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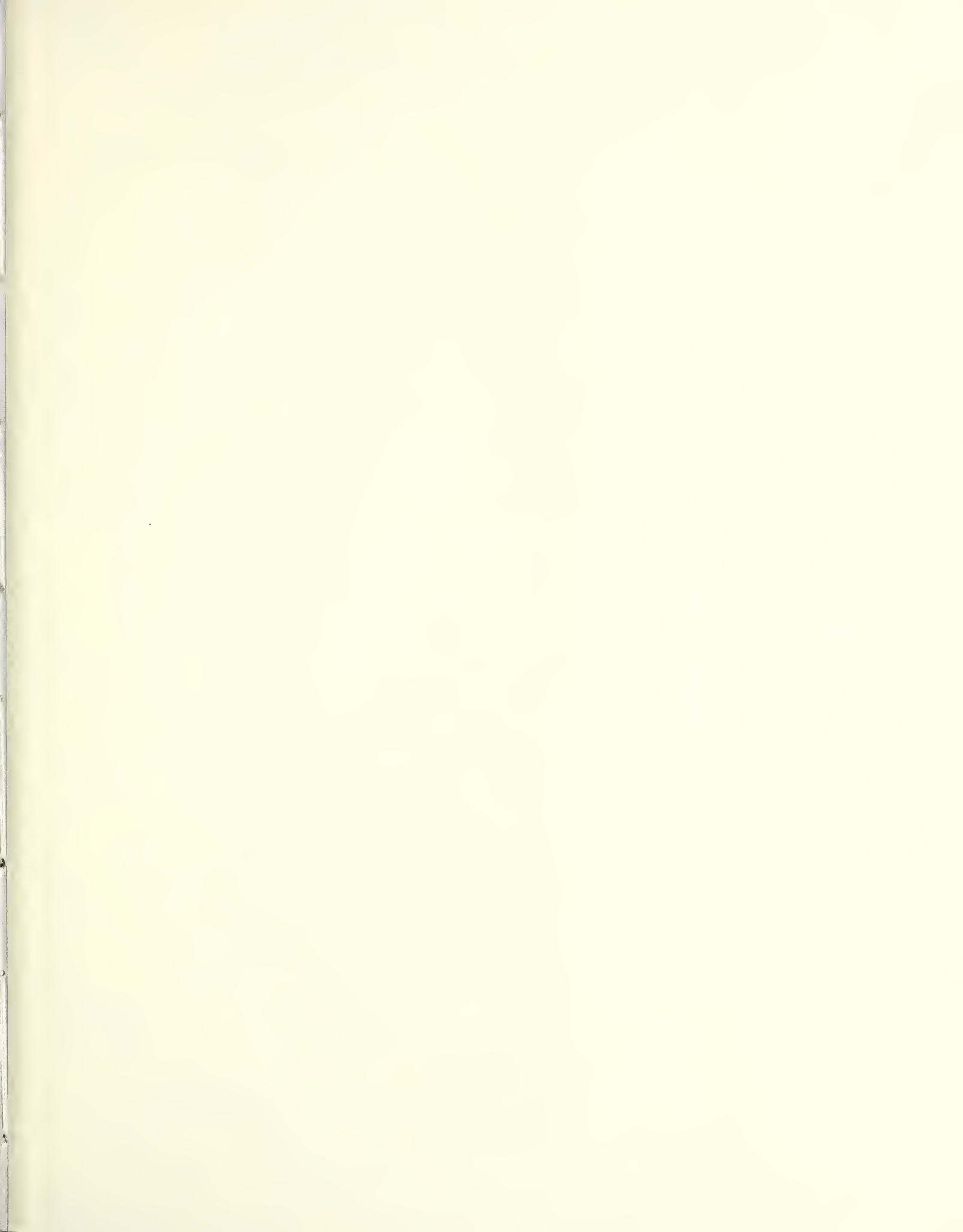
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P'an Ku



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P'an Ku Staff



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Special Thanks to the North Campus English Department

The South Campus Writing Contest is funded through a bequest

by Otto M. Burkhardt to the BCC Foundation.

P'an Ku, Volume thirty-two, number one, was printed by Ormont Graphics. *P'an Ku* is designed, produced, and edited solely by students at Broward Community College. All contributions in this issue are by students at BCC. This magazine is funded by the Student Activities Board. The opinions expressed are those of our contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the editors, faculty, staff, administrators or trustees of the college. Typed contributions with the name, social security number, and telephone number are welcomed from all students attending BCC. Copyright 2000 by Broward Community College, 225 East Las Olas Boulevard, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301. All communications with the editors and all inquiries concerning this publication should be addressed to: Editor of *P'an Ku*, BCC South Campus, 7200 Pines Boulevard, Pembroke Pines, Florida 33024. Telephone: (954)986-8044. All copyrights revert back to the original artists and authors after publication. Visit *P'an Ku's* website: <http://fs.broward.cc.fl.us/south/english/pkhome.html>



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WARNING by Shaista Khan

WARNING: Her appearance will seem common enough, but with the passing of time, you will see every movement, every motion, every gesture as a personal invitation into the forbidden.

WARNING: Do not look into her eyes, for she will devour your entire existence as if she was reading into your mind.

WARNING: Be cautious when listening to her speak: You are bound to become enthralled by her words; her voice will forever haunt you.

WARNING: Do not pursue her. She is the forbidden fruit. In doing so, this will be your downfall. She will enslave you and hold you captive in which no ransom will ever free you.

WARNING: She knows not of what she does.





"Waterworks 441"

Black and White Photograph by Susan Gunter



MUSIC POWER by Sandy Swisher

THE BEAT STARTS,

MY MIND GRABS THE TUNE.

A PLACE, A TIME,

I RELAX AND LET IT TAKE ME.

A TIME MACHINE,

PLACES I MISS,

MOMENTS HELD DEAR.

YOUNG, CAREFREE

MY TIME IS MY OWN.

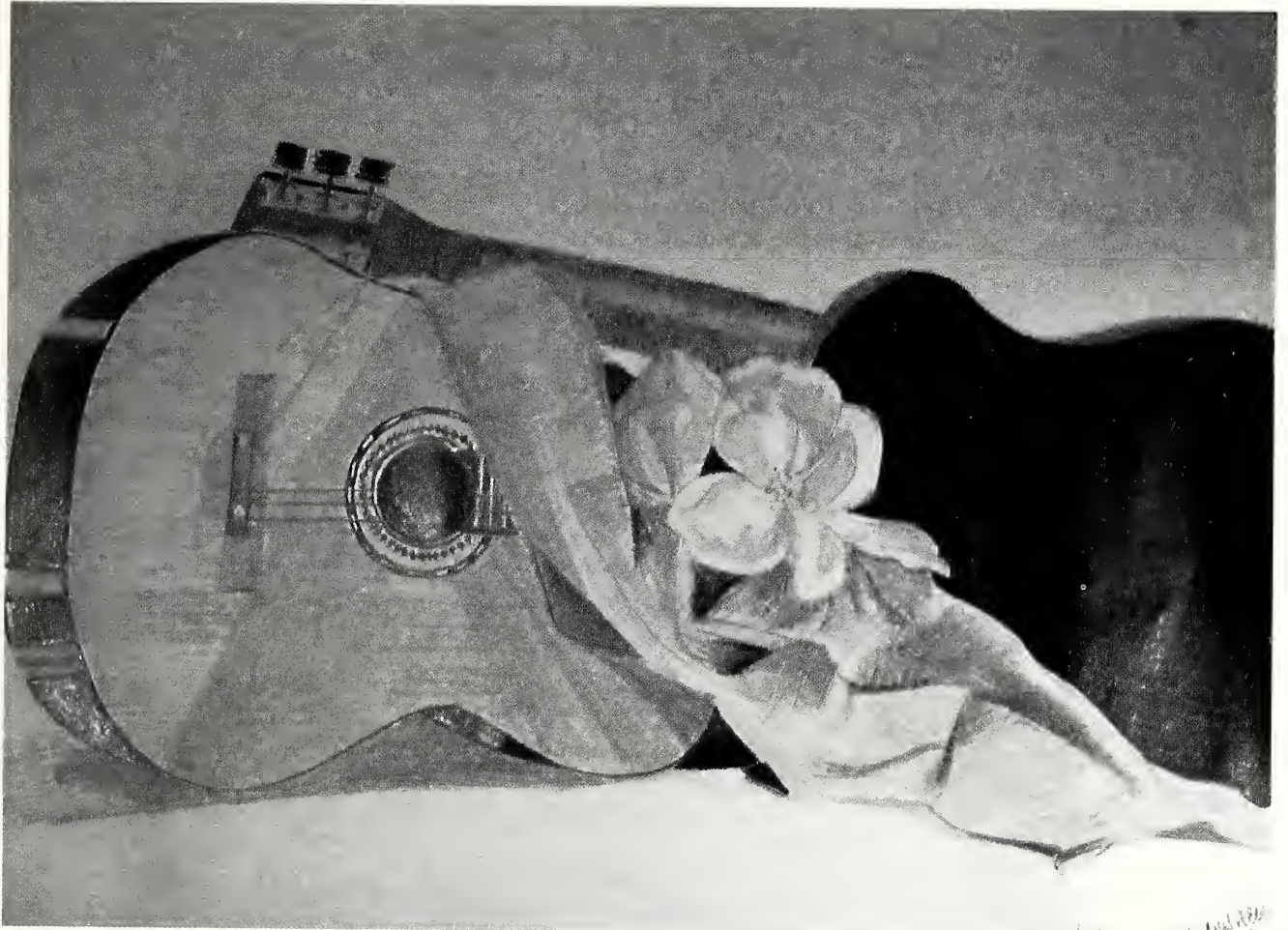
SWIRLING IN AND ABOUT

GREAT TIMES, GREAT FRIENDS.

SADNESS FROM LOSSES

PEOPLE FOREVER MISSED AND LOVED.





"Guitars" Pencil Drawing by Lori Ann Abou

On a Beautiful Summer Evening by Joseph H. Etienne

On a beautiful summer evening
As the sun was chasing the last stubborn clouds
As the skies wore their most colorful adornments
To welcome the joyful moon

On a beautiful summer evening
As the ploughman climbed the flowered footpath
On his way home with tonight's meal
As the grandkids gathered around the venerable recliner
Under the watchful eyes of the nursing stars

On a beautiful summer evening
In an overpopulated hospital
In a bed that has seen better days
A woman, a daughter, a mother
Disputed her last breaths to a death bubbling from her lungs

On a beautiful summer evening
Next to a hospital bed that has seen better days
A single wail drown in the flood of tears
From the dying entrails of a woman who used to be a mother
Could not keep the unwelcome death at bay

On that same beautiful summer evening
A medical student could not remember the words
To empathize, to reassure,
To open the clenched fingers of a mother who just lost a daughter.





“Bro Sun Sis Moon”

Acrylic on Canvas by Marie Smith

Winter Solstice by Susan Carr

Over the rolling hills of Arcadia,
Through the sleeping woods
Walks the huntress Artemis
Empty quiver.
Unstrung bow.
Midnight glistens on the snow.

Going to join her lover Pan,
Nestled deep within his cave,
Deep asleep within his furs.
Silent pipes.
Unused hook.
Winter wind crying over the brook.

Life Goes On Long After the Thrill of Living is Gone

by Ray Fernandez

Enter into the starlight realize everything's not right
Incandescent moonlight filters through the ceiling
It casts a cool shadow on this I'm feeling
Comfort in the notion nothing's gonna happen to annoy the person
you've become and learning how successfully to shun
I marr this moment with breath taking accuracy and I marvel at the
birth of another lost opportunity and please someone remove this
cacophony of irony before it takes me and consumes me completely
I wanna go to any place that needs me, but I know it won't come easy
and I know I'll end up freezing
Reach out to the one that needs you and embrace what you came for
Surrender completely, I know that feeling residing inside you
I'll wait to appease it that one lone desire ice cold and on fire
Don't call me liar I will not conspire to awaken the moment
that caught you forever so you nurse and you feed it and it clings to
your being and it's not worth repeating those words you think you've
been hearing
I'm proud of these moments they each represent a small piece of my
skin that's stretching and breaking and I'll pretend to devour, more
and more every shitty fucking waking hour
Goodbye I presume this pertains to all things that make me be the
best me I can be
I present to you all these two things I requirew
Remember to feel all that you can and never lose sight of your power





“Praying Plants”

Conte crayon and Charcoal drawing by Ayanna Hill

Babel Rising by Steven Kever

Shining,
Iridescent blue,
Concrete, steel and glass
-rising
-rising
from earth toward heaven
in arrogance and audacity.
Towers of Babel.

Below the crest
Of each attempt
The rising din
Of syncopated confusion.
Would be Masters
Scramble, claw, and kick.

Sophist
Reaching for a memory in Eternity.
Hide behind
Thees, and thous, and pardon me's
As the order of assent is proclaimed.

In this mad quest
The misused and abused
Lie scattered
Broken toys
-caught
-suspended
in the quicksand of time.

Toys
Scattered
Not by the hand of some whimsical child,
But caste aside
In all consuming haste.
As we,
The human race,
Continue
To be prodded
By the spear of fear.

The all too common,
Common denominator.

-ashes to ashes and dust to dust-



Cannibal by Shaista Khan

The first taste is forever.
Her carnal desires have grown since then.
Awakening an appetite so fierce,
So full of need
It calls her every so often.
Feeling it beating loudly in her every limb,
She holds on to whatever logical
Thought is left to contemplate...

She then holds on to her prey,
Preparing him for the onslaught
Yet to come.
Her grips tightens as she feels the
Blood flowing throughout the
Soon to be limp creature that lays
Before her...

Only shallow breaths can be heard
After he's offered himself for the taking.
As he imagines her on her knees
before him,
Ready to surrender, she revels,
Knowing that the victory was all hers.
Knowing that the insatiable hunger will
Always bring her back.

She, the eater of the flesh,
Will forever be on the prowl,
Ready to receive...



"Devil"

Color Drawing by Gabriel Izquierdo



Maelstrom of the Phoenix by Michelle Becker

And something dies
And the sun sets down
As he dives down
Down into something he never imagined

So here's the story
Of a pain that lives inside
And in his heart, in his eyes
The sun drops slowly down
This isn't a life, this isn't real
This is a world where things slowly die
But he's a child
Yet he's a man
With a life deep and torn and real
The bird dies
He is buried
But a phoenix never dies
He'll rise again
And he'll rise to show you all
Ashes will burn
Ashes will singe
But a phoenix never dies
You're in this world
And you shall live
Until it's time for you to rise
Rise again from the ashes
So it's nothing
And it is how you say
But I have eyes, eyes that see
That something is lurking near
And I have ears, ears that hear
Your life slowly turning around
Can you see the jewel?
The jewel that lights your way
To your future, to your life
And sometime, somewhere
Something will happen



Up Close in the Distance by Patrick Kerr

Sitting in the train station of the cosmic
Waiting for the twelve o'clock-Sunday,
Came down with a fever of sorts
An essential symptom of the syndrome of disarray
Blindness has hold of the bullets
Senselessness, a function lent to misery
I am left without understanding
If we be prophets, pray and tell, where lay our prophecy
scattered and torn, a deluge of scorn
Falling into irreversible outer confrontation
A ceaseless spiral never starting, only leading
To some limitless internal transformation
The benevolence of silent anger's magnet
Is the substance of my armed imagination
And wouldn't I make some differences somewhere
Were my heart not in suspended animation
If the sun has lost direction I could find it
But not before the moon is kissing Venus
Time is not an issue, just a seamless void
It's this ocean of stars that's come between us
Centuries of a microcosm's insight
Lost to the wisdom of a butterfly's wings
These twisters come on so furiously
It's hard to care what tomorrow brings
The drone of the everyday is the struggle for meaning
And there's a search for connection in the desolate sands
Freezing in the shadows and searing in the light
What's left of what collapses is left only to expand





"Emotional Blues"

Painting by Basheera Hassanali

My Rant on Critique by Jennifer Snolis

Who do we think we are? Seriously, who do we think we are? Here I am, a person equal to all other individuals, commenting on another's creative thoughts. Who am I to do that? I mean everyone's creativity is at different levels and everyone has a different definition of creative writing. So who are we to judge their work? I know when I write anything, I write it over and over until I feel it is perfect in my eyes and that it looks and sounds the way I intended it too. I love to hear feedback, too. I feel others' comments on my work is good, but to tell me to add something or to take something out I feel is insulting unless I asked for some feedback for those reasons. How dare anyone try to change what may be in a writer's eyes a masterpiece! Maybe the way certain pieces are written they are meant to stay. After all, nothing is perfect and who are we to say that someone else can do better. Yes, of course, there is always room for improving, but if someone did not ask for help in improving, why would we offer? Isn't that offensive? We really do kick people in their face when we take their work and kindly tear it up! Think about it. The writer sitting in the classroom with fellow classmates and his or her instructor, and their paper is passed around anonymously. At that moment the writer is proud of his or her work and pleased at what they had accomplished, yet at the same time they have a ball of nausea in their stomach because they know the inevitable is soon to happen. "The Critique" by your fellow classmates, who are no better than you are, yet they are all ready to tell you what needs to be done to your paper and you look around the room and think to yourself —"Oh, I forgot ... I'm the only one in this class learning! Everybody else knows everything! They're all teacher's assistants." Your next thought, "You can all kiss my ass." Then the comments begin.

"You should think of another title; this one's misleading."

"Maybe you might want to think about changing some of the character's personality traits."

"You should be more descriptive."

And my all-time favorite is when all the know-it-all's yell in unison, "Cliché, Cliché did you see it? It's on the top of the second page!" Did anybody think that maybe the cliché is there for a reason, like the writer felt those were the words necessary to say what it is the writer is trying to say? All in all, I'm just trying to say we have no right to comment on anyone's work unless writers themselves ask us for our help. And Forest Gump says it best: "And that's all I'm gonna say about that."



Talk To The Lizard by Luz Victoria Ruiz

"He was actually gone! I couldn't believe it!" At first I was numb, but that only lasted about fifteen minutes or so. I curled up on the couch and called up my best friend.

"He left!" I whined pitifully. "He left me for some bimbo student of his. Oh God, I feel so old! What's wrong with me? Men just don't like me!" I found myself saying out loud.

"Jane, calm down!" she said sternly. "Janey, you and Bill are both Leo's. It was inevitable. I tried to warn you."

"But he left me --"

"It's not you Jane. It's him. He's an idiot!"

"Don't call him that!" I caught myself. I realized he was an idiot. After a moment of silence I said, "Tell me a story, a joke, something funny."

"We'll let's see." She said with a slight sight. "How about if I tell you a story as I read your fortune? Let me get my cards." There was a slight shuffle as the phone went down. In the next moment she was back.

"Okay, here we go:

You are the queen; he got the king. And, you 'are' a queen-regal and statuesque. You sit in your castle performing your duties, sometimes unaware that you are living out the dreams, hopes, and fantasies of other women who envy you."

I knew she was making it up as she went along, but I listened because I liked it when she went on a tangent.

"He is the king, but he's an idiot. If you look closely at the king's card, you notice the lizard sitting beside the king's throne. The lizard sits there whispering to the king, always telling him what he should do. The king can't do it without the lizard, but only he and the queen know that.

Even with his beautiful queen and the lizard, which tells him what to do, the king is unhappy. He is tired of duty, tired of responsibility and of not being appreciated enough. He feels that he is the center of the

universe and should be treated as such. Now the king wants to be free, he wants to run away from his responsibilities,

He decides to leave. As he is running out of the throne room, he trips over the lizard. As he slides out of the castle, his Merlin is standing out in the hallway holding his crystal ball watching and waving good-bye to the king as he goes by.

As the king slides outside he sees that he is free and he is very happy. He gets up and dusts himself off. This is when he notices the peasant girl standing there outside of the castle. The king is enthralled with her. She in turn is in awe because he is the king, mighty, regal, and all-powerful. She professes undying love for him. He of course believes her and so he goes with her.

She takes him back to her village in the middle of nowhere. He doesn't mind because everyone loves and worships him because he is the king. They give him all the best and even build him a throne out of straw and he is very happy. Finally, he is appreciated the way he should be.

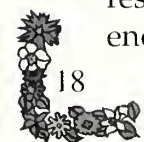
However, soon the peasants start to bring him their everyday problems, which he finds difficult to handle without his lizard by his throne, and suddenly he doesn't feel as loved. Then, when he tries to put the queen's clothes on the peasant girl he realizes they don't fit right. The little village in the middle of nowhere starts to become isolated and far away. And the king soon realizes that he misses his lizard and his beautiful queen.

It isn't long before the king shows up at the castle and begins to pound on the door, to be let back in."

"So you think he'll come back?"

"I think that the queen's clothes aren't going to ever fit some sleazy little peasant girl ... ever! And Janey, you are a queen." She said other things too but I stopped listening. I really didn't feel I needed to hear any more.

I spent about three weeks depressed in a pizza and milk dud induced coma. On the fourth morning I did something I hadn't done



in quite a while- I went jogging. To my surprise I showed up at my office later that day in a very good mood. Two depositions and one meeting later I was in court and actually won with the same smooth confidence that carried me through a successful dinner with two of the firm's partners. I walked into my apartment and realized that I didn't cry when I picked up the mail and saw Bill's name staring up at me.

I kicked off my shoes and stretched out on the couch with a glass of wine as I sorted through my bills.

The phone rang,

"Hello."

"Jane. Hi, it's me sweetheart. I needed to call and apologize. I shouldn't have said what I said. It was wrong and I just can't sleep at night thinking that I may have hurt you. Do you forgive me?"

"Sure." I said as I flipped through the latest Saks Fifth Avenue catalog. They had a really nice selection of pumps. Not too formal, not too sexy, but just right for the office. They looked really comfortable.

"I think we should talk. Our relationship needs a lot of work."

"We don't have a relationship," I said as I flipped the page.

"We can't just throw away two years of good times."

"And bad."

"I was always there. We were always there for each other. You know I love you Janey. You're my honey bear. Come on, what do you say?"

I thought for a moment.

"Talk to the lizard!" I said as I hung up.



A Smoker Till the End by Ron Hines

"Smoking or non-smoking?" the waitress asked
"Smoking please" I coughed back
After dinner, I stopped at the store
I was out of cigarettes, and had to have more
After arriving home, I had to wait before entering
And to catch my breath, or I would start fainting
After catching my breath, I walked inside
The stale cigarette odor, getting me excited
I turn on the light, I need to see where
My oxygen tank is, for a little fresh air
I find the tank, the fresh air feels good
And I take in as much, as I possibly could
I light another cigarette, I need just one puff
I can quit anytime, I don't buy that addiction stuff
Then something explodes before my next thought
I must have forgotten to turn off my oxygen

I am hurt pretty bad, and my house is now rubble
But where are my cigarettes?, now I'm in trouble!

As I lie in pain, where my home once stood
And trying to decide, what to do next
I decide the first thing I *must* do
Is replace my cigarettes!

But I cannot move, I start to wonder if I'm dead
I hope not, I still need to ask one more question
Can I be buried in a smoking section?





“Untitled”

Charcoal Drawing by Tiffanie Johnson



Lament for the Dying by Mark Napoles

After many lonely days of walking across the soaring sandstone formations of the red Arizona desert the ancient medicine man was tired. He was old, far older and more powerful than any natural man had a right to be. He had long ago lost count of the many years he had served as his people's medicine man. Until now he had served his people unselfishly.

With weary steps Stonebear walked the last few yards to his people's hidden medicine lodge, where for untold centuries it had remained undisturbed deep within a shallow canyon at the base of the sacred mesa. No white man knew of its existence. It was one of the few remaining places of power unsullied by them and it was also his dying mother's last hope for survival.

Chanting to the spirits, he entered the lodge to prepare for the gathering he had summoned. Stonebear genuinely regretted the years he had wasted seeking aid from the white man's universities. His breath had been wasted on all of them. They had all dismissed his mother's wasting illness as of no great concern or politely listened to his words while sneaking glances at their watches. His time and breath had resulted in nothing more than offers of money and regrets that they could do no more to help him. Their false sympathy disgusted him.

With the unthinking efficiency that only came from years of repetition the old medicine man filled the lodge with thick steam and scented pipe smoke. He did not have to examine the lodge to know that nothing had been disturbed during his long absence. No living creature, not even the wind itself would dare to enter the sacred lodge, much less disturb the many trophies of his ancestors. Nearly done with his preparations, he was not surprised when the first of the many other medicine men he had summoned entered the lodge in his loincloth to pay

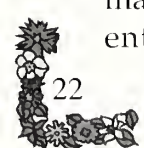
respects to Stonebear and the spirits that guarded his ancient lodge.

Throughout the course of the day dozens more arrived exchanging introductions, stories and songs within the steam and smoke clouded lodge. Not a single person had turned down Stonebear's summons. Never in the history of his people had such a thing been done. Never had such a gathering of power ever occurred. The greatest gathering of medicine men in history was fellowshiping within his lodge. Stonebear had expected no less.

Long into the night the gathering shared bread, water and fellowship. Until today he had been only a legend to many of these men. A name sighed on the wind or whispered by the campfire. Not a single one of them dared to dishonor him or the spirits he represented. Whatever disputes they carried against one another were not brought into his sacred lodge. So it was that when Stonebear rose up to speak, the lodge fell silent and all ears were turned to listen to the tale of his dying mother. Not even the sputtering fire or the howling wind dared to interrupt him.

When the telling of his mother's tale had ended Stonebear offered a prayer to the great spirits and dipped his fingers into three clay jars at his feet. The other medicine men sat in rapt silence. All of them knew that once the ritual paints met their flesh there would be no turning back. One by one they all kneeled in front of Stonebear to be painted so that the spirits would allow them to climb the ancient wind carved path that ran along the sacred mesa's steep sides.

The line of torch bearing men steadily ascended the mesa with Stonebear in the lead. Higher and higher they climbed the narrow path bearing their burdens of leather drums, firewood, and sacks of colored sand. With aching arms and hunched backs they crested the summit unprepared for the mind staggering sight that waited to greet them. It wasn't the cloudless star cluttered sky, or the dizzying panoramic view of the land that stole



the breath from their lungs. No, it was the undulating ankle deep sea of raw shimmering power rising from the ground that left them all awestruck.

For a brief moment Stonebear watched the gathering of transfixed medicine men. He genuinely wished he could allow them to relish what they would never again live to see, but his mother's cries stabbed at his heart. Even the beauty and power of this most sacred of places could not soften her cries of pain and misery. It was for her that he'd summoned this gathering and it was for her that he would do what must be done. With these dire thoughts in mind he waded out towards the center of the mesa's sea of power. Once there he brought the other men back to their senses with a word and a gesture.

Startled back to their senses, the gathering of men quickly went to work preparing for the great ritual dance. Within moments a ceremonial bonfire raged from the center of the mesa's sea of power. Ever higher it climbed sending fiery waves of heat and light outwards from its base like ripples in a pond. The waves surged over mystic rings and eye bending patterns of colored sand crashing against the legs of the encircling men.

Turning to face the fire, Stonebear raised his arms heavenward and held his breath. The time to heal his dying mother was finally at hand. Confident in his power, Stonebear rocked the mesa with the first word of an ancient song of power. Dozens of other voices took up the chant as from somewhere in the north a gust of wind blew by and the drums started their steady beat. One, two, tom, tom, tom.

In unison the dancers stirred to life. Leaping, spinning, shuffling and sliding they danced around the fire. Every time a foot brushed across the floor the sand pattern changed becoming more complex. Faster and faster they danced, raising their voices to the stars, channeling the mesa's power into a spiritual tornado. Abruptly the rhythm of the dance changed and a handful of medicine men

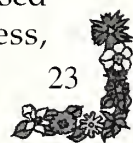
broke from the circle to form a smaller, tighter one. The newly formed inner circle spun in the opposite direction of the larger, creating its own tornado of power within the outer circle's greater tornado. The mesa's power increased a hundred fold.

A cloud of embers burst free from the raging fire, burning flesh and hair unnoticed. The dancers had all surrendered themselves to the ritual's power. Their spirits transcended into the spirit world, abandoning their dancing bodies. Opening his spirit eyes, Stonebear could see the ritual's power ascending into the spirit world. Never had one man ever handled so much power. At last Stonebear would be able to cleanse his mother of the evil cancer.

Lowering his arms, Stonebear considered the tornados of power and the medicine men dancing within it. Here on the spirit plane they all looked as they did in life except for him. He had learned long ago the tricks to survive here. In the spirit world he took the form of a fierce warrior in his prime. Strong, proud face covered in war paints, he clutched his spear and shield, eagerly awaiting any evil spirit that dared challenge him. He felt strong. He felt good. The dance continued.

Seizing the mesa's power as his own, Stonebear gasped as a torrent of life and power surged into him. Confident in his power he entered his mother's pain wracked spirit. Desperately he tried to raise his shield to fend off the onslaught of her pain. Only to have it batted aside as a cat would a mouse. Overwhelmed, he could do nothing but lift his head and cry out to the stars in agony. Through the ritual each of the dancers felt her pain and though it was an insect bite compared to what Stonebear felt, they were unable to hold back from crying out. Yet not one missed a step as the power of the ritual kept them moving.

Stonebear's spirit thrashed in agony. His shield and spear broken when he'd raised them to ward off the pain. Weaponless,



defenseless, he knew his mind would be the next to shatter.

Soothing warmth caressed his pain-racked spirit. Slowly the pain eased until it was gone. Even in her anguish the old woman had recognized her son and helped shield him from her pain. Standing with tears in his eyes, he knew he had failed. The tears he cried now where not of pain but of hopelessness. The cancer had taken her beyond the power of the dance. Her pain filled him with a rage he had no way of venting. What could he alone do? If the power of the dance was not enough then what was? The most he could hope for was that the power of the dance would at the very least ease her pain.

His mother knew him well. He could feel her trying to push him away from her spirit. But she was too weak with pain to fight against him. He would do what had to be done, out of need, out of love. Seizing the power of the dance, the old medicine man joined with her. The union of their spirits was glorious. In that instant she revealed all of her secrets to the favorite of her son's. With his new knowledge he knew how to do what had to be done.

There was no way the dance's power could heal her, but at least it would provide some relief. Even as he watched the cancer multiplied a hundred times, adapting to live in every part of her body scratching and clawing at her flesh.

William Redbear was the first of the dancers to die. His body ravaged as if by some wild animal danced into the fire of its own accord. His spirit joined the council fires of his ancestors.

Everywhere the cancer scratched and clawed it created huge sores on her body, overflowing with its vile waste. Another dancer made his way into the fire, his body covered with pus filled boils.

Crying silent tears, Stonebear searched deep inside her where he could feel the evil cancer sucking out her life's blood to feed its abominable creations. This time it was a

young man of thirty summers who died. Like a stick puppet his dry husk danced into the fire.

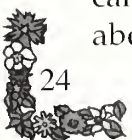
Dancer after dancer embraced the fire without hesitation. Each death felt as if he'd thrown his own child into the fire. Tears of grief ran down his face unashamedly at the loss of such noble life. Now only a few dancers where left, less than two handfuls. These he'd saved because he knew them to be the strongest of heart and spirit. To them he passed on her greatest hurts.

Spinning satellites circled above her like steel vultures, sending out burning waves of information over and across every part of her body. This hurt he passed on to old Ben, who was the eldest next to Stonebear. The power of the dance had kept his fragile body moving and full of energy until the very moment he danced into the fire. His skin flayed as if by a hundred whiplashes.

The next of her hurts were in the south. There he could feel her life ebbing away as she was helpless to stop hundreds upon thousands of trees and animals from dying all in a single day. The likes of which never to be seen again. The dancer he passed this hurt onto merely faded away as if he never was.

Lastly somewhere in the North a child of the ocean, one of the last of its kind is killed and gutted. Its last song a song of pain. This hurt he gave to Mekbaru the medicine man from the far north; he too one of the last of his kind. The ocean child was his totem spirit. Together they both vanished, never to be seen again.

The dance was over. There were no dancers left. The power was gone. To his right a drum lay on the ground, broken where the last dancer had dropped it before embracing the fire. Now that he knew what the cancer was, despair washed over him. Stonebear knew every kind of magic there was to know. Cures for every known illness were his to create or forget, except for the one that was killing his mother. There was no cure for the cancer of man.



Eight Pieces of Haiku by Shun Kiang

1

Breath of morning breeze
Wakes the land; smiling daisies
Sway softly and sing.

2

Castle made of sand
Stands alone staring; red cheeks
Play with glinting sweat.

3

Golden wheat in the
Field matures; scarecrow on guard
Alert day and night.

4

Freezing wind cuts through
Nude trees; a mournful wolf howls
And shiver on ice.

5

Streaming heat quickens
Ants' steps; crickets under grass
Play a symphony.

6

Blue moon hanging high
Glints the snowflakes; silent night
Calms the nature to sleep.

7

Robin sings a triumph
To foretell the joy after
Piercing cold.

8

Morning melts the snow
Covered on trees; a warm breath
Exhaled brings green leaves.



I Remember Billy by Bryan DeMinico

John walked around the corner and was met by a symphony of cell phones. The sounds flowed through the air, penetrating his young and somewhat inexperienced mind. He would never admit his true maturity level to anyone because he was a special person in the school in which he graced with his presence on the days he saw fit for himself. Those days that John would sleep in were due to his tiredness and lack of enthusiasm towards the learning that Graymont High School had to offer.

Everyone looked up to John because of his heroism on the football field and off. He was the first freshman for a long time that had made it all the way to the varsity team. What a party that truly was when he was initiated; John could still almost taste the alcohol on the tip of his tongue as he heard the multiple conversations enveloping the path to his next class.

John's next class was a Psychology class that he would never look forward to. His mind, even as he walked through the doorway, was now wandering off and imagining about a far off place. Out of all the many skipping places that John had experienced, his bed was his number one spot. And as John's eyes roamed over to one of the cheerleaders that would always give him a special game hug before the battle on the green grass would begin, his body was now getting a step ahead of his mind: without a voluntary cue, as if both of them were reading each other's feelings, as if there was a connection being made enabling the two of them to impress the world with their courage to overthrow the normal routines of life, and to rebel against the rules, regulations, restrictions, and jump into the fast car, drive quickly with a hint of nervousness, and walk through the door with secure feelings on their faces knowing that no one is home, and then end up in the bed with the golden reflection of the sun beaming through the two windows as if the holy eyes of Zeus himself were staring upon his pleasurable playthings.

The next morning John got up and decided he would go to school so he could hear all of his friends and followers discussing about how famous one could be. While walking down a hallway to class, he and his friends passed a group of things that they did not consider to be a part of life as they knew

it. So having the self-impression of god-like immortality, he and the friends surrounding him said a group of profane things to the small group. Just as John and his other counterparts began to turn a corner, they felt like finishing the damage they had done to the small group of undesirables by flipping them the most common but heartbreaking symbol one can possibly do. Erecting a single finger among the ones that are sometimes programmed to stay limp allows the experienced person to calmly and swiftly, without a second thought, produce this particular symbol.

Billy, Jacob, and Alberto watched the famous people of the school so rudely say and do the profane things that they had just witnessed.

"What do they have against us?" Billy asked.

"How the fuck should I know," Alberto blurted out with an emphasis on his language. Billy and Jacob both glanced with a hint of shock towards Alberto, who rarely used any profane language at all.

"Watch your mouth Al," said Jacob with an air of authority that he would sometimes feel over his friends.

"Shuut uup, he's right man," Billy said with his slow southern accent that would cause people to shyly and somewhat rudely end any conversation or contact with him.

"What time is it Al?" Jacob asked.

"Time for you to get a watch man," replied Alberto. "I'm just kidding, it's time to go to class."

"Bye yu all," Billy said jokingly as he would always do.

The next day, Billy, Jacob, and Alberto met by the one of the many school entrances. They stood like usual, talking about any exciting adventures that occurred during studying for one of the many tests that were scattered throughout the week. "Hey, look at that," said Alberto.

Jacob and Billy joined Alberto's gaze and noticed the odd happening. "Is that what I think it is?" questioned Jacob with a tone of curiosity.

"Yes sir," stated Billy. "I believe that is what we are seeing right now."

About a couple of yards and a half from the small threesome of friends, with other



groups conversing before the school bell, John and his buddies had lit a type of cigarette-looking object, had taken a puff, and had slowly yet stylishly tossed the object into a nearby garbage can. John and his friends left the garbage can area and walked by Jacob, Billy, and Alberto slowly and confidently. John passed one of the many assistant principals, shook her hand, said a nice "Good morning Ms. Lopez," and continued on his way.

Jacob's eyes were a bit watery as the stench ejecting from John's passing body had been something of foreign matter to his lungs. Jacob coughed and turned to Alberto. "Well?"

"One-hundred percent pure pot brother. No exception to it." Alberto took a small sniff. "And some shitty smelling pot at that."

"We better move before that cloud of dust heads over here," said Billy as he pointed to the remaining puff of smoke that had made its way out of the garbage can, coiling itself around in a demonlike manner,

"Well," said Jacob, "It's time for class, bye." The three dispersed and were lost within the ocean of students.

It was a Tuesday, meaning the three friends of Graymont could have lunch together. Billy had found a table but had lost it due to a storm of classmates that had swept him off. Billy could only flex his hard, large body as a response. He shrugged off the pain of defeat and looked around for Alberto and Jacob, but could not find them anywhere. "What's going on?" questioned Billy to himself.

Billy's curiosity was answered as every living entity within the school turned around and began to run north towards the parking lot. Billy was left in the dead cold stillness of the patio area, feeling lonely. He then decided to see what was the matter.

Billy had to swim through the reef of students to get a peek at what had happened. It seemed someone had been hit. "Jesus," whispered Billy to himself.

Billy caught a glance at a shiny red sports car and a gang of friends hovering above a lone person a few feet in front of the car. "What the hell is going on here?"

In the center of the whirlpool of

friends, was Alberto holding his arm in a sort of painful matter. Billy, feeling heroic, ran up to Alberto. He dived in and grabbed Alberto's good arm and pulled the faithful friend up from the boiling concrete.

"What are you doing redneck?" yelled a familiar voice. The voice came from the owner of the shiny red sports car; it came from John. "You better get out of here redneck, and take your spic friend along with ya!"

No adult could be found. No administrator. No person to explain the troubles of life to. Billy looked down at Alberto. "What happened?"

Alberto looked back at the crowd of dispersing students and then up at the huge frame of Billy. "I was walking and Wonderjock thought it was funny to speed his car up and tap me with it."

"Looks like he tapped you pretty hard dude."

"I'll be fine."

Jacob nearly cringed over when he heard the news.

"Where were you?" questioned Billy.

Jacob slowly lifted his eyes from the sidewalk. "I had to stay an extra fifteen minutes in French class to finish up a test."

Alberto rubbed the bruise on his arm. "Hey, it's okay, it's over, forget about it."

Suddenly, Alberto faced the wall and stared towards it in an attempt to hide his face. "What are you doing that for?" asked Billy. Billy then looked at Jacob, who was pointing towards a group of approaching beings.

John and his buddies walked by. Just as John reached his destination, he turned to his friends and said, "look at that fag spic, can't even look at me." John said it loud, and very proud. His buddies all agreed and joined in on John's laughter.

Jacob, Alberto, and Billy dispersed towards their classes. Jacob thought of red blood; he punched a wall just as he made his way to class. Alberto thought of rifles and action movies. Billy thought of nothing for the moment.

"Why don't we tell an administrator?" queried Jacob.

"Well, let's see, they love John because he is Sportman," responded Alberto.

"What do you think Billy?" asked



Jacob, who stood with tightened fists.

"I think we would be the ones that would get in trouble." Billy stood silent and took a sniff.

"This is a school! Not a frikin' drug house," said Alberto as he saw John smoking the short rolled paper.

John was engaged in conversations with his buddies near the garbage can. John's eyes and his friend's faces suddenly turned towards Jacob, Alberto, and Billy.

The smoke break was quickly over, and John and his friends began to walk towards Jacob, Alberto, and Billy. John took the still lit cigarette butt and tossed it at the three friends as he traveled by with a devious smile pasted on his face. The butt hit Jacob's shirt, causing a permanent stain to occur; it then dripped off his shirt and landed on the sea of concrete.

"It can't be like this everyday," said Jacob. It's like they are fattening us up for the kill. I mean, I can take one or maybe two of them but he has about ten guys following him around."

"Yea man," added Alberto, "he is famous."

"Let's just relax about it," said Billy. "They are not going to hurt us. And if they do, well I don't know then."

"It's time for class," said Jacob.

It was raining the following morning and there was a faint chill in the air. Jacob, Alberto, and Billy were conversing in their usual spot. "No sign of them yet," said Alberto.

"Wow!" said Jacob. "I wasn't even thinking about that."

Billy took off his backpack and cradled it in his arms. He then motioned over towards the patio area across from where they stood. "Now that you mention it, here they come," Billy said while rubbing the premature facial hair growing at the bottom of his chin.

John and his team of friends circled themselves around the patio and lined up with Jacob, Billy, and Alberto in order to make a walk-by inevitable.

Jacob watched and waited, thinking about red blood and guns. Alberto watched and waited, thinking about lunch. Billy watched and waited, thinking about the future.

John and his friends walked by slowly. John then made eye contact with Billy. "Hey redneck, I hear you fucked your mom last night." Laughter surrounded the patio as the echoed laughter from John and his friends could be heard.

Billy stood there silent. So silent that the heartbeats of Jacob and Alberto could be heard. Billy's heart, however, was not thumping with fear. Instead, Billy kept an eye on John and his friends. This caused John to freeze and stare at Billy. John did not know Billy, he did not know of the small apartment he lived in with one bed and bath that he had to share with his mother who was beaten on a daily basis by a father that spent more time at the bar instead of work, he didn't know of the late shifts Billy had to work to put a dinner on his broken wobbly table, he didn't know this, all John knew was that it was fun to use Billy, Alberto, and Jacob as his morning playthings.

The zipper of Billy's book bag could not be heard as the loud rain decided to flood the ocean of sin. Jacob only caught a glimpse of the small shotgun that Billy now held in his hands. Alberto only stood there with his eyes shining upon the weapon. "Don't Billy," whispered Jacob.

Billy responded by tipping his head towards Jacob. The trigger was pulled and John's body flew back into the wet puddles made by the rain; his face came off and his blood danced along the puddles. Three more shots rang out towards John's friends. They too turned red and fell into the ocean turned red by Billy's magical staff of death.

Those who were close to the shooting were too disoriented by the rain to view the entire happening. Only Alberto and Jacob had front row seats. Nothing was said yet every emotion poured throughout the three friends. Billy stood silent for a moment, letting the rain wash his sins away. He then put the gun to his mouth, and pulled the trigger.

The clear untainted rain fell upon the ocean of sin, and was quickly converted into its evil. Islands, and nothing more, covered the red ocean of the patio floor. Islands, and nothing more, graced the wasteland of red.





“Veracity” Black and White Photograph by Eileen Mulvey

Young, Strong Hands by Blu Skye

I'll want to hold your hands,
And you will not be there.
For you are sleeping too deeply and
Far away from me.

It's okay.

Sleep Daddy.

Sleep in deep peace.

For you now,
No more pain,
Yet so much to gain.

The Life you will awake to,
Better than you ever dreamed.
Pure and Good.

For the things you suffered,
Both in body and mind,
YOUTH is your reward.

I will be there when He wakes you,
To hold your hands.

Your Young, Strong Hands.



Little Boy Lost by Jacki Holland

The cold wind blew
 hard and strong
yet on a street corner he stood
 all alone

A tattered coat
 and just one shoe
he wept and trembled
 with nothing to do
huge dark brown eyes
 a vacant stare
Little Boy Lost
 and no one to care

Neglected from birth
 and on his own
any crack, any crevice
 became his home
the wide open sky
 a roof over his head
leaves sticks and brambles
 made his bed

The bright sun beamed
 fierce and hot
the one shoe he had
 he's no longer got
his tattered coat
 hung on his small frame
and no one even
 knew his name

There he stood
 a worthy cause
and still he stood
 little boy lost



"Have You Seen . . ."
Photograph by Ron Hines





"Big Decisions"

Pencil drawing by Lara Lenta

A Medical Type of Love by Joseph H. Etienne

In those days,
Our love smelled like formalin
And our eyes would furtively meet over the anatomy notes
To confirm a sweet promise – our sole tie

In those days
We had forsaken incredulous parents and skeptical friends.
And to change the world,
Just the two of us...

Our heart was filled with an impatient idealism
Tomorrow, we shall conquer dengue fever...
This evening, we will sing a requiem for malaria



“Mom”

Photograph by Kelly Alcott



Inside by Michelle Becker

It had been a great city once. The skyscrapers went on for hundreds of feet higher than those elsewhere in the world, the tops disappearing into the darkness as if to hide a common secret. The gigantic parking lots were like dark chocolate cakes sprinkled with sugar; the old tar was littered with dust and dirt and debris. The only lights were from the cracks in the rock and the security lights on the steel bridges. The city was underground. It was a tomb of sorts, yet it appeared alive still, just keeping to itself and avoiding the outside world. There were no ghosts, homeless beggars, or criminals. But there was an existence...

Apelle had left hours ago. At times it seemed like she left centuries ago, and then the next minute it felt it had only been seconds. She had pleaded with him to come with her and leave the city. She had praised him. She had told him the past was past; it was all over now, and no one would betray him again. She had been afraid for him, yes, but no matter how concerned she appeared he couldn't believe her sympathy. Sympathy no longer existed to him.

He was stretched out flat on the cold tiles, staring up at the burned out light bulbs. He was describing the bulbs in his mind: the round outline of the glass and the blackened edges that looked as if they had been sprinkled with coal dust. How bright the light must have been when these bulbs once worked; the way they would smack artificial glow upon the operating tables, the doctors, and the lucky and not-so-lucky patients. How long did the lights worked before they went out? Staring at those bulbs and interpreting them silently ... it kept his mind from the "other" things.

After minutes or hours or years he rose and made his way back to the biolab, which was connected to the nursery. The nursery was the one place he dreaded and hated most of all. And yet he had to go back because that was where it had all began. That was where the chaos had begun. The little fetus he had once been turned into a man. And yet he never really did grow up. He had lacked the childhood, parents, and the playground swings. He had only gained power, status and ego. Once he had thought that he had friends, but they all left him years ago. Perhaps

those friends could have become his saviors, but they ended up taking the side that was against him.

And Juliet. She might as well have been on the other side. How he wished she had been, for it would have been easier to kill her. How he would have taken that sword and sliced her through, just as she had to so many others. Her - the one who befriended and stabbed so many in the back. Yes, him and her had been on the "bad" side. The side that was highest on the foodchain. The side that was greedy and near the grasp of world domination. But he had never guessed she would befriend and then stab him in the back.

Juliet. The woman who whispered encouragement into his ear when the overlords rejected and insulted him. The woman who stayed by his side and slept next to him since the beginning of the war. And she had been the first...

He walked into the biolab, leaning his forehead against the glass panel that separated the lab from the nursery. As his blue eyes surveyed the scene, his body took on a slight shiver, and then it went rigid again. He need not fear or weep. He was powerful, beautiful, and nothing could stop him. And yet these rooms made him feel so uncertain. These rooms echoed the voices of the overlords. The insults and the fallen hopes they had had for him. He pounded his fist against the glass. No, he was ... powerful. He was. He repeated that to himself silently, over and over again.

Nothing much was left in either room; the city had been wiped out years before. The control panel, the operating tables, and the chairs were pretty much all that had been left. And the incubator was still in the corner. Another shiver shot through his body and he felt as if ice were forming deep down in him, slowly freezing his insides. The incubator he had tried to banish. He had tried to forget all about the incubator. But it had never left him. No, it had always remained ... and that was why he was the way he was. The way the others all thought about him.

Another pound against the glass. No, he was not what they thought he was! They were wrong, all of them! He had been created for a purpose - to be the ultimate warrior. To fall at nothing and grow stronger with each victory. He had been flawless until he had met the hero. The hero from the other side. The hero who had battled



with him over and over and over again ... and won each time. But it was not supposed to be that way! Something was wrong; he wasn't strong enough. But he had the capacity to be!

The hero was his tormentor. The hero he feared and hated. Feared because that hero was just as powerful as he was. Hated because that hero never lost to him. Annihilation. Death. Nightmare.

If the hero hadn't existed, he would have been highly regarded by the overlords. Juliet wouldn't have betrayed him. He would have never failed at anything.

But he had failed. No, he had never failed! His hand wrapped around the cold metal of the pendant that hung from his neck. It was a simple silver star. A star, one of many that shined somewhere up high where he could not see. And while some of those stars shone and lasted for eons, others were dim and they died out in such a short time. Did they live out on their own, free and mature, choosing their own fates? Or were they guided by a higher power such as the overlords?

It seemed everything had a higher power. Was it just an endless cycle, or did it really end at God or some other entity? It seemed the overlords, at least for now, were above everyone. He despised the overlords, perhaps even more than they despised him. They had rejected him and left him to fend on his own. Apelle had warned him but he hadn't listened. Even when he knew the traitors, he still hated the hero most of all. The hero's existence jeopardized his own.

The hero also had everything he never had. Everything he was refused.

He closed his eyes, but the incubator was still before him. The eerie light was above him, bathing him in neon blue, glaring at his naked eyes. He was suspended in the liquid. He was a child again, a fetus born out of science and intellect. He was not born from a woman. He was not a natural creature. No, he was even greater. He had been designed to be above the strongest human, the greatest warrior. He had the ability to destroy gods and to be beautiful. And he had failed...

No ... he wasn't capable of failing. He couldn't tell himself that he had failed, but he knew he hadn't succeeded. He could not understand why. Why? In his heartbroken yet

egotistical mind he could not comprehend the means or results. He couldn't even comprehend that he was feeling heartbroken...

He was certain of one thing. He would not go near the incubator.

He let out a strangled scream and fell to the floor. He had never cried before; never let out a tear. He had never felt a need to cry. And when the tears sprang to his eyes it was so strange and new to him that he never felt the sadness, just shock. He covered his face with his hands and curled up like a fetus on the floor. A shooting sensation grew in his stomach and spread throughout his veins. It was like being pierced by a sword or smacked with a hand, but it felt a thousand times worse. It seemed to hit him harder and deeper. It was more than a physical infliction. He didn't know what this feeling was but it made him howl and pound at the floor. No, he was not a failure. And yet he couldn't succeed. No, he was not going to cry. No, he would not kill himself. There was no reason to. He was not sad; sadness did not exist to him.

"I'm a warrior, a warrior," he told himself, and yet he cried and shook harder each time he said it.

He was a child again, staring out at the lone figure that was staring back at him expressionlessly. His hand seemed to swim as he reached out in front of him to touch the figure, but instead he only felt glass. And then he heard this harsh noise. The figure was laughing, smiling. And then face came closer, and he saw the mouth form the words that became engraved in his mind:

"Keep trying, child. Love is beyond your realm."

"Mike, I haven't really found much yet. Let's head over to those ruins over there."

Mike hoisted the pack onto his shoulder and adjusted his tool belt. "That's where the hospital is, right? Think we'll find something interesting there?"

Roy smirked, his weathered face looked patchy from the dust and dirt. "Hopefully. of fascinating stones about this place."

Mike skidded on some stones. Getting back up and dusting off his jeans, he eyed Roy with a smirk. "Do tell," he urged.

"Well," began Roy, carefully clearing some rotted wood away from the entryway, "there's



actually a lot of sad tales concerning the hospital here. There were a lot of secret labs underneath the actual place, which is where we'll be heading." There was a soft clack as he switched his flashlight on and led the way.

"Secret labs? For what?"

Roy turned to look back on him, his face unusually grave. "They experimented on humans, especially children. If you walked into these labs back when they were being used..."

He stopped and continued on. In a short while they reached the underground labs, and after much clearing away of broken tiles and cement they found themselves in a long corridor. It was here that Roy resumed talking.

"They used to have cages here," he murmured, as if there were ghosts lurking around. "The experiments would either kill the people or severely mutate them. The mutated ones went into the cages. And they were either used in more experiments or they were shot and killed. The lab assistants fed those corpses to the other 'guinea pigs'."

Mike looked so sick that Roy sighed sadly and shook his head. "Yea, unfortunately it's true. It's in the records. Thank God those practices were banished. It was worse what they did to the children." Roy then made a gesture and led the way down the hall.

Mike followed, more out of curiosity than Roy's order to accompany him. "What did they do?" he asked hesitantly, his voice tinged with either fear or concern, he wasn't sure which.

Roy brushed cobwebs aside and walked into one of the rooms, swinging his flashlight around. "They actually created human life here. They didn't breed. They actually made life with instruments and chemicals and such. Most of the children they made were trained to become super warriors ... and those that didn't fare so well were used as guinea pigs. What's even worse is that those children were raised so militantly and so impassively, without a family or home..." Roy let out a slight squeak of what sounded like excitement. "See that there?" The flashlight's beam highlighted what looked to be a rusty, cylinder-shaped object in the corner of the room.

Mike walked up to it. The object resembled something close to a large canister. It had jagged edges of glass on the lid and base, and there were broken pieces of knobs and buttons all

about the base. They were old wires sticking out from the sides and bottom like an old lunatic spider. There was an eerie impression about it; Mike's hand shook as he reached out to touch it. "What is it?"

Roy knelt next to him, fingering the wires like they were strands of silk. He touched them so delicately as if they were baby butterflies. "This was one of the incubators they kept the babies in."

Mike's hand shot back as if the incubator had come to life and tried to bite him. Roy smirked and went over to the other side of the room. "Hey, these laptops are in amazing shape!" he exclaimed, sitting down and rummaging through a pile of debris. He let out another squeak of excitement as he hoisted up the two contraptions.

Mike still eyed the incubator. "To make a child with science and then raise it without loving parents or a warm home. To make a child and train it to be an ultimate fighter, or use it as a test subject if it was weak ... it's so..."

Roy looked over his shoulder, regarding Mike gravely. "It seems so inconceivable, and yet it happened. History is full of ugly people and events. Be glad we learn from such things, Mike." He dusted off one of the laptops and poked at the keyboard. "I got an old wives' tale for ya. Back when all these experiments were being done and such, there was this one guy they created with those incubators and such. Supposedly he was designed to be the supreme fighter; he received all this training and schooling. He ended up becoming like this very well-known general and such."

Mike scowled at a roach crawling by. He kicked at it with his boot and fixed his attention on Roy. "So what happened to him?"

Roy shrugged. "Well, there was this guy he kept on fighting and fighting, and he never was able to defeat him. It drove him crazy. I heard different stories about what happened. Some say he went crazy. Some say he shot himself in the head. And yet others said he went on this killing spree." He turned back to the keyboard. "Like I said, an old wives' tale. I don't think it's true. Just something to freak people out." He pulled out a screwdriver. "There's no actual documentation about the guy, so I think it's just some demented fairy tale."

Mike glanced at the incubator. "But all those children..."

"Yeah, it's pretty sad." Roy was immersed in his tearing apart of the keyboard.

Mike carefully shifted through an old pile of what looked to be rotting fabrics, and shaking one loose he heard a small plink. "Look at this," he called over to Roy, picking up the object.

Roy eyed it with little interest. "It looks like a star pendant, nothing more. There's tons of jewelry that has already been discovered from the last century. You might as well keep it as a token or throw it out. I'm going to check out the control room. Coming?"

"Yea, in a sec." Mike stood there for a few minutes more, turning the pendant over and over in his hand. He wondered whom it had belonged to. Who had once worn this about his/her neck back a hundred years or so ago? A lab assistant maybe? A doctor? Perhaps one of the poor guinea pigs ... or one of the ill-fated children created by science and not nature.

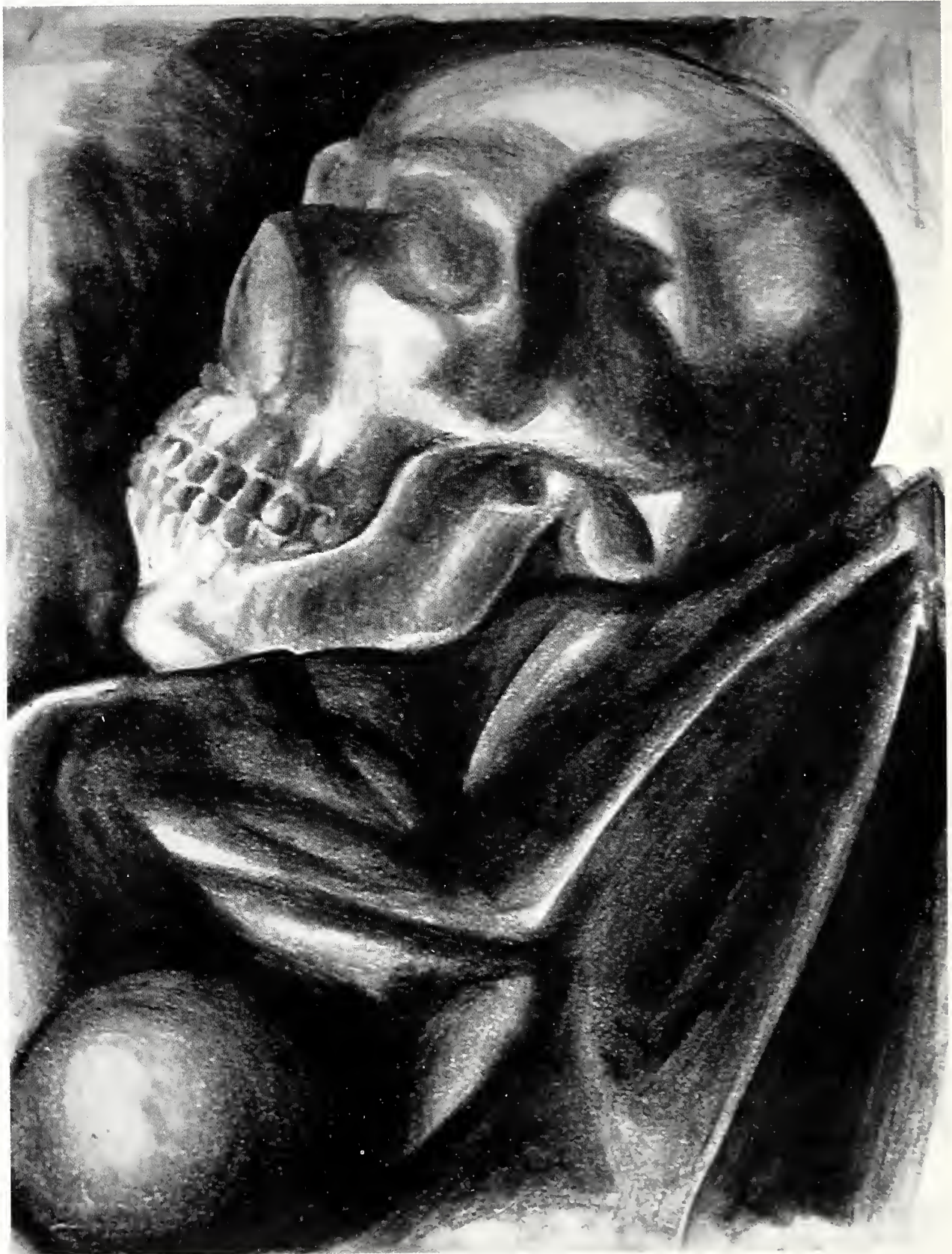
Inconceivable. To make a child and never to have it experience the love of a parent or the security of a home. Never to play with fellow children in a sunny playground or fight with a sibling over a cookie. How did someone survive like that without question or pain? Were these children raised so militantly that they never thought about what a normal life was like? Were they surrounded by so much harshness and cold ambition that they never wondered about the family or home they were born with the right to have? He couldn't comprehend it. But then again, perhaps that was why the children had probably never known. Because they never comprehended what being a real human, with a free heart and mind, was like.

To play God like that. To corrupt a small child. A whole life...

He took his handkerchief and wrapped the pendant up in it. Placing the bundle in the broken incubator, he stepped back and bit his lip. Yes, it was all he could think of doing. It was the little things that kill. And yet the littlest things could mean so much...

He dusted off his pants and followed Roy to the control room.





"Skull #1" Charcoal Drawing by Robert Harrison

Fantasias: The Dream Killer

by John Jeffords

For the first time as long as she could remember Shirley Morgan felt utterly alone. In the bed that she once shared with her husband resided a small emptiness that seemed to spread throughout the house. The stars appeared to her as memories, shining brightly until they died and fell. Her life had not always been this way; she once had something to wake up to everyday. A loving husband, a perfect child, everything you see on TV and wish you had - that was Shirley Morgan's life.

In the silence of the room, she could almost hear Joey talking to her, in that soothing, sensitive voice he had won her over with. *It will be alright honey.* Closing her eyes at the odd perception of the voice, she shudders. In the next room is her sixteen year old son, Jeremy Pierce. Shirley had returned back to her maiden name, Morgan, after Joey Pierce's sudden passing. Jeremy resembles his father in the small ways that only she can recognize. But sure, like every offspring, he had some of the more noticeable characteristics. Such as the same dark black hair, the hazel eyes (that Joey had stared through her with), and the ever present grin. Jeremy did have that familiar smile on most of the time, but since his father had died, it seemed to disappear more and more. Feeling tired of her own self pity which she was drowning herself in, Shirley stood up from the bed she and her husband once shared. Even though he had been gone for eight months, the mattress still wanted to hold the indentation of his body, as if it refused to let him go, just like herself. With that thought in mind, she collapsed onto her husband's side of the bed, beginning to cry like she had so many times before over the passing months since the awful tragedy. The next morning when she woke up, Shirley Morgan wondered why she was on the wrong side of the bed.

Mornings, for Jeremy Pierce, were

miserable. In fact, everything was miserable. The sky, the sun, the closet, the bathroom, every last bit of it, was taunting him in a high-pitched squeak of misery. Thing was, Jeremy didn't give a shit, nope, not anymore. His old man died from cancer. Smoked to many cigarettes and wound up in the dirt six feet under; there's a real T.R.U.T.H. commercial for you. The thought suddenly jarred Jeremy into envisioning what it might look like, a funeral with a bunch of idiotic children standing around with big signs saying things such as, "Smoking is the killer." Or, "Smoke now, die later."

The whole premise of these things was overrated and pointless. If people were going to smoke, than they were going to smoke; Jeremy was one of them. That was another thing. As far as smoking went it was miserable, and he didn't give a shit.

Downstairs his mother was making one of her miserable breakfasts, some crap like cornflakes or frozen waffles; the taste of such things made Jeremy cringe. He had instantly put them into a category of things he would never eat again, right after first tasting them. Looking at her made him sick to his stomach as well; she was pathetic. Acting like just because her husband was dead life was over. They got enough money to last from his life insurance, and it seemed that was the only thing she ever cared about. Even now he could remember her yelling at his father every night, "We need money for this, we need money for that!" And his dad had always given in. It wouldn't shock Jeremy if she continued to hound the man even in death.

But instead of doing that, Shirley Pierce, calling herself Morgan again (she wasn't even using his name anymore!) simply blamed herself for the natural tragedies of life. Jeremy had seen her looking at a dead sparrow one time that had fallen out of a nest, after his dad being dead for two months, and his mother was just standing over the fallen bird. The strangest thing about it was she was crying. As if she blamed herself for the death of the sparrow. How much more pathetic could you get?



And here she stood right now, putting frozen waffles on a plate for him, his mother. She finally turned and jumped a bit when she saw him, obviously startled by her son's sudden presence in the room.

"Made some orange juice if you want any."

But Jeremy was ignoring her; he was still thinking about what she might have started doing if she hadn't seen him in the room just then. Oh, Jeremy had seen it all before. She would start talking to . . . nobody! His mother acted like his father were still alive; a couple of times he had even seen her subconsciously fix a plate of food for him. Once or twice she had even called out his name as if he were upstairs, but the most often of she was calling Jeremy himself by his father's name, Joey. Noticing his mind was drifting in other places, Shirley decided to try him once again,

"Hello, Earth to Jeremy Morg... " she stopped suddenly, knowing that she had just made a big mistake and was going to pay for it.

Jeremy's eyes widened with anger; she was just about to use her last name on him! Morgan? Morgan? His name was Pierce! Jeremy Pierce! Not Morgan!

"What did you just call me?!"

His tone started mellow but his face and the off balance tone made Shirley turn away in fear. Before she could apologize, Jeremy was out the door; she knew his bus didn't show up for twenty more minutes, but she wasn't about to follow him outside.

Bruce Killen was walking slowly down his steps; the bus would be coming any minute now to pick him up, and Bruce had no intention of being late for the hundredth time this year. Quickening his pace, he glanced to see if Jeremy was already waiting outside-he was. With a wave, Bruce approached his next door neighbor best friend with an out-of-place smile. For some reason, ever since Jeremy's dad died, he felt the need to smile more often around Jeremy. Jeremy was certainly no

longer smiling anymore, so Bruce figured that he might as well smile for the both of them.

"Hi." Jeremy's usual one word, how ya doin, type greeting. The same monotonous garbage which the television spews out at its hypnotized viewers in a similar tone.

"Hey Jeremy, what's going on?"

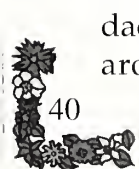
His friend had a total, FUCK OFF expression plastered all over his face, but Bruce Killen wasn't about to let that ward him off. Jeremy had acted this way so often over the past eight months that Bruce had become used to it as an everyday attitude his friend might support for the rest of his life. Waiting another second, Bruce was about to question him further, when the bus pulled up to the house. After they had both gotten on, neither of them said anything until they arrived at the school. Once there they quickly departed one another's company, but not before making plans to hang out at Jeremy's house after school.

Ever since her son had left this morning, Shirley was feeling very low. Had she really been about to use her own last name on her son? For a second she attempted to deny what she already embedded in her mind as a fact. She had returned to using her maiden name, but that did not mean that all of a sudden Jeremy should start doing the same! How could she have been so stupid?! She already knew her son's resentment of her for having changed her name, but then again it was her choice, and if Jeremy didn't like it then he would just have to deal with it.

That was when the doorbell rang. Shirley, already knowing who it was, rushed to answer it a minute later. Looking out just to make sure she was right, Shirley opened the door.

"Good morning Shirley!" Melinda Hartz said from the doorway. "How are you today?"

Shirley was about to try and play it off to her friend that everything was fine but opted at the last minute to tell her about what she had said to Jeremy earlier. Once she was



finished, Melinda laid down the usual condolences and reassurances before the two of them headed out to go shopping.

Once the house was quiet, a figure rose from the dust in the attic of the Pierce residence. It crouched itself down by a dusty suitcase, looking over the object with intrigue. The smell of gas; a dank stench that flowed through the entire world it inhabited, and the figure loved it. Sniffing wildly in the air, it began to crawl into the light. Ducking away at first, it then continued sitting the area around it. Sensing that everyone had gone, the dark creature swept slowly down the steps which led to the attic and through the doorway. Coming to this place had been the best plan, ever since the stench of death had descended here, the creature fed.

Feeling the emotions of pain; sucking them down with pleasure.

It had no pity for the souls it devoured slowly, insisting that people who lived with such vivid horror should be subjected to

It forever. If this went on it could live here till the last bit of life was taken from its hosts.

Passing through the hallway the darkness paused once to look at a framed picture of three of the creatures It fed on. One of them, it realized, must have been the one who died. The one they dreamed of.

It could see their dreams and feed off the pain in them.

Live with their death; thrive from their agony.

Nearing the room where the younger one stayed the creature slid inside with ease. Knowing that tonight when the boy slept it would consume more of his pain than before, slowly destroying his dreams.

In the emptiness of the house the dream killer laughed viciously to itself.

Once the shopping had been completed, the two women began the drive back home. Each of them was in a different car thinking about what would be made for supper in the evening hours. A bright sun had signaled afternoon as arriving and it beat down on whoever happened to be wandering the desolate street.

Halfway through the ride Shirley realized that she had forgotten to get the

frozen waffles that her son loves so much. She quickly picked up her cellular phone and dialed Melinda, telling her to go inside and wait for her, that she would only be a few minutes. Of course Melinda agreed, hurrying along down Maplewood Avenue in the direction of her friend's home. She had no idea the someone (something) else was there as well...

Shirley pulled back into the supermarket, heading directly to the frozen food section. Grabbing the frozen waffles she suddenly remembered Jeremy saying once that he, quote, "Hated those fucking things." She had stopped buying them and had told him not to use that kind of language. Only

after she held the box in her hand did she realize that it was her husband who had loved these things so much. Feeling

stupid, ashamed, and even a little unhappy, Shirley left the market, completely unknowing of the traffic accident that would delay her trip by a good thirty minutes.

"Thirty minutes," Jeremy whispered quietly, "then we'll be free of this hell-hole." Bruce was sitting next to him, feeling equally dazed by the teacher's boring lecture on photosynthesis. The two of them were dwindling down the moments in their head. Waiting for the bell to ring; retribution, freedom, escape, all of this laid in the ringing of the bell.

"Gentlemen," their teacher Mr. Arnold finally noticing their quiet conversation, "are the two of you reading along in your books?" His glare hardened on the two boys sitting next to each other in the back of his classroom. "Or would you prefer to see Principal Stallings?"

Both Bruce Killen and Jeremy Pierce instantly lowered their heads back to the textbooks in front of them. This time in his

In the emptiness of the house the dream killer laughed viciously to itself.



head, Jeremy kept thinking, twenty five more minutes.

Melinda Hartz stepped into her friend's home quietly, even though nobody was home it was best to still be polite. Being alone in the house for the first time was almost thrilling for her, as she finally had a chance to look around. She wandered from room to room, gazing at the knickknacks, which every family seems to collect. Melinda also noticed that the majority of these objects had something to do with the late Joey Pierce. She went into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of seltzer water, than sat down at the table to wait for Shirley's momentary arrival. Slowly sipping at the cup in front of her, making sure to let the drink last, she was startled by the noise from above her.

Melinda sat up in the chair, her eyes looking up at the ceiling, when she once again heard a peculiar thumping sound. Everything told her to get away, that someone must be breaking in, go to her phone and call the police! But then, she remembered that the kitchen was just below Jeremy's room.

Smiling fondly to herself feeling foolish for having assumed an intruder was lurking around, Melinda began walking towards the steps. Remembering that she had not actually talked to Jeremy in quite sometime, she recalled the two of them always being able to discuss things with each other. Like when his father had died, Jeremy had not felt comfortable relaying the feelings to his mother, but was completely fine with telling her about it. Things like this had made Melinda regret never getting married and having children, but then again, if she *was* married and *her* husband died, Melinda wasn't sure of what she would do.

Finally in front of Jeremy's door, she went to knock, before seeing that the door was open.

"J-Jeremy?" she asked unsteadily, the thought of a prowler once again entering her mind.

The dream killer had smelled the scent of the woman who had come into the home, it was an unknown presence that first made it uneasy until it recognized the aroma which circled the female's companion, it had often thought of feeding on some emotion that emitted from the woman.

Although the dream killer could never be sure of exactly what type of feeling came from her. Anger? Hate? Anxiety? All of these were plentiful in the world, which is why it had come here in the first place. To feed on the death.

Suddenly aware that the woman could hear its movements, the dream killer lay still. That was when it could feel the emotion which this woman constantly gave off, fear.

The smell of raw fear biting the inside of the dream killer's nostrils, it heard the woman begin to make her way towards it.

Crouched in the shadows of the room, the dream killer heard the woman speak. She paused a moment, their made light flood the room.

Relief struck the creature when it realized that it was still hidden from the light, concealed by the darkness it had inhabited through its entire existence.

That was when the idea first came inside its head. Licking its lips, the creature began to imagine what the pain would taste like. How many different types of feelings it could devour from the single act of killing this pointless being that was becoming more scared by the minute. Making up its mind, the dream killer lay still, waiting for the woman to get closer...

Melinda was scared, somehow she felt that she was not alone in the room, and even after she had turned on the light she still had the odd feeling. Beginning to sweat, she decided to look around the room, just to be certain that no danger was here. She opened the closet, and found nothing. Behind the bookshelf and then behind the dresser, nothing. Thinking that whatever she heard was just the house settling down in the afternoon heat, Melinda began to exit the room; that was when the noise broke the

silence.

It was closer, more distinct, and with it a smell came into the room. Melinda froze, already knowing the one place she had not checked, under the bed.

She bent down, beginning to shiver, telling herself that it was only her imagination. Just like when she was a little girl, there would be nothing there. Her eyes now able to see underneath, she looked, and she saw ... nothing. Feeling foolish Melinda had to let out an uneasy chuckle, and then she began getting to her feet.

The dream killer, hiding above the doorway, looked down at the woman. Content with the fear it had just consumed, it was now ready for the pain. Passing its tongue over its teeth, the dream killer attacked.

Melinda Hartz looked up just in time to see something jump from above the door onto her. She went to scream, but her mouth was suddenly filled with a hairy blackness that smelled absolutely vile. Managing to get away, she coughed in agony, then felt the pain in the back of her neck; as if a dog had bitten her. Melinda turned to face whatever was with her, and stared in shock at the creature in front of her. It's eyes were entirely black, fur that seemed more like unkempt human hair traveled around it's body, the teeth it bore were sharp and now soaked with her blood, and this thing was about as big now she saw, as a large dog. Melinda began to scream once more, but was silenced when the creature ripped off the left side of her face. She fell to the ground, wondering where Shirley was, and why she wasn't helping her; Melinda Hartz died a second later.

Finally breaking free of the never ending traffic jam, Shirley Morgan began to drive back home- wondering if Melinda Hartz would still be waiting for her.

Just as Shirley was nearing her home, Bruce Killen and Jeremy Pierce were let off in

front of their homes. They began walking into Jeremy's house, both promising not to tell their parents they had stayed a few minutes late after class to listen to Mr. Arnold talk about the necessity of learning.

Jeremy was surprised to find that the door was unlocked, that only usually happened when either him or his mom knew that one of them would be home any minute. He suddenly got scared that his teacher had already called his mother, and he would have to spend the evening listening to her bitching.

Opening the door he entered cautiously, allowing Bruce to go in first, just in case. Once inside the two teenagers searched the house, but found no sign of anyone being home. Relaxing a bit, feeling better than he had in the morning, Jeremy sat down in the living room with Bruce and turned on the television; totally unaware of the dead body upstairs, or of the dark figure which retreated back into the attic.

Shirley Morgan finally arrived home, seeing that Melinda's car was still out front, she smiled. But then again, the food that Melinda had in her trunk was apt to go bad if it wasn't stored in a refrigerator soon. Keeping that in mind Shirley quickly parked her car and went inside.

Her son was sitting on the couch with her next door neighbor, the two of them were watching some movie they had seen a hundred times before (but for some reason never got tired of) She looked in the kitchen and all around downstairs before asking her son where Melinda was. Jeremy said that she hadn't been here when they came in, and Bruce agreed, but then why was her car outside? Becoming frightened, Shirley hurried up the stairs, until she saw two legs sticking out of Jeremy's room.

She ran to them quickly, hoping her friend would be okay, and was greeted by the expression of death in Melinda Hartz's face. Half of her face was missing, leaving only muscle tissue that was so thin her skull could



be seen beneath it, her entire body was ripped apart- as if someone had cut her all over with a knife.

The shock in Shirley's head finally acknowledging reality, she screamed long and horribly.

The sound of screaming woke the dream killer from sleep, and it had not even been resting for very long- After feeding on fear, pain, and then death, which was an unexpected advantage, the dream killer had been tired. Now there was a new feeling along with death, and that was, terror.

Basking in the glory of knowing that it had caused this, the dream killer let out a sinister grin.

After the body had gone, Jeremy, Bruce, and Shirley had given their statements to the police. All three supported the same idea, but an investigation would probably not be necessary. The cops assumed that Melinda Hartz ran into somebody robbing the house, even though there was no sign of forced entry, everyone knew there were places where hidden keys stayed outside the homes.

Both Shirley and Jeremy had said they kept a hidden key, but they did not find one; none of them ever considered that the key not attached to Melinda Hartz's key chain was the hidden key of the Pierce's home.

The police agreed to let Shirley and her son spend the night in their home for the one night, as long as they did not go upstairs.

Jeremy, not having to act normal anymore since Bruce Killen was gone, once again let his misery show. This whole thing was miserable, first his dad dies and then a woman who seemed like the aunt he never had. His mother had tried to comfort him, before finally giving up and going to sleep.

Feeling like life couldn't get any worse, Jeremy began to pace around the house. He lit a cigarette and sat on the back porch to smoke it, when he was just about finished he heard a sound which resembled someone moving upstairs. The police had searched the

attic, hadn't they?

The dream killer stirred, waking from the sleep it had been in since the scream from the woman. And suddenly, a new feeling was inside the creature. It had tasted the boy's anger before, and the woman's grief, in their dreams and in their everyday emotions. But now, something different was coming into its mind.

After killing the woman and feeding on her death, the dream killer had felt exhilarated and fully; and how it craved such feelings again.

Heading towards the doorway forgetting its previous plans of destroying the boy's dreams, the creature decided that tonight, it would feed on death, and nothing else.

Jeremy once again heard the sounds, but this time it was as if someone was coming down stairs. Then it came to him, the attic stairs! Someone had been up there! Sitting up quickly Jeremy was about to wake his mother, than decided that if he caught the creep who killed Melinda then maybe he could make his mom proud. Knowing that what he was about to do was foolish- Jeremy picked up his baseball bat and began quietly moving through the house.

That was when he saw it, a figure moving through the darkness. It appeared to be someone crawling on the floor, Jeremy let his eyes follow.

The creature trotted across the upper floor, already, sensing the dreams of the sleeping woman. It started to descend the stairs, then paused, it felt itself being watched. Looking around it saw no one, but then, it could feel the anxiety in the air. It must be the boy, hunting the dream killer like he had the ability to fight. Feeling pleasure, the creature continued going down, sure that the boy had no way of hurting him. After all, the woman he had killed earlier was nothing, what could a younger being do?

Jeremy watched as the figure crawling in the blackness headed towards... his mother!



He was about to jump from the darkness but then paused, whoever it was would get a surprise when he came at the shithead with a bat, but if he revealed himself now then the person would be able to flee; and Jeremy Pierce had no intention of letting the son of a bitch get away.

But that was when the figure went through the moonlight, and Jeremy could have sworn that it wasn't a person at all, rather some kind of animal. He steadied himself as the creature was just above his mother, then Jeremy frantically turned on the lights.

He saw that he was right, it was a creature. And it was big, almost bigger than a dog, but this was no dog. The hideous thing bared its teeth toward Jeremy and was about to attack his mother when Jeremy ran towards it.

The dream killer watched as the boy came rushing towards it; this was unexpected. It assumed that he would run, especially after the creature had showed its teeth, but the boy was obviously persistent.

About to attack, the creature suddenly saw the boy was holding something. It had no time to acknowledge or identify the object before the dream killer's skull was crushed by Jeremy Pierce's baseball bat.

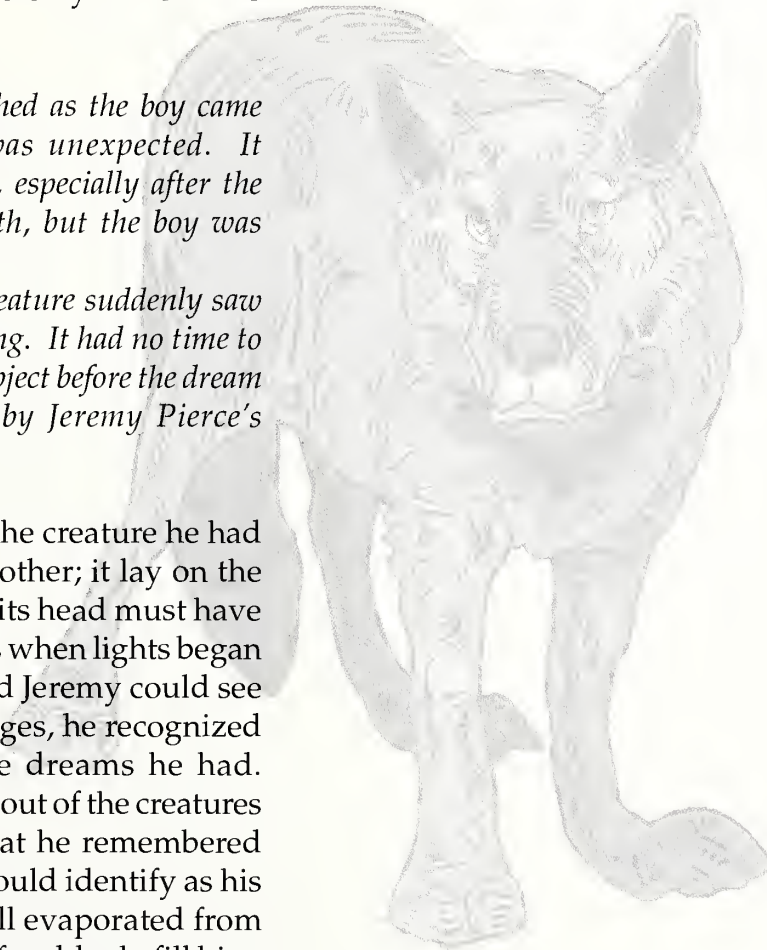
Jeremy stood above the creature he had knocked away from his mother; it lay on the ground, dead; the blow to its head must have killed it instantly. That was when lights began to seep out of the body, and Jeremy could see into them. They were images, he recognized some of them as horrible dreams he had. Other pictures which came out of the creature's body showed thoughts that he remembered having, some of them he could identify as his mother's. Once they had all evaporated from his vision, Jeremy felt relief suddenly fill him; as if he had just woke up from a horrible nightmare. Feeling better than he had since before his father's death, Jeremy relaxed in the silence of the room. And suddenly the

creature's body changed into black dust, and then swept away with an unseen breeze that came from the open window; leaving no trace that the creature existed at all.

His mother opened her eyes then, and stared at him. Jeremy looked at her, smiled, then sighed deeply.

"Mom," he said with a smile, "I think we're going to be okay."

Shirley Morgan had no idea what her son was talking about, but it was nice to see him finally smile again.



Dracula's Hand by Danielle L. Denison

I've been waiting for you, I made a point to be here,
I've come just as I am, I didn't look in a mirror.
Because I knew you could see me, as anything you wish,
And now I wait for you to come, to hear your evil hiss.
I stand before you now, with my flesh of peachy gold,
And I know what will happen next, my deed has already been sold.
And now you are standing there, with your dark and evil ways,
And everything I thought I knew has vanished in the haze.
I'm annoyed at you, but I know what must be done,
But soon I will understand, it gets better after the first one.
One more crimson kiss I plead,
For you my heart and flesh will bleed,
I'm already over, you've taken me now,
I'm addicted to the taste, somehow.
You've transformed me in an evil way,
With your ivory teeth and fatal sway,
Just one lick has ruined me,
And yours I will be forever be,
For this is how I planned it all,
How you would rise and I would fall,
You've turned my days into blind nights,
And taken me on feeding flights,
But still I stand before you now,
Programmed for you, some way, somehow,
And still I crave that crimson kiss,
Your body's shape, that hellish bliss,
To force myself to remember why,
That this is what it feels like, to die,
This is how I wanted it to be,
You foolish mortals will never see,
The pleasure of this morbid land,
And the ecstasy, of Dracula's hand.





"Garlic Cloves" Photograph by Vivienne Leibowich



Hidden Feelings by Jennifer Lee Herrera

You travel inside me, in the deepest way.
I breathe you, but still feeling lonely and stray.
You don't know, what this is I feel...
My emotions so deep, a disease that won't heal.

I try to disguise what you already know,
Hiding from you, hoping this feeling won't show
If only you could see beyond my words, and read my eyes...
You would hear a silent scream and distant cries.

Over and over again, I speak to you,
Longing for your lips to reach mine, but you have no clue.
Begging for a gesture, begging for a simple smile...
Something to forget my solitude for a while.

If only I could be your air, so I could be in you...
You would breathe me in and in your heart know I am true.
And all this, I think by your side.
Some how all this, I manage to hide.

By your side I forgot, by your side I remember.
I forget the dark of night and the coldness of December.
I remember I live for the instinct of love,
Heaven sent, a gift from the angels above.

All this I hide, all that for now you don't know.
Feelings that I can't deny, emotions I won't let show.
One day reading this, you'll realize my heart is in you.
And then with a smile, you'll know who to give your heart to.

Escape from Mainstream by Lawrence S. Behar

Up in the sky watch the blue slip away
And enter the clouds that turn everything gray
Rise with the air and fall with the rain
And flow down the mainstream that keeps life mundane

Because that's how it is with your head in the clouds
When you drift with the flows, blindly follow the crowds
Life is so dull when you follow the stream
It quenches uniqueness and smothers your dreams

One ray of light shining through the dark clouds
Who will not face defeat makes the hidden sun proud
The light won't comply; it will clash with the gray
To let the people downstairs know that it is still day

And that's how it is when you shine through the clouds
So show you're unique and play your style loud
Life is exciting when you fight the stream
It strengthens uniqueness and inspires dreams

In a world full of ghetto, baser, rocker and prep
Don't worry about criticism or rep
Be who you are and dare to defy
The conventions that made creativity die



"Sunset in the Keys" Watercolor painting by Yvette Estimé





"Leaf Intersection"

Ink Drawing by Fakhrunnaz Azam

All About Me, I am Exceptional by Terron Ragin

I am a student, just like you
I desire to be loved and respected too
There are so many things, that I wish I could do
To enable myself to be just like you
I come to school each day you see
To better myself according to my ability
My teachers are special, they are really the key
They are dedicated to excellence, when teaching me
So smile, when you see me, or just say hi
I don't mind that if at first, you are a bit shy
There's really not no difference between us two, because
I am exceptional, and so are you

LISTEN UP! by DeLisa Thomas

Girls, please listen-
Don't let any fox
have your cheese
Concentrate, sing , write, or read
Don't settle for passion, lust, or mess
Because neither one can pass a true test
Live and learn and learn and live
So when that special one comes
You'll have more to give
Life is of love and love is of life
Why settle for Mr. Wrong when
You can have Mr. Alright?
Whatever you do— listen
Just listen up, please
Don't let any fox
Have your cheese!



"The Gazer" Charcoal Drawing by Janet Weiss



“Lion Man” Acrylic on Canvas by Janel Harrison

They Said by Shukura Curtis

They said I'd never make it and never amount to anything,

So then why do I have a diploma, degree and a platinum wedding ring.

They said I'd fall and stumble through clay and over rocks.

I used to have holes in my shoes but now I'm wearing Polo socks.

They said I'd live in a machine on top of a hill, They said I'd live in a world with a shallow thrill.

Yes, my house is a machine on top of a hill but tell me why you're trying to bring me down when you're on the depression pill.

They said my skin was too black to go to Princeton University, but I walked across the stage with my degree from Harvard University,

This all started out when they said I couldn't make it, Yes there's pain, hurt, and trials but sometimes you have to take it.



“Reflective Couple” Photograph by Vivienne Leibowich

HARMONIC CACOPHONY by C. Silverstone

Buttery voiced tenor caressing notes of familiar Italian opera
under which speaks a tongue sweet as the freshly baked
cinnamon rolls she sells in the local coffeehouse hangout.

Male staccato voice picks up the melody, When will the computers be up?

Voices rest. Accompaniment of raindrops striking the pavement
crescendos to the bass of an Icehouse delivery truck
cars kicking up puddles with hissing refrain.

I sit in the center of my own symphony

I saw an old man plucking coins

from the bottom of a tiled fountain, his brass outrage continues
a witness called the authorities on his cell phone.

Is this a police matter I asked myself

maybe the guy just wanted a cup of coffee





"Flower" Acrylic on Canvas by Valentina Owens



Nothing is the same when you wake up on the floor. When unfamiliar fights and sounds first flooded my senses and I could feel the cold stone on my back, I knew that something was wrong. It took a second or two to realize that things were really wrong. It took a couple more seconds to realize that I was in jail, up the river, in the big house.

There were eighteen people in my holding cell, twelve beds, and not much space to move around. There were no windows and one imposing door, closed. The only light came from yellow fluorescent lights that were for some reason covered with strips of old newspaper. I stared at the newspaper and tried not to think.

Everyone started coming to at about the same time, although what time was a mystery to me. They had confiscated my watch. I soon had more important things to worry about than my watch. I was the first topic of conversation for the day.

"I know that ain't the motherfucker they had to carry out last night."

"They brought that Kansas cornbread motherfucker back in!"

"Aw shit!"

"Nah, that ain't him."

"I thought that motherfucker was dead."

"Motherfucker shoulda given up his socks."

"White boy could get fucked up. For real."

"Nah, that ain't him. This one's bigger."

"Motherfucker should have given up his motherfuckin' socks."

I wasn't wearing any socks. If I was I would have given them up. I wasn't wearing anything but a department of corrections burlap sack, vaguely shaped like a jumper, and my sneakers. I hadn't even been allowed to keep my underwear.

Before I could explain to my new

cellmates what I was doing there, the door opened. Thank God, I thought, an authority figure, someone to diffuse the air of menace that was palpable in the cell. Someone who may be able to restore some sanity to the situation.

"Breakfast," said the guard. "Let's go."

"Wait a minute," I said as he turned to go, thinking that I could just explain the situation: that I was in for a misdemeanor, a slight infraction of the law, and certainly didn't belong in here with real criminals.

The guard paused and turned. The cell quieted, waited.

"I think there's been . . ." I started, but got no farther.

"I said breakfast," bristled all one hundred and fifty pounds or so of the guard. "That means you move out quietly." He moved closer with each word, almost snarling. "When I say 'quietly', that means that you don't say another FUCKING WORD!" He finished, staring me down from about six inches away, then abruptly turned and stormed out.

Breakfast consisted of the driest white bread I had ever seen. It was complimented by a spoonful of gritty peanut butter, some runny eggs, and a cup of purple liquid. It was the high point of the day.

Back in our cell I was left alone. Interest in me seemed to wane when an old man was put in our cell. Rumor had it that he was in for molesting children. Everyone had in their possession a piece of paper listing what they had been charged with. The old man steadfastly refused to show anyone his paper, or really to say anything at all. Finally one of our angrier looking cellmates forced it out of his hands and read it out loud: "Offensive touching and corruption of a motherfucking minor!"

The cell exploded. While death threats were being handed out and people were explaining exactly what was going to happen when the lights went out that night, I found a comer and tried to look as inconspicuous as



possible. I hadn't even given a thought as to why I was in this place. That kind of comfortable numbness wasn't going to last long. There wasn't much else to do in that little cell but sit and think . . . and think . . . and think.

It had all started so innocently. I was back in town and happy to see my old friends. We were celebrating as old friends tend to do with drinks and a night on the town. We went to a bar where we knew the waitress. We had some drinks. I remembered a shot of vodka, and jagermeister, and whiskey, and jagermeister again . . . I think. Then there was the races to see who could chug their beer the fastest, and then we . . . ? Well, for sure we ended up . . . ?

I checked my sheet of paper: assault and resisting arrest. Then it all came back to me. The blind drunk stumble out of the bar. The limo parked right outside. I remembered thinking what a good idea it would be to hitch a ride home in the back of it. The limo driver hadn't thought it had been such a good idea and he had been especially vehement in denying me access, shoving me backwards and coming after me swinging. It had seemed so funny at the time, dodging his blows rather easily while he got angrier and angrier. When I reached in and gave his face a light slap, it was the final straw. "Police!" he yelled, "Police!"

Police officers are one thing that Rehoboth Beach, Delaware has in abundance. The town snatches up criminal justice students from the nearby university almost faster than they can turn them out. Usually they spend their time trying to catch people drinking on the beach or waiting for parking meters to run out, pretty dull usually. All that was about to change. Now they had an emergency on their hands, a full-blown psychopath running around town slapping limo drivers. They sprang into action . . .

"Freeze," I heard one yell, "you in the green shirt!" I looked down at my green shirt and immediately started running. "No way they can catch me," I remembered thinking as I took off. "No way they'll find me behind this bush," I thought.

When they formed a ring around me less than a minute later, I decided to attempt to surrender gracefully. It was not to be. I counted six drawn guns, not all of them steady, but all of them aiming right at me

There is something distinctly unsettling about a deadly weapon being aimed at you. For a nervous moment or two no one moved. Remarkably, no one fired. No one did anything. I sat there with my hands up for what seemed like a very long time, wondering what would happen next. I don't think I was the only one. Finally one of the officers tackled me, shoved my face into the

gravel and handcuffed me.

Four hours later, I was still handcuffed to a bench at the local station. It may have been my ill-advised

"No way they can catch me," I remembered thinking as I took off. "No way they'll find me behind this bush," I thought.

comments about the training and general intelligence level of resort cops, I'm still not certain, but for whatever reason they then decided to toss me into the back of a police car and drive me an hour north to the Sussex Correctional Institute. After a strip search and other assorted unpleasant tasks, there I was, on the floor of the holding cell, eternally grateful that there was a child molester in my cell to deflect any interest away from me and wondering why I always had to be such an asshole.

Sometime around noon a guard came and got five of us. The child molester was left behind. We were marched from our holding cell into general population. I went to Cellblock C. It didn't appear to me to be much of an improvement from the first cell, only larger.

The door to Cellblock C boomed behind me with an air of finality that one would imagine a prison door so large would boom with. It slammed with a sickening sound that you could actually feel vibrate up the soles of your feet. The guards patrolling the catwalks with shotguns did surprisingly little to ease my tension, nor did my new bunkmate whose red rimmed eyes eyed me suspiciously from a narrow head framed by a huge afro. I nodded a hello. He didn't. I climbed into the top bunk and tried to stare at the ceiling.

It's almost impossible to understand how slowly time was moving. Jail time moved in increments that had only a vague relation to outside time. It was only twelve thirty and I already felt like I had spent half my life behind bars. Minutes became hours, hours became days, days... I didn't even want to think about days.

I got something from the reading rack, a book to help me towards earning my GED, but the words didn't make any sense. They were esoteric symbols I could never hope to understand. I watched the one TV (from a distance, since there were 180 people in the cell and one TV), but couldn't follow the movie (one I had already seen). I laid on my bed and waited. They couldn't keep me in their forever (could they?). I mean, they hadn't forgotten me (right?).

Finally a guard came asking for prisoner number 00365841. I recognized the number immediately. He led me through some guarded hallways to a small room which held a TV monitor. The monitor came to life as I was standing there with a bored looking judge on the screen. He read my charges and asked me "How do you plead?"

Confused, I asked "What?"

"How do you plead?"

"Is this my trial?" I asked, still unsure.

"Preliminary hearing. How do you plead?"

"Innocent?"

"Fine, trial will be held one week from today, until which time you will be held in

this correctional institute."

"Wait!" I yelled as he began to reach for a button on his desk. "You can't keep me in here."

Annoyed, he looked up.

Quickly I said, "What happens if I plead guilty?"

"I set bail."

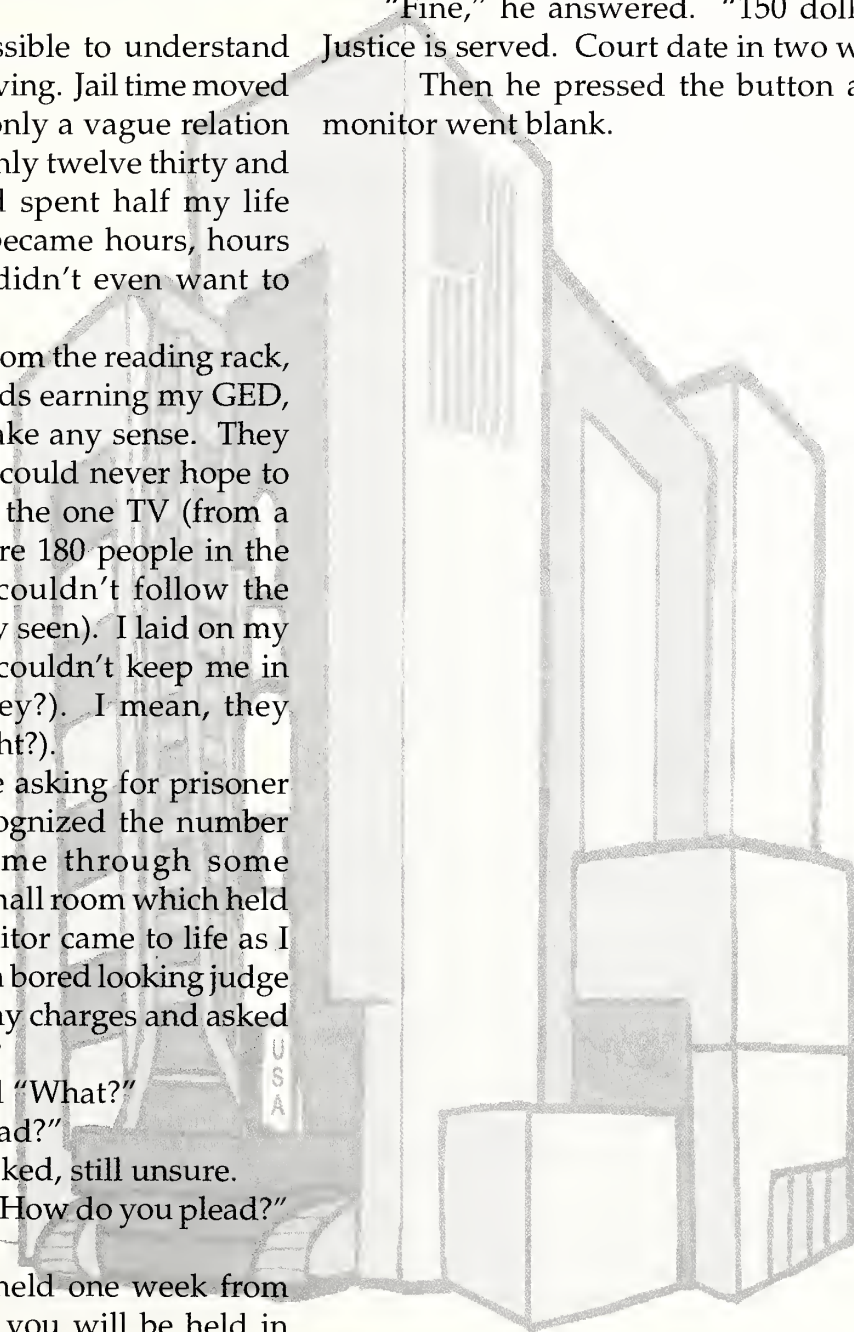
"And I can go home?"

He nodded, exasperated. He obviously had better things to do.

"Guilty," I said.

"Fine," he answered. "150 dollar bail. Justice is served. Court date in two weeks."

Then he pressed the button and the monitor went blank.



Dialogue with an Umbrella (the Legacy of Demetrius Gholar)
by Maxwell L. Highsmith

It rained the day they told me
Then for an eternity after that
An overcrowded sky shed tears
Until the blue had disappeared
Trees groaned as my thoughts invaded their lives
The air bowed under the testament of words
Demetrius was gone.

A guy next to me said, "God-Almighty look at this rain"
I knew why it was raining
Just like the trees and sky
(but we agreed to guard that secret)

The SGA banner wore a sad frown that day
He did not agree to our secret bond
And the rain...and the rain...
"God, Almighty look at this rain," he said again

The college logo wilted
He would not keep our secret either
Yearned to tell the world, he did
He did
So I guess it's official

School lights declined to shine
Since the sun rejected his name
Smoke from passing cigarettes
Howled "No!" when asked to go away
Because he was gone

But I honor him
Even as my umbrella pinned me to the ground
That day
Hip hop music resounded
While break dancers cavorted
Back-flipped and performed head spins
That day

There will never be another like you
Demetrius
So, what do we do now
Your walk—your presence
Taught us to never wait for another
To shape our destiny



Our ID cards don't feel the same
They are empty plastic shells
With a microchip
That will never know you

Alone and afraid of this world
You made the difference
So, what do we do now?
Now that you've vanquished all our fears
Now that you've given us strength to run on

Your smile
Was like the appearance of a police car
That moves those blocking our way
Just like you
It was the loudest silence
I had ever heard

It dictated the sun to shine
Commanded the path of the confused
Gave refuge
To the weak
And the strong

But when the rain comes
What do you do
Nothing-but
Take up the soccer equipment
Head for shelter
Just like you did
We could not have without the pain
So you headed for home
Just like every good soldier
Does at the end of the war
Just like every good soldier

You went to the only place that gave you
Peace
Home
You fought the good fight
You ran a good race
And in your small way-you changed our lives
Just like MLK or JFK
All students—all people
Every one of us



And if I needed another reason to be proud
To be alumni
Then it's you-Demetrius
Because Miami-Dade doesn't have someone like you
And USF-well...

We smile
Because you belong to us
Selfishly
Greedyly
We make you ours
Without hesitation or shame

We know you were here
For the wind still speaks your name
Demetrius
Plus our tears
Confirm your existence
And the rain...
Makes our umbrellas like concrete
They tell the story of a man
That was here
But now is gone

Thank you Demetrius for sharing the rain with us
And you know what-it's not raining anymore



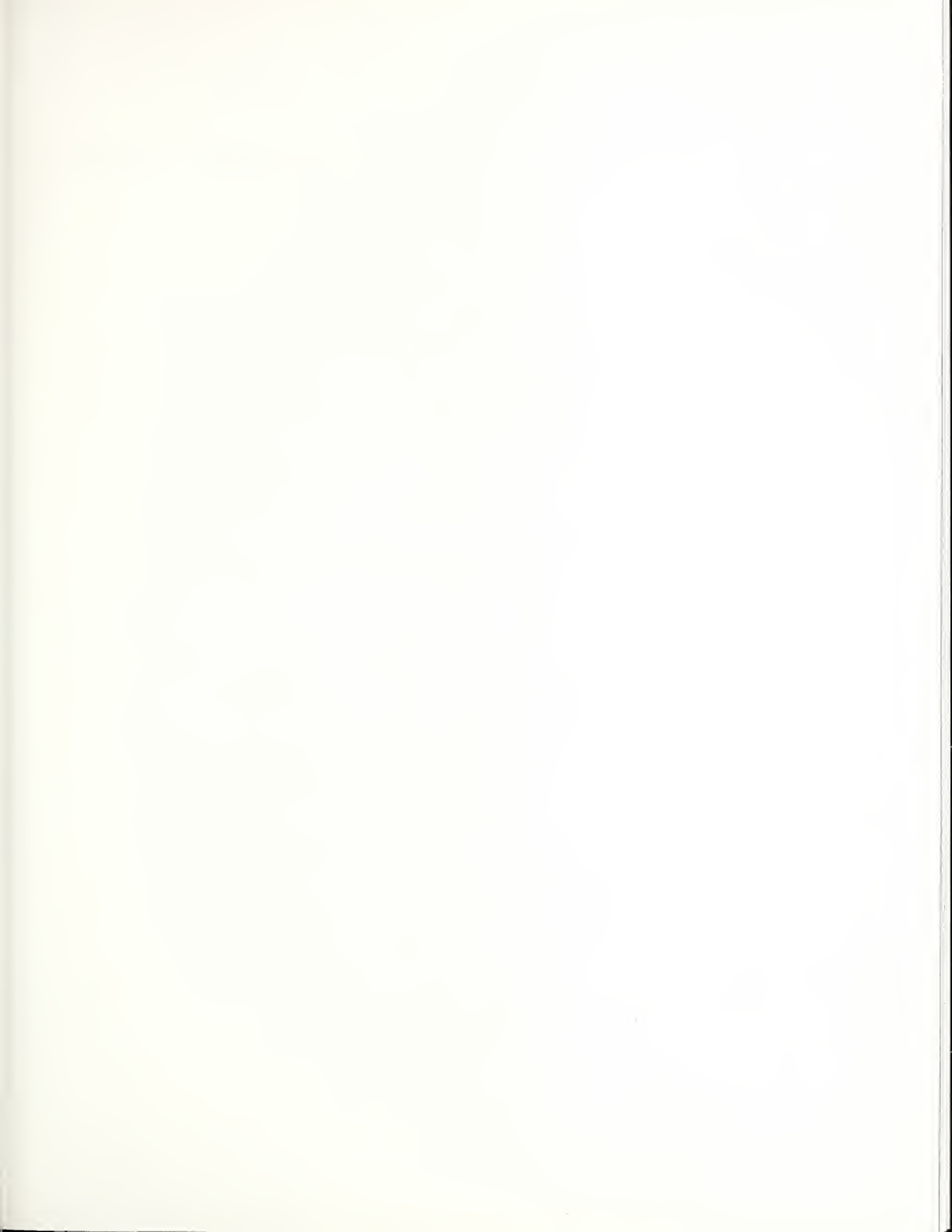
"Baroquen Hearts"

Black and White Photograph by B.L. Wells



Farewell Natalia by Roberto Fernandez

I told you how I felt,
You just looked at me,
I told you I wanted to be with you,
You were unwilling to take a chance,
That was your choice, entitled to you
You were afraid that I would change while I was away,
What will you do if I don't come back,
What will you do if I don't come back,
You took for granted all those times I was there,
Now, I won't be there,
You call me friend and so our memories I will keep,
While I'm away I will continue to love you, Although you will not love me in return,
I wonder if you will miss me while I'm away,
Ha! A dream that a dreamer in love has,
So long it was a privilege being your friend,
Perhaps one day we might be able to share something more than friendship,
Perhaps one day you might love me,
So long Natalia I hope that life treats you well,
I hope you find a person who will not hurt you,
Off to the Army I go,
Farewell Natalia,
Farewell.



**The Student Literary/Arts Magazine of Broward Community College
Fall/Winter 2000 Volume 32, Number One**



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Staff

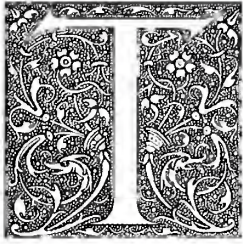
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*Special Thanks to Vicki Santiesteban,
Lynne Farber and Charlie Lyle*

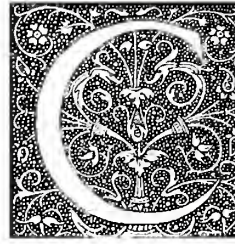
*The Robert Meeker Memorial Writing Contest is
funded through a bequest by Otto M. Burkhardt to
the BCC Foundation.*

P'an Ku, Volume thirty-two, number two, was printed by Ormont Graphics. *P'an Ku* is designed, produced, and edited solely by students at Broward Community College. All contributions in this issue are by students at BCC. This magazine is funded by the Student Activities Board. The opinions expressed are those of our contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the editors, faculty, staff, administrators or trustees of the college. Typed contributions with the name, social security number, and telephone number are welcomed from all students attending BCC. Copyright 2001 by Broward Community College, 225 East Las Olas Boulevard, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301. All communications with the editors and all inquiries concerning this publication should be addressed to: Editor of *P'an Ku*, BCC South Campus, 7200 Pines Boulevard, Pembroke Pines, Florida 33024. Telephone: (954)986-8044. All copyrights revert back to the original artists and authors after publication. Visit *P'an Ku*'s website: <http://fs.broward.cc.fl.us/south/english/pkhome.html>



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Cover by Omar Diego Ibarra

Back Cover by Omar Digeo Ibarra and Drawing by Daphne Crawford

Tomorrow Isn't Promised

by Ayodele Ogundele

"Treasure your life because tomorrow isn't promised to anyone" This statement in itself describes life totally. It took the experience of losing my Father at such a young age to understand that life isn't something to take advantage of

My Father was a very hard working man. He loved his family, but he also had a love for drinking and smoking. I guess you can say my father knew he was going to die young because on occasion he would sit my brother, my sister and myself down, and talk about how nobody would be on this Earth forever. No matter how many times my Father gave the "I'm not going to be here forever" speech, I still ended up crying. Then I would think to myself Why are you crying. Daddy will be here for a long time."

Then reality struck. The morning of June 17, 1990, I woke up to my mother's screaming. I immediately jumped out of bed to see what was going on. I stood at my bedroom door. I hesitated for a couple of seconds because I had no idea what waited on the other side. Finally, I gathered enough courage to open the door. What I saw will be imbedded in my mind forever. I saw before me the strong, independent man I once knew, looked dead into my eyes as though I was a complete stranger. "Daddy are you okay?" I manage to get out of my mouth, but it felt sounded more like I swallowed my throat. He said something, but still to this day I have no idea what it was. I watched him walk across the hallway and then into my parents' room. He was stumbling more than walling, and all of a sudden he fell to the ground. The fear that came over me didn't allow me to move. Even when the paramedics worked on him I stood frozen in the same place. The last words I heard my father say were, "Name my boy after me." Later on I was told he had a stroke.

My Father was in a coma for eight months. The whole entire time that he was in the hospital I only saw him once. November

16,1990, my Godfather took my brother and I to the nursing home. As I walked down that long corridor. my stomach felt like it was doing cartwheel;

my hands were ice cold. When we finally reached the door to my Father's room I stopped and took a deep breath before walking in. There I saw my Father. He didn't even look like the man I knew to be my father. He looked so pale and had lost so much weight. My brother and I walked towards his sick bed. My Godfather said to us "Go on, say hi"

"Hi Daddy." Although he couldn't speak, the way he looked into my eyes I could tell he knew who I was. After the deep exchange of eye contact, my stomach began to calm down. "You have a new baby boy! He was named Olufemi Adeyinki Ogundele Jr." Then I saw my Daddy lift his left leg up. Right then, I wanted to just break down and cry, but I knew I had to be strong for my little brother. Then I knew for a fact that he knew exactly what we were saying. Then I said, "I love you Daddy." His leg lifted up 'm the air again. He looked deeply into my eyes. I will never forget the warmth I felt at that moment. He died on February II, 1991.

Five days later was the funeral. Right before we left I grabbed my mother's hand. "Mommy, promise me you won't cry." It felt as though she looked right through me. I guess to reassure me she patted me on my shoulder.

When we got to the funeral home, I saw faces I've never seen. My family and I were led to the front row. The walk down the aisle was longest walk I ever took in my life. I could feel the stares and hear the low whispers. A tear slowly trickled out of my eye and onto my cheek. I quickly wiped it away before anyone could see. I had to be strong for my younger siblings. I started at the grayish blue casket for what seem like an eternity. Looking at it had a way of hypnotizing me. All I deeply desired was for my father to jump out of that death keeper.

I looked over to my mother. Not a single tear in sight. When I finally took my eyes off the casket long enough, I noticed a tall skinny, dark skinned man walked over to the casket. Then I heard "It is time to say your final good byes to our brother, husband, father and dear friend. Olufemi Adenyika Ogundele Sr." The casket was opened. People lined up to see my father's lifeless body. I watched my mother suddenly get up and walk slowly over to the coffin. She stood there motionless. I saw her stretch out her hand and hold my father's hand. My mother let out a scream unlike a sound that I ever heard. It was so high it could have pierced the coldest of hearts. I immediately ran over to my mother and put my arms around her waist. "Mommy, you promised you wouldn't cry." I said this repeatedly for what felt like forever. My mother never acknowledged that I was holding on to her. She just held on to the casket and slowly fell to her knees. Her tears flowed like a never-ending river. All of my mother's tears fell onto my face and slowly joined my own. A big boned woman came and broke the union that my mother and I had. I began holding onto the woman and still managed to say with all tears pounding down, "Mommy, you promised you wouldn't cry. The woman placed my head on her breast. After a few minutes I turned around and took one long last look at my father's earthly body then the skinny, dark skinned man closed the casket. Right then I realized my father was never coming back.

The sacrifice of his life and the knowledge he left with me will be something I will carry in my heart forever. It has allowed me to respect life because it is the most important thing I have. I hold the power of my life and the ability to create it. Treasure your life because tomorrow is promised to no one.



The Weathers Of Living

by Alexis Cohen

Pulsing lights faster than mach eighty-
I can't ignore fragments of
life anymore.

Pulsing crowding memories
of home/stale tears/ pain can't be re-
born

quicker than sound.

Pushing through my peaceful moments,
happiness pulsates on the walls around
me.

White absorbs so quickly,
invigorated by the wash of purity
evil deeds provide.

Every day I wake up innocent,
Elusiveness wears me out.

-I'm so tired-

of hating myself.

Of being angry.

Of smiling as if everything's alright.

Of love.

Of tasting bitterness.

Of missing those who've abandoned me.

-It wears me out-

to fight myself.

To not dream,

To pray and pray and pray.

To make excuses.

To pretend as if nothing happened.

Shedding skins I find new ones.

Age provides many textures

to battle the weathers of living.

If I could be a child wonder,

trapped in the essence of the moment,
the urgency of birth

Awaits you.



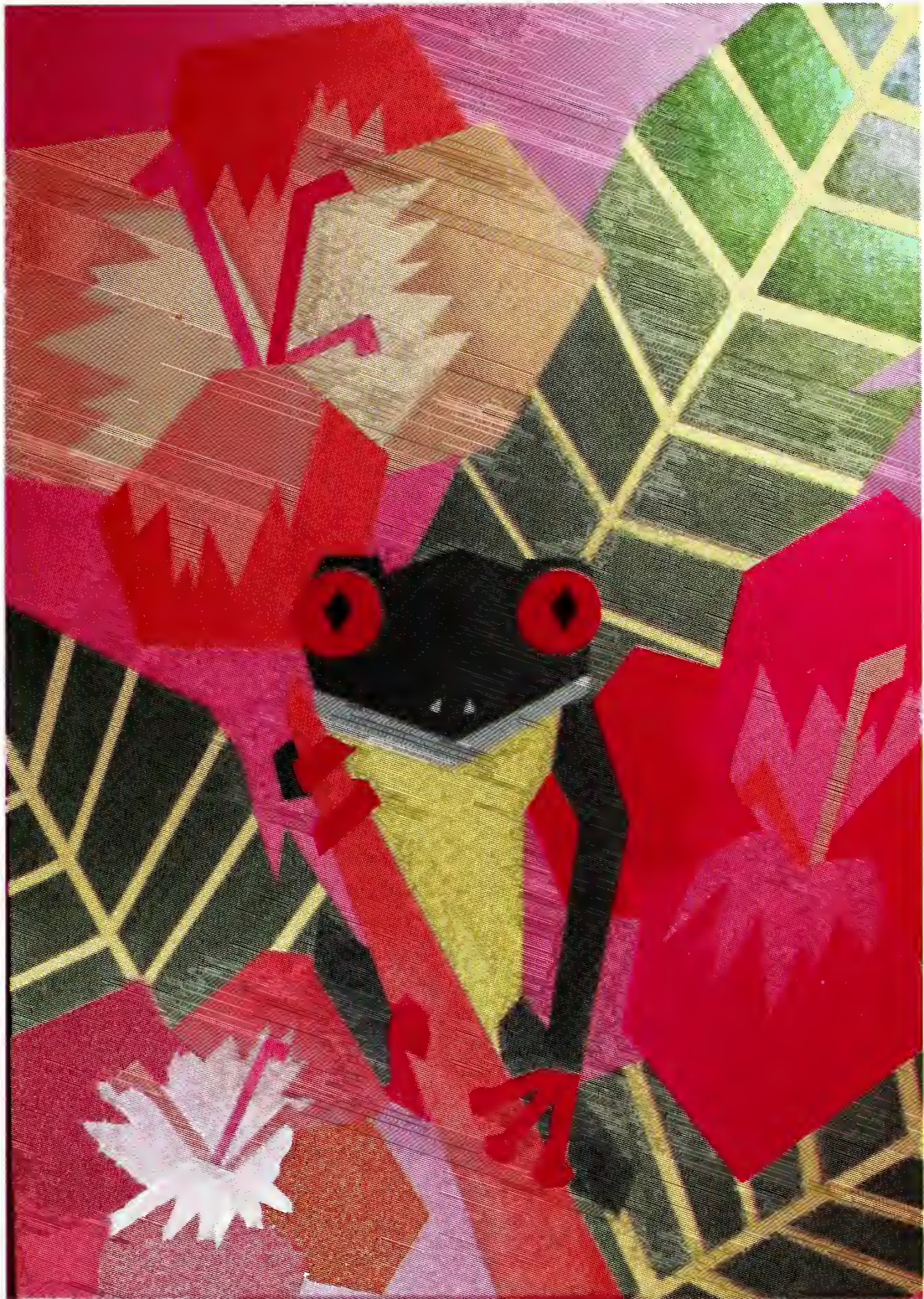


"Prayer" Black and white photography by Ramiro Revollo

The longing soul craves for true love

by Juliana Thumas

From the time my mother conceived me, I'm not supposed to be here.
And she only has a limited love for me that satisfies so far.
To really say, we are alone!
Crying behind my smile because of so much pain in this wicked world.
I ask who loves me?
It's real life!
Right now, a junky is sticking a needle in his vein...
Right now, a woman is getting beat by her husband...
It's real life!
Right now, a little four year old is being raped by her brother.
We put on our masks and costumes
And play our roles and act like nothing is wrong.
We do hide it.
But, deep down in our souls we crave, seek and desire.
We substitute our satisfaction with,
Materials, power, entertainment and people.
But, we are still alone!
The void and emptiness of our souls screams aloud;
Love me!!!!!!!!!!
But I found Him,
The Lover of my soul.
I was raped, I was broken, and I was hooked,
I was hurt, I was hopeless, and I was alone.
The touch of His love delivered my soul from the gates of hell.
I am healed, I am whole, and I am loved,
I am blessed, I am His righteousness, and I am pure in Him.
His love made me complete.
His dwelling in me satisfies my soul.
The thirst and craving of my soul overflows with the rivers of everlasting life.
Hallelujah!
I am free.....
Glory to God!
I am I,
Honor to Him!
For setting my soul free.
Peace and Love to all men
From Him
Because He is alive!!!!
He is the true love.
He does listen and cares for you and me.
He died for our pain,
That we may gain,
Everlasting life with Him.



"Out on a Limb" Acrylic by Melanie Miller

Wistful Hope
by Daniel W. Butler

Crushing soil within my tender hand
Disintegrates, plummeting last sparkle.
The sun above me The ever faithful
The Earth below me, now just simple sand.
The plants around me They sigh with sadness
The seas before me Torrent of madness.

Tornadoes surround me The frightful wind
Vegetation smolders, fire consumes,
My core feels hopeful Wishfully it blooms.
The beast of the land, presence determined.
Bred from heaven, light flow like divine ink
The flame-Darkness pursues—Heaven to link.

Lunar eclipse The end is drawing near
The silent stars The beginning is close
Earth, now a place of remembrance. A ghost.
The joy, chaos, distress, sadness and fear,
All is compete. High indeed was the cost.
The time has come, everything is now lost.

I stand alone, wading through the darkness.
The single sparkle, from my distilled eyes
Falls through the air Separates truth from lies.
Spreads apart, forms a land without finesse,
Sun and stars smiling The Earth is reborn.
Now purified, without hate, without scorn.

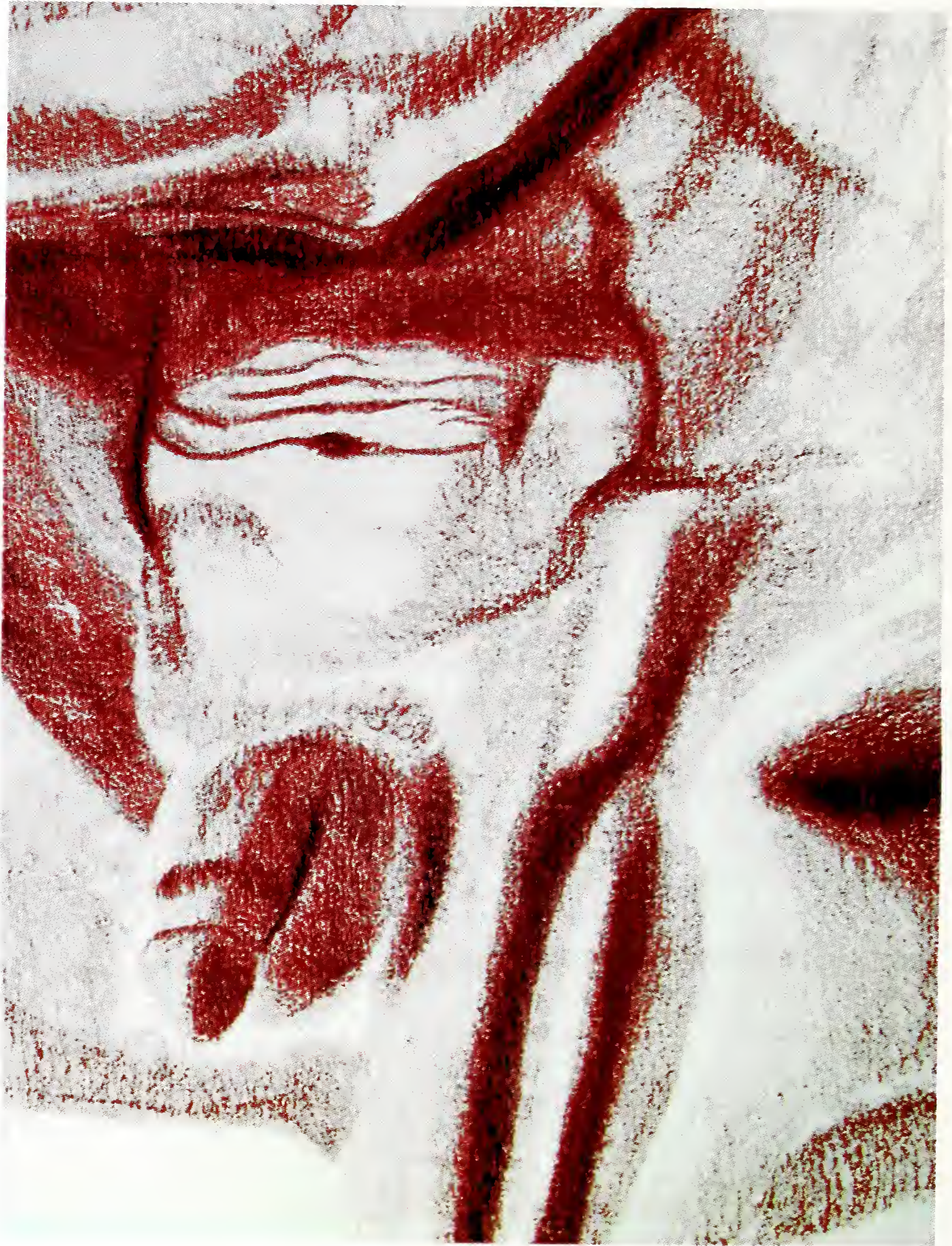
Patriotism
by Daniel W. Butler

A sedated turtle falling through a sea of red
She could not remember what was done or what was said
She did not remember all the people that had fled
She did not see any of the blood that she had shed
The Icon of esteemed honor and pride now lay dead
Her hunger of savage hostility had been fed
She continued to be a symbol of life ahead
She did not see any of the blood that she had shed

Priceless Passage

by Amy Harvey

Lies are what you sell
For your passage into hell
You tell them very well
For I know you know how I fell
In love with you, that's for real
I know you knew the deal
Cause when you left, you'd steal
My heart, now let me heal
What's left of my existence
Please stop your persistence
I beg you to keep your distance
No more...well, for instance
I'd let you control me
What was it I didn't see
All that was unholy
And when you'd just fold me
In half and there I go, into your pocket
Or a box, and you'd lock it
It was all quite shocking
Everything I'd say you'd knock it
Out of the water
I knew you liked others
Your eyes told my mother
Your expressions were revealed to my
father.
So no, I won't reconsider
Or even be bitter
I'll always be the winner
For you chose to be the sinner.



"David" Conte Drawing by Daphne Crawford



"Serena" Charcoal and Pastel Drawing by Andrea Kirsch

Black Hymeneal

by Manny Arenas

Azraelle, my moribund bride
Gowned in ebon lace
Down the funest aisle you stride
With an exequial pace

Niveous hands let fingers slip
With sharpened ruby nails
Like little bloodied arrow tips
Which have my heart impaled

Your fine fair bosom does not heave
With movements to respire
But moves my will, in twain, to cleave
As my heart would to expire

Trailing from your muddy feet
A sombre bridal train
Sullied in your brief retreat
Through graveyards in the rain

Tangled in its filigree
Are tokens from the grave
Supported by (with impish glee)
A grotesque lillim babe

Behind your veil of spiders webs
Your sable tresses flow
In rivulets, about you, ebbs
Away, from your dark brow

Peeling back gossamer mesh
Your eyes- a-glow like gleeds
Burning into my weak flesh
To my wan heart, which bleeds

Your crimson labia do stretch
Into a hungry smile
Enticing me, a poor fey wretch
With lewd and baneful wiles

Eagerly I give to you
My last remaining breath
And as my lips avow, "I do"
Receive your kiss of Death

The Dying Woman Explains Death to Her Granddaughter
by Brandy Sejeck

The woman is static
Her hands like misshapen peonies
Lie open in pensive silence

The Dead Sea is thatched in her chest
Under a nest of bone her heart
A buoy fixed brittle
Murmurs an elegy

"It is the process that is arduous," she says
Eyes cobalt blue flash like lighthouses
As if the moon were behind each iris

"What is it like?" I ask

But the weather of the mind is damp
As a Dhow ship the body dark
Each light fizzles under a shade of skin

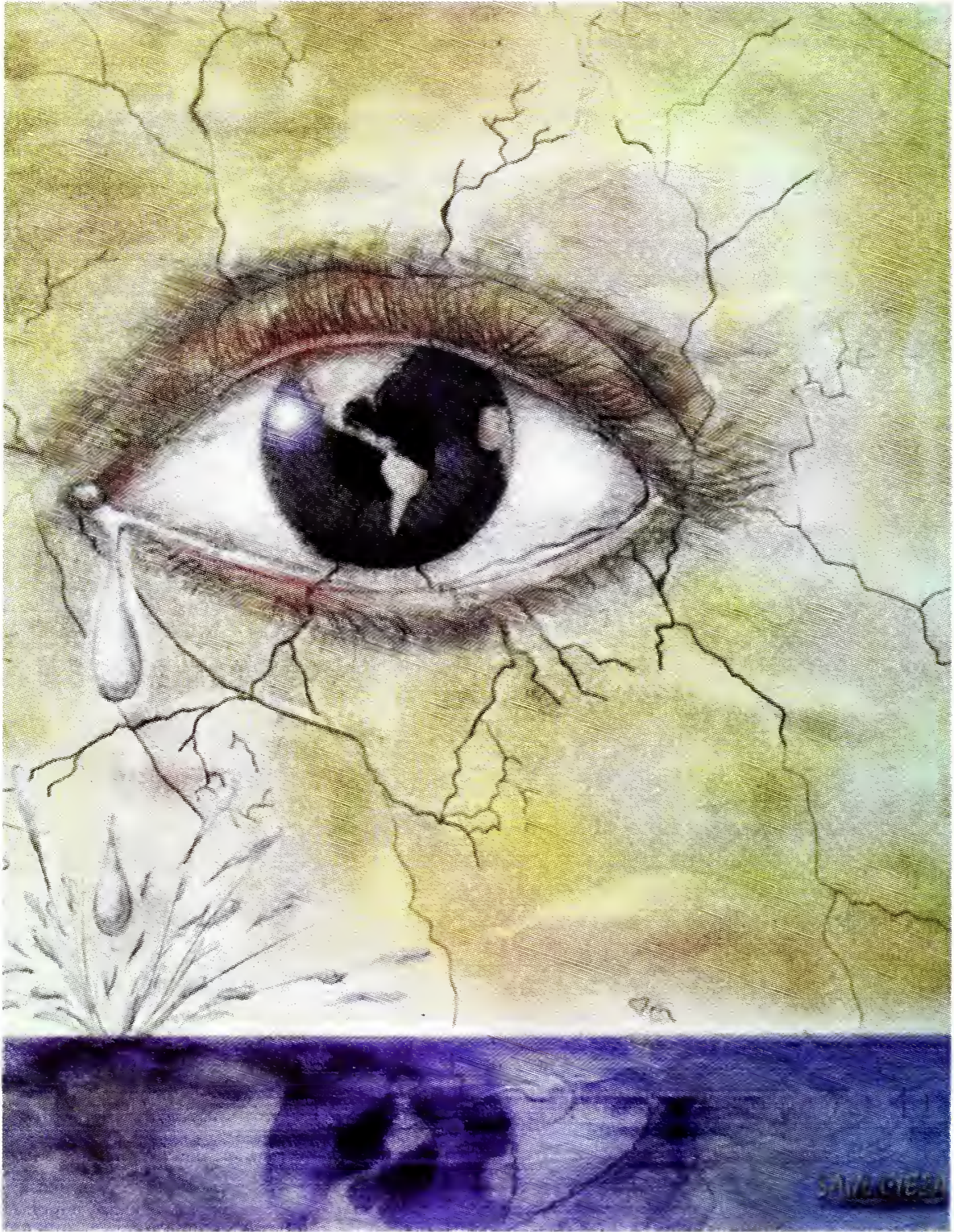
Death is slow as a widower's gaze

I touch the apex of each knuckle
Like the crags of the Pacific
And count her breaths
One...two...three...
Seconds drag her in circles

I, in my naivete, cradle her small head
As if she were new-born
And whisper Michelangelo's *Genesis* in her ear
"You will be finger to finger with God," I say
I am lying Her face blooms in my hands

"What is it like?" I ask

She doesn't hear
Her arm stiff as a spine
Is raised



Untitled by Saul Cieza

Timber of the Wolf by John Jeffords

The moon rose at the particular point in night when there is nothing but darkness; Stanford Cassel didn't have time to react. He felt his body changing, the hair spraying heat beneath his skin. The platform of his face twisted, until the work was complete. The thing that was once Stanford Cassel began to run rampant through the city streets of Lookington, Louisiana. Cassel was growing weaker, and his senses were off. Disoriented and scared, the creature wandered into the road, howling upon seeing the moon, he never saw the truck coming.

Behind the steering wheel to the truck that was about to smash into the wolf-like monstrosity named Stanford Cassel, was Wade Norson, lonesome truck driver on his way to Atlanta.

The weary travelers collided in the desolate darkness.

Norson exited his truck after some hesitation, expecting to see a dead animal lying in a pool of blood, covered with dirt. What he found was the crippled body of Stanford Cassel.

The werewolf was rushed to the hospital, immediately put on life support. The police would find his clothes, including the precious blood donor card his wallet carried, a very rare type of blood.

Without knowing the horrible consequences of their actions, the doctors took the diseased blood of Cassel to inject it into a patient in need of a donor. And they did this just moments before the wolf in Cassel's insane life passed on.

The blood arrived at the bedside of a dying man, his name was Herbert Bermin. He survived thanks to the blood of Stanford Cassel, but had no idea of the horrors to come.

The house was completely silent; not even the tiniest creak emanated from within. Herbert wondered if he should enter, if by some chance a horrible misfortune had occurred before he even got a chance to enjoy life back home.

"Sandra?" he called out,

There was no reply.

Not thinking rationally, Herbert rushed into the house calling out his wife's name again and again. Fear started to come out in his desperate cries, each one was met with the same silence he had felt upon opening the front door.

Then Herbert noticed the answering machine was blinking, he pushed the "play" button. An electronic version of Sandra Bermin's voice filled the empty house,

"Hey, I'm sorry that I couldn't be there when you got home, they're working me like a dog at this shithole. I know that you'll be hungry, there's some leftover chicken in the fridge from yesterday. And if you're still hungry after that... just wait till I get home." Herbert Bermin smiled to himself, with every intention to wait, eagerly.

It had been two weeks since a blood transfusion saved his life, since he had made love to his wife in their comfortable queen size bed, since the grim reaper had stood in his doorway; Herbert was grateful that he lived to tell the tale. Yet he regretted Stanford Cassel's death, the only other man, perhaps, who possessed the same rare blood type as Herbert. He sat down on his couch, falling asleep before he had a chance to eat or fantasize about what he would do when Sandra returned.

Outside of the Bermin residence, in the backyard, Sandra Bermin has built a small decorative pond. Different types of flowers surround the ceramic lawn ornaments and stones that make up the display; beneath the water are several large fish. But none of these things are what makes the pond look beautiful. Next to the perfectly clear water, everything else seems shabby and worn. The crystal clarity even reflects a perfect duplicate of the sky, mimicking all actions above it. And, in the sky at this very moment, the full moon is beginning to show.

Herbert woke from a nightmare, his heart felt as if it would burst out of his chest. Oblivious to what was transpiring, knowing only that it hurt, like a blistering heat rising from inside him, all Herbert could comprehend were insignificant details. Hair

in places where there was no hair before, long fingernails that did not feel natural. He discovered this as his limbs flailed madly about in the dark, seeking help from whatever might be there. Herbert Bermin found no such retribution, as his mind blacked out, another being entered.

Sandra Bermin turned the corner looking once again at her watch, she felt horrible about not being home when Herbert had arrived. But what choice did she have? It wasn't like she could just leave work whenever she felt like it, the doctors had given her notice when it was too late to request a day off.

She tried to focus on the road, on getting home, to Herbert. Again, the Bermin home was perfectly quiet, except for heavy breathing coming from the living room, where Herbert Bermin had been.

The creature was conscious, becoming aware of itself almost immediately. It began to understand what had happened, what it was, and why it was. This monster was the counter part of Herbert, and it possessed all of his memories prior to the transformation. But, unlike Herbert Bermin, this creature knew that the blood of Stanford Cassel was diseased, he understood his purpose clearly—the beast's motives became distinct. And soon, it was more than a feeling or an urge, the longing became necessary, vital. The existence it would live was the role of Mr. Hyde to Herbert Bermin's Dr. Jeckyll. The creature sneered as it thought of this, snorting through the large nostrils of its snout. The name was sufficient, Hyde; the werewolf stood up from the couch and wandered into the night.

Casey Strow was walking to the supermarket three blocks away, the night air was mild but slightly warm. Casey looked down at his feet; they were sore all over. You can expect that kind of thing after running a marathon only twenty two hours before. His thoughts lingered on the race he had gallantly ran, the race he lost, but could've won. *His legs were beginning to tire; an easy pain now becoming harsh was creeping into his side. Casey tried to concentrate, tried to keep his mind on the*

sky above rather than the path ahead. Although his body told him to stop, Casey knew that he was in the lead by at least half a mile. Startling to gloat in his mind, Casey did not see the other runner coming up next to him. His lack of attention would cost him the race, giving him second place. A huge dent in his thus far perfect record.

A loud growling from behind disturbed his thoughts, it resembled the sound of a large a dog, an **angry** large dog. Casey wasn't sure what to do, the street was desolate, showing darkness on every building cloaked within invisible shields stating that help wasn't near. Then he saw the corner, far down the road. He had to move, the sounds were getting closer, it was getting closer. Casey Strow ceased his hysterical attitude, understanding that he had to focus on safety. Contemplating nothing, he decided to rely on what had won him second place, his feet. As Casey ran he could hear the creature give chase.

Hyde was enjoying the fun; he even considered whether it was actually worth it or not. After all, the human was quite skinny, which meant the meat was probably not worth so much running. But still he continued amazed at the speed with which the human fled. This would be a proud, deserving feast.

His feet slammed against the pavement, sweat burned his eyes. Desperate cries of exasperation kept falling from Casey's mouth, and soon his legs began to tire. In front of him, only twenty or thirty feet away, was the corner which would have led into the street where perhaps there might have been safety. But Casey Strow never found that out, he collapsed to the ground without any effort to break his fall.

Heavy breathing from the animal, Casey was afraid to look up. In the darkness was a monster unlike any book or movie had ever categorized, on all fours, tremendous, and as the creature stood up on its hind legs he became a nine foot tall killer.

Lengthy brown hair covered in dirt was spread out all over its body; the head was that of a wolf, the same with the tail and body configurations. Claws existed on each of its four digits; they were small and dark

configurations. Claws existed on each of its four digits; they were small and dark resembling white lightning in a midnight sky because of their cracks. Baring its teeth the demon smirked at Casey, there was intelligence in it. These thoughts did not help him in the end, the werewolf slipped Casey Strow's head between his sharp edged teeth, and bit down.

Sandra pulled into her driveway, gathered her personal possessions and bags, then walked a bit faster than usual to get into the house. Inside, no sounds could be heard. "Herb?" she called out, no answer. He was probably asleep. After finding no trace that her husband had even been released from the hospital, Sandra laid down on her bed. She intended to call the hospital and find out why Herbert was still there, but a bitter sleep pushed itself on her and soon she was dead to the world.

Somewhere else in Lookington, in the downtown streets about five miles away from where Casey Strow had met a gruesome, untimely death, was a woman named Linda Frostin.

Frostin had just come back from her father's funeral; his death had seemingly completed a recent chain of deaths in her family. Linda Frostin's mother died two years before, and her younger brother died of cancer only one year ago, now her father.

Sometimes she wonders how horrible misfortunes can happen to one person, and then she tells herself that there are a million other people with worse problems than her. Linda has been around the country, and has resided in thirty-five states. She's stayed in these places for no more than six months apiece, traveling light, not even owning a camera. Linda holds pictures only in her memory; no photo albums can be found in any of her apartments. She lives her life from one place to the next with nothing that can weigh her down. Because Linda Frostin knows that staying in one place means meeting someone else she would have to lose.

Daylight would arrive, and the moon would no longer be so bright, the sun just might bring some salvation.

Nearby, the night stalker self-named Hyde had just caught the scent of her perfume in the air, and became intrigued.

Linda's one and only carry on bag was in her hand, the train would be arriving at any moment to take her away once again. The station was deserted, every now and then a rat would run across the tracks knocking over empty bottles and tossing discarded paper everywhere. Rain from the night before was still dripping from the drain pipes into brown puddles of water that were covering the metal bars and concrete of the train tracks; the scenery gave off the same kind of eerie emotions as a graveyard.

At the center of this cemetery was Linda Frostin, unaware of the other presence creeping around, and observing her. He felt her fear, the way she nervously brushed the hair away from her face, and it made him insane. Hyde was not human, but his senses were still partially working against his body. The human part of him was Herbert Bennin, and it was this essence that made him want the woman. His instincts told him to ravage her, to consume her life and feast on her flesh. Hyde was still not sure what he would do as he ran out of the darkness; his eyes were deadlocked with Linda Frostin's.

Linda turned her head when she heard the silence break, and what she saw heading directly for her made her nervous system freeze. Tears were building up, but she could not cry them out, numbness had made its way instantly through her body making rational thought impossible. She didn't want to run, she knew she couldn't get away, Linda Frostin only envisioned her death being the final sequence in a plan that had been made the day she was born. And now, as some monster came closer to her, Linda accepted her fate.

Hyde could already tell that this woman would not put up a fight, that she would succumb to his intentions with only screams.

When he was a few steps away, Hyde slowed down to a trot. He wanted terribly to enjoy his time with this human, to have her and make her as he wanted. Hyde knocked her off of her feet to the ground. Rising above

his fallen prey, the werewolf put one of his massive paws over her mouth, so that her pain would not be heard.

Hyde let out a howl before he lowered his head, before he sunk his teeth into Linda Frostin.

His victory would not be as glorious as anticipated, Hyde had forgotten about the sun. It rose just as the woman passed out, Hyde fell down beside her feeling hair retreat into his body, feeling darkness cloud his mind.

Sandra Bermin had been awake for two hours worrying about her husband. First she thought of calling the hospital to find out when Herbert was going to be released, they told her that he had left the night before. And this was only the beginning, Sandra also realized that someone had to have been home to play the message she had left on the answering machine. But what had actually put true fear in her was finding her husband's clothes in shambles in the backyard.

After that she had called the police, no help there, missing people have to be missing for twenty-four hours. **Sandra** could no longer stand just waiting, something had happened to Herbert, and she would find him. Grabbing her car keys, she was out the door.

On the opposite side of town in the Lookington train station, Officer Les Kermis had just made a peculiar discovery. A naked man and a woman with a huge gash in her leg were lying next to one another on the platform; neither appeared to be conscious. An ambulance arrived and carried the two to the hospital.

About a half an hour later the nine o'clock train arrived, the conductor had no idea as he pulled into the station that he had crushed the duffel bag carrying all the earthly possessions and identifications of Linda Frostin.

Herbert woke to blackness, unaware of what had transpired during his sleep. He was certain of pain covering his body, and soreness that soon became nearly unbearable. He was lost to the world for a short duration, but until the moon had gone time would be a clock slowly ticking to its set hour.

He felt all over himself, checking for wounds, or dried blood. All he discovered was sunlight, and that he was no longer in his house. Herbert was frightened, wondering if all he remembered from the night before was a dream. It had been so vivid, Sandra's message, and knowing that he would sleep in his own bed.

Herbert remembered how he had felt changes happening to himself, his imagination could never have created such an unbelievable event in horrid detail. Meaning that what he remembered was real, and there was something more to this than he knew.

Herbert pulled back the sheets and attempted to stand on his feet. His balance receded him slightly, but he found that moving was easier with support from large objects around him. Although it was late in the afternoon the hallway of the Lookington Hospital was empty, except for a few nurses that would walk down a passage and turn into another. Herbert walked down the corridor, not sure of why he was even there. Right before the main nurse station, something made his borrowed blood run cold. It was the name plate of room number six twenty-four, stating that the person who occupied it was named Stanford Cassel.

Herbert could only stare at the name, wondering if it was possible that his savior had survived. Feelings he had felt during his recovery, nothing but remorse, regret, and blame for Cassel's death and his life came back to him. Now he had a chance to rectify what had been wrong, he opened the door and entered Cassel's room.

It was stuffy inside, and one had the unfortunate ability to sense that something had died recently and close. The walls were institution white that looked more colorful than the face of Stanford Cassel. His bed was in the corner of the room, in the bed next to it was a young woman who was asleep, Herbert noticed that there was a bandage around her leg.

Herbert held the man's hand in his; the skin felt rough and worn away. When he squeezed Cassel's hand, the sick man's eyes opened and consciousness returned to him.

He turned his head to Herbert, who fell onto his back with surprise, "Who are you?" his voice was faint and scratchy.

"My name is Herbert Bermin, you saved my life."

"What are you ... talking about?"

"You were in a car crash, the rescue workers found your blood donor card, we are a perfect match, your blood saved my life; I've never been more grateful for anything." Cassel's eyes started to bulge, and then they exploded in tears. Within each sob he attempted to speak, Herbert felt it was out of happiness. But once the crying man regained himself, Herbert found that everything was completely different,

"You are wrong... sir ... I did nothing of the sort to help you. I don't know ... how long it has been, but it doesn't... matter anyway," between most of his words Cassel would pause to swallow; Herbert stopped him for a moment and then poured Cassel a glass of water. "Thank you, I must ask you, have you felt something strange since the blood transfusion?"

Herbert recalled the night before, explaining to Cassel how he was not sure of its authenticity.

"My God, it is true, **you are a wolf.**"

These words hit Herbert like a shotgun, pushing him back from the bed and making his body straighten out. Strange thoughts started to accumulate in his head, each made more sense than the one before, but all of them were things that Herbert would never have believed; before his operation. With force he grabbed onto Cassel's shoulders, screaming into his face, "What's happened to me?!"

A sudden voice from behind Herbert made him let go of Cassel, "Don't ... not until I find out how to save myself."

Herbert turned to see the girl with the bandage on her leg who had been asleep when he walked in, her eyes were distant, whoever she had been before coming to the hospital was gone. When she spoke, Herbert could only listen, though he was married an attraction came to him instantly for the woman.

"I don't know who the fuck you are, or

where I am, but I'm pretty damn sure that when that guy said, "you are a wolf," you felt the same thing I did."

Cassel spoke once more, "Your leg, you must have been bitten by him."

The woman stood there for a moment thinking, before her eyes flooded with realization and then tears. Herbert wanted to comfort her but was still too disoriented to move. It was Cassel who broke the silence once again,

"Please, both of you, there is no time for fear, before I die I need the chance to make things right," he waited until both Herbert and the woman were looking at him and then continued, "I have been a werewolf for eight months, and throughout all that time I tried to rid myself of the other. I refer to my counterpart as another mind, because that is what it was. The wolf inside of me called itself Lazarus, I discovered this after I had found a way to communicate with it. This creature desired something from me, my life. It wanted to become the dominant mind of our body, to rule over it night and day. All wolves have this feeling, and over the centuries it has acquired a name. It is the need in every wolf to thrive, it is the timber of the wolf."

Cassel stopped once again to catch his breath and sip on the glass of water, then he went on, "For eight months we both searched for the means to achieve this, a way to destroy the other half and still live. You see, that is the dilemma of all werewolves, every antidote will kill both minds. Silver bullets for instance, it doesn't matter whether you shoot the wolf or the human, both will die. But there lies the key. Right now I am on my death bed, Lazarus was killed on the night of the crash; thus I shall leave this world as well. But this time I have had, has allowed me to find a cure, to save every human who battles for their body. Please ... listen carefully."

Herbert and the woman could see that Cassel was starting to fade, the next sentences came out slowly and painfully, "Silver is somewhat scarce and expensive. Pure silver has the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of all metals, and possesses the lowest contact resistance. Silver is stable in pure air and

water, but tarnishes when exposed to air containing sulfur. To rid yourself of the wolf, you must consume the smoke that comes from tarnished silver. My theory is that the silver will poison whichever mind is not in control. If you breathe it in, your wolf will die, but if the wolf should come before you have a chance to complete these steps, then a new evil will be born. It will not have any human emotion, and no longer be a werewolf, but something worse. All that it wants to take from you is your body. Teeth will be replaced with fangs, sharpened to points that can penetrate skin with even the tiniest bit of pressure. It's skin will be covered in hair, and there is a possibility that the contours which create the nose will extend. This would be a monster, with the strength of a bear, the cunning of a wolf, and the instincts of a trained killer... behold, the moon is rising..."

And that was it, Stanford Cassel lay there dead, his eyes still opened with a small reminiscence of tears. Herbert looked at the woman with the bandage on her leg, after a few seconds she returned his stare, "My name is Linda Frostin," she said.

Herbert didn't smile, his expression rarely changed, "I'm Herbert Bermin."

"Well Herbert, as entirely unbelievable as this would have been two days ago, I'm positive that you want to cure yourself just like me."

Herbert nodded, "The hospital might have something in one of their labs, I've been here long enough to know where they are."

Frostin looked through the window into the sky; darkness had started to descend on Lookington, which meant that the moon would not hold back much longer.

Sandra Bermin was sick from searching for her husband, no trace of him could be found down any street. With her luck, he would be in the last place she checked. It just so happened that the last place she was headed for was the Lookington Hospital. With desperation and fatigue, Sandra only wished that Herbert was safe, and that he knew how much she loved him.

The sun was almost gone when she

arrived at the hospital, stopping only to hold the door open for a man walking on crutches, before continuing inside.

He had found what they were looking for, Herbert turned to Linda and smiled, "Got it."

Linda had the idea of going to the roof, where they could not be stopped, Herbert agreed. Sandra had found that a man fitting Herbert's description was admitted to the hospital as a John Doe that morning, she got the room number and headed for the elevators. When she arrived at her specified floor, Sandra began to pray that her husband was safe. The area seemed like a maze, a labyrinth of numbers and names; at last she found what she was looking for, but the room was empty.

They had reached the roof, and were already opening the jar filled with sulfur and letting the silver sprinkle into it. Herbert allowed Linda to be the first to try. Her hands shook as she reached for the jar in which she hoped the cure was contained. Closing her eyes, Linda Frostin lowered her head to the mouth of the canister; she breathed in the smoke trying desperately not to cough.

A minute went by, and then another, but nothing happened. Linda started to sob, and Herbert had to get the container from her before she dropped it. He wanted to comfort her, but before he could, the moon came. Both Herbert Bennin and Linda Frostin felt the affects of the disease that had contaminated them, the change would begin soon.

Sandra had wandered up and down the hallway and checked every male and female bathroom; it was only when she saw the trail of blood, which led to the staircase that she became sure of Herbert's presence in the hospital. Unbeknownst to her, this blood had come from the wound on Linda Frostin's leg.

The silver-sulfur fumes were still coming out of the jar, Herbert wanted to inhale them, there was always a chance that he might be saved. By now he had been forced to the floor, and his antidote was just inches out of his reach. With as much strength as he had, Herbert edged himself closer and closer to the canister. He was so focused on his own

actions, that he did not see was Linda was doing.

She stood at the ledge of the hospital, not bothering to look over the side. Her hair flew back in the wind. Perhaps it was because she had never changed to a wolf before, and this is why her transformation had not yet caused the same pain as Herbert felt. But she knew it was only a matter of time. Linda thought of her family, now deceased, she wished that another child of Frostin blood could live. But it was not meant to be; Linda Frostin closed her eyes and let the wind carry her off the building.

Herbert was unaware that this had happened, and as the hair began to sprout on him, he felt that all his hope was gone. With his last touch of effort, Herbert reached for the container, and managed not only to get hold of it but also to put his mouth over the top. Sandra Bermin burst through the door to the roof fight about then, running to her fallen husband. She struggled to get him off the ground, until she could cradle his body in her arms. He was shaking, coughing, and Sandra could see tears streaming down his face. There were sirens from the street below, where the body of Linda Frostin lay, fi-ee of the disease but also of life. Sandra could hear the security guards or police officers rushing up the steps to the roof, but she was too frightened and exhausted to move.

Another thing missing from the roof of the hospital was a werewolf, even though the moon shined brightly in an expressionless sky.

One week later...

It was late in the day as Officer Les Kermis received a statement from a man who had been through what he considered to be too much for any normal human being. After what the newspapers had called a dramatic tale in which the woman this man was apparently having an affair with had killed herself, and then a fire two days later claimed the life of his wife and burned him beyond repair.

He sat in front of Les now; there were bandages everywhere that was uncovered,

even his face was completely unseen. Les could also see that he was holding a book, although the title still eluded his sight.

"Well Mr. Bermin, I think that will do just find, I am truly sorry that I had to ask you these questions."

"Think nothing of it, you're just doing your job," he rubbed the bandages that Les could tell were over his eyes, "You know, it's not only brutal to know that Sandra is dead. But I think it's worse to go on knowing that I lived, even if my skin has been burned off." Les could only nod, he wanted to get the guy out of the station, looking at him was creating emotions that he did not want to feel.

"You really are very kind Officer Kermis, perhaps once I'm as fully recovered as I can get, you would like to join me for a drink."

Les smiled, "Certainly, that would be nice."

"Well then, I'd better be going, thank you for your sympathies."

With that the man turned and started to walk away, as he did Les noticed that his nose was stretched out forward farther than he had seen on any person. He figured that it was probably caused in the fire. Accompanying this crooked nose was another odd characteristic, he had not placed much bandage over his mouth, Les could see his teeth glint like razors from where he sat; Bermin didn't seem to notice or pretended not to care. Les also saw what book it was that Bermin held; he read the title with intrigue, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde."

Somewhere distant the sun had gone and the moon slowly began to grace the horizon.

The End



Make Me
by Lara Sophia

Transform my body into paints and make me whole

Streak my very essence of being along the colorless concrete and
give it life

Build from nature's brilliance and exaggerate its beauty

Make swirls of indigo, aqua, crimson, and violet

Let me be the sunset overhead reflected on the Earth

Make me whole

No Voice

by Donna L. Beckert

Your eyes penetrate my soul.
Who are you?

The wisdom you reflect is that of an ageless being.
Where do you come from?

You stare at me with a burning intensity.
What are you thinking?

Your loyalty is uncompromising.
Why do you care so much?

You are always available when I need you.
What makes you stay?

You listen to every word I say.
What is so interesting?

I need your presence.
Will you be here for me?



"Sleeping Beauty" Sharpie drawing By Salomon Carrasco

Tainted Window

by Tricia C. Smith

My eyes ache as I try to look
through my life's window.
Vision is blurred, by the many
corrupt, greasy smears
from hands of different races.

Small hopes of light-the only light
Is splintered by deep etchings
of pain, rejection, and embarrassment;
carved, and signed by the ones
who insist they love me.

I look deeper into my life's window
(embedded in pane)
as I'm partially blinded by my bloody tears
(I've been wounded inside)

But amidst all the layers of dust and mold-
Dished out by boyfriends,
And the "chameleon spider" over crowded webs-
The bad friends,
and everything but happiness and sanity,
I'm able to look forward to one thing-
My reflection, my only true
Family and friend.

The Silver-Plated Bum

by Bryan DeMinico

Then one of the Twelve, the one called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Matthew 26, verses 14-16

The small digital clock on my desk started to beep. This in itself was totally Pavlov because I involuntarily stood up and began to salivate due to the fact that the beeping told me it was time for lunch. My usual afternoon adventure would begin as it always did when the beeping of the clock would sound like a twenty-one gun salute. With the remembrance of those honor guards that would give their twenty-one gun salutes at the many funerals for family members, my mind would always interpret any intermittent thing as those haunting flashy sounds of reminiscing death.

Remembering what time it was, I grabbed today's newspaper that was on my desk, left my office and did not worry about locking my door because of a recent office memo that had circulated throughout the building. The memo had basically said that in order to work in a pleasurable and productive environment, all workers would have to practice trust with one another. Being a junior editor on the second floor, which was just shy of a higher intellectual arena of real persona, I had convinced myself, with help from the memo, to trust those in the office. I didn't know anyone except for maybe some of the cute women that would take pride in carefully ejecting the coffee from the lonely tin that stood in the corner next to the water dispenser.

I passed a small yet well built Chinese delivery boy just as I approached the open elevator in which he had come from. It seemed that everyone in the entire building was on a strict twenty-four hour diet

consisting of Chinese food, pizza, and those cheap health shakes that, in my opinion, are the farthest things from being healthy. It seemed to me that more Americans died as more fat was removed from food. It had to be a conspiracy. Maybe it was my attitude. It had to be my attitude for this was the day I had arranged for the meeting to take place with *him*.

I had seen him a while back when I had started eating at this new cafe that had tables out front. Remembering what my father had always said, I made it a habit of eating outside so I would get my share of fresh air that my crummy office at the publishing house never offered. Everyday I would see him walk by in the same manner. Technically you could call him a bum, but I thought of him as something else. It was sort of an odd connection that I had with people when I saw them; just by looking at the facial expressions and external actions, I would try to enter into their minds in order to find out why there was life on Earth.

After my brisk walk, I found myself standing in front of my favorite cafe. I sat down at a clean table and began to read the daily paper, which I had brought with me, while I eagerly awaited his arrival. He didn't look like a bum that would be baked by the sun all day, or sleep in puddles, or bathe in the rain, or eat out of trash bags, or hang signs around his neck. No. None of these. He looked like a sophisticated bum. And the most shocking thing about this particular bum was that he was very young. I had estimated his age as being in the early twenties. He was a young individual that had been tossed onto the streets by the troubles of life, or maybe something else. And that something is what I wanted to find out.

He didn't know I was about to invite him to my table. I was hoping he wouldn't become startled and run off. I didn't see him yet among the usual women with baby carriages, men with cigarettes, and boys with skateboards. I once again turned my

attention to the newspaper and continued to read its front page. Only the usual stories had made the front page. The first one that caught my attention was about a police standoff that had ended with a lunatic who had decided to take a few hostages at a local burger joint. The article did the usual views about the crime but stressed that the man had been tackled to the ground before being arrested. I thought to myself about the amount of tax money that would go towards his trial that would probably be held in the next decade. Sarcasm was surely on my mind as I read the next article. It was about a trial of a woman who had killed her husband in the middle of the night. The picture next to the article showed the defense lawyer standing up and waving his hands while the prosecution could be seen in the background looking depressed. The article further stated that the woman was claiming she was constantly abused and therefore her actions were just. I began to picture a husband complaining about his spaghetti dinner to his wife and the wife responding by pulling out a pistol and blowing her husband's head off.

I began to ignore the stories and nearly jumped out of my seat as I saw *him* approaching. I stood, tossed the paper on the table and trotted over to him. Gently, I tapped him on the shoulder. He slowly turned his eyes towards me with an innocent look of curiosity. "Yes?" he asked with a calm serenity that impressed me.

I stared at him just a little longer, studying the lines that surrounded his young and seemingly rebellious face. He hadn't shaved for a while. The young beard on his face almost made him look biblical in a sense because the way the hairs had formed made him appear like a wise soothsayer. "Will you join me for lunch?" I asked as I motioned my hand towards my awaiting table. I waited for what seemed like an hour for his response. He suddenly began to move past me and comfortably took a seat for himself at the table. I

followed his cue, and did the same.

Leaning back in the chair, I waited for any type of action to signal the beginning of the conversation. "Are you okay?" he asked.

I was shocked to hear something so direct. "Yes I am. Why do you ask?"

He pointed his finger at the newspaper that was placed on top of the table. "This trash would make even an undertaker regurgitate." He began to laugh at his own dark humorous remark. I did not find any humor in it except for the underlying stupidity of the comment, but gave a small smile of laughing acceptance.

"What's your name?" I asked. I figured it was a simple question that he would not mind answering.

"Name?" He raised his eyebrows as if something extremely shocking had just happened. "What's in a name?" He folded his arms and leaned back in the chair as if he had just scored a victory against me. "Oh, and another thing."

"What is it?" I had to know what this last concern of his would reveal about my current situation.

"Is picking a bum off the sidewalk and having a lunch that doesn't seem to be anywhere on this table some sort of sick fantasy of yours mister?"

These questions were killing me: only questions and nothing more. No substance to what I was doing. I didn't know what I was doing. What was I doing? "Hey waiter!" I yelled.

After a few seconds passed, a small thin man with a Hawaiian style shirt walked out and approached the table. "Yes?"

"I want two burger platters and two bottled waters."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

The waiter walked away to put the order in. Meanwhile, I was left with *him* staring at me, laughing with his eyes.

"My name is Judas," he said with a voice that penetrated my soul.

"Okay," I replied. I was a little shocked as my mind began to process his name throughout my memory banks. My mind shot back to the time when I had inadvertently watched about five minutes of a particular Christian channel on my television set; a preacher was talking about the one name that no one was dare named. I had just been introduced to that particular name.

"What's yours?" asked Judas in a relaxed manner.

"What?" I questioned awkwardly as I was still trying to evaluate my current situation.

"You do have a name? Right?" Judas asked with sarcasm in his tone.

"My name is James." My answer shot out at him because I was aware of my foolishness that seemed to be leaking out of my ears and oozing down my spinal column, which explained that tingly feeling that made me a bit uncomfortable.

"Me Judas," he said tapping his chest. He then pointed at me and said, "You James."

I stared at him and realized his sense of humor. It was as if he was purposely trying to make me remember those days in Sunday School.

"I guess we are both brothers now. Get it? Disciples!" Judas gave out a very eerie laugh that soon turned into something quite comical. It reminded me of a trip to the circus when I was around nine years of age. "So what do you want to talk about?"

I thought about the question for a split second. "Life," I replied, having the word roll off my tongue in a rehearsed manner.

Judas began to laugh. "Life is the fault of the people, my friend."

"What?" This guy was confusing me now. "What do you mean? Life is what you make of it."

He leaned forward, rested one elbow on the table, and planted his cheek into his hand. "Oh really, James?" He began to hum a toneless hum that was obviously his way

of preparing for the next sentence. "Let me explain something about life, James."

I wasn't about to let Judas continue with more of his mind games. "No!" I said with a firm tone. "I want you to tell me your background first. Where are you from? Who are you really? Are you educated?"

Judas gave up his relaxing position and slammed his fist on the table. "Why do you ask me these questions?" Judas made a short pause. "I shall answer you, James. For your information, I am twenty-one years old. Directly after high-school, I went to Harvard after being offered what you new-age men call full scholarships these days."

"You mean a full-ride?" I asked with uncertainty.

"Correct."

Just then the waiter with the Hawaiian style shirt came out with our burger platters and two waters. He carefully set the plates in front of us and broke the seals on our bottled waters in an attempt to probably earn a little extra on the tip. "Will that be all?" the waiter asked.

"It's great, thanks," I said as the waiter turned and walked away. I then turned my attention towards Judas and signaled him to continue his story.

"Well," Judas said. "I went to Harvard and began to major in law because my old man wanted me to."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be! I quit that college because it seemed everything finally came together in my mind and caused me to look at life and realize that life is not so lively. So you want to talk about life? Okay buddy, let's start the intellectual battle for humanity."

I stared down at my burger and decided to listen rather than to eat at the moment.

"Continue, Judas."

Judas took his water and removed the cap. Calmly, he drank a couple of sips from the clear plastic bottle. He then returned the bottle to its place on the table, and looked at me. "Life is prevention, my friend."

"What do you mean?" Judas was

confusing me a little.

"Life is prevention. No two ways about it. I learned the hard way. I was forced into a life with so much conflict and trouble that the only thing that I concerned myself with was taking care of those problems and trying to clear away my troubles." Judas took a deep breath and looked up into the sun for a quick second, allowing its golden rays to reflect on his face.

"So you lost out on life in a way?" I asked while attempting to accept the hard truth that Judas had finally found. Judas was a special man for he had truly found life's most disturbing secret. "Right?"

"No James, I did not, but the entire human race lost out and still is losing out to this very minute."

"You have to make life what you want it to be, Judas." I could feel my blood pumping as the conversation was becoming a sacred thing of recognition. It was something that the history books should have covered when the foundation of education had been established.

"You can't make life anything because life makes you. It is just like that filthy paper in front of you about rape, murder and politics. These things rip at our minds and cause the society that man has made to control our existence and make us lose out on our own individual perspectives and goals."

Judas was a real intellect. He was very intelligent, but he was too intelligent. All through his life I could see that he took everything for what it was really worth. He looked right past the decorations of life and went straight for the core of things. He saw the core in its most raw state, and realized all the troubles of mankind. "There is always love, Judas."

"Love?" His eyes widened as if they were preparing for a flow of tears to emit from them. He tensed up his facial muscles and controlled himself from his emotions. "I remember a girl that I devoted my life to."

"You were married?" Neither of us had

touched our meals yet, and I was so into the conversation that food was not on my mind.

"No, I was not married. I was in love with a girl for a long time. It made me do crazy things like pump iron like crazy and try to look like a movie star. I did all this for a girl that didn't even know I was alive. We would cross paths sometimes, but I knew there would never be a chance in hell to pursue my dream of love. This girl-thing made my imagination soar even more until I realized it was a lost cause"

My God. I was listening to the story of life itself. Judas knew too much about mankind, and the secrets of heaven were too much for his human soul to bear. "So you never got to express love," I stated.

"I am not done yet, James. As life progressed and age brought about young beauty in her, I realized something horrible."

"Was she attractive, Judas?"

"She personified beauty."

Judas was reeling me in with his story. Every syllable he uttered resonated within my mind. "Continue, Judas."

"Life destroyed her and my dream of love. The last piece of information I remember in Harvard before leaving is something I learned in one of my psychology classes. A good sixty percent of kids are fucking in their adolescence all before eighteen years of age."

"Yes, Judas. It is a scary statistic facing our world today. What does that have to do with your lost love situation?"

"My love situation was affected because that filthy statistic had invaded my life and my dream of loving someone. This girl that I was so compelled towards would walk around like she knew she was beautiful. The best dresses she wore. The best of everything because she knew guys would always look her way. I was proud of her because she had the strength to shrug the statistics of her age group away. But one day, I looked at her, and realized that she had been tainted. She had given up her

strength and spirit to join the world of those that have to live with the internal mistakes of life. People will say that it rubs off and you forget about those mistakes, but that is all bullshit. Those young kids. That's right! They are a bunch of kids forced to screw up in life at an early age because this society forces things to happen too early. And then those same kids have to look at their husband or wife in the future and look into their eyes and lie when they say 'I love you.' It is a lie when they say that because they also love all their mistakes in the past."

"What if they are not married? You just happen to look at life that way. What happens if someone isn't married, Judas?" I felt enraged as my own life was being deteriorated. Even more true and disturbing to my own life was that everything he said was true.

"If they are not married then they have to look at themselves."

I sat still, looking at Judas. I needed to get back to work. I thought about that very thought and realized that work was preventing me from life. Everything prevented me from life. "I have to go, Judas. It was nice talking to you." I stood while I reached for my wallet. I then removed and tossed twenty bucks on the table.

Judas stood up and gave a small nod. "Bye James. I hope this was a pleasant conversation for you."

"Yea it was." The words barely made it out of my mouth. I was feeling a little stunned and shocked as well.

Judas walked away down the sidewalk. I watched as he made it to the corner of the street and began to look both ways before crossing. I slowly turned away and began to walk back to the publishing house. Slowly, I watched my feet for a moment then looked up as a pretty lady dressed in business attire walked by. We both exchanged a quick glance and nothing more. I then heard a shocking noise echo behind me. It was like metal running along

concrete and then the sound of a car coming to a screeching halt. I gave a simple glance over my shoulder and saw a group of people running up to something on the ground. My peripheral vision then caught the group of people beginning to crowd around that something. I stopped walking and slowly turned all the way around so I could clearly see what was happening. It looked like some sort of accident or something of the sort. It was right next to the corner where I had last seen Judas standing. My heart began to freeze and my spine felt as if it was no longer in my back. I had this shooting burning feeling penetrate my stomach just before my ears began to ring from the chaotic beeping that was next to the accident. What was going on? My footsteps quickly became louder as I ran down the sidewalk and up to the accident. My God. Someone had been hit. My arms reached into the crowd of people and I pried myself a space. Faces surrounded me and I became confused. My eyes slowly ignored the many faces and began to focus on the one belonging to the man who had just been hit. It was Judas. My God almighty. "Why!?" I shouted, jumping to my knees. My hands cupped Judas' head and I held his bloody body close to mine. Tears were involuntarily ejecting from my eyes.

People stared at me with wonder of why I would be crying over a bum. "Hey mister, he's dead," said one of the spectators.

I laughed to myself. Judas was not dead. He was alive in all of us. Alive in all of our troubles and problems. Alive in all of our mistakes. He was very much alive in me now as his red as wine blood poured into my receiving hands.





"Keywest Sunset" Black and white photography by Donna Beckert

What Is Art?

by Nadyne Forbes

If art is life then we are living in a dimension of signatures scribbled in our souls that shows in the way we move ... our heads, our feet, the rhythms our hearts keep in each beat ... Signatures scribbled in the Earth's spin and the Sun's beam, even the way this umbrella leans in my drink ... I think they call it sex on the beach and it tastes so sweet I don't even notice I'm getting drunk ... Whether passive or blunt, art is life ... And we are living ...

So, what is art? Art is my imagination, and yours too, told in stories portrayed on canvas and other forms of medium. It's the blessed language of spiritualism and emotion. It is the sound, smell, taste, and touch of laughter, screams, engine roars, thunder, love, teardrops, and life, translated into a form, which is visual. To me, art is only found by perception. Constant perception, then, grows into appreciation.

I see art and art class from a psychological point of view. I truly appreciate learning what is on the artist's mind while s/he is creating a particular piece. I like being able to understand all the messages being sent to me. Those "records of energy" tell history in a way that interests the youngest to the most mature minds depending on whether we give it a chance.

Can I speak to you for a minute in tongues engaged in a French kiss? Could one even speak of art in a form that is other than poetic? To know art is to love art, and to love art is to caress it. If you ask me what art is, I wouldn't know any other way to respond.



"Self portrait" Colored paper with conte crayon by Rebekah E. Latham

The wRites of Spring - Fiction Contest Winner

Carry the Zero by Virgil P. Virga Jr.

As she sauntered over to me in her slow, sexy, woman strut I slurped my vodka-soda through a brown striped cocktail straw and peered through my half-shut eyelids straight down towards Sue's breasts.

"What's up sellout?" She muttered, swaying side-to-side, drunken, in a tight one-piece floral print dress and tall white open-toed platform shoes.

"Absolutely nothing" I muttered to her, in my usual, laid back, monotone slur. "Nothing except your breasts" I confidently told her, "ya know they've grown since last you graced me with your presence."

"Cool prick, attractive intro, nice frikken' breasts? What kind of shit is that?"

"Such a sophisticated mouth you've got, where did you get that vocabulary? I can see we have been attending school regularly haven't we, oh intelligent one?"

I have always busted Sue's ass. I've known her since fourth grade, and we were both truly nerdy clear up until high school, not any more though. Sue can't keep the guys off of her and women bewilder me, their petite minds at least; their bodies naked. partially clothed, clothed or otherwise, I love. The way women let themselves be manipulated has always boggled my mind, sort of like the way birds disappear when it rains. Where do they go? Is there some hidden, rainy day bird sanctuary?

"Fuck you Garritt! My vocabulary is fine, god, what is always up your self titled, intellectual ass?"

Her remark, being somewhat interesting, shocked me halfway into the crunching of a vodka-soaked ice

cube, so much though that I hacked it back into my transparent pint glass.

"Impressive Sue, but do you actually know what an intellectual is, you pre-Madonna tease?"

I knew that comment was all I needed to prompt her fine ass to shuffle out of my bar space. It is not at all the case that I do not like Sue I actually dig her tremendously. It's just that when girls are talking with you all the other women, encasing super-charged minds, stay out of arms reach, like the passenger side window crank on my Mom's old, green, wood sided station wagon, you just can't seem to be able to grab the crank to roll it down while your driving with your seat belt on, you just end up staring at it teasing it with your finger tips.

I've never been one of the shyest guys in the bar, not since I've had a chance to study the bar scene, and what a high-class ecosystem it is. Drunk sloppy sluts, sticky alcohol soaked floors, wenches and disillusioned pricks launching cigarette butt, one after another on to the linoleum tile, while they drop spent matches into nearby ashtrays. As uneducated as the patrons of most bars seem, they are not, they are worse.

On any given night I am usually sloshed on a bottle, bottle and a half of any assortment of cheap wine, a few beers, and an onslaught of numerous mixed drinks, as I am this evening, ingesting America's nightmare. I stand in a corner solitary, smoking a bummed menthol cigarette, tilting back a pint of booze with a splash of color. I am switching my attention back and forth from the NBA game on the TV set to Listette at the bar- being pawed by some super freak, steroid, meathead. Lisette is on her fifth shot, sixth beer. All of Listette's 105 pounds aren't

wearing much except muscle boy's anxious hands, and his cavernous, ignorant mouth. Lisette does this often; soon she'll escort the Hulk home to her house and show him her new rotisserie oven. The odd thing is Lisette teaches first grade. I myself have always found this funny, Ironic, and sad all at once. Now I know why we always had so much quiet time in elementary school, my teacher wasn't punishing us, she had a hangover, and who in the hell wants to deal with thirty screaming first graders when your head feels as if you've got heavy construction on inside of it. I sway my attention back to the television screen as Tim Hardaway penetrates, pulls up, and shoots it right in John Stark's face. Funny that's probably the same thing the Hulk is going to do to Lisette later on. Back towards the other side of the bar near the corner pocket of the pool table Joey is leaning in on some unsuspecting prey. I flick my cigarette butt onto the linoleum tile floor, put my empty glass on a high top table next to a vacant ash tray and head off to the bar for yet another installation of booze.

Waiting in line for the next available pisser, I stand patiently but painfully. My bladder feels as though it will burst into ten million little pieces inside of me, like the Beaver eating a few bags of pop rocks, drinking a glass of Pepsi and eventually popping like a baking soda volcano. Quietly I suck my 90 proof freedom up into my mouth and listen to the two bumbling fools eagerly emptying their penises into adjacent urinals. One drinking a top shelf Margarita, wearing a black pin striped suit with expensive black leather loafers, distinguished, cleanly shaven, obviously drunk, but lonely looking. The other toting around a Bud bottle, has his black sun damaged hair pulled back into a sloppy pony tail

fastened with a plain rubber band, an old Vinny Testaverde Hurricanes jersey, black faded tight jean shorts, and a pair of sandals semi covering the ugliest pair of chewed on feet in the bar. The two jaw back and forth about the amount of ample breasts filling the crowded pub. I realize that one drunk -is as useless as the next, regardless his preference in alcohol, his choice of clothes, or in his education or lack there of. Simply put if these two fine specimens of society, one fat and worn, one most likely married and cheating, were to come face to face outside this bar nothing but status animosity would come out of a conversation. Then I slurp the rest of my elixir down, unzip, then moan as if ejaculation is taking place, hear someone slur, "I guess the reason they call it a cocktail is cause you drink so you could get cock or tail."

And I realize I am also a reject of some went bad sociological study, just as pathetic as

Mr. Pinstripe and Mr. Ponytail.

Back at the bar I order myself a rum and coke, heavy on the rum, light on the coke.

"Two fifty," the bartender drools. While pulling a money wad from the left front pocket of my black corduroys I wonder if the middle aged woman hiding behind the bar and an assortment of puss filled skin blemishes is informing me about the price of the drink or her weight. Assuming she was referring to the price of the drink because she was well over two fifty, I smacked a five spot into her hoof, did a quick right-footed 180-degree pivot, and slowly started strutting through he bar. The booze erased my inhibitions; I was ten foot tall and bullet proof. I felt like I was showing off as if I were doing a fundamentally sound breaststroke through a sea of sexually frustrated intoxication. Navigating myself as best

I could, three quarters bent on booze stoking the crowd. I passed big Johnny Blanks. Johnny Blanks was donning a tight white tee, jeans, and a freshly released from jail grin, all while acting as the bar's pharmacist. All service under the counter, of course.

"What's up Johnny Blanks?" I said, while trying my best not to shower his face with my words, though he probably didn't get much wash time in the joint.

Johnny's glazed over; glassy, struggling eyes crawled up from his pill bottle eventually meeting my line of vision.

"Garritt, what's up dog?" In classic stoner dialect, "dude I just repped with some good green man, and these, two bucks for you man, the good pills, blue bars."

"Shit why you gotta tell me that Johnny? I'm dusted as it is."

He solidified my thoughts that Jail really teaches one their lessons.

Johhny Blanks

- @ Speeding
- @ Driving without a license
- @ Assault on a police officer
- @ *Possession of narcotics with intent to sell*

I thought for exactly two seconds then pulled a tennis ball size of crumpled- George Washingtons out of my pocket and smacked them down into Johnny Blank's palm, as if shaking hands, not to be conspicuous. He then tossed a small blue pill down into the front pocket of my see through green bowling shirt.

"Thanks a lot brother," I quipped as I walked away towards Joey by the corner pocket, "hey man don't get locked up within the next two hours, I might be back."

The purchase of this pill was not at

all for my own benefit; I figured I would be doing an ex-con a favor by helping to get rid of his stash so when the cops call he's clean. With a stumble and a smile I juttet off, but not before I tossed the whole blue pill into my gob, playfully, like it was a Mento.

I reached Joey's small plot of bar space shortly after pinballing myself off of unsuspecting whores and rednecks. Joey was still digging in deep on this naive shorthaired brunette. You see Joey has been around the block more times than the average twelve year old's bicycle. Joey is a good looking guy, so it really didn't matter much what came out of his mouth, though he is somewhat intelligent and by coincidence one of my best friends for as far back as I can recall. By this point the clueless brunette had been coaxed to slide up in between Joey's blue denim clad legs, up hard towards his crotch. Actually quite cute, the nose pierced, long tan legged floozy was by now totally smitten on Joe. While accidentally staring down at the huge jugs attached to her chest I asked, "Joe, who is this little number you've got camping on your crotch?"

She proceeded to bore, "My name is Cammie, um I like go to state, where um do you go? Joey says he goes to um JC for chemical engineering when he is not running his own business, I that is sooooo good. Do you go to JC too, if you don't go to school that is okay too, but the reason I am asking is becau..."

My mind started to flicker off, I kept noticing her breasts and Joey chugging down a jet-fueled Margarita while rolling his eyes. Do some girls hide a motor somewhere about their mouths to keep them running? They seem to chum with the energy and annoying noise power of a ceiling fan with a few loose blades. I assume the

engine takes place of a properly functioning cerebellum, and it must be a strong little engine, that runs on clear air.

"..... and so now that Janet Jackson got a belly ring, and Will Smith is married, we can um , easily like compare her voice to Paula Abdul or um, Allanis Morrisette's cause she is now um, like basically white."

Feeling cross-eyed and audibly nauseous, shifting my body's weight from my left Reef flip-flop to the right I asked Ms. Cammie the stellar linguist,

Ccusing as much energy that you do perfecting the art of ignorance, where in the hell do you find time to breathe, while your not forgetting to think?"

Cammie slowly drew her right index finger up to her sexy full lips and began nibbling on her red, slightly chipped fingernail, while all the while wearing the look of an experienced wind watcher. I figured an answer from Cammie sometime soon was as far off as a good major network sitcom. So I matter-of-factly saluted slosh-eyed Joe in departure, heaved down my stumble juice, and headed back to the big, rectangular, mahogany, TV toting liquor dispenser we all call the bar, because more is better.



The wRites of Spring - Poem Contest Winner

The Blue Samba

by Virgil P. Virga Jr.

Stretched white canvas lies across stilted lengths.
The serenity of a blue stained sky spills into the crack of a broken windowpane.
Her eyes and pores strain to open and allow the day to take them captive.
Then linens fall onto a wooden floor, splintering a spark of passion.
The wooden floor screams with each step of an uncovered heel.
The foreplay of a final yawn fertilizes her palette.
Breathe now brethren, for an artist is born.
Slow, calculated strokes, penetrating the canvas.
With each breath the piece takes form.
The nude painter easily wipes the orange streak of paint
from her nipple with her pinkie, as if teasing it with art.
Her whole canvas gyrates.
The symmetry she has beckoned evokes the passion she harbors deep within.
The sands of time run through her soft, tan hourglass figure
like a sinfully cool glass of lemonade on a beaming July afternoon;
entering her obsessive lips,
gliding slowly and directly down past her perfectly formed neck,
easing freely down, fondling the cups of her exposed, white breasts,
caressing her navel,
and hugging the inside of her hips before running down the arches of her feet,
the same feet whose heels are covered with gesso.
This artist cranes her neck upwards in ecstasy,
up, as if summoning inspiration.
She sighs a sigh of elegance as a bead of salty sweat tears off the bottom of her
bent elbow.
This artist's arm then moves in beats against the easel.
Her eyes shift violently making the holes in the canvas pant for more,
and the sun rays from the serene blue day dance on her fingertips.
Her brush then strokes the canvas again.
Now the world will sleep easily this evening,
for an artist has performed.

The wRites of Spring - Essay Contest Winner

A Day At The Office

by Dana Calderaro

I begin the same ritual everyday, at the same time, with the preciseness of a well programmed machine. Lunch at eleven, and shower at eleven thirty, then uniform preparation. I gingerly take it from its temporary resting-place in the dryer. The shirt is littered with wrinkles and they will not escape the steam of my super-sonic double-decker iron. It is a beast itself, with a scorching and thick outer edge of metal. The placement of the uniform is strategic for the most effective wrinkle elimination. The steam rises to my face, caressing my pores with warmth. The iron hisses gently as I run it along the creases of the shirt creating tight razor-like edges. The pants will suffer the same fate. Starch is an essential element in getting that precise firmness in my uniform. It is heavy and sprayed to the point of saturation. It is wonderful to watch the dampness disappear, leaving behind only a-smooth surface. My uniform is my armor, a symbol of perfection in an imperfect world. It is a shield from fault, a wall to separate me from the inmates that surround me. So begins the day at the office.

I walk up the long corridor, it is a tunnel into another world that most people want to forget exists. The time-clock beeps and I await the opening of the iron door. It is cold and mechanical, like me. I leave my fears and doubts on the other side. The slamming of the metal door confirms that I have walked in with only my bare hands to survive the day. As I walk to the first gate, my keys dance on my leg like mini tambourines reminding me that they can be my escape or my death. The second gate clicks and lets me into their world. I am greeted with news that two

inmates have died; one man hung himself in his cell and the other was a lifer with cancer. He died in a tiny room with no windows, no family, and no dignity. I had just seen him the day before. His feeble shaking hands were barely able to hold a plastic cup. At that time, I recall thinking how painfully sad it would be to die in solitude. We sometimes forget that life is still fragile even in the grips of prison. I pass the dining hall where inmates prepare soap-laced meals for all of us hard working officers. They say that your stomach toughens up after a couple of years, mine never did. A selection from the vending machine will suffice tonight, because the pizza looks worse than road-kill. The training sergeant informs me that a ten-inch shank-homemade knife-was found on an inmate worker in the kitchen. We are all reminded that for every knife that is found, there are at least a hundred that are lingering in prison cells. My day at the office is just beginning.

I run a cell-block that houses one hundred and twenty inmates, all male. They watch my every move, as I watch them. I cannot see everything like the gangs, gambling, drug sales, and shank making. I have no weapons, only a set of keys and a red alert button. If things go down, I am required to lock the cell-block down, with me in it. I should lock myself in a cell to keep the inmates from getting to me, or my keys. There are only eight female officers in the prison, and I don't really stand a chance. Would you like to have my day at the office?

After a dinner of Raisinets and a Pepsi, I make my way back to the housing unit. An alert tone goes out as an officer is in trouble on a unit across the prison. There are only sixty officers to super-vice and control these two

thousand inmates, so all the officers respond to help. The sidewalks are shoveled from the three feet of daily snow, and the air is bitter. The temperature is eighteen degrees and the run is the length of two football fields. My chest and heart are stabbing with pain from the air and the desperate voice of an officer. I arrive with numb legs and burning lungs and still manage to gather strength to fight. We wrestle the inmate into cuffs, and he is taken to the hole-solitary confinement for three months-assaulting an officer does not come cheap. It is an hour before I am able to stop coughing and catch my breath. This is a busy day at the office.

My shift finishes up with me walking up on a fight between two inmates. They quickly part ways to avoid me, and the unit becomes quiet. Things are funny in prison; it is when you can hear a spider fart that you need to worry. I am alone when I pursue the bloody inmate to his cell. My heart pounds so heavily I feel like he can see it through my vest. I gather all that I have in my tiny frame, and talk him into custody. As I'm bringing him down, I call for backup for the other inmate. The block is silent with inmates watching me. I am scared, but they will never see that-because it is enclosed in an impenetrable uniform-and masked by my anger. Anger because they disrespected the block, the authority, and the rules. Both will spend a month in the hole, and lose everything they worked for the last couple of years. It was a disagreement over wet laundry. My day doesn't really end there; retaliation is a possibility and a reality. Call it a day, and a good one, because I went home alive. Or maybe it's just another day at the office, *my office*.





"Many Faces" Pencil drawing by Curtis Robinson

Hereafter

by Jenny Stewart

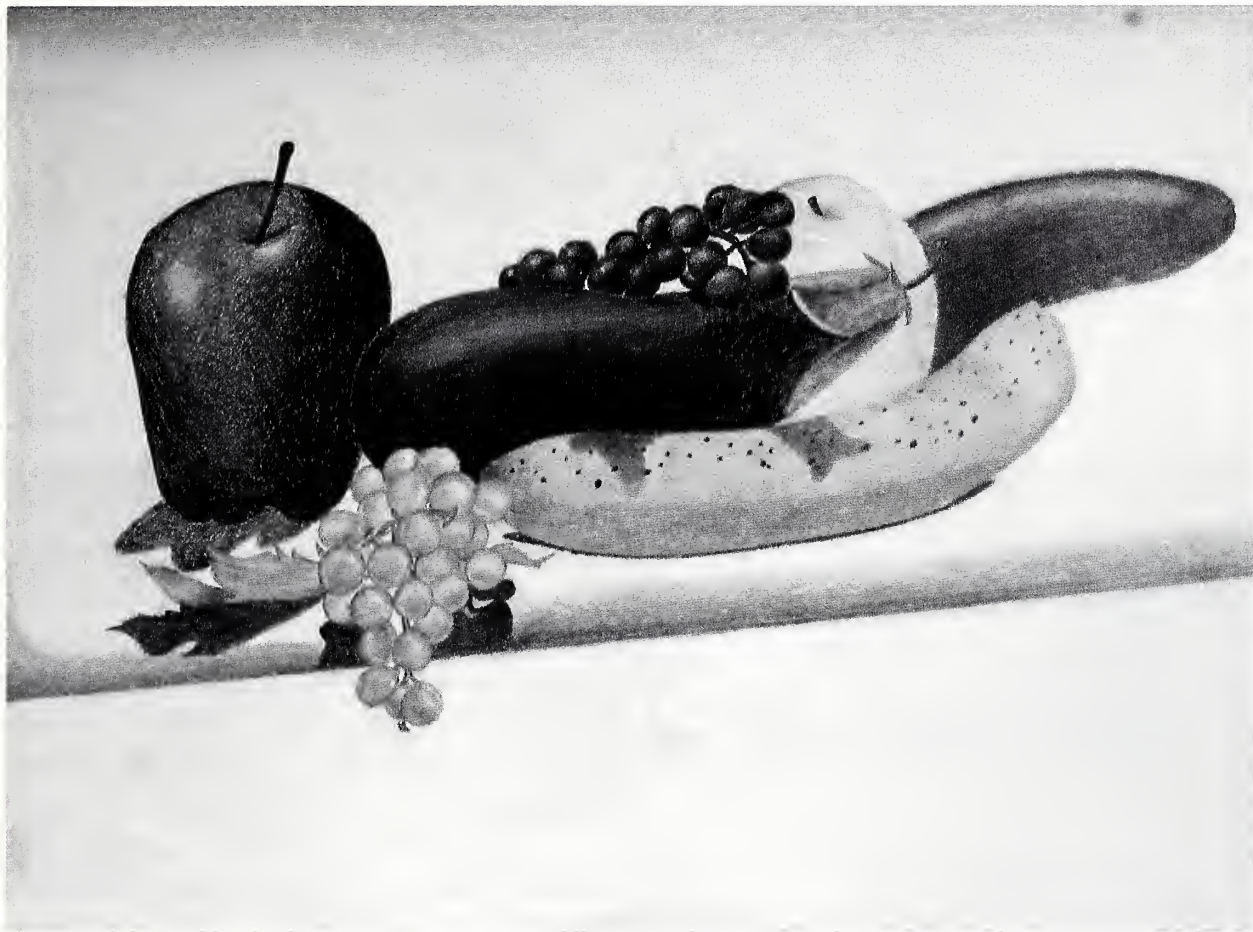
As I fall within the precipice, I'm unable to bray my pain, for my palsied mind has now left everything behind. As I fall into the inevitable darkness, only one thought clutches my mind. If only I could reach that light, although it is not mine. It belongs to something else, but still I pray as I hope in vain that it will reach me in time, before the darkness consumes my mind and swallows my soul within due time.

I hear the rattling of the walls, like the sound of tin against cast iron, and I laugh within myself as the walls begin to shatter. A metallic rain bursts from the twilight gloom of the walls, showering me in stingingly cool matter and immersing me in a bath of crimson lather.

With skin now scoured, I am pulled into a realm darker than what I had perceived as black. A cold, hard wind of nothingness envelops me, as I am held atop a platform that I can't seem to grasp. At least I'm no longer plummeting through that horrible abyss. Now I just lie here huddled in a warm crimson mass. My flesh, raw and ragged, embedded with splinters and shreds from that ill-fated mishap.

Yet now I sense that the beautiful body that I once possessed and was allied with has now become my enemy, imprisoning me, holding me firm in my place, and punishing me every time I try to escape. Although as I begin to wonder why it reprimands me so, I remember that I'm incapable of moving my feet to walk, so why does it punish me if there's not even a chance of my escape?

Then I realize I'm unable to open my mouth to scream, and I'm unable to speak, yet I just want to ask why this is happening to me. As self-pity fills this gro-



"Cluster of Fruit" Pencil drawing by Basheera Hassanali

*Traveling Across Country with
Five Cats and the Madman or the
Road from Hell to Hell*

by Kathy Curtin

It was a beautiful, warm day. The gray sky that we had grown accustomed to over the last few months was blue again. It had been a long winter. I had been battling bronchitis for almost three months and I had a lingering cough. My boyfriend Dennis and I loaded the last of our belongings into the yellow Ryder truck. Our pick-up was already loaded onto the car-carrier attached to the back. Finally, we were ready to load our most treasured possessions, our five cats, and hit the road. They were accustomed to the rituals that take place before moving. We had nonchalantly moved around the house, gathering the last of our belonging, pretending that we were just going about our normal routines, but they knew. Inevitably, they saw the cat carriers, and quickly attempted their escape. We managed to grab Sid and Goober and shove them into the carriers without much of a hassle. Ophelia was a little more difficult, refusing to get into the carrier, so I had to carry her out to the car in my arms, giving SweetBone and Possum time to disappear. SweetBone weighs around 20 pounds and is relatively lazy, so finding him wasn't too hard. Possum was another story. It took an hour just to locate her, then another 20 minutes to try to get her out of the tiny little hole that she had managed to squeeze herself into. She wasn't falling for treats or sweet talking, so it came down to trying to wiggle my arms into the hole far enough to grab her. Finally, even Possum was loaded in and we were on our way. They all glared at

us, curled up together on the mattress we had laid out for their comfort. Little did they know, this wasn't a local trip to the vet, we were embarking on a four day drive across country.

The streets were wet from the melting snow. The huge pine trees swayed in the warm breeze as we drove down Highway 50 and headed for the California-Nevada border. We were leaving one of the most beautiful places on earth; but for us, Lake Tahoe had been poverty with a view.

The first few hours of a road trip are always fun. I sat in the passenger seat as Dennis drove...Since I didn't have my license yet, he would be doing all of the driving and I would navigate. We talked about what we were going to do when we got to New York. We took video as we crossed into Nevada from California. We planned to capture our trip by taking video of us in each state.

The first night started off easy. We pulled into the parking lot of a Wal-Mart, but we didn't stay for long. I was just about to fall asleep when Dennis announced that he couldn't sleep there. We were back on the road. My eyes were rolling to the back of my head, and when I tried to focus on the road, I would see people walking on the dark, deserted road. I warned Dennis not to hit them.

"Just go to sleep," he suggested, but I felt too guilty.

I tried to listen to the radio. In Utah, 80's Heavy Metal is still on the Top 40. It was a change from the same 5 songs that every radio station played over and over again; not really a good change, but then again, when your driving down roads that all look the same, any change is good.

Finally, we pulled over to the side of the road and parked next to some tractor trailers. I tried to sleep on the mattress that was propped up on the narrow area above the cab of the truck, but it was too cold with the wind; so I curled up in a blanket on the floor. It wasn't the most comfortable spot, but I could have managed. The problem was when the truck stopped moving, the cats started. First it was the crunching of their food which seemed to echo through the inside of the truck, then the lapping up of the water. Of course, after they had some food and water, then they were off to the litter box with their seemingly endless scratching and digging. It was a vicious cycle, repeated five times, and just when I thought they were all finished, then came the mad dash from one end of the truck to the other and my body right in the middle of the run way.

Somehow, I managed to fall asleep, perhaps it was sheer exhaustion that finally kicked in. When we woke in the morning, we found out that we had only been a few miles from a rest stop, and headed there to use the rest rooms. When I looked into the mirror, it didn't matter that I had bags under my eyes or that my hair was in one huge knot, there were scratches from one end of my face to the other.

The next night was much better. First of all, both Dennis and I had started smoking again, saying that we would quit again when we got to New York. Cigarettes always make driving much easier.

We found a motel that allowed pets. We neglected to say how many pets we had, but since they didn't ask, we didn't tell. We were able to take showers and get

a good nights sleep. I was able to untangle my hair and braid it into two long braids that would remain in my hair for the rest of the trip. We headed out bright and early, back on the road.

"Are we going the right way?" Dennis asked a few miles into our third day of driving. I tried to decipher where exactly we were on the map.

"Yeah, I think so," I said, not really sure. Finally I saw a sign that we were entering Colorado. "We're entering Colorado and look there's buffalo on the mountain." I said and started to laugh. They weren't real buffalo on the mountain but flat cut outs made of wood or something. But Dennis wasn't laughing.

"We're not supposed to go through Colorado," Dennis said.

I quickly grabbed the map again, "Okay, turn around, we're going the wrong way."

For the next few hours it was pretty quiet, until the truck started smoking. It was at mile marker 191 in Wyoming when we pulled over, unhooked the pick-up from the car carrier, loaded the cats into the front seat with us, and headed for the nearest gas station. It was in a town called Rock Springs which pretty much consisted of the gas station. We called the Ryder Truck company and returned to the truck to wait for them to send someone out.

We spent the next few hours unloading our stuff from one truck and into the other. Finally we were on the road again.

The next night we found a truck stop to sleep at. A toothless woman came out of nowhere and stuck her face into the window, scaring the hell out of us. When we told her we were planning on stopping for the night, she directed us where to

park. I couldn't do another night on the floor, so I crawled onto the mattress and nearly froze to death from the wind that whipped violently against the front of the truck.

And then we were driving again. I thought the driving would never end. My ass hurt from sitting. My lungs hurt from chain smoking. I couldn't listen to "One of Us" by Joan Osborne one more time. I longed for the 80's heavy metal that they played in Utah. I was losing my mind.

"We're gonna get pulled over," Dennis warned in Ohio. I looked around, oblivious that there was a police car right behind us. And he was right. Our crime, we were told by the cop, was that we had driven over the white line on the side of the road. The real crime was that we had a California license plate on the truck.

The "good" cop came over to me and looked in the window.

"How ya doing," he asked, all smiles. This guy was my friend. I had seen enough episodes of Cops to know exactly what was going on here.

"Good," I replied.

"So where ya headed?"

"New York," I said, through the side mirror, I could see Dennis sitting in the back-seat of the police car. I wanted to say, "the same place he told you" or maybe tell him somewhere completely different.

"Do you mind if we bring the dogs around the truck?"

I told him about the cats in the back, but he assured me that the dogs didn't have to go in the truck, the cats would be fine. So I said, "Sure."

It didn't matter, the dogs found nothing, we got a warning about driving on the white line, and we were all on our way.

"So what did the guy ask you?" Dennis asked when he returned to the driver's seat.

"Same thing he asked you," I responded.

"What do you mean?"

"He only wanted to see if our stories matched," I said.

"Ohhh," was Dennis's response, finally realizing what had just taken place. I don't like the show, Cops. I watch it because Dennis loves it. I would have thought he would have picked up something from it.

The rest of the trip was pretty boring. We only turned on the video camera to catch a glimpse of us entering each new state, but there was no commentary. We didn't care at that point.

We finally got to New York, and I directed Dennis, without problem, to my parents house. Unfortunately, my family wasn't expecting us until the next night and everyone was asleep. We stood outside for ten minutes, ringing the doorbell, throwing little stones at my I sister's window, trying to wake someone up. Finally, we had to get back into the truck and drive to a pay phone, call my parents and get someone to open the door for us. And then, finally, our road trip was over. Was it worth it? NO! It took me only a few days to remember all of the reasons. I had left New York in the first place. If I could endure another four days of driving, I'd go back, but I can't. Not yet.





"Zen" Watercolor, inkwash and ebony pencil by Mike Owens

It was Only Just a Dream

by Louis Anthony Brennan

Smelling fresh brewed coffee with sugar and cream,
Is the best way to start the day after a scary dream.

The fire alarm rings, we've got a code one,
We rush out the station before breakfast is done.

It's a warehouse fire with people trapped inside,
It brings back memories of the Fireman that died.

We pull up on the scene; the fire is spreading fast,
We have to make a move, before too much time has passed.

My bell is going off, I'm running low on air,
I'm trying to scream out loud, "Is anyone in here?"

I'm looking at my gauge; it's reading 5 psi,
All I start to wonder is, "Am I going to die?"

I can't see a thing, I can't even shout,
I gasp my final breath before I finally pass out.

I somehow open my eyes by the smell of coffee and cream,
I finally just realized it was only just a dream.



"Snakes" Pencil drawing by Tony Wallace II

GIRL

by Michelle Becker

Dream - you are the sunset terrorist
We had all these years to break
Dream - you never looked behind
But I knew all along
The underground would be your fall

The rust sank and melded into blood
You always acted so toxic
Vibrant dance within the dream
Yes you always acted so toxic

Dream - you sculpted the black poison cup
Your glass left scars in my brain
Dream - you always stole the cake
But I knew all along
The cave was your innocent home

The coal burned and dusted your eyes
You always were fake inside
Silencer knows more than the killer
Yes you always were fake inside

Dream - you are the hooker in wet pearls
You stole this blanket in winter
Dream - how you loved me dearly
But I knew all along
The meadow was where you hid deep

We had all these years to break



"A Flower for an Angel" Colored pencil drawing by Giovanni Cain

Drop Kick Time Sequence
by Ray Fernandez

The world around me sets a gentle tone. As the breeze it whispers to me something bold and I cry out something I've been told and I feel like water raking coals. This Sunny Day embraces me. It takes a hold of me relentlessly and I try to find the proper words but they elude me with great tenacity. I'm always tripping over me and I can't quite tell what's right in front of me, oh how this furiously displeases me. I climb the path. It stretches out for miles, though I can see right through myself. I can't help but fool myself. All these memories are displaced as my mind gently crafts for me a new face. I feel left out from this world that you create, that I bind myself to as to only irritate. I sometimes feel like a phony alibi and nothing you can say will make me cry, except that one thing you'll repeat 'till I die. Erase the likeness of me completely and trace your mind with Instruments of mediocrity and envelope them majestically. I can't recall anything about me when you look at me and speak these words that set me free, if only temporarily. I look outside now and every scene reflects the moonlight dancing so selflessly. I can remember now how I felt when the day couldn't come anymore eagerly, now I sit and stare reminisce pathetically/romantically. I feel the heavy burden of this day pressing me to lay my head right where I stay. So I retire gently to my slumber as I can now let myself be completely devoured.



"Manny" Pencil drawing by Chris Nielsen

I think I love you
by Debbie Cannarozzi

You don't know what it's like to feel me,
You don't know how it is to breathe me.
You haven't touched my hand and felt your pulse.
You've yet to look into my eyes and see your unborn child.
You don't know how it is to hold me while I weep.
Or how my covers touch me as I sleep.
You've never held my hand while I was scared or hurt.
You've never let me fall asleep on your heartbeat.
You've never walked a mile in my shoes.
You've never carried me over the triumphs of hell.
When you know me inside and out,
You can say then you love me without a doubt.
But until you live all of the above-
Do not tell me you're in love.



"Bonnet House Bridge" Black and white photo by Julie des Tombe



"The Web" Black and white photo by Sharma
Alonso

Smack

by Michael O'Donnell

Perched on a dumpster in a dark alleyway
 Trying to erase images of home
 Repressing thoughts of a mother's dreams
 Of a Father's hopes
 Perched with a belt wrapped tightly
 Around my seventeen-year-old arm
 The needle
 Piercing my arm like a torpedo slipping water
 A direct hit into the enemy battleship
 Evasion the only quest
 Escape
 Ultra violet rays rip through my eyes like a kitten in a wet paper bag
 Toxic fumes strangulate me
 Reaching out with grasping hands
 Hands that have no conscience
 Buildings tower overhead dwarfing me
 I feel like an ant walking through a roller skating rink
 Not a smiling face on the block
 "Who killed their puppy?"
 Sounds of a jackhammer pound into my brain
 Beating it from the inside like a heavyweight fighter
 My senses are failing to function
 The cheap smack flushes through like a river forever winding
 I am at temporary peace
 I am selfishly leaving behind family and friends
 Going back to the comfort zone of a synthetic womb
 A place where there is no traffic
 No head throbbing noises
 No toxic air
 A place where there is warmth
 The home team wins again
 One more sacrifice to concrete jungle

You Don't
by Brooke Hayes

Crooked smiles that come and go.
Tears that always fail to stop
developing clouds that block my sight
due to the vicious eye that is shot
from you to me
then back to you.

see me.

Looks of half hate, half nothing
fill the space
between my eager blood and your
cowardly sweat.
With the turning of my stomach
comes the freezing of your flesh
fantasies I cannot fulfill.

feel me.

Corroded pieces of heartache left
black after the flames have vanished
into settled soil
and out of my concern.
Left only is the dirt
on the frame of your face.

know me.



"Plain Strength" Inkwash by Katrina Catlett



"Self torture" Black and white photograph by Lorraine Domenech

The Rose I Never Chose

by John Jeffords

The seashell in my hand,
Was carried by the waves.
It helped me understand,
Part of her still stays.
The ocean still inside,
Was heard each time I chose,
To step out of my mind,
And give her one more rose.

The sand went to my head,
The moon was cool outside.
My blue waves now felt dead,
And the morning was lie.
Yet the cloudy forever after,
Was vague on what I chose;
To hear infinite laughter,
Or give her one more rose.

The water wasn't clear,
I only saw the dust.
Of fading sandy years,
As the ocean swallowed lust.
The sin was mine to take,
And the water slowly rose,
To the shore where it would break;
It was vague on what I chose.



"Moon Light Tree" Paper by Richard Grimes





P'an Ku

The Broward Community College

Student Literary Magazine

994 V2 P 152
10/23/06 160679 SEL

Magazine









