

The Messenger

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THE *M*ESSENGER ~ 2008



THE MESSENGER
2007~2008

Max Bloom

Dear (College) Poets - 88

Josh Davis

untitled (for five days) - 12
Transcendence - 15
Memory is to Forgetting - 16
Bedding - 19
We Sought Rooftops - 28
The Way I Dream - 38
Intrigue - 38
The Final Chapter - 46-47
Noisy - 60

Angela Harris

The Color of Fear - 57

Timothy Henry

Kitchen Puke - 86

Lucy Hester

For a Friend - 26

Meg Hurtado

the 20th-Century - 8
Autumn 7 - 18
Mid-Life - 10
audience participation - 50
Basic Photo - 83

Ariel Olson

untitled (The curve of your top lip) - 13
Kisses - 13
The Library of Babel - 14
Mother - 23
untitled ("The weeks in Italy, I") - 43
the Ashtray - 49
Ambling - 89

Helen Queue

rubbing alcohol - 9
Bath - 31
Friday - 51
Not a Very Close Encounter - 80

Dan B. Shapiro

Beat - 81

Emily Smith

Papilio Glaucas - 5
Matches - 71

January Stewart

A Different Metronome - 30
iTunes Shuffle - 44

Schuyler Swartout

In the Barn of my Father - 28
The Pole Barn - 35
Why My Hair - 48
The Machine Shop - 66-67
The Elm Tree - 88

Hayley Swinson

Careful - 4

Jordan Trippeer

Altered States (Alaska, for example) - 84

Anonymous Submissions

in another life I was - 9
Impetuous Words - 22
Life After Sex - 71

POETRY

PROSE FICTION

John Alulis

Noggin Das
52-56

Josh Katz

And the Sign Says,
"Beware the Undertow"
74-78

Schuyler Swartout

The World is Waiting
for the Sunrise
64

Ashley Foxen

Plain Bagel,
Toasted with Cream Cheese and Tomatoes
62-63
She Sees, for the Most Part
72

Chet'la Sebree

Mr. Curious
10
Asphyxia
50

Katie Cloutte

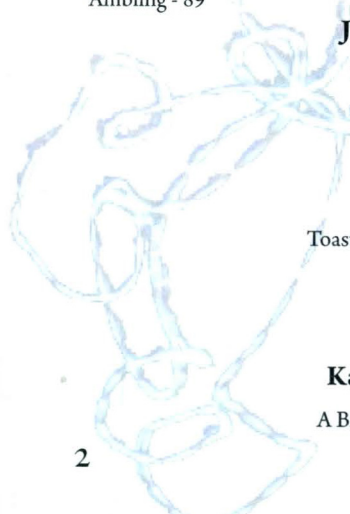
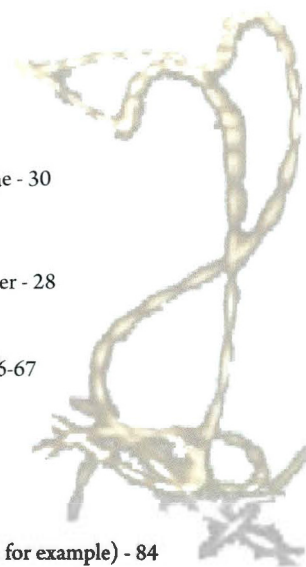
A Bit of Turbulence
68-69

Maria Ribas

Vanity
59

Jonathan Wilson

Quiet Reflection
20-21



Irena Stanisic

- Fast Forward - 4
- Inspiration from El Greco - 7
- Melting Pot - 58
- Tribal Fish - 37
- Nina - 67
- Mos Def - 47
- Untitled - 79
- Sink, Emerge, or Float - 56
- Bone Study - 87

Alicia McCarty

- Purple - 23

ART

Kim Wirt

- Turned On - 80

Liz Hartley

"Laughter is the best medicine,"

15

"What came first, the chicken or the egg?"

35

"bent out of shape,"

40

"Long in the tooth"

63

"Throw in the towel"

"Kick the bucket"

"Don't push my buttons"

85

**DIGITAL
ART**

Alice Chaosurawong

- Dis(Connect) - 82

Ashley Foxen

- Small Talk at the Dinner Table - 11

Jackie McMahon

- Acidic Cry - 17

Rafiya Naim

- Hijab - 41

- Confiscated - 42

Chet'la Sebree

- Solarized Rose - 30

from *don't judge a book by its cover*

Max Bloom

- Untitled - 18

- Robert, Age 37 - 29

PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrea Hague

- Lighthouse at Camogli - 8

Jackie McMahon

- Zephyrean Prayers - 39

- Curiosity - 39

- Fresh Affection - 70

Megan McNamara

- Post Office Scenery - 48

- Homeward Bound - 73

Liz McAvoy

- Made You Look - 51

- Trapped - 70

Ariel Olson

- Koi Pond, N. of Joburg - 12

- After Sunset When the Battery Died, We Sang in the Dark - There, a Hippo! - 21

- Soweto Rained on her Shanty-Towns - 61

- Lightning-tree & Biscotti-coffee Picnic with Sleeping Crocodiles - 65

Emily Souleret

- Conical Hill on the Routeburn Track - 27

- Penguin at Sandfly Bay 68

- Mount Aspiring National Park, New Zealand - 89

Dan B. Shapiro

- With the Grace of Water - 45

PROSE NON-FICTION

Rosanna Nunan Christopher Taddei

- Three Blunders

32-35

- Uptown 6

6-7

Mai-Anh Tran

- After Lunch, An Encounter

24-25

**OIE CONTEST
WINNERS 90-95**

CAREFUL
Hayley Swinson

Do not yet
unfold the covers -
alone,
these pillows give
too much time
to my thought.

Let's instead
tuck two in
this single bed
so you may
touch me
accidentally.



**FAST
FORWARD**
Irena Stanisic

PAPILIO GLAUCAS

Emily Smith



Under my father's descending hand,

The tiger swallowtail must think
I am over.

I have strayed into the apse
Of a bloodthirsty cathedral

This is the toothy tiger mouth
From which I will never come out.

A single note peals
From the velvet proboscis,

Unrolling a minute rebel yell

Small enough to tiptoe
Into a useless left ear

Threading on tiptoe through
plum jungle ruins

And fluttering down the incalculable dark
Of the Ho Chi Minh trail.

UPTOWN 6

Christopher Taddei

Subway Rule Number #1 – If it's past rush hour, never make eye contact.

After four years, when walking onto the subway, you tend to know what to expect. I always jostle for position by the doors in the same way. I passively struggle with the crowd—not shoving, just gently, forcefully, pushing people out of my way. In the winter, the cold air sprays the heat of my breath up the window the same way every time. I watch as it snakes slowly up the frigid pane and then dissipates as the doors part. The fluorescent bulbs within are always a shade too bright, cutting away at the uneven glow cast by the tunnel lights. After a while, the daily ride gets to be comfortable. The constant routine leaves you with a sense of stability, even security.

But these days, I wasn't comfortable anymore. I walked on the train and immediately cased the surroundings. I noted where everybody stood and watched carefully. If anybody moved, I'd notice it. Tonight, it was late, and I was riding uptown through Harlem after a basketball game. We were nearly at 116th Street and the train was almost empty. I stood by the door, staring down the car, just listening to the uneven rhythm of the metal on the rails. Down at the end of the car, I saw this figure rise from a seat and begin to walk towards me. Now they tell you that if it's late, or if the train is empty, never make eye contact with another passenger. You never want to draw attention to yourself. I pressed my body tightly against the door, as if I pushed hard enough, I could force my way through to the other side. But I couldn't stop staring at this guy. As he walked closer, his face became fully illuminated—covered in pockmarks. Or maybe they were scars. They looked like scars to me. And then I looked at his eyes. I took one look in his eyes and I knew what he wanted from me.

A few months ago, I wouldn't have paid any attention. A few months ago, I wasn't paying attention—until I was walking through 14th Street station and I turned that corner. I was staring down at the concrete tiles, dirt collecting around their edges, until I heard, "Yo man," from a deep voice around the corner. I looked up, and the knife, glinting in the wavering light, caught my distinct attention. "Gimme yo' fuckin' money." I never really even looked at him, I just stared at the knife and mumbled words like, "Alright man," and, "I've only got a little

cash." I held out the small fold of bills slowly, swearing at myself that I didn't have more. He just took it, and ran off. It was quick, I didn't even have time to be afraid. It's not something you think about, until afterwards.

But tonight, this was all I thought about as the man walked down the car towards me. I wasn't so much afraid, as I was wondering what to do. I didn't have any money on me. All I thought about were the "what if's." I pressed harder into the door as he came closer. I heard the screech of the wheels on the rail as the train came to an abrupt stop. The shrieking metal resonated in my head as my mind screamed for me to walk into the next car. But I couldn't move. I was paralyzed and all I could think about was what he held underneath his jacket. The doors parted and I nearly fell backwards, but caught myself as he strode in front of me. We brushed shoulders as he walked right past me.

INSPIRATION
FROM EL GRECO
Irena Stanisic





LIGHTHOUSE AT CAMOGLI

Andrea Hague

THE 20TH-CENTURY

Meg Hurtado

Stella's garters
are not for sale.
this is not the only way,
this is, furthermore, not the way that the Elizabethans wanted it.

all the seaside wars break like boiling bubbles
in the mind of an egg, waiting beside the stove –
rising like the Futurist god of scabs,
not long for this capped, contained world.

and we are not supposed to do anything too beautiful.
and I have not been waiting
for Nike to come down, unwrinkling her electric spine –
Paris was saved
by soldiers in taxi-cabs.

IN ANOTHER LIFE I WAS

so im having a moment, some kind of pivotal moment where things should all be clear and a light bulb may appear atop my head, etc etc. this is one of These moments. ambien is strong shit. but it feels like flying sideways. and i'm okay with this, i'm okay with today. because today i get to be her, and let's kiss like we mean it, okay? Even if absence is all there is she is painting fantasy into her dreams tonight. but tomorrow she will hold her love's hand and she will mean it, and he'll know that she meant it. Right?

later today when we talk face to face about anything and nothing or every Thing this may not come up, for now i am listening to a song made with piano-words. and finding that this song is saying everything im trying to say right now. but probably none of what im saying has been described how i wanted it to be... mostly i just want to press my self into you and yourself and melt into a puddle of ourselves And its perfect because if we are maybe oil and water it's the kind they use when they make those pictures, so it travels well together, like making a puddle with perfect consistency. but when the light hits, the puddle springs to life: two distinct figures. too distinct for now?



I hate the people who can feel like Etta James.
for whom love and right and stay
are one sugar-blooded bouquet.

the Please Mr. Postmen.
the earth angels clanging
at my door. go caulk
the splintering fissured factioned skeined
swimming pool that is my heart (not going anywhere,
warmest before winter).

RUBBING ALCOHOL

Helen Queue

MR. CURIOUS

Chet'la Sebree

He lived on Kemp Street, two blocks up from Cory's Fish Market on King. His fourth floor apartment was a little bigger than a kindergarten cubby. The one room nook had a kitchen, a pile of blankets, and a door leading to the bathroom. The only decoration was an indistinguishable sculpture made of fecal matter that stood behind the door. When asked why by his former best friend, he responded, "To keep people like you away."

After retiring, he spent his days eating expired yogurt and watching the daytime dramas of his neighbors through his window with a pair of binoculars. Mr. Lefthand was usually caught with his right hand on the remote and left hand down his pants. Mrs. Houseslave spent the whole day cooking and cleaning until her husband came home, ate, fucked her, and went to bed. It was a pretty normal routine until she found condoms in his Dockers. She was far more interesting after that: breaking dishes and arson were her new daytime endeavors. Unfortunately, she got arrested for bludgeoning him to death.

On his day out of the apartment, he found someone new, Ms. Hot Body. He'd followed her around instead of stealing soap for his weekly shower. After some stalking, he discovered that she lived on Kemp in the adjacent building. During his soap-less shower, he wondered if he could see her from the tiny frosted window above the tiles. Stepping on the lip of the tub and bracing himself against the wall, he hoisted himself up so he could put one foot on the soap dish and the other on the water tap. He stuck his face in the little nook and pressed against the window. Feeling a rush of cool air, he scanned the wall in front of him for her room and found her standing next to the window one floor down. At the same time his excitement peaked at the sight of her, his toes slipped out of the soap dish causing his other foot to simultaneously slip off the faucet. He then knocked himself unconscious on the soap dish and therefore did not feel his vertebrae shatter against the porcelain lip of the tub. His last image was of a voluptuous 76 year old woman, Ms. Hot Body.





SMALL TALK AT THE DINNER TABLE
Ashley Foxen





KOI POND, N. OF JOBURG

Ariel Olson

for five days,
the world was the two of us—
and neither had any complaints.
we sought the bed as often as the city.
our wine-stain-on-the-ceiling was lovelier
than
the battery which looks across the bay
to Fort Sumter.
we noted it would be splendid
to picnic there.

~Josh Davis

The curve of your top lip
captured so well in photographs,
is much better seen
up close--
I would rest my head upon your
chest
to feel your breath
rise
and fall...

and rise,
your eyes meet mine
and I can't help
but smile;
I'm not afraid of how
we're painted in the daylight.
Palm to palm,
our fingers fold the fifth
dimension:
yes, we can still hold hands
when we are
apart.

~ *Ariel Olson*



KISSES

And then it was clear!
Hershey's kisses are just big
chocolate chips, my dear.



THE LIBRARY OF BABEL

Ariel Olson

Thick-skinned
Rolling, watch me
slide—snaked around your
eyes, across the small
of my back and then, right there,

Into me, you,
wind-wild tempest,
thunder-struck my Heart—
thrashing in a shrinking
cavity beneath my breast—let's

Call it Supernova, we both know
why. Timing is everything. My dear,
the syncopation
of your slow cigarette burning
brings to mind such

A beautiful time;
Beginnings, there were still
epochs and hours before
we had to say goodnight--
oh, stay quiet love,

We hasten toward a place
atemporal, and shape
morning into night into
the china-cup of sunrise,
dance the edges, settle

In the blood-red bowl of sunset,
of the earnest Moon.
Golden, she loves the sky, loves
her stars; we tell her to go home
but she is implacable,

And she is infinite
and cyclical and so am I so
go, my love, be true and walk on,
a slow-step with your
moon-shoulder-shine on.



Liz Hartley

allow me to designate: **TRANSCENDENCE**

do not be deceived:
clichés happen everyday, but so does shit—
and if they/it didn't, we'd be dead.

so think about that for a minute:

- 1, ascertain within yourself the smallest of your tiny words
- 2, put them to good use
- 3, see if your sense of things is any less
- 4, follow through
- 5, ameliorate
- 6, enunciate
- 7, breathe

where are we now?

follow the yellow brick road:
fuck your fears and you may find that the frenetic(s) of frenzy are fantastic.

what the hell does that mean:
why on (God's?) green earth would you ask;
it's a poem—essays are attempts.

answers? your endeavor?

but it ain't mine.

lucky for you:
there's this thing called math.

~ *Josh Davis*

MEMORY IS TO FORGETTING

These things are kept without detail, abbreviated in the margins of memory, like the communes of old, sooner than later forgot. —Josh Davis

Memory is to forgetting like a purse taken, in accident, from the lightness of dark to the darkness of light. I remember green carpet under church pews, while my hand scribbling in a notebook of so many notebooks to come (and go). But there are no details and never dates, only periods, those rough brackets by which the history of my days has been self-demarcated. Emotions are denoted in the suggestion of time remembered, days unto months unto years, elapsed. A kiss recollected from a day long forgot. For me, all is evoked in the enumeration of my sins, sins catalogued in contrast to my traumas, long expunged and repressed. For my traumas are buried beneath the weight of thrust, a rush that speaks nothing save its promise of death.

The purse is not remembered, but it came from a table in a club and was deposited in a dumpster in an alley nearby. Neither alley nor dumpster nor purse is borne in memory, but it is known that the purse was taken. I confess to myself and I remember to know that the purse was first taken then deposited, in a dumpster that was found in an alley nearby. In an alley not unlike the alley that is remembered, leading from my house and by the high-rise to the station and toward the Methodist church at the top of the hill where choices are made, turning upward at times toward a house without conviction yet full of confliction. The house of a boyhood friend, with whom I grew up and with whom I still hold commune, and the house of his nephew-who-is-not-his-nephew, his brother, with whom I still hold commune.

Yesterday, I thought of my unborn son, not yet conceived, and I thought to say, "Masculinity is about strength." I thought to say, "yes, masculinity is about strength, but so is humanity, and, moreover, there are many ways to be strong, many of which involve no physical strength whatsoever." And then I thought to say, "humanity is about courage." Meanwhile, my son, who is not yet born, not yet conceived, would sit, listening, poised and ready, face calm, shoulders erect. And in his clear deep eyes I would witness the resonations of my spirit become beautified, the reflection of light all a dance—the reverberations of my heart in concert with his.



ACIDIC CRY
Jackie McMahon

-THE MESSENGER-

it crosses nobody's mind,
but spread out the soapy stripes,
the amaranthine negatives, and you
will find that a string of autumn mornings

goes missing. one sunburned chrysalis,
banished out of the salt world, while I
faithfully locked up the darkroom,
and I do not believe in ghosts

AUTUMN 7
Meg Hurtado

- as Helen of Troy does not believe
in ghosts, or they would crowd
in her hall, and lay waste to her carpets,
she must not give them an inch –

therefore, not ghosts. but I do
attest to what isn't there: a set of mistakes
soaking in their death, more perfect
than all the unshaved pearls dangling in the Lethe.



UNTITLED
Max Bloom

BEDDING

Josh Davis

once upon a summer night-time,
i lay among a sea of orange

my voice smoked
into a rasp of rhapsodizing raciness

then she,
the girl who lives in the telephone wire,
the girl who sends shockwaves
into the middle of me,
said that she liked the sound of my voice.

i complimented her in turn.

but meanwhile,
i dreamed amidst the folds of orange ...

smoke rose toward sexiness,
encircling eclipse,
with me and the moon's bright side
shining over all the faces of earth—
(as they fall, the faces,
fall furiously into the fissures of ferocious fractures)

i am naked as i drown among the waves of orange

i am naked
and she is gone



QUIET REFLECTION

Jonathan Wilson

Time passes slowly for this man as he sits in front of his dusty typewriter next to the one window in his one-room apartment. He is motionless, waiting for something to happen. As the sun begins to set, shadows cast over the desk and a hot haze seeps through the glass and calmly rests atop his shoulders. His concentrated state provokes the search for words and cools the sweat induced by deep thought. This meditation triggers his hesitation. Ideas linger in his mind and swarm his soul but remain disconnected. The buzz of the breeze outside disrupts the man's thinking. For a brief moment, he cocks his head in time to see the streetlights appear on Sleepy Hollow Boulevard, where a woman walking her dog stops at a bench on the sidewalk to watch a car go whizzing by, disappearing around the curve. The man shifts his head and re-fixates his eyes on the keys, blurred by the dark ink in dark print. Lost in a struggle for answers to a defined sense of self, a part of him that has been forgotten, his mind wanders lazily, unable to find the strength to begin.

The clock continues to drain out the light as darkness creeps methodically throughout. Suddenly this darkness brings vision, clarity. The glare from the moon guides his questions of uncertainty. His hands introduce vitality as his fingers touch the keys, feel the keys, punch the keys. His focus locks in sync with the synchronized pulse of the typewriter. The man's blindness that once lingered is lost as little ink-sprayed characters flood out and arrive, etched on paper. This fresh visualization creates a wiry power in his grasp and directs the push from page one to page two.

The typing stops. Darkness steadily vanishes to light as letters visibly emerge off the paper. The man's eyes fail to blink, simply stare with clarity as he reads his manuscript in silence. There is a deep sparkle in his eye as he traces the words. As he reads he watches his words flow into the change he wished to see in his life. His pursuit of truth, need for meaning, and hope for resolution all converge into one. He has rebuilt himself; filling the void that has haunted his life since that night in late November.

For the first time in a long time the man stands up from his typewriter and walks to the window. Gazing through the mist that hovers across Sleepy Hollow his eyes reach beyond the now empty bench on the sidewalk and onto the woman over the fence. He sees her lean down and place a bouquet of flowers on the gravesite in front of her. As he watches the woman wrap her arm around her dog, he glances to the memorial on her left. While the fog blurs his initial vision of the engraved words on the stone surface, the image of the funeral lingers. Tracing a moment from his past, a tear drips from his eye. Steadily, with time, he will escape from his caged emotions and embrace reality. As the man turns and walks back to the desk, an uncharted calmness eclipses the echoes of his suffering. As he sits down, the reflection of the last few words are imprinted into his soul: You will always remain a part of me. I will never forget you.



**AFTER SUNSET WHEN THE BATTERY DIED,
WE SANG IN THE DARK -- THERE, A HIPPO!**

Ariel Olson

IMPETUOUS WORDS
~ Anon.

Compare me to a shrub,
she says.
She's wrapped in a scarf,
dancing on a bench,
and telling me that I'm like an uncle.
But not a great uncle.
That much is clear.

I consider the delicate features of her gentle frame,
I consider the beauty of her lips—
but she distracts me.

She's terrifically overeager.
Not many can keep pace with her,
for she's a jumper and a tackler—
a dancer and a dreamer.

She shares her
uncompromised vision of "mature" love,
then she runs into a sparkle—
wide smile,
and along the way
there is not one boy
who does not know her name.

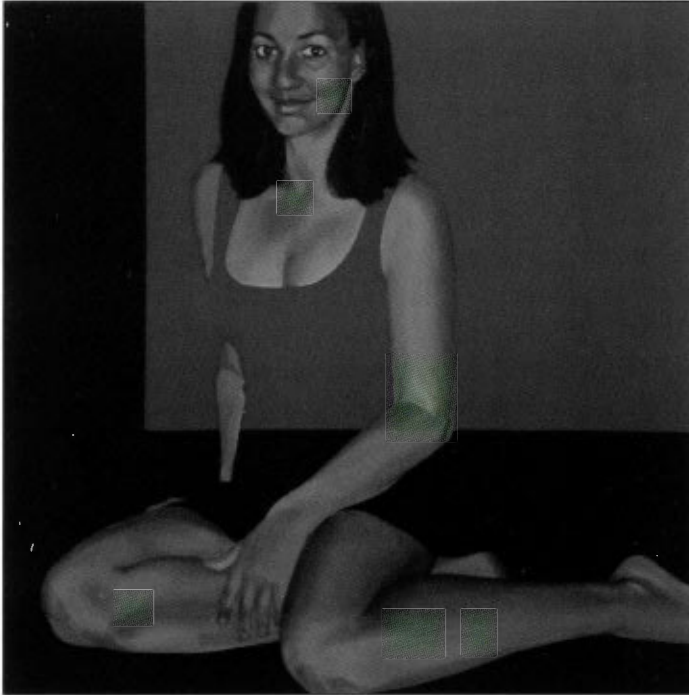
But my fascination is disrupted.
I remember the energy of my former pace
and I disdain the way she sees me now.

A dichotomy emerges:
I as "Uncle"
and I as I remember.

A bitter taste rises as I speak
cold, blunt words upon her.

And suddenly, there is a change in her face.

I find myself alone.
I find myself on a bench in a shadow.
I find myself green.
I find that I am overgrown.



PURPLE
Alicia McCarty

MOTHER,

in my mind you will always be 36, though
perhaps even more beautiful at 44 if possible
and I know that you wish you had more time
and energy to work out but what you do for
your clients is priceless I know this because
I've had you for almost 20 years and though
I don't remember the first year or two I know
that they were of light and the warmest love.

~ *Ariel Olson*

AFTER LUNCH, AN ENCOUNTER

Mai-Anh Tran

It's not every day that you see a rabbit in the wild. At least not around here, and in four years I can't remember ever having seen one before, though I've been told they're all over campus. But just the other day there was one sitting around that I'd almost mistaken for a particularly large squirrel before I saw its ears, and now there is one right here, having had the audacity to intrude upon my walk back from a leisurely off-campus lunch. Maybe it's a seasonal thing.

After all, it is summer in Virginia, and the heat is second only to the humidity in its intensity. We have each stopped in our respective tracks, the rabbit and I. Both shielded, temporarily, from the sun on a span of ground shaded by the looming trees behind me. Also behind me is the steep climb up that I have just made; ahead is yet more sun. The baby breeze coming through the woods brushes my sweat-soaked shirt against my back, and I hunker down on the ground, maintaining eye contact with the terrified animal that I, returning from my nicely satisfying meal, have just interrupted in the middle of its own lunch.

The rabbit is small and brownish-gray, utterly nondescript as rabbits go, at least to my untrained eye. If I could look more closely, I might see a few patchy white spots, some scars, or perhaps a five-toed paw. Not that I would know what to make of that. How many toes do normal rabbits even have, anyway? All I know is that it's a rabbit, it's remarkably conspicuous, and I am tired and hot and see no reason not to be squatting on the path, being remarkably conspicuous myself, staring down a tiny rabbit. I also see no reason not to talk trash to it, which I do, although in a somewhat hushed tone. *Hey. You. Rabbit. What do you think you're looking at, huh? Yeah, s'right. Go on and twitch your nose at me, you fuzzy, big-eared nose-twitcher.*

A rabbit's stare is surprisingly penetrating for something coming from a furry bundle of muscles and nerves with a brain the probable size of a really impressive walnut. Later on, there will be nothing to stop me from claiming that I was pondering the symbolism of the staredown between nature and modernity, or something equally abstract and high-falutin'. If that's what I want people to think I was thinking about. The possibility of doing that is kind of comforting, even if it would be a little misleading.

Actually, it is a huge lie, because all I'm really thinking about is how terrified this tiny, quivering thing must be, and how long I can keep it pinned down, and if I am agile enough and intelligent enough to maneuver it into letting me catch it, perhaps from some clever combination of intense eye contact and careful sidestepping. What would I do with the damn thing if I caught it? I don't freaking know, I just wanna catch it!

And, because I am five years old at heart, there is also an undercurrent of "Bunny! BUNNY!" running through my head.

With an extremely cautious eye, the rabbit nervously extends its head for a fear-flavored bite of clover. Since I'm not a complete jerk, I allow it to swallow before putting my capture plan into action. It works surprisingly well, at least until I trip an invisible perimeter alarm that sends the rabbit bounding away. Since rabbits are not really what we would call tactical experts, I manage to corner it again. We continue this stare and dance several more times before the arrival of a family (human) down the hill distracts me for a moment, and the rabbit darts off into the safety of a clump of prickly bushes before I can follow. The family looks up the hill at me curiously, and I straighten up and wave at them, feeling somewhat silly.

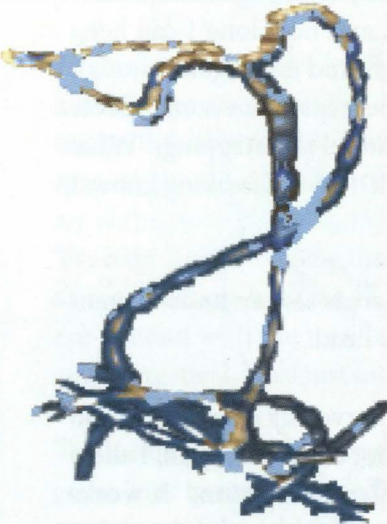
FOR A FRIEND ~ *Lucy Hester*

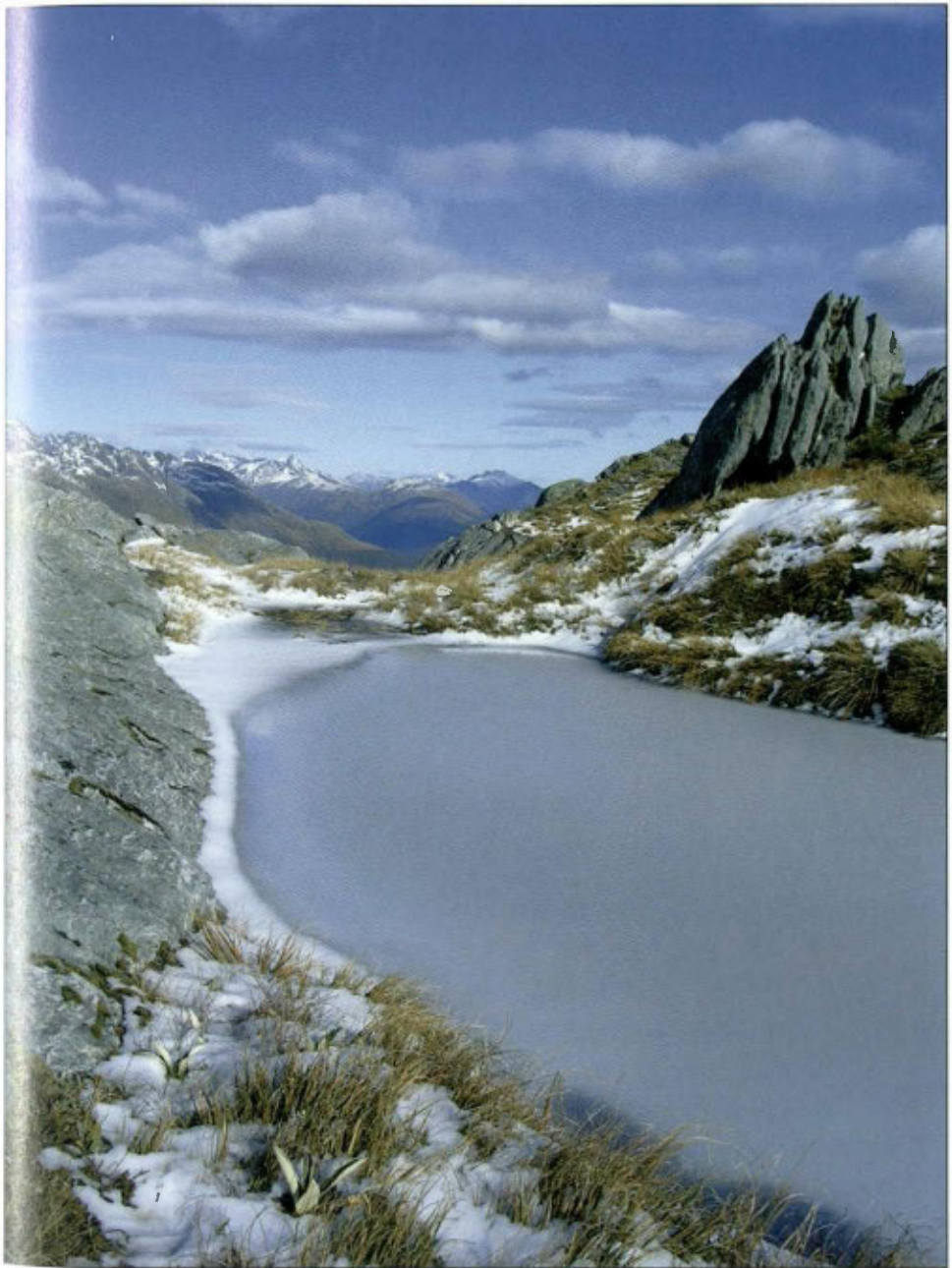
What I would say to you:
that when I was very small
my brother was smaller still,
I would tiptoe up to his crib
to watch through the bars
his sleeping breath.

For one year of high school
we drove together and ate
breakfast in the parking lot
listening to old music.
On the last morning I knew
this simple time together
would not come again.

I do not have
a sister.

I know death
widely but not well.
I was nearly eighteen when
my father's closest brother
went down to the shed
where he kept his guns.
My father often asks me
to write something about it
but I never have.
It is my father's grief.
I find I am speechless.





CONICAL HILL ON THE ROUTEBURN TRACK

Emily Souleret

IN THE BARN OF MY FATHER *Schuyler Swartout*

Rainwater falls from its patched roof
throwing some little light to the far corners,
during a summer sun shower. Through this light, bats stir
troubled in the mid-afternoon, and make quick bays like little
pigs.

And the pigs! Surely all the vibration could shake
the crumbly wooden roof down onto the hogs below,
with the air vibrating its dust,
and shaking droplets from roof to floor
and cobwebs pumping like subwoofers
and fifty thousand million bats waking
and chirping to sleep.

And the pigs rumbling in bloodstained pens.
And my heartbeats, pegging as they do in still night.

WE SOUGHT ROOFTOPS *Josh Davis*



We sought rooftops often.

If they were metal and uncomfortable then that was better.

If we had cigarettes and it was early fall then that was best.

One time I was on a roof in Nashville when my friend's neighbor
comes up to chill with us on her roof and he starts telling us all about how he
has an authentic replica of a lightsaber. I was confused as to just how authentic
it could be but then he busted it out. I was impressed. Something about his
electric phallus caught my eye.

And I guess even I have doubts sometimes.



ROBERT, AGE 37

Max Bloom

A DIFFERENT METRONOME

January Stewart

I need to know
nights and days
beyond yours
in order to know mine

when I said
last Tuesday that
I was in Albuquerque
I was really just down the street

Waiting for someone
Who keeps time with
My nights and days
And never wonders about his own



SOLARIZED
ROSE
Chet'la Sebree

BATH
Helen Queue

I

the wraith of clay
missing throughout,
and I wasn't told, here is the Serpentine,
here is the boy who catches ducks,
here lie the uncorseted hours
whose fumes will board
every sideswiped quotidian,
here is the world as you
will never know it.

II

in the bed of regret can be found
oracular fixation,
fingers of jazz singers and saints.
the true definition of "crepuscular".

III

CONDENSATE RETURN –
I read it on a pipeline in a pottery studio –
the brackish, beautiful end
of every dark ship sighted
on the shoals of joy –
maybe never to anchor,
but to beat all the odds,
to witness the homecoming
of jellyfish,
who know the most about love.
they wear poison like scarves.

THREE BLUNDERS

Rosanna Nunan

It is a useless corollary of my way of life that if I catch a glimpse, sometimes mere seconds, of a movie on TV, a movie that I have never seen before, I can usually guess the title and have some vague notion of the plot by virtue of the elaborate framework of movie knowledge that has constructed itself quite by accident, occupying valuable space, in my brain. So when Keanu Reeves walked into a bar to sweet-talk a lady on TBS this afternoon, looking all deceptively charming with longer, floppier hair than he had in, say, *The Devil's Advocate* or *A Walk in the Clouds* (both of which, to my shame, I have seen), and with a certain song playing in the background, it was not totally erroneous for me to guess that this film was *The Watcher* (very late nineties or early two-thousands I would estimate), about a floppy haired guy who sweet-talks ladies in bars looking all deceptively charming before stalking and chopping them into bits, starring Keanu Reeves.

The song playing in the background at the time I turned on TBS goes like this: "Every breath you take, every move you make, every bond you break, every step you take, I'll be watching you." The song is "Every Breath You Take" by the Police. It is a love song. It is actually kind of a nice sounding love song, but you can see how it would be very misleading given the circumstances. Yes, it would have been a bold move for the makers of *The Watcher* to include such a heartfelt yet lyrically creepy ballad in their film. It would have suggested an impressive subtlety of execution that, to say the very least, is unusual in the realm of Keanu Reeves movies, but I was willing to entertain that possibility.

Imagine a potential outcome of this scenario. If I had changed the channel after the scene had ended, one day I would have found myself at Blockbuster experiencing the all too familiar sadness of a person who has not yet been on the earth for two dozen years but nevertheless has difficulty finding movies that she hasn't seen before. She thinks about the decades and decades to come in which there will be thousands of empty hours and no new movies to fill them up with, and in this highly vulnerable state she zeroes in on *The Watcher*. She has never seen it before but she has a dim recollection that she has attributed to it an uncharacteristic subtlety of execution and feels strangely relieved. She rents it, thinking that the world has come through for her one last time, only to discover,

upon putting it into the DVD player, her grave, grave error.

Thankfully, I avoided such a fate by maintaining attention long enough to realize in the next scene, when a troop of football players in red, white, and blue uniforms scattered itself across the screen, that this movie was not *The Watcher*, but *The Replacements*, another Keanu Reeves movie that I have also never seen and intend to keep that way. All the subtle charm of "Every Breath You Take" was lost when I realized that it was simply part of the obligatory romance in yet another underdog rides again sports flick.

*

Ever since I can remember, my grandfather has had the head of a rabbit mounted on his wall. This rabbit has antlers glued very convincingly to its head. I swear that I saw a photograph of another such rabbit, alive and hopping, in *National Geographic* or some other less reputable glossy publication when I was eight or nine years old. At seventeen, I had a conversation with my dad in which the rare and elusive jackalope came up.

"Jackalopes? A rabbit with antlers—are you serious? Those things don't exist."

"What?! Sure they do. They roam free on the prairies out west. In Wyoming. I read about it when I was a kid."

"Um, no. Really. Those things don't exist."

*

My dear friend Chrissy Bailey is much more knowledgeable about popular music than I have ever been, and, with the exception of an incident that occurred about two years ago, I have never challenged her expertise. My mother has always listened to the oldies station in the car, and the result is that I know the lyrics of all the songs from the 50's, 60's, and 70's but have absolutely no idea who is singing them. This became readily apparent that summer day in 2006, when Chrissy and I sat on a tiny balcony in Pittsburgh and she was threatening to call her dad to corroborate her assertion that "Killing Me Softly with His Song" was not written or sung by Joni Mitchell.

"It's Joni Mitchell. I know it's Joni Mitchell."

"It is not Joni Mitchell. It doesn't sound anything like Joni Mitchell."

"It is."

"What are you even basing this information off of?" shaking her head at me wide-eyed, "You don't know anything about music!"

I was basing this information off of two mutually exclusive events. Number One: My mother had told me that Joni Mitchell sang this song. This is one of three specific conversations I remember having with my mother in the car when I was young. She not only told me that Joni Mitchell sang this song, but that Joni Mitchell wrote this song for Don McLean. Why would I have any reason to doubt such a delightful backstory when my mother had just explained all the clever allusions in McLean's "American Pie" (further supporting her legitimacy as someone who is likely to know the writers and singers of oldies)? Every time I heard "Killing Me Softly with His Song" up until two years ago I would think "Joni Mitchell," so deep was the effect of this could-not-possibly-be-imagined conversation.

Number Two: In the movie *About a Boy* starring Hugh Grant, various characters must mention Joni Mitchell in relation to Toni Collette's character at least three times. They talk about how much her character loves to sing Joni Mitchell songs out loud in the house with her son, and in one scene Hugh Grant goes into their house and what do you think they are they singing?

I kind of halfway explained this to Chrissy, and she seemed halfway convinced.

"God, maybe it is Joni Mitchell," she said, looking absolutely astonished, "It just doesn't sound anything like her. Are you sure she didn't just re-record it or something?"

I shrugged. Truth be told I had no idea what Joni Mitchell sounded like because "Killing Me Softly" was the only song I knew of hers.

After this I think google was consulted. And when I still didn't capitulate she finally did call her dad, whose decisive "ROBERTA FLACK" rang out loud and clear through the receiver.

(Post-anecdote codicil: After writing this I had an itching suspicion that something was not quite above-board about the whole Joni Mitchell/*About a Boy* relationship that is necessary for the success of these little blunders. So, after investigating the matter it turns out that although Joni Mitchell is actually never mentioned in the movie, her name appears multiple times in the book, which I read way back in the eleventh grade and completely forgot about. In the first forty-three pages alone Joni Mitchell comes up three times and the final moments of the novel revolve around the main character's dismissal of this singer, which is obviously supposed to signify a great change in him, boy becomes man, etc.: "You

love Joni Mitchell.” “I don’t. Not anymore. I bloody hate Joni Mitchell.” The book also includes a “Killing Me Softly” scene that leaves the true artist unmentioned. This amounts to the same effect in the book that I have been mistakenly attributing to the movie for several years now. Also, I’m convinced that the importance of Joni Mitchell in the book and the importance of “Killing Me Softly” in the movie exacerbated the false connection in my mind, and if anything I think this merely indicates a larger complexity of organized blundering that I am beginning to believe may follow some mystical plan).

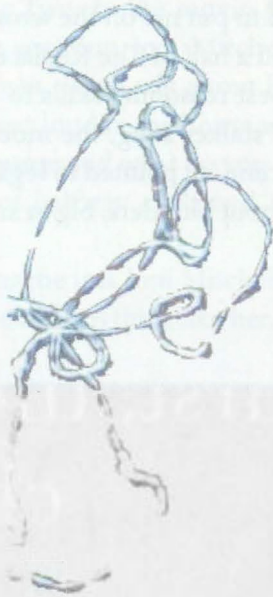
*

I am interested in the interconnectivity of events. At the moment I am particularly interested in the way the little, interconnected clues leading up to these three events all deliberately conspired to put me on the wrong track. What I’ve taken away from watching a minute and a half of *The Replacements* on TBS this afternoon is that you can apply your best reasoning skills to a situation and still come out a fool. The floppy hair, the stalker song, the mounted head, the glossy photo, my mother’s claim, a movie scene, all pointed to logical conclusions that will never be right. No more worries about blunders, big or small, clearly the world was designed for them.



Liz Hartley

THE POLE BARN
Schuyler Swartout



Out of the pickup,
I stop ten steps
before the cavernous
mouth, as if affixing
a diving mask, as if bracing
for a tornado overhead,
ready to be swallowed.
Dust here permeates
the atmosphere –
constant mist lethal
as mine gas.

Then, into the spar-house,
passing old gasoline
tanks, old turpentine.
Thin sun flits over slats
in heaps in dark.

At the epicenter,
jutting from canvas,
the rickety, shook-down tractor.
Machine in the beast,
a beast of a machine,
and I am about to stir its stomach.
I think of it wild,
a catfish, a boar
waiting to gash out prey
and I feel my sweat,
and my thick spit,
greasy, coats my throat
and I step to mount the
monster tires.



TRIBAL FISH ~ *Irena Stanisic*



Intrigue on angel wings, deep songs of the early morning.
a world drifts swiftly beneath high top stars,
evidence of Eden nevermore. raise high
the tall-story titles of architect men, a dream of God,
the glory filled hours of bright smile sighs. there are songs for us,
gently brushing our hearts with melody, the rhythm of breath,
a vision of blue—and i bristle with busied beauty, images wash
upon diamonds, crushed as shores, walled to the corners of my mind.
deeply i draw the drag of a cigarette, remembering always
in touch by lip, the delicate design of deliberate disaster.
searching hands, i always yearn for the dance,
and i stumble upon the blankets of poets, in December.

~ *Josh Davis*

The way I dream is something after midnight.

She laughed and I say, but not like how

I used to stutter. That was bad.

And I breathe shadows like cigarettes, only distracted by the sunshine paints a
pretty girl's face. But not like the first time that I saw her sitting in the breezeway,
clove in hand, ready to do anything that could ever mean nothing as long it didn't

because we would be together.

Even before we knew.

Even before breathing was hard.

Then coming back for the last time that was a last first time that wouldn't be a last
time at all—that time it was different. Soon I saw and knew.

There is a sickness in me. And they say it's not like dying. Good health.

But I am and it is happening and I can feel it.

There is a creep and a pull and sometimes it is like drowning,
frightening unto euphoria though I have never drowned that far.

-THE MESSENGER-

ZEPHYREAN PRAYERS



~ Jackie McMabon



CURIOSITY

bent out of



shape

Liz Hartley

MID-LIFE

Meg Hurtado

Come with me, to Arcadia –
(never to come down,
never to sink.)

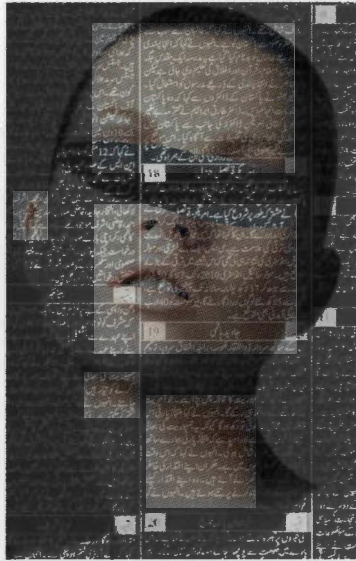
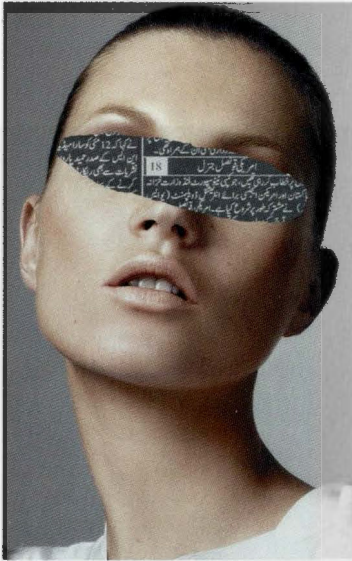
Come with me to Arcadia,
with the eyes of snakes and women in red shoes.
don't worry: no one will be able to hear what we say.

come with me! to Arcadia.
the thudding of cast-off picnic baskets tell me
we're never going back.
do you take note of the wagon-trains, covered in saffron-silk?

come with me to Arcadia because
my Muse left me six months ago
and she took the keys to the refrigerator.

Come with me to Arcadia:
("Why lie? I need a beer.")

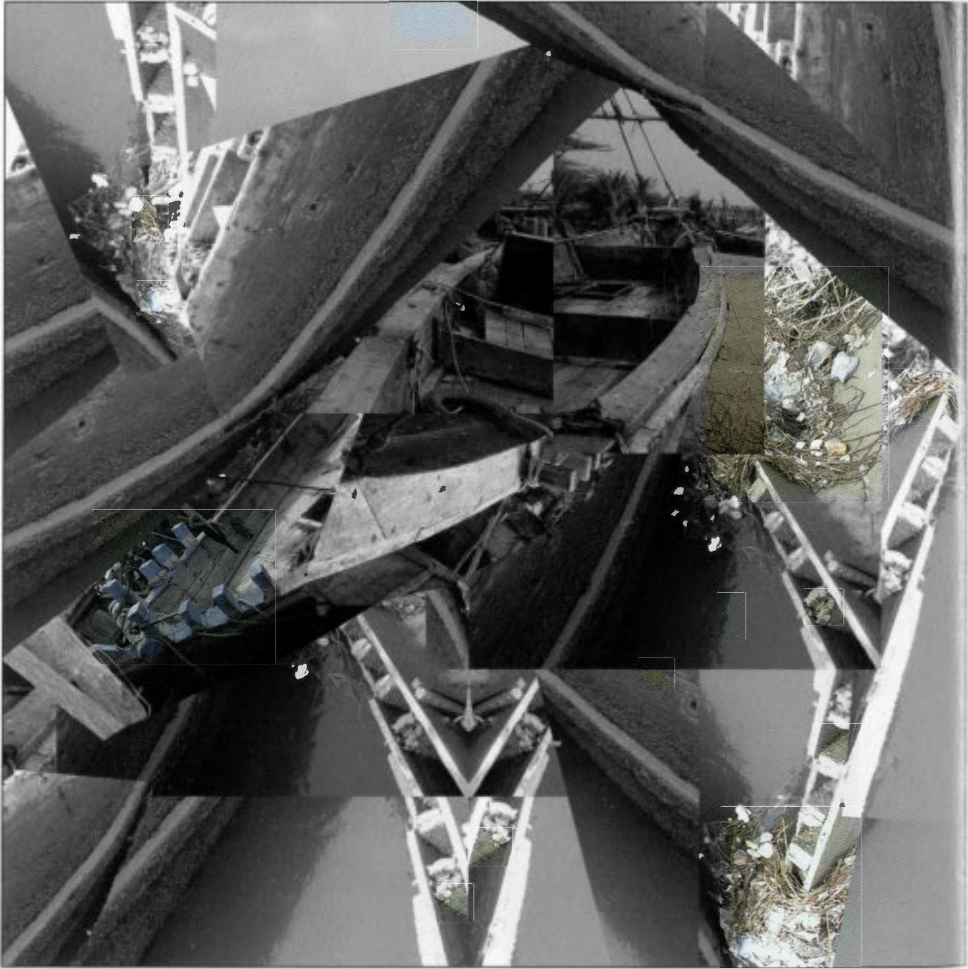




Rafiya Naim

HIJAB

CONFISCATED



~ Rafiya Naim

With the Grace of Water
Dan B. Shapiro

The two weeks in Italy, I
took that picture with me.

The one I put
on the front

of the card I made
for you late

the Night before
your surgery, though I will

still pretend it did not
break my heart because I know

I won't have you
Always. But only,

only that picture and just
your smile the love

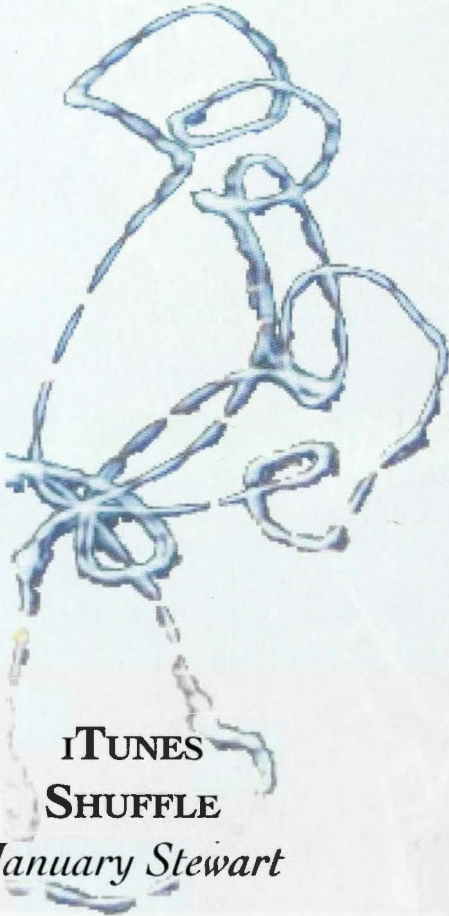
I won't forget. The only
truth for me is what I will remember

what I find in your
eyes, always

Bluer than mine.

Ariel Olson

TRANSLATION



iTUNES
SHUFFLE
January Stewart

Feeling this
Phobic
Night in Tunisia
Here goes
A wink and a smile
Planting the seed

Euphonic sounds
For dancers only
Speak softly, love
That Sunday, that summer
All blues
Lullaby of birdland

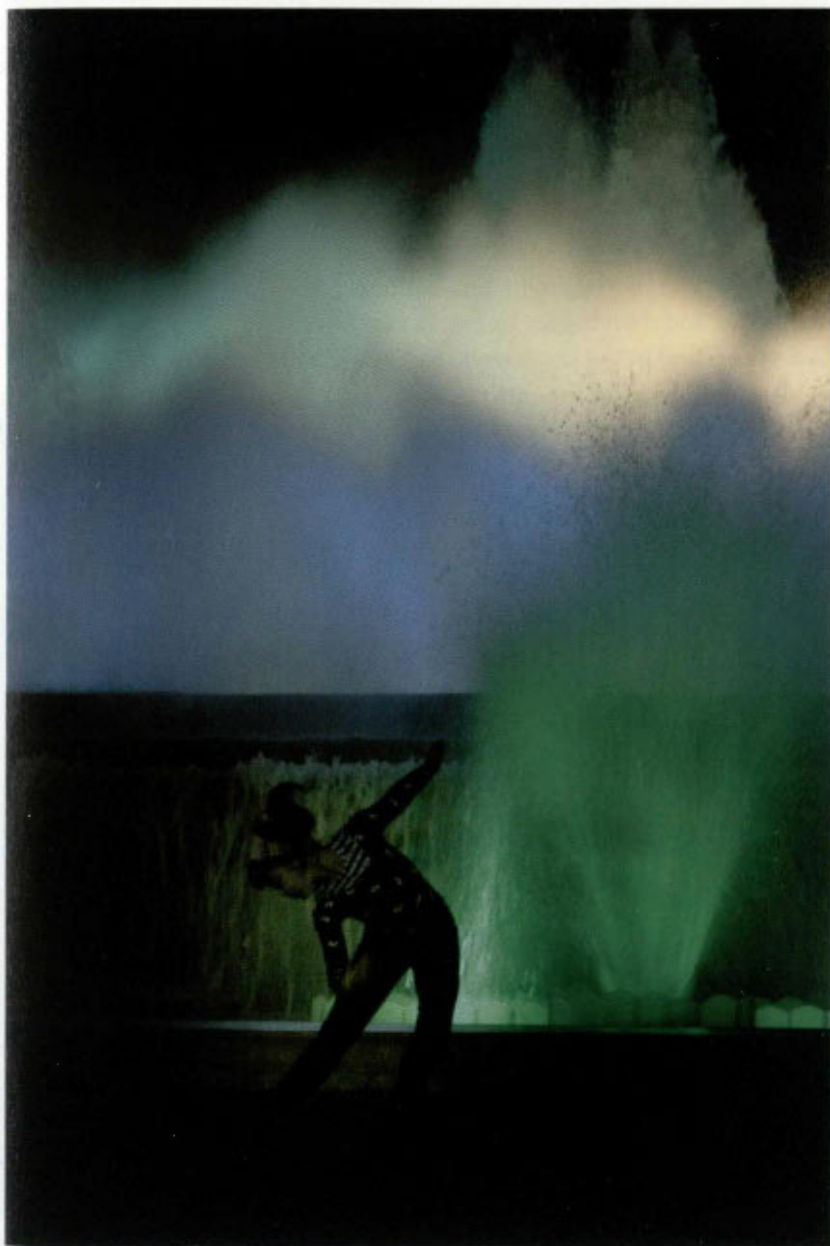
The damage in your heart
Tiny little fractures
From blown speakers
Concede
When it started
All over again

The past and pending
Moon love
Loss leaders
Straighten up and fly right
Back at your door
Happy together

-THE MESSENGER-

WITH THE GRACE OF WATER

Dan B. Shapiro



THE FINAL CHAPTER

Josh Davis

First, the bridges began collapsing.
then cars began imploding (I think the Audis were
the first to go).
one day the sun didn't rise.
the scientists weren't sure what to make of it
but they were confident that the sun was still completely functional.
they posited that the earth had gone awry.

A little time passed and then babies stopped crying.
there was an uproar and in the confusion someone grabbed a shotgun.
sadness was descending upon the earth.
but the poets claimed they understood precisely what was happening.
millions of poets set off on a journey.
they were going to stop the penguins.
less than seven poets remained when they reached the edge of the world.
across an unfathomable distance they were distracted by a wondrous sight.
however, before any report could be made, those poets vanished
into the thinnest air any of them had ever seen.

All we know is that for the next three days
a distant cry could be heard echoing throughout
the expanse of temporal reality—

Pterodactyls are powerful beings and they demand respect,
even from the grave.
the penguins had offended the pterodactyls,
although we never completely understood how they had done so.
perhaps it was the posture of the penguins.
we weren't sure what, but there was something wrong with their attitude.
those of us that were left tried to reason with the penguins,
but those damn birds wouldn't listen.
like most creatures of majesty, the penguins were victims of their own hubris.
for their blind pride, we were condemned—

They should have known their limits.

Some of us were consumed by our anger,
but as pieces of earth began crumbling away,
a precious young girl of about age four showed mankind how to die:

she was spinning
and spinning.
one of us stood beside her,
then another.
then another and an other.
we were spinning then.
we all began to spin.



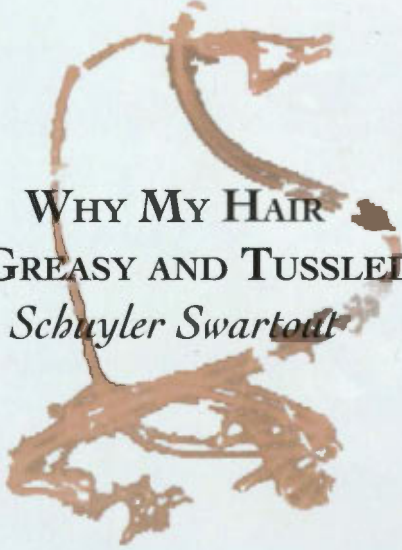
MOS DEF ~ *Irena Stanisic*



POST OFFICE
SCENERY

Megan McNamara

Yes, I showered
this morning, and I ran my fingers
through the back ends of my scalp,
where my ears meet my skull and back
to the fiddlehead of my spine.
Accustomed to closing my eyes,
I thought of hard kisses, the kind
they do in the movies with such gusto
to prove they're really in love.
Each fingertip through my hair, each hand
a mirrored press against myself.
Finally, I shuddered a great shudder,
saw my thousand hair-strands and
remembered how the hero carried his mother
out on his shoulders, the blades drawn out
like two rune stones on his back,
each with three-tiered whorls pointed in
toward his spindly vertebrae.
In fear, I turned off the faucet, dressed,
and left the house, shoving a hat over
my still-damp head.



WHY MY HAIR
IS GREASY AND TUSSELED

Schuyler Swartout

“THE ASHTRAY,

belly full, spills its contents

on the patio, and i think if we

wait long enough the rain will Fall

in heavy, swollen drops

and wash away

[I need]

your fingerprints.”

and

as you touch

[your lips,]

to my

cigarette, my lips

and this,

.this Kiss/

/

And this,

/ [in black & white] ?

but This

‘ or this, the stars, or stops;

is

start [with the stars and] then /part/

not...

with them, Stars again/

start again .Stop ’

a [sunrise-song,]

(the glass is

It says nothing
anyway.

[alive,]

while)

/ripples in the

/pretty words

mirror/

or

on your windowsill/

distract me

from the step

. And This! .

/may not be/

...no this is not

. Was A Fortunate .

[forever.]

(she sleeps in the

Fall) .

~Ariel Olson

He shattered the glass on the antique mirror with his fist, now bloody and throbbing as he admired the shards lodged in his knuckles; it was a mild distraction from the impending pain. His wife was lying in a thin white nightgown on the cold ceramic floor with increasing rigidity. There was nobody in her family to call at this hour. He had no one of his own to call. She was the only person he had and now her eyes were fixated on him reminding him that they would not bat playfully at him again. Those same eyes mocked his perpetual existence; they were going to haunt his every waking moment. So he stitched them shut before sweeping up the fragments of glass and remaining pills, and going to bed. He'd embalm her in the morning.

ASPHYXIA
Chet'la Sebree

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION
Meg Hurtado

- 1, Everything is better when you can throw half of it away.:
- 2, and Time, she said, isn't three pieces of glass hanging on a clothes line.
if it's anything, it's three pieces of glass in a kiddie pool,
past-future-presently themselves,
overlapping when we want them to, soaking in not-the-real-thing,
prepared to pierce.
- 3, I dream of blood and in the morning there it is.





MADE YOU LOOK
Liz McAvoy

FRIDAY
Helen Queue

my Camel No. 9's
the cold football field
a cloud spreading like a giant ribcage.

how moss is always moss.
how soccer is always an excuse.
how birds leave their homes.

my roommate smokes too but when
she asks about the grass in my hair, I say,
I fell down a valley of bones.

NOGGIN DAS
John Alulis

Translated from Norwegian:

At the edge of a forest on a frozen hill somewhere in Norway with an unpronounceable name, a young boy called Sigmund prepared to make his fortune. He'd set up a make-shift table and was bustling around arranging his merchandise for best effect. The table sagged under the weight of heavy wooden shields, great swords, helmets, and full jugs of mead. Eventually satisfied, he stepped back a pace to survey his setup. Nodding slightly to himself in approval, he turned to observe the battle raging all around him at the base of the hill.

The two sides were evenly matched for the moment. He'd accompanied a Norwegian war band across the border into Sweden, looking to make a quick buck (or the tenth-century Norwegian equivalent of a buck, at least) by selling vital after-battle equipment to the surviving warriors. After watching for some time, he finally decided that he might as well sit down and be comfortable until the first customers began staggering up the hill weighted down with booty.

Leaning back against a nearby pine tree's trunk, he was startled to hear a voice addressing him. "Yo! Kid!" Naturally, Sigmund leapt to his feet, knife waving in a vaguely threatening manner. He looked all around him, but saw no one. After listening for a short while, he convinced himself that it was really nothing and had just sat down when the voice came again.

"Hey kid! Yes, I'm talking to you!" "Who's there?" Sigmund cried out, on his feet for the second time. He turned in a tight circle once more, still trying to pinpoint the voice. The voice sighed. "Behind you. The pine tree. No, not behind the pine tree, the actual pine tree. No, there's no one hiding in the branches, I mean the pine tree itself. Really, yes, the tree itself." More than a little confused, Sigmund stopped looking around and stared at the tree in question.

"Yes, yes, ooh look a talking tree, am I crazy, etc. etc. right? How about we skip all that and get straight to the point?" the tree said, sounding a bit exasperated.

"I am a magical talking tree and I've got better business sense than you do." Sigmund had recovered enough to be annoyed at this. "Just what do you mean by that remark?" he snapped. "You've got the business sense of a lemming, kid. Sorry. I don't make up the truth."

"Stop calling me kid!"

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen in two months."

"Right. When you hit one-forty, then we'll talk. So what in the name of Loki are you thinking selling this stuff?"

"I'm trying to make my fortune!"

"You're gonna be losing it if you keep going the way you are. Tell me- why do you think men go to try to kill each other?"

"To win glory and riches and women."

"Right. So what you're selling here for the winners is all the stuff that they're winning for free down there right now. Why are they going to want to slog all the way up here and give you money to buy a bunch of stuff very similar to what's already become theirs because the original owner's a lot shorter?"

"Oh."

"Yeah, 'oh' is right. You want to make money you're going to have to be more original than this."

"I've got medicines and healing potions and lucky amulets to Thor and stuff like that," Sigmund said, brightening. "They could use all that since they won't be finding much down there."

"You've got a point there," the tree admitted. Sigmund beamed. "Course," the

tree continued, "You haven't advertised any of it. Or even brought it with you by the look of it." Sigmund flushed bright red. "Left it all back at the camp, didn't you? Figured you'd sell your stuff up here then run back just in time to catch all the wounded coming into camp and make a second killing off them, am I right?"

Suitably chastised, Sigmund nodded mutely.

"This battle's a loss for you no matter what you do now," the pine tree said. "But I think I can help you make a bundle with the next one.

"How do you know all this stuff?" Sigmund asked, genuinely curious as to how a pine tree went about acquiring business acumen. "You pick things up here and there," the tree said nonchalantly. "As it happens, I used to be a man before I ran afoul of Odin."

"That's awful!" Sigmund exclaimed, horror and the sort of curiosity that makes people look at car accidents warring in his head. "What happened?"

The formerly human pine tree let out another long-suffering sigh. "I was a merchant like you were. I had a bit more business sense than you did, but not much. Luckily, I found my opening almost straight off and the money started rolling in."

"What were you selling?" Sigmund interrupted. If he had had a piece of paper, a pen, the ability to read and write, and more intelligence than currently resided inside his skull, he'd have been taking notes.

The tree lowered its voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Deep-fried ravens. Usually on a stick." Sigmund's eyes went wide. "You heard me right," the pine continued, still whispering. "Deep-fried ravens. Go out on the battlefield today after they're finished and catch a few dozen ravens. Stick 'em in cages and keep them there until the next battle, then stick 'em in a big vat of boiling oil for a few minutes, insert a stick, and sell them. It's a sign of defiance to be seen eating one of the things that might be eating you in a few hours, so everyone'll buy one from you to look tough no matter what you charge for them. They're hard to catch, but a couple dozen'll fetch you a year's good wages. There's a fortune to be made selling them."

"So how come Odin turned you into a tree then?"

"I made the mistake of getting too greedy. After I made my money selling ravens, I tried branching out to make even more. I figured I'd hit on a niche in the market for edible battlefield novelty items, so I invented Noggin Das custard.

"Never heard of it."

"It never got as big as it could have gotten since Odin turned me into a tree before I could really market it properly. I figured if showing your defiance by eating carrion birds worked, why not show it by eating the jellied brains of your enemy? So I put out the word that you could bring me the severed head (or heads, in some cases) of your sworn enemy (or enemies) and I'd use a secret and mystical process known only to me to turn their brains into a delicious and marginally nutritious flavored custard. For a reasonable fee, obviously. Naturally they were fighting for space in line."

"Naturally."

"Right. But then Odin went and turned me into a tree just as it was getting really popular. Missing an eyeball apparently made him dislike people who went around desecrating corpses for profit. He saw how wide-spread Noggin Das custard was getting and so he started asking around to find out who'd started it so he could put a stop to it. He found me eventually, then turned me into the noble pine tree you see today when he didn't like my excuses. And that's it really."

"Wow," Sigmund said. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Unfortunately no," the pine tree sighed. "Consider this a free business seminar for a struggling novice. Get rid of this junk and start selling deep-fried ravens. Grab a net and start right now- the ravens ought to be landing shortly." Unnoticed by Sigmund, the battle below was beginning to wind down and the ravens were circling lower and lower.

"Thanks a lot..." Sigmund hesitated. "Ragnar," the previously unnamed pine tree supplied helpfully. "Thanks a lot Ragnar," Sigmund finished. Turning around, he

-THE MESSENGER-

sprinted back towards his campsite to get a net.

“Torvik, you ass!” a birch tree behind him yelled at the pine tree who’d been calling himself Ragnar a second ago. “You’ve always been a tree! And ravens are sacred to Odin, you sick fucker!”

“Hehehe,” Torvik née Ragnar snickered.



SINK, EMERGE, OR FLOAT ~ *Irena Stanisic*

THE COLOR OF FEAR

Angela Harris

Run baby run
Why mommy
Just do like I said baby
Run, Run Fast
But mommy why
I'm scared, I'm really scared
Just run baby
But why mommy
I'm cold, my feet hurt
Baby please just run
Do like I told you
But why mommy
What about daddy
Shouldn't he run too



He is dead

Tears streaming
Why mommy
Why mommy

Baby just run

Hid by the darkness of night
Crouched in a corner
Body covering mine

Voices low
Breaths deep

Why mommy
Why is Daddy dead

The color of fear baby
Because of the color of fear

Face to my face
Eyes to my eyes
Voice to Voice

What is the color of fear
Mommy, what is the color of fear

A pause, a deep breath
It you baby it you
You are the color of fear

I wept
No mommy, not me
I' m only three

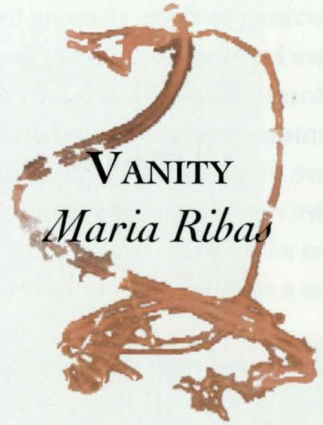
Yes baby, YOU

I wept yesterday
I weep today
I am the color of fear



MELTING POT
Irena Stanisic

Maybe it was better this way, but probably not. It had tried to assume a posture of grace, sincerity, and a total acceptance of its lot in life – to be like the pebble in the brook. But then, just as it could almost feel the rushing waters of life over its smooth surface, some idiot would come over and start picking meat from between his teeth right in front of it. Or a pretty girl would come over to gaze at herself and it would all too willingly join her. It had seen it all, and there was much to see in that room, where it was so supinely hung. A high-backed, winged chair with burgundy stripes was the focus of much reflection, as was the neat little teak table that received more polishes than seemed justified. People would stroll in and out at leisurely paces, but always with a self-conscious glance in its direction. In fact, the observation that not a person could pass by without a look at it is what had started all this. At first it had felt important, proud, and had gleamed with the knowledge of its indispensability. This illusion was shattered when it reflected more intently on the nature of the gazes it attracted and saw what was in the pretty girl's eyes. She saw herself and nothing more. It would only ever be a vehicle for the admiration of others, something forever looked past and not at. And so it went, day after day, reflections changing, but all of them leading back to the mirror's vain desire to admire itself.



NOISY.

Josh Davis

waking to sleep, sleeping to wake,
we know and we do not know—
tossed raggedy like lamb chops,
minced and marinated in the chill of cheap beer,
we forget ourselves as children,
we regret ourselves as men; and i regret myself,
as a boy-who-can-no-longer-pass-for-a-boy and
as a man-who-could-never-have-passed-for-a-man.

i am steeped in the noise of what i know i am supposed to know,
and of the ways i am supposed to do; like the color of noise,
i am saturated to the point of a scream, and a deadly whisper, or a near collapse,
watching the yellows swirl, to green, to blue...

too many hues;
and i, maroon.

sleeping to wake, waking to sleep,
i remember poets whose words i may never meet,
whose titles i may never taste,
whose dreams may never dance with mine,
yet i remain unrhymed, all the time, as a sign that i refuse to decline:
the key is rhythmic and it is slick like a line unpicked;

my mind is left a derelict.



SOWETO RAINED ON HER SHANTY-TOWNS

Ariel Olson

PLAIN BAGEL, TOASTED WITH CREAM CHEESE AND TOMATOES

Ashley Foxen

Blaring horns, sirens, children screaming, and heavy footsteps have ruined dreams. Another morning and another day when his alarm clock has become just another paper weight instead of a useful gadget. Ten minutes earlier than planned, he lies awake, stubbornly keeping his eyes shut. He hates this. He hates waking up to the world ahead of him, insisting that he join in. New York City, the place he dreamt of living, until now. He is confined to four walls and no quiet, privacy or peace of mind. Pangs of longing for a clean suburban town seem to ache inside him. Dramatically, for no one at all, he swings himself out of bed and trudges to the bathroom to stare at his annoyed reflection in the mirror. *If the bagel place on the corner is out of sesame again, I'm quitting, he tells himself. That'll be it, the last straw. How can I be disappointed before I even clock in? Yup, I'll quit.* He spits, rinses, and puts on his favorite blue suit. If he's going to make it through the day, he better feel good about something.

Six damn months and they still don't know my name, his mind grumbles as he passes the couple down the hall. They both look down to check their watches, avoiding a simple "good morning". He begrudgingly resorts to the stairs after the elevator is a no show, angrily pounding into them like a little kid trying to make the biggest echo. Bursting through the revolving doors, he enters into the chaos of the morning commute. Construction workers wearing hardhats walking next to men and women in suits, about to break into a run, their strides so fast, there isn't much of a difference. Then the kids on their way to school jump into the mix, along with backpacks, frantic babysitters and little dogs whose leashes add to the obstacles of everyone's mornings. He hangs a quick left, avoiding a Dalmatian, and brushes a sign "Wet Paint". *Perfect, now we look alike.* Desperately trying to clean off, he jumps into his favorite bagel place. *This is all the city has going for it, he thinks, the food.* Bagels and pizza, the two dishes he lives on, and will not eat anywhere else. The city has spoiled him with its perfection of the two. "All outta sesame," says the clerk, but he has already forgotten his little bet with himself. "Plain, toasted with cream cheese and tomatoes," he decides on the spot. He saw some guy order it the day before, and he looked like he knew what he was doing. There are the pros at the bagel store morning routine, and then there are the newcomers, who ask too

many questions, slow everyone down, but then look hurt when they receive dirty looks from the regulars. He was there once, amazed by all of his options. But now, the fascination has worn off. He grabs his bag, balancing coffee in his other hand, and counts down the blocks until he can sit and enjoy his breakfast.

The subway took him two weeks to figure out and two and a half weeks to hate. So he tried taking a cab to work, but on his second attempt, being a half of an hour late, with coffee down his shirt from the stop and go traffic, he decided he would take the crap from public transportation instead of his boss. Settling into the corner of the car, resting his foot up against the handrail for support, he relaxes and begins to enjoy his morning commute; a sip of coffee, then a bite of his bagel, and a few more lines of the paper.

As he reads about the war, he is distracted from the budget increase by a large "splat" in his proximity. There on his shined shoes sits a tomato slice. He looks up, and the young woman sitting across from him is starting to resemble its color. But she is smiling, obviously amused, but trying hard to hide it, quickly moving her breakfast to the side to clean his shoe and apologize profusely. She has long brown hair and a pretty face. *She smiles with her eyes*, he thinks, quickly noticing their color as he leans down to stop her, insisting it's not a big deal. Then he realizes, one second too late, his coffee is still in his hand. They both yell, and she frantically wipes her formerly white blouse. But then, to his pleasant surprise, she stops. "Fuck it," she declares, "I don't have anyone to impress at work anyway."



Liz Hartley

THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR THE SUNRISE

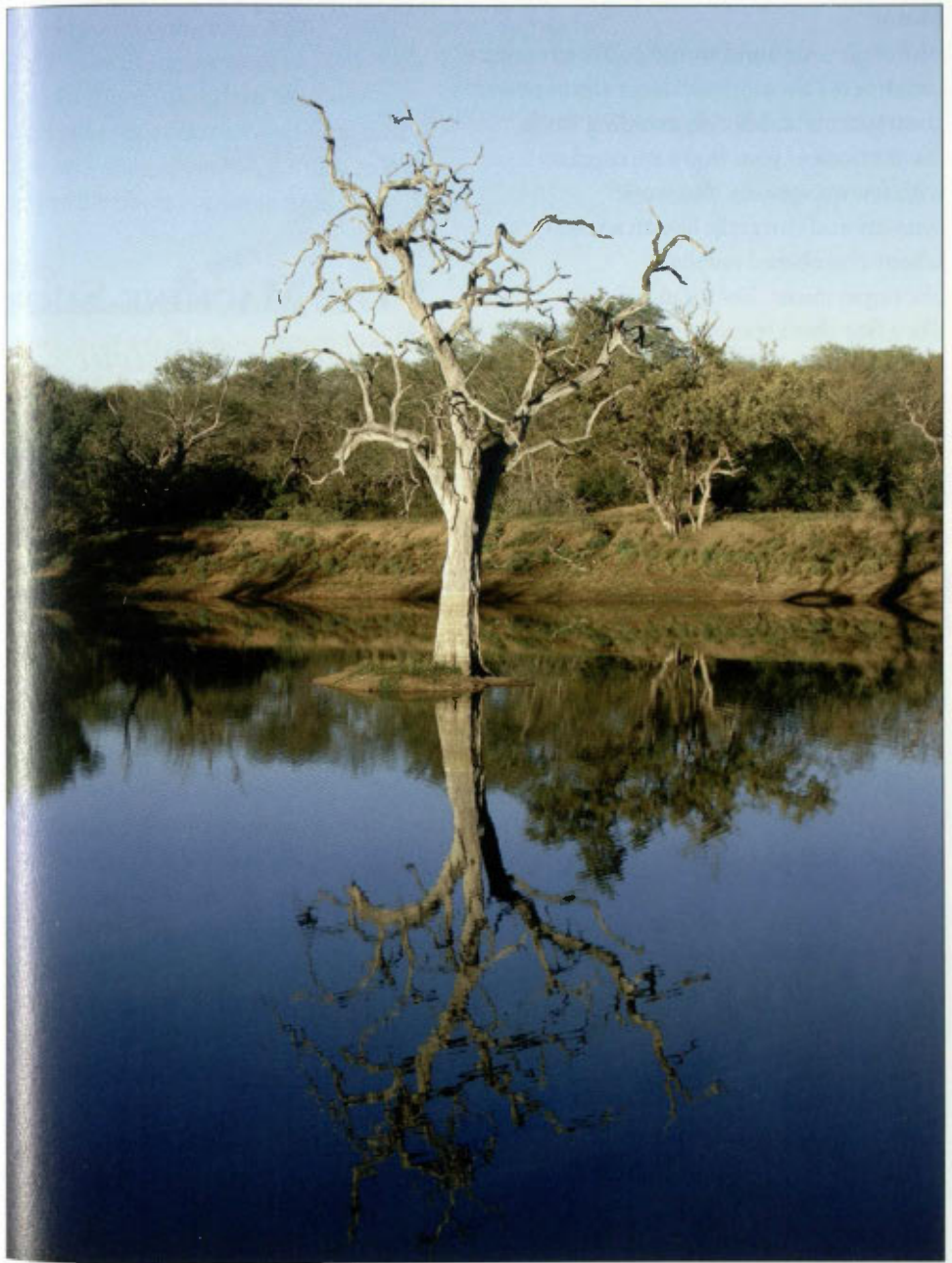
Schuyler Swartout

At 7:30 in the morning, the brakeman rises from his folding chair. It is snowy December, and he puts on his flannel coat before stepping out the hatch to have a cigarette. He smiles; his breath and his smoke fill the deck light's amber glow in equal parts. Ash falls from his hands, past the thin blue railing and onto the quick-moving snow beneath. As he finishes, the brakeman wheels around to the maintenance ladder and ambles up, flicking the butt off of the steel wall as his boots push him upward. He stands on top of the engine, feet shoulder-width, boots gripping firmly, eying the snaking length of cars like a desperado. He begins to stretch a measured step forward.

The brakeman has poor vision. He sends most of his wages to his mother in Buffalo, as does his brother serving in Europe. His hobby of whittling has yet to produce a finished object. No one has ever taught him how to play poker. He likes being outside the cars, feeling the wind beat steadily across his shoulders as he walks with it.

Against the denim sky, the brakeman makes a short jump to the first car and stops to turn the brakewheel. The pistons' chug speeds up, thrusting him forward, but he has braced his legs in preparation. He gets up and starts for the next car. As he walks the steel cars turning brakewheels, the engine reaches an incredible throttle. The boiler snarls, the cars begin to wrack on the rails, and the brakeman hears distantly the conductor practicing his banjo from the engine. The sky grows lighter, and the brakeman reaches the end of the train. He has removed his coat and stands now in his overalls at the edge of the caboose roof. The roaring engine is passing a small town, casting snow powder onto homes and the station as its whine heightens and the speed levels out. Arms spreading outward, the brakeman looks at the whitening eastern sky and squints. Then he is gone.

At 7:51, the town doctor walked onto Main Street, coat stained from delivering twins minutes ago. Looking up at the church steeple, he noticed a red flannel coat, as large as a gas balloon, carrying a man east into the sunrise.

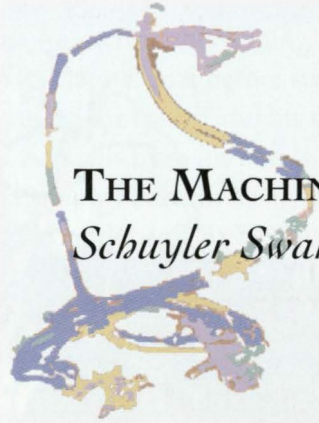


**LIGHTNING-TREE & BISCOTTI-COFFEE PICNIC
WITH SLEEPING CROCODILES**

Ariel Olson

Motor

Although your mind would prefer to conjure constructed memories of large steam powered contraptions stubbornly avoiding work, the motions of your body are regular with few exceptions. You work ornately and correctly, like an ancient, fifteen-chambered revolver like organ music, like a gandydancer like a fine china teapot steaming so that you can fill your waiting friends, politely, with that hot, strong brew they indulge in.



THE MACHINE SHOP *Schuyler Swartout*

Gears

Death, sinister pinprick that he is, has jagged sickles made of minute hands and waits for you inside roman numerals. Never having believed in Him personified, you prefer to use your limbs as countdown: bent on the bicycle, click, click, click from your gears. For every rotation, the magnet that works your timer/odometer counts the three steps that you did not take.

Machine Oil

As you digest, consider: that acid in your stomach could kill you. Take in too much, it bursts, slowly you drown in gastric juice. Less morbid perhaps is drowning in plain water but you fear this also: at night after drinking, bloody eyes at the ceiling, you think about the liquid closing in on your lungs, that gushing essential running through your chest.

Belts

Who needs memory when you've kept diaries for sixteen years? When you



stare at your continuous VHS,
you'll have the sense to sit as
frissons shoot from chair to spine.
You know your fears weren't imagined
later on – they appeared, cut you to ribbons,
they will be here for some time.

Bolts

The robber-monster on your sofa
spews mixtures from his copper innards
out his navel: he wants your food
and television. And who are you to
deny him and his steam belchings
the privacy of your own home when
you wake and walk down to find
him crouched, washing himself in front
of Leno, his arms outstretched?

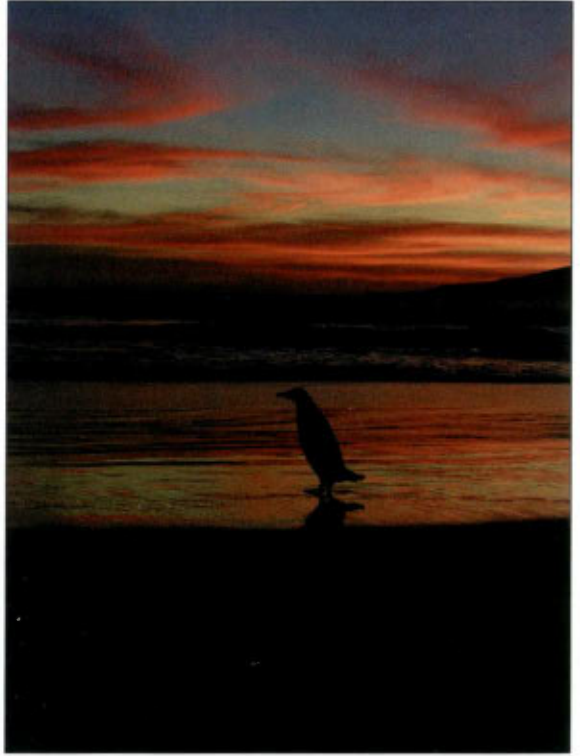
Turnings

Pressed out, used and left
to dry on a handkerchief
overnight, it is time for your
second brewing. I know –
you are tired, feel pathetic,
would rather fresh leaves
be spooned from the tin
but please, we must be frugal,
and it is late tonight. So please
unfurl your gunpowder leaves,
fill the teaball, mix, spurt
that engineered infusion,
that steaming liquid life-giver
that you know you hold,
concentrated and potent,
igniting in your pitted stomach.

NINA
Irena Stanisic



PENGUIN AT
SANDFLY BAY
Emily Souleret



A BIT OF TURBULENCE
Katie Cloutte

'Attention, this is your captain speaking. As you have most likely already noticed, we are currently experiencing a bit of turbulence. I am turning the 'Fasten seat belts' sign on so please return to your seats. Thank you.'

'Fuckin A. I hate this shit,' thought 22B, as he turned up his music.

9A gripped the arms on either side of her seat and subsequently crushed 9B's hand. 'Please make it stop,' she thought as the plane took a violent dip.

The turbulence ceased as quickly as it started. The tension that had previously filled the aircraft rapidly dispersed and sighs of relief were sensed among the passengers. The prior near-death experiences everyone suffered were soon forgotten. Books were pulled out; reports were typed; naps were taken.

'These people really don't realize how close they were to experiencing a nose dive into the ground. Captains are way undervalued.'

'Yes, well, if they had known, who knows what kind of chaos would have erupted back there.'

'True. Ignorance is indeed bliss.'

■

'Can I get you something to drink?'

'Ginger Ale, please.'

'Can I get a coke, no ice.'

'Vodka, a lot of it.'

'What kind of juice do you have?'

■

'Oh shit.'

■

'What was that?'

'Some kind of explosion.'

■

'757 Aircraft, Flight 1881, crashed last night into Longwood Elementary School. There were no survivors. The cause has yet to be determined as the black box has not been located. Family members please call the toll free number located at the bottom of the screen for more information.'

■

People from all over town volunteered to rifle through pieces of the plane, luggage, and corpses in search of the black box only to end up empty handed.

'What does this thing look like anyway?'

'Like a black box, I'd assume.'

'Thank you, Captain Obvious.'



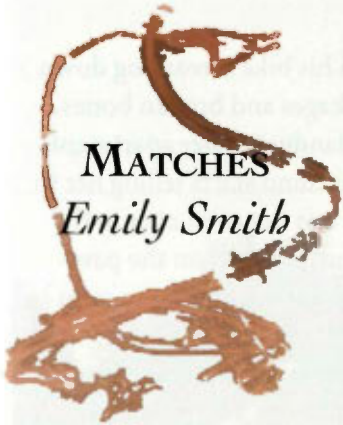
TRAPPED
Liz McAvoy



FRESH AFFECTION

Jackie McMahon





MATCHES
Emily Smith

Open your eyes.
Fold back the milk-pale spoons
Palm out the barstool ink
And lay bare the murky under-marsh
Where dream fish wade in slick black boots
Discussing night business.

In the dim vanilla kitchen, lid to lid
Somniferous cooks smiling into their ladles
Take off their toques and go
Shuffling out through the long-lashed dining room
Where delusions of grandeur dab their mouths
And put on tiny overcoats.

LIFE AFTER SEX ~ Anon.

the facts being that she and i became unvirgin together,
she on top, she unfulfilled.

the facts being that we were not found out until she told the wrong girl,
the girl who told another girl, the girl who told her parents,
the parents who told the school (since we had been on a school trip),
the parents who told the church, the church who prayed for us,
the school that had us suspended,
the parents who took her out of that school and then away to another
state.

details being that we saw one another again.

details being that the week afterward, before anyone found out,
i told her i would love her forever.

details being that i believed i would love her forever.

details being that i still do.

SHE SEES, FOR THE MOST PART

Ashley Foxen

In her peripheral vision she sees a delivery boy on his bike screaming down her block, just in time to avoid flying papers, packages and broken bones. Once the coast is clear, she steps down from the landing of her apartment building. Not a great start to her day, her superstitious mind starts telling her to go back inside. A potentially perilous situation and it was not even nine in the morning. It is just in my head, she tells herself, clicking her heels on the pavement in tempo to the music from the headphones she put on, hoping to calm her nerves.

Four blocks down, a Starbuck's fix, and two more to go. In her peripheral vision she looks at her reflection in the glass of the buildings. Her pleasant face and neat attire flash in and out of her sight as she is not the only one going somewhere important. For a second, she wishes she could jump into the shoes of the young boy passing her, holding hands with what appears to be his nanny. He cannot be worried about more than getting the more ferocious of the animal crackers from the box in the giant purse banging into the hip of the woman he clings to.

A sleeping bum, a business man on his phone, and a daydreaming young girl sit in front of her. She looks only at them, facing forward to avoid feeling sick. Hating the subway, she ignores what is in her peripheral vision, other cars flying by in a sea of colors and lights as she travels below ground. Yet, with her eyes closed and her mind far from her immediate surroundings, she still has butterflies. And they somehow fluttered their way up from her stomach into her chest. She is getting closer.

The Central Park Zoo tempts her; she has never been inside. But, she keeps moving, forcing her suddenly lead like feet on, through the paths and past the happy families enjoying what the city lacks of suburbia. Once seated on the bench, her watch becomes the only thing she focuses on, pushing out thoughts of what to say, whether to be upbeat or indifferent. Does she have too much makeup on? Looking at herself in her compact, she sees the distress in her eyes. She hopes she did not mess up the time in her flustered agreement to meet him here. She is pleading with herself to be more confident, holding her hands in her lap to stop their fidgeting. Suddenly, they freeze as the goose bumps ripple down her arms. She doesn't even need to peek in any direction to sense all over that someone is approaching.



HOMeward BOUND
Megan McNamara

AND THE SIGN SAYS, "BEWARE THE UNDERTOW"

Josh Katz

Wakefield, Rhode Island. It's two A.M. in Wakefield, Rhode Island, and as I lie awake on the guest couch, a red knitted blanket my sole defense against the cool air moving out of the Atlantic, up Narragansett Avenue, and through the living room window, I realize with no small wonder that Kim Bowman has given me an erection.

For a long time I have been in love with her. I'm not quite sure I believe in love at first sight—it has always seemed to me that hormones play a larger guiding role in that endeavor than many care to admit—but I definitely felt *fascination* at first sight. From our first meeting three years ago, we just got one another. She was nervous and odd and when she burped she acted like something busted inside of her. I was high-strung and arch and I'd sometimes throw up a little in my mouth if I got really happy. We were quite the pair of misfits.

Yet we never got together. I can blame the old insecurity valve (what if she doesn't love me back? I just can't take that kind of rejection) or the fact that I was dating someone I probably shouldn't have been (Bowman's best friend, natch!) but truth be told, I got off on the purity of my feelings. I loved Kim's mind, her spirit, her soul, *the way I felt loving her without reciprocation*. I refashioned myself as martyr, my tragic unrequitedness standing triumphant before all the shallow and petty physical couplings my generation deigns romantic. Hence the erection issue. I was too good for one, my emotions too true. You don't get a hard-on in the presence of a god (well, maybe among the Greek gods).

And yet here I am, 500 miles from home, summer's end in my sights (and then graduation, and grad school, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow), and I have an erection thinking about Kim Bowman as I lie on her grandparents' couch. I can't blame my loose-fitting underwear or the texture of the quilt; it's all me, baby. Every time I close my eyes, I see her on the Block Island Ferry. Her hair's in a bun, a few errant strands tossed about by the wind. Scattered freckles dot her nose and cheeks, forming an inverted "v." And the left strap on her brown bikini top slides and falls, ever so softly, to the bend in her elbow. She smiles big and pulls it back up, a crisis averted on the ferry but not in my mind somehow, and

my genetically allotted excuse for manhood roars in the night wind. Is “hard-on” pronounced with the same Yankee flair as “harbor” is in Rhode Island?

What does this mean?

Is it hormones?

Does it cheapen her?

Does it cheapen me?

Why is this different?

Things have felt different for a few months. Kim’s abrupt courtship with Dave, The Human Personality Vacuum, and its equally abrupt disintegration. Did that concern me? Or when her parents left for Wintergreen and she asked me to sleep in her sister’s room—was that to protect her from home invaders or an excuse to have me sleep in the same proximity? The same could be said for her panicked call that someone was prank-ringing-her-doorbell—did that even happen? Why, when our group of friends plays football in her pool, does she always pair up opposite me? That’s practically sex with a swimsuit on. And why oh why, has she come to me six of the seven nights of this Maine/Rhode Island Summer Closeout Sale (save tonight, oddly enough) asking for a purely platonic backrub before heading back up to her room and leaving me dazed and confused?

Because Kim knows how I feel.

Because I told her sister.

And her sister told her.

And still she asks me for backrubs, and tackles me, and asks me to sleep in her house all alone.

She’s just trying to preserve the friendship. She doesn’t want to act differently.

Or does she? Could she feel similarly?

Could my erection be a good thing?

Maybe I’m ready to give this a real shot. Petrarch might gag, but maybe I’m not blinded by an idealization of her anymore; she gives me an erection. As male bodily functions go, this particular one is less-than ideal. Means you’re ready to deal with the messy physical couplings, right? Unless, and here’s the catch, what if she isn’t? What if she thinks she is but when Game Time comes around, it grosses her out? I can’t blame her—the erect penis looks like a manically aggressive thumb. How can I—

“Hey? You still awake?”

Bowman. Without thinking I reply, "This couch is giving me a rash or something." Silence. I imagine how this looks to her; me, doubled over and facing the back of the couch, an ingrown fetus in a wife-beater and Jockeys. I stave off mortification by remembering that this position is the only thing separating her from my unimpressive and unsightly erection. It's dark in the room, yes, but is it dark enough?

"So I take it that means—ah, fuck it. Can I have a back rub?"

My face feels warm. I shift my body to face her, and as I do I push my penis in between my legs with my right elbow and clamp it down in between my thighs. Flawlessly executed, I think. If she notices the move, she isn't showing it; she stands at the foot of the second-floor stairwell, absentmindedly picking at the front of her Rolling Stones 2004 Tour T-shirt and then wiping her hands on the pockets of her flannel pajama pants.

I smile. "You're killing me, darlin'. Just a quick one, tonight."

Bowman grins big and hops over to the couch, plopping down next to me. She looks at me. I look away and down at my crotch, willing it to go away. The whole thing. Ten minutes of dead air. Twenty, tops. That's all I need. A vanishing act. Poof.

It doesn't heed my pleas. I start to fiddle with my blanket, trying to decide if she'd find it odd if I wrapped it around my waist like a crocheted diaper. Before I move on to Plan B (fake a seizure), Kim pokes me right between the eyes with her left index finger.

"Focus. I'm tense, so you need to make this good."

"You know I don't respond well to pressure."

"That's gonna have to change."

"Some men rise to a challenge. I'm not one of them."

"You buckle like a belt."

"A plastic one, at that."

"Then, how do you want to do this?"

To my horror, everything that pops into my mind is dangerously unusable. I see us together in ways I'd never imagined. Ways I didn't know existed.

"I guess this means I'm past the idealization stage."

Kim frowns. "Huh?"

Oh God. I can see the headline: "Felled by Inner Monologue!" I do a pretty good innocent smile and shrug. "Nothing. Said the quiet part and thought

the loud one.”

“Which was?”

“I don’t get Jai-Lai.’ Turn around and lean against my knees.”

And God parted the clouds, for Kim turns around, and I can stop pinching my penis. I sit up and face her back, bending my knees and planting my feet in the couch in order to support her. “Lie back,” I say, and she does, my erection floating in the dark between my gut and her back. Briefly I consider leaving it as is, consider spreading my legs and stabbing her in the back as she falls towards me. Something deep inside my brain convinces me this would be a bad idea, and I quickly tuck my junk in my waistband to hold it down. Not ideal, but then again, what is? After this quick adjustment, I place my hands on her shoulders, I close my eyes, and I begin to rub. I knead along the sides of her spinal cord, the fabric of her T-shirt grinding softly on her backbone. Using the pads of my thumbs, I roll concentric circles into her skin just above her bottom, working the obliques gently. My hands surprise me, sliding under her shirt and spanning upwards along the latissimus dorsi. Her back my back. I feel a pimple here, an ingrown hair there. Somewhere along the journey I dimly acknowledge that Kim’s not wearing a bra. When my fingers reach her neck, they deftly glide along her shoulder blades, tugging and separating the fibers of her trapezius muscles. Still inside her shirt, I probe her deltoids and head south, rubbing her biceps and then her forearms. I withdraw my hands back to her shoulders and curl them over, rubbing just below her clavicle. Her body lightly jolts and settles; I feel goosebumps form on her flesh. My hands slide back, and using the tips of my fingers, I brush down the length of her back. I pull my hands out from under her shirt, pat her on the shoulders, and whisper into her right ear, “Mission accomplished.”

And she collapses between my legs and leans against my chest.

My erection wilts, tugging painfully at the Jockey’s elastic waistband as it recedes into my groin.

Well, that probably shouldn’t happen.

A minute passes. Neither of us speaks, moves.

I remind myself to keep breathing.

It doesn’t work.

My heartbeat’s a pounding sledgehammer on my sternum.

Kim rolls to her side, and I have to roll too to keep from falling off the couch. I’m right next to her, lying on my left arm, my chest on her back, my knees

resting behind her knees. I remember a line from a book I once read: "They nestled together like spoons."

Kim yawns. "I'm just so tired," she says, breathlessly.

My right arm stirs. It moves to touch hers, pauses, drops, rests on my hip. "Uh... I am... yeah, it's so late. I could pull up the cover."

"It's cold. Pull it up."

Reaching sight unseen behind me, I feel the cover on the floor and un- gainly drape it over us, the fabric lying in awkward bunches and folds. I make no effort to smooth it out. Incrementally, I move my head into her hair, smelling jasmine and mango. When I exhale, it reflects hot on my face, misting my eyelids. I crane my head, just so, over to her right ear and whisper into it. My lips brush her ear as I speak.

"You could stay here, if you want. If you're too tired. I'll—"

I cut myself off before "—sleep on the floor if you want." Kim shifts and snuggles back into me. She rests her hand on my thigh.

Blood pulses hot through my ears. I hear only heartbeat, echoing out from under the cover like an explosion in a mineshaft. How much of it is hers, I wonder. I point my finger at her wrist. If I could feel her heart beat, if I could tell how fast it's going, I could know how she feels. Trying not to draw attention to my hand, my rogue assassin, I lift it in the air and hold it still.

It hovers, waiting for orders.

I send it towards her wrist, moving it with exquisite languidness. Mil- limeter by millimeter. Feeling the heat radiate off her. The air around us cool. A seagull crows, and a wave crashes. My hand almost at her hand. My hand almost at her truth.

On cue, the upstairs toilet flushes, byproduct of her grandfather's way- ward bladder, and my hand crashes down and Kim's sitting up, off the couch, and heading back upstairs, her hushed "See ya tomorrow, bye..." trailing in the air be- hind her.

Thirty seconds later, I am asleep.



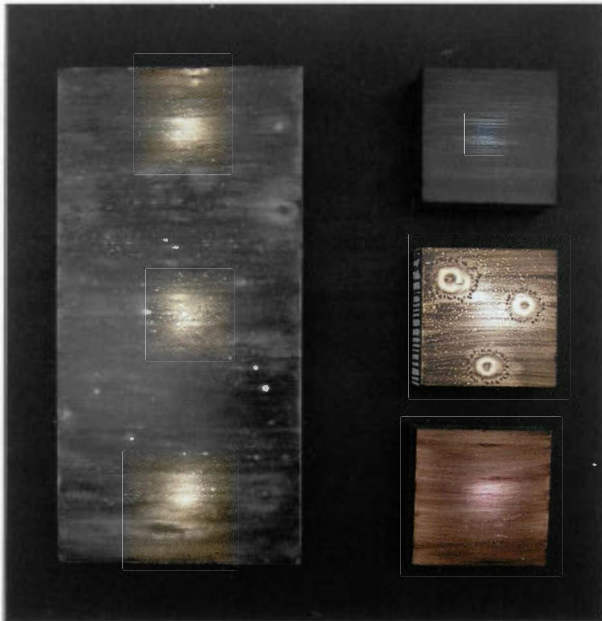
UNTITLED
Irena Stanisic

NOT A VERY CLOSE ENCOUNTER

Helen Queue

the other day, I was in the public library, and there in a sticky red and chartreuse armchair I encountered nothing less and nothing sweeter than an angel. and one with whom I have had intimate acquaintance (when autumn on the Verrazano Bridge led to disaster). thick-fast with sleep; lanky wings tucked under, soft dirty-blonde head thrown aside, and his leather jacket was on the floor.

I crept a little closer just to see if it was him. I thought of waking him, but didn't touch him. everything was soft. halfway across the first floor I felt my heart sift into pieces like cotton, and knew my laughter was no better than a screen door. it did not really make things any darker, it could not keep the flies away.



TURNED ON
Kim Wirt

BEAT

Dan B. Shapiro

The dad bends over the son, eyes aflame. The son is shocked; his hand clenches bedsheets. The dad is temporarily blinded by headlights through the window. The son panicks. The son's mouth screams soundlessly. Headlights flash again through the glass squares of the window.

The son is catatonic in a hospital gown. The mom asks, "What'd he do to you?" Visitors outside crowd the observation window. The mom cries, "He's gonna leave for a while. But, he still loves you, he does. He's just—" A hand closes in on the son's thigh. A nurse leans over his body, then spreads his gown open.

Through the window, the mom screams soundlessly. The thermometer under the son's little tongue wobbles. The brother shoves chocolate in his mouth. The dog's paws claw against the window. The nurse attaches a bag to the IV pole. A dim circle of yellow light comes from an otoscope. The doctor leads the nurse out of the room. The son lies rigid on his back. He cannot sleep.



DIS(CONNECT)
Alice Chaosurawong

BASIC PHOTO

Meg Hurtado

it lies in the ceremony of stop-bath,
how in one strangled twang on the
serrated lyre of doom,
worlds drown, capitulate,
writhe in the photo-lab trash bin. and 'tis all one,
for that.

what do you do
when it's too early for cigarettes, and
anyway you wouldn't know
what kind of cigarette is best
for smoke-screening the finality
of love. of tender-hatred, wider once
than St. Giles Street, commoner
than the choir of stars.
there is a reason Cupid and Psyche
got mixed up
with a Beast. one flush of unplanned light,
and the promisedland
defects,

long-gone as honor, or an equinox;
paralyzed, not everlasting, dew upon damask-lips.
and only the wailing-trains
to carry you out of the green world -
what kind of cigarette, really, is best

ALTERED STATES (ALASKA, FOR EXAMPLE)

Jordan Trippeer

I am three-dimensional!
and you are my blue-red glasses
Subjectivity objectified in technicolor crayon Monets
(we color inside the outside lines)

← more words are off the page

zazzle me circular sideways! (spiraling?)
Spiraling shoots of equatorial trees bloom
Flower and fruit-sprinkled fingers pointing towards the moon

You are three-dimensional!
and I am your red-blue glasses
Objectivity subjectified in technicolor crayon Monets
(we color outside the inside lines)

more words are off the page →

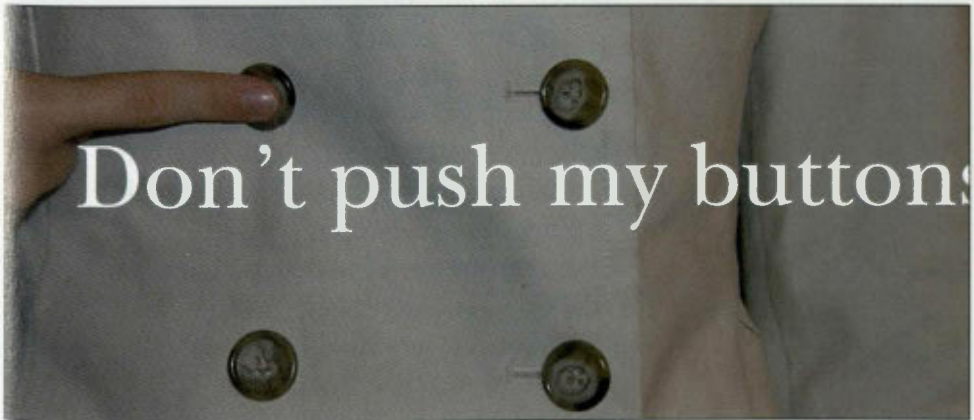
Throw in the towel



Kick the bucket



Don't push my buttons



Liz Hartley



KITCHEN PUKE

Timothy Henry

Wiffle ball scratches on kitchen windows remind me of saucedrum solos and playing my trumpet as loudly as possible on New Year's Eve at midnight, my fingers icy and gross from a sloppy spit valve excavation. I vomited in this very spot one after-school afternoon after eating half a dozen packets of candy shaped day-glo dinosaurs in the middle of telling my mother what I wanted for dinner. Dad came home just then and I can't even image what was going through his head. Regurgitated red brotonsauri blocking him from where he puts down his briefcase. Being seven I had no clue what his day entailed, but I'm sure that was the nastiest part. We had spaghetti and the garlic bread cooked too long since my mother had to pick up my puke. Pick up my puke! For reasons even I understood at the time, I couldn't help make meatballs. Every time I eat meatballs, vomit, or step into my kitchen I think of this, so I think of this often.



BONE STUDY
IRENA STANISIC

THE ELM TREE

Schuyler Swartout

A flute-maker says to his wife, come inside, it's time for bed. And the wife from the garden decides to come inside, into the house of smoky wood and old drill-press shavings and the bric-a-brac of a craftsman. As she pulls off her underclothes he remarks, enlivened, I have found it, a perfect tree in the forest, perfect fragrant wood and perfect grain and it's sure to play perfect notes and I will be the stradivarius of flutemakers. And the wife lies down, too tired to think through the distant limbs bending to him, calling.

DEAR
(COLLEGE)
POETS
Max Bloom

Please
stop
staggering
your
lines
(and parenthesizing) and
conjoining words phrases for no good reason.
Cumm
ings
is roll
ing
in his grave.
you forgot the delectable wetness.



MOUNT
ASPIRING
NATIONAL
PARK,
NEW ZEALAND
Emily Souleret

AMBLING,

toward End as once
from Beginning

We burst forth
while

the heavens sighed,

from a prostrate sky I reckoned
Spring wouldn't thaw

the flux of seasons

or of winter
this year.

~ Ariel Olson

OIE

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

STUDY ABROAD PHOTO CONTEST



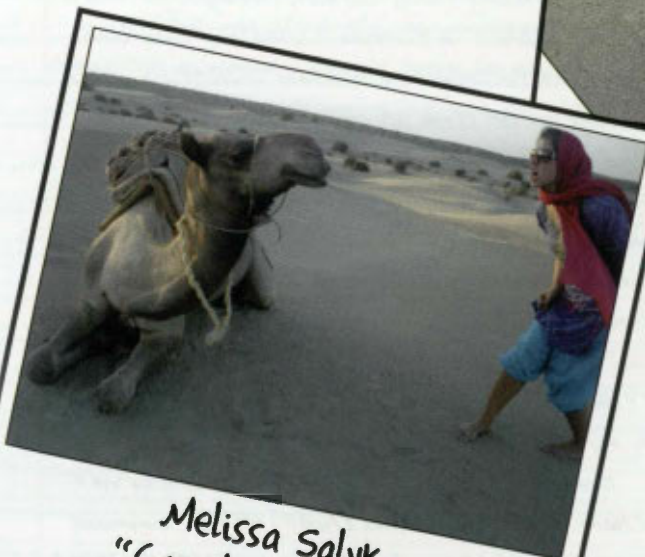
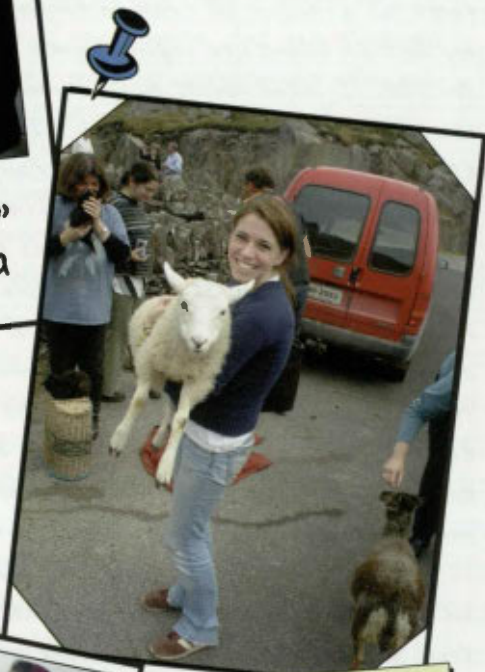
David Hille
"Winter Trail, Black Rock Gap"
Shenandoah Valley, United States
Fall 2007



Amaya García Martínez
"Holy Week"
Granada, Spain
Spring 2007



Rada Dogandjjeva
"Making a Zapallito tart"
Buenos Aires, Argentina
Spring 2007



Melissa Salyk
"Camel Quarrel"
Jaisalmer, India
Fall 2007

Megan O'Hara
"Kerry Lamb"
Ring of Kerry,
Ireland
Fall 2007

OIE International Writing Contest

Making a "World" of Difference

By: Allison Speicher

I made quips about being an English major. I cited my parents' fears as a reason to choose England. I explained the need to complete my British literature requirements and the rigor of the University of Bristol. I joked about how someone with my New York dialect could learn to use some real English. I scrambled to justify my decision to those with raised eyebrows and haughty tones, to those who could not see traveling to England as an international experience, those who did not understand my real reasons for choosing England. To me, study abroad was an almost unfathomable gift, a privilege I strove to assimilate with my view of myself and my life. I was keenly aware of my mission to reclaim the mother continent for the Speichers, none of whom have shown up without the excuse of a world war since immigrating to America. I knew I was getting a unique opportunity and attempted to understand and deserve it. I'd never been off the east coast, and for me England might as well have been Hong Kong, Jordan, Senegal, or Mars.

My time in England and my travels in Europe called for the kind of suspension of disbelief it takes to immerse oneself in fiction, only they weren't fictional. Five months of time abroad, two lovingly made scrapbooks, and three months of time back in States did little to convince me that any of it was real. That realization came when I took another journey, this one only twenty miles.

This fall, for my student teaching placement I was assigned to teach English 12, British Literature. It was in my trailer classroom at Highland Springs High School that I shook the sense of fiction from my experiences and claimed them. When we read the literature of the Anglo-Saxons, I brought in my pictures of Stonehenge, much to the amazement of my students. Said one, "I know you can get these off the internet, but you're in them. How'd you do that?" The comment made me smile, because it was exactly how I felt: how did I do that? That I was really there, standing in front of Stonehenge, did not dawn on my students. One student asked if he could drive to Stonehenge, and I laughed and reminded him that it is in England. "I know," he said, "but you didn't answer my question." I realized then that my students had no conception of where England is. Their college essays revealed how small their worlds really were, as they spoke of going away to college in North Carolina as if it were thousands of miles away.

I'd like to believe I changed that in some small way. Places like Highland Springs High School are not on the mental maps of the people who had raised their eyebrows at my choice, but my students were somewhere I had been before. My photos and stories allowed me to do something for my students that no one had done for me: I was able to give them the world. Pictures of the Globe Theatre brought Shakespeare to life. Renaissance poetry was offered side by side with my pictures from the Louvre. The Wife of Bath's tale was supplemented by pictures of a real-life Allison in Bath. My students can now say they know someone who has been to Europe, a simple something I couldn't say at their age. When speaking of study abroad, I emphasized how a scholarship, like that which made it possible for me, could make it possible for them. I could see my students imagining that their small worlds could be bigger and I knew I played a small part in that vision.

That my students, my underserved, poor, majority African-American students, could begin to envision themselves in the world and could imagine claiming a place for themselves in it finally made my experiences real - and really valuable. The greatest moment of my study abroad experience wasn't standing before the Eiffel Tower, La Sagrada Familia, or even Dickens's chalet, but rather before a group of 30 twelfth-graders in Highland Springs, Virginia. For these students, England is another world entirely, as it once was for me. My experiences in England allowed me to see the world and myself in it, a great gift. In the spirit of giving, I shared them with my students, paying my privilege forward and making what I like to think of as a world of difference.

OIE International Writing Contest

A Tale of Two Turkeys By: Alex Jakubow

Ahmet, a Turk who lived across the hall from me in our dormitory, upon hearing of my intended excursion to Urfa, a city in southeastern Turkey, immediately seized me by the arm, led me into a quiet corner of the adjacent study room, and proceeded to address me in a concerned whisper. "Alex," he instructed, "you must absolutely stay away from the East. The people there are not as receptive to foreigners as we are here in the West, and the PKK is very dangerous." These and other similar warnings I took under serious consideration, but ultimately, my overwhelming sense of curiosity prevailed. Were these people really as innately unwelcoming to foreigners as my friend Ahmet had suggested? Or were they merely just a group of people trying to achieve the basic goods of human existence for which we all strive, albeit through a different cultural means?

Visiting the bazaar in Urfa, it was in the bowels of this beehive of economic activity and aspiring entrepreneurship that the unique character of the city and its inhabitants began to radiate from all directions. Compared to the average Ankara street—a sea of designer jeans, hair gel, and Louis Vuitton bags—the narrow alleys of the Urfa bazaar betrayed far more humble, traditional fashions. Peering down a particularly busy street, I saw a mosaic of colored Islamic headscarves donned by nearly every female bazaar-goer, while the men, dressed in plain, unassuming browns, grays, and blues, often sported the traditional baggy Muslim trouser, the dimija. Such strong religious cultural undertones were further manifest in the sheer volume of mosques within the city; it seemed as if one was stationed at every street corner. Also notable was the peculiar absence of anything Atatürk, the secular founder of the modern Turkish Republic whose memory is still very much alive in the plethora of pictures and sculptures of him on display in many Ankara homes and public buildings. However, the all-important question remained: did these ethno-cultural differences and heightened Islamic sympathies in the eastern Turkish community necessarily engender xenophobic sentiments towards foreigners, particularly those hailing from Europe and the United States? After all, Eastern Turkey certainly has a lot to be angry about: the erosion of its cultural heritage and traditions by an influx of Western values and practices, an increased Turkish military presence in the region necessitated by the destabilizing effects of the Iraq war, and the manner in which some Western military strategists

and politicians have wrongfully obfuscated the boundaries separating the interests of the PKK from those of the general Kurdish population.

In search of an answer, my friends and I decided to dine at a restaurant renowned for its reputation as an establishment well off the beaten tourist path. Served a meal of traditional regional foods, whose piece de resistance was the delectable Urfa kebab of lamb, we dined on floor cushions while a live band regaled us with traditional Kurdish songs. The atmosphere was electric as other patrons frequently left their tables and assembled in the center of the crowded room for bouts of impromptu Kurdish dancing. Against such a festive backdrop, where all the locals in attendance were plugged in to a common framework of solidarity and fraternity, my friends and I, sitting awkwardly in the corner of the room, began to chafe uncomfortably from our own foreignness to this unique social environment. As we sat we felt the inquisitive gazes and glances from the locals pierce our collective sense of self-confidence. It was at this juncture that a man, perhaps in his early- to mid-twenties, approached us from across the room. Expecting perhaps to be reproached for abstaining from the festivities, we were surprised when our visitor proclaimed in nearly perfect English, "Hi! My name is Mohammed. How are you doing?" Mohammed introduced us to his other friends that had accompanied him to the restaurant that evening and, in a subsequent dialogue of cultural exchange, we told them all about our lives in our respective home countries while they, in turn, fielded our numerous questions about Kurdish culture and the PKK. The mood in the room had relaxed immeasurably, as boundaries melted away into the general atmosphere of food, friends, and fun. Our new-found companions attempted (unsuccessfully) to teach us the steps of the various Kurdish dances being performed, and Mohammed even gave me his phone number, instructing me to call him if ever I needed help or a place to stay in the future.

So while the presence of various cultural nuances may certainly define the relationship between the eastern and western regions of Turkey, such differences are bridged by a universal, nondiscriminatory ascription to the virtues of hospitality and courtesy. Satisfied with the results of my social inquiry, I could not wait to share my findings with the skeptical Ahmet when I returned to Ankara.

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