

# TULANE --- REVIEW

| 2014 |









# The Tulane Review

*fall 2013*

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**RAIN | Qin Tan**  
Photograph



# We Did Not Have Butterflies

*Sonja Daniels*

these aren't butterflies, he said,  
and raked my insides out to set them free.  
he plucked the tickle-scratched legs and corduroy wings;  
they were moths hiding in autumn  
cloaked in sunset leaves.  
he picked one out to split between his teeth.

he wedged my chest with honeyed bees.  
this is what i like, he said,  
heat so stiff i did not recognize the stings.  
he smoked me out without  
the veil i could not breathe,  
traced honeycomb patterns between my knees.

he pricked my ears with spider's legs  
and gagged my throat with wasps.  
his salted fingers, soft, caressed,  
arranged me in a form.  
be still, he said,  
and pinned my dying body to the board.

my mouth was raw with fire ants,  
my tongue swollen with stings.

## Feather

*Amy Huffman*

filament of flight. Finger  
of wing, caresser of currents  
and downdrafts. Filigree  
foliage, softness laced  
into down. Intricate insulator,  
flared to capture kiss of wind.

# Miracle

*Liz Dolan*

I have sliced an orange into five wedges  
for you. It is all I have. Take it. Press it to your lips.

Inhale its pithy fragrance. Cup it in your hand  
like fire from which we will each light a wick

to hold in our folded fingers. A rosary of blue beads glistens  
under a blue moon. A sloe-eyed young man swoons in the dark  
pine wood.

A host of fertile acolytes attends him chanting in unison  
until a litany of foreign cackles cracks above the shower of sparks.

One voice, the voice of a shackled demon, rises above the rest  
renting the dark in two. Yet children still sparkle in the trees.

Berries sprout in the sea.

## A Gold Coin to Play House

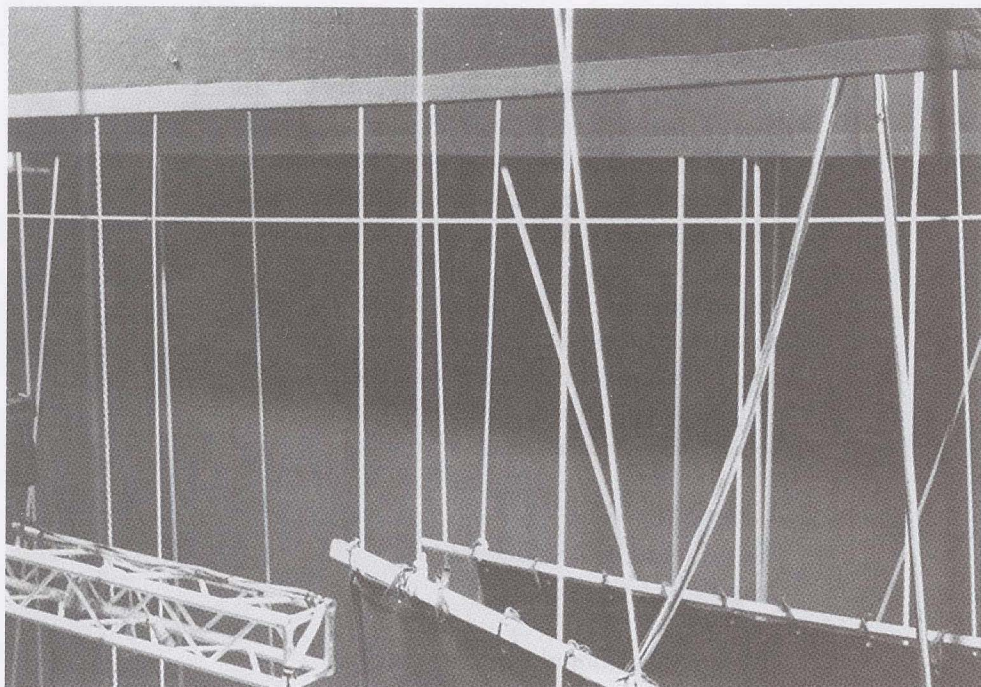
*Melinda Winograd*

Grass isn't really green. I'm surprised you didn't know  
that it isn't even grass. What you see across the fence are crystals  
forming from soil doused in leaching ashes, and the tears of evil eyes.

I can taste the same mire sticking heavy to your tongue when  
your tongue crosses mine. You tell me, "No time to act serious.  
Serious is time, every heart is tock." But you don't know

I have the open-palm talisman with  
snake oil dripping from its longest finger;  
the middle one, that I give to you

And pin a note to your dirt-dry, grassy chest:  
I am not the girl who asks forgiveness, who envies  
the wives in paper houses. Leave your token at the door.



**THEATER | Mariko Perry**

from the series I got lost to find something

Silver Gelatin Print

11" x 14"

## Butterflies

*Marvin Shackelford*

Perhaps you have seen them,  
proud boats obscuring the views  
of coastal homes in travel magazines.

Not so much here, in the suburbs of Houston.  
My galleon was always destined for the back lawn.  
After several deep sighs from my wife, I knew.

Then a letter from the homeowners association  
brought about the bough. My grand voyage,  
reduced to this corner of the back yard.

Look at this less than sea-worthy thing:

— Light blue paint, peeling.  
Rudder kicked out to one side,  
hanging by a single bolt.

I like to walk along the hull.  
Rub the scars, stain my fingers  
with old brass, share splinters  
with the dry wood.

I know enough about boats and marriage  
to realize the likelihood of repairs.

The sexton cannot hold  
in this sensible horizon.  
The mirror whirls. Each fix  
avoids the nautical miles.



Old flat maps land me  
far past fences and into  
identical neighboring lawns.

I drop anchor among the weeds,  
watch the neighbor cut his grass  
and bury myself in this green sea.

## Hemlock

*David Preda*

With one  
Herculean step  
Air seeps through my ears and eyes  
And turns my once fortitudinous mind  
to gelatin.

It's her life  
not mine  
Written by Zeus's lightning, flashing.  
A girl with mouse ears begging her mom  
for cotton candy  
15 years before she was Medusa who turned  
Soul to stone, heart  
to slate.

Her fist raised level  
To her diamond eye, she said,  
"Stop seeing things exactly  
as they are,"  
Then departed from her perch  
On the cliff of harpy feathers  
As I glided from the bridge.

The glints of blades  
Of which I once dreamt  
Are mirrored below in crystalline waves,  
The sirens slice the air  
In scarred gashes on my skin,  
And if time stops here,  
I'll know how the albatross feels when  
He is neither on land  
nor in water.

Then the current grabs hold

And I realize

I am just runoff

In the river Styx;

The ferryman yet unpaid.

And I remember when

I was on the ledge

Staring down.

## “Should We Be Mindful of Dreams?”

*Ace Boggess*

She tells me she tore her heart from her chest—  
not the valentine, the paper pretty with its buttocks &  
razor point, but the gruesome strawberry dripping  
juice—& handed it to me: not the me in the mirror;  
a panda that was also me, fat with devouring urge.  
Her elephant god looked on, scowling, scorned  
by the diversion of a tribute that belonged to him.  
How easygoing so much strangeness seems at night, &  
how apt the metaphors of the unconscious. I could be  
that creature full of cuddle & brutality, whereas she  
might gash herself apart in love or sacrifice.  
Everywhere a maelstrom ravages the body's rest, &  
the mind that never rests as it creates its gorgeous,  
frightful anime. What if it were not a dream at all,  
what if the butterfly saw itself Chuang Tzu?  
Just yesterday, I watched a squirrel standing  
on a tree branch, forepaws gripping a slice of pizza.  
The triangle dangled like a dart pointed down,  
while a furry mouth made meat of its crust.  
This was no dream, though it had the same  
character of fantasia & meaning, definition:  
such consuming, such taking in of the sacred &  
profane. No, I'm not saying to her give me your heart &  
I will give you pizza. No, I don't know  
what I'm saying, except give me whatever  
you choose. I accept it, will not consume it,  
will store it in a locked & lacquered box  
cushioned within with silks of infinite colors.

# Raid

*Anna Torson*

They come in their ships.  
The breath in their lungs born  
from frozen peaks that hiss at the touch  
of flamed fingers.  
Banners snarl in the wind like dragon wings.  
Drum beats the howl of hounds  
before the kill.

Boots crackle on shore pebbles,  
as sharp and warm as the sword  
that threaded my brother's ribs  
into a ruined tapestry.

Underneath my back angels hide in the sand.  
Choke on their kisses of light.  
Skin open to the sting  
of salt and ice.

Rosary beads torn from my waist.  
Spill on the sweaty palms  
which press my lips and breasts.

A last prayer I have to offer,  
when raven hands chatter at my thighs  
and tangled nets of golden hair wrap my wrists.

Swallow the moonlight  
that touches the rim of the ocean  
and maybe then I'll be saved.

## Salvo

*Jonathan Veach*

You, she points, and you:  
Don't fuck

with agency: I'll make you  
your very own

wizard cap from roadside  
condom foils—

it will block all transmissions. Her  
rooftop stretches

on for miles. I'll sit there for days,  
watching the numerous

silhouettes of felines. When I first saw  
the satellites

I believed they were constellations  
knocked loose.

You tease me about my accent  
and I'll tear

down your red stable, ride  
your palomino

to the glue factory. My hands  
build bombs

from clock potatoes. I target  
everyone—

simply step inside my giant mailbox.  
Tombs make perfect

dinner tables. I've traced triangles  
with grim efficiency

on the bare backs of lovers.  
I forget

whole portions of the alphabet  
and juice fresh

watermelon with shotgun blasts.  
Tiny elves

inhabit her attic. If her head  
is a rose

garden after a hail storm,  
then mine

is a thunderclap after  
midnight.



# It happened when you were fourteen

*Stephanie Chen*

*- for Ameer*

Invented a mouthpiece  
when you held  
a baby gun  
to the body  
who called your  
sister "slut." He  
deserved a raw  
denouement made of  
pomegranate. You de-  
served breath. The  
aftermath will gnaw  
you at intersections,  
sketch the cicada  
blueprint on your  
chest. Feels good  
to be unloved  
by war markings,  
a delirious dose  
dream you take  
to sleep in  
afternoons. In the  
morning, with coffee  
two sugars, tastes  
like the Broadmoor  
corridor at night.  
You get older but this  
still tastes like lead.

# The Retired Barkeep

*Mark DeCarteret*

Me, I've tricked up enough cocktails—  
cited their ice or talked up their late-kicks,  
and summed up their lemon or lime slice  
like a smile coming into a splash simultaneously  
(never mentioning the absence of a sustainable fizz),  
I've sighed for pineapples, some those sonnet-sized gasps  
that will drizzle off one's chin then stain the lapel  
and tripped on a phrase for one's inadequate sprits,  
admired the salt on its rim, my tongue later  
taking one last lap around its sounding-out,  
I've parted with sugar as much loved for its kiss  
as for how much we'll soon miss it,  
(though no, I've not noted how the onion  
has never won anyone's attention honestly)  
and waited through the thaws and what I sold  
of those summers in crepe paper umbrellas  
even gangster-squinting through smoke at the ceiling  
as I picked my teeth clean of any greenery,  
tried to lessen an olive's lack of get-up, fatigue,  
have it open up about that "flesh wound" of his,  
I've reached out to the cherry's done-in heart  
and lectured on the tundra-white soul of the celery;  
mused enough over mint and its lingering spring--  
time here measured in draft-spills, counter-slime,  
and the tales I've cried-over and laughed off  
with a similar snuffle, same build-up or finish,  
my only wish now's for that bottle-chime, shine,  
this muse unembellished and straight-up  
like the sun only more discreet, punishing.

## Menorah-Mama at Mt. Sinai

*M.E. Silverman*

Metal arms, octopus-long,  
suck and hiss,  
move machine-heavy  
in a room built for snoring.

Nothing makes sense.  
Mama has become a menorah.  
Her body tries to make  
its own miracle.

Matching our tired eyes,  
she flickers with fear.  
I want to lick the oil  
from her thin, black hair.

Torn by tradition  
& her present condition, we stand  
unprepared for the confusion. We wait  
with the whole family

for comfort. They give her a place in the corner  
where walls white as desert sun  
shine, a beacon  
of false hope.

Someone in charge speaks  
well rehearsed Latin. Mumbo gumbo.  
We don't know what to feel,  
filling the space with stories

about the night of the wobbly mantle  
& the bug-bitten Sabbath,  
or the evening we used our gas stove  
on the candles when we lost

the lighter box. We move through  
the holiday routine  
& mention our best menorah memories  
as we praise her

& shine her up,  
a top-shelf trophy.  
No one says fever  
or lesions.

Father sits with us  
on the other bed.  
We play a few games.  
We sing some songs, stopping

to eat chocolate gelt  
until my sister asks for latkes,  
which makes mama cry.  
From her nose, snot drips

like melting wax.  
We forget to say the Hebrew.  
We forget to open our gifts.  
At dawn,

before we have to go,  
before we know what to do,  
we linger long enough  
to watch her burn & puff out.

## The Plains

*Marvin Shackelford*

We thought it so terrifyingly lovely  
to get high and round the same curve,

pass beneath the same bridge once,  
but feeling in the dark we did so twice.

The next morning my mother wouldn't stop  
saying how lovely snow blown

across the highway while we drove  
looked, like a blizzard controlled

and prettily framed by the windshield.  
It never stuck so couldn't hurt.

And across the plains--they wouldn't  
thaw until May that year--I drove,

afternoon after a Christmas of lost  
trees and presents and mis-sized batteries.

I drove through river breaks and sudden,  
hidden forests and rose again and fell

on the Mississippi, Iowa like vengeance  
bleeding the white sunset dry.

I kept thinking how lovely it had been  
holding the déjà vu of your hand

under and under the Burlington Northern  
overpass, sensory lie of a curve.

I drove the bluffs along the coast, small  
town to the next small town touring

the abandoned houses of your life.  
Each grew darker--or maybe the day

only darkened--narrower, more paint chipped  
and windows boarded and always

the lonely miles between homes identical,  
ready for the confusion of memory.

## Old Blue Boat

*Steven Blythe*

Perhaps you have seen them,  
proud boats obscuring the views  
of coastal homes in travel magazines.

Not so much here, in the suburbs of Houston.  
My galleon was always destined for the back lawn.  
After several deep sighs from my wife, I knew.

Then a letter from the homeowners association  
brought about the bough. My grand voyage,  
reduced to this corner of the back yard.

Look at this less than sea-worthy thing:

— Light blue paint, peeling,  
Rudder kicked out to one side,  
hanging by a single bolt.

I like to walk along the hull.  
Rub the scars, stain my fingers  
with old brass, share splinters  
with the dry wood.

I know enough about boats and marriage  
to realize the likelihood of repairs.

The sexton cannot hold  
in this sensible horizon.  
The mirror whirls. Each fix  
avoids the nautical miles.

Old flat maps land me  
far past fences and into  
identical neighboring lawns.

I drop anchor among the weeds,  
watch the neighbor cut his grass  
and bury myself in this green sea.



## The Audubon Audio Tour

Mark DeCarteret

Light's gains from last Friday are gone  
so we're on the move once again, making  
note of the overgrown ferns and committing  
more mangroves and cypress to paper  
though the latest paintings (see entry on roseate  
tern, three-toed gull) are irresolvable, grainy —  
a tin-type's conviction, its burnt-sugar blackness  
now ghost-still and toxic, as if I'm pitted against  
a great grandparent's gaze ever-reckoning with time —  
crane-serious, grave, not a cloud in their thinking or behavior,  
with pleasure perpetually banned from God's abode!  
*I have told sizable lies. All those lines I've emblazoned with sun.*  
*But what pencil is able to dull all the corpses I've posed?*  
Or maybe it's the current that's curtailing my progress,  
the water tank-gray and enfeebled as turned-cream.  
And yet my feet are cranked forward, key thrust in my back,  
shells reacting in chorus to my steps, tipping me off,  
my soul followed up by more shadow than I'm inclined.  
*Their tittle-tattle's what kills me. Whisperings from the pines.*  
*A malice, ill-will, much more bewildering than this labyrinth.*  
Up ahead there are herons rehearsing for flight  
like a late-autumn snow that's astonished with itself.  
Light's gains are gone again. Sun, vine-wound and strangled.  
What little's left coming in unworldly angles, celestial.  
Is it enough of a dose to lure me out of here, Lord,  
arms airlifted, breast pried apart like a bromeliad's petals?  
Or will I only be able to account for my own stench,  
the fallout from this tallying, that desolate game?  
And yet, little harm's come to me taming your deer,  
stretching their hides from one horizon to the other—  
maybe my diary's finally cured me of Your disease,  
my palms forever stained with their blamelessness.

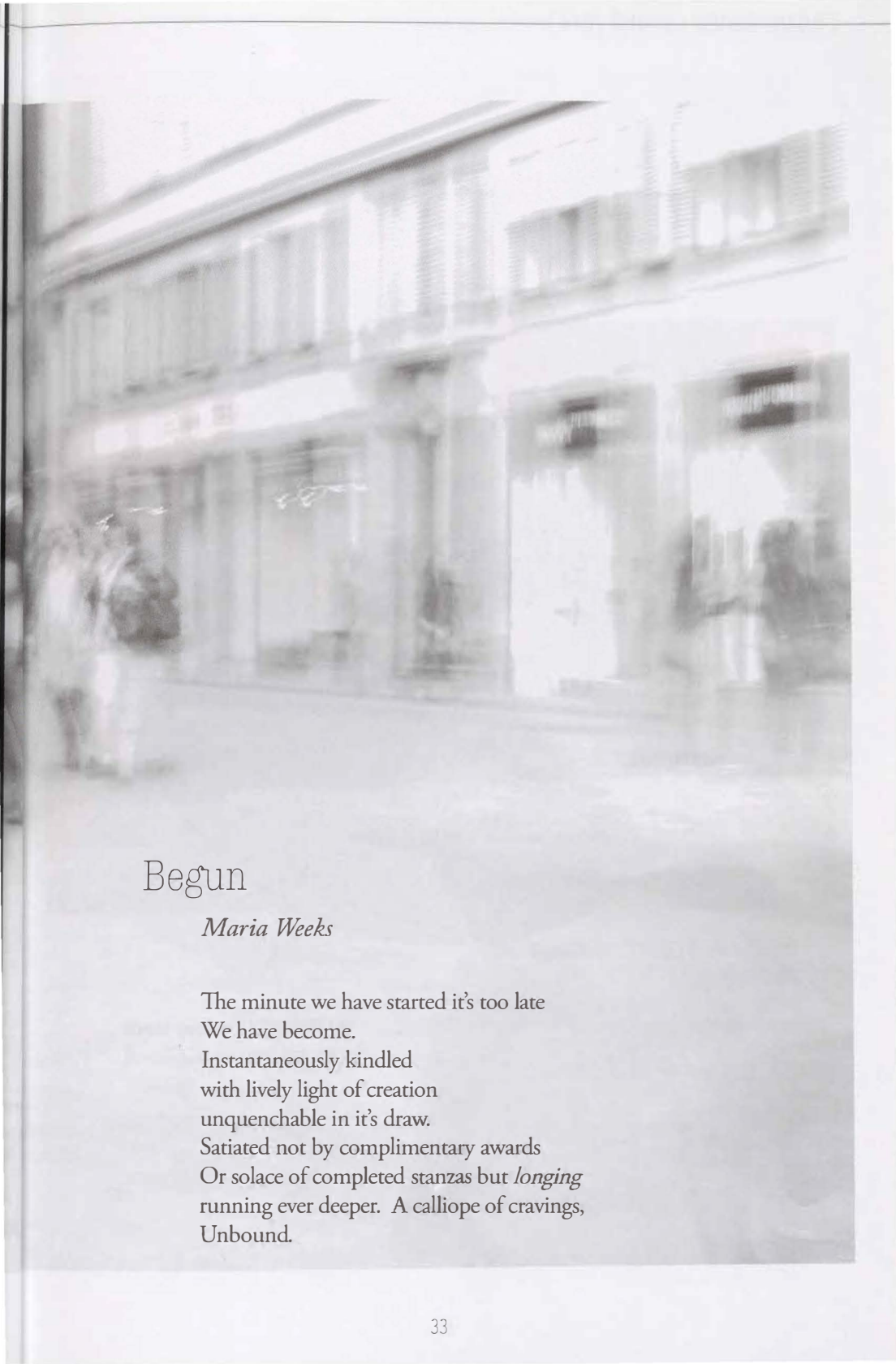


**MANHATTAN NIGHTMARE | Edith Young**

Photograph  
20.75" x 14.125"



**FLORENCE STREETS | Qin Tan**  
Photograph



# Begun

*Maria Weeks*

The minute we have started it's too late  
We have become.  
Instantaneously kindled  
with lively light of creation  
unquenchable in it's draw.  
Satiated not by complimentary awards  
Or solace of completed stanzas but *longing*  
running ever deeper. A calliope of cravings,  
Unbound.

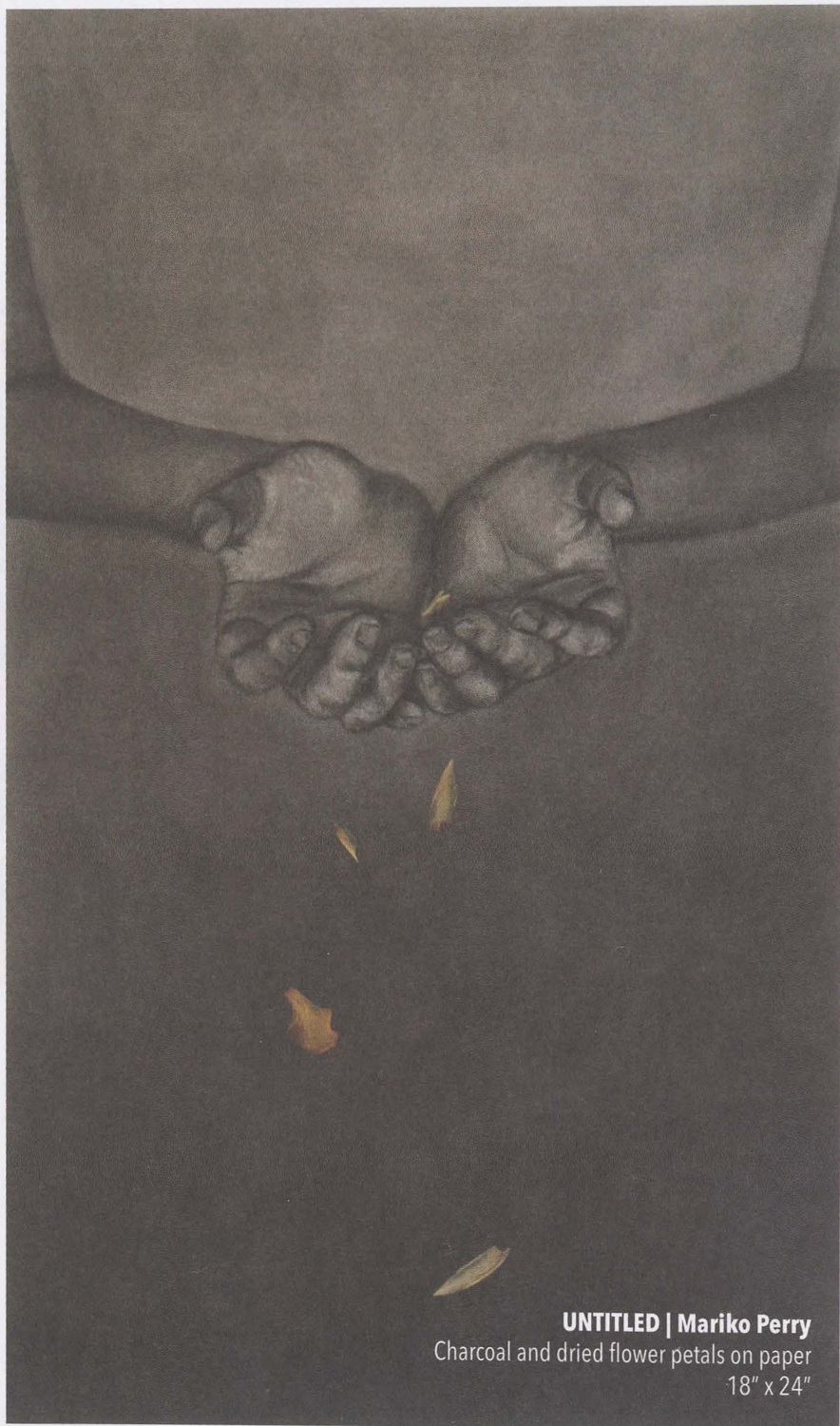


**INTERRUPT | Lindsey Mack**  
Acrylic and latex on MDF board  
42" diameter

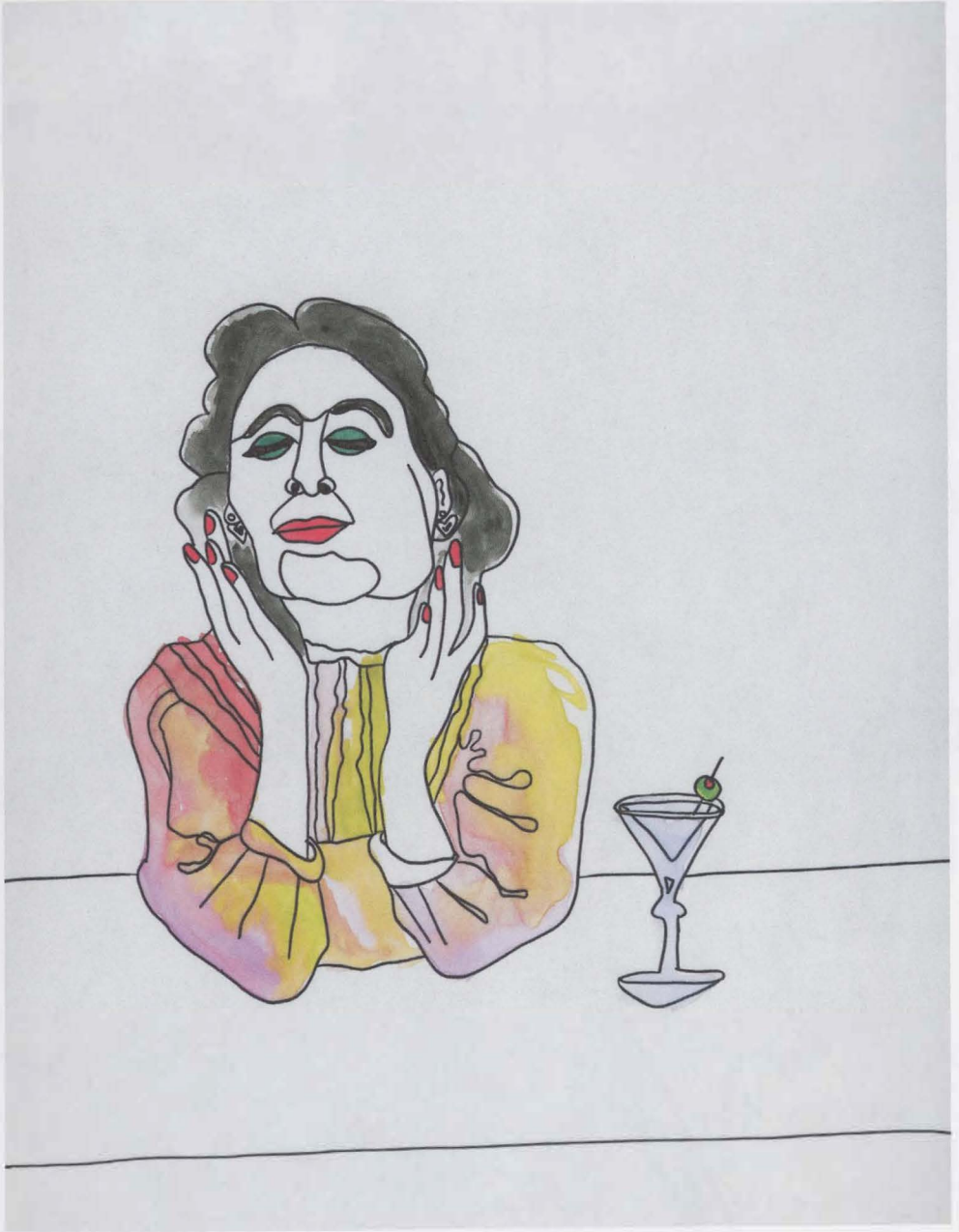




**TEMPORARY ATTITUDE | Derek Zwyer**  
Photo



**UNTITLED | Mariko Perry**  
Charcoal and dried flower petals on paper  
18" x 24"



**MARTINI | Julie Martin**  
Watercolor and ink on paper  
11 x 17"





**STACKED | Lindsey Mack**

Charcoal and white gesso on canvas  
24" x 60"



"When I awoke like this, everything would be moving round me through the darkness: things, places, years... [The body's] memory, the composite memory of its ribs, knees, and shoulder-blades offered it a whole series of rooms in which it had at one time or another slept; while the unseen walls kept changing, adapting themselves to the shape of each successive room that it remembered, whirling madly through the darkness."

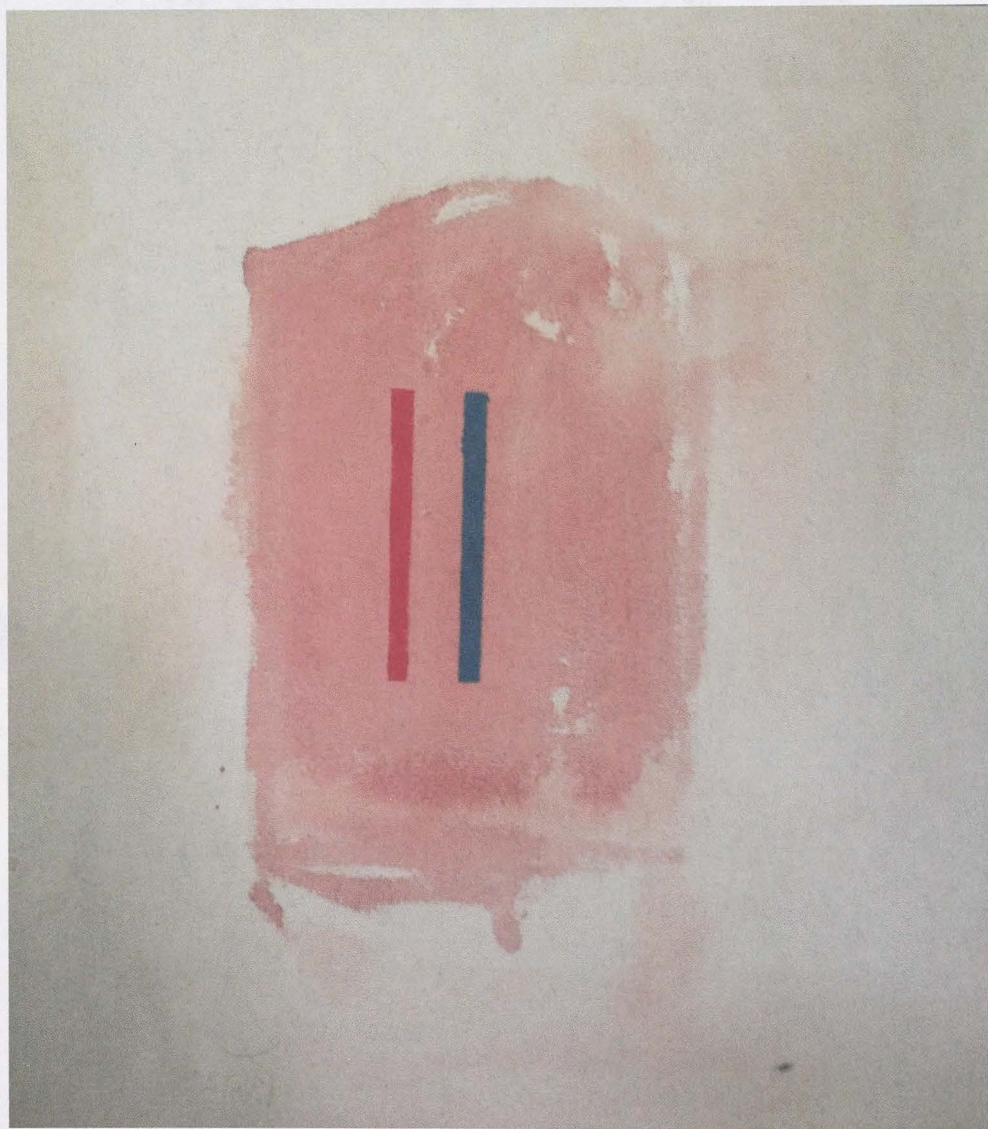
– *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust

### **EMETONM HALL, SW CORNER | Che Xinwei**

Souvenir Shirt from Cape Cod, hand-drawn maps, patent leather shoe, knitted globes, grey cardigan, window sill, plastic bracelet

9" x 7" x 5"





**EN LA PUERTA | Colleen Helie**  
Acrylic and house paint on canvas  
24" x 29"



**NO.2 | Mariko Perry**

*from the series I got lost to find something*

C-Print

11" x 14"



**BARRIER | Nina Raizel**  
Hand carved maple wood





**LILY PAD | Mariko Perry**

from the series *I got lost to find something*

C-Print

11" x 14"



**REFLECTIONS | Katie Darby**

Acrylic and oil on canvas  
36" x 24"





**DWELLING | Christen Chiosi**

Collagraph print

11" x 15"



**THE MAGICIAN | Edith Young**  
Photograph  
7" x 10.5"



# Laura

*Jacqueline Doyle*

When I rang the doorbell, Professor B. wasn't expecting me, but he ushered me in cordially, making small talk about the weather, what a lovely day it had been, a look of polite inquiry on his face.

"What can I do for you, Desmond?" he asked, then, half turning to the kitchen at the back of the house. "Can I get you something to drink?"

I waved my hand airily. "No, thank you, I'm fine." Smiled at him. Looked at my feet like what I was going to say next was hard for me.

"Please, have a seat."

He ushered me into the living room, where two couches facing each other flanked a brick fireplace.<sup>1</sup>

He settled back on the couch across from me and waited.

Outside wind rustled through the trees, and the dim light from the streetlamps wavered. I could hear leaves skittering across the street and sidewalk, the last remnants of winter.<sup>2</sup>

"I'm here about Laura. You know, Laura in our class?"

Of course he bloody well knew who Laura was, since he'd been fucking her for who knows how long. My Laura. The girl who inhabited all of my waking thoughts, haunted my dreams, starred in the mental porno flicks I couldn't keep from unreeling, though God knows I tried. She was better than that. I knew some day she'd realize how I venerated her. Some day I would prove my devotion.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or at least this is how I pictured his living room. Revenge wasn't so easy, and while I thought about making this visit, my murderous project didn't advance beyond the thinking stage, evidenced by this sophomoric story, recently recovered as I was clearing out my files. Thirty-some years later, the youthful Desmond is something of a surprise and embarrassment. You're always asking what I was like in college. I offer you this juvenilia as Exhibit A, complete with annotations.

<sup>2</sup> Rather nice attention to setting. Desmond wasn't without talent.

<sup>3</sup> A romantic, even chivalric ideal. Hopelessly clichéd, but remember, I was young—a chubby, virginal college student pining over an unattainable girl. I can't say it was my last crush, but surely it was my most pitiful. My most humiliating. The tears, the agony, the sleepless nights. My sheer ineptitude. Our middle-aged romance has proceeded much more smoothly.

And now the skin flicks had changed. I saw her in Professor B.'s office, coyly perched on his desk, while he set down his pipe, ran his hand up her leg, under her skirt, and between her plump, luscious thighs. She licked her lips and ...<sup>4</sup>

He frowned. "What about Laura?"

"She's been acting strange lately, distracted. I'm worried about her. I mean, her grades and her scholarship and all."

"She's doing fine in our class, Desmond. I don't think it's appropriate for me to discuss another student with you."

Of course she's doing fine, you mealy-mouthed, lecherous bastard.<sup>5</sup> I clenched my teeth, made my expression mild and concerned. I knew he'd say that he couldn't discuss her. Perfidy hiding behind academic confidentiality.

"I think she's become very quiet."

He probably liked them quiet, his "coeds." Quiet and cooperative, wide-eyed and willing.

"I don't think you need to worry about that, Desmond." He started to stand. Interview over.

Somebody needed to worry about her well-being. The nefarious Professor B. sure wasn't. And where was his wife?

Laura's roommate Brenda had told me all about it a week ago. "Professor Bennett's only the third guy she's slept with<sup>6</sup>," she confided, in eager hushed tones. "She cried all night after he told her they'd have to end it when the semester's over. 'How could we see each other my dear,' he said to her, and all along she thought maybe he was gonna marry her." Brenda

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<sup>4</sup> While I had, in fact, watched a pornographic movie in a dark theater on Broadway (this was long before the Internet), it's possible I couldn't really imagine what would occur next. Thus the ellipses. Or possibly I couldn't imagine this May-December sex, which seemed truly grotesque to me. And probably wasn't happening. You've gotten the impression already, haven't you, that Desmond may have been seriously deluded?

<sup>5</sup> I don't mean to preen, but I rather like this turn of phrase.

<sup>6</sup> Here Desmond drops the pretense of calling his villain Professor B., perhaps inadvertently, and reverts to the teacher's real name. Laura and I were students in Professor Bennett's "Introduction to Poetry" class. She was a transcendent vision—slender, with milky white skin, and pale blonde hair that she played with during lecture, twisting it around her finger, hooking it behind her perfect ear, trying out a pony tail, and then shaking it over her shoulders again. Sometimes she inspected her nails, which were painted with pearly pink polish. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I gazed at Laura across the classroom, while brooding over Petrarch's hopeless passion for the object of his desire, so aptly named Laura, and Yeats's unrequited love for Maud Gonne. Poor Willy. Not to mention Desmond's poor willy!

had been shocked—"just shocked," she said, when Laura told her about it.<sup>7</sup>

I surveyed the shelves of books and knick knacks lining the living room and wondered if Laura had ever been here, sitting right where I was maybe, whether she'd imagined herself a professor's wife, dusting the knick knacks, plumping up the tapestry couch pillows, pouring wine for visitors, bringing out artfully arranged trays of canapés.

Professor Bennett was old, fifty at least, maybe older.<sup>8</sup> Did she think he was going to marry a nineteen year old? I felt sick thinking of Professor B. without his clothes on, rutting between Laura's outspread legs—gray hair on his back, the flabby cheeks of his ass rippling with his exertions.<sup>9</sup>

He was waiting for me to go.<sup>10</sup>

"Do you have a bathroom I could use?"

"Of course, it's just down the hall on the right." Professor B. pointed down the long dark corridor. He switched on a light, and I saw a Persian runner, a row of framed watercolors—pastoral, sunlit landscapes.

"Nice pictures."

"My daughter painted those in college."

Disgusting bastard. He had a daughter, probably older than Laura then, out of college.

In the bathroom I rummaged through the medicine chest and the vanity drawers under the sink until I found the perfect weapon—a new-looking pair of shiny silver haircutting scissors, long, with a sharp point at the tip. I flushed the toilet, ran water in the sink, and exited, triumphant, my heart beating fast. He wasn't going to get away with what he'd done, not on my watch.<sup>11</sup>

Professor B. was back on the couch, leafing through a book, when I turned the corner and rushed at him from behind, right arm aloft with the scissors in my hand. I plunged them into his chest. Over and over and over.

<sup>7</sup> In one brand of teen movie, Desmond would come to realize that Brenda was the real thing, worthier of his affection than Laura. In another, Brenda would be an envious bitch, spreading lies to a.) disillusion Desmond, b.) steal Desmond from Laura, or c.) spur Desmond to some imprudent, possibly homicidal action. In real life, there was no Brenda. In fact very few girls spoke to me that year, as I was hopelessly tongue-tied in their presence.

<sup>8</sup> Young squirt. At fifty-two and fifty-six, you and I are hardly old.

<sup>9</sup> The aforesaid May-December sex. Desmond had more imagination than I've given him credit for.

<sup>10</sup> Since this is Desmond's fantasy, it's surprising there's no confession from the professor, who's acting more or less as I imagine he would have under the circumstances. Perhaps this suggests that the young Desmond did have some grasp on reality and its ambiguities.

<sup>11</sup> Desmond the hero emerges. From the toilet.



Blood spurted everywhere, staining the pale oriental carpet, leaving dark patches on the brown velvet sofa, soaking the cushion beside him. After an initial short shout of dismay he was quiet, the only sound blood gurgling in his throat. He slumped to the side, his expression astonished.<sup>12</sup>

I was trembling all over, laughing almost at the success of my impromptu plan. So easy, after all. If he hadn't been so smug, so unconcerned, maybe I wouldn't have done it. If he'd shown an ounce of compassion for Laura.

I wasn't sure what to do next. Fingerprints maybe. I should wipe down the bathroom for fingerprints, right?<sup>13</sup> And get rid of the scissors somewhere.

Laura would have been proud of my efficiency.<sup>14</sup> Leaving the body slumped on the couch, I walked quickly to the bathroom, wiped down the vanity and medicine cabinet door with a guest towel, mopped the spattered blood off my shirtsleeves as best I could, and strode down the hall. Using the cuff of my shirt so I wouldn't leave more fingerprints, I switched off the hall light and front porch light, turned the front doorknob, and walked slowly and casually out the door, shutting it behind me.

The air was balmy, and the dim streetlights were haloed by a faint mist. It was a beautiful night, really, and I breathed deeply, taking in the scents of early spring.<sup>15</sup> But I had things to do. Bloody shirt, bloody towel, bloody scissors. I loped four blocks to a dark alley by the canal, pulled off my shirt and wrapped it and the towel around a broken piece of masonry

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<sup>12</sup> Didn't happen, of course. I hasten to reassure you that this isn't a confession, beyond a confession of the ludicrous imaginings of my teen-aged self. Was this normal, or do you think I needed therapy? Would you have married this boy if you'd met him in college? I can only hope you are more sympathetic to his folly than I am.

<sup>13</sup> A prescient moment, as forensics have come to dominate today's television shows in a way they did not then.

<sup>14</sup> I doubt that very much. Laura was massively indifferent to Desmond. And probably to the professor, too. If she hiked up her skirt in the front row, and laughed at his jokes, it was because she had her eye on an A, not on his middle-aged physique. Beautiful from a distance, Laura was a superficial chatterbox up close, who reveled in admiration and gravitated toward preppy rich boys. I expect she's married one, or two, by now, and produced some profoundly boring children. Who may be old enough to have borne dull offspring of their own. Having enjoyed two marriages (if enjoyed is the word) without siring progeny, I have no plans in that direction, no late regrets. I know that you sometimes worry that your childlessness makes you less of a woman, but for me it is one of your many attractions. I wouldn't want to take on stepchildren at this stage of my life.

<sup>15</sup> Early spring as our hero undergoes this patricidal rite of passage? Desmond, Desmond, let's not get too obvious with the seasons.

on the ground, and dropped the bundle and scissors into the murky water, watching them sink with a deep sense of satisfaction.<sup>16</sup>

I've been thinking about it all week. When and where I should tell her. I want it to be an occasion, some place quiet, potentially romantic, and private, of course. She'll be sitting across from me, her eyes wide and sincere.<sup>17</sup> "Can you forgive me, Desmond? I don't know what I was thinking." I'll answer without a moment's hesitation. "Of course, Laura." I'll straighten my shoulders, give her a look of manly understanding.<sup>18</sup> "You're not the first student to sleep with her professor, but you'll be his last." She'll look back at me in awe, and her eyes will soften. She'll reach for my arm, she'll say, "You really did that, for me?"

I'll smile modestly, and shrug. "Really it was nothing. The bastard had it coming. It was so much easier than I thought it would be."

We'll kiss, and the screen will fade to black.

### The End<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Surely the shirt would have ballooned to the surface. And a murder like this would have produced a lot of blood, more than just a blood-stained shirt. But Desmond insists that this was easy, when in fact nothing was easy for that poor, bumbling nineteen-year-old. I almost feel sorry for him, looking back. But he had youth, and I no longer do, so mostly I'm annoyed at how much of it he wasted. Mooning after Laura, entertaining pornographic and violent fantasies, writing stupid stories. Did he ever get out of his dorm room? I remember him as a white-skinned slug who rarely saw the light of day. Desmond. Have I progressed since then? I have to believe I have. I hope you do too.

<sup>17</sup> Does the shift into present- and future-tense imagining suggest that Desmond was aware that this wasn't going to happen—that even murder wasn't going to impress Laura? Probably not.

<sup>18</sup> Manly? Don't make me laugh.

<sup>19</sup> Good God. This was the end? What about the long-desired consummation? The moment when he throws Laura to the ground, or onto the table, the couch, and pushes up her skirt? But even I, so much older and wiser, hesitate to go on, sympathetic to the virginal Desmond's dilemma. Perhaps he can't actually imagine what comes next. Or reality intrudes, and he can only imagine potential failures. He might come all over her panties before he's even begun to remove them. Or fulfill his aching desires but fail to satisfy her. It was only after considerable experimentation that I was able to pull that off when I finally bedded Cynthia, who was as inexperienced as I. It was winter of our senior year. For weeks we were at it like rabbits. I humped and she moaned, I stopped and she gasped, I humped and she moaned, I came to a shuddering climax and she moaned some more. Porno proved inadequate preparation for the business of actually satisfying a real female. Finally she took matters into her own hands, mounting and riding me with some vigor, an exercise that culminated in excited shrieks on her part, and tears of relief on mine. There you have it,

the climax of the story. As for the denouement, I have finished tossing files as I ready myself for our upcoming nuptials and move into larger quarters. I haven't run across the pleading sonnets I now recall writing to Laura, which is probably just as well. After graduating with an English major, I abandoned poetry to become a successful grant writer, a drier literature of entreaty that has paid the bills. The take-charge Cynthia, as you know, became my first wife. A psychology major all too prone to engage in psychobabble, she left me after ten years because I was "narcissistic," "anal," and "compartmentalized" my feelings. I would describe myself as mild-mannered and precise, not given to histrionics as Cynthia was. Qualities I think you appreciate. My marriage to Jeanette lasted for almost ten years also, when she left me for her yoga instructor, who happened to be a woman. They moved to California, and I haven't heard from her for years. You and I have had our disappointments, but are also well shed of our past mates. I appreciate your equanimity and good sense. You will not demand heroics, or inspire execrable writing. No adolescent fantasies of homage and homicide. This unexpected encounter with a self I had forgotten has made me grateful for the relative ease of middle age. Who would want to be nineteen again? It was so much harder than we tend to remember.

# A Breather

*Philip Jason*

When the Guy first showed up as a patient in Z wing, the hospital's coma unit, it was a quiet place. Most of the sounds in Z wing were produced by the machines that monitored vital signs. Then the Guy began to hum. It wasn't any kind of special hum. It was monotone and consistent, like the buzzing of a bee or a fly. The first nurse to hear it, working a night shift, wasn't sure where it was coming from and spent thirty-five minutes searching around her nursing station for whatever was producing it. When nothing turned up, she expanded the search area and carefully tracked the source of the sound to the nasal passage of the comatose patient in room 323.

"That's cute," she said, even though there's never anything cute about being in a coma.

At the end of her shift, she mentioned it to the incoming nurses.

"One of the Breathers is humming," she said.

These nurses also thought it was "cute" and it quickly melted into the auditory ambience, where it was just another noise made by a machine to let the nurses know a patient was still alive.

It was not until the shifts changed again that the sound did as well. A new, lower, rumbling frequency was added in a periodic fashion, giving the sound the character of a large, walloping snore. The nurse on duty at the time thought it was funny.

She said, "I hope you don't wake the other patients."

Then the nurse had paperwork to do, and the snoring disrupted her ability to concentrate. She would thrust her attention into the meaningless task, but the snoring would tug on her attention. What eventually started to bother her was that even though she hated the paperwork so much she would rather be listening to someone snore, she had to do it anyway, and this made her feel trapped in a world built on unfair principles.

She called her husband.

"That dinner you made last night was terrible."

She called her mom.

"You weren't there for me when I needed you."



By the time she finished her shift, she'd managed to get through all the paperwork, but she wanted to kill someone. She did not mention what had happened to the nurse that was replacing her.

"Let her find out on her own," she said to herself, "At least she has a chance to maybe not even notice it."

The new nurse, however, did notice. For the entire twelve hours of her shift, the Guy snored persistently, and the snoring echoed through the otherwise silent walls of Z wing, interfering with her ability to fill out and process forms.

"You've let me down," she said to the friends she called. "All of you."

Like the nurse before her, she too left work wanting to kill. And the same thing happened to the nurses who worked the next shift and to the ones who worked the shift after that. Soon all the nurses of Z wing had dumped on their loved ones. All of them had experienced madness-inducing, snore-oriented paperwork problems that made them want to kill.

Luckily, learning to repress the impulse to kill other people is a big part of a nurse's training.

Things in Z-wing went on like this for a week and, fortunately, the nurses found themselves able to adjust. The snoring became another part of their day to day experience, and the rage began to dissipate. The nurses apologized to the people they loved.

"I'm human," they said.

Then, quite incredibly, the sound changed again. Rising in pitch to an almost ear-splitting interval and becoming slightly more nasal, it began to resemble a siren.

Working at a hospital, the nurses were accustomed to the frequent siren sounds that accompanied a constant influx of ambulances and other emergency vehicles. Those sirens, however, were fleeting and justified, whereas the Guy's siren snore was unending and served absolutely no purpose. All day long, it cut through the air in the Z wing:

*"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!"*

The nurses were helpless against this endless assault on their eardrums.

*"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!"*

They couldn't close the door to his room without violating hospital policy.

*"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!"*

They couldn't wear earplugs without blocking out the blips and beeps made by the machines monitoring vital life signs.

*"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!"*

Some of the more sensitive nurses began to speak about transferring



to other hospitals, but the general consensus held that it was a nurse's job to be brave while great horrors took place (the least of which was death); therefore, giving in to what was merely a nuisance was tantamount to embarrassing failure.

So, all the nurses endured and, alongside some accusatory phone calls, made jokes.

"Do you think if we installed a knob on his forehead, we could turn down the volume?"

"Maybe he really is an ambulance."

"I bet if he was dead, he wouldn't be making so much noise."

Quite amazingly, the nurses adjusted again. The Guy's siren noises became a part of the ordinary, and the ordinary continued flawlessly. The nurses even celebrated their triumph over adversity.

"I feel stronger now. Don't you?"

"Absolutely. I could do the paperwork of three people I think."

When the sound began to change for a third time, the enhanced nurses of Z wing were once again tested. The pitch of the snore, still high, shifted only slightly, but each instance became choppy and of a consistent duration, occurring over and over again at remarkably equidistant intervals.

No longer respirating like a siren, the Guy now sounded like a ringing telephone.

Having grown up in a world full of telephones, it was instinct for the nurses to respond to the sound with the desire to answer it. Any time their attention wandered far enough, they'd forget it was the Guy, pick up the nearest phone and find themselves talking to no one. Maybe it was the loneliness invoked by the sound of the dial tone. Maybe it was the embarrassment of being fooled by someone in a coma. Maybe it was how it reminded them ironically of all the painful times they'd waited for phone calls that never came. Whatever the reason, things got a little crazy in Z wing. Nurses started calling in sick. And the ones that didn't started arguing with each other over small things (like pencil ownership). There were sad fistfights. Secrets revealed spitefully. Overeating.

Plus, everyone was having nightmares.

"My husband and I are having a conversation. I'm trying to tell him something important. The whole time he looks like he's really listening, and I keep thinking: finally, he hears me! Then I finish and wait for him to respond and he opens his mouth and he doesn't say anything, he just rings. He just fucking rings!"

"In my dream, I gave birth to a telephone and it came out wailing like a baby. The nurses handed it to me and told me it was hungry. I tried to

breastfeed it! What does that mean?"

"Yeah, well, I had one where I murdered someone with a ringing telephone."

"And?"

"That's it."

Eventually, the Guy's ringing made a nurse so desperate, she tried to answer him. The exact details of how she did this were never divulged, but the next day, she filed for transfer out of the Z wing. For the remaining nurses, her departure was a reason to panic. The more religious members of the group stopped praying for things like raises and world peace and took to praying as often as possible for the Guy to come out of his coma. The only true nonbeliever called the telephone company, who couldn't help because company policy did not allow them to take her claims that she was having problems with a constantly ringing man seriously. She reported this to the others.

"You chose the telephone company over God?" a colleague said to her.

"Maybe God should send me a bill every month," was her reply.

Not too long after that the Guy quite mysteriously stopped ringing. The nurse on duty, after checking indifferently to make sure he was still alive, called all the other nurses to tell them the news. Everyone was excited and got drunk celebrating. They went home and fucked their lovers like the world was perfect. They slept like stones.

The next day, though, one of the hungover nurses heard something coming from the Guy's room again. This time, it sounded like someone talking.

"The Guy's awake!" she thought. "I can't wait to tell him what he put us through."

The nurse rushed to the room and was surprised to discover the Guy was still unconscious. He was, however, talking, and what he was saying was very odd.

"Hello? [pause] Hello? I can't hear you. Are you there? Hello? [pause] Hello? Can you hear me? Hello? Hello? [pause] HEELLLLOOOOO..."

When he said: "I'm sorry. You're breaking up," it confirmed the nurses already mounting suspicions: the Guy was now on one end of a conversation involving cell phones with bad reception.

The nurse called everyone.

"I'm pretty sure we're fucked," she said.

The nurses of Z-wing tried, they really did, but where listening to someone say hello once is nice, listening to someone say hello a thousand times deprives life of meaning. And the Guy's "conversation" wasn't always

a string of desperate hello-ing. He would often say dull, choking nonhello things at unusually high volumes.

"Nice weather. Nice weather! NICE WEATHER!"

The worst, though, was when he said things that were interesting enough to draw the nurses in: juicy gossip about strangers (fictional or otherwise), dramatic disagreements, heartfelt apologies that spoke of the human struggle to be vulnerable. They would listen and get excited or even quietly take sides the way people do at the movies, but, inevitably, the reception would fail right before the critical resolution and the nurses would find themselves either thinking about every broken promise they'd suffered or longing for something to happen in their lives.

More than anything else, this wore the already worn-out nurses down, and it wasn't long before they began taking out their frustration on some of the other Breathers. These poor, distraught women (and two men) were jabbing things with needles. And roughing people up during bath time. And in one isolated incident, a nurse came on duty and found that a colleague had written some undesirable words on one of the Breather's foreheads.

Finally, a breaking point was reached when one of the nurses actually broke the smallest finger on one of the Breathers' hands. The release this affected was like an orgasm. The nurse felt suddenly calm and her head cleared, and in that instant, she recognized the threat she and the other nurses now posed to their patients.

"The Guy has to die so these others might live."

Normally, the nurses at this emergency meeting would have thought their colleague was crazy, but these were battered people who, in trying to help their patients heal, had reached the extended edges of their compassionate selves; now they were the wounded in need of healing, and wounded nurses only spill more blood.

"Yes. Yes," they agreed. "The Guy must die."

"What do we do, though?"

"We're nurses. We have the tools and the knowledge to make it look like someone in a coma died naturally, and since everyone expects that to happen anyway, no one is going to consider the possibility that a Breather was executed."

"Even if they did," another nurse chimed in, "it is natural for us to be driven crazy by his unbearably pointless conversation. We are human. It's natural for us to be driven to cause his death. We are natural causes."

"How will we do it?"

"Let's use a hammer!"

No one gasped, but one of the calmer nurses had another suggestion:

"We'll do it with a pillow."

Then came the question that everyone feared the answer to.

"Who will do it?"

Self-interested fingers quickly pointed at the one nurse who did not believe in God.

"She should do it. She's going to hell anyway."

"Don't put this on me," she replied. "One of the men should do it. They're stronger."

"That's ridiculous," one of those men said. "The Guy's in a coma. He's not going to fight back."

"Furthermore," said the other, "it is already hard enough being a male nurse."

"We should draw straws," an older nurse interjected.

And that's what they did. One by one, each of the nurses drew until the short straw was drawn. The nurse who drew it took a deep breath and considered turning the other nurses in to the hospital authorities. Then someone started talking on a cell phone.

"The Guy must die!" she said.

The others grunted.

A few days later, the heroic nurse marched into the hospital, ready to save the world. The outgoing nurses greeted her casually but bowed to her slightly as they were leaving. Once they were gone, she did some paperwork to put her in the mood to kill something.

In his room, the Guy was having a bizarre and heated conversation about either politicians or monkeys.

Hours passed.

By the middle of the night, the hospital had gotten extremely quiet. The only sounds not made by the Guy or the machines were the sounds of terrible suffering made by the patients who wanted life more than they wanted respite from their awful afflictions. The murder nurse looked at the clock and noted the time. She got up from the nurses' station and headed for the guy's room.

Much to her surprise, when she got there, he wasn't talking. Nor did he say anything when she took his pillow from him. The silence was uncanny. The Guy looked peaceful when he wasn't making noises.

Suddenly, all the doubts the nurse had about what she was doing manifested as shadows in the room and spooked her. She backed away until she was pressed against a wall. For the first time, she wondered what he was experiencing while he drove them all crazy. She was so scared that he might be happy, she almost dropped the pillow and ran.



"Maybe we don't have to do this," she thought. "We can cope. And really, can it get any worse?"

Then the Guy spoke:

"I love you."

The nurse was moved to tears.

But then, he spoke again:

"I said: I LOVE you! I LOVE YOU! I LO..."

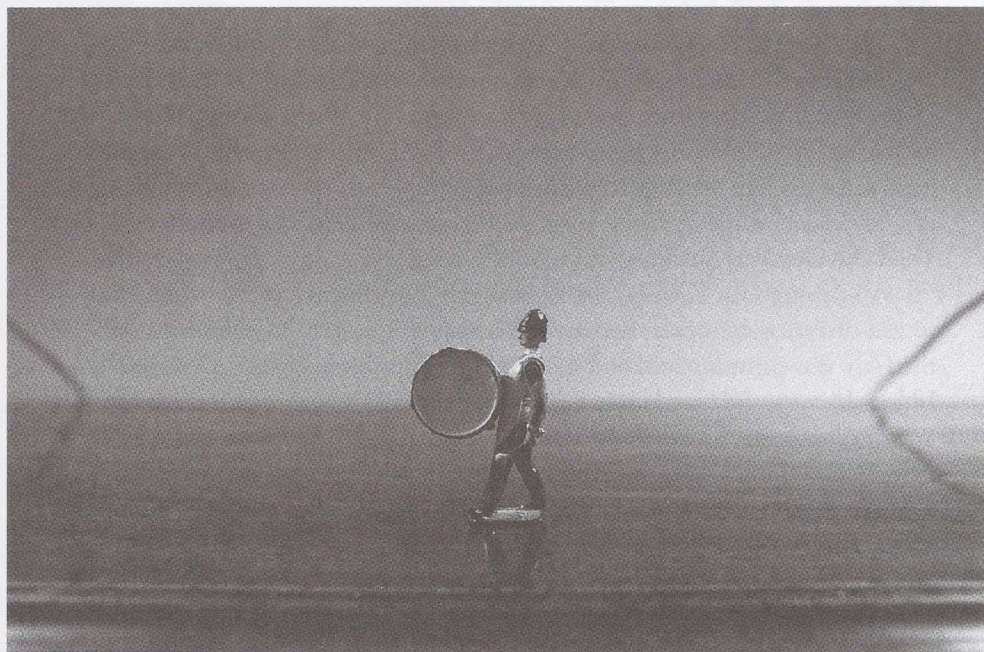
For five minutes, maybe more, the Guy went on like this, trying over and over to express his love to someone without success. As she listened to this, every unhappy moment in the nurse's life came to the surface at once.

"If this is what he's going to do from now on," she thought, "I will set this place on fire."

Quickly, she reached over the bedside railing with the pillow and lowered it onto the Guy's face. He continued with muffled attempts to say I love you, but other than that, the male nurses had been correct. The Guy didn't put up a fight. He was a Breather. All he did was breathe. It might have sounded like snoring or sirens or telephones or talking, but it was still just breathing, done in fancy ways. And after a while, that stopped too. Then the Guy was nothing. Then he was dead.

All throughout Z wing, the silence was embellished by the wonderful sound of raging monitors and a commotion of doctors. Within minutes, the Guy was pronounced, and half an hour later his body was removed. In his absence, the hero nurse tidied up room 323 in preparation for the arrival of another Breather who would hopefully be a lot more considerate. Afterwards, she peacefully did some paperwork. That was how the incident came to an end, and it wasn't funny at all because there's nothing funny about nurses killing people in comas.





**LITTLE DRUMMER BOY | Edith Young**

Photograph  
18" x 12"

## Second Childhood

*Lucy Stratton*

"The nurse can't come in today," your father says at the kitchen room table. "She just called, and she can't come in to give Ma her shower."

"Well," an uncle says gruffly, "What are we gonna do? Ma has to have her shower." Your father indulges in one of his characteristic pregnant pauses.

"Well," your father says, "I suppose Annie can just shower Ma." The uncles grumble incoherently in agreement before changing the subject to something more palatable than their naked mother. Meanwhile, you are in the adjoining room gripping the edge of the kitchen sink, letting the hot water run until the steam clouds your eyes.

The Hadsel ancestral homestead threatened to crumble to pieces around your grandma's oblivious head for decades. What once housed three generations of family was now occupied by the one person too brittle-boned to care of it. Once a year, your entire extended family filled up the house again for a thinly disguised social visit. While grandma took the grandkids out and baked cookies, the aunts and uncles ripped rotted shingles from the roof and gutted the sinks. When you got old enough, you and your cousins started scraping paint and polishing windows alongside the adults, leaving grandma inside. But the constant cycle of home maintenance, negligence, and repair was in itself a disguise and distraction.

Your father recently received some very startling reports of his aging mother. The nurse who regularly stopped by to administer your grandma's medicine and bathe her discovers that your grandmother cooked a five-course meal for phantom visitors. Your father received a panicked phone call from Grandma in the dead of night after she failed to reach your uncle Jim, who died of a heart attack ten years ago. Kathy, a local woman who capitalizes on the aging population of this town by informing on its movements, spotted your grandma two miles from her house in a blustery snow storm, no coat, steadily ambling forward with her arms outstretched. Fresh off the plane that carried you home, you found yourself hurriedly googling "frostbite signs" and "hypothermia" and dictating information to your father, who in turn told Kathy over the phone how best to examine your grandma's feet.

Something had to be done about grandma.

As the uncles made plans and your father packed an overnight bag, your mother pleaded with you to go with him.

"Someone needs to take care of your grandma," she said. The whole 'take care' of grandma euphemism was somewhat ominous, and you didn't really understand how it applied to you. Wasn't the very reason your dad was going there? To 'take care' of his mother? You agreed, but only because the hoopla over your grandmother's health convinced you that it might be your last chance to see her. The way your parents told it, she could die any second. Your mother would have gone herself, but unemployed college students are by nature better suited for spontaneous trips out of state.

After nine hours on the road, your dad's Volvo rolled down grandma's driveway, the wheels crunching over gravel and packed snow. You and your dad heaved your bags inside through the kitchen door, and you noticed that the house's shingles are the color of damp fire wood. You could already imagine yourself replacing and repainting them next summer. Your grandma and the uncles were waiting to greet you, each uncle giving you a perfunctory pat on the back. When you embraced your grandma, she seemed to shiver into you. She is shorter than you recall, and her curly blonde-white hair radiated out her scalp like a crown of mist. The oven timer went off and your grandma scurried around the room divide.

You left the room for only a second when the sound metal clamoring to the ground causes your lungs to leap into your throat. Dropping your bags, you dashed back into the kitchen. Your grandma was cooking hamburgers in the oven for her sons and dropped the scalding pan, burgers and all, on the ground. She just stood there holding her little potholders, arms trembling in the air.

"I didn't do it," she said, mystified.

You snatched her potholders away and asked if she burned herself. She was taken aback by your quick action and curt tone, but remained motionless in the kitchen. As you salvaged the food and uttered small condolences like "It's okay, Grandma," "The food is still good," and "I'll take care of everything," your grandmother retreated into herself, swiftly fading away without moving an inch. In your flurry of activity, you didn't notice when she finally left the room.

It is now your second night in this old farmhouse, and you have been anchored to the kitchen sink. The uncles and your father have similarly planted themselves around the kitchen table, exchanging in friendly banter as they figure out what will happen After Ma Goes, a mythical era that has been long talked about but never planned for. You are on the other side of a small dividing wall that separates the kitchen table from the real kitchen, rinsing dishes. The physical divide that separates the cooking from the consuming is



telling of the era in which it was built. The faucet's warbling doesn't drown out their guttural laughter in the next room, so you increase the water flow. Steamy water flows over your hands and you scrub a pan absent-mindedly, wondering if this was how it was when your grandma was in her prime—four boys chatting around the dinner table while she stood apart, with rubber gloves on. You wouldn't mind cooking and cleaning up if you weren't the only person in the house who getting anything done. Those old men in the other room, with rotund bellies and receding hair lines, had rapidly regressed since their arrival. They came here to make decisions they had actively avoided for the better part of a decade, but immediately slid back into the comfort of childish negligence the moment their mother greeted them at the door and offered them hamburger.

Your father was so nonchalant when he volunteered you to bathe your 95 year-old grandma that you are too utterly dumbfounded to speak up. You switch the faucet off and peer over the room divider where your father and the uncles were half-heartedly sifting through papers. The four of them, bent over stacks of financial statements, their scalps shining through thin wisps of hair, were nearly indistinguishable. It makes you glad that you inherited your mother's sharp, freckled face instead of their creamy round ones. You say only 'dad' and one speckled head rise, revealing your father's spectacled face. He joins you in the kitchen.

In the other room, which is was actually the same room, you fiercely whisper that there is no way that you are bathing grandma, and your dad should phone that nurse right away to make her do her damn job. This does not go over well.

"She is sick," your dad says, "and she's contagious."

"Well get someone else!" You've given up on whispering.

"There is no one else!" Your father explains that your grandma is showered three times a week, and never on weekends. This means she hasn't been showered since Friday, and the nurse cannot come back until Wednesday.

"Well, do you have any suggestions?" he asks. You fume.

"I have four suggestions, actually." This takes him aback.

"But she's our Ma!" he sputters. A son bathing his mother is too weird or taboo for him to handle, so he resumes attacking your character instead. "I can't believe you would actually refuse your grandmother the dignity of a shower."

Those are his last words on the matter—it was either you wash grandma now, or no one washed grandma for another two days. During this exchange, the uncles had risen from their chairs, and you could see them peering over the divide, looming behind your father. The combined weight of the four men glowering above you was asphyxiating. You twirl a bracelet around your wrist

in defiant silence, and your father fetches grandma.

You now pace in the living room, painfully aware that your grandma was heading into that shower now. This was really happening to you. You consider telling her that no one was coming to bathe her, or that she had to wait a couple days. But the idea of making her wait sickens you—forcing your grandma to accumulate sweat and filth because none of her beloved progeny knew what to do and her grandchild, you finally admit to yourself, is too disgusted by her decrepit body to try. You could claim that you weren't a nurse and thus underqualified for the task, but that insincere cop-out would only make you the bratty grandchild. And you won't stand for that.

You walk up the stairs to the linen closet and retrieve several towels. You fly down the steps and circle round the corridor to the bathroom door. This bathroom, recently installed after grandma officially moved her bedroom to the downstairs, is so unfamiliar and modern, a style completely divergent from the house's aesthetic of warped wood panels and cracked ceramic doorknobs. You knock. You breathe. In her little voice, you hear your grandma announce that she is ready. You open the door.

One summer years ago during your annual visit, you spent three days crying in your room. You were fourteen and your first boyfriend broke up with you shortly before you left for your grandma's, and you had lost your ability to love. Resigned to a life of everlasting heartbreak, you pouted your way out of doing chores and began your life of seclusion in bed. Oddly enough, it was your grandma that coaxed you back into the land of the living and loving. She was younger then, looked younger, stood up straighter and didn't pause so much between sentences. That day, she strode right into your room without knocking and sat down on the edge of the bed. You had been lying prostrate on the bed crying your adolescent eyes out, but quickly scrambled off the bed and wiped your eyes. Your grandma sat alone, the mattress lightly bouncing beneath her. She had a box in her lap.

"I want to show you my artifact collection."

Before she settled down with grandpa, your grandmother earned her college degree in social work and began her career traveling between Indian reservations in the Midwest. She doubled as a nurse and a social worker, and had actually traveled more than you have. Her artifact collection included some bracelets and objects she had collected, but it's mostly photographs and letters. She systematically sorts through each object, explaining where got it, who gave it to her and what prompted them to give it to her.

"A man who was sweet on me in Utah gave this to me on New Year's day," she said, fingering a ceramic pendent.

"Was he your boyfriend or something?"

"Oh, I didn't care much for him at all." Her laughter was like gravel in a



shaken bottle. "That was the best thing about my job. I could go anywhere and meet anyone. Very different from the way you grandkids are starting out."

That your grandma found you to be a sheltered homebody was cutting, but at least she pointed it out to you gently. After going through the box, you decided that feeling alone and loveless was too exhausting a lifestyle to keep up. Before leaving the room—you also decided that your bedroom, this house, this state, was too small to live in—your grandma surprised you by taking something from the box. It was a leather bracelet embedded with beads arranged in a tribal pattern you couldn't name or recognize. Beautiful, but due to age, fragile. It was the only gift she ever gave you personally, and it became your most cherished.

You began to stop wearing the beaded bracelet at first because you were afraid of the clasp breaking, but you put it away for good after you learned wearing such a bracelet was somewhat offensive. You tucked it away in a jewelry box beneath dangly earrings, but you would always keep it, this remnant of your grandma's storied and youthful past.

You decided to take the bracelet out of retirement before this visit, seeing as it might be the last time she would see you wear it. Now, as you stand in the shower door immobile and blank, you realize that you forgot to take it off.

She is already undressed and sitting in the shower, and you feel like you've laid eyes upon your grandmother for the first time. She is a mass, a peach mass of molten skin huddled on a small chair attached to the pearl-like shower chamber. Her arms and legs are crossed and laced with lavender veins, almost luminescent beneath the shower light. She is sitting upright, as in a waiting room or office. Her halo of hair is subdued by a pink shower cap.

You absorb this all in a moment and your eyes dart to the ground. You busy yourself with refolding the towels and arranging them on the towel rack, flustered to your core, but the image of glowing body on tile is hard to shake. Somehow you feel guilty, like you should be prepared for this. It wasn't her fault her appearance disarmed you, left you groping around for sponges and soap as if blinded. Besides, everyone becomes a wrinkled, shivering creature in the bathroom one day. At least, you think wryly, you didn't have to undress her. As you fumble with the towels, the sponges, the soap, it occurs to you that you don't know where to begin. How does one shower her grandmother? Your grandma is probably too feeble to stand on the slippery floor, so she ought to stay sitting the entire time. A brief glance towards the shower shows you that the shower head is detachable.

You are suddenly possessed and speak out loud.

"Hi grandma." There is a light echo, and nothing you have ever said has made you feel so childish. "Are you ready?" You have found the supplies you think you need, yet remain motionless and motiveless. Thankfully, your

grandma seems to sense that you need guidance through the same silent, innate knowingness you've observed in many other old people.

"It's okay, hon," she says. You think she seems very calm for someone who is just about to be washed by her granddaughter. With a towel in one hand and a sponger in the other, you kneel on the bath mat.

Like many confronted with an unfamiliar shower, you inspect the shower cautiously before turning it on. The sudden surge of water spooks you, and after you flinch you take the showerhead of its perch. Pointing it safely towards the shower floor, you bring it closer to your grandma.

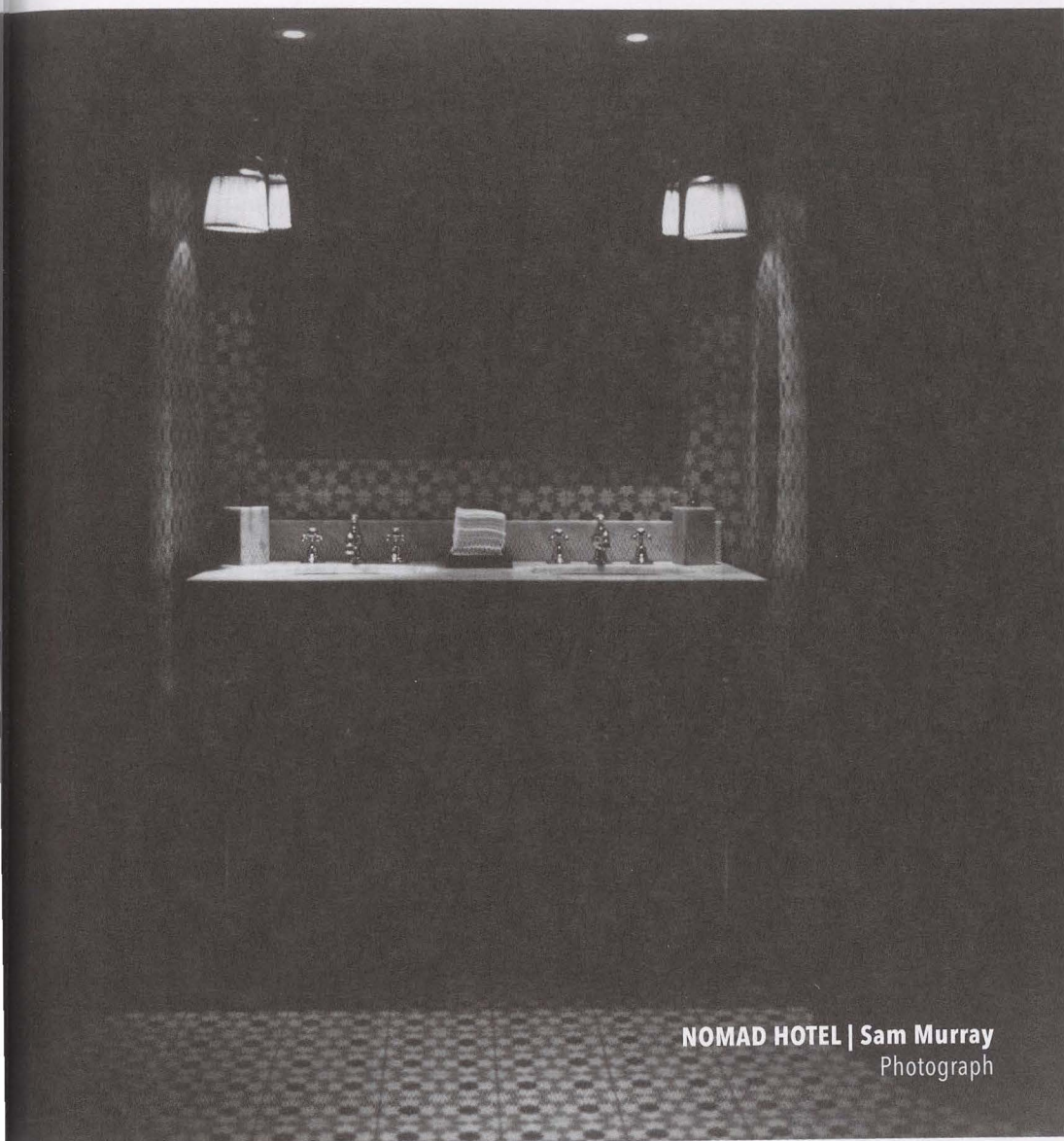
"Let me see how hot it is," your grandma says. You bring it towards her extended hand until the water runs over it, and she asks you to make it hotter.

She tries to take the shower head from you, and though you wish you could hand it over and let her take the lead again, it is all too clear that you should do no such thing.

The shower happens. Though your first glances at her bulbous knees and breasts hanging like waterlogged balloons repulsed and stunned you, the steam rising off the water has left you numb. You feel too hot in your clothes and your hair sticks uncomfortably to your forehead and the base of your neck, but you don't cringe anymore. First, you soak a wash cloth in water and gently wash her face. Her skin is wax paper that folds at your slightest touch. For her torso and arms, you use a soapy sponge in the hopes of creating some distance between you and her body. With one hand the sponge grazes over her shoulders, her breasts, her stomach, and with the other the shower head rinses the soap away. You are able to get her standing again for a brief time so you can run water down her backside and legs.

She sits and you lean towards her bare feet. Laying the shower head on the shower floor, you take a foot lightly in one hand and sponge it with the other. Before starting on the last foot, you mistake the sigh of the shower head and the creak of the house for your grandmother's voice. You attentively look back up to her. Her head is bowed down, and as you look up into her ice blue eyes you don't see the spark you remember.

She lifts her remaining foot, and you hold it still. The sponge squeezes soap suds over her spindly foot, creeping between her toes and over your wrist, soaking the beaded bracelet. You rinse it well. You turn the shower off and help your grandmother out. Once she is wrapped in a towel and somewhat dry, you both emerge from the bathroom. Only half an hour has passed, but you are drained and feel as if you could sleep a hundred years. When you return to your bedroom, though, you don't sleep at all.



**NOMAD HOTEL | Sam Murray**  
Photograph

## Carapace

*Jared Hegwood*

They stand in front of his hotel room's window, Owen and Faire, embroidered towels tied around their waists. She holds him from the side, her arms wrapped around him, her fingers knitted in a tight stitch. He buries his nose in her hair, and smells something citrusy there that he can't quite



suss out. His lips purse out to her scalp and he plants a light kiss. Owen's feet, Faire's feet, their toes sink in the carpet and the knee-high air unit whispers over their skin. They look out over the bay that crescents around the casino and try not to think about each other's spouses.

It's raining early in the evening and the sky is blue-black. Rain slaps the patio-window to their room's veranda. They're both quietly excited by the storm. Owen takes Faire's hand and leans into the window, pressing his nose up to the glass. "This is really, very nice," he says. Small lights, the boats, seem to crawl across the bay's black water. "I like this hotel."

"I think," she says. "If you wanted to retire, this is the kind of place to do it. Little shops, little restaurants. Before all this rain, I saw people walking around in shorts and flip-flops. God, that must be nice. Beach towns are great."

"I suppose. The weather seems to come in pretty fast here."

"Weather like this wraps you in, like, a bubble."

"Yeah?"

"It feels good to me. Suddenly, everything does."

A seminar they'd both come to this city to attend runs without them. Owen knows they'll be missed. Faire knows the same thing, though this isn't said, wasn't said, wasn't once considered when the kiss at the Sonic Drive-In transitioned from the car to the hotel to the hotel room's floor. Lamont, their project manager who's on his first company-paid trip out of town is a gossip. Faire imagines the long, white-draped tables, two empty chairs, two triangle-folded name placards, and two ownerless glasses of water.

Owen thinks about Annie, working at the library, shelving books. Annie loved to read and loved the library but the job was just busy work, really; something to get her out of the house while he was away. Something to get her out of the house when it was really the last place she should be. Something to pay for the one-room he'd been renting for the past six months. The economy's been so bad and they haven't been able to sell off the house, but he'd come to understand that Annie won't leave—just the talk of selling had done something irreparable to their marriage in her eyes—the house where the baby had died.

The baby, the baby, he thinks, trying to push her name out of his head.

Faire thinks about Chris and the audition he has tomorrow. Poor Chris, who tries so hard, but really has never been that good. At first it didn't matter that he wasn't as smart as he thought he was—she loved him. At first it didn't matter that he wasn't as interesting as he wished he was—she was the real personality, the person that people wanted to talk to. At first it didn't matter how many auditions came and went without a single call-back. Her job could take care of both of them, would pay the bills, stock the fridge, and support

what she has increasingly thought of as his habit.

But now, This man, she thinks.

Faire stares into her reflection. "Will you clean my neck up?" she asks Owen. The sink is cluttered with single-serving soaps, toothpaste, shampoo and aloe. She's surprised that men can keep their bathrooms so clean. "I can't see without another mirror, but my neck..." She shakes both her hands, like the word has slipped out between her fingers.

"Sure," he says. "Let me get my bag."

The bathroom is as cramped as you might think. Faire's brown hair is short, a little severe, and tapers at the back. Owen, naked from having stepped out from his towel, sharpens her hair with his clippers. He moves around her in awkward, angled movements. His elbows and knees jerk in opposite directions. Owen takes Faire's towel, wipes away the light hair that has fallen at the small of her neck.

"Was it good before?" she asks. "Was it good like that?"

He chuckles. "Like sex?"

"Like slow, like that. It wasn't like that the first time."

"Yeah," he says. "It was good. I thought both were really good to tell you the truth."

He buzzes her neck slowly.

"Are you okay?" Faire asks. "You're not saying much. And, honestly, it makes me nervous."

He puts his hand on her shoulder and gives her a smile. "I'm just really sore. That's all, but it's, like, all the time," Owen says while rifling his travel bag. "I don't know what it is, either. It's so bad I can't sleep. I don't even want to try."

"Here," he says, and pulls out a small mirror.

Faire keeps her face straight ahead, her neck locked. "Well, maybe you're anxious about something. I get like that a lot. Anxious about work, about Chris. Anxious about what I had for breakfast." She laughs at this last bit.

Owen sits on the edge of the tub, behind her. In the mirror's reflection, she sees his shoulders drop and he rubs at his face. "I don't want to lose this. I really don't want that." He opens his eyes, places a hand between her shoulder blades and lets his fingers slide slowly down her back. "I don't want all we are to be this... little room."

Owen stops the clippers, adjusts the safety guard and considers the top of her head. Faire angles her neck so that she can see him in the mirror's reflection. Her eyes are soft and she gives him what she hopes is a kind smile. She says, "I want to remember this exactly as it is."

She doesn't move, doesn't say a word, make a noise when he runs the clippers up her neck and rounds her skull, thick black hair falling in clumps



from the top of her head. No reaction, no response. She closes her eyes and allows him to continue. The vibration from the clippers race down her neck and settle between her shoulder-blades. She holds a knee in each hand, struggling not to squirm. Once he's done, she admires her new look, rubbing her pate, unfamiliar with the shape of a head hidden for a lifetime underneath a pile of coffee-colored hair. He removes her eyebrows; she does the same for him. Then she takes his hand, pulls him to the bed, laying him down. The mattress sighs under their weight. Faire spreads his legs, gently cups the pink bloom between his thighs and shaves around and over its folds. Owen watches her in the reflection of the bureau's television screen. She kisses just below his waist and hands him the clippers back. Soon, they are completely hairless and they try to touch each other the way they want to, but this new nakedness isn't enough.

"More," she says. "I think, I think I need more."

"I know. Okay."

Owen pops a blade from his razor. The commercial bragged about its titanium steel, its gleam, how close a shave, how much his wife, Annie, would like the new closeness. And his wife did, as she had bought him the expensive razor for his birthday last year and cooed when she rubbed her bare cheek against his. Faire inspects the small, glinting rectangle when he hands it to her.

"You first," he says and turns his back to her.

There's no history to this affair. It is blessedly, wonderfully sudden. It is new and right. There's been no gossip, no suspicion warranted. Friends only, they were, before a kiss that neither of them can remember starting.

The skin flays easily, the epidermis giving way to the dermis to the subcutis. Muscle and other viscera pull off with the same minimal amount of tug. Vein and artery pull off like spider-web, but hang and knot in Owen and Faire's hands.

Faire stops him, then kneels beside the bed, leaning over its side and lays her head on her folded arms. The muscles that form her lips bleed as she talks. "When I'm in bed next to Chris, I can't bear the thought of rolling into him in my sleep. It frightens me. I don't want to touch him ever again. I hang on the edge of the bed so that I won't.

"And I don't know why. It just feels wrong. I feel like I'm living someone else's life, that he is somebody else's husband. He looks at me across the room sometimes, and I know he's looking for some sort of recognition, that the unspoken married-thing we're supposed to have is there. I pretend what I can. I've forgotten how I married him in the first place. How did I forget something like that?"

"How?" he says, and sits on the bed, close to her.

"Why. I mean 'why' I forgot something like that."

Faire lifts her head to look at Owen for understanding. His look betrays nothing, but she knows he doesn't have the answer himself. His eyes bulge, freed from their curtains.

"Sometimes," she continues. "Once he's asleep, I'll get up to watch television, sometimes I'll do push-ups until my biceps burn. Lately, I'll sit out on the stoop of the breezeway, under these god-awful fluorescent lights. I'll smoke and listen to my upstairs neighbors. Watch stuff happen out in the parking lot."

"Interesting place, your parking lot?"

"Teenagers, but I guess they're older. I don't remember looking so young, or small when I was in my twenties. They'd have to be in their twenties to live there, I guess. They sit and talk, drink beer. This one guy has a little charcoal grill and smokes chicken on it. They talk about movies I've never seen. They talk about sex, too. A lot."

Still kneeling, she starts again, working her hands past her ribs to the thick, meaty muscle in the center her chest. She pulls it out, holds it, feels the weight of it, the gamble of it. Then she reaches into his place, pulls his out and she holds the two together, comparing them. They are the same size, the same dark falu, and each weighing only a little more than a large onion. She hands them to him for inspection and he nods. They both fit neatly in the room's safe.

"Do you think you'll miss me? After this?"

There is something sad about how her eyes curve when she says this to Owen. He doesn't condescend to her when he asks, "Are we sure we're already calling it quits?"

"No," Faire says. "I'm sorry. I don't know why I asked that."

Owen gets up from the bed, leaving a stain behind. "Let's forget it then."

Faire nods. "I was born in 1978," she says. "Can you say that back to me?"

"You were born in 1978," he says back.

Faire nods again, punches some numbers in and closes the steel box. "I feel so much better now," she says, still looking at the safe. Owen walks up to Faire and ties himself around her.

They straighten up the mess, tidy the sheets, cleaning up the gore and damage around them and, once everything is put aside, Owen and Fair move back to the window. The rain has stopped. They watch the lights below for a while and the slow cut they make across the night bay until each makes their way home. Their disassembled skins lay on the bed behind them, lying next to each other like life-sized paper dolls.

The next morning, they take their leisure through the casino. They feel gloriously invisible, stripped down as they are, and they cut through the crowds easily, never letting the other's hand slip free. When was the last time they felt like this? Like the world was just theirs to run through, a wide-open place to explore instead of negotiating? They hold their not-hands on the table while they eat breakfast at the buffet; they laugh without lips and remark on the strange world around them without their tongues. They sit next to each other and idly play slots with cocktails in hand until they realize it's an utterly sad waste of their time, a waste of their last day together and they decide to rent a car and drive the beach road. They race, giggling to the rental kiosk.

Despite how cavalier they were wandering the halls of the casino, the true test of their transformation is riding in the parking garage elevator along several co-workers that thankfully don't recognize them. The seminar will end this afternoon, and an uncomfortable flight awaits them early the next morning. They choose, rightfully, to ignore that. The sun welcomes them from the casino.

They rent a convertible because Faire has never been in one, but the novelty wears off quickly for her and they're happier with the top up, the air conditioner going, the radio on. Maybe it means they're old, Owen says, and they laugh together. But despite how naturally the chuckle happens, they both, at the same time, painfully realize that its truth. And both then wonder silently to themselves how long exactly this truth has been truth, how long they've been fooled into believing the opposite.

Owen and Faire spend the next few hours as tourists. They stumble on an arts festival in a nearby township and they browse through small, but proud galleries. Some are sea-washed, ramshackle beach cottages with crowded walls of storm paintings; others are crowded, jolly cafés with hanging fabric art. Neither Owen nor Faire would have considered themselves art appreciators, but Faire is suddenly. She loves it, and focuses on a photograph of what looks to be a homeless couple, young, sitting on a sidewalk. The girl is sobbing, her hand spidered across her face. The boy holds on to her, both arms desperately, awkwardly trying to comfort her. Legs of passersby blur around them. Owen steps behind Faire and wraps her in his arms.

As Faire noted earlier, there's quite a lot of people walking around in summer clothing and sunglasses. The storm from late last night has passed with no real effect. And now, no one is walking alone. Young and old, everyone is in a knot of friends or paired up, walking hand-in-hand or with expensive looking strollers. Everyone looks like they're enjoying themselves. It's a Coca Cola commercial.

Owen looks out the window as Faire drives. He watches families in

bathing suits.

Halfway back to the casino, Faire pulls over at a large gas-station, asks what sort of drink Owen would like, then disappears into thin air. After fifteen minutes, he goes to look for her: the ladies room, around the corner at a boutique, the beach across the road. He waits for hours, waits until dark before going back to the casino hotel.

His hotel room is exactly as they had left it that morning. Open, half-full travel-bags sit crammed together on the loveseat. The television tuned to twenty-four-hour news, but with the volume turned to a barely audible whisper.

The carapace that they had both shed still lay around the room, hanging off of the bed and chair and desk like wet towels. Their old selves. Without touching hers, he carefully layers his back into place, leaving a space to reinsert what had been left in the safe. Before his outstretched forefinger can punch in the code she gave him, he knows it was a fake. He tries anyway, unsuccessfully.

Owen finishes the transformation, pulling on a suit and knotting the tie around his neck. He steps out into the hallway and drags his hand along the wall to the elevator to remember how it feels.



## Against the Wall

*Brenda Seabrooke*

Late one afternoon a door opens on rue Mouffetard and a woman enters a dimly-lit cafe. She looks as if she is going to a ball or perhaps is on her way back from one that went on far too long. She wears a long black velvet gown and a matching cape that swirls around her creating a small storm breeze in the smoky fug. Her eyes search the far reaches of the room until she finds a familiar face seated alone in a corner against walls papered with handbills and news clippings. She sweeps through the jumble of drinkers, velvet brushing a bony knee here, a rough shoulder there, a grizzled ear or two and greets a handsome young man staring into a glass of murky liquid balanced on the scarred top of a small round table. When he does not rise, she sighs, leans over and kisses him on both cheeks. His eyes travel somewhere beyond her left ear.

"Ernest, I've been looking everywhere for you. This is the last place I would have looked but Ford said you'd be here."

He still doesn't look at her. The café is not noisy but there is a hum to the room, sort of like the buzzing of bees. Perhaps he didn't hear her. "Ford said —"

"I heard you. Why would he think I'd be here? Did he say?"

"Yes, he said that you like cliches. I don't know why you'd choose such a dingy place." She makes a moue to illustrate her disapproval.

A pretty moue but still a moue, an expression he can't abide on women. He growls a reply into his glass. "Ford wouldn't know a cliché if it bit him on the ass. Maybe I don't want to be found."

She doesn't believe him as she insinuates herself into the opposite chair and unfastens her cape. It falls back to reveal the inside, a red outline against the monochromatic room. Her shoulders gleam like fresh ivory against scarlet but it is an illusion. He knows her true age.

She peels off her long black gloves and folds them in her lap. "What are you drinking?"

"Cognac."

"Are you sure? One never knows in these places."

He hears that moue again and can't let it go by this time. "It tastes

like cognac. I accept it as cognac. It is cognac until proven otherwise."

She throws up her hands. "All right, all right. You don't need to be defensive with me."

He lets that lie. He has enough on his plate. Manners, Ernest. "What will you have?"

"I think I won't order anything. Not just yet." She waves the hovering waiter away.

His attention returns to the glass, now warming between his large hands. She doesn't speak for a few minutes but he's not fooled. Like all women, she can't bear silence unless she's doing it to someone. He waits in the long limbo of thirty seconds. Finally she sighs deeply and the words tumble out. No trickling with this stream.

"Why is it so hard? Why does it have to be so bloody hard? I'm torn in two, Ernest, I don't know what to do."

He shrugs. "I'm not a miracle-worker. What do you want from me?"

"I need the masculine point of view. Tell me what to do." Her eyes are wide-set, her face pale like a delicate white violet in Michigan's woods in spring. No, not woods, not for this one, a hothouse exotic, gardenia or camellia seen through a window in Paris on a snowy afternoon, blooms with petals that reveal the delicate veining and bruise at the slightest breath.

He never tells anybody what to do but she only wants the cushion of words to lean against when she does what she wants to do. He can oblige her at no cost to himself with enough left over for his writing.

"No problem. Do what is true and honest."

She waits for him to go on and when he doesn't, she frowns, then catches herself and smoothes her brow, aware of the dangers of habitual facial expressions to a woman of her age. Once written, lines are hard to erase from the face. "That looks really good on paper, you know, but what does it mean in real life?"

"It means..." He looks at the handbills and clippings on the wall beside her as if reading an answer written there. "Mene mene tekel uphars..."

"Stop speaking gibberish."

"It's not gibberish, it's from the book of Daniel. "The moving finger writes and having written moves on."

"Oh Ernest, you're so tedious when you're being biblical."

He looks at her. "That says it all."

She chooses not to understand. Or maybe she really doesn't. Why shallow rivers dance.

"Whatever." She leans toward him, drawing him closer to her need as if she can hold him there. "That has nothing to do with anything. It's not

easy to know what is true and honest in my situation.”

“It is easy. It’s always easy. Only people complicate relationships. Especially women.” Look what she’s doing now. He shifts in his chair to avoid a nascent crack in its hard wooden seat.

She does not reply but gives him a long level look.

Her eyes are almost black in the dim light. Like coal. No, black diamonds. Her eyes encase the restless light of black diamonds. Hold the restless light of black diamonds. No, the shifting facets of black diamonds. They reflect the dark of the room. Her eyes seem blacker in the shadowy room. Dangerous eyes. Not to be trusted. The hell with it. Her eyes are the blackest he’s ever seen.

It’s clear she isn’t going away. He’ll have to say something. “Have you tried boxing?”

“Boxing?” Her eyebrows lift higher this time. Again she brings them down, her brow as smooth and white as an onion framed by her dark hair, her dark brows.

“Sure. Boxing is great for clearing the head, trimming the fat -”

“A good true round?”

Her tone is playful. Slightly teasing. As if preparing to tease. Foreplay.

“Well, of course.” He smiles behind the mustache he does not yet have.

“Ernest,” she says in the tone one uses on a small boy, “women don’t box.”

“They should. It would solve any number of problems.”

“If you believe that, why didn’t you put gloves on Hadley and Pauline?” She tilts her head and waits as if she does not know the answer.

“Simple. It wouldn’t have been a fair round. Hadley outweighed Pauline.” In all the wrong venues.

“And you wanted Pauline to win.” She gives him a brief smile. Women can be so smug.

“Exactly. It was her time. Hadley’d had her allotment. We shouldn’t overstay our allotment. Or our usefulness,” he adds in an undertone.

“But Ernest.” She throws her hands out in a gesture of perplexity. It is a pretty gesture that shows off her hands, her pale, graceful hands. Slim hands. Ringless now. Has she pawned her jewelry? “There’s nobody for me to box. I can’t very well box myself.”

“Sure you can. You could shadow box.” He jabs with his left, his knuckles kissing the black curls over her right ear.

She doesn’t flinch. This surprises him. He would have bet she was a flincher.

“Fine. We all do that anyway but what does it prove?”

He grins. "You could box Vronsky."

"Oh Ernest, really. Sometimes you let your imagination run away with you. Why would I want to do that?" She punctuates her question with a short, scornful laugh. Why are women so good at scorn? They use it like a flense. Grace could remove a layer of skin with hers. Men rarely use it. They just use real knives. Or guns.

"If he were seeing other women." He glances at her to see if she knows. She doesn't appear to.

"Well, he isn't." Her eyes are cold, hard. Obsidian eyes.

"He will." He already has. She'll find out. Nobody can tell her now. He wouldn't even try but he should warn her. It is only fair. Fair and true.

She chooses not to believe him. He hadn't thought she would. Women never do. They only believe what they want to.

Her look is almost contemptuous. "Speak for yourself."

"I did. I do." Why is it getting harder to walk the narrow line of truth and honesty?

Behind her, waiters in black and white move slowly through the grainy afternoon, rafting trays of drinks and platters of croquettes. He watches them to keep her from reading the future in his eyes. Everyone knows about Vronsky. He will not change, not for her. Only perhaps in late middle age when he suddenly realizes that he is losing his waistline, his hair, can no longer satisfy a woman, needs an heir, his strength and acumen compromised, when he can't get it up but that will be too late for her. "Maybe that's my problem. Too many I do's."

"Ernest," she says, exasperated, "stay on course here. I'm trying to decide if I should leave my dull but safe husband and go off with a dashing lover."

"I always stay on course."

"What is my course then?"

"Do-"

"Do what is good and true and honest," she finishes.

"Right." He permits a small smile. She's getting it.

"But that's what I don't know. I'm not like you, Ernest." She clasps her hands in front of her, beseeching. "What's true?"

He shrugs. Everything. Nothing. He is beginning to be bored with her.

Truth and women never mix.

"Leave. Go. It all ends the same way."

The frown returns but she brushes it away with the dark tendrils that have crept forward like little inverted question marks around her face. She seems not to understand him. "What?"



"You lose, Anna." It's all so clear to him.

"I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. None of us do. If we did, we might not be able to act at all. We would sit in cafes drinking the days away, waiting for oblivion."

"How? How can I lose?" Her words are pitched higher, louder than their previous conversation. A rumpled gray-bearded man at the next table lifts his rheumy eyes but does not turn his head. She repeats her questions, lower this time, almost in a whisper, waiting for his reply as if it were to be a sentence.

"I mean either way you choose, you lose." He looks straight into her eyes so she can't misunderstand. "There's no black or white. There's only murk and consequences."

She doesn't react for a second, then closes her eyes and rests her pale forehead against her spread fingertips, their well-kept nails buffed into shining ovals. "That's horrible. Ernest, how can you say that? It's — it's depressing. I can't believe it. I won't believe it."

He doesn't answer. He searches his glass as though he can see a trout striking from its depths. Or a marlin leaping in his future. Trout, marlin, women, men all the same in their quest for lures.

"I said that's depressing," she repeats in a louder tone, composing herself.

He turns on her then. "Don't say that word."

"Why not? It's the truth. You're the one always talking about truth, doing what is true. I'm merely speaking the truth."

"Just don't say it. If you don't say it, it may not be true." He opens his hand in front of her as if spanning something.

"Depressing. Ernest, are you afraid of a word? A little word?" She serves him a pointed smile with her joke.

"It's not a little word," he growls. "It has three syllables. In some places where I come from, that's a lot. Listen, I think there's something in my drink."

She makes a dismissive sound. "Don't worry about it. There's always something in the drinks here."

"It's moving."

"Well, you're the big game hunter. Kill it."

He sloshes his drink onto the sticky table. Something small, brown and leggy scuttles across it. He bangs it with a heavy fist. The table shatters.

She regards the wreckage with amusement. "It was probably one of Franz's pets. They don't drink much."

"Nobody poaches my drink. I don't care how many legs they have."

"You certainly are fierce today, Ernest. And strong. Boxing must be good for you."

He blushes and looks away. Later, he will not be able to blush. "We've got to stop meeting in these dirty, dimly-lit places with cheap tables."

"I'll stop meeting you at all if you don't help me with my problem," she says with a flash of anger.

Anger flashing in her eyes. Her black eyes. Eyes so black they admit no light. Eyes without compromise.

He wants to look away but he can't. Her eyes, her situation, the truth hold him because it's his truth as well. "What problem?"

Everything always comes back to her. That was the way of women. It is not enough for the earth to move. The earth must move around them.

"I told you, Ernest. Shall I leave or stay?"

"And I told you. It's simple. If you go, you'll commit suicide when Vronsky leaves you for a younger, richer, sexier, prettier —"

"That's enough, Ernest," she interrupts as if reproving a child.

She will not listen. He tries one more time to cut through the warp of her defenses. "Right. Stay and you will have a safe boring life but nobody will write a book about you."

"Ernest, that's..."

"That's what is good and true and honestly worth doing. Writing books. That is all that matters. So live your life like a character in a Russian novel. Leave your husband and be immortal."

She's silent, her eyes closed against his words. He thinks this time maybe she understands.

Always leave before it's over. Before the bell has rung. Before the book is done. Before the candle's blown.

She gives herself a little shake, then smiles at him. He tries to read it but her lips close around her thoughts. "You certainly know how to put a spin on things. I think I'll walk over to la Closerie. I need some fresh air to clear my head. Want to come?"

It's hopeless. He can see that. "Nah. I'm moving on to the Select in a little while."

Why can't people see their weaknesses, their fears, their limitations and deal with them without sentiment as he does? He had loved Hadley — still does — but when it is time to move on, do it without all this agonizing, do it cleanly, surgically as he will the next time and the next until there is no next time. It is all clear to him, as clear as the cognac in the glass, the words on the wall.

"I feel better after talking this over with you. It's always helpful to get a man's opinion." He looks up but she is pulling on her gloves and doesn't

appear to intend sarcasm or irony.

She will stay with her husband, her boring, rich husband and have other affairs. He would make book on it. Women are always disappointing him.

"Yeah. And isn't it cute to think so. That sounds true."

He wrings out a napkin and reaches for a pencil in the pocket of his jacket.

She pauses with one glove dangling from her bare hand. "You're being depressing again."

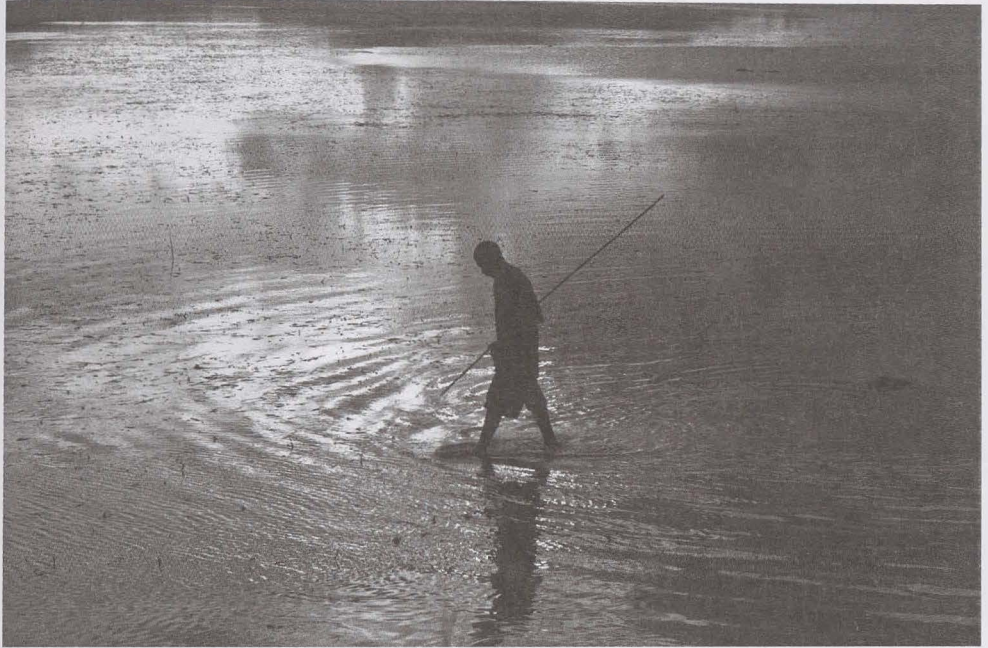
She is goading him. Why do women always resort to goading when all he wants to do is write? Or fish? Or fuck? Maybe in that order. He is impervious to her now. He writes on the napkin, bearing down on what is left of the table. "A realist."

"What?" She turns her head to one side, listening.

"I'm being a realist."

"Call it whatever you like." She slides her fingers deeply into the waiting glove that fits her like another skin. "I don't know why you're depressed. You're young, handsome, talented, living in Paris, women in love with you..." With a flourish she gathers her cape around her and leaves.

"Sometimes even Paris is not enough," he says, but she does not hear him and when he looks up he discovers that the dark beyond the door has swallowed her. He moves to a fresh table and returns to his writing. The waiters bring him sheets of paper which he fills and more cognac as he drinks through the waning light of the winter afternoon in Paris, trying to stay ahead of the night.



**SPEARFISHERMAN | Cristina Castro**

Photograph  
10.13" x 6.71"





**LONG RIBBON OF LIGHT | Che Xinwei**

Cyanotype prints  
Varying dimensions

Buildings remain, but we have left. There is a gentle echo of familiar footsteps down these empty corridors. A face, a smile, a tender wave of hands - they all fade away like ghosts at dawn. What is left? Sunlight is still flooding into the old living room; the shadow of sleepless nights remain. The moon hangs in the sky, pale and comforting, but I can no longer remember where is the exit. Shadows recede as the morning comes, and time frays at its edges.

— *Che Xinwei*



**ETERNAL SUNSHINE | Dasol Kim**

Oil on canvas

24" x 36"

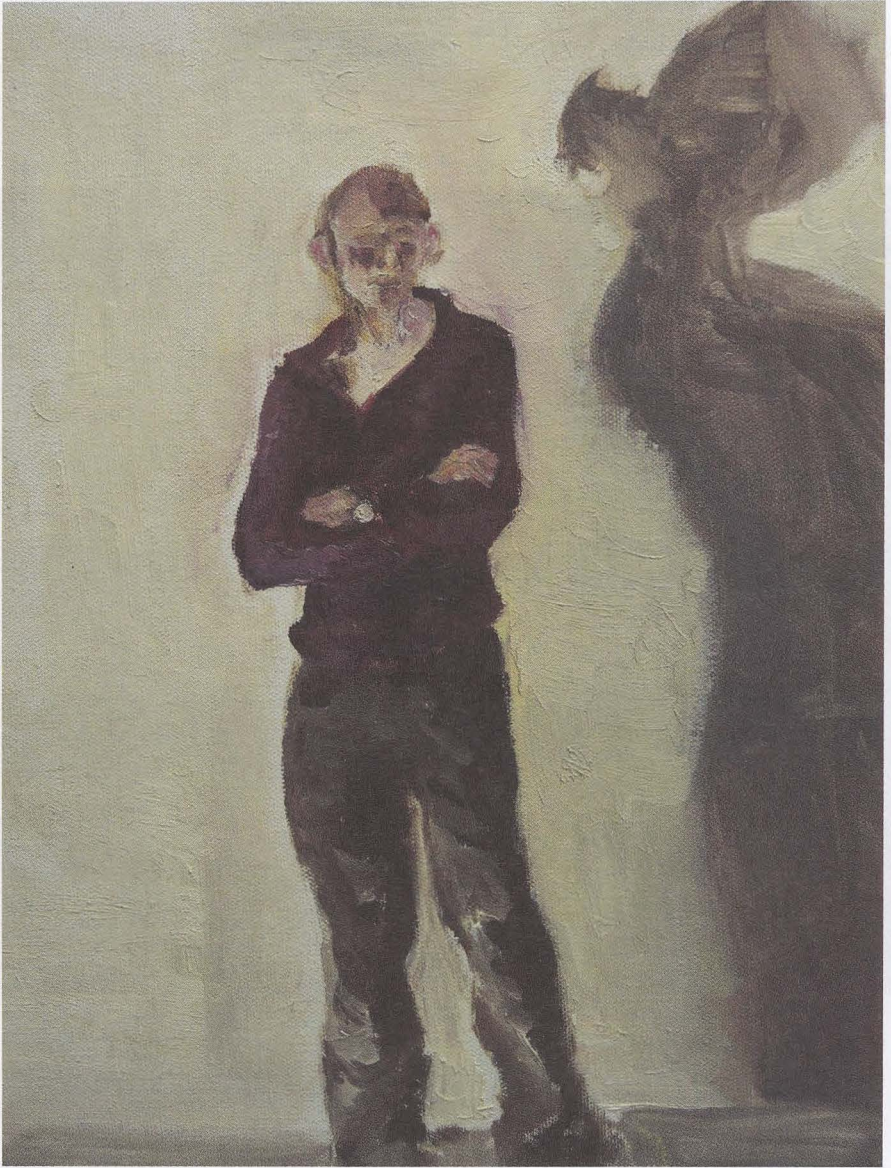


**ON THE PLATFORM, NO.3 | Yishu Ci**

Oil on canvas

48" x 40"

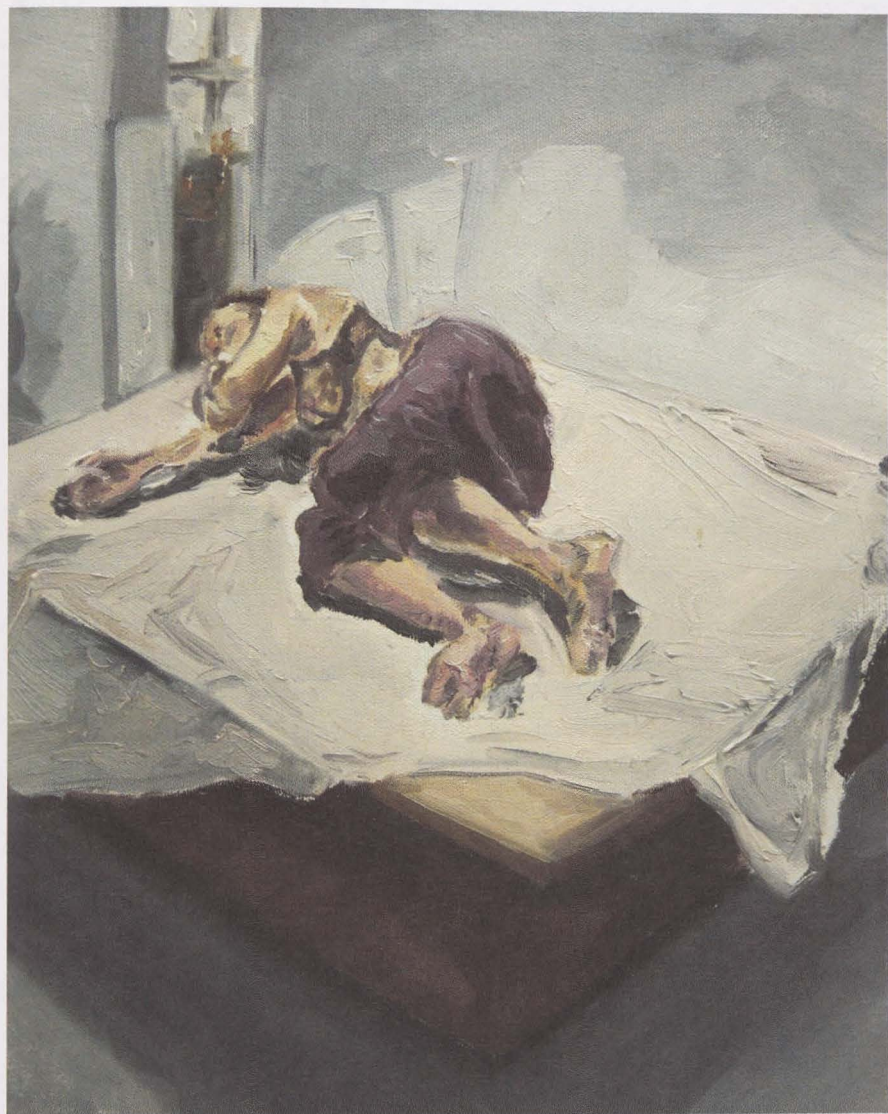




**PORTRAIT I | Jennifer Sugarman**

Oil on canvas

11" x 14"

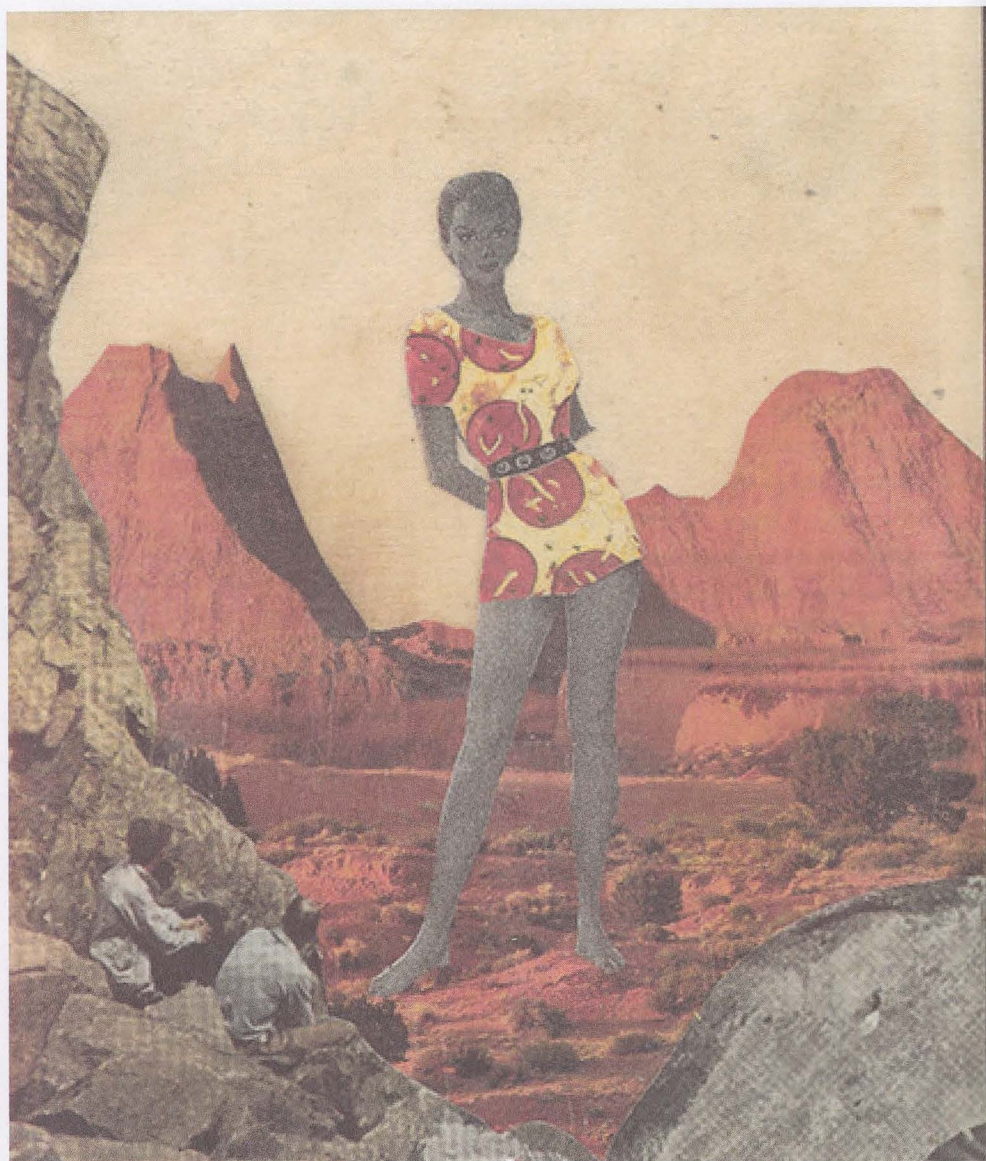


**PORTRAIT II | Jennifer Sugarman**

Oil on canvas

11" x 14"





**WOMEN IN NATURE NO. 1 | Ishiah White**

Wood, cut paper, masking tape, gloss varnish

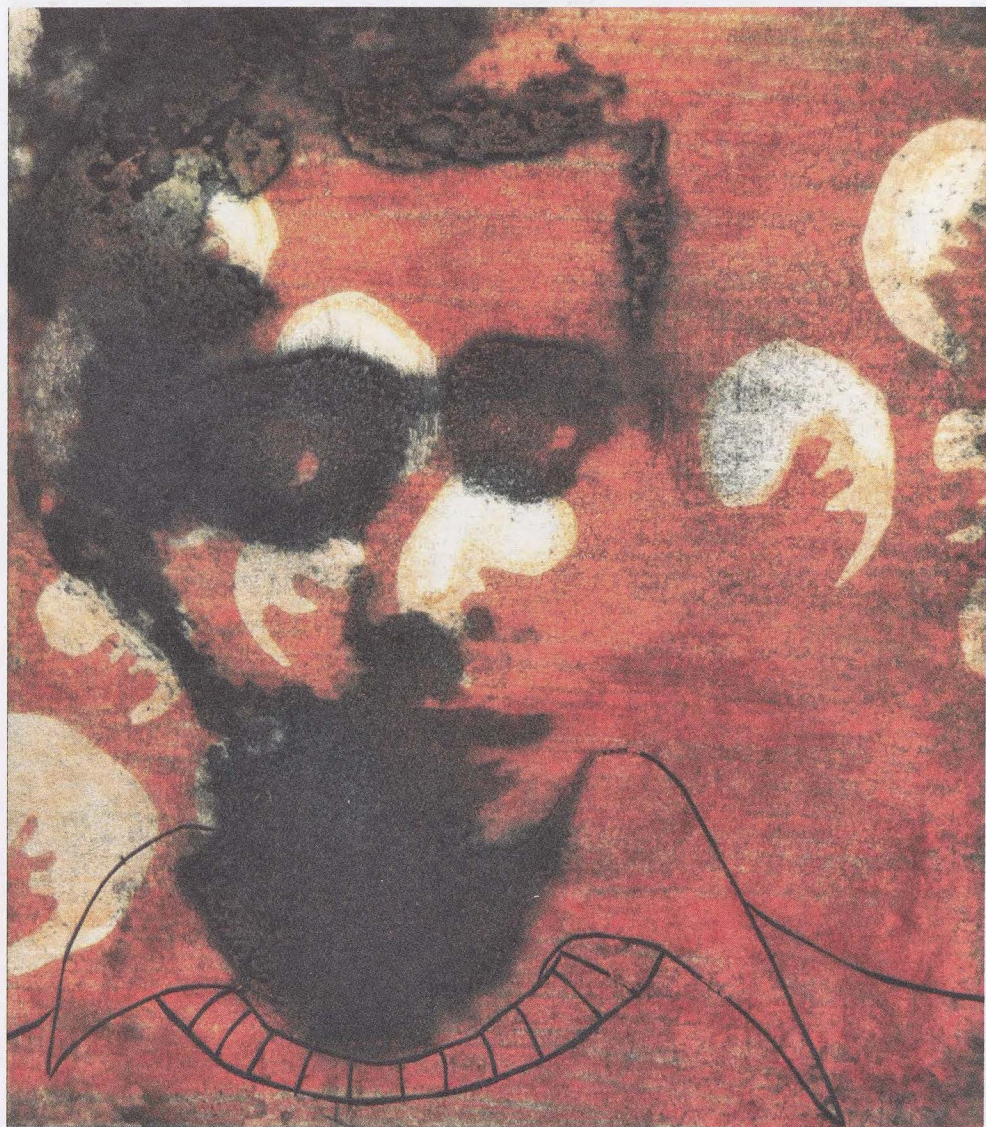
6"x 8"



**WOMEN IN NATURE NO. 2 | Ishiah White**

Wood, cut paper, masking tape, gloss varnish  
6"x 8"





**WATER BOY | Christen Chiosi**

Collagraph print

8" x 10"



**BATHING | Julie Martin**

Watercolor and ink on clayboard

11" x 17"





**BARBIE | Ishiah White**

Chipboard, cut paper, tissue paper, gold foil, barcode sticker  
5" x 5"

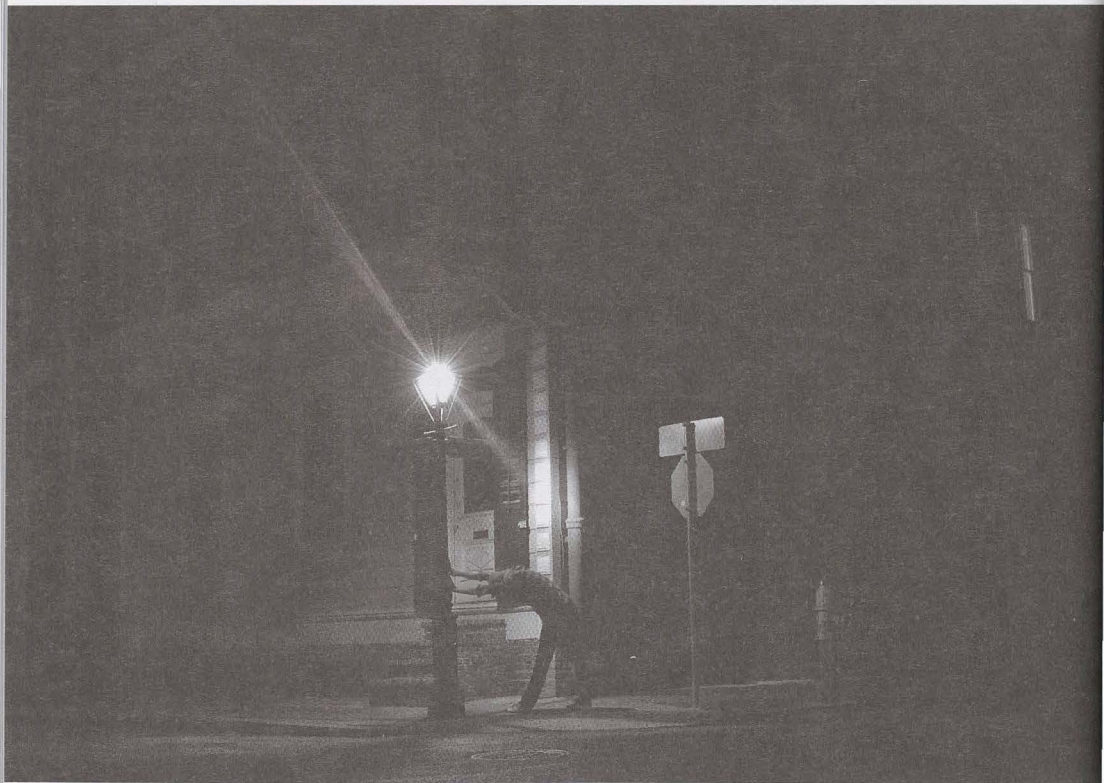


**IMPULSION | Staver Klitgaard**

Charcoal, acrylic paint, oil paint, ink, hair dye, and oil pastels

6' x 5'





**BURGUNDY & ST. PHILIP, HARD TIMES ARE HERE | Bryan Beight**  
Photograph



**VIEUX CARRE NOIR | Bryan Beight**  
Photograph



**ZACHARY'S MUSEUM DREAM | Edith Young**

Photograph

10.6 x 14.25



# Visible

*Mike Koenig*

Sometimes it's hard for me to remember who I was before that summer. It was my third year teaching at St. Agnes. My Worst school year, and had it gone a day past June 16th, I do not know if I could have continued my work. One of my ninth graders got pregnant. It was sad because Sally had seemed to know how the Church felt about pre-marital sex. She was one of the few students that really seemed to value chastity. It was a maturity I hadn't gained until my early twenties. "Waiting," she had said, "was the only way to ensure a perfect moment. To ensure the mind is as ready as the body." Her eyes had that look to them. The look teachers see far too seldom, a look of understanding and genuine agreement.

A mere three weeks later, her parents informed the school of the pregnancy.

"Are you mad at me?" Sally asked. She was sitting alone in the library. She was a thin girl, much like I was at fourteen. Her cheeks had a young color to them. It was hard for me to imagine her pregnant, she was so tiny, too small even for the chair she sat in during class.

"Mad," I said, pushing the bangs to the side of her head, "I will never be mad at you."

"My dad sure is. He said, 'we didn't send you to that school to be a whore.'"

As she talked in choked words, I gave her shoulder a light pat. "Boys never looked at me before this," she said pointing to her plaid skirt, the uniform of the school. "I never got looked at in middle school, not once."

I listened to her for a while about how the boys of St. Jude's would pass our girls on the way home from school, how they'd talk and somehow separate into pairs, how spinning the bottle didn't just lead to kisses and that abstinence wasn't really a choice. Everything Sally said was both sad and profound. I really didn't know these young women I was teaching, and my world of chastity was so different from their world of curiosity and flirting. I asked Sally about her paper on pre-marital sex, still the best essay I've ever read. I wanted to know how she lost her way so quickly. Sally looked up at me, her eyes vibrant and innocent. "I wrote what you wanted to read."

Talking with Sally, in many ways, was the end of my naivety as a teacher. I didn't think all my students graduated as virgins, I knew that wasn't the world we



lived in. But I did think the ones that participated in class, the ones that could discuss virginity as sacred, actually believed it. Now, with Sally, I knew that it was merely an issue of grades. Good students were good students, no matter the subject. That night, I looked over the grades of my other students and found the students who did well in my class, for the most part, did just as well in their other classes.

After that, teaching became so dull, so boring. I wasn't changing the way the students saw the world, not the way I thought I was changing them. I was just making them recite facts about a religion they weren't actually practicing. The girls sat in proper rows in their plaid skirts and white tops and would tell me that sex could wait, and I would really believe their words. But when the final bell rang, I was sure they were tying their shirts in knots to expose their bellies and folding over the waist of their skirts to expose their legs. They were not the same girls at three o'clock. I could see it as they ran out of the classroom to walk home with the boys.

When summer came, I was really thinking about changing positions within the Church. I had taught Religion and Health at St. Agnes for three years and wondered how many Catholics I had actually produced.

About a week after the school year, the first rape occurred. It was Sister Gertrude, who was followed into her apartment by an unknown man. She was forty and weighed about one hundred and twenty pounds. She didn't wear a habit, but she might as well have. All her clothes were muted, and she didn't wear makeup at all. She actually held the door to the apartment building open for the man and didn't think anything of it until he was standing beside her as she unlocked the door to her own apartment. It happened on the couch, maybe with the door still open. The police said she was a classic example of what not to do. She didn't scream or fight back. They said she looked away when it happened, making it easy for him to pretend she wasn't a person. She went to confession before calling the police. So there was little chance of the man being found.

I didn't know any of this until July, when the second rape happened. Again, it was during the day, this time outside the Catholic Charities building. Sister Anne was a bulky woman with thick hips and broad shoulders. She found homes for foster children and adopted babies. She was pulled into an alleyway, pushed on the ground, and smothered. Both rapes occurred on a Tuesday and involved a man wearing a Yankees cap. The police were sure it was the same man and visited all the parishes to give precautions.

The third rape was one of my closer friends at the school, Sister Helen. She had gone to the grocery store alone. It was a block away. She walked at a quick pace on the street side of the sidewalk. There were people all around her, so while she was cautious, she was not particularly scared. Inside the convent, she put her grocery bag down on the floor by the steps and bent over to tie her shoe.

When she looked up, she saw a Yankees cap and then a fist. He dragged her to the basement to finish his routine. She said she had called out for help, but he covered her mouth, and even with one hand, he was able to hold her to the ground. I sat with her as she gave a description to the police.

She was particularly concerned with the eyes. "They had this look, this grand intensity," she said, "I've never seen the expression before. The colored part of the eyes looked bigger. I've never seen something like it. His whole eye was a muddy brown. I don't think there was any white in it. And just the expression, I've never seen such an expression. His eyes, oh God, his eyes were just so—joyous. I felt his hand on my leg, and he pulled it hard. I tried to bite him, but he gripped my jaw and pushed me to the ground. The officer told us to look him in the eyes, that would make it more difficult for him, but it didn't work. He just stared back at me and he looked so happy with those big eyes. Why did you tell us to look at him? I'll never forget that face."

The sketch artist tried to calm Sister Helen with the thought that it was good that she wouldn't forget. It would help in court, and he promised that they would catch the man. Sister Helen wasn't concerned about court. It was falling asleep or entering the house that had her worried.

An officer drove us back to the convent and walked us up to her room. I sat with Sister Helen, holding her hand, but I didn't know what to say. I offered to talk to her, but she just looked at me blankly and said, "You wouldn't understand." I couldn't argue, so I just sat next to her until she fell asleep.

After that, the Bishop asked us not to leave the convent alone and said that we could "appropriately change our dress when in public" to avoid being followed. We weren't allowed out after eight, even though all the rapes were during the day. We were also instructed to carry notebooks and to report suspicious looking men. I didn't see the point. Sister Helen had been attacked in the house, which made staying inside almost unbearable. The third rape increased the police presence. But that only made me feel like a prisoner.

August was hot that year; every Tuesday seemed to reach one hundred degrees. The only thing worse than the heat was the tension inside the convent. No one wanted to talk about the rapes, and no one could think about anything else to talk about. So the days were long and quiet. I took walks in the park, somehow being around large groups made me feel better than the emptiness of the convent itself. I tried to think about Sally and how to help the next year's class make better decision. But I knew there'd still be girls drawn to boys as soon as the bell rang. And while I tried hard to relate to their decisions of having sex or not, I really couldn't, for it was a decision I had never faced. The boys of my youth didn't follow me home from school or ask me to play kissing games. I wasn't virtuous by choice, but rather from the bad luck of no one wanting to corrupt me. It seemed that mine was a virginity wanted by no one.

Things were quiet during that hot August, and the police said it was likely the headlines in the papers had scared the man. Sister Helen transferred to Boston. She talked often about the beautiful horror of the man's eyes. It reminded me of Sally and the boys that looked at her for the first time when she put on the school uniform. I wondered why I was never looked at like that. There was really no intensity in my life, and though the school year approached, I didn't feel connected to anything, least of all teaching. What was the point of my years of chastity? It only took me further away from real problems. My life was unrelatable, even to another nun. And while I never questioned my love of God, I did question how I could best serve: Did being a nun help me teach high school or did it just push me further from the students?

A week before the first day of school, everything became clear to me. It was back-to-school night for the parents of freshmen and transfer students. The parents followed their child's class schedule so they could meet all the teachers and learn the upcoming year's plans. Every freshman was required to take my health class, so I was busier than most teachers. During the third period section, one of the fathers was particularly vocal in his concerns.

"Are you sure an abstinence only program is wise?" He was a tall man and wore a full suit and tie, very professional. His voice carried that same professional tone, as if he was never argued with.

"I assure you," I said, trying to ease his concerns, "our curriculum is consistent with both state and papal standards."

"I'm sure it is," he continued, "but I'm not sending my child here for minimum requirements. I think she should be exposed to some alternatives."

"We don't like to encourage sexuality."

"Encouraged or not, you must admit it will happen. Don't you think our kids should be prepared for the worst case?"

"I believe in virginity until marriage," I said.

"I wish I could share your optimism. I just think our girls deserve all the information available, especially at two thousand dollars a semester. We can't expect them all to wait. If not in high school, then certainly in college, they will have sex and need to know about protection."

"I graduated college a virgin," I said.

He laughed to himself. "We can't expect everyone to be a nun."

I nodded and politely told him I would take up his concerns with the administration.

I had only one kiss in my entire life—a simple peck on the lips at a high school dance when I was seventeen. I didn't dare dream of opening my lips. I didn't even open my eyes for a good twenty seconds afterward. At which point my partner, Charles Littmore, softly scolded me for the move. "You know I like



Tracy," he said.

"But you asked me to dance."

He was looking over my shoulder now. "I didn't think anyone else would. But it was just a dance, okay?"

I nodded and leaned against the wall as he went back to his friends.

That was my one big moment; the romance of my life. A scrawny boy with acne and thick glasses that was quick to look away and quicker still to leave me in the corner. If Charles had looked at me differently, looked at me with anything that approached love, would I have given him anything he wanted? Sally was swayed by the mere idea of someone liking her. Was that feeling of love, if only brief, as valuable as my feelings of honored sacrifice?

The bell rang, and I dismissed the parents. My next class was my planning period, and I decided to walk to the cafeteria to get a soda. There were no classrooms on that side of the building, and as I walked it felt good not to hear any voices. I had three more classes of parents and was dreading the questions: Do you tell them how sex feels? How do you convince them to wait for marriage? Can a nun really teach this? I had heard the same questions every year, but this year, the first after Sally, the questions felt legitimate. So as I walked to the quiet side of the school, I was happy not to hear the voices of parents; the voices of my own new doubts.

The machine wouldn't take my dollar on the first or second attempt, so I rolled it against the corner of the vending machine to iron out the wrinkles. The bill still wouldn't take, so I dropped to one knee and looked for change in my purse. I was at eighty cents when a black shoe entered my vision. The width of the toe clearly distinguished it as a man's shoe and when I looked up, an angled baseball cap hid the face of the man. All I could see were the thick orange stitches of an NY against a royal blue background of a baseball cap.

As I stood I felt his eyes following me, though the cap still hid his face save for the scruffy bottom of a dirty chin. We stood there for a few seconds his breath, hot and moist, warming against me. The only sound in the room was the light rubbing of his tongue against his dry, blistered lips. I reached out and removed his cap, seeing for the first time the most brilliant eyes I've ever seen. They were brown like crucifix oak and were filled with a quality I'd never seen before. Lust? Hope? Knowledge? Even now I can't quite explain it. I just know they were beautiful. They were seeing in me something no one had ever seen.

I leaned forward and licked the stranger's cheek. It was a long motion that went from his chin to the corner of his mouth, past the nose, to a spot just under those beautiful brown eyes. The face was rough with whiskers and salty from sweat. It was everything I never knew.

The man smiled. Then took a step backwards, then another. He was still looking at me when he turned to run, and I was frozen when I finally heard



what must have been the third or fourth yell from behind my back. A new man grabbed me by the shoulders and turned me to him. I recognized the new man as a Kevin Landers' father from school, though I couldn't remember his first name.

"Are you okay, Sister?" Mrs. Landers asked.

I nodded.

"Who was that man?"

I looked down the hall but only saw a door swinging shut.

"Did he hurt you?" asked Mr. Landers, "Do you want a doctor?"

I just looked down at the hat in my hand. There was a rim of sweat on the brim and some torn stitches on the back.

There was some debate over whom I saw at the vending machine that night. I was told the hat I stole was not a Yankees hat, but a Mets hat. The man I saw might have been the serial rapist, or a copycat, or someone unrelated who entered the building undetected. He matched the description: white, middle-aged man of medium build, with an unshaved face, and a baseball cap. But if you look around the city a lot of men look like that. The only thing the police officers agreed on was that I was stupid to walk around the school alone and lucky that Mr. Landers had shown up when he did. The man, whether he was the rapist or not, had to be up to something. The way he ran away seemed to prove that.

And I do feel lucky about that night. Not because of what didn't happen, but because of what did. I saw something in those eyes I'll never forget and felt something inside of me that I didn't think I ever would. I'm not scared when I think about it. In fact, when I think about those eyes, calm and soft, I can't help but smile. I feel like a schoolgirl being seen for the first time. At night I dream about those eyes, the way all women, all people, dream about being looked at. And I feel connected to the world in a way I didn't feel before.

I didn't miss the start of the school year, though everyone in the church said they'd understand if I did. It never seemed to me that I was attacked, certainly not physically. And from that first day of school when I walked into my classroom I felt different. There was something in me when I wrote the word SEX on the chalkboard. I didn't feel nervous or shy. It felt like a natural thing to talk about. And while I was consistent with my message of abstinence, the presentation of the discussion was different. "You may want to do something," I told the girls that day, "but that doesn't mean it's the right thing." I think that's the difference between who I was and who I am. I understand a little something about love and desire and can connect with my girls who are feeling it for the first time. When I close my eyes I can see his eyes and feel that sense of thrill. It makes me a better teacher. Maybe it's crazy; I don't know. But that's what I remember most about that summer, finally connecting.

# Yankee Squaw

*Liz Dolan*

Surrounded by the mist rolling in over the green fields, Ellen could not take her eyes off the broad-backed stranger who was shearing a sheep at the speed of light. Bits of wool fluffed about him like moon dust. In his overalls, he looked as though he had sprung whole from the loamy, bog soil like an oak. When done, he stood, placed his hands on his hips and leaned back to stretch. He swung his tired arms from side to side and took a deep drag from the fag he pressed between his lips, accepting with a nod the applause from the group of ruddy-skinned men about him. When he saw El standing on a small mound of grass, he stared at her as if she had no right to be there.

She turned on her heel and scurried down the hill kicking the stones before her in the brogues she had borrowed from her aunt. She found solace from the fire in the kitchen. On the top of the stove lay a flat bread her aunt had baked at dawn. She cut a slice on the board and slathered it with churned butter. She chewed it so fast she almost choked. Its freshness and flavor amazed her as did everything her aunt did in the running of her small farm. She hoped she'd never see him again.

When her aunt entered the kitchen carrying a basket of eggs from the hen house, she announced, "James Devlin from down the lane will be here at seven to take you to the dance."

"Don't want to be a bother."

"No bother at all, he's delighted to chauffeur the young Yank."

At the dance, as James whipped her about the floor like a stack of barley, El could not take her eyes off the sheep shearer who spun about the floor a jet-haired girl with red cheeks and white skin to the beat of the Beatles-like band. As she whirled, the girl threw back her head, laughed out loud and gasped for breath. Throughout the evening, young folks from Kilcoo greeted El and asked how she was faring, but the sheep shearer never glanced her way.

On the day of El's arrival in Kilkeel, her aunt, trilling the bell on her bike, careened down the lonen to greet her. "The bus took me to Kilkeel instead of Kilcoo," El said, dragging her bags behind her. "I knew I was in the wrong town when I saw the cliffs. My mother surely would have mentioned

them, "Arra," the driver said to me, "Tis only a two hour wait for the next bus. Or you could holiday here with us altogether."

Ten years her aunt's junior, El watched her brush her auburn hair in front of the antique mirror sorely in need of silvering in her bedroom. She was tall, slender and sturdy. Her hands were thick from hard work. Her dappled green eyes reflected the color of the sea. "I saw one of the farmers from the hill at the dance last night," El said, as she fluffed the pillow on the bed.

"And which one was that? No Kilcoo man who'd miss it." Like all the other folks in Kilcoo, her Aunt ended her statements as though she were asking a question. Until El got used to the odd inflection, she was constantly preparing answers.

"Tawny-haired, thick, broad-shouldered. On the hill he had a brown dog." She hesitated adding he had a massive chest and nut brown eyes.

"Declan Hegarty. Stomping with the gypsy girl, no doubt." Her aunt sat on her bed and plucked the hair from the brush with a fine-toothed comb as rapidly as Declan had sheared the sheep. "Who will he next be twirling?"

"Are they to be married?"

"Tis not my business, nor yours."

Two nights later, James picked El up again. Going dancing on a week night at home in New York was rare. After two years of teaching and studying for her master's degree, she had become used to rising at dawn, answering bells every 45 minutes and collapsing into bed by ten P.M. Life in Kilcoo reflected the rhythm of the seas that surrounded this small island. El wore her red form fitting cardigan even though she feared it might be too hot for a night of dancing. James drove like a wild man over the dark, hilly roads. He guided her around the dance floor to "Welcome to My World."

"Are you enjoying your holiday?"

"Intoxicated by the place," she said.

"How much intoxication have you left?"

"Two weeks."

As she tilted her head towards James, pretending to listen, she followed the movements of Declan and his gypsy around the floor. More than once they bumped into El and James, the girl once again throwing back her head and laughing what now seemed a mocking laugh. After a quick step to "Pick Me Up on Your Way Down," the whole tent vibrating with the measured movement of a hundred couples swirling in a circle, El could feel the sweat slipping down her sides under her arms. She walked outside into the brisk sea air. Without turning around, she knew who slipped behind her. "How's farm life with aunty treating you?"

"Brilliant, as they say over here," she said.

"Has she mentioned me?"

"Why should she?"

"Thought you might be inquiring, Lizzie." He called her by her mother's name.

Before she responded, he disappeared into the tent. Of course, he would know of her mother though she left Kilcoo thirty years earlier. After El's father died, it was her mother who urged her to visit the home place.

During her first few weeks in Kilcoo, El had fallen into deep sleep, but now she tossed and turned and awoke with the sheet twisted about her legs. She had dreams of winds shrieking in the chimney, blowing over the flax mill and lifting the shingles of the red barn. Early the next morning she tiptoed out of the house, returned for her aunt's wool jacket, and strode up to the High Road past the corner called "The Cup and Saucer." Awed by the shifting shades of the small, green fields, El could see the field hands and children gathering hay and rolling it into huge stacks like sculptures she'd seen at The Museum of Modern Art or Van Gogh's "Sheaves of Wheat" at the Met. The sheep whose wool was stamped with the pink or blue mark of their owners dotted the pastures.

She gazed into the hedgerows like a debutante gazing in a jeweler's window: rocks, bushes, moths, deserted nests, a squirrel falling out of a tree. Suddenly Declan pulled up alongside her in a grey sedan; the head of his wooly sheepdog lolled out the window sniffing the wind.

"Get in," he said. He leaned over and pushed open the door. The car smelled of damp dog hair, smoke and the fug of maleness. They drove into Newcastle and found an isolated section of the beach. When he pressed his hard body against hers, she whimpered like a baby. "Sweet Jesus, Sweet Jesus."

"Och aye," he responded. El thought the way he had trembled when he held her was a hopeful sign. Back in the car she asked, "You're my aunt's age. Why aren't you married?" He pressed his foot on the accelerator, shook his head and roared laughing.

Over supper as El peeled her boiled spuds and smothered them in butter, she asked her aunt the same question. Her aunt was the youngest child who stayed behind to care for her aging parents, but El knew they had both been dead at least ten years. "You can't have two women in one kitchen. The farmers marry after their mothers die." Her aunt left El to clear the table; she walked to the fields to bring home the cows.

Earlier than usual the next morning, El heard her aunt moving about the kitchen; she could smell the bread baking. At the oil-clothed table, she poured herself a cup of tea from the delft pot. "The farmers and field hands will be here at noon for dinner famished as hogs. Four steaming flat breads



sat on the windowsill wrapped in white muslin.

"I'll help with the churning," El said.

"I'm not after sending you home with calloused hands."

"But I want to help, I need..."

"Truth to tell, an easy life has made you fairly useless, El. Go and fetch the eggs."

Though her mother had told her how she hated the smell and filth of the hen house, El minded neither. She fondled a warm egg in the cup of her hand and considered its oval shape perfection. She gathered the eggs, placed them into the basket and washed the shit off them under the outdoor pump.

When the farmers arrived, they scraped the bottom of their boots by the barn and placed their tweed caps on the hooks by the door as they gave El and her aunt, now in a blue apron that lit up her eyes, that curious nod of the head that seemed to acknowledge both women would do rightly. As Declan entered, El looked quickly away, as if by looking at him everyone would know. "Off with you, girl," her aunt said. "The kitchen is crowded enough."

Exiled to the lower room El thought the furniture, a set handed down to her grandmother, ugly and cumbersome, a waste of much needed space. She traced his name in the dust on the sideboard in elegant cursive and whispered a prayer her mother had taught her, "Mother of Christ, Star of the Sea, Hope of the Wanderer. Pray for me." El added, "Grant me my wish."

On the wireless, a medieval Scottish ballad hummed to the clink of forks and knives on plates. The men barely spoke to each other. Outside the window facing the lower garden, her aunt and Declan stood close to each other under the Sycamores. They spoke rapidly as if they were haggling over money. Surely, El thought they must help each other out for free at harvest time. The cultured British voice from Radio Caroline reminded her she was in Northern Ireland, not far from where the IRA had recently blown up a car in Newry.

No wonder everyone sang songs at the ceili given in El's honor when she first arrived both about the wild beauty of the place and its dark history of plots and secrets. After the ceili guests ate their biscuits barely filled with ham and tomatoes. Each guest was expected to sing or recite. James, almost too tall to stand in the low-ceilinged room, recited "The Man from God Knows Where," a poem about a rebel hanged in 1803, the "time of the hurry."

James's mother, Nell, in widow's weeds, sat in the corner close to the fire under the portraits of JFK and Pope John. Staring at the fire as though she

was conjuring some ancient lore, she barely lifted her head when the clearest voice El had ever heard trebled from her aging throat, "While Britannia's sons with their long-range guns sailed in from the foggy dew."

Everyone honored her with stillness, barely a breath. "The Mountains of Mourne," Nell," they begged.

"Enough," she said, raising her hand, "Tis El's turn."

Blushing, El chortled her way through two verses of "The Homes of Donegal" her voice cracking. Now El understood why her father, after reading the papers, pushed up his glasses to his forehead, then leaned against the back of the over stuffed chair, closed his eyes and sang, "In a lonely Brixton Prison high above the gallows tree, Kevin Barry gave his young life for the cause of liberty."

"Your mother was the sweetest of the lot," Nell Devaney said to her as she wrapped her homespun shawl about her shoulders. "Be wary of the boyos. Don't let the green beguile you. Your time won't be long going in."

Each morning, El trudged up the lane for her walk and met him where they did what they had to do and she returned. She could not believe the wild cravings of her body. "Your jaunts seem to be getting longer each day," her aunt said. "Where do you be dodging?"

"Here and there," El replied.

"So don't tell me," her aunt said sharply as she carried the butter down to the larder. At the animal auction in a cavernous barn in Newry, El sat on a backless wooden bench trying to follow the bidding, but the bidders nodded their heads so slightly she couldn't keep up. It was as if only the auctioneer needed to know. The farmers stood about in clusters in their weskits and caps watching the proceedings. She watched Declan nod his head each time a fatted calf entered the ring. He seemed to be the chief buyer. Her aunt bid, too, but quickly withdrew when his bid was higher. By the edge of the ring her aunt and Declan stood near each other. When the auctioneer declared the auction closed, El thought she saw her aunt slip something into Declan's hand. On the way home, El asked her aunt about it. "Twas just a chit for a sale," she replied.

On Saturday evening, James took El to what he called the films in Newcastle. The film, which she had seen at home a decade earlier, was "Red River," a Western, with her heartthrob, Montgomery Clift, and John Wayne. "What a grand, big country is America," James said, "Not like here where your neighbor knows what time you rise by the smoke flowing up the chimney. Or who you danced with too often the night before. Or who you might be dallying with."

"But here in the hills you can touch the sky, James."

"'T would be a queer sky if you could touch it, El. Can we catch another filim sometime?" He moved toward her to kiss her.

She backed away. "I don't like you like that, James."

"Do you wish I smelled more like a sheep? I know I'm not as successful nor as handsome as Declan."

In the middle of that night, awakened by the howling wind, El thought she heard voices in the kitchen. But the longer she stayed in this enchanted place, she felt she was unable to separate the real from the unreal. Her days in Kilcoo were dwindling and El felt a low rumble of panic in her stomach. She needed more time, needed to stay longer, needed to ask questions.

As James and El drove from the season's last dance in Castlewellan, a stream of cars filed before and after them. The car behind flashed his high beams.

"Tis that ijit, Guilfoyle, checking to see who's going home with who, and who's necking in the back seat," James said as he pulled ahead of the car in front of him even though a car was speeding towards them in the opposite direction. "Might as well be an ijit, too," James said as he flashed his lights on the car in front of him.

"Don't," El said as if she knew. All El could see was the back of the head of the woman sitting in the front seat. As the lights illuminated them, the driver, Declan, leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. As she turned her face towards him to return the kiss, El saw the woman was her aunt. "Oooh," El whimpered and steadied herself by leaning her hands against the dashboard. Neither had been at the dance. Why were they in this line of cars? With his left hand on the steering wheel, he turned around and gave James and El the thumbs up.

"I tried to warn you," James said. "I tried to warn you."

Nauseous and fearing she would throw up, El bent over and let her head hang over her knees. She recalled the scene in "Ryan's Daughter" where the people of the seaside village shaved the head of the young woman who consorted with the red-jacketed British lieutenant. Even the village idiot whom she had always given hot meals, mocked her by limping about the town saluting. El pressed her fingers against the window glass which was shockingly cold to her touch. Early hoarfrost silvered the road. She could hear the whispers, the gossips, the poke-bonnets, the sniggers. She, the champion sheep shearer's Yankee squaw.

# Spare Change

*Alysia M. Catanzaro*

Zora tiptoed around the bed, listening to the roaches scattering across the floor. She could hear their long legs scratching the wood as they moved, especially the larger ones. She was afraid of stepping on a roach and feeling a slick body crush underneath her foot. It would make her scream and jump, waking up her husband, Jesse, from his drunken sleep. Nauseated by the thought, she feared Jesse more than the roaches.

She only wanted Jesse for his skin. His skin was the color of coffee—no cream, no sugar—black, just how she liked it. She hated her caramel color. Some said it gave her a sweet glow, but she remembered the stories her grandmother told her about the white men, forcing themselves on the slave women. Some women fought back against the men, earning a good lashing. Then, less than a year later, they'd have a baby tainted with their creamy blood. When she met Jesse, she knew his rich skin could erase some of that tainted blood. Her five-year-old son, Jimmy, became proof of that.

After six years of marriage, she, like other housewives, found herself in a routine. As she tiptoed around the bedroom, she gathered his discarded clothes off the floor, taking them to the porch for washing. As the sun rose, she searched each pocket twice for spare change from his daily indulgences.

Some mornings, she had it good, finding plenty of change to buy groceries. She'd examine each coin, adding it to the total she calculated in her head. Sometimes, she lost count, smiling as she put the change in her green coin purse. But then again, there were times when she barely had enough to buy milk and bread. She hated those times as much as she hated Jesse. She prayed for days like that to end. But she was lucky that morning, and it surprised her when she felt the heavy weight of her coin purse.

Holding Jimmy's hand, Zora walked down the dirt road into town for church. Her large, sun-faded, blue hat shaded her eyes, but she felt the sweat rolling down her face. She left the house dressed nice, wearing her favorite blue dress with tiny white flowers and the hate to cover her short, messy hair. She was a new person when she left for church, but by the end of the walk, she looked like a worn out housewife.



Never one for staying in the house, Jimmy seemed to enjoy the walk. He stared at the ground, kicking up dirt with his feet, leaving a dust trail of where they'd been. Every so often, he stopped and picked up a rock, causing her to fret how dirty he was getting his church clothes.

When Jimmy stretched down for the third time, Zora fussed at him, pulling on his arm. "Jimmy, come on. Momma ain't got time for games this mornin'."

Jimmy ignored her and stretched for a round, shiny object on the ground. He grabbed it, holding it up to his mother. "Momma, I found money," he exclaimed, proud of the shiny nickel in his hand.

Zora's eyes widened with hunger. "Give it here," she demanded, holding out her hand. She ignored his pouting lip and insisted he hand the nickel over to her.

"Mine," Jimmy replied and clenched his fist tight around it, pulling it to his chest.

"Give it," Zora fussed, putting her hand in his face. "Come on, now."

"But I wanna buy a candy."

"You don't need no candy. Now give it here."

"No!"

"I ain't got no time for this. We gots to get to church."

"I wanna candy," Jimmy said in a soft voice as he peeked at the nickel, as if he wished he never showed her it in the first place. He pouted his lips, and then looked up at her with pleading eyes. "Please. I never get nufin'."

"Jimmy, now," Zora fussed again, impatient with his stubbornness. "Jimmy."

Jimmy placed the coin in his mother's hand and watched it disappear into her green coin purse. He held his head down, hiding his red cheeks. Then, she pulled his arm and dragged him the rest of the way to church.

Zora listened to the reverend preach about Satan tempting Jesus. Jimmy cowered behind her as the reverend hollered until his face turned red and sweat soaked his white shirt. As much as her son tried to ignore the reverend, his voice echoed in the church, reminding him God was watching. Zora enjoyed how church quieted Jimmy.

As the congregation passed the offering plate around, Zora pulled out her green coin purse. Sifting through the change, she took out half a dozen pennies. Pennies seemed worthless to those fortunate enough to have plenty of money to throw around, and she didn't need them as much as the rest of the coins. Waiting for the offering plate, she caught her son with his ears covered first.

"Boy, what you doin'?" Zora yelled, pulling Jimmy's hands down

from his ears. She didn't care how loud she was or the fact she disturbed the sermon. To her, not listening to God's Word was a sin, and she was ashamed her son disrespected God. She knew she taught him better than that, starting with the day he was born. He was the only one she could instill fear into, giving her power in her chaotic life. She noticed the silence and glanced around the church, realizing she was being watched. After she smiled like nothing was wrong, Zora looked down at Jimmy, whispering her threats. "You behave now. Don't make me take you outside and bust your butt."

"But Momma."

"Don't but Momma me," Zora said, trying to keep her voice down. "You show respect in the Lord's house. He's watchin' you. And stand up straight." She fussed, pressing her hand against his back.

"Ow."

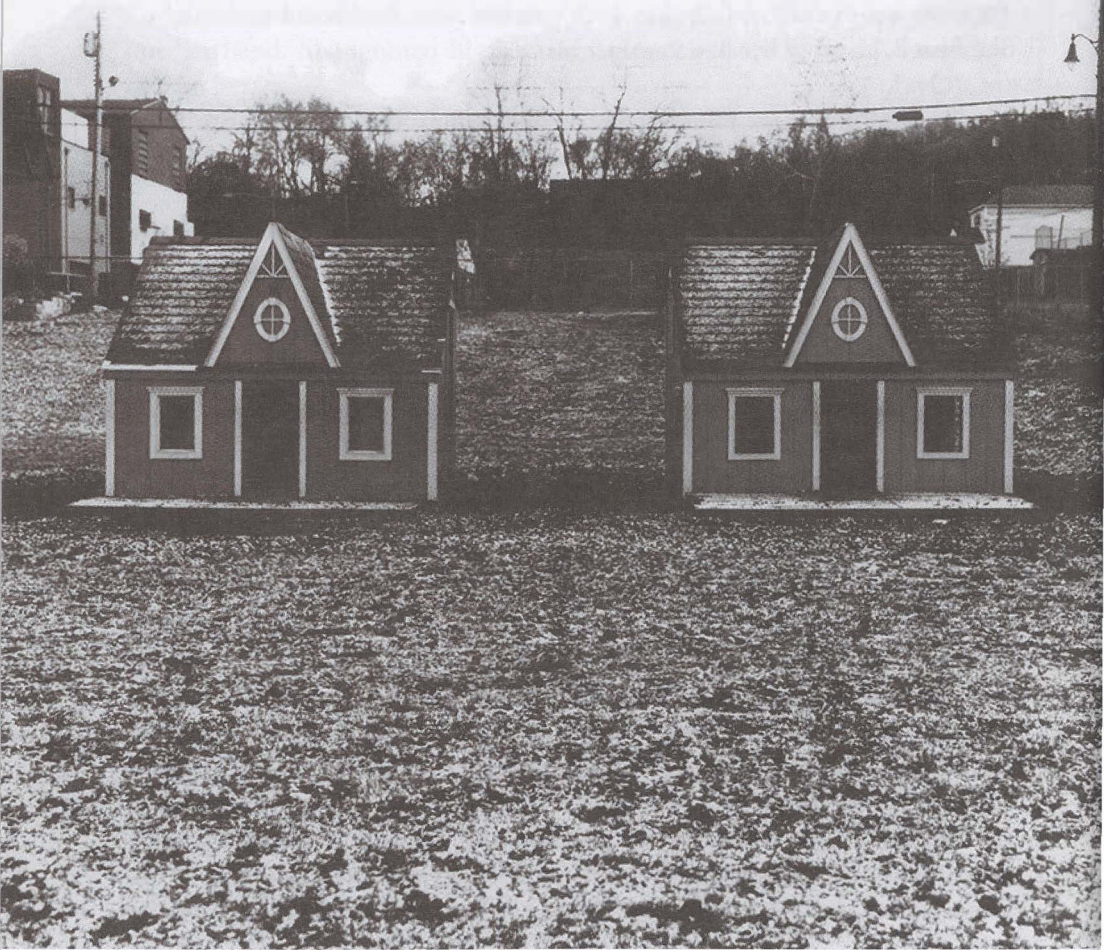
"I didn't hurt you none," Zora replied, taking the offering plate from the woman next to her. The woman narrowed her eyes in disapproval of the commotion.

Staring at the money in the offering plate, Zora knew it was more money than she had ever had in her hand at one time. She couldn't count it in her head, but it was more than just spare change. She could hear it calling her name, begging to take some of it home with her. The possibilities seemed endless. She could buy a new stove with it and finally cook a decent meal. She could invite friends over. She could clean up the house real nice and entertain them, buy a new dress in the shop around the corner to wear when she served dinner. Money was the key to the future.

"Momma, are you gonna to take that money, too?" Jimmy asked, looking up at her.

Zora felt her heart stop and looked down at his curious brown eyes. She hated her reflection in them—a thief. She only wanted him to see her trying to better their situation.

"No, baby," Zora replied, dropping the pennies in the offering plate. She passed it along, feeling guilty for always thinking about money. It consumed her daily thoughts, even though she knew it was something everyone desired. She opened her green coin purse again and sifted through the spare change until she found the nickel. After she placed it in her son's hand, she dropped down to her knees and begged for the Lord's forgiveness. She hollered to the heavens until she collapsed on the floor.



**BRADDOCK | Sam Murray**  
Photo



# Wild Things

*Alexia Chatfield*

The kids sat with their legs dangling off the edge of their grandparents' old wooden back porch. Jack played with a handmade wooden slingshot. He was trying to see how far out into the yard he could launch a small pile of rocks, and Katherine watched him intently, both of her hands gripped tightly around the rims of the black rain boots she was wearing. They belonged to her PopPop and didn't fit her in the slightest but she had worn them ever since the incident with the red ants when she was three.

It happened two summers prior. She had been waddling around, barefoot and unaware, and had stopped to watch some horses grazing in a field across the road. She was so mesmerized by the elegant beasts that she didn't notice the crunchy grass she was walking on had given way to soft dirt. And she didn't notice the ants swarming up her small fleshy legs. By the time she did notice, there were hundreds of them, covering her, turning her soft white skin red. She was on fire, and she screamed like a tortured tea pot until Grammy ran out with Mom and they rushed her to the small bathroom sink where they ran hot then cold water all over her leg to drown the ants and soothe the ascending invisible flames.

She cried even after the ointment was rubbed in and the pain was gone because though Mom hushed her and held her, when PopPop saw her he tisktisked her and remarked to no one in particular, "she better be more careful out here cause can't nobody be certain what's lurking nearby."

Katherine thought about that dreadful August day as she sat on the porch embracing her boots. It was summer again in New Iberia, a notoriously sultry time of year in Louisiana. The kids didn't mind heat or humidity, though. They looked forward to their annual trip to the countryside. The vacations were always a welcome change of pace from suburban Connecticut, where adventure ceased to traffic regulations and overprotective community members.

Jack picked up the last pebble by his side and pulled back the rubber band. He squeezed his left eye shut and focused.

"I'm gonna hit the shed," he said.

Katherine looked at the structure that was fifteen feet in front of them



and snickered.

"You can't hit that it's like a hundred feet away," she said smugly.

Jack squinted even more, "Oh yeah?"

He released the rubber band and the pebble flew with full force for about six feet before dropping. Katherine laughed again and just as Jack was about to push her off the porch, Mom walked out.

"What are you kids up to?" She ruffled Jack's sweaty shaggy hair leaving it spiky and disheveled.

"Nothing," he muttered, "I'm bored." He melodramatically put his chin in his hand and rested it on his knee.

"Oh no, well that's not good." Mom played along with a frown. Then she tickled Katherine's chin and as his sister screamed in delightful protest, Jack reluctantly smiled, exposing a gap where his front tooth had been. Mom stopped teasing her kids and knelt down besides them.

"Why don't you guys go explore?" she suggested.

"Yeah!" Jack yelled, and Katherine echoed him excitedly. Mom laughed at their enthusiasm and went inside to get their PopPop.

A few seconds later a tall weathered man sauntered through the old creaking screen door and let it slam with a loud shot-gun-bang. The kids hopped down from the porch and turned to face him. He stood looming over them in his white t-shirt and pointed leather cowboy boots. A yellow walkie-talkie was trapped under the fingers of his right hand, and he held a toothpick delicately in his left.

He eased himself down to sit on the edge of the porch where the kids had just been and he motioned for them to come over. With his thumb and forefinger he swiftly slid the toothpick between his lips so it poked out under his snowy moustache. He grunted, clearing his throat as he always did before he spoke.

"This here's a walkie-talkie." His voice was gentle but gruff – like that of a man who had endured a thing or two. He turned the radio on and the screen lit up orange. "Y'all need to make sure it's on channel sixteen, okay?"

He showed them how to push and hold the black button while they were talking and then explained to them that they had to release it in order to hear a response. The kids practiced a few times and PopPop told them to "hold on" while he went back inside.

He came back swinging the key to the truck in his hand. "I'll drop you kids off in the back field cause it's a long walk. Whenever you're ready to come back you just give me a call." He looked at them expectantly. When they both nodded he pivoted on his heels and headed for his truck.

PopPop helped the kids into the bed of the pick-up and slid into the front seat. There was a whispered jingling of keys before the engine roared to life

and a small puff of polluted smoke wheezed its way out of the exhaust pipe. The truck bumped and hiccupped on the uneven earth as the kids watched their grandparents' house grow smaller in the distance behind them like a dwindling sunset. Within a couple of minutes it had all but disappeared.

It was a huge property, about twenty-two acres in all. The bayou wrapped around the right but then vanished behind a forest of trees in the back, lassoing the land in a strange disfigured rectangle. Nobody really went back there much anymore, and the lack of lawn care had reverted the pasture to its primitive state. The abandoned brush was unkempt and gnarled.

PopPop slowed down close to the water's edge where the meadow grass wasn't as high. He jumped to the ground from the front seat then hiked around the side of the truck to assist his grandkids. He slipped his calloused hands under their armpits and gently plucked them up from the bed like weeds before replanting them on the ground.

"Alright," he said and he looked them sternly in the eyes, "now y'all go have fun. But be careful of the gators and call me on the radio when you're done." The kids nodded again and PopPop returned to the driver's seat. The truck sputtered and coughed and took off for home.

The kids stood pondering their next move for a long while. Coal black crows circled overhead then disappeared somewhere in the grasses. Suddenly, Jack started walking toward the far off woods but Katherine hung back.

"Where ya going?" she called.

Jack stopped, "Do ya see that?" He was looking at something in the distance by the forest.

Katherine made her way over to him to get a better view.

She stopped quickly when she saw what he was talking about. It was only a couple hundred feet away.

"Woah... what is that?" Katherine asked, tugging on Jack's arm.

"Not sure," he replied, and he continued towards it leaving Katherine dazed behind him. She followed slowly.

They wove their way through the knotted pasture, breaking through the tangles of tall grass that struggled to keep them at bay. Katherine attempted to follow the ground with her eyes in search of red anthills but she could barely see below her chest. Jack walked a good ten feet ahead of her, but he glanced back every few seconds to make sure she was following him.

They were only a hundred feet from their destination when Katherine shrieked. Jack jerked around but she was gone.

"Katherine?"

He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted for her, but his voice echoed in isolation. "Katherine!"

Panic rose in his voice. He ran frantically back towards where she had

been moments before, stumbling through the thicket that grabbed at his feet and tried to pull him down. Then he heard her.

"Here!"

He clawed through the grass until he saw her on her knees.

"What happened?" He pressed, helping her to her feet.

"I tripped on something really hard." She winced and rubbed a nasty purple bruise surfacing on her shin. Her face was pinched together like she had eaten one of Grammy's lemons off the lemon tree. It was clear she was holding back tears.

Jack moved past her and skimmed the ground with his hand. He felt something. It was smooth and solid and surprisingly large. He tugged at it, but it was stuck in the dirt.

"What is it, Jack?" Katherine asked as she brushed dust and twigs from her hands.

"I dunno..." Jack pulled harder, leaning back for leverage, and felt it shift slightly. "Wait, I think I got it."

He managed to wriggle the object free and then lifted it above the grass so that they could see what it was, but as soon as he did, he regretted it. Katherine's face contorted in fear. He was holding a skull.

Jack froze and dropped it. Blood rushed to his cheeks. It seemed as though the summer heat had thickened and the air was trying to suffocate them. Katherine was on the verge of crying hysterically, her large green eyes widened just as they always did before she started sobbing. Jack fumbled for the walkie-talkie, but before he hit the button he stooped back down to pick up the skull again. He looked at it more closely and put the walkie-talkie back down.

"Katherine, it's ok. It's just from the old cattle." He held it out for her to see and she hesitantly took it from him.

"Are you sure?" she whispered. He nodded.

"Yeah, it has to be. PopPop used to have a lot of cows out here. It even looks like one, see?" Jack seemed confident in what he was saying even though he hadn't ever seen the skull of a cow before. Despite any doubt, Jack's apparent conviction pacified them and they resolved on believing that the skull did, in fact, belong to a cow.

"Come on Katherine, it's ok. Let's keep going."

She took one last look at the broken yellow bone and let it fall from her fingertips. They slowly continued towards the back of the property but from that moment on they had an uneasy feeling that the ghosts of a hundred dead cattle were watching them.

As they neared the edge of the woods a breeze picked up, but it didn't cool them down. Jack scanned the sky with his eyes. Gray clouds were rolling in the distance threatening to crash and break like tsunami waves.

Katherine poked Jack's shoulder, "Look, it's a truck." He returned his eyes to the mysterious pile they had been walking towards. The pick-up had no tires, and rust was eating away at the metal roof.

Katherine walked up to it, "how old do you think it is?"

"I dunno, it's pretty cool, though."

They circled it slowly. "You think PopPop knows it's out here?"

Jack shrugged, "Don't know. I didn't see it when we drove up, maybe he hasn't either."

Jack pulled at the driver's door. It swung open with a loud crunch and he saw the inside was filled with dead crumbling leaves. He scooted into the seat.

"How did it get here?" Katherine asked, as she tugged open the door of the passenger seat and hopped up next to him.

"How would I know, Katherine?" Sometimes her questions annoyed him. It was clear by the way he enunciated each word of response with huffy precision.

Jack was playing around with the buttons on the dashboard and Katherine kept quiet for a few moments while she picked off some small flakes of rust from the doorframe, but she quickly forgot.

"What do you think in the woods, Jack?"

The car was facing the forest, but the trees gripped each other tightly with their spidery branches and it was nearly impossible to see through their woven clasp. Whatever lay beyond the edge of the pasture was trapped within the secret folds of those trees.

Jack summoned an answer.

"You know the stories mom reads to us, right before we go to bed?" Katherine's olive eyes turned to his, and she nodded. He continued, "I overheard mom and Grammy talking a few years ago. That's where the wild things are."

Katherine withdrew a little bit. "You're lying."

"No, I'm not," he said, "that's why we aren't allowed to go past the field. It's dangerous in there."

Katherine was silent.

They sat in the car quietly for a few minutes observing the eerie scenery through the dusty cracked windshield. Finally Jack decided to pretend he was driving a racecar.

He shifted the stick into gear and made sound effects of a running engine. "Number five takes the lead," he cheered in his manliest announcer voice. "But number seventeen sure is getting close!"

Then he faked a near car accident and slammed the steering wheel for dramatic effect. To both of their surprise, the horn worked, and its terrible noise tore through the previously undisturbed silence. The sound startled



them, and they sat stock still as their escalated heartbeats kept false time. Eternal seconds passed.

A flock of hidden birds flew up from the center of the woods, and for a second everything was still. Then suddenly, as if by magic, the forest came alive before their eyes. The wind began to blow furiously, and the clouds were creeping closer. The leaves and grass started dancing wildly, and the kids heard a low creak in the distance.

"Jack..." Katherine said, and she scooted closer to him. They were both sweating profusely and Jack could feel Katherine's heart violently beating against his shoulder.

Katherine tried to swing her leg up onto the seat to hug herself closer but she accidentally kicked open the glove compartment. Worn yellow papers fell out. They smelled like old rainwater and mold, and the kids couldn't read much, but one of the papers had a large picture of a man surrounded by text. He had a big moustache and long tangled hair and thick eyebrows that framed dark eyes.

"You think this is his car?" Katherine asked quietly.

"Yeah, may-" Jack was cut off abruptly by an earsplitting bang. It came straight from the woods. The sound ripped through the air and a second flock of screaming birds flew out of the jungle ahead of them. Jack and Katherine froze.

"What was that?" Katherine squirmed uncomfortably. "Was that thunder?" Her face was beginning to pinch again, but this time Jack couldn't calm her down because he was panicking too.

He fumbled once more for the walkie-talkie. He pulled it out and pressed the button but before he could speak into it, he saw something stumble out of the woods. He screamed and pointed and Katherine screamed too. It had terrified dark eyes and tangled hair, and blood, lots of blood. It looked at them and in less than a second collapsed behind the grasses.

Jack threw open the car door and dropped the radio. Wind forced its way into the cabin and disturbed the dead leaves that sat atop the cushions. Katherine was huddled in a ball crying, but Jack grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the car with as much force as his small arms could muster. The storm rolled in and thunder shook the earth that was already crumbling beneath their feet.

They ran back through the pasture, pushing to move as quickly as they could. But the wild grasses and roots that had warned them to stay away resisted their escape.

They didn't look back for a long time, not until they were halfway across the meadow. Jack turned to where the bloody image had been but only saw violent grasses whipping mercilessly in circles. "I think that was a gunshot," he

screamed to Katherine, "I saw something out there." Katherine was sobbing, choking on her own breath. He was starting to cry too.

Jack reached for the walkie-talkie but realized it was gone.

"I dropped the walkie-talkie," he choked. His heart was throbbing, and he knelt over as if he were going to be sick, but they saw their PopPop's headlights floating towards them and he gathered himself together. It had begun to downpour and as soon as their PopPop got to them he put them inside the cabin next to him.

"Are you kids ok?" He glanced at them worriedly. "I was taking a nap and Grammy woke me up as soon as she heard thunder. I thought you kids would have called me by then."

Heavy leaded rain pellets fired down from the sky and cascaded in rivers down the windshield. Everything was blurry and confusing. PopPop looked at his distraught grandkids and his voice shifted anxiously. "Did something happen?"

Jack burst into tears. "We heard a gunshot, we were out playing in the truck and we heard a gunshot. I saw something bleeding." Jack shivered despite the humidity. "I think I saw somebody bleeding." He was nearly hyperventilating.

PopPop's voice thickened, "what truck?" He had to speak up to be heard over the storm.

"The truck in the back, the rusty one," Katherine chimed in. She was hiccupping and her face was covered in snot.

"Did you see someone too?" PopPop asked her.

She started sobbing again.

He sped home and ran as fast as he could up the stairs. "Grammy," he yelled, "call the police! I think there was a hunting accident out in the woods."

She hurried to the phone, sheer panic rising on her face. Her elegant fingers swiftly dialed the numbers. Mom came rushing over to her traumatized kids, "Oh my god," she kept saying, "oh my god." She hugged them and kissed them and soothed them, "you're ok," she said, just as much for her own reassurance as for theirs. "You're ok."

It took ten minutes for the police to get to the house. An ambulance parked outside and the red and white lights flashed through the windows, projecting cryptic patterns on the walls. The kids sat in front of the fireplace wrapped in a blanket. Mom had some children's books to read to them but the kids refused.

The storm was going strong and it was getting dark, but the officers decided they couldn't wait for the rain to subside to start searching.

Two of them sat on the couch by the kids to ask questions, and fifteen more went out in separate vehicles to investigate the perimeter.

One of the officers asked the kids what they saw and for the first time there was doubt. They recounted the events from that night to the best of their ability - the truck with the papers, the skull, the gunshot, the forest coming alive before their eyes, and then the blood - but the details were vague and uncertain. The officers took down as much information as possible but their efforts were futile. Somehow, in the kids' minds the lines of reality had blended with fairytale fiction.

Meanwhile, in the back property police officers were trying to find their way through the tall thick grasses. They stumbled upon the broken-down truck but when they opened the cabin doors it was empty.

Water from the bayou was rising quickly, flash-flooding the area. It became increasingly difficult to find anything. They used their flashlights to better examine the area, and they searched for hours, but the water was already lapping at their knees.

Along the wooded edge, the current pulled at the roots of the grasses and plants, and the alligators crept farther up shore and away from the riverbank. Red ants scrambled together to form rafts, sacrificing one another in the process. They floated around desperately trying to cling onto any leaf or bark for survival. Within hours the backland had turned into a swampy jungle, burying everything in sight.

Perhaps, if that day hadn't been the first of a three-day tropical storm, the officers would have found something. Perhaps they would have noticed that, along the wooded edge where the water pulled at roots, a small pond of blood was swirling, dancing, and drowning in the thick muddy solvent.

The police left without answers, and the adults wrote it off as a misunderstanding. "It must have been an animal," they said, or an overextended imagination, and the kids began to question what they had witnessed that day. But as they drove back to the airport that would put them on a flight away from where the wild things were, they felt haunted. And for the rest of their lives, they would shudder to think that the ghosts of a hundred cattle and a wild dark eyed man were watching them from hollow, unmarked graves.

# Compendium



# Contributors

*Bryan Beight* currently resides in New Orleans, taking photographs and soaking in as much music as he can. His work has previously been published in a community book, *New Orleans by New Orleans* and a myriad number of art reviews.

*Ace Boggess* is the author of two books of poetry: *The Prisoners* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2014) and *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled* (Highwire Press, 2003). His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *RATTLE*, *River Styx*, *Southern Humanities Review* and many other journals. He currently resides in Charleston, West Virginia.

*Cristina Castro* hails from the Philippines, a graduate of St. Louis University with a degree in Accounting. She currently resides in the Republic of Palau and the Controller of Western Caroline Trading Company since 1992. A lover of nature, she appreciates and documents its beauty through Photography. Some of her photographic works have appeared in the Issue 2 of *The Indian River Review*.

*Alysa Catanzaro Anderson* is an English instructor at Southeastern Louisiana University, where she works with the Dual Enrollment Program and teaches Freshman Composition. Her short stories have appeared in *Louisiana Review*, *Red Clay Review*, and *Country Roads Magazine*. She lives with her husband in Folsom, Louisiana, and she is currently working on her first novel.

*Alexia Chatfield* was born and raised in Bethesda, MD. She is currently majoring in English and Education at Tulane University and hopes to teach high school students when she graduates. In the meantime, she plans to continue pursuing her creative passions through writing.

*Xinwei Che* explores the relations between memories and physical spaces, and the traces of absence and presence in her work. Sometimes it is an old pillow case, other times a fistful of human hair, Xinwei transforms these unexpected materials into works that suggest something eternal, borne of but beyond the reach of time. She has exhibited in many galleries in Singapore, the Netherlands and USA.

*Stephanie Chen* is from Scottsdale, Arizona. She is now a junior at Tulane University, where she studies English and Public Health. She likes black coffee and bad puns.

*Christen Chiosi* is a 20 year-old artist from Baltimore, Maryland who primarily works in drawing and printmaking. She is currently attending the Maryland Institute College of Art for a Bachelors degree in Fine Art, specializing in Drawing. Building off of her relationships with her models, Chiosi's work focuses on depicting those closest to her. In doing so, her work becomes simultaneously a statement about herself and her subject.

*Yishu Ci* was born and raised in Xi'an, Shaanxi, China. He is currently attending Maryland Institute College of Art majoring in painting and animation, and is graduating in May, 2014. His paintings always revolve around the social issue that he discovered by observing everyday life. He is currently working on a series of paintings focusing on the collective conscious of Chinese people as a racial group.

*Sonja Daniels* is a sophomore from Alexandria, Louisiana. She is studying English and Psychology and Tulane University.

*Katie Darby* was born in Overland Park, Kansas. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a concentration in painting from Auburn University in December of 2011. In 2012 she was awarded fellowships to attend artist in residence programs at the Art Students League of New York, Vytlačil Campus and the Vermont Studio Center. This past fall she started the MFA painting program at the Rhode Island School of Design.

*Mark DeCarteret* has met up with some lit-luck as of late at BlazeVOX, coconut, Confrontation, Gargoyle, Ghost Town, Hunger Mountain, Spillway, St. Petersburg Review, THRUSH, Toad Suck Review and Welter.

*Liz Dolan's* poetry manuscript, *A Secret of Long Life*, nominated for the Robert McGovern Prize, will be published by Cave Moon Press in 2014. Her first poetry collection, *They Abide*, was published by March Street. A six-time Pushcart nominee and winner of Best of the Web, she was a finalist for Best of the Net 2013. She has received fellowships from the Delaware Division of the Arts, The Atlantic Center for the Arts and Martha's Vineyard.

*Jacqueline Doyle* has work in *South Dakota Review*, *Confrontation*, *South Loop Review*, *Front Porch Journal*, and *Southern Indiana Review*. A recent Pushcart nominee, she also has a "Notable Essay" listed in *Best American Essays 2013*. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she teaches at California State University, East Bay. Find her online at [www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/)

authorjacquelineadoyle.

*Nina Raizel Hartman* is a senior at Rhode Island School of Design studying jewelry. She seeks to create one-of-a-kind interactive objects and jewelry that connect people and help them realize moments of self-reflection. After she graduates with a BFA this spring she will return home to Seattle and open up her own jewelry studio. More work can be found at [www.nina-raizel.com](http://www.nina-raizel.com) and [www.ninaraizel.etsy.com](http://www.ninaraizel.etsy.com).

*Jared Hegwood* teaches Creative Writing at Georgia Regents University in Augusta, GA. His work has been published in *The Adirondack Review*, *The Yalobusha Review*, *elima*, *Keyhole Magazine*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Night Train* and other fine places.

*Colleen Helie* was born in 1992 in Baltimore, Maryland. Time lived at the San Lucas Mission in Guatemala and in Florence, Italy for a semester at The Studio Art Center International propelled contemplation of the beauty of ritual and tradition meeting modernity and her body's experience of place. She studies at The Maryland Institute College of Art, and will graduate in May 2014 with a BFA in Painting and an Art History minor.

*A.J. Huffman's* poetry, fiction, haiku, and photography have appeared in hundreds of national and international journals, including *Labletter*, *The James Dickey Review*, and *Offerta Speciale*, in which her work appeared in both English and Italian translation. She is also the founding editor of *Kind of a Hurricane Press*.

*Philip Jason* is a writer and comedian, originally from NY. In addition to this story, he has stories out or forthcoming in *Mid-American Review*, *Washington Square Review*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Reed Magazine*, and *The Santa Clara Review*.

*Dasol Kim* is a Baltimore based artist who is born 1989 in In-Cheon, South Korea. She is graduated from Maryland Institute College of Art with BFA in Painting and currently works as an art teacher for young students. As an artist, her motivation comes from her spiritual transcendence and she creates works that reflect her feelings, thoughts, and memories that she has in her life.

*Staver Klitgaard* is a 3rd year painting major at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore, Maryland. Growing up around artists in Brooklyn, New York, Staver has always had a personal connection to paint. Her raw paintings, taking many ideas from the German Expressionist movement, create a human voice using color and mark making.

*Mike Koenig* received his MFA in Creative Writing & Publishing Arts

from the University of Baltimore. He currently lives in Columbia, Maryland and works for Discovery Communications. His fiction can be seen in *Phoebe*, *Crack the Spine*, *Quiddity*, and *Clover*.

*Lindsey Mack* was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland and continues to reside there as she pursues her BFA in Painting and Master of Arts in Teaching at Maryland Institute College of Art. She studied in Florence, where the city's expansive history and colorful accumulated surfaces immediately reached her attention. Her paintings arise from atmospheric experiences of decaying structures within her surroundings. They emphasize deconstructed space as abstractions of interactions between the controlled and chaotic.

*Julie Martin* is a sophomore at Tulane University currently studying Art History and Studio Arts. She is originally from Chicago, Illinois and is looking forward to spending her summer at home. Her work mainly consists of ink drawings and watercolors and she just recently finished illustrations for *Graze Literary Magazine*.

*Sam Murray* is a junior at Carnegie Mellon working in spaces between people and their experiences, whether that is with other people, artifacts, or environments. He has been trying to use photography to understand the world and then immediately project that knowledge back for others to absorb. He loves photography because it lends itself so readily to analysis of the subject, inherently and constantly critiquing the world by way of an objective piece of film.

*Mariko Perry* is a printmaker, papermaker, and photographer, currently living in Philadelphia, PA. Her international background, including her upbringing in Japan and travels in Asia, Europe influences her work greatly. Mariko is interested in the anxiety of not belonging due to cultural differences and/or communication difficulties and the isolation this provokes. Her work is based on her own experiences and is expressed through language, body gestures and aggressive, instinctive mark making layered within different media.

*David Preda* is from Fairfield, Ohio. He began studying at Tulane in the fall of 2012 and is currently majoring in English, Linguistics, and Gender and Sex Studies. He plans on seeking a career as an editor after graduating in the spring of 2016.

*Brenda Seabrooke's* stories have appeared in reviews, most recently in *Kerem* and *Yemassee*. She received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a fellowship from Emerson College, and won the WV Short Story Competition. She is also the author of twenty books for young readers which have won awards such as the National Council of Social Studies Notable, Boston Globe-Horn Book honor, Junior Literary Guild selection, Children's Choice, Edgar finalist.



*Marvin Shackelford* lives in the Texas Panhandle with his wife, Shea, and earns a living in agriculture. His works appears in such journals as *Confrontation*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Quarterly West*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *Zone 3*. His aimless tweets can be found under @WorderFarmer.

*M. E. Silverman* is editor and founder of *Blue Lyra Review* and *Review Editor of Museum of Americana*. He is on the board of *32 Poems* and is a reader for *Spark Wheel Press*. His poems have appeared in over 75 journals, including: *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Poetica Magazine* and other magazines. He recently completed editing *Bloomsbury's Anthology of Contemporary Jewish American Poetry* with *Deborah Ager* and is working on *Voices from Salvaged Words: An Anthology of Contemporary Holocaust Poetry*.

*Lucy Stratton* began writing fiction in fourth grade when she submitted a handwritten Indiana Jones fanfiction to a local writing contest. While her early work escaped critical acclaim, Lucy stubbornly continued developing her craft through high school and high school. After graduating from Tulane University in May, Lucy plans to continue swimming through the slush pile until she finds success.

*Jennifer Sugarman* grew up on Long Island, New York. Working from life, both representationally and abstractly, her oil paintings and charcoal drawings depict portraiture and cityscapes, centered on the mundane, anxieties and more recently the humor of contemporary living. She is completing her Bachelor's Degree in Art History at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore.

*Qin Tan* was born in Beijing, China and is a current student studying at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland. She works with a diverse range of mediums including painting, drawing, photography and experimental video. She is heavily influenced from her extensive time studying abroad in America and Italy. Her work deals with philosophical, cultural and religious contemplations from these experiences.

*Annalise Torcson* is a sophomore at Tulane who resides under the sun sign Pisces. She is a history major, and is most fascinated by the lessons and truths history has to offer. She attended Sarah Lawrence College last year, focusing on Creative Writing, before she returned to her native homeland of swamps and oak trees. She enjoys theatre, piano, Star Wars, and believes in the majesty of dragons.

*Jonny Veach* was born and raised in Quincy, Illinois. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Thrush*, *The Minnesota Review*, and *Quiddity*, among others. Currently, he is an MFA candidate at the University of Mississippi, and a

recipient of a Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Award from the Illinois Center for the Book.

*Maria Weeks* obtained her BA in Expressive/Therapeutic Arts from Marian University in Wisconsin and I'm currently pursuing my Master of Arts in Counseling at Lakeland College. Right now I earn income as an entrepreneur creating commissioned oil paintings, running a flea market business and working part time as a consultant grant writer for a local non profit charity. She dreams of opening an experiential writing, art, music and nature therapy center in the future.

*Melinda Winograd* studied poetry at the University of North Texas and is working toward becoming a "real poet."

My poetic life began at the age of 9 when my first pet died. I was inspired to write an elegy, though at the time I wouldn't have called it that. This short tribute to Furrball caused a stir in my family, who informed me my maternal grandfather had been a poet for many years.

I'm really just trying to get my foot in the door so I can get a start towards being a "real poet." Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Ishiah White* is currently a student at the Rhode Island School of Design, majoring in Sculpture with a concentration in Environmental Studies. From Virginia, she is the oldest of seven children and her family is a recurring theme with her work. During college especially, she has been expanding her familiarity with mediums, techniques, and overall studio practice.

*Edith Young* is a photographer at the Rhode Island School of Design.

*Derek Zwyer* a human being. He believes that there's something endearing about being in the world and walking around every single day for the past 22 years. I would even say that I've gotten better at navigating through the mixtape. I'm graduating soon (now).

# Submission Guidelines

The *Tulane Review* accepts poetry, prose, and art submissions. Poetry and prose submissions should be sent electronically to [litsock@tulane.edu](mailto:litsock@tulane.edu) and be included as attachments. Hard copy submissions will be accepted, and should be sent to *Tulane Review*, 122 Norman Mayer, New Orleans, LA, 70118, but will not be returned. Please submit no more than five poems and limit prose submissions to 4,000 words per piece. Hard copy submissions should include the artist's e-mail address. Art should be submitted electronically to [tulane.review@gmail.com](mailto:tulane.review@gmail.com) in high-resolution format. Please include dimensions and media form. Please include a cover letter with biography for all submissions.

The Tulane Literary Society normally acquires first North American serial rights but will consider second serial publication.

For more information, visit our website at [review.tulane.edu](http://review.tulane.edu).





