



**PREFACE 1998 • Year of the Tiger**

*The poet brings light into great darkness,  
even if that means the simple becomes difficult  
or the difficult easy.*

*Hence the tiger may silence other beasts,  
the dragon frighten away birds  
in terrifying waves.*

-Lu Chi (translated by Sam Hamill)

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**Shana Sabbath**

### Thanks To:

<b>Madison Bell</b>	Faculty Advisor
<b>Susan Gossling</b>	Administrative Advisor

## Editor's Foreword

It is with satisfaction that I present you with this year's new issue of Preface. I hope that readers will appreciate the dramatic change between this issue and those of years past. Having been increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of professionalism and polish in past issues, the staff and I decided to change Preface's vision: we are now committed to printing the best student work, showcasing the finest of Goucher writers and exercising true editorial discretion. In addition to being far more critical in our approach to submissions, we have also decided to publish Preface in a book form, with three distinct sections of poetry, art and fiction. Goucher boasts many accomplished writers and artists, and it is time to present their work in a polished, sophisticated format, instead of dabbling in the "artsy," chaotic 'zine style, where poems are thrown together on the page with random graphics and sketches. In short, we have attempted to make Preface into a "real" literary arts journal, instead of a hastily laid-out imitation. We hope that during the next years Preface will build and solidify a reputation, consistently striving towards excellence in publishing.

I would like to thank Madison Bell and Susan Gossling for their time and energy in advising me, and Michelle from the Communications Department for donating an hour of her time to tutor us in Quark. Thanks also to my staff, and the tireless Erika and Rebecca, without whose endless patience and abilities Preface could never have been so transformed.

Sharae Deckard  
Editor 1997-1998

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## **In Dreams I handle Snakes**

-Jonathan Musgrove

### **Copperhead**

poisonous, the pattern and color of fallen leaves

They're not easily found sunning  
on a well trodden dirt trail,  
often you will find them hiding  
under stones, leaves, rotting logs  
that disintegrate at your touch.

I turn over harboring rocks,  
stir suspicious piles of leaves.  
I can feel them straining to  
bite my hand, their neck muscles strong  
between my thumb and finger.

### **Black Snake**

non-poisonous, agile tree climber, jet

A beggar stands on the corner,  
cutting strips (with sharp shears) of  
night, folding them into black snakes.  
The wind makes them twist and struggle.  
As he holds them by the tail, they  
reach up, bend in half, trying to  
snatch an egg from the bird's nest of  
his hand, relentlessly failing.  
His eyes ask, "Ten bucks?" I'm tempted.

### **Coral Snake**

deadly, small black, yellow, red, ceramic finish

### **Scarlet King Snake**

harmless, small, black, red, yellow, ceramic finish

*Black on yellow, kill a fellow.*

*Black on red, go ahead.*

Snake, small enough to be waiting  
inside a boot, for a foot,  
unsuspecting, bare, unhurried,  
Should I fear you?

My ideal lover would suck,  
her tongue softly caressing,  
venom safely from my wound.  
Spitting the poison, head back,  
she becoming fountain, her  
sprayed drops reach high to seduce  
sunlight, suspend it in spheres  
slowly falling to our bed,  
a quietly reflecting pool.

---

**simple love poem**

-Jonathan Musgrove

A broken piece of wandering jew  
slowly sprouts roots in a juice glass  
sitting on our kitchen windowsill.  
Before you moved in, I would have thrown  
the cutting in with the dirty paper towels  
and the pieces of half-eaten chicken.  
You filled a glass with clean water,  
carefully balanced the stem on the rim  
and said, "With a little patience, it will grow."

---

**34th Street, 4 p.m.**

-Jenn Crowell

The city smells musky, metallic, like meat,  
warm with a madness you can almost taste.  
A violent lover, it knows where to kiss you  
and how to bruise you, sweetly sullen in the  
way it dredges up mistakes with a garish  
neon caress. You did not wear the right  
skirt. You were not articulate enough. You  
still gaze up at the buildings tall as promises,  
an awestruck child in the back of a cab, craning  
her neck, her skin stuck to black vinyl's heat.  
Your dreams are car crashes waiting to happen:  
drama and smoke, fire and waifish infamy.  
You tip your head back. This could be beautiful,  
this moment of smoldery change. It won't last long.

---

## **Blossom**

-Audrey Babkirk

As she plants my mind wanders  
to thoughts of her serenity  
so fine, like drinking jasmine tea  
in the afternoon. She leans, lowers  
and the wheaty-colored hair falls like  
beads of water slipping over dark rocks.  
The shadows and curves of her muscles  
strike me, how hard and real they are.  
How much power to come from nothing  
To shift and metamorphosize  
in my arms, to see the strength increase  
with my food, within the warmth of my walls,  
from looking on my face.  
And as she roots herself in the dirt  
like so many chrysanthemum bulbs  
absently decorating her hands with the rich,  
heady-smelling dirt, I see her as she is,  
Long and taut with purpose in her hands.  
And I can see her neck twist unnaturally with  
long purplish bruises and the silky straw hair  
tangled and matted against her face in dark  
congealed clumps of blood.  
I know how her skin will feel:  
a cold sweat, like fish in the back of my mouth.  
She crouches, but I see her knees-  
the sound of her bones as they strain and crack in two-  
When she breathes I see the wall of her heart  
exploding or her back crushed and crackling like  
so many pieces of cereal.  
Her body as a thing, some heavy piece of cardboard-  
Veins and synapses shocked into stillness, following  
the last precious tremblings and quiverings.  
Just as her boot is pushing down on the soil  
I can see his foot pushing down on her back,  
She unaware.

---

## **First Sonnet**

-Audrey Babkirk

Your statue eyes cannot force back my glance,  
Though in your stares I almost feel the rain.  
And I would teach those leaden feet to dance  
Upon my heart, indifferent to the pain.  
Your straightened smile is weighted down by woes,  
Charred scraps of life that gathered in your heart.  
If I could bear that weight for you, who knows-  
Perhaps your lovely lips might curve and part.  
Thus would I take your torments for my joy,  
And carry them like dust, though they be stones,  
And all the shades of love I would employ  
Would seep like fire into your very bones.  
Life then will be eternal holiday,  
And we shall laugh your sorrowed dreams away.

## **Imperfect Sonnet**

Audrey Babkirk

My love unleashes all things bright in me,  
Or rather I reflect his brilliancy.  
He finds gems I never knew I bore  
And bears them up like humbled Melchior.  
My muse and saints do all before him rise  
And in his presence seek to harmonize.  
The burning stars seem none too far to hold;  
They light this life that through him is retold.  
But whilst I throw my heart into the world,  
With jubilation, banners all unfurled,  
The mentor of my goodness shies and strays,  
Tastes not the sweetness of my glory days.  
Yet even from my shadow he still sings,  
And gives the sinner in me angel wings.

---

## **Pearl**

-Margaret Slack

The world is my oyster, and I am its pearl.  
Yes, I am that annoying piece of sand  
That sent this miniature world in a whirl  
With my odd ways and mental sleight of hand.  
A pearl is thought a rare and precious gain  
To men who must pry ten shells to find one.  
But that same pearl is just unneeded pain  
To the tissues for whose sake it was spun.  
The good of the whole is beyond my life  
The world wants only exterior shine  
There's no thought for a grain's internal strife  
There's no caring for a pain that's just mine.  
The world just repeats its nonchalant charm  
Just cover it up, it's doing no harm.

---

## **The Riddle**

-Jordana Woodward

Slab of stone staring back at me  
Born November 7, 1946- Died November 27, 1995  
Father's life between.  
Above his icy corpse,  
a dandelion's bright head protrudes.  
Taunting my grieving soul,  
the plague of curator's  
perfect green grass, it escapes  
the fatal, silvery blades.  
Like the Guardian of Giza,  
the Lion's tooth gorged  
on the corpse of the wrong answers  
to the Riddle.  
My father, a prey to golden jaws, decays,  
yet brighter and brighter, the predator grows,  
hosting on Old Man's bones.

Like my father, awaiting my chance to answer,  
I know I will fail.



---

## Earthwalker

-Sharae Deckard

I rose and walked the earth  
through snow and deep  
and down the halls of sleep.

I sent my voice in song  
through dream and wind  
but did not find them there.

I heard them scold the sun  
and singe the sky,  
I felt them brush me by.

Who saw them go, and how?  
My eyes were closed,  
my heart was folded tight.

Frost brings fear, dark and dull,  
by night, by day.  
Where did they go, which way?

The ocean weaves and winds,  
departs, returns,  
but they are gone, are gone.

The days all fall and fail,  
the world grows dim  
before the wind's lament.

Why walk the earth, why ask  
myself again,  
where they have gone and when?

They went where all things go  
when winter comes,  
and only shadows stay.

---

## February Light

-Sharae Deckard

for c.m.

February is his favourite month.  
The short month, the dead month.  
How she hates it, the world outside.

In their hoods and grey coats  
the students are great gliding bats,  
swooping blindly through the rain.

“Will this winter ever end?” she asks,  
touching her tender bruises,  
the violent seals of his affection.

Beyond her, the students stop.  
They raise wrinkled hands to the sky,  
whispering, “Look, Look now!”

The sun suddenly explodes in the trees,  
shivering the world with light.  
She lifts up her violet face.

“We can't change. We are lost,” she says.  
But the students stand transfixed,  
drinking in the light.

---

## Her

-Jessica Dolber

When she told me my stained dress was beautiful,  
or asked if I needed help,  
the purplish wart on her upper lip moved up and down,  
like a bubble gum bubble  
about to pop.

When she smoothed my hair,  
wiped my spilled milk,  
or took my doll-sized hand in hers,  
her veins bulged  
like polluted rivers,  
flowing up her arm.

When she played Ring Around the Rosie with us,  
her scattered tufts of  
wiry  
white  
hair blew in the wind  
revealing shiny bald spots.

When she smiled down at me,  
the crevices  
and canals  
transformed her face  
into a relief map,

and someday, I wanted to look just like her.

---

## The Taxonomy of Man

-Jer Welter

for Barry Rudd

after John Hersey's The Child Buyer

A piece of work, you, the scientist:  
The tender age of ten and you are weary  
already of this world. It holds no horror  
as you watch it, detached. It lays open on the page.

But as you read the words before you:  
“Penis,” “ovum,” “the mating ritual  
of *Gasterosteus aculeatus*”

(These words the work of *Homo sapiens*,  
Adam, he who classifies the beasts),  
They call forth something non-objective, undeniable:  
Thrust and thrust and thrust and thrust again.

You, precocious, now know that which parts  
the teacher from the taught, the codifier —  
This, below your belt: Adulthood.

## Something to Paint

-Sarah Azizi

It is almost night  
and Andy Warhol sits on his couch,  
eating Honey Roasted Peanuts,  
drinking his fifth beer.

Before the six-pack is finished,  
a masterpiece will be born.

Andy picks at the stuffing  
that escapes from the faded brown material.  
He's hypnotized by the images  
escaping from the shiny brown box.

Andy sighs.  
He hasn't painted anything for weeks.  
He scratches his belly-  
    in spite of the beer,  
    his bones still stick out.  
Andy's too lazy to get up and change the channel.

FLASH!

There she is,  
arms open wide,  
dress sewn onto hips and soft breasts.  
The red mouth opens:  
"I wanna be loved by you/you and nobody else but you..."  
Andy puts down the beer can,  
the wet condensation still on his hand,  
and he reaches.  
Down, down, down  
into the faded corduroy's,  
under the ratty Hanes,  
and he sighs again.

Now,  
he has something to paint.

## A Poem for Three Years

-Sarah Azizi

I. *October*

We met on a lazy day  
when even the fog  
refused to move.

You were stuck  
at the diner  
until the mechanic  
could get there.

I told you the coffee  
was on the house,  
made conversation,  
made you laugh,  
found out you lived  
just seven blocks from me,  
said I'd stop by sometime.

II. *February*

I knew all I knew  
of you from your  
drunkenness.

Our friends told you  
to quit "getting toasted"  
every weekend,  
but I wanted your addiction  
to keep raging.

It was my only window.

### III. July

You paid off  
that new used car  
by subletting your apartment  
delivering lumber  
across the mid-west.

On a mosquito-filled night,  
you passed through the town.

I invited you to stay.  
We listened to jazz,  
smoked herb,  
watched the children  
chase lightning bugs  
through the trees  
outside my window.

You smoked too much,  
drank too much,  
started the morning drive,  
two hours last, cursing, “that’s fifty  
goddamn bucks I lost.”

### IV. November

Chance moved us into the same building.  
It was a shitty part of town,  
but we ignored the nightly  
screams, the daily sirens.

Sometimes we visited.

Sometimes, I heard  
the clink of brown bottles,  
imagined them littering  
your coffee table,

listened to you forget.

Most times, I sat by my window,  
smoked cigarettes,  
and stared at naked trees,  
wondering if I was crazy  
to love you in silence.

### V. March

I woke one morning  
and decided  
to stop ignoring  
what was happening to me.

I made coffee,  
poured you a mug full,  
black.

You were packing  
when I knocked.  
You were leaving,  
moving in with a woman  
whose name you’d never  
mentioned. I smiled,  
wished you luck,  
handed you the coffee.  
You kept the cup.

### VI. September

The week before  
the leaves turned orange  
she left you.  
We sat on your porch.

I offered to help  
make the home feel

---

full, feel like yours.  
I'd hang dried flowers,  
decorate the walls,  
organize your dishes,  
make curtains for the windows.

You were crazy drunk.  
I was in the kitchen,  
cleaning the mess of bottles  
and cans. You watched  
me find a sponge,  
wipe the sticky beer foam  
from the countertop.

You kissed me,  
held my breasts,  
pulled my hips to you.  
I saw the dead of your eyes,  
pushed you away,  
drove home in silence.

VII. December  
I think of you alone  
in that house.  
Your curtainless windows  
black with night.

I imagine the women  
you sleep with--  
see them decorate  
your bed in silk.

I try to forget  
the kitchen,  
and I am failing.

---

VIII. April  
I heard--  
you are hauling  
lumber again;  
you feel you may  
never leave the truck  
the road, the wild expanse  
of motels, hotels,  
bars, diners,  
state lines, city limits.

I tell myself,  
"she won't come back  
she was drunk  
she doesn't remember  
and she won't come."

I go to the bars now.  
I laugh, I dance, I smoke,  
I talk, I drink.  
And I have decided  
to refuse  
to miss you.

## Orchard of Bitterness

-Jennifer Parde

Once again, I have caught you naked and red-hearted  
Snooping around the plot of my sacred grounds.  
So you are captivated by my mystic fruits, eh?  
Ah, but they're yours for a mere donation...

Bitterness is the spawn of my mangled trees,  
Warped and contorted from exposure to a torrid sun  
And I, brute keeper of these fatal beauties,  
Keep close watch over my prize-winning orchard.

My first seed was offered as a parting token  
From a dearly demented and treasured friend  
In years since, each plant has been nurtured with care,  
Each fruit savored with euphoric gluttony.

As you see, mine are the first of tangible treats,  
Pleasurable to the eye and smooth to the touch.  
Each bite is, of course, "preservative and fat free,"  
Natural as the Eden from which it was bred.

So you wish to sample some of my wares?  
I will allow you to take this first bite for free but  
I warn you that mine is an easy and demanding addiction  
The nerves are captivated by syrup-ridden vileness.

But my prices, dear friend, are impossible to beat:  
A dozen of my best for your cold embrace  
If you like what you taste, these make excellent gifts  
And I will make deliveries to whomever you wish.

## Desert Places

-Sheila Green

He pulls to the side of the road  
And whistles in a breathy tone.  
I watch him contort through  
The window  
To get:  
"The Perfect Picture."  
He wants me to see what he sees  
Know what he knows.  
Awe passed through  
Concave and convex lenses, silver, Kodachrome.  
He feels free here  
He flies in the desert and takes everything in.  
Perhaps his camera will be  
My eye  
And I will know what it's like to love this  
Desert.  
But all I see  
Is the ocean without water.  
This must be what it's like to lie  
At the bottom of the sea.  
Blue presses on me with the weight of open eyes.  
Help.  
I am drowning in sky.

## Red River Song

-Andrej Krasnansky

The wind rolls lustily across my face  
and runs her fingers through my hair  
I breathe as I walk, naturally so,  
and take of her as I always have  
an involuntary muscle, on auto-pilot,  
how am I to know what light I squelch each time I take a  
step  
what calculator to know what I owe for my abuse  
when light is given free  
but freely taken

I have not come to bore you with moans  
I only wished to lend you my eyes  
and perhaps you'll tell me where my blind spot is

there is a lady down below  
whose heart ought to have known better quarters than in  
me  
she waits, with the moon turning redder by the hour  
and the streetlights flickering, on and off,  
like a cricket's song  
telling me the temperature

bare fingers, bare bones, I have always said  
my friend, whose light is in your bedroom  
so that it shines like none I've ever seen  
when you leave me to retire

but masters of the butterflies do not tarry with long seek-  
ings  
but act and snatch as they know they must  
am I a net then? why do you ask  
have you not said you know me 3 times now

but do you know the secret, then  
there is one word, one sense, that,  
if found,  
will make it all worthwhile  
and I could go on eating bread and water  
and soaking the fire's heat  
and I would not worry so about the truth and the parasite  
for that word would say it for me  
and I would be spoken for  
at last

the fire in your place dims  
I go out, face the wind  
back to my red-moon ardent  
if she can forgive me once again  
for everything i know i'll do

---

## Via and disregarding Roots

-Jordie Shapiro

Clouds graze.  
Ducks pass, bickering  
and in the living field  
All is personal despite inanimate limbs  
I run in half-speed and wink  
at the trees I pass.  
Balance closes her eyes and spins  
She screams suddenly, amiably  
And collapses in giggle  
I too, rush to fall  
letting the soft earth tickle.

We gaze to the liquid cloud  
with cigarettes  
making angels in the soil.  
Our fingers dig like starfish  
marooned in the glistening sand

Balance clumsily takes to her legs  
Holds forward her chimney fingertips  
“These remind me that I am not five.” She says,  
sighs and darts to toes.

In the surreal night,  
even the silent brush has meaning.  
Our chambers of flesh and hair  
the only tie to yesterday’s mind,  
to the mind of tomorrow,  
the mind of Real, of productivity, of society.

    We have fallen in love  
with liminality.  
But forget not our roots, our bones, our real names  
our places in the Real  
for we know we must return

---

## Morning Hands

-R. Jason Leahey

You have hands like the morning.  
Slender and smooth  
    Spinning out tales of the sunrise  
Smelling of coffee from a Village coffeehouse  
On a Sunday morning in May  
When the streets smile up like a toddler,  
    Curious and mischievous,  
And smell sweet and wet.  
And the sun dribbles down like green water  
    Through the tree branches.

## replace

-R. Jason Leahey  
for Paul, Bob, Tommy and Chris

garage prophets scream from the cracked corner bathroom  
stalls,  
calling for Paul on Marlboro-coated tongues,  
with nothing to show except blood-shot eyes and loose  
scraps of  
    paper,  
lying in the corners of unvacuumed Chevy back seats  
and thrown out with the old gum wrappers.



---

### **The Talisman**

-Donna Maglio

In memory of "Big Bob"

The blue cloud  
of Lucky Strike smoke  
has cleared. No more car parts  
spread over the driveway  
on a Sunday afternoon. The tugboat  
captain has gone out to sea.  
Forty years of living crammed  
into a lonely Staten Island apartment.  
No family,  
only friends,  
to sort through the remainders.  
One less  
plate at birthday parties.  
One less  
gritty laugh.  
One less  
wrinkled cheek to kiss goodbye.  
Now, a small wooden seagull  
is the only memory. Carved by his hands,  
it sits on my desk,  
only a glance away.  
Whenever I am upset  
I stare at it.  
I am staring at it right now.

---

### **The Veins of a Leaf**

-Jonathan Colson

Within the veins of a leaf  
I see the outline of your face,  
staring back at me-  
motionless.  
And when your lips begin to part  
and a sound creeps from your fragile frame,  
a fall wind gusts-  
carrying you away  
into baleful clouds;  
daring to stain my face with icy rain.

---

**35 mi.**

-Angela Regas

I remember the men that came to our door  
shuffling bodies that seemed to be made of dirt  
they looked at me, a girl with cheeks that showed  
a dozen years of birthday cake  
*Trabajo?* they asked  
and I understood what they meant  
enough to answer always, *no trabajo*  
*no trabajo para ti*  
Then I watched them leave  
to continue their walk down the stretches of  
America  
like missionaries, searching for *in god we trust*  
searching for the hope  
written on a couple dollars in spare change  
They searched for someone to believe  
in the worth of their hands  
because no one believed in the worth of their souls  
anymore

---

**untitled**

-Angela Regas

forever," I say to the trembling seconds  
and the Bear in the sky  
  
Ursa bends down and pulls my soul  
in his teeth and we sink westward toward the ocean  
  
I reach for your arms to carry you with me  
across the arc of a moment  
  
and on your arms I leave teeth marks  
in the shape of my hands  
  
(the ocean will not wash them away)  
  
and so what has always been is now  
because forever stretches us both ways"

---

## **drown**

-Angela Regas

somewhere past the mountains, far enough away  
that the sky bears no resemblance to water  
and the people have no memory of swimming  
a long time ago

somewhere, where the sunset looks like rock  
looks like dreams looks like fire  
the bones of dinosaurs crawl beneath the still-  
warm dust

and the dust crawls, slowly westward towards  
the mountains, pulling away from the land  
and enlarging the sky until the weight of it falls  
like rain again

and the people stretch their thirsty arms up  
to hold back the deluge, their hands becoming lakes  
and their arms becoming rivers, and they fill, and fill  
and drown

---

## **Rough Chords**

-Megary Sigler

Today it was the blues that got me through:  
a hard handful of leather-rough chords  
strung out  
on thick, sandpaper sound,  
gristle and grease,  
like what's scraped into the dog bowl after Sunday supper.

Or steak and chicken sound  
to clench your jaws around,

belted

like a battle cry,  
like a protest on a picket line,  
wrenched up from thready, unscabbed holes,  
a resonating rhythmic rawness slickened  
into white Gardenia sweet,  
or plump and fleshy  
like a sequined alto breast

Stirring with dark power

and truth: bare and gritty as a hound-chewed bone,  
hard as a palm-heel smack.

---

## Broken Cocoon

-Megary Sigler

Bare-creaky-floored apartment.

Dust balls

and balled-up felines

fat as grease

spilling over the shredded, fringe-draped sofas.

Top floor apartment

where I nestle

invisible

against the snuggled pulse of the

dark.

I watch the snow

flake against the pink dust of dawn

and Domingo saturates the space in milk-

chocolate sound

Drenching my body

Cluttering the shelves

with smooth, vibrating arches of Italian

voluptuously buttered

in Puccini's song.

It resounds in Suzanne's grotesque antiques,

piles of blue sea-glass and gull feathers,

horrified sculptures that twist and breathe

when they think that

I'm sleeping.

Music

my music

Louder than is considerate

Louder than my mom would allow

Wine-red

and surging

Rattling the apartment

Splitting open the ceiling

and sponging me in the scalding

rawness of ache.

My ache.

My own.

The fattest black cat turns his plump lethargy

to squint,

with sea-glass eyes

at my magnificent grin.

---

## Waiting

-Janine Levin

He sits at home alone

Daddy's out getting drunk and Mommy's gone for good

Dry spaghetti and Michelob was his dinner and now he's  
having dessert; his last cigarette

The tv's playing in the background as is the radio- the  
Doors, his favorite

It's almost 2am and I can hear his heart breaking even  
over the phone

He tells me he wishes I were there, even though he knows  
it's impossible

He picks up his guitar and strums softly, singing along  
quietly, his voice cracking with each syllable

I know his cat is there, asleep on his feet, and it's comfort-  
ing to know that he's not alone;

He gets reckless when he's alone

I feel guilty for the fact that my parents, both of them,  
sleep in the next room, and that I am so loved

I fear for him  
for when his dad comes home,  
for what might happen if he gets too drunk,  
for the possible consequences of his depression

He hums ever so softly and sounds at peace

---

I listen intently, afraid to say the wrong thing for fear that  
he'll hang up

He has no idea how much I care, or does he? I'll never  
know; he doesn't say much

Yet I can sense that he's glad I'm there and I sit back,  
waiting for him to break the silence that scares me  
so.

---

## Mental Cirrhosis

- Sarah Smith

gripping the sink  
with white knuckles  
and vomiting  
yellow stomach acid jelly,  
I glance in the mirror.

my eyes,  
swollen half-shut,  
have yellowed in the corners.  
circles around them,  
dull grey, like worn tires.

Every  
heave  
hollows  
me further.

Perhaps  
all the drinking and drugs  
have caught me.

thoughts no longer  
come like  
monsoons;

my words  
are  
still waters.

---

## A Lesson in Canton

- Sarah Smith

He was crabbing off the pier.  
The way he squatted over the water intrigued me.  
I walked over  
and watched  
as he raised a string  
with a small crab swinging  
perilously from the end.

Netting it,  
then glancing at me, he said  
“This one’s too small”, tossed it back.  
It vanished in the harbor’s murky water.  
He must have noticed my rapt eyes  
and caught the trace of disappointment in them  
because his lit up,  
“But I have another in the cooler”.  
We walked over to a small Igloo and he opened the lid.  
A “Holy shit”,  
faintly audible,  
was all my mouth could manage.

He was laying on a bed of ice,  
broad white belly up,  
at least nine inches from claw to claw.  
He filled the cooler.  
The man picked him up by the midsection  
and held him at arm’s length.  
October’s sunlight gleamed  
off his shell and furious snapping claws.

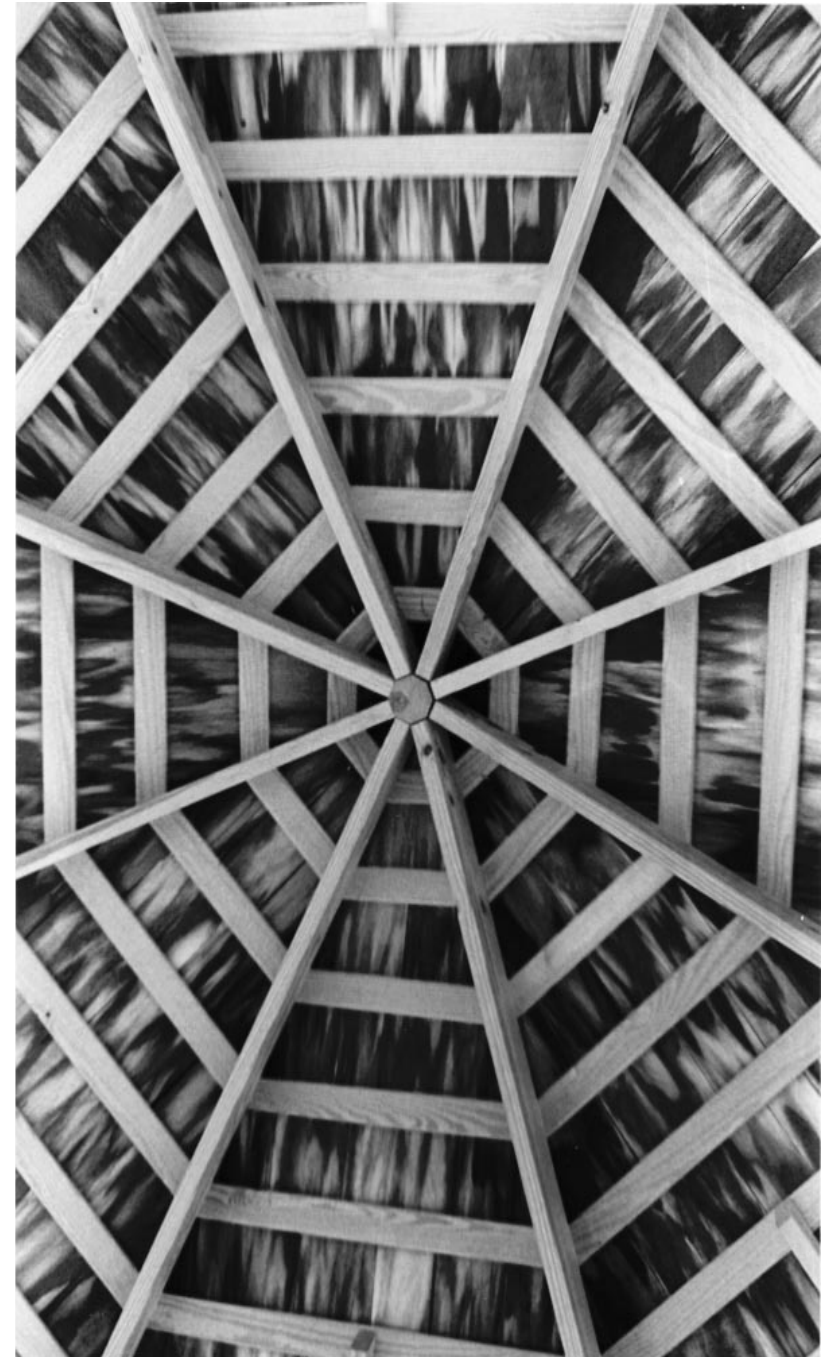
[Standing there speechless, I thought  
bluecrab blue  
is a color that crayon companies  
should never try to duplicate.  
Their imitations will be feeble.]

Beaming he said  
“That’s what they call  
a jumbo  
down at Albrecky’s market”,  
set him back on the ice, shut the cooler.  
I could hear muffled clacking against the plastic.

The man was checking the other lines now.  
“Do you catch a lot?”  
“Actually yeah . . . most of them are pretty small  
though”  
He attached a dirty pink clump  
to the empty end of his string.  
“What do you use?”  
“Chicken . . .  
chicken necks actually.  
They’re scavengers,  
and if they find something on the bottom  
they usually don’t let go.”

I wished him a good day,  
told him to take care,  
and continued walking down the landing,  
fascinated by the notion that  
crabs chasing chicken necks  
are tenacious.

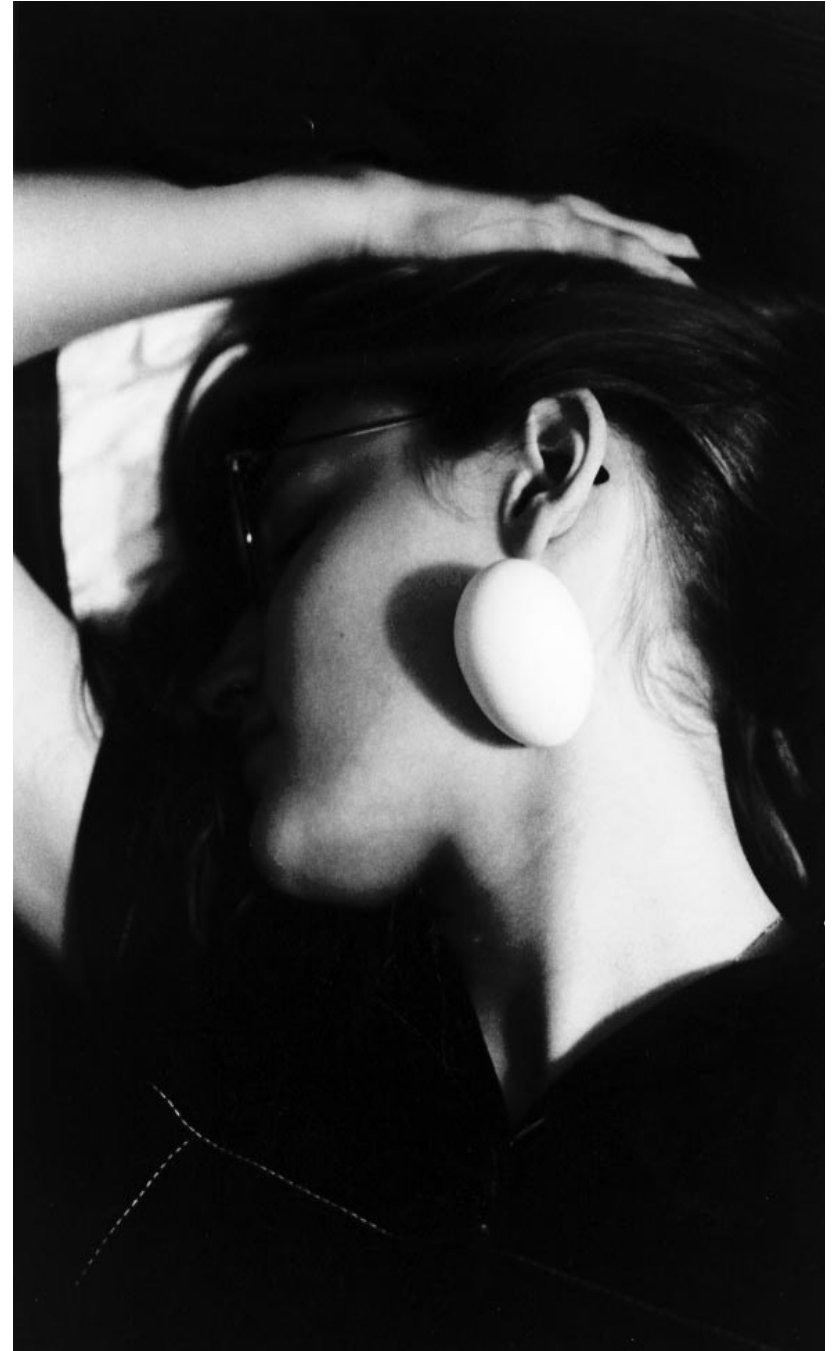
Even  
along the bottom  
of the ocean,  
there is still  
perseverance.



**Timothy Black**



**Neel Patel**



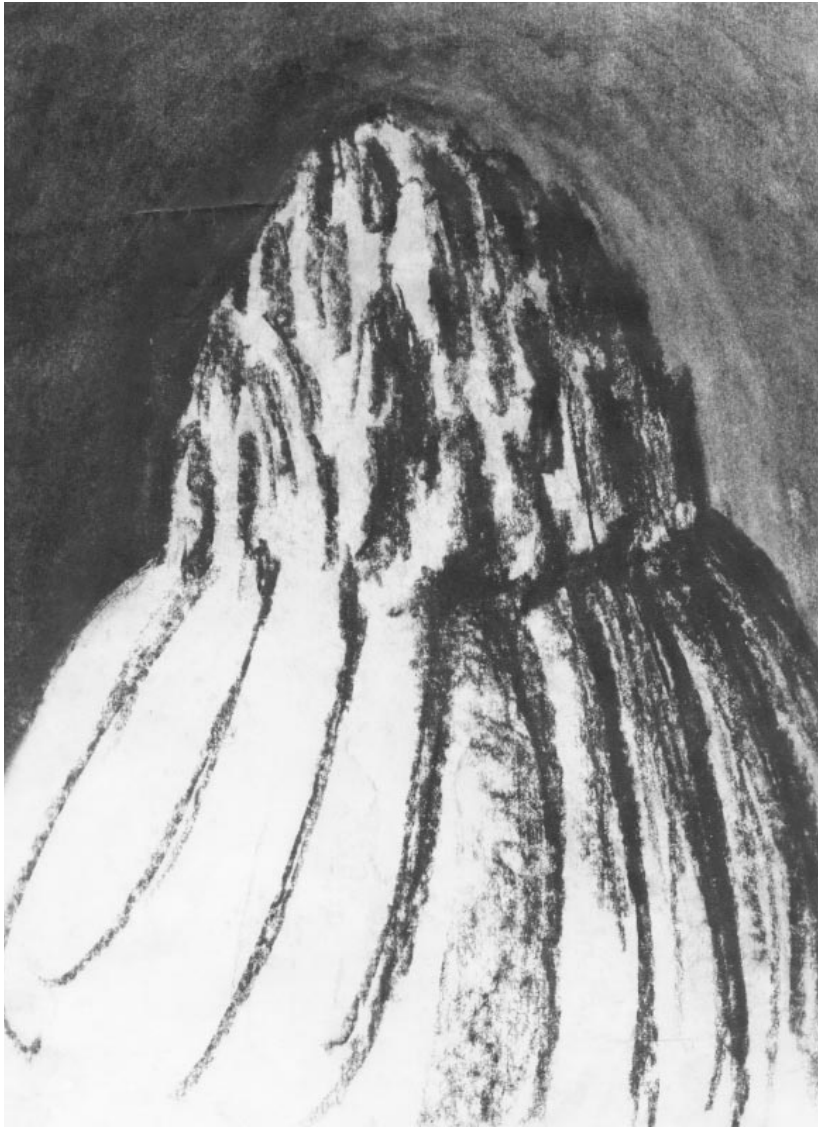
**Andrej Krasnansky**



**Aya Tsuchimochi**



**Russel Drylie**



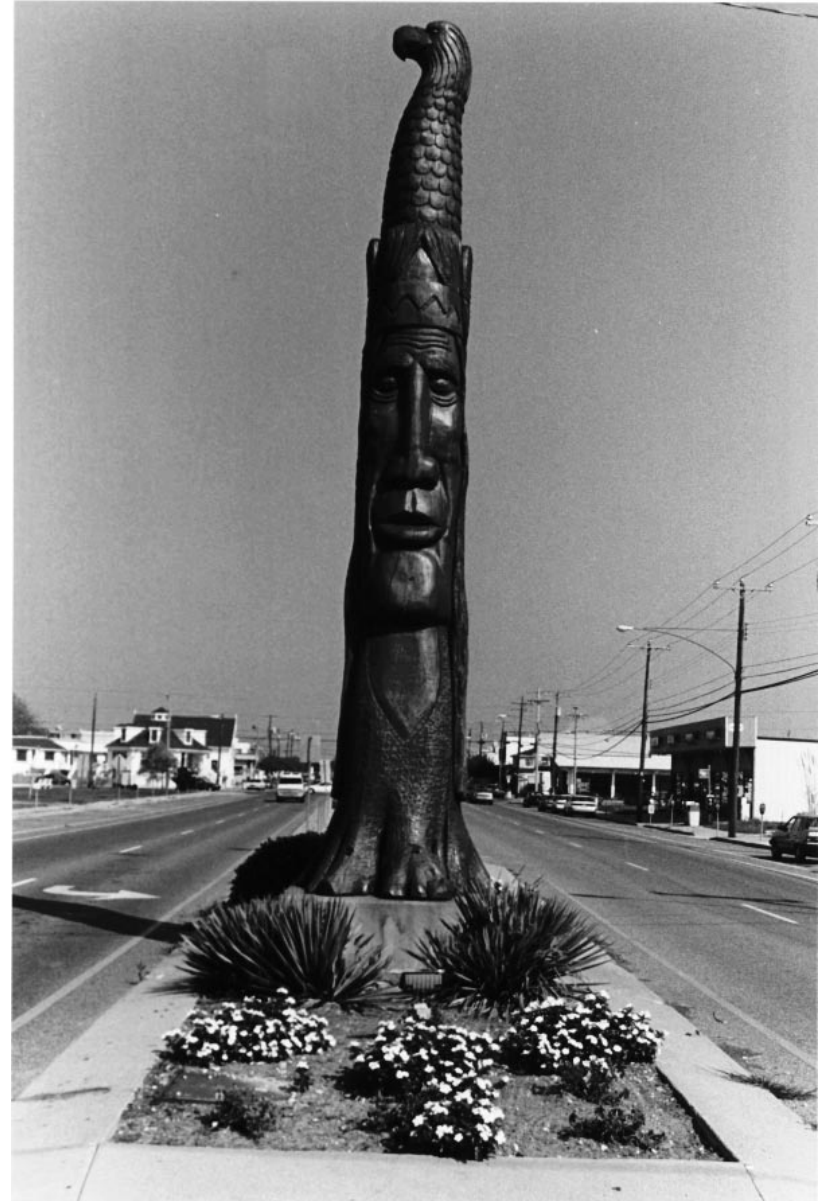
**Janine Levin**



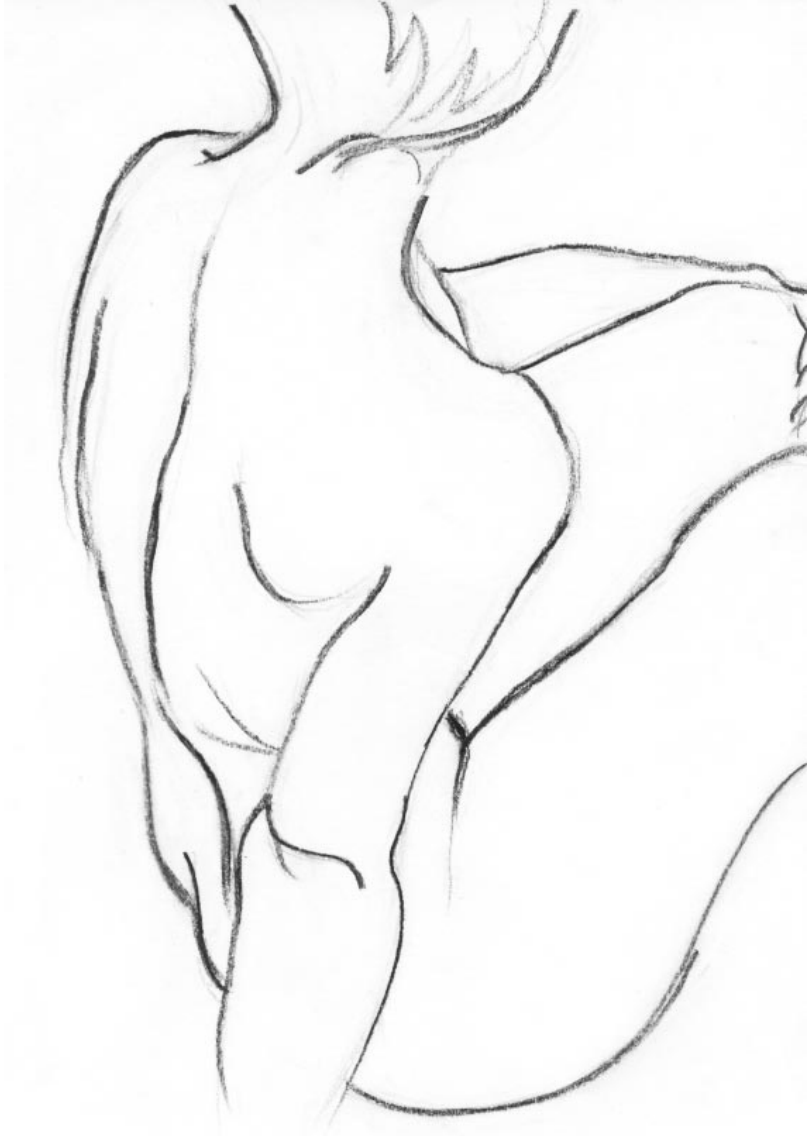
**Janine Levin**



**Angela Regas**



**Timothy Black**



**Corinna Yost**



**Chang Sun**



**Janine Levin**

## **Where I Come From**

-Sarah Azizi

Last night, I dreamt myself a murderess. I walked stiffly through my house, tiptoed up endless steps, and pushed open the door of my parent's bedroom. They were both awake; my father was lying on his back, oxygen tank by his side, and my mother was propped on her elbows beside him. Without a word, I confidently made my way to my father's body and plunged my heavy carving knife into his chest. I turned the knife around and around, carving shapes into his paper-thin flesh. I was grinning; my father was smiling; my mother was whimpering. My knife kept moving, swiftly, turning only at bones, because there was nothing else inside his body.

Where I come from, we talk only of what should have been and what should be. My Amu Masood and my mother say to my Mamangee, "You should have been here. You are his maman. He asked for you. Why did you not come? Why did you wait until he died?" My mamangee tells us, "I could not come. My health would not let me. My heart would not survive. I buried one of my children when I was seventeen. I could not bury another. He should not have died in America. Why did you not bring him home?"

Two months after we buried my father, my Mamangee came to the United States. She brought the grief of forty-five years and two months with her. With my hand on each side of the window, holding the white curtains back, I stood in our kitchen and watched her short, round body heave itself from my Amu Masood's car. I watched her solid frame walk to our door. When my mother opened it, I saw my Mamangee stumble as our house absorbed her grief. With every step across the shiny

linoleum and rough carpeting my father had crossed every day, my Mamangee let a year of memories go. Finally, wailing my father's name, she fell into my mother's arms and my mother whispered to her, "Beshiim Maman, Beshiim."

Before my father came to America, he had seen snow once. A light dusting had fallen in his village when he was seven. After a year in the mountains of West Virginia, he learned to despise the snow. Every winter, he would stand at the window in the family room and search for signs of spring. He would pass the graying of the seasons in warm flannel shirts and worn-out jeans, sitting on the couch with a philosophy book. When winter arrived in its full force, he would bundle himself up, spend hours shoveling snow off our long, twisted driveway, and swear the whole time, the words shooting out of his mouth so fast that tiny beads of spit would fly in all directions.

I had the dream again last night. This time, everything—the house, me, my father, my mother—looked as if it had been washed over with indigo paint. The blueness was thick; it made me slow, languid. My smile was even bigger this time, and my knife exited my father's flesh drenched with black blood.

I hardly saw my father during the last months of his life. I was too busy making sure I was acting normal. His decline was fast; he became disease. Only once did he and I cry together.

My mother's voice cracked as she told me he had six months to a year left. I hated her for that. I hated her for not being the strong one. I hated myself for believing that someone had to be the strong one. I hated her for being American. I hated her for not understanding the instinctual needs my sister and I had; we had to pretend the fear of losing control for a second was too great. We

could not speak about what was happening; we could only think of the injustice of death and disease. And I knew, when her crackling voice told me, that if I let the meaning of her words burn me, my fear would render me powerless.

Moments later, I sat face to face with my father. I clung to him, and our silent tears spoke for us.

Two months later, he was dead. Two months later, my aunt woke me at 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning. She said, "It's time." I ascended the steps to my parents' bedroom and took my father's hand. My mother was telling him to go, that we knew he had to, and she told me to echo her words. All I wanted was for him to die. I didn't want to hear anymore, see anymore, feel anymore. I had spent the winter listening to his lungs die, listening to his coughing, his wheezing, his moaning, his fear that he wouldn't die fast enough.

It took an hour for him to die. I remember five minutes of it.

Driving along the highway, I see leaves changing colors, falling, and some trees are already bare as November sets in. They frighten me. I remember that my father's final fall was spent traversing these highways, pavement carrying him from doctor to doctor, pill to pill, and diagnosis to diagnosis. His final trip down these highways showed him only barren dirt and naked trees.

I had the dream for the third time last night. I woke in a sweat, my right hand clutching my bedpost so hard my hand had turned red, my knuckles white. I let go and bit my hand, bit it hard to muffle any sound that might escape from my throat. I pulled on my robe and ran to the shower. I stood under the hot water for an hour, letting my tears join the water so that I wouldn't know which was which. I let myself wail into the sound of the rushing water. I whispered to myself, "Beshiim, Beshiim."

## Seven Shades of Blue

-Karen Barbour

The summer rain beat against the windows with a force the pounding bass couldn't quite drown out. He sat on the sofa, back to the dark windows, staring blankly at the painting on the wall above the plants, paying no heed to the storm's fury or the fact that it was the fourth time through that particular CD. He sipped from the glass in his hand absently, and noted that the yellow leaves touching the canvas were probably yellow because he hadn't watered them since she left. The piece was the first one she gave to him. He remembered how timidly she showed him her work. Every painting was a piece of her, and it was hard for her to show that inner-self to the world. Memories flooded through his soggy brain. He wanted to cry, had wanted to ever since that day two weeks ago, but the tears were spent, overpowered by rum-and-cokes, daiquiris, martinis, and on bad nights, vodka. He raised his hand and tilted his head to look at the empty glass, thinking the glass must have a leak in it; it was all gone again. Though he didn't know it, she too, was thinking of him. Wondering if she could have done things differently. Wondering if what she felt was regret.

The night passed, the storm passed, and he sat as if dead, eyes blurring over the painting until the colors swirled around behind his eyelids whenever he blinked. When he awoke, fire smoldering in his stomach and head bleary and heavy, the sun was high, glistening off the wet leaves so that the world seemed to be made of colored glass beads. He always treated his hangovers to a shower and a large breakfast. He let the water stream over him, first cold then hot, but he didn't feel the icy stream that numbed his thighs and raised small goose-bumps along his arms. Nor did he feel the scald of the steaming water as it turned his face pink, then red. He was if dead. He knew

this, could see himself, removed. Could see himself a zombie, a shell of a man.

He scrambled eggs the way she taught him: mixed with seltzer water to make them fluffy, with a pinch of dill. To his thick tongue they tasted like cardboard. He could feel himself sinking into the rut again, knew that something had to change before he sank too far, but he didn't care. Couldn't make himself care.

*She hummed to herself as she worked. The easel, slanted, was warm and light in the sun. She swirled the colors around on the palette. Her favorite part was the colors. She loved making them new, unique hues of green-gold and indigo-charcoal. Each color asked for life. New-leaf green, autumn moon pale yellow. The hardest part was the first stroke on the naked canvas. Confining each color to an object. Even as a child she hadn't been able to color inside the lines. The crayonings would skip outside the shapes, making skies purple or oceans yellow. Now she started with a loose stroke of russet. It wasn't until she began to shape it that she realized it was the color of an autumn leaf, the color of his hair.*

Couldn't make himself care. That was the problem. He knew it, but was powerless to change it. He consoled himself he still had some pride left: he couldn't call and beg. Maybe it would be better if he did. Considering this, he realized the point was moot, he wouldn't be able to do it anyway. He had tried to once. At least he thought he remembered trying. He had started to clean up the house, going through the motions of starting a new life, when he decided what the hell and opened a bottle of whiskey. He dimly recalled, several shots later, cradling the phone with tears running down his face because he couldn't remember the numbers. He was always crying about dumb things now: losing last month's

credit card bill, or forgetting to feed the cat, but it was just annoying water streaming down his cheeks. It irritated, no, frustrated, him that he couldn't cry bitterly for her, but tears only flowed unbidden over dumb daily obstacles.

The cat ran away. He hadn't seen her for several days. He'd always considered it was really her cat. They both had green eyes and tawny hair, and she spoke to it with unintelligible coos and murmurs. The cat would look up at her, eyes like wide jewels, and speak in her cat way, and she'd laugh and bring a dish of milk or dangle a piece of string. He'd gotten it for her, and then hurt and surprised when she so absolutely rejected him by not even taking the cat.

The strain of trying to fill the days consumed him. Nights should have been harder, evenings they had walked along the river, gone to theaters, or strolled in the moonlight with a bottle of wine, and afterwards they chatted on the back porch while fireflies blinked and mosquitoes hurled themselves at the screens. They would laugh while the moths thought the lamp was a sun and fried themselves. And they talked about yesterday, today, tomorrow. He remembered how her teeth seemed luminescent in the dim yellow light and how her earrings sparkled like another pair of eyes.

Yes, the nights should have been harder. The bed should seem cold and hard without her presence, the room should be dull without her brilliance, but he drank those nights away. It was the days that were impossible. They stretched emptily and eternally, sucking up every action as a black hole sucks up light. Work couldn't be bothered with; he didn't even bother checking the answering machine anymore. He knew she wouldn't call and he didn't want to have to explain to Joe or Mike or Jack that what they did just wasn't important anymore. They would complain that he'd left them short handed, or lament that he was wasting his talent, but secretly they

would calculate how much faster a partnership would be offered now that he was out of the way.

This truth didn't make him feel enlightened. Not even depressed. Just tired. He was so tired all the time now. He would sit on the porch in his old spot, or in the dining room, or the living room. And his eyelids would feel heavy and slow. But sleep wouldn't come. Only at night, when the gin and tonic had thinned his blood and his thoughts, would sleep rescue him. Sleep was wonderful, blissful, because it passed the time.

*She missed her cat. She had left her behind, hoping to hurt him, but now she missed the soft entwining around her legs, and the weight on her foot as adoring eyes gazed up asking for dinner, or attention, or whatever. At odd times she'd find herself thinking of him, remembering his quick, white smile or the funny rumble at the end of his laugh. She missed the talking, late at night, on the back porch. The easy camaraderie of friends, rather than lovers, gave the amiable ramblings a depth. Everything seemed important; the unseasonably warm fall was as significant as the pro-life/pro-choice debate. He listened well. He'd look at her seriously, as if carefully considering everything she said. It wasn't hero worship - that would have been tiring. Instead he gave her his full attention and that was unexpectedly restful. She'd always hated those late-night debates during her college years. Superficial students seated in a circle, pretending to listen, to understand, while all the time just waiting till they could say their thing, which no one else cared about. But he'd actually cared what she thought.*

*The painting was taking shape now: a lone, gray eyed figure in the corner gazing out across a twilight bay at a light house shining like a ray of star light in the heavy dusk. The dark waters met the infinite sky at an ambiguous horizon and the gray eyes looked wistful and l*



*lonely. She frowned critically and decided to return to it tomorrow. It must have been last night's storm that made her feel so restless and moody.*

It wasn't the sex he missed so much as her. When she'd first left he'd gone over every minute, every nuance, looking for answers. He'd interpreted, analyzed, studied every action, every reaction. The strange thing was he didn't think it was his fault. They'd been happy, he knew that. If she couldn't stay, that was her decision. There'd never been any pressure of commitment on either side. They enjoyed each other's company, as lovers, friends, intellectuals. He had hoped they'd last forever and her absence left him with a hollow emptiness, but no sense of failure.

He looked, for the first time in weeks, around the room. The dust hung thickly on the drapes and clung to the corners. The dead plants looked stiff and forlorn, the hard, dry soil the color of slate. The atmosphere was one of abandonment rather than despair. He thought that strange. He rose and opened the heavy curtains, the room lit up immediately but didn't seem any brighter. Outside the fallen leaves huddled in soggy heaps and the branches stretched dead fingers towards an ashen sky. The days were getting shorter and the chill air was developing a bitter quality. He suddenly realized how cold the house had become. Soon snows would come, covering up the world's ugliness with an indiscriminate blanket of white.

*The paintbrush was an old one and had seen many pictures - had created them. There were traces of red on the handle from an early attempt at a scarlet-cheeked dancer crying at missing the lead part. She painted the world as she saw it. Certain scenes would etch themselves into her brain, and the brush would paint the vision as if it were doing so of its own accord. Sometimes she'd be*

*scared of herself when she saw the results of her hand. That was why it was so hard to share her work with others - not the public, they didn't care about her - but with him, because he knew that it was a piece of her lying exposed on that canvas. Maybe that was why she left, she mused, maybe because he knew her better than she knew herself. She had no doubt that she was dangerous, she was protecting him, she excused herself. But a part of her wondered if in running away, she was really running away from herself.*

He noticed for the first time how many hues were in the painting above the skeletal plants. The sky overpowered the picture, overpowered the huddled figure on the thin strip of ground on the bottom two inches. The man sat, knees to chest, forehead to knees, looking very small under the force, the weight, of so much sky. Her paintings were always like that - lonely and filled with the raw power of exploring human insignificance. He understood what they encompassed because he too, often felt like that. Critics droned about tone and line and form, but he judged a work of art by the reaction it provoked in him. He noticed that the sky was not flat, but deep. A trick of the light perhaps, or a certain talent with perspective, but that sky was alive. He felt if he looked long enough, he'd be able to see sunlight glinting off the hull of a distant airplane, or a flock of Canadian geese traveling in their southward V. The myriad blues of the sky looked like a feat of nature, not of pigments. And he was amazed all over again.

*She cleaned up the brushes, letting the liquid in the jar turn from transparent to cerulean to murky chocolate. She stared appraisingly into the gray eyes of the young man in the corner. She knew that look well. It was the look he got sometimes when he stared up into the night*

*and felt inadequate because he couldn't imagine infinity. He was inscribed there forever. She knew now she'd never go back, but that look was safely remembered on the canvas, He was remembered on that canvas. And humming softly to herself, she laid the picture in the sun to dry.*

The living room seemed alive again, with no traces of the dusty bottles and sticky rings from when he forgot to use a coaster. The house seemed larger now, and it echoed disturbingly sometimes late at night. He still missed the warm smile over morning coffee, and the breathy mumbling in her sleep, but he realized, somewhat sadly, that he was becoming re-accustomed to being alone. The office managed to fill the day again, barely, but enough. Sometimes he'd still sit on the back porch after dark, but the cold stillness of the air made it hard to breathe, and more often now, he'd go to a singles bar, carefully drinking O'douls or a virgin cocktail, and smile. The smile hadn't reached his eyes yet - it was still in the experimental stages on his stiff lips, but his heart no longer felt like a lead weight. He smiled again at the blonde at the corner table. She noticed what beautiful, soul-searching eyes he had and smiled back, beckoning him over. He looked like the kind of man she wanted to spend more time with: sensitive, supportive, wise. The kind of man who really listened.

## **Straight Time**

-R. Jason Leahey

It always surprised people when she mentioned it. They generally asked her things like, "So, are you still in school or are you going to college?" while she was filling their coffee cups. Most of the time she just said that she was in school. Every once in a while, though, she would mention that she had been married since May when she was 17, and she would secretly relish the discomfort she could see squirming just beneath their skin while she continued to calmly clear their plates from the stained wooden tables. Most of the time, though, she just said she was in school.

She had gotten married for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that she was bored with her life. She hadn't gotten knocked up like some of the kids at school joked about, she had no intention of ever having kids, she just felt like a change. She had met Caston at a "street party," one of those they had on Friday nights at the dead end of a street where everyone drank beer until the cops came, and they had started dating. He was three years older and promised some sort of excitement even if it was only in a quick round of sex on the couch in his parents' basement. Her mother had gotten married when she was 19, so when Caston, 19 at the time, proposed, none of it seemed too unusual.

They had moved into a two room apartment, which Caston's parents paid for over the first six months as a wedding gift. They had a television with premium cable, Caston's old stereo, a bed and two tables in the main room. By the bed was a chrome-legged table with a phone and an ashtray made from a large clam shell. The kitchen had a fridge and freezer combo, a sink, and a stove. Off to the side of the kitchen was a bathroom with a small shower. The night they moved in, they tried to take a

shower together, but it was too tiny. Instead, Caston sat in a towel on the end of the bed while she took a shower. When she was done, he took his and then they both went to sleep. They hadn't tried it again.

She dropped school and quickly got her G.E.D. at night school, switching to full time hours at the restaurant while Caston continued to work for the maintenance in one of the subdivisions out in the east end. Sometimes at night they went to a movie with some of her school friends, but they were mostly caught up with their Prom and graduation, so she and Caston more or less stuck to the apartment. They rented videos a lot and Caston played a lot of video games on the system that he had bought. For dinner they ate leftovers she had brought home from the restaurant while they watched TV. Sometimes, they had sex once or twice a week, now in their own bed that her grandmother had taken from an old bedroom in her house and given to them. Mostly, they watched a lot of TV. Sometimes at night, when she couldn't sleep, she would bury her face down in the pillow with her eyes open, letting the sheer darkness flood in with little splashes of blue and yellow while she inhaled the seemingly permanent scent of Caston's hair that lingered in an off-color spot on the pillow. She was always tired; she just couldn't sleep.

Every morning Caston got up at 5 and left. She never got up until 6:30. She would crumple out of bed and drag to the shower. Afterwards, she tied her hair back in a pony tail of shiny black and took the car to the restaurant where she would have a cigarette and then go out to clear off her first tables. Normally, she was careful to pull her mouth up into a tight-lipped smile while she slapped her wet towel back into her apron. Sometimes, though, she forgot.

She met him at the restaurant when she was 19.

He had shaggy blond hair, slightly greasy, and green eyes that danced behind the flopping mop. He smiled when she filled his cup and said "Thanks," and when she raised her eyes to meet his, she couldn't help smiling back. He smiled wider, showing a set of off-white teeth with a chip missing from his third tooth left from the middle. She giggled to herself and brushed her bangs back from behind her right ear before she skipped back to the kitchen for a cigarette. She made a conscious effort to sort of swing her hips.

When she finished her cigarette she headed back to the front and leaned in the door jamb between the cash register and the kitchen. Her watch said 11:00— an hour and a half until her break. She started across the dining room at him while he spun a quarter like a top on the table. Every minute or two he glanced out the window, then went back to his quarter. She wondered what his name was. He looked too cool to be a "Matt" or "Chris;" something with more character, like "Emille" or "Jarret," maybe something really different like "Damien." She'd always liked the name Damien. He seemed pretty old, maybe 23 or 24. She tried to remember if she could recognize him from high school. She didn't. She wondered if he did. Was he a college student? Maybe he was one of those people from an upper middle class family that did well in school and then took a year off just to travel around. He sort of looked like that: neo-hippie bohemian.

Carol, the manager, nudged her and she sprang out to fill the tea glass of a middle-aged man with specks of graying blond in his red beard. Then trotted back to the register. What could she say to him?

He got up from his table and aimlessly walked over to the juke box. No one ever played the juke box until at least 5:00. She looked at her watch: 11:30. He dropped the quarter in the machine and fumbled around in his pockets, pulling out some other coins, half a roll of

Certs, and a hair band before finding it. He dropped that one in and punched four buttons. An old Allmann

Brothers tune squeaked out as he made his way back to the table. Definitely– neo-hippie bohemian.

She watched him, picking at his fingernails now since he had lost the quarter, as he glanced over the menu again before slipping it back behind the salt and pepper shakers. Did he have a girlfriend? He probably did; he had that charming “I just don’t care” look about him. Maybe he was a poet. She could imagine him wandering the country writing poetry. He looked wiry, though; he probably spent a lot of time outdoors.

Should she go speak? His coffee didn’t need to be refilled but she could still go over and just be friendly. Maybe if she saw his smile once again the broken tooth, she could get a glimpse of who he was, crack the mystery behind his blond bangs and green eyes.

Carol nudged her again and she rung up a 20-something business woman in a jacket and long black skirt. The woman needed change for a tip. She left a quarter.

She shut the register and backed up to the door jamb, taking her watching place, and looked over towards the table. He wasn’t there, just a folded five and two ones. She quickly swiveled her head to the left and caught his eye as he walked out behind an older woman. He smiled at her and then was out the door.

When she got home from the restaurant, Caston was already there, sitting in front of the TV. She went to the kitchen and put two frozen dinners in the oven before popping a beer and falling onto the ground and resting up against the chair that held her husband. He was dirty. He hadn’t even bothered to wash his face, and the deep tan of airborne dirt was streaked with lines from tears of sweat.

When the oven timer buzzed, she just sat on the floor sipping her beer. Caston looked at her, tiredly pushed himself up from the couch, and went to fetch the

dinner. That night they watched TV until he fell asleep on the floor with his head resting in her lap. She woke him up at 10:30 and they went to bed. She stayed awake, long after he went to sleep, staring face down into the pillow, letting the darkness flood in, while the scent from Caston’s hair lingered in her nostrils.

## Fall From Grace

-Sarah Pinsker

That was the night that Al Muniver vomited white foam across the floor of the hospice, and I was forced to look for God in every doorway on my way home. That was my game then, played silently with every panning hand and sleeping freak: are you the person who's going to change things? Just biding your time? I gave no less than a dime, even to the slumming uptown kids. That night, I bought dinner for a bag lady.

She was middle-height, middle-weight, a good deal more than middle-aged. Sixty or so, at least, bent under her bags and greyer than the street. I invited her to join me, and we ate in a diner just across the street from where she had been settling herself for the night. "The Three Brothers Restaurant," and there really had been three brothers originally, the woman told me, and they had fed her leftovers on long cold evenings. The waiter obviously was not one of them: he threw dirty looks at us as frequently as he could, and she ordered a BLT, no B, no T. Mayo and cheese. "Why not just order a cheese sandwich?" I asked, playing with the yellow crust on my fork.

"It makes 'em pay more attention to what they're making, makes 'em think about the customer for a minute. They're gonna make me a fresh sandwich, even if they have a case full of cheese sandwiches already made." She smirked.

Her name was Shel, and her belongings took up the entire footspace beneath the booth. She carried two small white plastic bags, "Food Emporium" stretched in green across the bulging sides; and one enormous one, a canvas sack that protruded well into the aisle. I kicked at it a bit, trying to feel what was inside: it felt in equal parts as soft

as clothing, as hard as bone.

I watched her as she ate, long after I had finished my own tuna on rye. She had torn the breadcrusts from her own sandwich when it had arrived, setting them neatly aside. With puffy gray fingers, she had grasped a knife and fork in trembling fists, and diced her sandwich. She never chewed, but let each morsel disintegrate slowly in her mouth, eyes closing as each one first touched her tongue, opening again. "My teeth gone fall out," she told me cheerfully, sucking on a long piece of breadcrust at the end of the meal. I told her that I had never considered that, and wondered secretly whether that meant that they were going to fall out, or they already had.

She told me that she had been a nurse of sorts, and I told her that I still was one, sort of. Nursing implies that some sort of healing process is involved. She agreed, and called me a shepherd; I wasn't sure that it was any better than before, but I took what she gave me. Shel was sick herself; she had been dismissed - "severed," in her own words. She was doing better at surviving than she had thought she would. She was taking longer to die than she had thought she would, was the way she put it.

After dinner, I watched her drag her bags back into the doorway she had claimed earlier, which had waited unmolested for her return. She settled herself within a nest of bags, and drew from the largest one a huge pair of wings. I watched as she folded her feathers around herself, and curled up against the doorframe.

When I was younger, there was an ice skating rink near my house. There was a bowling alley sharing rent; the rink was maybe the length of a lane, maybe the width of four or five. The owner was an old woman, in her sixties at least, with the pillowy fat that bulges out of some people at strange angles, so that it doesn't show if they look at themselves just right. Every weekend, twice on

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Saturday, three times on Sunday, she would clear all the skaters away. Tinny music would spill out of the tinny speakers, and she would step onto the ice, alone.

Her name was Charlotte Mills, or something equally benign. She had been an Olympic alternate at one point, I think, had won some important competitions. I imagine she was small and willowy and graceful, then. Now she was merely small and lumpy. She danced around the ice to her chosen waltz, throwing in spins and single jumps every once in a while. It was excruciating to watch. Did she realize she was no longer graceful, and skate in spite of that, merely for the joy it brought her? I don't think it had crossed her mind that things were different now. What does a jogger do when he realizes he can no longer jog, or a surgeon when her hands tremble too much? I can think of nothing worse.

Are angels finite creatures? I think of the stories that I was told as a child, and of the time walking home from synagogue on Yom Kippur with my grandfather when I had seen through the clouds to the open gate of heaven. I choose not to dwell on the day an angel told me that she could no longer work, but really, I can think of nothing else.

## **Matching Plaid**

-Reece McClung

She was one of those people who gripped the bottle just a little too tightly. Her thin fingers wrapped around the amber neck, clenched so they seemed to squeeze the condensation out of the glass. The rim pressed hard against bloody-red lips as she bit off another sip. She curled her lip with every swallow, not to seem tough or mature but because she secretly couldn't stand the taste of beer. Anyone watching would have noticed that she held the expression a little too long, but no one was.

She sat on a round, green footstool by the door, watching. The room she surveyed was dancing, laughing, spinning in every direction at once, but she didn't as much tap a foot. A girl across the room screamed as some jock heaved her across his shoulder. The girl was laughing, beating him on the ass with one hand while trying to keep from falling out of her dress with the other. She looked young, too young to be here, with thick black eyeliner and rouge caked on to mask her age. The jock pounded his chest with his bottle and then thrust it in the air like liberty's torch. His two friends laughed with vicious smiles. The jock gestured wildly, saying something that made their eyes widen and compelled them to clink their bottles.

A clot of people wandered in front of the green footstool just as the jock, in a flourish of machismo, kicked his heel out and spun in a pirouette, drawing even louder shrieks of convulsive laughter from the girl on his shoulder. The sound of breaking glass snapped the attention of the room to where they had stood, and as the crowd passed she could see the girl propped on one elbow on the floor next to an overturned chair and a shattered glass. The jock struggled to his feet, stumbling off toward

the bathroom as someone ran in with a towel to wipe up the spreading puddle of beer. The girl on the floor ripped the cloth away and began awkwardly scrubbing beer from her chest with a limp wrist. Most of the room laughed, the rest stared blankly. As the adrenaline rush of breaking glass faded the party lost interest, pulled away from the diversion by the pulsating drone of the stereo. One by one they re-gained the beat and floated off to their private universes of clinched conversation.

“Hey, you mind if I sit here?”

A shot of hot, foul breath forced her to recognize the guy who had stumbled up beside her. He was now in the slow, laborious process of simultaneously sitting down without spilling his cup while trying to put up a suave facade. She drew up a little tighter and he sloshed beer into her shoes.

“Oh.. Oh.. Shit...um, sorry about that,” he said as he bent to wipe the droplets from her patent boots. She looked around the room for someone she could pretend to need to speak to. When she glanced down, he had paused in mid wipe to stare at her crotch. He noticed her looking and broke his gaze only long enough to mumble something about liking this side of her better. She stood up quickly and edged around the doorjamb into the hallway, leaving him slumped against the footstool.

The hall was lined with people, a steady stream of traffic rolling past as she slumped against the wall. It felt as she had been shot into a hideously enlarged vein, but instead of blood cells the artery was flowing human bodies. A guy carrying three overflowing cups spun in a circle to avoid someone’s mad dash to the bathroom. He looked at her as he passed, smiled, and then slipped quietly into the room she had just left.

“I think he likes you...” a female voice said to her left.

She pretended not to notice, turning her back to the voice.

“Hey..” the drunk voice said, “Hey you, I think he... he likes you.” The voice paused in mid stream to suppress a belch, and then continued. “Do I know you? Hey, do you hear me?” the voice said, “I’m Sarah’s friend Emily...” Without acknowledging her presence, she slipped away from the voice and into the stream. She had connected no face to it, and it quickly faded, swallowed by the crowd.

She worked her way toward the front door, side stepping cups and the occasional piece of trash. Someone had brought the lawn jockey in from outside and placed it on the second step of the staircase landing. He was poised, gripping a pair of boxers in his extended, iron fist, a lit cigarette taped to his mouth. Someone had puked on the floor in front of him, perhaps the same someone who was passed out beside the puddle, maybe not. As ash from the cigarette’s glowing tip fell and settled in the pool, she pushed open the door and stepped out into the cool dampness of September. The hot, cloying atmosphere of the party washed around her, and she shut the door she could feel it being sucked away by the night air. The moon was out, casting dim shadows across the peeling floor. Through the drawn curtains of the front window she could hear the party inside. She crossed the porch and set her bottle on the handrail. She eyed the tapered neck as she leaned against the post, realizing it was the first time she’d let go of it all night. With a prodding finger she reached out and tapped the lip, her fingernail clinking against the glass. She smiled. The bottle teetered on the edge, and she pushed it over.

“Can I get you another?”

The intrusion snapped her attention away from the fallen bottle. The guy she had seen in the hallway hovered pensively in the open doorway. He smiled, exposing a

small gap in his front teeth.

“Do you want one? I can go get you another” he said. He stood on the porch, with the door pulled against him like a shield. His right hand was fidgeting with the sheers lining the glass paneled door.

“No, thanks, I’m fine.” She said as she turned to examine the ring of sweat left on the white-washed rail. The moon glinted faintly off the bottle through the bush below.

“Um, my name’s Ben, by the way” he said, extending his left hand gracelessly. She turned and faced him as he slipped a little further onto the porch. She extended hers, but didn’t leave the shadow of the post. He stared for a moment, looked back through the door and stepped from behind it like he was sliding out from beneath some huge weight. He took her hand briskly, but was amazed at how soft it was.

“I’m Margaret, nice to meet you.”

She couldn’t help staring at him. He looked so uncomfortable it almost pained her to watch him breathe, but in a way she thought it kind of cute. Refreshing anyway.

“I, uh, have been put in charge of drinks tonight, that’s why I asked.”

The hand he greeted her with was now jabbed firmly into the pocket of his tan pants. He rocked back and forth slightly, his brown saddle shoes peeking out from beneath a heavy cuff.

“I came out because I needed a break. I’ve been running all night.”

She looked toward the street. Traffic was slowing at the light, but at this time of night traffic was two or three cars.

“So you decided to take time out for one yourself?” she asked, turning her head as she walked to the edge of the porch. The moonlight painted her in a thin

wash of silvery gray, her nose chasing shadows across her cheekbones like a sundial as she turned to sit on the top step.

“No, I don’t drink.” He said. “I don’t have anything against it, I just never acquired the taste.” As he spoke she turned and propped against the post, the bricks bleeding cold through her jeans.

“Between you and me, beer is the first cousin to piss. Sam Adams might as well have drained it right there in the bottle,” he said, with a hesitant grin. Margaret laughed, and noticed that as she did she could see him relax. It was if an invisible thread suspending him from the ceiling slacked off and let his feet make full contact with the painted floorboards.

“Are you waiting for someone?”

“Yeah,” she said with a smile.

“Do you mind if I wait with you?” he asked, his string re-tightening ever so slightly.

“No, not at all.”

He crossed the porch and sat on the edge, a step above her. He paused for a moment, and then asked “If you didn’t want to drink, why did you come?”

She looked at him. His face was average in almost every respect, but there was something about him that she liked. Perhaps the way he looked so remarkably sincere.

“Why did you?” she asked with a grin.

“I’m friends with two of the guys who live here” he said as he pried a twig from a crack in the floor and began sharpening it on a mortar joint between his feet. “I watch out for them on nights like tonight.”

“Shouldn’t you be in there then?”

“No, they’re passed out. I’d rather be outside, anyway.” He picked up a leaf fallen from one of the maples that lined the street and skewered it on the twig.

“I know what you mean.”



He looked around for a moment, searching for something in the near darkness. Beneath the bush below he spied what he was looking for. He bent down, flicked a few leaves and sticks out of the way and straightened up, a small dark lump in his hand. She watched him as he carefully twisted the twig between his thumb and forefinger, driving it down into the lump. He began pinching off bits of the leaf until it was roughly rectangular, holding out his creation like a potter eyeing the symmetry of a piece. He let out a satisfied “Ahh” and turned to face her. He held in his palm a miniature boat. Its maple leaf sail arched out, caught in an invisible wind. Its pine-bark body formed a pointed bow, from which jutted another twig figurehead.

“Leaf-cutter’s Battleship,” he smiled. She laughed as he placed the miniature frigate on her knee. It balanced on the bone, looking like it was ready to sail over the end of the world. She picked it up by its rough, flaky hull and turned it in her hands.

“I used to make whole fleets when I was little” he said.

“Why don’t you now?” She asked, putting it on the edge of the porch. He looked at her for a moment, biting the inside of his lip. Her eyes smiled in the faintness of the moonlight. When she turned he could have sworn he saw the moon itself reflect in her pupils. He shrugged and looked toward the street.

“What time is your ride getting her?”

“I’m not waiting for a ride” she said, still staring at him.

“I thought you were waiting for someone?” he said, confused.

“I was.” She smiled. “Someone to talk to. Thank you.”

He looked at her blankly for a moment, a smile growing in the corners of his mouth. It spread across his face, pushing up his eyes and pulling tight across his chin. He scraped the heels of his worn shoes on the bricks as he slid down to join her. Behind his head, the tiny galleon stood poised, sailing on.

**Telemachus**

-Rebecca Knickmeyer

The scene: The bed chamber of Odysseus.

Time: Thirteen years after Odysseus' return from the Trojan war.

(Telemachus enters Odysseus' bed chamber. On the other side of the room, with his back turned to him, is Odysseus, packing a few weapons and clothes into a bundle.)

*Telemachus*

You are truly leaving then?

*Odysseus*

I have packed, haven't I?

*Telemachus*

You have been pretending to pack many years too long for that to mean anything to me.

*Odysseus*

Today is different. I have found passage on a merchant boat to Africa. It leaves this afternoon. By sunset I will be far out at sea.

*Telemachus*

You mean to abandon this house?

*Odysseus*

I do.

*Telemachus*

To leave your land, your subjects, your servants? Be reasonable.

*Odysseus*

I am...reasonable.

*Telemachus*

Have you no idea of responsibility. Will you leave the wife who waited faithfully for you for twenty years? The wife who refused a thousand men for your memory, who wove and unwove your shroud until her fingers were bleeding?

*Odysseus*

(turning angrily towards Telemachus)

My wife! Yes, it is strange I should wish to leave her, but I must confess I love her far dearer when I do not see her. On my journeys she seemed to me the most precious and beautiful creature in all earth and heaven. She has become smaller since my return.

To think, all those days I went down to the harbor to watch the waves roll out to sea and the sailors they took with them, she believed me to be seeing other women.

*Telemachus*

I daresay you've had enough adventures of that sort to rightfully alert her suspicions.

*Odysseus*

I might have had one or two, perhaps, during those long years away, but I suppose you do not want to hear of them, though I recall that once you longed for me to tell of them across the evening table or before the fire.

*Telemachus*

I enjoyed fantasies then, but I need no stories of women who live not, now. Dream women. I will marry a girl of flesh, blood, bone, and breath.

*Odysseus*

You would not say that if you had seen them, nor anything worthy of being near them. How golden were their skins, like olive oil that runs down the sides of gleaming brown jugs. Necks like swans and eyes like coals, before they crumble into steaming dark ashes. And in their arms it always felt as the rocking of the sea.

*Telemachus*

Shut your mind from these thoughts. I will hear no more stories.

*Odysseus*

It was your mother who forbade the stories.

*Telemachus*

You cannot go. You are old and sick. No longer can you fight nor even walk as you once did. Stay here and we will take care of you. You would dishonor us, and pain us if you went.

*Odysseus*

You would have me die here, Telemachus. Here! Tortured by the sounds of ships at sea. Looking every day from my window to its ceaselessly fleeing waves as they wash away the insignificant days of my life. Oh, if only this were not an island, surrounded by my torment. Do you not understand that this place is a prison to me? To sit still is to be bound. After my travels, I was so full of joy to return to my home, my Ithaca, only to find all the rooms shrunk too small for body or mind. What once seemed great is now only a toy, a flimsy painted miniature of the things that I have seen. Every boat in the harbor, every wave on the sand, every bird that passes, shrieking, overhead, every pebble thrown on this shore has a voice

which calls me, that urges me to escape. In the night they peel away my skin until only my desire for adventure remains, bitten and stung by the salt air. Is this what you want for me?

*Telemachus*

No!

*Odysseus*

You desire my punishment for the wounds you feel you have suffered from my absence. I too have suffered from absence.

*Telemachus*

You misunderstand.

*Odysseus*

Do you call yourself my son? My friend?

*Telemachus*

Odysseus!

*Odysseus*

No! ( He turns away and leans against the wall) I have no friends, but the memories of friends are borne in on the evening breeze. Tattered ghosts of soldiers and allies from the siege on Troy. They urge me to follow in their footsteps again. I see their images in the summer moon and the movement of the leaves of the tree beside the gate, late at night when you do not know the world. They race on the edges of the air and fill up sails with their breath. It is I alone who remain. (He struggles for breath) Who remains idle...(he begins to cough violently.)

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*Telemachus*

Father, father! You are not well; let me help you.  
(Telemachus catches Odysseus and leads him to the bed)  
Look at yourself. You are sick in body and in mind. Let  
me take care of you, father. (He leans Odysseus' head on  
his shoulder).

*Odysseus*

Let me tell you the story, Telemachus, my son.

*Telemachus*

No, I will not listen to your tales again. You would have  
me be the same as you. A heart so full of hunger. I would  
burn and starve to feed on horizons, poor food to eat in the  
end.

*Odysseus*

It is beautiful.

*Telemachus*

Not for me.

*Odysseus*

You have not seen the sunrise, lush and red on the island  
of Circe, nor heard the Greek cries of victory and the  
plaintive groping call of the Sirens.

*Telemachus*

It seems that you hear them still.

*Odysseus*

Perhaps I should tell it once more. Maybe the memories  
will escape to the sky.

*Telemachus*

You know they will not, father. Sleep awhile.

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*Odysseus*

(very quietly) Am I to hear the sea forever and follow it  
only in my dreams?

*Telemachus*

(looking away from his father)  
I will help you to your boat.

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