

The Messenger

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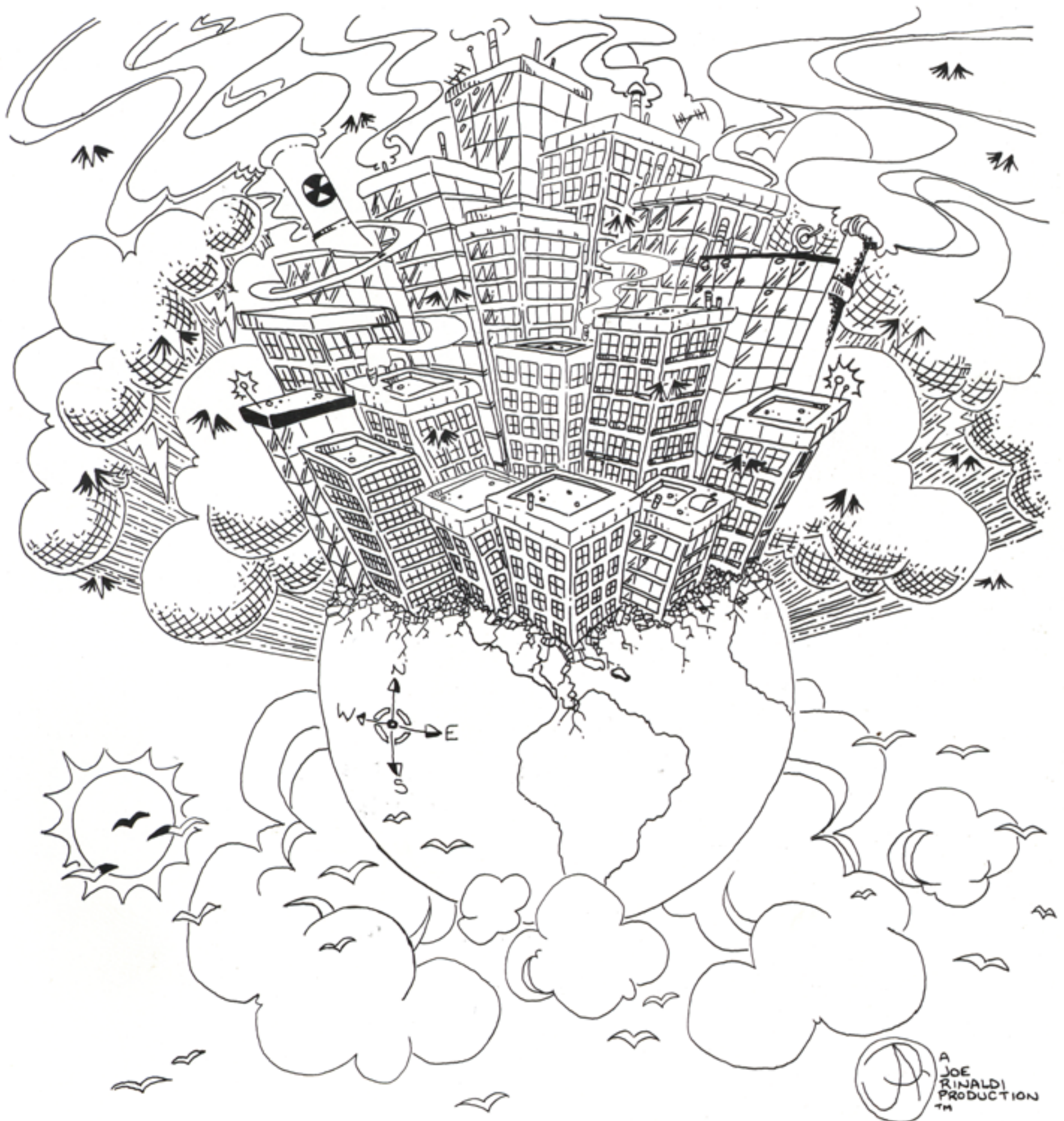
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The Messenger

Fall, 1994



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The Messenger

Fall 1994

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The University of Richmond
1994

Table of Contents

Poetry

September 30...Day One	<i>Eric Townsend</i>	4
On Adcock's Hand-Painted Photograph	<i>Emily Compton</i>	8
Meditation	<i>Timothy Dwelle</i>	14
Morning	<i>Randy Baker</i>	16
In Defense of the Draftsman	<i>Eric Townsend</i>	18
Sketch 2:5	<i>Josh Hockensmith</i>	20
Praise for Spring	<i>Roman Bulawski</i>	20
The Fisherman's Son	<i>Susannah Wood</i>	23
The Pendulum Which Swings Within My Breast (A Kerm Ode)	<i>Timothy Dwelle</i>	39

Prose

The Tobacco Road	<i>Alison Clayton</i>	10
Angel of Mercy	<i>Alison Clayton</i>	32

Artwork

untitled	<i>Joe Rinaldi</i>	cover
untitled	<i>Doug Satteson</i>	3
Waterfallen Asleep	<i>Eric Townsend</i>	6
untitled	<i>Sallie Hirsh</i>	9
Sunflowers at the Time of Their Death	<i>Eric Townsend</i>	15
untitled	<i>Sallie Hirsh</i>	19
untitled	<i>Doug Satteson</i>	centerpiece
untitled	<i>Sameer Chinoy</i>	27
untitled	<i>Sameer Chinoy</i>	31
untitled	<i>Ryan Jones</i>	34
untitled	<i>Ryan Jones</i>	37
untitled	<i>Sara Truitt</i>	40



September 30th...Day One

I am one ripple
upon the circle cornered
"those not concerned with restraint".
Embracing this,
it is mere unfolding
which leads to grasping
why
I cradle
and smooth
marble
in the whirlpool
of my palmprint.

Each rub is pure
vivarin release.
There is a certain state
achieved through
circum-stroke of stone
which scolds the sculptor
for desiring "completion"
while deserting "competition".
But the ignorance of the mind
and the burden upon its pedestal
only press the sculptor towards the former.
Victimized,
I am but one
weak link in the chain of experience.

Unraveling fingers
from the security
of a clenched fist
reveals the element enslaved,
and through breathing,
it is allowed to enlighten.
Only Nature's relentless faith
assists the sculptor

in realizing that stone
is rarely "harsh" and "uninviting"
as Knowledge has trained us
but more often "sensitive" and "beckoning"
as Perception primitively urges us.
It is during moments such as this
that I begin to understand
crucial knots in Nature's rope.

The marble obelisk
I am about to carve
is unlimiting textural source
whose flesh undulates and angles
with a complexity
only matched in the human figure.
Time invested
into uniting the woman within
with the wisdom of the fresh air
is no different from the years
I've invested in adoration
of the female nude.
One who follows the whims of stone
revels in her tease,
for with each chisel
comes a hint of orgasm
of the eventual image.
It is through being
true to materials,
that I can live
in truth about my love.

Three hundred miles
could never separate me
from my obsession
with the curves of her reclining figure.
I pray
that the coming months of carving
will quench my sexual desire.



I do cling to a fear
that my indulgence in the ritual
will deteriorate into
dulled senses and the habitual.
Repetition is a necessary component
in the development of a flow
and sculpture is a study in flow.
Flow can be a colossal force
like an ever changing, raging river
pummeling its bed
and transforming the most courageous of stone
into humble clay
or smoothed skipping stones.
Flow
coupled with regularity
can lead to predictability
and boredom
which should never be applied
to any flesh.
It is the latter
that is presently frustrating me
because I am not quite a river:
I am one ripple within its flow.

Eric Townsend, RC '95

On Adcock's Hand-Painted Photograph

Light edges the petal
Illuminates the stem
Like a shaft of metal.

The red rose's shape
Is Liberty's torch
Of copper.

Then an uncaged memory
Of the last gift
A thorn-stem.

The hot red rose
Takes a few lines
Demands them, always does.

Emily Compton, WC '96

Three young boys in traditional costume



The Tobacco Road

It was all land and sky, no margins, just two solid blocks joined at the horizon and Rebecca loved it. She knew who she was in the vastness, everything was focused to a point, senses were taut, the body relaxed and all she carried was portable. The road stretched ahead in the midafternoon sun, its edges blurred by the insidiously crawling dust and Rebecca hitched a lift, home to the country she had adopted.

Cars passed by, sleek. Drivers became part of the bodywork, ignoring her raised arm, and drove on. It didn't matter, the sun was too hot and she knew her car would appear.

It had become a magical existence. To be thrown totally on your own, to be able to do anything you liked --- go anywhere you pleased, be anything you could possibly imagine. Create in yourself a new you and no one would care, a hedonistic liberation.

Rebecca had left Europe nine months earlier, left her job, the constant timekeeping, the cat with her neighbor. Packed all she would need into a rucksack and shut the door on her flat. She had kept in touch with her old life, family and friends received postcards from exotic locations full of new faces and experiences but never fully shared them, they belonged to her and she kept their essence inside.

It was three in the afternoon and to countermand the hollow feeling in the pit of her stomach she lit a cigarette, enjoying the feel of the smoke curling around the back of her throat and down into her lungs. Tobacco was cheap, it was growing all around her. A car stopped and a face leaned out, a man's clean shaven and weather-tanned, smiling, "Where to?"

"B---", she replied.

He opened the trunk for her rucksack and she placed it next to the bottled water and petrol. In case of an emergency, he explained. His name was Jeff and he was driving a blue BMW. Rebecca smiled at the incongruity of the situation and scorned her old life at home.

She had hitched many lifts in the past nine months, balancing herself on logs that filled a tractor-drawn trailer, squeezed herself between families and their interminable boiled sweet conversations, housewives attracted to her vulnerability and men who wanted her conversation to brighten their long journeys --- routine in a country that seemed to have no end.

The seats were leather and Rebecca felt perspiration gather between her legs and into the grooves of the seat. Shifting slightly she asked if she could have a coke from the cool bag on the back seat,

They drove through the sun with visors down and the air conditioning on. Rebecca remembered the journeys where she would be crouched in the back of some truck with the wind playing with her hair, the dust settling itself into her, shifting when she changed position and resettling into the newly formed recesses, where she had felt complete freedom.

Jeff was a farmer with land to the North, suffering from drought, he was telling her. He was traveling to B--- to see to the possibility of digging new bore holes, people on his land depended on him. Rebecca kept to her side of the bargain and asked more questions.

He was a tall man with a tan that stopped on his upper arms and a balding head. She knew he was attracted to her --- they drove on.

People worked in the fields on either side of them, harvesting the tobacco crop, Rebecca wanted a cigarette, he said as long as she wound the window down. Hot air rushed into the controlled leather atmosphere and the skin on her face blanched. She held the cigarette out of the window with her finger and thumb, keeping the bright point at its lowest ebb. Widening her three remaining fingers, she threw the remains to the wind.

"Did you know that one foreign tobacco particle can ruin a farmer's whole crop?" Rebecca felt guilty.

The road stretched onwards, people were living in unseen villages and communities on either side of the road. The people working in the fields had to live somewhere but there was no trace of them in the immensity of the landscape. Rebecca knew she was lucky if she caught a fleeting glimpse of anyone walking towards the horizon until her gaze was lost in the receding mirror. She felt she had understood, in that moment, the organic nature of African life. She had become a part of it and attempted to bring some of it with her but the car was going too fast and it slipped from her grasp.

The car slowed down and turned off the road. "Short cut," Jeff explained.

Rebecca said nothing; there were no short cuts.

The land on either side of her was the same, tobacco growing in straight lines each starkly invisible in its regularity and Rebecca tried to imagine that this was the same road as before. It looked the same.

Jeff's hands stayed in the same position on the wheel. rebecca studied them. Strong hands used to hard work. Overpowering hands wearing a wedding band. The car stopped on the side of the road, Rebecca took another sip of Coke, Jeff leaned over. He clasped her face between his hands turning it towards him and she thought how normal his face looked. It wasn't until he spoke that the spell was broken and she screamed.

"Listen!" He sounded conciliatory as if he had no idea what was wrong. "SSh!"

Rebecca's mouth became mute but her jaw remained in the same clenched position. Her flesh seemed to melt away.

She hit him, flat in the face with her rolled up fist, took him by surprise and hit him again, took the Coke bottle and hit him with that. He grabbed her hair and pulled her face next to his, she jerked back and it came away in his hands. The bottle smashed and she slit the hand that was still making for her face, laughing insanely at the sight of the blood on the seat. she opened the car door and fell out, still clutching the bottle with one hand and soothing her skull with the other, still laughing. he fell out of the same door and grabbed her foot then her knee then lunged for her hair. She was crying now, great screaming sobs, "Fucking bastard. Fucking, fucking bastard."

She was on all fours, crawling. She was losing more and more hair as he kept pulling her back and at the loss of her femininity she kept on escaping. He had the Coke bottle and she felt it tear into her leg; she hadn't remembered dropping it. She turned suddenly and lunged for his face, he loosened his grasp and she stood, momentarily dizzy in the sun, and ran. Sometimes stumbling, falling, cutting her hands on the stones she ran towards the tobacco plants. She didn't know if he followed her.

A truck pulled up on the road and scared faces leaned out. He was behind her again, "It's domestic, she's my wife." Her eyes pleaded with the man and woman in the truck but they didn't understand and drove on.

Rebecca saw her life leave with them and ran desperately screaming down the road. A scarecrow figure, arms waving, running a strange limping race against her attacker. The truck stopped again and she opened the front door and threw herself in.

"What the...?" The man sputtered and winced as she bled over the seats but put the truck into gear leaving the strange road behind her. Rebecca answered their questions, room was tight in the front of the truck,

then remained silent until they found a hospital in the first town on the tobacco road.

They had cut her hair, the bits she had left were too matted with blood to ever be untangled and she lay in the hospital bed in the starched white room on starched white sheets under the fluorescent bulb of a light. Her eyes were closed, blocking out the sights and smells of the sick, and she mourned for her hair.

Days passed. the local priest came to see her, she told him to fuck off. He had left. She made a statement to the police; they wrote the details down with serious faces. They came back.

"Miss Anderson, we've apprehended the suspect."

She said nothing.

"He's claiming he stopped the car for a rest break and you attacked him."

Rebecca opened her eyes.

"He's willing to go to court."

She thought of his reaching out for her face, tearing her hair, her clothes.

"He's a rich man, perhaps it would be better if..."

Who was she? Her carefully constructed self, her magical existence, her adventure were all destroyed. She had become something else in that hospital bed, an alien, scared at the immensity of the situation, angered by her naivety, horrified by her powerlessness. Her mind escaped from the room. She was back on the tobacco road, running, arms raised to the people in the fields, hair in the wind, alone on the landscape, running a race she would never, ever, win.

Alison Clayton, WC '98

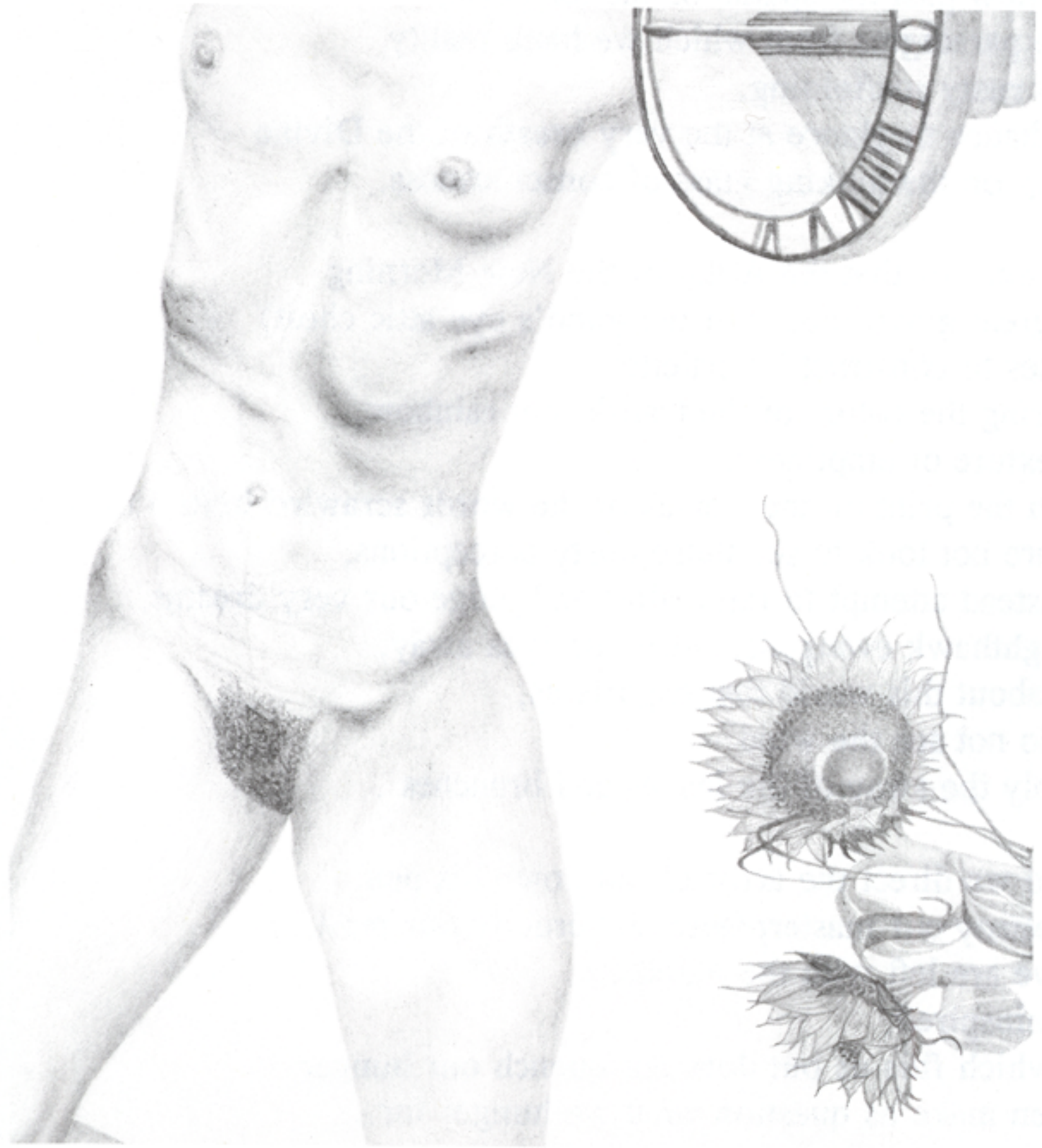
Meditation

These revelations that come in dream
Are those of the iconoclast ---
The dark, underwater light reflections
Of bent lines and twisted universes.
Lost somewhere in the dreamglow.
We follow past the spatial or the temporal,
Or the paradigms from which we hang reality
Like a rusty scaffolding,
And chance to glance at the very breath of the Divine
Misting on the looking glass of consciousness.

It is from this that the Artist of the New Morning
(The great grave robber of the mind's eye attic chest)
Chooses to construct his palette:
Capturing the colors of the translucent rainbow,
The texture of emptiness.
And in the print on the canvas or the words scrawled before us
We dare not look to see those misty perceptions,
But instead attempt to rationalize and judge our very dreams.
We nighthawk evangelists turn our eyes away,
Look about this world that engulfs us,
And do not see the wind ---
But only the sway of the leaves and branches .

And so we direct the artist to put down his pen,
We destroy our masterpieces and crucify our masters
And we are left with the mundane,
The uninspired,
That which fills us but does not quench our hunger
Or even make us question what we hunger for...

Timothy Dwelle, '96



Morning

Not dark, but gray was the sky
As I stepped off the first bus running;
My dull stupor sure of one thing ---
My flower, now cold and dead.

I saw the master bedroom light,
As I entered, bleeding terribly
Across the hall floor into me.
A song played, stirring memories.

I trudged toward my room,
My foot flooded with the wake,
And stopped. I could not break
The cascade of light.

I sat in resignation,
To watch the city waking.
Their lives I was making
From my tower window.

Across the street was a park
That was too clean to be afraid,
Where lonely men now live and then made ---
A legacy I chose to ignore.

I wanted to sleep,
Alone in my room
Ready to break
The terrible wake of light.

The 12:19 cease-fire ended the gathering.
Friends that knew much of each other
But little of life, were always ready to smother
Each other's bedtime stories.

My life and conscience gave way when I saw her.
The room cleared before she said, come with me,
And my limbs framed a fearful symmetry
Again, alone in that dimly lit room.

The beam moved
Cascading the floor
Covering more and more
I had to break...

Talking for hours, I chose not to hold him
As he suddenly wept.
The stairs were swept but the filth was unkept
And he lost his faith that night.

And I chose not to hold him.
I stared stupidly at the floor
The floor...
A legacy I chose to ignore.

I couldn't stop the slumber, infesting my brain,
And knew I had to break the beam.

The beam grew and consumed me
And a breath of scotch, through the light,
Came to linger and remind what might,
What could, but because of me, never would.

The flower was still clutched in my hand.
The song was still playing.
With the rising sun defining the night,
She traded me nothing for a cascade of light.

Randy Baker, RC '96

In Defense of The Draftsman

Venus reclines
and becomes a reservoir
for the liquid tendencies of light.
Like mercury stirring on the belly of Love,
Shadows coagulate
into trees, tributaries, and trains of my tangled thoughts:

all patterns temporary to the passing of time;
all projections destined to the pouring from flesh.

I conglomerate my senses
into a stone-patient study
as I struggle for answers with my pencil.
The November sun bleeds upon me
and the monumentality of out fixation
is captured within the death of two sunflowers.

Shadows scramble relentlessly;
fearful of the static.
You enter the studio,
freeze,
and forget.
"Artistically inspired"
and without restraint,
you grasp for the security of photography:

one snap suspends the suicide of sovereignty.

Eric Townsend, RC '95



Sketch 2:5

Fear of a black
Fear of a
fear of a
fear of

They mystify
The prophylaxis of a typhoid fever
results in the American Army

They mystify

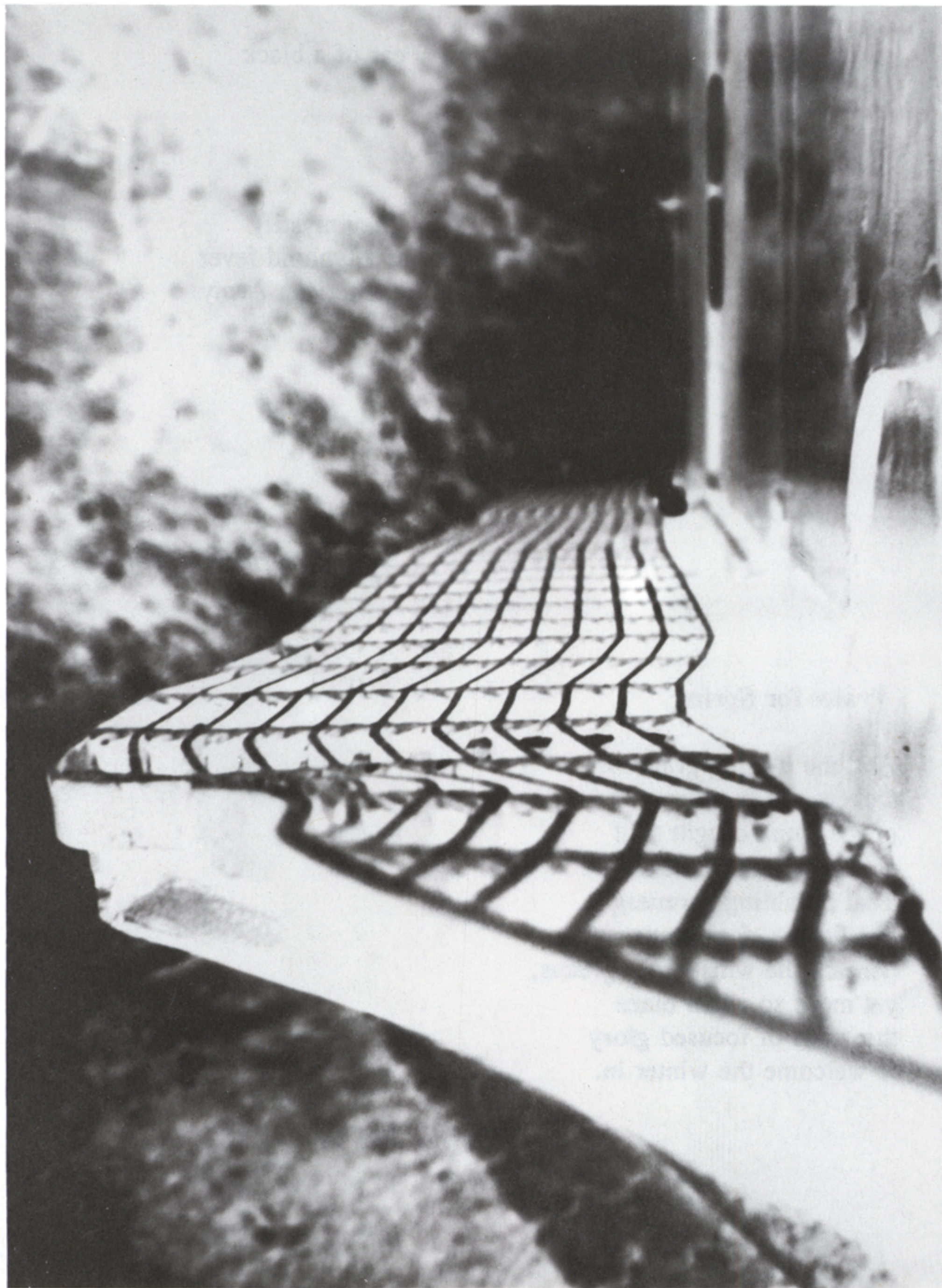
Negro
Mister
Coffee

Josh Hockensmith, RC '95

Praise for Spring

And the waxing grandeur
wakens the rustlings
of the trunk-caught soul
as the weather marches in.
That humbling bareness
lies listless, forgotten
beneath the whispering greens,
yet more so when blaze
the golds of focused glory
to welcome the winter in.

Roman Bulawski, RC '97





The Fisherman's Son

A fisherman's son and in love with the sea,
he casts his nets far from shore.

Eyes blue as storms,
(inside he mourns)
never at peace, a lonely young man was he.

He owned a small house on a fair distant shore,
where porpoises slept
and wind played
through the door.

Nights he spent under the moon;
sleeping, at dawn he would put out to sea
and at noon
he would sail as far as he'd see.

Happy was he, or so thought the sea
who would rock him and soothe him to peace.
In her calm, loving arms his murmurs would cease.
"Be still," she said, "and know I love thee."

As clouds shifted and turned in the sky,
while a lone candle burned in his window above
the fisherman's son would cry,
in the empty dark house, without love.

Dusky nights passing, he dragged in his boat,
far from the beautiful sea.
Salt in his eyes, and spray in his throat,
from his window, he watched her great mystery.

"How many nights must I spend so alone
up in this window, on this far shore?
So many nights under a moon of white bone,
with no porpoises and no wind in the door."

The sea, sad and confused,
teased his feet with her foam.
To cheer him, she beckoned, "Come play..."
With a shrug he refused,
and with regret and dismay
she said, "This is your home
far from me you can't roam.
Who else do you need but for me?
I love you, I feed you, I rock you to sleep
in my arms, in the deep,
and I whisper to you from the rocks on the shore.
What does it matter?
Cease all your chatter;
you need nothing but my waves at your door."
The fisherman's son turned with no word
his black hair and back to the sea.
"I have seen and have heard and believe thee," he sighed.
"And I say that I love thee," he said as he lied.

Surprised, the sea withdrew her tide;
and angry, her blue turned to black.
"Fisherman's son," she said in her storm,
"I will no longer be by thy side.
Leave this fair shore and seek what you lack,
but be warned.
Should you return to your door with a lover,
I'll take you from her; I'll take you for me,
for I am jealous of thee,
and will have you one way or the other."

The sea drew in her nets as the sun slowly fell,
and the moon flung his stars out to see.
And the fisherman's son, with his foot, crushed a shell,
and walked away from the sea.

When grey ribbons slipped over the waves,
and the last star had sunk into day
the fisherman's son took his boat from the caves,
and secured it land where it lay.

For several seasons
he traveled, searching for a love.
For several reasons,
he abandoned the sea and the shore.
For miles he had roved
until he returned, tired and grieving,
to find an open door.

She was a shadowed child
with quiet eyes that would rival the sea.
Hair of spun gold, hand timid and mild,
adrift and alone was she.
The fisherman's son, no longer alone,
took one frail hand and called her his own.
"Stay with me," his dark eyes spoke,
"in this house by the sea.
Be my wife and be faithful,
and I will love no other but thee."

She stayed with the man, in his house on a distant shore.
Far from her home, she longed not for more
than the stars, her beloved and the wind in the door.

"Fisherman's son, you have much to learn," spoke the sea.
"This much I know," he said, "I returned because I love thee."
"Your heart is not with me.
It rests down by the docks,
in your house on the shore,
in the white hands of one
with golden locks,
and eyes that would mimic the sea.
She would take you from me.
Beware; a temptress is she.
If her you not fear, then fear me."

The fishermen's son laughed as he cast out his nets,
"You have nothing to fear,
my heart is here, deep beneath your waves.
Truly my dear, I would love no one but thee."

The wind whispered beware;
but the sea murmured no more,
as he shrugged off this care,
and set sail to shore.

From her window above
salty tears spilled from her eyes.
She feared for her love,
her own prince of tides.
That day she spent weaving and crying,
by the window and sighing
awaiting his return.

As the pale moon arose,
he paced the shore
to the door
and without noise
crept up the stairs
and into the bed
where she slept.

Until dawn they made love
when at last she looked into his black eyes
and with trembles and sighs,
she whispered, "My love,
do not put thy boat out to sea,
for I fear that one night
in her wrath and her might
she would sweep you away and I would lose thee."

"Ah my dove," he smiled.
"You have nothing to fear
from her, the lady sea.
For I have tamed her you see."
His dark eyes cast upon her as lied,
"I love no one but thee."

And with a gentle kiss



he silenced her tears.
And with nothing amiss,
left her with her fears
to have his way with the sea.

For he felt he was true,
the fisherman's son was he,
no one would tame him,
he would sail and would love and be free.
"Surely, my sea, I love no one but thee.
My wife is dear
but she is there and not here.
I have loved thee since birth
with a gay heart and mirth,
but you cannot give me what she can.
And yet land
is no place for me.
I am home here at sea.
Truly I love her, but I also love thee."

"I do not share what I love," called the sea,
and she taunted him and his nets
were empty all day.
And at the end, when she tired, she called,
"Would you rather love her or love me?"

At home, while he sailed,
his wife watched and sometimes wailed,
"One with the ocean
one with the sea,
but never enough room
in his boat for me."

The fisherman's son, happy and free,
wove his nets by the sea.
His wife alone and afraid
watched the spot
where porpoises once played.

He'd take her out onto the shore
out of the house, out of the door,
to hold her against him,
as the red sun went out.
He'd whisper his love
so she'd hear above
the waves on the rocks on the shore.

The waves and the breakers
gently crashing sometimes lulled her to sleep.
It was no place for a young wife to be.
Staring out of her window,
at the rocks and she'd weep
as her lover set sail out to sea.

One tiny boat on a vast ocean wide,
one wave had only to laugh
one west wind to fail
to have a flood for a tide
and no wind in the sail.
Why did he leave his love's side?

Worse this than some sort of shivering storm
when the keel and bow start to shudder.
He would bail with the right hand
with the left resting firm on the rudder.

She sighed all of this
into his breast.
He calmed her and soothed her to rest.
"If I am not here in body
the waves will send you my spirit at best."

She sobbed in his hands
when she fell in his arms
her tears made him think carefully.
What would he gain if he never returned,
if he was one with the sea?

He paced on the shore for the days sure to come,
and his wife lightly slept in his bed;
dreaming his thoughts, she wept,
"Rather be loved than be dead."

The fisherman's son turned
to come back to his love,
but then he turned 'round once again,
the temptress the sea
laughed unmercifully,
"Would you rather love her than love me?"

The man took his boat out
for one last dusky sail.
The sea was calm as the temptress could be,
but the moon was becoming quite pale.

His lover awoke from a sleep
she was doomed to repeat;
but she walked to the window once more.
Looking out at the waves and the
pale moonlit night,
she saw nothing but dark sea and bright shore.

Her eyes searched the darkness
that had once been a sunset.
They sought a small boat on the sea.
She looked back for the last time, and softly she said,
"He would rather love her than love me."

Susannah Wood, WC '97



Angel of Mercy

The white ducks had left and only the brown ones remained. Desperate women marched their dogs around the lake and the leaves fell, covering the green with layer upon layer of brilliant golds, browns, reds and rusts. It was my favorite scene.

It was also a favorite scene of the old; they watched from their windows the seasons change into years, the days fade into nights and the nights into morning and the minutes tick by --- endless. The old were cocooned from the outside elements by the walls of the nursing home and the ceaseless muttering of the television kept them awake.

I worked in the home for over five years; sixty-one months of routine: morning and afternoon, day and night, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Some came and went, recovered from a fall or allowed weary relatives a rest. Most stayed on until they died and in the comfort of the home it was a slow and painful process. We made lives easier, but at what cost? Saturday was my favorite day --- weekend work never bothered me, for despite the merging of the days in the ever-controlled atmosphere, years of looking forward to "Saturday" could never completely be erased from the benumbed minds of myself and some of the residents. Sunday, God's day, was the most miserable.

I was a care assistant, not enough qualifications for nursing, but it suited my lifestyle: married young with children, two of them, aged ten and eight, though they were younger then of course, and a husband I could live with. So why did I decide to do it? It was the cost, I think. Morning and afternoon, day and night, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I walked the corridors of the home, always clutching something for someone: bedpan, tray, towels. Walking in a uniform and white pumps that made no sound, fetching and carrying, making life easier.

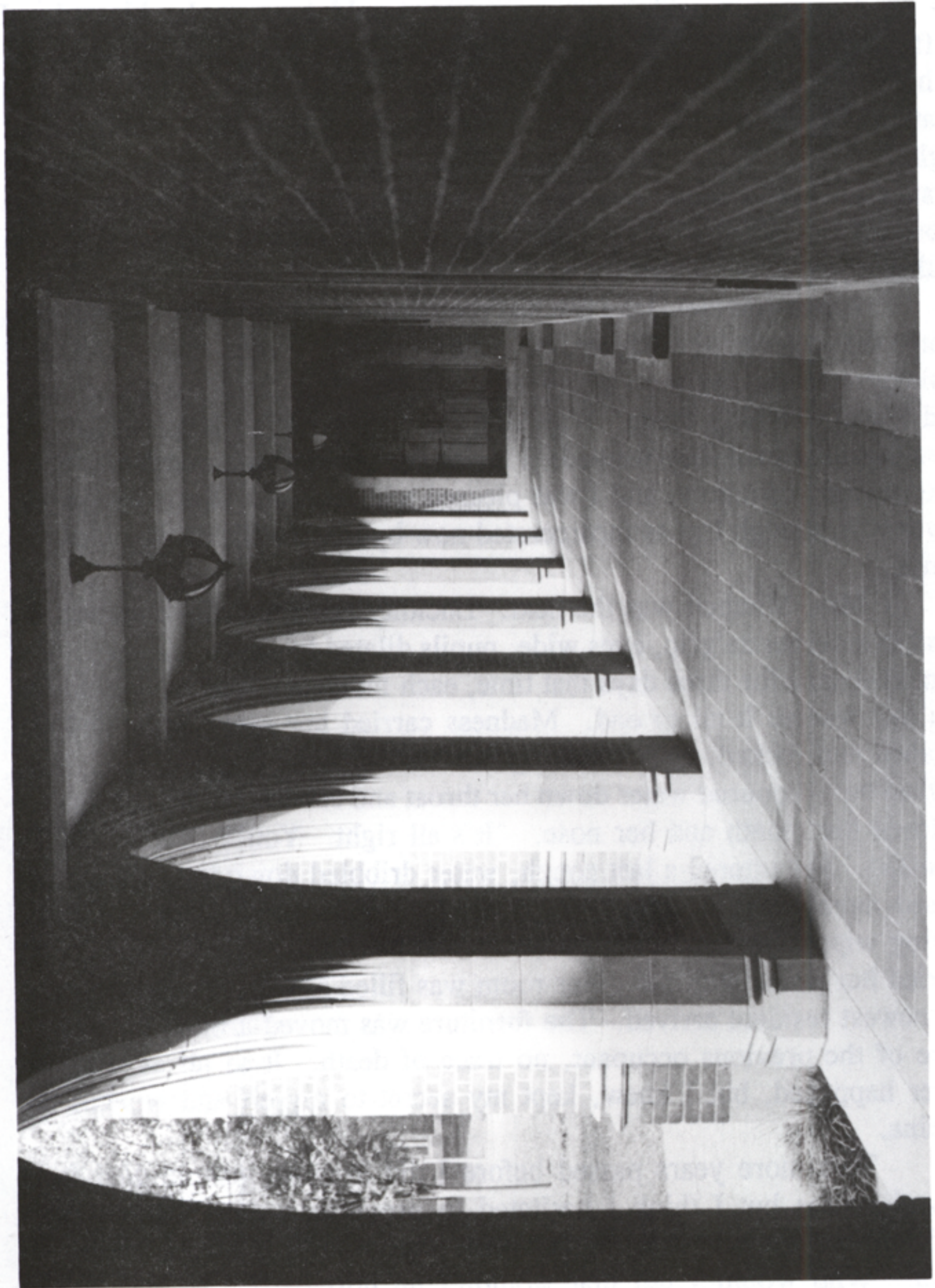
The residents had their own rooms, had saves enough in life to come and die in an expensive home. They were rich and pathetically grateful and every day for six and a half hours, minus my ten minute break, I did exactly as they asked. I wanted to do it for them. In my own way, I loved them. That will sound strange, but we were all close, the residents and me. I knew what they wanted, what they needed more than anything and what they couldn't get for themselves.

I sometimes took my break in Mrs. Barry's room. She smoked,

had never allowed cancer to kill her, and she let me do the same. I always wondered if smoking made me a weak person; it was an addiction, but Mrs. Barry didn't mind the broken rules. she held her cigarette in a shiny black holder but ruined the effect by clutching at the thin stem with gnarled, rheumatic fingers. Clutched it with a fist of a grip, drank in the smoke and rarely exhaled. The nurses turned a blind eye. Her photographs fascinated me; beautiful portraits of black and white youth with a far-away look that I sometimes saw today but usually it was an ugly face, ruined by age. Her neighbor, Mrs. Mitchell, had given up her fight with sanity and rocked in her chair with a strange moaning that penetrated even the sound of the television through the walls. Mrs. Barry had no pity, they had been neighbors for too long; she wanted her peace but the strength of the madness kept Mrs. Mitchell's will alive. Lucidity came and went and when it came the blackness only intensified, the horror would come again but at least it was apart from her consciousness. Realizing who she was, she agreed with Mrs. Barry and prayed, pleaded for release --- but it wouldn't come.

Activities were programmed for the rest. We wheeled them down to the social area and they watched demonstrations of flower arranging. Creations were raffled off at the end and languished in the corners of rooms until the cleaners finally remembered to take them away. I liked to leave them there, the reminder of dead flowers would, I thought, give hope to the residents.

Christmas came, the nurses sent out cards, a menu had been chosen and Christmas lunch was eaten. Decorations put up, pulled down. Over almost as soon as it had began and would have left no mark had it not been for Mrs. Barry's fall. Stretching out from her chair her legs gave way and she collapsed to the floor and stayed there in an agony of frustration and pain until I came in with her mid-afternoon tea and called a nurse. She broke an arm and a leg and encased in plaster understood her neighbor. I tried to visit her on my break but she wouldn't speak, accepted my help but not my company. She couldn't do anything, not even die. It was then that the idea came to me. As I washed her in the mornings and dressed her as best I could over the plaster, I knew why she wouldn't speak, why she hated me and I loved her all the more. We never spoke about it, she never knew what I would do for her until the moment. She rarely slept, the pills we gave her didn't help. I thought about giving her too many, an overdose that would ease her out of her pain but they were controlled by the nurses, vigorously monitored and locked away, it



was part of their job. Killing someone, no matter how much they want to die takes thought and planning. I didn't want to be caught, although I seriously never thought it would happen, just made sure I took precautions --- an overdose wouldn't do, someone would have to be blamed. I suffocated her. She was awake and struggled as a body naturally does, as it had been unconsciously trained to do since birth, but I knew she was grateful. I just couldn't look in her eyes. "It's all right. You'll be all right," I said. I covered her head with a pillow and pressed, gently at first, then harder until she died. They found her in the morning, we mourned but all shared my secret relief. The funeral was moving and within a wee Mrs. Mitchell had a new neighbor.

It was summer, lake life had returned, the view was the same apart from the colors, the layers of golds, browns, reds and rusts had disintegrated leaving the same green, but this time there were new eyes and I was watching them. Watching for a new Mrs. Barry, wanting to give them the help they wanted. I never saw myself as a murderer, more like an angel of mercy, and I was pleased with my role. I don't regret it, never will, though I'm as incarcerated now by these walls as they were by theirs.

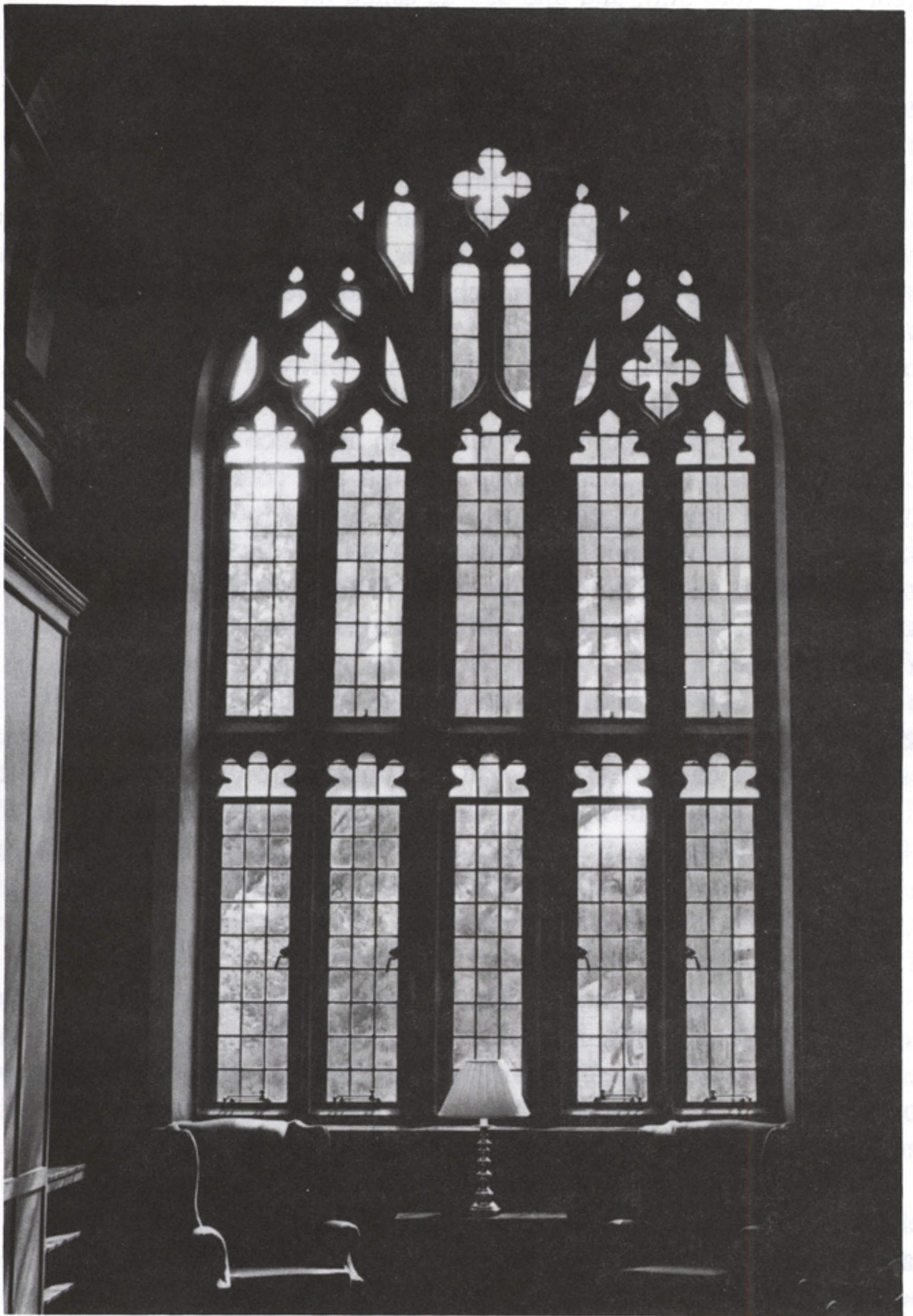
Mrs. Mitchell was the next. Lucidity came and she clutched my hand in a desperate grip, eyes wide, pupils dilated by drugs and pain. She remained sane for three days that time, each moment a fear for the future, she just wanted it all to end. Madness carried her away again and she moaned and rocked, eyes watching the lake, drowning in its view, and I choked her. I poured water down her throat and carried on pouring before I closed her mouth and her nose. "It's all right. You'll be all right," I repeated. She uttered a last cough, water dribbled down the sides of her closed mouth and I relaxed my grip. She was dead. I left the room having wiped her face with the towel that had lain beside the basin and carried her peace with me. Her room was filled again, re-painted before the newest resident arrived. The furniture was moved around leaving no trace of the previous occupant, no trace of death. It was all as if it had never happened, but I knew, kept my secret to myself and worked the routine.

Two more years passed before I did it again, people died from natural causes but I think I hesitated to prove to myself that I wasn't addicted, but it was always on my mind. I never told anyone in those two years. Who would I tell that wouldn't be horrified? No one would understand, I was performing the ultimate act of assistance, the most care

I could ever give.

Mr. Sedge, fairly new to the home, was coherent, we talked a great deal. I told him, and one day he asked me to do the same for him, but only when he asked, only when it was necessary. He wasn't shocked, it was something he believed in, just surprised that it was someone like me, a middle-aged housewife, mother of two --- normal. I told him of my love, my care, my job, and he understood. Of all the people in the nursing home Mr. Sedge was my favorite. I used to imagine myself living in his life, he had been a pilot in the war and he romanticized his stories for me, emphasizing the risk, the danger and the thrill. I loved to listen to him talk, he was a man very much alive despite his age, had raced cars in the thirties and liked to read Hemingway. Then one day he had a stroke, paralyzed down one side and lost his ability to move, to speak, and to live. He was reduced to a mind with no body and no voice and he grew bitter. He changed from a man who had once entertained me with stories of his life to a feeble lump of flesh that could only growl when something was done to help him. We fed him, wiped away spittle from his mouth, he refused and regurgitated food from his clothes, heaved him onto the bed at night and onto his chair in the morning, and I knew the time had come. His frustration reminded me of the agony of Mrs. Barry, of Mrs. Mitchell's fear of the unknown madness and it was time to keep to my side of the bargain. It was strange but the actual killing of Mr. Sedge, even though he had been the only one to have actually asked me, was the hardest one so far. He had legitimized it for me but I felt guilt. The days of seeing him in his chair, just sitting and staring at the television, something he had never previously allowed in his room but the nurses had insisted on --- to keep him entertained, they said --- made me do it, to end his torture and incarceration. I had put him to bed with one of the other assistants and was left to tidy up the room on my own. I stood over him and he knew. The stiffness and rigidity seemed to fall from his paralyzed limbs, his contorted face muscles relaxed and he was ready. I placed a pillow over his head and pressed, as gently as I knew how, and his body stiffened and I found myself murmuring the same caressing baby words of comfort, but the door opened.

Mr. Sedge lived ten more years after that moment. Having refused to plead insanity, they locked me up, they found out about Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Mitchell, their relatives were shown on television, used by the media who hunted me down as a witch. Newspapers told my story their way, possessed my life and never gave it back and my children



refused to visit. I knew the truth, that in the pursuit of freedom I had lost my own. They said it would be fifteen long years before I might be released, no one even knew for sure. The nursing home was eventually closed down. It couldn't attract any more residents, and was turned into a maternity hospital. I began to watch television, no one thought I was a threat to the safety of others, just some middle-aged nut that stayed in the safety of the television arc for as long as possible and rarely spoke to anyone else.

It's been ten years now and I'm still here, still sitting in this chair, still watching this television, still thinking about Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Mitchell. Their families had not understood, they should never have found out, they will grieve forever. Mr. Sedge has just died, even after ten years had passed someone remembered and I was mentioned in his obituary. He was the one I felt most pity for; he had asked for my help and I had let him down. His imprisonment had been far worse than mine. I miss my view of the lake most of all. I have a window, but all I can see is sky. I imagine all the old people I have known looking down on me, pitying me. It makes me feel good to know they are on my side. The rest of the prison ignores me and I am glad. Even when I am ill they came nowhere near me. I didn't want them to speak to me, to know me. What little I have left of my life is my own and it's my mystery.

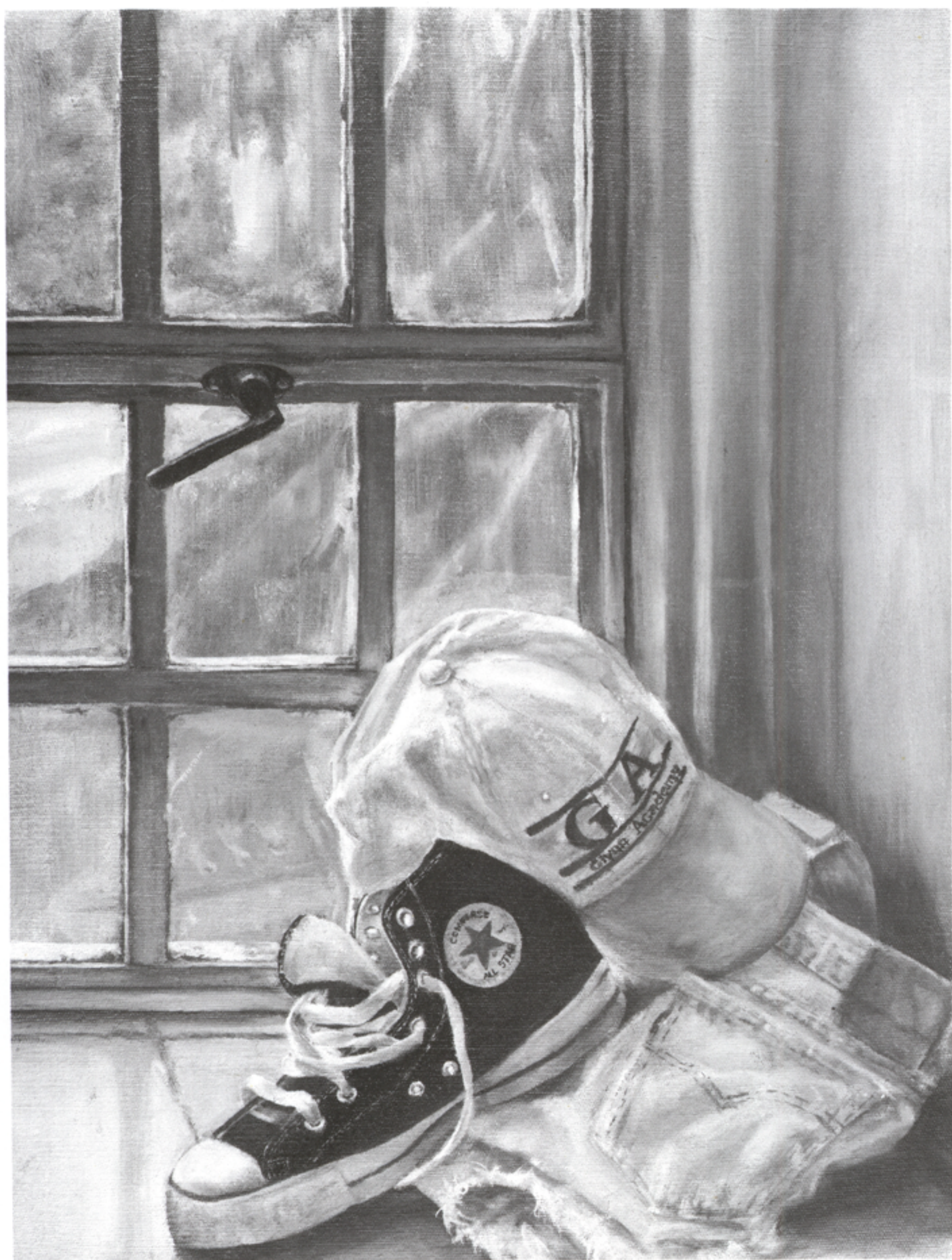
Alison Clayton, WC '98

The Pendulum Which Swings Within My Breast
(A KERM ODE)

This pendulum which swings within my breast,
A metronome to count the final beats
Until the Maestro's wand does come to rest
To end this sacred Symphony,
Progresses on from tick to tock
In perfect rhythm through a hundred staves,
As Heavenly melodies unlock
The wonders that await beyond the grave.

Or have I somewhere misplaced my sense of pitch?
No, there must be a beginning and end
From which to frame the Divine melody...
And so I close my ears and I pretend
To hear the tocks where there's only ticks,
And the genius within the cacophony.

Timothy Dwelle, RC '96



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