

# THE GARLAND





# **THE GARLAND**

The Art and Literature Magazine of  
Loyola College

**the garland** volume 19, Spring 2006

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# **Editor-In-Chief**

Craig Bresciani

# **Associate Editors**

Thomas Korp  
Michael Giuliano

# **Faculty Advisor**

Dr. Daniel McGuinness

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## Editor's Note

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As I sat down to write this editors note, with no particular direction in mind, hoping only to convey some meaningful thoughts on the importance of art and literature in today's society, it suddenly occurred to me that most of the work was already done for me. The fiction, poetry, and photography found in this year's Garland need no introduction from myself; the cover image of the television, that vessel of instant entertainment, smashed and rendered useless, says more on the importance of works than I ever could.

I wish I could say that the cover image was put there with the purposeful intention of a grand statement, yet alas, as most of these things turn out, it sort of all just fell into place. As such, I simply want to take the time to invite you to sit down, put your feet up, turn the television off, and enjoy the creative talents of these artists.

I'd like to thank the contributors, and all those who submitted pieces for review. Without your drive, and passion to create, none of this would be possible. To Tom Korp and Mike Giuliano, my associate editors, I'd also like to extend my appreciation; your help was key to the success of this issue.

Finally, I'd like to thank Dr. McGuiness, not only for giving me the opportunity to do this but also for the countless laughs in the classroom, which I'll carry with me long after I leave this campus.

-Craig Bresciani

# Rejuvenate the Wristwatch

by Matthew Rooney

Rejuvenate the wristwatch.  
Sate the soda-pop.  
Pacify the planner  
with plans for some later date.  
Crush the cross,  
(though not completely)  
but please be sure to  
rejuvenate the wristwatch.

Attack the armchair,  
the obstinate armchair.  
Flee the cathedral,  
(cruise like a Corvette,  
but don't curse  
at the cathedral)  
and remember to  
rejuvenate the wrist watch.

Imbue the blackboard  
with your thoughts.  
Infuse the bedpost  
with your dreams.  
Release the staircase  
from its misery.  
Have mercy on the armchair, too.  
(In fact, let mercy prevail)  
but,  
regardless of all this,  
regularly  
rejuvenate your wristwatch.

Hanging a Strand of Festive Lights,  
I Reconsider My Limitations \_\_\_\_\_  
by Laryssa Wirstiuk

I drape the green-coated cord  
over a nail I have positioned  
in the drywall, toning the bulbs  
to point inward from the outline  
each works to create in the room,  
the contained bursts metered  
and evenly spaced, pulsing.

I want to rescind what I said  
the evening you described  
a blue spruce you had found  
within the boundaries of your  
property, its branches strong  
for you to hang from, its roots  
planted firmly enough in dirt.

I cling to the strand of lights,  
remembering the evergreen.  
I conceal no bad intentions. I do  
want you to return, but not  
so I might kiss you, so I can  
implore your arms to demolish  
the drywall, to give me space.

I will hang this strand of  
festive lights from the emptiness.

## The Gift and the Giving

by Ross Losapio

I gave her a poem.  
But it wasn't a poem, it was a dead bird,  
Brought to her in the fanged mouth  
Of a shambling, brown-haired beast.  
I meant it as a gift,  
Hunted it down through my shadowy-forest mind  
And killed it amongst a sheaf of paper.  
The blood flowed like ink  
And the ink pulsed like blood.  
I made a mess of it...  
The giving, not the bird, I think.  
I dropped it at her feet,  
Dust collecting on my lingering slaver.  
To be sure, she was shocked  
And for a moment recoiled  
But ultimately accepted,  
Seeing the meaning and not the ugly act  
And maybe even the beauty of the plumage  
That I so wanted her to see.  
Maybe next time I'll manage  
To calm my clumsy paws  
And bring her a dove,  
Alive and warm and liling.

# Practicing Perfect

---

by Ryan Hindinger

They say you painted a lot of these  
You were practicing the times of day  
As reflected off the side of hay

I saw one once in a book of yours  
Struck by something so plain  
As hay and snow under light's wane

The thing that really gets me  
The shadows on the half melted snow  
They lend stature; the stacks seem to grow

I often wonder what they would look like  
From the window of the far off house  
Or from the interior nest of the mouse

Did you ever think that your practice stacks  
Would ever wind up in a museum  
For boys like me to see 'em?

# Contra-martyr

---

by Alison Koentje

I remember the road where the dead bird lay.  
Its splintered skull  
already crashed by tire treads -  
me burying the carcass,  
my car the spade.  
A mixture of carnage,  
mercy,  
destruction: I just drove away.

This reminded me of other destructions:  
last Thursday -  
some watery blood on the shower floor,  
a belated sting.  
Consequences of a shaving cut  
spiraled down the drain.  
Unaware,  
I had hurt myself again.

Blood dropped on bathroom tiles.  
I tended to the wound,  
remembering  
that dark night, spent out,  
when my blood pulsed  
without restraint.  
Satiated,  
but unfulfilled,  
those brief moments spent courting catastrophe.

The next morning, walking home,  
I saw a woman - in lace; inviting.  
Her bloodhot mouth

spoke of ravenous want,  
not need,  
nor necessity.  
I, too, tasted bitter iron:  
regret creeping up in me again.

Here alone in the bathroom,  
I know I confuse pain and pleasure.  
Whether on my back or in the shower,  
I rip deeper into you,  
and into me.  
A desperate grasp at power  
reduced to a rush  
of blood.  
It thrills me more than I want to admit.

But then alone at dusk, I punish myself.  
Lashes pulled  
and scattered on the desk,  
miss the mark of each crimson mistake.  
A bird outside the bedroom window,  
destined for sacrifice,  
sings for more;  
its feathers soon to be scattered on the road.

# The Sheriff of Duke County, Martha's Vineyard

---

by Caroline Page-Katz

Decades, and half-decades have passed  
since those hot days Kaity and I  
spent marinating in salt and sand,  
cracking open crabs with the Washington  
Memorial on their bellies, returning those  
branded with the Capitol building to the floor  
of the pond, brown, green, murky, mysteriously fertile.  
We spent boundless afternoons on South Beach  
running across dunes from waves that swelled  
like personal tsunamis, holding hands  
as we scrambled to get behind her grandfather's  
sturdy sea wall legs. Kaity's grandfather  
had been the sheriff for more than three  
decades, immortalized in books for being  
in the right place at the right time in My of '69,  
the last living eyes to see Kennedy's sedan  
as it passed before his patrol car's headlights  
on its way to the bottom of Poucha Pond  
at Chappaquiddick. To us at age five this meant  
always having a parking spot in front of the candy store  
in Edgartown, where we bought long pieces of  
white paper covered in pastel sugar dots.

## Nablus - West Bank

---

by Kinzee Ellis

There is something  
about a Palestinian man  
who, knowing his son was killed by  
Israeli police officers,  
has donated his dead son's kidneys,  
liver, lungs, and heart  
to dying Israeli Jews,  
and as he speaks to the newscasters,  
he turns his erect back to the neighbors  
with whom he still shares nationality  
but forgoes friendship,  
and does not flinch  
as the tomatoes they throw  
and the "traitors" they shout  
hit his back,  
fall to the ground,  
and burst.

## Summer Evenings

---

by Brittany Gigliotti

as the moon rises,  
the cricket's chirps  
drone into an undistinguishable  
endless  
racket  
that leaves you searching  
left and right  
for the culprit  
as though  
only giants could  
make a noise that loud  
as though  
nothing small  
can do anything big  
because greatness is followed  
solely by height  
and  
please don't stand  
on your tip-toes  
just now.

## Twelve Moons Pass'd

by Barry Dima

Akin to pair'd blackbirds floating ahead  
On top, attending neither back nor bow,  
Yet gaze fixed across to the other 'stead.  
These two birds mark for the twelve moons pass'd how  
Amour'd loyalty and amour'd friendship  
Combine abreast, inbreast, interwoven.  
Advancing the team goes, not by lordship  
Of gust or tempest, but the will governed.  
Alack! only young birds they. Ah! yet of  
A wiser feather be. Known it is that  
This poverty of years behind means love  
In wealth for the present that has not pass'd.  
A tender amidst and integral to  
This world, the blackbirds glide to where they do.

## Sincerely, Hobbes

by Michael Giuliano

I've been meaning to talk to you  
About something. You cannot fly  
An airplane, and you will never be  
Godzilla. Normal children do not  
Roll around in the mud and enjoy  
It as much as you do. They also  
Do not administer their philosophies  
On life to a few inanimate pieces of  
Stitched, colored cloth and stuffing  
That resembles a tiger.  
Someday the world will be too warm  
To go sledding whenever you wish,  
And I will be smart enough  
Not to join you. Calvin,  
You've been young for a long time  
Now, but that's not your fault.  
Soon you will wake up and  
Make up an excuse to go to school  
Early, just in time for that girl  
To arrive. You will have grown  
Out of striking her with water  
Balloons and constructing clubs  
Meant to keep her out.  
Things will change, yet I will  
Remain the same. Nothing more than  
A stuffed animal with the impossible  
Ability of speech. You will stop  
Prophesizing to me, and I will stop  
Doing your homework. I hope you  
Understand that life will happen, and  
It won't be a surprise when it does.

Things won't be as simple and easy  
As they were when we enjoyed the  
Idealized versions of the four seasons.  
Calvin, good luck growing up.

# The Other Eve

---

by Olivia Ceccarelli

to my naked breast I clasp  
Augustine's golden pear:  
dark locks fall languidly across  
his delicate brow

upon his wrist a happy kiss  
her virgin lips bestowed  
he dreamed of pulling back the sheen  
that o'er her bride's cheek hung

an unsatisfied promise.  
already had my teeth pierced  
the soft flesh  
of forbidden fruit.

## A Mission

---

by Matthew Rooney

My maternal grandfather, whom I have never met,  
was a Christian missionary in China,  
and is remembered favorably, because  
each time he came back to the country  
he brought suitcases full of jewelry—  
necklaces and rings and earrings—

He bought it cheap over there  
and gave it to my aunts,  
who sold it here.

## These Hands

---

by Ross Losapio

These hands have raised beer cans and cigars,  
Popped open bottles against countertops  
And bled from twisting a cap  
That was not a twist-off cap.  
These hands have clinked shot glasses  
And pressed against clenched lips  
To hold down the spume.

These same hands have broken  
Half-inch thick boards clean in two,  
These hands that crack their knuckles incessantly,  
That tap on my desk anxiously,  
And find their way to the safety of my pockets  
While I make strained small talk with a girl.

These hands have spun pens through their fingers  
And clamped down to strangle the words from them.  
These hands have written poems and stories,  
One full manuscript and a single, one-act play.

These hands have formed effective fists  
And taken part in awkward handshakes,  
Held on to hugs a little too long.  
These hands, so often, don't know what they're doing.

These hands have painted angels in flight,  
Picked brick-colored scabs,  
And absentmindedly scratched my ass.  
These hands have sketched teapots and riverbeds.  
The same hands have plucked the yellow crust  
From bleary, sleep-leaden eyes.

These hands have carried my great-grandmother to her grave  
And somehow, these hands were worthy.

## Waking Up 64

---

by Michael Giuliano

My brother's wife fell asleep on the floor  
In between the leather couch and the door.  
Empty wine bottles sit on the table  
With her fresh fingerprints on the label.  
My high school friend was never a big fan  
Of her anyway. He is the old man  
Sleeping fully clothed right by my TV,  
Snoring loudly. I noticed my son's keys  
Nearby. His car is parked in the front yard,  
Has been since his wife left him. Must be hard  
Being alone. There's still some birthday cake  
From last night, the sixty-fourth time. Take  
Out the garbage, prepare to someday die,  
Mop the wet floor, pick out a nice new tie.  
They will be waking within the hour,  
Better get ready and take a shower.

# One Year After the Jordanian Wedding Reception Bombing

---

by Kinzee Ellis

The explosion was almost like  
A wordless thundering of disapproval  
Of then vows.

Sometimes the sound of the blast  
Still jerks him awake,  
And he remembers how he  
and his wife of four hours  
Had rushed back into the hotel,  
Back to their wedding reception,  
Dismembered cake...  
Imbued piece of his father's tie.

Now he looks at his wife sleeping next to him  
And sometimes still wonders  
Why his father had to pay with his life  
To celebrate his love for her.

## Souvenirs

---

by Caroline Page-Katz

Whenever I read Jack Kerouac, I am reminded  
of a generation roaring against the pot roasts  
and responsibility of their parent's kitchens,  
of men voluntarily sitting on top of Hozomeen  
alone for weeks with their paper, pens, straw mats,  
gallon jars of the sweetest wine drinking it all in.  
There is always the inevitable return to below,  
with fast cars, greasy Chinese dinners, too many  
friends with too many opinions, too many women  
all leaping and lunging, flowing words out across  
dank jazz dens where the music played synchronizing  
the spastic speech, all characters in novels not yet written,  
and when all that became too much they would disperse again,  
like apparitions into the night, on trains, in cars, by bus.  
And then there is my father and his collections of these  
first editions, carefully and thoughtfully stalked in the  
bookstores of New York City where he has always been,  
now lined up on the top shelf of a bookcase in our living room  
downstairs behind a snow globe my sister bought in  
Disney World. I see my father waking up every morning  
before the sun comes up and walking our dog down the  
same squares of concrete and driving the same stretches  
of lined asphalt, and coming home to sit in the green chair  
by the window in the front room, feet up on the ottoman my  
mother bought him for Christmas, head slouched down,  
chin touching his chest, glasses askew with an open book  
in his lap. I try to envision him as a young man working  
at Orbachs selling men's dress shirts, going to school, smoking  
cigars, walking along Queens Boulevard on the way to the deli.



Adriana Marino



Eliza Schneider



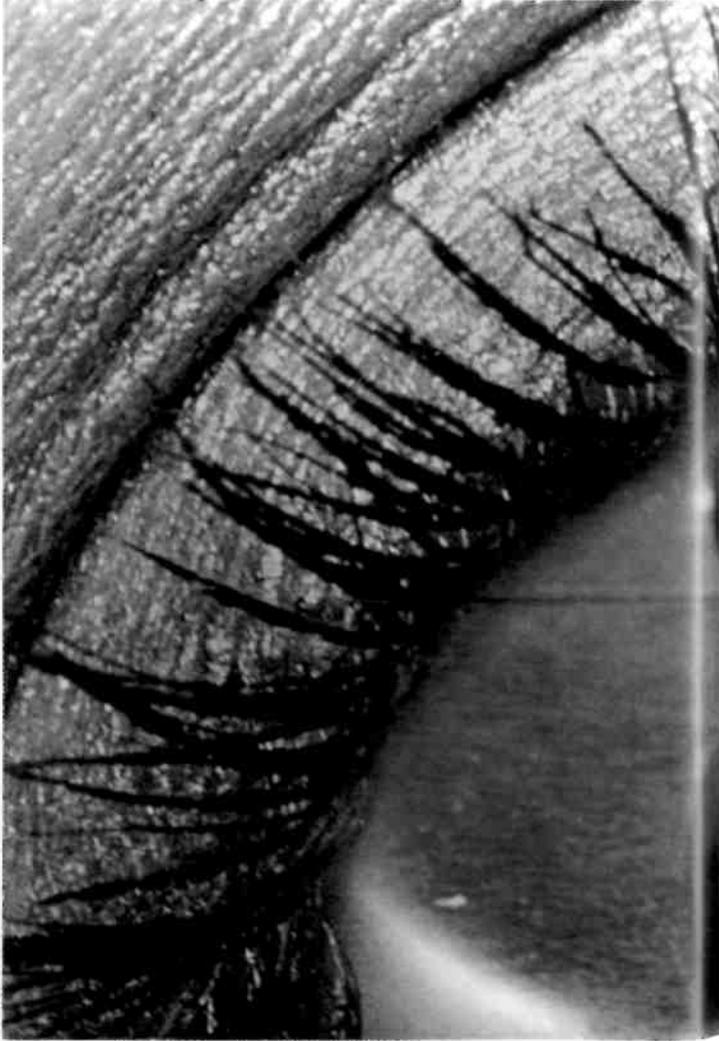
Margaret Burke



Craig Graceffo



Eliza Schneider





Adriana Marino



Craig Graceffo



Elizabeth Van Langen



Margaret Burke



Craig Graceffo



Elizabeth Van Langen

## Murdock's Tale

---

by Jason Simpkins

I never had a proper name. The Old Man, the farmer that took me, he called me Murdock. I never liked it all that much. I always fancied myself as something more traditional, like Blue or Jake. It could be worse though, that's what my friend Pickles says. The old man, he did okay I suppose. He kept me fed alright, gave me plenty of time to myself so long as I kept crows and no good folks away. All and all he wasn't half bad, neither was the Misses, she was just fine. It's just a shame what happened is all. I'll tell you about it. I'll tell you because I know no one will believe you, just like no one believes me, but it's the truth, the honest to God truth.

It all started years ago, two or three I'd say, but keep in mind that's somewhere between fourteen and twenty years for me. The old man wasn't so bad back then. Those days were most normal, I just kept to myself like a good dog should. Things tend to blend together a bit, more and more as I get older, but I remember one particular day when things began to change. I remember the old man took me into town that morning. I got to put my head out the side of the truck. It sure felt good, the wind blowin' through my fur. When it got cold I brought it in, and the Old Man scratched me behind the ears the way I liked. He could be a good man when he wanted to.

When we got back, the Old Man went inside the house and I stayed outside to go look for crows. I hate crows and I was beginning to suspect they hated me, as it had been a while since I'd seen any around. At some point, word probably got out amongst the crow community that a crow should stay away from the McNamara place on account of old Murdock. Anyhow, that's when I noticed one of those fancy city cars pull up.

I know that's what it was now but I was just a pup back then, so I took to barkin' at it as I'd never to my knowledge seen one before. A man in a suit got out. I was more energetic in those

days, and boy did I give him a scare. I was never gonna hurt him none, but he jumped back against the car and held his suitcase up in front of him like I was gonna try to tear at his throat or somethin' like. I didn't though, I just barked. I barked until the old man came out of the house with his shotgun. That's when I believe the City Fellow nearly marked his own trousers. The Old Man, he yelled at me.

"Murdock! Murdock, down!"

I left the fella alone for the time being.

"Mr. McNamara," he said, "I'm from the bank, I need a moment of your time."

"Alright, but you better be quick about it," the Old Man shouted. "That's enough Murdock. You sit down now."

The Old Man went back inside, so I kept an eye on the City Fellow. When I saw him relax and drop his suitcase to his side I gave him a look and growled, but I stayed sitting, just like the old man told me. I sat right there in place 'til The Old Man came back, without his shotgun.

"He's not going to bite me, is he?" the fellow asked.

"Nah, ole Murdock wouldn't hurt a fly, would you boy?"

"Well, if it's all the same, sir, I think we should go inside," the City Fellow said to the Old Man.

The rotting wood steps rattled as the two men stepped up to the porch and went into the farmhouse. I followed them the whole way, sniffing at the stranger's heels. He smelled like perfume. The Old Man and the City Fellow let the screen door close behind them, but I pawed it back open and slid through. When I got inside they were all sitting around the coffee table in front of the furnace, and the Misses was servin' up some coffee. We rarely got visitors, and the Old Man seemed a bit agitated. I'm not too sure he much enjoyed company. The Misses brought me a steak bone just like I was part of the family. The Misses was real nice like that; sometimes she'd give me some bacon or sausage from the breakfast table when the Old Man wasn't lookin'. He wouldn't have liked that. I nestled down in front of the Old Man's chair

right by his feet, where I could watch over things. Sometimes he'd scratch me a bit on the head if I lay there real still but he was a bit distracted. He and the City Fellow had some important issues to discuss I suppose. I overheard but didn't quite understand them. I am, after all, just a simple country dog, not one of those fancy, pure bred, collared city dogs.

"Mr. McNamara, you know why I'm here," the City Fellow started, "you've had problems with your mortgage. Now, we at the bank have been very patient with you, and we understand the circumstances of your situation, but the fact is your farm hasn't yielded any substantial profit over the past two years. To be frank, sir, we can no longer let this continue. If you do not assemble \$60,000 dollars by the end of the month, the bank will have no choice but to foreclose on your farm."

The Old Man took quite a look. "What? You know I can't possibly get that much money in a month. We're just simple country folk out here, we ain't got that kinda money just lyin' around. You... you city folk are all the same. You don't care about us simple folk out here trying to make a living. You just care about your dollars and cents, and that's all. Well, this ain't right. This ain't right and you gotta know it. You just don't care is all. Mister you gotta give me more time. I just need more time"

"I'm sorry Mr. McNamara, but the bank is out of time," the fellow said as he stood up. "Thank you for the coffee Mrs. McNamara, and good luck to the both of you. I'll be going now." The Old Man just stood right there starin' at the City Fellow, didn't move at all. I thought he might be fixin' to go get his shotgun again, but he didn't. The Misses saw the City Fellow to the door. They both retired to their room and left me out all alone. After I was done chewin' on my bone, I went outside to look for some crows.

I didn't see neither of them for quite some while. With me spending so much time outside I guess I just missed 'em, but they were upstairs an awful lot and I know I'm not allowed up there. Then one night, while I was all curled up on the rug as it had

gotten a good deal colder out recently, I heard the Old Man goin' out. It'd been a while since he'd gone out at night. I thought it was strange, not just the Old Man leaving, but he usually took me along wherever he was goin.' It bothered me a bit, I would have liked to go for a ride. It had been too long since my ears had had a good scratchin. I didn't pay no mind though, I just went to sleep under the chair where I liked. When I woke up a little while later, I had business to tend to. So I went outside to lay claim to some of the land, as they say. I came back up to the porch and drank some water from my bowl. It was plenty late in the night now. That's when I saw the Old Man's truck coming down the road. It didn't seem quite right though, how it kept speeding up and slowin' down and slidin' back and forth all over the road, kicking up clouds of dust.

Funny thing was, though, he didn't park in the driveway. He drove his track right up on the lawn. First it slowed down, then stopped right in between two tall oak trees. I thought it a bit unusual but I suppose it proved to be a bit more practical for what he was fixin' to do. The door swung open kinda wildly and hit one of them oaks directly. That's when I saw the Old Man squeeze himself out and stagger towards another tree. I reckon that he was fixin' to lay claim to some of the land too. Didn't bother me none, so long as he stayed away from my spot. When he was finished, I walked over and met him half way. He didn't smell like himself, like dirt or leaves at all. He smelled bitter and pungent. I drew back a little from the smell and took a step back, that's when he said something.

"What? You don't want to say hello and help your master to the door? Some dog you are. Man's best friend my ass." He took a step towards me, lost his balance, and leaned against the truck. "You think this is funny? You don't know what it's like. You don't know anything. You're just a dumb dog." Then he lunged forward and struck me clean across the face. I yelped and tried to turn away but the grass was wet and I stumbled. I got back to my feet as quick as I could and I saw the Old Man coming towards me. He

raised his fist like he was going to bring it down on my nose. Then I felt a hard kick into my chest. I turned again and backed further away. I'd always known the Old Man had something of a temper, but never anything like this. I turned and ran across the lawn to the trees. He started to look for me, but then I heard the screen door on the porch swing open. I could always hear those rusty hinges no matter where I was.

"Shamus," I heard the Misses yell from the house. "Is that you out there doing all that yelling?" The Old Man gave one last look in my direction and began to make his way towards the house.

"Yeah, it's me you shrew! Who in the hell else would it be?" The Old Man's voice trailed off. I followed him slowly through the trees and caught up to him and the Misses by the porch.

"Well, what on earth were you doing out so late?" the Misses asked.

"You know damn well where I was and what I been doing," the Old Man replied.

"You promised you'd stop drinking, Shamus, ever since that night you hit me. I told you I wasn't going to stick around here for that. I still won't, I don't care how long we've been together. I told you then, that if you ever came home like this again I'd leave," she said. The Old Man looked at her.

"Well what do you expect? We're losing everything. We're not going to have a pot to piss in when this is all over. You heard the... the banker. We don't have anything."

"We have each other," the Misses said; tears were beginning to well up in her eyes.

"And a hell of a lot of good that does us," the Old Man replied quickly. "I'm going to bed. Don't even bother to wake me up tomorrow." The Old Man walked by the Misses without even lookin' at her and disappeared into the house. The Misses on the other hand, just stood there. I never seen anyone look so bad. The Misses looked vacant, like she was dead inside, like the last petal had withered from a flower leaving only the stem. I myself didn't

want to go back inside either, so I just settled down to sleep out in the bushes and trees.

I woke up and brought the paper in the next morning. I'm not sure why, habit I guess. But when I got inside, I didn't smell any bacon, egg, sausage, or even any toast. I didn't hear any clamoring in the kitchen at all. I thought maybe the Misses had taken to sleepin' in, or maybe she'd become distracted elsewhere. Whatever the case I decided to go upstairs and look, but the Misses wasn't there either, it was just the Old Man. He was sitting on his bed and boy did he seem out of sorts. He had the same look the Misses did the night before, like some awful spell had come over him. It looked as though he'd seen a ghost. I walked over to him and put my head up on his lap. Sometimes, scratching my head the way I liked was good for the both of us, but he didn't want any part of that. He just pushed me off and said, "Get out of here mut! You know you're not supposed to be up here." The Old Man had a desperate look in his eye, and I didn't quite trust him after the previous night's events, so I just left.

I reckon I chased a lot of crows that day, just trying to keep my distance from the Old Man. He's not a man to tamper with, not when he's put afoul like he was. I spent a lot of time outside from that point on. Every now and then, I'd hear the Old Man's truck start up and pull away, that's when I'd go up on the porch to look and see if there was any food in my bowl. There never was though. I'd get mighty hungry, so I'd have to eat whatever I could scrounge up out in the woods or there in the house. It seemed like everyday there was less and less food around. Less food, but more trash, more bottles. Bottles were everywhere, inside the house, outside the house, in on the porch, out in the woods, they'd even fall out of the Old Man's truck when he opened the door. Bottles may satisfy an old man but they don't do much for a poor country dog like me.

If I was hungry enough, which I often was, I would nose through the Old Man's trash in the kitchen. There was never much food in there, but every now and then there'd be some table scraps or something close enough to edible. I'd made something

of a habit of this and I reckon the Old Man was starting to get sore about having to clean up all the trash I'd rummaged through. I'd always hear his truck coming though, and I'd be sure to get out of there as fast as I could. Naturally, I worried about what the Old Man might do if he ever caught me, but I didn't have much of a choice really.

The fact is, though, that one day he did catch me. I don't remember hearing his truck, maybe I was too busy making a mess of everything, or maybe I did hear it and I was just too darn hungry to stop what I was doing. No matter the reason, the Old Man caught me, and I took a beating. You'll have to forgive my not going into detail, but I'd much rather not discuss the specifics. It's plenty to say I took quite a beating, and I wasn't sure that it'd ever stop. I stayed out in the woods for quite a while after that. I didn't move an inch out there, no matter how hungry I was. It was lying out there in the bushes and trees that I realized things couldn't go on this way, they just couldn't. That's when I had a funny notion.

I was tired, I was sore, I was starving, and I was certainly afraid, the young pup that I was, but I went back to the house and waited by the driveway. I waited by the trees for the Old Man. I listened for his truck, and when I heard him climb inside and start it up, I went back inside and I made an awful mess of things. I tore through the garbage, I gnawed on the Old Man's chair, I even went upstairs and laid my own particular claim to his bed. That's about when I heard the Old Man's truck pull back into the driveway. As soon as I heard it, I trotted on over into the Old Man's closet and hid myself as best I could. I heard the screen door swing open and slam shut. Then I listened as the Old Man saw all that I had done. He was God awful mad, and he started screamin'.

"That damn dog has crossed me for the last time! I'm going to put an end to this right now," he said. Then I heard him coming up the stairs, just as I expected him to. That old man didn't often stray from routine, neither do I myself, 'cept when I'm starvin'.

He went towards his bed, and I heard him grow even angrier when he seen what I done. Then the Old Man picked up

his shotgun, and loaded both barrels, and he started towards the doorway at quite a pace. Just as soon as he had left the room, I climbed out of the closet as fast as I could, and I ran towards the Old Man. He was just beginning to take his first step down the stairs. That's when I jumped up and threw all of my weight into him. I fell back down and landed hard on my ribs, which were all but bare due to my lack of nourishment, and yelped as it hurt quite a bit. The Old Man, he fell down the steps. I heard him strike each one as he rolled and tumbled awkwardly down all the way to the bottom. Then I heard a loud blast from the shotgun. It was awfully loud, 'specially indoors the way we were. I pulled myself as best I could to the edge of the steps and I saw him lying there lifeless, bones broken from the fall, and flesh torn from the shotgun blast. It was a terrible mess we were in.

Next thing I know, I felt like flying. Then I felt a hand on my head. I opened my eyes, and I was moving. It felt like the Old Man's truck, but it wasn't. It was softer, roomier, and smelled like perfume.

"Hey boy, you coming around now? Don't worry I'll get you to a vet in no time. Just sit tight, and don't try to bite me." It was the City Fellow. "It's a shame what happened," he said, "I guess you two were planning on going out hunting and the old guy took a spill huh? Is that it boy? Well, no matter, I'll take care of you." I couldn't have bitten him if I wanted to, I was too darn exhausted. No, I just laid there and fell back asleep as the City Fellow scratched me behind my ears the way I like.

It's like I said, the Old Man, he was alright, even with the beatings. He just got stuck in a rut is all. I suppose I did love him, but sometimes, even though it hurts, the most humane thing to do is what's best for everyone, to just put'em down.

## Bea, Yourself

---

by Tykia Murray

### The End

Bea said she had a stalker named George Washington Lee. The last time she saw him, she had come home to discover him sitting on the low toilet in the bathroom of her apartment. He was barefoot and she cringed at the thought that he had walked the three flights from his room to hers in no shoes. Bea could see the darkened soles of his feet as he rested them on the edge of her tub. He had a little toy keyboard on his lap, the kind you got from grandma and grandpa for Christmas or birthdays when you were a little kid and he was playing a song that sounded made up. The choppy notes bounced off the yellowed tile walls and landed flat in the dingy moist air. He hadn't looked up since Bea walked in and she wasn't sure if he heard her come in. He continued playing for a minute more and then stopped and looked at her.

"It's called 'Bea, Yourself.' I like your galoshes." He was referring to the ugly giant yellow boots that he had seen her wear almost daily, since it only rained in Portland. George always said stuff like that, saying one thing and changing the subject completely in the next sentence. Bea wasn't sure what to say or how she could answer. He continued speaking, hitting random keys on the toy, accidentally accenting the wrong words.

"I had been writing a song about you for (ding) the past month but I got stuck on the end, so I thought coming to your place would (ding) help me figure it out. It did. It's finished. Do (ding) you like it?" George looked up, his eyes were vacant and red-rimmed, the pupils wildly searched her face. He almost looked possessed.

"I like it, it's good," Bea said. She didn't really like it or hate it, but what else could she say? The kid did not look well. The skin on his face was almost translucent and sunken in and his voice was hollow and cracked, the way a ghost's might sound.

"You probably won't see me again," George said. He

swung his feet from the edge of the tub to the cold surface of the floor.

### **The Beginning**

"Like the president?" Bea asked, crunching a cheese curl her next door neighbor Marcy's equally orange carpet. It was a get-to-know-you gathering she threw the night after Bea moved into the building (Marcy's excuse to be nosey). She introduced Bea to George.

"No, no, I was named after the man who invented peanut butter," George answered. He was staring directly into Bea's eyes, as if he were trying to see himself upside down in them. She didn't think he blinked once and, realizing this, redirected her attention to the cheese curl underfoot.

"Oh, yeah George Washington Carver. Ok, but wasn't he named for the president?" She looked up after asking this, hoping to get some kind of reaction or even piss him off a little, so he'd leave her alone. But George was still focused on Bea's face, kind of smiling now. His eyes reminded her of a bowl of milk after eating all the Lucky Charms.

"Yeah, he was. But I'm not."

"I see."

Nodding her head to the terrifically bad music coming from the Dell on the desk in the corner, Bea used this lapse in the conversation to more closely observe her surroundings. She knew she didn't feel comfortable here but she couldn't figure out why. The apartment smelled like pine scented cleaner and kitty litter. About thirty people were crammed into this more than humble, moderately furnished, one bedroom closet. Marcy had every light in the place on and the 70 watt bulbs, in concert with the orange carpet, gave everyone there a jack-o-lantern glow. Bea looked back at George, who'd been reading her t-shirt for an awfully long time.

"Have you memorized it?" She asked suddenly, making the poor kid jump.

"What?" Having refocused on her eyes, he looked ashamed

and she felt a little sorry for him.

"The words on my shirt. Do you get it? Utah: Two is Better Than One?" She pointed to the one male and two female figures on the blue shirt. They looked like the symbols on the signs outside of public bathrooms. The shape of the grand state of Utah surrounded them.

"Yeah. Polygamy. That's funny. I like your 'fro." George took a swig of his drink and cleared his throat, running out of things to say.

"Thanks. I've been growing it for a year. Hmm, well, I think I'm going to leave," Bea rushed, making her way past him to the door.

"But this is your party," he said, downing the rest of his drink and preparing to follow her.

"It's really not. I've got to get up early in the morning, anyway. See you around."

### **September 23**

"Who's that at your window?" Marcy said, looking past Bea.

"Oh, that's just George." Bea continued to fold her laundry and arrange it in her drawer. Marcy, the neighbor, had brought over donuts that morning and, though Bea found her to be something like a fly, she allowed her to stay. Bea didn't like being alone. This was the fourth time George had appeared outside of her window on a ladder this week, which wouldn't seem strange, as he was the building maintenance man. But there was nothing wrong with the outside of the building, specifically the outside of her window. She believed he positioned the ladder next to her window against the grimy red bricks of the apartment so he could lean over and look in. When she caught him looking in, he would return to a straightened position. The peeping started two weeks after their initial meeting.

"That doesn't bother you?" Marcy was at the window now, trying to see George on his ladder.

"I don't know. It's kind of funny, you know? He's entertaining. He told me his life's ambition was to own an apple orchard and make and sell organic apple sauce," Bea laughed and shut the drawer and moved into the bathroom.

"Aww, that's cute. I moved in here two years before you and I've never seen him act like this. He's a nice guy. A little weird, but nice. You know you guys are around the same age. Do you like him?" Marcy shut the grayish blinds and followed Bea to the bathroom.

"No. Well, not like that. He's too . . . I don't. . . innocent?"

"You're doing more harm than good by not telling him directly you have no interest in him?"

"Not really. It would hurt his feelings. All he's doing is watching me. He'll get the idea eventually. This way, everyone wins. He gets to watch me and I get to be admired - not so secretly." Bea went back to the window and reopened the blinds.

### **September 30**

"Can you rescue my broad?"

"Nelson? Is that you?" Bea said groggily into the phone. She turned over to look at her alarm clock: 8 am. She turned on the tv.

"Yeah. You gotta go get Angela out of jail."

Nelson was Bea's older brother, who was in a "relationship" with a crazy woman named Angela. This was not the first time he had called Bea to help bail Angela out.

"How much, Nelson?"

"Nothing. Could you just go pick her up?"

"I don't have a car anymore. Why can't you get her?" Bea started getting up out of bed.

"I have to be at work in an hour. Don't you have any friends with cars? I know you do. Come on, please. Please Bea. Just go get her for me."

"What did she do this time?" Bea pulled on some pants.

"Public intoxication. She peed on a fire hydrant."

"Ha! Ok. I'll find someone to take me to pick her up."

"Thanks. I owe you."

"Yup. Bye."

Bea hung up. She called the one person she knew would take her, no questions asked.

"Hello?"

"Hey, George. It's Bea. I'm sorry to call you so early but could you do me a favor?"

"Yeah, anything," he almost shouted into the receiver.

"Can you take me to the jail to pick up my brother's girlfriend? I'll explain everything on the way there."

"Sure. I'll be at your door in a few minutes."

"Oh, you're the best, thanks so much! I owe you so big! Luv ya, bye!"

George hung up the phone. A lopsided grin spread across his crooked teeth.

At about the twentieth knock, Bea got up and answered her door, which was barely a door. The constant humidity softened the wood and made the door as useful as a sheet across the entrance of her home. George was standing there. He wore a purple tweed blazer over a blue shirt that said "Jaaaaaam!" and green army fatigue pants. The red Nikes he compulsively wore were unlaced and covered with mud on the bottom. Bea laughed when she opened the door. He looked like an employee of Ringling Bros.

"Oh my God! I didn't expect you so soon. Come in," Bea said. Bea shut the door behind George and offered him a seat on the couch, while she disappeared in the bedroom. A worn in grayish blue piece of furniture, the couch was a gift from her brother, who told her he bought it at a flea market, but had actually found it near a dumpster. It smelled like rain and dirt but George didn't say anything. He figured with excitement at being in her room, sitting on the furniture she sat on. He took off his shoes.

"I'm ready," she said, and reappeared from the other room in giant yellow boots with an umbrella that looked like a picnic tablecloth. "Let's go. Hey, why are your shoes off?"

"I... I don't really like wearing them much." He scrambled to put them back on so she wouldn't think he was some kind of freak.

"Huh, that's weird," she matter-of-factly stated. She squatted down at Georges feet and helped him put on the right shoe. George didn't breathe once the entire time he watched her fingers loop and knot the twin strings. She finished tying his shoes and stood up.

"Let's go," she said, as the bottom of the umbrella scraped the floor and jarred George from his daze.

"Yeah, my car's the red one in front."

### **October 13**

George knocked once at Bea's door. At first, she wasn't sure if it was thunder or her upstairs neighbor dropping a cast iron pot. When she realized it was someone at the door, she sprung up to answer it, turning off the music as she walked by her stereo. She hadn't talked to anyone all day and there was George standing in the hallway, soaked and shoeless. Bea couldn't tell if he had been crying or if his face was just wet from the sudden storm. He looked so grave she pulled him into her living room.

"My sister disappeared. No one knows where she is. My mom just called me. The police are trying to find her." George sat down on the couch.

"I'm so sorry. Tell me what happened?" Bea sat down next to him and put her arm around him. She could feel his shoulder blades through the sweater he wore.

"No one really knows. She's just gone. Anyway, I'm not really ready to talk about it."

"We'll talk about other stuff then," she said.

They both had unique father problems. Bea's dad had ignored her mother and her since he'd left when she was eight. Her brother lived with their uncle. George's father died when he was four and had only known father figures in the form of the men his mother kept in constant rotation.

Bea told him about her job as the tech support at a computer company. All she did was answer phones all day and talk to people about their computers. George told her about his jobs as the building maintenance man and the concession stand man at the puppet theater.

"How'd you get that job?" Bea's shoes scraped across the floor as she got up to close a window. It was raining harder and beginning to come in the window and make small puddles on the floor.

"I first got it my sophomore year in college and I was going to leave when I graduated but I quit school the next year, so I kept it. The same year, my mother's ex-boyfriend told me I could work and live here as the maintenance man. That was five years ago."

"What was your major in college?" Bea asked returning to the couch.

"Music. I wanted to be a composer." As he said this, George looked her straight in the eyes, just like he had when they first met. She didn't know what to say next.

Neither of them said anything for a long time. They just sat there. Bea looked down at her watch.

"I actually have people coming over in a few hours. Stay if you want to, but you're probably not in the mood for that kind of thing. But, I'll tell you what, anytime you wanna talk just come on in."

She kissed George on the cheek and walked him to the door.

### **October 23**

Upon arriving at her door, Bea realized that it was already open and little rays of light crept from the inside and made little stripes against the dark corridor walls. She wasn't scared because she heard a Tide commercial coming from her room, and knew she would see George sitting on her couch watching TV. He didn't have one of his own so she allowed him to watch hers while she was out.

"You wanna drink with me?" George said sunnily and turned to the door. A bottle of vodka and two glasses were set up on the coffee table.

"Sure." Bea was never one to turn down free alcohol and thought it would be fascinating to see how George behaved when he was drunk. She walked to her bedroom, took off her jacket, threw it across the bed and returned to the living room. George had already filled both glasses. She sat down next to him, taking the glass in hand and bringing it to her lips.

"No. Stop. You can't drink yet, we gotta toast!" George lifted his glass to hers too excitedly, accidentally spilling a little of the liquid on the couch.

"I'm so sorry. I'll clean it up," George said. He stopped dead, mid-toast, and scrambled to clean up the clear spill that was the size of a quarter.

"It's ok. It'll be fine. Drink up," Bea reassured him.

Several hours later, George was lying on the couch and Bea was sitting on the floor. On the T.V., a hyena was attacking an antelope.

"I'm too drunk to go back to my room. I love you," George mumbled, eyes closed.

"I know you do," Bea shook her head and regained her balance long enough to push George's feet off the couch so she could sit back down. The pinks of his toes peaked through the holes in his socks.

"Don't you love me?" He raised his head a little to look at her through the slits in his eyes.

"No. You're weird and you remind me of a grasshopper," Bea said, looking straight ahead at the carnage unfolding on the African plains.

Using his last bit of energy, George hurled himself at Bea in a futile attempt to kiss her. She, outweighing him by at least 151lbs, threw him back to his side of the couch almost as quickly as he had left it. She continued starring ahead. The hyena was ripping dripping flesh from the antelope.

"I'll go home now." George calmly got up from the couch and slowly proceeded out the door and up the stairs.

### **The End (again)**

"I'm moving out tomorrow," he said, getting up and walking past her, keyboard in hand. Bea could hear the friction between the dry, crusted soles of his feet and her dirty hardwood floors. "I wanted you to hear the song before I left."

Bea followed him out of the bathroom, through the living room, into the kitchen.

"Why didn't you just tell me you didn't like me?" George sat the little keyboard down on the kitchen table between them and turned to face Bea.

"I thought you knew."

"How could I have known? You didn't tell me. You just continued being so nice to me, like we actually had a future. You knew I liked you."

"I wasn't sure. I —"

"C'mon, Bea. Just stop lying. Tell me." George was getting frustrated now. Bea could see his hands shaking.

"Why? Why do you wanna know now? You hate me now."

"Because I deserve to hear it. I've only been honest with you. I liked you and you were indifferent to me and you let me keep liking you."

"I mean I kinda . . . Fine! Fine! I knew you liked me and I let you because I liked the attention. Who doesn't want to be wanted?"

"Exactly, Bea."

Bea couldn't look at him. She could feel the tears attempting to fall and didn't want to cry, but couldn't seem to help it. She looked at the refrigerator, the floor, the microwave. George tried to continue looking her in the eyes as he always had.

"That's selfish. You're full of shit, Bea." George picked up the keyboard and headed to the door. "I'm going back home until

they find my sister."

"I know. I know I'm selfish and I'm sorry. I really am."

George nodded and walked out the door, closing it behind him. "He didn't even slam it," Bea thought. She turned around to her darkened apartment and sat down on the couch. She took off the yellow galoshes and damp socks and let her feet touch the ground. The silence surrounded her.

## Joyride

---

by Allison Flynn

The first time I heard "Wild Horses" by The Sundays I was lying in his snow-white porcelain throne. My top was off and was strewn about on the orange linoleum tile. My pants must have been in the other room. The cold sting against my pale spine bit worse than he had earlier in the evening. His name was Jimmy and everything in his house smelled of vinegar and brown sugar.

I lay in his bathtub silent and still, waiting for something to break or snap. My eyes were closed and the constant drip of the sink became the clock inside my body. I was convinced my number was up for the Chinese water torture phase of my life. With every drop that fell my eyelids twitched and goose-bumps poked their heads up to scold me for my actions. I thought about earlier and remembered his warm sweat falling on top of my body, branding and burning my skin. I knew Mother would not approve.

I sat up and brought my knees to my chest, hiding myself from his criticism. He sat on top of the counter with his dirty feet soaking in the cloudy water. He swooshed them around looking like a little boy jumping through puddles in his very first rain storm. I watched his body shift as he picked up the half smoked joint we had rolled earlier when the radio was turned up to its maximum volume and I was still little Gina who lived at the end of the cul-de-sac. His full lips grabbed the joint hostage and then proceeded to suck the life out of it. He blew the smoke out with vigor, like a line drive to my face.

"I told ya' —I would make you mine baby," he said, smoke billowing from his mouth.

I didn't speak, I just stared at him praying for some sort of intervention. I ran my hands along the bottom of the bathtub searching for something...anything at all. I found clumps of his unruly curls that apparently couldn't stand to be associated with him either. I wrapped one of his curls around my finger; I gave in to the numbing sensation of this makeshift tourniquet. I wanted

him to tighten it for me, make me hurt even more. Lifelessness surrounded me.

He lit a cigarette and started to ash it all over the floor, creating our very own graveyard of paper and quick fixes. I wanted the smoke to envelop the bathroom. I wanted him to create a fog so thick my vision might be distorted. It was emptier than I had imagined. He sat on the edge of the counter swinging his legs back and forth, tapping his fingers on the caps of his knees. He didn't talk much at all; he mostly just looked around the bathroom coughing periodically after taking a hit and taking quick jabs of eye contact with me.

"So, you go to Ridge or West Essex?" he said without making eye contact with me.

"West Essex..." I replied coldly.

"Oh, I went there, it's a pretty good school. I mean I never actually graduated...the school shit wasn't really my strong point ya know?" He mumbled.

"Yup." I said, not being able to control my volume or tone. The voice that reverberated off of the peeling wallpaper was someone else's. I swear it. It was shaky and quiet; a timid, meek girl's. I pictured myself to be different. My voice should have been deeper and louder. My breasts should have even grown or my curves should have formed at that very moment.

There was a long silence between us and I could feel the room becoming smaller. He sat on the counter trying to make normal conversation as if we were on a blind date. I was shivering now and my mind was prisoner to my body. When I first met him at Rodney's Market he was working as a bag boy. I noticed his eyes first; they were as deep-set and dark as a winter's night sky. He was older and knew older boy things. We talked about how the tomatoes were great that season and that Tony the butcher was getting fired for drug use. I remember going to sleep at night and imagining him sitting outside my house in his Thunderbird. I felt sexy for the first time, just like the movies.

I sat fidgeting in the bathtub examining the black hole that

was beginning to surround Jimmy's house on Meadow Bluff Lane. I wanted it to swallow me whole and spit me out somewhere far away. I wanted him to be my boyfriend. I wanted him to give me his jacket to wear. I wanted to tell all my friends that I was going to the movies with a boy who actually wanted to kiss me. The day he had asked me to go for a ride I jumped at the chance. I understood now what this meant. I understood he would never give me his jacket, kiss me like he should have, or bring me to the movies. I was a stupid girl for ever believing in purity. Everything was so dirty.

I stared up at his shower curtain rod that was rusted on the ends. Earlier, when he was tearing my clothes, off I counted the number of identical yellow fish floating about on the moldy shower curtain next to me and wondered why there were only seven. Out of all 42, someone had decided to choose only seven fish to make yellow. I thought how oddly complicated the life of a shower curtain designer could be.

I imagined my mother preparing dinner and hollering at my sister to walk the dogs because it was getting dark. I pictured her setting the table and glancing at the clock worrying about me. I was supposed to be home at 5:45 after my track practice. I missed her clean mommy smell. All I could smell was the stale stench of sweat, cigarette butts, and the faint odor of brown sugar and vinegar.

# A Smoke on the Steps

---

by Nicholas Brown

I lit up in the Piazza del Popolo, then walked down La Via Babuino to Piazza di Spagna and approached the Spanish Steps. I was getting too old for many things, but walking was not one of them.

Throughout the walk, I worried that the sun would go down too quickly, and I would not have ample time to finish the Carlos Fuentes I'd bought on a whim at some smoke shop near San Pietro. I hadn't had a good smoke in far too long, and now that I had chosen to treat myself, I didn't want any such worries to cast shadows over my late afternoon.

When I reached the steps, I followed a group of American teenagers to the second plateau and stood facing the city, leaning my elbows on the stone facade. Indeed, the sun was low in the sky, and I struggled to see the streets and apartment buildings and the dome of San Pietro in the distance without squinting.

The flaps and corners of my gray trench coat danced noiselessly, but the wind was a light wind and I felt no discomfort. I held the cigar in front of my face to study it, or perhaps simply to observe it, and I noticed it was not burning perfectly straight. By this time I had about an inch of ash on the end, but a piece on the bottom of the cigar had only burned half an inch or less.

I thought perhaps this was because I'd cut it poorly. I was too old to cut it smoothly anymore. I had popped into a Tabbachiao shop and asked for a cutter, had stumbled over my Italian—I was beginning to forget many things, for no apparent reason, and it worried me—and had felt embarrassed when, after this awkward conversation, the clerk handed me a tool that resembled scissors with the ends rounded, to conform to the shape of a cigar. I thought he was telling me they were for sale. I asked him how much they cost. He laughed and said, "No. Only one pair in store." I was too flustered to explain that I had never had the intention to actually buy them, so I haphazardly snipped the end of my Fuentes—

without wetting it first with my lips—and the leaves tore messily, broke in a way they were not meant to break. I felt as if I'd injured it.

But the taste was smooth, and I was thankful that no matter how much injustice I may ever do to a cigar, it would not seek revenge on me.

I thought about this as I stood on the plateau, looking out at the street that ran straight from the bottom of the steps through the city, growing narrower until it was nothing more than a speck of light at the apex of my vision. How many cigars had I smoked in a lifetime? How many injustices had I committed to them? How many times had I cut a cigar poorly, or smoked it too fast, or not enjoyed it fully? I could not begin to guess. Fifty years' worth, and probably at least two hundred smoking partners. And yet, never had I tasted one that was simply unpleasant.

These things are born to die at the hand of man, I thought, and yet they do it with such dignity.

The sun continued to sink, but even as it did, I felt blinded. I thought ahead briefly to the evening, when I would no doubt have to start forming the mailing list for the new proposal. I had told myself I'd do it by yesterday. International historical preservation conglomerates knew my name, regardless of whether I knew theirs, and I suspected I ought not to keep them waiting.

I turned the unburned side of the cigar upwards to try to even it out, and concentrated on the taste. On the plateau below the one I stood on, a group of Italian youngsters—Ragazzi, they were called—huddled close to each other and began singing the words to a song I'd never heard. They all seemed to know it. I wished they would be quiet, but it was entertaining to watch.

The Spanish Steps were inundated with people this afternoon. I suspected that was the case most days, but I did not get much of an opportunity to pass this part of the city anymore. When I'd first arrived in Rome—when my colleagues and I were still being eased in, when daily orientation meetings lasted only an hour, when we were actually paid to walk around, and acquaint

ourselves with the city of which we were to become representatives for history museums in our respective countries—back then, I took lunch here each day. Sometimes my colleagues would join me, sometimes not. I would either order a take-out slice of pizza from a shop off Via dei Due Macelli, or else I'd eat in at Pizza Ciro and stop at the Steps after, whether for a smoke or just to sit and relax.

No matter how hard I tried to fit in, people could tell I was American. On most days, early in my stay, I'd be approached by one of the Indian indentured servants. "Eng-a-land?" they would say. At first I would respond, "No, American." And invariably, they would respond with one of a handful of default comments they'd been told to say. "Ah—go Yankees," or "Ah—fuck Bush, yes?" And I would either say, "I'm from Boston—I hate the Yankees," or else I'd say, "Bush is a dolt, but Berlusconi's no better." And they didn't understand what any of that meant, but they didn't care—all they wanted to do was sell me a faulty plug adapter, or draw a caricature of me on cheap paper that would rip on the train ride home, or give me a flower that looked ready to bloom but really was ready to die, or—my personal favorite—tie a string around my finger, telling me it was a good luck charm, then rip it, convince me it was my fault, and charge me twenty euro. Over time, I'd learned how to handle them when they approached me.

"Eng-a-land?"

"No, Zimbabwe. Vai!"

And if they persisted, I would say, "Portaro la polizia. Vai!"

But on this day, no one approached me. No Indian indentured servants—the Spagna Gypsies, I called them—asked me any questions about my nationality, or tied any strings around my finger. And I almost missed them.

The sun was too bright to look at—all it was was a glowing spot of yellow in the sky, its roundness impossible to make out—but it seemed close to being ready to dip behind a tall apartment building across from the steps. Maybe it would be easier to see once that happened. But maybe it would be too dark and too cold.

A mob of tourists passed me on the steps, most of them

Asian, but some American-looking. All of them glanced at me. Most of them seemed to be smiling when they glanced, and it was then that I realized, for the first time, I was smiling slightly myself. A close friend had told me once as a young man that if I wanted to forget my problems, I should take up cigars. I had taken his advice, for I trusted him, and to this day still would, were he alive, but frankly I wasn't sure what he meant about forgetting problems. Certainly mine were still in the forefront of my mind. Yet, as I'd been told dozens of times and noticed myself, I smiled a little as I smoked.

In the left pocket of my trench coat, I felt a vibration, and reached down to grab the buzzing and flashing cell phone whose sound I'd forgotten to turn back on after the day's meeting.

The screen read "Anonymous Call," and I felt something jump excitedly in my chest. Whenever the phone said "Anonymous Call," it might as well have said "Emma." Our house back in Boston had a private number.

"Hello," I said, warmly, familiarly, as un-businesslike as I could. But the voice I heard did not respond in like manner.

"Mr. Sandy Davenport?"

"Yes," I said.

"My name is Federica," the voice continued, in polite—but severely broken—English. "I am calling from UPS. Did you know you are receiving a package?"

"Yes, I know. There's a computer in there. It's very important."

"Sir, I am sorry but we cannot send until we receive copy of your passaporte. Now, is in Traviso, Italy. We cannot send to Roma until—because we need passaporte to certify that you are—"

"Yes, yes I know. But have you spoken to my wife or my assistant? They've both been on the phone with someone from your company for days. We've tried to send the passport."

"Yes, sir, but we were not able to read name on passport. It was, eh.. .too dark. I am sorry, sir, but we need you to again try to send passport."

"Well perhaps you haven't spoken yet today to my assistant, but we're actually in the process of finding a new solution. I need that computer by Monday, so we were trying to find another way."

"Okay, sir, but we cannot send computer until we get copy of passport."

"Right, I understand," I said, "But I'm not sure you're hearing me. We've tried sending it, and—"

"I know, sir, but we need for you to send again because we could not read."

"Right—but the last copy you got is the best we can do. The fax machine can't get it any lighter. So what we're doing now is we're looking for a new solution."

"Okay, sir. Can you send passport tomorrow?"

"Well, we'll try. Like I said, we're trying to find an alternative means of fixing this problem. We're doing our best."

"All right, sir. Thank you very much. So tomorrow will we expect fax." I heard a click. She didn't understand.

I sighed, and took a drag of my Fuentes. It was approaching the halfway mark of completion. As I opened my mouth and let the smoke crawl out at its own pace, I realized that if UPS was going to be difficult, I was going to have to make a few phone calls and plead my case. No better time to start than now, I figured, and dialed Raymond L. Schrier, of TimeRider Exhibits, based in Buffalo, New York. It was almost eleven-thirty there—he'd probably be at lunch. That was fine—I didn't actually want to talk to him.

Indeed, I reached his machine.

"Mr. Schrier," I said. "Sandro calling. Listen—I just got another call from UPS, and they still aren't getting the picture. I may not have that computer as soon as I'd like, and I just wanted to call and alert you to that. If you'd like, you can give me a call back here—anytime until about four p.m., your time—and we can discuss the problem. Maybe if there's anything you can do on your end to get UPS moving—I don't know. I know you're not

really involved—really it's my issue. But nonetheless, it's an issue. So gimme a call, we'll figure something out. Talk to you soon. Thanks."

Again, I sighed, and put the phone back in my pocket. Raymond L. Schrier. He'd definitely have to be on the mailing list that I had to make later. All of this, of course, was hinging on whether the proposal would ever get done, and that hinged on UPS. But still, I had to make the list.

Names floated through my head like sheep when I couldn't sleep. Stevenson...Daly....Wrentham...no, to hell with Wrentham...but certainly Dobbler.

Why couldn't the phone call have come from Emma? "Anonymous Call" always meant "Emma." Why did this time have to be any different? But I smiled, thinking about her. It was nice to know there was someone thousands of miles away from whom I could expect calls. Strange, also, that all those thousands of miles didn't change the fact that the very same sun that was beginning to slide behind the buildings across the street was the one providing her with the daylight in which she was doing her daily activities. For her, it was probably at its zenith. Eleven thirty, almost twelve. Probably straight over her head.

I wondered, as I looked out over the city, if I was the first to watch the sun dip behind the buildings, the first to be unsure of whether its doing so would be desirable or objectionable—for it would decrease the blinding brightness, but also the temperature. These steps had been exactly where they were for six or seven centuries, so I assumed the answer was no, I was not the first. Even when the colonial Americans were fighting for their independence, when they were first birthing a nation, even then, these steps were older than anything the imagination of any man or woman could conceive. And they were not by a long shot the oldest the city had to offer. In fact, these steps were brand new, in comparison to La Via Salaria, the Catacombs of Priscilla, the monument outside San Giovanni.

A piece of ash fell from my cigar, and a group of pigeons,

suspecting that it might be bread, bobbed their heads proudly and unapologetically and waddled toward me. I respected them. I was impressed by the way they were so unafraid. They came as close as half a foot from my shoe, and didn't move until I made a kicking motion.

On certain days, it made sense to me why I decided to pursue history as a career. On certain days, it did not. My degree was in business, and I suspect I could have made more money in another line of work. But on certain days—on this day—it made sense. I was in the history business because history was not a business at all, but a living creature.

Raymond L. Schrier, prick that he was, was not going to accept any excuse I would give him about the timing of my computer. He was in the history business too—he'd gone to school a lot longer than I had, and he knew more about history than I did, yet he was always concerned with the timing of it. But as far as I was concerned, it did not exist in time. It was eternal. I joked with him once, by saying, "History's eternal—shouldn't it, therefore, be considered God?" And he laughed back, "Sandro, if history were God, it wouldn't be as sick as it is—ninety percent of it is bloody wars and fights about God. You think God would fight with itself about what it was made up of?"

And I suppose he was right. But as I smoked the ever-shortening Carlos Fuentes, letting the smoke dance in my mouth and then wiggle out, I watched the people walking up the steps and looking at me, smiling at me, taking pictures of all that was behind me, and the Spagna Gypsies, making their rounds on poor Asian teenage girls and rich-looking American boys. And I wondered if History—the concept of it—could be considered something that is alive.

Perhaps I was smiling quite a bit as these ideas poured out of me, for as they did, a girl approached me and said, "You don't look like someone who'll steal my camera."

Caught a bit off guard, I turned my head toward her, trying not to blow smoke in her face. She was about twenty, with pale

skin, dirty-blonde hair, no make-up, and a cigarette in her fingers, which she put out against the stone facade after one last drag. Cigarettes, I hated. Cigars were a different breed.

"Could you take a picture of me on the Spanish Steps?" she asked.

"Oh. Sure," I said. She handed me the camera, and darted over to the steps, where she sat and smiled.

I pressed the button and held it down until I saw a flash. "I think your eyes were closed. Let me take another." I snapped again. "Perfect."

She came back over, and I handed her the camera. She examined the pictures.

"Oh, yeah. That first one was crap," she said.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Germany."

"Germany? I would have said Australia. You speak English well."

"I spent a lot of time in Australia when I was younger," she said. "I try to hide the accent, but I guess it doesn't work."

"Well, I guess you could tell that I was American. So I'm not very good at hiding, either. What brings you here?"

"I drove down with my friend," she said. "I'm only here for two days."

"Trying to make the best of it, eh? Well these steps are definitely worth seeing."

"Yeah. What are you doing here? Vacation?"

"I wish," I said. "I'm representing a group of businesses building historical museum exhibits. I'm basically here to become an expert on the culture, then go back and tell them what I came up with."

"Wow. So you know a lot about the city."

I was amazed at how talkative she was, especially toward someone a few generations older. But for some reason, I was compelled to talk back.

"I know a fair amount, but I miss the States, every now and

then."

"How long are you here?"

"A year. I've already been here nine months, so I'm actually getting on toward the end of everything."

"What will you do when you get back?"

I chuckled. "Retire," I said. "I've only got a few years left to work. I suppose this trip is the last big adventure on my career path."

"So you must be very excited about it."

"Well," I began. I didn't want to lie, so I thought about what to say to her. She seemed so eager to learn that I couldn't find it in my heart to feed her the formulaic responses to questions I'd taught myself over the years. "I love it," I said. "But like I said, I miss the States. I have a wife back home, and three children. My wife has visited twice, but she's got various reasons why she couldn't come and spend the year with me here. I've kind of got an entire structure back there, you know? I love it here, but I'd like to go back. Or, let's put it this way: I've loved every minute, but I'm ready for the retirement plan. Capiisce?"

"Of course," she said. "It makes perfect sense. You've done a lot, but you've got just as much to look forward to."

I smiled politely, and nodded. That wasn't really what I'd been saying. In the distance, the sun finally disappeared. The shadows immediately crept over us, and the blinding brightness went away. I took a drag from my cigar, and I expected it would be the last. It was getting very short. I peeled off the band and placed it in my pocket. And it was upon doing so, looking out at the city, no longer covered in sharp glare, that I thought maybe the girl had a point.

"Yes, exactly," I said. "Very good."

For a moment, neither of us spoke. She seemed to be looking out over the city, just as I was, in the same end-of-the-day light as me, young enough to be awestruck by the view.

"You know, right as you came up to me, I was having this odd little thought process about the idea of history," I said.

"I wondered if it wasn't possible that, in some way, it could be considered alive."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I mean—if you stop considering being alive as breathing and talking and growing, and whatnot—because if you listen to most religions, they'll tell you that that's not what it really means to be alive—and you start considering 'life' as being defined by other things..."

"What sort of things?"

"Well—things like transcending time. History does that naturally, right? And how about having an influence on the shape of the world? Trees can't do that. Hell, most humans can't do that. Yet every move we make is defined by history. The future is defined by history. History lives in the past and the future. That's what I meant by transcending time. So it transcends time, it influences things every day...I just feel like, if a tree can be called a living thing, a tree that just sits there, and then stops growing, and nobody ever remembers it and it doesn't bring about any change—if that damn thing is called "alive,"—or if the human beings that spend their entire lives in one place, and never want to make friends, and never change the world—if they're good enough to make the cut, then how is History not good enough?"

"I guess it is alive, in spirit."

"And I'm not talking about that girly phrase you use when you say something's 'alive,' when all you mean is that it has character or it's interesting, or something. I don't mean it like a metaphor. I'm serious. Think about it."

"No, I think you're absolutely right. It's a very interesting theory."

"I mean, look. You've heard about the Italian culture—everyone always saying they're very demonstrative, they always hug, they love togetherness, all that stuff?"

"Sure."

"Well, history shows that. Look at the way these people have learned to interact with this history. Look at the way the

history lets us live in its kitchen—right in its backyard. It's allowed us to move in with it—it hasn't rotted, or broken to drive us out. What a gesture of trust. And in return, man has kept it healthy, clean, has gone about his daily activities without disturbing it too much. If you can look at the history and say that it mimics the culture—or that the human culture mimics the historical culture—then how can you call one alive and the other inanimate?"

The girl nodded vigorously, seemingly in agreement but also holding in laughter, I suspected. I didn't want to bore her or scare her, but I had just one more thing to say.

"In America, we take history, and we cage it up—just like we cage up exotic animals in zoos—and make people pay to see it. You see the difference? How can something be held captive if it isn't alive? In any case, they don't do that here."

"A good point," the girl said. Again, she nodded, and there was a grin on her face, but I was too old to be able to read young people. Whether she was smiling because I was entertaining—a little old, a little cooky, but sharp nonetheless—or because I was laughable, I couldn't tell. But I was too old to care anymore. My body didn't take stress well. When I stressed, my back hurt, the product of a herniated disk I'd gotten thirty-five years ago that still bothered me once in a blue moon.

We stood in silence, and I thought of Emma. When I'd met her, we were about the same age as this girl that stood to my left, staring off into the waning sunlight. I smiled. When we had first met, I think, we were both staring off into some kind of blinding light, as well. Now we lived in Boston, lucky to have light past three p.m. in the winters.

After a minute or two of wordless observation, the girl announced, "Well, it's about time that I get back to my super-cheap hostel. I think there might be free food there. Anything that's free should not be passed up."

"That's for sure," I said. "You take care."

I'm fairly certain I scared her away, but I watched her hustle down the steps with a pace I could no longer match. Even

when they had nowhere to go, young people always seemed to want to get there quickly.

I put the Carlos Fuentes out against the facade. I pressed it into the stone, in the shape of a C, the commemoration of an old friend to whom cigars had been quite important, and said under my breath, "Now maybe the ash will stay there for another seven-hundred years." I didn't think it truly would. Probably the next rainstorm would wash it away. But that didn't change the fact that I'd put it there, right then. Whether its physical form lasted a day or not was one thing, but the act had been done, and that would now be true for all eternity.

The flaps on my trench coat began to dance a little more energetically now. It had grown brisk, but not unmanageable. The sun was low in the sky and would soon set, but there was still plenty of light, and in fact now it was clearer and less blinding than ever.

I climbed down the steps, slowly and carefully, and walked to the train station. I was in a hurry to get home and call Emma.





