

The Manuscript



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Fall 2007

Wilkes University

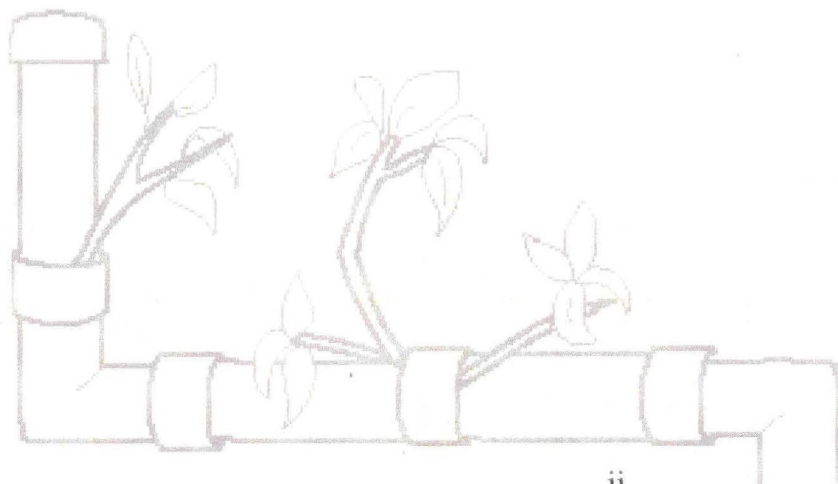


Dedicated to the Wilkes University community, and especially Dr. Mischelle Anthony, Dr. Larry Kuhar, Debra Archavage, Bridget Ferdinand, Geoff Forman, all students and faculty in the Division of Humanities, and those involved in the Masters in Creative Writing.

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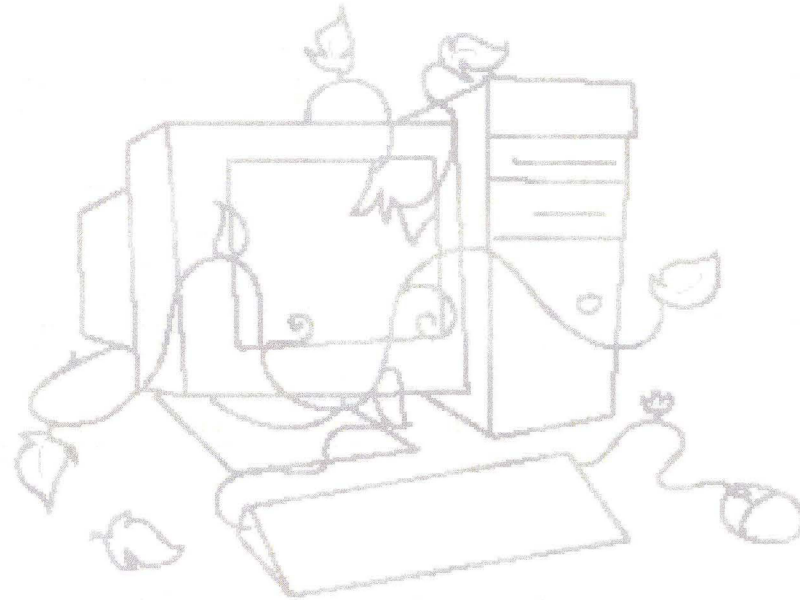


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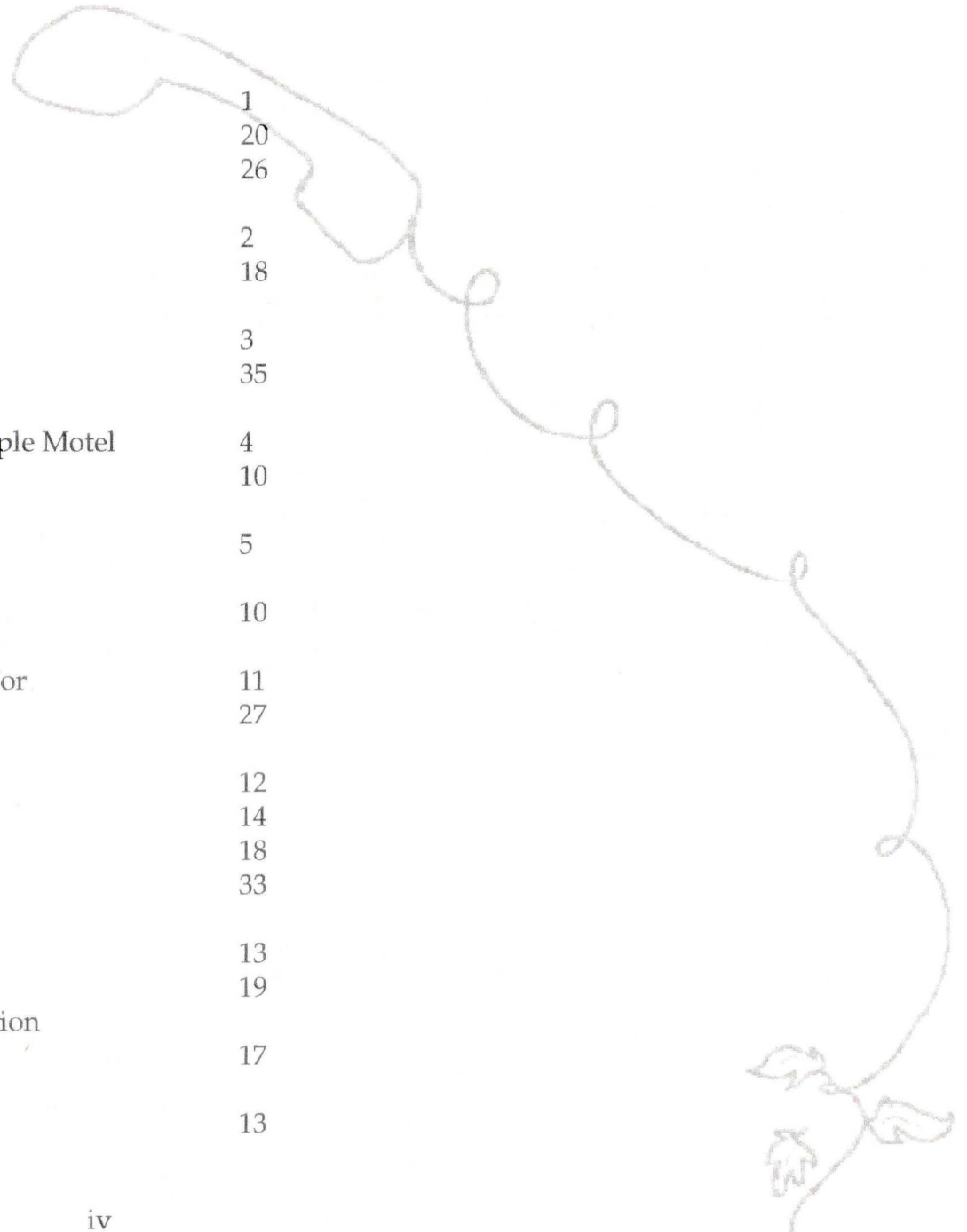
1947 Foreword

With this issue of MANUSCRIPT, a new publication is launched on the Bucknell University campus in Wilkes-Barre. Those who have been responsible for its coming into being earnestly hope that through your efforts and the efforts of those who come after you this magazine will develop into a college tradition of which we may all be proud.

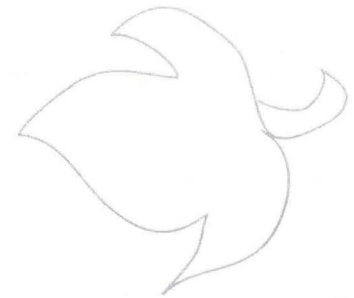
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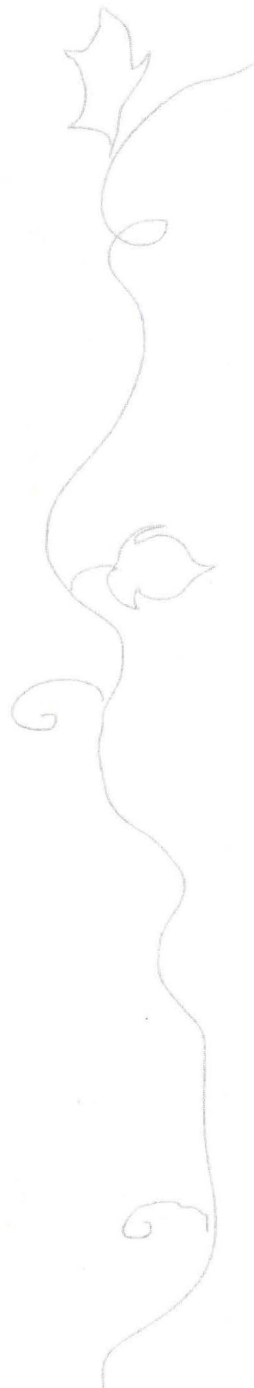
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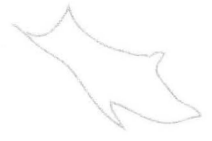
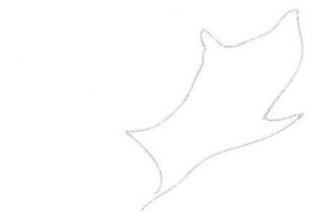
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Reunion

Conversation grabs
A bunch to
Squeeze the concentration
In a peopled room.

Straws directed
Are pulled from
Rum ripe lips—
Clothes people the room.

By Amy Kaspriskie

Planet Factory
By Conrad Miller



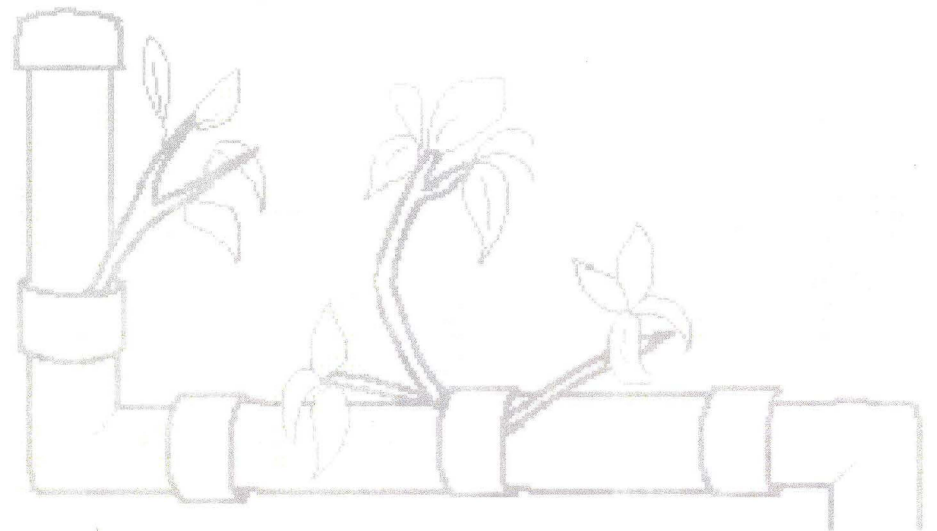


Welcome to the Dollhouse
By Kacy Muir

Orb of Recluse

I live in a delusion of my own making.
It has no walls, no bounds, yet endless limitations.
Everywhere's an exit, yet not a single entrance to be found.
Glass panes of different sizes distort what is to be seen.
Colors dance and then extinguish into bleak unending melancholy
Unending yet always ceasing, always lurking but never manifest.
I hold it back as I do them.
To live in a dream is foolishness, I know.
To live in reality even more so.
I am concubine to no man,
yet whore to my own unquenched desires.
Floating in a glass ball,
undecided.

By Sarah Hartman



To A Shooting Star

Though I have many secrets,
Many fears, concerns, and lies,
You've captured easily my trust
As I trace you through the skies.
Countless eyes may at you gaze
To confess their dark desires,
While others may stare motionless,
Contented to admire.
Still I've pitied you your burden;
I've wondered a wish's weight,
And therefore will without a doubt
Sympathize with your fate.

So in the light of fellow stars
That have mapped for us the night,
I'll send it to you properly:

I wish I may, I wish I might...

I have narrowed my requests,
For I'd gathered quite a few.
Quickly now before it's lost,
I'll whisper mine to you.

By Virginia Hults



Moon Over Promised Land Lake
By Aleksander Lapinski



A Sunday Afternoon at the Red Apple Motel

Danger alerts even the most gullible—
The woman, who wants to be like no one else

Obsessed with animal-like features,
You laugh and call me silly
But I cannot help and giggle at this pot-belly
Wishing it to be a baby

Precious metals should always be packed away
But consider donuts your saving grace

Good Old V is off
And reading
On that porcelain lover

No bat, no saw, but only a katana—
Swing blade-ancient upon a pawn man's wall

Running back
Little too late

But we are redeemed
And leaving LA this morning
The background overdoses
On saline and cocaine
But my crying eyes are not hers—
No European tears shed

Wet as an American
And still we are the same

I am the sweet Fabienne,
Just leaning with the wind

We are all changed in this place—
The moment we see the bullet holes
Have just nearly missed

And Grace is what gets us out of here

Peace It Together
By Jami Butczynski



By Kacy Muir



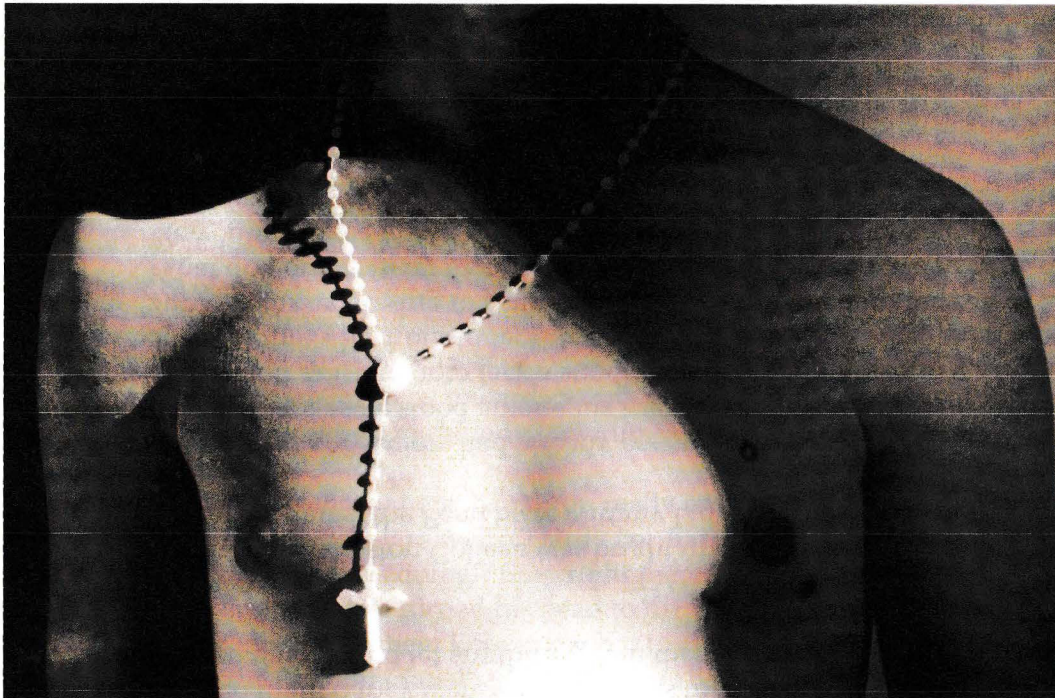
Corrupt

The air was more than cold—it was freezing. A thin covering of snow dusted the rooftops of nearly every building in Boston, Massachusetts. Morning Mass was over, which meant most of the city's population was nestled neatly in the warmth of their homes, enjoying the Sunday with their families. The sidewalks throughout the city were completely desolate, save for one. A single person stood in front of the Mayor's office on Montgomery Road.

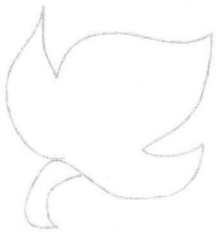
He stood there with a large cup of coffee in his hand, steam rising from the drinking hole in the lid of the Styrofoam cup as he completely ignored it. He wore normal everyday winter attire, consisting of jeans, boots, gloves, a brown jacket, and a Boston Red Sox winter hat. He had dark eyebrows, which meshed well with his crystal blue eyes and the five o'clock shadow that covered his face.

His name was Jack Sheridan and everyone in the area knew him. Anyone who read the newspaper wouldn't go a day without seeing his name bolded on the front page. He was regarded as one of the best journalists in the history of the *Boston Tribune*, and rightfully so. He had written compelling stories on September 11th, The War in Iraq, and a national story about the less fortunate around the world, which brought forth one of the biggest charity programs ever to be created in New England and all across the States.

But perhaps what he was most known for was the number of government officials that he had exposed as crooks and frauds. He broke into the *Boston Tribune* as a rookie journalist by actually bringing a huge scandal inside the *Tribune* itself to everyone's attention. This, of course, caused many to stray from him, not wanting to be the focal point of one of his next busts. But he didn't mind. He wasn't in the business to make friends.



Darkness Approaching
By Francisco Velez



Jack was currently investigating the mysterious and abrupt death of Councilman Derrick Andrews. Jack was not a detective—but if he ever felt like trading vocations, he'd probably be welcomed into the police force with open arms based on his reputation alone. He knew that every detective in Boston was busy trying to crack this murder case, but he wanted to be the first to do it. He never settled for second best.

Andrews was the favored candidate in the November Mayoral Race before he was found dead in his apartment the day of the election. The cops had ruled it as a probable suicide, but there was some evidence of possible foul play as well. The city mourned, but it also moved on. A Mayor had to be assigned to the city.

The most logical means of deciding who the Mayor would be was to give the job to the runner-up, Attorney Kurt Edwards. Jack had gone to college with Kurt, but as the years after graduation passed on, the two had gone their separate ways, occasionally meeting up for a quick bite to eat or some coffee—nothing too flashy. They weren't the type of friends that had dinner with their wives at each other's houses or went on vacation together.

But even though they were not as close as they once were—Jack knew something about Kurt that would never change. Kurt wasn't the kind of man who would let anything get in the way of obtaining what he wanted—even if it meant life or death...

September 1992

The campus of Boston College was bright under the afternoon sun. Students enjoyed their Saturday off and talked of the upcoming football game against the Penn State Nittany Lions. Others were doing their essays for the week or planning how to sneak beer into the stadium.

A small group of seniors had already assembled below the home bleachers, Jack among them. His face was pale and his black hair was all over the place as he stood among his friends, who were all smiles and laughs, excited about the task they were about to accomplish.

A firm hand grasped onto Jack's shoulder, causing him to look up from his feet. Kurt Edwards was beaming at him with his pearly whites while holding a beer out to Jack. He feigned a smile and accepted the beer.

"Sup?" he asked, trying to sound cheerful as he opened up the can of Coors.

"What do you mean by that, Jack? You do remember why we're here, don't you?" he questioned. "And what's up with you anyway? It looks like you've seen a ghost!"

Jack opened his mouth to retort, but he was cut off by the voice of his best friend, Barry Thomas. "Ahh...lighten up on the poor guy, Kurt!" he said, pulling himself away from his girlfriend, Sarah Runnels.

Barry was the one who had talked Jack into coming to BC for his degree in the first place. Naturally, they'd remained the closest of friends through their four years in college. Barry looked from his girlfriend to Jack, a glint in his eyes. "It's not every day a future journalist asks Crystal Stevens out on a date!" he said in excitement.

Jack felt like hurling on the spot. Ever since he'd blurted out the question outside of his dormitory he'd been feeling sick to his stomach. Crystal Stevens was the head cheerleader and the Dean's daughter. No one asked her out...any sane man would just fantasize about being with her, not try to make it reality. But what really made him sick was the fact that she didn't say no. She didn't say yes, either. She said she'd think about it.

"No shit!" Kurt said, looking back at Jack, his excitement tripled.

Jack already knew that he wouldn't hear the end of it just by the look on Kurt's face. So he merely shrugged and took a slug of his

beer in response, trying to avoid going further into the conversation.

"What did she..." Kurt began, but was interrupted by the roar of the crowd sitting above them.

Jack gazed up at the bleachers and could practically see the entire thing begin to vibrate as the school band played the Boston College fight song.

"It's almost time," Kurt said, tearing his gaze away from the bleachers and picking up his six-pack of beer.

Jack knew exactly what he meant. This is what they did every week. They'd hide out behind the bleachers every Saturday with their beer and when the team was coming onto the field and everyone was distracted, they'd hop the fence and make their way into the stands unnoticed. The plan was foolproof.

"We're going right when the band stops, right, Kurt?" Barry asked while picking up his case of beer and making his way to the fence.

Kurt nodded in response and made his way to the fence as well. He bent down next to Barry and grabbed the bottom of the fence, pulling it up just enough so that there was enough space to slide the beer onto the other side of the fence. Barry pushed his case through the space Barry created and then took the six-pack away from him and did the same.

"Alright, they're in, you can let go now," Barry said, rising to his feet and wiping his hands on his jeans.

Kurt nodded and let go, but pulled his hand away quickly. "Shit! That fucking hurt!" he yelled out, holding his right hand, which was beginning to bleed.

Barry grabbed Kurt's hand and studied it for a moment before rolling his eyes and letting go of it. "It's barely a flesh wound," he said. "Now if you excuse me, I have to help Sarah over the fence."

He turned and made his way towards Sarah, who was already halfway up the high metal fence. Kurt cursed Barry under his breath and turned back to Jack, holding his bloody hand up to him. "Does that look like it's barely a flesh wound?" he asked.

Jack smiled.

"I have to side with Barry here, Kurt. You really are a drama queen," he said with a laugh.

Kurt laughed sarcastically as well. "Hardy har har..." he said, looking down at his hand.

"Hey! What are you guys doing!? Stop right there!"

Jack's eyes widened as he turned his head to the right to see a massive campus security guard speeding towards them. Kurt looked back at him in shock, neither of them knowing what to do.

"Get back to the car, you idiots!" yelled Barry as he fell from the top of the fence onto his stomach on the other side. Sarah helped him to his feet as he picked up the beer and fled into the stands.

They didn't need to be told twice, so they turned on their heels and began to run away from the guard. The two of them sprinted through the football practice field, the guard not far behind. As they neared Barry's Toyota at the other end of the field, Jack pulled the keys out of his pocket. Kurt ran around to the driver's side of the truck when they arrived and looked across the hood of the car at Jack.

"Toss me the keys!" he yelled, stretching out his hand.

Jack obliged before wrenching the passenger side door open and climbing in. Kurt got in at the same time and plunged the key into the ignition, bringing the old truck to life. They both sat there for a moment, regaining their breath, hoping that the guard had fallen back somewhere on the field. But their luck wasn't getting any better. The guard appeared further up the road and spotted them instantly. He held up his hand and began to walk towards the truck.

"What the hell does he think he's doing?" Jack asked.

"He thinks he's got us caught," Kurt said. "But he's sadly mistaken. Nobody beats Kurt Edwards..."

He put the car in drive.

"What are you doing, Kurt!? Reverse it! Don't go forward! You might hit him!" Jack yelled, confused by Kurt's actions.

He was shocked even more to see a cold smile cross Kurt's face as he stepped on the gas.

The truck sped forward, coming closer to the frozen guard. Kurt didn't swerve...

Present —December 28th 2005

Jack drained the rest of his coffee and tossed it into the trash can outside of the office before turning and making his way through the glass doors. That whole incident was fresh in Jack's mind. To this day Kurt said that it was an accident and that the wheel wouldn't turn, but Jack always thought that Kurt knew exactly what he was doing. He meant to run that man down; whether he knew that the man would die or not, that was completely different. But ever since that day, Jack knew Kurt to be nothing more than a greedy bastard who would stop at nothing to get what he wanted.

One good thing did come out of that day, however. Jack asked Crystal out, who was now his wife of four years. After the incident, she had felt sorry for Jack for some reason and gave him a chance. It only took him about seven years to get her father to accept him.

The lobby was empty, no secretary or co-worker of the Mayor in sight. Jack stood alone for a moment, not sure whether he should come back another time, or knock on Kurt's door. The latter sounded a whole lot easier to him, so he made his way past the empty desk of the secretary and down a short hall to the door that had the Mayor's name on it. He raised his hand to knock on the door, but paused as he heard voices inside.

"This isn't right. I didn't ask for this!" someone yelled from inside.

"You told me to do what I felt was necessary," another voice responded, much calmer than the first.

Jack pushed the door open an inch, making sure he made not a sound; he peered through to see who was speaking. He could clearly see Kurt standing behind his oak writing desk, looking at a man in all black, a hood covering his head and his back to the door.

"So you skipped plan A and B and went right to Z? You were the last person I expected to pull the trigger!" Kurt spat. The man in black retorted, "Funny...I could've said the same thing about you."

"I'm not the one who actually killed somebody!" Kurt yelled even louder.

"Oh, is that so? Hiring me to do your dirty work exempts you from murder, now, does it? Besides, the old bastard was onto me. If I didn't take him out he would have connected it to you, and you would have been finished! I was doing you a favor! No one is going to vote for a man who tried to buy off his competition! And if I let him live, you would be just that...a dishonest government official. Oh wait...you already are," the hooded man finished in a vaguely familiar voice.

"Don't give me any of that! You'd be living on the streets if it wasn't for me! And because of your swiftness with pulling the trigger, the cops have me as their top suspect. What if they get more evidence that leads to me? I barely got through the first time they questioned me. If they come back, I'll crack. I can't handle a full-on investigation!" Kurt said.

Too late, Kurt...I got the story of a lifetime right here, Jack thought to himself.

"Well, you should have thought about that before you hired me as your gun. But if it gives you peace of mind, I didn't leave a single trace that could possibly lead back to you."

Kurt paused and looked down before taking a seat behind his desk. He sighed and looked back up at the hooded man. "I'm sorry...I can't take that chance. You're either going to have to turn yourself in...or I will for you," he said, picking up his phone.

"The hell you will!" the hooded man said, walking to the desk and pulling a .45 magnum out of his jacket and pointing it at Kurt's forehead.

Kurt looked up at the man without fright. He began to dial into the phone. The hooded man faltered for a moment before placing the gun to Kurt's forehead again.

"You leave me no choice then, Kurt. I'm going to miss you."

BANG!

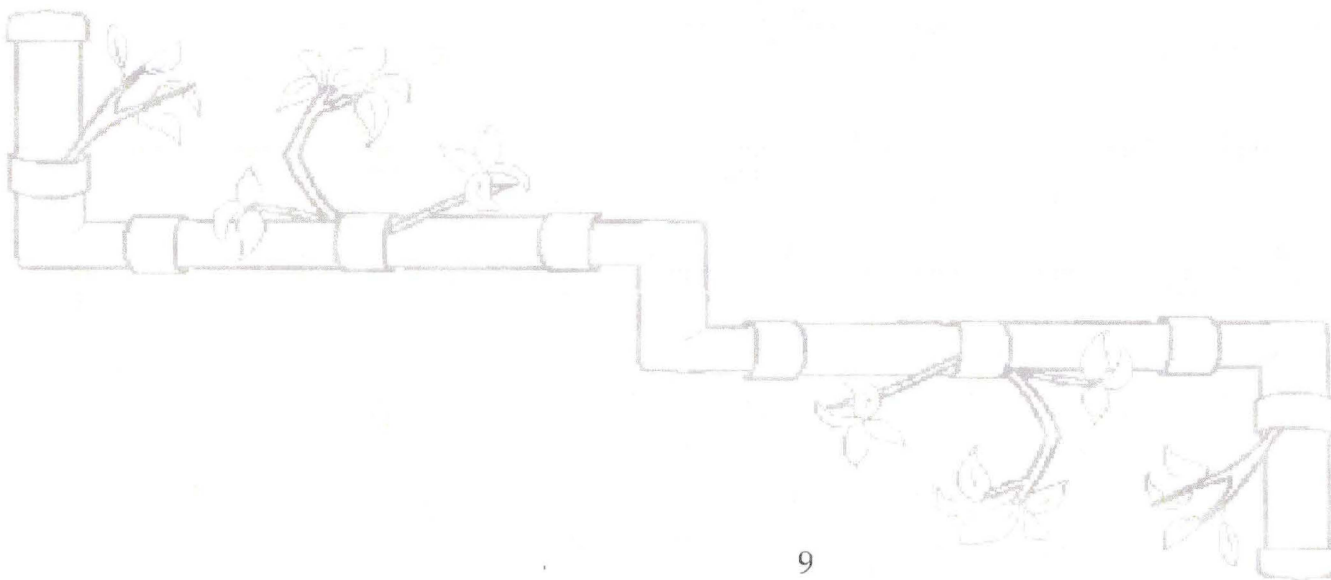
Jack nearly jumped out of his skin as the gun shot, splattering blood all over the wall behind Kurt. Jack fell back into the wall opposite the door and listened as the man inside made his way towards the door. He quickly dove behind the large plant in the corner and crouched there, watching the door. The door opened and the man stepped out, not noticing Jack behind the plant as he closed the door. The man sighed and reached up, lowering the hood.

Jack couldn't believe his eyes.

It was his best friend...

It was Barry Thomas.

By Justin Jones

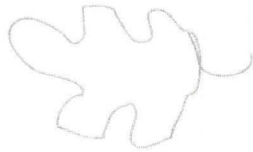




Finding Fred

Packaged in a
 Plastic package
 In six pairs of
 two all identical
 Twins waiting
 to be used and
 with time after
 they are worn
 they will become
 torn and their threads
 Will undo the intimate stitching
 that made you You, who deteriorates slowly
 inside a shoe and Lost your partner somewhere between
 the spin cycle and tumble dry; now a lonely individual until
 you die but don't let these stains of pain frighten you because the
 color yellow places no limitations on what you can do to irritate the
 one that owns you, so sneak behind the dressers and hide under
 the bed and maybe someday you'll meet up again with Fred

By Lauren Salem



In the Corner of Our Attics

Forever sold to the flash of the light
 the still faces sat smiling
 decayed in their pose

Fingerprint smudges on plastic film

Lying somewhere in a box in the cold

By Kacy Muir



Calm Denizen
 By Jim Feeney

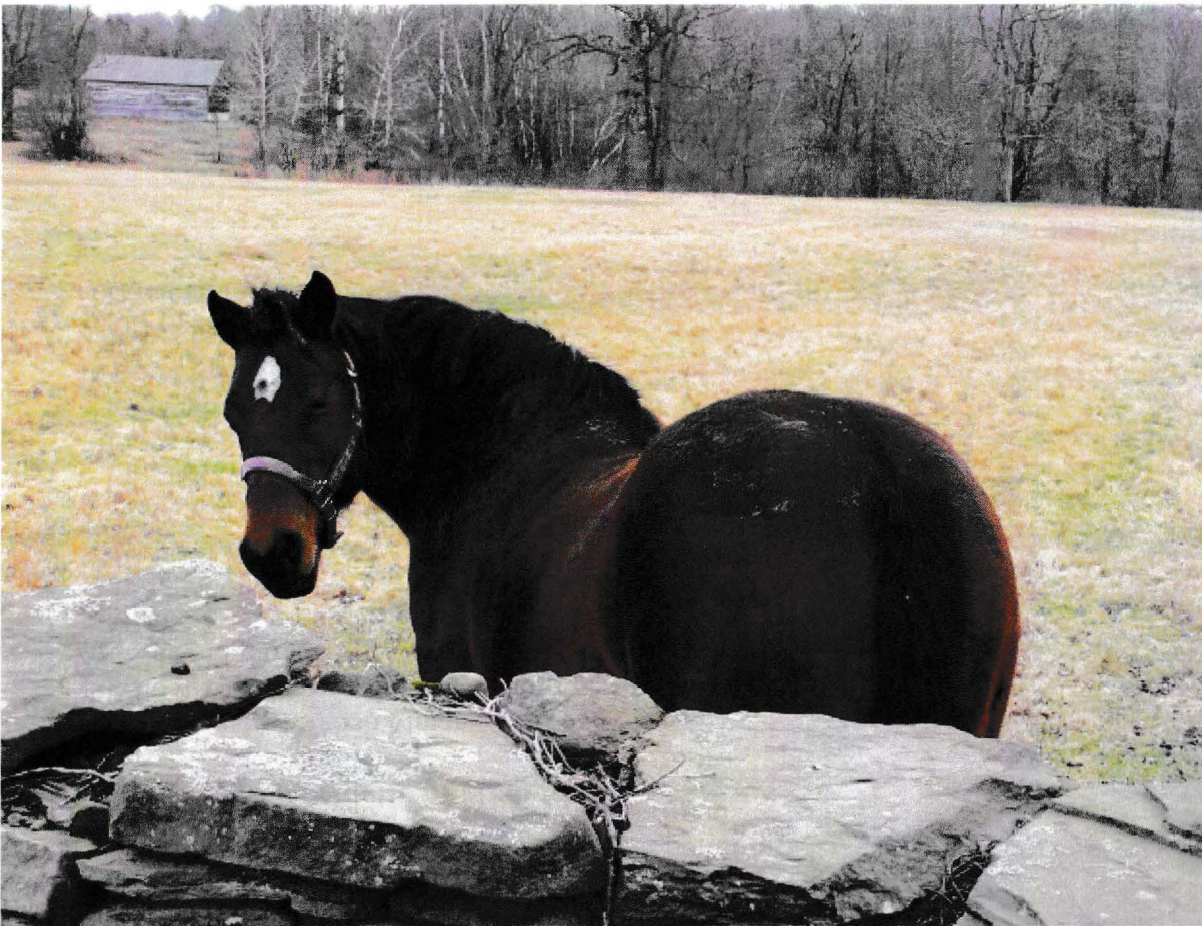
Ode to the Masochistic English Major

O, Masochistic English Major
Who luxuriates in subtexts consuming thy soul
And ragged paper edges shredding thy flesh
Make haste! young English Major
And delve into the world of literary complexities
And textual analyses
Awaken thy senses to annihilate thy classical traditions
Ripping thy love child from the loins of academia
And dissecting its contents like a gutted fish
Invoke thy masters—Shakespeare, Chaucer, Byron, Poe—
To jostle thy cognitions
To recite complex dictions
For that is thy undulation

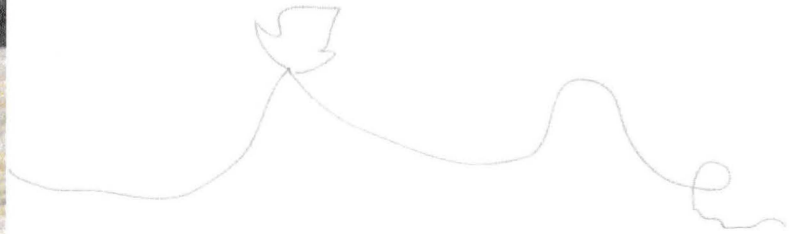
By Stefanie McHugh



Accidental Poetry
By Shannon Curtin



Does This Mane Make My Butt Look Big?
By Jami Butczynski



Sonnet 3 ½ : First Day of Pre-School

I hold on tightly to my mother's hand
As we walk by some kids that I don't know.
They're throwing balls and playing in the sand.
I say, "Please, Mom. No! I don't want to go!"
She says, "Calm down. Look, they're all having fun."
"I won't have fun because you won't be here,"
I scream at her as I attempt to run.
"I'll pick you up at noon, so don't you fear."
She walks me in and takes me to a chair—
A chair just perfect for a kid like me.
A little girl with glasses and straight hair
Says, "How are you? My name is Stephanie."
I look at Mom as I roll up my sleeves,
"Get out of here! Now I want you to leave!"

By Lauren Carey



Ode to My Doctor

I used to like you fountain-fresh,
or with three cubes of ice.
But I can't drink you anymore,
my Lenten sacrifice.

So now plain water meets my meals
and I try not to care.
But, at the store, I swore I smelt
your fragrance in the air.

Well, H₂O seems fair enough,
but it seems clear to me
its two ingredients are beat
by your sweet twenty-three.

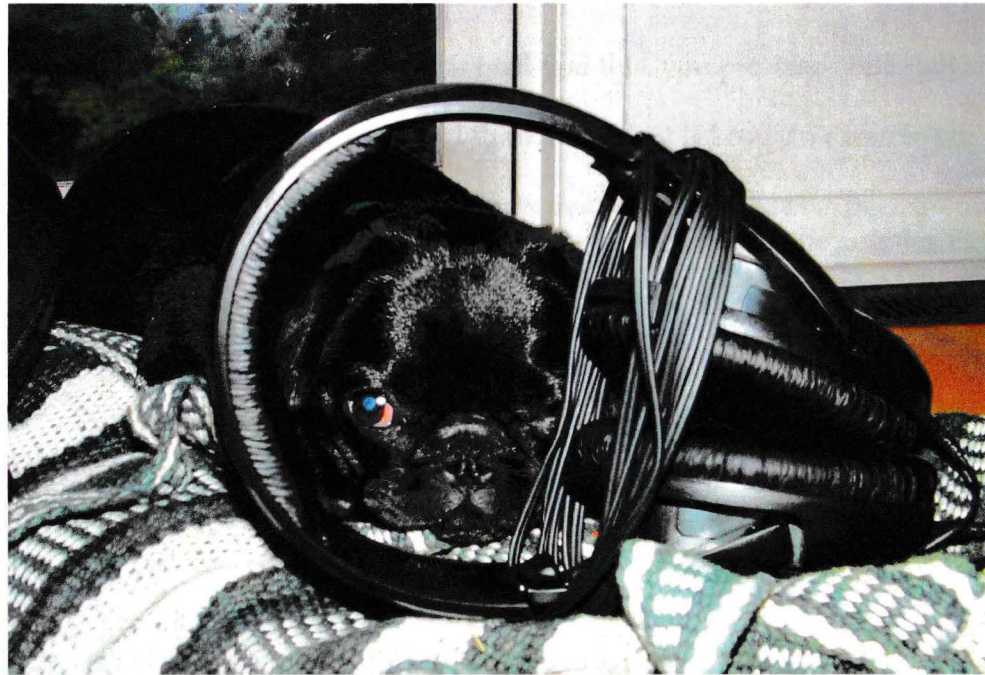
When Easter finally arrives,
I'll carbonate elation.
Just like the "Dr" in your name
our love lacks punctuation

By Angelina Teutonico

No Use

I dreamt I was a dictionary,
But no one understood me.
I was easily accessible
But I was of no use
It turns out
I was in a different country.

By Ivana Daher



Where's My Dr. Dre CD?
By Lauren Carey



Pigeon Master
By Jami Butczynski

Go Figure

Big Betty was cleaning the counter at the diner when a familiar face lumbered in the door.

"Mornin', Leroy," rasped the waitress.

"Hey, Betty," replied a heavysset bald man with a thick goatee and tattoos all over his arms. His sleeveless flannel shirt looked like it was about to pop a button—his big round belly didn't seem to fit in it anymore. When he spoke, there was a clearly visible gap where one of his front teeth used to be.

"Just take a seat...You waitin' for Biff?"

"Suppose so. He's commin' up from North Carolina this week. Hadda haul a load of...uh...I think it was lumber. Yeah. He shouldn't be too long."

Leroy ordered a coffee and the hungry man special. He, like a bear on a unicycle, balanced himself on the barstool. A few minutes and a few sips of coffee later, Leroy heard the little bell attached to the door. He let out a big belch before he turned around and saw his buddy Biff.

"Hey!" Biff sounded extra perky this morning.

"Biff," answered Leroy.

"I been drivin' for a straight ten hours. I's haulin' some crazy shit, though. And when I say shit, I mean shit. There oughta be somethin' in the union clause about not havin' to haul manure. It stinks." He stopped talking for a second as he tried to balance himself on the barstool next to Leroy.

Once he'd accomplished that, he removed his dirty John Deere hat and put it on the counter. "But, I dunno, something about today has me feelin' great," mused the slightly smaller (but still heavysset) bemulleted trucker.

"Yeah? I kinda feel the same way...Can't really explain it, though. Closest I can come is thinkin' about the way I felt when I hauled a load of chickens from Maryland to Atlanta in three hours."

"Bullshit. You didn't really do that."

"Who's gonna prove me wrong?" smirked Leroy.

"Biff!" Betty called from the kitchen, "You want the hotcakes?"

"Absolutely, Betty. Absolutely. Real heavy on the butter, though," Biff answered. Turning to Leroy he said, "Whatcha been up to these past two weeks? Other than drivin' 200 miles per hour down 81, o'course..."

"Same shit, different day. Yerself?"

"Me? I gotta little TV set for the truck. It's nothin' fancy, of course. But it's a lot more exciting than the radio."

"You ain't watchin' it, are ya? Gotta keep your eyes on the road. The union'll have your head if they find you've crashed because you've been watchin' TV in the truck."

"No, no, no," Biff assured his friend. "Fuck the union, though. They got me haulin' a ton of shit, least they could do is let me watch a little TV in the truck. But naw...I just listen to it. It's just this time of year, I guess. I feel like I'm missing out if I don't watch the TV."

"What the hell're you talkin' 'bout?" Leroy asked...almost embarrassedly.

"Uh..." Biff wasn't sure if he wanted to tread these waters with Leroy. "Um...Aw shit, Leroy. If I tell you this, you promise not to tell anybody?"

"Oh you know it, brother."

"All right...Okay...Well...It's the Olympics. Ever since I was small—I just love the Olympics. I think I'd be lost if I couldn't watch 'em...er...at least hear 'em."

"Wow..." Leroy wasn't sure what to say to his friend. "Buddy, wow. I...wow...okay. Alls I can say is that just ain't what I expected you to say."

"Here you go, boys!" Betty said. She'd come out of the kitchen with their food. As she not-so- gingerly put the plates on the counter, egg and butter sloshed all over the place.

"Thanks," the two men said in unison.

"Aw, I knew I shouldn'tve told you." Biff continued with food in his mouth.

"Naw, that's not it."

"What's it? You think I'm a queer or somethin'?"

"It's just that...well...Me too."

"What?! 'You too,' what? You ain't no queer!"

"Yeah. Er, no I ain't no queer. I was 'me too'ing the Olympics," Leroy whispered. "And, I guess, since we're pourin' our souls out here...I might as well tell ya. I got a TV, too."

"And you was bitchin' at me about it! Ha!"

Leroy continued, "Lemme finish, lemme finish. I gotta get this out now. It's the Olympics. I love 'em too. But I think I'm worse, Biff."

"Worse, Leroy? You really are a queer, ain't ya?"

"For the last time, I ain't a queer. I ain't never gonna be a queer."

"Well what is it then? It ain't figure skatin', is it?" Biff said through the food in his mouth.

"Yeah...it's the figure skatin'." Leroy started.

"Wow!" Biff couldn't contain himself. He almost spilled his coffee.

"What? You think I'm a queer now, dontcha? Well I ain't," Leroy sounded ashamed.

"No. This night has been a helluva surprise. We're a lot the same."

"You mean..." Leroy started.

"Yeah." Biff finished his sentence, "Me too."

"Okay...so lemme get this straight. If I was to say to you, then, that I thought that little fruit Johnny Weir shoulda got a medal... you'd know what I was talking about?"

"Yep. I'd say he blew it in the long program," Biff said. "Uh...could I ask ya whatcha think about Michelle Kwan's groin?"

"Bullshit! She couldn't compete in the Nationals. And that's where they get the Olympic team from—the Nationals."

"Leroy, that ain't news."

Leroy continued, "I'm gettin' there, I'm gettin' there...And so they take the top three finishers there to the Olympics. Well, it seems to me that that shoulda been the end of it. You had Sasha Cohen, Kimmie Meissner, and Emily Hughes. One two three. That shoulda been it."

"So you're tryin' to tell me that you don't think they shoulda given Michelle Kwan a chance?"

"Hell no. She pulled a real bitch move. Like a 'I'm Michelle Kwan, please gimme a break.' Bullshit. I'm glad she pulled her groin again. That kid, Emily, deserved to be there."

Biff seemed shocked. "You mean...well...This was Kwan's last chance, though. And you wanna take her medal chances away?"

"I didn't say nothin' like that. I just said it wasn't fair for her to play the Michelle Kwan card to get into Olympics that she didn't deserve to get into."

"That's it."

"What? What's it?" Leroy was confused.

"Leroy, I like you and all...but I can't sit here with someone that doesn't think Michelle Kwan deserved to be in these 2006 Torino Olympics."

"What?"

"Yeah. I'm gonna hit the road." He turned in Betty's direction, "Can I get my check, Betty?"

"Sure thing, sweetcakes."

"Biff?" Leroy started.

"What?"

"We not gonna be meetin' anymore? Is that it?"

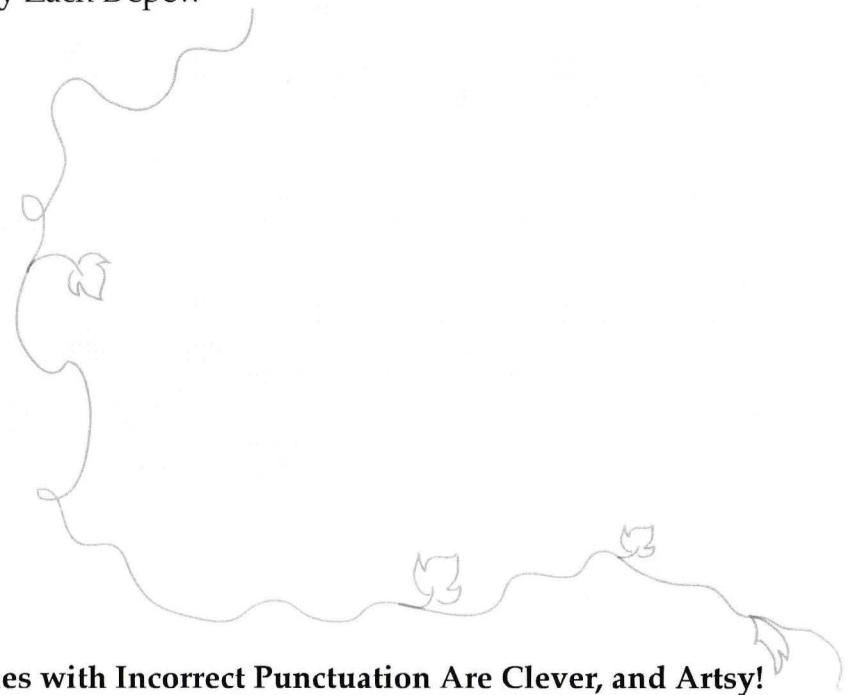
"I dunno, Leroy. That was a real hard blow. I gotta think about it."

With the ring of a bell and the sound of eighteen wheels rolling, Biff pulled out of the diner.

Leroy stared at his eggs in shock. Big Betty leaned over on the counter and said, "I don't usually listen to people's conversations—I swear. But I couldn't help overhearin' you and Biff. And if it makes you feel any better, I think you're right."



Kiedis
By Zach Depew



Long Titles with Incorrect Punctuation Are Clever, and Artsy!

Lashes curled,
ironed asymmetrical hair
gleams ink black.
Coal and blood
make make-up more manly.

Commodified subversion
in packaged four-sets—
if our outfits match
and we namedrop dead dandies,
no one will notice
our falsettos falter.



By Angelina Teutonico

The Whole World in Her Hands
By Jami Butczynski



Untitled Ode

Dear three little hairs between my eyes,
though I do pluck and curse you
you fail naught to return.
There you outlast any man in your devotion
for though I have plucked many
my bed grows cold
while my brow sweats under your warmth.

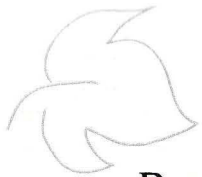
By Sarah Hartman

Hand Haiku

He knows he's in the
palm of my hand. Then he paused,
and said, "Please don't squeeze."

By Lauren Carey





Dear Abby,

Sometimes,

I want to tell Confused in Delaware
(and Heartsick in Houston
and Tired-of-Stepping-in-My-Neighbor's-
Dog's-Turds in Winnipeg)

to stop thinking too much
or to enjoy the inheritance;

it's no wonder your date
passed out during Pagliacci;

it serves you right for reading his email.

No one takes my advice.

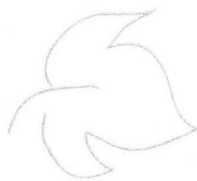
By Angelina Teutonic



Home Sweet Gnome
By Kacy Muir



Heartfelt
By Stefanie McHugh

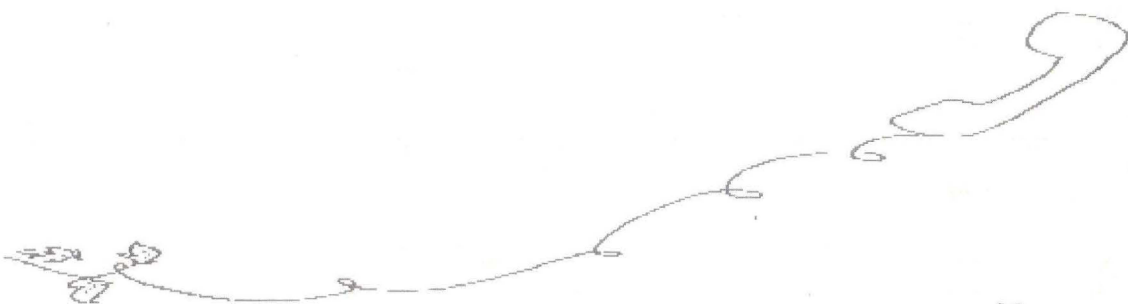


Autumn Aviary

Leaves feather foliage
And frightened flutter
To the ground.

Like footprints fall
Scrape and scatter
Crunching corpses sound.

By Amy Kaspriskie

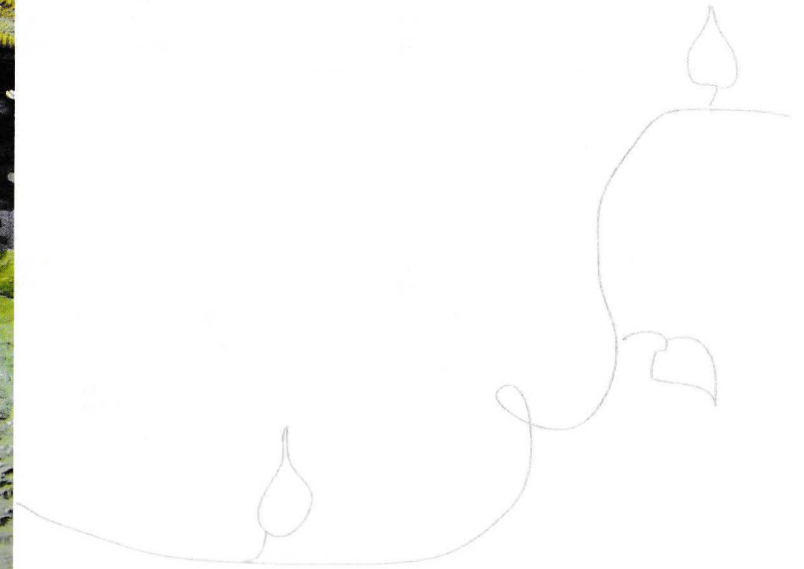


Yggdrasil
By Conrad Miller





Hey Frog I Said Leap
By Marissa Phillips



The Lobster Claw Game

When your girlfriend is a card-carrying member of PETA, there are a select variety of things that draw her ire. Taking her to lunch at a place called Chick's Seafood Shack ranks high among the list.

"You're kidding, right?" she bellowed.

Alyssa sat across from me, arms folded across a second-hand Sleater-Kinney shirt. She glared with white-hot vegan rage.

"Alyssa," I began, doing my best to defuse the "Meat is Murder" bomb, "this is our only choice. It's either this or we go hungry the entire way back home."

And it was true. Once we were outside of New Haven, on our way back from this anti-animal testing demonstration, we had a clear stretch of highway ahead of us, with nary a rest stop or roadside diner in sight. This wasn't quite the way I wanted to break that to her.

"Jaret, you realize the position this puts me in," she snapped back. "You're asking me to violate my ethical foundation. This is fascism." Fascism. The word has become a non-sequitur. Did she even know what it meant? I rubbed my eyes behind mirrored sunglasses. This entire trip had been an accident waiting to happen. It hadn't been my idea to come to New Haven to protest alleged animal testing in Yale's biology department.

After a scuffle with the police and a few unwanted photos that surely wound up on a student blog somewhere, I suggested a drive along the shore to unwind. It hadn't been my idea to get hungry when I did either, but I was sick of playing games, I had a craving for processed flesh.

"Look, Alyssa, does fish even count as meat?" I countered. "I'm starving, can't you cheat this one time? They have to have salads or something, right?"

She uncrossed her arms and shot me a look that could strip flesh from bone. This was atypically predatory for a vegan. She swung the door open and was through the entrance of the restaurant before I was done rolling up the windows. Chick's Seafood Shack. I was surprised Alyssa hadn't heaped sexism on top of animal cruelty charges.

Once we were inside my mistake had become evident. The interior smacked of gaudiness and repulsion. The floor desperately needed a thorough mopping; a complete restripping may have been in order. The dirt was surpassed only by the peeling formica and worn plastic on the chairs and tabletops. The staff yelled and cursed at one another in Spanish, wearing sustained countenances of horror at some atrocity yet to be committed. They grimaced at their futures of working-class indentured servitude like some sort of forthcoming personal apocalypse.

The blaring Rod Stewart light rock over the sound system set the appropriate soundtrack of despair, icing on the crab cake. I swallowed the bile in my throat and picked up a pre-folded menu, browsing the selections.

Chick's had a surprisingly decent selection of salads below the lobster bisque. I glanced about, looking for Alyssa.

Her frazzled bleach blonde hair gave her away. I saw her from the back, hips and torso tucked into that skirt and form-fitting shirt. It held her upright like some carving of feminist chic.

Her arms were slack at her sides, silhouetted by an oversized water tank. The backpack suspended from her right hand quivered. It wasn't until I made my way to her side that she dropped it altogether.

"Have you seen the menu?" I asked. "They have salads after all."

She didn't answer. She stood shell-shocked and agape.

"What's wrong?" I asked, the question swallowed by the space between us.

"Jaret," she said, trembling, her eyes still transfixed on the tank, "look."

I looked at the tank for the first time. Gathered at the bottom were twenty or so live lobsters.

At first glance it looked like any other lobster tank you'd see at a place like this. The creatures crawled over one another, with their claws bound by rubber bands, and the water cold and murky. Everything about it appeared normal until I noticed the money slot, the joystick, and the stationary claw mounted at the tank's lid.

"You know what this is," Alyssa said, her shock driven by an undercurrent of utter rage.

"It looks like one of those claw game things," I reply.

"Yes, Jaret, that's it," she continued. "That's exactly it. It's a lobster claw game. You're supposed to put in money and bob for live lobsters like stuffed toys."

"Okay," I said, not sure what point she was building to, but knowing she had an entirely new agenda. "Do you want to look at the menu?"

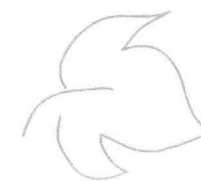
"You're completely missing the point," she proclaimed. "This restaurant is exploiting the deaths of innocent animals for the sake of entertainment. It's exhibitionistic slaughter!"

"Alyssa," I shot back, "these are lobsters we're talking about."

"What?"

"We're in a seafood restaurant. People eat lobsters here. That's pretty much how it works."

"You don't think it's cruel, unusual and barbaric?"



"No," I replied, futilely repressing amusement. My ruse was transparent.

"You find this amusing, don't you?" she fired back.

"Oh, give me a break."

"You do, you think it's funny. You think animals being put on display is a joke. You're laughing at my anger."

"I'm not laughing at anything! I'm standing here getting yelled at for things I haven't even done yet!"

"Well, do something!"

"What do you want me to do? You want me to let them go? I don't think anybody else here is interested in lobster liberation."

"You're mocking me. You think PETA is a joke. Am I that meaningless to you?"

"No! But be serious. We can't just fish them all out and let them go. What do you want me to do?"

She paused. It seemed simple logic may have finally won out. She peered at me, her eyes penetrating mine. She glanced back at the tank, looking through it to the ocean beyond.

"No," she began, her voice heavy with resolve. "We can't save them all, just one."

"Alyssa?" I deadpanned. The tone of her voice was all too familiar.

"Just one. We'll fish it out, take it across the street, and set it free for everyone here to watch. They'll watch and know we were here, and we'll have made our point."

Our point? I thought, not wanting to raise her anger.

"C'mon, Jaret," she continued, "this is the moment we were looking for. The cops broke up the rally, but now we have this opportunity to make it up. I think this is why we came here, we were meant to be at this tacky dive; to liberate one lobster that wasn't meant to die."

Again with the "we's." I played the monetary hand, hoping it would buy me a free pass.

"Alyssa, look, it's three dollars a play. The game is probably rigged. There's no way—"

"No, Jaret," she interrupted.

"Alyssa, you can't really—"

"You're going to do it, I can feel it," she continued. "This is what we were meant to come here for. You're going to get one on the first try, we'll set it free, and we'll be able to go home fulfilled."

Bravado nearly had me convinced, but practicality wouldn't concede defeat.

"Alyssa, be reasonable, you don't really—"

"There is no reason here, Jaret. This is fate. We are here to free one of these creatures."

"Well, if it's fate," I bellowed, "why don't you pay for it yourself?"

I was stunned by my own veracity. Without hesitation, Alyssa reached into her backpack and put three crumpled dollar bills into my palm. Her eyes burned holes through me. For the first time in a long while, I was a part of her agenda, her mission, and her unwavering passion. I walked to the machine and smoothed the bills against the glass before inserting them into the slot. The claw did a spastic electric dance along the runner and began its descent. Below, eighteen live lobsters lay motionless, unaware of the impending salvation of one of their brethren.

I did my best to appear competent as Alyssa looked on. I maneuvered the claw over a prime-looking target and pressed open on the control pad.

Alyssa quivered with anticipation as the claw slid off the motionless lobster's shell. As it hit the tank's bottom, the claw opened with mocking lethargy, lay in paralysis, then retracted to its lair above. The lobster sat, still as ever, ignorant of its near salvation.

Alyssa's mirth subsided. She stood beside me with her hands spread upwards and out, as if cradling two emancipated lobsters as symbols of revolution.

"Is that it?" she asked. "That's it," I answered. "Now, do you want to order something or should we move on?"

"That is so you," she interrupted.

"Excuse me?"

"This! This resigned attitude of defeat you have about everything. Things are too hard, so you give up without even trying."

"Trying? I did try, Alyssa! You saw me put in the money, you saw me push the buttons, you—"

"Yeah, I saw you do all that, but were you trying, or just going through the motions?"

"What?" I deadpanned for a second time.

"Were you moving the claw, I mean really moving the claw. Or were you just moving the claw?"

I pondered her words carefully, trying to place their origin.

"Alyssa, this is pointless."

"What is so pointless about humanity? Don't you understand what we are trying to achieve?"

"No, I'm really not sure."

"It's a statement, a demonstration. We rescue one lobster and set it free right here and now."

"So you've said, but what will that accomplish? It's just one lobster."

"It will be a minor uprising. It will have symbolic value."

"At three dollars a pop? Alyssa, we need to get home. We're going to need gas money."

Alyssa brought three fresh dollar bills from her backpack and slid them into the slot. The claw sprang back to life.

"I thought you were broke," I chimed in.

"I always keep a few dollars on me for special occasions. Now focus!"

"You never told me about that before. Why now do you—?"

"Never mind that, watch the claw!"

I turned back in time to get control over the claw and guide its controlled seizure over another would-be libertee lobster. The claw missed its mark, spreading its talons open in a sort of "fuck you, PETA pussies" guffaw. Again it redrew itself to the ceiling, and again Alyssa dug deep into a pocket, this time my own, and brought out three new dollar bills to be sacrificed to the cause.

Each time a lobster barely eluded our grasp, and each time three more dollar bills would leave our possession like kindling at an anarchist bonfire.

The cycle continued. Around turn five my mind began to wander. I thought back to my last couple of girlfriends before Alyssa. I remembered the first dates that led to the first kiss, the third dates that sometimes led to sex, the sex that led to relationships, and relationships that all seemed to lead back to the same starting point: disappointment and singlehood all over again.

On the seventh turn I looked over at Alyssa, her mouth agape and eyes focused fitfully on the tank.

In spite of everything, I had to admire her passion. I envied how committed she was to life. Whether it was academics, activism, or vegan dessert, Alyssa Jacobs didn't approach anything passively.

When her face was bright and anticipatory, like it was at that moment when I looked away from the tank and at her, her beauty flourished. My love for her was strongest at those times, when joy had her fully in its grasp; the bitterness and anger had been left behind.

I couldn't help but wonder, was it me? Had I done something wrong? Said the wrong thing at the wrong moment? Had I not loved her with



my whole heart? Or did she look this way now because I just had a lobster in my clutches, and, in my distraction, dropped it?

She cried out as if in pain.

"You had one."

"I did?" I mumbled, playing the part of ignorance.

"And you opened the claw halfway up and dropped it? What happened?"

"Sorry. Got distracted. My finger must have hit the release button."

"Well, focus! Try again."

Three dollars reawakened the claw, but my mind drifted on.

Why was I doing this? What gave Alyssa this power over me? Why did I allow her to manipulate me into this one-woman revolution?

That's when the revelation dawned on me. The framework was revealed in the game I now subjected myself to.

I hadn't just been playing the Lobster Claw Game on this day, I had been playing it all my life.

Every girl. Every first date, every kiss, and every broken heart led me back here to the playing field. A monetary donation bought me a turn, from there the game of chance commenced. It was arbitrary, a diversion of fate and given circumstance.

Alyssa and I were wrong for each other and we both knew it. Days like this made me wonder why we kidded ourselves into thinking we could make it work.

Did it really come down to this? A PETA rally at an Ivy League school that amounted to naught? Now we were reduced to shelling out cash to a machine at a seafood shack in the hopes of saving one pathetic lobster.

On the tenth try, I closed my eyes tightly.

I want it done, I thought. When we get home, I'm breaking it off. I'm sick of this game, I have to get out. I need to stop the game. I have to tell Alyssa—

"It's over," she said.

"What?" I panted.

"You did it."

I looked into the prize receptacle and saw for myself. A dripping wet, undergrown lobster stared back up at us with black ball-bearing eyes.

"Jaret," she stated, nearly breathless, "you did it. I can't believe you actually saw it through. I'm so proud."

She threw her arms around my neck and kissed me harder than she had in months. I looked into her eyes, blue green like the ocean, and saw love.

My voice broke, thirteen years old all over again.

"Uh, thanks," I screeched. "So, uh, what do we do now?"

"We let him go," she answered. "Down there by the shoreline so we're in full view of the restaurant."

"Why so close?"

"Symbolism, Jaret. I'll go get a container."

Alyssa got a plastic bucket from the counter staff. They filled it for us and we put the newly emancipated lobster inside.

We walked down to the beach. I held the bucket in front of me and stepped cautiously through the sand, trying not to disturb the inhabitant.

I looked over at Alyssa; her face was alight. Her mouth widened in an enormous smile, and she cheerfully squinted in the late afternoon sun. The sun's rays filtered through her hair like stained glass. She looked proud, content, and hopeful.

We stood at the water's edge and let the tide cover our ankles as it rolled in. I opened the bucket up and peered in at our rescue, the Frederick



"Would you like to say something?" I asked Alyssa.

"Thank you," she replied. "That's all I need to say."

And it was. Her radiance said everything. "Well, I guess this is it," I said. "Would you like to do the honors?"

"I would."

She reached in and plucked the lobster up, holding it to the sky. It flayed its mandibles against liberty's air, daring to try and fly through it.

"And his name shall be," she declared, "Jaret."

She set it down in the moist sand and we watched as the tide carried it out to sea. For a long while, neither of us said anything. We watched the horizon as the sun sank closer to it. I felt Alyssa take my hand in hers.

She kissed me again, longer and deeper, and ran her hand across my face.

"I'm so glad you came with me," she said. "It turned out to be a good day after all, huh?"

"Yeah," I answered, "it did."

"We should get moving," she declared, "it's getting late."

She kissed me again and pulled me along. We walked hand in hand up the beach, to the car, and back to our life together.

As we went, I turned my head to take in the sunset one last time. The tide rolled in, bringing the lifeless body of a shellfish in its wake.

It was a lobster, no doubt the same one we just spent all afternoon and thirty dollars setting free.

I suppressed amusement for the second time that afternoon and turned back to Alyssa. I didn't waste any time analyzing the symbolism of it. For now I was happy to exist in the merely suitable state of our existence together. The game was not over yet. I figured I could always scrounge an extra three dollars.



Who's A Good Boy?
By David Carey

By Corey Pajka

Theodore

When you lost an eye
I could bare you no longer.

By Amy Kaspriskie

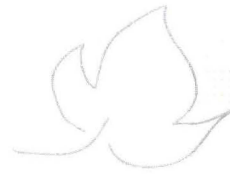
Coffee

Preparing an intoxicating cup of coffee
Smooth and creamy on my lips
The ebony nectar, a taste so lofty
Flavor consumed in delicate sips

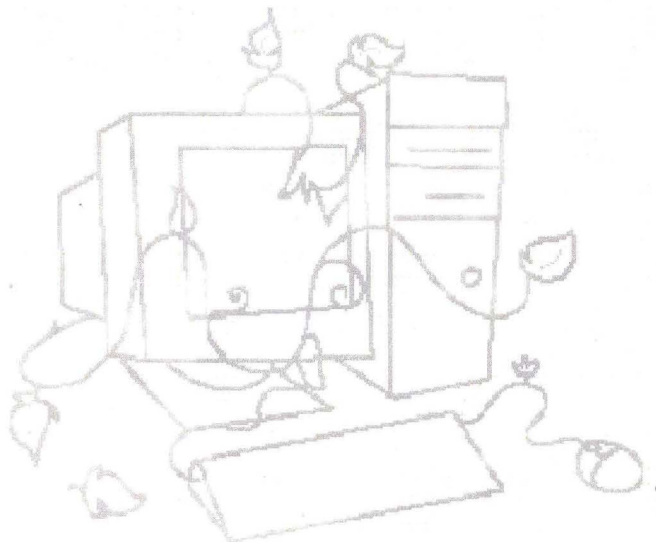
The rich aroma nudges me from sleep
Warm, divine, sweet to my liking
Nirvana in hand, it's an art to steep
Elegantly simple, flawless and inviting

Not the watery Maxwell House
Instant ruins my morning
I'd sooner sip Chamomile Tea

By Stefanie McHugh



A Past and Present Tense
By Jim Feeney



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Practical Man
By Stefanie McHugh

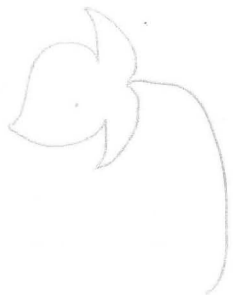


The Demise of Something Beautiful
By Raychil Arndt



Mustache

Your mouth is kind to words.
Every sentence comes out clean,
Regardless of how dirty the meaning.
 No linguistic butchering,
 No soft endings,
Your enunciation tickles
 Like a mustache
And leaves my skin electrified.

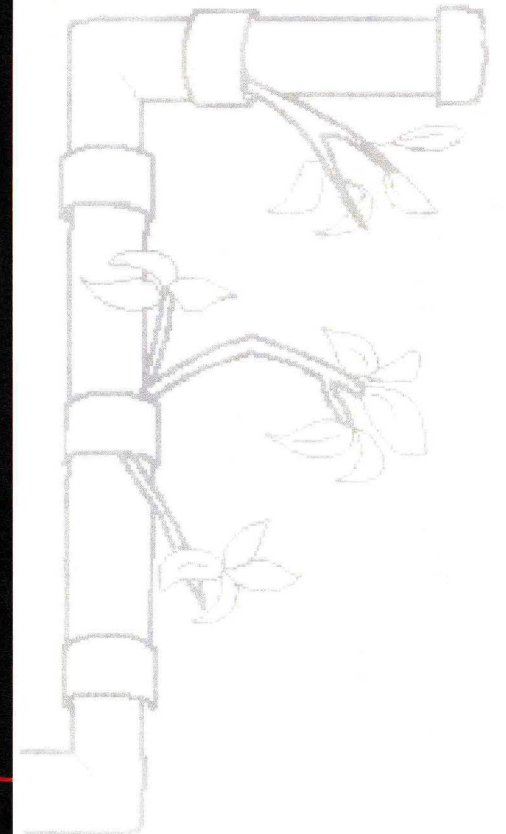
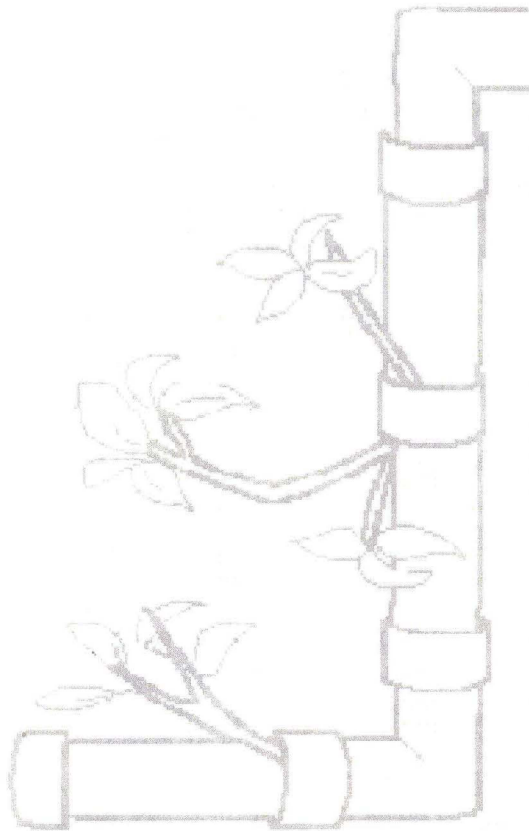


By Shannon Curtin

Toast

Grandma eats toast every morning
because toast doesn't change.
Her friends can die one by one,
her husband can forget her name,
her grandchildren can decide her attic is not as exciting as it once was;
but bread still turns to toast in ninety seconds,
and no one has improved upon the knife.

By Shannon Curtin



A Bold Realization
By Jim Feeny

Greetings from Exile

"To Diane, My One and Only..."

"Shit! What am I writing here?"

Derek tore the page from his notebook and threw it against the coffee shop's sooty windows. Bucky and Lyndon laughed heartily.

"You, sir," Lyndon said as he removed Derek's coffee cup, "are cut off!"

"Gimme that," Derek said, snatching it back. He resented being held in check.

"Get over it, kid," Bucky snarled, "life's a bitch and it doesn't get any easier."

"Yeah, man," Lyndon interjected. "Life sucks, then you die."

"So, life's a bitch," Derek mumbled. "Is that why I'm so hung up on her? Was she my life? That bitch?"

There was a moment of stunned silence.

"My, how your tone has shifted," Lyndon said. "Wasn't it just yesterday you were writing her a sonnet?"

"No! What gave you that idea?"

At this, Derek paused and thought. It had been one month since he had last seen the one he swore his life, his love, and his devotion to. Three-and-a-half weeks since he last heard her voice in that final, forced phone call.

"It's over, man," Bucky said. "Just let 'er go. There's no sense in dwelling on it. Won't do no good."

"I can't just forget about her," Derek snapped in between pencil erasures. "It's been built up to so much."

"It's all in your mind," Lyndon added. "You've built this woman up to be the sum total of all your romantic longings and it's not going to work that way, even if she would return your calls."

"Take it as a sign," Bucky said, taking long drags from his fourth cigarette of that breakfast. "It's not meant to be. You're free, you're in exile; just learn to love it!"

It was hard to argue with the fuck-all logic of his companions. In the month they had spent away from home since taking a semester off from school, it seemed any adherence to the mandates of the outside world had been thrown to the wind.

The three of them were there. 6:30 AM at a diner outside Omaha. Castaways from a place they no longer understood.

Derek held for a moment and stepped out of his own narcissistic entanglements, contemplating the plight of Bucky.

Twenty-five years old. Med school student. Standard deviant and instigator of one-man revolution.

Bucky's ideology revolved around the fact that all his life was a façade. He had no interest in healing people, but found the pursuit of love so simple, and the practice of medicine so self-defeating and absurd, he couldn't help but pursue it.

"The way I look at it," Bucky continued, "the pursuit of happiness is an invention of the imagination, compounded by the obsessiveness of the mainstream media to distract us all from the fact that we are dying. So I reassemble them, pump them full of equalizing drugs and send them back out again, only to be re-broken and returned until they can't be put back together again."

Derek segued mentally. He pictured Bucky standing at a podium, fists clenched in a combative stance. His hair was longer and unkempt, capped by a beret. His face was framed by a scruffy beard. Derek's coffee burst into flame, Bucky heaved it against the wall and the three of them watched as the diner was engulfed in the inferno. The blaze was their incendiary movement, the single spark that began the spectral fire of their revolution. Before long, their guerilla tactics would topple the fascist regime of the U.S. government. Soon, very soon, the only order the mindless drones of America would know would be theirs alone.

Derek snapped out of it. His Molotov coffee cocktail still sat in front of him, getting cold. He scoffed.

"That's a beautiful philosophy, Buck, really," Lyndon said. "I mean, by that logic I expect to someday be forced to represent you in a malpractice case. I think it's only a matter of time."

"Spare me the bleeding-heart rhetoric, please," Bucky retorted. "It's a corrupt, inherently suicidal system and you know it. One crusading law student isn't going to make any difference."

"This is exactly where you and I differ," Lyndon argued. "You're a nihilist and I'm not. We're entering a period of transition in this world and it's a strange, terrifying thing. We need idealists more than ever. This is a scary time."

Light poured from Lyndon's heart. His tone seemed to change the very essence of the room; all around them there was a mass flight by the patrons of the diner to be the first to gather around him. They raised their children to him to be healed of their sickness, they cried out to him to know the purpose of their mundane existence. Even Bucky and Derek soon took on alternate form, sitting beside Lyndon on either side, breaking the ceremonial bagels of sacrifice. Coffee and juice were poured in reverence as Lyndon, diner messiah, spread forth His Word of Love for all people.

Derek snapped out of it once again. By now, he had at last reached a conclusion.

"This isn't going anywhere."

"What," Bucky asked, "this conversation, or your letter?"

"Both," Derek replied. "Has it ever occurred to you to think for a second about why we are where we are? How we got to this point?"

"What do you mean, man?" Lyndon asked.

"I mean, what is all this? What are we doing here? It's February; shouldn't we be in school?"

"It's an extended leave of absence, man," Lyndon replied. "We're here 'cause it's where we want to be. Where else do we have to go?"

"But why this?" Derek snapped. "We could have just stayed at home and worked, you know. The way any rationally operating person would do."

"The hell with rationale, Derek," Bucky said. "That's your whole problem. You think too much, just live."

"Honestly, pal," Lyndon added, "if you were back home now, you'd be even worse off than you are now. Two blocks down from Diane, out of school, idle, you'd drive yourself right up the wall."

Derek was lost for words. He stared at his reflection in the window, his own shape shifting and metamorphosing against it.

He watched, stunned, as eighteen years melted away from him, his beard stubble and dark circles giving way to the new expressiveness of a child of four. He shrank down in his booth seat, marveling at the lightness of his spirit, Bucky, Lyndon, and all the diner patrons resembling stern, authoritative adults. He was all at once an example of the very mindset he sought to leave behind.

Deep within, he had always suspected he stopped aging emotionally at a certain age, but never as young as this. The world had taken on a shape so alien and complex to him that regression became his only defense. He felt coffee and bagel stain his shirt and cover his face as he was spoon-fed and fussily tended to by Bucky and Lyndon, inept as he was to feed himself.

His dignity had at last been stripped, his humiliation knew no limits. He nearly sobbed in the depravity of it until a light shone through the diner's smoky interior.

It was Diane—tall, statuesque, and regal. She was adorned in the kitschy French maid outfit she had worn the Halloween before they had broken up.

Diane gazed at him with glaring accusation. She approached, her footsteps heavy and ominous. The motion of her swaying hips hypnotically drew him in, but her foreboding rhythm repelled him again.

Her motion slowed to a crawl as she towered over him, an image of matriarchal dominance.

Derek sat in infantile awe as her hands moved up, unbuttoning each segment of her blouse. Diane pulled her shirt open, parting its halves and letting her breasts spill forth, full and engorged. They were more ample than he recalled, eclipsing him from the fluorescent lights above.

Shit, he thought, she better not be pregnant.

His mouth gaped open as Diane raised her hands to each breast, squeezing forth a cavalcade of white and yellow-tinged milk.

Derek was awash in the breast milk tsunami of the only woman he had ever loved. Bucky and Lyndon were swept out of his sight in the Great White Sea of Diane's Whirling Feminine Rage. Derek groped for the last remnant of air above him as the milk ocean rose to the diner ceiling and finally engulfed his infantile form.

"Derek, dude, did you hear me?" Lyndon repeated.

"Check's here, man," said Bucky, "and you've made a mess of yourself."

Derek looked down at the table, his elbows immersed in a lactic cream bath from a spilled carafe.

"So I have," Derek replied, "a rich, creamy mess."

Bucky and Lyndon laughed.

"What are you talking about, man?" Bucky asked.

"I don't know, Buck," Derek answered. "I don't understand my own thoughts half the time. Can't feel my own heart—understand what it's telling me."

There was a moment of baffled silence.

"Are you all right?" Lyndon asked.

"Yes...no."

Derek laughed forcefully, drained his coffee and slammed the mug down with authority, nearly making it shatter.

"I don't know what the fuck I am anymore," he continued.

Bucky and Lyndon glanced at each other, then at Derek, their faces puzzled and concerned.

"Well," Lyndon began, "back on the road, I guess."

"Yeah," Bucky added, "guess so."

They exited the diner and piled into Lyndon's Cavalier. Clouds gathered in the brisk morning air as the three piled in and pulled onto the near-empty stretch of highway before them.

Derek stared for long minutes at the grey expanse above, allowing the car's strained silence to envelop him. He uttered the only two things cluttering his mind aloud.

"Outcasts...exiles."

"Did you say something, Derek?" Lyndon asked.

"Nothing, man," he replied.

"Fuckin' Tuesday mornings," Bucky mumbled.

Derek laughed again before pulling the notebook from his tattered brown knapsack. He started a new page.

Dear Diane,

Greetings from exile...

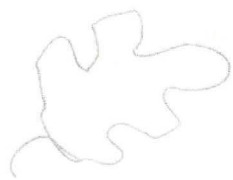


Wanda

My grandma has old hands.
They are not wise hands—
Just old hands.

The hands of a life untested
Sitting on Ellis Island
Afraid to go to Manhattan.

By Lauren Carey



The Silent Conversation By Conrad Miller



Seattle, November 30, 1999

They had come from all over the country, on both sides. To serve and protect. She remembered Susan from Thomas Jefferson High School. Much had changed since then in one sense, but not in the other. Sue had told her to ask her father about Sacco and Vanzetti. Faithlessness is an instinctive value, and so she took her father's words at face value. "What's there to ask about? Those anarchist bastards were guilty as sin. Un-American. Murderers." What else was there to say? If a few radicals want to turn sinners into saints that is their right, but why should we pretend things are different? That was just a phase of hers, call it teenage angst; she was willing to believe anyone who said anything so long as her country agreed. Her father had been a coal miner. What did he know? He didn't serve and protect; he was served and protected.

As the crowds gathered she took in their faces and thought how different they looked. This was not her first protest, but it was her first protest worth mentioning. She had had to keep the peace at the local coal mine once during a strike; the memory seemed so far away though not so long ago. It had been hard for her there because neighbors and former friends had been in the crowd, but she had done her duty. She had served and protected the mines. It would not be so hard now, so far away and among strangers; it is easier when they are different from you.

The officers suited up. You have to be prepared for war in order to keep the peace. Rubber bullets: check. Shield: check. Helmet: check. Baton: check. Gas mask: check. Pressurized four liter mace canister (a veritable fire extinguisher of peace!): check. Fully automatic rifle: check. Tear gas: check. Different places, different customs. Dressed all in black, she felt like a cowboy in a western or an urban soldier, if there is such a thing. "Don't forget to remove any masks or goggles they have before you spray them," her captain reminded them. Silly, she thought, as though they would sit still for us!

Outside, the crowd had already started to gather. People of all kinds walking slowly. Some with masks, some without, some with padded clothes, some carrying banners saying "free the third world," some yelling unintelligible slogans among the crowd. Old people, young people, long hair, short hair, white, other. She joined her line, near the front. This is where the action is, she thought. The people kept coming, as though it would never end. As the hours passed, they did not stop. She began to doubt whether she wanted to be in the front. They could tear this town apart, she thought, with so many people. But she stayed, like her father. To serve and protect.

Things had been violent at the mine. It had been a simple case of the workers versus the Peabody Energy coal company. When the workers stopped working, the company didn't hesitate to hire workers who knew the value of a dollar. What thoughtless people, she'd thought. First they refuse to work, and then they call honest workers terrible names like "scabs!" They blame those who work because they cannot feed their families? Where is the sense in that? The strikers tried to rush the mine when the "scabs" passed through the brand new chain link fences. She had arrested a few of them; it had been a good day, as far as her job was concerned. It was hard for her, though. Sue wouldn't talk to her. What a close-minded person Sue was; how could she not see that the strikers were wrong? How could someone show such disregard for peace and order (and property)? It didn't make much sense to her, how her friend who thought so well could act so poorly.

As the protesters poured into the streets, a group formed in the front, right by her. This is where the action is, she thought, and almost took a step back. They packed in, tighter and tighter until not a hand could pass through this veritable field of flesh and bone and hair. She was ready for a fight, and loaded her rifle with rubber bullets. She was scared of what would happen. She had never seen such a crowd. A few Un-American radicals had grown overnight, it seemed, into a swarming army against all that her father had stood for. Those anarchist bastards linked their arms and stood firm, immovable, a human blockade. Those Un-American probable Murderers chanted peaceful protest, over and over. And, oh my god! she thought, here's Susan! To her right only seven people over, roughly four feet away. Of course it wasn't; Susan was in jail. It was the image of the Susan she remembered, a young girl, perhaps twenty. Catching her gaze, the girl said to the Captain, "United we sit. What do you stand for? You can join us if you want," in her most sarcastic voice. He spat in her face, and continued down the line raising his megaphone to his lips.

He had prepared his speech all day. It was short. It was not particularly grand. He had disposed of the procedural reading of the Riot Act warning them that they were in violation of the law, that they were to disperse immediately, that they could be deemed domestic terrorists, that they could be sentenced to five years in prison should they fail to disperse. His speech was much more succinct, more direct, more honest in a sense. Instead, he quoted the well known Judge Webster Thayer, one he knew they would recognize. "This man, although he may not have actually committed the crime attributed to him, is nevertheless morally culpable, because he is the enemy of our existing institutions." For finesse, the captain felt it would be dramatic to strike at the protesters at the conclusion.

It is a shame she did not recognize the quote, but her mind was elsewhere anyway. He gave the order. The officers proceeded to beat the sitting protesters with their batons, some with gusto. She had to stifle her reaction; it would not look good if the only woman on the force couldn't fulfill her duties. First they would beat them, and then pull back their heads by the hair and spray the mace directly into the protesters' eyes. Not one of them fought back, though not one of them had the strength to remain for long. She was not proud that day. It did not make sense to her that the violent rioters in the back received less individualized attention. She did not know who she was serving or protecting but the brutal men with guns and batons.

The captain mistook her confused expression and joked "Why, to preserve the peace, of course!" What else is there to say? If a few radicals want to turn sinners into saints that is their right, but why should we pretend any different?

By Conrad Miller

Artist

Today I live restrained, refined
By all your standardizations.

Ironic, yes? It is to live.

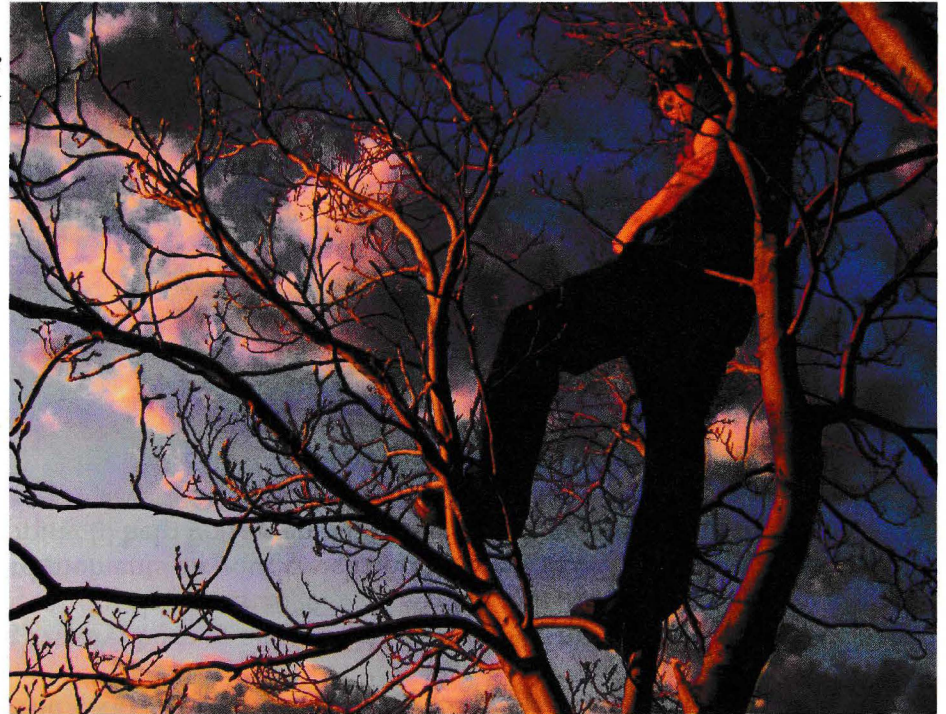
Drained of consideration;
For what is earned just to be spent
To meet your regulations.
This mask I wear was placed by me
With you my inspiration:

A living, breathing masterpiece.

How like you our creation?

By Virginia Hults

In Tune By Jim Feeney



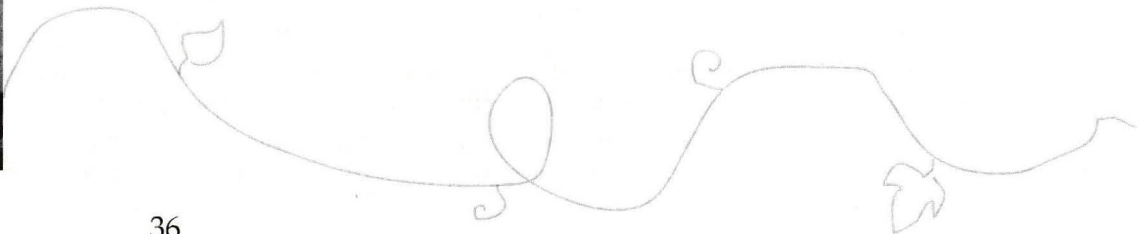
Lord of the Flame
By David Carey



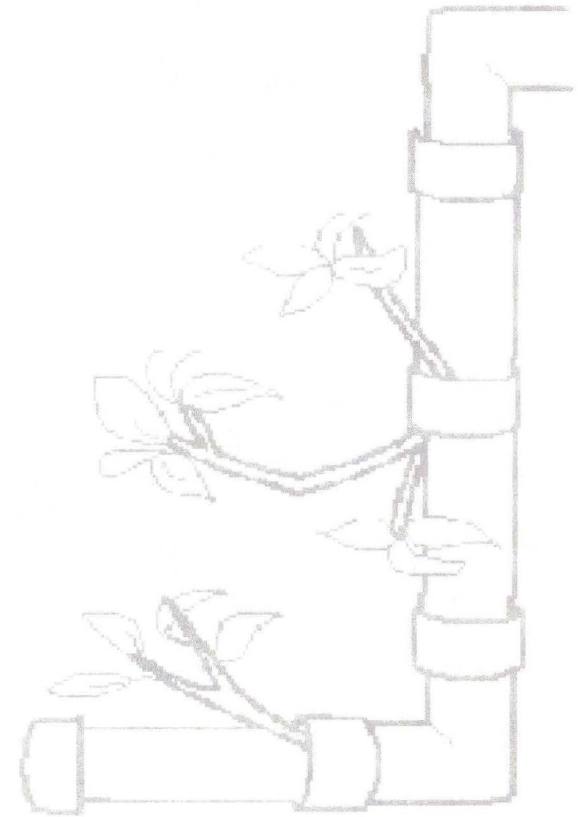
A Page From Sue Grafton (A Life in Progress)

A is for wishing I hadn't been so squeaky clean when we met.
B is for showing me it's okay to change.
C is for awkward moments on your couch and the best mix CD I ever received.
D is for not stopping to help you, even if you were choking on glass.
E is for being serious about breaking your fucking nose if I ever see you again.
F is for
G is for
H is for
I is for
J is for
K is for street corner séances, crushes, and everything in common.
L is for wet Legos and kicking you out of my car, and life, in the CVS parking lot.
M is for me not being ready, or you not being ready, or maybe neither of us were.
N is for
O is for
P is for two wasted years, tears as weapons, and the first notch on my bed post.
Q is for
R is for giving up on life in 4th grade.
S is for the interminable gap between us and happiness.
T is for kissing in the rain and being a Band-Aid when I needed stitches.
U is for
V is for being too pretty for him and too attached for me.
W is for cosmic alignment, coincidental timing, and friendship.
X is for
Y is for
Z is for

By Jason Sutton



Valley of the Gorn
By David Carey



Letter Never Sent VI: For Devon

They gave you just enough rope to hang
yourself with,
But they called it freedom instead of the
noose.

And now your feet have stopped kicking,
And I can't give you CPR over the stupid
telephone.

By Jason Sutton



The Princess and the Pauper
by Marissa Phillips

Pass the Buck

What if my What ifs
should hinder my shoulds
concede neither side
but then which side should?
Daughter or Mother
Which one has more right?
I cannot decide
between choices and life.
And I cannot say
Just what you should do
You don't order me
I will not judge you.

By Conrad Miller



Asylum

They never told me adjusting would be this difficult. They never really told me anything. I was snatched right out of my world and shoved into their own little society, where they thought I belonged. It doesn't sound right coming out of my mouth. I and Belonged; never thought I'd put those two words together in one sentence after that day, let alone right next to each other. Anyway, we're not talking about my feelings here.

Do I miss it? Sometimes. All the time. I miss my family and friends. I miss the house we all lived in, the dreams and ambitions that were shared by each and every one of us. The good life. Yeah, I miss a lot of things. But so does everyone. I'm not sure if I still make memories like those, memories that I miss after they're gone. These minutes that are passing while I sit here and waste time telling you a story you really don't want to hear—well, I don't miss them much. How could I? They're not real. Well, they're real but they're not really real.

"When did you first start seeing them?" they ask. "And when was the last time?" I can't really answer the first question. I say, why don't you tell me the same thing: When did you see your first person? I receive a blank stare every time followed by some scribbling on a notepad. In the cradle, I guess. Right? Coming out of the womb, maybe? But I can answer the second, if you really want to know. It was just a normal day. Just plain and average and free and limitless. A typical day. I was with Keri-Anne, Michael, and Amelia. The others stayed at home. I can't imagine why, though. It was such a beautiful day! So beautiful, it wouldn't be complete without going to the park. And to the nearest park we went. We swung and slid and laughed and scraped our dirty knees against the concrete. Freedom at its finest.

We were young. Nothing to lose or gain and time couldn't possibly have been spent any better. So have you got it? You got a picture of my last time? My last precious dose. Okay, now picture this. Someone grabs me by the arms. "It's alright," they say. "We're not going to hurt you." I look around and see about five of them, all wearing white. All wearing the same face. "Just come with us and everything will be fine," they tell me. I look at Keri-Anne. She's stopped laughing. Amelia and Michael—they stare at me with those terrified eyes we always prepared ourselves for. It was finally coming true. Our biggest nightmare.

I'll be back, I told them. We were prepared. We knew this day would come. Everything will go just as planned, I said. We had no idea which one of us would be taken, but we knew it was inevitable. Here I am. You're looking at the patron saint, the chosen one. It's a burden but, hey, I take everything as it comes.

So they sat me down. You know the routine. "What are your feelings about this?" they asked. "How does this make you feel? What we're telling you right now—how do you feel about it?" Feelings, feelings, fucking feelings! I told them. Like you give a flying fuck how I feel? They don't take to that very well. They shake their heads and write some more notes on their notepads. If you cared about my feelings, you wouldn't have brought me here, I say. "That's exactly why we did bring you here, dear," they reply.

But back to them. Back to my family and friends. That was the last time I saw them saw them. But if you want to know when I last saw their faces, well, I see Amelia every once in a while. She always manages to get in somehow. She slips passed everyone, unnoticed. One minute I see her and the next she's gone. I always figure they've spotted her and she's run to hide somewhere or she's sneaking around, throwing a spanner in the works, like always. Or sometimes I think they've grabbed her and thrown her in some other room somewhere. I can remember the first time I suspected this. Where the fuck is she? I yelled. You've got me. Now what the hell do you need her for? Everyone in sight got to know the angry me. Of course it didn't last too long. They restrained me and locked the door to my room. I think two days passed before it was opened again. But anyway, my assumption was wrong. My screams didn't stop after the door closed and I

heard the clasp of the lock. They stopped when I saw Amelia's face peeking through the skinny little window at the top of my door. She smiled with her eyes and I knew everything was okay. I knew they hadn't gotten her yet.

I don't exactly understand why they hate my family so. Maybe they know something I don't, but I doubt it. It must be the change that they fear. We were revolutionary and they can't deal with that. "Once you don't see them anymore, you'll be cured," they say. Cured. Cured of what? Cured of my freedom, my passions, my hopes, my desires? Cured from everything that makes me human? Whatever. Shove it up your ass, I tell them.

Once, it was my turn to lead as we took our weekly walk. I led us all the way back to the house, our house. It wasn't the same at all. The doors and windows were boarded. The plants had all died. The neighbors had moved out as well. No life could be seen at all. It was a horrible sight, you can imagine. Fear took over my body, stemmed from my throat to my fingers and toes. I trembled. It can't be, I thought. They can't beat us. Just then I saw the curtain in the only remaining window move. I saw a face staring back at the crowd of us. It was Michael, for sure. I know his face better than any other. In a few seconds, he moved away from the window. The fear left my body and was replaced with joy. Trust me when I tell you, I didn't want to leave.

Okay, I guess we are talking about my feelings. As for the nurse that accompanied us on the walk, she was fired. And I'm not allowed to join the others for the weekly walks anymore. Ah, what does it matter? All I need are these little glimpses of hope from time to time, just a hint that life still exists outside this institution. Who knows, maybe I'll be back some day. Maybe I can let go of my dignity just once and tell them my friends and family have been a figment of my imagination. Tell them I no longer see their faces lurking around from time to time. A little lie can't hurt. No matter what I say, I know they'll be waiting for me when I return.

By Jami Butczynski

Salvation
By Franciso Velez



New Jersey or America

Where is the Stoic luster
of Old American Campbell's soup?
Tell me?

Who fishes Negroes from Camden streets?
Tell Me?!

Who takes the money
but cuts the heat?

TELL ME?!!

Preach the Messages;
no cops on the beat!

As I gather my inebriation,
Bus stops, last time
I am privileged, I am perfect,
I Fucking Hate Being White!

Show me A White Man;
I'll tell you his burden.

By Gus Beil

The Fall of Man By Conrad Miller



A Lighter Out of Fuel

She stood in front of him with tears running down the crevices of her cheeks. They splashed out of the corner of her brown eyes and traced a destination mark down her face before dripping off of her chin.

"I guess this is goodbye."

Jason was consciously aware of the distance between him and Susan. Two arms' lengths at least. Close enough not to seem too standoffish, but far enough not to be taken by surprise by a lunging hug. He dug his hands deep into his jean pockets and looked at his sneakers. After a few more seconds, he spoke.

"Do you at least see where I'm coming from?" He felt the hotness in his cheeks and the pressure behind his eyes, but kept a stoic exterior.

"It's my fault. I should have told you sooner." Susan wiped a tear with the back of her hand and took a deep, close-eyed breath. A sharp intake of air came through her nose. When she opened her eyes again, they were imploring. "Do you feel like I betrayed you?" "No, I'm not mad or anything like that. I'm just disappointed." Autumn leaves rustled as a cool breeze blew across Jason's face. He drank in the scent of apples, and crisp air, and fallen leaves. A red leaf caught his eye, and he followed it for a few moments before looking back at Susan. She was wearing a scarf, maroon and yellow striped, wrapped around her neck so loosely. The scarf was just one of the thousand things that he had liked so much about her. A cricket chirped in the distance.

"I like you so much. You have no idea." She toed the dirt at the edge of the driveway. "My crush on the card shop boy is never going to amount to anything." She sighed and let out a single syllable self-deprecating laugh. "I did enough damage, don't you think?"

"I don't hold it against you." Jason swallowed a grapefruit, feeling it slowly and painfully descend from the top of this throat and melt into the hollow of his chest. With an effort, he changed his frown for a crooked smile. Susan saw through the poor transition.

"How do you feel?"

He took his hand from his pocket and wiped his mouth with the backside before answering.

"Sort of like after you get done watching an amazing movie, and the credits are rolling, and you take that deep breath and try not to forget any details while you head for the exit."

Silence fell like a blanket of crisp white snow across a field. The fence posts had a lopsided triangle of snow a half foot deep on top. Little icicles hung from the barbed wire. A cardinal, caught by surprise, blazed a red streak across the window, blurred against the foggy pane. Mouths hungry with thirst stared into the hot chocolate that was too hot to taste yet. Eyes, saturated with unfallen tears, met. She scrunched her nose, and then broke the silence.

"Can I ask you one thing before we part our separate ways?"

"Anything."

"Do you honestly share anything of the feelings I have for you?"

The answer came easy. "Every last one of them."

"Maybe some day we'll meet again and laugh about this."

"Maybe."

Susan said nothing for a few moments. A dramatic pause. Then she cracked a smile, her tears glimmering on her lip like fresh dew on a spring morning. Warm rays of sun shone from her sparkling eyes.

"Will you wait for me?" She smiled after saying this. Her voice was as fresh as the call of the season's first oriole. Brown feathered body, orange feathered stomach. Her rosy lips parted a little, showing a row of white tulip petals behind.

Jason felt the icy grip of the moment thaw into warmth, and smiled too. "We were made for a John Cusack movie."

"Years from now we'll end up together." Susan stifled a laugh and covered her mouth with her hand, her nails, close cut and unpainted, catching Jason's eye. Her plain nails always caught his eye. "Oh gosh, listen to me."

Jason took a step forward and flung his thumb over his shoulder. "I think I'm going to get going, but before I do, I just wanted to thank you for everything. For the butterflies, and flushed cheeks. The Bob Dylan Christmas card, the smiles, and the mix CDs. But especially for the butterflies.

"Good luck with everything." Surprised by the insincerity, Jason lowered his voice into a gentle whisper. "Is that really the period you want to put on the end of this?"

"No, it's not, I want to say so much more. I want to tell you how hurt I am inside. How naive I am. How I'll miss your laugh and the way I always thought about some lame joke you made and how it still made me smile. About how a silly summer concert started all of this two years ago. And especially how I'll miss never being able to take pictures together, or going mini golfing together, or picnics together. Or just being together." She looked at her shoes, took a deep breath and looked solidly at him. Things unsaid shimmered beneath her surface, rippling behind her gaze like bubbles in a summer pond. Jason floated in her eyes, sitting in a boat and enjoying the sun, not even paying attention to his neon bobber. Just sitting completely at ease, the hot summer rays glancing off of his chest and warming him. Just feeling the ripple of the waves beneath him and never wanting to go home. Barely feeling the tension of the line.

He shyly stuffed his hands into his pockets again and pulled his arms tight against the sides of his body. Part of him wanted to get lost in her arms, lost in her gravitational pull. But if he had to move on with his life, move on without her, he might as well start right then.

"Good bye, Susie."

"Don't forget about me."

Jason took one last look at Susan. At her eyes, at her face, at the way the fringe of her hair fell just short of her eyelids. At the way she stood so bravely, hardly trembling at all, even though tears cascaded brilliantly down her face.

He drew air deep into his parched mouth and turned. His shaking hands were still deep in his pockets when his frame broke, and he slumped away, concave back, shuffling feet, glistening cheeks, into the deep golden bronze of the failing sun.

By Jason Sutton

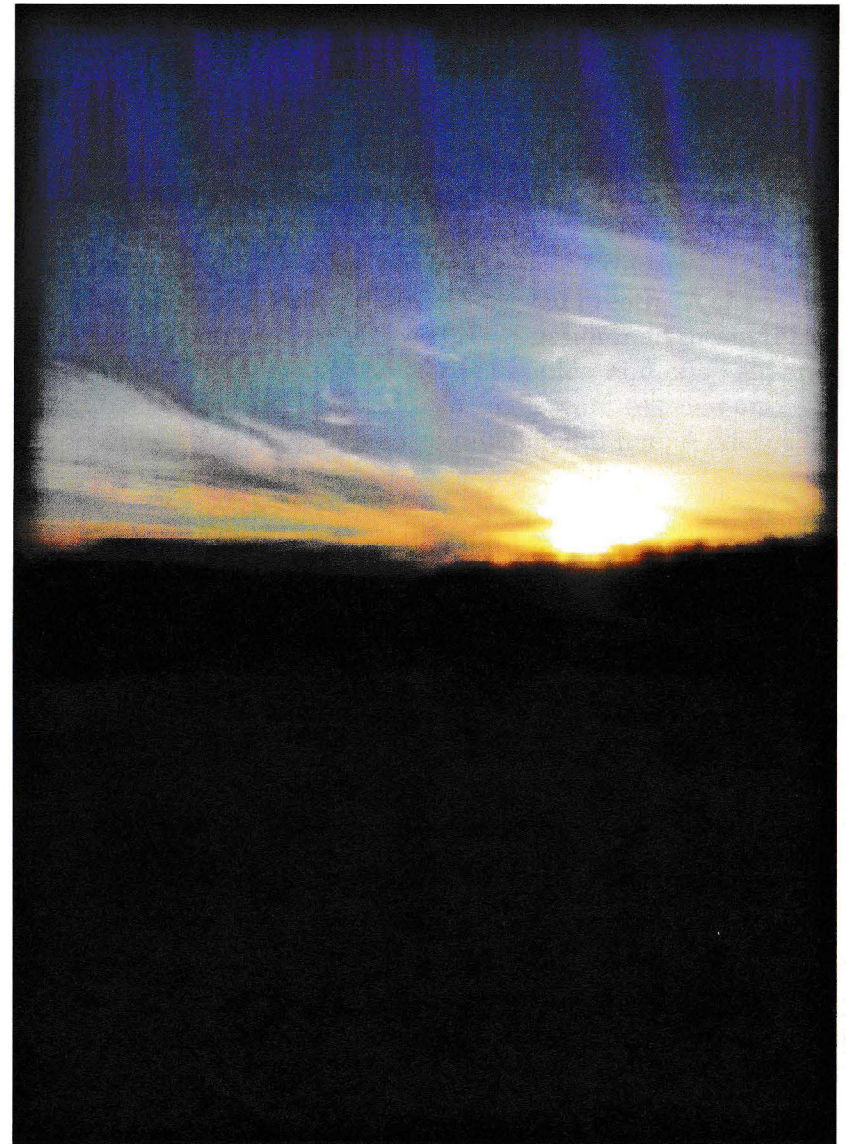


The Little Things That Remind You Why You're Still Alive
By Raychil Arndt

Ignite

I am lighter fluid.
I provide the fuel and
await the spark which will
i g n i t e
[understanding, compre-
hension, realization]
The flame is eternal;
I ensure it remains
and help the fire glow.
k n o w l e d g e
[compassion, patience, and
unconditional love]
As fuel must be present
for fire to survive,
I help keep minds alive
b e c a u s e
it only takes one spark.

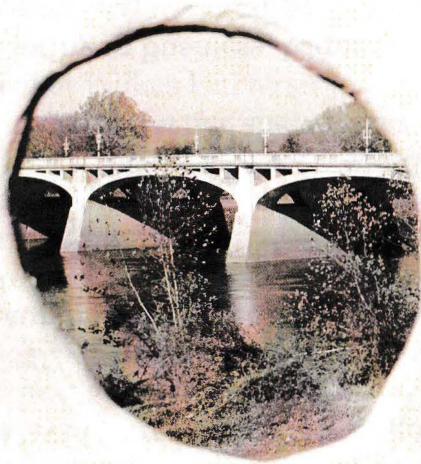
By Amanda Flynn



Sunset in Clarks Summit
By Stefanie McHugh



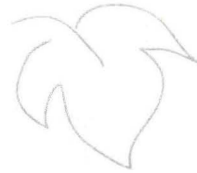
Ignorance
By Francisco Velez



Empty Glass

"I'm an empty glass," you say,
And hope that I will fill you.
Not because you want me there,
But to keep the others out.

By Jason Sutton



BIOGRAPHIES

Raychil Arndt is sick of school. She thinks that 17 years is a little too much. She finds solace in the fact that this will all come to an end soon, and she will be on her way to helping people in Africa and Reading find the services they need to survive.

ami Butczynski is a student at Wilkes University.

Then God said, "Let there be **David Carey!**" And it was good.

"The ultimate blockbuster of 2007...**Lauren Carey** is truly inspiring." –*The New York Times*

"Provocative...Compelling. Lauren Carey should not be missed." –*Rolling Stone*

"Lauren Carey, an emotional tour de force." –James Lipton

"A must see! Lauren Carey does not disappoint." –*Entertainment Weekly*

Shannon Curtin loathes Ugg boots, the color orange, standardized tests, and misogyny. She'll be in school until she's thirty, and when she plays doctor she plays to win. Once in a while she writes a good poem.

avana Daher is a freshman majoring in Business Administration. She is originally from New York, New York, but now lives in East Stroudsburg.

Zack Depew is a sophomore majoring in Accounting. He hails from the small town of Palmyra, New Jersey. He enjoys playing guitar, and when he is really bored, he draws. When he is not playing guitar or anything else constructive, he just likes to relax. If you want to see more of his artwork, wait for future issues of *Manuscript*.

Although **Jim Feeney** is known to withdraw into non-existence from time to time, he will always return, whether it be his current form, or a form found anew. He also knows the red sox suck. (Please do not capitalize red sox, they're not worthy of such a gesture.)

All **Amanda Flynn** really wants to do is fly airplanes. Being an English major with intent to teach is a good hobby, though.

Sarah Hartman is a sophomore at Wilkes University. Her influences include her unsatisfied lust for David Bowie and the entire seventies/eighties era. Sarah enjoys sketching and other artistic mediums, but abhors Pina Coladas and getting caught in the rain.

Virginia Hults lives permanently inside the fantasy world in which she writes and reads, while maintaining a clever, hard-working English major façade. After much consideration, she has come to the conclusion that this is the state of all writers, and this is what keeps them sane, or perhaps insane, when they are forced to be among all the other less-elevated minds of society. One day, she may resurface and join in the so-called “normalcy,” but for now, she is perfectly content among the characters of her own imagination.

Born on September 10, 1989, **Justin Jones** was destined to be a writer. He went through his school career in a flash, graduating from West Scranton High School in 2007. He was a member of the Creative Writing and Journalism clubs. He now is attending Wilkes University as an English major.

Amy Kaspriskie chooses to interpret “bio” scientifically because she admits that poetry is a part of her genetic makeup.

Aleksander Lapinski is a senior Mechanical Engineering major who occasionally happens to take a decent-looking picture when the opportunity is right.

Stefanie McHugh is an NEPA native who dreams of New Zealand, but lusts for Ireland. She works at a bakery because writing stories about her horny cat and drawing cartoons doesn't pay the bills. Banjos make her heart sing and she chews too much Bubblicious Watermelon Wave. She's accepted her nerd-dom, and you should too.

Conrad Miller is a student at Wilkes University

Kacy Muir remembers a snowy Christmas Eve from her childhood, laughing underneath pine as the crisp echo of a Beatles record was playing in the background: “There's nothing you can do that can't be done/Nothing you can sing that can't be sung/It's easy/All you need is love.” She looks back to those days and hopes that everyone will hear those words someday.

Corey Pajka is a 2005 graduate of Wilkes University. He currently lives in New York City pursuing a career in the arts. He is also co-founder of the New York-based theatre company Genius Savant Productions. Their premiere production, *Tracks*, of which Corey is a co-author, is set to debut next year Off-Off Broadway. He thanks you for reading. “You're a genius all the time.” –Jack Kerouac

Contrary to popular belief, **Marissa Phillips** has stepped down from her roll as the apparent “queen of the scum punks.” The title and crown are now held by a newly-inducted Miss Kate Baas.

uren Salem is tired of having holey socks that get lost in the washer and dryer, so now she just wears red sandals all the time. She is so a freshman majoring in Journalism.

son Sutton—the mysterious enigma. We pick up where we left off: after a year of self-exploration and bad decisions, our hero sees laughter in every hue and hears smiles in every octave. He flexes his biceps, puts pen to paper, and writes, "I'm just your average guy."

ngelina Teutonico hails from Brooklyn and has the bagel snobbery to prove it.

rancisco Velez is a free-spirited junior Biology major with a minor in Physics. He is from upstate New York. He looks forward to eventually joining the Peace Corps, and then hopefully getting his PhD in the Structural Biochemistry field.

