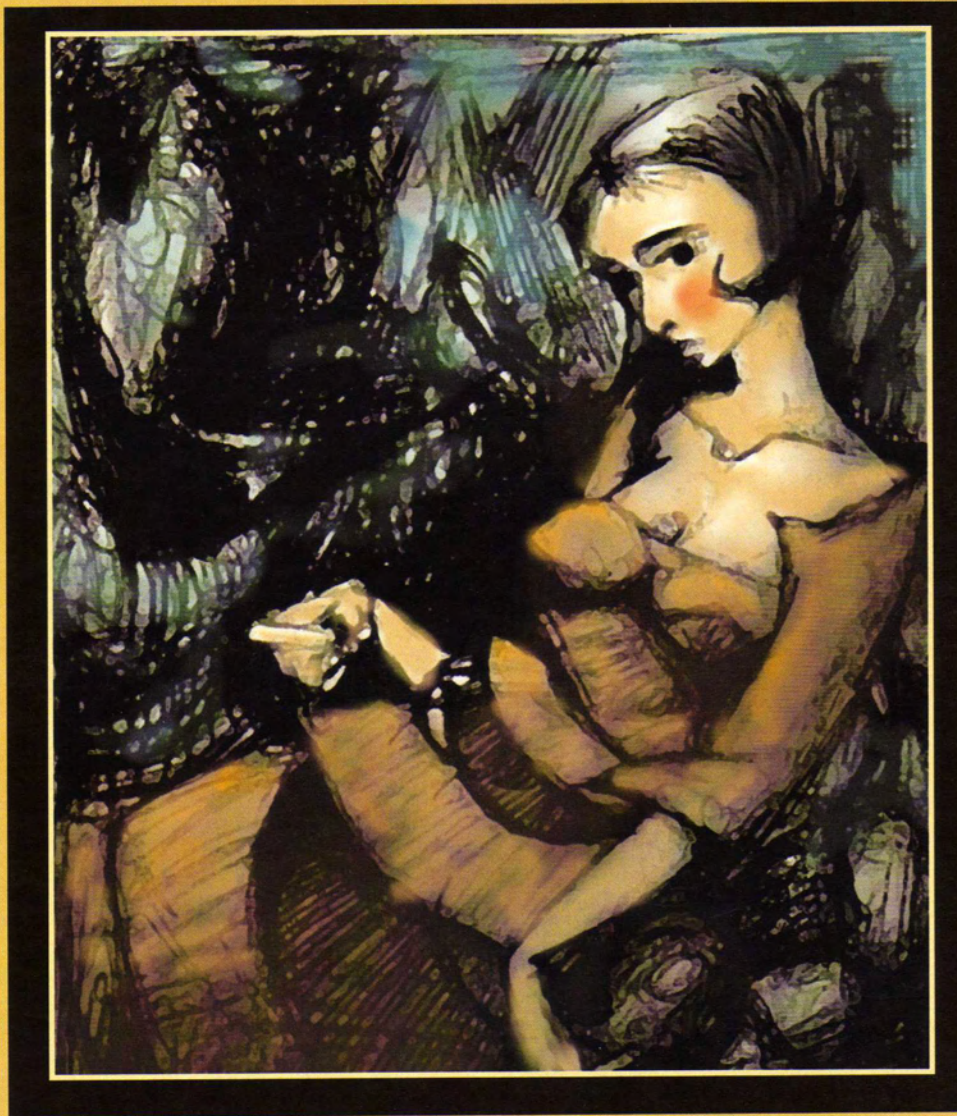


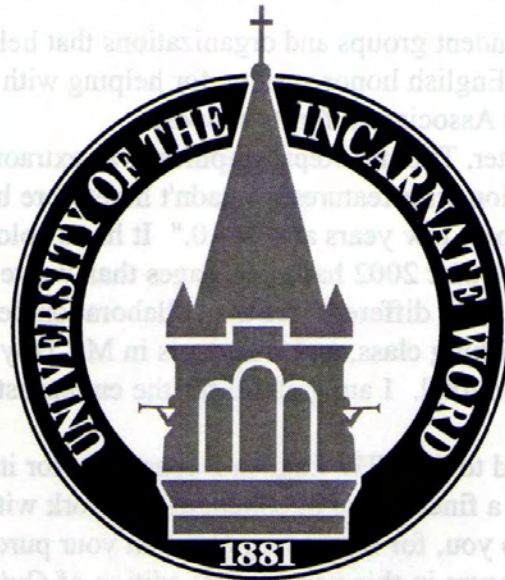
Quirk



2002

A Literary Journal

Quirk 2002



A Literary Journal

On the Cover: *Girl Reclining* by Desiree Maher

Advisor's Note

Spring 2002 has marked a pivotal moment in the history of *Quirk*. Never before have so many different groups and individuals worked together to help with *Quirk's* production. Over 60 different authors and artists, from all over the United States, submitted over 130 pieces for us to consider. In the end, we painstakingly selected about 50 of those contributions.

Furthermore, *Quirk* had unprecedented financial help from a variety of sources. We are grateful to Marjorie Jordan, one of UIW's most generous alumna English majors, whose donation helped us with printing costs. We are also grateful to the Dean of Campus Life, Renee Moore, whose office donated an unprecedented sum to help us with printing. Additionally, the only bilingual newspaper in San Antonio, *La Prensa*, gave a generous donation to help support literacy in our community. We are very grateful.

We also appreciate the student groups and organizations that helped with our endeavors. Thanks to *Sigma Tau Delta*, the English honor society, for helping with sales and distribution. Thanks to the UIW Student Government Association for its support.

And then, the actual printer, Thomas Reprographics, was extraordinarily generous with us, helping us to produce a publication with features we hadn't heretofore been able to include. This year, the book is a bit larger than the past few years at 8" x 10." It has a color cover, and color and black and white artwork inside. Also, *Quirk 2002* has more pages than we've ever had before.

Another thing that made 2002 different was the collaboration between so many students. 27 students in my Editing and Publishing class, and 7 students in Mr. Troy Knickerbocker's Print Design class collaborated to create this journal. I am grateful for the enthusiastic effort of all these sparkling scholars.

I am particularly indebted to the UIW English Department for its support, both morally and financially. Nobody could have a finer group of colleagues to work with, anywhere.

And thanks, of course, to you, for supporting *Quirk* in your purchase of this text. The staff and I sincerely hope you will find pleasure in this very special edition of *Quirk*.

Moumin Quazi, Ph.D., Advisor

Editors' Notes

Rather than have one editor speaking for the journal, this year's note is a collection of the notes that reflect the diversity of input that has been the hallmark of this entire production effort.

"*Quirk* 2002 seeks to quench the contemplative and expressive appetite. Its pages are filled with an intergenerational and exploratory venture into various literary genres, providing a breadth of perspective that encompasses modern to classical subject matter and style. Whether for a published author or amateur writer, *Quirk* offers a platform for expression, upheld by the tradition for literary excellence."

Liselda L. Lazo

"As a literary society, we look to texts to give us meaning; we look to the ink on a page to find purpose, comfort--to find a connection. But in doing so, we have created a system in which nothing is perfect, in which the room for error is great. Thus it is we, the writers, poets, and readers, who must give meaning; we must break through the walls of misinterpretation.

In an age where truth tends to be seen as the mere contextualization of ideas, we can find refuge in the text. We can create the text in our mind, thus making it a reality. We can play with meaning and broaden our constructed reality. When we read we are, in a sense, creating a world that we can control. In creating our reality we give ourselves purpose and meaning. And while the everyday world we live in goes on ambivalent to our existence, the text relies on us to make it real. The text needs us; we give it life. We are the creators; the breath of life is contained within our minds. And with this breath, we can speak to all mankind.

The world of literature is one that revolves around the consciousness of humanity. It thrives on our creativity. And as with all texts, it is with this journal that textual reality is actualized. Hopefully, we can bring a new generation of creators to the human experience, keeping our textual world flourishing.

Through literature, through the written word, we achieve a wondrous thing; we give ourselves meaning; provide ourselves with purpose and inter-connectedness. We give ourselves our humanity."

Justin Pozos

"In the 2002 edition of *Quirk*, the editors, staff, and contributors 'acknowledged the multi-faced nature of an individual's personality.' The authors allowed the reader to explore the many masks worn throughout life. Since *Quirk's* last publication, the world has experienced many promising, yet cataclysmic events. These events have forced individuals to delve beyond the reflection of the looking glass. Instead of merely looking at the reflection in the mirror, we have been challenged to look deep within ourselves, our society, our religion, our culture, etc. Whether done willingly or reluctantly, we have been forced to observe, hypothesize, and/or examine those clichéd skeletons in our closets. The observation of our individual, cultural, societal, and theological skeletons opens the door to a theme of *Quirk* 2002: Writing Down the Bones."

Mario A. Porter

QUIRK 2002

“One of the common threads sewn by our contributors is the longing for the past and all it was worth, from childhood innocence to adolescent nostalgia. The way that we used to think, our boundless imaginations, and naïve perceptions were revisited.”

Kristal Toscano

“Remembering a certain time or event can be more moving than when it first happened, and these submissions prove that.”

Kelly Leal

“Since most of the submissions seem to possess a nostalgia for the past, I propose a theme for *Quirk* 2002: ‘Commit To Memory.’ This theme asks the reader to remember the imagery of love, the process of aging, childhood memories, and religion. Even the more contemporary issues of ‘Street Tapestry’ suggest that the protagonist ‘remember’ where he came from in order to avoid living the same lives as the ‘pimps, ho’s, hustlers, and tricks.’ The journey of the reader while converting the words into imagery and meaning should be engaging enough that the reader feels compelled to retain the beauty of these literary and photographic works of art into their hearts and souls.”

Stephanie Guzman

“We could leave arrows to point in the ‘right direction’ to get you to the ‘right destination,’ but no matter what, the best path is always the one you seek and carve for yourself.

If a piece appears to the editors as a reflection on the value of remembrance, the reader may agree, or the reader may see the dangers of nostalgia and living in the past. Perhaps the reader finds the pieces in this publication to amount to the importance of the future. Then again, a reader may find no unifying threads and believe *Quirk* to be a ragged quilt of various themes.

You, as a reader, are free to roam, stick to a trail, or go off the beaten path. You are free to scream from the back of the church, as it were, ‘These two should not be wed! I see no theme!’ and then again, you may gladly say, ‘I do.’”

Anna Lawrence

“One editor may have many days to struggle over a poem or a story, trying to figure the text out, trying to pull the meaning from what was written under a storm of feelings. Now, think of 30 people, each one with his or her own approach to literature and life; 30 different individuals thinking, together, over more than 100 submissions to complete a journal, our *Quirk*. Yes, there was fire. Convictions flew around the classroom, hitting different opinions. But, as civilized people, no physical harm was done, and this year's journal, a collection of poems, short stories, photos, and artwork was delightfully completed by the team. Now we, the editors, hope that you enjoy the pieces, and find, within your own experiences, the joys of this literary compilation.”

Raquel Dieguez

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Attention, Title Shoppers

By Joshua Cooper

You said choosing a title would be the hardest part for you.

I try to picture it: you walking down aisle fourteen,

only stopping to compare prices or name brands.

And really, which one should you choose?

These are two for a dollar, but these others carry a good reputation

among label-conscious consumers.

But before you stop your cart, you should know this:

They're not exactly like marked down sale items

packed into wire-rimmed bins.

They're not exactly stacked along a dust-coated shelf.

There's no eye-catching sign that reads:

"Buy One Get One Free."

Still, I see you choosing one you most admire.

It is affordable and practical. It is the least handled

one near the back.

Thinking the hardest part is over, relief drapes across your face.

But have you considered how it should

be placed upon the page?

Should the letters be **bolded**? *Italicized*? Underlined?

Yet this matter is far too insignificant to worry you,

and the anxiety recedes.

The sudden triviality of the situation makes you flash this half-hearted smile.

The irrelevance of titles manifests itself like an impulse-item

purposefully positioned near the register.

But here is the consequence you've yet to consider, however ridiculous.

Your reader, like a well-informed shopper, will decide to read your work

entirely on the ingenuity or clarity of the words you choose.

This seems superficial, but it has always been this way.

This is the undeniable truth of titles.

This is the difficulty of titles.

Maybe you should exceed the store limit.

Maybe you should completely fill your rickety grocery cart

as the understanding of titles descends upon you like a blue light special.

Butterfly Trails Camp for Girls

By Joy Wilson

I remember Mom sitting cramped on a bench, making sure the two of us were never behind Henry. Most of the time she was quiet in the back of the courtroom near the heavy redwood doors, holding my hand. Often we stepped outside where she told me to get a paper cup from the water cooler near the elevator. She stayed by the doors, her ear almost rubbing the hinges and I looked around, wondering if people knew us. I know now they did not, because we were never interviewed and Mom was questioned by the police only on the day my father, Henry Riller, was arrested. How inconspicuous she must have looked to them, standing just outside the courtroom as reporters mingled near snack machines, scribbled on notebooks, and talked lowly around the water cooler where I watched air-bubbles ripple to the top of the Sparklets jug. Perhaps they wondered why she attended each day—especially with a child no more than nine—but never bothered to ask. Not that she would have told the truth or testified. She had children to protect.

I was sent to summer camp—Butterfly Trails Camp for Girls in the Angeles Forest. I suppose Mom thought it would be best for me, had the potential for being the place to forget I ever had a father. I managed to resent her for the decision, even after she bought me the new Barbie to take along. Then I heard her the morning I was to leave saying into the telephone, “I don’t know, the house payment is due.”

As we climbed the mountains, the little engine of her Toyota pulled and huffed. She said, “Jewelie, now, none of these girls know who you are. They don’t live in Big Bluff. They won’t know about your fa—” she cleared her throat. “—Henry. So you shouldn’t tell them anything. I don’t think they’d like it very much. Do you?”

I remember feeling insulted. I knew what people were beginning to think of me, my siblings, Mom—I was beginning to notice the stares at the supermarket. But I could not believe she thought I would make a mistake and tell strangers where my father was and what he had done. All I could think about were the people inside of the courtroom; some crying others looking at me, wondering. And the women at church, grabbing the hands of their little girls and dragging them from my brother, Ash, as he toddled next to me up the aisle during sacrament. I could hear them whispering, “—rape.”

But I was in no position to quarrel with Mom on the haul up the mountain. I knew that somehow she had paid for this camp and my new Barbie. I answered her while turning away so she could not see my face reddening, the shame I felt. “Yeah, okay, Mommy.”

We ate meat loaf and green beans in the cafeteria—over which she smiled wildly, as if she wished to escape into Butterfly Trails herself. Like I had won a prize, allowing me to frolic for the rest of the summer among pine cones and soft meadows and perhaps grow wings and fly to another state. When she left, she hugged me while a camp counselor watched from the door of my cabin. Over Mom’s shoulder, as I wrapped my arms around her and brushed her platinum hair from my mouth, I read the sign above the counselor: *Hawks*.

Her hands on my shoulders, the counselor stood in the doorway and said, “Hawks, this is your

new cabin mate, Jewelie.” She made us shake hands with one another, a concept I still do not understand. It was that awkward feeling, worrying your hand is too warm, too cold, clammy, wondering how long to shake. We all managed the exchange, saying low hellos as they all looked at me, suspicious of my late summer arrival but too well mannered to ask any questions right away.

Then the counselor was gone. One of my cabin mates, a squatty girl of ten, showed me to my bunk and the rest followed. We all stood around smiling, looking around the room—I who had never seen it, they too polite to show they already had. There were tissue-paper kites dangling from the ceiling beams and names carved into the wooden walls. One of the girls had brought several large silver frames with pictures of horses, cats, dogs, and lined them on the window sill beneath her bunk. She said they were her pets. Another girl had brought her own pillows, comforter, and space heater. She said her mother was worried about the cold. When I unrolled Henry’s old black sleeping bag, dust rose from the creases. I told them I camped.

They seemed to know I was lying but accepted me right away—at least after I produced the new Barbie from my small suitcase. The squatty girl then informed me that we were warring with the girls in the cabin up the mountain—the Squirrels. It was a harmless battle, stemming from an incident concerning an overturned canoe, but was being taken very seriously by the squatty girl. The rest of my cabin mates nodded and started a puzzle of the Grand Canyon as the squatty girl paced with hands on her hips. She said, “Those darn bitches,” as if saying damn would have made her tongue fall right off. She peered toward the back of our one room, perhaps trying hard to see through the knotty-boarded walls and up to the next cabin.

We almost finished the Grand Canyon without any other words between the six of us. I began turning each of the remaining pieces ’round and ’round, hoping they would fit the last holes. Then a loud panic struck me, and I remember thinking to myself, “This could be one of the holes that can’t be filled. Don’t sit here turning it over and over, they’ll all think you’re nuts or sick or something. Just put it down and try another piece.” I put it down and tried another, and after a few moments I had the remaining pieces divided into two piles, those I had tried and those I had not. Each time one of the other girls reached for either pile I began to panic again, trying to remember which they had touched. I remember that I felt confined in the cabin and wished I could step outside for a moment or get a drink of water. The image of the finished product was the Grand Canyon with the Colorado running very small and still. Four empty tiny spaces appeared along the canyon wall, like the paw prints of a cat. The remaining pieces divided into two piles, those I had tried and those I had not. Each time one of the other girls reached for either pile I began to panic again, trying to remember which they had touched. I remember that I felt confined in the cabin and wished I could step outside for a moment or get a drink of water. The image of the finished product was the Grand Canyon with the Colorado running very small and still. Four empty tiny spaces appeared along the canyon wall, like the paw prints of a cat.

The squatty girl was saying over our shoulders, “500 pieces. And four missing. I just know those Squirrels stole them.”

Butterfly Trails is a mixture of paper dolls, teepees, murky lake water, and beaded necklaces, all smeared with the strange banging of bongos, strumming of guitars, and the colors of camp counselor’s

T-shirts. If I try to remember certain days, events, outings, they all blur together and I cannot tell the difference between something I did the first or the last day. Only that first night of the camp is vivid because of the testimony I gave about Henry. There was a bonfire. All of the counselors were wearing their red T-shirts with large butterflies of green and yellow on their left breasts. They were teaching us the words to Cindy Lauper's *True Colors* as one of them tried to strum the chords on a guitar. I remember thinking, "This is boring. I could be home playing *Centipede*. I already know these words."

After more songs, Emily, another counselor, pulled me to the center of the group surrounding the fire. She announced, "Girls, this is Jewelie. Can you all say hello to her?" A large welcome came from the girls aged six to eleven; a less than receptive groan accompanied it from the twelve to fifteen year olds. I heard the squatty girl tell someone I was her cabin mate. Then someone answered, "Sooo." I assumed it must be a Squirrel.

Then they all fluttered their eyelashes. I remember feeling stunned before Emily explained, "That's a Butterfly hello."

I said, "Oh," in return. The large fire behind me was beginning to burn the backs of my legs.

Emily said, "Now, Jewelie, tell us some things about yourself."

I looked down at the pine needles and Emily's odd, strappy sandals. I remember thinking her toes were very dirty. "Like what?"

She muffled a laugh, "Well, where are you from? What's your favorite color? What do your parents do? Where do you go to school? Things like that."

I could feel them all looking at me. Those my age were watching me intently. I knew that somewhere the squatty girl would be elbowing a Squirrel every time I said something impressive.

I said, "I live in Big Bluff," drawing my Ked through the dirt.

I heard the Squirrel say, "Sooo."

"My favorite color is blue."

"Sooo."

The pine needles crunched as I shifted my weight. I interlocked my fingers behind my back and watched the shadow of my immobile, stinging legs. "I go to school at Walnut Elementary."

"Sooo."

"Mom stays at home and takes care of my sister and my brother, Ashley."

I heard muffled laughs again, from the same direction as the other remarks, but I was used to those because everyone laughed at Ashley's name. They thought it was feminine.

Then I was very aware of my own voice and the sounds around me. I remember the tremors from the fire and the swishing of the pine needles as the girls moved from position to position, vying against one another for comfort. None of them sat directly in front of one another, perhaps so they could peer at me hot in front of the fire. I could smell the redwoods, almost taste them in the campfire smoke. I heard my voice boom out across the circle and into the forest all around, "My father died. He died when—" I swallowed, "He died when a car hit him."

"Ouch!" A Squirrel had taken one in the ribs from the squatty girl.

Emily put her arm around me. "Oh, um, that's—um. Girls, let's all say sorry to Jewelie."

Since that bonfire I have grown to hate apologies. But I accept them because I cannot think of any other explanation that will not require more lies:

"My father and mother divorced."

But you see your dad on the weekends and holidays?

"No."

Why not?

"I don't know."

Does he buy you all the things your mom won't? That's what happened when my folks separated.

"No, he doesn't."

Why not?

"I don't know."

Even:

"My parents divorced when I was very young."

Do you see your dad often?

"No."

Why not?

"Because He's a mean bastard and I don't want to."

Oh, well, um.

Or:

"My father left my mother when I was a child."

Where did he go?

"I don't know."

Does he ever write or call or something?

"No."

That is odd.

And:

"My father was convicted of rape when I was young."

Excuse me?

"He's in jail."

I'm sorry, if you'll excuse me.

The first night hearing myself lie was the worst. That night I was so shocked by the loudness of my voice, I used my fists to cover my ears. It was as if I were in a large room, empty of everything except me and rows of wooden chairs lined up to face me. When I spoke, the boom of my voice caused the chairs to get farther away—scratching the tiled floor and almost breaking them to shards. Then I was moved too, outside of the room, away from the chairs that were suddenly filled with people I knew—Mom and Ashley and even my father with his back turned to me. And I could tell they were upset, just like the Butterfly Girls were confused by my hands at my ears, bewilderment in their eyes.

Later in our cabin, the squatty girl told me, matter-of-factly, "My grandma died last year. Where did your family have the funeral?" She said "your family" as if she thought I was an orphan and watched me across my cot while we brushed our Barbies' hair and began changing their clothes for bed. She had brought along a separate suitcase for her doll's clothing and told me I could borrow one

outfit a day. Tonight, I chose a lovely pair of blue and white striped pants with a yellow halter top.

"I don't know," I shrugged, looking down at my doll's long blonde hair and naked breasts.

"What do you mean? He had a funeral, right?"

Still not looking at her and becoming annoyed I answered, "Yeah."

She asked again, "Well then, dummy, where was it?"

Sitting up, I crossed my legs. "I'm not dumb." My new Butterfly Girls T-shirt lay crumpled on the chair at the foot of my cot.

"Well then where *was* it? In a church or a home?" She told her Barbie, "Grandma's was at a home."

I thought of the courtroom, the benches, the redwood doors, the banging of the gavel, and the high ceilings. I thought of the back of Henry's head, his dark hair, and how each time the reporters and sketch artists in front of me moved, I had to shift to see him. I shrugged, "His was at church, I guess."

"What do you mean, 'I guess?'" I could feel her glaring at me.

I said the first thing that came to mind. "I couldn't go. Mom wouldn't let any of us go. She said we're too little," and the beat of my own voice and the empty room that I heard it in filled my head so I could not hear her response. I finished dressing my Barbie.

She asked, "Huh?"

"What?"

"Don't you hate her for that?"

I thought about the water cooler and the paper cones the reporters used for cups. Each time the elevator rang, they would crumple them into the garbage and look up, ready. I answered, "No."

"Well, I would hate my mom if she ever pulled that darn shit."

I looked at her again, and she suddenly seemed smaller, more squatty than before. I felt bigger, as if not only the sound of my own voice had grown, but the secret about Henry had made me better than the girl cussing at her mother and loving her pink Barbie suitcase. It is still that way. Sometimes people think they know me very well and all the while I know I have lied. And somehow, for a split second, I feel bigger. But then I think that if they ever found out, they would see how pathetic, how sorry, I really am. I begin to fear they will not trust me anymore because I have lied so well, without missing a beat:

"My father died when I was a child."

Oh, I'm sorry.

"It's all right. I was very young. I hardly remember him."

That's too bad.

So push them away.

I pushed the squatty girl away that night. I told her, "I love my mom."

She huffed and stared, holding onto those almost-whispered words—the sound of my voice no longer vibrating in my ears but floating, like an echo heard outside of a closed door. She stood from the bed, moved toward me, and held out her hand. With an upturned palm, she demanded I return the blue striped pants and yellow halter.

Love Scars

By Catherine Garza

Cruising these bodily scars
creates the road map
to my unspoken love for you.
It is infinite.

The one on my cheekbone
causes laughter. I remember
you chased me.
I ran.
Ironing board, head first.

Beneath my breast shines
a faint teeth mark of a bite.
I was scared.
You retaliated with
a punch to that horse's mouth.

Texas heat diffuses interest
to help you clean the car.
I refuse your commanding order.
The Coke can grenade you threw
caressed my face with another...

Twenty years later,
I am at your beckoning call
for life.
I am rewarded
with a stitched up badge.

Eight inches of left-sides scar
no longer warrant
you as my scapegoat
to my marked body.

Renal love offers solace
to us both.

Dime to His Name

By Angelique Englehardt

Through a lens
 Quite dusty,
 He peeks out of his good eye and looks,
 But the dust remains.
 Through a lens
 Quite dusty,
 Exists a life
 Torn by weather;
 Shredded by neglect
 Like a bear with a beard, he makes his way through life.
 His name is number seven in line for food.
 He speaks...
 Forget me not. Though I am the earth's dirt, I use up your food. The children point
 at the man with the single dusty lens, giving light to an existence. Yes, I exist.
 He exists. Trash we stuff under our beds. Gum stuck to the soles of our shoes. A
 single hair in our mouths. A dollar better spent. He exists. What the fingers point at.
 What the eyes avoid. The treasure that belongs to the cardboard box alone.
 He exists.
 Through a lens
 Quite dusty,
 He spots something silver on the floor.
 He picks it up.
 He is not just a man now.
 He is a man with a dime to his name.

Love Scars

By Catherine Garcia

Craving these bodily scars
 creates the road map
 to my unspoken love for you
 It is infinite.

The one on my cheekbone
 causes laughter. I remember
 you chased me.
 I am
 leaning back, head first

Behind my breast are
 a faint red mark
 I was scared.
 You retaliated with
 a punch to that

Texas heat diffuses interest
 to help you clean the car
 I refuse your commanding order.
 The Coke can grenade you threw
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Twenty years later,
 I am at your beckoning call
 for life.
 I am rewarded
 with a stitched up badge.

Eight inches of left-side scar
 no longer warrant
 you as my scapegoat
 to my marked body.

Rare love offers solace
 to us both.

The Gentle Art of Family

By Evan Boston

Mourir.

Silent, or at the bare minimum, quiet.
 I see vague faces drawing near,
 And I can almost make out who they are.
 Distant relatives, lives I have not even grazed
 Since too many years and memories ago.
 A casual conversation seems obscene,
 Much too coarse a thing to drag into this room,
 A room now filled with flowers
 And us.

Her family.

I don't even recognize half the people
 That try to talk to me in low voices.
 I begin to feel uncomfortable,
 Not just from the tie
 wrapped tight around my neck,
 nor even from the stiffness the room conveys.
 The uneasiness that is spreading through
 My heart
 Reminds me that I did not know her,
 Did not love her,
 Half as much as I should have.
 I force my mind to drift away from the room,
 The flowers,
 The coffin,
 And my thoughts alight
 For just a moment
 On something more pleasant
 Than my own inadequacies
 In the gentle art
 of loving a family.

Tuatha De Danaan

By Anna Lawrence

we were on a transgender migration
to a continent of something more
than tolerance
when suddenly we halted,
we judged, misled, decreed:
This is Wrong
we let go the reins
we ceased to ride
dismounted the ideal and fell dismally
Down
Onward! Yelled the Mountain
to our turned and sun-burnt backs
we hastened to listen
there was no response
we cast our eyes for that golden horizon
But there was None
we rocked on our haunches, bawling for a faith,
for a man in a robe, a circle of thorns
they waited and prayed, and fasted and prayed, and then they
all left on foot,
raw and bleeding
And she stayed behind
Sitting and shaking, cold in the sun
There was vacant expanse, a circle
Cast to dance and
A single stone,
A sling,
To kill the Goliath religion
With apple seed rebellion

The Gentle Art of Family

By Evan Boston

Mount
Silent, or at the bare minimum, quiet.
I see vague faces draw my near,
And I can almost make out who they are.
Distant relatives, lives I have not even granted
Since too many years and memories ago.
A casual conversation seems obscure
Much too coarse a thing to drag into the room.
A room now filled with flowers
And us.
Her family.
I don't even recognize half the people
That try to talk to me in low voices.
I begin to feel uncomfortable,
Not just from the tie
wrapped tight around my neck,
not even from the stiffness the room conveys.
The uneasiness that is spreading through
My heart.
Reminds me that I did not know her,
Did not love her,
Half as much as I should have.
I force my mind to drift away from the room,
The flowers,
The coffin,
And my thoughts aight
For just a moment
On something more pleasant
Than my own inadequacies
In the gentle art
of loving a family.

Flagpoles and Other Commodities of Man and His Kind

By Anna Lawrence

I circled "other" on a survey
 And left the preceding blank empty
 I dangled my pen for a while and contemplated "gender"
 I considered going outside to the flagpole, stripping, and raising
 My satin panties as an emblem of freedom

How they would majestically billow, how proudly I'd stand saluting
 And how eagerly they'd come and carry me off.

And then I grinned, much like an android in the rinse cycle, As I realized:

Someone would have to take them down.

And replace them with a pair of cotton polka dot boxers.

In the blank, "name," I drew an "x" and thought about nametags, and the day

We would all stroll by wearing them "Hi! My Name is _____."

My I.Q. is _____. My bra size is _____."

Then I realized, "36 B" is nothing to flaunt,

Or hide I suppose.

I didn't circle anything for "citizenship." Instead, I scribbled in the
 margin "Earth" and attempted to draw an elegantly turning globe, which I feared
 looked more like an egg about to be pitched at a lonesome house.

Actually, I wear a "36A" if you must know, but that's only certain brands,
 of poor quality and pathetic standards, and that's only if I push them in,

But get me a flame, you with the fire down below, and I'll burn all
 my under wires, and turn into a Real B just for you,

Or maybe just for me

The gentleman came and picked up the surveys, and shook his head at mine

"what were you doing back here?"

"nothing," I said. But he already knew that.

The Death of Casey Johnson

By Krista Peterson

The genetic pool from whence Casey Johnson sprang suffered from two terrible curses. The first of the two was an unusually weak immune system, and thus a predisposition to contract whatever disease was killing the most people at the time. The second curse was a general instability, mentally and emotionally, which was heightened intolerably by the death of a loved one. These curses never took effect on any one person, but rather chose to strike in pairs. The result was that for every person in the family who fell victim to cancer or AIDS or whatever, another family member felt obliged to commit suicide.

This sequence of events had been reenacted over the years by various extensions of Casey's family for as long as she could remember. So ingrained was it, that Casey had always taken the death-suicide reaction for granted. She had been privy to it so often, that she assumed it was the natural way of things. She had such a strong belief in this system, in fact, that when Samantha, a girl at Casey's school, saw her dog killed by a stray car, Casey ceased to acknowledge the existence of the traumatized girl. Casey, unlike those around her, knew for a fact that Samantha was dead. That was just how things worked. Still, she never could quite understand why the deceased girl kept coming to class. Casey was quite certain that when she finally died she would find someplace much more interesting to go. There were all sorts of lovely, brightly colored places full of the lovely, brightly colored people she had seen in National Geographic. But then, if Samantha wanted to keep coming to school, that was her business. Casey just sighed quietly at the unimaginative girl and politely looked the other way.

Recently, though, Casey was having a bit of trouble with the routine. She had realized at an early age that she would die of disease, as she was convinced that there was nothing wrong with her mind. Still, she was reluctant to accept such a fate, preferring the choice that the second victim had in the matter. Thus, when Casey's mother was first diagnosed with cancer, Casey began to prepare herself for the end, her mother's as well as her own. She would sit very quietly on a hard wooden chair in the middle of her bedroom for hours, gripping an old steak knife firmly in her right hand and sawing at her jeans for practice. She had decided, you see, against falling prey to disease; it was too slow, and far too ugly. While her mother was dying, Casey sat beside her in the hospital and watched her face slowly change color. She didn't like the gray tint to her mother's skin; it looked as if she was molding from the inside. Casey could smell the mold, she could almost taste it in the back of her mouth, eating away at her mother. Casey swore to herself that she would never mold, she would die with dignity. She covered her mouth and nose with the sleeve of her sweater and glared at her mother's gray skin.

The knife blade tore through the ragged jeans, slicing its red signature. Casey squealed in pain and heard the answering echo from downstairs. It was her little brother, Adam; he wasn't taking the death well. Casey had made him promise not to do anything stupid, she had shaken him until he swore on his eyes. She had thought of how humiliating it would be, after all that practice, if a little 9 year old brat beat her to it.

In the end, after the last call from the hospital, both children had been denied the privilege. For

a week now, the body of their father hung from a rafter in the basement. Her brother had discovered the body. He had gone downstairs to shoot at the rats with his paint ball gun, but found instead only his father's bluish-gray body waving at him from above. His child's scream brought Casey, who had been busy arranging her knives beside the bath tub in preparation. It was too much, and for a moment she lost it completely, grabbing Adam's gun and firing round after round at the gently swinging corpse. When she finished, panting, his blue, shirtless form was covered in green and yellow splotches of paint, the liquid color running in streams down his face and chest. All Casey could see was mold, hideous green mold. She grabbed Adam and ran upstairs, locking the cellar door.

The next day she went to school, and the day after that. Adam pinkie-swore that he would not tell a soul about their situation. It wasn't a hard promise to keep. Ever since his father's death, Adam rarely spoke at all, except to parrot other people. He had been Casey's human echo for a week, while she fielded concerned calls from teachers.

"No ma'am," she said, "he's taking a nap," or "he's not back from work yet," and "Thank you, it is very sad about our mother, but we're doing fine."

Not much longer, though. They would come for her soon, for them both. Children are not allowed to live without their parents, she knew that much.

Another noise caught her ear, a warm, familiar noise. Casey smiled and sawed at her jeans.

A day or so after the discovery, after the pair of deaths, Adam had taken to walking around without a shirt. He wore instead only yellow and green war paint, hard stripes across his sunken chest. It was January, and the sterile, white snow pooled around the house, creeping towards the door. The green lines rubbed off a little when Adam rolled in the clean snow, leaving moldy splotches behind. Casey hid in her room. She had been watching Adam carefully since the incident, had watched from her window as he played half-naked in the snow. From there, safe in her room, she could keep a weary eye on the spreading mold, watch it clutch at her brother's pale form. It wouldn't get her, she laughed, because she wouldn't let it in. Each day, as she watched, her brother's movements slowed, he became sluggish and crawled through the snow banks, not leaping like he used to. Casey took comfort in Adam's warrior stripes as they sunk further between his ribs, reaching for his insides.

Now his soft, hollow coughs came from the next room. He hadn't even gotten out of bed today, and his cough sounded much worse. Again she raked the serrated edge against the cotton layers. She smiled a little at the choked sound from Adam's bedroom. She was ready.

I.C.U. Auntie Daley.

By Charles Valle

Monochromatic. Spikes in grayscales. Rhythm before tears.

Like Grandmother before, she loved soap operas: All My Children, General Hospital

[the wires, of course, scare the fuck out of us]

In bay 5, the old man has a cute nurse. Insurance prepares a smooth dying. Colored monitors all around. Red numbers. Blue words. A collection of greeting cards. Flowers mean love: tulips, carnations, a lone orchid (she opens herself), birds of paradise-flights in stasis.

Nurse Helen, LVN, eats a Big Mac, drinks soda from an obscenely large cup. She does not wish to interpret numbers or maladies. Her cross-word almost finished.

[if you stare at extremities
long enough
you can believe
you willed her foot or hand to consciousness]

When she told you stories about your childhood, you believed her -- even though you still cannot recall. But perhaps you did take special delight in reciting Bible verses, or eating spinach and fried fish -- hands sticky with rice.

But how could you forget
her last words? Her handwriting still
elegant: *I do not want to die
in this place, but home...*

The clear tube is food. Red, blood. Yellow . . .
 Her rosary wraps around her
 left wrist: Jesus, faceless
 in miniature
 You hold her hand for the last time: feel Christ in your palm,
 make promises to god:
 A squeezed hand indicates no more cigarettes
 Opened eyes: : no alcohol
 Her voice: : no more sex

Helen adjusts the catheter.
 You turn around: read get-well
 cards, count the flaccid roses-
 the baby's breath dying
 watching Helen's soda sweat on yesterday's paper.

Crossings

By Charles Valle

Just ashes now. An ornate urn to contain her
where borders could not.

Manuel's kitchen looked ridiculous: immaculate hearts on the chrome
refrigerator [the scotch tape curling at the corners],
beside the microwave, Jesus dies everyday.
His wife thinks herself kind, allowing *that* rice cooker to stay
but, *that flag simply will not do*. Every morning she would look at her
Ansel Adams--smile at Yosemite's moon rising. Then
later: *can you blame a woman for wanting a kitchen
of her own?*

After the war, she just wanted a soldier for a husband. Tidy
uniforms, clean lines. A stern hand for the many children
she imagined.

The parties were amazing. Children's laughter means it is safe. The officers'
wives steal recipes--spy each other's plates, laugh when
appropriate. In the back, the men play mahjong--talk about
nothing between sips of San Miguel. The women force food.
For them, joy is an empty plate.
The men, empty bottles.

Manuel was the second to go to America. Unlike his older brother, he believed
in work. Nights alone, he would turn off the lights,
open the window, smoke American cigarettes. He filled
his American dream with big cars, blondes with large breasts.

Milla, small voice and boyhips: she had an affinity for the arts and a horrible habit of going to the hospital. Her death hurt the most.

An officer's funeral in the rain. *like a terrible cliché* she said.

With her husband dead, she felt even more alone in the big house.

Her world was a small, wet lung
wheezing to repeat motion.

She was prone to melodrama: *If I were to die*

*alone in my husband's house, the summer
monsoons would continue without me -- with no one*

*to close shutters or say grace. My daughters have left me
for England and Australia. My oldest wishes to forget me. My baby
married to a wife who says the most inappropriate things.*

Grandchildren who only speak American.

In the mornings, she would sing old folk songs to the youngest -- smile
when he laughed at her accent. There were soap operas and game shows.

She was good at guessing prices.

At night, she would say her prayers,

touch each bead on her rosary with special conviction.

Sundays were her favorite. After mass, she would talk to the others
about home. But before the stories were exchanged,
there was confession,

there was time alone before the Jesus candles, offering
prayers to heaven, the incense ash

falling on marble, her words on her knees.

A Night Separating, in stone and star

By Charles Valle

And then evening
Falls, but slowly, the blue
Fading darker above
A pale corona above
Bare trees, barely supporting

The last glimpse of twilight
Dying. In the playground
Swings creak, chains
Taut, faded red plastic
Holding our asses. I kick

The gravel to break silence.
You tell me to stop, so I push
Off, shifting my weight backwards
Then forward, I pump
My legs, close
My eyes, I believe
The sensation of flight.
Toes pointing, legs
Extended, you tell me
A story. Between

Each held breath, a grade
School crush, a boy you can't
Remember. My neck stretching
Back, the ground a fearful
Thing. I imagine the impact,

My head scraping or a clumsy
Tumble into the grass.
I hold on tighter,
The cold metal links
Sweaty. And then

Stopping -- a spray of stones
To slow the arc.
You continue. I watch
Your shadow, your hair
Moving wildly with each thrust.

on the value of being without

By Brian Yetwin

J.F. lectures about poet, pilgrim, expelled.

'a writer is nobody but his text.'

no shit--i brood in middle seat--

hidden enough

participate bluff.

If a writer, did not write, s/he would be an

(r).

dance-r. move-r. make-r.

without the tango, swirl, pop.

And (i),

abstract

have no text.

confirmed why death will not come.

(i) don't exist without text.

not to (u).

not to (r).

Remembering

By Michael G. Richards

Outside the second-story window of the row house apartment, a fog sits heavily on 6th Avenue, and through it a mizzling rain taps the pane like a small child's fingernails. The bells of Our Lady of Perpetual Help peel gently in the distance--then a siren, a car engine revving, a horn blast. At dusk she used to wait for Thomas at the station above 59th, on the sidewalk in front of Tynan's Floral. Then, the tumult of the city would seem lambent, rushing toward its conclusion, carrying her love, her grá, to her on the crest of its wave: the men in their fedoras, their raincoats unbuttoned, briefcases swinging; the children with mothers--the girls in knee-length skirts, wool socks, boys in dark, pleated pants, tight jackets, tiny white collars folded under. She took James with her in his stroller before the dark times. Once Collin had arrived and the men were rioting, she could not risk the children's safety, so Thomas would walk alone from the station to the house to find James waiting for him on the shady stoop. She would open the kitchen window on the alley and listen for Thomas's whistling. Thomas was such a whistler, even in the darkest times. He whistled their wedding song. If only she could recall the tune. If only she could remember when.

She is tired. She is in the sitting room but doesn't want to sit. She will stare at the curved glass of the bookshelf, the heavily knotted pine, and she will fall into sleep.

The light rain has begun to mist the window. Just as well. She won't go outside. Brooklyn has gone to rot. The Italians first with their yelling, then the Orientals and their strange quietness, followed by the Spanish and their radios, and finally the blacks. God knows she holds nothing against them, really. They've never hurt her. (Though she has heard stories from the ladies at church.) She can only go to church now when Maria or Helen comes and takes her there. A humiliating business, that--her hobbling along clinging to the younger woman's arm. And that Maria! *Careful there, dear!* There's a curb! And the way people stare! Shame on them! Shame on Maria, who makes them stare! *There's a curb! Mind yourself now! Here we come!* Everyone mind, now! She should go take communion by herself. But how can she?--the neighborhood has changed so! She doesn't want to call that Maria. And Helen, bless her heart, has that family to take care of. Those four darling children. Three. One is too loud. Who would she ask if she lost her way? Why can't it be like it was--just the Catholics and the Jews? She had no parley with the Jews, of course, but she had no reason to fear them. Máthair would tell her to go on her *own* to take communion. Don't wait for Maria, for Helen, for *anyone!*

Where is the medicine the doctor gave her? Has she taken it? There's really no need. She can remember. As long as she concentrates. She should sleep. But she will wake with a headache. An aspirin, a glass of milk. The aspirin bitter, the milk sour.

In Uppers she had been chosen by Mistress Kelly to place the narrow bottles of milk into the grooves of the radiator to thaw. Each bottle clinked its own note; the radiator hissed an octave lower. Mistress Kelly said that she had a musical ear. Around that time, she had dreamed she would go to Broadway and audition for a show like that wonderful Ninette girl. Or that Anna Pavlova her mother loved so much. She had dreamed of being in *On with the Dance*, of wearing her hair in a permanent wave and singing "Poor Little Rich Girl." How she had dreamed of becoming one of C. B. Cochran's

young ladies! Once she sang "Danny Boy" at a picnic. It must have been in Brooklyn a long time ago. Thomas was so long and handsome. He was her Danny Boy, her prince, her *rí hairt*. Yes, her king of hearts. That day in the park when she sang, he stared at her the same way he had stared one morning when she helped Mistress Kelly with the bottles. He had asked, "*Cad é an t-ainm atá ort?*" And she, playfully, answered, "My name is Mary. Mary Rose." She knew the day he asked her name that she would marry him. The same face had turned to her at the gunwale of the *Queen Elizabeth*, the sea spray glittering his eyelids. They floated together there in the middle of the ocean, the middle of the world. "Would you go for a walk?" he had asked in English the day she helped with the bottles. And she, playfully, had answered, "*Ba mhaith.*" And they had.

Where is the album? Has someone moved it? There is a picture of Thomas in his suit in the park. There is a picture of the three boys on the stoop.

She turns from the window and goes into the living room. Hasn't she looked here? She goes to the dining room, where there is a plate with unfinished ham and potato on the lace tablecloth on the oval table. Has Collin left it? Is that the good china? But the hutch is locked and she can't find the key. She enters a narrow corridor where it is dark and turns right. The floor squeaks and she is in the presence of her old stove that no longer works. She turns the dials anyway, one at a time, to see if the blue flames have returned. No. They have taken them. What do they think she will do?--burn herself with so small a flame? She turns and there is the box they installed under her counter after they took the flames. She is hungry. She goes back to the dining room and gets the plate of ham and potato, opens the door on the black box and puts it in. She presses the buttons they told her to press. First the one that says TIME. They've written it so large! As for a schoolgirl! Then: THIRTY SECONDS FOR MOST THINGS. FOR MOST THINGS is crossed out with blue ink. They had said to her, "Thirty seconds for everything, Mom. Just thirty seconds for everything and let's leave it at that, shall we?" Shame on them! Defiantly, she presses 1-0-0. Then she presses START.

Placing the steaming plate on the lace tablecloth, she sits at the dining room table in the same spot where she found the plate. The ham and potato are too hot. There was potato salad with pickles and deviled eggs and ham sandwiches. A wedding anniversary. Fort Hamilton, near the bridge. Thomas had worn a pale blue suit and whistled their song. The meat is tough. The potato is too hot. The stenciled fringe on the wedding china is the color of Thomas's suit. Has she burnt her tongue? It feels like salt, like sand. The china is cracked! She runs her finger along the hot edge of the plate where there is a jagged fracture in the stencil. Her wedding china! Who has broken it? She starts to cry.

She remembers all the crying back then. Her sons were born in that ugly time. A time when even the Pope had gone mad--the one called Pious the something. Nine or ten. He said that Mussolini had God's full protection. Madness, that. The world had gone mad. She and Thomas had come to America already. Before that monster was strung by his ankles from a swing-set, his eyes pecked out. James was born two years later, in-- And then Collin in 19--. And then little Patrick two years later. They say the Catholics let Hitler kill the Jews! How could that be? Madness. Her sleeves are wet. *She* would never let anyone kill anyone. Hadn't little Sharon married one? They will raise the children *both*. What does this mean? You can't raise children *both*. They *have* been baptized haven't they? They are Catholic. Everyone knows they are. He danced with her at the wedding; came over to her with that long look on his face. Called her Nana! Imagine that--a Jew calling her Nana.

The meat is tough. The potato is still too hot. Sand. Sand on the tip of her tongue.

They never come anymore. James came last week or last month. They were all here when Thomas went with the cars down to the cemetery. That was so long ago. Collin is here somewhere. Isn't he? He'll know why the china is cracked. But he never sits to talk. Out walking, or out with a girl. Out with a girl at Coney Island. He'll come home tired and cranky, complaining that he needs to do his homework and the apartment is too loud. He'll get sick in the cold wind on the Boardwalk.

No, he's married now. Of course married. They all are. All three of them. Not Patrick. She's still here in New York. Lovely girl though she wore her skirts too high. He would pick the neighbor's roses for her late at night. Doesn't he live in Florida with that other girl? Nor do the grandchildren come. She *has* grandchildren. Oh yes, so many of them. Yes. But she can't recall their names. They don't come anymore. Even her own sons, though Collin is around here somewhere, if he's not at Coney Island with some girl. One has a Jewish name. His name is Jacob or Seth or Isaiah. A darling little blue-eyed Irish child. What possessed them to call him Seth or Jacob? How would she know? She will call him Jack.

The meat is gone. The potato is cold. Now she is not so tired. Now her head is clear. She wants tea. Jack is Matthew's child. He likes to dance. She saw him dance. She and Thomas went dancing on Saturday nights at the restaurant on the top of the building. Before the boys came. With friends. There was a huge black piano, just like the one Paul Robeson stood beside at Carnegie. They had friends back then. They danced in a line--the Charleston, the Kickaboo. The friends are gone. Life was so crazy then. So *light*. Like they had been floating. People were doing crazy things! Flying across the Atlantic. *Women* were flying across the Atlantic! That poor girl, Ruth something, who didn't make it... How she had felt for that poor girl! Then the Earhart girl made it, from Boston to London, and the city celebrated. She had wished for a girl that day. That was when she and Thomas were trying. Crazy *light* times when Jews were flying through the air. Men were hanging from buildings and making dogs jump twelve feet and goats walk tight ropes. A crazy time. That Lillian Boyer woman hung from the bottom of her plane. Ben Darwin pulled a car with his hair. Crazy times. She can remember it all. In 1929 she heard the Pope's voice on the radio and decided they would have a boy.

The bank kept Thomas, even when there were riots in the streets. Right out there on 59th the men marched. The year James was born. And she worried for him, that he would have no job, that he would have to join those angry, ill-dressed men. By the time James was two, the men were standing in rags on the street corners, waiting.

Her sons did fine. James went up to Columbia, where he met that darling Theresa and then started to become a doctor of ears and ended up being one anyway even though he never graduated as a doctor of ears. And Collin, the cleverest of them--the one who nearly burned the house down with the chemistry in the stairwell!--went to Harvard. Oh, how he would argue with Thomas! Pop, as he called him. *Too much population! Too many republicans! Too many corporations!* It was disrespectful, that. Collin was the fiery one, with a head he couldn't control. The white smoke. The one who went off on that scholarship that Fullbright Senator gave him. A generous man, that one. She wrote him a letter. Collin went to work for the Kennedy brothers and helped those wonderful boys save us from the Cubans. Martyrs, those two. And Patrick, her baby, went too far away, to a college of all Irish Catholics. If only Máthair had been alive to see that! You would think the Kennedy brothers would

have gone *there*. Bobby had Collin's room at Harvard the year before Collin did. She told her friends about Bobby and his room that Collin lived in. She called him Bobby as if he were one of her sons. Patrick went by train. In the chilly fall evenings she kissed him goodbye then waited until the train cleared the station before crying into Thomas's handkerchief. Those poor boys. Where was Collin when they were shot? How she worried! And Patrick!--in that train all alone, rumbling through cornfields in the middle of the night. The phone rang. Thomas was at work. *Collin is somewhere where men are shooting guns and his voice is so small and far away!*

The door downstairs has opened and closed. Her heart leaps. She thinks to rush to the kitchen and throw open the window. If only she could have known--. The footsteps on the stairs are light as they were when he would bound up them, the boys at his heels. No, not quite so light. The inner door opens. She tries to climb from the chair--

Not Thomas. Her son. Collin. He is old. How can this be? What has he asked? What was that? Is she all right? Why wouldn't she be? Where is his girl? Why would he not invite her in?

--Where is she?

--Who, Mom?

--*Who? Who do you think?* Oh Collin! You can be so *thick* sometimes! Who do you think I mean?

--Maria? Are you wondering about Maria again?

--*No!* Your *girl!* Where is she? Did you leave her out on the stoop?

--My girl ... Yes, I left her Mom. We left each other.

--Yes! You left her out on the stoop! Now invite her in! The poor dear is *freezing*, Collin. You can't just leave her out on the stoop.

--She's not out on the stoop. She's not freezing. I'm going to unload the groceries.

Where is he going? --Stay out of the kitchen! She grips the table and climbs from the chair. He is quick down the corridor, which is now lighted. --Stay out of the kitchen, you!

He is kneeling in the open door of the refrigerator, a brown bag on the floor beside him.

--Where is Maria?

--Maria is gone, Mom. Would you like me to ask Helen to take you to communion?

--Helen? She's busy with her children, Collin. She's too busy to bother with us.

--No, I'm sure she'd be happy to. Her children have all grown and moved out.

--No! They have not! Just the other day... The back of the kitchen chair is cold in her grip. She pivots herself onto the seat. --Tea, Collin. Will you make me tea?"

--Yes. Give me

Did he say yes?

--Did you break the china, Collin?

--No, Mom. Is it broken?

--*Yes.* Of course it is! Where's the album? Have you seen it?

--It's on your bed. I'll get it in a

When? When will he? His large hands are careful with the eggs. She caught the three of them opening it quickly to see if the light goes out when the door is closed. Maybe after tea she will ask Collin to take her to communion. *His* arm she will cling to and feel helpless. She will love to. She smiles. She will cling to him and feel her own weight drawing her down and his arm buoying her up as they float over the curbs and dodge the strangers.

7 in 10

By Mario A. Porter

I unlaced my shoes for You today
 (And I suppose for myself as well)
 And slid my bare feet into Yours.
 But, they now prohibit me from walking
 The way I naturally walked.
 (But I'll get used to it I'm sure.)

(Right . . . heel . . . toes . . . left . . . heel . . . toes . . .
 Right . . . heel . . . toes . . . left . . . heel . . . toes . . .)

Each step unnatural;
 Insecure reminders
 Of what was,
 And what will be.
 "What will be?"
 Becomes my distraction
 From concentration.

(Rightheelleftheelrighttoes)
 Tripping in Your clumsy shoes,
 I fall and burn my knee
 Against the summer sidewalk; and
 Hope You will be here soon
 To help me to my feet
 And back to concentration.

An Observation At St. Whatchamacallit

By Mario A. Porter

Last Saturday's tease and sleaze
Become a woman's Sundays best.
Prostitute makeovers:
Give-me-head red lipstick,
Tarantula leg eyelashes,
Peroxide-highlights in fried crispy hair,
Neon green broken heels, worn with
Little House on the Prairie dress
Bought at the Adult Megaplex,
And bathed in Cum-On-Me perfume.

Last Saturday's wear and tear
Become a man's Sundays best.
Mechanic makeovers:
10W40 stained under flaking nails,
Tres Flores cruising down Receding Hairline Ave.,
Cussing and moaning shit kickers, worn with
Multi-faded shirt and polyester Levi's
Bought at Dowdy's
(Closed fifteen years ago),
And showered in Hope-This-Cologne-Gets-Me-Some.

"Alleluia! Alleluia!"
They try to sing,
With hung over glee,
As their dissonant song
Becomes lost with the congregation
Of St. Whatchamacallit Catholic Church.

QUIRK 2002

Last Call

By Silvio Renzulli

Rain, twinkling off and on
passing through the moving lights.
Drops, cascading endlessly, erratically
sometimes hard, sometimes light, then mist.

Not unlike my mood
brooding, uncertain, searching...
wandering aimlessly
drops pelting me
with reflection.

Each a memory, a choice
or a road yet to be traveled.
Pausing I look downward
at the puddle around my feet.

I put out my hand and watch
the drops slither through my palm.
I look hard as if to glean an answer
only to have it drip away.

I search for solace
but find only reflection
images of a life.

Ahead the lights screech closer
I look up, straight into the oncoming orbs
and know it's my last call.

An Observation At St. Whatshamscallit

By Marie A. Foster

Last Saturday's tease and tease
Become a woman's Sunday best.
Prostitute makeovers
Give-me-head red lipstick,
Tartanuta leg eyeshades,
Peroxide-highlights in fried crispy hair,
Neon green broken heels worn with
Little House on the Prairie dress
Bought at the Adult Megastore,
And peddled in Cum-On-Me perfume.

Last Saturday's wear and tear
Become a man's Sunday best.
Mechanic makeovers
10W40 stained under flaking nails,
Fur flowers cruising down Reading Hairline Ave.,
Cussing and moaning shit kickers worn with
Multi-faded shirt and polyester Levi's
Bought at Dowdy's
(Closed fifteen years ago),
And showered in Hope-This-Cologne-Gets-Me-Some.

"Alleluia! Alleluia!"
They try to sing,
With hung over glee,
As their dissonant song
Becomes lost with the congregation
Of St. Whatshamscallit Catholic Church.

Street Tapestry

by Ya'ke Smith

The street was alive. The pimps, the ho's, the hustlers, and the tricks lit up the corner. It was Saturday night. The night when all the colors were out. The night when all the different stories could be told. In front of Hardy's corner store was Wyatt. Wyatt's the town wino, had always been for as long as I could remember. Walked up and down the street begging everybody for money. He never really got no money from nobody in the neighborhood, unless somebody was feelin' real generous that day. Got most of his money from them white tricks that came down here to take a bite out of the dark meat that covered the sidewalks. Was always setting 'em up with the best girls and they was always payin'. See, he wasn't always a drunk, so I heard. He knew all the girls 'cause he used to pay for 'em too. Used to creep out after his wife finished with dinner and lay up, come stepping back in right before it was time to go to bed, claiming he was at the bar playing pool with his friends. But his wife found out and packed up and took both of his kids. Said she would rather see him dead than live in the house with an adulterer. So, in order not to kill him, she left. Ain't nobody seen her since. He couldn't handle it, and a couple of years later he ended up down here. Sitting out here looking at all the girls, the girls he once feasted on, but now they like forbidden fruit to him. He can look, but can't never touch.

Down there standing on the left is Dacia. Now she was the main girl. Had turned every trick that ever walked these streets. Said since she was a ho, she was gon be the best damn ho there was. Damn that girl was fine. Had a body shaped like a coke bottle. Legs like bronze, hips like a thirty-pound thanksgiving turkey, and breasts like two sweet juicy hams. But there was something peculiar about her eyes. Something very strange about those. When you looked in 'em you saw something that was kind of scary. You saw a woman who had her share of bad times. She would never talk to you about it but when you looked at her them blues would sing to you. And then if you looked a little further you no longer saw a woman, but the face of an eleven-year-old girl who had her entire life ahead of her. Innocently passing love letters to the boy who sat in front of her in class, and tomboyishly playing basketball with the neighborhood kids. But then you saw that innocence taken away from her by her mama's boyfriend while on one of his drunken escapades. Her mama laid up in the next room and listened, not caring 'cause he had just given her a fix.

Now down there standing by that brand new Cadillac is Mighty Mouse; well at least that's what all the girls call him. I knew him as Mr. Charlie, or Rev Charlie. Was always giving me dollars, well, when my mama wasn't around. He the biggest pimp this side of the Mississippi. Got all the girls begging for him to own 'em, and he can have any of 'em he want. Know exactly what to say, too. Got this sly way of whispering in they ears and making they minds cum so hard they don't even know what had just happened to 'em. People around here say he used to be a preacher. Was the leader of a flock. Prayed twenty, maybe thirty, times a day. Had one of the biggest churches in the city, and the people loved him, say some of 'em thought he was the Second Coming. All the women adored him even then. He wasn't studying none of 'em though. He had Jeze. His sweet sweet Jeze. All the men wanted her, but he had her, or so he thought. Walked in early from church one day and caught her in the bed with

another man. People say they was so loud the neighbors could almost hear 'em. He stood there and watched the woman who he had given his whole life to give herself to somebody else. They didn't notice him in there at first; but when they did, they hopped up and scrambled for they clothes. But it was too late then, he had already seen 'em, wasn't no need in tryin' to cover up then. He was so sick to his stomach he couldn't even move. Just stood there and stared at 'em, didn't say a word. Then 'bout two minutes later he went for his pistol. They say her and her lover ran out the house butt naked. The man running down the street screaming, "he got a gun," his anatomy swinging from left to right. He never caught 'em. They say he never came out the house. Just sat on the stairs and cried his eyes out. After that, Rev. denounced women. Hated they guts. Said no woman could be trusted and all they could do for him was get on they knees and... well you know. But he kept right on preaching. Started pimping out of his church. Took all the ladies who wanted him and put 'em on the streets. A couple of years later he left the church. Said he ain't need no building to preach. That the streets was his sanctuary. He was the shepherd and the girls was his sheep.

Look about two blocks down to the left in front of Mary's juke joint, and you'll see Leah. Leah is a little different from the other girls. She aint no beauty queen. Her teeth is crooked. Legs all scarred up. She never make no money. Let's face it, she's an outcast. But of all the girls she got the best heart. Whenever any of 'em get into fights about who's the better one she get in between 'em and keep 'em from scratching each other's eyes out. She clever. Been on the streets most of her life. Back in the day, her mama was the biggest madam in town. Had all the girls working for her. They say she loved them girls like they was her own. And in many ways they was. She was the only mama some of 'em ever knew. If any man even so much as raised his voice to one of her girls she would cut him. They say she even killed a man once for slapping one of 'em. But after she died, everything went haywire. Leah tried to take over the house, but the men ran her outta there. Said they owned the streets. Said women belonged under them and not above. Told her she had to go. And before she knew it, she ended up down here.

Of all the people on this street, Ruth's story is the best. This is a woman who don't take nobody's shit. Stay ready for anything. She was her own woman, didn't need no man tryin to own her, didn't need no pimp. But unlike all the other girls, Ruth got babies. Two of 'em. She love them boys. Give 'em anything they want, and refuse to take handouts. Would slap they face if she so much as saw them taking a penny from anybody. "I work too goddamn hard for everything I got and I refuse to have you out here having people think that you need anything from 'em," she would say. She's a quiet, proud woman. This ain't her occupation of choice, but this all she know. She had been married before. Was a housewife. A maid basically. Was married to some big shot lawyer who demanded breakfast, lunch, dinner, and a late night snack, if you know what I mean. And like the good housewife she was, she delivered. He took good care of her, money-wise at least. But he had a temper. Put his fist upside her head at least three times a week; she say she think he got off on it. And for years she took it. For years she let that man put his foot off in her ass. But one night he went too far. He got tired of beating her and put his hands on one of her babies. She went straight in the kitchen and grabbed the soup that she had boiling on the stove, and poured it all over him. He had to be rushed to the hospital. Had third degree burns all over his back. After he got out of the hospital, he disappeared. Three months later she got some divorce papers, which she gladly signed. And for the first time was free from that master. We

ain't seen that bastard since. And a couple of months later, she ended up out here.

I've basically grown up here. These streets raised me. I sit on the roof of my building and make sure nobody take advantage of my mama. Sitting out here I seen everything. I was raised by these streets. These people are like my family. They all take care of me, make sure I don't get in no trouble. "Stay in them books boy," they always sayin'. "Get rich so you can take all of us outta here." They believe in me. Believe I can make it. Believe I'm more than these streets. And I love 'em all in my own way.

The street was alive. The pimps, the ho's, the hustlers, and the tricks lit up the corner. It was Saturday night. The night when all the colors of night were out. The night when all the different stories could be told.

Which Way is Up?

By John Lamb

Which way is up? I'm hesitant to believe what I've been told. "Up is where the birds are," my mom told me when I would point to anything and nothing and ask, "Up?" I distinctly remember feeling at an advantage over my mother, remember the effort it took to keep from stretching an all-knowing smile across my face when I pointed to a mole hole--stood above it and pointed down its dark entrance. "Up?" I asked. "No," would say my mother. "Up is where the birds are--in the tree-tops is up." I am hesitant to believe what I've been told. I mean, at home I've got my mother pointing to the sky shouting up, up, and at school my science teacher holding a blue beach ball in his hands tossing it up into the air shouting, "The world is a blue beach ball." And he points to one end of the beach ball, the end weighted with a sandbag and he tells us this is America. Then grabbing onto the air valve of the ball, he says this here is China. And this classroom is outer space, he says, up in every direction. And every time he tosses the blue beach ball up into the air--higher into this classroom that is space--I get to thinking I'm a spaceman swimming through the thick black sea that holds the solar system in its icy empty palm. I'm a space man swimming through cold space. Up is everywhere- out- out- here to there- light years of time and space between me- up- a spaceman and earth a blue beach ball. "Up is everywhere!" shouts my teacher. "Up is where the birds are," shouts my mother. Mother knows best- I'm your teacher- are you paying attention- hey are you with us johnny? Johnny?- "Up is everywhere" I say- "Space is black as a bug- space is my closed closet and within the darkness there is life- growing green and red and white- life of all colors springing up from soil as dark as space- up is everywhere in my dark closet- in space. This life - "Johnny are you paying attention?" "This life growing in thick vines up the walls of space- the walls of my dark closet- reaching for the idea of light somewhere- far above the surface of this oil ocean- Up is everywhere." "And if you drill through the core of the earth you can get to the surface on the other side. Up is everywhere, my children. Johnny are you paying attention?" I fall from space- fall down out of the oil-black ocean into this classroom full of children. I am a child? Not a spaceman? "Up is everywhere?" I say. "You're right," says my teacher, "space dismissed."

I go home--walking along the sidewalk--but in my mind--full of new knowledge, I know I am walking up--out to space. At home I slam the door behind me. This brings my mom from the kitchen, covered in flour or paint depending upon which life she happens to be living this day. So covered in flour today, because covered in paint she would have agreed with me about the location of up, she comes out of the kitchen and stares with fire behind her eyes at the slammed door and then at me- then at my backpack on the ground. "Just who do you think you are, Johnny? Slamming that door and throwing down your book bag? You know I'm jumpy, Johnny, you know I'm short on nerves--please try and make a more pleasant entrance next time. And take your bag up to your room."

Looking around at my familiar house, nothing seems as at had in the morning before

school. It is as if everything has been rearranged--paintings seem awkward on different walls- hardwood floors glisten with fresh wax across the ceiling. Up IS everywhere, I think--my eyes seem to confirm this. Smiling at my mom- covered in domestic graffiti- I say to her, "My bag is fine where it is up on the floor. The floor is up, mom. I learnt that today in school. Everywhere is up, mom. Look around- up or down- everything- everywhere is up. It's happening everywhere mom."

QUIRK 2002



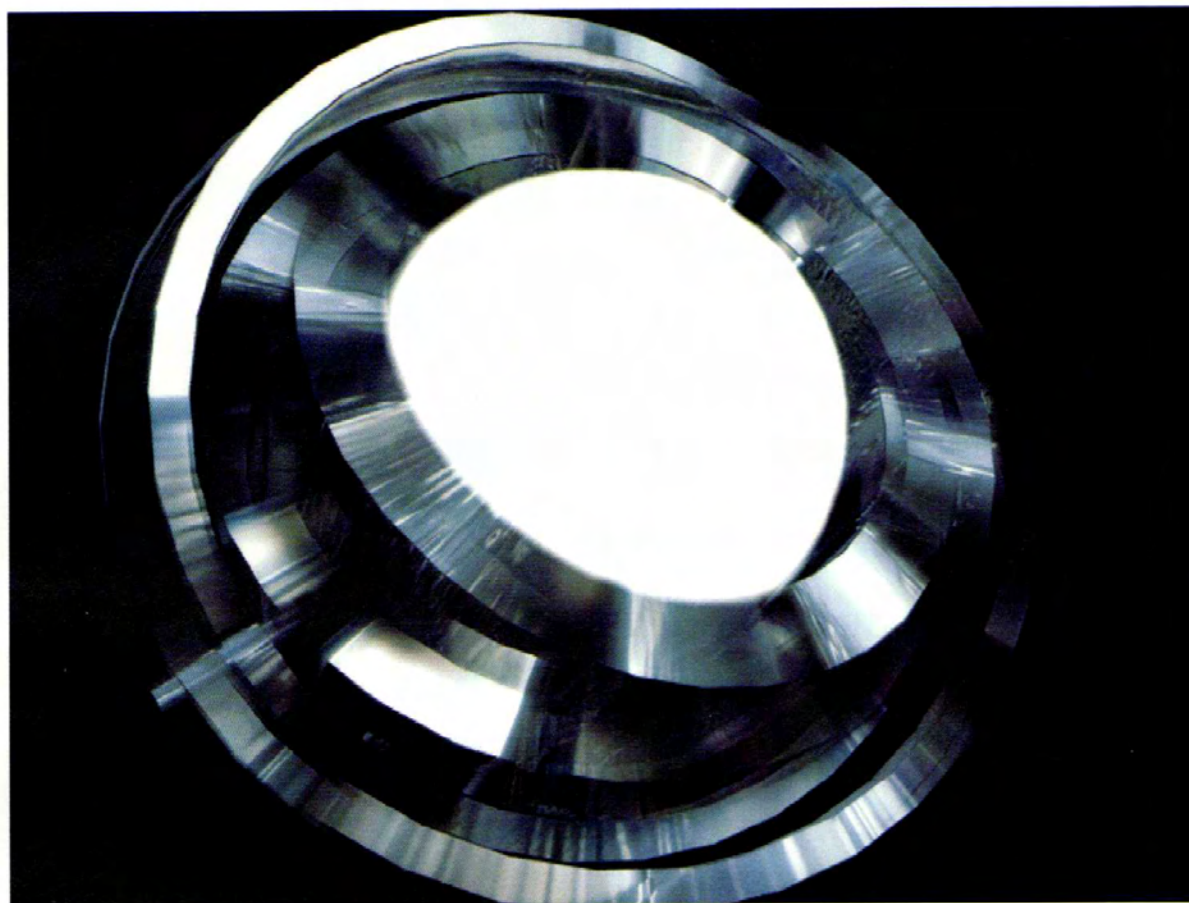
Sunset by Bryce Rushing



Velociraptor mongoliensis by John Carrola



The Kiss by Asenet Martinez



Interface Movie by John Carrola



Barbara Bush at the YMCA Pool by Joe Barrera, Jr.

Variation on Barbara Bush at the YMCA Pool

by Joe Barrera III

Hair like cotton candy,
the color of a rainy day.
And,
skin the color of purity,
ripples of age
covered in a peppermint candy.

Eyes of the future look upon her.

She governs this game of geometry
ending when the eight ball
falls fast,
and raises her hand
with all the excitement
of riding the bull.



Funeral by Jennifer De La Garza

QUIRK 2002



Feet by Asenet Martinez



Hibiscus by Bryce Rushing

Variation on Woman Smoking Cigar

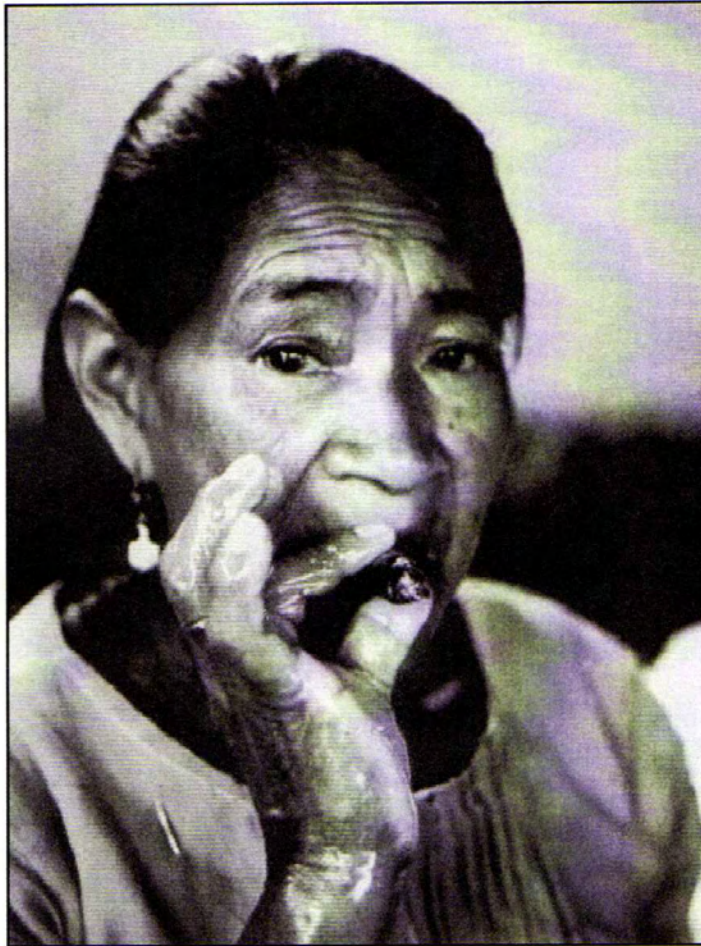
by **Joe Barrera III**

She is a heart at peace,
a clock
that ticks
each passing
day.

Her hair, dark as night, shines
like the moon on an ocean swell,
Breaks to a backdraft of ripples,
To remount in a tide of sight,
With no worries.

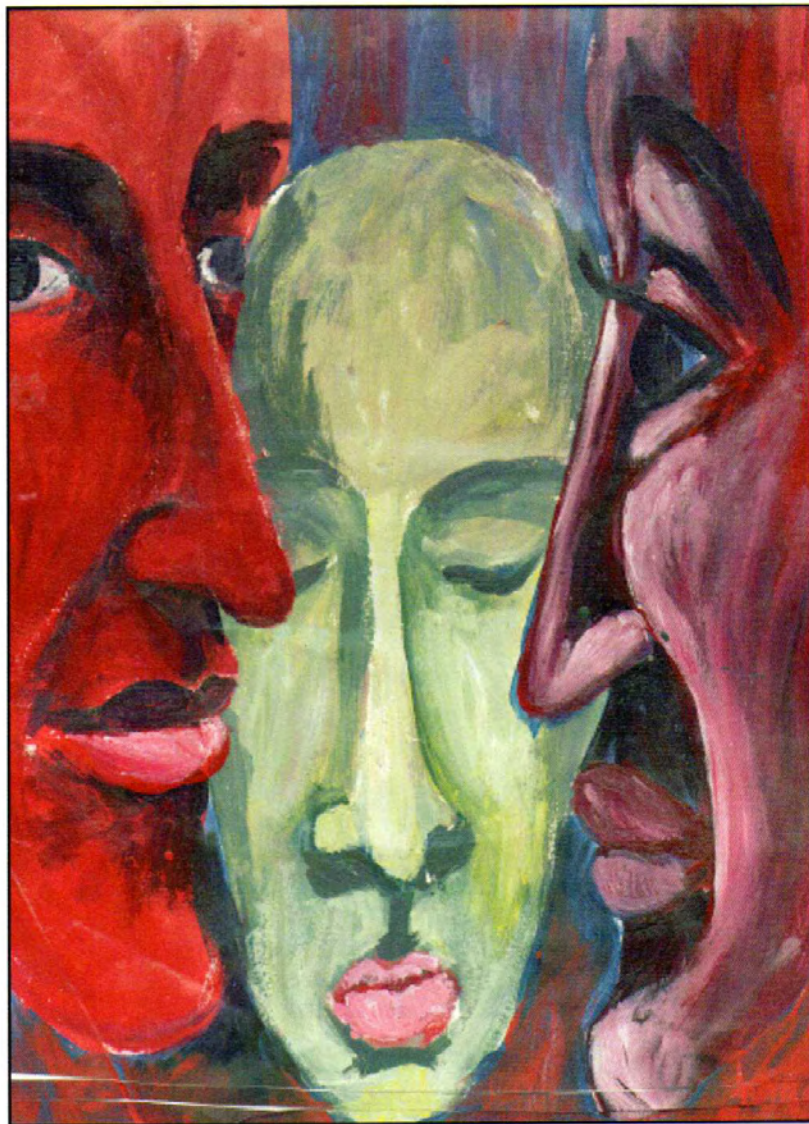
Her skin, touched
by a white disease,
looks like detergent
mixed with wisdom.

Her life is in the hands
of a fine Honduran cigar,
ending in ashes,
becoming one with the ground.

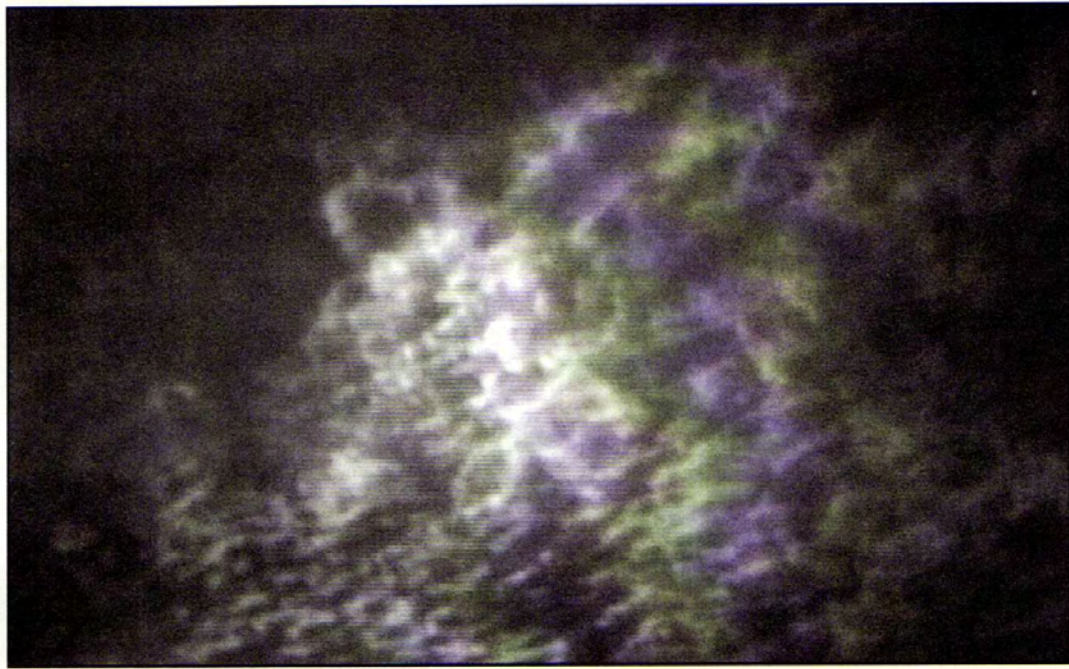


Woman Smoking Cigar by Joe Barrera, Jr.

QUIRK 2002



Three Faces by Desiree Maher

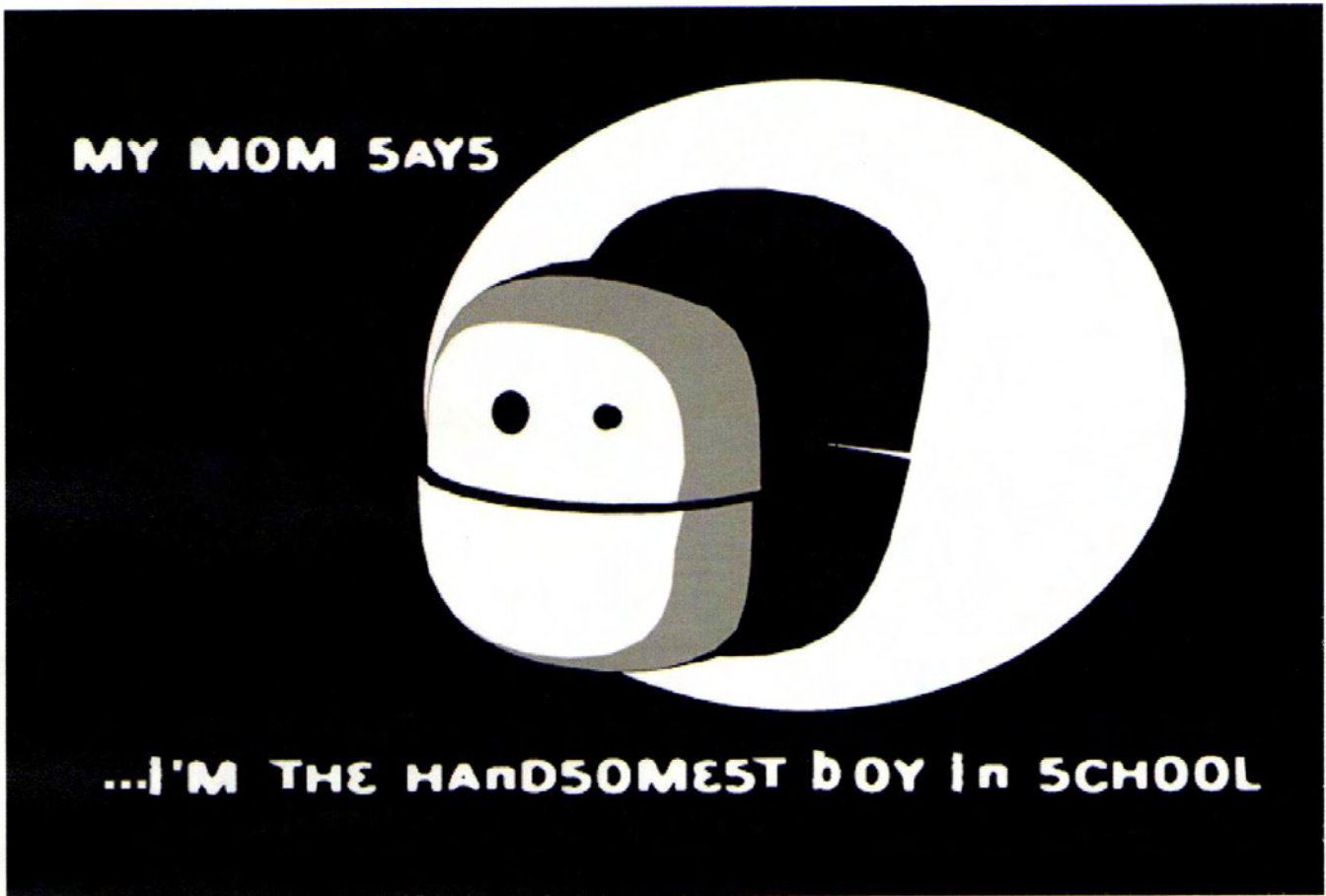


Cloudy Night Sky by Asenet Martinez

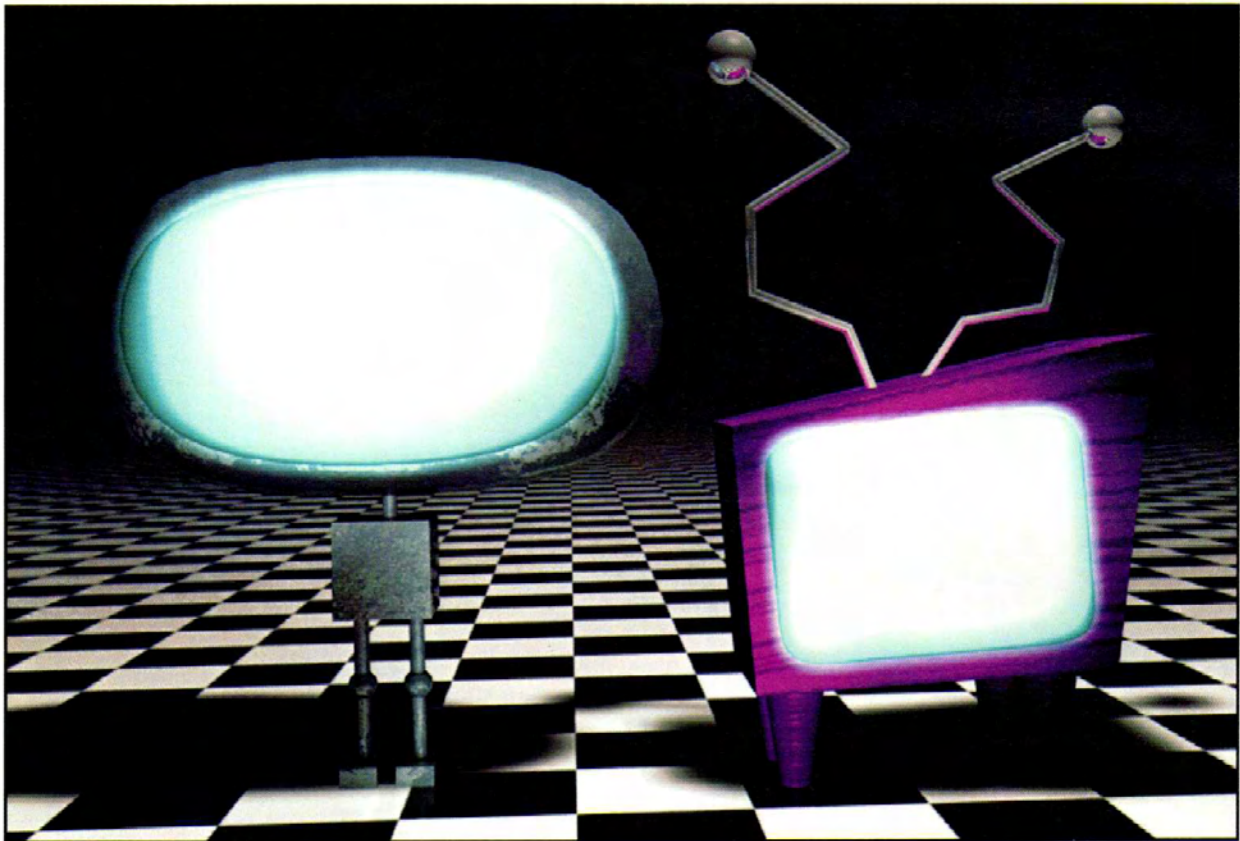
QUIRK 2002



Endless by Bryce Rushing



My Mom Says by John Carrola



Final Still by John Carrola



Flag by Carolina Ruiz

Moon Tonight

By John Lamb

moon- tonight, swollen, dilated
come dawn, a moon child
fat fingered and wrinkled will
reach a fleshy baby hand OUT
and clutch at its mother's night light breast
nursing the moon- baby lips
will spill a blue light across these otherwise
orange heavens of the city-

moon- my teacher, my guardian
once nursed me in this same
dark primordial way-

space, galactic womb-

once, a child, a fat little thumb rubbing
toothless gums-
i turned inexperience windows to the darkness
that
stretched everything i knew across the up
i knew not as sky
and though i knew not a word of this as of late
abused language i managed, "MOMMA?"
the darkness did not answer-

no longer child
the bigger ones call me orphan
but i know not a what that means
so i've come here to use the little i know to
sing you
this lost child's song-

The Only Child

by Matias Viegner

When the boy came to visit, he never knew what to call her. Mrs. B.? B.? Just Baudrexel? She never used his name and never needed to: there was no one else there. When Mrs. Baudrexel answered the phone, all she said was "Baudrexel here." Those who knew her, in fact, just called her Baudrexel.

Everyone in Baudrexel's life seemed to be dead. There was hardly a trace of other people at all, partly because Baudrexel was very clean. She thought photos in frames were "unrefined" and subject to dust and dirt. Two sisters and a brother had all died young. Her parents died within two years of each other, and her husband died on a horse when their son was four. This son, Gottfried, her only child, died in a freak swimming accident at seventeen. Nobody was allowed to mention the accident in Baudrexel's presence, but people said that one summer he had jumped from a bridge onto an iron pole, lodged underwater like a spear.

"Don't ever mention Gottfried," the boy's mother told him when she dropped him off. "Baudrexel never talks about him. But if she should, just listen and be polite."

When the boy stayed at her house for the afternoon, Baudrexel sat him down in the room she called the library and put a copy of Lhermontov in front of him. The boy was seven years old. He asked her if there were any books with pictures. She frowned and got up. She brought him a volume of Michelangelo's sketches. Baudrexel had almost no sense of life with children. All the furniture in her house was covered with worsteds and wool tweed where no child with bare legs could sit without itching. Even women in silk dresses squirmed.

If the boy got hungry, Baudrexel always had the kind of food no child had seen before. She had heavy black bread, sugar beet syrup, and blood sausage. For lunch she liked eggs in aspic, which stared up at you like eyeballs in gelatin; on the side you might find some pickles or beets. Her idea of desert was always very tart, like rhubarb, plain yogurt or sour cherries dusted with confectioner's sugar. In the boy's head, these kinds of food became identified with being German; he imagined that his grandmother, who knew Baudrexel as a girl, would have made the same things if she weren't dead.

When Baudrexel gave you food, she sat there across the table watching you eat. She looked like a man in a flowered dress. The boy never saw her make food, but the boy also never saw Alice, who did all the cooking. It was mostly cold food, even in the winter. Baudrexel said that too much hot food was unhealthy, perhaps even a factor in "the decline of civilization." She never carried the food to the table. It was always already there, with Baudrexel sitting and looking at it and the child. Baudrexel never ate with other people. Sometimes Alice opened the door a crack and watched the two of them, but Baudrexel never looked back. She looked at the boy. The boy watched Alice through the crack in the door.

"Why is he here again? Alice once hissed to Baudrexel in the kitchen. The boy was sitting alone in the dining room, folding his paper napkin into origami animals.

"The mother is at her divorce lawyer," Baudrexel said.

"Every Thursday?" Alice asked.

"Both of them want him," Baudrexel said. "Better this than tearing him limb from limb."

"Neither of them want him," Alice said. "He's a pawn."

"The boy will hear you!" Baudrexel hissed.

"I don't care," Alice said, lower. "I don't like his eyes. He reminds me... He reminds me of other children."

When he saw them, Alice was always different and Baudrexel was always the same. Sometimes Alice sang to herself and usually she was more likely to offer the boy candy than Baudrexel was. There were days when Alice was sour, or when she dropped things every few minutes or spent the day stifling her sighs. He often found notes they left for each other near the door: they always began B— or A— and were signed just —A or —B.

After lunch, Baudrexel took the boy outside. Before they walked into her garden, Baudrexel surveyed the neighbor's yards from her steps. She held her hand straight across her face to shield her eyes from the sun. "All those rose bushes!" she frowned. "So much orange and pink—it's a vulgar combination."

The great passion in Baudrexel's life was her alpine garden, which sloped up behind her big Tudor house. All she wanted were the tiniest, driest flowers. Everything she grew was exacting and difficult. Some things needed two feet of pure gravel so water could just race past the roots before disappearing; some plants needed a little roof over the winter so they could pop out and bloom for two weeks and then vanish for the rest of the year and stay completely dry— if they got wet, they rotted. Baudrexel ordered her little roofs from England, which served as miniature glass barns without sides. Most of her plants looked like something else: tennis balls, sticks, cat paws, or mice.

The boy squatted and stared at the plants. He rubbed his fingers on the hairy silver leaves of Lamb's Ears, the way Baudrexel had showed him.

Baudrexel had trouble reading the aluminum labels on her alpines. She carried a magnifying glass around her neck and squinted her eyes to read. "Bird excreta," she muttered. She scratched at it with her fingernail until the gray and white flakes flew off in the wind. "Aluminum is permanent and bird excretions are nearly so," she muttered.

"You must re-write this one," she said to the boy. "I cannot read it."

"*Iberis jocunda*," the boy said.

"No such plant!" Baudrexel said. "If *you* can't read it, who can? Look again. And write it big. Block letters."

The boy looked again and saw the same name. He took the new label, pressing as hard as he could, and wrote it in big letters. When Baudrexel saw it she agreed that it was right. "You have to learn to pronounce correctly."

"Stand here," she said, "and hold this basket. I'm going to weed. You need to hold it straight. If the weeds miss the basket they will root again and grow. When my son was alive, he never moved. Gottfried held the basket straight. He knew the weeds. Don't step on my labels! If you step on one and push it toward the wrong plant I will never know the correct names. If I were younger I would have the names memorized. When I was young I never forgot a plant's name. Look! A vicious weed," she said. "Sheep sorrel. Dig and dig, and it still won't die."

The boy stood still. His blond hair shone in the sun. He knew exactly how to hold the basket. "You don't look happy," she said to the boy. She stopped digging, stood up and leaned on the railing.

"Are you unhappy? Dropped here by your mother with an old woman like me. You should be paid to be here, holding my basket. Once Gottfried was paid to be friends with an old woman. A sad story. She had a stroke and wouldn't talk. Her husband couldn't talk to her, it made him too sad, so he offered Gottfried a certain sum for each hour he talked to her. He listened from downstairs. I think he liked the things Gottfried said. Sometimes he read her stories, especially folk tales. The husband was a famous violinist. She, she was no one. Not famous. I'm sure she never thought her husband was a genius. Of course I don't understand music either."

Baudrexel's true passion was cacti, but it was too damp to grow many with success. The ones that would grow she found, and for the others she took trips to Arizona and Mexico in the winter. On the back of her photographs she made notes— "A very old *Ferocactus wislizenii* leaning perilously towards the sun." Each photo was numbered and organized. When she went back to the same places, she added notes to her photos: "3/5/58— *Ferocactus* fallen. Signs of rodents."

One afternoon, Baudrexel told the boy that Alice insisted on throwing out the boxes in the attic. "She's right. I know she's right. Old things have a life and an end and naturally this life doesn't always overlap our own lives. So we're throwing the boxes out."

"You like books," Baudrexel declared, "of course." And she gave the boy a box of Gottfried's old books. He took them home. The book on the top was *Canals and their Construction*, which was never read. Underneath were books on European armaments, which were. There was a book called *A Foreign Devil in China*; the boy pulled this one out because he liked the orange and green cover, and he put it beside his bed. It was about a missionary or something and it bored him. On the bottom of the box were the books Baudrexel didn't go through: an old catalog of women's brassieres that was very worn. There were books on medieval instruments of torture and Nazi war atrocities. Someone had underlined the book on war crimes in heavy pencil. There were pages missing and threads of hair and bread crumbs between the pages.

"He collected knives," Baudrexel said. The boy had asked her about Gottfried's hobbies. They were sitting on his bed, which had black x's carved in the footboard. "I wish he wouldn't have done that; it really isn't like him." They only entered Gottfried's room when Alice wasn't home. When she went in, Baudrexel ran her finger across the desk to check for dust; when they left, she smoothed the wrinkles out of the bedspread. Once they were sitting and the boy saw a plate with some brown crumbs on the desk. Baudrexel talked until she saw it. Without a word, she pulled the plate to her chest and walked out of the room. It was the only time the boy ever saw her carry a plate.

"I never talk about Gottfried," she said. "Of course, it's not healthy to talk about him. That is why I never do so. I never dwell on the past."

That afternoon the boy saw Alice in the kitchen, gutting a big, silver fish. Usually she never left the door open. There was blood on the table, dripping down to the floor. Alice looked up at him and her mouth was caved in like a squeezed-out lemon. The blood dripped down one-two, one-two. Alice realized that she did not have her teeth in. Never taking her eyes off the boy, she stretched her

green-stockinged leg behind the door and pushed it shut.

"You saw Alice in a compromising position," Baudrexel said later. "This she will not forget, for a long time. You mustn't stare at her."

In the winter, Baudrexel had to stay inside. She wove tapestries with historical motifs. The boy came every Thursday. Baudrexel explained her newest work, *Admiral Peary at the North Pole*. Alice listened behind the door. Baudrexel depicted Peary at night, surveying his dog sled and the hills looming over him. Baudrexel chose the night because she was able to use all the shades from black to light grey. She said it would be too simple to do Peary in the sun, with just white yarn to convey the cold and snow. "Peary was a complicated man," she said. "He was an iconoclast." The grey threads hung down behind the canvas and trailed off on the floor.

Baudrexel was spending five days after Christmas at a nature center in the southwest desert, and she asked the mother if the boy wanted to go as her guest. The mother said yes. It was very convenient for her, because she had to go to Boston for a hearing. The boy asked why he couldn't visit his father along with his mother. "He doesn't understand the divorce," the mother told Baudrexel. They were all in the room together. Baudrexel smiled at the boy and Alice rattled the dishes in the kitchen. The boy agreed to go to the desert research center.

After the mother left, Alice began to make a great deal of noise. She must have climbed on a chair and dropped metal lids on her skillets. Baudrexel went in to her. The boy heard their hushed voices. All he heard was "insupportable," which Alice repeated twice. Then Alice hissed out "Gottfried's books!" and they were both quiet.

"My cousin Alice is not well," Baudrexel told the mother. "I cannot leave." Some people were under the impression that Alice was her sister. Sometimes she just called her the housekeeper.

The boy had to spend the two days after Christmas in his mother's hotel room in Boston. He watched television. He saw a show on the Living Desert. The mother had no time to take him to dinner so she brought him food. He saw a show on the Holocaust. He saw a game show, a show on predacious diving beetles and on the Arctic tern.

In the early spring, Alice mistakenly tore out a patch of Baudrexel's high alpine. Off to the side near the garage there was a bare patch of soil shaped like New Zealand. "She said it was an accident," Baudrexel hissed to the boy. There were tears in her eyes. "I heard her once. She said my alpine looked like dead forests. Like flying over dead forests. She wants to kill them, I know. It's my world, my very small world here. And she will kill it sooner or later."

Baudrexel picked up a Japanese beetle and held it in the sun to show him. It was black with luminescent colors in the wings. She put it close enough to his face for him to bite her fingers. "It looks like an Egyptian scarab," she said. "It is a pity to kill it." Baudrexel's neck was stooped over, as if from the cold; it was a warm day but she seemed not to notice. Her hair was thinner and her bun began faintly to come undone in the breeze. She lifted her hand and let the beetle fly away.

The food that Alice made had gotten poorer. The pickles that she once sliced she left whole. The boy saw a crust on some of the food that showed it was old, leftover mustard sauce, bits of dried cabbage on the rim of the bowl. When he got home, the boy threw up. He was in bed for two days.

The next week, he saw that the pudding had clear red berries in it. They were the ones Baudrexel said could kill a dog or a housecat. The boy didn't eat any pudding. For the first time he saw Baudrexel take a spoon, reach over and take a taste for herself. "They're poison," he said. She laughed. "You demon," she laughed, and swallowed a big spoon of white pudding with red berries. The week after that she was the same, maybe more tired, but she said nothing about being sick.

The boy's mother lost custody of him. Baudrexel offered her money for another lawyer, but the boy's mother said they had too much against her. They accused her of negligence. She was declared unfit and the boy was awarded to his father in Boston. It was beyond hope, the mother said. In any case, the father had told all the other dentists in the area not to hire her; all she could do was be a dental assistant, she said. Without a job, it was impossible to raise a child.

When the time came, Baudrexel wanted to come to the airport. It was the first time the boy saw her outside her house. She said Alice wasn't feeling well, but that she was coming too, if that was alright. All four of them were very quiet on their way to the airport until Alice asked the mother about her work. When the boy had to go, he ran to Baudrexel, not his mother, who was holding his bags. Alice began to cry. Some of her tears ran along the silver chain to her reading glasses. Baudrexel, dry-eyed, gave him a book on the first cave dwellers. It was new. No one had ever owned it before.

Sweet Cheat

By Chad Davidson

After the Sirens, Joyce confessed
he no longer trusted music,
how it aspires merely to reach
language, so at its best only
arrives. What it must have meant --
the last Wagner or, worse yet,
jazz that rushed into his Trieste
world -- the instant he arose
dispelling its retreat, condemned
to the slow bloom of parlour
conversation, pens carving;
to his own body, its noise
and divorce from all necessity
of sound. It must have been a trist,
he thought, allowing music to tear
his consciousness away, the way
gulps of water are to the drowning.

Or the other story: how he fought
against temptation -- a secret want
with all the myriad dialogue
to clamber up the dead crag.
To succumb, deafened by raw language,
Persephone's curse, Anthemoëssa
exciting *noble thoughts*, back hair,
genitalia -- *music please* --
until the page was bone white,
the punctuation walking, words
vanishing into a pure stream.

Until he finished the book,
watched the Lethe wash over
a fading siren -- only a woman
fallen on a beach, and a dog
barking silently outward to sea.

Skin

By Richard Foss

It is the largest organ,
 these thin elastic layers
 that mask muscle and bone, larger
 than the poisoned liver, drawing more air
 than the lungs, covering more territory than even the heart --
 nothing but what holds us together.

Yours is how I come to know you,
 everything,
 all second hand, transcribed by your skin;
 save for what remains hidden:
 how the simple grace
 of your small fingers on my body, my face
 how each time they settle me
 like faith found.

The second night, we slipped off our clothes
 and revealed our maps,
 the written record
 of where we've been: the knuckled scar
 above my left eye, the curved spread
 of light brown islands impressed at birth
 across your uncurved hip.

When we came back from Hawaii, newly-weds,
 dry white fissures appeared
 across our skin
 like the cracked earth of the Big Island,
 Earth's youngest, still stretching,
 gestating in the blue Pacific underneath
 a curtain of steam.

All week we peeled back the damage,
 the largest part of ourselves deciduous,
 coming off in thin translucent shapes.

Do you remember as kids
 trying to pull it back,
 shuffle it snake-like, the strange pleased-pinch,
 tearing off in widening ribbons? -
 as if you could make something out of it,
 another self, perhaps, hollow . . .
 the pink of dawn underneath.

They talk now of an endless communion,
 defecting atoms flying between us:
 I becoming you,
 you becoming me, ever-permutating.
 But we know better:
 the law of flying apart,
 that to touch one must reach.

And again tonight
 we'll undress and lie skin to skin
 in original darkness
 writing names across the wide page
 of the back, painting invisible pictures
 and peeling time, hour by hour, back,
 year into year until we lose these bodies,
 one and then the other.
 Then, please, outside your skin, tell me
 how will I know you?

Skin

By Richard Fore

It is the largest organ,
 these thin elastic layers
 that mask muscle and bone, layer
 than the lungs, covering more territory than even the heart -
 nothing but what holds us together
 Yours is how I come to know you,
 everything,
 all second hand, transcribed by your skin,
 save for what remains hidden:
 how the simple grace
 of your small fingers on my body, my face
 how each time they scathe me
 like faint found.
 The second night, we slipped off our clothes
 and revealed our maps,
 the written record
 of where we've been: the knuckled scar
 above my left eye, the curved scar
 of light brown islands impressed in flesh
 across your uncurved hip.
 When we came back from Hawaii, newly-weds,
 dry white fissures appeared
 across our skin
 like the cracked earth of the Big Island,
 Earth's youngest, still stretching,
 gestating in the blue Pacific underneath
 a curtain of steam.
 All week we peeled back the damage,
 the largest part of ourselves decaying,
 coming off in thin translucent spores

Little Brown Baby, 1994

By Stephanie G. Guzman

You, little brown baby
with crescent-moon eyes.
Do you know who you are?
The epitome of my being,
my golden mean. A luminous
star in mind's sky.
Do you know how you bring
totality to every breath I exhale?
Or when summoned from sleep,
all of the lucidity I entail?

You, little brown girl,
with crescent-moon eyes.
Do you know how you've grown?
How you bring ingenious wonderment
to all you examine, are endlessly curious,
valiantly pursuing the monstrous unknown?
Do you know what opulent delight
it gives to see how you learn?
The manner in which you are enlightened
forces reminisces, engraving in mind
all forgotten time immemorial in return?

You, little brown young woman,
with crescent-moon eyes.
Do you know what you've become?
What inborn exquisiteness you release, enslaving
with unseasoned knowledge
where this potency comes from?
Is it because you share the same
blood and lineage with me?
Or are you a minute marvel long petitioned
to infinite eclipses of hope, an unforeseen
renewal adding to all doings a certain fluidity?

Meteor Shower

By Richard Fore

When I was a boy it was fishing -- the small lakes
of Northern Illinois and Indiana,
Lake Michigan sometimes, downtown under
the shadow of steel. Then the cooler was paper,
grocery bag filled with beer no radio.
We had three specialized for special fish -
removes the second face just behind.
I see it, see how the camera on the darkroom
the image of my father plastic, transparent;
I snap the picture and in case another --
his chin one eyebrow lifted the serious scientist.
He sees me and strikes a pose, back straight.
I have inherited--the name, the face.
that watered stone face, a face they say
of his cigarette barely illuminates
cover the flash with my hand; the orange
his notice. I teach a camera out the window,
the long-awaited might sneak past, escape
stares down the vast face of sky, suspicious
A desperate patient in the hard eyes
& flashlight, punctures around the neck.
a equal notebook and pen ready in his lap,
Address TV Bobby Davis' head, heart attack --
in pencil on my father's workroom wall:
Bobby Davis, "Boyhood the 20" -- his death
filled with diet coke, and a radio playing
sits on a lawn chair, next to him a cooler
fiction turned astronomer, my father
I see him on the roof still as the moon,
I yearn, the bathroom window becomes a door.

Meteor Shower

By Richard Foss

Upstairs, the bathroom window becomes a door.
I see him on the roof still as the moon,
fireman turned astronomer: my father
sits on a lawn chair, next to him a cooler
filled with diet coke, and a radio playing
Bobby Darin, "Beyond the Sea"-- his death

in pencil on my father's workroom wall:
March '79 Bobby Darin dead, heart attack --
a spiral notebook and pen ready in his lap,
a flashlight, binoculars around the neck.
A desperate patience in the hard eyes
stares down the vast face of sky, suspicious

the long-awaited might sneak past, escape
his notice. I reach a camera out the window,
cover the flash with my hand; the orange
of his cigarette barely illuminates
that weathered stone face, a face they say
I have inherited--the name, the face.

He sees me and strikes a pose: back straight,
his chin, one eyebrow lifted: the serious scientist.
I snap the picture and in case, another --
the image of my father, plastic, transferable;
I see it, see how the camera or the darkroom
removes the second face just behind.

When I was a boy it was fishing -- the small lakes
of Northern Illinois and Indiana,
Lake Michigan sometimes, downtown under
the shadow of steel. Then the cooler was paper,
a grocery bag filled with beer; no radio.
We had lures specialized for special fish -

Little Brown Baby, 1994

By Stephanie G. Carman

You, little brown baby
with crescent-moon eyes
Do you know who you are?
The epitome of my being,
my golden mean. A luminous
star in mind's sky.
Do you know how you bring
totality to every breath I exhale?
Or when summoned from sleep,
all of the faculty I entail?

You, little brown girl
with crescent-moon eyes
Do you know how you've grown?
How you bring ingenious wonderment
to all you examine, are endlessly curious
valiantly pursuing the monstrous unknown?
Do you know what optical delight
it gives to see how you learn?
The manner in which you are enlightened
forces reinvents, engraving in mind
all forgotten time immemorial in tempo?

You, little brown young woman
with crescent-moon eyes
Do you know what you've become?
What inborn exuberances you release, enlivening
with unassessed knowledge
where this potency comes from?
Is it because you share the same
blood and lineage with me?
Or are you a minute marvel long positioned
to infinite eclipses of hope, an unforeseen
renewal adding to all beauty a certain fluidity?

Walleye, Northern Pike, Bass, the talked of giants,
 deep treasures -- bits of bright yellow freckled
 red, made deadly with clusters of curled steel.
 I imagined too well that first jerk to rip the jowls,
 the weight in the wrist, the body as anchor.
 But mostly we used live bait, worms for whom

I risked my father's anger, unable as I was
 to drive the hook through their bodies. He would
 have to set both lines, his thick fingers looping
 the worms through several times, injecting air
 with a syringe to increase the temptation.
 With his father's tackle my father was teaching --

these were man lessons: how to hook a worm,
 how to weight a line, how to carry in the shoulders
 and the eyes the things men were meant to carry.
 My father seemed to know the art of fishing,
 but the big ones, the Pike, the Walleye, seemed to
 belong to waters beyond our imagination,

so deep, I imagined in the dark folds
 of the lake, nothing could bring them to light.
 We'd watch those bobbers hour after hour,
 his whole body fighting back the rage. I held
 my breath to disappear, praying for his to break,
 for some mercy to sink his beneath the unyielding

surface of the water, a signal perhaps,
 that at last he might have something
 big enough for both of us. Now, I climb
 through the window to join my father
 in the darkness. He tells me where to sit,
 points my attention to the northern sky.

And again, sitting on the roof, we are still
 with everything before us. We don't speak.
 Looking for light in the sky our eyes adjust
 to the dark, gradually he appears, as I
 listen to the only sound: his light whistle
 under the sway of Bobby Darin's voice.

Board Aboard
 By John F. Kennedy
 A school down stairs and stairs until I wince
 myself awake to see the first light high
 in the place. The little boys next door and friends
 must be contemplating a great supply
 of gum they left inside. I'm on the floor
 by gutters in the next room, asleep
 beneath my sheets or wakened now by noise
 then slapping. It doesn't stop. It's deeper
 than a door slam. What is that noise? I hear
 that say, and I say back. I thought it was
 the neighbor's screen door slamming -- that's kind of
 the sound. It sounds like boards to me, the way
 they from New Hampshire. That's no answer at all
 for boards, of course, but I ought to make it known
 the's on a weekend visit five hours past
 from the hamlock forest Robert Frost called home.
 Like boards? I like someone's own time slapping boards
 that who aims boards together for no purpose?
 Well, no one's coming in or out of doors
 -- that idea's worthless --
 someone would be talking. The house is quiet.
 I wonder if we're listening for slams
 or in a fight. The silence, then a riot
 of boards seen or right. The half-occluded
 What the --? But still she lies in bed instead
 of coming out to see. I give up, get
 up, look out toward the neighbor. Nothing. Dead.
 The first fall most wanted in the grass, thus war.

Board Aubade

By John Poch

A screen door slams and slams until I wince
myself awake to see the first light high
in the pines. The little boys next door and friends
must be remembering a great supply

of gear they left inside. I'm on the floor.
My girlfriend's in the other room, asleep
beneath my sheets or wakened now by more
door-slamming. It doesn't stop. It's deeper

than a door slam. What *is* that noise? I hear
her say, and I say back I thought it was
the neighbors' screen door slamming -- that's kind of near
the sound. It sounds like boards to me, she says.

She's from New Hampshire. That's no answer at all
for boards, of course, but I ought to make it known
she's on a weekend visit five hours haul
from the hemlock forest Robert Frost called home.

Like boards? Like someone's out there slamming boards.
But who slams boards together for no purpose?
Well, no one's coming in or out of doors
'cause no one's talking -- that idea's worthless --

someone would be talking. The house is quiet.
I wonder if we're listening for slams
or in a fight. This silence, then a riot
of bangs, seven or eight. She half-exclaims:

What the --? But still she lies in bed instead
of coming out to see. I give up, get
up, look out toward the neighbors. Nothing. Dead.
The first fall frost warms in the grass, turns wet.

She must have heard my pj's rustle toward
 the window. So? she says. Her question hangs
 like a question mark. Not one single board,
 I say, and two blurs plummet past with bangs.

Pine cones. Rock hard pine cones releasing from
 the pine top, falling on the metal roof
 of the garage. They drop from the early sun
 that loosens them to make this violent move

downward. I'll later learn that these above
 are female cones and they fall first to lie
 and wait for males on lower limbs to love
 the fall as well, but now these thoughts of why

this noise is all. She lies still, doesn't ask.
 We hold our separate mysteries for just
 a moment more the way we hold our fast
 of love. We pine. She leaves in an hour. She must.

What Comes Next

By Teddy Bowers

Conversation was our way of flirting with each other. It didn't matter what we talked about. Everything we had ever said had been part of our courtship, from the mundane to the profound.

At first our conversation was about writing or about our students or about other faculty.

Then things got more personal. There were no confessions; there were no tell-all moments. But we had a lot to talk about. We got excited when we talked to each other. We stepped on the ends of each other's sentences, and we cut in when the other was talking.

We laughed a lot. We couldn't sit across from each other at meetings, because just looking at each other would make us laugh. I thought I could read his mind.

We talked in each other's offices, and in the hallways, and wherever we ate our lunch. We made each other late for classes.

We got so excited when we talked sometimes that our voices would get louder and louder, and then one of us would motion towards the door, or down the hall, wherever "they" might be, getting pissed off at us for being so loud. We'd shush each other and look at each other sheepishly. But we knew we were really thinking, *Too bad for them*, because they couldn't be in on our conversation.

That's how we got close.

I was attracted to him from the beginning, but in the beginning it was only in that vague way attractive people are automatically attractive to other people. I thought he was more attractive for a man than I was for a woman. I didn't think he was drawn to me that way—physically. But talking to him was almost as good as sleeping with him.

We got to the point where we could tease each other and say, "Fuck you!" and hit each other and put each other down. Things were personal then. When we got to that point, I was starting to feel like I loved him. My whole day revolved around him. If he'd asked me to divorce my husband and run away with him, I would have.

We never talked about our spouses. We each knew that the other was married, but home life was peripheral. It was inconsequential. I thought it was an unwritten rule not to talk about my husband and his wife.

And then one day, he walked into my office and broke the rule.

He looked tired and upset, and when I asked him how he was doing he said, "Not so good."

And of course I had to ask, "What's wrong?"

"I got in a fight with my wife last night because I didn't want to go down on her."

Immediately I was on the defensive, totally on her side, ready to tell him what a selfish asshole he was.

Then he said, "It's not that I don't like to go down—because believe me, I do—but last night I just wasn't in the mood. And she said, 'Well, that's not the point. You're supposed to do it to please the other person. It's a selfless act,' she said. And I said, 'Well, if I asked you to suck my dick and you weren't in the mood for it, I wouldn't want you to do it.' And she said, 'I'm *never* in the mood to suck your dick, but I do it anyway!' And I said, 'Well, that's not right.' She was crying. She told me

it was hard for her to ask me things like that, and then when she does, I tell her I'm not in the mood. I asked her, 'Where is this coming from?' And she said, 'It's coming from you turning me down!' And I said, 'But you turn me down all the time when I try to have sex with you.' She said, 'But that's *different*.' Tell me, Catherine, how is that different?"

I shrugged my shoulders, and tried to look sympathetic. But I knew exactly how it was different.

"The thing is this," he said. "I think she's being sexist. I think she's saying it's okay for a woman to turn a man down when he wants it because men are always hot and bothered—which is absolutely not true, by the way. But it's not okay for a man to turn a woman down when she's horny, because we should be grateful they ever get horny in the first place! Don't you think that's what she's saying?"

He stopped talking and gave me an expectant look, eyebrows raised. He was sitting on the edge of my filing cabinet, his legs stretched out in front of him, and his arms crossed over his chest. He looked good.

I know what he wanted me to say. He wanted me to be on his side. I wanted to be on his side, too. Considering the way I felt about him, I certainly didn't want to be on his wife's side. But I felt like he was missing a few key assumptions that men and women are taught to make when it comes to sex.

Also, there was the realization he had a wife and he actually had sex with her. Everything and everybody else used to be on the outside, but Hugh had brought something from the outside onto our turf, and I was mad at him for that, too.

But that was not the time to bring it up.

So instead I said, "You know, I think you just really hurt her feelings. Maybe her hormones are a little out of whack."

Part of what I told him was true, but I wasn't a big proponent of the hormone excuse. I only used it when I didn't want to explain myself. Like right then.

He wasn't totally satisfied with my answer, but at least I didn't alienate him with my big You-don't-know-what-it-means-to-be-a-woman speech. Because she was absolutely right, you know. His wife. I thought, One day I'll explain it to him and he'll understand.

"I still think she was being sexist," he said.

I wanted to say, Of course she was being sexist. That's the way we're all brought up.

After that time, we talked freely about our sex lives. It wasn't all we talked about, but it did come up quite a bit, and it was just one more thing we used to woo each other. I know I for one wanted him to be jealous. I wanted him to say, That should be me.

We started to have this thing where one of us would ask, "How ya' doin' today? Happily married?" And the other one would say, "Well, I'm married." And we'd cackle. Oh, man, we thought that was funny. I loved to hear him say he wasn't happily married even if it was a joke.

Not everything we said was always a big joke. We were serious, too. We argued, and sometimes we got mad at each other. Once I stomped out of his office in tears because I was so frustrated with him.

Many times I drove home thinking about him. I carried the thought of him everywhere I went.

Sometimes I would just *know* he wanted me, and I'd think, The next time I walk in his office, I'm going to kiss him. I'm just gonna do it.

And then I'd get in there, and I'd think, What if I'm wrong? What if I kiss him, and he doesn't respond? It'll be embarrassing as hell, and nothing will ever be the same between us.

We were even politely inquisitive about each other's spouse. I'd say, "How's your wife doing?" if he hadn't mentioned her in a few days. Or he'd ask me, "You and hubby do anything fun this weekend?"

It came to a head, as it always does. It never feels like it will before it actually does, but it always does. You eventually get to that point where you feel like the risk lies in not acting.

One day, at the beginning of the spring semester, I was in the middle of a late afternoon class, when he poked his head in.

"What's up?" I asked, frowning.

"They're shutting the school down," he said. "There's a storm coming in—freezing rain—and they've closed 410 and 35, so they're sending everyone home before it gets really bad. It's supposed to get down to fifteen tonight."

"Good lord," I said.

The weather had been bad, and the forecasters kept saying there was a chance of snow, which would have been beautiful. But so far, all we'd had was miserable, biting sleet and rain.

"Okay," I sighed, and waved my hand at my students. "Go on, go home. Stay warm. We'll pick this up on Tuesday."

Hugh waited for me to get my books and papers together.

"I was going to give them a quiz," I said.

"Well then I guess they got lucky," he said.

We walked to my office together. Hugh's last class on Tuesdays and Thursdays ended at 3:15. He kept office hours until five, though.

He sat in an empty chair in my office, and I plopped down in my chair. The weather was depressing. We were so used to sun.

"So," he said.

I leaned my head back against my chair, and tried to rub my eyes without smearing mascara everywhere. "So," I said back to him.

"Are you going home?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said, and lifted my head back up to look at him. "I was thinking it might be fun to get stuck here all night."

"Are you being sarcastic?" he asked.

"If you have to ask," I said. But when I saw the look of irritation on his face I said what I had really meant which was, "It would be fun, like an adventure, like having the rules suspended for one night."

"We could break into everyone's office and read all the stuff on their computers. All the stuff nobody else gets to see."

We were quiet for a minute and then I said, "The weather's got me feeling—" I made my hands into fists of frustration and shook them "—you know?"

He nodded his head. I slapped my palms on the desk and laid my head between them, cheek against the desk. He shifted forward in his chair, and my heart started to beat faster. He touched my hand lightly.

"Your hands are dry," he said, rubbing his thumb across the back of my hand.

"They itch," I said, lifting up my head.

"You should put lotion on them."

"I do, but I wash them a lot," I said.

He was still holding my hand, and he rubbed his thumb across my knuckles.

"Let's hide out in here until everyone leaves," he said.

"And then what?"

He shrugged and gave me a little half smile. Suddenly it occurred to me that he was unhappy. And I thought, It's just the weather. Everyone's feeling sad. But I guess I knew that he'd been unhappy for a long time.

"You look unhappy," I said. I was holding my chin in my left hand, and Hugh was still holding my right.

"I am a little," he said.

"Why?"

"Because things aren't going the way I wanted them to."

"What do you mean, like in your life?"

"Yeah, well, like in everything."

"What about us?"

"What *about* us?"

"Are you unhappy with us?"

"A little."

I could not help but be funny because I couldn't say what I really wanted to say. So instead I said, "Because you wish I was Carmen Electra and you could have sex with me?"

He snorted and shook his head, but he was smiling. "Yeah," he said.

"Yeah, you wish I was Carmen Electra? Or, yeah you wish you could have sex with me?" I was trying to be funny, but my voice sounded wistful, hopeful.

He looked at me, and I told myself, for Christ's sake, Catherine, kiss him. He is begging you to kiss him.

But the distance between us seemed too great for me to cross.

Then he said, "At what point are you no longer a coward for cheating on your spouse, but a coward for not? Is there a point like that? Or do I just want there to be?"

And there it was, in the open. Finally. I could not think of a response, but it was a question, and questions need answers.

I rolled my chair the two feet between us, until our knees were touching. We leaned towards each other and hugged, and from our knees to our hips up to our heads, we made a little triangle. My hand touched his hair. I'd never hugged him before.

He must have been holding his breath, because all of a sudden he let it out in a whoosh and it

was warm against my neck. It surprised me, and in that moment of surprise I found the courage to kiss him.

Every time I had fantasized about it, I had imagined us pawing at each other's clothes, two years of sexual frustration pouring out.

But it was a quiet kiss, a nervous kiss. No pawing. Everything was silent except for the sound of our kissing and the hum of my computer. I could hear nothing in the halls outside my office.

I wondered if my husband would call the police if I didn't come home that night. I thought I should probably call him. I imagined picking up the phone, and telling him I'd gotten stuck at school and was going to spend the night there.

I pictured Hugh standing next to me while I called my husband. And then, when I was done with the phone, I would hand it to him and he would call his wife.

I thought about a time when I had been sixteen, and a friend of mine and I had lied to our mothers so that we could spend all night out with these guys. I didn't like lying to my mother even though I did it all the time. It always cast a shadow over what I did, and then I didn't enjoy it as much.

I thought about what might come next between Hugh and me. I wanted to sleep with him, and in my heart I believed I deserved to. But I loved him, and I felt a shadow hanging over us. I realized that in all my fantasies I'd never gotten past kissing him. I'd never considered what might come next.

Signs of Life

By Stephanie G. Guzman

Languorous movement; signs of life,
Coiling and uncoiling the reminiscences
Of youth that wrap around psyche like
The serpent of Eden.

Breathing stoic air; signs of life,
Billowing to that somewhere else
That encloses the dull resonant hum
Of trepidation singing loudly in ear.

Tracing the scars; signs of life,
Sifting through the kernels of reservation
In a once vivacious existence
In an autonomous humankind.

Love Letters

--after a theme by Ivan Lalic

By Timothy Geiger

1.
Open this morning like a canceled envelope--
the return address reads winter.
Leaves take their sunlit scripts
and scatter the ground.
The squirrels grow fat and lazy.
A songbird's blood
is handwritten across the backyard,
but otherwise all is well here.
2.
Open this morning like folded parchment--
the ink has long since faded.
Leaves tumble
like anapests
in a silent language.
Songbirds gather solemnly
in the emptying branches.
If nothing else, wish you were here.
3.
Open this morning like a blank invitation--
the sender still only imagined.
The leaves do not fall
so much as they oscillate
orange out of October.
The songbird's alphabet
records only history,
no more, no less, as it seems from here.

Signs of Life

By Stephanie G. Gorman

I anguished movement: signs of life,
Coiling and uncoiling the retiniscence
Of youth that wrap around psychic life
The serpent of Eden.

Breathing stave air: signs of life,
Billowing to that somewhere else
That encloses the dull resonant hum
Of repetition singing loudly in ear.

Tracing the scars: signs of life,
Sifting through the kernels of resolution
In a once vivacious existence
In an autonomous hallelujah.

Intruding Voices

By Angie Brazeal

Through the fog of his headache, he realized that his wife wanted to tell him something with her look. Until then, he hadn't paid any attention to the voices in the patio...

—Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The voices plagued him as if they were his own thoughts. Their conversation came to him in bits and pieces, the way a dream is remembered the day after. His wife was still looking at him and he knew his response should be to ask what she was thinking. *En que piensas mi amor?* As the question materialized in his mind, he applied it not to his wife, but to the people on the patio. They spoke of a conversation; a retelling of dialogue. His wife began to speak, but he could not hear her. He rose to embrace her; to touch her was to comprehend her look and what she meant to say.

It had always been that way with them. He could touch her, or look into her eyes, and know her feelings. The problem was, she could tell you, that he didn't care to know her feelings anymore. He walked around aimlessly; stuck in a dream. A dream more interesting than anything she could say.

She continued to speak; he continued to hear. He still embraced the words drifting through the open window more fervently than he embraced his wife. *"Well, he told me that she makes him happy...Shouldn't he leave it to his wife to make him...She's pregnant, you know..."*

Slices of someone else's life stealing into his mind. He cared nothing for the gossip, but couldn't let go of the idea that was growing into something, a being, something real, interesting. An unborn child. This was what the patio voices talked about, or at least what he heard. Was the child plagued with other people's conversations like he was? Did the words of his mother mingle with others' words and intrude on the child's thoughts inside the womb?

He didn't listen to his wife's words. They became the melody of the music coming from the patio, his thoughts the chords that set the tone of the song. Her words stopped; and the music ended with them. She pulled away from his embrace and he realized that he knew what she had said. He wanted to tell her this, but could make no words. She turned from him. He tried to hum for her the song, to show that he understood the melody, but she had forgotten.

The voices on the patio grew quiet, secretive. His wife began to cry. This was altogether too much. The voices were unintelligible; they depleted his thoughts. *Crying helps nothing.* The thought, being solitary, became brave also and tumbled out of his mouth. His wife turned, and he noticed that she looked different than she had the last time he could remember her appearance.

"Crying is the only way my emotions can escape before eating me alive." The dull voice of his wife seemed not to belong to her. In fact, he decided, it *did not* belong to her. The people on the porch were speaking again, invading his thoughts again. It was their desperate statement, he realized, not his wife's. It belonged to them.

What did the voices speak of now? He was irritatingly torn. He could now hear too much and comprehend nothing. It was infuriating. The voices from the patio tried to penetrate his mind. His wife's sobbing crept into his thoughts like her tears crept down her beautiful cheeks. The thoughts

came involuntarily, like the air entering his lungs, while the sobs and her words avoided his ears. There was no escape from this life, burrowing farther into himself everyday. There seemed no room for him to think, but he did. He did! The patio voices, his wife's sobs, his thoughts; they were all engaged in his mind. The song had resumed; the melody softened this time. The tone, set by his own overloaded brain, was ominous. If only he could drift to something else. He tried to float away; he was usually quite good at that. Something inside him tugged at his thoughts; *you can't float away if your brain is too heavy*. He could see his dreams float by without him, his lucidity too engaged to let go and follow.

He looked at his wife. She paused. He tried to explain that you can't float away if your brain is too heavy, but then, somehow, his brain gave up the fight, and he did float away. As he was about to speak, he hummed the melody for her instead. *She must have remembered the song.*

Cruel Sonnet

By Chad Davidson

The naked birches splinter by the bridge.
 They split with quick creaks: a restraint
 no one understands. Flaking like paint
 stripped, whole limbs flay then saddle to sludge.
 The roots are suffocating, straddling the edge
 of the river's reason. On limbs the taint
 of frost fractures into raw complaint,
 crabs at the vellumed bark. Gray ice slabs nudge
 off bank, sift through shattered trunks of pine.
 Forget the fall: its distant drift from life,
 excessive life, to cold that rips the drones
 from a desiccated queen, sends tabbies to whine,
 freeze in hollows by the bridge, each safe
 from the other, each slitted eye alone.

Implosion Theory and Dostoevsky

By Chad Davidson

It is what you make out of first clouds: an eye
 or a finger pointed. It's just a rest. The rest
 intention being to ventilate you with guilt
 to what you keep from writing, let die
 in white like a writer's shirt, rope-quickled
 and wretched to a black pole. Awaiting bullets,
 your inspiration loses logic. The fall
 of such a mundane search, the way to feel
 emptiness yet be yourself not spent.
 You're behind the blindfold. Breathe the charcoal
 in your

Implosion Theory and Dostoevsky

By Chad Davidson

It is what you make out of flint clouds: an eye
 or a finger poised. It's just a test. The real
 intention being to ventilate you with guilt
 for what you keep from writing, let die
 in white like a traitor's shirt, rope-quelled
 and wrenched to a black pole. Awaiting bullets,
 your inspiration loses logic. The lull
 of such a mundane search, the way to feel
 emptiness yet be yourself not spent.
 You're behind the blindfold. Breathe the charcoal
 in. Vent.

Cruel Sonnet

By Chad Davidson

The naked birches splinter by the bridge
 They split with duck creator: a restraint
 no one understands. Faking like paint
 stripped, whole limbs lay then sabbic to study.
 The roots are suffocating, straddling the edge
 of the river's reason. On limbs the rain
 of frost fractures into raw complaint,
 creeps at the veiled bark. Gray ice slabs wedge
 off bank, sit through shattered trunks of pine
 Forget the fall: its distant drift from life,
 excessive life, to cold that tips the dance
 from a desiccated quest, sends limbs to whine,
 freeze in hollows by the bridge, each safe
 from the other, each tilted eye alone.

Stunning

By Timothy Geiger

The torn left wing
 of a monarch butterfly
 inadequately maneuvers
 its unstable operator
 against a burnished
 oak-leaf montage,

allowing the hungry aperture
 of a blue-jay's beak
 the quick jab and snap
 at an early breakfast,

which keeps the delicate jewelry
 of the grasshopper's emerald
 emblazoned pincers
 pre-occupied enough
 to not eat the slanted row
 of my neighbor's tomato plants,

so that my curious dog
 can dig up the roots instead,
 watch the stalks rust and wither
 between her squat,

returning the seed to the dirt,
 but not the butterfly
 back to a pupae --
 its disconnected wing
 now tumbling by mid-air,
 a shard of torn stained-glass.

The Art of Disappearance

By Richard Peck

There were times when I craved my own absence,
 a noted to disappear from the world.
 At first, already I had masked the art;
 first I would fall silent in plain view
 of my parents or sisters, play somnambulist
 with matchbox cars, or green plastic soldiers,
 ease myself away one sense at a time.

Under the cover of conversation I'd duck
 into the cereal cabinet. I needed ration.
 With one fluid motion, one hand soft
 on the magnets, I would open it just enough
 to slide out a box of Lucky Charms, or Life,
 even unwatered Cheerios if I had to.
 Up to my room to pick up my accomplishment. Of the

with full beard, black jumpsuit and King in grip.
 And as my parents cooked dinner or washed
 themselves for some wedding, or some wake,
 they showed the same old attention to my sister,
 and I became invisible, a part of the house,
 soaked up by the darkness of an adult room,
 unoccupied now, even by me. I would not swi

behind a curtain, into the furthest corner
 of a rare closet. The vibrant on my lap
 as I sucked on my teeth, conducting careful
 marshmallow searches. Old clothes in my hands,
 I strained to hear the color of the house
 without me, I listened for the discovery,
 waiting, the trickle of time in my throat.

The Art of Disappearance

By Richard Foss

There were times when I craved my own absence,
wanted to disappear from the world.
At three already I had mastered the art;
first I would fall silent in plain view
of my parents or sisters, play soundlessly
with matchbox cars, or green plastic soldiers,
ease myself away one sense at a time.

Under the cover of conversation I'd duck
into the cereal cabinet. I needed rations.
With one fluid motion, one hand soft
on the magnets, I would open it just enough
to slide out a box of Lucky Charms, or Life,
even unsweetened Cheerios if I had to.
Up to my room to pick up my accomplice, GI Joe

with full beard, black jumpsuit and Kung Fu grip.
And as my parents cooked dinner or readied
themselves for some wedding, or some wake,
they shouted the same old directions to my sisters,
and I became invisible, a part of the house,
soaked up by the darkness of an unlit room,
unoccupied now, even by me. I would crawl

behind a couch, into the furthest corner
of a rare closet. Joe vigilant on my lap
as I sucked on my rations, conducting careful
marshmallow searches. Old clothes in my lungs,
I strained to hear the color of the house
without me; I listened for the discovery,
waiting, the trickle of time in my throat,

Stunning

By Timothy Collier

The torn left wing
of a monarch butterfly
instantly maneuvers
its unstable operator
against a painted
oak-leaf montage.

allowing the hungry operator
of a blue-jay's beak
the quick jab and snap
at an early breakfast.

which keeps the delicate jewelry
of the grasshopper's constant
emplaced pincers
pre-occupied enough
to not eat the stained row
of my neighbor's tomato plants.

so that my curious dog
can dig up the roots instead,
watch the stalks rust and wither
between her spurs.

returning the seed to the dirt,
but not the butterfly
— back to a pupae —
its disconnected wing
now tumbling by mid-air,
a shard of torn stained-glass.

waiting for the muffled pitch of sudden worry:
 Where's your brother? -- for the moment
 everything stopped and turned to me. My name
 through the house, not echoing but searching;
 my body, rising, sent words to my mouth,
 but I held out. I had to be found. Somehow
 I needed that burst of light, red rushing back

into their faces, their eyes losing muscle,
 even the hard, three-sister scowl.
 But sometimes I would wait until night,
 leave my bed, my room, and descend carefully
 as if descending a cliff face, holding my breath
 at each creak of the stairs, into the empty,
 lightless house where I'd fold
 away like an old sweater.

I think now of that need to disappear,
 more than some cheap play for attention,
 as if I breathed there in the dark to know
 what it is to die, to have the world
 without me in it, to have nothing
 brush against me but boxes and old coats
 until my name seeping in with the light.

Butcher Post

By John A. Ward

Me and Clem come to the train

Our work was on yellow paper

And folded in our pockets

We'd handcarried the post

Scarcely a drop of verse

Gotta read but words

If words had rich black loan language

Like they got in universities

We coulda growed you a bodacious harvest

Then we wouldna been settin' bars

In some jerkwater coffee house

Scurfin' down instant cappuccino

And chompin' on day old napoleons

Buttcracker Poets

By John A. Ward

Me and Cletus come to the readin'
Our work writ on yella paper
And folded in our pockets.
Weez hardscrabble poets.
Scratchin' a crop a' verse
Outta red dirt words.
If weeda had rich black loam language
Like they got in universities,
We coulda growed you a bodacious harvest.
Then we wouldna been settin' here
In some jerkwater coffee house,
Scarfin' down instant cappuccino
And chompin' on day old napoleons.

waiting for the muffled pitch of sudden worry:
What's your problem? — for the moment
everything stopped and turned to me. My name
through the house, not echoing but searching,
my body rising, sent words to my mouth,
but I held out. I had to be found. Somehow
I needed that burst of light, red rising back

into their faces, their eyes losing muscle,
even the hard, three-sister scowl.
But sometimes I would wait until night,
leave my bed, my room, and descend carefully
as it descending a cliff face, holding my breath
at each creak of the stairs, into the empty,
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I think now of that need to disappear,
more than some cheap play for attention,
as if I breathed there in the dark to know
what it is to die, to have the world
without me in it, to have nothing
brush against me but boxes and old coats
until my name seeping in with the light.

About the Contributors

Joe Barrera, III – “Variation on Barbara Bush at the YMCA Pool” / “Variation on Woman Smoking a Cigar”

Joe Barrera, III is a senior at the University of the Incarnate Word, majoring in English and minoring in Business Management. His interests are writing poetry, fishing, and hunting.

Evan Boston – “The Gentle Art of Family”

Evan Boston, originally from Austin, Texas, is a freshman Theater Arts major at the University of the Incarnate Word. He notes, “I am a firm believer in the beauty of life and death, an opponent of the forces of conformism, and one who has been attempting to know myself through writing for over half my life.” He thanks everyone involved with *Quirk* for their efforts in the arts.

Teddy Bowers – “What Comes Next”

Teddy Bowers lives in San Antonio. This is her first published story.

Angela Brazeal – “Intruding Voices”

Angela Brazeal is scheduled to earn her B.A. in English this May from the University of Texas at San Antonio. From St. Louis, Missouri, Angela is interested in writing fiction, and has been influenced by such writers as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Italo Calvino, and Raymond Carver.

Joshua R. Cooper – “Attention, Title Shoppers”

Joshua R. Cooper is a sophomore majoring in English at the University of the Incarnate Word.

Chad Davidson – “Cruel Sonnet” / “Implosion Theory and Dostoevsky” / “Sweet Cheat”

Chad Davidson’s poems have appeared, or are forthcoming in, *Colorado Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Pequod*, *Poet Lore*, and others. He is currently a doctoral candidate in creative writing at Binghamton University. He lives in upstate New York.

Angelique Engelhardt – “Dime to His Name”

Angelique Engelhardt is a junior at the University of the Incarnate Word, double-majoring in English and Psychology. She says, “I plan to spend my whole life doing what I love, which is, of course, writing.”

Richard Foss – “Meteor Shower” / “Skin” / “Art of Disappearance”

Richard Foss is a doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University where he teaches creative writing and literature. He recently had poems published in *Cimmaron Review* and *Willow Review*.

Catherine Garza – “Love Scars”

Catherine Garza lives and works in San Francisco, California. She is a graduate of San Francisco State University. This is her second publication.

Timothy Geiger – “Love Letters” / “Stunning”

Timothy Geiger’s first book of poetry is *Blue Light Factory* (Spoon River Poetry Press, 1999). These poems are from a new manuscript in progress, *The Curse of Pheromones*. He is an associate professor of Creative Writing at the University of Toledo.

QUIRK 2002

Stephanie G. Guzman – “Little Brown Baby” / “Signs of Life”

Stephanie G. Guzman is a senior at the University of the Incarnate Word, majoring in English and minoring in Sociology. She plans to pursue graduate studies in creative writing. This is her second publication.

John Lamb – “Moon Tonight” / “Which Way is Up?”

John Lamb notes: “I am willing to believe any story you tell me, so long as you tell it true.” Lamb edits the zine *Raw Ether – the best words of the worst people*. In his spare time, he studies English and Secondary Education at the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor.

Anna Lawrence – “Tuatha De Danaan” / “Flagpoles and Other Commodities of Man and His Kind”

Anna Lawrence is a sophomore English and Theater Arts major at the University of the Incarnate Word. She notes, “I am grateful to be included with such talented authors.”

Krista Peterson – “The Death of Casey Johnson”

Krista Peterson writes, “I went from sunshine and public schools in California to Linfield College and the nine months a year rainy season of Oregon.” From there, B.A. in hand, she joined the M.F.A. program at the University of Notre Dame and is currently “suffering through the snow and ridiculous cold of Indiana. It’s all worth it.”

John Poch – “Board Aubade”

John Poch is an assistant professor of English at Texas Tech University. He has current and forthcoming work in *Paris Review*, *Salmagundi*, *Colorado Review*, *Re:generation*, and other journals.

Mario A. Porter – “7 in 10” / “An Observation at St. Whatchamacallit”

Mario A. Porter is a native of San Antonio, Texas. He is a 2002 graduate of the University of the Incarnate Word with a degree in both Religious Studies and English.

Silvio Renzulli – “Last Call”

Silvio Francesco Renzulli who hails from Brick, New Jersey is pursuing a Masters of English at the University of the Incarnate Word. He hopes to eventually teach and inspire future writers. He is currently working on a fantasy novel and a collection of poetry.

Michael G. Richards – “Remembering”

Michael G. Richards is currently the Creative Writing Program Fellow at the University Of Notre Dame, where he is Managing Editor of the *Notre Dame Review*. His collection of short stories, *Revelations of the Secret Storyteller Society*, was published earlier this year. He’s had work published in *The Bishop’s House Review*, and has work forthcoming in *The Notre Dame Review* and *Re:Visions Magazine*.

Dwain Ya’Ke Smith – “Street Tapestry”

Dwain Ya’Ke Smith is a Communication Arts major at the University of the Incarnate Word. He is an aspiring filmmaker who has written, produced, and directed two films while studying at U.I.W.

Charles Valle – “ICU. Auntie Daley” / “A Night Separating in Stone and Star” / “Crossings”

Charles Valle is currently a first year MFA student at Notre Dame and an associate editor for the *Notre Dame Review*.

Matias Viegner – “The Only Child”

Matias Viegner is a writer living in Los Angeles and has published fiction in *Bomb*, *Cargo*, *Framework*, *Oversight*, *American Book Review*, *Jacaranda Review*, *Fiction International*, and *Paragraph*. He also teaches in the MFA writing program at Cal Arts.

John A. Ward – “Buttcracker Poets”

John A. Ward was born on Staten Island, attended Wagner College in the early 60's, sold his first poem to *Leatherneck* magazine for \$10, and became a biomedical scientist. He is now in San Antonio “running, writing, and living with his dance partner.”

Joy Wilson – “Butterfly Trails Camp for Girls”

Joy Wilson is a California native and second year graduate student at the University of Mississippi. “Butterfly Trails Camp for Girls” is a section of a novel she is completing for her MFA thesis. This is her first publication.

Brian Yetwin – “on value of being without”

Brian Yetwin lives in California and Arizona. He notes, “With infinite pleasure and overwhelming sorrow, I write poetry.”

ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS**Joe Barrera, Jr. – “Barbara Bush at the YMCA Pool” / “Woman Smoking Cigar”**

Joe Barrera, Jr. is a photo-editor for the San Antonio Express-News. His interests are taking pictures, fishing, and hunting.

John Carrola – “Velociraptor mongoliensis” / “Final Still” / “Interface Movie” / “My Mom Says”

John Carrola is graduating in May 2002 from the University of the Incarnate Word with a B.A. in Commercial Arts and a minor in Psychology. Award winners in graphic arts, Carrola and Desiree Maher were also chosen from the CART program at UIW to go to China for a Computer Graphics Competition.

Jennifer De La Garza – “Funeral”

Jennifer De La Garza is a senior at the University of the Incarnate Word, majoring in English. She notes, “I have always had an interest and love for all art media, especially drawing and photography.”

Desiree Maher – “Girl Reclining” / “Three Faces”

Desiree Maher is graduating from the University of the Incarnate Word in May 2002 with a B.S. in Biology and a B.A. in Computer Graphic Arts. Maher and John Carrola are co-founders of a small multi-media company, Talking Chairs Studios.

Asenet Martinez – “Cloudy Night Sky” / “The Kiss” / “Feet”

Asenet Martinez, who hails from San Antonio, is a sophomore at the University of the Incarnate Word. She is an Art major and Dance minor.

Carolina Ruiz – “Flag”

Carolina Ruiz is an English major at the University of the Incarnate Word.

Bryce Rushing – “Sunset” / “Endless” / “Hybiscus”

Bryce Rushing is a former television producer and currently a senior at the University of the Incarnate Word and will graduate in May 2002 with a B.A. in Communication Arts. He has previously published photographs in the UIW magazine *Expressions*, and a technical article in the journal *TV Technology*.

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Call for Manuscripts--2003

Quirk is soliciting manuscripts for the Spring 2003 publication. Interested writers may submit up to:

- 1 essay (1000 words max.)
- 1 short story (3500 words max.)
- 3 poems (total 1500 words max.)
- 3 photographs
- 3 drawings or scannable art pieces

(in any or all of these categories)

Send submissions via e-mail to quirk@universe.uiiwtx.edu

Or via parcel post at:

Quirk
University of the Incarnate Word
4301 Broadway, UPO 350
San Antonio, TX 78209

Please include a cover sheet with you name, address, phone number, and e-mail address.

Please pass this "call for manuscripts" to anyone else whom you think might be interested.

Thank you,
Quirk Staff Members

Future Writing Opportunities

Fall 2002: In-spire Writers Institute at Our Lady of the Lake University will host a variety of workshops dealing with fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and writing for children and adolescents. One featured offering is a Sunday workshop, "Industrial Espionage and the Humanities." Instructor will be Ron Mendell, an Austin-based-free-lance technical writer with a background in the humanities and in legal investigations. Other workshops are currently being designed.

For further information, please contact the coordinator:

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Dwain Ya' Ke Smith

Charles Valle

Matias Viegner

John A. Ward

Joy Wilson

Brian Yetwin

Mission Statement

“*Quirk* intends to give voice to various forms of expression that will be available to the Incarnate Word Community and the community at large.”