

Duck Soup

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Creeping Darkness, digital image, by Tom Ritchey

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Abstract Snowman, photography, by Terri Pearce

ALONE



By Hollis Fischer

The wind makes itself known:
a dry crust of branch acts as its finger.
The slow tap, tap tap, tap, loops like a
reel-to-reel.

I shut my eyes – *tight*, but am still afraid.
The finger becomes a chorus!
Trees have many hands.
They are all open and stretched,
and mimic razor blades.

I squeeze my lids with the utmost contraction:
I cannot enter a safe place.
The echo of nail and blade sound out again.
My self's self comes apart like a double
negative.

The doors are locked, and all the money
is hidden.

My black cat is buried deep in the catacombs
that meander as fat worms under the bed.
There is no place I can get to: I am alone
in the dark –

the dark, I see grow thicker,
like black button-eyes orphaned in the shade.

Then it comes, the howls and whispers –
that thick thud of breath lapping at the pane!
Is it god or monster? I have fallen a long way. **DS**

Beautiful Disaster, mixed media, by Kapil Dixit

The Camping Trip

By Tomm Gillies

The moment I had been anticipating – or was it dreading – for days had arrived. We were going camping – just me and my son, Danny. I had promised him earlier this spring that we would go as soon as the mercury got above 70°. He reminded me of it fact on a daily basis, but this morning he practically ripped me out of bed at a time when a rooster would have been offended. I followed him bleary-eyed as he led me to the window above the kitchen sink where you could see the outdoor thermometer.

“Do you see it, Daddy?” he said, excitedly. “Do you see it?”

“Yes,” I lied, squinting my eyes, trying to make out the one-inch high numbers on our digital thermometer. I turned on the faucet, splashed some cold water on my face, and looked again. There was no denying it; it was 72°, clear as day.

“What time is it?” I asked. I didn’t really want to know the answer.

“5:13.”

He had missed out on the subtleties of analog clocks, and I suddenly wondered why I was the one everyone considered a stickler for details. I knelt down to his eye level.

“Danny,” I said, thinking of the exact words to say so as not to spoil this moment for him and have to hear about how I ruined his life twenty years from now when he’s in therapy. “Maybe we could wait until the sun has had a chance to wake up before we get started. What’dya say, huh?”

“Sure, Dad.”

The way he said it reminded me of the promises I had broken in the six and a half years he’d been on this earth and I rushed to fill the void I saw developing in his eyes.

“I’m not saying we’re not going, Bud. I’m just saying let’s get a little more rest before we pack up. I told you we’re going camping as soon as it gets above 70 and it’s above 70. Okay?” Why do I always have to add that last little bit? How am I going to get reassurance from a six-year-old? Here I was, still trying to get the approval of my own father through this little boy who just wanted to have some “Daddy Time.” He didn’t seem convinced by my placating request.

“I’ll tell you what,” I responded to his unspoken query, “you go start pulling clothes out and put ‘em on your bed while I make some coffee.”

“Okay!” He spun around and was gone in a flash. His renewed excitement resonated off his pounding feet throughout the house. Inside, I knew I shouldn’t have relented so quickly, but maybe one time wouldn’t hurt. They say rules are meant to be broken. I just wasn’t used to being the one to break them. I could hear him banging his drawers open and grabbing clothes. I followed the path he had beaten back to his room.

“Danny,” I whispered, “we don’t want to wake the neighbors up, okay? Then they’ll want to go camping with us.”

“Oh. Sorry, Daddy,” he whispered back, which really wasn’t much quieter than his regular voice, but I let that slide, too – we were back to “Daddy.” I guess it’s time to have one of those lax days, where you let go of the restraints and just live. I’ve never really been able to adequately map those out. Watching him tear clothes out of his bureau like the Tasmanian Devil, I thought maybe he did. Should I fix it, like I usually do, or let him choose? The danger? He brings the wrong clothes and there’s still a chance it could get cold again

this weekend. When was the last time I saw a weather report? I better go find one.

“Make sure to take some long sleeve shirts, too, Buddy. I’m going to go make that coffee.” I’m not sure he heard me, but I decided to let him have this moment the way he wanted it.

I shuffled back down the hallway, bypassing the kitchen and the prospect of coffee, and entered my study. Priorities. I hadn’t really planned this trip; it was Danny’s adventure. What am I going to pack? The weather. Check the weather – make coffee. Make coffee – check the weather. Is it really that difficult a decision? Okay. Here. Turn the computer on; go make coffee; come back and check the weather. I hit the power button on my desktop and monitor and headed back to the kitchen – two decisions made. I will make it through the day without my To Do List. Perhaps that will be my mantra for this weekend?

“Morning, honey.” My wife, Sarah, surprised me when I entered the kitchen, standing there in the dim pre-dawn light, her hair and clothes evidencing another hard night of sleep.

“Hi,” I managed, trying unsuccessfully to conceal my shock. “It’s 72°.”

“Oh. The camping trip.”

“Yeah. The camping trip.” We had been talking about it for the past few weeks, she encouraging me to abandon the planning of a trip that could take place without any foreknowledge.

“So, how’s it going?”

“I’ll tell you after I get some coffee in me.”

“I take it Danny’s already awake?” My wife has an amusing way of

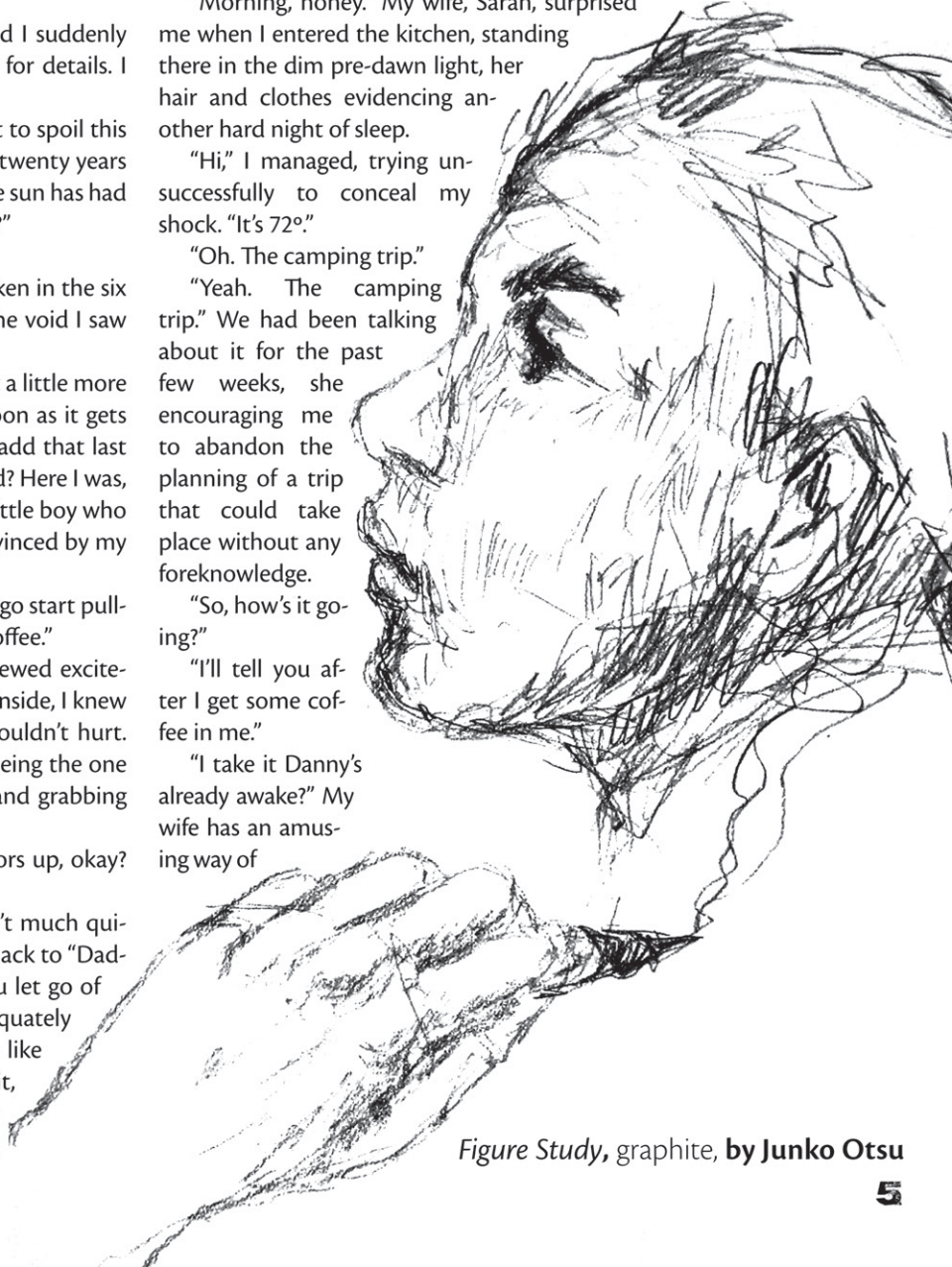


Figure Study, graphite, by Junko Otsu

“Danny,” I said, thinking of the exact words to say so as not to spoil this moment for him and have to hear about how I ruined his life twenty years from now when he’s in therapy.

pointing out the obvious – at least she thought it was amusing.

“Why do you think I’m out of bed before 7 o’clock on a Saturday?” My routines were legendary not only at the office, but here at home also. “Oh, damn.”

“What?”

“I forgot, I’m supposed to go golfing with Senator Hartwick this morning. We’ve been pursuing him for months.”

“Why do you have to go? You’re not one of the executives.”

“Honey, would you make me some coffee? I have to go check something.”

I walked as fast as I dared back to the study to get my appointment book. Sure enough, there it was in black and white – golf.

“Bill,” she had followed me. “He has been talking about nothing else for the last month. Who is more important, Senator Hardass or Danny?”

“What?” I didn’t like the way this was going.

“Is this going to be like the Science Fair?”

“Science Fair?” *Where do they come up with this stuff?*

“You don’t even remember, Bill. You told me – you *promised* me – you wouldn’t do this. And now it’s every time.”

“Do what?”

“This. Put work before family.”

She had me in her trap. “It’s not every time. And besides, this golf game was on the books weeks ago.” *She’s condemning me for following her advice!* “See? I knew this would happen. You said, ‘Don’t plan the trip, Bill. Let Danny decide.’ And now it’s my fault I have a work commitment?” I started to turn the tables in my favor.

I sat down in my chair and again tried to think. Now, tee time is scheduled for 7:38. I knew Doug, my boss, liked to get the business part of the golfing out of the way early so he could enjoy his game. He only needed me there to explain the technical stuff and, besides, I’m not a very good golfer. Maybe I could beg off after the first nine. Let’s see, that would get me back to the house by 9:15 or 9:25 at the latest. We could be on the road by 10:30, maybe sooner if Sarah could pack

for me. I think I can make this all work – where is that coffee?

When I looked up he was standing there. The look in his eyes sent a searing pain right to the middle of my chest.

“We’re not going, are we, Daddy?”

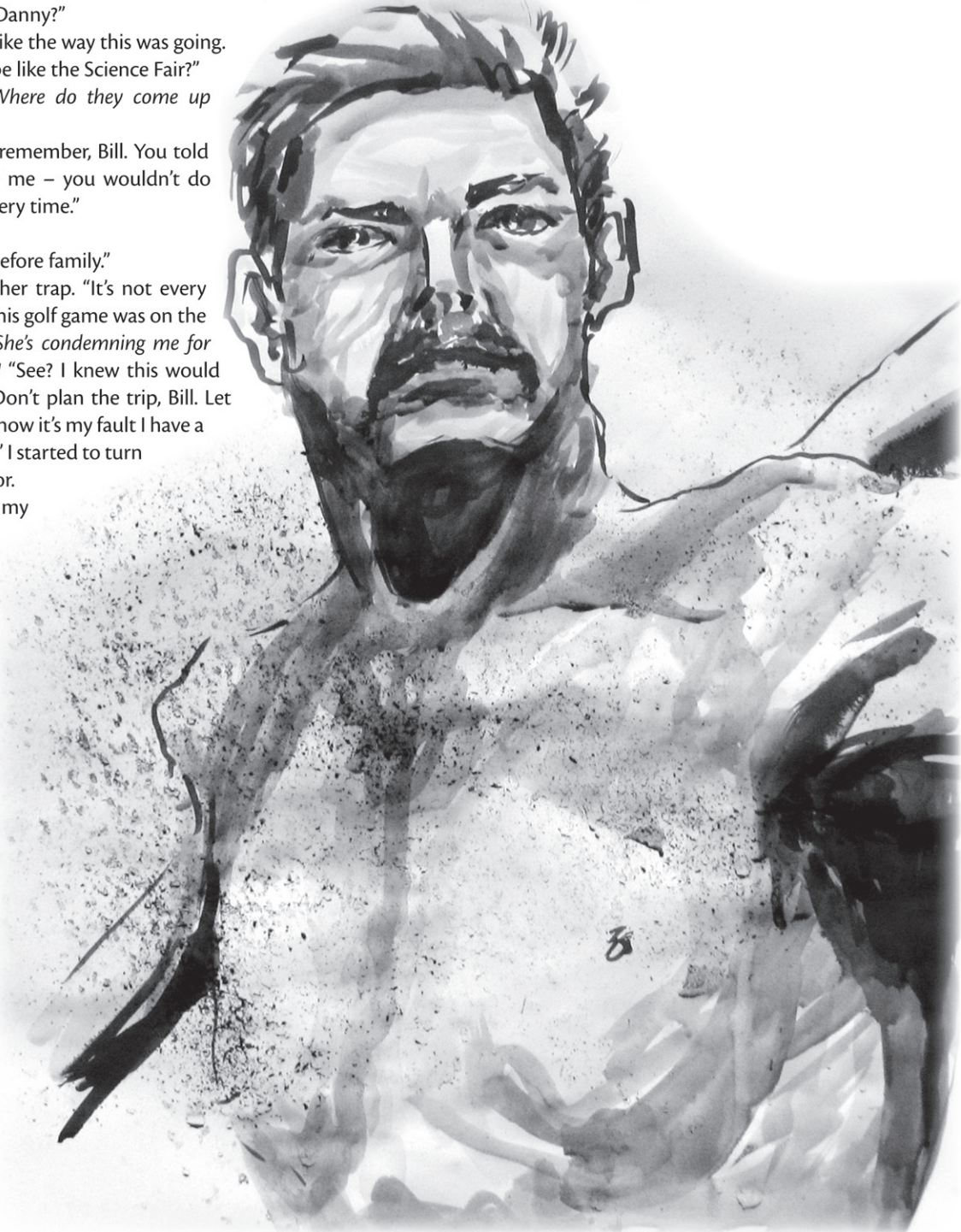
“We’re ... uh ... we’re going. We’re just ... we’re just going to leave a little later than planned.”

“That means we’re not going.” With that, he turned and trudged down the hall to his room. Immediately, I heard clothes going back into drawers – loudly.

I picked up the phone and dialed as Sarah entered with a fresh cup of steaming hot coffee. A groggy voice answered on the second ring.

“Ilo?”

“Larry? Bill. Sorry to wake you. Listen, I need you to do something for me ...” **DS**



Strength, mixed media, by Junko Otsu

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gut feelings

By Angela Vernon

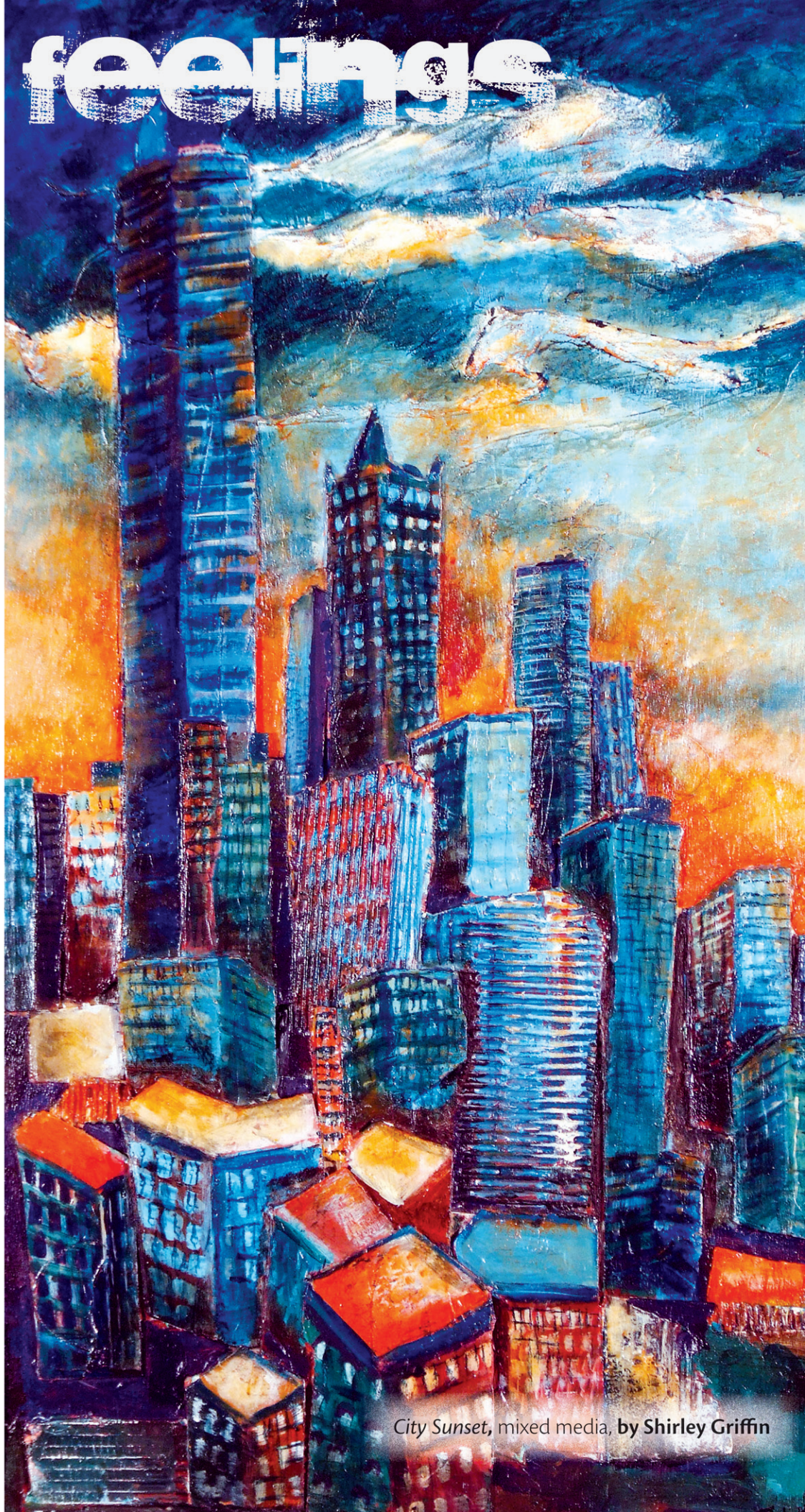
Fate one spring afternoon, sprawled out on my sofa, I was totally laid-back reading one of those trashy romance novels, you know the type – ghosts of ladies and gents from centuries ago claiming their love for each other while watching the sun slowly sink into the horizon, where gleaming horses graze and yearlings frolic in rolling pastures.

It was the perfect Saturday afternoon for this type of lazy activity. Nice and cozy, rumbles of thunder and intermittent downpours of rain. When the phone rang, I was too comfortable to get up. I let the answer machine get it. “Hey, girl, it’s Sue. I need a favor.” There it was: those four words. Those words are the reason I know for sure that you should always follow your gut feelings.

I didn’t go with my gut feeling that day, which would have been to make excuses why I couldn’t help out. Instead, like the good friend I like to think I am, I jumped from the couch and grabbed the phone receiver. “I’m here,” I said, catching my breath.

“Hey, Bev, sounds like you’ve been running.”

“No, just wanted to get the phone before you hung up. I hate playing phone tag. Actually, I was deliciously obsessed with one of those trashy romance novels we always make fun of.”



City Sunset, mixed media, by Shirley Griffin

"You mean where the characters argue passionately, then make up with the pounding rhythm of their undying love out under an oak in some foreign sprawling landscape?"

"That's the one; I'll pass it on to you when I'm done. So what's the favor?"

"I'm going out of town on business in the morning. I'll be gone for a week. Could you please come over and check on Calico and give my plants a drink?"

Before I remember how much I hate going into Queens, I blurt out, "Sure, no problem."

"Thanks, I owe you big time. Do you still have my spare key?"

"Yeah, it's here somewhere. I'll call back tonight if I don't find it. Have a safe trip and don't worry about a thing."

I hung up the phone, walked over to the window and saw that the rain had come to a halt as abruptly as it had begun. I went into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, stood and stared into it for about five minutes, and decided nothing looked appetizing. So I picked up the phone and called the neighborhood Chinese restaurant, Wong's Palace, and ordered my usual, chicken lo mein.

After my food arrived, I ate in front of an old black and white movie on television. Then I decided to get an early start on an article I was writing for the Urban Living section of the *New York Times*. My deadline was set for Tuesday of the coming week. However, my attempt to get the job done was fruitless. Greasy Chinese food and two glasses of cabernet took over my good intentions. I slept straight through the night and part of Sunday morning.

I woke up to loud raging music coming from the apartment directly above mine. Apparently, the guy who lives there has a rock band that can only practice on Sundays. My brain and body made a deal with each other to get out of bed with the promise of coffee. Just as I'm thinking, how am I going to get this assignment finished with this blaring racket, I realize that maybe Sue has inadvertently done me a favor. There was a nice quiet apartment waiting for me in Queens. All of the people in her apartment were elderly, nice and quiet. Great, I thought. So I packed up my lap-top and a few other essentials and set off to spend the rest of the day at Sue's, possibly the night.

The subway ride was seedy as always. Relieved to get off of that people-moving cess-pool, I stopped at a newsstand, picked up a Sunday paper, and started my three-block walk to Sue's apartment. The old brownstone Sue lived in was one of the nicer buildings in town. Most of the tenants had lived there for many years. The apartments were out-dated, but the rent was reasonable and the rooms spacious.

I climbed the stairs to the third floor, dug around in my purse for the key, and opened the door. Ahh ... blissful peace and quiet. I shut the door behind me and started looking for Calico. "Here, kitty-kitty ... Calico, here, kitty-kitty." I went into the kitchen and saw the full bowl of cat food. "Kitty, here, kitty." Then a horrible thought crossed my mind. What if the cat slipped out the door as I was coming in? I went back out into the hallway and checked

the stairs, but Calico was nowhere in sight. She's probably curled up hiding someplace cozy. She'll come out when she gets hungry.

I set up my computer at Sue's kitchen table, made myself a cup of green tea, and began working on my article. Hours passed and still no sign of Sue's cat. I picked up the bowl of cat food and walked from room to room, hoping to entice the cat to come out of hiding. After several minutes with no results, I got down on my hands and knees to look under the bed: still no cat. In the bathroom, there in the clothes hamper on top of some dirty towels was Calico. "There you are, you silly cat."

I reached in the hamper, picked her up, but she was limp and lifeless. "Oh, my God!" Sue's cat was dead. I laid her back into the hamper, washed my hands, and feeling sick to my stomach, I sat down on the bathroom floor. My first thought was to call Sue, but there wasn't anything she could do. No need to upset her while she's on business.

I got up off the floor, went into the kitchen to look for something to drink. I found half of a bottle of white wine in the fridge. I carried it into the living room, sat on the couch, and drank straight from the bottle. No more favors, I thought. At least not when it involves people's pets. I had to get the dead cat out of the apartment. It had already started to smell. I couldn't just put the cat in the dumpster. It deserved better than that. Sue loved that cat.

The phone book listed several animal hospitals with a twenty-four hour staff. Of course this meant another subway ride, this time with a dead cat in tow. I looked in Sue's closet for extra luggage or maybe a gym bag, but she had taken all of her bags with her. Back in the kitchen was my answer: my lap-top case. I grabbed it, carried it into the bathroom, wrapped the cat in one of the towels from the hamper and proceeded to stuff it into my bag. The towel was too much and I couldn't get the bag closed. I removed the towel and snapped the case shut. Then I locked it.

Just as I got the bag closed, I got a call from Sue. "Hey, Bev, I forgot to tell you to put Calico's vitamin drops in her food. They're in the basket by the kitchen sink."

"Ok," I said. "Sue, I can't talk, I'm late for a date."

"All right, and thanks again; you're a life-saver."

Locking up the apartment, I started down the stairs before I realized I left my case with dead Calico in the apartment. I went back to get the dead cat as fast as I could.

When I arrived at the subway station, I threaded my way through the crowds clutching my case tightly to my chest. At one point, a man bumped into me causing me to drop the case. Picking it up and handing it to me, he said, "Hope you have good padding." I thanked him and was lucky to find a seat.

During the whole trip a bizarre man stared at me. I pretended not to notice, but I was feeling uncomfortable and anxious. As we stopped at each station, more and more people got off, until there

was just me and this weird man. When it came time for me to get off, the stranger followed me. Next thing I knew I was on the ground. The man had grabbed my case and run. I had been mugged!

Startled but not hurt, my first thought was, how am I going to explain all this to Sue? My next thought was, I wish I could see his face when he finally gets that case open. **DS**



Phydeau, ceramic, by Carol Davenport

I WANT YOU OUT OF ME

By A.D.D.

Stiff, like white
and sterile as night
I came to you
And all you ever want
Is just what I give up
It's just enough
It's just what you want.

Embedded in smell
Of people getting well
Yes, some die, like cans
Crush and crack
Under the pounds of weight
of a heavy palm

I am aluminum, too
I am crushed easy
You wonder why
I don't bleed?

Another baby?
you ask
to feed

No, my organs hang
from the trees
I bend like a branch
down to my knees

Why don't you love me?
can't I leave
can't I bleed,
I want you out of me

Hospital halls
to skate upon
Frozen streams
to lean on
Thin ice

I'll fall into shock
And everyone will worry
As I rush along

In a big hurry
Up, the stairs
To a stiff, sterile night
I am not comfortable
and not willing as white

How can I say no, in clothes
To brown beautiful eyes like those ...

Now

I want you out of me. **DS**



Rescue, oil, by Lidia Chen

FLIGHT SCHOOL

By Tomm Gillies

“Lottsa space out there to hide a body where nobody’d find it, ain’t there?”

Three hours into a four-hour flight and this is the first thing he decides to say to me? He hadn’t seemed like the talkative type when I squeezed by him earlier to take my seat by the window.

I don’t like waiting in line, so I always wait until they give that final boarding call before getting on a plane. I know it makes it inconvenient for the people in my row because I always get a window seat, but I’d rather spend the least amount of time squished together with a bunch of lemmings as they slowly trudge their way onto a plane. Anyway, I’m content to stare out the window for the duration – that’s why I get that seat – but now he wants to talk?

“Excuse me?” I say, acting like maybe I just didn’t hear him.

He leans a little closer to me and his breath violates my nose.

“I said, ‘Lottsa space to hide a body where nobody’d find it.’”

He’s pointing out the window toward the vast expanse of unoccupied ground 35,000 feet below.

“Uhh ... Yeah,” I mutter.

I mean, what are you supposed to say to something like that? I look at him, not knowing where this is going to lead. He smiles, revealing very red gums and yellow teeth – the source of the stink enveloping me. “Name’s Victor Kantor. Kantor

with a “K.” Most folks just call me Vic.”

He extends his hand toward me. His teeth and his breath are the only things that clash with his appearance – everything else about the man is impeccable. He has on an expensive pinstripe suit and a custom-made shirt with monograms on the cuffs, “VK.” The hand in front of me is manicured and has a large ring from some college or university – I can’t tell which. His hair, thinning though it is, is neatly groomed. He has one of those thin moustaches that just rims his top lip like an outline.

“Avery. Avery Kendall.” I shake the hand – pretty good grip. “I take it you’re in the body-hiding business?” I joke, hoping he really isn’t. He laughs. Good sign. Or is it?

“Naah. I travel a lot in my business and you get bored with the usual blabber on flights, so I kinda try to spice it up a bit. I didn’t scare you, did I, Avery?”

“Uhhh ... No. I ... uhh ...” He still hasn’t let go of my hand. “Well ... maybe a little.” He lets go.

“What about you? Whatta you do?” he asks, finally settling back in his seat.

“I’m in sales. Promotional Products.”

“What is that?” he inquires.

“You know, pens, hats, key chains – stuff with a company’s logo on it.” It never ceases to amaze me, as long as I’ve been doing this, that I have to explain to people what is so in their face all the time.

“Oh, yeah. I got some a those.” He pulls a pen out of his breast pocket and hands it to me. It’s nice – has weight – I estimate it’s probably in the ten- to fifteen-dollar range. Etched on the side is, Victor Kantor, Kan Do! and a phone number. I start to hand it back, “That’s a ni–”

“Keep it. I got a thousand of ‘em.”

“Yeah. Me, too,” I laugh.

“Not with my name on ‘em, you don’t.” He’s got me there. I pocket the pen. “So. Where ya headed?”

“Albuquerque,” I say, giving the current destination of the plane.

“Business or home?”

“Business.”

“So, you’re from Dallas?”

He has such an easy air about him that I want to get comfortable. I really can get along with just about anybody. You have to if you’re going to survive in sales. There’s just something about him that makes me uneasy. The comment he had made at the start of this conversation was strange, yes, but there’s more to it.

“No. Boston. I had to make a connection through Dallas.”

“Boston, huh? How come you don’t have one a them accents? You know, ‘Paak the caa in Haavaad yaad.’ Like that.”

“I uhh ... I just live there now. I didn’t grow up there.”

“Oh. Where’dja grow up?”

Think fast. Have to get the focus off me. “Chicago,” I reply.

“No kiddin’! Me, too. Northside or Southside?”

Oh, crap. I always say, Tell the truth. You won’t have to remember as much. But – I don’t know – I just don’t want this guy knowing too much about me.

Face Left, charcoal, by Jin Choi

"Really? You tell me. I mean, you picked up on me not being from Boston pretty quick."

"Oh, definitely a Northsider. Probably one a the burbs. Evanston?"

"Close. Skokie." It was the only suburb of Chicago I could remember the name of. I hoped it was close to Evanston.

"...doin' growin' up in a town like Skokie?"

"Huh?"

"I said, 'What's a white bread boy like you doin' growin' up in a town like Skokie?'"

"I'm sorry?"

"Well, I mean, c'mon. Avery Kendall don't sound too Jewish to me."

"We ... uhh ... We moved there when I was four." Jeez! I had to run into some damn nosy know-it-all who likes mess—

"C'mon, Bud. Whatta ya take me for, an idiot?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look. Either your name ain't Avery Kendall, or you didn't grow up in Skokie. You don't even know where Skokie is, do ya?"

Decision time. Come clean or try to bluster my way out of this? Come clean.

"You're right. I'm not from Skokie."

"Don't live in Boston either, do ya?"

"No. Dallas."

"Well, why the hell didn'tcha say so?"

I turn and stare out the window again, ashamed to have been caught so easily in my lie.

"I guess I'll never make it as a CIA Agent," I mumble.

"Listen... Avery." He sounds so fatherly.

"Yeah?" I say, not wanting to face him.

"Can I give you a piece of friendly advice?"

I'm not sure I want to hear this. "Sure."

"Adolf Hitler said..."

Now I know I don't want to hear this.

"People will believe a big lie over a small one,' or something like that.

Point is, if you're gonna lie to a man, you gotta commit all the way.

"Now some people would be offended right now. Me? Naah. In my line a work, I've seen all kinds. And don't feel bad. People lie to me all the time. It comes with the territory."

"What are you, an IRS agent?"

"Naah. That's good, though. I should use that."

I'm done with this conversation. I'm not saying another word to him.

"So, how long you been married?"

"Huh?" The question startles me and I turn to face him. "What makes you think I'm marr—"

"You mean besides the way you just jumped at the question? That just confirmed it. The indent where your ring should be says the rest.

"Here's what I think: You're about forty to forty-five years old. You been married about fourteen years or so and you're either thinking about cheating on your wife or you been doin' it for about the last four years. My bet's on the second. Only now it ain't so much fun as it used to be. The little filly you got on the side wants more. She wants to be Mrs. Avery Kendall. And you're thinking that may not be such a bad idea. But... What do you do with the current Mrs. Kendall? And... Is that what you really want? I mean, face it, if she gets you to divorce or, let's be honest, kill the little woman, how much of a man are you? Really

"How'm I doin' so far?"

His eyes. His lips. Those teeth. Ugh. His eyes. Smug. Satisfied with himself. I couldn't speak. I could barely breathe.

DING!

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Captain has turned on the 'fasten seatbelt' sign. As we make our final descent into Albuquerque, please fasten your seatbelts and bring your seat backs and tray tables into their upright and locked positions. We'll be landing in about ten minutes. Our flight attendants will be coming around shortly to gather up any last bits of trash you may have."

I slowly break off eye contact with him and fasten my seatbelt. I decide it is best to spend the remainder of the flight looking out the window.

The plane lands without any further comment from either of us.

When we arrive at the gate, he is up at the bell with the rest of the cattle. I wait, as is my usual habit, until the path is clear and exit as the final passenger.

As I trudge up the jetway, his words echo in my ears. I rub the spot where my wedding band usually rests. How did he know?

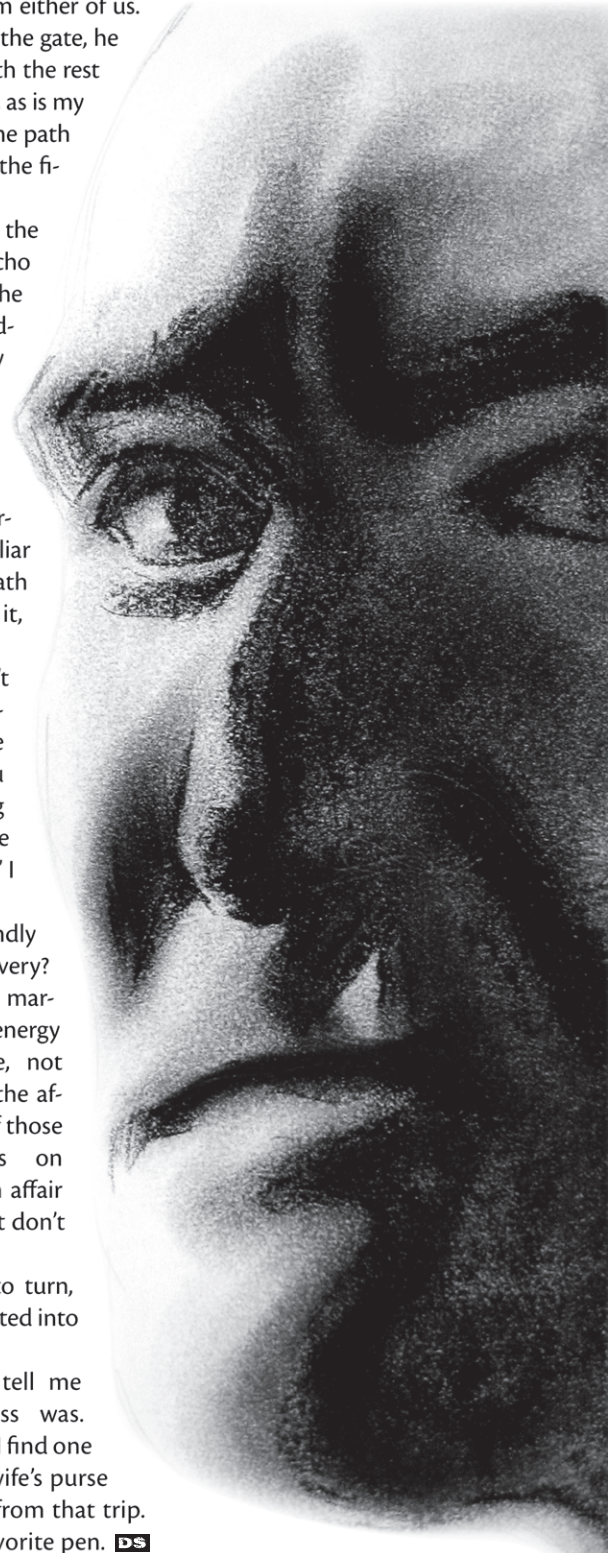
I headed toward the exit to Ground Transportation when a familiar voice and the breath that came with it, makes me stop.

"You shouldn't be asking yourself, 'How does he know?' Avery. You should be asking yourself, 'Why is he telling me all this?'" I can't move.

"Another friendly piece of advice, Avery? Go home. Stay married. Focus your energy on your marriage, not on trying to hide the affair. Lavish some of those romantic dinners on your wife. Have an affair with her. See if that don't change things."

I force myself to turn, but he has evaporated into the crowd.

He never did tell me what his business was. Nice pen, though. I find one just like it in my wife's purse when I get home from that trip. She says it's her favorite pen. **DS**



Face Right, charcoal, by Jin Choi

Mary Sue

By Hamid Azizi

If I'm going to have to pay more for an engagement ring than for my car, my wife had better be befitting. I'm not being unreasonable or anything, I just think that an ideal spouse should have some proper qualities about her. All I am asking for is an acceptable woman who can take care of a deserving man like me.

A big thing for men is food, and my little vixen better be able to cook finer than the average woman. Men cannot cook, of course, so this is going to have to fall into her duties as my spouse. I would adore for my darling to have at least three decent meals ready per day, and I'm not interested in waiting too long for any of them. I anticipate that I'll give her the privilege of choosing what she prefers to cook, as long as I'm in the mood for it. I'll also be reasonable and allow Mary Sue to order out – at most once a month if she isn't in the mood to cook; I am a rational husband, of course!

I've always wanted a couple of boys to play catch with, so my beautiful bride must provide me with quite a few offspring. I figure I would take it easy on my honey and not ask for too many children. Our little boys have to be athletes in some shape or form (this, of course, does not include soccer because we all know it is not a sport). I would probably be content with five or six. Furthermore, Mary Sue and I will not allow our boys to be involved in any forms of art or music; we don't want our boys growing up to become sensitive, do we?

An ample requirement for women that gets overshadowed these days in a marriage is their responsibility to keep the house immaculate at all times. I will in no way accept a messy house for any reason. I expect my other half to make our house completely spotless from the time she gets home from work until I arrive; that gives her plenty of time in my eyes. This isn't just an issue because I'm a neat freak, but Suzie has to set an example for our children as well. Keeping the house in ideal shape includes everything from vacuuming, dusting, designing, and doing the dishes. In addition to keeping the house spotless, my sweetheart will have to keep my clothes neat and ready to wear at all times. I'll never know when I have an important business meeting, or when I may go golfing with some potential clients.

My Tiny Missus will also enjoy the luxury of not being the prime bread winner in the relationship. Nevertheless, I do expect her to work on the side to pay for the small things here and there. I don't imagine that her job should interfere in any fashion with her obligations of being my mate or the mother of my children. Mary Sue's job should include flexible hours so she can still take the children to school and pick them up. The job should also allow for her to take the children to scheduled doctor appointments, along with the emergency ones.

I do not consider myself shallow in the least, but My Turtle-dove must be a presentable wife for me at all times. Whether My Dearest has to work all day or isn't feeling so well, as the female in the relationship, she has the responsibility to keep up her appearance. Of course I'm not asking My Baby to win Ms. America, but I would enjoy her hair and makeup to be suitable at all times. I imagine this will also be beneficial in the strength of our marriage; I attest she doesn't want me to get disentranced of

her looks, does she? I would also prefer for My Dearest to wake up a little earlier than me on most days and get her self together before I wake up; we all know that we're not the most appealing when we first wake up! Of course Mary Sue will be allowed to wear her comfortable clothes when she is ill, but that would probably have to be the only time. We all understand it is a woman's responsibility to keep herself presentable for her Casanova.

Any man considering buying a one-way ticket into marriage should take a close look at some of my requirements for a wife. What I am asking for is not outrageous or unreasonable, it's just what every man is entitled to from his companion. In a peculiar situation in which My Sweetie would not act in the way I want her to, I should also be entitled to a divorce in which I get to keep whatever I want; I mean, it is her fault we are getting a divorce, right? So I guess there's only one question left at this point; how in the world am I going to go back in time to 1937 to find my Mary Sue! **DS**



Guilty Memories, mixed media, by Elza Guedes

Love's Progress

By Hollis Fischer

We made faces before making love,
The granite and ocean above played with themselves,
Oblivious. Hot breath engulfed itself, circled our ears,
Sweeping away everything in a torrent:

In a fierce torsion of greed—
Branding us smooth as natural stone,
A radiant intercourse with the loam.
The body is nature's own private swell: we know it well.

Outside Boston window, dead puritans of the hamlet groan,
Inside, we conjure the last true magic known:
Chewing biblical bone, atlas center, pounding flesh,
Like wrecking balls without distress.

Beyond our bulwark, bell-buoys bang in exile,
And huddled harbor ships hew and thrust
Their wooden limbs against a rising gale:
In this we see our future—

Life, amid the death-lock of those bright and baleful sleepers,
Enduring, dawns break off Marblehead. Against our New England,
Fate fathoms with a mirthless leer, and the terse caterwaul
Of Cassandra cleaves our auspicious air:

Complaining—
"True lovers end in their ending, dying the little-death."
But we throw no muses at parsimony, simply oblige
Her nobility and forget, the dull hard way of resignation.

Under the eyes of the stars and the tide's cadence,
We augment the sequence that moves us rib over rib.
In a new branding effort: all our parts, rivet and moan,
Where the tame chapters of sound and privilege come unknown.

As real brick streets beguile the winter's transient skin,
We love the skin we're in, again and again.
Floating lanterns lit by little ones will not light us.
We light ourselves. Immaculate. **DS**



Glorious, acrylic on canvas, by Shirley Griffin

white rose

By Glen Sovian

“Ladies and Gentlemen, we have now started descending towards the Aurora Airport and we’ll be landing shortly. Please fasten your seatbelts,” the pilot announced.

The clock ticked close to 10 p.m. when American Airlines Flight 243 approached La Aurora. As Todd Sanders gazed outside the window, there was nothing much to see in the dimly lit airport except for the raindrops running down the window glass.

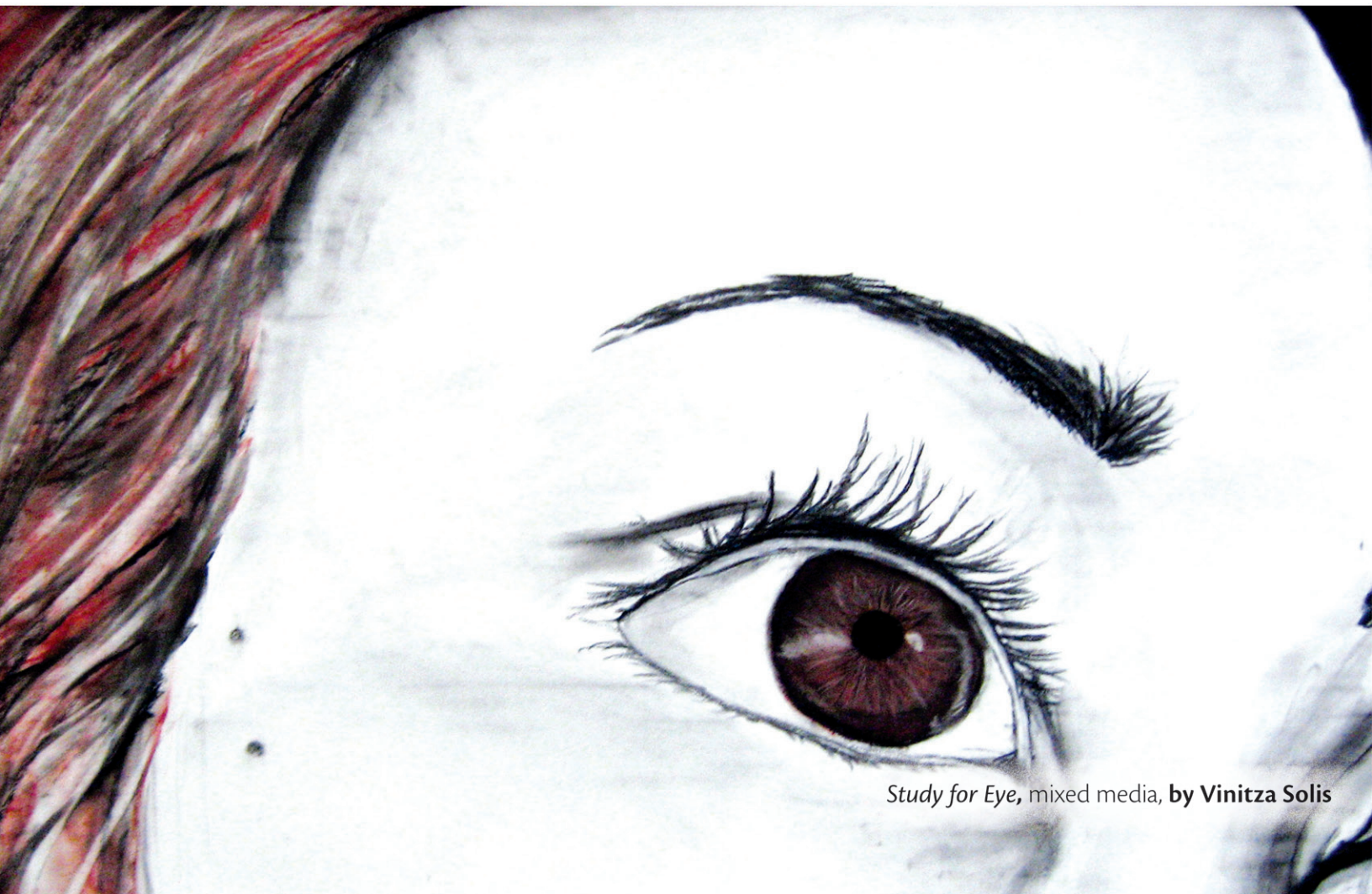
In stark contrast to the loud, overcrowded traffic at peak hours, La Aurora seemed to be completely deserted. The late hours and the lack of people didn’t bother Todd. He often stayed up late back in New Orleans. And for almost all his life, solitude and loneliness

had been his best companions. Other than the two intangible companions, he kept himself occupied with his great-paying job.

“Are you finished with your drink, sir?” a flight attendant asked Todd as she rushed to collect all the trash.

After sipping the remaining Coke in his cup, Todd recalled his past. His indifference to other people plagued him while growing up in his native New Orleans. He was never a popular kid in school. The constant teasing and demeaning name-calling by other kids were daily torture. His physical clumsiness and academic ingenuity earned him such names as spazz, dork, and nerd. The social exclusion left him with a wall of resistance to mockery, and to the people around him. He was glad they were behind him.

In college, Todd had no interest in any extracurricular activities.



Study for Eye, mixed media, by Vinitza Solis

He didn't have social life and didn't have lasting friends. His emotional past still kept him at a distance from the people around him. It only took him three years to graduate, magna cum laude. A Fortune 100 corporation recruited him as a computer programmer immediately after graduation five years ago, in 2000.

The pouring of the rain slowed down a little as the plane touched down on the wet tarmac.

Todd reminisced about the first college reunion he attended over two months ago. He had dismissed any chances of attending the event until the night before, at the urging of Dr. Gerald Robinson, his former mentor. Todd had a good reason not to. He would not know anyone there, he thought, not even those from his own graduating class. He had no one to keep him company either, but decided that at the very least, he could appease Dr. Robinson.

That evening, Todd wore his classic pure wool black suit and black leather lace-up shoes. Right after getting out of his car, a young lady approached Todd to ask for directions to the banquet hall. In the starry, moonless evening, Todd was mesmerized by her sparkling eyes. He could have sworn that her face glowed in the haunting darkness of the night. But his heart throbbed as he glared at the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

"I... we're actually heading in the same direction. You can follow me," Todd said.

"I am Mayra Alvarez. I remembered seeing you on campus about five years ago."

"My name is Todd. Todd Sanders, class of 2000... I'm sorry but I don't recall seeing you before. I mean, I'm sure I saw you at one time or another. It's been a while, you know," Todd said, trying to find a valid excuse.

"Well, I don't expect you to know me. I was a freshman when you graduated. Everybody in college knew you were the only graduate with a perfect grade point average."

Todd was flattered that somebody else remembered him at the college. He felt totally at ease walking into the banquet hall with such a beautiful lady.

Todd vividly remembered Mayra's astonishing appearance that evening. Her bright pink gown hemmed just above the knees perfectly showed off her long legs, hugged her curves and outlined the silhouette of her thin hourglass figure. Her dress perfectly showcased the luscious long, silky black hair falling in cascading waves below her shoulders.

Not knowing many people there, Todd and Mayra spent most of their time having champagne and chatting with each other. Todd thought the evening was the best thing that had ever happened to him. When he finally located Dr. Robinson among the crowd, Mayra suddenly vanished without saying good-bye.

"The captain has turned off the seat belt sign. Thank you for choosing American Airlines. Hope you fly with us again," a flight attendant announced.

Two weeks after the reunion, Todd returned as the guest speaker for a computer security seminar at the college of his alma mater. To his surprise, Mayra reappeared. As a graduate student, she showed a keen interest in the subject matter. This time, Todd was not about to let her disappear again. Like Todd, Mayra was the only child in her family and her father had abandoned the family early in her childhood. As they spoke, they discovered that they had a lot in common.

As their romance grew, they discovered they had a lot in common. City Park in the heart of New Orleans became their favorite meeting place. Todd knew Mayra would be there, waiting for him in her beautiful

pink dress beneath the shade of a 600-year-old oak tree at 9 o'clock sharp every evening. He met her at exactly 9 p.m. holding her favorite flower – a single white rose.

"A white rose symbolizes purity, innocence, secrecy, and silence while an oak tree represents strength and endurance. I am the white rose and en mi corazón, you are my oak tree," Mayra explained one day.

"Mi amor, when you show up after 9 o'clock, the rose just doesn't smell the same," Todd recalled her saying every time he showed up late.

The choice of their secret hideaway couldn't have been better for both of them. Todd accepted her conservative upbringing, which allowed her to meet him only at public places. The serene, dimly lit park was deserted at that hour, leaving the lovebirds with a small enclave of privacy and tranquility away from the bustle of the big city. The timing was also simply perfect for Todd after his shift at 8 p.m. and for Mayra after her evening classes.

As Todd was filing past customs with the twenty or so other passengers, he knew he would face the heartbreak of letting Mayra get away from him again, after only knowing her four weeks.

All of a sudden their relationship came to an abrupt end. Mayra was confronted with the choice of completing her education or returning to her home in Central America to care for her ailing mother, terminally ill with cancer.

"My mother needs me and I must go home now. Mi amor, I wish you could come to visit my mother and me some time. It will be the best birthday present I could ever wish for."

"I'll make sure to request some time off from work," Todd said as the two hugged.

"As a parting gift, I want you to keep this envelope. But could you please promise me that you will not open it until my birthday on July 25?" Mayra whispered softly into his ear.

"I promise."

"Hasta pronto, mi amor. I love you so much. Que te vaya bien."

Mayra pressed a brown envelope into his hand while kissing him good-bye, promising that it would only be a short separation. Before

Todd even had a chance to escort her to her car, she vanished into the dark of night. Todd couldn't believe the sudden course of events that just unraveled before his eyes.

"Muchas gracias, señor Sanders. Bienvenido," a customs agent said to Todd after he stamped Todd's passport and handed it back to him. Todd quickly flashed a smile.

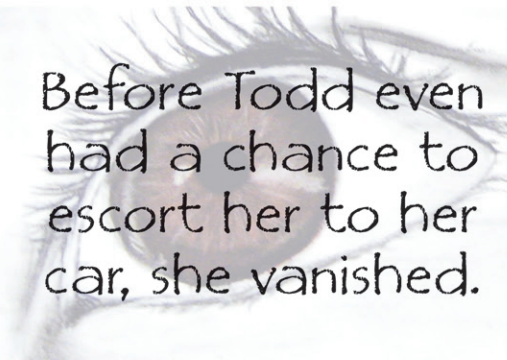
It had been about one month since Mayra left New Orleans and he hadn't heard a word from her. Several attempts to contact her were unsuccessful. Todd thought maybe the country's poor communication infrastructure was to blame. Tomorrow, July 25, was Mayra's birthday. Todd remembered Mayra saying his visit would be the best birthday present she could ever hope for.

Todd quickly walked to the baggage claim section of the airport.

This visit, he thought, promised to be magical. Todd couldn't wait to see Mayra's face when he rang the doorbell and to find out the content of the brown envelope.

It was still drizzling outside with occasional breeze. Todd caught a taxi ride to a nearby hotel to rest for the night.

It was 8 a.m. when Todd woke up. His typical schedule at work normally started at 11 a.m. and ended at 8 p.m. but the schedule was hardly unusual for his behind-the-scene computer-programming job. He was not an early riser but this time, the combination of an unfamiliar environment and the excitement of seeing Mayra again made him want to leave the hotel as soon as possible.



Before Todd even had a chance to escort her to her car, she vanished.

At this time of the year, in the midst of rainy season, the sky was overcast with dark clouds. The hotel concierge said that every time it rained, the nearby streets turned into giant muddy puddles, making it nearly impossible to walk. The weather was the last thing on Todd's mind. He was set to make this day Mayra's most memorable birthday present ever.

As soon as he jumped into a taxi, he quickly directed the driver to the nearest flower shop. Nothing short of a bouquet of 12 fresh white roses would enthrall Mayra, he thought. He knew that despite her limited means, Mayra was not the type of materialistic girl who would go for designer clothes and expensive jewelry. In fact, it wasn't only her exotic beauty and their common interests, but her modest way of living that captivated Todd the most. A single white rose was the only thing she asked for.

"Twelve white roses for ten American dollars, Mister," said a flower vendor in heavily accented English, requesting the greenback instead of the local currency.

Todd gave the flower vendor a twenty-dollar bill, leaving the change. The thought of seeing Mayra was the only thing on his mind.

"Calle Oriente No. 29. Is that where you're going, señor?" asked the taxi driver.

"Yes, just like what is written on the paper," Todd responded, pointing to the piece of paper the taxi driver was holding.

The streets were bustling with peddlers dressed in their traditional rainbow colored garbs, selling anything from beaded jewelry, hand-woven bags, carved wood and other handicrafts to churros and other local snacks on street corners. As the taxi snaked around the chaotic morning traffic, Todd daydreamed how this visit would bring back the good old days he shared with Mayra and re-ignite the budding romance they once had. He hoped it would even reach a higher level.

The taxi stopped in front of an old Spanish-style colonial building in the city of Antigua. With its candy-colored yellow stucco façade and white detailing, the elegant house nestled among the wide canopies of ancient trees, reminding Todd of his and Mayra's favorite meeting place back in City Park. The meticulously groomed front porch was strung with lush plant life, most notably white roses. Todd stood there for some time, admiring the beauty of the roses.

"They are beautiful, aren't they?" said a middle-aged lady in nearly perfect English.

Todd was taken aback by the remark but soon thought the lady was most likely the house owner and Mayra's mother.

"They are white, pure and innocent," the lady continued. "Just like my daughter."

"Oh, yeah, I totally agree," Todd responded, thinking she was referring to Mayra.

"My name is Rosario Sanchez. I am a retired English teacher and the owner of this house. What a lovely bouquet of roses you have."

"Hi, I'm Todd Sanders. I'm an American."



Teapot, clay and glaze, by Linda Cross

"Did you say you actually knew my daughter?" the lady asked in the past tense.

"Yes, of course, Mrs. Sanchez. I brought this bouquet for your daughter, Mayra."

"No. My daughter is Rosa Blanca, which means White Rose in English, but she doesn't live here any longer. On July 25, 1996, we were getting ready to have Quinceañera for her 15th birthday to celebrate her entry into maturity as a young woman – you know, it's like being Sweet Sixteen in America. An elaborate party with plenty of food, music and dancing was to have taken place at 9 o'clock that evening. She was to wear a beautiful pink dress accompanied by fourteen maids of honor and fifteen chamberlains. But the celebration never took place because she ran away with her boyfriend, Rafael Alvarez. For years, we tried every possible way to locate her, but all attempts failed. We haven't seen or heard from her since."

"But... this is the address Mayra gave me. Besides, Mayra has the same last name as the guy you just mentioned, Rafael Alvarez?"

"I don't know who you are referring to, young man. Why don't you come into our house? We like to welcome visitors to our house."

With his heart pounding and his mind racing, Todd reluctantly followed the lady into the house out of respect to her.

Inside the house, the living room was decorated with a colorful and tasteful décor. Traditional crafts and folk art seemed to fill every inch of available space. A beautiful, hand-woven wall hanging with a folkloric marimba musical instrument filled one side of the wall. On the other wall was a painting of colorful parrots and macaws preening in the sunshine. The cozy room had wooden furniture typical of centuries-old Mayan craftsmanship.

"Would you care for some hot tea, young man?" Rosario asked as she was gathering strength to walk.

Todd's eyes quickly riveted on the family photos near the fireplace. He was stunned to see Mayra in a number of them.

"Wait, look at what you've got here. Mayra is in all those pictures!" Todd jumped up and pointed to the family photos. "She's the girl I was telling you about."

"Yes, she is my only daughter, Rosa Blanca, who ran away nine years ago," Rosario confirmed.

"In that case ... I guess Mayra is your lost

Todd remembered about the brown-colored envelope that Mayra left for him. He reached for his pocket and pulled out the envelope.

daughter, Rosa Blanca. I... I came here to fulfill her birthday wish that I meet you because she said you had cancer." Todd dropped his voice, still confused.

"Yes, I do have cancer. The doctors said I wouldn't have much more time to live. My only last wish is to find out what happened to my daughter. Oh, I wish the Good Lord finally would answer my prayer. That will give me peace at last."

Todd remembered about the brown-colored envelope that Mayra left for him. He reached for his pocket and pulled out the envelope. As Rosario looked on, Todd examined the envelope briefly as if he were seeing it for the first time.

"She made me promise that I would open this envelope only on her birthday. And today is the day," Todd said as he ripped open the envelope. There was no writing of any sort on the outside.

Inside it was a typewritten, pink-colored letter, decorated with raised graphics of a single long stem white rose on the left hand side. It contained a poem by the poet José Martí.

+ + +

I cultivate a white rose
In July as in January
For the sincere friend
Who gives me his hand frankly.
And for the cruel person who tears out
the heart with which I live,
I cultivate neither nettles nor thorns:
I cultivate a white rose.

Waiting for our eternal reunion
Un besito de tu hija,

Mayra, the White Rose
Departed the mortal world,
City Park - New Orleans, 1996.

+ + +

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. On behalf of the entire crew, I would like to welcome you aboard American Airlines. We are now ready to take off. Thanks for flying with us, and have a very pleasant flight," the pilot announced.

As the jet taxied to the runway, Todd gazed outside the window. His mind jumbled with thoughts from the sparkling eyes, mysterious disappearance, white roses, pink dress, to late-night outings at the park. The whole experience seemed surreal and mysterious yet real. But now the whole puzzle had taken its shape.

Todd quivered at the thought that he had fallen in love with a spirit. He couldn't believe it could happen. He still loved Mayra. The realization hit him hard. Once again, the journey led him back to his profound solitude and loneliness.

Todd tried to fall asleep, but he was constantly awakened. The scene of the encounter with Mayra replayed continu-

ously in his mind. As darkness filled the sky, Todd glanced at his watch. It was 9 p.m. He felt the urge to pull out the brown envelope from his pocket to look at the letter one more time. To his surprise, when he looked inside, he found the letter had turned into a handful of fine white sand. **DS**



French Kiss, ceramic, by Paule Harsigny

CHANGING GEARS

By William Isbell

Go, idiots! What's wrong with you people? Get out of my way! My mind was racing with road rage as I drove down highway 183 in Irving, Texas.

At first, this didn't seem to be my "cup of tea," so to speak; I was used to the wide open road across the southwestern desert and over the beautiful Rocky Mountains. For a moment, I started second guessing my terminal decision to drive an eighteen wheeler truck in the city everyday, compared to just passing through."

It all started with the money; back then, that was my only focal point, the measure of success, I thought. I didn't finish college, so when I received my first weekly paycheck of fifteen hundred dollars, I was hooked. The paychecks began to look like trophies and I wanted as many as I could get my hands on.

Leaving the family behind was difficult at first, because it was like putting them on the shelf and saying, "Stay here, I'll be back." I'll never forget my children asking me, "Why do you have to go, Daddy?" while looking out the window crying and waving bye. I wondered sometimes if that would be my last moment with them. The road was so dangerous; I saw dead people all the time lying on the pavement, because the car they were driving had rolled over and crashed. Knowing that I was providing a good living for them seemed to soften my tears while driving all night long. To set myself at peace, after a prayer, I would imagine them sitting in the seat next to me and I would give them a guided tour of the United States. I wanted the children to be proud of me and for what I was doing for them. I wanted to be their hero.

The road became my spouse, my comfort zone, and my fertilizer for growth. It became my solitude, a place to free my ears from the sounds of the world. I slowly evolved into an introverted creature, a hermit on the move. As the years passed, I noticed the cab of the truck was as small as a jail cell and just as secluded. I was locked up and didn't realize it until ten years later when I started analyzing my own conversation. I spent 230 days a year on the road, approximately 25,000 miles every two months. The same distance as traveling around the world along the equator and back to the same spot. The truck and the road was all I had to talk about. Somehow, somewhere, someday I knew a change would have to come, I thought. If I'm not growing like the grass in the spring, then I must be dying like the grass in the winter.

Nine hundred thousand miles was my cut off. I couldn't take it anymore! What started with me driving the truck ended with the truck driving me! So, I became a city driver to break up the monotony. Although the road was much more tranquil than the city in regards to the traffic, the change was

better for the long haul.

The traffic conditions in the city, especially on highway 183 in Irving, Texas, were crazy. No one respected my truck: they would cut me off, slam on their brakes, and ride next to my trailer. I had to baby-sit my mirrors more than ever! The little red car to my right might speed in front of me within seconds and the yellow car on my left may move to the rear of my trailer. I thought, these people are fast and I really have to pay attention. There are about thirty or more exits dotted along highway 183, so the situation is a constant change. I tend to watch the service road, hoping to get a "heads up" on the number of cars I will be merging with. Will I position myself between the white car and the blue car or will I fall in behind the blue car? The people in the cars probably don't know that before they reach the highway I already know my position in their parade.

City driving has its issues just as cross country driving, but at least after eight hours I can go home. The road was more of a lifestyle than a job.

I do miss a few things from the road, like the Arizona sunset on interstate 10 coloring the skies with purple, yellow, orange, and blue tones, the freedom from everyone's daily commute to and from work, and the gorgeous mountain scenery.

In summary, the change in jobs has freed up some of my time, giving me the opportunity to return to college and grow in a different area of my life. The disadvantages of the road forced a positive change on me, so if traffic is what I have to deal with, then so be it. My new life is filled with many challenges ahead, unlike before, when it was on "cruise control." **DS**

(Background Image) *Tools and Gears*, mixed media, by Ho-Jun Cha



Cityscape Downtown, oil on canvas, by Terumi Oogake

THERE IS NO WAY THAT I COULD HAVE KNOWN WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WHEN I CROSSED THE LINE OF DEPARTURE INTO A COMBAT ZONE.

FROM A FOX HOLE

By Ryan D. Rinn



Hidden, mixed media, by Junko Otsu

The first time that I was ever shot at was in March of 2003, somewhere in the middle of Iraq. I was in my fighting hole that was about the same size as a freshly dug grave, which seems only appropriate in the midst of war. We were in the open desert with nothing around us but military vehicles and a palm tree grove about two hundred meters in front of my position. The rest of my platoon was dug in like me, forming a circular perimeter. An AK-47 assault rifle started firing from the darkness of the palm grove, sounding similar to powerful firecrackers children play with on the 4th of July. A burst of bullets impacted the dirt about a foot to the right of my head. Sand flew up much like a dog kicking up dirt while digging. The visual I have of the scene seems very surreal. For a second, the world even seemed to pause. This would be the time when panic would normally set in. For me, that day, "What a Wonderful World," by Louis Armstrong, instantly played in my head. It snapped me right back into reality and I was able to do my job.

The song seemed to release any fear I had and gave me complete clarity. It enabled me to think instead of panic. I got to what I thought would be a breaking point and pushed into an entirely different realm that I never knew existed. It seemed to be the key that unlocked a door that I quite possibly could have gone the rest of my life never opening. It opened my eyes to limitations I had spent twenty years setting for myself, tearing them down in an instant. It taught me that I do not have to succumb to the obstacles thrown my way throughout life; I could sing my way right through them with a smile on my face.

I could reflect on this situation and analyze a million different things that went on. I could think about the rounds that impacted near my head or wonder what the enemy was doing wrong that

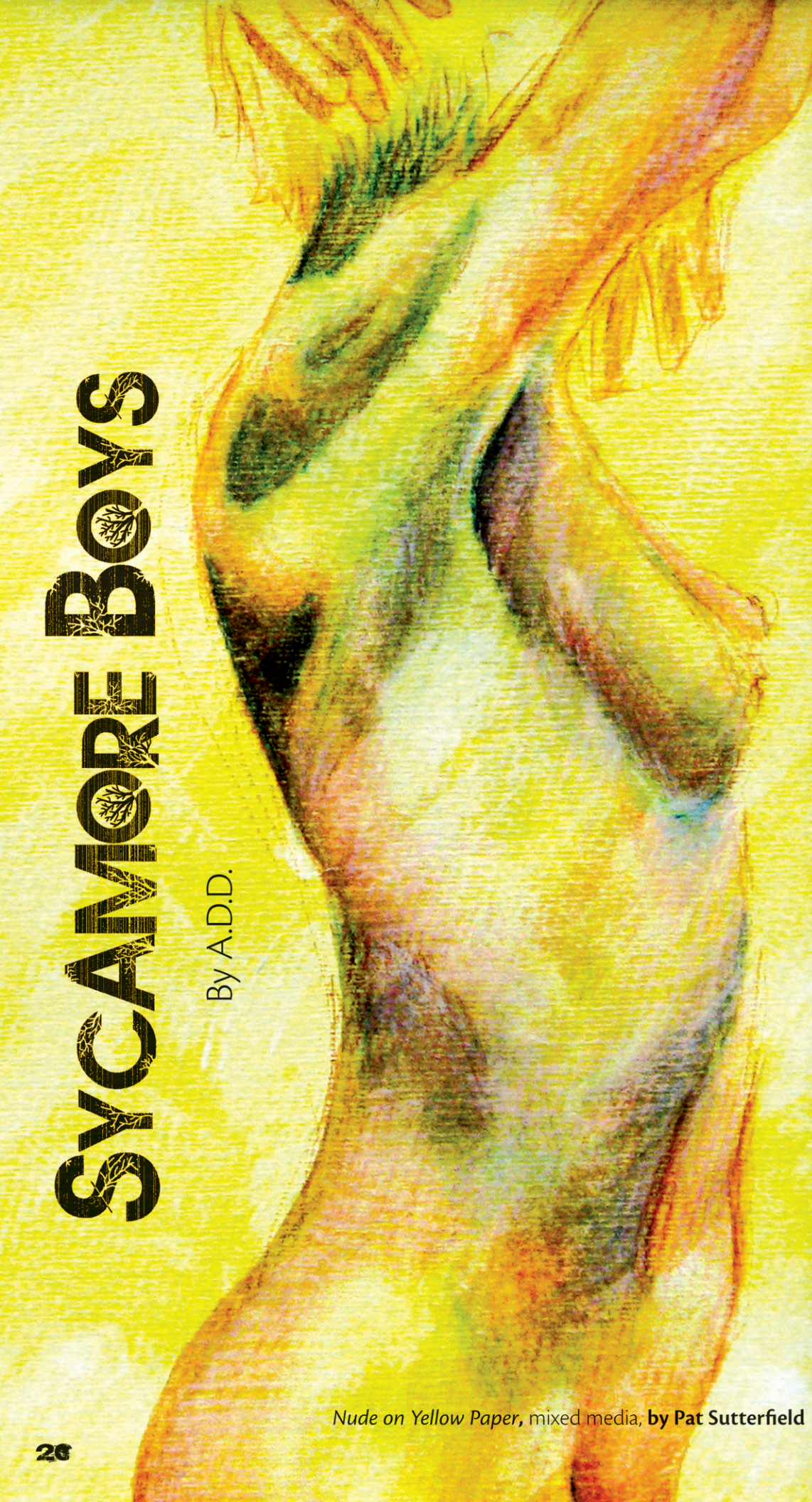
caused him to miss. I could consider the position I was in or what the rest of the platoon was doing. Instead, I will always think of that song. I will never know why that particular song played in my head or why music was the calming factor in the event. Some things are unexplainable. I do, however, find it ironic that in the heat of battle, the song that came to mind is about how wonderful the world is. Maybe it was a subconscious reality check telling me it was not time to depart this life. I can analyze that forever, but it will not change what happened.

Most people do not know their boundaries and limitations. There is no way that I could have known what would happen when I crossed the line of departure into a combat zone. I didn't have a clue how I would react. People are always asking how I was able to endure the burdens of combat. They tell me with absolute sincerity in their voices that they would never be able to handle anything like that. To me, they are just naive. No human being will ever be fully aware of what they are capable of in life until truly tested. I thought I would panic or somehow let nerves get to me. Instead, I walked away with a classic song, complete enlightenment, and a life of no limitations.

It is unfortunate that men are capable of initiating such evil things as war, but seemingly inevitable. I have spent fourteen months of my life in combat. I joined the Marine Corps in September of 2001 in response to the act of terror committed in New York on September 11th. Looking back on the incredibly bumpy road that would be my career in the Corps, I am intrigued by the way I mentally handled the extremely diverse situations that I endured. I am sure that the majority of these situations will be the most dramatic of my life. I will never take for granted how wonderful the world really is. **DS**

SYCAMORE BOYS

By A.D.D.



I think about that walk
now from time to time
Pyramid of youth, I climbed up
to that body of mine
A drive and to rest upon
some rusty car hoods
Far in the trees,
in the back
of the woods
Where the path ends
where the people don't go
Out of the suburbs
where the weeds grow
A group of boys
and the sycamores
To feel so different
from other girls
My natural tendencies
I tried so hard to fight
It was useless, in them
I was tied up tight
Go where I should not
away from the light
These were the thoughts
I had this night
One torrid summer.
smoke and green
Stories and celebration
of what we'd seen
Drive for us to do so much more,
down the hills again
A place male adolescents wait,
so soon to be men
I can still smell the trees and
the music the boys played
If there was a magic way
oh,
how I wished I'd stayed. **DS**

Nude on Yellow Paper, mixed media, by Pat Sutterfield

Hard Times

By Angela Vernon

Mae Foster stared at her reflection in the mirror. *People used to say I was pretty.* Hard times had taken their toll. She appeared much older than her actual thirty-four years. The bright morning sunlight that streamed through the window showed every line in her face. Her sapphire blue eyes were bloodshot from too many sleepless nights. The dark shadows under her eyes gave her a sickly appearance.

Slowly she rubbed her fingers over her cheek. Her skin was dry and chapped from working long hours in the scorching West Texas sun. She had lost that “peaches and cream” complexion, that youthful blush that once caught a man’s eye. Her chestnut-colored hair seemed to have a permanent coat of dust, making it dull and brittle. *No time for self-pity.*

Mae and her husband Tom had three children. Sarah was seven, Olivia five, and Ben was ten. He was more mature than boys his age. Since his dad left, he was the man of the house. Tom Foster left their home to find work. Several months had gone by and no one had heard from him. Each day brought new challenges and hardships.

Mae took a piece of string from the torn pocket of her faded, stained cotton shirtdress. She was so thin; the dress looked more like a flour sack. She walked into the tiny kitchen, took an old tin tea pot from the cupboard, filled it halfway with water, and placed it on top of the wood burning stove. She pulled open the drawer of the small oak desk that sat in the corner of the kitchen, and took out her husband’s pair of work gloves he wore when he picked cotton. She had to fight back the tears as she slipped her bony hands into the gloves. Arrangements had been made with Mr. Jones for Mae and her children to pick cotton on his forty-acre farm. She would need the gloves to protect her hands from the fibrous, woody husks of the cotton. It was hardly worth the ten cents per day, but with the children helping, they got forty cents per day. There was at least a month’s worth of work. Mae would put the money earned from picking cotton into an old cracker box to save for winter. It took much more to feed the family and warm the house during the winter months.

To scrape together enough money to put bread into her children’s mouths, and to pay rent on the little old wood frame house in Post, Texas, Mae tailored and mended clothing. She reached over to a nail on the wall and removed an apron that she had made from scraps of left over material from the sewing she took in. She tied the apron around her shrinking waist to get ready for the day’s chores. Mae was too proud and brave to be beaten down by hard times. Her family didn’t have much, but the house was always clean and

tidy. There were people much worse off. Not far from the Fosters there were families living with dirt floors and without running water.

“Sarah, Ben, bring Olivia, come eat breakfast.” Mae had just enough oatmeal for her children. She always told them she would eat after they left for school. After the first couple of weeks of the new school year, school closed down so everyone could pick cotton. “I don’t want to go to school,” whined Sarah. “I don’t like the way the cows in the pasture circle around us when we cut through.”

“Well, don’t cut through. Stay on the main road,” said Mae.

“But we’ll be late if we don’t cut through the pasture,” explained Ben.

“I will just have to get you up earlier,” said their mom. “Tomorrow we will all be together picking cotton.”

Life was a daily struggle during the Great Depression. It was hard on children and adults. Many families lost their homes and farms, and became homeless. She had to remind herself and her children how lucky they were to have a roof over their heads.

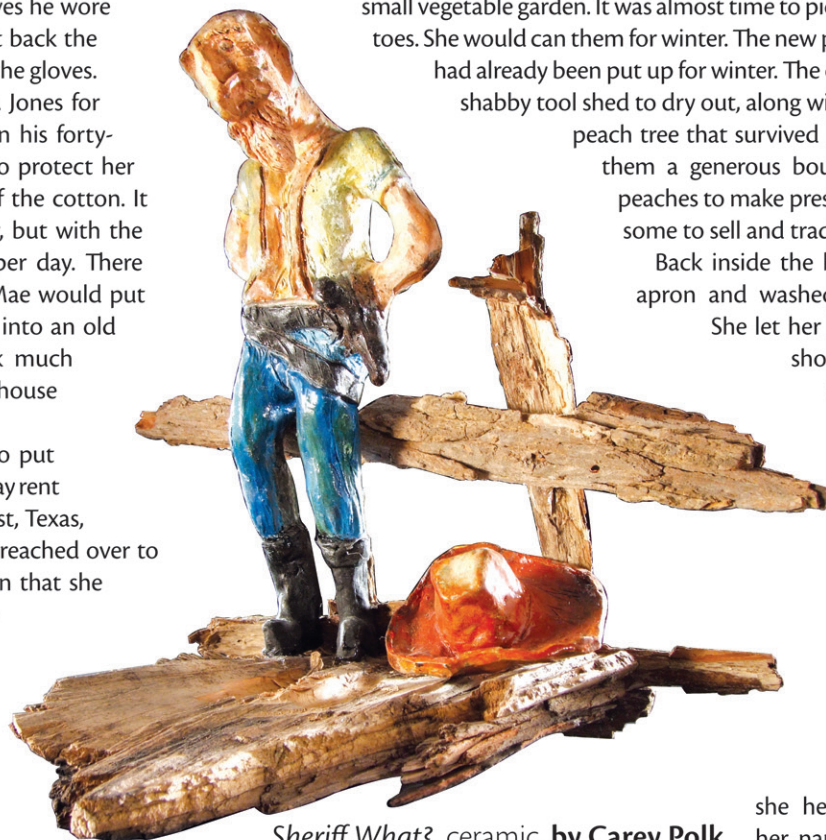
Mae helped her children finish getting ready for school, walked outside with them, and gave them each a big hug. “Remember, we may not be rich in things, but we are rich in love,” said Mae, as she watched them make their journey down the winding dirt road until they were out of her sight.

She walked around to the back of the house where they had planted a small vegetable garden. It was almost time to pick the last crop of tomatoes. She would can them for winter. The new potatoes and pole beans had already been put up for winter. The onions were hung in the shabby tool shed to dry out, along with other herbs. The one peach tree that survived last year’s drought gave them a generous bounty. Mae had enough peaches to make preserves for her family and some to sell and trade in town.

Back inside the house she took off her apron and washed her hands and face.

She let her hair fall down over her shoulders, brushed out the tangles and applied a hint of pink lipstick. Looking at her reflection, she thought, *at least I make an effort.*

Mae began her long walk into town with an old rusty wagon in tow. Upon arrival at Brown’s General store, she heard someone call out her name. “Mae, Mae Foster?”



Sheriff What?, ceramic, by Carey Polk

I almost didn't recognize you." When she turned around she saw Rita Henderson from church. "How is your family?" asked Mrs. Henderson.

"Well, we're managing; things could be better. We still haven't heard from my husband. How is Mr. Henderson?"

"I'm afraid he's not doing too well. He can barely get out of the chair, and has lost a lot of weight. Are you still taking in sewing?"

"Yes, I am." Mae bent down and picked up a shiny penny from the ground, and slipped it into her dress pocket. *Maybe my luck is changing.*

"I'll bring some of Earl's pants by for you to take-in. Is tomorrow ok?"

"Yes, but could you leave them on my back porch? We start picking cotton tomorrow, bright and early, at the Jones's farm. I'll try and have them finished by Sunday, and bring them to you at church." Mae put her hand in her pocket and rubbed the penny between her fingers.

In Brown's General store, she purchased apples, which were bruised, so Mr. Brown let her have them for twenty-five cents; a five-pound bag of flour and sugar, at fifty cents each, and two spools of thread, one black, and one white, at five cents per spool. She traded a jar of her peach preserves for a dozen eggs. Before she walked out of the store, a beautiful floral print fabric of pale green cotton sateen with tiny pink roses caught her eye. *I don't dare look at the price. I've already spent a week's worth of cotton pickin.*

With her wagon of groceries, she began her journey home. The hot, whipping wind stirred up the dirt from the road which left a thick layer of dust on her clothing. When she got home, she changed into some work dungarees. There was plenty to do to get ready for the evening and tomorrow morning. I hate that we're having rice and beans again, she thought. *I'll make it up to them with biscuits and peach preserves for dessert.*

Mae could hear her children's voices coming toward the house.

Generations, mixed media, by Kapil Dixit



"Wait for me," cried Olivia. Ben was already through the door complaining of hunger.

"There are apples in the basket, in the pantry. Just take one; dinner will be ready soon. Go wash-up," said Mae. Sarah and Olivia entered the kitchen out of breath. "Slow down. What's all the excitement?"

"Mom, our teacher had us write letters to the First Lady, Mrs. Roosevelt," Sarah stated proudly.

"What did you write about?"

"Our teacher said we could ask for stuff. Do we have stamps and envelopes?"

"Set your letter on the desk and I'll look after dinner," said her mother.

The afternoon passed into the edge of twilight. The tiny kitchen had quieted down from the bustle of the evening meal. Mae helped her children get ready for bed. Five-o'clock a.m. would come all too quickly. After she tucked them in, gave goodnight kisses, and assured Sarah she would look for a stamp, she walked outside for a breath. The crescent moon hung in the star-studded sky like an upside down fingernail. *God, I miss Tom. Please send him home soon.*

Mae went back inside to look for a stamp and an envelope. Curious about what her daughter asked for, she picked up the letter. Young people across America were writing letters to the First Lady asking for help. They asked for food, clothing, money, and even things such as bicycles. Sarah wrote:

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

My name is Sarah Foster. I am 7 years old and live in Post, Texas.

I know you are very busy, but there is a family in our town that really needs your help. There is a father, a mother, and five kids, all living in an abandoned freight car. They have no food, clothing, or toys. Could you please send them a little money?

Thank you, Sincerely, Sarah Foster

Tears rolled down Mae's face. She was so proud of her daughter's spirit of generosity. They didn't have any envelopes, but to Mae's surprise, she found one postage stamp.

In the morning, Mae woke up Sarah first. She hugged her daughter and told her how proud she was of the letter she wrote to Mrs. Roosevelt. Then she showed Sarah how to make an envelope out of a piece of plain paper. "We will get this in the mail right away," she told her daughter. "Maybe we can help that family ourselves; we have more than most. Now go wake up your brother and sister and I'll make us some breakfast."

She made them each one fried egg, which they ate with leftover biscuits from the night before. Eggs were a treat usually reserved for Sundays, but Mae knew what a long hard day was ahead of them. She packed lunches of saltines with peanut butter, and apples. Mr. Jones would send a truck to pick up all the families that were picking cotton on his farm. "Come on, the truck is waiting for us," hollered Mae. The Foster's was the first stop, so Mae got to ride up front. The kids loved riding in the back of the truck.

Mae stepped up into the old dust-covered truck, sat by the window where she could see her children in the side mirror, and thanked the driver for letting her ride in the cab. On the seat next to her was a recent newspaper. Pointing to the paper, she said, "May I?"

"Yeah, sure," the driver said. Mae unfolded the newspaper; her mouth dropped open: there on the front page was her husband Tom. He was standing in a city alley holding a poster with a portrait of F.D.R., with a banner that read: "A NEW DEAL." At least she knew he was alive. The driver asked her, "You ready to pick cotton?"

"Yes, Sir! It's going to be a great day." She looked at her children in the side mirror and heard their laughter. The road was bumpy. Times were hard, but things were looking up. *There is always hope, thought Mae, and hope does not always disappoint.* **DS**

The New Americans

By Hamid Azizi

Catastrophes like this don't happen every day, nor should they. Thinking of all of the children who were about to have one less parent really made me furious with the cowards who would commit such an act. Why would anyone do something like this? Even more analytical, how could this event have such a profound effect on my life? I didn't have anything to do with this and did not endorse this repulsive act in any measure. Nevertheless, on September 11, 2001, my life would be changed forever.

Explaining my Middle Eastern descent never really gave me any problems growing up. I was born in Richardson, Texas, so I have always thought of myself as American as anyone else born here in America. The only difference between my friends and me was my brown skin. At times people may have been confused as to who I was as a child. They would ask me what I was, if I was Italian. I would just inform them that I was an American-born Persian whose parents were from Afghanistan, a little country in the Middle East. My answer to their question seemed to satisfy them and that would usually be the end of that.

However, after September 11, explaining my ethnicity was equivalent to defending who I was. When I told people where my parents originated from, I usually received a pair of raised eyebrows. They would ask me if my mom had to be covered up in clothes at all times, or if my dad allowed my mom out of the house. I would calmly inform them that both of my parents were just as normal as any other set of parents. Little did they know that my parents had lived in Texas for over twenty years and were perhaps a bit more patriotic than their parents were.

I was never seriously bullied while growing up. Of course children will find something about you they can make fun of and keep doing it until it gets old. So, being Persian, I would hear the occasional Aladdin joke, or if I had come to school on my magic carpet. This never seemed to bother me on account that I understood we were all friends and that

everyone would wisecrack with everyone else; I also liked to think that I had a sense of humor!

However, after the tragic attacks, the horseplay seemed to get a little more sincere. Now instead of the Aladdin jokes, people would ask me how my uncle Osama was doing, or if I flew an airplane to school. I still had my sense of humor, but the terrorist attacks that hit America were nothing to make light of, even if it was just an antic. Even though I would act as if the clever remarks had no effect on me, they slowly took a mental toll on me. As the jokes increased, the sense of pride I had of being a Persian American seemed to decrease.

I suppose that one of the biggest changes after September 11 was the way I would get treated at the airport. I remember when I used to go with an enthusiastic attitude because I loved to travel. My mom would take me to visit my aunt Anita in Orange County, California, several times a year. We would never have any problems with the whole process of getting onto our flights; in fact, we always got treated a little nicer than the other travelers because my uncle was a pilot for American Airlines.

Now, however, getting on an airplane is as difficult as discovering the meaning of life for someone of Middle Eastern descent! After all the leery looks my mother and I receive from security and other travelers, we ponder why we just don't take a bus.

America has fought its entire life to get rid of racism and inequality. Should the acts of a few gutless men place a stereotype on millions of good-hearted people? Why am I looked at a little more carefully at the airport than the felon behind me? I understand that I may fit a profile, but so did every white male after the Oklahoma City bombing. I would hope that before my children are old enough to understand racism, America has truly learned to become "The Land of the Free." I guarantee that if someone would ask one of my friends who they thought the 9/11 attacks disgusted the most, I would be the unanimous winner. **DS**

Mask, photograph, by Glen Sovian

Then
Write

On

This

Page

By Bongani Mlambo

If ever it has happened, that by chance
In my word, my demeanor, or in my glance
Seemed comments or actions that inspired rage
Then I invite you to write on this page

If ever it has happened, that I put you down
Caused shame, caused anger, or caused a frown
Or perhaps, my laughter seemed harsh and cruel
Then write on this page, that I'm a fool

If ever it has happened, that you felt ignored
When you were around me, I seemed so bored
In your presence, I made a vow of silence
Then write on this page, that you wish me violence

If ever it has happened, that I seemed so high
And looked upon you with a judgmental eye
Or prideful in wisdom, my words cut deep
Then write on this page, that I made you weep

If ever it has happened, that by acting mean
Our friendship was quick to the guillotine
And I cut all affection and all communication
Then write on this page, that you felt in isolation

If ever it has happened, that you come to read
These words, this verse, then truly and indeed
Critique our relationship, and test its age
You are cordially invited to write on this page. **DS**



My Personality, acrylic, by Richard Ybarra

The Old Man & the Sea Change

By Tomm Gillies

"I knew Hemingway, you know."

It didn't sound pretentious when he said it, but I knew he was full of shit. He did look as if he drank like Hemingway. His white hair was slicked back with too much grease, or perhaps he just hadn't bathed, and his moustache lay long and messy, obscuring most of his mouth. The lines on his face were deeply etched and his clothes looked as though they hadn't seen water, let alone soap, in weeks. We were sitting outdoors at La Closerie des Lilas — one of Hemingway's favorite cafés in Paris — discussing the author's life, when the old man inserted himself at our table.

"Buy me a drink and I'll tell you about it ... if you care to hear. You are Americans, non?"

His English was perfect, with only a slight trace of an accent betraying his Parisian roots. He certainly was old enough to have known Hemingway, but I knew better than to take a Frenchman at his word -- especially when a drink was involved. What the hell! I figured we had already done most of the touristy things in Paris and he seemed to be a nice enough chap. Let him have his fun. We were leaving for home later that afternoon anyway.

"All right, Monsieur. You may have your drink, and we shall have a story. Garçon!"

The waiter approached from behind us — an actor awaiting his entrance? Ignoring us, he addressed our new friend. "La Fée Verte?"

"Oui."

And he was off to the bar. There was no pretense in this game, which I for one found rather odd, considering the French penchant for drama and intrigue. Perhaps the waiter had tired of the game — or his part in it. I picked up my own glass of Bordeaux and took a sip.

The man certainly fit the part. Even with the well-worn clothes and the greasy hair, there was an air of notability about him. Perhaps he truly was an artist. Not a well known one, but an artist all the same. Of course, this was Paris. Everyone in Paris is an artist. Therefore, I stuck with my original conviction: He was a barfly who knew how to scam Americans for drinks. Hey, everybody's gotta make a living somehow. I turned to my two companions.

"Are we all buying this story or am I going solo?"

Two five-euro notes landed on the table near my wine — one from each of them. They were as intrigued as I was.

The waiter returned bearing a tray of various items. He set them down

in what appeared to be some sort of ritual arrangement. There was an odd-shaped glass with an emerald green liquid. On top of this, he gingerly set a slotted spoon that fit perfectly. He placed a white cube on the spoon. Next, he set by the glass a small pitcher of ice water with a covering to prevent the ice from coming out. The waiter glanced at our interloper, who nodded almost imperceptibly, and was then left with both of the fives. I silently deduced there would be no change coming back. The old man reached for the pitcher.

"Hold on, Smiley."

The interruption came from Jack, who was sitting to my left. The old man was startled — Was the game up? — his hand frozen in mid-air over the handle of the pitcher. A look of bewilderment replaced the smile on his face that had prompted Jack's address.

"Monsieur?"

"You said, buy you a drink. Well, we've bought your drink. Now, if you want to enjoy drinkin' whatever the hell that concoction you got there is, I suggest you start talkin'. And it better be good, or me and my pals will have a little chat with the owner of this fine establishment and your days of rippin' off Americans will be over. Capische?"

Pete and I both stifled a laugh. Jack was every European's nightmare of the ugly American. He was bold, brash, and full of bull. He loved the way he offended what he called their "continental sensibilities." Even that

was a line, though, because in the States, Jack was more European than most Europeans. He said he just liked exposing everyone's inflated images of themselves and their culture. I think he just liked being an asshole. Either way it didn't matter, 'cause if you were in on the joke, it was pretty funny. The old man, however, impressed me with his reaction. He settled into his seat as if he'd never intended to have a drink at all.

"Very well, Monsieurs. If you will indulge me for a time, I will tell you a tale that, were it known in your country, or for that matter anywhere, it would set the literary world on its collective head. You are all young men, but I sense that you have more than a passing knowledge of the affairs of this world. You are educated. N'est-ce pas?"

We each nodded our heads.

"But you have more than just a degree from some university. You have seen things. You have experienced life in ways that others only read about — or, I suppose now, see in the movies. Very few have time for books now. Busy, busy. Everyone busy. A lost art, reading. It is sad. Too sad. Plus ça change...

To Ernest Hemingway. His life
has brought me more joy
and pain than any one man
should receive from another.

But, I digress. I am right, non? You are such men as I have described?"

Again, we nodded. He was very perceptive. You had to be, I guess, to be in his racket, but he was beyond good at it. We were hooked. He leaned toward us, his confidantes.

"I will tell you a secret. I have been earning my drinks for many years here, regaling tourists with stories of Hemingway and Stein and Fitzgerald and many others of the so-called Lost Generation. And it has been fun. But there is always a time when the piper is to be paid. I have been riding his coattails for too long. Perhaps the fee will be one I cannot afford, but I will stand tall and take it like a man. I once was a man, you know. A real man. A soldier."

He paused, lost in some memory of this man he used to be. I sensed a longing within him to return to this time — to be this man again. He shook it off with a grunt and continued.

"That is all behind me. All that remains is to tell the tale. The true tale. My coup de grâce. La vengeance est un plat qui se mange froid!"

He sat, reflecting on this last bit, letting the words hang in the air for a moment before they settled on our shoulders, giving each of us a slight chill in the warm summer air.

"This is ... how you Americans say, 'No Bullshit.' I have waited a long time to find someone intelligent enough and worthy enough to entrust this with. Apparently, Fate has chosen not one, but three. May I?"

He again reached for the small pitcher and none of us restrained him. At this point, I didn't care if it was true or not, I knew we were in for a good story and, so far, it was worth the price of admission. I signaled for the waiter and when I had his attention, I circled my hand, letting him know we wanted another round. Our raconteur, knowing he held his audience in the palm of his hand, went about his ministrations with deliberate care. He slowly drizzled the water in the pitcher over the white cube on top of the spoon, which dissolved down through the spoon and into the glass. The clear green liquid in the bottom reacted immediately, becoming cloudy and swirling around the glass.

"My name is Joubert. Henri Joubert. I was born not far from here in the year 1920. Oui, I am eighty-six years old. My uncle owned this café, so this was my second home. It still is, I suppose."

He stopped pouring the water as the cube, which I now took to be sugar, had completely dissolved.

"In forty years I have never told any of my ... my ... patrons ... my name. You three are the first to know it."

He set the pitcher down with the steadfastness of a condemned man, removed the spoon and, setting it aside, raised the glass in a toast. We quickly grabbed our own drinks and raised them as well.

"To Ernest Hemingway. His life has brought me more joy and pain than any one man should receive from another. May you rest peacefully until I come to see you. May you wait in terror of the coming of that day. May your legend and your legacy grow with each passing year. May you be exposed for the fraud you were."

He seemed to be lost in a trance, as if Hemingway sat next to him, a glass raised in kind.

"My friend. My enemy. L'homme est un loup pour l'homme."

A tear formed in the corner of his left eye and silently crept its way through the wrinkles and crags on his timeworn face. He let it fall.

"It has befallen me, as the last survivor, to finally break the silence. This is my curse and my duty. I toast you and Jacques and Pauline and James and all the others who went to their graves without revealing the truth. But I ... I shall tell it."

With that, he looked at us.

"Gentlemen."

He knocked back the mixture in one draught and slammed the glass on the table with such force that it was obliterated before our eyes. His fist squeezed the broken shards that remained in his hand and blood began to seep out between his fingers.

"Henri?!"

It was the waiter, returning with our drinks. The power of the old man's action had so mesmerized us that we had failed to see what was now alarming the waiter. Our storyteller had turned as white as the first snow of winter. His eyes had rolled back in his head and his breath came in guttural stabs, convulsing his entire body. His mouth began to froth a bit, but perhaps that was from the drink. All at once, his body stopped, his eyes came back, his head straightened and he looked right through me.

"Fraud..."

His head snapped back violently and the force of it took his body and the chair with it. The waiter tried to catch him but he was too slow and we knew the crack we heard was not the chair hitting the hard stone floor.

"Ambulance! Ambulance!"

The waiter's shouts virtually echoed throughout the café and down the famous Boulevard de Montparnasse, but we knew it was too late for our old friend. Jack found his voice first.

"Well that sucks. I was kinda lookin' forward to hearin' that story."

Seeing the tray of drinks the waiter had left in his haste to get help, I seized the moment.

"To Henri Joubert, last of the Lost Generation."

Draining our glasses, we smashed them on the floor and weaved our way through the gathering crowd. **DS**

Memories, mixed media, by Elza Guedes



Buckner



Children's Home



By Lluvia Ruiz

There are times in life when we conform to our daily rituals. We find comfort and security in what we know to be a normal life. But there are also times when life takes an unexpected turn, and that's when we really grow. Though some experiences may be painful, they force us to be more open-minded and to understand and appreciate the world we live in. I will never forget that October afternoon that changed my life forever.

It was ten minutes until three and I began to count the minutes until the bell would dismiss school. I anticipated this moment; I felt as if I could finally exhale once I left the building. Nine minutes ... eight minutes ... seven minutes ... my count-down was interrupted when the teacher called me toward her desk. With little explanation and hall pass in hand, I was sent to the main office. There, I was greeted by a tall, thin, ebony-toned woman. "Are you Iris?" she asked in a soft, almost motherly voice. After a quick, shy nod of the head, she motioned my sister, who was sitting in the waiting chairs, to join us.

She told us that we would be given a ride home that day and we promptly agreed to her very kind offer. Outside, a big white van was waiting for us, and I felt kind of special – clueless, but special. Upon entering, I found three more of my siblings inside and that's when I first felt suspicious, but I quickly dismissed it as we arrived at the front of the apartment complex.

We were not allowed to leave the van; instead we waited inside for our parents to come home. After a few minutes, my parents ar-

rived with my youngest sister. The lady who had introduced herself as Mrs. Angela left the van only to bring my baby sister inside with her. Confused, I turned to my older sister in search of some kind of explanation in all the chaos but found nothing. As the van drove off, I looked back and caught a glance of my now hysterical mother struggling with an officer. I felt numb.

Everything went by so fast and it was already getting dark by the time we arrived at our destination. Hand in hand, we all entered the building. Inside, we were told to take a seat and a caseworker tried her best to explain the situation. In short, they believed that the conditions that we lived in at home were not healthy for us. They used the word *neglect* a lot. I noticed that most of my sisters had fallen asleep and that it was getting really late. Were we going to sleep in the office?

For the first time since we were picked up I spoke up and asked Mrs. Angela where we were going to spend the night. She turned to me with those kind eyes; she looked as though she had had this conversation before. She told us that we were going to be taken to a children's home; well, the oldest children were anyways. The younger ones would be taken to a foster home. Once more we had to get on that white bus. The younger children stayed there waiting for their new foster parents. My heart mourned for them, but I knew that my journey had just begun.

Once we arrived at Buckner Children's Home, we were given pajamas

Conflict, oil, by Junko Otsu



and a grilled cheese sandwich to satisfy our famished tummies. Finally, we were sent to separate rooms where other children were already asleep in their bunks.

In the next three months, we followed a very structured schedule. We were to wake up at 6:30 a.m. and get ourselves ready for breakfast, which was in another building. Breakfast started promptly at 7:15 and soon after we were done, we lined up with our age group for school. School consisted of different activities and subjects. I especially liked school because even though I was in the fifth grade, the fifth graders shared learning together with the sixth graders, and I got to spend a lot of time with my older sister.

In the three months that we stayed there, I learned many things. I met so many children that I'll probably never forget about. Most of them had come out of broken homes and had endured some kind of physical or mental abuse. I met this girl who had been raped at a very young age and was caught prostituting at fourteen. Some of them had been in the system for quite a while; from Buckner to a foster home to another foster home and back to Buckner, and so on. I saw children there from the tiny adorable three-year olds up to eighteen-year olds.

Yes, they had gone through a lot, saw things they weren't supposed to see, were treated in ways they were not supposed to be treated, but in the end they were just like me. They wanted to be accepted and validated for who they were as a people.

As strange as it may sound, I am truly grateful to have lived through this experience. I don't think I would have become the open-minded person that I am had this never happened. **DS**



Black and White Mask, pastel, by Bryan Mokeski



Moving House

By Hollis Fischer

Sitting on the balcony:
white light as warm
as baby's milk on the arm,
white veins on a ledge,
a white moon,
wind chimes with white virgin hues.

The modern inside blinds
have cat eyes trying to see through,
know more, offer little condolences.

Its green eyes make me laugh –
I watch them without asking anything,
for behind their habits:

a long train of suburban boxes
is silently ushering out
of the bedroom's mixed geometry,
beneath a bottom-heavy
table lamp's bald reticence.

They follow its guidance
without a hint of prejudice,
but still with an effort,
to shrug off what they are –
a little tired, a little put down, a lot *bête noire*.

It is late as I sit alone –
even at midnight:
the sky is thirsty with clouds
in a slow Motown shuffle.

On the balcony,
I hug the dry concrete
with my lily skin.
It feels for what we might have known.

Years from now:
Will I remember this home?
Or simply an inaudible dream,
never brought out into daylight. **DS**

Alone, spray paint, by Ashley Jameson

I WANT A SUGAR DADDY

By Travis Vanderlaan

Since I was a young boy, my father has groomed me to follow in his success-driven footsteps. He has sewn the thread into the fabric of my being to attend a prestigious college, make straight A's, and establish a reputable career. The most imperative piece of this elaborate lifestyle is to marry and breed with a trophy wife. My father taught me that it is a man's duty to parade and exhibit his championship wife much like a hunter displays his mounted prey on the wall. After fulfilling these elements of success, I can toast myself with fine champagne for being the *crème de la crème* while on the country club golf course with my elite friends.

To achieve all of this, my father has showed by example what is expected of a man. He has taught me that a man has to be willing to stay at the office day and night, seven days a week, and forgo seeing his family since work always comes first. What little time a man has with his family he should spend plotting his next brilliant business move. Another valuable lesson he has exhibited is that a man must depend on Valium and alcohol to relieve the anxiety derived from constantly strategizing his financial future. My father has taught me that a man's worth is not measured by who he is, but rather what he has. With the pressures, expectations, and responsibilities that come with being a man, I daydream about the allure of a sugar daddy to relieve me from such manly duties.

My sugar daddy would call all of the shots, such as where we live, what activities we participate in, and our circle of friends. My sugar daddy will appoint an assistant to manage my wine and cheese lunches, daily appointments to the salon, monthly Botox injections, and seasonal appearances at Armani, Gucci, and Chanel fashion shows. There is no need to waste my time setting silly goals or aspiring to fulfill any dreams of my own as Daddy's desire is my desire. I will be his sexy, obedient, and submissive robot programmed to exceed all of his wishes and needs. The extent of my decision making is whether to use Visa, MasterCard, or American Express.

My sugar daddy must appreciate the daily duties I perform for him. Despite what people think, a kept arm piece has a job, too. When he gets home from work late at night, I greet Daddy with a stiff cocktail. I will look my best, rub his shoulders, tell him how hard he has worked, and summon the chef to promptly serve Daddy's supper. I am challenged by this multi-tasking rou-

tine, but with a cocktail in hand, I can manage. As Daddy's toy, I have my morning chores, too. I am still in bed when Daddy leaves for work and am required to fulfill any sexual favors he craves. Afterwards, I am free to roll over and continue my beauty rest.

My sugar daddy must provide me with a luxurious lifestyle. My end of the deal is to keep my buns toned, my stomach flat, my body tanned, and my teeth whitened to keep the eye candy seductive to Daddy. His part of the deal is lavish gifts, surprises of spontaneous vacations to exotic destinations, a life of luxury, and a cozy severance package for me when he upgrades to a newer, younger, and tighter model. Life would be so simple with a man to provide for me. I could live the easy life, stay at home and exercise all day, get manicures, pedicures, and massages. I get a large grin on my face when I imagine walks to the park with my tea-cup poodle, Tinkerbell. We get our nails painted the same color each week. He enjoys wearing costumes, bows, and rhinestone collars as much as I do.

A life filled with the finest quality possessions, the latest and greatest toys, and the most exclusive high society events may lure some women and guys like me to this type of relationship. Who wouldn't want a sugar daddy? Some men define themselves through the characteristics of the male role, which include sleep deprivation, the inability to be satisfied, and the inability to stop to enjoy success. Society's stereotypes of the ideal spouse are the "Desperate Housewives" trophy wife and the type-A personality alpha-male husband. As I consider what role to play in life, I will avoid succumbing to the pressures of what a man should be and look instead for a sugar daddy. **DS**



Fingerlit, acrylic, by Pat Sutterfield



THE VANISHING MEXICANS

By D.B. Denney

Veil of Mana, cattle marker on paper, by Vinitza Solis

The Mexicans started disappearing, vanishing into the thin air without a trace, succumbing to a deportation that would take them to another world, another culture. This deportation started with a few, but soon the politicians and the corporate leaders, with their greedy money-making mentality, intensified the project, advancing ten's of thousands more across the border every month, enslaving their minds and bodies. At first it was the men of Mexico who vanished. They vanished while sleeping next to loved ones, plucked out of their beds, in the security of their homes. They disappeared from work, city parks, public libraries, and busy city streets. They disappeared in the middle of the night and even in broad daylight. Then this extradition expanded, taking the minds and bodies of women, and children. The oddity of the situation is that nobody missed the vanished; and they, the vanished, missed nobody.

I saw a dark figure racing through my bushes in the backyard, and then suddenly, a thunderous sound from next door rocked the neighborhood. This sent Rex, my pit bull, scurrying out of his favorite recliner. He raced to the front window bark-

ing and growling with every intention of protecting his meager domain. I followed Rex to the window and witnessed my neighbor's house being besieged by federal agents. They violated my neighbor's front door, kicking it in, and this irritated Rex even more. As I tried to gain control over him, I noticed something odd that I have never seen before dangling from his dog collar. It was a square medallion made out of steel.

As the agents were busy searching Joe Varga's house, a cluster of neighbors gathered to gawk at the scene, and I rushed out of my house and joined them. Before I could greet my neighbors, though, two agents grabbed me by my arms and swiftly escorted me to a black Ford sedan with tinted windows. As we approached the rear passenger door, the window slowly rolled down, and the face of a man appeared. The grotesqueness of his face stunned me. He had a sickly pale look to his complexion, and his tightly curled hair was as white as snow, with his nose protruding outward like a ski slope. A black patch covered his left eye, leaving one freakish looking light blue eye to gaze into mine. He did not look like a federal agent; in fact, he looked like

a professional hit man. He had only two questions to ask me and the gruffness in his voice suggested that I should tell him everything he wanted to know. He asked me if I knew where Joe Varga was and I said, "No." I thought to myself, as a gap of silence interrupted our conversation, Could he tell I was lying? He then asked me if I knew anything about the CF project and I asked, "What is the CF project?" He ignored my question and the window slowly rolled up leaving me and the two agents looking at our reflections in the tinted window.

Rex was sleeping in his well worn, plaid brown recliner, when I returned, and I chuckled at the intensity of his snoring as it echoed throughout the house. As I sat in front of him and inspected the medallion, the initials on the medallion immediately grabbed my attention, sending me into a fit of air-gasping seizures. The phone rang, and it rang thirty times before I gained enough composure to accept the call. The voice on the other end was unrecognizable at first, but as soon as the caller caught his breath I knew it was Joe. I said impatiently, "Joe, what in the hell is going on? There is a mob of federal agents looking for you. Are you in trouble, Joe?" Without a hello or even acknowledging my questions, he said, "I need you to meet me at Vern's Diner. . . Now!" With that the line went dead and I rushed to find my keys to the car.

Vern's diner is a family-owned establishment, serving Americana cuisine with enough artery-clogging fats to choke a donkey. The locals have gathered there for decades, making it the central intelligence headquarters for discussing and debating the hot topics of the day. Joe stood out like a sore thumb and I spotted him at a table towards the back of the restaurant. He was wearing dark-shaded sun glasses, the ugliest puffy purple coat with orange trim that I have ever seen, a black long-sleeved shirt, black pants, blue Adidas running shoes, and socks as pink as a Mary Kay Cadillac. Without a customary greeting, which is highly unusual for Joe, he said, "I need you to help me schedule a meeting with a journalist from *The New York Times*." He then handed me a manila envelope. "This envelope contains all the information you need to know for now. There is another envelope inside addressed to a journalist. If they kill me, then mail the envelope, and please don't tell anyone about it; they would kill you if they knew you had it." Before I could say a word Joe stood up, walked over to me, and patted me on the back, saying, "You're a great friend." I left the diner shaken, but intrigued.

I sneaked in through the side door of my house, hoping to avoid being seen by anyone trying to kill me. The sounds of Rex snoring did nothing to calm my nerves; in fact, it made me think. Rex would never know if someone tried to break into the house; he sleeps like a Canadian black bear hibernating through a long winter. For the first time in my life I felt like I needed a weapon, so I searched the house, finding nothing but a fire poker from my fire iron set. Even though fear had overcome my inquisitiveness, I still intended to help my friend. Sitting in the recliner next to Rex with the fire poker in my lap, I opened the manila envelope and took out a typed letter that had instructions for me to follow and a white envelope addressed to Howard Fern at *The New York Times*. When I read the letter, and then realized the danger Joe was in, I immediately called Howard Fern to set up an interview. He said that he expected a call from Joe, but he understood Joe's predicament, and he appreciated my help in setting up the interview. He agreed to meet me and Joe at Gibson Park in Grand Prairie, Texas, the next day. When Joe called later that evening, I told him the time and location of the meeting.

The rain was as thick as a bowl of creamed corn and as cold as a Pop-sicle when I pulled into the parking lot at the park. I saw Joe sitting at a picnic table, under an awning, reading a newspaper, so I walked over to

"... OUR PAYROLLS SHOULD BE JAMMED WITH IMMIGRANTS. THIS WILL BE GREAT FOR PROFITS AND THE STOCKHOLDERS ..."

meet him. Just as I was shaking Joe's hand and hugging him, a hunter green BMW pulled into the parking lot. I had a million questions that I wanted to ask Joe, but I figured they would be answered during the interview with Howard so I held off from asking them.

Howard looked like a typical journalist, an old school journalist. He was in his late fifties, with a receding gray hair line that was parted in the middle, dividing his head evenly in half, and a cigar hung to one side of his mouth emitting a plume of smoke from time to time. Howard wasted no time with small talk and insisted that Joe tell him everything starting from the beginning.

Joe began hesitantly, "In mid-July, a friend of mine, Roy Barnes, who worked for the State department, called me and said he stumbled on to some information regarding my family, saying he knew where they were living."

Howard chimed in, "You mean *The Roy Barnes*, the Secretary of the State, who died in that freakish car fire?"

"Yes, yes. I told him that I did not have a family. I told him that my family was killed in a house fire and then Roy said, 'Joe, you may want to sit down. I know you believe your family perished in a house fire but that is not so. You have a wife living in California and a son living in Florida. Your mom and dad live in San Antonio, Joe.'"

I looked at Joe and said, "Oh my God!"

Joe continued, "Roy then told me about the CF project. He said that the Vice President of the United States and the President of Mexico formed a secret group called NAFTA which stood for The Nationality Abandonment Faction Trade Accord. This group stole a scientific device that was being researched and developed at M.I.T."

Howard looked puzzled and asked, "So, what does this device do and what would the President of Mexico and the Vice President want with such a device?"

Joe said, "Well, this device erases only the memories you want to erase, but leaves others intact. The device also creates new memories and fills in the gaps left by the erasing of the old memories. In fact, they used this device very effectively on the researchers and scientists at M.I.T. when they stole the unit." Joe went on without skipping a beat, "Once they have created a new memory, they export these people from Mexico and bring them to the United States, classifying them as illegal immigrants, hiding the fact that they have been brought here by NAFTA. The President of Mexico is in favor of this because these immigrants are brainwashed to send money back to Mexico. You see, according to Mark Stevenson of the Associated Press, 'Mexicans working in the United States are a huge source of revenue for Mexico, sending home more than \$16 billion in remittances'. . . This currency is the second largest source of foreign income."

Howard chimed in and said, "So the President of Mexico is in favor of immigration because the currency sent back to Mexico is an important source of income that helps the Mexican economy?"

"Yes, that's it," Joe said.

I felt compelled to share my two cents: "Doesn't the Mexican President realize that the deportation of people from his country causes more

damage because of the loss of their greatest resource, which is, of course, people? Doesn't he also realize that the deportation also undermines their economy and systematically erodes the Mexican middle class?"

Joe said, "Yes, you have a point, but I think the Mexican President is only thinking about the short term benefits and not the long term disaster that is approaching. The President of Mexico believes that native Mexicans will one day return to their native land."

"How was NAFTA formed?" Howard, quizzically asked in disbelief.

Joe said, "The Vice President has many ties to the business world; in fact he was once the CEO of Haliburton, so from his business connections he organized NAFTA. He proposed this scheme to the Mexican President during a vacation at the President's ranch.

Howard, still looking puzzled, "How does the Vice President benefit from this deal?"

Joe said, "The Vice President is guaranteed to win the next election because of the support he will receive from the corporate leaders associated with NAFTA."

Howard, being the skeptical, fact-finding, truth-seeking journalist that he is, said, "Joe, this all sounds rather interesting but I can't go to press with this unless you have hard evidence."

Joe reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a mini-disc player.

"On this disk is a recording from a NAFTA meeting and I think it's all the proof you will need. It has all the key players discussing the project in detail. Also there is another meeting recorded on the disk. In this meeting they discuss the progress of the project."

Howard, beaming with enthusiasm, insisted Joe play a few examples from the recording and he obliged.

The voice of Mexico's president jumped out of the small speaker, "Gentlemen, it is time to take this project to the next level. We have a secret site in Mexico, the town of Bisbee, which is only five miles from the border, which will act as a central location for the exportation of immigrants to the U.S. Once we have erased their memories and implanted new ones, then the borders can be fully open to allow a free flow of migrant workers.

"Shocking!" Howard proclaimed.

"Oh, it gets much better," as Joe located the next track to play.

"Corporate managers will place orders with our smugglers for a specific number of able bodies to be delivered." We will supply them with what they

need, but our goal should be to fill as many existing jobs as possible with immigrants. Our payrolls should be jammed with immigrants. This will be great for profits and the stockholders," the Vice President assured and then went a step further, "Gentlemen, the U.S. will need many, young, strong, productive workers from Mexico . . . so it will be important to reach a bilateral agreement this evening for a future flow of workers in an orderly and secure manner."

Joe played another snippet from another meeting: "We have a new account from Tiger Foods, Inc. They have placed an order for as many as 550 immigrants to replace 550 currently overpaid American workers."

Joe handed Howard the disk and envelope and ended with, "There is four hours of meetings on this disk and there are copies of five e-mails in the envelope."

Howard proclaimed triumphantly, "We can definitely go to press with this."

I sat with Joe, listening to the rain pelting the rusty metal awning, as Howard drove off in his BMW. Still not believing what I just heard I tried to put it into perspective. I said, "You know Joe, this sounds like a form of corporate slavery. In fact it is slavery. This is corporate greed going too far Joe, destroying people's lives and their families.

Joe said, "Yeah, you're right, and you know the harm done to Mexico far outweighs any benefit whatsoever. Just think, all of these workers coming from Mexico, young people, students, entrepreneurs, and the exportation of these immigrants is like a vacuum sucking the most valuable resource Mexico has: their people."

"Joe, I'm curious. Did you by chance put a steel medallion on Rex's collar and if so why?"

Joe said with a warm grin, "Yes, I did. Inside the medallion is a mini disk that contains all the information that Roy sent to me. I figured it would be safe around the neck of that killer pit bull of yours."

I laughed and then said, "Oh, you mean Sleeping Beauty?"

Joe laughed and then he got up from the bench. I could tell something was not right. He seemed distracted, distant, lost, depressed, or maybe he was just tired and overwhelmed from this experience.

"So when are you going to see your family, Joe?" I mentioned in the hopes of cheering him up.

Joe, looking as though a ghost had robbed him of his soul, "They vanished into thin air, without a trace and the oddity of the situation is that nobody missed the vanished." **DS**

Which Came First?, digital print, by Angela Galloway



More Than a Molehill

By David Eiler

There it stood before me, 3776 meters of pure volcanic rock and muddy trails, ending in a breathtaking view of the volcanic crater at the peak, and an amazing view of the surrounding landscape. The hard part was not starting this journey, nor was it ending it. The hardest part was not stopping short of the goal, and pushing myself to take that next step. Like so many things in life, we look at the obstacle in front of us and think to ourselves, "How will I ever do this?" I learned to just look at what is in the now during those trials, because if we look at anything past that, we can easily become overwhelmed. I only wish I could have learned that an easier way than by fighting for my life on the side of Japan's largest mountain.

I had gone to Japan, Tokyo, to be exact, for two months on a mission trip through a Christian organization. This was my first time out of the country and away from home for so long, so I knew it was going to be a life-changing experience even before I left, but I didn't know how true that really was going to be. We had been there for about a month and a half when it came time for our planned trip to Mount Fuji. So we left on a Tuesday night and planned on climbing through the night in order to make it to the top in time to see the sunrise. This also happened to be my first time near, on, and climbing a mountain. Go figure. We arrived at the fifth of ten stations at about seven and started our climb about thirty minutes later.

Our first mistake had been to not check the weather conditions before we left. If we had, we would have discovered that there would be torrential rains, thirty degree temperatures, and wind gusts of about fifty miles per hour. But it was too late now, so we trekked on. In about five minutes I was completely soaked, despite my greatest efforts to remain dry. It was almost pitch black, and all I had to guide my way was a little flashlight that fit in my palm.

As we got higher and higher, the air became thinner, and it became more difficult to breathe well. With the lack of oxygen came the almost unendurable fatigue of our muscles. We made it to the seventh station, going up a zigzag path the whole way, when we hit a path that required us to do some rock

climbing. Now, it is hard enough to keep your footing in the dark to begin with, but when you put the wet, slippery rocks and gusts of wind that literally knock you off your feet into the equation, that makes things so much different. In addition, I made the mistake of turning around and looking down the side of the mountain. I was terrified and could feel the vertigo coming upon me. I turned around and crawled up the rest of the way on all fours, holding on tightly each time I heard the thundering sound of an oncoming wind gust, which sounded like a freight train barreling down the tracks right towards us.

We finally made it past the rocks and back onto the zigzag path, but by this time our muscles were pretty much Jell-o. It literally became mind over matter from this point on, actually forcing your mind to tell your legs to put one foot in front of the other. We were thinking on a step-by-step basis. That's when I realized something quite profound. One time on the path I paused with my climbing buddy and turned the light off. I looked around and could see the silhouette of the mountain and the clouds rushing quickly down the side. I could hear the wind blowing and nothing else ... except that voice which told me to go on. The voice said to me, "David, you are so small compared to this mountain, and you won't make it unless you depend on me and take it one step at a time." After we had rested for a few seconds, we started off again, but now I had a newfound strength that pushed me onward. I said the same silent prayer under my breath all the way up: give me strength.

In the bus on the way back, my whole body completely drained and my mind screaming for rest, I thought about that experience. It was the most miserable experience of my life, but I know that looking back, I wouldn't have traded it for the world. Even though we didn't make it to the top because the people on the mountain said it was too dangerous to go on, I learned a valuable lesson. There are times in our lives when everything seems near impossible, and it may be sometimes; but, if we learn to look at things on a much smaller scale, like putting one foot in front of the other on that rocky path, we can conquer mountains. **DS**



Calligraphic Mark, ink, by Pavlina Panova

WILD WORLD OF SPORTS RADIO



By Roy L. Cover

You're listening to K J O K radio, Kayjock, five-seventy on your AM dial. We're your number one all-sports station. If it's a sport, it's on Kayjock. We now take you, live, to our man at the center of the action for this Kayjock sports exclusive....

"This is the Mangle Master. Yeah that's right, the master of mangle in all my glory. And I ain't never gonna let anybody forget it. Never!

"We're here, where it's always the freezin' season and the chicks dig me. Today, we're in Saint Pete, the big burg of Roosia. And we're ready to rumble, tumble, ROCK AND ROLL!

"We've gotta special treat for all you sportsters today. This is a winner-take-all, no-holds barred, in-your-face, grudge match between the two top pros that will decide, once and for all, who will be the chess master champion big dog of the whole friggin' world.

"I'm here, the Mangle Master, in a booth high above the action down there on the gym floor of the Leningrad . . . no, wait a minute. Make that Saint Petersburg High School. Looks like the name has been painted over a couple of times. But this is where the heavy checks hit the board, folks. And I've got a special guest commentator here to put in his three-cents-worth of chess ex-par-tease. Milton G. Waterford came here all the way here from London, England. Help me out here, Milty. What do these three lines after your name mean?"

"Those are the Roman numerals for three, Mister Master. It signifies that I am Milton G. Waterford, The Third."

"Whoa, first thing outta the box, Milty. Cut the mister crap. It's me and you here, okay. Just call me Mangler."

"Very well. As I was saying, Mangler, I, my father, and my grandfather all share the same name."

"Not much imagination in your family when it comes to the name game, huh?"

"Certainly not compared to your own rather colorful cognomen."

"My what? Oh, yeah, my name. That's from my old WWF days. You know, World Wrestling Federation. Don't wrestle anymore, but I liked the name, so I kept it. Pretty cool, huh?"

"It is certainly . . . unique. And rather fitting for a man of your bulk."

"You could stand to bulk-up a little yourself, Milty. There's more food out there than Slim Fast, you know. What do you think about the lineup for the big match today?"

"By 'lineup,' may I take it you are referring to the contestants?"

"Take it all the way to the bank, Milty. On the one side we've got the reigning world champ, Eye-van Romain – like in lettuce, I guess – Romain-ovich."

"That would be pronounced as E-van Ro-man-o-vich. Ivan Romanovich. And really, Mangler, sir, your voice does have quite a resounding effect. I do believe your volume is somewhat disrupting to those down there on the floor."

"That's what I'm here for, Milty, my man. Add a little color and excitement to the game when things slow down. Who's the broad sittin' behind

Eye-van?"

"That is Mrs. Romanovich, Ivan's mother, and serving as his second."

"That's a relief. Thought it might be his honey. Man, these Ruski broads are sure rough around the edges. Hard to tell if they're somebody's main squeeze, their granny, or their bodyguard."

"Please, Mister – that is, Mangler – we must remember that we are guests in this country. We don't want to offend them."

"Oh, hell, Milty, all athletes are used to that kind of talk. Comes with the territory. How do these boys stack up against each other? I mean, now that they're nose-to-nose, eye-to-eye. Who's gonna blink first?"

"I hardly think they will attempt to out-stare one another. Rather, I would imagine they will apply their talents to the intricate moves on the chess board. Each player has his own distinct style that will become obvious as the game progresses, and . . ."

"Right you are, Milty. Which one do you think will make the first check: Eye-van, or this Willy guy?"

"Actually, that would be William McNamara. You may be interested to know that William is from America, and has been your country's reigning chess master for over eight years now."

BL-A-A-A-T!

"My word, what was that?"

"Air horn, Milty. Wakes folks up when there's a lull in the action. From the looks of it there's gonna be a lot of lulls in this game. I shoulda brought an extra horn."

"I believe you may have disturbed the participants somewhat, as well as the entire gallery below with that incredible blaring sound. I say, must you really blast that instrument with such volume?"

"Why, hell, yeah, Milty. Gotta show support for my home-boy."

BL-A-A-A-T!

"The contestants and their seconds keep looking up here, Mangler. I'm sure they disapprove of your loud distractions."

"Are these guys scared of each other, or what? They've been at it for over five minutes now, and I ain't seen one check."

"The game involves considerable strategy. A great deal of patience and stress is embodied in chess."

"What they need is a little encouragement. Like this: Check, check, check, check. C'mon, Milty, help me get that gallery down there in the mood. Check, check, check . . ."

"Please, Mangler, you're disrupting the tournament."

BL-A-A-A-T!

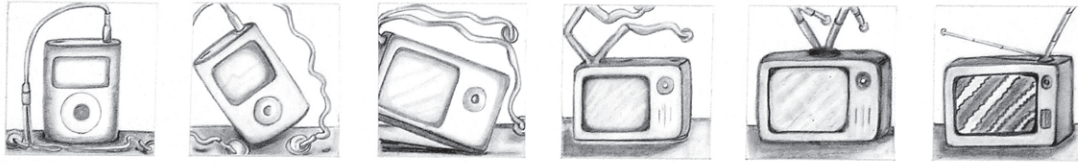
"Check, check, check, check. Nobody with me? Bunch of woosies!"

"Perhaps this is a different type of competition than what you are accustomed to covering on your broadcasts."

"Hey, Milty, a competitor's a competitor. Don't matter what the game. These ain't competitors. They're woosies. Woose, woose, woose!"

"Oh, my. Ivan made a gesture toward the booth here."

"Yeah? Great. Shows a little fire. Hey, Eye-van. Your momma wears



iPod Twist, pencil on paper, by Tara Brookman

IVAN'S MOTHER SENDS A FOOT TO HIS GROIN. AND THOSE AREN'T JUST BOOTS, FOLKS, THOSE ARE STEEL-TOED CONSTRUCTION-WORKER BROGANS.

combat boots. Hey, Milty. Look! She really does wear boots."

"Now William is talking with Ivan. This is most singular behavior for a championship match."

"Singular and stupid. Hey, down there! You woosies ever gonna get on with the checks?"

BL-A-A-A-T!

"Please, Mangler, those people seem to be genuinely upset with your antics."

"Yeah, yeah. What're they gonna do, beat me up?"

"Really now, chess players have been known to have quite a temper at times."

"Oh, stop, Milty. You're making me so frightened."

BL-A-A-A-T!

"Woose, woose, woose!"

"I fear you may have gone too far now, Mangler. The contestants and their seconds are making their way up here to the booth."

"Let the woosies come. Here, woosie, woosie, woosie."

"This may be very serious. They look terribly angry."

"Tell you what, Milty. Take over the microphone here and call it like you see it. I'll handle the action."

"I've never done this sort of reporting before. How should I go about it?"

"Nothing to it, Milty. Just tell the folks in radio-land what's goin' on."

"Upper lip and all then. . . . Ahem. Hello sporting enthusiasts. This is Milton G . . ."

"No time for that, Milty. They're breakin' down the door!"

"My word. The two chess masters and their seconds have burst into the booth, and the Mangler just took a swing at William McNamara, but missed.

"Now Ivan throws a left jab.

"The Mangler ducks, but William clips him on the chin with a vicious uppercut.

"The Mangler staggers. Ivan's mother sends a foot to his groin. And those aren't just boots, folks, those are steel-toed construction-worker brogans. Oh, she misses.

"The Mangler circles Ivan, looking for an opening.

"William's Second lands a folding chair on the back of the Mangler's head. He's down on one knee.

"William takes another swing at the Mangler's head, but he gets in the way of another swift kick from Ivan's Mother.

"William's down! William's down!

"The Mangler's up, but he's clearly hurt.

"Ivan swings with a right cross. He connects!

"The Mangler spins around and holds his chin. William's second connects with the folding chair again!

"The Mangler drops to all fours.

"William's up.

"Ivan's Mother kicks again.

"She connects. Ooo, and hard.

"The Mangler's down! The Mangler's down!

"William shoots out with a powerful right to the jaw. He connects!

"Ivan with a one-two combo to Mangler's breadbasket and spout-hole.

"William's second chairs again!

"Ivan's mother scores another solid kick. And another!

"Ivan cuts loose with a flurry of punches.

"Someone stop the slaughter.

"Now William wades in again.

"Oh, the humanity!" **DS**

Amis d'Arbre

By David Eiler

The sweet fragrant smell of pine needles fills the air. Each scent plays with my emotions, causing each breath to become an adventure. I lie there among the carpet of pine needles, warm from the little streams of light shining through the tops of the mighty pines. I close my eyes and am transported into another world, shaped by the green leaves and rough, tall trees. In my grandparents' backyard in Mississippi, I can get away from anything; I can escape reality just as easily as I can walk out a door. For some reason, the friendly trees speak to me. They teach me how to imagine and how to love even the smallest of things. The trees have their own story.

Standing at the bottom of my grandparents' back porch, I can see a sea of green; green grass sloping down a slight hill, going down to meet a literal wall of trees and a small creek at the bottom, green leaves clinging to the branches of their father trees, some floating down to the ground like little parachutes swaying back and forth. The ground is littered with a bed of brown, dead pine needles which have been shaken from their home at the top branches of the mighty pines that stand at random intervals around the yard. These trees, immense as they are, can become so personal with you. They call you to examine their aged skin, touch the rough bark, and smell the rugged, natural fragrances that emanate from within. The bark on the trunks is cracked and aged, grey and white and black all mixed, creating the look of a great, stone tower shooting into the sky. The trees praise the blue sky with lifted branches, as if Mother Earth herself wants to grasp and embrace the heavens.

I remember there were many times that I just went back there to escape the trouble and turmoil of everyday life. Those trees don't know heartache, anger, resentment, or sadness. All they know is what is around them. I expect they have seen much in their numerous years, from my mother and her siblings playing around their trunks and under the same branches to the following generation playing and learning much like before. The yard seems to be timeless. The grass is always the same shade of green, the trees always sway back and forth to the same rhythm, and the air has the same natural smell to it. Neither history nor humanity has affected that piece of nature in any way.

For that reason, I have grown to love the wisdom and air of adventure it all of-

fers. I can still sit under the trunk of a tree and imagine myself in the times of the Indians of those parts, hunting, fishing, and living as one with nature. I can sit by the slowly flowing, whispering spring and listen to its stories, then imagine that I am one of those frontier explorers, going where no man has gone before. I can build a fort of pine needles, sharp and hard, and imagine that I am a knight in shining armor, defending my great city on a hill. And when I am done adventuring for the day and I hear my parents calling me to dinner, I can look around me and see that same forest and know that nothing but my thoughts have changed.

One of my favorite things to do is to sit on the little bridge over the creek, and watch the water bugs ski across the surface of the water. Their long, thin legs push themselves across the water, gliding like ghosts across the intangible surface. The water ripples out as each tiny foot makes contact with the water. The ripples look like little bowls in the water, and then disappear back into the clear, calm creek. I also love to listen to the cicadas' songs during the evening and at night. It is a beautiful song starting as a whisper, and then gradually getting louder until it booms into a clashing cymbal. It then starts getting softer and softer until it again becomes a whisper and the cycle starts over again. I have never heard the backyard without this song, but I know that in its absence, there would be an unbearable silence that would cause an imbalance in the normally orderly and beautiful kingdom of nature. The forest forces me to acknowledge and learn to love things like the water bugs and cicada song.

Each time I return to that backyard, another year older, and hopefully another year wiser, I come back to my changing, growing family, and their changing, growing lives. I look around at my grandparents' house with its new furniture and pictures. And then I walk out the back door and I look around at the forest, the creek, and the animals, and I know that nothing has changed. I can still imagine that I am in a new, strange world, and I can always see the water bugs and hear the cicadas sing. But I know that when it comes down to it, those trees will always be there, ready to embrace me and teach me things I never knew before. They are my unchanging friends in this ever-changing world. **DS**



Nymphs, acrylic on canvas, by Junko Otsu

I am no longer concerned with the power this beast holds over me. I have become the host that has learned to recognize and break the spell ...

Lost in Sound

By D.B. Denney

It resonates vigorously, deep inside my mind and soul, fueled only by unbridled passion and the sense of pleasure gained by its existence. The origins of this beast are unknown to me, but its presence dominates my innermost being. This energy never leaves me; in fact, it has become quite a companion. After years of denying its existence, I finally befriended this companion accepting all of its qualities whether good or bad. This energy, this vibration I have come to live with, comes to life on its own, percolating like a coffee pot in my inner conscience until it is ready to stand on its own two feet and march to its own beat. As it parades around my mind, dancing to syncopated figures, it reaches a boiling point. It changes character, manifesting itself into a clickity-click tap sound of a pen on a table top, or a low, slow rumble of my shoe when it makes contact with a hollow hardwood floor. Although there is no known cure for this disturbing affliction of mine, it does have a name.

Musical rhythmic intelligence is the name of my beast. It is one of the eight multiple intelligences developed by a Harvard University professor that measure a person's aptitude for certain skills. The assessment showed that I have a sensitivity to music, rhythm and sound. I do hear melodies, even rhythmic beats pulsating in my head and throughout my body most of the time. This beast, this musical rhythmic intelligence, has had many effects on my life, some negative and some positive. I have finally learned to deal with the negatives and appreciate the positives.

There are many things lost in my mind because they are buried by sound, melody, and rhythmic drum beats. Sometimes words and sounds from the outside world, maybe important words and sounds, like the words in a conversation with my wife, or a lecture given by one of my astute professors, never make it to my memory bank. How could they? How could the words or sounds from the outside world penetrate through the barriers of sound layered so deep in my mind? The melody playing in my head is like a fortress keeping these real world events outside.

The passion that I have for music is so strong that music goes everywhere I do.

Melodies popping up in my head while I'm driving can at times distract me from the important task of observing traffic signs. I'm not saying that this happens a lot, even though I did run a stop sign once. In fact, I didn't realize I had run this stop sign until it was too late and I was well past the intersection. The funny thing is, while I was driving through this intersection, I was singing to myself lyrics that contained the word *stop*. Only by the grace of God that have I not been killed

by my affliction.

It is hard for me to stay focused on any subject for very long. As soon as boredom sets in, then the music begins to play. For example, two minutes into a tedious math assignment, I might hear the old Gregorian chant of a monk from the early Roman era that my music lit professor played earlier that day. As enjoyable as this escape from math may be, there are consequences. If my assignment is not completed on time, I run the risk of falling behind, or not understanding the material. This is an escape from the bland, uninspiring events we are subjected to on a daily basis. This is when my affliction awakes of its own will, casting a musical trance on its host.

There are times when my affliction is not a burden, but more like an oasis of sound waves rippling through my mind. This oasis of sound comes in handy when I stand in a long line at the grocery store, or while sitting in a mile-long traffic jam, watching the street sweepers make dust. These situations become tolerable, if not pleasurable, when my make-believe band kicks it up a notch in the chorus, entertaining me until the long lines have diminished and I can be on my way. I may be the only one in these long lines grooving along to a sound track inspired solely out of boredom or frustration.

When the complexities of life drag at my heels, slowing my pace, sapping my energy, burdening my blissful outlook on life, I look no further than the salvation of music to lift my spirits. Listening to music seems to have the power to wash away my negative feelings, renewing my enthusiasm for life. Listening to music is like escaping into a forest of dreams. In this forest, I can dream as big as I want and as creatively as my mind allows.

I am no longer concerned with the power this beast holds over me. I have become the host that has learned to recognize and break the spell before this energy has a chance to put me in a musical trance. Essentially, I have turned this energy into a beneficial companion, a companion that helps me break away from the harsh realities of life for brief spells at a time, to renew my own vigor in life, and to recharge my creative juices. I have often wondered whether or not other people experience this same kind of rhythmic intelligence. I remember an old friend of the family who could whistle just about every theme song to the old TV shows of the 1950's, 60's and 70's. I remember his renditions of classics like "I Love Lucy," "Leave it to Beaver," and "The Andy Griffith Show." He was even talented enough to whistle cartoon classics such as "The Flintstones," "The Jetsons," and "Scooby Doo." I always thought this man, like me, was possessed by the beast . . . lost in its sound. **DS**

Repetition, collage, by Ho-Jun Cha

46 YEARS LATER

By Duran¹

As the wind howls against the open window of the classic truck, I stare at the bouncing trailer in the rear view mirror. The sound of the clunky motor reminds me of why I love searching for lost treasures of the past. The long country miles of dirt roads and gravel give me a feeling of going back in time. As I pull up to her grave site, I jump out the truck to admire her beauty.

Many years of neglect and nature's elements left her lonely, rusted and hiding from the outside world. I spotted her while in search of my last endeavor into the past. She lay there surrounded by tall blades of dead yellow grass and covered in thick clumps of dried mud. A corner of her smile poked through the vegetation as if she was happy to see me. The badly faded red of her worn shell and dull bumper was an indication that she needed work. The flat tires and busted glass showed that she was doomed for the jaws of the local salvage yard. Her long curves and sharp eye-catching chrome had lost its appeal. It was time that led her to this fate, but it was all about to change. I eagerly jump in the truck and pull up to her broken smile. As I gently lift the aged body onto the trailer, the feeling of liberation overwhelms me with joy. Her future is with me now; I'm going to bring her back.

As we pull up to her new home, a crowd of onlookers and dreamers "Ooh" and "Ahh" at her sight. Her elongated metal body sits on the trailer like a battered queen on a stretcher. Day one of recovery has begun. As she limps off the long trailer, clumps of old dirt fall off the worn body and turn into dust. I strain as I push the lengthy and heavy corpse into the well-lit garage. The land sled's newly aired tires slowly roll to a halt.

I step back with a smile to admire her beauty. There have been so many others in my past, but she stands out from the rest. Her body has curves that seem to go on forever, and a roof line that sweeps me to the late 1950's. She has a body with many feet of striking chrome that stretch to two seductive tear drop taillights that are exclusive only to her. The mammoth grill lacks luster, and the lengthy amount of trim is in need of polish. Even though she shows her age, her personality still shines through.

I walk over to a well-used bench and dust off an old radio. I tune out the static and turn the knob up to the sound of Santana's "Evil Ways." With the music permeating the tin room, I grab a water hose and start to spray off years of grime and neglect. Her dignity is now coming back. I put down the green water hose and scan across the long table of tools. Reaching over, I grab a bucket and some 180 sand paper. Gliding over to her curvaceous fender, I gently massage the faded red until a glimpse of her younger years starts to appear. I must help her remove the past like an old snake shed-

ding its dried skin. Time passes, and the stars of the night are now gleaming; her last spot of red disappears. The injured beauty is now a color of a pale white cast.

"Click" is the sound of the old radio saying that it's time to go. Stage one of recovery is now finished. She did well, and in the morning we meet again. I say my goodbyes and leave one light on above her to keep her company. The latch locking on the massive metal door keeps her safe for the night. It's been a long time since she's been treated with respect and she sure deserves it.

As the warmth of the sun hits my face I wake up with a yawn and images of vivid color. Quickly dressed, I grab the shiny keys off the kitchen table. I fire up the old truck and slowly drive down the same dirt road that all of my cars have taken in the past. I unlock the latch and slide the heavy door across the hard pavement. There she sits awaiting my hands in her pale white cast. Walking over, I tap the fender as if to say, "It's going to be OK."

Pulling out a flat head screwdriver, I pop open a can of swirled silver and blue. Reaching over the large table I grab my favorite tool, the paint gun. "Snap," I firmly connect the aluminum gun to the long rubbery hose. I slowly pick up a multicolored gun and gently pull the trigger. As a beautiful puff of Atlantic blue floats off into the air, the smell of fresh paint brings back memories of other projects of my past. Like a surgeon at a hospital, I carefully start to lay her new skin down tail to nose. She starts to breathe again; she is just about ready to run like the famous name she's been branded: "Impala." The faded factory red is now a thing of the past.

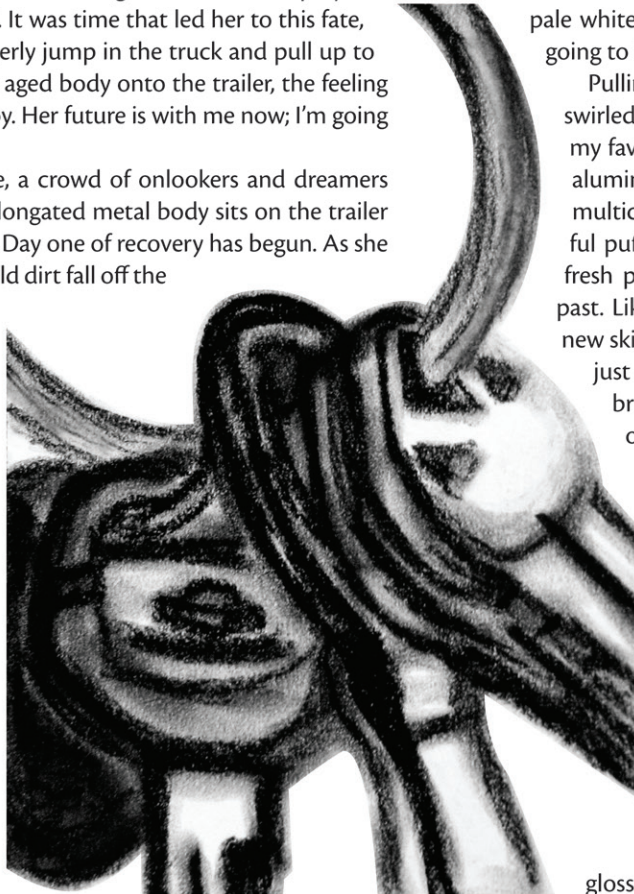
"Click," the connector is unhooked. It seems like slow motion as the brass fitting bounces off the floor violently with a loud ping, the sound of the end.

The time has come. Jumping out of the old pickup, I slide open the large metal door. I quickly pull out the jingly keys from my pocket. Opening the heavy door, I sit down on her newly upholstered seat.

The turn of the key awakens her suddenly from her coma; "vroom," the sound of the rumbling engine sends an instant jolt of excitement down my spine. I slowly press the large gas pedal, and the glossy Atlantic blue land yacht moves slowly out of the recovery room. Leaping out, I firmly close the solid door. Walking around the 15-foot classic, I'm blinded by the hot

light reflecting off her new chrome and stunning glass-like paint. She stands with pride and with a new smile that will be forever etched in my mind.

We have been through a lot these past few days, and I'm forever grateful that we crossed paths. With her new 100 spoke Dayton's on all four corners to her pure white interior, she has now become a rolling piece of art. Among the abundance of plastic bumpers and the fiberglass hoods, she's an exquisite rarity, a sight to see. She was once forgotten, but now she's a living treasure, alive once more 46 years later. **DS**



My Keys, charcoal, by Jiss Kuruvilla

DING! DING! DING!

By Stephen Davis

DING! DING!
My name is William Vercer and that sound was the bell, the bell that indicates when it's acceptable to punch the other guy in the face. See, I'm a professional boxer and tonight is my last fight. If I win tonight, I'll have a perfect career: twenty-five wins, zero losses. If I lose, though—what have I got to lose? I've been fighting since I was in diapers; this poor kid's still in diapers. There's no way he'll even touch me. The crowd is cheering my name.

"Will! Will!"

Some of them even hold up signs saying things like "Where there's a Will, there's a way!" Three hundred fifty thousand people came here tonight to watch me rearrange this poor kid's face.

"Come on, Will! Get in there! This is all you!" my trainer yells from my corner. The other trainer is yelling something, too, but I can hardly hear over the harmonious uproar of applause as I begin to pace around my opponent, making sure to keep my distance. This poor kid could be quick, but still nothing compared to the boxer I am. The mood and lighting in the arena shifts as the crowd asks itself who's going to throw the first punch. Naturally, I take the opportunity to answer, sending the poor kid a punishing right uppercut to the sto—

Before I can get close to even grazing the poor kid's chest, he comes out of nowhere with a fierce left jab to my right eye, sending me flying back, my face landing on the mat—my face is on the mat? That's impossible! There's no way that poor kid touched me, much less knocked me down in a single punch. As I begin to regain my hearing, I realize the crowd is dead silent. I get up, acting as if some kind of mistake has been made.

The ref gets in my face. "You slipped. It looked like you fell pretty hard. Can you continue?" he asks me.

"Yeah," I say, although I'm still confused about what just happened. Did I get knocked down or did I fall?

The ref gives the signal to resume the fight. I move in, slowly but surely. As soon as I am within reach, I wind up to deliver the same punch he just dealt me, but his fist is already against my face. He unleashes a three-jab masterpiece upon me, resulting in me being face down on the mat yet again.

What's wrong with me? This poor kid has knocked me down twice already and I haven't even touched him. The referee stands over me and begins to count.

ONE. TWO. THREE.

He looks like an angel, standing over me with the bright light of God shining behind him.

FOUR. FIVE. SIX.

It's not going to end like this. I get back onto my feet just as the ref finishes giving me the mandatory eight-count.

"Can you continue?" he asks again. I nod my head and walk back to the center of the ring. Suddenly, just as the ref signals for us to continue the fight, a camera's flash goes off somewhere near me, temporarily blinding me. As my vision comes back, I realize I am face down on the mat for the third time. Perhaps this is how it's supposed to end. I don't care if the first fall was ruled a slip; I'm staying down.

ONE. TWO. THREE.

"Get up, Will! You've got to!" my trainer screams at me, but my career is over.

FOUR. FIVE. SIX.

I feel so ashamed of myself, letting this poor kid beat me so easily. It's almost as if I didn't even try.

SEVEN. EIGHT. NINE.

Wait, I don't have to win. It's too late anyways; the referee has already made it to ten.

TEN. ELEVEN. TWELVE.

What? What is he doing? I look around to see everyone's eyes fixed on me, lying on the mat like a baby. This isn't how my career is supposed to end.

I get up again, answer the ref's question for the third time and step into the center of the ring. I am ready to annihilate this poor kid. The ref throws his hands down and I jump back to dodge the punch that poor kid sends my way. Just as I am about to throw my first punch—DING! DING!—the bell rings. Round One is over.

I hustle to my corner to see my trainer's disgusted face. "What are you doing? You're making yourself look terrible!" he yells as he douses my face with water.

I stand up and say, "I don't care."

"What?"

"I said I don't care about how I look. It doesn't matter. I don't care if I land any punches or not. It doesn't matter if I win this fight or not."

"Why not?" he replies, bewildered.

"It doesn't matter because in the end, that's not what it's all about!" I tell him, making sure he hears the confidence in my voice.

"What is it all about, Will?"

I put my glove on his shoulder, lock eyes with him, and say, "It's all about the money."

DING! DING! **DS**



Far From the Light, oil on canvas, by Junko Otsu

MAOISTS' INSURGENCY

By Jr. Ich Dien

Look around: the high hills surround me as if they wouldn't want me to go anywhere. The majestic White Mountains extend their arms for a cool clench. The air whispers by my ears the words that everyone and everything appears to be saying: "Don't go. Don't go leaving us all behind." As I move away, the voices become less distinct until I only hear a faint sound in the background.

But the echoes of the voices keep coming back to me, and the pictures of those tear-filled eyes and the faces of my loved ones keep staring at me. But I have to go, I have to go to prepare myself for tomorrow, I have to go for my motherland. Mother told me that she'd rather see me gone away than see my cold, lifeless body become the next victim of an ambush. She'd rather hear that I've become a woman than only see me as a bubbly teenager. She'd rather give me away to someone else than raise me in her home with daily news of bloodshed and violence that has taken more than thousands of lives and has transformed Nepal from a small, beautiful, peaceful nation to a battlefield.

This brutality has got to cease, this shadow, this mire that prevents us from being safe. Tears rush into my eyes and a cold chill runs down my spine whenever I think about her saying that. And I can't bear to see her in this horrific situation. Is this all a dream? I wonder sometimes.

Where is my country? Where is that Nepal that I took so much pride on? Where is my country which led the peace campaign? Where is my Nepal, which was once declared "a Zone of Peace," the birthplace of Buddha? The hills are all barren now; the ones remaining there are only orphans and widows. Lord Buddha, the messenger of peace, is ashamed to call it his birthplace. Mt. Everest, which proudly stood with its head held high has its head down. The color of the rivers has now become red.

And I can't blame it on anyone. My own brothers and sisters are doing it all. The one who kills and the one who gets killed both are Nepalese. I feel helpless, I feel frustrated. What should I do and what can I do? The ones who can do are all decadent. The lust of power and money has

consumed them completely. The violence and terror is insurmountable.

But don't worry, mother: time never stays the same forever. Evil will suffer, sooner or later. The pain and sufferings, the deaths and sorrows, the loss and heartbreaks will all come down upon those who invited them. I haven't thrown away the picture that I had of you because I'm hopeful. I know that someday the air will push away the dark clouds hovering above us and the sun will shine, more brightly than ever. God loves us and we'll all be together, united as Nepalese. The picture of a peaceful Nepal, the picture of a united Nepal and all the Nepalese helping one another resides deep within our hearts, and we'll do whatever it takes in order to make that happen in reality.

I will go now, with hope and optimism, to a far away land, which will prepare me the best for the future, the land which will teach me the real meaning of freedom and democracy. I'm going there to learn to be independent, to know people and the world. I'm going to an institution, which will teach me not only the theories of science but also the theories of life and reality, encourages hard work and honesty, and will help me find my identity. I want to study, I want to learn, and I want to be prepared so that I can serve better. I'm grateful for my life and I believe that there is a reason for my existence. I want to find that reason. I want to leave my footprints behind. I want to give, I want to share, and I want to love. I want to ameliorate the situation that my country, my people, and all the other people in the world are in. I want to bring back their long lost smiles and hopes. I want to fight; I want to rebel, against injustice and corruption. I believe in the power of one and I know that it's never too late to start anything good.

But my mother is afraid; she's afraid that if I stay I'll never be able to fulfill my dreams. I, too, feel that I have been given a lot and I don't want to be deprived of an opportunity to reimburse what I have been given, else my soul will carry too much guilt. So wipe off your tears and smile for me, pray for me. There is no need to cry for me because God, the Almighty, will look after me and I know that I'm going to a dreamland, which is the next best place to my homeland. **DS**



Floor Vase, clay, by "Gnat" Bozeman

Fatal Obsession

By Glen Sovian

CHARACTERS:

Carrie Barnett, divorced, early 40's
Caitlyn Barnett, Carrie's daughter, college freshman, age 17
Jonathan Hudson, Caitlyn's boyfriend, college dropout, early 20's
Brianna Murphy, Caitlyn's best friend, high school dropout, age 18
Madelyn McGuire, Carrie's co-worker
TV News Reporter
Company President

Setting:

Northeastern part of the U.S., inside the Barnett family's living room.

Time:

The present.

SCENE 1

[Lights up. Around 7 p.m. Caitlyn watches television. Jonathan and Brianna are speeding on meth and playing computer games over the wireless Internet.]

TV NEWS REPORTER: [On the television.] The methamphetamine usage, especially among young people, has now become a national epidemic, as it spreads from the West Coast to the Midwest and now to the East Coast. A bipartisan coalition in Congress has called for tighter controls on ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, the main ingredients of meth, which are commonly found in cold medications...

CAITLYN: Hey, guys, listen up, I guess they're talkin' 'bout you guys on TV.

BRIANNA: You mean, us? Whatever. You're gonna tweak with us or not?

CAITLYN: Dunno. I'm kinda spent. You know what? I have no idea why I got so many nightmares lately. The nightmare from last night just gave me the creeps. I found myself swimmin' alone in Brazil or somethin'. A bunch of piranhas were chowin' down on me. I was trying to keep my head above the bloody red water. It was scary.

[JONATHAN looks up and turns away from his computer game briefly.]

JONATHAN: For real? Me too. In my nightmares, there's this humongous, motherfucker black bear chargin' right at me. Last night I pulled out my freakin' nine millimeter but it kept jammin' on me. I swear I'll blow that son of a bitch's head off when I see it again! You guys know me. I ain't scared of nothin'.

CAITLYN: Now I'm sorta freakin' 'bout fallin' asleep. And I have an algebra test tomorrow. I really hate that stuff. Pretty sure I'm gonna

blow it this time.

BRIANNA: That's why you gotta try this good stuff, girl. You'll have this rush of pleasure, energy and focus like you never felt. You'll be totally gacked. You're gonna have all the time in the world to learn that crap – I mean, your algebra stuff. If I had used meth on math when me and you were in senior high, you know, I bet I coulda passed all those classes and graduated, too. And by the way, no more nightmares... for real. Jon, help fix her somethin'...

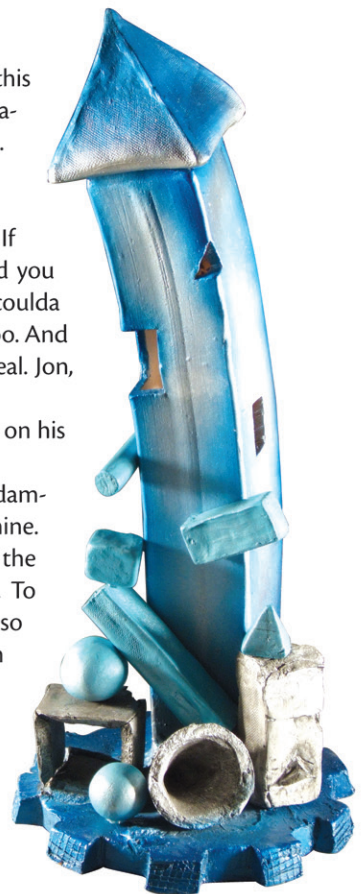
[JONATHAN turns around and slams on his portable computer.]

JONATHAN: ["high" on drugs.] Goddammit. I'm fuckin' sicka this crappy machine. Last week they told me this would be the fastest machine that money could buy. To me, it ain't worth a shit! Right now I'm so fuckin' pumped, man. No machine can keep up with me any more.

[JONATHAN walks over. He puts the clear, chunky crystals in a glass pipe and hands it to CAITLYN.]

JONATHAN: C'mon, baby. It ain't gonna bite. Just smoke it slowly. I bet from now on, that's all you'll want.

CAITLYN: It's kin-



Blue, ceramic & paint, by Michele Vickers



Dia De Los Muertos, oil, by Daniel Carranza

da stout. I'm afraid it's gonna make me blow my cookies again.

[CAITLYN starts to smoke the pipe.]

BRIANNA: See, it ain't too weird, right?

CAITLYN: Now stop starin' at me!

[CAITLYN continues to smoke while BRIANNA picks up a can of air freshener and sprays the room to clear the air. The phone rings, but nobody bothers to answer until the answering machine picks it up.]

CARRIE: Caitlyn, it's mom. I'm tied up at work and will be home very late this evening. I've got your favorite pizza in the refrigerator. If you need me, you know where I'm at. Love you.

[Black out.]

SCENE 2

[Lights up. In the weekend, around noon. Carrie works at home. The phone rings, and Carrie picks it up.]

CARRIE: Hi, mother. I'm fine. How about you?

[Pause.]

CARRIE: Yeah, I got all your messages from the last couple of days. I meant to call you back but since I got promoted as the Vice President of Operations, I've been pretty busy even in the weekend like today. Time flies. I can't believe I've been on this job for three months already.

[Pause.]

CARRIE: No, no. Caitlyn is out with her friends.

[Pause.]

CARRIE: Well, she used to complain to her dad about me all the time. Now that we're divorced, I guess you're the only one she goes to.

[Pause.]

CARRIE: No! That's not true and you know it. It's been hard for me, too. Caitlyn starts sounding like her dad, calling me a workaholic and all that. But that's right, I don't see her around much, and we don't spend a lot of time together like we used to.

[Pause.]

CARRIE: Listen, mother. I reap what I sow. I worked very hard for more than a year to get this big promotion. Unfortunately, I can't have it all – both a close family and a demanding career. The way I see it, it's all about making the right choices, and focusing on my career is the right choice for me right now.

[Pause.]

CARRIE: Yeah, I guess you're right. I appreciate what you're trying to do. I'll sit down and talk to Caitlyn. I wish Caitlyn and I had the same kind of good mother-daughter relationship you and I have. Well, I've got to get back to my work and I guess I'll talk to you later?

[Pause.]

CARRIE: Love you, too, mother.

[Black out.]

SCENE 3

[Lights up. A few weeks later, almost midnight. Caitlyn, dressed in work-out clothes, is reading a magazine on a sofa. Carrie walks in with a briefcase and files.]

CARRIE: Caitlyn, you're still up? Can you give me a hand?

CAITLYN: [Rolls her eyes and gets up from the sofa reluctantly.] Sure! [Sullenly.]

[CAITLYN takes CARRIE's files, drops them on a table and plops back into the sofa.]

CARRIE: Is everything all right, Caitlyn? Where've you been?

CAITLYN: Just came back from runnin'.

CARRIE: At this time of the night?

CAITLYN: Yup, I ain't sleepy yet.

[CAITLYN gets up and starts pacing the floor.]

CARRIE: In the past two weeks, every time I came home late, you're either pacing the floor or very irritable. Is anything at college bothering you?

CAITLYN: Nope. You ain't got nothin' to worry 'bout me. Just leave me alone.

[CARRIE looks through the mail on the table.]

CARRIE: Caitlyn, I worry you don't have good sleeping and eating habits.

CAITLYN: And you've pulled a lot of all-nighters too!

CARRIE: Stop comparing what you and I do. I worked so hard to get this promotion. I've done it all for you.

CAITLYN: You're never home. You really don't care about me. All you care is being with the people at work.

CARRIE: We wouldn't have this kind of life if I didn't work this hard. I need this job to keep this house, and to pay the bills and your college education. We've never been better off financially.

CAITLYN: No wonder Dad divorced you. 'Cause you were just never there for him. Or for me. I'd divorce you too if I had anywhere else to go.

CARRIE: Caitlyn! This is nonsense. Your dad is a lazy, useless bum who just likes to sit on his butt and do nothing all day. If we had to rely on him, we would be living in a shack and be on welfare. Listen, we talked about this so many times before. I'm tired and I'm not about to be drawn into this conversation again!

[CARRIE storms out of the room. Black out.]

SCENE 4

[Lights up. In the weekend, around 10 a.m. Carrie just gets up, sips her coffee and checks the answering machine.]

COMPANY PRESIDENT: [On the answering machine.] Ms. Barnett, this is Jessie Hoover from the office. Congratulations again for having engineered such a clever acquisition of our major competitor. Since the time you assumed leadership over the company's operation, we have outperformed all of our competitors in every category. I have every confidence you will continue to transform the company in the right direction. We will be celebrating the recent acquisition with a special reception this Monday at 7 p.m. Please make sure to keep your schedule open. We need you there.

[CARRIE smiles. There is a knock on the door.]

CARRIE: Come in.

MADELYN: Good morning, Carrie. Do you have time to chat?

CARRIE: Yeah, why not? I'm still waiting for my morning coffee to kick in.

[MADELYN brings some business magazines and newspapers with CARRIE's name and pictures on them. CARRIE glances through some of them and smiles.]

MADELYN: [Speaking with sarcasm.] Now you are a real star, huh? Everybody seems to be talking about you.

CARRIE: Well, everybody has his or her 15-minutes of fame, you know.

MADELYN: If they had picked me instead of you for this position, I guess today I'd be the one on those covers of magazines and newspapers. Remember, I've been around here longer than you have, have more college education, and surely have more qualifications. I still can't quite figure out how they passed me up for that promotion.

CARRIE: Well, lucky me. I'm just trying to do my best.

MADELYN: You know, I was wondering how you got to the top this fast. You're not a suck-up type, are you?

CARRIE: No, not at all. I didn't get this far without a lot of hard work.

MADELYN: I've done that, too. All my life I have only focused on climbing up the career ladder, including forfeiting chances of getting married and having children. How lucky you are to have both a successful career and a family at the same time.

[Pause. CARRIE changes her tone.]

CARRIE: Well, that's not completely true. I really love my job, but lost my husband and hardly see my daughter because of it. Our relationship has suffered, as a result. I feel ... I feel like I don't know her anymore.

MADELYN: Hmm, that's just a small cost to pay. I would be willing to do anything it takes to get your position.

[Black out.]

SCENE 5

[Lights dim. Around 8 p.m. At a rave party. Amplified electronic dance music is playing outside. Caitlyn and Brianna walk out of the party into the living room.]

CAITLYN: Let's chill out. It's cool out here.

BRIANNA: [Starting to smoke.] D'you wanna square?

CAITLYN: No, not right now. I don't feel like smokin' now.

[Pause.]

BRIANNA: Did you tell your mom we're gonna be partyin' here all night?

CAITLYN: Nope, but I told her it's for my 18th birthday and made this rave flyer. Look, it says "No alcohol. Supervised."

[CAITLYN laughs.]

BRIANNA: Did she actually fall for that?

CAITLYN: I guess so. [animated.] Only thing is it don't say "No drugs."

[Both of them are laughing aloud about it.]

BRIANNA: Whatcha gonna do if she finds out?

CAITLYN: I don't give a damn what she thinks. She's not around much and she don't care about me anyway. She's married to her damned job.

BRIANNA: I'm totally with you, girl. Cuz all mothers suck, you know. That's why movin' outta the house after my 18th birthday was the best

thing that ever happened to me since me and my mom got here from Alabama when I was 14. Ain't nobody tellin' me what to do no more. If they give me some shit, I just tell 'em to go to hell.

[Offstage: Sound of commotion and people shouting.]

CAITLYN: Hey, what's up? Check it out!

[BRIANNA gets up and tries to figure out what happens from a distance]

BRIANNA: I bet it's another dealin' gone bad. Nothin' new.

CAITLYN: Oh, is that what they're doin' up there? Dealin'?

BRIANNA: Hey's that Jon? I guess he gotta be scrappin' or somethin'.

CAITLYN: What? My Jonathan? He's fightin' again?

[CAITLYN gets up and tries to get JONATHAN's attention.]

CAITLYN: [Shouting as she rushes offstage towards JONATHAN.] Jonathan! Jonathan! What the heck are you doin' there?

JONATHAN: [Shouting offstage, "high" on drugs.] All of you get the hell out of my way now! Get the hell out! That beast is comin' my way again! Now I can see its ugly head!

BRIANNA: [Shouting.] Watch out, Caitlyn, he's got a loaded gun!

[CAITLYN reappears onstage, being chased by JONATHAN. JONATHAN staggers across the living room, bumping on things around him.]

JONATHAN: [Pointing his gun at CAITLYN.] I swear this nine millimeter's gonna blow your brains out! You're the ugly bear that's been terrorizing me all this time. I got enough of this shit! You gotta go to hell!

CAITLYN: [Shouting.] Jonathan, what the hell are you talkin' 'bout? You gotta be kidding, right?

BRIANNA: [Whispering loudly with gestures.] Caitlyn, he's tweaked to the max.

CAITLYN: [Shouting.] Jonathan, Snap out of it! It's me, Caitlyn.

BRIANNA: [Shouting.] Jon, put your gun down before you hurt somebody, please! Don't be foolish, you smart ass!

JONATHAN: [Shouting.] There's no chance in hell I'm gonna miss my target this time! Bring it on, motherfucker!

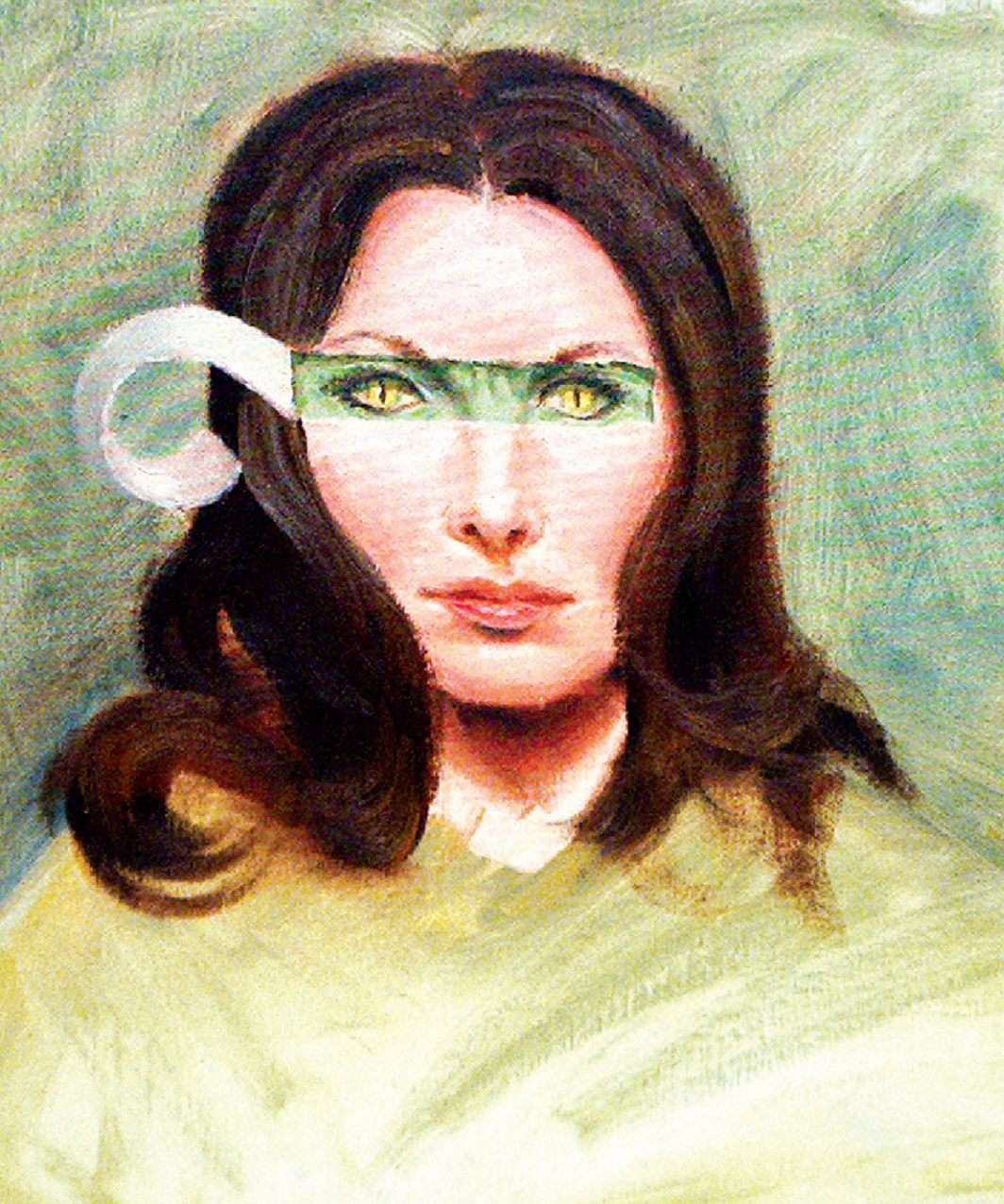
CAITLYN: [Shouting and running away.] You must be fuckin' out of your mind! Stay away from me!

[Both CAITLYN and JONATHAN rush offstage.]

CAITLYN: [Shouting.] Leave me the fuck alone, you crazy shit!

Masking Hatred and its Father Fear, oil, by Tricia Lambert





Unmasked, acrylic, by Steve Trower

BRIANNA: [Shouting.] Jon, put that freakin' gun away, you muthafucka!

JONATHAN: [Shouting offstage.] You started this bullshit with me. You think I can't do a damned thing about it, huh? Let's finish it off right here, right now, Goddamn son of a bitch!

[Loud gunshots fired three times. Girls scream.]

BRIANNA: [Standing still, astonished, hands on her cheeks.] Oh, my God, Caitlyn...

[Background dance music fades away. Black out.]

Scene 6

[Lights up. Almost one year later. Carrie and Madelyn are sorting through Carrie's belongings to put in boxes. Television news is on.]

MADELYN: Wow, this is a nice trophy. You never told me you were an all-around gymnastic champion in college? Which box should it go into?

CARRIE: Yeah, my mother was very proud of my achievement. Just put it in Box No. 8. Don't forget to put some bubble wrap around it first.

[Pause.]

CARRIE: Madelyn, I have to tell you that I'm glad the company accepted my recommendation to choose you as the new Vice President of Operations.

MADELYN: Well, it's about time. They know I have all the qualifications

for the job. The only thing is they're supposed to offer me the same kind of compensation package they gave you. I heard they would've even doubled your salary if you had decided to stay. I'm curious why in the world you turned down such a great offer?

CARRIE: I told you, Madelyn, I've just got to leave this place. I don't care what's waiting for me in Texas. I just can't live here any longer.

[As CARRIE sifts through a plastic bin, she stumbles into some of CAITLYN's belongings: childhood photo album, Barbie dolls, clothing items etc.]

CARRIE: This place is no longer the same without Caitlyn. As long as I'm here, there are times I would still call out her name, hear her laugh and remember her smile. It's so hard to keep my sanity.

[CARRIE begins to sob as she stares at the photos.]

CARRIE: Next week, she would've been 19. Her birthday brings back painful memories. I still can't shake the image of her final hours. I'm struggling to make sense of her death. She was such a beautiful, lively girl with so much to live for. The whole thing is beyond my comprehension. My mind is still searching for an explanation how a good kid like her could get drawn to drugs. Was I to blame? Was I a bad mother? I was not there when she really needed me.

MADELYN: [Stops packing things.] Don't you see, having no husband and no children is not that bad after all? I never have to deal with all those headaches.

CARRIE: What if I had been home that night? I wouldn't have let this happen to her. What if I had said something about her choice of friends? What if we'd had more time to sit down and talk? What... what if I had cared just a little more about her and her feelings? What if only I had turned down that damned promotion... What if...

MADELYN: [Interrupting.] Carrie, Carrie, cut it out! Dwelling on the past won't change anything. It

just brings back the pain. Both of us are now in the same boat – no husband and no kids. As I said, it's been good for me.

CARRIE: It isn't fair, you know. It just isn't.

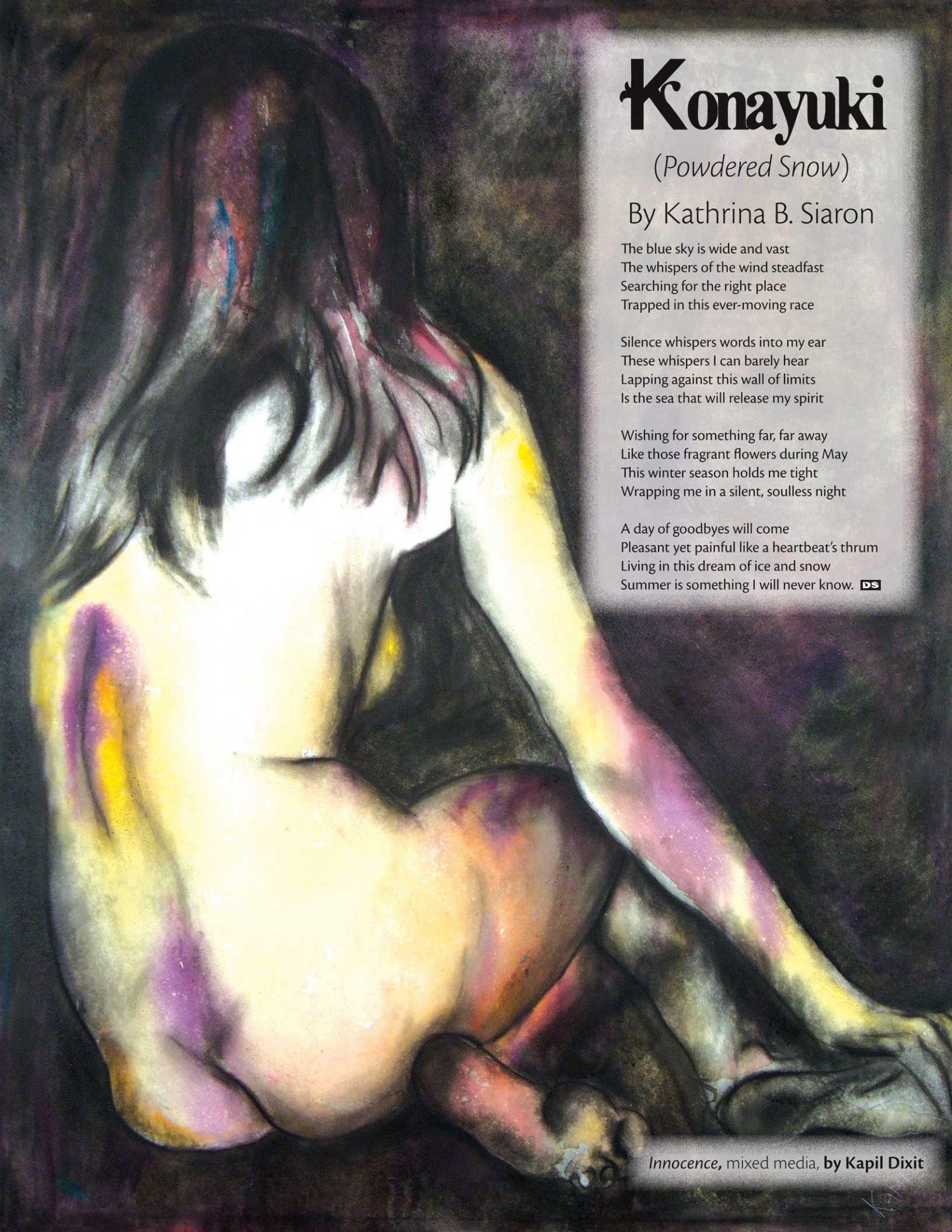
MADELYN: It's been almost a year since you lost your daughter. How much longer do you have to go through this grief? Think about it. Jonathan is serving a life sentence for manslaughter and drug trafficking, and the others are getting their fair share of punishments. Enough lives are lost and ruined. It's about time to come to terms with your loss. Put it all behind you, and find the strength to start a new life in ... where is it? Texas? Personally, I wouldn't want to live there.

CARRIE: It's just so hard to get over. So hard.

TV NEWS REPORTER: [On the television.] ... That destructive drug habit finally ended the life of the 18-year-old high school senior only one week before his graduation. His mother, Jane Switzer, said she is now left to wrestle with guilt and grief. It's ironic that his death occurred on Mother's Day. Switzer admitted that Mother's Day would never be the same again. To her, it will always be shrouded in misery – at losing her only son and all his dreams. Reporting live for Channel 5 News, I am Bryan Pittman.

[Black out.]

END OF PLAY **DS**



Konayuki

(Powdered Snow)

By Kathrina B. Siaron

The blue sky is wide and vast
The whispers of the wind steadfast
Searching for the right place
Trapped in this ever-moving race

Silence whispers words into my ear
These whispers I can barely hear
Lapping against this wall of limits
Is the sea that will release my spirit

Wishing for something far, far away
Like those fragrant flowers during May
This winter season holds me tight
Wrapping me in a silent, soulless night

A day of goodbyes will come
Pleasant yet painful like a heartbeat's thrum
Living in this dream of ice and snow
Summer is something I will never know. **DS**

Innocence, mixed media, by Kapil Dixit

