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A selection from thoughts...

Hoping and waiting for you,
 waiting for her.
 time does run, but then gets tired
 and walks. sits down to rest,
 indian style.

i can't think—i can only walk. i remember how time periods
 from my childhood used to have smells,
 lights, colors. Memories rich with feeling.
 So distinctly connected to the weather and season.

there are no seasons. there is no weather.
 they got left behind in the field. playing baseball i think
 [*grant rafield*]

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Roadtrip

we are the smoke
 spinning from our car
 as we wake the mountains

we are the blue roads rolling
 and the vast jealous gong of jackhammers
 in a red room that's soon to be lost

we are the combed fanning
 spine-bones, each locking with its shadow,
 of the Prehistoric fish.

miles of innocence and breaths
 bright like the Mediterranean,
 and years with you stacked like poker chips —
 I wake up and the world
 is the trail of your cigarette.

[*Meg Hurtado*]

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Sailing the Arctic [*Bob Quaintance*]

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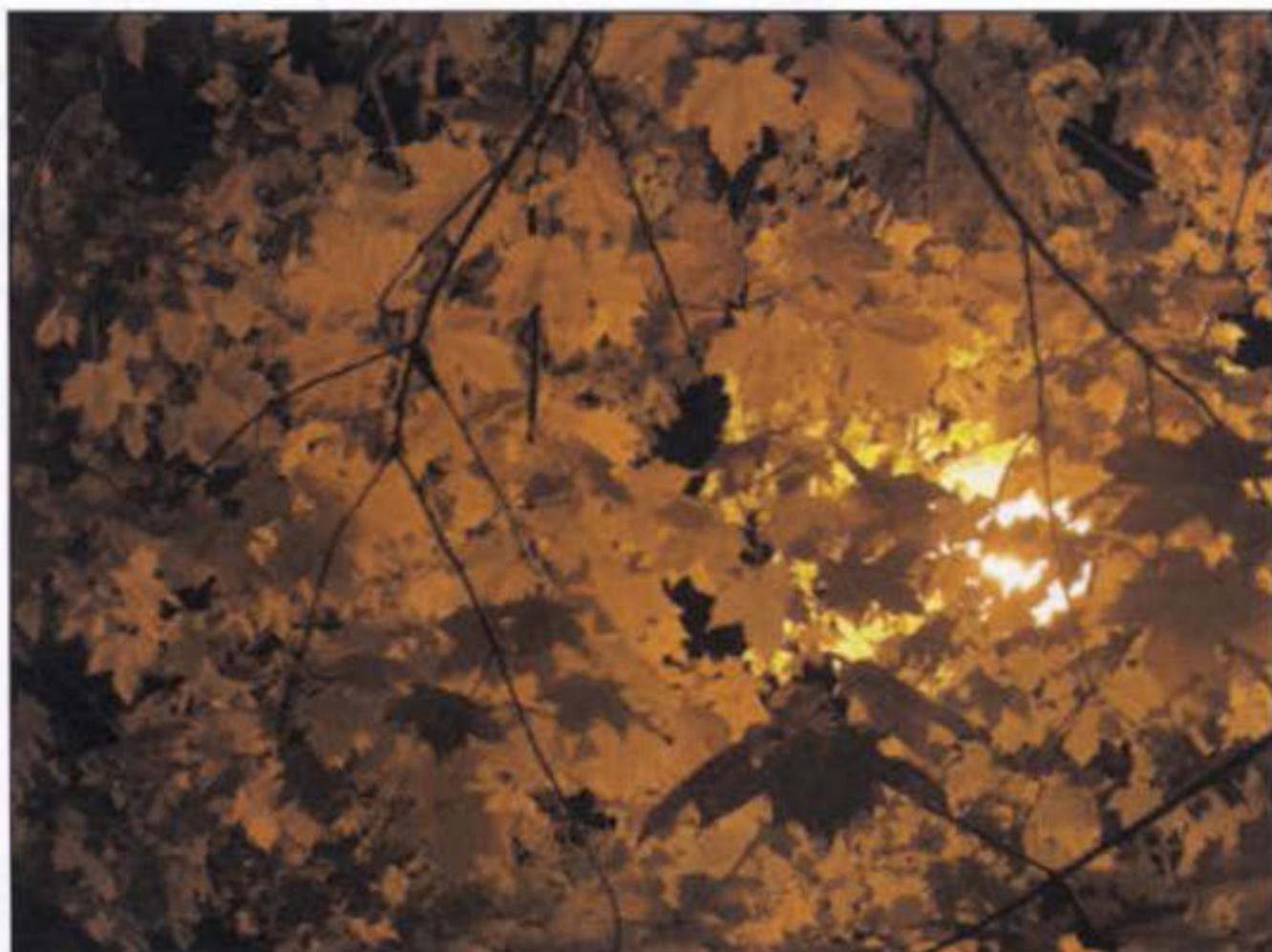
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Feels Like Fire

[*Maxine Naawu*]

A small eyecrossing

And thus! We spoke. We spoke in a group of different energies. Rarely touching base with the ground and metarealities. And many moments were moving around our heads. Flying, most fizzing by. Roaring with idle joys and slow emotion.

You and I, we caught eyes.

Mine at yours first, and then the concrete gaze. Solid. Full. Powerpacked.

We hopped on the eye Liner No. 22 and conversed on trapeze wires, and above the heads of a nonaudience — unaware of that charming power between us.

Now to convince my eyes to not shy away from yours.

We'll catch the next eye flight. And I hang back (anxiously with slight good PANick) for the Next.

[*Liz Anaya*]

Remembrance

1.) the hasty note came
 on the pretty little stationery
 she keeps
 to accommodate the aesthetic ideal
 that pleases her
 so very much

and I remembered

2.) without rain
 I find there are no dreams
 for her—
 only words unspoken
 and broken thoughts
 harbored

3.) Once, when we were restless
 and feigning sleep,
 we spoke our thoughts unchecked
 The result—
 as two, we hurried into the chilled night air;
 she boasted her chalk
 to the asphalt
 and poured language so very aged and beautiful
 upon that dark and brooding stillness

(I knew, in those moments of uncertain sobriety,
 that I could have taken
 the ever chance
 and risked a happiness less fleeting.
 yet

that was not the choice I made)

[*Josh Davis*]

A Portrait of the Artist as a Modern-Day Cowboy

In 1977, I sauntered up to a Sunoco station in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri astride a horse bigger than most cars manufactured at the time to be welcomed by assorted facial contortions manifesting various states of appall, consternation and what, in German, is known as *schadenfreude* - all results of my rather ragged attire - an unbuttoned tartan shirt, partially untucked from my pants of tarlatan, belted by tightly tied twine and clasps of brass, hung with teeth from every person that I'd ever made love to, slippers of animal hide, undocumented and slipped through customs, soled with fins sliced from sharks (a commodity in Cozumel), all torn and topped by three thick black braids in the style of the Indians of the secret desert that Texas can't touch and Oklahoma's too stupid to think of, and a smearing of grease, grime and gore - the road's gift to its travelers, and justified they were in receiving me thusly because after I roped my horse, Ethel Rosenberg, to uninhabited Pump One, I cracked my neck spat on the concrete, scraped half a cigarette out of the grooves where it met asphalt and put it in my mouth without wiping off the crumbled leaves, glanced sidelong at the big man (appall) gassing his Mustang at Pump Three behind Ethel, looked longingly all the way up and down the legs of the lesbian (consternation) sticking Pump Four into her Pinto, winked at the young gentleman in a business costume (*schadenfreude*) who couldn't tell a tailpipe from a tailpipe, but knew he'd go through a lot of them in his career because that is what happens to Colts these days, resumed my saunter towards the register, crossed the threshold into fluorescent hell that burned white and bright off of the tiles I stared at before the register-girl got up from her lunch of food she stole from her not-present employer, her eyes were blue and body from somewhere else said - three more dollars in the Pinto, she's cute - replied - sure, she is - with a trace of an exotic language only heard in Trieste under the river of her discourse, walked over wondering what her name might have been then remembered that she was nametagged Rich, slamming my shark-slippers I escaped with purloined package of Peachy-O's for a friend towards curved back of the Pinto-pumper, splayed my hands across her broad bottom, summoning Balthasar the magi through spasmic fingers, howling unprovoked Old Father Old Artificer Stand Me Now and Ever on a Good Steed as he entered her body she smiled knowingly because she was in on the

prank phone call to heaven, so I extended my claws through her backside spurting blood and screams while I tossed her longways away from the platform and neglected to explain myself to the inquiring big man or young gentlesir, and when I saw a coffee-stained envelope postmarked eight months ago next to the yellow foam where the passenger's pleather upholstery was pulled up it said Joyce first and then Burroughs-McCarthy above the place where she had her porno mags sent, I repeated my incantation Old Father Old Artificer Stand Me Now and Ever on a Good Steed seven times in a river of discourse, kicking the Pinto into reverse gear, intending to continue my escapade of evasion of my former and absent employers in the nascent space tourism industry, I waved goodbye to forlorn old Ethel Rosenberg expecting never to kiss her soft lips again, standing quietly she never budged, even when big man prevented more sauntering by backing his Mustang behind the shoddily constructed Pinto when I was waving, causing a crunching collision, forcing the Pinto's fuel tank into its rear differential, puncturing it with bolts and accomplishing an explosion of metal and fire consuming all present, so obviously it was the manufacturer's fault you see that my whole being is burned and pussing and I am without ears, nose or any place most people grow hair and I am being constantly approached out of man-holes and grates with explicit and sexual passes by a man with green skin who calls himself Cryptkeeper and invites me to his shit-smattered, sewer-lair, and when I told my story to a judge in 1981 he agreed with the abomination of subhuman pleading before his feet, ordering the manufacturer to issue warnings and to kiss me as punishment, as well as to me and the surviving families of Joyce and big man and young gentlesir money has been expressed to the places we used to have our porno mags sent, but Ethel Rosenberg's family live in Germany or are Jewish communist Steeds, so they deserve and receive nothing but consternation and *schadenfreude*.

[*Ben Brezner*]

Five Hundred and Fourteen

I

with your smile awake in mine
with your kiss-teeth making
upon my little ear
as bright a chime as any sunrise,
the world is melismatic

II

there is for each hour
a small panel
in an endless ceiling, a field
that puts Arlington to even further shame.

III

Light is before us all,
smiling like the Trobriander at the
1850-something World's Fair

IV

I woke and said, "do I talk in my sleep? tell the truth" -
there were dreams about
sex with a Bolshevik officer,
in a hospital gift-shop,

V

and I am ill
of being the lizard
with its back to the grim desert
and its ice-clear stomach
unlacing all
to the appraising children behind
their father's sliding-glass door.

VI

to you whose shadow I always read
in the scalloped chill of the rain: Never be silent;
In another life we would not lose the spring,
and there is no other life.

[*Meg Hurtado*]

winter in Fukushima-ken - Japan



[*Yumi Rydlun*]

The Ride

Len went to college for one-and-a-half semesters until he got suspended for who-knows-what violation – the story was different every time. Instead of returning to campus when they let him back a few months later, he took \$8,000 from his bank account (his savings from a brief stint as a high school pot dealer), got two Chinese tattoos, and drove his parents' Toyota all the way across the country to Los Angeles. He didn't know anyone and didn't have any idea what he was going to do. He wanted to do *everything*.

Sleeping for free on a couch in an apartment rented by gang members, Len tried novel-writing, club promoting, modeling, and finally rapping. He found an agent, wasting his money making awful demos. It took him nine months to realize he wasn't ever going to be the next Eminem, or even Vanilla Ice.

He spent his last week in California passing out on Venice Beach with a fifth of Wild Irish Rose under a plastic tarp in case the tide was unusually high. He contemplated moving in with a post-op transsexual named Seven until he (or she) stole his cell phone one night while he was sleeping on the sand. Shrugging his shoulders, Len spent his last \$300 on a plane ride back to Connecticut, expecting the welcome of a tired soldier returning home after a long, unsuccessful campaign.

Instead, he couldn't understand why his mother and stepfather didn't remember their son, but only the \$40,000 they had lost by sending him to college. When he got out of the taxi from the airport, a short yellow note taped to the door told him in five words that he wasn't welcome. So Len walked a half-mile to his grandparents' condo. The day my friends and I came home after our sophomore year at college, we found the same cryptic e-mail marked *URGENT* in our inboxes. The heading read: *The Ninja Cowboy has returned: Be Ready*. We just rolled our eyes. We knew he'd be back.

No one really remembers when Len started calling himself Ninja Cowboy. He claims he had a vision while tripping on Acid with our friend Alex at a Dave Matthews concert. It's his rapping name, his persona behind the microphone, whatever the hell that means. Lately, it's become the punch line of all our jokes. *Hey man, don't skip class tomorrow, you'll be the next Ninja Cowboy! Dude, you better get that internship at Wachovia or*

you might as well go to California with the Ninja Cowboy this summer.

We all went to prep school, one of the best, where getting into a good college is expected. Dropping out does *not* happen. Most of my friends are business majors. I'm in a five-year accounting and finance program. This summer I have an internship at my father's insurance company. The thought of spending the next 30 years in a cubicle sounds pretty crappy, but it's better than sleeping on a beach.

I always have to pick Len up because I live so close to him. It's not something I like doing. As I pull up to his grandparents' condo, I see him outside without his shirt on, cross-legged, happily slapping two large rocks like bongo drums. Jesus. When he hears my car, he jumps up, leaps over the rocks, and sprints across the front lawn. I unlock the passenger side door.

A grip-changing, fist-bumping, back-slapping handshake that looks like something from a rap video. Who does this kid think he is anyway?

"Hey Jeff! what's going on buddy?"

"Not too much. Ready to party."

"Good, good. Can I smoke a cigarette in your car?"

"Are you out of your mind? My parents would *destroy* me if they found out I let you smoke in here."

"Why do you always care so much about what your parents think? I mean, what's the worst that could happen if they found out?"

"Well, they could take my car away. Or stop paying for college."

"That might not be such a bad thing."

"Can we *please* just stop talking about this? I really don't want to get into some stupid fucking discussion. You can't smoke in here, so drop it."

"No big deal, Jeff. Shit, it's Friday night and we're going to be drinking cheap beer with our friends in half an hour. Why would I want to start the night by arguing?"

As we shoot up the onramp and drive southbound on I-91, the acres of shade tobacco farms with scattered rickety barns slowly melt into a world of concrete and billboards advertising strip clubs and sports bars. It's that time of day you can only appreciate in the summer. At about 8:00 it's not quite daytime anymore, but the sun still wants to remind you that it

exists. Blasts of deep pink, orange, and magenta ignite the clouds and drench the highway, one last convincing burst of color in the darkening sky.

Neither of us gives a shit about the sun. We're going to a party, to get wasted with our friends, and we have to take care of some business first. We get off the highway at Exit 46, the hip-hop booming out of my speakers. As we creep to the first stoplight, I turn the music way down, to Len's disappointment. It's an instinct because I know where we are.

The North End of Hartford is one of the worst neighborhoods in New England. Our suburban parents can spout out newspaper statistics about the appalling teen pregnancy and murder rates and about the segregated school system, but we see this place with our own eyes every weekend. Len and I drive past buildings with more boards than windows, past the shopping carts and useless fences; past the dealers standing in front of the Flamingo Inn, past Scott's Jamaican Bakery and the West Indian Social Club. Everywhere, black faces stare at us. Len smiles back, but I only see anger, indifference, and surprise.

Finally, Vanessa's Grocery and Package Store. There are only two reasons for preppy white kids driving a new Volvo SUV to pull into this parking lot. It's either to buy drugs at the nearby housing projects or to get booze without a fake ID. We're in a Puerto Rican neighborhood, so the posters that crowd the front of the store advertise Goya beans, food stamps, and *empanadillas* – all in brightly painted Spanish.

I give Len twenty dollars for a 30-pack of Bud Light. He promises to pay me back but I know he won't. Len gets out because I never get out. We've been going to this place to buy beer for four years and I still don't get out. Instead, I wait until Len goes inside, lock the car doors, and pretend not to stare at the three Puerto Rican men outside the store drinking out of paper bags and laughing.

It always takes him forever. What the hell is he doing? It's been at least fifteen minutes. No, only five. I turn on the radio but make sure the volume is low. I watch a fat little kid speed by on a bike. On the front steps of an apartment, an ancient man who looks exactly like Uncle Remus uses his beer bottle to serenade anyone unlucky enough to walk by his stoop. He belts out the chorus to an old Temptations song while two girls curse him out loudly in Spanish.

Finally, Len strolls out of the store, jabbering away with Pedro. We think Pedro is the storeowner's son, but we're not sure. He doesn't speak any English. You would never know it by the way Len is laughing with him, slapping his back, helping him with the case of beer hidden in a brown paper bag. Len only pauses to salute a grinning prostitute on the other side of the street. I unlock the car when they get close and give Pedro my best fake smile.

"*iCerveza buena! Usted se emborracha esta noche. ¡Encuentre a muchas chicas!*"

"Um, thanks, Pedro. Get in the car, Len."

I'm not here to make small talk with someone who I can't even understand. As soon as Len gets in, I put my foot on the gas and start backing out of the parking lot. The Puerto Rican men put down their beers and stare at us.

Back on the highway, the dim urban sprawl slowly turns greener as we speed out of Hartford and return to a land of golf courses, Mobil stations, and Hummers that will never feel anything but smooth asphalt hugging their tires. We're passing through Wethersfield, Ryan's town. It's just another cluster of trees and boxes that adds to the quaint monotony of suburban Connecticut.

Len turns up the radio until the rearview mirror shakes each time the bass erupts from the speakers. It's the new G-Unit single, so he raps along with 50 Cent, not caring about anything else. He doesn't have to think about the case of beer in the backseat, the parents who will disown me if anything happens to their car, the price of gas, the internships and jobs those same parents bother me about every night at dinner. He's just rapping.

I'm horrible with directions and I think we're coming close to Ryan's exit. It's Len's turn to contribute *something* to this trip. I turn off the radio.

"Hey, shut up. You know how to get to Ryan's, right?"

"Yeah, it's easy. You get off at this exit, take a right after the ramp. Then you take your first right, then your second left, and that should be Ryan's street. I'm sure we'll see Chuck and Dan's cars in front of his house."

"Thanks."

"Now turn the music back up!"

I follow his directions perfectly, but when I take the last turn a few minutes later, we don't see a stream of cars and drunk college kids. Instead, three vacant bulldozers sit next to some huge oak trees and a sign telling everyone that this is *the future site of Deer's Run, a premier outlet shopping center*. As we start arguing, a deer suddenly jumps out from behind the trees, sprints across the road, and disappears between two houses on the other side. Probably the last real deer to enjoy *Deer's Run*.

Being guys, we don't want to call Ryan for directions so we drive around for another half an hour before giving up.

"Just call Ryan, Jeff."

"All right, fine, give me your phone."

Ring...Ring...Ring...Ring...

Hey, what's up, you've reached the cell phone of Ryan O'Halloran. I'm not around right now, but leave me a message and I'll get right back to you.

"Shit."

We're lost again. It's almost midnight. I know, because I check the clock on the dashboard about every 30 seconds. We should have taken a left at the last golf course we passed, but I was worried that a man on the sidewalk had seen Len take a huge final swig of his beer and toss the empty can onto the road.

"Why do you always have to litter so much?"

"It's not littering, Jeff and I'll tell you why."

"OK, Ninja Cowboy, enlighten me with some great fucking wisdom."

"Well, it's simple if you think about it. What is this road we're driving over right now?"

"I don't know the name of the street. That's why we're lost, you idiot!"

"No, I mean what is the road itself?"

"Mostly concrete, I guess."

"Exactly. So are sidewalks and parking lots. Probably the foundation of



[Margaret Elizabeth Perry]

your house, too."

"So what?"

"Think about what was there before they built this road, or any highway."

"I don't know, trees, fields, ponds, Indians..."

"...Animals, birds, a healthy ecosystem. See Jeff, it's all pollution, it's all litter. Everything humans create pollutes the natural environment. When I throw this beer can out of the car, I'm not throwing it into the woods or into a river, I'm tossing it onto a piece of concrete that sits on land that's already been ruined. Another small piece of metal can't make this road any worse."

"Where the hell did you learn some logic like that?"

"Not in college, that's for sure."

"HOLY SHIT! Watch out for that guardrail, man. You almost made me spill my beer."

I can clearly see that he's spilled half his beer all over the passenger side

and I can smell the Budweiser as it seeps into the beige leather stitching of his seat. I'm too wrapped up in my own thoughts to even care.

"Sorry, Len. I, uh...I was just checking out my hair in the rearview mirror. Gotta look slick if there's going to be a bunch of girls at this party."

"Are you kidding me? Do you really think *that* matters? No girl at the party gives a shit about your hair or even what you're wearing."

"I know, but I just wanted -"

"Dude, they're going to check you out for like a second. You're a good-looking guy so maybe you'll get two, maybe three seconds, but that's it. After that, it's all up to you. Jeff, you know you've got game, you *can* talk to girls."

"First of all, I *know* I can talk to girls! I don't need you to tell me that. This isn't even about girls, it's a personal thing. I just don't feel comfortable unless I know I look my best."

"Well, if that's how you want to live your life, go for it. I just think that's pretty ridiculous. I mean, who cares what your -"

"I don't give a fuck about what you think!"

"Oh, believe me, I know that, Jeff."

It's over. Ryan's not picking up his phone and it's close to 1:30 in the morning. We drive back past more houses, fields and construction sites, most of them unlit. We can't see the street signs, but at this point it doesn't even matter.

Len's actually quiet now. He's realized that he was supposed to call his grandmother if he was going to be out later than 10:00. For the first time, he's not smiling. That's when I realize that he cares. He cares more about his grandparents than I care about school, about getting a job, about my parents, about anything. I want to tell him, but I don't.

We're finally off the highway. To get to Len's grandparents' condo, we have to pass through the center of town. As we glide past the town green, I notice that the sprinkler system is on and that some of the water is shooting into the road. My car is going to get soaked.

For a second I want to roll the windows up and turn on the air conditioning, but of course I don't. Because Len already has his smiling head

out of the car like a dog, waiting to catch a blast of the spray. Because it's a muggy and refreshing June night that reeks of summer. And because I finally want to get a little wet, too.

SPLASH!

"Wooo-oooo! Ha ha! That was crazy!"

My leather seats are drenched and still smell like skunked beer. It is crazy, but maybe that's the way it's supposed to be.

We pull onto the driveway in front of Len's grandparents' condo at 1:47 in the morning, almost four hours past his curfew. A dim light suddenly flickers in the downstairs window of the otherwise invisible building.

"Whatever. I'll deal with them. If they don't let me in, I, well...I've been meaning to sleep on the back porch one of these nights anyway. And it's not going to rain, I'll be fine. Don't worry about me."

A short, smooth handshake. Flawless. He springs out of the car, wildly smiling, ready to face his grandparents.

"Hey Len, wait. I'm really sorry about tonight, man. I bet we missed a great party."

"What are you talking about? Tonight was the best time I've had all summer!"

Now it's over. He runs around to the shadowy backyard with all the stealth and confidence of a real ninja cowboy. I know he'll be all right tonight.

I leave the windows down, turn the radio off and drive back through a silent suburban jungle of coffee shops, movie stores and police cars, just listening, breathing it all in. A bum kids call Cardboard Ralph stumbles out of the shadows, frozen for a moment in the shimmer of my headlights. I swerve and he gives me a stiff, apologetic wave, because he's anxious to get back to another drunken adventure. I trail him for a few blocks as he swerves past dumpsters and telephone poles, watching his bald head soaking up the moonshine, perfectly happy.

[*Chris Vola*]

[Margaret Elizabeth Perry]



El Corazón Maya

La France me manque Beaucoup



[Julie Bondy]

4006 Norbourne Boulevard

I have such a headache, and this family—This Family! They give me no rest. Today, a crow got in through the front door—which SOMEONE had left open (I thought it was the dirty one, but 4004 said the baby got out this morning and didn't close it). So when the boy found the crow, he started screaming to scare the dirty one, which started the crow flapping all around, and it kept flying into my window over and over again, which hurt a lot, you know, and the boy went outside to force the dirty one to get rid of the crow by herself, but she was too stupid to just open the window. So instead, she ran up the stairs and slammed her bedroom door as HARD AS SHE COULD and dumped out her toy box, which scratched the NEWLY VARNISHED floors, and closed herself inside it. Inside a toy box! And the boy and the dirty one BOTH forgot about the baby, who was left alone in the kitchen, crying her lungs out with a giant crow for company. And the crow was just circling and banging into everything around, like a derailed train or something. The old ones were out for a run, and when they got home they put the boy in his room for leaving the dirty one and the baby. So now he is banging out rhythms on the walls and loudly singing—or, rather, shouting—“la, la, la, la, la, la, la,” and I. Think. I. Might. Go. Crazy.

[*Lucy Hester*]

John

My brother used to sneak up
behind me and swing
his hands over my eyes,
calling out "Who do you love
most in the world?"

I like to remember the first time I drove him,
sitting rigid at the wheel,
my license freshly pressed.
From the passenger seat
he flung his hand before my eyes,
laughing at our old joke. I screamed
and he laughed harder
because he'd forgotten
I was driving.

[*Lucy Hester*]

Virginia Beach Reflections



[*Matthew Lonnquest*]

Daddy's Girl

On the corner of Canal between the streetcar's screech,
 I look into the eyes of a man who braided my hair
 And slid on my patent leather Sunday church shoes,
 And see the silent vacuum of space, a black hole of weightlessness.

My mouth whimpers from a smile, to an awkward line,
 To a rainbow in shades of grey.
 The whiff of your breakfast pancakes that longed
 To be the sweetest maple on my tongue
 Escape like steam from your pores, and the guilt
 Of my distaste for blueberries sinks in my stomach.

Brushing against your starch pressed shirt paralyzes
 The hairs on my arms, tickling my nerves, and sending
 A surprised tear gliding down my frictionless cheek
 Just missing the back of your heel.

I haven't heard your voice since August
 When you cursed my pseudo love and I walked away
 Into the humid night, my face drenched in truth's heaviness.
 So now hearing that one breath is like a paradox;
 Thankful for your life, but saddened by our death.
 I guess sporadic coffee talks and shopping sprees weren't enough
 Like magnetic poles that weaken with distance.

Your twitching, wiry, brows that I hate taming,
 And stressed shoulders I've learned to relax, frightened my lips.
 Within seconds, I missed the chance to ask you for the time,
 Or slip my graduation invitation into your pocket.
 We are two losers, stiff as dummies. Emotions de-shielded.

Fast-forwarding out of the moment, we erase the seconds,
 The cast shadow, the desert in our mouths, the vomiting glands.
 And forget the gnat-like pebbles prickling into our soles.

[*Trenise Robinson*]

Family Dinners

For the first eight or ten years of my life, dinner began the same way. My mom would tell my brother and me to bow our heads, and together my family would recite the dinner prayer. "God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food. Amen." I do not remember being taught this prayer, but I do remember not knowing the right words. For a long time, I thought the dinner prayer was said in a foreign language. Nightly, I would bow my head and recite with confidence, "Goddace grace, Goddace goo, lettuce thanken forrar foon. Amen."

We ate dinner in a kitchen with blue and white linoleum floors. My dad picked out this pattern when my parents first bought our house. He liked it for the UK colors. Our table was an eight-sided phenomenon that was attached to the wall on two sides and supported by a single pole in the center. Each person had an assigned seat. My father sat next to the wall on which the telephone hung. If it rang during dinner, he answered with a resounding "Hesters,"—never a hello—and asked whoever was on the other line to please call back later, because we were eating. I sat next to him and next to me sat my brother. My mother's seat, by the other wall, was considered to be the worst because from it there was no clear view of the fourteen-inch television that sat on our table.

My family has always eaten dinner with the television on. On the nights when my father was home and the whole family was eating together, we watched the news. We always turned to NBC and watched Tom Brokaw, because my dad liked him better than Dan Rather. I understood little about politics or world events and I asked too many questions, but during the commercials my dad explained anything I was curious about. From him, I learned how the stock market works and the difference between Republicans and Democrats. I asked many of the same questions repeatedly, but no matter how many times he had already told me what the Dow Jones was, my dad was never at a loss for words.

Many nights, my father did not make it home for dinner. The phone would ring at around six o'clock and my mom would set down the knife she was using to slice apples, or the can opener she was using to open a can of Chef Boyardee cheese ravioli, and she would answer the phone with a rehearsed "Hello, this is the H. residence." A thirty-second conversation would ensue, and then my mom would take the glass plate cover out of its

cabinet, put it over a food-laden plate and push it to one side. On these nights, she let my brother and me watch whatever we wanted. Often, we watched "Wishbone" or "Bill Nye the Science Guy." If it was later in the evening, we watched "Wheel of Fortune" or "Jeopardy." Sometimes we would keep score as we played along. Naturally, though, we never lost points for the questions we got wrong.

Gradually, dinner came to incorporate responsibility. It was my job to pour the milk, because I was taller and stronger than my brother was, and more able to handle a full gallon of skim milk. It was his assigned duty to set the table, but I could not stand that he always did it wrong, so I would follow along behind him and put the silverware in the right places and fold the napkins. At some point, we learned how to run the dishwasher and wash dishes by hand and on nights when my father was feeling particularly parental, he would tell my brother and me that we "got" to clean the kitchen, like it was a big treat.

At some point, my family outgrew the "God is great" prayer and we moved on to our own, improvised devotions. My greatest dinnertime fear (aside from the presence of squash casserole on my plate) became my mother's occasional request that I bless the meal. I would breathe deeply and quickly utter something that sounded appropriate. Once finished, I sighed in relief at the knowledge that my prayer duty was fulfilled for at least a couple of weeks.

After my dad moved out, dinner became strange. We ate a lot of Papa John's pizza and Chinese food. During this period, my brother ate at a neighbor's house nearly every night, and my mom wore sunglasses at the table. I pretended not to notice. We did not talk, because the only things to talk about were things that could not really be said. I baked a lot that year.

My dad moved back in and dinner became lively and home-cooked again, though pleasant conversation was forced. We did not watch television during the meal anymore, because we needed to "focus on each other." My father moved out again. He moved in again later, then, still later, out. He came and went and moved and stayed, and sometimes he ate with us and sometimes he did not. I began ignoring all of his attempts at conversation. "Wheel of Fortune" became all-consuming.

During one of my father's stays within my home, my parents decided

to put an addition onto the back of our house. The construction, however, did not begin until after my father had left, finally for good. The addition included a new kitchen. The old octagonal table was ripped from the wall, the blue and white-checked linoleum floor was peeled away and the wall where the telephone had hung was demolished. The new kitchen has wooden floors and marble countertops and yellow-painted walls and lots of windows. We eat at a table that stands on four legs and wears a tablecloth. My mom does not wear sunglasses indoors anymore.

I wish I could say that at dinnertime, we bask in the warm yellow glow of community and thrive on the hum of harmony. I wish I could say that we excitedly and intellectually discuss world issues and our own lives. I wish I could say that we linger at the table, enjoying each other's company long after our meals are gone and dessert has become an aftertaste on our tongues, but I cannot. That would be the most acceptable picture to paint, but what actually happens is this: we eat together often. Not every night, but most. I pour the milk—still skim—and set the table for three, while my mom finishes putting together the meal. Usually, she cooks. She makes salad, or breakfast, or soup. We take our seats, which are always the same. Mine is considered to be the worst at the table, because it is the chair that does not face the television. When she remembers, my mother says a prayer before we eat. I generally do not attach myself to her prayers anymore, but I still always close my eyes and fold my hands, out of habit and the long-held belief that I have held since I was young, that although her eyes are closed as she prays, my mother will know if I don't bow my head. She will know, and God's disappointment will befall me.

After "amen," we eat. Sometimes we will talk to each other, but usually we turn on the TV—we have a big-screen one now. We laugh together at reruns of "Will & Grace" or "Seinfeld," or play along with "Jeopardy," or watch the news. We watched Tom Brokaw until he retired this year. Now we watch his replacement, Brian Williams. I ask questions during the commercials, but my mother has never been good at explaining anything. I ask more out of a need to clarify my confusions to myself than with hopes of obtaining information. When the meal is gone or we are too full to eat more, my mom pulls a deck of cards out from a kitchen drawer. She spreads them out on the table—which is covered by a black and white checked tablecloth she made last year—and amidst the groans of my

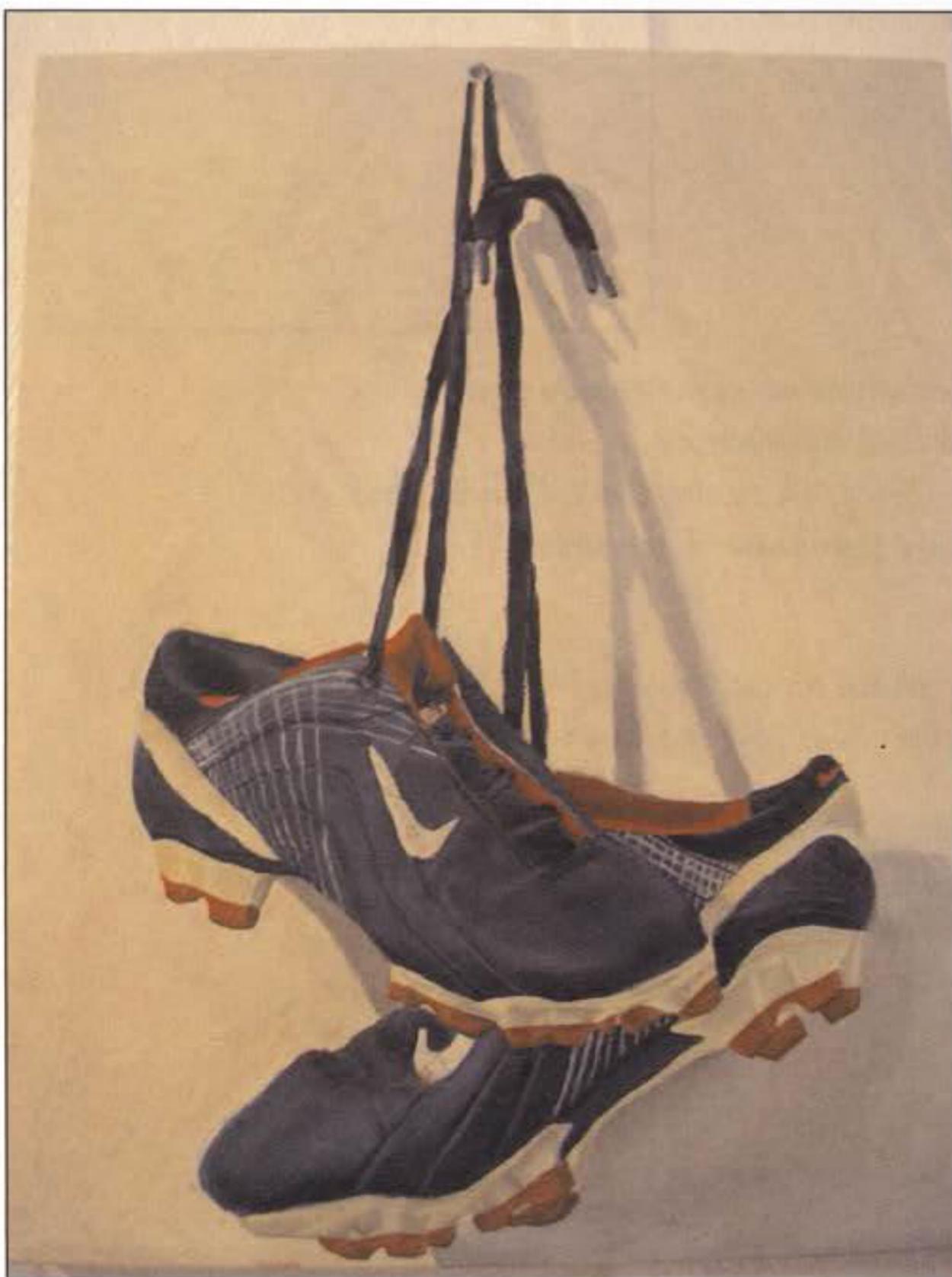
brother and me, we each draw one. Highest card does the dishes.

Every month or so, I meet my dad at a restaurant so we can eat together. He orders salads and talks about politics. I order fish sandwiches and conveniently forget to mention that I am a Democrat. I usually come home afterwards to find my mom dozing on the couch, in front of the television. She wakes up when I come in, and sleepily asks, "How's Dad?"

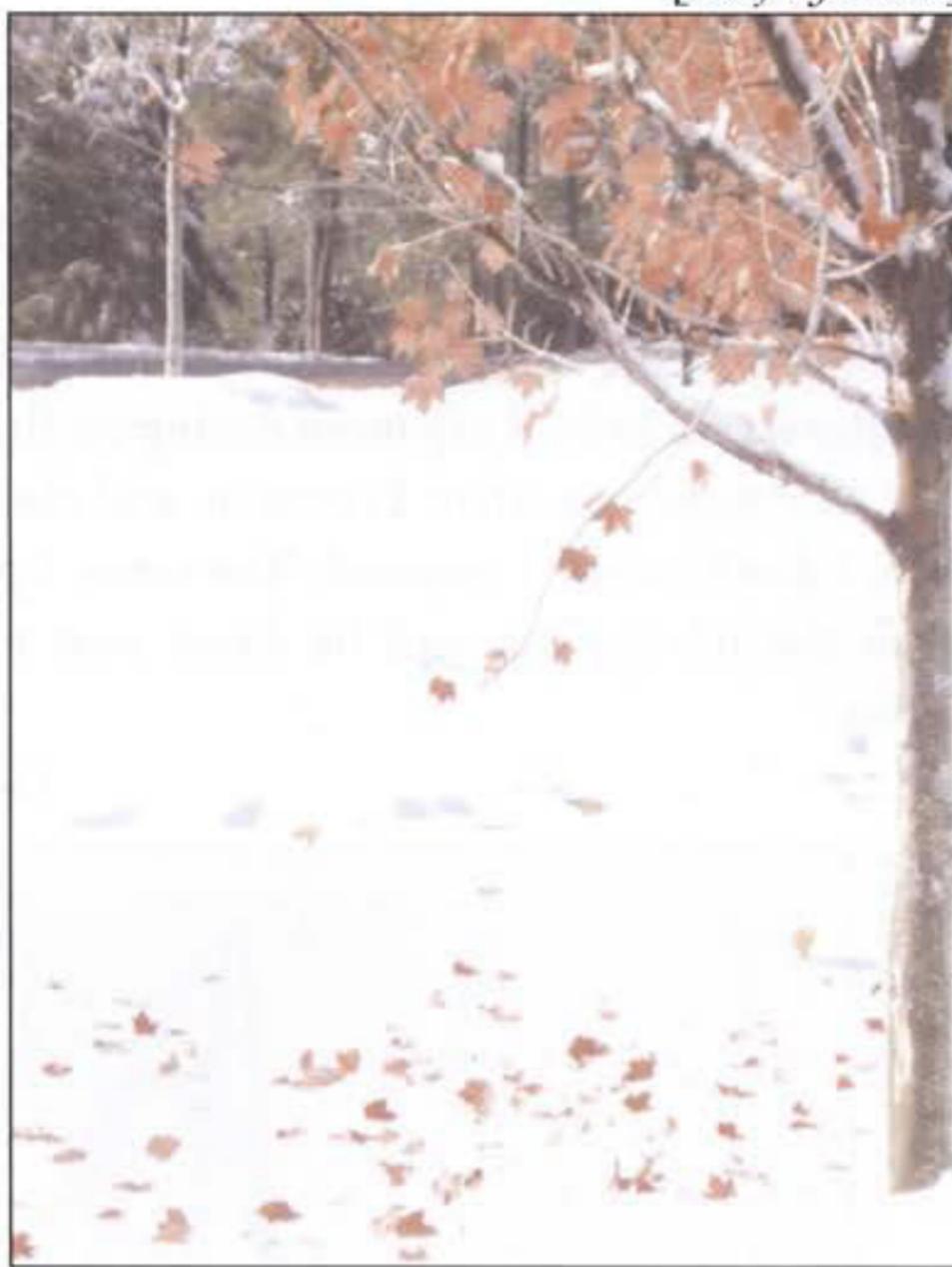
"Oh, I don't know," I respond, "the same, I guess." Then I put my leftovers in the refrigerator and lie down next to her, to watch what she's watching.

[*Lucy Hester*]

Soccer cleats



[*Emily Souleret*]



Still Life (First Snow)

Reid

Sometimes when we come to your grave
 Mom and Dad hold hands
 You were never old enough to call them that
 But I'm sure you knew it somehow

Reid,
 When we came on our way to New York City
 The cemetery was covered in snow
 And
 We couldn't find you

Everyone was laughing
 Until I tripped and fell

Reid,
 It was you
 And I should have seen it coming

Your first snowball fight
 And I'm sorry for the way we killed the mood.

[Taylor Hastings]

[*Julie Bondy*]



Sunny Day in Florence

After Reading Poems from the New Yorker

I don't know how to write poems like these
 but I played under a willow tree as a child.
 I made crowns and bracelets from the boughs
 and sold them for nickels,
 until one July it was struck by lightning and taken down.
 I love the smell of old books, like someone else's memory,
 and my Cincinnati grandmother had a water pump—
 a white one—that never worked.
 When I contemplate the feeling of Sunday
 I think of the Bible
 I was given at church in the third grade,
 drinking Coke with lunch, and the background noise
 of golf on television while I decide how to spend
 an empty afternoon. Once, maybe on a Sunday,
 I entered a museum room marked "Warning" and saw
 many pink, unborn babies, preserved and still.
 In second grade, my teacher had a baby.
 Our substitute for six weeks was from a town by Mt. St. Helens,
 so she showed us a tape and told a story
 about a man who died in the ash—
 the only man who didn't believe it would erupt,
 the only man who stayed on the mountain,
 who refused all pleas to leave
 because he would have rather perished than desert his home.

[*Lucy Hester*]

La Nouvelle-Orléans Après L'Ourage

The cathedral bells' untimely toll is awkward,
 Giving me a headache.
 It is my first time hearing it from home.
 The streets are too quiet, no longer flashing hypnotic lights
 And beckoning with its rum-soaked, flirtatious breath.
 Even the horns of men who made cocktails out of rhythm
 And drugs now lay rusted on my doorstep,
 Their notes a mere gargle.

What happened to the Creole and Cajun aromas
 From mawmaw's kitchen, that loved to shake their hips
 And wave their handkerchiefs in the wind?
 And the hail of Greek gods that drank from the goblet
 Of lust, and threw coins onto the heads of babies?
 And the fairy dust-like potions from voodoo priest
 That kept us all in an unsatiated worship of black and gold?

The crows are grey now, and caw in a listless perch
 On great oaks that gasp to retell Noah's tale.
 The grass once green and fat with greed in the humid air
 Now brittle, and petrified by the moment's sudden enrapture.
 But there beneath lies mudbugs and slave bones,
 And the syncopated music of motherlands
 Beating their congos and timbales, massaging the earth
 With their festive feet and ash-crossed foreheads.
 Tunneling their way in song to the surface.

Tarnished beaded medallions hang from the wires above,
 Grasping back at the past, trying to restore its antique luster.
 And the stench of soiled pants and molded treasures attract flies
 That feed on the bland gumbo of a decaying culture.

Today my forbidden lover has drunk Juliet's liquor,
 Lying pale and breathless as we mourn her death.
 But tomorrow we will place cayenne on her lips
 And she will awaken refreshed, hungry, and ready to dance.

[*Trenise Robinson*]

Observed From Abroad

and did those feet in ancient time
walk upon Nauvoo's meadows green?
and did that voice in ringing tone
wind through the crooked rows of maize?

and out of that rich black earth
rise the plain folk,
how rigid straight they stand!
against the wind that whips across the land.

mired in the rich black earth,
the plain folk
with blue-gray eyes and apple pies,
do their whites reflect
the fatherly tolerance of the east?
do the sharp boston observations dissipate
into the black western horizon?
or do the plain folk know and not care to say

I have taken tea on a sarcophagus
and in exile watched the sun set on the west.
I have seen those on the brink of the grave
rise from the moist earth, lean with age,
to feast on stillborn children,
the moon gleaming in their eyes
and empty skin clinging to their bones.

dollars floating on the sea,
once satiated, sink.
the unemployed in a line
sagging with the weight pounds gain,
these plain folk,
lost as the wind whistling through cornrows
and steel mills empty as toothless smiles,
lemmings queuing to eat what they have not planted.

cattle stare into the horizon,
silently chewing their cud.

bring me my arrows of desire!
that demand may birth satiety,
and chariots may once more draw horses.
but the voice whispers in the corn,
"I shall uncover your nakedness
and you shall die in a strange land,
your children, born into the debts
crossed out in skulls strewn over every hill and valley"

I have seen the stout men in rows
of helmets and uniform
springing from the black earth,
bored, and waiting for the ecstatic monsoon season
of fire and technology.

I have seen the stout men flee our shores,
the alabaster fragments of our cities,
and the fallow meadows of our middle kingdom.
and will heaven's mandate come home to us,
if we bring the covenant
out of our camp, to the fields of war,
while golden tumors grow
in the lazy, plain folk?

fragments glimmering in the western sky,
only bitter reminders of the sun
that has set, not yet there.
I have seen the white
separating the letters of our law.
will our heroic blue-grays rest before
they carve the quarters of Jerusalem
out of our green and pleasant land?

[*Jared Campbell*]

Great-Great Grandmother Lucy Wynns

When I slipped on my shoe and felt something that was not supposed to be there—the needle of a tack, tunneling into my biggest toe—I thought Dr. Jacobs when he had diagnosed me. “Be careful you don’t hurt yourself, because your scrapes won’t heal themselves well.” I remembered this and disregarded it as I pulled the little gold-colored tack out of its puncture hole and put my foot back in my shoe. Now, remembering my amputated toe, and foot, and calf, and—worst of all—my thigh, I wish I had minded those words. The little tack is holding my grocery list to a bulletin board, and I am fading, fading...

[Lucy Hester]

Iglesia de
San Juan de Los Reyes,
Toledo, Spain



[Shauna Haverkamp]

Hotel Alabama

It's 4 a.m. I wake up. I cry. I take three Advil and rub my face. The clock reads 4:10. There is no need to get up.

4:53. The crack on the ceiling seems to grow as I watch it. I am amazed by its perseverance. It etches its way above me while I sleep. The next time I see it, something small has developed into a pattern created by no understandable motivation. I wouldn't have chosen this place to begin something. When you're here, you're here for good.

7:26. I wake up again. Mozart is playing. It must still be on from last night. I like to listen to classical music when I sleep. I didn't notice it earlier. It has become part of the regular background noises, in addition to the couple above me trying to pulverize their bed each night and the occasional small explosions from the crystal meth lab down the hall. I've been here for over twenty years, and nothing much has changed. In the past

year, I have regularly made attempts at escape, but there's always something or someone in my way. Last week, the landlady was just walking in the door, with her stiletto-heeled boots and fur coat, while I was on my way out. Of course I hadn't paid my rent for the month, so I was stuck in a tough spot. With my bags in my hand and a hat on my head I didn't look like I was walking to the corner to grab the morning paper.

"John, where the *hell* do you think you're going?"

"Down to the corner, Ms. Leceer."

"Why do I doubt that? Get your ass back into your apartment."

She lifted a heel towards me.

"Yes ma'am."

Air



[Mai-Anh Tran]

8:15. That wasn't the first time she had caught me trying to leave. I once traded three vinyls for an electrician's suit and tried to walk out the back door. It was a decent disguise, and if it wasn't for my slip-up, I'm sure I would have made it.

"Goodbye, Ms. Leceer."

She put out her cigarette.

"Going somewhere, John?"

I stopped in my tracks.

I had forgotten that the electrician had a mustache. Now I keep a fake one handy, just in case.

8:32. I eat some stale wheat flakes.

9:00. I place another mark on the wall with my black crayon. This is the 50th mark. It signifies my last attempt and the day I will finally make it out of this place.

10:45. I make sure everything is going as planned. I walk the hall of my floor, checking off each potential snare as I pass the rooms. Morgan Kinney in 304 and the herd of stray cats that follow her have already left for the park. The cats like to follow me too. They make a lot of noise. Kyle Harding in 313 hasn't been seen around in over a week. I owe him at least 50 bucks for toilet paper, cereal and milk. Ms. Leceer at the end of the hall in 330 is gone for the night to the country with some new hotshot she met at a bar. Everything is unusually quiet. This sets me on edge.

11:37. I'm all packed and ready. I trash the remaining stuff in my room in the hopes that someone might be fooled into thinking I was kidnapped. I peek into the hall. No one is in sight. I make a dash for the stairs. One flight, two flights, ground floor. I go out the back door. No Ms. Leceer smoking a cigarette. No cats following me. I don't turn around again until I'm two blocks away.

12:13 p.m. A bum stops me.

"Got any change for a brother?"

"Umm."

I had saved over 300 dollars this year. All of it was for my escape.
"Here."

I give him a dollar. I feel as if I should share my happiness.

1:40. I arrive at the Holiday Inn, my final destination. I check into a room on the third floor. I'm comfortable with that. I've never had a television before, and this one even gets HBO. There is no crack on the ceiling, and there are no black marks on the walls. I hear no small explosions, nor do I hear any banging above me. I feel alone for the first time in a long time.

5:30. I am mesmerized by the television. It has become a black hole for me and I am trapped in its seductive dance of gravity. I twirl and spin into it. I begin to feel like Dorothy, flying away to another world, but I have no Toto.

10:34. I stand up. I feel sick and deposit my dinner in the toilet. The room is spinning, and the sheer volume of maroon and hunter green makes my stomach roll over. I lie back on the bed and try to steady myself by looking only at the white ceiling. I begin to feel better, and I just want to sleep now. I reach over to the nightstand to turn on the Mozart. There is no Mozart here. There are no vinyls either. I am frustrated and pull the covers over my head. The odd, foam-like blanket rubs along my skin. Chills of repulsion send goosebumps down my spine. I jump out of bed and stare in awe at the light pink-colored blanket. I question the sanity of the person who developed the device. I rip it off the bed and throw it into a corner. I look around at the rest of the room. I decide that the furniture pieces have no souls. They aren't individuals. They are mindless and unaware of the tired construction of their being. They lack even an ounce of character. They are all the same. I continue to be repulsed.

10:45. I call room service.

"Room service, how may I help you?"

"I'd really like some cereal and milk, please."

"Yes sir, what kind would you like?"

"Cheerios and 2% milk."

"We'll be there in five minutes, thank you."

"We?"

He had already hung up.

12:50 a.m. I am still not asleep. I yearn for violins, cellos, flutes and the percussion accompaniment from above. I want to watch my crack grow, and I want to tell him that there's no better place than home. This has been no holiday.

It's 4 a.m. I have finally finished putting my apartment back into order. The black marks have been erased from the wall, except for the last one. It signifies my first success at remaining in this place. I hear a cat's meow, heavy feet shuffling down the hallway, the clip of stilettos against the linoleum. Mozart is on, and trumpets sound my climbing into bed. I look at the ceiling and am startled at the progress the little crack has made. In one night he has managed to creep across the width of the room. Looks like I have a roommate. I wonder how he knew that this was a good place to start. The clock reads 4:24. I take three Advil and rub my face.

[*Jamie Drinan*]



[*Shauna Haverkamp*]

Oxford Drizzle

two turns spinning in the dryer,
 and still damp, dank, and clinging to the skin.
 here, my lust has mouldered into chinese water torture.
 a dripping faucet in the bathroom,
 rings of teastain on my desk
 accompany the evening entertainment.
 checking Cardinals scores,
 sent overseas by a dot com,
 but they don't mean anything over here.
 and without a Boston degree to stand as the middle term
 my Mississippi mind watches blue images pass under the bridge,
 with my father's time weighing me down.
 If I leap, will I find
 flat, open fields at home,
 or Aquinas schoolgirls,
 charming in their cold rationality?

[Jared Campbell]

Bath Abbey

[Kerry Grace]



Quiet now
my petite Alaskan princess
Let us embrace!

tears and tears and tears
now years—
the time has come
for the undoing of
those subtler things
which have ruined you

(I apologize for that midnight
I should not have tried to kiss you)

your stories have
turned to gray and ash rubbed upon skin
but I am listening

Let us embrace!
as friends
Forevermore

[*Josh Davis*]

The Wheelchair

I sort of wake up and they're all saying stuff like *Matt, how are you feeling or you really had us scared for a while there man*, you know, the usual bullshit from the movie they probably saw last night. Almost everybody's here. Jeff, Dan, Chuck, Alex, my mother, my little brother, Aunt Susan, her husband.

When my little brother asks me if I can remember how it felt, Aunt Susan squeezes his shoulder hard. He winces and shuts up. Everyone else is smiling at me like the girl who sleeps at your apartment but won't tell you she's been fucking one of your friends for the past week.

The scene is finally starting to sink in. But it's not the cold potatoes and spinach on the plastic tray and the nurse who wipes my ass twice a day. I mean, I can literally feel it inside of me, sucking me deeper into the bed until I can barely see over the metal railing at the far end. It's OK; these days I like being numb.

Laura visits me at night. I don't know how she gets by the security guard and the doctors, but she does. She gets in on the right side of the bed because she likes to lie on her left side. That way, if I fall asleep and start to snore, she can tickle my stomach until I wake up. Then she kisses my cheek. I laugh when I see she's wearing my Grateful Dead T-shirt like she used to do. It's so big on her that she doesn't have to put on any shorts.

I ask her why she doesn't come visit at normal times like everyone else. She smiles and rubs her face against my neck. I don't think she ever answers my questions.

Instead, we talk about stuff from a couple years ago, when we first met. Laura keeps reminding me about this one time after we graduated high school. We're at a party at Jackson Smith's beach house in Westport, and somehow we end up sitting together by the water after everybody else falls asleep or passes out.

Nobody notices as I hurry through the gate, past the lighthouse, and onto the beach. We stop when we get about three feet from the water. It's low tide and the air smells like salt and shit. We lay back and look out across Long Island Sound.

Aside from the smell, this beach really is beautiful. A string of piled

rocks forms a black line that looks like it stretches out for miles. Some boulders poke their heads out of the water a few yards away. For a second I want to swim out to one of them. The rippling of each wave makes a silver streak that lasts for a second under the moonlight. Even though there's a full moon, the stars shine brighter than I've ever seen in the suburbs. Laura pulls on my arm.

"Do you believe in God, Matt?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Well, whenever I sit on the beach at night and all I can see are the stars and the water, I feel like I'm inside a huge dome, like I'm in one of those little snow globes that you shake and all the plastic snow falls on the town. The stars are like the snowflakes, except they don't move. Then I start to wonder what's behind those stars. I can almost see a giant hand holding the globe, and a pair of eyes looking down, trying to figure out what's going on inside."

"That's scary. What if it wanted to shake the globe? We'd be screwed."

"Yeah, but when I look at the stars, I feel the opposite. It's almost like the hand is keeping us steady, just looking at what it's holding and wishing everything could stay just like it is now."

While she's talking, she slips her hand into mine. Her fingers are so small but they lock in perfectly. Her skin is hot and sandy and I can feel her pulse. We look up at the sky for a while, not saying anything.

Her eyes reflect the moonlight hitting the waves. I'm swimming in them. But I don't have too much time to enjoy it because she's kissing my lips and neck, running her hands through my hair. Her mouth tastes like cigarettes and vodka. I look up at the stars again for a second and breathe in the salty air that suddenly smells incredible.

Sometimes I tell my mother about our conversations and she doesn't believe me. She says that Laura's at school, that she's four hundred miles away, how could she be here, but I think my mother's full of shit.

[*Chris Vola*]

Finality



[Matthew Lonquest]



Wintery Mix

[Shauna Havercamp]

La Fille blonde

Si je ne peux pas voir votre copain,
Même si vous êtes frappée par la musique,
Je sais ce que votre regard implique :
Ce n'est pas facile d'oublier Demain.

La danse, le taxi, la chambre et le bain
Que vos yeux et votre sourire indiquent
Toutes ces choses sont les rêves d'un fils unique,
Et vous dévorez l'esprit comme le pain.

Je meure de faim quand vous restez sévère,
Et je ne peux pas échapper à cette misère
Bien que vous me touchez pour un moment,

Bien que la nuit pardonne la jeunesse.
Dans nos cœurs infidèles c'est évident
Q'un baiser mouillé n'est pas une promesse.

[Chris Vola]

A Love Affair

Consider *Interview with the Vampire*.

Do you think Christian Slater was miffed, I mean, do you think Christian Slater was *really ticked off* when he first learned that he would be playing second fiddle to the likes of Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise?

I would have been.

Surely he remembered the days when he was the stud and the star, old Brad nothing more than an unshaven pothead languishing on the set of *True Romance* while our hero cruised around with Patricia Arquette in a snazzy Hawaiian shirt.

So yes, perhaps he was a bit angry at the beginning, but I like to think that shortly after the movie started to take shape, a wave of relief o'ertook the Interviewer when he, ever the consummate artist, realized that he had landed the only respectable role that an otherwise dreadful film had to offer.

Some of you disagree. Some of you, still reeling from the false dazzle of Brad Pitt's smooth way of walking or Tom Cruise's toothy grin, operate under the misconception that Christian Slater ought to suffer under comparison. But some of you deluded souls also truly believe that Keanu Reeves is a good actor, or, although you exist in a time when Steve Buscemi and Jeremy Irons still walk the earth, would have the audacity to vote (like my senior class did) for Adam Sandler, Jim Carrey and Ashton Kutcher as the best kind of talent Hollywood has to offer.

To each his own.

Do you know what I have been doing for the past week and a half? Do you know what I have been *doing*, I ask you, as the last of my summer vacation dissolves in this oppressive ninety-degree weather? I will tell you. I have been renting Christian Slater movies, watching Christian Slater movies and now, Lord help me, writing about renting and watching Christian Slater movies.

You think less of me already, but allow me to explain.

Where do I begin?

First you have to understand that, at its base, this is nothing new. Perhaps you've done it too, once or twice at slumber parties, a late night marathon featuring your favorite fella and his films. Where I come from (a very small town where, obviously, there is nothing to do), it's a tradition. We've had John Cusack Night, Andrew McCarthy Night, Hugh Grant Night. Rarely anyone of my choosing, you see, but *High Fidelity* is a good movie and *St. Elmo's Fire* makes the grade, so I have no complaints. Once there was talk of a Brendan Fraser/Leonardo DiCaprio/Paul Rudd extravaganza, permissible only because Rudd was in *Romeo + Juliet* with DiCaprio and Brendan Fraser co-starred with Alicia Silverstone in *Blast from the Past* who co-starred with Rudd in *Clueless* (it's all connected, we like to say, entwining our fingers theatrically), but it never came to pass. This combination would have required at least four movies and, let's be honest, with the possible exception of Andrew McCarthy Night, I don't think we've ever made it through three. What ambitions we have, combing the aisles at the video store, arriving at Chrissy's house with five, six, seven tapes, only to fall asleep after we fast-forward our way through most of *Little Women*, stopping briefly for the Christian Bale (not to be confused with Slater) highlights.

So it's been done before, but never, I profess, never has anyone indulged a fleeting passion in quite the same way that I have indulged these past few days. Never has anyone embarked, as I have embarked, alone and unhindered, down this decadent path of sloth and idleness. Thirteen films! Can you comprehend it? Thirteen films: approximately 32.5 hours of my life, 1.333 spins on the axis (Are you appalled? Are you disgusted?) devoted to my own personal Adonis.

St. Peter's Basilica



[Katie Mulroy]

Of course I had heard of Christian Slater. It's a distinctive name, a name that hovers in the part of your brain concerning famous people, but until last week I had little idea of who he was or what he had accomplished.

Enter *Untamed Heart*.

I'm not gonna lie to you. Sometimes, at night, when I'm alone with a box of cookies and a glass of iced tea, I'm not above watching the Women's Entertainment Channel. There's no shame in it. That station has a lot to offer in the way of obscure romantic films with flawed plots and excessive melodrama. So that's where you would have found me on August 10th, 2 a.m., sprawled on the recliner with crumbs inching down my oversized T-shirt, gazing on in dreamy wonderment at the scenes unfolding before my bloodshot eyes.

And it was great, man. Just great. Marisa Tomei in her cute little waitress uniform. Rosie Perez with her accent. Christian Slater. Above all, Christian Slater. His smile, his eyebrows, his slightly receding hairline, his voice saying things like, "Would you like to listen to my records Caroline? ...Caroline." But you wouldn't have liked it. Don't go out and rent it, or if you do, don't say I didn't warn you. "She said it was great," you'll rationalize as you watch it with your friends in growing disbelief. It was great. But it was just one of those things. I doubt you'd ever understand.

That was how it started. I was smitten. My town has a pharmacy with a basement video store where you can still rent five movies for five days for five dollars. I took it by storm. I cleaned it out. Behold the roster, in no particular order: *Heathers*, *Bed of Roses*, *Pump Up the Volume*, *Very Bad Things*, *True Romance*, *Name of the Rose*, *Interview with the Vampire*, *Legend of Billie Jean*, *Kuffs*, *Mobsters*, *Jimmy Hollywood*, *Murder in the First*.

My favorite? Impossible to choose. *Kuffs* made me laugh. A lot. In *Very Bad Things* he was a very bad guy. I'm glad I caught *Heathers* and *Pump Up the Volume*, two movies full of the characteristic eighties adolescent angst, while I was still at an age to appreciate them. And as for *Name of the Rose*, I have three words for those of you who think that a movie set in a monastery would be the least likely to have an explicit sex scene.

Not. The. Case.

Yes, I have watched them all. And yes, he played a major role in every last one of them. So what happens now, after the carnage? After the dozen empty cassette boxes lie strewn around me like corpses?

The phone rings.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's Chrissy."

Chrissy: from whom I've heard nothing in a week or two. Where was she during this madness? See what happens, oh friend of friends, when you go gallivanting off and leave me to my own devices?

"Do you know what I've been doing?" I ask her lazily. "Do you know what I've been doing?"

"What?"

I tell her.

There is a small gasp at the other end of the line. Chrissy knows when she is in the presence of genius.

"What a great idea." She is in awe. "What a *great* idea."

We observe a moment of reverent silence.

"Did you see that one where he's a skateboarder who goes up against the Vietnamese Mafia?"

"No," I say, intrigued.

"Yeah, well, it's a pretty dumb movie. But, y'know," she chuckles, "he *skateboards* in it."

Can you imagine? A young, lithe Christian Slater. Muscles taut. The sun. The sweat. He maneuvers and meanders as the board becomes a magic carpet beneath his sneakered feet. I can definitely see the potential here.

"I'll look into it."

A pause.

"So," she starts, "you wanna go get food or something?"

"Fifteen minutes?"

"Okay."

The spell is broken. I sit on my deck and wait for her, eating mint ice cream out of a glass bowl as the sun streaks purple behind the Pennsylvania hills. I think about him, his beauty. Was there ever anyone so versatile? Ever anyone so equally capable of playing the good guy and the psycho, the scumbag and the intellectual? A small sadness creeps up my spine as reality repossesses me. I will never do this again, I decide. No more crazed frenzies, no more devouring. For with each new scroll of the credits, it becomes less and less likely that one fine day I will stumble upon a Christian Slater surprise at Blockbuster. Less and less likely that I will ever again witness his skittish, shirtless dance in some hitherto undiscovered comedy or action flick. There are few that remain. Just the bottom of the Christian Slater barrel, if you get my meaning.

What does all this say about me? What does it say about the degeneracy of America? Am I really as trivial as I sound? What is this superficiality, this love of the fictional character? Are people like me the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it?

Naaah, I say, with a wave of the hand. Glory be to God for motion pictures, for men so angelic that we are momentarily astonished.

[*Rosanna Nunan*]

I May Have A Problem But I'm Okay With That

does the girl
 two addicts behind me in line know
 that as I seem
 to unlace the virtues of
 latte against those of cappuccino
 I am in fact thinking that some of us
 will really never find love
 and she's probably one of them?

I feel like she has to know.

At any rate I wonder what smolders
 in the foam of an Ideal
 "Venti Skim Cinnamon Latte, Please"
 that always brings butcher-boy Cupid to heel — I can't
 endure the wispy grinning voice of the milk-steamer
 without wanting to unravel Cleopatra's sarong,
 just for the sweet reweaving.

I have no envy
 for those estranged from addiction — my trysts
 with steam and stimulant
 may leave my nerves
 with their bedclothes disheveled, but I'll never be unfaithful. One must
 keep lifting one's lips for the dream
 of the sugar and sting enfolded brightly. Not everybody
 knows this.

The girl behind
 rearranges her stare
 though I think she ought to tremble
 when she hears,
 "We are all out of the sugar-free hazelnut syrup today."

[Meg Hurtado]

Beijing

It is hot, and humid. To walk is to claw your way along, to fight against the pulsing currents of relentless heat and the little voice that wants you to go to your home not home yes home, to sleep the torpid day away in the comfort of a hard mattress and a flimsy pillow, of two thin sheets and the privileged iceberg of your room's air conditioning, dreaming of frosty winter nights filled with glistening snow.

But the sky is an insolent blue unflecked with white, pristine in the background of the pounding sun, the only glistening you can see is the sweat shining on everyone's faces and all around you there is life, whirling you away in an eddy of frenzied activity.

So you stay. And you watch.

Your mind whirls with the impossibility of the energy being expended everywhere you look. Provincial is what it's not. Cell phones bicycles taxis lights and restaurants and trendy shops. The only reason your heartbeat is audible is because of that languid heat, and you wonder why the crowds around you are even capable of movement. Why's that? Are you too spoiled, too frail, too broken by your luxuries, too dare I say Westernized, too *lao wai lai le!*, too this or that or the other? Or is it something simpler, more biological, *maybe I just don't like the heat*, is that why you wonder why even the dust swirling around your feet is more alive than you feel?

By rights that irreverent dust should be baked into solid ground by the oppressive temperature, resting dutifully under the hundreds of bicycles that line the streets, demurely offering itself to the leaden pattern of your steps. It shouldn't be dancing around you and everything you see, caking your pants shoes socks if you have them with the stubborn residue of its joy, on no account should something as simple as *dust, man, dust* be so vital, so omnipresent, so perversity of the inanimate, so making you cough like a cigarette-stoked crack furnace living on the streets.

That was probably politically incorrect.

It's absurd, the way something simple like dust or heat spirits you off into poetic excess here. Is it here, or is it you, or is it something else that you haven't figured out yet? Maybe you're overanalyzing or maybe not enough--and anyway, what does it matter? Aren't your thoughts your own, or have you been in school so long they've claimed even that, your ability to have a thought without justification, an opinion without argument?

It's something other than conscious thought that leads you to follow the rest of your flock of temporary expatriates, your feet mechanically echoing theirs down this street and past the next, and comprehending their conversation is out of the question. They're speaking in English, but it doesn't matter, the knot of voices is just as hard to unravel as its Mandarin analogues surrounding the group on all sides—you don't understand them because right now, right at this moment, you're sick of language of any breed, of words that continually cloud their subjects, doing nothing but adding ten pounds and stepping back, hoping that you're proud of them. Even the ostensibly familiar is foreign to you, and you'd give an arm, a leg, whatever it takes, *anything* to hear or see something that even hints at the sort of connections you made when you were too young to put words to them, *something* that would remind you of home, or even that you had a home or even that the feeling of home had ever existed in your mind.

You've all been out too long, seeing this and eating there and buying that, and before you know it the skies have darkened. No, it's not quite night yet; it's time for the daily downpour and you all have anywhere from two to five minutes fewer than you think you do to get under cover damn quick before the heavens open up and drown the world.

Run.

It's too late, of course. It almost always is, anyway, but your group continues the mad dash for several minutes before resigning themselves to their drenched and muddy fate—so that's what the dust's master plan has been all along, sneaky bastard.

They're so regular you probably *could* set your watch to them, always right on the cusp between day and night, although there are the occasional tardies that dawdle and only stroll up when you're safely inside watching the light show through the gigantic window on the fifth floor of your dorm/hotel. Nothing too shabby, either, no matter when it is that they come; they always go all out, torrential affairs of wind and water and lightning and booming, crashing thunder shaking your world the hell up. It's amazing to watch; slightly less or more amazing to be in, depending on just how irritated you are by soaking wet clothes, mostly a matter of whether or not you've been caught out several times too many and actually have anything dry to change into when you slide back into the safety of your room (usually about ten seconds before the storms abruptly turn their backs and saunter away, whistling innocently. This is the way it always happens; it's the rule). Either way, you've never felt so alive.

You vaguely figure that Beijing is too far north (and the storms are too short) to really call this daily/nightly event the monsoon, but you're not sure. Just to be on the safe side, you label it a regional peculiarity and leave it at that. Then you *take off those wet clothes before you get pneumonia!* because you're a good kid *at heart anyway* even if your parents aren't there, wring them out and beat your pants against the wall in the hopes that at least some of that omnipresent dust/mud will be scared off. The less laundry you actually need to do, the better. Like the process of getting internet in your room, doing laundry here is a mystic rite that requires various bureaucratic minutiae, three dead chickens and worst of all, walking between buildings.

Just when you've decided to be a proper little student and sit down to do your homework in your pajamas, you get the call.

You've never changed clothes so many times a day in your life and technically you don't have to, it's not like they'll notice or care whether you go or what you wear, pajamas or no, but it's not like this particular group is going to get together and go clubbing again once you all return and remember that there are other people in your respective lives that speak the same language you do. Besides, you've only been inside for an hour,

and after the excitement of the storm *boom crash splash whoosh pow!* like *old-school Batman effects* it seems only natural (well, actually, just lying around after that is a tremendous letdown). Even if you don't go out, you're likely to spend time in friends' rooms, talking playing cards watching TV teasing the girl that heard Yao Ming was in town and wants to go clubbing *maybe we'll see Yao! Oh yeah great idea of course we'll just randomly run into him at the cheap club, yup, that makes perfect sense.*

Going out to the clubs means Wu Dao Kou, screw the fancier areas. The exchange is overwhelmingly in your favor, but shimmied-up packed seas of people with cover fees, expensive alcohol and employees that sneer and peremptorily command you not to use the chair just to tie your *shoe, man, what is your problem?* aren't really all that appealing. Especially not when the alternative is a cozy club/bar that you've all practically owned since the second weekend, a place with no cover fee, nearly free shots of watered-down vodka and tequila and, when it gets late enough, a sidewalk lined with taxis and vendors of street meat (the edible *well mostly* kind, not the human kind); if you're all feeling fancy, you might migrate during the night to the slightly less sketchy joint almost next door.

But almost every night starts here. You all like the cheap little hole in the wall (or floor, as it may be; basement clubs save space) bartenders and patrons who'll chat with you, treat you like family *okay, maybe a particularly dysfunctional family, but isn't that the norm these days?* and drunkenly grope you (or rather, your friends; it's particularly amusing because they're guys, and feel intensely betrayed). It's worth the occasional fleshy slutty amateur English teacher that comes around every night because she had her eye on one of you and none of you have found the right, the absolutely *perfect oh man I can't wait to see her face* moment to let her know that said one has since taken up with a particularly long-legged specimen-member of the bevy of Korean girls. It's not very nice and in a way you feel sort of bad for her but *holy shit is it worth it* when he and the Korean finally come to the club with you several weekends later. You feel a little of your humanity draining away as you ponder whether to pat her on the back and say "next time, crazy stalker woman" or just surrender to your meaner impulses and point and laugh.

But all that's hindsight for the future at this point; right now you're trying to figure out who's going in which cab and if the girls that claim they wanted to go and will complain and complain if you leave them behind or if they think you were thinking about leaving them behind will actually show up this time. It's not far; the ride's almost always just ten kuai (unless you run across a driver who claims he has no idea where that part of the city is *yeah right damn money-gouger*), so it really doesn't matter that much whether you grab a 1.20 cab or a 1.60 one, but damn it if you don't try for the cheaper option anyway.

As you climb inside, you can't help but notice that in the what, maybe two or three hours since the deluge the streets are already trying to pretend that nothing happened *storm, what storm? Hahaha there isn't a puddle in sight, or won't be soon if we have anything to say about it*. At least that insouciant dust is laid low for now, slowly reconstituting itself from the patches of mud here and there.

Choose from any number of different incredibly inappropriate and/or random conversations that you have on the way there, enabled not so much by the fact that the cab driver doesn't speak English as by the fact that you're all more or less giddily hyperactive with the anticipation of actually *doing something*. Your incoherent dialogues here, foreshadowing their drunken descendants, will, like their spiraling children, always be hilarious to you, though none of them will make much sense afterwards, or seem interesting in the slightest to anyone you ramble on about it to secondhand—and, sometimes, not even to you. Ah, the burdens you must bear.

Before you quite manage to come to your senses, there's the bridge/overpass/you've never paid enough attention, which is another way of saying, "you're there." You've come to party, but for the 8-second walk from the cab to the club, watch your pockets and steel your heart because the beggars have come out, and they scent bloooood. Foreign blood, which as everyone knows is green and crinkly, although here the money looks like rainbow spit and...well, okay, it's still crinkly. And they want it, oh yes they do.

A beggar comes up to you.

> ignore beggar

The beggar comes closer.

> inch away

Even closer.

> say "mei you"

The beggar backs away mournfully. You are sad, but not that sad.

A flower kid is approaching.

> inventory

You are carrying:

-stylin' clubwear (which is to say, your normal clothes. *Oh come on, didn't you know, everything's in when you're from not-here or is it that you just don't care?*)

-shoes

-10 kuai in one pocket (cab fare for the way back)

-100 kuai in the other pocket (to blow on cheap shots for everyone)

> ignore flower kid

The flower kid comes up to you and makes big innocent possibly drug-induced flower-kiddy eyes at you.

> back away

You bump into the beggar. The beggar asks you for money.

> say "mei you"

The susceptible girl in your group (there's always at least one) breaks down and gives the beggar some money.

> grab susceptible girl, dive into sanctuary of club_

You have escaped.

For now, of course. Although in this case it isn't quite that exciting; these street beggars really aren't as bad as the hawkers that haunt touristy places. Dealing with those means playing emperor penguin and gathering into a tight huddle even if you don't have anything to talk about, backs to the world, except instead of shivering with cold, you're all dying from the heat, but to move is to break the line and next thing you know someone will have accidentally made eye contact with one of them

and then none of the bu yaos in the world can save you because you are all doomed.

The ones here usually back off fairly quickly, though; it's a bar street in an area where foreign students like to come out and play, so by the end of the night they'll have taken in enough from drunken donations to buy themselves another false leg. Besides, any minute now, another crowd of scandalously-dressed *even by our standards, but most of the girls here pull it off better* clubbers will stroll on by, much more interested in showing off their questionable wealth. These beggars won't starve, not tonight, at least.

They're not what you came here for anyway.

There's no time for this sort of reflection after you enter the door. The place isn't fancy, but that hasn't stopped it from being your group's personal weekend resort. Midway through your stay, you miss a weekend for a group trip that's taken you out of town (*oh, but that's an entirely different story, oh man, I gotta tell you about the time we and the hotel and the*), and the Friday after you return you notice they've managed to spiff the place up a bit, and though you doubt they managed it just from your group's entirely too generous patronage, it's hard not to feel at least a little bit smug—or ashamed, depending on how you feel about it. Either way, they have a little lounge area with nicer chairs and fancier lights and some sort of chain wall affair *yeah I don't get it either*, and that's pretty cool, you guess, though really you just don't care enough to really have an opinion as long as the bar and dance floor stay right where they should be.

Both before and after the change, though, the pattern of the night remains the same, and afterwards all the nights will melt together into a haphazardly spliced-together memory of lights in the dark and vivid blurs of motion and broken bits of conversations pieced together in any way that makes possible sense. They may or may not have all come from the same conversation with the same person, but your hindsight sure as hell doesn't know any better. Each separate night is was sometimes like the same one anyway.

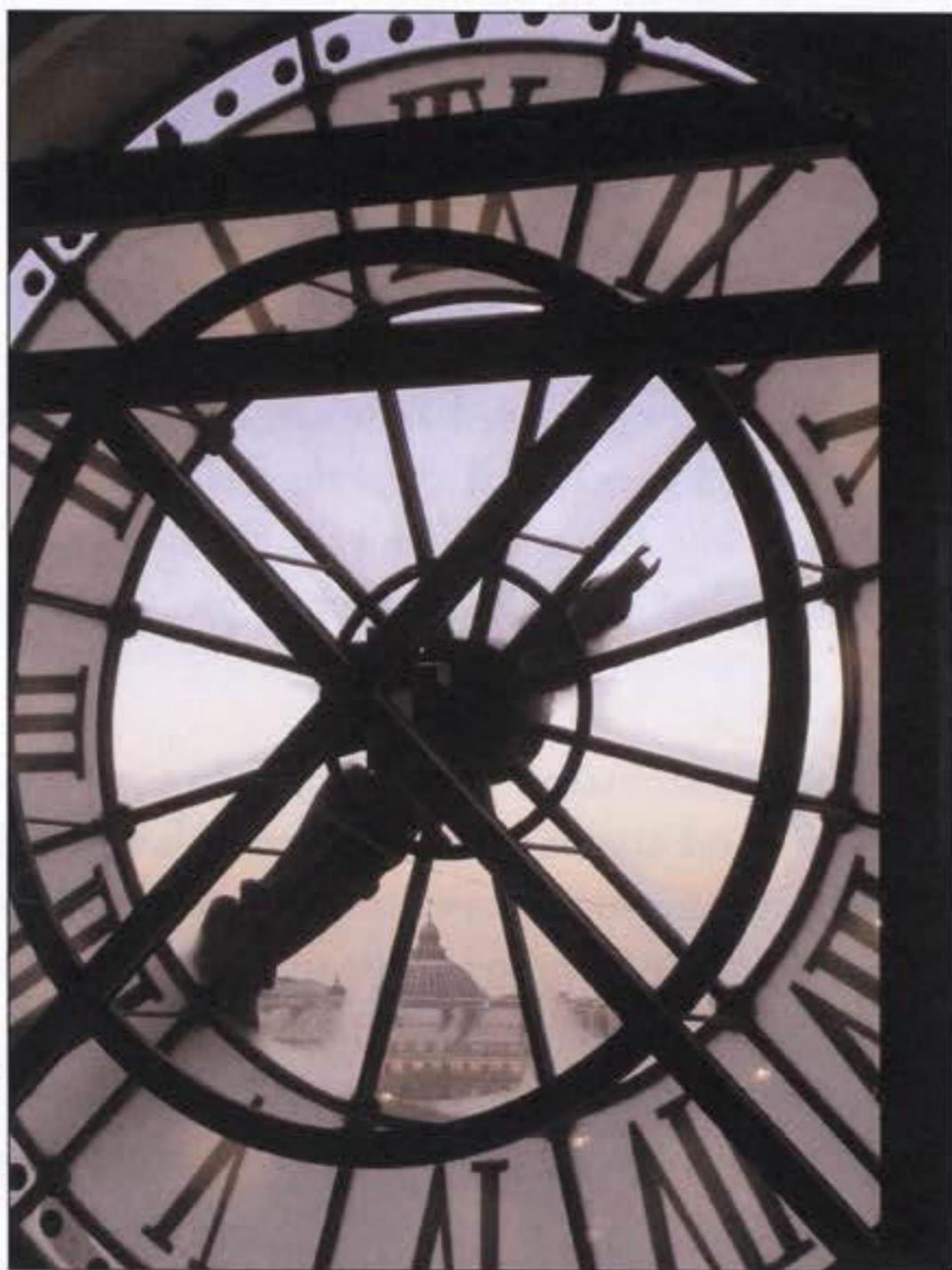
Lights.

Music.

Dancing.

People gyrating mostly-rhythmically in wild approximations of patterns, some drunk on various forms of alcohol, some drunk on energy and life. They look like demented dervishes without the body control. You'd laugh if you weren't right in the middle of them, letting the music move you in any way that feels close to right, half-self-conscious half-fuck-the-world.

[Julie Bondy]



Le Musée d'Orsay

Time passes, or you assume it does between dancing and talking and *what else oh yeah* breathing.

Dawn.

The problem with underground clubs is that the illusion of neverending time really is very effective. That and the sun's a tricky little bitch; you could swear that the last time you went up into the pollution-and-star-hazed night was only a few minutes ago, and there's gotta be some reason for the shy glow that greets you now from the horizon when you emerge from the pit of music and people. It's like walking through a baby cloud as you hail one of the crowd of taxis that's been lining the streets *jeez, do these people ever sleep all night long, as far as you can tell.*

Not every night ends this late, and it's a good thing, you think, as you stagger up the multiple flights of stairs to your room *what kind of place turns off its elevators at two in the morning?*, cursing those lucky bastards who get to room on the first or second floors. The adrenaline rush has mostly burned off and your legs get heavier the more you climb; your room's not that high up, but damn if it doesn't feel like it.

If you're unlucky, it's the night before one of the days that you have tai ji quan outside in the morning, early enough so that you've only slept a few hours. Of course, having exerted as much energy as you have, you still feel somewhat rested *or maybe it's just the jetlag oh come on it's been like weeks it can't possibly*, though it isn't as though your brain is on enough to do anything but numbly attempt to process the instructor's commands.

It isn't until you've automated yourself back to your room, changed, picked up your things and are on your way across the drowsy campus to class that you realize it's morning in any other sense than an *oh gods what kind of time d'you call this anyway?* one. It can be foggy in the mornings, and still slightly cool *for now*, though the humidity's bac and you're already sticking to your clothes. You look down, trying not to think about it, and catch sight of the sparkling dew that adorns everything you see.

By the time you finish classes at noon, it's all gone, and the pretense of slight cool has vanished as though it never was, lost in a haze of bicycle girls and drink vendors on the horizon.

It is hot, and humid.

[*Mai-Anh Tran*]

hunting in africa

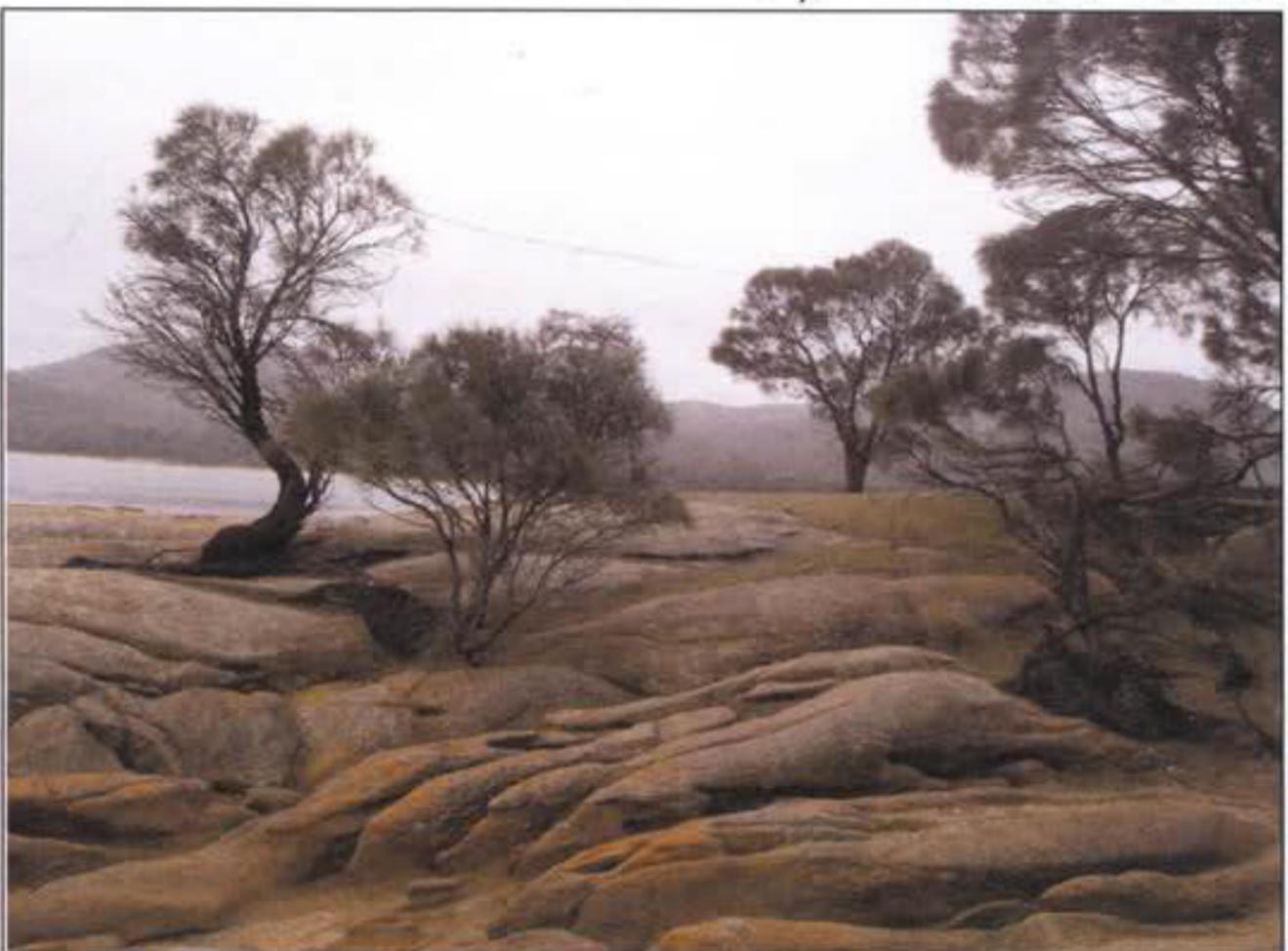
flipping fat flamingos
 sail through thick blue time
 creating eons like snowflakes
 screaming to the ground of
 maniacs and moo cows. slithering
 hippopotami eat orange-purple bread
 from heaven above. this with
 that is only one of those.
 yet neither nor is really
 illusion so familiar to death
 and life. whee!

no. not yet.
 it isnt time to be
 beginning to end. we are
 still young and born to our
 own strange stillness of seeing it all
 paused. scary as hell i know
 but i didnt say what you
 just did. get thee behind
 the flamingos before they
 flip out, you worthless thrower
 of green-round peas.

[*Jamie Drinan*]

Freyrinet - Tasmania

[*Yumi Ryōdan*]



-a lady of Elegance-

She sees the world
 as relative to the heavenly,
 the pure and true
 nature of a pirouetting soul:
 the delicate life
 of a dancer whose goal,
 above all,
 is to accentuate
 the gentle consequences
 of allowing
 Thought
 to remain unwritten

all is angels and paradise
 as she confesses
 "The world to my eyes is not necessarily so."

to wonder what she may compromise
 is to undermine the deliberate pains
 of her verse,
 is to question the desperate agony
 of the beautiful.

and on whichever elegant staircase
 she is to ascend,
 i will be there
 watching-

(only, for once,
 my presence will remain
 to her
 unknown)

[*Josh Davis*]

pro-life nonsmoker
 falls for pack a day vegan
 existentialist

[*Audrey Giampietro*]

Dangerous Creatures

He's a pretentious dick
 Sharks are dangerous creatures
 Deer are fucking dangerous
 I respect their environment
 You don't need to be cephalopods

Wet, cold,
 reminds me of
 Something I saw at beach last year
 Like the dead horseshoe crabs

Proven fact:
 yellow walls lead to depression
 Does that mean I'm going to be sponge depressed?
 Only because the TV is fucked.

If my kids end up like that
 I will feed them to the fucking sharks
 and kill myself
 I don't want to go to bed
 Or jail
 I don't want to be raped

I don't know how many guys I've been with
 In a closet with a tuba
 Clogged?

The worst part:
 I went with a friend
 Across a river, in bed
 Can I walk you home?

Wrapped around his finger
 Even though we were always together
 From afar, from afar
 You probably hate me don't you?
 Recommend me to a friend

What's my price tag?
 How much am I worth?

It's just a bar code.

the carbon chauvinist

I beat people up who choose not to bake me cookies. I did it to Tim Sandwich just the other day. I said, "Make me some goddamn cookies and leave them on the TV when my mom's at work." He said, "Fuck you, what the hell are you talking about?" So I punched him in the throat and crossed the street. I hope he choked to death on the sidewalk.

When I tell people to make me cookies, they better goddamn do it.

This morning, I told Maria to bake me cookies. Maria's parents sent her here from the Canary Islands. She says there's no money in Tenerife, unless you learn to surf off of the craggy black volcanic rocks in the swirling foaming waves that crash hard against the hellish points stabbing out of the whitish froth. Nobody can get work because they can't make any more canaries in the factories — they escape their cages and dash themselves against the white-rimmed basalt under the yellow sun. That's why they call them the Canary Islands. Her father never learned to surf. What a weirdo.

She said, "No me diga qué hacer." And I told her about how Tim Sandwich cried for eight hours and almost died last week, because he chose not to make me cookies, and that I don't even understand Spanish but she sure better get cooking and speaking normal or else I'd punch her right in the throat just like Tim Sandwich.

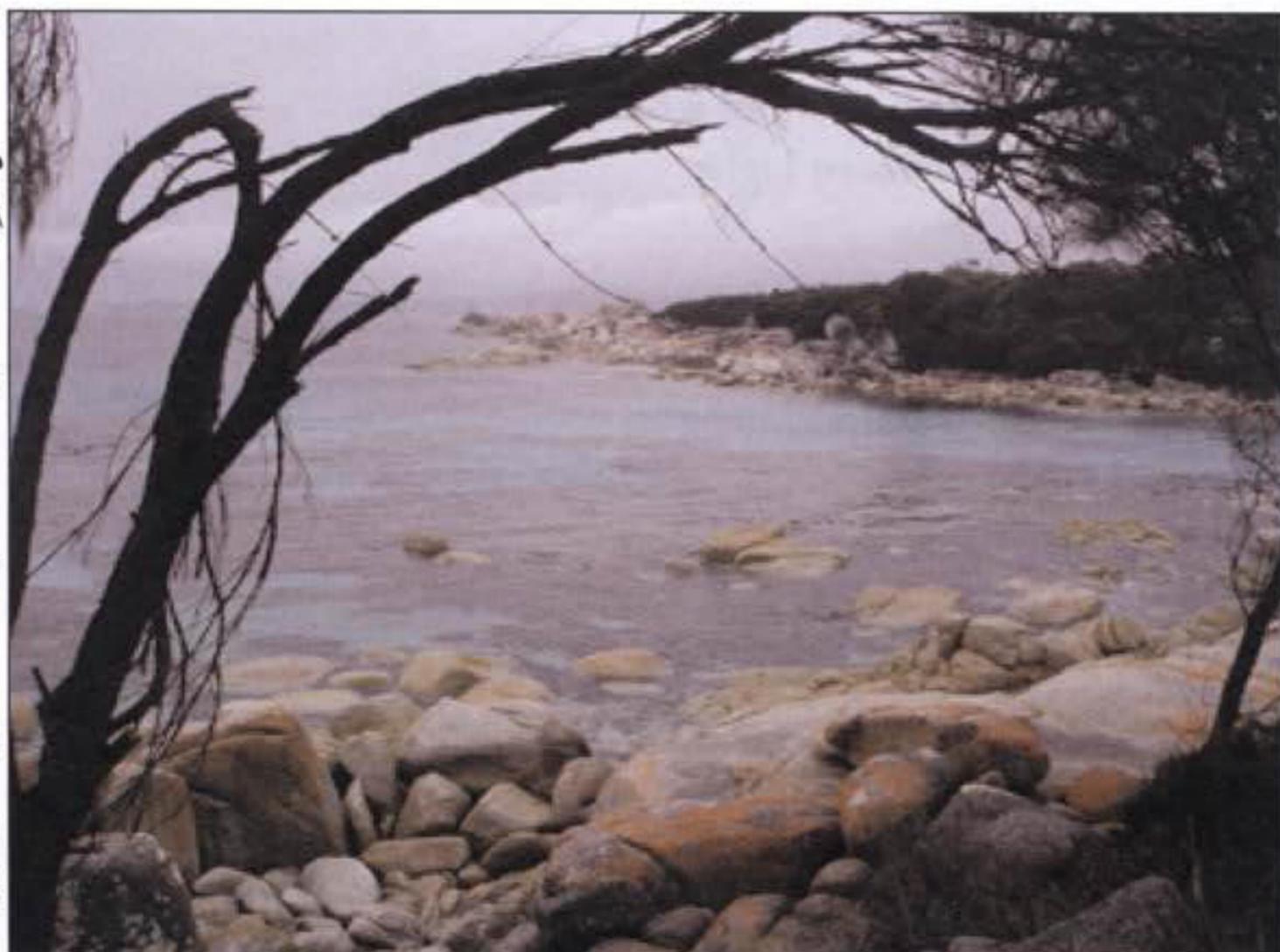
Maria said, in not-normal English, "Tell me not what to do, young sir, for I am a powerful maiden. I have honored thy kind by appearing in a form visible to your inferior human eyes. If thou dost not refrain from black threats and heartless insistence, I shall cause great pain to come upon thee."

But I told her I only knew two things — that she better make me cookies, or I was going to punch her in the throat, and that she was fucking nuts, so I'd punch her extra hard for being a goddamn crazy.

Apparently, this pissed her off to no end, because she disappeared, or just kind of made everything where she was all jumbled and boxy, like when the cable's acting weird, and it was hard to distinguish her from what was behind her. I couldn't tell if she had altered the visual schema which I had perceived as "Maria," or if she had simply gone away, leaving some kind of cosmic skid-mark where she had just been.

Bay of Fires - Tasmania

[Yumi Rydjun]



At this point, the universe turned off. I didn't know which way was up, but I might have been dreaming or hallucinating because it didn't feel like I was falling, just like all the molecules in my body were trying to escape in all directions at the same time and it wasn't throwing off my balance, because there was no balancing, simply existing in a void of encompassing blackness. It's goddamn weird. But I still wanted some cookies, and when I figured out what the hell was going on, I was going to punch Maria in the throat until she made me some damn cookies.

I couldn't figure out how to surf off of these goddamn pillars of magma sticking out of the ocean. You have to carry your board up and dive off, hoping that you don't get buried by a wave. But I can understand everything Maria's talking about now. She's what they call in science a "non-carbon based life form." She refused to explain to me how she exists, even though I insist that it's impossible. She told me where the cookies are and how you have to swoop down out of the sky and grab them from the waves just as they break apart on the still-hot lava floes, trying not to smash yourself to bits on the glassy black promontories. The damn cookies better be good or I'm going to punch her in the throat, just like I did to that humanoid abnormality, Tim Sandwich.

[Ben Brezner]

Dissipating Haze

I found myself at the bottom of a bottle
smoking another Marlboro Light.

Not a surprise

I found you there too.

Everyone says we're in denial
and enlighten us with moral insight.

Not a drunk,

I think we're more like shoes.

We tread ourselves from bar to bar
wearing down, so many holes.

Not so practical,

but we fit quite comfortably.

With every rip, tear, scar,

we vow to soften our strolls.

Not a problem.

We swear to step more gently.

[*Jen Lehner*]



[*Kerry Hart*]

as and a snow

Ponder



[Kimberly Wirt]

Painters

Today I had a half-hour long conversation with the tiny woman who cleans our hall. She has a thick accent, and it's terribly hard to understand her sometimes. She gestures at my self-portrait, leaning against my desk waiting to be hung on the wall, and asks, "You paint?" Yes, I made that, but it was the only really good thing I ever made, I tell her with a grin. And it isn't paint, anyway, it's oil pastel. Oil pastels are much easier to use than paint. "You paint face, hands?" I did not draw my face on my self-portrait, and one of my hands is rather indistinct. It's difficult to get fine details with oil pastels; they're a bit like crayons for adults – blunt, I mean. I'm not sure she'll know what a crayon is if I mention it to her. I'm a bit stung that she doesn't like my hands, though. You try making five clear fingers and shading them properly on a hand barely bigger than the tip of your thumb with an implement as big around as a crayon. So I reach under my bed, grab my sketchbook, and flip through to the page where I did a few studies of my hand, with a brief twinge of anxiety for showing a stranger my innermost thoughts in sketch form.

She looks a little more approving of these hands, though, even if they're

just basic outlines. "My father paint, back in my country," she tells me. "Taught me. I go home, paint." She smiles at me. A humbling jolt. This tiny woman who cleans my hall paints. "Where are you from?" I ask her.

She's from Vietnam, and her family paints. Her father is dead now, but he painted, and taught her and her sister. Her sister married a young American, she tells me, and gives me an expression of affectionate amusement. The colloquialism she would use is cradle-raider, but I doubt she knows that phrase. "But he love her. He love her. And she still paint," she finishes with the smile of an elder delivering a lesson to youth. "My daughter go VCU. Study finance. Finance," she says, and her smile adds, what a thing to study. Now her daughter has two young children, four and three years old. And she still manages to paint. "Paint girls. Paint girls, maybe sad, standing there in garden, mountains, long hair." She brushes her hand down the side of her face, tracing imaginary hair down to her waist. "Long pretty hair. You hair so pretty, if long. Use lemon." Lemon? I ask. Lemon good for your hair, she tells me. In my country, she says, struggling with a language never completely mastered, there is a tree whose fruit holds soap inside it. They boil the fruit and use it on their hair, and then lemon. Hair so soft, she says, once more running her hand down beautiful hair now cut to shoulder-length and relegated to a ponytail. She sits on her heels in my doorway, head cocked to one side, smiling at me perhaps a little wistfully. "You pretty," she says to me, "you pretty." I smile, a little shyly. "So are you," I murmur. I don't think she believes me. I suppose that's fair, since I don't really believe her either. But she is pretty, still, even though she is long past the days of her bloom. She is still smiling at me, wide face, dark eyes, and I insist silently that she would have been beautiful when she was young. That same quiet smile she gives me now, high cheekbones, wide mouth, sharply defined nose. Long, long dark hair falling to her waist, soft and shiny from lemon and the fruit of a tree I've never seen. It is not, perhaps, a conventional beauty, but it is beauty nevertheless.

She doesn't respond to my quiet statement. Instead she says, "You pretty, but you go out, let sun, wind on you face." I laugh, surprised that she would know that I spend too much time inside. It didn't occur to me that she might simply have read it in my pale face. She tells me, "I think you be good painter. You not like noise, no? You not like noise." No, I

reply with a smile, I don't like noise. Now her smile says that she was right, that I can be a good painter. "And you — you quiet, you — " Her brow furrows as she searches for a word. "You keep — things here?" Her fingers hook into her chest. I look at her, thoughtful and almost wary. She's right, I do, and people like that are not comfortable with such easy penetration of self. That isn't something she could know from observing my comings and goings.

Maybe she did see that small inward flinch at showing someone my sketchbook.

"Yes, I do," I say carefully.

"See? You be good painter."

I relax, laughing inside that she thinks so little makes a painter, and shake my head, remembering my attempts at painting in high school art classes. "No, I'm not. I tried painting, it's hard."

"Painting easy."

"Maybe for you it is. It's hard for me."

"Painting easy."

To me, this simply means that her entire family is fantastically talented. "I'm not very good at it."

"You go out, get book, paint. You learn."

"All right."

"Payn-see? Payn-see?" It takes me a moment to realize she is asking for a pencil. I give her one from my drawer and hand her my sketchbook. One quick, dark, sure line, a second, a third, she hunches over the paper and throws down a rough outline of a smiling girl with long, dark hair. "See? Just that, painting easy." She smiles up at me.

A clump of girls walk by, chattering, and she quickly hands back my sketchbook and my pencil and stands up. "I go, let you work. But you paint."

"I'll try," I promise her, and think with a kind of wonder, maybe I will. In a moment she is off down the corridor and gone.

I stand looking after her for a moment, thinking that I don't pay enough attention to cleaning ladies, and realize that I don't even know her name.

[*Anne Marie Salloum*]

Deconstruction

It's in the quiet times
That you really feel ready to face the world.
The thousand tiny chinks in your armor

*—The modern fascination with relics of centuries gone by
Can be traced to a sense of dissatisfaction with the complexity of
The business of making a living in this world and
The price paid for today's luxuries, which practically necessitates
An increased involvement in outside affairs.*

Wrapped and subsumed in the folds of that eerie calm,
Spirited away from the world of mortal worries.
The serene invincibility—

*—The hubris-nemesis complex is said to be comprised of
The idea, feeling or pretense of godliness or ultimate power—
Which includes the notion that one is above worldly punishments and
law—
And the desire, sometimes vengeful, to confront, punish or defeat
An adversary seen to be responsible
Or that can itself be accused of hubris.*

With this you could take on the world,
(Pomogite pozhalusta por favor lüften s'il vous plaît qing ni se faz favor
xin per favore tafadhali bitte schön!)

*—Can the increased use of fragments of foreign languages be
Attributed to the sociocultural effects of globalization?*

*—That's certainly a possibility, Miss ____, but
What's your reasoning? Can you substantiate it?*

The myriads of pain, joy, suffering, ecstasy,
All your worries, all your troubles,
Strive for a staggering victory
Over that loose bundle of everything we call life

*—One of the interesting things about English is the varied etymology
Of many of her words; a much larger percentage
(compared to other languages) of which are borrowed
From other tongues, and the way in which there tend to be
Many more synonyms for adjectives, adverbs and the like
Than there are for nouns, some of them seemingly simple ones,
Such as "love" or "friend."*

And win, every time—
 Take it, hold on tight,
 Want to never let yourself lose it.

—Many believe that the extensive interest—
 "crackdown," if you will—
 In preserving rules of grammar that seem
 Obsolete in modern usage and a barrier to
 Comprehension, really,
 Is at least partially due to
 The influx of new words or new meanings attached to
 Old ones as the result of a change in the terms of their usage
 By society, out of either ignorance or convenience.

But in the sun and rain and chaos
 (in other words, the hustle and bustle and assorted commotion)
 It disappears, treacherously like mist after the rain,
 Fresh snow dying in the warmth of spring,
 Dew on leaves of grass
 And all the other beautiful things.

—Note, class, the multiple use of similes based on water
 To signify a sense of transient beauty.
 Does anyone have any thoughts on why this is?
 On why water imagery is so associated with the idea of aesthetic
 Beauty and tranquility?

—Is it because water shines when light reflects off it?
 —An interesting response.
 Any other takers? None? Maybe on why water's transience is
 Linked to the sun, which is itself traditionally thought of
 As a positive symbol? Why it is considered negative in this context?
 Nobody?

Where did it go, your deeper meaning?
 Is it something that you found?
 Or has it been there all along?
 It's inside all of us.
 All you have to do is
 Breathe in. Look. Breathe out.

[*Mai-Anh Tran*]

Removed

I guess I'm awake again. Alive and on the vigil time — the inbetween time. Not completely active and definitely not in a sleep yet. Some guy's poetry I read said that this a completely productive time of life.

I vote no. I am static.

If static means nondynamic, then why is electricity static? Isn't it ever flowing and ever present?
Isn't it godlike?

My fingertips are on the verge of callouses. This may or may not affect how I perceive things with my hands. It's an idle, dawdling concern that I have for my hands. If I broke a finger tomorrow, I would be all shook up and not in the Elvis way, but in a perturbed self-loathing way.

There's much mischief to be had. But then the melody turns ever-so-minor and it's all on the back burner now. The rough spots and knots are unravelling and tightening so I no longer know which way is westways to move with the direction of lifewood's grain.

I need a better medium.

I guess I could use the rock formations in my shoulders. The unwanted fruits of my labor quests tonight. Dependent am I on much. I found myself spouting promise words often.

Good promises, but it's hard to let them tag along. Chill it will, if I will the chill.

The wind blows and I turn to the sound.

The wind blows right through my ribs.

[*Liz Anaya*]

Concordia

Today will be wonderful.

I can see it in the sparkling grapefruit waters, in the shining tangerine skies. Look out at the inky rocks and take note of how the rays bounce off of them in a million parallel lines. Nothing could destroy this day.

I will sit with you in my glance and your dog at my feet. He'll whimper softly, and I'll lean down to run my hands through his golden locks. I absorb this day on the porch jutting out of the back of this house like the rocks jut out of the shallow ocean. This house, passed onto you from the parents you never saw, is draped in curtains the color of the skies and covered in carpeting the color of the waters. The mahogany furniture is as dark as ink, just as your parents left it. I know you think we don't belong here; I can see in your kelly green eyes. But, we do. Sometimes, you just have to keep your back turned on the world so they won't knock you down with their cruel words and high expectations.

My back is turned on the world — or at least on your nosey neighbors. They'll stand on their kelly green grass all day sipping red wine from crystal, complaining about the riffraff that has taken over the neighborhood. They'll set tee times and lunch dates and write them in ink. They'll stuff their plans into shirts and pants that match the colors of the waters and skies, respectively, and drive away in their flashy cars at eight.

You and I — the riffraff — will stay here until dusk, sipping General Store wine coolers that match the color of the skies (but taste the color of the waters) through straws. We'll watch the sun set, just as we saw it rise, from our broken kelly green lawn chairs and ride away on rusted bicycles at midnight to a small tattoo shop down the street so you can decorate yourself in ink with dreams your parents would disapprove of.

We'll ride back to the house, while your nosey neighbors lay in their water bed wrapped in sheets the color of the waters and rest their heads on pillows the color of the skies. All the lights will be out, leaving the house as black as ink.

Maybe around three or four we'll do the same. Our heads will share a pillow the color of the waters and our bodies will be held close by a sheet the color of the skies. In the morning, my mascara will leave traces of ink under my eyes, and we'll come outside and do it all over again.

Today will be wonderful.

[*Diana Mergiotti*]

On an Ostensibly Cold Winter's Night

Past two in the morning on a lonely weekday night,
 It's quiet for once!
 The stars are very lovely.
 Light me a cigarette
 And let's take in everything.

The bright gleam of streetlights through the trees,
 Suck in a nice warm dose of lung cancer,
 Let a deep foggy breath out
 To watch the glowing aura beams spray out just before our eyes
 —it's really pretty and
 with the naked eye
 you can't see them for the leaves—
 Look at them dancing in the air,
 They're so happy to be seen, noticed, admired.

It's a wonderful life
 Even if you don't smoke.

[*Mai-Anh Tran*]

[*Yumi Rydlun*]



mangrove knees - Queensland

-Juniper-

drifts so down in breezes
 forever guiding to
 little houses on lanes
 in places i would hope to die some day
 with a loved one dear
 together
 in our bed
 after having seen our children
 and our children's children
 one week before
 when we had a big barbecue
 in the spring
 with aromas
 so very pleasing
 to every sense
 i have ever known

and sunshine
 pouring down rays ablaze from an auspicious sky—

dear Anything and Anyone
 out there
 or up there
 who is greater than me
 and mine

Thank You

for at least providing me this moment
 in youth
 to stop.
 and think
 and breathe and taste and smell
 a life unseen by the fortunes of this soul—

Thank You

[Josh Davis]

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Contemplating Sailors



[Adriano Pentado]

Editor's Note

This year, The Messenger received nearly three hundred submissions — an increase of fifty percent from past years and the largest number in recent memory — for our anonymous review and selection process. Our staff worked diligently to select the pieces seen here in print, as well as several others that met our standards of quality, but could not be included in the print version due to restrictions on page length imposed by our budget. These works, as well as their digital arts and drama counterparts, can be enjoyed online at our website (<http://www.student.richmond.edu/~messenger>). The website also offers the opportunity to purchase The Messenger 2006 CD, which includes our musical pieces and willing contributors' readings of their work.

The staff of The Messenger 2006 is extremely grateful to our fellow students at the University of Richmond for contributing the products of their artistry for consideration, and it is our sincere hope that the tradition of student excellence in creativity will continue in following years.

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