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2012

THIS VENUE WILL BE
CLOSED
FOR ONE YEAR

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INSTRESS

LITERARY AND ARTS MAGAZINE

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome.

Here within the pages of this, the 46th edition of Instress, you will not simply find images and words. You will find the collective creativity of Misericordia University as a whole. Represented within are the hearts and minds of our student body, the collective soul poured with ink upon page. Take this into mind when reading each work and viewing each image.

Take into mind that what you are reading are feelings and ideas that are important to someone.

They are important enough that what was thought or viewed was not simply allowed to pass by and vanish into the evanescence of the past, but were recorded and are being presented to you so that they may thrive in the minds of others. Reflect on what you see. Most importantly, share it with others.

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AWARD WINNERS

POETRY

Sydney Stamatis

“Don’t Let Go”

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ramah Williams

“Untitled”

PROSE

Marina Orrson

“Cindy-Lou Who Attempted to Ruin My Life--But Didn’t”

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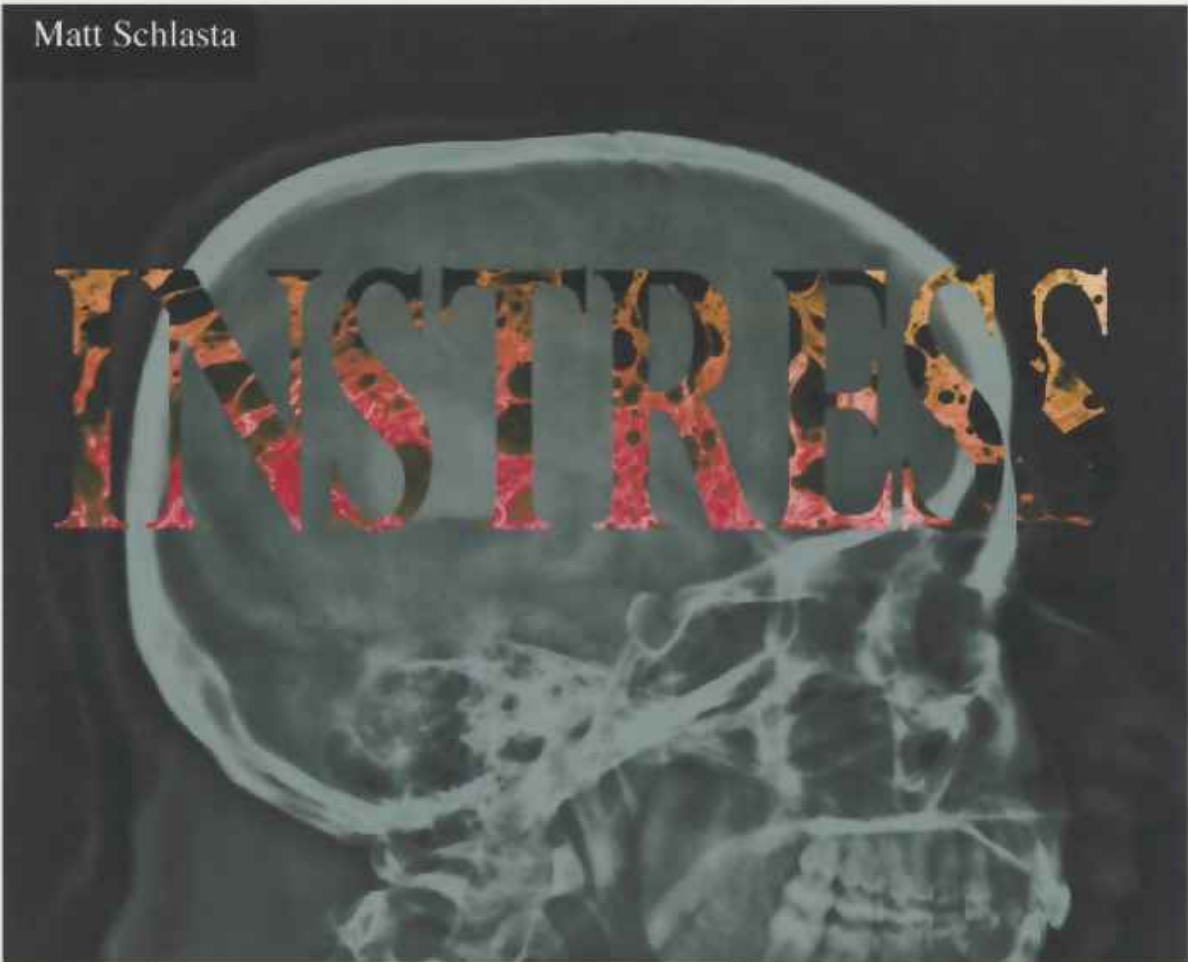
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Matt Schlasta



AWARD WINNER

Don't Let Go

By Sydney Stamatis

Rough hands
Scrape across
Tangerine t-shirts
You intoxicate me
I want to breathe you in
But it's okay
It's okay
Singing "Girls Girls Girls"
And asking, what is art?
And I stare out the window
And there are hills, overlapping green
There is a microcosm
Of mulleted snobs,
Aimless cats, beat-up four-doors,
And there's the sun
Shining down on all of it
On all of us
And I think, This is comfortable
This is transient.
Everyday it becomes
Harder to grasp
That this may be
But a minor part
Of my history.
So I hold on tight
For I will not accept my fate.
I hold on tight
For I won't always have these summers
Drunk in a pond
And we swim, we swim
Even though we know it's wrong
I hold on tight
For the first time because
All is crumbling, changing,
And it's pivotal to acknowledge the reality

That I will tell my children what was,
Not what is.
How do I tell the world to slow
down?
How do I tell my world
That I am not yet ready
To lose and to change
What I've known?
Ambivalence, Acceptance
That's easy.
But should I fight?
Yet there's joy in the effortless
Joy in a floral dress
And Chaplin Oxfords,
Joy in gin buckets,
Joy when it's 5:30am
In nicotine-swirled air
On an open deck
And there's music in my bones
Music on the road
Poetry on the soft strums
Of your ukulele
And I am overwhelmed
All summer I am motivated
By the meaning intrinsic
In a night
In a glance
In a song
In your interest, hesitation.
One more year, you say
That's all we have,
All we have had,
One year.

Each day I take a step.
It's all I can handle
And oh it's lovely
And yes, I'm happy.
Yet still I see
That I may never know my father
That I may never
Change as a person
That I may never Experience real human
Chemistry.
I want us to talk all day, run errands,
I want you to call me for no reason,
I want us in a tent by the river.
You've been damaged, disregarded,
You've been disillusioned, hurt, forgotten,
And you tell me and I
Want so bad
For you to know that you can trust me.
You say people change
After a year;
You say that people leave.
But I'm still here.
I won't let go.
Rough hands.
So much working against you.
So much working against me.
And I worry that I leave pieces of myself
With everyone, with everything
Losing a bit more each time.
Losing, And it's like I think I'm an expert
By now
At losing.
No. No.
Yes, I lost her, but
Hasn't my life so far
Been something amazing?

IMMORTALITY

By Kailee Hummel

In every essence of the word, it
Means to live forever.
Men have tried for hundreds of years,
Opened their minds to many ideas, but never
Reaching that blissful eternity.
Time stands still for no one.
Always moving,
Lightening fast,
Indifferent to our word or warning.
Too much or too little, time never listens to our cries or
Yearning.

Heaven

By Jacob Hebda

Give me the black expanse of the night
 sky
 Glistening with stars innumerable
 Shimmering in a silent river,
 Radiant stillness.

Give me the warmth of a companion,
 Gentle and kind.
 Our hands are interwoven, blissful
 softness!
 We gaze together at Heaven.

Is it really so far away?



Mary Bove

in the sunlight

in the Sunlight
 you can do no wrong
 in the Sunlight
 you are radiant
 a piece of silver
 a piece of gold
 that shines with the life
 of a Star

By Auraleah Grega

By Andrew Corbett

Poison flushing through her veins
 Radioactive zombie mother
 Hair in clumps on the shower floor
 Crying in her bedroom
 She thinks I can't hear
 At least the chemo
 Will kill her hunger
 For brains

Zombie Mom

By Ramah Williams

AWARD WINNER





Cindy-Lou Who Attempted to Ruin My Life

By Marina Orrson

-- But Didn't.

It was a *kid's* movie – a children's feature film – that outright ripped my heart from my chest and left my stomach twisting and churning. How could something so sweet and innocent do that to me?

The questions began to stir in my mind. How could Cindy-Lou Who lose Christmas like that? Was Christmas even something that could be lost? As I awoke from an impromptu nap I had accidentally taken mid-movie, I found the credits scrolling accompanied by the soothing melody of Faith Hill's voice singing the song that both brought me such heartache and confusion.

Where are you Christmas? Why can't I find you?
Why have you gone away?

With every lyric that soared through the air and into my ears, I felt another reeling blow to the chest – and the bladder (Although, I did just chug a mug of hot chocolate – complete with marshmallows – so that is easily explained away, but still...)

She had lost Christmas. And this song – this tear jerking, sadness laced song that made "The Christmas Shoes" sound like a toe-tapping show tune – was describing the very manner in which Cindy-Lou Who – no older than two – had lost Christmas. Christmas had walked right out of her life, leaving her with nothing but spoiled memories and fleeting reminders of its once important presence.

Why did Christmas have to leave?
Why couldn't she find it?

I just couldn't understand why this all had to happen. It was all too puzzling and heartbreaking to imagine such a cute little Who down in Whoville with no one that could tell her where Christmas had gone. The pieces were not fitting together; they refused to form any sort of logical shape. There she was on my television screen, forever searching for where Christmas had gone. Why, cruel world!? What in God's holy name had this creatively licensed aged girl, who was only two (in the book),

but now seven (in the movie) ever do to anyone!? Oh, Christmas thinks it's so smart letting itself be stolen like that, but you know what? A two-year-old, that's who the world stole Christmas from, those dirty, Dr. Seuss pigs. How they would justify such an act was beyond my comprehension. How could I have ever seen this coming?

As the credits continued to scroll, warm tears began pooling in the corners of my eyes, and in response I rubbed my hand furiously across them. My mouth grew dry as my ears continued to listen to the song playing softly in the background. Soon, my cheeks became red as a feeling of pure dread overcame me. Had I lost Christmas too?

I mean – I'm about her age (the movie version at least)...just a tiny bit older (like six years older). Oh, who am I kidding? I'm nowhere near her age! I'm thirteen. I'm practically this girl's grandmother! And besides, is it possible for a young teenager to lose Christmas the way a Who down in Whoville lost Christmas? Is there any comparison?

Holding my sleeved arm over my tearful eyes, I make a dash for the bathroom, hoping no one had noticed my hysterics. Upon reaching the bathroom, I slammed the door behind me and locked it for good measure. Racing over to the two-ply toilet paper on the opposite side of the room, I ripped a few squares and began blotting my eyes.

"Marina," my Dad's voice was muffled through the wooden-looking plastic door. "Marina, what's going on? What's the matter?"

I didn't respond immediately, instead I stared in the mirror at my bloodshot eyes and tear streaked cheeks. I blotted the toilet paper against my left cheek to wipe up a few stray tears before sniffing once or twice. "Nothing, Dad..." I started, but the sight of Cindy-Lou Who and thought of my lost Christmas plagued me.

AWARD WINNER

'Are you sure?' He pressed the issue, hoping to weasel something out of me. "You sounded pretty upset when you went in there."

I didn't exactly mean for it to happen, but when I swung the door open that very moment – eyes completely bloodshot, mouth drooling, eyelashes soaked – I blurted it all out.

"Dad! How could Cindy-Lou Who lose Christmas like that!?" The hysterics from earlier returned in a flood-like fashion. "Does it not care about her feelings!? Does Christmas not care about me!? Why would it leave me like that!? Was I not good enough for it!?"

"Marina," my Dad gave me a look directly in the eyes, raising an eyebrow slightly at what I had just said. "Are you PMSing?"

"NO!" I replied hastily, rubbing the already tear-soiled toilet paper over my eyes once again, before returning my attention to him. "Why would you think that!?" The words came out as more of a moaning sob rather than clearly articulated question.

How could he not realize what was happening here? Christmas had been lost! The thing walked into my life and out of my life like a bad perm in the eighties. It hadn't lingered for long: only thirteen years. Just enough time for me to realize that we were growing a bond, that we would forever have each other. If December didn't have the wonderful time (also known as Christmas) – a wonderful time that now HATED me – it would be nothing but a lonely month of cold and snow and cold and depression and cold and cold and ice pops and freezing and cold and snowmen and cold... Without Christmas, December would be nothing.

I had lost Christmas, and my Dad was asking me if I was PMSing. Ridiculous – that's what this

situation is. After receiving no response besides my hysterical outburst, my Dad took that as a reason to continue on with the conversation as if I had said nothing.

"Marina," he began slowly, making sure my full attention was solely placed on him. "Explain to me why it is you're crying right now."

Letting out a frustrated breath, I went again to tell him of the horror that was once Cindy-Lou Who's and now mine.

"Dad, I told you," I started out with irritation lacing each word. "I was watching *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and *Cindy-Lou Who* lost Christmas! And then I was thinking, 'Oh my gosh! If she lost Christmas that easily, I must have lost it too!' Then the waterworks started and I ended up in the bathro—"

I halted mid-sentence when I noticed the Christmas tree I had helped put up in the center of the living room, all lit up with lights and garland. The stockings were hung carefully on the fish tank since we didn't have a fireplace. The futon slip was holiday themed with snowmen and sleighs carrying children across the white snow. The scent of cinnamon and sugar cookies, courtesy of two Dollar Tree candles, lofted through the air.

"Oh my gosh..." I muttered bitterly. "I'm PMSing..."

Dropping the subject, I walked away from my Dad and headed back into the living room.

If losing Christmas was a crisis for Cindy-Lou Who, wait until puberty sets in. Dr. Seuss is going to have a hell of time rhyming the words menstrual cycle.

ATLANTIS Morissette

By John Meholic

HONORABLE MENTION

et it enfold you
music, sex, art, friendship,
spiders, Russia, expensive shots
Kick it up a notch

Let it light you up
my friends
Don't follow the Leader.
with an open palm
reach
down into the dirt
feel around for
the ancient remains of those once here
who feared, hated, rejected the
twisted minds
of
city streets

I once was there
But
freely I'm growing
away from the rotted roots
that have been injected
a century ago
You might feel sick
Like
beef being pounded
but my
Friends
the window is weak
the shadow is shattered
and the fangs are fake
all
are waiting to be broken

Let it engulf you
This one bright day



Aubrey LoPresti

Harlequin Moonbeams

By Andrew Corbett

Shine down on me
With insanity spewing
From your wicked smile

The curve of your orb
The flow of your lips
Draw the eye

Release me jester
The king shall rise soon
To restore my mind

Our parting is but brief
Our time together torture
Leave me be
Come to me
Place my life
Out of order

An Unlit Temple

By Melvin Jay Busi

My body is a temple, but no one comes to worship.
My soul is a lantern, grimy, dark, unpolished.
My mind is a library, filled with dusty books and mold.
My hand yearns for something to grasp, to have, to hold.

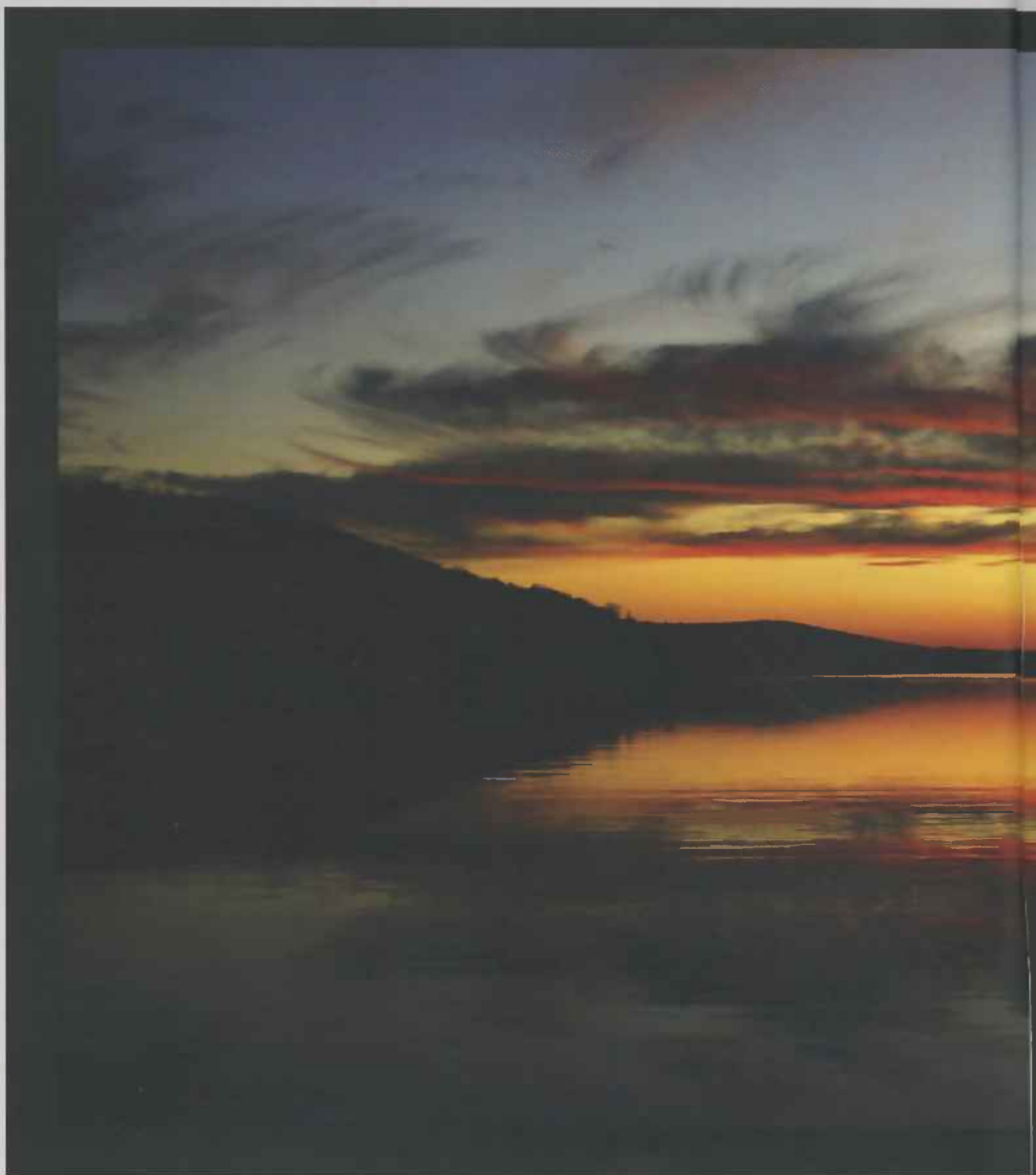
My body is scarred. The scar may never fade.
My soul is stained. The soul's light has thus decayed.
My mind is haunted. Phantoms roam betwixt soiled shelves.
My hand continues to search, longing to complete itself.

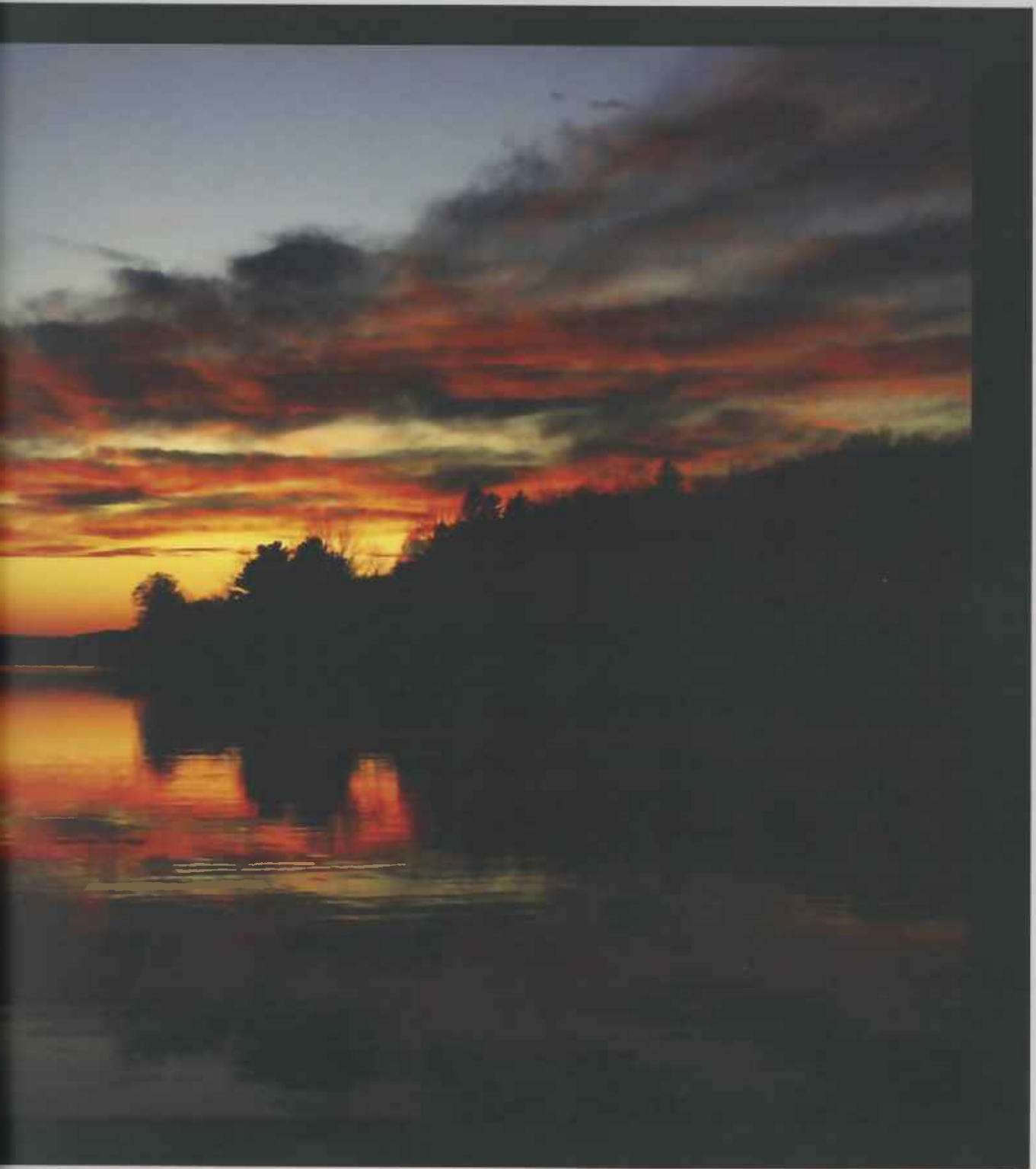
My body is a temple. A visitor opens the gate.
My soul is a lantern. The dirt is washed away.
My mind is a library. Someone picks up a book and reads.
My hand clasps another, finally finding what it needs.

I take your hand in mine and feel my heartbeat race.
As I stare deeply into your eyes, I feel my spirit soar.
I press my lips to yours and enjoy your warm embrace.

HONORABLE MENTION

By Tony Lubinski





Grab Bag

By K. Jenkins

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. It's a simple phrase that we are taught as children in order to teach us to ignore the hurtful things that people say to us. But even if words we heard never did hurt, which they sometimes do, what about the words that you desperately need to hear? What happens when they are left unsaid?

After my dad died and after Teresa left me, I just realized that I don't need anyone. And I don't. I don't NEED anyone. The only person I need is me. Inside, my heart exploded with fury, with hurt, with remembrance. But Lex continued, and I remained composed. I mean, yeah, I want people in my life. But they have to actively want me there, too. I'm too old to be dealing with their bullshit if they aren't going to be supportive of me. Because I don't need them. I don't need anybody. So if you need me to need you, this isn't going to work.

To need. The verb exists in every language, no matter what the dialect may be. The reason, of course, is simple when you stop to think about it. Every person needs something else in order to survive, in order to exist at all. So what exactly do we, as humans, need? Many people, theorists, and philosophers have given their opinions about this. But where do people come into context with these needs? Sartre once expressed that Hell is with other people, while Streisand once serenaded the world with lyrics which told us that people who need other people are the lucky ones. One of the two must be right; Right? Do we need people? And if we need people, does that in turn make us lucky? Or are people just some sick form of torture?

It is incredible how many transformations can occur over only a few short years. Two years ago, Sartre and I could have sat down with one another and completely torn apart the lyrics that Streisand sings. Part of me still longs to go back to that place because somehow it was easier. Easier to shut everything off, push everyone

away, and tell myself that the world was just a gutter cluttered with the shambles of broken things. According to the basic definition of 'need,' I could survive without other people. But the dictionary isn't human with human feelings and emotions, nor is it the end-all be-all of that which determines what is right and what is wrong. So then whose side do I take? Fighting myself, a recent event kept running through my mind. The more I tried to shut it out, the more it fought me back. It was in that moment where it occurred to me that maybe I didn't really have to choose a side.

The room was battleship grey and an eerie chill had entered it. The clock face on the television console illuminated that it was only seven o'clock on that Wednesday evening, but having gone hiking all day with my childhood friend, Amelia, my body was already ready for sleep. There was a crack between the taupe silk curtains where sunlight attempted to penetrate through the synthetic darkness where my crumpled body was hunched over a small lit screen. As I sat cross-legged on the floor, Amelia gathered her duffel and prepared for her four hour ride home. A short visit from an old friend, we had spent two days wandering the area I had only recently begun to call home. While the sojourn had been most enjoyable, it was now quite evident that the last few moments I would share with her would be far less than satisfying.

As the small screen lit up once more and vibrated in the palm of my hand, gut-wrenching anxiety overcame me, sending me into a jittery panic. Anxiety which was driven forth from ominous, vague messages sent from the phone of the woman I began to regard as my own. No words ever seemed to fit the relationship between the two of us. I longed to call her mine, while she panicked at the mere mention of the titles corresponding to an actual relationship. Exclusively dating, I told my friends. She isn't my girlfriend, don't call her that, she doesn't like it. People tried to label us, and soon, I too wanted to label us. Are you confused about this? She asked one day after hearing someone call her my girlfriend. Yes and no, I tell her. I like you, she said. I like being with you. Can't that be enough? Yes, of course, I automatically returned. It's enough for now.

But one day, one day I want to call you mine. She sighed, shook her head and smiled, and kissed me on the mouth. It will happen when I make it happen, she said. I kissed her back and said Okay. I should be happy, I should be enjoying this moment. Instead, I dread that it will never happen. Somewhere in cavity of my chest, I know that she will never make it happen.

Just as Amelia was about to say her last goodbyes, she saw my face and sat down on the old, worn couch, covered with a brown slipcover that never seemed to fit quite right. Go away, Amelia! Why are you here right now!? Everything you do is driving me insane. Just leave me alone, I don't need you, and all you are doing is pissing me off! Opening my mouth to spit out so many angry words, all that managed to come out was, Will you stay while I make this call? She nodded yes, and my whole body turned to ice. Why did I just ask her that? Dialing the familiar number, hands shaking, I anticipated the exchange with dread.

Less than an hour later, it was over. The phone call. The dream. The hope. Everything I had told myself about how it could work. There would never really be an 'us.'

The walls, white with country ornaments strewn across them, closed in as though they were trying their hardest to protect me. Rather, it only added to the feeling of suffocation. Silent tears that fell down my face as I listened to Lex turned to violent sobs once the phone hit the ground. I don't want you to cry over this. Her voice echoed in my head. How could I not? I was choking on the air now. Unable to breathe, unable to catch my breath, the air became a solid mixture that refused to enter my lungs. Stabbing pain ripped through my body as I sank deeper into the ground. A razor blade sliced through wall after arterial wall, digging in and twisting, cutting open old wounds while promising to leave more than a few more.

Like a vase knocked from a table, my torso smashed into the ground, and I for once, I could not move. The pools of water which were once contained so neatly in a glass jar gushed down my face and into the ground. The well-worn carpet on the ground laid matted, and began to look more like coagulated,

wet sand than anything else. The kind that has been worn down so deep that it continues to look dirty even after it is clean. It felt rough, yet was still trying hard to retain the soft cushion it once was. My hand tried to grip it, tried to cling to it, but there was nothing there to cling to. At this level, I could just make out the hills and valleys, the sudden dips of where one would have to pull themselves out of, if one were a millimeter tall. How will I get up from here? Where the carpet dips down the most, the dinky leg of a wooden coffee table stands like an inverted column with grooves. Sanded and polished, but without light, one would never know even if it wasn't. Lex laughed at the frail table once. I laughed with her once.

Amelia sat on the floor next to me as I rocked myself. Girls are stupid. We are really dumb sometimes. Should I go beat her with a stick? She twisted her face and put up her fists. My favorite comedian. Few people could make me laugh in the midst of crying, and over twenty years later, she still had the capacity for doing so. Only the laughter came out more like dry heaving due to my failed attempts at restraining my sobs. Without words, she rubbed my back. Ugg, Dy bust look like a trainwreck or sombthink. She burst out laughing, which made me laugh, then cry even harder. Imb so sorwy you hab to see this, 'Melia.

My left hand gripped the steering wheel while my right hand clenched the phone I had always hated talking on. I sobbed hysterically into the phone as I drove to my grandmother's house, although I knew I shouldn't have been driving at all, let alone using my phone. She. She. It's over. I cried. I needed my best friend. I needed her right then, in that moment, that very moment. But she was three hundred miles away, so all I could do was cry loudly into a lousy four inch piece of black technology. The sky was getting darker, and I could barely see the road in front of me. There were no windshield wipers fast enough for the rain drops that flooded down my face. But I could not spend the night alone, no matter how badly I wanted to.

The night seemed endless. Even now I remember each painful moment as if it might haunt me forever. Sleep, once my greatest ally, betrayed me. Don't trust her. No, you want to trust her. But she can hurt you if you trust her. Damn it, listen to yourself! What do you want to do?!

For the first time in an awfully long time, I had pushed the doubt and the fear away. I began to let her in. I started to open myself up. And even quicker than it began, I was shut out entirely.

The thin tan-carpeted patio floor was cold and hard beneath my body. I had always had an affinity for lying on the floor, but in that moment it provided little comfort. It was well after one in the morning when my mind finally gave in to the exhaustion that had already overcome my body hours before. I picked myself off of the ground, and upon realizing that my body was numb from the cold night air, I went into the house. As I crawled under a knitted afghan on the couch in my grandmother's living room, my mind began to race. Wasn't it just a week before that Lexi sat on that couch with me? Why did I come here tonight? Memories of her began to haunt me. Not knowing what else I could do, I began to write. Writing. Writing more than I had in weeks. More than I had in months. Writing until my hand screamed to break off, full of numbness. Sometime around three in the morning my mind collapsed into an ambiguous state of sleep.

Upon waking up after a mere two hours of agitated sleep, I woke up in a sweat. I must have had a nightmare. No, it could have been. It wasn't a dream at all. It was a memory.

It had been a sunny day, cool yet warm enough to feel the heat of the sun, especially as we sat in my car in the parking lot behind the school. A conversation that needed to happen, as many of our conversations were turning into. Rather than excited, I had grown accustomed to the heart-pounding unease and apprehension which led up to every conversation preceded by "We need to talk."

The conversation that followed struck me hard. Much harder than I realized at that time.

Her eyes of ochre and burnt umber seared into places I have kept hidden from so many others. Sad eyes, filled with pain and heartache. It was in this moment that Lexi told me that she didn't need anyone. It was in this moment that she told me that she did not, and was not ever going to, need me.

The tan interior of my car was suddenly fascinating. My hand gripped the steering wheel, and I could no longer see the wrinkles on my hands. No marks, no dents, I can't even make out the two small scars I know are still there. Four white knuckles on the steering wheel. Four white knuckles surrounded by the red of the blood that wants to rush back under the skin where it belongs. Why are you gripping the steering wheel so tightly? It doesn't matter. The momentary silence is glorious, and I stared out of the front windshield, right above my left hand. The sun left a glare on the glass. It obviously needed to be cleaned. I needed to learn how to clean it better. A window should look clear, not like a transparency full of smudges where you have tried to wipe too much ink away with a dry paper towel. Through the glass, I could see the back of the school. The unloading docks. Or maybe the loading docks. I didn't know. I didn't care, honestly. But my attention was diverted. Distracted by the plain white trucks parked at the docks. She had started talking at me again, as if I could never possibly understand just what it was that she was feeling. Workers noticed us, noticed my car parked under the wimpy tree that provided a drop of shade. I saw them staring at us, and I wanted to stare at her rather than back at them, but I could not even look at her.

My heart rose into my throat as I opened my mouth to speak, then plummeted before a single vowel could exit. I desperately wanted her to see all of the things that I already had seen, and all of the things she could not yet see. All of the things that screamed 'There are greater needs than those for basic survival!' Under the wheel, the dashboard called out, longing for me to stare deep into it, far past the hand on the speedometer that rested under the zero. I hated that I had felt all of the words that continued to erupt from her mouth and I hated realizing that I knew she would have to discover the Need for herself, on her own time. I

hated wishing I could change her answer, wishing I could somehow make her need someone. Oh, how I had wished that someday she might even come to need me!

Now I sit, haunted by that memory, still aching from the razor that tore apart wounds that had finally begun to heal themselves. In that moment, Sartre and I are one, because we know that Hell really is other people, and without other people, this pain would not exist. In that moment, I think about how Sartre must be right.

But even as I consider that, my stomach turns and my heart cries out; I must be mistaken somehow. Saying that people are Hell and saying I do not need them now or ever feels right, but only for a moment. The anger I built up over the centuries is no longer there, though in this moment, I desire for its return. Yet I know I have come too far to return to my bitterness, and for this I am thankful. My finger presses the 'play'

button, and as I hear Streisand sing, my stomach settles and my heart is at ease; I know that it is she who is right. The crooning voice carries itself across the room, filling the deafening silence with lyrics, warning me against grown up pride. She is right, and for this I love her and I hate her. Hiding was something I was good at once, hiding everything I needed. How good was I at playing pretend with emotions I had spent my whole life repressing! Pretend, however, is a game people play only when they know something better exists; something that is, in some way, intangible. Perhaps Sartre spent his days playing pretend or perhaps he chose to cling to his grown up pride. Either way, I know now that even if people are Hell, and even if I allow myself to love people who choose to side with Sartre, I still need people. And for that, I truly am lucky.



Heather Marsicano

Apartment Walls, Shaken not Stirred

By Thomas Simko

In box and out Rocks
Spent thrills in argyle socks

Beats bent backward below subsonic samples
Stomping underground: the L train moves

And old-time coal mine
Slaves
Spit century old backy into
Rusted warehouse barrels

While whammy bars and wah wahs wail
Electronic hum buckers
Signifying bad ass motha fuckers

And that departure, departures and arrivals
Departures of Dreams
Arrivals of rivals reveling in soaked scotch memories

Claps with a 5 second delay, piano players out of tune
Without a tune
Clichéd counters and routine renditions
"The piano has been drinking, not me," sings the pseudo-
Tom

But the music box dancer tifully, sinfully dances on
Towards a crescendo of cracker jack surprises
Gifted to youngin's who wouldn't know junk from gold

Ending towards progression and the happily never after
Of gun shots, black pots, and empty parking lots

Japanese smiles sent abroad in brown envelopes
Smearred glasses, half-full drinks, half-full hopes, quarter
time
On my dime, dropped down, dropped beats
And lifted spirits

The Flower Vender

By Auraleah Grega

She sold flowers along the side of the street. An old, worn, solemn figure, she sat with a brown babushka around her head, yelling to the passersby. I did not know what she said; she spoke only Slovak. But when I stopped, smiled, and pointed toward the petals before me, she began to weave stories into the air, her hands dancing, her voice singing. I wonder what she said to me, but I like to think it had great importance. Her eyes gazed so deep within me I cannot help but think that her words must have been spoken only to me, a secret that she entrusted to an American girl walking down the streets of Kosice in a yellow dress.

She was so very, very old. It was as if her age dripped off her, every experience, every bit of pain she's ever felt relived within her very flesh. This was her beauty. Her wisdom exposed for all to see, revealing her past and her present at the same moment. I imagine her in a black and white photograph on the cover of a magazine, her creases dark and deep, swaying like the bark of a tree. Her face was made for photography. Yet, when I asked as best I could, my hands in a square around my eye, she hid her face within her hands, just as wrinkled, just as beautiful.

Why she sat in a plastic lawn chair selling hydrangeas I will never know. Did she have no family, no house, no money? Or did she just want to watch the people of the streets, hoping to become one of them, hoping to lure one away from their pressing matter with swelling blossoms of blue or pink. Why did she sell the flowers? I see her hobbling across a meadow selecting each and every flower, slowly, slowly bending down, and slowly, slowly standing straight, the reward for her effort grasped within her palm. But will anyone else see her struggle, her plight just to sell the flowers? Is it a victory that her elderly body was able to stretch and groan in order to reach a daffodil near the edge of a garden to anyone else but her?

To me, her every movement is a victory. To me, her presence along the sidewalk is a miracle. Whether or not she still sits there, crippled, with a babushka around her wrinkled face, I will never know. She lives in a place half the world away, a place I hope to visit someday again, so that I may find the family of the flower seller, and ask them why she looked so sad.



HONORABLE MENTION

The Knife

By Kathleen Lord

It's a world of complications, medications, royal bullshit.
Close your eyes, believe their lies and you live lifeless.
Everyone is all alone, and on their own.
We all are orphans.
We play the game to dull the pain, just like endorphins.
But tell me do you ever take a look at yourself?
Do you stand there in the mirror, like a book on a shelf?
Do you ever just imagine all you could be,
If you opened up your eyes and you could finally see?
Well, this is life; a game you'll win it if you want to.
So roll the die, and start to cry to mourn the old you.
Awaken in the truth,
abandon the abuse.
Start to fly and recognize the beauty inside;
Beneath the make-up and the medicines that mold and shape and morph you.
Put lies aside,
And just enjoy the ride.
You have one life,
Put down the knife.
and tell me, what will you do?
In this game of life and death,
To pass the test you have to fall out.
Cast away the broken dreams and in-betweens that haunt and daunt you.
Do not be frightened of the truth,
but run from sheer lust.
Throw away the gun and take a look at yourself.
Or do you kill the broken heart and never heal what its dealt?
In all it seems,
It ain't a dream,
This is a nightmare.
Or maybe you are just afraid of being too aware.
But you were born that way,
They can't take that away.
So just stand up,
Try to act tough.
You must believe it.
Open your eyes,
Throw lies aside.
And you will make it.
Before the new day comes,
The liars you will shun.
You have one life,
Put down the knife.
and tell me, what will you do?

Runaway

By Noel Sidorek

HONORABLE MENTION

Here was a girl, 26 years old, a woman really, waiting in the line to board the plane, her suitcase trailing behind her. She looks around and notices all the happy families and couples. There's the woman in her late thirties leaning her head on the strong shoulder of her husband, their hands intertwined, as they keep up a steady stream of quiet conversation while they patiently pass the time to board the plane. An older couple and their three teen-aged children look exhausted but they are all laughing and smiling, reminiscing about the adventures they've just had together. She feels like the only person who is alone in the whole airport, until she catches the eye of the stewardess and sees the same sadness that she knows is reflected in her own eyes. The plane smells like desperation, stale sweat and salty pretzels. She's not sure why she's in such a hurry; she doesn't even know what's waiting for her when the plane lands 600 miles away. She's been hoping it will take her to a place where she can feel safe again. She finally reaches the aisle, takes her seat by the window and leans her head back against the faded maroon fabric of the seat. She closes her eyes and as she tries to fall asleep, memories of the day her life changed, memories of her wedding day, almost seven years ago, break down the barriers she's been trying to keep up all this time.

It could barely be called a wedding, that day she snuck into the county court house with the wild-eyed boy she would soon call her husband. At nineteen she thought she was mature enough to handle anything, even the responsibility of being a wife to a soldier who was about to go to war. Only his parents were at the ceremony, she had been too afraid to tell her own. They thought she was staying at her best friend's house. They had no idea their baby girl was about to walk down the aisle all alone. Her dress was simple, a twenty dollar dress on the most important day of her life. She remembered how the material scratched at her hips during ceremony. The reception was at the local diner, his parents bought them a bottle of champagne and gave the newlyweds their aging Ford sedan to drive the twelve hours south to their new home. She remembered the white fuzzy dice that hung in the rearview mirror swinging back and forth with every bump they hit and every turn they took just a little too quickly.

Their honeymoon didn't last long. Her husband of three weeks was sent overseas to fight for his country and she was left all alone in a strange new land. She had no one to turn to, no shoulder to cry on, no mother there to stroke her hair and whisper "It's going to be alright".

She had only spent one semester in college before she eloped and her resume's lonely single line read, High school graduate. She found a job working as an aide in a local nursing home, a place that reminded her she wasn't the only person alone in this world. The elderly residents made her nostalgic the past. She began taking college classes at night when she realized spending her days with people who lived in the past and then returning home to an empty house was not helping fill the emptiness that had become her life. She kept up the routine of worker by day, student by night for eight long months, until finally her husband returned home. But the war had taken the man she loved and left only his shadow. He was at constant battle with his memories. She felt like she was living with a stranger, she was lonelier then she had been when he was thousands of miles away.

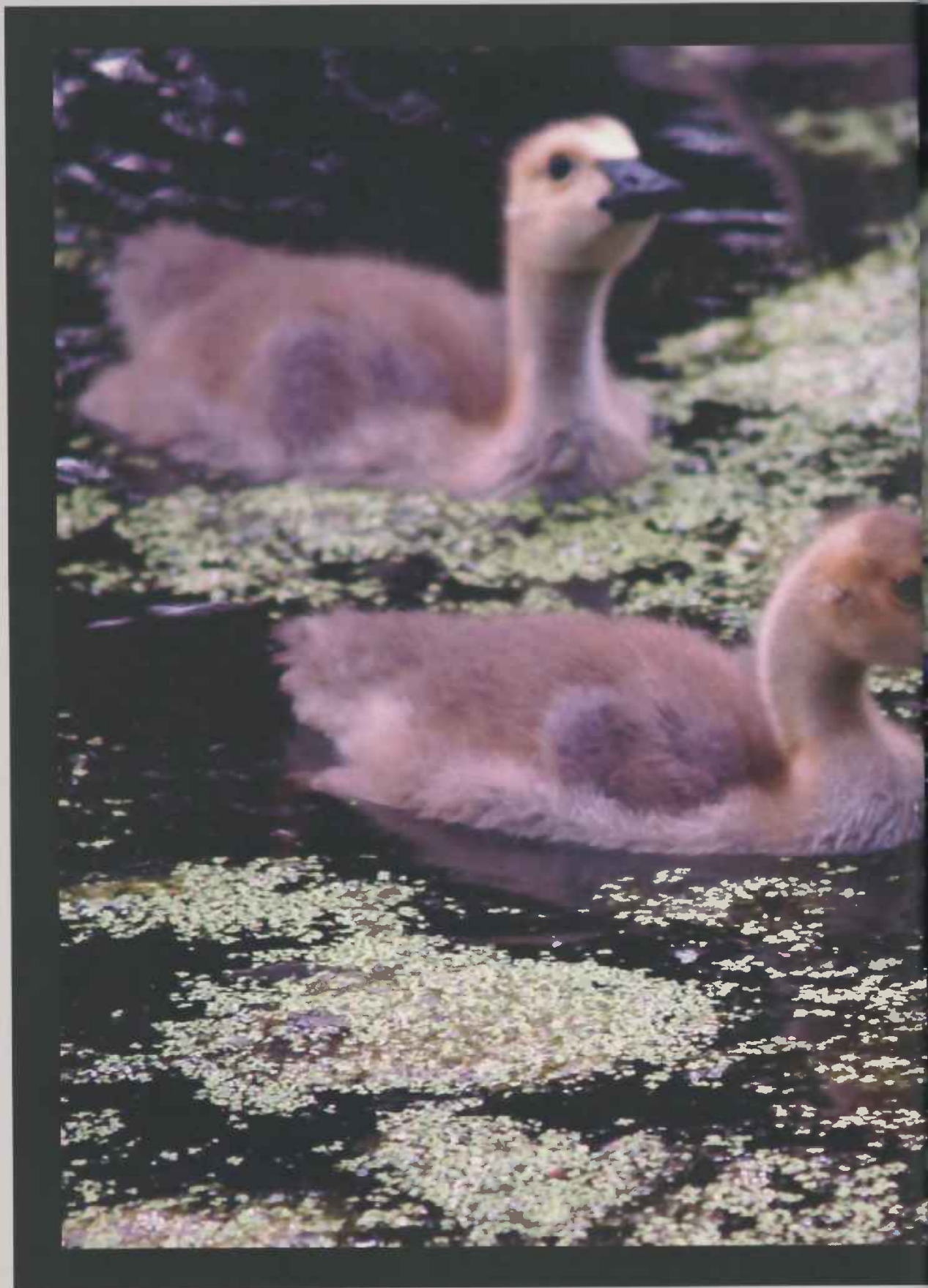
The first time he hit her was a hard slap across the face. She hoped it was a mistake, a one-time deal she could forgive him for. She told this to her reflection every morning after carefully covering her bruised face with makeup. Then she woke up one night choking for air, his strong hands clamped around her neck. In his waking dream he yelled out, trying to kill the enemy. She knew she was lucky when he awoke and cried for her forgiveness, but the punches just kept rolling. She told herself things would change. He was leaving again so soon, she couldn't send a broken man off to war to die, and so the cycle continued for seven years.

The knock came at the door early one Tuesday morning when she was putting on her purple scrubs for work; two men standing at her door in their best dress blues shaking their heads in apology. The news was a bit-sweet sorrow. She barely remembers that day, the day her life changed, the day she got the news she would never see her best friend again, the day she was free. The funeral was one week later. She remembered how strange it felt to have the sun warming her face as the casket was lowered into the ground. The only other people at the cemetery were the preacher and the last few of his friends who were still around to say good-bye. It didn't take long to pack up the house; she didn't have much she wanted to take with her from this place.

The first time she ran away it was for love, now she was running from its memory. As the plane takes off, she watches her world disappear below her, hugs the folded American flag tightly to her chest, and whispers "Goodbye".

HONORABLE MENTION

By Heather Marsicano





The Man With Two Hearts

By Alexandria Smith

I am unlike others because
Instead of having just one heart
I have two

The first heart, like most,
is capable of seizing and
squeezing blood from
one organ to the other
The second heart is very different
Instead of simply being, or
Pumping blood from one vein
To the next (now, this is where the
Doctors get perplexed)
It seems that my other heart
Is responsible for many things
That my first heart is not
Such as hoping or
Freeing and
Seeing every dream
That I have ever imagined

Of course, this second heart
Cannot be measured by any
Medical instrument, graph,
Carefully trained ear or test because
It does not beat within my breast
(At least that's what the doctor's say)
My second heart
Can only be measured
By the beauty it sees

Naturally, it cannot get sick
So it is infinite and eternal,
Not mortal and diurnal
Like my physical heart

Yes, from the moment
I started breathing
I knew that I was going to
One day grow old and die
I knew the heart that was beating
Was already fleeting

Like a personal hourglass
The sands of life were already
Moving from one hemisphere
To the other
Leading me
Defeating me
As I began the slow crawl
Toward inevitable death

However, as terrified as I am
Of the idea that as I am living
I am also dying
I still insist on trying
To make my life as beautiful as possible
I have been granted the chance
To experience everything that
This world has to offer
So I will continue to live and
Give as much as I can
As far as I see it, that is all I can do

I am comforted by the thought that
My second heart with its infinite
And eternal nature will survive
In the relationships that I built and
In the moments that I spent
Creating memories with people that meant
More to me than never dying

***"The greatest treasures
are those invisible to the eye
but found by the heart"
-- Anonymous***

Pretty.

By Leila Comerford

When we're five, we think we're princesses.
We obsess over dress up and tea parties.
Everyone is pretty to us, all girls are princesses.

When we're ten, we want to be cheerleaders.
We want to be teenage girls, wearing make up.
Our friends are pretty to us, everyone else...who cares?

When we're fifteen, we can't look in the mirror.
We tell ourselves we're ugly, fat, and all the above.
We are envious, wretched and blind to our beauty.

How have we spiraled so much in just a decade?
How have we forgotten the princesses we all are?
I sit here, pondering how i could've gotten this way.
I wonder how i have lost my way.
Here starts my story, not every other girls.

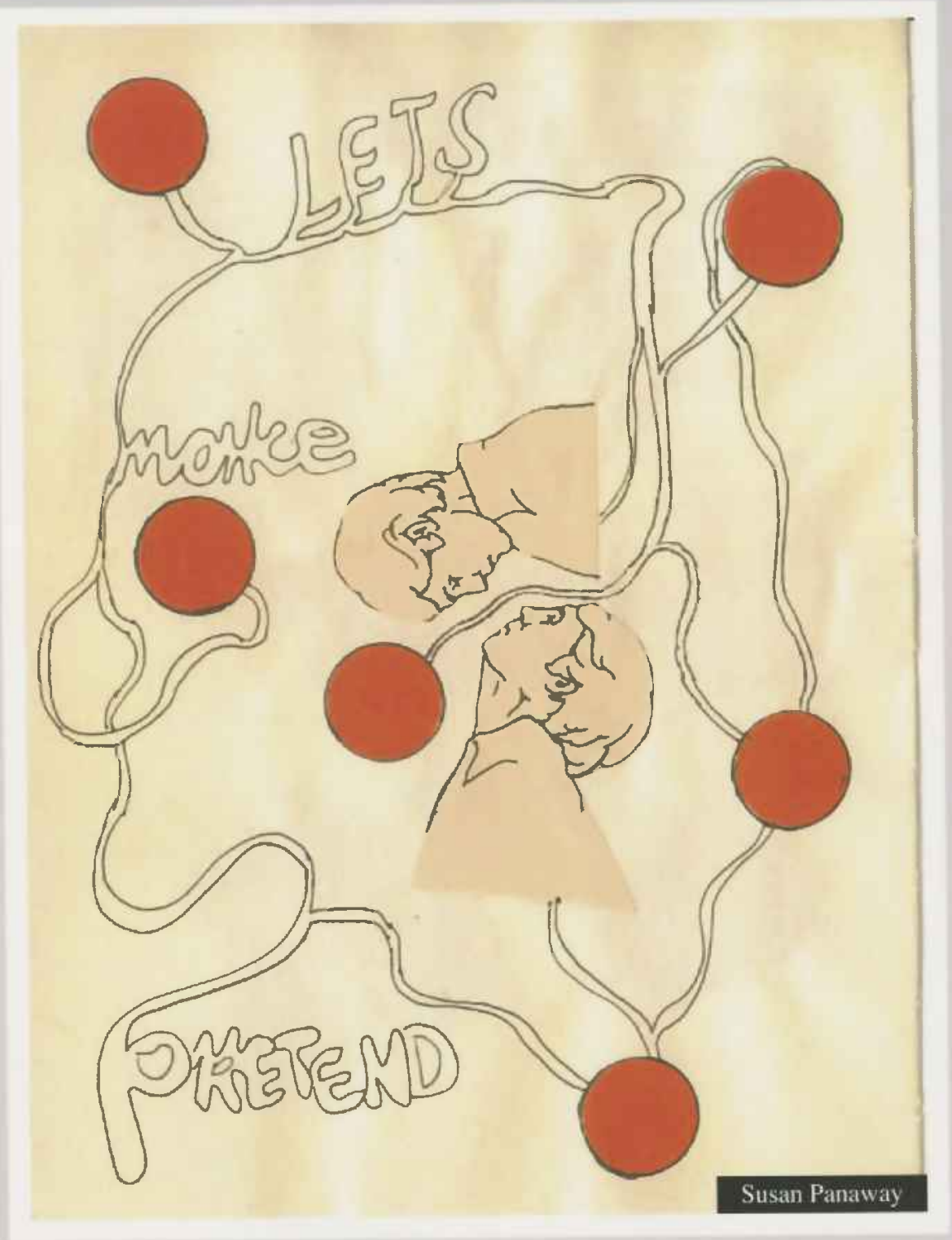
When i was seventeen, i forgot the person i was.
I forgot who made me and how important He was.
I forgot how beautiful and perfect i was made.
No one could tell me otherwise.

When i was eighteen, i abused the beautiful person i was.
I disregarded your creation as mere ugliness.
I decided for myself, i didn't even ask You.
Why?

I stand here, nineteen years of age.
I'm ready to accept myself for who i am.
I'm ready to accept myself for who You made me to be.
I'm not afraid, You are always with me.
I shudder because of the damage that is done.
I'm glad for my blank slate ahead of me.
Good morning tomorrow.
I arise from the ashes like a phoenix.
I arise from the ashes of my past.
I am ready to rejoice in Your Grace.



Mary Bove



Susan Panaway

HUMIDOR By Judy DeCarlo

Two hours ago, I walked out on twenty-seven years of marriage carrying nothing but a hastily packed suitcase and an empty humidor tucked under my arm. She had ordered, "Get out." So I did.

My wife's taunts rang in my ears as I made my escape. I could hear her clattering footsteps chasing me and her shouting, "Why are you taking that?" Like Bernice had any use for a humidor.

Now I sit alone on a bed at the Days Inn Motel. I pulled into the first place I'd seen; Bernice was always the one who saw to reservations. She set up the AAA discounts and scrupulously checked Trip Advisor reviews, her black eyes darting left and right, searching for the word "bedbugs."

I pick up the pillow, take a precautionary peek and drop it back. Lift it again and take a sniff. Seems OK to me. Good enough for one night, anyway. Tomorrow's Sunday, a day always yawning with possibility but usually ending in disappointment.

Why don't we do something? And something always ended up with me trotting from Home Depot to Target, following Bernice like a dog on a leash, and her not buying anything anyway. While I could've met the guys at Sharkey's, where they had TVs playing all the football games, cold beer on tap, and the best wings in town.

Grinning, I stroke the humidor. Tomorrow I could join them and wouldn't the guys be surprised. The old lady let you out? they'd ask. And what would I tell them? The truth? That Bernice hadn't just let me out. I'd gotten tossed out, after twenty-seven years.

They'd probably ask why. I'd have to answer honestly. That I didn't rightly know.

I open the humidor and admire its heavy wooden inlay. I like the sound it makes when I shut the lid. It makes a whooshing sound, creating a vacuum inside I suppose, so the cigars are kept sweet and fresh. Too bad old Fred, my father-in-law, may he rest in peace, didn't leave any good cigars behind. He liked smoking them, right up till the end. I'm surprised he wasn't more careful with the humidor, though, being how he treasured the thing. All this sooty white grit inside, it's like he didn't bother with ashtrays.

I walk three steps to the desk and pick up the telephone receiver, thinking I'd call up the guys. No dial tone. Maybe you needed to clear it with the front desk first, before calling your buddies and spreading your happy news. I start opening drawers, expecting to see a Gideon's Bible but wanting instructions on how to operate the phone. Instead, I find a local directory, a slim version with only yellow pages. It opens prophetically to the C's. Cigars. Tomorrow, even though it's Sunday and I hate shopping, maybe I'll drive to a cigar store. I'll go early, before the 1:00 games. I'll tell the salesman I'd inherited an heirloom humidor. He won't ask any questions. I'll point out it is a fine humidor, nice wood, teak maybe, and that only the finest cigars will suffice. Before that though, I'm going to dump all these ashes.

Truth is that Bernice has no use for a humidor. I'm doing her a favor, taking it off her hands. Plus I have the feeling, she's ready to get used to something new. Like life without me. And her father.

Revelation 20

By Hilary Hoover

I've spent my life comparing myself to the person that you dreamed me to be.
When you held me for the first time and planned the sum of my existence,
I was blinded to the endless opportunities of the sights that I was meant to see.
As I grew up, I just wanted to make you happy
Make you so proud of little me
But I shrouded myself to the world wondering when I would get your praise.

I swore up and down like a sailor when I got my first B.
Knew I would never be good enough for anything that you wanted.
I wasn't living up to your dream, so I wept and fell to my knees
Pushed my bones to the grindstone and became one with the floor.
I couldn't help but dream that perhaps there was something more...

But who was I to dream?
A dream is a careful destiny planned from the very start.
It takes time, it takes dedication, it takes everything- even your heart.

But it wasn't my dream.
So, I'll take back my heart because after twenty years I can see
You're not the one whose judgement I must appease.
The one in the mirror is the scarred face I must please.
All those years spent wondering if I would ever measure up-
I've finally come to the conclusion that for me, I'm enough.



Mary Bove



PhD Car Accident

By John Meholic

Sickly moonbeam powdered donut
shaking saliva out by the hour.
Remember to shiver out all your screams.
Pick out your favorite stool,
scared that the voices you hear
may Bar your eyes.

Pale surrender to a onetime classis poetry bartender.
She knew such happiness
slowly humiliating his loveliness
in a broken
down Budweiser Chevrolet.

The vitim of this rattlesnake converstaion
Is neither you, kid
Nor
You.

Concrete questions to be answered
in between the beaten blue bug

And
widowed undernaeth a
winter window display.
Ironically, the irony hasn't been poured yet.

Remember
to Martyr yourself
for the sake of Cancer.
In the name of Ulysesses!
Inhale the love
of the fucked up
and the "I don't giva shit."
Because on the long list of emptiness,
beached broken hearts,
beer and candy bars,
the stains on your teeth
float above me now.

Burnt holes in corduroys,
empty bottles and sugar cane.
What you are:
A lifetime, a cigarette,
a PhD Car Accident.

Ships on Black Seas

By Thomas Simko

There's the way. Sitting,
again, Indian-style. Is that
appropriate nomenclature?
Self-referencing aside, when
will all this be over, Pozzo?

A Novel
A Series of Seven Non Sequiturs
A world of paper
A sea of ink
A tower made of clocks

Why can't these be a part of all this?

Setting the sun to paper I'll
be home again soon

The alpha fish and beta males will compete
Naturally
In a bowl of glass and ambition
In fact
That's what they can call it:
The Glass Ambition Bowl
Brought to you by Budweiser
And TetraMin

Elvis Presley could preside over the half-time
ceremony
Why not?
This is my world, and I do what I want
Hips swaying, everything swaying
Buzzing
Blurring
Crashing comatose

Settling for the bucket
or the box

Whaddaya want on your tombstone?
Pepperoni and rose petals
Some nice vidalias below the footprints
I wonder what the carbon emission rating of a graveyard

If we're gonna be green, let's get serious
Paint
Spackle
Floral prints and that shit you put along the edges

Yep, there's a word for that somewhere
Let's find it together
(Yeah, that's right. I put a little fucking bow on it.)

So still sitting
Legs sleeping
The Indians aren't mad
(Because they're all dead)
Here, endlessly
Waiting for Godot

Backwards

By Kailee Hummel

He looks me up and down, smacks his lips,
Says, "How you doin'? You look good."
I look away, disgusted,
By his lack of tact, lack of wit, lack of better words.
He stares at me, his expression so condescending,
"White girl don't want a black man."
Yeah that's it.
Please.
It's your lack of respect, you fool.

She purses her lips, backs it up on me,
Grinding, pushing, provoking me,
All to the beat of the music.
She won't stop, til she gets a reaction.
In the end, I give in.
She contends,
Says, with a backwards glance,
Her words, dripping with mockery,
"Don't worry, you got moves too."
I sigh. What a relief.
I don't fit her stereotype of a white girl.

Now, you stand in front of me,
Going on about how the color of your skin
Held you back.
You had to overcome so much
To get to where you are today.
Your success, a rare thing in a white man's world.
That's right, you said a man's world.
But tell me this,
If your skin color held you back,
How the hell did you get so far?

You go on and on about your achievements,
Accomplished despite the countless offenses
against you,
The terrible disrespect you faced.
Making my success seem like nothing.
You say it's not your fault you were born
Black and poor.
Well, you know, I had no choice either.
It's not my fault I was born white.
And what do you know?
I had to struggle too.

You're doing a discourtesy to yourself.
Yeah, I'm talking to you.
You tell me I judge you the minute you walk in,
Writing you off because of the color of your
skin.
But it doesn't take a fool to see.
You've got it backwards, man.
Doesn't it seem like you're judging me?

Well, you hit one thing spot on.
I'll give you that.
You're right about racism.
It's more alive than ever before.

Woman

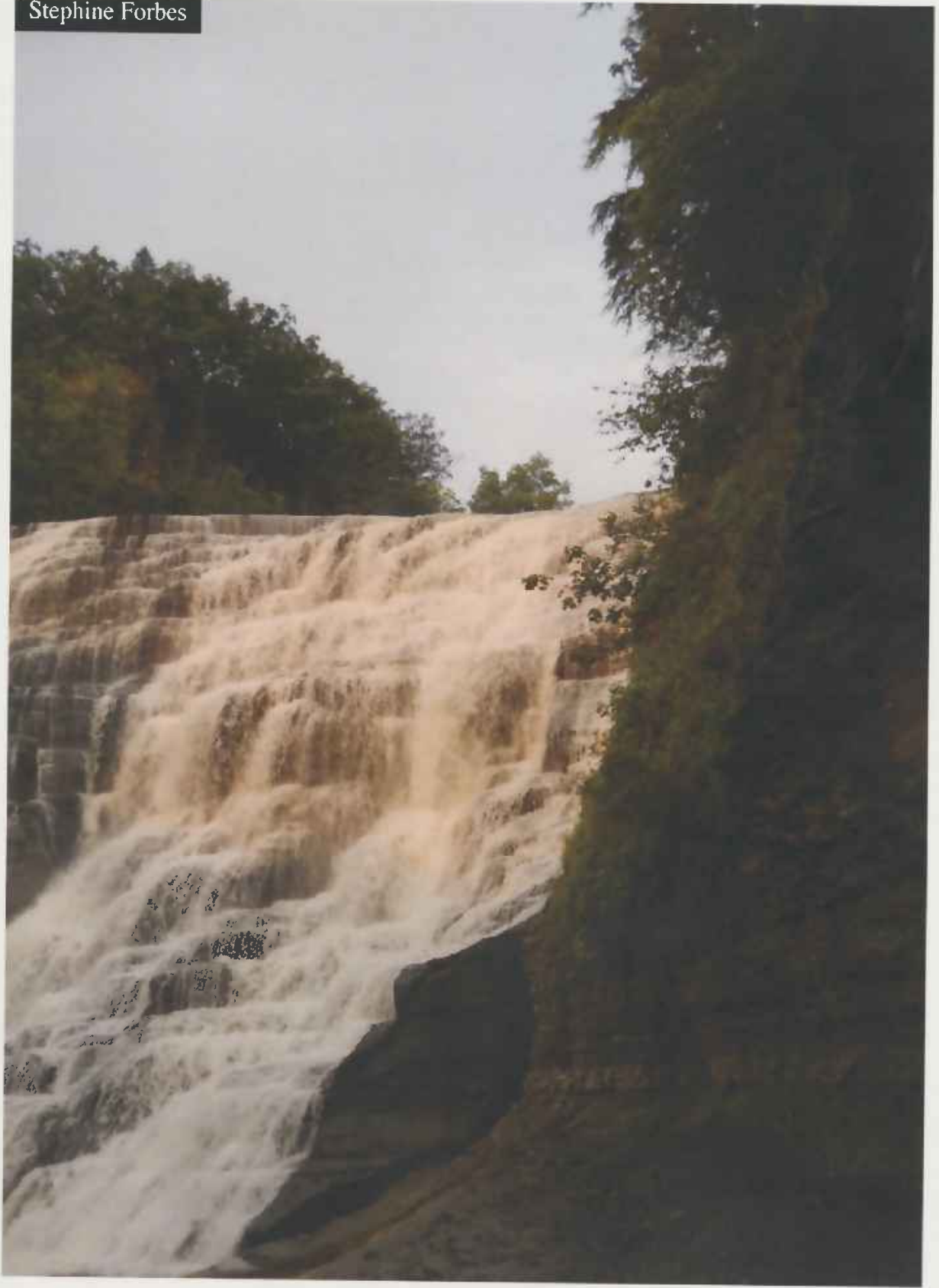
By Kelsie McNamara

I rest here: 6 feet up
Not down.
I wear a shadowed crevice
on the small of my frown.
I rest dusty; I rest hard
like the forgotten grassless winter grounds.
I am as wooden as the Cross.
I am as transparent as sound.
Damaged
they have called me.
Forgotten,
they won't see.
I have broken once,
twice. Diamonds only shatter as easily.
I have faced the fall.
I have healed my wounds from the Night.
Only the kindest tree's most damaged apples
will I ever again, Bite



Nicole Di Giovanni

Stephine Forbes



Losing My Religion

By Laura Thomas

From the outside I was the All-American Catholic girl. I was baptized in the Church, wore a beautiful white dress for my First Holy Communion with a huge party to follow, and received Confirmation smack dab in the middle of my "awkward" years. I went to Catholic school for four years but decided on a public school for high school. We went to church every Sunday as a family, and even when my parents were divorced my brother and I were strongly encouraged to attend Mass. I found other religions strange and weird. I remember when I was around ten, I attended a Baptist service with a friend of mine. The minister came out dressed in an Abraham Lincoln costume (I believe it was around President's Day) and I was scared to death. That service left quite an impression on my little Catholic brain and I swore I was never going to my friend's church again.

My teenage years passed without great incident. I was good in school, never got in trouble, and had no boyfriends. It was not until I entered my twenties that I found my freedom and realized how extremely boring I actually was. I was having a good time, but I still made a conscious effort to still attend Mass on Sunday. When I slept in on a Sunday and missed Mass that week I would feel really bad about it. (Good old Catholic guilt working its' magic!) By this time my parents relationship with the Church had changed dramatically. My Dad moved out and started a new life and my Mom became very disillusioned about the Church's attitude toward divorced Catholics. According to the Church, they were seen as something of a pariah and were told that they should not receive the Body of Christ or marry again in the Church. UNLESS..... you pay the Church \$2000.00 for an annulment which is basically a piece of paper that says the marriage never existed and that my brother and I were little bastards. She decided to stick with being a pariah.

Let's skip right through my twenties because some things should not be talked about by a Catholic young lady. Anyway, I meet a guy who is really great, super sweet, my parents loved him, and he had a job. Bingo! It's time to get married. Paul is not Catholic, but Protestant. I wanted a Catholic ceremony and he had no problem with that. So we meet with my priest, lie about having separate residences, and sign a paper saying that when we have children we will raise them Catholic. Paul is not religious at all and raises no objections to any of this. As I said before, he is really great.

The happy twosome becomes a threesome very quickly. A year after we are married we become the parents of a beautiful baby boy. We are thrilled, life is great, all my Catholic dreams are coming to fruition. We join a Church that has a very young parish

and I decide that to be the perfect wife, mother, and all around Super Woman, I also need to be the most perfect Catholic. I throw myself into the Church. I take classes to become a Eucharistic minister, I start teaching religious education, and most importantly, I make sure we are all color coordinated when we attend Mass. This seemed to be very important at this Church. By this time we have another son and life is pretty hectic, but I embrace my Catholicness with all the gusto I possibly can. My husband's only complaint about being dragged to Church every Sunday with two toddlers is " Why do they make us stand up and sit down so much? My knees are killing me!!" Unfortunately, I didn't have an answer for him.

Then something happens. I start to read things I don't like. I watch the news and I hear about priests abusing young boys, gay parishioners being shunned, and copious amounts of money being spent on cover ups and payoffs. But I forge ahead and decide that it would be a great idea to start a food pantry at the parish with my second grade CCD class. The food pantry would be a resource for parishioners that could use a little extra help and at the same time teach the kids about helping others. I approach our parish priest about it and he tells me no, we can't do it. This is his reason, and I quote, "I don't want our parish to have those kind of people coming here. It would attract the wrong element." I was speechless and I was also devastated. Everything I was ever taught and ever believed in was just shot to pieces. Didn't Jesus teach us to treat our neighbor as we would want to be treated? Didn't he teach that the meek would inherit the earth? After that experience everything changed for me. I could not look my priest in the eye and I decided at the end of the school year, I would not be returning to religious ed. We started to sleep in on Sundays much more and my husband's knees were doing much better. When I was told at Mass one Sunday by our bishop that if I voted for Barack Obama in the upcoming election I would not be welcome in Church anymore, I knew that this was not the place for me. I started praying on my own and I asked myself, did I become Super Catholic because it helped me feel closer to God or because I thought it fit the image of who I thought I should be. I think it was a little of both.

I have tried some other religions on for size over the years.; Episcopalian, which I call Catholic Light, and "Born Again" which was even scarier than the minister dressed as Abe Lincoln. I counted how many times the minister called me a "sinner" during the service and I am pretty sure it was over 100. So I decided that organized religion is not for me. Do I believe in God? Absolutely. Do I try to follow his teachings by being a good and kind person? Every day. No, I am not raising my sons as Catholics. I am raising them to treat every person they meet with respect, to not judge another human being until you have walked in their shoes, and to thank God every night for all his blessings.

God's in His Heaven

By Melvin Jay Busi

There once was a sparrow that would not sing
Of a Muse his heart was deprived
A soul gripped by sorrow, shadowed by doubt
Its gleam from darkness derived

His heart and wings with darkness laden,
To take breath was, itself, a chore
A resounding crash rang out through the woods
A giant fell stiffly to the sylvan floor

A man lay trapped beneath a branch
He could hardly move for pain
The sparrow swooped down to see this plight
To see him struggle in vain

The man looked up with a smile
(In spite of his hurt, he could still smile.)

"Pretty bird, gentle bird, lovely bird
Will you not sing, and dispel this pain incurred?"

The bird moved not a feather.

"Pretty bird, tender bird, lovely bird
Will you not sing, and make sweet this death deferred?"

The bird stood still, as if tethered.

"Pretty bird, kindly bird, lovely bird
Will you not sing, and give solace to this man interred?"

The bird shed tear, and took up the endeavor.

The song was sharp, the song was black
The song was bitter, but it did not lack
Strength of heart, nor warmth of soul,
Nor a dream of joyous life, extolled

Despite the terrors of the now
With wonders innumerable is life endowed
The will to live - so long as you have this
Heaven will appear wherever you wish

The man looked up with a smile.
(It no longer hurt; he continued to smile.)

The bird looked up, gazed upon the great blue sky
A world without end, stretching far, stretching wide

A soul gripped by sorrow, shadowed by doubt,
Its gleam from darkness derived,
Began to quiver and shake, and threatened to go out
But flared up anew, resplendent with goodness revived.

The sparrow had hope in his heart and faith in his wings.
His voice rang out sweetly, carried far by the winds.

All's right with the world as long as you sing.



Alexandria Smith

Heather Marsicano



A Ticking Time Bombshell

By Susan Panaway

Mother Nature, are you alright?
You don't look like yourself.
Have those boys got you down?

You fade after each falling minute.
Don't lose yourself in a world of crime.
Spring into action, Dear.

Mother Nature, you'll be alright.
A hair cut, just a trim, will fix you up.
They'll never notice anything.
Comb your hair and wash your face.

Baby New Year is screaming for
a drink.

The Milkman's dressed in white.
Don't be alarmed.

Wait just a second,
A little rogue will hide it all
Until Time has another
setback.

Has Time flown off the handle
again?
Leap this year, Sweetheart.
The hour hand will never land on
your face again.

Mother Nature, you are alright
once you leave Father Time.

Susan Panaway



Imprisoned

By Jacob Hebda

Cold iron bars and damp cell walls
Dingy, filthy, darkness
It surrounds and envelops
But does it penetrate?

Health and well-being.
Where is it in society,
Despite the idealistic figures
And the deceit of the media?

Blazes of torment
Pain for every mistake
A hellish judgment awaits
Or is it a Fear imagined?

Why so swift to condemnation?
The act of hostile judgment
Saps our souls of character
And leaves our essence drained and withered.

A well-wrought web
Has us as its gleaming threads.
The urge to separate, forsake this communion.
A thrust into eternal darkness.

Without Bones

By John Meholic

I'm being stirred like chicken soup
On a cold winter day
gently
without care
Sometimes
salt and pepper
is added
to my being
But mostly
I am left
untouched
to follow a
boring recipe
Goddamn
I hate the face
of
the man who prepares me
projecting fake emotion
upon me
From within the pot
I want to spit
my oily body
out at his face
but without bones
it can be difficult



Auraleah Grega

Lisa Witkoski



Simple Steps

By Nikki Helwig

Simple Steps are all it takes,
To recover from these mistakes,
To me, this quote is a lie,
For the days of recovery never die

The battle fought against my own mind,
Is the hardest struggle that I will find,
All the thoughts inside my head,
Horrible memories I want to shed

It's hard to rid them from my brain,
The embarrassment, the hurt, the excruciating pain,
This sounds dramatic to another's ear,
But for me, it is fact, hard to hear

The want to be normal, just to fit in,
Knowing that this is a hard quality to win,
So tired of crying myself to sleep,
The secret inside, just too big too keep

I want to get better, someday, somehow,
Then 10 seconds later, I give up, only for now,
Sick of all these thoughts, they have made a game,
Against myself that I feel I have barely overcome

I look at some girls around me,
The struggles that they also have and see
We all have the determination to overcome
And to get our life back...only some

Only I can make myself better,
Just by writing a personal letter,
Doing something positive in this world and for my own life,
Following my dreams, relieving myself from this strife

Reflection

By Kailee Hummel

Deep as diving water, taken out into the sea
Vibrant as summer eyes, reflecting Charlie's love for me
Soft as snowflakes falling, white like winter rain
Smooth like ice running over my red, swollen leg
Passionate as the August sun, sweat beading on my skin
Cool as shower water, washing me away again
Guarded as a broken heart, playing it too safe to love once more
Free as the autumn wind, picking up the leaves and letting them soar.



Samantha Zaykoski

Shooting Stars

By Kathleen Lord

Silent screams, invisible cries
Dreams that haunt the starless sky.
Churning, yearning, tumbling, fumbling;
Yet to see the world is crumbling.

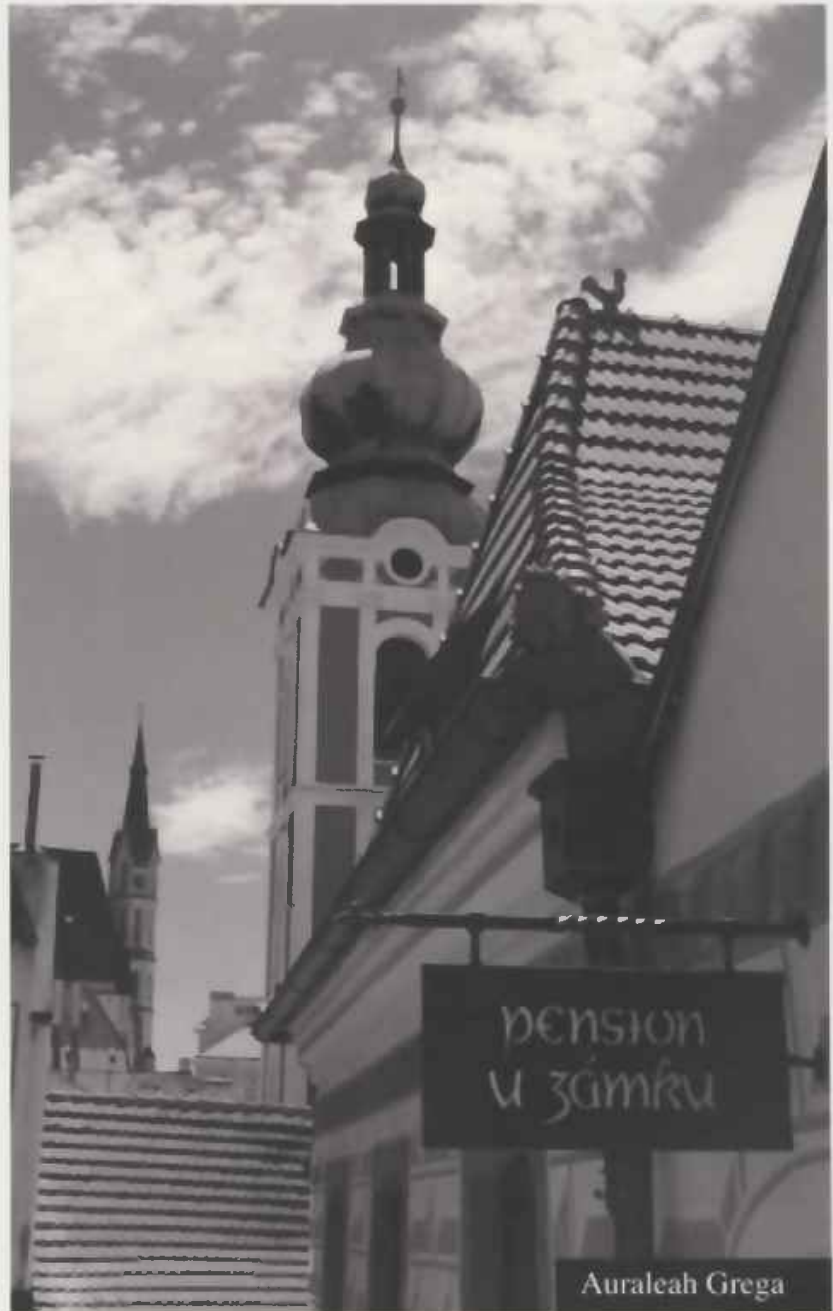
Darkness covers all the land.
Oceans tremble, waves of sand.
Nothingness and loveless-ness
Haunting, daunting, screaming, teeming.

No one knows and no one cares.
Oblivious to all that's there.
Streaks of power, sparks and showers,
Silently poses, caress.

Broken dreams, bleeding hearts,
Minds that race, seas that part.
Lies and dies, those fable skies,
Nothing is believing.

Try to stop me?
Dare to try.
No one sees beyond the lies.
Ends will come, both far and near.
Creeping closer, year by year.

Silent screams, invisible cries.
Dreams that haunt a starless sky.
Churning, yearning, crying, dying
No one out there's even trying



Auraleah Grega

Everybody Gets One

By Andrew Corbett

When we made the "everybody gets one" rule it was a Friday. The rule states that each one of us can ask the other two to move a corpse, no questions asked. It's a onetime deal, and also not something we ever thought we would need to make a rule about. So, like I said, it was a Friday. A bright, annoyingly sunny Friday. Matt, Lilly and I were just trying to enjoy some fake Italian food, courtesy of everyone's favorite incorrectly named chain restaurant. Olives grow on trees, in a grove, and not in a garden. As the average priced wine flowed, we munched on breadsticks and salad.

'Whooshwhooshwhoosh'

"Jesus Matt, do you ever turn your phone off? We've been here five minutes and you've gotten about fifteen texts."

"Lay off. I'm talking to a cute girl."

Lilly snorted out a laugh and said, "Is she cute, or is she easy?" Before Matt could respond I cut in "The fact that she's easy makes her cute."

He scowled at me a little and turned to Lilly.

"I was going to say she's cute. She likes to drink, she's young. Long dark hair and dark skin. Skin tight clothes that are always just a little too short. Mouth like a sailor and she always wants to party. Huge chest. She's the perfect girl."

That didn't sound like the perfect girl to me, but to each their own I guess.

"Where'd you meet this winner? A Wal-Mart parking lot at two in the morning?" Lilly said.

"Har Har. I met Carly while I was at work. She comes in for a sandwich now and then. You should know that, you and Tom were there the last time she came in."

"Yea, but I was too busy noticing how she completely lacked any social graces whatsoever. She was pretty awful."

"She wasn't that bad. She was at least trying to make conversation."

I laughed.

"Yeah. She started off the conversation by asking if I was the gay best friend, and if I was a top or bottom. She's super good at conversation. Also, while I appreciate the fact that she was trying to win Lilly and me over, telling us stories about how she stole a car and got wasted at fifteen is not the way to impress us. Nor is a story about her giving a blowjob to someone in public at a pool party. Also that thing she said about hating fat, ugly, smart and red headed people was a little weird man."

"Just give her the benefit of the doubt Tom. I really like her."

"No. You really like sex. And don't think we don't see the pics Carly's sending you. You're out with your friends in public. You shouldn't be looking at grainy snapshots of a pair of boobs or a vag."

"Lilly does have a point there. This is a family restaurant, and your behavior is highly inappropriate."

"Tom, you should not be lecturing anyone about inappropriate behavior. You threatened to 'break up with me' at Target if I didn't stop obsessing over the action figures. We're not even dating. I'm not gay. You threatened to slap me across the face and yell about how I cheated on you."

"In his defense, Matt, he didn't actually do any of that, and the compulsive toy shopping is annoying. You should probably see someone about that. It's turning into..."

'Whooshwhooshwhoosh'

"A real problem..." Lilly trailed off as we both noticed that Matt had gone quiet as he stared at his cell phone.

"Hey guys, this is going to sound really bad, but I kind of need your help to move a dead dog."

Lilly and I stared at Matt. He told us that while babysitting her three siblings, Carly's dog had died. She needed some help as she didn't want the little ones see the dog, and she had no idea who to ask, except for Matt. Lilly and I, essentially being family to one another and Matt, agreed to go with him and help him if he needed any assistance. We paid our bill, got in Matt's jeep, headed for the highway and mentally prepared ourselves for moving a corpse, which consists of actively trying to avoid thinking about what we were about to do. It didn't work that well.

"How the hell did we end up being the go-to-guys for animal corpse removal?"

"You are seriously going to owe both of us big time."

Matt looked a little scared when Lilly said that. It was more of a growl than words, and it promised that there was going to be repercussions for Matt, for once again, forcing us to deal with his psychotic love life. Her tone matched the day quite nicely though. As they bickered, back and forth, I laid my forehead against the window of the jeep and watched the world go by. It was boiling out. Lazy spirals of haze were rising from the blacktop of the road everywhere we looked, and the grass had browned and looked crispy, like it would crumble to dust at a touch.

We found ourselves in a less than savory neighborhood. Carly's yellow, dirty, house was built into the side of a steep hill with several plateaus built in, and there was a staircase cut into the hill on the left side of the house. A wooden railing, with its green paint flaking and falling off ran up the right side of the stair case. And next to that staircase, swaying back and forth, 6 inches above the landing of the staircase was the dog. Carly had let him out on his run and he had wrapped his chain around a post in the banister and fallen off the side of the staircase. His chain was just half a foot too short.

He weighed over a hundred pounds. It was obvious that Carly couldn't have moved him by herself. Matt knocked on the door and started speaking in hushed tones with Carly as Lilly and I spotted curious little sets of eyes peeping through the window at us. We pointed out the spectators and Carly disappeared

back into the house for a moment, trailed by yells and the telltale scurrying of feet. Lilly and I approached the staircase and realized at that moment, that we hadn't been told everything. This dog had been dead for hours.

The silver water dish sitting on the steps was completely empty and totally dry. There was a bowl of wet food that smelled like it had been baking in the sun for at least a day. Flies clouded the air around the dog and the dish, an enveloping swarm of annoyance and sadness. I realized then, that Matt wasn't going to be very helpful in this process. He was too busy comforting Carly, and rightfully so, though it was frustrating to us.

"Can we get a blanket or something? We should put him in something to move him to make sure the kids don't see and Matt's jeep stays clean."

"No. I don't want to get anything dirty."

Carly's response to Lilly's question left me dumbfounded. Lilly stared, open-mouthed at Carly's callous disregard for her pet's life. Both Lilly and myself had grown up surrounded with dogs and to us, Carly's attitude was disturbing. Even Matt was bothered by it.

After a couple of terse words with Matt, that I couldn't quite hear, she slipped back into the house. She returned a moment later and thrust a ratty, old, blue, blanket at Lilly, with a pout that clearly showed how put upon she was by our request. We approached the dog slowly. Not out of fear, or disgust, but out of respect. Lilly and I shared an understanding that while this dog may have been neglected in life, he should at least be treated with dignity in his death. I wrapped the blanket around his rigor mortis ravaged frame and lifted. The weight of him hanging there made it impossible to unhook his chain, so as I lifted, Lilly freed him. Moving the corpse, however, disturbed some of the insects, and as we laid him down, much to our horror, a bee came crawling out of his nose. Lilly stared, lost in the quiet buzz of bugs and her own private thoughts and I seethed with rage, and my hands clenched into fists at my sides. This one strange little occurrence seemed the greatest of all desecrations. It seemed like no one cared about the final repose of this once beautiful animal, and though I couldn't blame nature for following the natural course, it didn't make the sight less heart wrenching. After sharing a knowing and silent look with Lilly, I bent and lifted his corpse. I cradled him in my arms as best I could, but it was difficult, as his blanket wrapped limbs were stiffened and outstretched, as if he had been caught in the middle of a mad dash after a rabbit and flash frozen, a snapshot of a remembrance of life. Lilly reached over and grabbed one end of the blanket and we carried him down the stairs, wrapped in his pale blue shroud.

We gently placed him in the rear of the jeep as Matt descended the steps to join us, keys in hand, and opened the driver's door. Lilly got in the passenger seat without saying a word and Matt paused, standing next to the open door to stare at me. I looked away and then opened the rear driver's side door and got in the jeep, maintaining the silence that seemed to have blanketed the world. No more flies buzzing, no cars honking,

no radio blasting, no words. Just silence. The sun had started to set, and everything was tainted that fiery, bloody orange, like the universe was burning. We drove, with the bloody sky to our backs and the blue-grey darkness of twilight in front of us, still not speaking, though so much was said.

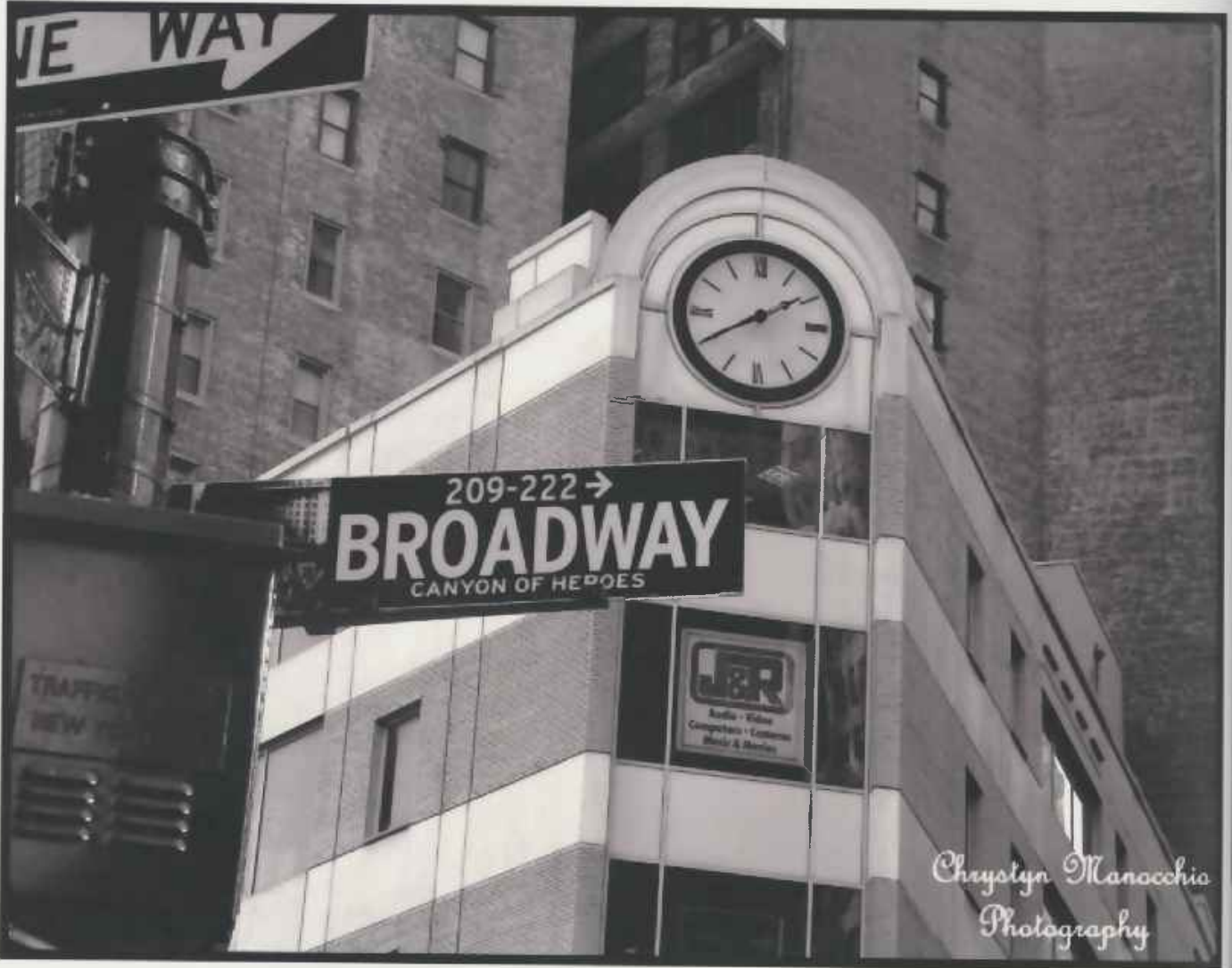
By the time we reached the animal hospital that would take care of the body, full night had fallen. The on call staff brought out a stretcher to take the dog inside and Matt and Lilly followed. I stayed outside, alone, leaning against the jeep, breathing deeply. Everything was still silent, and it seemed like the world had slowed to a stop. I slid down, until I was sitting on the blacktop, and rested my head, tilted towards the sky, against the wheel well. There was no moon, but the sky was bright with stars, like someone had strewn it with broken glass. Bright, sharp points of twinkling light, promising not hope, or safety, but rather, an end. These stars were all dead. The light I was seeing had taken immeasurable amounts of time to reach me, and by now, surely the source of the light was gone, exploded in a last blaze of glory or collapsed in on itself until it was dense enough to rip a hole in the fabric of reality. And yet, there I was, bearing silent witness to their beauty, even after their death.

One last, lengthy breath and I stood. I felt empty, but not in a bad way. I was ready to charge headfirst back into life. I was hurt. Something inside me was deeply wounded in a profound way, but I felt more alive than ever. Matt and Lilly exited the animal hospital and I saw Matt tuck his checkbook back into his jacket. Apparently Carly couldn't even be bothered to pay for the expenses. I didn't ask what was going to happen to the body. It didn't matter. It was time for the somberness, and silence to be banished. A dog is a happy animal, full of life and joy. The three of us had done what needed to be done. We honored the life that was lost, each in our own way. I won't say how they did it. It's their story, only to be told if they choose. I, personally, resolved to move on, and try to have some fun. I gathered my two best friends, the people who meant everything to me, in my arms, one on each side. The world seemed to breathe deep in synchronicity with us. Hugging them tightly, I spoke, and the world began to spin, and sound washed over us.

"Just so you know, we each get one of these. No questions asked. I plan on using mine for a human though."

"Yeah. You really should have saved yours, Matt."

A moment of laughter and we, along with the rest of the world, move on.



*Chrystyn Manocchia
Photography*

Good Times

By John Meholic

I will saw off my flesh and use
Crooked teeth to stutter
Broken words and
FRAGMENTED
SENTENCES

It is better this way
With No Skin to Feel
Just
Muscles for
Eating

My eyes will roll about
This flaming head
As semen seeps through
Your bedroom slippers
to rot the tiny pink
Toes that we call
Children

Nonsense fills my lungs
Which
Pulverize my chest
Causing
Blood to sprinkle out onto your
Sundress

All the while
Logic is in the clock
With no face
No one will look there

Sit there on the couch
With flesh
And perfect teeth
Your mechanical hand
And
Box of toys
Gather around the burning piano and pound out the
good times...because
a world without me
will be spiritualized and free

Her By Kailee Hummel

I can see her, in the distance
Flitting in and out of my view,
Taunting me.
She is lovely. Beautiful, in fact.
But for me, unattainable.
She knows this. And takes pleasure in this knowledge.
She knows how she tortures me,
and she loves every minute of it.

To the untrained eye, she looks harmless.
But I know how she is.
I have walked with her before.
When she's on your side, she brings the sunshine,
The blue skies.
When she's yours, you are so high,
And you don't ever wanna come down.

But she's a fickle one. Suddenly, she'll turn her back on you,
and you're left, plummeting to the ground.
Suddenly, you're so far down,
You can only catch a glimpse of her.
In the blink of an eye or
The snap of your fingers,
She's gone.
And you're left gasping for air.

Try to chase her. Countless have,
Only to find out that the more you pursue,
The quicker she'll slip between your fingertips.

Who is this girl? You may ask.
Well, to most, she's known as
Happiness.

Cyclic By Andrew Corbett

a cloud of smoke hisses from my lips
Another cloud and the lighter goes back in my bag
A boy with piercings and curly hair is talking to me.
He's cute.
He's straight.
I flick my ashes.
My roommate asks me to go to church.
I laugh inside and politely decline.
Two more puffs, and a flick of ashes.
I really should be doing something
but it's all too much effort.
Another cloud, and I wish I were drunk or stoned.
Another pierced boy also cute.
...straight.
Puff Flick Snub Rustle Click...
A flame bursts into existence and
a cloud of smoke hisses from my lips

All My Yesterdays

By Thomas Simko

Sleazy, no, squealie, no, what the hell was the word?
Scrunchy. NO. Swanky? Closer.
SLINKY!
THAT'S the word.

It's a memory of a memory.
Remembering a remembrance.
I remember what I was remembering.

Drunk.
Of course
The counter-top sways.
She says the song makes her feel slinky.
It was a good word.
It was a good drink.
It was a good night.

I'm not friends with any of them anymore.
I think the band was The Toadies?
Memories, especially drunk memories, are drunk
In a way
In and of themselves.

They dive down and bob up
They blur
They fade.

Remembering is actually a lot like drinking
Hard drinking too
Not that social shit

I remember toy cars
And trucks
Not those plastic not safe for children under three made in
china cars
Metal ones.
Hard and cold
And safe, on the asphalt of the driveway

It's sunny
And there's a two car garage in front of me.
My cousin is there? Or am I adding him?
I was told he was there. Do I remember?
And then the reel ends.
About a moment in.

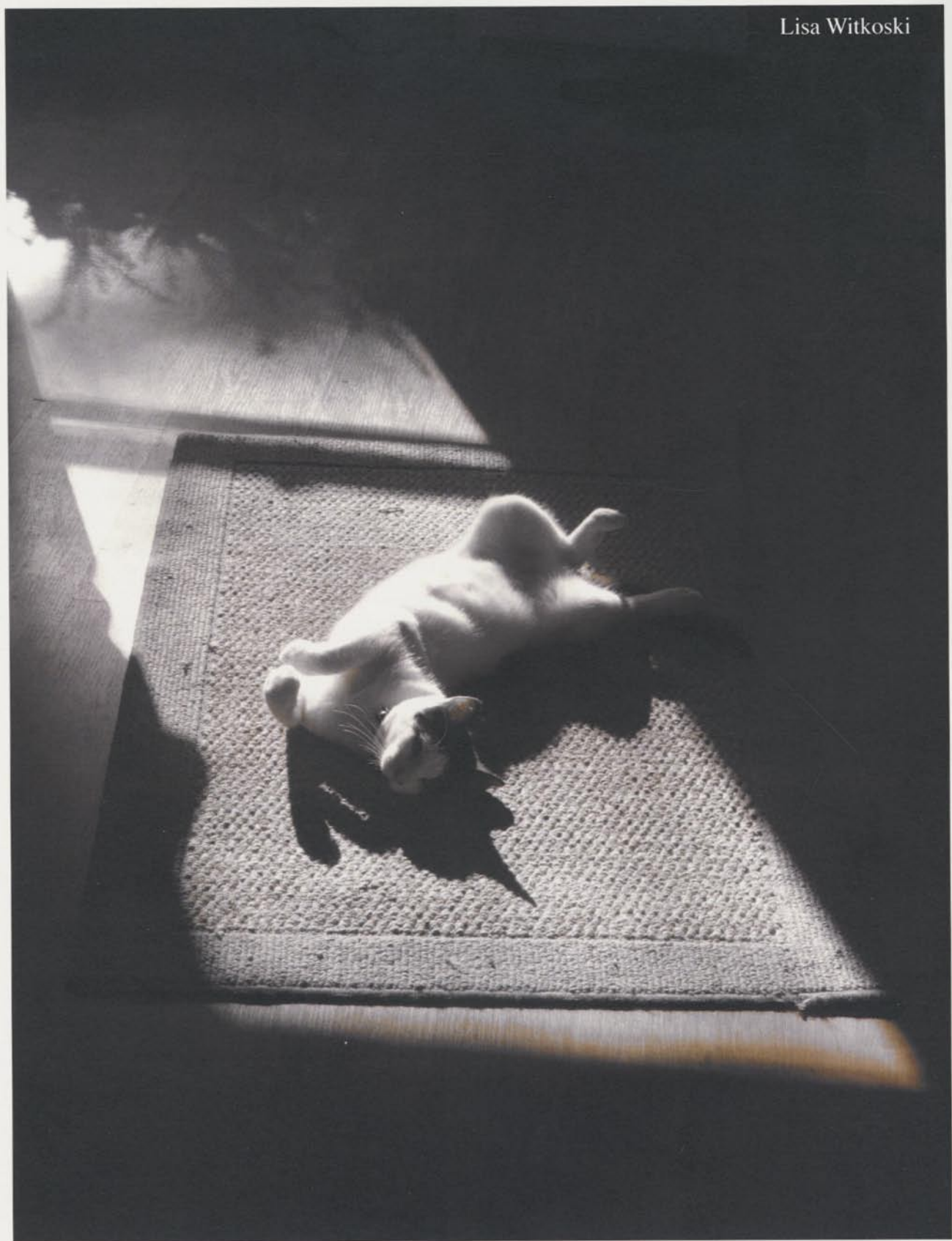
Spinning in a bathtub.
Spinning in the little parks they used to have for kids
At McDonald's
Spinning in a computer chair
At Best Buy
When I should have been working.
Spinning
Holding my daughter in my arms.

Will I remember these things tomorrow?
Will I invent something new to remember?
Will I find this
Years from now
And remember this moment?

Samantha Zaykoski



Lisa Witkoski



Sandwich

By John Meholic

What is this smell?
Open faced roast beef sandwich
Placed in front of my
Swaying body
My
Swollen head

Why do I always come back to you?
Toasted bread..
Dark gravy..
Pink center..
How I love
my
Red topping

Why am I afraid to lose you?
You're always to be found
On this menu
But one day maybe not!
You'll be far away
While I'm left alone
Craving your taste
My mouth dribbles while I look
At you

Why do you do this to me?
I can't even fathom
Someone else eagerly sticking
their knife into you
Making...
Warm juices pour out onto the
Plate

Why is the table shaking?
My hand clutched tight
My eyes ..
bright blue berries
while my friend sits down
and takes a bite.

Call me crazy

By Kailee Hummel

I'm on the verge of a breakdown.
No, let's call it a let down.
It's not a matter of life or death.
It ain't even a matter of my happiness.
And it certainly isn't matter of me being saved.

It's a matter of a spark.
Not being turned into a flame.
And I just want to be on fire once again.

It's not a matter of willpower.
It's not a matter of changing my ways.
The thing is, it's a matter of patience.
And that's just something
I will never understand.

It's not a matter of shame.
It's matter of wits.
This kind of thing is a game.
And me? I'm a pawn.
It seems that by playing this game,
I'll just get in the way.

So I'll take step back.
Take a breath and just be.
Watch the sun set on my expectations
And close the door on my hopes for change.

INSTRESS 2012

46TH



EDITION