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The Messenger

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Spring, 1995

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*Richmond College and Westhampton College Government Associations
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The Margaret Owen Finck Prize for Creative Writing

The Margaret Haley Carpenter Prize for Poetry

Dr. Steven Barza, Faculty Advisor

Herbert Peterson, Controller

And all of those who submitted their work.

Nominations for Awards

*Indicates award recipient

Margaret Haley Carpenter Prize for Poetry

The Fisherman's Son (Fall, 1994)

Come, (p. 34)*

Susannah Wood

Joshua Hockensmith

Margaret Owen Finck Prize for Creative Writing

Angel of Mercy (Fall, 1994)*

The Window (p.9)

Alison Clayton

Leslie Duncan

Artwork and Photography Award

untitled (Fall; 1994)*

Doug Satteson

Judging

Poetry: Dr. Louis Schwartz, Dr. Anthony Russell, Karen Gover

Prose: Dr. Steve Barza, Dr. Suzanne Jones, Sallie Hirsh

Artwork: Sarah Arnold, Dr. Margaret Denton

University of Richmond

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Keith Richards	<i>Rich Mitchell</i>	back cover
Manchester, VT	<i>Sara M. Truitt</i>	front cover

Postcard

Staring out the greasy window of an all-night diner,
Lost in the nocturnal glow of four a.m.
Where the sky turns two shades darker than bus station grey
And the moon looks like a cue ball
Sinking into the corner pocket.
And the waitress says her name is Sandra Dee
Even though it only says "Sandy" on her red plastic name tag,
And I remember when a waitress's name used to be embroidered
On a little kerchief over her right breast,
Back before working at a diner just became something you did
As a summer job or because the bills were tight this month,
And I say, "Sandra Dee --
Like from *Grease*?"

And she smiles and pops her gum and asks me what I'd like to order.
And I stare up at her fading beauty,
The wrinkles and worry lines smeared under a thick coat of Avon,
Like the torn Naugahyde on the cushion of my booth
And the chipped chrome skirting the table top.
"Just a cup of coffee," I say,
And I watch her wander back to the kitchen,
Humming along to the Buddy Holly tune
That plays on a scratched record in the Wurlitzer.

And I stare out the greasy window of an all-night diner,
Remembering when a place like this was bright and new --
All polished chrome and turquoise and waxed linoleum,
When the marquee looked like the hood ornament of a '57 Thunderbird,
And the old-timers nursed plates of pancakes at the lunch counter.
And I wish that I could take Sandra Dee away from all this,

From the rusted Coca-Cola clock like so many dreams,
And that we could ride away in Greased Lightning
And have one last dance at the sock hop.
But dawn had already begun to peek out of its hiding place
And squint at me with one eye,
And I have to be moving on. . .

---Timothy Dwelle

Blue Light Special

12:30 a.m.

In the fluorescent yellow of the 24 hour Shoprite
Her nose is red and raw from the cold,
And she's run out of Vicks.

Robatussin, Triaminic, Tylenol, Nyquil.
Sorry, I wasn't looking she crashes into him with a cart.
What beautiful startled blue eyes.
That's okay, Blue Eyes flashes a smile,
Bending to pick up the Kleenex she had dropped.

Up and down aisles,
Suddenly her cold doesn't seem so bad.
Blue Eyes makes her laugh--
Stories of his mother's chicken soup and Crisco cold remedies.
And in the frozen food section,
They grab for the same bag of peas.

As the droopy eyed hairnet lady
Puts their groceries in their bags,
She writes her phone number out on the back of her receipt.
Giggling at the Elvis Lives tabloid headline,
She's confident that he'll call.

She watches as Blue Eyes,
A brown bag under each arm,
Climbs into the car with the baby seat in front.
Suddenly her head hurts again.

---Kelly Pearce

Just a Sonnet

Shield your eyes from the twice seen wishing star
Before the dreams by which our dreams fall through
Beg the web to confess of who you are
and demand from the fly what I should do.
My Liege, Luck, you were my favorite piece,
But silver flashes irony in your flight
To appease the well, to ease the crease
Of a leaden brow, where down, beyond sight,
Echoed vows torment me my brazen start
Toward chivalry and courtesy, and nights
From which no simple plunge could mend this heart.
Oh, for the simple style of those jousting knights...
Such bit cast prayers cast upon tarnished mails
Shadow terms better left in heads and tails.

---Roman Bulawski

Invocation of the Muse

Too many nights spent waiting in this brooding darkness,
Watching the storm gather on the horizon
And devour the world with its desolate, amorphous mandibles,
Waiting for you to burst through the door
With a nervous smile and a flimsy excuse
As a single raindrop collects and falls from the bridge of your nose.
Too many nights spent alone in this hollow room
Waiting for lightening to strike.

Waiting...

Because I know you're out there.
I can see your footprints in the gathering storm,
In the low carnivorous growl of the wind through the gutters,
In the sudden flight of birds and the scattering of leaves
And a lone dog yapping in the distance.
And I can feel that anticipatory electricity all around me,
Like a string being pulled too tightly
Knowing it's going to snap.

Oh yes, I know you're out there.
Like one of those haunting melodies stuck inside your head
That you're sure you know but you can't quite seem to place,
I can see you in the shadows,
In the corner of my eye,
Teasing me to turn my head and find you no longer there.
Or maybe you're the kind of game men play upon themselves
When they spend too long alone in a hollow room,
But I keep your photograph in nine sonnets
And that's the only reality I know.

And that's how I know you're out there,
Because I can no longer see the wind and the trees and the gathering
storm,
But instead only the reflection of your face in a smoky mirror.
And that is why I have no choice
But to spend another night alone in this brooding darkness,

Waiting for you,
Waiting for the storms to come,
Waiting for the lightning to strike...

---Timothy Dwelle

The Window

I have brown hair; I know I do. It used to hang in long silky strands from my face. My Brazil nut eyes were trimmed with straight, wide bangs before they cut it off. Now my hair pokes out of a lumpy head like so many quills. I can feel it, wrinkling and coarse. I can't see just what it looks like. They won't let me have a mirror. But I remember who I look like. I know my hair is a luscious chestnut brown and that I am beautiful.

I barely remember the complexion of my skin. I can look at my hands sometimes and that helps me to see it again, that unblemished berry that turns to rose just as it crosses my cheekbones. I try to imagine myself in the mirror. They won't let me have a mirror now; it's been a long time since they've let me look. But I can still see it sometimes. I fool them. Deep down I remember my thin, delicate brown hair caressing the soft curves of my face.

All I have now is this cold, impartial, maniacal door and pane of unbreakable glass. All they've left me is the window. Clear and small, it mocks me continually. Within its four corners, pinched tightly in prudish delight, the rest of the world lives and breathes. They've put me on the other side of the window; and I've tried to break the sheet of glass. My fist is still bruised from all the efforts. But it won't move. I touch it, and it presses back firmly on my fingertips. Solid and impersonal, it stares blankly at the long corridor outside my cell. All it lets me see is this putrid hallway, this meaningless view.

I turn around and all the world is a harsh, gaudy white, sinking eternally into its eight padded corners and twelve padded edges, fading into millions of padded crevices and lines. The air never moves. It hovers in a smothering haze smelling of disinfectant. This sterile expanse allows me five steps in any direction. Five away. Five across. I turn slowly and trek the five paces back to the wretchedly impartial window.

I used to know the window, even when I couldn't see it. Before I woke up in this trapped white oblivion, I shared the world with those who really lived. I would evaluate each separate attempt. I could relive every experience, savor all the feelings while safely within a shielded wall of observation. I had my own my own window before this; and I barely had to move. I respected its boundaries and it never let anyone touch me. "No touch, no feel." That's what I'd say, what it

told me to say. To everyone, to *him*. But never has it been like this, never so permanent.

If I flatten my nose against the glass, I can see clearly all the way down the hall. That was invariably the problem with my window: the warped and painful view it always gave. No touch, no feel, because it was always too painful. This window is merely pale and empty. It towers in front of me. All I can do is experience as best I can the nothing that happens in this disinfected and soothing hell.

I have red hair now. I know I do. Flaming short tendrils bounce out from under my pointed cap. Beyond the window, I feel myself walking slowly and deliberately down the corridor, my orthopedic rubber soles squishing against the floor. I see myself busy behind the cart, fumbling with food-laden trays as I enter the various rooms. As from a moving camera, I can see the many thinning faces as they receive their evening meals. Alone in the hallway, I glance around at smooth stucco walls of soothing pinks and blues, planned carefully by a team of specialists to provide a pleasant environment. I can feel the cold metal of the cart's handle sting my hands as I grasp it tightly for support. The cart fights my progress, its wheels whining nervously and wobbling at every third step. I can tell I've almost finished my rounds.

I imagine that soon I'll be able to leave these sanitary corridors. I'll go out into the city air, smell its freshness. I'll see the sun sink gracefully behind facades of crystallized sky scrapers and inhale the purple and burgundy hues as they melt into deep sea blue. Perhaps, I think, I'll go to a club to visit a friend for drinks. Perhaps, I think, tugging girlishly at a stray wispy curl, it's a rendezvous with my lover, with Mike, the man I met two weeks ago at the gym.

I meet him inside the Sax Cafe, in the usual booth, and we sit and talk softly, holding each other close. The jazz band plays softly on stage, our favorite song, the one we heard the first time we met here together under dim and smoky lights. Our conversation is nothing specific; we concentrate only on being together. For once, he won't have to go home early to his wife. Holding me snugly in a muscular grip, our bodies sway in tune to the music. I hear his pulse dance in the rhythms of the sax. then he invites me to his lake house for the night. I accept; I'm always quick to accept. He knows, he knows how I'm always waiting for just the right time. He knows it as he smugly runs a contented finger through my hair. It passes to his face as he

suddenly lifts my mouth to his...

All that greets my hopeful tongue is the cold hardness of the window. "No touch, no feel," it silently scolds. That's what I used to say. That's what I told *him* as he came on top of me. I open my eyes in time to see the nurse creeping her cart around the corner, her red curls disappearing from view. I am quiet and alone and clawing helplessly at the walls, like the night I slept in a pool of his blood. Like the morning I awoke suddenly clean and new, I'm clawing desperately at the smooth pane that traps me in.

I have brown hair. I know I do. It's been so long since they've let me see a mirror. but I still remember that I'm there. I remember how I once, at least, made a reflection. And I think that if they would only let me try, I could do it again. (Even *he* couldn't take that from me.) But they give me nothing here, only a world that is white and painfully clean. I'm trapped in by monotonous light and thin, filtered air and now it's incredibly real. All that's left of existence is that small, hideous, rigid obstruction. And the window gives no reflection.

I am under water, or simply caught up inside the vial. I shake thunderingly with every inch the cart rolls. Bathing in a translucent green, syrupy sweet, within my miniature prison, I watch myself from my larger prison down that hall. It's almost like a mirror, and I haven't seen my wild, cat-like eyes and stretched face in so long. Tension grows visibly on the face behind the door as I approach, falling and tumbling as the vial rolls across the tray. The screams coming from the white room are bizarre and contorted, as though someone physically strangled the noises in the air as they flew towards my ear. They beat harshly against me eardrums. I try to stand, but can only manage to shake uncontrollably in a dizzied headrush, then fall through the liquid to the hard, clear floor.

The girl behind the window runs at my approach. Five fevered, desperate paces; five across, five down, five away from the soothing smile of the nurse and my syrup-filled vial. My heartbeat pounds in on me underwater as I am lifted in my glass cage and approach the howling creature. Faster it pounds, rolls, surrounds me in terrorizing anguish. I suddenly realize there is no air in here, no air at all, only this incredibly sweet serum numbing my limbs. I feel a jerk as the needle is stabbed into her flesh, the moans and pleas still pouring from

her hoarse throat. "No touch, no no no, no feel." And that's what I used to say, before *his* stabs in me, then again before mine.

I see the nurse's thumb push with gusto, and am thrown from my vial in a single nauseating rush. I enter myself and suddenly seem to die.

---Leslie Duncan

The Muse Responds

The pitter-patter of the raindrops sound like the beat of the snare drum
As the night begins to come alive with the sounds of sweaty jazz,
And I scramble for a pack of cigarettes inside the pocket of my zoot
suit

And watch the trees dance in time with the rhythm of love and carnage.
you know it wasn't so long ago when *you* used to move to the music
like that,

Before you became so serious and set on only hearing classical vibes.
And now the ska master chides his favorite pupil for improvisation
Lamenting that the world no longer seems to sing with that same
pulsing, organic groove,

And never stopping to listen to the slow, soulful notes of the wind
Jamming out a mean tenor sax from underneath a street lamp on the
corner of 7th and Calloway St.

No, you want to hear the tender, softly-brushed strings of some Italian
quartet

Soothing out an aesthetic based on social injustice and God and fine
wine.

Well I hate to be the bearer of bad news, pal, but this here is big band
country.

We play on horns and brass, the flapping of broken shutters and the
gravely purr of a rusty Chevrolet.

The entire world is jamming along in cadence...and I just tap my spats
in time.

Because the real art doesn't hang in some gallery or museum like a
butterfly pinned to a mat,

It sings from a street corner on a rainy night with a voice that sounds
like the ghost of Jelly Roll Morton.

So don't give me that song and dance that art is dead and there is
nothing worth being left unsaid

Because tonight is alive with the rugged sensuality of a million songs,
and you can still hear *all* of them ---

You just have to listen for jazz...

---*Timothy Dwelle*

On the Burning Of Anger

Anger --- Black and burning fire
consuming my soul and fueling the heat of passion.
Violence wicked and vicious
comes easy and vents my rage
Destruction, chaos
Splinters and shards
I throw my raw emotion
against the world
Hurling it with cries of frustration
that escalate into screams and curses ---
Who is at fault, who can be blamed?
Does it matter? Even if the transgression lies
within, it does nothing to quench the fire
which will burn unabated until everything is consumed ---

Only then will I slump down
to the ground with the last gasps of emotion
Wracking my body with their departure
The silent desolation around me,
mute testimony of vented expressions of
Helplessness and uncontrolled Anger.

In the wake of the scourge,
I must fit back together the parts of
that which lies in broken heaps around me.
Now, as always, the fragments are less than before, as
my rage has forever banished
Valuable pieces of that which once was
And I sadly realize that the parts can never again be greater than the
sum of what has fallen into the abyss.
Rebuilding the shattered structure,
Into smaller and smaller frames ---
Each deemed sturdy only until the black ire
Lashes out again and chaos reigns.

---Mike Gifford

September's Evening

The warm humid summer air
has left,
with August.

The summer wind has stayed behind,
to greet September,
with her stunning golden moon.

The meadow grass waves,
illuminated in the moonlight,
slowly dying with the summer's wind.

---*Siobhan Mulvey*

Desert Bloom

Michael rises at six
Every other Wednesday
The dew heavy grass
Soddens his tennis shoes
As he backs the creaking mower
From the rusty shed.

Sweeping wide arcs
Around white pebbled beds
Stretching narrow rows
Across the front lawn
Two hours to push the machine
Through the prickly old lady's grass.

Met with an invitation,
Michael sips iced tea
And listens to her chatter.
Once
She played the piano.
The notes filled the room
Spinning in the swirling scent of her lavender.

The boys tease him.
They simply can't comprehend
Two hours sweat
For five bucks
And iced tea.

Michael merely shrugs
Knowing they won't understand
That even the cactus
Needs the cooling rain
And time to let
Its flowers bloom.

---Kelly Pearce

Gazing at the Sky

Twisting, spinning across the velvet emptiness,
They stalk each other silently
Getting closer, but never close enough
Doing battle and retreating.

Their endless journey takes them over
Worlds without number ---
How many spectators sing their praise
And tell their stories over firelight?
Or watch with wide eyes
The forever contest?

The combatants do not hear the same songs
or see the watchers.
their quest is eternal and unaffected
By mortal lives.

Do they remember the explosive moment of their birth
Or the meaning behind their endless pursuits?
Only they could say ---
as if the inkiness of their battlefield
could be pierced with questions
But I suspect:

Twisting and spinning is all they know,
And their struggle is all they have.
They do not pause to dream
Their sleep would come only with
An unreachable dawn.

---Mike Gifford

Symbiosis

The chain gate that closed off the access road in the cemetery was unlocked. Gordon lifted the chain off the hook and watched it fall heavily to the ground, dragging itself oddly for a second or two across the gravel before he tugged it two-handedly to the left side of the road. His brown-blond hair hung in his face clumsily until he wiped it away with his long, bony fingers.

Adam looked on from the passenger seat of the red truck. His focused visage was heightened by his exaggerated facial features and his short brown hair, and this gave him a presence that Gordon could not equal despite the fact that he was taller.

Back in the driver's seat, Gordon almost turned the key before realizing that the motor was already humming. A piece of paper that had directions on them lay neglected under his foot, already dirty with mud he had just stepped in.

"Why was that chain up in the first place?" Adam asked, staring forward. "It's not even dark yet."

"I think they close the place up at five," Gordon said while looking at his watch. It was ten minutes to five.

Adam touched the heavy branches of fir trees that hung down over the road as the truck did a slow 10 m.p.h. on the dirt road. A grassy divider defined the path, and on both sides of them, there were large tombstones with bold-looking names inscribed on them. Montgomery. Lockwood. Parker. His eyes fell on a weeping Madonna and child sculpture partly hidden by green bushes.

"Is this place Catholic?"

"I think so. They're the ones who have all the statues, right?"

"My mother's a Catholic."

"Looks like birdbath art to me," Adam said.

Gordon stopped the truck at a small white building. In the front was a plain wooden cross, about ten feet tall, keeping watch over the dead. Adam stared past the cross down the hill, where he could see the hamlet they had driven through ten minutes earlier after getting off the interstate. Stringy white clouds gave an egg drop soup effect to the steel blue sky.

"You guys are here for the marble, right?"

Both Adam and Gordon did a 180 as a short, wrinkled black

man appeared behind them. He had on red overalls and a striped polyester shirt, and was wearing a pair of medium thick black glasses.

"Yeah, that's us." Gordon nodded. The man looked to be about 70 years old, but his gray head of closely cropped hair gave him the look of an elderly sage.

"We agreed on 100 dollars over the phone," the man said hoarsely while wiping his nose with his sleeve. "Right?"

Gordon nodded. They stood there as the old man bent over slightly and coughed a harsh, mucus cough, then made some sort of joke about his health neither were able to decipher.

"The pieces are in the back," he said and motioned for them to follow him behind the white brick building. Adam thought he could smell the scent of fresh paint, two or three days new. "What are you kids looking to do with this marble anyhow?"

"We're art students," Gordon answered.

Next to a rusted gas tank were two scrap pieces of yellow-tinted marble, the same color as the old black man's jaundiced eyes. When he crouched down and began pulling out the weeds that surrounded the stone chunks, Gordon and Adam did the same.

"Where did you get these?" Adam asked the old man once they had finished pulling the weeds.

"Been back here for years. About time I made some money off some of the junk back here." He coughed again.

After they had loaded the second piece of marble, they paid the old man and left. Both of them were covered with sweat from the labor of lifting the marble chunks. Adam thought this to be odd because it hadn't seemed like he had used much effort. They passed the chain gate and drove for about half a mile down the cemetery main road. Free of the death hold that the dormant graveyard exerted on them, Gordon ignored the speed limit and they rocketed down to the interstate exit in meditative silence.

The suspension path underneath the river bridge threaded its way gracefully over to Sherman Island. Wiry gray cables, which joined it to the concrete mammoth above, vibrated noticeably every time one of the bigger tractor trailers thundered down its floating roadway.

About 100 feet down the indolent river flowed, nonplussed that it would soon join with the nearby fresh-water bay.

Even though the river bridge above provided ample shade, Adam was still wearing his sunglasses as he made his way down the narrow pathway. In front of him was a middle-aged couple, a golden retriever trotting reverently by their side, leashless. They were in athletic clothes and had weights clenched in their fists as they powerwalked across the arc of the suspension path. Yuppies, Adam thought.

20 yards in front of the couple was a girl, about Adam's height with short, jet black hair and very pale skin. She was leaning against the railing, peering off toward the skyline of the southern city, and holding the leash of what looked like a small, strong cow. Adam watched as she took her sunglasses off, fastened them to her waist, and stared off into the direction of the sun, which was shrouded by a solitary cloud.

As the retriever ran ahead, snout jutting forward eagerly to sniff the cow (which was actually a pit bull), the other dog began to growl slightly as the retriever approached. The girl began rapidly pulling the leash of her dog toward her, her face contorting as her dog became more excited. Her cheekbones seemed to increase in size as she became more tense, and Adam saw her sunglasses fall from her waist and off of the bridge as she braced against the railing in a struggle to restrain her pit bull.

The couple hemmed in their retriever, frightened after his friendly overtures had been rebuffed. The man was now gripping its collar tightly as the girl made several awkward apologetic remarks.

"I'm sorry," she said, demurring. "He's only trying to protect me. . . nothing would have happened." Their aura having been temporarily pierced by the girl's presence, they said nothing to her, resuming the normality of their lunch break regimen.

Adam found himself standing an arm's length away from the girl, who was shaking slightly. He noticed a tattoo of what looked like rainbow-colored lace circling her ankle. The dog was barking at him idiot-style until the girl gave it a light blow to the ribs with her knee. Crouching down to calm the dog, she looked over the bridge in a hopeless attempt to locate her sunglasses and squinted as the sun, recharged after its short hiatus behind the milky cloud, glared at her

imploringly.

"My name's Mareta," she said, eyeing him up and down in an unsubtle manner. "This is Kirby, and as you can tell, he's a little excited right now. Are you going over to the river?"

Over on the rocks that cradled the Madison River, Kirby, the pit bull/cow who belonged to the dark-haired Mareta, napped in the brightness of the noon sun. Adam could hear the dog snoring. The two of them sat with their legs submerged in the running water about a foot apart from each other while about 20 feet away some city kids took turns sliding down a partially submerged rock formation that made a natural waterslide.

Mareta's skin was so pale Adam thought of his tall piece of marble. He had chipped away the yellow covering but hadn't thought of a design in the three days that it had sat in his apartment, so he had brought a small sketchpad to brainstorm with. Both of them were wearing jean shorts, and she had on an orange bikini top that looked incongruous with her ashen flesh.

"Your dog looks like a farm animal," Adam said jokingly as he looked back at the resting dog.

"And I have more, you know," she revealed. "A whole pit bull arsenal."

"How many?" A flat stone that Adam threw into the water skipped three times before disappearing.

"Five, and one is pregnant, so if you know anyone who wants to buy a pit bull, tell me."

"I think my roommate's allergic to animals." This was a lie, and Adam was not sure why he had said it.

"You couldn't afford one anyhow. Mine are purebred, so Jared and I are going to sell them for about 500 dollars."

Mareta lowered her body into the water. Through the water her thin frame glowed. She yanked on Adam's leg, asking him with her eyes to join her. She splashed him and he slid snake-like into the murky green water, his stomach flattening against the rocks behind his back to reveal his muscled torso. Then he closed his eyes and let his

head sink under the surface.

When he came up after a good 10 seconds or so, maretta had put on his sunglasses and was standing with her arms crossed in the natural pool they were in. "Look," she said, pointing to her dog, 20 feet away, who was staring at them attentively. "He's jealous of you since you're so close to me." When she lifted herself back onto the dry rock, a camera in his mind's eye quickly focused, and in a split second, the shutter opened and closed.

Adam had Marena pose with her arms stretched behind her back, so it appeared that she was pulling herself out of the water. Her head was tilted back toward the tree line.

"Take your feet off the bottom."

"Why?"

"So I can see your muscles working. There we go. Now, look down a little. Not at your feet, more upward. Hold that." Adam stood in the waist-deep current concentrating on Marena's figure as he transferred its likeness onto paper. He could tell she was beginning to burn in the sweltering heat. Another tattoo of some sort of demon was partly eclipsed by the fabric of her swimsuit, he noticed.

Adam told her about the marble and his idea. "I'll have to make one of you then," she said, breaking her pose to splash water on herself.

"Can you?" he asked, only half listening.

"Sure. I took a sculpture class once when I was in school. . . Hey, can we take a break? I've been this pose for half an hour." The playing children had left without her knowing it. "Actually, I should get out of this sun before I melt."

They agreed to come back tomorrow, and Marena waved back to him as she and her oversized pit bull walked back toward the suspension bridge. Adam put away his sketches and drank some sun-warmed water out of a clear container. He saw Marena look back at him as she walked away, then quickly turn away. The water tasted foul, but he drank it anyhow.

The brown clay felt moist under their fingers as the three of them sat on the clear plastic sheet that covered the wood floor. A fan with blades blackened by dirt and age spun loudly on the other side of the room in the turn of the century apartment, creating a draft in the apartment since the doors to both the front and back balconies were open.

"Guess what this is," Gordon said, holding up his clay creation, a tongue flopping out of a pair of fat lips. he had not even begun to work on his sculpture yet, but figured that if he waited eventually a great idea would arrive for him, since it usually worked that way anyhow.

"It's one of those Rolling Stones lips," Mareta chimed while grabbing another fistful of clay from the opened bag. "But you forgot the teeth."

"Well," Gordon countered, "the Stones are old now, and this one just took his dentures out." They both laughed inattentively, continuing their work with the clay.

Mareta was aking a statue of a man sitting, and then with an unexpected jerking motion she twisted the clay legs upward in quite an unnatural fashion. Her light green eyes narrowed as she let herself become enraptured by her own, wonderful creation. Gordon noticed this and allowed himself to stare at her narrow face, not caring whether she would catch him doing this or not.

Adam was composing his clay model from some black and white photographs that he had taken of Mareta a day earlier. When they went back to the river, there was no one else there, save the towering skyscrapers half a mile away. Ghostlike and fragile-looking, she sat halfway up a jagged rock that was in the middle of the rushing current while he snapped away with the camera, enjoying every minute of it. Even in the closet Adam had made into a dardroom, he thought the photos were artistic by themselves. The rocks looked even darker, making the contrast even more heightened. Her eyes closed, her hair slicked to the side of her face, her white body shimmering against an inauspicious charcoal sky. A borrowed camera that had a slow shutter speed made each ripple of the water ominous looking and portentous.

"Wow," Gordon said when Adam showed him the developed pictures. "You met this girl when?"

This evoked the usual critical response from Adam.

"Is that all you can see in these pictures is her body?"

Although he was only joking with this remark, Adam didn't think Gordon could appreciate things in the same way he could. Gordon was Gordon.

"Sorry," was his sarcastic reply. "Yeah, you know me Adam, I'm such a misogynist." This statement was followed by a playful shove and then some sparring between the two of them, which resulted in big red marks across both of their faces.

The clay model was about two feet tall and had a wooden rod running through it for support. Adam had decided to simplify the legs so that the effect of the body shooting out of the water would be intensified, electric. This was the first sculpture that he had not strayed too much from the shape of his model, he thought while kneading the clay into her shape.

"It's really hard to work on this while you're here," Adam said, after he noticed that Mareta had been glancing at him intermittently for the past half minute. "Do you want to go out on the balcony?"

"Hold on." She was focused on her piece that she had been laboring on the past hour, working with deft fingers to put the final details on her piece. "Alright, done."

After placing it on top of a fold-out table, she stood back and folded her arms, grinning. Adam looked at the clay legs which she had turned upward. She had shaped them into the necks of two swans, and then made the man's arms so that they went around the swans, as if he was cradling them. The face was stolid, features heavy and accentuated with a troubled gaze. The two swan/legs, however, were working themselves free, heads turned upward as if to scream or to grasp for nourishment.

"It's you," she said smiling, her smile turning into a low, secretive laugh. Adam hid his initial dismay, but later Gordon would comment on what Mareta had inadvertently captured in her quick study.

Four days after Pit Bull Girl -- that was her new appellation -- had mysteriously appeared at their apartment, Adam had finished working with the clay and begun to chip away at the marble stone that had sat expectant in the front room the past week. Gordon was strumming his guitar softly on the balcony, watching the traffic and enjoying the day in which a steady warm breeze, like a river unto itself,

washed over the southern city.

Adam had woken up at eight, feverish to begin work on the actual sculpture. He had yet to look for a job in the city; his savings account could float him for a good month or so, he figured. With a chipped-off stone he drew lines in the marble, careful to preserve the measurements that were present in the photographs. With a pair of safety glasses, hammer and pick, all of which he had purchased from an art supply store a few blocks away, he began the arduous task of removing the excess stone from the structure.

Between blows Adam could hear Gordon, strumming gleefully away on his guitar, singing a song he had written:

*She found a room on the second floor
That I never knew was there;
Both my eyes covered by her hands
As she led me up the stairs. . .*

Later, when he took a break from the sculpture, he got a drink and joined Gordon out on the balcony. Sitting on the wall with his back to the street, body covered with white marble dust and hands already aching from the work he had done, he was the first to speak.

"Do you have any songs that aren't about obsession?"

"What do you mean?" Gordon noticed the bags under his roommate's brown, half-angry eyes. He got into these states, Gordon remembered, when he became involved in something challenging, and his discontent would seep out in ravenous, blind clutches.

"Do you have any songs that weren't inspired by some girl dumping you?" With this Adam laughed.

"Um, how do you want me to answer that, Adam?" He paused, stuttering, now knowing what to say and not wanting to say anything after being offended. Taking his guitar off his lap, he leaned it against the wall of the building, and walked back into the apartment.

"No, what I meant was. . . Hey, I was joking!" But Gordon had walked back into the apartment. Adam, recalcitrant but not without some remorse at this display of callousness he had just rendered, went back to working on his sculpture. He knew subconsciously that he had meant and not meant what he had just said.

The light on the answering machine was blinking spasmodically.

"Hello, Adam? This is Mareta. I had fun the other day with you and your roommate. . . what was his name? Jordan? Morgan? I know we don't know each other well but I'd like to spend more time with you. . . You're into art and everything and you seem like a pretty interesting person. How's your sculpture coming? Listen. . . The dogs had a big fight. . . I got a bad cut on my thigh trying to break it up. . . and I'd just like to get out of here for a change. So call me tonight, okay? I get off work at 7."

You're not going to call her, are you? You should at least give her the statue, since it's dried." Two days later, and the same stupid message was on the answering machine, which sat next to the man with two geese for legs that Mareta created. It was a genuinely eerie creation that Gordon could not stop looking at.

"I think she has a boyfriend." Adam was picking steadily at his marble, the basic form evident and getting more and more realistic with every fallen chip. His left hand was bandaged from having hit his thumb with the heavy hammer while carving the other day, whittling away at the sculpture's chin, but he had decided that he would keep the bottom part of the statue nondescript, so it would look as if it were either being freed from stone or turning into stone.

"How do you know that?"

"The dog tag on her white pit bull said 'Jared' something or other. Maybe I don't really like her, anyway. She's kind of dull, I think."

"How can you say that?" Gordon asked with a laugh. "Look at the sculpture you're doing. . . It's her!"

"Doesn't mean I have to fall in love with her," he said with a semblance of conviction. "She was my model."

"Wait," Gordon said, slightly flustered. "How can you recreate her -- if you really don't know her?"

"Why don't you shut up about this?"

The argument continued for another 10 minutes.

Later, Gordon flipped through the phone book searching for Mareta's address. "I'll be the one who gives her the statue then," he thought. "Maybe I'm interested in her. And with all the pounding that's been going on this little edifice is going to get it sooner or later unless we give it back to her."

Adam could hear Gordon going down the stairs in twos, eager to search Mareta out and excited at his possibilities. He wondered if perhaps he should have returned the phone call, but he had been busy lately with his sculpture.

It took him a while to find the address he had written down on the scrap of paper, but he finally did once he figured out all the one-way streets on the other side of town. He parked his truck in front of a small, somewhat decrepit white house, that needed a paint job badly. Sticks that had fallen out of a neighbor's oak tree littered the front lawn. Gordon was wondering if anybody lived there until he climbed the three stairs to the front door and heard the multitude of dogs barking, alerting someone of his presence. He noticed that an old man with sagging eyes was staring at him curiously from a doorstep across the street.

The door opened from inside, and a white pit bull pressed its nose up against a screen, staring and sniffing at him thoughtfully.

"That's strange," Mareta said, cradling a puppy in both arms while fumbling with the door. "He's not barking at you." Her eyes were green, he noticed for the first time, the same color as his and the same color as the indolent Madison River.

"I brought your sculpture," he said as he walked into the small house. "I didn't want it to get knocked over." A black-haired man sat lithely on the sofa, watching a game of some sort on a large-screen television.

She nodded and said thanks. "Your name's Gordon, right? Gordon, meet my brother Jared. He studies veterinary medicine and lets me crash here until I get my act together." The man on the couch smiled inattentively.

Three weeks later Adam had finally completed his effigy, having smoothed over that hard marble with sandpaper to give the effect of cool, polished skin. He had tried his best to copy what he had captured in the photographs, which had begun to curl on the bulleting board that was across the room. The face was serene and angelic, with its eyes and mouth closed in a pose that suggested either sleep or meditation. Her body was magnificent, stretched out in pagan bliss, the smooth thighs descending into the water which doubled for the sturdy base.

Actually, it looked more like a centerfold than a person, he lamented. But a very accurate study, he thought, comforting himself while scratching at the nascent beard he had let grow over the last few days.

He stood back, and then walked slowly around the statue, his shoes crunching into the rubble of everything he had separated from the column of marble that no longer existed. The motion he had sought was not there, and it was too late in the game to make any big changes.

What was it that he had overlooked?

---Jonathan Fox

Simple Thoughts about Higher Education

It is not
as if I am
a person of exceptional
looks, personality,
intellect, talent,
or style
But I go deeper than
"how's the weather?"
I broke the cookie
mold, just to get attention.
Students should check me
out of the library.
What's the use of
knowing people if you
can't their insides?
I don't want
the wrapper of a Snickers,
but rather the taste of the
caramel and the peanuts.
College friend could be
an oxymoron, or the
friend a moron.
Can college students be trusted,
or has the
need to rebel
changed our definition of
respect, as well?
Who wants a cup of
cappacino when there's a
Nattie Light left on the planet?
Don't misunderstand--I love a buzz
as much as Winnie the Pooh.
Beer flows straight through,
leaving the soul by itself again.
Mine needs some company.
Perhaps the enemy is a

fear of an internal mirror--
the plague of the college
masses-- forcing them to
ignore the need for a
more personal communication
than naked mamba.

Am I too cynical?

Please, somebody, discuss
before I blow into
a trillion little ideas
that no one will ever hear.

I need a friend

because I already have
plenty of people to
spend Friday night with...

---Ashley Broom

The Silent Ones

Silence.

A golden gift never received,
And one that he desperately craves.
Their words echo all around as the
Chaotic jumble runs through his mind.
Unable to shut them out, he chooses
To withdraw into himself and try to
Puzzle out the encrypted meanings.
The words still come,
in an increasing
Flow that he can never hope to keep up with.
Growing desperate,
He tries every which way to escape
The mockings, the insults,
The accusations and the useless advice.
Twisting and struggling within himself and without,
He is powerless to escape the maze they have woven.
Silence.

Denied to him at every turn,
His desperation increasing,
The pace becomes more and more frantic.
The words come at him faster and faster ---
"What are you...How can you...Who do you...Why did you..."
The smothering intensity of his pain and confusion
Reaches his capacity to contain,
And beyond.

Explosion.
Those encircling him stand shocked by the light,
And scramble at the end in trying to evade the blast.
When the debris settles,
Fingers are pointed,
The knowledge of society's wise is shared ---
"Drugs...Born evil...Wrong crowd...Mentally unstable..."
All have opinions, none have the truth ---
In a world of the cruel, the crazy,
The foolish and the self-righteous,

God help those who are truly sane.
Silence.
the golden gift now rewarded,
Words cannot reach him,
Hard as they try.
The wings they tried to clip
Unfold as he soars a new world.
Open and quiet.
Peace.

---Mike Gifford

He smelled of sunshine and he thought Alicia smelled like laundry day. It wasn't the chlorinated water heat of Sam's Laundry but the smell shaken out of worn undershirts and jeans still warm from the dryer as she laughed and dug through her pockets to find him a quarter so he could run his machine.

He had gotten her address on the pretense that he needed to give back her quarter not to mention the detergent he'd also run out of and also for the simple reason that he wanted to see her again.

Three months later they lay on the blue blanket they's taken from her bed. She was curled and sleeping under their piece of the Sunday afternoon sky. He stretched out on his side and watched shadow clouds slip over her face. Her mouth was open slightly, sugary lemon lips from the lemonade they's gotten from the man with the white pushcart. She worked as a waitress and went to school at night. Tom wasn't allowed to visit her at work anymore. He'd always pull her to sit with him or smack her twitching butt in the short starched apron. He'd smiled seeing her run to the statue, tripping skip-hops in her excitement. She had slipped up the sides of the mushroom and sat in Alice's lap gasping for breath and chattering even as he snapped her picture.

An ant crawled along his wrist. Tom flicked it off and watched it wade across the blue wool mountains. The ant would get stuck, backtrack with antennae waving furiously, forward, stuck again. He rested his chin on his folded arms and waited for Alicia to wake up. So much to talk about...life work death love shoes goodbyes. She rolled over suddenly, her brown eyes immediately clear and searching his. Tag you're it and she was up and running for the hill, long brown dress catching her ankles. He sat up and watched her shimmering. The picnic basket was open and a tupperware of potato salad was slowly rotting in the 3:30 sun. But he could wait a little longer before packing up. He ran to catch the smile she threw at him.

---*Kelly Pearce*

Come,

people,
with your healthy eyes
and a minute--
there is your living,
after all,
here
to be gripped softly
and touched with the tongue
I
am not one
to be feared.
Come--

we have together before, you know,
at various
dawnings--
and if
there are words
and lines
and poems
that do not understand
themselves
to you,
they are
for other ears.
But
(my promise to you)
there will
be touches
and song,
hot
and sincere
as the sun.
---*Joshua Hockensmith*

A Crayon World

Crayon drawings,
Stick figures, incomplete,
Not entirely colored in,
Not quite concrete
For the crayon does not
Cover all, or stick well
To this paper of flesh,
This cellulose shell.
Motion distorted
In absence of will.
And of course, stick figures
Will always stand still.
There are no true faces:
The dots for eyes
Eyes unseeing.
A curve for a mouth,
Mouth unspeaking.
And when do we ever
Actually have ears?
You know not a single
One of us hears.
A world of stick figures,
Colors in dissonance.
Crayon drawings
Without the innocence.

---*Carol Thompson*

What Just Anybody Can Do

I found her sitting on the ground, holding her head in her hands and trying to fight back the tears that threatened to spill over at any moment.

She heard me come over and looked up at me. Clearing her throat, she said, "Sometimes... sometimes it's just too hard!"

I smiled and knelt down in front of her. Touching her cheek with my finger, I replied quietly, "But my dear, if it were easy, then everybody would do it."

---Mike Gifford

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