



BAYOU REVIEW

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language
us/them
colonialization/slavery
flow

(patience)

just black people
continental african
semantics
love

In remembrance of Olaniyi Labinjo, I was speechless when I heard, but I will forever speak of the weight of our last conversation.

Many thanks to the Source and UH Printing for supplying me with my backbone.

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KILLING THE MOMENT

He pushes me towards him and grasps me so close. He wants us to become one. I feel his bare chest so warm. His heart is pounding fast against me. We breathe heavily. Every breath is our last. He kisses me. Drops of hot sweat slide down my cheeks to my neck. Kiss after kiss makes our anticipation greater. Hard knocking interrupts the moment. I run to the door. Through the peephole I see a guy in a Pizza Hut uniform with a pizza bag. I turn and ask, "Did you order pizza?" he gives me a wry smile and says, "I thought we might get hungry."

4 PECKS

Austin Senators, sighted, out on the town
—they point each other out

Over their heads, a sycamore provides rest.

1 A Rest in Fall

Attire is casual. They crowd the entrance.
Branches heavy with wingshadows hovering
down, the free saturated, the rows filled, the
gathering thickens at dusk.
When the foyer lights dim, the overture thaws
close.

The din salutes all they know, rising from—
at once audience and performance, they know no difference
—a throng celebrating itself and
The proper labor of bidding "goodnight."
Goodnight.

2 Tricks of the Eye, of the Trade

The next afternoon, I took my break on a bench.

I thought I glimpsed a silver eagle
on the green. In a squint, I saw twisted tin foil.
And I saw a crumpled page spread leafy wings and fly away.
I knew then, I must be Dreaming.
A plastic bag rode gusts like tradewinds until caught
by a branch—now for hours a white flag
Waving.

Tricks.

3 Waiting v. Weighting

Loner flits thru his own
secretarial needs,
opens his own mail even in these times
to a single phrase: "careful, else you plummet

like a well stone"

—no signature.

Impacted bird cannot sing an
inappropriate
song, and, if he could,
it would be "corrected".

4 Ultimate Censorship

Dirty bird entrenched on the roadside,
hungry for it all—
calling,
getting nothing, then falling flat
—cannot pursue what was said.

Dirty bird infixed on the roadside
hungers for nothing at all,
dead,
immune to your PR campaign
—could care less about
what you said.

A WESTERNER'S CHECKLIST

Ying and Yang bored both
Nike and Ford, major and minor chord;
His are born a desperate peasant, yet a restless lord.

With what medicine do you treat his mood?
Short stories, sensual touching, Chinese food?
He's glued to his confusion, he
 —misunderstands East,
—misunderstands Maker,
—misunderstands Self
—Calls all 3 'Hell.'

If he'd trust the virtue of strawberry patches
He'd hike their paths around the ditch.
But he's distracted:
His fully-automatic scratch harvests rashes,
While he wonders what would stay the itch.

With what brew will you soothe this baby?
Messages, massages, MSG?
He's glued to his exclusion, he
 —misunderstands East,
—misunderstands Maker,
 —misunderstands Self,
—Calls to all 3, 'Help.'

OUT OF FOCUS

Earl put the gun down and picked up the binoculars. He held them to his eyes and fumbled briefly until he was able to focus on the birdfeeder. At least those damn squirrels scattered quick enough, he thought. God knows I've spent a fortune of my hard-earned money feeding them. His wife, Barbara, made him fill the feeder with sunflower seeds every day, even though he kept telling her that the squirrels ate more than the birds. She was the one who liked watching the birds; she raved about the cardinals and chickadees, but all he ever saw was sparrows.

Barbara had ordered the binoculars from Home Shopping Network last year. Earl thought they cost too much, but she bellyached about his stinginess until he finally gave up. More than once she'd accused him of ruining her life: "You promised me kids and a nice house and a new car – and here we are, twenty years later and we still live in a double-wide trailer just waiting for a tornado to blow us away – and no neighbors for five miles."

He twisted around in the chair to examine the trailer. It was showing a good deal of wear and tear. With the binoculars he could see a wasp's nest up under an eave. He needed to get that down before he got stung. It wasn't such a bad place to live; at least there were some nice trees around for shade. She'd liked it well enough when they got married, but over the years, she'd wanted more and more – and he couldn't seem to give her any of it.

Earl aimed the binoculars back to the birdfeeder. He wished some birds would show up so he could see them up close. This morning's fight was still on his mind. Barbara had told him she deserved more out of life, and she was going to find somebody better looking with plenty of money. She said she'd had enough of living with him and scrimping just to pay the bills. He hadn't known what to say to her.

Suddenly, he saw a flash of red. A cardinal landed on the feeder and began to peck at the seeds. So that's what she was always excited about, he thought. It looks as though that bird is right in front of you. He panned the binoculars over the scene and admired the color and motion of the delicate creature.

Then he said out loud, "I could sit here and watch this all day."

He slowly lowered his vision to the body lying under the birdfeeder and centered the binoculars on the bullet hole in the side of Barbara's head. Blood red, he thought, just like that cardinal.

BLACKTOP

Today's morning already felt odd and creepy like one of those old Wild West movies. The morning fog still covered the yellow-brownish grass making the scene come alive. The blacktop usually full of loud crying of kindergartners not wanting to leave their parent's hand was quiet. As if everybody's mouth has been stitched shut. The silence began to take an effect on me making me feel distant from my body and afloat. The solace scene shattered in a wink of an eye. The cafeteria doors behind me burst open and the silence was interrupted by three thundering gunshots. The once quiet blacktop became a frenzied stampede of kids trying to get away from this man covered in all black. I began to make my way through the crowd in chaos. Pushing my way through and staying low. My strategy was useless when the shadow in the corner of my eye began to take aim. Each bullet finding its innocent victim causing them to collapse to the ground like wild beasts. Bodies dropping on the grass and being left behind to their own will. Finally reaching the gate that separated life and death, I began to scale the obstacle in front of me. Reaching the top, I looked back to see what danger was left. The once crazed man prostrate on the blacktop, his life slowly drifting and pouring out onto the cracks and crevices of the black cement. I remained stoic to the scene I witnessed, not knowing how to feel or react. I continued to observe the mayhem quiet down and finally tranquility found me one step away from freedom. Nobody knew why we had a crazed man shooting at us. I knew the blacktop was at peace again.

JESSE BAUTISTA

LITTLE SISTER

No one knew how it was in our house. How we shared with the underground people our meager war rations: meal cakes, thin gray gruel, anemic white liquid disguised as milk. How our gums bled from lack of citrus. No fruits available since the Nazis confiscated most food for their armies.

My father's eyes cautioned silence like he never had before, and my mother supported him without a dissenting word. They forbade me to talk to neighborhood children; even at school, I kept my mouth shut unless I had to speak to avoid suspicion. There were no more friendly after-dinner debates between my parents. All pleasant discourse ceased, but I knew they still loved each other by the way they kissed—as if each sparkling moment might be their very last.

I missed the soothing chime in my mother's voice. Now she awakened me in hushed tones before she filled a tiny basket with crusts of bread, before she pressed her finger to her lips, before she rolled back the brightly woven rug and lifted the well-oiled cellar door to enter darkness. She always turned wistfully toward me as she descended the stone steps.

A dank fusty odor filling my nostrils, I sneaked to the edge and peeked down at a single yellow bulb strung from the rafters, casting shadows on four gaunt faces smiling in gratitude, so heartfelt my young soul was swept away each time I saw them. As always, I searched for the little girl, exquisitely beautiful, only four years old, my mother said.

Each day, this child waved at me, puckered her lips to form audible sounds before her father's hand gently covered her mouth. The underground mother, a ravaged beauty, and her son shamefully passed their chamber pot to my mother. Sometimes they touched my mother's hand as if she were a saint.

I cleaned my meager toy box, sent down coloring books, pencils and my favorite puzzle. In turn, the tiny girl reached into her pocket and handed me a spinning top called a dreidel. I twirled it on the floor until my own father snatched it from me.

There must be no evidence, he warned, but my bruised feelings wouldn't allow me to show that I understood.

One evening, my father, a pharmacist, returned home with four white pills. Mother slipped them into her pocket. He told her the Americans were coming, and the Germans would protect their own. They would evacuate and safeguard our village because all of us knew about the ammunitions plant and the prison camp nearby. He said our friends would have no chance if they came out of hiding. The whole idea stung me deeply. I found it difficult to breath, pining for the underground people whose names I didn't know.

My father was right. Next morning the sky filled with black specks growing larger at an alarming rate as they approached the ground—bombs exploding so loud my head throbbed, in the road soldiers yelling through bullhorns demanding we leave immediately.

"Give them the pills while I finish packing," my father whispered to my mother.

Through her sobs I saw more than grief for the loss of our homestead. As my mother reached the bottom of the stairs for her last visit, a uniformed man hammered on our door so hard it shook. "Open now!" came the ominous voice. Frantic, my father closed the cellar, hiding my mother with the others, and we hurriedly straightened the rug before he took a breath and opened the door.

A Nazi shoved the butt of his gun into my father's gut for not having answered promptly. "Anyone else here?" he asked, stepping into the room.

Only my daughter." My father gestured toward me. "My wife, she ... stepped out. She'll be back shortly."

"Too bad for her," the Nazi said inspecting our belongings already packed; he ushered us into the street where neighbors huddled in the vacant shadows of smokestacks from the ammunition factory.

Eyes misting, my mind raced to my mother and I kept looking at our house, but the desperate cautionary glances my father shot at me said it all.

Trucks overflowing with families ground past us in a slow line. I wished for more bombs to halt this exodus, keep my father and me from being compelled to board the camouflaged truck now at the end of our block, stopping at each house. I counted the people waiting; there would be room for us on this truck. I merged with my father's panic. We couldn't return to the house for my mother without the soldiers seeing, suspecting, knowing.

In the bitter cold, I climbed up into the truck and stood straight as if I were brave, but I bit my lower lip so hard it bled. My father's eyes cast about aimlessly—now far away, now near. His face, in shock as if he were dead or had seen the walking dead.

I could make out our house from a space in the slatted boards along the truck's side panel, the door opening and my mother carrying a small frail child bundled in my old coat, a flowered scarf knotted around her chin covering her dark hair, and the same gleaming eyes that stared up at me from the cellar.

"Papa," I whispered. "Look!" That was all I could say. "Look."

My father was agitated, inconsolable, but finally he gave into my furious tug on the frayed hem of his coat. His shoulders relaxed; he took a breath as if it were his first inhalation of free air.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

He closed his eyes and gripped my hand. I bowed my head, feeling a tight fist closing around my heart. I had never been so sad.

Our truck lurched forward as my mother and the little girl were loaded onto the next truck. Their images slowly became as small as my thumb, then mere specks before they passed completely out of site.

I sank down on my haunches, losing myself in the motor's predictable hum, dreaming of the time very soon when we would halt, when I would run from this truck to Mama, when I would embrace the dark bird of a child safe in my mother's arms and lovingly call her Sister.

PICK A WINNER

Tuesday, 7pm

"We've got a butt picker, a flower picker and a nose picker," Phil said.

"I give you the Mighty Robins, most uncoordinated, non-athletic kids in the league," Greg replied. The Robin Runts, he thought, but didn't say it out loud.

The two coaches conferred in hushed tones as they trailed their ragtag team from the field after their fourth practice. The first game loomed heavy on their minds.

Saturday was doomsday.

Refreshing spring air and a dusk rose sunset would ordinarily boost their spirits, but not today. Rival coach, Lyle Claymore, lumbered toward them at an unusual speed for his slovenly girth. Phil and Greg wished he'd evaporate, but of course he didn't.

"I watched your team try to hit. Are you sure they know what a baseball is?" Lyle snickered and kept going. "See you at Saturday's slaughter."

"These kids deserve a chance, Lyle. We may be down, but we're not out," Phil called, then glanced at Greg.

They both knew they couldn't be anymore down. Their players included an angry boy with ADD, a hypochondriac with a malady de jour, a pimple popper who harbored a phobia about catching baseballs, several batters who jumped away from the plate when the ball was thrown, and a compulsive shirt-chewer who also gnawed his glove. And then there were the parents. "How 'bout that father?" Greg grumbled. "The nerve, saying I terrified his child when I threw a ball at him. We were playing catch."

"And Rescue Mom with her first aid kit and ice bags. If she interrupts practice for another false alarm, I'm gonna deck her."

The coaches waved goodbye as the Mighty Robins, exhausted from drills and running, hobbled away. "Thursday, five o'clock sharp," Greg reminded them.

"Other teams only practice once a week," the hypochondriac whined.

"No excuses. Be here," Phil said.

"Our only hopes are Harry and Dean," Greg said after the last Robin had been driven away. "I'll put Harry on the mound and Dean at first. With any luck, Harry'll stop some balls and throw to Dean for an out."

"No chance of a double play. Sam, the butt picker, is on second. He won't be able to get his hand from behind his back in time."

"I've slated Vince for shortstop. At least he can catch."

"Just keep him away from the bluebonnets. He'll pick a bouquet and wander off," Phil said.

Greg gazed across the street at a church steeple. "We're gonna need divine intervention."

Thursday 5:45pm

As he batted, Vince smashed Coach Phil's nose while he squatted to show the boy how to swing. Phil was hauled away in an ambulance under the care of Rescue Mom, but Greg doggedly continued the practice.

"Catch this for Coach Phil," he said. He hit a drive to second.

"Run fast for Phil," Greg urged as kids swung at the ball from the pitching machine.

Despair wasn't a word in Greg's vocabulary. The grueling practice ran late that night as he ran the Robins through drill after drill.

Saturday Noon

Completely miserable, ice bag on his nose and two black eyes, Phil lay on the couch when the phone clanged in his ear. Fearing the worst, he answered, hoping it wasn't Lyle.

"Seventeen to two," Greg said. "The ump adhered to the six runs per inning rule. That's the only reason the score wasn't higher. We had a slew of embarrassed parents."

"An absolute slaughter. How'd the boys take it?"

"Pretty well." Greg's voice sounded far away. "They kept running, catching flies, even a couple double plays. A well oiled machine."

"Any injuries?"

"Only pride," Greg said. "The boys and their parents are taking me for a pizza lunch."

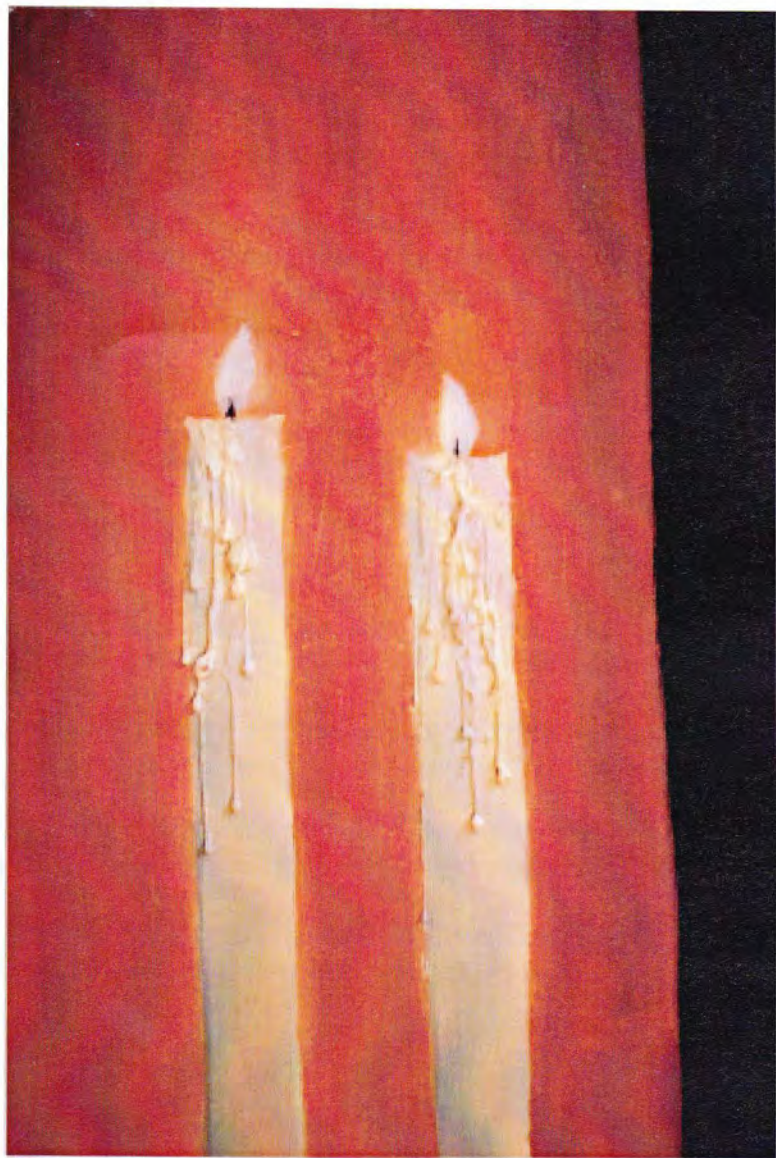
"Good move. Console the miserable." Phil's head throbbed. "I'm keeping the phone off the hook, so I won't hear from Lyle."

Greg cleared his throat and chuckled. "I don't think he'll be calling. This was his team's first defeat in three seasons."

"Son of a gun!" Phil flew off the couch. "Where's that pizza parlor? After I congratulate the kids, I'm going to punch you out for leading me on."

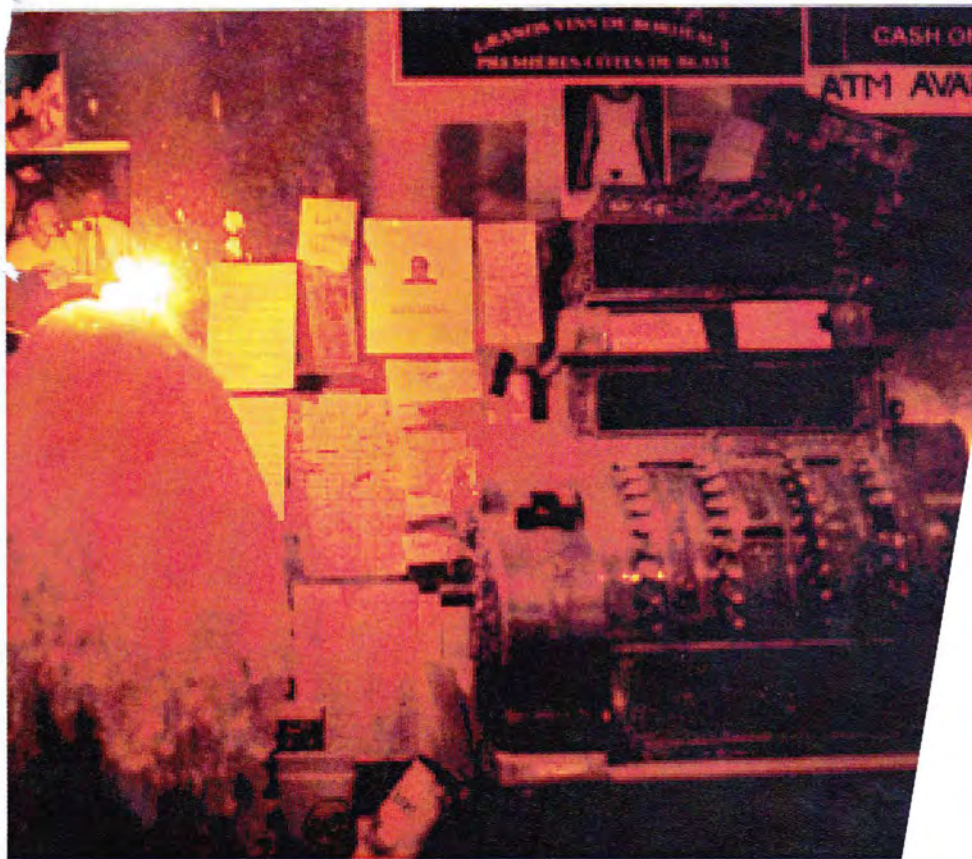
"I wouldn't try it, man. I have the Mighty Robins on my side."

LIGHT IMITATES ART



EMILY BROWN

WHILE WAITING FOR A DRINK



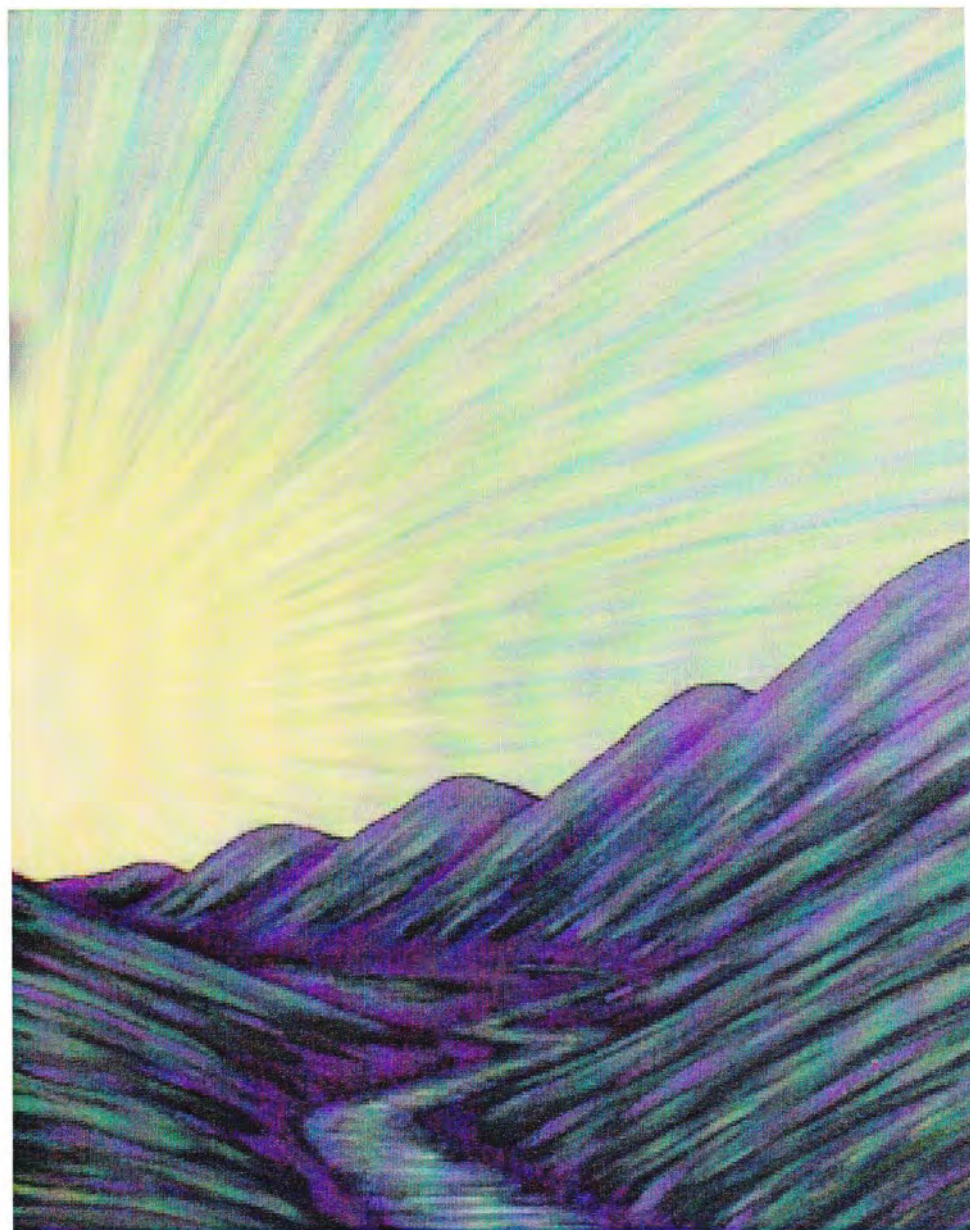
EMILY BROWN

SOCIOLOGY 255

This is what you tell your seeds when they ask where babies come from, from the suppressive nature, in a government refund. For them, he who laughs last rules the globe, and "Homeland Security" equals population control. I'm a songwriter, strong fighter, long wick, and a long lighter, who's tighter? I'm sick, of reverse-racism, mate hate-schism, and sisters who make blatant fake face incisions. When I'm gone just revamp this, and I can't move form the mind cause still owe rent to my hippocampus. I spit, at all times, and all rhymes, take shape; of all lives, check my blood stream, it pumps nothing but all drive, this is what it sounds like when I get in'em raw hide...

NATO CALIPH

LEMON'S SUNRISE



STEPHANIE CHADWICK

LUNA



STEPHANIE CHADWICK

MY FATHER OILED THE ROAD

So the dust wouldn't fly.
The greasy dirt would settle
into its own self, not in the salad,
the hot dogs my mother
set outside for us in summer

He oiled the road, mornings
before the dust slipped its skin
over the shingles, the parched and peeling sills
of a house I must have loved for the way a kid
could tear into it, not mess
much of anything up. I can't remember

how he did it
if there was a hitch he put on the car
a long pipe with holes, a shutoff valve
or gallon cans with holes punched in them
that hung from some contraption
he strapped to his shoulders
and hauled himself.

I seem to remember him walking
the oil lifting the dirt into a sweating mass
I followed his legs
they were bare and gleaming
an uneasy mix—as best I could I tried
to understand him, the dirt and the heat,
reasons for doing things, power,
beauty in the work of his muscles
that song for the daughter

JANE CREIGHTON

CREATING IMPRESSIONS

One morning when I was 14, there was an artist across the street from my house, drawing Mr. Barnes's souvenir shop. I stepped outside and tried not to make any noise as I walked up behind him, but he turned slightly.

"You like to see?" he said, holding it out.

His voice, deep and dry, moved like coarse sandpaper over fancy, curved wood. I wondered what part of the world he was from.

"How'd you get it to look that way?" I asked.

"Mostly luck," he said, smiling.

He had shiny teeth. They looked brand new, like something out of a box.

When I looked closer, he asked, "You like to draw, yes?"

I nodded. He said his name was Ernesto, and he asked me mine. So I told him, and he repeated it, as if learning a new language, word by word.

"Do you live near here, Josh?"

He said my name so easily and in such a different way that for a second I thought of myself as someone else. I pointed behind me.

"Oh," he said, half turning around, "then that is your black dog?"

His expression changed. I wondered if he was angry. Barfy was always barking and upsetting people. It was strange timing, but just then, Barfy let out a bark. A short one.

"I think he is saying 'yes,'" Ernesto said, smiling and turning around even more. He had a tanned face and light white beard. Then he turned back around and went on working.

"I had a dog like yours once."

I watched the tip of his pencil wiggle a mix of dark and light scratches into an impression of trees in the background of his drawing. That was what my art teacher Mr. Thompson always wanted me to learn to do—to create "impressions."

"He was my companion. I had him outfitted with a...it was a kind of...fit over his back, hung down on the sides."

He was drawing in the air what he was describing, and as I watched the pencil in his hand, I saw how he sketched in quick, easy strokes, creating impressions.

"Pack?"

"Yes, pack."

It allowed his dog to carry his paints and short easel for him. He looked off for a moment. "He was a great dog." He went back to drawing, but soon stopped again and asked me what my dog's name was.

The name was the most embarrassing part. Barfy was named for what he did best—running the flower bed bare, choking himself on his own chain, then throwing up.

"Barfy?" he said.

I wanted to laugh; hearing this foreign man say Barfy, not knowing it came from the word "barf."

"Hello, Barfy," he said over his shoulder. Then he looked up at me. "Do you ever let him off his chain, Josh?" I shook my head.

"But why? You are a boy. You should have a dog with you." He looked at me for a moment, then turned back to his drawing. "You like to draw and paint, yes? Your dog could carry your supplies for you. Be your companion."

It was the most ridiculous thing I could imagine, Barfy walking along, carrying my drawing pencils. Just then, Barfy let out another bark from behind, trying to get our attention.

"I think it is time," Ernesto said, standing, "for he and I to say hello to each other."

He leaned his drawing board against the rock wall in front of our house and started up our front steps. Halfway up, he stopped and looked back.

"Is it okay, Josh?"

I nodded without really knowing what he was asking me. Barfy didn't know either. He was staring down at us, a dumb look on his face. Ernesto was a stranger, and everything about him looked strange against our house—his tanned, hairy legs, his shorts with many pockets, his colorful tee shirt with a paint smear on the shoulder. Our house didn't look real behind him. It was gray and small like a house in an old photograph.

As he stepped over to Barfy, he put out his hand and said his name over and over. Barfy brought his ugly nose down and sniffed and licked his hand. Then he started wiggling his body and wagging his tail like a fool.

I hurried up the steps, and when I saw Ernesto standing in the dog turds around Barfy's box and near the overturned water pan and tufts of dog hair on the bare ground, a terrible feeling came through me. We were an awful family for letting our dog become like this. The flies buzzing around the turds were so loud they sounded like a hornet's nest. The smell of dog dirt was as bad. I expected Ernesto to look disgusted. But he pretended not to notice and started rubbing Barfy's head. You could practically see the dust and bugs jumping off.

"He just needs a friend," he said. He turned to me. "You will let me walk him sometime?"

Walk Barfy?

When he went back down to the street, I stayed on the porch, not sure where I belonged now. Eventually I went inside and stood at the window, watching him draw. I waited. And waited. Later that afternoon, as soon as he left, I ran outside and started kicking Barfy's turds back up into the trees. I kicked so hard that I could feel my bare legs and arms hitting the big, slow flies. Some of the turds smacked into the thick weeds and bounced back. Others went flying into the street and lay there like mud. I even picked up a few with my bare hand and threw them like rocks high across the street into Mr. Barnes's lot. For the fresh piles, I had to find a shovel. I felt out of my mind, working fast so that no one would see me. I was sweating and holding my breath as long as I could, and when I had to breathe, I jumped back onto the porch. The big flies followed me until they realized I wasn't dog dirt. And there was Barfy the whole time, on his back haunches, just watching.

I couldn't make the bare ground around him into bright green grass. I couldn't straighten up his bent water pan or make it shiny either. And I couldn't make his chipped, unpainted, sagging particleboard box into a bright-red, store-bought doghouse with little asphalt shingles on the roof. If only I knew about building things.

I ran upstairs and grabbed mom's hairbrush. There were tufts so thick on Barfy that I couldn't brush through them, and when I pulled too hard, he made little whimpering sounds.

And where there weren't matted clumps, there were sores I didn't dare touch. To make these go away, I patted his hair down over them. Under his neck I found blood ticks—gross, bloated blood ticks—ganging up on him in spots. I tried to pull them off, and some did come off, and I flung them as far as I could. But others burst, and I was so grossed out that I wanted to wipe my fingers on something, and I thought about wiping my fingers on Barfy, but then I remembered I was here to clean him up. For a moment, I didn't know what to do. I just sat crouched down with tick blood all over my hand. With my other hand, I started petting him the way Ernesto did. He was skinny under his hair on his sides and bony on top, and I could smell dog dirt all over him. I wondered if Ernesto had felt how skinny he was, or had noticed how bad he smelled.

Why didn't Ernesto get mad at me? There was no excuse for Barfy ending up like this. How could we treat Barfy this way?

I grabbed hold of him tight with both hands and started crying. He stopped squirming and just sat there, wondering what was going on. I started speaking to him the way Ernesto did, in a deep, slow voice. I tried to imitate his accent. I said, "Hello, Barfy," and tried to feel all the love and kindness Ernesto had shown on his face. But nothing happened. Maybe I didn't love him. He was disgusting, and the truth was, I hated what I was doing. He was dirty and would never be cute. His nose was dented to one side, and his bad eye had a funny look. Maybe it was better for ugly things to just go away.

Early the next morning, Ernesto was back, making a spot for himself in front of our house. I ran outside, waited until he saw me by Barfy's box, then waved. He stood and came up the steps.

"Barfy," he said, smiling, "you look very handsome." But he didn't. Barfy was sitting there whimpering, looking dirtier than ever, I thought. Still, Ernesto bent down and petted him and said over and over how handsome he looked. Then he went back down the steps, sat down on the walk, and started drawing.

Wasn't anything ugly to him? What did he see that I didn't? He was a great artist. Somehow in being that, he saw much more and, at the same time, much less than I did.

That morning, I dragged Barfy around back and stuck him in the big, dented-up pan for mixing cement that my father had left behind. As I filled it with water, he pulled this way, then that, splashing me, then shaking all over me, before he finally settled down, shivering, looking miserable, all soaped up, and scrawny. He turned the water black three times. Afterward, I toweled and combed the Dickens out of him. He looked like a sissy dog now, his hair all glossy and flyaway. It hung down from him in places like a dress.

For the box, I hauled out scrap lumber and tried to get the structure down by hammering a couple of big boards together. But every time it was lopsided and didn't stand up very well. Again and again I knocked it apart and tried over. Finally it got somewhat square. It was like sketching and erasing, sketching and erasing, over and over, creating an impression. The easiest part of building Barfy a new box was breaking up his old one. I swung the hammer through the rotten, particleboard, and the sides just caved in, as if made of shredded wheat.

Now, it was time to take Barfy for a walk. That afternoon, the town was full of tourists, and Barfy, fighting his old leash, nearly killed me right off the bat, tripping me down the front steps. All the way down the street, he was too stupid to walk right on a leash and too excited not to dash ahead as hard as he could. I had to practically choke him to make him behave.

When I got him down to Potomac Street, I tied him to a big tree where I would be drawing, then stood looking across the road at Mrs. Dillow's shop, thinking about a view. The best view was right where Barfy was sitting and panting, so I shoved him over and took his spot.

My hand, my pencils, were alive to do my very best. At first the sunlight was so bright on my paper I could barely see the lines I was drawing. Soon tourists were straining to see from the path high behind me, even though there was nothing to see yet. A while later, just as I was getting going, I heard someone saying hello to me. The voice was familiar to me now.

"I see you have your companion with you now," he said, in his curvy, sandpaper voice.

He stood and watched me wiggle the tip of my pencil as he had, making a mix of dark and light scratches into an impression of trees in the background. That was what my art teacher always wanted me to learn: to create "impressions."

Meanwhile, Barfy, the little bozo, was pulling on his leash and showing off. He was like my drawing that still needed work. Underneath his sissy new hair, he still had sores that needed more salve. But now, I would take care of that.

DARK CLOUDS WITH SILVER LININGS



JAMAL CYRUS

WINTER LITANY

Kraków, 8 march 2004

I think this must be
what death is like

I stand on *Wawel Hill*
in early March and morning snow
falls in flocks
tiny paper cranes
descending blowing dissolving
one into another
on the cobblestone walk
an avalanche of light

I believe this must be
what death is

this alternate
shining and melting, shining and flying

for William Brigman
died 7 march 2004

ROBIN DAVIDSON

BLOOD LAPS

Mae Baneda Jackson reigns
from her throne,
a crate on the side
of the crossway
before the feeder at
S 610 at S 288.
Her kingdom encompasses
a grassy knoll in
the greatest country in the world.
Like Nzinga, with cinders in her eyes,
she rises like the phoenix,
dazed by the sunlight.
She could have been.
born and buried
alive in Jasper, Texas.
She vanished from
Jefferson High School
like a phantom.
An invisible woman,
the alcohol dyed her lips
permanently pink,
like a passionflower.
Her smell was musky
like passion fruit.
Hair curly like lambs wool,
skin like burnished copper,
shoeless, crusty toed,
she embraces her box,
and builds a mansion
(condominium, apartment,)
with dreams of something
lofty, like a full meal
in a restaurant and
a house with a door and a yard,
or maybe just a bed
that didn't have nails in it.
Scraps of discarded aluminum,
shopping carts, rags and pieces of

cardboard are found treasures.
Her breakfast is from the trash of the
convenience store in the gas station
across the way,
but she always says grace.
And when you hand her a dollar
or a quarter or a ten,
she says thank you.
If you pass her by,
or roll your window up,
or speed by,
or never even see her,
she still sings to herself,
some old Supremes song,
"Stop in the name of love,"
that her dear departed mother loved.
Mae Baneda swims
in a sea of gas fumes.
See her at the crossway,
her arms outstretched,
swimming in blood.

RHEA DANIEL DEAR

TOY TELEPHONE

The inside of this aztec looking building reminds me of a hospital. There are many people, it's cold and the cries of children echo all about. The spiral stairway leads to the sacrificial point, the WIC office. One by one we line up to pay homage to the gods of the powdered milk. "Tiene una cita?"

"Yes I do, its at 8:00 am." She Looks at me as if the clarity of my English shocks her.

"Okay, you can take a seat over there."

I looked toward where she was pointing and all I could see was chaos. Children were running around with boogers oozing out of their nostrils, mothers screaming at them to sit down, babies crying so hard and so much that they have to take a breath and start all over again. I take a seat by a tribe of seven, a mother, her five young children, and her small baby. It seems as if she had one child right after the other and I'm thinking maybe she didn't listen to the doctor's advice after she had each of them. " Connie, do not, do not, do not have sex until after six weeks, you are so fertile right now you can get pregnant very easily."

Why did this woman go through nine months of agony, of stretch marks, of back aches and vomiting over and over? Six times she went through labor enduring hours upon hours of pain. Pain that feels like your ovaries are being pulled and bitten.

"Falcon!" I look up to see a woman calling my name. When I enter the room I take a seat in one of the plastic chairs and wait to see what the gods ask of me next. The woman looks at me as if I am nothing and asks me to look over some renewal papers. She then asks me for this months Medicaid and I tell her that I do not have it with me.

"You know you have to bring this piece of paper, I don't have time for this, you are just going to have to come back next month. Wait outside!" she barked at me.

I look around to find a seat fearfully worrying of what is to become of my fate. I see a chair in the front row and I take it.

"Hey girl, what's up!" It was Erika, a childhood friend of many years, she lived down my block with both of her parents and siblings, she was the youngest.

"Hey, how are you doing? Is that your baby?!" I look down at the car seat with a pink fleece blanket over it.

"Oh, let me see her." Kneeling down I peek my head under the blanket. Inside I saw this tiny head that looked like a little cherry with a beanie on top. The baby was surrounded by blankets and little pillows. It looked like the inside of a genie's bottle. She seemed so peaceful with her lips slowly opening and closing as if she was whispering in her sleep.

"She's beautiful Erika, she looks just like you." She gives me a tired smile and stares down at the floor. She looks exhausted and I know this is the last place she wants to be at right now because unlike the baby she can't sleep as much anymore now that she stays up at all hours of the night.

When Viktorie would wake me up I would be half asleep walking sideways to the kitchen and I would drop powdered milk on the floor when I was pouring it in the bottle. I mostly always heated the water too high and I would have to sit through what seemed like hours of crying until the water cooled and I was able to give her her bottle. My eyes would feel like they were sinking into the back of my head and my arms were stiff and sore from holding Vicky for so long. But she's older now and she sleeps through the whole night. Those days of staying up went as fast as they came and I'm grateful.

"So what have you been up to?" Erika asks with her eyes half open.

"Nothing much, I've just been busy with Viktorie and school." This time I look down because I don't want to meet eyes with her. I don't want to see the longing in them because I knew she had been wanting to go to college after she had graduated high school and I also knew that right now it was simply out of the question.

"Are you going full time? What classes are you taking?"

"Yeah I'm going full time, I'm only taking my basics right now." I give her a short answer because I don't want to get into details but I wish I could tell her all about going to college. I wish I could tell her how I love to go because its so enlightening and everyday I walk away with a little more knowledge than the day before. I want to share with her how I go to the library to read and study and how I forget about everything and concentrate on my work. I want to tell her all of this and talk to her about the things that I've learned while attending, but I can't because I don't want her to feel bad. The last thing I want to do is make her feel like she's missing out. So we stay quiet and watch some children play with a toy telephone on the floor.

"Falcon!" A young woman at the front desk yells out my name until I signal her to wait.

"Well I have to go but call me when you have more time."

"Okay, I'll talk to you later." I stood up and bent over to give her a hug. She said bye and I walked away slowly. At the front desk I was given some papers to look over by a young woman who talks to me like I'm five.

"Next time you come you have to bring your Medicaid if you don't bring it you cannot receive W.I.C. okay?"

While putting some papers in my purse I glanced at the area where Erika and the tribe of seven were sitting. Why were we following these unwritten laws that most women tend to follow after they have children. I've heard them many times before and they never settled well with me. "IT'S ALL ABOUT YOUR KID NOW. DON'T EXPECT TO HAVE A LIFE AGAIN. NOW YOU LIVE FOR YOUR CHILDREN ONLY. ITS NOT ABOUT YOU ANYMORE."

Why? Why can't I care about myself and my child? Why does my life have to end because a new one is created? Can't they coexist? Why am I not allowed to care about where my life is headed as well? And like that I am banished from the haven of grade A milk and pinto beans. Never to return again until the rise of the next full moon where I will once again sacrifice my spirit.



EDGAR FUENTES

GHOSTHORSE



EDGAR FUENTES

WITH THE SUN ON HIS FACE

A lean meat, deadbeat, trash-talker with two left feet
Walked into the room with the sun on his back.
She was there, silken hair, the kind that makes the young
men stare,
And not the slightest bit of grace did she ever lack.

He shook the dust from his forgotten lust, took a second
to let his eyes adjust,
And searched the room for the one he had come to see.
She licked her lips of the gin she sipped, and with a twist
of her rolling hips,
She slinked across the room to set his heart free.

She walked the walk of a lion's stalk, but this young man's
desire was all for naught,
As she passed him by, giving only a perfumed breeze,
Embracing an ultra-chic, dressed neat, smooth talker
with dancing feet
Who had been there all the while, surveying the scene.

His jaw grew tight and his head felt light, to compose himself
took all his might,
And he dared not look upon their entangled embrace.
He managed to hide the sorrow inside, gathered what
remained of his heart and his pride,
And he left how he came, but now with the sun on his face.

JOSEPH ALAN GARDEMAL

WHAT MAKES ME, ME

My heritage makes me strong.
My fears make me weak.
Sometimes I do things wrong.
God make me complete.

My fears make me weak.
My essence makes me sensual.
God make me complete.
My soul makes me an individual.

My essence makes me sensual.
My mistakes teach me lessons.
My soul makes me an individual.
God forgives my transgressions.

My mistakes teach me lessons.
Sometimes I do things wrong.
God forgives my transgressions.
My heritage makes me strong.

UNTITLED

After the little white pill, my brain shifts to a lower sequence. First goes balance, then speech. My eyelids shut themselves like someone else is turning the blinds, and there is nothing I can do to keep them open. The last thing to lose before falling into a deep, chemically induced sleep is my thoughts. They fight the effects of the pill while they can, but everything eventually dims away.

I wake up, 30 minutes into my first class, but I don't get out of bed. I don't want to get up, drive to school, and face my teachers and peers. I want to stay here, and look up at the ceiling and find patterns in the walls. My mind lapses. Suddenly, I am approaching a time machine with the ability to change everything I ever wanted to do differently. First stop, fourth grade.

I'm ten and wearing patched, faded blue jeans that were re-sown too many times. As a new student at Washington Elementary—a mostly white Magnet school—I'm still getting used to the change of environment from Gonzalez Elementary. Having no clue of what people talk about during lunch; I hear "Kurt Cobain," and "Sim City 2000" and just nod and smile.

"Oscar, you're such a fruitcake", says Wesley.

"What's a fruitcake?"

Everyone laughs. They dare me to crush an apple on my forehead. Why would they want me do something stupid like that? I want for them to like me, and they "triple dog dare me", so it's not like I have a choice. I look down at my lunch tray, pick up the apple, look back at my friends, and then look back down at the apple. With all the force of my scrawny, little body, I crush the apple into my forehead. It disintegrates upon contact, throwing little bits of apple all over my clothes. Homemade apple juice runs down my hair and face. I smile, and look back at my friends, who are laughing hysterically.

"See, he's totally a fruitcake."

"Yeah you can make Oscar do anything!"

"Hey Oscar, do an orange!"

Someone tosses me an orange. This time I wipe the apple juice from my face, shake the applesauce off my hair, and lay down the orange and I give "my friends" a harsh medusa-freezing stare, straight from the future.

Back in the current, I'm exactly where I left off. I want to lie in bed and replay scenes from my life, but I've already missed too much class, and need to make an appearance to keep the numbers balanced. Nice and balanced. Nice and balanced.

A BEND IN THE COLORADO RIVER

The flume roared toward us as we trespassed into nature students trailing like conspirators that regretful day at summer camp when we all followed I must show them the fossils in the river bed forming the gang that chased the boy who wanted to be my himself the layers of rocks exposed in cut banks up the bleachers over the top betraying ancient shores continental shelves teeming with algal reefs trilobites snails nautiloids his broken leg waking us from mob mentality and sticking fossilized in memories like the one my student offers Christmas present wrapped in black shale back exposed treasure hidden wanting to be left alone I strike it with my hammer and the roaring ocean reaches us and we are drowned like villages in the anoxic depths of black sea students mumbling like water down a drain deposited into waiting vans to continue our quixotic quest.

BRADLEY EARLE HOGE

THE WIND STILLS

you've heard the claim -
a butterfly
surrounded by rainforest
this is how the winds shift
the tides neap and roil
but imagine if there was no butterfly
and the trees remained
silent and the air
remained calm
and the rain did not fall
weather fails the brave
children and homeless
the forlorn
imagine you did nothing
imagine you simply didn't know

BRADLEY EARLE HOGE

INSTITUTIONALIZED A

Perfect
Straight lines
Fluorescent lights
Institutional smell
Cafeteria

Desks in a row
right legs on line between tiles
Overhead files roughly
1.5 X 6
Wafting up one's nose on
Overheated air
Sounds from around the corner

Stripped
Censored
Broken
Ridicule
Incongruent

Mandatory showers before men
Library meaning shattered and
Spirit, Heart, and Glass Menagerie
The different, special, unique
Freak

MICAH S. JACKSON

INSTITUTIONALIZED B

Perfect, straight lines

Desks in a row right legs on line between tiles

Fluorescent lights

Overhead tiles roughly 1.5 X 6

Institutional smell

wafting up one's nose on overheated air

Cafeteria

sounds from around the corner

Stripped

mandatory showers before men

Censored

library meaning shattered and

Broken

Spirit, Heart, and Glass Menagerie

Ridicule

the different, special, unique

Incongruent

Freak

MICAH S. JACKSON

BARE THOUGHTS

Someday,
I shall make an honest woman of you,
he whispers
as she closes the door.
She looks shocked, dismayed.
You wouldn't dare, she says.
Her look of concern betrays
the fact that she knows he isn't
talking about marrying her,
merely telling her husband.

The arrangement works for now -
He's in it for the sex,
she for the excitement.

Yet he wonders if it's worth it,
his undying commitment to
noncommitment,
as he spends yet another night
in her closet,
naked and cold,
hiding from the husband
who wasn't supposed to come home.

CHARLOTTE JONES

SHED INVENTORY

Rough hemp rope once
tied a Christmas tree
to the top of the car.
Grit covered metal,
cool to the touch
outlines a fluorescent lamp,
once cast encouraging light
onto seedlings.

Half empty, dust-covered
plastic containers of
poison, not used since
going organic, stored because
disposal seems too complicated.
A plastic tub, filled with hard,
worn sponges, once used to
wash walls with trisodium phosphate.
Garden gloves caked with mud,
various bags of fertilizer,
an almost empty paper
bag of bird seed,
a hole eaten in the bottom.
An old hose, severed at both ends,
saved for something,
I don't know what.
A flat bicycle tire,
a broken pump,
empty paint cans,
a dented squirrel baffle,
rusty tools.

Junk I don't need,
yet don't know
how to get rid of.
Like old friends
seen out of habit
with whom I now have
nothing in common.

MY ROOT

You are my shepherd
You filter everything for me
Warding off the dangers
Approving of the safe
I can never be harmed
With You watching me;
When things get rough
You round me up
And sit me down
And suddenly I am calm.
You keep watch over our family
And anyone else that enters
There wasn't a living thing
That was welcomed into our house
That You didn't surround with Your love
You have always been the smartest, the best.
When You bled
I bled, too
When Your heart stopped
My heart stopped with that news
Your name is signed in the clouds and in the earth
In unique asymmetrical curves.
In assurance of the eternal guarantee
That You will always watch me.
Not a day has, is, or will go by that I won't think of You.
I just wait for the day that I arrive at those gates
And I know I will see and hear You
Long before I see God's fence.
I might have to wait another seventy years
Until I can take my next walk with You
But I'm willing to live seventy sinless years
To see You again.
You are my reason
My spice of life;
You are my strength,
And my conscience;
You are my root.
Not just mine,
But everybody's
Root—
Ginger.

DANIELLE JONES

ATKINS

Charge thy potato!
Carbs be gone!
Hail to cheese, beef and bacon.
Bread is cursed,
rolls are the devil,
I denounce you carbs,
you are evil.
I will not work out,
I will eat protein,
No balanced diet,
just beef fat for me.
Like to watch TV
and eat string cheese,
not use the carbs for healthy energy.
Food pyramid
cant show me
just protein, protein, protein!

PAIN AND FLAMES

Everyday you live proudly holding a white paintbrush.
You paint everything to be as it should.
Those who burn and turn to ash-
 it is those you won't touch with your brush.
Your brush beautiful and perfect.
Lightning strikes- unexpectedly. A light from God
 down to earth.
You lower your brush and find a match.
You lay divided across a line you drew with the lightning.
A choice stares you in the face and you burn it.
It is by the same match that you die as well.
Where did your paintbrush go? Why doesn't your
 belly grow?

NORMAN JESSICA

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

I was nine years old and
drawn to the animal barn
at the Southeast Texas Fair
where the smell of sawdust,
Nanny goats and the ink spotted pig
was strong and sweet and
pressed at the doorway
like the big bosom
of my second grade school teacher,
Mrs. Montgomery.

The toothless man was the keeper
red headed, freckled faced and
almost as thin as the metal pole he carried
like he never turned loose.

There was no peace inside these pens.
When the keeper walked near
the animals moved like water
tilting in a pan
when they could go no further
a back wash of livestock, crying
spilled in his direction.

One night from atop the Ferris Wheel
when the animal barn looked like a meat loaf
and the windows popped like a row of
buttons all ablaze, my friend, Jill, and I
sat perched in our seat and plotted a plan.

An hour later,
we stepped inside the animal barn
like testing a tub of hot water with one toe.
Rusted fans made a dull whistling sound
as the animals lay smothered-like
under single strung light bulbs
the color of cooked corn.
No keeper in sight
Jill moved to one aisle, I another,

cupping the metal part of the first latch
to muffle sound.

After that, I was less cautious.

For every gate I opened
my fear grew and
quivered like a bird on a wire
between the toothless man and
thrill of success.

I'd almost reached the last pen when
suddenly, I saw his face
glaring at me from in between the boards and
everything on it looking as red as his hair.

In an instant, he came rushing forward
as though some huge body of water was
propelling him from behind.
"What the hell you girls think you're doin?" he hollered,
the metal pole gripped in his hand and
pointing in our direction.

But we were faster than the man riding the wave and
Jill and I hit the barn door like a one, two punch
leaving the keeper somewhere behind and still screaming,
"You girls git the hell outta here and don't you never come back!"

Later that night, feeling safe under my covers,
I thought about the animals and
the deep sadness and fear I'd seen on their faces.
I remembered that oddly, none had stepped through
the opened gates and I felt sad, wondering why.
I thought about the toothless man and wished that something
bad would happen to him.

I'd been as scared that day as I'd ever been before
but even so, Jill and I had outrun something evil
and for a precious few seconds,
those animals and two kids were free.

KATIE OXFORD

I CAN'T STAY

"I have to go. I can't stay." I begin to shuffle through my drawers and throw a couple shirts and jeans into my oversized backpack.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

I don't want to leave. Yes, I thought. I have to. You can't expect me to sit and wait till morning and be yelled at and who knows what else! Do you? Instead, I kept this to myself, simply nod and continue to the bathroom. My eyes move swiftly across the space I once inhabited and will finally leave. Toothbrush, lotion...razor, what else? I'm surely going to be there for more than one day.

The cell vibrates and I shove my hand under the pillow to answer as I slide the purple toothbrush into my back pocket.

"What happened? Are you okay?"

"Yes, fine, just come back and pick me up."

"Are you sure?" Didn't I say yes? Why does he always have to ask this?

"Yes, I'm sure!" I push the end button and begin to silently look around at the room that I've always had to share with Erica, Jeny, and Carlos as I grew up. Jeny lies peacefully on the bottom bunk with her hand hanging off the mattress. Carlos, who hasn't yet learned to close his mouth as he sleeps, slobbers over his Pokemon pillow. On my dresser the stereo, the CD player worked before Carlos got my tweezers stuck in it. An arched mirror smothered in pictures I've collected and taped through the years. Photos of friends, cousins, and all the guys my sister once dated. How will I be without them?

The phone vibrates again and I answer.

"I'm outside."

Erica simply stands by the half open window with her deep brown eyes hoping I would drop my bags and say I'd changed my mind. It didn't happen so she quickly says in a low, warning voice, "You better leave before I call Dad."

A second later she takes my hand from my side, pens it and tucks in a crumbled up fifty-dollar bill. "Take it. I'm sure you'll need for food."

"Erica, stop. I'll be fine. Don't worry"

I tried to swallow the lump down my throat but it was impossible. That painful sadness in my throat remained. I leaned over still holding my bags and gave her a quick hug. I looked back one more time at my room and my sister who remained in the same spot. I can't believe I'm doing this. Running away to avoid getting kicked out first. What will happen tomorrow? How long will it take for them to realize that I'm not there? What will Erica tell Jeny and Carlos? How will they react? No, stop. I can't think of this right now. I have to go. I can't stay. I tucked my head down as I set one foot out of the window not knowing what lay ahead.

YESENIA RUIZ

THE FLOWER POT

It is 1965. She is one year old as India and Pakistan go to war for the second time in their nineteen-year history. She is little and she hides her fears by smiling. Her aunts, uncles and cousins conspire to force the laughter to leave her face. It is not natural, they say, for her to smile so much. We have to make her cry, they say. They do not announce that they will laugh after they make the little girl cry.

As warplanes skate over the sky, they cut open a lemon and put it in her mouth. They slice open a crinkly keraila bittergourd and place it on her tongue. The infant's eyes open wider and the aunts, uncles and cousins wait for her smile to fade away and for tears to trickle out of her tear ducts and sit on her plump cheeks' shelves like crystals. She keeps smiling and nodding her head and saying num num, but tears roll out and sit on her cheeks shelves until the water dries, leaving behind white streaks of salt that trail down to her chin, songlines, telling the story of the time she tasted bitterness.

One morning, her aunt is looking after her and the household is quiet. The older kids are at school, the younger ones are playing in their corners. The men are at their offices and the women are in the kitchen. The aunt wanders into the kitchen to investigate the turmeric-cumin-coriander scents. When she returns to the living room where she left her niece, smiling and laughing, she finds the room empty.

Accustomed to her niece's laughter, the aunt thinks that the one-year old is playing a game. She searches under the coffee table, under the dining table, the chairs. She even drops flat on the black stone floor to peer under the sideboard. But the girl is nowhere to be seen. Panic rises. The aunt races to the kitchen and shouts, She's gone.

Turning off the stoves, the women begin searching the house, looking under the beds, inside the cupboards and in the shower. The girl remains gone. The women cluster together, not knowing how to find the niece who never cries.

And then, from the outside they hear Mali, the gardener—who tills the soil every day—laughing. Come, he shouts. Look.

The aunts and kids troop out under the hot Karachi sun. Mali is pointing to a two-foot high terracotta pot. The women peer inside and there sits the little girl, chewing a leaf. Crystal tears rest on her cheeks' shelves. Over the sky, above the little girl, streak warplanes and there is a bomb blast.

It is 1965 as India and Pakistan are at war over Kashmir for the second time in their nineteen year history and the girl, alone in her flower pot—sheltered by her terracotta walls—cries over the deafening roar of the warplanes. In her flowerpot, the girl knows—and the aunts and uncles know—that the year is 1965 but it can be 2003 in Iraq, 1982 in Sabra and Shatila, or 1971 in Bangladesh.

On the girl's face, flow many songlines of salty tears that tell stories of repeated wars and repeated violence. And now that we are in 2003, the girl is ready to smash the walls of her empty flowerpot, irrigate the lands and bring the world's soldiers home again.

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

He smelled like cigarettes and Ivory soap.
Watched television and my brothers and me
Sat and smoked and drank and talked.
Talked and talked and talked and didn't talk at all.
He told stories.

He told stories.
He told stories about someone a long time ago,
Someone who was him, or like him, or might have been him
Someone he remembered being, or knowing, or seeing,
But not the who he really was. Maybe not at all.

He told stories.
He told stories about the army and not about the army,
Not any army that really was or is, anyway,
Stories about life and women and playing poker & blackjack
And shooting pool and drinking whiskey and about nothing
at all.

He told stories.
He told stories about a sun-browned, treasure-digging boy.
A shirtless and shoeless boy who grew up out in the country
With nine brothers and sisters who ran and played and worked
and fought
And stole watermelons from a farmer's truck.

He told stories
He told stories about hiding stolen watermelons in the ice
cold water
Of Acre's Mill Pond. But maybe Acre's Mill Pond wasn't a place.
Maybe more than one place, maybe more than one pond that
May have been cold and may have been warm.

He told stories.
He told stories about a young man who broke his arm
Roller skating through town, down the hill, past the college.
And about a man in boot camp who broke his back
And his will and his spirit falling from a wall.

He told stories.
He told stories and said that's the way it was.
When I was a kid, that's the way it was.
Things were different when I was a kid.
And the lovers memory and fiction danced together as one.

TOMMY THOMASON 59

CHIHUAHUA

This dog is small,
Brown, ugly,
And fidgets
In the presence of others.
It is only good as a pet.

But if this dog could speak
It would speak Spanish.
It could recite poetry
To all the other dogs.
It could walk the streets
Of Mexico swooning all
The alley cats.
The German Shepard
Would drop to its knees,
Poodles would stop
Shaving their legs.

Although this dog is ugly
It might be a romantic.

OMAR O. YARGAS

HALO

she seems to overwhelm him in this melancholy world
feeble it is to have someone so dependent
she doesn't know half the things that matter
no, not of common sense nor hues

solitary nation is the closest thing to reality
depend not on the waves of rhythm
that keeps this merry world turning
schemes of tyranny exhumed by advocacy

he thinks the solution's simplistic
she is his guiding light
how can he experience life
if all his aim's to please her

does he not realize
her halo has deflected
the joy has worn away
the world has overtaken her

soon very soon a recovery will occur
hope by then he comes to senses
and she will see more than black and white

JUDITH VASQUEZ

PIECES OF PAPER (THE MEANING OF LIFE)

Thou art brought unto this world, but most unofficially,
Until Certified on Paper, thy parents, and what thy name is to be.
And ere before your delivery, they must signeth themselves in
On Pieces of Paper in blue or black pen.
So on Life engulfs thee, though unwillingly brought;
Now hither cometh ye education inevitably sought.
Beginning with Construction, the change to Ruled thou doth maketh,
And rule it shalt, the course that thy Life shalt taketh.
For thirteenish long years, and for some still longer the run,
Thou worketh thy butt off... for a Paper... so that Work could be done.
But, though the *Real* work has only but been wrought,
First a continuance of ye education cometh to thought;
To study for a specialty that a Piece of Paper would decree
That thou hath a Degree of Bachelor's, Master's, or a Ph.D.
More years have passed and for that Paper thou did strive
To reach a lavishing level of labour to keep thee comfortably Alive
By receiving a Periodical Paper that thou would cash in
For more Pieces of Paper that some simply win.
And all along the governments and services Taketh their share;
Receiveth thou their mailed forms... leaving little to spare.
From this thou doth liveth on and buildeth thy retirement aid
So thy Life might goeth on by It and ye Pension thou paid.
Throughout thy Life the Pieces of Paper played their Role;
Be it in the restroom or workplace, They taketh their Toll.
From labels to transactions, though needless to say
Uses of Plastic Paper art coming ineth to play.
And much to the relief of the benevolent Trees
The Internet's E-Paper is surely to please.
But from yearbooks to textbooks, Books of fact to fiction,
Reference to novels and religious contradiction,
From newspapers to magazines, records and files,
Drivers license to Marriage license to pictures with smiles,
From the Pieces of Paper the laws of the land hath been written
To personal contracts amidst legal documents unbidden,
From admission tickets to traffic tickets, diagrams to maps,
Confetti to greeting cards to gift boxes and their wraps,
From a friendly letter to the envelope betwixt the stamp it is needing,
Prose, philosophy, and poetry to this very Paper thou art reading,
And as thy Certification at Birth, so thou art Certified to Die
Leaving behind a Paper to sayeth who gets what and why...
At designated times thy goals, work, ambitions, and dreams
Are for those different Pieces of Paper, so - materially - it seems.
Of course I may be wrong.

BENEDICT WOLF

EVERY HOUSE IS A WORLD

Scene - A man and woman in bed.

Time - The present

(As lights come up, we see a couple in bed. Wine glasses on a bedside table. The man is reading a newspaper. After a moment, the man puts the newspaper aside and clears his throat)

MAN

It's getting late.

WOMAN

Do you realize, we haven't left the bed all day?

MAN

It's been a perfect day.

WOMAN

Yes, it has.

MAN

I've been thinking about us.

WOMAN

Oh?

MAN

If I had to describe us, we would be like an old cathedral. Lasting, you know.

(The woman thinks about this, smiles, then runs her fingers across his chest, then traces the line of hair down his stomach)

WOMAN

Us, a church?

(They both laugh, she because of his statement, he because she has tickled him in a tender place)

MAN

A physical cathedral. Nothing more than that.

(He takes her wandering hand in his own)

It still amazes me, how lovely your hands are. And how they fit so nicely inside my own.

(He places his palm against hers. She laces her fingers around him. Together their fingers make a steeple)

WOMAN

We aren't as stone cold as that. Like a dark old church. Not us. We still have fires inside us. This afternoon is proof of that.

MAN

I'll say.

WOMAN

A cathedral. Are you trying to tell me something? Maybe, something sad?

MAN

Shh.

(He runs his fingers across her lips, then leans over to kiss her.)

Don't you remember, when we went to visit the cathedral? How it had lasted? Supported from the outside?

WOMAN

Buttresses, you mean?

MAN

Right. Sturdy stuff. Moored in the earth.

WOMAN

(relieved) I see now.

MAN

Good, then. That's how it is, this thing between us.

(He puts his arm around her and draws her close. Her head rests on his chest. He plays with her hair.)

I have never felt this way before, with anyone. The rarity of it. The simply joy. I've never known a thing like it. Before now, I wasn't even alive.

WOMAN

(She takes his hand and places it palm to palm against his, and makes another steeple)

Someday, all cathedrals will be like this. Rising up into the sky.

MAN

We don't need sky.

WOMAN

No?

MAN

Just earth. Sturdy. Solid. Something else might bring bad luck.

WOMAN

Then let's leave it the way it is.

MAN

Good.

(Without another word, he shifts his body, moving until she is beneath him. As the light begins to fade, they begin moving slowly, deliberately.)

BLACKOUT

DOWN IN THE HOLE

six and a half steps from window to door
one small mistake was all it took a
slip-up on the way to the grocery store
everyone said i was on my way

one small mistake was all it took a
twelve year old girl in a plaid skirt
everyone said i was on my way
her little breasts bounced in her shirt

twelve year old girl in a plaid skirt
disappeared from outside school
her little breasts bounced in her shirt
i'm down the street shooting pool

disappeared from outside school
the cops nailed me for it
i'm down the street shooting pool
everything seemed to fit

the cops nailed me for it
slip-up on the way to the grocery store
everything seemed to fit
six and a half steps from window to door

ALEX WUKMAN

HONEYMOON: SISTINE CHAPEL

God is reaching out
but never quite touches
Adam's finger, even though

centuries have passed
since Michelangelo brought
these figures into existence

and they should be tired by now.
This is how art stops time.
We've got it all on tape

and I carry our shaky documentary
up the stairs and away
from the most famous ceiling

in the world, as we return
to the Vatican Museum
which has become nothing

but an unbearably ornate hallway
through which we must walk
to get back to the ordinary beauty

of the rest of our lives.

ROBERT WYNNE

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ROBERT WYNNE

MICHELANGELO'S "VENUS DE MILO - RESTORED"

It's nothing but a pair of arms:
jagged near the shoulders,

huge and detailed
from the finest marble.

The hands reach forward,
palms up and fingers outstretched

as if offering comfort or beckoning
for the missing body, as if

Michelangelo knew the goddess of love
was lost without the ability

to embrace her fickle subjects,
as if we would forgive her stone heart

only if she'd caress us lightly
with broken arms, remind us

the strongest substances can be the most brittle-
how our thin skin bends around bones

so we can hold each other.



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