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ABOUT

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CORADDI

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PRIZE WINNERS

Coraddi is pleased to offer six equal first-place cash prizes to select works published in the magazine. Awards are judged anonymously by members of the UNCG community.

Writing, selected by Dr. David Bruzina of the English Department at USC Aiken (a former professor at UNCG):

Edna Period Myers by Sarah Sills
Q by Ross Brubeck
Divine Moment by Caroline Myrick

Art Pieces, selected by Leah Sobsey:

Sanding Perpendicular I-V by Heath Montgomery
December by Amélie Blanc
Virgensita by Brenda Vienrich

Anyone may submit to Coraddi, but only non-staff members are eligible for the contest.

ROOMS

- - -

ALEX CRAIG

At first, it was warm and cushioned, a
 thick, fluid-filled, flesh-walled nursery.
 Mom's first present, a bunched and bundled umbilical scarf,
 draped its sinewy tongue around my tender pink throat.
 The birth was unremarkable.
 I'm told the walls were so sterile and white that they glowed in the fluorescence.

At seven, it was a generous double-windowed rectangle
 in an eggshell color way with Disney-themed wallpaper
 leftover from someone else's childhood dream,
 which seemed to become mine by default. Fluffy, chocolate-colored
 Saxony, meant for informal, high traffic areas, showed more dirt than it hid.
 It lay, soft and patient, as I rolled around the floor playing with Legos until I was nine.

Next, I wriggled all twelve years of my pre-pubescent
 body between 700 thread count jersey sheets on a twin bed,
 set up next to the window, overlooking ominous wooding
 behind our house. My closet groaned, bulging with enough fabric
 to clothe a small country. I never gave anything away.
 I hid from the world as it spun along, I plastered the walls with a colorful magazine collage.

As an adult, it's a large apartment with vaulted
 ceilings, and 3 semi-permanent friends
 set up between several oddly-textured
 not-quite-thick-enough "walls." Rich, red brick piles itself
 high, sheltering my bed from the outside as two
 wonderful, broken-sealed windows usher in
 winter and condensation, mold and mildew, light and ground-level glances.
 On sunny days you really see how white the walls can be.

THIS WAS JEZEBEL

- - -

ALEX CRAIG

I am a woman. My fire is my body, is my tongue, is my mind.
 See my hands, my feet, my skull,
 lying prostrate, painted in prophesy.
 Wet noses of the dogs
 mashed against my bones and teeth like tines sank into my flesh.
 Hot breath against this painted face. Skin dripped like wax from my body,
 as their sticky mouths cradled my damp frame.

My eunuchs heaved me out of the window.
 I felt the ground like a hard, dusty palm as it absorbed my body.
 The blood of my dignity, my harlotry, my idolatry painted the walls,
 the horses, the faces. My black kohl eyes ran down my face as they watched and
 watched the horses trample my body.

You walked into my house, the house of my family.
 You ate and drank. You killed what you couldn't make submit.
 My blood fills the stomachs and the veins of those beasts that tore me.
 My flesh idles between their teeth. I wormed into the ground, I soaked into the air.
 I am here. You can taste me when you breathe.

FIX IT FOR ME

- - -

ALEX CRAIG

I was in a house. I mean, it was my
house. But full of water, like a fluorescent, window-front fishbowl,

colonized by my family's old animals, and
kids who weren't ever my friends in eighth grade. So I'm swimming around.
But I can't swim. At least

not in real life.

The thing is, these breathing souls had beautiful
faces. Rich. Meticulously detailed. Painstaking. Too detailed.
I swam into them, grubby-finger grabbing at their

plastic little features. I wound their angel hair with my toes,
slid digits along lips and paws, chins and collar bones,
canine nostrils. Bony, salivating pearls.

Then? Then the water started to get to them.

Plastic melted and chunked together, gumming up their faces.
Algae grew on glass walls, the fishbowls ceramic castle collected

rust, and short, matted hair. The bright light shattered
and the water became a toxic, diaphanous landscape.
Choked for air, ready for death, I clawed at the water, ate
mouthfuls of the stuff as I let it sift through the
cracked wall of my broken teeth and my
imperfect features.

THE MACHINERY OF NIGHT

- - -

RJ HOOKER

Finally the sun is exhausted,
falls to the horizon
and leaves a bruise of clouds.

Cicadas seethe in the trees.
Bats dart like windswept paper
to rummage through the dusk.

The streetlights burst open
at the end of their stalks
in the oil black distance.

All of the houses, disturbed
by people returning inside,
open their glowing, paned eyes.

The machinery of night
begins to churn, and the moon
rises slowly on a pulled rope.

ECOSYSTEM

- - -

RJ HOOKER

A couple argue
naked in the kitchen.
The woman sits
under fluorescent lights
in her veil of lucid skin.
Her newly re-situated thigh
reveals stippling
impressed onto her buttocks
by the pattern on the stool seat,
like fading pink Braille.
The man's stomach pooches out
above the counter, his penis
is pinned between flesh
and countertop.
They're in tears.
The microwave hums to itself.
In the corner,
between the broom and trashcan,
a roach's antennae stand erect
and dust a crumble of popcorn.
Plates float in a grimy sink
like porcelain lily pads.

A SUICIDE LETTER WRITTEN BY A MAN TURNING INTO A TREE

- - -

RJ HOOKER

Each morning I stand in front of the sink
and cough up gobs of sawdust.
My back is crusted with bark.
My scalp grows tufts of pine needles.

My hands are long, slender branches.
My left forearm is nailed at the elbow.
On my shoulder, a heart is carved
around lovers' initials.

I've lost my desire for maple syrup,
books have become nauseating,
and every telephone pole
is a crucifixion.

My wife hates me now. I lust
after cherry trees, the low swaying of willows,
the ripe, yearning peaches
that quiver on a branch.

A fucking poet lingers around my house.
He leaves scrawled poems on the porch
and tells the neighbors it's my choice,
that I'm just fending off his advances.

Because of it all, I dream of an ax
nuzzling its grinder. I dream of fire-licked,
ashen charcoal. I dream of being hand-fed
into the whirling grin of a circular saw.

THIEVING

- - -

ANDREW HEIDER

The relics of flowers, held as evidence of our days,
 which lined the pages of your novels, or the confessions
 amidst my journal, were stolen from our neighbors' yards.

WE'RE WOLVES

- - -

ANDREW HEIDER

As I examine the edges of the spine, the
 aroma settles into the membrane walls
 of my wet snout.

I am so hungry for knowledge as I tear
 through the pages, ripping each one from
 the innocence of their books.

I devour ink, the words of men far more
 intelligent than I, digesting each syllable
 and metaphor until their lost meanings

pour down my face. The frightened
 librarian shouts at me. She stomps her
 feet and pulls out her hair.

She has never seen a man like me before.

I am an animal searching for its existence.
 I snarl at anyone who comes near. I pounce
 on any female brave enough to test her wits

and graze this blond mane. The librarian is
 crying now. She cannot believe the mess I
 have made of myself, and of her once orderly

collection of novels. I attempt to explain, as
 I tear up the stairs, gunning for the exit.
 Tears stream from her eyes as she screams,

What are you? Why would you do such things!

I'm a man! I howl back at her.
 A man pretending to be a wolf.
I'm a wolf, I say. A wolf afraid to become a man.

DIVINE MOMENT

- - -

CAROLINE MYRICK

Do you remember where we were when you said it?

By purple orchids shaped like Heaven's trumpets,
Under clear skies, opened up just for this moment.

You were probably wearing a 1970s button-down,
Chucks and a nervous grin.

When, just like the Red Sea, your lips parted and
You said to me with hands in the air "Okay, okay

I don't know if there's a God."

And the clouds came
And the thunder cracked
And the preacher yelled
And the babies cried
And you and I went straight to Hell

Where we continued pursuing liberal arts degrees.

SPAIN IN THREE PARTS

- - -

CAROLINE MYRICK

I.

Hot tears
and cold cervezas symbolize
what the distance does to me.
The ocean laughs
as it rubs sodium and chloride deep
into the trenches of my chest.
My heart is cracking open
from Madrid's arid heat,
the salty calamari
and the 4000 miles
separating me from el amor de mi vida,
also known as the love of my life.

II.

The women on the sidewalks
are secretly walking catwalks
while the men on the Metro
discretely pose for ads.
None of them are married,
none can recite the prayers of their fathers,
but all believe in a little equality
and a lot of looking good.

III.

And on my last night
I sipped crimson Sangria
under a tangerine sunset
above a plateful of saffron paella.
Richness reminiscent of the
cave dwellers' dance,
Gypsy feet pounding on the floor
like the fists of angry Catholic gods.

BEHIND THE PICKET FENCES

- - -

TRAVIS HAUER

A couple in their mid fifties having morning tea with cream,
playing their roles among the understood gestures
that was commonplace at this daily routine.

A quiet contemplation took the two of them,
as they settled into their silence.
The birds never chirped anymore

And just then he almost wanted to
tell her about his dream but his eyes were lost in
the stain on the linen cloth from a day earlier.

A loud crash
suddenly startled her into spilling her tea and from under
the rim of his cup. He muttered, "Damn cat.
Always getting into something."

AFTER THE FIGHT

- - -

MICHAEL BOND

Driving away
suits me
too well.

The punch
of passing trees
through the sunlight

in the country,
only tobacco barns
fall apart,

rusted through
with skylights
where vines climb

out of the earth,
where clouds gather
to soften the dirt.

I thought the first
drop pushed down
a key

and started to type
like a typewriter
on the roof.

BLACK LUNG, BLACK TONGUE

- - -

DALLAS BOHANNON

My father breathes like a fish out of water
As I replace the IV in his arm, and

Relive the night I went
Ice fishing alone,

The line left on the lake like a
Lonely hammer without a hand.

We had been trying to catch the
Brosme Cusk for days

And I disobeyed my father—
Because I believed I could catch it.

The naked night chilled the
Nape of my neck as I crawled forward,

Slithering on the ice like a snake,
Like an eel,

And for thirty minutes,
I held the pole firmly.

There's another world entirely,
Beneath the ice—

When the line tugged I
Lost everything.

The cusk reared its black head and
Emerged, dancing from the ice before it

Snapped the line,
Inches from the open water hole.

The glacial surface hissed,
Grilling the fish.

I threw the rod and shattered by elbow
In a crack,

My fingers like screaming needles against
The ice and black scales of the cusk.

I clutched my prize, an angry black lung;
Dug my nails into its slime,

And began to skin it like a
Dead organ.

I behaved madly and did not cry
When the fish's gills cut me.

I slammed the cusk like a butcher
Against the white winter,

Cursing its shell to slabs of oily mush
And grease in my lap.

When I cleaned it of its filth,
It's sickness,

I released the pink vessel
Back into the water and

Soaked it in a warm bath.

*Can you breathe better now
Daddy?*

My father, with his black tongue,
Asks me for a glass of ice water.

ÁNGEL

- - -

LAWRENCE HOLLIDAY

Desperté a encontrar un ángel:
Me ha visitado en un sueño;
Esos ojos y aquel pelo largo—
Los colores de canela y miel...

Fue una mujer, joven y guapa
(Aquella aura hermosa la circunda).
Pasó por la ventana, en luz áurea,
Mientras yo descansaba en mi cama.

Sentí las manos de una diosa:
Su toque, femenino y suave,
Me manoseó y en la luz, me lavé
De los pecados de la vida mala.

Antes de salir, me tocó un ala—
Un viento gélido me sopló;
La dureza de realidad me cayó.
Se voló, con garbo, de mi sala,
A medida que dormía en mi cama.

I woke up to meet an angel:
It had visited me in a dream;
Those eyes, and that long hair—
The colors of cinnamon and honey...

It was a woman, young and pretty
(That beautiful aura surrounds her).
She passed through the window, in a golden light,
While I rested in my bed.

I felt the hands of a goddess:
Her touch, feminine and smooth,
Fondled me, and in the light, I washed myself
Of the sins of the wicked life.

Before leaving, a wing touched me—
A frigid wind blew upon me;
The harshness of reality fell upon me.
She flew away, gracefully, from my hall,
As I slept in my bed.

English translation provided courtesy of the author.

IT WAS TRUTH WE SAW

- - -

HARRISON RINELLI

a cracked-out,
diffused, or simply irregular
black male left my store today
garbed in a large, bubbly black
jacket.

are you hearing me?

and my boss, she
looks over from the register
wearing the blue uniform of food
lion and pops a question
towards the diffused
irregularly dressed
man.

"Just lookin' for the bathroom!"
he laughs in a high-pitch, low
sort of way,
"And a ride back up to
VIRGINIA!"
then, he takes a few paces,
muttering to himself.
"If you could gimme a ride
up to Virginia."

that man must have gotten it.
are you hearing me?

off he goes, outside, when
Suzanne, my boss, garbed
green in the food lion uniform, says
"That man was carrying a ton of
beer in his jacket!"
and everyone around gets in an uproar, saying,
"Yeah yeah, I seen the bottle."
"It was sticking out
of his jacket, that man, he's stolen
a helluva lot of beer."

and my other boss, a larger,
much larger black man,
(looks like he ate another man)
comes up and follows him slowly into the parking lot.

I peek outside, hearing them, those
people who saw everything go down,
chatting about the robbery
they had just witnessed
with their eyes fully open.

and my boss, Dwayne comes back inside and states,
"He didn't have anything."

I guess everybody knew that, too.

ON HOW TO BUILD A GUN

- - -

HARPER BOKUM-FAUTH

One six-inch copper pipe, two bullets, one lighter,
 and the will to let the unknown in.
 That is all it took to bring my brother to that field where I once played
 as a child among the grasses of my youth.

It was the empty barrels of his synapses that brought him to build his own
 tool for a thirty-year old abortion.
 How he came to that desert snowfield, I understand.
 It is what he has become, that I do not.

His living body remains with us, marked
 by the scarred closed door to his heart.
 The rest of him is lost, temporarily, like the blood on that frozen ground
 that would later soak through ice and earth on its journey back to the beginning.

FOOTSOLDIERS

- - -

CHRISTOPHER WALSH

i used to bartend for an 85yearold named Tom
 who squeezed himself out of tubes of toothpaste
 and hemorrhoid medicine each morning
 before having his first dry manhattan.

he told me about Bostonian gangsters in the thirties.
 i believed him
 even when he was lying.
 they were good stories.
 i poured the whiskey
 and gave him an extra cherry.

his wife was still alive,
 she had to wear baby diapers
 even at home.
 Tom spent a lot of afternoons at the bar.

his face was Michelangelo plasterofparis
 without the paint,
 or god's finger.
 he'd never been to France
 or Italy
 except during the war.
 he remembered bullets
 and urine
 rather than the buildings.

i'd never been to war
 except against my father.
 Tom said that didn't count.

one day i went to work
 hungover,
 feeling like death,
 and one of the regulars told me Tom had passed away.
 i put my hands in my pockets
 and squeezed them into fists,
 but quickly let them ease
 as i moved toward the taps
 to serve the workingclass hands.

JABAO

- - -

LEVON VALLE

A long time ago, Damestah, Queen of the Earth, was lonely.
The land had long been shaped by her thoughts
and Man, her final dream, had
long betrayed her.
Her womb was closed, barren and
her dreams long forsaken. But, Mama said
Damestah's sisters Sun and Moon consoled her, saying,

“She who does not dream
has no peace, no hope
so we will create a dream
for you, a memory, a history.”

They gave her an idol, a child, to
inspire her, rile her emotions.
Damestah cried in joy and yearning until
waters descended from Sun's eyes and Moon glowed bright, all on this day.
Damestah carved another idol, another child,
deep within her womb and fed him love, rice milk, and honeydew.
She made his hair from the yucca,
plucked stars from the heavens and gave him eyes, his alone,
and she bathed him, smoothed him, cleansed him of afterbirth.

Full of delight and motherly pride,
Damestah showed Man her dream, her gift, and
hoped for peace. Yet, Man sneered.
“What do you think of my child, Jabao?” she asked and
Man spat at Jabao's hair, jealous. Then Man stole Jabao from her and
scalped his skull bare and covered him in kelp. Mockingly,
beat Jabao's cassava-like skin until bruises sprouted all over him.
“This creature is an abomination!
H—he will never be like me,” Man said and threw Jabao back to her.

Thus Jabao hid in Damestah's cave-like bosom.
But she pushed him out, saying, “Man is a hollow fool, certainly,
but you must live among him. For
I made him in the same way and that makes you brothers.
My sisters and I will watch over you, son, so
know your steps are guarded, followed.”
Thus Jabao, exiled and pale, took his first steps on the Long Road called Life.

NIGHTSHADE

- - -

JESSICA BEEBE

I cannot remember the last time
it rained so hard that it broke
through the awning she said
and closed the window.
There was a crack in the sill
I had never seen before but I followed
her into the kitchen where she said
she would show me the proper
way to peel a tomato. She asked if I knew
how to make the skin fall off but I could
only shake my head no. You have
to bruise it first she said and then struck
the blush red cheek.

THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

- - -

KAYLA CAVENAUGH

The house has been sold.
 Let me circle the roots
 of the front-yard oak
 one more time

Six-and-a-half months
 removed from two blue
 men and a pacific birthday.
 Steam rose above
 hoods of parked cars.

Your winter fleece now
 dwells in my closet
 like the skin of an animal—
 woolly and warm,
 a zipped-up relic
 of someone who lived.

LEGACY

- - -

LAURA BROWN

She wished for a more musical name,
 something that makes men more inclined
 to sing. Leah or Caroline, anything
 that would grant the permission of
 a history other than her own.

Imagining that a person
 amounts to what is left behind,
 becomes the broken umbrella
 as it rests in the hall,
 walled in by the present tense:

Susan, black-eyed—
 the month of April.

Anne, Elizabeth to afford royalty.

Even unearthly Mary or Ruth.

There is a ghost
 two cities to the east,
 waiting to become a part of her world.
 When the heart can no longer beat

in the throat,
 in the wrist,

it finds a way into bedroom
 slippers and forgotten grocery lists.

SAME MOON

- - -

JESSICA FRITZ

I.

There was a thickness in the air
and it huddled and rose and clung to us until we wore it like robes.
Hundreds of little heads like
pebbles or
glass marbles, rolling unconsciously beneath beaming blue light.
And that light scattered and bounced.
Spews of lemon soaked in neon,
thin white slices of the moon, jutting out of the walls and
cutting my pupils in half.

II.

From where I sit
there is assurance greater than any
ever handed to me in small words, left impotent on the floor,
or tiny troubled touches of the spine.
It is soaked in thick cans of paint: blues and
whites and grays and violets.
I let these patterns ribbon themselves into visions of the night
because we still see the very same moon
and I won't sever this tie between us.

III.

Pale slices of oranges are
placed in my hand like an offering of indifference, or just a justification.
Plump and oozing: sticky soured tar.
Through the creases of knuckles like chairs scraping down coffee shop
floors.
And, yes, hands are always kept far,
picking and peeling, and at a distance we can bear.
There is no shovel for the layers of silence and the
small sting of another's stare.
They pile up and we gather them, respectively.

IV.

The season moved swiftly so that
daylight was the Summer's heat and night the Autumn's calling.
Millions of bare limbs, as if
Earth were testing her modesty, ripping all the color and
throwing it to the ground,
graciously giving us long beds of yellow and
soft sheets of orange: Lying places
for every biting dawn,
looming low and laden in late November.

SLEEPTALK

- - -

JESSE MORALES

At low dawn we sleep,
she and I,
awash in the oblique notes
that train wheels sing.
The oval legs

of a passing locomotive
spin like lame turntables
whose liquid whirl-songs

leach through screens
pinned in the windows. Lying
not awake in bed, we too
make sonic turns, our bones
scraping tunes from the world

like needles from vinyl discs. Our limbs
swim in their sockets
like the globe in space; woman and man,

we move to mark the time.
If I were alone
I would be still and feel
the purls of time
eddy in my navel

the way the train's
polyphonic yawn pools
now like water

in the cup of her back.
Then I would know, like her,
what it is to keep a shrine
in my twisting abdomen
to time, the one thing

that exists of its own will. But I am young
yet, too young to fly and gyrate in spacetime,
and I don't like to sleep alone.

UNTIMED, DIVINE

- - -

AMANDA MANIS

On the roof at Ian's house I am high
up, almost flying, when he names me
divine.

*laughter ringing from the stars *you are*
he says trembled touch,
fearless face, timeless timeless timeless,
taste—

sang *bi* from a whisper
and high from which we came,

said *hello there, I know you*, without reason,
without shame.

YOUR PLASTIC

- - -

ANTHONY MANENTI

I have no eyes to match
the glares against our willing faux pas,
from necktie royalty.

Mr. J.P Morgan. – Adieu! Adieu!

I have held that flaccid rag to shine my shoe.

And have done no good for me,
or you.

A drunk, bleary-eyed,
wails cirrhosis
to the lidless moon, knows
only the wending of footsteps.

Or the pins of dreams
that stitch fragile seams
around threadbare nakedness.
The cerebral drain, circle and circle
till all the world is drowned
and purple.

THE TASTE OF WHISKEY

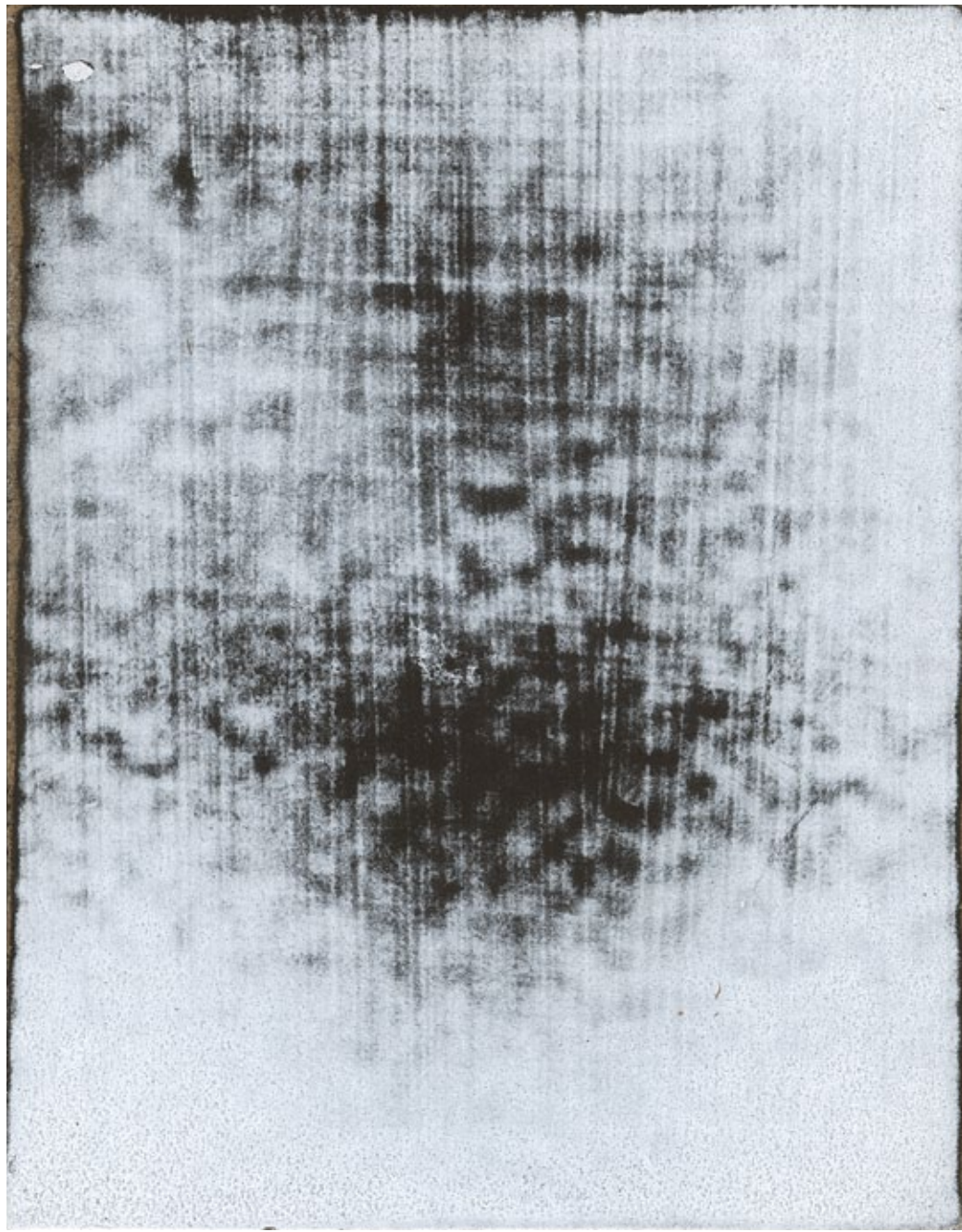
- - -

CAITLIN McCANN

The flashing, blue glow of the television screen
reminded me of the night
after my uncle's funeral
when we stepped on my deck
in the middle of a violent storm
just so that we could kiss,
because neither of us had been kissed
in the rain before.
You told me my lips
tasted like whiskey.
I told you it was because
my uncle died.
You knew I was being ridiculous.
I hoped the rain would hide my tears,
but when you kissed my closed eyelids
you could taste the salt
and you knew I was crying.
When we went inside
we lit candles and watched the flames
do their shadow dance on the wall.
You gave me gummie worms
and told me you loved me.
I knew you were being ridiculous.

HEATH MONTGOMERY
SANDING PERPENDICULAR I-V









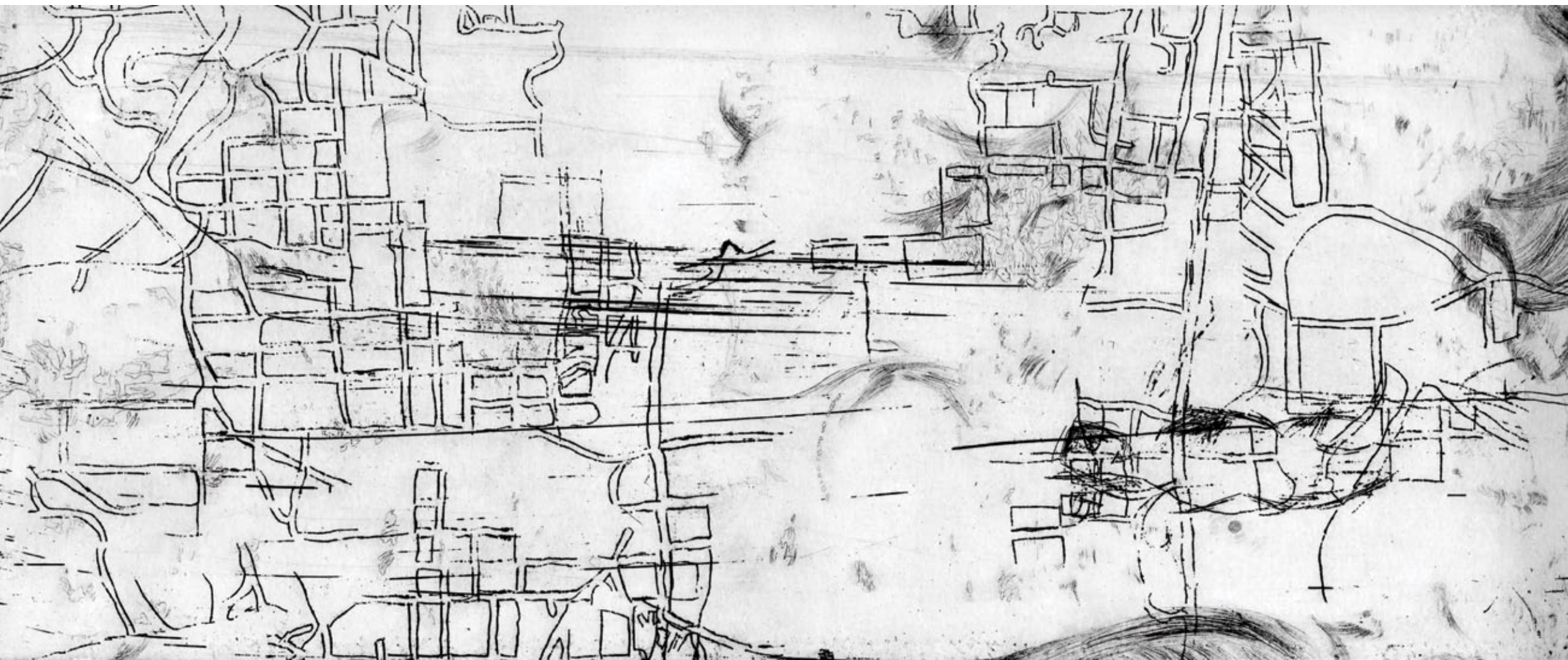
ERIC KNISS
*COLLAGED INDEX, INDEXICAL TRACE
and SIFTED*



KIMBERLY WOOD
SUNSET



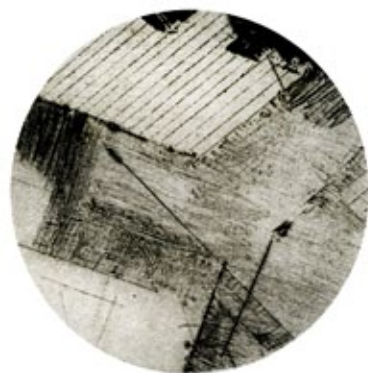
AMANDA KATHERINE NICHOLAS
RAVINE



ELIZABETH INGRAM
GREENSBORO



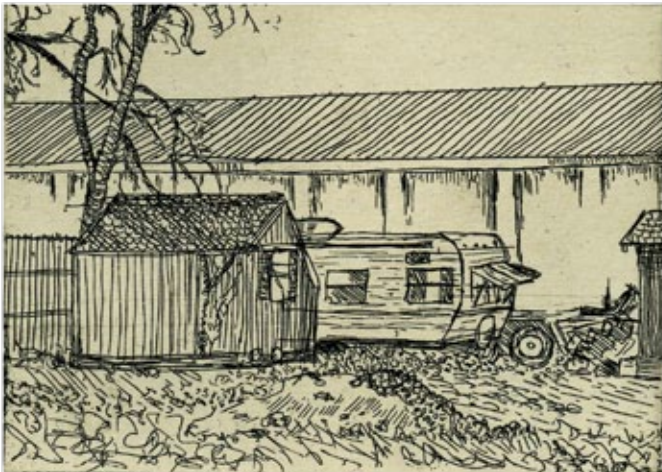
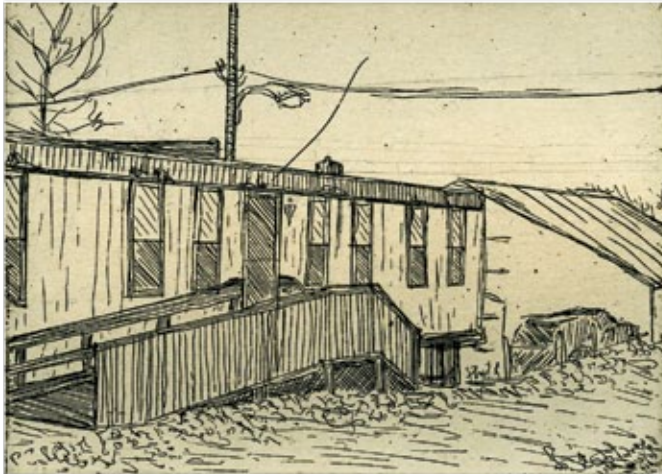
JOSH NORMAN
UNTITLED



GABRIELLE TROTT
///



JANIE LEDFORD
NATIVES



STEPHANIE CASE
TRAILERS

IVAN GILBERT
SOUP
(following)



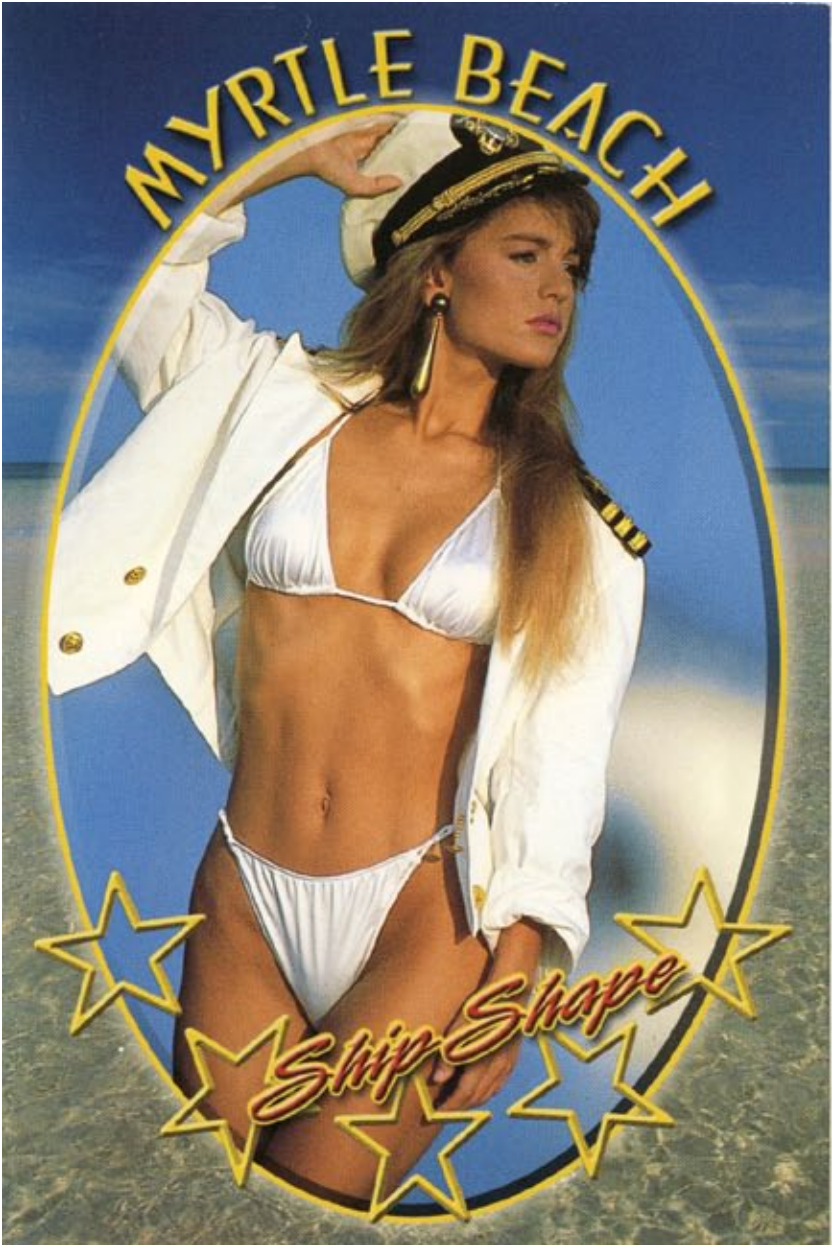
S/SA

SOUP

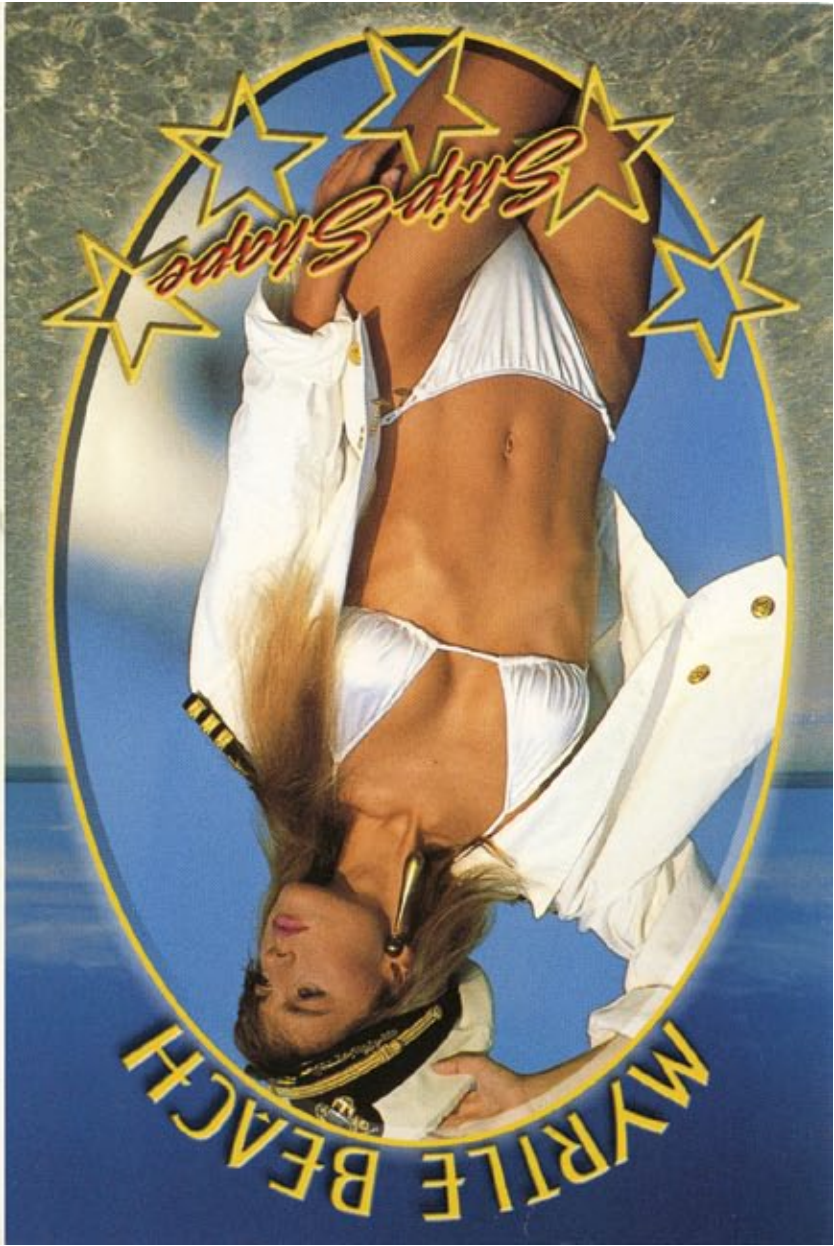
IVAN GILBERT '09



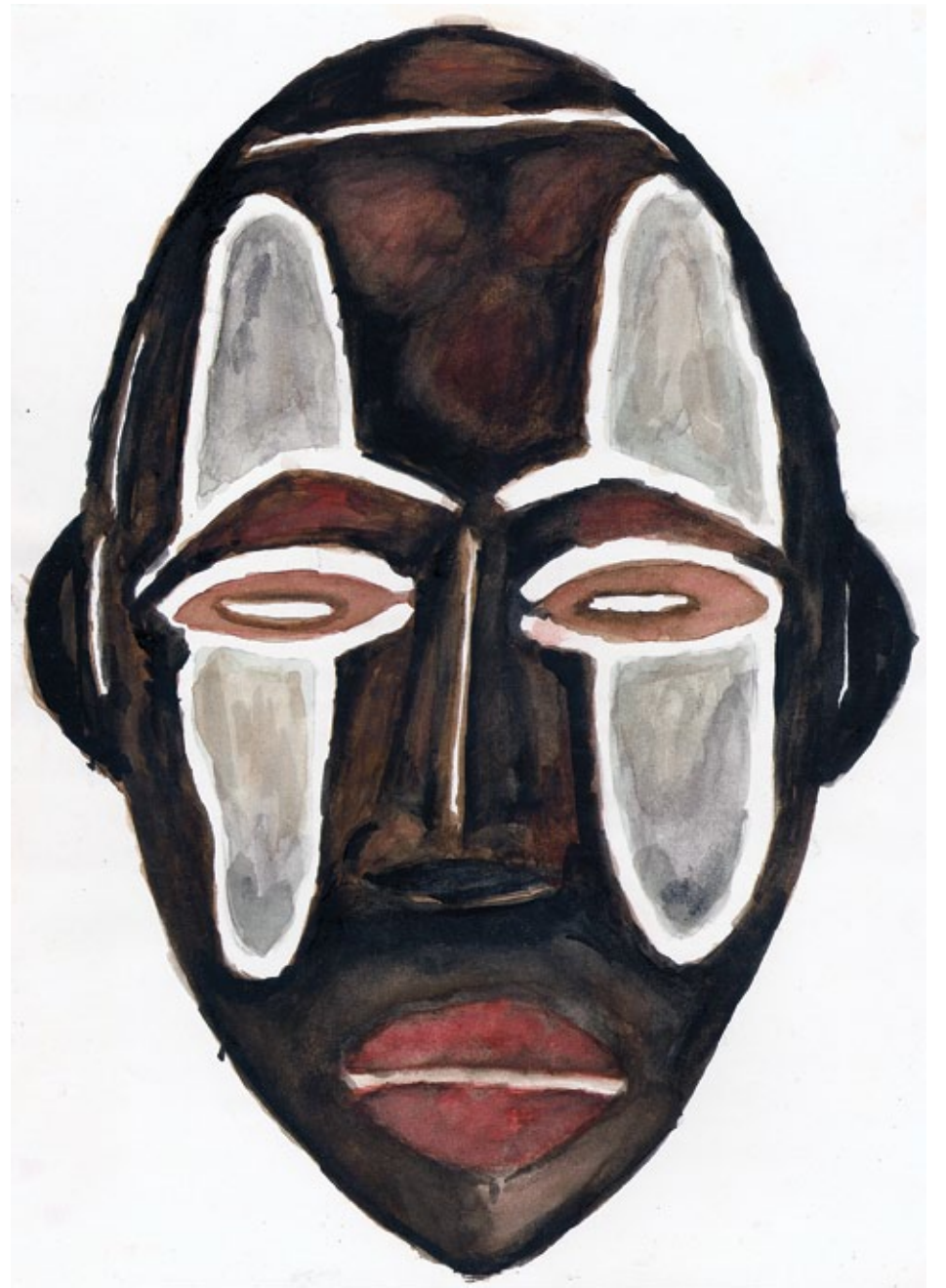
BENNIE ROBINSON
FIRE WALK WITH ME



Old
Faithful



JARED WATSON
THIS IS NOT ART



SAMUEL DALZELL
NARASIMHA and IRON DOES NOT PENETRATE



KELSEY HAMMERSLEY
OFF LIMITS
(previous)

TOMMY MALEKOFF
SKATEPARK KIDS (ROOFTOP)

AMELIE BLANC
BOUCHERIE PARISIENNE
and DECEMBER
(following)



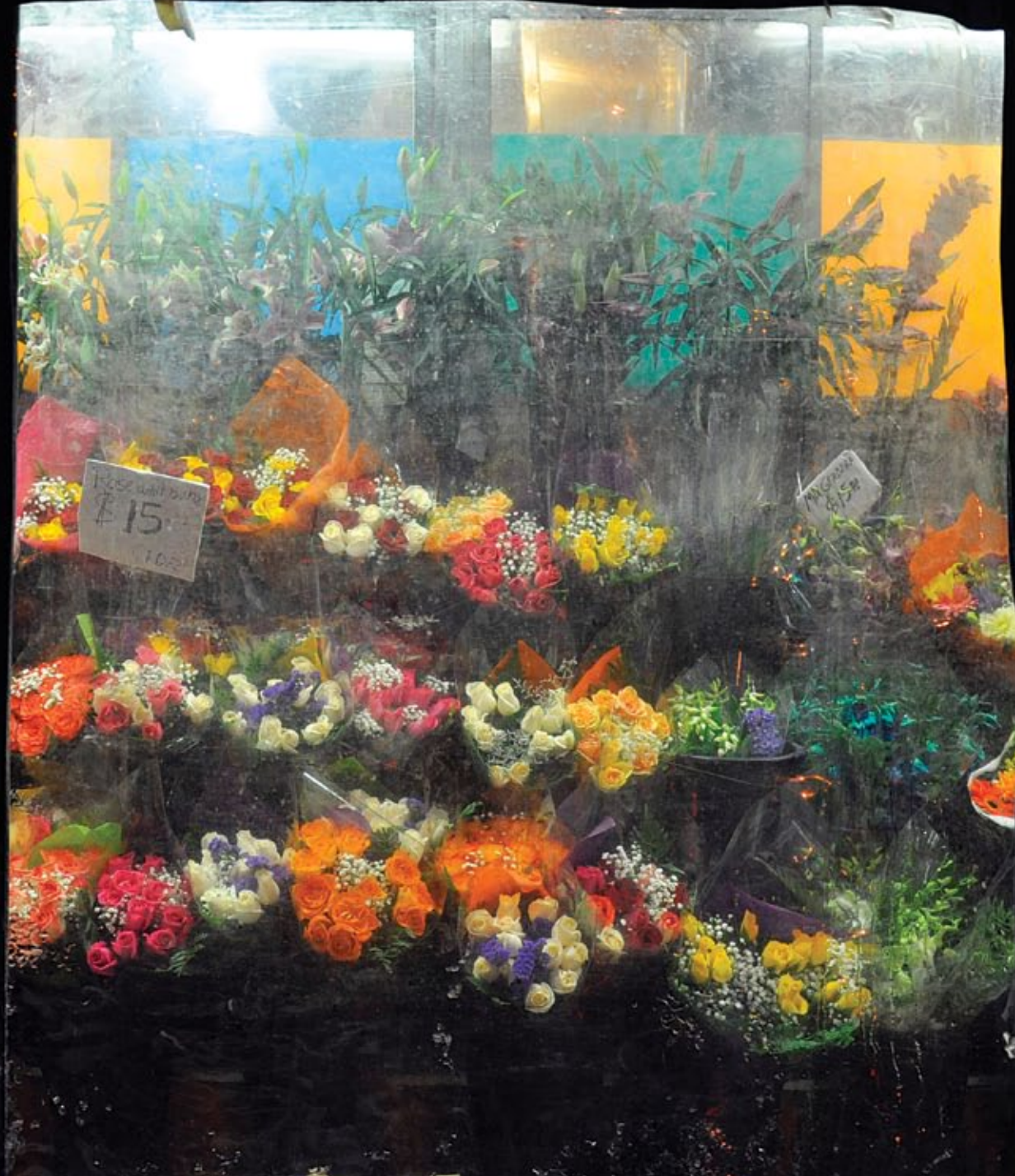


CÔTE
de BOEUF
22.00

FAISANS
10.00

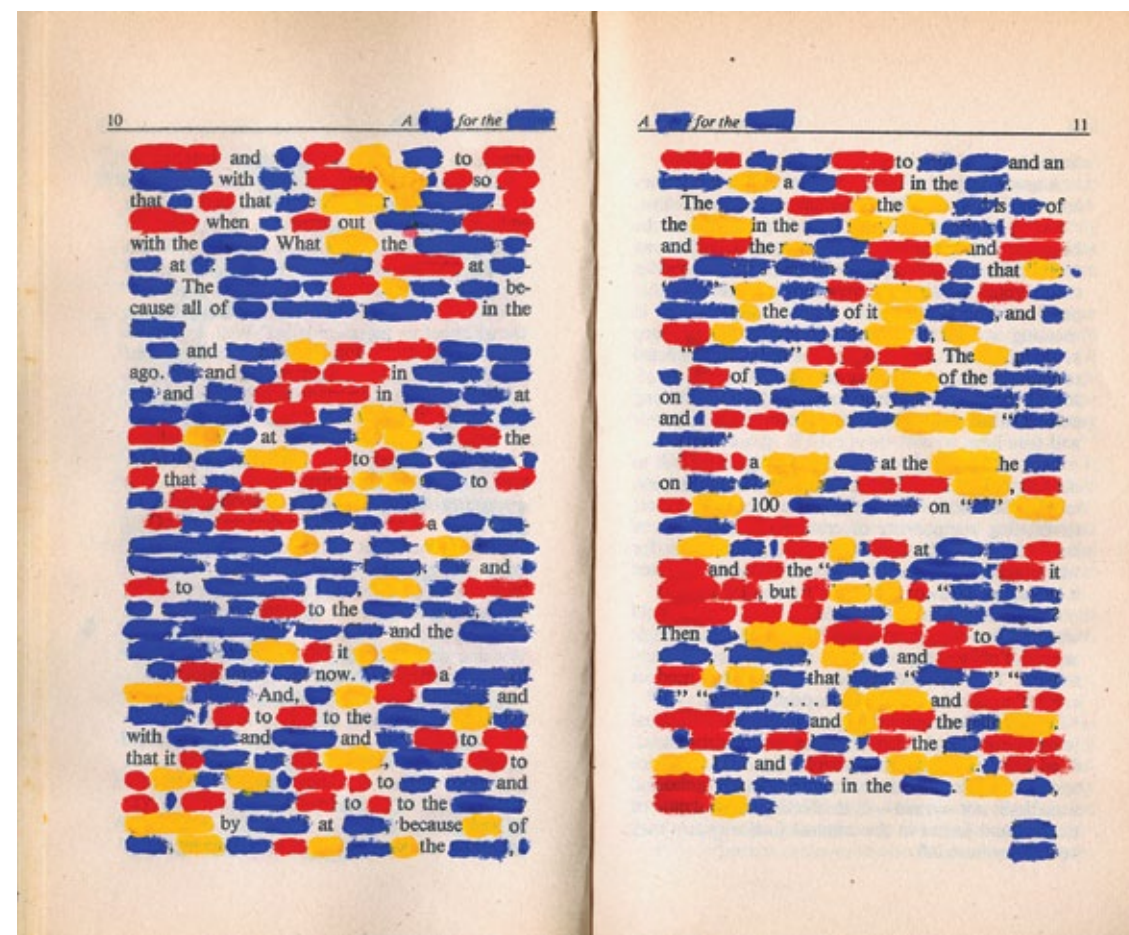
PINTADE FERMIERE
D'Auvergne

PINTADE FERMIERE
D'Auvergne

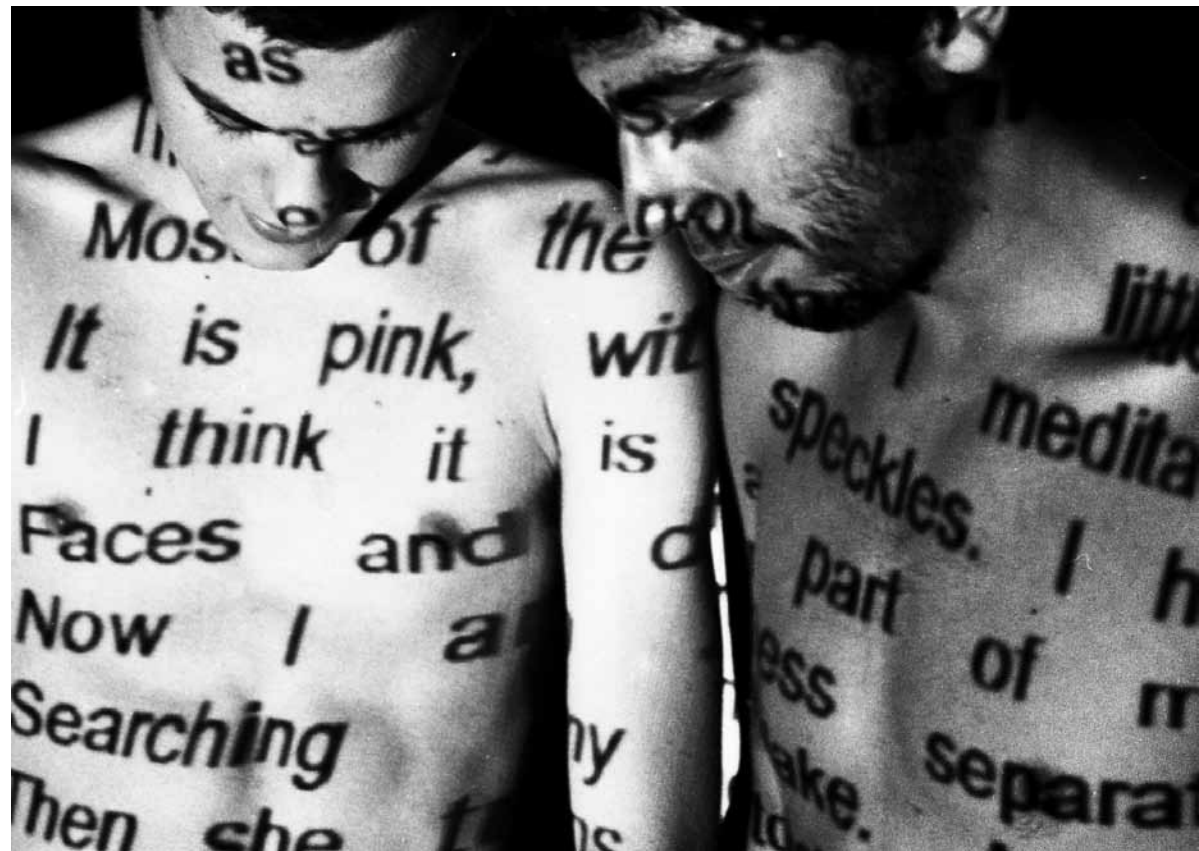




BRENDA VIENRICH
 VIRGENSITA
 (left)



ZACK FRANCESCHI
 RED YELLOW BLUE



JESSICA FRITZ
UNTITLED and TERRIBLE FISH



STEPHANIE KING
LA FILLE
(left)



STEISHA PINTADO
FIRST DAY ON THE JOB



LAUREN ROCHE
FOLLY BEACH YOUTH



LAUREN ROCHE
UNTITLED



STEPHANIE CASE
HOME



STEPHANIE CASE
DOLL FACE and FOTOMAT



DOGWOOD LANE

HELEN MARIE POHLIG

If I led you into the old, dark room with just a candle for secrecy, outside the stars cool and sharp, sat you down and in hushed tones told you about the house beneath the trees, the ivy growing up the tired brick walls, you would listen without speaking, eyes focused and mouth shut, watching me in the dim light, bound my by tale. You would follow me through the sleepy rooms, the red walls heavy against the wood, the country tile, rooster wallpaper peeling beneath the kitchen cupboard. See the intricate rug, the worn wooden floors, the metal spiral staircase sleek in its secret corner of the room. Do not speak as you gaze upon the pipe organ, hundreds of tiny pipes grown bigger, all hidden behind the Chinese black and paper screen. A metal pitcher of long peacock feathers, blowing in the nothing wind, embroidery framed and hanging on the wall, the picture of my mother growing faint behind its glass, the generator humming in the evening warmth. All is quiet now on Dogwood Lane. Nothing now belongs, although it did. Follow me as I shut up the house, lock the doors, and tread silently on the tired floor as I always have. Go before me, and I will find you in the street, beneath the stars, a solitary figure between the house and the wood, surrounded by eternity. I will yet pass once more through the hall to the window with the long, heavy drapes, to gaze with all I am out into the night, one removed street light illuminating its leafy canopy, its overgrown forest path.

LOUISIANA

HELEN MARIE POHLIG

Do you recall that cold night in December when we went to find the perfect Christmas tree, the night we all dressed up like children and had to hide in the branches to avoid curious eyes? Remember, there was a young man who took care of the trees, dressed in worker's overalls and a cap, a man with the Deep South in his accent and big, strong hands? His eyes were gentle and bright, his manner polite and calm, his smile disarming. He is a lover, that one. Every evening, when he has a moment to himself, he slips into the shop, ill-lit by a dim fluorescent light flickering over the settled dust, sits down on an old stool at the solid wooden table, takes out his pocket-knife, and begins to carve a heart for the woman he has not yet met. He hums to himself as he dreams of her warmth, already loving her with a soft love, his strong hands on the curve of her back, content to grow old with her on some sun-filled Louisiana farm where the corn fields sway back and forth, and the children capture fireflies at dusk.

EXCERPTS FROM A SEMESTER ABROAD IN BOTSWANA

- - -
HELEN MARIE POHLIG

1. Domestic Wildlife

Dumela, everybody! Jimmy and I made it to Botswana where the sky is big, the people are social, traffic is crazy, and the sun works overtime. We are here at the University of Botswana, in the capital city of Gaborone, about 9 miles from the South African border, where we will study for a semester.

Yesterday, our third day here, Jim and I rode in combis, which are a bit like small buses, but really more like 15-seater vans. There are hundreds of combis on the road at any given time; each is numerically marked according to the route it drives, and choosing the right combi (that is assuming that you really do care where you end up) can be something of an art. The combi itself might easily be added to your generic list of African wildlife; they are aggressive machines, sputtering along the highways, honking their horns and generally getting ahead of anything and everything else on the road. And yet, to all appearances, the typical combi should not run. Either the seats are falling down, the roof is caving in, the floor is ripped apart, the headlights are smashed in, the windows will not shut, or the wheels are coming loose. Combis are also known as vicious predators, and humans are advised to stand far back when one is seen approaching. From this distant position, the curious tourist or documentary film-maker can see through a telescope or a good pair of binoculars that the combi can devour up to as many as 17 or even 18 people, on a good day. Of course the combi will run a bit slower under these circumstances, and the underbelly will likely sag lower to the ground. Do not dismay, however; the combi will recover quite quickly, and you will likely be left in the dust, wondering how it has retained its speed, how it is even running at all.

2. Life on Campus

The block of hostels in which I live is, interestingly enough, called Las Vegas, and what this Botswana Las Vegas lacks in flashy lights and shiny cars, it makes up for in the sheer volume of nightlife. Out in the African bush, in a hammock or a hut, one will drift off to sleep at the sound of village children singing. It is a surreal feeling matched with the fire of a thousand starry skies, and the cool relief of night air carries the single beat of a drum to match the rhythm of a human heart. In Las Vegas, the only rhythm to match a human heart would end in cardiac arrest. As darkness begins to settle on the land, there is an understood cue, albeit a subtle one,

that only the most astute of university students can pick up on. It signals one to open all the doors of one's automobile, switch on the radio, and turn the volume knob as far to the right as possible. It is better to position your vehicle in the reverberant enclave of the dorms to allow as much sound as possible, flooding the block with slamming house music or American rap. The self-appointed DJs take their work very seriously and remain up throughout the night to humbly provide their friends and peers with entertainment, ensuring a cheery and successful following day of work.

But the best, most peaceful time of day could be described as "the calm before the storm"—the balmy hour of dusk, when the light has begun to settle and the shadows start to fall. It is the gathering of the day, the time when all the insects emerge from under their hiding places and begin to hum a gentle song, when the stars step meekly forth in the expanse of soft sky and quietly begin to glow. It is a moment to remember that even in the midst of a busy city and a busy school, we are still in a land of peace, G-d's land, a place where the zebras run free and community thrives. It does not take material wealth to live in an hour like this, and it can bless even the poorest of men.

3. For the Birds

The campus cafeteria, or refectory, as it is called here, is known to the student body as the Curry Pot. Every day one can visit the Curry Pot for lunch or dinner and indulge in a hearty plate of papa (pounded maize), rice, fried chicken, and gravy. Here, the words "every day" may quite fairly be emphasized. All of the international students have at some point commented on the repetitiveness of the meals served at the refectory, some even nervously admitting to nightmares of giant, headless chickens and overturned plates causing avalanches of papa, with gravy coating the houses of quiet villages, flooding the streets and obliterating all life within its reach. And yet, despite the heavy meals and the slight boredom endured, there are some wonderful things about the Curry Pot. For starters, it is a delightful place to meet people. Anyone can sit with anyone, and many stimulating conversations have been born out of mundane mealtimes. The general attitude about the place is that as long as the person you are interested in talking to is eating his papa, he cannot move away from you and is thus forced to listen to or engage in conversation, answering questions about Botswana culture, politics, religion. Sometimes the person is even obliged to offer a crash course in Setswana, depending on how long he has before his next class or football match.

A second charming addition to the atmosphere of the campus refectory is the happy row of little birds that sits at the top of the ledge where the always open windows let in the air and sunlight. From morning until evening, they can be seen flying through the cafeteria, picking at crumbs on the floor, or plumped contentedly in deserted plates of rice, nibbling at forgotten feasts. They are kings, in their own smart little ways, and there is always enough grub to satisfy the cravings of seventeen to twenty feathered friends.

Earlier today I returned to my room from an afternoon at the pool to find my own little friend perched at the top of my open window, enjoying a quiet corner just his size. At present he is dozing, just as I should be, since the hour is now grown late. I have named him King Alfred, with respect to his position of height near the top of the wall, but also because sometimes the little ones, the ones we discover we are fond of, merit the biggest names.

4. Tlokweneng

The SOS Children's Village in Tlokweneng is home to around 200 kids of various ages, ranging from toddler to teenager. On Sunday, Jim and I went with a group of African friends that we met at the pool to play with the kids. It was a delightful, sunny afternoon, complete with hula hoops, footballs, basketballs, volleyballs, toddler-size balls (the ball market is huge), spray bottles, rocks, thorns, bugs, you name it. A child's paradise. When we arrived at the Village, there were groups of children standing in the shade, sucking on baby mangoes, pairs of little hands gripping their fruit, juice dribbling down their little faces, necks, all the way to their bare feet. One child had strayed from the group out into the sun and was crouched down near a football goal, pants sagging, scooping dirt into an old snack box, a corner of which was ripped. He proceeded to place the ripped corner into his mouth and blow into the box, attempting to inflate it in order to next stomp on it in the hopes of causing a catastrophic explosion of dust and sunlight, by which, incidentally, he would be the only one blasted. (You never quite know whether children are not considering the consequences or if they just don't care.) As we approached the children, we were initially greeted with careless sideways glances and the unique fervent sucking sounds of people with fewer teeth than yourself. It was only after the pits and peels of the baby mangoes had been tossed aside that children came running towards us, sticky little hands clutching at our clothes and hands, rogue mango strands hanging from our trousers.

Now, the interesting thing about children this side of the equator is that within half an hour in the sun or so, one begins to notice the effects the heat has upon them. These little people, recently playful and sweet, begin to change, a slow glaze creeping over their eyes. Their bodies begin to slow down, taking on stiffer movements, their dusty little feet patting the ground in longer intervals. One little girl with a shock of jet black hair began growling at nothing, palms clenched, brow furled. Naturally, one wonders if one should interject, but soon learns that the phase is only momentary, and within five minutes or so, everything is back to the way it was. Far from being outdone, there is a general kind of mass exodus from the football field (or the killing field, as it is aptly named) through the thick twist of vines, flowers, and thorns to the old, caged, kid-sized basketball court. It is here that the big people face humiliation. Despite our advantage of height, the little people far outlast us, since, as everyone knows, they all are born with a heart as big as it will always be, giving the little people more bang for their buck, while we desperately try to pump

enough blood to our proportionally bigger bodies.

One crazed little girl wearing a grubby pink skort that read "Spoiled But Cute" on the rump, complete with two big silver stars, took a liking to Jimmy, and made him her personal play partner for the afternoon. Apparently Jim met her standards, since she only marched away in frustration two or three times, swinging her arms, huffing and puffing, undoubtedly wondering how such a big person could understand so little of her Setswana chattering. Unthinkable.

Our afternoon with the monkeys was tiring but, as always, too short. We hope to make it a regular event, especially since it is imperative that all children receive a lot of attention, particularly in their younger years. There may be no activity more important than loving on kids, especially ones with no parents who have to share their few, often exhausted, supervisors with 199 other brothers and sisters. One thing we noticed while playing was that the big people in our group were the only big people to be seen. Initially I was greatly impressed at the orphanage workers' speedy escape, reflecting that years of training must have made them masters in the art of disappearing, but then I reasoned that they were probably simply relishing an opportunity to catch a few moments to themselves, gather their thoughts, or maybe even siesta. In any case, I hope there will be more stories of the children to come, whether or not the adults make an appearance.

5. Lessons in Romance

Despite the fact that I stand out in a crowd, sunburnt like a man selling mirrors, do not speak Setswana and thus do not understand about 70% of daily conversation, there are some great advantages to being white in this African country. For example, people are always ready to point me in the right direction to the supermarket, usher me onto the correct combi, answer my cultural questions, and help me count my change. They are very understanding when I need water, or an open window, and they love to teach me local vocabulary. I have been told that, as is probable in many places, Batswana are wary of foreigners and are shy, and perhaps slightly nervous, around those with white skin. I have noticed signs of this, but I have also noticed those Batswana whom some would call brave when it comes to approaching foreigners. I have seen the curiosity of children who come up to touch my white skin or attempt to pleat my hair (never quite a success). I have taken the waves of people walking along the road when I pass in a vehicle to be signs of hospitality. I could give many examples, but I would not be accurately portraying daily life for me in Botswana if I did not describe to you those very brave Batswana, the ones in a league of their own, those young men whom some might even deem outlandish. These are the young men who particularly love to socialize with women, and who find the nerve to approach foreign ladies in the supermarket, on the street, at the mall, anywhere and everywhere. They are generally quite friendly, sometimes overly friendly, and interested in their foreign finds. I know, I know; this sounds like paradise for the young, single ladies of the foreign world, but for those of us who

do not fall under the single category, it can sometimes prove tricky to disentangle oneself from uninvited advances and overbearing conversations. The inexperienced woman may be caught off-guard and depart, frazzled, from her recent acquaintance with someone arranged as a hot date for Friday evening, or worse, a wedding next month, complete with bride price and fatted calf. However, all is not lost for those betrothed: it is really only a matter of learning the right manoeuvres in speech, and can be easily learned. The key to remember is stubbornness and persistence. For example, the other week I purchased something from a campus shop, and the young man at the cash register did not hesitate to inform me of his wish to see me over the weekend. I told him that all of my friends would love to get together, paid for my purchase, shook his hand, and walked out. Do you see the efficiency of my response? I did not have to lie to the young man (although I doubt my friends would be thrilled at my signing their weekend away), I avoided a scene, I did not wait long enough to actually arrange an outing, the cashier had no straight-forward reason to be offended, and I sailed out home free.

Alright, one more example, and then it's your turn. The other day I was at the pool, adjusting my goggles at the water's edge, when one of the lifeguards, a solid man wearing dark shades and a red shirt, approached me and slyly engaged in conversation replete with subtle hopes and slippery charm. (Actually, in all honesty, his hopes were not so subtle as he may have liked to think, and I almost laughed out loud at what he said.) "Dumela ma," he began, "howzit?"

"Sharp," I replied, mentally preparing myself for the worst.

He weakly attempted to be smooth and steer the conversation through the small talk towards the deeper feelings of his heart, but instead succeeded in bluntly presenting the question, "What do you do in your free time, especially the weekends?"

There, he had spit it out, a fast slew of words and the damage was done. I, an experienced young foreign woman, reminded myself to remain calm and evenly replied, "In my free time I read, swim, uphold my responsibilities as a student, and go to Mokolodi with my boyfriend." Voilà, it worked like a charm. The lifeguard, only slightly battered, returned to his umbrella, and I to my laps.

So now it's you, my friend. You are riding on a combi to the nearest shop in order to purchase the greatly needed ice cream on this particularly hot African day. There are already fourteen people in the minibus when you stop to let in a young man with a suspicious look carrying a bag of biltong (dried strips of meat). He hunkers down next to you on the last available seat, greets you, opens his grubby plastic bag, offers you some biltong, and asks you for your name. As there is nowhere else to turn, you are forced to answer him, even if you can wave away the dried meat. Soon he is asking where you are from, how many siblings you have, if you want many children of your own, and where he can meet up with you later for a chat. What is your response? Remember, doing your homework now will prepare you for the pop-quiz.

O

ROSS BRUBECK

Late, late afternoon. Early purple evening. Collin Jesse Davis Timothy Alec Richard Jack was in the middle of a second hug with Tom Brian Daniel Jacob Ronald Max Stephen's little sister, Josh Russell Ash Drew Ryan David in the drivers seat looking across at the two and the second embrace. She's considered a friend. She's actually quite neat, quite great. Greater (secretly) than her brother. Her relationship with the two (mainly Collin Jesse Davis Timothy Alec Richard) lives as a remainder of Tom Brian Daniel Jacob Ronald Max leaving for his own reasons, some product to come forth from the silence of his absence, but none seen yet. None but this thinly familiar friendship that lasts only on afternoons when they happen to be in Tom Brian Daniel's part of town, his sisters phone number only appearing in their minds within a certain radius of her house, which they never go inside of for fear of her clammy mother. She's a breath of fresh air, the way she sees them. They were in high school together but she was three big planets of three grades behind them, and their worlds could never really mesh. Now at the end of high school, she's biggest and brightest, bigger and brighter than they remembered her before this summer when her brother for the first time wasn't around, while they've been set adrift going on three years now, and despite all of their perceived shortcomings they are still worlds bigger and lovelier than her own, in her eyes, and for this, they love her. In certain moments it feels like they exist to serve her, to serve and support every notion that she might concoct and let on to the concoction thereof. Images to be maintained by elliptical encounters. To give her two older, wiser friends and cultivate an understanding of, if nothing else, or mainly, or solely, the power of obliqueness, at a time much more opportune than they themselves found it. In retrospect, she's much smaller than how she actually felt. Smaller and frailer, her ribs a half-hearted press away, each half of her ribcage seeming to fit in each hand, a weak stirring of a heartbeat to be felt through her back if Richard Jack was to dare to linger, dare not linger, dare not spend time later than the afternoon. "She's still a virgin," Josh Ash says.

"Good for her. Good for that girl, I'm proud of her. Not giving it up back when she was 14, like every other girl her age. Good for fuckin' her."

They ride.

“Fucking fourteen goddamn years old. My little pony and shit.”

He sits and makes the first motion for his pocket, then says “Christ. Weak-willed sluts.”

Putting a cigarette into his mouth, and lighting it, he says “Tarts.” Ha ha ha!

“It might be love,” Josh Russell Ryan David Ash Drew says.

“Love! *Love!*” Collin waves his cigarette at him “It might be predation! Frustrated high school boys and their starry eyed freshman coeds! *It might be love.*” He aped. Ha ha ha. He waves his cigarette at him, and Drew reaches across himself and flicks the ember onto the dash, where it lands to fade to gray and crumbles into the wind. Timothy taps what’s left of it back into the box and places it between his legs. “Frustrating as hell, man. Good girl, that one.”

They ride. “Great fucking girl. Don’t want nobody on her.”

By nighttime, they haven’t found the mind to stop. “I’m feeling like anarchy tonight,” Collin Davis Timothy Alec Jack says. They’re both three years out of high school and six-and-a-half years since punk rock, punk rock decades “There’s just too much unrest. This was a weird day.”

“What do you want?”

“I want some untouched land. Something to take for myself. Nobody else knows how to get to it. I want it public and permanent”

They ride a while longer and find nothing of inspiration.

“Can’t you imagine her with paint splatches on her fingers and pants wandering into parties way past the point where everyone’s too drunk to be entertaining, like, because she spaced on what day it was and she was too involved in her work? And she finds an open 40 or like, grabs a near-empty handle of whiskey, and can’t find anyone she feels comfortable with, so she ends up leaving right away? And she goes back home to go to sleep or something? And she forgot her phone on the floor of her apartment and it’s been buzzing itself in circles all while she’s been out trying to make up for lost time, and she gets back and has no energy to return the calls of the people she spent all night looking for?”

“She doesn’t even paint.” “I’m just dreaming.” Later, Timothy’s found her by herself by himself by way of calling her and then clawing his way through her open window. She’s grown much larger than she was this afternoon. She’s bare and undone,

and her skin is beaded and tacky like rubber just about to melt. She did nothing but breathe, and he felt like she needed nothing else, nothing that could make any other person love her. She’s more than enough without any of it. He wanted to strip her completely. He wanted to strip her of her wisps of summer breeze, of all her goose-bumps and roundness and lankiness and dips and curves, of anything to grab or cradle, of everything that might sway and anything to cry or gasp, of everything to range from ice cold to fire hot, of all four dimples and every patch of freckles placed not by her, but by her mother and father, accenting her effortlessness, of all her effortlessness, of her neatness and greatness and flexibility, of all the rotten thoughts she’s had and others have had about her. He wanted to strip away everything that might grasp and shudder, her lips, nevermore wet nor dry nevermore, each cheek, pressed never again, each eye, not ever again to be pooled and gazed into, not to be misunderstood ever. He wanted to work each hand under her ribcage and lift away everything that would cause confliction or hesitation, to unravel her innards and brush away her blood. He wanted her down to herself and only herself, and he wanted to reach her green-hot nuclear core, to feel it with his palms, fingertips, and fingernails.

Q

ROSS BRUBECK

Holly is stardust. She is the placeholder. The space between words—or letters, even. She is “Ø”, zero, all of the zeroes in a billion. She is zero, and they are one. She is the segue from stardust to stardust, alive and the only one on the planet who is conscious of her origin and destiny. From out of silence back into silence, from inconsistency to momentary, bright, painful coherence, back into dissolution. She will rot from the inside out and be carried off by nature, extinguished and returned.

Holly only has one front to share. One working side. She would be multi-sided if she could be. This is just how she was made. She can only hold one at a time, and if all of her arms were real, she would hold all she could, all there was. She would have and hold a kaleidoscope of life, tumbling it over and over, grabbing it towards her again if any part crawled away. But she was made with only one front and only one back. She can only receive or refuse, and only one at a time, to or from one at a time. It’s how she was made, and it has required a life’s worth of patience and creativity. Her two arms reach forwards, not backwards. Her face points straight ahead, not right behind. Holly moves on and on and on and on.

Holly goes out again at night time. She has had a lifetime of failure. Her dogs act like retards. Her spaghetti tastes too strongly of garlic. In middle school, she never talked enough. In high school, she never talked enough. She never asked her parents for more siblings, so she doesn’t know how to share or compete. She doesn’t know if she would if she could. The sun was and is too bright and too far out of reach, and it won’t ever stop moving. She sleeps too little, and can’t make anything of her time while awake. She goes out alone. She walks too much. Holly noiselessly strolls the streets. She is a mere liaison. She is only a moment, grown from absence.

She finds crowds to walk through. She finds spots where passersby stick around a while. Holly walks mutely through crowds, making steady eye contact. She is tired all the time. She knows she needs to act out if she’s going to get anywhere. The first step has been hard to find, but lord knows she’s taken the first step to finding the first step many, many times. She walks mutely into a madhouse of a bar. Walking silently and sleeplessly, she’s found congregation of life, parts gathered in a shell, connected by a spirit. It holds its gelatinous form for a few hours, swelling and decaying, purging

continually and splintering nightly to reshape and reform itself daily without external conscious effort. Through nature, through its nature, through magnetism, through god or human character.

She places her hand on the arm of the one she finds the rowdiest and most postured, and most alone, making full, steady eye contact. He asks her name, and she smiles. Leaning close enough to breathe her in entirely, he asks louder. “What’s your name?”

She smiles and shows her teeth. He shows back and loops his arm around her, asking how her night’s been and what is she drinking? She eyeballs his friends. Less. They’re much less. She catches sight of the television a moment. It’s a game show, all shadows and glitter. Shadows, glitter, and loss, this time. She moves to look at his cup, and he swirls it enticingly. “Beer?” She takes a moment to notice the skyline out of the window, and she shape and color of the bottles behind the counter. “How about this one?” he asks his friends.

“I think she’s a keeper,” they tell him.

“Would you like a beer?” he asks her. She moves one arm across his back and rests her other hand against his shoulder, sinking into him.

“How *about* this one?” he asks again. This time to her, “Do you speak English?” A drink is poured for her and she lifts it to her mouth, drinking three gulps and watching the shadows on the television. She rests the glass on her bottom lip to give the turmoil a few moments to settle, then drinks the rest completely. “Like a fish.”

“Maybe she’s a mermaid.”

“Maybe that’s why she doesn’t talk, because she’s a mermaid, and she breathes beer.” His friends say.

“Well, let’s keep her alive!” he says and orders another drink. She burps silently and waits with it in her hand, then fixes her gaze on his friends and finishes this second glass without pause, sets it on the counter without reflection. He squeezes her in his arms and she smiles at him and hooks an index finger in his collar.

The men continue to talk and gaze around the bar. She follows the conversation with her eyes. He breaks from the group to ask her questions occasionally: What’s her name? So, what’s her name? Who did she come in with tonight? Where does she live? Where did she get this beautiful necklace? Is this a pyramid? How did she manage to get such green eyes? How did she manage to get such smooth skin? He wrestles her and she pushes back. He wonders to her how she got to be so strong with such tiny

arms? Where is she going tonight? His friends are asking for his attention, but he says again: Where is she going after this. She shrugs and sips his drink.

“Do you want another?” he asks. She nods and walks out of his grip as the conversation forms again, now heated. The sound of it sinks into the cacophony as she weaves back through the bar. Occasionally she meets directly a heated glance. Spite, she greets from the women, scanning her thighs and the length of her skirt, her breasts and their size and shape, her face and its symmetry, her makeup and its effectiveness. Interest, she greets from the men. The bathroom is at the back of the bar, past the pool tables.

In the bathroom she is alone. She steps slowly and audibly towards the mirror, which she peers at and breathes on. Within a stall, she sits and breaks the silence as she starts to pee. She wonders what kind of woman drew this penis on the inside of the door. She sits longer than she needs to and nods off once or twice before standing up again and rejoining the crowd. As she approaches, the eyes of his friends in turn meet her and now in turn dart away. One by one she knocks them all down. She takes up her position again, arm around him, but reaches across his face as he’s talking, louder and rowdier now, to hold the newly full glass. He catches her wrist.

“Where did you go? I thought I’d been had!” He is speaking very loudly now. “What’s your name? What’s your name?” She leans in to kiss him, and, after a moment, he releases her wrist. She presses herself against him, holding the glass aloft.

“Who are you?” He asks. She steps back to drink in a slow, careful rhythm, holding his gaze, then looks at him with one eye through the bottom of the glass after it’s emptied.

“You are a bloodletter. You’ve played this game before,” he says as he motions for another. She takes one long sip of it and places it on the counter, then smiles at him, and at his friends, now avoiding the scene. “Is this one for me?” She nods in affirmation, eyes on the television. He pours what was left of his glass in and starts anew.

Each member of the crowd had come with the purpose of wearing themselves out. None arrived intending or expecting to stay a productive member of the community the entire night. The spirit is aloft, and Holly and her new friends take leave of their duties and entrust the rest of the night at this establishment to whomever. It doesn’t matter who. There is a pride within them, leaving. Encouraging change. Acknowledging decay. Expressing publicly their modesty and tact.

Holly’s man is loud and very present, and he stoops to leave through the doorway,

though he doesn’t actually need to. Walking through the night, he lights a cigarette and lifts her to his back, and she clammers to his shoulders. At a crosswalk, he stumbles forward and hits the ground with a smack and an orange spark, but Holly lands on her feet and takes a few steps. They are honked at, in the headlights. She lifts him up and walks on with him.

His apartment is first, and he pushes her up the stoop into the doorway and closes her in. His friends swagger up the steps, jeering and goading, talking about other places to be, and then stop one by one as they briefly catch her eye contact. They carry on, silently, as Holly is made to lead the way up three flights of stairs and through his front door, her ears ringing all the way.

She is powerful. Her god-given traits, her self-taught skills and her knowledge of circumstance, bring her to where she is standing, and she likes where she is standing. She likes the smell of this place. It looks expensive. She takes off her shoes and likes the feel of the floor. She closes her eyes and likes the spin of the room, like lying beneath a wave, forever cresting. She likes the buttons on her shirt and takes wonderful pleasure in undoing them. Having started from the top down, he joins her from the bottom up. She begins to race because he’s taking her game, and he begins to race also because he’s enjoying it. He whips off her shirt and places his hands on her shoulders, close enough to breathe her all the way in again. One game ruined, she dodges his descending head and runs to lock herself in the bathroom.

Here she strips completely, leaving her necklace on, and lays face down on the cool tile. She stretches and flattens out as much as she can manage. Cooled here, she rolls over, cooling there. She reaches up with a foot and opens the cold water faucet in the bathtub and listens to it run while the shadows of her eyelids swirl around her. She presses them and sees glitter. Growing hot, she moves to another part of the floor, and dips one of her legs into the bathtub. The water is freezing, lapping at the sole of her foot, which doesn’t touch the bottom.

“Oh, miss mermaid,” She hears from the other side of the door. “Homesick?” She hears the knob being tried. “Am I going to have to smoke you out?” She hears him kneel and ask the question again, under the door, next to her ear. She splashes water in response. All is quiet after. All is quiet, and ringing, and rushing, with traffic, and spinning. All is quiet but her blood. All is hot but her backside and ankle. All is still, but she suspects that was the freezer door. She suspects that was ice in a glass, and another. That was a cabinet, those were footsteps, that was a window opening, those were footsteps on the fire escape, that is him tapping on the window. Her eyes are still closed, but she is almost certain that was him tapping on the window. He sets the two drinks down on the window ledge and pries open the window.

“Marco!”

The traffic is louder. He tips over one glass, then the other trying to shoulder his way in. The ice slides across the floor and bounces off of Holly’s side. He upsets a potted plant with his knee and says, “Shit.” He rights the glasses, then kneels to clean up the mess with his hands. The tub is halfway full, and as he is turned away she crawls up the side and slips in, beginning to shiver immediately.

“How about this one?” He asks, turning to see what the noise was. He brushes the dirt and booze mud into a small pile in the corner of the room, then throws the potshards loudly into a garbage pail, where they break some more. He kneels by the bathtub and looks at her submerged, goose-bumped body. He trails a finger briefly through the water. The cold hits him and he withdraws immediately, leaving a small, dirty cloud.

“How about this one?” He mumbles again. “No tattoos anywhere on you,” he murmurs. “That’s good. No mold on this cheesecake.” The water is advancing up Holly’s shoulders. She is whirling in the dark. “Look at your nice legs.” He says as he reaches in again, up to his wrist before withdrawing from the cold. “Look at your lips, you’re freezing. Let’s warm you up, keep you from getting sick.” He turns the water hot and washes the dirt from his hands into the bathtub, rubbing them together loudly under the faucet. “Keep you from getting sick in the summer,” he says.

Clouds of burning water take a tight hold of Holly’s feet and climb slowly up her legs. He brushes the hot and dirty water around, and it touches her stomach, then spreads up her chest. Holly moves her legs back and forth to even out the temperatures as he trails his hand in greater lengths up and down the bathtub. He takes off his watch and places it in the soap dish, then reaches both hands in and takes hold of her waist and begins to lift her up, but she limply opposes. He supports her under her knees and the small of her back and lifts again, but she slips out of his wet hands and splashes him with water and silt. “Shit,” he says, and brushes at the wet spots a few times, wetting them further. He begins to remove his shirt. The water in the bathtub oscillates fore and aft, revealing her feet, revealing her mouth, and inflecting the pitch of the flowing water high and low. Naked from the waist up, he scoops beneath her arms around her back and slides her from the bathtub onto the floor, now freezing. She glances at the doorknob, out the window at the building next to his as he undoes his pants. She fixes on his face, but he is looking down towards his zipper. She looks to see where he looks next, but it is at the dirt and melting ice on the floor, so she looks away.

He’ll never hear the sudden, startled agelessness of her laugh. He finds his way home, right to where it matters most. He’ll never get his pants all the way off now,

it’s too late. The golden feet on the bathtub fascinate Holly temporarily, then his hand, palm flat on the floor, moves in the way. The colors and general appearance here are just as interesting, as is its motion, and sound. Slipping back and forth, with an occasional squeak or some sort of groan, blood filled flesh pressed against a pale, blood-starved fold, supporting weight and motion against the slick grimy tile. Hairy. She reaches out and rubs it with the tip of her finger. He is still looking at some spot on the floor to the left of her head. She holds on to her necklace with both hands. She loses track of time and sees the water begin to overflow from above. Holly just wanted a bath, but she moves on.

A LIST OF THINGS

- - -

AMANDA MANIS

A list of things I consider telling my doctor, but don't:

I'd tell him I am nothing more than fawn bones. I am no bigger than a pygmy child.
Or

I'd show him how my wrists snap off or how my fingers are smaller than his and I'd tell him to make a note that reads: 'her fingers don't work well' and one that says: 'she tries' and then I'd tell him to cross it out.

I'd tell him about counting tiles and forgetting to swim. I'd give him the definition of apathy.

I'd tell him how I stole silver spoons and then threw them away.

I'd show him fragments of paper from that time I tore apart the maps. That time I burned the instruction manuals. and

I'd make him look at my feet. I'd tell him that they're covered in mud and that they are the most pure thing I have.

He'd make a note: 'muddy feet' and I'd cry. I'd confess.

I did it I did it I did it. I broke the lamp. I broke ties. I broke.

I'd draw him a picture of the time I lit seventy-three candles and they all burnt out.

I'd say I'm twenty-one. I'd pluck a hair from my head. I'd say I'm sixteen. Another hair. I'm ninety-two. Another.

I'd say I'm a fucking fetus and it's cold.

I'd tell him I'm bald.

I'd ask for a new doctor, one who might give me candy and tell me to play tennis or golf, and then sit in silence with me for an hour.

He'd deny my request.

He'd tell me my time was up.

He'd give me a note that read: 'clean your feet. consider wrist bands. buy a wig.'

I'd stand up and thank him for his time and he'd thank me for mine and he'd put me in some file while I drove home and by the end of the day he'd forget about me.

I'd tape his list to my fridge.

I'd consider buying a wig but I wouldn't clean my feet and I wouldn't bother with the wrists either. I've known since birth there was no hope for them.

CRACKLE

BASIE SETTLE

Crackle. My nails were dirty. I couldn't imagine why, either, I hadn't been outside in days. *Crackle.* I hear these things are called "Crackle," but spelled "Kerekle" or something, in Indonesia. Cloves, or whatever. I had some soft-core porno on, it was like two AM and I had just blown my fiftieth milligram of Oxycontin. It had not been a good few days.

The girl on TV's fake tits reminded me of Celia, which was odd, because Celia did not have fake tits. She had real ones, and they were really nice. She wasn't a very good actress, which also reminded me of Celia, who I had never seen act, but she was a very bad liar. Plus, she didn't really have any right to be a good actress with her looks and her artistic and musical talent and her everything else.

Crackle. I took two drags—one and held it in, and then another and held it in on top of it, because this was my last one for the night. Not on purpose, of course, but I was out of them. Cloves—sorry, Qereq'le—are an expensive habit. A pack of twelve is like six bucks. I took a drag. *Crackle.*

I watched a girl masturbate on TV in all of its shadowy, censored, softcore glory. I couldn't help but not be excited by it. It wasn't her fault, bless her, she was trying. I hadn't been horny in weeks, not since one night in the hospital that I probably shouldn't talk about.

"I feel like you and me are meant to be together," Crazy Brittney said, sweat beading on her chocolate skin, a frenzied look in her beautifully crazy eyes. I glanced at my door, at my clock, and at my bookshelves. I looked at the half-finished painting of Crazy Brittney on my floor. I looked at Crazy Brittney's shirt on my floor next to it.

I said something romantic and weird, and she said "I've always believed the universe does these things for a reason, that you're strong and handsome and I need this and you, now, and you were sent to me." I kissed her, long and hard, so that I wouldn't have to think of something to say. I like to think I'm a good kisser, but I couldn't make her forget that she wanted to crazy-ramble. I worked at her bra.

"I feel like my son would love you," she said. I tensed pretty hard, but for the first time in forever I was horny hornier than I'd been for months before and really months since. She pulled my shirt off and tossed it somewhere or other. It pulled at both of my nicotine patches, but those little fuckers hang on like champs. I thought of Joe Peralta as I took her pants off. The hospital didn't let us have belts.

Crackle.

"I had sex with two girls at one time once," said Joe Peralta. "It was awesome." I nodded and took a toke of my blunt. It was my personal one that Joe had rolled for me. Joe's loaded.

"Wicked." I said. "Totally bitchin'."

"Yeah man. So listen, I got a business proposition for you, man."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Joe had always been, well, not so much a business-minded type, so much as someone with a lot of drive. Rich, but not very smart. He could make things happen, and that's really what counts, anyway.

"Lay it on me." I said, toking again. I was hoping to get high enough to agree with whatever insane thing he said.

"You're good with business, numbers and stuff," he said.

"I don't know, dude, I guess I can push well enough but—"

"No, I'm serious, you're a real good dealer. So like, listen. I'm sitting on a fatass quop right now, and I need someone to push it, but I need a two hundred and fifty dollar investment."

Crackle. I looked at the quop sitting on my counter next to my Oxycontin and my inhaler. The guy in the softcore porn was having a remarkably deep conversation. I thought it was weird, because I was watching porn, not known for its writing or acting, although this one had better of both than it did of actual sex. I was enjoying it. It must have been the drugs.

My Kerrakle went out. I was bummed. I pinched a little bit of weed out of the quop I had just promised all of my future money and more for half of. I had no plans to sell it, and I think Joe must have known that I was going to smoke all of it. I looked at it again. I had an obligation to sell the half I hadn't "paid" for, since I planned on maybe borrowing the money from my parents, telling them it was for food or whatever.

It hit me suddenly that I'd seen this porno before, though I remembered it distinctly being not softcore. I distinctly remembered seeing these girls' vaginas. I guess they edit these things for Skinemax or HBhO or some other sex-based pun titled movie network. It had been in December last time I watched it, too.

"Now, two-fifty is a lot, Joe," I said, taking my enormous aviator glasses off. I let my southern accent through slightly when I spoke to make it sound like I was Hunter S. Thompson, which is how I always get when I do business. I was lying, too, which is also how I always get when I do business. Twofifty wasn't just a lot, it was way, way too much.

"I always forget that you're poor," said Joe. "Two-fifty shouldn't be too much for you, man, should it?"

Yes, absolutely, I thought. At no point have I ever had two hundred and fifty dollars, and I had even less than nothing now. I looked at Joe. I put my huge

aviator glasses on. I took a toke.

“How long would I have to come up with the money?” I asked Joe. I can’t remember the answer he gave but it wasn’t particularly persuasive. I took another massive toke.

“How’s Celia?” he asked.

“No, dude, I’m not going to ask her for money.”

“I don’t care man, you don’t need to be too fast, man; it doesn’t matter. How’s things? You’re my friend, man,” he said.

“She hates me, it doesn’t matter. It’s just not going to work out.”

Celia looked at me from across the table, candlelight glinting off her eyes, glittering on the tiny sparkly things on her top, way, way beautiful. Way, stupid awesome beautiful. It was nuts.

“I, uh...” I said. I looked at my scallops. I looked at Celia. She was smiling. It was the biggest, most sincere smile anyone has ever given me for any reason, ever. “I was wondering, what, uh, what are you doing Wednesday? I was thinking of walking to the theatre, to see that play, but uh, I don’t want to... go uh... alone”

She was nodding and saying yes before I finished, which was good, because I trailed off. She looked like she really wanted to go, too, which was just so weird to me. The way she ate her tofu thing was adorable.

“Yeah, totally!” she said, “My friend Phil is acting in it, actually. If you want to go, I can get us good tickets.” I was of course floored. Yes! Awesome! Totally amazing! I thought, saying “Hey, yeah? That’s sweet—really? Let’s do that. Cool. Uh...” I grinned nervously and looked at my food again. Thai food is really some of the ugliest food that I still eat regularly. Celia managed to of course be utterly flawless, beautiful in comparison to her pretty bad looking food. The food was delicious, by the way. Thai Garden on Tate Street in Greensboro. I recommend it.

“Yeah! I’ll call him n—well, after dinner, maybe, later tonight sometime.” She said. She smiled so broadly I caught it and smiled, and I just look so weird when I smile. I bit my lower lip. I almost giggled. I felt like a girl. I hadn’t been on a date in a real long time.

I hadn’t been laid in a long time, either, though I didn’t mention that to Crazy Brittney as she clawed at my back. She was saying stuff. She was blathering *on and on* about Christ and love and her son *while we were fucking* and I have to say, it was weird enough to keep me distracted. I lasted like thirty minutes. It was pretty cool.

Crazy people have a joking stereotype applied to them that they must be crazy (HAHA) in bed, too. Unsurprisingly, this is not wrong. Crazy Brittney could have held that moniker solely from how wild in bed she was. Not just wild, but good. She was strong and forceful but submissive and accepting, and also really, really hot. I could not have scored with this girl if she weren’t crazy.

I clamped my hand over her mouth around twenty minutes in when she started getting loud. I understood that getting busted fucking here was probably a

crime of some sort. I wondered if maybe I could pin it on her and say that she took advantage of me in my demented, atypical antipsychotic-addled state. Say that the crazy girl had come into my room and raped me. It couldn’t fail.

Those thoughts, as best as I could piece them together through the cloud of drugs in my brain, were in my head as I came. I pulled out. I rolled over. I laid there. It was very, very dark in my room, and Crazy Brittney was nearly invisible. I could see her eyes glinting in the moonlight that flooded my room because I wasn’t allowed to have curtains, but she disappeared otherwise in the shadows of my small bed.

“I love you,” she said.

“Oh.” I said.

Celia looked at me in the darkness. She would laugh when I kissed her. When I asked her what that was about, which I did with more than likely annoying frequency, she would say “I’m not laughing, I’m smiling audibly.” I didn’t know quite what that meant, but it sounds good, right? I’m not alone in loving that line, am I?

It got to the point that I would ask why she was laughing just to hear that. I found myself becoming violently enamored with everything about her. It was a huge mistake; I know that, you know that, and most importantly she knew that. But I knew that I hadn’t ever cared less about anything, ever. Which was of course also a huge mistake.

“Don’t love me,” said Celia, seriously, looking right into my eyes. I smiled and laughed and looked down, and then I immediately looked away because I had a massive erection that I didn’t want her to look at. I looked at her. She was smiling broadly, and her eyes were positively sparkling. Oh my god, she was just so perfect.

“Don’t love you?” I asked, not adding “Fuck you; how could I not?”

“Don’t love me,” she said.

“That’s interesting,” I said, being completely at a loss for words.

She looked at me quizzically, calling me out with her eyes.

“I try to avoid loving people immediately, and don’t worry I don’t love you,” I lied. “Yet,” I added, for good measure. I kissed her. She smiled. I smiled. She kissed me.

I loved her. Whoops.

Digging through my stash box I found another Kra’aakl cigarette and lit it as fast as I could. *Crackle*. I double-fisted it with my corn-cob pipe full of pot. Real primo bud, too. The tastes mixed fantastically. It tasted like candy and grapes and island spice. For one moment as I held the smoke in my mouth and lungs, I smiled and closed my eyes, and everything was spectacular. “Mmm,” my TV said over my moment of ecstasy “Oooh yeah.” I hadn’t had sex in four weeks.

At that point, I wasn’t even sure if I’d be able to maintain an erection. I had been snorting so many varied pharmaceuticals that I could feel my system twitching

valiantly in protest. I shuddered as I took a bump of Ambien, which I hadn't done before and didn't particularly enjoy. I chased it with a bump of Oxycontin which of course was nice.

I laid down. My eyes were twitching involuntarily. I felt like my pupils were very dilated and my eye-whites very red. I thanked Satan that I was alone in my apartment and without internet. If I had the internet I would definitely have bought something ridiculous. I already spent fifty bucks I didn't have on porn and two hundred and fifty that I didn't have on weed.

I looked at my bare chest. I didn't remember taking my shirt off, but I wasn't particularly surprised. I wondered why it was so cold in my apartment. My nipples looked like they'd healed nicely.

Nipples are interesting. People don't pay a lot of attention to male nipples, but they're just as sensitive as female nipples. One thing people don't really know is that when a nipple bleeds, it bleeds *a lot*. And they bruise quickly, too.

Crazy Brittney clamped her teeth down on the nipple she had been up to that point erotically licking; both were novel sensations to me. I felt the pleasure all the way in my toes but then suddenly I could feel the pain in my teeth.

"OW, FUCK" I said, calmly and gently slamming the butt of my palm into her forehead to push her away.

"Sorry!" She said, and seemed like she meant it. Sorry isn't even a Band-Aid, though, and god damn it my nipple was bleeding. I felt like I might pass out. I had no idea something so simple could hurt so bad.

"Damn, baby. I'm sorry," she said, blackly. She dabbed at the blood with a tissue, which stung pretty bad, too. I pushed her hand away.

"Ow. Don't worry about it dontworryaboutitstopstopdontworryaboutit" I said, totally calm and collected and smooth. The areola around my nipple was black with bruising.

"Sorryyyyy sorry sorry," she said.

"It's really fine, stop apologizing." I wanted her to leave. I was terrified already that we were making too much noise. This hadn't been something I'd wanted to do in the first place.

"Baaaby, are you okay?" she asked, trying to be cute, acting like a girlfriend, which just terrified me more. My nipple actually bled faster with my increased heart rate. I was quietly impressed with my body for reacting so properly to such a subtly scary thing.

"I think you should go before we get busted, darlin'" I said, calling her darlin' because I am a fucking idiot.

"Mmmm... I can't sleep here?" she said, snuggling close to me. I nearly shit myself.

"I mean... We'll get caught. I think this is illegal," I said, desperately trying to squirm away from her without seeming like I was trying to desperately squirm away from her.

"Damn, baby. If you say sooo" she said, pouting. She kissed me, though, and got out of bed to get dressed. I was grateful. My nipple kept bleeding. I really had to get a Band-Aid or something from the desk, and hope to hell it didn't look like I'd hurt myself.

"I love you! Kissesss!" she said, as she left. Fuck.

The next morning I called Celia from the hospital and blubbered to her about nothing for a few minutes. I don't even remember what I said, but it must have sucked; She wouldn't say more than one or two words. I cried. A lot. It was humiliating.

Crazy Brittney hadn't spoken to me yet, which was nice, and I was pretty sure she didn't remember the previous night which was sort of a freebie for me. Not that I'm a forgettable lover; she really was crazy.

Crazy Brittney as far as I know didn't have a last name but she did have massive, skull-fucking schizophrenia, and a kid. Yes. I know. I made a huge mistake. Fuck you. She glanced once at me and went back to talking to the other crazy girl, Maria, who I think was retarded. Some kind of super retardation. She punched some dickhead doctor, though, right in the fucking face, so I don't have any issue with her.

"Maria," Doctor Marten had said, "Shut up." He laughed at her. That's sort of weird, I thought. I mean, he's a fucking doctor, she's a patient, and we're all locked up in this shithole together. I didn't get him. Maybe he had some issues at home or something, but as far as I know, Doc Marten—yes I know his name is Doc Marten—was just a fucking asshole.

Anyway, Maria screamed something retarded at him, and he told her to *sit the fuck down and shut up*. She decked him in the face and sprinted for the door. It was awesome. I was doubled over laughing. Terrence, the guard or orderly or something, shot me a look, one that said, god, I wish I could laugh at this too, before he went to sedate the ever-loving fuck out of Maria. I never even saw her walk around again.

Crackle. I was about halfway through the Kerekel. I looked at my humongous bag of ganja, and thought that I must be a really good salesman, or else Joe's dumb ass wouldn't have given it to me *for fucking free*. I had promised him 250 dollars that I now had less than thirty hours to deliver on, but whatever. I would worry about that in twenty five hours.

And then my fucking phone vibrated, shattering my peace, startling me pretty badly to boot. I was too far gone for phone stuff now. I looked at the screen. Too bright for me. Plus, it wasn't Celia, so I didn't give a shit. "Where r u??" read the text. I replied with "here" and threw the damned thing into the hall.

When I said I didn't give a shit because it wasn't Celia, I should add that she hadn't spoken to me in four weeks at that point, and I had made no effort to contact her. I am either a coward or a gentleman, although I have no idea which.

Celia looked at me sadly. I could feel whatever designer drug it was we had dropped earlier coursing in my veins, and I could feel dirt crusting on my hands and arms. I was bummed out. I had had a bad trip. It happens.

“Sleep well. Be safe,” she said. She obviously didn’t mean the last one, praying probably that I would walk into a wheat thresher or something. Wheat threshers are scary as hell. I watched her disappear into the distance, standing at the door for a long while after she had left. I hated to see her go, but damn did I like to watch her walk away.

I say that. I say stuff like that, but I don’t mean it that way. Celia was - and is - gorgeous. She just had a nice ass, too. There’s no gentlemanly way to broach that subject with a girl, I’ve found out, so I never mentioned it to her.

Crackle. I didn’t really know what I was doing. I walked outside, sneezed, and laid down on the concrete of my porch. I stared at the sky. *Crackle. Crackle.* My neighbor Job was out, he waved to me. I sort of flopped my hand limply on my wrist. Job accepted that. Job’s a nice guy.

Job had been the one to pick me up from the hospital. Crazy Brittney and I had kept talking and being friends and stuff, but neither of us had mentioned what happened that first night. I seriously don’t think she remembered.

She gave me a big hug as I left and whispered, “I love you, Buddha.” She came to call me Buddha during my week’s stay there, but that’s a completely unrelated story.

I didn’t know what to say. I knew she didn’t have any of my numbers, and I’m pretty sure at some point she forgot that my name isn’t Buddha. So I said, “I love you too,” and slung my bag over my shoulder, grinned, lit my first cigarette in a week, and left. It was pretty smooth.

I told Job I’d fractured something in my leg, and that was why I was in the hospital and needed a ride home. He didn’t even ask why I was staying in a place called Holly Hills Mental Health Facility or why there were armed guards at all the doors, bless him.

I thought about calling Celia. I thought about it as soon as the orderly gave me my phone back, and I thought about it in Job’s car and for the next four weeks locked up alone in my apartment. I never did. I was waiting for her, I think, because I still had her hat, her hairbrush, and two of her books, and she had one of my books and a DVD, I think. I expected her to try and reach me at some point. She never did, though.

Crackle. I had the clove perched vertically in my mouth, the ash teetering perilously. I didn’t really care if it fell on my face, but it didn’t. I was grateful for that. Who was I grateful to? I had no idea, I realized. I would stop being unduly grateful to nobody, I pledged, and then immediately forgot. I took a long swig from a day-old beer someone, more than likely me, had left out.

There’s no message here, really, but who cares anymore? *Crackle.*

EDNA PERIOD MEYERS

SARAH SILLS

Edna was adding some pickle slices to her plate when the phone rang. She quickly rinsed the pickle juice from her fingertips before drying them on the white kitchen towel hanging on the refrigerator door. She lifted the receiver, the towel draped neatly over her shoulder.

“Hellooo?” Drat. She hated to answer the phone sounding breathless, as if she had hurried to answer it like some pathetic old lady.

“Oh, Pastor Ridgemont! Oh you did? Well, yes, unfortunately it was my fibromyalgia flaring up again... Hmm? Moses? You don’t say. I’m sorry to have missed it...four Sundays in a row, really? I hadn’t even realized!” Edna attempted to slice her egg salad sandwich while clenching the phone between her ear and shoulder. The warm toasted bread was cooling. “You are just too sweet to check up on me... oh yes, I’m sure I’ll be feeling much better by Wednesday night. Mm-hmm...oh that’s nice...all right; talk to you later.”

Edna turned on her kitchen TV and tuned in to Channel 4. Whenever she had to mis a service due to health concerns, she always made a point to catch the broadcast of Glory Cathedral’s service over in Raleigh. Today she had missed the singing and the scripture reading, but the preacher was only about five minutes into the sermon, so she could at least watch that. The message on Lazarus really was interesting, but she couldn’t keep her attention from wandering to the large sedimentary rock perched on the other end of the kitchen table.

The rock used to stay by her front door as a doorstep, but no more. Last Tuesday Edna discovered, completely serendipitously, something remarkable about it. On the smooth flat underside, where she had never bothered to notice, was a clear and perfect image of the Christ. She had been sweeping her front porch and kicked the doorstep to move it, causing it to roll over. As it turned, Edna felt goose bumps on her arms despite the warm weather. Then she looked down and beheld the miracle sitting on her very own front porch.

A knock on the screen door pulled her thoughts back to the present.

“It’s open!” she called. She turned the volume down on her television.

“Lunch already, Mom? You must have gotten out of church early.” Evelyn kissed her mother’s cheek, or rather, the air right beside her cheek.

“Actually, I had to stay in this morning. Another flare up.”

Evelyn raised her right eyebrow, a gesture that always irked Edna. “Mom,”

she said, “I really don’t think it’s wise for you to diagnose yourself. At least go see Dr. Peters.”

“Evie, there is no reason for me to pay that man fifty dollars just to tell me what I already know. Wilma listed all the symptoms for me, in detail, when her daughter was diagnosed, and she may as well have been describing me.”

“I’ve never noticed any fibromyalgia symptoms in you. And again, please don’t call me Evie.”

“Well maybe you’d notice more symptoms if you visited more often.”

“Mom, not this again. I come every Sunday afternoon and most Thursdays before yoga class. Wilma’s daughter only stops by once a month. I think I come often enough to have noticed you suffering from a major disease. One that seems to make a great excuse for getting out of things you don’t want to deal with.”

“Why, Evie! I can’t believe you would accuse your own mother of deception!”

“Mom. Really? Then why was your most recent ‘flare up’ when you were due for your annual dental hygiene appointment? And the one before that was the bridal shower for Lucy’s daughter, whom you detest. And don’t get me started on all the Sunday morning flare ups...”

“Evelyn Bristol! Are you accusing me, the woman who gave you life, of intentionally missing worship services through deceit?”

Evelyn turned her head away and rolled her eyes tiredly. “No, Mom. Of course not. Look, it’s just that—well, after Dad died you stopped going out much, and then you had to quit volunteering at the hospital because your plantar fasciitis kept coming back, and - I don’t know. I just don’t like to see you cooped up in the house all day every day with nothing but soap operas and John Grisham novels. It just doesn’t seem... healthy.”

Edna stared at Evelyn the way she often had when Evelyn was a teenager. “You come to me when you’re seventy-two and tell me how much you feel like going out.”

“I know, Mom, I know. I was just trying to... I don’t know.” She sighed and sat silent for a few moments while Edna resumed eating her sandwich. Then she cocked her head slightly and said, “What’s your doorstop doing on the table?”

“Oh, that! Well, go on and pick it up and tell me if you don’t see something on the underneath. Go on.”

Evelyn raised the eyebrow again and reached for the rock. “There’s nothing on here.”

“You don’t see it? Look at it a little longer. It’ll just pop out at you. Bam! Like that.”

Evelyn continued to stare. “Nope.”

“For goodness sake, it’s the Christ. Don’t you see his features? Look, there are his eyes, and the hair, and his mouth...”

Evelyn’s mouth hung open for a second before she caught herself and

snapped it shut. “Mom. Seriously? You’ve had this rock for years. You can’t be serious. What are you gonna do, sell it?” Her smirked dissipated as she realized that her mother was not laughing at the joke. “Oh God...”

“Actually, that’s exactly what I plan to do. On the ebay.”

Evelyn pinched the bridge of her nose with her thumb and forefinger. “Oh boy. I’m sure you’ve already thought about this, but...you have no computer, am I correct?”

“No, but they’ve got them down at the library, free to use for anybody.”

“Ok. But do you even know how to use one?”

“Jaime at the hospital had me put pharmaceutical orders through the computer several times at the hospital.”

“She had you do it yourself, or she stood over and told you what to do?”

“Some of both. But it wasn’t hard at all. Look, Evelyn, I heard on the news about a fellow who found Jesus in a grilled cheese sandwich. He sold it for upwards of twelve thousand dollars on the ebay. If something so impermanent as a sandwich can fetch such a sum, surely an object of such substance, like this rock here, would be worth at least double.”

Evelyn had no words. She was looking at Edna the way she usually did right before she made some kind of comment about Edna needing to take up a hobby of some sort. “Mom,” she started. Then she shook her head and put her hands up in the air. “Never mind. We can talk about this later. I’ve got to pick up Marsha from a friend’s house. I’ll be back on Thursday, ok?”

She let herself out of the front door, and Edna went back to her sandwich. It had gone completely cold.

When Edna entered the library the next day, the girl behind the counter waved. “Good morning Miss Edna. Back already? It’s only Monday.”

“I’m not here for another book, Sheila. I got something to do on the computers.”

Sheila blinked twice. “Oh, I didn’t know you...um, do you need any help?”

Edna shook her head. “I’ll let you know.”

There was a young man sitting at the computer she wanted to use. It was in the back corner behind the reference section, where people couldn’t easily walk by and see your business. The boy was wearing headphones, and his head bobbed rhythmically as he intently followed the colored circles on the screen. Edna watched from a few feet away. As he would click a group of circles, a “blip!” issued from the machine and the circles disappeared. After watching him for a few minutes, Edna determined that he was not doing research or school work.

She cleared her throat, and then realized he probably couldn’t hear her through his headphones. She shifted several feet to her left so that she was standing in his peripheral vision. Again she cleared her throat. The young man glanced in her direction and then returned to his game. After another couple minutes of staring and ahem-ing, he looked around at the other available computers, rolled his eyes, and

got up.

Edna smiled at him as he passed by her, and then slid into his place. The game had disappeared leaving Edna staring at a desktop full of icons. It looked very different from the computer that the nurses used at the hospital. She read some of the words on the screen. Microsoft Excel. My Computer. Recycle Bin. *Recycle Bin?* Edna wondered. Internet Explorer. My Documents. Edna read every word on the screen but did not see anything that said “eBay”. She tried typing in on the keyboard. She was a very fast typist. She used to type invoices and reports for her husband’s lawnmower repair business. E-B-A-Y. Nothing happened.

Edna revisited the little blue e with the words “internet explorer” underneath. Well. eBay was on the internet, was it not? She placed her hand uncertainly on the mouse and managed to maneuver the arrow over the e. Just like at the hospital. She clicked. Nothing. She clicked again. Nothing. And again and again and again and - oh! Finally a screen opened up. There were several pictures and lots of headlines. Still nothing that said eBay. She tried typing it again. E-B-A-Y. *Still* nothing.

Edna pondered her next move, listlessly reading headlines that had no articles underneath them. Now what was the point of that? With a sigh she rose from the chair and shuffled to the front desk.

“Sheila. Can you help me with The Internet?”

“Of course, Miss Edna. What are you looking for?” Sheila walked around the desk and walked with Edna towards the computer.

“The ebay.”

“Okay...” Sheila sat down and quickly typed “ebay.com.” Edna sat in the chair next to her.

“EBay period C-O-M?” asked Edna. Is that how you get it to come up?

“Yep, you just type it here in the address bar and it takes you right to it.”

“Into the what bar, now?”

“The address bar. See the long white rectangle here at the top of the page? You just type in whatever website you want to go to and it takes you there.”

Edna nodded, squinting her eyes at the screen. “EBay period C-O-M,” she repeated softly to herself. “Now what do you click on to sell something?”

Sheila’s fingers froze in their poised position over the keyboard. “You want to...sell something?”

“Yes I do.”

“Well Edna...you’ve got to have an eBay account to do that. And probably a PayPal account; I’m not sure.”

“I’ve got to open an account?” Edna’s mind suddenly filled with images of large corporate bank buildings with “EBAY!” emblazoned on their fronts.

“Yeah, you give them your credit card number and...”

“I’ve got to *give* them my *credit card* number?”

“Yes ma’am, that’s how it works.”

Edna pursed her lips and leaned back in her chair, as if the idea smelled and she was trying to politely avoid it.

“Well.” She looked away, out of the window. She had not anticipated this.

“Edna,” said Sheila, “If you want to sell something, why don’t you take it to the bazaar next month at the Holy Bible Baptist Church? Or you could put an ad in the newspaper.”

Edna shook her head. No one paid twelve thousand dollars for items sold at the bazaar or in the newspaper. It had to be eBay. “I’ll come back.” Edna hoisted herself out of the chair.

“Sorry I wasn’t more help...” Sheila trailed off.

“That’s all right.” Edna raised her purse strap over her shoulder and headed toward the door.

“Wait, Edna...”

Edna looked over her shoulder but didn’t bother to turn fully around.

“Next week starts another series of our introductory computer classes. That might be something that could be of use to you. It’s three o’clock every Wednesday, and it’s free. There are a lot of, um...senior citizens who attend.”

Edna narrowed her eyes at the senior citizen comment but nodded her head anyway. “Maybe.”

Two Thursdays later when Evelyn visited, Edna met her at the door.

“Mom! I wasn’t expecting to be greeted at the front door.” Evelyn smiled and kissed the air beside her mother’s cheek.

“Oh, I’ve just got a little more energy today. Come in the house, I’ve been waiting to tell you all about this class I’m taking at the library.”

“The computer one? How’s that going?”

“Well, first of all, I learned yesterday that there is one very large, comprehensive encyclopedia and the whole entire thing is on the internet. You can go to it and just type in whatever you want to look up, and voila! Up pops a screen with everything you could want to know about it.”

Evelyn looked confused for just a moment, and then grinned. “You mean Wikipedia?”

Edna sat back. “You’ve heard of it?”

“Sure, Mom. I use it all the time. It’s pretty popular.”

“Oh. Anyways, isn’t it just wonderful?”

“Well. Yeah, I guess it is.”

“Yesterday I typed in ‘Lazarus’ and I got all sorts of information. It was so much fun.”

“That’s great, Mom. I’m really happy you’re enjoying it.”

“And another thing! I think I have an e-mail address now. We set everything up yesterday but I don’t know if I did it right. Marcus, that’s the instructor, told us he’d send all of us a letter by e-mail and then we’ll check it together next week.”

“Wow.” Evelyn actually looked a trifle impressed. “So... I guess I could

have Marsha e-mail you huh?”

“Sure! And you too! Marcus said lots of his students email all the time with their long-distance grandkids now. They keep in touch way better than they used to.”

Evelyn nodded. “I have to say, Mom, I think this is going to be really good for you.”

“I think so too, Evie. Now, come on in the kitchen and try this new salad. Have you heard of recipe period C-O-M?”

The next week in class everyone was checking their email when Bill leaned over and whispered in her direction, “Edna, what is your email address?” Bill had been very helpful to Edna the first couple weeks of class.

“Edna period Meyers nineteen thirty-seven at hotmail period C-O-M. Why?”

“Just asking.” Bill grinned.

“All right, what’s yours?”

“GrandpaBillytheKid at hotmail dot com.”

“Billy the kid? What on earth is that supposed to mean?”

“I dunno. But ‘GrandpaBill’ was taken, and so was ‘GrandpaBilly’ and so I had to add something. I thought Billy the Kid sounded kind of neat.”

“Do you even know anything about Billy the Kid?”

“Not really. But I guess I could look it up on Wikipedia, couldn’t I?”

Edna giggled. Then she realized she had giggled and turned back to her screen seriously. “Why don’t you leave me be, Billy the Kid? I’m trying to work on my email.” She frowned at him, or at least she meant to. It came out more like a smile.

When she turned to her screen again she noticed there was a new email. She could tell because it was bold and it had a little picture of an un-opened envelope beside it.

“A question for the lady,” she read from the subject line. “From Grandpa Billy the...Bill! Did you just send this?”

Bill feigned concentration at this screen but kept grinning. “Stop bothering me, lady. I’m trying to get some work done!”

Edna double clicked on the email. It still took her a couple times whenever she tried to double click something.

Dear Edna, she read to herself. What are you doing after class? I am walking to the deli and getting a sandwich. I sure would like some company. Sincerely, Bill aka Grandpa Billy the Kid.

She turned to Bill. “What does aka mean?”

“Also known as”

“Oh”

“Is that it?”

“Is what it?”

Bill drummer his fingers on the desk. “Am I gonna have a pretty lady

accompany me to supper, or do I have to eat alone?”

“Well.” Edna looked at the e-mail again, then at her lap. “I don’t see why not.”

Bill smiled. “It’s settled then. You’re going to love their homemade potato chips.”

Sunday after next when Evelyn came by to visit, she was surprised by an empty house. The television was off, and the egg salad was put away. There were fresh roses on the kitchen table. She looked for a note of some sort but found none. She looked at her watch. Edna’s church had let out forty-five minutes ago. Where could her mother be?

Just as she was contemplating whether or not she would seem ridiculous if she called Sheriff Tate, she spotted Edna meandering down the sidewalk towards her house. With a man. Evelyn squinted. Yes, it actually was her mother. She sat in one of the front porch rockers and attempted to appear nonchalant.

When Edna and Bill reached the bottom of the steps, Edna extracted her arm from the crook of Bill’s elbow and gestured towards Evelyn. “Bill, my daughter Evelyn. Evelyn, this is my friend from my computer class.”

“Pleased to meet you, Evelyn. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Likewise,” fibbed Evelyn. “Mom, I didn’t think you’d be... um, out.” Evelyn’s amused stare bounced from her mother’s flushed face to Bill’s beaming countenance.

“Oh, we just went for a quick walk after church. Sitting for so long makes a body stiff. But come on in the house, you two. I’ve got a fresh batch of egg salad I made this morning. We can sit out here and eat some dinner and enjoy the nice weather.” Edna opened the screen door as wide as it would go and propped it open with a large sedimentary rock.

“Mom, I thought you were going to—” Evelyn started and then thought better of it. She smiled and shrugged and followed her mother and her friend into the house.

SEX AND THE SEPULCHER

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ANTHONY MANENTI

One sat next to another, atop the wall that encircled the old headstones behind the Catholic Church. Their legs draped like loose silk over the edge. The two eyed each other for an encroaching consummation. They carried that wish on their cheeks, rosy and forlorn in the tides of rapture. Her name was Rosaline. With skin like lilies resting in milk, Siamese eyes, auburn hair that falls to the small of her slender back when she kneels angelically to pick flowers. Her voice could vibrate my bones like the reed of a clarinetist puckered softly between pursed lips. The scent of her kiss lingers about my consciousness like the impressions of fingertips pressed gingerly against foggy glass.

We read the stones, traces of names, dates, and places that have been etched away by the fall of acid rain, yellowed with pollen, and sullied with the defecation of crows. Beyond the beer cans and roach tips there is a playground. The wind rustles through the pines their bodies whine and wend, lamenting the dead in their resting places. The green nettles fall to my feet. She speaks softly, and calculates everything with a heaviness that is uncommon for girls of her age. She wears dresses, they remind me of Kimonos, the ends flutter in the breeze leaving a trail of ballerina grace behind her as she walks with a beauty so serene that it is elixir to the senses.

I am a sucker for all things beautiful and real. I drink and sing songs. I like the sound of my own voice.

Great clangs echo from the bell tower above. We watch with lidless anticipation as the procession of the pious file from the great wooden doors. Children dressed in Easter-egg shell pastels, penny loafers, neat bows and pigtails. Children holding mother's hand swinging and fluttering like parachute balls in spring. Fathers with a stern motion and a clearing of the throat. The priests with their papal hats and yellow robes wait at the bottom of the railings to utter hurried blessings and affirmations.

"May the holy spirit bless you in all your pursuits."

"Glory be, glory be..."

The clink of spare change into the collection.

The wheels of minivans kick up gravel as they exit the dwindling lot to arrive at some family restaurant on the side of the interstate. Plastic placemats and Formica tables. The dust settles and the sun dips, touching the navel of the earth, sending great undulations of aerosol strokes against the canvas in the sky. The pagan

ivy strewn across the courtyard shrinks into its own shadow in the dying of the light like snakes into their holes.

This feeling old as time, though ridden with desire and forbidden in textual transgression, summoned our eyes to search the map of our intentions, like that of a cartographer's lens. The course of our time together steered us. Determination and inevitability. Rosaline clasps my hand, her fingers wrap like ties on the back of a dress, gentle yet secure. We walk through the orchard, it is spring again. Red apples hang lusciously, dripped with the luster of soft dew clinging to the curves. White rice is strewn across the path ahead of us. Crows peck tirelessly at the grains and flutter away, squawking in protest as we pass.

The doors creak as the great seal is opened. An ancient hush passes through our bodies, smelling of incense, oil and holy disaster. The trickle of water and the moaning of old wood. The waxen crawling of candles. The fluttering of yellow pages. Illuminations of stained glass. *In Excelsis deo*. Oxidized casts of saints, missing eyes. The cross suspended by wire. *Ubi caritas est vera*. The Holy Kiss.

Rosaline's lips touch mine as we cling before a stand of votive candles. The flames lick and sway with our hips, creating a silhouette in the dark. I cannot help but feel as Adam, pondering the design of our likeness, our fabricated forms.

She parts as a dancer with extended arms, and kneels slowly. With purpose in every movement. She grabs a reed and tickles the tip of it in slow burning flame. The black smoke rises in a slinking graceful plume that flits and wavers carelessly on the air. A candle is lit, majestic royal blues, passionate orange.

Rosaline turns, her expression, fixed and pointed. Shoots a question, hits a mark. Cupido with elegant arrow.

"Why do you suppose people pray as they do?"

I've never been a particularly faithful person.

"I... I can't really say."

"We all want things, need things. We trust in truths and untruths. We speak to ourselves for consolation, to rationalize. We put our hopes in a basket. We strive, desire, fall in love, fall out of it. Live and die, like fog. We need to feel that something is definite, watching and narrowing."

I shove my hands into my pockets and feel about with my thumbs, unsure of what to say, what to do. My eyelashes dip like the wet wings of an insect. I muster up a throaty gurgle, and curl the corners of my lips. I slump over and lay close to her on the floor, our bodies curled against the richly patterned carpet. Arabesque flowers in circular reefs. From above I realize that we resemble the symbol of Pisces, two fish swimming together, chasing and following endlessly. The chancel is empty, the walls sing of elderly women and rosary beads. Pews reminisce on bowed brows. The sweet murmur of a baptized infant, pressed to his mother's breast. *La madre padre spiritu santi*.

I caress the nape of her neck. I become tangled in the dream catcher that is her hair. Her voice is rich in timbre, velvet to the ears. We are sea shells, homes of old

things now departed. Our passions are of amber, pressed closely and molded into a shape of our own. We are foolish and perfect. We are lying beneath Jacob's ladder. A candle catches and drips, warm, supple. I feel nothing.

In the mornings I often stare in the mirror, a beard carpets my face. The realization of my temporality outlined by the caricature that now stares back at me. I see hung-over eyes. My hair is no longer pure and blonde, but long, ragged and untamed. I wish I could mark the frames, see the broadening of my features pass by like a flip-book, but I cannot. *"How did you get here?"* I remember innocence, my blissful footsteps against the concrete. Happiness that knew no rights of passage. Yes, I am no longer a child. Though I am not weary, I have not let the weight of reality tear the seams of my passions. I see that in the mirrors, her eyes those being no pool of Narcissus. I see what I am. *"I see, I see..."*

Drips and Drips.

Catches and Catches.

For everything there is a season.

Grows and Grows.

Burns and Burns.

The myriad of moments, our cues and exits. The moments that brought us here. Desire, the tourbillion against temperance. We stretch and intertwine. Heart strings that play and glances that collide and shatter into ash that fertilizes, rebirths, and recreates.

"I smell smoke, I cannot tell, is it incense or the traces of cigarettes on my fingers?"

We curl to each other, like leaves that grow old. Holding each other's images like a locket that is clasped and kept close to the chest. Pictures that you look at when you feel lonely, put them on shelves and hold their meanings to frames without borders. Purpose undying questions and answer as you rationalize, categorize and remember fondly. All I can feel is warmth.

"You plucked me out."

TRAIN RIDES AND NIGHT DISTURBANCES

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GABRIEL MORGAN

—My two companions were beginning to stretch out across our compartment, kicking up the arm rests and laying on the seats. I decided to leave all my luggage with them in the locked compartment and sleep alone in the next compartment over so that we could all have more space. We were on a trans-Euro train somewhere in Slovakia. We had passed Bratislava but couldn't shake the rain that had been tailing us since Budapest. I kept my wallet and passport in my pockets along with my cellphone and some change. The cellphone alarm was set to go off at four so that I could get ready to switch trains in Katowice and head back to Wroclaw. I was alone in the cabin. I turned off the lights and stretched out on my side in the dip in the seat. My book was on the opposing seat, and my shoes on the floor. The day of wandering around Budapest on my feet had made me rather tired, so I passed out pretty quickly and dreamed heavily.

—About three o'clock the train was shuddering violently, slowing down and roaring with the effort of restraining itself. The brakes hissed and squealed on the tracks. Valves spewed steam outside, and the rain slowly spread outwards in rivulets down the windows. I was well asleep, and my dream was mirroring the tumultuous event around and beneath me. There was a sense of great motion as a presence moved near my body, and I felt something being slid from my pocket. I came awake instantly and sat up. I could immediately tell that I wasn't alone. There was a backpack on the seat across from me, and the man who was in the process of picking my pocket turned and half strode, half ran from the cabin. I was stunned and unable to act for a moment. My whole visual and perceptual field was moving and shaking. I sort of rolled from the seat and made my way to my feet. Weird light was pouring into the room from the windows, bubbling orange through the residue of rain as the groaning train skidded into the platform. I staggered out into the aisle just in time to see the thief dart into the last cabin to wait until the train stopped. I patted down my pockets as I ran around people and luggage in the aisle, running towards that last cabin where I was mostly sure the thief waited. I arrived at the cabin half dazed, and stood in the aisle looking in at the man who I presumed to be the thief, staring at him and thoroughly checking all my pockets. Everything was there, so I was sure I didn't have to attack the man to get anything back. Instead I stood there, staring at him through the glass. He wouldn't make eye contact. His hat shaded his face so that

his eyes receded into something of a black mask of eye, stubble, and smoke-stained skin. His shirt was plaid. The white light of the synthetic overhead created a strange image, glaring across this dirty specter of impoverished Slovakia.

—I didn’t know what to do. The situation was so absurd and so lifeless in a way. There was not the pounding beat of an action movie pushing at me. There was nothing that made me want to do anything to this man whom I was mostly sure had just been picking my pocket. There was only the strange awkwardness of two humans looking at each other, one staring, the other standing, pretending, waiting for the train to stop so he could push away into Slovakia. There was sort of an equilibrium, a mutual recognition. I could do nothing. He had tried to take my things, but I had caught him. I had no desire to attack, and I couldn’t notify anyone because I couldn’t speak the language. I could do nothing to him, but it was enough for me that I had him cornered in a small glass room, that I was staring at him, and that for him to leave the train he had to walk right in front of me and suffer my gaze. As he pushed by I spoke to him. He looked away and said some things in Slovak then held out a pack of cigarettes. I wish now that I had taken the whole pack.

—When I went back to tell my friends what had happened, I noticed that my pocket had been slit halfway down with a knife. He had actually been in the process of cutting my pocket off while I was asleep. The backpack he left in my cabin was owned by a Jewish man from down the aisle. We managed to find the owner by the passport that was stuck in the top pocket of the bag.

IT’S HARD TO BREATHE

JOSH LITTLE

My friend’s dad had lung cancer back when we were in elementary school. One day, this kid in my class saw the doodles of dragons that snaked down the sides of my looseleaf paper. That’s when my friend and I talked for the first time.

Sometimes it’s like I’m still having to get to school really early, like Mom’s still the tech person.

There I am.

I jerk awake to the blare of the alarm, its demon red six, zero, zero the only visible thing in the dark. After today I’ll start waking up at 5:59. It’ll help. That sound is something I hate more than anything at this moment. I hope in vain that it’s just part of a nightmare.

I peel myself out of bed, I shower. I wish I could just make time stop for a moment so I could take a bath. Baths are always better. We drive to school, and I sleep on the way. We get there, and I sleep in my mom’s office until it’s time for class. The click-tap-tapping of her working on her computer is like the crashing of waves during a beach nap.

I get to class and sit down at my desk. I nod and smile at the teacher, but I don’t talk to him. He knows better than to try and spark some fake conversation. I just take out my notebook and pencils and doodle little winged lizards. Teachers are always extra nice to you if your mom fixes their computer.

The bell rings, and the other kids filter in over the next ten or so minutes as I’m waiting for my friend. In my school years, I won’t make many friends. If it hadn’t been for our teacher’s forced interaction, I wouldn’t have met this guy. I wouldn’t have thought about him every day.

The bell rings again, the final one. The teacher closes the door like someone putting the last nail in a coffin. Where is he? He’s been late. Things haven’t been going well recently.

At this point he’s already told me about his dad. Six months earlier he’s telling me about the cancer, about the doctor’s updates. I just sit and listen. What am I supposed to say? I don’t think much of disease or death. Right now, I’m immortal. And yet he goes on about how things aren’t looking too good. His dad’s coughing up blood at the dinner table. It’s spraying out of his nose and mouth over his plate of mashed potatoes. They stare at him and his wife gets teary and wipes his mouth clean with a tissue.

My face is warm. I just want to go throw rocks at cars with the other neighborhood kids. Or maybe talk about different kinds dragons.

Five months later and things are looking better. He comes over almost every day now. He tells me about his dad's improvements. I don't mind listening so much anymore. I haven't been to his house yet. His dad hasn't been well enough for company, but now he invites me to eat with his family.

The dad's bald, but nice, and the mom's constantly straightening his collar, brushing his clothes off. She looks like him, really, like her hair could fall out at any moment. Their eye sockets are dark, their faces are pale, but they're smiling, like dead bodies fixed up for going out. They ask me about my favorite subject, about my hobbies, what I want to be when I grow up.

I tell them I don't know.

We all sit down around the table in the kitchen. The aunts and uncles arrive, a few cousins that are our age too. My friend didn't tell me they'd be here. The mom sets the pot roast down and everyone stares and grins and licks their lips, all the *mmms* and *ooohs*. I force a smile. I pass the sides as they come, the green beans, the collard greens, the mashed potatoes. I take a spoonful of all but those potatoes. I wish I could just take the food and leave.

I try to keep food in my mouth at all times so no one can ask me anything else, so I look occupied. I realize I'm not even hungry, but I keep eating.

Eventually the parents have something to say. Everyone gets quiet and looks at them.

In a few days the dad is going to the hospital for surgery. Now, you can't always operate on cancer. You'd think you could just cut it out regardless of how big it was with all those high-tech lasers, but tumors can become too attached and intertwine with healthy tissue. The dad's tumor though, it's gotten smaller. The doctors say that it's going into remission, that all the radiation, and all the chemicals are bombing his blood cells and hair follicles and digestive tract. The doctors are going to go in and cut out his left lung.

I'm not sure if what I just heard was good news or bad news. But everyone smiles and claps, so I do the same.

During the start of the next week, my friend seems nervous. I'm actually happy about this whole thing. We can finally just move on to normal stuff and get back to shooting aliens and killing monsters that are taking over the cul-de-sac.

We're sitting there by the T.V., game controllers in our hands. He's hasn't been concentrating, and I'm easily winning because of it. So I pause the game and say there's nothing to worry about. They're doctors; they've got to know what they're doing. With such a big operation they'll be extra careful, and within no time his dad will be back to normal. My friend should just relax.

We get back to the game. I let him win once.

The day of the surgery goes by. He tells me he won't be at school. I don't tell him this, but I don't go either. I lie in bed faking a cold, the phone sitting beside

me.

He doesn't call, but he comes over the next day.

He tells me his dad came out of surgery looking like a different person. All tired and stretched out on that hospital bed, almost asleep, wrapped in bandages, encased in casts, breathing heavily like he'd been in a war. Taking out most of his lung had to be hard on his breathing. At least the cancer was gone, and he could have a normal life now. That's what mattered.

I tell my friend that his dad will probably lay off the cigarettes, but he says that his dad's never smoked, that people can get lung cancer even if they don't touch one of those things.

A few days later they take his dad home. His mom used to be a nurse, so they work this at-home care thing out. It was really easy to do. But the dad is still in a lot of pain. He must've been allergic to the medication he was taking, because he's still breathing heavily and still looks tired. I've gone over for dinner a few more times. I do see a different person than when he first made the big announcement, but it's someone worse. Anyway, with the focus usually on him, I don't mind eating with them so much anymore.

Now I'm sitting here at my desk, and the one beside me, his desk, it's still empty. I stare at my winged lizards, their smudged faces indifferent to all of this. My friend and his family went back to the hospital today to get different medicine for his dad. I guess they're celebrating now, doing whatever someone with one lung can do.

The bell rings. Things flash by, and I let my body follow the same school-to-bus-to-home path.

I call my friend as soon as I get home. No one answers for the first two calls, and then he picks up, and he's crying, already on these long sobs before I've said anything. He says he has to go, and then the line's dead.

I don't know what to do. My bike's broken, and Mom isn't home yet. She stays after sometimes to get extra work done.

I run to the front door and put my hand on the knob, rest it there for a moment. Should I wait and call him back? I open the door and run down the sidewalk. His house is on the other side of the neighborhood. I pump my legs, and soon I'm wheezing and coughing up phlegm, that hint of blood in my breath. I spit the globs onto the white sidewalk and wipe my mouth with my palm.

People slow, and I think they ask if I need help, if I want a ride. But I don't talk to strangers. I keep looking forward, down the bend of the road that dips upward again. I stop and crouch and rest until my chest stops aching so much. I spit some more, and then I stand and run again. The sweat is cool on my forehead and cheeks and neck.

I turn down the last road. I get to his house and stumble up his stairs. I ring the door bell and rest on my knees. No one answers. I stand and slowly open the door. Someone's asleep on couch in the living room, tissues on the carpet around her. There's a faint crying somewhere. I run up the stairs. The sound is coming from

his room. I walk to the door and listen. It's the same sobbing from before. I twist the knob, but it's locked. He must hear me because he stops crying and asks who it is. I tell him it's me. He shuffles over and opens the door and then walks back to his bed. He picks up a pillow and holds it close to his chest and takes in mucousy sniffs.

I say I had to know what was wrong.

He stares at the floor for a while then looks up. He stands and drops the pillow, and he walks over and hugs me. I've never hugged a boy before, but I put my arms around him and just stand there. He's my friend. It's okay to do this.

He draws back. He's sobbing so much that I have to listen extra careful to make out what he's saying. To this day, it's the hardest I've ever listened in my life. He tells me what the doctors told him, and for a moment he and I are the same person.

There we are.

We get to the hospital, and Dad's supposed to go to the doctor's office right away. Mom says we aren't sitting around in the waiting room while he wheezes and wheezes. The girl in the tan scrubs doesn't take much convincing. We have to wheel him in on a hospital wheelchair because he's so weak. As we sit him down he coughs and splatters blood on his thighs. They're white like mashed potatoes.

We transfer him to the soft cushion with the crinkly paper. He lies back, but that only makes him cough more. They're those sharp, phlegmy coughs, and he quickly turns to the side with his hand over his mouth. Mom covers his mouth with a roll of tissues and the muted coughs make his stomach and neck convulse and tighten. I can just see him about to throw up. When she pulls the wad away there's a little strand of blood that clings to the paper and his mouth, and then it pops and beads on his lip. She wipes his mouth again. She calls for someone to help, and two scrub ladies enter and take over.

The doctor comes in now and closes the door. He asks how Dad's been feeling. Mom looks at the doctor, puts her hand on her hip, and then she says something right out of one of those R-rated movies that she and Dad watch at night.

The doctor tells her to calm down, and that he may know what's wrong. He flips through the pages of the clipboard and clears his throat. He tells us that the surgery would have been successful, that there weren't any problems until they got into the lung. I keep hearing "clerical error" but I don't know what that means.

I'm in his room again, myself again, split from my friend like a dividing germ. My heartbeat is fast. My throat hurts. I don't feel like a kid anymore. I don't think kids should deal with this stuff.

He sits down on his bed, and I sit beside him. He finishes the story.

Ask me if I feel sorry for anyone in this scenario aside from my friend and his family, and I'll tell you maybe the surgeon. When he cut out that big chunk of lung, enough so that he'd for sure get the whole tumor, and then plopped it onto that metal tray like some gutted fish, and in it he didn't find a tumor... I can't imagine he'd ever live his life the same way again, knowing the tumor was still inside, attached to the other lung.

With that horror festering and growing, he might as well have had cancer himself.

My friend sits there, crying. I'm a kid still in elementary school, and I've already heard the most gruesome tale of my entire life. And it just doesn't make sense. I say it can't be real. Doctors aren't like kids with Easy-Bake Ovens.

He's not himself. He's feeling down for the next few days. He doesn't want to play any video games or make-believe games, but really, neither do I. What's the point of all these games if you're just going to be organless in the end?

His family sues the hospital, but the court date's delayed again and again. The dad dies soon enough, and a few days later they're sitting before a judge, winning a lot of money without the ability to buy back what they really want.

We've tried to move on, but his mom's still in that same house.

There's a screeching sound, and I wake up. I check my watch. Five, five, nine. I rest another minute. Then I get up, put on a robe, walk to my porch. My friend's sitting on our couch with a controller in his hand, his eyes red, hair messy. I ask him how long has he been playing. He says he lost track. He hates the game but it's the only one we have. He's on his last life though, so he won't be much longer.

I open our front door, and I sit down. Soon enough he comes out and sits beside me. Our cigarettes glow like the sunrise.

NO TRAVELER RETURNS

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ROBERT LITTLEJOHN

I brush my hand across the glass and watch the light reflect around my fingers. Ethereal. Trees and buildings slide by out of focus. I think I've seen it all before.

The bus lurches as the world outside slows to a halt. The driver swings a lever and sunlight pours in through the doorway. Is this the stop? I glance at the other passengers. They look disinterested, their thoughts elsewhere. They fumble with newspapers and coat clasps. No one gets on or off.

As the bus begins to move again I catch a woman in a frumpy overcoat with a mole just below her eye staring at me. As I meet her gaze, she turns away. The girl beside her, not more than six, is plucking petals from a daisy. She sings softly to herself; I can't make out the words. The woman watches over her anxiously, distant yet fearful. She clutches the strap of her pocketbook.

I look back out the window. Patterns of light dance across the glass, but the shapes of things beyond are vague and washed out. Where am I? I lean back in my seat and pass my hand over my forehead. I know I had a destination.

The man across from me, with stringy, black hair and hollowed-out eyes, takes another bite of his bar of chocolate. I can hear the texture from across the aisle. As he chews, his eyes dart greedily at the other patrons. I turn away from him.

In the very back, an old man sits slumped in the corner, his head twitching every now and then in sleep. He wears a blue suit with a grey-and-white tie, and his round glasses and close-cropped hair make him look like Harry Truman. As he sleeps, he mumbles something incoherent, and tosses restlessly. Bad dreams, I guess. How long has he been sleeping there? How long ago did I get on?

The bus lurches to a stop again. I press my hand against the seat to keep my balance. The door swings open, and sunlight pushes through. I want to get up and walk right through that door but am afraid. How can I be sure? I look through the window, but can make nothing out—only shapes and shadows. I glance at the other passengers. The woman in the overcoat looks around fretfully, the girl beside her oblivious to whatever it is she sees. I start to wonder about the man across from me. I catch his eye, and he glares at me, as if to say, "What are you looking at?" As if perhaps I would take his chocolate bar. Avoiding his gaze, I look down at my fingers, but watching them, they don't feel like they're mine.

The bus starts to move again. As it does, lights and shadows outside flicker

across the world within. The man across from me takes another bite from his candy bar, and I can hear the texture from across the bus. He's been eating it for as long as I can remember. The only thing I can remember.

I look up at the girl pulling petals from a daisy. The woman beside her is staring at me, but as I meet her gaze, she looks away. The girl's still singing softly to herself, still plucking petals from the daisy, still. But a daisy doesn't have that many petals. I feel a chill wash over me and try to remember my name.

But I can't.

My muscles begin to feel very uncomfortable in their skin. I stand up slowly, grabbing the handles overhead, my legs unsteady on the moving bus. The man across from me flinches; he shoves the chocolate bar into his pocket. He stares at me, eyes wide with fear and anger, and mutters something under his breath. Carefully, I make my way towards the front of the bus.

As I edge closer to the door, we begin moving slower and slower. Finally, as I pass the last seat, we come to a stop. The driver rises and turns toward me with a nasty look in his eye, like I'm usurping his authority. He puts his arm out across the aisle, blocking my passage.

"This isn't your stop," he says.

Before I can respond the girl behind me cries out. I turn around and see her holding the daisy in her trembling hand. All of its petals are gone.

"He doesn't love me" she cries.

The woman beside her fusses with her, trying to yank the stem out of her hand, but she pushes back, tilting sideways in the seat to get away. "Don't make a scene," the woman scolds, but the girl, tears streaming down her face, isn't listening.

Harry Truman pipes up from the back of the bus. "What's going on? What's the racket?" He tries to stand up. His arms make a windmill in the air, and he falls back down into his seat.

The driver still stands there unflinching. I try to gesture for him to let me through, but he's not impressed. I could go back to my seat and wait, just long enough for the next stop maybe—if I thought there really would be a next stop—but as I consider this, I notice the man with the stringy, black hair has stood up from his seat, and my blood freezes in my limbs. Gesticulating wildly with his candy bar, his eyes pure rage, he shouts at me at the top of his lungs. "Go ahead and leave. I don't need you. I am death, destroyer of worlds!" Then, quieter, in disgust, "I don't need you."

I realize I can't stay here any longer. I duck under the arm of the bus driver and force the lever back myself. "You can't do that!" the driver says, and I hear Harry Truman gasping, "Wait a minute," but I ignore them, stepping through the door into the sunlight.

I walk outside into the sunlight and am nowhere. The bus is gone. There is nothing.

I feel cold inside.

HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE MY DOPPELGÄNGER

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ADAM THORN

In May there are certain combinations of words that set people off. I'm unemployed for the moment and trying to come off of America's favorite flavor of anxiety medication, Klonopin. I was working at this Carvel Ice Cream in downtown Transylvania where I share my name with a locally well known musician, which is unfortunate since I'm a musician. That day I'd been working for eight hours, and this old white guy comes in and orders a vanilla waffle cone. "You look worn out," he says. I gave him his cone. "Could ya' put some sprinkles on that?" I put the sprinkles on it and hand the waffle cone back. I'd been putting sprinkles on cones for a little too long that day.

"That will be 2.09, Sir," I said.

"Urrr, these aren't evenly distributed; they are all sideways. Can you see that, or are you dumb or something?" He has all this hair shooting out of his nose and his ears.

At the moment I've been without the pills for four days, the point when most people cave in and go to an emergency room. The tremors are setting in pretty bad and everything. So what I said was, "You racist whore go fucking buy your own sprinkles and glue them to your pussy." There are certain combinations of words that get a guy fired from the most menial labor.

A Tuesday in June. The neighbor's daughter who came back from a stint in Korea last week is sunbathing in the yard adjacent to my apartment building that I share with a lesbian creative writing major, a dealer named Sasha Savientes, and a woman so fat that she just sits by her door and listens to everything happen. The neighbor's daughter has on a two piece navy blue bathing suit with stars covering her nipples. She takes the top off and they are eventful breasts, ripe, but those of an athlete. Their yard is surrounded by towering bamboo plants, so she has the idea that no one can see and has taken this opportunity to do some massaging. Her arm moves like a snake over her stomach glistening with sweat. It is almost impossible not to watch. I put the shades down. I feel paranoid so I put on WTHM and listen to this raspy girl singing "It's okay baby/ all in your head/ we'll stay in bed and listen to things fall apart." The lesbian on the other side of the wall is screaming for some reason. I think she bought the wrong kind of cereal at the store or is working on a story. She had a restraining order put on me after I asked to use her phone last

month. The whale says the lesbian spends too much time studying. She does tarot card readings on Frankford Street for a dollar and resolves people's personal conflicts by assigning them spirit animals. She takes a taxi there. She said the lesbian's was a Mexican bulldog named Furnando and mine was a Kuala named Beach Bubbke.

Seven in the evening. Waiting for Cal to come by because her boyfriend Kevin is a walking pharmacy, and she's agreed to bring some Xanax which is a lot better than beer for sedation. She's a speed freak and sleeps with him for chemical purposes. Waiting, thinking of things I forgot to do. I forgot to take out the garbage. I forgot to pay the electric bill but remember I can send it in late with an overcharge fee. The worst thing I forgot to do is get away from my doppelgänger, the other Michael Asteri.

"God, it's dark in here." Cal says when I open up the door. She's come equipped with a Starbucks coffee and giant red purse. Her t-shirt says "Too Busy to Fuck" which isn't really funny. She puts an index finger on my chest. "I've got something you want." I try to look through her for a second, the pouting blowfish lips and the green eyes that look like the eyes of an all American girl. We're fixing our kids pizza on a Saturday evening, playing with them on the beach, going to a funeral of a relative I don't like. The dream of it moves through my mind, Polaroid after perfect Polaroid.

"Michael, ground control to Major Tom, you are so fucking out of it." She hands me a plastic bag with the red pills in it. I take one right away and swallow it without water.

"What were you doing just now?"

"I was doing things that I do?"

"You were watching her. Jesus, you can see everything." She says looking out the window at Anya.

"Don't look out the window?"

Cal pulls herself away from the window reluctantly. "You don't look so hot, Michael." I lay on the bed and she pulls a roach out of her wallet.

"Can I smoke this here?"

"Yeah"

She lets me look through her purse. Ritalin, a roll pill, an eighth of midi, a sketch notebook, shoelaces, a digital camera, a plastic dinosaur, a cellphone, a dead starfish. She hasn't waxed her mustache in a while but obviously couldn't care less, so it makes me care less. Italians can get away with it.

"So what have you been doing here all day?"

"Withdrawing. I think I'm getting the hang of the still life stuff pretty good." She doesn't laugh.

"Do I seem real to you right now?" she asks, looking at herself in the bathroom mirror.

"Real? Why?"

"I read that panic attacks cause people to feel like they're losing their minds

because of the cortisol levels in the brain overflowing. You think that's true?"

"Yeah, sometimes. How's your band doing?"

"I don't want to talk about it. They suck. I mean we suck. I don't know. Everybody likes Animal Collective. Anyway, I mean do you ever feel like you're losing your mind?"

"Well, no."

Cal smokes the rest of the pot by the window. Behind her the downtown skyline is pink and orange, and Andy says if you can enjoy the sun for a few minutes a day then you aren't completely fucked. The skyline isn't posh like the sunset over LA or San Francisco or New York but it's better than a lot of things. The Xanax kicks in and it feels like someone's letting go. The jukebox at the bar down the street is playing a B 52s song.

"You know what I feel like Michael?" There is no escaping this. She has brought me pills so I inevitably have to fall in to this position. "I don't know who I am, like I've lost my identity."

"I can relate."

"No, not just like someone has the same name as you, but there is a part of me that is already dead and it's clawing at the part of me that's still going, devouring the good parts. There's some stuff still left, you know. Whatever makes me pick up a guitar or paint, although I know I'm not gonna be famous."

"There is no famous."

"Just, shut up for a minute, and don't freak out or anything. Just listen. Nobody ever really listens."

"I drive to Wilmington in the middle of the night sometimes just to walk on the beach. Do you know that? You can see the lights in the rooms of the hotels, especially the Sherrington, and I think about all the people who are just watching romantic comedies to distract themselves from something they've lost."

"It works for withdrawal."

"Everybody's withdrawing, though, from something. You think you are the only person who's ever been in pain? Somebody's dog gets run over, you know. Their wife fucked somebody, a lover, a pill. We all lose something we were used to getting. And fuck, you just take that stuff because you're scared of other people."

"Who am I scared of?"

"For the most part, idiots." She looks at me with a deviant glare, "A vampire."

We stay in the bed and fool around for an hour. All the worry disappears. Cal's body is cold and hot in different places. She holds me from behind and makes me push harder into her. I can see myself in the mirror on the wall and try not to look. After I come, I go between her legs and forget about careers, about names, about the lives we are stuck in. Cal clenches my head with her legs. "I need to come so bad. Make me come, that's all I want, just make me come, I just want to feel." The

jukebox in the bar down the street is playing a Sonic Youth song. Afterwards she's crying and says that she has to go pick up Kevin.

The other Michael Asteri resides in a split level ranch-style house on Echo street. He turned into a vampire at the age of twenty-six. That's the legend. He had someone living with him for close to four months named Rola Johnston. I was getting her mail, too, and glued it to the coffee table. Her mail stopped coming in February. People say he ate her. They play his music on WTHM in the middle of the night. There's this one song that goes, "I wish you were dead/ I'm not your 13th shade of blue/ I wish you were dead." When the song comes on, I pace back and forth until I take a pill and do controlled breathing exercises in the bathroom with the fan on, and the lesbian talks to her dog on the other side of the wall.

Friday in mid June. My band, The Coffin Kids, plays a gig at the Morgue with Casual Furious and this electronic band from out of town called the Mystic Minstrels who are spaced out and turn the reverb up so high on the PA that the words are incoherent. The bartender sings "Sunday Bloody Sunday" to herself even while they are playing and says we get twenty free PBRs. Andy, the drummer in my band, drinks about twelve beers, and I have thirteen. Casual Furious are so casual that they don't even bring their instruments, so the electronic band plays for a couple hours and half the crowd starts drinking blood shots out of boredom. This group of kids in the back of the club plays video poker the whole time. This blond guy comes up to me and is sort of twitching.

"You Michael Asteri?"

"Yeah."

"Wow, bro. It's great to meet you. I listen to you on the radio all the time. Did you really eat your girlfriend? That's rad. I mean it's a funny story and shit. I thought you wore sunglasses all the time."

"They broke."

"Oh, man that's too bad. I heard they were badass, like Animal Collective."

"Yeah. They were badass sunglasses."

I know it's useless to explain that I'm not the guy, although I have his mail and in one of my darker moments wrote his dad about borrowing money for a sex change operation.

"Well, what do you like about my music?"

The kid looks like somebody just accused him of being gay. "I, you know I dig on the whole post-punk thing and you know it's popping and shit badass like Animal Collective but, you know, with a...twist. I'd love to buy you a shot later." I give him one of the Coffin Kids CDs out of my backpack for three bucks and tell him it's a little different than the other stuff but still like Animal Collective. The set goes pretty well, but the guy I was talking to earlier seems dumbfounded that I'm not the person he was thinking of.

We steal some equipment—microphones, cables, speakers. My drummer

frowns at me. “Just this once,” I tell Andy. I stuff it all in the back of the van. I get so drunk that I make out with this tall guy in front of everyone, and he gives me a blowjob with the bathroom door open. I don’t do this because I like him or it that much, but because it makes a spectacle. Michael will inevitably have some explaining to do.

July. Cal moved into the apartment. She watches the neighbor sunbathe all the time and draws pictures of spiders. She does or doesn’t have a job at Starbucks but her trust fund seems inexhaustible. We stopped sleeping together with the arrival of a conservative, tattooed vegan named Randy who seems to have taken Kevin’s place. He says I shouldn’t drink milk and refrain from calling the stray cat downstairs my nigga. The lesbian thinks he’s an artistic genius because he spray paints portraits of retarded kids for charity, but they all look like blobs. I don’t understand why the bulldog (lesbian) talks to me if she has a restraining order. The old stairs creak in the building when I come home. Paranoia, bugs, and flies are under those stairs. The walls have vertical vanity mirrors glued on them beside the stair well. I can’t see my own reflection anymore. I see the other Michael Asteri. I’ve been wearing tinted sunglasses because the daylight gives me migraines. When I open the door Cal is on the couch smoking a bowl. She has on Victoria’s secret underwear. Kurt Cobain’s messianic face floats on the TV screen. It’s another VH1 countdown special.

“What is that smell?” I ask politely as possible.

“Fucking blood hound. Sniff, sniff, sniff.” Cal mumbles like a zombie transfixed by the concert footage of Cobain getting beaten by a crowd member and Chris Novelselic coming to Cobain’s aid.

“What’s burning? Did you leave the oven on again?”

“No. I cooked a fucking frozen pizza yesterday. I turned the goddamn oven off. After I turned the goddamn oven off I ate the goddamn pizza and washed the plate I ate it off of. You want to get high, I got a lot? Why don’t you relax? You never relax. You know why?”

“Because I have a career path, because you are a living breathing fire hazard? I might as well just have a dragon living with me, and that fucking mustache is turning into a beard, my god.”

“That’s exactly right. No, I’m lying. You, my friend, are an addict. Come on I’m trying to help you out.”

“You are trying to help me? Get a t-shirt and a pair of jeans... oh god I can see your... Jesus Christ.

“Oh, yeah? You like my Christ. You did. You wanna be Paul, and I’ll be Jesus?”

“Just turn the kitchen appliances off, and get your boyfriend away from my guitar. Don’t call me an addict while you are sitting there like that smoking away your grandfather’s trust fund.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“What did you say?”

“Where’s the crack Huckleberry hound?”

Cal’s Italianisms are accentuated by the neighbor’s mid-grade marijuana. She’s been eating her out from time to time for an eighth. You might call it unfortunate that Sasha Savientes lives downstairs, or you might call it convenient, but everybody who smokes her stuff always thought it was laced with something stronger, something more extravagant. Whole groups of college freshmen have been so stoned on her pot that it took them an hour and a half to make it to the Wendy’s on Lee Street. One time a kid passed out in his friend’s arms because he couldn’t “feel his balls anymore.” I estimate that the money Cal’s grandfather left will last about six months or less. I walk over the linoleum in the kitchen noting with a grin of assurance that the orange light on the oven was on.

“It’s definitely on,” I shout over the television. “I think what’s happening is that your pizza crumbs from yesterday have been burning at a low temperature since whenever you cooked the pizza. When did you cook it?”

“Chill, you’re freaking me out. Maybe I should get Savientes’ opinion on the matter,” Cal says.

“Oh god, please don’t bring that in here.”

“I’ll bring whoever the fuck I want in here, fuck you. Randy’s coming over tonight, and he’s going to play me all his new songs.” Her hair falls in her face, and I try to look through her but nothing’s there anymore. Our imaginary children have committed suicide. “How do you like that? When you’re trying to sleep, I’m going to make him dry hump me on the couch!”

“I don’t sleep anymore.”

August. I’m standing in the middle of this field near God’s Miracle House of Deliverance off of I-40. I pull hard on the cigarette I’m smoking and put it out in a Quick Stop cup. The air hitting the side of the church sounds like an animal clawing to get in. The other Michael Asteri overdosed, or that’s what I heard. I walk up and down Frankford Street most days in my sunglasses humming his songs and people think I’m him. I live with one of his old girlfriends now. Somebody gave her some bad acid, and she can’t tell the difference. Randy pulls up in his dad’s Miata while I’m standing in this field naked.

“Jesus, what are you doing out here like that?”

We drive to Dunkin Donuts. Randy sings in the car “I made it through the wilderness/ oh yeah I made it through/ didn’t know how lost I was...” I get out of the car because Madonna creeps me out. “Hey, you can’t just get out here in traffic. Why don’t we go get something to eat, or, um, do you want to go get coffee?” I keep walking because he’s an idiot. I walk to Michael Asteri’s house and pull the covers over my head and try to sleep. The wind howls in the trees outside, and I’m not afraid.

WEIRD, OLD

A selection of scans from Coraddi's past.

1950s–1990s

A Letter to the Student Artist

Dear Artist,

It is important that we understand each other at once. The *Coraddi* has been put in the position of defending and upholding you on this campus. We are responsible for your paintings and your manner of dress, your short stories and your idiosyncrasies. It is a privilege to defend you. We accept this responsibility. If your work is good enough, we will not only publish it, but insist on your right to walk on the grass.

But never forget, dear artist, that in allowing us to be your scapegoat, you have placed yourself in our debt. We at any rate are too shrewd to let you forget it. We demand payment in quality and quantity and our currency is art.

But you fail us. Either you never deposit your masterpieces under our dorm doors, or in our mailboxes, or in the *Coraddi* office, or the work that you bring is careless, careless. Are you a self-respecting artist or are you a person? The person can occasionally make excuses for stumbling, the artist never. Do you realize that you have committed yourself to the most exacting profession, one that demands and demands? Or have you committed yourself to anything? Writing and painting are crafts and arts. They demand skill and imagination. If you are a self-respecting artist, you will want to understand the tools of your trade. Only through using them can you express yourself.

But ah, you say I have an excuse. And you do. We admit it. That word "student" in your appellation is your alibi. But you have to admit that we have taken your excuse into account. We have published your works, faults and all, because of their warmth or because of their breadth of understanding or because of their lyricism. We have rejoiced at your newfound intensity even when your line quality missed being what it should be.

We agree with you that the important thing is expression, but we cannot separate what you have to say from the way you say it. That is the nature of art. Otherwise you are reporting or editorializing, not creating. You, as an artist, realize how important it is for you to have freedom to do things the way you want to do them. That's something we're willing to fight for for you—a little breathing space in which to paint and write. We want this for you so that you can interpret and imagine for us, so that you can make our lives ring in round tones. But we won't lie to you that mean, purple lie which is lied when we print your work without merit, not even to encourage you to produce that gem that we know you are capable of producing. It won't be worth it to you. It won't even encourage you.

If you think that you are ready to publish and you are not, then it is time you knew the truth. If you do not know that your habits of working are shabby and ineffective, you will go on cheating your readers and viewers and yourself. We hope that you will not always remain a student artist working at a student artist's level of competency. We hope that you will become independent, experimental, sure a master

Sincerely,

CORADDI



C O R A D D I



THE
MAGAZINE
OF THE ARTS
AT UNC-G



Editor's Mistake

Copy



Coraddi

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS AT U N C G
N O V E M B E R D E C E M B E R 1 9 7 9





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Amélie Blanc is a 20-year-old French exchange student at UNCG. She loves Duane Michals’ photographs, Eric Rohmer’s movies and Serge Gainsbourg’s songs. She thinks it is funny that American people like free food, icy drinks and frisbee so much.

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Harper Bokum-Fauth is a native Vermonter and senior at Guilford College studying Cultural Anthropology and Spanish. He enjoys reading, going to museums, the Mola mola, and anything outdoors. No, he does not play the harp.

Michael Bond is a graduate student at UNCG who is addicted to nature, but not granola enough to dress as such.

Laura Brown is a senior at UNCG. She was born in North Carolina, but moved to suburban Southern California at the age of fourteen; this sometimes makes her seem exotic to people who don’t know better. Now she lives in a purple house in Greensboro and usually calls that home. She knows how to sew, sail, and solve the Rubik’s Cube.

Ross Brubeck is currently studying psychology at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His favorite and most emotionally taxing hobby is never spending more than a year at a time in the state of North Carolina. A quick search on Google will be all you need to find out about all the interesting things he’s ever done.

Stephanie Case is a diversified artist searching for her niche.

Kayla Cavanaugh is a freshman at UNCG. She is currently studying Art History and German. She can peel various citrus fruits in one long curl.

Zack Franceschi is a _____ !

Ivan Gilbert is a junior at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He is a major in fine arts, concentrating in painting and printmaking. He also highly enjoys literature, film, theater, music and other forms of creative expression. He is passionate for creating, but even more so for spreading that passion to others; and hopefully will do so for someone, someday, somewhere.

Kelsey Hammersley is an Orange County, NC native working toward her BFA in Design at UNCG. In her most recent series of mixed media images, she hopes to achieve a sense of ambiguous nostalgia while seeking a balance between digital and analogue photography.

Travis Hauer is a Junior at UNCG. He submitted to the Coraddi this semester. He likes to write.

Lawrence Holliday is a senior at UNCG. He is currently majoring in Spanish and International and Global Studies, with an Asian Studies concentration. During his spare time, he enjoys listening to various genres of music, playing video games, studying foreign languages, and creative writing. One day, he hopes to become an interpreter in order to bring about better changes in the world.

RJ Hooker is a senior at UNCG. He’s attending George Mason University in the fall so he can write twelve billion poems in the span of three years. His poems have appeared in such prestigious collections as “left in a notebook on a bus station bench,” “my mother’s filing cabinet” and the award winning “stack of papers above my desk.”

Elizabeth Ingram is a senior at UNCG. She was born and raised in North Carolina and has a two brothers, one of which is her twin. She enjoys spending time with her dogs and trying to cook like Martha Stewart.

Stephanie King is a junior at UNCG, majoring in English. Her passion is photography, seeking to capture beauty with each frame.

Eric Kniss is completing his second year in the MFA program at UNCG. He was born in the Himalayan Mountains of India and lived in Northern India through his early childhood. He enjoys all types of international foods with a particular affinity (not surprisingly) for Indian food.

Janie Ledford is an avid Dolly Parton enthusiast living in the piedmont of North Carolina. With her collection of over 75 original TY Beanie Babies, a Special Edition Labyrinth DVD and every Lisa Frank sticker to hit the market, she is easily giving Thomas Kincaid a run for his money.

Robert Littlejohn is a junior at UNCG. In his free time, he enjoys trying to

teach monkeys ninjitsu, and so on.

Tommy Malekoff is a senior at Grimsley High School (but is going to UNCG next year). Skateboarding saved his life. The only thing he believes in is the Loch Ness Monster.

Amanda Manis was, in a past life, a recklessly wild wanderer on the Oregon Trail. In this life she is a soon-to-be ex-student at UNCG who enjoys bellowing bluegrass from front porches and dancing (clichely) in the moonlight. She is still determined to go West, but knows better than to take a wagon this time.

Caitlin McCann is a senior at UNCG. Her dislikes include ladybugs, socks, and pizza. She loves books, dyeing her hair, and her grandmother. When she grows up, she would like to be a combination of Matilda and Harriet M. Welsch.

Heath Montgomery is a graduate candidate at UNCG. He uses traditional artists materials in process based work in which the end result comes from a set of actions not his aesthetic desires. He likes to think that being capricious and sincere at the same time is possible. Heath hopes holiday happiness has honor.

Jesse Morales was born on Mexican Independence Day during a hurricane. She loves wordsmithing, books, Greensboro, dance, and the campus rabbits.

Amanda Nicholas is a first year grad student at UNCG. She enjoys manga, swimming, seaweed, and chasing her fellow grad students down the hallway.

Samuel Herrashoff Peck was raised by drunken hobos while riding railway cars cross-country. He is currently studying for his terminal degree in Fine Art. He also enjoys the simple pleasures in life like heating a can of beans over a trash fire.

Helen Marie Pohlig is a sophomore at UNCG. She was born in France, spent six years in Cameroon, has lived in NC, and is currently enjoying a semester abroad in Botswana.

Lauren Roche takes a photojournalistic approach to explore individuals and their relationship within society, paying close attention to generational and cultural differences. She is enrolled in the certificate program at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. She is not engaged to Adam Moser.

Basie Settle was born nineteen years ago and then lived for nineteen years. He plans on living several more in the near future.

Sarah Sills is a senior at UNCG. She enjoys studying religions, belly dancing, writing, and hanging out with her hot husband. She has no career aspirations and is currently attempting to devise a plan which will enable her to remain a student for life.

Adam Thorn was born in Emerald Isle, NC. He is a graduating senior who plans on moving West to pursue new life experiences because you can't write about what you don't know.

Brenda Vienrich is finishing up her last semester at UNCG. She was born in Lima, Peru and is the daughter of two Hispanic-European immigrants. She currently enjoys making shoes from recycled materials and eating lots of delicious carbohydrates. If she could rule the world, she would put up Lisa Frank art and the font Comic Sans all over the walls of all the art galleries and art classrooms of the world, and set up laser beams so that perpetrators would be shocked if they tried to take any of it down.

Christopher Walsh recently moved to North Carolina from New York City where he and his wife art-ed around for a spell. They now live in a 1920's home with their nine month old son and fur kid of the canine variety.

Jared Watson is not an artist.

Kim Wood is a graduating senior at UNCG. A Design major, she loves hot Earl Gray tea and good techno music, and often trades her stoic persona for a healthy dose of FREAK!

