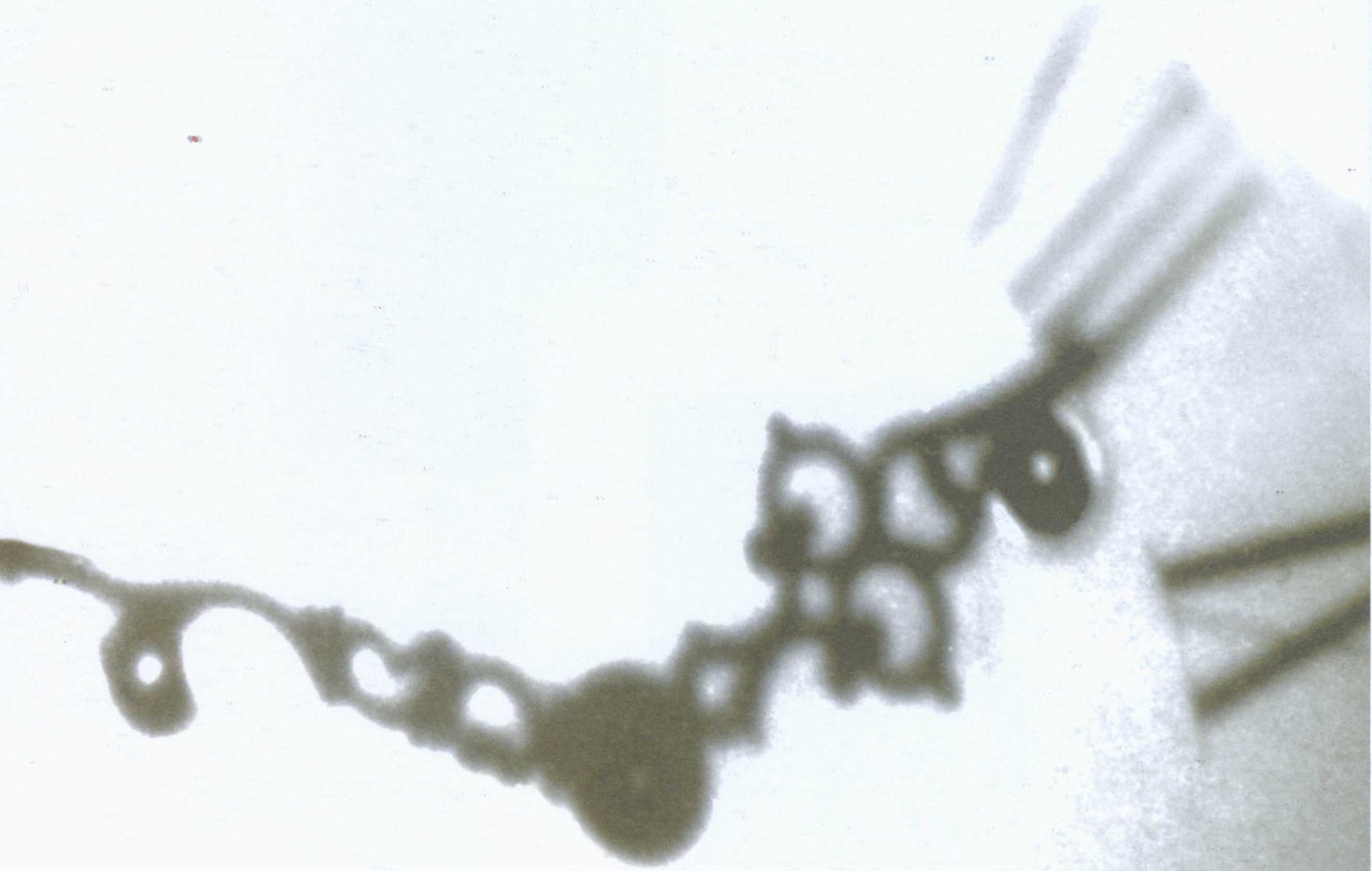


TO THE



and one toward the future, toward eternity. —Daniel Barenboim



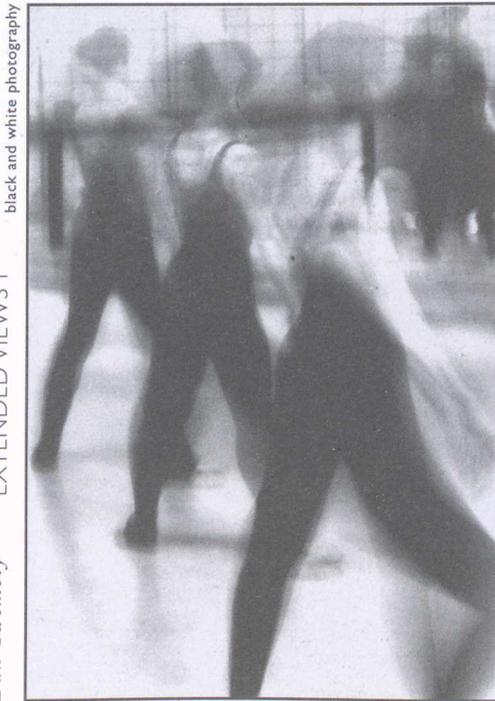
Towers is sa funded

*faculty advisor* John Bradley

*art directors* Stella R. Langas, Leslie Carlson Vaughan, Matthew Leacock

*editors-in-chief* Heather McIntosh, Julie Skaggs

*Dan Twombly* EXTENDED VIEWS I



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*fiction editor* Christie Trepanier

*fiction staff* Rebekka Antonson, Jyl Fehrenkamp, Shawntina Moore, Casey Pennel, Cindy Podesta

Artists of words and images have an affinity with time. Despite hectic schedules including work, classes, and social commitments, artists find time to devote themselves to their craft. Once they find the time, their creative expressions become immortal. Towers has been immortalizing the works of selected *Northern Illinois University* artists for seventy-five issues and will continue to do so in the years to come.

We thank John Bradley, our fearless advisor; Stella R. Langas Leslie Carlson Vaughan, and Matthew Leacock the dedicated art staff; Christie Trepanier and Ayana Nickerson, our genre editors, and their staffs; the Student Association; Mike Ruscitti; judges Katie Andraski, Becky Parfitt, and Philip Melnick; and all the artists who submitted their works to Towers.

Heather McIntosh

*editors-in-chief*  
Julie Skaggs

**First Place Fiction Winners**

*Shawntina Moore*

WET LEAVES AFTER A HEAVY RAIN

*Ryan G. Van Cleave*

LIVER AND ONIONS

**First Place Poetry Winners**

*Gwendolyn T. Urbanski*

I THINK THEREFORE

*Ryan G. Van Cleave*

BLACK POPPIES

**Honorable Mention, Poetry**

*Katherine Mason*

UNTITLED

**First Place Fine Art Winners**

*Sherri Lerche*

SANCTUARY OF THE SOUL

*Dan Twombly*

EXTENDED VIEWS II

**Second Place, Fine Art**

*Brook E. Dickinson*

THE WAY WE WERE

**Honorable Mention, Fine Art**

*Tim Hagaman*

END OF INNOCENCE

“What day is it?” he asks  
With indifferent indigo  
Eyes. I have to think.  
Not because my head has just plunged  
Into the transparent pool  
Of my front windshield: shattering glass,  
Creating chaos, and alerting ambulances  
But because I never pay attention  
To the date.  
“What is your social security number?”  
Ahh, something I know. Those nine numbers  
Engraved on the insides of my eyelids  
Reminding me of the test I won’t take  
Tomorrow. Flashlight beams stream  
Into my crazed, glazed yes. I keep my thoughts  
Busy with everything but the accident:  
I think of kissing  
My boyfriend under a fluorescent yellow sun;  
I think of my future  
Beach house with glass wall  
Facing the Atlantic on a tranquil autumn eve;  
I think of the itch  
On my right ankle that I can’t scratch because  
I am bolted to a board.  
I think of seeing  
My first novel with its sleeky, shiny cover  
And my name embossed in block letters;  
I think of fresh slippery mushrooms  
And Rotini noodles doused in spaghetti sauce;  
I think  
That this would make a corny after-school special  
Or  
At least a poem.  
I think of everything so that I’ll forget  
Nothing.

Don't ask me where  
I come from

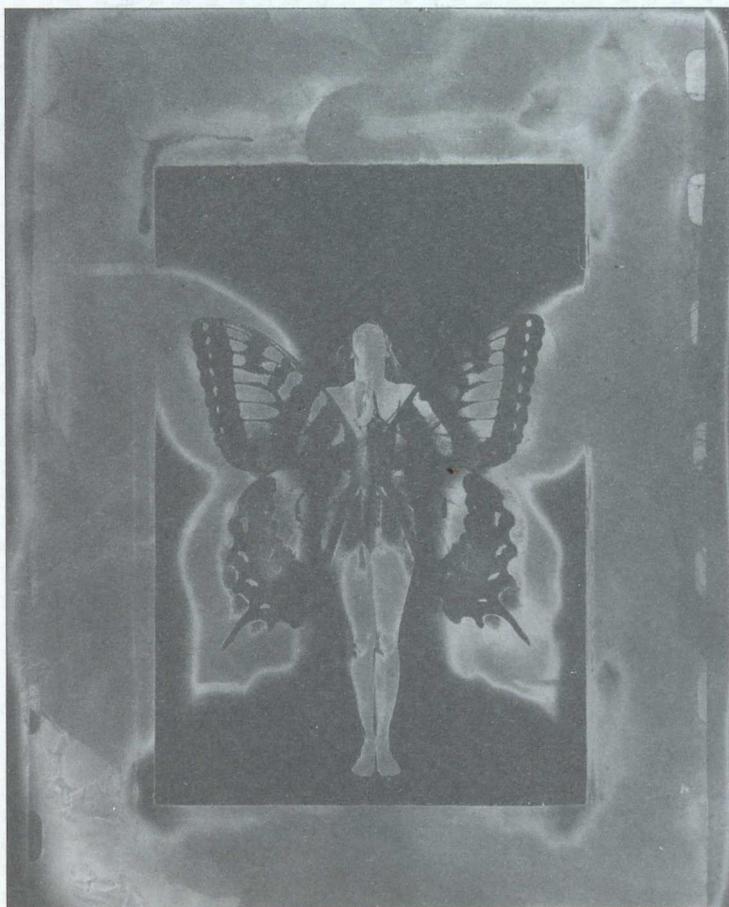
I cannot answer

You may gnaw the shell of silence  
Until the oceans revolve like the sun  
Still there will be no answer

Last night  
In the middle of a dream  
I felt myself exist  
Only a single moment  
Without the bleat of time  
But I was no closer  
To the knowledge  
Of original rest

I used to be bound  
To the soil with roots  
Crosstides full of darkness  
And bubbled water  
Waltzing palms in green halls  
Violet-veined and wild

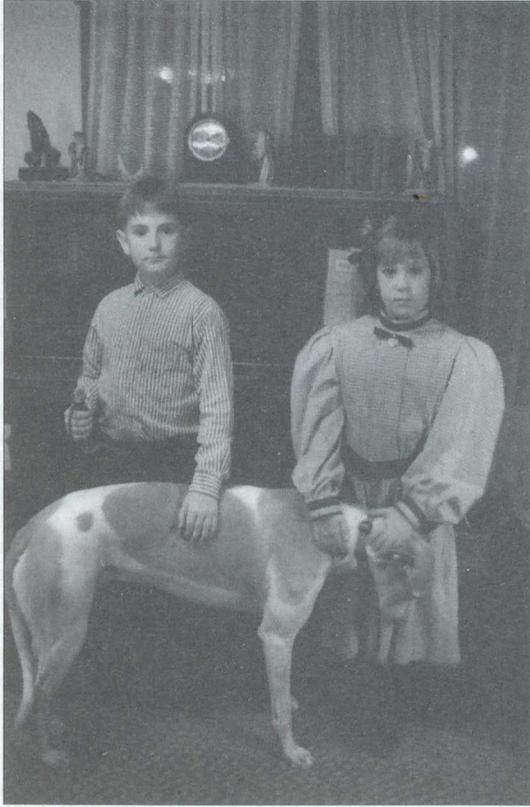
But all I remember  
Are skies of feathery stars  
Brimming crucibles of light  
And drifting fields of black poppies  
The afterbirth of some forgotten  
Unity



*Sherri Lerche*  
SANCTUARY OF THE SOUL  
stained and toned gelatine silver print  
**First Place, Fine Art**



*Dan Twombly*  
EXTENDED VIEWS II  
black and white photography  
**First Place, Fine Art**



*Brooke E. Dickinson*  
THE WAY WE WERE  
black and white photography  
**Second Place, Fine Art**

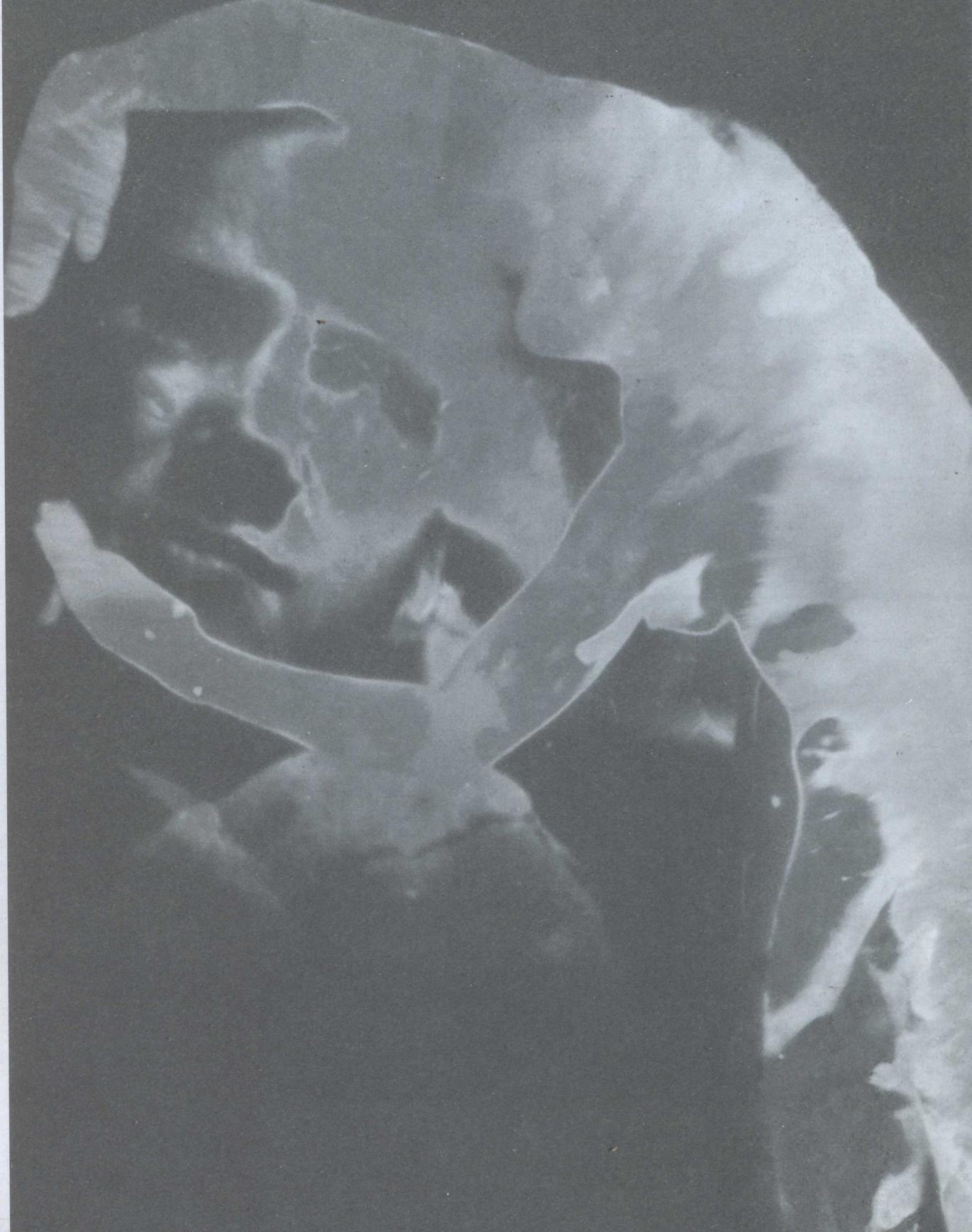
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*Tim Haggaman*  
INTERSTELLER INTERLOPER  
developing techniques



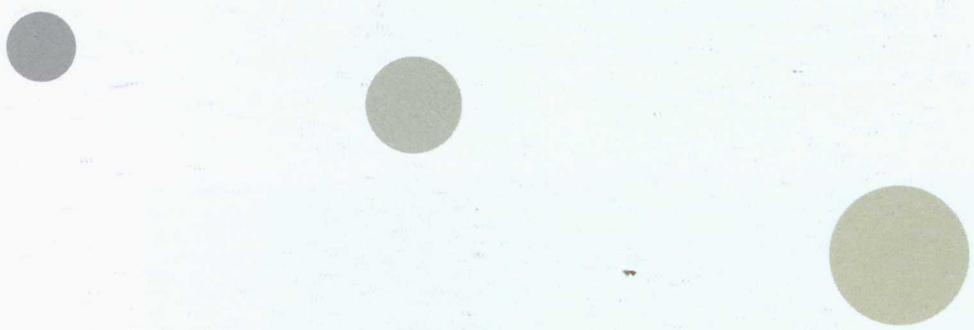


I WOKE THIS MORNING and the moon was at the foot of my bed; it had fallen from the sky to the Earth through my roof, landing only feet from my head. It was a thin, silvery disk that dropped into my day without notice or warning, and its hue changed with its mood—right then it was blue—but aren't we all at seven in the morning?

*Jenny Wessel*

COLORED LIGHT  
color photography

Honorable Mention for Fine Art



After much thought, deliberation, and thirty minutes in the shower, I folded it in my pocket to take with me on my day—the moon, that is, which upon my touch had altered its hue to a rose like the flower. It was about five to noon when I noticed the twenty dollar bill stuck to the bottom of my shoe; a twenty that bought me a Coke from a little stand on the corner of seventh and a date at eight on Saturday with the girl behind the counter.

In a pawn shop at two there was a vintage Beatles album for a dollar and a quarter and at three my number came up in the office lottery—all of which I knew, while speeding along an unclogged freeway at five, was due to the bit of luck tucked in the back of my pocket. It was at six when the world began to murmur in utmost disbelief about the missing of the moon, and at seven CNN had caught the story and ran it every half hour, where scientists, environmentalists and countless theologians speculated it was an act of God, or maybe just a trick of light, but no one had any real clue why the moon wasn't up in the big sky blue.

After two hours of CNN and one presidential address I knew what I had to do, so up the back stairs of my building I climbed to the roof, where I took one last look at the moon in the palm of my hand, where it was a placid pink, then closed my fist and threw as far as I could the moon, which landed among the stars above my head. Reluctantly, I left the roof to play my new Beatles album and find some duct tape for the hole in my ceiling, when I stopped for a moment and thought I had seen it smile, but then again, it's only a moon.

THE DAY I TUCKED THE MOON IN MY BACK POCKET  
*Peter Schub*



H A V E N

So, in waking, an oppressive haze shadowed her. She chased her cognitive tail with sharp hills and valleys of thoughts winding her way into consciousness. Deep within the warm water of this person cradled, not transgressing the womb of pillows and a thick comforter, lay the familiar desire. Still, in waiting, she was aware of the whole front side of her body in contact with the surface on which she lay. Heavy, gravity increases in the morning. She knew what would clear the bad aura inside. Movement as a possibility, she tried to doze but found no haven in the subconscious. The mood of the previous night reclaimed her, dragged her down, made her feel so human that she was embarrassed—and maybe a little guilty.

*D. Lawrence Rowley*

Another day slipped by and what of it? Wondering about wondering, and then wondering about this. The echoing voices, the sounds, the way a stranger approached her and the way his withering wonton voice ran fear through her right down to where it counts. The thought had occurred to her to just tell him to “shut up and take me to your conjugal bed and then treat me like a strumpet, a harlot, a Venus, give me the love that I need so badly” but she did not. She just listened to the nonsense and ignored it. All that exited her soft lips was, “I have to go pee.” Again, but this time in the now. Considering movement was now something to really roll around about. She touched herself, a kind of short rub that just happened without thinking, maybe she was just checking. Her hand slowly probed her skin for awhile. She pulled off underwear that was her only uniform for the slumber full of toxicity. She rolled over on her left side and slowly, knowing that her relief was in sight.

Getting off her bed she grabbed

a towel from the top of a pile of laundry that was getting stale and walked out of her room.

She held the blue towel up in one hand in front of her small breasts but she knew that no one would be awake so she didn't mind her own nakedness. Soon she would be nude. The wooden floor was cold on her bare feet. This process was a familiar one, it was a healing help that she looked forward to once she realized how nice it was. On down the hall and into the bathroom, seeing herself was not so bad. She had survived without much damage—the night of letting go had proved to be only a slight drag the next day. She wondered if it was wrong to let go. She wondered what wrong was. She started to brush her teeth and then turned the shower on, hot, hot, hot, a shower with power. Conveniently wearing no clothing she stepped up over the edge of the tall tub and slid the large door shut. Done brushing.

Here was another kind of letting go. One entirely more complicated and completely indescribable. She lay down in the tub. Her little foot searched around for the hot. Got it, turn it up. Feel.

THE VOYEUR stained and toned gelatin silver print



*Sherri-Lerche*

Brenda Klein

PROPULSION  
black and white photography from "objects in disguise"



As I was walking in my grandfather's falling down barn on a cool fall day, a tiny spider caught my attention out of the corner of my eye... crawling in the cobwebs and ancient straw. There everything. She was wrapping her children in a sack-like my mother used to wrap me in clothes to go outside in the cold. Like me, they would be warm. She knew they would be safe enough I watched the black legs finish their work and she began to move away from her sack. I knew then mama would not be coming back. It wasn't in her nature to stick around. Some mamas are just that way... not helping their young. Mama drifted to the floor on a strand of her own creation. She had no more responsibility to them. I watched for only a second more before

**SPIDER MAMA**

**stomping**

mama into the dirt with more force than was needed... they would have been like orphans anyway.

CHINESE HAKAKIRI

Every day he meditated  
trying to free himself from cobwebs of frustrations  
through belly breathing, mind clearing;  
the mantra sounds R-ah-m R-ah-m

And every day he saw the same picture:  
a white elephant wall and  
her soft green scarf *Christian Dior*  
glittering on the sexual chair

Yesterday the phone was silent again  
Having torn off his stiffened clothes,  
he was dancing to Chun's pipa  
smoothly, like a Shaolin priest,  
weaving his body.

*Dmitri Peskov*

was a mama spider meticulously finishing the last silky strands of an egg sack. Mama had calculated  
under the ridge of the ceiling, out of the wind.

*Rebecca Houlné*



First Place Fine Art Sherril Lerche SANCTUARY OF THE SOUL stained and toned gelatin silver print



THE PRODIGAL  
oil pastel

*Jim V. Parks*



IN THEIR SHADOW

oil pastel

*And even in our sleep  
pain that cannot forget,  
falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair,  
against our will,  
comes wisdom to us  
by the awful grace of God.*  
—Aeschylus

## THE PLAGUE EPIPHANY

Mark Rake

BLACK DESERT NIGHT FLASHED PAST US. ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ROAD WHITE CROSSES SHIMMERED IN THE DARK, washed by our headlights to an almost phosphorescent glow. Neal had explained them to me that morning. “Every cross marks where a car wrecked,” he said. “Where somebody lost it and went off the road. Where somebody died.” The crosses blurred by like dancing ghosts. Neal stirred in the passenger side, started to wake up. “You hungry?” I asked. He nodded, then let his breath out with a sound like a faulty engine. “Neal?” I said. “You okay?” He nodded in reply. “We’ll stop in Flagstaff,” I said, “find a real restaurant, get something to eat. On me. Sound okay?” Neal rummaged silently in the nylon pouch at his hip. He finally found the vial of AZT, popped one in his mouth, chased it down with a swig of melted ice from a near-empty McDonalds cup.

We were quiet for a while. We topped a rise, saw the faint angel-pattern of city lights in the distance. “Thanks for the trip to the Canyon,” Neal said. And didn’t add *Probably the last time I’ll ever see it*, though that’s what lurked behind his eyes. I drank some melted ice from my own cup. “Hey, I never been there myself, you know?” I said. “Always wanted to. I’m just glad you were along to give me directions, keep me from winding up in Nevada or something...” “Neal gazed out the window, watched the stars arcing in the infinite black. “John?” he said, still staring upward. “What did you think when I told you I was gay?”

I cranked the window open, felt the desert air roar over my face. “What did I think?” I said. “I thought you were running a scam on me. Doing your usual. Like that time we were kids, and you had me convinced that plastic bag in your fridge was full of pot instead of goddamn catnip...” Neal convulsed with

laughter. "And you almost smoked it!" he chortled. "You wanted to, to *dry* it in the microwave. And get rolling papers from Circle K. God, I should've just let you do it." I kept my eyes on the road, flipped him off. "Yeah, well, that was my childhood, my son," I said. "Thirteen years old, we didn't know from shit. But you can see why I doubted your confessional? You call me up two years ago, you say 'Hi, Johnny, how's everything, how's work, how's school, oh that's good, and by the way I'm dating men now. How about those Bulls?'"

Neal smiled. "I remember," he said. "I was afraid how you'd take it. All that time we spent going to that private Christian school. I thought you wouldn't be able to deal with it. Remember the fag jokes we all used to make? Playing Smear the Queer every recess? I thought for sure you'd drop me as a friend." I grimaced at him. "Screw that," I said. "It's like I told you before. Suppose you had suddenly confided in me that your fundamental nature was expressed by your intense, irrational love for day-glo

green. You paint your car day-glo green, your house day glo-green, you wear only clothes that are entirely day-glo green. Would I burn down your house because of what I see as an obvious and inexplicable lapse in taste? No. Will I refuse to associate with you? No. Will I snicker out loud at your choice of decor?" I scratched my head. "Hell yes, I will do that. I mean, come *on*. Men instead of women? Get real. You might as well be telling me you've fallen in love with a formation of anthracite." I gave him my best falsetto: "Oooh, just look at that mineral outcropping over there, John! Isn't he simply to die for? He's big, he's hard, he's geologically unstable..."

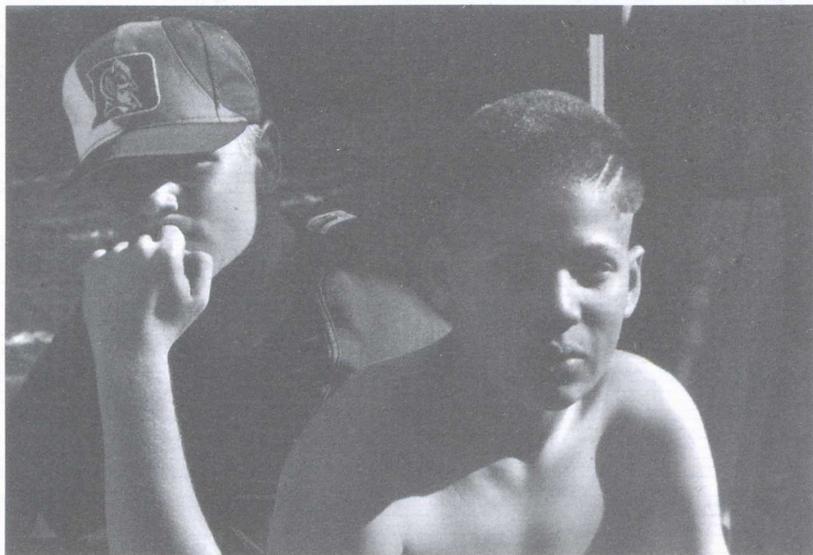
Neal laughed like somebody had pulled the plug. Suddenly, a spasm twisted in his face. "What is it?" I asked, panic coming up my throat. "Neal? Is it your stomach again? Like before?" He nodded weakly, collapsed back into his seat. "Yeah," he said. "The medication. I'm going to have to eat soon. You said a restaurant...?" I leaned on the gas. "Don't worry," I said, "we'll be there soon. Just hold on. Maybe you oughta try to sleep some more." Neal grunted, settled back. He was quiet for so long that I thought he had drifted off again. "Hey," he husked, his voice drowsy, pain skirling around its edges. "You. You don't believe in God anymore, I know. And I know what the Bible says about me. About gay

SILENCE

*Robert Higgins*

BEAT drum, BEAT  
guitars sing electric  
light colored *fiesta*

break time



people. But I've still been going to church." He swallowed hard. "I didn't ask to be born this way, you know? I've been praying a lot. I guess it's a waste of time. Which book is it in? Leviticus? 'Homosexuality is an Abomination before the Lord,' it says." He turned his face toward the window, toward the stars. "People at my church always used to say AIDS is a judgment from God. Probably still say it, just not when I'm in the room. The pastor and my father both tell me I have to repent. But how do I repent of what I am? What I'm always going to be?" Sleep thickened his voice. "I don't know why I'm asking you. You don't believe in hell anymore. Or in anything..."

We drove on. Periodically I would glance over at Neal, straining my eyes in the half-light of the dash to make sure his chest was rising, falling, rising, falling. Asleep in the muted dark he looked much younger, looked like he did back when we were kids. Back when we didn't know from shit. Back when the world was an endless panoply of classes, malls, girls Liquor sipped in furtive experimentation, then dry and not-so-dry heaves when it finally fought back. Crouching on the patio, smoke and nicotine burning your throat as you inhaled in the hot summer air. The slow despair of acne and shyness stacking dead calendars of loneliness behind you. And over it

all hung the precognition of adolescence, the sure suspicion that the horizonless road stretching before you might not really be leading anywhere, a road to nothing lined by cenotaphs to mark the fallen. I peered closely at Neal. Still breathing. The holy glimmers of the distant city slowly resolved themselves into a chaotic array of gas stations, malls, convenience stores. I let him sleep until we pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant.

The waitress seated us. A group of four at the next table was apparently enjoying Family Night Out, jabbering excitedly about the son's prospects for making the school football team, or the basketball team, or the soccer team, or some goddamn thing. We studied the menu. "Crab sounds good," I said. Neal mm-hmmed in the affirmative. The waitress took our order. We played briefly with our napkins and silverware, then Neal put his hands behind his head and looked at me through half-lidded eyes. "You really don't believe any of it anymore, do you?" he said. "You're not just messing around when you say that. When was the last time you were in church?" I folded my hands. "God and I have come to an amicable parting," I said. "Irreconcilable differences, you see. *Por ejemplo*, when our fine, upstanding, fundamentalist Christian-school teachers

would tell us we're going straight to hell if we drink, fornicate, dance, play cards, watch R-rated movies, read secular authors, swear, talk back, or, worst of all, think for ourselves. Let's say I have problems with that. And with how we had to pray that America be saved from sin, Satan, forced busing, evolution, and the Democratic Party." Glances from the Family of Four. The waitress came with my Michelob. "Just call me an unregenerate pagan," I said, taking a deep swig.

Neal studied me narrowly, like a specimen on a slide. "You really have changed," he said. "I wish I felt like you do. It might make what I'm going through a little easier. Less guilt, anyway." I peeled the label off my bottle. "Listen," I said, "it doesn't matter what I believe. What matters is you staying as healthy as possible. Look at the statistics. People can live with HIV for eight, nine, ten years and up. By that time they'll have the damn thing cured. Someday we're going to be cantankerous old farts together, okay? You just do exactly what your doctor says and don't make yourself crazy worrying about religion." The waitress brought out our food. Neal waited until she left. "Well, my doctor says I better start making my arrangements," he said. "My immune count is down to fifteen. I'll see you get on the plane back to Illinois next week, but beyond that..."

I stared at him. Felt something structural in my chest give way, the fragments falling to form a jagged heap of rubble in my lower abdomen. "He says it's that bad? Already?" I asked. Neal nodded. The son at the other table had started glaring at us when he heard the words "immune count". I ignored him. Neal and I were silent, the seconds slouching into eternity. Then, "Neal, I told you this already. While I'm here, anything you need, anywhere you want to go, anything you want to do, just say the word and it's done. Name it. What do you really, truly, badly want to do?" He smiled again, like a parent indulging a child. "Pretty much what we're doing right now," he murmured, digging into his crab. "You know, John, I wish you could have met Michael. You'd have liked him. Not sexually, I mean, of course, but you two were a lot alike. You would genuinely have gotten

along." I wiped my mouth. "Michael," I mused. "That's your ex-boyfriend, right?"

Muttering at the adjacent table. Son and father were now staring balefully at us now while Mom and Sis huffed in genteel horror, reeking melodrama, their eyes shouting, How can such Trash be allowed to sit and eat next to God and Decent People? I locked stares with the son, grinned pleasantly at the overgrown pile of glands, skidded my chair back from the table. Started to get up. Neal rumbled what was going on. He caught my eye, shook his head desperately. I sat back down slowly, gave the Gang of Four a regretful shrug, resumed attacking the shell of my crustacean. "Michael. He got himself tested, didn't he?" I asked. Neal toyed with his fork. "Yeah," he replied. "He's negative. Same with Todd, and Scott. But there's a lot of guys I can't track down." He bit his lip. "It's like being in a car crash, you know? You're just cruising along in your own lane, full tank of gas, sun's in the sky. Then somebody blindsides you. Forces you off the road. And it's over, just that fast. And it's not even any use trying to blame the person that hit you, because they're

wrecked and burning just like you are. And maybe, just maybe, you get a cross planted to show you were there." Neal folded his linen napkin carefully, placed it over his plate of half-eaten food. "It's good to have someone to talk about it with. Mom is so shattered, I don't dare even bring it up. And Dad, when he sees me coming, he just grabs his Bible." Neal took a capsule from his hip-pouch, washed it down. "I go to my support group at the clinic, but they're all strangers. I never see anybody from school. Except you. And you're only here on vacation."

Behind Neal the Family was huddling together for protection, exchanging furious whispers, gazing venomously in our direction. "What about you?" Neal asked. "Ever hear from Will or Allen or anybody?" I shook my head. He gave me that half-lidded, appraising look again. "What about your friends back home? They know you're out here to visit your gay buddy with AIDS?" I chugged the dregs of my beer. "Hell, no," I said, belching like a dyspeptic hippo. "They're not enlightened and refine-ed likes I am. Plus the fact that I don't have the stones to tell them. They wouldn't understand. Shit, I don't understand. You were engaged twice. To women, I might add. Then you suddenly tell me 'Oh my life is a lie! I'm coming out! Oh John, I've just met the most marvelous man with a heart-shaped ass and eyes like an angel...'" Neal laughed, leaned forward and smacked me with a breadstick. "Stop it!" I shrieked in mock horror. "Put it down! It's, it's *phallic*, is what it is. Don't you act out your Freudian fantasies on me, you flamboyant, alternative lifestyle, non-hetero person..."

The Family got up and headed for the door. I turned in my seat and gave them a hearty wave as they passed by. The son halted in his tracks, face a rictus of hate, stalked back towards me. His father grabbed his arm, murmured something to him. The son acquiesced, allowed

himself to be hustled away. "Smart move, Dad," I shouted after them. "Cut back on his red meat while you're at it." Father and son glowered at us with fine white disgust, then disappeared past the cigarette machine and into the night. Neal was still laughing uncontrollably. "Never could keep your mouth shut," he said, wiping his tears with a soiled napkin. "By the way, thanks for dinner." I waved it away. "'S'nothing," I said. "We better go. It's what, two-and-a-half hours back to Phoenix?" Neal grinned. "Yeah," he replied, "so I'd say you'd better have another beer to fortify yourself." I beckoned to the waitress. "A keen and highly creative sense of judgment you got there," I said to Neal. "It's why your people do so well in the artistic community. Miss? Another Michelob, please..."

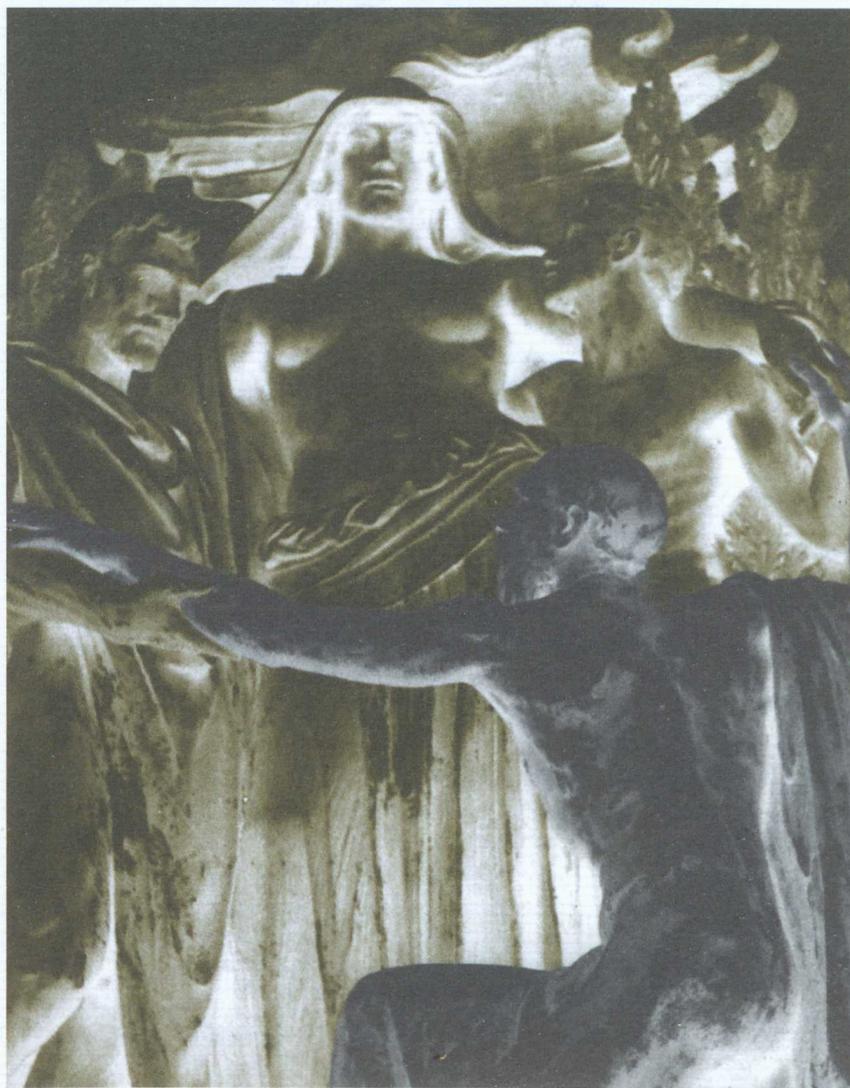
More white crosses in the lambent night. Neal was sleeping with a copy of *People* in his lap. The mountains loomed like black Jehovahs, blocking the gentle light of the stars. A prairie dog squatted bolt-upright at the side of the road, headlights shining its eyes into tiny beacons as it watched us roar past. I looked to the passenger-side mirror, noticed Neal's eyes were open. "How do you feel?" I

asked. He shifted uncomfortably. "Okay," he said. He flicked the radio on, hunted for a rock station amid the wasteland of country-western. Kurt Cobain sang plaintively from the tinny speakers. Neal reclined heavily in his seat, as if what he had just done had exhausted what slight reserves of energy he had left. "Want some water?" I asked, worried. "Some pop from the cooler? Pretzels, maybe?" Neal rested his head against the window. "No. Thanks. I just need some sleep. It's all I ever do anymore." Kurt's voice trailed off into the void, replaced by Temple of the Dog. "Only I don't want to sleep away the time I have left," Neal said woozily. "Although, dying in your sleep, I suppose that's the best way to go. No panic, no fear, no pain. Just drift off into dream state and never wake up. That's what I'm praying for now."

My hands tightened on the wheel. "Forget that," I said. "Your immune count's low, so what? Your doctor can't predict when, how, or what's going to happen. He isn't God. He don't know. Nobody knows. I could get killed in a hit-and-run tomorrow myself. No one can say how much time they got left." Neal folded his arms, clutched himself as if against some arctic cold. "I picked out music for the funeral," he said softly. "I was hoping that you'd come. It's going to be closed-casket. Probably have a non-denominational service." His voice dwindled, weakened. "I'm sorry I'm talking like this. Just scared, I guess. I know where I'm going. To hell. I can't repent of it, John. I can't help what I am. Why did God make me this way, if it's so wrong?" He choked off the sob, stillbirthed it in his throat. Couldn't

stop the tears in time. "Why's He done this?" Neal cried. "Why has He rejected me? An Abomination, He called it. My pastor and my father call it the same thing. I love God. I accepted Jesus when I was nine years old. So why? Why can't I just be what I am? Why do I have to die without Him?"

The road ascended gradually up the side of a mesa, the plateau sheltered in darkness. To our right, the side of the road dropped off into an abyss of night, no guard rail, no



*Darum Hancock*

**HUMILITY**

sepia toned silver print

shoulder. My mind raced. "Okay," I said slowly. "All right. Listen: God hasn't rejected you. Want to know where He's really at it in all this?" Neal gave a hollow laugh. "You're talking religion?" he said. "You? You're damn near to an atheist. You said so yourself." I reached over, turned down the radio. "What I believe personally don't enter into it," I said. "All that matters is what *you* believe. You believe that Christ died for your sins on the cross?" Neal gave me his half-lidded stare. "Yeah," he said. "Of course I do." I slowed up to a crawl, watching the treacherous fall on the right. "Good," I said. "So you're saved, then. Now, quote me the Gospel where Christ says He rejects you if you're homosexual." Neal fingered the pouch at his hip, zipping and unzipping it. "Yeah, I know," he said listlessly. "There isn't any. But in the Old Testament—"

I spat out the open window. "The Old Testament?" I said. "And how many bullocks have you sacrificed this month? Stoned your quota of harlots and adulterers lately? Tithing your income, are you? If violating the Old Testament gets you damnation, then hell is going to need a zoning easement. And the Old Testament isn't even the issue here. Christ was God Incarnate and He didn't say a word about you guys. What He did say is that all who believe in Him shall not die but have eternal life. *All* who believe. The thief who hung next to Him on Golgotha was a criminal, untouchable, lowest

Antiseptic floors and  
white, white walls ...  
Can't you smell them?  
All the years, all  
the life wrapped  
into one, content,  
sterile tear.

Sunken eyes and smiling  
mouth;  
You are a limp glove,  
the warm hand long since  
departed.

You are a dry effigy  
chiseled by a decaying artist  
into a poor mockery of your  
former self.

You are loved, but like a  
small child, you only smile  
and clutch my arm,  
a link to the living

you can no longer  
comprehend.

*Græme Udd*

of the low. But he believed, and Christ said to him, 'Today you shall be with me in Paradise.' Once you accept Him, He will never abandon you." Neal looked at me quizzically. "Yeah," he said, "but, well, look at the New Testament. In Romans, Paul says that sexual immorality includes—" I shook my head violently. "Paul?" I said. "Are you saved by Paul? No, but only by the blood of Christ Jesus.' Christ is God, Paul isn't. When God personally speaks the word against you, clear and unfiltered, then you can worry. Enough people are prejudiced against you guys to begin with. But what does God say to the persecuted, the maligned, those whom the world hates? 'The stone that was rejected shall become the foundation of the Temple.' Yeah. 'And in the place where it was said, "You are not my people," you shall be called Sons of the Living God...'"

Neal stared at me like my forehead was burning with the Mark of the Beast. "You're taking all that out of context," he murmured, "twisting it around. You can't just—" I grinned at him. "Sure I can," I said. "God gave us permission. 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law,' Jesus said. 'Love, and do what thou wilt.' So you're my friend, my brother, I love you, and I'm doing what I wilt. Namely, taking the essential truth from the Big Book and throwing out all the crap." Neal looked horrified. "You can't do that," he said grimly. "What if everybody just started using only the parts of the Bible they agreed with and ignored the rest?" I laughed. "Like they don't already?" I said. "You got any bankers at your church? When they're quoting Paul's rant against homosexuality, do they ever bring up his injunction against charging interest on loans to fellow Christians? Do they open their homes to the homeless, to the poor, as God commanded?"

Do they refuse to ever seek divorce, or even refuse to sue other Christians in court, both things the Lord through Paul forbids us to do?"

We topped the slope of the mesa. Somewhere a coyote began to howl at the dark. "Do they obey those particular portions of the Word of God?" I asked. "No, they do not. Know what they'd say about those verses? What your pastor would say? 'Allegory. Purely symbolic. Not to be taken literally. Those parts of the Bible would interfere with our lifestyle, we don't agree with them, so out they go.'" The far reaches of our headlights caught a diamondback sidwinding over the road. I slowed to give it time to cross. "So what about those parts of the Bible that you feel condemn you for being what you are? For being something you can't change? For being the way you were born? Allegory. Purely symbolic. Not to be taken literally. What really does matter? What did Jesus call the greatest commandment? 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy soul, and love thy neighbor as thou love thyself.'"

I ripped open a bag of M&M's with my teeth, took three, passed the rest to Neal. "God hasn't abandoned you," I said. "He's always there, waiting for us to come home to Him. Waiting for us to cross the River. And what He has in store for us is going to make all the fear and pain and misery of this life seem like a fever dream, a dull and plotless nightmare dreamt by somebody we never knew. 'Know you not that we shall judge angels?' Yea, that and more. Much more. God didn't create the earth and the universe to be an *abattoir* of suffering and punishment; He made it to be a place of infinite wonder and infinite beauty, the jewel in His crown, and each of its billion billion facets is a human soul..."

Neal watched me like I was wired to a proximity fuse. I crunched my M&M's loudly. "There. Any of that help you some?" Neal folded the bag of candy, placed it carefully on the floor. "A little," he said. "Maybe more than a little. You're *sure* you're an atheist?" The car jumped forward as I accelerated. "Never called myself an atheist, Neal," I replied. "Just said me and God weren't on speaking terms. Doesn't mean I can't talk about Him behind His back. Look at the white crosses on the sides of the road, all around us; I don't have to believe in them to know what they stand for." I increase our speed. "And besides, think about it; does my not believing make Him any less real?" Neal looked at his hands, deep in thought. I jabbed his arm gently with my index finger. "Your God's still with you. He's *always* been with you. Forget torturing yourself about it. Just worry about taking care of yourself and keeping healthy. Know only that God loves you and you love Him. And screw anybody who says different." Neal gazed heavenward, the stars mingling with his reflection in the window. "John?" he said quietly. "You suppose you could, like, repeat all this? I mean, to my father...?"

Illinois. Rain on a March night. I put down the phone. My roommate Billy saw something in my face. "Everything okay?" he asked gravely, concerned. I grabbed my coat out of the closet. "No, I said. "This friend of mine in Arizona. That was his mother. He just died today." Billy looked stricken. "Jesus," he said. "Your friend died? What happened, did she say?" I zipped up, fished my keys out of the pocket. "Car crash," I said quickly, something thickening in my throat. "Blindsided. On the highway. Happened just like that. Don't think he ever knew what hit him." I fumbled the door open. "I'm going out for a while. Don't know when I'll be back."

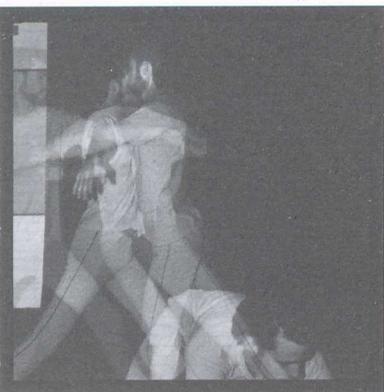
Rain spattered the nighted streets. I drove with no destination, no direction, no will. The iron sky hung above me like an inverted desolation, empty of God, of theology, of meaning. The sobs racked me like epilepsy. The lights of strip malls and gas stations and speeding cars danced and distorted over the slick surface of the road, over the salt water that sluiced my eyes. At the edge of my blurring vision the glow of fluorescence and neon seemed to twist and fold back on itself, forming brief and transient patterns: ephemeral white crosses that flashed and faded as quickly as they were born.

Some of my oldest memories are those of dance and music and the movement inherent in each. For me, these photographs are a continuing look into that personal intrigue and fascination.

Although I cannot reproduce the motion of these performances on film and paper, I can, however, record transient moments and suggest this change through space and thus convey the idea of motion in images which do not physically move.

By combining several camera techniques, I have attempted to make visually striking images which explore, reveal and give a sense of the expressive flow of movement, in ways that can only be seen with the camera.

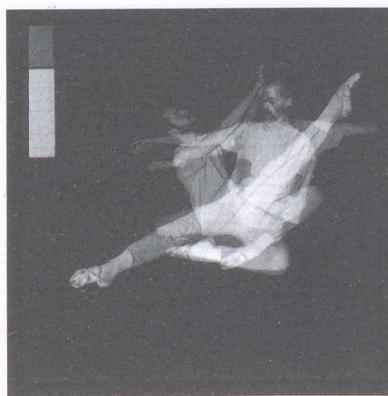
Martha Graham summarizes these impressions very succinctly:



Dan Twombly



EXTENDED VIEWS II



black and white photography

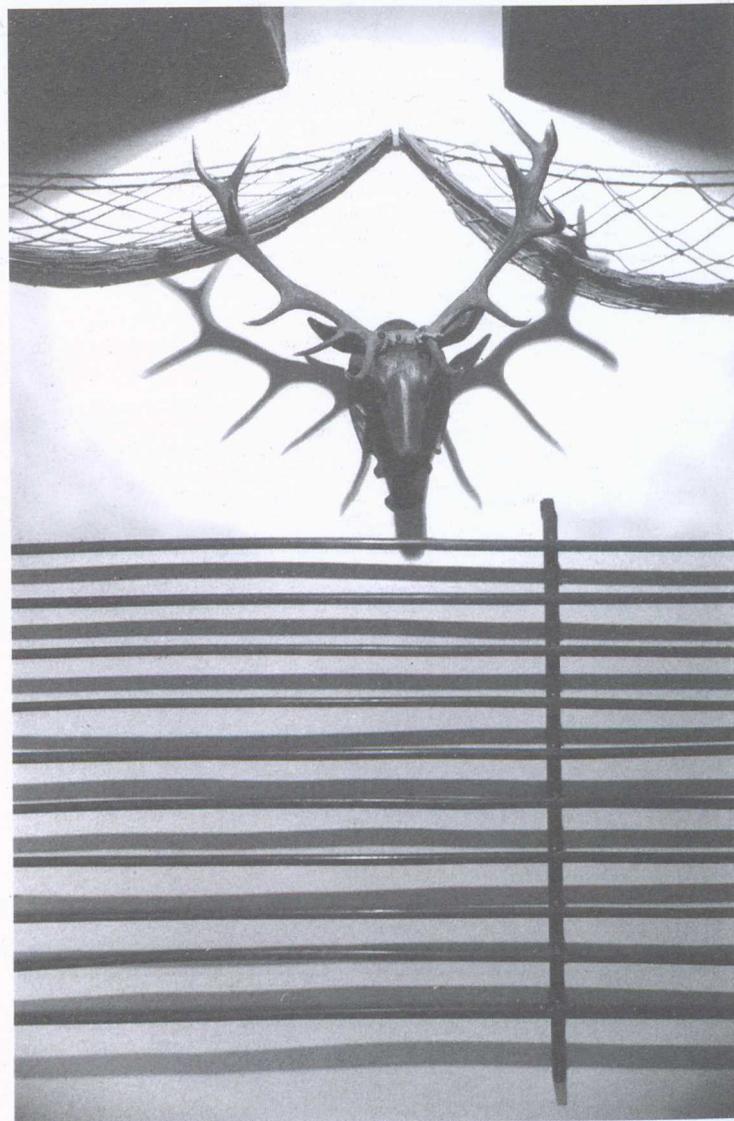


"Nothing is more revealing than movement."



First Place Fine Art

Sherri Lerche  
RITES OF PASSAGE  
silver gelatin print



He noticed my staring, acknowledged it with a grunt before turning back to the counter.

I'd never seen him before.

Immense, a whale of a man. The skin dull; it looked bloodless, lending a bluish tint to full cheeks. His face bumpy and rough, like an overripe melon. He had fine gray hair cut into a butch, which covered his round head. Flat arms hung at his side, flippers. Squat legs tapered off into wide feet that stuck out ridiculously.

"Gimme two medium Cokes, large fries, and a double cheeseburger, chief. For table seven."

I leaned over the edge of my booth and watched Mr. Bratchet disappear

RYAN G. VANCE  
First Place Fiction  
*Liver and Onions*

into the kitchen as Molly plunked onto a vinyl-covered stool two down from the whale. She didn't seem to even notice the man was there until he coughed something at her that sent her scurrying to the back of the diner with a twirl of blond hair. She really had a way with twirling her hair. I mean, Cindy and Beth can both twirl their hair something special, but not with Molly's style.

The whale snatched a cigarette from the steel ashtray on the counter and stuck it in the corner of his mouth. The lip on the opposite side bent up as he sucked the embers to brilliant fire. He closed his eyes, pulled the cigarette from his mouth, and let the smoke drift lazily from his nose and through his teeth. Pretty neat. I wondered if he could blow fire from his mouth, thinking of a puppet show I'd seen the week before at school. Some princess walking in the forest got snatched up by a dragon. A knight came along, followed them to a cave, where he beat the dragon to a pulp with his sword. Pretty stupid, really. But the dragon was really cool. Little red paper flames shot from the mouth and all. Cool.

"What can I get you?" a soft female voice asked.

I looked up and saw Molly standing over me, pencil and paper in hand to take my order. Her ponytail twitched back and forth in time with some Top 40 song in her head.

"Large chocolate shake, please."

Molly rolled her eyes and stuck the pencil stub back over her left ear.

"You get too darn many of those things. Someday, you're going to turn into a chocolate shake!" She strode off to get my order.

I thought it would be pretty interesting to be a chocolate shake, though I didn't tell her that. She wouldn't understand.

I noticed some streaks of color on the man's arms for the first time. It looked like faded tattoos or maybe scars like the ones I had on my knees. I doubted that he got his from jumping off a swing set. Maybe they were tattoos. Maybe a dragon tattoo. Or a whale, I thought with a grin. It would be pretty neat to be a whale. Did they let whales have chocolate shakes, though?

"Here you are, buddy."

Molly flashed me a smile and slid my shake across the table to me. I scooped it up and began to sip. Perfect. Smooth but thick. Molly was the best. She saw my approval and left with a sharp snap of her hair.

I tried to concentrate on my shake, but soon found myself staring at Mr. Bluey's strange marks again. They seemed to twist and writhe on his arm. I stared.

I was halfway across the diner. I don't know how I got from my booth to there. Holding my breath, I slid my left foot forward on the yellow-tiled floor, intending to shuffle across the last few steps. I was all ready to talk to him. Ask him who he was. Where the scars came from. Why he liked liver and onions. Why he came to this diner. Most importantly, why he hadn't come over and talked to me. But I turned and walked stiffly back to my booth and sat down as if I'd been scolded. My shoulders sagged. I felt bad inside. A sip of my shake couldn't rinse the foul taste out of my mouth. I looked back at Mr. Bluey and wondered if I was just being silly about this.

Mr. Bratchet stepped up to my booth and leaned on the table. He followed my gaze over to the man at the counter. He glanced at me, then back at the man.

"Pretty strange, isn't he?" he whispered.

I nodded.

"See those scars on his arms and neck? He got them in the war."

Mr. Bratchet looked at me to see if I was impressed. I was.

"I've also heard," he continued, "that he was a general in the army until he got too big to ride in the tanks anymore."

"Holy cow!"

I quickly covered my mouth with my hand, wondering if I'd spoken too loudly.

"I didn't believe it at first, either. He doesn't say too much about it, though. I've tried talking to him but he ain't one for saying much. Most of them from the war ain't. He just comes in here every Tuesday and Thursday and orders the liver and onions dinner plate. Smokes two Camel cigarettes and leaves. He's a strange bird, that one."

"Boy, you sure know lots about Mr. Bluey." Too late, I realized that I'd called him the name of my sister's whale, a dilapidated, black stuffed animal she used as a pillow. I was embarrassed.

"Mr. Bluey?" he said, cocking his head as he noticed the man choke down a dark chunk of liver from his plate. "As much as anyone, I suppose."

I smiled.

"Mr. Bluey," he repeated. "I like that. Mr. Bluey."

He walked away chuckling.

I looked at Mr. Bluey's scars and thought of Uncle Mark. He had a bunch of scars on his legs from the war. A slight limp, too. Some days, he couldn't walk much at all. The scars came from crawling through a barbed wire fence. The only way I knew about it was from the Christmas Eve when he came over "all liquored up," Mom later explained, and collapsed in her lap, sobbing and hugging her all at once. He babbled about the barbed wire, straw huts, and all sorts of things for a while as Mom

cooed and stroked his hair like she did to me when I had a fever or a bad dream. When she realized my sister and I were sitting there the whole time, listening, she shooed us out with a free hand. I heard crying all night long. Not just Uncle Mark, either.

A few weeks later, I asked Uncle Mark about that night and he got real mad. He stomped around for a while, muttering to himself, then he grabbed me by the shoulders and slapped me up against the bathroom door.

"Stop making up stories about folks," he screamed, spittle flying from the corner of his thin lips. "You hear? I don't want to hear your lies!"

His normally expressionless face broke into a wild-eyed mask of white that sent me running away without answering. I never brought it up again.

For the next two months, I came into the diner every Tuesday and Thursday around 4:30 P.M. Mr. Bluey was always there, eating and smoking. I got a chocolate shake, sat in my booth by the glass front doors, and watched him. I had even come up with a story behind each zigzag scar he had on the back of his neck and arms. One he got climbing into a foxhole when a grenade exploded nearby, sending a piece of metal whizzing across his left wrist. Another he got while escaping from a tank that was about to self-destruct. Mr. Bluey was an amazing man.

Then one Thursday afternoon in fall, I came into the diner and found no Mr. Bluey. I checked the bathroom, but he wasn't there. The three wooden stalls were empty except for the usual graffiti, some of which, I had to admit, I put there with a rusty pocketknife I'd found on the sidewalk in front of the diner. But I only did the pair of whales on the inside of the back stall. And maybe the stick man that gave everyone the finger as they walked in. That was all.

I came out of the bathroom and slid into my booth. Molly brought me

the unasked for shake—I had her trained pretty well by now—but she hurried off to help another customer before I could ask her anything. When Mr. Bratchet came scooting by, I grabbed his arm, determined to get some answers.

"Hey, Mr. Bratchet?" I asked, stirring my chocolate shake absently with the straw. "Where's Mr. Bluey?"

"I'm not sure, buddy. I haven't seen him all week," he said, shrugging his shoulders. He didn't leave.

I put the glass to my lips and drank the remainder of my shake before speaking again.

"Did he move or something?"

"I don't think so, kid."

"Oh," I said.

Two weeks went by without seeing Mr. Bluey again. Then one day, I came into the diner and nearly dropped my bookbag in surprise when I saw his familiar bulk perched atop the stool at the end of the counter. His face looked sunken, pale. The fingers that pinched the glowing cigarette trembled visibly. He stared at the plate of liver and onions before him as if he didn't have an appetite. His butch had grown out and his chin was stubbly, dirty. He reminded me of how dad looked right before he ran off to Vegas with that girl mom referred to only as the "Tramp."

I grinned, despite myself. Mr. Bluey was back.

Mr. Bratchet saw me and brought over a chocolate shake. I accepted it and started sipping. Where was Molly? I was about to ask when he answered my unvoiced question.

"Molly won't be in until six, so I'll get you whatever you want. Your mom called and said she'd be home late, so you're to have dinner here."

I wiped my mouth on my sleeve. Molly would've play-scolded me for doing that, but Mr. Bratchet missed the cue.

"This is enough for now, thanks."

Mr. Bratchet nodded and stared at his feet as if a twenty dollar bill had stuck to them. I almost bent over to look, too. When he finally spoke, his voice was mousy, shrill.

"I don't mean to worry you or nothing," he said, "but Mr. Bluey won't be back again."

The straw slid from my lips. The thick brown ooze slid back into the glass.

"What do you mean?"

He chewed on his rough bottom lip before speaking. I wondered where Molly was.

"This is the last time in the diner. He won't be coming back."

"Is he moving away or something?"

Mr. Bratchet paused, then nodded.

"Something like that, yeah."

I wanted to talk to Mr. Bluey. Run up to him and tell him it would be okay to stay. Give him a hug. I wanted to say goodbye. Why didn't I talk to him when I wanted to before? How could he just leave after everything we'd been through?

Even as I thought these things, Mr. Bluey levered himself off the stool. He got his bulk moving in a rocky,

sliding fashion. Without a smile or a nod of farewell, he shuffled past Mr. Bratchet and me.

Just like that, he was gone.

Mr. Bratchet put a soft hand on my shoulder, then sighed quietly and wandered through the swinging doors into the kitchen. Everyone was gone. There was a couple whispering quietly two booths down, and a lean man in a brown trenchcoat sipped coffee at the counter, but I was alone in the diner.

I wondered if Molly was sitting in a car somewhere with the top down, flinging her hair in the wind and thinking about me. I hoped she was.

I stared at the half-finished chocolate shake. I felt my stomach rumble.

Somewhere behind the black swinging doors to the kitchen, I heard the clatter of silverware being dropped into water. The man in the trenchcoat tapped the side of his coffee cup with his fingernail. Hamburger grease hissed from the grill

in the kitchen. The overhead fans hummed softly.

I could smell burnt toast in the air. I'd never liked to eat bread much. Charred bread, even less. But I found myself sniffing at the bitter odor. Enjoying it, really. Wishing I had a piece of dark toast to munch.

On the far end of the counter, I could see a half-empty plate. A half-eaten dinner roll was balanced on the edge. One side of it was soaking up the juices from the plate, making it soggy and squishy-looking. I never did like bread much.

I wasn't ever going to eat liver and onions again.

As **WORDS** become  
free of the printed  
page and become  
bits of information  
floating without  
dimension—

Information loses its  
voice and context.

As **IMAGES**  
are rendered—  
two dimensional  
illusions of the  
three dimensional  
world, we realize,  
the only represen-  
tations we create  
with any accuracy  
are shadows...

their shapes only  
clues to real form.

More daunting is the  
hope of recording  
**TIME**

for without a record, it  
is lost—along with the  
ideas that are formed  
but not transcribed.

**A wise man hears one word and understands two.—Yiddish Proverb. □ Words can have no single fixed meaning. Like wayward electrons, they can spin away from their initial orbit and enter a wider magnetic field. No one owns them or has a proprietary right to dictate how they will be used.—David Lehman □ All my life I've looked at words as though I were seeing them for the first time—Ernest Hemingway □ "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."—Lewis Carroll □ But words are things, and a small drop of ink, falling like dew, upon a thought, produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.—Lord Byron □ The Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy.—Ezra Pound □ We operate with nothing but things which do not exist, with lines, planes, bodies, atoms, divisible time, divisible space—how should explanation even be possible when we first make everything into an image, into our own image!—Friedrich Nietzsche □ We are all hungry and thirsty for concrete images. Abstract art will have been good for one thing: to restore its exact virginity to figurative art.—Salvador Dalí □ For such an advanced civilization as ours to be without images that are adequate to it is as serious a defect as being without memory.—Werner Herzog □ The Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy.—Ezra Pound □ Isn't life a series of images that change as they repeat themselves?—Andy Warhol □ Is there not an art, a music, and a stream of words that shall be life, the acknowledged voice of life?—William Wordsworth □ Not even the visionary or mystical experience ever lasts very long. It is for art to capture that experience, to offer it to, in the case of literature, its readers; to be, for a secular, materialist culture, some sort of replacement for what the love of God offers in the world of faith.—Salman Rushdie □ Without music to decorate it, time is just a bunch of boring production deadlines or dates by which bills must be paid.—Frank Zappa □ The years like great black oxen tread the world, And God the herdsman treads them on behind, □ And I am broken by their passing feet.—W. B. Yeats □ For time is the longest distance between two places.—Tennessee Williams □ Time is waste of money.—Oscar Wilde □ As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.—Henry David Thoreau □ Time is the only critic without ambition.—John Steinbeck □ O, call back yesterday, bid time return.—William Shakespeare □ Time and I against any two.—Spanish Proverb □ While time, the endless idiot, runs screaming 'round the world.—Carson McCullers □ City people try to buy time as a rule, when they can, whereas country people are prepared to kill time, although both try to cherish in their mind's eye the notion of a better life ahead.—Edward Hoagland □ Time goes, you say? Ah, no! Alas, Time stays, we go.—Austin Dobson □ I recommend to you to take care of the minutes; for hours will take care of themselves.—Lord Chesterfield □ The illimitable, silent, never-resting thing called Time, rolling, rushing on, swift, silent, like an all-embracing ocean-tide, on which we and all the universe swim like exhalations, like apparitions which are, and**

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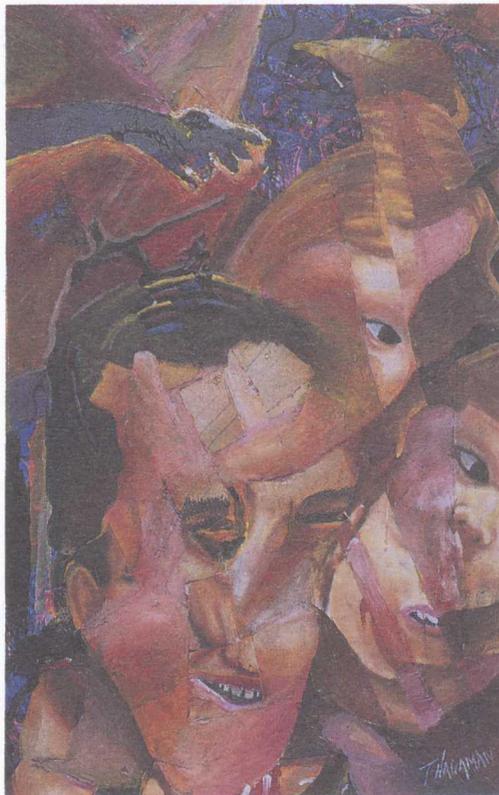
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Tim Hagaman

END OF INNOCENCE  
mixed media

the **old** Comic

G.T.S.

I used to do funny looks  
Now I just look funny  
With these fucking tubes  
Up my nose and my  
Wrinkled fat ass hanging out of this hopital dress.  
I used to wear a dress, actually too.  
But it was humorous then.  
Even a damn ass hanging out can be funny.  
But not now  
Not here.

My face, when it was young, could show  
So much expression.  
Hell, I could make people laugh just  
By arching or lowering my eyebrows  
Or by twisting my lip or blowing out my cheeks.  
There were funny tricks I could pull off then.  
They left me when my hair went gray and fell out and my face lost its life.  
Now I am about to lose my life.

It's too short, you know? Even eighty-two years are not enough time.  
I was just that smart-assed kid making faces and tap dancing for applause  
And attention in the basement of my Grandmother's house,  
Entertaining uncles and aunts and passing the hat for  
Pennies, nickels, and the occasional dime if I made Grandpa laugh.  
God, I'd give anything, and I do mean anything  
For one last crowd unable to control themselves with laughter.

I  
don't  
know why  
I'm so afraid  
I mean, I've died  
dozens of times, right?  
But this is the big one—no second chance to win'em over  
and redeem myself.  
Is there?

I actually should be grateful.  
I mean, look at the greats who went out early.  
Lenny, Freddie, Douglas and John.  
They didn't even make it to forty.  
I'm eighty-two and I'm the one complaining.

Hey, nurse.  
How about this.  
You prop me up on the top of the stairs  
And let me go.  
One last pratfall for old time's sake.  
That's how I want to go out.  
Not like this.  
This isn't funny.

"Anything For a Laugh" Murphy  
That's what I want on my tombstone.  
And underneath:  
"This Isn't Funny"

"This Isn't Funny"

# Wet LEAVES After a Heavy Rain

*Shawntina Moore*

First Place Fiction

My space is a small isolated corner. I must walk around the office borrowing windows to

look through. I was the last hired, the fifth black woman the white man took a chance on. He seems to think we are all the same, with the exception of Eddy. He never confuses Eddy with the rest of us. She advised him once, on an affair concerning his wife. He has been impressed with her ever since.

I pictured Eddy as this beautiful, black goddess who had successfully entangled her overweight, bald boss into a fake love affair. She turned out to be a petite, elderly woman with short, nappy hair. A deeply religious woman. Her chapped lips have never felt the excitement of a good lipstick. Her clothing reminds me of things left aging in a dusty attic.

"Virginity is the greatest thing to the woman who has lost it," Eddy says. She looks to me with a toothless smile. "Priceless is the gift of oneself," she whispers then rushes off toward the executive offices full of life's zeal.

Eddy knows that I am angry with God.

Eddy made a promise to me my second week on the job. Her promise is that I will make some man a very good wife. She stood over my desk with a cup of hot tea in hand. She can see straight to the soul of a person. Eddy knows a lot of things but she does not know that I am not a virgin. I have not the heart to tell her.

It is also because of the rain that I am angry with God. It rained hard here in New York. Sometimes so badly that



my body refused to get out of bed. The weather affects me strange. I get these pains all over as if I am about to die the moment a raindrop hits pavement.

God alone controls the weather. He knows what it does to me. Why then does it continue to fall so badly

where I live? I

asked Eddy

one day. She

was sitting at

her desk with a

box of raisins in

her hand. She

raised her nappy head gracefully.

"Nothing can live without the rain," she said simply.

"It doesn't have to rain so much," I argued.

"Has there been warning of a flood?"

"It doesn't have to flood to be bothersome."

"Then that is all it is, bothersome. What a small price to pay for the life it provides."

When I grow tired of hearing how much I "still have to learn" I have a tendency of tuning Eddy out. She stops talking when she knows I have changed the channel of my mind. But she knows, that I know, when the rain falls badly again, I will wish I had listened. There has been a great deal of rain in these parts lately.

There are only two others in the office that I converse with. Pete and Tom. Pete is an elderly white man with fifteen grandchildren. He flat out refuses to retire. So far no one has asked him to. The other is a young white man, twenty-four. Tom is an atheist and high on Eddy's list of "those to reach with the word of God".

I do not think she will have long to wait for him. He is coming along quite well. Eddy has a great impact on people. She woos them with her love.

Pete is grossly overweight and has a difficult time talking after he has returned from a short trip to the copy



*Brooke E. Dickinson*

THE WAY WE WERE

black and white photography

**Second Place Fine Art**

machine. He is constantly sending me upstairs to the vending machine and downstairs for office supplies. Everytime he asks me to do something that I say is not my job. He says, "But Eddy does it for me all the time."

Eddy is colorless. This statement she firmly believes to be true. She claims to see neither black nor white, Hispanic or Jew. She says she sees the eyes of Jesus in every face, and hears His voice in every word. When I told her it was impossible to really hear and see those things she only smiled. Her smiles make me nervous. I hate it when she keeps things from me.

Today is Eddy's birthday. It is also raining. Had it not been for the birthday party everyone has been planning for the past two weeks I would not have come in today. Besides, I brought Eddy a cute, religious birthday card that I am dying to give her.

Tom says Eddy is sixty or so but I think she is more like ninety. Only ten candles sit on the big cake hid in the cafeteria. Just about every desk has a gift wrapped box beneath it. I guess my card is not such a big deal after all. The president of



the company has come to our humble building to personally wish Eddy a blessed birthday. His pal wife is at his side. She is ill. Her back is bent over like a hunch back. "She shouldn't be out of bed," whispers Pete. "She looks awful," Tom adds.

The thin, sickly looking woman walks over to Eddy and touches her. Just like that. Only she keeps touching her as if drawing strength from the tired, aged Eddy. What a sight two old, skinny women standing eye to eye. Eddy closes her eyes as if having one of her revelations or something. Then the weirdest thing happens, although I have come to expect the weird from Eddy, the president's wife straightens up. Her cheeks take on the color they lacked and she laughs. They both laugh.

I am close enough to the elevator to rush in and down to the main floor and out the door. As a matter of fact, I vision myself flagging down a taxi. But then I vision the rain. This stuff is all too deep for me. Tom is standing perfectly still with his mouth wide open. Tom is smiling. He must know something the rest of us do not. The president of the company has tears in his eyes. He seems to be trying hard not to allow them to fall. I have never seen a man cry before.

Everyone watches the two women in total silence. Eddy still laughing walks up to me. She starts saying how I remind her of someone who died. She says that person was

special to her. Then she calls me her daughter.

“You’re like a leaf battered by the rain, wind, and storm,” Eddy says.

I totally resent that. I stand embarrassed like a student called out by a teacher to read and explain a parable she has no knowledge of. I say thank you politely only because I do not know what to say. Pete has pulled his gift from beneath his desk and hands it to Eddy.

After the gift giving, laughing, talking, dry punch, and strange conversation, everyone is sent home early. I sit in the taxi almost forgetting to tell the driver “where to”. The rain does things to my mind you know. He is a nice driver, full of conversation. I smile. I was hoping to get home silently. There is something about talk and rain that scares me. I can only pay attention to one at a time.

“Most drivers don’t like rain. Me, I love the rain and not just because I’m a good driver either,” says the friendly middle-aged man.

I nod.

“Hey, I ain’t no college graduate or nothing but I can tell you one thing—rain is symbolic. This morning I told my wife, there is just something about the way the rain beats off



the leaves that makes me feel like going on. Hey, if the leaves can take it, so can I. My wife says ‘you deep’. You think that’s deep?

Of course I do. Nothing surprises me anymore. Now even taxi drivers have visions. That was pretty tricky of Eddy or God or whoever to have this driver take me home.

At home, in my apartment, I sit at the window and watch the night unfold. I realize that my problem is with this whole virginity thing. How did Eddy know? I think for the first time that I could possibly make some man a good wife just as Eddy said.

*Terri L. Birch*  
THE PIT

A photograph...

A child in a  
light blue  
ruffled dress  
standing in front  
of a green '54 Chevrolet,

alone.

It was inexpressibly  
difficult  
being there without you,  
believing I was paltry,  
not whole,  
half a person.

I was a child,  
digging bright copper  
colored pennies  
out of the black back seat  
of that huge green car.

Then you  
were gone.  
I pretended you were  
none.

A white and red birth  
certificate  
with black blanks  
where your name  
should be.

Silence  
will be deemed  
as an admission  
of guilt.

Damn you for your  
inadequacy,  
damn you for the  
emptiness of my being,  
and damn you for being  
my father.



*Gwendolyn T. Urbanski*  
**I THINK THEREFORE**  
First Place, Poetry

“What day is it?” he asks  
With indifferent indigo  
Eyes. I have to think.  
Not because my head has just plunged  
Into the transparent pool  
Of my front windshield: shattering glass,  
Creating chaos, and alerting ambulances  
But because I never pay attention  
To the date.

“What is your social security number?”  
Ahh, something I know. Those nine numbers  
Engraved on the insides of my eyelids  
Reminding me of the test I won’t take  
Tomorrow. Flashlight beams stream  
Into my crazed, glazed yes. I keep my thoughts  
Busy with everything but the accident:

I think of kissing  
My boyfriend under a fluorescent yellow sun;  
I think of my future  
Beach house with glass wall  
Facing the Atlantic on a tranquil autumn eve;  
I think of the itch  
On my right ankle that I can’t scratch because  
I am bolted to a board.

I think of seeing  
My first novel with its sleeky, shiny cover  
And my name embossed in block letters;  
I think of fresh slippery mushrooms  
And Rotini noodles doused in spaghetti sauce;  
I think  
That this would make a corny after-school special  
Or  
At least a poem.  
I think of everything so that I’ll forget  
Nothing.

*Dawn Hancock*  
**UNTITLED**

black and white photography



*Casey Pennel*

THE DISCOVERY OF HANDS (upon rolling silverware at denny's)

Demon-idled,

My hands

Should have frenzied against the ticking,  
Thrilling should have known  
The sweetened sour clefts of your body.  
Risen into breath,  
Falling my hands slide through  
Whirling—scathing you.

Slow moldered,

My hands

Should crush your silent inhale,  
Shoot through and bliss it,  
Sculpt cherry lows and chainsaw moans.  
“Glorious”  
Should my fingertips murmur  
And echo glory.

Callused and rheumatized,

My hands

Should have beaded skeins of you,  
Spun lofty moons through you,  
Draped sunkissed dances from you.  
Fast should my hands have been where  
Now I lay out napkins and pick up silverware and  
Hold.

*Katherine Mason*

UNTITLED

Honorable Mention for Poetry

My mind, bruised and bleeding  
washes up on the shore of sanity.

I can see your footsteps here,  
leading up the beach.

With no one to believe in them  
the delusions rot in the sun,  
grotesque driftwood dragons  
on the white sand,  
buried by the white sand.

I'm looking for you here.



*Steve Stelling*  
INTERNATIONAL  
acrylic on board

"FOR LAST YEAR'S WORDS BELONG TO LAST YEAR'S LANGUAGE AND NEXT YEAR'S WORDS AWAIT ANOTHER VOICE"—T.S. Eliot

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products requiring special attention and a little extra care.**

**A wise man hears one word and understands two.—Yiddish Proverb. □ Words can have no single fixed meaning. Like wayward electrons, they can spin away from their initial orbit and enter a wider magnetic field. No one owns them or has a proprietary right to dictate how they will be used.—David Lehman □ All my life I've looked at words as though I were seeing them for the first time.—Ernest Hemingway □ "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."—Lewis Carroll □ But words are things. A small drop of ink, falling like dew, upon a thought, produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.—Leonard Cohen □ The Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy.—Ezra Pound □ We open our eyes to nothing but things which do not exist, with lines, planes, bodies, colors, divisible time, divisible space—how should explanation even be possible when we first make everything into an image, into our own image!—Friedrich Nietzsche □ We are all hungry and thirsty for concrete images. Abstract art will have been good for one thing: to restore its exact virginity to figurative art.—Salvador Dali □ For such an advanced civilization as ours to be without images that are adequate to it is as serious a defect as being without memory.—Werner Herzog □ The Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy.—Ezra Pound □ Isn't life a series of images that change as they repeat themselves?—Andy Warhol □ Is there not an art, a music, and a stream of words That shalt be life, the acknowledged voice of life?—William Wordsworth □ Not even the visionary or mystical experience ever lasts very long. It is for art to capture that experience, to offer it to, in the case of literature, its readers; to be, for a secular, materialist culture, some sort of replacement for what the love of god offers in the world of faith.—Salman Rushdie □ Without music to decorate it, time is just a bunch of boring production deadlines or dates by which bills must be paid.—Frank Zappa □ The years like great black oxen tread the world, And God the herdsman treads them on behind, □ And I am broken by their passing feet.—W. B. Yeats □ For time is the longest distance between two places.—Tennessee Williams □ Time is waste of money.—Oscar Wilde □ As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.—Henry David Thoreau □ Time is the only critic without ambition.—John Steinbeck □ O, call back yesterday, bid time return.—William Shakespeare □ Time and I against any two.—Spanish Proverb □ While time, The endless idiot, runs screaming 'round the world.—Carson McCullers □ City people try to buy time as a rule, when they can, whereas country people are prepared to kill time, although both try to cherish in their mind's eye the notion of a better life ahead.—Edward Hoagland □ Time goes, you say? Ah, no! Alas, Time stays, we go.—Austin Dobson □ I recommend to you to take care of the minutes; for hours will take care of themselves.—Lord Chesterfield □ The illimitable, silent, never-resting thing called Time, rolling, rushing on, swift, silent, like an all-embracing ocean-tide, on which we and all the universe swim like exhalations, like apparitions which are, and**