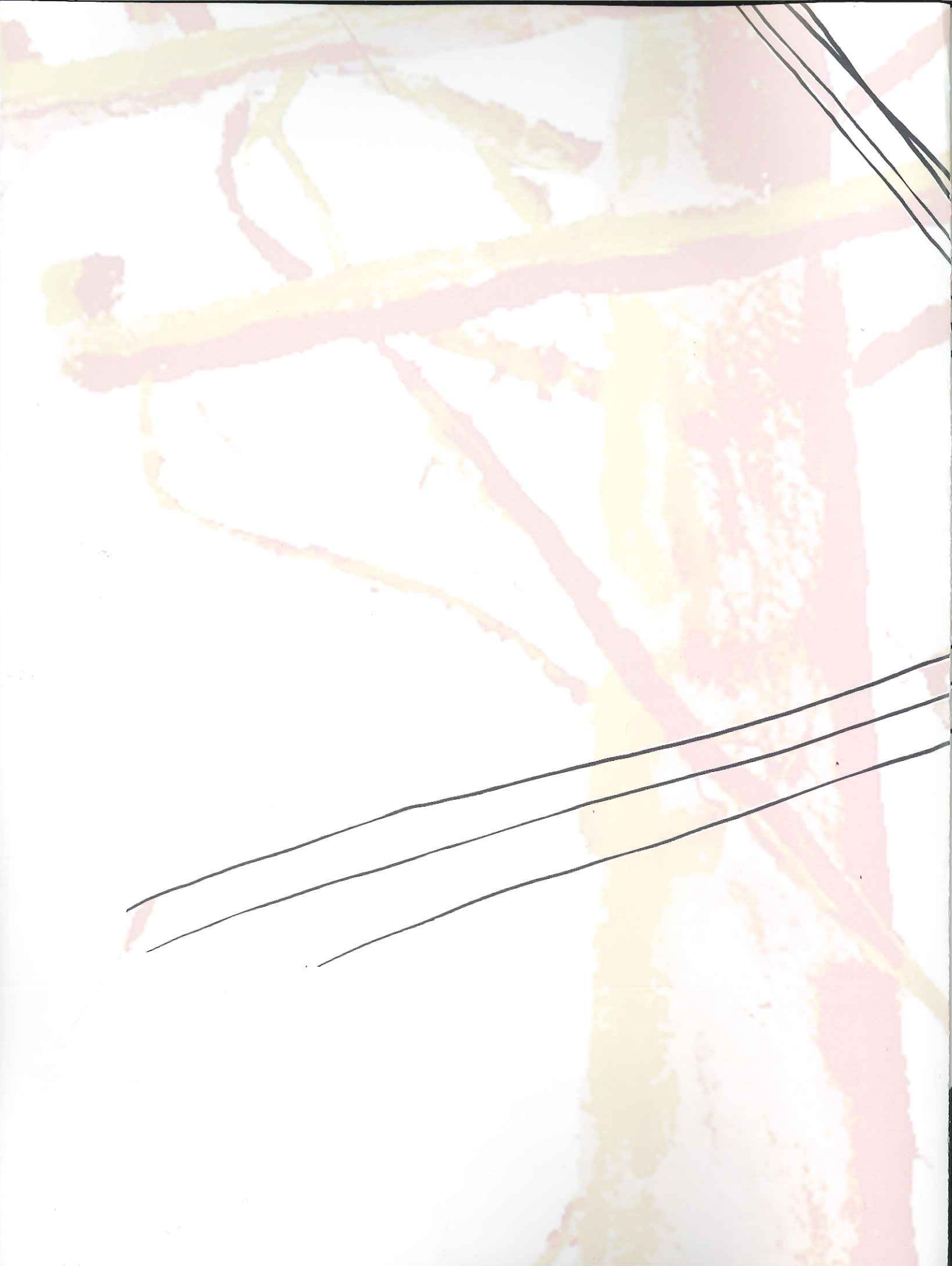


City Limits

Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine

Fall 2008



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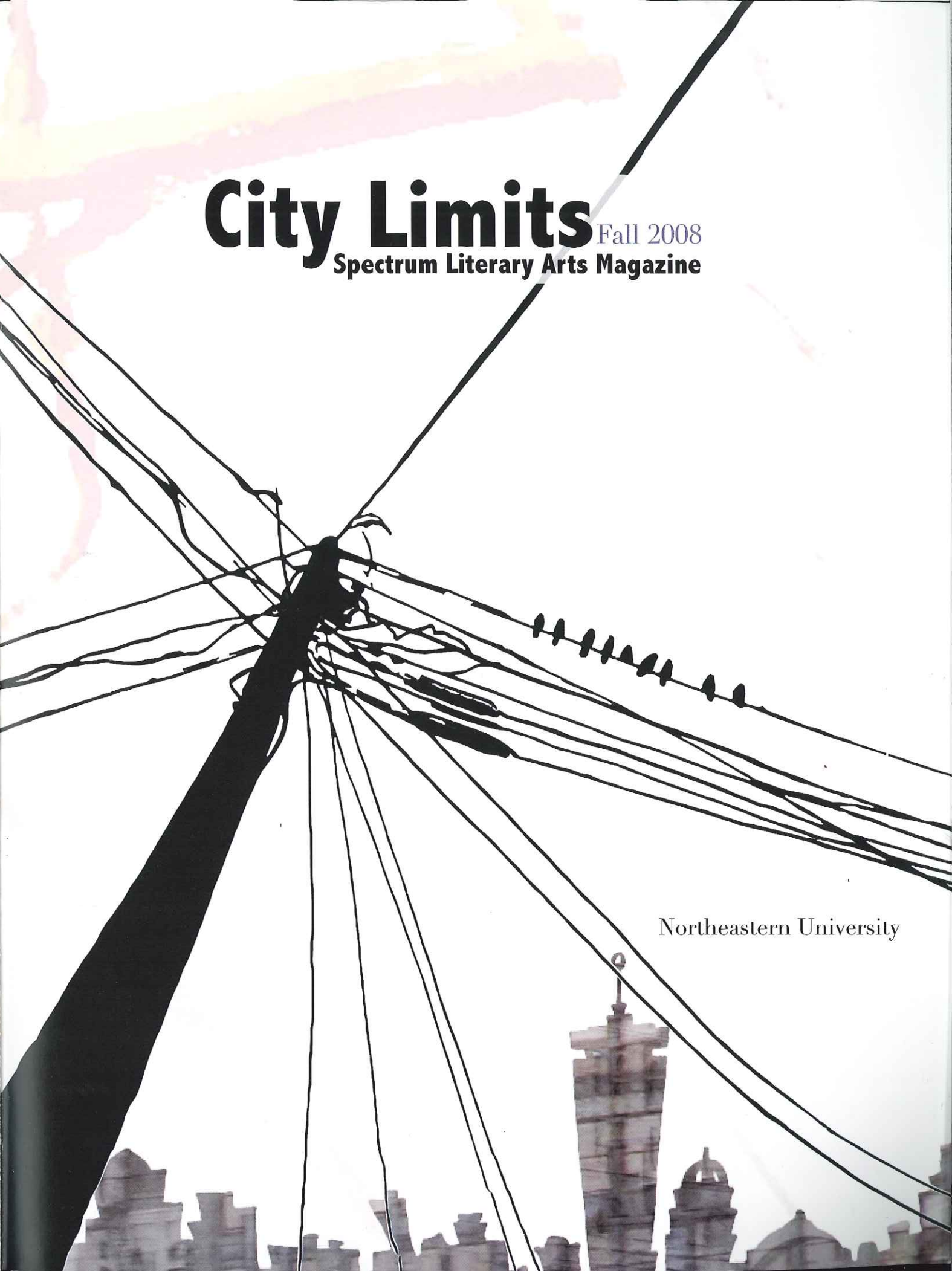

Northeastern University

Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine showcases the talents of the writers and artists at Northeastern University. All members of the Northeastern community are encouraged to submit works of original poetry, prose, and visual art. For more information, please visit www.spectrum.neu.edu.

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Letter from the Editor

Each day we are bound to a schedule: classes, work, obligations. Our commutes remain unchanged, and our everyday travels become familiar, broken-in. Slowly, the cracks on the sidewalks each have their place in the back of our minds; faces on the T who share our morning routine become silent family; the wind's harsh greetings at major streets are anticipated by our tensed bodies. Slowly, we've all become part of the home that we've made here.

Every sidewalk, tired commuter, and wind current is part of the great city in which we live. With this in mind, this issue of Spectrum looks beyond our neighborhoods and day-to-day responsibilities, creating a celebration, examination, and proclamation of the city as a whole.

Each one of us is more than just a resident of a city; we develop a relationship with it. In this issue, Spectrum explores the dynamics of this bond, examining all facets of the city's presence among us, and us in it. What does graffiti on a building matter to our community's identity? How can a poem scribbled on the train relate to fellow passengers? Behind apartment walls, are our stories much the same?

Throughout the issue, scenes of urban strength, fantastic creation, and rural simplicity demonstrate the diversity and grace of this place we call home.

Megan McCormick

Cover: "Tree" by Michelle Alexander

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Nightlight

by Rodney Jonace

jah bless, me nah test,
in the deep dark of night i write to confess,
lines of poetic rhyme repentance to ask for forgiveness
for it is when i lay to sleep i feel like most giving in;
i see the days, sun rays
light shining silver off of street signs,
car hoods, roof tops
traffic in slow motion rewind,
images of weeks past
strike in fresh silence of the night,
when i lay in bed with pen
all becomes dark that once was bright

earlier i had optimism
my crimes solved, my guilt passing,
how beautiful is light when you have not fear, but passion,
but now, oh now, i hate me, i hate me,
so greatly, innately, i hate me, i hate me

i hate me
i whisper the words so slightly they become thought
and lost in the repetition, submission again tonight so soft . . .



"Pieces" by David Nadeau



things come and go here:

by J.M. Olejarz

things come and go here:
  this city is a maze
where landmarks bandy all about, playing
funhouse tricks on dazzled tourists.
    and things here vanish: red statue LOVE
appears at fifty-fifth and sixth sometimes, winks
to me sideways and is gone
when I turn for another look. it's the weird aura
of the place, the gypsy turnover that takes hold inside
these city limits. Broadway is nice;
        it pops up hither, thither when I wander, on
        random avenues crossing by surprise,
like a sudden fin breaking calm water. the road
becomes the city's signature, cutting through the
geometric streets with alacrity, a paved monument to
    there's something strange
     going on here.



"Spectre of a Scoop" by Ben Landsberg



In the lofty wings of Stone Cathedrals

by J.M. Olejarz

In the lofty wings of stone cathedrals
naked cherub angels
swoop androgynous over interceding
patrons.
A painter made God's messengers
anatomically indifferent --
to each other, to us;
do angels wander then,
holy nomads in north atlantic
cities: guardians watchers castrated survivors
of the premier holy war?

I have seen sexless men
(men?) in the subways, on the sidewalks,
mistaken soft curves and strong shoulders
for female, for male -
but they are neither: instead, some strange
third sex, unnative to the Earth, but
at home in Heaven.

The ethereal winged seraphim mirror
their omniscient Maker's incorporeal
form -- divinity
is next to chastity. When God made
human love, He gifted fallen man
with unique neo-eros
(unknown to the ancient
godly servants who caretake Creation
yet are strangers to the complex joys
of mating reproduction
consecrated marriage -- gender-based
terrestrial love): a human glimpse
of divine Feelings for the man
made
in His Image.





"Untitled" by Ryan Tuck

Pigeons

by Christopher Longenbaker

Beauty, power, unity
sounds of soft wings in flight
together--woosh, woosh

Looked upon highly
when compared to their
city-dwelling counterparts
and much smarter
yet the same beneath

They look much the same
they are much the same; physically
but worlds apart
thanks to experience

While their lice-ridden cousins peck at the
ground
they soar and circle with soft speed
a living, flying truth
of the potential for all their kind



Free Food

by Punleu Kitiyakara

There was a disappointing sploosh as the school literary magazine I had been reading landed in a puddle, one of the few remaining signs of that morning's showers. "Sex, love, and suicide," I cursed, watching as the corners of the publication began to darken with moisture. Above, the late morning sun had finally broken free from its cage of clouds and stood ready to finally banish the shadows of the night. Across the street, the sun's persistence revealed a gentleman in a blue shirt ringing a doorbell, his utility belt loosely wrapped around his waist. The variety of tools that rested over his falling pants left me in doubt as to his occupation.

I looked to the puddle, too frustrated with the endeavors of my fellow classmates to think correctly. I've always understood the existence of these basic human desires for love, sex, and closure, but the fact that every single short story revolved around one of the three left me completely dumbfounded. I glanced across the street as the plumtrician's call is answered by my statuesque neighbor, Ms. Eva Lindgren, who is casually dressed in a tan T-shirt and a pair of white shorts. Because of the mailman's inability to distinguish between a 9 and a 4, her mail often ended up at the foot of my front door. Her defined form, the definition of feminine beauty circa the 21st century, obviously piqued the serviceman's interest, because he quickly took his hat off in her presence.

I grimaced. Having long since given up on the possibilities of love and human interaction, these absurd courtship rituals were nothing but an amusement to me, the physical manifestation of all that I had been reading. "Still," I decided out loud, "I might as well stick around and see what happens."

In response, my stomach growled at me, unsatisfied with the lack of food I had been provided. I looked around, hoping that there was something I could do about it. "Excuse me, sir," I shouted.

The maintenance man looked over in my direction, half a crust hanging from his mouth. "Yeah?" he mumbled before stuffing the rest in.

I managed to find my way across the street. "Could I possibly inquire into what's going on inside," I asked in the most disarming way possible.

He swallowed his crust and shrugged. "I honestly don't know, I came over for a broken pipe," he paused and thought. "There's just some lady in there asking everyone questions."

"Questions," I asked, "so I suppose she's expecting answers?"

"Yah, crazy stuff," he said. "I guess she's afraid of disappearing or something."

I looked at her door and then back towards him. Thanks were about to roll off my tongue when my stomach interrupted, Is there any pizza left?

"Huh," he reacted.

"Pizza," I smiled nervously.

"Oh," he patted his stomach, "boxes and boxes. You can probably slip in and take some if you're fast enough."

"Thanks," I replied and turn away before the conversation degenerated anymore.

"My inability to understand this two-piece jigsaw puzzle of penis and vagina forced me to fulfill my urges by indulging a different organ."

I turned back towards my stoop and my stomach rumbled ominously. Unwilling to get into an extended battle, I relent and walked up Eva's front porch. The plumber had left the door open a crack so I slipped in quietly. Before me are a set of stairs, draped with a dingy gray carpet which made the off-white walls seem colorful in comparison. Several frames dot the hallway adjacent to the stairway. I skipped over the glamorous prom and graduation shots and focused on a family picture. Pale and blonde, like the rest of her kin, the youthful Eva was difficult to pick out from the

fied with my mealtime schedule. It couldn't understand my resistance to yet another sodium-laden bowl of Maruchan Ramen Noodles. At least it's not Top Ramen, my stomach pleaded, at least it's food. As if carrying a child, I laid my hand on my belly to sooth the life inside. My inability to understand this two-piece jigsaw puzzle of penis and vagina forced me to fulfill my urges by indulging a different organ. I thought back to my last substantial meal, a heaping plate of artery clogging fettuccine alfredo with extra cheese on top for good measure. Those thoughts send my stomach into a fury.

"'Questions,' I asked, 'so I suppose she's expecting answers?'"

To distract myself, I glared across the street to see my neighbor letting a Christian pastor and our visually challenged mailman into her house. She glanced over and smiled but I looked away towards "Little Angry People" floating in the quickly diminishing puddle. I kept my gaze averted until I hear her door slam shut.

About a half an hour passes by as I lazily traced the outline of her house with my finger. Those first few warm days of spring have a way of slowing things down. "I wonder what's going on in there," I asked to no one in particular. I wonder what's going on out there, my stomach growled in response.

A noise drew my attention back across the street where the serviceman was walking out with a slice of pizza in hand. I tried to gauge what unfolded inside from the look on his face but am thwarted by his obvious enjoyment of the food. Go, my stomach urged me. Placated by the warmth of the new spring season, I ignored its advice and suffered the consequences as I'm forced to clutch my belly in pain. Go, it repeated, creating one more knot for emphasis, you stress your desire for food yet you ignore your naturally insatiable curiosity. A pastor, a mailman, and a maintenance man in your neighbor's house…what does it mean?

I was well aware that I was being fooled into action for a chance at edibles but there wasn't much I rest of her siblings. I paused and listened for voices.

"You're a member of my flock, and no matter what misgivings you may have, know that the church will always be there for you."

There was a pause. "I'm not sure if I believe you," Eva sounded resolute yet unsure. There were some inaudible sounds followed by indistinct shouting.

Moments later, the pastor stormed out of the room. Upon seeing me, he slowed down and feigned a friendly smile. I don't return the gesture. Resolved, I strolled towards the door the pastor had burst from and poked my head inside. The first thing I noticed was that there were many more people than I had expected. I recognized a professor we had shared in the past, an aging Irishman, and by their manner of dress, people I supposed to be Eva's milkman, electrician, and by his evil brow, her landlord. By the window, our mailman stood continually shifting the curtains to get a clear view of his truck. A campus policewoman had her hands in her pockets, eyeing an unsavory athletic type that I recognized as a frequent nighttime guest of Eva's.

Seeing that Eva was focused on conversing with our professor, I crept along the walls to a corner of the room where a large stack of pizza boxes called to me. I opened up the top one and grabbed a slice of bacon pizza, inhaling it down my throat to appease my ailing stomach. I grabbed another slice and sat on the floor to avoid detection.

"You seriously don't remember me?" Eva seemed shocked at the possibility.

"I'm sorry," our professor explained, "but you never spoke up."

"I was there every day!" she raised her voice.

"I'm sorry," he apologized again, "but unless you contributed to the classroom discussion, you're just one of fifty students in that class and one of hundreds I teach."

Eva's unadorned fingers began to tap at her knee nervously. Her head turned to the mailman peering out

the window and she darted out of her seat to talk to him. Relieved of his duties, the professor reached for his hat and briefcase. On a puke colored loveseat, the policewoman squeezed herself next to Eva's shapely mate and unseated a bewildered milkman. Her landlord impatiently checked his watch and the electrician closely monitored the professor's movements. Both seemed ready to slip out of the house at any moment.

Distractedly, I munched on my pizza and mused over my neighbor's unusual behavior. For a perfectly crafted beauty, Eva seemed to live a rather unglamorous life. In class, she usually sat typing away at her iPhone in the back of the room. She never wore anything flashy enough to catch my attention from the window, and save for her scripted varsity boyfriend and natural assets, seemed to be a decidedly average person. We had never really spoken, so I knew little of her personality, although her behavior today would surely color my thoughts.

My hand slipped up for a third slice and I noticed that except for the mailman and newly resituated milkman, everyone else had left. I assumed that the landlord and electrician had followed the professor out, but the location of the couple on the loveseat escaped me. At the window, the mailman shrugged and turned toward the door. Eva's eyes quickly darted to the loveseat. Her defeated body language evoked the likely scenario that had occurred between her boyfriend and the policewoman.

Looking even more distraught than before, she turned to the milkman. "Milkman, my milkman," she sat on the arm of his chair and draped herself over his shoulder, "please, please tell me I mean something to you."

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Look, lady," he started.

"Come on, I've got to mean something! You stayed around this entire time," she tried to situate herself onto his lap. "Do you think I'm beautiful?"

"Listen lady!" he barked, jumping outside of her reach. "I'm married, for Christ's sake. I've just been waiting here because you haven't paid me in a month. I don't know what any of this crazy disappearance bullshit is. Jesus! I'll just pay the company myself."

She stood up to prevent him from leaving and he stared her still. Frozen, she watched helplessly as he stormed out of the room.

"Shit," I muttered, my mouth half full of pizza. I swallowed and tried to shrink myself to avoid being seen.

She fell to her knees in obvious despair and our eyes met. "Neighbor, neighbor, neighbor, neighbor," she walked to me on her knees.

I slid away from her. "Look, Eva," I stuttered. "I don't really want to get involved."

"It's too late, you're involved," she laid her head in my lap, and then thinking otherwise, picked it up a moment afterward. Desperately, she went on. "So tell me that I mean something. I don't want to disappear! My boyfriend's abandoned me; I don't mean anything to him. Please, just tell me what I want to hear. Honestly, neighbor, just tell me what I mean to you."

I'm not quite sure what to say. "Honestly," I paused and gazed into her imploring eyes. My mind tried to remember what I was taught about talking to women but I blocked those thoughts out in favor of the truth. I held up the half finished slice. "Honestly," I shrugged, "I'm just here for the free food."

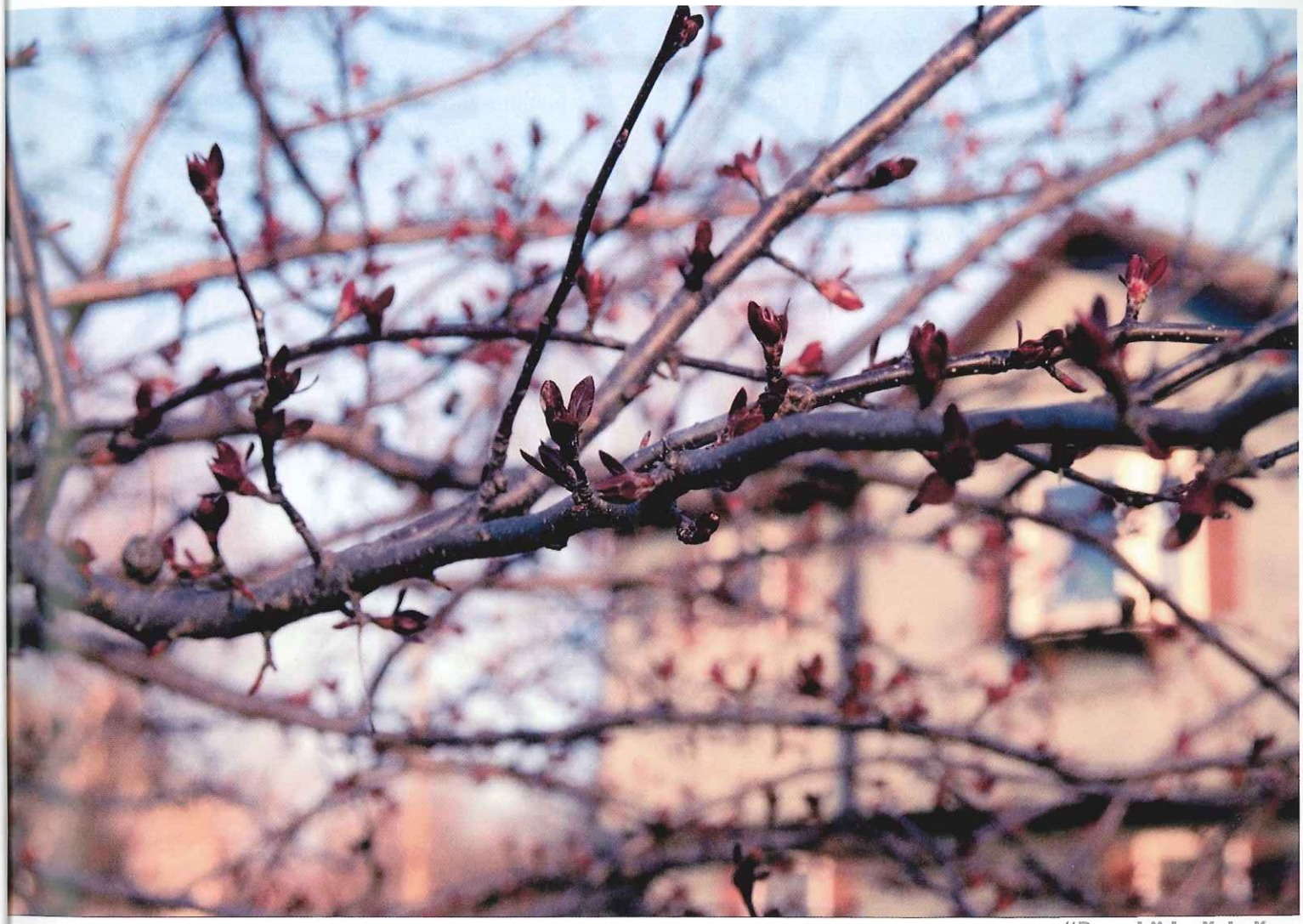
Her hopeful look faded away, and along with it, her face as well. Her facial features began to soften as her pale skin was the first to become transparent. Gradually, the transparency traveled down her body and through her limbs until she completely disappeared.

Sufficiently spooked, I pushed myself up along the wall and listened to the silence. The air still felt heavy with the odors of the crowd but the house was most definitely empty. I closed my eyes in an attempt to regain my bearings and opened them to find myself staring at the stack of four quickly cooling pizzas. Might as well, my stomach reasoned, unfazed.

"Might as well," I echoed. I put my hand on my belly and cooed, "I'm glad you're always there for me."

It gently purred in response.

The End



"Branch" by Kyle Kerr

Silent Universe

by Timothy Boston

"Where did I come from?" my little child
sweetly says, -

I've been dreading this moment
since the day I saw her
deep blue eyes look right at me.

Even then, I could tell
she was something special,
very smart.

And I knew there would be questions,
questions I could not answer.

- She stared and smiled at me,
and my heart broke.

Many days turned into many nights.
And time swept by that memory,
filling our life with others.
Her first words, her first steps,
Christmas, New Year.

I give her baths in the evening.
Her mother died giving birth,
so when she's gone to bed
the house is very quiet.
And I look at the stars
and dream, about love.

My little girl is 7 now,
and it's been a long time
since I lost her mother,
since I last knew love.

It's getting hard for me to remember
what it was like to be loved.

Of course,
I still see her face,
hear her voice,
sometimes too clearly.

And I know that I will always
carry her with me,

but my body aches for
something it does not understand,
something it cannot have.

My little girl
never knew her mother,
but she's starting to look like her:
a pretty nose, rose-colored lips, long brown hair.

Sometimes after her bath,
she comes to sit on my lap
and watch the stars with me.

I sing a soft melody
and she falls asleep
in my arms.

Her face is so peaceful,
her chest rising and falling
silently as she breathes.

And then I remember; this is what love is like.

And I think, 'we all just want
to be cradled like little babies
knowing nothing,
feeling only the warm bath of love;
like a silent star
floating through its own
silent universe.'

Little Black Genius Girl

by Rodney Jonace

Little black genius girl
Never had a chance,
Never even seen this world,
'Cause of circumstance

Ten languages she could speak by two,
By three she knew five more,
She knew algebra and calculus too,
Quantum physics by age four

The histories of distant parts,
Economics and social science,
She could easily charm and warm your heart,
Yet she's skilled in cruel defiance

She can reap from ground Earth's full fruit,
She knows of plant and beast,
With skill she hunts, and farms, and shoots
And prepares a king's true feast

This genius girl had but one life goal,
For her talents and skills so great,
With purity of cause and soul,
She set out to improve man's fate

So she congregated with Earth's queens and kings,
They gave her less than one glance,
And before she could say anything,
They hollered for her to "Dance, black girl, dance"



"An Observation" by Ben Landsberg

Right Now

by Joseph DeRoche

What I did yesterday is such old news.
Tomorrow's plans like skin, alas, can bruise.
I count on not one thing, except I'm here.
Soon as you read this, I'm likely over there.
Memory fails, paper burns, computers crash,
Hard facts get tossed each week like so much trash.
Our friends, our marriages, our lives go out.
The universal drift is but a rout.
Well, let it go. Or, let it come. Right now
We are together. This one day. This small hour,
So common but so brilliant when it's filled
Up to the brim. But then, of course, it's spilled.
Even our names on granite tombstones fade.
None of this matters when we're on parade,
Waving banners, blaring trumpets, banging drums.
In life, we march a unit swamped by sums.
This breathed brief second has no proper name;
Time is the animal we cannot tame.
Let's breathe in the moment that will not die.
The line before it's read, the past untied
From all it should have been. So there. Hello.
This one will never come again. Just so!

"Generations" by Erin McGann



Electric Blue Toenails

by Christie Perkins

Electric blue toenails peek out beneath frayed edges of too long bell bottomed jeans -
the ones with the purple threaded butterfly sewn on the hip
and the sharpie marker star doodles on the lower thigh
drawn during those long math periods
right before lunch.
The faded lemon yellow and pastel green lunch trays,
the cardboard half-pint milk cartons available in plain, chocolate, and sometimes strawberry,
if you were lucky
and the plop of canned peas spilling into the watering brown meat -
all disturbingly alluring as the clock ticked towards the bell and the sickly sweet smell of sharpie lingered in the air.

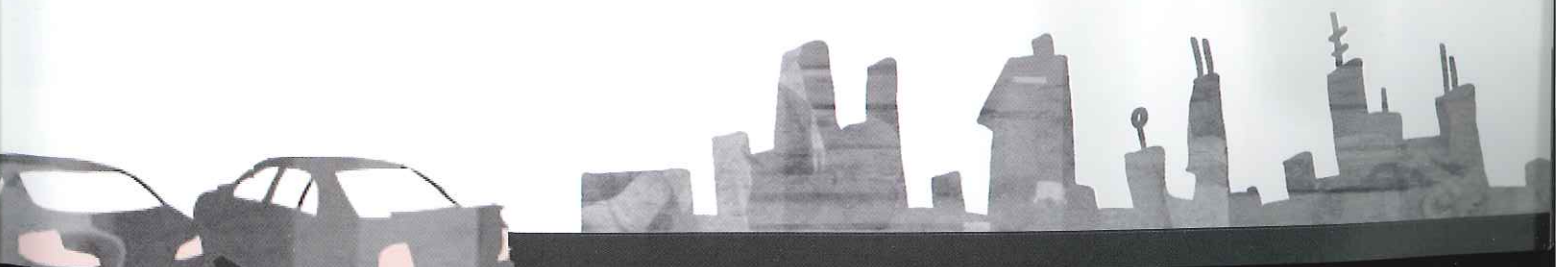
She plays her elephant pink guitar now, tapping soft ivory feet and sharp electric blue half moons against the window sill, lying sprawled open on the bed, ink black hair spread across a silk pillow.
She sings softly, letting the rich chords resonate under thin spider fingers,
singing of the plans she once had,
before.

Simmons College, like her sister, BU, or Emerson, like Mike.
She could study music…or film. Could direct movies, comedies, horror, or maybe even the next E.T.
She would go to London for the premiere, then take the tubes around the world.
Sushi in Japan, a handsome stranger in France, a romance in Italy, bull fights in Spain.
The tubes do take you everywhere, don't they?

But applications were due a month ago
Emma and Jade's acceptance letters will be coming soon
and she probably won't be invited to the celebration dinner…that would just be awkward.
Fuck them. It's not like they didn't get those red streaks in their hair together,
or pass notes all through history,
or share the limo to junior prom, ignoring their dates and giggling behind newly manicured hands at the upperclassmen.

If only there had never been the strawberry dakaris at Dan's,
or the coconut rum and coke, or that stupid beer pong tournament that she never should of entered because she never liked beer anyways…if only a lot of Fucking things.

Shit. Now "when we grow up" means
no more high school, grocery shopping with mom, a thirty hour a week job at Hank's Pizza,
and
another set of tiny toenails
to paint vibrant, glossy, electric
Blue or Pink.

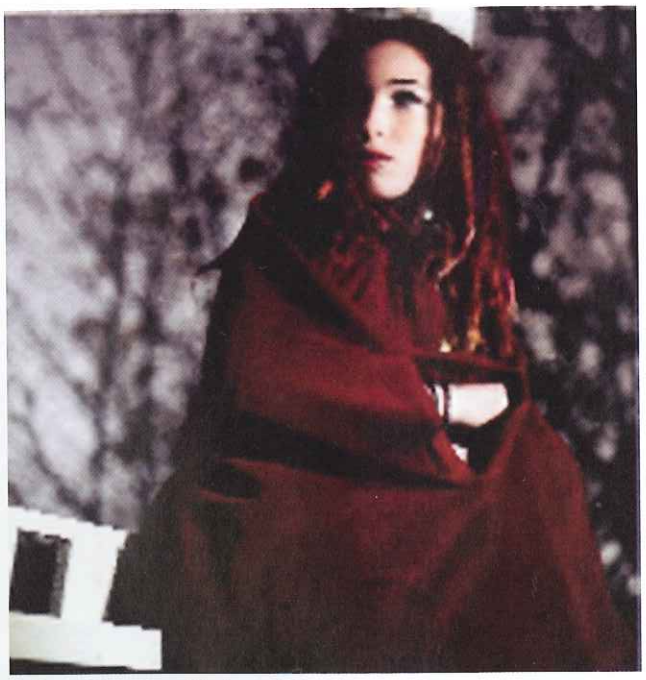


Nana

by Alyssa Mastrocco

This quiet discount hotel room, with its gauzy beige curtains and mismatched furniture does little to warm the heart. The red-haired matriarch sits quietly on a creaky sofa and we all watch a streaming blur of paltry images, trying to remember the feeling of summer grass on the soles of bare feet. The blistering winter wind outside, calls out to us a reminder that we still have socks and shoes on.

I'm cold. It's time for bed.



"Checking for Wolves" by Laura Mangano



"Fall" by Alexandra Aas

Savor

by Anna Westendorf

I. Cranberries. Sweet crispness of November mornings. Blue skies behind flaming leaves over my head and rapidly fading crunches beneath my feet in an underrated California autumn. Quiet observance of brilliant rainstorms by eyes that dance to the rhythm of her heart; soaring to words she wished she had spoken. "Sing me something soft, sad and delicate, or loud and out of key; sing me anything..." Her lips part, and her tongue is restless behind her teeth; the vibrant and cliche taste of life.

II. Fresh Laundry. Warm and soft as she folds it in her lap, dreaming of something greater. Not fame or fortune, but simple wishes of a world that deserves better. The vague scent of fabric softener wafts through the house, invading the residing fragrance of abandon. Between sips of diet coke that gently bites her tongue as it bubbles its way down, she inhales the sheer scent of pure awe. A clock taps in time to her thinking, her thoughts and time racing for the vanishing point in her photographs.

III. Rose-petal soap. Romanticized promises of maybe seep into her skin as the star-shaped shadows wrap their arms around her; cradling her in her midday lone wonder. Light and lingering bath bubbles she could only envy the delicate nature of, exude scents reminding her of risk and security; throwing herself to the edge, trusting to be caught. Her catcher in the rye is out there.

Notes on a Summer

by Meghan L. McCormick

Billy pooped his pants three times today. Maybe I should stop feeding him grapes? He has to get used to the environment and slower pace here, although the last thing he wants is to go back to Brookline. Aside from missing Mary, his teacher this year, his sweet little worried voice asks, "Home?" and then insists, "No, Cape House." With the child-like certainty summer will last forever.

If I needed one word for him it would be... Nope. There isn't one. I melt when he laughs as I pretend to eat his toes and then cry out in pain as he really eats my nose. I cheer and smile proudly when he speaks a full sentence but scold him when he forgets to use his words and hits and bites Lizzie. Nothing is safe around him. Nancy left him for a moment tonight and he almost jumped into the shower with me. So much for a sense of privacy. We picked flowers yesterday and when I turned around and he was drinking the water from the vase, the flowers strewn like forgotten dreams on the dusty wood floor of my cabin. But when his grubby pink hands grab me around the neck and he buries his tired eyes in my neck, I feel a fierce love for him, no matter what he managed to ruin that day.

"Oh my Lizzie-belle," Nancy always says with a sigh. Like a small, delicate songbird, Lizzie twitters and chirps to herself in a countless number of voices when alone then roars out with frustrated hostility when touched and forced to come back to this world. She could have stayed on the shore for hours today, splashing, murmuring and discovering in her droopy faded blue bathing suit and hello kitty sunglasses, needing no one. The sand glistens in the humid air as Lizzie sits, hunchbacked on the small beach.

Today Lizzie had a hard time getting ready, a transition from her lazy morning that is always a little bit challenging. She is absorbed in her Channel Two shows and sings along or is quiet, close to the screen and glued criss-cross-applesauce on the floor. After she shrieked and hit during round one of getting dressed, Nancy gave her her daily medicine. She had a small bowl of frosted flakes that she twirled her spoon around in and used as a valid excuse when we made an effort to try again. "I don't get dressed until AFTER my breakfast," she says to me dismissively, like really, *you* should know.

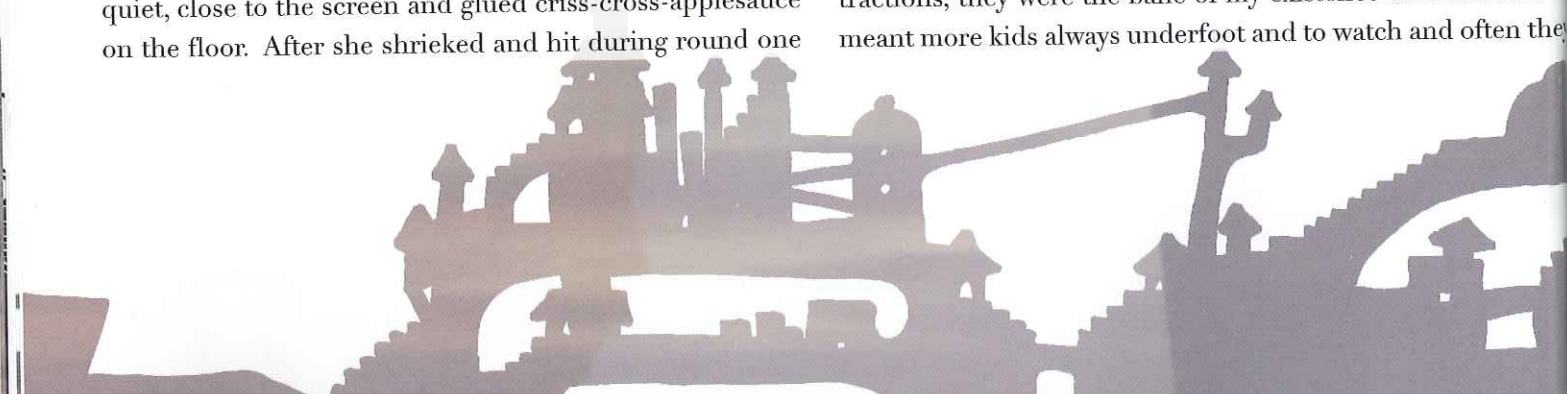
Finally after the medicine has kicked in a little bit and I passed the time following Billy around, making sure he didn't turn on any more sprinklers, I got Lizzie into her tiny green bikini and surf shirt.

The pink water shoes presented yet another road block as apparently Lizzie had a small cut on the pad of her foot from the abrasive sand at the beach yesterday. A warm foot bath, bacitracin cream and waterproof Tigger band-aid later, we grabbed her strawberry shortcake sunglasses and headed to join the others at the beach. It was a minor miracle that Nancy had left Lizzie in my care, as usually she was reluctant, preferring to take Lizzie with her on errands and to appointments with her.

Soon the tiny bikini was caked in salt and sand as Lizzie ran out to join Billy and the older girls at the water's edge, splashing and giggling. I sighed and related the chain of events to Nancy. It was 9 am and I felt like a week had already gone by.

Although the main characters stayed the same at the cape house, a host of other miscreants came and went throughout the hot summer days, eager to make the drive for a sandy beach promise of cookouts and a reminder that their family was at least slightly more normal than the Scanlons. Friends, relatives, tenants, neighbors, there was always food and someone to watch the many kids at the beach or in the yard. Paula, Nancy's unpredictable sister and her three kids had the other side of the duplex from me.

Although a lot of times they provided comic relief and fun distractions, they were the bane of my existence that summer. I meant more kids always underfoot and to watch and often the



demanded more attention from me than did the Scanlons. Kyler, Michaela and Miranda lived in Florida for most of the year with Paula's "scummy" (as Nancy and Bill insisted and Paula didn't object) husband but drove the 24 hours for Christmas and the summer. I had met them the previous Christmas and managed to survive although left the house with a horrible case of the flu on the 23rd of December. Nancy had laughed and exclaimed, "You've been Davis-ifed!" Needless to say I was thankful to be going home to my family for Christmas.

Paula let her kids run wild and always had the last word on everything, no matter who it concerned, her OR Nancy's kids. It proved frustrating as many times I was forced to go behind her back to enforce the rules *I* had set for the Scanlon brood.

This summer I collect compliments like sea glass, examining each one in detail during the lonely nights.
Kate said you were the most energetic of the nannies we have had down here…
Mommy, I love Meghan, All the others would have quit long ago…
Wow, Meg, most of our babysitters are scared of sand crabs…
Meg is really fun!
It's the fuel I need to make it through some of the hardest days.

The week before we left for the Cape House, I piled Allie and Stephanie into the car to head to Target to get underwear and bathing suits for the whiney packers who both insisted they had hit a brick wall because of these necessities. Alex had so graciously "allowed" Stephanie to come with the shotgun agreement, revered like gold among the three older sisters.

Once we had settled on a mutually acceptable radio station and the wind was blowing through the windows of the small car, Steph asked, "Where are we going?"
"Target," says Allie, trying her hardest not to make a comment on Stephanie's often sieve-like memory.
Panicked, Steph sits up and her eyes get wide. "RHODE ISLAND?!" she says.

Allie looks at me and rolls her eyes, a talent that she has gotten especially good at lately, and says, "Ughhh, I love auditory processing…"

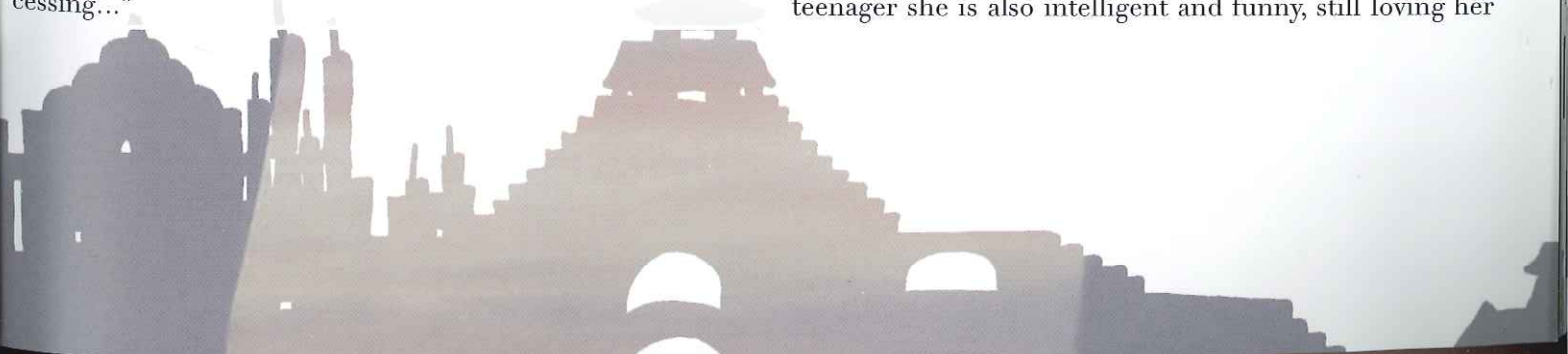
I make a mental note to write that one down as I assure Stephanie we will just be in the car for five minutes as we are going to Target, not my home state, two hours away, an arduous drive we had completed yesterday. I smile distractedly, thinking of my Stephanie, as I shift gears in Bill's ancient Honda.

While I was unpacking, I grew frantic, thinking I had lost my cell phone charger. Before I found it, buried underneath a pile of clothes not yet put in their drawers, a thrill ran though me. Dramatically, I remember thinking my only contact with the world was gone. Slightly excited, slightly panicked, I lay on my bed to test it out. I didn't implode or shiver with ecstasy but, hey, it was a start.

I called my Dad before bed, partially to confirm that I, too, was someone's child and partially to fill the empty house with my voice. Sleep was rather elusive that night, my first night at the cape, not to mention alone in the house.

Colleen, a daughter of one of Nancy's friends, wears a tankini too. I am glad because then Leppy isn't the only one bikini-less any more.

Could Alex possibly grow up any faster? When I first met her, in my co-op at Heath School, she was withdrawn and shy, struggling with math and writing assignments and now she breezed through the seventh grade, even excited about her final projects and further more has grown into a real teenager. She's an Abercrombie girl wearing things one size too small but modestly covering her developing body with long tank tops and short skirts. Her previously uncooperative hair, frizzy and horrifyingly red like her father's is less greasy and sleeker, even having to endure being straightened once in a while. As she walks along the beach with her stylishly big sunglasses and red bikini (children's large at Target, although I was sworn to secrecy), I can envision hordes of boys going after her in the years to come. I know that Steph, even though she is younger, will be the one with her period first and the bigger boobs, a constant cross for Allie to have to bear. Although she is often a snarling or whining teenager she is also intelligent and funny, still loving her



family, for the most part at least. Allie loves to go on the slippery rocks near the beach with Kyler and Michaela. They will net sea creatures for hours on end, returning with pink noses, breathless and sandy to show us a squirming blue crab in an upturned hand with fingers slowly unfurled.

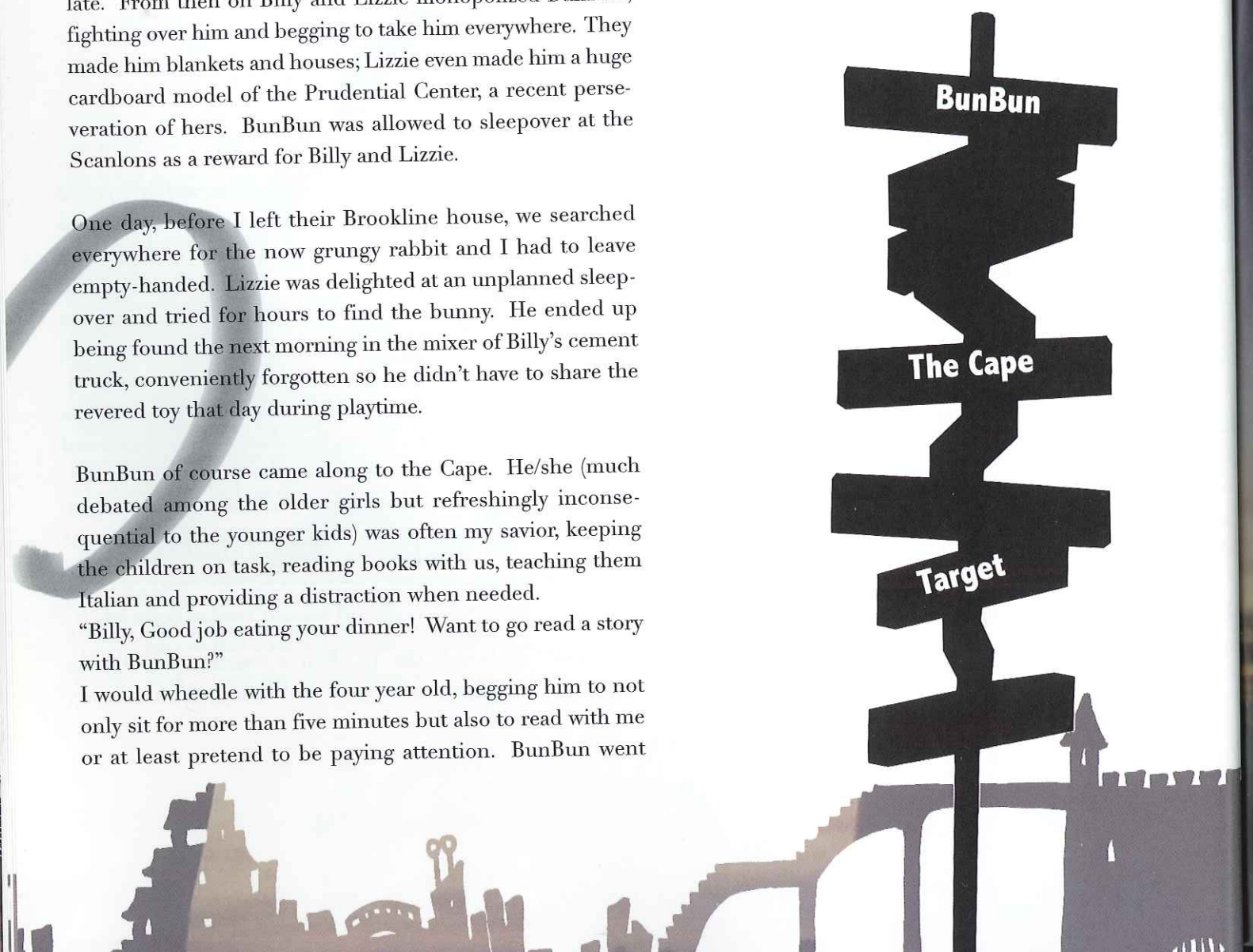
Choosing a nanny is a tough job. Raising your own kids is hard enough without having to hire someone to help you do it with the same consistencies. Sometimes I feel as if I should offer up more information to Bill and Nancy. Tell them what I do on the weekends and when I am not with their precious children. By no means do I want to regal them with drinking stories or "sleepovers", but how would I trust anyone to watch my imaginary children without knowing the minute details of their lives?

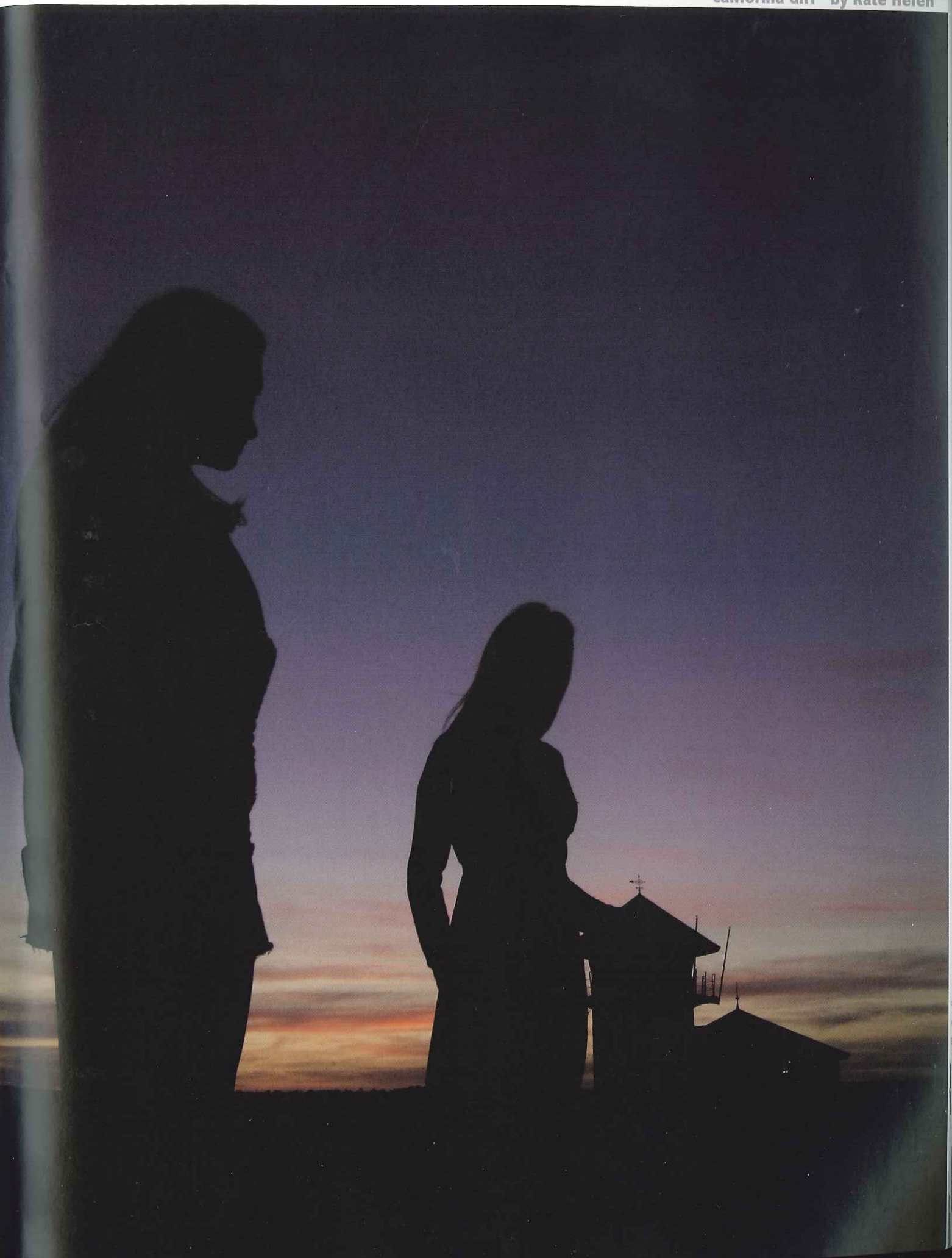
Almost as a mistake, the children were introduced to my stuffed animal, BunBun, one night when I stayed over so the Scanlons didn't have to bring me back when they came back late. From then on Billy and Lizzie monopolized BunBun, fighting over him and begging to take him everywhere. They made him blankets and houses; Lizzie even made him a huge cardboard model of the Prudential Center, a recent perseveration of hers. BunBun was allowed to sleepover at the Scanlons as a reward for Billy and Lizzie.

One day, before I left their Brookline house, we searched everywhere for the now grungy rabbit and I had to leave empty-handed. Lizzie was delighted at an unplanned sleepover and tried for hours to find the bunny. He ended up being found the next morning in the mixer of Billy's cement truck, conveniently forgotten so he didn't have to share the revered toy that day during playtime.

BunBun of course came along to the Cape. He/she (much debated among the older girls but refreshingly inconsequential to the younger kids) was often my savior, keeping the children on task, reading books with us, teaching them Italian and providing a distraction when needed.
"Billy, Good job eating your dinner! Want to go read a story with BunBun?"
I would wheedle with the four year old, begging him to not only sit for more than five minutes but also to read with me or at least pretend to be paying attention. BunBun went everywhere; the beach, Dairy Queen and on trips to Brookline and back. Even the older kids developed an affinity for him patting him on the head and giggling, as Billy and Miranda would shout, "BumBUM!" All of the kids seemed fascinated about the fact that I even had a pal, giving BunBun an air of mystery. They would find him and run to me with sandy feet pounding on the kitchen floor.

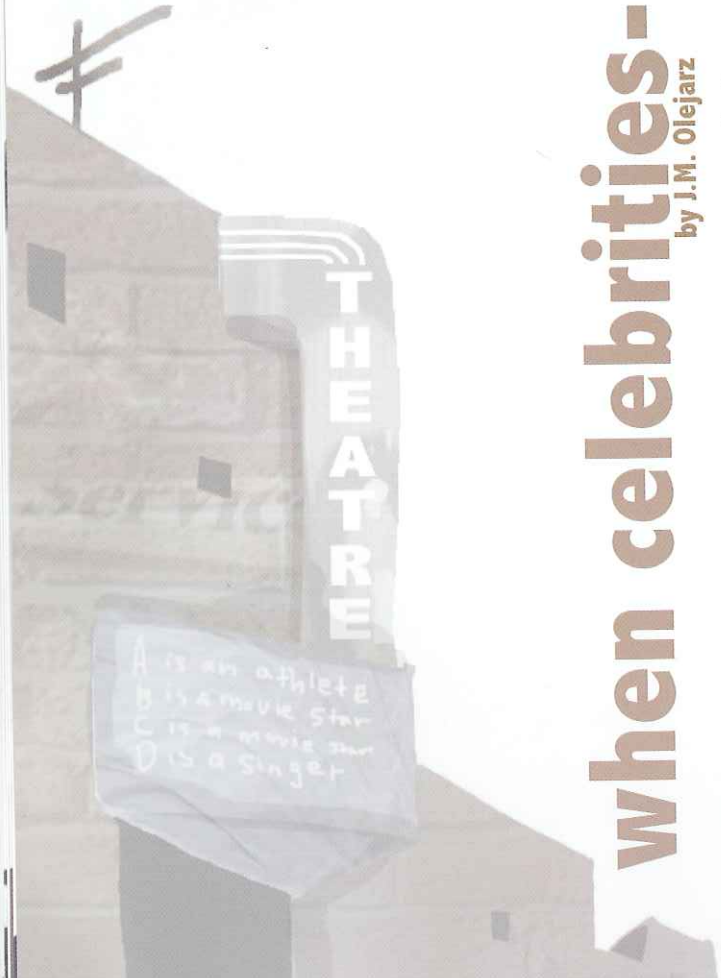
"MEG! I found BunBUN!" they yelled through the compound confused that I would *ever* let him out of my sight.







"untitled" by Ryan Tuck



when celebrities--

by J.M. Olejarz

when celebrities —
the unqualified cornerstones
of democracy —
dabble in marriage, their celebrity spouses
already know each other.
example : A is an athlete
B is a movie star
C is a movie star
D is a singer
now, A marries B, introduces B
to friends C and D —
A, B, C and D.

B and C worked on a film
D hung out backstage with B at a show
C roots for A at games
etc.
it's a famously sick inbred family
and the hoi polloi are all too glossy eyed happy
to drool over paparazzi wedding photos
proudly taken in the land
where wedding news
is mad lib algebra

Better Math

by Heather Faherty

I look at you with growing anticipation
and by your dilating pupils,
I can tell you are looking back.
You wonder
if you are maybe stealing me from someone
that might take me in the future
or have had me in the past,
but I tell you,
"You can't steal something
that was already yours."

"Untitled" by Kathryn Hansis



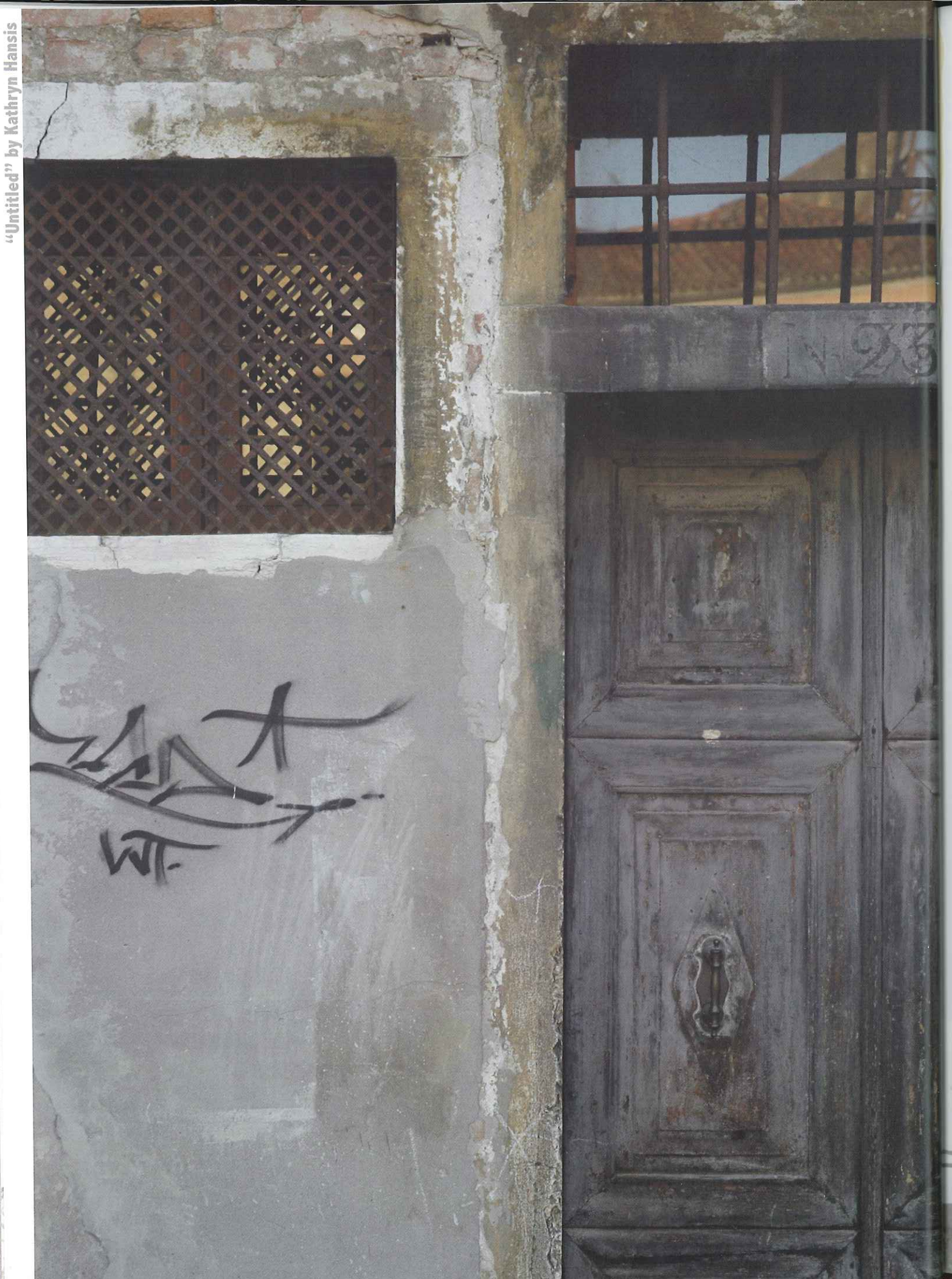
Perceptions

by Anna Westendorf

She has a strange love
(for books, beaches, cameras...)
that somehow isn't expressed through her
wasteland green eyes.
Strands of her hair that's the color
of dead autumn leaves
falls across her face,
carefully shielding her from the scrutinizing stare of society.
But behind the blanket,
the book,
the hair,
the glasses,
the eyes,
lies a hatred that she doesn't show
like the love she has for everything else
(for irony, tolerance, and rain...).
So strong. So powerful.
Is it possible to love someone this hateful?
Somebody tell me:
how is this pretty?



"It's Complicated" by Megan McCormick



"Untitled" by Kathryn Hansis

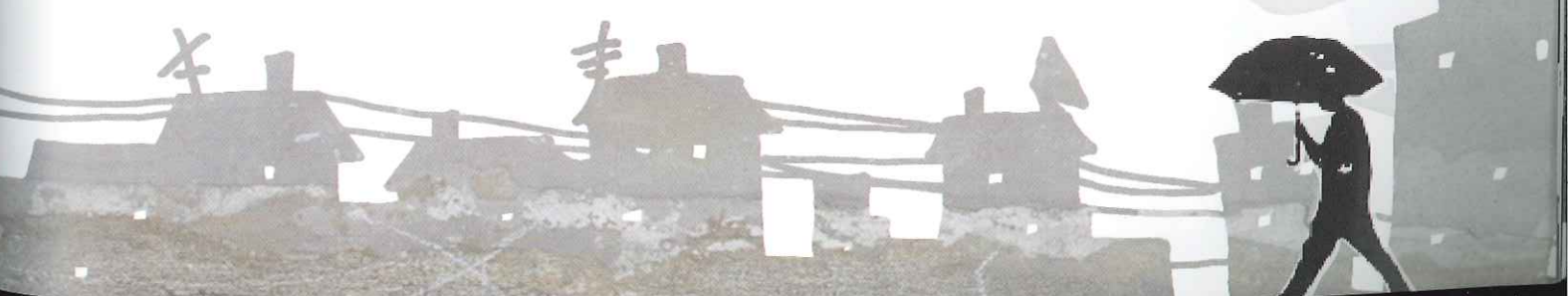
Waiting for the Father

by Christie Perkins

She can see rain pounding the bricks outside the glass -
the black pools that turn white with each ringed splash,
reflecting broken bits of streetlamp glow.
It is almost midnight and he still hasn't come.
He who took her for walks in the rain on the way home from school
in her glossy purple raincoat and duck-patterned red and yellow rain boots.
He who played Connect-Four for more hours than any adult should,
letting her win just often enough that she didn't suspect it.
He who scooped her in his arms, so firm and warm when she cried.
He who bought her a large cotton candy at the zoo even when her mother told him not to.
He who wasn't coming.
She turns on some music to fill the room, a little Oasis to make her relax, a little Shakira to make her smile.
Not Nirvana. That was his favorite band.
She pretends to do some homework: a few calculus problems, a minute or two of French flashcards.
He said he would be here between eight and nine, ten or eleven at the latest.
Once he had been late to pick her up from gymnastics and she had sobbed in the coach's arms for twenty minutes until he came and then he had to buy her a chocolate ice-cream cone with rainbow sprinkles to make her forgive him.

Forgive and forget, they say. She can never forgive and she can never, never forget.
Can never forget his large hand in her own. The way it felt on her body.
The way it was good and warm and then too warm.
How she giggled and squirmed to get away even though she wasn't sure why she was giggling when it was the last thing she felt like doing.
The things he taught her about herself far before the other girls in fourth grade still playing with American Girl Dolls and Amazing Ally ever even imagined such things.
Who knew? Who knew something could feel so wrong and so right at the same time?
It was wrong, everyone knew that.
But whose fault was it, anyway? His for doing it or hers for wanting it?
There were years when she didn't. Years when she dreaded her mother's weekend long business trips and time home alone with Daddy. She used to beg Kim or Lydia to have sleepovers but their mothers got sick of her. If only they knew.

Why wasn't he coming?
She is seventeen now, almost an adult. It wasn't as if she were getting old or ugly, like her mother. She had the long lashes, the innocent yet not so innocent smile with grape lip-gloss and highlights in her hair. So why wasn't he coming?
Boys looked at her, she knew. But they were just that, boys. How can you go back once you've gone so far?
There is no clang of the clock, like in Cinderella, when the stroke of midnight comes. There is only the passing of the digital digits to 12:00 to 12:01 to 12:07.
Then there is the sound of feet stamping outside of the doorway.
She looks out the window.
The rain has lessened to mere moisture and the black pools on brick are still.



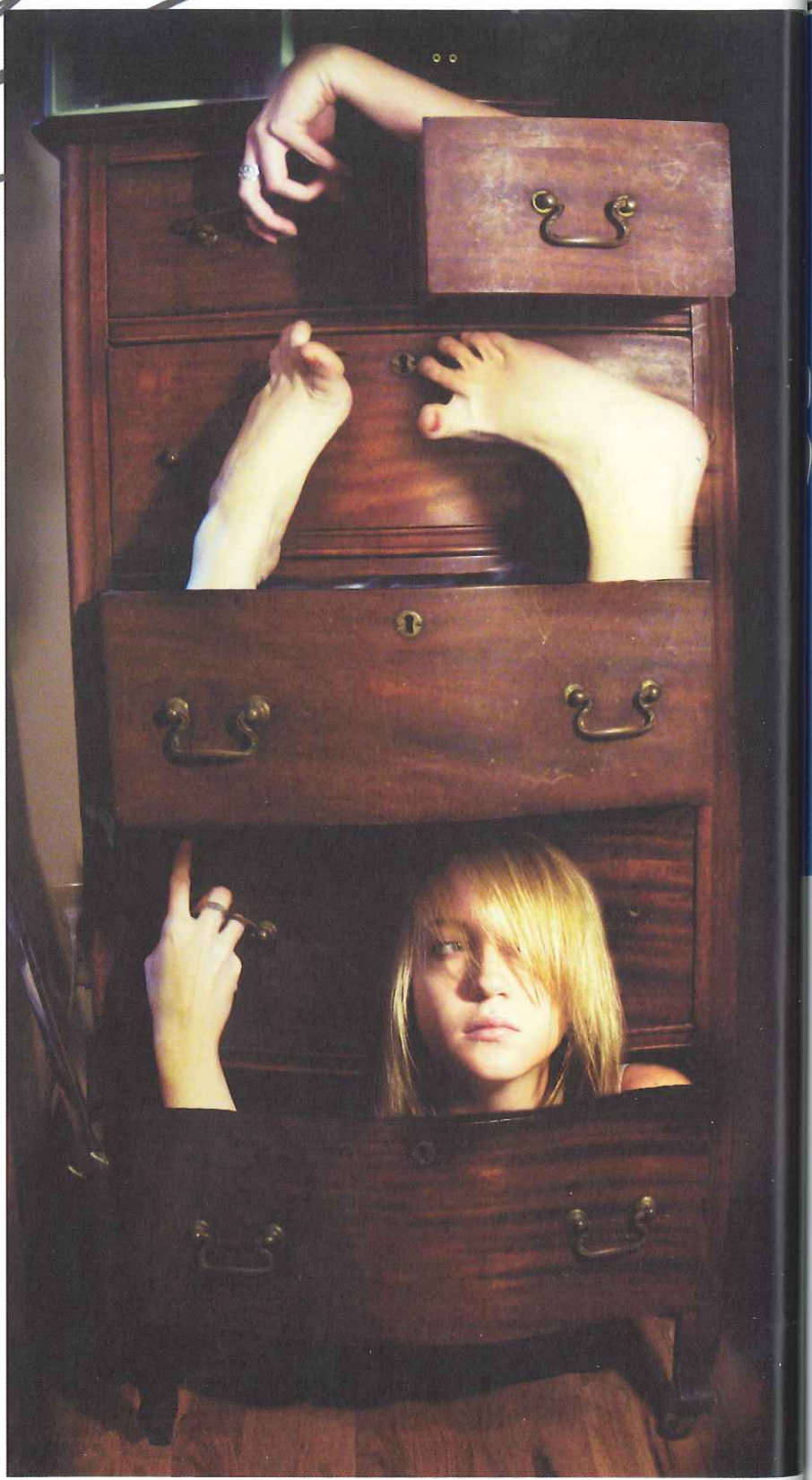
Why

by Rodney Jonace

Sometimes the time is right
Life reminds you it is time to write
Sometimes fear is clearly more importantly
near to, near to, near two:

I am not afraid of the loose jaundiced
Convoluted, lost pages
That will bleed forth
the lines of my sageless
Vernacular veins

I am more worried of
how quickly, fleshily,
deeply,
and thoroughly
My spoken ink will
reveal my insane



"He's Gonna Come 'Round Soon" by Megan McCormick

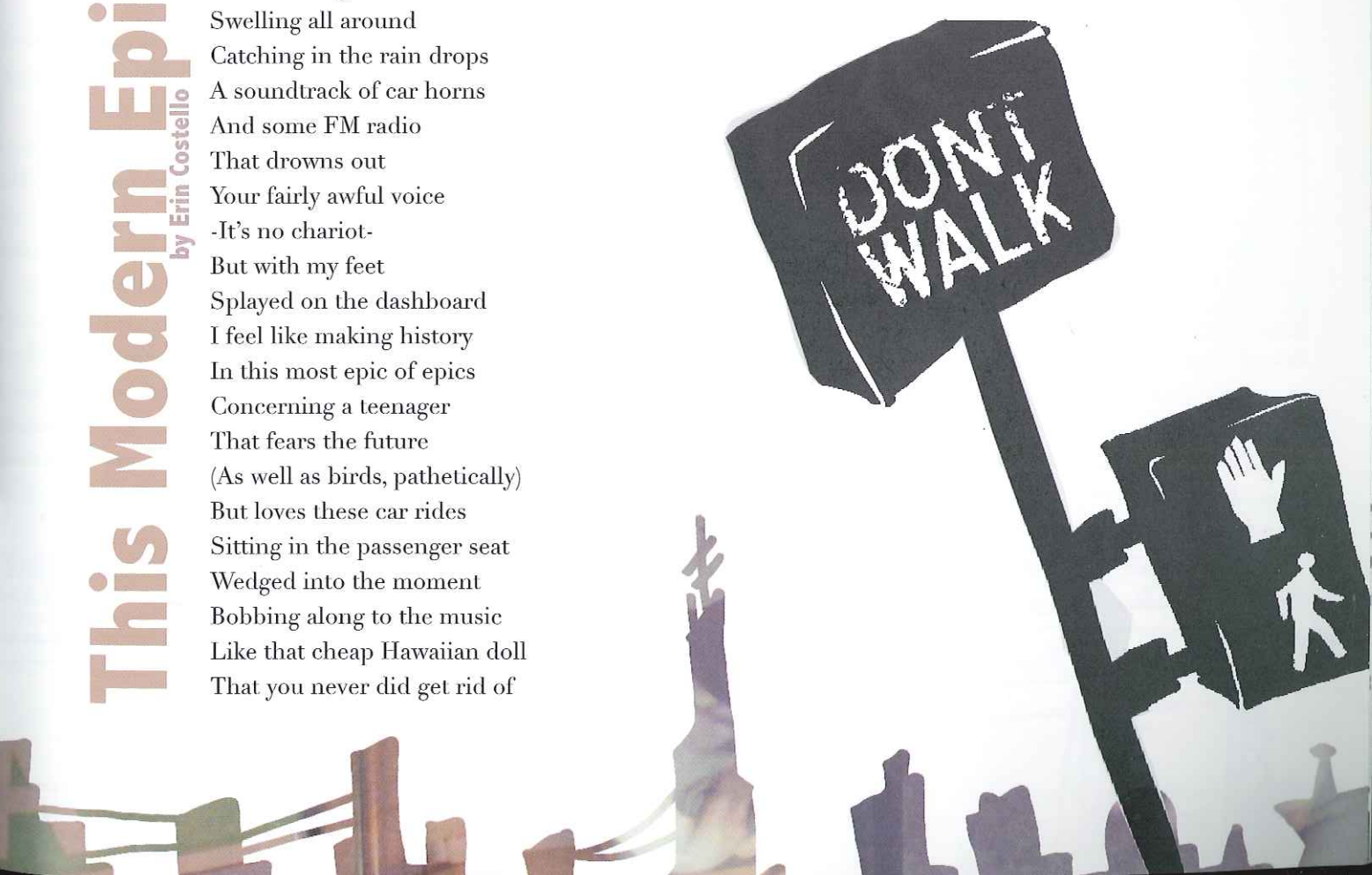


"Mi Barrio" by Diana Mai

This Modern Epic

by Erin Costello

We'll ride into the night
A whirl of lights
Swelling all around
Catching in the rain drops
A soundtrack of car horns
And some FM radio
That drowns out
Your fairly awful voice
-It's no chariot-
But with my feet
Splayed on the dashboard
I feel like making history
In this most epic of epics
Concerning a teenager
That fears the future
(As well as birds, pathetically)
But loves these car rides
Sitting in the passenger seat
Wedged into the moment
Bobbing along to the music
Like that cheap Hawaiian doll
That you never did get rid of



Near-Miss

by Abigail Hawkins

Here's the thing: you met him when you were 16 – a time in your life when things drifted about without expiration dates in sight, when consequences weren't apparent. And for that, I do not envy you.

You also met him at a time when your first love – a reckless boy a year your junior – had tainted the waters and coated grease on your arms, making it harder to wear your heart on your sleeve.

It's a pity because the one you met was so genuine and his intentions were pure.

He was a friend of your first love's older brother, visiting from out of state for the summer. It's a pity he didn't step into view earlier. Perhaps he would've received the coveted feel of First Love – the unadulterated, unlimited emotion without any local precedents to keep it in check. Because you liked him. Your heart knew it. Your brain knew it. You just had a problem translating it.

He was nothing like First Love – his face held a subtle handsomeness that peaked out in his most candid moments. He had a wit about him and furthermore: *he liked you*. He put up with you at your coldest when First Love felt no interest in you at your most charismatic.

My God, girl, you were an idiot.

You walked the shoreline with him; you sat next to him on Sunday nights. You laughed and you smiled but you showed no restraint for social pleasantries. You spared no expense to keep him unimpressed, but it was too late for that.

Maybe in the end, you two would've never worked out. He lived out of state. He'd be going to college soon enough. But you don't think about it in those terms, do you?

He loved to toss you over his shoulder and you loved to laugh along with it; because for a tiny moment, he owned you and you were powerless otherwise. And you liked it that way. You didn't want a choice. You didn't want the chance to say no, even in the form of never saying yes.

There is one night you always have dancing in the corner of your mind. Maybe you should tell your friends about this night in the way that it plays in your head – one of them is a writer and it's quite surreal – perfect for a scene in a novel or up-coming movie. You were laying there, in the hammock in the backyard of your First Love's lot with the new guy by your side. It was midnight and everyone else was inside. The full moon was your only source of light, and it fell lightly in shades of blue on you two. He was holding you and you could feel his heart break, but you didn't have enough sense to create the correct combination of words – words you knew even then that you had in you – to reverse the effects. But what did you say?

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't feel something."

My friend, you are quite the Casanova.

You started shivering and he kissed your forehead. And that's all he ever did or dared to do.

And soon enough he stopped returning. He went back to his state and you stayed in yours. That night was the closest you two will ever get.

The funny thing is, you don't reminisce about First Love. His glamour fell within a few years and you saw him for what he really was: a stumbling half-wit with not enough appeal to win you over half-drunk.

How long has it been, then? Five years, six? Eight? You're a grown woman with a 9 to 5 and a live-in boyfriend. He has a subtle charm that comes out in candid moments. He kisses your forehead when you're upset and wants nothing more than to love you, even at your coldest.

And you heard from the grapevine that the one who got away was working in the same city as you. So what do you do? You

leave for work early; you get home late. Some days you don't even have lunch. You just walk around the downtown area where you believe he works, hoping to run into him, hoping to breathe life into something from your adolescence.

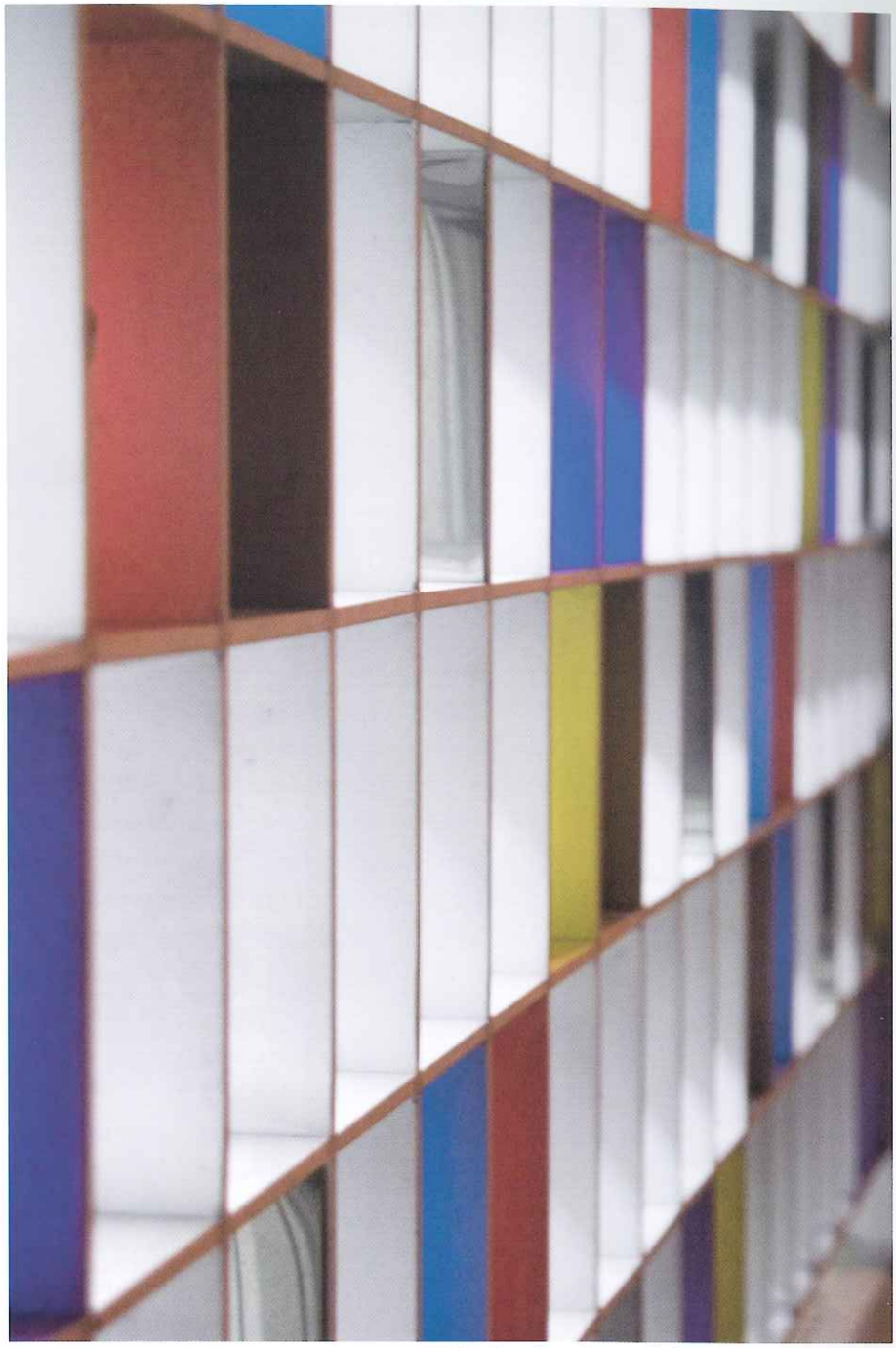
But what you don't see is how beautiful you already have it. That blunder at 16 has kept you from forever making it again. You've learned, and that was his only purpose to you. You needed it, the same way you need First Love, even Second and Third Love – but especially your boyfriend; the one you've grown too accustomed to. Where does he play into this?

And what happens if the one who got away collides with your wander? Will you nervously talk? Will he tell you he's married? Will you apologize for something that most elementary school children weren't even alive for? Would you leave your boyfriend for him, or would you date him, seduce him, behind Boyfriend's back?

You still have his number, but you don't call. You have his email – you don't write. Instead you wander the downtown streets with your head in your dreams and your eyes clouded over.

And that's why nothing I say will ever affect you: unrequited love only works because there nothing parallel to destroy it. What good is love if you can touch it, use it, grow too comfortable with it over time? The excitement in the ever-alien anatomy; the mystery of his mannerisms and speech. Where is the adventure in a body you could map out, domesticate, civilize?

So honey, I tell you this: God help you if you ever do run into him again.



"Color Bookcase" by Jason Jedrusiak

Coupon Cut-Outs

by Erin McGann

I finished my last cigarette on the lopsided, shaded bench outside of the market. Other shoppers walked past me, sizing me up, looking down their wrinkled noses through bifocals at the young woman collapsed on the bench, reading and smoking and drinking her life away into a book and a coffee cup. I could feel them snarl at my youth. I put my cigarette out on the ground leaving that little, soft dark circle in the pale gritty flow of concrete, then I flicked the butt under the bench, finished chapter nine and rose from the gnarled wood.

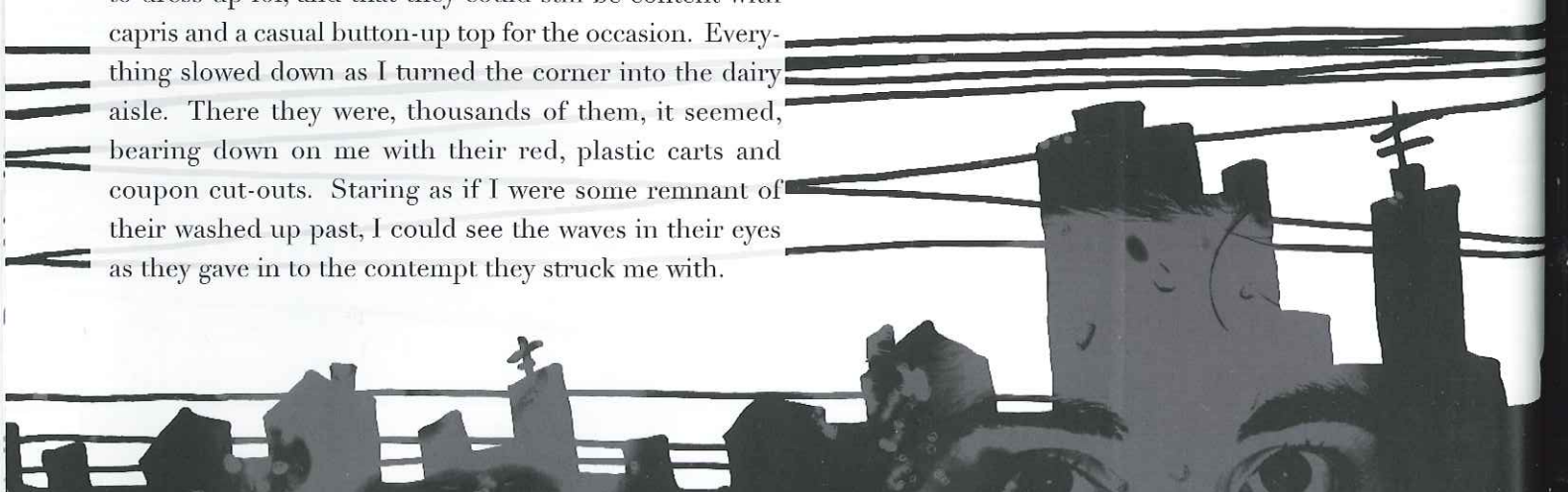
The automatic doors whisked to their hiding places in front of me, parted and silent after a defiant buzz followed by a coward's swish. I stepped inside and the coolness of the grocery hit me like a brick wall. I hated the supermarket. The lighter in my right pocket suddenly felt heavier than a medicine ball and my legs felt cumbersome and unfamiliar. as I walked, the white linoleum rose before me, stretched out in front like some dreadful padded cell. But then something odd happened, I turned into the frozen food section and I shrunk back into a shade of myself, at six years old. Everything looked larger, the garishly colored packaging struck me, and with a faint panic for my mother easing back into my head, I realized my torso was the only warm part of me. I turned slightly to the left and caught my grown-up self in the reflection of the ice-spit window-doors. Yep, there I was, unkempt, but dressed well, and young.

Something about the supermarket makes me hate being young. Perhaps it's the stares from all the sixty-somethings dressed to the nines and wishing they were young enough that the supermarket had yet to become a treat, an event to dress up for, and that they could still be content with capris and a casual button-up top for the occasion. Everything slowed down as I turned the corner into the dairy aisle. There they were, thousands of them, it seemed, bearing down on me with their red, plastic carts and coupon cut-outs. Staring as if I were some remnant of their washed up past, I could see the waves in their eyes as they gave in to the contempt they struck me with.

The supermarket makes me want to be invisible. I wished I were old and seemingly uninteresting, like they thought they were. Then I could move freely along the milk lines and meat sections without feeling the sting of those wise, jealous eyes. It has nothing to do with being beautiful, no; this war was fought merely off of my younger flesh, my uncrooked, seamless, if insecure, stride.

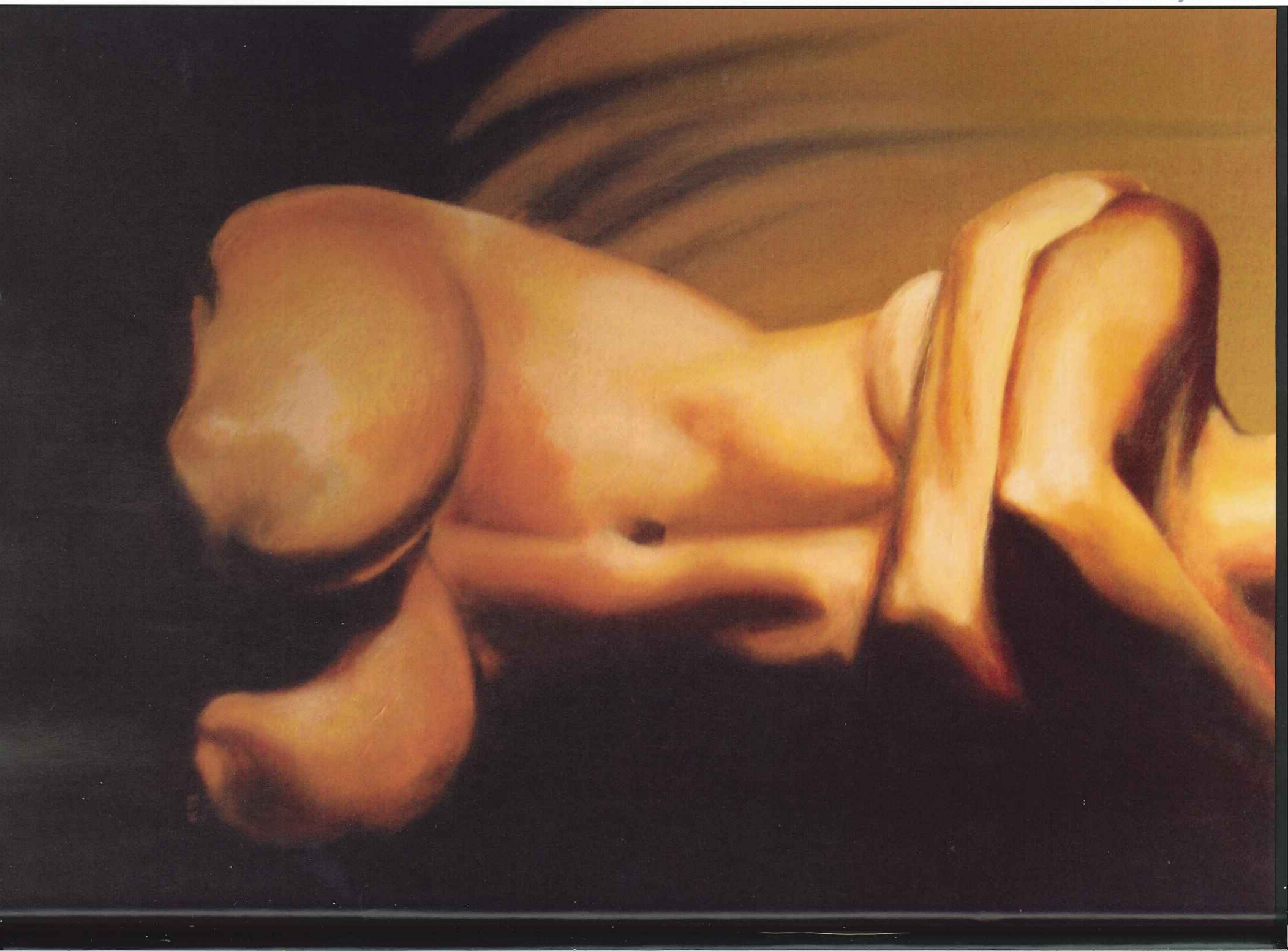
Then it happened. I made a quick left to avoid an older woman's particularly strong glare and I stood entrenched in my worst nightmare, as far as the market goes anyway—the paper aisle. To the left was a flourish of paper towels, paper plates, forks and knives and napkins, to the right a plethora of school supplies—paper, pens, journals, loose leaf, etc. and I was trapped, frozen like the tv dinners my mother would never let us buy. I stared down the aisle, motionless, at my future. To the left was the domestic, a house and the children and the cleaning and the cooking and the barbeques and the wiping of sticky lemonade of off any and every surface known to mankind. To the right was stoic, solid and strong academia, business suits and quiet cubicles and computers and corner offices and women in the work world lectures that I'd heard for the entirety of my high school career.

I sank down again, this time past age six and into nothingness. I felt as if I'd vanished flesh and blood from the ugly death trap aisle and all that remained was a pile of the clothes I'd been wearing, which someone would stumble upon in a few minutes, wonder at, and then dispose of quietly. That would have been a blessing, because when I opened my quickly flooding eyes again, I stood, still facing the wretchedness of my disillusioned life options. Boo.





"Untitled" by Liz Noftle



Devotion

by Nikki Frankel

You burn my tongue, taste buds erased, but I scream for more. Force-feed me your sarcasm, I'll put up a struggle if it makes your criticism, of life and everyone in it, sharper. Strip me of my preconceived notions; I deserve to have my empty codependent core exposed. Use me as a doormat at the entrance of America's collective living room. They'll listen more attentively under threat of harm. I want to be made an example of, a martyr for your as of yet undetermined cause. We've all got to die sometime, might as well go out with a reason affixed to my tombstone. "In death she garnered awareness." Not too bad for the most passive act imaginable.

I crave that gag-inducing sting at the back of my throat as I swallow your words whole. I affectionately pat on a daily basis the wound in my cheek left by your fishing hook, a constant reminder of my blissful capture. I am awaiting further instructions on how to best serve you. I will not rest until I have succeeded in exceeding your expectations, fantasies, and untold desires. I belong to you; your name and address is on my luggage tag. Don't let me get lost, forgotten at an airport newsstand for a stranger to abscond with.

My future includes only your plans. Activate my final sequence of commands! I am ready now to accept the true reality. There is no other way to exist for me. I want to be absorbed into your physique. Consume my flesh amongst your morning scrambled eggs. Pulverize my bones into a powdered topping for your Corn Flakes.

Take me, Master, as your own. I will not sleep, eat, bathe or even move from this post until I receive your affirmative reply.







"Bike Riders" by Diana Mai





"Untitled" by Ryan Tuck

That Weekend I Made Out With a Zebra

by Ricky Tucker

That weekend, I made out with a zebra, cowboy, geek, an Egyptian soldier (the most tawdry), and practically attacked a friend with neck kisses (he had it coming). Though, that what remains suspended above the haze was my encounter with Captain Morgan.

True to his costume, He had arrived to the party with a group of rogues; uninvited and much louder than necessary. I tried my best to avoid him. For some reason his costume made me nervous (the sword?), and for me history dictated it was wiser than not to walk away from the perfect pitch of a school of sloshy massholes. Cross stitch, invert, pin it- Captain Morgan is a Red Sock.

I love being called Brother / Brotha/ "Bruh-tha." Multiple times is my wet dream.

That's how he started invading my space, in line for the bathroom.

"Wuz up Brudda?"

"Hey, Man," I managed.

"Are you waiting for the bathroom?"

I thought it was obvious.

"Uh, yeah, and for a while now."

"I hear murmuring, so whoever's in there is either fucking or doing a bunch of blow."

I giggled awkwardly at myself. My point had entirely evaded him, though. I knew because the Captain was now shouting and banging on the door. He used his words. He used his sword as treble.

"Eat each other's shit somewhere else! We gotta line out here." Wow. I pictured them gathered round the toilet. Two sitting on the tub brim, sick with excitement, as the third sent another steaming heap down the line; preparing a final for her share. Just as they take their obligatory whiffs, the ruckus at the door brings them to a stop. Their heads lift in unison. One's monocle dangles, the other's glass locked in a toast…

POP.

The three actually came spilling out of the bathroom giggling. No eye contact. My eyes, though, met with the captain's and his said, "It's all you, Brotha'." I prayed he'd be civil now that I was on the more privileged, peeing side of things.

I was not taking that long. At all. In fact, I distinctively remember pushing myself more than what's natural. This, because I knew very little of Captain Morgan, just that his patience was limited. My time was up. He came in and just stood there. Before he could say anything stupid I exclaimed, "REALLY?!!" The feigned shock was only for his benefit/shame; really I had been expecting his arrival the entire time.

"What... You done?"

"No." It's all I wanted to say. Times like these my face usually said enough.

"Well, Damn BROTHA. My bad!"

He walked out backwards. At that moment he was drunk. Was he just indignant?

I had gotten that reaction before.

I love to dance. You could say I'm good. I'm saying that. It's my pleasure. I'm a stereotype. When I'm full on dancing, for one reason or another, all eyes are aimed my way (I promise not an attempt at false modesty). On occasion I'll catch a thumbs up flying across the room from a total stranger; some times a wink, others a smile of encouragement. That can be a bit gross. More often than not, my dancing makes people increasingly conscious of themselves, their limbs, their rhythm, their selves. It ups the bar; it cracks the bar. This countenance comes over them that reads, "I am *really* feeling this!" and I can't help but wonder if that's the impression I give.

Black guys have soul.

The true conundrum is satisfying people. I have a friend who on several occasions has introduced me saying, "This is (insert first and sur names), one dancing mothafucker!"

At most, on any particular moment, I'd rather not dance. I've found that that isn't okay. A friend will come to me and say, "Come on, let's dance." Their candor is noted and valued, but I'll say, "I don't really feel like it." That's usually when they'll commence to dance around me. Shaking, undulating, hoping to inspire. Dancing is weird and tribal that way. Getting together in large groups to bop around to sounds above a certain tempo; it's just plain odd at times. My friends aren't easily deterred. They try pulling me, to no avail. When I do, I stand my ground. That's right around the time they give me the "hurt" look. A ponderous but unmistakably pissy look; as if I'm broken:

"This Leprechaun won't grant my wishes."

"That Doggy won't perform any of its tricks."

"This Black Guy is too uppity to dance for us."

"That Black Kid is too good to let me watch him pee."

On my way out he was there, there perhaps to deepen our relationship, or mend whatever what just happened was. He came just up to my face so that I could smell how many he'd had; our breaths converging into a vaporous cocktail. "No hard feelings, right buddy?" His poor, poor execution. I don't know. For some reason I couldn't bring myself to grant him complete clearance, partially because I wasn't certain what for. "Whatever dude; it's cool." I thought I allotted that gracefully. We could both tell he wanted more from me, but his urgency to go was paramount to his need to kiss and make up with a stranger. His sheathed sword scraped a clumsy bee line resulting with a click of the door. "What in the world?" I threw out to nothing.

Costume parties are supposed to be frivolous. Mystery is so key. You, at most, make out with strangers; at least, make acquaintances. What you don't do is end up having to validate some frat boy of a Captain Morgan while holding his hand through bathroom etiquette. Although, I am sure the real Captain lacked that particular charm as well: the 7 seas + a lifetime of rum = Golden Showers. "I just had the most fucked-up exchange with some sort of Baron!" I announced

to the rest of the party.

Somewhere towards the end I caught his finale. He and his crew made a drunken waltz of an exit from the house. I shot my eyes away quickly as not to catch his attention, you know, provoke anything further. It was no good.

"Hey, hey! No hard feelings, right?"

I was done. "I don't know what you're talking about." It came from somewhere.

"Oh, okay. I see how it is."

I just shrugged non-committaly.

"Naw, man. You fucking know what happened!"

At the sound of the F-word people started to look up. Someone exclaimed, "WHOA!" Likely because it actually sounded more like "Fawkeeeeng". Flagrant mispronunciations startle me too. With him on the sidewalk, the rest observing from the porch, it was a play of the absurd. One where the existence of an abstraction (as far as I was willing to let on) was in question. I almost felt for him because I had now set off an existential crisis within him. The immediate world was indeed against him, and rightfully so: he was a dumbass.

I forgot to mention a crucial element to the story. I had come to the party dressed as a nihilist. Honestly. I wore a black sweatshirt with a gash of lacquered puff paint across the chest. I'd found it at Food Not Bombs six years earlier and never had a reason to wear it until then. For those who would listen, I explained how it signified the negation of one's self/existence, thus extinguishing any chance for the occurrence of personal drama. There was no person.

So maybe, somewhere inside, I was playing true to character. In theory, and theory alone; though, theory is more than everything, I the nihilist was the natural predator to the just slow enough existentialist. Perhaps I was doing the sap a favor by emptying the contents of what he thought was his Halloween/evening/experience and rendering it null and void. Maybe I was sick of him.

Would that I could dismantle an ego.

He was pissed, not thankful. Before it could go any further his crew swept him up and they shouted and tromped their way back to their SUV. I guess no one even knew who they were and they had collectively managed to anger the host. As they climbed in, I said just aloud, "They are going to die." People laughed but I meant it. As far as I know, no one ever figured out who they were. Afterward some one asked me what that had all been about. I thought, but came up kind of short, and all I really had the strength for was, "Nothing." I lost my Nihilist sweater that night.





"Cap'n Chon Chon" by David Nadeau

Ah, O'Neillians!

by G.Tod Slone

When men make gods, there is no God!
—Eugene O'Neill

Ah, O'Neillians! is a one-act irreverent fringe essay-play based on the observations of a *poète maudit* at the annual conference of the Eugene O'Neill Society in Tours, France. The following are the first two out of six scenes.

Scene 1: Lobby of the Hôtel L'Univers

Joanie Kurtesz and Henry Cusantre arrive in Tours at the Hôtel L'Univers at seven p.m. for the conference. Joanie had sped down the A-10 from Paris, now and then, reaching 175 kilometers per hour. She'd wanted to arrive for the O'Neillian Happy Hour at 5:30. But there were pockets of traffic, then a street manifestation for better pensions on the avenue Heurteloup where the hotel was located. They park and walk into the hotel lobby. Joanie checks in, while Henry hangs around. The lobby is swarming with O'Neillians conversing vociferously in English, seemingly unaware they are in France.

French University Professor of English (FUPE)— Are you lost, sir?

Henry Cusantre— (bluntly, somewhat aggressively and with Quebecois accent) No ! *Pas perdu, moé !*

FUPE— Well, you could be.

Henry Cusantre— Yes, and you could be too. *C'est pas la France icitte ?*

FUPE— Yes, this is France.

Henry Cusantre— *On parle français, non ?*

FUPE— (refuses to speak French) Yes, we do speak French here.

Old Theater Actress— Oh, Louis! Isn't this just exciting? I can't believe we're all finally together again. It's been such a long year.

FUPE— (immediately casts his attention toward actress) Yes, this is it. We are all together again. Did you find your conference packets, Sally?

Old Theater Actress— Yes, I did and thank you so very much for telling me where they are.

FUPE— Did you enjoy the Happy Hour? It was so nice seeing everyone again, was it not?

Old Theater Actress— Yes, Louis, it sure was. Oh, look, here comes Tom. I'm so glad he could come. You know, they weren't sure at first if Tom was going to make an appearance or not... but, well, there he is! And doesn't he look just handsome? I've always liked that blue blazer he wears.

FUPE— Oh, Tom, how are… (Tom who looked like he was going to stop and chat, scurries off, leaving his admirers open-mouthed)

Henry Cusantre— (now standing next to Joanie Kurtesz, who is still in front of the reception desk conferring with a receptionist.) *Dis-lui qu'une bagnole bloque le garage !*

Joanie Kurtesz— (still wild-eyed from the drive) You tell her! I can't do everything.

Henry Cusantre— You know, I can't stand talking to butlers!

Joanie Kurtesz— She's not a butler. She's a receptionist!

Henry Cusantre— Whatever! *Moi, j'aime pas l'humanité compactée !*

Joanie Kurtesz— Why can't you do anything? I always have to do everything!

Henry Cusantre— I'm only here because you wanted me to be here. I can't stand academics. You know that.

Joanie Kurtesz— They're not all academics.

Henry Cusantre— How can you tell? They all look the same to me.

Joanie Kurtesz— Well, they're not!

Henry Cusantre— Why are academics so mystified by literary personalities who went through hell? If they think O'Neill is so great, why don't they go through hell like he did, instead of wallowing in academic comfort?

Joanie Kurtesz— Maybe you should just stand outside for a minute while I get us checked in. This is costing $200 per night.

Henry Cusantre— Yeah, and I really appreciate it because your college is paying for it. If you don't tell her, you're gonna get your ass towed. Repeat after me! *Une bagnole bloque le garage !* (walks away from the counter to a stand of leaflets)

Joanie Kurtesz— (to the receptionist) *Excusez-moi, mais une bagnole bloque le garage.*

Receptionist— *Madame, "bagnole" ce n'est pas correct, c'est un peu vulgaire !*

Joanie Kurtesz— *Oui, je sais. Il faut dire "voiture."*

Receptionist— *Oui, madame. Je m'en occupe.*

O'Neillian #1— (to Henry by the flyers) So, what is your paper about?

Henry Cusantre— The Ryan O'Neill connection, get it?

O'Neillian #1— Well, that ought to be quite interesting.

Henry Cusantre— Actually, I was just joking. I'm tagging along. I'm not presenting.

O'Neillian #1— Well, that's nice that you came. (she quickly walks off)

Joanie Kurtesz— (walking over to Henry) *Elle a dit que "bagnole," c'est vulgaire.* You got me to say the wrong word! And you did it on purpose!

Henry Cusantre— Well, *qu'elle s'en aille se faire foutre, la pétasse!* Vulgar? She's vulgar. Who does she think she is, an elitist? Everyone says *bagnole*, for chrissakes!

Joanie Kurtesz— Just relax! You're so uptight all the time.

Henry Cusantre— I'm not uptight. I'm hungry!

Joanie Kurtesz— You need a glass of wine, that's what you need.

Henry Cusantre— I need a goddamn bottle! The hell with the glass!

FUPE— Okay, everybody, now go into the dining room. We should get started now. (the flock of O'Neillians move chaotically into the dining room)

O'Neillian Chorus— (singing in monotones akin to religious litany) O'Neill is a genius! O'Neill is unique! O'Neill is won-der-ful! O'Neill! O'Neill! O'Neill is our live-li-hood! O'Neill is why we are joined here to-ge-ther! O'Neill! Praise! O'Neill! Praise! O'Neill! Praise the scribe!

Scene 2: Conference Room at the Hôtel L'Univers

The O'Neillians, after dinner, have transmigrated into a conference room. The evening's keynote speaker, former president of the O'Neill Society, has been rambling on O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* for 45 minutes. Half the audience have their eyes closed and appear to be snoozing, while another fourth have been nodding in and out. The speaker concludes…

Speaker— We must not forget that as O'Neill himself had said, this plot was pinched. (chuckles from the audience) Of course, it was a precise analysis of O'Neill's family, their, uh, very emotional make-up and within context. Lavinia as O'Neill himself loses one by one his, uh, her family members. Orestes and Electra, well you know, they were, uh, brothers. And we should not forget what O'Neill himself had as a premonition, forecasting his own fate even when he was, some would say, at his own perhaps most joyous moment in life. Here, uh, O'Neill wrote, uh: "I'll never go out to see anyone! I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die! I know they will see to it that I live for a long time! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born!" Uh, that's all I guess. Uh, thank you. (but there is silence. it is over and the audience does not seem to realize it… until the current president of the O'Neill Society suddenly begins clapping enthusiastically. spouses elbow spouses, clapping erupts, then all stand, one by one continuing the applause. most begin leaving immediately, while a few approach the speaker.)

O'Neillian #1— Oh, Richard, I just want to tell you how lovely that was. It was all so informative. He was certainly the master!

Speaker— Thank you Mark. You are too kind.

O'Neillian #2— What a wonderful turnout! You really did keep us all so mesmerized, Richard.

Speaker— Thank you Helen. I was nervous you know.

O'Neillian #3— Well, you didn't look like it! You read as calm and collected as, well, I've ever seen you read.

O'Neillian #4— It was so brilliant, Richard! Nothing short of brilliant!

Speaker— Thanks so much.

O'Neillian #5— It was really quite an informative paper. It's going to be a tough number to upstage, Richard!

Speaker— Oh, well, I'm sure you'll manage, Harvey. You're the one with the magnetism.

O'Neillian #4— Harvey might have much charisma, but Richard, uh, you're much more natural.

Henry Cusantre— (heading out the door to Joanie) Come on, let's bolt!

Joanie Kurtesz— Okay.

Henry Cusantre— Who are these O'Neillians anyhow?

Joanie Kurtesz—Whoever they are, I'm not one of them.

Henry Cusantre— Well, you're an academic. They're all academics, living and writing off the backs of famous writers.

Joanie Kurtesz—I'm not doing that. You're always putting me down.

Henry Cusantre—Okay, you're not one of them. But if O'Neill were so radical and daring, so denouncing of the "filthy lucre," how did he end up having such a bourgeois coterie of suit and ties worshiping him?

Joanie Kurtesz— Well, I suppose you have a point there. But he would have hated this.

Henry Cusantre— Maybe not, but the O'Neillians seem entirely governed by the "pragmatic morals" of success equals cash. Think and rebel and the worshipers will hate you. What difference between them and the handsome dope praising the airhead beauty broads on TV? All of them yak crap!

Joanie Kurtesz—Oh, Henry, you need a drink!

O'Neillian Chorus— (singing in monotones akin to religious litany) O'Neill is a genius! O'Neill is unique! O'Neill is won-der-ful! O'Neill! O'Neill! O'Neill is our live-li-hood! O'Neill is why we are joined here to-ge-ther! O'Neill! Praise! O'Neill! Praise! O'Neill! Praise the scribe!

A Seductive Silence

by Deema Faisal

lifeless palms resurrected
as fingertips trace
fingerprints. Lifelines overflowing
with adrenaline giving
birth to joints
intertwined, until oneness
is finally established

"Hands" by Laurel Schultheis



At First

by Abby Zorbaugh



"Market Day" by Gina Bollenback

You first. No, you first.
Really, I insist.
Excitedly we interrupt each other with eager sharing
ever-polite
our words slide all over each others'
like our bodies would be
if we weren't on a city bus
a casual date
intently watched by an old woman clutching a suitcase
A middle-aged couple is not speaking to each other,
but he strokes her thigh slightly with his thumb,
almost absently he loves her.
You, my too-eager boy
whisper wide-eyed that you have that man's shoes
that very same pair
at home in your closet
beat up and brown.
I glimpse your future, with me in it,
responsible you reading the Times over breakfast
glasses on, suit and tie
teaching your daughter to play piano
her fingers gliding expertly like yours over the keys
then playfully hugging the dog I will let you get, even though I hate being slobbered on.
I plan our couplehood as you chatter.
I bite my lip to keep from blurting
I WANT TO HAVE YOUR BABIES!

More newborn than our imaginary offspring is our relationship-
maybe I will wait 'til we are engaged to start planning the wedding.

"Untitled" by Ryan Tuck



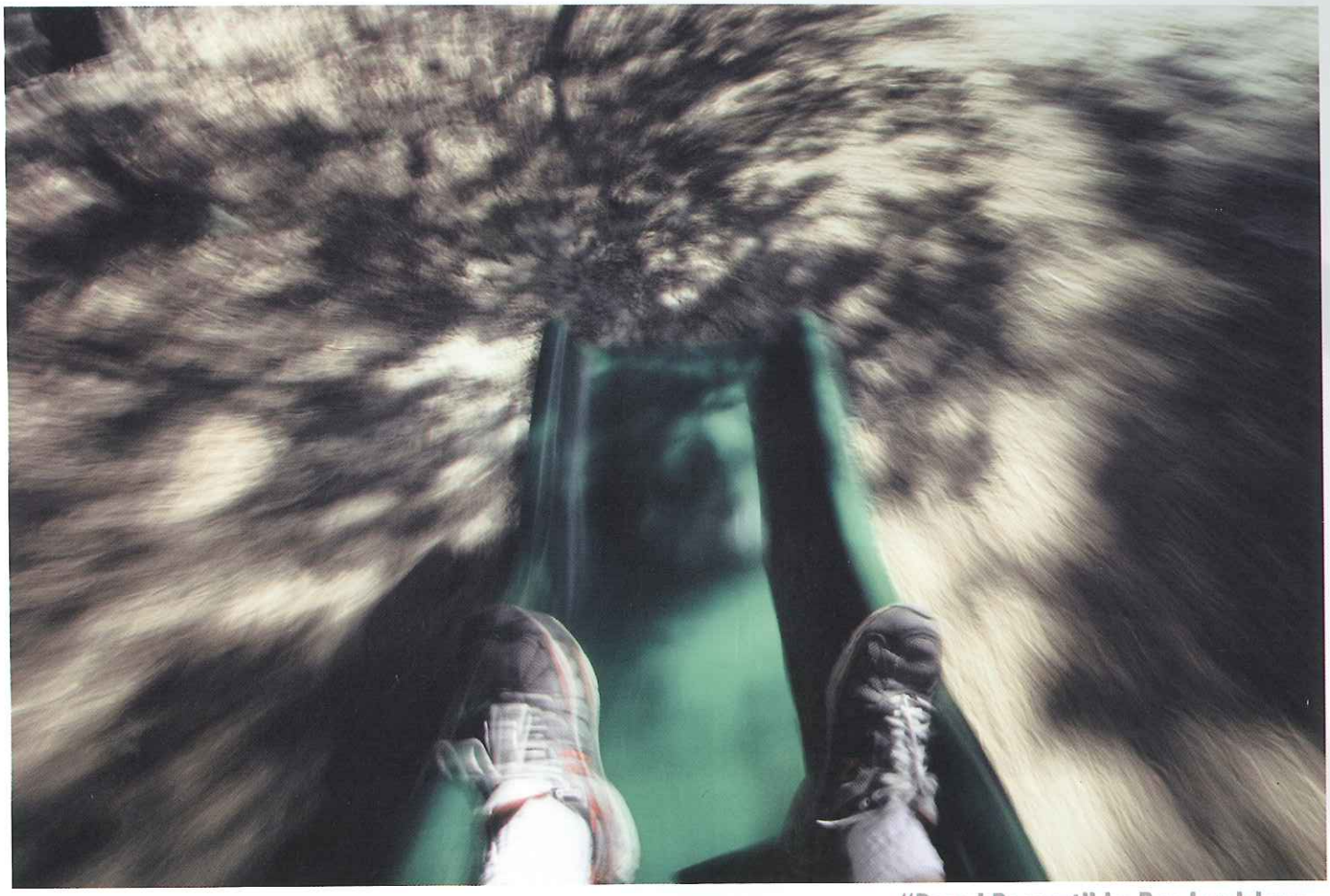
machinery

by Alyssa Mastrocco

the machinery looms in the distance.
its long arms and bright red glow
are reminiscent of childhood closet monsters.

I lay flat on the earth and gaze toward the sky.
the glare of the crimson sunset is soothing.

ticks tock while I lay, motionless,
and the monster fades into no more.



"Dazed Descent" by Ben Landsberg

Sandalwood

by Keir Bristol

i've never smelled sandalwood

but it sounds like some kind of wonderful

like those fresh white chips of lumber

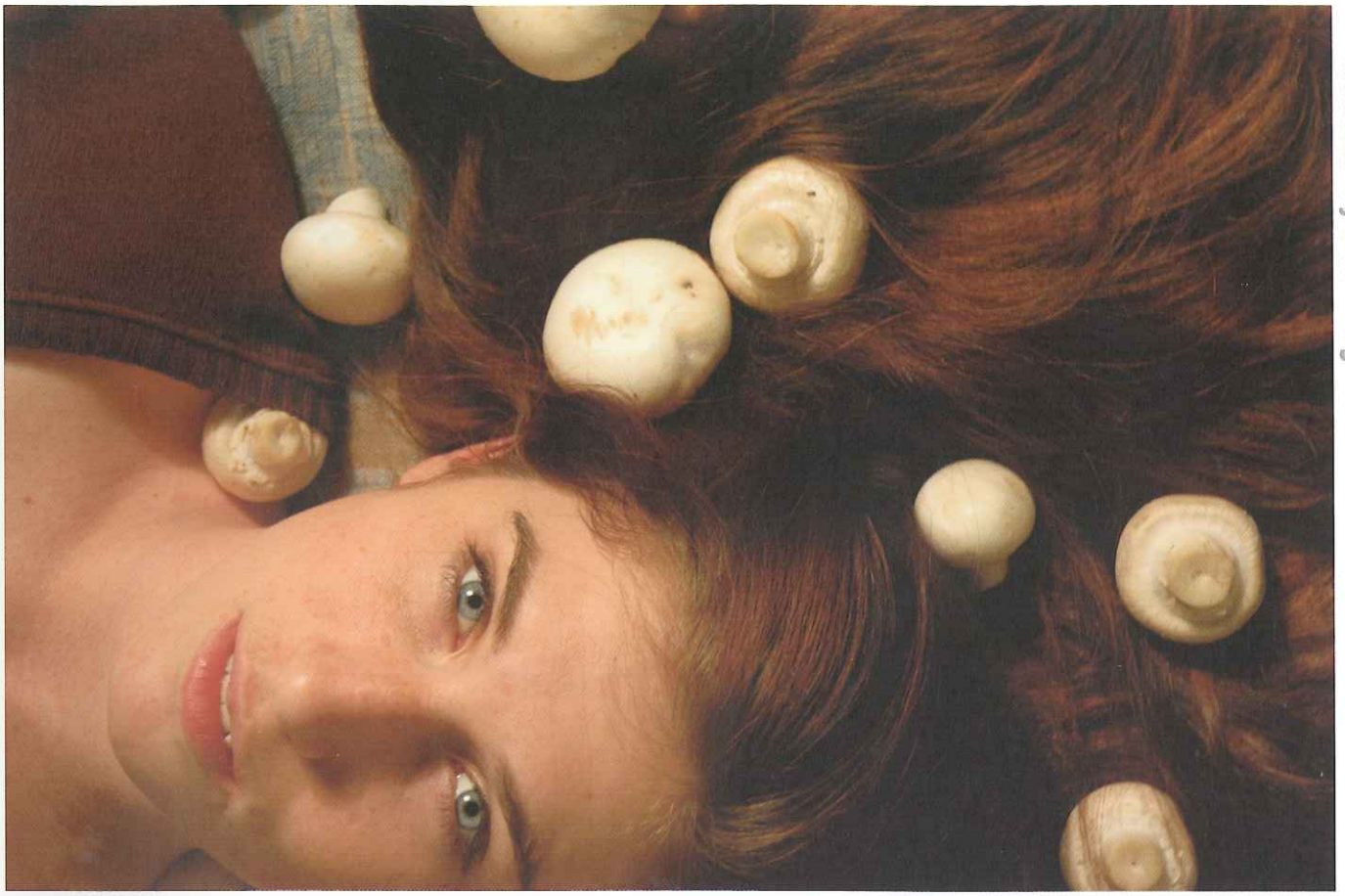
under our playground feet

when we were still young and pretty

and remembered how to smell the coming snow

when the trees gently undressed

and the sun set early



"Goldstein" by Willow Hagemeler

Sun Gleamed Library

by Christie Perkins

A page of white in the sunlight
stretched through the panes
leaves sharp shadows on the table.

A thick pencil point scratches
darkly across sun-warmed lines:
a poem about the girl at the next table.

Her chestnut hair rich with strands of red,
her thin white fingers poised goddess like
above a keyboard, waiting.

The way she traces her lips with her pencil
every once and a while, eyes darting about
while she thinks.

Her laptop has stickers of purple ducks
and her hoddie is splashed rainbow polka dots
and her name is Laura or Lauren, or something like that...

She was in his second period algebra class
last semester, Mr. Kead's class, but
he never took notice, before now.

The buttery glow of her petal cheeks
and the glean of wetness on her lips,
and the flutter of long black lashes:

All so much more exciting than
the eraser darkened pages
of statistics homework.

Recipe for recycled love: White-50 sheets-Wide ruled

by Heather Faherty

100% recycled paper, and I'm happy,
Not because I'm writing on recycled paper,
But because
I finally have something to write about.
For months, no words punctured the fibers in this notebook,
But now you –
you, have punctured it.

I fill in the blanks perfectly,
black ink tells of your existence.
You always wished you could hide,
But you are too beautiful.
Hiding is no longer an option,
so I'm letting it out –the better part of me.

Pen tip to paper, you are purely recycled
from my thoughts to the world –
When I hear you talk,
bits of the past are scattered in your words,
And I feel the burden when I think of what
–Who
Could have discarded you?
–Why?

A perfect example
of how much we humans
waste, of
perfectly
good
things.



"Love" by Gina Bollenback

The Gift of Control

by Nikki Frankel

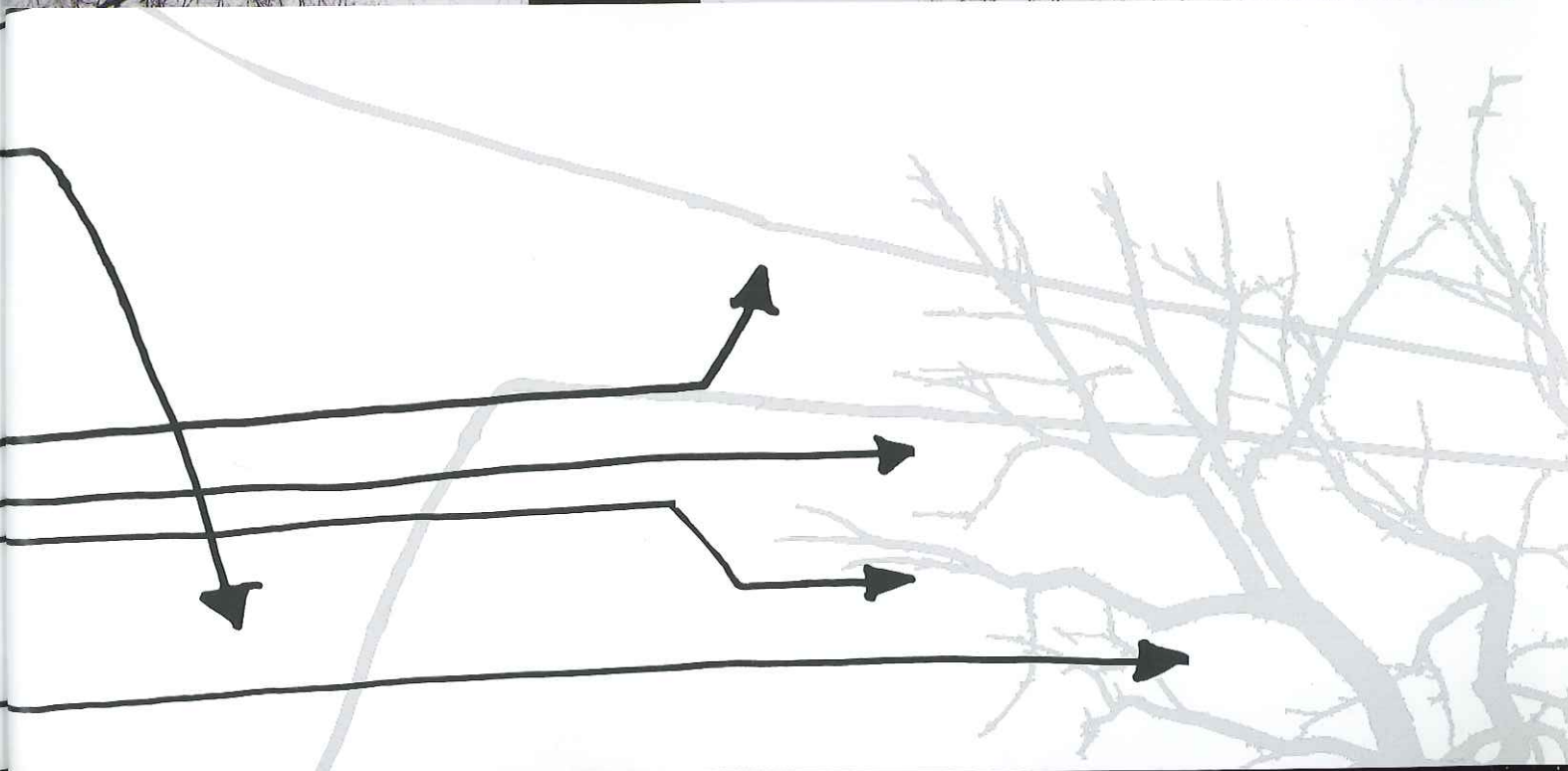
I feel my ankles separating as I approach, each step that much closer to oblivion. Disintegrating at the slowest rate, my body begins to betray me for the millionth time. It might be trying to protect me from the inevitable. Why can't my logical mind override these irrational decomposing joints? I split myself and make distinctions to prevent any future union. Casting the "bad" away I can continue denying the inherent malignity of my existence. My capability to do wrong is not something I can begin to tolerate. Blame must be placed on another, be it human or metaphysical, source.

My ribs feel like they will soon be cracked like a lobster's, directly preceding consumption. My breastbone is bare save for a neon bulls-eye in the middle. My eyes are closed. My head is slightly turned away in anticipation of the strike. But the blow doesn't come. I'm still tight and tense and breathless—with no end in sight. What does it mean if I don't have tools for relief in my eternal possession? I'm waiting for him to untie this forced corset. I'm pleading with my eyes for him to notice my growing lack of circulation and blue-tinted flesh. But what if he is blind?



"Frank Lloyd's Tree" by Laurel Schultheis







"End In Sight" by Anna Westendorf

Banana Bread Memories and the Nature of Man

by Adam Gorvine

"Look at these towers, passerby, and try to imagine what they really mean - what they symbolize - what they evoke. They evoke an era of incommensurate darkness, an era in history when civilization lost its humanity and humanity its soul . . . " Eli Wiesel

The dark brevity of the message sends a shiver up my spine as I meander about the clear glass towers of the Boston Holocaust Memorial. It is a crisp Boston day, and the air is warming, somewhat rare for early March. I mingle with others arriving to the site, feeling my thoughts drifting home, to the woman who raised me, who lived through that era, and experienced the darkness firsthand....

"Hi, Grandma!" I yell as I swing open her door unannounced. She is where anyone who's looking can find her 96 percent of the time-- clinging to the stove top in the kitchen. "Unless its banana bread, stop cooking!" I joke. "It is banana bread, I could somehow sense you were coming," she says. After a brief discussion on how I need to grow out my 'beautiful curly hair,' she beckons me purposefully to the kitchen table.

"I mingle with others arriving to the site, feeling my thoughts drifting home, to the woman who raised me, who lived through that era, and experienced the darkness firsthand...."

The structure lays before me, heavy with meaning. I sit at first from a distance, aloof from the towers immediate impact, observing how the architecture is meant to 'evoke' the dark possibilities of the human soul. I follow the sleek black granite lines that come together and form cubes that stack into the sky. Each portion represents a different death camp. A little brown sparrow glides down and lands in front of me, cocking its head, indicating his wish for some of my breakfast. The nearby smell of food wafts into my nostrils, and I remember....

My grandmother and I sit side by side. I wonder why this mixture of sun baked plants and kitchen smells reminds me of practicing my multiplication tables here as a kid. Memories within memories. She turns the page of the 'Auschwitz Album,' a picture book with a frightening story to tell about the nature of man. The Nazis, with their passion for detail, documented many steps of their final solution to the Jewish 'problem' during World War II. "What do you say to people when they ask you how you got so brave?" I ask her. She looks puzzled, and then responds, "It's not about brave or not brave. There is just the hope of surviving another day. There is determination to live through each day. This is the human spirit. People don't just give up and commit mass suicide. There is a will to live no matter what."

The setting sun hits the towers and sends shadows dancing on edifices nearby, as if trying to communicate my grandmother's unheard thoughts. Half the day has passed and what have I learned from being here? We have to teach each new generation how to think for themselves, and thinking is a very difficult process. Most people don't think at all; they are just moved around by whatever is out there." People

stream by like cattle being herded to the fields, their undisturbed faces seemingly indifferent to the message of these monuments of death. Are these the faces of all mankind, strolling blind through history? I can't help but see, in my mind's eye, the millions that will pass here, an echo of the six million numbers engraved in the glass. I reach out and grasp the cold side of one of the cubes, and imagine smoke rising from the embers sewn about at the base. The stacks are open at the sides, and standing within, I look up at the untroubled sky.

My grandmother flips each page with focus, scrutinizing every detail, as if she has a goal in mind. Each page brings new images of emaciated corpses, piles of stolen jewelry, transport trains, cattle cars, and confused, wounded faces. I stare at my grandmother's still spirited, youthful face and marvel at her righteousness. Her aging, veined hands continue on their mission….

I observe a child ask his mother about the meaning of the towers. "Isn't it beautiful, Todd?" she says. "It's here so we remember the people who died in World War II, remember you learned about that in school?" The child peers up at her. What will he remember? Beautiful towers of death? The concept escapes me. People are just moved around but whatever is out there, the message is alive in my head…

"Is it my responsibility to pass on this way of thinking, my people's reality?"

My grandmother is philosophical. "Despite our advances in science and medicine, and despite our ability to do so many wonderful things with life, humanity is very shallow. Our civilization is a very thin veneer and can easily be torn away. Beneath lies a dark, brutal, evil nature. That brutal aspect is easily aroused, by charismatic leaders, by propaganda. Mankind is easily influenced and manipulated, and unless we are determined to overcome these influences…."

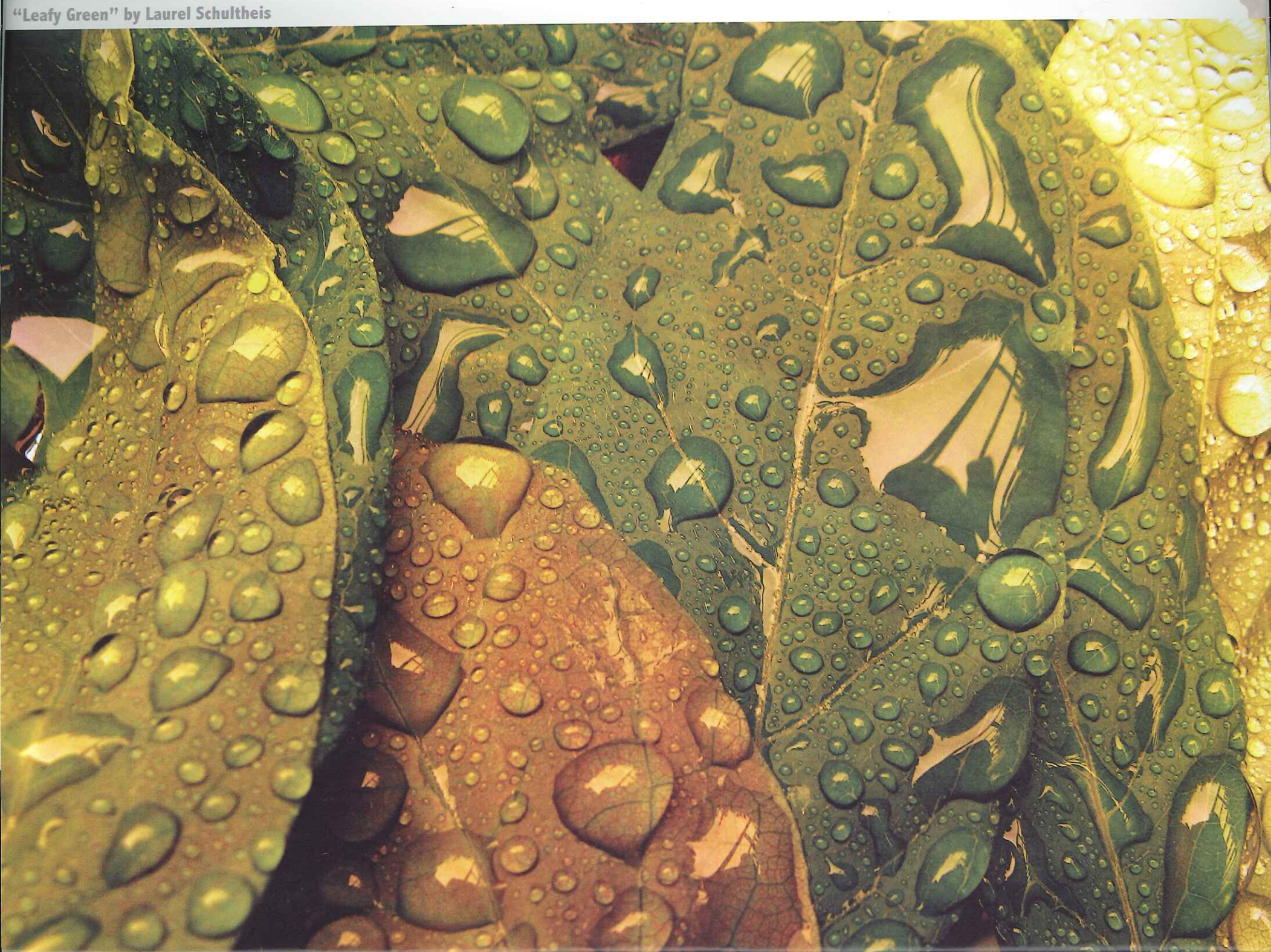
Her mission seems to halt about halfway through the picture album. The way she turns the page before tells me the stop was not unexpected, and I follow her gaze as it becomes fixed. At first glance, it is an aerial photograph, probably taken by a guard standing on a nearby building. To the casual observer it reveals two long lines of people, seemingly endless, the smudges of dark clothing blending together towards the horizon. It shows the arrival of a train bringing Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. Woman and children stand in both lines, the men having already been separated out. One line is formed by the elderly and mothers with small children, who were immediately selected for the gas chamber. The other consisted of those deemed healthy enough to work. Life and death. At the very end of one line there is a girl clutching her chest, her head turned in a purposeful manner toward some object outside the frame of the picture. "There I am," she states matter of factly. "My sister went that way and I am looking after her."

As I gaze at the looming towers, I see again the crematorium chimneys rising above Auschwitz, and I try to imagine my grandmother living in their shadow. I have never known anyone as selfless, kindhearted, and forgiving, yet her perception of people, her very reality is so different from mine that I have trouble grasping it. She has seen the worst that people can do. What faith can she have in the present, in the future, knowing what she knows? Is it my responsibility to pass on this way of thinking, my people's reality?

The pages in this memory book from hell are running out as my grandmother turns to a page that shows a group sitting under dark, ominous trees. The people in the forest look confused and dismayed, but they could not know of the fate that waited for them just beyond the woods. Among the faces, my grandmother points out her little brothers and her mother. One is 6 year old Gershon Fogel, who gives me my own middle name, 40 years later.

Gershon and the rest of my grandmother's family are here, notched in the glass of the towers. It is a beautiful day, but in the fading light I pause to remember, and to reflect again on what I will never fully understand.

"We must look at these towers of memory and say to ourselves, No one should ever deprive a human being of his or her right to dignity. No one should ever deprive anyone of his or her right to be a sovereign human being. No one should ever speak again about racial superiority... We cannot give evil another chance." Eli Wiesel


"Leafy Green" by Laurel Schultheis

Starbucks Stalker

by Christie Perkins

I watch you in the reflection of my blackened computer screen.
It went dark half an hour ago
as I further fucked up my Sudoku.
The green and white circle of Starbucks glows to my left and I stare at it only when I don't stare at you sitting there, so pensive with your Greek Mythology book at the raised table behind me - ridiculously small, just barely large enough to hold a computer, book, and cup of coffee - forcing bags and purses to sit rejected on the floor.
You ate a poppy seed bagel at two.
You drank a grande sized hot drink at three thirty.
I wonder what it was.
If I had to guess I would say a caramel dolce latte with skim milk, two splendas, and whipped cream.
But I could be wrong.
I can see my own reflection in the gloss before me: the not-since-two-days-ago washed hair draping over hungry eyes, the thick plastic oval glasses, the Elmer's glue pasty cheeks, the peeling lips, and you over my shoulder.

Are you watching the back of my head, wondering who I am too? Wondering who it is scribbling so furiously in the corners of a sudoku workbook, glancing up so frequently at a blackened laptop?
Probably not.
You are immersed in Hera and Zeus. Athena and her beauty, Achilles and his heel.
Damn you.

I've never seen you here before, in all my years of Starbucksing. Never seen you place your order, hand over your hard earned dollars for the outrageously overpriced fee, wait at the tall counter while the coffee machines screech like spaceships.
I can tell you all about it. Starbucksing here. Farthest table from the window. About the man in the corner with the newspaper on his four to four fifteen coffee break. Hardly time to wait in line and take a sip, but he sits down as if he has all day, feet up, for seven minutes exactly before putting on his pea coat again and heading out. Or the Russian lady over there with the thick accent who always orders a large frappuchino with extra whip but who is still anorexic thin with collar bones protruding. And that single mother there who comes in three times a day for a double shot cappuchino with her kid, her snotty nosed kid who is always crying.
Your forehead is smooth like steamed milk.
You hair is soft like a mocha latte.
I want my brittle fingers in your hair.
I want my ragged lips on your moist ones.
I want
I want
I want
to not be alone.

Where is my Juliet?

by Andrew Harris



"At An Angle" by C. Benedix

I have found my Rosaline,
Now where is my Juliet,
The one who will love me for me?
Loneliness is worse than any poison.
Where is my Cleopatra,
The one whose love is worth a nation?
Being alone is worse than any snake bite.
Where is my Helen,
The one I would cross oceans to retrieve?
Solitude is worse than any piercing arrow.

I have found my temptress, Calypso,
Now where is my Penelope,
The one who would wait for me?
No journey is more treacherous than a lonely heart.
Where is my Eurydice,
The one for whom I would fight Hell to keep by my side?
A life alone, is worse than any death.
Where is my Guinevere,
The one for whom I'd sacrifice my quest?
No treasure is more valuable than love.

One day I am sure to discover her,
The girl who will satisfy my dreams.
But why must I wait and be tortured,
By the villainesses who only hurt me.
I am offering my heart and soul,
And no one gives it a second thought.
She entrances me with her tricking ways,
Then dashes my hopes with her indifferent rejection.
My only solace lies in my hopes that one day my true love will find me,
And will be more than I could have ever imagined.

Didactic Villanelle

by Joseph DeRoche



"Purple Mountain Road" by Emi Gonzalez

We know some things that we intend to do.
We mean to love. We mean to write, to call.
But we are busy and the love falls through.

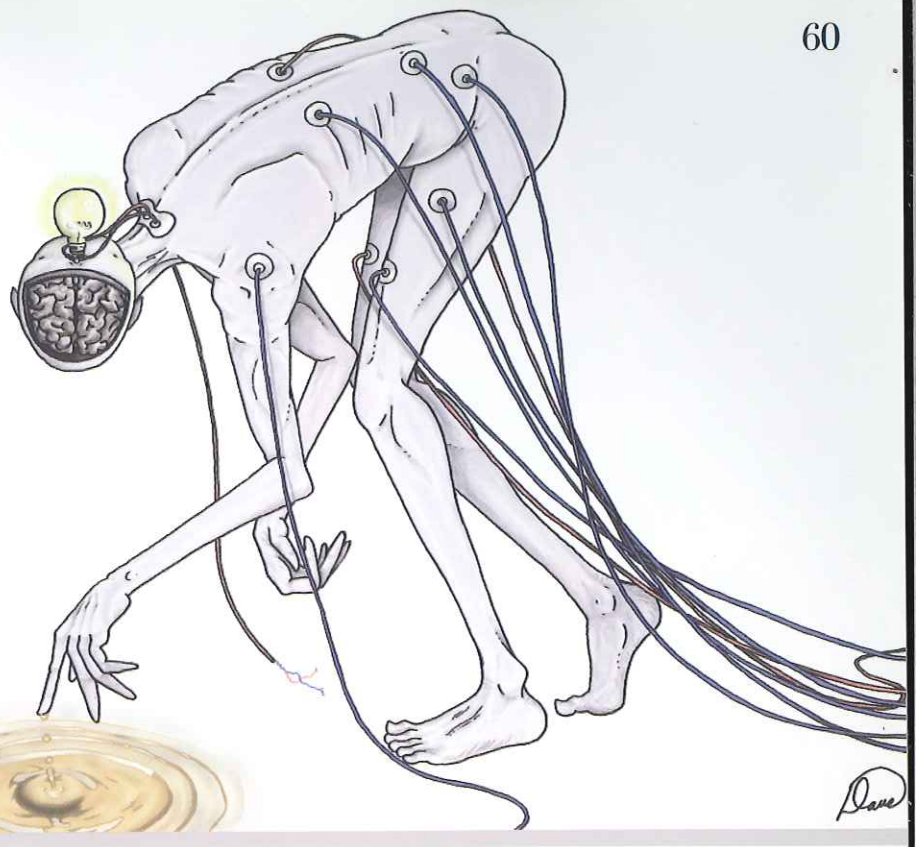
Oh, what the hell, the words we speak are true.
We didn't have the time. That's it. That's all.
We know some things. What we intend to do:

The right thing all the time. We know that, too,
We're late and, true, half the time forgetful.
Well, we are busy and the love falls through.

Time strikes, we know, like fists, and black and blue
With guilt, with hang-dog shame, we're sorrowful.
We know some things. What we intend to do

In love grows cold. But, it was meant for you.
What the spring I rose to meet you in turned fall,
Why was I busy? Why did my love fall through?

I'll take the phone and lift it, dial, call.
I'll tell you what time's meant to me. I'll crawl
To you in time with things I'd meant to do.
But we are busy. And the falls through.



"Freedom" by David Nadeau

I Subscribe

by J.M. Olejarz

I subscribe
to an intricate system
of sending things to myself
from the panoptic storehouse
of the world wide web.
it's mostly a survival play - it's
no longer necessary to
leave the house to find food,
amusement, conversation or news,
and when I do, everyone's inside hiding
from everyone else.
so I plug my life's saving
into ordering magazines, furniture,
blue jeans, but especially
flowers: Everything is located, package-
sealed, shipped out by calculating subscription
robots, but every couple weeks,
somewhere, a florist will assemble my
bouquet, and know
I still exist.




Look closely