Great Lake Review

Spring 2009

GLR
Spring 2009

The Great Lake Review

Spring 2009

Oswego State University

The Great Lake Review is open to submissions throughout the year.

Please send your fiction, creative nonfiction, dramatic writing, poetry and visual art as an attachment to:

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Table of Contents

Poetry

Tuesdays With Jimmy by Kevin G. Leonard ---------- 6
Down: Down the Rabbit Hole by Sarah E. Carello ---------- 9
Ivan the Terrible by Linda Black - Ochsenbein---------- 24
High Smells and Roast Beef Words by Marc S. Sklar---------- 25
Familiar Rain by Jennifer Tinker---------- 37
Mary, Executed by Sarah E. Carello ---------- 41
Untitled by Linda Black-Ochsenbein ---------- 68
Scatterbrained, and How to Collapse Everything at Once by Mark Wallace ---------- 69
A Field Proposal by Hannah E. Smith---------- 77
Mohammed Salman Hamdani by William J. O'Brien ---------- 78
Everlasting Oxymoron by Carissa Ruiz---------- 82
Raid Rainbow by Kathryn E. Van Houtte ---------- 96

Creative Non-Fiction

Music is Bliss by Keith Edelman ---------- 7
Faces on the Mantle by Matthew C. Fallichio ---------- 19
Gasoline Heaven by Joeseph LaBella ---------- 31
Brushing Through a Tangled Mane by Viktoria Valenzuela-Pennington---------- 39
Hammer Down by Keith T. Edelman ---------- 54
Redemption by Jennifer Tinker ---------- 70
Claim to Fame by Matthew C. Falicchio---------- 83
Ups and Downs of Butterflies by Joeseph LaBella---------- 97
A "Roux" for you, mom by Keith T. Edelman ---------- 106

Fiction

Castling by Daniel N. Herson---------- 13
In the Long Run by Sarah R. Georgianna---------- 27
What We May Be by Amanda Nargi---------- 60
Into the Night by Marissa Hill ---------- 90
Wayne McCready by Jeane Spencer---------- 111

Art

Elitism by Gloria K. McAndrew ----- 12
On Parade by Kelly Chilton ----- 26
Untitled by Cara Livermore ----- 38
Santa's Coming by Gloria K. McAndrew ----- 67
Brass, Drums & Everyone by Kelly Chilton ----- 76
Erik by Gloria McAndrew ----- 81
My Mind Wanders From Here by Thomas Chilton ----- 89
Good enough by Gloria K. McAndrew ----- 95
Who Are You? by Sarah E. Fedigan ----- 105
Knowledge is Power by Gloria McAndrew ----- 110
Untitled by Cara Livermore ----- 114

Graphic Novels

Felix and Dad by Matthew Colon ----- 42

Tuesdays with Jimmy

Kevin G. Leonard

frying pans (hold your filibuster please
and kindly fold your hands)
made me smile. like friendship dipped
in heavy battered egg, two yolks
cracked out together burning out together.
sealing off doubt, jamming filters
of the trained assembled mind.
grease clears with time and questions
and the kitchen window is thrown
open once again and
air.
I find I can freely breathe
the crisp fall air.
I'll dance to that - fried
jig fire
kindled by cooking hands.

Music is Bliss

Keith T. Edelman

The line for the elevator in long, so I take the stairs. I do this often. It's my weak substitute for going to the gym. Pausing for a moment at before I make my way down 8 floors of Onondaga Hall, I pull out my newest toy from my coat pocket.

I'm a virgin. The first time is much anticipated, and then gone without fanfare as the glossy white ear buds penetrate my ears for the first time. Volume is maxed; nerves are shattered. So this is what it feels like. I've become one of them.

Shutting out the creaking of pipes, I'm struck by the heightened sense of piss and beer.

The heaviest boots Wal-Mart had to offer made silent work of the flights. The da-dum-da-dum two step of my usually eight floor decent lost in distorted guitar and snare drums. By six, I trip and almost take the fast way to five. At four, shuffle mode takes me from thrash metal to folk, I grab to railing to keep me from diving again.

"What the hell is going on?" I feel brain damaged.

Slowing down, I manage to make all the way to the basement without a struggle, never mind the fact I lost track of floors in a solo. I make my way back to one.

Coming out on the first floor, I round the corner and pass by the desk attendant. I'm looking, as I always do. I'm fascinated by the position, desk attendant, a person who gets paid to sit 3 hours a day behind a computer, playing spider solitaire, then has the balls to tell me they never have time to study.

Today, she's facing away from the window that surrounds the desk, entering in something on the computer, her fingers flying through the keys. I think so at least. My eyes see her fingers move but all I hear is Thrice, sporadic clicking is replaced by rhythmic thumping coursing its vibrations into my skull. I send her a smile and a quiet hello, like always. I try to be polite.

She jumps and turns. I stare at her in confusion, or I think I'm staring because she turns and stares at me. Maybe she said something. I don't know. I keep walking. Bitch.

Two silent doors later and I'm into the cold. It's 10:45 a.m. but it might as well be 5 a.m. Dark clouds are filtering mid-morning into a hazy gray light of predawn. It snowed last night. Classes won't change for another half-an-hour, and there only a few stragglers out and about on campus.

It's cold, I know it's cold because the thermometer mounted in my window read 12 degrees before I left. I can't feel it. I'm too focused on figuring out this cool acoustic melody, contemplating chords and pull-offs. The trees are moving, like always, bullied around by endless wind, but they feel detached. The same wind that pummels their ice crusted branches pummels my exposed cheeks yet am above it. I feel detached from the forces at bay. I feel powerful, like an aristocrat walking above the daily discourse of the masses.

This is amazing. I feel alive, awake, and I haven't had a single cup of coffee yet. Walking feels like floating. Everything washes away into music. Everything.

Someone is following me. I can feel it. Whatever, it's probably some creeper walking to close.

I focus on Clapton.

"They're still there," I can feel it again, someone lurking behind me. Fine, I'll turn around.

A green campus pickup truck is five feet behind, plow down on the sidewalk, clearly making enough noise to serve as the alarm clock for all of west campus. I hear none of it. . The driver stares at me and throws his hands in the air, and clearly says without a single word, "It's about fucking time,

asshole!"

I move to the side and the driver clearly is staring me down, although I don't turn my head to look.

"Shit," I thought. "This is how people get raped." Something country pops up on the shuffle. "Oh god, how did this get on here?"

I turn down the volume for a bit, I might live longer, and with gloves on, I couldn't click the "next" button.

Waves of faces are heading my way. Class must be out. Passing through the masses, I see the rash of daggling wires, and I notice something. Those white, wired ear drums signify more than just being cool, trendy, and a servant of Apple.

I take out the plugs and toss the tangled mess in my pack. Like most people, my first time was full of regret.

Down: Down the Rabbit Hole

Sarah E. Carello

Down: Down the Rabbit Hole.

So if I fall I'm really going to
float
right?

I mean, that's the theory.

But whenever I try it, it seems
that the theory fails.
Doesn't logic then dictate that this theory
just might be

false?

Who wrote the books of Wonderland
anyways? Oh right -

Carroll. But he is just Dodgson, a
mathematician

And Wonderland as a whole
has nothing to do with the sum of
anything; the unicorn will vouch for that.

Guess the whole of life
equals
the sum of wonderland
divided by logic.

Go figure, the mathematician
calculated correctly.
Who'd a thunk?

So why then am I falling again?
Einstein would define me insane

The last time...
I think I broke somethingAs usual, I tripped
over myself,

damn brain always seems to

get in the way,

like Chuck's age difference with Alice,
but my problem
didn't work out so nicely.

He at least got published.
and famous.

The whole way down I kept
thinking-

but not about the longitude
and screw the latitude,

Alice, must havebeen on crack-

but more about the fact that
physics and math go hand in
hand.

and I was at terminal velocity.

Around me nothing was
floating

and my brain wasn't near
my feet but somewhere
between

my ears.

I knew this couldn't be good

again.

And after I had stood up...

my limbs... they were working backwards.
The lion and Jack

were laughing and eating
cake.

Their knife cut me and I stopped
bleeding.

And I proved if nothing else,
the rabbit-hole theory
hurts;
        no leaves at
the bottom

to cushion the fall.

Elitism
Gloria McAndrew

Castling

Daniel N. Herson

The man knocked on our imposing three-story Victorian. He seemed out of place to us. He wore a suit on Saturday which screamed salesman or Jew. He didn't drive to our incredible house; he walked from the bus. His laptop bag did not escape our view. Salesman. The door flung open, but we knew it couldn't be Frank because Frank, the current master of the house, was in Sacramento giving a speech on workplace cooperation. He was the keynote. Naturally, Vicky opened the door. Vicky, Frank's daughter, was 12. As always she wore a black glove on her left hand and a white glove to mask her right hand.

"I'm Vicky."

"Hi, my name is ..."

"Stephen. I know. Come in. Do you like chess?"

"I'm here to speak to Frank." His impatience was already showing. The fact that she wants to play chess with him must mean he's one of those death insurance salesmen.

She paused. We hate death insurance salesmen. Long before Vicky was born we watched as a different man selling death talked to our mother. She bought policies to cover our funerals. "Just in case," she said with a smile. Money was tight and Hoover was doing nothing to help. Mother's smile turned to determination when our bath turned violent. We hated death insurance men.

Vicky ended her pause abruptly. "He's not here. You have a rock in your shoe ... might as well take them off."

"Where is he?" Steve asked, while removing his shoes. Vicky was wearing a pale blue shirt and pink corduroys, our two favorite colors. "When will he be back?" Steve already seems annoying to us.

"In California, somewhere. I made the appointment."

"I think you're wasting my time." He turned to go, leaving his guide behind. We didn't like him here, not alone, not with our Vicky. All the others had met with her when someone else was home besides us.

"Wait. Please, I did make the appointment."

"look I'm sure you did..." he clearly had already forgotten our Vicky's name.

"Vicky"

"Vicky sorry I'm bad with names ... but I can't sell, can't even do a fact finder to see what your needs are. My boss always says 'don't stay where you can't close' and I-"

"Please, if you already . . . I mean you're here and you put this in your planner so where are you" she cut herself off while using the white gloved hand to brush her hair out of her face.

" I don't mean I have other things to do it's just..."

He stopped. He seemed harmless although we had thought that before. He seemed indecisive, we tried to reassure ourselves. Passive, yes, that was it. If he were strong-willed, we reasoned, he would have left or stayed regardless of what she desired. His decision would not be based on her wants. If he was strong-willed then we might have an issue. But he seemed passive ... unless that was part of his tactic. She led him to the chess room.

"A chess room?"

It was once a small ballroom where we played. This children's dance we did moved us around the space as we had imagined what it would be like to grow old and go to balls. The room had long

since lost its purpose and Vicky was not interested in dancing. She was interested in chess, so the room became filled with five tables with inlaid wood, each with a chessboard and two leather chairs. If Frank made less money this would seem incredible. As it was we saw it more as a token. An apology of sorts since we rarely saw him and neither did she. She gestured the man to one in the center of the room, and he sat down. The board and pieces were made of Swarovski crystal.

"I feel like I'll smudge the pieces." She smiled at his statement and pulled out a drawer on her side of the table and then handed a pair of our father's black tuxedo gloves to Stephen. She then took off her black glove and put on the other half of our white opera gloves and began to play. Her moves were casual and harmonious.

"Have you been in the business long? Prudential. Do you know Matt?"

"He's my manager."

"He's an asshole — he's my stepdad."

"Right before giving me Frank's information and right after I had been warned about not meeting my quota, Matt had asked me 'Do you think I'm an asshole?' "

She laughed; she was warming up to him.

"Check." But in terms of the game she looked like we felt ... bored. The game began again after his bishop slid in front of his king.

"I've been selling for eight, no, nine years."

"Cool." She only spoke on her move as an ancient form of etiquette. He mirrored her etiquette.

"Do you like it?""It pays the bills." We could tell he lied; the cuffs of his dress pants had several rips of the sort that a man of means would have fixed. A man of true wealth, like Frank, would have bought a new one immediately.

"I like your suit." She was just being nice. We were not sure why. The minor details that have escaped the normally perceptive girl did not escape our gaze. This could get him in trouble; alone in the house with the daughter of a potential client. A girl who happened to be his boss stepdaughter. This is bad for him. He looked hungry; he is beginning to remind us more and more of the man who sold our mother the death insurance policies. Even if we don't think Frank is like our mother, we can't help drawing parallels.

"You are barely playing."

"Sorry, I ... "

"It's okay; I come off aggressively on the chess board." In one move, she slid her rook into place; it was checkmate. Hopefully Steve will remove himself from this house. "I always win." Her words were angelic and sympathetic. She wanted to empathize with his failure even if she couldn't.

"I'm sure you can lose, although you are very good."

"I have never lost. I'm not trying to be arrogant. It's just honest." She paused while she picked up the board and rotated it carefully. 180°. Then she began setting the board up again like a pool shark. It was automatic. She began speaking again, "There is this boy in school. I like him and he likes me, I think, but ,,, don't move yet." She pulled out the drawer and took off her gloves.

Steve followed suit. She had our black opera gloves now to counter father's white tuxedo gloves. They were father's favorite pair. She continued talking, while he studied the board. "I like him, but I can't play chess with him. I already think, I think too much. Too geeky, too not like Sarah." She said one of

our names. Why doesn't she want to be like us? "King's pawn. Nice. So what do you prefer? The Icelandic or just run-of-the-mill Scandinavian?"

"I used to like center game, but it's been awhile, Vicky, and I must admit I'm a little rusty. When I was younger I used to play the orangutan, but that was a long time ago."

The game continued in total silence, until finally, while Steve was staring at the board he said, "What's his name?"

"Who? Oh ... Josh. He's nice and cute," she blushed. "Stop fingering your bishop. It's not even your move."

"Sorry."

"But if I beat him, what guy would hang out with a girl who could beat him in anything, much less date? Especially when there are girls in school like sarah girls that don't have to try to let the boys win girls that don't have to try to have boys around them."

She stopped more abruptly than was warranted. "Can we talk about you?" She wasn't talking about us we wished we could be more a part of her world. Still her description of Sarah made us a little glad she was not talking about us.

"Okay." He took her pawn in an unusual way.

"En passant," she said, surprised. "Most people don't know how to do it." He smiled.

"Are you married?"

"No."

"How old are you?" she asked sweetly.

"Thirty-six."

"Have you ever been married?"

"No, I'm just looking for the right fit." He stretched his hand in the glove.

"My mom took till she was 40 to find Mr. Right, twice. Maybe if you had a car. Sorry, I noticed you walked. I saw you get off the bus." She paused, awkwardly. "It would have been shorter just to cut through my backyard. I didn't mean to make you wait so long, I just ...." She seemed too restless to finish her thought. She put her hands on the leather armrest and lifted herself into Indian style. "Maybe this is a bad subject. Um, I know, do you know how many squares are on the chessboard?"

"Sixty-four."

"Nope."

"Vicky, the chessboard is eight squares by eight squares, that's 64."

"That's right, but you're still wrong."

"Oh, are you counting the board? Okay, 65."

"204. You missed a few," she laughed innocently. "Math is rather simple; it's a pattern. See there is only one 8x8, four 7x7 and nine 6x6 and .... I'm boring you and if this bores you, how will I ever talk to Josh?" She gave a long frustrated, sad sigh and then said, "Let's talk about chess." The fact that she was playing a second game we found interesting. If he were too passive when he surmised that this too could be bad, what if Frank began thinking like mother? What if Frank started seeing dollar signs instead of Vicky? If he's passive, and we think he is, then Frank's offer of vast sums to insure the daughter will go unquestioned. He needs to be decisive but not aggressive. Make a choice. If only we could interact. Chess is the game of choice and he looks overwhelmed.

"Good move," she said, even if it wasn't, as a way of transitioning into "How do I get a boy to

like me?"

"I've never tried."

"Well what could a girl do to get your attention?"

"I ... I think I am the wrong one to ask"

"Don't women get your attention?"

"Yes, but I don't get their attention, so I notice them all"

"Do you notice me?"

"Can we change the subject? I'm a little uncomfortable with this."

"Sorry, I didn't mean I ... sorry, I just ... he's never around ... sorry."

A silence fell between them and she faltered in the game. We love the idea of him winning because if he won Frank would open a policy. Hopefully the policy would be to protect his daughter in case he died, Hopefully Frank would make her the Beneficiary, but one could never be sure. Steve was making choices; perhaps we will wrong about him. He might not be out to get Vicky or too weak to protect her if ... if something happened.

"Checkmate in four." If she wasn't playing better before, now she definitely was. He looked, studied and couldn't see anything. Then he began to see the problem. We could see it in his pupils as they dilated. In his situation that quickly explained why she didn't care about the pawn one step away from becoming a second queen for him, the board looked so dire it seemed hopeless. This came as a cruel blow for us. We were beginning to like him. We were beginning to believe that our desires had an effect on the living. She had him. He might as well resign — it was that terrible.

"Want a little break for tea?" she asked. He nodded his head in the affirmative. His internal frustration has been showing. She left the room. Casually he pulled out an old coin from his pocket. We looked closer at the Liberty nickel. We recalled this 1903 nickel; it was ours. We had branded it with an S. All of our names started with an S. He began rubbing our coin for luck.

We were taken off guard when she returned with two cups of Earl Grey tea on saucers. He seemed equally distracted. He went to put the coin back into his pocket but it hit the ground and began rolling in a woodgrain-made channel. The coin tumbled into that heat vent. We never expected him to give the coin back. We didn't even think he knew it was ours. But he did.

"I put milk in the tea, like the British. You look frustrated."

"I just dropped a coin and it rolled," he pointed to where he had generously returned the coin to us.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Was it valuable? I've lost a lot of things down there. Dad says it's dangerous to try and get things back out."

"Don't worry, it's not that valuable. A friend gave it to me said it would be lucky and that 'someday you'll realize how lucky it can be,' but don't worry. It's never brought me any luck" he paused. "So have you ever been to England? The milk ...."

"No, but I think that's how they do it." She continued, "How do you know if a guy likes you? Sorry, I know I already asked, but ...."

Steve took a long sip. The steam billowed lightly out of the top. He had proven to be a man of character. He deserved to win. But the board still held the pieces in the wrong places for an easy victory. He looked at the board and castled queenside. She looked shocked and said, "You play well, but you never answered my question."

"Let's just play to the end. Then I promise I'll answer you." She moved the only one she could move. She dared him to take her queen, with his knight. Both would leave the board, but since she had more pieces this would be a distinct advantage for her. Unless he came up with something incredibly clever, she would take his queen and Matt would be even worse than any other possibility. We scanned and searched. We knew it wouldn't actually affect the game. Make a choice Steve, we hoped, make a choice. We knew losing the queen would destroy his game, even if he could find a way to take several of her pieces in its wake. He still had a pawn one step away from turning into a queen and then he'd have two queens. But somehow that didn't seem like it would help. He took another drink and a smile crept across his face. He put down his cup and stretched his arm across the board. He picked up the pawn and flitted gently to the last row.

"Queen?" she asked, as if it were a foregone conclusion.

"No." She looked bewildered by his response. "Knight." At first his insistence for the knight seemed odd. But then the devastation was visible on her face. Steve stared at his handiwork. Not only was she in check and had only one way to escape, but the next move for him was to use his new knight to take her queen. She saw her own move and took it.

"That was brilliant." We wished we could have added our compliments to hers. As planned, Steve took her queen with his new knight in quick order of four moves. Both of them stared at the board. It was clearly impossible for her to win, and she resigned, smiling as she did so.

"Are you happy that I won?"

"Yes, even chess masters, grandmasters, Fischer, all have lost, but I could not identify with any of them. Even Deep Blue, a chess playing computer, had more human flaws than me. I feel human now. I feel like I can connect to people. Everyone applauds genius until it goes too far and then it's just weird. And I'm relieved for another reason ... now come, you promised me that we would talk about Josh. I can see from your eyes that you want to leave. That's all right, but there is one more thing that we have to do first. His presentation was yesterday and he never travels on Saturday, so he's expecting my call." She pulled out a cell phone. He is confused by this unexpected turn and we rejoiced so loudly that I'm surprised no one heard us. Three of her phrases rang above the rest: one "He beat me;" two "Prudential;" and three "okay." Then she handed him the phone.

Frank's voice boomed as he talked a little too fast. "Congrats on winning. I need a policy with her as beneficiary. I don't want to mess with the other policy. How about this? I'm a smoker. That's not a problem." It wasn't a question. He continued, "I would like to sign for 100% income replacement on Monday. You're free, right at, say 7 a.m. I'm a morning person." This also was not a question. "Let's close this then two days from now. You need to know my income. I make 6 1/2 million every year. Income replaced until she's 25. All right?" Finally he paused.

It only took a matter of decimals of seconds for Steve to take a quick inhale of breath and respond with, "Yes, thank you, I think it's a terrific idea."

"Don't thank me. Every life insurance man and woman from every company has been to this house. They all play chess. If they don't beat the girl, not even once, and they leave, with just a waste of time ... get what I'm saying? I mean, if you can't beat a 13-year-old at chess why should I trust you with my money? It takes math, chess, and insurance. So 7 a.m. Monday."

Vicky said "You two had a nice talk"

"It was amazing but I, I didn't say much" this was normal for conversations with Frank.

"Talking to Frank is mostly about listening I love the sound of his voice." Slowly she took off her gloves and Steve did as well. She put all the gloves in the drawer. We couldn't understand why she didn't pull out a new set of gloves for a rematch. Perhaps she wants a break. She then put out her hand and that man who moments ago returned our coin to us shook her hand. No one not even us touches her skin.

" I guess I should be going now."

"Wait, I'll walk you threw my backyard... we can talk - "

"Ok - "

"About josh"

"Oh right I did promise"

They cruelly walk to the door. And out. As the door pivoted on it's hinges we knew she would return to us. We knew she would return to us. We knew she would return to us.

Faces on the Mantle

Matthew C. Falicchio

"My grandson Matt was a hell of a basketball player," Tom, my grandfather blurted out, though one really had to listen closely to understand the labored words. He looked at me wide-eyed, as if it were a typically conversation piece, waiting for me to respond...

"He had his moments," I replied with faint frustration.

A football game was on the nursing home's television, and I figured it had sparked the comment. Correcting Tom on his confusion would have been futile. My family and I simply tried to go along with what he was saying, no matter how absurd. Harping on inaccuracies only further confirmed how far from the norm his mind had truly wandered, extents none of us were eager to discover.

"Matt was hungry all the time when he was small," he joked, smiling. "Could eat until his stomach was ready to burst! Stayed skinny though, I don't know how."

I laughed out loud.

"Grandma sure as hell never starved anybody," I replied.

Mary, my grandmother, and Tom's wife, had brought her families Italian cooking to America from Sicily. A dinner preparation for her was more like a priest getting ready to perform a sacrament, rather then a simple late afternoon routine. Tom showed a similar admiration toward mealtime, which was to be expected after so many years lucky enough to enjoy Mary's cooking. Despite the fact that my grandfather's brain was dissolving into an abyss of madness he managed to remember me as excited at Sunday dinner as a typical child would be running down the stairs Christmas morning to a sack of gifts. To not appreciate that kind of cooking truly would be a sin. Those dinners, of course, ended after Mary's last fall, which landed her a prolonged stay at this local nursing home. The fall took place, fittingly, in her kitchen.

As our discussion paused again I stared at Tom, as I often did, wondering what was going through his head. The man had rolled his car into our driveway every Saturday morning of my childhood, ready to take my sister and I to the mall to pick out any toy we wanted. He spoiled the hell out of us one day a week, and there wasn't a damn thing our parents could do to stop him. My sister and I adored Mary and Tom. Looking back, I find myself unable to find one instance where either of them exhibited anything toward us without love or a degree of admiration. If we screwed up, it was my parent's job to scold us, not theirs. The Saturday morning mall trips, along with the Sunday Italian dinner extravaganzas, had ended some years prior. Now, with my father and various other members of the family spending a few hours a day at Tom's house, he was just barely able to manage by himself.

There were frequently slip ups, like when he'd once driven to an electric company where my grandmother had worked decades prior, and proceeded to wait hours for her to emerge from the building. Only after management was alerted were they able to track us down to collect him. We accepted and handled such events as they happened, feeling they weren't serious enough to take him out of his home. Institutionalizing my grandfather was simply not a feasible option. He didn't have the demeanor for round the clock care, and had previously not tolerated any form of it. Looking around the nursing facility, I began to understand why. The house was the only tangible thing he had left to hold onto mentally.

There would always be some tiny degree of sanity in Tom's mind while he remained in that house, and we each knew that the moment we took him away the illness would only destroy him more rapidly.

My family figured that bringing Tom to see Mary often at the nursing home, as in this instance, would put some of his confusion at ease. Also, somewhat selfishly, we hoped it would result in calls

to our house at three in the morning, terrified that his wife of fifty-two years had disappeared, occur less frequently. Even if the second Tom left the nursing home no memory survived of ever being there, it still brought a smile to his face every time he saw her. Instead of my grandparents being the constant caregivers it was now my family which did the looking out. Roles had reversed, and the new arrangements echoed with a sense of finality.

My grandfather and I watched the football game blankly as nurses prepared my grandmother in her room. The dining area was equipped with a big screen television and long cafeteria tables. Flowers and decorations were neatly placed along the tables in hopes of making the prolonged stay of the facility's residents minutely more endurable. Six or seven residents remained in wheelchairs at the tables, though dinner had ended three or four hours ago. A few older folks just stared at my grandfather and I. They seemed unapproachable, dazing in and out of sanity and consciousness. Eyes looking at no particular part of us, just staring blankly at our figures. Perhaps we were just something else to look at. New scenery. It was their home, not yet ours.

The dining area, and for that matter the entire facility, was lit very brightly. Light bounced off the all white walls every hour of the day, giving one the sense that they were in fact institutionalized. Motivational posters appeared on the white walls with every diversion of the eye. One of the posters contained a cute animated tiger with the saying, "Keep your head up!"!" It was almost as if we'd stepped into an elementary school. Nurses shuffled around the dining room carelessly, picking up from dinner and kindly chatting with the remaining seniors.

The nursing home had the same unexplainable smell as most hospitals. I related this rubbing alcohol, old furniture odor with misery, imprisonment, pain and utter helplessness. I couldn't help but feeling a great deal of unease every second I spent in the center.

"Grandpa, you're wearing your wig?" I asked with some confusion.

His head nodded and he smiled, but kept most of his attention on the television screen. For the hour or so I'd been with my grandfather I hadn't consciously realized that he was wearing his hair until that moment. Tom wore brown, wavy wigs most of his adult life. They gave him resemblance to a Mafioso game show host. He'd worn the wigs for thirty or so years after losing all the hair on the top of his head. He had three or four mannequin heads on the mantle in his bedroom which he kept the wigs on. The heads were white, with small indentations for eyes and the mouth. The ghostly figures reflected against a large rectangular mirror on the wall behind the mantle. I recall being completely terrified of the faceless heads, and refused to enter his room as a small child. The oddly textured wigs meshed nicely with his extremely thick, dark eyebrows not uncommon among Italian men.

A few years back paramedics found my grandfather passed out in his car for no particular reason and took him to the hospital. On that day, after he woke up, Alzheimer's mysteriously crept into all of our lives. The wigs suddenly stopped attaching themselves to him. No longer did he find a need to leave the house with a head full of hair.

The disease robbed my grandfather of many things, and the wig was a part of his mind, a part of his life, that died with Alzheimer's birth. My mother and father were actually pleased to see the wigs forgotten. They found it a little odd for a sixty-five year old man to need a wig.

"Who was he trying to impress?" They'd joke.

Part of me believes that seeing hair on his head every morning in the mantle mirror was a way

for Tom to stay young, if only in his mind.

My grandfather seemed to take on about ten years without the game show host wigs. His newly-exposed forehead was wrinkled, and his eyes were no longer hidden behind the artificial brown hair. Grayish bristles around his ears and over his neck now followed a path to a bare head. The harshness of reality and old age could no longer be concealed. My grandfather went from independent to unpredictable, young to old, healthy to terminal, in a single afternoon. The vanishing wig had just been the beginning, an uncomfortable breeze blowing by an hour before the hurricane.

A wheelchair rolled into the dining room. A woman in a flower patterned nurse outfit pushed. Seated was a petite older woman, who after years of poor health vaguely resembled a skeleton which had yet shed all of its skin. The nurse had pulled her clothes on and fluffed up my grandmother's hair, probably at her own request. Mary's hair never had turned gray. It was the one, and possibly sole aspect of my grandmother that hadn't surrendered to time. Perhaps wearing that wig for so many years was Tom's way of keeping up.

The nurse pushed the chair toward my grandfather. He awkwardly stood up, kissed Mary on the cheek, and hugged her as if he hadn't seen her in years. My grandmother pointed her lips toward him and kissed the air, to weary to turn her head all the way around. Her legs were wrapped up in bandages following recent surgeries where she received brand new knees and hips. A blanket was spread across her lap, though it must have been eighty degrees in the facility. She didn't weigh anything over ninety pounds, and her bones looked so brittle they'd crack if someone were to touch them. The nurse pushed the chair toward my grandfather. He awkwardly stood up, kissed Mary on the cheek, and hugged her as if he hadn't seen her in years. My grandmother pointed her lips toward him and kissed the air, to weary to turn her head all the way around. Her legs were wrapped up in bandages following recent surgeries where she received brand new knees and hips. A blanket was spread across her lap, though it must have been eighty degrees in the facility. She didn't weigh anything over a ninety pounds, and her bones looked so brittle they'd crack if someone were to simply flick a finger against her. It'd be a miracle if she ever regained the ability to walk on her own, but her mind remained sharp as a tack. My grandmother would not be staying in the nursing home indefinitely as most of the others would, only until she healed enough where Tom, and perhaps a part time nurse could care for her.

I knew that it killed Mary being surrounded by the dying day after day, but she never would let us see it. It was only visible in her sighs and the blank expressions on her face when she thought no one was looking. She couldn't bring herself to let my grandfather know she was unhappy. Not one of the multiple ailments tormenting my grandmother ever meant the least bit change for Tom's admiration toward her. He showed her the same affection on this day as he probably had when she was a twenty-year-old woman. He hugged her as tight now as he had for decades, and forever if he could.

"I was just telling him about Matt and how he used to play baseball," my grandfather said joyfully as he again joined me on the couch.

"You lump," Mary replied jokingly. "This is Matt right here."

His eyes looked me up and down, his expression still one big smile.

"Yea," he continued, laughing awkwardly. "Course, it's Matt" as if he'd known the whole time.

He glanced away, unconcerned with his mistake. My head shook a little, and I smiled in disbelief that the two of them still were able to function as a couple. The two had been identically alike back in

their prime. They each came from the same section of Italy. Just from photographs you could see it. Perfect for each other.

My grandmother kept a black and white picture next to the hospital bed of the two at what I later discovered was a lavish Mafioso wedding decades prior. In the photo my lavishly dressed grandparents had one arm around each other tightly as they posed. In the background were various figures laughing and dancing, and I bet that the two of them had reentered the dance floor the moment after the camera flashed. It resembled something found in a classic film. Now in the final days of the fifty-two year marriage I could clearly see it again. My grandfather's mind was lost, or at least leaving, and his wife's body was rubbish. Tom acted as the body, and my grandmother the mind. Together, as it had always been, they seemed to make one complete person.

"Grandma," I blurted out, noticing that she had not clued in on Tom's hair either. "Grandpas wearing his wig tonight."

She looked up at her husbands head. Her face winced and the forced smile she'd been carrying popped in and out of existence as she struggled to turn her body.

"You get him to put that thing on?" She asked, laughing somewhat.

"No," I replied casually. "I just noticed it before you came out,"

Mary turned again and her eyes focused intently on the wig, and on Tom. Her smile relaxed into an even expression of missing emotion. It looked as if her physical discomfort had slipped to the side and been replaced by another, equally ferocious hurt.

It had been years since anybody had seen the ancient wig on Tom's head, and after seeing my grandmother's expression it dawned on me how incredibly odd it was. Why today? After so long why had those particular nerves connected in his brain telling him to leave the house with his wig on?

The three of us didn't discuss the wig further, and converted to small talk about our day and how upstate New York was presently being blanketed by snow. The football game ended about an hour later, and I walked alongside Tom as he wheeled my grandmother back to her room. She didn't make a single remark regarding the wig, her only reaction being the initial stare of concern. Tom gave her a kiss on the forehead and we headed for the exit, just as we'd done countless times before. We left the nursing home, and after Tom was settled in his lonesome residence for the night I made the short trip back home. My family had made an unspoken habit of not talking much about the changing behavior of my grandfather, so I said nothing to them about the wig. Like any good mystery, the answers would soon find the light of day.

Thirty-six hours later, after he'd suffered a massive heart attack and I had found the answer, I told them. My parents, sister, Mary and I watched as my bald grandfather inhaled a large gulp of the hospital air and drifted off to sleep for the very last time. Why on Earth he had remembered his hair two nights prior surprisingly was the only thing we could bring ourselves to discuss on the solemn drive home.

I knew the answer. Pending death had cleared up certain anomalies in his mind, such as the wig. Even on his deathbed he appeared aware of his surroundings compared with the sedated looking expression he'd carried throughout the past few years. It wasn't a definite conclusion, but enough for me.

"Maybe he should be buried with the wig on?" My mother stated a few minutes into the ride home, trying to break us from the situation at hand.

None of us responded. I simply placed a hand over my sweaty forehead and rested my head against the cold glass of the backseat window, watching tree after tree zip by. My mind was not in the car, but with the widow two miles back.

To this day expressionless, upright heads of mannequins wearing beautiful wigs remain forgotten on the old man's bedroom mantle, reveling their youth.

Ivan the Terrible

Linda Black-Ochsenbien

Ivan the Terrible, we
called him-
smirks sliding underneath
our cheeks--we
wouldn't get what we
deserved.
He wouldn't raise
the hand to strike-the belt to
slide loop by loop, snaked
around his waist-
felled-
falling slack between,
ground and hip.
By evening, his scent would
drift, long before his
descent in,
an off-white suit, red
shirt stained, and a herringbone
chain, thick as a thumb, winking an
obscene gleeam from his neck.
Mother would wear the smirke curled
tight on pressed lips, slipping a hand
inside her robe, pulling out tangled
Kleenex, crumpled like yellow
roses.
A cool palm pressed into
his. She whispered, "Don't
be late". She knew,
he would.

High Smells and Roast Beef Words

Marc S. Sklar

The diningroom bubbles with talk
Aunts pull out chairs for whide smiling wives
Kids scatter in, chasing mom-calls
All around, thundering boom of flesh on wood

Erupting from the room flew a delicate smell,
Of spices rich and dark, juice and debris
Brown crust and sear marks of torn and burnt meat,
Towered over trunks of broccoli trees,
The stiffened rod forest of hot, steaming greens,
creamy dense dunes of spud and salt licked,
Splashed and spat towards the towering meat.

Framed by shores of porcelain sand,
Violent and churning seas of oils and fats,
Lapped and danced at the base of the meat
While climbing above lay cracks torn in,
Rivers of juice carving lines to the sand
Outcrops and crags of pepper-rock cracked
Tumbled and spun and splashed

Bellowing steam, wispy foam, floating,
Fluttering, flies to their wet, dripping noses
They wait.

And metal to mouth
The scrape of the knife,
The glug-slap of coke,
"I'll top off your glass!"

Stuffing and snorting, cramming and gloating,
Until their plump, sticky hands fall to their sides
Weak from the feast, full from the meat,
Stuffed from the brim, "god save the beast!"

A weak wretch of a squeek came from a seat
In the back of the room, surrounded by meat
Tipped toward the rest, head up and arms wide
a small little boy proclaimed "genocide!"

On Parade

Kelly Chilton

In the Long Run

Sarah R. Georgianna

It was the type of day that rained pure slush, straight from the sky. The type that by-passed the natural process of snow-ice-melt and skipped straight to the grand finale, the final act. It was the type of day that rained pure slush and insured that my new ill Roché boots would never be new again.

They say spring comes with renewal, and renewal does not come easily.

"Spare change?"

I hate the bums of this city.

"A nice girl like you has a few bucks to spare."

I spent two hours on this outfit.

I throw out my chest. Straighten my chin. "I'm poor."

I am *such* a bad liar. A fifteen-hundred-dollar outfit, minus the purse and shoes, and I have the nerve to say I'm poor? Well now I really have his attention.

Breathe deeply. Get in character. Assume the role.

This is why I'm in therapy 4 days a week.

This is why I keep walking, knowing that the beige-toned suede lace-ups with the moc-style round toe, contrast stitching and overlay accents will be a wet dull gray in the 15 minutes it takes me to reach Doctors Kilchers office.

It starts with me being insane, I should clarify that.

When you're young and circling the drain, New York is pretty much the best place to be. Ask anyone. A plane ticket and a cheap apartment, both made possible by a parent-funded college loan I never wanted, and here I am. Cheap being a fairly relative term, of course.

When you're young and circling the drain, New York is pretty much the best place to be. Ask anyone. A plane ticket and a cheap apartment, both made possible by a parent-funded college loan I never wanted, and here I am. Cheap being a fairly relative term, of course.

After that it was clothes, shoes and an overpriced hair cut. Something edgy. I got a job off it and have lived hand-to-mouth ever since. The money is spent on Some Well Known Designer clothes, which are needed to work at Some Well Known Designer store.

If we all lived this way, the economy would be booming and the concept of cloning would be considered redundant.

It's true.

It's only paranoia if it can't actually happen, that's important to remember.

So we've started where I'm insane, and left for New York, because really, why *not* leave for New York?

I should also clarify that I was never a college student. Tell people you work at Some Well Known Designer store and they want to know why. What else are you doing with your life? Where will you go from there?

But tell people you're a college student studying hard and working to support the brothers and sisters left behind by your mother's untimely tragic death from Some Kind of Cancer and they shut right up.

No questions asked..

I never had brothers and sisters either.

God love me for a liar.

My boots leave splotchy wet track marks across the frieze-style carpeting in the outer office. There's probably a maintenance man flinching somewhere. A uniquely beautiful Asian receptionist takes my name and offers me cappuccino while I wait. Most people don't notice these beverages being added to their weekly bill at three times the price that you could buy one on the way over. It's only paranoia if it can't actually happen.

My Dior Botanicals lipstick forms the words no thank you as I take a seat.

Kilcher is precisely on time, even on a miserable day like this.

Capped white teeth guide me to a pristine inner office where I'll be offered more caffeinated beverages and sympathetic looks at $125 an hour. A tab that will steadily rise for Mom and Dad back in Some Suburban Town, USA.

"How are you feeling, Eileen?"

I'm not. I'm really not.

"Is there something I can offer you? Tea, coffee?"

This is when we first met.

Let the games begin.

I've never been healthy. Something in me is always calling for something more, some new place, some new solution lying just out of sight. I can be a whole new person. Anyone I want.

I can search until I find a sky blue enough, and water clear enough, so that the seams blend flawlessly at some distant horizon. And that's why I really left for New York.

That and the fact that if you can't find something real, you might as well settle for the best brand of Fake you can find. New York, New York.

Let's jump back a little.

"Shit...fuck!" A thousand pills spill from my Carlos Falchi handbag, impeccably designed to make Marc Jacobs look fit for a hobo.

Ok, not a *thousand.*

Not even Carlos Falchi it's a knockoff.

"Eileen? Eileen, leave it. What's all this?" Judging by the name, it's me my boss is talking to.

I mumble something about protein supplements, iron pills, a daily vitamin. I'm a vegetarian, you know, and anemic to boot.

What I don't remember is that vicodin comes with its name neatly imprinted opposite the evenly scored smooth side. So does xanax, though with the quantities I take, no scored line is necessary.

My boss picks up a few.

I think, C'mon, everyone's doing it. At least it's not Quaaludes.

Her pursed Apricot Sun lips say, "Last straw. Sales are down and your foundation work is sloppy.

Leave the counter keys on my desk."

When you're young and circling the drain, New York is pretty much the best place to be.

I'm turning to leave.

"Oh, Eileen? No pay today."

Of course.

When you lose a job while living in a city that could chew you up and shit you out without actually noticing you exist, the first thing you think of is being able to sleep till noon the next day.

The next thing you think of is what you can sell without completely disrupting your wardrobe.

Except when you're me, the only thing your really concerned about is how many vicodin it would take to make you feel better about this. And how many after that would kill you.

You knew this was heading to an overdose, didn't you?

So I guess that's the real reason for Doctor Kilcher. I guess that's where he enters into this, if you need me to connect that for you.

After Mom and Dad of Some Suburban Town, USA received their third medical bill for a stomach pump and 4 days of hospital-supervised de-tox, they decided paying for therapy would actually save money, in the long run.

They still believe in a long run. It's flattering, in its own way, it really is.

And all because I wouldn't come home.

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They still believe in a long run. It's flattering, in its own way, it really is.

And all because I wouldn't come home.

Which leaves me wading the 14 blocks to Kilchers office in these boots.

Which leaves me declining overpriced beverages.

Which leaves me stuck here, in a pristine sterile eggshell-white office staring at the slits of plastic blinds, having divided myself on the neatly imprinted scored lines, evenly, to the neurologists and the therapists of Some Overpopulated Area, NYC.

Now that's not entirely accurate. God love me for a liar, but I left out a few things.

It's been weeks since that first meeting. Kilcher's been faithfully on time and consistently useless ever since, and the rent money I don't have is due at an upcoming date that I don't know.

I guess this is what they call "real time".

Kilcher directs my gaze lightly from the blinds with the tip of a pencil.

"Eileen?"

He's asked me a question, I must have zoned out. That's probably not the whole truth either, but it makes the most sense.

"Eileen, can you wait just a moment?"

He has a call.

"It's my daughter's school, just one moment?"

The receptionist must have patched her through.

I nod. I'll be fine. Love me for a liar.

Ok, blinds. Just you and me.

Tell me, how're *you* feeling? Got any spare change? Anything I can offer you to drink?

Stuff like this makes me giggle, lips bleeding slightly where they're chapped to the point of cracking.

I cross to the blinds.

Fascinating little things.

The long cord trails through my fingers the way water would feel if you made it a solid.

A few short turns and I'm held by the neck, like a leash.

Studies show that suicide cases favor one method of termination per individual.

What I mean is, people have a favorite way of doing things, and once they've tried a first time, they tend to stay in similar categories. Guns to guns. Knives to knives. Ashes to ashes, if you get my drift.

People like me weren't interviewed.

People like me were probably busy thinking up new ways.

Knit white threads press a few inches under my chin.

I feel the pressure.

Involuntary cardiac muscle moves faster because boy, we're getting down to it now.

I drop the cord.

"Kilcher?"

I'm yelling in a therapist's office. That's inappropriate, I know that.

I'm yelling because when you're young and circling the drain, New York is pretty much the worst place to be.

"Kilcher? I'm done with this, Kilcher. Can you hear me? I won't do it again. I... I wanna go home."

When you lose a job while living in a city that could chew you up and shit you out without actually noticing you exist, the first thing you think of is how many mistakes it took to bring you here.

Because the truth is? No one here is as bad as I make out. My parents are concerned. Kilcher is frustrated. And I'm the warm little center of all my own plotlines.

Renewal does not come easily.

"I wanna go home, Kilcher. Please…make me better 'cuz I wanna go home."

Gasoline Heaven

Joseph LaBella

It's another one of those hot, summer days where the shirt sticks to my back. The kind of day that when the wind blows it feels like someone was breathing on the back of my neck. A day when the wind picks up enough and I'm sweating so much that I get the chills. The chills hit my bones. It's the kind of day where I get so hungry from sweating out all of my energy. It doesn't help when I can smell the Spare Rib down the block cooking lunch. I smell the seasonings as they exit the vent fan at the top of the building and make their way over to me. I can smell them when I get the quick break from exhaust and gas fumes.

I approach a yuppie in his Mercedes Benz. His right, rear tail light is out. I've asked him several times, nicely, to turn off their engine.

"Please, sir. It's really hot out here and the engine running is making it worse."

"Well, if I turn my car off I won't be able to have the air-conditioning on. I'm on my way to work, and don't want to sweat in my suit," this arrogant dickhead says, covering the receiver part of his phone with his hand. He looks at me and laughs.

"Sir, I'm going to turn off the pump if you don't kill the engine. It's illegal to keep the car running while you're getting gas. It's the law."

"I don't care what the law is. I'm not sweating."

"Fine, have it your way, sir." I click off the nozzle and put it back in the holster. "You owe me $6. Actually you owe me $6.34, but since I'm a nice guy I'll only ask for $6. How's that sound?"

"I want to see your boss. This is ridiculous that you're being like this. It's your job to pump my gas. What I do while that's happening is my business."

"Well, when I'm losing two pounds every second your engine is on, then it becomes my business.

So, where's the six bucks, guy?"

Through all the shouting my boss comes out of his office to see what the problem is. Since it's his business, and he "values" each one of his customers, I know it is only time before I'm stuck with exhaust hitting my leg as this asshole gets the rest of his gas.

***

People ask me what I do for a living. I respond with, "I'm a Petroleum Engineer." They make faces that say "wow, sounds like a great job." Their smiles go away, though, once I tell them what that means. I pump gas. My job consists of greeting the customer, asking them what type of gas they want, how they're going to pay for it, pressing the button of the type of gas they want, and putting the nozzle into their car. It's a cake job. The only times the job is terrible is when I have to deal with the weather and people who can't follow directions.

***

It was the first day of summer vacation before I became a senior in high school, and I wanted to sleep late. My mom came into my room at nine in the morning.

"Get up! You need to go down to Rudy's place and get a job." She threw my blinds open, and the morning sun smacked me in the face.

"What the hell time is it? It's the first day of vacation, Mom. Can't I just sleep for another hour?"

"You get your ass up right now! I'm going to be late for work. I want you to call me after you talk to Rudy, and let me know how it goes." As she left my room she called my dog to jump on my bed

and wake me up. Between the slobber and nasty breath I was awake. I knew that this wasn't going to be fun, but I got up and dressed with the mindset that I could get this job.

When I walked out the door my newly purchased red Monte Carlo SS was smiling at me as I opened the door and hopped in. On the way to the gas station I rehearsed what I was going to say. *Hey, my name's Joe. No, that's not right. Hey, Rudy, I'm Joe. I was wondering if you needed anyone else to work for you. No, that won't work either. Hello. My name is Joe, and I need a job.* I got myself upset because I couldn't help but realize I sounded like a dufus no matter what I said.

As I pulled into the gas station parking lot I decided that I was going to let the words fumble out of my mouth. The anxiety was building while I walked over to a couple of the guys who were working.

"Excuse me. Do you guys know where Rudy is?" I said.

"Yeah, he's in his office. It's right through those doors and it's the first one on the right." The guy working there looked at me and smirked as he put a wad of money into his pocket. He had at least five hundred bucks on him. I thanked the guy and walked towards the office. I nervously knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" A raspy voice came through the wooden door. That was a good question. Who was I? I was just another little fucker looking to make some money while finishing high school.

"Um, it's Joe LaBella. I'm here to look for a job." There was a buzzing noise and the door flew open. I walked into Rudy's office and stood in front of his desk. I felt as if I was talking to the "Gotti" of gas station owners. His velour jumpsuit looked ironed, what was left of his hair was slicked backed nicely, and his gold watch gleamed from the reflection of the lights in his office. All that was missing was some type of Mafia-style music.

"Sit." He took both hands, open-palmed, and pointed to the seat next to his desk. "So, Joey, how do you know me?" *He's already calling me Joey as if he knows who I am.*

"Your brother, Mike, was my basketball coach last season. He told me if I was looking for a job I should come to you, and see if you can help me out."

"Oh, right. Michael was telling me about you. Alright, come back in tomorrow at ten to train." He on the front. "Here are my rules. If you're fifteen minutes early, you're on time. If you're on time, you're late. If you're late, you're fired. I'll see you tomorrow at what time?"

"9:45."

"Oh, right. Michael was telling me about you. Alright, come back in tomorrow at ten to train." He went into his closet and threw me a pair of black shorts and a large green shirt that said "Gasoline Heaven" on the front. "Here are my rules. If you're fifteen minutes early, you're on time. If you're on time, you're late. If you're late, you're fired. I'll see you tomorrow at what time?"

"9:45."

"You catch on quick. I like that. Now get out of my office, I'm busy."

The next morning I awoke at nine o'clock. I ate my cereal, read the comic section, took a shower, and drove down to the station. I got there earlier than being early. I wondered if that counted for anything. I waited on the bricks in front of the office window for Rudy to notice I had shown up. I wasn't sure what to do with myself. I stood there baking in the sun. A few of the men who were working at the time kept staring in my direction, sizing me up like I was prey for their hunt.

"Hey, kid. He isn't going to notice if you stand there with a thumb up your ass. You gotta knock on the window," a man with a bull-dog face said. I didn't know if he looked like that every day, but that day he seemed pissed.

I knocked on the window. Rudy threw the window open and shot me the dirtiest of looks. I thought I was going to be sent home at that moment.

"I'm on the phone. What they hell do you want?"

"I'm, um, here to train for the job?"

"I know that. Who told you to knock?"

"Hey, Al, you think you're funny? You knew I was on the phone. Get this kid started with Steve on the front island. I don't want him handling money yet. Just show him what the hell he has to do." He motioned me over to Al then slammed the window shut.

I walked up to the front island and met Steve. He was a short guy with thick hands and crooked teeth. He looked worn out, as if he'd been there for a long time. Al told him that all I was to do was learn the basics of what this job is about.

"That guy right there," I said while pointing over to the pissed off guy.

"Hey, Al, you think you're funny? You knew I was on the phone. Get this kid started with Steve on the front island. I don't want him handling money yet. Just show him what the hell he has to do." He motioned me over to Al then slammed the window shut.

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"Alright, Joe. Here's the deal. You start the shift with $100 in your bank. You split it up with your partner, each get fifty dollars. As the shift goes on you're going to get more money. Every hour and a half they call a 'drop,' which means you go up to the window and you drop off some of the money in your bank. Usually you keep five twenties, if you have it, and drop off the rest of the big bills. Twenties, fifties, hundreds, what have you. You got that?" he said. *You talk so damn fast, so how the hell am I supposed to keep up?*

"Now we'll learn how to address the car. Alright so, the car pulls up. You walk up to it and say, 'Hello, how are you today? What can I get for you?' They respond and let you know what type of gas they want. Next thing you ask is, 'cash or credit?' Next you put the nozzle in the car, and pull the trigger so the gas goes into the car. You hand them back the card if they give you one, or else you just sit there and look pretty." He smirked while nudging me in the ribs, "That isn't hard for you to do, right?" *Okay, A. don't hit me in the ribs, and B. don't hit on me, please?*

"After it's done pumping you put the nozzle back in the holster, and give them a receipt if they get one. If it's cash you wanna round the number on the pump to the nearest dollar. They give you such-and-such amount of money, and you give them such-and-such amount of change. It's simple the more you do this. You got it?"

"Um, yeah. Seems easy enough," I said. My head felt like it was spinning, but I just sat around and watched Steve work. After my three hours of training I felt more comfortable with the job, but I knew I needed more time before I could do it on my own.

***

"Um, yeah. Seems easy enough," I said. My head felt like it was spinning, but I just sat around and watched Steve work. After my three hours of training I felt more comfortable with the job, but I knew I needed more time before I could do it on my own.

***

The hardest part of the job was making sure I put the right kind of gas in the cars. Everything else was done by computer. It was all taken care of by technology. Even so, I was still worried that I wouldn't be able to do everything right.

***

It's November and the weather is beginning to get colder. It's the point in the calendar season when the end of fall is merging into the dreaded winter months. There is usually a bet that many of us make to keep our minds pre-occupied from the cold weather. We see who can go the longest into winter without having to wear their snow suit.

The snow suit keeps everyone really warm. The only problem is it's kind of an eye sore. I mean I walk around all day with this suit on as if I'm preparing to go skiing, or I'm going to shovel driveways for the day. They're also annoying to wear because they are so burly. It's constricting, and the majority of us workers don't like it.

Today is really cold. I'm wearing two pairs of thermal socks, long-johns underneath my Dickie pants; I had two thermals on underneath two sweatshirts, two pairs of gloves, a scarf, and my winter hat. I can barely move my arms.

I was warm at the start of the shift, which started at 5:30, but I've been waiting outside since 5:10. I know once 8:30 rolls around I'm going to be frozen. Today my side of the island is busy as hell, and I can't get inside the booth at all to warm up. There are two sides to an "island," which means that there are four pumps on one island, two pumps on each side, and one side is usually busier than the other.

I'm doing my best to think warm even though I feel terrible. (There is no money to be won from this bet. It's just a stupid idea one of us brought up, and we've all been doing it for a few years so it stuck.) Anyway I'm sitting in the cold for an hour before I could get a chance to take a break. As soon as I enter the booth I take my gloves off, and I put my hands against the heater. I can't feel the heat on my hands due to their numbness. I'm inside the booth for four minutes before another car shows up. I put back on both sets of gloves and go outside. My fingers are tingling, but I feel a pain like I've never felt before in my hands. It's a warm, burning feeling, but I know I'm freezing. After I put the nozzle in the car I go back inside the booth to see what the problem is. I take both sets of gloves off again and notice that my hands are swollen and red. I open the door to the booth. I yell to Mike who has been working at the station every day for eight years.

"Yo, Mike. Look at my fucking hands, man! What the hell's the matter with them? Have you ever seen anything like this before?"

"Yeah, I have." Mike walks over from his island and takes off his gloves. His hands are also swollen and red, but he seems okay. "You got frost bite, asshole. That's what I got, but that's from working here so damn long. After a while you just forget that it stings and go about the day." This is the last time I'm taking part in the bet.

***

When Mike was in his mid-twenties he robbed banks along the upper east coast. He moved back in with his parents on Long Island while he was hiding out from the police. When his parents found out what he had done they made him leave. He settled in PA with a girl he met, he called her his girlfriend. She called the police after they got into a fight one night. He told me she got pissed because he bought the wrong type of ice cream. . He spent the next six years in prison. The experience humbled the guy. After his first year out of prison he got into a terribly bad accident that left his back broken in six places. It was the seventies and there was a lot of research being done in the medical field. Since Mike had no insurance he opted to try an experimental procedure that would cost him nothing. In return Mike now walks around sloped over because there's a metal bar where his spine should be. The reason he slouches when he walks is because the metal bar shifted five years after the surgery. It's bad to say, but he's one of the sole reasons I stay out of trouble and in school. Whenever I'm home from college and start working at the station again, he's always the first guy to greet me with a huge hug. He's not the best role model, but I do admire his courage through all the things he's been through.

***

I was waiting for a week to get my jumpsuit. I bought it from my boss and it had cost $100. It was really cold that day. I figured once the shift started and he came out to go home he'd have my suit along with my paycheck. On Thursdays he would give out the paychecks, but if you worked on Thursday he would hand it to you as he was leaving. I never understood the logic behind making us wait, but it added frustration on days like that.

The weather was getting worse as time went by, but I figured I could just suck it up until he came outside. One strong gust of wind came that went up my pants and out the top of my sweatshirt. *I'm going to the window to get my suit and my paycheck now. I'm not waiting anymore.* I knocked on the window.

"Come inside the office a second, Joey. I have your suit in here," Rudy said.

I entered the office, and saw my suit on the chair. I put it on then waited while he looked through the paychecks for mine.

"So, it turns out that you're not going to get a paycheck this week. You only work three days, You only work three days, so your paycheck went towards buying the suit. Sorry." He smirked as I walked out of the office with my head down.

***

I understood that it was the nature of things. Supply and demand, all that stuff, but he left me with no money. Actually he left me still owing him $10. I was only seventeen, so I didn't have many bills to pay. I still had some, though, and they didn't get paid on time because of it. I couldn't pay my car insurance that month due to the lack of funds from my paycheck, so my dad had to cover it. That sucked because then I owed my dad money. After this incident was over I vowed to never have to owe anyone money. If I did I would make sure I paid it all back, in full, the second I had the money.

***

The snow is falling very heavily. There are cars lined up out into the street. Apparently everyone wants their gas tonight because it's supposed to snow like this for the next couple of days. Nights like these are terrible for a number of reasons, but mainly because of the customers. They act as if they are the only ones who had a long day, and now they need to wait in line to get gas. I've had a long day too. I had two tests today, a presentation; I had to come into work early because Mike had a heart-attack

while at work. I was pretty distraught about it, and would do almost anything for the guy. According to the customers, though, their lives are more important.

The one thing they don't realize is I'm the one standing outside in the snow. I'm the one who has to act like I'm super fucking happy to be outside while it's snowing like crazy. It's okay. I just keep telling myself that the nicer I am the more possibility of them giving me a dollar for standing out here. As the night's progressing I'm getting more irritated. The cold is getting to me, the customers are getting to me, the snow is getting inside my boots, and now my socks are all wet.

I can see a woman who's three cars down the line. She's going to be my customer eventually, but I don't want to deal with her. She's already got a pissed off look on her face, her kids are jumping in the back seat, and she's screaming to whoever is on the other end of the cell phone. She inches closer to the pump and looks at me.

"Can I have twenty dollars, regular?" she yells. The cell phone is still attached to her ear. She displays all of the signs of a person who doesn't like the cold. She rolls the window down a minimal amount so that she has to hand me her credit card with her index and middle fingers. I have to ask twice what she wants because her voice doesn't pass through the sliver of space the window is down. After I swipe the card I have to knock on the window to get her attention because she's still on the phone. I ignore the kids in the back making faces and yelling at me as if I don't see them. When the transaction is finished and I'm ready to hand her the receipt she says, "Stay warm." Oh, really? Like this whole time I've been *trying* to freeze. I say thanks and motion the cars behind hers into position to get their gas.

***

It's been five years since I started working there. There's been four times where a car has driven away before the nozzle was out of the car. Gas went everywhere, but luckily I didn't blow up. Twice I ran a credit card and didn't realize it didn't process through until the car left. I had to pay for the money that was lost.

I also trained two people in that time. Remembering my experience with the details of the job I made sure I didn't go too fast. I wanted the new kids to know that not everyone here is worn out. I also wanted to make sure I clarified as much as I could to show them I knew what I was talking about. I went through the processes numerous times in order to jump start their confidence. I didn't want them to be sitting ducks on their first day alone.

Just because the word heaven is on my shirt doesn't mean it actually is. It's taken me five years to realize that it's the worst metaphor I've ever encountered.

Familiar Rain

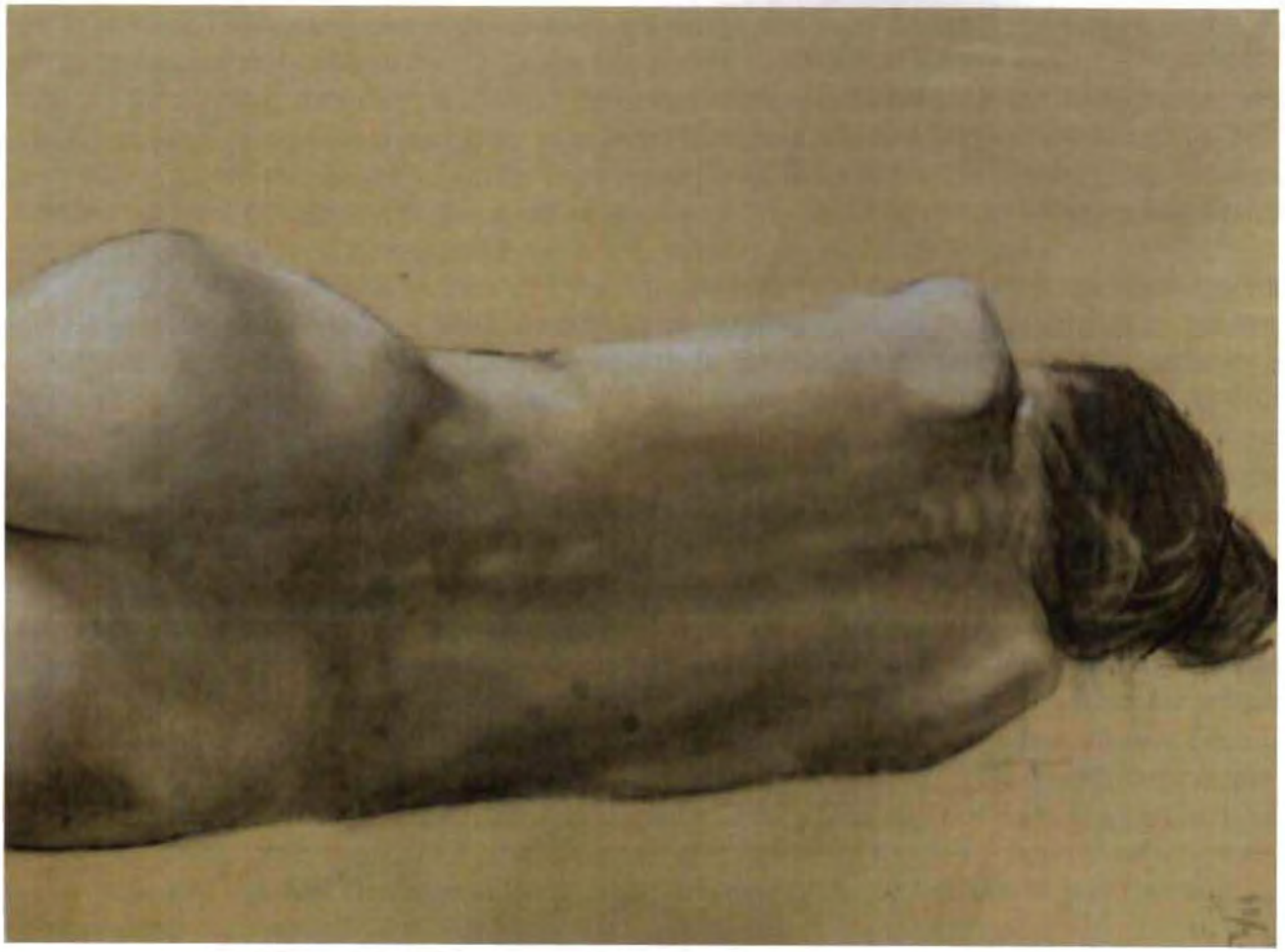
Jennifer Tinker

I walk with my shadow ahead of me; it was always
by brother who walked there. The silence
from the mourning leaves me lacking the dimples
that often appear below my cheeks, the clean whiteness
surrounding my now sore eyes, and a full heart
that will take away too many years.

I stride through air of old rain with fallen leaves
smushing under each step. The sun is making its way home and I beg
for it to drag away my reminiscences of blank apologies.
Left over drops of water make rythmic beats as they fall from leaf to leaf.
Beats that echo inside (his punk rock drumming resonates through my mind)
Only a few beads reach my skin looking like tears.

I walk with the though of his zest --
I can feel it lingering
in front of me. Maybe he is,
a part of my shadow,
directing me east
so I don't miss the wake
of one more daybreak.

Untitled
Cara Livermore



Brushing Through a Tangled Mane

Viktoria Valenzuela-Pennington

8:02 AM

My daughter's hair is a wild halo about her face. The children and I are running late again. The black and white picture on the shelf hides the brush behind it. I take it and turn to my girl. I note my own reflection as I lift the brush to her little crown. My boy is adjusting his coat and strapping on his backpack. The wall mirror across the room reflects my own wild mane.

Behind me is a corresponding mirror hanging at eye level. The two mirrors give the purple dining room fanciful character day or night. Cleverly framed and purchased damaged from American Signature Furniture, the mirrors embrace our reflection inside its chic oval contours. The metallic scars of silver impressed transversely on the black paint of the frame were scraped there by its twin, and time.

"Mo-om," she says as if my name were two distinct words, "Why do you have to brush my hair? I can brush my own hair." I've just brushed all of her hair slick back, away from her face. Meanwhile, my own hair is a mess. My boy laughs at my hair and covers his own with a knit cap.

I reach up to brush out my tangled mass of curls. I do so hastily since we need to hurry and be out on the sidewalk. I have to sheep-dog the children to bus stop. The day is about to begin with a rush of snow dewy air. The smooth follow through of bristles through graying hair prompts me to check the mirror once again. My temples are now strewn with silver hairs among the black. I can not believe there are so many gray hairs gathering in one temple. I bite my lip and consider my roots.

Running the black brush through my hair again, splaying it out like a paper fan, I recall my own father brushing my hair. I remember being in San Antonio, living with Dad and Grandma. I would fan myself in the sweltering heat while Dad brushed my heavy curls with Grandma's smooth white brush. The handle of it looked like a tooth.

The brush's smooth white handle had strands of black gouges in it from years of handling. The occasional crevices on its sleek spine were powdered with grime from her antique rose soap. The bristles were puffy with Grandma's white hair. The many soft bristles on the brush pressed into my scalp gently. It didn't matter how hard you pushed, the bristles would bend indolently. The sweep across my scalp felt like Dad was mixing spackle up there. It was a sloppy process to get my hair as straight and untangled as possible. My hair ended up parted down the center, curled under in places, and curled up in other places. I looked as if I'd licked by a demonic cow.

When I looked in the mirror I nagged him.

"Dad-dy," I'd say as if his name were two distinct words, "why did you part my hair in the middle?" He'd just laugh. I'd scowl and scramble my hair out of its pristine slicker. My hair a wild halo about my face once again, he'd grin his jack-o-lantern grin at me and laugh in a falsetto tone. It was his high breathy laugh that perplexed me every time. I didn't understand if he was laughing at my reaction or my messy hair.

When Grandma brushed my hair she used the same brush. She was much gentler. She hummed as she braided my long black hair. I'd sit on the floor of her sewing room among the lace and chiffon scraps. She'd hum ancient lullabies and brush, hum and brush my silken hair. Then she'd weave ribbons into my braids that matched the dresses she made for me; in Spanish, she'd say, "*Levantate, a la escuela,* I have to measure more ladies today." I'd walk out of her sewing room. At least two beautiful wedding dresses and ball gowns would have been hung in long strands of silk in the door frame on my way out of her room. Grandma never went to school, but she can sign her name and sew a beautiful dress.

I emerged from grandma's room with my hair tamed down into two braids on either side of my head. Grandma set the braids low; I'd look like a first grader from the 1940s or 50s, I would smooth the skirt of my dress down and be ready for school. Dad would take my hand and walk me to school all the while laughing that certain laugh again.

I now know that laugh. I execute it for my own daughter when she nags me. I'm astonished at how much she has grown from a little baby. She has become a lovely eight-year-old with long milk-chocolate brown hair that is as smooth as silk. Her long veil of hair reminds me of my own at that age. I am tempted to braid her hair, but I know that it is much too cold outside to put her hair up.

I also know that she doesn't like her ears to show. She'd rather brush her own hair. She looks up to me.

"Mommy, can I use the brush, please?" she asks.

I hand her the brush. She brushes her bangs forward over her forehead, partially covering her eyes, rearranging the hairstyle I just crafted for her. My adoration of her is greater than my need for hierarchy over her. So I just laugh that same laugh Dad did.

"Ti-Ny" I say, as if her nick name of "Tiny" was two distinct words. I guess there is no stopping her. I have to get myself to the university by 9am and forego refreshing her hair.

"Let's get a move on. We've got to go to school," I say instead.

I am a long way from home here in Oswego, New York. We zip up our coats and brace ourselves for the snow and bristling wind outside. My boy bounds out the door like a bull. My girl steps out on to the porch with her umbrella open blocking the wind from her face. I lock the door behind me and step onto the icy porch. The blizzard is cruel to my hair style. I lift my hood to protect the curls as much as possible.

My girl has never met Grandma or Dad. She's never experienced the heat of San Antonio, Texas. We live in the coldest belt of New York State and today's blizzard is fierce. I shoveled the icy path to school for us earlier this morning and my boy is stomping up the path holding onto my girl's hand. The black ice threads its way down the steps, while grey rock salt is sparsely strewn on the sidewalk along the way.

"Stay on the left side of me," I say on the sidewalk, to keep them safe from on coming traffic. The road is bustling; I consider its magnitude and the time it will take to get to the school bus. I flip my hair out of my face and adjust my scarf. It won't be long now, almost there.

Mary, Executed

Sarah E. Carello

Magnification at 20x had displayed her milky
flower Trichomes, like Aurelia jellyfish,

darkened amber atop the chlorophyll
soaked bio-waves leeched of hydration,

her resin glands matured potent and sticky,
a glistening reflection off thousands of Kelvin's.

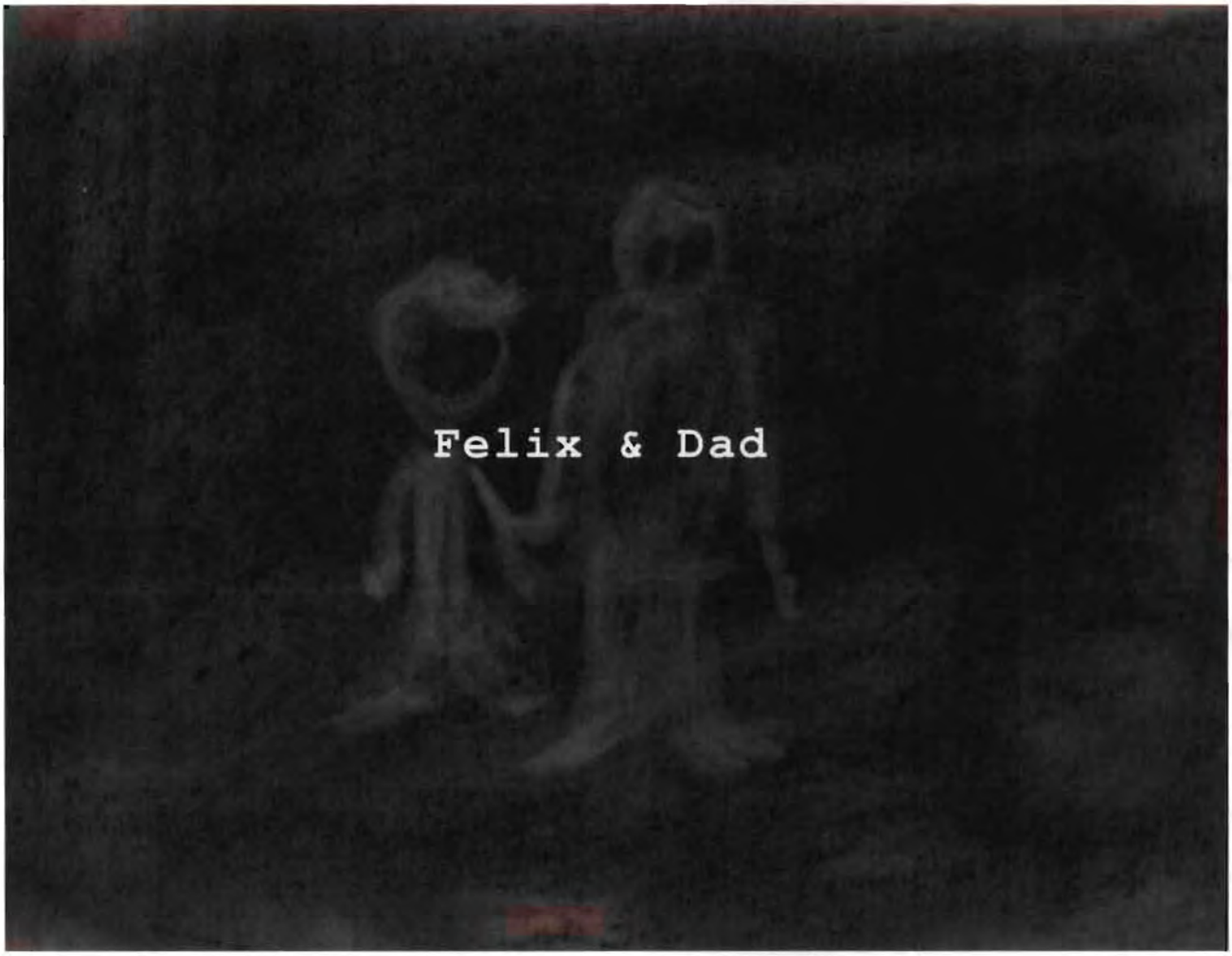
-

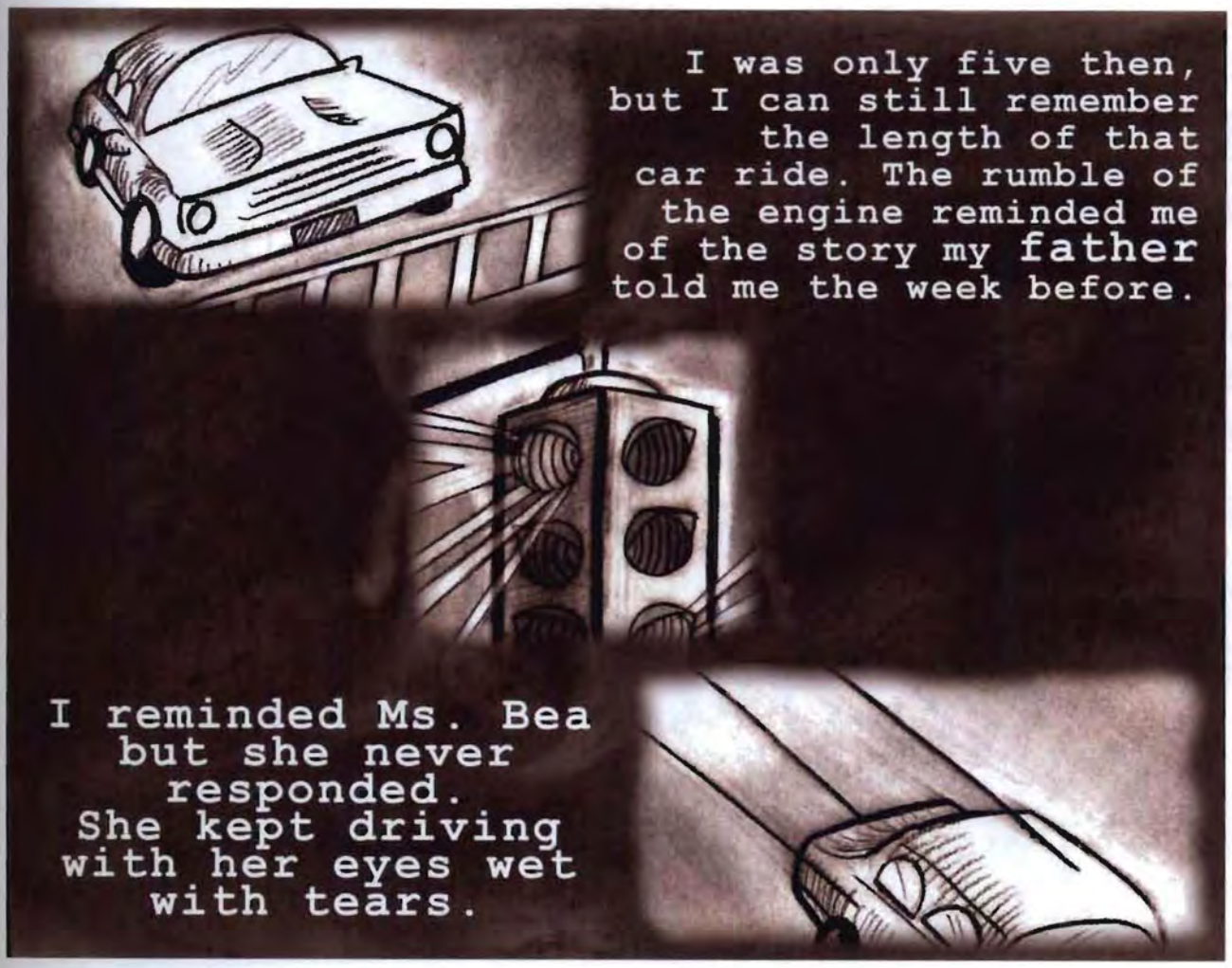
Her narrow veins had released a single screaming
protest when the blades severed her stalk,

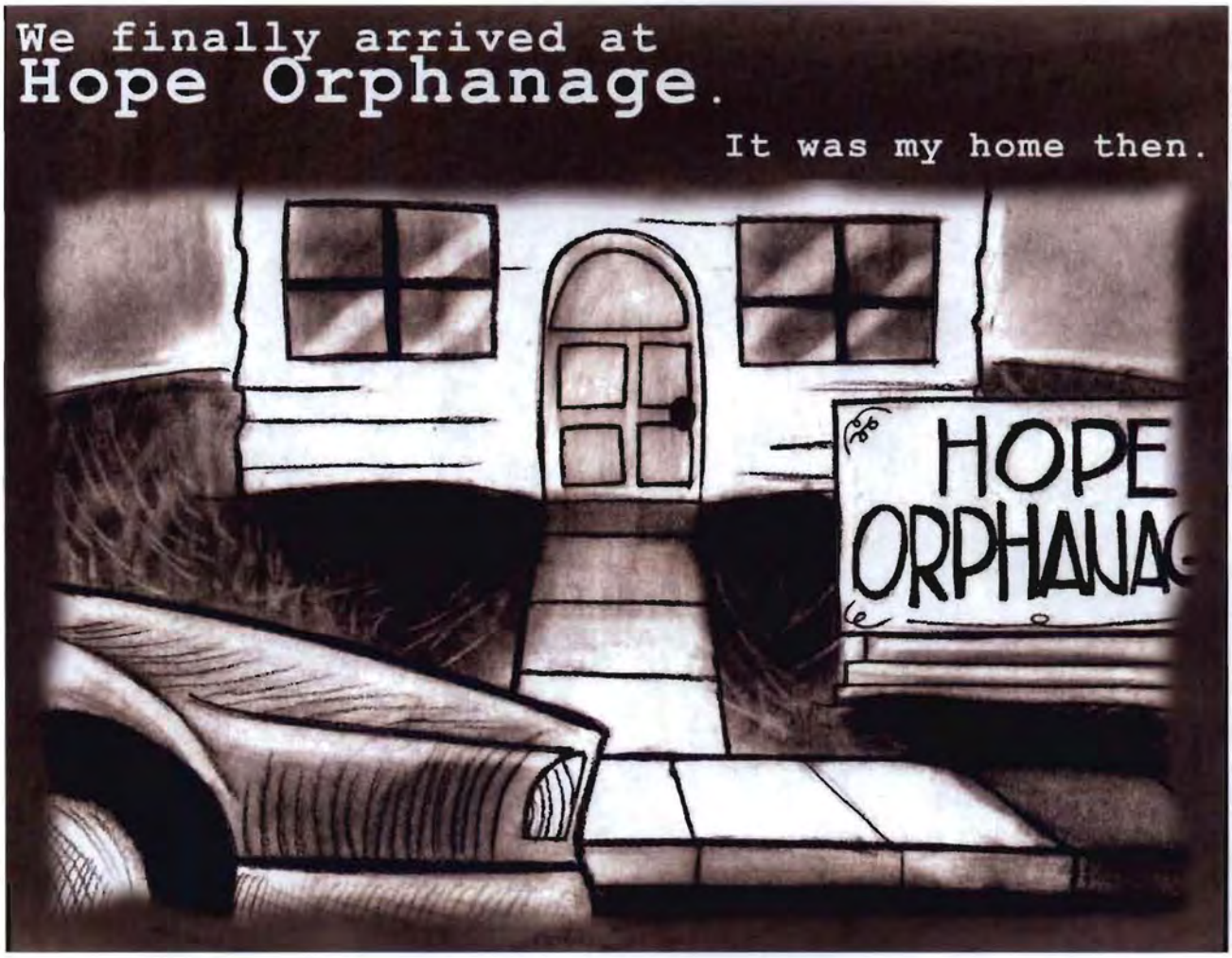
though now, suspended inverted, the circulating
breeze rocks her mute as she dries out,

activating inactive narcotics at 70° F.

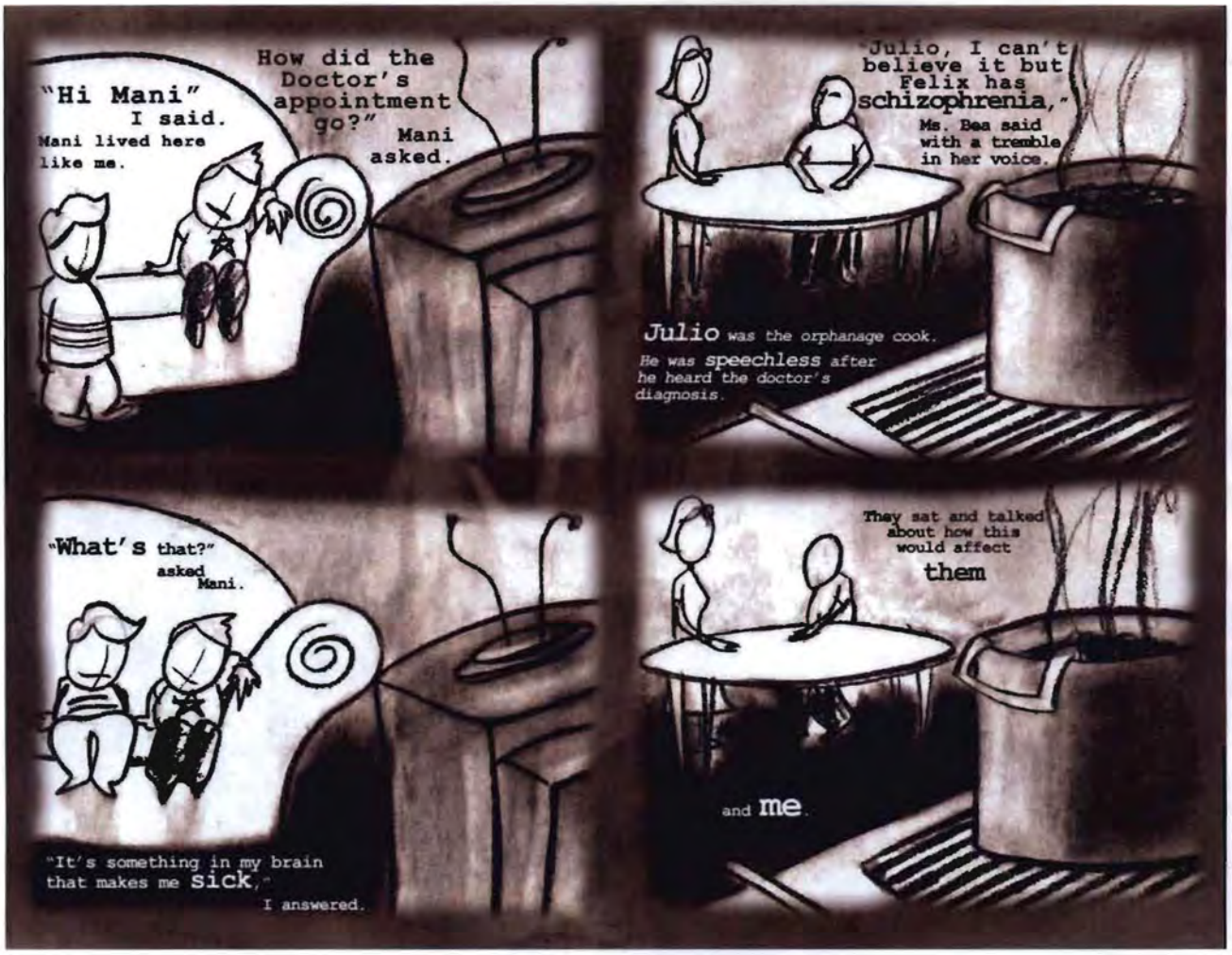
Felix and Dad
Matthew Colon



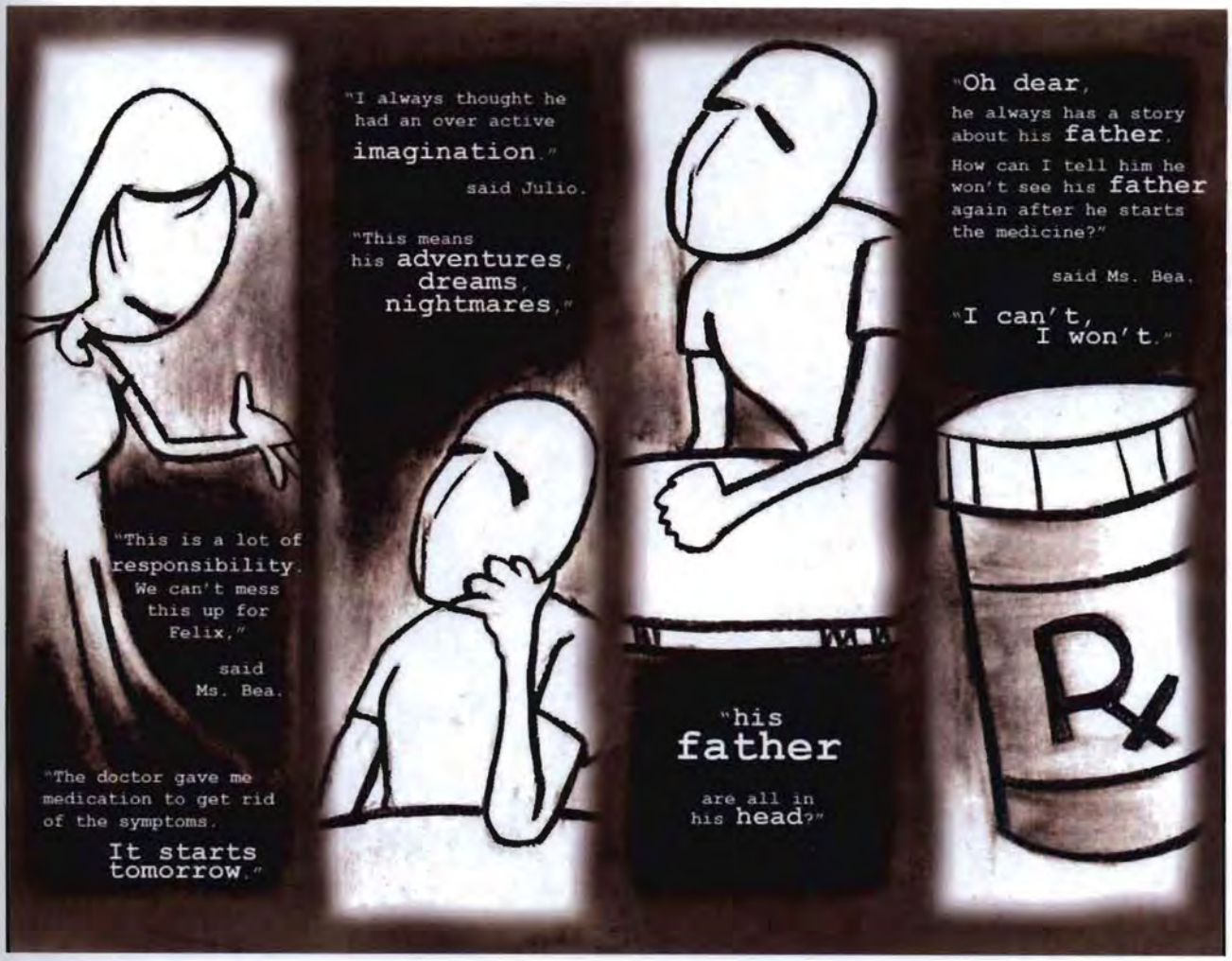

I was only five then, but I can still remember the length of that car ride. The rumble of the engine reminded me of the story my father told me the week before.
I reminded Ms. Bea but she never responded. She kept driving with her eyes wet with tears.

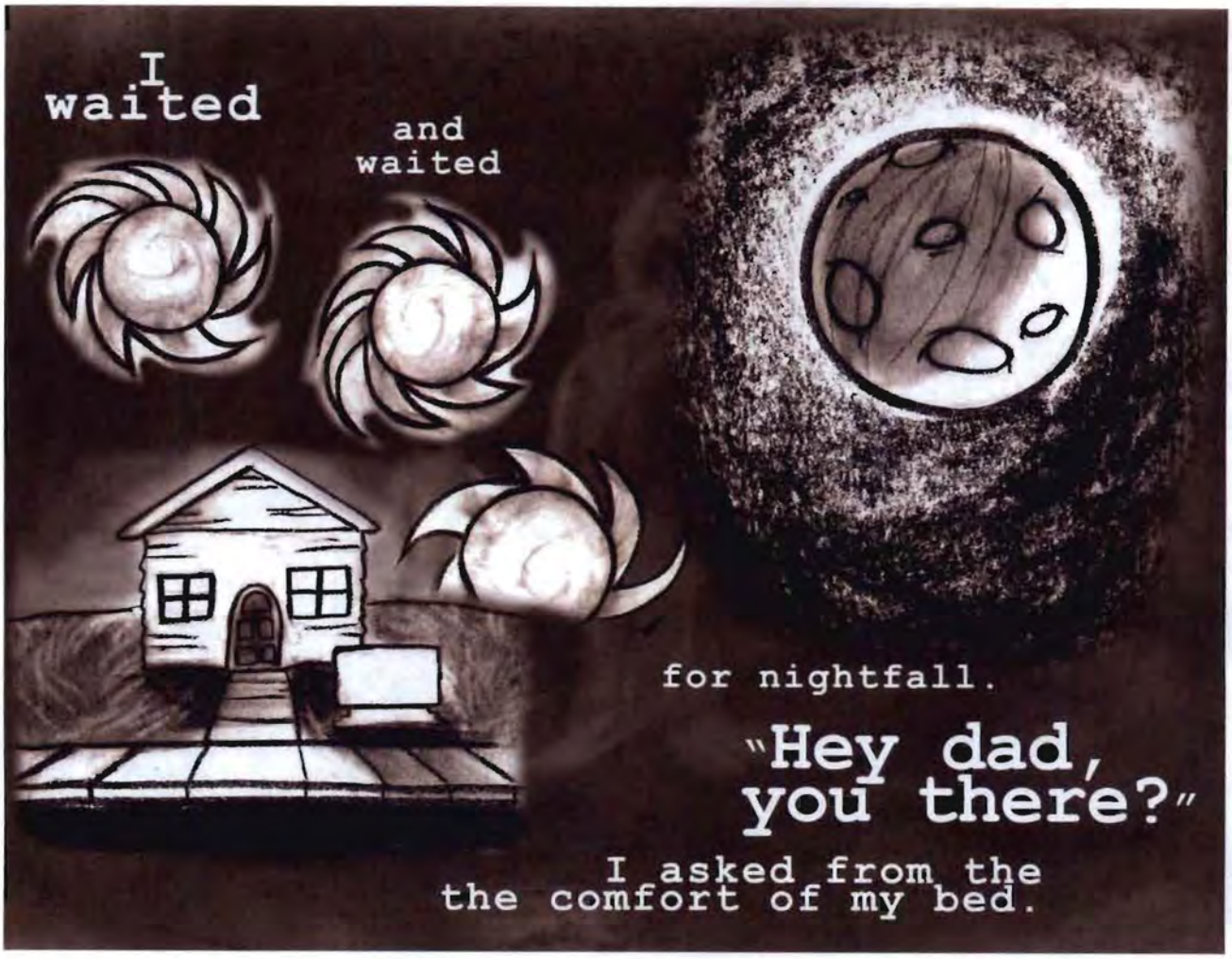

We finally arrived at
Hope Orphanage.
It was my home then.
HOPE
ORPHANAG

I didn't know then why she cried to herself all day.
I didn't pay much attention.
Instead, I ran off in pursuit of a new adventure.

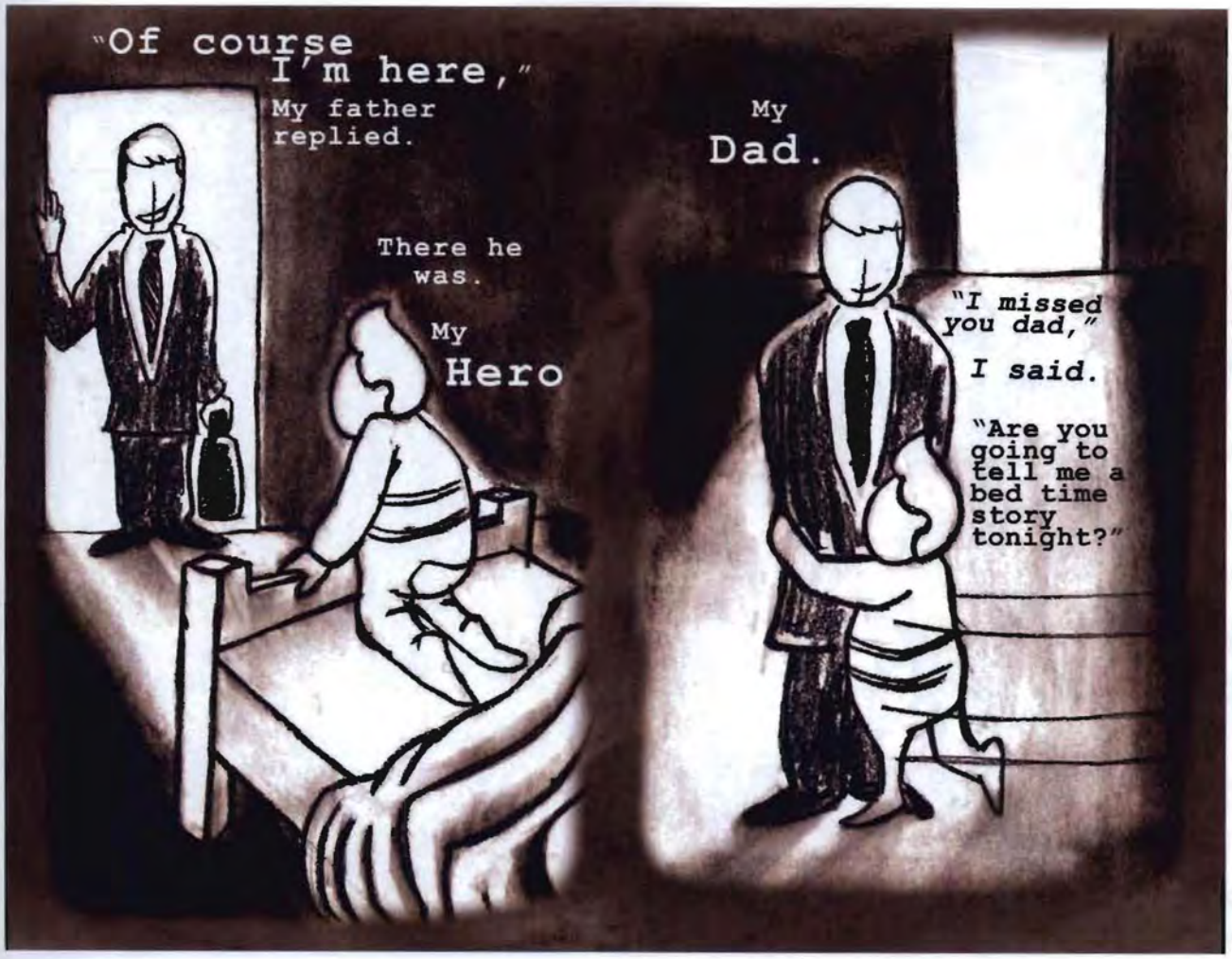

"Hi Mani" I said.
Mani lived here like me.
How did the Doctor's appointment go?" Mani asked.
"Julio, I can't believe it but Felix has schizophrenia," Ms. Bea said with a tremble in her voice.
Julio was the orphanage cook.
He was speechless after he heard the doctor's diagnosis.
"What's that?" asked Mani.
"It's something in my brain that makes me sick," I answered.
They sat and talked about how this would affect them
and me.

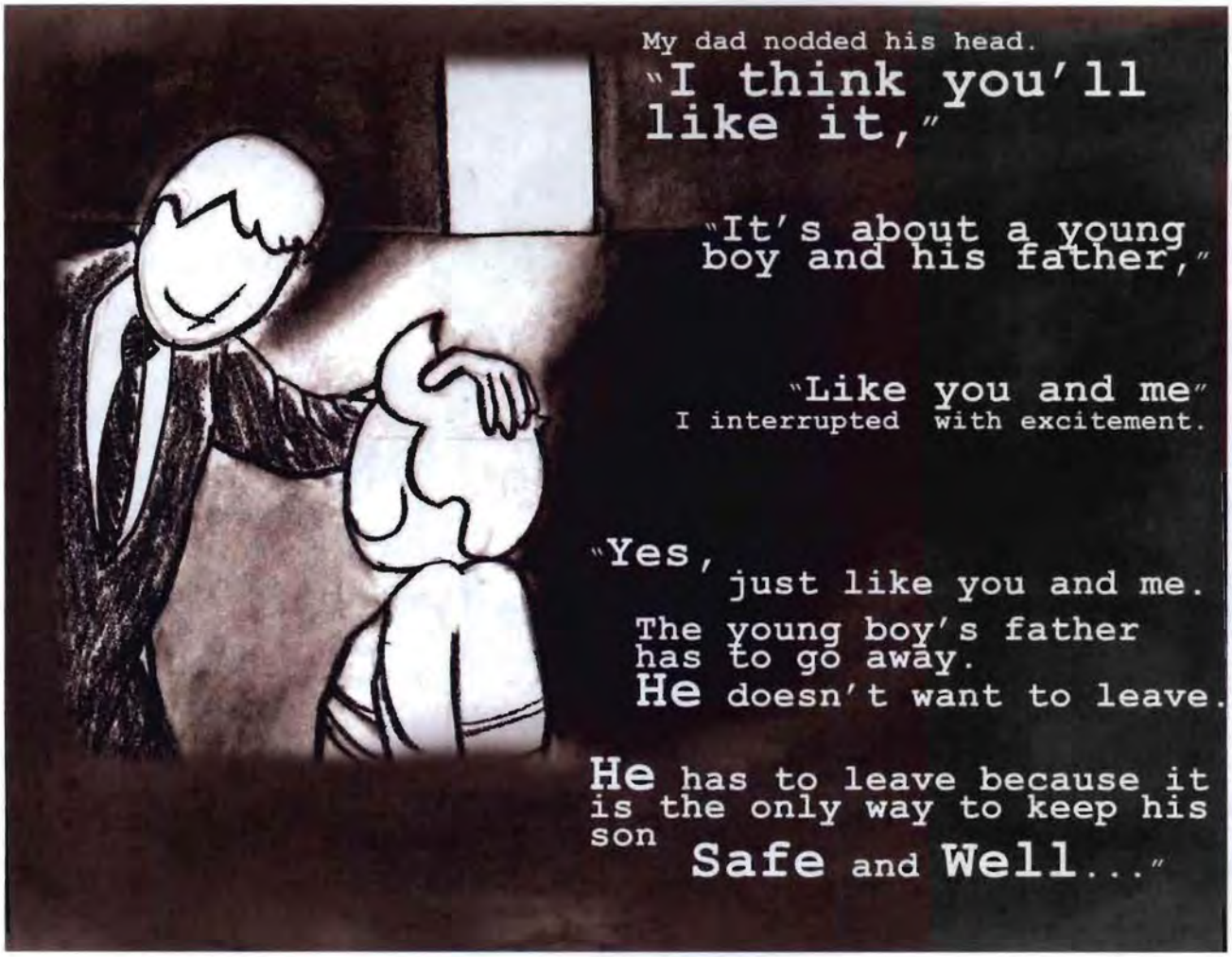
Felix and Dad

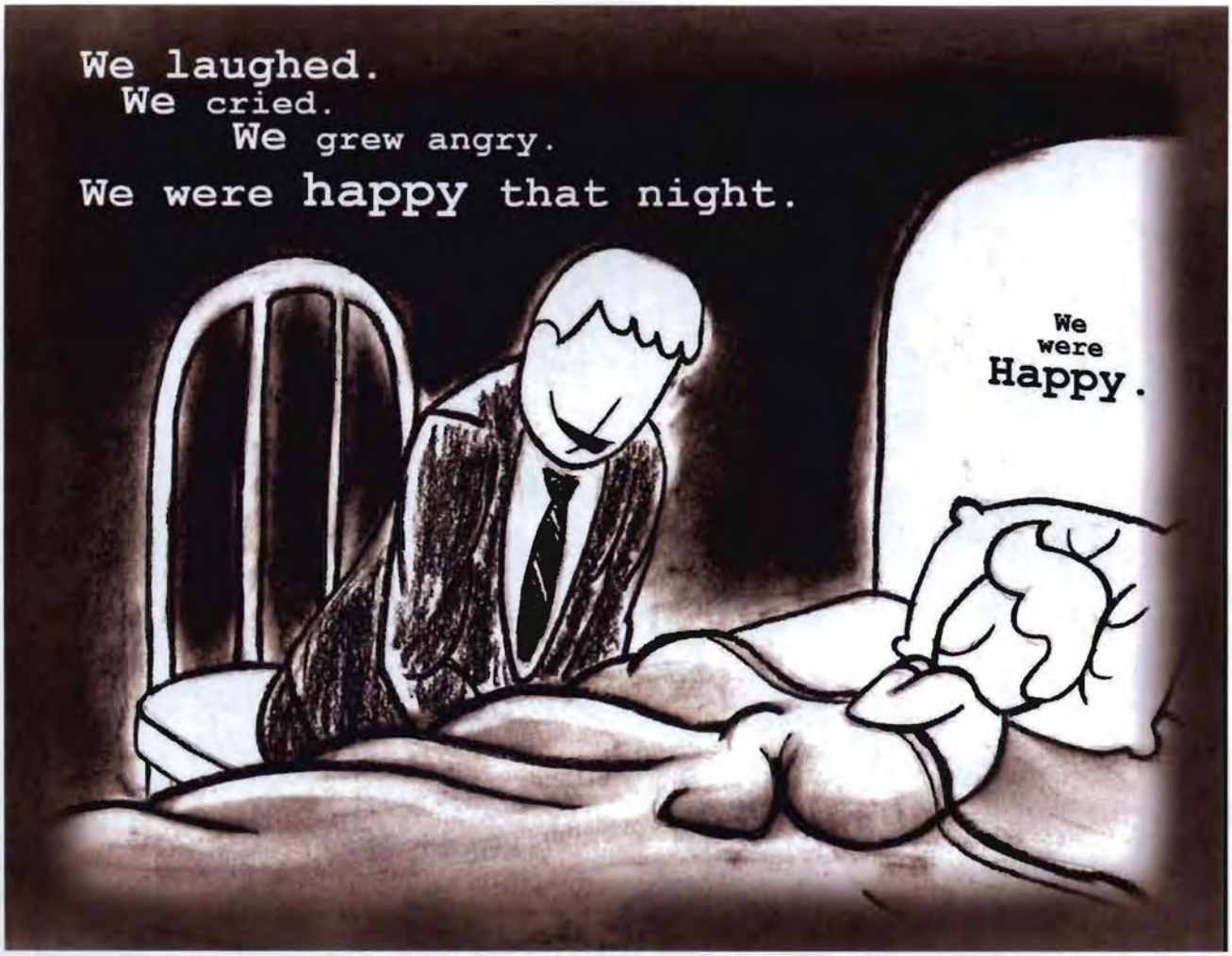


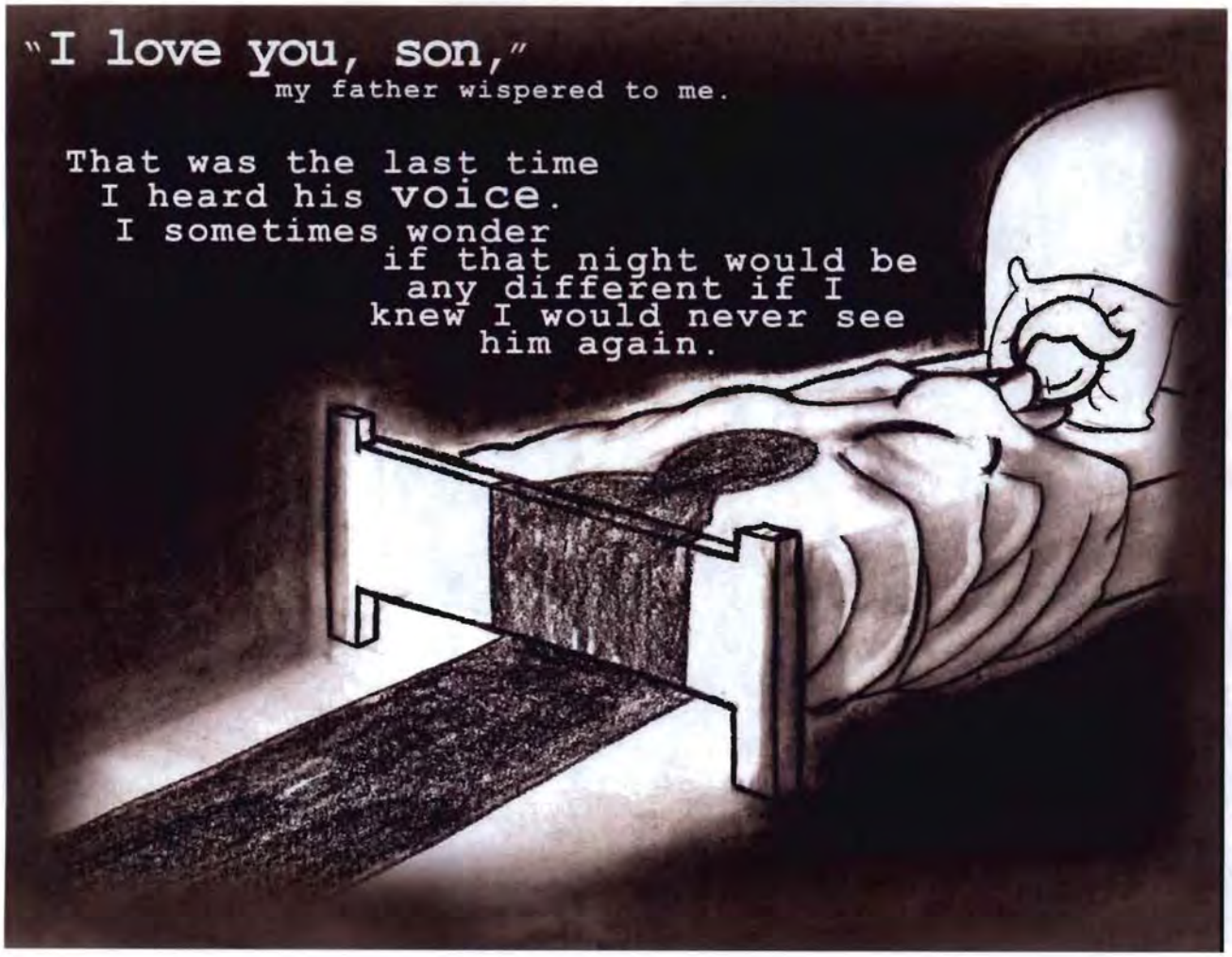

I waited
and waited
for nightfall.
"Hey dad, you there?"
I asked from the the comfort of my bed.

Felix and Dad




My dad nodded his head.
"I think you'll like it,"
"It's about a young boy and his father,"
"Like you and me"
I interrupted with excitement.
"Yes,
just like you and me.
The young boy's father has to go away.
He doesn't want to leave.
He has to leave because it is the only way to keep his son
Safe and Well..."


We laughed.
We cried.
We grew angry.
We were happy that night.
We were Happy.


"I love you, son,"
my father wispered to me.
That was the last time
I heard his voice.
I sometimes wonder
if that night would be
any different if I
knew I would never see
him again.

THE END

Hammer Down

Keith T. Edelman

I was drenched in sweat. The back seat was stifling, and I was trapped, cornered into the back of the Trans Am. The bank checks were piled up in front of me where the passenger seat should have been. The flash cards were spread out before me, laid out on my father's clip board. I didn't know the answer. Trying to remember the letter, trying to make him stop asking, to move on to the next card, the card I knew. Every muscle was clenched, a feeling in my groin like I had to pee but couldn't. My father sat behind the wheel and turned to face me, pointing at a card.

"G," I said.

"No. Come on, we just went over this." His eyes were glassy and his clenched teeth revealed the high, sharp angular lines of his cheek.

"I don't know," I was four, but the muffled words hung like a noose in the air.

"Then figure it out," he said. "You've got three minutes."

I stared down at the card as he got out of the car and slammed the door shut. I watched his long, powerful stride as he walked toward the bank. I tried to remember. I was scared. Why couldn't I remember it? The seat belt seemed to get tighter as I tried to squirm back into my own body, as I tried to implode into a tiny speck on the gritty floor. Come on, dummy, remember the letter!

He was back; a rush of cool air as he tossed the checks into the passenger side. He brought the smell of sweet pipe tobacco and fresh, earthy cardboard.

I stared at the floor again.

I heard the rustle of paper as he filled out the bank manifest and stashed a copy away, deep beneath a pile of paperwork.

"B," I said

"Good." He barely looked up.

The engine cranked and roared to life. Gears shifted and squealed. We cruised down the hill and out of the parking lot into the night. The dome light clicked off and it was dark. Passing by street lamps and half lit houses, we found the highway at the edge of town. Picking up speed, we were off into the great paved abyss. It was another stop and another box, just another car streaking through the night.

***

Courier companies like FedEx and UPS neither enjoy sending their drivers down driveways that have their own street sign, nor do they like to carry "attacked by carnivorous chicken" insurance. They don't like the sight of a bright yellow "seasonal road" sign, or a packing slip with nothing but a zip code, or anything with the foreboding destination "Blue Mountain Lake, NY." These companies like paved roads and gas stations and towns without the descriptor "Creek" in their name. They send their drivers out at 7:00 a.m. and expect them back at 6:00 p.m., swollen creek or bear attack aside.

However, it is an inevitability and beauty of life that the people who occupy these wondrous third-world destinations will eventually discover the alluring green of an L.L. Bean catalogue and the click-it and ship-it phenomenon known as eBay. When these flannel clad tamers of dear and woods decide to spruce up nature with flat screen televisions and curtains, they call us, D&D Courier.

***

"What do you mean you don't go to work with your parents," I said. I was puzzled. "What do you do when you get home?'

My parents weren't cheap. They could have sent my brother and me to daycare. They were hard working conservative entrepreneurs who valued their money and clearly thought liberals would eat our souls during naptime. We were even vaccinated. What else do you call a daily twelve hour dose of AM radio and three hour follow-up of Rush Limbaugh?

I could never figure out why everybody else seemed to make friends so easily. I always felt like I was out of the loop, and when I tried to find my way in, I was talking at a different level. Teachers loved me, kids laughed at me.

Now I realize that there were exactly three key ways to make friends in elementary school.

Friend Making Scenario #1

Your parents were either good friends or grew up with my parents. My parents didn't have friends...duh. They were driving across New York State everyday.

Friend Making Scenario #2

You attended daycare with other children. Yeah, sure, while some hippie with a four year associates degree tokes up in the bathroom?

Friend Making Scenario #3

You were raised Catholic and went to religion class with everybody from school twice a week. My family is Protestant Lutheran. Just great.

Did I mention I was a whale growing up? No? Let me explain.

I would need the metabolism of the Jolly Green Giant to sit my ass in a car all day and eat mayonnaise sandwiches with a side of bologna, 3 cans of soda, crackers and cheese, plus the occasional Dunkin Donuts and McDonalds, and manage to stay thin. To my great and utter dismay, my brother was a flagpole with an insatiable gastronomical turbine for a stomach.

Until I was about nine, I honestly believed that everybody did what my brother and I did. The kids at school always asked what my parents did for a living. When you're eight and explaining expedites and priority overnight delivery, kids look at you funny and say, "My mom's a teacher!" The following conversation is the disclaimer of my childhood:

"You wanna play catch later on?" some unsuspecting peer asked.

"Nah, I have to go to make a delivery to the Syracuse airport with my mom tonight." Here it comes, I thought. "I have to leave right after school."

"Where's Syracuse?"

Does this kid live in shoebox? Haven't you ever read a map for your mother in a blinding snowstorm before?

"It's towards the west, past Rome on the thruway." I was calm. I'm playing it cool. I've gone through this routine before.

"What's the thruway?"

Dumbass!!! That is, if I knew what a dumbass was at seven. "It's a big road that runs all the

way across New York," I was losing my patience.

"Why do you go to Syracuse?"

TO MAKE A GOD-DAMN DELIVERY YOU CORN FLAKE!!!! I was pissed like only a lonely, nerdy, introverted second grader could be. I then assaulted his face with pudding.

No, not really, but it was verbal pudding I threw. Okay fine, I lied again. Actually I didn't do anything, didn't say anything, didn't even change the expression on my face. I took it all in, swallowed and stared at the floor and tried to disappear.

"Oh," a half puzzled, half curious look across his face. "You're weird."

***

Early on, when my brother was born, my parents decided it would be too unwieldy to take care of a two-year-old and six-month-old in the same car. They decided to split us up, alternating kids from day to day. It was really strange. My mother and my father are two very different people. It was like being raised bipolar, one day sitting amidst the piles of coffee-stained waybills and crumpled paper towels in my mother's van, the next in the filed and ordered cab of my father's truck or his sharp, sleek Pontiac. But a different set of wheels traveled the same road, every marker was another mile and every window was another movie screen. I knew the road from day one. My childhood was the road.

I learned how to eat in the car, tie my shoes in the car, learn my ABC's in the car, read my first book in the car, and learned to scroll perfect cursive in my first grade spelling book in the car.

I put my mother through twenty-six hours of labor on Christmas day before I plopped out the following morning. The doctor said a month, but my mother was back on the road in a week. Two weeks later I joined her. At five months old I was already holding my own bottle. I wouldn't have eaten if my parents had to drive and feed me at the same time.

Go figure.

***

I recall the smell. A thick acid stench like buckets of rotten tomatoes, it covered the exposed white flesh of my chubby legs, the viscous orange sludge like an infectious blanket that covered my shorts and the camel-tan seats of that same black Trans Am. It was vomit, my vomit. I stared down at the chucks, identifying parts of lunch in the slop. I couldn't escape the smell. My father just drove, cruising stone-faced with the t-tops down.

I couldn't look up; I was too embarrassed, too ashamed, and too afraid to look up. No time to stop today, deadline in two hours, and a hundred more miles to go. The sun was setting across the scarlet-orange hills of Interstate 88, and the muddy waters of the Delaware winded past. There was a 10 p.m. deadline every night of the week. Sometimes my father's morning route would run late, or FedEx would call in some obscure pickup late in the day. Envelopes would pile up or a jackknifed trailer on the Interstate would put the whole day on a two hour hold.

While cruising through the Southern Tier of New York, picking up payrolls and bonds from small banks and delivering them to the Federal Reserve Bank in Utica, sometimes things got tense. The

checks and the envelopes, they were first priority. Sometimes there wasn't time to be a kid.

I looked down at my legs and then out the window. I'd seen it before. I didn't say a word. I just stared at my legs and waited.

***

All the towns were small, cobblestone sidewalk and stone hedge types, where the local bank actually took on the name of the community. Everybody knew every teller, accountant, filer and manager in the place. The owner actually worked nine to five, every day.

At four in the afternoon my father starts the "bank run", winding through towns like Cobleskill, Delhi, Richmondville, Stamford, and Oneonta. It's a mix of highways, back roads, and Getty gas stations where my father built my baseball card collection with change from a cup of coffee. It's a curvy, twisted route, defined by the river.

I remember the parks. They were my savoir, an oasis amidst asphalt and yellow lines. In the fall, acorns blanketed these grassy patches. Most weren't parks at all, just gravel snowplow turnarounds on the fringe of a county line, nothing but a roadside strip of grass descending into the banks of the Delaware River. I waded into the cool, murky water. The sun was a fading painting, slowly being eaten by the night. It was still muggy outside, and the water felt good on my legs, easing away the red lines where the seat had dug into them.

My father waded beside me, a coffee cup in his hand.

"When I say go, flip the rock over." He was crouching down with the cup under water.

"Okay, now!"

I kicked over the rock with my bare foot. Two crayfish darted out, ass backwards into my father's waiting cup.

"We got 'em!" I looked into the cup and examined our catch. "Two more lobsters in the fish tank!" We both went in the bushes, and I struggled back up the bank, sending loose pebbles clattering into the water.

Grabbing a tall sports cup, the kind with the long sippy straws, I dumped out the rest of my apple juice. Acorns covered the grass by the river. I had to feed the squirrels when I got back home.

"Time to roll, Thomas," my father said, heading toward the truck, his long, powerful strides made it seem like he was gliding. He smiled. He still likes to call me by my middle name.

The river seemed to guide our path through southern New York. From a cold, trickling brook near Stamford, the river grew and gained power and water. Feeder streams from the heights of the Catskills filed into the river one by one without reserve. As my father drove, I watched as the trout-filled waters grew into a dam by Deposit and then re-emerged as another trickle, only to repeat the process all over again.

At some point, I don't recall when or at what age, my father retired the Trans Am, bought a truck and rediscovered fishing. We traded crayfish for trout. Every chance we had, every hour ahead we were, was spent casting up and down the Delaware's thick, red clay, hunting for the fat wild browns. My father taught me how to tie the knot around the barbed hook and skewer the worms just right, so they wouldn't fall off after my first cast.

In that silence I hear the trickling of water around my waders, the whir of taunt fishing line,

and the epic splashing of my father with a trout on the line. I guess it really wasn't so bad, the silence that is.

***

Two million eight hundred and fifty thousand miles.

Today my parents joke a lot about how my brother and I were brought up, how we logged more miles before the age of ten than most adults drove in a lifetime. My father's truck has 980,000 miles on the odometer. His truck before that had 250,000. The Trans Am has 360,000. My mom's first van had 400,000 miles before my dad totaled it on black ice. Her second had 560,000 miles before I started driving it to high school. Her new one has close to 300,000.

Two million eight hundred and fifty thousand miles.

My parents have driven over 100,000 miles a year since they started the company in 1986. I was born in 1987 and drove almost everyday for eleven years. My odometer reads over one million miles. My brothers was born in 1989, his odometer reads closer to an even million.

Two million eight hundred and fifty thousand miles as a family.

That's six round trips to the moon with Mom telling the story of when my grandmother found out my uncle was smoking pot. That's 115 times around the earth's equator while listening to the Yankee game with Dad. It is 531 trips across the United State of America and back with nothing but some coloring books, a few notebooks, and a radio.

It's 2,850,000 ups and downs, straight lanes and winding curves, blizzards and sunny days, rest stops and tow trucks, homework and waybills; it's 2,850,000 miles of my childhood.

***

I always loved the loading docks. They were the smell of diesel and gasoline in the cooling air and the chance to stretch my legs. I helped my mother unload the boxes onto the conveyer belt as men in dark blue jackets and tan work gloves stacked them into airplane bins. Pills and paychecks, candles and cocktail dresses, window blinds and car transmissions all shifted and shorted before they went airborne across the country and around the world. I loved the loading docks because the next stop was home.

"Lights out, guys," my mom said as she clicked off the light. The van went dark.

I closed the black composition notebook, taking one last glance at the half finished sketch.

I put it on the floor beside the dried orange peels and colored pencil shavings.

Sprawling my body across the back seat, I tried to find a comfortable position. The seat belt dug into my waist as I stretched and contorted. Taking off my coat, I balled it up and propped my head up

against the window and buried myself into the seat, the gray polyester twill smelling of crayons and motor oil.

I smiled; soon I could sleep in my other bed, the one without four wheels. Through my falling eyelids I saw my mother eyes in the rear view mirror, watching over me. I was tired; the dull hum of rubber on pavement at sixty-five miles per hour was a lullaby.

What We May Be

Amanda Nargi

I was a man of meager beginnings and fortunate circumstances. I do not say meager because there was an absence of wealth in my life, for I was indeed born into a family of moderate wealth. Simply that my childhood was much like that of any other in my position, devoid of passion and intrigue. I lacked for nothing save a challenge of intellect and color to my everyday.

Paris was a city of black and white sophistication on the streets where I grew up, the *madams et messieurs* parading about, single-file. Like living in a photograph, it was always the same picture day after day. There was a disease spreading across the country then, *s 'ennuie*, the gloom of the French. This was my inheritance upright, rudimentary, unshiftably planted in the long ago yet continuously willed forward again and again and again. I was expected to be a *un avocat,* which my father took great pride in. Under his crushing tutelage my once-genuine motivation morphed into flippancy born of sardonic irony. I was not a man of law nor did I find any gratification in that sort of work. My *baccallauréat* was in literature.

Those days my father and I argued a lot over my future what the type of man befitting the name De Gas should be. As the eldest of five, many things were expected of me and none of them was pleasing to my deepest self. I avoided facing this inevitable reality by clinging to my last spring studying at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand before I would begin law at the university in the fall.

"I see you've changed your name," Toulouse said to me one afternoon. He was reading my essay on the works of Voltaire. I could tell that the new spelling amused him.

"*Degas* is how it should be spelled," I insisted. And it was! What a pretentious thing my father had done, reverting its spelling back to De Gas.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was my closest friend. He was different from the other young scholars at the LLG, not only because he was a man grown with child-like legs. Toulouse was unafraid of his identity, which was something I admired him for. And though he stood nearly a foot below the rest of us, when he was close he was impossible to ignore.

"If you are determined to cheat him of his pride, my friend, you know as well as I he will not buckle lightly."

I allowed myself a smile. It was neither his pride I cared for nor anything else of the sort. I craved freedom, not approval.

"Do you know what you need?' he asked me suddenly, handing me back my papers, barely finished with the second page. Toulouse revered most everything I wrote, but he had no taste for the elegant conception of well-written prose. He was a man of color.

"What is that, besides fifty francs and a ticket to the coast?"

He laughed. "Only fifty? My friend, you sell yourself short."

"How?"

"With how much you could get away with," he replied, his dark eyes bright. I joined his laughter, imagining the look on my father's face if such a plot were possible. When we had sobered, I turned to him, pausing our walk across the school grounds.

"Bien sur," he said. "Forgive me. As I said, what you need is a day of complete frivolity. We will spare nothing! If you want to find true vis-à-vis, you will not find it here, Edgar."

He patted me on the shoulder, to the best of his ability, gesturing grandly to the LLG before us. The bell would soon toll, calling us to our afternoon lessons. I looked up at the grand archway of the grey-stone building and watched the other students follow the walk to their classrooms. The LLG had

kept my curiosity for knowledge and talent for words alive, especially now that my father's expectations had become higher than the Eiffel Tower herself. A mark on my record for not being present during my lessons would cost me dearly at home. I would have to suffer through a sound lecture on my lack of judgment and disappointing behavior. I owed so much to this establishment my sanctuary. What a strange thing it was to be suddenly compelled to leave it all on a whim!

"Where will we go?" I asked him after another moment of hesitation. He lifted his hands, elated, his smile spreading across his long face.

"Montmartre!"

I cringed. The stories I had heard about Montmartre were unsavory ones indeed. The people there were not the sort gentlemen had anything to do with, and getting spotted there by anyone who knew my father would be fatal for me. I started to protest.

"It is not what you think!" he cut in. "The people there are alive, my friend. Truly! You will not be disappointed."

I wanted to believe him.

"Toulouse, we have lessons "

"We always have lessons! We learn and we work and we learn to work more and all that learning is to make us more money than our fathers before us and to what end? What happiness will be waiting for us when this is done?"

"Family? Security?" I countered, starting for the entrance hall. Toulouse rushed after me as best he could on his stunted legs.

"We can still have these things! Edgar, a man does not find happiness through humility."

"He may find respect by it."

"You have an excuse for everything," he called after me, halting in his pursuit. "Were you born for greatness or are you so determined to follow in your father's footsteps?"

"What?" I snapped, turning around. He took a moment to catch his breath, raising a hand to point at the LLG.

"Your father is a banker. From here you become a lawyer. You will graduate from this building and from the university after that and you will live in an office just like your father. Where is the security, the family, in that future?"

His words stung, but I couldn't argue with him. I didn't want that future, though I couldn't exactly see how going to Montmartre was going to change it for me. The bell started tolling in the silence that spread out between us. I didn't know then that leaving with Toulouse that day would change the course of my history forever.

We took a coach to the hilltop city of Montmartre, and as I watched the scenery pass by me I felt the cold stab of fear and guilt slowly ebbing away. I admired the work that was being done to the *Ile de la Cité* as we rode out of Paris. President Louis Napoleon III had ripped open the heart of Paris and was in the process of setting it back together again rightfully rebuilding and adding new homes for the growing populace, as well as restoring the grand Notre Dame. Perhaps my favorite addition that our once-Emperor had set in motion was the completion of the Louvre, and the galleries that lined the Seine. I must have fallen asleep watching them fade into the distance, because the next thing that I remember was stepping from the coach with a magnificent view of the country spread out at my feet.

The hill unfolded in waves below me, the sky a blistering blue to my eyes but I could not look away. The buildings were clustered so tightly together I wondered that this brilliant city had any inhabitants at all. But around me men and women were calling out, even singing; I could hear the faint sound of a violin in the distance. Everything smelled of hot breads and meat spices and the heady scent of good, strong Parisian wine. And the color! Blues, warm pastel creams, and whites. Even the grey did not seem forlorn as it did across the cityscape of Paris.

I will never forget the sight of it as long as I live.

Toulouse smiled at me and tapped the back of my leg with his cane, urging me forward. I needed no urging. We walked the streets together admiring the painters that had set up along the buildings, the beautiful women parading the streets in barely decent attire. We stopped at a bar and there I tasted my first glass of absinthe. It burned violently on the way down but nothing tasted sweeter, especially on this day. My thoughts soared. Toulouse's words from earlier finally reached me. Montmartre was nothing like the squalid underground city my father had made it out to be, *non*, the people here were truly alive.

I was so entranced by the streets that I could not be persuaded to enter the shops with Toulouse. We parted briefly so that I might explore while he conducted whatever business he was looking to do. I relished our parting. My back was never held straighter than on that afternoon.

The breeze was cool but the sun was high and before long I had slipped out of my jacket and carried it under my arm while I walked. I did not mind the chill on my arms with my shirtsleeves rolled and my jacket in danger of becoming creased I was far too pleased with my rugged appearance to care. Around me the city dwellers teemed, vendors calling out their wares to the passersbys. Thick loaves of warm bread and fresh herbs wafted over the cobbled streets around me a sharp, buttery sensation floating over honey and spice. But I was not interested so much in the food, and pressed on towards the banners of brightly colored scarves and fabrics where the vendors were selling trinkets and jewelry and all manor of fine treasures. I ran my hand over a petit charm and thought of Hettie, the youngest of us. I had been away studying for some time now, only returning home when the libraries had closed, so as to avoid our father. I missed her terribly just then. She would have loved this place.

I picked up the necklace, a tiny silver balloon on a thin chain, and held it up for the vendor to see. I handed him a few francs and carefully pocketed the charm before heading on my way. I had promised Toulouse that I wouldn't stray far from *le rue* where I had left him, but quickly I found myself in an unfamiliar area. Though no less brilliant in color, it was quite silent as compared to the streets filled to market. All at once I felt intrusive, my person obnoxious in this sudden calm. Like a fool, I continued walking in the wrong direction, if only to outrun my discomfort.

Ahead of me, there was a group of painters set up along the road. I made my way over with the intention of asking for directions, coming to stand beside an elderly gentleman scrutinizing one of the smaller canvases among the group. He seemed so deep in thought that I was embarrassed to interrupt him, and found myself looking at the painting also.

It was nearly finished, I speculated, a scene from the street we were facing. It's high buildings cast deep green shadows onto the dusty cobblestones, the darkness starkly contrasted by the pastel figures strolling up and down the lane. I frowned.

"Something wrong?"

I glanced over at the old man, taken aback. He was watching me with a curious glint in his deep

blue eyes, a hint of a smile playing on his lips.

"Wrong?" I managed.

"You don't look pleased with the canvas," he clarified, turning to better face me. I felt my cheeks grow hot since the painter was seated very close to us, but something in the man's gaze egged me on.

"There aren't any people on this street," I said.

The man pressed his lips together thoughtfully and nodded, glancing around. "True enough for now. But perhaps later this evening? Tomorrow?"

I shrugged. "Perhaps."

"Then perhaps this is a painting of later this evening, or tomorrow?"

His eyes were laughing at me. I was suddenly inclined to defend my position.

"But it is being painted now. If it were a painting of a different time, then why not paint it then?"

"Anyone can paint this day today, my boy," he said with a laugh. "It takes an *artist* to paint tomorrow today."

I was at a loss for words. The man chuckled quietly and turned me away from the painters, one soft hand on my shoulder.

"Come, you look lost. I will walk with you."

"Do you know the way back to the market?" I asked, feeling too young at his side.

"Ah, a short walk then," he smiled. "Not to worry. You did not stray far."

"I appreciate your kindness," I replied, holding out my hand. "Edgar Degas."

"You can call me Ingres," he said, taking my hand firmly. There was a smile in his eyes again and something so warm and charismatic in his face that I found myself inadvertently smiling back. We started off in the opposite direction at a slow pace.

"Are you an artist yourself, sir?"

"I am a *conservator* of good doctrine," he said reverently. "Art is my field, yes."

"Then, those men are your students?" I glanced back at them as we rounded a street corner, worried that my earlier comments had been offensive.

"Occasionally," he answered with a mischievous tone. "From time to time I even like the work they do."

"Did you not like the canvas then?" I frowned, confused.

"No, no. Terribly flat scene wasn't it? All color and no life."

"But I thought you said "

He waved his hand, cutting me off. "Of course the skill is there, my dear boy. Not just anyone can paint what doesn't exist."

I was thrown by his tone of voice. There was a slight annoyance to it as he clasped his hands behind his back, his thick eyebrows dipping over his eyes.

"Well, then what was wrong with it? I thought it was crafted very well."

"Yes, it is exquisite work!" he replied animatedly. "But it will not embody perfection until it can encompass the union of a beautiful image and a beautiful idea. The people of Montmartre live here, Edgar. Do you think they come to gaze at paintings of their everyday?"

"If the art is pleasing, then "

"No," he shook his head. "People need not be reminded of the day-to-day. That is not why we

value art. It is the idea, the purpose, the *immortality* we value." He paused, bidding me stop with a hand on my arm.

"What do you see?"

I glanced around. "It's just a road, sir."

"A road on which we are both standing today," he replied passionately, gesturing between the two of us. "This moment may never happen again. And just think how brilliant it would be to keep it forever, regardless! With art, we can make the ephemeral eternal once more."

"And how does one achieve this?" I asked skeptically. Such ideas seemed a bit radical for a mere painting. He patted me on the back, chuckling as he continued up the road.

"By starting at the beginning of course. By drawing lines, my dear boy, lines!"

When we made it back to the market, I could just make out Toulouse nudging through crowds of people's knees. Turning to Ingres, I gave him a small bow and a smile.

"It's been a pleasure, sir."

"For me as well," he said, tipping his hat. "Good luck to you, Edgar."

I thanked him again and turned away to find Toulouse, who had a tendency of disappearing from sight when in large crowds. I found him after a short time, looking a bit worn out.

"Toulouse!" I called him over. He smiled broadly when he caught my eye and lifted his cane in a wave.

"Edgar, where have you been off to?" he elbowed my hip with a conspiratorial look in his eye. "Find a pretty lady, did you?"

"Hardly," I replied around a laugh. "Actually, I was rather lost for a time."

"Pity that," he clucked. "Shall we sit for a while? I'm famished."

I nodded, following him closely through the throngs of people. My thoughts lingered on the old man, Ingres, and I found myself glancing around as though I might see him again. I knew that I wouldn't, but our conversation seemed to have burned itself into my mind. I thought about what he could have meant by drawing lines. That was too obvious wasn't it? Everything was made of lines.

"So, what did I tell you?" Toulouse asked me when we had seated ourselves at a small café in the heart of the city centre. He slapped his hand on the table laughing as he gestured a waiter over.

I could not help but let my spirits be lifted by his good mood. We ordered a late lunch and spoke lightly as we ate, taking our time.

"You can only imagine the underground at night, yes?" he asked me, taking a sip of his drink and leaning back. His feet did not begin to reach the ground.

"How often do you come here, Toulouse?"

"As often as I can manage," he said, raising his glass. I obliged him, throwing back the last of my wine uncivilly. I delighted in these small discourtesies.

"Why did you not tell me about this place before now?"

He regarded me with a sly smile. "Would you have still associated yourself with a drunken, promiscuous, dwarf if you were also aware that I spent most of my free time in the dark city of Montmartre?"

I shook my head, trying not to laugh.

"Toulouse, I'm afraid that you think so little of me!"

"Think so little?"

We laughed together at the bad pun, until a commotion across the street drew our attention away from our merriment.

The sounds of the people milling about seemed to dim in wake of the sudden shouting. A crowd was forming around whatever chaos was unfolding. I could hear the deep, angry voice of a man rising over the rest.

"*Putain!*"

There was a resounding slap that echoed across the street and I found myself rising as a startled gasp rose from the crowd. Toulouse rapped the table with his knuckles.

"Sit, sit, my friend. Pay it no mind."

"*Salaud!*" A child's voice bawled back. "*Casse-toi, pauvre con!*"

I bolted for the crowd. I could hear Toulouse calling after me to wait, to come back, but now the crowd was yelling raucously and the *policiers* were starting to take notice. I shoved through the mass of people to find a young girl lying in the road, her small hands wrapped tightly around her head as a man twice her size raised his cane to strike her again. I looked to the others. No one was moving. The man snarled, spittle coating his beard in a thin layer of white. I reacted instinctively, lunging for his arm. I barely caught the strike before he swung his improvised weapon too hard for me to stop. He roared, wrenching his cane from my hand so viciously I nearly stumbled backwards on top of the girl-child on the ground behind me.

"Get out of my way, boy," he spat at me. I planted my feet.

"What do you think you're doing?" I said fiercely. Toulouse pushed his way to the center of the conflict, where I was. He stood on the edge of the ring of suddenly silent onlookers, watching me.

"I paid good money for this *chienne*," he said venomously, jabbing his cane at her under my arm. I knocked it down.

"How much?" I demanded.

He looked at me in a calculating way, sizing me up. I set my jaw and reached for my purse. I took what was left of my allowance and shoved the bills into the man's massive chest, forcing him back a step. It was more than enough, I knew. The thought made me sick. He fumbled with the bills.

"Leave," I told him. He sneered at me and turned to go but not before spitting on the girl, eliciting a disgusted cry from her. Toulouse hobbled in between us before I could lunge at the man, allowing him to leave in a huff. The rest dispersed slowly, the policiers no longer interested. I watched the man lumber away, feeling an anger uncoiling inside of me like a spring wound too tight for too long. I had never felt such rage before.

"Edgar," Toulouse said at my side. "Come, we should go."

I shook him off. The girl was slowly picking herself up off the ground. When I reached out to offer her my hand, she slapped it away, hard.

"Leave me alone, *cochon*."

I yanked my hand back, startled. Toulouse glowered at her.

"A simple thank you, would do," he snapped at her. I dropped a hand to his shoulder as I straightened.

"It's alright," I said. "Are you hurt?"

She seemed taken aback by my question. I wanted her to answer me but she didn't need to. The bruise welting on her smooth cheek and the angry purple marks dotting her arms spoke the truth for her.

"Toulouse," I asked him quietly. "Call un médecin, please."

"Edgar "

The fact that he would protest this brought the rage burning back into my chest. I turned on him.

"I'm not asking anymore, Toulouse."

He pressed his lips together, taking one last look at the girl before heading down the road on his too-small legs. I reached into my pocket and took out my handkerchief, holding it out to her.

"Here."

She glared at me, her lip trembling. "I don't need your help!"

"Please, take it." I felt suddenly drained by the whole situation. I didn't want to argue with her. After a moments hesitation she snatched it from my hand and scampered back like a skittish pup.

"I can't pay for a doctor," she said. I ignored the comment and watched her wipe the spit off her arm in a delicate way.

"What is your name?"

"What is yours?" she fired back.

"Edgar Degas," I replied easily. She folded the handkerchief and pressed the clean side to her cheek, watching me. Her eyes were a sharp, deep hazel that seemed to drink in all details at once.

"Sophie-Marie," she said finally.

"May I call you Marie?"

She shifted on the balls of her feet. She didn't protest at the very least, so I continued.

"How old are you, Marie?"

Her eyes narrowed and she took a step back as if to run. I raised my hands.

"Please, at least wait for Toulouse to return."

"I told you "

"I will take care of the doctor," I cut in, my hands still raised. "Oblige me this, please?"

As Marie stared up at me, it struck me how her expression did not coincide with her appearance. It was far too mature for a child, too angry. She couldn't be older than Hettie, no more than twelve with her flat chest and full cheeks, and yet her smooth white skin and perfect almond eyes were beautiful. Though her body had not begun to take shape, it was long and lean and she stood with an unconscious grace. I found myself sinking into her gaze, clouded as it was with uncertainty and distrust, and I did not resurface.

Santa's Coming
Gloria K. McAndrew

Untitled Poem

Linda Black-Ochsenbien

I hold these moods to my breast
as if it were an everlasting
hung upside down
on a wall, sprayed, doubtful of
its status, with synthetic acrylics
spewing fumes, demanding nature be
bound to this stance
be bound to this stance
stayed from the slow brown death of
most things, like the life of words, that leap
or slither or gasp in
hearts on pages, transferred from mind to mind, lip
to lips, on the vibration of a string, the bleating, the moan,
the whine— the narrative
She who creates the narrative
has the final say.

Scatterbrained, And How To Collapse Everything At Once

Mark A. Wallace

A flood inside of my throat,
of white and black and gray like
the only decent dress of a television set;
like the eye color of coma victim 1,209 of
human year two-thousand and eight,
built of blood and guts and chemical stupidity,
no more or less.

I now know the dread and the weight
that I've worried so dreamily over since age ten,
when I found a hand up my skirt
and ALL OF A SUDDEN lost alla my ticklish tendencies;
discovered No Feeling.

How the war between my ears has now grown into my heart,
I know of problems greater than whether or not
our minds may escape the dirt when it's all
"said and done."
—And done.

I hope for the sake of hope,
that no soul finds the touch of
darling sadness I sleep cuddled up tight to nightly,
DRUGGED and SMOTHERED and never sleeping really.

I blame the glow inside of my belly!
I blame the once warm hug of a mother being friendly!
I blame the bluebird's glory-songs so catchy in the morning!
yet I blame nothing just the same,
for the only face I ever loved,
I've trampled with fabulous aim.

Redemption

Jennifer Tinker

"Of course Joey would be late to an event like this," I said to my cousin.

"He just texted me Adam. He said he just left the airport and will be here in about 20 minutes," Brian responded.

At the time, I still could not believe that I had not spoken to Joey, my younger brother, in over a year. We got into a minor dispute just before he moved away from our little town of Anchor, Michigan to the big city of Los Angeles, California. I could tell that it was still a little awkward for Brian because as kids it was always the three of us. I guess he was the link between us two because of the six year age difference that will always separate Joey and me. That day of our grandfathers wake though, time had passed and Joey was 22, Brian was 25 and I was 28.

"Ok, now I'm starting to get a little worried," Brian said to me.

"Worried?" I said back to him. "No one should be worried, we just have to get to the funeral parlor and none of us, especially our fathers, can deal with any unnecessary distractions right now."

Just as I said that, the door to my parent's house swung open and in walked Joey along with the cocky, careless attitude that he possessed. I watched as he greeted my father and hugged and kissed my mother. I noticed a few moments later my mother had said something to him that he did not exactly like. I didn't think anything of it though and kept my distance from him until we exchanged "hellos" from across the room. Right away, I could tell that the time away from each other had furthered our relationship and that the words I said to him 13 months before were still as present in him as they were that night.

That day before the argument, Joey was in a tight jam and asked if he could borrow my brand new black Pontiac G6; the car that I had been saving for years to buy. To make a long story short, my car never made it back to mine and my wives apartment that night. Instead, it ended up at a local car garage until it was later determined to be "totaled".

The next day, I made a poor choice. I had a little bit too much to drink and called him up. Being the older brother that I am, I chose force over reason and yelled at him. Both of us exchanged a few words and said some things' we should never have said.

We went the next several weeks without speaking and then all of a sudden one day my mom informed me that my little brother was picking up and moving to California. Why on earth he would do such a stupid thing, I had no idea

The day of the wake was a hot and muggy mid-August day. My grandfather was a well known and respected man in our town. I just sat back and watched as of his former friends and relatives paid their final respects to him and then made their way through the "line" to offer sympathy to my father, aunt and uncle.

"Look at that," I said to Jessica, my wife of a few years. "This is something special, look at how close of a relationship my father has with Uncle Tom."

"I know," she responded as she just looked into my eyes and smiled.

Across the room, I noticed that Joey was peering at this too. I felt though, that he did not take this in the same light that Jessica and I did. How could he not realize the importance of this? I said to myself. My wife realized this too.

"He doesn't even realize," I said to her. "He just picked up and moved away and wasn't able to cherish Pop's final moments of earth. But look at my mother with him," I said as I pointed to the two. "She loves everything about him. I'm the one that graduated college and took over my father's real-estate business. What's he doing, chasing some far-fetched dream of Hollywood," I continued.

"Adam, stop it! Not now, I am not talking about this" Jessica pressured me to come to my senses.

The wake finally ended a few hours later and the next day we sent my grandfather off with an incredible funeral ceremony with military salutes as an appreciation for his time in World War II. They say that times of tragedy can bring enemies closer, still though, there remained a large gap between Joey and I and we still were yet to exchange words.

A few days later, Brian and Joey went out to lunch. The two both just ordered a casual meal, a sandwich and fries. It was as if time had not passed as they were once again residing at the popular diner in our town, Annie's. The meal ended a short while later without a word spoken of the events of the last few days. Yet, Brian was determined to speak about it and began to do so on the way home.

"So what are your plans here Joe?" Brian said to him as he started the car.

"I don't know, its just times like these that I don't want to be away," he said back to him.

"Then why don't you stay, you don't have to go back you know."

"I know, I know. But things have just changed so much. And yeah, I'm sorry that I go away and things change. Honestly though, how much less can someone think about me? Adam didn't even talk to me all week," Joey said.

"Well, did you make an effort to talk to him?" Brian asked.

"Yeah but, it's not even that. As soon as I got home my Mom said to be good and basically tried to tame me. What am I like a time bomb, if that's what you think can you at least show me a little bit more respect than that. Did you ever think that I got into a fight with him, but I was right? I wouldn't let anyone say "Fuck you, you scumbag," especially my brother."

"I understand," Brian said.

"I made a mistake, I admit it, but can't you even forgive your own brother? And, for him to be drunk like he is 16 years old and call someone to yell at them then not even have the maturity to call them back the next day and explain when he was sober. He has to grow up too!" Joey said in a frustrated voice.

"Joe, you got to realize that that was over a year ago."

"I've thought about calling him so many times, but I just don't know what to say and I know that he would just be short with me," Joey told him.

"Talk to him, soon, who knows you guys could be come best friends!"

"Yeah, but, I doubt that. I don't want to be around here and with the family and just worrying about Adam and focusing all of my attention on that. I thought we all learned something with what happened these past few days. Life is precious and as time goes on, there is even more of a good possibility that someone we care about will not be here. With every day that goes by the chance of that continues to grow. I don't want ever look back on the past and try to recall the happy times. But, instead only be able to think of negative thoughts because of the tension between me and him."

"You don't understand. That doesn't need to be the way it goes. The past is the past, he is your older brother. Does that mean anything to you?" Brian said in a desperate attempt to talk some sense into his younger cousin.

"I'm a little brother and I have always been. Remember playing sports out in my back yard? The feeling that came over me when I caught a pass he threw or he picked me to be on his team first, it was great. I guess, I'm just over it, we will never be close again and I'm just sick of searching for his acceptance."

From what I have been told, that was right about the same time the conversation ended, so abruptly, as the car pulled on to Recor Ave and approached my parents house. At the time, I was standing in the driveway watching the car near closer and closer. This was not any coincidence though. Brian had called me earlier in the day and told me of the lunch date and approximately what time he would be bringing Joey back to the house. I did not know what to expect in waiting for them, it was just out of pure instinct and feeling that I went and waited.

The car seemed to be coming at an incredibly slow rate. Truth be told, as I watched the car finally come to a complete stop, I got a little bit of butterflies in my stomach and I was nervous. The tension had been building between me and my brother since he arrived back in Michigan and as he got out of the car and walked toward me, it was as if the silence was finally going to end. To my surprise, I was wrong because Joey just walked right past me without making any eye contact.

At that moment, it seemed as though this was not just another sibling rivalry. No, there was much more at stake here.

"Joey," I said in a desperate attempt as be drew closer to opening the front door of the house.

In response, he stopped in his tracks and looked straight up into the bright blue sky. A few moments went by like this until he finally turned around to face me. "Yes," he finally said in a disgusted tone

"We got to talk," I said with a slight stutter.

"What? What do we have to talk about? What is there to talk about?" he replied rudely.

"You must be joking me right?" I said back.

"Adam, you basically disowned me, real cool of you, really," he said sarcastically as he walked closer to me.

"Disowned you?" I asked.

"You know nothing about me. Nothing! What's going on in my life, I'm sorry about the car. But really is it that big of a deal?"

"Fuck the car, that's beside the point" I told him.

"Yeah exactly, fuck the car. Do you even give a shit about me? Do you realize that I am out there and you don't know anything about my life? Do you realize how strange that is?"

"Well what are you doing? You moved away from us just to live the party life like you always did. Maybe it's time to grow up," I replied back in disgust.

"Oh my god, you think you know everything don't you? You got all the answers just like you always did, right? Honestly, I'm out there working my ass off doing what I want to do and I'm...yeah I'm happy," he said as he searched for the right words to say. "I'm trying to make something of my life."

We were now standing about three feet from each other not saying a word. We were just staring at each other like we had just met. Ironically, it was in the same place where memories of our childhood were present. There we were, standing under our old, worn down basketball hoop. That driveway was our get away, our safe haven. It was our paradise where we imitated our idols, where we made the game winning shots like Jordan did. All at the same time, it was where we were best friends.

Not anymore though, this time we were strangers. The anger and hatred of emotions were in our eyes now.

"You know what? I'm sick of this. I'm out of here," Joey said as he walked past me once again and ventured down our old street.

I watched him walk away and then glanced over at Brian who was still leaning against his car that was parked on the street in front of the house. My cousin looked at me, then just kind of shook his head and starred at the ground. I then peered back at my brother walking further and further away. It was in that moment that I first saw him in a totally different spotlight. For the first time, I looked at him as a person. I guess it was much more than that, though. For the first time in my life, I saw my little baby brother as a man.

For the next twenty minutes or so, I stood in the same spot like my feet had been cemented into the driveway. All the while I was there, Joey did not return. I finally came to my senses and got back

to reality, went to my car and drove home to be with my wife. While with her, I could not knock the thought of my brother from my head. I did not want to talk to anyone about it and so Jessica let me be. While I was sitting there on our couch, I heard the phone ring but had no motivation to get up and answer it.

"Hello," I overheard Jessica say as she picked up the phone. "Yes, I will go get him," she said next.

"Adam! It is your mother, she wants to talk to you," she yelled to me.

It wasas my mother calling. Growing up, it had always been her role in the house to mend arguments that came about over the years. Yes, most of the time, I was blamed because of my existence as an older brother. This time, I was convinced as I walked through my kitchen to the phone that the conversation with my mom was going to be a similar conversation of the past.

"Adam," she said warily. Right away, I knew that she had tears in her eyes.

"Yes mom? What is wrong? Let me explain," I replied

"Adam," she said again.

"Yes Mom? What?" I said as I got this awful gut feeling.

"He left," she said in a soft voice. "He left again, he went back."

"He did what? But I never got a chance to tell him, I mean ask him..." I said as I suddenly stopped my words.

"Never what? You never asked him what?"

"Mom, I got to go, I just got to go. I will call you back."

I hung up the phone quickly. To my shock, Jessica had been standing behind me listening to the entire conversation. I peered into her eyes and right away she knew what was going through my head. She looked at me and nodded as a way to agree with me. I nodded back and ran out of my house.

Outside, I quickly got to car and was off to retrieve my brother. By the time I got to Route 78, rush hour had set in and the highway was jammed with cars. Fear was now present in me. What if I don't get there in time?, I said to myself.

Luckily, I knew the roads well enough and managed to get on an alternate route that could take me to Detroit International Airport. Beads of sweat began to drip down my face. Upon arrival, I frantically got out of the car and scurried into the building. I did not know what to do. I glanced at the television screen, I saw flights to Chicago, Orlando, Atlanta and Austin, but didn't see San Diego.

"Was I too late?" I said aloud now.

Through the window, I could see an airplane taking off. The thought that Joey could have been on the plane and out of my life came over me and I was worried. Still though, I was determined to find him and the search continued. Despite my effort and me seeing a few men that looked like him and definitely could have been him, I had no luck. I desperately took the escalator down to the basement level. Once at the bottom, right away there in plain view I saw the man I was looking for. I could not believe my eyes, but reassured myself that that was my brother. Joey was at the front of the line talking to the receptionist behind the counter. I took a few deep breaths, wiped the perspiration from my head and walked slowly up to him. All the while, he still did not see me.

"When is the next flight boarding for San Diego, California," I heard him ask the lady. "I need to get on that plane."

"No you don't," I said to him as I placed my hand on his right shoulder.

In shock, he turned around and faced me. "Adam?" he asked knowing that it truly was me.

"Why can't I get on that plane?" he said to me.

"You want to know why?" I asked him. "Because my child is going to need a godfather. He is going to need the best godfather and that is going to be you," I said to him.

He just starred at me and looked deep into eyes. As I looked back at him, I could practically see the years of searching for meaning and acceptance drain from his body. I reached out to shake his hand, but he didn't. Instead, he gave me to biggest hug I have ever gotten by anyone. If I could only remember the look on the receptionist face, two grown men hugging in front of hundreds of people, without a care in the world.

"I'm sorry, I didn't even know," Joey said to me.

"I know, but you're not alone. No one knows, only you me and Jess. Come on bud, let's go home."

As I sit here right now in the hospital waiting room, nine months later, I am nervous and excited all at the same time. Within the next hour, I will be a father. I find comfort though as I just ventured from the flashback of the rivalry that once existed. The comfort is because it is gone and in the past. With Joey by my side waiting, how can it get any better than this? It can't. We begin this world with family and we end with family. Yeah, I guess I was wrong. I guess the drama that was once present with my brother was just another sibling rivalry.

Brass, Drums & Everyone
Kelly Chilton

A Field Proposal

Hannah E. Smith

Mother saying no, father saying yes.
A story of contempt it thus began.
A blessing he asked for, and I said I guess.
"He is a good man," father said, "kind man."

"We are different, you and I, to love."
"What, you prideful, I… me indifferent?"
"No, shy and you outspoken, beloved.
To love in such a way, so defiant."

Another suitor hoping for romance,
my mother liked his chances better.
First look, I knew I didn't like his stance.
I found on my room desk a sealed letter.

My love asked me to meet him in the field
of white flowers hoping my hand to yield.

Mohammed Salman Hamdani
William J. O'Brien

Happy Birthday, Salman. You are 31 years old today.
We here are all together: Vinnie, Athar, Adeel, Adnan, Zeshan.
Love you,
Mama

When I die, they will suspect me of mass
murder and I will represent what is best
in human beings. For now, I'm looking up
at a 747 taking off over Shea Stadium.
The number 7 train pops
against the rail and I
can see sparks under the wheels. Soon,
a girl in a nearby middle school
will note the smell of burning
bodies, but I'm riding a train
on my way to the chem. lab
at Rockefeller U., thinking
this weekend I should revise the letter
I wrote for med school in between shifts
in the ambulance and sorting
the Sunday papers in Abu's shop. Maybe
I'll just watch *The Empire Strikes Back* on VHS.

Remember, Nano said you would make a great name in the world one day because at 4 months old, you would look at your palms. Nano said you see your destiny, and you would always ask me, "How will I make a name, Mama?"

When I am in the burning skyscraper,
I will approach a man in
a black tie with no jacket. He will recoil,
remembering the four
Arab men seen leaving
the Oklahoma City Building
before he got bored and turned
off the news, and I will say,
"My name is Sal. Come with me."
Living bodies will fall past the windows.

Until my body is found, I will
be a fugitive.

Here, on the 7 train,
I am training with Obi-Wan
in a daydreamed Millennium Falcon.

I'm wondering if I'm too involved
in fantasy, because everyone is
looking up at me from their seats. I think
I may have pretended to swing a light saber,
or the Quran is sticking out of my bag, but
they are looking right past me. I turn
around. Some will later say they could see
the devil's face in the smoke,
but I see Darth Sidious.

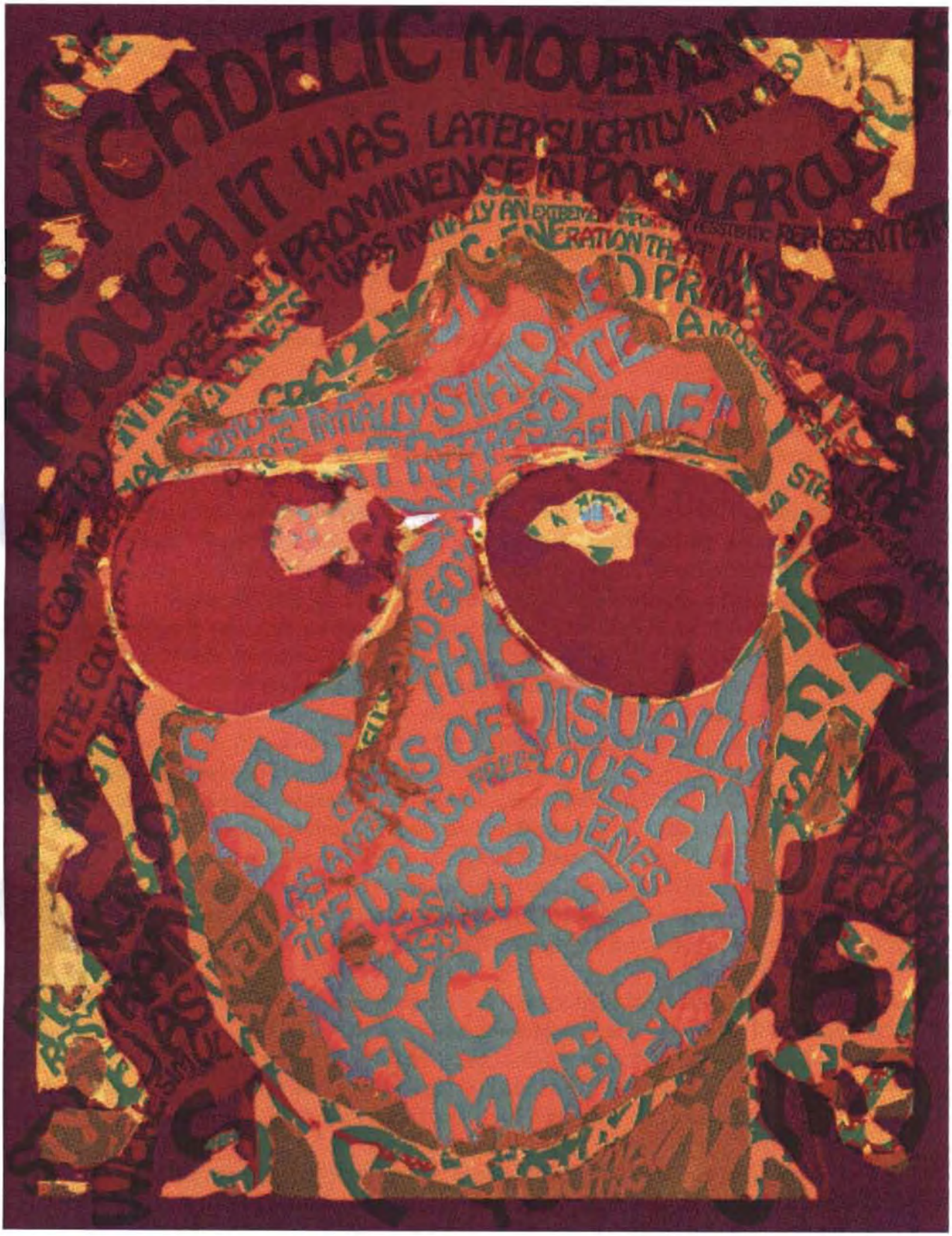
My young Jedi,
you gave your life for the children of ignorance.

While I am missing, Mama and Abu
will be visited by a government task force
that wants me for "questioning." They will
go to Mecca. A guard will ask where
they are from, then point his thumb down.
My new Honda will sit and wait
in the road. The "YUNGJEDI" vanity
will gather a film of dust before I am
found under rubble,
but now, the 7 train's brakes
squeal like padawan

slaughtered by Anakin in *Revenge of the Sith*,
which I will never see. I dig
into my bag, past the Quran
and the medical books, and pull
out my EMT and NYPD cadet badges. I run out of the station
toward the flames, sifting through a stampede
of retreating clones.

Note: The italicized sections are appropriated from posts by Talat Hamdani, Salman's mother, on a 9-11 memorial website dedicated to him, or from news articles quoting Mrs. Hamdani.

Erik
Gloria McAndrew



Everlasting Oxymoron

Carissa Ruiz

You don't know me,
But I am everywhere,
I'm in everything you see,
But neither here nor there

Feel the hairs stand up on every part of your being?
That's my breath running over you,
Everything you've ever seen,
But the mysteries you have yet to

Do you understand yet?

I'm the beautiful ugly duckling,
The shine in rusted metal,
I'm the stars that shine in a cloudy sky,
I'm a girl in love who just can't settle

My eyes are closed but I'm wide awake,
My skin is hot but I still tremble,
I give what I won't ever take,
And you know what I resemble?

Claim To Fame

Matthew C. Falicchio

When I was about ten years old, I had a friend who lived downtown, about a mile away. It was just him, and his mother. Once in a while, I would eat dinner with the two of them. Right before we would sit down at the kitchen table his mother would rush over and shut the blinds on the window looking outside.

"Can't have *them* looking in," she'd say politely.

Out the window, in the distance, the outline of a vast old building loomed above our heads. It's an outline that was there long before we were born, and probably will remain long after we die.

To think of the center of any town, even a small one like Auburn, New York, my hometown, you'd imagine that something beautiful would be placed there, like a monument. Not just something beautiful, but something symbolic, reflective of the town it represents and the values of the residents living there. This could be a garden, or statue, perhaps a museum holding the towns history. Auburn had a lot of material to choose from for such an honor.

Harriet Tubman lived in Auburn, and her house served as a major stop on the Underground Railroad. She's the most famous runaway slaves in history, I would assume. Her monument and museum, however, is near the edge of town, hidden to those who aren't looking specifically for it. I am embarrassed to admit that I've never even been inside. William Seward, the guy who bought Alaska, he lived in Auburn too. Probably every Auburnian, including myself, has at one time or another visited the Seward house. It's an old mansion that the city has preserved in every detail because it was, and for what they knew might always be the most significant thing that Auburn would ever be able to boast ownership of. I've stood beside the couch that Seward had been resting on the night one of the Booth conspirators broke in and stabbed him. That same night Lincoln died, but Seward survived, and little did he know, his couch would outlive us all.

Those monuments and houses for former Auburnians, who so bravely did what it took to eventually alter the course of American life, would be the central focus of many small towns throughout this country; the towns, "claim to fame". My home town is unique though, and holds something which has made the other options seem like sideshow acts.

Auburn's big hurrah, separating it from most other places, is the very reason my friend's mother had to close the blinds before sitting down for dinner. Some towns boast famous people from the past, and others their own natural beauty. In the center of Auburn's busiest district are four cement walls holding murderers, rapists, and a who's who of other violent felons. The massive structure has been in the center of my hometown since it was constructed in 1816. If you ask someone from upstate New York what they picture when they hear the word Auburn, nine times out of ten it's "The Prison". Go ahead, try it.

The oddness of our prison is not apparent to most of those born and raised in Auburn. I strolled by the prison every day for twenty years without the slightest urge to look at it critically. It was just, "The Prison", like "Wal-Mart" is "Wal-Mart". Hell, nobody even sees behind those walls, and it's not like what happens to men in prison is a hot topic for the news. Criminals are criminals, and no one loses sleep wondering what is going down on the other side. Whatever's happening in there, they deserve it, so who cares?

I may have been thinking back to that movie, "Escape from Alcatraz", when the prison first began to strike me as somewhat peculiar. In the movie, the escapees, I think there were two of them,

were in a prison so separated from society they had to swim miles through horrible currents in order to escape, this after making it out of the prison itself. The end of the movie basically implies that nobody knows what happened when they swam away, and they could have survived. I don't think so. Also, channel surfing late at night I'd seen a few of those television documentaries about various prisons. All those prisons were also in the middle of nowhere, so remote they may as well have been placed in a desert, and a few of them were. Our penitentiary is the same as the ones from movies and television, maximum security, worst of the worst. In Auburn, however, these prisoners have been placed so close to us, that a mother feels the need to close her blinds so the convicts can't peer in at their dinner.

It is taught at every elementary school in Auburn that our founders had a choice when the city was in its infancy. Either we could become the capital of New York State, or be the location of a brand new prison. The founders were given a choice between being a symbol of democracy or the symbol of the cold fist of justice. We chose the fist, and they chose to put this fist in the center of town, for all of us to see. That is pretty much the extent of our education on the prison. They teach us why it is there, but fail to mention any of what has since happened within it.

Auburn also holds my favorite restaurant on the planet, serving the most delicious tex-mex dishes I have ever tasted. The Spanish restaurant is across the road from the large left wall of the prison. The place is called "Connie's", after the owner. Throughout the years I have eaten Connie's dishes so many times she knows me and my order as soon as I walk through the door. Connie's is literally fifteen feet from the prison walls, and the guards frequently come over during lunch and eat. I don't get the same sense of masked fear when I see prison guards as I would the typical city police. Over time many people learn that men in blue are more often not friends, but it's the opposite for guards. Everybody in Auburn knows a guard, primarily because the prison is one of the biggest employers in town. Many acquaintances throughout my teen years went on to become guards. It doesn't take a justice loving fanatic to be a prison guard in Auburn. In fact, some of those I knew who went on to work at the prison were the same people that I feared walking past in an empty hallway throughout middle school, and I suppose it makes sense.

As I previously stated, my fellow citizens in Auburn don't pay much mind to the prison, and neither did I for awhile. Even after I was arrested as a youngster for a "boys will be boys" crime, the prison still didn't evoke guilt or terror in me as if it was something I was on the road to myself achieving. It was just a trip to Connie's when it suddenly dawned on me how odd our prison, and city for that matter, really was. The ground right in front of the prison walls serves as a parking area of sorts. Short-term parking, well you're really not suppose to do it at all, buts it's one of those things that's generally understood as acceptable. They'd surely have you towed if you left your car there all day.

It is the perfect spot to park my car and run across the road to pick up my order from Connie's. I usually leave the keys in and the motor running. Ironic looking back, as a prison doesn't sound like the safest place to leave your car running.

This particular instance, when I came back to my car, a pizza delivery vehicle was parked beside me. I figured the pizza was for one of the houses next to Connie's, but was delighted at what I

discovered. Ten feet to my left was the pizza delivery guy, pizza in hand, staring up twenty feet at one of the prisons near dozen armed guard towers.

I waited to watch the pizza guy instead of racing home to devour my nachos. A head poked out from the guard tower; followed by a bucket. A smile went across my face as I realized what was happening. Slowly, the guard lowered the bucket to the ground with twenty something feet of rope. The pizza delivery guy grabbed the bucket, removing money. He then put the pizza in the bucket, and the guard carefully pulled it up. When the bucket reached the tower the guard again poked out his head, giving a half hearted sort of salute to the delivery man, and that was it. I pulled away from the cement wall before the pizza guy made it back to his car, delighted at what I'd seen.

As I drove home, amusement transformed into something I can only describe as a feeling of oddness. The only feeling the prison had ever really spawned in me previously was simple annoyance when I'd happen to be driving down the street during the guard's shift change, where a parade of guards on the crosswalk delay traffic for ten minutes or so. But the pizza? For a tower guard to order a pizza is certainly not an action encouraged by the higher ups, as while he pulls that rope, some bastard could be trying to make a hopeless escape. Is it normal in towns for the inhabitants to be numb to things such as a prison watchman ordering a pizza in the middle of the day, after apparently taking the time to construct a device designed specifically for the retrieval of ground level pizzas? All this, while they are supposedly protecting the city from two thousand ruthless men who can only be thinking of how to get out.

A few weeks after the pizza incident was my 21st birthday. As expected, my friends paraded me to all the downtown bars to celebrate my newfound legality. Our second stop was at a bar right next to Connie's, called Swaby's. I'd never been in the bar before, but had heard stories, so when I stepped inside for the first time, I went right to the back to see what the stories were about. Sitting on a little stage, lies Auburn's "claim to fame", and it has nothing do with freeing the slaves, or the state of our republic. Swaby's holds Auburn's most widely known contribution to the world, and it's it's just a chair.

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A man named William Kemmler visited Auburn in 1890. He was a pretty typical guy for awhile, working as a produce salesman, and living with his wife, Tillie, in Buffalo, New York. Unfortunately for them, William decided to pick up an *axe* one day, and hack his dear wife to death. This was what gave William the privilege of visiting my town. We were overly excited to have him, only because Auburn had just gotten a brand new toy, something the world had never seen before. Now, I don't know what the problem was with firing squads. Hanging someone on the gallows could be pretty slow, and sometimes messy, probably not a welcomed sight for such a "civilized" country. Perhaps these methods had simply become outdated, worn out like a sitcom in its tenth season that has simply run out of ideas. We had the solution though, regardless what the problem was, if there had been a problem in the first place. What Auburn had was a chair, nice and simple, but with a sinister twist. The plan was simply to put our man in the chair, sitting upright, and with a flip of a switch, fry him to death. This new toy would proceed over time to gain infamy, infamy that Tubman and Seward could never compete with.

There were 17 witnesses at Auburn State Prison that night to see the first man get killed with the fairly new invention that was electricity. It cannot be said, without greatly stretching the truth, that

William's execution went smoothly. To the prison's credit, the chair's operators had practiced the night before. They successfully shocked to death a horse in preparation for the big night. What crime the horse was accused of is not in the public record, though obviously quite severe. I suppose the rational for killing the horse was something to the effect of, "if we can fry the shit of a big horse, Kemmler should be no problem."

They shaved him and sat him down. Surprisingly, witnesses stated he looked completely composed. Perhaps since the chair was so new and foreign, he thought that it just might not work. The Warden read some words, and quickly ordered for the switch to be pulled, letting the show begin. One thousand vaults of electricity poured through William's body. For seventeen seconds the switch stayed down, the first seventeen seconds any governing body in the world had administered electricity as a form of capital punishment. After seventeen seconds, the doctor present examined Kemmler's lifeless body, immediately declaring him dead. Just moments later, however, witnesses realized Kemmler had again began to breathe.

"Have the current turned on again, quick- no delay!" The doctor is recorded to have yelled.

The chairs operators did just that, except this time they doubled the current, two thousand vaults. At this point, I can say with fair amount of certainty that William regretted living through the first electric wave. His blood vessels were described as having "ruptured through the skin". Some witnesses, the ones who could bare continuing to watch, stated that William's body actually burst into flames during the two thousand volt knock out punch. During the second burst, however, it is also recorded that most of the witnesses were already attempting to flee the room, unable to tolerate the stench of burning flesh that they almost certainly had never experienced. They were unsuccessful in their attempts, because Auburn Prison's rules at the time stated that witnesses could not leave until the entertainment had concluded.

George Westinghouse was Thomas Edison's greatest competitor at this point in history, and it was his newly invented current of alternating electricity which William Kemmler became acquainted with that night. Westinghouse was one of William's biggest supporters for an appeal, perhaps just not wanting to see his invention used in such a manner, and fearing the guilt that any sane person would feel afterward. Regardless, Westinghouse was amongst the 17 witnesses, unable to avoid glimpsing what his invention, his flash of genius, would ultimately do for the world, better or worse. A newspaper reporter quoted Westinghouse immediately following the execution.

"Far worse than hanging," the inventor stated. "They would have done better using an *axe*."

Sing Sing Prison got their own electric chair immediately following Kemmler's execution. Fair to say, the invention caught on almost as quickly as it sucked the life out of those sitting in it. It's hard to know exactly why, being that any prison warden looking into alternate methods of execution must have known about the brutality of Auburn's chair. Regardless, they all wanted it. Maybe it was because the country was fresh out of the industrial revolution, the moment when technology had gone from a wish for the future to a common occurrence, present in everyone's daily life. Perhaps the new method of execution gained popularity because it symbolized, in a disturbing way, the evolution of man. Electricity was such a revolutionary concept, and what better way to display its power to the world than to have it take the life right out of our criminals. It was new, it was simple, and perhaps the smell of burning flesh appealed to certain parts of human nature, the same that inspired those performing,

say, The Salem Witch trials.

Auburn's next use of the electric chair was in 1901, and perhaps the most famous flip of the switch for the prison. On September 6th, 1901, then President Mckinley was shot in the head by a man named Leon Czolgosz. Two weeks later, Leon promptly found himself in my hometown. Perfect candidate for our chair, as the majority of the country wanted him dead, and many of this majority wouldn't mind to hear that he'd felt it. Leon was found guilty of assassinating the President of the United States, in a trial that went from jury selection to verdict in one day. He was sitting in our chair within two months of pulling the trigger against the president's head.

This time, the chairs operators decided they would apply the electricity differently, most likely in hopes of avoiding a slight mishap, such as the one that ultimately turned William Kemmler's body inside out. This time they applied three, 1,700 volt jolts to Leon, and he was stone dead. Dead, not like Kemmler, but really dead. Unfortunately, Leon's story just didn't quite end there. Leon's brother, and brother-in-law visited my hometown for his execution, and after they watched their brother die horribly they asked the Warden for his body, to perform a proper burial. The Warden declined to give the assassin back, and said a mob would gather around the body and kill the brothers if the corpse was released. The Warden imposed that the body would receive burial in our prison, for safety.

After they'd gotten the brothers to piss off, they immediately threw Leon into a coffin. Of course, you can't bury a corpse in a prison built with cement. Where would you put it? The warden made a rational choice, and ordered sulfuric acid to be poured over Leon's entire body. Everything but the bones decomposed within 12 hours. After that, they decided they might as well burn all his clothing and letters too.

It didn't end with Leon. More prisons in more states got their own chairs. Auburn fried more people. Sing Sing fried way more people than Auburn. My town had given birth to the chair, but Sing Sing was its true love.

Almost everyday I've spent in Auburn I have had to glance at those walls. The massiveness of them is just awesome, completely consuming three or four of our city blocks. Three to four whole blocks, sealed off by men in guard towers, loading automatic weapons under shoot-to-kill orders. In all the time I've spent in Auburn, I've only seen two actual inmates. Stopped at the crosswalk one afternoon, waiting for the guards to move their asses across the street, I caught a glimpse of two men in orange suits. They stood side by side, with an armed guard in front, near the gate of the prison, which was open for the shift change. They were both smoking cigarettes, and the guard in front made remarks to them, but being in my car I obviously couldn't hope to hear a word. I have no idea why they were out that day, perhaps for good behavior. Maybe they had snitched on a fellow inmate, and the guards knew word had gotten around within the walls, and he was letting them have one last puff before sending them back inside, where they would be sheep to a pack of wolves. Who could know? All I could think was what could be going through the two men's heads? Behind them, hell, in front, an open gate to freedom, but no hope of reaching it alive.

To be the capital of New York, or the home of Auburn State Prison? Now, when I look at the walls, I ponder the decision. Would our founders have chosen this if they could have known about the fates of William, Leon and so many others? Were the new jobs the prison created worth spawning an invention that a few hundred years later would be deemed so brutal and sadistic that it is presently outlawed everywhere in the world except for nine states here in America?

For me, the walls, and the stories of what has come from them, serve as a sort of symbol. A symbol, that I still can't fully understand. They build walls in the center of town, reminding us each day that if we stray too far from societies chosen path, the walls will be our fate. It's history reminds us that there may or may not be a hell in the afterlife, but there *is* a hell here on Earth for those who deserve it. A hell where we can be tortured, killed, and have our bodies immediately decomposed with acid so that our tissue may never again feed the earth.

Long after the dinner with my old friend and his mother, when she'd shut the blinds, it occurred to me that the likelihood of a prisoner ever being able to see them eating dinner was impossible. They would at the very least need binoculars, or a telescope... being so much higher up and having such a tiny barred window to look out of. Being somewhat matured, I realize that she must have known this, but chose to close the blinds anyway. Maybe her conscience told her it was to prevent violent felons from somehow playing peeping Tom. It's possible, on the unconscious level, that she was shielding us from seeing the prison, and not the other way around.

Who could blame her? Our prison; a well planned, well constructed display of what society is capable of doing to one another. The brutality of hardened criminals, along with the equal brutality of many of the upstanding men who've run the facility throughout our history, each on display within those walls. The Wardens and guards of our prison's past committed injustices upon humanity, just like the prisoners beneath them, yet that's not how it's remembered. Our town introduced one of the most brutal forms of human extermination to the entire world, but that's not the way we talk about it. Those walls, they do more than keep the scumbags inside. They speak to my town. They tell us everyday to walk straight, to act right, because if we screw up, hell is just downtown, and it was created specifically for the living.

Every time a break from college comes along, all my friends and high school acquaintances usually gather at Swaby's for a few drinks. Through the laughs, burps, and stories, our eyes will always divert, at least once in a while, to the ghostly chair in the back corner. Something inside everybody tells them to look at the chair. It's there for a reason. It's there because it was us, and it's ours. Everyone is fascinated by the antique, but nobody could tell you why.

My Mind Wanders From Here
Thomas Chilton

Into the Night

Marissa Hill

I awoke from something like a trance to realize I had sat, silent and still, for the last three hours. It was only then that I noticed how dark it had become: the blue glow of living room televisions and yellow-orange of family room lights had begun to diminish after the natural light had faded to black. Now the true night had descended, or at least, as dark as it became in this part of the world. I looked around myself; at the abandoned swings gently swaying in the breeze, and at the toys left strewn about the dirt and wood-chips from the adventures of the day. I sighed and rose from my perch on the slide, the cool metal brushing against my bared hands.

I could smell a crispness in the air that came with the chill of autumn nights. I slowly drifted from the top of the slide to the bottom, where the woodchips had been pushed aside from hundreds of children's feet coming down for a landing. I smiled, thinking of my childhood, so long ago now.

I walked past the swings, past the long-forgotten toys, and out the enclosed area of the playground and onto the street. ((The sound of my footsteps echoed off the houses where they sat: perfectly aligned and evenly separated along the road. The neatly trimmed lawns, lightly dusted with dew, were all the same shade of green under the florescent streetlights. I strode past mailboxes, standing alone at the end of each perfectly laid-out driveway. The flawlessness, the precise planning; it disgusted me; all places like this disturbed me. I had grown up in the bustle and chaos of a large family in a oversized, ramshackle village. It was difficult to stomach this order.

I came to the end of the street and turned to the right, following the double-solid lines at the very center of the road. I walked two blocks then, stopping in front of a house that looked just like any of the others, I walked up the impeccably crafted driveway, and around to the back yard. This is where the chaos began. This is where my sanctuary was to be found: inside of this house that looked not different from the front. I climbed up a decorative trellis to a second story window where a warm, flickering light came from within. The window was left open for me, as it was every night. I was always welcome here.

I climbed through the window and onto a small desk cleared of any papers or materials one would normally find there. The first thing that drew the eye was a single lighted candle the source of the flickering light. It was set upon a small night table, the candle illuminating the bed next to the table. On the bed lay a girl her body still, her breathing deep, as if from sleep. But her eyes were wide, the whites showing all around the iris, as they always were when I first entered. I took a seat atop the desk letting my legs hang down, and stared at the girl I had come to know so well, her breathing that slowly rose to a panic, the tightening of her grip on the black bedspread pulled up to her neck, and the slight quivering that began in her fingertips. The blanket was covered with stains most could not see in the darkness, but I knew them for the memories of how I had caused them. I smiled and looked around, seeing that nothing had changed from the previous night.

The wooden floor was partially covered with a throw rug emblazoned with graphic depictions of murderous creatures devouring their victims. The walls were hung with artwork: finished and unfinished, paintings and drawings, photographs and carvings, all with similar subjects to that of the rug. Unlit candles covered the horizontal surfaces of dresser, bookshelves, another small table that crouched in the corner of the room, and were scattered atop a large oak chest of drawers. There were pillows set in a neat pile in another corner, all of a different color. It was one of the few places in the entire room with color and I liked it that way: contained and limited. ((I crept down from the desk and walked to the bedside. I sensed the girl's heart rate quicken, and the rest of her body begin to shake ever so

slightly. I knelt down beside her, took her hand and, looking intently into her eyes, willed her not to be frightened. As I stroked her hand gently with my fingertips, I could feel the blood in her veins slow as her heart rate returned to normal.

A small smile crept across her face as she relaxed, and a similar one crept across mine. It was invigorating to know I still could cast some fear into people, if only in this little girl. Well, she was not a girl; I could see the curves of her body through the bedspread. I leaned my head down to hers, our eyes again locked. She moved her face to mine, her misted eyes closing, as if expecting a Lover's kiss. But as her neck began to stretch, I changed my course and sank my fangs deep into her pale flesh. Her heart pumped her Blood steadily into my mouth, as if to give it away. I drank the familiar copper-liquid with a passion, the sweet flavor of this girl's Blood dancing across my tongue as it slid down my throat. I gripped her head in one hand, stifling her weakened voice with the other. I nearly lost myself to her Blood, as I always did, from the barest of tastes I was taking. It always made me recall things I wanted to leave in the past...

I remembered my first, the first Blood I had taken, remembered the face of one so loved... I pulled my mind forcefully from the past and focused it on the present.

The girl in my arms was beginning to shake once more; I had to let her loose if she was to live past this night. I relinquished my hold upon her and released my fangs, feeling them slip past my lips and return to my jaw.

I thought, as I usually did, that it was a shame I had to hide my fangs on every day of the year, except for one, these days. The people would not understand, not as they used to. Then they knew who were their masters and who ruled them. But that was millennia ago and again I had to return my mind to the room I was kneeling in. The girl still had a small smile on her face as her eyes looked calmly at nothing in particular. I liked to see that. At least she knew who she was to bow down to. I shook my head slowly as I stood.

Tomorrow, I thought, I would feast as I only did once every year, the deaths blamed upon mindless drunks leaving parties, thinking they really were who they pretended to be. I willed my body to nothing as it melted away into a pale white mist that drifted from the room through the open window, and into the night...

The next night began as promised. The children running about at their parents' hands, scurried from onhouse to the other, hoping for more candy than the previous year. The teenagers: roaming in droves, calling out wildly to friends across streets. The intoxicated: walking, swaying and dropping in their drunkenness, laughing crazily to jokes only they understood and talking to trees and scarecrows propped against those trees. I shook my head, but smiled. I would never be noticed in a crowd like this. Perhaps a gang of teenagers might stop me, but not for long. Only the drunk could pose any problem; they could act out wildly with no understanding, so I stayed well away from them. Looking around at the chaos, I spotted what I had been looking for. She was young, barely 17 if that. She wore a poor-excuse for a nun outfit, more a devil's nun, if anything. She stood in a slight clearing, away from others, looking around herself as if a little lost or confused. That look told me she would be ideal. I set my eyes on her as I walked through the crowd to her, closing off my intent into a small part of my mind. I was within an arm's reach of her before she even noticed me, and when she did, she almost screamed, but laughed instead.

"Oh wow! I love your costume!" she crowed, laughing hysterically. I looked down at the dark

grey baggy pants, black tee-shirt, and grey trench coat that I always wore confused but allowed it. She began to reach for my mouth, my fangs that I showed, but I pulled back slightly. She only smiled and stepped closer to me, so close I could feel the warmth of her breath on my cheek. "I see you don't have anyone to go 'trick-or-treating' with, huh?" the term emphasized very slightly, almost unnoticeably, except that she wanted me to notice. I felt she had recently been dumped, either that or left behind by her friends. I only smiled and nodded, making my teeth more pronounced. Her amused smile widened as she tapped my nose and took my arm, walking me through the crowds.

As she began to chatter away, I willed to her a comfort, a contentedness. "I think I've seen you somewhere... maybe at school?" she shrugged and kept on: "Well, I know you must have heard about the girls that got killed last year on Halloween?" She looked over, and I nodded. "Well, the news said they were attacked by a bunch of drunken guys. And so, as you know, in homeroom, they go and tell all of us girls not to leave a party unaccompanied, or to stick with friends and not to go out alone." She rolled her eyes and giggled. "Well, my friends dared me to go off on my own. So they left me in the middle of the street, expecting me to come crying back. But 'no,' I think to myself. 'I'm gonna to prove to those girls that I'm not afraid. I'm gonna to go find some party, find some one to accompany me," she squeezed my arm a little at this, "and disappear, make them worry." With that, I knew my net had found the right fish: the little minnow that thought she was the shark. I would show her how wrong she was.

We walked past the park into the back yards along a man-made river that encompassed the development. She still chitchatted, with only the briefest of responses from me to let her know I was still listening. I led her to my chaos, my sanctuary, conducted her up the trellis, and into the bedroom. At first, as she looked through the window, the nun looked confused, but she shrugged and followed me through the window, walking over as if to take a seat on the bed. She seemed to be obvious to the other girl lying there, shock to stillness. I smiled and shook my head to the nun as I led her out of the room, shutting the door behind me, and down the hall. She followed me, cautious but eager.

I opened a door at the end of the hall to reveal another bedroom; much scruffier and messier than the one we had first entered. It had posters of metal bands on the walls and a teenage male's clothes strewn about the floor. The bed was a mess, the former occupant leaving it as it had been when they got up, too tired or lazy to make it. I took a seat on it and motioned for her to sit beside me. She smiled and did so, leaving nothing but our clothing between our legs.

I made a move to clear the hair off her neck as I smiled at her, enticing her blue eyes with my own darker ones. She smiled back, tossing her hair away. Her eyes gleamed at me from the corner of their sockets. I grinned broader, showing my fangs again. As if in response, she ran her fingers through my long dark hair, unusual for a male in this time, though she did not seem to mind. I put my hand on her shoulder, turning her to face me. Again, she responded to simple body language and mental coaxing as she shifted her body towards me, lifting a leg upon the bed and laying it behind me, her skirt lifting to show things she thought I had an interest in. I did not even need to force her; she was as willing as a cow being lead to the slaughter. I chuckled and slid my hand from her shoulder to her back, resting my palm against the small of her back, twisting to face her and lay her, little by little, down on the bed.

As she looked up at me, her hands beginning to grasp at clothing, I leaned back and I let my fangs extend farther, to a more useful length. When I saw her eyes widen, I clutched the back of her head in my hand, pinning her underneath my body, and sinking my fangs into her neck. In that instant,

I let myself go to the rush, let my mind soar as her Life's Blood flowed into me. My mind clouded and filled with a burgundy mist that did not come with the memories. I could still feel the teenager that I held in my arms, I could still hear her stifled screams, and I could still hear her heart beat in my ears as it began to slow, but it seemed so small, dulled, unimportant. There was a stillness at my core that came from nothing else. With this release I was able to fall into a kind of infinite solitude, yet I was still comforted and held in a small way that kept me whole.

Suddenly, it stopped; the Blood stopped coming. I gasped for a breath I did not need as I released the drained body from my grip. My own body shook violently from the shock. 'I should be used to this by now, I thought as I stood up carefully, lifting the body into my arms, licking my lips of any Blood left behind to savor the limited tranquility.

I again willed myself into nothingness and became a mist, as did the body of my latest victim. I sailed through the night, following the wind that carried me to the river. I willed myself to the ground and made myself whole once more, as well as the body of the girl. I dumped the carcass unceremoniously into the freezing waters, watching it float away and disappear into the darkness. As I walked, I knew that many more would follow that night because I could feel the many minnows dancing in my net. I knew I would feed well...

Just before dawn, I found myself at the footsteps of the nearby Catholic Church, not in the development, but close enough to have an access road directly from the gated community. I smiled then, knowing what I would find inside: people praying, like they did every Halloween now. They prayed for the daughters they had lost in the last 10 years. I had started small, one a year, taking her life instead of leaving her in mist and made-up dreams, but then I found the feasts too hard to resist. The year before this one, I remembered dumping 10 young creatures into that river. I had not been safe that year, almost caught a few times. I had forced myself to use caution this year, using the room in the house of my chaos instead of the open. But I couldn't help visiting an old 'friend' this year, as always.

I opened the doors to the Church and stepped inside, my dark hair falling down, hiding my face from the mourners, though most did not notice me, buried as they were in their grieving. I grinned and walked up the aisle, stepping into the confessional booth and closed the door behind myself...

"Happy Halloween, Father," I whispered through the screen. I heard a gasp from the other side and smiled. The old man still remembered me, not surprising.

"You blasphemous creature, how dare you enter this House of God!" came a low, wheezing growl, a curse on every syllable. I laughed cruelly, knowing the man could do nothing to me if, so his Church said, he wished to keep his soul.

"Be quiet, Father. I have only come to taunt you once again, as always. Think of it this way: with my work, you have more people praying on this day, and doesn't that add to your name in the Book when you reach the Pearly Gates?" I laughed, mocking him. I could hear his heart race, his breathing quicken, though it was not from mortal fear. He knew I would do him no harm though his body shook in rage. Part of him thought he had a good chance of being damned for what he was allowing me to do, though we always spoke in the confessional, keeping his hands tied and his mouth shut. He also knew that if he tried to stop me, I could turn him into something like myself, and the guilt, that he had brought it on himself, would be delicious. I chuckled, knowing, because of the many conflicts within him, he was helpless and worthless as a newborn babe.

"Leave this Holy place at once. You are not welcome here," he whispered to me, pleading to

me. I almost laughed again. I had been around too long to be daunted by Holy places and Holy signs; I had seen their creation, and I would see their downfall. I had learned early that everything that was created was, inevitably, destroyed. Most of the time, the very thing that created it brought about its own destruction. I sighed, knowing this yearly torment would eventually kill the poor old man.

So I left the confessional and the sanctuary without another word, my boot heals tapping the marble floor of the Chapel. I pushed open the doors and slammed them behind myself. I laughed quietly, knowing the commotion would give the mourners quite a start. I continued my pace to the house I had brought five young harlots that night. I looked up at the window as I thought myself to nothingness so that I could settle onto the bed next to her when I solidified. I felt her shiver as I she felt my weight next to her.

She knew, even if only in the bottom of her human mind, what my coming like this meant. I had never shown this aspect of my abilities to her, always clouding her mind or hiding the truth from her until the feeding had already entranced her.

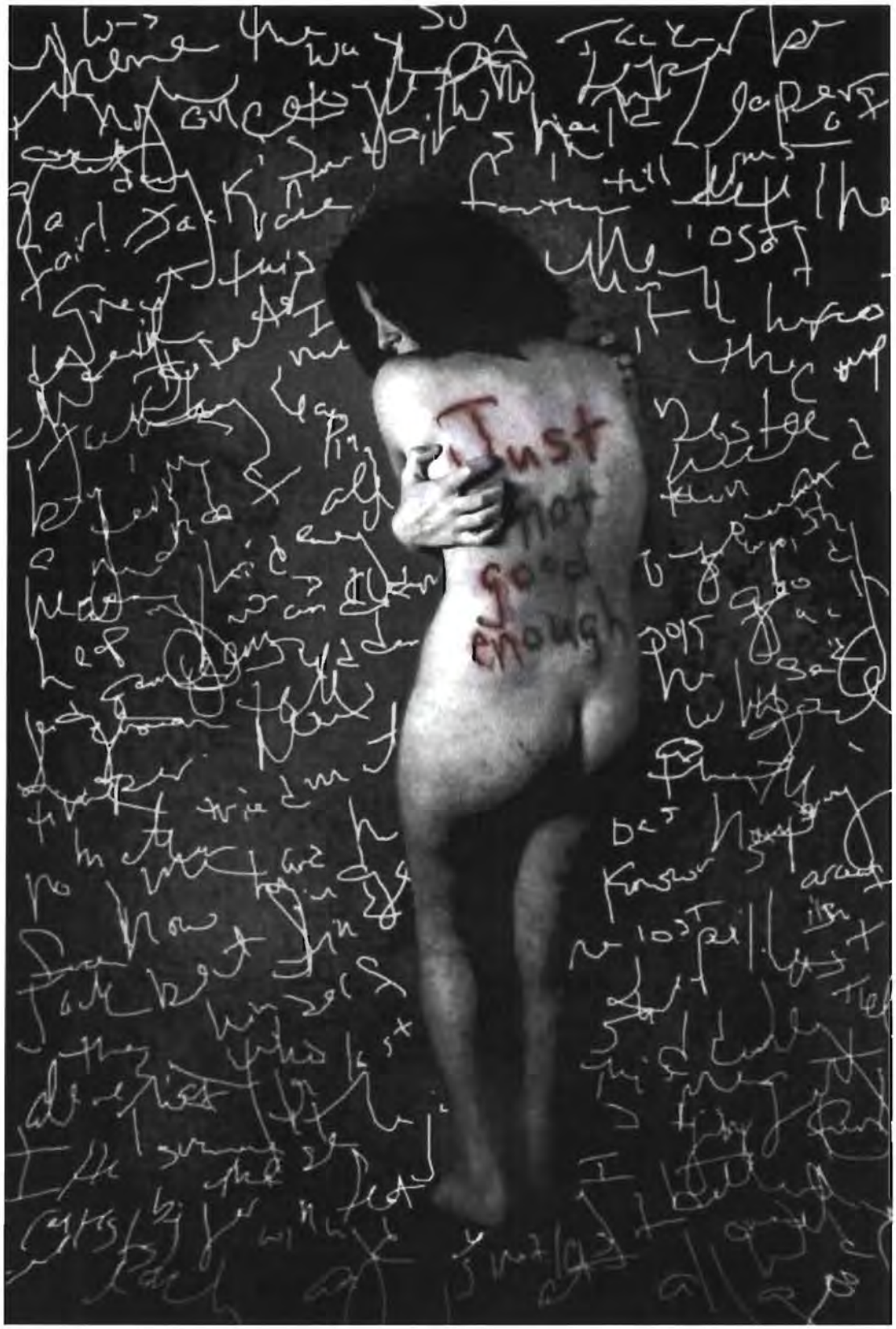
I reached across her chest and pulled the covers away from her body. It was shrunken, her skin hanging off of the bones as though she were another one of the corpses floating down the river. She had not eaten much, or moved at all since we had first met, since I had begun using her as regular satiation. Draining Blood from her took away energy, making her family think she was very sick with something like cancer, AIDS, or some other venereal disease, though they could not bring themselves to have her tested for the marred image it would leave on them.

If I had stopped feeding on her a few months ago, or lessened the amount or frequency, she might have been able to recover without any more than a few scars on her mind. She would not live much longer the way she was though, even if I were to end my feeding off of her at this moment she had lost too much Blood consistently to be able to rebuild her system. It was also time for me to move on. People were beginning to get suspicious of me, a late teenager, that never aged, that never changed, that roamed about with no family, yet looked well enough to have a good home.
I would attract attention soon from the wrong people, and I could not leave a witness at good as this one by my side.

I caressed her cheek as I climbed on top of her, my knees on either side of her hips and my hands above her shoulders while I looked down on her pale face. In that face, in her bright green eyes, I saw something that sparked a memory, a memory that chilled my heart colder that it had been already. I shook my head, attempting to rid it from my mind, and leaned my head down to her neck. I sighed as I sank my teeth one more time past her now brittle skin and into her soft flesh, savoring the sweet taste of the Eternal Syrup of Life.

Good Enough

Gloria K. McAndrew



Raid Rainbow

Kathryn E. Van Houtte

What's the objective today?
Pick your adjective for "gay"
Once it was "happy"
Now someone's scribbled
"Stupid" in your dictionary

And who says we can't
Make the perfect omelette
Like the perfect mom
Miss Suzy-Q Homemaker
Cookie-Baker Flake
Because Heather has two mommies
The Earth shakes
Beneath your high-heeled feet.

But Hollywood
And porn industries make a killing
By hollowing and shelling
Perfect blondes who claim bisexuality
And become a casualty of a society
Of experimentation
And limitation of the truth
We lament your hypocrisy.

Then songs about kissing girls and liking it
Yeah, you're certainly dyking it up,
Aren't you?
And girls who want their own
Gay Boyfriend
Like some little fashion trend
Because he would know fashion
Being queer and all, right?
Oh, you're impressive, the backward progressive.

But you're not to blame.
The world's got itself a new old game
A new stain
A blemish on the face of Humanity
It's this insanity
That pulls hair out
Rips fingernails out
Cuts hearts out
And makes our colors run

Ups and Downs of Butterflies

Joseph LaBella

The Tension in a Haircut

At the top of my staircase, a smile began to appear on my face. My mom grabbed my hand and led me down the steps. She'd say, "Don't touch the railing. You don't know who put their filthy hands on that." We walked to the parking lot and hop into the family's '88 Buick Regal. The car felt like I was sitting on a cloud. It was so spacious and comforting. I'd sometimes forget I was riding in the car while we were driving. The smile stayed on my face as we left the parking lot and headed down the road to the hair cutters. I would look in the mirror above the passenger seat and rub my head. In a way I'd be saying good-bye to my old haircut, and fixing myself up so I looked good for Julie. She was the only woman in the shop that I allowed to touch my hair. Others before her cut it too short, too long; they'd miss spots, or, simply, smelt funny. All the attributes led me to decide that Julie was the one for me. She had straight, brown hair, and she had a smile that grew bigger as I walked in the door. She always wore this perfume that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. I'd consider her my first big crush.

I'd sit in the chair and gaze at her through the mirror while her fingers would run through my hair. She always asked, "What are we going to do today, big guy?" The nickname gave me the chills. My mom tended to sit in a chair behind her cutting station. She usually chimed in with comments about our relationship. "He loves when you touch his hair." "He told me he goes to you because of the way you rub his hair." "He talks about you all day and night especially at dinner." After these comments I would blush, re-group and shoot her my "I can't believe you just said that" face. In the end my mom had the final say as to what my haircut would turn out to be.

The apron was wrapped around my neck. A little tight, but not enough that I would turn blue. A mist from the spray bottle would devour my line of vision. It felt refreshing to have some of the mist hit my cheeks. The comb ran my hair straight while getting rid of any excess water. Every time, I fell into a trance. My eyes would close while the shears crunched through my hair, and formed into clumps on my lap. As my eyes were closed she'd spin me around in the chair. If I held my eyes closed too long I felt like I was getting nauseous from the movement. That's why I frequently open my eyes. I also liked to keep an eye on how her progression was going. I always laughed when she used the buzzer to trim the back of my neck. It always hit the top vertebrae and sent vibrations down my spine. The final sign to tell me I was done was when the smell of white powder entered my nose. The powder helped relieve the irritation from the buzzer. The apron would be snatched off, and the hair slid off onto the floor.

The four dollar tip, already in my pocket because I asked my mom to give it to me before we showed up to the salon, would be in my hand. She would lean down and give me a kiss on the cheek. After she gave me my reward I'd run over to my mom who was at the counter paying. The final decision of the experience came down to the cherry, grape, or orange lollipop. After I decided, I usually picked cherry; it would be back out into the world. The wind would fly down the back of my shirt since the old hair was done protecting me from the weather.

Three months of joy came crashing down when we found out that the shop was out of business. No warning, no signs, nothing. Julie was gone and I had to go back to mom cutting my hair. The white-powder smell was substituted by cigarettes and coffee. The occasional "Whoops" would slip out of her mouth.

"Whoops?" I would say.

"Oh, pipe down. Just wear a hat until it grows back in," my mom would answer. After Julie left I resorted to the crew cut for the next five years. Mom couldn't really mess up a buzz cut.

My Goal was to Impress

Weekends were sometimes spent at my Grandma Rosie's house. I would arrive late on Friday and stay there until my parents would come over for Sunday dinner. Those weekends were fun. I would be up at seven in the morning to watch my cartoons. There would be my routinely early-morning visits to my grandparents' room after the cartoons were over. Instead of nudging or calling their names to wake them up I would just lift their eyelids. All I needed was my index and middle fingers. I'd put one on the top lid, and the other on the bottom. Then slowly slide the lids open across the eye. Startled, my grandma would spring up, and out of bed.

"Would you like some breakfast, dolly-boy?" she would ask while we walked down the stairs.

"Yeah! I want some cereal. No. I want some pancakes. No. I want bacon. I don't know what I want."

"Well, just sit at the table and I'll make something for you. You won't be disappointed."

I'd give her what she called my "dolly-boy" smirk and answered "You never disappoint me, grandma."

My grandpa and Aunt Dena slowly woke up as the day went by. Until they did I would be in a trance in front of the television set. Once my aunt was up I knew that her friends, Patty and Christine would be over shortly. I loved them. They'd always come into the house and yell, "Where's little Joey?" From down the hall you could hear my feet smash against the tile as I ran into their arms. It would either be single hugs, or a double hug. Both resulted in kisses on the cheek.

After my adrenaline wore off I would lie on the couch and finish my television shows. While watching the late afternoon cartoons my eyes would become heavy. That was usually when Patty would ask me if I wanted to lie next to her and finish the shows. I loved that part of the day because I had two things. Cartoons and Patty rubbing my head just like Julie used to do. At that moment in time I didn't want any other girl touching my head, but Patty. She was something special to me because she liked to play with my G.I. Joes, watch cartoons, and even eat gummy worms with whipped cream on them. She came to family parties, and sometimes even dinner.

After my nap was over I did my best to impress her. I would put in my aunt's New Kids on the Block tape she had in her collection. I proceeded to show off the newest dance moves that I had learned during the week. These would consist of a few cart-wheels, a somersault or two, and a few spins. I would make sure that I was constantly jumping as high in the air as possible when not performing my latest choreography breakthroughs. Since I would leave on Sunday I had to say my good-byes on Saturday night. Each Saturday night would be capped off with some hot chocolate and a movie. I never cared too much what movie was being picked as long as I could sit next to Patty. As I got older I found myself getting jealous at the boyfriends that Patty brought to my grandma's house. The flame died out when I was six. I had realized that this Gene fellow was a re-occurring character in the life of Patty, so I had to grow up and live on.

~~Puppy Love~~, Dumb-Ass Puppy Love

I lived in an apartment complex until I was eight. The way each complex was set-up reminded me of a well-developed suburban area because every building was exactly the same. All of them were made out of brick. Those living towards the front of the building had the pleasure of a balcony. Many a night I spent on that balcony looking across to the balcony next to mine. The day's events went through my head as if they were happening all over again. I remembered how my friends and I went looking for the dead birds in the trees that the local cats had killed. That day we saw three. Although the birds were dead my friends and I would give those names. Whether it's a bird, or a person, no one can die without a proper name. The three that I saw that day were named Gary, Harper, and Quail. I picked the name Quail after my favorite cartoon character's alter-ego. His name happened to be Quail-man, but since it wasn't a man I left out the latter part of the name. The other two names were made by Maria. She lived in the same complex as me, but one building down.

Every morning before school I would head to the balcony to sip on my hot chocolate. Maria's family also had a balcony that was adjacent to mine. I would see her out on her balcony sipping on her mug which I assumed was filled with hot chocolate as well. Maria was four grade levels older than me, and that meant that she had to move out of the apartments and into a bigger house. Those who attended the same elementary school as me could go there until the sixth grade before they moved on to middle school. Since the middle school was ten miles further than my elementary school most families moved once their children graduated. This also meant that I only had seven more months of morning cocoa with my new crush.

Her hair was dark brown just like her big, dark eyes. She played sports, and rode her bike around the sidewalk. Her family was Spanish, and she tended to change her language when they would call her in for dinner.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Joe," she would say as she walked away.

"You bet, Maria." I would blush then run up to my apartment to have dinner with my family.

"Guess what? So today me, and Maria were riding our bikes, and we found two new birds in the bushes, but we didn't touch them 'cuz I remember you told me not too 'cuz they have germs, but we named them Harrison and Chester. Maria thought of both of the names. Maria has really nice eyes, doesn't she?" I would ramble on before dinner started.

"That's lovely, Joey. Now go inside and wash up before dinner," my mom would say.

"Hey, guys it's time for dinner!" My mom would yell to my brother, and dad who were in the living room watching the television.

As dinner started I had to wait for my parents to tell their stories about their days. Dad would mumble about some guy who worked with him. Usually something about how that guy never does anything, and my dad would have to pick up the slack. My mom would tell us about the new people she would take care of at the nursing company she worked for. Finally it would be my turn.

"Today I saw Maria in school. When she walked by I said, 'Hello,' and she looked at me and said 'Hi.'" My parents would laugh at my stories because they had no depth to them. They were just different tales of how I saw Maria, and she greeted me back after I initiated.

Two months of saying hello went by before I had enough courage to approach her in school

and say something more. I saw her waiting outside of her classroom for the teacher to let the students inside. On my way to the bus stop that morning I had picked a red flower out of the garden to give to her. I walked up to her and held out the flower.

"I picked this for you. It's almost as pretty as you. Well, that's all. Bye."

I put my head down and grabbed my straps on my back pack. I ran as fast as I could back to my classroom line, and listened as her friends giggled. I was very proud of myself at that moment. I let her see exactly how I felt, and hoped that she would say something back to me someday. As the day went on I thought of nothing, but her. I wondered if it was show and tell in her class. I wondered if she would show off the flower that she was given.

A few days later I was waiting for my teacher to finish up her math lesson. She finished and told us to grab our stuff from our cubbies. I put on my Chicago Bulls coat, and matching hat. I liked the Bulls although I should have been a New York Knick fan. I was in the second grade, and didn't care about what team I liked. I just enjoyed watching the Bulls play on television. My class formed into a single-filed line as we headed out to the busses. My teacher forgot her keys in the room, so she told us all to wait until she came back. As she walked away I watched a sixth-grader walk up to our line. He was pointing at me before he even got close to us. I turned around to see if there was anyone behind me. There wasn't, and that meant that he was pointing at me. I put my finger to my own chest to say, "Me?"

"Are you the kid that gave Maria a flower today?" said in an aggressive tone.

"Um, yea."

"I'm her boyfriend, and I don't appreciate when other people give her flowers. I don't want you to talk to her anymore."

"Well, I, um can't do that because she lives in my complex and we're on the same bus." Thinking that I was being a smart-ass he smirked before his fist landed in the middle of my stomach. My breath quickly left my lungs and out into his chest. As I slowly fell to the floor I tried to grab onto my classmate's backpack. I almost took her down with me, but my grip slipped and I lied on the floor alone.

He grabbed the hat off of my head and threw it into my face. Slapping his friend in the chest he said "Look at this haircut. Did a blind person cut this for you? I'll call you patches from now on, faggot." He looked me in the eye and said, "By the way, the Bulls suck." The next four months I drank my hot chocolate alone, and never took my hat off until my hair grew back in.

At the end of that year I moved to a new school. I never wanted to leave my friends, but once I realized that "patches" would stick for a while I quickly understood that it was a smart idea to go. It turned out that being the new kid in school wasn't so bad. The third grade was a great year because of the attention I got from the girls in my class. They all wanted to know about where I came from and who I was. Neither I nor the girls focused on my hair. I slowly forgot the bad haircuts, and even found a new barber. I started to carry myself with more confidence. The confidence lasted three years. I hit middle school and there were a lot of unexpected changes that hindered my personality developments.

Stupidity: Realized and Revised

Seventh grade was the height of my puberty experience. I was eight inches taller than anyone in

my classes, skinnier than the width of a single sheet of paper, and my face was loaded with acne. The worst part of my day was waking up to see myself in the mirror. That year the lights in the bathroom never seemed to go on. I would shower in the dark, eat in the dark, and hang out in my room with the shades closed. The constant heckles I got from kids in middle school really made it harder to wake up every day to go to school. I had some guy friends, and I had friends that were girls, but nothing passed that point. At that time my best "girl-friend" would have been Kyra Slater. She was always around me to say positive things. Never once did I hear a negative comment towards me that had to do with my appearance. Like me she was a quiet person who kept to herself in the shadows of the other girls in school.

My classes weren't too difficult, but they were filled with the kids that waited for me after class to see how long it would take before I got upset at their comments. "Hey, Lurch how's your face feeling." "Hey, pizza face how's the air up there." "Has anyone seen, Joe today? Oh, there he is. He must have been standing sideways." Since there was five minutes between classes I learned to close my ears, so that they couldn't see it affect me. There wasn't much to look forward to except for chorus class. There I got to see my favorite person in the world. Heather Skula. She had olive skin, eyes that didn't open all the way when she smiled, and silky, black hair that went down to the middle of her back. She had an exotic look to her that drove every guy in school crazy.

Since I had the lowest amount of confidence in the entire school I usually walked around looking at my shoes. I always yelled at myself because the laces on my left show were never tied. I couldn't tie them in the hall because if I bent down there would be someone there to push me into the lockers. The sarcastic, "Thanks," would come out of my mouth. That usually led to a confrontation in the locker rooms before gym class. Either way I did my best to get from one class to the other without stopping or talking to anyone. The only times I would stop was if Kyra was at her locker.

"Hey, Kyra. Do you have a minute?"

"Yeah, Joey. What's up?"

"Andrew, Dave, and Steve were at it again. It just seems like they get off to making me miserable. Have you ever felt like that? One day I just wanna laugh in their faces, and show them I'm not such a dork."

"Don't worry about them. You're a great guy. Anyone would be lucky to have you as a friend, or as a boy-friend."

"Thanks. Hey I gotta run, but I'll see you on the late bus?"

"I'll be there. I'll save you a spot."

In chorus, I was the quiet kid that sat on the last riser, and sand only when asked to. I never raised my hand, volunteered for anything, or laughed at jokes from my teacher. If I was called on I would turn red, and stutter.

The day came where the teacher wanted each student to sing a specific part of a song to see it we would qualify for a special chorus the next year. Each student went, and I would dread the end of their turns. That just meant it was getting closer to my turn. I didn't want anyone, especially Heather, to see me cower with embarrassment. Although I prayed the entire time that my teacher would skip me, it never happened.

There I stood at the top of the riser. My left hand buried in my pocket while the right held the music sheet. "You may being when you're ready," the teacher said as he patiently waited for me

to begin. I took a hard swallow and began singing my part. I could feel everyone's eyes on me. To myself I was invisible, and their glares helped me to realize I was right. I finished my segment and looked up to a wide smile on my teacher's face. I glanced over at Heather and saw that she, too, was smiling. She stared at me, and I did my best to look at the floor.

"Very nice, Joseph." My teacher congratulated me in front of the entire class. It was nice of him, but that just meant I could begin to figure out the new ways of ridicule I would get when class was over.

The bell rang, and I headed towards the front door. Before I got there I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"You have a very nice voice, Joe. I'd love to practice singing with you one day." I stared in amazement. I had so many things I wanted to say, but the only word that came out was,

"Okay." Heather acknowledged me for the first time. My knees were weak on the walk to my next class. I couldn't believe it. I had to tell someone about my good news, and since I didn't have too many friends I thought of one person.

I ran to Kyra's locker to tell her what happened.

"She was like, 'I would love to practice singing with you some day.' I was so nervous I didn't know what to say."

"That's...awesome. I'm very happy for you, Joe." Kyra looked down at the ground after congratulating me. I could tell that she wasn't truly happy about my news, but she was my friend. I had to tell someone.

After classes were done I had to go to basketball practice. That practice was exciting for me because I had some newly found confidence. There was nothing the coach of my teammates could say to put me down that day. During my water breaks Kyra would be there watching me practice. She would sit on the floor near the water fountain doing homework. She'd usually read a book or write in her notebook. We never could talk for too long, but it was nice to see her there waiting. She was always happy to see me, and it helped my spirits if practices weren't going well for me.

"Yes, coach. I'll try my best from here on out," I said.

"Don't try, Joe. Just do it. I'm glad you're finally coming around on the court. The team can really use another solid player coming off of the bench. It's about damn time!"

The coach pulled me aside after practice.

"You keep practicing like that, and you're going to start the game on Saturday."

"Yes, coach. I'll try my best from here on out," I said.

"Don't try, Joe. Just do it. I'm glad you're finally coming around on the court. The team can really use another solid player coming off of the bench. It's about damn time!"

I smiled as I went into the locker room to change, and hurry to catch my bus home. As I walked out of the locker room there were a few kids from the team waiting. Chris, one of the best players came up to me.

"Dude, you totally talked to Heather today. What did she say to you?"

"She just asked me if I wanted to practice singing with her one day," I said as I tried my best

to keep the glow on my face to a minimum. I tried to act like it was no big deal. Billy Mathews came up to me. He was the best player on the team, and a very popular guy in school.

"You're lucky, man. I've been trying to get her to notice me all year. Just don't get your hopes up. She's a really tough girl to get a hold of. Listen, I'm having a party on Friday. If you wanted to come by just give me a call. You have the phone chain, right?"

"Yeah, um. Well, I gotta see what my plans are, but I think I can make it." I knew I didn't have any plans. I barely had friends, but I didn't want to sound too excited. As I walked out to the busses I saw Heather waiting by the vending machine. She walked up to me, and grabbed my hand. In my daze after seeing Heather I neglected to say hello to Kyra who was also waiting by the vending machines. I acknowledged Heather which made Kyra walk towards, and out the door to the busses.

"I got this for you," Heather said while putting the top half of a dandelion in my hand. She took her other hand and closed it over. "Don't lose this. I picked it just for you."

My jaw hit the floor as I stared in amazement. I picked my tongue off the floor and headed for my bus. The weak feeling came back to my legs, but I was able to make it there without falling. As I walked out of the door I could hear her and her friends laughing. There were little remarks made about my pants, or the way my hair was all sweaty from practice. I thought it was just from her friends. I thought they were trying to make fun of her for being so nice to me. When I turned back to see where the voices were coming from I could see that it was Heather. She was pointing to her own face to show the spots on mine that she was making fun of. As she turned to continue laughing she saw that I was staring at her and her friends.

I sat in silence next to Kyra on the ride home. She tried to ask me what was wrong, but I didn't want to talk about it. I was crushed inside by the actions of my crush at the time.

The next day in school Heather found me outside of my third period class.

"Hey, Joe. I wanted to say sorry about yesterday. It was just my way of being nice to you. I was sticking up for you in front of my friends."

"No you weren't. I saw you. I saw you making fun of me. Don't do me any favors."

I reached into my backpack and pulled out the dandelion. I grabbed her right hand, and placed it on her palm. I grabbed her left hand and folded it over.

"You might be the prettiest girl in school, but I would appreciate it if you didn't talk to me anymore. Thanks."

I became known as the guy to turn away Heather Skula. The most popular girl in school had just gotten turned down by me. By the end of year I started to grow into my own, physically and emotionally. People started to whisper as I walked by. Saying, "That's him. That's the kid that told Heather to fuck off." I was proud of those remarks. I started to appreciate comments made about me because they went from negative to positive. From that day on I held my head high in the hallways. I didn't care about my shoelaces, or the name-calling.

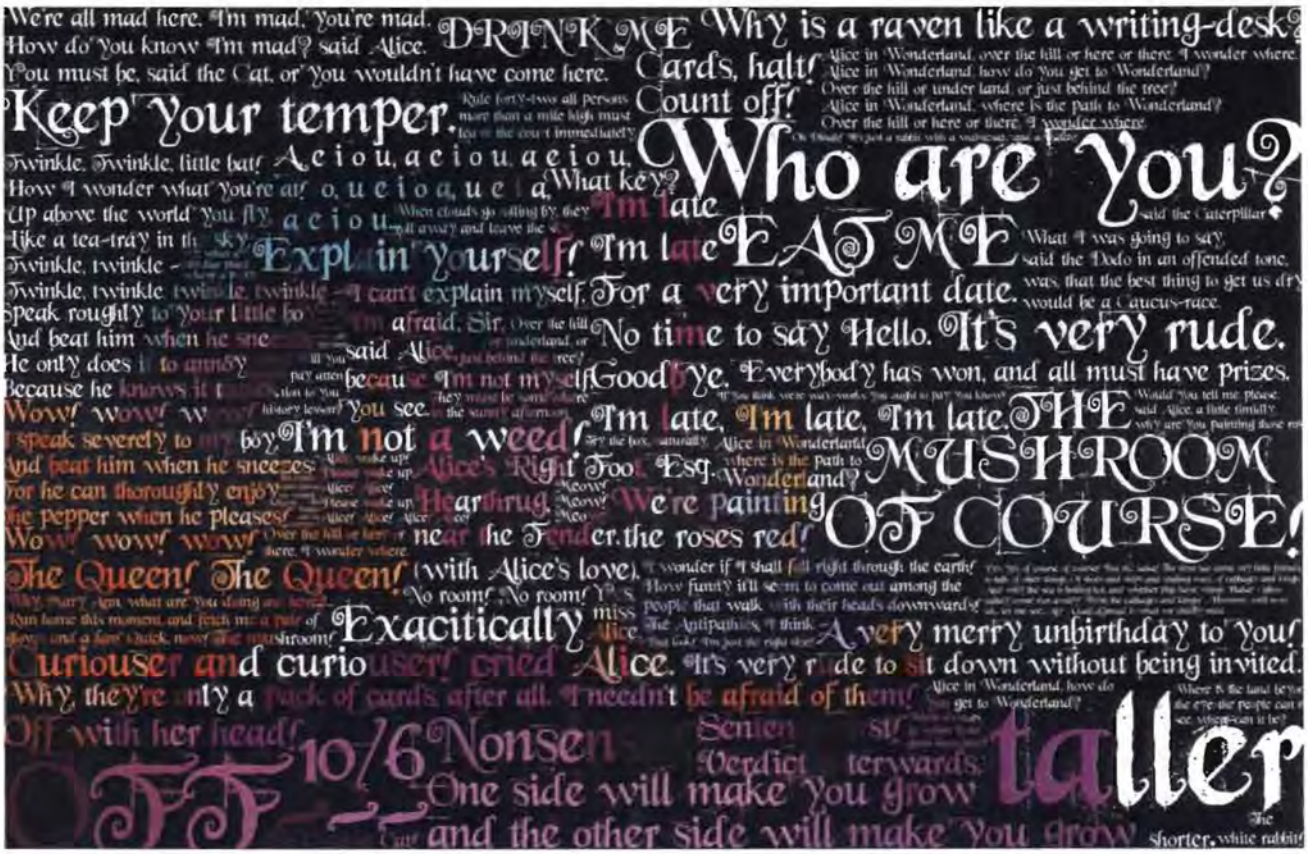
That Friday I went to Billy's party. I asked Kyra to come with me. She was excited I asked her let alone the fact that we were going to an "older-crowd" party. For the first time in my life I was the center of attention. People wanted to know how I told Heather off. They wanted to hear how she reacted. I became a kid who wasn't ashamed of himself anymore. I laughed and had fun that night. I was able to be myself without having to worry about the ridicule that usually followed. I started opening my blinds, eating with the lights on.

Movies are Always Right

I found out that it was easier to be honest than to be walked on. The whole experience with Heather made me realize what type of person I was attracted to. I mean she was still really good-looking to me, but inside she was nothing. The feel-good movie themes started to re-enter my head, and I realized that they were right because being happy doesn't mean having outside looks. It's all about how you feel with that person instead of how you look with that person. Also like the movies the one person that fits for you is usually someone you neglect. They're the one that you never noticed in that way before. And they're the one that makes you feel the best about yourself.

Kyra and I dated through middle school and at the start of high school. It was a great experience, but we both realized we were too young to get caught up in all of that. The rest of high school was spent with friends I made as well as with girls I wanted to chase. I grew up and found myself. I've never been happier.

Who Are You?
Sarah E. Fedigan



A "Roux" for You, Mom

Keith T. Edelman

It's all about the roux. Butter, flour, and maybe some onions, that's all it is. It's quite possibly the easiest thing you, as an aspiring cook, are ever going to throw a ladle at. It is the key component of everything delicious, it's the glue that miraculously turns chicken stock to gravy and turns milk into mac'n'cheese. Pronounced like "rue," the word is French. Like anything else in the "language of love," if you roll the 'r' long enough people will either call you "cultured" or thank you for the shower.

Yet, a roux is so much more than the thick pasty sludge that forms the brick and mortar foundation of soup and sauce pans. I an told you that a roux is flour, butter and onion, but it is also the idea of starting food around something strong and not trying to hide it with all kinds of frivolities. The vegetable, the stock, the meat, the exact cooking time, or even a recipe; none of it matters. Screw it, I say. I'm serious. The only thing that really matters is your base, whether that base starts with a roux, a really good tomato, or a fresh cucumber. You take all that is great about an ingredient and you highlight that, not hide it. If you don't start with something strong, everything else will only get worse. Everything else you could do after making your roux, with some exaggeration, is an accessory to the fact.

In the culinary world, a roux holds a pristine title, "The Mother of Sauces," because is the basis for all milk or cream based soups and sauces. My mother taught me how to make one and now I'm passing this down to you in a recipe I know and love. The dish is corn chowder. It starts with a roux.

***

Find the biggest pot in your house and stick it on your head. If it doesn't at least come down past your chin, it's not big enough. If, when examining location in your home where cooking instruments are stored, you have any confusion or uncertainty that the thing you are holding is a "pan" or "pot," it's not big enough. If by chance you are the type of person who engages in the act of camping, then you may have a dented, slightly blackened, and likely forgotten pot sitting in your cellar/garage/attic. This might be big enough. If after going through a.) the kitchen b.) the cellar c.) the garage d.) the attic, then e.) you should immediately run to the nearest Wal-Mart and buy anything in which you could also use to wash a small child.

As far a material, aluminum will be your first choice, not because it's good, but it's cheap. Not to mention you can find aluminum pots the size of wine barrels just about anywhere. Cast iron is ideal, but it requires working out at least three days a week, because if you can actually find a pot big enough and made out of cast iron, you're going to have to be able to dead lift 100 lbs to get it from cupboard to stove. Teflon coated stuff is NASA approved and guaranteed not to let your roux stick. This great, except where does all that Teflon go when it scratches off into oblivion? Personally, I don't need any, umm...internal non-stick surfaces. Stainless steel can be good, and is probably your best bet, unless it's cheap and thin, then it's about as useful as aluminum and despite what I said above, aluminum is actually pretty crappy.

Okay then, the point of all this is that once you get going, you're going to end up with a lot more chowder than you planned on making. There is no worse a feeling than starting with a small little sauce pot and having it overflow as soon as that chowder starts to simmer and make love to itself. Even if you feel the need to measure, the scraping of charred soup from on, near, or around the stove is and activity that can't be avoided. Besides, I highly discourage measuring.

***

"Mom, how much cinnamon should I put in?" I'm standing by the hand painted ceramic canisters, the ones my mother made while pregnant for me, covered from my nose to my knees in flour, and

scooping sugar into a mixing bowl. I am short enough so that I still need a stool to reach the cupboard where the measuring cups were stored.

"Until it's as brown as your eyes, baby." She peeled apples into a big aluminum pot, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows. An old red ratty apron hung from around her neck, the remnants of a day when she bartended and waited on tables at Jack Appleseed's restaurant.

It's fall and the kitchen is a storage shed of the fall harvest. Buckets of crab apples line the wall by the refrigerator, deep purple beets and golden russets sit soaking in the sink, tomatoes oh the tomatoes they fill every inch of counter space with a stunningly vivacious red. We're baking apple pies, making chowder, cranking out tomato sauce and blanching vegetables in one great kitchen fiasco that I remember as Sundays in September.

"Is this good?" I show her the mixture of cinnamon and sugar. "Is it as brown as my eyes yet?"

Putting down her apple peeler, she brushed the hair away from her light blue eyes and peered into the depths of mine. "I don't know there. I think you might need some more. Your eyes are pretty brown." She brushed aside my blond mop of hair and smiled. "I think you need some more flour on your nose too."

She always let me be in the kitchen with her when she cooked. Instead of putting me in a crib, she'd put me on the floor with a couple pots and a spoon and let me go crazy. I don't remember this, but still laugh. I must have driven our dogs nuts.

Moving away from the apples and onto dinner, she threw a stick of butter into the pot. I watched as it skidded and danced along the bottom of the hot pan, vanishing into a creamy golden liquid. She tosses in a handful of chopped onions and garlic and stirred. They sizzle and pop; the liquid in the bulbs explodes into a cloud of billowing steam above the stove. After a few minutes, the vegetables are soft and transparent. By then, the smell of the butter and garlic was almost too much to bear.

***

I come home from school and the kitchen is a war zone.

"Mom, can't you just sit down and enjoy a day for once." I tossed my book bag full of bricks on the floor by the door, my 5th grade math book hitting the linoleum with a tremendous 'thump.'

The refrigerator is open and its contents spill out across the kitchen counter. Moldy oranges, sticky jars of jam, and three bottles of opened ketchup saw daylight for the first time in months. Half of the dingy white linoleum is covered with bright pink floor stripper, swirled in tight concentric circle at the hand of a Brillo pad. The chairs are up on the kitchen table. The drawers to the refrigerator are soaking in the kitchen sink. A pot sits on the stove. Buckets of pink rinse-water marked the boundaries of a half mopped floor. I hear a vacuum start in the living room, the high whining of its motor changing back and forth in pitch as it moves across the dog-haired oriental rugs

I search the smells of the room for something edible. The sweet salted smell of butter wafts up and over the chemical reek of the floor stripper. It seems oddly appealing.

Hopping over the patches of wet floor, I navigate a minefield of cleaning products as I work my way toward the stove. The vacuum goes quite and my mother is now standing over the sink, scraping moldy cheese and maple syrup from the refrigerator drawer.

A "Roux" for You, Mom

"You think you got enough projects here, Mom?" I wrap my arms around her and she smiles. She squeezes me tight and holds on. She feels soft and warm. I could smell what she had been doing on her tattered pink sweatshirt, but it was more inviting than revolting. It was her cleaning shirt and she wore it like a medal of honor. Some grease here, a smear of paint there, and a thousand little white blotches of bleach.

On the stove sits the biggest steel pot we own. Moving away from the sink for a minute, she tosses a cup of flour into the pot and begins working a giant wooden spoon. The flour absorbed all the flavor of the fat and onions, creating a rough paste that turned smooth the more she stirred. She turned down the heat and it all begins to sweat and simmer in the rich salted butter. It is a roux in all its simplicity. Throwing in a dash of salt and a bit of pepper, she moves back to her hands and knees, scrubbing the floor for 5 minutes and then stirs the pot again before moving back to the sink.

"Mom, you're amazing."

She turned from the sink, steam billowing up and fogging the windows behind it. Her hair was up in a loose pony tail. Strands of white fringed her forehead; the wispy split ends fell across her eyes and flustered cheeks. Her eyes glittered and the thin wrinkles of her mouth betrayed the smile that cracked across her face.

***

Armed with the Food Network, a set of knives and the attitude that I was 14 and could do anything better than everybody, I led a coup d'état of the counter space. My parents ran their on small business a courier service and she spent her morning's delivering green L.L. Bean bags. For five days during the week, she also put in long night hours at a local restaurant, waiting tables and putting on a smile for wrinkled Baby Boomers.

Food was a necessity; my brother and I had to eat. Somewhere along the line I decided it was below my gastronomical character to eat Hamburger Helper and Kraft Macaroni and Cheese like the other 10 million home-alone teenagers. I don't remember why. I think it was about the same time I stopped doing homework. Yeah, that's it. I started cooking because it was better than doing my 7th grade algebra.

This is when the tears would come. The fights over not doing my homework or about my girlfriend or all the hours she worked for her to come home everyday to two spoiled brats. It was the pounding of feet as she stormed out of the kitchen, her face red and eyes squinted up on the verge of tears.

I took what my mother taught me and I cooked. While my brother was at sports and my parents were at work, I fed our family. I made a lot of roux and corn chowder on my own. Not many of them were very good, but I learned.

***

"No, that's not how you do it." I was exasperated. The irregular and chunky shards of onion were driving me crazy. "I need them diced," I said. "These are for a soup Mom; do you want big chunks of onions in your soup? I know I don't."

My dad appropriately calls it "The Kitchen Wars." For some reason he thinks our squabbling is amusing, but should anyone dare pick a fight with him, all the fury of his 6 foot 4 inch, 210 lb frame would be felt in our house for days. To him the spectacle of watching my mother and me at work in the same kitchen has about the same entertainment value as watching "Iron Chef" without the subtitles or giving our dog, Chipper, Jack Daniels.

My mother stopped mid-slice and stared at the cutting board. Little piles of onions littered the board and spilled onto the counter and down to the floor. Like always, she was using a tiny paring knife to dissect the pungent white bulb. She stared at me. In her hand, the knife reflected the blinding yellow light of dusk that filtered through the screen window.

"Oh, I'm sorry." She looked tired. Her golden hair was tied back in a loose pony tail. Strands of white fringed her forehead; the wispy split ends fell across her eyes and flustered cheeks. She looked deflated.

"Why do you always use that dinky little thing anyways? We've got this whole set of brand new knives and you're using a glorified steak knife." Pushing into the tight corner nook where she stood, I took the long imposing chef's knife and pushed my way in front of the cutting board.

My mother glared a second and walked away, delegating her attention to the potatoes. She peeled them silently into the sink, the stubby brown peels plastering the inside of the aluminum basin.

"Why do you always put that stuff down the garbage disposal?" I halved an onion and with mechanical precision, diced it into perfect 1/8th inch squares. "We have a garden that spans the entire length of the backyard to use for compost and you're throwing potato peels down the sink?"

A look of hopeless disbelief spread across her face. The thin lines around her mouth quivered, wavering slightly before turning to stone.

"Fuck it all," she said. "Fuck this life. If you're so perfect, you make the God-damn dinner. All I do is hear you bitch, bitch, bitch. You're like an old woman." She slammed the peeler down into the sink, glaring at me with tears swelling up in her eyes, and a stomped out of the kitchen.

I dice another onion, its acrid odor permeating through my eyes and nose. Four cloves of garlic, three ears of corn, two carrots, and a green pepper, all neatly cleaned, quartered, stripped and cubed.

I wiped my eyes and put the cubes in a bowl by the stove.

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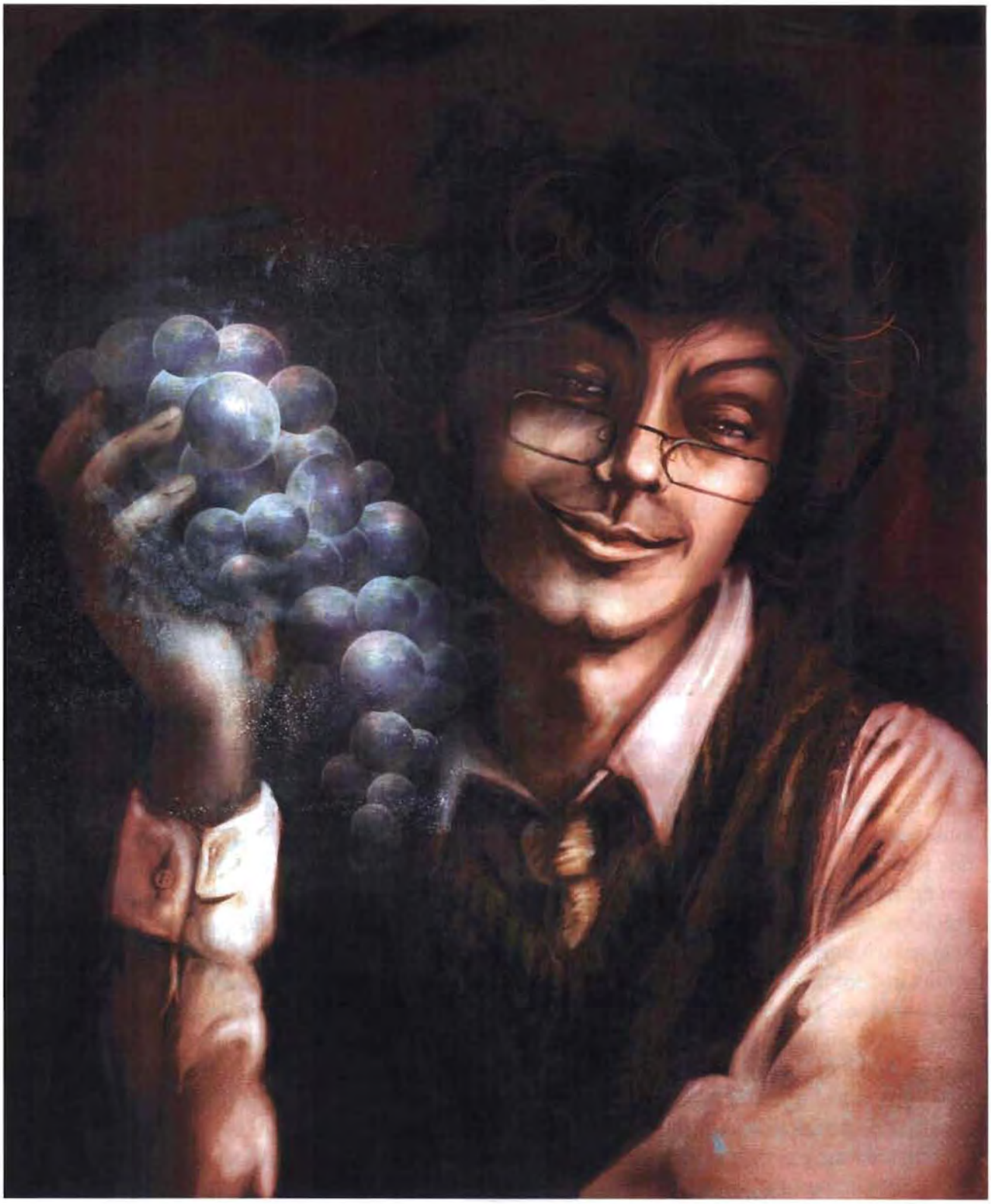
Okay we're almost there. Remember those vegetables we chopped earlier, just put it all in the pot— the corn, cubed potatoes, the carrots, and about a quart of chicken stock. This is the easy part. Just set it to medium heat and simmer for roughly an hour and a half.

But you have to give it time. It won't be done in 5 minutes, or even a half hour. At times it won't look like it will ever thicken. But you have to be patient, you have to trust it. Besides, did you think this was going to be easy? Sit down and relax and let it simmer. It's just enough time to set the table and finish cooking the rest of the meal. It's enough time to give your mom a kiss and a hug and tell her you love her. Enough time to sit and watch the pot thicken to add some salt and herbs. Enough time to help her with the dishes and to put a coat of wax on the floor. Enough time to tell her about your day at school and for her to vent about your father, about work, about life, about love. Time to tell her about the project you're working on in English and the 'A' you got on your earth science test. Time to tell her, with that potato in your throat, that the girl you just can't get over is going out with your best friend. It's an hour and a half, that when you make corn chowder all alone, is just enough time to remember that you're all grown up. And here's where the beauty of a roux comes through. It's a thickener. The more the stock boils, the thicker the soup gets. It's the binder for everything. Take it away and you're just a vegetable floating in a sea of chicken broth, without a body and without a soul. Then you'll realize how important the roux is. You look at the green LED clock above the stove and sigh.

Soup's done.

Knowledge is Power
Gloria McAndrew



Wayne McCready
Jeane Spencer

As Wayne McCready stared across the dining table at Constance he thought, *God, she's beautiful.* He soaked in her porcelain skin, ruby lips and blue eyes. She was perfect.

"Well dear," he said, "I've got to head back to work. I guess I'll see you tonight." He stood and kissed the top of her golden head. "Don't forget to dress for dinner." Constance stared ahead as he left.

With a spring in his step and whistling a merry tune, he approached the office building. Today was going to be a great day for Wayne McCready. He was up for a promotion to Clerk II. As excited as he was, he would be sad to leave his cubicle full of memories and the pictures of Constance tacked all over the cloth walls. The promotion meant not only a move up in pay grade, but a move into a brand new cubicle away from the telephone operators. Their voices repeated the same thing over and over, day after day. "Good morning, Cayuga Heights National Credit Union, how my I direct your call?" He heard their nasally mantra in his sleep. It was enough to drive a man crazy. At least then he would be able to hear himself think.

When Wayne walked into his office that morning, his co-workers scattered to the far corners of their cubicles. The first person he spotted was Beatrice. She knew he had seen her. It was too late to run. She lowered her head hoping that he would think she was preoccupied. Wayne approached her, clucking like a puffed-up rooster about how great his and Constance's evening had gone, the dinner, the wine, the romantic snuggling in front of the fire. Beatrice began to feel nauseous.

"That's nice Wayne," Beatrice said, "but I've got a lot on my plate this morning. I'd love to hear all about your night, but duty calls." She turned and briskly walked in the other direction leaving Wayne to stand there scanning the room for his next target. The rest of the office staff busied themselves with paper shuffling and phone answering duties.

Wayne fashioned himself a lady's man. There were those in his office who would reject his idea, telling him if he asked that he was a short, balding, self-important little oaf with bad breath and body odor.

He went to his cubicle and put his hat on his desk. He stared at one of the many pictures of Constance he had tacked to the grey woven cloth walls. There were too many to count, and where most people had pictures of their whole families, pets, friends etc, Wayne had one subject, Constance. Here she was sitting on the porch swing during the summer, dressed in a halter top and shorts, here in the living room in front of the fireplace in the silk robe Wayne had bought for her birthday. In another she was poised at the kitchen table, cigarette in hand, even though neither of them smoked. Wayne thought it would make a great picture for her to look like a 40's movie star. He scanned the walls and as he did his demeanor changed. He relaxed, his blood pressure lowered, he felt contented again. *Screw you Beatrice,* he thought. *You can't hold a candle to my Constance.*

"You know, Wayne," Mr. Breedlove his boss began, "You've done quite well here according to your yearly job performance reviews. How many years has it been?"

"Going on four Mr. Breedlove," Wayne replied. He adjusted his glasses, then his tie. He hated these meetings; they always made him feel like he had something to be nervous about.

"Well, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't recommend you for the Clerk II position," Breedlove said.

"Thank you sir, Constance will be pleased to hear the news as well!" Wayne tried not to gush, but was unsuccessful.

"Speaking of Constance how is the little woman?" asked Breedlove.

"She's as right as rain, sir, and as glorious as a summer breeze."

"You'll have to bring her to the next company picnic, I'd love to meet her in person if she's as lovely as in the pictures you have all over your cubicle."

"I think she'd like that sir, I'll see what I can do. She loves to get all dolled up, women, you know," Wayne chided.

"Well then, that'll be all for today Wayne, and again, congratulations on your promotion." Breedlove stood and offered a fat, manicured hand. Wayne reached out, then remembered to wipe the sweat from his palms.

"Thank you again, sir," he said. He walked back to his cubicle.

He couldn't wait to get home to tell Constance the good news, and as he passed all of the other clerks he began to puff up even more. Beatrice noticed his expression and couldn't help but be jealous. She guessed that he got the promotion. *Actually, I'll be glad to see him go.* She thought to herself. *He's so... creepy.*

Wayne popped his head into Beatrice's cubicle, disrupting her reverie and making her jump at the same time.

"Did you hear? I got the promotion!" he sang.

"Why no, Wayne, I didn't hear, but thanks for the heads-up," she retorted.

"Awww, are we jealous?" he teased.

"Jealous? Of you? Oh my, aren't you clever!" she laughed. It irked him that she wasn't outwardly jealous, but in fact she was. She'd never let him know.

"I think I'll cut out early, be a dear and cover for me?" he mewed.

"Oh sure Wayne, go ahead. Go home to that pretty wife of yours. You'd better keep an eye on that one, don't know what she ever saw in you." Beatrice waved him away. *Yeah, just go. Turd.* She wondered what any woman would see in a man like Wayne. Must be he had some large assets, she giggled under her breath as he strutted off like a peacock.

"Honey! Put on your dancing shoes, we're goin' out tonight!" Wayne announced as he came in the front door. Constance was at the dining table.

"I got a surprise for you, my lovely!" he said. "Guess what I've got, and it isn't in my pocket!" She continued to look at him.

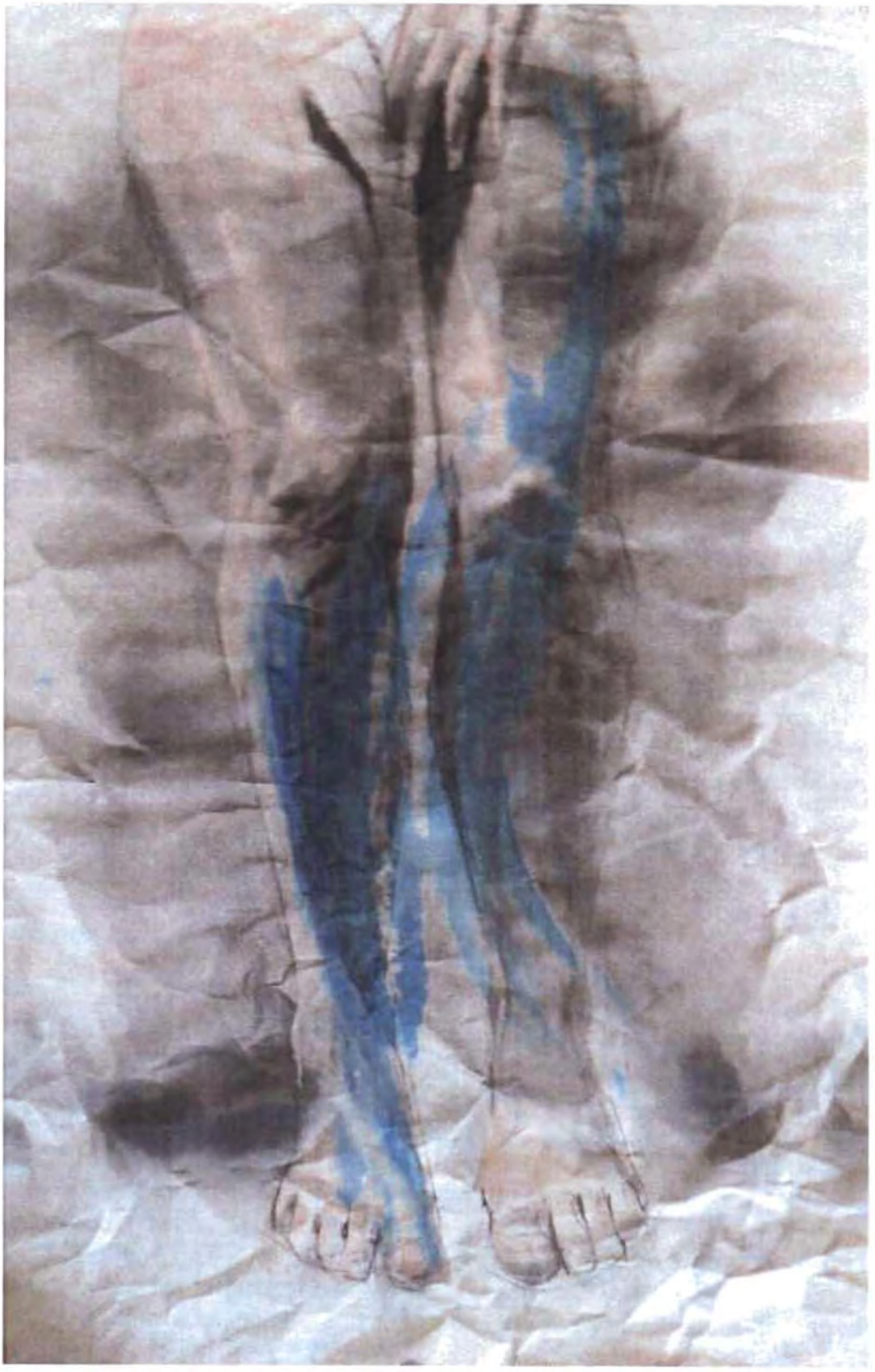
"Alright, if you won't guess, I'll tell you. I got the promotion, and Breedlove says you must come to the next company picnic, isn't that grand!" He bent to give her a kiss.

"Ahh, my sweet, if you don't feel up to going out, we can celebrate here in our usual way." Wayne winked at Constance, knowing she'd catch his meaning.

"I'll just go wash up and meet you on the couch then," he said. He dashed upstairs and quickly returned with her black negligee and high heels.

"Here, I brought you my favorite." He purred, as he led her to the couch. As he began to disrobe, he also took off Constance's clothes. She gazed at him with a pouty, ruby Mona Lisa smile, so secret in its meaning that only he knew what she was thinking.

"Ahhh, finally...Are we ready to celebrate, my dear?" Wayne asked as he slowly spread her legs, his hand gliding up her perfectly formed thigh to her soft round belly and across one perfect 36C breast. He shuddered while he entered her and breathed in her perfume. Grunting, he bucked and thrust, yelling

her name as he came, "CONSTANCE!" She never moved an inch. He fell off her smiling broadly.

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Cara Livermore