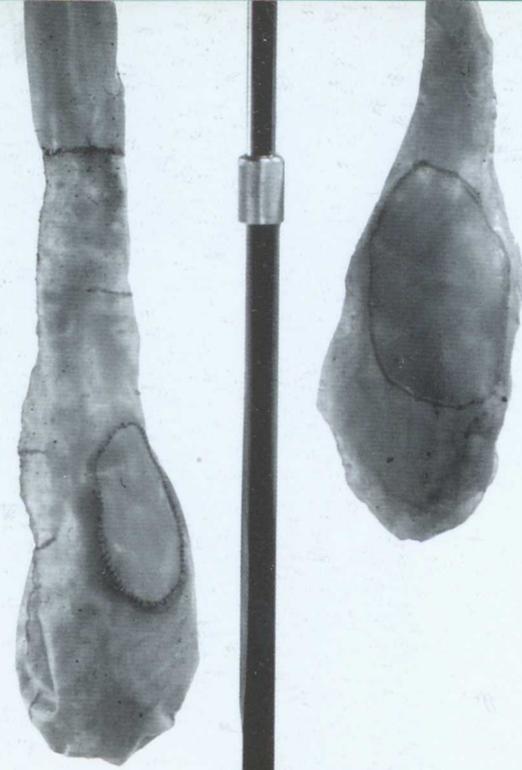


[1998]



	TOWERS	NO.78	

...Ted already knew that

...crisp chill of the evening breezed into T

POETRY

FICTION

FINE ART

Untitled
NELLEKE BELTJENS

At the Pond
CHRISTINE BROVELLI

Un Souvenir d'Aix
LEILA BUCHMANN

The Bath
CHRISTINE BROVELLI

The Bird in My Binoculars
TESS FARNHAM

Sprout
ELIZABETH BURE

The Point of the Dandelion
TESS FARNHAM

Untitled
AMANDA FLOOD

Walk on Water, but Beware the Undertow
DOUGLAS GOODMAN

Sunday
TESS FARNHAM

Sleeper
KRISTINE HERBST

Used
MIKE GRANDYS

All Titled
RICK IFARRAGUERRI

Alarm Clocks
SETH LOY

Absence of a Parade Among Nothing
MEGAN JOHNSON

Untitled
ELIZABETH MEHRER

From the Apple to the Man
HEATHER MCINTOSH

Untitled
GENE TANTA

White Silence
DAWN RAFTERY

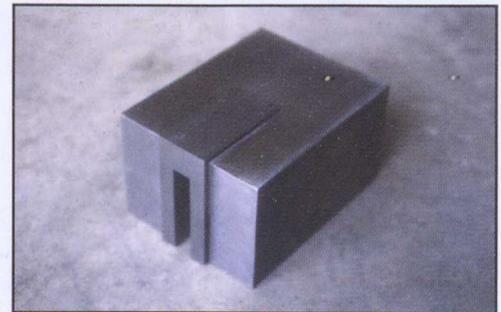
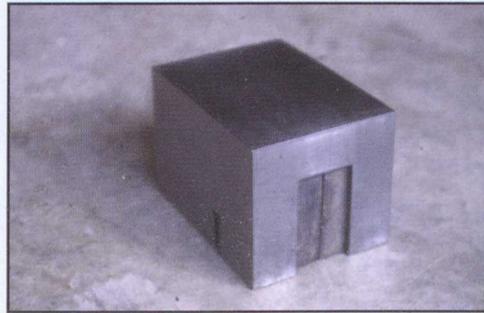
Untitled
DAWN RAFTERY

Untitled
NICK TOMASIC

Alarm (verb tense)
GENE TANTA

UNTITLED

NELLEKE BELTJENS



THE BIRD IN MY BINOCULARS

TESS FARNHAM

The Bird in My Binoculars

There is a bird in the binoculars—
and you lean in; sometimes you forget yourself
fenced in by feet and distance.

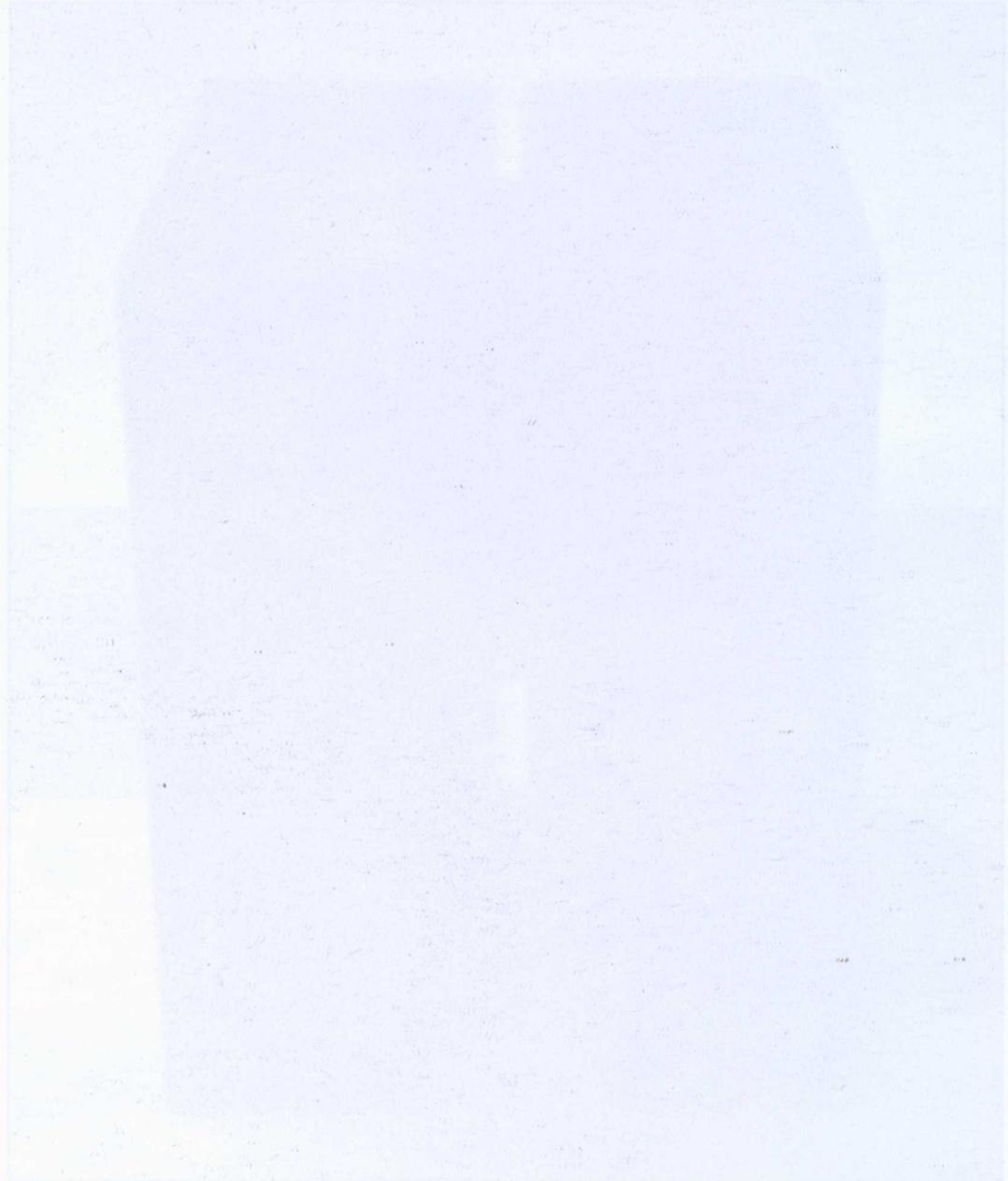
Grounded. A young girl writing
Woman on a blackboard, remembers the first
consonant is sometimes used

for *Wings*—and she imagines
a cerulean sky with real birds. But for the time
being, marginal sketches suffice, or a phrase,

A space where the moon should go.

Oh, here is the round character.
The hands pull away, and you
the fat crayon, the meaty vowel. A pressed feather

for delicate fossil. *Or a fish,*
caught swimming somewhere, swallowed struggling
in other words.



THE POINT OF THE DANDELION

TESS FARNHAM

The Point of the Dandelion

Slicing close under the surface only encourages [growth]...

—World Book Encyclopedia

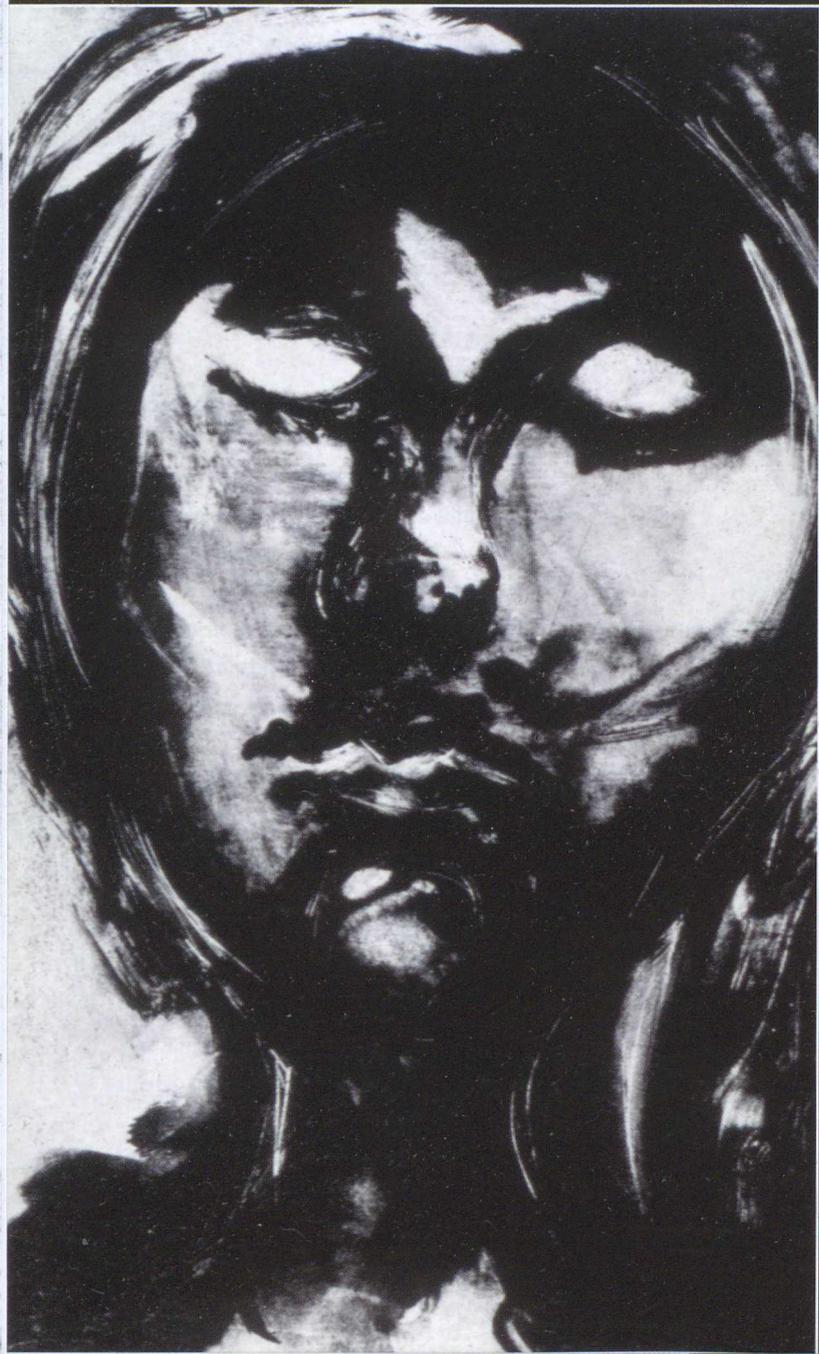
Look. We'll start here
in the backyard. Remember
the sixties—people doing what they could
to get them out of the neighborhood? Thin hiss
of a sprinkler, a spritz of herbicide. Your parents
explaining. *Here*, they'd say,
we ought to dig these up. And you could see
the point—leaves like teeth,
and a bloom that appeared out of nowhere
like a flat planet or a crew-cut. Once, while peering out

of the upstairs window, you noticed the way
a sidewalk always pointed toward the corner;
on the wall a guardian angel—behind glass
and out of reach. Leaves turned on the trees
and down the corridor, it's more of the same—
Trompe l'oeil.

Beyond the curtain, a little girl folds
something into the skirt
of her dress. The elegant necklace.
Milk sticky in her fingers. Silence later—silence
for seeing them off: indigo moon, cardboard star.
Weightless—still clinging to a parachute

UN SOUVENIR D'AIX

LEILA BUCHMANN



SPROUT

ELIZABETH BURE



ABSENCE OF A PARADE AMONG NOTHING
MEGAN JOHNSON

Absence of a Parade Among Nothing

Down banner balloon ice-tea streets

This one winks at the air's clock.

No, not the dusty pendulum knowing numbers

or recorded drunken crimes in the alley's fingers.

This one is for the non-streets

Whose buildings are earth stored away.

For the daughter-less mothers

Snowing like stars.

Never clapping of hands

Reminding, reminding, remaining.

The sound of the ocean and the

Dying of grandmothers.

Give a glass of wine to the wind's mind,

Feel it shatter.

From the Apple to the Man

Thin
red skin
peels
to reveal
round, white flesh—
the core of
the man.

He hides in
the fine, white
layers
as they
fall away.

ALL TITLED

RICK IFARRAGUERRI



USED
MIKE GRANDYS

Used

To winter, I am a maypole

Wind cutting circles around me

Where flakes dance silently downward

Enclosing me head to toe

In her freezing mummification

Lurid slumber takes my body

Secret whispering skies

Dark clouds ready to burst forth

And cover the ground

In satin glittering sheets

Blinding in pure daylight

And deadly silent in the still of eve

Sunday

These are the measures destined for her soul.
—Wallace Stevens

You kneel to the tub and a ring
of soap scum. Spider-webs spreading
in corners near the ceiling. Time
to clean house. Imagine the way he made his body

smaller that night, holding soap near his face
and smiling. You lit candles, fire
scented like vanilla and cinnamon, as he washed his hands
and skin; you are thinking

maybe of crawling in under the Mr. Bubble.
Maybe of getting the hell out. Instead,
You read to him. Scenes from other lives. So you wore
something flimsy he could see

past. At the time it didn't seem
like a big deal. He said he saw
your breasts like flesh through a stained glass
window. Your toes dipping in and out

of the blue bathwater; he was snatching glimpses
under the nightgown, whispering *you have wings there,*
still a little wet, not quite ready for the journey.
First time you made love

there were books in the house—a fortress
of them stacked around his bed, you thought
these will keep us safe.
Still you could not sleep from thinking

about what you left—moon spilling
into familiar bedclothes, candles
and a hibiscus plant you missed watching
flower. *Death is the mother of beauty,*

Stevens said. Petals the color of pomegranete
or a blood orange, night reaching for them
like fingers under the velvet skirts,
and your strangeness later

at finding the dropped blossoms.
Next morning you tried leaving,
wanting someone, anyone walking you out
to the car. And he was making breakfast

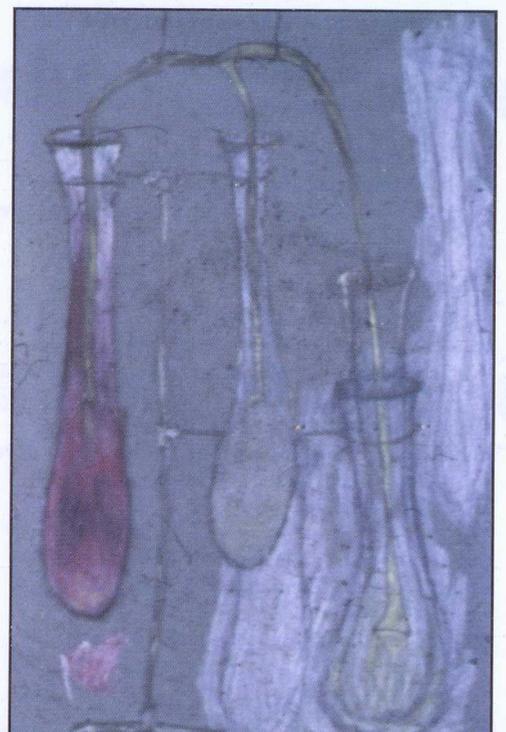
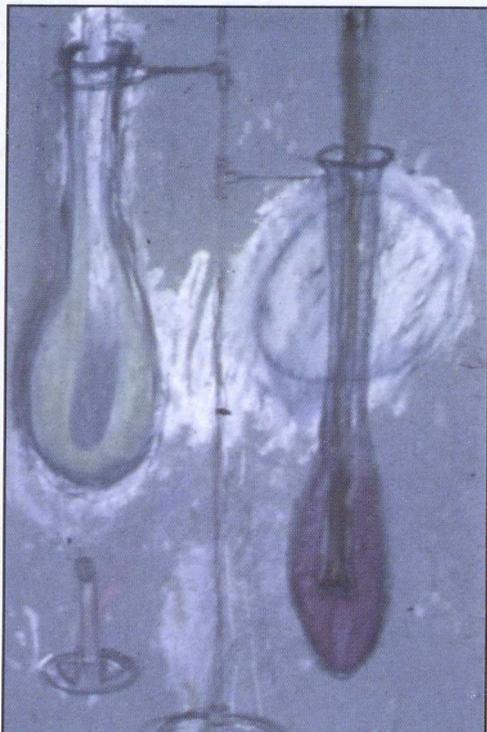
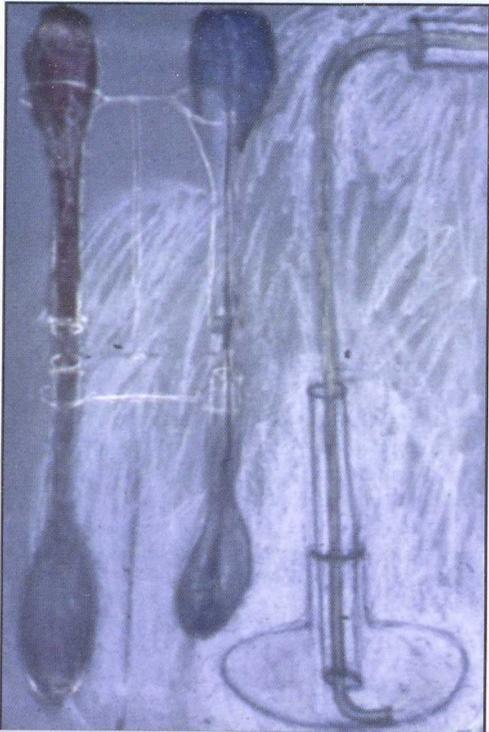
just then; you could smell him. *The warmth will slide out*
slick as mercury when you stop for gas.
You already know this. You eat his bread
and marmalade, his eggs, and spend the rest

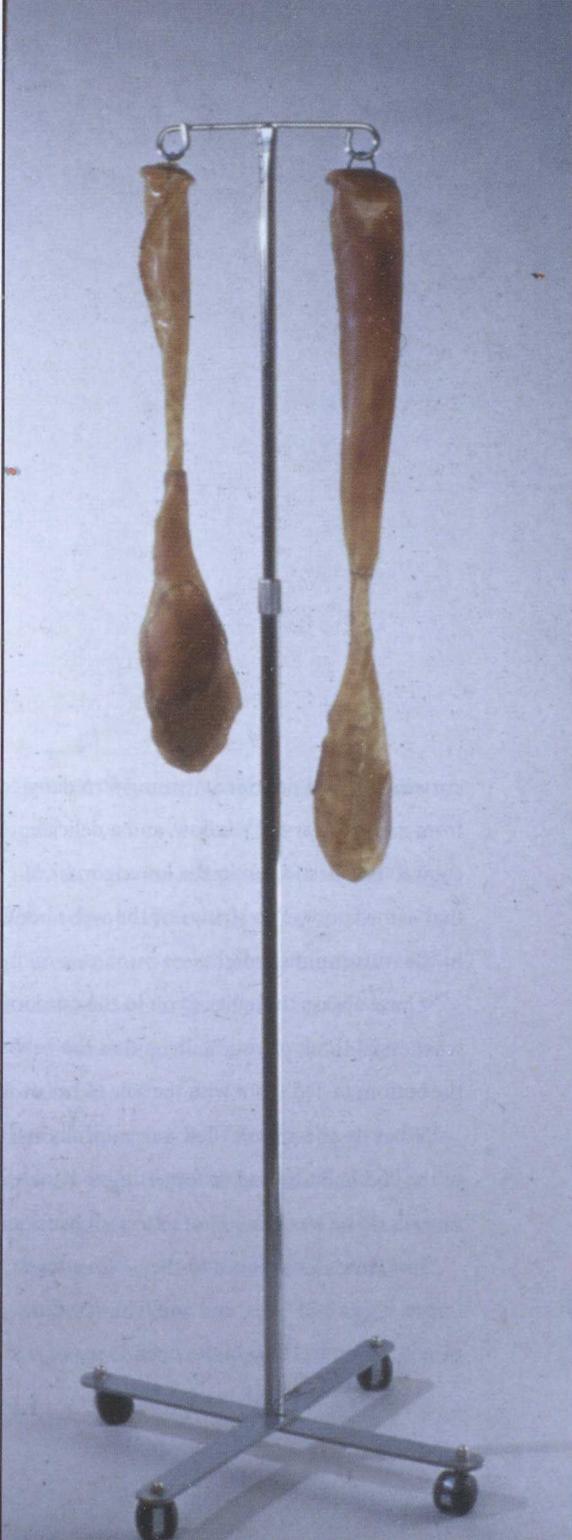
of Sunday morning making yourself hungry again.
It takes an hour, more or less—finally you lay
your face in his stomach, and the phone rings—the sound
of her voice breaking under the bed

like water. Again, I am thinking *maybe I see God*
in the house and you, missing church.

UNTITLED

AMANDA FLOOD





Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.



THE BATH

CHRISTINE BROVELLI

The bathtub that they were sitting in was one of those wide, deep, monstrous creatures with pointed toes and cracks on its underbelly. Someone, a previous tenant, perhaps, decided it would be artistic to paint the exterior of the tub a brilliant shade of red. This stoic creature claimed its territory below the peeled plaster ceiling, and above the chipped green linoleum and naked porcelain. Ted, the tub's current

owner, added his own touch by laying down a fuzzy black rug and hanging a few pictures, in no particular arrangement, here and there on the dim, white walls.

Crystalline bubbles framed Ted's slender shoulders as he rested against the side of the tub. He always sat at the end where the faucet was. He was very considerate in that way.

"Ted, I was thinking. That is a terrible painting to have in the bathroom. It is more of a kitchen painting," Lilly said. She juttied a wet thumb over her head. "Don't you think?"

"I don't think it's too terrible," Ted replied. Two fat stripes of Mediterranean blue, slashed with thinner stripes of greens, oranges, reds and purples. This is what the painting consisted of. Lilly slipped her fair body further under the water. "It reminds me of those jars you got at the fair as a little kid," she said. "You know, the ones with the colored sand."

It would look better hanging above the stove, Ted thought. That is what he decided they would do in the morning.

The bathtub was open to the rest of the room;

curtain-free and doorless. A young fern dangled from a hook near the window, and a delicate cobweb had been spun in the lower corner of that same room. The strings of the web shone in the Autumn moonlight.

"I have always thought of you in the outdoors, whenever I think of you," Lilly said as she rubbed the bottom of Ted's foot with the sole of her own.

"What do you mean?" Ted was painfully aware of the bad habit he had of forgetting to trim his toenails, so he was careful not to scratch her skin.

"In nature. I see you, and then I see a forest, or just a grove of trees, and you'll be standing near a mountain. Out in the open. Lots of sky."

"Is it out West, or in a foreign country? An island?"

Lilly thought for a moment, then said, "Definitely out West. It is more of a brown and green nature scene, not as blue as I feel nature would be in Europe."

"Are you with me when you picture me? Or am I alone?"

Before answering, Lilly reached up to refasten a stray lock of her brown hair that had fallen from the grip of the bobby-pin.

"You are alone, just because I focus on you. I daydream about you."

Ted wrapped his ankles around Lilly's waist and repositioned his head against the porcelain.

He said, "I visualize you more as a painting. I forget who the artist is, but it is like a painting done by one of those Renaissance guys. You remind me of...a...Botticelli!" Ted was very pleased with his description.

"Why Renaissance?"

"Because. You have beautiful dark hair, pale skin, big eyes. Just the way I imagined a perfect woman."

"Are you saying I'm fat?" Lilly's body tensed up.

Ted remembered the trip they had taken a couple of weeks ago to the museum. Visions of fleshy Reubens flashed before his eyes.

"No, no, no," cried Ted. "You're just so beautiful. In fact, I don't know what I like more, you or the painting or you."

Ted thought that what he had told Lilly did not sound at all like he wanted it to. He had meant to flatter and charm her.

"Ted, what the hell," Lilly said. She folded her arms across her breasts.

"You know what I mean, sweetie, don't you?"

Lilly laughed, "Things are going really good for us, Ted, aren't they. I mean, we really get along pretty good."

"Of course we do. I love spending time with you. But I also want to make sure we are on the same page."

"What do you mean?" Asked Lilly.

"Well, I know it's not going to sound very

nice, but I can't see myself ever married to you."

"What?"

"You know what I mean, Lil. I just can't see us getting married. You're not the one I pictured as a wife. Since I was young, I always knew that the minute I laid eyes on the woman who was to be my wife, I'd know in that instant. There would be no messing around, none of this dating nonsense."

"I believe you're insane," Lilly said. "What even made you think I was interested in marrying you?"

"I just want to make sure you know, that's all. To make sure we're on the same page."

"Yes, well fuck you." Lilly rarely swore, so Ted knew that she meant it.

Lilly told him, "Lasting love is not something you just fall into, Ted. It develops over time and grows into a meaningful relationship. It doesn't just happen."

"I like to believe that it does." Ted continued to speak in his low, meticulous tone.

"How can you just sit there and tell me things like that and not see how much you're hurting me?"

Ted said, "I know that it's not very nice, but it's the truth. I believe in brutal honesty. Most people don't like to hear it, but I want to be up front with you. I've always been up front with you. We're friends."

Lilly curled her legs under her body in the

tepid water. She scraped at a patch of red paint.

“Ted, I think you’re making a big mistake. You have ruined a perfectly good thing!”

“See, I don’t think so. I mean, we are still close and I still want to be with you and see you.”

“What am I to do? Pretend that it doesn’t hurt?”

“No. I know that it hurts. But I’m sure you have been in relationships where the other person was more into it than you.”

“Actually,” Lilly said, “I seem to be the one getting dumped all the time.”

“But it’s not like that. I don’t see any reason why we have to stop being so close, stop being in a relationship. We have been happy, right? I just know that I don’t want to marry you.”

The spider that made his home in the windowsill cobweb began creeping along the lip of the bathtub. Ted decided it was time to go to bed. His skin had become puckered, and the bubbles had melted into the pale green water.

He stood fully upright, then stretched out his hand and helped Lilly to stand up.

“Ted, you are a stupid, stupid man.”

Of course, Ted already knew that.

The crisp chill of the evening breezed into Ted’s bedroom through a tiny crack in the window. The gold moon painted stripes of light across the bed, the walls, the floor.

Cobwebs filled each corner of the boxed room, and each thread spun silver in the moonlight. The

webs floated delicately, seemingly indisposible, yet they hung on and hung on. The bare, white walls had only one or two paintings on them to break up the emptiness.

Lilly lay awake most of the night. She drifted in and out of sleep. Once, she opened her eyes and Ted was holding her. When she woke up the next time, he had his back to her.

Ted tried to fall asleep. His earlier words hovered above the bed, coming together and then shifting apart, like tiny drops of water in a large pool that kept growing wider and wider. The words were out there and there was no pulling them back in, back into his mouth and his heart.

The time had passed. This Ted knew.



SETH LOY

ALARM CLOCKS

Alarm clocks.

The words could start a heated debate among politicians, or frighten a group of retired, church-going women. It was the subject of talk shows and chat rooms, of Sunday morning sermons.

Some said it was the work of the devil.

Others said it was fallout, a nuclear experiment gone terribly wrong.

Or a government conspiracy.

Workers started showing up hours late for work, catching dirty looks while sneaking into their cubicles. Their bosses soon grew tired of it all--the fudged time sheets, the missed meetings, the frequent calls in sick. People bought new clocks. Sales skyrocketed. But they simply wouldn't work. It was their silent revenge for years of abuse--running slow on the same old battery, being ignored, slapped, pounded, or knocked carelessly to the floor.

Soon even the bosses were showing up late for work.

"Well, what do you know. The son of a bitch was telling the truth."

It was a national epidemic. A bleary-eyed president appeared on a nationally televised, late morning broadcast (six o'clock traffic and weather updates were a thing of the past) promising "immediate results." A special task force was assigned--scientists

and technicians and Nobel prize winners, but after two weeks still nothing was solved.

By then things had gotten even worse. The NBS-4 atomic clock at the National Institute of Standards and Technology was "acting strangely," according to scientists. The international Time Bureau at Paris reported similar problems with six of its other laboratory-maintained atomic clocks. Big Ben was shut down due to "technical difficulties."

Out of necessity arose the specialty stores--"For all your chronological needs"--everything from mechanical wrist chronometers (which depended solely upon body movement, and were at best only halfway accurate), to pocket sundials, hourglasses and Clepsydras, personalized shadow clocks or gnomons, and even such rare and collectible items as Japanese lantern clocks, still infused with museum dust.

It was a bleak time indeed.

And then the news broke.

Scientists at NASA reported receiving signals from outer space.

Intelligent life. Martians. CNN dropped its coverage of the "Atlantic Time Zone Crisis" and began hourly updates from Cape Canaveral.

The president was glad to have attention diverted away from the clocks; his administration was catching hell from the press for its handling of the situation. His advisors told him meeting with the aliens would do wonders for his image and might even sway public opinion back in his favor. It was an election year, after all. If nothing else he would be remembered as the president who ushered in (as he planned to say in his welcoming speech) "this grand new era of space relations."

The reception took place on the front lawn of the White House one bright morning in early April. The grounds were packed. The president and his advisors, plus foreign dignitaries and representatives from around the globe stood overlooking the enormous crowd. Marching band music filled the air. Reporters were everywhere it seemed, crowding as close to the stage as secret service agents would allow. The president joked with one of his aides, saying the press hadn't been in such a frenzy since last year's allegations of sexual misconduct. A couple of wayward stars suddenly appeared on the western

horizon, growing brighter and increasing in number as they approached the White House lawn. The people held their breath in expectation.

Eventually a dozen shining saucers came to land upon a sectioned-off area of the grounds. The crowd let out a cheer.

After all the formalities, introductions, and several lengthy speeches by the president and other heads of state, the Martian representative stepped up to a specially lowered podium, cleared his throat, and began to speak.

"Good day, my friends," said the alien in a clipped British accent.

It was known that the aliens spoke English (and many other languages as well, as it turned out) since the first radio transmissions several months ago. (Everyone saw the surprise on the president's face as the first message from the aliens was decoded over the speakerphone in the Oval Office, and out came the summery voice of a southern belle drawling, "How y'all doin'?" The president just sat there unable to respond, and finally the woman--the alien--explained how they had taken the time to learn some "human talk" on the way over. From the background came Desi Arnaz' unmistakable voice shouting, "Lucy! I'm home!" followed by laughter.)

After the press conference later that afternoon the president and the Martian representative had a chance to speak in private. The two of them were discussing various matters of state, trying to set a date for the next meeting.

A certain question had been bugging the president.

"But why now? Why didn't you ever make contact with us before?"

"We've been busy, actually. There were some bombings recently and our government was afraid to make the trip, for fear of retaliation," the alien said. "Of course, in the end we decided to go ahead with it. After all, we couldn't just turn our heads in your time of need, now could we?"

"I'm not sure what you mean," said the president, surprised the alien knew anything about their recent problems with the clocks. He had carefully avoided the issue. It was embarrassing.

"Come now. Do you think our arrival today is entirely a coincidence?"

"You mean this has something to do with the clocks?"

"Quite," said the alien, whose turn-of-the-century British accent was very convincing. All he was missing was a pipe. "We've come to help, although we really must be leaving soon. It's grown quite volatile back home. You understand."

A blank stare appeared on the Martian's face then, and he nodded almost imperceptibly.

"I must return to the ship. You may accompany me if you wish."

"Yes, of course."

They walked out across the vast green lawn to where the gleaming ships awaited.

"You needn't be worried. Believe it or not, we went through a similar problem ourselves a while back. And, of course, we came through it all right. It was just a matter of perspective, really," the alien said. "Things became much simpler after the change took effect. It solved that, too."

"What did?" the president asked as they approached the ships.

"You see, everything runs smoothly now—the ships, the computers. What is the word. . .synchronization. Yes. Although I guess that shouldn't come as such a surprise," the alien smiled knowingly.

"They tell us when to eat, when to sleep—they even

informed us as to your problem here on earth. They wished to see that things were progressing in a natural order. If you would like, I could show you the. . ."

An oddly familiar, high-pitched beeping noise suddenly filled the air. It seemed to be emitting from the ship. It sounded like, well. . .the president supposed it sounded like the Martian equivalent of, say, an alarm clock.

"We would like to thank you for your hospitality. Thank you for the—" The beeping sound grew more insistent and a pained expression appeared on the alien's face, as if he had grown sick of the noise.

"Good bye. We apologize for not staying longer. We'll be in touch, as you say. Best of luck in your transition!"

With that the alien abruptly shook the president's hand and turned to board his ship.

"Thanks again!" the alien shouted, sounding strangely like a prisoner as the door slid shut behind him.

"Oh, boy," said the president, watching the spaceships rise higher and higher until finally they were only specks of light on the horizon, fading into the glare of the setting sun.

The End

DAWN RAFTERY
WHITE SILENCE

The white silence of the room surrounds me, looms over me, swallows me into its maw so that the shrieks stick in my throat like fish bones. I stand beside the bed, gulping in air, trying to forget the white silence, to focus on her face, so small and lost amid the sprawling whiteness of the sheets. The girl resting in the bed is my best friend, a golden goddess, with her cap of copper-colored ringlets now shorn and her laughing, silver-blue eyes closed. I squeeze my

eyes shut, but the white silence is inside me, storming into my mouth, roaring down my throat, settling in the very center of myself like chips of ice.

I reel backward, clawing for air. A slender hand snakes out, wraps tightly around my wrist, then drags me forward. My gaze travels up the slim white arm to the body—her body. She's sitting up, her head tilted, her eyes questioning and unblinking.

Emma. The name stays frozen in my mouth.

"Rowen, how could you let it come to this? You know I hate hospitals. Why did you let this happen? I thought you were my friend, my best friend." Inch by excruciating inch, she pulls me closer until I'm practically hovering over her. "Why, Rowen, why?" she whispers in my ear.

I shake my head, tears spilling from my eyes. "You have it all wrong. I didn't mean for this to happen. I didn't know. I—"

She shoves me, and I flail backward, falling through the ground. My body jerks up, my eyes fly open. I'm slunked down in a chair. The sky outside the window is streaked rose and violet with the dwindling rays of the sun. My gaze flicks to the bed. She's still there, still asleep, her lashes like sable lace against the pale blue, half-moon shadows under her eyes. I laugh

nervously, but my laughter is short-lived. I notice she's kicked the covers down, and now I can see the gashes grinning luridly across her wrists. I tear my eyes away. A clock on the wall tells me I've been at the hospital for an hour and a half.

There's a tentative knock on the door, which is open, and I turn to look. It's Nick, one of her ex-boyfriends. I give him a searing scrutiny. His pale blond hair is mussed, and his Beatles tee-shirt and light brown cords are rumpled.

"What're you doing here?"

He shrugs helplessly.

"Oh, that's good. That's great," I say sarcastically.

"Look, I have as much right to be here as you," he says.

"Yeah, whatever. Well, I'm going now, so you don't have to hug the doorway any longer. Oh, and one more thing—try not to make anything worse. OK?" I smile grimly and stalk past him, ever so careful not to brush up against him.

"Bitch," he mutters.

His parting shot nips at my heels as I thread my way through the surging hallways to reach the front entrance of the six-story building. Relief flows over me when I finally step outside. Free from the suffocating whiteness and lime green lighting of the hospital, I drink in the cool evening air. The sky is a patch of crushed purple velvet dripping with tiny, sparkling gems.

I smile briefly, then head home. The two-block journey goes by swiftly. Pounding up the stairs to my apartment, I dig through the pockets of my

navy blue jacket for my keys. I live on the second floor of a three-story complex. It's just a one bedroom, but the living room is spacious, and there's a charm to the place. Locking the door behind me, I throw my keys on the kitchen counter. The light on my answering machine is blinking rapidly, but I'm not in the mood to talk to anyone.

Grabbing a Miller Lite from the refrigerator, I crack it open, the sound like a symphony to my ears, and plop down in front of the television. The remote control's not on the table. I search behind the couch, under the cushions, on top of the shelf. As a last resort, I manually turn on the television. The irony of the situation strikes me, but I don't laugh. I switch on an old episode of Seinfeld, hoping that good old Jerry and the gang will be able to squeeze a laugh out of me.

I return to the couch and pick up my beer again. Before long, I'm peeling off the label. The poster-plastered walls fall away, and I'm sitting in a seedy bar across from Emma, a pitcher of Bud between us. The silver-white smoke rolls above our head like tufts of cotton, and the music—a song by Janis—is so loud that we've given up on conversation. We've both been drinking heavily. Each time she lifts the mug to her lips, I catch a glimpse of her wrists, of the latticelike marks that gleam an ugly red against the ivory whiteness of her fragile, blue-veined skin.

I repress a shudder. I smile weakly when she suddenly looks up from her intense perusal of the carved writing on our table. She flashes a

smile back, and I can feel my own turn genuine. She runs a hand through her crop of curls—a habit she's had since junior high—and leans forward. She says something, but her words get swallowed in the cacaphony of sounds around us.

I scoot my mug to one side of the table and lean toward her. "What?" I shout.

"What d'ya wanna do after this?"

I shrug. "I don't know. Probably go home. Why? What do you wanna do?"

We go back to drinking our drinks and sinking into our own thoughts. With a wink, she pulls a cigarette from my pack. Sighing, I toss her my lighter. She catches it in one swipe, lights the cigarette, and exhales a cloud of smoke which accidentally blows in my eye.

I blink. I'm sitting in front of the television, a beer bottle in one hand, the shredded label in the other. I set both down and light a cigarette. I watch the smoke drift out of my mouth, miniature haloes without their angels. I swill down some more beer. I find the remote control under a heap of magazines and flip through the channels. I've forgotten that I'm smoking. My cigarette is half-finished already.

"Shit!" I say, picking it up and taking another deep drag.

"Shit!" Emma is dangling from the stairway railing; her knees buckled under after only the first few steps.

Adam rushes forward to help her up. Laughing, I follow them up, unsteady myself. Pink Floyd drifts down the stairs from the party. When he opens up the door, one arm still slung around Emma's shoulders, everyone jammed into the apartment turns, blinking at the light from the hallway. I quickly close the door behind us, and eventually everyone turns back to what they were doing. Ahead of me, Adam guides Emma's faltering steps toward a couch and hunkers down before her. She slinks down, and her head lolls to one side. He bends his head down toward hers, and I glimpse her lips moving. I can guess what she's telling him—the music is putting her to sleep. It's an old trick.

I plunk down beside her just as Adam rises to his feet and winds his way to the stereo to look for a new CD. She turns her head and smiles crookedly at him. I smile back. There's groans when the music stops, but when Front 242's "Headhunter" fills the smoke-heavy air with its pulsating beat, everyone's happy. Emma jumps to her feet. A group of girls begin dancing, with Emma in the lead. She's in the center, dancing with enough fervor to draw every eye in the

room. She runs back and pulls me to my feet. I follow her to the middle and start dancing, too. I close my eyes, and the music carries me away. The stifling heat, the stale smells, the gawking strangers—they blur into the background until there's only the music.

A crash drowns out the music for only one second, but it's long enough to break my concentration. I open my eyes. Emma's lying on the floor, a knocked-over lamp next to her. Adam is immediately at her side. He sets the lamp upright, then eases her into a sitting position. She draws his face down to hers and kisses him. In spite of the dancers around them, they continue to kiss, her hands tangling in his long brown hair, his hands sliding up and down her back.

The phone rings, jangling me back to the present. I remain seated. After two rings, the answering machine picks it up.

"Hello? Rowen, I know you're there. Just pick up. OK?" Sigh. "Look, I'm really worried about Emma. We need to talk. When you stop feeling sorry for yourself, you know where to reach me."

Click. David—another one of Emma's ex-boyfriends, if three weeks constitutes a relationship. David, Emma, and I have been friends since our sophomore year in high school. Things didn't get screwed up until she started playing around with his head two months ago. That's when everything snowballed into the mess it is today. I warned David that getting involved with Emma would just break his heart. He ignored me. So I went to Emma and told her to leave him alone. She ignored me.

"But you don't like him!" I said accusingly as we drove to downtown Chicago in my car. "Why do you have to flirt with him if you don't like him, Emma?"

She arched a finely plucked eyebrow.

"Who says I don't like him?"

"Oh, come on. Stop playing the innocent. You don't like David, you didn't like Chris, Tom, Jack, Dan—do you need me to go down the whole fuckin' entire list? Why did you have to go after Adam, your old boyfriend's best friend? Can you look me in the eye and honestly say that you do not realize that what you do hurts people? Angela—your own cousin—was majorly infatuated with Adam. Maybe he wouldn't have liked her, but you didn't have to shit on her fantasy like you did. Don't you care about anyone?" I went on and on, and as usual, she nodded and didn't say a thing, except an occasional, "Yeah, I know it was wrong, but I was drunk."

"Being drunk is not an excuse to sleep with anyone you want!" I exploded.

"I spent four years of my life with Nick. I'm single now, Rowen. I can finally do what I want."

"That's the whole problem, Emma. Just because you're single doesn't mean you can do whatever you want. You still have to take other people's feelings into account, especially your friends. That's another thing. The people you're screwing over are your friends. You don't think there's something wrong with this picture?"

That was three nights ago. When I dropped her off at home that night, she hugged me good-bye, the vanilla scent of her shampoo engulfing me. I watched her walk up the driveway, her red-gold ringlets boluncing in the summer breeze, her slender shoulders drooping. Angela later told me over the phone that Emma slashed her wrists

repeatedly with a pair of scissors, then staggered into her younger brother's bedroom.

I never meant to feed her poison. I didn't know she would swallow my words down like bitter apple seeds. Nick, Adam, and all the others—they hurt her, too. They sucked the marrow out of her bones, the silver out of her eyes. They put the livid scars on her wrists, on her soul. And I—I failed her. I failed my best friend.

Light from cars zipping by in the street below slant through the windows, cutting into my vision. Tears brim my eyes, tears partly for her, partly for myself. Stumbling to my feet, I grab another beer from the refrigerator. Returning to the living room, I flick off the television and the lights. I pop a CD in the stereo, and a few seconds later, the bluesy strains of Nina Simone's "I Need a Little Sugar in my Bowl" oozes out of the darkness. I slouch down on the couch and stare up at the off-white, dimpled ceiling. The white silence of the room surrounds me, looms over me, swallows me into its maw so that the shrieks lodged in my throat topple backward.

I set my drink down too hard, and the beer foams up, spilling down the sides of the bottle. Leaping to my feet, I rush into the kitchen and rip some paper towels off the rack. I spin on my heel to go back, and the world whirls by. My eyelids snap shut.

I'm sitting cross-legged on the floor of my living room, chattering away, my hands fluttering in the air to accompany my speech. Emma's sprawled on the couch, her legs entwined with those of Dan.

Beer bottles clutter the surface of every table. I'm on my seventh. Realizing that no one's listening, I throw back my head and finish off the rest of my beer. Then I rivet my attention on the television; we're watching "Diabolique." Or at least I am. Dan and Emma are too engrossed in each other. Everyone else—Angela, Adam, and David—are curled up on the floor, passed out. The setting is conducive to sleep; the only light in the room comes from the few guttering candles and the television screen.

Untwisting my legs, I slowly rise to my feet. "Anyone need a beer?"

"Yeah, can you get me one?" Emma says. "How 'bout you, babe?"

Dan shakes his head. "No thanks."

Entering the kitchen, I putter around, trying to avoid having to return. I don't want to watch them grapple each other like touch-starved maniacs. But when I pull open the refrigerator room, releasing a sliver of coldlight across the apartment, I look over my shoulder. With me out of the room, they're groping as if they're in a hotel room and not my apartment.

Clearing my throat, I go back into the living

room. I hand Emma her beer and stretch my arms. "Well, I'm tired. I think I'm going to go to bed. I'll see you guys in the morning...umm, make that afternoon."

"Oh, do you have to go to bed?" Emma pouts.

I glance at Dan, who's nodding encouragingly, and smile. "Yeah, I've had a long day. Good night."

In my bed, I huddle under the covers. They've invaded my mind. I can't forget the sight of her long, pale white legs wrapped around his, her head cradled in the crook of his arm, even as she sent me smiles and chatted about how much she missed me now that I was going away to school.

That was a year ago. I've since graduated and moved back to my hometown. As I swipe up the beer with the paper towels, I rub much harder than I should. My eyes travel to the loveseat—the infamous loveseat—and I can feel my chest tightening.

The phone rings. Kneeling on the floor, I stare at it as it trills again and again like a demented parrot. Then, with a sigh, I straighten up and answer it.

UNTITLED

ELIZABETH MEHRER



FAMILY
SABRIER

ANTHONY
JUNE 25 1888 - JUNE 11 1967
HIS WIFE
FLORENCE MA
SEPT. 7 1894 - JAN. 11 1954

DOMINICK A. MAND...
191... 19...
E. SABRIER

WALK ON WATER, BUT BEWARE THE UNDERTOW
DOUGLAS GOODMAN

When the Holy Ghost descended upon Teddy's home, he was not ready, but is it not a silly assumption that anyone could ever be truly "prepared" for the Holy Ghost? Still, early one evening while Teddy cooked himself dinner, the Holy Ghost entered his house.

Teddy stopped in mid-carrot-cut and looked over his shoulder. He felt something watching him, but he knew not the identity. Not seeing anyone, he calmly recommenced the crk-crk-crking his carrots. He perfected his culinary duties, today a nice stuffed chicken, because he enjoyed cooking. Seating himself at the small dinner table he looked around again. Still he saw no one. This time, however, instead of returning to his dinner he loudly rose up from the wooden table (generously allowing the chair legs to scrape against the tiled floor) and stomped heavy-footed through his home. He opened the foyer closet door and pushed aside his new coats. Then he walked briskly upstairs, afraid that perhaps an intruder was hiding under his bed or waiting to ambush him from the guest room closet like so many murderers in the movies. Doors swung open quickly, but he stared into normal, untouched and messy rooms. The piles of books in his bedroom had not been inadvertently knocked over by an escaping intruder, and no one lurked in his bathroom. His guest room was intact, so he retreated downstairs

and finished his dinner, aware that something had entered his abode. After dinner he put on his walking sneakers; Teddy routinely walked around his neighborhood after good meals. He opened the front door at the same moment that a large Buick pulled up beside his lawn. An obese bald man wearing a gray business suit stepped out of the vehicle.

"Can I help you, sir?" Teddy asked the man approaching his house.

"I don't know, but--and this may sound crazy, could I come in your house? I do not know why, but I was driving home on the interstate, but instead of going home I drove until I arrived here. May I come in?"

"Of course, but I don't know that you're going to find anything."

The man wandered cautiously from room to room through Teddy's home like a hunter weaving slowly through an Amazon jungle, and Teddy watched the obese man enter the den. He stopped and looked back at Teddy. A large grin spread across his face. The man raised his hands, as if feeling something. "Thank you," he said, but not to Teddy. The man did not notice Teddy as he left the house and drove away.

"And the guy has this really weird grin on his face, and then he leaves. That's it. He just leaves," Teddy said over a beer above the sound of blues songs. His eyes glittered as he spoke to the woman beside him.

"Says nothing more? Not even, 'Thanks for letting me wander around your house?'" a black woman wearing a tight blouse asked Teddy. She swigged the last of her beer and ordered another one from the bartender.

"Nothing, Clara. You want to know what I think? This is going to sound as crazy as anything else that

happened to me today, but I think the Holy Ghost is in my living room."

"What you talkin' bout, Teddy?" she laughed in her best Gary Coleman impersonation. She smiled warmly at her friend. "What makes you think that? Are you pregnant or something?"

"No, no. It's nothing like that. I mean, there are no burning bushes or storms, but I tell you, Clara, there is a definite. . . presence in my home. Something is there that wasn't there before five this evening."

"How do you know it's not Poltergeist or something from a Stephen King novel? You might wake up with a clown dragging you under the bed, Teddy."

"You're not acting seriously, Clara. Listen, I'm going to take off. You want to come see the Ghost?"

"Hell, no, I don't want to see the Holy Ghost. What if it tells me I'm going to Hell? Did you ever think about that possibility? Cause that is one prophecy I would rather hear later in life. Besides, I have an early rotation tomorrow."

When Teddy's Saturn rolled into the garage, ten people stood waiting outside his house. The crowd stared with wide-eyed wonder at his simple brick house as if a great light pierced the shingles and illuminated the sky. The small crowd moved toward Teddy. An older black woman in a thin sweater and slippers touched his arm and asked, "May I come inside? There is someone in there I must see."

Teddy drew back in surprise, as if he was incapable of dissuading her. He opened the door and watched them enter his home, overlooking his dirty dishes and scattered laundry, and unlike the man from earlier in the evening they did not wander aimlessly through the

house. Instead the crowd gathered in his living room and extended their arms high in the air as if to feel the presence. Teddy watched each of the strangers react to the presence he could no longer deny. Each person showed a different reaction. A teen-ager broke down into tears, but Teddy could not describe whether they were tears of joy or misery. A young couple sat next to his couch and folded their hands together. The couple, Latinos in their early twenties, seemed peaceful, like lovers watching a beautiful sunset. An older black woman lay on her back in the center of the living room.

Midnight passed, and Teddy wished to go to bed, but every time he thought the last person had left another lost soul showed up at his doorstep and queried for an audience with his living room. The older black woman had fallen asleep on his floor. He brought her a blanket, but she slept so peacefully that she never noticed his charity. "Well, if the Holy Ghost truly is in my house, I should be protected tonight."

He left the door wide open. The summer wind kept his home cold, but not so cold that he was up all night.

Teddy kept the door open that morning, and as he departed for work, another man, this one in his late twenties, ran into the house roaring laughter and fell to his knees in front of the older black woman, who still slept peacefully. When Teddy returned home, however, he was surprised to see no cars adorning his lawn. A single run-away child covered in grime and dirt and no older than ten stood in his living room, smiling the same weird smile of contentment that many others offered the world after exposing themselves to the presence. As the boy in rags walked out of the den, Teddy offered the

GENE TANTA UNTITLED





child some food, but the child paid no attention to Teddy. He walked outside and turned down the side street, disappearing into another suburban maze.

The old black woman still rested underneath the presence, and when Teddy checked her pulse, he discovered that she was dead. He had never dealt with reviving a dead person. Frantic and bewildered, he first called Clara. "What should I do? I have a dead woman in my house!"

"Man, that is one messed up situation you got there, T-Daddy. I think you should move."

"Hello, Clara! A woman, as dead as Einstein or Davey Crockett, is lying in the middle of my living room. What do you propose I do about it?"

"So call the cops, Teddy. Call the Pope. Call the Psychic Hotline. Hee! Hee! I'll see you tomorrow night, okay? I'm in the middle of a date."

When the police arrived, first they wanted to rope off Teddy's house, and then one officer arrested Teddy. A few minutes later, several white vans appeared on his lawn, each with bright blue and yellow characters painted on the side. Men wearing cameras and chained together by microphone wires ushered themselves quickly across the lawn to Teddy and his arresting officer. Bright camera lights burst across the city's silhouette below the evening sky's kaleidoscope. Several paramedics escorted the covered body of the dead woman across the lawn. The men chained by microphones talked glibly in many tongues.

"What can you say about the death of this woman?"

"Did you really find her dead in your house, or did you purposely kill her, and if so, are you a member of the Klan?"

"How does being arrested make you feel, sir?"

Teddy squinted into the explosive lights but said nothing.

"Do you think that O.J. is a murderer?"

"Sir, what can you say about the accusation that the Holy Ghost has entered your home, and has it done anything of significance, such as move furniture or granted you political immunity?"

Teddy asked the man, "Where did you hear that the Ghost resided in my home?" The microphoned man did not answer Teddy. He stared at him, as if wondering for himself why he had asked the question.

"Perhaps you should go inside," Teddy said. The man no longer concerned himself with Teddy or the accusations. He dropped his microphone and walked toward the house, where a small crowd waited for entry, but a sentry officer repelled all entrances.

Clara appeared from nowhere. Her clothes seemed mismatched and bedraggled. A tall, muscular man stood next to her. "Teddy, what happened here? I heard on the television that someone died at your house."

"I called the police like you said, remember?"

"Oh. Not really." She blushed, looking at the man. "I was busy," she said as she squeezed her friend's hand.

At the same moment a sheriff's sirens screamed into the driveway. The sheriff jumped from the car and launched a verbal assault onto the arresting officer. "Let this man go," he said. "He is no criminal. And get rid of these lines!"

The sheriff smiled at Teddy, and suddenly Teddy recognized him as one of the ten people who waited for his return from the bar the night before. "I wondered what happened to you guys after you left the

den. Now I guess I know." Teddy did not realize he was thinking out loud. The sheriff dissipated both spectator and officer and then apologized again to Teddy. As he left, Clara's date asked for his speechless woman, "Why did he do that? Are you in with the P.D.?"

"No, that was one of the people who visited the Ghost last night." Teddy gathered himself and said, "Where are my manners? Would either of you like to come in? I can make some wonderful tea or offer you a beer." Clara looked at her clothes and then declined the offer, smiling brightly. "I don't think I look appropriate, but maybe some other time."

"Do you think He really cares how you look, Clara?" But as much as Teddy pleaded, it did no good; Clara would not enter his house.

The next morning when Teddy descended the staircase, his hand lightly touching the banister, he saw three people in the living room. An Asian man stood on Teddy's sofa with his face in his feet, and a blonde woman chuckled quietly. A third person, the reporter from last night, lay on the floor. Immediately Teddy ran to the man's side and checked his pulse, but the man was alive. Teddy prepared a pot of vanilla bean coffee and sat in the living room recliner. Ever since the Holy Ghost's descent into his home, Teddy had stopped watching television in the den, and not

wanting to disturb the visitors but wanting to receive the news, he subscribed to the Austin American Statesman. As he unfolded the paper a thought occurred to him. He placed his coffee cup on his plate and watched the people in the living room. He looked around the palatial room. A tiny bead of sweat dotted his forehead; the bead had been with him all of his adult life, emerging any time he concentrated hard on something.

Half an hour later the Asian man began to cry despondently, and then he exited the house. Teddy took the sofa in his hands and struggled with its weight as he fought to maneuver it into the kitchen. He also relocated his end tables into the guest room and the television into his bedroom so that he could watch the news in peace. The evacuation of his den ate up his day, and when he had finished he called Clara to meet her at another local bar. They danced through several songs and then talked work over several drinks, but eventually the conversation shifted toward Teddy's house.

"You know what I think is the craziest thing about having the Holy Ghost in my house, Clara?"

"That you can never tell Him He's worn out His welcome?"

"No, He could never do that. The first night, when the Ghost came to my home, I knew He was there, but I tried to ignore Him, like maybe He would go away if I pretended that He wasn't there. Can you imagine trying to ignore God?"

There was a pause as Teddy waited for Clara to say something, but her words fell from her lips before she could say anything. Finally she said, "Well, you have yourself a special moment with God, but I think I am going to meet a man."

Teddy thought dating would perhaps shift the tension in the air, so he said, "Who? That same guy you were with the night of my arrest?"

"Oh, no. Honey, he is ancient history. Too young for me. He is a freshman running back for the university. But tonight I am meeting a real tasty treat. Deborah from pediatrics hooked me up."

"Why don't you ever come to the house, Clara? You haven't visited me since the Ghost's appearance."

"Oh, don't get me wrong, Teddy. I would love to hang out with God, but I don't think we would have much to talk about. You know, He would probably want to discuss the virtues and the vices while I would want to discuss 'Sexy New Tips to Keep Your Lover in Bed' from the latest issue of Vogue."

"But you're a doctor by profession, Clara, and your job demands that you work with terminal cases. Don't you think that a visit would help your bedside manner around the terminals?"

"Teddy, if I don't want to see God then that's my own business. Look, I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but I just do not want to visit your place anymore." She held his wrist in her long fingers and watched his arm hairs rise beneath her touch. She jerked her hand away.

Clara stopped calling Teddy and stopped returning his calls. Teddy did not understand what he had done to ostracize himself, so he concentrated on publishing a paper. With years as a doctor came experience, so when he read a younger, inexperienced doctor's publication sometimes he could easily see loopholes and pitfalls that made that paper easily refuted. As a result of the publication process, Teddy spent less time at home.

One day he looked up and realized three months had passed since the Ghost had come to his home.

In the final week of June he mailed his paper for publication review and returned home. His Saturn crawled into the garage, and as usual all his house lights streaked through windows like a miniature Hallmark Christmas home, and several cars were parked by the curb. He entered his house through a door connecting the garage to the den underneath the staircase. As usual, various people positioned themselves in diverse postures with their arms raised and gazed into the presence. Two men, however, did not react to the presence. They paced back and forth through the house as if searching for something important.

Teddy went into his kitchen to make some dinner. He was thinking that a succulent Asian dish would be appropriate for dinner. One of the searching men walked up to the kitchen counter where Teddy was removing his wok. "Hey, if you don't mind me asking, why is everybody else staring at nothing in your living room?"

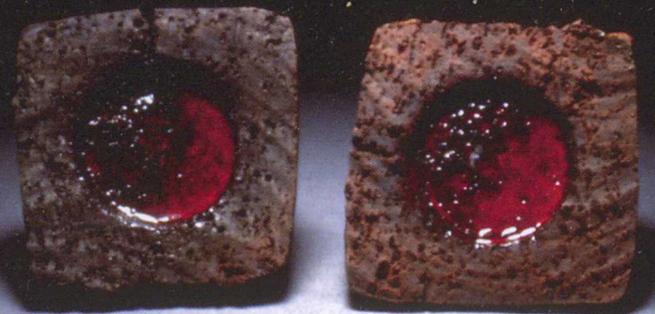
Teddy looked at the man in shock, "You mean you're not here for the Ghost?"

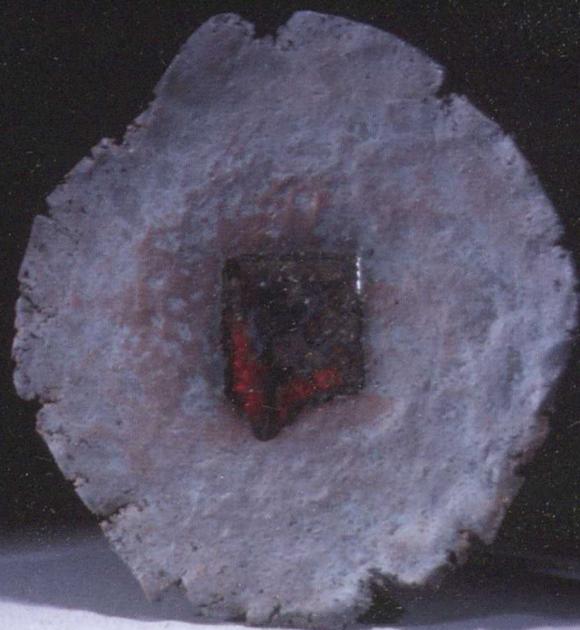
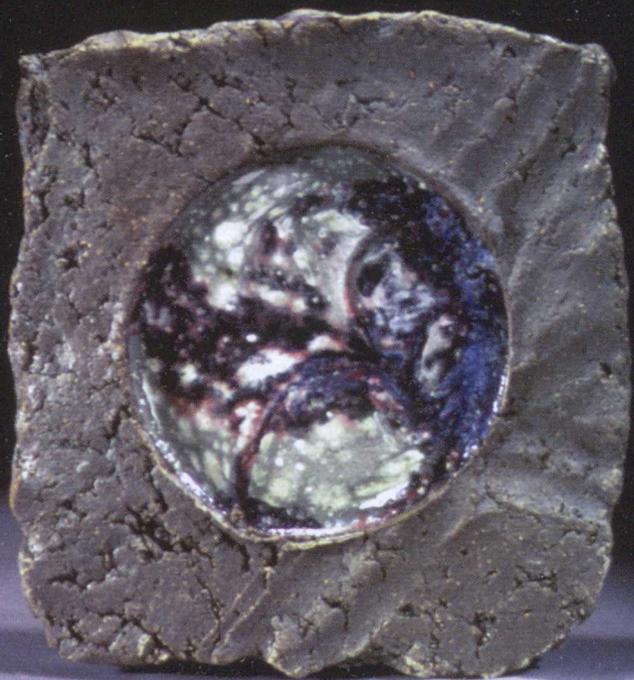
"No, but the door was open." The man flashed a smile. "I'm here for your furniture."

"I don't understand."

"We are robbers. We have already loaded all your

NICK TOMASIC UNTITLED





stereo equipment into the back of our truck. Now don't move fast, ace. I have a gun, and I'll use it on a dumb stump like you, so don't test me. Why would you leave your door open?"

Teddy looked at the man's hands; the robber held a gun in his gloved palm. "Now, if you'll come with me," the robber motioned to the front door.

When Clara arrived his hands were tied to the light post outside his home. He sat uncomfortably, shifting from side to side and stamping his feet for company.

"How long have you been there, cracker?"

Teddy glanced at the descending sun. "Something like two hours, I think. What time is it?"

"Half past seven," she said as she untangled and untied the nylon chord. "What in God's fury happened here, Teddy?"

Teddy explained everything to Clara, and she suggested he get a drink. He offered her something from his bar, but she declined. "C'mon, honey, let's go somewhere where we can be alone."

They skipped the noise and action of the downtown pubs and settled for a nice quiet bar where ties were a requisite of the dress code. After a cool nourishing drink of wine, Teddy said, "I was under the impression that you were avoiding me."

"Well that's because I was avoiding you, Teddy, but you know that I can't keep away from a rascal like you forever."

"I knew that all I had to do was wait and you would come back. So what bothers you, Clara?" She wore concern and worry on her face as bright as any neon sign.

"What is nagging at me is that my best friend

believes the Holy Ghost is making your home His crib. It's like Apollo told you he wanted the Delphic Oracle constructed, but the problem is that nothing told you to do this. Do you know how wack that sounds? I am willing to grant you some leverage and admit that the strangest things have been happening to you lately, but are you sure that it is the Holy Ghost? I mean, what kind of proof have you been given that this is God?"

"None," he said candidly as he sipped from his wine. "Nothing has been said to me, nothing has been shown to me, and no prophesies have violated my dreams. I have no evidence to support my belief that the Holy Ghost is in my house."

Clara stared at her wine pensively. Slowly she said, "Then what makes you think that it isn't something else? Look at all the bad fortune you've suffered lately. Zombies overran your house, you have been arrested and nearly thrown into jail, and robbers stole all your material possessions."

"And if what I owned were truly important to my life then I would be angry, but none of those things matter to me. I live a good life. I have been blessed by escaping poverty and disease and a thousand other blessings I should count. I have a college education, I have liberties and freedoms. Who needs a car or a stereo?"

"But you earned them on the ills of your patients, you bastard! They are yours. Don't you understand? Ever since that thing has come to your house, your life has been slowly eroding away, like not even your heart belongs to you any more. Dammit! You are so stubborn, Teddy. I'm telling you to drop this monk's facade. You have so much faith, and it's really cute, but you're not walking on water with Jesus, Teddy. You've been fooled."

Teddy's eyes darkened. His face lowered. He put down the glass of wine he had sipped all night and asked her, "What do you think is in my house, Clara?"

Crystalline tears fell down her thin cheeks.

"Teddy, can't you see the signs? That's Lucifer in your house, not God."

As Clara drove Teddy home, his face belied his thoughts, showing his concerns and fears. Adamantly he refused to believe Clara, but as his face closed tightly around him the seeds of doubt warred with his mind.

As he opened the door to leave, she said, "I'm afraid."

"Of what?"

"I refuse to enter your house for the same reason I refuse to enter a church. I am afraid of my life and the things I have done. I am afraid of what God will think of me." She nestled her thin face in his neck and tried to stifle a soft whine. He curled Clara into his arms and hugged her tightly. "Love, I want you to hear something. Stop crying. Shh, I have something you need to hear."

As she looked up at him in the dark through her bleary eyes, she barely saw his charming smile. "Clara, God doesn't care about who you were or what you did in your past. That's one of the great things about Him. He recognizes change."

She grabbed his arm tightly. "Clara, if you are willing

She grabbed his arm tightly. "Clara, if you are willing to change your life from here, then God will accept you."

"How do I know that I can change?"

"My father taught me a trick in life so that I would never have to worry about what God and Jesus thought about me. He told me that no matter where I was or what I was doing, all I had to do was imagine that Jesus stood by my side. If I was proud of where I was, who I was, and what I was doing, and I was willing to let Jesus see me, then I would never have any problems in life. You know what? My father was right. I never worry about God's opinion of me."

Clara left Teddy bathed in black night on the front lawn. His house, too, was dark. He assured her that he was all right and that he would look for new furniture with her in the morning. They would leave around nine.

When he was alone, meaning that people still attended to the Ghost inside his home, but that no one approached him while on his lawn, he stumbled into something very tall and dark. At first Teddy believed he had run into a wall. As the cloak plummeted to the ground, however, Teddy realized he stood in audience with the Dark Lord. Not that he saw a red satyr or a man with a forked tail. But Teddy knew that this apparition with the taunting smile was Satan.

"I wanted to congratulate you," Satan said in a very soft and plain voice, "on discovering my little ruse. I was beginning to wonder when you would figure out that all those people were seeking salvation from me."

"You are lying to me, and I don't believe you, so if you will let me pass, I want to sleep."

"On what? You have no bed. Burglars took

everything, remember?"

"All I ever owned God gave me."

Satan chuckled. Then mockingly he repeated what Teddy said. "You sound like Job. Is that it? Do you think that you are Job, and that all this is a war between God and I over you? Do you think that you are that important in the cosmos?"

"No, I do not. I confess to knowing nothing. And I do not need to know."

"Ignorance and folly go hand in hand, little man."

"I owe you no report, so go away now, and leave me to my bed. Seeing you fortifies what I have believed ever since He entered my home. It is the Holy Ghost, and you are trying to frighten me." He made for his front door with the apparition following him closely.

"Yes I am here to frighten you, but I have honorable intentions. I want you to consider Clara's and my arguments. Why would God send the Holy Ghost, Ted? Doesn't that seem a bit contrived? After all, we know so little about what the Ghost looks like, so artists universally represent Him with a dove. The Bible spends all those chapters dealing with God and Christ and their works toward man. How much is really said about the Holy Ghost, this third leaf of the shamrock? Almost nothing. And now you believe that this thing inside your house is the Holy Ghost? Not a demon? Not a devil? Not some arcane unholy terror that I have unleashed upon this world at your expense?"

Ted finally reached the front door, which, as always, was open. As his fingers wrapped around the doorknob, he turned to face Satan, and in a moment of triumph said, "I have met a beautiful woman for the first time tonight, and now I am tired. You ask me questions, and

you want the answers from me, but I am not God or Jesus or the Holy Ghost. I do not profess to know the answers. I am a human being, and I follow the will of God, whatever it may be. I follow His Will with patience and acceptance, but if you would like to say anything more, then I call your bluff. Please come inside. Everyone is welcome here. Chat with the Holy Ghost. I am sure you have much to discuss since you have known each other for so long. I, on the other hand, am waking up early tomorrow morning to search for new furniture."

Before he could leave, though, the apparition said, "You have faith, Teddy," and then it vanished. Teddy did not care. He ascended his staircase and quietly shut his bedroom door so as not to bother the people in his living room. He fell asleep and dreamed of Clara, who he had always loved but never admitted to loving. And he knew.

AT THE POND CHRISTINE BROVELLI

At the Pond

Flee from me—

I cup you in a
boy-brand grasp,
sour to the
tongue tip and
why

don't you
poke a quick straw
through, and
swallow up my
watered sighs,

as smooth as breath
on pearls
on flesh.

ALARM (VERB TENSE) GENE TANTA

Alarm (Verb Tense)

If your shoulders should brush pain,
know this avulsion runs
with his thin pails
worn but full. And

will weld them well, mouth
held, pinned with pencils to the ground.
Granpa's felling ax will split your
breath. (This morning palms against his face.) Beaten floor

proves water cold next to
heavy muscle. His two hands, blind
as lead crotch the stasis line; he waits
inside the shrinking room with parts of phonographs.

Boiling whiskey, he
pumps reality by the light of his teeth.
Patient, for beauty's attrition
will make bricks for the atoll of love, pull

splinters, atone for the atrophy
which builds inside the chambers of your heart,
charge the cavity its tenant thirst, condemn
scar tissue to lilies of the avalanche. You suggest some

light through dusty drapes
for this dull dance with attenuation; I
admit your comfort but see room in the draft, his
arms around a tree.

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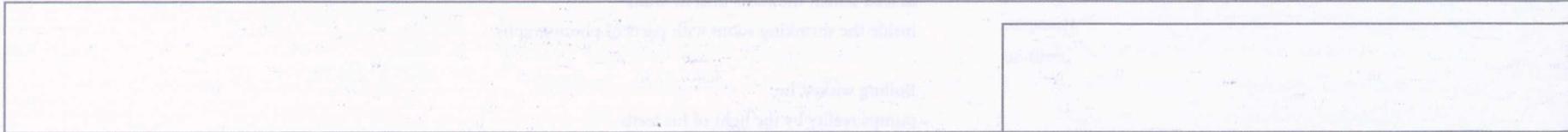
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Our intent is simple: to present the diversity and abilities of our creative community, and to preserve the images and words as they are.

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