



Phoenix²⁰⁰⁵

The Art and Literary Magazine of Clark College
Volume 25



Phoenix

The Art and Literary
Magazine of Clark College

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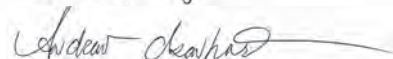
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Previous Page:

Ron Utterback | Peter Cooley | Silver Gelatin Print

Editors' Note

The *Phoenix* Staff is thrilled to present the Clark College student body with 2005's edition of *Phoenix*. We've chosen a new layout and format affording us more pages than ever before, enabling us to include more student work than any previous issue of *Phoenix*. We're proud to build on last year's award-winning publication; *Phoenix* garnered national recognition in 2004. More than 60 students were involved in this year's *Phoenix*, from editing to contributing, making *Phoenix* one of the largest and most successful student-run programs on campus. We've added never-before seen features, such as the history of *Phoenix*, as well as editors' notes on the selection process. The *Phoenix* staff encourages you, the reader, to dive in and enjoy this collection of art and literature crafted by Clark College students.



Allyson Bennett

Daniel Borgen

Andrew Isenhardt

Marissa Katter



Opposite Page:

Untitled | Jason Collier | Silver Gelatin Print



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Opposite Page:

Appreciating the Classics | Nicholas Beatty | Toned Silver Gelatin Print



Self Portrait | Rob Burton | Graphite on Paper

Gary Lives in Caldwell

By Cynthia Vogel

Gary averted his eyes, walking hurriedly, but without sacrificing Goth posturing for speed. The students peppered the walls of his high school with accusing stares as he passed. He felt their eyes boring into him with a mixture of disgust and amused curiosity. In spite of the fact he'd gotten rid of his dusty black trench coat after Columbine, no matter what he did, the kids made sure he knew they watched. At times, his schoolmates would ignore him, for months at a time, and he managed to escape their gazes. He never quite worked his way into the ranks of the faceless, unpopular students of his school, however, because his style made him stand out: tentative vintage in a sea of Old Navy. Gary's world, at fifteen, was like this in Caldwell, Idaho. In some ways he made this world, as one of two Goth kids in his small school, by embracing the darker side of existence, moody music, and Anne Rice. But this unfamiliar level of torment and abuse had all started because of a fluffy kitten.

Two weeks prior to his day of disproportionate, freak, microscopic, observation hell, Gary worked at the lone KFC in his hometown. The cooking grease popped and sizzled, sounding much like a hail storm on the roof as he lowered the popcorn chicken into the deep fat fryer. The heat and humidity generated by the steam trays, coupled

with moisture emanating from the deep fryer, made his black hair and, more importantly, his spirit limp. Sniffing sadly, he brushed his disheveled hair from his forehead with a sweaty smear of his inner arm.

“Welcome to KFC. I can take your order whenever you’re ready!” his coworker, Trudy, sang out. Gary tired of her voice, day in and out, always the same tone and fluctuation, always interrupting the customers before they finished speaking. Gary knew he belonged working at any other hipper, darker, or more interesting job, not pushing soggy Original Recipe factory farm chicken. Though he investigated many other options, it was often the fast food teenage curse that got the better of the kids in Caldwell. There he stood when the phone rang in the kitchen.

“Hi Honey, it’s Mom. Listen, the neighbors’ cat just had kittens, and I thought since you were feeling so depressed, a kitten might cheer you up. Get you to clear up that gloom and doom outlook of yours,” his mother said hopefully.

“God, Mom,” Gary said annoyed, “It’s my style, OK? If you’re hoping I’ll start listening to Chicago with you and Dad and wearing some nice slacks, I need to inform you that it won’t happen. Sorry to disappoint you,” he said, a trace of hurt in his voice. His mother sighed on the other end. But Gary wanted the kitten, so he added consentingly, “I guess it would be fun for us to take care of a critter as a family, so...”

“Oh, Great! I’ll walk over there and pick one out. I saw a cute striped one.”

“If they have any black ones, I’d rather have one of those.” He liked the superstitious connotations of having a black cat.

“Oh, Gary,” she sighed.

Gary’s thoughts of the frisky responsibility headed his way were gratingly interrupted as Trudy snapped: “Quit mooning about death or whatever and get the customer at the counter.”

Even Trudy’s sprayed and frosted bangs attitude couldn’t pry him away from imagining the silky fuzz of kitten fur nuzzling into his neck. He imagined the kitten purr when it sat in his lap and dreamed of it licking his nose with its sand paper tongue. He couldn’t wait to get home.

The Stump family house was a seventies ranch style, painted powder blue with brown spotted carpet. The lawn was dead, neglected in the fall and summer to cut costs. Gary entered through the garage side door to see his three-year-old sister, Denise, stamp past him smudged with dirt and a band-aid on her knee. Dressed carelessly in a halter-top and matching green bottoms with a yellow floral print, she shrieked in reaction to the goings on in her toddler’s mind and barely noticed her brother.

“A titty, Gary!” she yelped with glee when she finally noticed the person entering her spastic, early childhood realm. She ran to show him the kitten jaunting around the living room and mewing. Gary had already thought of a name, depending on the sex. He liked Siouxie, after the wonderfully witchy female singer, or Edgar, after his favorite writer.

Warm currents of love curled over him as he gazed at the kitten, delighted. Gary and Siouxi bonded while playing games of around the corner with string. She climbed his legs, pounced on him and ran, hissed when frisky, and generally clawed her way deep into Gary's heart. The situation resembled the kitten in cartoons kneading into the bulldog's back to sleep. It hurt Gary to love this tiny thing so much, yet he withstood the pain. This kitten was impossible to deny.

For the next two days, Gary's parents marveled at the change in Gary's demeanor. Friday arrived, and as he prepared to head over to his best friend Dwayne's, he put Siouxi in his book bag.

"Gary, honey, I just can't believe the change in you," said his mother as he got his things together. "I've never seen you so open. You know, God forbid you ever showed any vulnerability," she added against her better judgment. "But now-well I just-" Gary shot her a look, a quick eye roll that creased his forehead with W's and silenced his mother. Her crestfallen face betrayed her disappointment. Shielded from further discussion, Gary left for Dwayne's.

Dwayne, the other Gothic kid at their school, responded to Caldwell with scoffs and erudite observations on the hopeless herd mentality of the residents of their rural town.

"So, you ready to hit Boise for the all-ages show tomorrow night? I guess Lotus Cup is playing," said Dwayne. He looked resentfully at Gary's kitten. Dwayne admired

Gary from the time they were young children in Caldwell. Before Gary adopted Gothic style during their freshman year, he'd been fairly popular, leading the teens to allow him to squeak by with less taunting than Dwayne now received. Dwayne's loyalty never wavered, but he jealously eyed the kitten, and a vague sense of fear settled around him that he would be forgotten in the kitten's shadow.

"I can't. I want to stay home and take care of Siouxi. If I don't keep an eye on things, Denise kind of tortures her." He looked at the kitten, enraptured with her shiny nose and yellow eyes. She played with the string on his hood, batting at it in instinctual form.

"C'mon, Gary," Dwayne griped. "You haven't taken us in over a month. I gotta get out of here. The Jocks and Jills are closing in."

Gary mulled over this truth. He needed to stay connected to the scene. Maybe his mom would be able to supervise Denise with the kitten, he thought. After successfully pushing away his paternal instincts, he agreed to go. He left instructions with his parents on the care he would require for Siouxi in his absence.

When they returned the following morning, foggy from a late night of throbbing techno bliss, Gary's home was unnaturally quiet in a tell tale sinister way that Gary would relish in any other setting. Now, he limited this admiration to the safe confines of the rest of the world. This current silence provoked anger and fear of what, in his mind, came to pass during his absence.

The Evidence: He did not hear Denise, and his parents sat silent, together, with no T.V.

The kitten was dead. It was an accident.

It seemed Denise had been carrying the kitten around, hugging her and going overload with her tactile sensors, petting and patting Siouxi. Their mother soon discovered the kitten, still soft and warm but gone limp from being clutched too tightly in her daughter's three-year-old arms, its neck snapped. As she relayed the story to her son, her eyes gazed out the window, unable to meet Gary's, as if telling a sad tale that involved others less fortunate. Gary, overcome with frustration, angst and grief stormed to his room, inconsolable.

Amidst all the emotion, Dwayne slinked off, ignored due to the family crisis, and walked home wanting to console his friend but unsure of how to do so. With Siouxi lost, Dwayne felt fearful that his jealousy snaked its green way into the universe and caused the sad turn of events. As Gary wept alone in his room, his friend walked through the dry brown landscape, the heat cooking the top of his head. No one was out. It was too hot. Waves crossed the road in the distance, the effect enhanced by his squinting. When he looked back, the Stump home shrank in the haze. He'd forgotten his sunglasses and the brightness bounced off his eyes painfully.

At KFC the following Monday, Gary slumped through his work with no sign of life or feeling. Even Trudy, used to his unapproachable haughtiness, noticed

with annoyance that Gary appeared even more absent, replaced by a body of flesh that refused to notice her.

"Hello! Earth to Gary," she snapped with words and fingers. "What is your problem today? Worried Halloween is still a month away?" She chortled and flipped her crimped hair off her shoulder.

"My cat was killed," said Gary softly, eyes to the ground.

"What?" She yelled. Her voice trumpeted through the dining area. "Killed, how?" she asked.

"It was an accident. Its neck was broken," and with that, he took off his visor and clocked out. He couldn't handle Trudy's harsh voice today, and felt vulnerable as her gaze bore into him, observing with distaste and rendering the death irrelevant. In any other circumstance, Gary would marvel at the secret glimpse into Trudy's thoughts, surprised that she actually thought so much about him. She indeed felt perplexed by him and his morbid ways. To her, Gary seemed an anomaly of an organism. The fact that he had feelings, experienced human sadness, was something incongruent to the case study she developed on him in her mind. Irritation pulled vaguely at her mind as this new development interfered with her original calculations. She watched Gary walk out the door towards home, his posture folded.

"Chuh," she muttered, suddenly feeling strangely self-conscious. She scratched her elbow with some thoughtful reserve and went back to work. "Whatever."

But the memory of the kitten would not rest in

Caldwell. When Gary arrived at school the next day, he heard random hisses and saw horrified looks on his classmates' faces as he wound his way through the halls that smelled of erasers and tempura paint. He heard whispering about kittens and, muddled, tried to ascertain the gist of the hushed jabbering. His steps, hesitant, seemed to echo loudly, as if alerting the school that Gary arrived.

"Meow," someone said in a high scratchy voice, followed by laughter.

"Oh, that's awful!" squealed a girl's voice. Hushed discussion around Gary continued until he ran into Dwayne in front of the water stained aluminum drinking fountain.

"What's going on around here?" he asked, distressed. "How does everybody know about Siouxi?"

"There's a rumor going around you killed her on purpose...some sacrificial, devil worship bullshit, I don't know," Dwayne said, avoiding Gary's eyes. Dwayne shifted around, unsure of how to proceed.

"Freaks!" another teen shouted as they passed, "Get out of here, Cat Killers!"

"But, how does everyone know?" Gary's voice rose, "I thought you were the only one who-" he continued, noticing Dwayne's downcast eyes.

"Hey, Man. I didn't say anything. It must have been the School Crier," Dwayne added hastily, referring to Trudy by their private nickname. "How could you

even think that?" Dwayne said, tugging at his pale green army surplus bag.

Gary stormed off, leaving Dwayne churning with emotion and tried to get to class. Sitting through each period and pushing through the lynch mob atmosphere became more difficult. During lunch, he finally decided to ditch fifth and sixth and drive home alone.

His mother heard the door to the garage, and then to Gary's bedroom slam. She walked apprehensively down the hall and paused. Gary's moods could be worrisome and intimidating. She considered leaving him to his headphones and prerogatives, but remembered he'd arrived home early from school and decided to tap on his door.

Over the next half hour, Gary cried and stammered out the whole appalling account of the day's events to his mother. After he'd fallen asleep, drained and cried out, she walked out to the kitchen and glimpsed the graffiti sprayed on the hood of his Ford Probe. This time, she would do something, had to do something. She called the principal.

For the rest of the week, Gary was allowed to stay home from school while the administration sent out a memo for the teachers to read aloud in class. The memo reported the accurate account of the heartrending incident, in an attempt to squelch the rumors and redeem Gary. While he rested and mourned at home,

the student body pondered the latest information. Trudy stirred about the place frustrated that others couldn't see what was so obvious to her. Gary's family invented the story of the little sister, she insisted, not wishing the event to die down. As if acting on duty, she reminded everyone that what she told them was the real truth, and that truth, the only explanation that fit with Gary's bizarre persona. "Anyone could see it. I knew there was something wrong with him the minute we came here Freshman year," she said to the nodding crowd.

The next Monday morning, Gary sensed a distinctly cool sharpness in the air. The Indian summer was over. As he weaved his way through the streets toward the high school, the sun stuttered across the windshield through the shade trees that lined the black streets. When he walked through the parking lot to the main entrance, a crumpled brown bag scratched liltily along the ground in front of him, unnoticed in its place. As he opened the doors, he took a deep breath and attempted to relax his shoulders.

"He-e-re, kitty, kitty, kitty!" called Trudy's boyfriend when Gary walked in. His heart sank, and he realized in a flash, that his future at Caldwell High would be forever altered. Gary, once grudgingly put up with and often unconsidered in his black clothes, became now, a target in red, white and blue. ♫



Flood | Adrian Anderson | Silver Gelatin Print



Untitled | Sarah Glover | Silver Gelatin Print



Sacred Souls | Lale Hodges | Welded Metal and Wood



Counter Stool | Nina Crawford | Welded Aluminum and Brass



The Hand | Lisa Avina | Ceramics

Chitter Chatter

By Jeff Isaak

Rubble clattered loudly under Jack's feet as he raced through the ruins of the city. Shattered towers and fallen overpasses jutted into the sky like clutching fingers of a skeleton, eternally grasping for something just out of reach. Beside him, Jack could hear Erin's footsteps as loud and ragged as his on the crumbling asphalt. Yesterday, he'd been safe in his home and job and girlfriend, his activities in the Resistance not looming large in their lives. Today, he raced through the Outlands with a squad of soldiers in hot pursuit. He didn't know who in the cell sold him out, but it really didn't matter; dead was dead, no matter the reason why. So they ran, hoping against the odds they could escape into the ruins of old Portland, escape from the hunter teams and certain death for dissenting.

Jack's foot struck hard on loose gravel and, for an instant, he wavered, his balance teetering on the edge, but Erin grabbed him as she ran and pulled him upright again. She could have saved herself, he knew. She could have simply turned him in when his membership in the Resistance had come to light. Instead, she chose to run with him into the unknown areas of the Outlands to face probable death at his side. Once they ran, there was no going back. Not ever. No debriefing, no work release or Government program to re-educate them, just a bullet to correct social deviancy. He regretted dragging her into this, but now she had no choice but to take the plunge and hope at the end of the drop rocks weren't hidden in the water.

The whine of a military hover sled echoed off the sharp edge of fallen skyscrapers, and Jack knew they had found the end of their run. Soon, the soldiers would overtake them and kill them. Even if they escaped, the only thing that lay ahead was Chatterer territory. According to the Governmental broadcasts, the Chatterers killed all humans they encountered, and the aliens held a complete hostility towards the entire human species. Since so much of what the Government of the American Federation had said since the Shattering turn out falsely, he hoped the statements on the Aliens might be wrong, too. The thought of escaping only to meet death at angry aliens didn't make Jack very happy.

The whine of the hovercraft grew louder, and he pushed himself harder and harder until the muscles in his torso and legs burned and his breath came in ragged gasps. Grey concrete and rusted metal blurred in his vision, and he only saw passing terrain as streaks of gray, white or dark rust hued red. Erin, who ran just slightly ahead of him, slowed down, her breathing more and more irregular. Most of Portland lay behind them, the Columbia River no more than a few miles distant; yet, Jack knew even if they reached the river, they had no way across. Not since the Chatterers had taken the bridges. Like a ghost down in the desert, the wind whipped through the dead city, and stinging dust tore at his eyes and the back of his throat. Nothing lived in the urban wasteland, at least nothing anyone wanted stumble across. *Even if we escape, where will we go? Where will we live?* He pushed the bleak thoughts aside and focused on running.

He saw Erin fall, bright red blood blossoming from her thigh before he heard the crack of the rifle. She fell in slow motion, her scream lost in the wind and the hammering of his heart. Gravel tore at her, and she tumbled into the old roadway. After a few broken rolls, she lay still except for the heaving of her chest. Jack skidded to a stop and turned to grab her up, then froze, his heart sinking. The Patrol hover sled drifted only twenty yards behind him, and the soldier leaning on the roof, sighting down on Jack had the stance of a man ready to kill.

Jack stopped and dropped to his knees next to Erin, cradling her head in his lap and heaving for breath. If we have to die, at least let us look it in the face. He braced himself for death, wondering how it would feel. A sharp fast pain and then nothing? Or, perhaps long and lingering as in the movies? He hoped for the first, at least for Erin. He did not wish to think of her suffering a slow death or worse at the hands of the Federation soldiers. More soldiers appeared from the vehicle and approached cautiously, their weapons ready. He heard yells to get down and to put his hands on his head. He knew if he did, they would simply shoot him in the back of the head. He decided not to die like that, and prepared to stand up, determined to die on his feet.

The air suddenly came to life with sharp electrical hissing, and the hovercraft vanished into white-hot light, searing his eyes. Screams filled the air. Human screams. He looked up, blinking away the white spots in his eyes and froze. All around he saw leaping forms amid the smoke from the hovercraft and the natural haze of the Outlands.

Almost the same dark shade as the rock and concrete, they moved through the rough terrain with ease, their human like shapes punctuated by jagged edges where joints must be, and he swore they had horns. Chatterers. Their energy weapons hissed as they cut down panicked soldiers, their Federation issue flak vests offering no defense against whatever the Chatterers used in their guns.

A soldier ran at Jack, obviously intent on killing him but unable to see clearly in the smoke of the burning vehicle. A form leapt out of the smoke and crashed into the man, a high-pitched screech emitting from its inhuman features. Claws on both hands and feet latched onto the man, and in seconds tore him apart. Jack winced at the man died, unable to watch even an enemy die in such a brutal manner.

He forced himself to look back at his erstwhile rescuer, having never seen a Chatterer before. Dull gray-ridged plates extended from feet to neck over a relatively human physique; at the joints a spike rose up giving the body a jagged broken look. The face was unseen before a faceplate, which had abnormally large eyes that glowed almost orange in the firelight of the hovercraft. Spiked ridges extended up from where the eyebrows should have been and curved hornlike back over the head. Rough beadlike braids hung from the back of the helmet and draped down the back and shoulders of the Alien. Body armor concealed every inch of the body, and he still had no idea what a Chatterer looked like, even though it stood only a few feet away. He stared into the orange eye plates, desperately trying to see into the eyes behind them, to no avail. Its stance was hostile and the dead soldier's blood

still dripped from the blades at the times of its fingers.

A high-pitched chitterling erupted from it, answered from several different directions all around Jack and Erin, and the aliens eased its stance. From its suddenly more relaxed appearing position, all the patrol must be dead or routed. Though, from the sudden quiet broken only by The Chatterers talking softly to each other, Jack assumed the Federation troops had all been killed.

Another bulkier Chatterer approached holding some sort of case in its hand. It chattered at Jack, and then gestured with the case at Erin's leg. He stared for a moment dumbfounded, and the Alien repeated its high-pitched clicks and an exasperated gesture. Jack shook his head and stepped away, realizing the alien with a bag was some form of medic. He let the creature examine Erin and then tend her wound with odd instruments, inexplicably stemming the flow of blood. He heard footsteps behind him and as he turned to look he felt something hot press into his neck. Angrily, he tried to turn, certain he'd just been tricked, but blackness swelled up and he lost consciousness.

He awoke in dim light and felt well rested. Cautiously, he turned his head to look around. He was in some sort of room, and when he shifted slightly, he saw that Erin slept next to him. He saw a flicker of motion to his right and turned. In the dim light he could make out little except for a pair of lamp like orange eyes. Careful not to wake Erin, and sure that the Alien meant no harm; given the circumstances, he sat up slowly.

"Are you hungry, Jack?" The voice was soft and melodious and the English accented in a rolling way that

reminded him of a cat's purring. Compared to the high-pitched voices he'd heard it was almost shocking at the difference.

"You know my name?" He felt stupid as he said it, since it obviously knew.

"Your identification was in your pocket." The voice held amusement, but the tone was kind.

"Sorry. It's just that--"

"You expected us to be something else?" The form moved closer into the dim lighting and he caught his breath at the sight.

Lean and well muscled, the Chatterer was obviously female, and amazingly human in appearance. She had dusky skin with a purplish tint, and hard well-defined muscles that rippled as she leaned forward. Long nimble fingers had hard, clawlike nails.

Vulpine features lent a feral cast to a hollow checked yet delicate face and sharp pointed foxlike ears lying close to the head. Her eyes appeared to glow a solid orange in the light, and he could see no iris or pupil in them. Full lips parted in a smile, and he saw razor teeth reminiscent of sharks behind them. Thick curly black hair almost like a mane tumbled from her head and fell free across her back. Alarmingly human, except for the eyes and the horns rising from the brow ridge and sweeping back across her hair.

"You look so human, uh, Ma'am." He flushed sounded foolish to himself. "You sound different."

"Oh. The battle language, modulators in the helmets, you see. It inspires fear, which means less fighting. Not quite the picture of ravening monster you hear about eh?" He shook his head in amazement.

She stood up, and then Jack noticed that she hardly wore any clothing at all, only a black halter top and short leather pants that clung to her curves. No shoes. Her feet, he noted, had longer than human toes and look nearly prehensile. She gestured that he should follow her and so he did.

"So why help me?"

"Why not? You are on the run. You were there and we saw you running. If we hadn't you'd be dead."

"We've always heard that your people hated all humans, and killed us all on sight." He threw the thought out there, hoping she didn't get offended. She simply emitted a rolled growl he thought was a chuckle.

"Do you always believe what you are told Jack? Think of the war. We didn't start it. When your government shot our ship down we were angered that our request for aid was met by violence so we fought back. We never wanted a war with your people, Jack."

"But you destroyed whole cities."

"We fought back against an enemy Jack. Since then we have tried to make peace several times, but the Federation needs an enemy to justify its actions. Only threat of us invading keeps your people in line."

She opened the door and he stared.

A largish hall was filled with people, Chatterer and human alike.

Everyone turned as he walked into the room, and he saw smiles on Chatterer and Human faces alike. Many faces he recognized. Resistance members and even leaders and many others that he'd heard had died running into the Outlands, several hundred people that the Federation listed as dead.

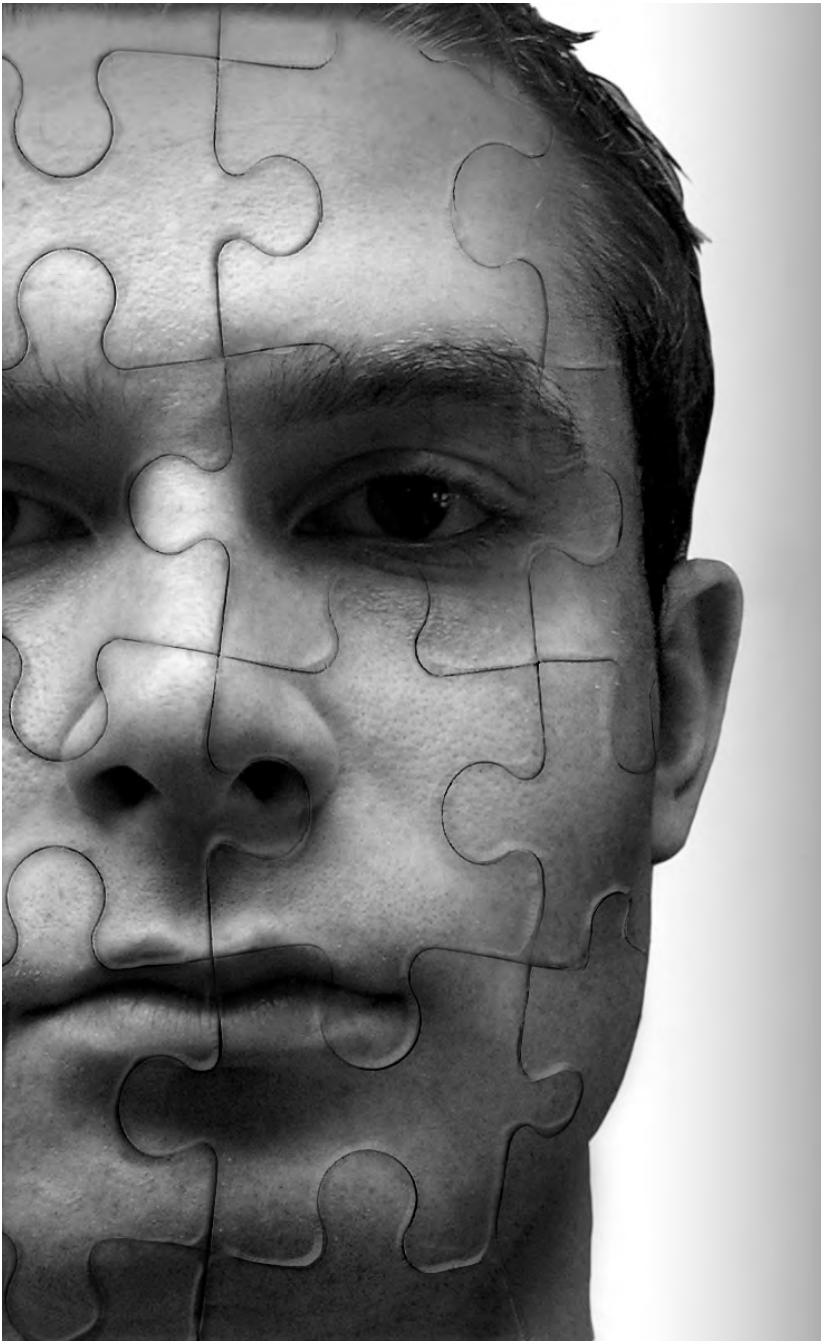
Realization of the truth struck him, and worlds of possibilities opened up before him. He had the proof before him that the Federation was a lie. He took a deep breath. Yesterday he'd been a member of the Resistance and hadn't dared dream about the day when the Federation fell. Today, he found himself standing on the verge of a truth, a truth that could shake the very foundations of the world, and break the Federation's tyrannical hold on the American people. Today, he stood at the beginning of a Revolution. ♪



Head of Jonno | Paige Pienkowski | Ceramics



Coil Mask | Rebecca Stephens | Ceramics



Pieces of Me | Stephen Stum | Digital Photography

What's Your Greatest Weakness?

By Shane Cone

One of the fundamental rules of Biology is that life cannot come from non-life. If God exists, that would be exactly the sort of thing he would do, though, I bet.

Eric checked himself over one last time in the mirror. "Life's a landmine," he muttered, picking his teeth. "And job interviews are shrapnel. I hope my non-life can recover after this." His black two-piece suit fit him well, though he thought he might be underdressed. Picking a piece of lint off his shoulder, he walked out to his AMC Hornet.

Morning clouds enveloped the green and gray suburban landscape on Eric's short drive to Whopplebee's. He liked how the grey of the clouds brought out the green of the trees. He gave himself plenty of time so he didn't have to rush. He stopped completely at every intersection, including the one in front of the funeral home and cemetery. He eyed the morgue as he passed it. *Too bad I don't have an interview there; that might actually be a fun job. It's one of the few signs that real life actually happens in this town. At least Coca-Cola doesn't sponsor tombstones yet.*

He sighed as he puttered down the street in his Hornet to pull into the Whopplebee's parking lot. *I can do this*, he told himself, knees shaking. He felt close to retching. *Who'd want to hire me?* After a moment of trying unsuccessfully to calm his nerves, he made his way towards the Whopplebee's entrance. He spotted a Nevada license plate on a newer Mustang in the parking lot. *I don't have one of those. I need one.*

He continued walking.

“Welcome to Whopplebee’s, how many are in your party?” said the young blond girl at the front counter. Eric noticed she was considerably dressed down compare to him. She sported a white polo shirt and some khakis. This added to his discomfort.

“Actually, I’m here to talk to the m-m-manager for an interview,” Eric’s jaw quivered slightly as he said the words. He suddenly had a sour taste in his mouth.

Is that bile? He wondered.

“Oh, he’ll be right out. Hey, didn’t you graduate from Vernon High last year?”

Eric wasn’t sure how to respond. He paused for a second. “Well, I was a senior there, but I didn’t graduate,” he said, blushing slightly from embarrassment. He recognized her now. She was in the grade below him; she had been in his drama class.

“That’s what I thought. Well, good luck, I guess,” she paused to make sure no one important was around before whispering. “If I were you, I’d get out of here, though. This place is a hell-hole.”

“Yeah, but so’s everywhere else. This particular hell-hole is a unique fun hell-hole and it’s obviously an integral part of its equally unique locality,” Eric schmoozed.

The girl laughed a small polite laugh, then tried to look like she had something to do. She straightened menus. Eric knew he had wasted his breath. She either didn’t get it, or she didn’t think it was funny.

“Good luck on your interview,” she said.

Eric had to wait a few minutes before the manager came out. He found a booth in a corner and took in the garish surroundings. The fast-food chain made an effort to use authentic-looking paraphernalia recovered from local high schools and antique shops to decorate their interiors. This Whopplebee’s had Vernon High School memorabilia plastered on the walls as well as various historical photographs from the area. Eric noted the ordinariness of the silverware.

These are just begging to be taken, he thought. His conversation with the girl reminded him of part of the reason he was here. Every senior at his high school was required to do a senior project before they could graduate. This consisted of two parts. The first was to spend a certain number of hours either making something physically—such as a work of art—or doing community service. The second part was to write a paper related to the physical project. He never completed his senior project, so he wasn’t allowed to graduate. He had planned to make a movie, but he never quite found the motivation to do it. Now Eric’s dad told him he either had to get a part time job and finish school, or he had to get a full time job. If he didn’t do one or the other within a month, his dad was going to evict him.

“Eric Goolman?” asked a man’s voice. It startled him a little because it came from behind. Eric guessed it belonged to the manager. He turned to look. This man was less well dressed than Eric, wearing a sloppy button-up shirt with the top buttons undone and some black slacks.

Eric shifted in his seat. “Y-yeah, that’s me,” he tried to smile, as the man approached him. That’s what his high school Job Acquisitions Skills curriculum taught him to do. “I’m Steve.” His handshake was nothing less than painful. “Let’s go to my office, shall we?”

They wound their way through the seating area and the kitchen where “chefs” were de-bagging pre-chopped lettuce and deep-frying frozen pre-cooked chicken pieces. The fluorescent lights reflected off the once-white tile floor, now covered with black streaks and scuffs. A congealed mish-mash of ancient remains—once considered edible—nearly adhered Eric’s shoes to the floor as he walked across it.

Steve’s office sat in a corner of the kitchen close to the delivery door. It was sparsely decorated, except for the bare essentials. Official business papers lined the wall, along with a diploma from the University of Nevada. A three-by-five of Steve’s wife sat on the desk. Eric noted a wedding band on Steve’s finger. On the desk sat a paper-weight modeling Newton’s Second Law of Motion—the kind with hanging spheres that bumped each other back and forth. Steve took his seat on the side of the desk opposite the door.

Eric took the remaining seat and faced Steve. Steve sat down carefully, covering the top of his pants pocket with his hand. His shaking had subsided somewhat in the seating area, but now began again as soon as he sat down.

“Let’s get started,” Steve said, glancing at Eric’s application. Eric’s only job had been a week of yard work for

a family friend who owned his own landscaping company. “So you have no experience with food service?”

“N-n-no, but I can make macaroni and cheese and pancakes and stuff like that.” This know-how seemed as if it should be good enough to Eric.

Steve’s eyebrows furrowed a little, “Ok, well what about customer service? Do you have people skills?”

Once they got started, Eric forgot his nervousness. That was how things usually went for him. Even though his leg was still shaking a little, his voice was steady now.

“I had a lemonade stand once when I was nine. Nobody wanted any lemonade in October, though. I used food coloring to make it almost black. I called it ‘Poisonade,’ you know, for Halloween. I thought it would be a good gimmick to get people to buy it. I told everybody it wasn’t really poison. There was an old couple who bought some just to be nice. I treated them pretty well. I gave them as much as they wanted. They didn’t complain anyways.”

Steve cleared his throat, “Uh, I guess that counts for customer service. So tell me, what would you do if a customer did complain? What if they said you short-changed them, and you knew you didn’t?”

Eric thought for a moment before answering, “I’d let them have whatever they wanted. I’d tell them to take some salt and pepper shakers while they were stealing stuff.”

Steve coughed and used his hand to cover half a smile, not sure if Eric was serious. “Um, that’s not usually the way we handle things around here, but okay. Actually,

FYI, we never accuse customers of stealing, and we have video surveillance that could probably tell us who was right in that situation. If it's smaller change, we don't usually worry about it. We just give it to them."

"Oh."

Steve changed the subject, "It says on your application you'll take any position here. Why do you want to work at Whopplebee's?"

Eric wanted to be somewhat honest, but he also wanted to get hired so he wouldn't get kicked out of the house. He briefly thought living on the streets might not be so bad.

At one time he seriously wanted to try it, especially when he realized he wasn't going to graduate. However, after telling some of his high school friends about his idea, they convinced him not to do it.

"I want money. And there's a lot of great stuff I can take from this place. I mean, you know, job experience I can get from working here."

"I see," said Steve, moving on, "Why do you think I should hire you?"

This was where Eric thought he should make the move for ultimate cheesiness and a bit of sucking-up.

"I'll work hard for you, Sir. With your expertise and my passion for adventure, we can rule the universe... of...Whopplebee's. People will be kneeling at your feet for your superior Whoppleburgers and the ultimate dining experience that only you and I can give." Eric was feeling

a little more comfortable now. He thought he had nailed the question in his appeal to Steve's vanity.

Steve shook his head slightly, "Are you serious about this job?" He raised his voice; his face was a little flushed.

Eric began to doubt his answer to the previous question. "Yeah, I'm serious. Did I say something wrong?"

"Um, no. You're fine," said Steve shrugging his shoulders and calming down a little. He resumed, apparently deciding to give Eric another chance. Steve played the trump card of all interview questions: "What is your greatest weakness?"

Eric had heard of this evil question from his friends who had gone through the interview process before. They told him to answer with a strength disguised as a weakness. Up until that point, Eric hadn't decided how he was going to answer it.

After thinking a second, he answered, "I guess my greatest weakness is that I'll eat just about anything. I don't care what kind of crap you people might serve around here, I'll eat it."

Instantly, realized he'd said the wrong thing. He tried to fix it. "Not that you guys serve crap," he continued. "Or that we will serve crap if I work here, but if you did serve crap, I'd eat it. The thing is, no food would go wasted around here. If a customer didn't like it, I'd eat it. I guess that's my weakness."

Eric examined Steve's face to see if he'd been successful. It was hard to read. Steve's facial muscles seemed almost completely relaxed. His eyes seemed to be opened a little wide, though. Eric decided Steve was shocked, and probably duly so.

Steve's response confirmed Eric's analysis. "Well, Eric. It's been a pleasure talking to you. We're not hiring now, but we'll file your application," he said, standing up. He shook Eric's hand and began to escort him out into the kitchen. Eric knew what that probably meant. Steve didn't think he was Whopplebee's material.

They were already halfway across the sticky floor when Eric said he'd forgotten his coat in the office. Steve waited in the kitchen as Eric slipped in and out of the office, retrieving his coat. Eric then retreated to his car and cruised home.

"How'd your interview go, Eric?" asked his mom as he came in the door.

"I don't think they'll hire me, but hey, at least I've got some experience," he replied.

He went up the stairs to his room and shut the door behind him. It was then that he laid all the experience he'd gained on the bed: one salt shaker, one pepper shaker, a set of silverware with a cloth napkin, one Newtonian paperweight, two Nevada license plates and a diploma from the University of Nevada made out to Steve Jones.

I've rescued these. Now they can have life outside of chain restaurants. ♪



Maple Leaf Obsession | Jenell McCluskey-Halverson | Ceramics



Dream Bowl | Rebecca Stephens | Ceramics



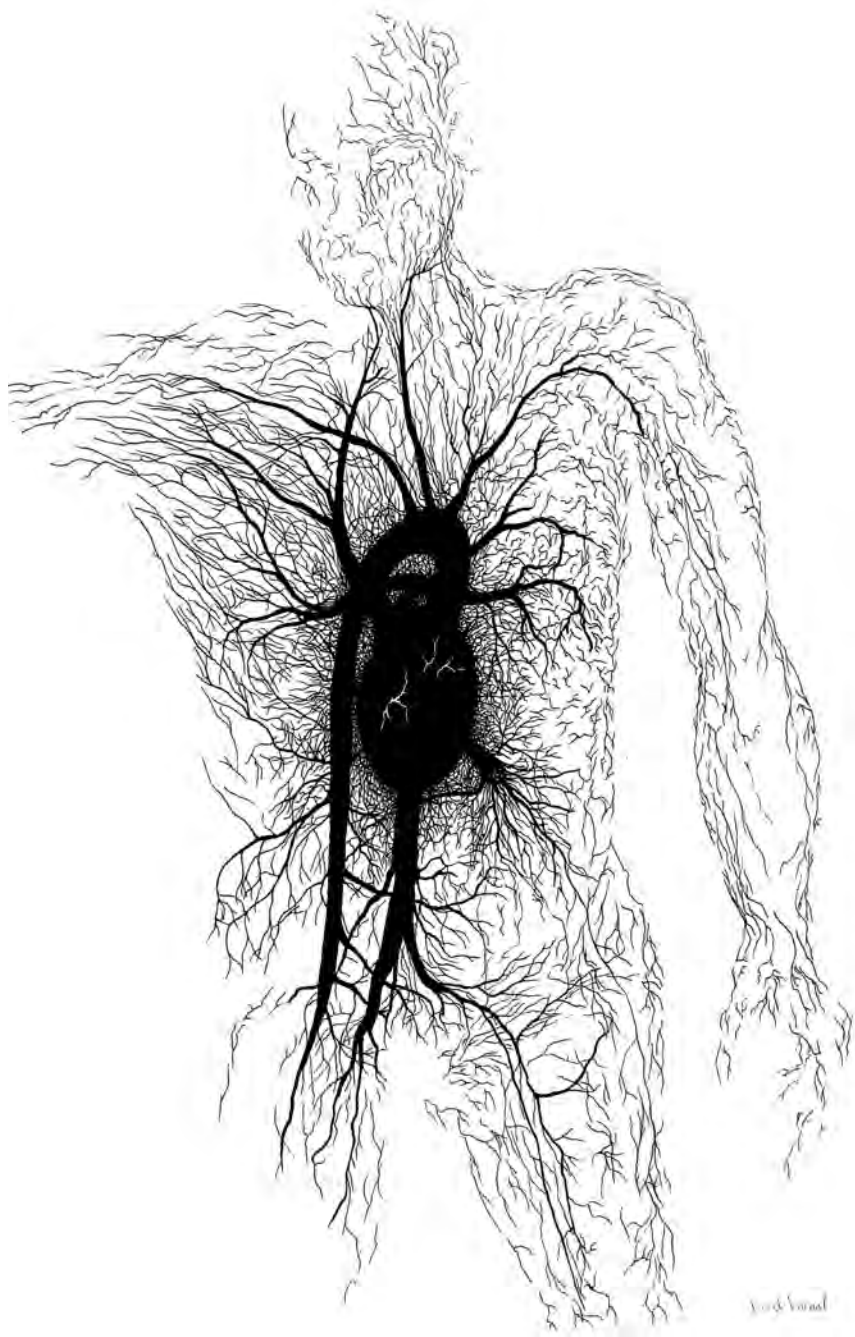


Self Portrait of a Genius | Marci Larson | Graphite on Paper

Night Watches

By Tatiana Iwanick

*S*ide by side we sit together
Talk about nothing
I laugh
You smile
Discussions about everything
I frown
You tilt your head
Inside my body I have my own debate
My heart says yes
It's love, why not tell
My mind says no
He can't love you, his age makes it
taboo
This one-sided love and your friend-
ship is all I have
I sit and listen as you speak of your
long-lost and only love.



Creeping Heart | David Varnal | Ink on Bristol Board

Club

By Marissa Katter

At night, when the methamphetamine racing through my system denies my worn body sleep and forces me to ponder such things, I wonder why the single most fortuitous event in my life took place in the dirty men's restroom of a mid-grade accounting firm. Doris curses when I ask her such things, slamming down the phone after screaming slurs, never giving me the answer I need. For most women, weddings and childbirth occupy that coveted spot in their minds, the one they think of fondly, something to smile about in later years. I guess my life wasn't meant to be this way. A religious woman would tell the world that the Good Lord sent her to the bathroom, that fate and destiny played a large part. Then again, most religious women wouldn't go into the men's can, especially not to huff cleaning supplies stolen from the custodial closet.

With each meaningless new job, I searched the building, choosing which bathroom would best help me escape the monotony of responsibility. I chose this particular lavatory based on careful observational patterns. The fourth floor restrooms at Werner Braun sit at the end of a dark hallway, avoided by skittish, middle aged secretaries terrified of rapists lurking around every corner. Personally, the computing department seemed to fulfill the company's rapist quota; I figured dark hallways were safe.

Men's restrooms held a fascination for me from a young age. I think every schoolgirl nervously opens the blue door, marked with a solemn "male" symbol, and gig-

gles as she eyes the stark porcelain urinals before slamming the door and heading back towards the safety of the monkey bars. The older I grew, the more apparent the convenience; no one looks for a female cripple in the men's john. Search parties check the closest women's handicapped stall and give up. Every time, every place, without fail. The farther the toilet, the less I'm bothered.

The drugs came in high school, when a troubled boy in my Special Needs classes traded hits off a slobbery joint for a peek up my shirt. Pretty girls, popular girls, they avoided special boys, so I got my pick. The cream of the crop, really. Boys who brought knives to school and screamed obscenities at teachers seldom answered to concerned parents, the kind who asked about curfew and club feet and Christian values. Special Needs parents made jokes about sex, and sold weed, and kept unlocked liquor cabinets.

When subsidized lunches and intramural activities were no longer an option, I turned to meaningless drudgery and meaningful drugs. Walk in freezers, broom closets, playgrounds; any little hole transformed into my own private den of iniquity. No one ever questioned me. Disfigurement frightens people; they'll do anything to avoid it. Six months of employment at Werner Braun meant six months of getting high.

Tuesdays were inhalant days, and that Tuesday I enjoyed Lysol, the peppery fumes sucked into my wheezing respiratory system, glazing my eyes and eradicating my nervous response. I sat on the handicapped toilet, my legs braced against the gimp handrail, scratching at my ill-fitting pantyhose, nodding my head to the rhythm of per-

sistent thoughts crowding my head, following stall graffiti with my hands, anything to drown out the silence of being by myself. An industrial bottle of sky blue cleaner, half empty, lay at my feet. The steady drip of the faucet provided a fixation; I counted the drops of pure, untainted liquid and dared myself to get up and turn off the faucet. I never did.

My mid-morning reverie fell apart much earlier than intended. The creaky door, in dire need of the WD-40 I pinched the previous week, sounded the alarm as two pairs of dress shoes tapped across the floor. The men attached to the wingtips kept talking, oblivious to the spy in their midst.

"Too bad about the layoffs, but payroll says there's no other way. Mailroom and typing staff goes first; the old secretaries will be busy for a while."

"You know, I feel bad, but some of those people are goddamn freaks. You ever see that chick from typing with the gimp leg, looks like she's been trapped in someone's basement for who knows how long? That bitch weirds me out. She'll be first on my list to go." Chortles of approval came from the other man as twin streams of urine hit porcelain. I lowered my head cautiously, peering underneath at their shoes as they rambled about busty receptionists and business lunches. They left without washing their hands.

Sitting on the toilet, stoned, I started to panic. Getting laid off, searching for another meaningless job; these options terrified me. Werner Braun took six months of my mind and rewarded me with nothing more than meager paychecks, unlocked custodial closets, and whispers behind my back. Sure, I stole and never completed a day's work, but I'm not one to sweat the details.

And trapped in a basement? My hair might have been a little greasy and tangled, and my clothes threadbare, but he wore wingtips. Hardly one to talk.

Lunchtime fast approached, and so did taffy-colored pink slips. Taking one last hit to strengthen my resolve, I climbed off the toilet, stashed the cleaner under the sink, and thumped my way out of the bathroom and down the corridor. With no plan in my decaying mind, I stepped onto the elevator and let the inhalant take over.

The Werner Braun lunchroom was my least favorite part of the building. The scent of thousands of cheap lunches, leftover casseroles, and fructose-laden soft drinks filled the air, nauseating me each time I ventured through the double doors. Office cliques were most obvious during the lunch hour, when popular employees found themselves surrounded by admiring minions. This caste system isolated me at my own table, until the hour drew to a close and latecomers forced themselves to sit near me, smiling briefly at the pariah before staring back down at their tuna salad. The seat next to me never filled.

That Tuesday, Werner Braun stunk like overcooked spinach and hardboiled eggs. I stifled my gag reflex, knowing vomit would only slow me down. I paused in the doorway, unsure of what action to take. I've never been one for quick thinking, and the drugs don't help. My nervousness brought out the worst in my foot, which stubbornly lagged behind its perfectly formed counterpart. Staggering across the linoleum, shiftily gazing from left to right, I didn't see the pool of water directly in front of me.

The thud of my drug-filled body echoed through the lunchroom, silencing conversation and directing every

pair of eyes toward me. I could feel their stares drilling into my back as I tried to push myself up, my limp hair filling my mouth, obscuring my view. The harsh, shrill sound of an alien wail filled the room. My face cringed at the public show of emotion evident in my face and voice, and as tears filled my cloudy eyes, I breathed deep. Fuck.

Most companies, Werner Braun among them, try to avoid lawsuits, especially those brought by crippled employees who are grievously injured due to company carelessness. No jury in the world would vote against a girl with a club foot and broken ankle, bad as her hair may be. The check arrived a week later, accompanied by a pile of papers forbidding me to speak of the incident. I expected an overly tan retiree in a bad suit, smiling as he handed me an enormous beige cardboard check and a bouquet of festive balloons. I got certified mail from the post office instead, but I'm not picky.

It looked like any other paycheck, printed on mottled blue paper, stamped with an official signature. The power of so many zeroes failed to impress me as much as it should have; I wanted song and dance, a vocal reminder of my new purchasing power. I acquired a repulsive bank account, augmented by weekly disability and unemployment checks.

My rented duplex, situated atop two flights of stairs, no longer seemed feasible. I opted for a ground floor apartment in a tenement, intrigued by ill-lighted hallways and strange noises emanating from the basement. One of my dealers lived nearby, a hefty Samoan woman missing four fingers who was more than happy for the extra bump in business.

Coke always fascinated me, but as a mere office grunt, my finances allowed only holiday indulgence. With a broken ankle, no occupation and more expendable income than ever before, I lived up to my true potential as an addict, never straying from a bong or razor blade.

Common sense dictated I should alternate between my vices, stick to a schedule, and I did so, with fanatical precision. Pot days came easiest, the smells in my building and my differently-abled status disguising the telltale smoke. The few neighbors aware of my presence didn't care enough to sniff the hazy fog coming out from under my door, and I sat, hunched over, on the floor. Particles of dust, magnified by smoky light, danced through the air, my fingers molding shadows around them as I grew increasingly happy with the squalor surrounding me.

Coke days were different. Coke days meant hours of intense focus, a sharpened sense of my own failures. Horrifying moments, scenes I played over and over in my mind, crowded my head, tightened my jaw until my gums bled. The euphoria of self-induced punishment helped me start meaningless projects I was too pathetic to complete, littering the rooms around me with half-painted curtains, mason jars of wax and sand, collages made from the phone book. I met Doris on a coke day.

Doris walked the halls of my tenement, picking up garbage from the hallways, pulling balls of lint from the carpet, stealing light bulbs and packages left by delivery trucks. I watched her from my peephole, mesmerized by her decaying slippers and tattered house dress. She smoked in the stairwell and put the still-smoldering butts in the

window sills, kicked over flowerpots and pocketed the terracotta shards. I loved her immediately.

Walking home from my dealer's, coked out of my mind, I noticed a shiny glass mug on the front stoop. I snatched it as quickly as I could, convinced it held myriad possibilities, and nestled it among the plastic baggies crowding my purse.

Once inside my apartment, I set the glass down and located my favorite mirror and razor blade amidst the paraphernalia and debris. I cut a line and inhaled deeply, dumping more white powder on the coffee table to admire the pristine effect, tracing imaginary letters into the colorless dust. An abrupt noise, one that sounded like a slipped foot kicking, interrupted the scene. On the other side of the dirty peephole, picking at her teeth, was Doris. I gasped and stepped back.

"I can see your lousy foot underneath the door, you worthless gimp. Open up! I'll burn you out if I have to," her haggard voice threatened. I obeyed.

She shoved past me, muttering to herself and upending cushions and books, searching through the random clutter that accumulates in the homes of shut-ins and hermits everywhere. I watched, awed by her demeanor, as she found the discarded glass on the kitchen counter and snatched it up. She polished it with her housecoat as she sat down on the couch, dividing her attention between me and the coke.

"This is mine, fair and square. Mine." I could only nod. Using the glass, she gestured at the coffee table.

"What's this? We used to call it 'the Devil's Dan-druff.' Never bothered with it. Where's that shit you smoke,

the stinky garbage? Get that out, and don't pretend you don't have any. I see you all the time, sitting here without a care in the world. Get it out. I'll be right back." She turned and left, combing through her rat-colored hair with her fingers.

I retrieved an ounce of weed and some rolling papers, too transfixed by my newfound acquaintance to dead-bolt the door and pretend to sleep. I waited five minutes, glancing at the clock, impatient for her return, for more instruction, wondering what else could possibly happen.

She marched in, dressed in a different but equally ancient mauve housecoat, embroidered with monkeys. In her hands, she held a plate covered in small gray lumps. The glass was nowhere in sight. She thrust the plate in my lap and grabbed the bag of pot.

"Eat one. I make them, every day. Gotta keep busy, they say. Eat." She picked up a lump and placed it, surprisingly gently, in my hand.

"You look like you've been kept in a dungeon by some wacko who wants to harvest your eyeballs. Being crippled sure doesn't help. You should know these things." I shoved the lump in my mouth, amazed her insight in my life reached so far. The gray mound tasted like chalk. Sugary chalk. I ate three while Doris showed surprising aptitude for joint-rolling. In search of a lighter, I went into the bedroom, and Doris followed. After procuring what I needed, I headed back out to the living room, only to be pinched in the arm.

"Not out there, you stupid gimp. People can see through the windows; you aren't invisible."

Her severe monologue continued between hits,

coughing and sputtering as she informed me of her right to the glass and anything else left on the stoop. I kept nodding; there was nothing else she'd let me do. She called me Betty, and I let her, too amused to correct. We lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling, transfixed by the smoke rings coming out of Doris' mouth.

"Betty, you and I need an understanding. This here is between you and me. No one in this Godforsaken place deserves this except for us. They're thieves and liars, all of them, and I don't associate with people like that. Hypocrites. Gimme another cookie; I'm starving."

Her harsh voice, grittier than a coal miner's, lulled me into submission, mending my troubles and clearing my mind. She spoke of strange men with Scandinavian names and whiskey breath, men who would treat me right if they were still alive, men who would get me out of this hellhole. Escape was futile, impossible. Doris held me captive in a strange prison made of growled assurances and jerky arm movements, a daily barrage of outings and adventures filling my schedule, numbing what the drugs could not. The comfort of a genuine friend, a companion, snuck past the nosebleeds and misfiring neurons, lodging itself in my psyche, demanding to be noticed. Gone were the days of boys who set fire to elementary school playgrounds, janitors who accepted cheap fumbings in a dark closet in exchange for industrial solvents and breathy apologies. When she left, back to the apartment I was forbidden to see, my eyelids grew weary and my skin itched, begging to be ripped off my pathetic frame and placed somewhere worthwhile, someplace where I was more like her. I slept in my living room, waking when vermin and tenants scurry-

ing outside gave false hope. Each morning, the gritty sand-paper sound of her slippers, kicking up dust along the floor, followed by machine gun rapping at my door, signaled the daily arrival of something different, something unknown, something I alone was privileged to see.

Doris decided we would steal the parking meter. Every day, as the meter maid ventured much too far past the payday loan operations and grimy convenience stores with foreign names, signaling the absolute end of civilized society and the beginning of a new world, Doris waited. She chatted with the matronly parking enforcer, offering her sugary lumps and fictitious gossip. When the small cart whirled away, gas and battery power operating at full force, my only friend would remove putty-colored tickets from the offending windshields and add them to an ever-growing manila folder. The punch-line to this stoner joke came weeks, sometimes months later, when angry drivers stood helpless as their only means of transport was secured to the back of a tow truck as Doris and I sat on the stoop, stifling our laughter with bewildered shrugs and provoking questions.

When cars and their drivers grew wary of the block surrounding the apartment, shoving the rusty meters with heaps of coins when forced to park nearby, Doris became agitated. Her irritation was evident that morning as she emerged from her mysterious dwelling, shoved the daily plate of lint-colored lumps into my arms and stormed past into the living room.

“Bored, Betty. I’m bored off my ass. I feel so god-damn antsy, and don’t try to tell me otherwise. It’s plain as

day. There’s nothing to do in this place. We could be real people, real interesting people, but we’re sitting here surrounded by halfwits. Do you understand me? Alone among the fools. It’s just you and me, and it’s never gonna be different. No one else.”

I nodded, picking the plaque off my molars with a ragged, dirty fingernail before swallowing another cookie.

“Time for change. Come on, Betty.” Doris pulled me off the couch, mid bite, and yanked me into the hall. Outside my door, a tool box marked with the super’s initials lay waiting, the lid open, worn tools spilling onto the creaking floor. She selected a wrench and thrust it in my hands. The metal felt cold, the foreign tool much heavier than it looked, and my arm dropped to my side as I leaned against the wall for support. Doris grabbed a crowbar, a handful of screwdrivers and a file, shoving what she could into the roomy pockets of her tattered housecoat.

Outside, wisps of steam rose up from the cracked pavement. The pockmarked holes dotting the street were filled with muddy sludge created by the morning’s rain. A piecemeal van, poorly assembled with scraps from other vehicles, the rear windows blacked out, charged past, and we were left alone.

After handing me the file, Doris set about hacking at the meter, just below the coin deposit. Unsure of what to do, I rubbed the sharp instrument against the casing, the rasping, grating sound crawling up my arm and filling my ears. I let the useless tool clang to the sidewalk and sat down on the stoop, where I pulled a damp cigarette butt out of the garbage can and rubbed it between my fingers as I watched Doris work.

She attacked the rusty pole, the voracity of her actions creating unexpected dents. Uncollected quarters and dimes jingled with each new blow from the crowbar, flecks of spit flying as Doris' tongue flapped out of her mouth in an act of unprecedented concentration. A confetti of Tetanus-inducing flakes of rust and decaying metal covered the front of her housecoat, strands of hair flying out of her loose bun, and still she attacked.

When the pole of the parking meter ran parallel with the sidewalk below, Doris hissed at me, motioning for the file. I put it in her sweating palm and stood back as she sawed away at the bend, a threatening cackle growing louder and louder as she made more progress on the insulting apparatus. The crease in the metal gave way, whiplashing back in a rush of coins, and finally a crash as the contraption gave in and fell to the sidewalk. Doris took no notice as I filled my pockets with coins. Soon, even that wasn't space enough, and I formed a crude basket with the front of my shirt, scooping the money into it. My greedy mind, focused on less important matters, took several seconds to register her cries.

She lay pinned beneath the parking meter, her cheeks smeared with grime. I ran to her, a shower of silver currency littering the ground, dusting her body like painful ticker tape. As the gravity of the problem sunk in, I hovered above her, biting the back of my hand, crying. She looked somewhere past my head as she tried, in vain, to push the meter off her chest, her arms still bent when she passed out.

I pulled Doris off the ground, choking as I tried to yell, to scream her back into consciousness. Her limp

muscles fought against the strain of mine, trying to drag both of us back to the mess we'd created on the pavement. Drops of blood squeezed out of a scrape on her neck, and I pressed them back in with my hand, willing them to disappear. Hoisting her across my shoulders, like a butcher with a carcass, I trudged up the stairs, past my sin-filled apartment, and down the hallway to hers.

The door was unlocked. I shoved inside, back first, careful not to hit her head on the doorjamb. The visual frame around the door grew larger and larger, more items entering my periphery, waiting for my judgment, with each backwards step I took. Pictures of smiling, gap-toothed school children and Doris, nestled among a happy family, covered the rose-flecked wallpaper. Neatly folded throws and embroidered pillows adorned the couch, and the scent of gardenias wafted from the lit candles on the coffee table. I set Doris down, careful not to disturb arrangement on the couch, and put my shaking head against her legs.

"Who are you? What happened to my wife?" A small man, neatly dressed in a cardigan and slacks, stood dumbfounded in the doorway to the kitchen, holding a half-eaten piece of toast. Greasy drops of butter fell to the spotless linoleum as he glared at me, accusing, trying to lay claim to what I knew to be mine. My useless leg kicked out on its own, violently, and I swore, my face burning, furious at his deceitful implication.

"Stanley? Jesus Christ. Oh Betty, what did we do?" Doris pushed herself up, smoothing out the wrinkles in her housecoat, looking at her husband as he eyed the rusty mess on the carpet. She looked at me, unconcerned, and then back at her husband, wiping away dirt as she kept

mumbling to herself. I wanted to slap her, find some appropriate punishment for her betrayal, but shame and shock overwhelmed my system, begging me to make my escape. My deficient limb thumped, keeping a steady beat for the musical sounds of the change in my pocket, as I lurched out the door, alone.

It was easy to cower in my cluster of rooms, making twisted pathways of the ever-growing junk piles, destroying any monument to Doris I found among the decay. Passing her door made my throat feel tight and my lungs ache, terrified of the possibility of seeing her. I ventured out only at night, hiding behind street lamps and abandoned cars, keeping one twitching eye focused on the tenement door and any sign of my traitorous friend and her accusing spouse. She tried to enter my apartment a week later, but the chain stopped her. I envisioned her face straining past the tiny crack, held back by a simple latch, as she yelled my name, foolish enough to think I'd forget her infidelity.

My sheets, rife with unidentified odors and stains, discolored beyond recognition, mixed with smoke and ash to form a cocoon around me. For days, maybe weeks, I sprawled across the misshapen mattress, crawling to bathroom or kitchen only when necessity dictated. I lay waiting for something worse, an extra insult, anything to justify a change in my routine. I should have expected her.

Her form, always hard to focus on, crossed back and forth in front of me, blurred, distant, different. My body rolled towards the center of the bed as she climbed on, clutching a tinfoil covered plate and a pair of wire

cutters. She kicked the filthy bedclothes aside, yanking them out from under me, adding them to the growing piles throughout the room.

"What's wrong with you? Where have you been? You always get so cranky and moody. I'm not standing for it anymore. It's selfish, leaving me like you did."

I stared at her, gnawing on the collar of my t-shirt, the one she stole for me, the one that read "You can't hug your kids with nuclear arms." A bleach stain in the corner, from when we tried to dye my hair.

"It's just you and me, Betty, and don't you forget it. We've got things to accomplish, see. I can't have you hiding in here when I'm outside, all alone, trying to do what's right."

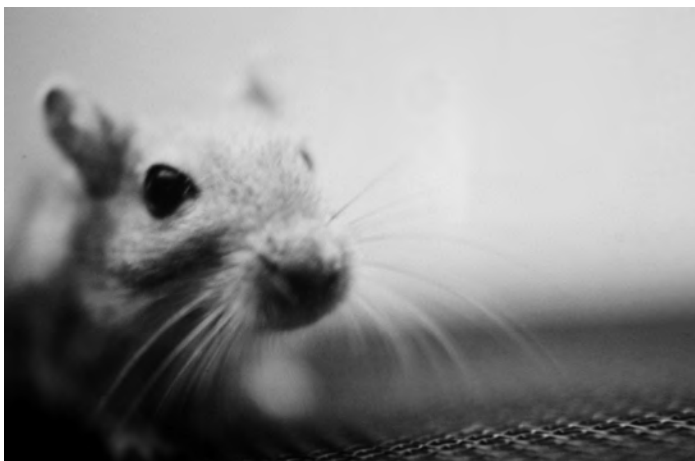
I nodded, my thousandth silent agreement. She sighed, placing a half-eaten cookie on her stomach as she moved the well-worn afghan with her foot. I grabbed her hand on impulse, feeling the blood move through her tired veins, our hearts moving out of sync, thudding dully as the ceiling fan cut through the smoke-filled air. ♪



Study of a Hand | Catherine Carpenter | Pastel on Paper



Lavender | Rebecca Stephens | Digital Photograph



Gerbil | Carrie Countryman | Silver Gelatin Print



I Got You Babe | Luke Schaad-Dang | Silver Gelatin Print



Self Portrait | Allyson Bennett | Silver Gelatin Print



Corner of 10th and Main | Allyson Bennett | Toned Silver Gelatin Print

Smile Like a Song

By Daniel Borgen

I tightened my navy blue apron and adjusted my matching red and blue striped tie, ensuring its symmetry while examining my appearance in the faint reflection staring back at me from the timeclock's dull plastic cover. I scanned the stock room. I noticed the large bins management placed conspicuously near the trash chute overflowing with various sundry damaged and spoiled products. We, the staff, referred to as "cohorts" by management (it offers employees a sense of "ownership"), grew accustomed to the rather reprehensible stench. All along the bottom of the grimy, gray cement walls lived a concoction crafted after one too many trash bags missed the trash chute, bursting at the seams, leaking and dripping, adding its vile contents to the cracked cement. Unmotivated bottle clerks blamed someone else. The remaining moments of freedom ticked away, one by one, succinctly and neatly in time as I tapped my foot in time. I deftly slid into my pseudo persona, my arduous daily ritual. I'd smile and apologize when customers chastised me for placing their eggs or bread in the bottom of their shopping bag or when they demanded I allow them to exceed the store's fifty-dollar check-writing cash-back limit or when they demanded I allow them to purchase alcoholic beverages with their state issued welfare credit card. I'd explain the intangibles like I was letting them on some big company secret. They'd understand.

I looked down and then up again, skillfully replacing my sullen demeanor with an enthusiastic one. Smile and say thank you, my bosses told me. People can shop anywhere,

but they choose Freedom Foods because of the fantastic service, they'd say. The toilet paper and the soda and the toothpaste were all the same. But the employees weren't. We made our customers feel comfortable at home by greeting them with a warm hello and thanking them by name. "Thank you, Mrs. Cooper." I'd continue to make myself comfortable by passing out free beer to my friends and slipping enough dollar bills into my pocket to sustain another night's festivities after my shift ended. Nothing seemed as important as a night of socializing and impressing. Years of being sheltered meant years to make up for. Tasting freedom from a stifling, religious household proved the most powerful narcotic—I'd determined to be the proverbial belle of the ball, at every function, every time.

Before work, I arranged for a friend to pick up four cases of Widmer for an important party later that night. There were boys to impress. I also needed forty bucks for weed. Payday was too far away and I'd blown most of my cash on guys, booze, and CDs. I determined I'd achieve my lofty goals before noon, as planned, and reassured myself with each tap of the foot. At Freedom Foods, I found the perfect balance between quiet submission and even quieter stealing. Youthful exuberance coupled with humble steadfastness—I projected such intoxicating loyalty and dedication, there wasn't ever a need to question occasional, minor discrepancies. An extra post-purchase void or no-sale cash drawer opening meant nothing when it came from Brandon Stewart. They considered them minor oversights from someone wrapped up in the lives of his customers. Aside from the impeccable reputation I maintained, I helped my cause by posting the highest checker-efficiency and produc-

tivity rating in the entire store. My talents kept the customers moving, the smiles coming, and the money flowing.

The staccato beeps yelled back at me as I entered in my social security number into the time clock, offering up my freedom and officially started my shift at ten o'clock in the morning. I quaffed the rest of my caramel latte, my morning sustenance, and headed toward my post. I passed the entrance to the dairy cooler, a place reserved for illegally eating large loaves of fresh bread while consuming stolen pints of chocolate milk with a few other evildoers. Free snacks remained one of the greatest perks. A soft, velvety, motherly voice interrupted the Carpenters on the store's squawking, crackling speakers.

"Good morning Shoppers, we hope you're having a greeeat Thursday morning! Today, in your full service bakery, you'll find fresh-baked French bread for only 1.99 a loaf! If that doesn't tempt you, stop by and let our tastes-like-homemade-and-no-one-will-know-it-isn't cherry strudel tickle your taste buds. If this delicious, decadent treat doesn't satisfy your dessert cravings, nothing will. Come see us today. Thanks for shopping at Freedom Foods, where customer loyalty comes first."

I never understood why we announced, "Customer loyalty comes first." It meant nothing, and I wished for everyone to catch on.

I loathed everyone in the bakery. I cursed my store manager's insistence that every department in the store try to lure customers their way every fifteen minutes via elaborate loudspeaker announcements. I shook my head and suppressed my disdain as my steps carried me swiftly out of the stockroom and down aisle five toward the cluster of

registers standing guard at the front of Freedom Foods. Aisle five housed chips and carbonated beverages and microwave popcorn and peanuts. It was my favorite aisle because it trumpeted so many of my personal favorites.

I turned the corner and breezed past the deli. Leslie, a coworker who tanned far too often, used too much hair-spray, and ate too many pieces of fried chicken while too infrequently washing her uniform, waved enthusiastically as she poured another vat of frozen chicken into the deep fryer, wiping copious amounts of splattering grease deep into her apron. I nodded and averted my eyes to hide my grimace. I saved the smiles for customers.

“Oh yes, hello there.”

“Are you finding everything OK? Greeat.”

“Looks like you’re doing some damage today, Mrs. Spencer! That French bread smells so wonderful.”

“I’m using it tonight with my home-made spaghetti,” she replied.

“I bet you’re quite the cook.” I added a wink and a smile.

I greeted several people as I headed toward the office to fetch my cash drawer and receive my assignment. I always hoped for the express lane, the work station most in tune with my formidable talents. The office stood proudly next to the long line of checkstands. There, managers and bookkeepers went about the important business of running the store. They’d make schedules, drink coffee, audit cash drawers, talk on the phone, or catch up on one another’s lives. The office itself was enclosed in clear plastic ten feet tall—it looked even taller thanks to their very important pedestal; this conspicuous epicenter looked all the more

crucial because it remained set upon a thick slab of cement. The high-profile nucleus enabled employees of vital import to maintain his or her bird’s eye view of the bustling store surrounding them.

I knocked on the transparent, plastic door. Jules, our sickeningly perky morning bookkeeper, whistled and screeched something about me being hot stuff and harboring secret resentment about marrying the wrong man. She constantly reminded me how she thought I should be a model and my looks coupled with my charm would take me places someday. I imagined how every male model breaking in to the fashion scene had a devoted grocery clerk behind him. Her large, sagging breasts battled to get out of a white blouse she bought two sizes too small. The bright red lipstick—the kind retailers stopped selling long before Cyndi Lauper’s only hit record—over-compensated for her thin and barely noticeable lips. It looked like she treated herself to a perm the day before. Maybe she shouldn’t have.

“Hey, Jules. How’s your morning?” I feigned genuine interest even though I knew she’d tell me anyway.

“Oh, Brandon, it’s been so hectic! Jean and Maggie called in sick, so we’re short two checkers. You might not get your lunch on time. But by God, we’re calling people—we’ll get someone.” She motioned to my store manager: a man who smoked too much, suffered from irritable bowel syndrome and incessant underarm perspiration, and always insisted his polyester pants give him the ride of his life each and every time he donned them. Horrible camel-toe-of-the-ass, we called it. His fingers assaulted the buttons on his oversized telephone as he left frantic messages for employees who always screened phone calls. The messages always

implied Armageddon was nigh. The world will spontaneously combust and explode if you don't come in to work on your day off.

"Well, thank God you're right on it." The praise in my voice remained unmistakable. "With you two on the case, I'm sure everything will be fine."

"You're such a sweetheart! We're putting you in the express lane; we really need you to perform today."

"Oh, I will. Whatever you need. I'm here for the team."

"Greet, Brandon. Go ahead and take register 3. We've attached a copy of the latest secret shopping report to each checkstand. Make sure you read it if you have some free time. 85%. It really should have been 100." Jules smiled so big I could see every last morsel of red lipstick on her front teeth. Her Lauren Hutton gap wasn't so attractive streaked with red chunks.

"Oh yes, you're right. Thanks, Jules." I carried my drawer to relentless agony. I reminded myself of the lucrative paychecks, legal and otherwise, and determined to endure another day. Register 3 meant I'd be neighbors with my favorite coworker, Louise. She'd been a cohort at Freedom Foods for three and a half decades. Louise climbed to the top of the salary scale; she could make her own schedule, pick her own checkstand, count her own drawer; she even received the ever-coveted weekends off. Everyone longed for such a fancy position. Her life had some semblance of normalcy. With all that security, she never worried about the things I did. I envied her.

"Weezy." I called to her from my station. She scanned her customer's toothpaste, then toothbrush, turned

her head to smile, offered a wink instead of a word, turned back, and continued her important conversation in perfect time. What a pro. Her perfectly bouffant hairstyle amazed me with its impeccable circular shape and simultaneous elasticity in the face of obvious thinning, and what I was sure one day would surely be a nasty case of female-pattern baldness. It bounced as she laughed. It turned with her in a wide, sweeping arc as she gently placed Mrs. Norris' eggs and bread in their very own paper sack. Nary a hair ever remained out of place for long—a feat I hoped to master one day. My awe at her ability to conquer and tame her locks overcame my less than enthusiastic evaluation of her poorly applied makeup. I kept it to myself.

I turned my register light on and unhooked the plastic wire acting as an impenetrable gate. Customers emerged from obscurity and from seemingly nowhere to purchase their various, disparate goods. I swiftly satisfied every customer, happily, so it seemed, taking in everything around me, preparing for the inevitable. Customers' faces and personalities meshed into a giant melting pot; in the end, I could never really differentiate one from another but I always thanked them by the name on their credit card or check or with sir or ma'am while mustering the most genuine smile possible. Simultaneously taking stock of peoples' purchases and maintaining a sense of my fellow employees' placement proved my greatest challenge. I waited for the right moment each and every time—the right moment to process a fake return or void a small sale or feign register problems and handwrite a receipt. I'd take my newly earned loot and slide it into the lowest pocket on my apron, deep and out of sight.

Crowds ebbed and flowed as people came and went with astounding proportion and balance. Louise and I stopped to talk between our duties. We chatted about the day and the weather and the management and my religious parents. She quoted Rush Limbaugh and I pretended she was right and he was a genius and I nodded when she badmouthed Bill Clinton's devastating reign, even though I didn't agree. We discussed Bill O'Reilly's lawsuit and all the things Weezy wanted to do to him with a vibrator. Anything to endear me to the store's most prized employee—someone to vouch for me if times got tough. We talked about the union and the strike the year before and my college plans. I didn't have any yet. We listened intently to courtesy clerks who regaled us with tales of urine-infested cars and the intricacies of facing cheese and beer and how they caught a couple having sex in a bathroom and how they weren't lying when they told us they found a large, steaming pile of human feces on the floor in aisle seven. All this story telling happened between customers and smiles, of course, and only after various cleaning duties and bag-stocking. I envied the freedom the courtesy clerks enjoyed. Free to roam the store and the parking lot and the stockroom. A luxury, really.

"Did you hear we're getting more secret shoppers until we can raise our scores?" Louise asked as she finished packing Mr. Lundy's groceries into his cart.

"Oh, damn, well I haven't really paid much attention yet."

"They told me yesterday. We should be worried about all of these people watching us work all the time." She emphasized us and her stare lingered a little longer than usual.

"Well, doesn't that mean we just need to keep on top of our game?" I asked.

She smirked. "That's not all it means. You have a customer."

I turned to face a portly red-faced man wearing a yellow windbreaker entered my checkstand holding two-dozen roses. Roses went for \$19.99 per dozen. \$21.51 with tax. I memorized key prices for ease of earning the hefty, lucrative tips I deserved. He set the flowers down and fumbled for his wallet. He pulled it out and fished through his cash. I greeted him warmly and asked about his day. No one was behind him, and Louise's attention remained rapt by the package of steaks Mrs. London insisted on returning. His flushed cheeks and hurried search told me he his time must be valuable.

"Sir, I'm afraid I'm having a little trouble with my scanner here. Do you mind if I just handwrite a receipt for you?"

He stared for a moment, but seemed reassured by the gold-colored plastic nametag that announced me a customer service superstar and "high-productivity" checker.

"No, no, it's fine. No trouble. No need to do that. How much do I owe you?"

"You've got two dozen there for your sweetheart? It looks like it will be 43.02 with tax."

He handed me three twenty-dollar bills. I pressed "no sale" and opened my drawer and fished out his change, smiling as I counted back to sixty. I thanked him for his purchase and apologized again for my temporarily defective scanner and wished him well. He smiled and thanked me for my kindness, gathering his things and congratulating himself

for choosing to frequent Freedom Foods. Great service proved an impetus for many returns. I rested my hands in my front apron pockets, sighing and yawning while I moved two twenty-dollar bills from the sleeves of my white shirt and into my blue apron. The rush always started as anxiety. Reassurance would follow. My impenetrable façade proved too steep a mountain to climb for any potentially suspicious coworker. If you like someone enough, there's really no reason to look for anything else.

The manager of the floral department announced a sale on roses and gardenias and lilies—a strange mix. I wondered when store management would see her for the gardening fraud she so obviously was. She rambled longer than anyone else, unable to complete a sentence but seemingly thrilled by the sound of her own voice and mesmerized by her own incompetence. My eyes glazed over as I tuned out her inane banter and I turned to help the newest customer in my line. I glanced at my watch and realized Denny would be coming soon for the beer. Beer passing proved the easiest swindle of all. I'd merely ring up some other item—produce, bulk nuts, whatever—and take a few dollars while pushing the cart brimming with brew right through my line. I refocused my time and attention to our store's sustenance, the smiling customers at hand.

I noticed Denny nervously pacing near my station moments later. He waited for my nod of approval and headed to the beer display with a cart. He carefully placed four cases of Widmer in the cart. He stopped to show interest in chips and salsa and other potential mates for his beer, but approached the cluster of registers with only the precious nectar. I noticed Louise's empty checkstand and

worried she might usher him in. She called and welcomed him to her register. Denny looked and looked away, pointing at the express sign that announced my placement. I greeted him as I did any other patron of Freedom Foods. I asked him about his day. I mentioned the weather. I asked him to see his identification.

Louise abandoned her post and its inactivity and planted herself firmly at the end of my checkstand. She made small talk with Denny, asking about college and his studies and I acted enthralled as I tried to kill time. Action came to a grinding halt. I couldn't complete my grandiose scheme with Eagle Eyes Weezy watching. Fortunately Denny wowed her with his intellect of all things political and historical and said nearly everything she seemed to want to hear. She was abruptly cut off when the first of many ailing nursing home residents meandered into her line. I silently praised the daily field trip and the scores of old people I loathed and dreaded. I moved Denny through quickly, charging him for pistachios and a newspaper and sending him on his way. The residents were starting to fill up my line, as well.

"I think that guy you just had was one of them," Louise, still facing decrepit customers, called over to me.

That's why she was so nice, I thought.

"Eh, I need a break."

Denny's visit remained as close a call as I'd experienced, and I hoped for my first break. I called the plastic cubicle and hoped management would provide a brief respite. After much discussion and explanation, my break was approved. I roped off my checkstand and turned off my light as a disgruntled produce clerk ambled toward the front of the store, bitter about waiting in the wings as my replace-

ment. I couldn't be troubled by where or when he'd end up, so I rushed to the soda machine to buy a Coke to accompany the cigarette I'd have out front.

I stepped outside and moved away from the store's entrance. Managers didn't like us smoking close to the front door. It looked trashy, they said. I leaned against the brick wall, basking in the sun and lighting my vice. I inhaled deeply, examining the activity in the parking lot. I noticed my manager standing a few yards away, talking to someone who seemed familiar but not important. Some overweight man. He was probably congratulating management on a great staff and even better service. It seemed the day would fly by. I hoped it would. I'd met most of my quota and I promised myself a relaxing, stress-free day.

My manager looked in my direction. I took the biggest drag I could muster and crushed what little cigarette I had left in hopes of avoiding confrontation. I looked up again, and he started walking toward me. His arms and fingers danced like a mime's as he engaged in an animated conversation with his companion. I looked more closely. My stomach jumped into my throat as I recognized the slightly worn, but most certainly familiar yellow jacket. The same windbreaker I'd seen moments ago. Management's face seemed contorted in anger. Perhaps confusion. I remained utterly horrified. And confused. The customer I had taken so lightly now seemed the most important of my grocery career.

"Brandon."

"Yeah."

"I'd like you to meet someone." Management's gaze remained fixed on me.

I locked eyes with the stranger as he passed us and

went back inside, trying to avoid my manager's at all costs. I felt the color drain from my face and I nervously peeled at the label of my bottle of Coke.

"Brandon, that was Neil, one of the Company's secret shoppers. We need to talk."

"OK."

Shit. I knew they caught me. All at once, my mantle of invincibility faded. Management talked about lengthy and elaborate sting operations and spies and secret shoppers, all seemingly involving me and my "illegal money making scheme." He asked if I wanted to head to the office to see the proof. There I'd find a laundry list of my dirty deeds and handwritten receipts and a rough calculation of how much money I'd pilfered from the Company. Jules had been tallying it for some time, apparently. I declined his kind offer. Instead I offered a quiet exit. He said there might be charges and he was sorry to see me go. I was sorrier to complete the walk of shame, fielding confused looks and whispering and outright stares. Louise stared at me as I was escorted in and toward the backroom and back up front again, not missing a step while ringing up her customers. She shook her head slowly, disgust replacing ambivalence. I cleaned out my locker, gathered my things, and left Freedom Foods for the last time.

I cursed myself for not better covering my tracks.

As I walked through the parking lot toward my car, I glanced back at the towering, formidable grocery store. Several employees had gathered around the front door, bombarding Management with questions and commentary. I looked ahead, hoping my steps appeared resolute and undaunted. After all, no one ever said anything about handing out free booze. ♪



Id | Anthony Fontyn | Ceramic and Wax



Picasso Plays | Stephen Berry | Ceramic and Wire



Pauly Shore is the Boss | Marci Larson | Charcoal on Paper

Thief's Honor

By Jamie Schindler

Kagami sighed and adjusted the strap of her leather shoulder harness, wishing she had the luxury of pacing and kicking the nearest tree trunks. She'd known the duke was foolish enough to chance the muddy, perilous road from Brikal to Calandria; was he also foolish enough to drive his coach into a ditch as well? With her luck, he was stuck in some nameless muck further up the road, and she'd be sitting in this gods-forsaken Prasket tree all night with nothing to show for it but a numb behind.

Thunder grumbled ominously overhead; she muttered a curse in Proper Elven as she eyed the dull gray storm clouds. It had been raining for a week, part of the reason Duke Lenscar had been so convinced he'd be safe with his horde of expensive Nesket furs, gaudy Plarin feathers, and chests of gold Prites. He was mostly right about that, actually, she admitted to herself. Very few thieves would risk the High Forest's backways—filled with switchbacks, overgrown trails, murderous beasts and land pirates—even for a haul of riches as tempting as Lenscar. Kagami grinned, white teeth flashing in a wickedly dazzling smile as she flicked a piney bough off her shoulder.

Cowards, the lot of 'em, but it certainly makes my job easier.

She glanced down to check her tools and caught a glimpse of herself in a puddle cupped between the raised roots of her tree, tugging absently at the hood of her long cloak to make sure it stayed over her head. The teenaged

girl staring back from the mirror of the water was pretty, in a haughty sort of way; bronzed skin, high cheekbones in a sharp oval of a face, full lips and large, cat-like amber eyes. Her hair, tucked up in a tight braid so as not to get snagged, was thick and rich, a glossy color somewhere between black and darkest magenta. Some idiot from Earth had once asked if it was her natural color. With a snort, she remembered the horrified look on his face when she'd pinned him to the nearest building with his own throwing stars. As an acquaintance had once so memorably commented, Kagami didn't suffer fools well, even in her best mood.

If I have to wait another hour before that little jumped-up toad of a royal seat-cushion shows up, I'll pin him to the nearest tree. She thought mutinously, shifting as another of the branches dug into her back.

As usual, she was carrying only the barest essentials—she'd never needed more than those and her wits, anyway—but even that slight weight could drive someone nuts if they'd been sitting in a tree for three hours and counting. She'd made good time through the woods, thanks to a shortcut she'd learned from traipsing after one of her more idiotic associates through these same hills, but she was beginning to get rather bored.

The creak and snap of a royal coach reached her ears. Kagami sighed in relief, muttering her standard rote of thanks to the demi-goddess Thedri. Lady of Justice and thievery, steady my hand and silence my feet. Wiping her gloved hands across the leg of her breeches, she traced the image of Thedri's scales etched into her handstaff. It was a small weapon, not more than a few feet in length, but it

had a javelin blade on one end and had saved her neck on several occasions. She could be absolutely silent with it, a great advantage when she needed to lift something from the top of a carriage.

The furs will probably be on top; Lenscar is idiot enough to think they're waterproofed. And the Prites, which is what I'll want first. Too bad I can't get to the feathers, but I suppose I should leave him something to balance the scales.

Steadying the lead-weighted staff across her knees, she peered intently through the trees. All she needed now was her hapless victim.

As if on cue, Duke Lenscar's coach rounded the bend, his pretty, high-strung horses struggling wearily through the caked mud. The fact that the fool used horses at all on these boggy roads, instead of the shaggy-furred Ixthias whose paws were bred for muck, was all the proof Kagami needed that the man was a complete imbecile. Anyone with anything of value used Ixthias during the short rainy season, from the Knights of the Realm to the lowliest cartier. Shaking her head just slightly, the tall, slender thief shifted until she had a clear window over the road and waited patiently. As she'd predicted, there were several chests mounted atop the coach's roof, strapped with leather harnesses and closed with padlocked chains.

They always seem to think I'm going to open the chest right in front of them. They haven't figured out yet that any thief worth her lockpicks isn't going to bother perching on top of the carriage like some daredevil just to pick their pockets. She grinned, the look half amused, half sour. *Well, Livian might have in the old days, but she was always half-idiot anyway.*

On came the Duke, oblivious to the danger drawing nearer and nearer on the roadside. As the creaking contraption reached a few yards, Kagami counted the guards and nearly laughed out loud.

Good grief! Two guardsmen in front, two behind? That's like asking for someone to lighten his load for him. She glanced down at the first tier of her plan, concealed innocently in a ragged line a couple yards beyond her hiding place. Just a few seconds more.

Snap-boom! The shatter of wooden cartwheels underscored the terrified whinnies as the horses danced and reared, four tossing their guardsmen riders this way and that as the four hitched to the coach fought to escape it. The wheel-crackers were inexpensive devices, barely more than five inches long including the pointed spike, but they were designed to puncture the wood of a cart wheel and snap it apart as the thing rolled forward. Kagami had tucked them into the mud along with several herb balls; these cloth bundles, stitched to explode when thrown or stepped on, were her own mixture, made to render a horse and rider helpless for roughly five minutes. It was all the time she'd need.

The second stage of her plan erupted in the trees across the road, filling the air with smoke and random arrows fired harmlessly into the air. As she expected, the remaining guardsmen bolted towards the shots; the riders inside the coach screamed and shrieked. Stretching out with her handstaff to pick up the nearer of the chests, Kagami frowned. One voice was Duke Lenscar, but the other sounded like a little girl.

Just then, the door of the carriage blew open, so

fast it banged back on the hinges and nearly clipped the small figure that flew from the interior of the coach. Kagami froze, almost dropping the chest on the child's head. It was a little girl, no more than six, smeared with mud and ragamuffin clothes torn. For an instant, Kagami just stared as the tiny girl bolted through the trees, staggering and clutching a ragged teddy bear to her chest. Duke Lenscar hit the door a moment later, red-faced and smelling of the Avrill wine freshly spilled across his doublet.

"Get back here, you little mutt!" He roared, fighting to keep his overlarge feet as the carriage bucked and shuddered. "Stupid little gutter brat, I'll knock your teeth loose for this!"

He brought his personal maid with him?!

Kagami hung motionless, suspended between the top of the coach and the concealing branches of the Prasket tree, and a cold fury began to burn in her chest. She'd only had a glimpse of the child, but it was enough; she recognized the ferocious bruises, the ducked head and hunched shoulders that spoke of repeated beatings. Unwashed, feet bare and sliced open, obviously all alone in the world...was this the protection the Lenscar family gave to their people, then? Kagami wouldn't have trusted him with the welfare of a dog, let alone a child. Icy fire tightened her stomach as the bastard reached behind him and pulled a riding crop from the carriage, smacking it against his palm. "You get back here this moment, you little scut!"

Later, Kagami would try to convince herself she was just protecting her own hide. That he'd seen her hanging there when he maneuvered his skinny, awkward frame down from the still dancing coach, and that he'd raise the

alarm. But still, she swung from her perch and landed like a cat in the mud, throwing stars already pinning the gawky, hook-nosed little piece of horse dung to the side of his carriage. Quicker than lightning, she snapped up a length of bandage she carried in her harness and tied him 'round the mouth, knotting it as cruelly tight as she could manage. Picking up the riding crop, she tapped him on the forehead, a savage smile turning up her lips as she stared into the Duke's wide, watery blue eyes.

"Not a sound, Little Man," she whispered in the Common tongue, adding the rapid drawl of the Sevoraz backwoods for an accent. "We're going to play a game now, you and I. It's called payback."

It was nearly evening when the door to the Brikal inn opened, spilling cool air and the promise of more rain into the taproom that served as a lobby. The patrons gathered around the fire glanced casually at the two figures that entered. It wasn't too unusual to see a pair like them traveling together nowadays, even though they didn't look much like kin. The older was obviously some sort of Halfling human, possibly Fey, with her purple-black hair and golden eyes; the younger one was a pale honey-blonde, with grey eyes peeking out like a scared rabbit from beneath an overlarge hood.

Kagami sighed wryly as the villagers and travelers turned back to their own conversations, handing over some of Lenscar's stolen gold as little Caitlin clung to the hem of her cloak with one hand. She'd managed to find the small girl once she had picked up her own Ixthia—the mount was currently resting in the inn's stable. As for

Caitlin? Kagami sighed, leading the way up the stairs to their rooms and a hot bath. The child had no family, hadn't had anyone for as long as she could remember. And she certainly couldn't go back to Lenscar's lands. The tall thief knew several people who would welcome a child, any child, and treat her well, but that would entail travel time and many awkward conversations with acquaintances she'd rather avoid at the moment.

And there is the catch of responsibility, isn't there? I saved her. I took care of Lenscar. That makes her mine now.

Glancing down at the little blonde head already nodding with sleep, the thief sighed and shook her head before picking Caitlin up. Starved as she was, the tiny girl weighed next to nothing. Kagami opened the door to her new rooms and smiled ironically. Sometimes, having standards was a pain in the ass. ♪



African Memories | Lois Russell | Mixed Media



Paint Face Peel | Jason Collier | Digital Photograph

Novel Chapter: To the East Gate

By Seth Bennett

Lucian plunged down the narrow alley connecting the back door of Keevan's home to the main street of the Forger's District. Keevan followed, trying to sprint in pursuit while simultaneously donning his sturdy leather boots. A loud, obnoxious snort sounded from around the corner. Muttering a curse, Lucian pivoted and grasped Keevan by the collar of his tunic. He hurled him behind a conspicuous pile of scrap, remnants of the neighboring blacksmith's labors. Rusting blades and discarded tools squeaked slightly as Keevan rolled gracelessly behind the pile. Lucian's eyes watched the alleyway with almost zealous fervor as he crouched cat-like behind the pile, waiting.

"What is it?" Keevan whispered, after a moment of silence.

"The reason I entered your home through an upstairs window." Lucian answered, his voice soft as a breath of wind across velvet. Then Keevan saw the creatures and stifled a gasp. Four of them passed the entrance of the alley, each at least six hands taller than an average man, and armed with weapons ranging from blocky war hammers to serrated battle-axes. A high-pitched squeal sounded as twisting, tearing hinges announced their successful entry into his home.

"Hurry, they'll soon figure out you're gone." With another heave Lucian hauled Keevan onto his feet and they both sprinted down the stone alleyway and around the corner, towards the east gate.

“What were those things?!” Keevan demanded, tripping slightly as he tried to regain his balance.

“Gorghal, the smaller variety.” Lucian answered, eyes searching the road ahead, which made a sharp right after a few hundred yards.

“Smaller?” Keevan’s breath caught sharply as his stomach knotted into a cramp. Four days in a bed followed by a sprint was a bad combination.

“A Gorghal is simply a perversion, in this case an aspect of man.”

They had not gone a dozen house lengths when a scream of alarm and a hastily aimed crossbow bolt announced their discovery. Glancing over his shoulder, Keevan caught sight of a man clothed in black leather armor, hastening to reload his crossbow while screaming at the Gorghal.

The window to his parent’s bedroom exploded in a shower of glass and debris, as one of the creatures leapt from the second story to the street below, stumbled slightly, and took up pursuit. Three others emerged from windows and the devastated doorway to his home, joining in the hunt. Silver armor sparkled in the afternoon sunlight as each of their massive, loping strides outdistanced each of his two.

“We won’t make it to the East Gate,” Keevan gasped slightly, clutching the stitch in his side. “We’ll never outrun them.” Lucian glanced behind him and nodded. Stone ground beneath his feet as Lucian halted, sword drawn.

“Run!” He ordered, shoving Keevan ahead of him.

His left hand extended outward, a fountain of flames erupting towards their foes and incinerating an advancing crossbow bolt. The Gorghal flinched slightly at the heat. Their armor shimmered, deflecting the majority of the attack, and setting a nearby forge alight.

Keevan stumbled forward and then stopped, realization of Lucian’s intent striking him deep. A human scream sounded to meet the guttural war cries of the Gorghal. Lucian brandished his blade and charged, fire wreathing his blade. Thirty yards separated him from a painful death, which Keevan would not allow. Mustering up what courage he possessed, he sprinted towards Lucian. Embracing his Seeker Sight Keevan, struck an unpracticed blow. His eyes blazed sky blue as this mind unleashed a Curtain, and the lead Gorghal dropped its hammer in confusion, blind.

The Gorghal stumbled and fell. The other three behind it soon collided into their comrade, tangling into a mass of steel, flesh and muscles. As one pulled itself upright from the pile, its eyes widened in terror. Lucian’s flaming blade engulfed its head, obliterating the unprotected portions of its face. A flailing arm caught Lucian beneath the ankle and as his flailing body descended backwards and Keevan’s breath caught, though not for him.

In his Seeker Sight, Keevan could see the man clearly. His black armor seemed gray in the presence of the mass of black energy it sheltered, a Twisted Sky Fire formed before the creature and it smiled malevolently.

As the bolt of energy streaked towards his heart, Keevan forged the familiar shield around himself and

strengthened it with every last ounce of his will. Sky Fire bathed Keevan's barrier, engulfing it for an instant. Keevan, slightly dizzy from the exertion, struck back.

His Book of Instruction had called it a Mind Blade, and to his vision a spear of white light lunged towards the Twisted's head, which blinked in surprise at the assault. A barrier of its own caught the blade of energy, however, and Keevan's head rang with the force of the block.

The ground rumbled and over the horizon they rose, balls of molten fire, all arching towards Keevan. For a moment all but the blind Gorghal stared unmoving at the oncoming maelstrom. Lucian's battered body rolled into Keevan, his arm a bleeding, broken mass of masticated flesh and shattered bone. His eyes radiated the panic he felt at finding Keevan with him.

Then he saw it. To his Seeker Sight Keevan could see strands of energy emerge from the rooftop to the east. The strands connected to the oncoming fury and pulled hard. Gorghal and Twisted screamed in panic as the hailstorm of fire turned to plummet towards them.

"Brace yourself!" Keevan commanded, shielding Lucian with both his body and mind. The volley struck the street and his foes, exploding on contact. Molten fire coated both sides of the street and splattered all over his shield. Half dead flaming corpses thrashed upon the ground; even the Gorghal's armor couldn't stave off this heat completely.

Keevan collapsed to his knees in exhaustion from the struggle. Releasing Seeker Sight and his shield, the last specks of the strange fire fell harmlessly to the ground.

His ring seemed to burn with such ferocity he wondered why his skin did not catch fire. The pain awoke him, reviving his senses.

The gruesome sight of a half-burnt Twisted met his brown eyes, cross bow leveled at his head. From ten feet away there would be no chance it would miss. Darkness' creation grinned triumphantly and chuckled to itself, tossing the weapon aside and drawing two twin sickly green metal daggers from sheathes concealed within its scorched boots.

Groaning with effort, Keevan pulled himself onto his feet and drew the Tri-Being's blade. Forcing a trickle of Sky Fire into the handle, blue light speckled the natural brown surrounding his pupils. The Twisted tilted its head slightly, calculating, then advanced. Its hands moved smoothly despite the burns, a cobra swaying hypnotically before it strikes.

They stood a yard from each other, waiting. Keevan struck first, trying to apply the advantage of a longer sword; putrid green stone met cold black metal. Deflecting the blow with his left-hand blade, the Twisted lunged inside and attempted to knife him with his right. Keevan caught the wrist of its right hand and forced the knife away, at the same time twisting the burnt flesh with all his strength. The Twisted howled in pain and kicked his kneecap viciously. Keevan's leg gave way and they toppled. Keevan's head collided with hot stone and amidst the stars massing before his eyes he saw the Twisted's left-hand rise above his chest, dagger poised to strike. In desperation Keevan pulled his blade in front of his face, and forced the

dagger's downwards plunge into the stone beside his head. Grunting in satisfaction Keevan felt his Tri-Being Forged, Sky Fire bonded blade cut deep into the Twisted's arm.

Howling a second time, the creature reared back its head, arching its back farther than Keevan would have thought possible, energy ravaging its body. The scent of smoking flesh returned, more intense than before. Drawing his blade from the Twisted's arm, Keevan kicked its smoking face with all his might, using the force of the blow to roll himself backwards, over his shoulder and onto his feet. He breathed in relief as the creature collapsed onto its back from the assault.

A grunt sounded from behind. Keevan turned a war hammer larger than his head and commenced its downwards decent. Two hands away from Keevan's head, a thick quarterstaff whirled from his right, knocking it aside.

"Help me finish them!" Keevan blinked in surprise, noticing the other two rising forms of partly dead Gorghal, and the black haired man engaging them. Drawing no quarter, the man ravaged his way through the Gorghal, striking head, hand and throat with all his strength. Fire burst from his fire-bonded staff as the Tri-Being bathed the still smoking flesh of one opponent in renewed flames while crushing the throat of another simultaneously.

Joining the fray, Keevan thrust his sword through a small space in his attacker's flawed armor, where it left a thin strip of skin unprotected. It cut though effortlessly, the flesh already partially cooked. Once again Keevan's

blade took life, Sky Fire coursing through Keevan's opponent, leaving a dead body behind. The now overpowering stench caused his eyes to water, and he gagged.

Keevan sheathed his sword and hobbled over to Lucian's body, still unconscious. The black haired man had just finished immobilizing his mangled arm. Together they each took a side and hefted their breathing burden. Silence consumed their conversation for a short time. In the distance, both could hear the battle near the west harbor growing steadily closer, an occasional explosion drowning out the screams of the dying. Soon they rounded the bend in the road and far in the distance he could see the relief wagons gathered near the East Gate, preparing to depart.

Keevan broke the silence. "I'm Keevan Stratagar."

"I know," the reply came. The man stood a half a hand taller than Keevan and his hair resembled a drain clog. A mass of tangles and dirt—combined with the worn leather armor and weathered skin—spoke of a man in his late twenties, accustomed to exposure to the elements. "I am Baden Ishaliron, and if try something like that again, you fool, I will tie your hands behind your back and teach you to run from a fight myself." His voice was cold and his expression perfectly serious.

"What part?" Keevan responded, "The part where I saved Lucian's life or preserved your own?"

His quarterstaff seemed to move faster than the Twisted's daggers, and the dense wood struck his shin firmly. Keevan nearly collapsed under the combined weight of his own body and Lucian's while he clenched

his teeth together, exhaling vigorously. Baden's tirade commenced.

"For staying to fight, you fool." His staff returned to its previous position of support, but stood ready for use on a moment's notice. "The future of the Tri-Beings hangs in the balance and you go pull some heroic garbage like that. Do you have pig's slop for brains?"

"I wasn't going to just let him die!" Keevan retorted, his eyes narrowing curiously for a moment. "Why don't you consider the Tri-Beings your people? You are one of them." He questioned. The staff whirled again, and Keevan nearly collapsed as pain laced along his other shin.

Baden continued as if no interruption had been made, Keevan's seething breath guaranteeing him an alert audience. "Every Tri-Being on Hiertaelia is hoping you can restore Nirovanya. Especially with the latest findings at the Hovel I would of thought you, of all people, could understand the importance of your life to all of us right now!"

They had been sighted. Men on horseback were galloping towards them, dragging a makeshift stretcher. Nariem, Keevan's father, was among them.

Keevan raised his hand timidly. Baden just looked at him, staff tense, waiting for the slightest mocking tone in his voice as he asked, "What's the Hovel?"

Baden's eyes grew wide and Keevan jumped slightly in surprise as the man before him embarked on a bold oratory of profanity. Throughout the dialog, Keevan caught snatches of speech ranging from the more mild

"gorghal mincemeat" to "pig-slop brained shore dwellers" and "bumbling blacksmith" to other intense phrases to which Keevan had never before been exposed. Ending with an oath of sorts and promising a death of Sky Fire upon Nariem, Baden finally stopped and calculatingly glanced at Keevan.

"The Hovel is an abandoned mine in the mountains East of here." Baden answered. His eyes began to search their surroundings again, as if expecting an eavesdropper in an abandoned portion of a war zone. "Recently, we've uncovered a number of ...artifacts." Baden paused, organizing his words carefully. "Our best scholars have been studying them for weeks and discovered nothing useful."

His head rocked back towards the battle to the west, "As you can see, despite our efforts to keep the discovery secret, someone managed to get word out to the wrong people." His eyes fixed firmly on Keevan's. "That army is not here for Shalon, though they will settle for it should their main goal eludes them, which is you."

Keevan went slightly pale, and then the news grew worse. "Those Gorghal were clothed in armor no Tri-Being, Human or Fire-wielder could have forged." His head now nodded towards the unconscious Fire-Wielder they carried. "Your history books are wrong of course. There have been some uprisings of Twisted, mostly small bands hiding in the mountains, ignored by historians and rolled into myths by constant rumors. But this is the first time in two thousand years such forces have risen to challenge anyone with any kind of significant military prowess."

Silence followed as Keevan digested this new information. "One last question?" He asked, "What was that thing that drew the fire balls away from me and Lucian? I watched it work, it was incredible." Baden's staff twirled in his hand beside him, he glared at Keevan intently.

"You will not mention that to anyone, not even Nariem. That is my burden. When you're ready, perhaps we will overcome it together, should my suspicions about one of the Hovel's artifacts prove useful." His dark blue eyes narrowed into coals of heat, silencing Keevan's questions before they left his lips.

The silence that haunted their conversation was soon interrupted with the arrival of the stretcher. Keevan leaned over to lay Lucian down gently, and was struck by a blow to the head. Standing a half a head shorter than Keevan the blond woman's green eyes radiated anger. "Get this boy away from me." She demanded, turning to examine Lucian's wounds.

Familiar hands grasped Keevan's shoulders as Nariem pulled Keevan away, calling for a horse to be brought. He patted Keevan's back comfortingly. "It's not your fault, Dara doesn't understand the what's at stake here. She isn't willing to accept it at least if it doesn't include her own broken race." Gripping the reins, Keevan pulled himself a top his mount, wincing at the pains thoroughout his body.

Nariem continued, "she's only here to try to protect Lucian, I expect he will have quite a shock when he wakes up to Dara's fury. He snuck out of camp late last night after she fell asleep."

The group trotted slowly towards the wagons, Dara demanding both protection and a slow pace in order to keep Lucian as comfortable as possible. The wagons were now departing to the east, towards the mountains. Keevan spoke. "According to Baden, I don't understand the situation either. Why did you keep all this from me?" Keevan questioned, waving his arm toward to chaos and plumes of smoke blanketing the west horizon.

A clatter of hooves announced Baden's arrival as he leapt upon his mount and hastened to Nariem's side. "Yes Nariem, why keep something so pivotal from the boy we need the most?" His voice quivered with anger. "Your son nearly got himself killed back there, and we would have all suffered greatly for your stupidity in not explaining this situation to him."

Nariem's eyes grew wide in indignation, "Don't you see why?" He challenged, waving his arm towards the pillars of smoke and fire rising from the city. "If Keevan knew nothing of this a small chance remained that he wouldn't be perceived as a threat. I didn't want my son exposed to war, he deserves peace."

Baden snorted in derision, "Don't give me that sqalm." He said, motioning towards the remains of a north bound horse's south-end's excrement they were passing, still fresh. "Even if you can't see a Gorghal, it's there and it will kill you anyway. Your son is tougher than you think, but if he doesn't become a man and stop trying to be a hero all of you will have no need for Nirovan-ya, you'll all be dead." With that final statement Baden heeled his mount's flank hard and rode off towards the wagons.

During the silence that followed Keevan pivoted in the saddle, looking back on Shalon. The flames of the Twisted were consuming all he had known before today. A sense of foreboding grew within him and he sensed a strange malice hunting him still, even as he escaped from his former home. Attempting to shake off the sensation Keevan turned to face the distant mountains, and escape. For a brief moment the sensation resurfaced, stronger than before, now emanating from the east. He knew, deep in the mountains, something waited. ♪



Teresa | Claude Czajkowski | Welded Metal



Untitled | Rebecca Stephens | Ceramics



Best Leaf Ever | Corinda Anderson | Ceramics



Noun | Steve Berry | Ceramics



Mukanshin | Chihiro Bise | Ceramics



First Mobile Home | Monique Easley | Ceramics



Memory | Derek Danielson | Pastel on Paper

Perfect

By Marissa Katter

Anne and Roger Epstein had the Perfect Marriage. Everyone said so. Throughout their Connecticut town, people spoke politely of their admiration for the newlyweds. His successful law firm handled all the right marriages and divorces, and she decorated their tasteful home in all the right ways. They threw delightful dinner parties, gave generously to moderate charities, and kept their cocker spaniel from barking too loudly.

The Epsteins met at Yale, where she studied Communications and he, Law. Their courtship lasted two years and Roger's graduation before he proposed. They registered at Williams-Sonoma and married six months later, right after Roger passed the Bar Exam. The Epsteins traveled to the Bahamas on their honeymoon, and hosted two dinner parties the week they returned. Anne served brisket.

Roger's favorite things about Anne were her aptitude at housekeeping and her loyalty to him. He enjoyed watching her decorate their home and liked it when she asked his opinion on matters of great or little importance. Anne couldn't think of anything that stood out about Roger. If pressed for an answer, she would reply he lacked nothing and was the perfect husband.

Roger was the perfect husband. That's what Anne's mother told her, and why Anne agreed to marry him. When he proposed to her during a picnic, she realized she could find no faults in him. True, Roger displayed no dazzling character traits, either, but Anne felt confident she would find them soon enough.

Four months after their nuptials, Anne began to worry. She sensed a growing boredom, creeping into her mind as she wandered throughout her house. She checked to ensure the curtains hung straight, the dog was fed and walked, and all bills were paid in full. A dull pain in the back of her head told her she'd forgotten something, and day after day she searched the house for the unfinished task.

Roger knew nothing of his wife's worries, and Anne vowed to keep him uninformed. After coming home from the office, Mr. Epstein was too tired to be bothered with trifling household matters. Anne kept her confusion to herself and continued with her daily routine, cooking dinner and serving it in the freshly wall-papered dining room, the organic homemade food artfully arranged on dishes imported from the south of France.

After dinner, Roger attended to the needs of his clients and business and went to bed, motioning for Anne to follow him upstairs. Together they examined his closet, choosing shirts and ties full of power, suits that made him seem taller and wiser. Anne let Roger make the final choice, making sure he felt confident in his choice of attire. After brushing and flossing, he'd peck her cheek, murmur "Goodnight," fold his arms over his chest, and drift away. She stared at him, wondering what he dreamt of, and turned on the 42 inch plasma TV, the sound muted. All night long she sat, mesmerized by the glow of the screen and the neon green block script in the upper right hand corner, reminding her of the silence.

Anne devoured whatever came on, paying no attention to program quality or length. Infomercials and re-runs of sitcoms from her childhood were thrown into the same

category of mediocrity. Roger thought these archaic programs gauche, but Anne found them engaging. Everything received a shrug of approval when she couldn't sleep, when she'd been awake for weeks.

The Epsteins didn't care for cable, and the networks played the same programs on a loop. Anne never knew the day of the week until she turned on the television at midnight, and recognized a familiar face and product. A pop singer shilled skin care on Tuesdays. A man with acne scars promoted cleaning products on Wednesdays. The ghost of a crooner offered his greatest hits every Sunday at four AM. New musical compilations were sold during the commercial breaks. The Queens of Country and Kings of Rock sang songs about love and children. Anne was intrigued.

She wanted to buy these musical collections, a jumble of inelegant artists forced to commingle. They sang for her, tossing back their out-of-date hair as they held onto the microphone cable. Song snippets, taken from the chorus, hinted at their stories but never gave any definitive answers. It was like reading a book jacket, trusting in the taste of the good people at Time Life. There were no real answers, no denouement. Anne never found out why Mama socked it to the Harper Valley PTA, why Satan found it necessary to travel to southern states.

Roger woke up one night and caught his loyal, fastidious wife hugging a pillow, standing at the foot of the bed, rocking back and forth as a man in a chef's hat demonstrated the sharpness of his knives. He tugged at his left eyebrow, clearing his throat to interrupt her trance.

"Why are you still up? I think you should go to bed now." He eyed her suspiciously as she turned off the television and climbed into bed.

"Go to sleep," he repeated.

Anne's nighttime activities woke Roger six times before he suggested sleeping in separate rooms. He reasoned his important job depended on alertness. He couldn't fall asleep in court and expect to be taken seriously. Anne, ever aware of her husband's needs, nodded several times, knowing he was right. She moved into the office the next day, taking refuge on the plush chenille couch. This empty, productive room lacked a television. Roger's computer sat on the desk, next to the bag of sleeping pill samples his father sent that morning.

"Roger says you've been a little off-schedule lately. These will put you right back on track."

The round blue pills procured by her father-in-law went down easily. Sleep still avoided Anne, but the gnawing pain in the back of her skull disappeared, replaced by a satisfying numbness. She took one pill every six hours, grateful once again to embody the proper wife her peers knew her to be. The mild barbiturates made her as polite and stoic as her husband. Guests at dinner parties remarked that Mrs. Epstein seemed quiet lately, and gossips concluded she was with child.

Deprived of the television, Anne turned to the office computer. Its rhythms comforted her; she liked the soft clicking sound as her fingers pressed down, forcing the keys into submission. The internet offered hours of distraction. She spent entire nights perusing online bookstores, compiling lists of volumes to purchase for the Epstein library. Anne devoted utmost care to finding the perfect book for Roger; she looked at financial planning books, cookbooks, novels and memoirs. She avoided the implied insult of the Self Help section. For hours every night, she searched in vain.

Early one morning, after taking the cocker spaniel on its walk, Anne returned to find Roger in the garage, loading his computer into the back of the Volvo.

"Where are you taking that?" Anne's voice sounded crisp, her cadence clipped and staccato.

"My computer at work is being fixed, so I'm bringing this one in. I'll have it back next week." Roger pushed the trunk door shut, petted the dog, and left for work. Anne stood still, leash in hand, until the whining dog reminded her of her place.

Roger came home late that night and went to bed directly after dinner. Anne washed the dishes, scrubbed the countertops, and finally acknowledged her nightly responsibility, her duty to feign sleep. She trudged upstairs slowly, careful not to disturb her husband. The desk, devoid of distraction, faced the doorway of the office. Anne couldn't look away. She lay stiffly on the couch, willing her eyes to close and her mind to sleep. The minutes and hours on the digital alarm clock kept a tally of her repeated failure. Two hours passed, then three, then five, before she conceded defeat. Anne folded the wool blanket, smoothed the pillowcase, and got dressed.

Once she started driving, Anne understood the foolishness of her plan. All the shops in her Connecticut town were closed, and the doorways of bars were filled with a steady stream of patrons sent home for the night. She passed dozens of mileposts before she found an open gas station, but turned away at the last second, bothered by the small group of teenagers loitering near the door.

Sometime after three, Anne crossed the state line into New York. A chain restaurant's sign lighted the free-

way, the red neon declaring the establishment “Always Open.” Mindful of her distance from home, Anne took the next exit and drove into the half-filled parking lot.

The dim light of the smoke-filled dining room illuminated the faces of the weary patrons inside. A waitress nodded at Anne, handed her a menu, and pointed at an empty booth. Mrs. Epstein gingerly opened the grimy laminate menu, already knowing she wanted nothing more than coffee. The waitress produced a brown mug of ebony liquid and a handful of cream packets. Anne stirred in sugar and wiped the rim of the mug before taking a cautious sip.

In the booth behind her, two drunk men raucously discussed women and work. Anne winced each time they swore; she wanted to move and wondered if she could. The waitress came back and took Anne’s order of pancakes and more coffee. She returned with the food quickly, slapping the bill on the table when she was done. Anne tucked a ten dollar bill under the gray check without looking at the total. The pancakes, the waitress, this place; everything repulsed her, but Anne ate anyway, politely chewing each gritty bite.

The men behind her stood up to leave, bantering back and forth about who earned the privilege of paying. One, wearing a blue sweatshirt and a long greasy ponytail, tried to grab the check out of the other’s hand. The flimsy bill ripped in half, and his hand shot back, smacking Anne in the back of the head.

“Ma’am. I am so sorry.” He placed his hand on her shoulder, peering into her eyes to measure her pain. Anne stared at his hand, the clipped fingernails and the coarse knuckle hair touching her black cardigan.

“I’m fine. Really. I’m fine.” Anne grabbed her purse and ran into the bathroom, as far away from him as she

could get. She kicked down the royal blue door of the stall, kneeling down in front of the toilet. The mildewed grout between the tiles and scratched black toilet seat made her dizzy, and before she could pull back her hair, she retched.

The retching led to violent coughing, shaking her entire frame until she tasted blood in her mouth. Still she couldn’t breathe, and she collapsed on the dirty floor, gasping and crying. The waitress came in, staring at the strange woman on the bathroom floor.

“Ma’am, are you all right? Do I need to call someone for you?” She kneeled down, rubbing Anne’s back as she spoke. Anne sat up and dried her eyes, thanking the woman for her concern.

“I’ll be all right. Thank you.” She stood up and brushed the hair out of her face, wiping it clean with a paper towel. She washed her hands in the sink, picked up her purse, and walked out the door. There was nothing more she could do.

Mrs. Epstein arrived home around dawn, trying to ignore the imprint of the strange palm on her upper arm. Roger sat in the kitchen, dressed in his suit and reading the morning newspaper. He looked up and examined his disheveled wife.

“Where did you run off to this early?”

“Oh. I remembered that I needed something at the grocery store, and then I got coffee.” Roger, satisfied with her answer, continued to read the Business section, not noticing the lack of food or beverage in his wife’s arms. After a few minutes of silence, he seemed to remember something and put down the paper.

“I’ve been thinking. Don’t you think it’s a good

idea for you to move back into the bedroom? I can move the TV out so it won't distract you anymore." He waited for her response and, realizing she had none, continued.

"It's for the best, Anne. I wouldn't want anyone to get the wrong impression. Let's get the sheets washed today so you can come back in tonight." Anne caught on to her husband's request and slowly nodded. To Anne, it seemed a futile gesture, but she didn't want to alarm Roger any more than he already was. It was best to agree, keep him confident in his choices.

Roger, sensing success, rose from the table to pat her on the back and rinse out his cereal bowl. He put the empty dish into the dishwasher, just as Anne asked him, and dried his hands. She placed her keys on the monogrammed key rack and headed towards the stairs.

"Where are you going?" Roger called after her. Anne paused, wondering what the right answer was, how to concede defeat.

"To bed. I need to rest." ♪



Figure Study, Lying | Anthony Fontyn | Conte on Paper



Flat Stomach | Nina Crawford | Welded Metal



Still Life With Plants | Evelyn Ogg Thompson | Pastel on Paper



Courting Shoes | Evelyn Ogg Thompson | Pastel on Paper



Another Day in Paradise

By Gypsy Alderman

It was another hot, sticky day on the outskirts of the swamp. The humid air hung on him like an extra set of clothes. By two in the afternoon it would feel as if an overcoat hung on top of that. God, how he missed the feel of that hot damp air on his skin. The air, with all of its sweetness, would be the tonic he needed.

Surprisingly, the rattletrap car his friend Marty the Mole called “a fine piece of equipment,” got him there. Many times on the drive down, he considered it a piece of Hell with wheels on it. Fine had nothing to do with it. The lid on the trunk and the front bumper were missing. At least part of the muffler fell off sometime early in his trip. As he burned rubber out of the Double PP Disco and Dinner, he heard The Mole shout out his final instructions, “Remember, every half tank of gas, add four quarts of oil, let the radiator burn off some steam then leave the engine running and add as much water as she’ll take.”

The missing tail pipe made the old thing sound like a racecar cruising in for a three-lap victory. During the middle of the night, when all he saw was miles of blacktop and a black sky ahead of him, he shut his eyes, and his imagination let him hear the crowd roaring in the distance. Never mind all of that. The old Buick got him back to the place he missed the most, the place that filled all of the empty spaces surrounding him in that dark hole he left behind him.

Opposite Page:

Paradise Lost | Nicholas Beatty | Silver Gelatin Print

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When he turned onto the dirt road, the sun broke over the palmetto bushes that palmettos made him think of Neeney's swamp cabbage and how much he hoped a big pot of it simmered on the stove by dinnertime.

He heard the crickets, frogs and various other inhabitants of the swamp and lake shutting down their chattering for the night. They were the ones surviving one more night out there where everything wants to eat something or someone else. It seemed fair before; he called it a kind of dance in the darkness. He didn't know if the snapping, biting, tearing and blood sucking would sound so normal now. His feeling of being safe from all the things out in the night vanished. He knew this little camp with the people living in it, brought him peace or no place on earth held it for him. If he did not get a night of rest to-night, this little dirt road held the end for him.

Did his absence affect PoPo and Neeney in some terrible way? His grandparents always said, "We love you more than 'sugar pie and bumble bees,' no matter what, no matter who, no matter why, and forever plus one day." They never looked at him with anything but love in their eyes. Did their promise still stand? Only God could love him more, and he wouldn't have even considered that if Neeney hadn't tried to assure him so many times. In a few minutes, the circus would begin and those lingering questions in his head might be answered.

He cut the engine to coast in and ease out of the car, wanting a few minutes alone to glance around the place. He felt a little surprised to see how small it looked.

In his mind's eye, it seemed so big. He didn't look the same, either. A worn down look on his still youthful looking face betrayed the change in his heart. His crystal blue eyes told a different story now.

He didn't know whether he should just casually saunter over and open his cousin Harley's door or not. A straight shooter, Harley would give him the real scoop. Leaning up against the dirty car, he decided he needed a cigarette and a few minutes to prepare himself. He kept reassuring himself that his people, his family, would love him no matter what in the hell they thought he had done.

Now the sun was past the point of "fish bitin' time." He could hear the whine of the little flat bottom boats as they headed in from their early morning fishing trips. The airboats with the giant airplane/fan engines had long ago pulled up onshore. They were usually homemade boats, meaning there was not a safety feature or rule not broken. Airboats skimmed on top of the high grass and shallow water. They carried too many people and could fly on top of spit...and they could do it fast. The family need fast when they poached alligators and ran dope. A couple of Mason jars filled with bourbon or grain alcohol didn't hurt either. His family had never been anything but preachers and pirates. He derived from the pirate faction of the family.

He had grown pale and lost that salty taste mosquitos didn't care for...now he must taste pretty good because they were starting to chew on him. He could slide his hand down his arm and make a small black ball with the ones he wiped off. The blood left on his arm called all of the other pests to dinner.

Just as it was starting to bother him, the door of the first trailer opened. The sun shined right in his eyes. It kept him from knowing at first who opened the door. He didn't really care which one of them opened it. Just being there seemed good enough. He made it home, back to Lake Okeechobee, the place he dreamed of for six long years. It was the only place on earth he really loved, and now it would begin. Whoever opened that door began the realness of being home, all the good and all the bad.

His cousin, Harley, had been lying awake in bed for a while. She dreaded another day of sameness; same breakfast, same chores, same heat, same sweat and worst of all, the same words shared back and forth with the same people. The same tired old souls, speaking about nothing in particular, just to make sure they still had voices.

Something told her to open the screen door and survey the yard. She knew all about the patches of weeds that had to suffice for grass. Everything looked faded, even the weeds. Although, if not for the weeds, there would be no color at all. She saw places in the movies with green, green grass and brightly colored flowers. The people that lived in the movie places had on pretty clothes. Everybody, even the great big men, looked nice. She noticed gloves, suit jackets, starched shirts, crisp long dresses, velvet hats and silk stockings. Some of the clothes were adorned with feathers. No matter if they were crying or laughing, they were never sweating. She begged God to get her out of the infernal hell swamp she lived in. Until she got rescued from this living hell, she needed to remember to look down everywhere she walked. There were rattlesnakes and sandspurs to worry about now.

Neeney had just found a rattlesnake yesterday in the shed. She told Harley, "He was all coiled up, shaken' his rattles. It didn't scare me none. I just reached over to my hoe and chopped his head off. He must not a' known his head was gone for a bit. Looked like he changed his mind about bitin' an ol' granny like me 'cause he was tryin' to crawl away, then he must noticed he didn't have no head. That snake just boinged right out into a straight line. He was a five-footer if he was an inch."

Then she kind of cried and laughed at the same time, very softly. Harley guessed Neeney was thinking about her baby boy who got bitten by a rattlesnake and died before he reached three years old. Neeney didn't let herself feel the past very often. She always said "Sad feelin's from the past need to stay where they belong, and that's in the past."

All of these silly thoughts of nonsense floating in her head, she thought, just because there isn't anything important to think about. Then, Harley opened the door, and she saw him.

"Charley! Charley! Oh my God. It's Charley," she screamed.

Doors opened everywhere in the little camp, people running out to grab Charley. It was all of the usual suspects, the cousins, Great-granny, the aunts and uncles and some people he hadn't met yet. Some were crying, some laughing. All of them excited one way or another.

Last to walk up to him was PoPo with tears in his eyes. The family said he hadn't walked that far of his own volition in two years. Everybody standing there knew PoPo

never loved anybody the way he loved Charley. Charley put his arms around the old man and hugged him carefully so as not to break him.

“I don’t care who they said you killed, boy,” PoPo said.

“All I know is you survived six years in that God-damned Yankee prison, and if those people ever try to take you away from us again, they’re going to need bigger guns and more people than they had last time.”

Charley’s home. ♫



Two Heads and the Space Between | Nicholas Reed | Pastel



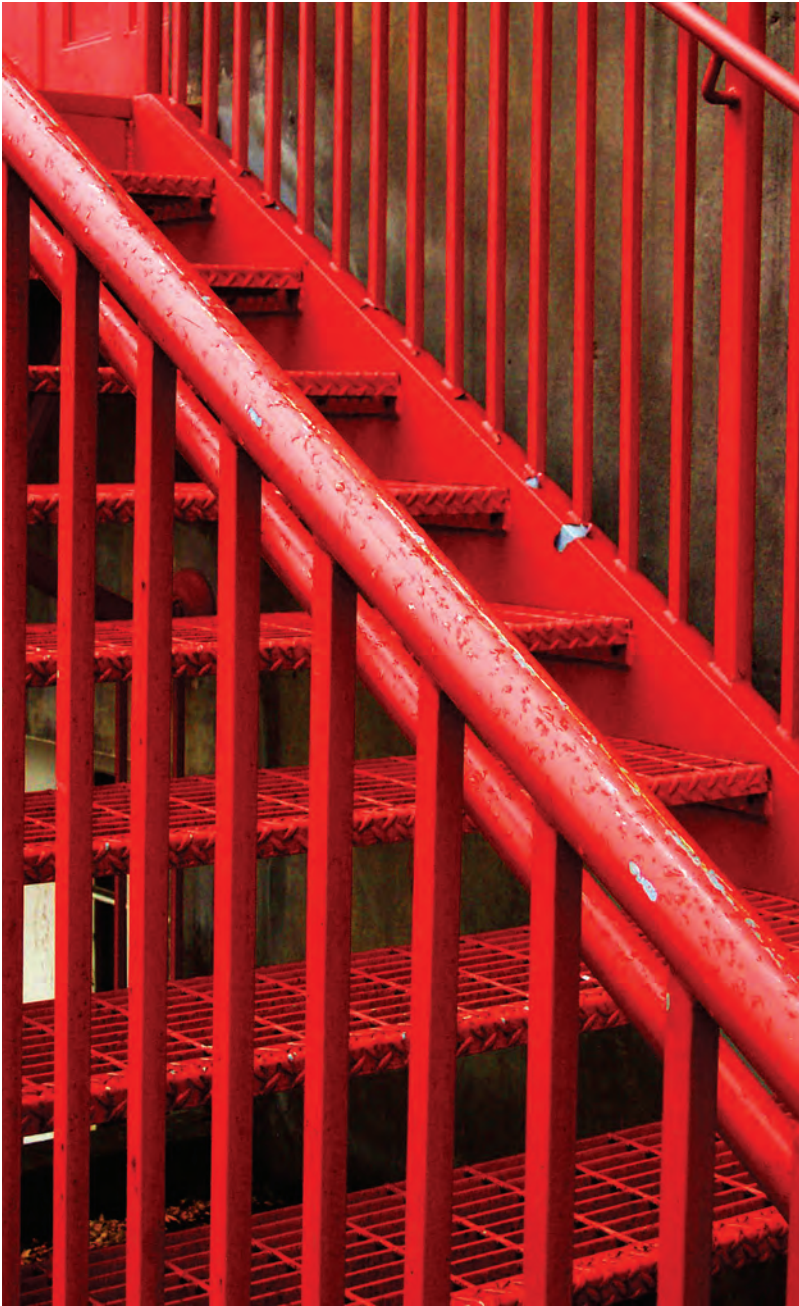
Egyptian Ankh | Claude Czajkowski | Welded Metal



Anguish | Rebecca Stephens | Acrylic on Wood



Hope | Rebecca Stephens | Acrylic on Wood



Red Stairs | Deanna Bredthauer | Digital Photograph

Time to Live

By Danny Ramey

The brick felt rough in his calloused hand. Admio turned it over, laying it on the ground and fitting it next to the last stone he just placed. Straightening his back, he looked down on the brick from where he knelt. Satisfied with the fit, he scraped up a bit of mortar on his trowel, wedging it down between the two cobblestones. He picked up another brick from the satchel next to his knee. Rolling the brick between his hands again, he took the time to examine how best it would fit with the others he placed.

He set the stone into place, securing it there with another application of gritty mortar. Admio caught the strap of his satchel with one hand, snatching up his pail of mortar with the other. He stood, pausing to admire how his work blended with the surroundings. The circular path he finished ringed a multi-level fountain decorated with ferns, water splashing down from the top, pooling in a large bowl. Outside the ring, an ornamental garden sprawled to the edges of the courtyard.

Stepping carefully so he didn't upset any of the freshly placed stones, Admio made his way to the pump carefully concealed in the back corner of the courtyard. He pumped enough water to wash his hands and rinse away the remaining mortar, not sparing any for his spattered clothes. Afterward, he tucked the stones away just inside the threshold of the gate. They had been paid for by the lord of the house and should remain with him.

She dressed expensively then, and got lost immediately after she entered the city. Admio stumbled upon her as a pack of rogues converged on her. He chased them away and brought the poor girl home. He hadn't known what else to do. Admio made his way through the bustling city street, mortar pail swinging with each step he took. Merchants dressed in shawls of bright red and purple haggled over prices with vicious proficiency. Admio stalled a while, gazing at a necklace of shells he knew Jess wanted. The coins in his pocket called to him, but his stomach let him know there were more sensible places to spend his earnings, like the cart offering potatoes just down the street.

Passing by the vendor Admio turned down a side street, one which would allow him to get home without walking through the central marketplace. He didn't want any more temptations. Sparse decorations adorned the exterior of the sandstone tenement house. A small gargoyle, as tall as a hand span, stood watch at the foot of a short flight of stairs. Admio patted it on the head, jogging up the last couple steps, eager to be home. The front door, a heavy wooden affair, opened into a stairwell. Admio took the stairs down, setting the pail down on a shelf just outside the door.

Opening the door, Admio peeked inside. Stillness covered the living room, but Admio could hear a bustle from the kitchen. His face broke into a grin. After slipping through and closing the door, Admio strode across the living room. Reaching the kitchen threshold, he glanced inside. Jess was there, stirring something in a moderate

sized iron pot on the stove with a long wooden spoon. She wore a long white apron over a simple blue dress. A glimmer of a smile crept onto her lips, a lock of reddish brown hair getting caught in the corner of her mouth.

"You're home early," she said.

"I thought I'd surprise you," he answered, moving into the kitchen and wrapping his arms around her, taking the spoon from her grip. He continued stirring, pausing only long enough to bring a taste to his lips. A rich flavor of tomato and onion seemed to leap off the spoon. Admio made a face, sticking his tongue out.

Jess giggled, shying away from him. Admio smiled in spite of himself. She had spirit, and wasn't afraid to show it. That's what Admio fell in love with years ago. Others did not see Jess as beautiful, and some might describe her as mousy, Admio blinded himself to everything he didn't wish to see.

"Is that a new recipe?" Admio asked, releasing Jess from his embrace and earthing for a pitcher of water.

"Just a different flavor," she said, taking the spoon back and taking in a scent of her concoction. "We ran out of potatoes so I put in tomato instead." She hesitated a moment, thinking. "That's not a problem is it?"

Admio replied, "no," his tone unwavering. He came upon the pitcher at the end of the counter and scooped water from it into a blocky cup, drinking deeply. He would live with the tomato soup Jess made for him. Doubtless it would be better than any potato soup made by another.

"Let's take a walk," Admio said, beckoning Jess. "Just while that cools."

“Okay.” Jess pulled the apron over her head, hanging it on a hook at the end of the cupboard. Absent-mindedly, Admio picked up a shawl and wrapped it around her shoulders. The material was smooth and he wanted to leave his hands on it, but did not want to seem overbearing. They left, Admio pausing again to pat the gargoyle and walked down the street.

Admio pointed to the sections of street he helped lay, they walked on the stones together. She paused in the middle of one of these to kiss him on the cheek. Wooden signs hung overhead from metal posts, driven into the ground. They meandered down the street, window shopping and people watching until they reached the central marketplace. The market, located just a stone’s throw from the dock, housed all manner of merchants and dealers. Admio and Jess did not linger over exotic goods or expensive crafts. Instead they walked sedately, his hands clasped behind his back, hers clasped in front, from booth to booth. Occasionally one would pause and point out an item, a frivolous piece of house ware, and they would laugh, wondering who would need such things. Admio paused after sighting a booth selling pies. He glanced next to him and saw Jess staring at the same adobe brick building.

“We should get a dessert,” she said wistfully. They rarely indulged in sweets. The pie vendor, a gray haired man wearing a flour dusted apron, seemed oblivious to their approach. He wiped nervously at the same section of his counter with a threadbare rag, and stared across the way to the mouth of a dim alley.

Admio glanced at the alley, and thought for a moment he could see someone standing there. The man wasn’t there next time he looked. When Admio and Jess reached the booth, the vendor nodded toward the alley. He went back to his oven, checking on the pies inside, apparently not seeing the two of them.

Jess looked over the selection taking in the various scents.

“This smells good,” she said while pointing at a pie overflowing its tin with cherry syrup.

“Excuse me.” Admio tried to get the vendor’s attention. He shut the oven door and turned around. His eyes bugged when he saw Jess holding the pie.

“Yes, hello,” the vendor greeted them with a nervous smile. “How can I help you?”

“We would like to get this pie.” Admio told the man.

“I still want to look.” Jess frowned at the tin giving it a little shake. “Do you have any fresh apples?”

“Yeah. Let me get you one.” The man brushed at his mustache absently, coating his upper lip in flour. “The best pies are always fresh.”

“Take your time,” Admio said. He watched the vendor spinning around, looking all over the little booth for a pie.

“Hello, Castore,” a man called from twenty paces away. He waved at the pie vendor jovially. The man wore a heavy wool jacket, brown, but even so Admio could tell he had a massively developed upper body. He wore matching knee length trousers and shiny black shoes. The man

looked like an official in the government. He was not tall, and did not seem imposing as he approached. Still, Admio could tell the man was far stronger than he. It made Admio feel insecure for a reason he couldn't quite identify.

"Hello Olivander," Castore waved back, grinning to the man.

"You folks like pie too, eh?" Olivander asked. His face broke into a huge grin.

"Yeah," Admio agreed warily.

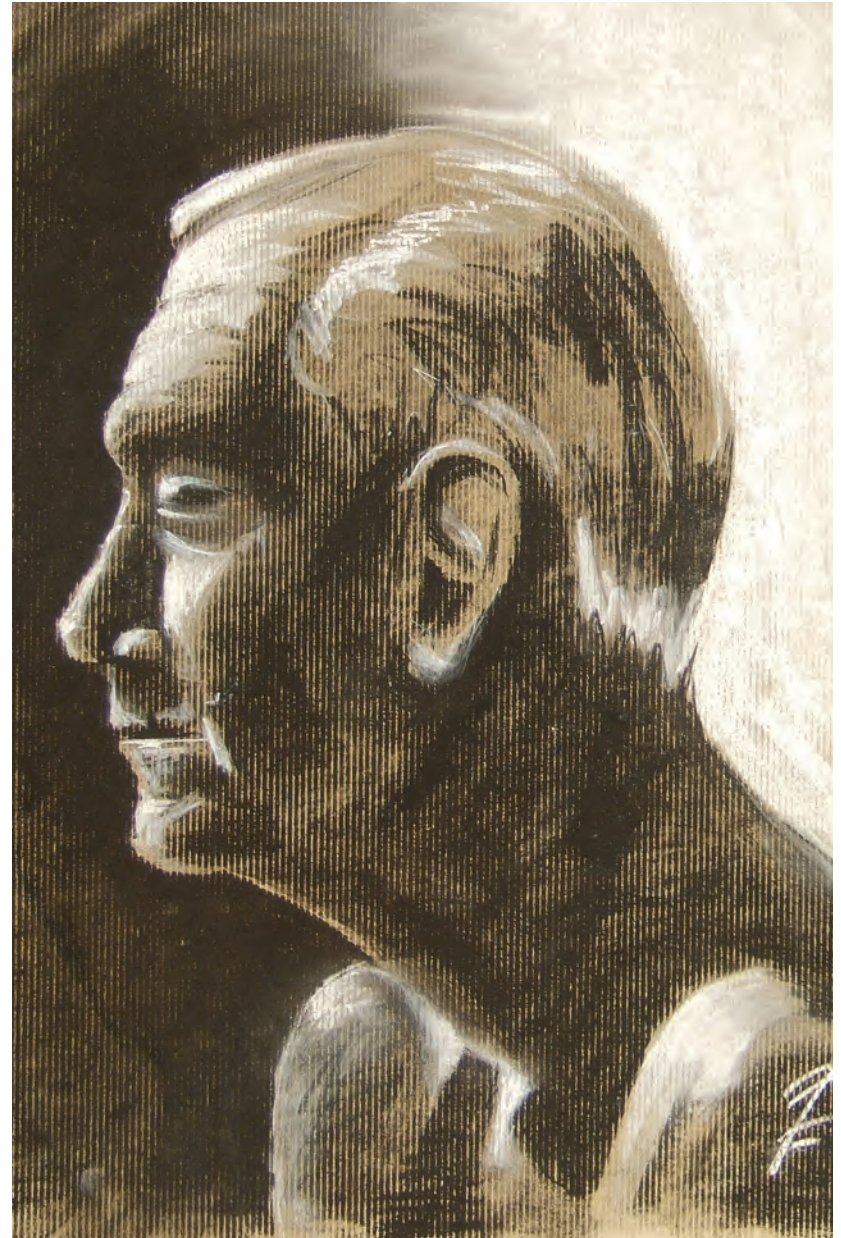
"Great," the man said, still grinning. "Then you know what it's like to look forward to sinking your teeth into a pie. I'm absolutely famished for one. What do you say I buy you a pie?"

Admio tried to look past the man's grin. He did not trust this man, but still could not rationalize it. This was just a friendly man who wanted to share something of what he had with those who shared the same likes.

"Really?" Jess stepped back from the counter to Admio's side. "That's very kind of you,"

"Here you go," the pie vendor said, announcing the arrival of fresh pies. He set one on a sheet of paper and wrapped it up neatly. The vendor handed it to Jess with hardly a glance to the well dressed Olivander. Jess took the warm pie in both her hands. Admio watched Olivander with a calm gaze. He didn't understand the man's actions, but was to grateful to questions them.

The vendor winked as the two of them left. "Tell all your friends about me." Admio nodded, wondering what the man was hiding, but willing to take the pie without question and leave. He gave a small smile to show his thanks and followed Jess back home. ♪



Portrait of a Man | Anthony Fontyn | Chalk and Charcoal on Paper

Mother

By Bev Vogler

A bit of lace peeks out from her sleeve,
the clean handkerchief always ironed
and folded.

A small swelling at the end of her wrist, a
safety net should she cough or snuffle.

Embroidered with petite yellow and blue
flowers on this square of white linen.

Every day a clean one – “Wash them once
a week.”

Sometimes found on the floor, slipping out
from her blouse sleeve

Only to be tucked back in to that hidden
place.

Even in her nightgown the infamous bulge
was there.

We tease her and say, “Use disposable
tissue.”

“But my nose doesn’t like it,” she says

New hankies for birthdays, Mother’s Day,
the white linen, a winter project,
waiting for her needlework.



Self Portrait | Sandy Hilgendorf | Oil on Canvas



Hands | Sandy Hilgendorf | Oil on Canvas



Untitled | Leanne LeFebvre | Pastel on Paper

Hot Spa

By Cynthia Vogel

In all honesty, I can say that, with minimal concern, we both took recreational doses of Percocet on the day we consorted with the patrons of the Korean Women's Health Spa. Our classmate offered us pills the previous night, and the unexpected opportunity seemed too perfect to pass up. Both Rhonda and I relished the warm, swaddling comfort that prescription pain meds offered. We knew that to combine this effect with massage, mineral bathing and heated floors would be to discover an oasis of milk and honey. Like two nymphs languishing in lotus-filled ponds, we would transcend the gritty, wet pavement and dark purple skies of Tacoma, Washington, forgetting about torts, lectures and everything associated with law school.

Entering the lobby of the spa, we could feel the hot moisture in the air, smell the salt of the body scrub and minerals, and hear the voices of the sisters who owned the place lilting and cooing deeply in Korean. The jets to the tubs whirled in the background. I went about signing us in, looking occasionally at Rhonda and smiling sleepily. Our reservations provided for a body scrub and moisturizing facial before the massage. Waves of relaxation washed through us like mint poultice, giving us shivers and pricking at our eyelids like soft sandmen. The Percocet worked its hypnotic trance.

One of the owners, in her red and white striped shirt, showed us to our lockers where we changed. Opening the doors to the baths revealed to us a conglomerate of naked women in light blue caps with elastic rims that tucked their hair safely up inside. The women moved in clusters from pool to pool, pouring water over themselves and talking quietly to each other. These were real women with hips and veins. None of our breasts were perfect and most had full bushes. Women with cellulite sat comfortably and talked, breasts lying to their sides, skin jiggling around as they gestured. The women were arresting in their imperfections: flawed, genuine, and happy.

I turned my gaze into a panoramic scan, fixing on the wall to my left. Shower heads snaked out of the tiles, and a row of short red and green plastic stools sat low against them, occupied by four Korean women facing east. Each industriously washed the back of the lady in front of them with a sponge. They leaned sweetly into the job with care and gentle kindness through graceful, broad movements. Blue heads bobbed up and down with the task, in rhythm with their words and strokes, black strands of hair poking out of the caps. I tried to imagine Rhonda and me, washing each other so kindly and without thought, but realized with envy that we could never cross into what I imagined was an Asian level of comfort.

We melted down into a mineral tub to soothe our weary bodies and wait for our body scrub. Rhonda looked, half lidded, on the women in the middle of their own scrubs. The bodies wobbled on the tables under the scrubbers' rubbing hands.

"This is so nice," Rhonda said, slowly exhaling. "Oh, my God. If I relax any more, I might die."

We laughed and let our arms rest on the wall of the tub. A sign on the wall told the customers not to engage in public displays of affection, and I imagined couples making out in the tubs with discomfort.

An employee walked through calling, "Numbers five and eleven!" Our numbers. We stepped out of the water, still dripping, and followed the woman to the area reserved for body scrubs area. She asked us to lie down on our tables, side by side. I could see Rhonda's short, red, curly hair through the filmy cap. I scratched my pixie nose and caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror of a woman who looked, concerned, into her compact. My freckles surprised me for an instant with their sheer multitude. Who am I? I wondered, and startled at the thought.

"It looks like they really scrub the shit out of your skin, Jenny," Rhonda said lazily.

"Yeah, but I hear your skin comes out feeling like a baby's," I replied.

The table was made of steel and I reclined, face down, on its cool surface. Little feet with toe rings bustled before my eyes amidst the slap of rinse water hitting the floor in the echoing tile room. As they worked, the women chatted and laughed together in Korean as I slipped again, into a semi-conscious state, compliments of the Percocet and hot air. Jacki, as she introduced herself, began scrubbing my back and legs which set my skin alive under the abrasion. The sensation was a surreal mix of invigoration, sting, and sedation. Jackie was somewhat gruff with me in tone, tired from a long day of work on naked bodies.

"Turn over, please," she said firmly, "No, no, no. Like this," and she pushed me, pliant, around to suit her

angle. Jackie left no flap unturned, enflaming my skin and making it buzz with molecular fission. Feeling vulnerable, but not caring, Jackie turned me over on my back and began to exfoliate my front. Mechanically, she did this without a second thought as she wove in and out of stories with her coworkers, my nether regions staring up at her in disbelief that she paid so little attention.

At once, in the middle of the moisturizing, Jackie's hands sliding up and down my chest, there arose a piercing shriek. I bolted up from my bed. Dizzy and drugged, I couldn't focus as I looked around, struggling to get my bearings. Blurs and dashes of women running on the slick tile came into focus. The women shouted in Korean and English, and I heard them saying something about an alarm. The ear-splitting sound came again, and everyone was putting on robes and being escorted through the doors toward the lobby.

I looked blankly at Rhonda. "Is this actually happening?" I asked, foggy and uncertain as to our situation.

"Yes!" she cried and jerked her foot oddly, "Get your robe! It's a fire. We have to get out!" I stood up waveringly and made for the locker room. An employee grabbed my arm and pulled me in the other direction.

"You can't get your things. No time. Please to get your robe and go through the lobby. I help you. Come, come, come," she snapped, seeing my reluctance to leave my things. Not thinking, I followed her to a robe, and we headed for the door as I put it on. I lost Rhonda in the chaos.

A blast of biting air struck me full force as we opened the front doors and exited into the parking lot.

Smoke billowed out of the spa in black cauliflower formations. Coveys of women in blue caps and grossly inadequate robes stood on red, angry bare feet on the wet asphalt, engaged in verbal pandemonium. My heart pounded as I coughed and shook from the smoke. The dark inside the spa had sucked around me like a feeding aboeba, and I couldn't adjust to the white light outside. I'm all here, I observed with detachment.

The flimsy coverings barely reached most of our thighs, and stuck to our wet skin. Sirens wailed in the distance. The nice buzz I'd started with had become a headachy reverb, and my scalp twitched randomly as my lower jaw shivered, its teeth meeting my top lip. I scanned the crowd for Rhonda, but we were all virtually indistinguishable in our matching spa wear. Looking down, I saw that moisturizer still slathered my splotchy pink skin which tried desperately to hide under the hanky of covering we'd been given. What happened to my heated floors? What about my massage? I thought. Rain fell and wind blew in that unrelenting Pacific Northwest style. I could feel my lips chapping.

"Jenny!" called Rhonda, running on tip toes toward me. "Thank God! It's so hard to recognize anyone in these caps. So I heard the owners tell some customers that they think a rival day spa sent over a plant to set the fire."

"You're kidding. That seems a little unlikely," I said, moving and trying to keep warm. I touched my legs and hands and felt wavy, like I wasn't in my body. A crowd of people across the street had watched us and some teenage guys laughed and pointed. I couldn't believe that of all the ways to get caught in a fire alarm, it would be naked and

high on pain pills. My brother had nodded off on heroin once and caught his mattress on fire, but he always took the moronic route.

Fire trucks and ambulances arrived and dispensed blankets and hot fluids. Others immediately got to the business of putting out the small, but toxic, fire. Police and fire investigators asked questions, and the owners answered loudly with broad gestures and much finger pointing towards the south part of town. I noticed an investigator coming towards us with a little pad and pen. She asked us questions, and Rhonda answered, as I tried to get my head together. She informed us that someone would return our salvageable belongings to us soon, and suggested that we make arrangements to be picked up after release from the Emergency Department.

We graduated from the day spa safety evacuation plan, and Rhonda drove me home, the two of us blurred into a space-time dimension of the moving car. Nauseous, I rolled out of the car and onto my feet at the curb. "See you," I said, while simultaneously burping. I needed sleep. Looking around, I noted the darkness, and soft scratching of leaves.

"I'll call you," Rhonda said, lost in her own thoughts as she pulled away.

I slumped into my apartment, exhausted, and hit the bed. I didn't even undress. Sleep would not come. I froze there, visions of running feet and black smoke flashed in a slide show across my walls. Though I had not seen flames, I now felt them licking my back. Something moved in me, a focused urge to flee or to live pumped through my limbs. A knock cracked at the door and snapped me out of my flashback. Not used to being so self aware, I felt em-

barrassed that I'd ventured into a quest for understanding. I used to poke fun at what I perceived to be dorky hippies at school famous for this type of talk, and their part-time philosophies. Rhonda stood in the doorway.

"Sorry," she began nervously, "I couldn't sleep. Do you want to watch a movie or something?" Her eyes hinted at a plea.

"Sure," I said, with poorly disguised relief. I moved aside so she could enter.

We sat close together on my couch, not speaking. Soon, I felt a small trembling and, looking up, saw Rhonda crying softly. Seeing me look at her, she quickly turned away and apologized. I felt awkward, but tried to touch her shoulder. "It's O.K." I ventured.

"We could've died," she blurted out. "Not to get all heavy on you or anything. I don't know, I guess I'm just tired."

Rhonda's sudden candidness provided an opening to haltingly discuss how we actually felt. Like the hippies at school, we spoke for awhile about the experience at the spa. The fire cleansed us, and awkward emotions flooded forth as we discussed law school and our happiness. At a certain point, pressure welled up in my chest and I started feeling dizzy as the talk got even more intense. We went back and forth on the subject of our friendship, and what Rhonda would've done if I hadn't survived.

"Hey, do you want a bong hit?" I interrupted. Rhonda agreed, and we lapsed slowly but easily, into the familiar ceremony of smoking pot, comfortable once again. We continued to be together, side-by-side, looking at the T.V. screen, at ease in the friendly world of weed, and of things unsaid.

The next morning, I walked to the corner for a coffee. Rhonda still slept in my apartment. There in the paper box next to the coffee cart for the Tacoma News Tribune, was a front page picture of blue caps, bare legs, and hunched backs of the spa women trying to keep warm in the wet afternoon, looking like cast aside sisters of the Three Little Maids from School. Glancing across the first paragraph, I noted that the fire started because of faulty wiring associated with one of the foot massagers. No one had been hurt, and the headline read: "Bathing Women Flee Blaze," and below that, "Day of Treatment Brings Terror." ♪



Bowl and Pitcher | Brooke Danielson | Ceramics



Torso:1 | Cynthia Bushell | Steel Rod



One Night in Vaseline Alley

By Daniel Borgen

The incessant pounding, throbbing bass beats that sneak their way underneath the door and seep out through the drafts in the walls of the club irritates me. Every single night, especially every single weekend night, it's the same terrible music played at the same tired, worn-out, oft-frequented nightclub. A parade of people so desperate to blend in, they ignore the monotony and mediocrity of the night scene and enthusiastically participate in this social train wreck. Some diva past her prime, her latest and greatest single remixed to the same generic beat every other boring dance single is mixed to, singing about failed love or new love or hopeful love or rediscovered love; it never changes. But here I am, as I am night after night, braving it all with my cohort, dancing away to these songs I loathe, drinking with these people I merely tolerate, all because it's the only place where enough of my people get together. Tonight seems special, though. I brave the mediocrity to see him. The one I'm arguing with outside the club—the one with whom I'm making a spectacle.

We stand outside the bar, on the main strip, Stark Street, dubbed "Vaseline Alley" by the homosexual elite. Scant feet remain between us and the club's main entrance, a grand, protruding archway painted purple and housing far too many homosexual-themed, rainbow striped flags and stickers. The venerable strip is its usual Saturday night busy; familiar faces pass us, but I don't bother acknowledging any of them. Enthusiastic waves are met with blank

Opposite Page:

Silhouette | Veva Campeau | Digital Photograph

stares as my gaze trumpets my mind's preoccupation. The entrance brims with drunks eager to suppress their sorrows, forget about the proverbial rat race, and soak up the nightlife. This place packs them in and debauchery abounds. I've had several drinks at this point, so annoyance wins out against every other emotion I'm feeling and resurfaces. He feigns ignorance as to why I'm so angry. Oh, he knows, I tell myself. At least I think so.

"Who the fuck do you think you're dealing with? You're going to lie to me and tell me you don't want him? Come on, Michael, you know I'm not so fucking stupid."

My accusation, although fervent in its delivery, apparently goes nowhere. I nervously rub my sweaty palms on my designer jeans in an attempt to settle myself down. I sure hope I don't stain them. I pull my tight black knit shirt further past my thick, black studded belt. Keeping it together means keeping it sexy.

"Goddamn it, Brandon. I didn't come out here so you could ream my ass until the bars close. I've told you, we were just dancing, nothing happened." His flat, meager attempt at reassurance falls on deaf ears. His dark features are accentuated by his stubble—he wears it so much better than George Michael hoped to—and sweat seeps down through the barriers his extensive hair products built in vain. I reminded myself that he's the prettiest boy I've ever dated and that should count for something. The cigarette he held between his fingers drops to the ground as he throws his hands in the air in faux surrender.

Two years have passed since our break-up. Those two years match the two we were together, but the crazy

post-relationship dynamic remains a constant. I endure it because I've never been with someone so intensely for so long. Post-break-up interaction promises me there might be something more, some residual feeling or longing or itch might keep us from drifting too far apart. At this point, however, all I can count on is no "official" label, most of the benefits of a label—except anywhere in public—and seemingly never-ending jealousy and ubiquitous doubt. I know I shouldn't be here with him, I know I shouldn't continue to stay, but I can't help myself. I've only ever really loved Michael, although I'm constantly left to wonder if the feeling is mutual. Love to him doesn't seem to mean the same thing.

It really doesn't to most faggots, I remind myself. They're far too eager to move on to the younger, cuter, fitter. They forget that whomever they grow old with will do just that—grow old. Wrinkles and age-induced weight eventually curses everyone. Hopefully they'll still have something to talk about when the inevitable comes.

Now, my most significant relationship has turned into, by far, my most maddening. His apathy toward me and anything I think I might have to offer taunts me every time I see him. That and the living, breathing, painfully obvious dichotomy he eagerly embraces and quite knowingly embodies. It remains so much easier than getting to know someone new. So I endure it. Who wants to invest so much time and effort into some different, equally futile endeavor?

"I saw you. I saw him. I know him. I know what he wants, and I sure as hell know what you want. You just aren't doing it in front of me. I won't allow it," I assert. At

this point the pleas and accusations are redundant, and I'm even boring myself. I'm not giving up, though. He's going to get it, even if it kills me. And I'm going to get him.

"This is over," he proclaims, "I'm going back inside. I've explained myself to you. Do you just love that everyone is watching this? Are you reveling in the little movie of the week you've started out here?"

I chuckle. Usually Michael's verbal arsenal lacks such pointed, pithy one-liners. I've taught him this. Or he imbibed it from me or from my circle of friends. Whatever the case, I find it amusing. For now, this is enough to squelch my anger.

"It's almost last call. I'm going back in for more drinks...you comin'?" His question is more of an ultimatum. I shrug. My time with him exhausted, for the moment. White flags are up.

I excuse him with a gesture of the hand and follow him back inside the bar. As I enter, I am greeted by Whitney's latest attempt at reclaiming her lost stardom. The gays do love some Whitney Houston. I made a name for myself in the community by openly rejecting and judging everything they embrace. I sense the desperation in her plea, I'm not afraid to try it...on my own, and apply this not-quite-learned life lesson to my own situation. I congratulate myself on some profound thought, empathizing with her newly public struggle with drugs and a man who doesn't love her, but continue wishing for some energetic rock.

Is it so hard to play some decent music?

"Let's get a drink," he suggests, nodding at our favorite bartender, Tyler. Tyler's tips have grown exponen-

tially since Out magazine recently featured him as one of the "hottest bartenders in the nation." Homosexuals love notoriety, even when it's by association—or perceived association. They worship it. It gets worse with real celebrities—they're discussed as often and intimately as if they're siblings.

I continue in my silent acquiescence and follow him to the bar. This isn't over, I remind myself. He's coming home with me. I'm sure being myself will remind him of everything I think he misses.

He orders our drinks, I pay, as usual, and we squeeze past the Abercrombie-clad, muscle-boys—who I notice are surprisingly free of body hair—to our table. Our friends have left to go move in mindless synchronicity to the hot new bass beat on the dance floor. Out of the corner of my relatively drunken eye, I see Michael start chatting it up with him, the same one from earlier. Peter, or whatever the hell his name is. Paul? Pat? It doesn't matter. I've seen him around and decide I know enough about his reputation to stop this.

I tug on Michael's sleeve. "Let's go dance," I suggest playfully.

"No, I'm fine. You go dance. Jeff and Brad are out there anyway. I'm sure they're wondering where you are. You know they can't operate without their fearless leader."

I won't be fooled by this blatant attempt to have some time alone with Pat/Peter/Paul. I'm not being featured in some dating game show, and he sure as hell won't be giving me some time-out. I shake my head and lean in a little closer in a failed attempt to hear what they are talking about. Damn the gays and their loud, thumping, pound-

ing dance anthems. I can't hear a thing. Because they're whispering, I decide. Their hushed words means only one thing: discussion about me. The paranoia that was subtly dining on my emotions metamorphoses into a painful, grinding gnaw.

If he's losing interest in me, why aren't I losing interest in him?

Paranoia coupled with insecurity paired with a few drinks doesn't bode well for one's temporary sense of self. I scan the bar for my friends, hoping my lazy attempt at showing interest in something other than Michael lacks the transparency I'm very sure it trumpets all over the bar.

"Last call, laaaaaast call for alcohol." We're so used to the emcee's voice and agenda. Steve, the infamous emcee and de facto star of the joint, has a voice perfectly suited for his duties. He might have made a go of it in car commercials if he hadn't lost himself in the veritable who's who of Stark Street. A few announcements, collection of the glasses, encouragement to enjoy what you have in short order before it's taken from you. I look at my beer. I start to gulp.

The bar continues to burst at the seams with people, ignorant of the hour. Gay guys always push the limits. Boys barrel in, waving arms and kissing necks, screaming "hey guuurl" or "wassup!", pretending they didn't just talk shit about each other at the white party the weekend before. Annoyances abound: shirtless forty-somethings trying to reclaim their lost youth with nudity and aggressive groping—they're notorious for ass grabs and tacky propositions, muscle-tee toting twenty-somethings hoping they never get old, drag queens sauntering to and fro, offering make-up tips to anyone who'll listen, obviously too drunk

to remember if they are, in fact, the diva they represent. I don't see Jeff or Brad. I wonder where they are; but I'll be damned if I'm giving up this prime spot and my bird's eye view of Michael and his annoying, adoring fan.

The nuisance finally walks away...I am shocked and amazed that he seemed to give up so easily. I expected some sort of confrontation between him and me and some proverbial fight to the death.

"Where'd your boyfriend go?" I ask.

"To the bar, nag." His smug, curt reply reveals something's awry.

"Last call is over, dude." My tone gives me away. Confusion? No, jealousy.

"He's getting paper and a pen. I'm getting his number."

Jesus Christ. What the fuck does he need his number for? Well, yes, I know what he needs it for. This isn't going well at all. I'm going to play it off. Calm, cool. Right. My face tells him that inside, I'm a wreck.

"And." He pauses long enough to tell me he's worried about my reaction. "Just so you know, Paul and I are going to grab a bite after this," every word is like a mini-knife wound in the heart, "Don't freak out, OK? He's really cool."

"Michael, listen, I thought we were hanging out. That was the whole reason I came out. You said you were going to spend the night. I want you to," my voice's weakness reveals my epiphany that this night won't end well. He sure hasn't gone home with anyone else since we've known each other. Not in front of me, anyway. "Besides, what's the impetus for wanting to spend the wee hours of the morning with him? What are you kids planning to do? Hmmm?"

“Brandon.” He just says my name and looks me squarely in the eye. “I’m going home with Paul. I came here to see you, I’ve seen you, and now I’m leaving.”

I roll my eyes and hold my tongue. My temper gets me in trouble. I could rant about how ugly Paul is, about how he’s balding at the age of twenty-one—he looks far too young to be folliclely-challenged, about how he’s wearing a fucking Old Navy sweatshirt to the bars (it’s not that hard to put on a real shirt), but I won’t, for once. My complaints rarely win me any new fans. Actually, these lame attempts at sass are probably my most self-loathed quality. I constantly complain about the shallowness of gay culture, yet far too often I dive in and play the game.

“I’m so confused,” I confess. “I just don’t get it. Why tonight? Why now?”

“We’re done. What we have is fun—and weird—sometimes, but it’s time we both move on. You know I love you. I’ll always love you. It’s just not that kind of ‘I can’t stop thinking of you I need you every second’ kind of love. Sometimes I want it to work, but, I just can’t, and I don’t think it will. You know it, too.”

After this pleasant exchange, Paul returns and plants himself next to Michael. He’s won, obviously. I console myself by assuring my fragile psyche that I didn’t really fight. He got what I wanted. Although I’ve had it, I still want it.

“Greeeeat,” the word is dripping with sarcasm, my usual and best defense mechanism. “Have fun.”

“Don’t be mad. Come on dude.”

I decide to walk away. It’s apparent that I’m not going to win, that this new asshole will, and Michael is

trying to teach me some lesson of sorts. I hear him explaining things to Paul in the background as I get further and further away. The music stopped to cue the emptying of the bar. I hear Paul’s question.

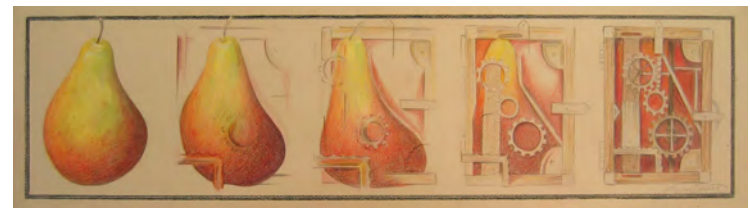
“Why is he being such a prick?”

Michael pauses. The silence remains louder than any queer scream or pounding bass beat. It exudes emptiness.

“My ex. I’ll fill you in tonight,” Michael’s response was matter-of-fact and aloof. He won’t explain anything. He’ll have his fun and call me in the morning. Paul will only have him tonight. Tomorrow, he’ll be mine again. I hope.

As delusional and preposterous as it may seem, I’m coming to terms with the fact that Michael’s promiscuity tonight might lead him back to me. I revel in that. At least I hope for it. He will test the water, play the field, perform every other cliché imaginable, and realize he needs me after all.

I push my way through the crowd, searching for my friends, content with the fact that I have momentarily tricked myself into thinking I still have it. Maybe it isn’t all I want, but it seems close. I’ve convinced myself into thinking, all this is close enough. I’ll be going home with denial, my new best friend. ♪



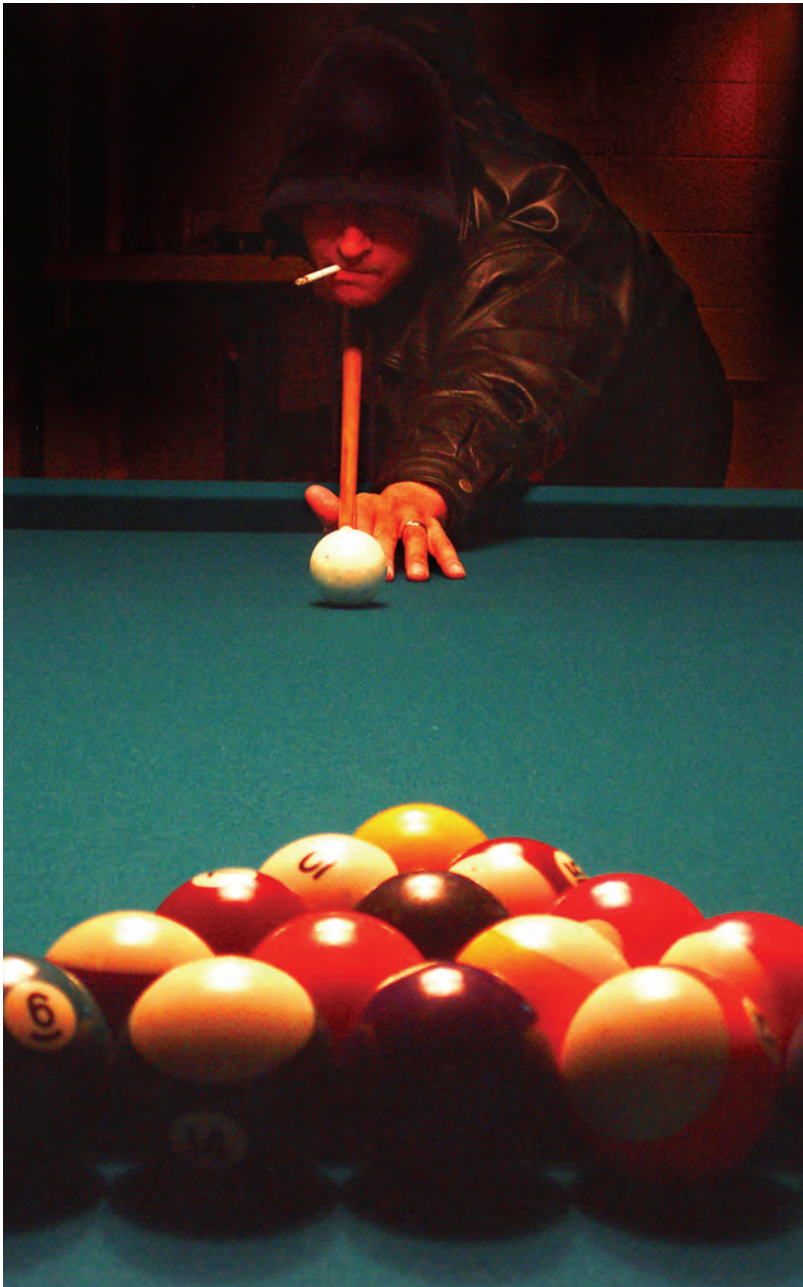
Promotion | Allyson Bennett | Colored Pencil on Paper



Thirsty | Sandy Hilgendorf | Oil on Canvas



Ripe Red Tomato | Allyson Bennett | Colored Pencil on Paper



Pool Devil | Andrew Isenhardt | Digital Photograph

Night Watch

By Nicholas Beatty

The streetlamps play against the black velvet sky, watching everything and everyone who dares venture into the bleak hours of the morning. The statuesque guardians of quiet side streets let their soft golden light wash over a world in transition, silently waiting for the sleepy neighborhood to stretch and yawn, and wake into its full urban vibrancy. This period of in-between, seemingly a no-man's-land, offers refuge to the disenchanted. Those who venture into the streets night after night, searching for what little solitude the maddening crowd allows remain the subjects of inquiry for a man who wants to remain nameless. He, too, is one who finds comfort in the deserted streets, dark alleys, and aging corner cafes. Away from the crushing scrutiny of a world interested only in material wealth and acquisition of power, the night watchers are able to breathe. In this world of in-between, the night watchers are able to think and feel without the judgment of the multitude cascading over their bodies like a turbulent ocean wave. This is their story.

Three A.M., have you seen her? Stashed away like the embarrassing stepsister of illustrious midnight, she slowly paces her way through the night. Her sixty-minutes of life every morning are the refuge of Zebediah, the one sitting on the bench across the street. His features appear somewhat muted, but even in the shadows his dark eyes seem to penetrate the impenetrable. He is a watcher. From his post he admires the streets, only moments ago cleaned

by the sweeper. The drone of the machine still lingers in the crisp night air. Zebediah imagines a symphony of night sounds in his mind. The lingering drone of the sweeper, accentuated by the low hiss of the streetlights, and the steady hum of the freeway fifteen blocks away. Outside of his imagination words are meaningless. He can't speak anyway.

Holding a now tepid cup of coffee, Zebediah waits for the arrival of his friend, a stray black lab that wanders the streets every morning in search of food. Zebediah doesn't know the dog won't be coming this morning. A local pastor's family has rescued it. With its new family, the dog will enjoy trips to the country every weekend, and will soon forget of Zebediah's kindness. Curled on a wool blanket at the end of the pastor's eight-year-old daughter's bed, the dog will most likely never see the golden street-light of three A.M. again. Yet Zebediah will continue waiting, hoping for his friend's return.

Several blocks away, a dead-end street houses the remnants of a failed bakery where Louis paces the night away. His slight frame, and thin, pockmarked face proved detrimental to his dream of becoming an actor. Instead of basking in the stage light of Broadway, he hides in the shadows of Thompson's Bakery, guarding the assets of the deceased Mr. Thompson. Louis wonders what he'll do after this morning when he'll no longer have a job. After nine years of lurking in Mr. Thompson's shadows, he'll have to look for work.

Security is all Louis knows. He'd never be able to stomach the bustle of the 9-5 business world in a city of

conceited phonies. His stomach churns at the thought of looking for work, especially without Mr. Thompson as a reference.

Looking around quickly, half expecting someone to have seen him wipe the tears from his cheek, Louis laments the death of his friend, Mr. Thompson. What the young security guard doesn't know is that had Mr. Thompson not died from a massive heart attack, he would not have been able to keep Louis on staff anyway. The failing bakery lacked the revenue necessary to pay Louis's salary, let alone Mr. Thompson's quadruple bypass.

Feeling something more than fear for his financial outcome, Louis is unsettled by the morning air. His whole body seems to tingle as if in a suspended state of expectancy. He stops pacing and breaks to look off into the early morning sky. Through the golden haze of street lamps penetrating the incoming fog, Louis can make out six or seven stars; beacons of light millions of miles away. He trembles at all of the mysteries of the universe that elude his understanding.

Just as three A.M. bids farewell to the fog encased morning, Georgia unlocks the rear entry to Fat Joe's Café, a throwback to the inner city corner cafes of the 1950s and 60s. Her ample frame, topped with a mass of bleach blond hair pulled back from her face, sweeps about the cafe making last minute preparations for breakfast.

As her swift hands crack eggs into a large bowl, she feels a sudden stabbing pain in her chest. Alarmed, she leaves her work to sit at the bar for a moment. Her mind is a swirling mass of color and words. Her breath

quickness, and with each beat of her racing heart she becomes more and more terrified. She lays her head on the counter, trying with all her might to take deep and slow breaths.

"I can't do this," she whispers to herself, "I can't do this."

At 52, Georgia's life has become a monotonous routine involving the same activities and conversations. But she knows nothing else. She has been a cook and server at Fat Joe's for half of her life. Twenty-five-years of early mornings, twenty-five-years of steaming coffee, and twenty-five-years of taking orders seem to have drained the life from her. She feels empty, especially since losing her lover last month. And now she stands to lose her life to the very same fate as he. The image comes clearly to her mind, and she feels it with every ounce of her being. She pictures herself, pouring a cup of coffee, not too far in the future, then suddenly clutching her arm and collapsing in excruciating pain.

"So that's how it will be?" she asks the empty cafe.

Feeling somewhat relieved in the certainty of her imagined fate and having caught her breath, she turns on the barstool to look across the street at Thompson's Bakery. The daily reminder of her lost love is too much to bear. The panic attacks she believes to be a failing heart will only become worse the longer she remains at Fat Joe's.

Silvery threads of light beckon the early morning, urging darkness to retreat until the next evening. At Five A.M., Georgia turns on the red and white sign proclaiming Fat Joe's is open, the coffee is hot and steaming and she's ready to serve.

Emerging from his dark corner several blocks away, Zebediah can smell Georgia's fresh baked rolls, and the inertia of a new day beginning. The streetlights, one by one, wink "Good Morning" to Zebediah, Louis, and Georgia, and one by one, their guardian flames extinguish.

Louis is the first to arrive at Fat Joe's, greeted by Georgia's forced smile. His emptiness fills the small cafe, and Georgia eagerly awaits the arrival of more regulars. If she stays busy, she feels her mind won't have time to wander.

Louis asks for an omelets and coffee, and rests his head on his arm as he feels sleep calling him. But Louis can't sleep. Sleep won't pay the rent. His coffee and the walk home will wake him sufficiently, enabling his to begin his dreaded search for work.

As Gloria pours Louis' coffee, Zebediah enters the cafe, a small bell above the door announcing his presence. His dark eyes analyze the room and its inhabitants, and make those caught in his glare uneasy. He quickly seats himself and motions for Gloria to take his order. Gloria easily tolerates Zebediah's company. They ask nothing of each other, aside from a warm breakfast and a no-hassle payment. Gloria's allowed her private thoughts without being bombarded by idle chitchat. At the moment, Louis is babbling away, partially to himself, partially to anyone who will listen.

"Gotta find work today," his clipped, short phrases punctuated by frantic gulps of coffee, "Someone's gotta pay the bills."

Zebediah points to the menu, showing Gloria he wants scrambled eggs and bacon; he then grabs a three-

day-old copy of the newspaper. He buries himself in old news and disassociates himself from the others in the room. But he is not focused. His mind wanders as he thinks about the pathetic dog and the simple things in life that make people happy. He quite suddenly feels the need for someone with which he can share his life.

Silently contemplating his quiet life, Zebediah can't help but be reminded of his troubled past. Forced to abandon his position as assistant pastor at a local non-denominational congregation, he realized his faith wasn't as strong as he thought it to be. The very public affair he'd had with a young secretary seemed to be his only way out. He'd grown tired of his perceived hypocrisy of the church politics. And he often wonders if the sickness he endured upon leaving his position was a form of punishment from God, as he'd been told. His voice was taken away as a result of his sickness. Unable to share his dissatisfaction with organized religion, he found relative contentment in the new life he leads. And he'd long ago justified his loneliness as the only alternative to the hypocrisy he endured before.

Watching the men in the cafe enjoy their warm breakfasts, lost in thought, Gloria breaks for a moment, not noticing the blue-gray light of dawn filling the room. A sudden loud pop and splattering noise in the back of the cafe demands the attention of the three. Gloria races behind the counter to the kitchen and screams, but Zebediah and Louis need no invitation to help her; the smoke was already filling the small cafe. Racing to the kitchen to find the cause of the smoke, and to calm Gloria, Louis

and Zebediah are met with a massive gas explosion that takes the lives of all three night watchers. In a matter of seconds, the quaint cafe with peeling paint and a red and white sign becomes a huge ball of flame with red and yellow sparks shooting into the iridescent morning sky.

There are no final thoughts, nor actions. Death came swiftly and without notice for the three. Simply standing alone in Louis' former guard post, in awe of the unpredictability of the situation, I shake my head in wonder.

They're coming now, the citizens that would normally begin ambling out onto the streets. Instead, they are rushing with an urgency I have never seen before. Women in nightgowns lay in the street, sobbing for the unknown victims inside the searing flames. Brave men, attempting to enter what is left of the building, become burn victims themselves as their hair and clothing become singed by the fiery outer reaches of the flames. We are helpless spectators, waiting for emergency crews to arrive. The tears subside, and the popping and hissing flames soon become the only sounds filling the shocked neighborhood. I would normally retreat when the sun makes its way into the darkened corners, but I am compelled to watch the neighborhood spring into action. I see police, and emergency crews, defeated in that there are no lives to save, but doing their best anyway to extinguish the brilliant flames. I also see Fat Joe himself, along with several insurance agents, standing in awe of the catastrophe before them.

Slowly, the crowd dies, just as the flames, and interest is once again placed on busy lives. Jobs must be

done. There are places to go, and business to attend to. I realize that in time, Fat Joe's will be forgotten, and a prosperous restaurant chain will call the corner its new home. The community will continue to grow, and in the process, will become increasingly concerned in appearances, tearing down Thompson's Bakery and the other businesses that have called these streets home for so many years. The mayor will cry out, "Make way for progress," at a local ribbon cutting ceremony.

I've stood at Louis' outpost well into the early afternoon, wondering if anyone besides me will notice the empty space my fellow three night watchers will leave. Georgia, Louis, and Zebediah will enter my mind every night as I wander the quiet and remarkably altered neighborhood that will soon emerge.

As I stand here, thinking about all that will change, I hear a strange whining in the distance. As the noise comes closer and closer, I soon see the bewildered local pastor emerge from around a corner with his new black lab before him stretching and leaping to free itself from its leash. As the pastor and the lab near the ashes of the cafe, the dog immediately comes to a halt. Sitting on its haunches, it lets out a low, mournful howl that echoes throughout the empty street. The pastor stares, quite puzzled, at the strangely behaved dog. He momentarily feels regret for bringing the animal into his home. The man has no idea his former assistant pastor, and two others, became helpless victims of a gas explosion this morning. He, like millions of others busy with their perfect lives, has failed to notice something as seemingly insignificant as the loss of three night watchers. ♪



Alight | Deanna Bredthauer | Digital Photograph



Texture Study | Gloria Scheel | Pastel on Paper

A Façade of Solace

By Scarlet Tendler

It became more and more difficult to go to school, but near the middle of my third grade year, Mother became engaged and we were planning a move to Longview, Texas, as soon as the wedding was over. I had only met the man twice. I was terrified, I was mad and I cried all the way to Texas. What would I do without my grandmother? The pain I felt before, deep inside, was nothing compared to the empty sadness that now engulfed my soul. We drove for what seemed to be a lifetime. I was pleasantly surprised at the sight of my new home. It was a brand new brick house nestled on a corner lot in a gated community properly named, Glenwood acres. The yard was rocky instead of lush and green like Grandmother's yard.

It was 1979 and disco was still in, although it was on the downslide, making way for the 80's. When we arrived at the skating rink that first night, the Jackson Five's song "One More Chance" was playing. The lobby area was dark and drab and an old neon light flickered from above. The walls were partially paneled in dark wood and trimmed in a hideous shade of burgundy. But inside... it was invigorating. I loved the disco ball and the colorful lights that danced across the floor. It created a chaotic state of pure pleasure; a mask in which to hide; a feeling of absolute carelessness. After that one night I was hooked and this is where I spent my weekends for the next two years.

I was growing up and had begun to cross over the line of puberty at a very young age. Even though my heart still ached for my Grandmother, the pain and longing had begun to grow numb. My grades had improved along with my self-esteem. But I had been ignoring the problems at home. My mother's new husband Rusty was physically abusive. He never laid a hand on me, but the bruises on Mother were obvious. Grandmother and Granddaddy had come, but it wasn't to visit. They begged Mother to come home to Mississippi before Rusty killed her. But like every abused woman, she thought she could change him. She couldn't have been more wrong.

On a Saturday night I'd gone skating with another of my friends, Stacey Collins. I hadn't known at the time what a good friend she would become. Stacey lived in one of the first houses near the gate. My house was located towards the back of the neighborhood. We'd decided that it would be easier to call my mother and ask her if I could spend the night rather than drive all the way to my house. I knew she was sick with the flu and had stayed home while Rusty went to a barbecue with his friends from work, so I didn't figure she'd mind if I stayed with Stacey. The phone rang and rang. After about an hour I was growing worried and asked Mr. Collins to take me home so that I could check on my mother.

Mother's car was in the driveway and all of the lights were on in the house. Very unusual. On the way in I also noticed that Rusty's car wasn't there. The house was quiet, too quiet. I called out to my mother, but she didn't answer. I did a quick search of the house and found her nowhere. By this time my heart had sunk into my stomach

and I was feeling sick. With my hand on the doorknob, I called out one last time. And this time my fears were confirmed. She was in the house and I could hear her moaning weakly from the living room. There she was lying on the floor, the carpet beneath her head was soaked in blood. The son-of-a-bitch had put a towel under her head to catch the blood and left her there to die. Her face was swollen, black and unrecognizable. I screamed and ran for the door just as Stacey and her father were getting out of the car. He knew what had happened... he knew. Mr. Collins yelled at Stacey to get back into the car and I showed him what I'd found.

The next few hours were a blur. I couldn't recall the exact order of events, but I knew the ambulance had come to take my mother away. I remember sitting on the end of Stacey's bed just waiting. My tears had dried up and that recognizable pain of emptiness had begun, once again, to engulf my soul. Even though my mother and I weren't close she was all I had. I knew my life in Texas was over and the day would come when I would never see my friends again. It was a loathsome thought and I just wanted to make it all go away. Was it selfishness that made me think this way or was a deep need to be happy?

Early the next morning Mr. Collins received a phone call. Mother had been transferred to a hospital in Tyler. The extent of the damage to her brain was still unknown. She was comatose. The swelling in her brain and the damage to her face was something this hospital had never seen. She had bit her tongue in half during the beating, which needed stitches, and there was perfect imprint of her ear stamped into her skull. It was

apparent that she had been dragged for some distance. Her entire backside was scraped and burned from the cement sidewalk and Mother was missing an enormous amount of hair, which we now know was his leverage in moving her lifeless body. The doctors were doubtful that she would make it. They estimated only a few days. Mr. Collins arranged to drive me to see her at once. This would prove to be the longest and hardest drive of my life. Incomparable to anything I had so far experienced.

We arrived at the hospital early that morning. My memory doesn't allow a picture of the hospital to come to mind, only the intensive care unit that she was in. The nurse's station sat at the center of a round wing of the hospital with the units visible from every angle. The nurses didn't want to let me in because I was too young and the sight was too brutal for a child. Mr. Collins argued that I found her and deserved to see her in the case that I would never get the chance again. The nurse agreed and made the exception.

The room was cold, white and very brightly lit. My mother's face offered the only color in the room. Her eyes were opened and where they should've been white, they were blood red. Her face was swollen so badly that it didn't look like my mother. It had obviously worsened since I'd found her. She moaned and thrashed in her bed. I'd always thought of a person in a coma as being quiet and still. The nurse said that the entire left side of her body was paralyzed from the damage to her brain. The blow she'd taken to the left side of her head had caused the brain to impact with the right side of her inner skull. She explained

that the bruising to the right lobe, which controls the left side of the body, had caused her paralysis.

As we drove away from the hospital, the thought of my mother's face haunted me. Was there something I could have done to prevent it? I'd begun to believe that if I'd been there I could've stopped it. It was my fault that she was hurt and ultimately it was my fault that I would have to leave the place where I'd finally found solace. It was as confusing then as it is now... How could I want to stay in a place that had almost ended my mother's life? Was her pain somehow less important than my need to be happy?

After a couple weeks had passed Mother had improved enough to be airlifted to a rehabilitation center in Jackson. I'd been staying with Stacey and her mother, Mrs. Petty. Stacey's parents were divorced so I would never see Mr. Collins again and never have the chance to thank him. Grandmother had decided that it would be best for me to stay with the Petty's so that I could complete the school year.

When it was time to leave I can remember taking one last look at Stacey's room. There were our school banners, colored in orange and black; they read "Gilmer Buckeye's". The pompoms, hanging from the mirror on the dresser, waved goodbye forever. It was the most heart-wrenching task yet. As we drove down the long barren highway I remembered the day Mother and I had moved to Texas. I remembered the pain of leaving the only place I'd ever known, to go to a place that was a complete mystery, a blind spot of the mind. Yet there I was, two years later, moving back to Grandmother's, my youth's sanctuary, and, somehow, it still felt like a mystery, a page unturned. ♪

Regarding Selection

The *Phoenix* Staff works to ensure an inclusive, fair, and open selection process adequately representing Clark's diverse student body while meeting the high standards of quality *Phoenix* demands. To encourage as many entries as possible, *Phoenix* staff members promote *Phoenix* in Art and English classes throughout the academic year, in addition to publishing and distributing promotional materials throughout the college campus. Additionally, *Phoenix* advisors work closely with other instructors in an effort to facilitate student participation.

Art Selection: The Art Selection Committee carefully plans their process to ensure fair consideration of all submissions. Since taste is subjective, however, each selector may value artwork differently. *Phoenix* staff members uses a diverse committee of students representing the various disciplines from the Art Department. Art instructors nominate judges based on their knowledge, skill, and maturity as students of Art. Judging is anonymous and independent, and the works selected received the highest number of votes. Criteria includes quality, craftsmanship, and originality. Judges were not limited in the number of pieces they could select; each piece was judged solely on its own qualities. Our goal as *Phoenix* staff was to make editing decisions that emphasized high student participation and breadth of entries while showcasing the amazing talent of Clark's students. The *Phoenix* Staff completes final editing.

Literature Selection: Like the graphics selections, literary selections also bend to taste. While personal preference always plays a role in determining final selection, irrefutable elements of fiction and poetry remain vital to selecting writing of high quality. The *Phoenix* staff works to secure a talented, diverse panel of students for the literary selection process. Recommended by faculty, each student judge has previously studied creative writing and poetry writing. Without sacrificing quality, each student judge seeks to include a wide variety of genres and styles. The Literary Selection committee judges entries anonymously and independently from one another. Judges who submit work bar themselves from voting on their own pieces. To be considered for publication, entries had to earn a majority vote. All selections then went to the literary editors and finally to the literary advisor for final approval.

The *Phoenix* staff encourages all Clark student writers and artists to submit to future *Phoenix* publications. ♪



Armadillo | David Varnal | Cut Paper on Bristol Board

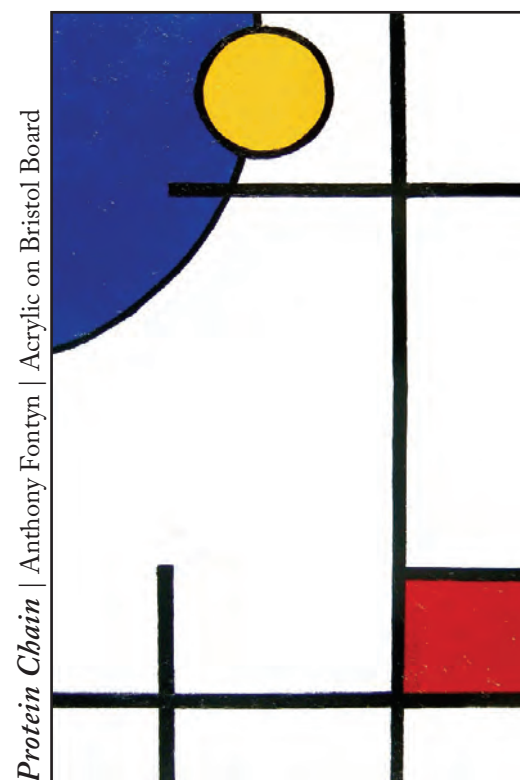
History of Phoenix

On May 13, 1959, the Penguin's "Daily Bulletin" announced a student reader's group would publish a small collection of writings, including essays, poems, and short stories. In an effort to align the literary booklet with the college's recently adopted Penguin mascot, one student suggested naming the booklet, *The Egg*, in answer to the question, "How do penguins create? They lay eggs." The name carried until 1981 when the editors resurrected the magazine and adopted the mythical bird, the phoenix, as the new title.

Some earlier editors gave the phoenix myth partial focus; others used the myth as a major theme with contests and fantastic illustrations spotlighting the mythical bird. Eventually, editors' attempts to relate the magazine's content to the this myth faded. Later editors carried no selections celebrating the mythical phoenix and recent publications celebrate legends in the making by publishing student work of literary quality and distinctive visual imagery. Although past issues focused primarily on publishing poetry and prose, issues in the last many years give equal consideration to all three forms of expression: literature, graphic arts, and original musical compositions.

In 1990, *Phoenix* editors expanded the publication schedule to include the entire academic year, so students enrolled in any quarter enjoyed the opportunity

to submit their work. This change also offered students a predictable atmosphere in which to make suggestions, develop concepts and achieve advancements. The 1991 publication illustrated improvements gained such as a more polished appearance, professional layout and intensified promotion on and off campus. The 1991 publication won the Washington Community College Humanities Association Award for Excellence. In the past fourteen years, *Phoenix* has enjoyed national recognition several times through National Scholastic Press Association awards. The Association awarded the 2004 edition of *Phoenix* a First Place with Special Merit Award. ✎



Contributor's Statements

Gypsy Alderman

Another Day in Paradise, Short Fiction

There are so many characters bumping around inside of me. It feels good when some of them jump out and come to life. I can feel Neeny's cheeks, I can smell the inside of PoPo's cowboy hat, and I can feel the sun on Charley's shoulders and see every bit of light in his hair.

Adrian Anderson

Flood, Silver Gelatin Print

I was inspired while driving next to a river. Both the road and river were long and narrow, so I knew they would line up well. I am proudest of how well the two pictures meshed together.

Corinda Anderson

Best Leaf Ever, Ceramics

The project was inspired by a plant: an elephant leaf philodendron. I used a slab of clay, adding the veins and detail. It was bisque fired, then glazed with only under glazes. When the process was done a coat of wax was added to give it a rich luster. I am proudest of the fact it was my first piece I made and I made it for my mother. The glazes work the best for this piece; it wouldn't have looked as real with a shiny glaze.

Art Appreciation Class, Fall, 2004

Lisa Conway, Instructor

Mona Lisa I and *Mona Lisa II*, Mixed Media

On this project, students were randomly assigned a section of *The Mona Lisa* by Leonardo DaVinci. Also, they were randomly assigned an artist and style to reinterpret their section. Students researched their assigned artist and focused on the artist's use

of color, shape, line quality and materials. The resulting images present a mixture of styles throughout the ages.

Lisa Avina

The Hand, Ceramics

I was inspired by Salvador Dali's painting, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*. I wanted to capture a hand in mid-motion. I love the realism the piece invokes. Making a realistic hand was difficult, but it started becoming an actual hand when I made the fingernails. I wanted my piece to have movement. I wanted people to believe it was alive.

Nicholas Beatty

Appreciating the Classics, Toned Silver Gelatin Print

Momentary Innocence, Toned Silver Gelatin Prints

Night Watch, Short Fiction

Paradise Lost, Silver Gelatin Print

Throughout history, humankind has scoffed at the very idea of idleness. The beauty of my imagination is only made real to me, however, when I fully acknowledge the idle moments of in-between. I am only able to find peace when I stop whatever I am do-



Triple Self Portrait | Evelyn Ogg Thompson | Acrylic on Canvas



Battered | Shamarie Kepler | Silver Gelatin Print

ing to simply breathe, question the universe, and try to make sense of the tumultuous world I find myself in. From this, my inspiration comes forth.

Allyson Bennett

Corner of 10th and Main, Toned Silver Gelatin Print

Promotion Colored, Pencil Drawing

Ripe Red Tomato, Colored Pencil Drawing

Self Portrait, Silver Gelatin Print

It's so exciting to be able to work in so many mediums and styles at this time in my life. I'm sure at some point I'm going to have to narrow in and choose a focus for my career, but, at this point, exploring what art has to offer is what makes me happy.

Seth Bennett

To The East Gate, Novel Chapter

Although I've had an idea for a novel series, it took entering a writing class to develop it to a much deeper extent. This piece fulfilled my goal of finding and practicing my own personal writing style. I hope in the future to produce an intense, action-filled novel series to rival those of my favorite authors.

Stephen Berry

Noun, Ceramics

Picasso Plays, Ceramic and Wire Sculpture

I prefer working in a mixed-media format, primarily mixing ceramics with various metals. My pieces represent both realistic and historical objects, and purely abstract pieces relying on form and colors for content. Mixing medias enhances the value of the individual components of each piece, resulting in an overall work more than the sum of its parts.

Chihiro Bise

Mukanshin, Ceramics

The Japanese word, “*mukanshin*,” translates roughly to “uncontrolled by any outside influences. It is already satisfied to be itself.” When I made this piece, my physical and mental condition was very stable, and I was satisfied being myself. The piece does not force attention, but attempts to attract people’s unconscious attention.

Daniel Borgen

One Night In Vaseline Alley, Short Fiction

Smile Like a Song, Short Fiction

I find people simultaneously loathsome and fascinating. Occasionally, I vent in written form as a means of avoiding institutionalization. The mundane inspires me—the woman screaming about the foam on her latte as if world peace depends on it, or the man’s lecturing some grocery clerk in order to boost his own faltering self-esteem. I am amazed by such minutia; it runs rampant in our lives.

Deanna Bredthauer

Alight, Digital Photograph

Dishwasher, Acrylic on Bristol Board

The Kiss Revisited, Digital Photograph

Red Stairs, Digital Photograph

Cirrus, Acrylic on Bristol Board

My art is the result of many factors, not the least of which is the tremendous desire to create. In particular, I am intrigued by color and composition, and I love strong forms that speak volumes as simply as possible. I never feel as if a piece is working until I feel that “click” of certainty inside me. Ultimately, I always try to create art I would want to have around me.



Intense Gaze | Luke Schaad-Dang | Silver Gelatin Print



Brother's Keeper | Luke Schaad-Dang | Silver Gelatin Print

Rob Burton

Self Portrait, Graphite on Paper

I drew this piece for my art class. It was fun.

Cynthia Bushell

Torso: I, Steel Rod

The beauty and strength of the female figure inspired this work.

Sarah Campeau

Vegetarian Nightmare, Digital Photograph

I think the photo is an amusing take on the nagging questions presented by wiseasses, upon learning that I'm a vegetarian: "But, how can you be *sure* fruits and vegetables don't feel pain?"

Veva Campeau

Silhouette, Digital Photograph

I like the high contrast created between myself and the picture in this piece. My shape stands out, creating a disconnected effect or supernatural feeling. I am most proud of how the project came out, overall; I did it as an experiment, and it turned out to be something powerful.

Catherine Carpenter

Study of a Hand, Pastel on Paper

My piece was done with the goal of understanding the importance that light plays in a value study.

Jessica Chu

Untitled, Acrylic on Bristol Board

I started from a single tiny shape repeated in my piece. I took the time to mix the colors, then printed out each single shape and cut them all out. I carefully arranged them on two separate pieces of bristol board so they mirrored each other. To me, it feels like something is hidden and when the mist eventually clears, there will be a surprise waiting on the other side.

Jason Collier

Eye of the Beholder, Silver Gelatin Print

Paint Face Peel, Digital Photograph

Untitled, Silver Gelatin Print

I like trying to create art people have never seen before. Looking at ideas in new ways or just pushing the current concepts to new limits, I like to see how far I can take an art form. I will get an idea and then run with it, seeing what I can do to make it something I am proud of.

Shane Cone

What's Your Greatest Weakness? Short Fiction

My ultimate goal in any piece of writing is to give the reader a realistic experience. I love the way non-genre fiction can awaken our senses to look afresh on our every day lives on good old planet Earth--and sometimes make familiar things seem eerie and strange, yet true to life.



Stop | Anthony Fontyn | Pastel on Paper



Peter Cooley

My Mom, Silver Gelatin Print

Ron Utterback, Silver Gelatin Print

Red Berries and Water Drop, Color Transparency

Art is the aesthetic expression of one's imagination. The camera has given me a way of expressing myself without miscommunication. I avoid complex metaphors: what you see is what you get. I have no choice but to see the world in a tightly-focused frame. Steering clear of everything but the heart of the image allows me to escape confusion. Photography lets me force you to look at the world the way I see it.

Carrie Countryman

Gerbil, Silver Gelatin Print

I was inspired to take the photograph 'Gerbil' because I love to experience our world in new and interesting ways, through my camera lens. I've taken photographs from a baby's eye view while lying on my belly, I've placed my camera on the ground and seen the grass as an ant does, and, yes, I've followed my gerbils around with a close-up lens to see them as they see each other.

Nina Crawford

The Counter Stool, Welded Aluminum and Brass

Flat Stomach, Welded Metal

I used aluminum because it is lightweight and difficult to weld--it gave me a challenge. The brass pieces really made this piece a success; they added contrast, as well as decoration. I focused on mechanics as well as form.

Claude Czajkowski

Egyptian Ankh, Welded Metal

Teresa, Welded Metal

The ankh was an inspiration from a drawing my best friend drew for me; I made it come to life with steel. My mom asked me to make a simple bistro table for her; my head got flooded with complex ideas. Inspiration in both cases came from loved ones, and they deserve equal credit.

Brooke Danielson

Bowl and Pitcher, Ceramics

The glazing on both pieces makes them unique. Glazes draw attention to the piece first; if the glazing is enticing, the viewer is intrigued and looks deeper to see the shape and line of the piece. Ugly pieces can be glazed to look incredible; it is possible to glaze a piece with great shape and take away from it. The artist has to find the balance.

Derek Danielson

Speechless, Airbrush on Canvas

This picture was inspired by one of the best people I know. This piece came to be simply because she was one who actually kept telling me to keep drawing and painting. My favorite part about the piece is how the bright red contrasts against the black and gray tones in the piece.

Monique Easley

First Mobile Home, Ceramics

All of them will hear your words.



My Mom | Peter Cooley | Silver Gelatin Print



Eye of the Beholder | Jason Collier | Silver Gelatin Print

Anthony Fontyn

Figure Study Lying, Conte on Paper

Id, Ceramics and Wax

Portrait of a Man, Charcoal on Paper

Protein Chain, Acrylic on Bristol Board

Stop, Pastel on Paper

Inspiration for my art is my life: be it my emotions about society (war), personal strife (money) or joy (the birth of my two beautiful daughters). I feel like I'm on a runaway train. Sometimes, when I work on a piece, it's a train wreck; sometimes it's a survivor.

Sarah Glover

Untitled, Silver Gelatin Print

The curves from a bridge attracted to me to take a photograph.

The way the bridge looked from underneath it all together attracted to me also since it was dirty. I'm proud of how it ended up turning out, because it looked so dirty and rather ugly, in person.



Untitled | Elizabeth Woodward | Acrylic on Paper

Sandy Hilgendorf

Hands, Oil on Canvas

Self Portrait, Oil on Canvas

Thirsty, Oil on Canvas

I have begun to experiment with different styles and techniques in my paintings. I was very happy with how these paintings turned out, because they all worked well and were completely different from anything I've attempted before. Finding and fitting together different elements was fun, but it also made me think about how colors and shapes move your eyes around the painting to make sense of things.

Lale Hodges

Sacred Souls, Welded Metal and Wood

This piece began with an image that was created when my sister was diagnosed with breast cancer. Nine years later, the image reappeared when I was pulling a stump out of my yard. I could see the same image trapped in its gnarled root mass. For nine years, the issue of female image and cancer had occupied the recesses of my mind. As I began working on this piece, the issue of age and the female image took hold as well. With those things in mind, the two sides emerged. This piece is about overcoming those issues and what we have come to think of as the essence of womanhood.

Tommy Holczer

Architecture in Portland 1:4, Silver Gelatin Print

Beautiful Destruction, Digital Art

Genesis, Digital Art

Everyday life inspires my artwork, whether a thought, a conversation, a photograph, a commercial, or even a song. From an inspiration, I try to understand the big idea encompassing it and then trudge on from there.



Bracelet | Whitney Woodland | Metal Arts

Jeff Isaak

Chitter Chatter, Short Fiction

I had a dream with indistinct creatures that made high-pitched chatter noises and the Chatterers from this story came out of that. An odd, very surreal dream, and I tried to keep that surreal aspect in the themes of the story. I liked the semi-introspective nature of the characters' thoughts, the descriptions, and the fast pace.

Andrew Isenhardt

Pool Devil, Digital Photograph

This piece is one of four in a series. I chose red and black to give the feeling of despair and loneliness, and white to show the lighter side of the subject. Overall, the series is inspired by inner feelings for that era of my life.

Tatiana Iwanick

Night Watches, Poetry

Fantasy novels, stories, and video games have always inspired my works. *Night Watches* was inspired by two characters in a role-playing game I played.

Marissa Katter

Club, Short Fiction

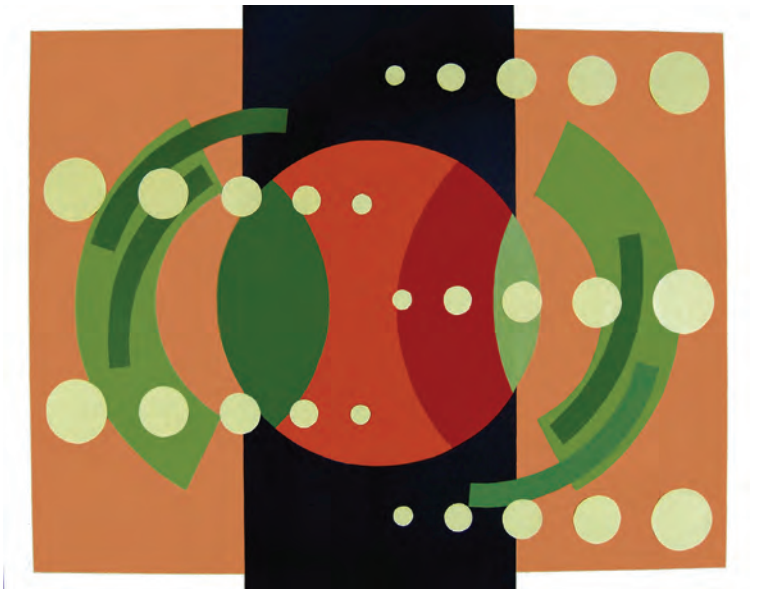
Perfect, Short Fiction

I'm fascinated by the concept of normalcy and the lengths people will go to achieve or avoid it. I'd rather know about crazy, pathetic people walking among us than magical fairies, purple dragons or missing golden amulets found by long-haired damsels with awkward names. Reality has more potential for the hilarious and breathtakingly sad.

Brandon Kays

Thirsty Bird, Cut Paper on Bristol Board

I came to the idea for this piece from an episode of "The Simpsons". It was the latest I ever worked on any project- 5 o'clock in the morning!



Dishwasher | Deanna Bredthauer | Acrylic on Bristol Board

Shamarie Kepler

Battered, Digital Photograph

This is part of a macabre and horror series printed for Photo II, done with high speed infrared film. I wanted to portray subjects that are not normally photographed, things we perceive as ugly or disturbing.

Marci Larson

Pauly Shore is the Boss, Charcoal on Paper

Self Portrait of a Genius Graphite on Paper

Most people choose to drive and have money. I choose to mobilize with the pursuit of artwork as an extension of myself ... and I love the bus.

Leanne Lefebvre

Memory, Pastel on Paper

Art continually opens my eyes, both visually and spiritually.

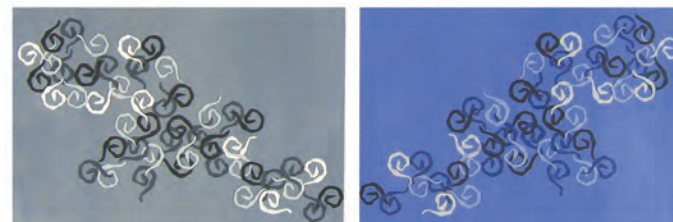
Jenell McClusky-Halverson

Maple Leaf Obsession, Ceramics

I've always loved Maple leaves, so I started to press large and small ones into the clay to get the natural look of each leaf, including veins and scrunches. I like the way the curves I shaped into each



Architecture in Portland, 1:4 | Tommy Holczer | Silver Gelatin Print



Untitled | Jessica Chu | Acrylic on Bristol Board

leaf individually fit well into the piece as a whole. The natural curve of each leaf was accentuated, and I was pleased at the natural but unique look when it was finished.

Mark Owens

Yesso Spruce, Ink on Paper

The art of bonsai is a rare and beautiful thing, but the ability to share it with others is priceless. I realized that pictures of bonsai could be just as useful and beautiful. The simple elements used in this composition, such as pen on watercolor paper, allow the beauty of bonsai to show through without distraction; I feel it works best in the piece.

Jayne Park

Concentration of Butterflies, Ink on Bristol Board

My pieces were inspired by a sense of returning to nature and human figure and movement. I am proud of the simple yet elegant end result, and the simple, black, figurative lines that can carry an entire piece.

Paige Pienkowski

Head of Jonno, Ceramics

This piece is based on my brother's head, mixed with elements of my father and grandfather to give my interpretation of what I think my brother will look like in approximately thirty years. This

piece was also a stretch out of my comfort zone; I used to make small clay models, so the success of this project gave me the confidence to continue to create bigger pieces in hand building, as well as attempting to create elegant thrown forms.

Danny Ramey

A Time To Live, Novel Chapter

This piece kind of inspired itself. It is set in the middle of a dark fantasy, and the dark aspect needed to be offset by something very gentle. The novel in its entirety is inspired by my fascination with rogues and other mischief-makers.

Nicholas Reed

Two Heads and the Space Between, Pastel on Paper

I wanted to draw the model from a different point of view. Plus, this was my final for an art class – the desire for an A can be very inspirational.

Colleen Roberts

Wine Nights, Digital Photograph

I wanted to do something different than what the viewer sees every day. I'm proud of how well it turned out, especially the set up and the lighting. If one wants to, one can take a picture with imagination and clarity and get the viewer to get the message.

Lois Russell

African Memories, Mixed Media

Lunar Music, Digital Art

Art is that accidental glimpse in one's peripheral vision. As a viewer, art provides me a puzzle, a transcending connection to what I sense is a common understanding of greater unknowns.



Beautiful Destruction | Tommy Holczer | Digital Art



Genesis | Tommy Holczer | Digital Art



Red Berries and Water Drop | Peter Cooley | Color Transparency

Luke Schaad-Dang

I Got You Babe, Silver Gelatin Print

Brother's Keeper, Silver Gelatin Print

Intense Gaze, Silver Gelatin Print

I am inspired by my faith in God, and I am grateful for sight to see so I can capture the beauty of simplicity in all creation.

Gloria Scheel

Texture Study, Pastel on Paper

Texture Study came about as an art assignment in my Drawing II class. After starting over three times, I finally became satisfied with my drawing; it soon became something I wished to make a work of art. What works especially well in this piece is the tilted position of the head and the textural detail of the subject's body. Although laborious, Texture Study was well worth my time.

Jamie Schindler

Thief's Honor. Short Fiction

Thief's Honor was inspired partly by the series of novels I was working on, and partly by a writing prompt in class. It's also the result of a lot of intense work on several characters, particularly Kagami. This story best showcases her complexity and her attitude.

Rebecca Stephens

Anguish and *Hope*, Acrylic on Wood Series

Coil Mask, Ceramics

Dream Bowl, Ceramics

Lavender, Digital Photograph

Untitled, Ceramics

My paintings were inspired by the devastating tsunami in 2005 tsunami. The faces of extreme emotion came from photos of both



Speechless | Derek Danielson | Acrylic on Canvas

victims and survivors. My faith inspires my work; I know that suffering ultimately leads to hope, which never disappoints.

Steven Stum

Pieces of Me, Digital Photograph

Every photograph contains bits and pieces of its creator, especially in a self-portrait. Through literal interpretation, I explored the idea that we are made up of a thousand unique pieces which, standing alone, can be confusing, but with careful thought and understanding of the individual pieces that make up our psyche, soul, and body, we can truly know ourselves.



Lunar Music | Lois Russell | Digital Art

Scarlet Tendler

A Facade of Solace, Creative Non-Fiction

I've been tossing around the idea for this story for quite some time. Originally, I'd planned to write it in a much longer version, expanding on aspects of my life. I chose to use this subject as an exercise in a creative writing class; it proved a good opportunity to get feedback on a creative nonfiction piece and afforded me the experience of really putting myself out there for criticism. The piece worked well because the emotions were inspired through a child's perspective, but told through an adult's perspective.

Evelyn Ogg Thompson

Courting Shoes, Charcoal on Paper

Still Life with Plants, Pastel on Paper

Triple Self Portrait, Acrylic on Canvas

This assignment consisted of choosing three different artists or styles to influence three separate self-portraits. I chose Paul Gauguin, a French post-impressionist painter, for the first. The second selection was for style. Japanese portrait compositions are flat, shadowless caricatures, lacking a background to ensure the subject is predominant. The third choice was the Cubist style, for which Picasso is famous. The fragmentation and anatomical dislocations make this part of the assignment intriguing.

David Varnal

Armadillo, Cut Paper on Bristol Board

Creeping Heart, Ink on Bristol Board

These pieces were completed in Design Fundamentals I. I created patterns in which the dark and light areas are reversed.

Cynthia Vogel

Gary Lives in Caldwell, Short Fiction

Hot Spa, Short Fiction

As is true with most fiction writers, I take my inspiration from my life experiences and twist it inside out and into fiction. I try to set bizarre events into motion and then explore the characters' reactions to the events. I'm motivated most by the humorous and sad elements of living.

Bev Vogler

Mother, Poem

Poetry is a new venue for me; I approach it hesitantly, but with determination. My poem is a tribute to my mother, who loved real linen handkerchiefs and looked forward to winter so she could sit in her rocker with her many spools of thread and embroider to her heart's content. When she died, we found a drawer full of new hankies, folded and ironed, waiting for her artwork.



Pearl Earrings and Necklace | Whitney Woodland | Metal Arts



Wine Nights | Colleen Roberts | Digital Photograph

Whitney Woodland

Bracelet, Metal Arts

Pearl Earrings and Necklace, Metal Arts

Torch Pin Metal Arts

My art is an external expression of inner emotion and thought laid out in form, line, function, design, and a touch of whimsy--sometimes classic and simple, sometimes complicated and contemporary, but always purely me.

Elizabeth Woodward

Untitled, Acrylic on Paper

For this piece, I wanted to move out of my comfort zone--representing a recognizable object--and try something abstract. I intended the gray lines to create subtle movement--to make certain planes lift and others to fall back. It was also designed to illustrate contrast. ✂



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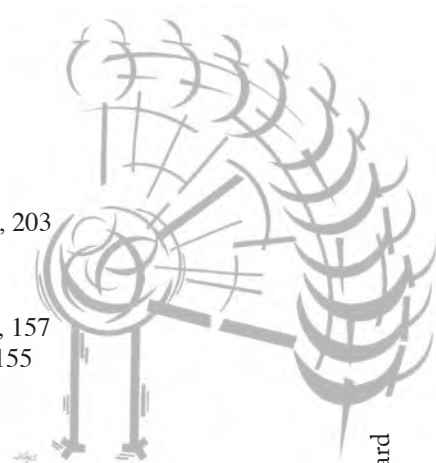
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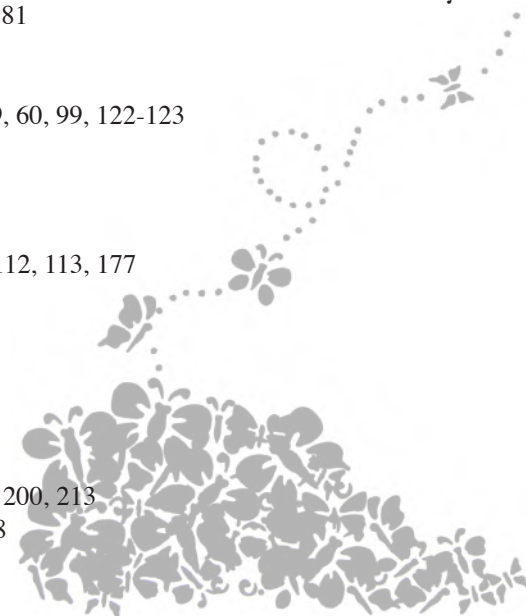
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About the Editors

Art and Graphics editor **Allyson Bennett** delves into myriad forms of art and media. Working on *Phoenix* afforded her the chance to showcase her considerable talent and eye for quality and craftsmanship. Allyson plans to continue working with various art forms while honing her own talent and skills.

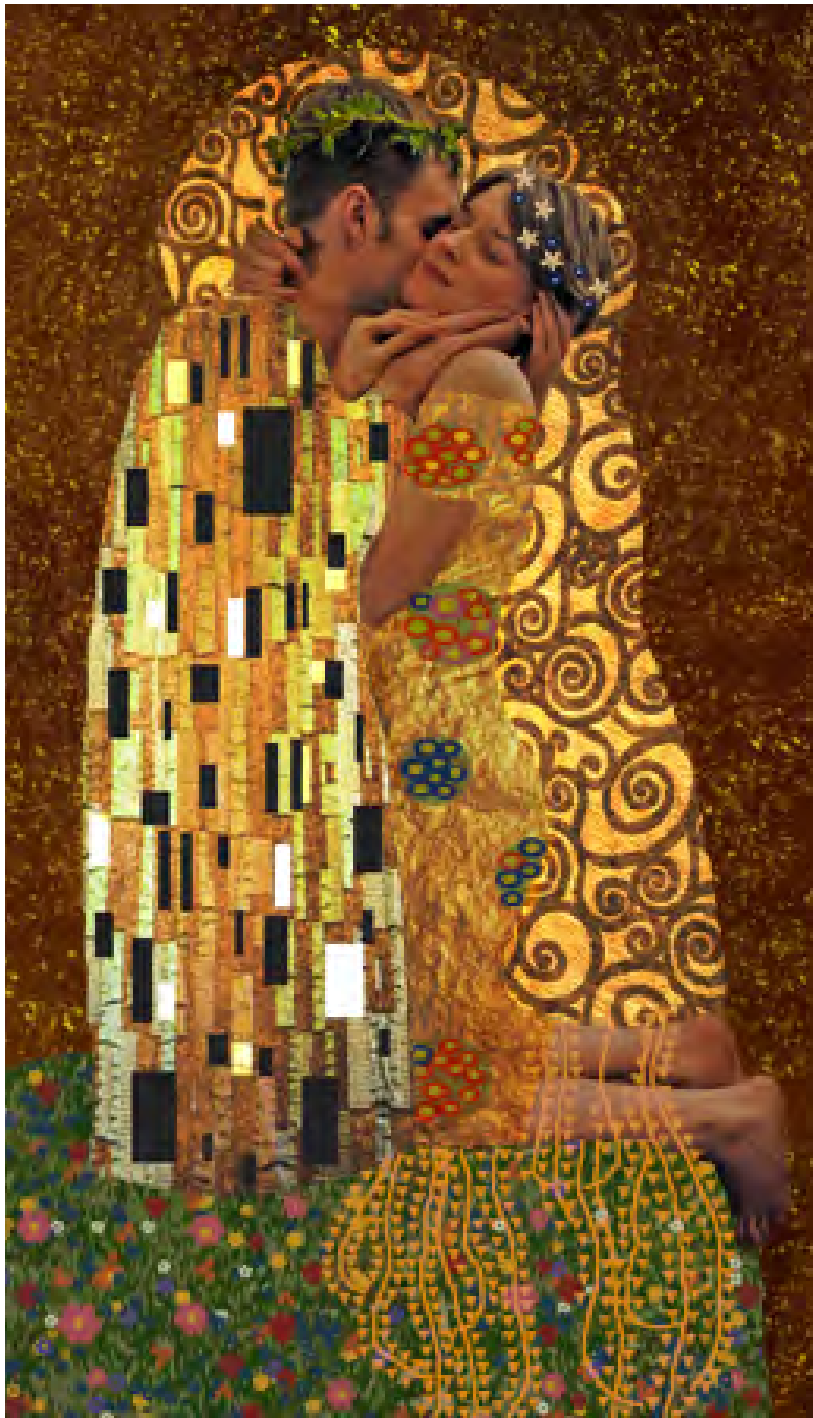
Literary editor **Daniel Borgen** plans to major in English and Political Science at Washington State University Vancouver in Fall, 2005. Daniel has worked on other writing and editing projects for Clark College, including the 2005 Women of Achievement Award biographies and the 2004 *Phoenix*. He plans to pursue a career in teaching and freelance writing. Daniel relishes the opportunity to showcase the talent of Clark's many fine writers: "Clark boasts a talented, diverse group of writers; their voices simply must be heard."

Andrew Isenhardt, photo editor, appreciated the chance to enjoy all of the students' artwork firsthand. "As photo editor, I saw the artists' work in a way that let me really appreciate the talent of the people who crafted it." Upon graduation from Clark, Andrew plans to pursue his Bachelor's degree and eventually integrate graphic design and communications into his already successful photography business.

An aspiring writer, Literary Editor **Marissa Katter** jumped at the chance to work on the *Phoenix*. Her work as an English tutor provided a strong background for the editing and proofreading integral to the magazine's creation process. In 2004, her work was featured in the *Phoenix* and was honored with first place in the Clark College Gallivan Award for fiction. Marissa's experience editing the literature of *Phoenix* has encouraged her to pursue future work in editing, as well as complete a short story collection.



Cirrus | Deanna Bredthauer | Acrylic on Bristol Board



The Kiss Revisited | Deanna Bredthauer | Digital Photograph

colophon

This publication was laid out in Adobe InDesign CS on an Apple Macintosh G4. Artwork was reproduced either on an Epson 4180 scanner or with a digital camera and was then prepared for publication in Adobe Photoshop CS. The publication was printed by Paramount Graphics in Beaverton, Oregon.

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Torch Pin | Whitney Woodland | Metal Arts

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