ridiculous that man using the machine is. It is interesting how wonderful someone sounds when I am drunk. I'm tired. I take the bottle from the counter and walk out. The ally is dark. My mind is a mess. I need some sleep. Which way to my house? That way I think. No, another ally. It is strangely empty. Empty all except for...for NO!! It has followed me again! I cannot move. Its gaze holds me. Its horrible laugh sounds again. The hairs on my neck twitch and stand up. I stumble backwards, freeing me from the creature's locking stare of death, and run. Out of the alleyways I run, and over into the park. It's beginning to rain. Large, heavy, hard rain. It pours down me as if all the water had been evaporated, and is now returning. It is difficult to see where I am going. The alcohol is getting to me. I can hardly stay up as I run. I no longer feel the road under me. My body is matted by soft wet grass.

I suddenly hear that laugh once more, chilling my bones and echoing through my brain. It is coming. Oh, when will I wake from this? Terror runs through me, and I wet myself. I try to talk sense into myself. A man does not run and hide, he faces his opponent. I am a man, aren't I? I must defend myself. There has to be something nearby that I can use. What's this? A bottle? I must have brought it from the bar. Oh, why can't I go back to that merriment and away from this creature? Here it comes behind me. Get ready. The time to act is now!

I turn and see my wife running to me. My wife! How beautiful she is! She runs up at me and I hold her in my arms. The creature has gone away, and my wife is here. Oh, how much I love her! How I have missed this touch. Her skin, so smooth and fair; her hair, so soft and free; her eyes, so bright and full of life; her body, so slim and oh so beautiful. I want to make love to her right now. Here. In the park. Now. She doesn't refuse. I pull open her blouse. She smiles. What is happening? She is beginning to fade away. Her body is shriveling up! To my dismay I see her slowly decrease into a fine dust, and blow away. How horrible this dream is! To play such tricks on my mind as this with my wife! I remember she died about a year ago...a year ago today! I fall to the ground and tears pour out relentlessly from my eyes. I feel cold and empty. Despair and loneliness tear at me. How I loved my wife! I can hardly remember how it happened. I have been drunk too often and it has affected my memory.

I remember blood. I saw her. She was dead. Why? Oh, why did she have to die? My wife! Dead in our home! Bruises and cuts all over her body. She was killed...by a man. Killed. Man. Killed. Man. A man killed my wife. A man. Killed. My wife!

Rage has overtaken me. *A man*. I grab the bottle and stand. *Killed my wife*. Hatred and

revenge flow through me like blood. *Killed my wife. Killed my wife.* I see a man walking through the park. *A man.* He is drunk. *Killed my wife.* He is carrying a bottle with him. A man!

I run toward him, my yell striking the man with absolute terror. He stared back at me, horrified. I have a bottle. So does he. I must strike first. Kill him. *A man killed my wife.* The man will die! I beat him over the head with my bottle, and shards of glass cut into his head and scatter on the ground. *A man killed my wife.* He falls. *A man killed my wife.* I stab him in the chest several times; his blood flows freely. *A man killed my wife.* I dig the glass deep into his face, tearing the expression from it completely. His blood coats the body. I look down at him. My body is calming down. *A man...* I feel dizzy, lightheaded. *Killed...* I can hardly stand. Everything is getting dark. *My...*

I come to on the body. The man. My head is ringing. I do not know how long I was lying there. I can hardly remember what happened. Who is this man, this man I killed? I have never seen him before. Maybe he has some identification. Here in his pocket, what is this? A mirror. This man was not my wife's killer. I know. The killer...The killer I see now. In my hand. The killer is...me.

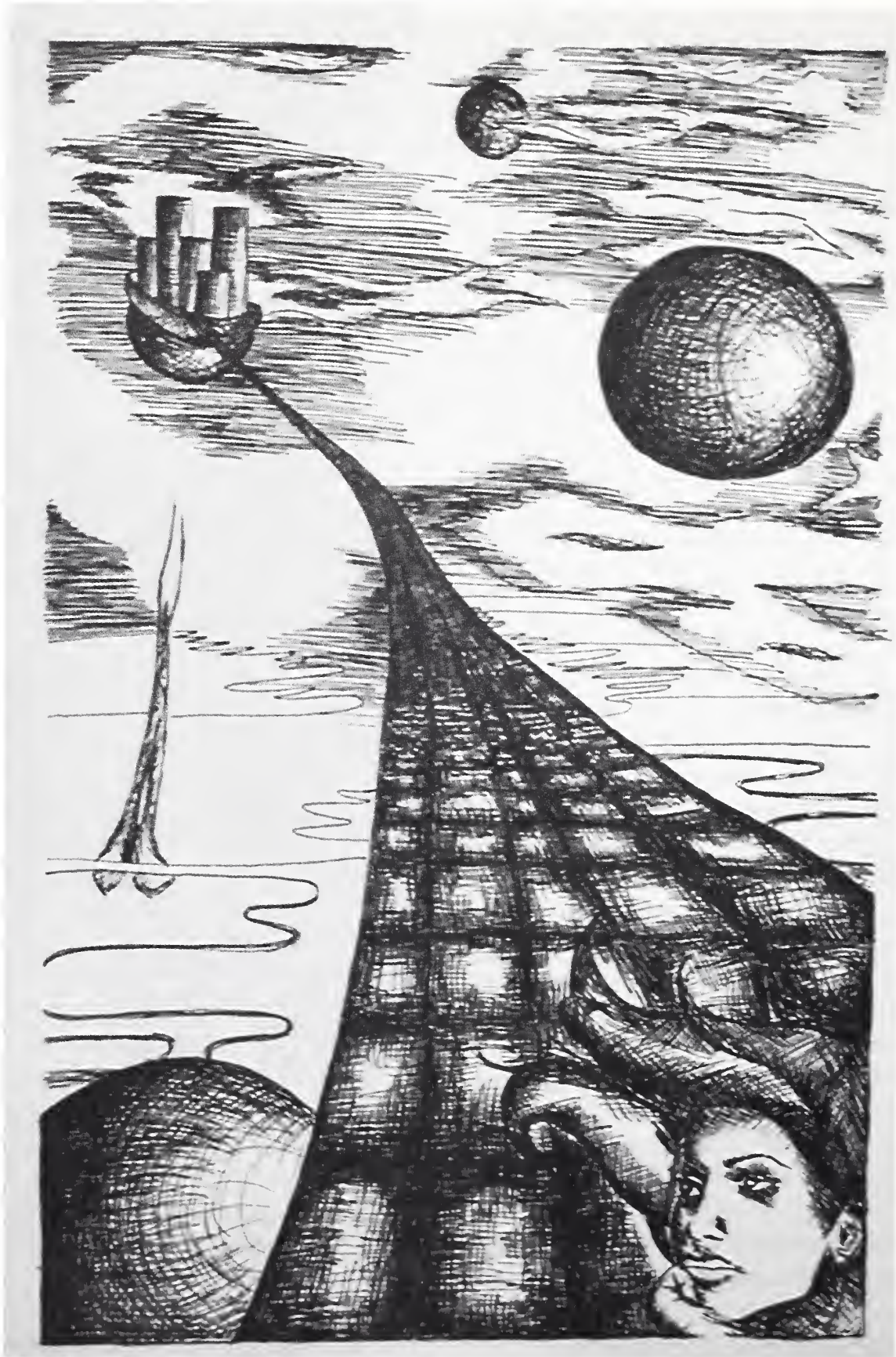
How could I kill my wife? I know it is true now. I killed her. It was not a man I saw in the mirror, but a horrible monster. I hear that laugh once again. That horrible, horrible laugh! I drop the mirror, and it shatters into uncountable slivers of glass. I then realize that the laugh had not come from anywhere but inside me. No one else made that laugh. I did. Horror and despair swim through me. I feel as if the creature is after me again. I don't care. My wife is dead. I killed her. He is approaching quickly. This man is dead. I did not love him, or even know him. He is dead. I killed him. The creature is near. I can feel its breath hot on my back. My body is soaked with rain and sweat, and my clothes smell of urine and alcohol.

I don't move; I only sit here looking down, drowning in my shame. I feel it walking around me, waiting. I don't care. It laughs. It laughs once again that horrible laugh. I don't care. It mocks me as I sit here dreading my past, not wanting a future. Then it stops laughing. It tosses me a dagger and walks away. Oh, how pathetic I am that this creature does not even want the satisfaction of seeing me kill myself. Nothing is left for me now. My life is at its end. I hear its laugh one more time, going farther away, as I bring the dagger to my throat and begin to cut.



Illustration

by Pia Pownall



“Planets” Gabriela Nunez

Pen & Ink

Wet Dreams

The crisp air washes my face

With a slick virility

Waking me from the dream

I am standing in

Like a child in a puddle of rain.

Sand Stories

You cradle the sand with a gentle stroke

*Your long slick fingers
massage away the imprints of man*

As the sun dips into your pocket

You pull the covers over a chalky beach

And tell bedtime stories to the shells.

- Julie Adams -

Everchange

Once upon a time, there was a magnificent brown man who lived in a shining castle. He adored his castle and he took great care in maintaining its extravagance. His castle had several elevators, all of which had excellent heating. It was rarely ever cold there, but they were heated none the less.

The man loved to look out over his balcony to his vast golden fields, and farther out was what he called the Sea of Everchange. He called it this because sometimes the waterfall flowed and it filled the sea, then the waterfall stopped and the sea went away.

While he watched out over his wonderful land, he would have visions of Three Great Goddesses. One was the Goddess of the Seas, who controlled Everchange and its waterfall; the second was the Goddess of the Earth, who controlled its great fields and all the life that was there; and the third was the Goddess of the Skies, who controlled day and night. They all appeared to have odd tentacles coming out of their bodies, and they changed colors, but still he loved his Goddesses very much.

Although the Sea and Earth Goddesses gave him his favorite scenery, his favorite goddess was the ruler of the skies. Almost every morning she would send out great ships that docked in his elevators to warm up, and dropped off people who wanted to live in his kingdom. All who came were different colors but the longer they stayed, the browner they became.

He always enjoyed meeting new people and he soon has a nice family. He had prayed to the shy goddess for a family, and the next morning, when the ship docked, he found the one who would be his wife. She was the only one on the ship and he knew that the goddess had done what he asked.

When they had children, he taught them the ways of the world, the magic of Everchange and of the Three Great Goddesses. He loved the family that the Goddesses has blessed him with and he lived the rest of his life happily, never once realizing that his waterfall was a faucet, that Everchange was a sink, that his golden fields were a counter, and that his shining castle was only a toaster.

- Alan Tenore -





“Jazz”
Kawai Laurencin

Charcoal

South Campus Writing Contest Fiction Winner

Hitting Bottom

Jill Armstrong

Alicia didn't believe she would ever emerge from the depths of her despair. Although she was cognizant of her surroundings, it was if she was another person watching herself. A person somewhere out of reach and Alicia had no desire to seek out the person and become that woman again. She really had no desire to do anything at all.

So at first Alicia refused to leave her room. They had taken everything from her, even her shoelaces. A guard would open the door every hour. What in the world did they think she was doing except lying on the thin plastic covered mattress at times crying and at other times just staring at the wall.

Roommates came and went, each with a different story that Alicia really didn't care to hear. The aides were becoming impatient with her.

"They'll never let you out of here if you don't leave your room and try to participate in the group activities she was told." So what, Alicia thought. She didn't care if she ever left.

Anyway, she was afraid of what she would find outside the confines of that room with its stark empty walls and the screened secured windows which could never be opened.

Eventually Alicia ventured from the room. She could feel the eyes of the others on her. Nothing mattered anyway. Alicia sat on the floor with her back against the wall unable to control her tears. After awhile, Alicia realized that no one cared. If that was what she wanted to do, no one

interfered as long as she didn't cause any problems.

Alicia began to reflect, trying to understand how she had come to this point, how she had reached rock bottom. What else could you call this place? Certainly she could never leave and would never be able to look anyone she knew in the eyes again. She could never hold her head up, never put on the facade of perfection which Alicia believed would build walls around her so that no one could break in. No one could hurt her and she would never be vulnerable.

Alicia tried to remember her attempt at suicide. It didn't make sense. Weren't people supposed to plan such a thing and methodically work out each detail? At least leave a note. She had done none of that. Alicia recognized that she had been depressed and knew she had been drinking too much. But there had been no forethought. She had simply closed the door to her bedroom, dumped all of the pills from her bottles in a pile on the floor and began to swallow them handful by handful. Perhaps her attempt was not really a serious one because Alicia knew that just before she lost consciousness she called her daughters' father so that they would not find her body. She recalled her last thought before her eyes closed, surely the seventy or eighty pills she had swallowed would release her from her pain before help arrived.

There were fleeting images after that, the ambulance ride, and the tube being pushed down her throat so that the contents of her stomach could be pumped out. Alicia remembered floating in and out of consciousness and knew that she had spent some time in the intensive care unit, how much she didn't know. The next thing she knew she was being placed in the back of a police car that would transport her to this place. It was the law, Alicia was informed, that individuals who attempted suicide had to be "Baker Acted," placed under psychiatric observation for at least three days.

It was during the ride in the police car that Alicia had some realization of what was happening. The questions rushed at her. What would happen to the children? Who would do her job? Would she even have a job now? Who would pay the bills? Who would take the children to dance

classes, cheerleading practice and school functions?

Alicia shook her head, shook all thoughts from her mind. After all, that was why she was here now, wasn't it? She had been overwhelmed, had known she could not handle all of the responsibility anymore.

And now here she sat, on the floor of some mental institution that she didn't even know the name of. Alicia could cry all she wanted. She no longer had to hide her despair, her feelings of hopelessness. And no one looked at her, no one even seemed to notice.

Slowly Alicia began to become aware of her surroundings and of what was happening in front of her. Patients would wander in and out of the room. Some appeared to be having conversations but there was no one near them. Many people cried and some were delusional. Alicia watched as new patients were brought in, some of them restrained while others appeared quite normal.

Occasionally a patient would lose control, screaming and cursing at the orderlies. When they could not be restrained, the individual was injected with lithium and locked in a room away from everyone else.

Like clockwork, the window to the medication room would be unlocked four times each day. The patients would rush to stand in line, eager to receive whatever they could to help them escape from reality. Alicia obediently swallowed the little cupful of pills they handed her. She didn't ask what they were. She didn't really care.

As she continued to observe the patients, Alicia began to feel sympathy for many of them. Some would shake constantly all day long apparently because their body was no longer receiving whatever drug that had become their addiction.

Many were simply not rational for whatever reason. It brought tears to Alicia's eyes each time one young patient returned from shock treatment therapy because he would become violently ill, vomiting repeatedly. He did not appear coherent for hours after the treatment.

Alicia was told that he was being treated for severe depression because no other method had been successful.

She continued to watch. On visiting days, some patients would cry and beg their families to take them home swearing that they had been cured and could leave. Others did not even appear to recognize their visitors or acknowledge their presence. One man sat patiently by the locked door every visiting day informing anyone who would listen that this was the day that Frank Sinatra was coming to visit him. Of course, Frank never came but the man continued to sit and wait patiently by the door each and every visiting day.

Slowly the fog began to lift from Alicia's brain. She recognized that there were others with more severe, more debilitating problems than her own. Perhaps if she tried not to be so hard on herself, maybe she could give it another try. After all, when you reach the bottom, there is only one way to travel.

So Alicia participated in the therapy groups, attempted to maintain a positive attitude and eventually left the hospital. She managed to face the people she knew and became functional again.

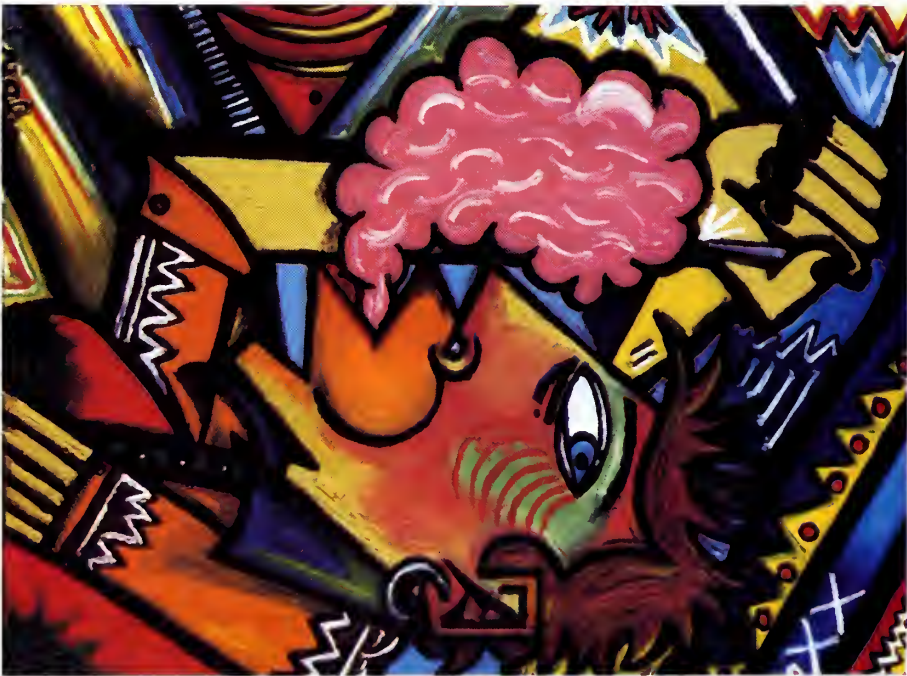
Two weeks later, however, as Alicia sat once again in the back seat of the police car headed to another hospital, she was not really surprised. She was even a little relieved to be going. It might be a different institution with different patients but Alicia knew now what it would be like. She leaned back on the seat of the police car and breathed a small sigh of relief. At least where she was going she didn't have to live up to anyone's expectations.

“Broken Hearts Are Blue”

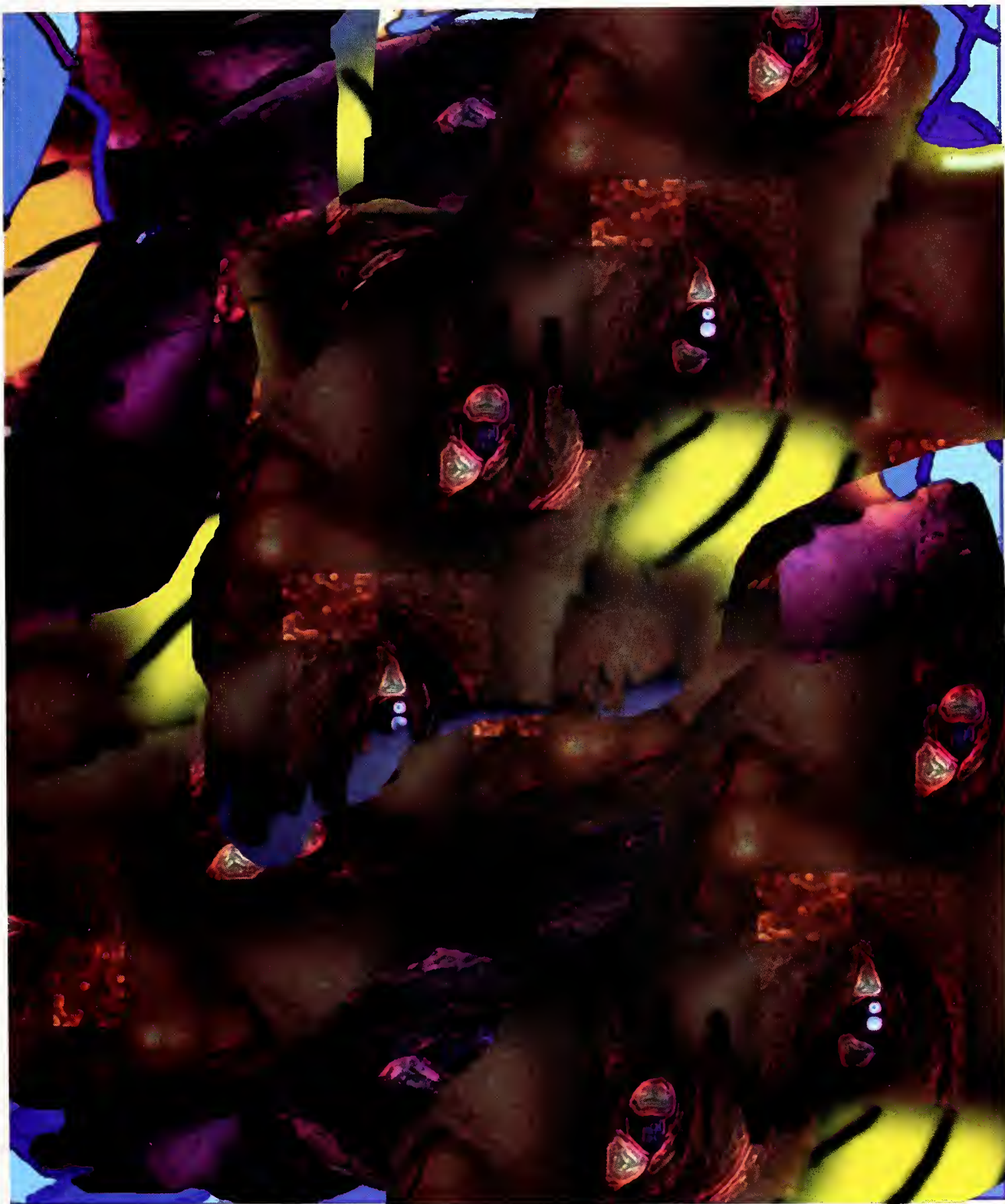


Oil on canvas

“Carnival”



Michael Crigler



“Faces”

Sheryl Cadogan

Digital art



“Cowboy Accident”
Gabriel Izquierdo

Charcoal



"untitled"

Kawai Laurencin

Pen & Ink



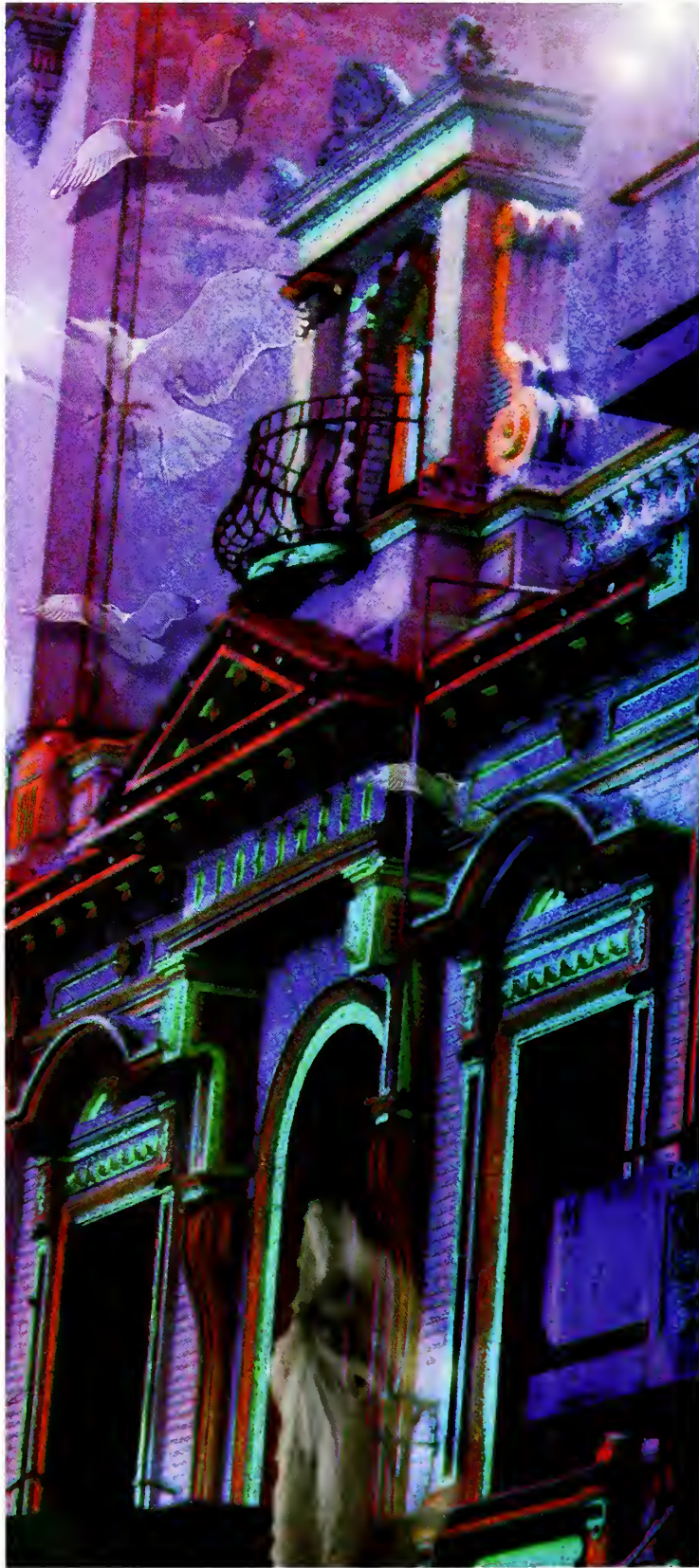
"Boy" Saul Cieza

Oil on posterboard



"Self portrait" Pia Pownall

Watercolor



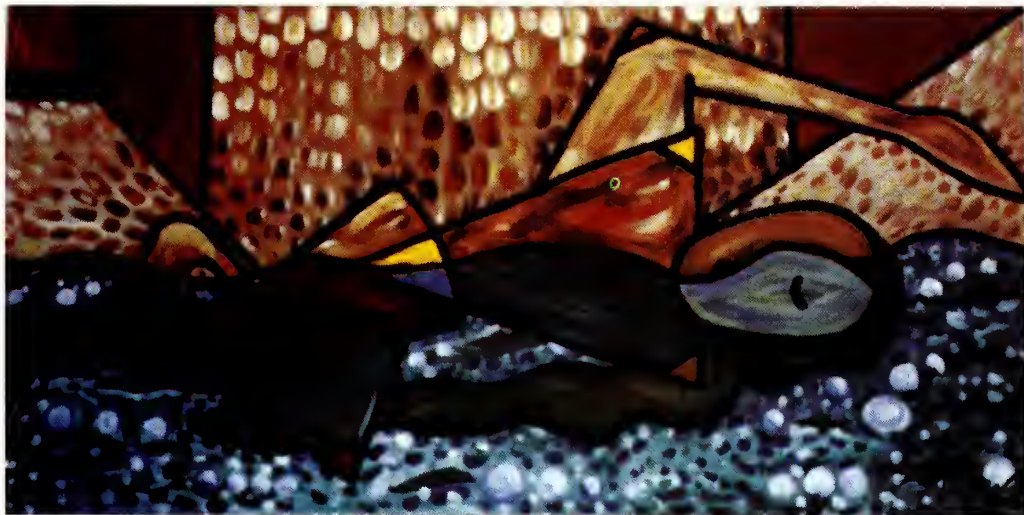
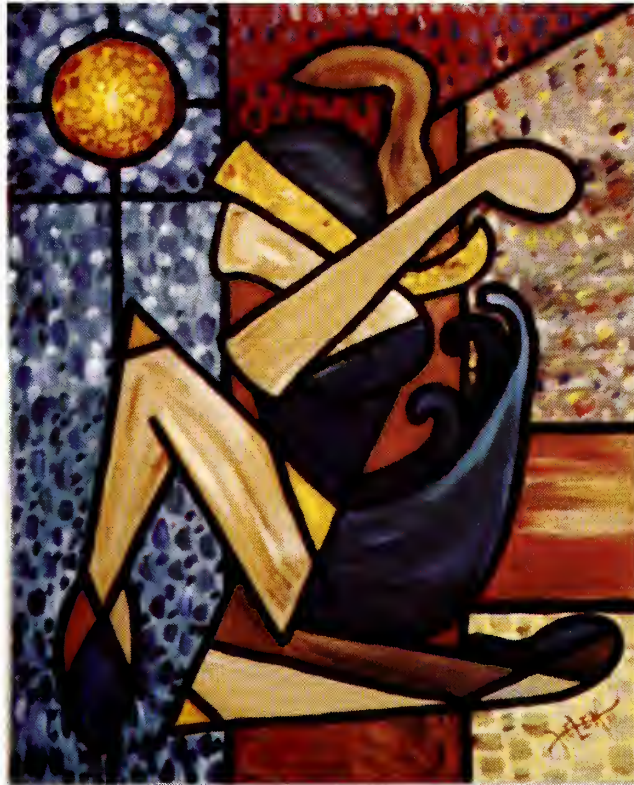
“Ghosts of Montevideo”

Digital art

Rami Altherr Silvera

Helen Daniels

"Dirouette"
Acrylic on canvas



"Aqueous"
Acrylic on canvas

South Campus Writing Contest
Poetry Winner

The Wanderer

*The sun creeps through the trees like a weary sloth.
The slight morning fog that had been, rises away.
Night creatures give way to day creatures
Owls to finches, foxes to squirrels, demons to fairies.*

*The wanderer watches this.
He is older than everthing
except the Earth.
He survived the Great Wars that ravaged the earth.
watched as humans built their grand cities.
Rome. Paris. New York. New Nashville.
Stood by and watched as their greed and ignorance,
became their demise.*

*He has lived it all.
He is at peace,
with the forest and trees.
sunshine.
fairies.*

- David Mioduszewski -

Erotisme

*Ferme les yeux.
Sens ma caresse
Elleveille tes sens
Goute mon baiser
Il etanche ta soif
Et te laisse affame*

*Tandis-que de tes mains
Tu joues de mon corps
Ecoutes le soupir auquel je m'abandonne
Ce souffle harmonieux de notre respiration.*

*Sous tes yeux languissants
Je me dévoile, vulnérable
Et me laisse dominer*

*Contre ton coeur ma poitrine s'ecrase
Tes doigts envieux cherchent mes seins
Caisses toi aller au mouvement des vagues
Je sens ta force qui m'envahie
Mes reins se courbent, secousses incontrollables
En moi le plaisir coule de tes baisers.
Unis, possedes, nous nous perdons dans l'ivresse
Et contre mon corps
Tu viens t'echouer.*



“Darling Saint of Death” Photo sequence

by Adrienne Fernandez



Monologue of A Drag Queen

Nicolette Pownall

I sit here, in this half lit dressing room, as I do every night, putting on a face that only partially resembles mine. A more beautiful face, one of many famous icons of the female sex. Hours of meticulous preparations to paint a portrait over my freshly shaven skin. I sit here, amongst the props and costumes, staring at my reflection that is lost beneath layers of rouge and mascara. If you look closely, you can see that my eye-brows are thinner, my skin a mask of foundation made to glitter under the hot stage lights, my nails are long and red or maybe black depending on the dress, and next to me rests a wig of Barbie doll hair, which I'll spend a fortune to style and perfect.

I do not pretend to be glamorous, nor particularly talented. If you ask me how I got into this business, I could tell you a sign came about in youth, when I discovered my mothers' earrings and lipstick and then for years secretly paraded in her stockings and stiletto heels. Only later would I realize I was never going to be boyish enough to grow into this man's skin. If you believe me a freak, then there is little I can say except that it's easy to judge another person's lifestyle. Besides, everyone's gotta earn a living right?

I sit here, in this solitary dressing room and wonder how long time can pass before these routines become too old and ridiculous, before my body decides I no longer look good in a sequin dress. A bargain basement drag queen, not exactly my life's dream. It's like saying one always wanted to become a B-movie

actress. But here I am, night after night, performing for a crowd that doesn't cheer my identity only my vaudevillian-style theatrics. Everyone looking at me tonight, will assume that I am gay, that nothing normal about me could make me dress and behave this way. Why contest their intimations, it's true I sleep with men. But it's not a personal indictment only a sexual preference.

I do not pretend to be happy, nor especially content. I'm not exactly the son my mother had imagined when she took in my father's semen. Too bad he wasn't around to catch my home performances, or teach me how to behave like a "real" man; then again some say, it's there from the beginning, regardless how much they try to beat it out of you. My mother, she's learning to understand, at least long enough to appreciate my sense of fashion. I wish there was something I could say, other than I cannot help being who I am. I do not blame her for being disappointed, I only hope she'll come to be proud of me some day.

I sit here in this musty, old dressing room and wonder if maybe God made a big mistake. I partially disguise myself as a woman, the other half is about being a man in drag. A drag queen is what I am. I do not pretend to love what I do, nor feel that you should understand why I do it. Some nights I wish I had wanted to be a cowboy, a cop or a race car driver but I know deep down, this boy was never meant to fit inside a man's skin.



Movement

Voyaging...
beyond the realm of familiarity
I am renewed; a mystery of sorts
to strange places and stranger people

Wandering...
I taste and touch and plunge into foreign waters
and I am absorbed

Thinking...
For just a few.
I talk and flirt with destiny
knowing all along it is captive in my hands

Vibing...
suddenly seems so trite
I part with the moment
and pull deeper within
connecting with infamiliarity

Then...the universe somehow seems...
smaller

Listening...
Distant stars serenade me one by one
as they kiss the day goodnight,
and greet the moon with such feverent delight
I am jealous

Strolling...
down avenues of temptation
with no quivering hand or wandering eye
placidity has found refuge within my soul

Replenishing..
the joys I hold dear
irreverent strength is incarcerated within me
no soil nor sea of uncertainty can find my fingertips

Searching...
I reach beyond my own boundaries and climb...
onward

The Art Show

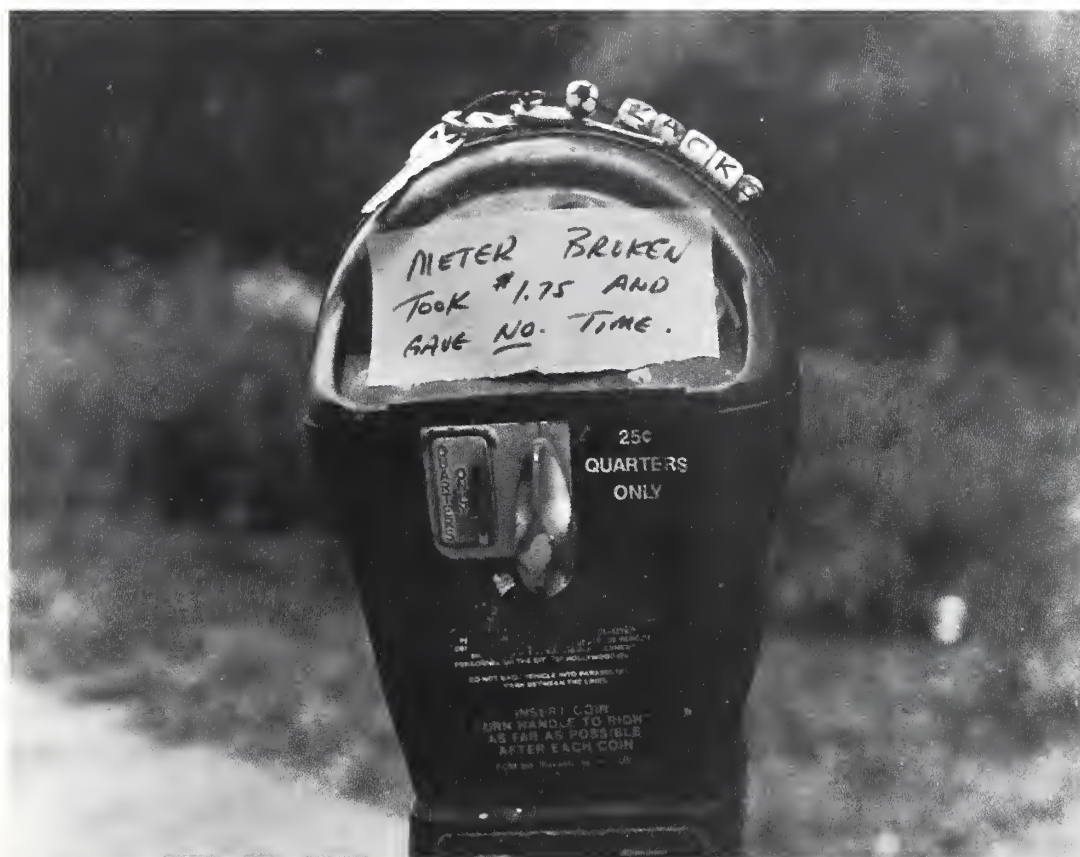
Stacie Hargis

with dim lighting a white eye is spotted moving across room from door to screen...passing bodies interact against the wall that has become the art as these blinded creatures watch repetition of one of nature's jokes...music swells into stiff flesh as concentration turns to manipulation within a non-existent art display of a sickening human commodity...uselessness, uselessness what may this be but useless...intellectually stimulating is what they think as if they sit there with any thoughts self-induced.

one-man keeps his eyes glued to the shaking of a bee's body upon technology's magical tool of film...his ears twitch to the pounding momentum in the air, his lips start to drool, his arms limp at his side but slowly he stands and shifting his feet in circles, SCREAMS...

"This is brilliance!"

"This is exactly what we are going to run into if we don't continue to interact, praise global communication not global homogenization."



"Meter Broken"

Jeanne Brodsky



“Strength”

Nicolette Pownall

The Elephant Girl

*I'm sittin' on life's inner circles
Feeling like a dynamo going to waste*

Sittin'

Waitin'

Hopin'

Flipping through leaves

Grabbing knowledge

In hopes of making up

For what genes didn't give

I walk along the Tigris

And Absalom scorns me

Preferring the presence of Esther and Nefertiti

To me

I run alongside Melkysedech

He tells me to run to the temple

To wash the hideousness from my face

While Tamar assures me to give up

For

I shall never win the race

What a tragedy

What calamity

For one born in Leah's image

What an avalanche of tears for

A soul on whom

Beauty's splendor

Failed to lay its touch

- K. St. Fort -

Taking Out The Trash

Elgin Jumper

FRIDAY: 1999

THE LAST DAY

Richard Rainwater, a twenty-seven year old convict, took a last drag off the Marlboro, flicked the butt into the moist grass, blew out a small cloud of smoke, and began the walk to the back gates, where every morning, he met, Carl Gentry, the old red-haired, redneck guard who drove the prison's trash-truck. It was daybreak as he followed the sidewalk leading past the mailroom, the prison library, and on down to the back gates. He walked on, looked up at the ominous guttowers, at the dark-clouded sky, exhaled deeply, closed his eyes, and raised his arms as if in triumph. Yet as the weather was exceptionally cold, he quickly returned them to pockets of his blue prison jacket, his short black hair fluttering in a lively South Florida breeze.

Other prisoners, black and white, passed him. There were some 1500 prisoners in all at Maryville Correctional. Most wore blues, while only those who worked in the chow-hall wore whites. The cold wind hummed in his ears, chilled his face as he approached the prison mailroom. Hank Peterson, the blond-haired, blue-eyed, mailclerk was standing outside waiting for a large guard to open the door. Unlike Richard, Hank was only a year into his life-sentence.

Richard nodded a greeting.

Abruptly, Hank placed the clipboard and copy of *The Herald* he was holding, between his legs, slid the yellow headphones down around his neck, nodded.

"Richard," he said, "Quite cool this morning, huh?"

"Yep."

Hank took the clipboard and newspaper in his left hand. "You know... that was a damned shame about that sentence reduction thing ... for real."

Richard said nothing, looked past him as if in a trance.

Hank said, "I... I mean ... It's probably something you don't want to talk about ... so, I'll..."

Inexplicably, Richard smiled, shrugged, turned, and walked away. He heard Hank's voice behind him: "Take it easy ... alright?"

Watching Richard depart, Hank thought: so they didn't give it to him—and he's a model prisoner too—that's a damned shame—he's been here for so long—and besides that, his mother just died—damned shame.

As Richard rounded the corner past the mailroom, he saw a slow-moving mob of lifers and double-lifers standing around, in a hovering cloud of cigarette smoke, outside the prison library. They had no enthusiasm for work today, what with the new century coming on an all. Their rakes and hoes lay in a heap, untouched. He walked past them, still smiling.

It was a complete contrast from his behavior two weeks earlier when he suffered a touching, heart-rending loss.

His dear mother, Flora Rainwater, a Native American from Hollywood (the one in South Florida), was killed during a botched convenience store hold-up. The masked robber, infuriated at the feisty cashier, cursed, shot up the place. And kind, Flora Rainwater, who had only stepped in to purchase a few stamps for the Christmas cards she planned to send Richard, was killed instantly by a stray bullet. Prison administrators had denied all his requests to attend the funeral, leaving him a shattered mess. At about that same time, Richard began an unusual friendship with an old gangster-type by the name of Cody Jarrett. Since then, Cody had persuaded Richard to calm down, make a change. Yet, in order for Cody's plan to succeed, Richard had to report for work, on this particular morning, earlier than usual. He whistled a playful little tune as he stepped lightly, thought of all the joyous times when he was a boy, when his mother used to take him into Fort Lauderdale, to watch classic films. He remembered: James Cagney in the classic, *White Heat*. It was about a ruthless, deranged gangster, overly devoted to his mother. It was Richard's all-time favorite movie.

Past the prison library, near the back gates, he saw the brown trash-truck, stepped off the dew-moistened grass, onto asphalt, noticed the redneck guard was nowhere in sight. He quickly closed with the truck. Chilled winds slammed against him as he walked to the passenger side door, looked about, thought: Where the heck is Cody? In such a short time, Cody had made a deep impression upon young Richard. He desperately needed Cody's guidance. Watchfully, he tried the door-handle. It was unlocked. He pulled up on it, climbed in, slammed the door shut. He was somewhat surprised to see the key in the ignition, thought: good, now I can listen to the radio. He turned the key to the left, flipped on the radio. It was the morning news. Apparently, the Russians and Islamic rebels were still facing off in Chechnya. An update was given on the latest high school shootings out west. There was a part about the great "Y2K" scare: was it really going to be the end of the world? And, closer to home, a man recently profiled by John Walsh on *America's Most Wanted*, was actually captured in Key West. Richard glanced out the windshield, towards the library, saw a prisoner being pursued by another prisoner, swinging a steel rake. He took little notice, turned back to the radio.

He was just about to locate a song on the radio when he heard several hard taps on the passenger-side window. He turned to the right, saw Cody, wide-eyed with a devious smile. "What do you say, Tough Guy," he said. "Sure was careless of that old hack to go an leave the key like that, wasn't it?" Actually, Richard had known Cody since boyhood. Arthur Cody Jarrett, ruthless criminal extraordinaire, as portrayed by James Cagney in *White Heat*.

His beloved Ma, Cagney, as Cody, and Popcorn. That's how it was, long ago.

His father, Richard Davis, a white-man from up north, had died in a car accident. That was a month before Richard's birth. His life on the outside, except for the times he spent with his mother, was miserable. Shunned by the Indians for being white, and ostracized by the whites for being Indian, he became extremely close to his mother. At seventeen, he had married, but, the

beautiful, young bride had died a mysterious death not long afterward.

"Slide on over," Cody said. "Now's our chance. We ain't gotta waste time boostin' the thing...come on ... start her up."

Richard smiled, opened the door, slid on over into the driver's seat, felt the coolness from outside the truck. With a trembling hand he turned the ignition, heard the engine start up. Cody was revved up as well. He yelled, "Alright suckers, clear-out!...Me and Ritchie's bustin' outta here!" He could not sit still. Now the deranged psychopath was laughing, pointing up the road to the front gates. Richard threw it into gear, started up the prison's main road. He gradually increased the speed, saw he was nearing the prison library. The lifers and double-lifers had already noticed him, were in an uproar. One, who was jumping up and down, yelled, "Stop, let me on!" While another, shouted, "No, don't leave me!" Two, a black man and a white man, talked near a red brick wall. The black man said, "That crazy fool on the trash-trucks makin' a break for it." The white man asked, "You don't mean that one who's been talkin' to himself, do you?" Rakes and hoes bounced loudly off the trash-truck. A large orange circular cooler, thrown into the road, was smashed.

Richard grinned, shifted, and rumbled on.

Near the back gates, from out of the machine-shop, ran, Carl, the old redneck guard. In a tan Correctional uniform, he scrambled up the road, shouting and waving his arms high in the air. He had murder in his eyes. He would have the devil to pay if Richard made good his escape.

Cody was giggling, uncontrollably.

Now, prisoners and guards alike were taking notice. This kind of thing didn't happen everyday. Richard drove, swerved here and there to avoid a crazed prisoner or two. It was outrageous. He slammed curbs, mowed down some landscape, and continued on to the front gates. Trash from the bed of the truck littered the roadway, and black smoke blossomed from out of the muffler.

Cody laughed, hysterically.

The guntowers were responding to the crisis now. Bullets exploded through the cab of

the truck. Showers of glass. Cody looked at Richard. "It's gonna be swell when we get outta stir, Kid ... just swell...you'll see." He gritted his teeth, shook a fist out the window, giggled. "And then, we'll get us some artillery ... yeah..." He looked up as if he were watching an old movie, up there in that gray sky. "Yeah ... that's it." Numerous bullets pierced the cab, crashed frightfully, noisily into the dashboard, the seat, the floorboard; one grazed Richard's right cheek. The blood trickled down like red tears.

"Oh, I'm okay, Mr. Jarrett," Richard informed. "Just you keep down." Richard saw him grimace. "I'm not gettin' bumped off, Kid. Nothin' doin'." Hot deadly lead rained down. The trash-truck was flying now. Somehow it was still moving. Momentarily, a strange image formed in Richard's mind.

He saw the old theater where he and his mother had watched classic films. Lights were dimmed and an old black and white movie was on the screen. Yet there was no one there to watch. The image flashed and faded. A bullet ricocheted off the steering column.

"What's the matter with you, Creampuff!" Cody shouted, still shaking his fist out the window. "A guy can't get a break nowhere!"

Richard saw the front gates getting closer by the second, saw the chow-hall off to the left, thought he smelled bread baking, swerved sharply to avoid a white-uniformed prisoner. The administration building was coming up on the right. Secretaries and guards were watching from the windows. A bullet raced past Richard's head. He blinked and drove on. And then it happened.

He felt a sharp pain in his left leg, found it difficult to press down on the clutch. The scent of blood. He quickly grabbed a rag off the seat, jammed it into the gaping wound, heard Cody say, "Ah ... don't get sore, Kid, them hacks up there get paid to shoot guys down ... you gotta expect it. You know what Ma once told me and the gang? She says, just like this here ... Roughstuff's always been a part of being a hudlum ... It may come from them coppers, mugfaces, even them dames ... they'll try to get cha for your dough. You gotta expect it. But don't worry though...we're pals ... we're gonna bust this place wide-open ... you'll

see. We'll make it to the top."

Richard grinned, widely, his words slurred. "Yeah, and we'll pull a few jobs, take our cut." He was sounding like Cody now. Cody giggled, smiled, eyes wide. Then, the trash-truck smashed into the front gates. Richard braced, closed his eyes. The crash was tremendous; metal screeching against asphalt, crumbling under a terrible onslaught. The powerful truck drove on, leaving bent, twisted heaps of fence, razor-vare, and cameras. Fire from the guntowers intensified. Richard hunkered down, the pain in his leg searing. Although he had been unaware of it, the morning news was over. Jim Morrison, and the Doors were now belting out their classic, *Break On Through To The Other Side*. Cody, his blond wavy hair, cut short, yelled, "Tough break, Kid ... If only we had Tommy-guns ... you know, rat ta tat tat?" He pretended he was actually holding one. Richard opened his eyes, rubbed the bridge of his nose, sat up, clutched his leg, said, "We'll get some ... first city we come to."

Morrison was wailing out an ode about death.

The trash-truck blazed on, numerous cars and trucks trailing behind it. All over the prison compound, a deafening siren blared out. It was wild disorder. Malicious armed guards rushed to block the gap in the perimeter. Hostile prisoners were violently subdued. The guards fired tear-gas, blared out threats with bullhorns.

"You know, Kid, a fella can never have enough artillery," pointed out the old gangster. He looked up, and said, "Yeah." Richard drove for half a mile, turned left onto a two-laned country road, lined on both sides with pine trees. The cold air was just ripping through the cab of the truck now. Cody pounded hard on the dashboard, observed, "Music sure has changed, hasn't it?" Richard nodded, coughed, covered his mouth. Cody patted his shoulder, consoled him. "Kid," he said, you're hurt bad ... we gotta pulled over ... get you fixed up."

And so, at a little dirt road, not far from the prison, Richard turned off to the right. In a few minutes the truck neared a forestry tower. It was fenced in. He crashed these gates as well. He slammed the brake with his right foot, slid the truck

in. He smiled through excruciating pain, felt his mind slipping inexorably into madness.

Cody pointed upward, said, "That's the top of the world, up there ... Come on."

Richard cut the motor off. The coldness bit right through the thin prison blues. He opened the door, stumbled out, saw smoke rising from the hood, limped across green grass, freshly-cut, to the stairs. On the bottom stair, he came across a red two-gallon gas can, snatched it up, smelled those awful fumes, began a hazardous climb. Down below, he heard police sirens, cars sliding in, looked down, saw red and blue police lights, felt dizzy. He continued the painful ascent. Somewhere overhead, a noisy helicopter was hovering. He paused, set the gas can down, felt a burning pain in his head. He leaned on the rail, sick, pale, caught his breath. He could hear the faint sound of dogs barking. A cop on a bullhorn thundered out instructions. Richard was surrounded. There was only one way out. Cody was there, like a pugnacious bulldog, he was eager for a fight. A fury of madness. He yelled down, "Yellow coppers!" There were swarms of police down there. Prison gunmen as well. They were taking up positions behind cars, trucks, and trees. Richard, weakened, his madness overflowing, climbed on.

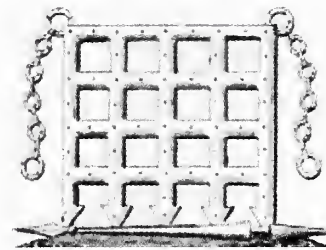
At long last, he reached the top, followed the walkway around the observation room, found the door. Finding it unlocked, he entered. It was a quiet room, dust-covered. Cody coughed. There was a small wooden desk, two chairs, two file-cabinets, and an empty wooden guncase. In one file cabinet, he found an old 22 caliber pistol, broken into several pieces. The black gun was inoperable. The climb had totally exhausted him. Taking a deep breath, he limped over to a window, blood trailing, opened it, glanced down, saw a blurred, swirling scene. A deranged idea formed: set fire to the tower, it's the only way! He searched his pockets for the blue lighter, found it, limped over to the door where the gas can was, pick it up. He splashed what was left in the can around the doorway near the stairs. Those awful fumes. After a few attempts, he lit the gas, the stairs, the doorway. Orange flames reached out quickly, climbed for the dark downcast sky. The bullhorn blared: "Hold your fire!" The police were

baffled. Flames climbed.

Richard hobbled back to the window, the old 22. in hand, looked down, felt a chilling breeze, pain in his mind, heard the flames crackling. He glanced up at the tops of the green trees, the cold gray sky, sought courage. He leaned out the window, scalding flames rising, dark smoke bellowing, waved the broken gun erratically. He felt his last ounce of strength diminishing, looked around for his gangster friend, didn't see him. Last ounce of strength. Slowly waving the dismantled weapon, he said in a low voice, in emulation of Cody Jarrett, at the close of *White Heat*, "Made it, Ma. Top of the world." He closed his eyes, saw the sweet, caring face of his mother, smiled, was no longer afraid, would have no more tormenting headaches.

On the ground, amongst the throng of gunmen was, Carl Gentry, the redneck guard who had left the key in the trash-truck in the first place. He, with the rest of the gunmen, aimed high-powered weapons at Richard. Right between the cross hairs of his scope. With his right eye closed, Carl whispered, "I'll take this trash out," and fired.

The next day was Saturday, the first day of the year, 2000.





“untitled”

Kelly Alcott

Where Is The Devil When You Need Him?

Joy Duffy

The weeping willows swayed gently overhead spreading tendrils of shadow across Kirsten's bare leg as she adjusted her short skirt. The man sitting next to her watched every move with profound interest.

"I just want you to hold it for a minute."

She shook her head. Cascades of blond curls bounced around her face. "No, I can't. Mommy said it's bad to touch a man down there."

"But, honey, I'm your mommy and daddy's best friend. I wouldn't make you do something wrong. It's okay with them. They let you come to the park alone with me didn't they?"

Blue eyes framed with fuzzy blond lashes searched his leathery face. "Yeah, but..."

"Think about it honey. They wouldn't let you come to the park with me if they thought I'd hurt you or make you do anything wrong, would they?"

Shadows elongated across their park bench and crawled across the wide expanse of grass. "You said that if I came to the park with you, you'd buy me ice cream."

"I know honey, but you're not making me happy. You don't trust me."

"I trust you. Can I have my ice cream now? It's getting late and you did promise."

"Don't worry, you'll get your ice cream. If you touch it and make me happy, I'll even buy you marbles. Your daddy told me you've been asking for marbles."

A squirrel skittered by and Kirsten watched it until it disappeared behind a cluster of pines before she answered the stem looking man. "Yeah, my friend Bruce

has marbles but he's selfish and won't let me play with them."

His lips were pressed tight, like he was thinking, but the rest of his face wrinkled in an odd way. "Touch it, and then I'll buy you a bigger bag of marbles than Bruce's. In fact, if you make me happy, I'll buy you two bags of marbles."

"But it's wrong."

"Two bags of marbles."

"It's wrong."

"Two bags of marbles and a double dip ice cream."

Kirsten sat studying her hands in her lap. He reached for her hand. She moved it behind herself and finally sat on it. "Mommy will be mad and yell and stuff."

He put his hand under her small chin and raised her face and looked into her eyes. "We won't tell her. It will be our grown up secret. No one will know except you and me."

"Even if mommy doesn't know, isn't it still wrong?"

"No honey. Grown up ladies do it all the time. They don't tell you about it because they think you're a baby. But I see you differently. I see you as a pretty young lady."

"I'm a big girl."

A sudden gust of wind blew a blond curl across her face. He reached over and placed it behind her ear as she bent backwards to avoid his touch. "I know honey, I can see that. You're a beautiful young lady and I want to make you feel good. You know I'm your friend and I

would never do anything to hurt you, don't you?"

She thought about the question. "I guess so."

"I don't think you're a baby like your parents do."

"You think I'm a big girl?"

"Yes, and you can prove it." He unzipped his loose fitting chinos. "Look, here it is, just touch it once."

She turned her head away. "I can't; it's so ugly."

"It doesn't look like much now but it has magic powers."

"It has?"

He smiled and slowly chose his words. "Sure, it can do lot's of things."

"Like what?"

He took her hand as soon as she pulled it from beneath her backside. She didn't pull it away. He said in a gentle voice, "See how little and shriveled up it is. If a beautiful young lady like yourself were to touch it, you'll make grow big and hard right before your eyes. It has to be a special lady like yourself. Not just anybody can make the magic happen. Wanta see?"

Her mouth formed a small O. "I don't think so."

"Come on honey. I care a lot for you. I wouldn't waste so much time with you and your parents if I didn't. I want you to be my special friend."

Her brow lifted slightly. She stood, faced him, and loudly voiced her next question. "If you care for me, why are you trying to make me do something wrong?"

"Sit down and I will explain."

She sat. "It's not wrong honey. When your mother wanted a new car, she went to work to get the

money, right? And she treated your dad extra nice didn't she?"

She considered it. "Yeah."

"You want ice cream and marbles so let's call touching me, and being nice to me, your work to get what you want. There are grown up women who work at pleasing men all the time, and they get everything they want. Grown up ladies do it all the time."

Kirsten turned to watch a woman approaching. "They do?" She started to get up and follow the woman but he grabbed her hand and roughly pulled her back to the bench. Cascades of blond hair bounced around her angelic face. "Sit down here when I'm talking to you."

He rubbed her arm that reddened up where he'd grabbed her. "Sure, adult women do it all the time. You not doing it only proves that you are still a baby and we both know better than that. Don't we?"

"Two bags of marbles and ice cream?"

"Yes, and all you have to do is touch it."

Silently Kirsten's eyes followed the woman as she walked out of sight.

"If it's not wrong, why did you put that newspaper over it when that lady walked by?"

"Because she'll see it and want it for herself. But sweetheart, I only want you to have it. You're the only one I care about."

Her face scrunched up and her eyes squinted as she glanced down. "Why would she want that ugly thing?"

"Grown up ladies love it because they know the magic it can do."

"Then why didn't you let her touch it then?"

"No, I want you honey. I don't want a strange woman getting my magic. You're my special girl. Now, come on touch it, that's all. Then, we can go get your marbles and ice cream."

Tentatively Kirsten reached out and touched the dreadful little thing with her stubby fingers. As she started to draw back, Stanley took her hand and wrapped it around his penis and held it there. She sat rock still, not daring to move. Fear building in her mind caused her mother to appear in a vision.

He began moving her hand up and down and sure enough, the magic started to happen. It was holding more than just touching like he promised, but it wasn't bad. No devils came rushing from hell to carry her away like her mother said would happen if she touched a man down there. Her mind disconnected from the scene. Things got foggy as he disappeared and her mind carried her to her version of hell, based on the teachings in Sunday school. It was all red and glowing but she couldn't conjure up one devil. According to her mother, devils were always watching; waiting for someone to be bad so they could drag that person to hell and bum them up. If the devils didn't appear, it must be because what she was doing wasn't so bad.

Stanley shook her. "Kirsten, Kirsten, pay attention." She opened her eyes and looked down. He was wiping her hand with a dirty hanky. When he finished, he took her to the store and brought her ice cream. As they walked to the toy store to get marbles, he took her hand. "There, that wasn't so bad was it?" He placed two bags of marbles in her hand.

She licked the strawberry ice cream. "No, I guess not. This ice cream is real good and I love my marbles."

He smiled down at her. His face didn't look so old and wrinkled as he said, "Next Saturday we can come to the park again and I'll show you some new fun we can have. I'll get you a coloring book."

"And crayons?"

"Sure, why not."

"If you're really good to me, maybe you'll get a new doll. Would you like that?"

Crystal blue eyes shimmered as they met his. "I would like to have a bike but mommy says we don't have enough money."

"Well now, a new bike, that's a tall order. After I see how nice you can treat me, we'll see about a bike. I hope you realize that to get a bike you'll have to do some real nice things for me. You'll have to come to my house because if any grownups see us they will get jealous."

"A bike with training wheels?"

"We'll see how good you are. Now make sure you don't tell mommy or daddy. If you do, our deal is off, and you get nothing. Okay."

He wasn't so bad. She wondered why his face used to remind her of a wrinkled brown paper bag.

"Okay."

"I'll pick you up early next Saturday and we'll spend the whole day together."

"Okay."

Gold Leaf Vase

Walking in with purposeful funky-out clothes

Actions never for fun, but to uphold image

Why should you look up, you are the best

Thinking creativity secedes from every pore

Motsturized skin and occasionally manicured nails

Everyone must know acrylics are shallow

Holding epiphany provoking material in notebook

No one else on a level to create such a piece

You think you are the gold leaf vase

That no one dares destroy...

No one dare destroys except me

My passion will tear you apart.

- Mackenzie Donovan -



"Spiritual Birth" Pia Pownall

Graphite



"The Fula Hoop"

Courtney Pryce

Ponce the Christmas Pony

By Maxwell Highsmith

Ponce, the elf, was sitting in Santa's workshop. It was February and the holiday season had just passed. He was looking forward to this Christmas because he was a newly promoted elf to the workshop. He had waited along time for this promotion. He was still young at 305 but he could wait no longer. He was finally a real live elf working in Santa's shop.

He walked along touching the tables and smelling the smells. "Wow," he said aloud. "I've finally arrived."

Ponce was a regular looking elf with regulation pointy ears and funny pointed shoes. He walked right up to the lead elf waiting for his assignment. He was handed a piece of paper. He turned it over. He couldn't figure out what it was. He turned it over and he was still not able to tell. Finally, after a few minutes, he asked.

"What's this?" The lead elf looked at him and smiled. "What is it?" He stammered again. "I can't figure it out."

The lead elf looked him in his eye and said, "It's Santa's new toy for next Christmas."

"Really?" Ponce exclaimed with joy. "Can you tell me what it is?" He was wringing his hands with excitement.

"It's a wooden pony," The lead elf said matter-of-factly. "It's a real live old fashioned wooden pony." He smiled a great big smile.

Ponce was sad. "A pony?" He looked around the room. All the elves had stopped working because he was shouting. "A wooden pony? What's so special about a wooden pony?"

The lead elf understood. He remembered the first time that he was assigned to Santa's workshop-he had assigned a teddy bear. His beard shook as he laughed. "Ho! Ho!" He held his belly like Santa would. He laughed again. "Ho! Ho!" Ponce was confused.

"Young lad", the lead elf said, "Sometimes the simplest toys are the best toys. Don't you worry-you'll see" He handed a pony to Ponce. "This is what it looks like when it's done."

"Santa gave me a whole year to make ponies?" Ponce was really confused now. "Why?" The lead elf started again. Ponce just took the pony and the plans and went to assigned station. 'Maybe tomorrow I'll talk to Santa about this and he can explain'

The next day, Ponce went to go see Santa. He was line with three other elves. They were filling out applications for the workshop. They seemed not to mind the long lines or the long forms. He overheard them talking.

"Hey," said one to another. "Did you hear that Santa assigned the new Master Toy maker a wooden pony?"

"Really?" said the second to the first. "Wow! What a honor!" Ponce wondered whom they talking about? Who was this Master Toy Maker? Then suddenly he remembered. They were talking about him. You see, once an elf is assigned into the workshop-that elf was designated a Master Toy Maker. All the elves dreamed of being a Master Toy Maker, including these three. He felt ashamed. He left the line and returned to his home. He vowed to return to the workshop the next day.

At 8 a.m. the next day, Ponce was standing waiting for the shop to open. When it did, he ran to his assignment area with a heart full of excitement. He looked up and saw the stations. Station #1 was a Baby doll. Station #2 was-race cars Station #3 were Toy trucks. "Yeah!" He was running at top speed. He passed Station#4, which was sneakers, and #5 were basketballs. Station #6 was electronic games and finally around the bend was Station #7-his station. He looked up and hoped that Santa would have changed his mind and gave him superheroes but...nope, it was wooden ponies. He sat down at the desk, and was disgusted. He

should have been happy but he just couldn't bring himself to be. He put the pony together and went home for the day.

"Oh, I wish I could have been assigned to do superheroes," he said as he walked the door.

"Hi honey! How was your day?" Elsa his wife asked as he came through the door. She made a wonderful elf wife. He long curly black hair made look almost 200 years younger than she was (she was 305, too.). "What are you making at the workshop?" she asked with genuine care.

"No basketballs. No sneakers. No superheroes. Just wooden ponies." He sat down defeated. "Can you believe that? After all making Santa's sleigh shine like the sun, after caring for the reindeer until they were picture perfect, they were they healthiest that Santa ever saw. He even gave me a commendation two Christmases ago. After all that, I'm making wooden ponies."

Elsa looked at Ponce in her loving way and said, "Well honey, Santa is a good man. Probably the best that ever lived. If he thinks that wooden ponies bring out the Christmas spirit in you, then that's what you'll have to make. Besides, every child deserves Christmas. Even if it comes as a wooden pony. Sometimes the simplest toys are the best toys."

Ponce loved Elsa. She was always sensible. "Maybe you're right Elsa." They ate their dinner and went to bed early. Oh well, maybe tomorrow will be better. Maybe...just maybe Santa was testing him. Tomorrow he would change his mind. Ponce hurried off to sleep and dreamed of the superheroes he would make.

The next day, March 15, he leaped out of bed. He ate breakfast with greater enthusiasm. He dressed quickly and raced the wind to the workshop. As he entered the door, he looked for the assignment sheet. Santa had assigned him to the same workstation-number 7. "No problem," he thought. He ran over and started the machine.

It whined and purred and chugged and soon some pieces started coming out. First, a long cylinder with a leather piece hanging out from one end. Next, a piece that looked like a head with two eyes on it. Then, four short straight pieces came out. These pieces looked like legs. Finally, two rockers came out.

"Umm, strange," Ponce thought. "This can't be a superhero?" He said aloud. Where was the cape? And where were the muscles? He had assorted pieces of wood. He looked at the plans. The plans didn't make sense. Then he turned the plans upside down. There, that was better. He began to recognize the toy. It was... it was...it was a wooden pony. Sheesh! Why would Santa make him a Master Toy Maker for wooden ponies?

"I've got to talk to Santa about this." Ponce was angry. He left without making any more toys. He was sadder than ever.

Several days later he went to see Santa. Santa was discouraged as he listened to Ponce. He sat quietly as Ponce talked.

"Santa, I really thank you for selecting me as a Master Toy Maker. It's great and the thing that I've always wanted. It's any elf's dream but..." he sat down in the chair.

"But what Ponce?" Santa wanted to hear the rest of his problem. He folded his hands over his big Christmas belly and waited. "Go on Ponce. You can tell me..."

Ponce cleared his throat and continued, "I thought I'd be making toys that kids really want, that kids really dreamed about. Not..." his voice trailed off.

"I know Ponce not wooden ponies," Santa said calmly. "Do you know why I picked you as Master Pony maker? Hmmm?" Ponce shook his head.

"The reason I picked you is that these ponies need the utmost Christmas care. Inside of you is a good heart. You are meticulous and

loving. I saw how you took care of my reindeer. You have the ultimate Christmas spirit inside of you." Santa began to speak slowly. "I hope that this doesn't affect your decision to remain a Master Toy Maker?"

"Well, actually..." Ponce began to speak slowly also. "I was considering going back to reindeer and sleigh duties. I hope you're not mad."

Santa sat quietly and looked at Ponce. His cheeks were big and red and his nose began to twitch. Suddenly, without a warning, He jumped up and laughed a hearty laugh.

"HO!HO!HO!" His belly shook like a bowl of Jell-O. He laughed again, "HO!HO!HO"

"Santa? Santa? Are you all right?" Ponce was a little nervous. "Is it O.K.? Can I return to sleigh and reindeer duties?"

"Sure, Ponce you can return to those duties." He laughed again and put his hand on Ponce's shoulder.

"Are you sure? You're not mad, are you?" Ponce asked sheepishly. He stood up and realized that Santa was almost as old as he was.

"No, Ponce. I'm not mad. Thanks for telling me how you feel." Santa said as he stopped laughing. He marked day on his calendar- March 30.

"Thanks, Santa." Ponce turned and returned to the stables for the rest of the day. Santa smiled and twinkled his nose as he went out the door.

When Ponce arrived home, Elsa had dinner waiting. "How'd it go with Santa?" She was glad that he finally went to talk to Santa.

"Santa said I had special Christmas spirit and that's why he chose me for the wooden ponies." He was tired. Ponce had forgotten how much work the reindeer were.

Elsa smiled and said, "My big brave Ponce- such a wonderful little elf. You do have that Christmas spirit. Go back tomorrow and tell Santa

that you'll do the ponies. Please Ponce, just for me" Ponce was quiet and decided it was time for bed.

Several months later, he looked at the calendar while eating breakfast. It was October 2- one month away from Christmas countdown. He decided to check in at the workshop.

When he walked in, all the elves were busy. The machines were going clang! Some were going whoosh! While others were going musha-musha-musha! The shop was a busy little place. The elves were singing and dancing while they worked. Elves were everywhere hard at work. Ponce got so excited, at first because he had never seen such a hub-bub. They were really working now. He was saddened because he could not join them, well-he could if he wanted too. He decided to go back to the stables.

"Maybe I'm not cut out to be a Master Toy Maker." He sighed. "At least I'm a A+ Reindeer groomer." He ran around the back. "Hey, got room for one more?"

"Sure, c'mon in. We could use all the help we could get," one of the elves said. So he re-joined the group.

"Hey did you hear that one of the Master Toy makers hasn't been in since March?" Ponce overheard two elves talking.

"No way," said the other. The elves stopped grooming the reindeer and began to chat.

"Sure did," said the one who had greeted him. "I think it was the Master Pony maker."

"Are you sure?" Another elf yelled from afar. "I heard it was the Master Superhero Specialist"

"Nope, it was the Master Pony Maker," repeated the first. "Yeah, he got discouraged because he couldn't make superheroes." Ponce wanted to say something but remained silent, trying to began work again.

"Didn't he know that wooden ponies are

for Santa's special kids. These are the ones that Santa loves the most. Why would he leave? That's the most honorable Master Toy Maker position. Only the elf with the ultimate Christmas spirit gets that. Hey remember the last one, Manny was his name wasn't it?" The elves broke off into memories about Manny.

Ponce got lost in the excitement. He replayed what they had said, "...special Christmas spirit..." He could hear over and over again. How could he have been so foolish? Of course, that's why Santa chose him. That's what he meant when he said "special." The ponies went to Santa's favorite kids. The ones that really needed Christmas that year. Ponce left the stables focused on that one thought.

The next morning, he ran to the workshop to speak to Santa. He just had to speak with him. Knock, knock went Santa's door. "Come in," Santa said.

"Santa, please I want my job as The Master Pony Maker. Please Santa, I understand now"; Ponce was speaking very fast and was almost out of breath when he finished. He looked at Santa with hope-filled eyes.

"Ho, Ho Ho!" Santa laughed and held his belly. "Now slow down just a bit there Ponce. I'm sorry but I had to put Manny back in the shop. Why it's four till Christmas. I'll need those ponies- a lot of children will need Christmas this year. I'm sorry Ponce, I waited as long as I could."

Ponce folded his hands and walked out silently. He realized that he had made a big mistake. He walked all the way home without realizing it. When he opened the door, he waved at Elsa and went to bed without dinner. Elsa understood his sadness and let him sleep.

On December 23, he awoke with a start and went straight to his stables. Today was the final sleigh detail. After that, every elf had work in the workshop because it would be open for 24 hours.

Starting at 8 p.m., the workshop would be open around the clock to finalize all the last minute details. Tonight was also special because Santa would read all the letters from the boys and girls across the globe as the elves worked, this always seemed to motivate the elves a little more. The elves worked at maximum speed with the sincerest of hearts. This was always the best and most fun time for all the elves.

Ponce finished at the stables and arrived at the workshop by 7:30 p.m. There was a growing hum in the shop. Everyone seemed to be working then suddenly Santa announced "Magic Time!" The air became crisp and the wind began to sing. Chimes and whistles were everywhere while the elves danced a jig while they worked.

Santa came out in his red suit and sat his the big chair. He had a stack of letters and began reading. The first was from a little girl in Bangladesh.

"Dear Santa," Santa began, " My name is Sally. I'm hoping you get this letter in time. I am three years old and have cancer. My dolly burned up when our house caught fire in the lightning storm. Please if you have any dollies left over, give one to me. Thanks, Sally."

The workshop was quiet for several seconds, then Master Doll Maker Baxter said, "Roger, Santa! Full speed ahead on the dolls!" Suddenly, the doll machine seemed to come to life. Baby dolls were coming out of it from everywhere; blue dolls, green dolls, white dolls, black dolls, red dolls of all shapes, sizes and colors.

Santa began with the next letter, " Dear Santa, my name is Tony, and I am four years old. When I grow up I want to be a race car driver. I watch it on TV with my dad. Can I have a race car so that I can pretend. I love you Santa and know that you can bring me a car. Hope you liked my cookies last year. My dog Rudolph helped make them. Merry Christmas, Tony."

Within seconds the race car machine was heard roaring to life. Vroooooom! Vroooooom! Master Race Car Maker Egan waved his checkered flag at Santa and everyone laughed.

Letter number 3 was from Suzy, who also wanted a truck. At the end of her letter, Master truck Maker Sheila was racing around with Egan. With both machines going, the elves could hardly hear themselves sing. So they sang louder.

And so on it went; each machine and Master Toy maker became alive with the reading of a letter from a child from around the globe. The workshop noise grew louder and louder. The lights were brighter and brighter until the whole South Pole glowed like a magnificent star.

After a n hour or so, Santa read another letter. "Dear Santa, My name is Max. I am in Chelsea Clinton Children's Hospital. I am 5 years old and I'm in the hospital because my family had a car accident two days ago. See, we were on our way to visit Grandpa and Grandma Jack in North Carolina. They have horses there. Grandpa said that I was finally old enough to ride Ponce, a pony that I helped to take care since last year. But now, I'm in the hospital and I haven't seen Mommy or Daddy since the accident. The doctors won't let me yet. My nurse is writing this because I can't use my hands. Anyway, I'm gonna miss Ponce because I'll be in a place called 'ICU' for a long time. I'm not sure what that means but I know I won't see Grandpa or Grandma Jack and certainly not Ponce. Please Santa, if you could send me a wooden pony, I could name it Ponce and not be so sad. Thanks Santa, you're the best. Max"

The workshop was immediately silent. Ponce could hear a pin drop. A second ago the place was full of joy and laughter. Now it was so silent that he heard the cries of the wind. Ponce was sad but expected to hear Manny rev the machine to life. But he didn't hear anything. So he took a walk over to the Master Pony Maker to see what was

the matter.

He ran over to the station and nothing. Manny was nowhere to be found. Santa, who was looking down from his big chair, saw Ponce's confusion. "Well, Ponce what are you going to do?" Ponce looked up and saw Santa's big smile. He looked around at the rest of the elves and saw that they were looking at him. He shifted his hands in and out of his pockets. Finally, he broke into a big smile. "Full speed ahead on the pony machine."

"Hooray!" All the elves cheered as he ran up to the machine and hit the start button. It began slowly to wind up, slowly and slowly the start sequence sounded, until...

The machine stopped. It didn't cough or whine. It just stopped. Oh no! What was Ponce going to do? He had to make this wooden pony for Max. He wanted to scream for help but his voice froze in his mouth. Suddenly he remembered! Where was the first one he had made on that first day? Under the chair-no! Under the table-no! On top of the machine-No! He searched and searched and searched and searched. Finally, he looked by the plans and there it was! He signed his name to it and lifted it up in the air. The elves started singing again. Santa winked at Ponce and touched his nose. Magic dust came down from the ceiling and the elves danced and sang as they finished the night.

And do you know what Santa did? He let Ponce hand deliver that wooden pony to Max in the hospital. Nobody had a better Christmas in the whole wide world than Max. Well, maybe one little elf named Ponce did.

Butterfly Rain

A calm silence exists

As deadly rain cascades down

And butterflies scream

Kitten Play

Wiggle, wobble, WOW!

I didn't do anything wrong!

You don't need your toes!

- Jason Aiford -

The Corner

Sitting Silently

No Soul to Rest Upon it

Little, Lonely Bench

The Fall

Gently Falling Leaf

Twirling Through the Unseen Breeze

Left its Tree Behind

- Stormy Freeman -

Autumn

Birds fly above me

Going to their winter's home

I prefer to stay.

- Katarina Topolac -

Consultation

*Talking to you
Is like
Pulling out bits
Of my soul
And tossing them
Onto the floor.
Then I get on
The ground
And examine
Each piece.
You hand me
A broom, a dust-
pan,
And I sweep
Up my soul.
After reviewing
The parts
And stuffing
Them into
My empty heart,
I smile.*

-Rebecca Faust-

That's Right

*That's right
classroom down the hall
Where all the kids who don't like to be taught are
ones who miss the meaning of responsibility
Who tinker with toys still
Go there
You belong there
Join others who don't think before acting
they just don't act
just don't act right
Write down ground rules if you want to play with us again
Stay focused
But only at one game
Choose a game that fits functionally in our world
For instance since you seem to have problems, start out simple
Choose minimum wage
Work long hours for Mr. no name boss
Fatigue yourself
Spend free time on
Resting activities like watching a football game or
The newest blockbuster movie
Have kids and we'll replace your old seat in the normal classroom
We'll get another chance
Always think beyond yourself
Remember
Adam and Eve connect the whole world
Most of all forget the animal truth
We are civilized
We do not do anything for pleasure
We do everything to keep life smooth
Oh, I almost forgot
Most important ground rule
Believe that what you are doing is what you want to do
Go ahead and open the door
They'll set you straight in there
Best of luck*



“Public Opinion”

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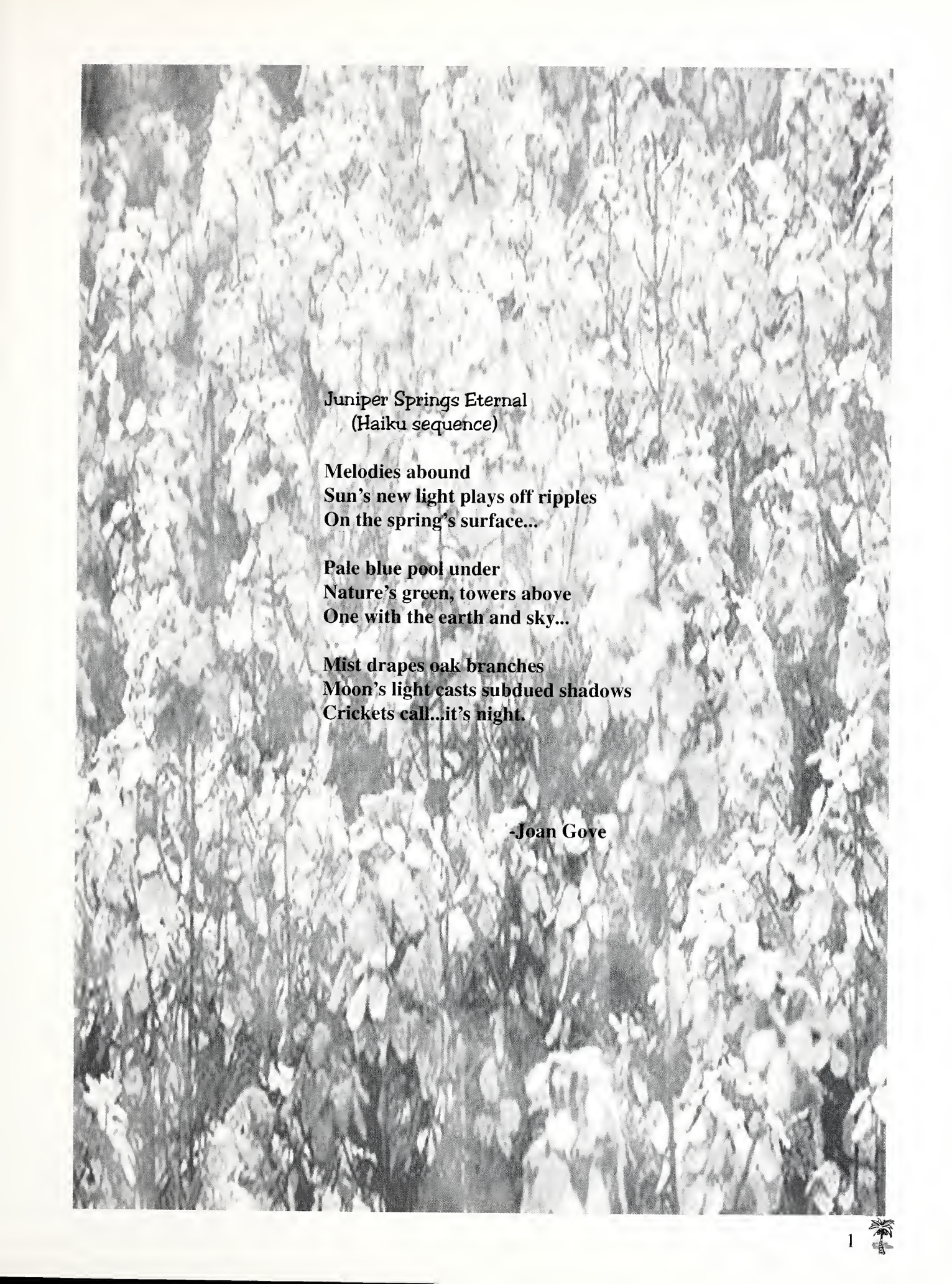
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The Student Literary/Arts Magazine of Broward Community College
Fall/Winter 1999 Volume 31, Number One



P'an Ku



Juniper Springs Eternal
(Haiku sequence)

Melodies abound
Sun's new light plays off ripples
On the spring's surface...

Pale blue pool under
Nature's green, towers above
One with the earth and sky...

Mist drapes oak branches
Moon's light casts subdued shadows
Crickets call...it's night.

-Joan Gove



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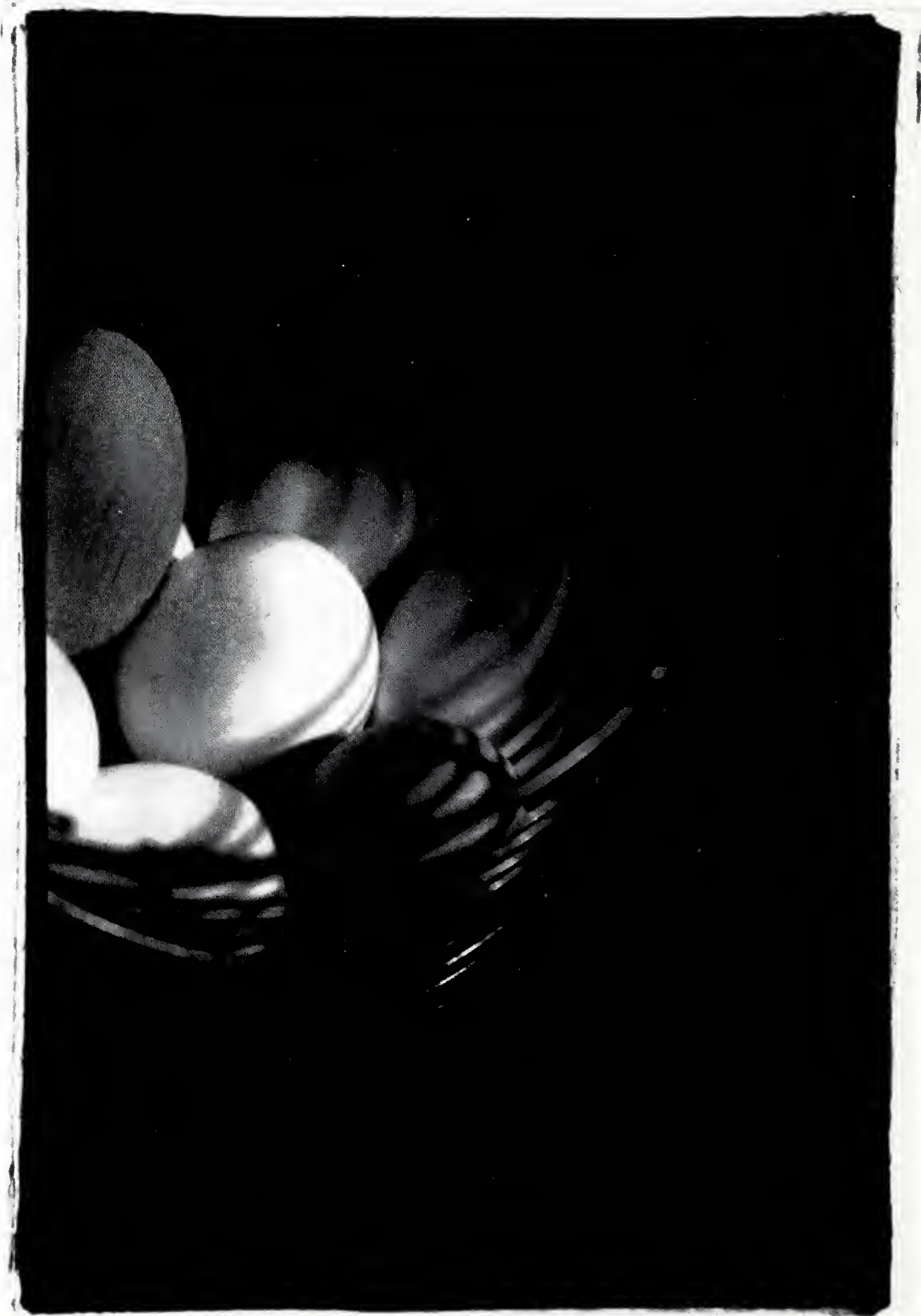
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"Eggs" - Black and White Photograph

-B.L. Wells

EGGS

(the Joyce Kilmer “Trees” version)

I think that I have yet to Beg;
to hear a LONG poem about the EGG.

An Egg, be it boiled, poached meringued, or
scrambled;
the recipes are Endless, and so I may
ramble.

An Egg, whose shell that conveys such Beauty;
to photograph in “just the right light,”
was our “Focal Duty.”

An Egg, in all of it’s witty prose;
Reflective, High-key, and “Floating,” was
what we All chose.

To see it glisten and show its delicate skin;
Yet to capture that Essence—
Must be printed again and again.

And Now, at last, the END for You, Tired Folks,.....;

I just hope the Next Assignment is NOT THE MORE
CHALLENGING
YOKES!!!

-B.L. Wells

Zozobra - the burning of Old Man Gloom

Carol Freeman

It was an unusual afternoon for late October. Although wild purple asters were in full bloom and the cottonwoods in the city were already losing their leaves, out in the high desert east of Albuquerque, Indian summer lingered, bright and hot, far into the dusty afternoons. Charlene had been reinforcing the fence for the past three hours. Her hands were cut; she was tired and dirty. Her wrist ached from slamming nail after nail into the endless line of wooden posts that marked the western border of her and Gary's three-acre lot. She paused to shake a cramp out of her hand and recounted the items on Gary's list of winter preparations that remained undone, most of them still waiting for her to begin. Her heart rate quickened. It was Gary, not a fence post, she really wanted to hit.

Charlene gritted her teeth, positioned a nail, and lifted the hammer for another painful strike. She was in mid-swing when her fingers released their grip. The hammer fell with a thud and kicked up a fresh layer of dust to settle in the creases of her faded black cowboy boots. Her fingers were frozen, locked in a witch's claw. The sun had begun to lower slightly on the horizon, and its slanting rays sent a brutal glare rushing across the miles of open prairie. Turning away from the blinding light, she looked down at her abused hands, the hands that had once been so soft and elegant. "No, damn it, these can't be mine!" Tears trembled beneath her eyelids. She blinked them away, struggling to hold back a surge of despair.

Her hands were scraped raw, but the real wound was deeper yet. Looking at the cuts and lacerations in her pale skin, Charlene could no longer deny how helpless she was alone. Her plans for leaving Gary crumbled. When she realized how impossible it would

be without him, she began to cry.

"Why did I come here?" She half-sobbed, more with resentment than regret. It didn't seem possible that more than eleven years had passed since the night she had run away with Gary to New Mexico, leaving forever her family and friends, everything and everyone she knew. At the time, none of that seemed important.

As she stood alongside the unfinished fence, an image of Gary seemed to hover before her. "He's ruined my life," she thought. Self-righteous hatred toward him swelled in a wash of violent intent. He was the reason for everything, everything that had gone wrong. "I never want to see him again," she fumed, but the angrier she got, the more she was helpless to block his memory from her mind.

Gary's hazy image solidified into a likeness so clear that Charlene felt his presence beside her. She blushed - just the thought of Gary could still make her weak. A thrill of desire shot through her body, as intensely now as in their early days together. It arced from her nipples to her sex, connecting them in almost painful arousal. She put her hand between her legs and pressed against the crotch of her jeans. The seam rubbed in the places she longed to be touched and she moaned in urgency. The ache inside of her called out for release.

Charlene had fallen recklessly in love with Gary before the end of their first afternoon. She was 16 then; he had just turned 23. She'd lived always by the lake in Ohio, but Gary was a traveler, only arrived just yesterday. No man had ever looked at Charlene the way Gary did that afternoon. For the first time, she felt beautiful, for the first time, entirely alive. When just a month after they met, Gary told her they'd be leaving, she nearly collapsed in his arms. Her prayers had been answered. Six days later, she secretly packed one bag. She paced her room frantically until her parents were asleep, slipped quietly out the window, and ran out into the night. The night air was cold as they burned up the miles

between the empty lot at the end of Charlene's block and the Ohio state line. She never even asked him where they were going. The only regret she had was not being able to tell her parents goodbye. Gary said she couldn't tell them anything until she was 18, a year and a half away. It didn't matter - as long as they were together, everything would be all right.

But, they weren't: things were not all right at all. Charlene's mother's heart had broken; the flowers on her grave long wilted before that winter's end. Her father became an old man. His world eclipsed by tragedy, he found solace in dark miasma that layered across his mind. Finally, the news reached Charlene. For many months, she was not rational, wandering lost through the shadowy land between reality and the insane. When the voices cleared and the images blew away, she awakened again to life, subdued and somewhat changed. The door to madness had been opened, at times seductively calling her name. No matter what was to come, she knew she'd be with Gary, for now she was an orphan, and he was all she'd ever have. She had no home to which she might once again return.

Most times these days, Charlene felt like the wind could blow right through her. She felt barren, as stripped of color as the clapboard house in which they lived, isolated and alone, in the middle of nowhere. No one ever came to their home. She rarely saw anyone on the road. The community was no more than shacks, trailer homes, and small dirt farms. She wondered whether anyone would ever know if either she or Gary disappeared.

It was time to head in. She gathered up her tools and supplies hastily, cursing when a jar of nails fell from her cramped hand and scattered over the ground. Reaching down, she focused on her chipped polish, broken nails, and dirty hands with exasperation. It was all Gary's fault for bringing her here. A thin rivulet of dirt and blood ran off her chafed palm. Despite the heat, she shivered as the dark red

droplets fell on her pointy, cracked leather boots. "Where the hell is Gary, damn it. He knows I hate this. He damn well knows this is his job. Just how the fuck does he manage to disappear every time ..?"

That was it. Charlene's volatile emotions erupted into fury. Memories that she'd hidden from herself broke loose in fragmentary visions. Gray light stole over the pastel sky, and bloodstained images flashed across her mind. The sky seemed to be tilting on a diagonal. There was something important she needed to remember... As the memories played before her, the world around Charlene became still and very clear.

It was the first night of their last days together. Gary was sitting shirtless on the edge of their waterbed, golden in the glow of the 13 candles he'd lit and set around the room. The candles flickered, sending prisms of light off the beveled edges of mirror and Charlene's collection of small cut-glass figurines. The fragile creations were all that connected her to childhood. They represented her family, her youth, her innocence and her dreams, the only pieces that hadn't been destroyed. She watched as rainbows of light danced across the walls and ceiling, transfixed by their colors and the magic in the night. Then it happened.

Tossing a tiny ballerina dangerously in one hand, Gary motioned for Charlene to join him. She crossed the room and, with her eyes cast down, knelt humbly at his feet. When she looked up, he reached down to help her, simultaneously holding the tiny ballerina high. The room spun slowly. She felt dizzy, hot. Charlene watched hopelessly as Gary let the fragile dancer plummet to the tiled floor. In a sharp explosion, it shattered across the room. She froze, wracked by Gary's violence, stunned by her own grief. Gary stroked her hair gently. "I love you, Gary, never leave me. I love you." She couldn't stop the words. They tore at her heart. Tears of desperation ran down Charlene's cheeks as her belief in his love for her died. When she next looked up at Gary, Charlene felt nothing but pure hate. She

knew she'd have to kill him in order to get away.

She heard, rather than saw, the hammer crack against the back of Gary's skull. She watched as he pitched slowly forward in the sudden illumination of a lightning bolt's strike. Gary slumped to the ground, his body slack and heavy. His blood ran black in the moonlight, pooling around the back of his head. In the low cloud of rising dirt, Gary tried weakly to rise. One more time, in her mind's eye, Charlene watched herself lean and reach as if to help, felt her fingers touch his cheek and the weight as her arm raised the hammer. She looked into Gary's eyes. And, hit him again.

Charlene fell to her knees on the hard, broken earth. She sank down on her heels, unable to stop the gruesome images from appearing before her eyes. Again came the sound: Crack! The memories she watched were no longer in the past. Events from days earlier were happening before her, now, real time. Charlene looked down and saw that gore had spread all the way up the hammer's claw. Gary's blood was spattered on her clothes, in her hair. She could smell it, sickly sweet, becoming rancid. Like film forever looping through a camera's reels, the morbid visions played surrealistically on. She watched them, no longer attempting to turn herself away. With each replay of the brutal scene, Charlene yearned for Gary more; loved him anew. She needed him now, badly, and ached to be cradled in his arms once again. "Please, come home," she whispered. "Gary, Gary, please come home." She covered her face in her bleeding hands and sobbed. Pink stained tears fell through her fingers and snaked through delicate faults in the dry New Mexico clay. She raised herself from the ground and walked deliberately toward the house.

The Sandia Mountains began to tinge watermelon-rose, heralding the onset of deep afternoon, New Mexico's most beautiful time of day. Charlene was unable to see it. She ran toward the house, wanting only to lock the

doors and hide until the nightmares stopped. Her mind struggled to understand. What had she done? Perhaps she had imagined everything. Maybe it was nothing at all.

Sunlight reflecting off metal drew her eyes to the crest of their property. She stopped and looked to where the grass and scrub were sined in a wide circle on the ground. On that spot 10 days earlier, Charlene and Gary had built a 62-foot model of Zozobra, New Mexico's "Old Man Gloom," out of metal, wood, paper and straw. In honor of the Navajo harvest celebration, they had burned their effigy the same night the huge annual fete was being held in Santa Fe. There, thousands of people gathered to watch a 50-foot Zozobra light up the nighttime sky. The bright flames promised to lift the gloom from everyone's lives, but for Charlene, the ritual left only a doleful figure charred and crucified on the burnt cross ahead. Its shadow elongated and poured down the small hill to where she stood, arms open with palms lifted to the sky, mewling softly to the stark silhouette above.

Music came on from inside the house and broke the strange spell that had insinuated itself about her. Before the second note, she recognized the Allman Brothers and knew it was the CG) Gary had played over and over on the cold night they had driven to New Mexico so many years ago. The air reverberated with sound as the volume came on loud, cranked up full blast boogie. Southern bass guitar vibrated through the porch floor planks and rhythm pounded out the cabin's front windows. It seemed perfectly natural when Gary came out with two cold Budweisers in one hand and a handleless harmonica between his lips.

The stench of decay made her gasp. What was that? And, Gary couldn't possibly be here. Could he? No, it wasn't possible. He had died on the night Zozobra had burned. But, what she saw now was unmistakable. The terrible smell faded, and she watched in disbelief as Gary turned to her and grinned. "What is this?" she thought. Oh, My God, I'm

crazy.” Nevertheless, she remained riveted to what had to be an apparition of the man she still cherished. The man she had murdered only a few nights before. Her heart began to sing.

Gary’s legs were long and it took but a heartbeat for him to cross behind the burnt and crucified hulk of their scarecrow-like Zozobra. In the changing light, the sun’s rays created a gold ring of light around the skeletal effigy. Sunlight refracted through scattered-crystal clouds and spilled orange, red, and purple dyes across the turquoise blue sky. Time became fluid. For an eerie moment, the past seemed to hover in an aura surrounding its charred remains. Although she wanted to move. Charlene found herself frozen, transfixed by the mournful song rising from the pit she’d dug in front of Zozobra’s cross.

At last, she heard him. From across the stretch of flowering cacti and fragmented tumbleweeds between them, the wind carried Gary’s voice to Charlene. The sound was sensual and stirring. Without understanding his words, she knew what he wanted her to hear. She turned away from Zozobra and walked directly to the place where she knew he would be waiting.

They met in the secret corner beneath the tarp fastened to the roof of their deco-in-the-desert painted school bus. The bright red of Indian paintbrush ran through the flowering cacti, spinning a tale of love and sorrow in the desert tapestry. Here, Gary and Charlene were hidden from the view of wayward travelers on the long dirt road leading from Route 66. He pulled her to him roughly, and then cupping her face in his big hands, gently turned her lips up to meet his own.

“Whatever might have come between us,” she thought, “I will always return to him for this.” Gary pushed her back against the ridge of their old water well and pressed himself against her, stroking her hair soothingly while rough stone scratched through the back of her blouse. He was hurting her. Badly. She started to pull away, but realized she was torn

between pain and her desire to have him. Gary looked down at Charlene, and his eyes seemed to grow bright and clear. At last she stopped trying to get away. Holding Charlene with her face pressed against his shoulder, Gary smiled clandestinely. She was almost his.

“Charlene!” She heard him command silently. She clung to him in submission. With a gentle touch, he caressed her face. She became lost in the sensations of tenderness and pain, in the confusion of fear and desire. Gary was both her abductor and the only way out. Charlene sobbed; she pleaded with Gary to forgive her. He chuckled softly, the low laugh that gave her chills of erotic longing. She realized that he knew how she’d betrayed him. Gary held her against him and caressed her intimately, until she relaxed completely in his embrace. He hummed to her like he would to a small child, whispered that he loved her, and assured her that she was precious, she would always be his. He kissed her deeply and traced the curve of her back with one hand. If Gary had not been holding her steady, Charlene would have melted into the ground.

Later, they lay together amid the wildflowers. The shadows had grown long into twilight, and a light breeze from the cooling earth raised goose bumps on Charlene’s bare arms. Gary’s skin was radiating heat. She burrowed into his warmth, remembering their last Christmas together, the brilliant moonlight on the snow, and the black nothingness to come when once again she’d realize that Gary was no longer there. A shudder ran through her body; she didn’t want to know. She disengaged from Gary’s arms and stood up, breathing deeply of the perfumed air. When she turned around to speak, Gary had disappeared.

Alone under the now-rising moon, Charlene started walking through the dark to their cabin, but the figure on the rise seemed to call. Although his carcass hung, luridly impaled on the cross looming above, in an uncanny way Zozobra seemed alive. She turned back from the light that shone out



warmly through her kitchen window and staggered across jagged stones, sharp cacti, and hissing night animals as she passed on her way to spend the night resting at her beloved icon's feet.

At the top of the rise Zozobra's shadowy form swayed, cadaverous and foreboding. She stumbled again and raised whirs, clicks, tiny crackling sounds from the cicadas whose sleep she had disturbed. Charlene shivered. She felt the trepidation of walking an invisible line between life and the realm of damnation. Amidst this cacophony of thought and sound, understanding flooded her awareness; she knew why she was being summoned to that place. She continued with serenity, knowing that tonight, unlike the night she'd dragged Gary, still breathing, for cremation in Zozobra's fire, tonight she had come to bring Gary life. She was here to help Gary rise from his ashen grave beneath Zozobra's feet.

The moon was a waxing crescent in the star filled sky. Charlene saw something move beneath the cross where Zozobra still hung impaled. Raggedy as he looked, she was sure it was her lover. She ran by divine guidance; it was effortless. She ran into Gary's arms, pulled him close. And retched. Nearly fainted. Gary smelled like a charnel house. His skin was rotting and huge holes were burned right through his body. His face was nacreous, and the very ground on which they stood had putrefied. I le told Charlene to hurry, that he didn't have much longer.

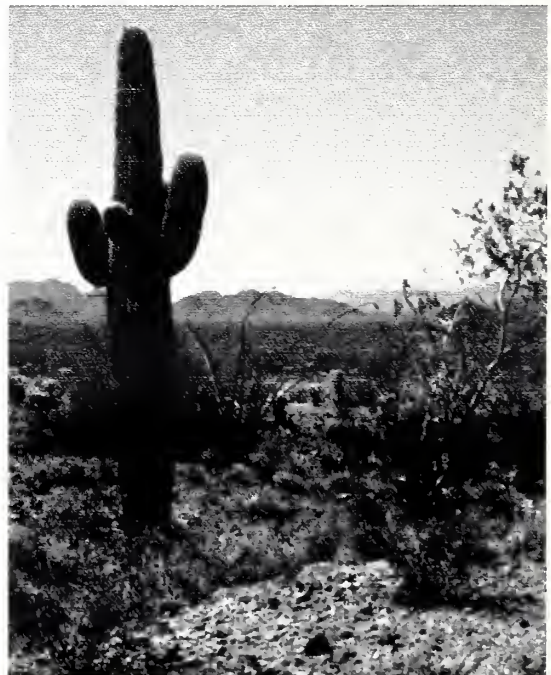
Charlene fell to her knees and waited for Gary's command, praying that he would forgive and allow her to rise. A feral cat howled and threw itself around his neck, and Gary held a burning finger toward the sky. She felt herself lifted off her knees and raised up into his arms. Green light glowed menacingly through the skeletal orbits that housed Gary's once-beautiful eyes. He hurled her to the ground.

Crack! The sound is familiar, but I can't remember why. There is dirt in my mouth, blood running in my eyes. I try to get up, but

can't figure out how. Through the cloud of dust that is beginning to settle in my blood-matted hair, I see Gary reaching down towards me. When he touches my cheek, I know everything will be all right. I look up. His smile glitters savagely. He raises his arm. I see the hammer in his hand, and at last I understand. It is I who have called him, and he's back to take me home. With the reverberating crack, I feel my skull split open. I know he has hit me again.

I do not see Gary, but I am sure he is very close. I will lie here, like a good girl, and wait for his return. I smell the fire as it singes my hair and burns the skin from my beautiful fingers. Blue flames crackle in the screaming cat's fur.

The hour is growing late. The sun breaks the horizon. Nails pierce Gary's palms, hold him crucified over me. I lay prostrate before my lover, how godlike he now seems. I roll over. He impales me. I feel him deep inside. Flames consume Zozobra's cross under which our lives are burning, and Gary whispers softly that he'll love me for all time.



Her eyes

my guide
through this supernatural quest directly to obsession,
no longer tripping like a stranger to the walk
-tied danger in two left shoes.
I catch her tears in a teacup
painted rain, to dry off her pain.
I saw my animal
lurking in the memories
in the smearing of torn skin
betrayed in the wilderness.

He licks the soft presence of mother sunrise
from the grooves in his paws,
Remembers:
The passion fruit
The wise hysteria of black moons in her eyes
The starving of blood
And the kiss that made
laid, craved
his virginity.

-Troy Umphlette



“Swimsuit” - Color Pencil Drawing

-Gabriel Izquierdo

A Dream

**She was a dream,
In a cloud of a dress.
The whisperes of gods was what she wore.
The guazy sheath of a cherub adorned her like a breeze.
Hair soft as a feather.
Skin pale as milk.
Could she be an angel...
Or was she just a dream?**

-Amy Harvey





“Girl By Fountain” -Black and White Photograph

-Linda Dankovich

Smokers' Kampf

T. Robert DuVal

Smokers. We're a tenacious bunch. We want to smoke? Believe me, we're gonna smoke, and nothing you can say or do is going to convince us otherwise. We'll watch all the obnoxious Truth ads they run on television roughly 17,000 times a night. We'll sit and listen patiently as you quote chapter and verse of the multitude of dangers that smoking represents. Emphysema, heart disease, fifty kinds of cancer, necrophilia, hemorrhoids, swimmer's ear, and any other godawful disease you can name. Talk until you're blue in the face; when you're done, we'll light up. Give us a patch: we'll tear open the whole box and wear them all around our waist like a belt. Hey, nicotine gum. That'll ease us off the smokes. Especially since everyone knows it's practically impossible to smoke with your mouth crammed full of a whole pack of gum.

Take smoking areas away. We've sat and watched as restaurants cut their smoking sections from roughly half the tables to one cramped little booth, quarantined inside an airtight partition, hidden away from the sensitive eyes of non-smokers in a dim, dusty corner. That's fine. When we feel that nicotine monkey tapping us on the back, we'll just step outside, enjoy ourselves, then crush the cigarette out right in front of the doors. And we'll do this again and again in the course of the meal; you don't want to put ashtrays on the tables? That's cool. We'll just make use of the entrance, instead, littering the sidewalk with dozens of dead soldiers, smoked right down to the filters.

Raise cigarette prices. Three dollars, four dollars, six dollars, ten dollars. That's right, keep pushing us. Keep blindly hoping against hope that higher prices will make us see the errors of our ways. Just don't be too surprised when the numbers of gas station and convenience store hold-ups rise in direct proportion. Men and women, heads stuffed into pantyhose, gun in hand. Terrified clerks, fingers already moving toward the "No Sale" button on the cash register, until the robber stops them. "No, no, no." Voice muffled through the

nylon. "Forget about the money. Just get a bag and dump all the cartons of cigarettes in it. And forget about the mediums and the lights and the ultra lights; just the high-tar, high-nicotine, high-risk cigarettes. Wait, better yet, just give me the filterless! Now!"

This is the future. Smokers can see it coming. Before long anyone even suspected of lighting a cigarette will immediately be set upon by a crack squadron of ex-Green Berets and Navy Seals — re-trained by the United States government for something it really considers important — all armed to the teeth with fire extinguishers and high-pressured water rifles. That's why the smarter of us already have deposits down on those viral protection suits, like Dustin Hoffman in *Outbreak*. And not only will this keep our Marlboros nice and dry, but it'll let us suck on our second-hand smoke all day, too. But why stop there? Might as well go the full nine! Make it illegal... because that's worked so well with marijuana and cocaine and heroin, hasn't it? Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" program wasn't exactly an overwhelming success. And you think the prisons are overcrowded now? Wait until full federal penitentiaries are bursting at the seams with thousands of pissed-off men and women jonesing for a smoke.

But fear not, for a blessed day is coming. A blessed day when all us discriminated-against smokers are going to march two by two onto a vast ark made up of burnt-out matchsticks and used up disposable lighters. Much like our forefathers, fleeing the religious persecution and famine of the Mother Country, we're going to set sail from these smokeless shores. Captained by Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man, we're going to find the promised land... wherever it may be.

Blind

i stare at the gleaming sun
Yet all that enters my vision
Is the opaque darkness
My world has become.
i drink it in.
Letting the spirits
Claim my soul.
i cast myself to the depths
Intoxicating my soul
With each anguish-saturated tear.
Each breath i take
Pains my lungs
And hangs on my aura
Like dingy, soggy clothes
That will never, ever dry.
Every beat of my heart
Perpetuates and shortens
My pitiful existance simultaneously.
Living and dying all the same.
An animate corpse
Going through the motions
Of life without living it.
A dead soul
Surrounded by the beauty of life
But unable to see.
My eyes were plucked
From my skull long ago.
Curiously coincidentally
At about the same time
You walked away from me.

-Christie Daniels

The Dark Alley

Patricia Aguiar

Two years ago, I used to frequently visit the bars in San Diego. Every weekend was the same routine. I would go to the bar at 8:00 p.m., hang out all night with my friends, shoot some pool, and maybe play some darts. At 2:00 a.m. the bar would close the doors for the night. After the bar would close, I would walk through a dark alley back to my car and simply drive home.

All my friends would tell me, “Patty, you need to be careful when you walk alone to your car late.” The expressions of worry in their faces scared me.

I said to them, “Why? I am a big girl. I can defend myself if I have to.”

“Just promise us that you won’t walk alone to your car anymore, ok?” they would tell me.

“Fine. I won’t walk alone,” I said, in order to finish the conversation.

New Year’s Eve is a night of celebration. It was a time to say goodbye to the old year and bring in the New Year. As in every weekend, this night was no different. I arrived at the bar at 8:00 p.m., just in time to avoid the five-dollar cover charge. On this night, however, my view on violence would change forever.

Right after the bar closed my friend George and I walked through the same dark alley back to my car, as we had done so many nights. It was a cold night, and fog made visibility barely possible. We were joking and laughing, even while we saw a shadow in the distance. We figured it was just simply someone else walking to his car. We pay no attention to the person. As we passed the dark shadow in the night, I glanced over my shoulder just to make sure that we were not being followed. Several minutes later, we heard footsteps so we decided to stop and look behind us. There was no one there. The alley was deserted, but we kept on hearing footsteps. All we could see were a couple of cats scrambling for food in the dumpster.

We walked faster back to the car, but it seemed like forever. As we got closer to the car, a

tall man blocked our way. He asked for a couple of dollars for food. We simply ignored him. Suddenly, he screamed with a deep tone in his voice “Hey bitch, I asked if you have any money.” I jumped, I did not know what to say.

“Sorry, I have no money on me,” I replied, scared.

George pulled me toward him, standing his ground showing no fear toward this man. We started to walk again, and the next thing I knew, I was being pulled back by my shoulders and thrown into the hard concrete. George started to argue with the man, and out of nowhere the man struck him. A fight broke out, and punches were swinging from side to side. I could not stop the fight, but I was helpless. George tried to block the hard blows to his face. All of the sudden, he dropped to his knees and grabbed a bottle that was near him on the floor. The man would not stop beating him up. He kicked him in the stomach, as if he was kicking a football. George was able to break the bottle, and cut the man on the leg. The man, in profound pain, stopped his assault. As the man retreated, we rushed to the car. George was pretty hurt, his eyes were swollen, and blood covered his face.

I was positive that this act of violence was finally over, but I was wrong.

All of a sudden, a gunshot was fired. I ducked as quickly as I could. George fell to the ground, and lay next to me motionless. Seconds passed, and I stood up. The man had disappeared into the fog of the night. I turned to George, and all I saw was his shirt covered in blood. I dropped to my knees and tried to help.

I held him in my arms screaming for help, but it was hopeless. No one was near to hear my screams for help. My hands were covered in his blood. His body started to get cold, and I realized that he was dead. All of my life, I thought violence was just a role people played and acted on television. I never realized that it was real. I never realized violence could happen to someone I cared for. If my friends hadn’t told me to not walk alone to my car late at night, that cold bloody body lying in that dark alley could have been me.



“How Secure” -Acrylic on Canvas

-Anca Tudor

Casino Life

Tension crowded the room like no other feeling,

It was almost as strong as the hatred I possessed,
from the ill-fated position I so held-
in the casino

Lurking eyes of desperation
Slaves of money

Fun?
From what perspective?

When all of the uncivilized gather to build
Their egos and quench their thirsts

And I with seeing the obvious made obvious,
would gather my tray of drinks and deliver to them first

Cocktails, beverages, cigarettes.....
As we fixed our faith on the man with the highest bets.

It's funny the ones that had the most, never gave much
To say the least
Yet we'd race to the higher hand and give in to the ignorant beast

A waitress? Not even, more a slave
Not only to the money I suppose, maybe more to the part I played

As my smiles paralleled the casino lights and erased the
Worries of their provincial lives

Bet after bet, hand after hand I'd watch their faces speak of shame
They'd reek of alcohol and all subconsciously for the love of the game

When I with perspectives of both worlds, would bet not even a penny
For should even the odds be with you, the casino never falls short
Of plenty

-Rozzie Lynn Franco



I must be a junky

look at my clothes
look at my hair
look at the metal in my face
look at my tattoos
i must be a junky
i must be a dope feind
i probably have some on me
look at my car
look at my shoes
look at my gold chain
listen to my music
i must be in a gang
i must be dope dealer
i must be a criminal
i probably have a gun
why don't you pull me over
and search my car
you could even bring out the K-9's
wouldn't that be a great show
all the other cars could slow down
and see how big and tough you are
even though I'm clean
you'll still find something on me
look at my over-sized pants
look at my hat turned sideways
look at the hoop in my nose
listen to the slang I use
i must be worthless
i must be illiterate
i must be a degenerate
i must have no future
look at the skin on my bones
listen to my accent

look at where I live
look at who I fuck
i must be a junky
i must be diseased
i must be a devient and delinquent
i probably robbed your house last week
why don't you file a complaint
why don't you put me on your neighborhood watch list
why don't you and your morals
and your church and your state
and your judges and juries
your Jesus Christ justice
and your police and politicians
tattoo your stereoetypes
and your fears and your prejudices
right on our self image
and see how that looks in 20 years
and before you say that
we have no future
realize that we are YOUR future
some of us are dandelions, some are apples
some of us are strong enough to stray
most are too weak to walk away
but make no mistake-
the future is an equation starting with you
yeah, your right-
i must be worthless
i must be a criminal
i must be...a junky

-Patrick Kerr



“Music Slave”

-Savita Singh



“Mr. Magic” -Oil on Canvas

-Michael Crigler

Perfect Paranoia, Perfect Awareness

-T. Robert DuVal

“Okay...” The tax man stares into his computer screen, as if peering into a cloudy crystal ball.

His head is shaped like a giant pumpkin, vast and round. His face is a deep, flushed red--his skinny tie is cutting off circulation from his brain. Little beads of perspiration dot his forehead, gleaming under the harsh fluorescent lights. A tiny nametag clipped to his sweat-stained shirt identifies him as simply, Ted.

“You. . .” *Pause.* “You owe. . .”

Owe?

“Seventeen thousand dollars.”

Ted states the figure impassively, as if a part-time shoe salesman can just write out a check.

My eyes go wide as all five digits explode in my head.

“But... But I only made eleven thousand the whole year!”

“Nevertheless, sir. You owe the federal government seventeen thousand dollars.”

Ted’s face is stone. Ted can’t be bargained with, pleaded with, or reasoned with. His eyes stare out at me from the deep rabbit holes of his sockets.

A thin black hair juts from his right nostril like a periscope.

My heart is slamming in my chest, a boiler edging into the red. My lungs have locked up tight. My hands grip the sides of my narrow chair so tightly my knuckles are bone-white, my arms numb from the elbows on down. I think the fluorescents are giving me cancer.

A bead of sweat breaks free from Ted’s high, Cro-Magnon forehead and traces an oily course down the side of his face over his temple, along the left side of his nose, over his cheek, down his chin to splash on my W2.

“You. You’re one of *Them*, aren’t you?”

My voice cracks as I give the noncommittal

“them” proper noun status.

“One of who, sir?”

My God, what a poker face he has! This “Ted” must surely be an accomplished master of subterfuge.

Them! I want to shout.

Them, who have come into my apartment and shortened my furniture six inches.

Them, who send me pizzas, and flowers, and candygrams, strippergrams, and singing telegrams by the score.

Them, who took my sweet pussycat Captain Teuille and replaced it with an identical hissing, scratching, yowling thing.

I want to shout all of this into Ted’s face, about the endless tortures great and small that They have visited upon me, but all that will squeak from between my dry, trembling lips are:

“. . .Them. . . “

I want to put a shoehorn through Ted’s brain.

I want to take a lady’s shoe with a five-inch heel and put it through Ted’s eye.

“I assure you, sir, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

But Ted knows. Ted knows who the brilliant mastermind behind this conspiracy of nearly X-Filesian proportions is, lacking only a cigarette smoking man dropping in now and then to leave cryptic comments to make it complete.

I feel like Fox Mulder.

“Wait...” Ted is looking at his screen again. “Wait a minute...”

He frowns, the first emotion he’s betrayed since this whole thing began. For a single, shining moment, I think maybe I’ve somehow gained the upper hand. But that faint glimmer quickly cools as Ted’s fingers fly across the keyboard, skillful as Beethoven working his piano. Could he be adding a zero, changing \$17,000 to \$170,000? Two zeroes? \$17,000 to \$1,700,000?

Maybe this is the horrific final act, to enslave me to the grim-faced IRS Gestapo, until the high-interest loans and the repossessions and imposed liens on my paychecks are no longer

enough to satisfy them, and they lock me away in a debtor's prison. This would be no country club for the wealthy, convicted of insider trading or embezzlement, with filet mignon for dinner and HBO, Cinemax, and The Playboy Channel on the big screen television in the rec room. No, this would be a cold, hard place. A rigid cot swarming with fleas. Fighting the rats for your daily gruel.

I'm about to have an embolism. Please God, give me an embolism.

"Seems I made a little mistake." Ted has two chins; they wobble when he speaks. "You only owe \$170.00."

Ted folds his sausage fingers on his desk and stares at me. Clever ploy, but I see it for what it is: a trick, an attempt to get me to hang myself. The government will get my \$17,000.00. The check will be bad, of course, but it will buy me time. Time to get out. Mexico must need shoe salesmen. I'll hide away in some tiny little town with a long Spanish name, fitting the fat, veined feet of Hispanic senoras with pumps and sandals, far from their insidious grasp.

And Captain Tenille's nasty little doppelganger can stay behind.



"Plant Contour" -Charcoal Drawing

-Ayanna Hill



"Leopard" -Oil on Canvas

-Saul Cieza

Death of an Artist

(or, just another day at the office)

-Richard Smith

There is a second story office in Washington, D.C. It is called the Best Messenger Courier Company. Inside, are two brothers. One of them is a part-time employee, and a struggling musician, who we shall call Ricky, because that's exactly who he is. The other, who is seated at his desk, is the owner of the business, who we shall call Happy, because that's exactly what he isn't. Happy is preoccupied at his computer's monitor with the telephone receiver wedged between his right shoulder and ear. Ricky is gazing out the window. There are two telephones. The white phone is for clients, which is answered cordially, and the black one is answered impatiently. The black telephone rings...

HAPPY:(*Rudely*) Yea, what is it? Okay. You got a signature? Okay, good. Now go down to Bracewell & Sivapithecus on K Street. Pick up the mail, and take it to the Main Post Office at Mass Ave. and North Capital by six. It's only two duffel bags...(Listening, replying) Yes you can! I'VE done it! You strap one to the back and lay one on the gas tank...I'VE done it rush hour traffic too! Look, it's a money job. Do you want to get paid today? Good Then just do it! (*He slams down the phone*)

RICKY: I hate those mail runs on a bike. They're dangerous.

HAPPY: You hate money.

The sound of a motorcycle is heard outside, arriving. The office door opens, and DAVID enters. He's tall and thin, and looks like young Sam Shepard. He drops a small package on the desk and turns to go without looking at anyone.

HAPPY Hey! Wait a minute. I've got a RUSH to F.E.R.C. (*He grabs another large manila envelope, and throws it to David*)

DAVID: What ho! (*He turns just as he catches the envelope*) Yea, alright, if you give me my check now, and no bullshit. I've got to get to a reading on 14th Street in an hour. But this is the last ne...You mean the Federal Election Repudiation Committee?

HAPPY: (*Long sigh. Annoyed, yet composed and sarcastic*) No, a filing...at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Lord Byron.

DAVID: Byron had the WORDS, man. He'd probably even have a couple for you! (*He looks up at Ricky by the window, rolls his eyes and smiles*) Ricky, what's up? Playin' the clubs?

RICKY: You know that old '50s song, "Rock and Roll will never die, it'll go down in history..."

DAVID: Yea...?

RICKY: It went down in history, alright. It's dead.

DAVID: Sounds like the worst of times, man...You mean D.E.A.D., as in the Department of Ecological Apocalyptic Disasters?

RICKY: (*Laughing*) Yea right, ha!

DAVID: Well, like Shakespeare said, "Fuck it, try theater!"... You gotta' stop by the playhouse sometime, when we're just fucking around. It's fun.

RICKY: How's the play coming?

DAVID:(*He pauses to think, and looks at Happy as if explaining to him*) Well, the basic "frame" is there, but I still have to put on the "front door," and then I have to break through a "wall" or two...But it's okay...nothing "structural."

HAPPY:(*To Ricky*) What the fuck is he talking about?

DAVID: Art, Mr. Wagner! I'm talking about Art, for Pete's sake...And Pete for Art's sake! Now

gimme my check. *(He gestures in the air)* My Art calls in an hour! *(Happy hands him the check)* Mr. Wagner, why do you look so sad? You write the checks, so every one should be happy to see you. It means that you are well liked. *(He smiles at Ricky as he turns to go)* It's very important that a salesman should be well liked, Mr. Wagner.

HAPPY: *(As David is walking out the door)* I am not a salesman!

DAVID: *(From the hallway)* Oh, yes you are...!

David's motorcycle roars off. The black telephone rings.

HAPPY: *(To himself)* Have an artsy evening. Fuck you. *(Into the phone)* Yea, what? *(Gradually raising his voice into the telephone)* I don't care what it takes! You better get those tickets over there by five, or you can start looking for another job! I don't want to hear it...Just do it! *(He slams down the phone, and takes a deep, disgusted sigh)* No one wants to work on Friday afternoon. I guess that no one wants to make any money either.

RICKY: Calm down. What's the problem?

HAPPY: Congressman Loman needs these tickets to "RENT" at his office by five. It's hard enough getting across town from The Kennedy Center to Capital Hill in rush-hour traffic without these idiots who work for me involving ME in their ridiculous *(sarcastically)* "artistic" pursuits... *(He sarcastically mimics the caller)* "...But I have band practice!"

RICKY: *(Indignantly)* Well what do you expect? That people should devote themselves to riding around on a motorcycle, risking their lives in traffic every day as a career? I mean, that's what WE do... Artists, musicians, writers... We wait tables, we bartend, and we work for you, among other things, in the pursuit of better things later on.

HAPPY: *(Sarcastically again)* Yea, right. And you're another one who can't be depended on. If only half of you would stop being "creative" for a day or two, I could stop advancing all you "artists" money. We don't need any more artists.

RICKY: Congressman Loman is going out see some art tonight, isn't he?

HAPPY: Congressman Loman can afford art. But he isn't an artist.

RICKY: That's for sure. Why doesn't he just show up at "will call?" He probably wants to show off the tickets in The House cafeteria... Funny, he consistently votes against the National Endowment for the Arts.

HAPPY: *(Agitated)* And I agree with him. Why should I have to support all that bullshit with my taxes?

RICKY: *(He pauses to reflect, and points out the window, down to the street at a man in rags, pushing a shopping cart full of cans, bottles, and all of his worldly possessions. It was the usual pathetic sight, dirty and mumbling)* Look at that guy down there. Tell me, do you think that guy is free?

HAPPY: *(He looks out)* He probably used to be an artist, or a musician. What do you mean?

RICKY: Is he free to go wherever he wants? Can he walk into a restaurant?

HAPPY: How in the world would he pay the bill?

RICKY: No, that's not what I mean.

HAPPY: I repeat. What do you mean?

RICKY: Well, okay. He's filthy, and they would probably throw him out. But what if he came in looking for a job? I mean, who would hire him? Would you? Isn't he restricted from making his life a little better, just because of his current situation?

HAPPY: *(His voice rising)* I couldn't disagree more strongly. Everyone in this country has an opportunity to do whatever they want! I did. Besides, it's his own fault. *(Turning back to his desk)* You see, that's what's wrong with you and your artsy-liberal point of view. That's what's

wrong with this country nowadays. Everybody wants to be such an individual. No one wants to work anymore. What ever happened to the work ethic? You have none! Everyone wants a free ride by being “creative.” Just look at all that modern shit taking up space at the National Gallery!

RICKY: (*Incredulously*) I was just there yesterday! I saw the De-Kooning retrospective. You call that shit?

HAPPY: Who’s he?

RICKY: Fantastic! Dutch... He was world famous, and very modern. Did you know that Dad knew him. He told me that he had lunch with him once. Dad said that he was drunk. Ha!

HAPPY: Of course he was! And Dad is another one.

RICKY: (*Angry*) Shut up! Dad is a great writer!

HAPPY: He’s a dinosaur.

RICKY: He’s a screenwriter! People like his work.

HAPPY: Yea, but is this “work” that you speak of well liked? You know, your literate friend was right. It is important to be well liked. Well liked people have things, and don’t need to live on the periphery of society. He’s living a lie out there in La-La Land.

RICKY: (*Adamantly*) Y’know what? He’s making a living.

HAPPY: Oh really? Well, I haven’t seen any of his blockbusters.

RICKY: He’s gonna hit a home run one of these days. You’ll see...

HAPPY: (*Angry, argumentative*) Bullshit! Listen, the guy had a perfectly legitimate job selling those art supplies for years. Then one day, he gets it in his head that he wants to be a writer in Hollywood. So, he drops everything, including Mom, to chase this fantasy. First he couldn’t make it as an artist, and then he compounds an already bad career decision with an even worse one.

RICKY: He wasn’t happy, Happy.

HAPPY: And now neither is Mom. And neither am I.

RICKY: Y’know, not everyone is content to go selling door to door. Not everyone is enthralled with the prospect of making widgets for the rest of their lives on some assembly line, and not everyone is like you! Don’t you understand that a man can suffocate in what you call “a perfectly legitimate job?” Don’t you understand that it’s about fulfillment? It’s about self-realization, you fucking automaton!

HAPPY: (*They are in a heated exchange by now*) What? Automaton!?!...Don’t hand me that philosophical garbage! I’m not interested in your theories about fulfillment. Fulfillment is a paycheck! We really don’t need anymore artists in this world. And while we’re on the subject of self-realization, realize this- that the man you so lovingly refer to as “Dad” doesn’t have shit! No property, no equity...

RICKY: Is that how you measure a man, by what he’s worth?!

HAPPY: What other way is there? (*Continuing...*) No insurance...Not a goddamned dime in the bank! And for what, fulfillment and self-realization? If you want to talk about the “self,” that is the most selfish way for a supposedly responsible person to behave!

RICKY: You have no right to...

HAPPY: Right? Don’t even get me started with what is right. He left! He left me, he left you, he left Mom. The only thing that he went looking to fulfill was his own ego. What is this art that was so important, that he should leave his wife without an ounce of security?

RICKY: They didn’t love each other anymore!

HAPPY: That’s quite irrelevant. Oh, you make me sick with the love, and the art, and the fulfillment, and the self-realization, and all the other indications of your screwed-up sense of priorities.

RICKY: But...

HAPPY: But nothing! I can't pay my bills with self-realization. I can't fill my gas tank with love. And I get all the fulfillment I need from reading my monthly statements, which represent a hell of a lot more than what YOUR FATHER has. And another thing— when he fails, and I'm sure he will, you can be sure that I'll have nothing to do with him when he comes back. And I hope that MY MOTHER would do the same.

RICKY: *(Pauses, stunned. Then quietly)* So that's what it's all about, what a man has?

HAPPY: A man who has nothing, is nothing.

RICKY: *(Shouting, and starting to lunge for Happy)* Don't say that!
Suddenly, the white telephone rings.

HAPPY: Hello, Best Messenger. Any way, anywhere, anyhow...why are you calling on this line?...WHAT!...You what?!...Oh, my god. Listen to me, don't move!...No, no, no! Don't move!...Fuck the ambulance! I said don't move! If you do, I swear I'll break your other leg!...Ricky is coming there right now. WAIT THERE! *(He slams down the phone)*

RICKY: What's up?

HAPPY: *(Panicked)* Listen. You've got to get to 20th and L Street right now! Jerk-off-artist-junkie-musician had an accident with a taxi. If he doesn't die, I'm gonna kill him! He's laying there against the mailbox on the corner, waiting for an ambulance. You have to get there first, and get those tickets, and get them to Congressman Loman's office on Capital Hill. It's in The Rayburn Building. Room 1207 on the north side. What time is it? Oh, my God. It's 4:35! They have to be there by 5:00!...Go!...Go now!

RICKY: Wait a minute. But I have to...

Suddenly, the white phone rings again.

HAPPY: Shhhhh! Shut up. *(He answers the phone, composed)* Best Messenger. Anything, any place, anytime. Can I help you? Oh, Congressman Loman...Yes they've been picked up...What, not there? Well, I'm sure that...Yes sir...um...yes, uh-huh...yes...no-I mean yes! I understand. Yes sir, I'll get right on it. *(He is hysterically waving Ricky out the door, and says in sort of a screaming whisper as he covers the phone)* Go! I swear I'll take care of you! Just do this. Now go!

RICKY: Happy, I really...

HAPPY: *(He gets up from the desk and starts pushing Ricky out the door)* Now don't give me any shit about a rehearsal. Just do it! Go!

Ricky sighs, shrugs, and heads down to his trusty Triumph Bonniville 750. From the office can be heard the loud roar of the drag pipes, as he kicks it over. The sound reverberates down P Street, until the sound of screeching tires and a horn is heard, then ...

HAPPY: *(He sits down at his desk He pauses for a moment, luis head in his hands, and then starts looking through the drawers, and under paperwork scattered around the desk)* Now where the hell are those leads...*(The telephone rings a couple of times)* Hello, Best Messenger... any thing, anyhow, anyone...



“A Long Night” -Charcoal Drawing

-Juan Felipe Gomez

wRites of Spring

Short Fiction Winner

Reflected Images

-Timothy Duval

Tom Garrett and Alex Keiser walked together into the Garretts' kitchen. It had taken over forty-five minutes, but Tom's four-year-old Laurie and Alex's six-year-old twins Todd and Randy were finally asleep together on the king-size bed in Tom and his wife Monica's bedroom upstairs. With any luck, maybe they would even stay asleep for a full hour. Tom opened the refrigerator. "You want a beer?"

"No thanks," Alex sighed, collapsing in one of the chairs at the kitchen table. "I'll take a soda, if you've got one."

"You don't want a beer?" Tom asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"Carolyn doesn't want me drinking when it's just me watching the twins.

Tom laughed, shaking his head. "Break the leash, my friend. Break the leash."

"You know what? Hell with it. Get me a beer, too.

Tom handed Alex a bottle of Budweiser, then sat clown at the table with his own. "What she doesn't know..." Alex said, winking, and took a long pull from the bottle. "Carolyn's getting worse. God forbid she comes home and dinner's not on the table. All Hell breaks loose." He took another drink. "Same old story. Women want us barefoot and in the kitchen."

"Come on, now. This is the year 2000. We have gender equality these days."

"Screw that. What's that old saying? 'A woman is assertive, she's confident. A man is assertive, he's a butch.' We're as equal as they want us to be.

The other night Carolyn said that maybe I could go back to work when Todd and Randy start kindergarten. *Could* go back to work; it's like she was granting me permission. But I almost don't see the point. When I left the firm to raise the kids, I'd only made junior partner, and we both know that I wouldn't have gone any higher. The glass ceiling," Alex said, sourly.

"I read in the paper that the new workplace policies have eliminated all that. You know, you're starting to sound like one of those masculinists that are always screaming on the news."

"So what? They may be radicals, but they make a lot of good points. I know a guy who's been working in a brokerage house for twenty years. In those twenty years, he's trained thirteen women. Of those thirteen women, ten of them now hold higher positions than he does. The other three have moved on to other firms. You want to tell him the glass ceiling doesn't exist?"

"Well," Tom said, finally, "at least we can work. Our grandfathers never even had the chance to go to college, get a job..."

"Your bottle is half-full," Alex said, sourly.

Tom shrugged. "I'm just saying. You're right. Things aren't perfect, but you have to admit, we've come a long way. My grandfather was the smartest man I've ever known, but he never held a formal job. He cooked, and cleaned, and raised my Dad and his three sisters, because that was the way things were."

"That's funny. Seems to me that, right now, the both of us aren't working. We're cooking... and cleaning... and raising the kids while our wives are out building on their careers..." Alex saluted Tom with his bottle. "Yeah, we've come a long way, Tommy." He swallowed the last of his beer and set the empty bottle down on the table, looking at Tom.

Tom couldn't think of a single thing to say...

"He just doesn't get it," Monica said, laughing. "His wife was President, but no man will ever be in the White House. Put a man in there, how long before he starts a war? How long

before he pushes the button?"

"About thirty seconds," Carolyn said around a mouthful of Cleopatra salad.

They were sitting in the outside terrace of Marty's, on 42nd Street. Carolyn was a doctor; Monica, a graphics designer. Since their buildings were only two blocks apart, they took their lunch breaks together whenever they could. The bus with the "Bill Clinton for President" ad on the side turned the corner and was gone.

"So how's Alex?"

"Oh, we've been having some problems. I've been working late some the last couple of weeks, since the Chief Medical Consultant job will be opening up when Rosemarie leaves, and it never hurts to show that you're willing to put forth the extra effort. But no, he immediately accuses me of putting my career ahead of the family."

"Someone sounds a little insecure,"

Monica said, winking.

"I know! Work late and suddenly they think you're at a strip club drinking with the girls, or in some cheap motel room with another man. Is Tom like that?"

Monica shook her head. "He's pretty good about stuff like that. He knows I work hard to support the three of us, so he doesn't mind if he has to watch the kids a little extra, or even cut loose once in a while."

"Sounds like you married a good one."

Monica smiled. "I know."

"I just don't understand Alex sometimes. It's like he's bitter he had to leave work to raise the children. But that's the way it's *always* been, hasn't it?"

"You know, it's that Howard Stern I blame. Stirring all the guys up, spreading all that propaganda around the news. Him and his masculinist movement. It's making almost everybody a little bit crazy."

Carolyn lit a cigarette. "Women are superior. Look in the Bible, for God's sake. Adam tempted Eve with the apple. Thus, from a theological viewpoint, if not for men, there would be no death."

"Your Catholic school is showing, love."

"Then look at it from the biological viewpoint. Women give birth. Without us, the human race would disappear."

"Yes, but if I remember correctly, both men *and* women are needed for the act of procreation."

"This is the new millennium. We have artificial insemination. Men are incidental." Carolyn winked. "Women are on top. Women will always be on top. As it was, so shall it be."

The women finished their lunch, left the waiter a nice tip, and went back to work.

wRites of Spring Poetry Winner

A night in the park.

doom has dirty blond hair rusty blue eyes
and ten razor painted crimson nails glowing under lust,
blooming under heart in the musty cramp of an illegally parked
humming motor car. The music is old dull thin retro
and is cast over young ripe love like a veil of thick filth,
tall plastic heels hammer against half open windows in the back,
and heads tangled in teething suffer sink into torn upholstery,
sweating nervous hands twist and contort tender trembling skin
and his breath seizes her senses like blunt rich death,
enveloped by the hard press of fear her lip quivers into a broken forcing smile,
she presses on,
as this demon is vile, breathing a lyrical tease of wishing words based on
“together” and “forever...absolutely, I’ll never leave you.”
Her soft limitless tears
dissolve and break apart upon the touch
of his fiery rabid scales....

She releases a stubborn whimper
and the only thing that changes
is the crippling dull music on the radio
still playing.

-Troy Umphlette

wRites of Spring

Essay Winner

Small Woman, Big Boots

Dana L. Calderaro

You are an eighteen year-old girl, and decide to take on the male dominated world of the military. The pain that you are about to endure is never mentioned in the twenty-page military contract, that you blindly sign. The first night you arrive at 0300hrs., and are woken up at 0400hrs. As you stand in the cool darkness looking up at the stars, you suddenly wish that you were somewhere else. All of your belongings are taken from you, along with your female identity. You are now a soldier, to be molded and shaped into a killing machine. You are herded like cattle—along with hundreds of other scared girls—into an endless line of shots that are administered with large silver pressure guns. Girls around you begin fainting from fear and nausea.

Your mealtime is spent in line staring at the back of another girl's head, or else you lose your eating privileges. You eat your food without chewing for fear of the bull-faced drill sergeant that now haunts your dreams. You are taught to lose your female tendencies, while learning how to shoot and stab your future enemies. This seems useless since your gender will keep you from fighting on the front line. When one of the other girls can't hack it and starts crying during M-16 training, the whole group is forced to hold out their heavy rifles at arm's length. This tactic works as a very persuasive punishment.

Just when you think it could not get any worse, you break your toe on the day of a road-march and are forced to continue so that your platoon will complete the mission. Your very last bit of strength is tested on the day of the gas chamber. You are in a room that is filled with painful CS Gas that burns your skin and leaves

you with the inability to breathe.

You suddenly realize what it feels like to suffocate to death, you gasp for air, and a way out, then blackness. You are one of the lucky as you pass out and hit the floor. Your platoon drags your limp body to safety and air. You must overcome your fears and save a fellow soldier and yourself as she throws a grenade that bounces back. You are both able to escape injury, by a thread. You believe that the broken toe, the pain, and the conquered fears are all worth it. As you walk across the parade field with your family proudly watching as you carry your platoon's flag, you realize that you were absolutely right.

Air Assault School appeals to you because you are young, and want to push your mental and physical limits. You are eager to conquer your fears and be better than the male opposition. The possibility of going to war intrigues and excites you, allowing for determination to push away your anxieties. You want only to compete with all the men. You are one of 3 girls, in a group of 150 men. Your ruck-sack weighs forty-five pounds, a heavy burden when you only weigh 110 pounds. You stand in formation—stiff back—like a toy soldier. The men look you up and down sniffing for weakness, hoping that you fail. This is why you ignore the pain and sweat of the twelve mile road-marches, in full gear. The weight of your ruck-sack, M-16, protective mask, and 5 pound kevlar helmet tear at your muscles with no mercy.

In the next three months it is an everyday struggle to not fall on your face and cry when sharp pebbles dig notches into your tender and once soft hands—as you do endless push-ups—for your punishment.

You must take five steps for a man's one step, just trying to keep up. You stand on the rappel tower—nails dug into the wood—not wanting to take the 200 foot leap. The happy and eager eyes of the men, waiting to see you fail, urge you on. There is relentless punishment and yelling, that you ignore and let bounce off your helmet. You can't and won't fail. The day of the road-march it is 0400hrs. and still dark outside, as you load your body up with gear and begin the long trek.

The miles go by slowly. You want only to

keep moving and not quit. Pole by pole, you march wishing you were dead so don't feel the half-dollar size blood blisters on each foot. Men drop on the road next to you, only half a mile from the finish. You think to yourself, I must do better than that. You think the blood and tears that have been shed are worth beating these men and their taunting smiles. As the wings are pinned on, you walk with crutches to receive yours. You realize that you were absolutely right.



The wRites of Spring



“Path To Knowledge”

-Bernard Bernbaum

Against the Wall

A few people at the entrance,
waiting,
 anxious men, women without a purse

The hall is dark...
 with enough light for cameras to work,
the door opens, a man in black and white steps aside
 we come in

Plastic tables, plastic chairs, nothing breakable,
nothing sharp,
guards on each side of the big room,
cameras rolling, and yet
 it is not a movie scene

I wait a minute, he walks towards me,
slowly,
he is not allowed to rush
 ...blue uniform, white socks

When I see him,
my heart cries, my eyes water,
 my arms reach for him

He touches my hand, I don't know what to say
I give him a kiss, he blushes and looks away,
he turns around to check his friends, they are busy with their own,
 nobody noticed he blushed that day

Forty-five minutes we talk,
promises, hopes and dreams are exchanged,
a bell rings, time is up,
 he hugs me and walks away...to his place against the wall

I turn around,
there is a girl on one side,
she must be 12, with freckles on her face,
 watery eyes, hugging her parents, saying goodbye

On the other side a boy cries, he is not old, probably 10,
he refuses to let go,
 his father leaves, waving his hand

A line of kids, hands up against the wall,
the guards in front of them searching their clothing,
the door opens again, then...the dark hall...
 we walk away...

-Anna Arriaza

Identity

I am a majestic snow-capped mountain
rising high,
touching the cosmos,
 looking down
in sweet guiltless envy.
Will you climb me?

I am a deep glittering ocean
sparkling with beauty,
depth,
 and dangers
I smile with a gleam of crystal rainbows.
Will you cross me?

I am a towering weeping willow
my sorrows droop down
 in rusty green tears
my steady, strong branches
may snap.
Will you fall from me?

I am a distant and lonely star
all alone,
yet, seen by everyone
I shimmer with precision,
I shine with hopeful wishes
I'm filled with the wondering unknown.
Will you look to me?

I am everything, I am anything, I am questions.

But climb me . . .
Cross me . . .
Fall from me . . .
Look to me . . .

Then you will stand on my mountain
swim through my ocean of tears
swing on my sadness
and wish on my brightness.

You will love me...
I am me.

-Kacie Singleton





"Infinite Unity" -Acrylic on Canvas

-Jack Behar

I'm a Professional in Bed

my pop always said I'm a professional in bed
showed me the ropes on how you get head
showed me the life with more than one wife
one ditches you, the other's still nice
told me his schemes
be very clean
don't be too nice, but don't be too mean
make her feel special, but not too great
gold is good, but she stays second rate
indeed it is a shindle
a mere mortal scam
but in his eyes
he is the king
he is the man
this is the spice that adds up his life
he's lived by these rules, but he's paid the price
always in the wrong bed dancing from chase
always a step behind, losing his place
did i call this one or did i call that
was it jennifer or was it shaunette
it's a scheme in itself to remember their names
but like he always said
one is a shame
i see where he comes from, i honestly do
i also have dreams that I want to pursue
but I must not lie
a life of poverty
of many lost dreams
that have no ends to any of its means
that's not a life for me
not one that I choose to take
placing your bets no matter the stakes
a choice to be made when you live if one place
now you've got kids behind in the pace
what are you going to do when they enter your space
are you going to drive away to your sweet little ho's
turn your head
lift up your nose
point in the direction of them wiggling toes
driving them away
far far away
best thing to do to ease the pain
raised to be men, but their still boys
you dish them scorn, argue about poise
not what you'd call a typical man.



soft on the edges
hey!
but this was your plan!
you're the one who's supposed to be the man
running your schemes and your little scams
ain't you the pro?
ain't you the king?
ain't you the one Mr. Dingoling
now you got five kids all across the shores
but you still out there looking for more
i don't understand you
i just don't know why
weren't you there when our family would cry
laying awake late at night
wondering where you were
any second he'll walk through that door
stroll in at six reaking of fumes
then momma catch a whiff and she wasn't amused
a fight break out
and us softies start to pout
you fight till the end or till someone's knocked out
ten past seven and still at the throats
but I know in your head all you could do was gloat.
another one in bed
blanca was her name
lived right next door
man am I the king

-Jesse Quinones

Venus Man Trap

In hues of red and blue
the shoulda-woulda-couldas shake their heads
at the will they-won't theys who look down on
the cant's and shant's for being too weak
to live in a world of such conjunction.

The wish I may-wish I might get stardust
in their eyes,
crash landing their flight.

The sheep teaches the parrot to talk.
The shark devours a family of lemmings.
A vulture swoops down for a meal and
the hyena stops laughing.

The piranha curses the bottom- feeders
for not rearing their heads.
Meanwhile, the ants and the bees
fight for the milk and honey.

A wheel falls off.
The glue doesn't hold.
A backbone breaks.
The thread unwinds.
A dam crumbles.
Faultlines crack.

A yellow ball
falls through
the hole
in the hand
of a man.

-Randy Harris





“Future Subway” -Color Pencil Drawing

-Gabriel Izquierdo

Patterns

Pieces cut into shapes
Some smooth and silky, some rough with ridges
Splashes of splendid hue

Her hands keep busy
Stitch by stitch, pieces become patterns
Butterflies dance through daffodils

She's not alone...she has her mother's mirror
In the house where she spent her childhood
Content to live out her years now

Devoted to this house and its memories
Devoted to her craft and its beauty
Devoted to God...with simple thanks for another day

Nanna passes on her love for quilting
I will pass on that love to my daughters
Patterns weaving in and out of generations.

-Joan Gove

W.A.R

i love no one and no one loves me
i trust no one and no one trusts me
i care for no one and no one cares for me
I see no one and no one sees me
we're all just heartless frames
with nameless names
participants in this shameless game
where no one evloves
but rather stays the same
hanging in their small clicks
which is their own claim to fame
we never learn to share or rise to compromise
but rather rely on information from some prophet who thinks he's wise
telling fabricated lies
about some tribe on the westside
that's plotting to divide
but we don't scold him
because he's a prophet that tries
and that's commendable in this land
where supporting effort is always the task at hand
but on the flip side
now we're a nation divide
and everyone has to choose a side
outstretched hands
claiming patches of land
that belong to no one but the apache clan
families divide
lovers divide
creatures divide
i...inevitably...divide
and on the coattail peace rides
first runner up
by a margin much too wide

-Jesse Quinones



“Indonesian Boys Playing” - Watercolor

Jean Slosberg



"Bus Stop" - Watercolor

-Shirley Arce

Just Like You Said

-Tina Angelone

When I was in the third grade, everyone made fun of Tammy. We used to laugh at her dirty clothes and face. Some kids would even pick up ants off the ground, put them in her hair, and then taunt her, yelling out “Bug girl.”

One afternoon, my mother overheard my brother and I laughing about Tammy.

She sat us down and told us, “You shouldn’t tease those who are less fortunate than you are. What makes you think you’re better than anyone else is? Never judge a book by its cover.” She also said we might be passing up a wonderful friend.

When I was eleven years old, my brother, mom, and I used to play Monopoly. I loved the game and intended to profit as much as possible. Once, during a game, I teased my brother with my new gained wealth. I fanned myself with a giant stack of play money and gloated about the many hotels lined up on the “Boardwalk.”

My mom looked over at me and said, “You know, money isn’t everything. There are more important things in life.”

Curious, I asked for examples.

She replied, “Family, friends, happiness, and love.”

In high school the demands of peer pressure got ahold of me. April started dosing on LSD, Kevin and Dana smoked pot, and Tracy, Jennifer, and Troy skipped school. I spoke to my mom about it. I told her that sometimes I felt like an outcast when I didn’t follow along.

She told me, “If everyone jumped off the bridge, would you?” She also told me that people have more respect for those who stand by their beliefs. She said, “Stand up for yourself and your values. Be a leader, not a follower. Be an independent strong woman, and defend your ideals with conviction.” She gave me the strength to challenge people and overcome the obstacles of pressure and conformity.

As I grew older, my mother’s lessons stayed with me. I struggled with mainstream society, greed, and morality. I wanted individuality. I wanted to absorb knowledge of love, light, and awareness. I set out to explore various spiritual beliefs and began donning myself with crystals, feathers, and other icons to keep me connected with the earth, rather than mainstream culture. My mother disliked this rite of passage and told me so. She said I dressed like a gypsy and no one could ever respect my point of view, due to my belief and attire.

I said, “Never judge a book by its cover.”

She replied, “by looking at you, I can tell you’re one book I don’t want to read.”

She then began to criticise my work. She disliked the store I managed and thought I should look for more pay elsewhere. I told her that I really enjoyed my job and was satisfied where I was. I let her know the money wasn’t important to me.

She said, “It should be.”

I then asked, “What about family, friends, and happiness?”

She countered, “Family, friends, and happiness don’t pay the bills.”

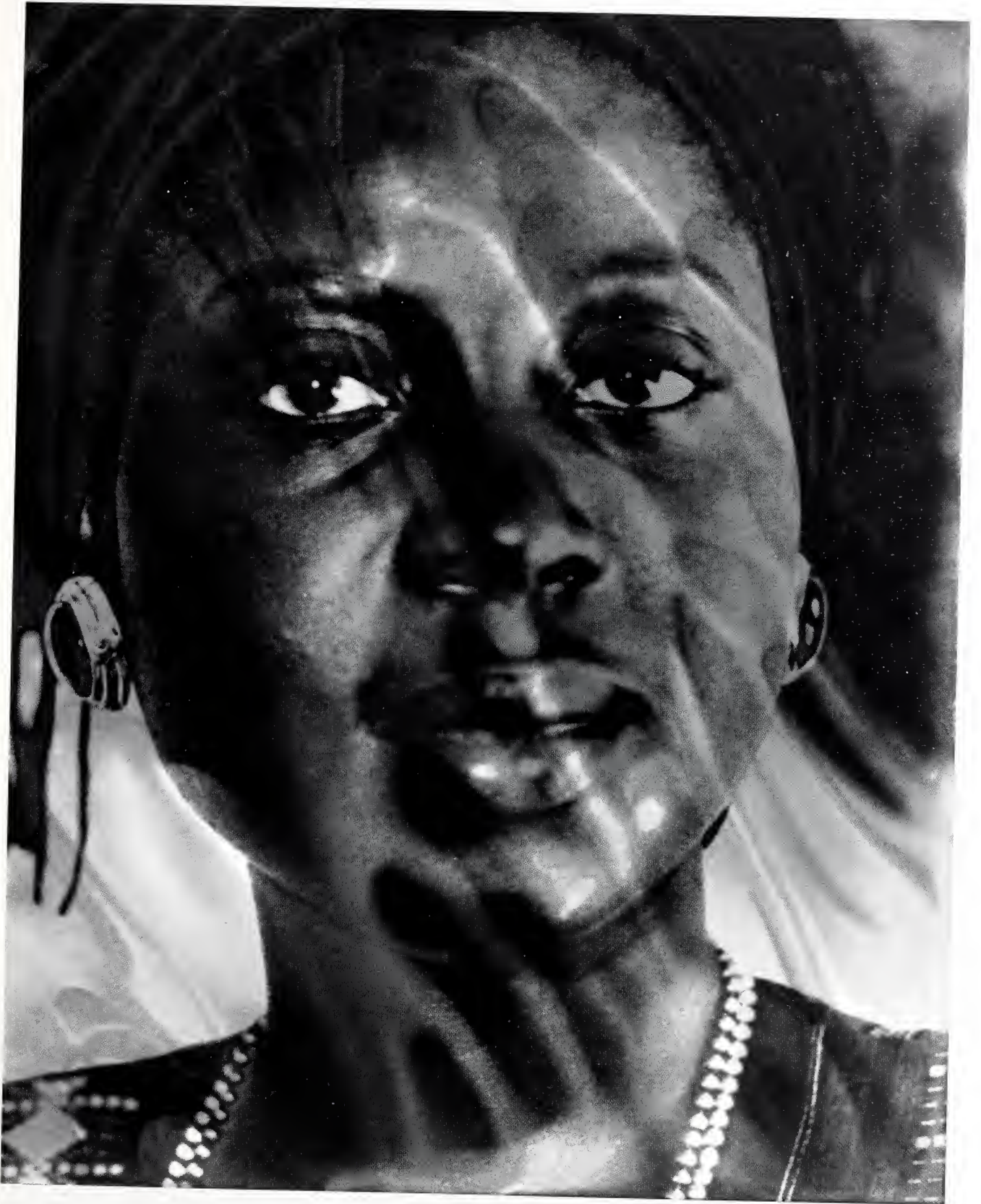
Nagging me about a solid career choice, my mother proposed that I should go back to school.

She said, “Your cousins all went to college and look at them now! Don’t you want to be married soon, have kids, like every other normal person?”

I screamed, “Married?! What about independence? ‘Be like every other normal person’?! Didn’t you used to tell me not to follow the crowd and stand by my beliefs?” Exasperated, she had no answer for me.

“I can’t figure out why you are the way you are, where on earth did you get your notions from?”

Turning my back, I whispered, “From you.”



“Viviane” -Black and White Photograph

-Bernard Bernbaum



“Stress-Free” -Acrylic on Canvas



Start Your Car Engine- If You Dare!

Surviving a Leisurely Drive in South Florida

-Joan Gove

Ready... set... go! A drive in South Florida means, "Let the games begin!" You know the ever popular game of "chicken," but in this case, it's "how close can I come to your bumper passing you at 90 miles per hour!" Or, cars going so fast, it's "now you see me-now you don't." And pedestrian right of way? You might as well call it "dodge car!" Most drivers in South Florida would just as soon hit a pedestrian rather than have to stop!

I've grown up in South Florida and going for a drive was something I used to enjoy. Not anymore! Driving has become a Mad Max — Road Warrior experience. Once You get in your car and pull out onto the obstacle course, the bedlam begins! Heck, the obstacle course starts just trying to back out of your parking, space. Drivers whiz by as you sit in your car waiting. . . and minutes turn into hours. Then you realize — you have to make a break for it! Once you make it OUT of the parking lot, you then have to get around the drivers going 30 miles under the speed limit . . . watch out for the maniac drivers going 30 miles over the speed limit, all the time keeping an eye out for the tourists who don't know where they're going!

Remember the driver courtesy we all learned in driving school? It's a thing of the past. Signaling to let other drivers know your intention is practically forgotten. If you do use your turn signal to change lanes, the other driver usually speeds up to keep you from getting in front of them. And, if you do get in front of them, they take it as a personal assault! Look out — let the road rage begin!

Have you noticed that tailgating has become a popular pastime for drivers? What am I saying? How COULD you not notice someone

trying to put their car in your trunk! What ever happened to a safe driving distance?! Have drivers become conditioned like trail horses following each other nose-to-tail or hood-to-bumper? And, of course, there are always one or two horses that have to race for the lead!

Back in the days when it was possible to take a leisurely drive, getting behind the wheel of your car was actually RELAXING! But times have changed. Between all the traffic and waiting at lights, a drive these days means more stopping than driving. And, don't forget the Mad Maxes out there! You know the ones — they drive like they own the road.

I'm thinking about getting a 10-speed and ending the madness permanently, but I'm afraid that would really end it altogether! Hey, I wonder if meditating while driving would work...?

-Karine Carmello

A Day At The Races

-Ricky Smith

Michigan was having a pretty good season. So was Philadelphia, and Louie was on a roll going into the weekend. He started out the week on death row, but finished up on Friday night with a clutch, twelfth race trifecta. In the thirteenth, he gave a quarter of the money back. It took all of my meager powers of persuasion to get him at least headed toward the parking lot with what was left of the money still in his pocket, before the last race ended.

"The problem with the fuckin' dogs is that that they're smarter than horses," Louie reflected as we descended the escalators down to the ground floor. "Horses are stupid...with a horse, all you have to do is get him in shape, and point him in the right direction...they don't have any brains- that's what jockeys are for. The goddamn dogs have enough brains to question *why*. They think they're chasing that steel rabbit for food...I guess that one wasn't hungry tonight...did you see that son-of-a-bitch get bumped around the first turn? We would've had it!"

As usual, I was along for the ride. I'd sit at the bar, place a few small bets, but nothing like Louie. He would put his neck on the line for a couple of dogs. He'd bet on anything- which streetlight would change first, which fly would fly off the kitchen table first; anything. I wasn't that much of a gambler. I had my own compulsions, but gambling wasn't one of them. But Louie was always a source of laughs, some excitement on the weekends in order to forget the mundane work-a-day world that I could never deal with anyway. Besides, he had a seemingly inexhaustible supply of pills for both of us. The days had turned to years. Disgusted, he threw his program into the trash as we headed for the exit. I was relieved. Getting him to leave the track with money before the last race was a real accomplishment- sort of like trying to corner a stray cat. It was Christmas-time, play-offs season, and all the tracks were open in Florida, where the license plates ought to read- "*The Anything Goes State.*"

We maneuvered through the parking lot

scattered with the cars that were still owned by the last obstinate few devotees left to play out the fourteenth, final drama of the night. I was punch-drunk from numbers. 2-4-5 pays \$12.50 in the 3rd...7-4-9 pays \$18.20 in the 4th...6-2-8 pays \$32.60 in the 8th...all day, all night. The 3-7-4 twelfth that bailed us out paid a respectable seven-to-one. Then, it was one more trip around the track for Sparky, the mechanical rabbit. Every dog track has one. Just as we were walking out the door I could here the announcer's voice over the PA...

"...And heeeeere comes Sparky..."

At that moment my exasperated mood reminded me of how Sparky had once killed a creative sports photographer at Flagler, leaning over the inside rail to get a good shot. Finally, we made it to the car.

"You hungry, Ricky?" he asked, as he thumbed through his newly acquired collection of currency while I tuned the radio to the oldies station. "Let's hit the diner...six, seven, eight, nine..." he inhaled. "...Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen..." he exhaled. He looked up from his inventory, suddenly reminded of something. "Shit, I need to know what happened in that Michigan game...swing by the pharmacy first...gotta pick up a script."

"Louie, it's late. Where you gonna...?"

"Never too late to fill a prescription," he countered, in the same optimistic tone my mother would use, before I could finish the question - "*It's never too late to apologize...it's never too late to go to school...it's never too late to...*"

After a quick stop at the all night drug store, we arrived at the diner. We got out of the car and traversed another parking lot for our favorite late-night breakfast, bagels with cream cheese, coffee with Percocet and Valium. Just as we approached the entrance, the door swung open and a husky figure in a Hawaiian shirt and a greased back ponytail obstructed our path. Louie stopped dead in his tracks. It was Carmine.

"Oh, where you been, Louie?" Carmine grinned coldly as he shook his head with a downcast expression. "You're the only guy I know who can be late for his own funeral...got my money?"



“What the fuck are you talking about?” Louie backed up a step.

“Don’t start with me again, Lu-Lu.” Carmine compensated with a step closer. “It’s been three weeks now that you ain’t paid, an’ I’m gettin’ tired of this shit. I been carrying you since baseball season, an’ I ain’t no community service.”

“C’mon Carmine, I told you that I was good for it this week,” Louie appealed. “Look, I got a lock on tomorrow’s games. Gimme ‘till after the weekend...besides, I took Colorado with the points today, right?...They were winning...”

“Colorado lost, asshole, Michigan beat the shit out of ‘em in the second half,” Carmine snorted. “Don’t you keep track of your investments?”

Louie and I just looked at each other, acting out the usual moment of dumfounded surprise. He played this one as cool as he could, and I refused to let myself look into Carmine’s eyes. Loosing, or at least paying for it, was the boundary of my relationship with Louie. “Okay, so I dropped one. Tomorrow’s another day,” Louie shrugged. “I told you, I’ll catch you after the weekend. I still have that Philly-Dallas game, right?”

“So I dropped one...tomorrow’s another day,” Carmine mimicked. “Louie, my uncle told me last week not to take anymore action on you. I let you talk me into it, and now I’m up to my fuckin’ neck...you got a reputation for this shit.” He paused, looked down at his white Sergio Brutini loafers and shook his head again. “Shit...alright, I’ve gone this far...you got Philly, but...”

“With the field goal, right?” Louie interrupted with an index finger pointed upward. He was always looking for an edge, if he could get it.

“Fuck no! You’re getting two points, godammit!...That’s it!” Carmine’s voice rose in anger as he held up his hands, palms outward, emphasizing the finality of his decision. Both of their hands were doing the talking, in that Italian sort of way, their words just playing out the same dialogue, the same shit, week after week.

“Yeah okay, okay,” Louie deferred.

Carmine looked up at the night sky, now with his arms folded with one hand scratching his

chin, as if in contemplation of the constellations, looking for some sign of divination. He sighed a deep breath.

“Louie, as of now, you are in what my uncle calls ‘a *state of grace*,’ and in my business, judgement day comes every Tuesday morning...You hear me? Your stay in purgatory is over, Lu-Lu...see you Tuesday.”

He turned and started for his car. But before he made two steps, Louie blurted out, “Roll it over, will ya?”

Carmine stopped. He slowly turned around with his arms straight at his side as if on a turntable, gazing down, then menacingly raised his eyes at us. He started to nod his head. Suddenly, in an explosive instant, he took two steps and grabbed Louie by his shirt with two clenched fists.

“Are you fucking with me?” Carmine cocked his head to one side, and squinted his eyes. “Because if you are, I will send you to hell on Tuesday!” Then he pushed Louie away, and paused to contemplate once more, his hands stroking the sides of his head. “Okay, I’ll role it all over on Philly... but don’t make me come lookin’ for you!” Carmine finally looked at me, pointing his thumb at Louie. “Y’know, this guy’s gonna get you fucked one of these days, just for being there. You ever heard of the wrong place at the wrong time?” He turned to go, and rhetorically muttered to no one in particular, “I dropped outta business school for *this* shit?”

This kind of thing made me nervous. I liked the pay-off, but I didn’t like to be around for the pay-backs. Like I said, Ricky’s no gambler, but I always liked to come along for the ride. Louie turned to me, and smiled slyly. He’d been through this many times before. He motioned for me to go inside to the safety of the diner. As we walked through the door we could hear Carmine shout from the parking lot, “Don’t make me come lookin’ for you!”

As we passed the cash register, I casually inquired, “Are you fucking crazy?”

Louie rolled his eyes as he reached inside his pocket for his prescription bottles while we took our seats at the counter. “Relax...here, have a Valium. Listen, Dallas isn’t even going to the play-

offs this year,” he admonished. “They’re playing in Philly... they won’t *get up* for this game.”

“Oh yeah, they will.” Interrupted a voice from a booth behind us, catching Louie’s confidence off-guard. We both turned around. It was Totsie.

Totsie was that jolly sort of an immense egg of a man with an obliquely round, cherubic face and a perpetually sly grin. We had known him since Jersey.

“Heh heh,” he chuckled. “Look who’s out on the town after a hard night at the track. You look like you just seen the future, Lu-Lu... you look like shit! Come over here an’ sit down, heh heh.”

We sat down at his booth. Totsie took a huge bite of his bagel and lox as he leaned over his plate. The cream cheese on his red sunburned face contrasted his black silk shirt and an adornment of little gold chains hanging from his neck; a Star of David, an Italian horn, a miniature Cadillac crest, and a dollar sign. The waitress came over with menus and poured coffee.

“Put ‘em on my check,” Totsie mumbled with his mouth full.

“The cream cheese is flyin’ tonight, huh Totsie,” Louie smiled. “How’d you do at the track, you win?”

“I survived the evening playin’ Rummy. I wasn’t even at the track,” Totsie informed us. He took a sip of his coffee. A diamond studded ‘T’ glistened from his gold and onyx pinky ring. “But Carmine was, heh heh,” he giggled.

“Fuck him,” said Louie without looking up from his menu.

“He saw you at the fifty dollar window f’Chrissakes!”

“Fuck him,” Louie repeated as he threw a couple of pills into his mouth and drank them down with coffee. “He’s no *made guy*.”

Totsie laughed and shook his head. “Those pills are making you goofy...don’t you think he’d like to be one, though? What better way than to make an example out of someone like you?” He piled some more cream cheese on an already mountainous portion of lox atop his bagel.

“There *are* no more made guys, Totsie.” Louie retorted.

“That’s not the point,” munched Totsie, his mouth stuffed. “You haven’t picked a game in two weeks, and the same guy who takes your dubious wagers sees you at the fifty-dollar window? After you just dropped it all on that stupid Colorado bet? Michigan’s having a championship season. What were you thinkin’?” Totsie tapped his finger on his balding head as he swallowed. “Y’don’ even give him the friggin’ *vig* f’Chrissakes!”

“I had a lot of fun in Boulder,” Louie shrugged. Anyway, how do you know about all my bets?”

“That’s what happens when you got a reputation, heh heh. See how you are?” He laughed, waving his clasped praying hands to and fro, like an Italian grandmother. “That Woodson kid’s gonna win the Heisman.” He shook his head and laughed incredulously “He bets against a championship team at home with what? Two points?...all because he got laid in Boulder? Ha!”

“Two and a half.”

“I stand corrected.” Totsie slapped his balding head. “They got killed, ha ha ha...!” Totsie still hadn’t finished making his point. He caught his breath. “...And you got Philly Monday night at home plus three against Dallas?”

“Two.”

“Louie, you dropped half a point just sittin’ here!” We all laughed. Totsie continued his inquisition, waving his finger at Louie. Now came the anticipated lecture that had Louie rolling his eyes again, sarcastically.

“My father always said, ‘There are no *friends* in the *gaming business*. They ask for favors, and they borrow money. I got family for that!’ That’s why he’s comfortably retired in Vegas now. Listen Louie, I’m gonna bend a rule an’ do you a favor since you’re gonna come to me for one after you loose on Monday night anyway, an’ I don’ wanna become involved once this thing gets outta hand.”

Louie almost choked on his coffee.

“What do you mean ‘after I loose on Monday night?’ What are you, clairvoyant? How do you know who’s going to win that game? What do you mean, out of hand?”

“The game?” Totsie cocked his head and smiled. “I dunno who’s gonna win the game.”



Then, his expression changed and became momentarily somber. "But what I *do* know is that *you* are going to *lose*."

"What the fuck are you talking about, Totsie?"

"Because you don't want to win!" Totsie paused, staring directly into Louie's diverted eyes and sighed. "C'mon Louie, we played *Hi-Low* in the fifth grade in my father's basement back in Jersey. Remember Piggy Feldman? You cheated Piggy out of his lunch money back then."

"I remember the pig. That's why we called him Piggy...not a bad player, though."

"My father *still* doesn't like you for it."

"I can't believe he remembers...and why should he care? He wasn't even playing with us." Louie sat there disinterested, coolly grinning and looking out the window. He possessed a certain detachment about those things. Cheating at cards or anything else, was just another edge.

"My father remembers every bet he ever took," said Totsie emphatically. "It was his business to remember those things. Unlike you my friend, he's was a professional," he reprimanded. He wiped his face of cream cheese with his napkin, and continued.

"Look, I don't go up to Calder much anymore, but I got a friend there who might be able to help you out. I hope I'm wrong, but if you should get caught in a jam, maybe you could use a little inside information. Tell 'em you're a friend of mine. I'm not promisin', but maybe he'll have somethin' you can use. In the meantime, you didn't hear it from me. Not for nothin' Lu-Lu, but you got your reputation, and I got mine to protect, understand?"

Louie leaned across the table, suddenly interested in another edge, any possible advantage. "What's your friend's name?"

"Buddy. He used to be a jockey. Now he does a little training."

"Why are you so anxious to help me out?" asked Louie quizzically.

Totsie took a sip of his coffee and lit a cigarette. "I dunno... maybe it was those Poker games that my old man used to run in the neighborhood. You knew they wuz fixed, and never

said nothin'. I hate to stand by and watch you go down...Louie, you got the talent, if you could just learn to control yourself."

"Wait a minute, I can't control myself." Louie got up to go to the restroom.

Totsie looked at me and laughed. He leaned across the table, appealing with his extended palms to whatever good sense he thought I had. His hands were talking again, "See what I mean? Ricky, does he ever take *anything* seriously?...He just doesn't give a shit!"

I didn't care either. I was high again. The pills were starting to kick in, and anxiety about money, and everything else except for *that moment* began to fade. *The moment* is what we were good at. Like the song said, "*Sha-la-la, live for today...an' don't worry 'bout tomorrow, hey hey.*" It was the thing that bound me Louie and me. He staggered back from the restroom. Nothing mattered, as long as we could get some laughs...

For a while we all reminisced about the old days at Aqueduct and Monmouth Park down the shore. When we were teen-agers, Louie and I would cut school and drive out to the track, or take the train to 14th street and stumble around Manhattan, fucked-up. Louie was always in and out of the OTB storefronts. He just hadn't changed. Totsie was right. His fatalistic view was that in the long run, nothing mattered and no one could give a shit. Just like in the old days back in Jersey, the three of us had some more laughs and finished the ritual late-night breakfast at the diner. In Totsie's mind, he was just offering a little help for old time's sake. To Louie, opportunity was knocking at the back door, just as trouble was about to come in the front.

Louie knew it all. He knew the odds, the dogs, the horses, the jockeys, track conditions, who was playing hurt, who was going to the playoffs, and how many cards were on the table. So, sure enough when the Monday night game came along, with two chances to win the game, Philly figured out a way to lose not once, but twice to Dallas in the last two minutes. It was as if the entire Philadelphia Eagles football team had found out that Louie the Lu-Lu had parlayed them with a winner, and so they were determined to fuck it all up. They denied Louie's stay of execution by

fumbling at the goal line. As if that wasn't bad enough, with two minutes to go they managed to get the ball back, only to miss an easy fifteen-yard field goal in the closing seconds. He watched the end of the game on the couch holding his head in his hands.

"I don't feel so good. I have to go lie down. Are there any more Valiums?" he moaned, as he headed for the bedroom, and comfort of the 24-hour sports radio station beside his bed.

I shook my head. "Nope." The depression was contagious.

The next morning when the phone started ringing, it was like a fire alarm.

"Don't answer it!" He yelled from the bathroom. "Get ready...we gotta get outta here!"

"Where the fuck are we going?"

"Calder!...I gotta get out...gotta get out!" he kept repeating over the sound of running water.

"Yeah, you gotta get out alright," I said sarcastically. "Are you fucking crazy!?"

It looked like we would have to make use of Totsie's tip. After a quick stop at the newsstand for the Daily Racing Form, we headed up to Calder. After stopping at the first water fountain we saw to swallow some more pills, we rode the escalator through the cacophony of the track up to the clubhouse in desperation to find our insider. At the clubhouse bar we found Buddy. His uncharacteristic long gray braided ponytail hung below the back of the barstool.

"Totsie and I go way back," Buddy explained. "I knew him in the old days when I was riding up at Aqueduct...he was just a fat kid with pimples back then...he's a good man, that Totsie...how's he doing?"

Louie tried to ingratiate himself. "You know Totsie. He's always in good shape. We've known him since high school...he said that you might be able to help us out."

"Did he say that? He must have, or you wouldn't be here, huh?" Buddy scratched his gray, receding scalp and adjusted his thick glasses in consideration of the impromptu request.

"Well, he's done me a couple of good turns

over the years...alright. Look, I'm not psychic or anything, and being a gambler you must know that nobody else is, but I'll tell you what...a friend of mine has been training this horse. She's a runner. But my friend needs the money, so he's running her in a claiming race today in the seventh. She's dropping way down in class. It's too bad...if she wins, he has to sell the horse. Sort of like one of those *when-ya-win-ya-lose* kind of deals. But, those are the rules."

"Will she win?" Louie asked anxiously.

"Well, she is dropping down in class, and Angel's riding her today, so that's good. But it ain't like the old days...they didn't have video tape. Back when I was riding, they only had 35 millimeter cameras every twenty yards or so, and they couldn't catch all the shit we used to get away with."

"What do you mean?"

"We cheated!...Oh sure, we all did." Buddy laughed. "Go look up the definition of 'jockey' in the dictionary sometime. Bill Shoemaker was the worst. He'd leg-lock you around the turn, or whip your mount. Man, he was treacherous! Nowadays you can't get away with nothing." Buddy shook his head. "It's a goddamned shame, is what it is...they might as well be riding dogs."

Louie gulped nervously. That last bit of information was at odds with his philosophy, and seemed to shake his confidence. "But, will she win?"

"Oh yeah," said Buddy, reassuringly. "At least she'll be in the money...she's dropping way down in class...check it out in the program." Buddy advised as he got up off his barstool to go. "Well, nice talkin' to ya...gotta go to work!"

"Which horse?" Louie asked him, shaking Buddy's hand in gratitude.

"Free Radical...in the seventh...runnin' little bitch..." Buddy called over his shoulder as he departed the bar.

"Cool name. I like her already." Louie muttered.

For the next twenty minutes Louie studied the program intently, every few seconds pausing to look up at the tote board displayed on the monitors between races. I took a seat at the bar, exasperated again. It was as if Louie saw religion

in the numbers, in the odds and laws of probabilities. I just didn't belong to the same faith as he did. I sat there waiting for our deliverance in the seventh race, sipping on my usual Bloody Mary, studying the crowd from the reflection of the mirror behind the bar, listening to the raspy, cigar choked voices behind me, the customary confusion proceeding the race.

"Yo, Cheech! Get me a ticket...!"

"Gimme the two-five in the fourth...!"

"That son of a bitch can only run in the rain...*he's a mudder.*"

Then, from behind I heard in a familiar voice.

"Wheel the five up and back. I got something to take care of. I'll be right back."

I turned slightly from the bar. Holy shit, it was Carmine, just as I heard the announcement:

"And they're off!"

When Carmine disappeared into the crowd I ran to find Louie to warn him, as the horses flew around the backstretch. But it was too late. There he was, in front of the big screen TV, screaming conspicuously, "C'mon Free Radical...Go, Go, Go..."

And there was Carmine, calmly watching him from a distance, looking like a placid reptile...waiting.

"Louie, we better get outta here...I just saw Carmine," I advised nervously.

Louie just stood there gaping at the screen, his eyes wide as the horses crossed the finish line. He looked down at the tickets in his hand, then back at the screen as if for confirmation. "I won," he said in amazement, quietly, to no one.

"Louie, we need to go..."

He turned to me and looked directly into my eyes and said, "No, I mean...I won!" He held the tickets up to my face just as I heard the track announcer over the PA:

"And it's Free Radical, at the wire..."

Louie quickly turned to check the lighted tote board inside the dirt track. There it was. WIN: 2, PLACE: 5, SHOW: 8.

I glanced at them, and did a double take. The first thing I noticed was the red stripe along the sides of the tickets that read in blocked italics:

SEVENTH RACE

Under that, it read:

No.2 Win \$100.

I didn't even bother to look at the rest of them, but there were six of them in different combinations, and from the look on Louie's face, he knew that he was holding some real money. Now it seemed as though what I had been saying to Louie had finally sunk in, and he looked around suspiciously.

"Here, take these and cash 'em...meet me at the car." Said Louie in a hurried voice. Now, finally he figured it out. He knew that he shouldn't have those tickets on him, much less even be within miles of the track, but it was too late. He wheeled around and was gone. I looked around, but there was no sign of Carmine. I figured that I'd better move fast. I went to the cashiers window, handed over the winning tickets and leaned my head forward as far as I could to try to be just a body without a face, but I couldn't help glancing over my shoulder conspicuously. When I turned back, the cashier was just finishing up the tally, "...*forty-four, forty five, forty-six...*"

I couldn't believe it. The cashier hand handed me \$4,785.50! I threw the cashier the only fifty-dollar bill and said, "Thanks." I went to the men's room and in the privacy of an empty stall, split the money up. I put some in each shoe, sort of like expensive Dr. Sholz's inner soles, and shoved the rest down the front of my pants. I made for the escalators back to the ground floor, and headed quickly for the parking lot.

As I was crossing the driveway by the main entrance, a new black Cadillac pulled up slowly. There were two rather imposing looking greaseballs in the front, and Carmine was in the back, but he said nothing. I was getting that feeling in the pit of my stomach when you know something has really gone wrong- like when you knew you were about to get busted by the cops, but worse. I was thinking about the money in my shoes and pants. The heavier, more intimidating one on the passenger side turned his Carrera sunglasses at me. His forearm, with the tattooed sword through the skull, above which, read in script: *Pac et Spera*, hung out the car door.



“C’mere,” he beckoned to me. I cautiously approached the Cadillac. “Got any money that belongs to us? Your friend should have had more than we got outta him.”

“What? Whaddaya mean?” My voice cracked. Carmine just looked away, out the back seat window. A feeling of genuine terror knotted my stomach tighter. I raised my eyes to look for some sign of Louie. I started to back up and almost choked with fear when the car door cracked open and the big guy in front said, “You want this guy, Carmine?”

I was frozen for a second, and in a second the bone-breaker was out of the car, and had me by my shirt, pulling me toward the car. Carmine’s warning floated through my mind. “*Wrong place, wrong time...this guy’s gonna get you fucked...*” I made a move to escape the guy’s grasp, which only tore my shirt. Now his fat hand was around my neck, lifting me just an inch or two off my feet for one terrifying instant, just enough to have me gasping for air. Then, he abruptly just dropped me. I was stunned, but then I noticed why the guy suddenly lost interest in me, and although I instinctively wanted to, I did the right thing by not running, and drawing any attention to myself. Just at the right moment, a police car had just turned the corner of the building and cruised slowly by, and another just as husky, bearded guy in a blue uniform was behind the wheel. His aviator sunglasses turned toward us curiously.

“Everything okay fellas? I just got a call from the paramedics. Some guy got hurt in the parking lot. You guys seen anything?” said the cop in a way that didn’t ask, but told. He conveyed just enough of a subtle message to the occupants of the Caddy that said, “I know you guys, I know your business. Now get the fuck out of here before I get interested.” We all just stared blankly back at him and shook our heads. “Have a nice day,” snorted the cop. Up went his window, and he was gone. No one was going to say anything anyway.

Was it possible that Carmine appreciated my discretion? Maybe he and the cop were acquainted anyway. “Let him go,” he said calmly. “It ain’t his problem.” Carmine’s enforcer got back in the car. Actually, we were all glad not to have to

deal with a cop.

“You lookin’ f’ your friend?” He motioned with his head towards the lot. “He’s over there. I think he had an accident.”

For once, for once in my life, there was a cop when I needed one, and I didn’t even have to ask for his help, which made it all the more helpful, but not for Louie. Thank God for that...holy shit, I thought, as the Cadillac began to pull away. And as it did, the big guy in the front leaned his head out the window and shouted, “Tell that *bafangool* friend a’ yours it ain’t healthy to play at the track with other people’s money!” The black Caddy sped away.

By this time my stomach was churning as I quickly tried to make it to my car, and saw that an ambulance wasn’t far just sitting, idling. I hid behind some cars for a few minutes for the police cruiser to leave. After the cop had sped away from the parking lot, I approached the driver of the idling ambulance, finishing up some on-the-scene paper work. “Where’re you taking him?” I asked.

“Hollywood Memorial...friend of yours?”

“Yeah, I know him.”

“Well, he looks busted up pretty bad...said he fell...”

“Tell him that I’ll meet him at the hospital later.”

As I approached the car, I reached into my pocket for the keys. Looking down, I noticed that I was standing in a small pool of blood. As I unlocked the door I could see little beads splattered across the windows...

I raced to the house to get rid of the money, then to the hospital and waited in the emergency room for a few hours. I was surprised to see Louie actually walk out the door with only a little assistance. His face looked pretty bad, and his arm was in a cast up to his elbow. There were concussions, contusions, abrasions and fractures. His ability to walk wouldn’t proscribe any serious lifestyle changes though, except for one.

“How you feeling?” I asked him sheepishly.

“Ouch,” mono-toned Louie, as he limped through the waiting room. “You know what?...that motherfucker had the nerve to call the ambulance on his cell-phone before they fucked me up, just

to put the fear of God in me.”

“Well...?”

“I dunno ‘bout God...” he shook his head in disgust. “But, I got a prescription!” He waved a little piece of paper, trying to manage a smile. “You still have the money?” he asked anxiously.

“Yeah. You gonna pay him?”

“Are you fucking nuts?” He said out of the corner of his mouth, as he half turned a black eye toward me. “How much was it?”

“About forty-seven hundred.”

“Swing by the pharmacy, then take me to a motel,” said Louie, unimpressed. I helped him into the car and headed for the beach. Louie was grinning, while holding his battered face. Then he inquired as to whether or not I had paid the rent. I knew that Louie still hadn’t learned his lesson.

And neither had I. It was time to migrate. Time for a road trip.

We went west...

Not Quite The End



“ ‘Frog’ Went-A-Cart-N” -Black and White Photograph

-B. L Wells

The Ballerina in the Box

She waits inside her lonely room
Darkness is her only friend
She smiles yet lives in constant gloom
From sun-up till days' end
She spins around by the touch of a hand
When the light goes out she stops
She will never know the love of a man
For she is the ballerina in the box

-Amy Harvey



“Black Garden” -Charcoal Drawing

-Michelle Rubio

My Aesthetic Pattern

(or, perfect grammar makes the writer forget what to write about...)

Some writer once said that the greatest books write themselves, but I won't do the honor of knowing the exact name. There is no pattern in the way I create...pattern pertains to structure and schedule- these things pertain to work and I enjoy avoiding all of the above. Few sights inspire me when I torture the outside world for an answer; rather I invite my time into a series of broken self-induced trances. Such episodes allow me the freedom to perform and conduct rather than write. The words just seem to happen in their place- a festival behind closed eyes.

My present project, my burden and romance, is a furious collection of scribblings and scratches based on two years of perfect madness. Slowly , I connect the severed ends that fit and try to summarize this grand mess with an original viewpoint. I must admit that a long trailing project can bring grave doubt to the writer. Being chased by a monster that you can't prove, there is very little hard evidence to share with others- except faith. Sometimes I allow such "proof" to come in the form of poetry, a word drug, a testament of soul- other ways to get results quickly before bedtime.

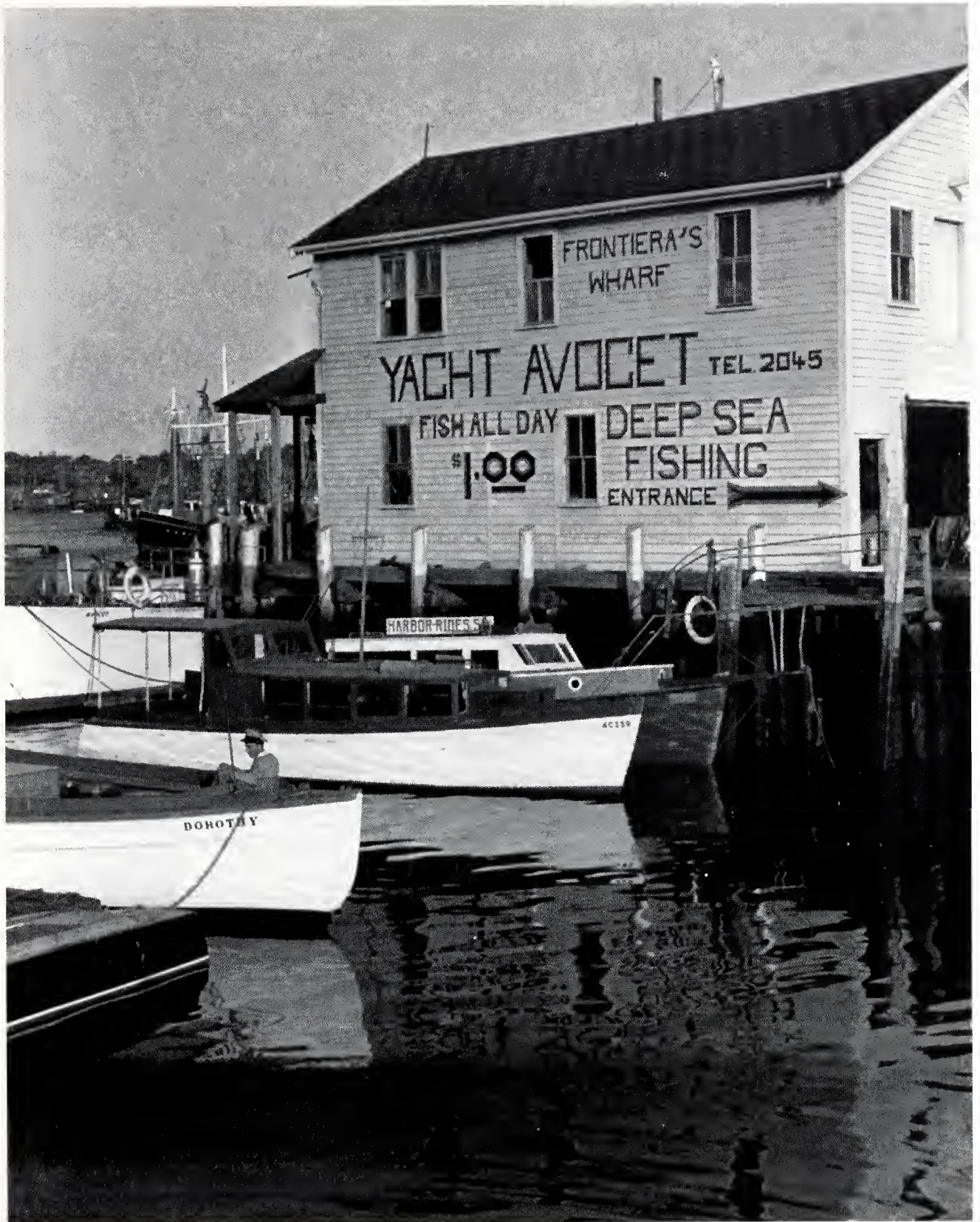
As far as how my work may be interpreted, that is a tough topic with me. I both attract and repel most and/or all criticism. For example, in a certain class on a certain day somewhere in my college career, I might learn why Tennessee Williams wrote "*The Glass Menagerie*," what was he trying to prove in the final scene, or why he choked to death with a bottle of pills (not the only bottle in the room). Sorry- tangent, not pattern.

I am more interested in what I will find buried inside the images that were meant for me to endure before being told what to look for, single out, praise someone else's verse and analyze. To me, most academic interpretations are nothing more than hopeful opinions, misunderstandings, or vile dissections.

It is my core belief that within an audience, each of us is invited to contrive our own personal bliss, be it the music created in a briefcase "to move you," films that are maimed "because we just can't show you," or the books left hidden in the dark attic of history. No artform can be standardized or trained to remain a ritual unbreakable by mainstream law. We need not prove everything under the pressure and tradition of "cute" or "suitable." It is unnecessary and impossible to package everything. For if there is no mystery, there is likewise no chaos- and I for one am no longer interested. Relieve us of individual thought and our art forms will no longer form art at all- passion become documented and dangerous no longer.

-Troy Umphlette





“Gloucester, Mass.” -Black and White Photograph

Bernard Bernbaum

Mental Rant

I don't even know what time is it
Something inside me doesn't want to know.
I softly struggle with what to write in this, my poem.
Not really a poem, more like a rant.
I was never good with rhyme.
So forget the two roads in the woods.
I made my own path using a mental chainsaw.
Now I think about it, that Frost guy was onto something.
Why go the same ways as everyone else does?
Why become a part of the system you sometimes can't stand?
Because if you don't, your labeled an outcast.
Shunned from the normal society, pointed at like a freak.
But I like "freaks," even though I could never be one.
My girlfriend would leave me on the spot.
She is my entire life, my reason for it.
The heart can die while the body lives on.
But you won't like the experience.
Where was I before I got distracted?
Oh yeah, Robert Frost's poem.
There is no such thing as "Normal Society".
We all have flaws.
We're human, damn it!
We are incapable of being normal!
Anyone who says they are normal are the true "freaks".
Anyone who says they are a "freak" is someone being himself.
Or herself.
And just who brought on this whole Politically Correct stuff?
I thought politics was related to politicians!
I thought politicians were synonymous with lying and cheating!
I thought lying and cheating were wrong!
Wrong is another word for Incorrect.
Does that mean we want to be Incorrectly Correct?
Or Wrongly Correct?
That makes no sense!
The whole system makes no sense!
DAMN IT! I'm ranting again!

-David Pietka





“Upward Climb” Clay Sculpture

-J. Michael McCartney

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