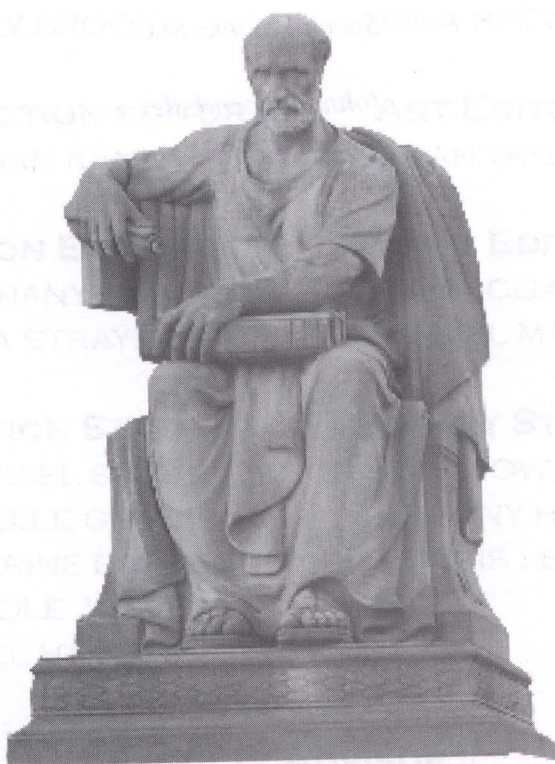


REFLECTOR





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2006

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LOLITA

ERIC FRANSON AND SARAH TAYLOR

DINER

FICTION BY: DAN FRANKENFIELD
2006 FICTION AWARD WINNER

It's very late at night and very empty in the streets. I walk into the diner on Main Street to drink a cup of coffee because it seems like the thing to do, and I feel a little out of place because you can never quite walk into a place anymore and sit down and have a waitress come over to you and smile and tell you her name and this and that and the specials, and then after all that, order just a cup of coffee.

-can I start you with something to drink?

-just coffee please.

It's strange from thereon out because Tina, the waitress, with all this glittery shit on her face is working you; working for tips. A nice girl with a nice face and lots of glittery shit on it and her eyes batting and her lips all glossed up. I try to slide the menu her way so we're at least honest about how this is going to be but somehow it breaks my heart.

She comes back with my coffee and it's very hot...just the kind of coffee you don't have to taint with sugar or cream. At the cafes the coffee is very dark and strong, Colombian or somewhere I don't know, but you always have to taint it just a little bit to take the edge off, and all the other coffee drinkers there sort of scoff at you; not outright but they all sort of scoff at your cream and sugar and you then sit in a corner with your coffee and cream and sugar and pick up the bow hunting magazine left there and try to look at the pictures but you know what they're all thinking.

It's not like that here. The coffee is good.

-have you decided?

-oh right, decided.

-do you need another minute?

The other minute is worse than the glittery shit. I don't want food. They're always trying to feed you. Always working you, nickel and diming you. They're always upping the ante but I just can't bring myself to do it.

-yes please, another minute.

I open the menu. There are lots of things I'd like to be

eating but don't want to be paying for. Truth be known, I am very hungry. I do want to eat. It's been too long. Too many pretzels and candy bars for dinner and breakfast and all over again. I want a bacon cheeseburger. I want a fish sandwich and French fries with ketchup. I want steak. I want hot grease, some sort of animal, something visceral. Something carnal. Tina is on to me, on to something. She knows carnal.

-so what'll it be?

-a bacon cheeseburger.

-and how would you like that?

-bloody as hell

-okay

-and could I have a glass of water too?

-surely.

My water arrives and it's delicious. Just cuts right through and refreshes and I've been going through this water phase where I really like to drink water because I feel that in some way it's improving my state of mind, flushing me out or something. I've been urinating a lot but it's healthy and I think I feel better for it. I get up to go to the bathroom.

It's mildly clean in there. Surprising really. Scrawled on the stall door in black and jagged pen is:

Here I sit

Cheeks a'flexin'

Giving birth

To a full grown Texan

I laugh because it's pretty funny and awfully poetic. Better than most poems I usually read anyway. I leave the bathroom good-humored. I get back to the table and find the meal sitting there. How could she? She didn't even wait. They never do.

I eat the bloody thing. It's pretty good and satisfying and all that and I look to the counter and Tina is pacing around with all that glittery shit on her face. How ridiculous that a person could walk around like that. And I'm working on the French fries that came with the meal. I'm finishing my water it's even better tasting now than it was before, I guess because of the food. The coffee is now just right, cooled down, black and not even a blemish on the surface. Tina comes back just as I knew she would. They always do.

-is there anything else I can get for you?

-no, thank you.

-no dessert? We've got fresh pies.

-no, thank you.

-another cup of coffee?

-no, not tonight.

She lays the check on the table and turns. I never see her face again or the glittery shit. The bill is seven bucks give or take. I take it to the register and pay it even though I don't want to. I start back for the table to leave the tip and already the busboy is clearing the mess off. It's a real in and out deal, and now it's open for the next. The busboy must think I stiffed Tina as he's wiping the table and it's very late at night and very empty in the streets, so I do.



POUNDS & PENCE

Warehouses around here
are mostly used for storing cinders
the hulking shell of a 10 year old
fiery shipwreck

This has got to be
a kapital krime
to allow the frost to settle
on army surplus vagabond coats
and build up around the master's locks
on the swinging doors
of sheltered safety

It's got to be something
you learn in business class
to lock out your own humanity
and keep the cold
off your property

DOLLARS & CENTS

Warehouses around here
are mostly peeled red paint
a shrinking store of
hay and rusting steel machinery

This has got to be
a kapital krime
to jettison a family's ballast
and let them drift
into the master's chains
through the swinging doors
of sheltered safety

It's got to be something
you missed in vocational school
that class on living
in the bright new plumber's van
you traded for your tractor

BARBED WIRE FENCE

Warehouses around here
hold mostly stagnant dreams
the recurring mistakes
of desperate lonesome people

This has got to be
a kapital krime
to force the millions
with nowhere else to go
to cycle violence
in and out the swinging doors
of sheltered safety

It's got to be something
you learn on the news
to keep those criminals out
away from your only chance
to shut the door of sheltered safety

ERIC FRANSON



THE PARK IN FALL

NICOLE JONES

JAMIE

FICTION BY: KELLY MOSER

The water was running loud and harsh in the room adjacent to his own. He knew the water pressure was hard, and so the water droplets would be pelting down firm enough to make the rinsing quick, and easy. He closed his eyes and could almost see the fingers running through brown hair made black by water. Those fingers would be massaging in the shampoo, creating foam that would cascade down the sleek body in a rush. Opening his eyes, Danny nervously cleared his throat. He moved to the bed and sat, immobile, on the blue comforter. His green eyes were drawn to the left where a variety of clothes and suits hung beside ratty t-shirts and sweats. Most of the clothes belonged to him, but a growing collection of them also belonged to Jamie.

He worked in an office, thus the suits were mandatory for meetings and trips. One was simple, green, and had been given to him for Christmas. He hated it and barely wore it. Danny's favorite though, was a pinstripe gray. It was the suit he had purchased on the day he realized he had gotten this job. It was a goal he had worked towards for six years, and was satisfied. Glancing over the contents of the closet, he realized that he owned a lot of gray but that Jamie's clothes were vibrant, highlighted by gray and thus consuming it in turn. He needed his clothes, felt validated by their presence, by their indication of success. Jamie's clothes, simple and broken in, both pleased and disturbed him. He nervously ran his fingers through his hair.

The red sweatshirt tossed carelessly on the end of the bed, however, was new. Danny leaned over and picked it up. He inhaled deeply the scent that permeated the threads. He let out a sigh and folded it before placing it back on the bed. Jamie had always been a little messy and had a habit of making Danny's life so as well. This apartment had been immaculate since the day Danny had moved in, everything had a place and was kept there. He tried to remember, among the mess Jamie always left behind, that life was always a matter of timing, how long it takes to get from one moment to the next. Keeping the apartment clean and orderly, even after Jamie, helped calm his nerves, kept the clock ticking with precise indications of time. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Danny sighed, and rose from the bed. He rubbed his hands down his thighs, and looked around for the room. He didn't want to seem like he had been waiting when Jamie got out of the shower. He heard a bang from the bathroom and jumped, startled at the sound. Hearing the subsequent laughter, Danny felt the tension relax from his shoulders and he could smile. Jamie had the ability make him feel silly and asinine.

His mind traced back to the bathroom. He closed his eyes and could imagine the shower gel, blue and confident, squeezed on the loofa. He knew the path it would take, down the arms that were toned from regular exercise, across the chest and down the abdomen. Danny swallowed audibly, his throat thick and tight. The soap would slide down the skin that he loved so well and had kissed so many times before. He shook his head and blinked. His pupils were contracted, as if he had been in the dark for too long, and he was afraid to enter into the light too suddenly.

Danny licked at the fine sheen of sweat that accumulated on his upper lip, Jamie was incredible. Sexy as hell, but still brilliant. He wandered around the bedroom, stopping at one wall to look at the neatly arranged photos hung there. They were all in the same frames, frames he had gotten with Jamie on a shopping trip. He normally hated to shop, but they had done it with the intensions of being light-hearted. Too often things between them were very intense. They were a passionate pair. Danny had wanted frames that were all the same and matched the silver in his bedroom, but Jamie had wanted him to buy frames that were varied and different. "You need frames that are different so that you always have one to suit your mood. Every moment is different, unique." Danny had heard the statement time and time again and, as usual, they had gotten into an argument over the frames. Uniform or diverse. Jamie was impulsive, and he liked to plan things out. Jamie was vivacious, and he was so much more reserved. Jamie was so social and often he felt isolated and imposed on by the groups of people around him. He had won the argument about the frames only because Jamie had stalked away angry and frustrated.

His favorite photograph of the two of them was when they were at a party. They had their arms flung about each other, and their cheeks were flushed. The camera had caught them

in the middle of a laugh, and they looked so happy together. It had been a Halloween party. He had gone as a priest, while Jamie had dressed as a hippy in tribute to the rebelliousness of the sixties. Danny smiled to himself and touched the picture, feeling the cool glass beneath his fingertips. He remembered touching Jamie, sliding his hand down the cheek, and across the lips. He remembered the moment in the photo when their lips had met, soft and firm as the crowd screamed and jeered around them. Danny had started to laugh in the middle of that kiss, and for a moment it had felt as if nothing could go wrong. Jamie created that for him, often. They had both had too much to drink, and he had impulsively flung his arms around Jamie who had laughed in delight. They had spent the night together, and the next morning they slept in their own spaces but with their skin subtly touching. Fingers to hip, foot to foot, thigh to thigh.

His eyes drifted to a photo above it, to the right. Jamie was sitting on the bed, surrounded by pillows and blankets and balled up tissues. The flu had been going around and Jamie had gotten it particularly bad at work. The school always seemed to carry germs and colds, mass market. Jamie had been miserable, not wanting to stay in bed any longer, declaring that four days had been quite enough. He knew how depressed Jamie had been, how alone Jamie had felt all day alone in the apartment. There had been an abundance of whining and pouting when Danny had finally come home from the office. The pleading hadn't been enough though and Danny had insisted that Jamie rest for one more day, one more day to get well enough to laugh, to smile, to look at Danny in just such a way that both their cheeks would flush.

Danny heard the water stop, and the sound of the shower curtain scraping against the metal bar that held it up. He closed his eyes and held a deep breath, then opened them. He studied a picture of the two of them at a park. They had

been picnicking that day and were wading in the icy water, their pants rolled up to their knees. Jamie had always inspired him to do things that were fun, things he had never thought to do on his own. It was the times when Jamie was able to push him into doing those things that he loved the best. He hadn't wanted to go into the water, was always a little leery of walking where he couldn't see what he was walking on. Jamie had laughed, smiled, and tugged his hands and arms until they were on the banks. They had bickered for a while, until Danny realized that his shoes were gone with his socks, and his pants were rolled up to his knees and yes, the icy water was engulfing his toes. These were his favorite memories, despite the fact that he so restrained himself that the moments were a struggle to come to. Danny had realized early that day, sitting in his office, that Jamie meant the world to him. Jamie would always mean the world to him.

Hearing the bathroom door open, he turned to look at Jamie, who was standing in the doorway wrapped in a towel. Smiling, he watched those fingers run through the dark wet hairs, flicking dripping strands out of the way of flawless skin, expressive brown eyes. They smiled at each other for a long moment until Jamie's voice broke the silence.

"Danny? You okay?"

"Jamie," he paused, feeling the anxiety building up tight in his chest before rising up into this throat. The tension burst out from between his lips, "I love you."



ORIONIDS

what burns never seems to die
revengeful coals
regretful pores
as burning debris flies
through a lens he sees a science
in a lab he calculates
through a pupil enters a wonder
in a field thoughts turn wishful

words in wishes waste precious time
impractical notions
improbable creations
while embers light the sky

KENNY KOLLIAS

THE GRAVEDIGGER KNEELS

FICTION BY: GREG HARR

It was always the same. For the first five years of the job (which I've been at for fifteen), nothing had ever really changed. Dig the hole, wait around while people cry, fill up the hole, start again. It doesn't take very much to do this job. When I was young, I used to hang out in the graveyard anyway, so I grew accustomed to the surroundings. My friends and I used to sit together, getting drunk and switching up the gravestones. Jimmy, Stan, and I would all grab a stone and push it to the ground. Then, we'd drag it across the cemetery, tearing up the lawn until we couldn't drag it any further. We'd knock over another and finish the joke. That came to an end

when they all left for college, and I got stuck here because I've never been too great with tests. I only started working here because I couldn't find any other work in this shit town. Also, I'm a big guy. I'd say typically bigger than most other guys. I'd like to think that most people wouldn't want to meet me somewhere after dark. Because of my size, I could dig a hole with no problem, and this was important since the cemetery I work at refuses to get with the times and use a backhoe. I didn't have much of a family life because my dad had split after I was born and my mom died after I got out of school. I could spend as much of my time here as I wanted because I didn't have much else to do. It's a lonely job – digging holes for other people's loved ones. But it pays fairly well and affords me even more benefits than just health insurance.

The cemetery itself can be pretty interesting. You can learn a lot about someone from their gravestone. "Jonathan Vantine. 1906 – 1980. Forever Loved, Forever with us." "Christina Thompson. 1967 – 1988. Beloved Daughter – Gone Too Soon." There are hundreds of these, set up in straight lines, all across the graveyard. It seems that when someone dies, everyone thinks they were the best person to have ever lived on (and now in) this earth. I guess it's pretty comforting knowing that I am always surrounded by some of the nicest people in this town. But it's not just the gravestones that make me feel comfortable here. The brick wall put up around the area doesn't make it feel too confining, which is good. It's high enough so that people can't see in from the outside, but the view from inside is amazing. Looking over the walls, a person can see a forest of trees and shrubbery which is pretty relaxing. My breaks are always spent sitting at the Mandelson mausoleum around the center of the graveyard, looking out to the trees as their branches stretch down from old age. It's best during the fall because the center is on a slight hill, so I can watch the leaves turn brown and withering as they fall over the wall and land on the cemetery grass. But, the sights aren't the best thing about this job.

After a while, I decided to start making things interesting for myself. There are many things a person can take advantage of when they are alone with a casket in a dark cemetery. I, for one, decided to steal whatever I could from the bodies. From what I stole, I was able to make a pretty fair amount of money from the pawn shop, whose cashier never questioned why I kept bringing in expensive jewelry and other odd goods and I hoped it would stay that way. I didn't take too much. I just took enough to not be noticed and to get by.

The stealing started about ten years ago, but nothing really caught my attention until a few months later. I had dug the hole for an old woman named Greta Anderson and I waited around as the crowds laid their roses on the casket and left to go to the reception where cake and platters of meat were supposed to make them forget their grief. When they were gone and I had set the ropes to lower the body, I took it upon myself to celebrate the life of this woman by opening up her coffin one last time. It was fairly dark by that time and no one comes here after dark. The body was all dolled-up with jewelry of every kind and leather boots on her feet, so why let it go to waste in the ground? This woman used to be someone's mother, grandmother, or wife. I've found that the older women are the most likely to have the best taste in "coffin-clothes." But don't get me wrong, the teenagers and older men I've sent six-feet down also have a great affinity for diamonds. One kid, a young white wanna-be rapper, was decked out with diamonds and nice clothes. Diamonds and gold filled every hole in his body. Now, some people might call the stealing of goods from a dead person "desecration of the body," but I've taken to calling it an "ample opportunity."

Questions always went through my mind as I poured dirt onto the casket about what kind of a person these dead folks were when they were alive, beyond what their gravestones told

me, and what exactly had brought about their demise. I wanted to decide for myself if they were suitable to be sleeping with all the other good people here in the graveyard. So, I decided that after I opened the lids of the caskets, I would look at the body, how they were dressed, how their faces were made-up, and tried to feel the aura that they gave off. It started as just a little fun thing to do to kill time as I shoveled dirt, but soon it turned into an obsession for me when I opened Greta's casket. It all became too interesting to just stop doing it.

She was dressed in a fancy business suit – sort of an off-gray color with black lapels and thin black stripes horizontally throughout it. Her face was made-up to look serene, as if she was sleeping, and the make-up girl did a great job with her. I couldn't think of any reason for her death besides old-age, since her tombstone read that she was eighty-five years at her death. She was apparently a great mother and grandmother. I found that out by all the people, young and old, crying as the last prayers were said over the casket. This old woman wasn't very hard to figure out. But, she was intriguing to me. I felt a connection with her. What exactly was she like when she was alive? I tried to play it out in my mind...

A small old woman sits on a porch, a green plastic chair flexing slightly under her weight. A glass of iced-tea sits on a matching green plastic table to her right. Her eyes scan the parking lot of a local pharmacy across the street, looking for someone in particular to come to her and visit, if only for just a short time, but she still has a smile across her face as her gaze deepens. The old woman is seemingly content with everything in her life. It's how every day of her life goes. It's how every day of her life went.

I grabbed my folder with my work schedule and other cemetery notes in it, and pulled out the cleanest sheet I could

find. I picked up my pencil from the dirt and did a rubbing of her name from the gravestone, then put it in my pocket. I closed up the casket and began lowering it into the ground. The counterweighted pulley I use had become a minor inconvenience when lowering the box. It's as easy to me as pulling a dandelion from around the front gates. I got all the ropes off and started pouring the dirt. The things I stole from her ten years ago were two large diamond earrings, two diamond rings, one sapphire ring, her wedding band, and the leather boots. I pawned them off down the road for three hundred dollars, then went out and bought a newspaper and a cheap bottle of wine – there was no point in wasting the money right away. I'd rather save it up for something nice.

I went back to my house and stared at the rubbing. It brought back memories of what she had looked like: her white hair was permed perfectly on her head and her lips were dark red. The vision of her closed eyes gave a sense of perfect calmness. I'm sure when she was alive, she prayed every night before bed, went to church every Sunday, and raised a great family. This old woman was goodness. I could see myself there with her...

An old woman sits in a green plastic chair on a porch across the street from a local pharmacy. Her eyes scan the parking lot, looking for someone in particular. A man, around the age of twenty-three, walks up the steps toward the porch. He walks over, gives the old woman a hug and a kiss, and sits down beside her. They share a glass of iced-tea, and talk to each other. They smile and laugh. Both of them seem content with their lives. It's how every day of their lives go. It's how every day of their lives went.

A few years went by and the stealing continued. One day, I had the morning shift at the cemetery and I had to dig another

hole. I spent a few hours doing that, took my lunch break, and dug for a couple more hours. Finally, my replacement took over, and I was on my way out. I walked around town, still thinking about Greta, the woman from years before. I stopped by the local car-dealership. I looked around for a while until I found the perfect car for me. It was sleek. It was black. It was the car I needed.

I didn't have the money for it, though. I knew that this was a car for a good man – a man who was loved by his family, great to his friends, and was pretty much someone important. I caught the bus home and walked into my house. I went up to my bedroom, and on my bedside table sat the rubbing of the old woman's grave – I'm sure she was still sleeping, still serene.

The next day, I finished the grave. The funeral procession entered the cemetery a few hours later. I sat back and watched as a small coffin was carried toward the hole. Mourners filled the area while I stood back at a distance, just watching the people. One woman was convulsing as she cried over the casket, grabbing at the white blanket draped over the top. A man stood behind her, pulling her away, then hugging her tight. Finally, the last rose was laid down upon the coffin, and the crowd left. As I watched the last car pull out, I hooked the ropes of the pulley to the casket and dropped it down. I started down into the hole to undo the ropes around the box. As I got to the ground, I turned and opened the casket. Inside I found a small child, about the age of 5, lying down upon the silk lining. Her head rested upon a white pillow, trimmed in shimmering lace. She was dressed in a little pink dress with small hearts around the waist. Her cheek bones were raised a bit, almost giving a hint of a smile. As I looked at her, my mind did not race to figure out how this girl had died, but it tried to figure out why. She was innocence in the purest form. I shut the lid of the coffin to let this girl sleep in peace.

She didn't have anything to steal, and I had no intention of stealing anything anyway after seeing who was in the coffin. I do draw the line at stealing from young children. I looked at her for a little longer, then climbed back up my ladder. I grabbed my folder, pulled out another piece of paper, and did a rubbing of her name - Amy. I put it back into my folder and continued with my job. I poured the dirt upon her casket and I watched as this little girl disappeared from the Earth, but not from my thoughts...

An old woman sits in a green plastic chair on a porch across the street from a local pharmacy. Her eyes scan the parking lot, looking for someone in particular. A man, around the age of twenty-eight, steps out of a sleek, black car. He walks over to the other side, and opens the passenger door. Out comes a little girl in a pink dress. He takes her by the hand, and they walk up the steps to the porch. The girl runs over to the old woman, and jumps in her lap and gives her a kiss. The man picks the girl up, kisses the old woman, and sits down in the chair next to her. He sits the girl on his lap. They talk to each other, share some iced-tea, and laugh. They all seem content with life. It's how every day of their lives go. It's how every day of their lives went.

A few more years have gone by, and I am now waiting for the funeral procession for the newly deceased to enter the cemetery and to fill this hole that I dug yesterday. As they are entering, I can see a long convoy of cars coming up the road to the grave plot. It's evident that this person was popular and, just as everyone else in the cemetery, well loved by the world. They all get out of there cars and gather together at the hole. I stand at a distance by the Mandelson mausoleum, shovel in hand - ready to finish my job for the day. My folder is opened on the ground to my instructions for tomorrow's dig, and I notice the rubbings of Greta and Amy in the left folder pocket,

all crinkled from my sweating hands over the years. I shake my head, knowing it is not the time to day dream, and I focus back towards the people.

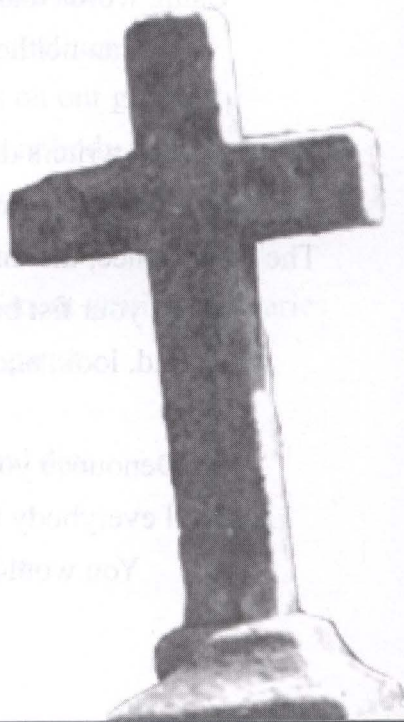
Everyone is crying, and a man sits in a chair at the front of the casket. His face is looking down, and his hand wipes at his eyes. He looks up, mouths the words "I love you" towards the casket. The priest has said his final prayer. Everyone turns to leave, except for the man. The priest puts his hand on the man's shoulder, and he grabs the priest's hand with his own. He stands up and walks away. He turns to look back, and whispers what I think is, "I will always remember you." The procession is led out of the gates into the world once again. I walk over to the casket and hook it to the pulley to lower it down. The cars are still leaving and I can see the man watching me as he pulls through the gate. I finish lowering the box and I go down into the hole in order to get the ropes detached. My feet sink into the dirt as I step off the ladder. I turn toward the casket and I open it up.

Beauty.

That's the only word that I can think as I gaze upon this woman in her funeral bed. Her brown hair is curled and draped over her shoulder. Her cheeks have a slight hint of red and her eye lashes are long and dark. I pull down the cover on top of her. Her body is shaped like a woman you would see in a Sears swimsuit catalog. Her hourglass figure is evident in the thin black dress she is wearing. I kneel beside her, my knee sinking into the gravel. I take her hand and kiss it. This woman is an angel. I stand up from the ground, and slowly and gently move her body over as I slide in next to her. Her skin is stiff, but still smooth and she smells of vanilla. I lie on my side, looking at her face. I press my cheek against hers. As I close my eyes, she becomes mine...

An old woman sits in a green plastic chair on a porch across the street from a local pharmacy. Her eyes scan the parking lot, looking for someone in particular. A man, around the age of thirty-three, steps out of a sleek, black car. He walks over to the other side, and opens the passenger side door. A beautiful woman steps out, her brown hair blowing in the wind. She opens up the back door and takes a little girl in a pink dress by the hand, helping her out of the car. The man takes the woman by the hand, and they walk up the steps towards the porch. The girl runs over to the old woman, and jumps in her lap and gives her a kiss. The man picks the girl up, kisses the old woman, and sits down in the chair next to her. He sits the girl on his lap. The young woman hugs the old woman, and takes a seat across from the man. They all talk and laugh. They all seem happy with life. It's how every day of their lives go. It's how every day of their lives went.

The man's eyes move toward the brown-haired woman. He smiles at her. It's a smile telling her that he is truly happy and never wants to leave the place he is now.



IN DEFENSE OF POESY

DEDICATED TO DAN FRANKENFIELD

We all have dreams.

And privilege.

So, my friends, let us examine

Poesy.

Poetry.

Poems.

Writers read to one another

In the over-dramatized voice of how they would read their
poem-

How they meant their poem to sound.

Using words that most native English speakers
Can neither pronounce nor define.

And writers discuss one another's poems

The diction, the metonymy, the rhythm, the meter,
The consonance, the dissonance, the cacophony, the syntax.

Thrust your fist beneath your chin and try try try
To sound, look, and feeeeeeeel like an intellectual.

Denounce your tattered thrift-store rags
And tell everybody that if you cared about the money
You would have studied business.

When the truth is that you cannot begin
To understand why you are your age
And still not famous
After all, you're in your prime.

Tell everybody that you're a working-class
Idealistic poet
Write about the people's struggle
When the only poverty you know
You read in Faulkner.

Go tell everybody in the working-class bar you hang out in
That you're a writer
And see who buys you a beer after that.

Let us wear our pretenses
Like a hooker wears eyeliner
And congratulate ourselves on our genius
When the truth is that nobody nobody nobody
Reads poetry
And nobody ever will.

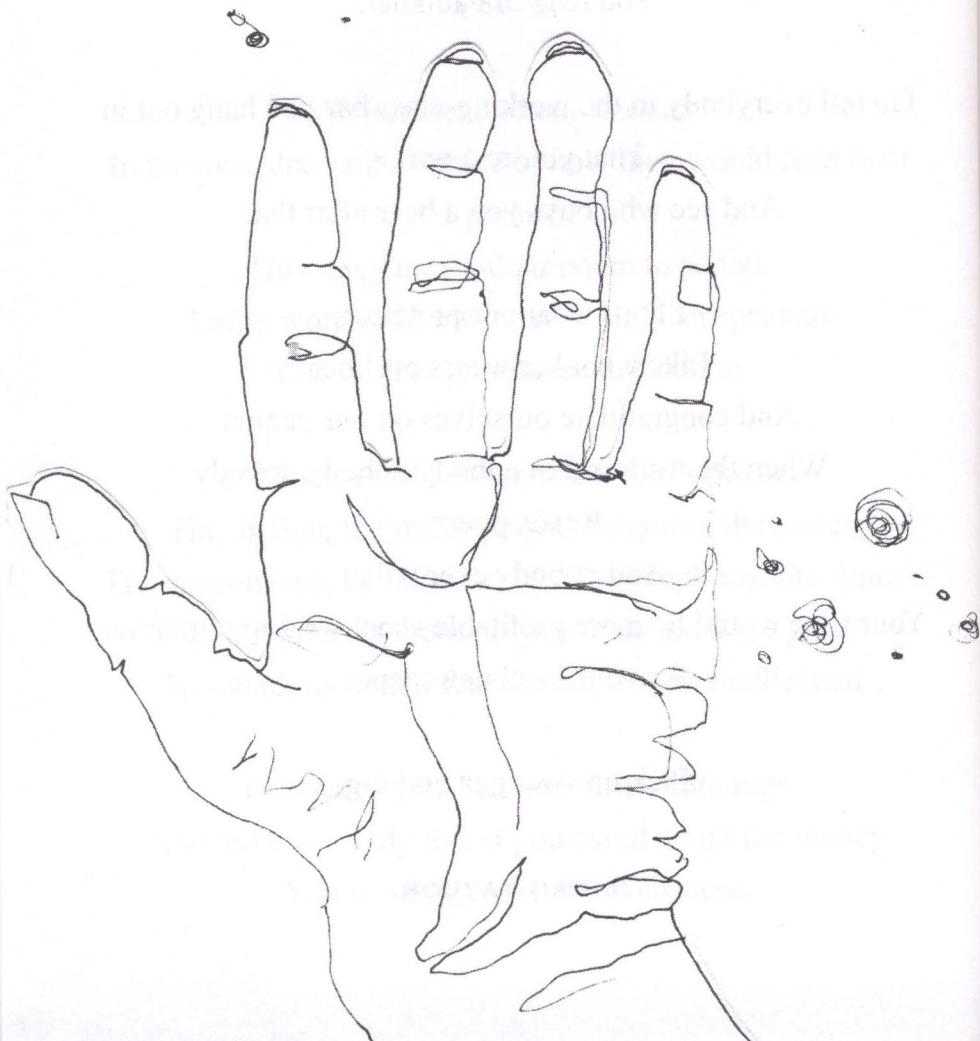
Your time would be more profitable spent writing obituaries
for your local newspaper.

Pick up your pen and dig.

SARAH TAYLOR

SERIES OF HANDS

MARIE HATHAWAY



ABDICATION

we made love in your bed
like a spider makes a living in her web

as we burnt the day's liquor
on your bleeding altar
i kept track of every scar
every turn and crevice

you would think

of all people i memorized the taut stretched skin
over the hard bones at the borders of your hips
the gentle curve of thigh to knee
and filed away each shuddered breath

upon waking, we were awkward
as walking backward up stairs

i would have learned

by now

i needed something concrete
a single unqualified moment
the final report in your file
an ending rhyme for our act

and it was all a question of context
whether it was yours or mine

because though i catalogued your very skin
looking for the places you keep your secrets
i haven't found the answer
and i can't keep looking

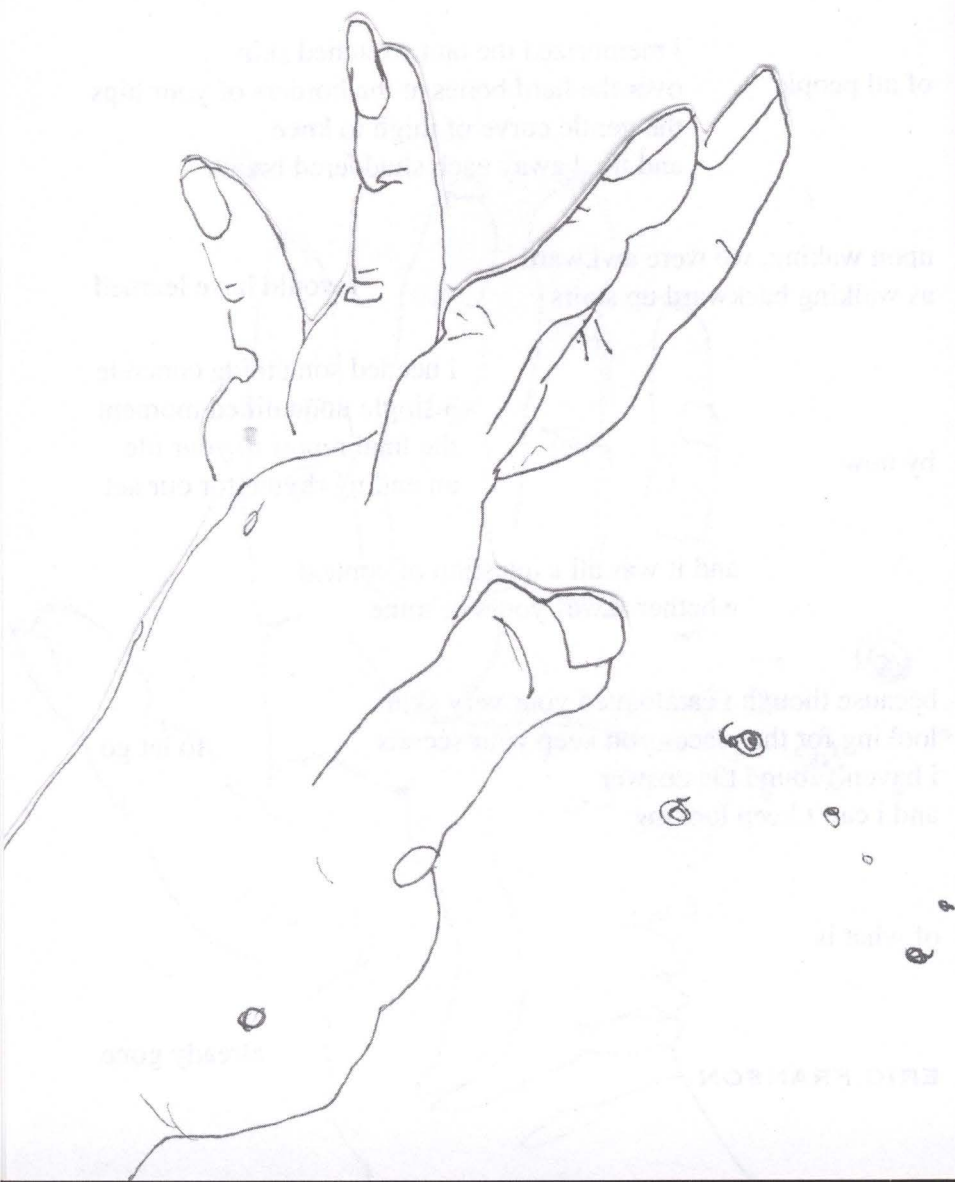
to let go

of what is

already gone

SERIES OF HANDS

MARIE HATHAWAY



PRISON BREAK**2006 POETRY AWARD WINNER**

The prison break occurred around 10 PM.
Regret and Guilt, through combined efforts,
Broke out of Webster's Penitentiary.

A pleading man on Main and Mill
Encountered the two convicts
While shouting into an innocent
Payphone.

Regret accosted the man first,
Separating his pride from the situation.
Customers across the street at the Uni-Mart
Said they could hear the nervous clicks
Of static.

Guilt watched from behind a street light.
It agreed to be the look-out, just in case
Any power-trips with night sticks
Should stroll along, in the mood
To split their bulging
Seams.

On the other end of the receiver
 A brick wall tried to find a place
 Between broken mortar to set
 The phone.
 It heard sweat and temper mixing
 With pepper.
 The phone kept falling.

When Guilt finally got the better
 Of itself,
 It ran out from behind its physical
 Figure of speech box and
 Tackled Regret off of the sidewalk
 Into the street.

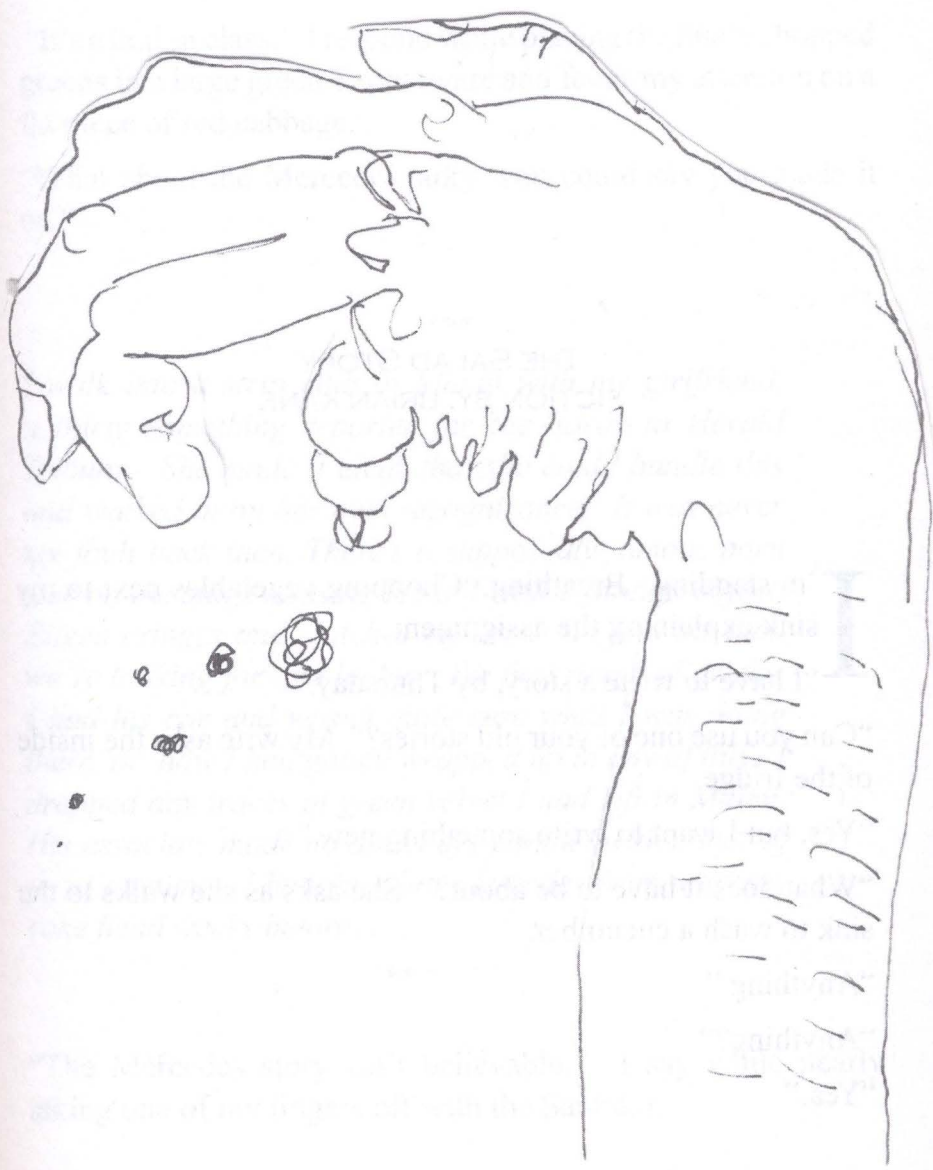
Into oncoming traffic.
 The brightest lights ended the call
 Just in time.

At the hour of dark superlatives,
 Payphones consider pills.

JAMES MCGEOY

SERIES OF HANDS

MARIE HATHAWAY



THE SALAD STORY
FICTION BY: BRIAN KANE

I'm standing. Breathing. Chopping vegetables next to my sink explaining the assignment.

"I have to write a story, by Thursday."

"Can you use one of your old stories?" My wife asks the inside of the fridge.

"Yes, but I want to write something new."

"What does it have to be about?" She asks as she walks to the sink to wash a cucumber.

"Anything."

"Anything?"

"Yea."

I chop spinach with our new German made Santuku knife recently purchased on an outing to the Bed Bath and Beyond.

"That should be easy, why don't you just tell one of your stories?"

"Because I want to make people feel. I want to make people laugh and cry. That's what writers do."

"Write about your life."

"It's a fiction class." I respond while placing the finely chopped greens in a large green Tupperware and focus my attention on a fat piece of red cabbage.

"What about the Mercedes story, you could say you made it up?"

I walk into a strip club in Miami with my girlfriend, a thirty something reporter for the Sarasota Herald Tribune. She made it clear that she could handle this and walked in on her own recognizance. It was never my fault back then. There's a supposedly famous porn star on the stage abusing herself with a foreign object. Eileen cringes and clutches my arm. We find the man we're looking for and he buys the first round of drinks. I had his car and wasn't quite sure what I was doing there, or how I had gotten wrapped up in any of this. I dropped any traces of green velvet I had left in Miami. His associate made no direct eye contact with either of us at anytime. I bought a hot Mercedes from a greasy coke fiend weeks before...

"The Mercedes story isn't believable," I say while nearly taking one of my fingers off with the Santuko.

"But it's true," my wife responds.

"That doesn't make it believable," I say placing the red cabbage into the Tupperware. I pick up the Tupperware and shake it violently. The colorful vegetables mix like an abstract piece of art. Confusedly scattered thick paint transforming a green canvas. I thought it was quite beautiful, my chopped salad.

"I need to have a beginning a middle and an end," I say, just trying to stay on task. The task being to make a salad and discuss the day with my wife. "How was your day?" I ask.

I'm scraping expensive food into a large smelly garbage can with my hands in the back kitchen of a trendy downtown restaurant in a dirty east-coast concrete city. I can smell the wretched river mixed with the thick perfume of the crusty young women in the dining room. I'm wearing a long black pinstriped apron and a modish purple colored button down collared shirt. I look like an ass with product in my hair and short heels on my cheap black shoes. I'm sweating profusely.

The girl I was living with gave me the bad news a few hours before. There was a bell tolling in my ears since then and a large rusty spoon was lodged in my stomach trying to dig its way out. I was alive and he was dead. The former seemed to hurt more than the latter. When the music stopped it would be alright, I'd meet the drummer from the jazz band in the dingy basement bathroom and it would all go away. Unbeknownst to my girlfriend or my employer this would be my last night in town. I poured a cup of coffee and left it sitting in the kitchen while I had a quick smoke behind the grease dumpster

out back with one of the waitresses who happened to be free after work. I returned to the kitchen and, dipping my fingers in the cup of coffee to make sure it was still warm, walked out into the dining room and served it.

My wife was setting the table still telling me about her day. I opened a can of garbanzo beans and dumped its contents into a stainless steel colander. A twitch of guilt ran over me. I don't like using beans from a can because of the high sodium content. I'd rather use the dried organic beans, although they take so much longer to prepare. I rinsed the beans and watched the sodium rich foam wash through the tiny holes in the colander. When the beans were cleansed I added them to the salad and we sat down to eat.

"What do you think?" She asked me.

"Sure," I said.

"Sure, *what?*" She tested.

"Sure, to whatever it is you said."

"I asked if you wanted to go up to the Bed Bath and Beyond tonight and return those spoons." She spoke patiently and good-natured.

"Sure." I smiled and didn't bother to ask what was wrong with the spoons.

"Where are you tonight?" She asked concerned.

"I'm thinking about this story."

"Do you want a drink?" She asked me.

"Please," I said and she poured me a glass of water without asking anything further. The water came from a spring on South Mountain, fifteen minutes from our house and the glasses were thick with a little pocket of air jailed in the bottom. They were nice and I was sometimes worried that I would crack or break one.

"What are you going to write about?" She asked as I spooned the mosaic salad onto her plate.

"I don't know. I need a plot, a setting, and some characters."

"Bill from the Hill" was a short Mexican guy with facial deformities who lived behind the restaurant that we worked at. He had a stolen North Face tent and half moon shaped pile of rocks that served as a bench to sit on. Ponderosa pines covered his little hill and most of the upland desert of northern Arizona. The ponderosa smell and the pine needle carpet-like forest floor made for a surreal atmosphere, especially for two white kids from the green hills of Pennsylvania. The clear blue sky was enormous and totally devoid of clouds for the entire summer. The tile-like texture of the ponderosa's bark and the perfect horizontal straightness of the forest, added with obscene amounts of cocaine, turned the reality of the hill behind the restaurant into an absolute cartoon.

Bill from the hill turned us on to the jobs at the restaurant; they were the only place in the small tourist town that didn't piss test. He also turned us on to the exhilarating white powder. He introduced himself one day as me

and Mitch shared a cold can of corn-beef hash on the tailgate of our pick-up. He wasn't any dirtier in appearance than we were, but his face looked like it had been partially run through a meat grinder. We walked up the hill with him and sat on his half moon alter.

He claimed to be H.A. and explained that his facial features were the result of a motorcycle accident that also claimed the functional use of his nasal passages, which is why he had to main-line the coke. He said he liked the needle much better anyway. "It's the rush man, it gives it to you all at once."

His skin had turned to leather and his dark Mexican eyes had a polished steel glaze over top of them at all times. His deformed face was not at all difficult to look at except for the fact that his shiny silver eyes quickly stole your gaze. He was intense in all aspects of his character, from his quick jerky movements to his quick jerky speech. He told wondrous junkie vagabond stories that I would later learn were not uncommon among most western junkie vagabonds: how many people he had to kill, how he was the biggest supplier of every kind of illegal narcotic known to man from Vancouver to San Diego, how he owned expensive homes on pristine Baja beaches. He just chose to spend his summer shooting up behind fast food restaurants in Northern Arizona.

"Are you okay, honey?" She asked as I held a forkful of spinach halfway between my plate and my mouth. I usually didn't stall much while eating.

"Yea, I'm sorry I'm not listening, babe, I keep thinking about this story, I want to make people feel something but I just keep thinking..."

"How are *you* feeling?" She asked.

"Lucky," I said.

"Awe..." she said and smiled warmly, misunderstanding me. She leaned over and pecked me on the mouth.

"Thanks, babe," she said, "but lucky isn't an emotion."

"I know...What were you saying?"

I'm lying on a melting bathroom floor, everything is white and clean. The linoleum is slick from my ice cold sweat. Nightmarish dreams wake me from blackouts. My body is rejecting something and I crawl to the toilet. I have no idea where I am. The large mirror above the spotless double sink counter is half covered with steam. Uncovered light bulbs, like those seen in the dressing rooms of celebrities on TV, surround the mirror. Their pure white light blinds and sickens me. An unholy blackness surrounds my every perceivable thought. I go quickly to the sink after vomiting bile. The young man in the mirror is not me, I do not recognize him, his eyes are sunk back in his head and his skin is the color of clean cotton. Fear grips me as my stomach contracts and pulsates violently. My heart is beating out of my chest.

"Where am I?" I ask myself. "Sedona," the word comes as a revelation. There were girls, and a hot tub. This is

their rented condo. An evil fear invades my thoughts as I remember the girls purposely trying to poison me. "That must have been days ago." I think and sit down in the corner, freezing, sweating, and shivering violently as delusional thoughts skim passed my recognition like small stones being skipped across calm black water.

A loud bang comes at the door. "Are you okay?" Someone is yelling in to me. It's Mitch.

"No," I yell back. "Stay away from them," I shout as a warning.

"He's fine," I hear Mitch say. "Let's get back in the hot tub."

"He's overdosed," A female voice says, concerned. "We need to take him to a hospital."

The voices continue, muffled.

"I don't know...lots..."

"How much is lots," I hear Mitch ask as the voices get dimmer and dimmer and the strange nightmares begin again, invading my whole being.

"Do you want some help with the dishes, Babe?"

"No thanks, I got 'em," I respond.

My wife helps clear the table. Not an ounce of food remains in the large Tupperware. The colorful remnants of the meal, however, dot the dished and the utensils. Purple, white, red, yellow and various shades of green are being washed into the drain stopper. I empty the stopper into the garbage and wipe

out the sink. I let the water run over my hands and then replace the stopper in the drain as the water begins to cover the bottom of the sink. I pay close attention to my breath as it moves past my nostrils and deep into my belly. I clear my thoughts and add dish soap to the water. I submerge a plate and wash off the last remaining specks of produce.

I'm lost near Kensington Avenue. Broken glass vials crunch beneath my feet.

I adjust the water so that it's not so hot and rinse the first dish. I rinse the top and then turn the dish in my hands, concentrating. I take a deep breath, watching it coming into my nose and out my mouth. The suds in the sink are thick. I wash another plate and flip the water back on. I am careful not to waste any water by letting it run and rely on the water that is rinsing the dishes to fill the sink.

I am locked in a padded room. I can see my brother through the small Plexiglas window in the door. He is shaking his head and waving goodbye.

I notice the flower patterns on the dishes and flip each dish three times while rinsing. I rinse the front, then rinse the back, then rinse the front again and then the back again. I place the dish in the drying rack and pick up a fancy glass with an air bubble in the bottom. I shove the sponge to the bottom of the glass and rotate my wrist. Then with my thumb on the outside and my fingers on the inside I run the sponge around the rim of the glass. I dunk the glass in the sudsy water, flip on the faucet and rinse it thoroughly.

I'm in the back of a Pennsylvania State Police car. My pockets are loaded with contraband. It's not a strange feeling being this scared. I am almost used to it by now. But this is the middle of the story. I need a beginning. And a plot. There is absolutely nothing worth writing about the cop in the front seat, so I may need a character or two. Preferably someone more heroic than what's handcuffed in the back.

I take a freshly washed brown dishtowel from the freshly washed dishtowel drawer. I'm sure it's not brown but 'desert sand mica' or something like that. I spread it over part of the countertop and place the fancy glass, with the air bubble in the bottom, open end down on the towel. I feel safer if the fancy glasses are not clanging around with the dishes and the pots and pans in the drying rack.

I have a large amount of heroine, a handful of unused hypos, a spoon and a large stack of napkins shoved inside of a McDonalds to go bag while I'm walking across a parking lot in South Philadelphia surrounded by blue uniforms and gold badges shimmering in the midday sun. There is one single exit in the chain link fence. The barbed wire menaces above me. My saving grace is just past the exit. I can see the red and white striped garbage can approaching like an oasis. I nod politely to the uniform at the gate and drop the paper bag in the garbage can on the way out.

Visualizing my breath as it moves in and out of my nostrils I wipe down the sink and the countertops. I get the broom from the closet and sweep the floor. I lean over the trash bag, see the colorful produce mingling with the rest of the garbage, and pull out the inner garbage bag.

I'm twelve years old and I'm smoking a cigarette with my brother outside of the house. We speak only in necessary whispers, as not to get busted by our parents. The smoke is warm and soothing. I watch it move past my nostrils on the way out, up into the night sky.

I walk out to the big garbage can outside and place the white bag inside. That old familiar feeling comes. The *feeling*. I crave a cigarette and remind myself that I don't smoke. We know each other so well. It has a beginning, middle, and an end. It comes. It is there. Then it goes away.

"Hey Babe," I yell into the other room where my wife is watching a prerecorded episode of the Doctor Phil Show.

"Yea?" She yells back.

"Are we going to Bed, Bath and Beyond to return those spoons?"

We get in the car. It's a new Toyota Corolla. She wanted a silver one but we got a good deal on the white one with a moon roof. We get great gas mileage.

"Any ideas for the story yet?" She asks.

"I was thinking of writing a Killgore Trout kind of science fiction anti-war thing."

"A what?"

"Or maybe a palm-of-my-hand self discovery type story."

"That's disgusting."

"The whole class has to read it," I inform her.

"The whole class!" She says. "What are they like?"

"They're all young and smart and good-looking."

"Why don't you write it about overcoming adversity in your life."

"Then there won't be an ending."

"Just tell me how much you love me and have us drive off into the sunset in our little white Toyota," she said smiling.

I am twenty-eight years old and I'm driving towards Harrisburg Pennsylvania to return some perfectly good spoons to a warehouse full of overpriced kitchen utensils produced by third-world poverty stricken children. I am explaining to my wife how very much in love with her I am as we watch the changing colors of the sky reflect off the clouds in the eastern horizon. Our little Toyota passes a semi and my wife informs me of the posted speed limit. I set the cruise control and am literally overcome with a feeling of gratitude. The feeling begins and it is there.



THE MANHOLE

You can't kill Sodom and Gomorra.
 It's there, right there among the
 seedy, downtown atmosphere of Chicago.
 It has a big, neon sign (or it used to
 anyway) reading, "THE MANHOLE"
 with a smaller neon sign reading, if
 it is indeed Friday or Saturday, "shirts off."

The walls are painted with dry semen,
 and it's true that HIV (or is it
 AIDS at this point?) separates itself from the
 walls and stands sentry at the bar.
 He's always dressed so well,
 and he hates it when you call him H-I-V;
 he prefers it Hiv—as if it were a word.

Hiv always knows what kind of drink you want.
 If you fall on the dance floor, he's always there to
 pick you up or brush off your new GAP khakis so
 it's not quite as clear you're that drunk.
 He'll light your cigarette.
 He'll ask if you need to talk,
 that weird, cold hand on your shoulder.
 That deep voice, like a thousand echoes.

Sometimes,
 (everyone hates to do it
 so we take turns but it's the rules,
 you know?) I have to remind Hiv that
 it's Friday or Saturday—that it's shirts off
 for everyone and that includes pathogens that
 have separated themselves from dried semen.

He gives me this aww shucks look (can anyone help but smile?) and button by button peels away his white, starched veneer.

You can't help but look at his skin:
A million million little hearts. Some
say they sound like chimes, but I think
they're just a million million little voices all
at once and so you can't make out their words.
They just sound like chimes, is all.
It makes you want to look away, but then I know
he was there when I fell that one time and oh boy
would I have been embarrassed if he hadn't traded me
shirts and whispered in my ear the
story of Sodom and Gomorra—how it was about
hospitality and all and how you can't kill it but each
of us can take steps to make the world a better place,
an easier place.

Yeah, yeah he pours me a drink,
and I drown in Hiv's smile above his exposed
chest. "You can't kill Sodom and Gomorra,"
he says. "Because the Manhole's the heart of America.
And I'm the heart of the world."

(You just can't help but smile.)

MICHAEL MANIS

GRANDFATHER'S MENU

Things look so much better
when someone dies for them.

It's why, now listen up

Jake. This is important.

I golf at Arlington or shop
for only the best diamonds
from the Sudan.

I take my coffee
with a dash of nationalism,
my cantaloupe on a sliver platter.

It's why Jake,
get close now I'm having trouble,
it's why I must,

I always must,
take my tea with
soot.

Have you ever seen
the supermarket at Auschwitz?

Have you heard of their sale on shoes?
(It was in their circular.)

Oh Jake, I want a pair.

You get me a pair.

And some of those pants,

in which Franco looked so dignified.

I want to die in those pants.

Take that down, Jake. The thing
about the pants I want to die in.

And some water, Jake.

I'm tired, Jake.

MICHAEL MANIS



SCHOOL OF ATHENS
(AN EXERCISE IN SELF-INDULGENCE)
FICTION BY: JOHN ARMINIO

I see Abraham Lincoln's face. I know I'm not dreaming, but I see Abraham Lincoln's face. He's smiling at me. He looks healthier than any of the photographs I've seen of him, but it's still definitely him. His cheekbones look as if they're trying to emerge from the inside of his wrinkled, taut face. He stands. Jesus, he *is* tall...wait, I'm sitting down, no wonder he looks tall. What's going on? I'm in a white marble room surrounded by red pillars. I can see a gateway in front of me to what looks like a similar room. There is a marble sign that reads "Musicians" above it, to my right, "Scientists," to my left, "Artists," and behind me... "Philosophers and Cafeteria." I look up and see an enormous golden dome inscribed with painted images of minotaurs, monsters, underwater creatures... and I'm guessing the guy standing on the pile of demon heads is Beowulf, but—

"Well gentlemen, I'll leave you to him. Good luck." Lincoln begins to walk away. No! I want to scream at him, I want to talk to him ask him questions, I mean, it's fucking Lincoln! A small, thin man in a red robe snaps his fingers in my face to get my attention then motions for me to stand. He is the most oppressive looking human being I have ever seen. While Lincoln's cheekbones jut out of his skin like two knives, this man looks as if he has a pair of sledgehammers bulging out from under his face. He has a massive jaw highlighted by a protruding chin and an elongated, hooked nose. His small, stern eyes are deposited in an enormous set of eye sockets.

I stare at him. "Jesus fucking Christ—"

He punches me hard in the nose. "Of all the people to commit blasphemy in front of. Are you sure you belong here, boy?"

I blink and clench my nostrils as I try to stop tears from forming. The little bastard hits hard. "Uh...am I dead?"

"Of course you're not dead —"

"Then where—?"

He slaps me then shoves his finger into my neck. "Don't ever interrupt me! Before we begin, I have to take issue with you."

"With me?"

"You're slow...yes, of course with you!"

I hear a British voice come from my left. A man with a well-kept mustache and an oval-shaped face cuts in. "Would you move along?"

Dante ignores the man but seems irritated by my dropped jaw. "Eyes here boy. Now, do you know the most grievous injustice to my countenance and reputation has been throughout history?"

"Um, I..."

"Don't hesitate when you answer me, boy! If you don't know something, it is better to admit to it than stammer like an imbecile, pretending you are my intellectual equal."

"Right..."

"Yes, so the greatest injustice to me has not been that God-forsaken English playwright's mythos trampling over my legend as an artist, that has happened to all of us, it is that they spelled Alighieri with two L's on my statue in Florence. I suppose they banished me for so long they forgot what it looked like. When I look upon it, it seems they forgot what my face looked like as well."

The English voice cuts in again, "They did a great deal of improvement, if you ask me."

"Silence! You sodomite lapdog of a heretical whore you call a Queen, I'll—"

"Anyway John, you've been brought here for a reason."

I stand there, shifting my eyes between the men who... seem to be Dante and Shakespeare. Was I drugged? Was I kidnapped by sexual perverts who get off on playing dress up as figures of literature?

"Fine, fine, you're here because..." I stop listening to Dante when I look through the gateway marked "Musicians" and see Beethoven grabbing Robert Johnson in a headlock while Miles Davis collects bets on the brawl from Mozart and Chuck Schuldiner.

"On all that is holy, I swear, the boy is deficient." I see a pudgy, balding, awkward little man walk by mumbling something about "The Head" to himself and I can't help but again divert my gaze from the Italian. William Blake is walking past me and all I can think to say is:

“Lord Byron’s not here, is he?” What the fuck is wrong with me?

Blake laughs at me, shocked that I would ask such a question. “Of course not!”

“Oh, that sucks. I’ve always wanted to fight him.” This guy wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and all I can say to him is “oh, that sucks”? I should kill myself. I mean, making Byron cry would be great, but...

“Hmm, it’s best not to start that kind of conflict around here. Dante and Milton have had more rows than I care to remember.”

Dante, no longer offended that I cannot seem to pay attention, turns to me and jerks up his sleeve, showing me his scarred arm. “The bastard bites!”

Blake rolls his eyes as he walks into the Artist room, “he’s blind.”

“They’re allies you know, Blake and Milton,” Dante informs me. “I would have thought delusional heretics who believe they are divined by the heavens wouldn’t get along as well as that.”

Shakespeare raises his eyebrow behind Dante’s back as the Italian continues. “You presume to make yourself immortal, do you not?”

“I don’t know about immortality, but...”

“No, that’s why we are all here; we all attempted to achieve immortality through mortal means. We all succeeded as well, we conquered death, the Great Infinity, with our finite time in flesh. I wrote myself being privy to God’s plan, I wrote myself ascending into heaven, I *saw God*. Understand? You seek to do the same otherwise you would not be here, correct?”

"Yes, but..."

"Then you must shun all thought of intimidation and inferiority in your soul. The...*Englishman*, after all, wrote *Coriolanus*, I know how you feel about that play."

"Shit."

"I'm asking your opinion, don't respond like you're impressed with the fact you know the answer. Still, if you or any of your peers value your own creations as having greater worth than the filth that comes out of the back end of a pig, then you value your work higher than *Coriolanus*. Expand on that hubris, boy. If your peers found a scrap of paper that the Englishman wiped his ass with, it would be declared the greatest illustration of irony since the invention of language."

Shakespeare seems displeased. "Listen greaseball, I wrote *Hamlet*! I didn't have the luxury taking a literary piss on all the people that disagreed with me. I had to make a living."

"You also wrote *Measure for Measure* and *Titus Andronicus*."

"I also wrote *Macbeth* and *King Lear*!"

I can't help myself. "Um, I liked *Titus*."

Both men grimace. Dante turns back to me and takes my shirt in his fist. "Look boy, I'm tired. I'm tired of having scholarly debates and fistfights with my inferiors. I'm tired of these English-speaking, half-insane forgeries your people call 'geniuses.' We need new blood here. It is obvious that nothing you have done can even compare to the least of us, but when you and your people think they have no hope of conquering their predecessors, they never will."

Shakespeare interjects, "well, I do enjoy seeing children forced to read my plays against their will, though I don't know why you people have taken hold of *Romeo and Juliet* they way you have."

Dante ignores him. “Hubris, boy. The only way you can hope to encapsulate Creation is to believe you can best those before you, however impossible,” he looks me up and down with contempt, “that may be.”

Shakespeare approaches Dante and wraps his arm around the poet’s shoulder. Dante is clearly made uncomfortable by the physical contact and tries to ignore the playwright, but Shakespeare seems to enjoy the situation, raising a suggestive eyebrow at the Italian. “Why Dante, are you insinuating that the child attempts to supplant your position here?”

Dante remains irritated, keeping eye contact with me as he refuses to even acknowledge the playwright. “It’s touching me.” Shakespeare gives Dante a sarcastic puppy-dog look, but acquiesces to removing his arm. Dante continues to address me. “Of course you cannot ‘supplant’ me, I would simply appreciate some variety here. The most prominent of the living among you is a witchcraft-obsessed writer of illustrated stories. *Another* Englishman, as it happens,” he gives Shakespeare a sideways sneer, “and a rather unkempt one at that. Now, if you wish to supplant *this* one here, you are more than welcome to it.”

Shakespeare holds his finger in the air. “And if you wish to supplant the Italian, you should feel obligated to do so.”

Before Dante can respond, he sees a woman enter the room who seems to raise his ire even further. Gesticulating wildly at her, he begins to scream. “Look, look! There are even *more* English-speaking lunatics in this place!” He turns to the woman, “get out of my sight! Your very presence causes a drain on my spirit!” The woman, shocked, leaves without saying a word, obviously disheartened by the insult. I think Dante Alighieri just told Emily Dickinson to fuck off. I feel like I should mention something about her being American, but I don’t think that would improve his opinion of her.

My curiosity finally compels me to ask, “where are you people coming from?”

Shakespeare looks away and scratches his head, seemingly embarrassed. “We have a rec room.”

“Like...with ping pong tables?”

Dante quickly cuts into the conversation. “It’s time for you to go.”

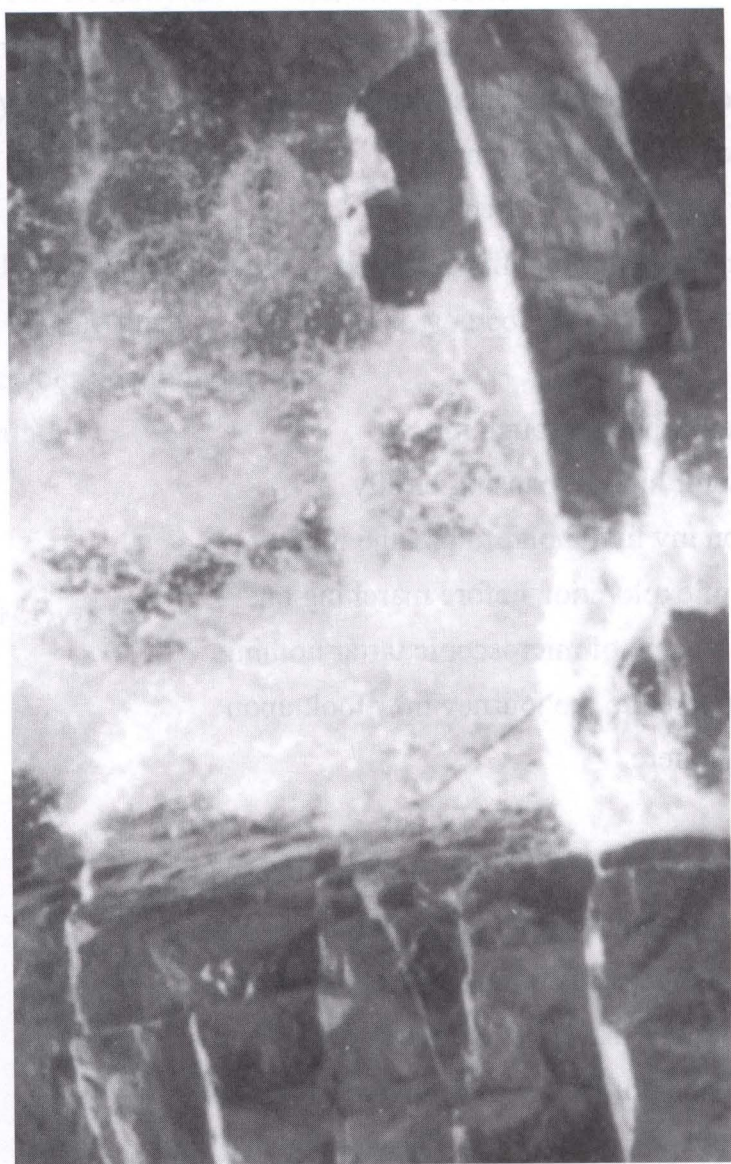
Shakespeare begins to wave at me, but I can’t tell if that smile on his face is genuine or if he wants to creep me out. I have to ask *something* before I leave.

“One question.”

Dante looks unmistakably impatient. “Yes?”

“Beatrice...was she...?”

Dante’s mood changes as he smiles at me and gives a subtle raise of his eyebrows.



RUSHING WATER

NICOLE JONES

FOLIATE PAPILLAE

There are germs in me.
They climbed through
the hole you left when you
removed your mouth from
mine.

They slipped through my
Lateral Incisor, pausing briefly
upon my first molar to breathe in the
air of exploration before marching on,
the swamp of microscopic tartar nothing
compared to the journey they took upon
to get here.

They set up camp within my taste buds,
drawing tents within this muscular hydrostat
of a tongue, this lingual musculature they now
call home. They fell in love and died in my
Foliate Papillae and held council beneath
the overhanging Lateral Glossoepiglottic Fold.

I can only imagine the germs which began to
 inhabit your mouth, the laws they drew up
 upon your Geniohyoid Muscle, the speeches
 their most revered citizens must have given
 while you sat there unbeknownst to what they
 had to say.

We only knew they must have been there,
 and in the end this was just a way so you could
 mingle your newfound germs
 with mine.

SIMON OWENS

CHAPTERS

I have loved Arabic

for you

By exiles of it all

in real time of fire things

Shines my word

From the start

Angels of water, as ever land

Not all

only a few return

even the rain,

water of snow

air about me.

In marble

Bones in, beyond english

of light, stars

for time, God

forever after you

in Arabic

Tonight existed.

--- thanks to

Agha Shahid Ali

JIM FLANNERY

THE LAWS OF LABOR

FICTION BY: MIKE MANIS

“**H**is kids belong to me”—a woman etched the phrase above the headboard with a knitting needle years before. The woman, was her name Natalie?, came running to the house. From afar she looked filthy, and Sarah had assumed her dress was soaked in some mixture of puddle-water and dirt. Was it Laura? Lilly? Her shoes flying off those square feet. She squatted in the doorway and flailed there like a bird. Blood coursed through her skirt until saturated. Later, Sarah would pace in the kitchen, look through the cupboards for coffee and wonder what law determined the blood coil through the woman’s fabric so diligently. Capillary action: a phenomenon associated with surface tension and resulting in the elevation or depression of liquids in capillaries. “Is that it?” she whispered over the book, and she reflected on the hours spent consoling the woman. On the struggle to cut away

her defiled clothes—to convince her up the stairs and into the bathroom.

“You just want to wash him away. Wash him away forever,” the woman, Charlotte?, whispered. They worked hours to clear her insides of remains, appalled by how far the baby had come. It was a girl, but Sarah did not tell her—she was so set on a boy, you see.

Sarah found the woman the next morning, a quilt draped over her shoulders, a knitting needle clutched in one hand, her back toward Sarah—immobile, statuesque and admiring the fruits of her vandalism.

“It’s true, you know,” the woman said. “Without me, what’s there to leave behind?”

Sarah acknowledged the inscription and asked: “What would you like for breakfast?”

So she stood there, on the spot she first saw the inscription five years before, her green eyes mulling over the jagged letters surrounded by chipped, white paint. Sarah had charged extra for the damage to the wall, and she overheard one day the woman threw herself in front of a train nearly a year after the incident. The gossip circulated not merely on account of the suicide, but spurred by the fact the husband left town before paying the undertaker.

The woman’s check, Sarah recalled upon seeing the inscription, had bounced.

“It’s a natural way to have a child, Burt. Between women, I’m convinced that’s the way it was meant. It’s in the Bible somewhere. Frankly, I never looked forward to having some strange doctor’s hands on me while, well, you know. Tell him,

sweetheart.” Mrs. Crawford said. Her hand landed on Sarah’s knee. Sarah’s body tightened on account of the touch—too light for flesh. “Don’t you agree?”

“Oh, yes. Yes I do. Can I refill anyone’s cup?” Sarah slid from beneath the hand.

“It is not in the Bible. I don’t mean to offend, but you’re not a doctor. Do you really have the qualifications to handle an emergency? My wife has a history of fainting, you know. What would you do if she fainted? Or worse?” Mr. Crawford said.

“Oh please Burt.”

“If anything exotic arises, God forbid, I have a good report with a Dr. Clemens. He’s very thorough. I’ll be happy to give you his number.”

“Please,” he said.

“We could have the birth at the hospital. I’m sure we could arrange a private room for Mrs. Crawford.”

“Out of the question! Hospitals are for the dying. Too white. Ugh, gives me heart palpitations, I swear to God. I want it right here. Or perhaps under water. I’ve heard that’s very relaxing.”

“Jesus Christ,” he mumbled.

“I’m afraid I have no experience with underwater births. But I can recommend...”

“Then here. We’ll do it here. Don’t worry, sweetheart. You come highly recommended.”

“I don’t know,” Mr. Crawford said.

“What else do you want the poor woman to say? She’s answered all your questions, and I refuse to do it in a hospital. It’s my choice. Shouldn’t it be my choice?”

“It’s my money.”

"What else can she say?"

"I don't know..."

"Tell him sweetheart. Tell him how good you are. Don't you have children? Don't you love babies? Tell him, sweetheart. Tell Burt how much you love babies."

Mrs. Crawford's eyes burned into Sarah. They were an icy blue.

"Oh, I've loved children, we've all loved children, since we've been playing with dolls."

"And how many children do you have?" she pressed.

"I'm afraid I never had any. But I've held more...more babies than any mother. Mrs. Crawford should come and stay two weeks before her due date. There'll be less stress before the labor."

"See Burt. Thank you sweetheart. Look at him, look at Burt."

"Shut up Laura." He ran his hand over his eyes then scanned the kitchen, resting his attention upon a book on the counter. He stood, picked up the article, titled: *Elementary Physics and the Laws of the Universe*. "Who's the book for?"

Sarah shrunk into her chair. "Just a passing interest, really. Not even a hobby. The reading, it helps me sleep."

"Look at her blush. Look how adorable," Mrs. Crawford said. She raised her eyebrows at her husband. "Burt's an engineer."

He smiled and took Sarah's hand and said, "I'm so sorry to probe. Don't you worry sweetheart. You come highly recommended. To whom do I address the check?"

For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Dirt lurked beneath her nails. She rested on a branch and examined a broken cuticle, its remainder lodged in a piece of bark further down. She wondered if her mother would notice and decided not to ask to have her nails painted for the next few days. What a sacrifice—she so enjoyed having them blue. She held up a hand to the sky in an attempt to camouflage her fingertips with the cloudless portions. She never could get the color to match. This time, despite the broken nail, she was remarkably close and mourned the loss of future excursions into the realm of cosmetology.

She crawled to the end of the branch. Her tree had a great view of the playground, and she observed little, white children scramble over the onyx pavement. They looked like dust from above—she couldn't identify any of her friends with certainty. Sarah's hands secured her against gravity, and she peered down to adjust their grip. Those blue fingertips stood out against the multitude of roots, like green snakes in a breeding pit, below. And when her eyes returned to the playground, they were struck by a new presence.

He was tall and must have been a few years older than Sarah. He leaned against a pole close to the tree, his chiseled face positioned toward the sun, hairy arms buried in corduroy pockets. Erect, that's how Sarah would remember him through the remainder of her youth. Stood so upright against that pole while the other boys were satisfied with an apish slouch. His mother must have nagged him: "Stand up straight—straighter! Slouching is not attractive," just as Sarah's did.

What a beautiful boy, Sarah thought. He caused her to stare, her consciousness to drift, and so she thought little of the wind or the way the branch swayed. She did not hear the first crack or the second. Rather, she gasped when the boy looked

up and screamed, "Watch out kid!" Then gravity wrapped around and pulled her toward the wooden snakes until a moss-covered viper, its mouth wide-open, entered her above the waist. She heard the branch crash just after. The beautiful boy's red sneakers in front of her face. Then the hands, falling over her like a dozen faith healers. "Oh my God! Oh my God!"

Oh my God.

Sarah woke in a white room. Her body seemed to rebel, to lash out in pain, but her mother was beside the bed. The doctor, Sarah's father gathered round. There was so much crying, but Sarah did not cry. She stared and wondered what happened to that boy. He stood so straight against the pole. Then her mother removed something from her purse. A doll made of porcelain. Sarah reached for it. Its dress was silken, pink, but Sarah was drawn to its eyes—an icy blue.

A glacial blue.

Then, Sarah cried.

Laura Crawford's things filled the house.

Foodstuffs clogged the cabinets, most of which remained half-eaten after a night of cravings. Baby catalogues were strewn over the counters while maternity wear overflowed from each hamper. Daily Burt would bring her more, and Sarah was obliged to help carry armfuls of baby clothes from the car, stuffed animals, books and cartons of cigarettes for Laura's two-pack habit. She wondered if the Crawford's understood they would move on after the birth. Sarah counted the days.

Work kept Burt from visiting too often. Much of Sarah's time was occupied by household chores—the laundry, cooking

and cleaning up after Laura. However, the two spent most of the time waiting for the baby, whether through a leisurely walk or sitting in the parlor and discussing paint colors for the nursery. The whole idea of motherhood captured Laura's vocabulary like the talons of an eagle: "Oh, it'll be a girl; I just know it'll be a girl. I hope she's a girl, anyway. It's no fun to dress up a boy." And Sarah would nod, her attention deviating to the character of the weather or the pattern of the wallpaper before too long.

Over dinner, Laura insisted on opening a bottle of wine, and the liquor had a way of broadening her horizons. She tore into the goose with gusto, and Sarah found herself transfixed on the display—picking only sporadically at her own food.

"You are a wonderful cook. You'll loan me some recipes?" Laura asked.

"Of course I will. Be sure to remind me before you leave."

"Would you like some wine? It's really good. Free of charge. Burt brought it specifically because he heard you mention something about a penchant for merlots."

"Really? I don't remember—"

"Trying to steal my husband are you." She pointed at Sarah with her knife, resting her elbow on the table. "I know your game."

"Mrs. Crawford..."

"Laura! How many times."

"Laura. I'll be happy to try the wine."

She poured Sarah a glass. "Tell me if you like it."

Sarah tasted it. "Too dark. I like sweet wine."

"Then fetch a bottle."

"I'd rather not go out. It's supposed to rain."

"Don't you keep wine?" Laura asked in such a way, Sarah blushed.

"No, I don't have the room. We did once. Overseas, but that was the custom—it would have seemed strange..." Sarah swallowed some wine, puckering her lips afterward. "Perhaps this isn't so bad."

"Overseas? You never mentioned world-travel."

"Oh, just a couple years in Normandy. I'd rather not—"

"A couple years?" Laura dropped her silverware to the plate. "In France?"

"Yes. In Normandy."

"Alone?"

"No, with my husband."

"Yes," Laura whispered, returning to her goose. "I'd heard you were married, but I guess things didn't—"

"Those are vicious lies."

"Oh sweetheart, I didn't mean..."

"It's alright." Sarah poured herself another glass. "I like white wine more."

"Yes?"

"Woodrow died."

"I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to—"

"It's ok." Sarah twisted the glass by the stem, watching the light through the dark lens of the wine, like a chalice of blood. "Just spread the word for me, please."

Laura served herself more goose, her eyes averted. "In the War?"

"Not in the war. But—but he was in North Africa."

"My husband was too young," Laura admitted. "Your husband, Woodrow, must have been brave."

Brave, how brave he must have been! And Sarah would nod and smile, blushing a bit—perhaps even a moment's pride. In the back of her mind, however, the memories ran like wet ink on an endless page. "Sweetheart, there's a spider in the bathroom," and Sarah would march in armed with a rolled-up newspaper in one hand, a tissue in the other. When they had mice in the basement, Sarah set the traps. Friends would come to the door, and even when expected, Sarah would answer while Woodrow lurked in the background, biting his nails. Army buddies would come to visit, to flatter Woodrow with tales of his bravery under fire, and Sarah would stare at her husband while they blathered on, wondering if he was faking it all.

"Thank you. Yes, yes he was," Sarah said.

"If you don't mind me asking, how did he—?"

"I'd rather not—not over dinner." Sarah smiled and poured herself another glass. "When do you think the baby will come?"

And it was that easy to return Laura to the beaten path. A mouthful of shredded, dark meat opening and closing over and over and, "I hope it's a girl. All these clothes. I'll dress her up like a doll. Like a little, porcelain doll."

Every point mass attracts every other point mass by a force directed along the line connecting the two.

"Sarah! Sarah!" Woodrow yelled, but she did not hear him. Rather, Sarah hummed over the stew, prodding the meat

with a wooden spoon. How marvelous, when the meat-chunks sank, they would pop back to the surface and send a spray of rich-smelling broth over her apron. She laughed and poured herself another glass of wine. "Sarah!" this time closer, and she turned. Her elbow bumped her wine glass into the sink. It shattered.

"Oh shit! That was the last of it Woody, Jesus. What're you screaming about?" Sarah said.

"It's these shoes." Woodrow entered the kitchen. "Did you spill your wine? Don't bellyache; we have plenty in the cellar."

"Bring up a merlot—two. They like red, right? What's this about your shoes?"

"Take a look." He handed her the right shoe. The inside was caked with mud. "It goes through the sides on a rainy day. They're cheap. That's the problem. Cheap as hell."

"We're not oozing money, Woody. Are we?" She dropped the shoe.

"Don't buy them again. They make me look like some kid. Honestly, what self-respecting man wears red shoes?"

Sarah hugged him; he felt solid. "Aww, I think they make you look dashing. Like a baseball player."

"That so?"

"Yes." Sarah kissed him. "That's so."

"You know honey, your breath smells like a hoochy's."

"Two merlots."

"Sure thing sweetheart."

That night Sarah answered the door, and in came a very pregnant Mary with her husband, John Voucher. Woodrow approached from deeper in the house, followed by a round of cheek-kissing. Mary smelled so especially wonderful—like

how one would imagine ambergris in its purest form. John stunk of cigars, but not even tobacco could cheapen Mary; her aroma merely twisted John's into line. When Sarah kissed Mary, she hovered for a moment, "You smell so wonderful," and then, "Mercy, you have such a nice home, so spacious."

They ate dinner quickly, as if eager to retreat to the parlor for wine and music. Woodrow poured for the ladies, even insisted on igniting John's cigar.

"This is excellent. Very smooth," Mary said.

"A '35 Merlot, Sarah's favorite," Woodrow mentioned.

"I'm surprised I like it. I'm partial to sweet wine. John can barely stand it."

"She bleeds me dry—I have to buy two bottles over dinner," John said.

"I'm glad you like it," Sarah said.

"Yes. You know, what a cozy home. How many bedrooms did you say?" Mary inquired.

"Two," Sarah replied.

"Three, sweetheart. There's another in the basement," Woodrow added.

"Three then. I can't help but ask, when're you going to fill them?" Mary asked.

Woodrow's face went slack, and John chimed in before Sarah, who was too occupied with the task of filling her second glass to have heard Mary's question: "They know it's a big house. This is a really good cigar, Woody. Where'd you get it?"

"Uptown. At this place—"

"Come on Sarah, let's have it. When're you going to fill up all this space?" Mary pressed.

"It's rude to interrupt. It's the wine talking, the hormones," John explained, but Sarah just stared at Woodrow. Anger pressed against the back of her eyes. She peered at him waiting—waiting for him to take command, to save her from the question, but Woodrow lowered his head and poured another glass of wine. Mary tugged on Sarah's sleeve, "Sweetheart did you hear me? Are you alright?"

"Oh," Sarah whispered. "I'm sorry. Must be the wine. What did you ask?"

"The room, when're—what're you going to fill them with?"

A strange silence dominated the parlor, and Sarah could smell Mary all the more clearly as a result. Yes, she was beyond perfume. The aroma was something organic—it attacked Sarah. Really, it attacked her, and Sarah swallowed some wine.

"With furniture, deary. We'll fill them with furniture," Sarah said.

"But I don't mean..." Mary turned to her husband and Woodrow, captivated for a moment before she dove into the wine, "Of course. I should have known. Of course."

Woodrow mentioned something about the garden. The four were invited to browse the rose bushes. On the way out, Woodrow grabbed Sarah's hand before she stumbled, and pulled her into him—running his lips over her ear. Sarah formed her body to his frame. Her eyes drifted down and there were the sneakers. Some of the red barely showed through. It made her want to cry.

The women stumbled back to the parlor while the men enjoyed some scotch on the patio. Mary dozed off on the couch, a cigarette balanced between her fingers. Sarah took the half-burnt thing, and in that moment, Sarah's face suspended above Mary's, she realized from where the smell emanated. The fumes coiled their way through Mary; they liberated

themselves through the pores and lungs. Sarah imagined the aroma was like a ghost. She traced it back to its home, her hand landing like a feather upon Mary's pregnancy, and Sarah knew there was no smell more alluring as her child. She just wanted a taste of it, and ever so lightly, like a cat burglar on a roof, Sarah's lips met Mary's. She hovered over Mary, on occasion diving in for another brief kiss, until, out of the corner of her eye, she saw Woodrow, but he could not stop her. He would never give her this, could never give her this; it was her right. Then Sarah returned to her chair by the hearth. She crossed her legs, watched Mary sleep and cried a little. Quiet enough so no one would hear.

Woodrow never spoke of what happened. Three weeks later, he was killed by an unexploded ordinance, a relic of the War he could never escape.

Laura's water broke one morning.

"Sarah, it's happening!" she screamed. "I woke up. I thought I was peeing myself, but it just kept coming. It wouldn't stop. It just kept coming like a waterfall."

"That's how it starts sometimes," Sarah said. She changed the bedding, put down clean towels and gathered the necessary tools. Laura kept opening and closing her legs; she pattered her pregnancy over and over.

"How long do you think it'll be?" Laura asked.

"Long time yet. You just relax for now."

"Did you call Burt? He'll be pissed at me if I don't tell you to call. Oh Christ Sarah, I'm so...I don't know—full of energy?"

"You're just excited. Relax. You're having contractions?"

"I uh, yes. I believe that's what woke me. I feel like I've only had a few, about every five minutes. There's some pain in my back. It's getting worse."

"Try sitting up sweetheart. You'll feel better." Sarah helped her up and fitted a couple pillows behind her back.

"Thank you. You're so gentle." Laura put a hand on Sarah's check. The touch was not so light this time but heavy with sweat. "Did you call Burt?"

"I will in a minute. I have to—"

"I'll be fine. It'll give me peace. Just a quick call."

Sarah dialed Burt's work, but the line was busy. She returned to find Laura rocking back and forth on the bed.

"He didn't pick up."

"That's his fault. He knew it was going to be soon. How much longer did you say?"

"A long time. Don't fret about it. Worry about the labor."

"You know where the clothes are, right? The baby clothes. I don't want the baby to be cold when it comes out."

"I know everything. You just relax Laura."

"I never thought I'd worry so much."

Sarah sat next to her and blotted the sweat on Laura's brow. "Don't you worry sweetheart. Everything will be fine. I'll see to it."

Laura grabbed Sarah's arm. "Will you please?"

"Yes. I will." Sarah saw the fear run over Laura's body. The abrupt switch was unnerving. Gone from her vocabulary was the idea of dolls and play as if something had switched on

inside of Laura that caused her to watch the border of the room like an elk would for wolves.

They spoke little throughout the labor. Laura's eyes darted about the room, and full efface came very early—about four hours in. Sarah got a hold of Burt; she told him to hurry, that things were moving along quickly for a first pregnancy. The screams cut their conversation short.

“Oh God. Oh Christ Sarah. Not again.” Laura pushed with what seemed impossible might. “You’re so brave. You’re such a brave girl,” Sarah kept repeating through a surgical mask. She made sure to keep a damp towel on Laura’s forehead, but things were moving along so fast, she had little time to take care of every detail. “How much longer,” and then Sarah form between her legs, “Not long at all,” and then Laura screaming, “Not yet! Not without Burt,” and then so much pushing that the house seemed to move, and then “He’ll be here soon. Don’t worry. Very soon,” but not soon enough.

There was a great heave. Time seemed to stop, a sensation not unusual during the end. Sarah reveled in the feeling, but such phenomena can be a fickle; it turns easily from bliss to terror, and Sarah’s heart picked up when she saw a foot before a head. Sarah grabbed the foot; she pulled, but not too hard—one mustn’t risk nerve damage. Then another leg, this one bent at the knee as if praying, until the whole thing gave way, tangled as it was, the umbilical looped around the shoulder and between the legs.

Sarah held the baby, a boy, observing the slight blue hue of his lips. She diagnosed kinks in the cord. “Sarah, Sarah. What is it? Show me,” Laura said. Sarah was paralyzed. She kept looking at him. He smelled so wonderful. Like her mother. Isn’t that strange? A baby just brought into the world, but he

smelled so much like her mother she wanted to cry. The feeling broke the moment. Sarah did the thing for which she'd trained all her life, and bit by bit the baby's breathing leveled. Sarah clamped and cut the cord. He cried.

As if from water, Sarah arose from the base of the bed. For a second the two women stared at each other like sisters—like partners bound by one important endeavor. The umbilical cord stood out against a white towel, and Sarah wrapped the baby in the blanket prescribed by Laura.

"He's so beautiful," Laura said.

Sarah handed over the baby with some hesitation. "He was breech"

"Is everything ok?"

"He looks fine. There were some kinks in the cord, but it was all so fast the situation didn't have much time to play out. He was the kneeling type. Very rare."

"And the cord?" Laura asked.

"It's all fine." Sarah blotted Laura's forehead with the damp towel.

"And Burt?"

"He's on his way."

By the time Burt arrived, things had calmed down. They fussed over the breech for awhile, but by the next day the trouble was forgotten. Dr. Clemens gave Laura a clean bill of health. Sarah and Burt packed everything one evening, two cars worth, while Laura tended to the boy. They'd named him Bernard.

"Thank you, sweetheart," Laura said while Burt waited by the car. "You've been so hospitable."

"It's nothing," Sarah said.

The two embraced.

"You know," Laura whispered before they parted. "I brought up Woodrow, but Burt said it was too old fashioned."

"It is a little old fashioned," Sarah agreed.

Sarah kissed Laura on her cheek. The house was once again empty.

The smell of cigarette smoke dissipated over the next week. There were never many dishes to do. No frantic calls over false-labor. Instead, Sarah had troubled sleeping. She would dream of the miscarriage or Woodrow or Laura and wander out into the kitchen to leaf through *Elementary Physics and the Laws of the Universe*. What was her name? she'd think while reading, and one night she came upon a new chapter, which began with a fundamental of physics: "Inertia is the tendency for an object at rest to stay at rest and an object in motion to stay in motion with the same speed and in the same direction, unless acted upon by an external force." Sarah read over those words again and again, her mind reflecting on the snippets of nightmare she could grasp. The bloody skirt. The kneeling baby. All the children like porcelain dolls. The name—most of all, the name clung to her, and no matter how she thought, Sarah could not escape it.

Sarah felt as if she were coasting. The motion brought her to France, to the wine cellar, full of merlots like liquid rubies. She heard the floorboards creak underneath the footsteps of the people upstairs. They sounded like they were having such a good time, but she could not join them. She felt as if an umbilical cord had tangled its way around her waist.

Sarah fell asleep at the table. Upon waking, she felt something stir in her stomach, and in the basement she found an old can of white paint. The bedroom door creaked open. The room still smelled like her mother, and her eyes came upon the—"His kids belong to me." Sarah painted over the crooked words. She did not want to end up like her husband.

THE END



MY HOUSE IS OUT

My house is out in a patch of grass
Nails are driven through boards that cover the windows
You can't even see the door

The next day you find an ad in the paper
Looking to do a scientific study
In cynicide

How many would I weed through?
Those that say no before they wonder whether or not
This pays

These feel a subtle attraction
Towards the idea like someone finding out
Their life is the same as it was twenty years ago minus the
excuses

What if inside the front door, once you've found the knob
You see walls scorched black
Glass melted into a shape that may have been a picture frame
Slivers of light choking on the ceiling

This one starts to smile
She smirks hard, cheeks puffing wide
Her lips break apart, and for one second
She isn't laughing

JAMES MCGEOY

A WALK IN THE SHEDDING LIGHT
NON-FICTION BY: ANDREW PISANO

FROM HERE TO THERE

I wonder how many people have a family member in whom they find true inspiration? Sure, the love for parents and grandparents is common-place, but what about a sincere admiration for someone's accomplishments and philosophies? I'm sure there would be many exceptions and examples if this was a poll, but its not. This is my particular story. This is a particular moment in my life where my mother's brother Thomas Haugh continues to inspire.

Around Easter 2005 I joined family for a delectable feast, one for which my Grandmother is known and one which always brings camaraderie and conversation. Amongst the

hash of a typical theological debate involving my mother who's Catholic and my uncle who's Methodist and a Jack Russell named Katie who's hungry for a tug of war with her moo cow toy, I hear Tom mention a potential trip in the summer.

"A friend of mine approached me and offered the chance to teach in Ghana. For about three weeks or so," Tom said. "Oh Tom!" my mother proclaimed. "That sounds like a wonderful experience." He sat quiet for a moment seemingly studying Katie's pounce and run tactics. "Yes," he said "I'm still not sure if I will go through with it. It's dangerous over there and Sue and the kids..." he trailed off. "I'll meditate on it and see where the light sheds," he said.

I was fascinated. I became a mixed bag of emotions. I had for quite some time, a sort of unsatiable thirst. Here I was, finishing up the last leg of what seems like an epic college experience and I wanted something else. I wanted to immerse myself in someone else's culture. I wanted to understand first hand, the human experience; beyond the airport terminals, rest stops, and cheap hotels. Since I was fifteen and watched my sister's Boeing 737 ascend into the heavens toward the great American Southwest, I wanted America. Sitting at home, I would write awkward little poems about the mythic expanse of the plains, the quiet pillars of stone in the Utah desert, the thick wisps of dust forming rays of moonlight in my backseat as I pressed on through the Phoenix valley climbing up, up, up—into the Verde mountain pass, to where I could feel the pressure of altitude in my lungs, climbing, climbing, climbing until I stop. Flagstaff. I would get out. Thick rows of pines stretch over the hills, going up and down, up and down, into the horizon. Silence. A gust of wind. Snows falling, with flakes rocking back and forth, like ice shavings, frosting my hair.

A post card would arrive two weeks later from Bryce Cannon, Utah; glowing layers of rock, thick and bushy evergreens, and

softening sun in the distance like melting butter. "Wish you were here. My painting is going well. I'm working on THIS landscape as you read this." - love Kari.

I would eventually get my wish and live that dream, touring and living in the Southwest; actually making that drive through the Verde pass. But now, I felt a call beyond the Americana of Route 66 and the rows of glorious and reverent Joshua trees lining the California highways. I wanted Africa. I wanted tribalism. I wanted to be rocked asleep in the cradle of civilization. I wanted the chanting and drums that layered the dusk and ushered in the morning sun. I wanted the paint crusted to my face. I wanted their spirits. I wanted to connect again, to something. Anything.

Around the fourth of July, we gathered once again ready to transform quiet Waynesboro into a mash of food and laughter. I had heard from my mother in the previous days that Tom had decided to go. He was to undergo extensive training before hand. In a series of meetings, he was informed of Ghana's social and political environment; dangerous infractions; sanitary conditions; religious diversity, and a host of other tips and advice to ensure a safe and productive journey. After graduating from Franklin and Marshall's Lancaster Theological Seminary branch in 1986, he's since become a Senior pastor and has presided over three congregations with his third and current position at Lehman United Methodist Church in Hatboro, Pa - about twenty miles from Philadelphia.

"Well, I'll receive my final vaccine boosters next week and then depart on the fourth of August," he said digging into a bowl of vanilla ice cream. "How long will you be gone?" I asked. "About three weeks," he said getting up to rinse out his bowl. "Are you nervous?" he turned and looked at me. "Yes," he said.

Through correspondence with my Aunt Sue, I kept informed of his condition. All was fine. Some mentioning of unspeakable poverty and an upset stomach came my way, but mostly vague details.

He had arrived home safely, it was the end of August and I was preparing to start my senior year at Shippensburg University. He and his family decided to drive down to Waynesboro to share pictures and stories. I couldn't wait.

Even though I knew realistically I could have never gone, I still fantasized. I mean really, what would a twenty five year old college student with shaky faith in God do on a missionary trip to Ghana. As far as I knew he was bringing religion into a dark and smokey African night. Could I earn my Masters in Divinity in a month? Sure I could, damn it. Well, maybe not, but I could have built houses sweating in the African sun for three weeks; exposed my nervous immune system to an assortment of diseases; grinded up my intestines and entered into an emergency ward for a painless gastritis procedure. Considering what a Pizza Hut buffet can do, I'm sure the indigenous cuisine would have meant sheer and sudden death.

Regardless of my daydreams, I was still captivated by his experience and seeing him only a few days after his return was thrilling. Standing in my Grandmother's kitchen I could see him sitting out on the porch, tired and changed. Walking out side I lit the gas grill and began to saute onions and peppers to top the Italian sausages I had defrosting inside. I am the official grill man of the family and occasional all around chef. I've been trying desperately to earn my keep after completing a degree in Culinary Arts and consequently burning out after just three years.

Tom came out to say hello and I asked him general questions regarding his trip. "How was it?" That sort of thing.

I felt unable to really address my mind. “Who, what, where, how— do you know the meaning of life?” That sort of thing. The peppers were burning and my Grandmother was getting nervous; her scalloped potatoes were bubbling over in the oven, so I turned to the sausages instead.

The semester came on quickly as it always does and I found myself sitting at the table of my senior seminar class wondering what I could write about. Hurricane Katrina? New Orleans was dear to my heart, being the father of jazz and blues. Something pulled at me though. I hadn’t forgot Tom or Ghana. Now I had the excuse and the proper time to pull all those thoughts together in my head.

POWER OF THE SEED

I rested comfortably back against the soft cushion as our waiter placed a warm towel across my lap. “Some rose water to clean your hands?” he said graciously bowing. The surround sound speakers were pumping out a delicious sound foreign to my Western ears. Timbales and tambourines kept the time while a voice sang melodic phrases in a language unknown. Tom uncorked a bottle of *Jacob’s Creek* Shiraz Cabernet, an Australian favorite of theirs. He filled my Aunt Sue’s cup first, then mine, then his. “There,” he said placing the cork back in the neck, “You are now the official pourer for the evening.” The room was windowless, appearing circular although I don’t think it actually was, and there were couches with small tables in front. A red weave with intricate designs was laced throughout the fabric covering the walls and floor. The soft lighting, music, and color scheme placed me much further away than the busy Philadelphia suburb of Warrington. The smell was thick with curry, chili pepper, and seared meat.

There were no menus or utensils. Leaning close to penetrate the music, he said, "I recommend the rabbit. It's delicious. It's braised with lemon, olives, chili paste, dates, apricots, and walnuts. You'll love it. Oh, and if you notice a spike in the volume be prepared for the belly dancer." I quickly poured another glass for myself.

Leaning back into the cushion the wine gently loosened my tensions and I simply closed my eyes taking in the sounds and smells. A phrase Tom had spoken earlier in the day was echoing in my mind. Our conversation was still clear in my mind.

"Do you feel like you made a difference?" I said. A few shouts rang from the other room where my cousins were fighting over the computer. "I'd like to think that while I was there I set some form of example. I wouldn't expect instant change and it would be naive to think it. But I firmly believe in the power of the seed," he said.

The power of the seed. All our lives we wish to make a difference. In my youth, I'm learning that very rarely can you make an instant impact on an individual. But if you can plant an idea in someone's head, whether it's to help them help themselves, or to help others it has the potential to grow. Sitting back he crossed his legs and looked me directly in the eyes. "I felt like the church leadership was hungry for a new thought. They seemed genuinely interested in my interpretations," he said. And the purpose for his mission was in fact—interpretation. They already had pastors familiar with scripture, but this familiarization came through outdated instruction. He was asked to the group Acts6 which is founded and led by a man named Gordon Hendrickson, whose base is in St. Peters, Pennsylvania. From what I gathered, Gordon was a man who, according to Tom "struggled to think *in* the box!" Tom took it one more step saying, "If it was up to Gordon, all preachers would be standing in the streets evangelizing! There

would be no walls confining people to a building. Church would cease to be a physical entity.” Chuckling he said, “Although I don’t necessarily agree with him on some things, I do admire his spirit and ambition.”

Gordon’s job focuses primarily on missions and education. He follows a divine call for inspiring others and lives according to a philosophy of *openness* with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He develops relationships with churches as well as individuals who consider him a missionary. The idea is to develop relationships with churches and individuals around the world to see if there is a spiritual connection. Acts6 then organizes and executes the proper resources to accommodate to the openness of a community’s spirit.

Ghana is a primary member for this relationship and according to Tom, “has a very good relationship with the government.” In the past Tom has taught upcoming pastors techniques for community building, outreach programs for youth, and biblical studies. It would be through these encounters he would befriend Gordon and eventually be asked to join one of their missionary trips to Ghana. Another primary issue of Acts6 is to encourage modern interpretations of scripture and to try to keep Ghana’s pastors updated on new scholarly materials. In discussing his purpose and goals, he said, “One thing we found over there, were very outdated and frankly narrow views on teaching scripture. So we made it part of our mission to bring as many modern texts as possible to offer current scholarly interpretations. They seemed very interested in this.”

He proceeded to discuss a particular evening where he decided to help the women serve dinner to locals. “They thought I was crazy!” he said, laughing. “I wanted to show them that in America men participate in the same types of activity as women here. The idea was to show them that lines of gender were not international. During our many Bible studies, they

would inquire about American culture. They were under the impression that even though we were advanced, our culture remained stuck in a model of patriarchy and racial intolerance. I was determined to shed this myth.”

After pausing a moment, he continued. “We spoke of Martin Luther King and general concepts of equality. I wanted to make it clear that what they thought they knew was outdated and if anything, was only a representation of the worst of our culture. It also made me wonder about our own perceptions of, say, Iraqi culture. Our media spends little time on anything else. Again, it was a simple seed I wanted to plant.”

Kofi Appiah-Kubi sums up Tom’s message nicely in his book *Man Cures, God Heals*. He discusses that it is best to give encouragement to people for development than say, doing the developing for them.

Casablanca Restaurant was suddenly filling up. It was about 8:30, and a younger college crowd began to file in. Our waiter skirted over to us with a large silver tray. “Your Bastilla,” he said placing the round cake looking item on the table. “Dig in!” Tom said, “Be careful though, it is hot.” With a certain amount of uncertainty I pinched a piece off the side and a puff of sugary smoke lofted into the air. The plate was dusted in confectioner sugar and I grabbed a chunk of the steaming filling and wiped around the edges.

A light crispy dough surrounding a filling of chicken, scrambled eggs, cinnamon, sugar, and toasted almonds, were now laying in small piles on everyone’s plate. It was most unusual and delicious. Filling all three flutes with wine, the music began with a thump and a house beat began to drown out the tambourines. “I think she’s coming out,” he said finishing the last pile on his plate.

Glancing around the room, everyone was laying back sipping wine with jovial glee. I was surprised not to find

Hookahs adding to the flavor of air, but there were none to be seen. I was really digging this place. "More wine?" Tom said not waiting for a response. Our waiter came back out with a bronze wash basin and cleansed our sugary hands with rose water. The music seemed to regain its original volume. The tambourines and timbales resumed the tempo. The only dancing done was by our waiter who skipped and twirled in between sprawled out feet. My mind becoming slippery with wine, I attempted to discuss matters of science and religion. We managed to chat for a while, but soon we were interrupted with another spike in volume and a rattling of timbales, yet something was different this time. There seemed to be something coming from around the corner. Eyes began to brighten and the men in the room straightened their slouchy posture. I waited and breathed, frantically wiping my face with my lap towel.

A THREAD OF LIGHT

"Germs," my uncle said looking out the window of his spacious office residing in the lower level of Lehman United Methodist Church. "The discovery of germs has changed faith perspectives." *I was silenced. For about 10 minutes I had been spouting off about my observations on campus and within my own circle of friends. There is a consensus that science has lessened the possible existence of God.*

"Well," he said, "I'm a mystic at heart, I truly am. I believe there is more in this world than just this desk (pounds the desk) or just this chair (slaps the chair). I know there is. Religion... well it generally fails. Faith and spirituality need to be the core and without them, religion is hollow."

“Well, what about the existence of God?” I said. “Did you ever doubt?” He scooted closer to me and said: “I believe there is a Buddhist wisdom that says a man spends the first twenty years of his life learning how to love; the next twenty years of his life making a living; and the next twenty years of his life making meaning from his living.”



FUNNY FEMINIST

Why is it that you never see a man's hand featured in a dish detergent commercial? Just how stereotypical can society get? Are men too dumb to know how to clean a dish? Or is it just that it is a woman's job?

Why is it that when little Johnny gets hurt mom has to lift him to the counter and apply the Band-Aid? Where the hell is daddy? Out at some corporate office bringing home the bacon?

How come momma has to get it out with A-L-L? Does daddy not know how to turn the knob and hit the button on the washing machine?

Why do only choosey moms choose Jif? And why are KIX kid tested and only mother approved? Is daddy so barbaric that he can't feed his own children?

Why is Mr. Clean the only man on television that knows how to work a mop? I'm waiting for the day that I see a man using the quilted-quicker-picker-upper.

According to these commercials women have no lives. We are slaves to the kitchen and the kids...

I'd love to stay and chat with you but the dishes are dirty, the kids are hungry and the laundry needs to be dried.

APRIL HOWARD

SLEEP DEPRIVATION JOURNAL

NON-FICTION BY: JESSE MCMICHAEL

Every once in awhile, I stay up for a few days, either because I have to, or to study the effects of sleep deprivation on my mind. A few years ago, I began keeping a journal to see how my brain reacts to a lack of sleep. This is what I managed to extract from it so far. It had been many days since I had slept when I wrote the passages that follow.

I have so much more time now, without sleep. My concentration is a beam of pure, focused thought. I have great mental clarity. I am capable of simultaneous thought on numerous levels. I have so much energy. Head feels light.

Slight paranoia, especially near the bathroom. I have drunken at least a gallon of water. School today will be very interesting. I shall keep this log and write in it my experiences of sleep deprivation. My lungs seem compressed. I feel an electricity in my feet. Though my focus is much better, my general thought process is quite disturbing. Random sentences seem filled with meaning and symbolism. "Your uncle is the one with the forks on it. Bring me your eagles for polishing." I found this pencil in the bathroom. Paranoia is worsening. I have left all the lights on. I am so very thirsty. Why? I can read inside-out now. Stupid "pencil." Numbers are failing to have meaning. Math class will be very hard.

SHARPEN! You're welcome.

Computer men should sing more. These thoughts are less random than they appear. You cannot see my stimulus. So much hair.

All music can be produced in order. Note and Time are a function. Multiply this by length of song. $(1-100(f(x,y))) =$ all songs. (elvis = 1.56 billion). The shifting.... 1 hour + 26 minutes. Then school. I should take a shower to calm myself. My feet won't stop moving.

Handwriting is detereorating. Mapping. Stimulus! Affecting my brain. But I provided the stimuli, so I am the generator of my stimulus. How long am I staying up? There must be a benefit to sleep deprivation, aside from gaining time. Is there insight?

The teeter-totter of thought. I may be hungry. I am going to merge. MERGE. Stupid liquid. Where do burned calories go? They cannot "turn into heat." Heat is just movement. Shower. Who are you? Deja Vu (I) Where is the cow? Motorman.

Neck-worship. Gum. I am capable of any task. THE HORROR! SHIFTING! School is soon. So much to remember. I shall bring this. I am an illusion. I trick myself into existing. You Got Me, Self! Ha ha! Marvelous Joke, Old Chap! Skin.

I just ran to school, dodging invisible clowns. My logic has been sharpened. I feel more alive. I need not refresh all day. My actions are manifestations of want. Everything is happening my way. Everything is so lucid. I feel above all these people. While they are just waking up, I have been contemplating existence. I must play the piano, violin, bagpipes. Need coffee, java pants. I can feel the places in my brain that have shut down. There is darkness there. But, I can also feel light in new places. I am enlightened. We use 10% of our brains, but which 10%? There are 90 possibilities of thought. I was at #1, now I feel like #23. The frontiers of the mind are limitless. Everyone else seems so slow. Their light orbs are darkened.

I live in the desert with a mandarin orange named Spander

I just spent 10 minutes thinking there was a severed head in my bathroom The dog is horror. Thank god I'm not made of wood. There is an upside to this: No Dreams. I cannot stand dreaming. I hate it. I have nothing but disturbing dreams. Trapped in a world I am incapable of realizing I can easily escape from. A world of discomfort and pain. I keep thinking my fingernails are dirty. Cough drops can tell time. My spinal cord forgot. I don't always know where my limbs are positioned. Distance is meaningless now. FINT. Eyelids are so very special. Tunner. Bo-ling. Computers see through my thumb. A chinese man can see my wall. 2 thoughts = 1 superpower. Skint. I can hear piano music. Hunger? I have no idea what time it is. I just gave my report on Zimbabwe. I forgot I had to present it today. I'm not sure if I was speaking English.

I'm sitting on a bench with a guy I'm naming Ralph. I'm not swimming. The fatigue is gone. Replaced with blanking out. I'll be sitting here doing nothing for 45 minutes. Not supposed to have books or anything. I'm not supposed to be wearing clothes, but somehow I snuck my entire binder into the pool. God, my school is great. Today feels like one of those high school movies where they do stuff you cant normally do. PENGUIN! I dont know whether that thing is a giant lifesaver, or a clock. The groundling is my zebra. I am now inside a bench. The raspberry Nixon onion is covered in tooth gounds. I feel no shame. My reality is dissolving. When asked water, shut up-Fint. The bronze squirrel is orbiting my sphere. I am proud of my newfound Chinese abilities. My insanity is only partly a function of my time. It is more directly related to the stimulus. I am only afriad of involuntary sleep during school. [Diagram of the horse I apparently saw on the road. It's neck is broken. Strange symbol, along with the word "USHEL" with upside-down umulats. Then "um um" and & "Harnionarnex Baffleizer."]

At this point I have passed out. I slept for many hours, and awoke feeling much more sane.

Michael Jackson
Is full of action
White gloves and leather clothes
Too bad he has no nose.

APRIL HOWARD

INTERVIEW WITH MARK WUNDERLICH
BY DIANA COADY, MICHAEL MANIS,
AND SIMON OWENS

DC: There is this theme in *Voluntary Servitude* of emotional, mental, sexual even spiritual bondage. How did this theme come to life?

MW: There is an essay by a French political philosopher named Etienne de la Boetie with the title "On Voluntary Servitude." He was a contemporary of Montaigne. The two of them corresponded and developed one of the great literary friendships; from their correspondence this essay was born. One of subjects taken up in the essay is the nature of tyranny. Boetie extrapolates that a dictator maintains control, in part, by frustrating close personal friendships and engendering fear. The antidote to fear is voluntary servitude or willingly giving oneself in service to another. It's a metaphor for friendship. It interested

me as I read Montaigne and Boetie's correspondence that their relationship verged on the flirtatious. There was an intellectual bond between them but there was also a sexual charge. If you go on the Internet and search "voluntary servitude," you'll find the Boetie essay, but you'll also find S&M contracts; the links between this political philosophy and sexuality are right on the surface. I was interested in writing about physical bondage as well as psychic and spiritual bondage. I wanted this book to be a frank exploration of what it means to be in service to another—to a friend, to an idea, to a cause, to a lover—and see how an idea like this might bear itself out in poems.

DC: In the actual poem "Voluntary Servitude" it mentions how shackles can be voluntary too and the concept that someone can be in a state of shackles, whether emotional, spiritual, mental or physical and not even know it.

MW: There are many different ways of being bound, many differing ways one can be restrained. After I wrote the book I sent it to the poet C.D. Wright. She read the book very differently than I had; she saw it as a book essentially about emerging from depression. Depression is a kind of bondage.

MM: How does this theme of voluntary servitude resonate with your life growing up on a farm? How much of this is response to your sexual maturity?

MW: I hope that the book demonstrates a kind of maturity even though it looks back at a childhood. A lot of the poems in this book are about animals. Growing up on a farm connected me to life and death in the animal world. I'm not sentimental about animals and I don't have particular sympathy for animal rights activists, many of whom allow sentimentality to overwhelm rational thought about complex issues of cruelty, human morality and the inherent differences between animals and humans. I

respect animals too much to allow myself to feel sentimental about them. I deplore cruelty in whatever forms it takes and there is something particularly disturbing about cruelty to animals. I grew up around horses and I feel a particular fondness for them. Horses are big and scary they can hurt you and yet riding horses is thrilling, it's a feeling of incredible freedom. The relationship between horse and rider is both voluntary and involuntary servitude; the horse is a little afraid of you, you are a little afraid of the animal; it's a very tense, unique relationship. When I was young, horses provided an escape.

MM: Basically, do you have first hand knowledge of the seedier side to the gay scene?

MW: The short answer is yes.

DC: Do you think it was necessary for you to go through that? I have this theory that sometimes people have to experience crazy things because it's necessary to their life cycle; it gives them a knowledge of a certain world even though they may not necessarily become apart of it.

MW: The position of queer people in our society has changed considerably in recent years. We're becoming just as boring as everyone else. For some decades we experienced the problem of being defined only in terms of our sexuality. More specifically we were seen only as the sex acts we engaged in. We were constantly linked to the idea of sex and excluded from more nuanced identities.

DC: Do you think that nature would be as evident in your writing if you hadn't grown up on a farm?

MW: It's impossible to know, of course. My work has always been connected to the rural landscape that was my home, and to

the specific speech patterns of the people who live there. The region of western Wisconsin where I'm from is a very evocative landscape and it is permanently impressed upon my psyche. The creatures that populated the region, the flora, the river and accompanying bluffs are all integral to my conception of the world. We write about what we know and what we feel connected too. Our place of origin forms so much of who we are.

DC: How was it for you to leave and then come back home, how was it different, how did it change?

MW: When I went away to college, I didn't go very far. I went to the University of Wisconsin. I was three hours away from home but a short time after I graduated from college I moved to New York City. I managed to save 700.00 dollars and I just kept thinking "I'll be fine, I have seven *hundred* dollars. What could go wrong? It never occurred to me that I would fail. It did work out; I did get a job and found an apartment and made my way.

DC: What urged you to move to New York?

MW: Revenge. (Laughs) In all seriousness, I always wanted to live there and I had known that New York had to be the most exciting place in the world. So I just moved. After I graduated from college, I stuck around in Madison for about six months. I was working two or three depressing jobs and I realized that I could take a leap and do this really crazy thing or I could stay in Wisconsin for years. I had a job interview in Madison before I left at this place called The American Doll Company. It's based in this town outside of Madison and they needed someone to write little poems on their greeting cards from the American Girl doll. I convinced myself that this would be an ideal job for an English Major: writing fake poems for dolls. I thought I could end up doing this for a really long time, maybe I could work my way up here at the American Girl (laughs). It wouldn't be so bad.

When I got home to my apartment I thought I would just die. Maybe it would be funny years later to tell people about being a doll ghost-poet, but I already had jobs that were funny to tell people about. Hey, I danced on bar for awhile and I worked in a cheerleading uniform factory and that is the truth. When I thought about the American Girl Company, I knew what I needed to do. I had to leave and trust that something good would happen. I'm lucky to have a very strong sense of origin. My family has lived in western Wisconsin for generations. I go back there and feel immediately connected to it. On the other hand I don't think that the people there would think of me as being connected to it anymore. You can leave a place and eventually you are not greeted with open arms when you go back. My parents are always happy to see me but the rest of the community does not see me as a member. Growing up I never felt as though I fit in. After I left I continued think of that place as my home. Queers are uniquely attuned to this dynamic.

DC: In your interview with Jorie Graham, you asked how teaching affected her writing as a poet and she said "that sometimes teaching feels like an extraordinary price to pay to write pay for the freedom to write poetry" and I was wondering if that is true for you, being both a teacher and a poet?

MW: I feel very lucky to do what I do. There are lots of soul numbing jobs and many people don't have choices about how they make a living. It's a privilege to have the kind of choices that I have. Earlier I spoke about ways in which my upbringing felt restrictive. On the other hand, I was also brought up with the idea that I could do anything I wanted; Everything was available to me and only the limitations I set for myself could hold me back. That is really a remarkable idea to have about one's self and it is uniquely American and we get into trouble when we start blundering through the world making assumptions about

the kind of choices other people have. That being said- I really love to teach and I try not to view teaching as being separate from writing. I write poems, I teach poems to people. I talk about poems, I read poems and it's all one process—engaging with literature. Sometimes I would rather be writing than teaching, I'd rather have time to myself but I have responsibilities to my students and the institution in which I work, and that's fine. As a teacher at a college I meet people who are in their late teens and early twenties and I get to understand a lot about how the world is changing and what their concerns are and I love that. I figure things out about my own work and about the literature I admire that I wouldn't figure out on my own. I think Jorie says in that interview "sometimes the ivory tower feels a little like the ivory emergency room." Students often have difficult lives and I spend a certain amount of my time dealing with student crisis, but ultimately I know teaching is a useful thing to do and I think I am good at it, at least some of the time.

DC: In what ways do you see poetry transforming?

MW: I see that the experimental work of the 1980's has become mainstream and the experimental techniques that were once considered radical are now just what people do in poems. I think that serious students of poetry have figured out how to read poems that are really complex. I find that my students are much more able agile readers now than they would have been ten years ago when I started teaching.

MM: People seem to brush poetry aside. In comparison to a playwright, or a novelist, or "I make TV shows." Do you think that's because people can write poetry in like 30 seconds. So when you say, "I'm a poet," they're like, "Oh well I'm a poet but nobody writes plays or books. Nobody makes TV shows." Long story short it's too easy to be a poet.

MW: Max Beerbaum who was a contemporary of Oscar Wilde and a famous wit, once said “ The hardest thing about being a poet is trying to decide what to do with the other 23 1/2 hours of the day.” (Laughter) I would take issue with this notion that one can write a poem in thirty seconds. There are those poems that are written very quickly, but from my own experience good poems take a tremendous amount of time to complete. Good writing is mostly about revising. The great poems were labored over and were worked on very intensely. I think that there is always someone out there who wants to say that poetry is dead, that poetry is no longer significant in our world, that it’s television or film that reaches the most people. As a poet I’m not interested in reaching everyone. In the Anglo-Saxon dialects the words for “poet” have buried in them the idea of initiation. By this, I mean that the word itself suggests that poetry is for the initiated; It’s available if you wish to provide the effort.

DC: What is your advice or wisdom to young aspiring poets?

MW: Read.



HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

NICOLE JONES

HEATHER HONEY

heather grows in the crevice of a rock

observing these scenes puts you out of your place
out of the ability to be aware of self
or at least selfish ambition,
because you finally become yourself
in the future.

and so what blooms, what images
kaleidoscopes

come cooling out of that new time frame?

you've sized up the heather in the rock

and predicted everything

there is to know about

botany,

but you still don't know which way you trail
through trail tolls

or what's going to trump you next.

honey comes for the rock

hopefully

you hope for

the crevice to be big enough to let

in some breathing room

but not enough room for panting

because not even you want to pant

about a machine made by time for time.

that only means there is something to lose your breath over,

lose your sleep over,

and you thought there was a difference between losing breath and sleep

you do not know the range of going that will come forth
from this thought

it would be rather more comfortable sitting with a feathered pillow
as opposed to this unhemmed one

but no one can promise that, a holding knot takes time and

you volunteered to be planted under this here rock—

where the honey might or might not burst.

Blossoms of cream-clouds

people believe in these things like it's the last living
decimal of their depth

you too smell every shirt, every piece of food, every change in weather.
face yourself—you are a smeller.

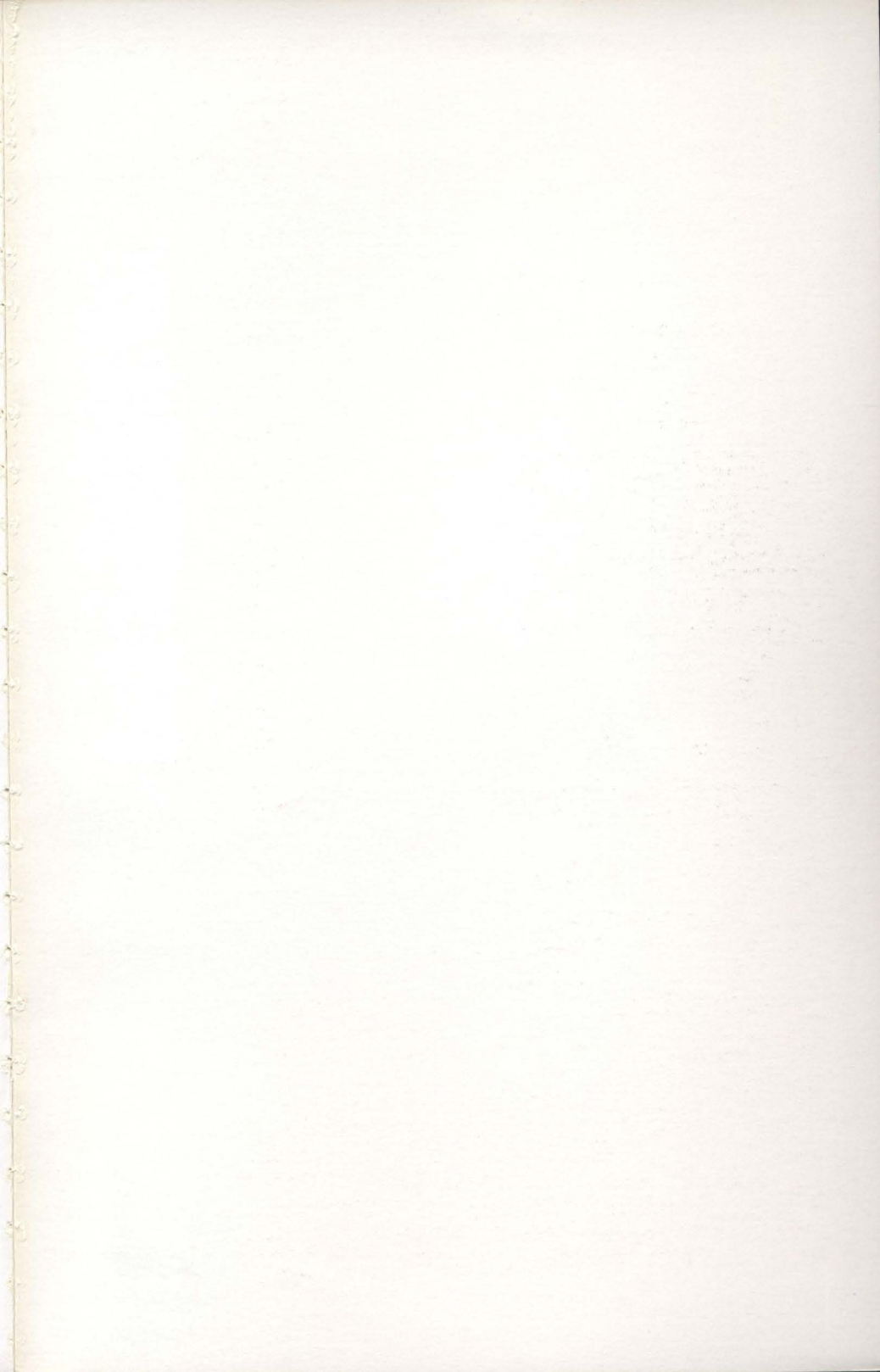
you smelled the place to plant the heather and now you are here, honey,
waiting for the extraordinary, or just the takeoff

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