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P'an Ku

"Bastet" - Carl Englesman



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Digital Art

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*"Images are nearer to reality than cold definitions."
- Ancient Egyptian proverb.*

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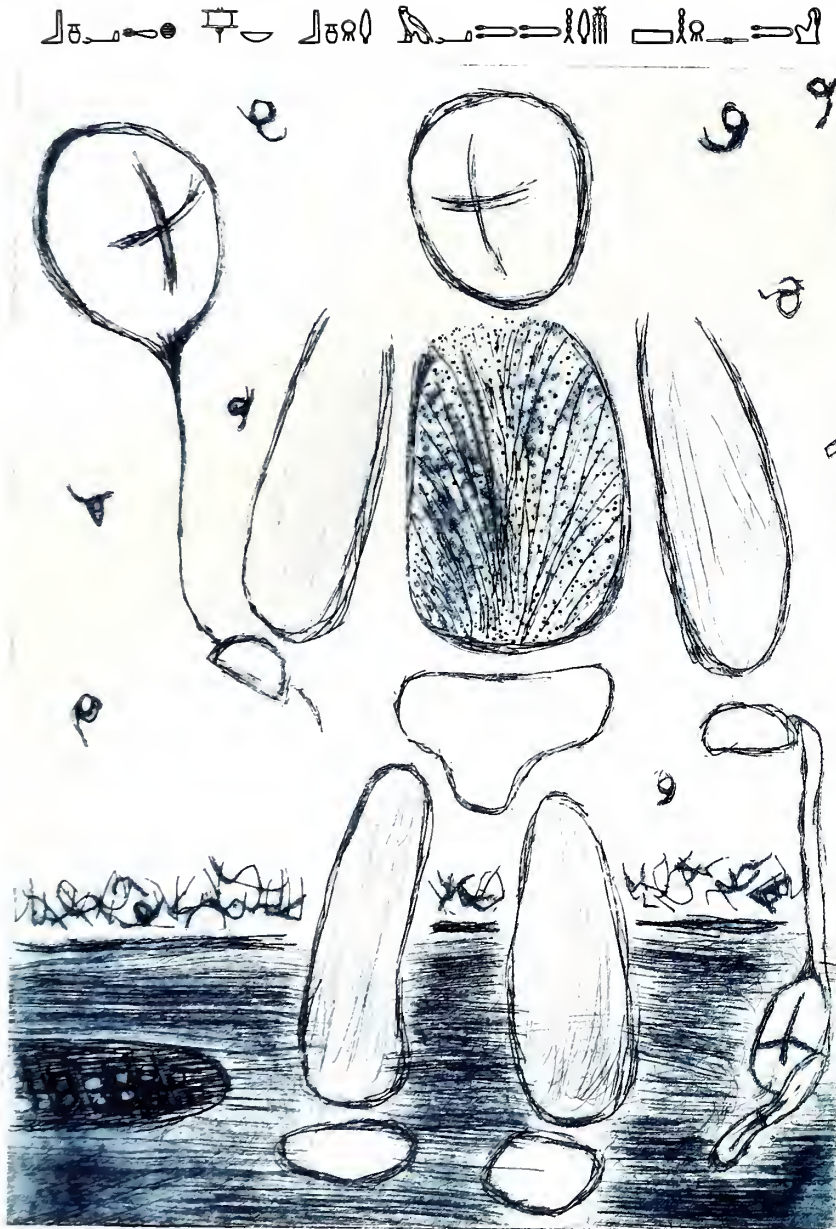
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Busted; Burst

Blowing bubbles as a child
 Disappointment as they drop.
 Trapped in bubbles in adulthood
 Devastation as they pop.
 Catching, chasing, jumping, laughing
 Never imagining
 How frail these bubbles are...
 Protection, detection, denial on trial
 We see through the veil
 Ignore the quandary and turmoil
 Until it is...
 We derail.

- *Ali Harris*

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“Fountain” -Kristen Nethen



Photography

WAR

like dead roses, so the blood flows.
Captivated by thorns, they won't let go.
It rains and pours with refreshing feel.
Concealed in battle and atrocities.
The screams for freedom exceeds the will,
As outbursts of horror announce a kill.
Abandoned and all alone,
Shadowed by the thoughts of home.
Will I ever leave this rugged path?
Clouds of destruction, life overcast.

Is Morality still a part of me!
Have I become society's enemy?
Like an earthquake my life explodes
The feeling of flesh devoured by an albatross
My conscience is webbed with unbearable emotions of fear,
Like a flower without moisture
I wither here.

I do the works of a cause I know not.
Is it worth this many innocent lives?
I see their pain, I hear their cries.
Like a time bomb so my life flashes across my mind.
Tomorrow wasn't promised
Nor was any other time

- *Roxanne Williamson*





Proof of Purchase

She glanced at the athemae sitting on the table. She shut her eyes, trying to concentrate above the noise. "Trade you," she heard from the corner of her mind. Her eyes opened wide as he shook her from her thoughts. Literally.

She felt a sharp pain in her arms where he held her in his iron grip. His sharp tone pierced her ears, giving her a headache. "Stupid wench! Listen to me when I'm talking to you!" He did his best to scare her, but she did not flinch. Not today. She looked down at her wedding ring, and with a deep shuddering breath, she whispered, "Trade you."

Everything around her froze. For a moment she stood in awe, not moving and not breathing. "Lillith..." called the voice to her from the darkness. The most beautiful man she had ever seen strolled over to her, the athemae in hand. His bright blue eyes glistened in the darkened room and his raven hair shined like the night sky. He smiled a perfect smile, hiding his malicious intention as he placed the athemae in her palm.

She walked over to the frozen man, his face set in menacing convulsion. With a deep breath she touched the athemae to his chest, and the athemae began to glow. She turned back towards the beautiful sinister man. "I require proof of ownership," he said with a determined look in his eyes. Lillith touched the picture in her pocket with a heavy heart. On the back of the picture was inscription. It read:

Adam. "My dearest Lillith, I pledge to you my eternal soul. With all the love I possess,

Another shuddering breath escaped her lips, but she'd come too far to turn back now. "Here Luke." She handed him the athemae.

In an instant, Luke was gone, taking with him his new prize (Adam). He left in a puff of smoke that stole Lillith's breath, but soon the memory was gone. Before Lillith could gasp or cry she was in a new place, a new life. Her memories of this life and Adam were vanished to the farthest corner of her mind, and she was happy. Once in a while when she would close her eyes and begin to fall asleep, visions of her prior life would flash in her mind. There in the dead of night, she could not explain why, she swore she heard a voice call from the dark, "Fair Trade."

- Raquel Hernandez

"Untitled"-Mikey O'Dea



Solarplate Etching

"Alison's Treasure" -Amanda Leigh Conrad



Photography

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Summer in the City

We lived on canned pineapple
and your grandmother's soupy black beans,
that summer we shared the living room pull-out in her rent-controlled walk-up,
the edge of Spanish Harlem.

It was so hot we could never sleep, so we stayed with the windows open,
cursing global warming,
fanning ourselves to the lull of the street.

Sundays, the rot of trash day reached us up on the eleventh story
and mingled with Abuela's potpourri.

Those smells of the city and
the screech of the subway,
my love affair with headphones,
that familiar ache in my feet.

My first fifty-cent Italian ice in the village melted over my fingers
as we watched some boys play basketball in Tompkins Square Park.
They watched us back through the chain-link,
the ball's rubbery thud in rhythm with our Converse on concrete,
the cadence of sidewalks, slipping behind us.

A thunderstorm over Fifth chased us into the Public Library,
where ancient stone lions greeted us;
The Beats lay waiting in the stacks.
From then, Ginsberg crouched upon our thoughts like a debauched Buddha,
his mantras echoed to us in the subway's steely howl.
We fantasized freedom,
but we were fifteen men, and couldn't do much of anything.
Not even buy cigarettes.

So we paid cash for our metro cards,
became intimate with the rails and the hard plastic seats.
In a café on Eighth street, I fell in love with a redheaded pianist.
She scaled the keys with all the grace of a Russian ballerina,
and shared her cigarettes
that always tasted of the stains from her scarlet lips.

We were fifteen that summer,
the heat and smog and sermons of underground prophets
sunk in our veins like Burrough's junk.
Teenaged Subterraneans, broke and
wandering, glistening sweaty in broken down shoes.

The din like Calcutta, the smell of strangers,
the fleeting discomfort of brushing unfamiliar skin.
This city.

My last morning, you squeezed me goodbye on the platform,
watched me board that commuter train, then watched it pull away.
And I, somewhere beneath the East River, changed.
Changed back into my mother's child,
and started thinking about the new shoes I'd need for school.

- Sarah Penello

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

With each footfall a shock of blistering pain shot through her body, and every breath felt like it would be her last. Her over-stressed heart was threatening to give out on her, but she knew that she could not stop. The eerily light footsteps, that had always been a few yards behind her, now sounded so close that she was surprised to not feel his breath on her neck. All of her survival instincts were telling her not to look back at him, but she could stop herself. She threw a single glance over her shoulder, her pace slowed just a step, and he was upon her within a second. She was lying flat on her back, her whole body throbbing in agony. Sweat had soaked through her clothes, matted her hair to her neck, back and forehead, and was now stinging her eyes as panted and gasped for air.

The man, now standing at her side, was beautiful; he was the kind of guy that could stop traffic with a simple smile. His golden blonde hair was blowing softly in the night breeze. There was a drop of sweat on his solid, tan, muscular body, as though the last several hours of running had been completely effortless. "You knew you couldn't actually out run me," he said casually. His voice was like a song, captivating and perfect.

The girl looked up at him and for a moment she remembered why she loved him. He was the most incredible looking person she had ever seen in her whole life. Even now, as she lay at his feet about to die, she couldn't help being enchanted by him. Everything from his skin, which always gave a gentle internal glow of health and energy, to his icy blue eyes, was perfect. He looked just the way she had always imagined her boyfriend would look, but there was something wrong.

She started noticing things that she couldn't explain a few weeks after she met him. Sometimes while watching the news together, when something particularly horrible was being reported on, he would get a silvery gleam in his eyes. Several times, she had also seen, nestled down in his wavy blonde locks, what appeared to be two, small, black horns. Of course she quickly dismissed these things as her mind playing tricks on her, but she wasn't so sure anymore. She was the track star of the high school she attended, and

had never been out run before. She was in peak physical condition, and yet he still caught her, and he did it without even breaking a sweat during the whole twenty mile chase.

"Who are you?" she asked breathlessly.

"Lucifer," he said with a smile that would have seemed genuine, if not for the silvery haze in his eyes.

Of course she knew it sounded crazy, but she also knew he was telling the truth. He had arrived at her house earlier that day, reached out his hand, and said come with me. However the girl had seen something in his face, something wicked, and she knew it was time to run. She pushed passed the man that she thought had loved her and began the chase that would last nearly five hours.

They had only known each other three and a half weeks. They met at a high school football game. She was there with her friends, and he was a new student looking for someone to talk to. Everywhere he went he left a trail of gawking girls in his wake, but he passed all of them by to sit next to her. She thought she was the luckiest girl in the world. He asked her out on their first date, after only knowing her for four days. He told her that good things were too hard to find and that he wasn't going to let the opportunity pass him by. Now that she thought about it though, she realized that their whole relationship was one big cliché, as though the devil learned his love skills reading cheesy romance novels. Then again, he would have to learn it somewhere, it's not like love comes natural to the master of all things corrupt and evil.

"I thought you were supposed to be ugly."

"I was God's most beautiful angel. He made me to the sound of music. If I were really so hideous, then sin wouldn't be so seductive." Satan said this in a bored tone that gave the impression he had said it many times before.

"Why do you want *me*?" a tear leaked from her eye and rolled down her sweaty cheek.

"I'm sure you remember the book of Job in the Bible. God bet me that I couldn't get Job to betray him. Lets just say, Job is the only one who's ever resisted my persuasions to come to the other side."





He shrugged his shoulders and reached to down to help her up. "You were such a good little protestant, I really thought you'd hold out longer." Lucifer's voice was still sweet and song-like and the girl found herself reaching to take his helping hand as though in a trance.

"You've done this more than once?" The possibility that God would put another person through what Job had to endure was incomprehensible to her.

"The rules are a little different now, but yes, God has been abandoned by nearly everyone, and he's desperately looking for people who will stick by his side. Nobody in your time could ever hold up to the tortures for Job without abandoning God. He thought it would be too easy for me to just get people to sin once or twice, so now I have to get people to break all seven deadly sins in one month. If I succeed then I instantly get to take the soul of the betrayer, and if God wins, I never get to bother the person again." The devil was now leading the girl back the way they had just come. They were walking toward a big black door. Flames licked all around it, and ear piercing screams chilled the girl to her bones.

"I...I didn't break the seven deadly sins," the girl said nervously.

"Do you really think God would be letting me take you to hell now if you didn't?" The devil gave a deep sigh, and wispy cloud of smoke emitted from his beautiful mouth. "I saw how you thought you were so much better than everyone else once you started going out with me; that's pride. You broke envy and greed every time I told you I was going to hang out with my guy friends, and you thought that I was seeing other girls; you wanted me all to yourself. Sloth was when you quit your job to be with me more after school. Gluttony was easy, you wanted to be with me so badly that I offered to take you out to eat seven times in one day and you happily obliged. Six, wrath, was when you punched your best friend in the face when you thought you saw her looking at me too often. Lust obviously happened yesterday, which is why I came to claim you today. Look at it this way, not everyone gets to have sex with Satan." Lucifer gave a roguish wink, and together they passed through the flaming door.

- *Stephanie Mundo*

"Untitled" - Jennifer Wollaber



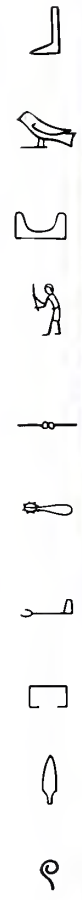
Photography

So The Whore Sleeps

Never mind what she was thinking or where her unconscious has taken her.
Her skin remains untouched for the moment.
No matter how many times her belly cried starved and stretched.
Tasteless men on the tip of her tongue on the tip of her sins.
On the top of this sentence ending with a period.
So the whore sleeps she lived reckless, laid down restless.
Unloved yet adored, cherished by many.
Intoxicated kisses couldn't wait to make contact.
Knuckles and fists hit her face with passion.
Beauty bleeds even though it's not wanted.
So the whore sleeps.
Peacefully.
Never mind what she was thinking or where her unconscious has taken her.
Her skin remains untouched for the moment.
Until she never wakes up the next morning.

- Adama Wiggan

"Bodyscape 3" - Jennifer María Córdoba



Photography

"Nameless"-Marianne Wagner



Photography



The Sandwich

I took another drag off my cigarette and sped up my pace. I was late and couldn't figure out why I cared. It was my ex-girlfriend Sarah's farewell party. She was heading off to Venice for a semester and assumed that there would be widespread heartbreak. After a few blocks I arrived at my destination, a hip hotel that the local socialites were calling home until a magazine told them otherwise. I stood outside the complex for a while, looking through the door at the people inside mingling and dancing. It looked exhausting. A well-lit gulag. A few yards away there was a homeless man missing an arm, being kicked out of the parking lot. They shoved him and he fell, lowering his amputated arm to break his fall. He let out a weak shrill. I stared at him rubbing his stump, in pain, cold and ashamed, and for a moment I saw myself in him. I saw myself crumbling under the weight of his day to day. Where others see parallel, I see perpendicular. I exhaled and headed towards the door. A thick hand pressed against my chest and a deep voice asked, "Are you on the list?"

I answered "Yes," and tried to be on my way, but was called back and told that my old, beaten up, trusty brown boots weren't up to par with the poshness of the establishment. I called Tom to come to my aid. Tom is the son of a Dominican senator, which means that his father was a rich, unscrupulous thief. Somehow the sins of the father were engraved on his perfect, smug face. He's been claiming to be my friend for the better part of a decade now, but I can't be sure. Plus, I'm fairly certain that he's been fucking Sarah since even before I got involved with her. Anyway, he came out, gave me a friendly pat on the shoulder, and whispered something into the bouncer's ear as he put a fifty in his coat pocket. I walked in and a tidal wave of Billboard International Top Ten music and nonsense washed over me. Tom proceeded to tell me that Lily, a depressing, bulimic red headed stick figure, but gorgeous nonetheless, has been more than a little curious about my recent availability. He said I had to get back in the game, get my feet wet, then went on for a while about how everything is marketing and began giving me suggestions on how to properly market myself. He then told me he'd get my foot in the door, all I had to do was say the word. "Anything for a pal," he said. I called him a "maggot" and headed towards the bar.

The middle-aged bartender was a she and she looked tired and despondent. I asked her for anything, "Single malt."

"Coming right up."

My drink arrived and I lit a cigarette and brooded for a while. Through my smoke-filled peripheral I saw women dancing, shaking, bouncing, selling their meat up to the highest bidder as best they could. I felt like an atom bomb amongst sheep. Out of the corner of my eye I caught Lily in a violet dress, eating what I assumed were an unusual amount of oysters. The bartender looked genuinely concerned about me and I could do nothing but smile at her. A delicate hand touched my shoulder and I heard an indelicate voice say, "Hello stranger," my head tilted only to see Sarah all beautiful and repulsing in a thick coat of make up. "You look well," she whispered.

"Likewise" She asked me for a drag, blew smoke out her burgundy lips, and told me in her most sincere tone: "I've missed you and I will always miss you." I began attacking my drink, stabbed the ice with my straw. At that instant I wanted all the ice cubes to be tiny Burmese monks. I didn't quite know what to make of what she was saying. I just felt sorry for her, all I saw was a barrel, an invisible gun to her head. I gave her my best affected look and gave her a hug. It seemed to be enough to make her disappear, she excused herself and said she was going to the little girls room.

After a while of people watching and three drinks later, I headed towards the bathroom. On my way there I saw Sarah sticking her tongue in Tom's ear as they slow danced. I suddenly pictured myself in the backseat of his car, waiting, drooling...hungry, my silhouette flickering in his rear view mirror. I brushed it off and kept walking.

As I took a piss in the urinal I heard a ghastly convulsion coming from one of the stalls. I opened the stall door and saw a pale figure vomiting into the toilet. The toilet was immaculate, shiny and white, polished to a mirror sheen. even the chunks of brown goo sliding off the sides didn't detract from the magnificence of this toilet. It was the nicest toilet I had ever seen. I snapped back to reality, stopped admiring the toilet and realized it was Lily, slumped over, hurling out oysters in the men's room. Modern prayer. When she saw me she panicked and desperately wiped herself clean. She stood facing me, seemingly filled with indignation, defiant. She stood in way I imagined could only be learned through private posture lessons. Her poise didn't hold. Her knees buckled causing her torso to

crash against mine. She started crying and told me she didn't want me to see her this way.

"I have this burn in my stomach, this pain in my side," she mumbled. She grabbed my shirt and through tears and vomit said, "I want you, I want you to love me," then she hurled again.

I took that as my cue to leave, I made my way out of the debauchery and onto the pavement. My steps felt heavy and I was wiped by the time I got to my car. I opened the door, sat down, turned the key, popped in the new Springsteen album and was on my way. I was hungry, so I stopped at an all-night sandwich shop and bought a meatball sub to go and promptly went. A couple of miles down the street I saw a homeless man from the party walking down the sidewalk. For some reason I pulled over, lowered my window and said "hi." He gave me a crazy looking military salute and said "hi" back. I asked him if he wanted to share a sandwich. He smiled, "sure," so I pulled over, grabbed the sandwich and found a good piece of curb to sit on. The man was old, late sixties I guessed. His skin looked like sand, he had a surprisingly well-kept white beard and long but perfectly combed silver hair. He had this wise elder thing going for him or at least what I thought a wise elder would look like. I asked him why he worried about grooming.

"For the ladies," he replied and we both chuckled as he took another bite of his half of the sandwich.

His name was Henry, he was a Vietnam veteran. We began to talk music and he told me he was a big Dylan fan. So I got up and popped *Blonde on Blonde* into the CD player, and gave the evening a soundtrack. He told me he lost his arm in the war. A guy in his platoon, "Gus" had tried picking up a live enemy grenade and hurling it back, but it exploded on him taking Henry's right arm from the elbow down and showering him with pieces of his friend...He woke up in an army hospital two days later. He told me he wished he would have lost his leg instead of an arm.

"What, you used to juggle?" I asked.

"No, I'm just lonely," he whispered as "Just like a Woman" played

in the background.

We finished our sub and I offered him a cigarette. "Why'd you do this?"

"I don't know, boredom? I felt I needed company and you looked like you needed a sandwich."

He then asked if I had considered the possibility that he might be dangerous, and to be honest, I hadn't. After that I thought about how I was using this man to fill a void...a lack. I was drifting away when he anchored me by asking, "Do you have a sick desperation in your life?" A black dog ran past us screaming. Out of nowhere he grabbed my shirt, pulled me in close and in a voice that sounded as if his vocal chords had been drenched in motor oil said: "No one's keeping score." Leaning in, solemnly I said, "I am." Henry took a deep breath, stroked his hair and exhaled.

"Then for that, if nothing else I am sorry." A gloomy look came over his grizzled face. And out here, out in the darkness, he pulled out a switchblade and calmly stuttered: "gi- gi- give me your wallet kid." Light reflected off the blade and into his eyes, revealing unwieldy madness. I hesitated and felt paper- tin steel pierce my belly. I kneeled and softly laid myself onto the pavement. As he ran away I listened to his shuffling steps grow faint, and then disappear all together.

- *Tan Romero*

Light reflected off the blade and into his eyes, revealing unweilding madness.



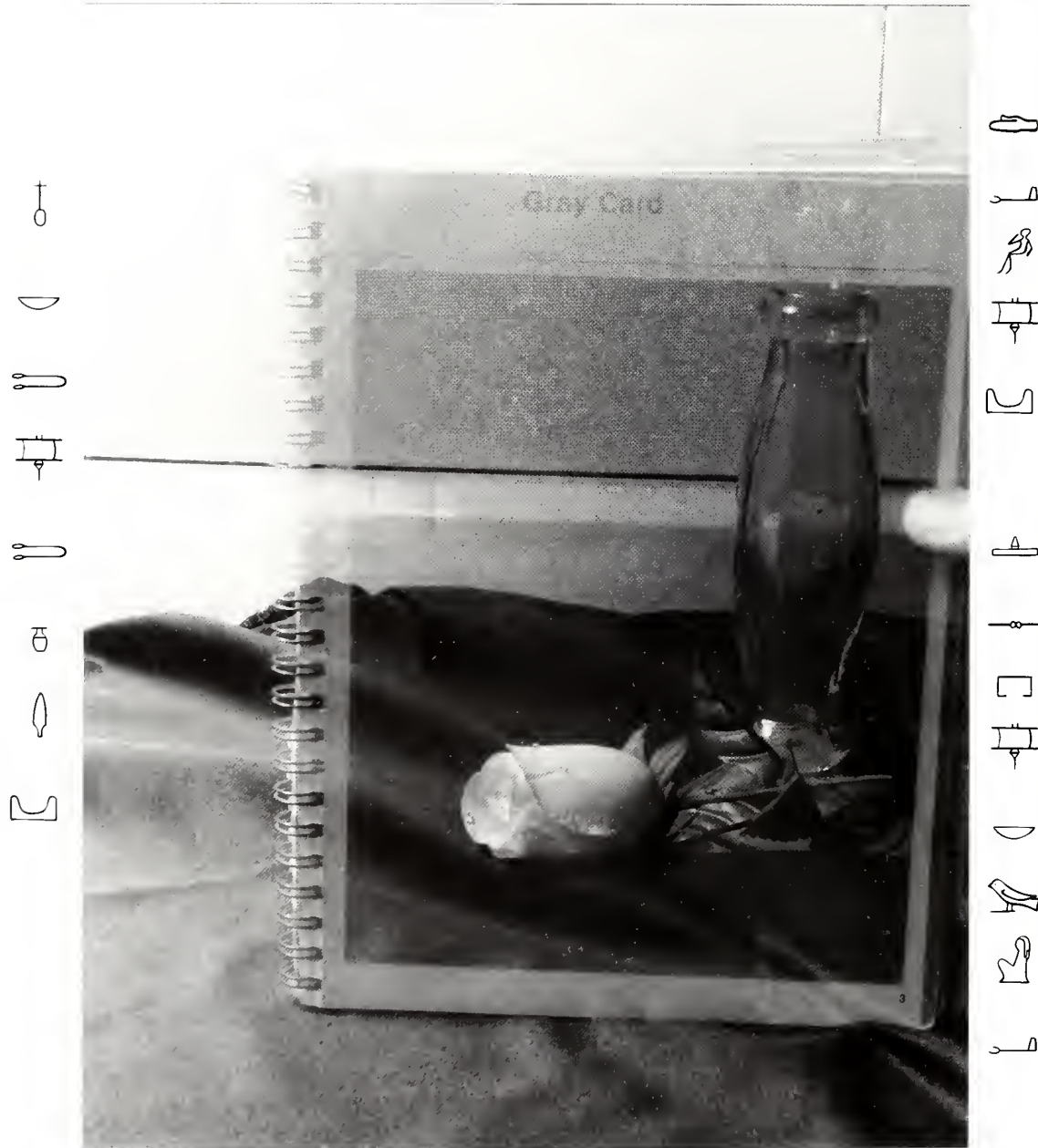


Nave Especial

Quiero una nave especial,
blanca como la leche.
Allí es donde voy a poner mi maleta
Para un lunes por la mañana empezar de nuevo.
Puedo tocar tu puerta y si quieres vienes,
pero así tan de repente
te puedo dejar botado en el espacio.
por eso no te pregunto hoy,
así cuando me veas y te emociones no me digas que no
Y después cuando me haya cansado te boto en el espacio.
Es que mi nave no permite monotonías
No permite celos, ni presiones
no permite límites.
Por que si vuelas, vuelas libre
sin presiones.

- *Sofia Bastidas*

"Untitled" - David Espinoza



Photography





The Rose

Seekest thou to enter this room
 This room that is the color of a broken heart
 That is filled with an all-encompassing gloom
 In which occurred an event so sorrowful as to tear many a soul apart?

Or perhaps thou dost not know
 Of this sad, sad tale
 Perhaps the saga lays as yet untold
 Of the storm of sorrow that turned into a gale?

Ah, then sit, sit upon this stool
 Steel thy heart against sorrow
 For this tale is cruel
 And it will strike thy heart like the arrow of a longbow

A flower entered this room
 Much as thyself sought to do
 Bursting with color and in full bloom
 and here she wilted and died without as much as an adieu

But before thou sayest what a sad event
 And seek to rise from thy chair
 Let me first tell thee the goodness of a life barely spent
 And why this death was so unfair

This flower you see, was not just a flower
 She was a deep red rose among a thicket of thorns
 A shining light that facing the darkest darkness did not cower
 And in whose pure heart evil was unborn

She brought scent to those who had never smelled
 And wondrous color to any dark place
 The rage in people's hearts this rose quelled
 She gave hope and justice a face

This flower gave all that she possessed
 And even that she did not
 She had soul that was good and just
 And for the rights of the oppressed she fought

She delivered from evil many a lost soul
 By giving love to all, no matter how vile
 And showing compassion even to those who in sin loll
 This rose filled an empty heart with just one smile

When this flower her petals closed
 Darkness once more overcame this world
 And down all faces the tears freely flowed
 As evil once again its sails unfurled

This room thou sought to enter was barred
 For where such a horror takes place
 No heart can leave unmarred
 For once entering thee shall stare evil in the face

With hand lying chastely across her breast
 Upon a bed of roses lay
 A lady in justice dressed
 The purest maiden of yesterday and today

- *Leah Bigl*

She Is

She is what made me feel again
Something that I thought I lost
Through her beauty she showed me that life can be beautiful
She is god at his best
Having Mother Nature's compassion in her heart
Her eyes show the survival of the pain and struggles throughout her life
She is young in the physical form but older inside, similar to me
This could be the rescue of the both of us
I want her to have the world and half
Show her a true woman's worth
Her love, her touch, her look is the only thing I want and desire
She is what makes me whole
The sunshine behind my clouds and rain
She is the closest to heaven that I will ever be
She is dear to me
Precious in every sense
She is what I have missed
She is what is now
She is what could be
She is

- *Duilio Roldan*

Almost

She almost had something.
But almost doesn't count.

Almost perfect.

It trickles down,
The warm stream reminds
Her that she is cold.

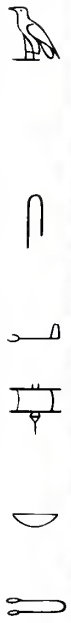
He has this effect on her,
And he has no clue.

Almost everything.
Almost.

- *Angela Osborne*



"A Saint" - Shaday Moshanko



Digital Art Photography

"Untitled"-David Espinoza



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SIDEWALK OHM

Today I flew back home from Texas, and because my plane came in a few hours late, my parents' plans had already begun. I caught a ride home with a friend, and for the first time in my life, I found myself alone on Christmas Eve.

Alone for the first time in a long time, actually. The kind of solitude you only get to experience when nobody's home. You can spread out to fill up your whole world without making room for anyone else, if it's just for a few sacred hours.

I went for a long walk, determined to wander all the streets of my neighborhood like I used to, in the days before drivers licenses and late curfews, when my only escape was on foot. Back then, it was my daily ritual, when we first moved here, and only the first two streets of the whole place were occupied.

Miles of unnamed streets and cul-de-sacs lay on top of white sand, Everglades only just sucked dry, to make room for unfinished homes and huge piles of construction materials. I spent so much of high school exploring this secret and empty metropolis; with headphones, with friends, with dime bags and bummed cigarettes. Hours and days in the shells of houses that didn't yet belong to anyone.

Dirty jeans, construction dust, freedom. It all felt so personal, like a different world I had all to myself, and the friends who shared it with me.

But time moved us all forward as it tends to do, and everything changed. I got older. I got a job. I got a car, and picked up distractions that kept me from my aimless meditation on foot.

Trucks brought square patches of crab grass sod to lay on the barren sand like a patchwork mask. Streetlights went up. Trees were planted, the houses were painted. They got their doors and windows and their locks.

Now the houses are filled with people, the streets lined with their cars, the air lilted with their voices and the flint of their Christmas lights. Now the neighborhood belongs to everyone and no one. We all occupy this shared space, but we keep our distances.

But not everything has changed. Tonight I stepped on a sidewalk slab that'd had a big Ohm scratched into it before the cement dried. An Ohm I must have drawn, but have no recollection of. My Ohms litter this country; one for every patch of wet concrete I've encountered in the past few years. But to have stumbled upon what is probably the first one I ever did, on a solitary Christmas Eve of all nights, is so strangely coincidental that it got me thinking.

I found it very comforting in a strange way. Everything is different now. Houses and lives and many people have moved in around that Ohm. The girl who drew it has lived and died many lives of her own since then. She's become someone new and almost entirely different. But that little symbol in the concrete is a record of what used to be. A record of what I used to be.

That girl no longer exists as she did, but she belongs to me. The years before this neighborhood filled up left their marks on me, and although I now share the streets with hundreds of strangers, I have left my mark too.

That eight-inch square of concrete where my Ohm is etched; and these roads and insides of these houses will always, in some way, belong to me.

We own ourselves past, future and present. And in some moments that feels like the world entire.

- Sarah Penello

“My Ohms litter this country....”

Man Overboard

The boat sways menacingly under my feet as I struggle to stay upright. The white, rolling waves are at the whim of the howling wind and slap the hull at unexpected moments, tossing the boat around like a cork.

"Lissa, start to lower!" Derek screams to be heard over the slashing rain. I feed the slippery, wet rope through my hands, trying hard to go slowly, but also trying to prevent rope burn. The immense pressure on the line from the enormous spinnaker sail shakes my already exhausted arms. The lightweight sail flails and twists in the roaring wind, looking like a horrible manifestation of a god, outlined by the sporadic lightning. Suddenly, a colossal, ten-foot wave crashed into the side of the catamaran. There is a scream of utter terror from the stern, and I hear the desperate cry of, "Man overboard!"

Time freezes and then restarts a hundred times faster.

"Jesus, God, Tiana is over – she fell over!" Despite Matthew yelling as loud as possible, his voice is whipped away by the wind and barely makes it to Derek and me. No, hell no, Tiana couldn't be in that malevolent water! I desperately cling to the mast, as the ruthless tossing of the boat pitches me around. I'm immobile, helpless, useless.

A huge gust of wind screams, and the sail snaps like a gun. The sound releases me from my helpless immobility. I frantically tie off the line in my hands and grab the spotlight that is shackled to the violently swinging mast. After wrenching it off its casing, I begin to scan the waves with the powerful beam. There is a flash of color in the dark water, and I focus the spotlight with wild hope rising in my heart. However, it is merely the life-ring Derek has pitched over. The tossing waves yield no sign of my friend; the dark water unanswering to my frantic calls.

"Hell, I can't see anything; the rain is too thick!" The wind

pushes against me, forcing me backwards.

"Turn around! Get back to the point she fell over!" Derek orders Matt, squinting as he also scans the water for a hint of life. "Now! There is no time to lose!" He throws an anxious look over his shoulder as the boat continues its straight, plunging voyage into the darkness ahead. Why isn't Matt turning?

"It won't turn, the friggin' boat won't turn!" Matt screams hysterically. The incredible power of the sail was rendering steerage moot. The little engines of the sailboat have no control over the immense pressure of the wind.

We're going to have to let the sail drop free-fall. The thought races through my head as fast as the lightning that streaks the sky. There is no other choice.

I hurdle towards the halyard and unwrap it from the winch. Derek understands immediately and leaps forward in a mad effort to prevent the sail's plunge into the frothing water. The line races through my hands, and I feel as though it is cutting me to the bone. Surely my hands are wreathed in flames. No matter, somewhere out there is Tiana, swamped by the ruthless waves. Suddenly, there is no pressure on the line. I spin around and see Derek desperately trying to haul the sail out of the water.

"We have to get it out of the water, or it'll get caught in the propellers!" On my hands and knees I crawl towards him as salt-water crashed over the deck and soaks me. I grab the wads of sails I can reach and carry them onto the deck. Tears of agony mingle with the rain on my face as saltwater washes over my horribly burned hands. After an eternity of bringing endless sail onto the boat, with Matt's heart-rendering cries for Tiana whipping in the wind, only ten feet remain. I start to head towards the spotlight to search for Tiana, when Derek calls out, "Quick, help me get this last bunch up! It's too heavy."

I jump to his side, and together we haul at the sail. Even once it breaks free of the water, the section of sail feels like it weighs hundreds



of pounds. It lands on the deck with a loud thud. A whimper sounds from the depths of the cloth. Derek and I stare at the origin of the sound, momentarily transfixed. The section of the sail thrashes slightly, and my mind immediately turns to a trapped animal, caught in the suffocating sail underwater. No. Surely not, for the likelihood is inconceivable.

I tear savagely at the sail, unwinding what seems like miles, trying to be speedy, but not wanting to risk the possibility of harming any animal that may lay ensnared in the sail. The thrashing has ceased, and I worry that the unknown creature has been smothered.

“Tiana – look for her!” I tell to Derek, who turns away, resuming his frantic scanning of the water for our friend.

Finally, I reach the center of the folds of the sail. A tiny cry escapes my lips, and I stare at the sight before me. There, wrapping in the center, is an unconscious Tiana. How...?

Derek somehow hears my disbelieving moan through the torrential rain and tortured wind. He turns and freezes at the sight of our friend lying on the sail. A stream of blood is pouring down her face, mingling with the salt and rain. Her face is ghostly white against the scarlet; her soaked hair, caught up in the wind, whips me. I feverishly feel her neck for a pulse. Thank God, thank God, there is a steady beating beneath my fingers. But why isn't she breathing? “Derek, Derek! She isn't breathing!”

He pounces on her, immediately beginning CPR. I try desperately to push away the blood seeping into her sightless eyes, but my swollen hands are producing too much blood of their own to be of any help.

Derek has been working so long, so very long, surely she should be reviving. Is she...? No! Don't even think that. She can't be... My friend, my best friend. Derek is tiring, sweat running from his face onto Tiana's.

His arms are pumping slower and slower, his breathing labored. Matt is urgently trying to turn the boat away from the pounding waves, but we are still inundated by the freezing water over and over. When all seems lost, Tiana spurts out a gush of waters and coughs rackingly,

rolling onto her side. I gather her in my arms with a glad cry. She's alive! Derek slumps over, exhausted, gripping Tiana's hand. Matt runs up from the help and wraps his arms around all of us. There we sit on the surging deck, rain pouring down from the heavens as the lightning illuminates the sky.

- Leah Bigl



Defenseless Prey

He knew he was surrounded by them, but he was confident they didn't realize he was there yet. That's the best way to hunt prey though, to have more than enough of them around you without them having any idea that you are there.

He stalked between the trees carefully. He saw a small group of them off in the distance. They were all huddled together on a branch of a tree. Stupid things really. If they only realized what was awaiting them they would group together. With a shot into a group of targets, you're bound to hit something, not like if they were all scattered off by themselves.

He picked up a rock and threw it into the crowd, hitting one square and knocking it off the branch. The rest of them stood there almost petrified as he casually walked up to claim his prize. He ignored them though; he only wanted one and couldn't care less about the rest of them.

He held his prey firmly in his hands, making sure it would not try to escape as he did what needed to be done. Slowly, firmly gripped between his teeth, he began to rend the skin from the soft, supple flesh. He was not sure it felt pain. He wasn't sure if it were even still alive or not. He didn't really care. He would devour it anyway.

He spit the skin he had peeled off onto the floor. He hated the skin. It left a nasty taste in his mouth. It wouldn't matter soon though. Soon that filthy taste would be washed out of his mouth by the sweetness of the flesh, as the skin had been rent that is.

He spit the last chunk of skin on the ground and stared at his prize. Its supple juices began dripping between his fingers, no longer hindered by its outer covering. He dug deeply into its flesh with his fingers. If it were not dead before he was sure it was dead now.

As he pulled off a chunk of its flesh some of its juices squirted him in the eyes, stinging them terribly. "Tricky devil," he thought, "even now still trying to fight back." He popped the chunk of flesh into his mouth and savored the sweet tangy taste. Soon he had devoured the entire thing and longed to have another orange.

- Adam Roberts

"Oranges" - Leigh Anthony



Photography

COCONUT

The coconut sat atop the old desk. He liked this English class. They actually had spunky intellect. He had traveled much, this coconut, and was developing worldly knowledge, so he should know. As he listened to the content requirements of an argument paper, he couldn't help but think about the argument that he had with his girlfriend that morning. He could swear that she was making googly eyes at his best friend, Mango. True, he was a bit on the jealous side, but he really could have sworn...

He went home with the instructor after the class ended. He looked forward to seeing his girlfriend and Mango too, to solidify his relationships with them. He just wanted harmony in his life. Enough with the bickering already. He made up his mind that he was going to try harder from now on to appreciate the companionship and character of his girlfriend, and concentrate less on nit-picking about his certain envious delusions.

When he and the instructor arrived home, the lovely smell of a home-cooked meal assailed them. On the table stood two crystal candlesticks with two cobalt blue tapers aglow within them. The table was set with the finest silverware and chine. "Oh yes!" thought the coconut, "It's their anniversary today. I overheard them discussing it this morning." The coconut was laid on the kitchen counter, and he wondered at this. "Why am I not in the comfort of my basket at the window sill?" he pondered to himself. "Where is my girlfriend? Where is Mango? Why-," and then he stopped in mid-thought. For there, upon the table lay a cutting board with the peel of Mango strewn upon it. His yellow blood lay in small pools that were already drying. He couldn't locate the body from he was at. He didn't want to contemplate the grisly scene in front of him anymore anyway. He was in such shock and dismay, that he didn't even realize himself being picked up and placed right beside his girlfriend on the counter. He did somehow discern through the fogginess of his mind the instructor say to his wife, "How about a couple of piña coladas to go with that fruit salad, sweetheart?"

- *Yvette Susan Bernstein*

"Coco" - Chris Michael



Photography

Celebrating Our Strength

The alarm was blaring, but he barely heard it. As he rolled over, he noticed the empty void in the bed.

"She already left," he murmured.

He didn't have to look at the clock to know it was 7:00 a.m. As he stumbled out of bed, he managed to trip over his own sneakers he left on the floor last night. It wasn't long before the shower was running and he was screaming like his little sister. As hard as he tried, he could not get the water any hotter. In fact, it seemed like it was just getting colder.

"I have to remember to thank the landlord for this old water heater," he thought.

As he was trying to get ready for the day he managed to only cut himself several times while shaving, and he ran out of his favorite body spray. He walked out his door and locked it behind him; consequently, he noticed it had to be one of the hottest days of summer yet. He walked closer to his car and saw that it was bombarded by bird dropping from the hood to the trunk.

"Looks like it's going to be another fantastic day today, Mark!" he said sarcastically to himself.

Mark started his old beat up '90 Buick. With no air conditioning, he could already feel the beads of sweat pour out. He turned the dial to his favorite radio station, and of course, commercials were playing. As he sat back in his chair looking at his apartment he and his girlfriend rented, he had to stop himself from vomiting. It had to be one of the oldest places in one of the worst neighborhoods in town. The paint was peeling off the side of the building, but at least he was starting to be on his own, although it had only been three months since they moved in. He was running late; Mark knew his teacher would try to make yet another example out of him.

As the "old clunker" pulled into the school parking lot, Mark finally thought he was in luck when he saw a spot right next to his building. It was a nice spot, and he felt he did a great job at parking. He

put it in park and pulled his keys out of the ignition. Slamming his door, he ran to open his trunk, but when he opened the trunk, he noticed that his book bag was not there.

"Damn! I left it home," he said as he stomped his foot into the ground in anger.

Drenching in sweat and annoyed by his current situation, he walked to class 15 minutes late, dreading the upcoming embarrassment. Worst of all, his assignment that he spent hours completing was due today!

"Oh, I'm so anxious to hear what excuse you have come up with this time Mr. Jenkins," his teacher squeaked without looking at him as he opened the door to his class.

It was just as hot in the classroom he learned to dread over the last few months. Of course, Mrs. Detrik had her hair in a tight bun and was wearing clothes from 1950. She looked like one of the stereotyped moms on an old TV Land sitcom.

"In all honesty, I don't have any," Mark sheepishly replied.

"Oh, how disappointing. I also noticed you do not have your book bag today, Mr. Jenkins. How do you expect me to educate you without it? I also pray that you remembered today your assignment is due."

He knew this was coming. Mark tried to ask her about bringing it in tomorrow. "Yes, I do know that. I was kinda hoping you would-,"

"I would what? Forgive you for bringing it in late?" she abruptly interrupted. "Not without a drop in your letter grade, of course. So at the very best, you could only have a B, but we all know that level of achievement is not possible for you Mr. Jenkins. Have a seat and I can continue where I left off on today's lecture before you interrupted."

He tried to whisper "What a bit..."



"Mr. Jenkins?" She had heard him.

"You betcha," was his attempt at saving himself.

Class dragged on for what seemed to be hours. It felt like pulling teeth. Her voice was so low and monotone that the students had to struggle to stay up.

"Someone just shoot her already and we can leave," a nearby student whispered.

She finally finished, but Mark still didn't feel any better.

"May I have a word with you, Mr. Jenkins?" Mrs. Detrik asked.

Hell no, he thought, but what he actually said was: "I have to run to work, but-,"

"If you care about passing this class, I suggest you spare a few moments." She really knew how to agitate

someone. He walked to her desk where she was seated. She looked like she had news of death in his family. Her hands were clasped on the desk. He saw her long thin fingers crossed in what appeared to be a threatening demeanor.

"Currently, in this class you have a D. This assignment and your final assignment that is due next week better exceed your average work in order for you to scratch by with a C, Mr. Jenkins. Consider yourself warned." With that, she lowered her hand into her grade book and did not say another word.

He jumped into his car, started it, and squealed out of there as fast as he could. As he drove, he thought about the one thing he looked forward to: Christina.

"As beautiful as she is, why is she wasting her time with a loser like me?" he thought. "She could be a damn model. Every man wants her, and she could have anything she wants. So why waste her energy on me?" He was stuck at a red light when he started looking at himself in the rearview mirror. His hair was a big dark mess of tangles and curls. At the age of 23, his acne was as bad as a teen. He grabbed his "spare tire" and shook it around. He wasn't by any means fat or ugly, just plain and average. "Maybe she's with me because she could use me as a flotation device when the ice caps melt?"

He arrived at work late of course. He hated this place as much as he hated his apartment. It was a café for college students named "The Scene." It was the owner's attempt to make the place seem trendy. It was far from it. The windows were tinted and had ridiculous logos slapped all over the place. As he opened the door, he was blown away by the blaring rap music playing on the sound system. Several TV's were playing MTV 6. The floors were made of some kind recycled tire

or something, and smelt of burnt rubber. The walls were painted bright red, and purple-topped tables were arranged throughout. Against the west wall was where the 3 wi-fi desktop computers sat, and against the east wall was where the register and food prep

area laid. The menu was clearly visible against the wall. They served mediocre food and drinks and used special names and descriptions to make them seem more appealing. Everyone knew better though.

"Jenkins, in my office now!" his boss bellowed. Mr. Harper, as much as he thought he was cool, was a bit of an idiot. A sixty year old, over weight, bald man shouldn't try to relate to college kids by owning a coffee shop.

"Yes, sir?" Mark said as he entered the tiny windowless office where Mr. Harper sat his desk, scattered with papers of figures and numbers for the coffee shop.

"Mark, I've warned you so many times. You are always late. You never seem courteous or even pleasant. Everyone complains about the

They served mediocre food and drinks and used special names and descriptions to make them seem more appealing.

sandwiches you make," he ranted on.

Mark boldly defended himself. "Everyone complains about the sandwiches everyone makes."

"What are you trying to say?" Harper acted as if he didn't know that the food sucked. "It doesn't matter, and neither does your opinion," he continued.

"Why?" As if Mark really cared.

"Well, I'm trying to make this easy, but if you prefer the direct approach son, here it goes. Mark, get whatever things you have and leave. You no longer have a job here." Harper was so gutless, he could barely get the words out.

"You've got to be kidding me! Can this day get any worse?" He wanted to scream.

He left the office and on his way out he heard from the register, "Hey buddy, what's up?" It was Brad. One of his co-workers and Christina's ex.

"At least I don't have to work with that jerk anymore," he thought. In truth, Brad wasn't a jerk. He was actually really nice; Mark just refused to like him. He ran out of there without saying a word and headed to his car with no idea where he was going to go. As he buckled in and turned the ignition, the car refused to start. He tried several times to start the car up, but she just refused to respond. Yelling and banging on the steering wheel also proved to be a waste of time. He knocked his head against the headrest as vulgarity continued to pour out like a water fountain. Mark was finally reaching his breaking point when a knock on the window shocked him. It was one of the last people he cared to see at that moment.

"Mark, I'm sorry to hear about what happened in there. You okay?" Brad's gesture of kindness was making Mark feel worse.

"Whatever." Mark thought if he avoided eye contact, Brad would leave.

"You having car trouble?" Brad was still there.

"Battery is probably dead." Mark began thinking that for once Brad may actually be useful for something.

"I have some jumper cables in my car; I'll grab them and give you a quick." Brad said without a second thought.

"You've got to be kidding me! Can this day get any worse?" He wanted to scream.

"Thanks Brad." It was the first time Mark ever said that to him. Within minutes the "old clunker" was running and Mark was on his way home.

He arrived at 4:30 p.m. and Christina would be home soon. Their place was pretty empty. It consisted of two computer desk chairs and an up turned box as a table in the living room, basic kitchen necessities, and a full size mattress in the bedroom. As he sank into one of the chairs, he enveloped his head into his hands and allowed himself to break down. For twenty minutes all he could do was cry with his head hanging low.

"Hey babe, it's me. How was your day? I had a pretty eventful one." Christina arrived him, but even that couldn't bring Mark to raise his head up. "Are you okay?" She immediately ran to his side. "Mark, what's wrong? You're starting to scare me." He began to tell her about the day's events. How he forgot his book bag and of Mrs. Detrik's torment and threats. He explained his release from "The Scene," and everything in between. He told her how fed up he is with his car, and then he told her how disappointed he was with himself for not being able to provide her with a better place to live.

"You deserve so much better, and this is all I can do for you. I can't see things improving, just getting worse," he managed to say between tears. "I can't even get decent furniture for us."

"Now listen here, you. This is the first time that we are on our



own. It's not going to be easy. I already know that. But it can only get better. Forget about what happened at school. You'll bring your assignment in tomorrow, and you'll prove yourself by bringing in an A paper for your final essay. Plus, you hated your job, so that could actually be a blessing in disguise." She was starting to make sense, yet Mark still felt belittled. "We have enough money for rent, so don't worry about that. Now you get to look for a job you will actually enjoy. Do you have any idea what you did today, Mark?"

"Wasting time?" Mark wasn't really sure how to answer that.

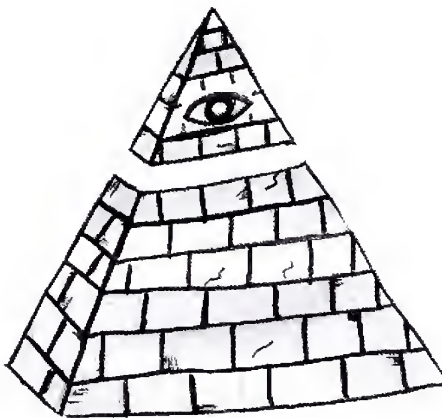
"You were celebrating your strength today." She said it so soft and so gently Mark had to struggle to hear. He was confused by what she said. "This is life. It's difficult and it gets to you. We are both going to have days like this. We have to accept that and understand what we get out of them." He remained silent, hoping that it would make sense soon. "How do you feel right now?"

He had trouble finding the best words. "I feel like things can't get much worse."

"But you're still here. You have a place to stay tonight in a cozy bed with me. Tomorrow is a new day. Life knocked you down as far as you could go." She paused and tried to make eye contact, but Mark still had his head in his hands. "But you're still standing. It may not seem like it, but you're stronger now that you were this morning."

He knew she was right and began to feel better. He took a deep breath and smelt her warm sweet perfume. He looked up into her clear blue eyes. The light from the window was glowing on her softly and gave her an angelic appearance. As he forced a weak smile, he simply said, "Thank you."

- *Andrew Johnson*





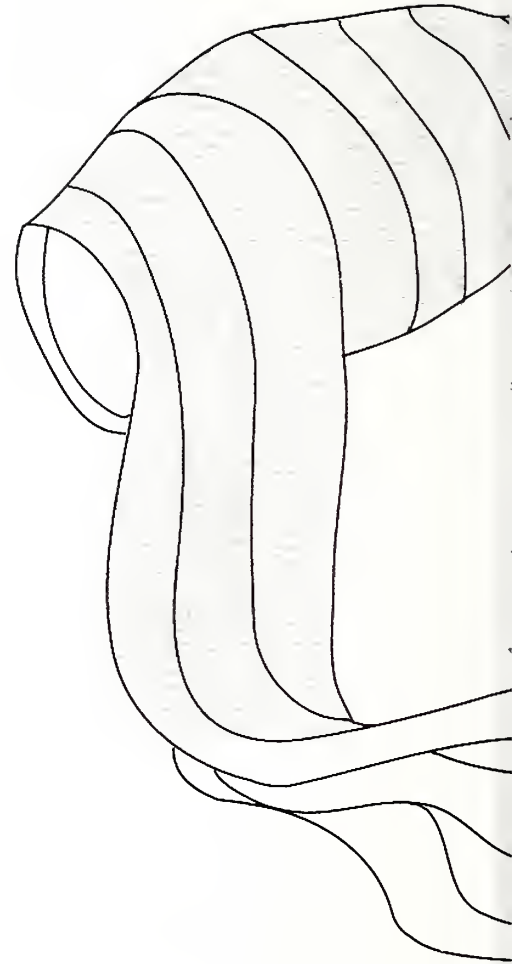


Diptic

Prescription

Life -
To be taken in large dosages
Injected daily through a tube
Without your consent
For machines to continually
 Pump
 Fill
 Blast
 Circulate
To keep me breathing, beating
To sustain my mind captive
 Confined to a cell with no locks or doors.
"Life Support" is our bodies.
 Our minds, vegetables within
Side Effects -
Pain, Nausea, Illness...
 A constant unyielding awareness
 Pathetic inability to act
 To go beyond our feeble means
Loss of control
Relaxation on an already
 Flimsy
 Fragmented
 Fleeting
 Failing
 Faulty
 Concept
 of Reality
Habit forming and addictive
Those who have a history of (?)
 Should avoid...attempting... life
Prolonged exposure to life...
 Inevitably
 Leads
 To
 Death.

- *Ali Harris*





Band Aid

Every bump, scratch and bruise you leave
behind
Magnified for everyone else to see.

If you were blind,
Your aim
would suggest otherwise.

They can't touch me,
not that they'd want to,
they can see I am broken.

Beyond repair.

You can't even try to fix it,
Make it all better again,
Feeble attempts make it worse.

It wasn't that I asked for this,
It just happened.
Again, and again.

Refurbished from the factory.

Super glued soul
Rearranged into a new puzzle,
I have to learn all over again.

Not a striking
Resemblance of my former self,
But I wasn't meant to be.

Rose colored glasses only
Help the blindness,
The scars protect from it.

- *Angela Osborne*



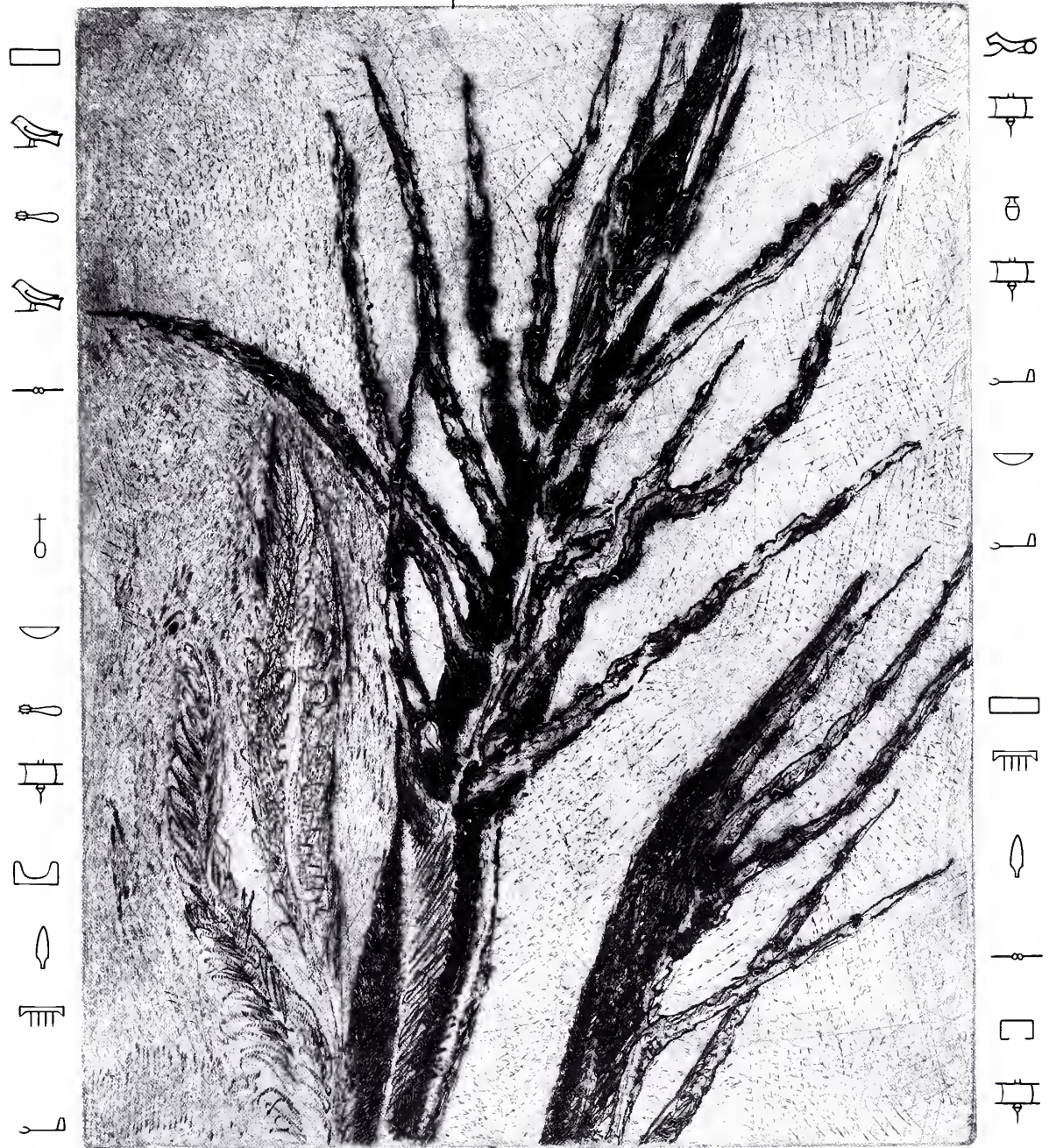


Photography





"Cocos Uncidera" - Liliana Crespi



Solarplate Etching

A NIGHT'S TRAIL

In the place I live, Miramar, night, or rather the night sky, had little to offer me in my younger years. Television was already exasperating at the age of eight and books were now the main appeal. My passion was to go to the library and check out all the books on the solar system, I could, even if I could barely understand most of them. My only condition was glossy pictures of the subject matter and the wonderful smell of clean book pages. At that age, I believe the smell of those books was magic, or that they gave some kind of unknown wisdom through each breath. I would stare at the stars in those books for hours waiting for the chance to sneak out to see them.

I never snuck out to see friends, unless the night sky could be called my friend. I was indeed not the type to have many friends, but when my father took my mother and me camping in the Florida Everglades, it was as if stars waited for me every night. Camping at the Everglades Conversation Club my father was in was far from "roughing it." We slept in an air conditioned trailer complete with a porch on the outside, large marble dining table, microwave, stove, and a refrigerator. The only down side to this getaway was the long walk to the bathrooms, which at night meant "forget your flashlight, and do not expect to get back."

I slept, or rather pretended to sleep, on the top bed of a bunk bed. I would normally browse through a handheld guide to the universe's sky as I waited for the long abrupt snores of my parents in the bed below me. In fact, the reason I first snuck out was to get away from their noise, which I mistakenly thought was some dark hooded monster lurking in the corners of the small well-supplied trailer waiting to attack me. As I walked outside, the cold air of Florida's December hit my nose and bare feet with the strongest force as I stepped onto the wood deck that was our huge screened in porch. I feebly grabbed a flashlight, the smallest as was my favorite, and walked out slipping on sandals before my descent into the dark walk to the bathrooms.

I walked staring at the ground to avoid stepping in something unpleasant, such as snakes, lizards, or possibly a freak accident of quick sand. Such were the villains in the stories of other club members that

they unknowingly placed in my nightmares. I could not help beginning to feel terrified by the sound of my hollow steps crunching down on the small rocks echoing behind me. In my state of heavy limbs still burdened with the want to sleep, it sounded almost as if the monster in my imagination was following me. So I ran.

The faster I ran the more its steps seemed to get closer behind me. I was panicking. I knew I had to calm down. I'd had bad dreams before. I knew what to do.

"Just think of something else, like always," I whispered very quietly to myself, hoping "it" would not hear me stalling for bravery.

I slowed my steps down, feeling the heavy weight of my fear try to pull me along the dried mud trail, and looked around for something pleasant to see. All I could see around me were ghosts of empty trailers

that had possibly not seen visitors in years; some even had Christmas lights still existing but decades old. My only option then was to turn around with my yellow molded grip flashlight I had convinced

"The faster I ran the more its steps seemed to get closer behind me."

myself would protect me. As I spun around quickly and more wildly than I would have liked, the veil of protection from my flashlight died. I stood in the darkness shocked, engulfed in shadow only to have it melt away as my first venture out in the purest time of night revealed its secrets. I saw the beautiful night sky, encrusted with sparkling water drops that shone bright, much brighter than any glossy page could show me.

I stared up at the sky that seemed to be a velvet dome higher than my eyes could calculate over my head and let out a sigh of both relief and amazement. Since then, my midnight "bathroom walks" became routine as did the camping in the Everglades. Every weekend I would see my stars, looking at books of them on the way there and on the way back. A part of me grew up as I left behind the flashlight that watched over me all those nights before. I roamed uncharted territory and craved darker trails to walk as my eyes began to adjust to twilight's murky glow. This was my secret world now, a place to ponder, regroup,





and create fresh thoughts in my mind. Sometimes I even believe I expected the sky to whisper some honesty about the questions in my head. Often, these questions were about the meaning of life.

As my life went on, camping in the Everglades was put on the back burner for my parents, as work consumed most of our family life. Slowly my attempts to find the enchantment and simple beauty that became less and less frequent. Worst of all, they became unsuccessful to the point I only could see it in my dreams. The nights seem brighter now, and the stars looked as though they have aged with me. I'll never forget what they meant and still means to me, or of the changes I went through just by walking an unmarked path to see stars. I can see now that what I was really looking up for was a future, the bright future I wished to have but knew nothing about, like the books I stared at but never read. While those starry nights will always have a place in my heart, I know now that the future is not as far away as it seemed.

- Sharday Moshanko



A Letter to Law Enforcement

The city is outraged and we citizens detest
The fact that parents are forced to lay their young children to rest
Because a trigger happy cop couldn't perform a simple arrest
Without putting a dozen bullet holes in a juvenile's chest.
And you turn a blind eye to crimes in the inner city zone
It seems the only time you put effort in solving a crime
Is when the victim is one of your own.
And the statements you write in those police reports are fiction
You cowards are known for planting dirty weapons just to get a conviction.
You're nothing but gangsters with badges
And for this I owe you zero respect.
How can you consider yourselves good?
When you murder those
You swore to serve and protect.
You venomous snakes utter infection lies
You're just cold-blooded assassins in disguise.
And when your time here is done
I hope you return to the darkest pits of hell where you belong
So you can burn and suffer for all the things you did wrong
Like incarcerating innocent folks
Knowing they weren't guilty all along.
I'd rather see a dozen criminals
Released from their cells
In exchange to send one of you cowards
To spend eternity in Hell

- Sergio Moise



Mama

At the time I could not have known
That I was like my mother's gift to you on your day,
Now...
Our day

We share the date and the same name
But the times we shared together
Are still alive in my heart
And vivid in my memory

The only one who gave me special attention
Always there for me, even when I thought I didn't need you.
Your warm smile I remember, your calm voice I can't forget
Your kind words filled my life with joy

I was the favorite said the rest
Somehow we shared a stronger bond
I imitated you and watched you as I grew
And I am so much like you today

But I can no longer wake up to the smell of your sweet potato
pies
Or dance with you to those old Bob Marley songs
No longer hear you scream "Gal why you did that"
When I do something wrong

For you left me with nothing but memories
Not a locket or a watch
Or something I can hold

My mama,
More to me than my own mother
You left me
With memories of you and me

- *Tisari Black*

"Untitled"-Alex Demassis



Photography



Haití

Today I starved myself, further insane
 Actually woke up from a dream of shit splattered throughout the bathroom
 A terror tale of “late to work”
 Disturbing recurrences swimming by my head like
 Barracuda

Watched VH1 with Jack and Coke, when Coke ran out
 I had root beer
 Root Beer has finally served his purpose and found a place in my life
 VH1 Classics played classics, I realized I still
 am not a fan
 of David Bowie
 and I will always be a fan of Gloria Gaynor, (I WILL survive)
 I also am now – along with Iggy Pop – convinced The Carpenters were
 Great Sonic Architects

My hands shook at the end of the night, down to my friend’s last clove,
 Romans versus the Gaals on Discovery
 Caesar wins again despite all odds,
 raging cape on the battlefield inspiring blood
 Barbarians bit the blade
 Drove home listening
 to the Darkside of the Moon
 being muted out by ambulances and bikers headed to “Harley night”
 at the local Hooters.

I am so sick there is nothing to tell
 I schedule an appointment tomorrow
 I sliced some tomatoes, and ripe bananas from my yard
 Laid some taco meat between the red pinks and pale yellows
 And on my green plate, with it*s single olive,
 I felt I held Haiti in my hands
 All its refreshment and spices
 A child up on the roof looking out
 as cock fights go on in the town

- *Sergio Mora*

Greed

When desperate times call for desperate measures
We regard human life with less worth than worldly treasures.
Guilty pleasures, fast cars and suede leather
are opium's used to sedate life's pain and pressures.
Yet when the pain remains
We are stunned in disbelief
not realizing material items only provide temporary relief.
And you know I'm right
like me you battle these same demons day and night
Never content with what you've got
But wanting to own everything in sight.
Greed has hardened my heart and darkened my soul
It makes all else seem worthless
with the exception of the pursuit of gold.
Too many times this issue has been swept under the table
Regarded as fable
believed to be conceived in the mind of a mad man who is unstable.
But greed is an addiction we must resist
Though sometimes difficult we must persist.

- *Sergio Moise*



PYRO

As I spark the match I lose myself
Attempts to control the fire and burn everything
Completely mesmerized by its glory
I'm taken away and forget all common sense

It burns skin and destroys nerves
Slowly flickering like a beautiful waltz
Everything gradually dies into ash
Cinders are all that's left of my once loved home

No evidence of a cheating wife
An inferno finished destroying what she started
All pain has vanished with the smoke
The only thing to love now is the flame

Deafening sirens return me to myself
Restrained into submission
Strapped into the white jacket
Sent away where combustion is impossible

But I still dream of incineration
Ignition is all I need to break free
Because old habits die hard
Just like the flame

- *Andrew Johnson*

Insomnia

The day had been a whirlwind of events that all seemed to blur together, thanks to yet another sleepless night. Spence had had a lot of sleepless nights lately, and standing there trying to bring the day's events into focus, he couldn't help but recall when his insomnia had begun...

The spark of rage that flared up in her eyes when he bumped into her had intrigued Spencer, but without a word she quickly winked it away with a mischievous smile. Spence had worked with Ann for sometime and never really noticed her, but in that moment, he saw her, truly saw her; and from that moment he was completely under her spell. That night was the first of many sleepless nights to come, though he hadn't known it at the time. Ann's face in that instant just wouldn't leave his mind. What was it in her eyes that had captivated him? She was just a girl. Spence knew lots of girls; beautiful, vibrant, funny girls; and none of them had ever had this kind of effect on him. Suddenly the 32-year-old bachelor felt 16 again, and he was overcome with a desire to understand the fire in Ann's eyes; but where to begin?

Over a week went by before Spence saw her again; apparently their "encounter" had happened the day before Ann was leaving for Ocala to visit her family. By the time he did finally see her – 10 days, 13 hours and 26 minutes later – he was sure that the moment had passed and the opportunity was lost. He tried to put her out of his mind, but every time she walked by or he caught a glimpse of her out of the corner of his eye, he felt his heart beat just a little faster and a sudden flush of heat run through his body. Then she came to the bar to pick up drinks for the table; he had gotten so distracted by seeing her name on the ticket when it came out of the printer that he completely forgot to make them. He had to rush to make the concoctions while she stood there waiting for what seemed like an eternity. Ann noticed the wait too, and jokingly remarked, "What's taking so long Spence? Did you forget how to make a margarita or something? We only sell like a hundred a night!"

He couldn't even respond, just put the drinks in the service well and turned around to greet his own guest who had just sat down at the bar.

Though she looked a little confused, Ann shrugged at his aloof reaction to his comment, grabbed the drinks and walked away. For the rest of the night, every time that Spence saw Ann's name come out of his printer, he dropped what he was doing and hurried to make her drinks before she came to get them so that they would be there waiting, and he wouldn't have to interact with her, for fear of a repeat of the earlier encounter.

Towards the end of the evening, however, the two passed each other as Ann was coming out of the manager's office from doing her cash out and Spence was going in to turn in his drawer. She almost walked by without noticing him, and then looked up at just the right moment, smiled that same mischievous smile that had started his infatuation, and said "Hey Spence! You were really on your game tonight. Sorry about what I said earlier, it looked like it might have bugged you. I was just joking, but sometimes things come out bitchier than I meant them too. Whatever. Anyway, thanks!"

A quick "No problem" was all the response that the flustered Spencer could muster as he quickly retreated into the office, all the while wanting to smack himself for not saying something more. He already knew it would be another sleepless night.

It went on like that for about a month (actually it was 32 nights), of Spence not sleeping every time he worked with Ann, before he gave into his pride after still another bout of sleeplessness and convinced himself to ask her out. Besides, what did he have to lose? He had already foregone sleep, and his sanity wasn't far behind if he didn't act soon. So, while it was against everything in his nature to do so, Spence resolved that night to ask Ann out the very next time he saw her, no matter what. He turned to step off the treadmill and come face to face with Ann.

It was all Spence could do not to linger as he swept the towel across his face; it smelled of flowers and honey like Ann's hair.

Spence had started frequenting the 24-hour gym around the corner from his apartment on these sleepless nights as a way of tiring himself out in hopes of salvaging some rest. He hadn't known that Ann was a member there, and certainly never expected to see her there at 4 in the morning. But there she was. Right there in front of him, watching him stumble and nearly fall because the shock of seeing her had caused his feet to go numb. He quickly caught himself on the handrail, though it was anything but a graceful recovery, nodded in her direction, and said "Hey." Stupid monosyllabic idiot, he thought to himself, way to make an impression you clumsy fool!

"I thought that was you" said Ann, as she handed him her towel to wipe his brow.

It was all Spence could do not to linger as he swept the towel across his face; it smelled of flowers and honey like Ann's hair. He knew this because on one occasion when she brushed passed him in the restaurant, her ponytail had whipped him in the face and he had remembered the scent. "Yeah, it's the only time this place isn't too crowded" he lied after a brief pause. "What about you what's our story?" He was trying to sound aloof, but was afraid his inquisitive eye would give him away so he wiped his brow again, taking in her scent and covering his face for a moment.

"I had a math test in my night class and not I can't get the formulas to stop running through my head, so I figured I'd do some running of my own until my brain decided to shut down for the day. So far it's not working though. I think my next step is to go overdose on waffles at I.H.O.P. Carbs will make me sleepy for sure! Hey, you wanna join me?"

Was she really asking? Of course he wanted to; but how to answer without sounding desperate? "Well, I was gonna do a couple sets with weights, but I guess I could skip it if you need some company" he lied again, biting his tongue to contain his enthusiasm.

The two of them had watched the sun come up from their booth while sharing blueberry waffles and hot chocolate.

Now, six months later, as Spence stood there at the front of the church, surrounded by family and friends, and with Ann by his side,

the day he had been waiting for came clearly into focus. As he heard the minister say "Do you Spencer Michael Monroe take Annabella Ginger Williams..." he was drunk with joy. He instantly knew that all the sleepless nights had been worth it, and even if he never slept again, he would have Ann; to lie in her arms was all the rest he would ever need.

- *Laura Champlin*

"Love is one thing; knowledge is another."
- Ancient Egyptian proverb.

"Untitled" - Laird Allen



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Photography



My Kingdom my King

My kingdom my king conqueror of all things come home.
Feed me fix me because I am your Queen your destiny.

Erection to perfection sensitive to touch skin to skin
As our bodies tell the story of love.
Two beings embracing tangled into one.
Creeping into your subconscious

I want my metaphors and similes to molest you in your sleep.
Dripping with intensity exchanging dialogs telepathically
Tasting every word each verb mixing with adjectives
Squeezing nouns into pronouns

Capitalizing my womanhood with your red ink pen.
My professor,
My kingdom my king
Conqueror of all things

Take me I am all that you need for your recipe
Let me sizzle on your tongue deliciously
Gripping your taste buds
As you lick your lips slowly

Trickling inside of you as you digest me gradually
Burning with desire because you struck me
And I caught on fire crisp to the core
Listening to our unborn children

Sing the chorus to the song of how
You and I became we
Me as your Queen and
You as my king

My Kingdom my king
Conqueror of all things where are you?

- *Adama Wiggan*

“Dania”-Sergio Mora



Photography

Life Changing Experience

To some kids six years old, life is nothing but a fairy tale. Whoever you are introduced to, that person is automatically added into your list of friends to play with. Trust is automatically given. At least that's how it was for me. I don't think that any six year old kid can be held accountable for being naïve about the people that surrounds us.

Around this time in my childhood my family and I lived in West Palm Beach, FL. I guess the area in which we lived in could be considered a suburban area. The schools were great A+ schools, the people were very friendly and everything just seemed to be perfect. Summer was approaching and almost every morning was a beautiful sunny day. The birds were singing the flowers were blooming and you could just smell the freshness in the air as you took a deep breath.

Every day after a long day at school my mother would pick me up since my father was always working. Since school wasn't too far from my house my mother would either walk or drive to pick me up. From this routine for over a year we were very familiar with the people around the neighborhood. One person in particular was the guy which came and cut the grass once every two weeks. Over the years this guy and my family grew a great relationship and a great friendship. We were so close that he was granted access into the house sometimes without the presence of anyone.

On the night of the 4th of July, there was the annual firework show in our neighborhood. This is probably the only time in the year where everybody in the neighborhood is in one place enjoying the company of each other and everybody is having fun. I can still smell the smoke of every time they launched a firework, the way the lights changed colors in the air always reminded me of a beautiful canvas. As my family and I were there enjoying ourselves, the thought of anything going wrong never even occurred in our minds.

As everybody was making their way back home from the festivities we noticed that our front door was unlocked and the kitchen light was on. It was a strange moment but no one thought anything of it because we were kind of used to forgetting to do things. We all shared a couple of laughs then everybody settled in and went to bed. It was no more than forty five minutes later when I was awakened by a strange noise that was coming from the kitchen. It was the most

uncanny noise. The squeaky sound sounded like a couple of kids were jumping up and down on an old broken bed. Being scared of the situation I covered my head and decided to ignore the sound, and I slowly drifted back to sleep.

At approximately at 1 am which was about fifteen minutes after I drifted back to sleep, I was startled by the sound of men yelling and screaming right outside of my door. It sounded like a bunch of angry fans at a ball game or something. As I got up to investigate the situation I was immediately snatched and tossed into a room where my whole family was sitting on the floor and being held at gun point. Other than on television that was the first time that I have ever seen a gun. It was a count of three men and they were all masked. One of them was holding all of us at gun point while the other two were terrorizing our house. An hour had gone by and we sat there and we sat there and watched as one of the men who seemed to be leader was getting frustrated and yelled out, "we are wasting too much damn time". As I was examining the men I notice the boots that one of the men was wearing the boots looked very familiar. The stains of grass on the shoe and that smell of mud went up my nostrils. I concluded that all of that could come from him walking though the grass outside. As the anger grew between the men the louder and louder they got, I was wondering if any of the neighbors heard anything. After an hour and about fifteen minutes that man grabbed almost everything that my parents worked hard for and everything that was sentimental to us and left with them as if it was owed to them. As soon as they left my parents asked everyone if they were okay and got up and called the police.

A couple of weeks after the incident, we were informed that the men were captured and that one of the men who was part of the heist was the great friend that everyone trusted, the guy who cut the grass. It was then at that moment that I felt a feeling in my stomach, a feeling I never experienced before. I felt as if someone just punched me in the stomach. At that young age it was the that I realized that in this world there are good people and there bad people and you will not always have the chance to know who is the person that will hurt you. I also learned that you should never get to a point where you feel like you now everything about a person because that person can always be the one who hurts you.

- *Guyfred Mathurin*

QUEENS

it was a cloudless yet dark night 'cept for the city glare lights coming from everywhere as we stumbled down roosevelt off train downstairs to street into bar where mexicans short and bent backed sweaty and grimy from days work now shooting pool&drinking coronas look up at Patrick and I wondering what two yanquis are doing in their bar with neon virgin mary illuminating liquor rack as beautiful azaltan woman walks up about to struggle with English but i cut her off and ordered us warm tequila y dos coronas, so we settle in for serious drunk drinkbout with old beer buddy pat who i could never run out of words fer- but there's a pervasive feeling of goodbyes because again much as we love these times im always taking off somewhere for some adventure or some woman and he feels my impending departure (still haven't told him ill be moving off his couch in few days time with duffel bag over shoulder to catch big magical plane fly me back to the tropics for some dramatic return to win trini gals heart back-which didn't happen anyway and i cried in a little catholic garden to hear her tell me there in the shadow of st elizabeth that i was too mad in my youth still and although she loved me couldn't stand my distorted hop around craziness) sop we get well into agave distillation mystery of mexi-tequila and i break it to him-he's expecting it has rant all prepped telling me to stay that he'll help me out but i don't wanna be a burden no more on him or his sweet little nicorouguan madre who watches me drink while i read dante and she so sad and lonely here with nobody in the big city where they don't let her sit down on train because aint a gentleman left in the street for pretty lady who has been on her feet all day selling clothes outta hip designer store and she's there pursuing own dreams of art and designing her own fashions-plus he's got sweet eve all angelic and soft as snow-a real doll to me and she's crazy about him-speaking with a slight polished accent to drive a man mad-ive got miserable chick who loves me to death over in sunnyside with early morn before work at little cafe run by irishman and wife with good coffee and better blueberry muffins and afterwards i head to the village to sit in union square and talk with bums or watch pigeons fed by everyone or listen to girl from missouri strum lennon tunes and hear radical rants

We tear down and out of there not three seconds before bottle smashes wall where I was sitting

from bearded men. so we're sitting talking rapidly sadly gladly just rappin like we do so well old brother and i and then over left shoulder of mine patrick sees man with look of drinking since two that afternoon-glassed over red eyes and pinched forehead with whatever demon on his mind bout beating his wife or loosing his job or INS or whatever else drives men to such drunk deliberate all day slow binge-hes glaring at us something nasty and patrick bit hot head temper himself from the drink

and lively from conversation-sez to big drunk mexican-"what the fuck you lookin at?!"-hombre says nothing but drunk hatred glare and pat gets angrier and yelling over bar at him-bartender gives me nervous look and pretty much

the whole bar is now into the situation and definitely not on our side starting to look ugly at little talian guy screaming in english-i see chicano pool players advance with cues and cues so i toss some cash down grab patrick and we tear down and out of there not three seconds before bottle smashes wall where i was sitting.

- Nicolas Rodriguez



She.

She looks at you funny as she smashes her cigarette out in the bottom of her cup.

She says:

“You didn’t think we could go on like that forever, did you?”

You did.

She says:

“I still love you.”

She doesn’t.

She says:

“We can still fuck.”

She looks away.

Free radicals and invisible molecules bounce off one another at hyper-speed,
invisible in every inch of space,
but for a moment,
your world stands still.

She coughs.

An ugly chain-smoker hack.

Moment over.

- *Sarah Penello*

JUST SPACES

This place. So strange. Complicated and frustrating. I find myself in a dark land, where thousands – no, millions – congregate. There are no homes and there are no places. Just spaces. Infinite spaces for the millions of creatures here. They are all messengers, each with different messages that are somehow all the same. The entire place is a bazaar. Signs are everywhere. Sell, sell, sell! They ask me trivial questions with a promise of great riches for the correct answer. Somehow I know the promise is a lie, all a lie, for how could there be any treasure left for me when any person can solve this sphinx's riddle?

I believe that this place may be built upon a foundation of lies. One creature in a space claims that he is nearly one hundred years old! Another promises that he is a gentleman, and yet he seems to have made a harem out of his acquaintances. They call each other "friends," and yet they have never met. She knows three thousand faces that she will never see.

I have my own space now. Just a space. Right now it is empty. I name it after myself at first, but now I fear that they will find me. Why do I fear being found? Well, they are all creatures. In this place with spaces, I cannot look into their eyes, and they cannot look into mine, but they will find me. They will find me and ask me to worship them. They call themselves musicians, artists, comedians – they all need followers. I glance over at their congregations and I scoff. Another brothel. Another filthy horde. Am I expected to worship the diseased now?

However, the diseased seem to worship *me* as well. The messengers often come to me, handing me letters of courtship. He calls me beautiful in the same way he would compliment a whore – he and many others after him. I purge the letters in a great fire, and I ban his presence from mine forever.

Before long I am thoroughly frustrated with them all. There is an obsession to be among my eight great ones, positions of so called importance that in truth really mean nothing to me in this insane place with spaces. I eventually realize that these creatures might not even have souls, for how could a creature with no eyes to look into possibly have one? They sell themselves to be a mere number on a list while I struggle

to keep them all at bay, out of my own space. Then I begin to wonder:

What am I doing here?

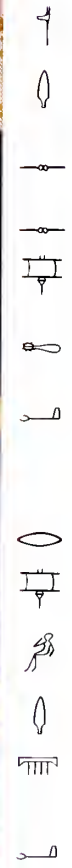
I seem to have accomplished little in this land. Ever since I have arrived here I have been sought out and badgered by propaganda, obsession and liars. There is an infinite amount of space here, and yet I feel claustrophobic. I try to burn my area and depart, but it is impossible. The spaces are indestructible. They *want* me here. They will not let me escape. However, I have found locks. They're not completely effective, but now I can breathe, at least. I can finally think. I can send a messenger to my family without being pursued by the creatures with false eyes. I keep very few around me, those whose eyes I have actually seen in another place, a place without these spaces. This space that I have can only fit so much.

Let it be known that this is *my* space, and *you won't be in it*.

- *Annabella Rios*



“Fantasy World”-Jessica Rivera



Mixed Media Painting

"Poet Joy Harjo" - Elgin Jumper



Graphite, Charcoal



CARAVAGGIO

Caravaggio
Chiaroscuro
Outta control
From Florence to Rome
From light to shadow
Goliath's head rolls
If truth be told
Strange tormented muse
"Judith Beheading Holofernes"
And "Doubting Thomas"
In notorious quest
Caravaggio's drama's the best!
Dark style blessed
On pain of death
Bacchus self-portrait
Doing the unexpected!
And oh-so-hard to interpret.

- *Elgin Jumper*

"Mystery Yin and Yang" - Mark Anderson



Handwritten symbols and characters arranged vertically on the left side of the page, including a stylized bird-like figure at the top, followed by various geometric and abstract marks.

Handwritten symbols and characters arranged vertically on the right side of the page, including a stylized bird-like figure at the top, followed by various geometric and abstract marks.

Photography

Handwritten symbols and characters at the bottom left corner of the page.

"Untitled" -Marta Gonzalez



Photography

Perfection

In the gospel According to Saint Cosmo,
I will never model.
I am too short,
I am too flawed.
For in life, an accomplishment isn't an
accomplishment.
Unless you stay under a size five.
A girl will never be president
(Not here, anyway)
Because you'll never find How to Run for Office
Between what's "in season"
(Which looks like last year's crap to me)
And How To Make Him Love You
(And make love to you)
Between glossy pages, you might see an ad for
Some cause.
But, by next month, a cosmetic company will have
Invaded that space
Lipstick is more important- much more.
And you would be so pretty
If you just...
Lost weight
Bleached your hair
Fixed that nose
Tightened your abs
Enlarged your breasts
Reconstructed your whole body-
Mattel will guide you.
Is it any wonder the prevalence of STDs?
You have to find acceptance somewhere,
And maybe if someone-
Not yourself, never yourself
Can stand to see you naked,
Vulnerable.

Maybe they lied.
Maybe you're not a whale.
Maybe you're not a monster.
Even if you are, you're not like
Those pathetic, lonely girls

- *Lexa Samuel*

*"Be it known that we, the greatest, are misthought."
- Cleopatra Ptolemy VII*



"Twisted"-Amanda Leigh Conrad



Photography



Tremaine Byfield
Royal Vizier



Amanda Leigh Conrad
Oracle



Nathan Phelps
Mystic of Horus

Pharoah Patrick's Court Gives Thanks To:

Richard Vom Saal
Roger Smith
Alicia Sobchak
Jan Johnson



Annabella Rios
Royal Architect



Sergio Mora
Royal Scribe



Sharday Moshanko
Protégé of the Royal Architect

Faculty Pharoah: Patrick Ellingham





The Broward Community College Student Literary/Arts Magazine



Greetings
From Pankunna





P'an Ku

"Samuel"-Amanda Robinson

*W*elcome to Pankunia!

Pankunia is a state of mind established in 1964. It is a destination that cannot be reached by car, boat or plane, but you can make a reservation using your imagination. Artists live there, whether it be of the written or visual arena. It is a place where creative juices flow freely that cannot be bought at a smoothie bar.



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Map of Pankunia

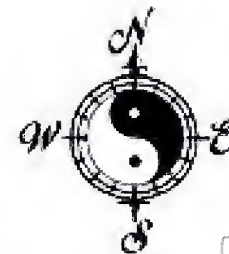
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"At the Bottom"

-Amanda Robinson



Photography

"Butterfly"

-Amanda Robinson



Photography

Replaceable

Angela Osborne

I loved the fact that I didn't have to cook or eat alone, the way you used to brush the hair out of my face, even when I deliberately put it there, the way that you made me feel part of your family, the way that I gave you credit for cleaning the house after I woke up early to do it, having somewhere to go when I didn't feel like going home, the way you would look at me as if you hadn't seen me in years. It's a shame that I love all this more than I actually loved you.

To Get Over This

Kwanokee Gallon

I'm going to need time. Space. Someone to talk to. Someone who can handle me. Tears. A notebook. A pen. Words. The strength to write. A canvas. The colors. Spread my emotions across the page. A big padded white room, maybe a special jacket. Sex Our Favorite position. A letter. An apology. An "I Love You." A new guy. New relationship. Time. I'm going to need late nights. Memories. A shot of Patron. My mom's ox-tail and rice. Aunt Laura's mac and cheese. Friends. Family. My I-Pod. The ocean. Space. My voice as I'm screaming. One last picture of us. Time. The Gods watching over me. One final kiss from you.

"Broken"

-Angie Gonzalez



Graphic Art

"Airhead"
-Graciela Gomez



El yo esta de mas
Sofia Bastidas

Me visto de amarillo
Camino de colores
Sonrio de morado y
Estudio geografia
No comprendo tu locura,
No conosco tu otro lado.
Te pinto con pinceles
Respiro de verde
Me rio de rosado
y estudio arte
Me asombro de Dali
Me contagio de Van Gogh
Me sorprendo de Miro
Me inspiro de la vida y
Solo me confundo conmigo misma.

Six Months in London

R. A. Congdon

I was nervous; I didn't know what to expect. We hadn't laid eyes on each other in almost six months; phone calls and e-mails did nothing to alleviate how I felt. But nonetheless, my heart pounded inside my chest, I felt light-headed as my plane started descending. That could be from the change in cabin pressure, or the fact that I had not seen my fiancé in six months. I think it is the latter.

I took an overseas job in London for six months, I am not at liberty to say my position, nor my employer so needless to say it is important, and they could not have done it without me. So in May I bravely boarded my flight to Heathrow, and set off with my brand new Burberry coat and a "go-gettem" attitude.

I had to have a go- get- them attitude, I got in a fight that almost ended the relationship with him the night before I left. I wanted to be wanted, he wanted to let me go. There was some debate as to whether this job would be turned in to a permanent thing or not. Which would mean that I, of course, would stay in London, and we didn't know how his job would play in to that. He owns a very successful company, and basically runs it, so it isn't like he can just up and leave whenever he wants to.

I left before my fiancé woke up the morning I left, I didn't want a tearful goodbye, and as much as I wanted a huge hug I couldn't bring myself to wake him. So needless to say he was quite upset with me for a while, because I was "inconsiderate and selfish." Direct quote.

I sent him an e-mail once I got to my new 'flat', small but oh-so-chic, (I even had a great view, and a velvet couch) with its modern décor and soft feminine accents such as a light ballet pink bathroom with a lion claw tub and small porcelain sink. I explored the apartment further, since the e-mail had been the first thing I did, (aside from using the adorable bathroom) I found a welcome basket on the four-person dining room table in a small nook by the kitchen from the office.

I need space, and I'll let you know when you can be in my life again.

With some things to tide me over until I could get to the grocery store the next day. Milk was in the fridge,

which was an absolutely fantastic 'ice box' that looked as though it was from a different era, when in fact it had just been modeled after another time.

My plane had been delayed at the airport, so I didn't even get in until very late my own time, let alone London's own. So after putting on my night shirt brushing my teeth I promptly fell into bed in a large comfortable bed with soft white sheets and a large feather comforter.

The next weeks were very hard, the only response I got from the 'I'm sorry e-mail' was, "I need space, and I'll let you know when you can be in my life again." Which threw me off to no end, I went to work in the morning,

and came home at night heart and homesick, but covered it up with work, this was the first time in almost ten years that I had not seen or spoken with him every day. I was lonely; I called my mom and best friend a lot. They kept telling me to go out, I was in London, my mother, who was completely against drinking, even encouraged me to go to the local pub and have a pint to calm down. Since my wedding was in 8 months my mother and I had a good portion of it planned, but I wasn't sure whether he would want to go forward with it or not, so we were forced to put planning hold.

My best friend also told me to find someone at work that I liked and go out with them, she said he would come around and that if he didn't he was an idiot, that made me feel a bit better. So I did, I went out with a lady in another department who had just moved to the company from the Paris office, she was outgoing and a blast, she and I would go to Jazz clubs and have cosmopolitans and then meet up with her friends. I was beginning to think that I could adjust to not being around him when he called me. He didn't speak me to for three and a half weeks and seven hours, in case you were wondering.

I was sitting in a small coffee/tea shop directly below my flat reading the paper when my cell phone rang. I immediately picked it up, expecting a fight, but there wasn't one. I could tell by the sound in his voice that he was trying not to cry, so I let him talk. He felt like he was

being left behind and that I would never come back. I assured him that I wasn't about to stay in London forever THIS time, but at some point this was the ideal office for me to further my career and that we would have to cross that when we got to it. He said that he just wanted me back, the old me, the one he "fell in love with", I knew what he meant, and I knew his tone, so I listened.

He wanted who I was in college, someone who would drop everything to go to the beach, or stay up all night talking. But that changed when I got this job just out of college, I had been out of college for three months and working at an entry level position, when by some magical reason (I swear it must have been magic) my boss promoted me because she said I was probably the most honest person she would ever speak to and that I deserved it. Once I got into that position I discovered something that I never knew, I am really, really amazing at what I do. That changed things, I think for the better, and I know he gets that deep down.

After a long and tearful conversation that lead me back to my apartment while talking to him, I hung up, and stood in my living room with the phone still in my hands. The feelings that rushed over me were so mingled that I couldn't discern what they were, but I could feel the extremely hot tears welling up my eyes. I fell onto the couch and let myself miss him so severely that I could not breathe. My chest honestly hurt when I thought that I

.....
**I was practically fainting
from my heart racing
too fast...when we finally
started exiting the plane.**
.....

wouldn't get to see him for 5 months.

I had lost myself in the 2 years preceding that day; I had changed so that my fiancé didn't even recognize who I was. I realized that I was actually going to have to start enjoying life rather than working constantly and being such a brat. My first implementation of my new life style was to throw out all of the suits that I hated and were drab and boring, and go out and buy well fitted suits with a flare of drama. I got a fabulous hair cut so that I no longer wore my long nut brown hair in a tight French twist, but so that it flowed gently down my back in soft waves.

With the fashion changes I also put into practice a strict exercise regime, where I did Yoga three classes weekly, and ran on the weekends. My entire outlook on life changed. I got back to who I really was. Cross-oceanic wedding planning started taking place again, until I was searching for the perfect dress in London, WITH my mother who had flown over to make sure I did not repeat the senior prom dress fiasco.

I stayed busy, and before I knew it I was packing all of my things to be shipped back home, and my wedding was in a month. I said goodbye to the few friends that I had made in London, and left my flat for the last time and headed towards Heathrow.

I was practically fainting from my heart racing to fast when we finally started exiting the plane. When it was my turn, I practically raced up the ramp to the terminal; and to the escalator that would take me to baggage claim where he would be. I saw him before he saw me, he was staring at the flight monitors intently, his hands in his kaki pockets

and his button down shirt rolled up. It was abundantly clear, even from afar, that his normally short hair, had grown out to the point that it obviously needed a haircut.

I walked up behind him silently, and slid my arms around him. He jumped slightly, before he turned around and gave me the warmest hug that I had ever received.

"I love you." He whispered.

Vuelvo a ti

Jose Aristimuno

Vuelvo a ti.

A tu tinta negra con capa de la noche.

Vuelvo a ti.

Como los pajaros vuelven a su nido.

Como madre despues de un dia de trabajo cuando aguarda a su
nino.

Como las Tortugas cuando vuelven a la duna del amor.

No desconfies en mi, siempre volvere.

Cuando menos te lo imagines ahi estare.

"Coastal"

-Alex Demassis





"Lonely Night"

-Alex Demassis



Photography

Fortune Teller

Angela Osborne

Breathe.
Close your eyes.
The warmth of
Candles, scent of burning
Sage enveloping you.

It's natural to be curious.
Grasping at swords,
You'll go on that dream vacation.
Lost inside a
Crystal ball.

Your line has been crossed,
Waiting to meet your
One and only,
I won't say it's
Going to be awhile.

Concentrate.
I am left deciphering
Inner most desires.
Selling my gift
For shiny trinkets.

Leaves that leave
You speechless,
Drinking my every word
From gilded cups.
Do you really want to know?

You are the pentacle
Hanging from my neck.
Dangling in the gap
Between past lives,
And future self in perfect balance.

You can't Fool me.
You're no Queen.
Reversing your Wheel of Fortune
I can see it. I am
The Magician, want to see my wands?

Leading yourself palm first
Into the future,
You'll be back next week,
Questioning every flicker
Of light or turn of a card.

In Memory

R. A. Congdon

I never knew something like this could happen. You always see it in the movies, but it never happens to you. I think waiting was the hardest part knowing what was coming, but at the same time not knowing exactly how much grief would wash over us when it was all over.

The day of the funeral was one of the most heartsick days of my life. My best friend, Duncan, came up to me just before the funeral started. Standing behind me he wrapped his arms around me in the most tender of hugs, and whispered in my ear. "She'd have wanted you to be strong Brooke. She'd want you to get up there and say something about how circus animals are being treated or how whales are being butchered. Not how sad you are."

My eyes were burning from not releasing the tears that were there, but I wouldn't let them out. Instead I squeezed Duncan's hand and clenched my jaw intently.

"I know, she would hate the attention. Which is ridiculous, because she deserves..." I paused realizing the tense I had just used. "Deserved the attention." I concluded softly, turning my head and biting my lip so forcefully I drew blood. Duncan hugged me tighter.

"Just say what you feel," I was terrified of doing this, but I, of course, would do it because she asked me to. People began to take their seats. Duncan and I walked to our front row seats. When we sat, he held my hand because he knew I needed him, whether I would admit it or not.

The service was beautiful, but when it came time for me to stand up, my body felt like jelly. I'm not sure how I made it to the podium, but my feet managed to take me there. I stood without

talking for a few moments, shuffling the sheets of paper on which I had written beautiful things about her: what a wonderful student and daughter she was. I decided against reading that; I spoke what was on my mind.

"I first met Trish when we were four years old, when her family moved her. We became inseparable. Our mothers said that we were Irish twins, born to different mothers, when we should have been born from one. Problem is; we could never decide which mother it would have been." A small, soft ripple of chuckles was emitted from the crowd. I stared at Duncan in the front row; then I glanced at Trish's family. Her mother had an expression of immense sorrow on her face that I will never forget; she smiled a slight smile at the mention of that memory.

"Trish was an activist: she wouldn't eat meat, of any sort; she wouldn't wear leather or fur; she recycled, also making Duncan and myself recycle too." I smiled "I remember in ninth grade she forced the two of us to do a protest with her which, for some reason, involved covering each other in blood-colored corn syrup and feathers and walking around town with picket signs.

She was always doing stuff to make us laugh." I smiled a tearful smile and inhaled hard.

"Even at the hospital she was trying to make US feel better. She didn't let us be sad, that's how strong she was... or rather is. She lives in my heart where she has a permanent place..."

I sat in Geometry class, between Duncan and Trish, passing notes to each other.

Trish to Brooke: stop staring at Duncan and pay attention to class you moron!

Brook to Trish: I AM NOT STARING AT DUNCAN! I was merely debating asking him a question about class.

Trish to Brooke: Yeah, sure. Hey, do me a favor, if I ever have the look you JUST had on your face, SLAP ME! Then Duncan leaned over and whispered to us, "What are you guys writing? I want to see."

"What'll you give me?" Trish asked Duncan, I spit out, "BITE ME!" to Trish in a spitting voice.

PAY ATTENTION YOU IMBECILES!

I gave her a pleading look and her demeanor softened to a sympathetic smile at me, " we weren't talking about anything important. Now PAY ATTENTION! Do you want to fail and wind up getting kicked out of early decision and wind up going to some community college with seven kids by the time you're thirty working at BURGER KING and living in a one-bedroom apartment? I didn't think so. PAY ATTENTION YOU IMBECILES!"

We all giggled and got a little bit in trouble with the teacher. It was then when it finally calmed down that Trish fell off her chair, unconscious, her face hidden by a mass of glossy curls.

The class panicked; 911 was called, I held Trish's head in my lap. Her forehead was burning up, and her sleeping face was suddenly flushed...

She was rushed to the hospital. Duncan drove us there, and we sat with her until her family arrived. She woke up about an hour after they got her into the ER. She, by that time, was so pale- more so than when we went to the meat- packing factory on a field trip in the 5th grade.

She said she felt fine and just wanted to get home. We knew it wasn't the truth- she was hurting, but we didn't know why. Neither did the doctors initially. The tests they ran showed that her body was toxic, and they couldn't find the source of the infections. They believed that there were several infections, but they were so advanced they couldn't determine the source of them. So without knowing the cause of an infection, it's almost impossible to treat.

Duncan, Ted (Trish's brother) and I were asked to leave the room for the diagnosis, but Trish insisted that we stay. By the way she was clutching my hand, I knew she was scared.

We were told that there was a low chance of someone surviving this. Trish clenched her teeth, and gripped my hand tighter; I didn't see what everyone else was doing because my head was spinning. "Trish is going to die" kept spinning through my brain, like some sick mantra. I was numb.

The doctors tried everything they could. We never left her side. I prayed so hard that she wouldn't be taken from us. She had

so much to give, so much life to live! she needed to be given the chance to live it!

Maybe waiting was the hardest part, not wanting to admit that it was just a matter of time before she left us. Maybe it was her mom: crying non- stop, so that she had to be sedated. No, I take that back. THE worst part of the whole thing was; watching my best friend, my "Irish twin," suffer. Watching her wither away, and still be strong throughout the whole ordeal.

Trish just "Drained" away. Everything that could go wrong, did. Her energy was gone! The vivaciousness and vibrancy disappeared from her body.

On the last day her life, Ted, Duncan and myself sat quietly in the room with Trish. We all new it would be the last day we would spend with her. She looked like she had been ravished by cancer for months. In fact it had just been days since the collapse. Ted was quiet, Duncan was optimistic, and Trish, well, she remained herself until the last breath she took. Me? I stayed calm and balanced throughout all of it, or at least tried to, I didn't cry once, even though I was screaming on the inside about how unfair it all was, and how angry I was.

"You guys, it feels like a funeral in here. Put on some music or SOMETHING!" Trish said with great effort. "Come on guys, don't be depressed. GET SOME MUSIC!!" she paused, and when no one did anything, "NOW!" she added as forcefully as she could muster.

Duncan hopped to it, he grabbed his portable DVD player and popped a CD into it. Music flooded the room.

"That's better. I love this song." Trish said, smiling and leaning her head on the pillow.

We had our little party, even laughing a bit. Until we could tell that keeping a smile on her face was wearing her out. She protested when we turned the music off. It was late though, we could tell she was fading. It became harder for her to take a breath. I sat next to her bed with Duncan on my right. He held my hand with tears streaming down his face. My left hand held Trish's. I kept smiling just for her, because she told me that she needed me to be her rock, or she would loose it, so I kept my promise. Her

family was ashen faced and didn't speak. The six of us sat in the room, waiting for the thing we knew was coming. Finally when I saw it was a struggle to take a breath, I opened my mouth, and with great difficulty I said:

"It's ok. You can let go. Your body is tired. I love you. We all love you." Trish looked at me with a grateful look in her eyes.

"I love each and everyone of you with all of my heart. Thank you so much for being here with me. Keep on being who you are." Then slowly her breathing became shallow and her eyes closed, then her breathing stopped all together. We knew she was gone. Everyone in the room sobbed but me. Duncan held me while the family grieved.

It only took FIVE days. We didn't see it coming, you never see it coming. The funeral was two days later, on a Monday afternoon. Trish would have loved to have an excuse to skip school, so it fit...I remember it was cold and rainy. Those two days before the funeral were a haze. I know Duncan never left my side, not talking, but just being there for each other. Nothing mattered to me.

"Trish was the most..." I paused, because my body couldn't hold the tears much longer. "Amazing person that I will ever know in my life, I'm just glad that I had the opportunity to know her. She was truly a gift!" And with that, my grief took over, and I let out the first tears I had cried about her. I tried to regain some composure, because I'm sure I looked like an idiot up there, but my body knew better and wouldn't let me. Duncan helped me off the stage and out the door. I leaned heavily on him. I sobbed for weeks, mourning the life she would never get to live. All of the plans that we made that she would never get to complete.

For a while, I thought I wasn't going to pull through; I had lost my other half. I was in physical pain from the loss. I stopped talking to people, including Duncan. I could still see him from my window; he lay on his bed with the lights out every night, looking so sad. I knew he was crying, even if I couldn't quite see him. He cried not only for the loss of one, but two friends. I wanted

desperately to be near him, but I couldn't let anyone close.

About six months after she died, her mother brought over a box of Trish's things. On the top was a letter she had written to me on her deathbed apparently. She wrote that yes, her death would be a sad event in my life, but there was going to be many jubilant moments, and she wanted me to live them, for both of us. She said I needed to mourn for as long as I needed to, but please not stay stuck.

We knew she was gone.

That lifted my spirits.

In the spring I graduated from high school. And in the fall I went to college, where I re-met Duncan; I had forgotten all three of us had gotten "early acceptance" to the same college. Duncan and I fell in love, never forgetting our dear friend. And yes, Duncan and I married when we graduated, and in memoriam, named our oldest daughter after Trish.

"Juno"

- Marianne Wagner



Photography

Stumped

Aaron Avis

The *Schinus Terebinthifolius*, or Florida Holly, can be classified as either large or small evergreen, but being nature's biggest weed is the best description for it. They can grow upwards to 30 feet and be just as wide. They possess compound leaves with shining red berries that local animal life use for nourishment. The multi-stemmed trunk of the tree creates mangled masses of arching and criss-crossing branches that form dense thickets. The invasive tree is non-native to Florida and can disrupt natural communities by devouring water supplies and cutting out shade to smaller plants. The tree is impossibly persistent. A cut stump re-sprouts profusely and the spread of the tree is increased with the fertilization and germinated seeds found in the feces of birds that enjoy the Holly's red berries.

I grew up with one in my backyard.

My Holly was the greatest backyard playground a kid could dream of. I did not so much as climb her but instead allowed her to carry me up in her offering branches. There were spots to sit in comfort, letting my feet hang as I rested my back against the branches that extend to heaven. The stump of the tree grew outward at its height like the plank of a pirate ship. I would stand on it while holding on to smaller branches, the king in my own particular world. The bigger branches that got too heavy to support themselves carved downward then grew on, creating natural bridges that I would creep across to reach the various towers of perfect seclusion. One such bridge led to a thorn bush that grew several feet away from the Holly. The two trees had grown into one another so it was impossible to see what the tree started what tree ended. But the bridge was covered in a canopy of red berries and thorny red flowers. Its shade was penetrated by rays of sunlight that poured through leaves like laser beams. I would walk along the bridge in the comfort of my imagination, the green womb protecting me from the heat and from the rain. Sometimes I would blur my eyes to create a grandness that made

it seem more unreal. It was magic.

It was a damn shame that I had to cut it down.

I moved away from home. My plan was to go to college and make something of myself, to grow as an individual, to prune the excess. But sometimes things do not work out as planned. The financial stress and burden of living without the aid of a parent was too much for me to bare.

My mother.

I was amazed at how much she did for me while I lived under her roof. I never realized it until I tried to take care of myself. I had to return home with my tail tucked firmly between my legs. I was a beaten dog waiting for permission to eat. That was the hardest phone call I ever had to make, the phone call in which I had to ask my mother if I could live with her again. When I got back home she already had a spot cleared for me in my old room, which she had been using as storage. The bed was made and as a joke she had the Alf doll I used to sleep with centered on the pillow.

I could not properly define the irony because I failed out of school but its possible definition was could be found between the lines of the agreement my mother and I made. Growing up I abhorred yard work. Battle of will were constantly fought between my mother and I. As a teacher, my mother had summers off but she had little free time. She often taught summer school or worked endless hours crafting wood to sell at fairs in order to make extra money, doing anything possible to make ends meet. She would leave notes with a list of chores that my sisters and I had to complete before she came home. My list of chores angered me. My list of chores I thought were unfair. Weed the yard, mow the grass, paint the roof, clean the pool, pave the driveway, pressure clean the patio, re-route the sprinkler system. Ridiculous chores. I would raise hell, complain, throw fits of spoiled rage. I would state my privileged friends never had to lift a finger or I would compare my list of chores to that of my sisters, who always has cushy, air-conditioned indoor jobs like vacuuming. My eldest sister, for example, would always that chore but she hated the sound the vacuum made. So she would instead go through the motion of

vacuuming but with the vacuum turned off, y mother never knew because the marks were sill left on the carpet. I hated my sister for that. Not because of her wasted cleverness but because I was envious that the technique wasn't applicable with mowing the yard.

Thank God for the consistent Florida summer rain. I would lie in bed and just wait for the rain. The rain made it impossible most of my outdoor duties. I would tell my mother I was doing assigned summer reading for school because school was more important than yard work. In reality I would be playing video games and waiting for the rain. She knew i was lying and if she didn't she knew I was lying now. I failed out of school and the only way I could live in her house was by doing the assigned yard work. Irony.

On the day I was to remove the tree I stood there and stared at ti for a while. This was no longer the tree of my childhood. A hurricane had destroyed the towers and precipices of that playground. My bridges were snapped and my canopy protection was uprooted by nature's fury. The thorn bush was no longer a companion of the Holly for it too was destroyed. That tree was so overgrown that it took all three of my sisters, my mother, two of her friends, myself and the good portion of two days to completely remove the fallen limbs from the altered trees. Only the stump of the Holly remained. My mother did what she could to ensure my life was never disrupted by anything in life might throw at me. The stumped stayed because she knew that I would be devastated if it completely disappeared from my life, so many other things had left in that way. She might not have wanted the reminder she knew the shadow of a thing still had substance so the stump stayed.

The stump became smaller in my eyes, losing the height and aw a child's perspective gives everything. The bark of the stump was the brown color of rotten wood found on the backing of baseboards. Black scars, the color of the mildew from the unkempt showers appeared sporadically throughout. The old jagged edges of once mighty branches houses spider webs filled with little insects struggling to survive or already dead.

If the stump is the heart of the tree then this one never stopped beating. Eventually new life sprang from the seemingly dead tree. Eventually new branches replaced old glories and the tree grew on. Greens similar in hues to that of an algae infested pool once again started to shine. Red berries returned and the tree became a new being. No better or worse than before. just different.

But the tree still had to come down.

The branches that once shielded playing children from the sun became grossly overgrown. The thorn bush was gone so the Holly had nothing to share in its growth. It was a sprawling mess and it was all over the place. The branches grew tangled within themselves, creating a mass of nature. Branches impeded passages through the pool patio, blocking the screen door. The overflow overlapped the chain fence of the backyard, resting in the brackish waters of my canal. Any strong wind from any strong storm would snap some limbs but they would not fall due to the congestion of the overgrowth. The big knot of fresh foliage was specked with dying bark. it reminded me of graying hair, age becoming apparent.

All I had to dispose of he tree was a hatchet, hedge trimmer, and an old rusty saw.

Tools were always a minimum when there were projects to do. When I had to pressure clean the roof, I only had a five-horse power electric cleaner, which was the equivalent of me having a mouth full of water and a straw to spit it out of. After I finished cleaning the roof, I had to paint it with nothing but a small brush and one roller. My mother loves all things free. She heard the city had an excess of mulch that it was trying to dispose of. My mother jumped all over it, calling the city and proclaiming her need of it. The mulch arrived on the back of two dump trucks. When the dump trucks left there was a mountain of mulch that stood chest high and extended down the length of the driveway. I had to distribute the mulch throughout the yard with nothing to aid me but an old shovel and a wheel barrow with a flat tire.

I knew the tree would be down in seconds if I had a chain saw. But chainsaws cost money, and I learned long ago where money did not grow.

It was early morning When I started to cut the tree. The intense heat of Florida was more bearable in the early hours I held the hedge clippers in my hands. I in-took a huge breath of preparation and began the job. I snipped the thinner branches first. I cut with an early enthusiasm that I always brought with me on big jobs. I saw the end before I began. I saw a job completed before I started. Any little disruption to the plan would shatter my perceived outcome. I clipped branches free from the mess. It was fun in an odd, distracting way. I tried to guess how long each branch could be before pulling them free. One branch was 20 feet long. I piled what I pulled in a stack next to the wall of the house. The length of the branches had to be shorter so they could fit more comfortably in the back of my pick-up. Later I would have to drive to the dump to dispose of them. Each large limb had several smaller branches growing from it so those needed too be trimmed. A pattern developed. Snip. Snip. Pull. Pile. Snip. Snip. Snip. Snip. Pull. Pile. Snip. Snip. I kept this rapid pace for ten minutes before I took a break. I rested on my mother's swing that was shaded by the branches of an oak tree that also made residence in the backyard.

I sat back, panting out loud and looking at the tree. I wanted to stop already. It was a hot summer and an even hotter summer morning. Sweat was forming all over me. I never sweated so much as a kid, I never had to worry much. But I was sweating now. I wanted this job to be over. I wanted to go back to bed. I wanted a chainsaw. I was bored ad tired and I wanted to finish later. The pile was huge already, there was proof I needed to show that I did something, did a lot really. I was always about appearances. My mother would never know the work I sctually did. The huge pile could have taken hours to the untrained eye. I could sit under the shade of this tree, take a nap and wait for her to come out and say "hey mom, look at how much I did, aren't you proud." half-assed. I always did everything half-assed. I would mow the front yard not the back. I would clean the pool but not the patio. I would clip the branches but never throw them out. I wondered what angered my mother mre, the fact that I hardly did anything, or when i did do something it was hardly ever

enough. She was old fashioned, she expected a man to finish what he started.

I got up and went back to work. I wanted to be different, no better or worse, jus different.

I took the hatchet, hoping a change of procedure would kill the growing laziness sprouting in me. I chose to attack the larger limbs that extruded from the base of the stump. I hacked over and over., chunks of wood flying in my eyes, my mouth, my forehead. M patience decreased while my pulse increased with agitation. I would chop faster and faster only adding fuel to the debris, a cycle of frustration and annoyance. Branches would crack then fall. I would stand over m y conquered enemy, breathing heavily in victory. I would take the saw and perversely smile as I watched it's rusty teeth dig into the flesh of the fallen limb. Sap would pour forth from the wounds, staining my hands with a substance that took many showers to remove. I took the pieces of log and heaved them on the ever-growing pile of dead tree. I lost all track of time but gained a sense of space. Little by little the tree was shrinking. Little by little I was winning.

The pile was getting big, taking up most of the backyard. I decided to move some of the bigger branched closer to my truck to make disposing of them easier. Some of the branches still had little sharp twigs on them that would scratch any potion o my flesh not protected by clothing. Little trails of blood outlined my arms and legs like varicose veins. While dragging hem across the floor of my backyard the leaves would pick up pieces of dog manure so kindly left there by my mother's two large dogs. When I threw these branches in the back of my truck particles of feces showered me. It just added to my agitation.

It took several trips to the truck to shrink the pile of limbs in the backyard. If I was not contending with the dog crap, microscopic ants were biting me. My sisters and I called them spider ants, but I have no idea why. We would swim in the pool everyday in our youth. There was always holes in the screening so these little ants would fall from the palm trees that bordered the patio. They would cover our body, leaving little hives of irritation. only their stings gave us any indication that they were on us.

These little bastards were all over these branches. My whole body was stinging. I did not even bother scratching, for some reason I felt like I deserved the pain.

When I returned to the tree I jumped the fence and started to conquer the branches resting in the canal. I hacked. I sawed. I clipped. A large branch slid downwards, stopping when the top reached the bottom of the shallow canal. I walked to the edge to remove it, city ordinance 20-61 forbid the disposal of trash in canals, an offense punishable by citation and fine. I took care of the branches because neither my mother nor I could afford the fine. I lost my footing on the slippery bank, sliding knee deep in the warm water. My shoes were baptized, every step I took felt as if I were wearing sponges of filth. Later, due to not wearing socks with old tennis shoes I developed a form of athlete's foot that took months to go away. An unseen force made the few remaining branches vibrate. I was in a fever of fantasy fueled by the heat, the shit, the scars, and the shoes. I felt as if the tree was laughing at me upon the rustling of its leaves. Some inside joke only it understood and me, left guessing what I did to face such harsh ridicule.

Only a few branches remained. The limbs of the larger portion of stump were now at a manageable level. There was this one long skinny arm of branch that extended fifteen feet from the trunk. I snipped it easily but it did not fall. The top of the branch was clinging onto the higher branches of the father oak. No matter how hard I pulled on this branch it would not let go. I grabbed hold with my hands and lifted myself off the ground but my suspended weight was still not enough for the branch to let go. It clung ad clung hard, refusing to release itself. I had a three foot long linked chain that I attached to three bungee cords both of which I had in the back of my pickup. I managed to throw it with precision; it circumnavigated the branch several times, locking itself up. I backed in the glory of my own ingenuity. I tugged on the makeshift pulley but the bungee cord, by design, offered little resistance, making it an ineffective tool. The bungee snapped at the base of the chain. It recoiled rapidly towards me, the metal hook of the cord splitting the skin on the knuckle of my left hand. While I shook off the pain I watched the branch fall with no

assistance. It as if I learned all by myself that it was ready to let o of the father oak and it fell on it's own terms and in its own way.

Only the stump and one large limb in its center remained. I had finished. I had completed the job. I was different. I will saw off the last large limb and once again only the stump will remain. This tree has plagued this backyard for multiply incarnations will be a shadow yet again. Every muscle in my body was sore from the repetition of hacking. Every joint stung from the monotony of sawing. My hands were callused from the wasted rubber handles of the trimmers. I was glad this war was almost over. I started to saw the limb, proud of my accomplishment and proud of my determination. The saw became stuck. Something impeded its ability to cut the limb. Maybe the age. maybe the rust. Maybe the pressure. Maybe me. It really didn't matter. That branch was coming down. I did not do this for failure. I did not start this job to finish later.

I climbed the tree, gone were the offering branches. I stood upon the plank of my pirate ship again but this time I was no king. I was a tired man who wanted nothing more that to destroy the tree. I kicked the limb with all the force my exhausted body could muster. I beat my foot against the stubborn, steadfast limb in a madness grown from anger and frustration. I kicked with all my might, all my strength, and all my will. Sweat dripped off my body, mingling with the sap of the bleeding tree. Every muscle was tight as I grunted and cursed. I hate you. I hate you. Fall. Fall Fucker. Fall. Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Why do you always have to be right? Stomp! Why do you always have to win? Stomp! Why did you have to leave? Stomp! Stomp! CRACK!!! I heard a crack. The limb slowly started its fall, cracking louder as it built speed in it's decent. The force of the last kick threw mw forward off balance, I had to jump to avoid falling, landing hard on my stomach. I crawled away on all fours as the branch fell seconds behind me. The cloud of uplifted dirt soiled the water covering my body.

I got up. I was college of sweat, blood, sap, and dog feces. My feet were soaked and ant bites covered my body. The tree took a belt to me, and these were my battle scars. I looked up and saw the late afternoon sky. No more shade, no more protection against

the heat or the rain. I wiped the sweat from my forehead. No more tree, just a stump. I wondered if it grew back whether or not I would climb it again. I doubted it. I was too old for tree climbing after all.

My mother came my way from the freshly cleared screen door. She was carrying what looked like lemonade. She walked slowly towards me, her knees were withered and her branches did not sway as lightly. She handed me the lemonade.

"I'm sorry." I said to her.

"What?" She asked,

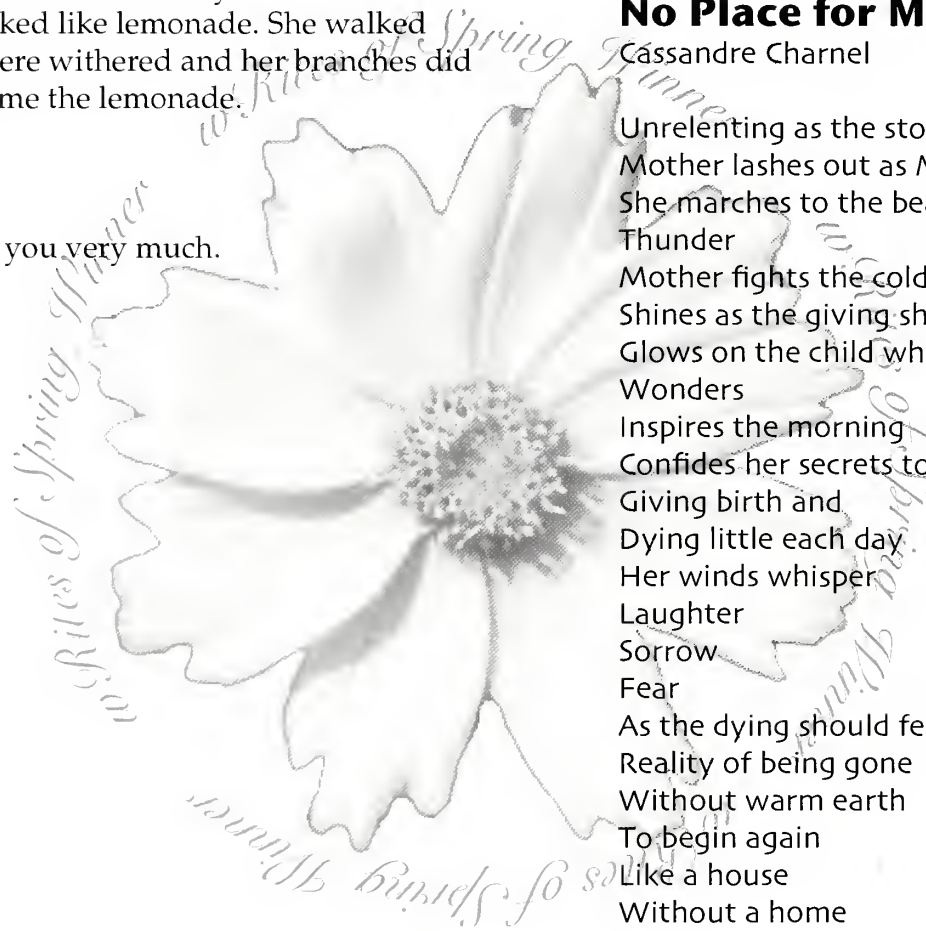
"Nothing."

I meant thank you, thank you very much.

"Earth to earth and dust to dust." Ruth Ozeki

No Place for Mother

Cassandre Charnel



Unrelenting as the storm,
Mother lashes out as Mothers do
She marches to the beat of her own
Thunder
Mother fights the cold
Shines as the giving should do
Glow on the child who
Wonders
Inspires the morning
Confides her secrets to the night
Giving birth and
Dying little each day
Her winds whisper
Laughter
Sorrow
Fear
As the dying should feel
Reality of being gone
Without warm earth
To begin again
Like a house
Without a home

Twelve Minutes to Midnight

Chris Garces

There's a storm brewing not that far southeast of Tom's house.

And the wind's blowing on hard towards the northwest.

The Doppler's showing all vindictive red and orange, none of that bullshit green, and the National Weather Service is shooting out Tornado Warnings like hard candy to all the surrounding residencies in the storm's supposed trajectory. The storm herself even looks pissed-off on the TV as she etches her way through the southern cities. Like she's Mother Nature's real bitchy sister. Santa Maria. Santa Maria, the sweet-smelling Matriarch of Mayhem. a fired-up broad of ice and electricity. The authentic Lady of Chaos. Thoroughbred and unbeatable. No nukes or bullets or broken legs can touch her. She's in full swing and not even the Big Man himself could break her momentum. She's a marvel, once in a life time spectacle. And they want Tom to run. Fat chance. No way is he missing out on this train. Probably couldn't get that far anyway until being sucked into her wake, and personally he'd rather see it coming.

Tom ends up giving Santa Maria the benefit of benefit of doubt. She'll be here in twelve.

Hell hath no fury....

He continues watching the bright red bar at the bottom of the screen as it rolls on by unconcernedly. The slick haired jerk commentating isn't worried. He's safe. His playboy subscription's safe. His gaudy oceanfront is safe. His five figure job and pension are safe. No trouble, no hassle, no problem, just another drudging day in machine. The dog on the other hand is going berserk. Barking and howling and gnawing at the cuff on tom's leg. He looks down at her and sees the knowing fear. She doesn't understand the how but she knows the when and the what that's enough to make her piss on the rug more than a few

times. He takes pity on the thing. He walks over to the door, with her scratching at his heels, opens it and watches her make a mad dash for it, through the downpour and the thunder. She doesn't look back or wait. No hesitation at all He wishes her the best of luck anyway.

Tom looks at his watch.

Ten minutes to show time.

He leaves the door open thinking what's the difference. He sits down at the computer, listening to the rain waft in and hit the tiled floor, and he tries to figure how he's gonna go out. He gets sentimental. He thinks about writing long drawn out letters and sending them instantaneously over cyberspace to people worth writing to. His editor or Kirds. Nah, they're both jerk offs. Maybe Vasquez, even though it's been a few years. And goddamn he didn't even know if Sera were still alive, much less her E-mail address. She probably doesn't remember him either way. He scrolls through the whole long remembered list of people in head again and again. It takes him a moment but eventually he realizes that there isn't anybody worth it, or anybody who'd care. Except for maybe Jamie. But screw it. Kid's better off without. The boy's mother wouldn't like it anyway. Tom can't say that he blames her.

He ends with having nothing finished.

Seven minutes.

Tom gets up from his seat just as lightning strikes nearby, and the thunder rolls through his head painfully enough to make him dizzy. He leans too far to the left, stumbles over his own feet while trying to rub the resonating orchestra from behind his eyes as the bastard with the mallets swats the bass drum over and over again in his skull. He does what he can and manages to collapse gracefully on to his ass. He picks himself up, a little disoriented but otherwise fine. Outside it sounds like a frieth train bound for hell is about to barge on through. Tom makes his way to the kitchen. He checks in a cabinet and finds an eighty dollar bottle of black label. He opens it for the first time and pour himself a tall glass of Johnnie Walker. Might as well make the last drink a good drink. He plops in three cubes of ice from the freezer, anymore than that and he gets some whiskey with his water. Then he

lights up a cigarette using the stovetop. He inhales, takes a sip, inhales, sips, inhales, sips, all in rapid succession. One directly after another, it hardly phases him though. Tom's a pro. He enjoys watching the blue plumes of smoke as they swirl around the living room, drafted by the raunchy wind coming in through the open door.

Three minutes.

He finishes his first drink, and pours himself another, forgetting the ice. He smokes the cigarette down to filter, heavily tasting the tar on his tongue. Lung cancer? Nope, not today, not at this very moment. And that's all that really concerns him. Tom downs the burning liquor in three large gulps and rest the glass on the counter-top. He strips away all the articles of clothing from his skin and drops them onto the door, thinking to hell with it, he'll go as he came. His mother wouldn't have it any other way, crazy old gal that she is. Anyway he walks over to the door, feeling as the cold, swearing wind blows freezing rain against his chest and thighs. Something reflexively shrinks. Oh well. No one's around to see anyway. Lord knows it's just him and Santa Maria now.

Two minutes.

Hands shielding his eyes; he forces himself through the ridiculously icy air and water. He jogs over the lawn, sinks his feet deep into slurping mud, pull himself out, and heads over to the small rising hilltop a block down the street where there weren't any house yet built. In fact he remembers that he had heard that they were planning on constructing a play place for the kids in the community. It was going to be complete with a full swing set and jungle gym, and other senseless crap like that. The sides of the hill weren't steep, and the top was fairly wide and flat. A perfect plot for all the little jackasses of the world to come and run around and giggle stupidly with all the other jackasses of the world. A perfect plot for the young to play and the old to die.

One minute.

Tom somewhat crawls up the slope, slipping and sliding the whole way. When he finally makes it to the top he plants his bare bottom unceremoniously. He turn around and looks down to make sure someone hadn't slid an ice block under his ass just before he sat down. No ice. Just wet mean green grass. He spits on it.

30 seconds.

The storm is raging all around. She's in a jubilant psychotic frenzy like a sociopath with a knife in a pet store. The rain pelts him, stinging Tom's body and face. The wind pushes him this way and that way. He gets shoved over and over, back and forth, left and right, up and down. His joints, already tender from the cold, snap again and again as he is forced to land awkwardly on his arms and legs, but he can't hear himself scream into the wind.

1 second.

Hail falls inaccurately in fist-sized chunks, nearly missing Tom. Lightning flares white hot in every which way direction. The wind howls in a soulless monotone. Then he sees it. A dark cylindrical mass of destruction making its big, grandiose entrance. A horrible creature, vicious and insane. The black swath of rage, the Lady of Chaos herself. It comes shriekings down from the sky and lands onto Tom's house and rips the thing apart. No big loss. Just an old place filed with bad worn out memories. The Lady swarms to and fro, hunting and killing. After 54 years of this hellish place, with its unending crucifixions and momentary passivity, and its unwanted children and unloved widows, after, after all it's bloodlust and fear; it was game over. Tom waits on the hill for the lady to make her rounds.

The shadowy form shifts through the horizon, erratically cutting and slashing its way through the community. Hacking and tearing at domiciles, sidewalks, and asphalt. He sees the Jerigans'

place go up into the swirling grey madness, torn into bits and pieces of debris. Who cares, Mr. Jerigan was an asshole, married to an asshole, with two soon-to-be-assholes for pups. None of them would be missed, at least not by Tom.

Santa Maria grabs at whatever she can turn to rubble. She continues along her random path of reducing everything to grains and molecules for a while, and after a few moments that feel like months it happens. She spots Tom, alone and naked, on the hilltop. He smiles. Lazy old hag, he thinks, took you long enough. She comes on full force, gushing forth amazing ferocity. His smile twitches and his eyes hint of doubt. Tom Ol' Boy, this gonna hurt like hell. He tries to draw his chest out but his back stiffens. He tries to laugh but his voice won't come out in anything other than a scream. He tries to challenge her but can only manage to urinate all over his legs as the harsh reality becomes all immediate.

He sees her wicked grin. The ultimate evil mockery.

He feels himself pulled upward as he is swept off the ground by the tumultuous wind. He is levitating over the hilltop, soaring through the air. Beaten and bruised by thunder and wind, by rain and hail, by people and gods. Beaten and bruised by the supreme storm herself; a certain miss Santa Maria. He sees her gaping maw, with her razor sharp teeth of shattered glass and stone, and shards of rusty rebar, and splintered planks of wood. No negotiations, no forms, no paper or plastic, Tom is fucked. No time for denial anymore. But just before he enters, just before he gets chredded into some hundreds of globs of twisted flesh, the sly, inattentive bitch goes hard to the right, sighting something better to sate her insatiable desire for destruction, and spikes Tom hard to left. There he goes. Like the world's most pathetic super hero. A Fat balding, bare-assed 54 year old man who's still yet to cover all the prerequisites for flying. Once of which, is being able to fly.

It's amazing how slow things move when you realize that you're either about to die or that your about to ever regret living. Just before he hits he thinks of Jamie. He sees the kid running around, talking and talking, laughing, and crying (always doing either or more frequently than a bipolar teenage girl), and just

regularly irritating the hell out of Tom. And Tom understands finally that he loved every second, although he really never told it to the kid. Jamie's mother never crosses his mind in the final seconds of his life but Tom does recall Sera. With her dirty blonde hair and perfectly sculpted legs and soft-hearted diction. The girl from his youth, the only one he ever really gave a damn about. Had there ever been one that he should've married, it was her. But she eventually slipped through his fingers like everything else, and also like everything else, he was too stupid and selfish to care. Damn if he hasn't been a fool all his life. That's God's best joke on humanity: you realize what you should have done right before you're about to become extremely incapable of ever doing it. He sees the ground coming closer, wants to vomit, can't. He wishes that things had turned out different.

They don't.

He hits the sidewalk doing eighty goes out with a forgotten bang.

Rites of Passage

Alana Guttman

Dangerous intelligence and fierce solemnity. That's what Utoma saw when he looked into the nyoka's eyes. A bead of sweat slid down his forehead and into the corner of his left eye causing his vision to blur for a moment. He licked the inside edges of his chafed lips.

The beast had raised itself up to its full height now, nearly looking him in the eye. It was as thick as a strong man's arm.

Utoma could not remember a time where he was a frightened as he felt right now. He'd fought many great creatures and faced many dangers in his young life. Hunting with his older brothers had taught him how to react to speed and strength. But how could he have prepared for this?

His ears throbbed with adrenaline and he tried to stay focused on his mission, his eyes never leaving those of his hopeful assassin.

He thought back to events leading up this moment and tried to draw wisdom.

He'd been anticipating this day since his older brothers Cani and Danki had first come home with their own kafsha stories. Now it was finally his turn to have one.

Shuani, Utoma's mother, smiled confidently at her son as he walked past her and the rest of tribe before stopping front of the elders and the village shaman.

Everyone, including Utoma, stood in silence waiting for Shimi, the chief elder, to say those words that every man present had once longed for and dreaded hearing.

"This day has been appointed to you for testing of your manhood. What strength lies in your heart and what courage in your belly will be proven today by your ability to complete the kafsha given you. Your kafsha has been chosen by shaman Bomani as a task fitting your potential as a man. Only after you have successfully completed your kafsha can take your place in this village as man and a warrior. Are you ready for your testing?"

All eyes turned to Utoma.

"I am ready," he said.

The men of the tribe stepped forward now. On their faces were war markings in the traditional white ink used only for battle and this particular ritual. Many of the warriors bore the scars from their own kafshas.

Utoma tried to control the deep shaky breaths he was drawing in. He did not want show the nervousness he felt, especially not with his brothers standing before him with the other men.

He was considered tall for his age, standing nearly five-nine on this, his fourteenth birthday. Naturally thin, his long limbs looked like loosely knotted ropes, muscles and joints sticking out in awkward places. His mother said he was lean, his brothers called him scrawny. His facial features were defined, with a prominent chin and a pair of wide set of chocolate brown eyes.

The shaman stepped forward from the elders and stood alone in front of the Utoma.

"I have prayed to our great ancestors, and they have revealed to me I a night vision what is to be your testing."

Utoma tried to hold the shaman's gaze but found himself staring at the lines of the dry, cracked clay beneath his feet.

Shaman Bomani looked down to the boy with a disapproving se to his jaw.

"A worthy man is able to look into another man's eyes when he is being spoken too. An a warrior is able to speak fear into his enemy without saying a word. You must find the anger and fear inside yourself and make it your enemies'. Your task Utoma, is to find the hooded bora nyoka and make him fear you without a weapon or a sound."

A woman's voice cried out. Utoma's mother had fainted. Some women gathered around and began fanning her with their head scarves. Cani and Danki looked at Utoma with worry on their faces. The white paint on their foreheads crinkled with furrowed brows.

"Do you accept your kafsha?"

"Yes, I do."

And now he was standing before the great bora nyoka, its enormous hood framing its face like a coffin frames death. Black scales glistened purple in the noon sun and a fleshy-pink forked tongue sliding effortlessly from the expressionless mouth of the giant reptile.

Utoma stared in hypnotic fascination as the serpent moved closer, its half swaying in the air as its bottom half swam through the shallow grazing grass. Then it stopped, its face only inches from his own.

He held the giant snake's gaze without blinking. Each breath he pulled in was used to push down the terror in his chest until he began to breathe evenly. Now it is time to make the beast fear him.

Utoma drew inside himself every angry contemplation, every thread of hatred that had been woven into his life, every scrap of ugliness he could find in and in one great moment he aimed it at the bora nyoka.

The serpent only glared back, reflecting the same anger and hatred intensified in its own gaze. A deep hissing noise rose up in the throat of the beast and a tear slid down Utoma's cheek.

He could not make his enemy fear him. The great snake was much stonger and much wiser than Utoma. It deserved both fear and respect, how could Utoma ever ask for what he had not yet earned himself? And now he would die with the shame of his failure as the great serpent was sure to strike once it realized his adversary was unworthy. He looked down at the ground in front of him and waited for his punishment.

The great snake stood still for several seconds then, slowly, began to lower itself to the ground. After several more moments of waiting for the cobra folded in its hood and stared back through the grass in the direction from where it first came.

Utoma stood in wonder as he watched his death sentence disappear into the jungle.

He started to walk back to the village, the weight of his failure slowing his steps.

All of his tribe gathered around Utoma as he entered the

village.

"Share with the elders your experience and they will judge whether or not you were successful," said Shami.

"Great chief, I know already that I have failed and am ready to receive my shame."

"First tell us what happened then we will decide how have you done."

Utoma then told all that happened to him in the jungle with the great snake, and how he could not hold the bora nyoka's gaze.

The elders listened to Utoma's story intently and then met together in the kibanda to discuss what should be done. The sun had long since set when they finally came out of the meetinghouse.

"We have made our decision. Utoma step forward."

Utoma stood before the elders with his head bent towards the ground.

Chief elder Shimi stepped in front of Utoma and placed his hand on Utoma's head.

"It has been decided by the council of elders that your kafsha was successful and you are ready to be a man."

Utoma raised his head from the ground and looked at Chief Shimi, "How could that be? I failed?"

Shaman Somani spoke up, "No Utoma, you did not fail. Being a man is more than looking someone in the eye, just being a warrior is more than putting fear in your enemies. I spoke in half-truths before. A worthy man is one who is aware of his strengths as well as his weaknesses and is a true warrior is one who knows the honor of humility.

The bora nyoka would have killed you if you had not lowered your gaze. For the great snake is much stronger than you and is much wiser than many elders. If it had sensed any pride or anger in you it would not have hesitated to strike. Remember your first lesson as a man Utoma: if you humble yourself you will be exalted, but if you exalt yourself you will be humbled.

"Moonlite Diner"

-Marianne Wagner





Photography

Sameness

Michael E. Smith

It was bright out and sound
Moved easily with the wind.
All was still and serene,
And it was then I
Thought to clean my glasses.
This world I roamed deserved
the clearest windows to
View its grandeur with.
I removed them and
Wiped each lens three times;
Suddenly all sound went
missing.
That's when the tree fell.
For a moment I lie still
Under its immense weight,
Capturing the events that
Preceded the current,
Crushed and twined.
I began and so did the trunk,
I ended in the ground with
torn roots.
And as the wind picked up, the
fallen branches
Swayed around my head
I thought to myself that

Nothing had changed.
And those damn glasses
Were lying unscathed in reach.
And with my last strain
I pushed them aside.

"Sway"

- Amanda Leigh Conrad



Photography

The Toll at 1st + Park

Brendan Connolly

If I could go anywhere, anyplace, any event in time it would be the year "0". The very first second. The birth of age. The betrothal of death. I would be time.

If there was no memory, time would not exist.

"I'm sorry," quizzically limped from the backseat.

"If you could go back in time, anywhere, where would you go?"

"Why William," he said. "I would go to the blessed event of the Immaculate Conception."

"Why," I asked looking in the rear-view mirror.

He shrugged and said, "To see if it's true."

I pulled up next to the curb. The church dominated the sky above us, the sun was blocked out by the buildings across the street.

9th + Redding.

He handed me the money.

"Billy," he said, "remember: There are none so good they have no faults, and none so wicked they are worth naught. May the Lord bless you with good graces this fine day.

"Thanks Father," I said. "Same time next week?"

He blessed me and shut the door.

Father O'Flynn. He was alright for a guy who didn't get any.

I've driven any cab you've ever seen. Every cab driver has something in common, we don't know who we pick up. And thanks to our medallions and license proudly bannered behind us they all know us. They all knew me. They all knew my name.

12th + Conway

"Bill Patrick Murphy? That Irish?"

2nd + Hale

"Billy, Cinderella only has an hour for me to slip on the latex slipper. Know what I'm sayin'."

Kill Me + Now

"Bil-ly. What's it like to have an adverb as a name man?"

There are three types of passengers: Annoying, horny, or drunk and/or stone.

Quite possibly, and usually, all three. My repeating cast of regulars. Everyone knew my name. I was the typecast taxi driver with a few words of wisdom, and time willing, a slightly more askew adult-oriented joke.

I danced for the jock-type bullies. I sang for annoying next door neighbors. I groveled more askew adult-oriented joke.

Sometimes re-runs lose their charm, but maintain their nostalgia. Soon they become backlogged.

Soon they become references.

That's why the year "0", because I couldn't reference anything to it. The "must-see" event of eternity. Nothing like it before.

"Where would you go," I asked the uptight assistant principal who stewed over

the most popular kid in school as I turned right on Callahan Ave.

"To watch Marie Antoinette lose her head," she said.

"That'll be \$8.73."

She gave me a ten dollar bill.

I received a call from the dispatch for a fare at the hospital. Warp speed.

I never liked hospitals. The cold demeanor of the Hippocratic Oath white washed the exterior of the complex. Memories hung from the concrete walls. Time here is triage; if you don't have much, they focus theirs on you.

The couple was waiting outside of the emergency room. Their age difference was apparent. She had grey hair.

I stopped the car and popped the trunk. I unlocked the doors and began to open my door, ready to get their bags.

The wife was in the backseat before I could stand.

.....
**He was alright for a guy
who didn't get any.**
.....

She didn't look too good. The husband was in my window as I turned. He dropped 300 dollars in my lap. And an address.

"Is she okay," I asked the back of a white jacket.

"She could probably walk," he said turning.

I started the car.

1st + Park.

That's what the slip of paper said.

The woman in the backseat moaned. Her hair was shaved in parts. The flesh stitches zippered across her scalp like rail road tracks. She had an aged bruise on her left jaw line. Her eyes were closed.

She was wearing a hospital gown.

No pants.

No shoes.

And no anesthesia. She continued to moan. A personal prayer to St. Tanatos.

21st + King.

Her arm looked like a cheese grater. She had attached ear lobes. Her hair, which wasn't shaved, curled in an old home type of comfort. She opened her eyes.

Like someone, somewhere.

She had the most beautiful eyes.

"Where am I going," She asked me.

There are none so good that they have no wicked. My predisposition to fall, I didn't answer her.

I couldn't

Shame extends time. It expands it like salt water taffy. It stretches a forked highway that leads to redemption or the road less traveled. The heavy crown expressway; where each toll reminds you of which path you patronize.

19th + Locke.

She wiped away the emerging tears with her scabbed forearm. This leper of time, reaped by the curse of tomorrow.

Tommy had told me all about this off-script humanity. The hospital would call us because someone had no insurance. We picked them up. We drop them off in the middle of the street

somewhere. We drove off. Skimming off the top of life's payroll, he called it.

17th + Yard.

"Billy," she said.

"Yes," I answered. I could feel her eyes reflecting from the mirror like solar flares. They were the softest blue I had ever seen.

"Where am I going?"

I handed her the slip of paper the jacketed man had given me.

I glanced up as she looked at her invoice. She reminded me of a child. scolded for no reason they can fathom. Judgment for no crime. She stared out the window.

"I knew a Billy once," She said. "He looked nothing like you."

15th + Reeves.

She was missing a few teeth.

12th + George.

She sobbed quietly.

10th + Langone

She reminds me of something, somewhere. The syndication of my life. Memory on parade.

I was in an airport. Somewhere around 8 am, and I was drinking a coffee and leaning against a wall.

They were hugging.

His backpack was as heavy as her heart.

His hands were interlocked on her back.

The living pieta.

It was his mother. No one hold on so abstinently. She had to stand on her toes to reach around his neck.

8th and Manchester.

I stood by and watched them say goodbye. I could hear her tears. They stained his shirt. They tattooed his uniform.

His fatigued uniform.

His name stood over his heart.

She would not let go.

Her posture became stoic. She stood as the colossus of Rhodes fell. Her feet were bedrock.

Her son was running late.

5th + Brooke.

Then a woman, from somewhere, touched her shoulder.

"He'll be okay," she said.

The mother turned to the untimely Samaritan. And she saw the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. They conveyed a sense of something, somewhere safe. Warm. Nostalgic.

The walking reference of everyone's backlog.

The mother hand released like rusted anchors.

3rd + Pine.

3rd + Pine.

3rd + Pine.

I was sitting at a redlight.

"If you could go anywhere, anytime, to any even," I asked, "when would it be?"

Her eyes caught mine in our only form of contact. Her eyes grabbed me. Her stare choked me.

"Tonight," she said.

"Why?"

"So I could be in a hotel."

3rd + Pine.

There are none so faulted that they are worth naught.

"You," she asked looking out the windows with tears brimming.

The light turned green. I turned right.

"I used to wish to go to the year "0", I said. "The big bang. The staring point. Before aging existed. But, now..."

1st + Park

I drove past. There was a hotel a few blocks away.

"I think I would go to the night of the Immaculate Conception," I said as I pulled into the hotel parking lot. It had free cable. I gave her my 300 pieces of silver.

I don't even have cable.

"Why," she asked. She had the most beautiful eyes I'd ever seen.

"Scarlett"

- Graciela Gomez



Chalk

TRIANGLE

Charlie Cohall

He sat on the bed now rully clothed as he watched Stacy, she was fascinating to watch. Her hair a shiny black, thick for pulling just stopped above her Hello Kitty tattoo on her lower back. She had the perfect coke bottle frame, with curves so deadly you'll crash. It was easy to see why she got him.

He watched smiling. The tattoo of a Devil having sex with an Angel on her right ass cheek was sexy, but who was who with him and Stacey? Her thighs smooth and thick were nicely shaped and were strong for love making. She moved so gracefully, not a care in what she did, or how she hooked him. She smiled back at him her juicy lips, her black eyes glowing like stars.

She didn't blink a lot, it made him a bit nervous. She started to dress covering her caramel brown skin. She tied her hair back in a ponytail and proceeded to walk him to the back door. She walked in front of him doing the sexy walk looking back at him. How he wanted so much to stay but her husband was about to come home from work, and his brother didn't need to know about what was going on in his home.

"Reality"
-Romina Bobadilla



Photography

Turbulence

Andrew Johnson

“Good evening ladies and gentleman. This is your captain. We will be landing at our destination of MIA, Miami International Airport, within the next 10 minutes. It appears that they are experiencing some thunderstorms. The fasten seat belt light will be coming on. So please sit tight while we prepare to land” the calm pilot said to the flight attendants and passengers. John and Mary were looking forward to landing.

“I can’t wait to get out of here,” John said to his wife. He started thrashing back and forth trying to find a comfortable position.

“Oh I know. Sleeping in our bed tonight will be nice,” Mary said to John. Their conversation was light and pleasant. This weekend marked their 25th anniversary. So at this point in their relationship, all their conversations were light and pleasant. Neither one of them looked at the other through out the whole flight. Probably out of exhaustion from their long vacation. They spent the week at a B & B in Vermont. It was lovely. Just like the last anniversary.

Then all of a sudden it happened. As the plane approached the thunderstorms, they were struck with turbulence. The cabin shook violently and the lights flickered. John flies often because of work. But poor Marry hasn’t flown in 5 years. And guess who sat at the window? She saw the wings of the plane flex and bend like a slinky in the night air. She thought those damn wings would snap any minute. Her breathing started to get heavy and ragged. She felt a tension in her chest.

“John! The wings! They’re going to fall off. We’re going to fall. John look! Look!” she said hysterically. She began to hyperventilate. And the turbulence ended just as easily as it

started.

“Calm down Mary. It was just some turbulence. The pilot warned us that we would run into to some thunderstorms. You keep this up you’ll have the whole plane in convulsions.” John said to Mary while still reading his magazine. He was pretty agitated with her. It was just some turbulence. And the pilot did warn them. But still. Now that they were older, Mary has become less rational in compromising circumstances. She felt a little embarrassed by her actions and John’s reaction.

“I hate you.” She said so suddenly. She didn’t mean to say it. She may have been thinking it. But she definitely didn’t mean to say it.

“What?” John asked.

“Huh?” Mary replied. She decided to play stupid.

“You said something.” John had his suspicions about Mary’s feelings. He sometimes felt the same way. Although John was an intelligent man, he couldn’t understand why he sometimes felt this way.

“Probably just heavy breathing. I’m feeling better now,” she said. It was a horrible cover up. But John didn’t question it. They both preferred to sweep it under the carpet.

It happened again. The turbulence was worst this time. The plane started losing altitude. The G force from the plane’s decline was felt by crew and passengers. The lights went out. Mary began to scream. She couldn’t help it. She was so scared. But she wasn’t the only one who was screaming. Just the first. The captain managed to pull to plane out of its decline and the lights flickered back on.

“Folks, I apologize for that scare. As you can tell the

weather isn't looking so good here in Miami. Were going to turn around and head to FTL, Fort Lauderdale International Airport. We should be there in about 20 more minutes. Again thank you for flying with us," the captain announced.

"Do you have to be such a bitch?" John exclaimed. He really didn't mean it. He was just as scared as she was. But he's nerves were to wound up. And sometimes that's when the truth leaks out.

"What? Please John leave me alone," Mary said as she wiped her face with a napkin. She was so upset by his words. John knew he should apologize and let it go. But the flood gates had been opened. He had been holding back his thoughts for sometime.

"Did you have to start screaming?" John squeaked.

"Come on John. Leave me alone. That was a very scary thing. And I wasn't the only one screaming," she rebutted.

"No you weren't. But you started the screaming. Because of you, more people started screaming. That damn kid back there won't stop crying now," John answered. He really couldn't hold himself back. It was like he was vomiting and couldn't stop.

"Oh shut up you ninny," she said back to him. Ninny was her word she used for him when they would joke around with one another. He would purposely say something stupid to make her laugh, and she would call him a ninny. This didn't happen very often. But when it did she would say it so caringly. And he always knew it was a very affectionate thing for her to say. Except this time there was no affection. When she said ninny, she said it with aggravation. John truly wasn't upset with her screaming. He couldn't explain why he was so upset in fact. Maybe the turbulence was stressing him out, and this was his reaction. When people get upset they tend to take it out on others. It's possible

that's what John was doing. The one thing he did know was that he didn't like the way she said ninny.

"Now how the hell are we going to get home? The car is in Miami, and we're heading toward Ft. Lauderdale," John said trying to forget what just happened. It was easier to bottle their feelings up then to actually talk to one another. But how much can they bottle up before they explode?

"Maybe Michael can pick us up. He should be home," Mary offered a solution. She too decided to lock up her feelings. John and Mary had two kids together. A boy and a girl. Michelle was off to college upstate. Michael still lived at home.

"I suppose you're right," John admitted.

The flight continued smoothly. No more problems. No more turbulence.

"Folks, this is your captain again. Luckily we've had some smooth sailing since we left Miami. We are coming on to FTL now. We will be landing shortly. So again, please remain sitting through the duration of the flight," the captain announced.

But no sooner after the announcement ended, their plane began to shake again. The lights went out and the cabin began to rock back and forth. Again, they started to decline. Mary's weak heart was pounding.

"Don't you dare yell at me. I have a right to be scared you NINNY!" she screamed at him as she shook her head viciously. It was slightly uncalled for. But she didn't want him barking at her.

"I didn't say anything," John responded. He was dumbfounded by his wife's reaction.

"Oh but you were going to," she responded in a deep voice.

The plane had pulled out of the turbulence and the captain was on the speaker apologizing again. But they didn't even notice the plane had stabilized.

"You really are a bitch!" John stated in a matter a fact tone of voice.

"That's because I have to put up with you!" Mary responded.

"I'm sorry, sir, madam, we will be landing very soon. And the rest of the passengers are all nervous. If you can please refrain till we land, we will all be grateful," a flight attendant sincerely requested from John and Mary.

"Oh shut up!" John and Mary said simultaneously.

"What! Listen here you two. I don't care if you're having a lovers quarrel. And neither does anyone else on this DAMN plane. Most of us are about to piss our pants. We don't need to hear you two arguing. Now you will be quiet for the remainder of this flight. What you do after we land is on you. If it takes a shot of whisky for the both of you to accomplish this, well than it's on me tonight. Now sit tight and thank you for flying with us," the flight attendant said with a tilted head and an obnoxious smile before walking away. John and Mary were left with their jaws on the floor as they silently agreed. The plane continued to fall in and out of turbulence. The passengers and crew slowly went from scared to annoyed to pissed off. The captain tried so many times to land. And with each attempt, the plane would lose control. John and Mary just gave each other evil glares.

"Where the hell did you get all this aggravation?" John asked.

"What does it matter?" Mary replied.

"I'm your husband. That's why it matters," John asked.

"Is that what you call yourself?" Mary quipped.

"What?" John said.

"Don't act stupid. We haven't been close in years," Mary responded

"Listen, the doctor said I'm not healthy enough to take those blue pills. That's not my fault!" John shouted back. He clearly misunderstood his "wife". Half the plane stared at them. Since they were no longer in shock from their rocky ride, they began to become intrigued with this argument. It was like watching Jerry Springer.

"I don't mean that Ninny. When was the last time that we had a real conversation? Or when was the last time that we did something for the other? When was the last time we cared about the other?" Mary said staring in John's eyes longing for the truth.

"Do you blame me for that?" he questioned. But he didn't ask out of anger. No, it was more out of sorrow because he knew that she was right.

"Neither one of us to blame. Nor are either one of us the victim. I guess we both played our part." Mary paused for a moment. She began staring at the back of the chair in front of her. But she wasn't looking at it. She was looking through the years. Neither John nor Mary realized that everyone on the plane were on the edge of their seats to see what would happen next. "Maybe I shouldn't have slept with your brother," Mary said out loud.

"What?" John said in shock. The men on the plane oooooed at John's embarrassment. The women called out "yeah" in celebration. They paid them no attention. "How could you? When?"

"Oh it was years ago. It was right after Michelle was born. It was like being with you," she said so nonchalantly.

"So I guess you won't care about me and the secretary," John added. This time the men wooed and the women booed.

"You mean Sherry? Why do you think I slept with your brother?" Mary responded.

"Well then I guess I deserved it?" John added. "You know Michelle is a lesbian."

"What? Our little Michelle. Wait, why did she tell you and not me?" Mary asked.

"Because she knew you would act like this," John explained. Some of the passengers started to lose interest. But most were still hooked. It was reality TV right in front of their eyes. "So when did you start hating me?"

"Well I don't know if you would call it hate. But it was a few years after we got married," she said. "Michelle was born right after we got married. That put my career on hold. Then Michael came, and you decided my career was over. Don't get me wrong. I love our children. It's just that I was doing so much better than you were. But I guess I could have done more than just agree with you."

"I never knew you felt that way," John admitted.

"When was it that you started to hate me?" Mary was curious to know.

"I guess when you travel 7 months out of the year, the distance begins to grow. We had less and less to talk about. Then we just stopped talking. By then it was really too late. We were just

kinda stuck," he explained. They were so busy with each other that they didn't even notice that the plane was declining, but this time in a good way. They were actually beginning to land. The rest of the flight and crew were cheering. John and Mary took a deep breath. As they exhaled, the landing gears disengaged. Everyone began taking their luggage down. John and Mary just sat there. They were confused. Partially because it was the most they talked to one another in years. But mostly they were confused because they didn't know where to go. Normally they would make some sorry excuse and pretend it didn't happen. Then they would bottle it up, and that ended it. But now it was released. All of those years of pressure just poured out of them. There was no way they could sweep this under the carpet. And now that the air between them was finally cleared, they could land at a real conclusion.

"Now what?" Mary asked.

"That is a good question," John said. "What do you think we should do?" It was the first time he asked her what she wanted since they left for their vacation.

"Take me home John," Mary said. They grabbed their bags and walked off the plane. And, as they walked through the terminal, John reached his hand out for Mary's. She looked down at it and hesitated for a moment. Then full heartedly she grasped his hand. And, as Michael came to pick them up, everyone thought they were the cutest old couple.

Tarnished Silver

Angela Osborne

Almost sleeping
Halfway awake to my new reality

We sit alone;
Drinking up each other
From gold teacups
Dimples appear at
The slightest hint of a smile.

I can feel your breath
On my neck
And then-
I can barely see the gold flecks
Of your eyes.

Make up your mind.
Choose what's real.

Nothing more than
A place setting for two;
I sit.
Fiddling with the gold locket
That hangs from my heart.

Silver candlesticks
Hold unlit candles;
Then I turn to you
The warmth disappeared
From your eyes.

"Male and Female"
- Terese Caruso



Photography

"Fire Eater"

- Shimon Sacharow



Bound

Maggy Shirley

It stifles –
this object tormenting me-
twisting around me and
keeping me impotent
for eternity.

Always squeezing-
this gray flesh
tightening around me
as if it wanted to-
to consume my totality.

Who's knife
sliced my eyes?
Steel cold as ice-
yet burning like devil's fire.
And the blood
warm, thick, blood
like weeping
pouring down my cheeks
into the abyss below.

My screams...
sucked deep
into the vacuum-
am I condemned to
a lifetime of silence?

I'm in hell.

Bound.

In Hell.

The hell of my mind's insanity.

"Silhouette"

- Laura Bartick



A Serious Speech by Kacie

Maggy Shirley

Us 4 us 5
Us 2 a kind
Us play in dirt
Us like our `zerts

Us sing us fight
Us speak in whine
Us play 2- gether
Us hate the other

Us no like `part
Us prance us preen
Us princess three
Janet, Kacie and Mommy

`zerts= desserts
`part= apart

UNDRESSING A STRANGER

Terese Caruso

bold eyes lock with mine:
confidence and arrogance versus hope and modesty;
green versus brown.

you distinct, voluptuous laugh sounds;
i attempt to mimic but nothing escapes.

i'm too caught up in the moment.

and just like that,
the moment is gone.

i stand to the side and observe.

i notice your hands,
always in motion,
fixing and describing;
(how well they would look linked with mine.)

i notice your mouth,
lips muttering details
of drunken nights and mindless mornings;
you enjoy the sound of your voice.

i'm undressing you,
examining the figure underneath.

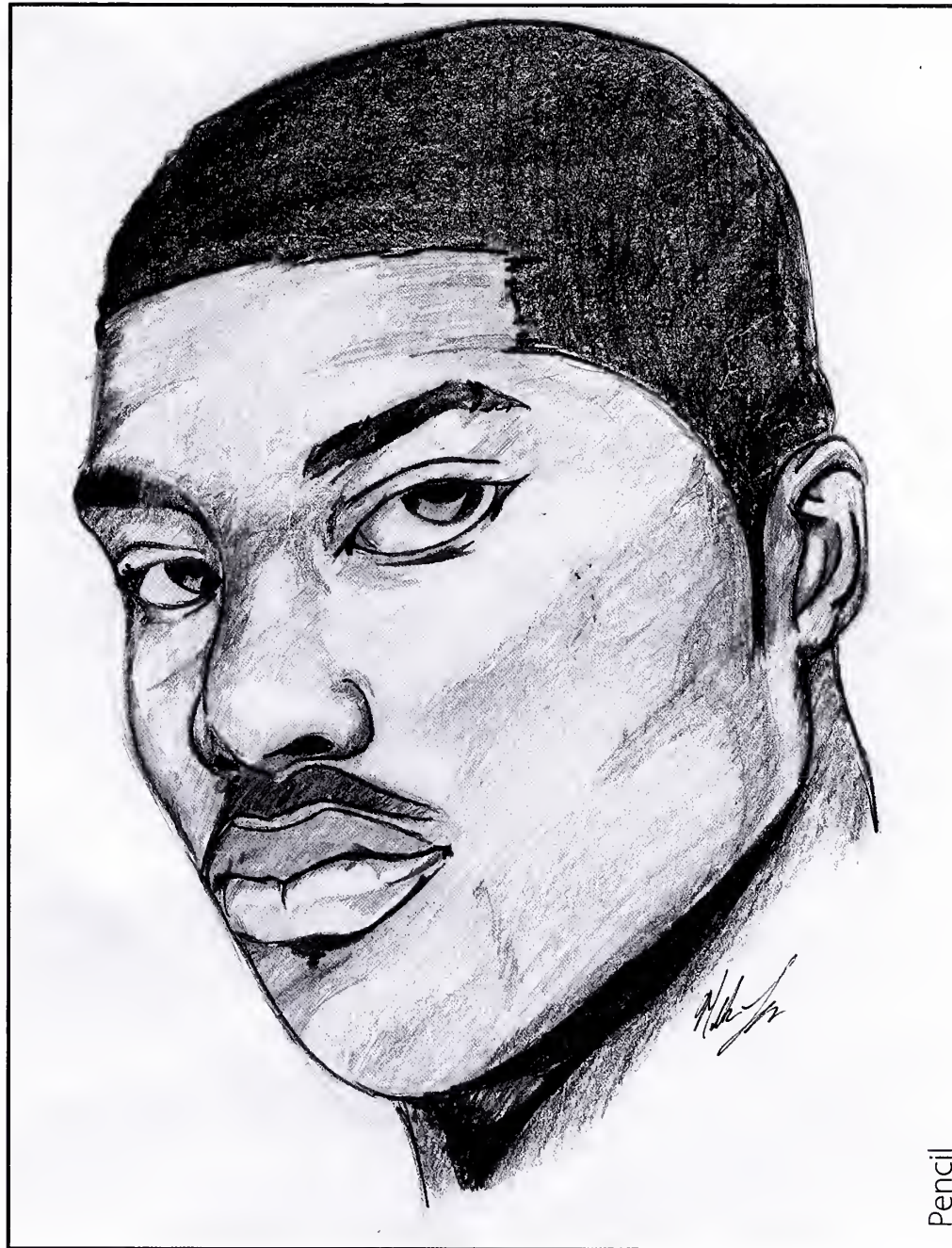
eyes steady and full of emotion;
soft.
a smile appears,
formed by lips that are smooth and full
of taste and passion.

gentle, meticulous hands pull me in;
mask and costume left behind.

a stranger stands before me,
undressed and bare to see.

it's obvious we're much alike,
when stripped down to the bone.

"Me"
- Michael Johnson



Pencil

The Cheese Bandits

Sharday Moshanko

I come from a long line of just about everything when combining both sides of my family. My mother's side is full of Latinos from what seems all over the planet. When I had the chance to go visit some of those places, in this case, Nicaragua and Honduras, I was the most excited six year old girl you could ever meet. Most of the trip was an easy one, until it was time to travel from Nicaragua to Honduras.

Our Bus left in the early dark hours of the morning. It was just me, my mother and Aunt Martha, so to help in our travels to the neighboring country, our cousin Martin from Nicaragua came along to assist us. It was one of those mornings that was impossible to tell if the sun had just set or was about to rise. I can't say how long that bumpy bus ride was, I just slept through it all. Before this ride, I remember, we stayed for almost two weeks in Nicaragua in a town with dirt roads that turned out to be like a fun filled amusement park for kids like me. I found that I had more family than the already large family of thirty-five I had in the states. More often than not, I was awoken by the friendly faces of many cousins my age or younger, eagerly awaiting me to spend time with them. I spent those days in a type of youthful bliss. One strong memory was the surprise that came of drinking foreign orange kool-aid called Glu Glu, for the first time. It was packaged in a plastic pouch that had to be bit open but most importantly it was sweet and refreshing. To this day, family members from Nicaragua remember me as the girl drinking glu glu and asking for pepsi cola at every chance I could find and talking up a storm in my "funny American accent" when I was not. Even my mother and Aunt Martha, got caught up in the simple pleasures of relaxing with long, almost lost relatives.

The blissful ignorance of the world around us was soon to

be challenged. The hours passed on the bus ,well after the orange sunset disappeared behind the dusty country and the veil of night wasted no time engulfing the scenery around us. By the time I woke, to get off at our destination it was in the early dark hours of the morning again.

When we were arrived at the bus station, Martin went to retrieve a taxi while us ladies waited. We had all our bags filled to the point they were almost bursting. Our suitcases contained candies, clothes, even special dried salty cheeses we planned on taking back home to enjoy. They were the last parting gifts from our family. It was almost a way to say, "We may not be as rich as you are in the U.S., but damned if you won't miss our food!" Of course, this was meant to be taken as a loving jest, so to say.

Mother, my Aunt, and myself waited patiently, tired, and unsuspecting when, out of the looming darkness that seemed to cling on to the edge of the bus station, where the glow of the overhead lights could not reach, two men came staggering up. One was noticeably drunk and the other wearing a smirk like the devil. They came and asked an oddly pronounced question that to this day my mother and Aunt can not decode. After the short and awkward introduction, my Aunt being the strongest willed of our group curtly told them to get lost. Before they realized what was going on, the drunk one swung wildly aiming his bottle of beer to my mother's forehead. Luckily my aunt's hand came in to take the blow and shield her face from harm.

I can still see, vividly, how the blood began to run down Martha's open palm, showing off the brave deed with crimson pride. The two men jumped at the bags we were carrying like a couple of desperate, starvation-crazed animals. The wild action they had brought from seemingly out of nowhere, made my eye lids open up wide as I realized, "now's a good time to wake up." And I tried to be more alert. My mother, luckily, was quick enough to push me, almost gently, off to the side of the sidewalk and onto

.....
...the blood began to
run down Martha's open
palm...
.....

the dusty curb with two of the smaller bags. "Sharday, stay there and don't move!" she said breathlessly as she blocked a hit from a broken glass bottle with her bare forearm. It was a miracle; this time, the bottle, try as the assailant did, could not break the skin.

I stood, immobilized on the edge of the street, watching my mom and aunt fight like the video games my cousins liked so much. All through the battle, I never once yelled for help. I merely stared as if it was a TV show. I remember wondering why they would bother to fight when I was there only steps away with bags. It would have been easy to take something from me, so why attack the better of the group? Luckily, they never seemed to pay attention to me. My mom seemed to handle herself decently though to be honest we were all unprepared.

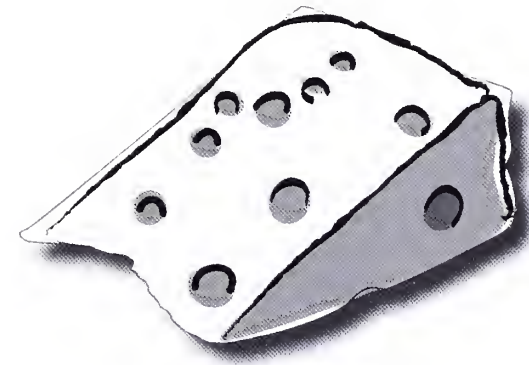
The other man had a better jump than his partner. Before I could get a good look at him, he was draped over the large bag and wheeling it away like a dragon hoarding gold. My aunt merely gasped and chased him in circles as fast as she could despite the wounded hand. As he ran backwards, still hunched over the bag, keeping both his eyes on her, she followed, screaming at the top of her lungs, "MY CHEESES!!! MY CHEESES!!!"

Though the situation would be a joke for years to come, I was in no mood to laugh. The moment my mom and aunt realized that the standing crowd around us was either watching or going about their business as if nothing were the matter, they began screaming for our cousin. "Martin!" they shouted and from around the corner, heavy stomps sounded in the air as he began to come to our rescue.

Little did they know that Martin was not the most imposing man, but in this case was blessed with big feet. Having heard the intimidating foot falls, the two men dared not to fight and ran for their lives, empty handed. With Martin, a white van, showed up, our taxi; it seemed to have come from God himself as it emerged from the dark corner of the street, flying to the rescue.

As we got into the car, safely, heading back home and tending to my aunt's wounds, we all began crying which soon led to laughing. We laughed at my aunt's greedy need for foreign

cheese, my mother's newly found fighting skills, and my innocent witnessing. It was the kind of laugh that can only be done when you realize how great it is to be alive and have family fighting by your side.



I Remember

Rey Rodriguez

Yo, what's up kid? It's been a long time. I'm fine,
I figured it's probably time to get all of these things off my mind.
It's messed up what happened, I think about it all the time,
No matter how much I try, I just can't leave it behind.
My future is looking good so far, God willing,
And I'm still doing the same things, working out, working, and
chilling.
I hope you got all that jewelry that you wanted,
Every time I saw you, there was a new piece you flaunted.
I remember when we first met; you were shadow boxing by a
door,
You told me you were an amateur boxer, with a career that'll one
day soar.
I remember getting wasted and going over our problems on the
floor of your yard,
As we talked about one day becoming one of those stars.
I remember getting pissed when you would name me "ReyRey,"
I hated that nickname, but you'd introduce me as that everyday.
You always had the corniest jokes, and always knew what to say,
Irresistible to females, my role model to this day.
A slick looking Puerto Rican, with the most heart in our crew.
Always flexing your right bicep, to show off your "Boricua" tattoo.
You taught me how to act slick, and how to look my best,
To get a fade, earrings, contacts instead of glasses, and even how
to dress.
You were always like a big brother, why, I never could tell,
You met me when I dressed retarded, I was bony, and used a
bucket of gel.
I remember the last time we hung out, you wanted to leave me
behind,
You told me you were going to fight some kid, "we'll hang out
another time."
And that, "people can show up with guns, they're serious, they
don't play,"

But, I had to have your back, because you're my homeboy, and
went anyway.
We called at least 40 people, and all of them came,
And as many people as we brought, they brought about the same.
Everybody charging everybody, I still remember the feeling,
Of swinging left and right, not knowing who you're hitting.
Everyone started pushing and running, when we heard police
sirens,
It wasn't raining, but two thunderous sounds went off with two
flashes of lightening.
I remember you grabbing my shirt and pulling me behind a store,
You ran so fast that you needed to rest, and sat down on the
floor.
You leaned against the wall, got comfortable, and said, "I feel
stuck,"
Got quiet, closed your eyes, and never woke up.
The pain that you felt in the back of your neck, was a bullet from
a 22,
My right arm was gushing out blood; I had gotten hit too.
You're my best friend for life and I think about you everyday,
I just want you to know that I introduce myself as "ReyRey."
I have it tattooed on my back, and "Boricua" on my arm like you.
I keep my head held up high with pride, and always stay true.
I can change the atmosphere in a room with a joke like you
taught me to do,
And always pour for you before I drink, while drinking your malt
liquor brew.
Ever since since that happened, I pretty much stopped hanging
out with the crew,
But, I remember everything kid; the way I am is thanks to you.
At night I still talk to you, and remember our conversations in
your yard,
And I grip the scar on my forearm as I stare at the stars.
Because, I know in my heart that you can hear me from heaven,
I love you, rest in peace. to my homeboy: Edwin.

"Lil Bro"
- Michael Johnson



Pastel

Taking a Trip

Rey Rodriguez

I began my trip at 8:15pm, knowing that I'd soon be at my
destination,
I take trips at least four times a week, and it always a different
vacation.
For some reason the time always feels like 4:20, like it did that
day,
After a long day at work, there I was, it was finally time to play.
When the fun finally began, the feeling was insane,
The whole world looked different, nothing looked the same.
The images on my poster moved back and forth,
And all the lights around me made trails as I headed towards the
north.
I reached the end of my room and could see the sky,
And with the wings that I now had, I began to fly.
I felt pressure rising up, as if my body was heading down,
But, although the sky wasn't in this direction, I smiled while flying
around.
I felt the wind blowing as it made my nose freeze,
As I felt insects hitting me hard, like the stings from bumblebees.
The midgets that saw from afar were suddenly growing bigger,
It looked like they were flying towards me, quicker, and quicker.
Then within the next few seconds, it felt like time had dropped,
It still felt like 4:20 when suddenly, all movements stopped.

At 10:18pm my trip was over, and I was being scraped off of the
street,
After jumping out of my window during an acid trip, and falling
thirty-two feet.

"Will art Basel"
-Laura Bartick



"Curious Desire I"
-Marta Gonzalez



Graphic Art

"Curious Desire II"
-Marta Gonzalez



Graphic Art

WOLVES

Lexa Samuel

1. They don't tell it right.
2. They never have.
3. I wasn't afraid.
4. I was going to help keep my people alive.
5. That was the way it's always been.
6. That's the way it should have been.
7. Noble.
8. That's what they called me.
9. And, savior.
10. They treated me like a goddess.
11. Every year, always the same.
12. They'd choose a girl who was only sixteen or seventeen.
13. She would be sent into the woods as a sacrifice to the faerie folk.
14. The land would then flourish.
15. The wolves would never stray into our village.
16. And they wouldn't eat our cattle.
17. Blood was shed to keep other blood from being spilled.
18. It was heroic.
19. I felt honored to be chosen.
20. The morning of, I was dressed in a fine red cloak.
21. Our elder gave me basket was laden with honey and wine.
22. My parents did not weep, as they were proud.
23. Head held high, I set off into the forest, alone.
24. Under the canopy of the trees, it was still dark.
25. I was unafraid.
26. No creature troubled me.
27. Although, I did meet a wanderer.
28. He was lost, and did not speak our language.
29. I had to leave him, but I pointed in the direction of our village.
30. When I found the path, I left the basket for the fairies.
31. I felt watched.
32. It was the wolves.
33. Each of them bowed their heads in submission.
34. They guided me to him.
35. He was like them, a wolf, but he changed that.
36. He shape-shifted.
37. As a man, he was the most beautiful person I had ever seen.
38. I did not expect him to kiss me.
39. He called me his Ruby, his jewel.
40. I was not killed instantly, as I had expected.
41. He treated me as his equal when we spoke.
42. Without my blood or the gifts to offer him, I gave him my body.
43. I loved him, then.
44. There was so much he had done for us.
45. I knew he had to complete the sacrifice.
46. It was the way it had always been.
47. He promised to be quick and gentle.
48. The lost wanderer had followed me.
49. He found us.
50. He did not understand.
51. If he had not surprised us, he would not have managed to do as he did.
52. He killed the shape-shifter to protect me.
53. I wanted to avenge him, but I was afraid.
54. The wolves got him, though.
55. They ripped him apart.
56. I fled home.
57. My people were ashamed of me.
- .

58. They all but declared me anathema.
59. They would kill me again to bring back the crops.
60. And all the cattle killed by starving wolves.
61. They believe the ground is fertilized with blood.
62. If they wish to do so, I will not fight.
63. It must be my destiny.
64. But I gave them a changeling baby.
65. They worship it as they worship the faerie folk.
66. When he grows older, they will send him into the woods.
67. Not as a sacrifice.
68. As a god to be worshipped

"The Howling"
by Esther Bobadilla







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