

Piercing the Surface



Quirk 2005

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Quirk 2005

Dedicated to
Jo LeCoeur, Professor of English
And
Eloise Stoker, Professor of Art

Faculty Advisors of Expressions, the original
Literary Magazine of this university and
its sister institutions in San Antonio.
Under the professional guidance and
creative eye of these women,
Expressions grew to be a respected
and honored literary publication
of the university communities of San Antonio.

We salute these professors, their legacy,
and their continued inspiration.

Advisor's Note

This journal is the result of a semester's labor and class consensus, often reached after heated discussion. "Poetry is not fast food," commented student Zhen Chen when the students in Editing and Publishing made final decisions on which works to include in this issue of *Quirk*. Both Charles Biedenharn and Cecilia Iniquez reminded all that a work had to move past the predictable and the rehashed. Jennifer Gilbert insisted on "compression" in the poetry; Gina Garcia, Paige Giamari, Audrey Tranter, Garret Exner, and Rick Mahler attended to style and audience; and David Rhoads, Sonia Lopez, Liliana Berrueto, Janet Tondre, Yazmine Alarcon, and Luz Lopez looked for "authenticity."

Sec 1 :ii Relying on their varied experience in all aspects of communication, Dwayne Henry and Eric Camancho grounded all discussions in praxis—can it be done with the resources at hand? Mark Solis, Sin-Yu Chen, and Jose Aguilera taught us to "look again," and Michelle Zambrano, Judith Victorin, Yeon-Hee Lee, Kim Murillo, and Renee Salandy reminded each of us to read with both heart and mind. Together, these students compiled a journal; more importantly, these students' discussions and selections remind us all that the artist "pierces the surface" to help each of us see.

It is this "seeing" that is the source of art's power. Most of us probably recall learning that the poet (the artist) holds a mirror up to nature and then merely records what the mirror displays. Most of us also probably recall the times we found this statement of the artist's role puzzling, if not false, especially when we encountered works that bore no resemblance whatsoever to our 'reality.' Perhaps then we discovered another role of the artist: **to show rather than tell.**

Within this small volume are a variety of works by members of our university community. In each of the works—whether poem, photograph, painting, essay, or story—images come first, not interpretation. As Chris Anderson notes in his *Teaching as Believing*, “the image comes from somewhere deep down and carries with it some sense of that inner vastness and depth, untranslatable, not reducible to abstract propositions or a single interpretation” (39). Quite simply, this process of image making and story telling is central to human nature. As Ricouer asserts, story comes first and “gives rise” to thought (*Symbolism of Evil* 16).

And so, what thoughts might these works evoke? My sense is we will find that some of the works resonate with our experience and other works leave us wondering, confused, or uncomfortable. What is true for each of the works in this volume is that the writers, the photographers, and the painters invite us into the mystery that we call life and ask that we look beyond the surface. Sometimes, these artists ask us to look inside ourselves.

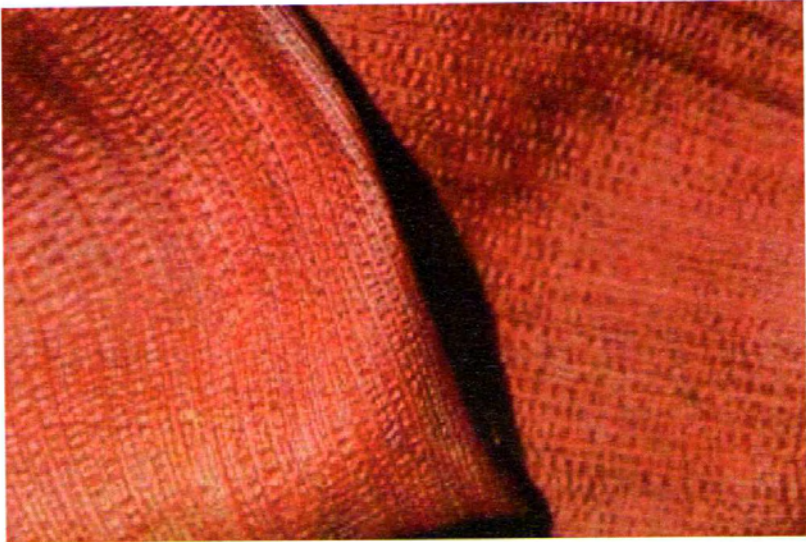
Many ways exist to pierce the surface of things. It is our hope that you will find in these pages images and words that not only strengthen your understanding of others and yourself, but also remind you of the mystery of being human. We do not fool ourselves: we know that some of the works will raise questions. These questions may challenge and/or provoke: if the questions lead to discourse with others, then the possibility of understanding exists. Within that possibility is the promise of the discovery of truth. That is our hope, and that is our goal.

—Patricia Lonchar, Professor of English

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Sec2:1

"Red Undulation"

Painting by
Matthias Schubnell
[Professor of English]

Envidia Does Not Translate

Linda is Spanish for pretty.
But she is not.

It is Linda's sister who makes Roberto
drop his cue stick, Marcelino miss
his bank shot, Carlos cross his *chocolate eyes*
and scratch an easy straight.

Sec2:2

Eyes dilated with *envidia*,
deadlier than any Anglo envy,
Linda trembles in the mirror at malos ojos.

Scared to turn them on her sister,
Linda takes to skipping school
(bought beauty don't come cheap)
to help out at the Shadowway Shop
on *Calle Culebra*, Snake Street.

The Shadow is an artist with the needle,
Linda's lips the canvas
for what she swears are fire ants stinging ink.
And soon her mirrored mouth
Is eating yellow butterflies.

Then coiling round her rounded chin,
a cobra swallows a thorny stem
winding greenly up her jawline
to the black rose on her cheek.

On the other fat-baby cheek
a fighting cockhead flourishes red-orange feathers
at a lizard crawling up her little nose,
its tail a delicate curl of blue around one tilted nostril.

But now her eyes smile without envidia
even while the needle sparks a nerve,
for now she is the one turning heads
when she steps out with her sister.

Sec2:3

-Jo LeCoeur

Reprinted from *Borderlands, Texas Poetry Review*

Fire

All morning she has waited
on a bed of dry leaves
in a circle of rock.

Weary praying for godsend
blessing her people,
she doubts vision

high above on the hillside
sun-crowned figure
poised to leap

old split-hoof rhythms,
slain birds draped blue
across his shoulders.

Spirals coiling his hair
set some counter curl whirring
deep behind her eyes,

spinning him up the rocks—
sparks strike bright bone splinters
off silvered hooves and antlers,

Sec2:5

head thrown back
gnawing sky, noon's white eye
burst into a host of suns

trained on the dry leaves
where she has begun displaying,
howling out to him her season.

—Jo LeCoeur, Reprinted from *Puerto del Sol*

Flying with Mother Her 98th Year

Closing in on the sun just now,
bright red Easter glory
reaching up out of the Gulf,
setting the clouds afire

*to melt our wings, she asks,
and plunge us to the sea?*

Sec2:6

Unwrapping her grip
light as feathers on my arm,
*Our wings not wax, I say,
we ride pink clouds today.*

It is not the sun;
it is reading Mother's palm
that circles every moment
holiday red, in the air or no.

Right now she will not warm,
cooling skin stretched thin as time,
red nails unreal as ice-carved swans.

For our walk down the beach today
there is the old fur coat
passed round the Ladies Bible Class
she's taught since time began.

She strokes its sleeve and smiles,
Right now this very minute
they are asking Where is Mabel?

She is flying with her daughter.
They are heading for the sun.

Sec2:7

-Jo LeCoeur
Reprinted from *The Texas Observer*

Patterns

Blade grazes skin.

Pacifies every nerve.

Intricate patterns of blood
Dribble down.

Red waves of release,
Remind me of detachment from sanity.
Remind me of the times I'd give up.

Always, forever.
The scars let me know.
Always, forever.
My pain won't let go.

—Audris S. Fuller
[Student at UIW]

White Picket Fence

In our suburban home
Upon our green front yard
Is a white picket fence
Standing straight and tall
Until your fat uncle sat on it
Pushing all his weight against the world
Our picket fence fell like two towers I'm sure

Your family is so ghetto
They decided to throw bags
Instead of bags of rice
I guess they needed something
To go with the beans and chicken
When they came over to visit
On our honeymoon
I remember quite vividly
They stole the wedding gifts they had given
Blamed it on the blind kid
Down the street
He cuts our lawn

At ground zero I stand
Where our white picket fence once stood
Two hijacked butt cheeks
Collided into the Great Wall of Suburbia
Ever since 4/11/04/201 .3946
Life has changed
And I will not forget
Unless, of course, we move

Sec2:9

—James Harris {CommArts Major}

Idle Time

The warden says I have 3 months left
20 years from now
I spend time being productive
Finger painting
With rat crap
A stained canvas
My stained mattress
I go to the library often
They call me "professor"
I read all kinds of literature
Mostly looking at the pictures
I spend my idle time
Watching Penitentiary Idol
Some of the inmates are very talented
Most of its not marketable
The fastest stab
The loudest scream
Most people would consider jail
A waste of someone's time
I spend most of my jail time
In someone's waste

Sec2:10

-James Harris

Having A Black Son

My white son says he wants to be black
Rappers are black, with black expensive cars
And black credit cards
Not tire or tar black
Not dirt or mold black
Not drug dealer, demon, satanic black
But Sunday suit and dress shoe black
Soul power back-to-Africa black
Rhythm jazz gospel black
Swing big band hip-hop black
Inventor scientist orator black
George Washington Carver
W.E.B. Dubois black
My white son says he wants to be black

Sec2:11

So I tell him
You are white, my white son
Vanilla ice cream white
Pearl and silk white
Notebook paper clean slate white
Pure, good cowboy in a white hat
Angel white
Clouds in the sky white
So he tells me
Cocaine is white
Angel dust, PCP, bird crap is white
Onions are white
Cauliflower wart and snot white

My white son wants to be gray
—James Harris

Disappearances

As she stared at her reflection in her dorm room mirror, Ashley could not stop thinking about her past. She had definitely been through hell and back the past year or so. As if starting her first semester of college in a foreign land wasn't bad enough; then there was Eric.

Where to begin with him? He was Mr. Perfect, or so Ashley thought. They had dated for about seven months and he had opened her eyes to things she never thought she would experience; things her parents would surely frown upon. But, as her friend Carrie had once told her, all good things must come to an end. Boy, was she right! Eric broke her heart, plain and simple. He led her down a path of lies and deceit. He never had any intentions of running away with her like they had talked about. She soon learned she was just another poor soul he kept around for entertainment until he got bored, that is, and moved on to someone else.

The police said his family reported Eric missing. Ashley knew better. He wasn't missing; he had "disappeared." She told the police Eric probably went traveling around the world like he often spoke of doing. He talked about their going together, but obviously that never happened. That was yet another lie.

The police continued to question her and everyone they knew who was associated with Eric, but they came up empty handed. They concluded, with Ashley's help, he had indeed run away. She let them in on the fact he hated his family and wanted to get away as soon as possible. Then, his mysterious disappearance was logical. Case closed.

Six months passed since his "disappearance"; yet it continued to haunt Ashley. She had seen a psychiatrist, gotten medica-

tion for her depression and other problems, and was dealing the best she could. She tried not to dwell on it and let it control her life. She had moved on, as much as possible. She had met Mason and he seemed like every girl's dream. Of course, with what Eric had done to her, she was wary. She definitely didn't want to get burned again.

Mason was very distant and short with Ashley the night the fairy tale romance ended. They happened to be on the very same bridge Eric had broken her heart on not even a year prior. She should have expected this. Mason told her it wasn't going to work. He was tired of the constant comparison to Eric, whom he didn't even believe existed. He thought Ashley lived in her own universe, and he had enough on his plate right now with finals and work without having to worry about some psycho he decided to date casually. Ashley was hurt and enraged by his remarks. How could he think she wasn't sane, and worse, that Eric wasn't real? She began to argue with him, defending herself and her past, but he was tired of listening. He ripped the bracelet she had given him off his wrist and threw it at her. As if his allegations of her lack of sanity weren't enough, this pushed her over the edge. Ashley grabbed his arm, but he jerked it out of her grasp.

She looked over her shoulder at the massive rock she had used once before. She picked it up, noticing the prior blood stains from Eric, raised it above her head, and smashed it against the back of Mason's skull. He went down instantly, blood seeping out of his head and down the back of his neck. She hit him again to make certain he was dead. The fact that she had killed yet another past love didn't seem to bother her one bit. She simply propped Mason's lifeless body up on the wall, pushed it to the edge, and dumped him into the river as she had done with Eric's body. She picked up the bracelet and threw it in the water on the opposite

side of the bridge. Ashley put the rock back in its place, picked up her purse from the ground, dusted herself off, and began to walk back to her dorm.

Luckily, she hadn't gotten any of Mason's blood on her silk blouse. Bloodstains are so hard to get out. "It's a shame it had to end this way, again," she thought to herself as she placed her purse back under her arm.

There she was, still looking at her reflection in the mirror. She picked up her brush and began fixing her hair. Upon receiving the news that Mason's family had reported him missing, the police didn't bother to question Ashley. Mason always wanted to keep their "relationship" a secret, so she never told a soul. Good thing, too. For some reason, he and Eric were all she could think about today, but she had to put them aside, somehow. After all, she was about to go on a date, so she'd better get a move on.

His name was Troye and he had been after her for quite some time before she finally gave in and decided to give him a chance. He seemed perfect, much like Eric and Mason. She warned him not to break her heart and he promised he wouldn't.

Ashley finished brushing her hair and glanced at herself one last time before grabbing her purse and heading out the door. "This could be the beginning of something wonderful," she thought to herself, "Let's hope it doesn't turn out to be a killer." She chuckled and gave a hint of a smirk before closing the door behind her.

—Kelly Alexander

[Now at UIW, Kelly wrote this story while at SAC]

Best of Both Worlds

You say I can't dance
You say I'm too real
You say I got to hold back the way I feel

I can't date your guys
I can't hear your rap
I try to come out yet y'all hold me back

I'm not quite white and I'm not quite black
And y'all the only ones who see problems in that

I never questioned myself till y'all came around
I kept my chin up and stood my damn ground
I hold my head high and I never choose sides
You may push and push but you can't make me decide

Sec2:15

I'm too black for some and not enough for others
Yet in God's eyes aren't we all to be brothers?
See, y'all are the ones who see problems here
I'm the best of both worlds
Did I make myself clear?

-Erin Reed
[Education Major]

All my words

All my words
like little dead sparrows
Stillborn in front of your feet.
I handle you like fine china
—with kid gloves
with so much urgent care.

A misplaced intonation and we're both in tears.
The frustration of hating myself for always avoiding you
—for saving myself the battle scars—makes me so sick inside I ache
at the very thought of you.
The ache of so many wasted words
of so many attempts at veiled fear.

Sec2:16

it all shows in my hesitancy,
my need for delicate diction
for every single simple matter.

I'm so tired.

What power do my words have?
So carelessly spoken in one breathe
so violently spewed in another
and then stttuuttuering to a dead end.

Still, you reach out to me
for a gesture
a simple word.
But all I have for you today is silence.

—Mary C. Ruiz [English Major]

The Shoulder Poles

The summer in south Texas is roasting. Walking in the glaring sun, I feel sweat coming from every inch of my skin and my legs melting, and I think of Chongqing in China, where summers are hotter and sunlight is bitterer, and I remember the people walking in the streets haunted by heat waves. I forget feeling hot myself, when I think of those "shoulder poles."

Shoulder poles are not shoulder poles. They are men who carry poles over their shoulders. They are the porters of this city. They put down their harrows when work in the field is not quite busy and come out of their homes in the rural areas. They come over the bamboo fences and overcome their fear of the unknown to go to the awe-inspiring big city where they know nobody and are the nobodies. They take with them only a few clothes, a quilt, a shoulder pole, and a dream of earning for the family a better life. Once in the city, they have no names. They are called by the manner in which they earn their living: they are called shoulder poles.

Sec2:17

In Chongqing, the large city built in the mountains where steps up and down and zigzag alleys in back streets make vehicular transportation unable to satisfy people's everyday needs, shoulder poles help city people transport a variety of items, from a few pounds of meat to pianos. These individuals have become a unique feature of this city. Yet, they are not part of this city.

Shoulder poles are cheap: carrying a fridge for a mile costs only the money for an ice cream. Shoulder poles are foul smelling: their clothes are soaked with sweat from their bodies and dust from the streets. Shoulder poles are humble: their menial job and their ignorance have taken away the peace of mind they used to have in the days of working in the field.

In the day, shoulder poles are on street corners, and sometimes in front of stores, waiting and looking out for opportunities for work. But more and more stores are banning shoulder poles from these spaces because they are "defacing the storefronts." When someone with bags of food, or a piece of furniture, or anything else that he thinks he cannot carry, comes out of the store or gets off the bus, and calls to the air "shoulder pole," shoulder poles dart to the spot from everywhere. The first to arrive gets the work; the others leave disappointed, curses murmured in some mouths.

In the night, shoulder poles are invisible to the city people. They are back in their rented dwellings in this city, usually small old dust covered houses built on the trash-scattered riverbanks, or in the shadow of the back streets. In these houses, several families share one room, pieces of cloth dividing a small room into smaller ones. For the majority of the shoulder poles, whose wives and children are in the country, living in these rooms is a luxury, and many of the single ones sleep together on the floor of one room, which costs the least. For those who are out of luck, or have just arrived in the city, empty storefronts are neat enough, and they don't cost at all.

Far from home and the tender gaze of the wife, the aromatic freshly cooked sticky rice, soft clean beds, green fields, and the moo of the cattle, the cheap and stinky and humble shoulder poles wander in the shadow of the sparkling skyscrapers and vivid billboards exhibiting boots and body lotions.

On their shoulders, there is a shoulder pole, and a dream, a dream of earning more money for their rural home, paying off children's tuition, and making possible for their next generation to leave ignorance, to leave the field, to leave the cheap and stinky and humble life.

Lamps from tens of thousands of families up and down the hills twinkle like little stars and neon lights along the sinuous streets winding their way in the mountains light up the enchanting night of Chongqing, and, in their cramped dwellings, shoulder poles count their savings again, and again, and again.

Sec2:19

In the glaring sunlight of South Texas, I see the short dark shoulder poles, walking with shoulders lopsided from the weight. I see them walking in the roasting heat, in the pouring rain, in the chilly wind, from summer to winter, from youth to old age.

-Zhen Chen

[An English major from China, Zhen plans to teach English when she returns home after graduation]

Nicholas Plays

Nicholas plays a haunting melody on this antique, out-of-tune
Piano

You hate yelling, and yelled to save my legs.
Your son Matthew yells at you almost continuously.
Nicholas steals your beer and threatens to destroy your cigars.

And the melody continues, quick and mysterious—
Nicholas on the piano.

When I walk around your house, I notice the pictures
Fairy Tales in the hallway
Glowing coals seen through windows—your dear friends,
Captured moments—scenes of times past together with
Friends and events and family—
Your family—your children.
Four in all: the older pair of daughters and the younger pair sons
Christina, Tatiana, Nicholas, and Matthew.
Your son Matthew gives you the greatest grief
You search for the silver lining.
Matthew speaks with me in an eerie politeness.
You have tried to teach your sons and daughters
To count their blessings, to be peaceful, simple, and cheerful.
Matthew reminds you of your ex-wife
He repeats things he has heard from his mother
Matthew smiles when he sees me—strange
It is strange how I see that as strange—but, it surprises me.

And Nicholas plays another song—lower and
Sounding from the Orient.

I sometimes think of words I wish to say to your children
Your dad loves you so much—so very much
It brings shivers down my spine—your dad's love for you—
You have no idea how much this love—wow, how to speak of it?

Oops, a clash on the piano—a small mistake, but the tune
continues.

The faith we share with those bright burning coals seen in
windows
Your oldest is the only one that keeps it for right now.
Do your cherubs know of the coal that wept for their parents?
Perhaps that bright flame of Alaska wept for them, too.

And steady methodic chords echo eerily through the house—
Nicholas is playing still.

Sec2:21

Pain that hurts the most is the pain that strikes the heart.
I think Matthew likes talking to me—hmm?
Why? I think he would be disgusted by me.
Who is the fool who actually likes my dad?
But that is not the case somehow.

This time Nicholas plays sound from a newer instrument.

The martyr's joy—what is this?
Joyful sorrow and happy suffering—huh?
It is written that Christ came to bring war
Within a man's own household.
This seems to be contradicting Christ's awesome love, peace, and
Joy.

I hear strange dissonant chords—modern music of Nicholas.

Christ wars with weapons strange and mysterious.
Nick, you have brought war and strife into your house
You have brought Christ into your house
And a tumult has come about as a result.
You war for and to and at your children
You fire arrows of flame and sling stones that burn
You wield swords and spears toward their direction.
God's love is a fire, and peace and truth pierce and slice
The world—the sinfulness of this fallen world
It lives in your house amongst your children and your self
The struggle you give to make peace and love reign in your
House.

Sec2:22

The fallen world resents it and hates it
The fallen world hates Christ
And so there is war in your house
And you have suffered because you try to be a good father
You try to be a good steward and a loving man
You try to make peace and honesty the laws of your castle
And you have much grief as a result.

Nicholas plays another song, more upbeat and with strong
Bass

Keep on fighting and continue struggling
You have sorrow and grief and pain
Because you love your children,
But be glad and hope in the Great Victorious One.
Your children are your children
And their love, although plagued with their age
And the times of this world,

Still lives inside them—They have Christ in them, too.
And Christ wants to get out into more of them
But it is hard, but you love them.
They are young and time is short, but much can happen.
In a short period of time, a blink of the eye—

 One day soon you may blink
 and the tide of the battle may have changed.
Beware of hugs and words like “love” and “dad” whispered
in the dark of the night.

Another song is played by Nicholas—upbeat and Latino-Blues
sounding.

Sometimes, things work out mysteriously together just right
And sometimes, things do not work out how we want them to;
But, sometimes the most valuable silver lining is found where
 it is hard to find,
Then, in the silver lining most hidden, it is not silver that is found,
But gold and platinum and mithiril, gems and jewels of great
wealth.

Sec2:23

Sometimes, it is the things that don't work out that
 synchronize together
Mysteriously in the end, to work out in a way that we
 never imagined.

 —Benjamin Tolleson
[Psychology Major, Religious Studies Minor]

Sec2:24



"Fallen Cross"
by Raul Xavier Treviño
[Art Major]



Sec2:25

"Fishermen"

by

Cecilia Iniquez

[A Spanish/CommArts Major, Cecilia
took this photo when visiting her
hometown in Mexico]

Sec2:26

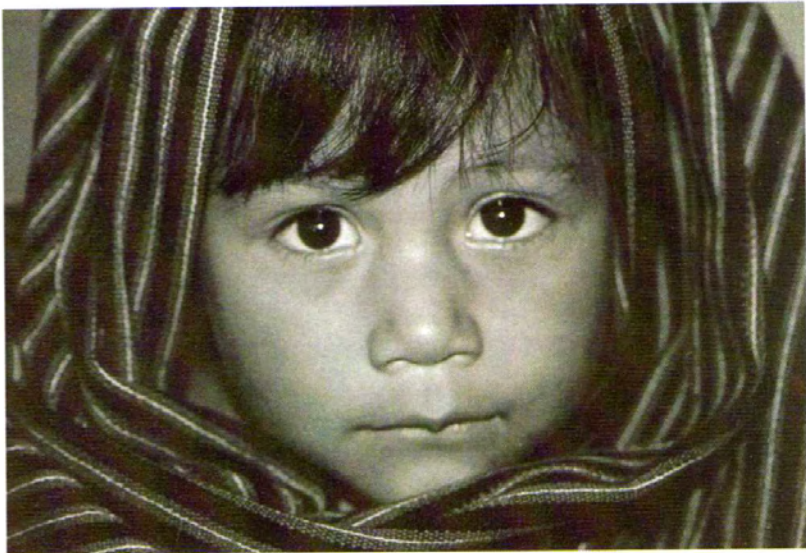


"Wearing Her Sunday Best"

by

Robert Kropp

[A Nursing Major, Robert took
this photo when he was on
duty in the Honduras]



Sec2:27

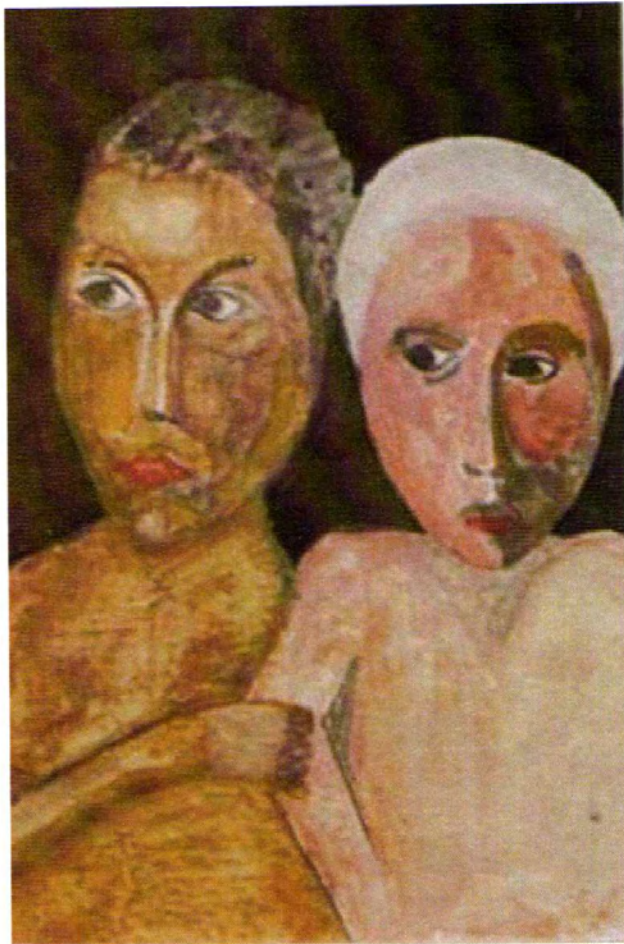
"Tarascan Eyes"
by
Cecilia Iniguez

[taken while Cecilia was visiting
her hometown in Mexico]

Sec2:28



"Eerie Pond"
by
Raul Xavier Treviño



Sec2:29

"The Couple"

Painting by
Matthias Schubnell

Sec2:30



“Keeper of Stories”
by
David L. Rhoads
[CommArts Major. Photo taken
after a rainfall]

El soñar no cuesta nada

Que te puedo decir, soy una mujer de negocios. Tengo mi propia oficina en el décimo piso con unas gigantescas vistas que dan la vista a la gran ciudad de México y no es por presumir pero soy la más popular del edificio. Todos van a dar a mi oficina y a preguntar que si tengo esto o el otro. Yo soy Francis Hilton, presidenta ejecutiva de esta asociación anónima con un doctorado de Harvard.

Pero suficiente de mí que llevo prisa. Tengo que tomar la limosina que me llevara al centro de la ciudad en donde comeré con mi esposo adorado. Sabes, es un restaurante francés elegante donde tienen botones a la entrada del lugar para abrirte la puerta y luego otro adentro que toma tu abrigo y lo coloca en un closet donde se encuentran mas abrigos de piel como el tuyo.

Sec2:31

Al restaurante francés por favor. Mira ya son las tres de la tarde y la ciudad llena de gente por todos lados. Dios mío esas casas grandes por Insurgentes no se comparan con la mía. Una casa colonial de dos pisos con hermosos jardines.

Bueno, supongo que tendremos Emincé de Volaille sauce Roquefort - Pommes de terre sautées con un vino tinto. Luego de comer, John me dijo que pasaremos por la sucursal Liverpool para ver que me puedo comprar. Tal vez un brazalete de diamantes o que sé yo una bolsa de mano de Dolce and Gabbana.

Pero suficiente de mí estúpida fantasía del lugar ideal para viajar que por estar soñando ahora sí que llevo prisa. Tengo que tomar la combi a ese lugar remoto donde me espera mi esposo y mis hijos para comer.

Sec2:32 ¡Sabes, como hoy saque suficiente lana nos daremos el lujo de comer unos perros calientes del carretoncito en la esquina de don Chui con su mayonesita, tomatito y cebollita en cubitos, su salsita verde, y con una Coca-Cola bien fría, bueno una chela pa mi viejo! Allí a los cuatro vientos el botones es don Chui que nos pone unos botes grandes de pintura pa sentarnos. Mira ya son las tres de la tarde y la ciudad llena de gente por todos lados. Dios mío esas casas grandes por Insurgentes sí que no se comparan con la mía. Una apartamento que es salacosinarecmará.

Pero como el soñar no cuesta nada, este sería el viaje ideal de Panchita Ilton, la mera mera sabor ranchera del pasillo C del tianguis La Guadalupana. Aquí las ventas más altas las tengo yo y las ventas de mi puesto son infinitas como el cielo. Mis estudios fueron de la Universidad de La Vida y de La Calle donde recibí un doctorado. Vaya que me lo merezco, pues me la paso todo el día con el lomo en la espalda pa sacar a mi familia adelante. Y como no cuesta soñar seguiré soñando.

—Sonia Lopez
[English/Spanish Major; The English translation follows]

It Doesn't Cost Anything to Dream

What can I say, I'm a businesswoman. I have my own office on the tenth floor with gigantic windows that face the great city of Mexico and, I don't intend to brag, but I'm the most popular in the building. Everyone ends up in my office and asks if I have this or that. I'm Francis Hilton, executive president of this anonymous association, with a Harvard doctorate.

But enough of me; I'm running late. I have to take the limousine that will take me down town where I will eat with my husband. You know, it is an elegant French restaurant where they have botones at the entrance of the place to open the door for you and then another inside that takes your coat and places it in the closet where there are other fur coats like yours.

Sec2:33

To the restaurant please. Look it is already three o'clock, and the city is full of people everywhere. My God, those big houses by Insurgentes do not compare to mine. It is a two story colonial house with beautiful gardens.

Well I suppose that we will have Emincé de Volaille sauce Roquefort-Pommes de terre sautées with red wine. After eating, John told me that we would walk around the Liverpool department store to see what I can get myself. Maybe a diamond bracelet or, I don't know, maybe a handbag from Dolce and Gabbana.

But enough of my stupid fantasy of my ideal place to travel; now I'm really running late. I have to take the bus to that remote place where my husband and my children wait to eat.

You know, since I made enough money today, we will 'splurge' and give ourselves the luxury of eating some hot dogs, with mayonnaise, tomato, onion, green salsa, and a real cold Coca-Cola, well a beer for my husband, from Don Chui's little cart in that corner of the street! There, out in the open, the botones, is Don Chui who puts the empty pails of paint so we can sit down. Look it is already three o'clock in the afternoon and the city is full of people everywhere. My God, those huge houses by Insurgentes really do not compare to mine. An apartment that is living room-kitchen-bedroom.

But since it does not cost anything to dream, this would be the ideal place to travel for Panchita Ilton, the one and only, the best from row C of the Guadalupeana outdoor market. Here I have the highest sales and the windows to my lot are infinite, like the sky. I received my education from the University of the Real Life and the Street where I received a doctorate. Boy do I deserve it, I spend all day killing my back to help my family succeed. And since it doesn't cost anything to dream, I will keep dreaming.

-Sonia Lopez

Conscience

Remember Alex at the age of seven. You have seen him riding his bike around the neighborhood occasionally, but have never talked to him. He is different, though you aren't sure how, and, even at your young age, you realize that being different is a terrible thing for a child, that differences lead to scorn or ridicule by your peers.

Remember how he looks. Alex is short and skinny. He has blond hair—not quite colorless—and pale, white skin that appears almost completely devoid of pigmentation except for the vague hint of a bluish vein running across his right temple. Not albino, but he doesn't seem to go outside very much. His eyes are blue but not the piercing, perceptive type of blue. Rather, they are the blue of the distant city on a hazy day, the blue of sunlight diffused through an overcast sky.

Sec2:35

Remember your first encounter. You are randomly assigned to the Cub Scout troop led by Alex's mother. At your first meeting, the group spends time marveling at his vast collection of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles action figures. He has a Nintendo, and you will find that merit badges and soapbox derby cars can't hold your interest in comparison to the instant gratification received

from rescuing Princess Zelda or destroying alien invaders in *Contra*. Eventually, your mother and his become friends, and the two of you see each other more often.

Remember Alex in elementary school. You rarely see him because he takes classes that are different from yours, away from the first grade wing. The other kids call him retard while you only have the faintest grasp of what the word means. When you ask your mother, she tells you that the kids are wrong, that Alex is only a little slow. Occasionally you'll see him going to lunch separately from the rest, but when you wave to him your friends laugh, and you learn to stop drawing this unwanted attention to yourself.

Still, you see him on weekends when the two of you go to Cedar Point or the nearby arcade, spending time and quarters on *Street Fighter II*.

Remember the boy in middle school. The two of you have grown apart in tastes. Action figures no longer interest you as puberty sets in. You begin to shave and notice girls as creatures of desire rather than obstacles. You make new friends, a motley group of losers who spend most of their time trying to get noticed by the other gender when not trying to obfuscate the fluttering rises and drops in their voices. You are entering another life while Alex collects Power Rangers, and your contact with him is reduced

to an acknowledging nod of the head when you pass by him in the hallways. He has few friends and the divorce of his parents forces him and his mother to move to the cheap, dirty apartments at the very edge of the neighborhood, but you try not to think about this. He is called Casper due to his white skin. He rides the short bus while you attend the gifted and talented program. Your best friend calls him a queer, and you laugh to hide a sense of guilt. You don't defend him from others because you want to disregard that he was your friend.

Remember high school, even if you want to forget it on principle. You try to rebel and become a trend whore. In freshman and sophomore years you pledge punk and dress in NOFX and Bad Religion t-shirts and wear chain wallets. Your girlfriends have spiked bracelets, wear ripped fishnet stockings and dye their hair jet black. You pick up the guitar and write simple three chord songs about living in the suburbs and smoking pot. Junior year you flirt with nu-metal, listening to Tool and the Deftones but quickly become disenfranchised with the lifestyle after finding yourself in mosh pits with fat, balding Cro-Magnons at various concerts and seeing everyone outfitted in the same clothing from Hot Topic. Senior year you learn a bit of self-acceptance. You find a part-time job and see movies and play pool. You go to parties and have sex. You look forward to college and the possibilities of freedom that it brings.

Sec2:37

Alex has a different experience. He grows his hair out and wears it in a ponytail. He wears faded black shirts emblazoned with logos for Ozzy Osbourne and Metallica and the World Wrestling Federation. He has become fat, the rounding of his cheeks and the weakness in his chin giving him a baby face appearance. He has one friend, a boy who attends the same special education program, whose appearance reminds you of the third figure from the right in that picture of the ascent of man you saw in Biology. Alex is insulted constantly, and this worsens after the Columbine shootings. Suddenly, he is a "cause for concern." Other students joke about his shooting up the school and draw comparisons to the black trench coat worn by his only friend. Your mother, who still occasionally talks to his, tells you that Alex hates school and vomits every morning with psychosomatic dread at the new day. Then, senior year, Alex is gone, home schooled, and you eventually forget him.

Sec2:38

Remember leaving the city where you grew up. You move away to attend college in a different state and focus on academics interspersed with alcohol. You talk to your mother once a week. One night, she tells you that she saw Alex. He works at Jack in the Box and takes a few night classes at the community college. He is saving up for a used car. He asks how you are doing and is happy to know you are well, telling your mom to send his regards by proxy.

Remember. You get off the phone and think about Alex and how you have avoided thinking about him for so long. You

justify to yourself never having come to his aid in the past, instead standing idly by as he was insulted and beaten. You tell yourself that it would have done nothing to come to his defense except to fulfill some abstract idea of moral rightness. You tell yourself that there was nothing you could have done anyway, that you were too busy trying to get by or get through your own troubles. You tell yourself that, had you defended him, you would be forced to be his friend, and you never really liked him all that much anyway.

You realize that these are all lies, that you were weak and immature. You realize that, in reality, you have no defense for your own inaction, and it is of little comfort to know that you didn't participate in his defamation, instead washing your hands of the matter like Pilate. You hate yourself for this until you find a sense of solace knowing that you were just a kid, no better than any other. You think about him for a little while because all you can do now is remember.

Sec2:39

Soon, however, you will go to the library to study for an exam and later meet your friends at a bar. Tomorrow you will take your girlfriend to a restaurant and she will spend the night. You will act as guitar tech when your friend's band plays at a small club on the weekend. Soon real life will intrude and you will forget Alex again.

-Jason Dresner
[English Major]

Untitled

She always wanted to explain things,
so she drew.

She wanted to carve it in stone
or write it in the sky,

and it would be only she and the sky and the things inside her that
needed saying.

It was a beautiful picture.

She kept it under her pillow.

When it was dark and her eyes were closed
she could still see it.

And when she started school,
she brought it with her.

She sat in a square brown desk,

But she thought it should be red.

And her room was a square brown room.

She hated to hold the pencil and chalk,

Her arms stiff, her feet flat on the floor,

The teacher watching and watching.

The teacher told her to wear a dress, like all the other girls.

After that they drew.

She drew all yellow.

The teacher asked, "Why don't you draw something like Jen's
drawing, *Isn't that beautiful?*"

After that her mother bought her a dress,

and she always drew rainbows and puppy dogs

And she threw the old picture away.

And when she lay alone looking at the sky,

It was big and blue.

But she was square inside and brown

and her hands were stiff.

Johnny's Swan Song

No distance I can run could ever be enough
To turn back the clock on what has begun
Or backtrack from what I've become
For I was born to walk against the bad luck wind
With "13" tattooed on my back
A cross 'round my neck
And this old axe slung real low
I roam this highway by myself but never alone
And I'll be here as long there is pain in the world and victims of the
times
All I have to give is theirs for the taking
My weary eyes
My bent ears
My calloused and raw hands
My blistered feet
I don't care what happens to me if in the long haul
If I can leave this world a little better off than how I found it
Because like the one who came before me,
and the one who will surely follow...

Sec2:41

*"I'd love to wear a rainbow every day
and tell the world that everything's okay
But I'll try to carry off a little darkness on my back
til things're brighter, I'm the man in black."*

-Ben Melville

[CommArts Major]

Post-Modern Requiem

Children tread toward a mirage
The vision flickering in Beslan
Of innocence stained in a montage
Of retribution demanded in the Koran
Gabriel condemns the infidel
For Separatism, liberation. . . no Imperialism
The imam rings the school bell
Allah's judgments are never terrorism
Beware the alleged clarity. . . the canard
From sensing evil on the playground
Holy Warriors convert into a graveyard
Corpses clutter the lost and found
Who died learning their first lesson
The final Post-Modern judgment
That eluded them during confession
Condemning evil breeds imminent
Insurgents, counter-insurgents,
Released into an embattled cauldron
Impugning Children as serpents
No dismissal bell. . . only an explosion

Sec2:42

Post-modernists respond to jihad
With a sterile, amoral phrases
Echoing prophecies from a dead God
Speaking in tongues he praises
The images of paradise at the Potemkin
Village poised to uproot the West
But this revolution died in the Kremlin
Before those born and buried to rest
The first generation blessed by glasnost
Conceived by God condemned by Allah
Sacrificed resurrecting a Post-modern ghost
Embalmed by history. . . embodied by a Fatwah
Communism collapsed under its own weight
Hubris at dawn. . . Darkness at Noon
The Commissar bows to the Caliphate
Vaporized in their own moral vacuum
Abandoned by Marx filled with Mahomet
Post-modernists polish their lexicon
God and the godless unite at sunset
Will the child leave home at dawn?

Sec2:43

-Robert Baker
[Graduate English Major]

The End of Man

Nature unfolds her mystery
One more apocalyptic lecture
Only fools continue to conjecture
Distinguishing genius from a fool's will
Their distance fades into a febrile
Stage whereby the self-appointed
Stand summoning the anointed

Spread over contours of cognitive dissonance
Scattered between essence and existence
Conditioned by class, condemned by genetics
Distorting balance between ethics and aesthetics
Social Engineers remerge on one shade of innocence
100 million dead bequeathed their offspring penance
All systems gloss past the eccentric man's hope
Determinisms unleash another misanthrope
Triumphantly treading mankind into his post-modern
Paradise with no cathedral, no canon law to learn
Truth floats into a fungible state
Lies merge below the metaphysics of debate

Sec2:44

Christians fled the lions unleashed by Diocletian
Stumbled in front of two variants of a Manichean
Edifice One capitalism, another communism
Dysfunctional fraternal twins of empiricism
Dueling conceits of the cult of progress
Each promised man eternal happiness

Ministers imposing redemptive rations
Markets indulging his unlimited passions
Devil stood on both sides of the Iron Curtain
Laughing while its strings burn . . . victory was certain
Peasants, dissidents, philistines etc. begin fleeing
Into a "FREEDOM" ensuring he remains a material being
Escaping poverty though never purging his vices
"The Last Man" risks death mocking his ancestors' sacrifices

Sec2:45

-Robert Baker

The Walk

Jade sits quietly on the pavement watching cars drive by. Processions of ants approach a stale grapefruit as another mosquito attacks her fat legs. Five more minutes and she appears restless, almost as if she's about to explode. The swelling of a heat rash forms Mississippi on her left arm, no, Alabama.

"What's wrong, shuga? You thought Mama left you huh? Uh uh. I would never leave my Janie. No, sir, not this Mama. She loves her fatty too much to leave her out in this blazin' sun. Come along now, let's take that walk." Mama is still wearing her gray apron and her body reeks of bleach. Jade tries to stand up, but a charley horse hurts her left foot.

Sec2:46

"This side of me is broken, Mama. I think I need to see the Doc. again."

"Is you crazy? You ain't seeing nuthin' for the next year unless you fat gets outta hand. Now you jus hush up that griping and come along, hear?"

"Yes'm." It's nearly 3 p.m. and she finally gets a break from her daily chores. Mamma is the head laundress for the Johnson's in Norton County. Mrs. Johnson is fairly pleasant, but her husband . . .

"Mister says laundry duty tomorrow, so we gotta leave early. I s'pect he knows I have six young ones but it don't matter, he don't claim none of yous anyway." Jade trips on the asphalt and falls flat on the pavement facing Dave's Country Store. Her greasy plaits slap her face as she attempts to regain her balance. Her beige dress is soiled with dirt and her hands have scaly calluses stained with fresh blood.

"You fool of a fatty! Don't you know no betta?"

"Mama, I told you this side of my body is broken."

"What'd you say, girl? Now don't think that I won't wail on your hide in front of all these here white folk? Now dust off and come on." The customers disregard Jade's fall by briefly glancing in her direction as she readjusts her stance. Mama's sturdy frame forms an eclipse over Jade's round body. Two stray dogs smell the nearby debris of left over food from lunch as Jade sees her friend Emma.

"Hey, Jade, you coming to my party?" One look from Mama warns Jade to quicken her stride. Evidently the party is out of the question.

"Mama, you mad?"

"Hush girl."

Mama's hair is wrapped in a brown scarf and her face is flustered with a look of grief. Her thick thighs move swiftly with her rapid stride. All of a sudden Jade has an urge to suck her thumb, but she's scared. A cool breeze drifts along the path, and Mama finally speaks.

"Girl, you gotta learn to stay outside when I'm working."

"But Ma..."

"Now hush. Don't you be lettin' Mr. Johnson on you again. I can't provide for no mo' children 'round here."

"Well, what we gonna do with this one?"

"You know we needs the money for the Doc. since you keep complainin' 'bout your side. There ain't nuthin' wrong with you, girl!"

Jade sluggishly attempts to continue walking at her mother's quick pace, even though her fat swollen legs outweigh her stomach.

"Why you slowing down girl? We ain't got time."

"My left side Mama, it hurts."

"Come on girl, we'll be home soon if you quit slowing down, baby. Come on now."

Jade can't take it anymore; the cramps are too intense. Mama refuses to slow down, because she knows — she knew all along. The road home is nearly empty, aside from old man George and his nearly dead milk cow. By this time, they had been walking for over an hour, and then it happened.

"Mama I think it's time."

"Hush, girl. Home is over yonder, so keep it moving. You'll be fine."

"I can't. Not no more. We gonna have to stop now."

When old man George takes notice of Jade's agony, he ties his cow to a nearby fence.

"Anethin' I could do, ladies? You alright Jade?"

"Naw, I need to let it out now."

Mama slaps Jade across the face. "You damn whore! I can't believe you doin' this in the middle of the road when the house is right across the way. You betta wait. I don't know why your tail was walking so damn slow. Are you trying to embarrass me? Is that it? Is that why you took to walking stupid? Do you hear me?"

Old man George never performed a delivery before, but was willing to be of assistance to this desperate child.

"What do she need me to do for her? Girly, you gonna need to tell me what I need to do for you?"

Jade suddenly faints; a stream of water escapes from her body as she lies in a fetal position on the warm pavement. Mama continues walking.

-Renee Salandy
[English Major]

Subdivision Mother

No matter what I do, it will never satisfy you
In your eyes I can do only wrong
And when I bow to your wish,
To reject things that you deem unfit
All I will receive is never-ending scorn
In return for a daughter's obedience to her mother
And still you have the gall to chastise me
That your own children deny you
That we keep our hearts from you
To live in fear of you, in the loveless house you fashioned

Sec2:49

God forgives you, I know I will
But the question remains how long this grace will remain
Because I'm looking out for the next opportunity to run
And this time, I won't look back.

-Ben Melville

Pink

And I tear off the scab;
there's a patch of softness
underneath what would be
skin. Beauty, in ugliness.
And I want you here,
beside me to lend a gentle
hand, to pat the wound.
To exchange a reading, and
just . . . smile.
And in our smile, we'd both
feel better; in our smile
we'd both connect; in our
kiss, another smile would follow.
And I want so, so badly to feel,
like I deserve it all;
like I know who you are;
like I know who we . . .
couldn't be.
It is then that I lend a
rough thumb to my forearm
and pat it down. I have to hide
the beauty in the ugliness
once again, if I'm going to settle
for beige.

Sec2:51

-Troy Dalton, from his series "Colors"
[English Major]

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

Jeff met Lulu at a seedy place in Austin.
There were addicts sprawled out around tents in the living room.
Lulu was lying amongst them; face down, in her panties.
Jeff was thoroughly convinced she was dead.

They shared a cup of coffee at the local diner.
Jeff took her to where she lived.
It was a room that she shared with two brutes.
One was away at the veterinary clinic.
The other was asleep on Lulu's mattress, holding his privates.
Lulu cried profusely while Jeff stood awkwardly.
She begged Jeff to use his phone to call her parents.
They lived far away in the country.

As they ate their breakfast, they wondered about their daughter.
Lulu's mother would cry for hours.
Lulu's father always maintained his composure.
Until no one was looking.
They were both relieved to hear from their daughter.
And purchased, for her, a bus ticket home.
Lulu thanked Jeff as he walked to the elevator.
She slept soundly, knowing that she would leave in the morning.

The brute came home from the veterinary clinic feeling quite aroused.
He injected Lulu with animal medicine while she was asleep.
And had his way with her for many hours.

The medicine did her in that night.
Lulu missed her bus in the morning.
The brute stuffed her in the trunk.
And he left her at the hospital.

The doctors did not bother with her much.
Nor did the police.

The brute had already disappeared when Jeff found out.

He never found her burial place.

Lulu's parents waited and waited.
Lulu's mother would often cry for hours.
Lulu's father lost his composure.

Sec2:53

-Richard Guerra

[A Theatre Arts Major, Richard graduated in December 2004. Richard notes that the story is factual and Lulu's parents gave him permission to use actual names]

Someone You Know

1. Listen.
2. Let them know you believe their account of what happened.
3. Let them know that it was not their fault and that they are not to blame.
4. Control your own emotions.
5. Give comfort.
6. Allow them to make decisions.
7. Offer shelter.
8. Continue to provide support.
9. Consider counseling.

Sec2:54

He raped her. Eric. He raped her. That's the only word for it. What he did. Rape. The drunk is wearing off. I lay in bed. Can't sleep. I have class tomorrow morning. I lay on my back. He raped her. Eric, my best friend. I need to go to sleep. My head's all screwed up. I can't deal with this right now. It makes no sense. Why? Why did he?

"You play guitar, man?" I looked up, cafeteria pizza halfway to my mouth. He pointed to my shirt, to the Gibson logo across my chest.

"Uh, yeah," I said, staring up at him. He stood over me, across the table, holding a tray in his hands. He was tall, skinny, tanned, longish dark hair that hung limply down over his ears, not quite covering his eyes. He seemed familiar, but I couldn't quite place him. It was my third day of high school, a new city. I didn't

know anyone, didn't talk to anyone. "Do I know you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, man. I think I have Biology with you. Mrs. Braddock's class, right?" That's why he looked familiar. He sat a couple rows behind me.

"Oh. Yeah. Hey."

"So, what kind of guitar you got?"

"Well, a Gibson," I said and nodded my head towards my chest, "but not really. It's really only an Epiphone, a Les Paul, but they don't make shirts for those."

"That's cool." He smiled shyly, not showing his teeth. "I have a Fender Strat."

"Oh yeah? I've played one of those. They're all right, but not really my style. I like to play heavier stuff: Tool, AC/DC, I'm learning Zeppelin right now, trying to at least. 'Immigrant Song,' that kind of stuff. I'm not all that great, though."

"Yeah, but Zeppelin's really tough anyway. How long you been playing?" He set his tray down. "Mind if I pull up a chair? I'm still trying to get used to this place." He looked across the cafeteria. "So this is high school, huh? Oh, yeah, my name's Eric." He held out his hand. I shook it.

"Good to meet you, Eric."

2 AM: tired but still awake. The last of the buzz has worn off as I think about what happened earlier tonight. We were drinking, Eric and I. I hadn't seen him in a while. Too busy with school and the job and my girlfriend. We've been losing touch with each other recently, kind of drifting apart. I'm a student, a junior in college, and he dropped out last year and does construction full-time.

A career, I guess. Now he mostly hangs out with guys from his job, talking about stuff that I don't have a clue about. I've noticed that more often we've had to make plans to see each other.

We met at a bar close to his apartment around ten, time to catch up on each other. We talked about work, how he got a raise and might be moving up to some kind of supervisor status. He asked if I was still at my job. I work retail at the mall, folding clothes and helping kids find body jewelry or t-shirts for pop-punk bands I've never heard of. The job sucks and the pay is crap, but I don't plan on staying there and it gets me spending cash, so I don't mind. We talked about his family, his older brother's new baby. He asked how things were going with Jill, how she and I were getting along since we'd moved in together. I asked about that one girl he was seeing, Amber.

Sec2:56

"Well, check this out." He pulled out his phone, one of the shiny new flip kinds that could take twenty-second videos, and started messing with it.

"Looks like a phone," I said, smiling, and took a drink of Shiner.

"Not the phone, man. Here, look at this." He turned the phone towards me. A video was playing, dark and grainy. The screen hard to make out.

"What is it supposed to be?"

"Here, look closer." He put the phone into my hand and I studied the tiny picture. It was Eric and Amber, having sex, it looked like. The two were shown from the side, waist up. He

was on top. Amber appeared either bored or asleep, I couldn't tell. Eric, on the screen, looked into the camera: "You getting this?" Then the video cut out.

"I guess things are going well, then." I said and put the phone back into his hand. "Who did the filming?" Eric smiled that shy smile I knew, vaguely guilty.

I didn't like Brian the moment I met him. He was one of Eric's friends from work, an electrician, a few years older. Brian and Eric had been hanging out a lot. Eric would tell me about the stupid alcohol-fueled crap they'd do together. How they got thrown out of a bar when Brian drunkenly hit on some guy's girlfriend, causing a fight. How they drove to the lake with a case of beer and got stuck in a ditch late at night on the way back. Brian seemed to be a dick. He looked over my head when Eric introduced us at a club, slapping my hand and saying hey disinterestedly. Then he excused himself and left to talk to a girl sitting behind us at a nearby table.

"Friendly guy," I told Eric, who grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

According to Eric, this is what happened. Amber and Eric and Brian were hanging out late one night at her apartment, drinking. The two of them had apparently planned this, since Eric told me he had been trying to get Amber into a threesome but didn't know how to ask. They got her drunk until she passed out. Then they took turns screwing her while she was asleep. Eric, then Brian, coming inside her. They took turns. They didn't use

condoms. They filmed each other with that stupid-ass little phone. Afterwards, Brian left and Eric fell asleep beside Amber. The next morning, she woke him up and asked if anything happened, saying that she couldn't remember last night. Eric told her no and they went back to sleep holding each other.

"Then she doesn't know?" I looked at Eric, my mind feeling sluggish after the second pitcher. He shook his head. "That's kind of messed up, man."

"No, it's cool," he said, looking away as he put his phone back into his pocket. "I mean, she wasn't really passed out. She was kind of moaning anyway, and I think she woke up a little bit during. She probably liked it." He took a drink and smiled again. "Anyway, I'm taking her out to dinner tomorrow night."

Sec2:58

Why did this happen? Sure, he was drunk. He gets stupid when he's drunk. Maybe he was trying to impress Brian. Maybe it was Brian's idea. Still, that doesn't excuse it. Eric raped her. Her name is Amber and he raped her, and I'm not sure if he cares or even realizes what he did. He can be an idiot and a bastard when he's drunk, but I can't believe he would do this to anyone, especially to someone he was dating, someone he knew. He isn't like that. I begin to breathe quickly and clench my fists to calm myself down. I know this feeling, this frustration and impotent rage. It reminds me of November.

It was a Tuesday night in November. Dad stayed out late again and came home drunk. He and mom got into a fight. I

was in my room, listening to my CD player, trying to learn the intro for "Nothing Else Matters" and block out the shouting. I heard the front door slam and took off the headphones and put my guitar down. I walked into the living room and saw my mom sitting on the couch. She was quiet and staring at the front door. She looked up at me as I approached, her hand covering her face.

"Mom, what happened?" She removed her hand to speak and I saw blood coming from her nose.

"The son of a bitch hit me."

I'd been riding my bike for twenty minutes in the darkness. The streets of our neighborhood were quiet, no dogs barking, no cars passing by. A cold autumn stillness. Lonely. At some point I decided to go to Eric's house. I put my bike down on his front lawn and went to the side of the house and tapped on his window. When he whispered my name, I asked if he would hang out with me for a little while.

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We rode to the wooded area at the end of his street. There was an abandoned tree house within, built by some teens in the eighties, where we'd sneak cigarettes and hang out. It was private. We sat on the ledge side by side with our legs dangling over as I told him what had happened, how it had happened before and how my dad had promised never to do it again.

"He promised." I said, "I hate him so much." My breath quickened and became erratic. I started crying. I'd never cried in front of anyone since I was a kid. My face grew hot as I slumped forward. Eric put his arm around me. "I hate him."

I don't know what to do, or who to talk to. It's late, almost three, and Jill's asleep next to me. There's nothing I can do right now. And tomorrow, even then, what can I do? I can't tell the cops. He's a friend. Then what? Tell Amber? I've only met her a couple of times; I hardly know her. Maybe I should get him to tell her, somehow. Or at least tell him to stop drinking and stop screwing up. Christ, I don't know. I suddenly feel tired and worn out, feel myself beginning to drift off to sleep. I realize that I don't want to see him again. He's not my friend anymore, not after this. What he did was wrong and terrible, so pointlessly stupid. I close my eyes.

Sec2:60 *We were at a party thrown by a mutual friend: myself and Jill, Eric and Amber. I'd never met Amber before, the two of them had just started dating, and I found myself alone with her for the first time, awkwardly trying to start a conversation.*

"You've known Eric for a while, haven't you?" She asked me as we sat on a couch. I looked at her. She was nice, I thought, not all that great looking and maybe a little dumb, but nice enough.

"Yeah, I have. Ever since high school. He's my best friend, you know? He was always there for me, especially when my parents got divorced."

"That's nice. I mean, I haven't been seeing him for that long, and I don't really know him that well. My last boyfriend was a total asshole, but Eric seems nice. I don't know if we're going to get serious or anything, but I like him. I just want to know if he's, you know, a 'good' person. I hope I'm not being a pain in the ass."

"It's cool, I understand. I don't know. He and I haven't really had too much time to see each other lately, but I guess that kind of thing happens after high school, growing up and all of that." But as I looked over at Eric laughing with a few friends at the keg, I knew I could answer honestly, without hesitation. "Yeah, I think he's a pretty good guy. Probably the best I know."

-Jason Dresner

Payback

You don't know where to begin looking for the real victim
Give up? I've got the boot-heel on your throat
And I'm pointing the gun squarely at your head
The chamber's locked and loaded baby,
and the hammer's clicking back

When I pull the trigger
It's gonna be a constant attack and it's coming at you,
blasting fast and loud-
It's gonna be louder than the sound of the twine
Going through all the eyes of dirty needles
you used to stitch helpless girls shut
To be your pure trophy wives until you fucked and raped them until
they couldn't stand up

It's gonna be louder than the sound of the fists that beat and bruise
And the straps that whipped and scarred innocent skin

It's gonna be louder than the sound of screams from the back alleys,
Where so many died
to the tones of a stabbing bloody coat hanger

It's gonna be louder than the sound of the poor and unwanted
Starving, freezing, and whoring themselves in the streets

It's gonna be louder than the sound of all your prayers
to your misogyny-hungry demigod
That the torture never stops

And it's gonna be volumes louder still than any silent scream you
thought you could hear in me
Because now it's time for you to see that I cherish life more than
you can ever know

Try to bind my womb if you dare—but you'll do it only over my
cold dead body.
And as you can see, the only corpses here used to be the likes of
you—the dogs I put down.

Sec2:63

BANG!

Payback's a bitch, mother-fucker!

—Ben Melville

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