

The Messenger

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The Messenger
Fall 1990



The Messenger

Fall 1990

University of Richmond

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The Margaret Owen Finck Prize for Creative Writing

The Margaret Haley Carpenter Prize for Poetry

Steven Barza, Faculty Advisor

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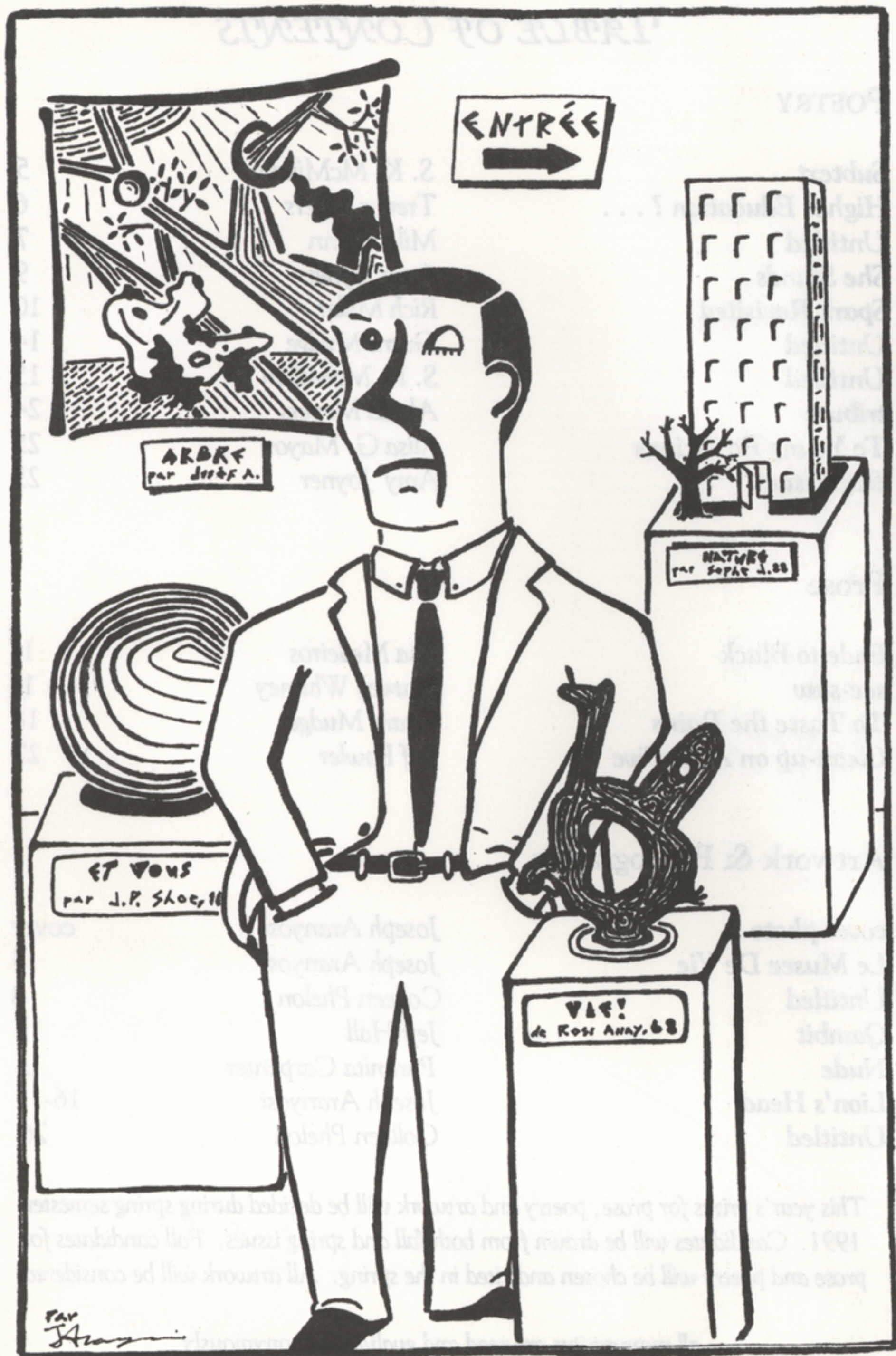
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This year's prizes for prose, poetry and artwork will be decided during spring semester, 1991. Candidates will be drawn from both fall and spring issues. Fall candidates for prose and poetry will be chosen and cited in the spring. All artwork will be considered.

all manuscripts are read and evaluated anonymously



LE MUSÉE DE VIE

Subtext

Leave.

Go away.

No, please stay.

Casual conversation drives me mad.

Let's really talk,

Let's slit our hearts

And let them bleed on this table

(So perfunctorily set and neatly arranged)

There's so much I long to tell you.

It's like a knife down deep in my womb,

Working its way up,

Cutting through my throat to be free.

These things I hide slice away at my soul,

Mangling what will never be whole

Until you see it.

(Adjust your tie and call the waiter)

Let's drive the world mad,

Turn it on its ear,

Make all the love and war in one blow.

We speak in metaphors

And with quick-tongued grace,

But I want to say

That you set my bowels on fire,

And I want to fuck you

In this pristine landscape

(With the waiter watching

and the wine dribbling onto the white tablecloth)

I want to live, you see.

I want you to know how real I am.

(In the dimmed lights of this ritzy restaurant)

Love me.

Fuck me.

Hold me until the world stops spinning

And the stars fade into the brightening blackness.

(And leave a nice tip for this over-priced meal)

S.K. McMillan

WC '91

Higher Education? . . .

Pewter-gray, his words slap at me without impact,
Oozing off my face (**impassive**),
Dripping onto pristine paper
And organizing themselves
Into a Bible of Facts (**pseudo**),
To be memorized
And spewed forth on the exam (**arrythmia**).

The man is unremarkable,
Weatherbeaten and without polish (**robotic**).
He endures (**publish**),
Coughing out fumes (**noxious**)
Disguised as Knowledge (**bullshit**),
He does not care,
For he has achieved the Grail (**tenure**)
And merely persists until retirement (**pension**).
He does not Teach (**enlighten**),
But lectures (**decays**).

And I (**rotting**). . .

I sit,

Passive (**putrid**),

Accepting (**dying**),

A Facade (**oblivious**)

Constructed over Self (**me**).

I am confused (**g.p.a.**).

I do not Learn (**growth**),

But memorize (**graduation**).

I am a Student (**NO!**). . .

Trevor Myers

RC '91

Untitled

*I'm desirous of that pain again.
I'm desirous of that pain
That saps the skull
And tears the mind
And brings the gentle rains.*

*That mistuned heart forsakes as free,
What in the shaded silence we
Beckon to our side;
On the shoreline, with the tide
It longs with us to never be.*

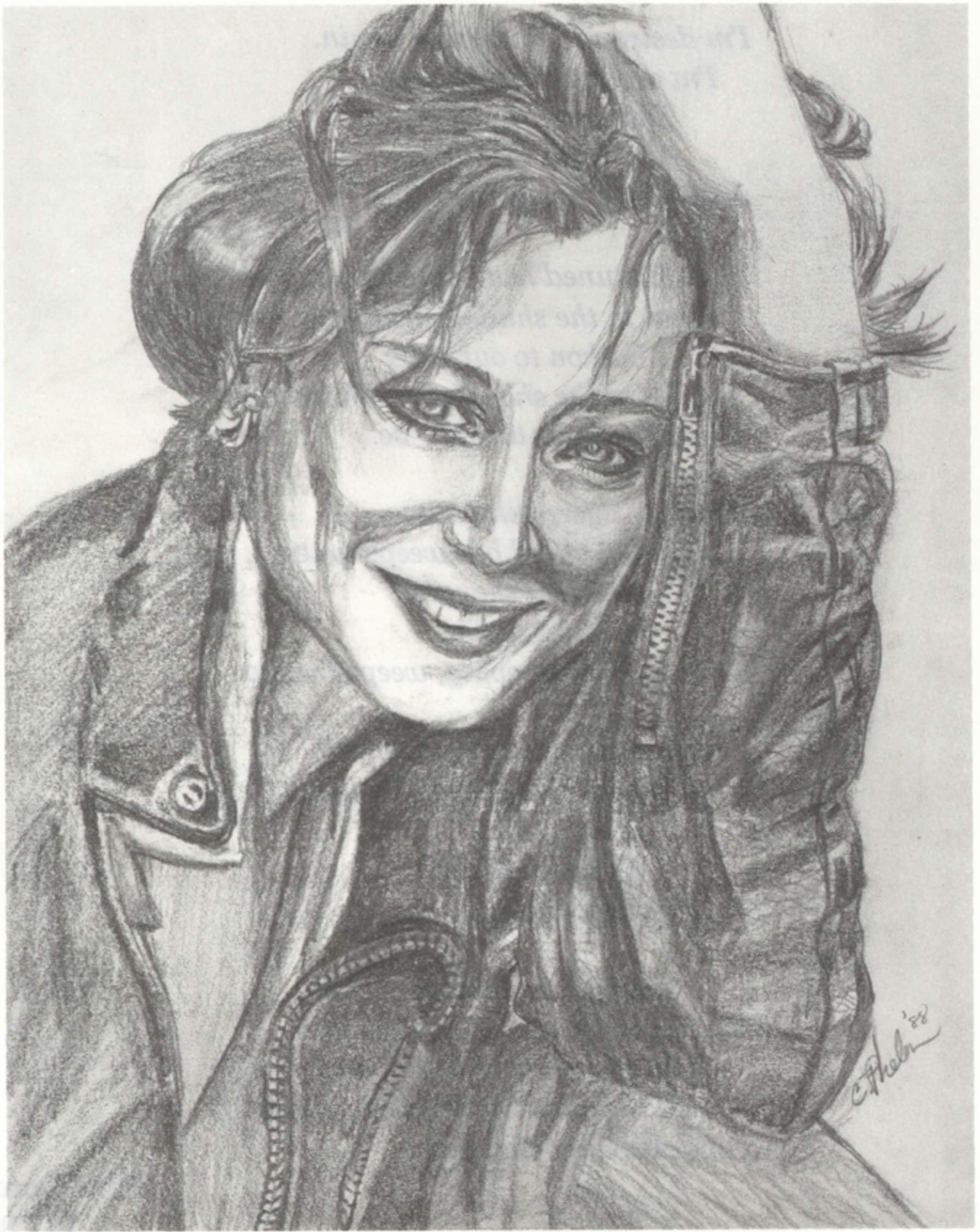
*Winding tiger, wind to me.
Blinded blond boy weeps to see.
A violent thought
In violet dawn,
He craves the weeping, weeps the sea.*

*Fainting touch, my blade and I
Are the beckoned and the eye.
In early may
We seize the day,
My true love and I . . .*

*. . . have seen tall flowers slain,
By fingers gaunt, severe yet vain.
Seen the white man ebb and flow,
Felt the wind bleed and I suppose
I'm desirous of that pain.*

Mike Dunn
RC '93

Untitled



C. Kohn '88

She Stands

I

*She stands
On the corner
Holds out her hands -
Chapped and raw
Watches the taxis
Sputter
Down the road.
The laughing ladies
With Bloomie bags
Waltz by,
Jingling their
Tiffany's tune.
She ain't asking
For nothin'
That ain't her
Right.
She'd be content
If Somebody,
Some warm, human,
Living body
Would give a damn
And look her in the
Eye*

II

*She stands
On top of the
World
Looks with
Tender eyes
Upon the wilting
Subjects
Who fight for the
Right
To worship
At her feet.
She smiles
With plastic lips
And stares
Through glass eyes,
And she knows
That if she smiles
Long enough
And tilts her head
Just this way
Enough,
Know one
No one
Absolutely NO ONE
Will ever see
Through the glass eyes
To the shattered
Soul
To the blood
That drips
In tick-tock fashion
From the hollow
Cavity
Where her heart
Used to live
And breathe
And BE.*

III

*She stands
At River's edge
Frozen in the
Crossfire
Of Eternal Isolation
And Immanent
Transcendence -
A teardrop in
Time's river
A shattered crystal
Of ice
A formless lump
Of clay
A frantic swirl of
Atoms and molecules
Whose energy is
Sputtered and
spattered
And spent.
She stands
At River's edge
Lifts her hands
To a purple
Blood-stained sky -
A dove in flight,
A rush of light -
And she lunges
Forward,
Embracing the
Water of the Womb -
Born again.
Alleluiah.
Alleluiah.
Amen.*

Amy Joyner
WC '91

Spark Revisited

I, Spark,
Flail against bars.
I struggle, mired in mud,
Incarcerated in a labyrinth
And scream.
The encumbering muck hampers me;
The winding, random walls imprison me.

I realize I am trapped-

And for a slice of eternity I explore the maze;

Most of us eventually grow to enjoy the labyrinth,
(It's not but **so** bad)

And we all forget the trap.

We adopt bits of the maze for ourselves.

I gain a best friend.

And the two of us trap several others,

Calling it love.

Suddenly my friends are all gone;

And the mud dries;

Crumbles.

I watch the maze shatter,

And,

heartbroken,

clutch-

at-

the-

bits-

.

.

.

.

.

I, Spark,
Fall from the heavens,
And split a thousand-year oak.

I swim over an eye,
and flow down a blotchy cheek

Rich Miller
RC '92

Fade To Black

run, run, run, run, runaway . . . Fade to black . . The song ends, so we fade to black. Simple concept. Have you ever wondered how sound fades to black? That's how television shows end too. Simple. "And fade to black." You shut the iris, close out the picture of life. So in the end . . . fade to black . . .

* * *

My walkman's batteries are dying—going quickly. How much longer do I have to sit and wait? My bus should have been here nearly an hour ago. The terminal is awfully lonely at this time of night . . .

Damn it! C'mon. If these batteries go, here I sit in silence . . . Do you realize everything echoes, echoes, echoes in the silence, silence, silence . . . I can't stand this slow version of Hoooooteeeee
Caaaaaliiiiiifooooorniaaaa Off. Click! Then God said, "Let there be silence." I think I heard footsteps. (Or is that my own feet tip-tapping?) Oh, they echo (echo, echo) in the silence (silence, silence) . . . No one's coming. Some damn imagination. In the silence, si . . . Yeah, we get the picture. It's my heart beat. Brain, ears, working overtime tonight . . .

Could I have missed the last bus out? . . .Gotta get outta here. Today, people today . . .

My butt's numb. Numb and dirty, dirty and numb . . . I'd get up, but then my footsteps would echo (echo, echo). I'll sit. Who cares? Could these jeans get any more dirt on them, any more smells ground in? City smells. Tried to count 'em today, those lovely city smells. I sorta lost track. They were just, smells . . . Lotsa people, and smells. I'll bet my bus smells too . . . Oh well . . . Dirt is dirt. Mom didn't want me out in these pants anyway. Ha! She says, "They make us look like we don't clothe you, like you're an orphan." Yeah, Mom. Poverty stricken, that's us. We're just suffocated and starved by the hardships of poverty. Poor us . . .

* * *

What ho! Methinks I hear a solitary snore. Breaks the silence . . . Not alone

—Move on you bum.

A voice cries out. Muffled groan. Rap-tap-tapping (rap-tap-tap) on a bench. Cop waking a bum not supposed to be here . . . dirtying up the storefronts.

—outside with you . . .

. . . a humble sh-sh-shuffle echoes through the terminal . . . rattle, clatter of coins—the beggar's creed . . . closer . . . nearer . . . rounding the bend . . .

A face . . . she hunches over, staring at her shuffling feet, willing them to move. Bundled in rags, dirt ground in—her matted hair, streaked legs, stained hands. The dirt even has tinted her dull, jaundiced eyes . . . no . . . misery fills and taints the color . . . She looks up and smiles—brown-lipped, half-toothed smile . . . Draws nearer, lethargically dragging a foot around the corner . . . Rattle, clinck . . . —Sssspare shum change, honey? . . .

Sl-eeping, go away. I'm sleeping. Silence. I hear silence. Close my eyes, shut the iris, and . . . Okay, fade to black . . .

Gia Medeiros

WC '94



Untitled

*Specter blue full lit moon
Shadows patterns on the floor
Through bamboo blinds
I sit in a relative darkness
Next to the patterns, next to the
Rug which softens the polished wood floor
An oriental flute breathes a
Melodious meandering, governing as
I sit with crossed legs, watching
Clouds eat the moon*

Grant Mudge
RC '92

see-saw

another day leaks into the horizon and my eyes absorb sunset.
unexplainable thoughts skim across my mind, leaving ripples of desire.

another horrid day, dripping superficialities and bitterness while
expressionless faces hurry past . . . all too weak to raise a smile.

soft lips. sanguine kisses in the bushes. composure erodes,
countenance weakens.

flat broke and one cigarette left. drawing hard, i exhale my
clouded worries. all of a sudden the skies pale and blacken, only to weep
their sorrows on everything: the earth, me, and my last cigarette.

rolling around in the daisies with a maiden, drunk of spring air.
"May I take the first joint, sir?" after a hearty drag and a flurry of
laughter we plunge into a cold, clear river sawing through the hills.

ascending and ascending, feathers soaking the elements . . .
misty blue mountains trail so far behind.

falling and falling, spiraling downward, sinking further into
despair.

Harvey Whitney
RC '91



Untitled

Fuck the moon

Radiate for days with cosmic orgasm

Twist and gyrate in a lunar dance

*Where mating calls are shimmers in the pitch
black
sky*

*Quiver and quake with the energy that
shoots through the universe*

Crash into the spine of the earth

And explode with the intensity of a meteor's might

Climax in the darkness where pain and pleasure collide

One small penetration for humanity

One giant thrust for infinity

Fuck, fuck, FUCK the moon

until you die

The ultimate suicide

Ejaculate your soul into the shaft of the heavens

Where it will glimmer in the twilight for eternity

S.K. McMillan

WC '91





Aranyosi

To Taste the Rains

In the early fall of that last year they came to the house by the sea. It was a large, affable house, thickly surrounded by trees and built on a high hill overlooking the ocean. Smells of autumn and of oceans flew quietly past them as they stepped out of the car. Around them, the sky and the sea and the land were in unison, moving along at a slow, methodical pace, moving forever as if no one would notice their serenity.

On the three hundred yards between the house and the beach, pine and other young plants and bushes grew on dunes that rolled down to the edge of the sea. They walked down the hill to a winding, sandy path which was covered with pine needles and bordered with beach grasses.

Their heavy shoes sank into the sand, making the last steep dune a struggle, a slow-motion trudging dirge that finally ended with the explosion of the view of the sea. They stood for a time, looking out over the Atlantic, watching the waves incessantly battering the shoreline. When they caught their breath, they took slow strides on a long walk to the north, watching water reflect the sky, and shells frame driftwood on the beach.

"I bet you could find a wonderful landscape from the top of that cliff."

The man squinted, stretching up on his toes as if to improve his angle of vision.

"Maybe."

"Let's go and see."

"It's farther than it looks." His eyebrows contracted and he closed his eyes. "Maybe tomorrow."

The woman seemed disappointed, but said nothing. They stopped after a while and sat on the sand. It was still warm from the fading afternoon sun.

"Where you want to go—that's far too." She held her hair away from her face in the ocean wind.

"I know."

"I still think you're leaving to get away from me."

He lifted sand into his palm and turned it over, letting the grains drop back onto the beach.

"You know that's not true. How many times do I have to tell you? I'm the one who keeps asking you to come with me."

Her face flushed and adrenaline flowed to her limbs. She let go of her hair, tired of keeping it in place. Grabbing a chunk of driftwood, she hurled it into the waves. They were both quiet for a while, and she remembered the vibrant, emotional man she had fallen in love with. He had wonderful vision then. Whatever she could paint, he could describe, and usually he had been able to do so far better with words than she could with oils. Where had that vision gone? She hated feeling like a cause of his decision to leave.

“How fair is that?” she asked. “You can want me to go, but I can’t want you to stay? It’s not like you want me to go to Tennessee or California or something. My family is here. My friends are here, my work—you have no idea how long you’ll be gone— You don’t even really know where you’re going, I just—”

Her voice trailed off as she wondered how to make him understand. She couldn’t believe his insensitivity. Was he blinded by his Africa? Or was she really so unimportant to him?

He glanced at her and then looked out across the waves. “You ignore your friends. You spend all your time with me. You can’t stand your family and you can paint in Africa. I can’t think of a more perfect place for it.” He turned to look at her and put his hand in hers. “I thought for me you might have given those things up.”

She wrenched her hand from his and threw her hair back out of her face.

“And I thought you would give up Africa for me. What’s the difference? Why is what you want so much more important than what I want? Why can’t you write about this?” She pointed to the sea and to the cliff and the sky and to herself. “This is beautiful too. I have to go where you want to go, but you don’t have to go where I want to go. How fair is that?”

“It might only be a couple of months. I might not even like it by then. I might come back by then.”

“And if you like it?”

“Then I’ll stay. Don’t you get it? I’ve been writing about things everybody knows, about people and places everybody’s already been. Adventures in those places seem ordinary. I have the chance to go to what I believe is the most beautiful place in the world, to see places and peoples—to find that inspiration we both need to paint our paintings. If I find it there, then that’s where I’ll stay.”

“Without me. I just don’t think you see that there’s no difference between what each of us wants to do. I have asked you to go somewhere

you don't want to go, just the way you've asked me."

He felt anger building inside himself. What about Africa did she despise so much? Why wouldn't she go?

"But you didn't ask me! You don't feel the way I do. How am I supposed to keep the two things I need most together? How am I supposed to make you understand!? How am I supposed to understand you!?" He was shouting. She winced at the volume, and he heard how ridiculous he sounded, shouting there on the beach. He calmed down and quietly, slowly, deliberately the words came from his mouth.

"You know I'm a dreamer. You know my stories and books have been fantastical, whimsical even. Adventure for me is the challenge of life. Maybe I need the rush, I don't know. I need that exhilarating rush of chance, doing something so totally different that you just don't know how it'll come out. But I don't need to get away from you. That's been the hardest thing of all. I need you with me. You're making me decide what is more important. I know that sounds terrible, but I have to go. I have to choose Africa."

She turned to look at him, to see in his face if she really held such a second-place position in his life. His eyes were scanning the grey horizon, looking toward Africa. She wanted to be away from him. She turned away. The sight of him angered her—repulsed her. She got up finally and quickly, striding back toward the path to the house. He didn't watch her leave. His eyes were glued to the horizon.

But he looked down at the beach and dropped the sand he had been holding. He thought about letting her go, letting her take the car and drive and leave him to this ocean and to Africa. But he was up and running after her.

She heard him running on the sand. She wanted to be away, to be done with it. She started to run, her body and her desire to be away from everything taking control. But she wanted him to know how angry she was. She felt herself stopping and turning around.

"Just a fucking minute!" Her words stopped him, violently shocked him and riveted him to the sand beneath his feet. She shouted as she tried to catch her breath. "God damn you! How can you say I made you choose!?! I made you choose!?! Fine! Go! Go to your precious Africa. I made you choose? Shit! SHIT!! There hasn't been any choice for you through this whole thing! Just once if you would think about this as a choice, I might—" With a sound that was halfway between a scream and a grunt she again turned and aimed for the house.

He ran up to her side and walked along with her. "You are

important to me. I need you.”

She threw up her hands as she walked. He went on.

“Yes! Oh that surprises you? I need you. I need you with me and I need to go. Please—look. Hold it.”

He took hold of her arm that swung in front of her. She hid her face from him. She hated the fact that he could do this to her. She hated to let him see her cry. She hated the fact that she loved this thing standing in front of her. Her mind fell into a paradox of hate and love and confusion. And he would not shut up.

“Everyone who has ever been to Africa eventually says that they wished they had arrived there earlier. Everyone sees Africa disappearing. They wish they had come before the white man, or before colonization, before all the farms and the dwindling of the herds, or before modern machines. How much will it change while I wait? I want to be there before it’s all gone. I want to—I want to drink the smell of those plains after the rains have come—to consume the images and the beauty and the life—the immensity—and say with every breath— This is Africa. This is Africa.”

She wanted to interrupt him, to tell him she could give him more than his precious Africa. He tried to go on but she stopped him.

“Aren’t you overlooking a couple of things? Like all the poverty, the overcrowded cities? What about the poachers who machine-gun those animals you want to see, for their teeth? What about the filth? What about the smell of death? That smell is there too. I was there, don’t forget, while you were doing your over-romantic research and I see it for what it is. I sat there, right next to you, thousand of miles away from Africa just like you were, and I saw it for what it is. I read the books, and the magazines, and the histories. You won’t even open your eyes. All you think about is the beauty. It is a continent of beauty, but it’s locked in some inevitable mortal conflict with pain and death and filth.”

“You think I’ve forgotten that? That’s the conflict I want to be a part of. That’s the adventure of it. But it’s more than that. I have to find something. I have to see it for myself. I have to see its beauty before nothing’s left. I have to find out if I’m supposed to write about it. I can find that on the Serengetti, or in the Ngong hills, or below the rim of Kilimanjaro. That’s why I have to go. I feel pulled. I have to know. It’s calling me. I have to find out why. That’s what I have to find. Maybe it’s everything that’s been missing. You’ve been the only thing in my life that’s right. There’s always been some enormous thing missing.

I have to look for it. And I can't stand you not being a part of it."

They stared at each other for a moment, not knowing what else to say. He gave a half-smile, and quietly spoke.

"If I know a song of Africa, —I thought, —of the Giraffe, and the African new moon lying on her back, of the ploughs in the fields, and the sweaty faces of the coffee-pickers, does Africa know a song of me?"

She interrupted him. "Would the air over the plain quiver with a color that I had on, or the children invent a game in which my name was, or the full moon through a shadow over the gravel of the drive that was like me, or would the eagles of Ngong look out for me? You've quoted that damn thing so many times I know it better than you do. You still don't see what's important to me. And you don't see the real Africa. You only see yourself."

Her crying took over and she began to sob. Why couldn't he see it? If he would simply tell her that he would give it up; if he would agree to have her instead of Africa, she would have gone in a moment. She wanted to be important to him. But she was too tired to argue anymore. She loved him, for some strange reason, and she wanted him with her. If he was leaving and wouldn't see what she wanted, she would stay with him as long as she could before he left. He pulled her close and they embraced by the ocean in the gathering dusk.

After they walked back from the beach and finished their evening meal, night had engulfed the house and the sea. He built a fire in the huge stone fireplace in the wood-panelled living room. They were both calm now, pleasantly tired and warm by the fire. They sat for awhile, and she looked through a collection of records that sat next to an old, dusty player. She found a particular favorite, dusted it off, and together they put it on the player. The record was old and scratched, and the machine was nearing its last play, but they danced in front of the fire to the same song many times.

"Let the Rest of the World Go By.' That's a fine song you've got there." He smiled and she laid her head on his chest, secure for the moment, calm for the minute, living life as a connection of comfortable seconds, and for once, she did not think of the future, or tomorrow, or even the next dance.

His thoughts were of Africa. What could he do to convince her that he had to go? Why couldn't she understand his need? Those questions eventually faded and images of Africa came to his mind. They were images of writers, and of movies, documentaries, of huge open

horizons, filled with an air so intensely wild that it lived a life all its own. He thought of the grassland sunsets, red glow in the sky obscured only by the low mountains on the horizon and the silhouetted mimosa, slender trunks with a rounded platform of leaves at the peak. He thought of the coming of the rains, giant clouds at the far end of the African plain, thundering across the grasslands like all the power of Kilimanjaro unleashed. He had heard stories of the smells after African rains, and his brain could almost create them. He felt the grasses under his feet, his mind was colored the same color as the hills where Hemingway hunted. He could smell the coffee from the Baroness's farm. He soared over the plains where the herds and packs lived and roamed. He was at one with the wild and color and the smells and the air.

They fell asleep in each other's arms by the fire. The dim moonlight sparkled on the ocean, and bounced on the sand. The wind buffeted the house and the trees with a calm caress, and the house stood majestically at the top of the hill presiding over it all like some giant god, pleased with its creation and relaxing after the effort.

They awoke just before dawn, and walked down to the beach once more to watch the sunrise. Neither the man nor the woman spoke. It was a comfortable silence, and they smiled at each other as the day began. They drove away from the trees and the sea and the breeze as if they had been riding on a cloud the entire time, one that's spotted and forgotten as it approaches out on the horizon. One that doesn't appear to be in motion at all, but then suddenly is overhead and gone, and the sky is clear and darkening and the sunset has begun.

Grant Mudge
RC '92

*The quote is from Isak Dinesen's Out of Africa.

tribute

i lick the bottom mud

of my coffee mug

and see our faces in the slime.

the smiles are melting down

slick

oozing.

your face is lined with wrinkles

and the grounds thicken around your eyes.

this is the lovesong

we make

as we evaporate

the last life in our usurped

world of drought.

Alexia Meyers
WC '94

To Young Politicians

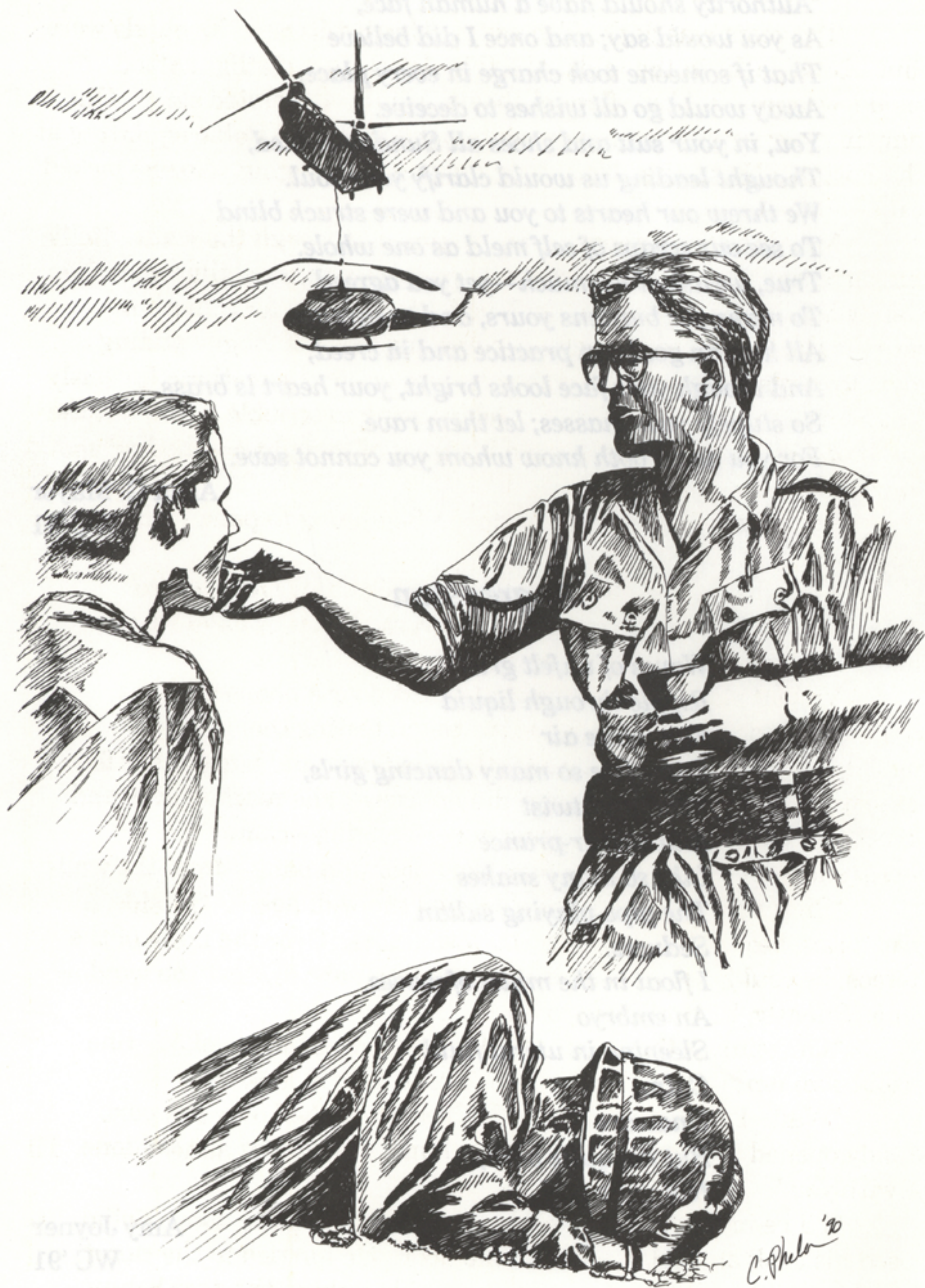
*"Authority should have a human face,"
As you would say; and once I did believe
That if someone took charge in every place,
Away would go all wishes to deceive.
You, in your suit and shoes all Sunday-shined,
Thought leading us would clarify your soul.
We threw our hearts to you and were struck blind
To see our scraps of self meld as one whole.
True, we asked too much—yet you agreed
To make our burdens yours, and to surpass
All human goals, in practice and in creed;
And though your face looks bright, your heart is brass.
So stupefy your masses; let them rave.
For you and I both know whom you cannot save.*

Alisa G. Mayor
WC '91

Regression

*Waves of unfelt grief
Ripple through liquid
Egg-white air
Sway like so many dancing girls,
Bend and twist
And slither-prance
Like so many snakes
The pipe-playing sultan
Seduces.
I float in the midst of waves,
An embryo
Sleeping in uteral fluid . . .
Calm,
Unaware . . .
But not quite born,
Not quite real*

Amy Joyner
WC '91



Clean-up on Aisle Five

The room was dark. The walls. The furniture. The blinds were shut. Outside, lit in the midst of a thin drizzle, a streetlight stood. Inside, wrapped in black flannel sheets, Mandy attempted sleep. One lamp in a corner gave off a pale white light. By it sat Rollie squinting at The Portable Nietzsche. Next door a phone was ringing. No one picked it up.

Mandy's stereo shook, music oozing all through the walls. Rollie remembered the song from a few nights, last week, sometime ago when Mandy had been murmuring her love for it, for him, for something—perhaps the way he was touching, caressing her, his tongue gliding down towards her navel—and then he was erasing something furiously that he had thought of and was quickly trying to scribble down, but the sound of her voice had interrupted his train of thought and he had ended up writing down gibberish.

Rollie hated the song. He stood. Beginning to pace, he began to read aloud:

“Whither is god,’ he cried, ‘I shall tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea?”

Violent slamming on the wall—next door a phone still rang—neighbors on the opposite side began testing their stereo's capacity for loudness. Mandy silently rolled over and banged her fist against the wall. When the noise did not cease, she reached over and turned her stereo louder. Banging now—banging—came persistently—banging—came from next door and bang—from the wall—

“Shut up!!” Mandy's fist slammed the wall again. Outside, a strong rain began to fall. Rollie sat downstairs. Over the noise of the stereos, he could almost hear the rain hitting hard against the window pane. Silently, he continued to read . . .

“I'm going to the store. Need anything?” Mandy asked. She grabbed an umbrella and her purse. Rollie did not look up.

“Wait. I'm almost finished.” His eyes flashed over the page. Mandy opened the door. He held up a hand. “Wait, I'm almost done. I'll go with you.”

“I'll be in the car,” she said and left, shutting the door. Rollie closed his book and set it down on the floor. He hurried to the closet, brought out a hooded jacket and left, quickly locking the door behind

him. Upstairs, Mandy's stereo and the neighbor's stereo stayed on shaking the walls. Both had been playing the same song.

Mick's All-Nite Grocery was not crowded. Mandy and Rollie stood in the dairy aisle.

"I can't find my wallet," Rollie said. Rollie searched his pockets. Mandy pushed the cart.

"You lost it? Did you bring it when you left home?"

"I thought I did."

"I'll be paying for groceries again, I suppose." Mandy shuddered. She put a carton of milk in the cart, neatly placed it alongside a pile of frozen pizzas and rubbed the goosebumps on her arms.

"You were going to anyway," Rollie said. "Had I not come with you." Mandy pushed the cart, its wheels rattling. She pushed it past the snack foods aisle.

"Yes. I guess you're right," she said and grabbed a bag of potato chips off a passing rack and let it crunch on top of the pizzas.

"We need bread too," Rollie said.

"I know."

Rollie saw that ground beef was on sale as the meat counter loomed closer. He thought he heard calliope music. Mandy was about to turn the corner into the cereal aisle and wondered if any Lucky Charms sill lingered in the cupboard at home and—CLANGGSSHH!!!!!!—the sound of colliding grocery carts . . .

"Excuse me. I'm sorry. I guess I wasn't watching where I was going." It was a deep, thick, radio announcer voice, belonging to a man standing behind a cart that contained five dozen eggs. The eggs had been stacked neatly at the very front of the cart. In the collision they had fallen and raw egg white was now dripping from the bottom of the man's cart onto the shining white grocery store floor. The floor had just been mopped.

"Oh yuck," Mandy said. Fragments of egg shells laid scattered at her feet. Rollie tore open a box of Kleenexes already in their cart and started wiping up the mess.

"Wait, you don't have to do that," the man said. "They pay people here to do that." An older woman with a blue hat and a noisy cart steered clear of the accident and headed towards the ground beef sale.

"No, it's O.K." Rollie persisted. Mandy watched as he took a fistful of Kleenex, smeared the egg white a bit and handed the man the gooey used ones.

“Uh—” the man held the Kleenex at a distance. “I’ll just set the damaged ones over here and that’ll do.” He put the gooey used Kleenex in one of the open egg cartons, then walked over to the meat counter and set all the damaged cartons over on the nearby packages of ground beef.

The woman with the blue hat peered at the dripping egg cartons. She glanced at the man. He looked back and smiled, applying a wink.

“Hello,” he said. She took her ground beef and left, one of her cart’s wheels refusing to roll with the rest, whine-squeak—squeaking as she left. The man walked back to where Rollie was holding a bunch of gooey wet Kleenex. Due to Rollie’s efforts, the mess on the floor was now well spread out.

“If you need us to pay for the—” The man held out his hand. It was then that Rollie noticed that the man was only five feet tall, had a bushy salt and pepper, speckled beard, and looked remarkably like a professor he knew at the college.

“No. No. That’s all right. It was really my fault,” the man said, “I should have been watching where I was going.”

“Are you sure?” Rollie asked. Mandy shifted uncomfortably. She thought she heard calliope music.

“It’s all right,” the man repeated. He moved to speed away.

“Hey.” Rollie stopped him. “Uh, aren’t you Dr. Todd?”

“The man’s eyebrows took a trip towards his receding hairline. He looked surprised. “Yes. Yes, that’s right.”

“We’re having a kind of party this weekend, if you’d like to come you’re welcome to.”

“Oh.” The man stopped.

Mandy’s eyes grew wide. She looked furiously at Rollie. She opened her mouth to protest and—

“Well, it’s a friend of mine’s birthday. Actually he’s a student of yours—Sean Malone?”

Mandy bit her lip.

“Well—”

“Yeah. Well, the party’s in Complex 9, Apt. 2783—the apartments over on Pynchon Lane—do you know them?”

The professor seemed distracted. “That’s a kind offer. We’ll see. Apt. 2833 you say? I don’t have any plans, but—” the professor checked his watch, “but we’ll see.”

“Well, I mean, you don’t have to stay. . .long or. . .anything. . .” Dr. Todd was speeding away, one of his wheels squealing madly. Mandy

let her jaw drop and then snapped it shut as if about to say something as she watched Dr. Todd disappear down near Frozen Foods. She looked furiously at a box of Lucky Charms and snatched it off the shelf.

The grocery boy had a blue name tag that read "FUZZENBON" in small, white, capital letters. He watched Rollie and Mandy roll into his aisle, with an almost, but not quite, complete and total lack of anything resembling interest. The phone rang and he picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Has the fruit come in?" a voice asked.

"No, Mr. Kline. Call back tomorrow." He hung up.

A gray-haired man rolled his cart behind Rollie and Mandy. In his cart there was a single pack of cigarettes. Noticing Mandy, he pulled out a small sketch pad and started penciling gibberish. He scratched his head, glanced quickly around and felt his pockets as if looking for something.

"Well, you didn't say anything," Rollie said. He was speaking to Mandy who carefully put a cluster of very long bananas on the conveyor.

"I didn't say anything because I didn't want him to recognize me," Mandy said through gritted teeth. She pulled the milk out of the cart and set it down on the conveyor with a thud. "You know I skipped his lab today."

"So? I'm sure he recognized you anyway. He was just too polite to say anything."

Mandy took a Soap Opera Digest from the rack and dropped it on the pizzas that Rollie had just stacked. She took a deep breath. "You are so hideous sometimes," she said. She shook her head. "And I definitely don't want that man at my party. He has the most profound knack of anyone I know, except maybe for my father or possibly you, for making me furious."

"Yes. So?" Rollie picked up a bottle of Tylenol. "I mean, I'm sorry. I didn't think it was a big deal." He looked at the Tylenol. "I guess I thought—I mean, I thought it might be nice if—never mind. I didn't think it was a big deal. Is there some reason that we're buying Tylenol?"

"Tylenol?" Mandy asked. "I thought we got the cheap stuff."

"There's Tylenol here." Rollie held up the bottle.

"Well, go get the other stuff. Hurry up," Mandy said. Rollie disappeared down the soda aisle.

Fuzzenbon kept sliding down the groceries. The old man behind Mandy looked intently at her, squinted, and held up a thumb, closing

one eye. He flipped his sketch pad and began writing on a clean white sheet.

Mandy noticed this. "Excuse me—what the hell do you think you're doing?"

The man smiled. "Pardon me ma'am. You see, I am an artist, a painter." He made a magnanimous gesture. "I want to paint you. Here's a sketch I have done in just these few moments."

"Oh really?" She took the sketch pad.

"I am in search of a subject and you would be perfect."

"Oh would I?" She looked at the page. On it was written: 'cooperate and i will not hurt you.' The words were thin and scratchy.

"Oh yes," the man said, "your form is exquisite, magnificent. I would like very much to paint your body." He looked around nervously. "Then, perhaps later, I would paint a picture of your body as well." He laughed. There was an unsettling gleam in his eye.

Mandy looked down the aisle where Rollie had disappeared. Both diet Pepsi and Coke were on sale for the same price. Fuzzenbon fiddled with a bag of M&M's, as if searching for a price tag. Mandy looked around nervously. No one around.

"I don't think so," Mandy told the painter. She began putting the last of the groceries onto the conveyor. She felt goosebumps creep over her flesh. Her hands trembled. She picked up a can of Ragu traditional style. She was about to put it on the conveyor when it slipped and crashed to the floor, smashing in front of the painter's feet. Tomato sauce poured out from the broken glass. Fuzzenbon looked up and picked up the phone.

"Clean-up on aisle five," he said and his voice carried over the PA, replacing the calliope music for a moment.

The painter put away his sketch pad and put the pack of cigarettes on the conveyor. Mandy noticed that the old man was missing his left index finger. Suddenly, she felt his other other hand on her waist. She suppressed a scream.

"Why don't you let me take you home with me," the painter half-whispered near her ear. "That boy of yours cannot satisfy a woman like I can." The painter grinned a toothless grin. Mandy looked up and looked over a tabloid headline that read "LOSE 50 POUNDS IN ONLY TWO WEEKS."

"You're really sick," Mandy said. She looked deeply into the painter's strange dark eyes, her bottom lip trembling. "If you were twenty-five years younger I might consider it." With no farther

comment she dashed the old man's crotch with a sharp knee blow that sent him doubled-up falling backwards into his cart, sliding on the spilt Ragu sauce. His cart rolled and hit a stack of toilet paper, toppling them over, leaving the painter groaning on his back. A very rotund gentleman with a blue name tag that read "LEROY" in small, white letters walked up with a mop.

"Yup. This is some mess alright," he said and proceeded to mop the floor.

Rollie knelt in front of a gumball machine. In his hand, he carried a little bag containing a bottle of generic acetaminophen. He had gone through the express lane. He turned the handle on the gumball machine for the third time and still no gumball. He turned it again and then began shaking it. He tried sticking his fingers up the metal chute, but it was useless.

Mandy stood in front of the automatic doors, which kept opening and closing as she rolled her filled-up cart back and forth absent-mindedly. She was watching Rollie.

Rollie forced the handle again in the opposite direction. There was a strange grinding, clicking sound, a sudden pop, and then a loud crack. Rollie yelled and held his hands over his head as the bubblegum machine exploded, sending a hail of green and yellow and red and pink and white gumballs all over the floor. He looked up.

"Oh, Hi Mandy." He grinned. "What took you so long? I got your Tylenol-stuff." He held up the bag and began gathering as many gumballs as he could off the floor, putting them in the bag.

"I'll tell you later. Could we just go now please." She waited for him to stand up and put the bag in the cart.

"I found my wallet," he said. She looked at him. He smiled. "I left it in the car. I forgot I put it in the glove compartment."

"Good. I'm glad." She held out her hand and smiled a faint smile. He took her hand, and together they left the grocery store, the automatic doors shutting behind them.

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