

TULANE REVIEW



| FALL 2015 |



THE TULANE REVIEW

fall 2015

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Dancing Song

M.C. Rush

Why do we tolerate ruins
while we can still rebuild?

Autonomic anomalies,
the hazards of matter,
the ceremonies of endurance.

When you tire of blood,
come to poetry,

the elegance of artifice,
the honesty of simplicity.

When you tire of poetry,
follow the blood,
salted with deceptions.

It is impossible to live two lives.

It is impossible to write two poems.

Untitled

Abby Ratner

I asked for a tattoo of a boat on the bottom of my foot

for my eighth birthday. I wanted to

sample boredoms, to be

pregnant with unfulfillment

Untitled

Twixt

I will get as far as I can then fade
into the pastel pocket that I made
out of inner resting material.

Locker #223

Lauren Bender

I admit to losing the combination. Several
months. One day I opened a drawer and there it was,

the ripped bit of page with its six numbers.

Had been there all along, not lost. Thoughts of
the spirit plane then, your astral form, last

I saw it crawling away. Slightly chewed. Crushed

just enough to die, slipping into the dark crack
where the bed almost meets the wall. Still

the full longing for paranormal detachment,

my essence lifting off like a dirty bandage
and the drunken weave through the night, searching

out another loose dreamkin, testing the limits

of mysticism with you, my friend, my fellow swapper.

Frankly, I'm tired of our heavy breathing

about ourselves and the world. From these boxes.

When I hear drums, my hands dart out from sleep.

When it gets cold and buzzy with vibrations.

I get nervous we'll never make the connection.

Taipei Girl

Eleanor Levine

I'm looking for a girl
who drinks coffee
and reads movies.
It's better than subtitles
cause she coughs
and spits in Chinese,
which is intuitive and
has more elasticity
than English verbs.

Without Salt

Amelia Cairns

Ash cataclysm

Nashville Cadillac

Finnish insomniac

Manila hot fudge

Easter Sunday lice parade

oversized milk crate

second date atmosphere

erasers fast pace-

makers in hounds-tooth

static wall-to-wall

napkin dispensers sound

evidence of a cat

enlarged pores plantation

tours tasteless without

salt the topsoil abounds

over Tiny Town where

even the traffic signs

are made with corn sugar

insured each model home in-

sulated with insulin

federally inspected

yearly yet the cavities

and cancers still recall

the warmth of a sun

On the Way to New Delhi, through a Period of Invisibility

Bibhu Padhi

There is nothing new to see;

everything happens far inside.

There are no local details, only

a self-flaunting brain that can

see nothing beyond itself,

a never-ending, graying night

until the cells fall into the next day.

There are voices struggling

to understand what their words

of comfort might mean to someone

who has grown dark with pain.

Indeed, there is nothing to see—

no towns, no streets with names;

there is nothing to listen to, except

an infant cry, unable to bear

even its mother, cannot sleep.

How fine and lucid and simple
 life would have been without
 the brain's bursts of agonies
 and immediacies! The local details
 are here, in some ways—
 in these hands and fingers
 learning again and again the same
 old exercises in handling
 the grey brain's skull-like outside:
 the forehead, the temples,
 the exact point where the heart
 is believed to meditate, the alien,
 bloodless arteries, the dim jugular veins.
 There is indeed nothing to listen
 to or see. It happens so much
 inside, in such clever ways!

i.

Mary Mac Jones

my favorite thing about horses is
they can't throw up. they find a way to keep
all down south in the guts of porches.

in Tennessee the whips, spurs, and twitches
are null because the state fair state will sweep
and twirl dried grass crust on a fork to choose tunes

like country on the radio. your tractor's
sexy, she thinks, journeying deep
in your chest as you feed her pinkish

bits of cotton, still not clean after washes
of centuries. you say what seeps
is money, not prejudice and lies.

but yes they all are one and the games,
Tennessee, you cheated. your rivers peek
at our bends which we cannot revise.

we are sick dogs tooting your verdant knolls.
you give deciduous forest kicks and weep
louder than us to prove your prognosis,
my little pony, you must also swallow this.

Toyota Camry

Jake Koch

Everyone has always been dead and it is entirely my dog's fault

I am sitting in the passenger seat of my 2007 Toyota Camry in a handicap parking spot in the parking lot of a Best Buy while my older brother is inside picking up his preordered copy of Halo 2.

I am sitting in the back seat of my 2008 Toyota Camry with my very large dog who is faceless and has large human hands instead of paws. He presses his clenched fist into my jaw with force and continues to do so until I am 33 years old.

I am sitting in the trunk of my dead brother's 2009 Toyota Camry and the large faceless dog has used his hands to trap me in the trunk. It's just me and a large baby.

That baby would grow up to be Tony Hawk Pro Skater Tony Hawk

and with his massive wings he would carry the two of us to his bird nest where we would enjoy chicken tenders and 1000 years of Red Bull Sponsorship money.

And when Tony finally passed I would close his eyes and I would close my eyes and I would open my eyes and find myself in the driver's seat of my 2010 Toyota Camry.

Is that a look of ecstasy

Laton Carter

Is that a look of ecstasy as they float in their lettuce dresses? The closed eyes, the curled-in toes, the splayed fingers suggest yes, but these are dancers. The billow of the tulle — identical — and the mouths slightly agape: if it is ecstasy, it's ours for watching them. Splendor in synchronicity, their torsos suspended in pale green light.

Kinglet in the dogwood thrusting its body from branch to branch, each tilt of the head a question. The swollen fruit is larger than the whole of its chest cavity, the fine-toothed set of bones encaging a frantic heart. The ringed eyes give its countenance a look of pleading while the black shadow of the cat lies further still.

Trance. Rapture or terror. The senses long for their own de-ranging, a placement out of stasis. On the playground, children spin and spin. Now stop. How does your head feel? Try to walk straight.

Diluvian Tractate

Samuel Moulton

For lust:

Collect last rain drop

in glass jar. Salt. Repeat

thirty-nine times. Grind

three cloven hooves in

rotwood. Peel one

coweye with bone. Mix

with hands. Funnel in

jar. Stir clockwise with

dove leg seven times.

Cork with fourth finger

of virgin—bloodside

facing down. Cut

horse belly. Insert jar.

Let ferment until

horse dies. Drink.

Forty-one times speak:

Kabriri

Briri

Riri

Iri

Ri

Then sleep.

So I do

And wake alive

To wife of Noah's youngest son

Ghastly robes still shaking

In a space

Bereft of wind

She spits dry:

I recognize you

Not-yet-drowned one

Quality to a sinful substance

How long will you float?

Do you recall the second day

When god made not the water

Merely moved it?

No I say and do not stir

She grins:

Portend your inundated nature

It broods heavy clouds of sin

Verily, I see the flood is coming

Ponder breath

That it may flood precise

She leaves.

I wake again, I think,

To watered horseblood

Twisted in the wind

Parole

Ivan de Monbrison

revêche indécision du coeur blessé

les muqueuses sèches dans la bouche et la faim qui dévore les dents

la traversée hostiles de ces plaines de papier te rend fou

ton crâne éclate au moindre son la nuit

et la vue même d'un humain t'aveugle

tu es seul et défiguré

la momie viendra te chasser

en ces lacunaires plaines de phosphore tu seras maudit

par la pluie qui tombent des yeux pressés comme des oranges tu seras

apôtre de ton propre sacrifice inutile et purement mental

les pelures de l'œil se défont et bientôt tu peux enfin voir

au travers de l'orbe parfait le monde tel qu'il est

au premier jour du monde tu étais

mutilé par la peur

aplati sur le sol

comme un animal écrasé sur une route qui ne ressemble à rien d'autre qu'à un p

de charpie

Language

Ivan de Monbrison

surly indecision of the wounded heart
dry mucous membranes in the mouth and hunger that eats up teeth
crossing hostile plains of paper makes you crazy
your skull splits up open at the slightest sound by night
and the very sight of a human being blinds you
you are alone and disfigured
the mummy will come out to hunt you down
in these lacunary plains of phosphorus you'll be cursed
rain falling from squeezed eyes
like oranges you will be
apostle of your own unnecessary and purely mental sacrifice
the peelings of the eyes are taken off and soon you can finally see
through the perfect orb the the world as it really is
on the first day of the world you were
mauled by fear
flattened on the ground
as a crushed animal on a road which does not look like anything as it has

chasseur des seuils que personne ne franchit
tu ignores toi-même ta solitude écarlate comme un fruit
comme le sang versé sur la robe du monarque qu'on assassine
tu es cet épouvantail qui ne fait plus peur à personne
et celle que tu regardes détourne les yeux
pour ne pas voir les mutilations sur ta face
mais laisse moi te dire
puisque tu n'en as sans doute pas conscience
la nuit dans leur tombe en silence
les morts parlent entre eux

been torn to shreds

hunter of thresholds never crossed

you're yourself unaware of your loneliness which is scarlet as a fruit

as the blood shed on the dress of the murdered monarch

you are this scarecrow that is not scaring anyone

and the woman you look at does not look back at you in order not see the
mutilations on your face

but let me tell you as maybe you are not still aware of it

at night silently in their graves

the dead talk together

The Reader

Scott Thomas

I. 1993

What if the Reader of Palms was wrong?
In her beaded shop on Bleeker Street,
She predicted I will grow old,
Live in a farmhouse
With a woman who will take care of me.
The hillside of foxgloves will be wavy
From flaws in old window glass,
But I will see the peak of the abandoned outhouse,
Aluminum vent pipe like a periscope.
I will not hear her approach.
She will place her hands softly on my shoulders,
Say, "The poem is fine,
But I still say you can't rhyme
'Turkey hunter' and 'honeysuckle.'"
My cider cup will steam.

A cat will jump on my writing table,
Lie down on my manuscript,
But here's the question:
Could the lines in my palm have been misread
(I know what that is like),
Or worse was the Reader a liar?
I mean if the news is bad,
What is a Reader of Palms to say?
"Son, I really hate to tell you this,
But you're in for a shit sundae."
Face it. It could happen at any time.
Face it. It could happen right now;
Dead at age 32, March 27th 1993
While hiking,
While crouching to look at violets,

The Reader

Scott Turow

Wondering what were those two distant booms,

TNT in a stone quarry or some catastrophe?

I wait for the atomic wind,

But Reagan is gone.

No need to worry.

Even so, massive failures

Do kill men my age,

My body found in six weeks

By the turkey hunter

Who sits among but fails to notice

The honeysuckle.

.

II. 1998

She awoke

La Petite Mort

Holt David

And tried to remember the dream,
But already it was fading
Like a sidewalk chalk village
In a sudden rain.
Something about buying a ramshackle farmhouse.
The garage was built into a hillside
Just off the road, no driveway.
She and a man and a woman with papers
Climbed the cement stairs,
Grass in the cracks,
The metal pole banister
Quivering
Putting rust in her palms,
The hedges closing in.
At the top of the hill stood a latrine.
She inquired of the woman who pointed
About indoor plumbing,

And the man turned around,
Smiled great warmth,
His beard flecked with gray,
And then it was gone

Like she never knew,
But planted the bulb
For future déjà vu.

La Petite Mort

Hollie Dugas

Dangling

in that dainty plié,

you rise in waves,

pulling me under

the plunged body's

stench of brackish blue.

But, to hell with death

I've got ya

in my mouth- the savoir.

I think back to when I was a child

how I would hold my breath

with characters in movies

that struggled underwater.

I puff. *There, there,*

We lived this time.

I drip as the mourner

when your blood floats up

to the surface

like a fish. I watch it whirl back

into the profondeurs.

Ubi Mater Est

Keith Dunlap

Where is my mother now,
with her nervous stomach,
her short-cropped Brillo hair,
her blue eyes like cough drops,
and her trembling hands
lighting one cigarette on another?
Misery was her lollipop,
as she undid the crossword puzzle in pen
and left us drunkenly scrawled notes
which we couldn't comprehend.
She would take her false teeth out,
put them on the table beside her bed,
and sleep until the afternoon,
drifting through the house like a fabled ghost,
that just wanted to retrieve its head.
We burned her corpse in a cardboard box,
scattered her ashes in a blustering wind,

so that they flew back in our faces,
dandruff on the shoulders of our funeral clothes;
she clings to me still, that ancient curse,
or worse, the flame she was consumed in,
burning darkly on the brightest snow-dazzled day,
loose flakes shaking from the tree limbs.

Young Siddhartha

Daniel David

A small statue of Buddha,
the lad, Siddhartha Gautama,
sits cross-legged on my desk,
his smile serene;
however, my prayer wheel stopped
spinning when I dwelled on this:

Siddhartha, the prince, wanted
for nothing and saw nothing,
his smile serene behind tall,
gleaming, palace walls
at the foot of the Himalayas,
where the air was cold and thin,

until, on a stroll, he felt
the soil of his kingdom beneath
his feet, rather than smooth,

colorful tile, thick, rich carpet,
until his desire to comprehend
an old man, a corpse, a beggar.

At twenty-nine, Siddhartha left
his princess, sheer silks and gold
bangles sliding on her hips;
her serene smile, her lips,
her dark nipples, the color of earth
and dates, would not keep him.

Siddhartha left his infant son, Rahula,
after dubbing him "little fetter,"
wriggling *karmic* manacle,
no bliss, no enlightenment
in the curve of her arms,
his son's serene smile a tether.

The Wisdom of the Crowd

At thirty-five, after six years
and two gurus, his empty ribs
unsatisfied with ascetic life
(Was all that near-death necessary?),
and knowing, however hobbled, he could
return to his father's sumptuous table,

after forty-nine days and *nirvana* –
finally, no crying baby –
Siddhartha found his serene smile
under the leaves and figs of the Bodhi tree,
the Buddha, an open, white lotus
floating above the mud. And yet,
the Buddha did not return to his wife, his son.

It occurred to me, now twenty
years older than the Buddha,

perhaps Siddhartha was simply

a naïve and foolish young man.

Oh, what an exquisite flaw!

My smile is serene.

At eighty, the Buddha concluded,

his smile still very serene,

he mastered the shackles of his *samsara*,

the endless, dizzy spin of birth and death.

Maybe, just maybe, Siddhartha

might have gone round again.

The Wisdom of the Crowd

M.C. Rush

While in the street

outside, the people hear nothing at all.

– C. P. Cavafy, from “But Wise Men Apprehend

What Is Imminent”

If we mattered

we’d have more time.

The day comes

when we will eagerly trade the past

for more tomorrow.

Not so much chosen

as the result of our choices,

the wild world

violating our timid wills with rhythm,

a blow exchanged for a blow.

How else can we treat the stranger,
believing ourselves what we believe ourselves?

Must we fill the moat with trash, tear down every stone
that sits on stone, and move into temporary shelters,
tents and cardboard boxes?

The best scripts are written after the curtain comes down.
We love neither chance nor the inevitable.

The Poem of Forgetting remains so much more popular,
so much more familiar than the Poem of Remembering.
Choose: Wandering or searching?

To Be A Body

Myra Pearson

1.

You skinned your knee
and didn't know what to do.
Saw the red sticky rip staring back.
Realized there is more than you can see.

Your body carrying you lovingly through hours.
Your body on autopilot. Your body needing
no key, opening doors, flowing full
through small corridors, leaving, retrieving.

Your body flaking off on a bookshelf.
Your body a dress a hanger wears,
mending itself in secret.
You become aware of it.

Series of circles, lines, skin
stretched over a drum, one
touch start, fire engine heart fan
the flames, hot blood font.

2.

You are a window
at midnight, lights
on the inside.

There is no road only
your image returned.

A face floats, ghost left
in space beyond this world.

Those of us on the outside

see your figure silhouetted
against stained wallpaper.

We imagine what we see is you,
but we cannot
consider the phantom
reflecting in an empty room.

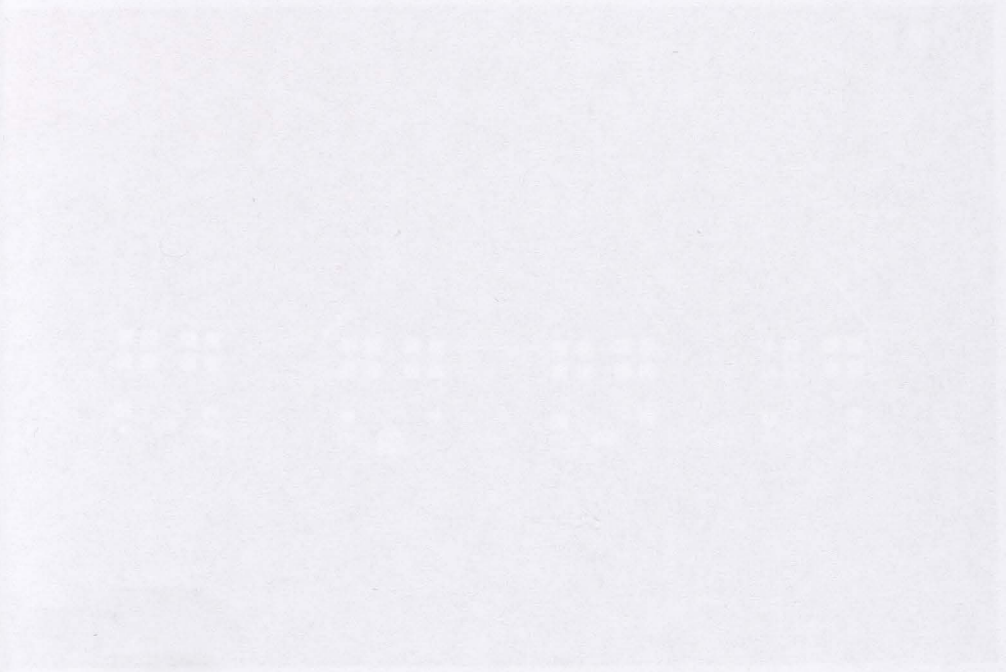
3.

No one can remember how they were pulled in,
or what weight guided the mission. It helps

to think of a bright light, not the dim distance
of non-existence, lit up like the birthday cake

of someone on the way out, who drifted so far
from the start they came back, back from the dark

to walk the beam of the moon cast across an uncertain sea,
to dive headfirst out of a body, into memory.



Little Borne | Denis Schwartz
Photograph



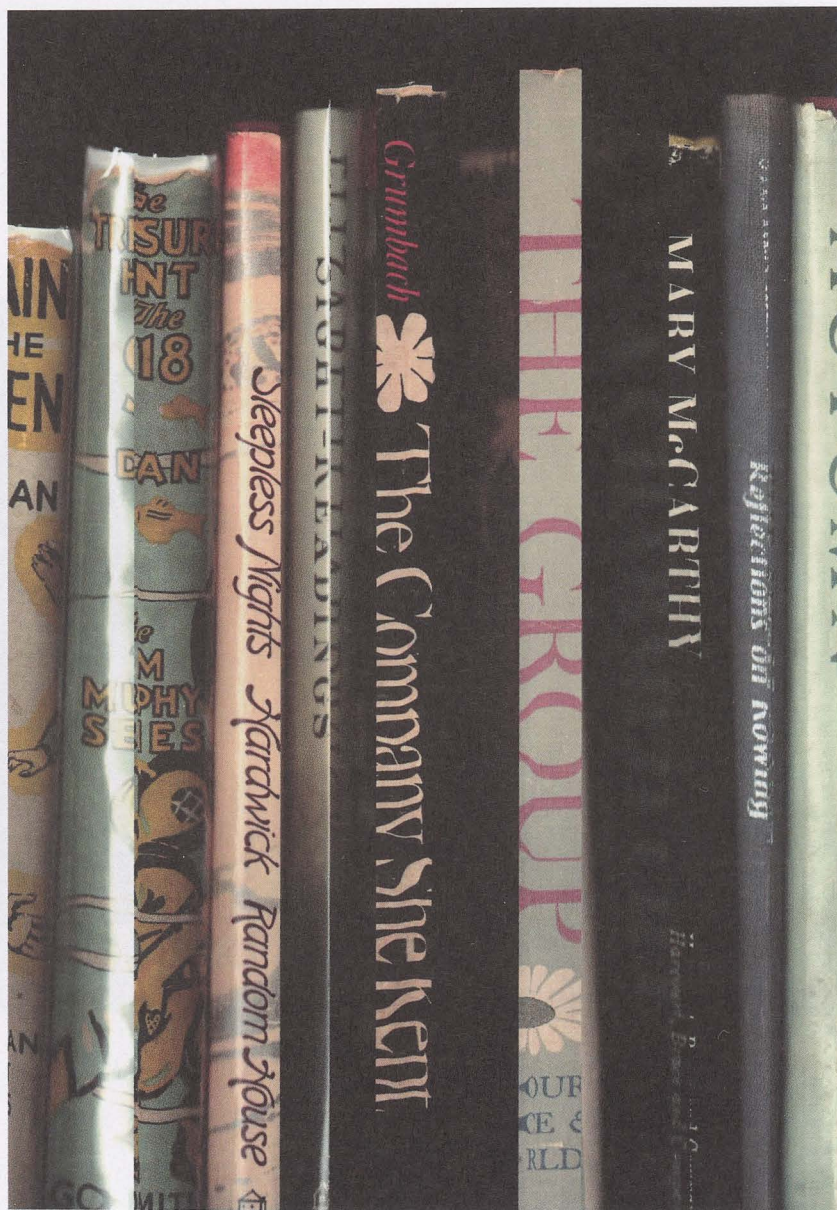
Little Boxes | Becca Schwartz
Photograph |



Untitled | Marie Piccione
charcoal, graphite, and white chalk
pastel on paper | 8.5" x 11"



War | Marie Piccione
graphite pencil on paper
22" x 18"



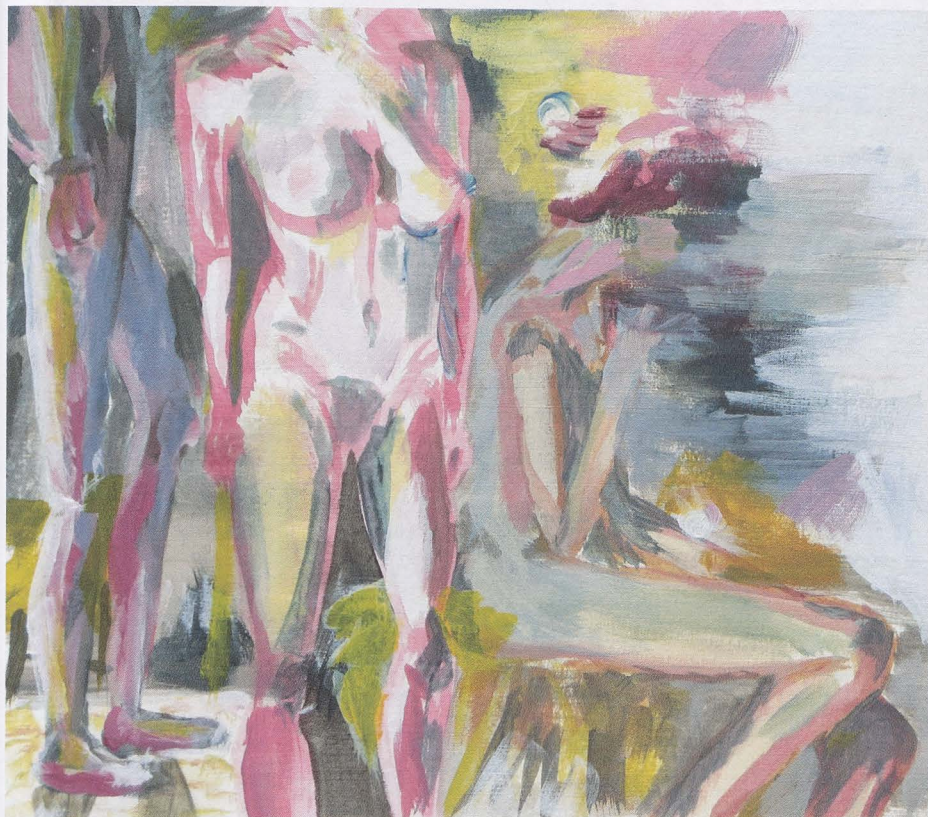
Mary McCarthy | Edith Young
Photograph | 9"x 12"



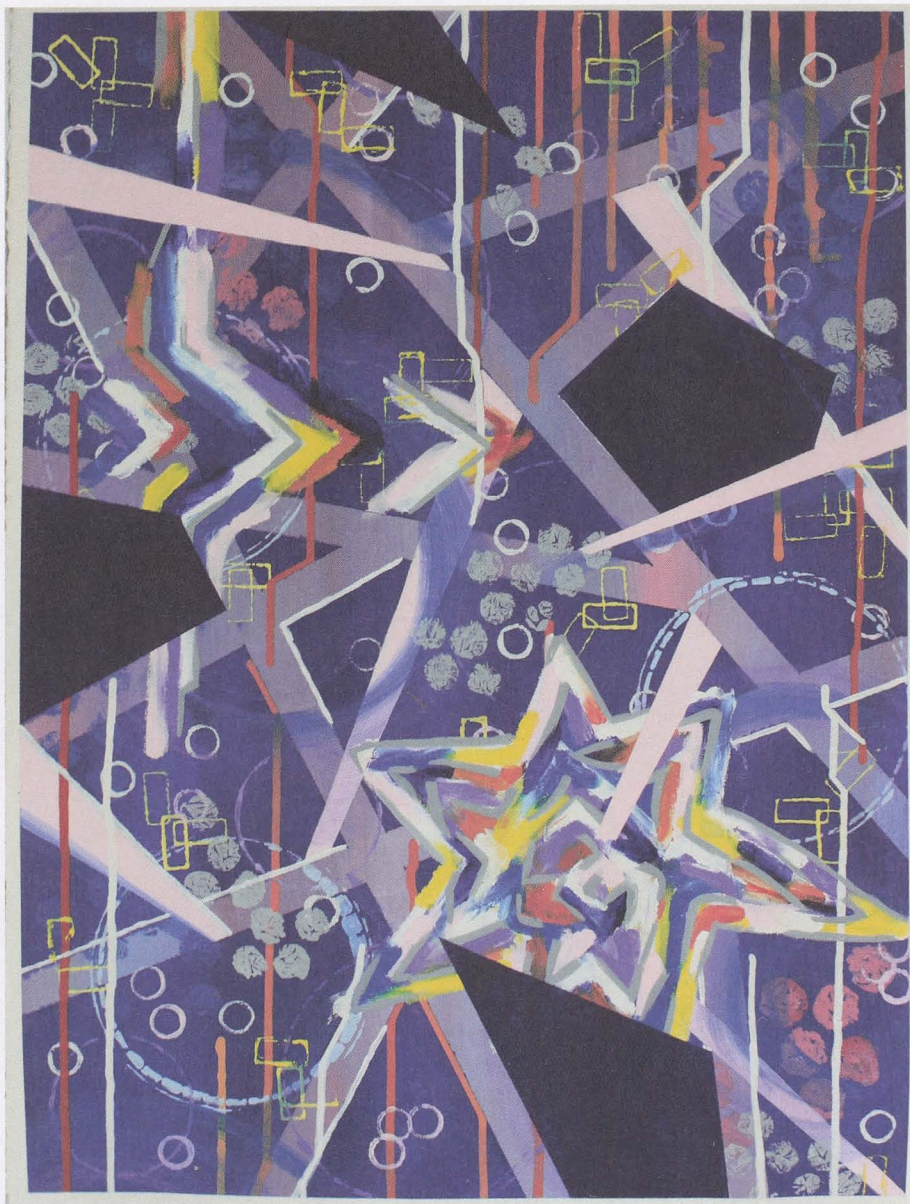
Robert Lowell | Edith Young
Photograph | 9" x 12"



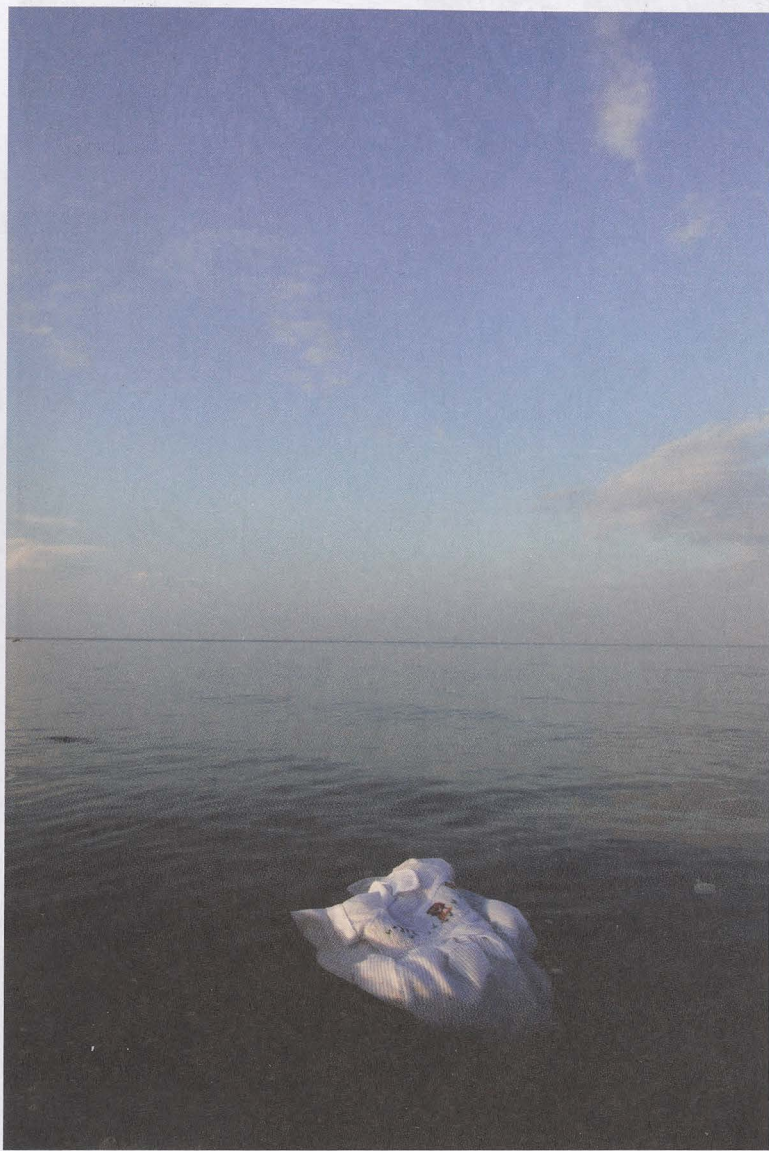
Catastrophic Carnival | Rachel Keitelman
acrylic paint on BFK | 22.5" x 30"



Three Figures | Rachel Kietelman
acrylic paint on BFK | 10" x 11.25"



Outburst | Emily Berger
acrylic paint on BFK | 22" x 30"



Chasing Saturn - Poseidon | Virginia Mallon
24" x 36"



**The Masters Revisited, Ingres, The
Turkish Bath** | Allen Forrest
ink on paper

59



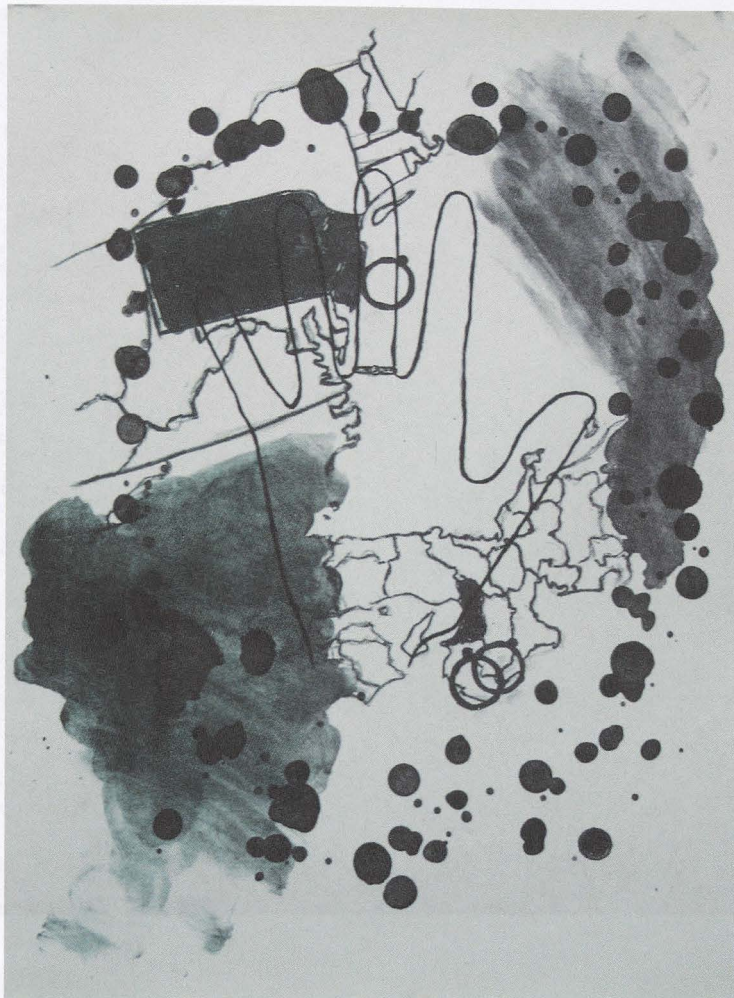
A "Cozy" Nest | Renee Jin
Old sofa & nails | 60 cm x 60
cm x 60 cm



Starry Night | Austin Aviles
Digital | 16" x 20"



Untitled | Mariko Perry
Charcoal and dried flower
petal on paper | 18" x 24"



**Untitled (Until Together) from the
series *My Ritual* | Mariko Perry**
2 layer Lithograph | 11" x 15"



Three by Three | Christine Stoddard
digital collage based upon an original
mixed media work



Rattle Feminism | Christine Stoddard
digital collage based upon an original
mixed media work



VCPL | Ruby Huh
Oil on canvas | 9" x 12"



One Sunday Morning | Natalie Shyu
Photograph



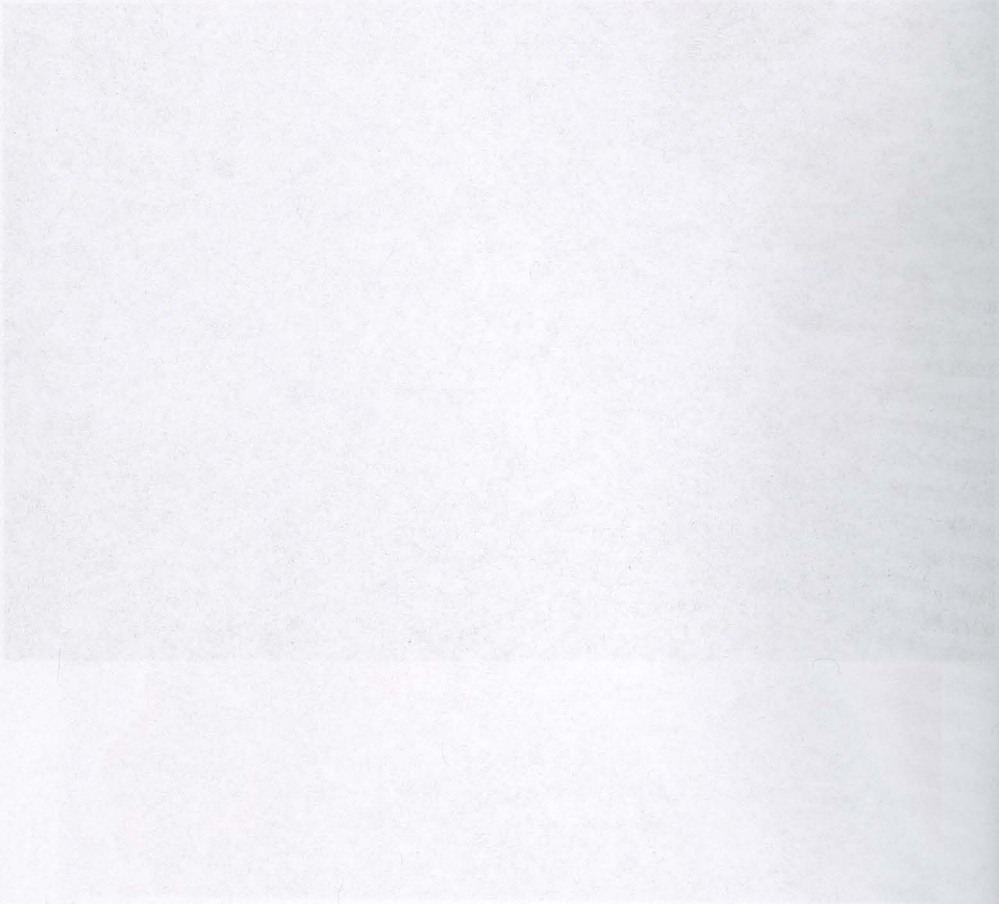
Earth Lingo | Farah Serur
Acrylic Paint on Paper | 18" x 24"

Drowned Fear

Alan M. Rice



Camp Bisco | Farah Serur
Photography | 36" x 24"



Earth Lingo | John Smith
Acrylic Paint on Paper | 18" x 24"

Drowned Fear

Allen M. Price

On the Friday before Labor Day when Grant Dunn came home from Bishop Hendricken, and through the bow window saw Bina beating Tamar, he muttered: "I'm gonna kill her dead." He was seventeen, his face scarred from where he used to have acne. He clenched the straps of the book bag slung over his shoulders, gnawed on his lower lip, then said it again, as he bolted down the driveway into the backyard. Grant knew his mother, Debora, was working and wouldn't be home until after he was in bed. He swung the door open and stormed through the house and up the stairs, taking them two by two, but paused at the landing when he looked inside Tamar's bedroom. He saw her sitting on her bed with her shirt off and her back turned, exposing a welt mark. Tamar's bedroom was his mother's before and, like Grant's, didn't have a door. Taking a deep breath, inhaling the incense Tamar was burning to cover up her mother's cigarette smoke, Grant walked into his room, pulled the .357 magnum out from under the mattress that his dog, Lady, was sleeping on, and placed it on top of the Bible inside the book bag.

"She keeps getting away with this," Grant mumbled, as he took off his Catholic school uniform, and put on his work clothes: khakis and a Rocky Point amusement park polo shirt.

"Grant?" Tamar whispered.

"Yeah?"

"Can you come're?"

"Hang on, I'm changing."

"She's not taking her car."

"Tamar," Grant said, hurrying into her room, sitting down beside her, "be quiet."

Tamar linked her arm with Grant's; he looked at her. Beneath her eyes there was swelling from years of abuse and suffering. She rubbed her fingertip along the scar in Grant's eyebrow where Bina had stabbed him with the steak knife he went after her with the first time he tried to stop her from beating Tamar.

"She got pissed because I asked why she was walking to work."

"She's walking in my Goddamn neighborhood again."

"Calm down."

"She's gonna kill you. She's already killing you."

"I'm okay."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. You let her get away with everything."

Lady startled them with her sudden bark to go outside. She then tore down the stairs, slipping and sliding on the red runners that matched the rug in the living room, and skidded on the kitchen floor into the back hall before jumping up on the screen door. Grant opened it. While she ran around the yard, he sat on top of the picnic table. Bina then came out and walked past Grant down the backyard walkway to her bartending gig at the Governor Francis Inn.

Bina Almeida met Debora at the Inn on a cool 1983 summer night and, shortly after that, Debora moved Bina and her daughter to 39 Toledo Avenue from the drug-ridden, cockroach-infested Pawtucket housing projects, bringing the roaches with them. That first night, she told Grant and Tamar that if they didn't behave she swore to God she would put them in the bathtub and bleed them to death. From that moment he wanted her gone; four years later, he wanted her dead. Grant didn't speak to Bina. He didn't understand his mother's relationship with her. Though they shared the same bedroom and slept in the same bed, his mother would often go out with a different man on Friday nights. Friends, was all he could think. Neighbors, teachers at his and Tamar's schools, those who knew Bina by face at the Inn thought otherwise and had traded rumors which created a series of images when they saw Bina: the thirty-five-year-old high school dropout; the abusive mother; the oblivious hated woman flaunting her homosexuality and corrupting their children; the short, heavysset bartender whose salary and tips were augmented by her lesbian lover could be called gracious but nothing more: as she tended bar, her dark eyes, and dark spotted African face always without makeup. Her dress was opposite Grant's mother, he thought, shading his eyes from the setting sun as his mother got out of the car and headed up the walkway.

"*Ugh, God.* Why you always gotta dress like a backup ho for some rapper?" he punted.

"That's not very nice, son."

"Neither is the fact that I can see your dirty pillows," he said, alluding to a scene from Stephen King's "Carrie."

"They're called breasts."

"They're called the reason you make so much money waitressing. Why're you home early? You got fired or somethin'?"

"I took the night off. I do work. I know you don't think I do."

"Open the windows if you straighten your hair. I'm tired of coming home and my room stinks of burnt hair."

"Have fun at work."

"Bina just beat Tamar."

Debora leaned over, and Lady licked her hand.

"I know you heard me."

Grant put the leash on Lady and, as he pulled her away, muttered, "God'll get you," but Debora heard him, and shouted, "He already has. He gave me YOU."

Grant, the tall, muscled but slender brown-skinned boy, kept walking. His mother's words stung worse than anything she had said before. He thought about it while walking Lady over to his buddy Izzy's house to hang out with him, because Tamar, who knew Izzy could calm Grant down, told him to go, she was all right. Grant barely saw his mother after she moved Tamar and Bina in, having to get a third job to cover Bina's expenses. On Sundays she stayed in her bedroom recuperating, getting ready for Monday work. But that wasn't the way they were. He missed the talks that they had during those summer weekends driving down to Narragansett beach, stopping at Aunt Carrie's, and eating clam chowder and clam cakes while Lady explored the dunes. He would tell his mother of his deepest feelings: sadness his father was gone; fear he wouldn't live past the age his father died, 19; loneliness being at home alone while she worked long hours; hope he would make enough money to be able to flush the toilet and take a shower whenever he wanted. Even before Tamar and Bina moved in, Grant wasn't allowed to take showers and could only flush the toilet after he went poop because Debora couldn't afford to empty the cesspool but twice a year. They all took a bath once a week, using the same water, alternating who went first. The rest of the week they washed up in the sink with a face cloth, but when Grant was done, he would drown himself in Polo cologne for fear that he smelled funky and everyone at school would make jokes of him.

When Grant got to Izzy's, the front door was open, so he walked in as usual. Izzy, short for Israel, was also a Hendricken senior, and the school drug dealer. Grant followed the marijuana smoke down the stairs to the game room: a floor model television set playing 'The Untouchables' sat in front of a poker table strewn with beer cans, cards, chips, filled ashtrays, and lines of cocaine on a mirror that was surrounded by the chairs in which Izzy and his friends were sitting. The nineteen-year-old redhead booted his friends out when he saw his good buddy come in. They picked up the old banter as if he had been there the whole time, though Grant could see the concern in their eyes. Izzy poured them both a rum and coke, but Grant did a blow line, and then took a swig of the drink.

"I hate her," Izzy said. "She told my dad what we did to them fags."

"I still can't believe you egged them getting outta their cars."

"My dad told her, her kind don't belong in our neighborhood."

"It's not enough that she hits my girl. She's gotta bring friggin drag queens to my house. Everyone thinks I'm a Goddamn fag."

"Not everyone."

Grant looked at Izzy, then at the empty spot in the gun cabinet, then at the suitcase he had stuffed with some of Bina's clothes.

"Even if her body washes ashore," Izzy said, "she'll be eaten by crabs and fish. Maybe we'll get lucky with a shark."

Grant then finished his drink. Izzy fixed him another.

"Remember last year, Mark Martone killed his father? He was what, sixteen? His brother and sister were glad he did it he was always beating the shit out of them. They told the press he had done them a favor. Know where he's at now? Living in Haverhill, Massachusetts with his family."

"I miss living."

Every day when Grant woke up, he said to himself, 'Rest in peace. Now, get up and go to war.'

"How's Tamar doing with this?"

"She doesn't know."

"You said she did."

They had had many talks, but the one that lingered in Grant's head was from the first time he and Tamar drove home from work: Grant, able to close his concession booth before Tamar, drove his rusted Mustang. They sat in traffic along the shoreline where Rocky Point was built. The tide smacked the sea wall. It took them over an hour to get home that night, and they talked about Bina until they joined the traffic on Warwick Avenue around midnight with the moon darting in and out of the clouds. Tamar told Grant things he would later pretend to be okay with when he saw Bina.

"That's a lot to go through," Grant said, and put his hand on Tamar's knee.

"Beats living on the streets."

"What about your dad?"

"Don't know."

"You don't know who he is?"

"No, I don't know where he is. He split when I was born."

"I don't know how you do it."

"Like I said, beats living on the streets."

"If she threw a fork at me and it stuck in my knee," Grant paused, and then said, "You ever think of killing her?"

Grant realized that from the first night, fearful this kind of living would get him and his fourteen-year-old girlfriend killed until now, sitting in his car with Izzy parked outside the Inn, waiting for the bar to close, that he not so much lived his life as went through the motions, his body bumping and banging into random objects like a pinball. He was always fearful: when he was a baby his mother would try to stand him up on the grass barefooted, but the only way he would stay without crying was for her to put shoes or socks on his feet first. By the time he entered junior high, he was using twenty-four bars of soap a week, washing his hands and body to the point of bleeding, frightened he would contract and die from a misdiagnosed disease the way his father had: Lyme disease. Grant would watch Lady roll

around in the grass and dirt and appear relaxed and happy, but in his mind he was terrified she would pick something up, give it to him, and he would die an agonizing death. Those were the days when he prayed and believed what the priests at school had taught him: *He was coming with clouds*, God, all merciful Father. Then after years of pretending he was dead, he made it out alive. He had survived his father's death, his childhood, and only had to worry about graduating from high school with honors to get a scholarship to the college of his choice, and then his mother moved her girlfriend and Tamar into his house, and all the fear he had overcome, and all the grief he had gone through came rushing back toward him, like an army of a thousand soldiers. He had to listen to people he used to call friends call him a fag and he had to watch his pretty brown-eyed sweetheart endure violent beatings, since his mother, too, was afraid to do anything to stop Bina. He made sure to be home at the same time as Tamar, because he was relieved when he was there to protect her from her mother; that relief was his only recognition of his fear. He went through each day this way, and when he was able to forget and actually enjoy living, the scars Bina had left on Tamar's body betrayed him. Beneath his fear, he thought about killing Bina, especially on those nights when Tamar snuck into his bed, held him close, and cried, her hand clenching his so tight that her fingernails bit into his palm.

The way his own fingernails were now biting his hand as he clenched the .357. Through the windshield, Grant looked around the parking lot, one hour away from midnight, and watched the last of the drinkers leaving the Inn, talking, going to their cars. The air was misty and damp and Grant could smell the lingering stale smoke. He got out of the car, walked around to the back, and waited near the dumpster for Bina to throw out the trash; the lot now empty, Grant pulled out the gun when he heard her walking alone, giving up the hope he had held onto all day of Bina coming out with coworkers and him having to abort the mission.

"Grant," Bina said. She looked at him, then at the gun, then back at him.

Izzy, watching the parking lot and the road, got out of the car and aimed the hunting rifle over the hood at Bina's plaid flannel shirt twenty feet away.

"Don't talk. Walk," he said.

Bina turned around and Grant followed behind, jabbing the gun into her lower back. He opened the back door, said, "It's cocked, get in," then slid in beside her and closed the door.

They drove across the lot onto Warwick Ave. The street was bustling with traffic and pedestrians, as they had expected when they planned this. Not telling Tamar was also part of the plan, though Grant believed she knew. He wasn't aware that Tamar was watching him when he took the gun from under the bed and put it in the book bag, or when he took clothes from Bina's closet, stuffed them inside a suitcase, and walked out of the house with it. But when he brought Lady back home right before he

left for work and kissed Tamar goodbye, all Tamar did was stare at him, which made him believe she could see the gun in his eyes as well as what he was going to do. Izzy didn't have a curfew, but made his father his usual whiskey on the rocks with a splash of lime juice, then crushed a sleeping pill and stirred it in. He left the TV on in the game room and two half-filled glasses of rum and coke on the table just to make sure.

"What're you gonna tell your mother?" Bina's voice was nervous but not begging.

Grant pressed the muzzle against her temple, and said, "Don't talk," then let off, feeling his hand trembling.

Bina did as she was told. They drove past the Newport Creamery that was still serving ice cream to a crowd of people through the window and when they turned onto Sandy Lane and entered Conimicut, they passed an Iggy's Chowder House and Del's Lemonade that faced each other and also had lines of people waiting at the windows. Grant couldn't see the ocean yet, but he could smell the salt, which evoked memories of him and Tamar at Rocky Point: him holding tight to her arm as they went through the House of Horrors, listening and singing along to Bon Jovi's "Livin' on a Prayer" while riding the Musical Express, sitting on the dock of the Bay eating clam chowder—his red, hers white—and seagulls flying overhead. He had plans to marry Tamar one day and have children together, but feared she would end up in a grave if Bina didn't get there first. He envisioned the harried yet quietly pleasurable days of their future: Tamar walking into the living room with a plate of cookies she and the children had baked, the children telling daddy to try one, Tamar smiling at him, the children laughing—then Bina storming through their front door, beating Tamar in front of the children, an immutable memory the children would have of their mother.

Not too far ahead, carousels, roller coasters, and Ferris wheels illuminated the cloudy night sky while music, chatter, and laughter from the crowds drifted through the woods that preceded the park. They hit a snag of traffic when they crossed the entrance. Izzy weaved in between the cars, down the hill, to the shoreline, and then parked the car away from the parking lot, in front of the curling white of the waves as Grant told him. Boats were docked and bobbing in the water, which lapped against the rocks and slapped them hard before retreating into the Atlantic Ocean. The smell of the salt was intense now.

"Let's go," Izzy said, opening the door.

"I'll turn myself in," Bina blurted out, frantic and fearful. "I'll do twenty years, be fifty-five when I get out."

"Who's cock of the walk now, huh?"

"Now's not the time for this shit, Izzy."

"I'm serious," Izzy said, pushing Grant back, getting up in Bina's face.

"Who's cock of the walk now, huh, bitch?"

"Why do I think you wanna call me suttin else?" Bina punted. "You

wanna call me sittin else, Izzy or isn't he? You know that's what people call you, don't you? They think you're sweet on ol' Grant here. Hey, it's okay with me if you are. I mean, live and let love."

Izzy charged at Bina and then grabbed her by the throat.

"Knock this shit off right now," Grant said, grabbing Izzy's shoulder.

"You get that hand off of me or we're gonna have one more missing person out here."

"Whoa, the fuck's your problem?"

"I'm trying to stay alive."

"You're trying to get us caught!"

"Why don't you act like you got a pair?"

"Man, screw you."

"You doing this or do I gotta?"

"You know what I just realized? When people get really scared, it's just like when they get drunk. The real person comes out."

"I'm startin to think you like being calling a pussy, and that you couldn't give a shit if Tamar lives or dies. Now, Grant. Let's go. Now. Do it. Now, Grant..."

Grant stood there staring at Izzy still holding Bina by the throat. Fear was shrinking his brain as Izzy's browbeating, the din and the gaiety, the music and the crashing waves, the smell of the salt and spring air, the fear and the relief, the guilt and the grief, what was real and what was not all swirled together in amplified chaos until he heard the gun go off.

The explosion of the shot isolated him in a nimbus of light that flashed back every horrible and fearful moment he ever had in his life, as he stood still in the dirt looking down at the blood flowing from the bullet wound in Bina's chest, the gun now at his feet. Grant dropped to the ground with it. He watched her squirming on her back, losing consciousness and peering up at him while a car drove along the roadway that paralleled the shore, until it was gone and her eyes stilled. He heard the trunk of the car open, grunting, and rocks moving. He turned and saw Izzy bent down picking up large flat rocks that had crumbled from the tall, jagged ledge. Grant grabbed the suitcase from the trunk and put the gun and the rocks inside of it. Then they each grabbed an arm and leg and lifted Bina onto the dolly that was also in the trunk, but Grant could do no more than that. His body was going limp with his spirit. The former Hendricken linebacker picked up his good buddy, put him inside the car, and grabbed the rope and tarp from the trunk. Grant watched Izzy wrap the now dead body with the rocks, tie rope around it, and pull it on the dolly down to the end of the dock, dumping it into the sea. Izzy then took off his shoes and t-shirt, picked up the suitcase, and jumped into the water.

This wasn't happening, Grant thought. This wasn't happening to him anyway. He had to be rehashing a movie he had seen, or something on the nightly news, because this didn't exist in his world. He had grown up in Warwick, a town he planned to raise children in, but those streets had

become embarrassing for him to walk, if only in his mind. He had heard his share of well-meaning but offensive comments from some otherwise really nice men and women. People are people, he thought. The more afraid they get, the more stupid they get. He wondered now if holding Bina at gunpoint and forcing her to leave town would have been enough, then thought about her taking up residence at some other home, abusing the kids, and walking the streets there.

Izzy was dripping wet when he got back to the car.

"No one's gonna find her," he said, while drying off with his t-shirt.

Grant dazed out the window at the water.

"Grant?"

Grant did not move.

"Grant, say somethin." Then Izzy pulled him through the open window and said, "Come on, Grant, I need you to hold it together."

Grant nodded his head.

"Look at me, Grant."

With a blank stare, Grant looked at him, and said, "I'm so scared, Izzy."

"I'm scared, too, all right."

Neither of them spoke again. Izzy drove to Grant's house, then Izzy walked home looking for any signs of life from the houses he passed. It was almost two in the morning; the air was still sticky. Grant opened the back door expecting Bina's lingering smoke to hit him in the face, but the kitchen windows were open. He kept walking through the dark house toward his bedroom. When he got to the top of the stairs, he heard Tamar snoring. He walked into his bedroom, turned the light on, propped himself up against the headboard, pulled the Bible out of the book bag, and started to read from Revelation, but all he could do was stare at the pages so he closed his eyes and laid there with Lady sleeping by his side.

"Grant?" Tamar whispered, bent over him. Tamar's stirring caused Lady to awaken, and jump down off the bed. "Are you all right?"

Grant pulled back the blankets and opened his arm for his half black, half white statuesque beauty to lie in.

"Are you all right?" she repeated, afraid to ask him anything more.

Grant shuddered with a sob. Lady started running up and down the stairs and in and out of his room. Tamar booked it into her room when Debora yelled for Grant to get up and to take Lady out, but he ignored her until she was standing in his doorway. As he opened his eyes, he saw Bina, her face, alive. He saw rain falling on the Atlantic, then snow: freezing and thawing and freezing.

"I wonder where Bina is," Debora said.

Grant lay there, staring at his mother, wondering whose side she would have been on when the gun was loaded.

Slug Love

Martha Clarkson

The morning after Karl left, Jane found the slugs copulating, a health-class word that appeared from nowhere in her brain. The outdoor chill goose-bumped her arms. Jane stood on the small back deck because she was taking up smoking again. The only pleasure from last night's surprise exit by Karl was a trip to 7-11 to buy a pack of Winstons, her old brand. But then she just about had to be picked up off the store's dirty linoleum floor when she saw the new cost of a pack.

Jane held her unruly dirt-brown hair back and bent over the plastic Target garden pot to look closer at the brown blobs on the edge, stuck together like breakfast sausages in shrink wrap. Two pair of antennae at one end.

Slugs were her nemesis, undaunted by the ring of Deadline she carefully applied each spring. The slugs ate her basil and pansy leaves and left shiny zig-zag trails across the imitation wood deck planks. As a girl at summer camp, Jane walked the trails with her one friend Luta, watching for the huge banana slugs, their rotten-peel coloring disguising them into the leaves and needles of the forest floor. Luta would find a whip of a stick on the path side and beat the slug until the guts spilled white and creamy, as if it had committed a crime by assaulting their aesthetic ideal of the animal kingdom. Jane had watched with glee from the sideline.

Even more mysterious than Karl's packed but hidden bags (that weren't revealed until the car was warmed up) was their love-making yesterday morning, twelve hours before his announcement. They had not had sex in seven months and though she'd regarded the new energized Karl's attempts rather quaintly, as a fondness for times past rather than a minute of screaming erotica, she now wondered if any last little eggs were deviously still alive and waiting in her four-decade uterus. Wouldn't that just be the way, after all the trying, she ended up a single mom?

Karl had no patience for slugs, because they ate the lettuce he liked to grow, in his own, more expensive pots, labeled with "Ks" in leftover blue house paint. The slugs ate all but the muscatel, which they must've found

too spicy, as did she when he tried to slip some into a salad. He set his alarm each spring morning to rise just before dawn and, flashlight in hand, kitchen scissors in pocket, Napa Auto Parts hat on balding head, trolled the crooked line of pots and snipped the offender slugs in half. Each half oozed its own innards and dried dark purple like old clots, around the skirts of lettuce.

Jane looked beside the pot and saw another pair, engaged in the same activity, on the deck itself. An orgy in her own backyard! She stepped closer to watch and blew smoke on the deck pair, as if that would make a difference. It did not but the blowing gave her a sense of power. A which-way clump of green stakes leaned against the wall from years-ago attempted tomato growing. She grabbed one of the slim poles and poked the two slugs on the deck, gently out of fear, not compassion, as if they might rear up and attack at the uncivilized interruption. Jane's Winston was down to an inch of tobacco, before the filter butt, the place she'd always stopped smoking. A high school smart-aleck had schooled her that would stop the cancer, that all the danger was in the last inch. She thought of using the cherry to burn the slugs to death, like Karl had snipped them and Luta whipped them, but she didn't want to be that close. Slime trails along the gravel sparkled in the new sunlight.

Karl had said she was too bossy, that she didn't pay attention to him, that she spent all her time reorganizing utensil drawers and not enough time cooking him spätzle and brisket, his favorite. "Do...do you even know what's my favorite anymore?" he said, after announcing he was leaving her. She wasn't sure if he meant food or not. Then he'd gone into the huge walk-in closet she'd insisted on building and, with much grunting, unearthed his two packed bags from behind the steamer trunk full of photos and the card table they had nowhere else to keep. This had shocked her, seeing the luggage, one bag of which had been her mother's hard-sided snowbird suitcase each winter. She opened her mouth to demand it back but the sudden realization of his earlier words combined with the Samsonite evidence quieted her. Was she supposed to beg him to stay? She wanted to, but clearly it was too late. He hadn't allowed a compromise period, or time for negotiating and pleading and trying to work things out. All her other friends were in counseling, trying to save their decades-plus marriages that were all but dead after the kids went to college. What could she say now, after a measly seven childless years? I'll cook a brisket nightly?

Jane's careful poking pried apart the deck slugs. She saw the penis of one, a tiny white nub. Jane had read once that slugs were hermaphrodites, each with a penis and vagina, and could do a number of variations to reproduce, which made them even more despicable in her mind. How did such a dull creature get so many options? She wondered if these two were done, or would reconvene if she left the stick out of it. Where would they lay eggs? Where did they sleep during the day? Certainly it could not be far – it

would take them all day just to get to the back corner of the yard.

Jane lit another cigarette and blew on the penis, expecting it to disappear to the brown cavern it came from. Instead, the other slug put its head to the penis and bit it off. The lover did not move and Jane wondered if she/he was alive, or just in post-coital trance, something she never achieved, always hopping up out of bed after to busy herself with some closet or shelf cleaning.

The penis-eater slithered in his/her slow way in another direction and Jane stood because her knees hurt from bending down. She wondered what a penis tasted like and if the slug was enjoying it or it was an act of violence. She had refused to put her mouth on Karl's penis. Those cocky high school brethren had told her it was not a woman's obligation way back when.

Jane looked at the pair on the planter rim, now separated and sliding down into the pot of basil. "Dammit!" she shouted with a mouthful of smoke, coughed and gagged, and jammed the tomato pole into the middle of the fattest slug, through to the white speckled potting soil. Bringing the pole out, the punctured slug on it, she rammed it through the second slug and pulled the stick out again. She wished the grill was hot so she could fry their brown bodies for good measure, but when she looked around she saw the Hibachi was gone. The rectangular shape of the low grill showed on the deck like a ghost. Karl must've made off with more than she knew.

Would You Like to See Dubai?

Marlene Olin

They filed in one-by-one, brushing their fingers to their lips then tapping the mezuzah on the door frame. Zippy welcomed the last of her guests then took a deep breath. Her decision was final. The nine women she had invited to her home were now under one roof, making the circle complete.

It had taken Zippy a month to sculpt the Golem. Six feet tall, he posed lifelessly in her basement greeting her each morning with his solemn smile. Naked, he stood with his hands at his side like a child waiting to be dressed. She flicked on a single bulb and led the procession down the steep steps. A chorus of *oohs* and *ahs* punctured the air. The brown modeling clay made him look tanned in the dim light. "Is he black?" more than one woman asked. "Can you make me one?" asked another.

The oldest woman grabbed her hand. Malka was swathed in sweaters. Her thick eyeglasses made her seem owl-like but in truth she was nearly blind.

"Zipporah can make a whole army," said Malka. She turned to her left and spit three times. "A whole terracotta army like the Chinese."

Like the other women, Malka was blessed with a gift. An entire world lived inside her head--an endless montage of pictures and sounds that sometimes predicted the future. On September 10th, 2001, the image of a burning skyscraper leaped onto her computer screen. She stared helplessly, her arms at her side, her chin vibrating with fear. Sometimes the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fit. Sometimes they didn't.

The old woman paused before she spoke. "And like the Chinese she'll be buried with them."

Zippy sighed and gazed at her handiwork. From top to bottom the man of clay was perfection. She looked outside her window each day and watched happy families, couples holding hands. Why couldn't she be one of them? She glanced at her friends. The nine women in her basement were a study in chiaroscuro. Good. Bad. Fat. Thin. A draft chilled the room. The light bulb swung. Nothing was simple.

"Is loneliness such a virtue?" she asked.

Swooping her arms, Malka shooed the women away from the sculpture. Then she took a piece of chalk from her pocket and drew the hexagram on the floor. The women wore hand-shaped amulets round their necks. They fingered them as she drew, mumbling the ancient prayers. When Malka was through, she dug the first gift from yet another pocket and laid it at the Golem's feet. "A picture of Paul Newman. So that he's handsome."

Naomi's website featured cures for broken hearts and broken homes. A cornucopia of herbs tumbled out of her tote. "The root of a mandrake for virility. Ginseng for strength. Yohimbe for stamina."

Next Tamar stepped out of the darkness and carefully placed a pile of magazines at the statue's base. *Car and Driver*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Better Home Improvements*. A dowser by trade, Tamar could find water in the most barren of landscapes. Her hair was cropped short, her make-up non-existent. "So that he's handy. He should know how to fix things."

The red-headed twins had saved their gifts for last. One leaned forward and tossed in a tattered book. "It's *A Woman's Guide to Sexual Fulfillment*. May he be competent."

"And kind."

"And sensitive."

Just when the mountain of offerings threatened to topple over, the second twin placed her gift. "A copy of *The Wall Street Journal*," she pronounced. She lifted her head and cocked her chin. "I like to fuck success."

They stood back, joined hands and began chanting.

"For Lillith, make it be."

"For the eighty in Ashkelon, make it be."

"For the mistress of Endor, make it be."

They swayed and chanted until sweat soaked their clothes, wrapping elbows when they their knees buckled, collapsing on the floor when their arms gave way.

"For Miriam, make it be."

"For Deborah, make it be."

The light of a full moon pierced a small window near the ceiling. Yellow shadows lit their faces and lapped the walls. Like women in their clan for centuries, they each menstruated in sync. The air was tinged with musk. The scent of wild animals choked their throats. Chanting louder and louder, their powers at their peak, they felt a wetness between their thighs and knew the stuff of life.

By the next morning, the basement was bare. Zippy itched all over like her skin was too small. She beat the rugs and swept the floors, dusted the shelves and washed the sheets. Time seemed frozen. When she looked out her window, snowflakes lingered and the wind stood still.

I failed, she thought. It's not meant to be. A weak potion, even indifference, could make for a wayward spell. Then a week later he

knocked on her door.

"Something need fixing?"

His hair was blond and his eyes blue. A flannel shirt, a North Face jacket, brand new boots, and a crooked grin.

"And you must be...?"

He blinked his eyes and looked right through her.

"Let's call you Adam."

When she ushered him into the living room, he slowly followed. Each leg was lifted deliberately as if a puppeteer yanked a string. She pointed to the couch but he just stared.

"Why don't you have a seat?" suggested Zippy.

He smiled and ran his hand over the cushions like he was appraising the workmanship.

"It's sure a beauty."

"I mean why don't you sit down." Exaggerating her movements like a mime, Zippy placed her backside on the armchair across from him. Then she lifted her index finger and motioned downwards. "Adam, sit."

For the next ten minutes, they both said nothing. Zippy listened to her wall clock tick.

"Are you hungry? Thirsty? I have cereal and milk."

Again the blank face.

"I bet you're handy with a hammer."

Finally his eyes lit up. "Say goodbye to garage clutter and triple your closet space," he blurted. "All you need are the right plans and the right guy."

When she showed him her tool chest, the one with the Sears receipt still taped to the lid, he smiled ear-to-ear. By the end of the day, he tuned up her car and fixed the leak in the kitchen sink. After dinner they showered together, slowly made love, and nestled under the blankets.

That first night Zippy felt full and satisfied, like she had eaten a seven-course meal without consuming a single calorie. There was no emotional entanglement. No fear of communicable disease. Rolling onto her back, she stared at the ceiling and let the radiator lull her to sleep.

Like most couples they developed a routine. For a while Adam was content toddling around the house with his Leatherman wrench/plier/crimper/screwdriver/wire stripper/bottle opener all-in-one "*Leaves Nothing Undone!*" carpentry tool. He tightened screws and adjusted wobbly legs. But when he ran out of simple home repairs, he paced the house nervously, ricocheting off furniture and mumbling to himself. Within weeks, he was punching through plaster and knocking down walls. And while he hammered and nailed and grouted, Zippy hid in the attic and painted.

Almost every day a client knocked at her door. They'd fan snapshots on her desk or email photographs to her phone and say: *Day after day I wake up to a nightmare, a nightmare I'd like to erase.* A cheating husband or a senile mother or a juvenile delinquent was always in the

wings. *This is what my reality is*, they'd tell her. And they'd beg her to change it.

And sometimes, only sometimes, Zippy could draw a picture perfect versions of their lives. A loving spouse, a healthy parent, an accomplished child. And sometimes, only sometimes, the air-brushed images on her canvas would come true.

One by one each member of the circle also visited. Like most friends, they hoped and didn't hope for Zippy's happiness.

"He's so handsome!" said Naomi.

"I know," said Zippy. "He's prettier than me."

The minute the twins took off their coats, the claws unfurled. They fished for intimate details. "Why you're positively glowing!" they purred.

Zippy hadn't slept in days. When she looked in the mirror, she saw her mother. "Would you like some coffee?" she replied.

"Your complexion! Your hair! You're ten years younger!"

Zippy flashed her teeth and smiled. Too much of a good thing would drive them crazy. Too little would made them preen.

Tamar ran her fingers across the new dining room table. Adam had applied at least a dozen coats of oil to make the walnut gleam. When she finished checking the top, Tamar crawled on the floor and checked the underside.

"He's an artist," said Tamar. "Look at this workmanship."

"He cries at Hallmark commercials," said Zippy. "Sends all my spare cash to those harelipped kids you see on TV."

Malka was the only one she could confide in. Zippy walked the elderly woman from room to room of her home, pointing out the new fixtures, flooring, and state of the art LED lighting. She set out a lunch fit for a dozen people. Tucked in a chair, Zippy finally confessed.

"Each night we make love for eight and a half minutes. It's eight and half of the longest minutes of my life."

The older woman inched her eyeglasses up from the tip of her nose.

"I know every move he makes," said Zippy. "I hear every grunt before it even happens."

Malka sat up a little straighter and patted the napkin on her lap.

"And afterwards..." Zippy's voice rose. She scanned the room to make sure they were alone. "And afterwards, he cries like a baby!"

Malka clapped the crumbs off her hands. "Send Adam out into the world, Zipporah. Other women have neglected pipes, too."

Word skipped through the neighborhood about the good-looking handyman. And each night, Zippy helped him with the bookkeeping, totaling his cash receipts and subtracting his expenses. Soon he hired two helpers. Over capon and Chablis, an architect offered him a job.

Another full moon and another circle. This time they met at the twins' house. Daffodils and tulips were pushing through the topsoil. Soon it would be spring.

"Would you like to see the renovations? You must see the renovations!" Everyone admired the twins' new kitchen with its top-of-the-line appliances and glossy cabinets. They nibbled on cucumber sandwiches while the twins poured tea.

"So Zippy, how's Mr. Eight-and-a-half minutes?" asked the one in gray.

When they giggled in unison, Zippy felt her stomach cramp. The walls began to undulate like waves.

"We could never keep enough Kleenex," said the other. "My God, the sobbing, the histrionics!"

"We call him Mr. Hanky Panky!" they both shrieked.

That night, Zippy came home and found Adam watching TV. He was hooked on British mini-series, the ones where people living upstairs are not supposed to mingle with people living downstairs but one or two of them inevitably fall in love and are disowned. A bowl of popcorn was sitting in his lap. Zippy plopped beside him.

"Did that guy make it back from the German lines?" asked Zippy. "You know. The one who got blind from the mustard gas."

"It's a tragedy," said Adam.

"And the girl. The one who's pregnant with the gardener's child?" asked Zippy.

"She's living on the streets." He pulled a tissue from his jeans pocket and dabbed his cheeks. "The grandfather, the one with all the money, thinks he's so clever. The way he controls everyone's lives, pulling all the strings. As if everyone don't already know whose place is whose."

They sat together and watched in silence. Zippy put her head on Adam's shoulder while he held her hand. But when the show was over, instead of following Zippy to the bedroom, Adam headed to the basement.

"If you don't mind, I think I'm gonna do a little work tonight," he told her.

"A new project?" asked Zippy.

"You can call it that."

For hours the walls vibrated with the whirr of the buzz saw and the thwack of the hammer. He never came to sleep that night nor the following nor the one following that. Zippy never realized how full her life had become until it was emptied. She inched over to Adam's side of the bed. His weight had created a slight depression, a downward slope in the mattress. When she shifted from hip to hip, it enfolded her like a hug. She rolled and pressed her face against his pillow. It smelled like apples. Like perfectly ripe apples.

He began acting differently, too. Instead of walking stiffly with his arms straight by his sides, he developed a certain confidence and swagger. He scanned the business section of the newspaper and called his stockbroker "Ken." Then one evening he was late for dinner. He barreled his way through the front door lugging shopping bags behind him.

"I was worried," said Zippy. "It's seven o'clock. We always eat at six thirty."

"I went to the mall," he told Zippy. "With the architect's wife."

His hair was styled and slicked. His slacks were perfectly creased. "I have to dress for success," he told her. "You are what you wear."

Zippy had spent all afternoon cooking Adam's favorite meal. Brisket braised with celery and carrots, mashed potatoes. She poured two glasses of wine and steered him toward the table. Images from black-and-white TV sitcoms raced through her mind. Laying down their briefcases, the husbands would slip off their laced shoes and zippered sweaters. *Honey, I'm home!* The lipsticked housewives, their hair teased and shellacked, would wait a few moments to answer. *How was work today, sweetheart?*

"How was work today?" she asked.

"Fine, fine," he answered.

She watched him eat. Bite, swallow, sip, sip. Bite, swallow, sip, sip.

The architect was urging him to get his general contractor's license, said Adam. He has projects all over the world. With your talent you could go anywhere, he told Adam. Would you like to see Dubai?

Zippy gazed out the window. The sun was setting. Mothers were calling for their children. *Dinner's ready!* Fathers, she imagined, were walking home from the train station. *Did you have a nice day, darling? Can I offer you a drink?*

Then she turned toward Adam. For the first time she noticed tired circles under his eyes. Good lord, thought Zippy, what have I done? I rain sorrow wherever I go. I'm a veritable storm cloud of misery.

"So I told him *no*," continued Adam. "I'll make my happiness at home, thank you very much."

Then he took Zippy's hand and led her down the basement steps. Standing in the center of the dank room was a metal sculpture. Bits and pieces of old cars and rusty tools were welded and nailed together. Two legs, two arms, an hourglass figure. There was no doubt it was a woman.

"She kind of looks like a can opener, doesn't she?" said Adam. His foot paped the ground while he cleared his throat.

"I like the coffee cans for breasts," she said. "It's a nice touch." She regretted the words as soon as they spurted out. Why should she feel betrayed? Adam was a part of her. He was all her emotions refined and distilled, the truth unvarnished.

His eyes welled up. "Is loneliness such a virtue?"

The next day when he left for work she took pictures of the metal sculpture and carried them to the attic. Then on a life-sized canvas she proceeded to paint. The trick was channeling the essence of her subject. To keep what made it unique but tweak the flaws. Meanwhile she chanted.

A stroke of yellow for beauty. A slash of blue for wit. Red for lust, green for life, purple for strength. Back and forth her brush dipped into her palette until every color of the rainbow was splashed across the canvas. She'll knock at our door, thought Zippy. Holding flowers in one hand and a basket of muffins in the other. She'll smell like lavender and glimmer

like Giverney. She'll laugh at his jokes and cry with his pain. Praying and painting, Zippy labored through the night until her work was complete.

General Li Hua Lin

Darren Dillman

Before he became the General, Li Hua Lin was wasting away in Changsha Hospital Number Three. He had contracted a new strain of bird flu, H7N7, and everyone, including Mr. Li's own grandson, An Shen, who I worked with at a cell phone factory, knew he was going to die. Mr. Li lay in a coma, a skeleton hooked up to a breathing tube, just short of being declared brain-dead, when he began to regain consciousness.

He left the hospital in five days, and a week later he was standing on the steps of Changsha City Square, wearing a beige uniform of a People's Liberation Army general, singing "My Chinese Heart." The sky was hazy and thick smoke billowed from the Baisha cigarette factory five miles away. Mr. Li's prune-shaped head was round in the back, flat in front. He gestured diagonally toward the sky with his right hand, and we listened as his voice, a beautiful high tenor, climbed an octave during the chorus. Some people cheered, probably because Mr. Li had been holding death's hand a week earlier, while the rest of us looked on out of curiosity. Although Mr. Li had served four years as a PLA infantryman, he had never been a general.

When he finished singing, he began speaking in a loud voice, the kind used by China's old leaders as well as foreign clergy. First, he praised Mao Zedong for his "impeccable vision." Then, in a patient, methodical voice, he began berating the current generation of Chinese citizens for forgetting their nation's roots.

"Where are the posters of Mao?" he asked. "Where are the songs of red and the red women of cheer? Doesn't anyone love this country?"

There was a pause. Everyone looked around. Toddlers giggled and pointed at Mr. Li, perhaps thinking he was role-playing a character such as Ronald McDonald. Finally, people began snapping photos with their iPhones, and Mr. Li started singing again.

The next day, I saw An Shen at work. We worked on the assembly line for Smart Corp, a Taiwan-based company that manufactured electronics

for Apple, Sony, and Samsung. An Shen was tall, handsome, a little stocky, and a few years older than I was. We stood next to each other on the line, everyone decked in the same heavy blue uniforms, the same goggles, soldering chips onto iPhone motherboards. Smoke hissed from the silicon as the soldering guns, attached to coiled cords above, burned the chips into place.

"Your grandpa was a one-man show yesterday," I said. "He looked like a new man."

"You should try living with him," An Shen said. "Don't get me started, Peiyuan," The old man, widowed for five years, lived with An Shen's parents, and An Shen and his wife Bingbing were staying there until they could find an apartment of their own.

"A general?" I asked.

An Shen chuckled. "He *was* in the Army. A grunt. My dad doesn't think he even made sergeant." He paused, then shook his head. "The thing is, he hated Mao."

Chip after chip rotated along the conveyor belt. It took just seconds to solder each. Chip, chip, chip. Solder, solder, solder. We were as fast as gunslingers, we could solder in our sleep.

"Aren't you glad he's doing better?" I asked.

"I don't know if it's a blessing or a curse," An Shen said. "Bingbing says he's a zombie. She wants to buy a gun on the black market and shoot him in the head."

I knew Bingbing from high school, where she had been a bubbly girl, good looking and popular, always wearing bright green or pink Hello Kitty berets in her long silky hair. I couldn't imagine her putting up with the General. What was worse, she was four months pregnant.

"I've gotta keep my eye on her," An Shen said, "because I think she might try it. He bought her a cheap red dress and told her to put it on and dance."

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She chopped it up with a meat cleaver," he said.

During our break I bought a Coke at the Family Mart beside the factory entrance and sat down on a patch of grass. An Shen stood beside the Family Mart entrance, smoking a cigarette. Some of the men were already beginning to stink; many were afflicted with body odor while the chain smokers reeked like ash trays. A handful were sprawled supine on the grass, their eyes closed.

I opened the can of Coke and took a drink. The carbonation tickled my throat and went down like a small piece of heaven. I closed my eyes. When I opened them I saw Yan, a young woman who worked on the line, sitting on the step near the factory entrance, drinking a small carton of green tea from a straw. She was strong, though slender, and attractive, with large eyes and fleshy cheeks, her hair tied into a ponytail. She kept to herself.

An Shen appeared beside me. The smoke from his Zhongnanhai cigarette was blowing into my face, but he didn't care.

"You like her?" he asked.

"She's okay," I said.

"Go talk to her," he said.

I was exhausted and felt unable to stand at that moment, but I wanted to escape the punishing draft of An Shen's smoke, so I got to my feet and moseyed toward Yan. Her black eyes peered into me as I approached. Was she dreading a conversation with me? I couldn't tell. Just when I reached her, the break bell rang, and it was time to start the next shift. I managed to smile, but Yan remained straight-faced, and we followed the others inside, like some ghastly herd of goats.

The next weekend, on Sunday, the elder Mr. Li was at it again, wearing his PLA uniform at the Changsha Square, criticizing the "evils" of modern society. His hair was darker now, from blackening shampoo, and he appeared even fuller of vigor and rejuvenation, as though an angel or demon had possessed him.

"The West has invaded you so quietly!" he said, standing almost completely upright. "You're the easiest lay in Asia. Even easier than Vietnam! You bend over and hike up your skirts for Apple, KFC, and Buick. If you continue in this direction, we won't have any Chinese culture left. We will assume a new identity: Ameri-China!"

I saw An Shen and Bingbing standing by the chicken gristle vendor. An Shen looked calm enough, but Bingbing, concealing a baby bump beneath a thick pink sweater, wore a concerned expression that exposed her dimples. She was saying something to An Shen, telling him, perhaps, to take his grandfather home.

The Square's eight police officers stood together in their dark blue coats complete with insignia. Theft and corruption were rampant in the city, and I wondered if the officers' insignia were any more genuine than the General's four stars. They wore steely grins, chuckling at the old man's antics.

The crowd was larger than the weekend before. I caught a whiff of stinky tofu, followed by the pervasive draft of cigarette smoke. The ground was littered with plastic bottles, paper trash and cigarette butts. Ten meters from where I stood, a toddler was squatting beside a tree, his pants pulled to his ankles, while his mother watched.

"Our young women are bleaching their skin white," the General said. I knew this was true; Chinese women loathed dark skin. "Would you rather be white? Would you rather be American? If yes, then get the hell out of my country!"

Many in the crowd erupted into applause. A few policemen were guffawing. The remainder, including myself, were awestruck and speechless.

Mr. Liu then turned his attention to Mao and the forefathers, praising them for their “vision.”

“The hell you say!” an old man shouted from the crowd. He had a broad forehead, pensive eyes, and his last remaining gray hair was combed neatly across his scalp. Mr. Li paused, shocked by the interruption. “Mao was a nut! He’s in hell sweeping up his lieutenants’ shit.”

Mr. Li’s head began shaking. He was boiling with rage. A brief verbal skirmish ensued.

“You don’t know anything!” Mr. Li said.

“I know more than you!” the man said.

“Traitor!” Mr. Li said.

“Idiot!” the other man said.

“Western spy!” Mr. Li said.

“Senile billy goat!”

“Go to hell!”

“You go to hell!” the man said.

A man and woman, likely the old man’s kin, led him away.

Shortly after, Mr. Li began singing the songs of red, as he had the previous week, and I left during the chorus of “Power to the Peasants.”

Every day at 1 p.m., you could find Mr. Li performing in the Square. He had become a local celebrity; everyone was calling him the General. All of Hunan Province had heard of him, and word of his antics was spreading to Sichuan and Guanxi. Parents made their children pose with him for pictures, and vendors were selling flashy t-shirts with the General’s photo and quotes—without his permission. In addition, a reporter from the Changsha TV station broadcast from the Square during his oration.

At work we were visited by Mr. Wu, the inspector from the parent office in Taiwan. In his forties, Mr. Wu looked like a budding politician, with short styled hair, designer-framed glasses, and a long-sleeve shirt and tie.

Although he entered our section smiling as usual, we knew what he thought of mainland Chinese. We were lazy and didn’t want to work, and our standards were poor. He had told us as much, usually after spotting defective workmanship. Nevermind the fact that many of us—especially single young women like Yan—often found ourselves working fifty or sixty hours per week, a violation of national labor law, which no one followed anyway.

Mr. Wu knew the details of every job in the factory. He stood behind An Shen, watching with snake eyes as An Shen soldered the chip set onto the frame. Then I felt him standing behind me. I tried to relax, to no avail. The soldering gun felt red-hot in my hand. A bead of sweat slid down the side of my nose, and my neck tensed, hardening into a brick.

“Not bad,” Mr. Wu said.

And like an exorcism of some kind, I felt his presence abscond.

We continued working. Ten minutes later, we heard a commotion. There was shouting. But because the phones were streaming along the conveyor belt, we couldn't leave our positions to find out what was happening.

During our break we learned that Mr. Wu had been shouting at Yan for shoddy work, and she had run out of the factory, crying.

As I drank my Coke and bore the brunt of An Shen's cigarette smoke, I felt like punching Mr. Wu. Not only that, I wanted to knock him to the ground and kick him a few times.

Yan didn't return to work. The next day, her roommates said she had left most of her things in the employee dorm, which made us wonder if she had committed suicide, perhaps by jumping off the Xiang River bridge. After all, a dozen young women at the factory had suffered the same fate, jumping from their dorm windows to the hard ground below. Safety nets had recently been placed along the dorms, so if someone chose to jump to her death, she needed to go elsewhere.

Two weeks passed. No one had seen Yan. I was worried about her. Wherever she was, I hoped she was not only alive, but doing well.

On Sunday the General's audience swelled to over a thousand people. He had to use a microphone now. Because of his popularity, the Square's tourist shops were thriving. The chicken gristle vendor could not produce the chicken gristle sticks fast enough, and thirty people stood in line for the pork loin kabob.

Choreographed by their parents, a group of little girls donning red dresses danced and spun around in front of the General as he sang "Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China." When the song ended, the Changsha TV station began broadcasting live.

"Today the bones of our beloved Chairman, Mao Zedong, are rattling in his tomb," the General said. "His vision has been shattered, his principles urinated upon. Look around you! What do you see? Trash in the Square, on our walkways and streets. Poisons in our water and food, and in the very air we are breathing. Poisons in the milk of our newborn. Poisons in the land of farmers upon which the People's Republic was founded! Who do you think is responsible for this?"

People gawked in amazement. I, myself, was bewildered. Had I mistaken the General's adoration of Mao for loyalty to the government, and thus, to the Chinese Communist Party?

"Mao believed the poor were the backbone of China," he said. "Without farmers, there is no food. If that food is poisoned, then we are poisoned. Not just in our bodies, but in our minds. Our very souls have been corrupted by a monster. The CCP is that monster!"

Many in the audience gasped. The police suddenly stopped laughing and now looked on with concern.

"Our government doesn't help the poor," the General said. "Instead, it steals from it. How can our leaders be one thousand times richer than American Presidents? Why do our military officers own twenty estates and yachts larger than our houses?"

The police moved to shut down the General's speech. They turned off the power to his microphone, which upset him. They ushered him off his platform, his complaints falling on deaf ears.

"Get your hands off me!" he said. "You can't treat me like this. I'm a general!"

The incident left An Shen and Bingbing in an uncomfortable situation. They rushed to Mr. Li's side.

"Stop it, Grandpa!" An Shen said. "Let's just go!"

The General finally relented, leaving the Square with An Shen and Bingbing, and business in the Square returned to usual.

The next Wednesday I ran into Yan. My shift had ended at the factory and I was looking for a place to eat in a small shopping complex near my parents' house.

I saw her working in a shop that sold Xiaomi cell phones. She was wearing a long-sleeve white shirt with a collar and black trousers. Her hair, no longer confined to a ponytail, fell naturally to her shoulders, and her makeup lent her an even more attractive appearance than when she'd worked in the factory. On the other hand, I'm sure I looked abhorrent, and probably smelled the same.

I smiled when I saw her, and she smiled back. I entered the store. She stood in front of a display of top model Xiaomi phones.

"Yan," I said.

"Peiyuan," she said.

I was surprised she remembered my name, since we'd never really talked, other than to say hello.

"Everyone was worried about you," I said. "Why did you leave so many of your things?"

"I couldn't stay there another minute," she said. "That place is haunted, at least for me."

"I'm sorry for bringing it up," I said, realizing her discomfort.

"It's okay," she said. "I took the important stuff. My laptop. My cell phone. My parents' letters."

Yan's shift was ending and her supervisor, a thirty-year-old woman in an identical uniform, asked her to clock out. Like me, she was hungry, and she said she knew a good small restaurant in the complex, so we continued our conversation in a booth over spicy Sichuan noodles.

"Do you like your job?" I asked. The heat from the red peppers was clearing my sinuses.

"It's okay," she said, slurping a thick noodle. "I'm trying to save a little money before going back to Shang Tan."

The revelation pricked me like a small knife. I didn't want her to leave Changsha, not until I'd had a chance to know her better. I asked if she had a boyfriend, and she said no. Toward the end of our meal, Yan pulled her cell phone--a deluxe Xiaomi with a bright green case--from her purse, and we exchanged phone numbers.

The next week we learned at work that we had been given a low inspection rating by Mr. Wu. Upon his recommendation, our general manager, Mr. Song, had been fired, and the new GM would be arriving in three days from Taiwan. What was worse, Mr. Wu would be inspecting us again--this time for two days. He was hoeing the weeds, he said.

When he entered the factory on the first day, he didn't smile. There were no greetings, no small talk. He immediately fired a young woman who some guys had nicknamed "Little Bull" because of her bulky figure. She didn't go quietly.

"Go to hell, you Taiwanese devil!" she said on her way out. We all had a company-issued towel, small and sky blue, for such use as wiping sweat from our brows, and Little Bull threw her soiled towel at Mr. Wu, hitting him in the face.

"Get out!" he said, slinging the towel to the floor.

"Why do you hate mainlanders so much?" she shouted. "Your ancestors were Chinese, you idiot! Just like us!"

Mr. Wu, now incensed, didn't stop. He fired another young woman the next instant, and ten minutes later I held my breath as he stood behind me. My chest tightened. My hand shook as I soldered a chip onto a phone. What sloppy work, I thought. Then a cacophonous burst of ridicule jolted me.

"What the hell are you doing!" Mr. Wu said.

I melted. The soldered tool slid from my hand and sprung up toward its coil.

"That's not how you solder!" Mr. Wu said.

"That's how I was trained!" An Shen said.

At first I was relieved that I wasn't the target of Mr. Wu's wrath. However, I knew An Shen possessed at least as much skill as I did--he had practically trained me--and I thought of Bingbing. With a baby on the way, they needed the job, which paid more than most in Changsha, more than I did.

I rolled up my own towel into a ball and pelted Mr. Wu with it in the side of the head. Mr. Wu looked stunned.

"Hey!" he said. "You trying to get fired?"

I swiped five unassembled iPhones off the conveyor belt toward Mr. Wu.

"If you can do better, then you assemble them!" I said.

The distraction worked. Mr. Wu followed me as I left the factory, telling me my career in high tech was finished and that I'd never earn more than ten yuan per hour again, removing the target from An Shen's forehead.

I discovered later that An Shen had been able to keep his job, and he thanked me when I ran into him and Bingbing at Walmart. Bingbing, whose

belly looked like a soccer ball, was especially grateful. I asked about the General, who had recently been absent from the Square, and they said he was at home with bronchitis.

I took a job as a security guard at the shopping complex where Yan worked, and we began seeing each other. At home my grandparents were already arguing over our baby's name, even though Yan wasn't pregnant, and even though we weren't married.

One day at work, in the afternoon, while I was sitting down, on the verge of nodding off, a young man ran into the shopping complex.

"They're beating the General!" he said.

Changsha Square was only six blocks away. I leapt from my seat and ran, with about a dozen other men, toward the Square. When we arrived, there were fifteen men in plain clothes, the local mafia, hassling the General, who stood in his usual spot, donning his PLA uniform. We knew who had sent them. When the government wanted to put down a protest or some other form of dissidence, it sent the mafia. Because it was a work day, slightly less than a hundred spectators looked on.

The General's uniform looked crumpled. One of the men slapped him in the face. Another pushed him to the ground.

I would like to think that I led the charge, but I can't be sure. What I can say with confidence, however, is that dozens of young men like myself, as well as middle-aged and old men, arrived at that moment and rushed toward the mafia and swarmed them, punching and kicking them, putting them into headlocks and beating them with sticks and pipes. I poked one man in the eyes and pulled a fistful of black hair from another. A chubby man punched me in the ribs; I blinded him with my spit and then elbowed him in the nose. *Crack!*

I saw the General on the ground, slid my hands under his underarms, and pulled him out of the pile. I helped him to the nearest building, where he sat on the concrete, leaning his back against the wall. One of his eyes was black and swollen, and a bead of blood slid down his forehead from a small cut. I pulled some tissue from my pocket and pressed it against the cut. The tissue quickly soaked up the blood.

We both looked back at the brawl. More men--ordinary guys like myself--poured into the Square. The mafia members lay on the ground, battered and bruised, holding their heads and ribs. Some crawled and limped away. The General smiled at me, pumped his fist, and broke out into a wild laugh.

"Victory!" he said. He calmed down and said again, "Victory."

Waterproof

John Gorman

If she stopped drooling I would've married Rita. We loved Cary Grant films, André Previn overtures, Ben and Jerry's by the pint. We hated the constant dumbing down of our species, the desperate grope for complacency, scratch-off lotto tickets, cruise mongers, and spiritual homogenization. She had a Filipino accent, but swore she was French. Or Danish. Or Maori. Her nationality depended upon her mood. She lavished me with detailed accounts of her weekend getaways to Segovia, Prague, and Martha's Vineyard, and then, grinning wryly, promised to sneak me into her suitcase. First, I had to get over her drooling. Call me squeamish, shallow, but this hanky codependency bugged me. I think it had to do with the fact I'd been a messy kid and my mother was always licking a finger to wipe away the dirt on my face. Whether this was a spit phobia or an Oedipal thing or some weird mix of the two I didn't know. Rita and I were getting closer and had crossed the Relationship Rubicon. We eyed each other with lust, but only touched in a familial way.

Rita hooked into my orbit when I was long on want and short on hope. She came by chance, a knuckleball from another era, but forward-thinking, classy (almost chic) and most importantly she was a vigorous conversationalist. She had a spiffy comment for everything, astounded me with her expanding universe of knowledge and permitted herself, every now and then, to a bit of juicy, but tasteful gossip, artfully described.

She was somebody who still handwrote letters and thank you notes.

We met at Bergdorf's. Rita had been a regular browser for two weeks before she spoke to me. She removed a humus-colored v-neck and pressed it to my chest. She gave a sidelong glance and offered me a full view of her exquisite, hairless nostrils then tapped me twice on the bone of my shoulder. "Ring me up," she said.

I didn't have a password to log into the computer and I was embarrassed to tell her I was only a folder. She ran her manicured fingers through the onyx sheen of her hair, sighed, and then puppet-dragged the merino wool vest over to the counter. I watched her unzip her avocado-

shaped purse and meticulously shuffle through credit cards until she slid, Canasta-style, the American Express “black card” onto the glass counter. Before leaving the store, she handed me the bag as a peace offering— my sweat glands dialed a new notch.

A few days after that, Rita invited me to tea at Takashimaya. I’d been hit on before, but never wooed. Rita made me feel like a debutante. She assured me she was only after friendship. Soon she had me stretching my lunch breaks, five, ten, twenty minutes into jeopardy.

On a chilly Tuesday morning, 6 AM on the dot, she rang me up and told me to call-in sick. She’d cleared her schedule and had a surprise. I’d grown pretty sick and tired of folding pashminas so she didn’t need to twist my arm. I took the F train to 71st Continental. She was waiting for me by Station Square, my old neighborhood, across from the trestle Teddy Roosevelt once delivered a famous speech. The street still had red bricks.

Calendar-wise, we had two weeks to go before Easter, but it was still cashmere weather, cold enough to snap your toenails and I had a fresh pair of woolen socks tucked into my topcoat. There’s no better feeling on either a shivery or a sweltering day than to slip into a clean pair of socks. Rita, my peach-dimpled pal, unzipped her ski parka, briefly, so she could rebundle her scarf and pull the collar to her chin like a coffee sleeve. I was amazed at her gloved dexterity.

We crossed Groton and she tagged me behind the ear with a major league snowball. Anybody else and I would’ve made a stink. Rita teased the boy in me. She was telling me about a prima donna at the soup kitchen she volunteered at when she began to drool. If we kissed right then we’d fuse into one being.

The boot step trail of white wedges, single file, suggested the dauntless vigor of a great migration. Something Pre-Devonian.

“Right along this path my mother taught me to stop pointing,” I said.

“How civilized.”

“If I spotted somebody picking his nose or scratching himself or simply the owner of a funny face, she had me squeeze her hand instead.”

Rita adjusted her woolen fingers then eased back into my leathery grasp.

“Go ahead, make yourself comfortable,” she said.

“Nothing to report.”

“Maybe I’ll squeeze you if I see an oddball.”

“Deal.”

We walked along Greenway North and I marveled at the contrast between the old frosted lampposts and the silvery-tinged cars walled into snow castles. A wet squirrel skittered over my boot and hurried up the yellow-taped handrails of the Lutheran church. The curious fellow sniffed about the rubble and didn’t turn when I clicked my gums. He wriggled his nose and bore his puny chompers when Rita made a high-pitched squeak.

Flagpole Park had a bunch of hand-pulled sleds, a few stout

snowmen, and an unbroken, white-dusted canopy of treetops. Perched out on a thick branch, a frumpy cardinal flapped his bright wings as if delivering a sermon from his icy pulpit. He reminded me vaguely of Lawson Duncan, the class tattletale from Most Precious Blood, who borrowed my book on the Navajo and returned it with fruit punch stains. It took me a long time to lend anything after that.

Rita looped her arm around mine and I let the nostalgia crunch under my boots.

At PS 101 we took a breather. The ivory-capped roof and the panoply of hanging icicles lent a regal character to the dud-gray municipal bricks. Snow glazed the steps like wedding cake and kids bounded down, fearless. Somebody who passed for a teacher held a green buckram blotter, its ribbon fluttering in the wind. One particular woolen-capped boy took his sweet time going down the steps. He looked too old to be wearing mittens. He had a library shelf scrunched into his backpack.

Rita didn't need to say anything. I knew it was her son.

"Harry, say hi to Bart," Rita said.

Harry meekly raised his shoulders. If he shrugged that load, two dozen times, daily, he'd play left tackle for the Giants. He had a circus tiger twinkle in his eyes weary of its trainer. With the kind of schedule she imposed on the wunderkind, I frankly, couldn't blame him. He was probably wondering, like me, why we needed to meet on this of all days.

"Who's up for a snowman?" I said.

I got stinkeyes from both of them. And, Rita wondered why I admired hermits.

We began a lazy gait into town. Rita removed a stack of index cards from her ski jacket.

"Tallinn," she said.

"Capital of Estonia." Harry replied. "The old seaport touches the Baltic."

"Population?"

"410,000."

"Currency."

"Euro."

"Former currency."

"The kroon."

Back and forth they batted these questions and answers like badminton rivals. Then they debated where to go for coco. I played the wise, but silent third wheel.

When our boots were good and sloshed, the three of us stopped at Cinco Burro for coco. The laptop and tap water crowd had secured the window spots and a sizable portion of stools on the western front. A small round table in the middle was free. I borrowed a wobbly chair to complete our party. None of us actually ordered coco and when I brought this up nobody seemed to care. Harry sat with his Earl Grey and took wolfish bites of his twelve-inch turnover. I bet him a dollar he wouldn't finish it. He pinkied my

challenge. Rita sipped her macchiato and I warmed my hands on a mug of French Vanilla.

Harry and I entered a bout of smart-posturing and peered over at Rita, every so often, to umpire.

Rita made Harry pay for his snack out of his allowance and he offered to pay for mine and I felt like a crumb because I wasn't smart enough to offer first.

"You can't deny him," Rita said her brows furrowed and furious as if I'd insulted her.

Harry flagged down the waitress with a casually raised hand as if airing out his armpit for the benefit of his school nurse. The waitress squeezed through the tables to bring the check. Rita coughed up her share. Harry removed a cobalt blue nylon wallet from the side pocket of his herringbone trousers. He wore a proud grin when he peeled the Velcro fold and added a crisp five and a scotch-taped Washington to the plastic bill dish. I was proud too he could relish such a small detail, made me wish he was my kid brother.

While we waited for change, Harry struggled with his shoelaces. Rita scored *The Times* Dining Section from an empty table. She crinkled an article on artisanal cheese as I prepared to payback my teatime benefactor. I took a quarterback knee to get some leverage over Harry's laces. He wound it into an impossible knot. Lucky for him, I hadn't clipped my nails. After considerable effort, I'd managed to untie them, but had frayed the one lace to the point where I'd plucked off the aglet. I bunny-eared both laces and tethered them into a gift bow.

"That's the baby way," Harry informed me.

"Twenty-three years of experience."

"Be nice Harry," Rita said and went for a last peck of turnover.

Harry accepted my novice tying and began to lecture me on 17th century galleons. I thought he might be a collector of model ships, but it turned out he'd chosen this topic to deliver a presentation in social studies class. Then I figured his knot-making might've been related to his nautical interest. Rita creased her paper and said no.

"Excuse me," Harry said. "Got to hit the head."

"By all means."

Harry kept his arms virtually still when he passed me. He then half-turned and saw that Rita and I had begun talking. That's when he made a beeline for the john.

"He's a trip," I said. "How old is he?"

"Going on eleven."

"He looks smaller."

"How tall were you at his age?"

"Not very."

"He's a joy, but doesn't have many friends."

"Am I the play date?"

"Don't think you have much in common, yet."

"But, you've given it thought?"

"Need to be seven steps ahead. Want to go to the planetarium tomorrow?"

"I'll have to check my schedule."

"It's not a date. Harry has to invite you."

"And if he doesn't."

"Tough break."

"You're hoping he won't."

"I'm a mother. I'm impartial."

Harry returned with wet wings behind his ears. He made a sour face at his mother as if she'd been spreading gossip. I had the urge to mess his hair then thought better of it. Rita would've judo-flipped me.

We did the planetarium the next day and Bronx Zoo the day after that. Strolling through the zoo on a winter's day is a bit like reading *Wasteland* while recovering from the flu. Harry was far too advanced, in metaphysical years, to have the same schmaltzy appreciation as his adult chaperones.

By Thursday, Rita had a new surprise for me. When I arrived at the lobby of her building, the doorman was smirking at me when he called to warn her. She wasn't ready, but permitted me to go up and wait in her apartment. I had the distinct feeling something wasn't kosher that the doorman was messing with me and when I rang the doorbell Rita would greet me in a towel. This had its obvious benefit too, but I didn't want our first romantic interlude to be the result of a gag played by a semi-bald, door-pulling oaf who wore a crooked nametag.

When I got off on the fourteenth floor, I felt a walnut of constriction bunch in the back of my throat and then the yucky wash of acid trickled into the pit of my stomach. I counted one minute by Mississippis before ringing the doorbell. The door creaked open and I poked my head in. Rita was shimmying into a pair of black knee-highs. I was relieved and disappointed to see her hair towel draped over the Biedermeier's backrest. She had a truly eclectic, but puzzling mélange of furniture and competing interests of mimeographs on the walls. One that suggested she might be older than she claimed, at least, as far as her taste was concerned.

"Can I get you some apple juice?" Rita said.

"I'm trying to cut back."

"There's bottled water in the bottom of the pantry."

I took the opportunity to snoop in the kitchen. I was shocked she used refrigerator magnets. To be fair, she used them to calibrate her busy schedule with Harry's hectic list of activities. Her days were filled with gallery talks, yoga, body-waxing, foreign policy classes, shopping, the soup kitchen, options investing, and pottery. I couldn't help but notice *Playtime*, highlighted in yellow, coincided with the times I spent with her. *Playtime*, I repeated to myself, in her accent.

After all the time we'd been spending together, she didn't have the

courtesy to write my name down. She startled me and I knocked her magnet onto the floor. Rita fished a bottle of water from the pantry, twisted it open.

"Mmm," she said and took a big swig then handed it over.

"Thanks," I said.

"You know Bart," Rita said, "Harry seems to like you."

"That's good."

"He's hard to please so thank your lucky stars."

"Thanks Polaris."

"Seriously."

"Seriously, thanks Polaris."

"Bart."

"Yes."

"I want to give you a chance."

I was flying with joy. And scared. I'm sure there was a right response, but I was mute.

"You'll have to brush up on your French." Rita said. "Harry too."

She snatched two brochures off the kitchen counter, Pic Saint Loop and Casablanca, and made me choose between them as if deciding between Pizza Hut or Golden House. She pressed her thumb next to mine and we both stared at the moonlit casbah.

"Tell me about him," I said.

"What do you want to know?"

"How did you meet?"

"I can't remember."

"Of course you can."

"I can't."

"You said he admired the way you swam."

"Then why are you asking?"

"No need to be shy."

"There's so much else to talk about."

"Have you heard from him?"

"He calls Harry."

"And you?"

"We talk."

"About what?"

"Things."

"I'm just curious."

"Well, don't be."

"If I run into him I mean."

"You're not going to."

Rita turned away. Maybe she felt guilty.

"Forget about it," she said.

"Okay."

"No, I mean forget about the trip. It was a bad idea."

"I want to go."

"You're getting weird all of the sudden."

"And you're covering up."

"That's what I mean."

"I'm fine," I said, my heart sputtering to its own wild beat.

"Harry doesn't need another father."

"Of course not."

Then a clear drip fell onto the brochure, a bubble formed below the midnight glitz of Casablanca. I smoothed it. Another drip. To my horror, I followed the source to my lip. A slobbery splotch covered my chin. Drool. I wiped the shame onto my linen sleeve. Rita hadn't noticed. I cringed at the irony and a damp listless feeling crept under my skin, the weight of loss.

"Don't you see, I want to be with you," I said.

She began to weep. I couldn't get my arms around her so I patted her elbow. I thought back to our first encounter when she ordered me to ring her up and how useless I felt. She didn't walk out of my life then, but I had a glimpse of grief, the slow splinter of pain for having met somebody too soon. My mouth had gone dry and I didn't see a gleam of wetness on her lips. Her mascara ran in runnels down her cheek, leaving behind a dark, winding trail, streams on a map and she licked a finger and rubbed it clean. I thought of footprints lost in the tide and my mother.

CONTRIBUTORS

Austin Aviles is a student photographer pursuing a BFA at VCU in Richmond Virginia. He finds his inspiration in the diverse environment he find myself in; the contrasts of the city and its close proximity to nature. His work is influenced by his personal experience with nature, impermanence, and travel.

Lauren Bender is a graduate of Green Mountain College where she earned her BFA in Writing and served as co-editor of the literary magazine Reverie. Her work has appeared in *Barbaric Yawp* and *IDK Magazine* and is forthcoming in *The Lindenwood Review* and *Coe Review*.

Emily Berger is a Tulane junior from Richmond, VA majoring in English with minors in both Studio Art and Psychology. She spends most of her time tutoring second graders at Lafayette Academy Charter School, working in the photography department, and pursuing her love of painting with inanimate objects.

Amelia Cairns is a New York native and a senior at Tulane University. She is graduating in the fall with a BA in English and Linguistics and a minor in German. Creative writing is the focus of her English degree, with special attention given to poetry, non-fiction and screenwriting. Amelia's additional academic interests include the study of language death and revitalization techniques, the history of German cinema, and the acquisition of American Sign Language.

Laton Carter is the author of *Leaving* (University of Chicago Press), selected by Mark Doty for the William Stafford-Hazel Hall Book Award. He lives in Eugene, Oregon.

Martha Clarkson manages corporate workplace design in Seattle. Her poetry, photography, and fiction can be found in *monkeybicycle*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Alimentum*, *elimae*,. She is a recipient of a Washington State Poets William Stafford prize 2005, a Pushcart Nomination, and is listed under "Notable Stories," *Best American Non-Required Reading for 2007 and 2009*. She

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Daniel David is a writer, artist and professor living along the southern shore of Lake Erie in North America. His poems have appeared widely in a number of venues across the United States, in Canada and the United Kingdom. His publications also include articles in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*; chapbooks *Close to Home* and *Two Buddha*; and his novel, *Flying Over Erie*.

Ivan de Monbrison is a french contemporary poet, writer and artist born in Paris in 1969. He currently lives in both Paris and Marseille. Five poetry chapbooks of his works have been published: *L'ombre déchirée*, *Journal*, *La corde à nu*, *Ossuaire* and *Sur-Faces*. His first novel *Les Maldormants* has been released in november 2014 by Ressouvenances publishers, it is illustrated by his drawings. His poems or short stories have also appeared in several literary magazines in France, Italy, Belgium, The UK, Canada, Australia, Switzerland and in the US. His visual works have been shown in Paris, L'Hay-les-Roses, Barcelona, Brussel, Weston-Super-Mare (UK), Pittsburgh and New York, and have been published in several magazines in France, Canada, Australia and the US.

Darren Dillman is from New Mexico and earned an MFA in creative writing from McNeese State University. He has published one novel, *The Preacher* (David C. Cook, 2009), and my short fiction has appeared in *Shenandoah*, *the George Washington Review*, *Consequence*, *the High Desert Journal*, *Prole*, and *Best of the West*. He teaches English for a university in Shenzhen, China.

Hollie Dugas is living in Lafayette, Louisiana. She has a knack for making language delicate. When she is not writing poetry, she critiques novels in the making and writing workshop. Her work was most recently selected to be included in *Cactus Heart*, *Issue 10.5*, *The Common Ground Review* (17.1), *Adrienne*, *Under the Gum Tree*, and *Folio*. She is currently a member of the editorial board for *Off the Coast*.

Keith Dunlap is a former co-editor of *The Columbia Review* and former co-editor of *Cutbank*, having received his M.F.A. from the University of Montana. His poems have appeared in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Georgetown Review*, *Jabberwock*, *Poet Lore*, *Sou'wester*, and *The Tule Review* among other places. He has a B.A. in English from Columbia College and an M.A. in Classics from Columbia University. He lives in Portland, Maine with his wife, the novelist, Jenny Siler, and his daughter, Vivica.

Allen Forrest, graphic artist and painter, was born in Canada and bred in the U.S. He has created cover art and illustrations for literary publications and books. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's Reed Magazine and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

John Gorman used to snap the Eyesore of the Week for the *Queens Ledger*. Now he spits wine for a living. His stuff has appeared in *Monkeybicycle*, *Word Riot*, *Writer's Digest*, *The Helix*, *Newtown Literary*, *Gravel*, *Vector Magazine* and elsewhere. He is the author of the novels *Shades of Luz* and *Disposable Heroes*. He earned his MFA in Creative Writing at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. You can read more of his stuff at <http://jgpapercut.blogspot.com/>.

Ruby Huh, born in San Jose, California, is currently a senior at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). She is a multifaceted artist with a background in ceramics, painting, and history of art and visual culture.

Renee Jin was born and grew up in China, currently studying sculpture and printmaking at Rhode Island School of Design. Adhering to the concept that great works usually come from true experiences, feelings, imagination, and the world artists perceive by themselves, She treats every piece of the works as a portal connecting between the outside world and herself. This work, A "Cozy" Nest, delivers the message that even comfort zones may turn to the other side and seemingly cozy things are made of tiny poignant "pins" at times.

Mary Mac Jones is a senior from Memphis, TN majoring in English and International Relations. She is an aspiring screenwriter and filmmaker. Mary Mac's interests include cartoons, dog spotting, and nachos.

Rachel Keitelman is from Washington, DC, and will be graduating from Tulane in Spring 2016. She first became interested in art in High School where she had an amazing teacher, Deirdre Saunder, and decided to major in English and Studio Art in college, where she had been fortunate enough to have learned from Anne Nelson and Aaron Collier.

Jake Koch is a writer from Glen Ellyn, Illinois that swears his success by this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3_IVSrPB6w.

Eleanor Levine's writing has appeared in *Fiction*, *Evergreen Review*, *Dos Passos Review*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Pank*, *Barely South Review*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Barrelhouse*, *Intima*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Kentucky Review*, *Juked*, *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, and *Thrice Fiction*. Eleanor's poetry collection, *Waitress at the Red Moon Pizzeria*, will be released January 2016 by Unsolicited Press. She dedicates her poem, "Taipei Girl," to the memory of poet Eric Trethewey, alumnus of Tulane University.

Virginia Mallon is a painter, photographer, and blogger with a focus on both human and environmental subjects including urban landscapes, nautical spaces, and personal histories. Her goal is to reflect and comment on the current state of the world and the psychological undercurrents of contemporary society. Poseidon is part of a series called Chasing Saturn which folds Greek and Roman mythology into contemporary dreams and memories.

Samuel Moulton is a current junior at Tulane University studying English and Philosophy. His poetry has appeared in about a dozen magazines.

Marlene Olin, born in Brooklyn, raised in Miami, and educated at the University of Michigan, is a contributing editor at *Arcadia* magazine. Her short stories have been featured or are forthcoming in publications such as *The Massachusetts Review*, *upstreet Magazine*, *Steam Ticket*, *Vine Leaves*, *Crack the Spine*, *Poetica*, *The Water Stone Review*, *The Santa Clara Review*, *The Broken Plate* and *The Saturday Evening Post* online. She recently completed a novel.

Bibhu Padhi has published ten books of poetry. His work has appeared in distinguished magazines throughout India, UK, USA and Canada. They have been included in numerous anthologies. He lives in Bhubaneswar, India.

Myra Pearson is an American poet originally from Blacksburg, Virginia. She graduated from Radford University in 2007 where she studied literature, poetry and applied media theory. She was recently nominated for the 2015 Pushcart Prize by Boston Poetry Magazine and has currently completed her debut book of poetry. She resides in Seoul, Korea, where she teaches English at Duksung Women's University. Other works appear in the *Chiron Review*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Boston Poetry Magazine*, and *Maudlin House*.

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 and Europe influence her work greatly. She 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.

Marie Piccione is pursuing a degree in Environmental Biology and working on two minors in Art History and Studio Art, set to graduate in May 2016. She hopes to blend her two passions together as she furthers her career in both fields. Marie is working to shape a future filled with outdoor education and outreach that brings art and science opportunities to children in new, innovative, and creative ways.

Anna Pleskow is a Richmond based artist attending Virginia Commonwealth School of the Arts. She loves to manipulate images and make old images new again.

Allen M. Price lives in Rhode Island. He is an MFA candidate at the University of New Hampshire. He has an MA in journalism from Emerson College. His fiction and nonfiction work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Natural Health*, *Muscle & Fitness*, *Pangyrus*, *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*, and the *Foliate Oak Literary Review*, among others.

Abby Ratner is a senior at Tulane University studying English and Public Health. She's been using a list titled "Interesting Things" observed from her childhood in her poetry, in which she usually prefers to write in the prose poetry form.

M. C. Rush grew up in Louisiana, studied creative writing at both LSU and the University of Arizona, and currently lives in upstate New York. He has most recently published poems in *Broad River Review*, *Whiskey Island*, *The Bicycle Review*, *Open Road Review* and *300 Days of Sun*.

Becca Schwartz is a Maryland native who is currently pursuing her BA in photography and film with a concentration in still photography at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her work focuses on social norms and often involves an element of performance or construction. Through the mediums of film and photography she simplifies dynamic social perspectives into easily digestible formats. She plans to graduate in 2017 and peruse large-scale social experiments around the country.

Farah Serur, after taking a few summer classes in NYC, truly began exploring her boundless creativity. The class which inspired her most was a class in which she unintentionally enrolled. It promised to bridge the gap between drawing and painting; but instead, bridged the gap between her childhood artistic self and the more mature artist within her. She was only 14 and was presented with a naked man before her on the first day of class; expected to observe and even paint this unfamiliar subject. My artistic style was now born as she attempted making the nude figure, appeal to youth through vibrancy on a page. She was able to morph explicit subject matter into art that was more playful. She embraced her artistic license by adding lots of colors and textures to conceal the mature content. Ever since then, her favorite subject matter can be simply put as “colorful bodies” adding a juvenile essence to figures typically bound by realism.

Natalie Shyu was born in Pasadena, California. She is currently a junior at Tulane University studying Ecology and Evolutionary Biology along with a minor in Studio Art. In her free time she enjoys exploring the great outdoors and ducking out in small coffee shops for extended periods of time. She intends on pursuing a career that works towards bridging the gap between art and science.

Christine Stoddard, born and raised in Virginia, is a Salvadoran-Scottish-American writer and artist. In 2014, Folio Magazine named her one of the media industry's top 20 media visionaries in their 20s for founding *Quail Bell Magazine*. Her work has appeared in the Ground Zero Hurricane Katrina Museum, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Feminist Wire*, *Bustle*, the New York Transit Museum, local PBS programming, and beyond. She lives with her husband and many books. Learn more at ChristineStoddard.com.

Scott Thomas has a B.A. in Literature from Bard College, a M.S. in Library Science from Columbia University, and a M.A. in English from the University of Scranton. He is currently employed as a librarian; specifically, Head of Information Technologies & Technical Services at the Scranton Public Library in Scranton, PA. He lives in Dunmore, PA with his wife Christina and his son Ethan. His poems have appeared in *Mankato Poetry Review*, *The Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Sulphur River Literary Review*, *Webster Review*, *Poetry East*, *Stirring: A Literary Collection*, *Poem*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Poetry Bay*, *Floyd County Moonshine*, *Talking River*, *Pointed*

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TWIXT has had poetry published in *Margie*, *The Indiana Review*, *Amelia*, *California State Quarterly*, *RE:AL*, *Pegasus*, *First Class*, *Pot-pourri*, *Art Times*, *The Iconoclast*, *Epicenter*, *Subtropics*, *Quest*, *Confrontation*, *Writers' Journal*, *Rattle*, *Prairie Schooner* and others. He lives in Ithaca, New York.

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