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The Watermark: A Journal of the Arts - Vol. 02 - 1994-1995

University of Massachusetts Boston

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A Journal of the Arts • University of Massachusetts • Boston

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EDITORS' NOTE

Many borders have been challenged in our recent history. As we look around it is evident that our populations have become more varied. The community created at our university is representative of one such population. Walking around the corridors we see and hear a weaving of cultures. We find ourselves in a borderland.

Last year the literary arts journal began a transformation to become more representative of our UMB community. Changing the name to *The Watermark*, a name which invites multiple meanings, was a first step. Since early in the fall semester our staff has visited classrooms and clubs across campus in an effort to gather work from our many voices. These efforts are realized in the pages of this journal. We are excited to have received so many diverse submissions—artwork in various media and styles; translations of poems; writing that challenges conventions. Of course, this made the selection process more difficult.

We receive approximately seven hundred submissions annually and reducing that number to a journal of just over one hundred pages is an enormous task. Sometimes it means letting go of a piece we love due to lack of space. Our collaborative efforts do not always come easy, nor are we always in complete agreement. In order to gain multiple perspectives, each piece is considered by several people with selected pieces moving on to second and third rounds. Final selections are made during a meeting at which we discuss, argue, and at last come to decide on which pieces will be included in the pages of *The Watermark.*

Not every piece will appeal to everyone, but most will find pages to enjoy. And we hope the diversity represented in these pages will encourage future submissions. Without your submissions, we could not have a journal. Further encouragement comes by way of the Lillian Lorraine Jones Memorial Prize. Lillian Jones died in 1986, during her second year at UMB and the prize was established by Lillian's mother. This year's prize goes to P.H. Allioth for "Pearl of the Antilles," a social commentary which crosses borders—between non-fiction and fiction, prose and poetry.

Finally comes the task of thanking people. Of course there's Donna Neal, our trusty advisor; Dave Bufano for his input; Vivian Zamel, Ellie Kutz, and Neal Bruss for their patient listening; and Martha Collins and Lloyd Schwartz for their technical advice and caring. We would like to acknowledge the support of the Art and English Departments, Creative Writing, the Offices of the Chancellor and Provost, the Mass Media, the Student Senate, Yearbook, Wit's End Cafe, the Campus Players, and the Harbor Art Gallery. And a round of applause to Stan Kaplan whose expertise in production has made the final product possible.

—JRL and MD

About *The Watermark*

The Watermark publishes its second volume this year having succeeded *Howth Castle* and *Wavelength* as UMass Boston's journal of the arts. A "watermark" can have multiple meanings: a tidal change, a mark on high quality paper, or a coffee ring left on a napkin. And multiple meanings can be drawn from the work presented in this journal.

Join *The Watermark* Staff

Working on *The Watermark* staff provides students with a chance to become invoved in the planning and production of a major publication. In some cases work-study money is available. We invite students from all areas to join our staff. Call (617) 287-7960 or stop by our office located on the fifth floor of McCormack Hall, room 407.

Submit Your Work

Any UMB student is encouraged to submit work for the up-coming edition of *The Watermark*. General guidelines follow:

We ask for blind submissions. That is, only your student ID number should appear on the work. All other information about yourself should be on a separate cover sheet and include your name, student ID number, address, phone number, title of your work, and type of work.

Written work should be typed and not exceed 4,500 words. Fiction and non-fiction should be double-spaced and submitted in duplicate. Poems should be typed as you wish them to appear and submitted in triplicate. We seek all types of written work including essays, commentaries, short stories, poems, plays, humor, etc.

Artwork includes prints, line drawings, collages, paintings, computer art, photography, etc. Please bear in mind that these need to be reproduced (and often reduced).

We are willing to work with you if you encounter any problems with these guidelines. Please call us at 287-7960.

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P.H. ALLIOTH

PEARL OF THE ANTILLES

Like a bomb, somewhere inside, the circadian clock goes off. Somewhere inside a thin fluid voice calls out in a desert of sleep. I get up, tip toe on darkness. My brother groans, a familiar discontented groan; I have stepped on his ankle. He can never keep his foot on that straw mat no bigger than an exercise mat they both sleep on. Perhaps afraid of each other's breath, they sleep back to back. Spine rubbing against spine.
To my left, a deafening sound comes in short bursts. Locked in mortal combat, my temple tries to repel it. My uncle is lying on his back, mouth wide open in a heated contest with the gods of thunder.

In this darkness, roaches lose their way; it's incomprehensible to me how—so far—they've missed his gaping hole. We have plenty of them, you know, plenty of them. The last one I crushed, the smear of his fluorescent gut the only noticeable thing in this darkness.

"Where are my shoes?" I ask myself, but low enough not to wake up my sister who sleeps with grandma on the twin size bed. My sister's got bronchitis, so she wheezes in her sleep. I don't hear grandma though, she's dead to the world, maybe dead for good but we won't know until morning.
She has a nasty habit of leaving her dentures in her mouth.

Looking for my plastic shoes I decide is a vain exercise. So I stand up, sniff, and head straight for them.
I walk towards the door, make one leap over the young maid sleeping on the cold floor. I know her exact spot on the floor. Trust me.
Silently, I unlatch the splintered green and yellow wooden door, and slip outside. My lungs ache as they voraciously suck in the fresh air.

I walk to the back of our one room house towards the small hill leading to the back road. Just beyond the house, I jump to avoid

the open sewer. But at the bottom of the hill, the air takes a different mien. There, the oppressive odor of the latrine is in constant friction with the fresh air over space. Overhead, like a menacing cloud a putrid scent suspends.
Here, all is dark. All is putrid.

With my Henry Des Champs notebook under my armpit I run up the hill taking my nose to freedom. The dim yellowish light of the lamppost casts its aura upon the street. Soft and diffuse like eyes behind a veil.
It is not enough but it's all I've got; so I open my notebook and start memorizing as I pace up and down the pavement. Memorizing is the best route to a quick forgetting; especially when the powers that be do want me to remember. They are always selling me the future at the expense of my past. Beyond the hill a soft golden glow ascends. Under the lamppost, in the dreamy light, I study everyday, irrelevant lessons with no connection to reality, past or present; today, I'm memorizing a redundant English poem, tomorrow it will be negritude, a beautiful flower without fragrance. I never understand what or why I'm studying because I'm forbidden, robbed of understanding.

I am forever to stay in darkness. The same darkness which exists in my one room house.

The lesson memorized. I stand as I would stand later, facing my teacher. And he, he would stand, legs wide open, hands behind his back as if tied by an invisible rope, being whipped by an ancient ghost; bulging eyes, red with fresh pain; the pain of being human, of being forsaken.

Notebook closed, I recite, as I would do later.
I stand. I recite. I vomit the lesson as I would do later, then I come home with a void in my head. All forgotten.

I Stand. I recite.
I bounce as I recite like a rooster eating from the soil.
I bounce as I recite like a man praying against a wall.

In the east, Lucifer starts to rise. It is time for coffee, the same coffee which enriched the French and enslaved my people for three centuries. The same coffee which still enslaves them, but today the master is different, he's one of their own, flesh and blood. I walk up the block to the corner. Ash and soot cover all four pavements. The motion of the activities and the aroma of

the street vendor's food hang in the air. The fried marinated fish, pork, and chicken descend like balloons. And the fragrance of the fried plantains and the consomme makes my mouth salivate. I always have my doubt about the meat, but I eat it anyway. It's Good.

"Coffee?" the vendor asks, interrupting my thoughts.
"Oui, cafe au lait," I reply "with three slices of bread."
I take the bread and the coffee, then I hand him 5 cents, three for the bread and two for the coffee. The bread, I always pry open since the day I found a glassy roach wing embedded in one like a lost vestige of a dinosaur waiting to be discovered—or eaten.

Today school is the same as yesterday as will be tomorrow; a sysiphian pseudo-intellectual exercise. Enlightenment has long bony fingers to point out injustice; thus, darkness is taught, and I consume darkness as it consumes me.

The same darkness which exists in my one room house.

Coming back from school, my plastic shoes are melting.
The sun above my head sits on me like a woman's heavy thighs.
With my sweaty palms I feel my pocket for the dime; it's there.
It's been there three days now. It's my emergency money, and the hellish sun is not emergency enough to make me spend it on a Taxi-Bus.
Besides, I 've got to be sure of a replacement before I can spend it.

My head is vacant from vomiting the lesson.
It swirls and spins like desert dust in the heat,
and my inside wrings with hunger.
The same hunger which erodes my people and my land. After a night of tropical rain, the mud comes down from the treeless mountain and sits on downtown like Buddha's statue. By midday, the baked mud starts to dissipate under the pressure of tired feet and Michellin tires. A dust storm envelops the city. That's why our X-rays are never clear.
Yeah, trust me.

Through all this storm, the open Taxi-buses painted in bright yellow, red, blue, orange and purple show off their colors like proud peacocks. They all have their own identity painted on them, a wife's or a mistress's name, a daughter's name; Names like "Michelle B.," "Marie-Denise" or a mindless phrase such as "God is Good."

Across the street a man is walking. Hands swinging free. Pants pulled up from the back, strangling his testicles. Behind him a policeman leads him on. The man's heels never get a chance to touch the ground. He floats onward supported by his balls. His face the color fear bleeds around his eyes. Mountainous cheeks, —purple from being beaten and as high as Kilamanjaro—hide his eyes. His white T-shirt bright red with blood against the azure sky. At the corner, a street sign reads, "Pearl Of The Antilles."
Every one walks past him, heads up or down looking for a non-existent address. Here no one sees anything. No one hears anything
Here all is dark. All is putrid.

Somewhere, someone waits for him, you know; perhaps a wife, a son, or a daughter, but he'll never show up.
Trust me.

Down the street, a fat BMW took a red light. A policeman in a dirty blue uniform steps in it's path. He shoulders an Uzi, and a book of summons sits like a brick in his back pocket. His abhorrence of writing instruments earns him a living. A window rolls down just enough for a sleight of hand. The man in the dirty blue uniform steps away from the car, sticks his hand in his already fat pocket. The BMW eases slowly past last week's trash, it's fat tires leaving some dust behind for me to swallow. "A bureaucrat," I say to myself. "Here, they start work at ten, take a two hour lunch with their favorite secretary and head home at two."

In the mean time, the pseudo-cop is already up the block chasing a young school girl. No one notices anything. I have never seen a pair of eyes in this country. Never.
Here, all is putrid.

Three blocks up, I turn left, than right on to the avenue which leads through "Le Champs De Mars"—a plaza located across the street from the national palace. My feet slide in and out of my plastic shoes as the heat from above and below compresses my body like tin can. The asphalt is bubbling and the vapor it releases plays tricks with your sanity. As I reach the park, I see two figures who perhaps once were self-sustained men; but now they are two emaciated beggars sitting under a flag pole as testaments of our leaders greed. The air is dead. The red and

black flag is limp and the inscription reads:
"L' union fait La force"

Alas, so much for independence I hear my ancestors whisper, as their indigo breaths potent with the magic of Dahomey turn the black part of the flag blue instantly for all time.
Had we understood the inscription on the flag, we would have united long ago to defeat the hunger, the corruption and the oppression that are eating our insides like acid on a wound.

Across from the flag pole, a woman sits, her back leaning against a statue.
It's a bronze statue of a gigantic negro, kneeling on his right knee, a broken pendulous chain on his right ankle. His left foot firmly planted on the ground. His back arched and neck extended backward. His two strong hands hold a conch shell to his lips. His belly is pulled in tight under his ribs, pulling in the air, lips firm and ready to blow the sounds of liberation momentarily. Actually the call did come once, two hundred years in the past and we did something about it then. That's how we could afford to have a flag pole with our own flag floating on it; and that is also how we can afford the luxury of misery brought on by that liberation.

Next to the woman leaning on the statue lies her daughter, too weak to sit up under the constant and heavy weight of the flies. In the woman's arms is a dead boy. He could not be more than two years old, but his body looks less than one and his skin more than seventy years of age. Oh, he's not dead. His eyeballs move, barely noticeable. The first time I see eyes in this country—what a pity—they belong to death.
"Woman, Woman feed the child for he is dying." She spoke but no words came. Finally she opens her blouse, revealing a paper thin chest. She has one breast and blood is dripping from it.
"No more milk" she musters the courage to say, though barely a whisper.
I drop my emergency dime on her lap, "I'll say a prayer for you," I hear myself murmur in disbelief. "Thanks for the dime," she says with a fading voice, "but save the prayer because God is . . ." and her voice disappears inside her Adam's apple; but I swear her lips read "deaf" or "dead."
I am not sure which one; nor do I have the courage to ask, for she is exhausted beyond words.

I run all the way home under the warm tropical rain, under the Indian summer sun. I let the rain purify my sight. I let the rain wash what I have just seen; but a vestige of it sticks to my canthus, cannot be wash away for it is calcified.

Like our neighbor, the strong northern wind, as it has done for more than a century, reaps than rapes the southern plain before blowing it to the edge of the abyss.
In the west, the sky is bleeding red. Crepuscular.
The sky is tired, tired of the sun's weight, it drops that ball of fire on the ocean giving shape to the horizon. Soon enough, the heavy sun sinks behind the ocean on its perpetual chase of the moon, never understanding his courtship of her is forbidden, for when they mate, their daughter is darkness.

The same darkness which envelops my one room house, my life, my people.

That night, walking into my dreams, I see a vision of things to come.
I see game in pursuit of the hunter. I see the oppressors being oppressed. What a glorious dream! Finally the bronze negro has eruct the call; and the conch shell's mellifluous sound travels the ocean waves to reach my ancestors in Dahomey.

I see the Pandemonium of a nation. A people as angry as Chimera take to the street. The uprooting has begun; HA! Dechoukaj, how sweet you sound. I hear the drums of Africa gliding across the ocean, then inside my heart it beats; the rhythm of Africa seizes my soul as the voodoo spirits of my ancestors pierce my being. We form a circle. The drums beat faster, and faster, and faster, Oh! I'm possessed. I'm free. I'm whole. Okonkwo lend me your strength to fight and Obrieka your wisdom to destroy; for the violence that oppresses is the same violence which liberates.

I see a hunter, face painted in the color of angst, standing inside his blue uniform, begging for his life. Sweating in his red bandanna as the circle of men around him tightens like the ring of death. I see a tire dowsed with gasoline; a man dowsed in gasoline. The ring of death tightens, forcing him to drink the vile liquid. The tire thrown around his neck, glides to his waist then stops. Eyes of death bulging. A cigarette thrown. The ring of death opens. Engulfed, he runs in all directions, doing a macabre dance. The tire melts and becomes his flesh. He screams for the gods, the gods of rain, of snow, of spit, any god. He sinks to his

knees and gives one last shrill as the flames follows the vile liquid of death to his stomach.
He implodes.

The scent of sweet and sour pork overtakes the air.
The smell of rubber and human flesh, pungent, attacks my nostrils.
Chiseling itself from the stench, the black smoke spirals and ascends.
The noisome odor widens, reigns over me as it descends.
I look at the caoutchouc the hunter became; and I—as game—am satisfied
I look at my hand, my cigarette is gone.

I walk towards the cathedral, but not for a confession, because after all the hunter has gotten what he deserved. For decades, him and others like him have been murdering our brothers and sisters. On top of the cathedral sits a white old man, a yarmulke on his head, the opiate of my people some say. He seems to be far away, but still able to exert pressure on the church. When I look closely, the church itself is made of people standing on each others heads, bending and suffocating under the weight of the old man. The cathedral is curiously leaning to the left. The bottom row of people which supports it starts moving away to join the insurrection. To my amazement, all of sudden they start moving backward towards the church. I get closer to inspect this phenomenon. What I see I can not believe. They have strings—strings—attach to their backs. The old man is pulling them back with a nefarious grin on his face. The cathedral is now straight. The old man descends and stands at the pulpit. He preaches about benevolence and turning the other cheek. He talks about the milk and honey free flowing in the afterlife, but always forgetting the here and now, and this crucible we live in. This crucible we call our nation.

Effectively thwarting our uprooting, the old man ascends to take his place on top of the church. But, before he does, I espy a good look of his transmogrified face. And for the first time in my life I understand.
I understand why the church always sides with the oppressors.
He has two dark empty holes where his eyes should be.

Today the church forfeits our future. It plunges a venomous dagger in our hearts and we bleed as Christ bled, For nothing.
Nothing.

"What ever happen to the church siding with the poor?" I murmur in my dream.
Instead, it has pandered our virgins, abandoning them in a four point restraint on Lucifer's bed. Naked.
It has sold our here and now for an uncertain future, for a land abundant with milk and honey where everyone will drown in its viscosity.
The church will never be forgotten for thwarting our uprooting.
Ha! Dechoukaj how sweet you would have been?

Outside, I hear a commotion, so I step out of my dream. A Pandemonium of people takes to the street as angry as Chimera. I stand, arms akimbo.
I watch. Then I go back to bed for I already know how the uprooting ends. In a lull, suddenly my body jerks, trapping my dream between two worlds. And I, trapped between my flesh and my wraith, hear the sounds of liberation deadened by the church.
I am stuck in an ephemeral and ethereal world, at the crux of dream and reality, while potent indigo breaths keep me afloat in nothingness.

MICHELLE BERRONG

Girl

You could hear the faint
tick, tick
of shoelaces tapping on the shoes
each time she stepped forward.

She wasn't very old,
just a skinny-hipped
spindly-legged
long-fingered girl,
who walked with her
baby butt and flat chest
all stuck out.

What was she doing there
with her eyes that lacked constancy?
They were already nearly dim,
those ten year old eyes.

Closed now, or open,
they saw the same thing over
and over . . .
Nothing that they didn't see.

Saw you with that
big-busted, busted-lip lady,
the one you always messin with,
saying she's messin with you.
Well you messed too far this time.

Because the outraged girl
in this beaten woman
has just stepped forward.

RACHEL SQUIRES BLOOM

Black Feather Boas and Guns

Last Friday you stuck my feather boa in the bird cage
and my tiny green bird seized up in terror.
I slapped you, stupid girl, but it was my fault—
by now I should know better than to let things like that
lay around on my dresser when you're over.
Good thing I don't have a gun.

I suppose that intellectually
we only use each other as excuses
to do all those "I-can't-wait-till-I'm-a-grown-up" things
(complete with stomps of knee-socked legs for emphasis).
Together we eat entire bowls of chocolate chip batter
and drink martinis, blue with food coloring
until we want to throw up.
And we do that thing that I never considered
(even child that I was)—eat ice cream with our feet.
We stay up all night until I have to shower
and dress for work at six-thirty, leaving you sluggishly
complaining on my couch about your full day
of two classes, German and philosophy.
Using Daddy's money to celebrate your independence
you gripe to me, "why don't you have a TV, dummy?"
I don't like you then at all.

Together we're not afraid to dance the way
people do in the privacy of their bedrooms
(you know, face microphone and all).
And other passions—like our love of hats and dares.
In Truth or Dare I never choose "Truth";
this is possibly our only real bond.
We slip nicely into each others' clothes.
You say "Ha ha, my hair is longer than yours!"

I reply "My hair will grow but you'll always be short."
But we both know these differences
are nearly impossible to discern at more than ten feet.

You become depressed and sulk like a moody teenager
when you don't feel hot and dangerous on a regular basis.
But I don't need the ugly men who stand outside liquor stores
to hoot at me, "fine lady, wanna party wid me tonight?"
I'll never understand you and God help me if I did.
Life is not a movie, as you insist—Technicolor is added years later
when as old women we'll hover over musty photo albums
and talk about regrets, secretly relieved that it's all over.

But you may destroy yourself long before then
in the slow lane, of all places. I mean this literally, love.
You will drunkenly stumble in front of a
Dodge Dart going twenty miles per hour
and that will be the end of you. And us.

I told you how on my morning jog I watched
a ripe red robin tug worms from the March earth.
A woman wearing a white jacket,
bright white snow falling on her black hair,
was watching it too.
Our eyes met over the bird and we smiled.
You were gulping a martini when I told you.
You giggled and the olive fell out of your mouth
onto the carpet and rolled under the couch
You lost what little composure you have
(as you often do) and kept on laughing
out of lips so like mine.

JILLIAN BRADY

Yellow

Again I catch you
Scaling the kitchen walls
My handmade shelves bent and croaking
Under your hundred and two pounds and
As I plead your leg crushes bottles of paste—
Soup and chicken-flavor cubes like a body
Landing from six stories crushes the pavement;
Me still as glued tile.
"Hand me the brush?" My arm like
Syrup gets and gives the sticking
Horsehair, and I only bear to watch the way a
Mannequin watches herself being stripped of
Auburn crocheted and flowers for
Gleaming plastic pale-blue prom-time;
Dripping with banner-yellow you begin
With cream of mushroom, then ziti and the
Corner of one wall and the edge of the ceiling:
I inhale and know it won't end until
You've painted my shoes and teacup and
The television and my kindly
Kitten's ears

Remember One Thing

Never talk to Rico
who was born on the kitchen table
in the apartment beneath us. Never
take the 47 past Lackland. Don't trust
the smudged milk-date and
don't leave meat on the windowsill.
Never call your sister a whore.

MARK BRENT

THE MONARCH

The Jumpmaster's howl initiates the jump sequence, but I'm not at the jump. Instead, I'm dreaming. . . .

I'm in Ms. Washington's classroom, again. Marvin's bulbous head is there. Laura Ann's there with her metallic smile. All six foot of me is stuck, crammed into this grammar school desk. My knees are tender from slamming into it every time I get an itch . . . itch, scratch, oof!

Everyone looks at me. . . .

I had to dress in Army camouflage; you see, it's best that Ms. Washington doesn't call on me. I won't know the answer and this void will make her angry. Ms. Washington flicks rapidly through her nature slides. She stops, and says something about a caterpillar. I can't hear her, but she's going on about this caterpillar. Why can't she ever discuss the lion or the tiger? Finally, her lesson dries up, and as time strolls away from the two dimensional world of the slide-screen, the lights begin to darken. Marvin's head flattens and disappears. The slide show becomes a movie. I reach inside of my camouflaged fatigues and pull out a bag of popcorn.

The movie sputters from frame to frame. I see a succulent leaf and a plump and fleshy caterpillar. The caterpillar anxiously spins a saliva rope from it's spinneret . . . every lesson Ms. Washington calls it a spinneret—you'd think she'd become tired of that word. The caterpillar fastens a rope to the waxy surface of the leaf, then the worm creature slips over the edge of the leaf. Zip, to the leaf below! A metallic blue dragonfly invades the film and for a moment my attention turns from the caterpillar to the predator. I follow it; the film's creation tests the projected boundries of the picture on the white wall. The dragonfly flies to the top of the screen. There it flattens out its wings into a glide, it banks, then dives . . . off the screen. 'Private Ottarson . . .' Ms. Washington is calling my name. She's seen me. She's going to ask if I've paid attention. I keep real still . . . I hope that she'll doubt herself against the camouflage of my fatigues. 'Observe, the tiger-stripe on the caterpillar . . .' Damn, she's locked on to

me. I have to wake. All I can see is tiger-stripes, and the plump and fleshy. . . . I'm out of popcorn. Wake up!

The dragonfly comes back on screen and starts to encircle the leaf that holds the caterpillar. 'Look,' I yell, 'The dragonfly is looking for a meal.' Ms. Washington continues to question me.

'Private Ottarson, when ingrained instinct and chance timing fail to keep the caterpillar away from its predators . . . what can it rely on?' I don't know the answer. I'm sure the caterpillar will find the answer. Everyone looks at me, all six feet of me stuffed into this desk. They laugh at my stupidity. Laura Ann raises her hand.

'Private Ottarson, it's been more then a decade.' Ms. Washington has a way of stating the obvious. She's right. I can't escape grade school. She calls on Laura Ann. 'With luck, Ms. Washington, the caterpillar will survive all predators, like birds, and humans, to make it to the cocoon stage. There it will go through a lengthy maturing process, much like a living death. Once complete, the once caterpillar will emerge as a beautiful butterfly.' Laura Ann cracks a smile; I hate that glint-ridden mouth. My face turns red. I'm frustrated with the lesson and I've grown tired of it. I smell smoke and my mouth tastes of coffee grounds. My body is telling me I'm too old for grammar school. I need my own cocoon.

I never liked Ms. Washington . . . not because she's never liked me . . . I liked her odd nature lessons, for the most part. . . . I don't know why she never liked me. Maybe it's because I never liked her lesson about the caterpillar.

'Stand up.'

It's the Jumpmaster I hear. Again, I don't respond to his voice. I'm still in Ms. Washington's nature lesson. The Jumpmaster commands some other jumpers to shake me. I oblige and open my eyes. I look straight into their camouflaged faces and decided it's best to stand. Gravity pulls my first effort back towards the floor of the fuselage. I try again: the same happens. I try a third time to stand. The Jumpmaster's howling and the red jump light points the way for me and I stand as strong as I can and face the aircraft's tail.

'Hook up! Check equipment! Sound off for equipment check!'

'OK' echoes down the line of paratroopers, as we sound off that our equipment is checked. It starts with the last jumper and each jumper in turn spanks the one in front of him shouting 'OK!' The last jumper delivers a straight-hand sign to the Jumpmaster. 'All's OK, Jumpmaster!' Always a step ahead, the Jumpmaster doesn't wait for Polowski to give him the signal before he goes

for the jump door. The door opens with a pop and suck of air. The vacuum in the aircraft is broken and in an instant the rushing of air drowns out the paratroopers' anticipation and expectations. In front of me Olsen checks his pulse.

'Stand by!'

Polowski stands by the door. We wait. Only Polowski and the Jumpmaster can see into the night. The Jumpmaster must wait until he sees the blinking beacon below on the approaching drop zone.

'Green light, go!'

Polowski, Murphy, White, and Olsen are gone and the Jumpmaster is looking at me. He yells for me to exit his aircraft. I take a step forward and gravity sucks me from the warm belly of the 'bird' and delivers me into the autumn night. The laborious roar of the aircraft is left ringing in my ear and in the abysmal darkness my affection for warmth is met by bitter cold. In a fetal position, I dream of cold—it's bitter black. I spin away from the warmth of the red light. I spin into a familiar dream. . . .

I'm flying around my bedroom, again. I gracefully flap my arms and they become wings, butterfly wings. I'm a Monarch butterfly playing touch and go around my room, extracting nectar from the lines of flowers on the wallpaper. It's the sixth grade and I'm back in class. I'm flying and I wing-dance above my classmates and imagine the teacher pointing out all of my beautiful colors. My classmates applaud as Ms. Washington puts a sad-face on my homework. She argues that dragonflies can't eat caterpillars. I argue that I believe they can. When she turns her back I rotate my homework and try to make her sad-face smile.

The middle school lunch room is cool, white and cool, I see Marvin coming for me. I start my flapping. I rise up and away. Marvin climbs a table in pursuit as I flap just out of his reach. The higher this Goliath, this King Kong climbs, the higher I flap. All the children are in good humor and I flap easily about on the warm air created by their laughter. Marvin throws cafeteria Jell-O at me . . . for fun I dart in and out of his oversized arms as he wildly swings at me. The whole moment is fed by laughter and a few other boys join in and start throwing flak from their food trays. Laughter, the flak, Jell-O and peas, exploding around me . . . then Marvin yells, 'I'm going to kill you, Nick Ottarson! Cross my heart and hope to die, I'm going to kill you!'

I'm back in my race car bed and the whole world is present to watch my Indy victory. I lay my head back onto the pillow, start

the engine, and listen to the roar of the crowd. I smell fuel, asphalt, and an intoxicating smell of urine fills the room. I've wet my bed. The windows blow open and a cold breeze paralyzes the Monarch. I'm so cold.

The Jumpmaster's instruction echoes in my memory.

'Check body position and count!'

'One one-thousand!' I begin the count to four one-thousand and tuck my chin tighter into my chest. The weight of the coverall helmet pushes my lips into the St. Michael's medallion hanging around my neck. I kiss it and say a quick prayer. 'Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep . . .' My fingers spread and grasp the sides of the reserve parachute. I tuck my elbows aerodynamically into my sides and press my feet and knees together. The tighter the body position the less I'll spin. I continue to fall. . . .

'Two one-thousand!' I finally get my eyes open and look into the dark real night. A touch of illumination from the frosty moon highlights my descent. My ears are laughing and the moon smiles knowingly on my figure as I hurl towards earth. As I separate from the aircraft a rocking action begins—first my toes point towards earth, then my head, then my toes again. My back always remains pointed to heaven as I try never to lose sight of the aircraft's moon-lit shadow on the drop zone.

'Three one-thousand!' Elastic bands, each with a distinctive lesson, snap one after the other. They release the caution-yellow static line that is my umbilical cord to the aircraft. With a final tug the static line releases the pack assembly and my main parachute springs forth from its dormant state.

The parachute trails along behind me like a balloon waiting for air. The aircraft's shadow disappears across the drop zone into the woods at the far end, leaving me alone with the other jumpers.

'Four one-thousand!' I catch a thermal rising through the night from the sun-hot clay below. A breath of hot air gives the ashen silk of my parachute life and with a sudden jolt the 'chute fills with air and jerks my legs around to standing. My chin comes off my chest and I face forward. I hang weightless under the parachute.

'Check canopy!'

The distant curve of the horizon defines itself as my descent slows down under full canopy. I'm able to focus on the jump. Looking hard to the still sunlit horizon I see an abundance of autumn's reds, oranges, and yellows. The trees are burning. . . . The sun has just slipped beyond the trees and its glow is inviting

me to follow . . . I feel the need to be in the sun's reassuring rays. I commence flapping my wings.

'Cherry, check your canopy!'

'Check can of peas!' I mock the moon shining through the apex in my 'chute and with the help of its sarcastic light I perform a three hundred and sixty degree inspection of my canopy. No rips or tears, no panels missing. At one thousand feet above the ground and under sound canopy I feel relief. In the air all is calm and I dream this familiar dream.

It is the Wilbur high school gymnasium. It's my graduation. The whole town is there to see me graduate. My father—a hard worker—is sitting with his new girlfriend in the visitor section. He's afraid of my mother starting a scene. My mother—a professional—is sitting with her husband and his daughter Ann. I hate Ann. I don't know why, maybe it's just the way she looks at me with her crow eyes. They've seated the students by class rank and alphabetically in the case of tie. Laura Ann—God she's beautiful, heavenly even—is giving her valedictorian speech and I'm basking in her. I decide to fly about the podium. Laura Ann smiles through me, as I flap about her head, as she delivers her last hurrah. Laura Ann is ranked number one. I'm forty-ninth; Marvin is ranked last. He's fiftieth. The Army recruiter told us—Marvin and I—'be paratroopers, sons.' He told me I could learn while earning for college. I've never given any thought about going to college. I only want to fly. Speak to me, Laura Ann!

'Gain canopy control!'

I'm in the Captain's office and he is congratulating me on my flying ability. He orders me to perform . . . I take to my wings and flap for him . . . I land on the ceiling and he points out my beautiful colors. He invites me to his house to show his wife my colors. She is known for collecting butterflies. How could I refuse. . . .

'Prepare to land!'

'Get out of my way!' It's Marvin. He's also under canopy. 'Get out of the fucking way, sky shark! I'm going to obliterate you!' The fucking hick thinks *I'm* the shark. It's too late for preventive measures; it's time for emergency procedures. Marvin's 'chute oscillates into my jump space. Miraculously I remember what I've been taught. I spread eagle in the attempt to bounce off of Marvin's suspension lines, but the wind turns my out stretched body into a weathervane and spins me sideways. I slip in between two of the suspension lines instead of bouncing away . . . my canopy slides over and collapses on top of Marvin's parachute . . . I find myself upside down inside of his 'chute . . . the suspension lines that run from the silk of his 'chute down to the

main lift web that holds him tight as a Christmas ham forms a circular jail around me. . . . I forget quickly what the Jumpmaster had taught us to do when in this predicament . . . I've forgotten all.

'Get out of my fucking 'chute!' 'It's not like I want to be here,' that's what I tell him . . . it's not like I want to be here. . . . I'm looking through the apex in Marvin's canopy and thinking about it, then I start falling back out of his 'chute the way I went in. As fast as I went in, I fall out. But the damage is done. I fall down past Marvin with my limp 'chute trailing humbly along behind me. . . .

Back at the Captain's house he introduces me to his wife—Laura Ann. I smile at the familiarity of her name. I tell her I fly, but of course she knows I fly. She listens and the Captain smiles. She shows me her butterfly collection.

'Nick, we need good paratroopers to stay in the Army,' is what the Captain says.

'Am I a good paratrooper, sir?'

'Nick, we have a war developing and we need all the able bodies we can muster.'

Laura Ann smiles at me. I think she liked my colors. The Captain is waiting for an answer so I give his statement thought. I think of the boys and girls that had been in Granada and Panama, and how I was moved by movies made about Vietnam, even though I had been too young to remember the actual conflict. I look right at Laura Ann. 'Sir, I terminate service in twenty-eight days,' that's what I tell him, 'Twenty eight days. I don't see how I can be of any help.' I look down at my boots. I think Laura Ann understands my point. She's nodding in my direction.

'That is why I brought you here today, to ask you to reenlist. What do you say? There would be a healthy bonus in it for you.' I can see that Laura Ann knows my answer. 'We could even make you a sergeant. How does Sergeant Ottarson grab you?'

'Why don't you ask your wife, sir? I think she knows my answer.'

The Captain snorts, 'My wife, what does she have to do with anything?'

'Like you don't know . . . she knows butterflies . . . I mean, why else have you brought me here to your house?'

'Butterflies? What about butterflies?' the Captain asks.

Laura Ann smiles at her husband and then nods at me. The Captain and I look at her. We wait for her answer. The Captain looks at me, and I look at Laura Ann, and she smiles and nods. I look to the Captain and my colors fade. I find it hard to hang to

the ceiling and eventually fall back to my seat. The time it takes me to fall is sufficient enough for me to lose all the color in my wings and I even start to look like a paratrooper. I know I can't go back to that shape. I can't reenlist. I have to go on to college. College is next. I flap my wings and begin to fly around Laura Ann's pretty head. She giggles and smiles right through me.

'College?' the Captain asks with coy bewilderment. He comes for me.

'I want to shag butterflies,' Laura Ann says standing and grabbing for her net. I realize now that this woman is not my Laura Ann; she's not the valedictorian of Wilbur High. It's unfortunate, but that valedictorian did not know butterflies. It's a travesty.

'Land!'

It's a promise. I continue to fall past Marvin. I fall past three other jumpers. Each paratrooper in his own way tries to warn me of the impending ground. I jettison all excess equipment and smile internally when I think of the shaving cream and shampoo in my ruck-sack exploding on impact. I laugh. I know that the accident inspector will measure the splat radius of my shaving cream in order to calculate how long I was in free-fall. On impact I attempt with all I can muster to make one with God's green earth. 'It's not the impact that'll kill you; it's the bounce.' There it is, earth it seems . . . is colorless and without odor. I will not reenlist . . . I can't . . . how can I reenlist? I think of my maker who promises that I come from dust and will return to dust. I think about Ms. Washington's caterpillar . . . the Monarch butterfly . . . I think about returning to dust. I realize that I'm about to be consummated . . . and I fly.

DAVE BUFANO

Caesar Bufano Brushes His Teeth

I'm making faces again, the sound of scraping
mingling with static from the radio upon which
the world has fallen like a good soldier,
knocking it out of tune.

Last time I went to the dentist he said
now is the time to have those wisdom teeth
out. He showed me some x-rays:
grey-white masses drifting toward
my molars, like old refrigerators, just waiting.
Pointing, he said, *Here.*
They will come when you least expect it.
They will come and ruin your smile.

They'll come and ruin my smile, I think,
the microscopic scraping mingling
with the sound of the world
knockin' out a tune.

All I want for christmas—
is a new radio.

The romans didn't have radio. *Tsk. Tsk.*

Pffft. Marcus Aurelius to campaign this week against the Quadi . . .
"Say to yourself in the early morning:
I shall meet today inquisitive, ungrateful, violent,
treacherous, envious, uncharitable men . . . But I . . . *Pfft*
have seen that the nature . . . *Pfft*
of the man himself who does wrong
is akin to my own . . . *Tsk Tsk*
for we have come into the world to work
together, like feet, like hands, like eyelids,
like the rows of upper and lower teeth."

Pfft (rinse. faces.)

Letter to God or Lover
(whichever comes first)

God, I can't believe it.
You're leaving California
for Boston! You're coming over!
No more long distance on the weekends.
You're right here. But how can I
write this if you're looking
over my shoulder, making faces?
Sometimes you're impossible.

I never told you about passover.
My mother, a good catholic,
fed us small bread, some bitter things.
I was looking through the dark
into the livingroom.
Lighting a short candle, Mother said
we should always act as though christ
were standing right next to us.
I couldn't touch my lasagna.

What was it I was saying?
Never mind, I can't stand it.
Hurry up and kiss me on the mouth.
Tell me I'm the best looking christ-
figure in town. How can you stand there
when I'm standing right next to you!

P.S.
Why don't you visit more often?

Why don't we go out anymore?

Why are your letters so confusing why can't you explain yourself
why am I so evil so afraid of you why do I like you better when I'm
alone?

LORI A. BYRNE

Dyeing Eggs

Your drafty kitchen made humid by the boiling pot
—our time kept by the click of white shells
turning against the salt darkened steel.
You take them, warm and hard to handle,
to their vinegar baths, the tips of your fingers
stained lavender, mauve. I want to ask
if you would hold me that way, cradled
in the nested ends of your muscled hands,
as though I might hatch into something light
and winged. . . . Instead, I watch you rub a candle end
around an egg's wide middle,
in one unbroken border of wax.
Between us lie hard promises,
a dozen tipped, clumsy ovals
cleanly rinsed, ready for coloring.

A Whole Man

Blond strands hang over me
like light from beneath the window shade,
splintered & diffuse,
they brush my eyebrows,
tangle between my fingers,
reveal your dry parted lips
outlined by the yellow sparks of whiskers,
your rapid breath.
My legs fold around your ribs,
& I remember today's patient
—a man our age whose heart flew open
like a screen door with a rust-weary spring,
the sudden surge of blood to the brain
rendering him speechless.
Your tongue finds my mouth,

& in the dark I try to forget
the grief of bathing a man's dead limbs—his eyes,
the keen voice of the newly mute.
But it is your voice
trembling against my cheek,
the solid pitching hull of your body
urging me to scratch a prayer between your capable shoulders.

Baptismal

Once a month my mother went to the sacristy
to collect dirty linen.
She cared nothing for laundry,
yet each time she undid the knots of the loaf-shaped bundle
her hands took on a tenderness reserved for flowers.
She would fill the enamel basin
scattering soap flakes like ashes
across heat-clouded water, lowering
each length of fabric into the bath.
She did all the wringing herself,
laced each altar cloth on the second floor line
where no one could touch them.
While the ropey blue veins of her legs throbbed
and swelled, she'd press communion napkins
until they were dry and devoutly creased.
The next morning Monsignor received her,
praising the pristine folds and starched
mitred corners of her work. He shook holy water
over it, flicking his wet silver pestle like a hand bell.
Mother kneeled and was blessed.
She cared nothing for laundry.

MAGGIE CARNEY

Spitting Images

The calm of the lake
did not reflect my marriage
Spitting, I made rings.

Nixnames

Fart Blossom would quietly open
my bedroom door, let one royally
rip, pull the door closed leaving
me screaming for my life
in a foul fog of rotten eggs.
Looney laughter from the other
side, holding the knob
blocking my escape.
The eldest. He got straight A's.

A good gust of wind and Dumbo could
have navigated himself to China.
A ten pound fire hat worn with
three-year-old pride bent and molded
his ears for life. Flapping his way
through sports he scored highest
in touchdowns and baskets. He
is now a long-haired narc flying
through the streets of Boston.

The kid *a k a* Pug nose. Never
could resist smooshing or poking
his marshmallow-like schnoz.
He never cried . . . just stayed
cross-eyed for a few seconds.
All the incentive we needed

to continue our torment. Later
a few fist fights proved the Pug
had bones in the nozzle.

The nincompoops could never pronounce
Margaret. Maggot. Much worse
when they found out what
it meant. Took me out to the garbage
can just to make sure I knew.
Mine for life after biting into
a store-bought powdered donut
with half a wriggling body.
. . . And I still answer to it.

JOSE CARVALHO

Peter

He spent the last summer
on our shrinking lawn
burnt and frayed around
the edges like that
pot holder that hung
on the Hibachi.
My perennial man defending
his right to dahlia, unable to
accept the loss of his cosmos.

I brought him back
this final season, in a heart-
shaped basket he used for seed.
Selecting for Best Of Show,
I sifted through the baked
lightness and not quite
whiteness of packed talc.

A molar, a bit of brain bone,
some unknown knob on a
thread around my neck,
I painted my face
smudged my chest and raced
through the floating shroud
chasing my valentine cloud
upwind, going for the garden.

Crab Apple

The Branches hold you,
prized purple fruit
hanging heavy and low.
Van Gogh crow;
you hover, toes resting
above the blighted field.
Twisted lips dusted
with pollen, plagued
by bees and flies,
your head swollen
in the noose like
loose chamomile
in a fine china cup;
a black and blue tea
bag; you steep, slowly
spinning in a veil
of apple blossom.

Lunch Hour, Harvard Square

Steaming wanton, egg-drop soup—
lemon grass rising through porcelain
paddy, cubes of tofu settle down
like tumbled stones of
ivory temple, tangled in the vine
of slivered scallion.

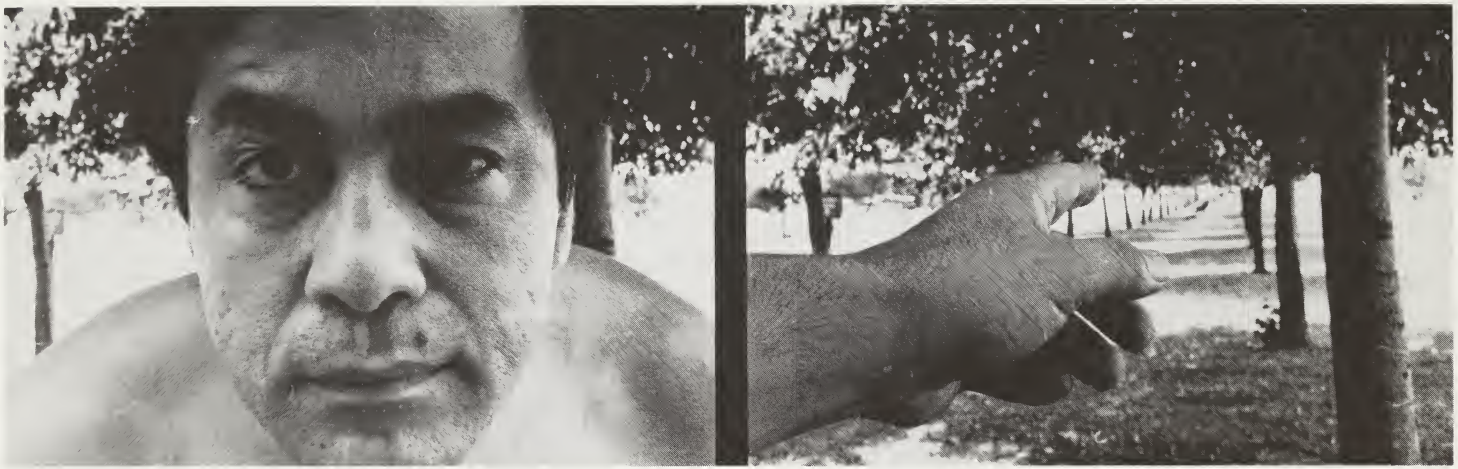
Bountiful fungi, you fill me
with language lost to lunching.
Oh, Holy bowl of Hunan
you hold my great fortune
unravelling now, before me:

It is better sometimes
to travel hopefully
than it is to arrive.

NANCY CLOUGHERTY

I know

you will never again
be that girl who dropped the phone
and fell to the kitchen floor laughing
because of Lark cigarettes;
and I can't go to the parties anymore
or work at any bakery.
And where is that boy
who told me about Burroughs and Jean
Genet and listened to Big Black
into morning? Looking
for a mother? Hiding
in a field somewhere, afraid
that the stars are going to kill him?



CRUZ SANABRIA
untitled

LISA FURST
untitled

LISA FURST
Azul

KRISTEN J. EMACK
Antonella

AUDREY PITTS
untitled

BARRY MAHONEY
Landscape #8

BARRY MAHONEY
Friar's Fortress

JILLIAN BRADY
Papersorting

JULIAN HILL
Absence

JULIAN HILL
Absence

JOHN CATRAMBONE JR.
untitled

JOHN CATRAMBONE JR.
untitled

DONNA HARDCASTLE
untitled

JENNIFER HUBACHECK
Miami Beach

Mt. Auburn Beech

MATTHEW COLANTONIO

Marge

"So let me get this straight," Marge says like it aint nobody's
business,
"the goddamn Egyptians built the Pyramids before anyone invented
math?"

She doubts it; I think.
Marge thinks it must have been God
or little, green alien creatures from Mars or Saturn,
who began digging on opposite sides of the great pointed tombs
and were only an inch or so from accuracy upon union
in the ground below the perfect middle.

Sipping her powder-mixed iced tea and wiping the hot pink lipstick
from her dentures, Marge says
"Well if the big guy's gonna' send us another kid, he'd better do it
before Labor day because I'm goin' down the Cape."

She is carrying on the conversation with the canopy top patio where
her "ass" sits, her "fat ass," as she likes to call it.
"And it aint movin' til' my goddamn soaps are over."

JULIE COLLINS

Dye-Job

I.
I am a white girl in a black box
with a tiny pinhole that permits
a thin column of light to fan out
into particles of fog and dust
that end in the inverted image
of YOUR face on the wall.

YOU are pink-faced and strawberry-nosed
and smiling, but you are upside down
with a hard, coiffed head and an angry mouth
puckered and lined from smoking
on the sly and breathing in hairspray applied
over and over, under which lies
a blue-black dye-job under which hides
WHITE hair with roots that feed
on an oily, papery scalp; showing their stalks
worrying over the harvest, only to be
thwarted by a box of Clairol number nine.

II.
It's time. You let your hair grow gray
as if to say: "I'm tired.
I have a headache. I'm going to sleep."
Dream of me bathing your body
and wrapping it up tight in pink crepe paper

propped in a box where mourners can see you lie
self-consciously while I start the eulogy:
videotaped T.V. ads selling
household cleaners and yard tools...
your stiff, vacant smile slowly turns smug
no bugs in my garden—no stains on my rugs

I push STOP and recall your dull face
and limp body and my torn letters you taped
together and read to get to know me better
and all the poems you dug out of me
with the savage spoon of sentimentality

oh mom when awake you are dead forgive
me but please please stay asleep

Dawn

The pond is an empty space mirror
with no reflection, so
we plunge from the path into
the naked woods where we wade and kick
through a woven sweater of leaves
that whisper like corduroys with
each step, shushing us into silence.

You are quick and bold and climb
the rocky hill easily, but I am
tired from a night of fitting
your small, strange lips into
elaborate kisses, and stop
in sudden mid-climb terror
to tremble-cling in a stone pocket.

I glance up and a startling patchwork
of browns and greens look down
to greet me—large eyes so lush
and round and sincere, with those
Christmas caroler cheeks and moist
blushing mouth, I remember
your tender belly kisses

and passionate promises and
long flung hair that tossed
and tickled against me.
Like looking up to rediscover
the vast, forgotten splendor
of a blue sky, I am blinded
and gladly take your hand.

Ad-men Make Lousy Poets

inside my cracked coconut
stirs a warm, pelvic pudding
that cools at the top
to a thin, red skin
you can scrape and skim
off, like an abortion

hollow me out
with white-gloved hands
scoop up my fleshy soup
and splash the stuff
full in your face
Is it flowery?

mine is no girlie gazpacho
not fresh, not cold
but slow and strong like aging mold
no perfumes or powders
just the thick, warm chowder
of an ailing woman

Join me in a glass of vinegar
and water champagne. We'll toast
to your bloodied hands and smoke
super tampon cigars.
drugged and drunk

your panty shields can't protect you now
as I mace you in the face
with feminine spray
strap on a maxi-pad-with-wings
flap
and fly away

COREY FISK

Antigone

I am not pretty, you know.
My face would launch no ships;
I can hear the whispers,
"Poor Haemon, it's a wonder . . ."

I'm no enchantress, I have no magic song
to entrap the wandering Ulysses.
I'd rather be wandering with him,
if you want the honest truth.

Besides, there always seems to be
a lover who betrays the witch
as she steals for him, lies for him
and in the end, dies for him.

But who would bother betraying me?
After all, I cannot tell the future
from the mud dried on my hands,
except what it will be for me.

Maybe if I knew where to look,
I might try to steal from a god
and bring the trophy back
to rescue my loving husband.

But I won't have a husband
though sweet Haemon chose me,
the strong-headed girl with untidy fingers,
over beautiful Iseme.

The only thing I'll have
as I lie here in this tomb
is the satisfaction that
just this once
something got done right.

FRANK GAUGHAN

BOURBON, GINGER ALE AND ALL THINGS THAT FOLLOWED

Joanna called me at 2 o'clock in the morning, asked me to meet her on Broadway and 47th. I hadn't seen or heard from her in almost a year and I'd assumed that she had gone forever. "I thought you joined the Peace Corps." I was half asleep so I didn't catch her reply, but the gist of it was they didn't accept her ("you needed a farming major or something") and she was alone and had just arrived at the Port Authority from Chicago.

I told her I'd be there in twenty minutes—showered quick and threw something presentable on. Clothing aside, I looked horrible—pale, hollow in the cheeks with a gaunt, almost fragile frame. I remembered with envy the days when I was fit, jogging home from football practice in full gear just to give me an edge on Saturday's game. Then, at some point, I realized all that work and practice was for nothing. I quit. I think a point came when I quit everything and now I look like shit and I wonder what I would have looked like today had I not quit. But for the time being, I had a three-quarter length army jacket; I'd just keep it buttoned. I even convinced myself it didn't look so bad, despite the holes and frayed sleeves. Plus, the cold November air would put some color back in my cheeks.

My face was numb from the wind and I figured running would warm me, but then I decided that a cigarette would probably be more relaxing.

"Wa'cho need, wa'cho need, wa'cho need man?"

That was Pancho. I was an occasional customer of his (though more so, of late), but I didn't really want anything right now. I had smoked too many cigarettes and was feeling nauseous. I wanted to go back to bed. Joanna was late. I had no idea where she could be. I was only supposed to meet her down the block from the bus station. I started to wonder if someone was playing joke on me or if I had even heard her right. Maybe she was waiting at Grand Central or maybe at Penn Station. Maybe she wasn't showing. I decided a drink would settle my nerves if not my

stomach. I walked over to the deli across from the station and bought a pint of MD 20/20. I always loved cheap port. I'd walk around the city some days and sit on the steps of churches and watch the people walk by and sip on a bottle of cheap port and wonder where in the world they were all rushing off to. I drank my port and thought that my occupation was perhaps the most noble of all occupations—dreamer, drinker, wanderer.

I had the change ready and walked out and quickly unscrewed the cap. Wine always warms your insides from the minute you swallow it. Joanna was maybe half a block away and these big slow falling snowflakes had just begun falling gently on the wet street and sticking to my hair and shoulders. She really was beautiful, you know. She was a lady and I always felt like a gentleman when around her—even if I was drunk out of my tits. She smiled after finally recognizing me. I wondered if she missed me.

"It's been a long time," I said.

"Coffee," she said, "I love coffee. Is there a diner open?" We walked a few blocks to an all-night place near seventh avenue and sat at a window booth. We both drank our coffee black and I put my MD right on the table to temper the hot bitter coffee taste with the cold, sweet, buzzing taste of my wine. Her deal was this: She wanted to start a youth center for all the fuck-ups in the neighborhood—which was nice I suppose, but I didn't see a bunch of drug dealing hoodlums stopping in for a game of hoops. But you never know. Besides, I wanted to ask her out. It wouldn't be a good idea to start cutting up her ideas within ten minutes of her arrival. She was excited to see me, but I could tell that she was shocked as well by the way she was studying me.

"Where are you sleeping tonight, Joanna?"

"I wanted to sleep with you, but . . . It's just that you scare me now. I mean look at you. "You're a drunk. You're all bones . . . and your eyes."

I sensed a you-drink-too-much-lecture coming, but instead she said, "You're so smart. Why are you fucking your life away like this?"

And I suppose her question drove right to the heart of the matter. I had always been able to fend off the lectures before, but this was different. Joanna asked me a question and I had no means of answering it. I had no way of explaining to her or anyone how I moved from Summa Cum Laude to bum in two short years. I had no means of explaining why I liked sitting alone in an alley behind the theater district and getting stoned. I just

liked it, that's all. But I really didn't want to answer the question.

"We should get going," I told her. But Joanna wouldn't leave and she demanded an answer.

"I just can't say. I guess I always thought that this was the life. I always wanted to be a bum. It's a funny thing but from when I was very little, I remember looking at the bums and thinking that this was probably the closest I could ever come to being untouchable and I had always wanted to be untouchable."

"But why?"

"Cause, I want my life to be mine. Look at her." I pointed to our waitress. "Her life isn't hers. It's ours and her manager's and her boss'. That's ridiculous. I may be a bum, but I can travel around and drink and live."

"Where have you gone? Ever?"

"I know. I know. I haven't gone anywhere yet, but I'm saving up for bus fare to Frisco or LA so I can ride out the winter in style."

"And what's going to change except the scenery?"

"Maybe I don't want anything to change. We should go."

Joanna wasn't happy with me, but that was tough. If she liked me and wanted to be with me then she'd have to accept my bum-ness for what it was—a vocational calling. I let her pay the bill and we left. I never wanted to stop drinking and getting high. The only reason I went to school in the first place was because I had always wanted to be an educated drunk. And indeed I was. I could translate Latin and speak in Middle English and I had read all 37 of Shakespeare's plays and the bible cover to cover and I can honestly say that I like St. Paul better than Jesus. Furthermore, the Chinese Buddhists have it all over the Judeo-Christians.

But all of that is neither here nor there. It was time to go home. The sky was pink at the horizon and shading over to blue. We walked down the street, past Pancho balled up in a doorway. Joanna squeezed my hand and said "That's your role model? That's who you want to be?"

"Where are you staying tonight, Joanna?"

"With a friend down the village. Will you call me tomorrow?"

"I'd like to cook dinner for you tomorrow night if you're not too angry at me or anything. I mean, maybe all this is just a phase or something that I have to do before getting a real job or something like that, Joanna. I'm paying rent and taxes. It's not like I'm a total waste of time and breath."

"How many days in the last month have you been sober?"

"Definitely none. I've been fucked up at least once a day for the last three years. But you know that. I remember when you thought hanging out with me and getting fucked up was the bomb. You thought that we had it all over the nerds and had it all over the social drinkers. We raged every night, Joanna. You're standing here and talking to me like you don't know the deal, but you do. You know how fun this shit is."

"I've never been fucked up alone."

"You will be. It's not that bad. What's wrong with being fucked up alone? Is it any different from watching television alone? Isn't it all just recreation. And after all what is recreation but *re*-creation?"

"Be sober tomorrow, for dinner at least?"

"We're having dinner—a bottle of wine, maybe?"

"Fine, two glasses each, no more."

I watched Joanna get into a cab and watched as the tail lights faded into a mash of other cabs and tail lights down seventh avenue. I stopped in another deli and bought another pint of MD and finished it on the steps of an apartment building. When I got home that morning I realized that I was supposed to be at work an hour ago. I called in sick and busied myself with dinner preparations, which was more preparation than you might think. I had to clean the apartment and scrub the dishes, vacuum the rug and clean the furniture. I finished at around five that afternoon and showered.

I didn't need a drink. But I did definitely want one after all that cleaning. And as I reached up for the scotch I stopped. I can't even really describe to you why. I just stopped reaching. The next thing you know I was pouring all the booze down the drain. The scotch, the vodka, the gin, the vermouth everything, even the beer. I still wish I understood why. It was almost like a physical fitness kick, you know, where people go out and buy running shoes and then go out jogging for a week only to realize that the reason they never went jogging before this day is because jogging sucks and then the running shoes go into the closet. It was like that.

Except I never even finished pouring out the last bottle—it wasn't even good booze. It was a big plastic jug of Popov Vodka. It was in the back of the cabinet, in the corner, behind the Wheaties, past the sugar.

The first slug burned down and little streams drooled down my chin to my still unknotted tie and I sat down on the kitchen floor. I was ten again, curled in the kitchen corner watching my father beat my bicycle lock off the cabinet door with a hammer. "Mommy said she was only playing, Daddy."

"Shut up, you little shit." Bash. Bash. Bash. And I watched his big bricklaying hands dismantle the rest of my three dollar chain. There were Wheaties on the floor then too, and a broken jar of spaghetti sauce with broken, uncooked pasta shells scattered about. I was screaming and my baby sister was screaming. I held an unbroken pasta shell between my fingers because somewhere in my mind I believed that if that shell broke then we'd all die, right there in the kitchen. But if I could just hold that shell and keep it safe then everything would be fine. Down came the Wesson oil, bounced, child-safe plastic. Then the vanilla extract. He must have drank that because it was empty. He finally got to the bourbon—I. W. Harpers. I remember him putting it up there. I could've even told him where it was, right behind the extract. As soon as my father got his hands on the bourbon it was as if a storm had past. I remember him sitting down peacefully at the kitchen table and pouring the bourbon over a glass of ice and then walking calmly to the fridge for the ginger ale. He said, "You kids want soda or anything?" Here we were thinking that our father had turned into a maniac beating the life out of a bicycle lock with a hammer. All he wanted was a bourbon and ginger ale and he was more than happy to sit at the table with his kids and have a drink. But for some reason, no one wanted him to have that drink. He never missed a day of work in his life with the exception of a flu or something minor like that, but never missed a day due to hangover. He was never fired for drinking. He was home for dinner more than I was and he never, drunk or sober, raised a hand to us. I only remember him raising his voice twice in all the years he was alive. In all respects, he was a kind and decent man and all he wanted was a bourbon and ginger ale. If mom could have her chocolates, why couldn't dad have a drink? I remember thinking at that moment that my dad was the bravest guy in town. Someone locked his drink up with a chain and he beat the door off the cabinet. I was so proud of him. I sat down with my little sister, who was still sobbing, and had a ginger ale with him.

Well, I was thinking all of this and was having a couple of vodkas on the rocks and by this time, the bottle was considerably lighter. The doorbell had been ringing and ringing. I hadn't even heard it. It wasn't until I stood up that I realized that I was drunk—"pretty well drunk," I said to myself. Joanna was crying, bawling like my baby sister. There was something in her hand, long and cylindrical. The bottle fell out of my hand and bounced

because it was plastic and some of the cheap vodka splashed up and over our faces and clothes.

She dropped what she was holding. I looked down and saw a bouquet of flowers soaking in the puddle of vodka. Irises. She remembered that irises were my favorite—the poor man's orchid. I felt sick with all that booze sitting on an empty stomach. That crying. I just couldn't deal with all that crying. "Shut up you bitch," and I don't even remember hitting her. I just remember picking her up off the floor. I tried to say, "I'm sorry," but the words stuck in my throat.

FRIDA GENERZOVA

SINK OR SWIM

We came to the United States. I mean we finally made it; it was a lot of paper work and a big headache. But thank god we're here. Now all we have to do is adjust to American life. The first step is to learn English. We're not going to survive if we don't know the language, my Mom said.

That's why we're sitting in front of the TV for five hours everyday. We're learning English. We even fall asleep in front of the TV. TV is not fun for me anymore. I'd rather sleep; that way I could have a dream in the Russian language. But we're not going to give up, and my Mom's eyes get red from concentration on some stupid movie that she would never watch unless she had to. I think we felt like someone who was thrown in the water but didn't know how to swim. They are going to learn how to swim real fast, or die.

The time when we felt like having fun we would go to the supermarket. There are a lot of different packages with different names on them. Who knows what they mean? I bought one with a cat on it. I like pictures of cats. Who would think that it is a food for cats in such a pretty can? I thought it had a strange taste. But America is such a different country; so I didn't think it was unusual for it to have a strange taste.

But the cat food was nothing compared to the time when I could not get out of the restroom. For some reason the door just would not open. I felt stupid. I couldn't even ask anyone to open the door because I could not speak English. Now I understand how mute people feel. After that, I wrote to my friends who were going to come to America, "Be careful with the bathrooms."

For some reason I had a lot of episodes like that. For example, when I was working as a babysitter, I spoke some English, but not very well. The telephone rang, and someone asked for Mrs. Gold. "Nobody's home," I said. I think the person on the other end was surprised by my answer. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am a ghost of Mrs. Gold's residence," I answered. I did not mean to joke; I wanted to say that I was a guest in her house, but I screwed up the word. In five minutes policemen came to

check what was going on. They were telling me how bad it is to joke like that with the police.

When I was in Russia, I imagined the United States in different ways. For example, I never thought that we would live in the apartment we live in now. That's not what they were showing on the TV in Russia when I was there. On TV, the apartments didn't have this gray color of walls, and I never thought that the apartment itself would look so bad. My brother-in-law said, "Well, that is capitalism. Some people are rich, some people are poor." I guess we're not rich yet. "Not all in one day," he says. It doesn't make me feel good though.

"I want to go back," I said.

"Everybody does, but nobody will," says my sister.

"Why?"

"You will see."

I'm trying to see something, but don't see anything except for some movie that my Mom is watching, trying to learn English.

Americans seem funny to me. They always ask, "How are you?" but don't even wait for an answer. Why do they ask, then? There are no commercials on TV in Russia, and when I watched commercials in America for the first time, I got an impression that all Americans do is eat hamburgers. I got an impression that all Americans do is eat hamburgers, cheeseburgers, and cookies that somehow happen to be without fat. Americans are able to make even butter without fat. I heard the word cholesterol for the first time when I came to Boston. I was wondering what it is and why everyone is afraid of it. Nobody cares about cholesterol in Russia, probably because there are more problems there than cholesterol. When I came to America for the first time, I got an impression that there are only two problems in the USA: cholesterol and gays in the army.

In Russia I thought that America was exciting. I mean something like a lot of lights, houses with a thousand floors. Who would have thought there are many one and two floor houses? Who would have thought that Americans dress pretty casually, and that the clothes they wear are not any better than the clothes people wear in Russia? Who would have thought that the T station is dirty, with mice running around, and that people here work most of the time, instead of having fun?

Now it is time to think about a job. My mom is sending resumes. All my relatives say in one voice that she's crazy. "You could not possibly get a professional job when you are fifty and really don't speak English." But that didn't stop her. She said

that she is not going to work in the pharmacy for the rest of her life. That's not what she came here for. She's sending hundreds of resumés, and then, she's gets an interview. "But I don't have a suit," she said. "How could you possibly not have one," my sister replied. "Everyone here is supposed to have a suit. I mean you would have nothing but a suit."

My mom doesn't understand that. "Who cares about a suit," she says. "I don't think the people who have suits work better than the people who don't." Go talk to her, she's not an American. But we finally go to the store and buy her one. Mom looks at herself in the mirror like she never saw her own reflection before.

"I'm not comfortable," she says at last.

"It's only for an interview," says my sister. She is losing her patience. "Come on, we don't have the whole day."

"What do I have to say on an interview?" That is the real problem. We don't have such things as interviews in Russia, and I'm not sure how she is going to make it. She calls to all our relatives and asks everything about interviews. She even asks if the interviewer is going to have lunch with her, and if so what should she get. "What's the difference? How should I know?" How can we know that? She has never had an interview before.

On the day of the interview, she looks like a school girl who's going to take an exam. It is funny to see my Mom like that. She wears her new suit and new shoes. She even tinted her hair a different color. I don't know why she decided that blond hair is good for an interview. Probably one of my aunts told her that. Her face has an expression as if she just came back from a funeral. "Mom, smile." Now that's even worse. Her lips changed their shape, but I don't think it looks like a smile now.

No luck. "Mom, it was stupid to expect something after the first interview." She doesn't believe it. "I want to go back," she says, and takes a relaxant.

I think after three interviews she got a job. All our relatives are surprised. "That could have happened only with you. You are lucky."

But I don't think it is luck. It is something good about this country that I did not see at first: if you really want something, and you try hard enough to get it, you can. Only with time I started to see what I did not see before. I started to see that Americans are different from Russians, but they are not that different. Much of the time they like the same things as we do. My apartment is actually not that bad. The walls are almost white. Why did I think they were gray? Even though I'm still

homesick, it is not that bad anymore. I almost never think about it during the day. Only at night when I close my eyes I see the streets of Kiev, the city where I used to live. I see myself walking through the streets, lights in the five-floor houses at night, the windows of the stores, the trolley that I used to take on the way home, faces that I used to see. But then, morning comes and I'm too busy to think about it any more. "And that's a good sign," my sister said. "That means you are adjusting to life in the USA."

FRANKIE HENG

RELENTLESS

Where am I? I do not know. Things seem to happen so quickly. A year flits by like a blinking light on the street. Days are here and vanished. Nights have come and disappeared. Summer seems to be like yesterday, but Fall has already passed away.

What will the world be if time is not moving? I will not know. A beautiful, quiet night is moving swiftly like a drifting cloud in an empty sky. Yesterday, my nieces and nephews were small, still playing marbles in the playground, going to kindergarten, doing chores like normal kids used to do. But yesterday, when I saw them, they were so big, so tall, and no longer the little kids I used to know.

I wake up in silence, still lying in my bed, surrounded by the darkness. I am expatriated from my country. I feel the cold on my feet. The blanket is strewn on the floor. Snow is still falling. In the darkness, I see my dream.

The broken vase, filled with wilted, dying flowers, is deserted on the round table near the bookshelf. The old, rusty typewriter, left unused beneath the desk. A naked body in a painting hanging on the wall smiles at me. Light flickers. Music plays on. A dog stops howling. The new melody of a strange sound comes from the outside. A moving car on Broadway. I feel sick to see the falling snow. In the shadow, I see my past, and if I turn around, I lose my dream.

A bus stops. Passengers go off and on board. The calmness in the air. Quietness in the sky. Twilight in the realm of dusk. Silence in the street. The tortuous road behind my house. A homeless man walks back and forth on the pavement across from my house, a hopeless smile on his face, hostility from his staring eyes, a great anguish from his words. Questions are urging me. In the restless moment, I surrender to the past.

Snow was still paving over Broadway. The naked, leafless tree stood persistent against the winter wind. My eyes were strained, and slowly began to close as I became unable to resist the past. I was drowning and sinking deep like a wrecked ship in

the ocean. Oh! My body was dying and drowning deep in the sea, the sea of reveries and dreams, into the abyss of yesterday's sorrow and pain.

My tear was dried with my dying soul. I felt like a zombie. In a deep, blue sky I saw a falling angel with a broken harp. I saw a flowing current of the Mekong River hastening itself into the Big Lake before the dry season came, like the remains of the frozen snow that was dribbling along the sidewalk, pacing itself into the blossom Spring. I saw each day look bleaker and darker, holding for me no promise or happiness. My dream began to dwindle with time, and a day was nothing but just a waking moment before the twilight.

I longed to see the beautiful, bright light of peaceful sunshine, a full moon in a blue sky with glittering stars, the thick, green grass of the prairie, a dead, falling leaf in the dusty road near the river, the yellow stumble rice that stands straight to the sky in the paddy rice fields, against the sun's rays, the granary rice behind my backyard, the fish in the muddy pond; I longed to hear the drum from the Temple. How could I, if I was still in my bed and far away from my country?

I heard a singing voice from another room, smelled my older brother's cooking from the kitchen, and the coffee in its cup. Who could that be, Anna or Princess? I did not know. Anna is a restless and idealistic woman who is in search of her prince. She comes like a storm and disappears like a shadow. She moves silently like a breeze of the winter wind and drifts like an oblivious rain in the spring. She is a nocturnal dreamer and an escapist. She is a relic of a goddess from the far east. What is she doing here, in Chelsea, the city of frozen snow?

I saw the idyllic beauty of her familiar face ignore me, insult me, despise me, and in her evanescent beauty I saw a great despair on her face. An impecunious man with a complacent attitude refused to accept the money from the people. On the river, a man was paddling with a broken oar. In the far distance of my dream, I watched her slipping away from my fate.

What time is it? Why should I want to know? Time is always here, eternally. It comes into being and passes away. Time makes the past obsolete and the future inevitable. Time makes successes and failures, determines our fate and our future, changes our lives, replaces our hope, extinguishes our dreams, expropriates our love. We are not the proprietors of time, we are the possessions of time. We make choices, but time determines the way.

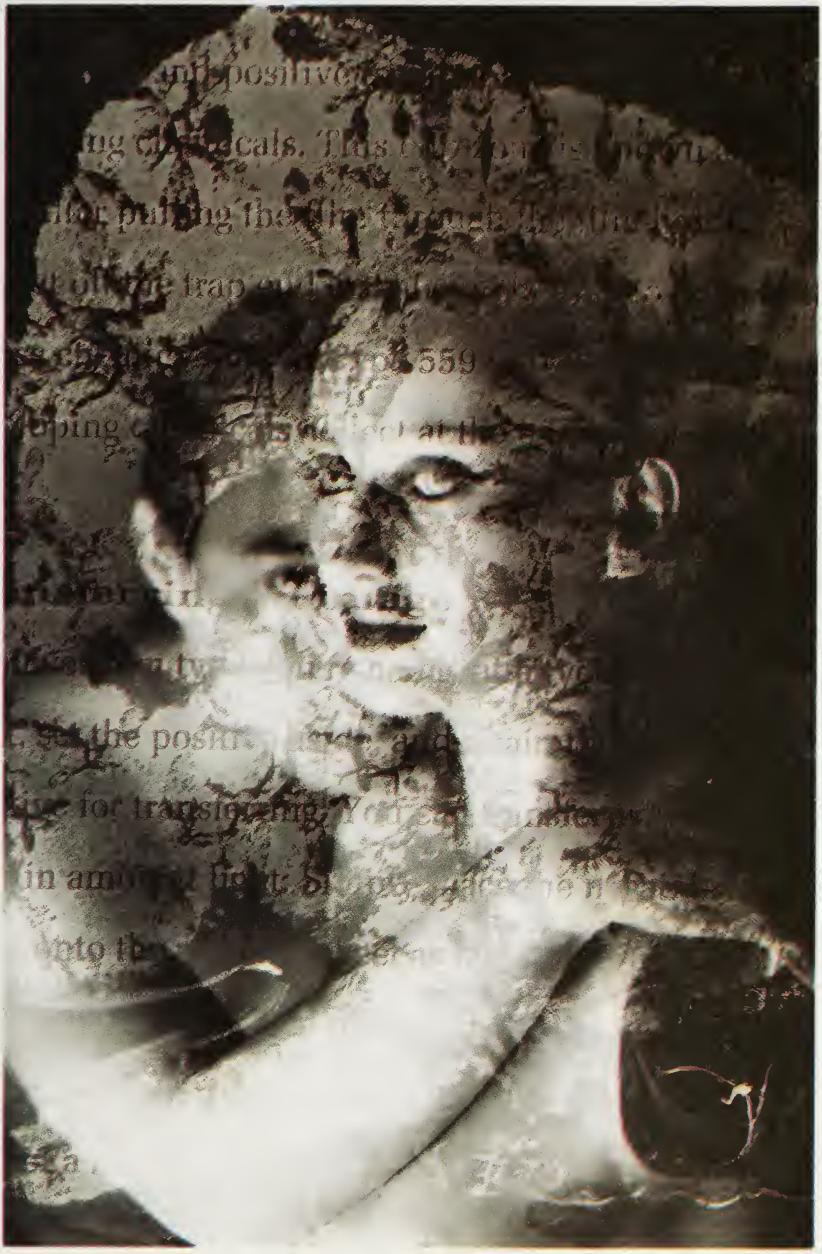
The room is filled with cigarette smoke. The ashtray is full of cigarette butts. A small red table is full of coffee cups. The Television is still on. The sky is gray. Snow stops falling. Silence is shattered in the realm of darkness outside my house. The coffee is done, and I think it is time to get up. The phone and the doorbell ring. Who would that be, Armindo, Sean, David, or the unexpected stranger? How should I know?

M. KATRIN GAZI
Undying Beauty
oil on canvas (18x24″)

FUKIKO CUDHEA
untitled
linocut block print (8x10″)

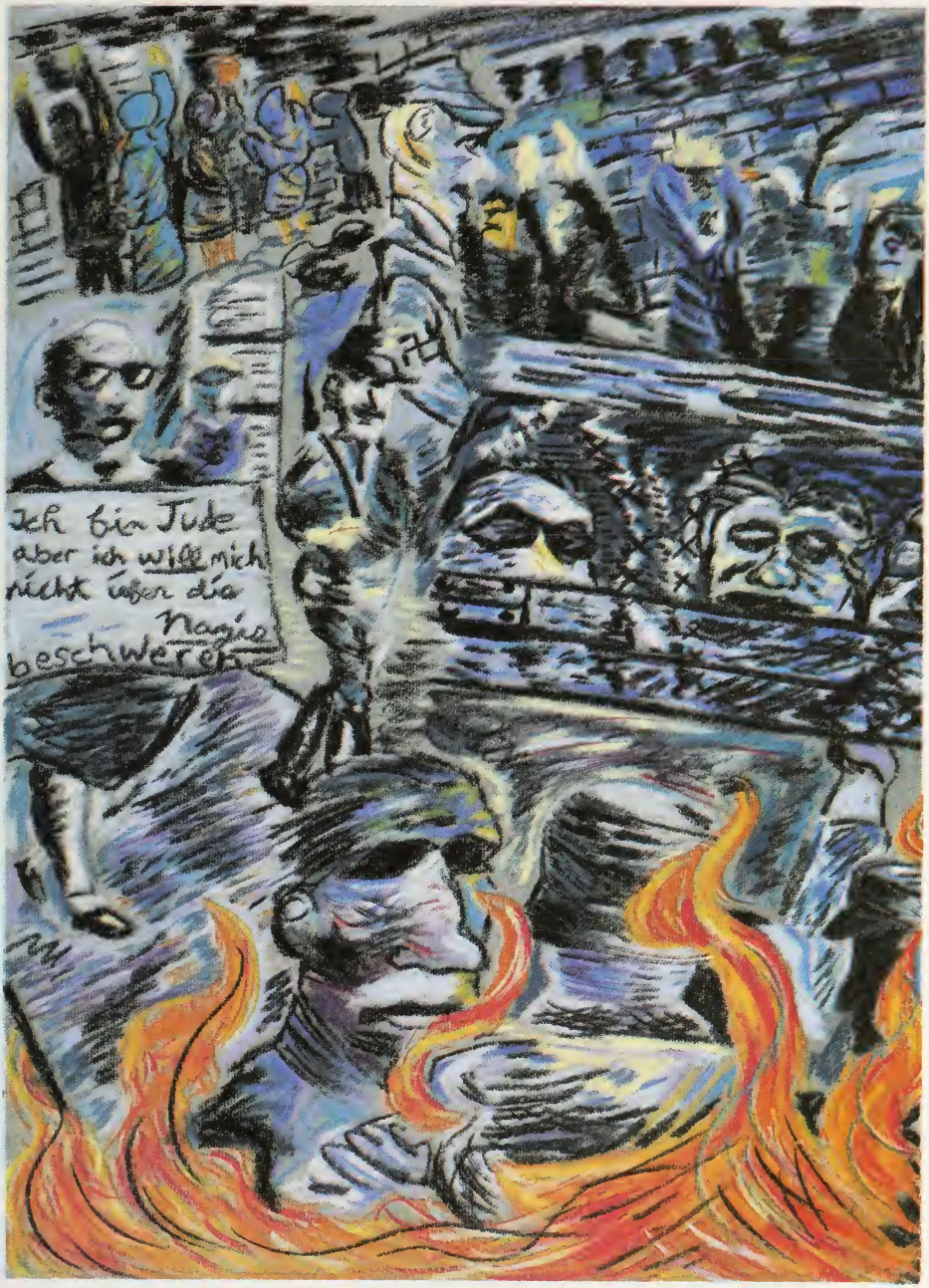
SALLY BERNARDINA SERAPHIN
Sunflower
oil pastel on paper (18x24″)

CHUN K. SETO
untitled
Polaroid Type 55 contact print, copper-bronze toned



CHUN K. SETO
untitled
Polaroid Type 55 contact print, copper-bronze toned

KATHLEEN WELLS
Portrait with Word Slaw
oil stick on paper (14x16")



BERNARD MEANEY
"Jch bin Jude aber ich *will* mich
nicht uber die Nazis beschweren"
"I am Jewish but I do not want *to*
complain about the Nazis"
pastel on paper (18x24")

ANDREA KONDRACKE
The Orb ***and detail***
ceramic (10″ high)

MARY JOHNSTON

HEARTS OF GOLD

The smell of perfume was overwhelming. It wasn't any one particular scent, but instead, a horrible collision of too many different flowers and spices. An invisible organ provided background music while people spoke to each other quietly, creating a hum that reminded Maddy of church. She tugged on her mother's hand.

"Mama, is Grampa here yet?"

"No, honey. He went to finish some of the arrangements. But do you remember Mrs. Wheeler? She was Mother Amy's sister."

Of course she remembered Mrs. Wheeler. Who could forget those breasts? Maddy met her at the family reunion last summer, and immediately found herself wondering if this woman could see her own feet. Her chest seemed to enter a room long before she did, and although she was nice enough, Maddy always felt distracted around her.

"Little Madeline. You've grown up so much since last summer. How old are you now, anyway?"

"Ten."

"Well I'll bet your grandmother would have been so proud of you for being here today."

"She wasn't really my grandmother."

"I know honey. But she loved all of your grandpa's little children as if they were her own." Maddy looked at her blankly, and then turned to her mother.

"Maddy, I think it's time we go up to the coffin. You remember what I told you, don't you? She's going to look like she's asleep, and in a way, she is. Her body's at rest because her soul is with God. Are you ready?"

"Yes Mama."

They got in line behind the others. Maddy watched carefully as Uncle Albert knelt and crossed himself. A woman she'd never seen laid a rose on Mother Amy's chest. Maddy remembered what her friend Audrey told her about her grandfather's wake. She said that everyone was whispering to each other when suddenly, her grandmother ran toward the

casket, threw herself on top of her grandfather, and wailed, "I'm going with you, Gino! Take me too!" Maddy wondered what she would do if that happened here tonight, but as she looked at the vacant faces around her, it didn't seem likely.

She approached the coffin and knelt on the cushion. There was an awful sheen to Mother Amy's skin that reminded Maddy of the figures she'd seen in a wax museum. And she didn't appear to be sleeping as much as she appeared to be pretending to be asleep. Her mouth was too tight, as if her lips were concealing clenched teeth. And the hands. Oh, those hands, with their rope-like veins. They always looked like they'd be more comfortable strangling a chicken for dinner than stroking a cheek, or handling a photograph. Even now, as they lay folded across her stomach, they appeared to grasp each other too tightly.

But when Maddy looked back to Mother Amy's face, she suddenly realized she had never seen her forehead look so relaxed. Those two hard vertical lines between her eyes were still there, but the rage was gone. Maddy soon realized something else, too. She could no longer smell all that perfume, or even the scent of the many Sister/Friend/Husband/Brother flower wreaths that were only a few feet away. Up here at the coffin, just the sight of Mother Amy filled her nostrils with the stench of old liquor.

The young girl felt dizzy. She stood up slowly and found a seat next to two women who were talking quietly. To Maddy's amazement, one of them had blue hair. She turned to Maddy.

"Well, hello. You're Madeline Kristoff, aren't you? What a big girl you are, coming to your grandmother's wake. Hello, Barbara. I'm so sorry about your stepmother. I was just telling your daughter it's very nice that she could come here to pay her respects. What a shame though, isn't it? How is your father doing?"

"Actually, he's doing quite well. Amy's been sick for the past year, you know. I think he's just glad she's not suffering anymore. We're all going to miss her, though. How are you doing, Esther?"

"I hold my own. I keep myself busy with the Lady's Auxiliary at the V.F.W. It helps me keep my Arnie alive. He's been gone five years in June. Amy though, I had no idea she was so sick. She was a wonderful woman."

"Heart of gold, that Amy. Heart of gold," said the other one. "Just like her not to let on about her suffering. Don't you think so Madeline? I'll bet you were the apple of her eye. She always loved children. She could never do enough for you kids, truly the

most generous person I've ever known. A living angel, that's what she was."

"Aunt Nancy said she was a drunk," replied Maddy.

It was the kind of quiet that followed the crash when someone dropped his tray in the school cafeteria.

"Honey, I think you might have misunderstood," her mother said quietly. Her jaw was tight and she seemed to be talking through her teeth.

But Maddy looked directly at her mother. "No," she said. "I did not misunderstand. She's right over there—go ask her." Now Aunt Nancy was looking over at them with a puzzled expression.

"Maddy, there's Grandpa. Didn't you say you wanted to see him? I'll bet he could use a big hug from you."

Grandpa looked drained. So often when he'd see her, he'd scoop her up and dance her around the room, but now, just walking seemed to require all of his effort. She went over to him, but as soon as she got within a few feet of her grandfather, a circle of people closed in tightly around him. Maddy found herself at eye level with their lower backs.

"She was a great woman." "Let me know if there's ANYTHING we can do." "You have to take care of yourself. Amy would have wanted that." "You were the love of her life, you know." "We'll all miss her terribly." "Heart of gold in that woman, heart of gold." After trying several times to find an opening in this human ring, Maddy gave up. It was as if she were invisible. She began to wonder what she was doing here.

"She's too young to understand," her father had said.

"No, she isn't. I think it would be good for her to understand that death is a fact of life," her mother argued.

"What do you think, Maddy? Do you want to say a final goodbye to Mother Amy?" asked her father.

"Yes."

But now that they were here, Maddy didn't know what was expected of her. Her mother told her that they would all come to the wake to remember Mother Amy together, but it seemed that everyone here was remembering someone else. And just who were all these people? The only friends Mother Amy had were Grandpa and a little sterling silver flask she kept tucked inside the pocket of her house sweater.

Except for the time she forgot it on the kitchen counter.

Maddy picked it up and ran her fingers over the flowers embossed on its surface. When she opened the cap to inspect its contents, the old woman appeared out of nowhere and tore the

container out of her hands. The amber liquid flew out of the flask and landed in a long, thick puddle across the linoleum floor.

"Now look what you've done!" she screamed.

"I'm sorry Moth—," Maddy started.

"You just can't keep your hot little hands out of other people's things, can you? That's your problem, young lady. You don't know your place at all. The things your mother lets you get away with! If you were my daughter, I'd straighten you right out!" She scrubbed the area furiously with a dishrag while she yelled at Maddy. "Why can't you be more like your cousin Sharon?"

Just then, they heard footsteps at the back door. The older woman threw the dishrag under the sink and shoved the flask into her sweater just as Maddy's mother entered the kitchen. "Hi Mother. Maddy—hey honey, what's the matter? You look like you've lost your last friend." After a long silence, she asked, "Are you ready to go home?"

"Yes Mama."

"Thanks for taking care of Maddy. We'll see you over the weekend, okay? Maddy, do you have a hug for Mother Amy?"

Maddy felt as if her shoes had been nailed to the floor. She looked to her mother and then back to Mother Amy, who was smiling.

"Of course she has a hug for me!" she said and reached down to Maddy. The aromatic blend of the amber liquid and Listerine was making her sick, and Maddy felt every muscle in her body go stiff. After what seemed to be a very long minute, Mother Amy finally let her go.

Outside, her mother asked her what had happened.

"Nothing Mama," replied Maddy.

There were so many times she wanted to talk about these incidents, but Mother Amy had a way of letting her know that what she had done was not careless, or mischievous, but inherently evil. And if what she had done was half the violation the old woman made it out to be, then Maddy was sure she didn't want her mother to know about it.

There was the time that she and Sharon had been playing house, only this time, Maddy was pretending to be pregnant. She stuffed a couch pillow underneath her dress, and both girls agreed that she looked a lot like Carol Marold's mother did just before she had Carol's little brother. Then Mother Amy walked in.

"NOW what are you doing? Maddy this is just what's going to happen to you if you don't straighten out. Does your mother

know what you're showing your cousin? You and your boy-crazy ideas!"

Maddy had no idea what boys had to do with any of this.

Then there was the time she woke up to Mother Amy screaming at her. "You had to go and ruin it for everyone didn't you! Well I'm not going to take you and Sharon to the art museum now and it's all your fault!"

At first, Maddy thought she was still asleep, but within seconds, she realized this nightmare was really happening. "What did I do?"

"What did you do? Like you don't know, right? I don't know why I agreed to let you stay here for the weekend. I thought we'd go to the art museum, get lunch, and go shopping for clothes—just the three of us. But that wasn't enough, was it? I go to all the trouble of planning it and you make it so none of us can go!"

"Why can't we go?"

"Because of that filthy mouth of yours!" Mother Amy stormed out of the bedroom. Maddy scrambled after her.

"What?"

"You wouldn't say that word in your sleep if you didn't say it when you were awake!"

"Which word?"

"As if you don't know. You want to come off like you're Little Miss Innocent. Well, I'm on to you. I know who you are! You're the Devil's child!"

Maddy looked over at the casket. She half expected the body inside to sit up suddenly, turn directly toward her, point her long thick finger, and scream the words "Devil's child! Devil's child!"

Maddy had tried so hard to get on her good side, but she finally realized that was not going to happen. It could not happen, because with Mother Amy, Maddy never had a clue as to which rules were being broken. It was as if the old woman made them up as she went along.

"Can I go out in the hall for a few minutes?" Maddy asked her mother.

"Sure honey, but don't go any farther than that. We're going to be leaving soon."

Maddy sat down on the stairs near the foyer. The air was noticeably thinner out here and she breathed a sigh of relief. She was suddenly very tired, and leaned her head against the wall. "Why can't you be more like your cousin Sharon?" It was a question she would learn to ask herself.

Maddy loved her cousin. The two of them had been inseparable since they were toddlers, but Sharon had a way of coming out of any situation smelling like a rose. Maddy didn't. Never had this difference been more obvious than the time she saw the photograph Mother Amy had taken of the two of them last summer. There they were in their Sunday dresses, posing in front of the television at Grandpa's. Sharon was smiling and performing her best curtsy, while Maddy looked straight-faced into the camera with her arms folded across her chest. When Maddy saw that photograph, her heart sunk. Mother Amy got her again.

"Maddy, why are you sitting out here by yourself?"

She looked up to find her Aunt Betty hovering over her. Maddy suddenly felt the tear on her cheek and tried to wipe it away.

"Honey, have you been crying?" her aunt asked, cupping her face. "Are you feeling sad about Mother Amy? We'll all miss her. But don't you worry, Maddy, God has a special place all ready for her."

"I hope so," Maddy said. Just then, her mother came out to join them.

"There you are. Maddy, we're going to leave now, okay?"

"Okay. But I'd like to see her one more time. Can I do that?"

"Sure. I'll go with you."

"I can go up by myself."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

As she approached the coffin, the bits and pieces of conversation around her seemed to grow louder. "At least she didn't suffer. They said she died in her sleep. I hope I go like that. " Maddy knelt on the cushion. "Isn't that something? Little Maddy Kristoff is handling herself like a little grownup tonight." "Well I don't think Barbara should have brought her. She's too young to understand these things." "Oh, Edna, kids grow up a lot faster these days." Maddy studied Mother Amy's face. "It had something to do with her liquor." "Gladys, I think you mean her liver." Maddy's eyes moved slowly down to the two hands folded over each other. "I think it's really sweet that Maddy's so sensitive." Maddy touched the old woman's hands. They were so hard it would take a crowbar to pry them apart. "I still can't get over how good she looks. They did a great job." "They certainly did. Considering everything." She wrapped her small fingers around one of the heavy hands, found a spot on the underside, and dug her nails against it as hard as she could.

JENNIFER JOHNSTON

Meditation on O

Love entered her like a door
over and over.

Silly girl, she is a potato
hapless

its eyes hollowed out
by stones.

Naughty boy, she is a mouth
toothless,

tongue hung from
its scaffold.

Old crone, her body is an orange
crushed seedless

bury her in a hole with her robe
left open.

KATHLEEN JONES

Camera Lucida

Couched comfortable in sixty
years' hindsight we can dismiss
her—propagandist, Nazi
muse. Now, we recognize her
hero; a low-
angled, backlit mad
mad deified, atumor wrapped
in jackboots, serge, and
iron, successfully excised from
our reasonable skin. It's
history. But was it a crime,
her making him beautiful?

What if in a covert
corner of every theatre lies
a Leni Riefenstahl editing
her Fuhrer?
The lens a sieve between celluloid
and eye, she filters out
darkness—Kristallnacht,
Auschwitz—whispered
secrets, lies

Climb into the light chamber
where no chiaroscuro lines divide
the shadows. Nail reason
to the floor of your mind.
Lift her blind camera to
your eye. Can you still deny
he is beautiful?
She will dismiss you: "Liar."

Chemin de Fer

No downtown card counters
cheapen chance with statistics,
equations or single-deck odds.
Under the crystal castle chandelier
the dealer calls you madame,
and with honest sleight of nimble
fingers stacks your chips. Count
on this; they are never yours
to keep. Random as a coin toss,
in the long game odds favor
the house, and plastic chips are
whispered away by a golden stick.

To play to win is
to have already lost. As "all men are
one man in the climatic instant,"
all men are one when holding the deck
and losing it all to a player nine. But
to believe in the inevitable instant of
chance suspended, limit lifted,
in the black queen pinned beneath nine
spades begging the table: let it ride.
To hear her voice and have faith
in the fortune of the one perfect hand
is to be alone.

Skin the Cat

Hiss a whip and
the jumprope
snitched through
silver heat-
waves slidy and
slick, cat-scratched
the sidewalk
and the fatman watched
Rebecca
quick, like a
cricket tip
taps on macadam,
Rebecca
quick, never
misses, front-
wards, back
perfect rythmic
sandal slap
and the fatman waits
for Rebecca
quick, to trip
on the whip and
split a hard-
apple kneecap
on a sidewalk
crack.

STAN KAPLAN

Round Pond Harbor

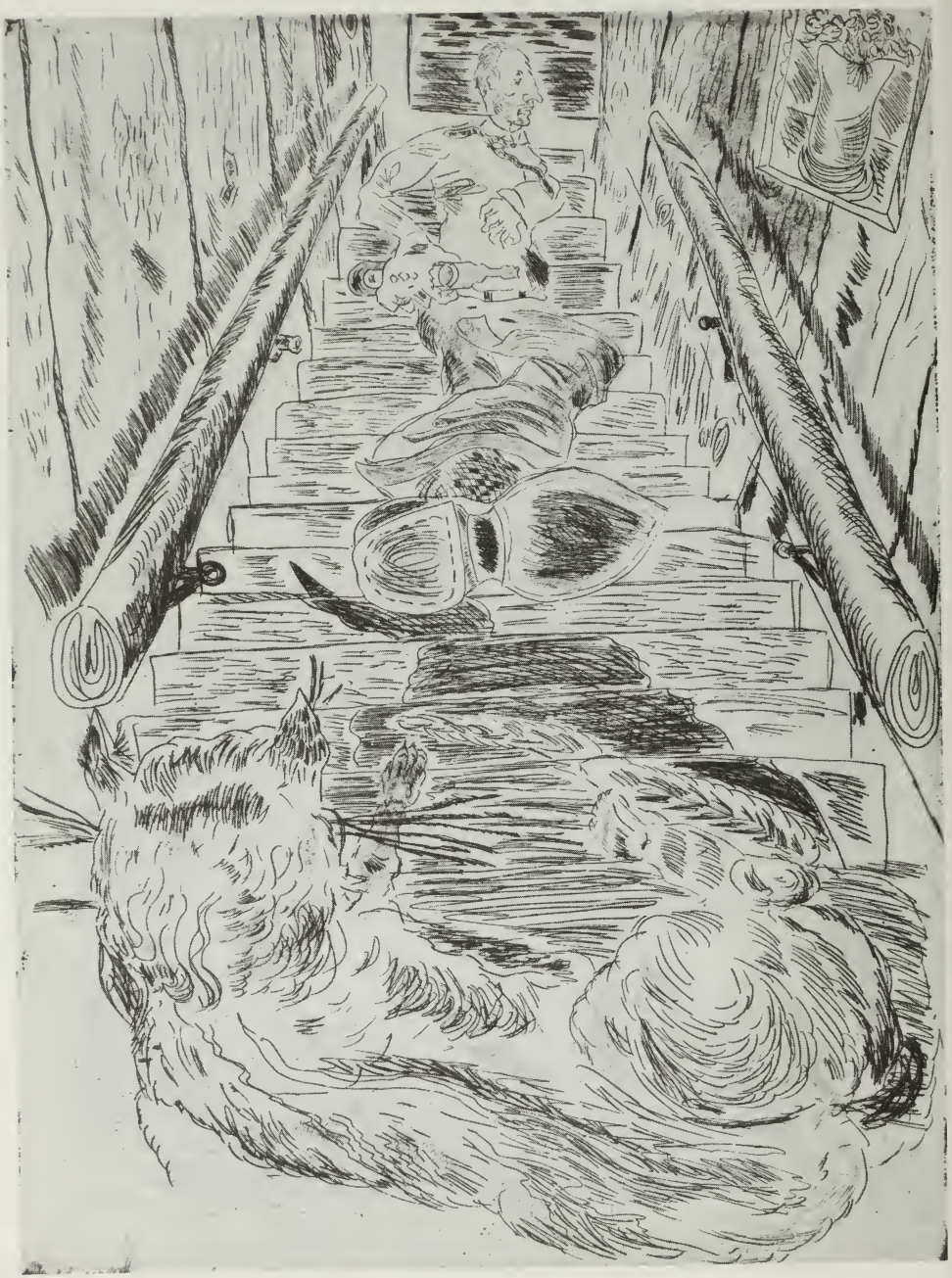
Before the light,
I listened, in the dark, in the quiet.
I listened to the soft lapping.
Before daybreak I heard the lap of oars.
I listened to the lap and creak,
    the lap and squeak, the old oar-leathers,
    to the plash and wish
    and then the bump of boats together.
I listened to him clamber aboard,
    big boots on deck,
    to the engine crank,
    to the sharp bark and cough.
The unmuffled Chevy engine started loud
    across the water.
He goosed the gas, then slipped his mooring.
I listened to the low throaty growl and burble,
    coming closer,
    passing close across my bow.
Then, in the wake of the lobsterboat leaving,
    roll, rolling,
I listened to the lap, lapping on the sides,
    to the lap, lapping
    of the wake of the lobsterboat leaving,
    to the halyards slap,
    slap,
    to the lap of the last of the wake.
I listened as the engine receded.
He slowed, he idled, he hauled a trap.
I listened.
He revved, the trap splashed, and he went on.
That afternoon he came back full-throttle-loud
    amidst guffawing gulls.
But now it was still dawn.

SUSAN KIEFFER

A Lake in Time

All is as it was—
the arcs of saplings,
the tender silver
undersides of leaves,
the fish flashing
in clear shallows,
the forest rising
out of its reflection—
but I am not the child
who swam and splashed
until her lips were blue
and you are no longer
the man who waited
on the shadowed shore.
You are twisted, grey—
and filling my eyes
are the hazy gold
of cattails from which
deer emerge at dawn,
and the shimmering,
impossible blue
of the dragonfly.

NAVY CHAO
Wood
paper on paper
(10x14")

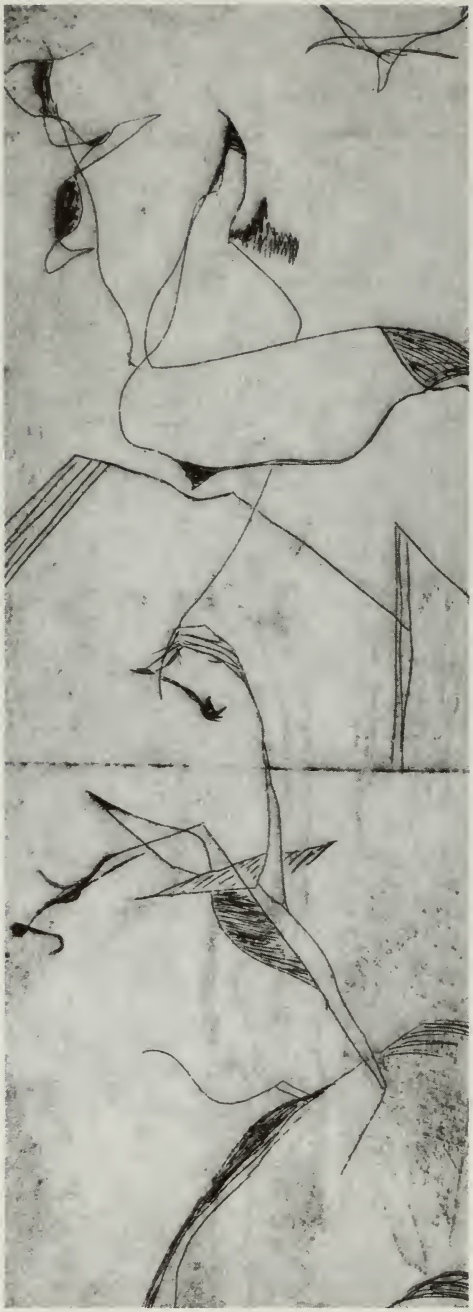


BERNARD MEANEY
untitled
etching (9x12")

BERNARD MEANEY
untitled
etching (9x12")

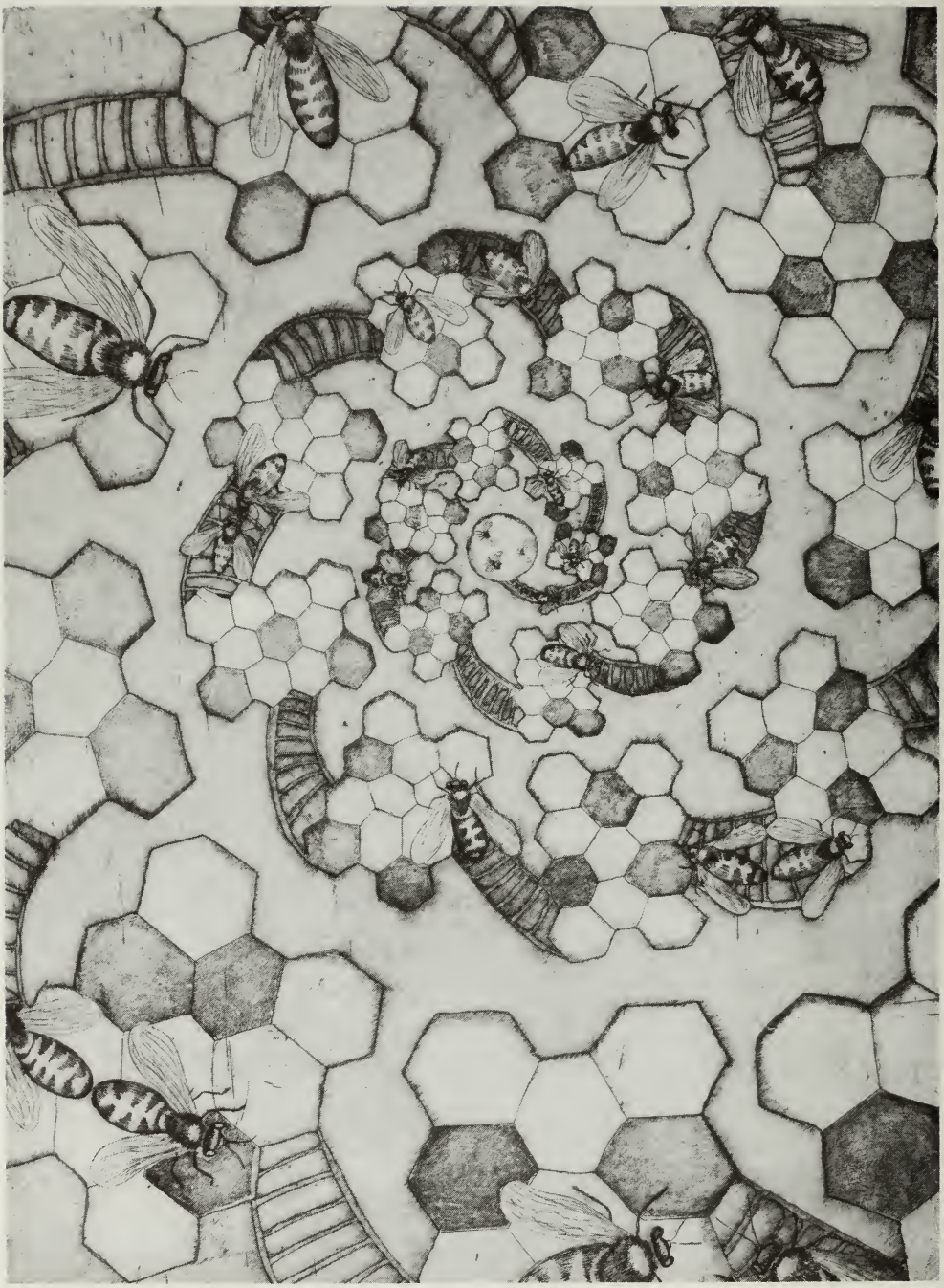
NORIYUKI INOUE
untitled
photoetching (10x10")

NORIUKI INOUE
untitled
photoetching (10x10")



NANCY CLOUGHERTY
untitled
etching (3x8″)

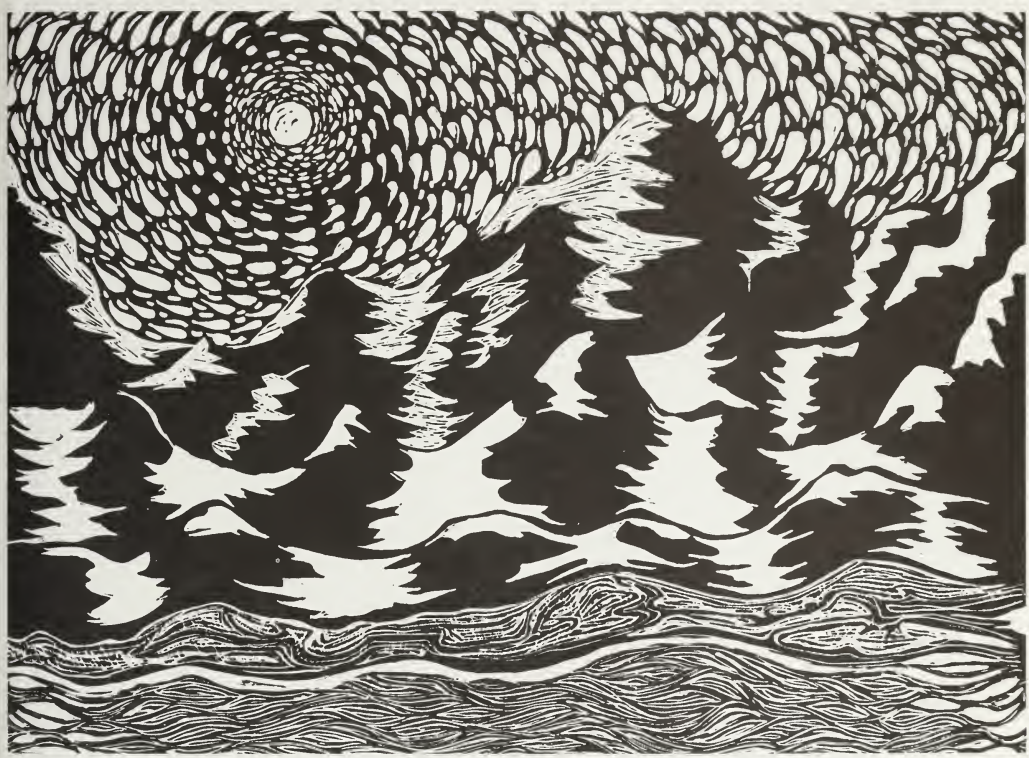
FRANK TIPPING
untitled
etching (18x24")



DIANE HENDERSHOTT
untitled
etching (18x24")

FUKIKO CUDHEA
Window
linocut block print (8x10″)

TOM GREALY
untitled
linocut block print (8x10")



STEPHEN A. BAILEY
untitled
linocut block print (9x12″)

NANCI SULLIVAN
Desert Ghost
scratchboard (8x9″)

BRUCE MENIN

THE WATCHING MAN

"Mr. Kaszuba . . . we, uh . . . we haven't met. I'm your neighbor from across the street . . . number 15 . . . Brad Collins." Brad hesitated, searching for a glimmer of recognition in Eddie's dark eyes. Sensing that Eddie did not understand intuitively the reason for the impromptu meeting, Brad folded his arms in front of himself, and sharpened his tone slightly.

"Well, Mr. Kaszuba . . . this isn't exactly a social call, I'm afraid. I also happen to be President of the Lemon Street Neighborhood Association. The group asked me to talk to you about the condition of your house. . . ."

* * * * *

Eddie Kaszuba returned home in the spring from the Second World War wearing a purple heart on his chest and a buried arc of shrapnel that stretched across his back. Home was his parents' small, tidy house on Lemon Street, near Grape Street, near Orange Street . . . in the Polish section of the city known as "The Fruit Belt," where he'd grown up.

His mother cried when he returned, taking his face in her hands and kissing his forehead repeatedly between sobs. She prayed daily for the safe return of her only son, attending the 6 AM Mass at the small Polish church two blocks down on Kosciuszko Street. There, on cold mornings before the pale sun rose, she bartered with God for his return with candles and prayers.

"God—I'll never ask for another favor—please just get him home safely, my Eddie. Never another favor. . . ." On the day after he arrived home, Mrs. Kaszuba went back to the church, and lit a half dozen candles. Through her tears, the lights multiplied, and smeared, and she thought that the flickering ocean glimmering in front of her was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen.

In those first days of Eddie's return, he would sit on the front porch most of the time. He would stare, or doze, occasionally rubbing his shoulder in a careless, unfocused manner. Mrs.

Kaszuba, joyful at the sight of her son safe at home, did not question his torpor.

"He's home, thank God," she would say to her visiting friends. "Thank God, he's safe, and home! All my prayers, answered!" She'd smile, her eyes moistening, as her friends nodded.

The summer drifted by. Daily, Mrs. Kaszuba would wake at dawn and set about the preparation of swollen, bountiful breakfasts with eggs and bacon, sausage and potatoes, and occasionally fresh fruit. Eddie would emerge from his room, disheveled and sleep-heavy, aroused by the aroma of the fresh coffee wafting through the house. After breakfast, he would go out into the back yard and sit at the picnic table, as the hazy mornings dissolved into warm and bright afternoons.

Gradually, Mrs. Kaszuba began to understand that Eddie had changed. His smile became wan and infrequent, and then slipped away completely. His laughter diminished, as if it was being swallowed by some part of Eddie before it could escape, until it disappeared entirely.

Late one summer night during that first year she sat with her husband in the quiet, dimly lit kitchen. The wind grazed the front screen door and drifted aimlessly through the house, gently pushing curtains and scattering the evening newspapers. She sat in the humid darkness with her husband, both glistening with sweat, and listened to the steady rumble of thunder in the distance. Eddie rocked in a chair on the front porch, the slow rhythmic cadence of wood on wood a counterpoint to the gathering storm.

Mrs. Kaszuba reached across the table to touch her husband's arm. She whispered softly, as if she could not bear to hear her own words.

"Stosh . . . Stosh . . ." She paused, then resumed. "Stosh, something is not right with Eddie."

He stared back at her, wiping his face with his sleeve. He shook his head.

"What the hell are you talking about. Eddie? Our Eddie? He's fine, he's all right. He needs some time to adjust, that's all. He'll snap out of it. When he's ready, Stawicki has already promised to get him into the union. He can go to work with me. Or maybe even go to college on that GI bill. Sure, he'll be a cop, like Stawicki's kid. He'll be fine. Just give him a little time, woman. He just needs time."

She shook her head imperceptibly. She whispered.

"No, Stosh . . . something has happened to Eddie. He isn't the same. I'm his mother. I know. I see him all day . . . I'm with him all day. Look at him now! He rocks, all day he does this. No talking, no laughing. I feel something terrible has happened. . . . Stosh, in my heart, I feel he has come home to die!" Her whisper could not choke back a sob, and her eyes brimmed with tears.

He stared at her, the muscles of his face working as his jaw clenched. In a hoarse, fierce whisper, he cursed her.

"No, dammit," he spat. "NO, NO, Not my Eddie! He just needs time, dammit! You'll see, woman! All those months, you prayed for him, and now he's here, safe. You would give up on him so easy, God damn you! Give him some time. . . ."

She reached across the table, startled at his sudden rage. He shoved her hand away violently. The back screen door slammed, muffling the soft tread of his steps across the small backyard to the tool shed, where he kept a bottle of Vodka and a single glass.

Mrs. Kaszuba turned to look through the living room window at her son, silhouetted in his chair on the porch. The thick patter of the rainstorm, upon them now, muffled the sound of the rocking chair. She buried her face in her hands.

* * * * *

Brad shifted his weight. He searched Eddie's unshaven, smeared face, trying to find his eyes. What was that first rule of salesmanship? "Look 'em in the eyes," he thought. In the shadows of the early evening, he'd have to settle for an approximation, a glimmer where he imagined the old man's eyes were.

"Listen, Mr. Kaszuba . . . I'm sure you've noticed the neighborhood is changing. A lot of us have moved in here in the last five years. You know, we've really invested a lot in our houses, repairing and improving them. Trying to bring some pride back to the neighborhood. You know, we've brought the entire 'Fruit Belt' back to life, made it a decent place to live. That's why we're concerned about the condition of your house. Frankly, Mr. Kaszuba, it could use a lot of work."

Brad paused, and tried to smile sincerely.

* * * * *

The summer faded, the fall passed, and the days dissolved into wind and rain. The war drew to a close, and many young men returned to the neighborhood. They would gather on the corner of Apple and Kaspar, and swap stories in the night. Eddie could not be coaxed off the porch or out of his house. His friends would walk over to the Kaszuba's and stand, tall, trim, and polite, smiling on the porch, touching Eddie on the arm or shoulder.

"C'mon, Eddie, c'mon," they'd say. "One drink down at Wally's with us. Come on, just one. Won't hurt you!"

He'd look up, wave them off, and step into the house. They stood on the porch, hushed, and awkward. By late that first fall, they no longer found their way to the Kaszuba's.

Mrs. Kaszuba cared for her son. Their's was a slow, cadenced and incremental duet, in which she assumed an increasing degree of responsibility for him. He folded into the routine of her week, became a part of the soft rhythm of her day. Shopping, sewing, preparing his meals, house cleaning, attending early Mass, doing his laundry. Late at night, after her husband had gone to sleep, she would step out onto the porch with a dampened washcloth. Scrubbing Eddie's face, she would hum softly, whispering in Polish.

"Eddie," she would say, "Eddie, where are you? Come back to us . . . please, come back to us."

One fall, several years after Eddie's return, Mr. Kaszuba came home late, drunk. He stood weaving on the sidewalk in front of the house. He stumbled up the stairs, finally moving across the porch to the chair Eddie sat in. The old man fell to his knees, reaching into his pocket for a piece of paper and a book of matches. He stared at his son, who did not make eye contact.

Mr. Kaszuba crumpled the paper, then held a lit match to it. He took Eddie's face in his free hand, and moved the burning paper closer to his son.

"Where are they?" he said. "Where . . . are my grandchildren, Eddie? Where are they? You . . . thief, you thieving bastard!"

His own eyes thick with tears, Mr. Kaszuba would not make contact with his only son, afraid of the dullness and darkness he would find. The paper burned his hand, and he dropped it onto the porch. A gust swept it onto the street in a swirl of leaves and drizzle. Mr. Kaszuba wiped his eyes quietly on his sleeve and went inside.

* * * * *

Brad continued, no longer hoping for a response from Eddie.

"Mr. Kaszuba . . . several of us in the neighborhood would be willing to help out . . . you know, cut the grass, trim your shrubs. Tidy the place up. As far as getting the porch repaired and the house painted, well, I'd be happy to recommend some of the people who worked for us. They are a little steep, but you can certainly see what a great job they've done on our place!"

His arm swept proudly across his chest, pointing towards his house across the street. Eddie's eyes did not follow the motion. He continued to look at Brad.

* * * * *

The soul of the Kaszuba house slipped into a dreamless sleep after that. The three of them settled into a routine, subdued and devoid of spontaneity, comfort, happiness. Eddie would sometimes walk the neighborhood at night, hands gesturing vacantly. Mostly, he sat on the front porch, or in the living room. Some mornings, he would shave. His mother would cajole him into changing his clothes every few days.

"Eddie . . . Eddie! Look, I have a clean shirt for you. Why don't you put this on? You never know, this could be your lucky day . . . maybe today, you win the sweepstakes, and you don't want to wear a soiled shirt when the reporters come to take your picture!"

Sometimes, he would smile at her. He would start to unbutton his shirt, and stop, preoccupied with a thought. When she could stand to wait no longer, she would finish unbuttoning his shirt for him. After a while, she stopped coaxing him to change. Helping her son in and out of his clothing became a silent, accepted part of her daily routine. She continued to go to daily Mass to light a candle and thank God for the safe return of her son.

Mr. Kaszuba went to work at the mill every day, and returned home quietly drunk every night.

Eddie's friends went to work at the mill, or the Chevy plant, or to college on the G.I. Bill. They married, and soon after, would move away. There were fewer families walking in the neighborhood on humid summer evenings. On weekends, many of the Kaszuba's friends would visit children and grandchildren living in geometric and manicured suburbs. The tinny sound of a thousand radios caressing the same station gave way gradually to the silver-blue, hypnotic glow of televisions in the living rooms of houses throughout the Fruit Belt.

Among the new, unfamiliar faces that filled the neighborhood as friends of the Kaszubas moved out, Eddie became known as "The Watching Man." He would spend hours standing on the front porch, hands twitching, or shuffle down the street to the vest pocket park on Colvin, near the small Polish Church. He spoke only to his mother, who would walk down to the park in the evenings and sit by him for a while before she took his hand and led him back to the front porch of their home.

He was the neighborhood eccentric, evoking little fear and much curiosity, and stories revealing the origin of his manner

grew like weeds in the tattered vacant lots emerging on the Fruit Belt streets.

"He was a POW, you know!" some would whisper. "His best friend died in his arms!"

The older women would cluck their tongues, shaking their heads sadly.

"He was so handsome . . . so polite! A waste! The war, you know, it was the war."

If Eddie heard any of these comments, he gave no outward sign.

The neighborhood continued to change. Stocky, rolling Polish phrases, guttural and rich, gave way to softer, musical southern accents, or the staccato lilt of Spanish. Friends sold their houses, and retired to Florida, or to box-like in-law apartments carved out of suburban garages in outer communities, near children and grandchildren.

* * * * *

Eddie swallowed, and continued to stare at Brad. The smile on Brad's face faded, replaced by an angry and irritated look.

"Mr. Kaszuba . . . look. I really don't want to get nasty about any of this." He hesitated, and decided that a change in strategy would have the desired affect on Eddie. He recrossed his arms, and spread his feet belligerently.

"Some of us have invested a lot of money in our houses. We take a lot of pride in this neighborhood, a lot of goddamn pride. You obviously don't care a damn about how your house looks, or about the effect that has on the rest of us. . . ."

He paused, for effect. "Well, we think it's a goddamn eyesore. We think you ought to do something about it!"

He paused again, and pointed his finger at Eddie.

"D'you understand what I'm saying?"

Brad believed he already knew the answer to that question.

* * * * *

In soft, neutral tones, Mrs. Kaszuba would try to talk to her husband about Eddie.

"Stosh," she would say. "We must plan for when we are gone. What will happen to Eddie.?"

He would rub his eyes, and explode suddenly with rage.

"Shouldn't you better ask what *has* happened to Eddie? This . . . this man . . . this man is not a . . . a son . . . he's a stranger, a man I don't know who lives here. No dreams, no ambitions, no thought of anybody else, nothing. A man without dreams, a stranger we knew who lives here. Enough . . . enough!"

He would turn his back to her, angrily pushing the screen door open as he cut across the yard to the tool shed.

Ten years after Eddie returned home from the war, the cumulative disappointments wore down his father, breaking his heart. A massive stroke left him slumped on the front porch of his house. Eddie watched the life fade from his father, while Mrs. Kaszuba screamed into a neighbor's phone, calling for help.

When she left the hospital, Mrs. Kaszuba went directly to her son. She took his face in her hands.

"Eddie, your father is gone. His heart gave out. He was a good man, Eddie, and he loved you in his way. Say a prayer for him. Come with me, now, and say a prayer for him."

As she pulled on her sweater, her hand caught in the sleeve. She struggled. Eddie, reaching over, put one hand on her shoulder, and eased the sweater up along her arm. She touched his hand gently, and turned to look at him.

"Will you come with me to Church? We'll say a prayer, and speak with the priest about the funeral."

Eddie shook his head, and did not speak.

Mrs. Kaszuba nodded, smiling sadly. She left by the front door, and as she walked down Lemon Street, Eddie stepped onto the porch and followed her with his eyes. Long after she had disappeared from view, he continued to watch the spot where she had hesitated, and looked back at him before turning the corner.

Eddie attended the funeral in an ill-fitting suit that he had worn to his Junior Prom. His gaunt figure seemed angular and sharp in his clothes, and he stayed in the back of the church for much of the service, pacing. He'd pause, intermittently, as if hovering in place. His eyes never left his mother.

After the casket had been lowered into the ground, he stood next to his mother. As the crowd dissipated, she turned to him and spoke.

"Thank you, Eddie."

He took her hand and squeezed it. He looked away from her, and spoke in words that were detached and shrouded.

"Sure, Mom. We'll be all right."

* * * * *

"I don't think you *do* understand, Kaszuba!"

Brad was unwilling to bridle his impatience. It filled him with self-importance, and he became more animated.

"No, I don't think you do understand! We work hard in this neighborhood. We don't depend on any handouts from the government. I gotta tell you, Kaszuba, that it really bothers a lot

of us to bust our butts at our jobs all day and then drive home past this shitbox you call a house!"

Brad felt the satisfaction of a man who believes he has placed an ugly truth, somebody else's ugly truth, on display. He nodded slowly, not wanting to appear too smug.

* * * * *

The Kaszubas returned to a practiced, comfortable routine. Eddie would sit on the porch, oblivious to the steady passage of days, months, seasons. Mrs. Kaszuba absorbed Eddie into her life, seamlessly. She could no longer wash her own face without washing his, clean and iron her own clothes without doing his; and she would not feed herself until she was sure he would eat. Some days, she would go to two Masses, where she thanked God for allowing her son to return home safely.

Eddie's passive forays into the neighborhood ended abruptly one night when he was beaten unconscious by a local gang three blocks from his house. He staggered home, still bleeding from the head, and it had taken a shocked Mrs. Kaszuba a day and a night to convince Eddie to accompany her to the hospital. He needed two dozen stitches to close the head wound, and his jaw had been broken.

After that, he would not leave the house. The beating served to insulate the Kaszubas, to speed up the process of severing their ties with the community.

Both of them became gray, and their skin acquired the pasty, bluish pallor that comes from habit, insularity and isolation. As their lives wound inextricably together, they would sit quietly in the living room, Mrs. Kaszuba knitting, Eddie slumped on the couch. She would talk to the boy who delivered the groceries, telling him how the neighborhood had changed.

"I don't understand it," she would say to him. "People live like this, with their drugs and sex? This isn't a . . . a community anymore. Not safe to even go out! I don't know what will become of this world." She would shake her head, sadly.

"Of course, not you, Jerome. You're a nice boy," she'd add, quickly, fearful of alienating him.

She would turn back to Eddie after the delivery boy had left, and continue.

"People living like animals! Animals!"

Eddie rubbed his shoulder and peered out of the kitchen window.

"We'll be all right, Mom."

* * * * *

Eddie rubbed his shoulder. He stared out of the darkness of the living room at Brad, still sputtering on the porch.

Convinced that Eddie was too stupid to understand what was going on, Brad decided to play the trump. Even this poor, crazy, disheveled son-of-a-bitch would understand what Brad was going to tell him.

"Y'know, Kaszuba, the little kids in the neighborhood are scared of you. They say you walk around at night, and peek into windows, that you're watching them all the time. Morrison, down the street, is a lawyer. If you don't watch your own ass, instead of some little kid's, you're liable to get into some pretty damn hot water, do you understand?"

Brad was standing, hands on hips, squarely facing Eddie's shadow in the door frame.

"You ought to take a little pride in this neighborhood, instead of being a goddamn community problem, a goddamn nuisance!"

Eddie took a step back into the living room, which had become darkly shadowed in the fading light of the early evening.

"Listen, mister," he said, hoarsely. "I don't need any help. Thanks." The door closed so slowly that Brad didn't hear the sound of the latch catching.

* * * * *

When it became clear to Mrs. Kaszuba that she was dying, she made arrangements with a lawyer. The house was put into the name of her only relative, a niece living on the west coast. The taxes were put in trust. She arranged to have Eddie's disability checks directly deposited. Food was delivered weekly: cold cuts, TV dinners, and soda. The grocery store billed the bank, and the bank paid the account monthly.

When all this was done, she held Eddie's face in her withered hands.

"It's all done, Eddie, it's done for you. Eddie, I'm going into the hospital now. I may not come out. I have arranged things for you. I'm old . . . I'm very tired. You will have to care for yourself now. Say your prayers, and God will watch you. God bless you." She kissed his forehead.

She called the ambulance, her shaking hands barely able to turn the rotary dial. Eddie rubbed his shoulder.

"It's O.K., Mom. I'll be all right."

When the ambulance arrived, he retreated to the kitchen. Long after the sirens had shattered the late afternoon air, he

stood in a corner of the kitchen, breathing in short, shallow gasps. When the phone rang insistently late that night, he was still in the kitchen, shaking. He did not answer.

After Mrs. Kaszuba died, Eddie took little interest in the upkeep of the house. The backyard became overgrown, a jungle of tangled weeds, overgrown shrubs, and oddly skewed trees. The neighborhood kids would sneak into the yard at night, past the torn-down fence, and copulate furtively. Sometimes, their passions spent, they'd look up at the back of the house, and see Eddie, silhouetted in the window.

"Who's that?"

"That's Watchin' Man, jes' watchin' what we do. That crazy ol' 'Watchin' Man. Hey, Watchin' Man, check out this full moon!"

And they'd shake their buttocks at him as they gathered their clothes, cackling and hooting obscenities at him.

Once his own clothes had worn out, he began to wear his father's . . . binding a pair of suit pants with a rope, covering his back with a faded flannel shirt.

When he could no longer stand the dull ache of isolation pressing up against him, he began to walk out again at night, melding with the shadows when he would see small groups of people on the sidewalk ahead. Still, and hesitant, he listened to the murmuring voices with a mixture of fear and longing.

"Hey, Watchin' Man," they would shout when they spotted him. "Crazy Watchin' Man!"

Young parents in the neighborhood would threaten to turn misbehaving youngsters over to the "Watching Man" as punishment. As the kids grew older, they taunted Eddie, challenged by their peers. He became an adolescent rite of passage in the community. Sometimes they'd throw rocks at the house, breaking a window.

Over time, Eddie noticed subtle changes in the rhythm of the neighborhood. More police sirens, more parents walking small children to a program that took place in the basement of the old church his mother had attended. He saw the brightly hued flowers made of construction paper taped to the windows of the church basement, and would sometimes walk up to the windows and touch the glass, enthralled at the colors. Late at night, as he walked the Fruit Belt streets, he saw many houses having work done on them. It seemed to Eddie that nearly half of the houses in his neighborhood were growing cavernous, blue dumpsters on their front lawns, which would fill and empty like the ebb and flow of the tide, then disappear, leaving impossibly fresh and sparkling houses in their wake.

Eddie watched these changes come, even to Lemon Street.

* * * * *

Brad stared at the door, incredulously.

"Damn crazy man . . . goddamn drunken bum!" he muttered. He turned, stomping across the front porch in his anger. As the boards beneath his feet groaned ominously, he hesitated, then tread more lightly down the battered steps.

"Can't be reasonable with these kind of people. Gets you nowhere!"

He was still grumbling as he crossed the street, and cut across his manicured lawn. Moths swirled luminously around the gas lamp post that marked the edge of his walk. He shook his head and cut through his garage to the backyard pool.

Eddie slid back into the dark embrace of his house, and sat quietly in the kitchen. After several hours, he went upstairs and showered. He shaved himself very carefully, applying scraps of toilet paper to the cuts on his cheeks and chin, and stared into the yellowed mirror over the sink.

He went into his bedroom and stuffed several pairs of socks, pants, and shirts into a pillowcase. He put on one of his father's suits, went back into the bathroom and stared at the mirror. He turned down the hall to his mother's room.

In his mother's bedroom, he gathered several dusty photographs from her bureau. He looked at one of a young man, crisply dressed in an army uniform, intent, and serious. He held it in his hand for a while, eyes closed, and then tossed it casually onto his mother's bed. Gathering the rest, he put them into the pillowcase.

He walked down to the basement. He gathered several pieces of paper and crumpled them, building a small mound near the hot water heater. Tossing several pieces of scrap wood onto the paper, he lit a match and tossed in onto the pile. Once he was sure it had taken, he went back upstairs.

He picked up his pillowcase and left the house. Outside, he paused again, holding a fresh handkerchief to his mouth, as orange-red shadows danced in the broken panes of basement window glass. He turned and headed down the street, past the soft hiss of the sprinkler caressing the lawn in front of Brad's house. The night moths, drawn by the flickering orange flames, drifted across Lemon Street, abandoning the gas lamp on the Collins' lawn to pirouette on the updrafts.

GLENN P. MILLER

The Long Descent

(for John Berryman)

A blank check only could name the dead man in the snow.
The hundred foot step, taken when he was sure
that there was no coming to terms with either
himself, or this absurd and man-wrecked world.
Below the arc of the bridge, old drunks near death encircled
a fiery drum, and eyed the shoes of the crumpled scarecrow.

Sad, disordered man, charting his heart's slow erosion
in words that writhe and will not rest upon the page,
but keep rising up like wasps, in their rage.
The jazzy, gin-bitter, syncopated verses,
razor songs, sung of diminishing choices,
born in the cold epiphany of a tropic sun.

In the end, language stilled for him, gone too the myths of salvation:
God, Art, a woman's mouth, where to go but with the sun descending?
Let the bassoon play a lament the color of evening—
no answers will present themselves. Tonight a distant train
calls, an unearthly owl, and the moon slides up from shadow again,
an ancient wanderer without a destination.

KIRSTEN OLSEN

Alvin's Market

Outside Alvin's market
The sharp-eyed men with razor teeth
Make her want to fly away.
They surround the door, battered hat
Rotating, to the tired undulation of her step
As she walks into the air-conditioning.

When the excitement is over
They settle back.
Parts is parts, says her boss,
And that one's got tits. Knockers!
Bodacious ta-tas, as it were. Thurgood,
I saw you drooling over those legs.
And they aint half bad. How much do you pay
For dark meat like that Thurgood?

Thurgood laughs but he's insulted. His teeth
Are double-edged, all canines,
And he never pays because he takes.
He plays it smart and disagrees, claims
He wouldn't have her on a platter
If she paid him. He says, *white meat only.*
Nothing inferior, no matter how sweet. Not even
When they beg me, cause you know their men
Aint never around.

Inside Alvin's market, she works the meat counter;
Dismemberment on display. *Parts is parts* she knows
But Poultry is too easy. *White meat*
Or dark, it shrieks. *Breasts or legs?* She
Is halved and quartered—frozen, bloody, splayed.
How much does it cost, he asks counting change.
She points to the wings
Which are always nearly free.

NORM OPPEGARD

Bright Starry Night

by NGUYEN BINH†

Night appears, stars slowly rise;
the low horizon, suddenly black,
reveals the two cold banks of the Milky Way.
Where is the black-winged bridge where lovers meet?

I miss Nong's hat. The duck swims
alone in midstream currents.
These early stars are your tearful eyes
watching me drag myself away.

The northern stars shine bright; the Polar Star
resplendent, fills a corner of heaven.
You are far away across the latitudes.
How many sleepless years must I endure?

Stars burn close all night;
never apart, they kindle always.
Sometimes they forget to rise, but
there is no night I do not think of you.

†*Translation of poem (opposite) by Nguyen Binh (1917-1966), famous Vietnamese poet.* • *The black-winged bridge is a reference from a Vietnamese tale. Two young lovers are forced by the emperor to live at opposite sides of a river and once a year, blackbirds come and form a bridge so that the lovers can be together.* • *Nong is an ancient god of agriculture, pre-dating Buddhism.*

NGUYEN BINH

Đêm Sao Sáng

Đêm hiện dần lên những chấm sao
Lòng trời đang thấp bỗng nhiên cao
Sông Ngân đã tỏ đôi bờ lạnh
Ai biết cầu Ô ở chỗ nào?

Tìm mũ Thần Nông chẳng thấy đâu
Thấy con vịt lội giữa giòng sâu
Sao Hôm như mắt em ngày ấy
Rớm lệ nhìn tôi bước xuống tàu

Chùm sao Bắc Đẩu sáng tinh khôi
Lộng lẫy uy nghi một góc trời
Em ở bên kia bờ vĩ tuyến
Nhìn sao thao thức mấy năm rồi!

Sao đặc trời, sao sáng suốt đêm
Sao đêm chung sáng chẳng chia miền
Trời còn có bữa sao quên mọc
Anh chẳng đêm nào chẳng nhớ em.

VIRGINIA PIRES

LUCUSSE

It took us four days by train and thirteen hours by jeep over some six hundred and seventy kilometers of mined roads to get to Lucusse. Our military convoy moved slowly, truck after truck filled to the top with brown bags of sand. Other trucks with soldiers followed, and behind green Land Rovers, their canvas tops rolled up and secured with rusted belt buckles. The soldiers stood up in them, pointing their rifles into the forest in every direction.

My father rode in the passenger seat in the jeep in front of ours. My mother held Victor, my baby brother, in her lap. My sister Mady, the next youngest, sat tightly between my mother and my brother Osvaldo. I sat squeezed between him and the metal door with its yellow plastic window. All I could see were the shapes of trees.

A trooper drove us. Another one sat beside him in the front seat, holding a rifle between his legs. They only spoke to respond to my mother when we needed to go to the bathroom. The jeeps and trucks were filled with young troops, green handkerchiefs tied across their mouths. They were covered with dust.

In Lucusse I remember running with my friend Sesa down to the river along the main road. Our legs were covered with red dust. Army jeeps passed up and down. The troops shouted and waved at the women walking along the side of the road. The women did not wave back. They walked behind one another. Some carried their babies on their backs wrapped in a cloth knotted in front. They carried drinking water on their heads in big rusted Shell Oil cans. Others carried big loads of fire wood tied together with sisal on their heads. They held their children by the hand.

One woman carried a pig upside down, his legs tied with a rope she used as a handle. In the basket on her head were chickens with their wings and legs tied, loose corn, a plastic bag of salt, palm oil in a beer bottle. There were eggs nestled in the corn. Other women carried baskets filled with ripe mangos, raw

peanuts in their shells, dried spoiled cassava, and dried "bargo," a river fish with long whiskers. They smelled rotten. Dry smoked insects were sold by the tin can. They were crispy and smelled like fried fish. I tried some at Sesa's hut. I didn't tell my parents.

The women would roll strips of cloth and dried corn husk together. They would put this on their heads and prop the baskets on top of it. They did not use their hands to hold the baskets even when they walked fast. They sang and spoke to each other in Kioko. They swatted the flies away from their legs and shoulders with leaves.

When the jeeps drove by the women walked faster, away from the road. One day I saw some troops jump off even before the jeep stopped. They pushed away the older women. Three or four troopers ran after one of the younger women. They threw her to the ground and got on top of her. They were laughing and yelling ugly words. They ripped her clothes and took away her head handkerchief. Then they ran fast back to the jeep, which was tilted off to the side of the road, the motor still running. After the troops had left, the women came out from behind the trees and bushes. They gathered the fruits and animals scattered around her basket. They took the young woman to the river and scrubbed her with mud and leaves. Then they cut through the forest.

Sesa and I ran to the side of the river where the sward ferns are bigger and the moss is thicker. To the right, next to the loengo tree, its fruit like a prune, there was a little stream. We took our clothes off and splashed in the water. Sesa sang a song in Kioko. She had a stick in her hand which she zig-zagged in the water. I looked up and saw a chameleon changing color as it passed from the loengo to a bougainvillea branch. We waded through the water. Loose leaves and weeds moved about us. Sesa screamed, "A cobra!" I ran to the river bank, splashing the water ahead of me, hopscotching between the crocodile eggs.

MARY REIDY

BETWEEN CYCLES

She usually came in on Fridays, dragging a large, heavy cloth laundry bag behind her. Always she carried a book, although he never paid too much attention to what she was reading. As far as he was concerned, she was smart because she read: it didn't much matter what she read. The book jackets were always different—that much he knew. So he figured that she read frequently, which made her even smarter.

Tonight again she came, dragging her laundry bag. But she wore work clothes, a long skirt and a matching sweater, which surprised him because he always assumed she was a college student. And she stopped at the counter, instead of heading for the top-loading washer in the farthest corner of the laundromat. Her favorite.

He was folding clothes, the way he always did. Spoiled students dropped off their laundry, leaving him to sort through monstrous piles of underwear, T-shirts, and mismatched socks. Couldn't be bothered doing their own. Snotty rich kids attending the university could afford to pay 60 cents a pound for laundry.

Which is why he liked her. She did her own laundry. Waited patiently, sipped her coffee, turned the pages of her book. Loaded, unloaded, sorted, folded her towels, trousers, blouses, bras, socks and underwear.

Tonight she would not. She carried her purse instead of a book and stood breathlessly at the counter. Her cheeks blushed with excitement, and although the lipstick she had applied earlier in the day had nearly faded, her lips looked fuller, poutier that usual. Her hair was pulled away from her face, which was also different. She usually wore her hair down, so that her wispy brown bangs dropped over her blue eyes.

She needed to leave her laundry and would it be possible to pick it up tomorrow? Was that asking too much? She smiled slightly, almost apologetically. He promised that it would be ready in the morning. She thanked him.

He disregarded the pile of unfolded clothes and carried her laundry bag over to the top-loading washer. He dumped the

entire contents of the bag into the washer, not bothering to sort them. He threw in the laundry bag, too, and he noticed a little hole in the corner of the bag. Not too big, but large enough so a small article of clothing—a bra or perhaps a pair of panties—could pass through it.

He returned to the unfolded pile of clothes and folded, folded, folded through the wash, rinse, and dry cycles. Once her clothes were dry, he brought them over to the table and sorted and folded her royal blue bath towels, faded Gap jeans, L.L. Bean turtlenecks, satin bras and panties (all from Victoria's Secret), and cotton boxer shorts (obviously too small to fit any man). He paused before folding one pair of panties—a white bikini with a tiny white babyish bow on the front. He imagined how her navel would appear above that bow. He set the underwear aside.

He did not mind folding her laundry, because she usually did her own. She wasn't a spoiled, snotty rich kid attending the university. Obviously she had a pressing engagement this evening—perhaps a date. He was happy to help her.

The tv blared. Bruins vs. the Capitols; the Bruins had just scored the tying goal. He nodded absentmindedly at the television and turned down the volume.

His thoughts meandered back to the white bikini with the tiny white bow. He glanced at her neatly folded laundry and lifted a pair from the solitary pile.

An arctic seeming breeze blew about him. His eyes skipped around the laundromat. The door was open. Sam must have decided to resume his panhandling shift. Friday nights were usually good for business; liberal college kids loved to give money to bums. It made them feel like radical socialists, as if their spare change significantly altered the condition of the homeless. Sam boasted that he could make about $20 on a Friday night, especially when the weather was cold.

"Fucking idiots," he'd snarl, clutching his newly purchased bottle of booze. "They want to change the world, as long as their parents are footing the bill. Once they graduate, they'll petition Congress to send people like me to the gas chamber."

Of course Sam had made no effort to close the door behind him. The wind braced the door open, and kept it open. He shoved the panties into his sweatshirt pocket and crossed the room.

He paused at the door, savoring the combination of hot and cold air. The frigid gusts seemed oddly pleasing. Raw and real, a startling contrast to the artificial warmth generated by the dryers. He fastened the door shut and remained there.

The glass dripped with condensation. He traced his warm finger on the sweaty glass, and then blew on the snaking streak. He stared outside.

Sam shoved his face up against the glass and banged an imprint of a fist next to the streak. He grumbled something inaudible, waved a five dollar bill at him and sported his famous grimy grin. Jim Daley, the officer on duty, pulled Sam away from the glass and escorted him towards the curb. Jimmy glanced back at the laundromat door, glanced back at him, and rolled his eyes.

He smiled at Jimmy and gathered his hands into his sweatshirt pocket. He stroked the tiny white bow.

* * *

He did not work that morning, but was nearby, eating breakfast at the deli next door. She arrived early. She wore sweatpants, a baseball cap, no makeup. She'd tied her hair back into a pony tail and pulled it through the back of the cap. He watched it swoosh back and forth as she made her way back to her car. It seemed to move in slow motion, more slowly than the rest of her, gently stroking her shoulders.

She loaded her fresh laundry into her car and locked the hatchback.

She made a quick trip to the florist to buy the fresh flowers she usually bought on Friday nights. Twice a month she bought a bunch of eucalyptus. It was too early for the eucalyptus. Only flowers this morning.

He took a bite of toast and a sip of coffee as he watched her car pull away. He had his pen and a slip of paper ready.

Massachusetts plates. 384-BOK.

He stroked the tiny white bow.

SONDRA UPHAM

On Leave

My brother curls his fingertips under mine
to teach me the Jitterbug.
The back of my head tingles.
I'm thirteen. He's nineteen.
I can't remember him ever touching me before
except to bully me.

Everything in the room is familiar: the picture of Jesus
kneeling on the Mount of Olives,
the crimson drapes, the chain of plastic monkeys
someone brought back from Mexico
and hung on the lamp next to the piano.
And there's the coat closet under the stairs
where I used to hide from Gary after school.

But now, we're dancing and Jerry Lee Lewis is singing,
Great balls of fire. Gary twirls me out, spins me in;
his right arm, newly tattoed with a cobra, circles my waist.

He's amazingly handsome.
His hair's combed back in black waves.

What is he?—
not boyfriend, this man whose hip touches my hip,
whose sudden flick of wrist or backward step I follow.

When he praises me for catchin on so fast,
I feel the grudge I've held
edge forward on its shelf, slide off.

My Father's Hand

When Grandmother said I must
kiss his hand, I looked up at her.

You must, she repeated, *or he won't rest.*

And so I bent over
into swells of white satin. The smell alone
warned me I had no business there,

but I did it. I pressed my lips against
his huge blue hand.

Then I knew.

VICTORIA VANASCO

Theme

Dogs love snow. The children point
and say it's silly how dogs roll in it
and try to eat it. But children
are nearly as silly as dogs.
They both look at us they same way—
their eyes plead.
When I was little I pleaded
for a schnauzer at the pet store. I got
a free mutt instead who cost more
in vet bills than the schnauzer
did at the store. He bit me alot as dogs do
because dogs don't like me.
Children like dogs and I used to
too but now I like to go on vacation.
Dogs don't like to be alone, nor
do children. Cats are nothing like children
or dogs so I got one. I go on vacations
and she likes me better
when I come back. But this
isn't about cats. It's about snow.
I don't like it at all. I vacation
to get away from it except
this year I went to Chicago.
My friends there have a dog who loves
to be locked in his cage at night.
He doesn't even plead to get out
in the morning. A cat wouldn't
put up with that. Nor would I. Cats
aren't into cages—they prefer paper
on the floor which they sit on as if
it's a spot. Dogs don't do this
nor do children and I tend not to.
Cats also aren't into snow
which is a form of water and you can't
fool them though they may hang out

in a dry bathtub. Dogs don't do this
but children might. When the snow
melts, dogs and children
are less alike, though they still plead
for food or water or because
they have to pee. Everything's immediate
to them. Like the urge to stop
for a roll in the snow. Cats and I can wait.
We're more into paper and bathtubs
though for different reasons. But
this isn't about me or cats
but snow. Dogs love it and so do kids
though for different reasons.

BECKY WARNER

Blink

For a moment there is nothing
but the sun blooming
red through your eyelids,
its heat on your shoulders,
the weight of your bones.
Poems prickle your lips;
the earth breathes under your feet.
If you lift your arm
a cloud might bring
a sudden chill, sunspots
vanish from your eyes,
and all the words you'll ever need
scatter into blue air.

LINDA WERBNER

THE VOICE OF THE DOLPHIN OR MY MOTHER'S MORNING FART

I remember the huge, bellowing, stuttering fart my mother made every morning.

My room was adjacent to the bathroom and let me tell you, the acoustics were impeccable. In fact, we could rent it out to a local band to cut their 8-track demo in if it weren't so goddamned small.

You could hear every sigh and shudder, every gasp, every magazine page being turned in that tiny fake wood-panelled bathroom.

My mom knew it too, because whenever she cried, she'd run the water as a noise decoy. But I could always here her staccato sobs and whimpers through the gush. The first five minutes were always really hard and strong, and then it just tapered off into hiccoughs. After maybe about 8 minutes I'd see smoke coming out from under the door and I'd know she was ok, that any minute she'd bound outta there all relaxed and pink-eyed, ready to cook some sloppy joe and listen to my stories about school. All those years, I never asked her what was the matter. That's just what my mom did every day at 5:30 p.m.

At exactly 6:12 a.m.—I know this cause at the time, I had one of those cellular clocks on my nightstand, the kind where the letters are lit up bright yellow-green and you always end up remembering really precise times like 9:17 instead of 9:30—my mother would trudge into the can, her huge feet barely lifting off the ground so it sounded like the sandpaper bars we used in music class when we did "Kumbaya."

Someone's crying my lord, kumbaya/Someone's crying my Lord, kumbaya/Someone's crying my lord, kumbaya/Oh, lord, kumbaya . . .

I'd hear that lumbering slap of her meaty, varicose thighs on the porcelain and a moment later a huge, bellowing, stuttering

complaint of a fart echoed through the bowl. There was something triumphant and burly about that sound. I always envisioned it as her little fuck-you to all those assholes who'd ripped her off and messed with her head. Those assholes who made her cry every night at 5:30. And we both knew who they were.

Her special noise reminded me of this episode on dolphins I'd seen in "The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau," my favorite tv show on channel 2. (Mom liked it when I watched educational shows. She wanted me to have an education.) It suggested the haunting, moan-like cries that dolphins send to one another, lonely telegraphic signals bouncing freely, boundlessly on the dark ocean floor.

My mother's morning fart contained poetry, meaning, a soul.

Secretly, I marvelled at her body's ability to produce such a colossal sound every morning like clockwork, a sound expressing such emotion and pathos.

I wondered if one day my body would also be capable of articulating such a formidable utterance. I was 12. I had a difficult time imagining my body—short and flat and round, awkward like a guitar with new strings that hasn't been tuned yet—making such music.

My mother was shaped like an eggplant. She was thick and wide and curved in the right places so it didn't look like she was fat. She was built like a brick shithouse, as she liked to joke, and carrying three children had given her a Mae West style buxomness that she enjoyed showing off in supermarket aisles and on Saturday nights at the Best Western, where she'd dance with her girlfriends, other 40-ish truck driving ladies from Mal's Bakery Emporium, to 70s disco hits in her clingy black rhinestoned dress.

My mother hated the morning. She cursed it from heaven to hell. Why she had a job where she had to be up and out of the house by 6:30 a.m. every day to deliver cookies and pound cake to supermarkets, I'll never know.

During the day she'd joke and make light of this dark hatred she had for morning, like it was an old, familiar enemy that she had a sort of chummy, grudging respect for.

A million times growing up I must have heard my mother say on the phone that she was "not a morning person."

"No, me and morning don't get along," she'd say, nodding her head slowly, a soft, ironic smile playing on her lips.

Only zeeks and geeks liked the morning, according to my mother. The kind that get up every day without the aid of an

alarm clock to wrest them from balmy dreams. The kind that spring out of bed and don't need a brisk shower or caffeine to jumpstart their nervous systems into actions.

My mother loved her bed. She loved to sleep. She spent a lot of time sitting in her bed just reading mystery novels, smoking Virginia slims, painting her nails burgundy, watching Kojak on Channel 56.

Sometimes I'd come up to her room, after I did my homework, and just sit on her bed and watch tv with her. We'd say a few words about how fat Kojak's brother Stavros was getting. I'd borrow her nail polish and paint my toenails during the commercials.

Usually Bebop would be snuggling at my mother's feet, sleeping c-shaped, his low rumbling snores barely audible above the din of the tv. My mother would be wearing her bifocals, these Coke-bottle glasses she kept by her bedside table, which gave her a buggy look. Her face would be shiny from the vitamin E oil she mixed with Oil of Olay and slathered on. It gave off a funny, sweet, chemical smell which I have never been able to replicate.

"Tomorrow's trash day, don't forget," she'd say, her thumb gently swatting the cigarette lighter wheel.

I'd nod and blurt out, "there's this problem set that I still didn't get and it's driving me crazy, I tried every—"

"OK, OK. Let's have a look," she'd say, putting the cigarette down and folding her arms.

CHRIS WRIGHT

Exit

I found out early about lifts
and shafts; it's not all ropes,
boxes, ups-and-downs. Sometimes
they stop between floors,
the doors open and it's like skin
being opened. You smell
cemetery air—something private—
a downward communication
of thick wires, filthy brackets.
You scream and dent
the tinny walls, just to keep
from hearing the possible snap.

Sometimes you're stuck, lead-footed,
cooped-up in unlit crates. But
when you know better you find out
other ways, other ways out:
our stairs went in flights of threes
and sevens, two hundred down,
forty vaulted flights
then flushed into the bright
and widespread day.
Sometimes your legs can carry you,
you're cut free, touching the ground
just long enough to take off again.

The Watchman's Gone

So tired, oh so tired, the trains come and go.
On with destinations unknown.
The sun strains through the clouds
bright, bright sun it shines down on me.
I lay down, sleep, peaceful, sleep
it won't come.
Dreams, dreams my head doesn't clear.
The watchman's come,
kicks me out
down on my luck
no place to go
no food to eat.
I don't care
gotta move on.
Watchman's gone
When I die my brother, lie me down in the sun
The watchman's gone.

—N.W. MARTIN (1992)

In Memoriam

NORMAN WALTER MARTIN

July 24, 1944-February 25, 1995

U.S. MARINE CORPS
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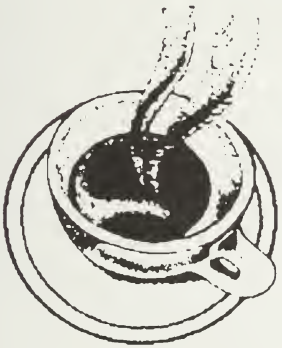

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