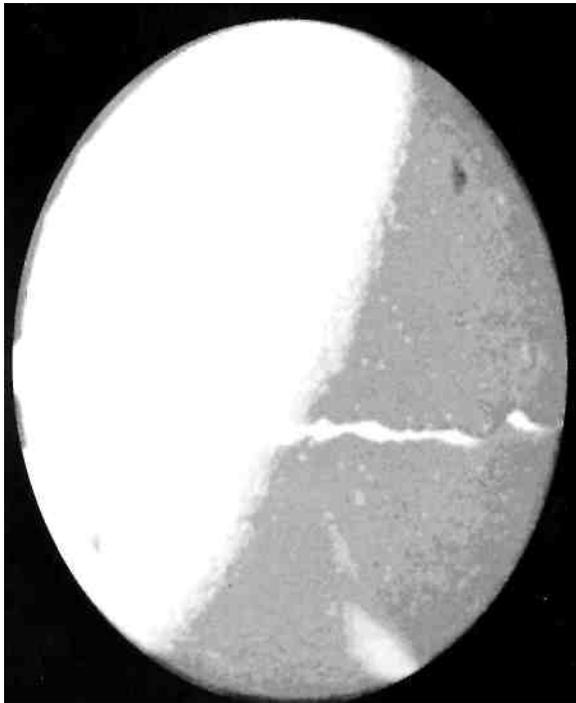


# the garland



spring 2001



# **the garland**

**the art and literature magazine  
of loyola college  
in maryland**

**the garland** volume 14, spring 2001

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## Just a little something to masticate on....

In the wee hours of assembling the Garland, we were stymied as to what to write about for the intro, so we just started talking about writing...

*Jessica: "For someone who has mastered the art of saying dumb things, I appreciate the craft of writing if for nothing less than saving my valued reputation. Thankfully, the laborious process marked by endless phone calls at odd hours of the night, a thorough cleaning of my apartment, and attempts to perform a one person dance party in the glow of a blank computer screen, goes undisclosed to the general public. Until now of course."*

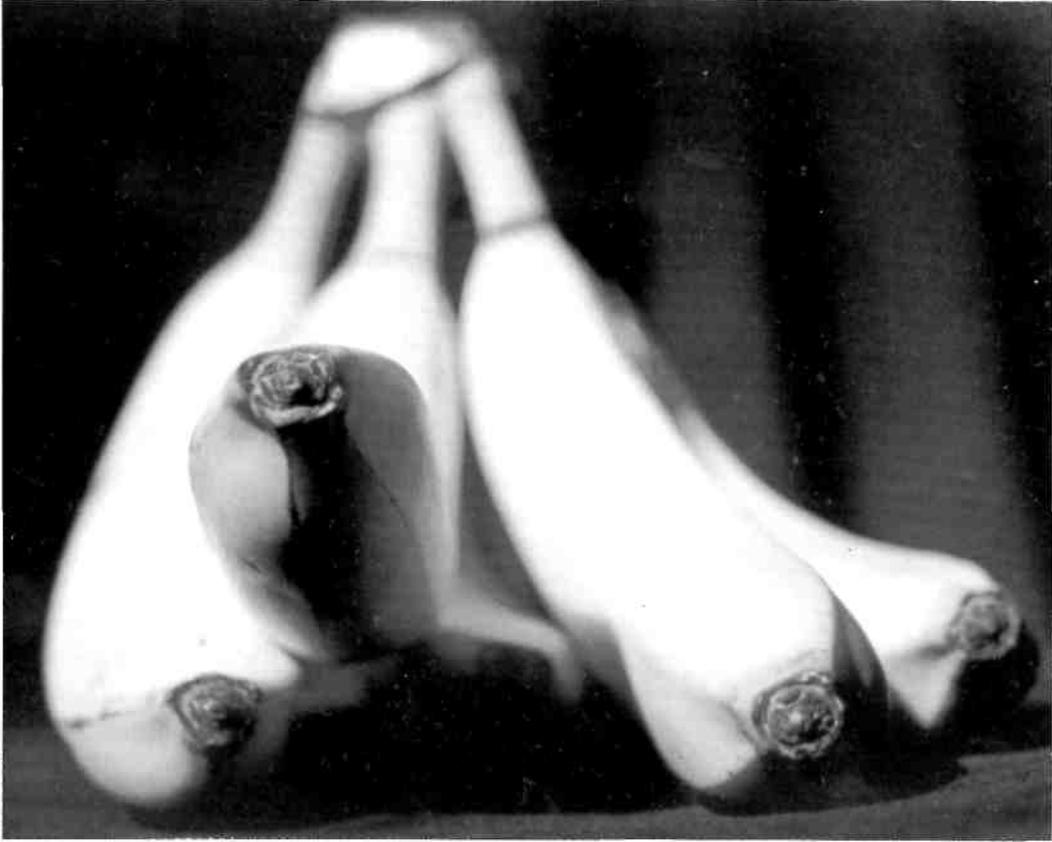
*Rebecca: "It makes me laugh: as a writer, people always ask which of my characters represent me, since the assumption stands that all creative work is autobiographical. They don't know the all-too-familiar restlessness of time and me as the only one to fill it. Sitting and inventing is much better than dealing with myself and the same old ticker tape that makes me think, 'Oh God, it's me again,' each time I find that late-night rerun of old thoughts and wonderment creeping in. Writing is screaming over myself to make my other, greater voice heard. My characters always strive to be far more interesting and three-dimensional than their creator."*

*Jessica: "Still, every now and again, amidst the jumble of words and phrases that seem more like remedial English or some foreign dialect, something good emerges. Let's go ahead and say fantastic even. Sometimes it takes a whole page of nothing to say one thing worth something."*

*Rebecca: "I often look back at what I've written later on and am so baffled by what it says about what I am capable of. Generally, I barely remember even conceiving of the idea. When the pen starts flying I never know what I might say."*

We appreciate your sharing your poems, stories, and photographs with us and thank you for your commitment to creating literature. We value your struggles and successes. A poet we admire told us that you know you're a writer when you realize you have no choice but to write. The individuals published here are among the choiceless. Thanks again.

-- Jessica Anderson and Rebecca Burrett



Jessica Anderson



# Freedom

*"He will have had to give himself  
room to withdraw in relation to the  
world, he must posit a state of pure,  
present nothingness." --Jean-Paul Sartre*

July 4, 1971, Jim Morrison, 27,  
This instant above Morrison's grave,  
American poet, rock star, its graffiti excessive and empty  
self-named erotic politician, as my palms turned upwards.  
found dead in a Paris bathtub, smiling. His freedom, a  
Roman wilderness of pain --  
This flight from life -- mortal proof where stuffed lizards and love letters  
that freedom is nothing' collect on dirt and stone.  
blood and sweat In this instant, I choose to engage, inhaling  
ringing the bathtub drain like a halo, the scent of freedom's mortality.  
This "room" he gives himself,  
like withdrawal --  
restless hands scrolling napkin poems,  
unearthly legs adorned in leather.  
Freedom, measured out in acid tabs  
by teenage crowds.  
Closing perception's doors  
in frantic gulps of Jim Beam.  
I wander, in August, 1999,  
lost in Pares-Le-Chares,  
wading up to my knees

in the pure nothingness  
of the present moment,  
Past freedoms,  
recorded in fading phrases,  
staring up at me from  
eroding tombstones.  
Freedom's casualties  
fill this "room"--  
Pamela Courson,  
soul-mate,  
joined him in 1978,  
syringe fresh in her arm, like a corsage.

**Kara Candito**

## for you

through and past so many days  
still scenes stand so quiet  
when in reality they were so loud  
looking at one instant  
holding on to that second  
can make so many more shared experiences come around  
as a constant  
a fixture in my life  
both having seen the past mistakes  
between us and of the others  
the future will let us prove we have learned  
make decisions for the better  
make them right  
what ever becomes of this  
what ever becomes of ourselves  
I'm always here for you  
forever proud

**Dan Woelfel**

# Will you be home soon?

Steve Kania

Typical. Teenagers. That must have been a prank. Don't they know it's not nice to scare an old man?

Wait! What's that noise? A beep? Where's that coming from? Oh, it's just the phone. I didn't hang it up right. I've been getting so careless lately. My son, he tells me that all the time. Apparently, I leave spills on the kitchen counter every time I pour the milk into my Cheerios. He's very understanding, though. He tells me these milk circles I leave are hard to see since the counter is white, too. But still, it's very careless, I know.

If my stomach won't stop growling, the neighbors will be able to hear it! Marty should be home soon with some food. He's a good son. He really is. It's good of him to look after me. I'm not of much use anymore. I'm like a sack of potatoes, you know. I really am.

One thing, though, about living with Marty-he thinks he's still 23. He lives off the barest essentials. Like with the groceries, he'll wait until the pantry is bare. I mean it. Oh, he'll wait until he's down to the last black olive or the last soupy little glob of jam before going to the store for more. He's very busy, though. I used to love going to the grocery stores, I'd go to four or five a week, comparing prices and produce and all. But Marty says he's too busy for all that. As if his job as a police officer wasn't enough, he's a basketball ref for the local college circuit.

I wish he'd call. He said something about a drug bust this morning. I'm sure he's fine, though. He's tough. Hell, he takes after me. But boy, he's awfully late tonight.

Unbelievable! I can't feel a thing in the fridge. Just the water pitcher

and the sticky orange juice carton, I think. I ate the last slice of bread an hour ago. It was a little stale, but I could sure go for another right now! I wish I could go to the grocery store for Marty. I'd love to go, but I can't of course. You can't do a lot of things with 20/220 vision.

Ah, how I wandered the brightly lit aisles in the supermarket. I always used the same route. Naturally, I started with the produce section. And I can still smell the fresh fish in the back of the store. And those poor lobsters, with bound claws, always crawling over each other in the tank's murky waters. And then there was the cereal aisle. I scoured the shelves, looking at all the labels. How many milligrams of fiber per serving? And the best unit price? And would my customer satisfaction be guaranteed?

These days I stick with Cheerios. I can still barely make out the bright yellow box. Barely. These days, especially on bad ones, I can hardly tell jars of orange marmalade and pasta sauce apart!

Wait. It's the phone again.

I ask: Hello? Marty? Hello?

I hear nothing. A void. Then, suddenly, the high, crackling laughter of a few boys.

I yell: Stop calling! Stop tying up the damn line! If you call one more time, you'll be very sorry!

All I achieve is louder whoops and cackles. No wonder they laugh, what's a blind old bat like me going to do? I'll bet you a dollar they call again. What a shame! What a shame!

Nighttime is the worst. Oh, it's the pits. I can barely make out anything during the day, but at night...

I sure hope Marty wasn't just trying to call. He said the drug bust was around Fifth and Tobely Street. Awful place. It was a crummy neighborhood, even back when my mail route stopped there. Litter piled up by the curb and

weeds sprung up through the uneven sidewalk. I still remember this one corner row house down there. How could I forget? The howls that came from behind that splintered wooden door scared me to death. I didn't dare peek through the mail slot to see what kind of beast was on the other side, waiting for me.

I've got all these memories stored up in my head. They're crystal clear. Sixty-five years of images that no eye failure can touch!

I remember my old routes perfectly. Marty asks me for directions all the time. I tell him, who needs a map when you've got me!

Besides, everyone's got their own crosses to bear. I had this one friend, a fellow postman, Eugene Delacroix, who had the worst scar above his left eyebrow. It was this burnt purplish color. I'm sure he was always self-conscious about it, and he claimed he had it since he was fifteen. Fifteen! Oh, everyone's got something.

I don't like to think of it much, but on some nights, when Marty's late arriving, I can't help but wonder what I'd do without him. My other son, Patrick, moved with his wife and twin daughters to Sacramento. It's too far away. Anyway, I'd get in the way, I think. I know there's not always a silver lining to every tragedy, but after Marty got divorced, at least I gave him some company. I would never want him to feel like I'm imposing, though. It's just that living alone can get pretty lonely.

I hope he's all right. I hope he's ok. I'm sure he is, but I wish he'd call.

What time is it, anyway? I better go to Marty's room. I swear he has the brightest digital clock in the free world in his room. I ought to put it in mine.

Tonight's a bad night. I can't make out much of anything. Maybe it's cause I'm so hungry. Who knows?

It's amazing, but as a mailman you get used to knowing where everything is. It gets so that you're not even aware you're even walking. Day after

day, year after year you take the same steps. I used to tell Delacroix and the boys at the office that I could do my route with my eyes closed. Boy was I something!

Now here I am, in my son's apartment, creeping down the hallway like a snail.

And wouldn't you know it, just as I get in his room, the phone starts ringing! Probably those damn kids again. They're testing me. Wait! Marty's referee whistle is probably on his desk somewhere... Letter opener, scissors, stapler... Aha! Here's the damn thing. I'll teach those kids. I'll leave 'em deaf!

But I hear nothing. After such a loud shriek, how could there be nothing? No dial tone, either. Maybe they dropped the receiver? That'll teach them. That'll teach... Marty?

Dad? He asks. Dad are you there?

Poor boy, I blew the damn whistle in his ear! I answer: Marty, where are you?

I'm at the food store, he says. Everything ok?

I reply: Fine, just fine.

Listen Dad, I called to ask what cereal do you want?

Oh, get me regular Cheerios, the one in the bright yellow box, I tell him, leaning on the edge of the mattress, still gripping the whistle tightly in my palm. I ask him: Son, will you be home soon?

Yeah, Dad, soon. I'll be back with dinner soon. It was a long day.

Oh good. I hope so, I say, and we hang up. I carefully place the receiver back down into place. My stomach growls again in my hollow paunch. I don't get up right away, though. I just sit for a while in the dark room. Not that it makes a difference if the lights are on or off. Nothing to worry about, I guess, Marty will be home soon. Nothing to worry about.

# Slow Dance

*(from David St. John's)*

It was awkward, because we knew  
My oldest brother and I,  
That we'd done this before, only with someone  
We wanted to lean up against,  
Get so close as to fill in all the gaps  
And pockets, so instead of two  
People dancing there's only one, back  
And forth, back and forth.  
And so we tried to redefine a dance.  
It was like a child dancing atop the feet  
Of my grandfather, stepping off  
His brown leather shoes  
In anticipation of his next move,  
Only to be held up  
By his arms.  
And the kitchen, blue-tiled French,  
Filled with copper, dried flowers  
I never think to look for now  
When I'm there.  
The scented face of my mother,  
A bony cheek pressed to mine,  
And she holds me hard.  
The lavender-white room  
And the gold-trimmed four-post bed  
I shared with my sister.

We tugged on flannel and raced  
To warm the bed, together, little bodies tense.  
My brothers threw pillows and bounced  
On twin beds next door.  
They were silent when my grandfather  
Started the slow ascent to his room,  
Wool socks on the hard wood, soft  
Like his gait across his farm.  
Alone and unaware but always  
Thinking, the breeze picking up  
And blowing gray hair to one side  
And he bent to reach a stray branch  
With large calloused hands  
That brushed against mine  
Like his unshaven cheek  
On my baby flesh.  
He walked up to where I stood peeling garlic  
In the yard, the one thing he could think of  
For me to do; it was his favorite memory  
Of me as a girl. And he said I looked so natural doing it  
He had to get the camera  
And I watched him as he watched me  
And we both knew  
What was going on.

**Catherine Crabtree**

**i.e.**

at midnight  
the soft june ferns  
billow across the driveway.  
fireflies  
dot the black expansive night.  
hills roll from under my feet  
to my neighbors back porch.

i'm swirling  
skim milk, equal, and folgers  
to a sandy beach shade.  
the cold rod-iron chairs  
impress basket weave marks on my legs.  
at six,  
i'd hide under the picnic table,  
shuck corn on the cob for my mom,  
build a fort and play in the pool,  
dig in the sandbox.

frozen forsythia  
borders my childhood landscape,  
as time kills it.  
memories sustained  
by  
peach crisp,

citronella candles  
and the snapshots  
of a life  
cut  
and pasted,  
roses stuck to the side of the house.

**Monica Deady**



**Jessica Anderson**

## Forget him

Bad Blood ... so he was dying anyway,  
Slipping through the cracks  
just getting by  
barely living  
early parenthood  
extended hospital stays  
Typical. . .  
his race, his situation.  
But she loved him, misunderstood the reasons and the lesson  
She, the "better half" of common chromosomes, the achiever  
who "made it out"  
who would be more than he  
because he would never be . . . anything  
so life turned  
made the decision  
and like a dog, he died in the streets  
to the common tune of common boys.

**Tyauna Bruce**

# Satisfaction

She appears out of nowhere, out of the shadows  
in the corner of my mind.  
She swoops down at me, like an angel.  
I go to her, but stop dead in my tracks.  
Am I afraid? Intimidated?  
Never. I feel too much, too strong, too fast, too  
hard.  
This is too much of a gamble, a risk  
to throw all I am at her like a crashing wave.  
I do not know her.  
Maybe not. But I feel her.  
With one glance into her entrancing eyes,  
she is in me.  
She flows through my body as free as die wind.  
Our souls entangle into one.  
One free, capable being that is fueled by the want,  
die need of one person for another.  
Satisfaction can only be achieved  
through equal and stable input.  
She moves freely inside me once more.  
Satisfaction.  
She exits me faster than she entered.

though not *ever*, *green*, or tree

**AH'01**

## Me, Green

An escaped mental patient in the blazing July field.  
Dirt chunks at his ankles,  
his heels leave holes in the earth.  
Behind him, like the hacking-through  
a helicopter gives the air, were countless others at their windows,  
cheering him on. A carrot-man in his prison clothes.  
Freer than grass. At his back,  
the tinny rattle of crazies behind glass.  
Disrupting our picnic.  
Happier than life.

As a gesture, we handed him sandwiches,  
one for each hand.  
Further on, running wild, we heard he stumbled. Recovered.  
The bottoms of his feet, chlorophyll-stained.

**Rebecca Burrett**

Anita Coupe Molina



# Simultaneous

4:30 a.m. the fish in the Mediterranean start to shiver  
through the depths of blue,  
the water they glide in like icy velvet  
on their armor that is glinting in the moonlight.  
Below in the inky black the ancient plants sway,  
hopelessly bound to the colorless sand.  
Bound by gravity,  
feet on the floor and hands in the air  
faces upturned, eyes closed,  
the natives and foreigners dance this way  
in a basement club one mile inland,  
hidden in the labyrinth of stone alleys.  
In a maze of turns  
and folds of bedclothes the lovers writhe  
in a room over the street,  
the balcony doors are left open,  
and soft sounds drift down.  
A rhythm of movement and the sigh  
of the old tramp shuffling down the road below  
with a crooked cane, a mangy dog, a green bottle.  
He wanders, eyes closed, hand trailing a wall  
while the dog runs along in the gutter;  
they are walking for the dawn,  
they are seeking open space

**Amanda McLaughlin**

# Back Room

I was led to the back of the store  
To see him, large knives and piles of meat, bones  
Split by a joking man.  
He is there, white-aproned,  
Affable, blood-stained.  
His hands are clean and dry.  
There were heavy women in work clothes  
Moving in and out of the swinging doors,  
Laughing. He sent one out the door  
With a swat to the backside.  
Behind him, An old farm calendar:  
Large horses and green fields.  
A photograph of someone else's  
Smiling grandchild is stuck  
Behind the yellowing telephone  
That just then rang.  
He sauntered over, picked it up,  
Did his business. All this  
And I was still watching. And the men  
Were still hacking at the stubborn  
Bones and the women were feeding the meat  
Into a grinder, pushing up sleeves and plunging  
Thick arms into full bowls. My mother  
Pulled me back. He kissed me goodbye,  
And I noticed: above one ear,  
A black birthmark spreading.

Catherine Crabtree

## Obfuscation

The intimate chaos of unspoken words  
Echoes like rain on a tin roof --  
The culmination of calamity, washed weather  
Under the weather of regret or nonchalance.  
At the pulpit where all is said and done  
Except what isn't -- an abyss  
Within the sermon yields  
Past missed points, clubbed feet,  
Lights manifested in shadows.  
I try to make sense of what isn't there  
Or what is but shouldn't be.  
Is ignorance an excuse to be content  
And is awareness the decision  
To understand and wish you didn't?

A fearless rendezvous with a beggar  
Finds you hungry in an attempt  
To claim the darkness hidden behind  
His greedy eyes.  
A Himalayan Sherpa smuggled  
To civilization carries the bags left unclaimed  
Because that is all he knows.

A pinecone mistaken for thunder falls on the tin roof,  
And the lake swirls and settles in frayed pretensions -  
A body of water changes direction without direction  
Disproving elemental theories with the kind

Of threats owned by the delusional insomniac,  
Pathos comes on like whip lash:  
I can't see straight inside of anything  
More than what I know...  
Summer solstice waiting  
For darkness and slumbering skies,  
For the rain to end and noise to settle  
To take notice of what isn't and speak in turn.

**Jessica Anderson**



**Anita Coupe Molina**

# Kind of Blues

Miles Davis what a name for you,  
for what you're doing,  
bleeding the brass,  
oozing the smooth musings aching  
of miles between,  
wandering in tangents,  
wilderness of notes and  
coming back to the melodies-  
I hear the themes of thoughts recurring.  
Retracing my steps every day,  
retracing thoughts, I'm seeking  
new frontiers of feeling  
and different octaves of consciousness.  
Awareness is a song you hear  
a woman humming as she scrubs the steps  
of a church.  
It is with you for a second,  
for glimpses and flashes the world is right  
and then you make it to the corner  
and forget it all again,  
overtaken by the storefronts and automobiles,  
rattled by the rush.  
Feeling Kind of Blue  
it's Monday night,  
work is over and, alone,  
I stand at my open window above the street  
and I throw things out of it,

pear explosions on pavement  
and curious expressions of passersby on a  
sidewalk littered with pancakes.  
It's like riding on a carousel  
not sure if the world is spinning  
or if I am,  
dizzy with the movement, colors, lights  
blurring reality with surreality  
and returning to a point  
where new harmonies begin,  
haunted by old ones.  
Miles Davis you've gone beyond the poets  
in their infancy of language,  
you speak of emotions we can't name  
of our secret homes within,  
the pain of being without.

**Amanda  
McLaughlin**



**Anita Coupe Molina**

## **Above**

The paint is cracking  
slowly.  
Their fingers are almost-  
touching.  
The one is pointing  
sure and powerful  
Proclaiming The Way  
but the other  
is not reaching  
not even leaning forward  
in awe  
could almost look back  
over his shoulder  
as if to say  
'there are other ways'  
and the third party  
who is you  
or I  
neck bent in consternation  
can't tell  
if their fingers have met  
or will meet  
or should have met  
and that tiny gap  
is why our worlds  
don't meet  
just one brushstroke away

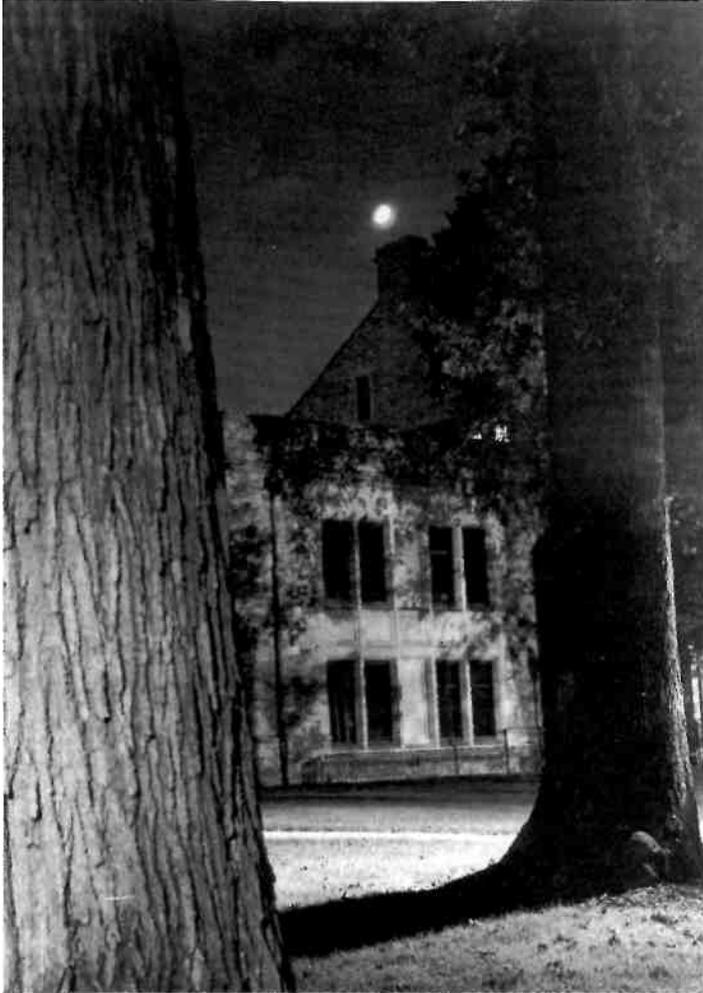
**Mindy Stavrou**



## **the clock**

The clock sealed the day with  
An echoless tic,  
To claim that which  
Dissolves and  
Delivered a consequence  
Wholly and compulsively  
Inseparable from the  
Hauntings we avow  
Under the brink of a  
Dusty moon resembling  
Arched limestone.

**Jessica Anderson**



Anita Coupe Molina

# Just Dessert

Erin Holohan

Tom Maloney never really liked children. He hated the way they waved dollar bills in his face, shrieking as if they were at a Backstreet Boys concert. He hated their whining when they wanted more helpings of vanilla or a different kind of cone. He hated the smell of pool chlorine that emanated from their wet hair and towels. He hated the melting ice cream that dribbled down the sides of his hands like drops of sticky sweat. Most of all, however, he hated being Mr. Softee.

As Tom reached into the freezer for what seemed like the thousandth time that day, he tried to remember how he had gotten himself into this mushy nightmare. Only a few months ago, he and his buddies were sitting in a dorm room chugging cans of Busch and trying to impress a few tube-top wearing freshmen. Ice cream was the farthest thing from his mind. Now, however, ice cream was not only on his mind, but it was all over the white uniform that the company told him to "wear with pride." He was a walking Tide commercial, with splotches of strawberry, chocolate, and vanilla scattered over the front of his shirt like paint on a white canvas. His name was embroidered in a proud blue on the left side of his button down shirt. He'd wanted it to say "Tom," but his boss told him that "Tommy" would be best because "it seemed friendlier - more like the name an ice cream man should have." And so that's the way it was. Tom could not complain because he needed this job. It helped him out considerably on those very thirsty Saturday nights at the bars. It's amazing how quickly pockets can empty when you're in college.

When Tom's friend Mark heard that he was monetarily challenged and looking for a job, he introduced him to the world of ice cream. Mark had been an ice cream man the summer before and although he had hated it too, he persuaded Tom to share in his misery. He had been offered a last-minute internship at his uncle's law firm and needed someone to take his place as Mr. Softee. "Look at it

this way, Tom. You need a job and there is one here for the taking. The hours aren't bad and the pay is ok," Tom remembered him saying. "Besides, think of how many honeys you can pick up in this sweet ride." Tom had reluctantly agreed to take the job and filled out the necessary paperwork the following day. It was like signing away his soul to the devil. Originally, he thought that all he had to do was hand out ice cream and then send the kids on their way. He could park his truck on the street outside the pool and check out all of the Coppertone beauties sunbathing. That was nearly three months, two billion ice cream cones, and five hundred fat ladies in thongs ago.

Now, during the sultry days of July, Tom would rather give himself brain surgery with a Black & Decker drill than spend another hour in that truck. The only thing more annoying than the high-pitched screeches of the children was the music that beckoned them. It charmed them like one would charm a snake from a basket. The moment their ears caught the sound of the catchy jingle, they would come running - caught under the spell of Rocket pops and King Cones. Tom remembered the day he decided to have a little fun with the children. He saw them come running and simply kept driving. He didn't drive very fast, but kept the pace of a stalker as he watched them in his side mirror - running for their coveted ice cream. Some of them were quick and managed to catch up to him. They had earned their ice cream. Others, however, were not so athletic. One little boy, in particular, was in the blob phase of childhood. His bloated face looked like something left underwater. He huffed and puffed, a bright yellow towel over his shoulders swinging wildly. Drops of sweat mixed with pool water fell from his hair as he waved his arms frantically - too out of breath to yell. Eventually, Tom stopped the truck, but not until he'd had all of his fun. This business had hardened him.

"I'll have one Flinstone Push Pop and two Jolly Ranchers," a tiny voice said precisely. Tom looked down and saw a little blond girl hanging on the side of the truck. She stood on the tips of her toes, trying desperately to look old. Her blond pigtailed gave her away. Tom gave her a fake smile and reached into the freezer.

"Emma! How many times have I told you not to run off like that?" Tom heard a breathless voice yell. When he looked up he saw an older girl running towards him in a floral two-piece bathing suit. She struggled to hold a blue towel around her waist with one hand. Tom gazed at her, taking her in as if she was pure blond oxygen. She smiled at him, handing him money for the ice cream and candy. "Thanks, Tommy," she said with a wink. Then she turned around and left, helping Emma unwrap the ice cream. Tom's mouth remained opened, but no words escaped. He had never seen her before that moment and he hoped that she would come again.

Over the next few weeks, Tom actually began looking forward to going to work. It was not because he suddenly developed a great love for children or for ice cream - this was far from the case. It was because the girl in the floral bathing suit did come again - and again. Sometimes she would come with Emma, but most of the time she would be by herself. Each time they talked, Tom learned a little more about her - and liked her even more. Her name was Kelly and she, too, was home from college for the summer. Emma was her little sister. Tom thought about asking her out, but always lost his nerve at the last minute. Most of their conversations only lasted for a brief time and they were basically small talk. Then Kelly would run off somewhere. Tom wanted more.

One day Kelly came up to the truck and noticed that Tom was in a considerably bad mood. She asked him about it. "I haven't had any kids come up to buy ice cream all day," he explained. "This has been happening for a while. I think it's that Good Humor guy over there who's stealing all the business." Normally, Tom wouldn't care whether or not he sold ice cream. In fact, he preferred not seeing those runny nosed kids every minute of the day. His boss, on the other hand, had grown quite concerned. He'd pulled him into the office the other day and questioned Tom.

"Tommy, Tommy, Tommy," he'd said, "I've noticed that sales have gone down considerably on your route. Can you think of any reason for this? Are you being friendly with the kids? They are, after all, the customers." The image of a lit-

the fat boy ran through Tom's mind. "This didn't happen at all last summer when Mark held the route. I'm gonna keep an eye on you, Tommy. If sales don't go up within the next few weeks, I'm afraid I'm gonna have to let you go."

After Kelly left, Tom plotted how to get the kids to come back to his truck. If worse came to worse, he would just have to take the Good Humor truck out of the equation. He considered slashing its tires, but soon gave up on that idea. That wouldn't bring the kids back. At that moment a little boy walked by. He had bright orange inflatable swimmyies on his arms and looked like he was going to take off at a moment's notice. "Hey you!" Tom cried. "Wanna buy some ice cream?" The little boy looked straight at him and began to cry. He then ran back to the pool - arms flapping all the way.

"He doesn't like you," a voice called out. Tom looked over at a boy standing behind the chain link fence. His stomach protruded considerably over the waistband of his shorts. "None of us like you...or your ice cream."

"And why's that?" Tom wondered.

"Emma told us not to buy ice cream from you any more. She said the Good Humor man is much nicer," he replied matter-of-factly. "And you know what? I think he is."

"Emma told you that?" Tom was confused. The boy nodded gravely and then turned around. Tom watched him cannon ball into the pool, water splashing everywhere. His job was slipping away like a rope through sweaty hands. He made it a point to ask Kelly about this the next time she came by. Sure enough, Kelly walked up to the truck a few days later. She was wearing a little yellow sundress and Tom almost forgot that he had something to ask her.

"Hi Tommy," she said seductively. "How's it goin'?"

"It's goin' ok, Kel. I have a little question to ask you though."

"Yes?" she asked, leaning on the metal ledge.

"Why is your sister Emma telling the kids not to buy ice cream from me? Tell her to stop. I'm really losing business."

"I know you are, Tom. That's the plan," she bluntly replied.

"What?!"

"You heard me, Tom. I want you to lose your job."

"Are you serious, Kelly? Why would you say something like that? I thought we had something special. You know, I was really beginning to like you." Tom could not believe this was all coming from the girl who'd flirted with him all summer.

"Nothing was ever going to happen between us, Tommy," she said slyly. Tom stood there, not knowing what to say. "You know that little boy who chased after your truck awhile back? That poor boy was my brother. And now you know what it feels like to chase after something you really want, and never be able to get it." She raised an eyebrow, smiled at him coquettishly, and slunk away. Tom watched her go and knew that he'd soon be losing something else as well.

**Stacy Judice**



# I Hear the Air Passing Through You

I hear the air passing through you.  
You feet smell like wine  
and your teeth shine like yellow moons.

I once rubbed you out in an ashtray,  
rubbed you along my gums,  
strained my neck to look up at you.

I am the great need for Love, you said,  
a pimple on her face or back,  
a stretch mark on her belly,

The material of smoke, foreign currency,  
a large muscle working.  
I am getting away with murder.

Made by hand, a child of God,  
a wound sealed with a butterfly bandage,  
a shot in the dark, a tiny flash of light,

everything that I think, and everything  
that I thought and insisted I wasn't - I am.  
An exhalation, a round of breaths.

**Melissa Bean**

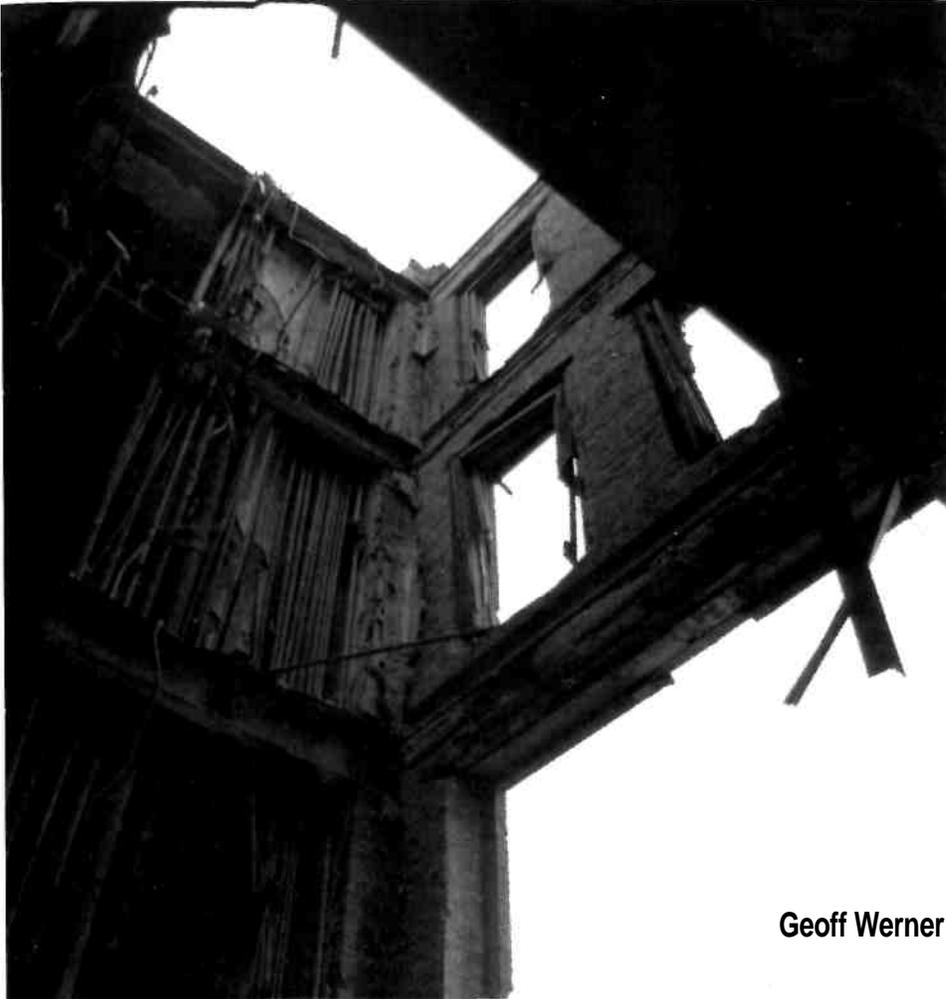
**39**

## Noncommittal

You want to see me dolled up like a doily  
for the old church routine, your mother weeping  
silently in her pew for the son she lost to a Catholic.  
But suppose I told you my worst fear  
is that you'll turn out like your father,  
or maybe mine, and I expect to find you one day,  
done in, bleeding from a gunshot or blood clot  
like karma revisiting your dad's awful luck.  
That chance at happiness on loan from our creditors  
only till they come to collect.  
Then I'll be gutted, drained without you  
even though I was alone the whole time,  
waiting for it to happen.

I want you someday to find me blindfolded  
in off-white, ready, and all I'll be waiting for  
is the crazy fucking on the honeymoon.  
That would be the real filling-up.

**Rebecca Burrett**



**Geoff Werner**

## The American Legion: Post 0326 Mount Kisco, NY

I am twelve and crouched.  
The wake of smoke smolders near the yellow ceiling  
Drifting, merging and bursting from itself,  
Wafting from sizzling cylinders  
Charred belching chambers

Cigars and cigarettes  
The occasional cauldron of a pipe...  
*Ranks fall in!* In stools  
Commanding officers and lieutenants  
Jockey for the first tap

And sometimes I think I hear a war-like stillness  
That creeps along the ceiling,  
Camouflaged within the plumed cotton of smoke.  
They can hear it better than I -  
The clink of ice cubes chimes,  
The last gulp is perched on the threshold of the throat.  
Numbed, underwater and ears ringing,  
They fight back the wool of whiskey,

And I watch with terrified pity  
As they try to swallow.

**Kristopher Mans**

# Ordinary Time

Katie McHugh

There is nothing outside my apartment window except an ordinary, quiet street far below. My watch reads two minutes past three, which makes him officially late -- boyfriends always are. I know that I know exactly where James is. Exasperated nonetheless, my hands jump into my combed hair, involuntarily twisting it into a knot at the nape of my neck.

My apartment, like the street, is unusually empty for a Saturday. The living room couch is gone. I went discount furniture shopping last week and found an adorable navy plaid couch: firm, comfortable, matches the room's color scheme. It was ordered, charged, and supposed to have come by Thursday. It hasn't. My deteriorated beige sofa -- a lumpy relic from my college dorm -- I've already donated to the local youth center, and two teenage boys in sweat-stained t-shirts hauled it away yesterday. Impatient, I dance to the center of the small room, do a half-pirouette in my delicate dress and inappropriate shoes, and collapse on the rug, my elbow propped against the narrow mahogany coffee table. The corner lamp isn't pretty in the daytime when it's turned off; the shade looks dull. Wallpaper needs to go one of these days. And the floor is hard beneath my matted carpeting. Where's the couch? I called UPS yesterday and they actually tracked it to Milwaukee.

The air is dusty and dim, except for bands of afternoon sunlight streaking faded walls and the sagging ceiling. I arch my back against the table, listening to the hum of the world, straining to hear a car slowing, an engine stopping. We're supposed to have an early dinner, but first we're going to visit my mother at the St. Joseph's Church Bazaar, where she's selling hand-beaded rosaries. Seven minutes late.

But the buzzer bleats. I'm not going to go crazy in my half-naked living room after all. Rather than wait for him to trek up three flights of stairs, or wait for an elevator that will never arrive, I gather myself up like a pile of clothing, thrown in the

direction of the door, and rush to meet him.

We bump into each other in the lobby, really a poorly protected cubicle of space separating the building's elevators from the sidewalk, with a vacant desk and two potted rubber plants.

"Sorry I'm late," his mouth offers a shy smile, as he pushes the glass door open. "I was at the program this morning."

"I know," I sigh, and we step towards his old car.

I work as a legal secretary and attend a second-rate graduate school for writing, of all things; James is a financial analyst for a Cincinnati law firm and a professional volunteer, so I like to explain. He is taller, and a year older, mild, usually looking as though he'd rather think about you than talk to you.

Polished burgundy loafers, dark belted jeans and a green polo shirt. He's wearing his new glasses. Last Saturday we went to the eyeglass place in the mall to pick out frames. The woman behind the counter - a mass of frizzy hair and a boxy, flowery dress — suggested a black frame of medium thickness. "These are German glasses," she chuckled. "They make everyone who wears them look German. You'll look German!"

He tried them on and I liked them, so he bought them. James is half-Italian and half-Scottish, but the pitch worked. The glasses match his dark hair and light complexion nicely.

James volunteers weekends at the Dorothy Day House, the city's soup kitchen, serving balanced breakfasts and sandwiches. I've worked a few times; the thought of going more often feels guilty to me. It's a small brick building on the other side of Cincinnati, stained with graffiti, although the interior is kept immaculate. The plain cream colors, flickering fluorescent bulbs, long, fake-wooden folding tables and orange plastic chairs all remind me of my grade school cafeteria, complete with name-stickered, gray-haired monitor ladies. The patrons are usually interesting to talk to. A few weeks ago, one man wearing a ski jacket and a jack o'lantern grin, between sips of coffee, explained to me his theory on religion. It was all about love, he said, too big to explain, like the universe, like God; God just lets the universe go, and sometimes Satan tries to snatch it away, you see? I saw, I said. He stared at me with wide brown eyes that left deep creases in his temples when he blinked. "Your eyes," he decided slowly,

"are like the cosmos."

We're driving, weaving out of bottled-up lanes and into deceptively clear ones. Now we're stopped at a light and poised to make an illegal turn, and I point this fact out. James is preoccupied, smoking a cigarette out the window.

"How many are you down to now?"

"Two a day."

"Two?"

"Maybe three. I have a lot on my mind," he sighs, letting the exhausted cigarette fly towards the pavement.

James is driving one-handed and that scares me. When he's distracted, he fumbles with his glasses, the mirrors, his buttons, focusing too much attention on the radio dial and not enough on the road. The last time he had a lot on his mind he was worried about the health of a middle-aged woman who lives at the shelter, and ran the car into a streetlight post while searching for an a.m. radio advice show.

He settles on a news station that sounds as if it's blasted out of 1948. Glancing over, he notices my right hand, knuckles white from clutching the door handle. "I'm all right," he grins baby milk teeth at me. "How was your day?"

"Great; no couch," I tell him. James nods, his pale, square jaw moving steadily. His face is clean-shaven. I have a bad habit of staring at nose profiles and ears and sideburns when someone is trying to concentrate on driving straight.

"No couch," he frowns, contemplating this for a moment.

"None," I say. He's not being very talkative today; I haven't even heard one Dorothy Day story yet, and we've been traveling for fifteen minutes. I lean back and lay my head in the crevice between the car door and my seat, listening to the tragic news of the world buzzing and fading when we drive under overpasses, fireflies of sound dying in a jar.

By the time we arrive at the church, the lot is full and cars are haphazardly parked all over the grass. It looks more like a carnival; children are bouncing and shouting on a giant air-castle, smoke is billowing from barbecue grills, and balloons are escaping left and right. "You and James have to come," my mother begged me on the phone the night before. "Proceeds go to the renovations!" My mother has recently

been appointed to St. Joseph's building committee, in charge of fundraising, expanding the church. Towards the rectory I can see rows of crepe-paper covered tables, various knickknacks perfect for...well, perfect for supporting a good cause, anyway. Somewhere in the crowd, my mother is seated in a metal folding chair, laughing and smoothing her hair in the wind, chatting with Fr. Foley and hawking rosaries at the same time.

After walking around for a few minutes, everything suddenly feels more normal. Parents are roping in their children, ice cream is melting on the blacktop, rainbows are painted on almost translucent cheeks. "Want a balloon?" James kids. "No," I tease back, "I want a goldfish." A Boy Scout troop is having a sale about twenty feet away.

"You got it," he laughs, walking over to the table. I grab his arm. "I don't really want one," I say, but it's too late. The wallet's out and he's buying me a two-dollar goldfish in water in a bulging plastic bag. It's heavy and dangerous. The fish's eye is dilated and bewildered.

"Maybe I'll write a story about this fish," I muse.

"Don't drop it," he cautions. "You'll have to call it A fish out of water."

"Ha-ha-ha," I exaggerate.

James looks sly. "You should write about a boat."

"A boat?"

"I have a story for you; a boat, and it sinks. It hits an iceberg and it sinks. It's a tragedy."

My face breaks into a smile. "Maybe there could be a lot of people on the boat. Maybe my story will be really popular and I can turn it into a movie."

"There you go," he says. "It could be an epic. Make sure you include several nudity scenes, though."

"Oh, I will... Seriously though. I need a story. An idea."

"I told you, write an epic. You could write the next *Odyssey*."

"It's been done. That was *Ulysses*,"

He laughs a gruff German-sounding laugh. "I'll call you Joyce, then," he says, taking my hand.

We find my mother. Though her hands are folded on the rosary table, she's not hard to miss with the dyed platinum hair that clashes with her age. She thinks she's trendy in that bright outfit, but now -- I view it objectively even in this crowd -- it's still just an old-lady floral dress. She giggles at my fish, which I carry gingerly, a water balloon ready to burst at my feet if I make one clumsy move. She starts telling me a "can you believe this?" story about the rudeness of a lady in her sewing circle, and James is leaning on the table, crinkling the paper, talking with Father Foley. A breeze drifts by and it occurs to me that for the first time this week, the sun is out, ripening through the trees, blanketing the tables white and warming our shoulders. We lounge for half an hour. James buys a rosary from my mother before we go. I thought he was doing it just to be nice.

We won't have dinner until 6 o'clock. We're late again, stuck between exits on the highway because a car cut too close in front of a tractor-trailer. For half an hour we have no idea why traffic is at a dead stop; even the up-to-the-minute radio broadcast has yet to cover the story. All we see are a barrage of ambulances and police cars plowing through the emergency lane. All we hear are sirens approaching and wailing away: jarring, unpopular music.

I'm driving now, and only get a brief view of the wreck as we inch forward and finally pass it. James is gawking behind the window glass, jaw set to cringe, as though he is looking at a terrifying museum exhibit. News helicopters are chopping overhead and the radio is now providing the historical summary.

"...and on I-75 a terrible, fatal three-car accident -- Oh, that's awful, Les! -- Sure is, Samantha... Anyone traveling southbound on I-75 should find an exit, because heavily backed-up traffic is only beginning to clear... Police say one driver was trying to pass a tractor-trailer... One passenger has died and three others are being rushed to St. Luke's Hospital..."

I glance longer than I should. The area is sectioned off by flares, shouts and flashing police lights. Lots of guys in uniforms, mustaches and sunglasses, are busy, directing traffic and leaning into small, hand-held radios. The trailer is perched perilously between broken guardrail, cliff and highway. A red car is flipped over in the embankment, grounded in tall weeds. A third car, a white one, is on the shoulder of

the highway, slightly dented. The innocent bystander, travelling in the right lane when a car and a truck came swooping over. There is a huddle around the injured, so I can't see any blood, or a body bag, or whatever my riveted eyes have hoped to see. And then we're by -- we're passed.

The atmosphere is numbing. We're driving through a tunnel of trees, following a dotted white line as usual. "How's the fish," I finally say, looking straight ahead.

In my peripheral view, James has his palm on top of the bag, as if he is covering the fish's eyes. "Oh...it's fine," he replies belatedly, still staring out the window. Right now he's thinking of death and pain, life and peace, and a telephone call from God, of things I will not know until we have our own fatal accident, dinner at the Sweetwater Café.

There is no wait at the bright, eclectically decorated restaurant. James has his arm around me and is rubbing my shoulder, as if trying to melt away the inexplicable tension between us. Sensing his nervousness makes my own mind wander.

A string of rehearsed words leave his mouth the moment we sit in the cushioned chairs. "We need to talk...I need to tell you this now," he sighs, eyes looking away from underneath his black glasses, and then suddenly I know we won't be discussing hunger programs or homeless shelters.

"You know that I love you," he says. What? Oh, God. This is it; this is the line. I close my eyes briefly; I want to plug my ears the way children do. One year, one month, six days, eighteen hours, destination: breakup.

"I've been thinking about this for a long time, for about six months, and lately I've been sure, and now I'm really sure." He clears his throat. "I don't think I'm cut out to be an analyst. Or to work for a firm."

My shoulders collapse with temporary relief. "All right then," my face relaxes.

"Because I've been called," he continues. His fingers are drumming the tablecloth.

I don't understand yet. "Who called you?" I'm wary now, and angry, expecting to hear an ex-girlfriend's name.

"I mean, I have a calling. I know I'm not making any sense. This is just so hard for me to tell you." Another deep sigh, pregnant pause, peak of drama.

"I'm thinking of entering a seminary."

This is the part where everything is slow motion and rapid pace all at once. Shock. Lean forward. Sit back. Clutch fork. "A sem-in-ary? You're going to be a priest. A Catholic priest?"

He takes off his glasses to rub his eyes, upset that I'm upset. "I think so," he whispers. "I know this is what I'm called to do. I want to help people. I want to understand them, and listen to them. And -- that accident today -- seeing the accident today made me feel so helpless. Although that's not what made me decide, although I guess it did finally inspire me to decide, but really, but no, I just, I think it was a sign from God, that I'm choosing the right path. I need to do this, to have peace with myself."

He's not looking at me. I'm dizzy with the illogic of the statements. I want to say can't you help people without being a priest? You do help people now. You help hundreds of people now. You help me now. Can't you you can't can't can't. But I remain quiet. I drink my whole glass of water, trying to keep a steady occupation in the chaos, trying, at the same time, not to choke.

Obviously, it's over. Just like that, we're over. Two hours ago, buying goldfish together; now, goldfish has a broken home. Did I cause this? Is this me? He says no. He doesn't think so. My lip is raw from biting it. I could make a scene, yelling and screaming about how selfish he is and tip the table into his lap. I could dump his water glass on his head. But wait, you can't throw a glass at a priest, because priests aren't selfish! What a nasty, horrible breakup trick! The blood ebbs from my face and I won't plead temporary insanity; dignity is the best choice. A dignified response will prove how supportive I am. "I see. I understand. I mean, I don't understand, but maybe I can understand. I don't know." I drop my napkin onto the table. "I think I'd like to go home now."

"I understand," he nods solemnly. He's already solemn. He leaves a tip for the befuddled waiter, who hasn't even brought us salads yet. I haven't eaten anything after all, anything besides a glass of water and an ice cube. The water is sloshing around in my trembling stomach, which is confused, empty, and longing for the signal of substance.

There's nothing worse than, having been dumped by your boyfriend in the

name of the Lord, inadvertently deadbolting and un-deadbolting your door when you're trying to get inside your apartment, just because you can't tell your keys apart, and then bursting inside and falling onto a couch that isn't there. "God damn fucked up fuck!" I mutter. My pantyhose are ripped and my knee has a brush burn. Answering machine silent: no messages. Letterbox: no mail. My blue sofa love-seat is still in Milwaukee, well across the state line, and the space in my living room irritates me, haunting the apartment like the unshakable, prickly feeling of a phantom limb.

The oblivious goldfish has managed to survive the trip, resting safely on the floor, his water-baggie home still intact. He floats quietly on the bottom, fins barely whispering movement. Frustrated, I search my cabinets for an empty Mason jar and scoop up the bag, pick the plastic knot and pour the fish inside. I add a cup of water; bubbles rise to the surface. The fish appears slightly unsettled but adapts to the new habitat. I give him a pinch of the complementary fish food and stare into the green-tinted jar. For a moment, I consider dumping its entire contents down the toilet.

Every time I see my reflection in the bathroom mirror I remind myself to get rid of the fluorescent bulbs. Between the lights, the dry air, worn-off powder, and trauma-induced blotchiness, my skin is a pink mess, like a healing sunburn victim's. Where is my concealer? I make myself up again to regain some sense of decency. I am dignified.

As my reflection wavers in the mirror, the phone summons. I spring to answer it, bounding across carpet and over my kicked-off shoes, both praying and fearing who it could be. It's not; the voice belongs to my friend Carrie.

"What are you up to tonight?"

"Nothing." For once, it is the absolute truth.

"Let's go to the bar, girls' night," she prods.

My hands are unsteady and pale, and the thought of beer in my empty stomach makes me wince. But I'm too dazed to make decisions and too angry to protest getting drunk. "All right," I agree. "I'll meet you at nine." We always go to the same bar, The Cove. It's half a block away from my building.

It's cooler out now and I'm wearing a black short-sleeved dress, new stockings to cover up my swelling, blue-black knee. Instant goosebumps, hair standing straight

up, like a thousand thin, tiny dog's ears, pricked at a faint sound -- that's the soul of me. Cars are drifting between traffic lights. Clusters of teenage girls come and go. On the right are two more apartment buildings and a deli, the neon sign illuminating the vicinity more than the corner streetlights. Across the street is the Episcopal church, a gray stone castle with three needlelike steeples. The bell is not ringing, thank God. My feet pause approaching it. Will this sight, this monstrous, gloomy giant, finally register enough ugliness to stir my nerves and make me cry?

The patches of sidewalk in front of the church are empty, the heavy gothic wooden doors are closed, and the walk sign is lit pale green. I could go in. I could pray. Pray that James stops being an idiot. He could have become an Episcopal minister, couldn't he? Same vestments, same sacraments, girlfriend included? Aren't Episcopalians just Catholics with common sense? They have women priests; some factions are even hoping for homosexuality to be tolerated in a rational, timely way -- they live in the real world. But I can't compete: James wants to marry the Lord, not me. I walk on, allowing the church to drop farther and farther behind.

I can hear the insistent bass thump when I'm ten feet away. The Cove takes up the next corner block; flashes of light blink where the black curtains covering the tall windows do not meet. "Hi, Bill," I sigh to the bouncer, a thick, muscular man in a crew cut and a too-tight black shirt. "Hey," his chin protrudes.

The bar is cramped. Herds of people are scrunched together at tables meant for two; crammed body-to-body on a tiny slab of dance floor; clamoring around a lone pool table. I meander over to a vinyl stool and order a double shot. A knocked-over beer bottle is dripping a steady puddle on the floor near the legs of my stool. I nudge the seat to the left. The stool makes an uncomfortable scraping noise.

I eye the doorway. Carrie -- where the fuck is she? My trauma is going stale; it needs telling or it might curdle. An attractive bartender shoves my double-shot in front of me, and I drink it, before I can worry whether or not it's impolite to not wait for the guest. My throat harbors a stale burn and my insides a warm, mollifying feeling.

A blond man I vaguely recognize (the bus stop? James' apartment complex?) is sitting at the other end of the bar. He is dressed casually, and when he moves his wrist the silver band of his watch flickers. I cross and uncross my legs and pull my hair in

front of my shoulders. When he shifts in my direction, I smile the daring smile.

As planned, he sidles over. "Can I buy you a drink?"

It's 9:09 and Carrie isn't here. "Sure," I say with false brightness. Jesus, I'm going to be plastered before Carrie even slings her purse on the damp bar. I'm sticking with hard liquor tonight so he orders a Long Island Iced Tea for me, and a beer for himself. "I've seen you somewhere," he says loudly, over the din. "I can't remember where, though."

I'm glad the impression is mutual. "Yes, you look familiar," I admit. The drinks are on the counter and I'm guzzling amiably.

"So, come here often?" he attempts. I'm holding a steady buzz and he has nice teeth, so I'm willing to forgive the cheap line. "Yeah, what's your sign," I giggle. Oops. I didn't mean to say that.

"Virgo," he says, not noticing the unintended tinge of sarcasm in my voice. "Virgo," I echo. Suddenly Madonna pop enters my head: 'Like a virgin-oooh- touched for the very first time...'

"What do you do?"

"I'm in grad school, a writer," I announce importantly. At least, I would be if I had a story or poem half-finished on a disk somewhere. "What do you do?"

Now he's talking about investing or something and I'm inquiring about 401k plans; I'm not sure how we arrived at this topic. There's nothing funnier than a fledgling writer pretending to know about money. Time to flirt. "Time for another drink?" I ask. "How about martinis?" At this point I've forgotten about Carrie, and it appears that she's forgotten about me too. Nowhere in sight

His name is Derek and he's not bad looking - thin nose, somewhat muscular build. I'm sure I could pick him up. I have picked him up; I could carry him home now if I wanted to. It occurs to me that James will never sleep with anyone - we were waiting until marriage, so he said — and that abrupt thought startles me. "Don't be a priest," I tell Derek, wide-eyed and in a serious voice.

He looks puzzled but I keep babbling on. "It's a terrible thing to give up your whole life for. I mean, maybe when you're thirty, thirty-five, and have lived a little bit, then if you're single, and want spiritual fulfillment, ok, maybe. But, God, it seems like

such a waste!"

"I don't want to be a priest," he confides, bemused. Now is the moment where he should state that he has someone to meet, or that gosh it's late and he has someplace to be. Yet, he just sips his martini and waits for me to go on.

"Oh, I know you don't," I laugh, as though the idea is hilarious. "But I'm just saying, I know I read somewhere that even though the Catholic population is hugely increasing, the number of priests are decreasing. Those priests are all getting older and every year fewer and fewer men wander toward the seminaries. It's practically helpless. It's practically a lost cause. So what is going to happen when the day comes and there aren't any more priests, and then suddenly Catholicism, the biggest fucking denomination in America, is over! Finished! What's going to happen then? What does that mean? What does that say about religion at all?" I'm out of breath and out of martini. I slump back against the edge of the bar, trying to remember where I am, who I am, and everything I just said.

"Wow." He runs his fingers through his blond hair. "That's something to think about, I suppose."

"Yeah, well, you know, it's all celibacy," I rush on. "When forced to choose, most people are going to pick sex over religion. Because, sex isn't a bad thing. Especially, if, say, you're in love."

"Hmmm," he frowns, and then smiles again, inching closer to me. I've at least introduced some subjects he's got some allegiance and sympathy to. His hand is on my sore knee. "Do you want to dance?"

"Dance?" I'm very confused. I don't see what dancing has to do with any of this, and I'm not sure I can even stand up. "Oh. No, I can't. I'm a terrible dancer. And I need to wait for my friend. She's" — I squint at my watch -- "half an hour late. At least."

"I see," he says, and his other hand lands on my hand. "Well, can I at least have your number?"

"Sure," I exhale, and rattle it off, like a schoolgirl trying to prove she knows her facts. I don't wait for him to produce a pen or scrap of paper.

He's leaning to kiss me when I hear a name -- my name -- being called in a

familiar nasal tone. "Carrie!" I look up, and she's standing two feet away, gaping, at me, no, at Derek, no, at Derek clutching my palm. I'm not sure. Her hair, usually a perfect black bob, is falling in her face. Her eyes are steely circles.

"What are you doing?" she grits her teeth at no one in particular, and then it hits me that this is the creep -- Derek, Derek the creep, that Carrie dated for a month last summer. I turn back to the bar and lay my head on the counter. Carrie, taller than Derek, is pointing a red fingernail at him, as if aiming a pistol, and Derek is backing away, surrendering, pleading innocence. He's feigning confusion -- motioning, as if he's not a native speaker, doesn't know the language.

"And what are you doing?" she hits my shoulder. Derek has retreated behind the pool table, pretending to be engrossed in the game. "I'm sorry," I breathe. "I didn't realize. James and I broke up today. He's going to be a fucking priest," I say matter-of-factly, as if me being dumped were a weekly phenomenon and -- priests -- well, that happens all the time. Or once in a while. To other people.

"A priest? What? What? Oh my God." She sits down. "Well. Well. Well. He's just gay. He must be gay." This idea, an answer, brings me back, as if even if her suggestion were true, it would change something.

Gay theory. I should have known this was coming from her, who has never quite been able to get over hooking up with a confessed bisexual man in college.

"Thanks. Gay and celibate and dumping me. That makes me feel better."

"Oh, sweetie," she puts her arm around me, pulling to hug me, "you know that's not what I mean." And now I'm crying, four hours too late, four hours since I could have laid it on the line for James and guilt-tripped him into coming back to me. "You know what I want?" I say deliriously, my voice rising. "I want the kind of guy who spends his weekends spray painting my name on a highway overpass. That's hard work. I mean, they must have to hang upside down to write those things, and they must do it late at night, since it's gotta be illegal, the whole defacing part. That's talent! That's fucking devotion, God damn it," I sob.

Carrie is dragging me off the stool. "Good thing I got here," she reminds herself. "I have to take you home."

Carrie props me up and walks me back, even opening the door for me, relay-

ing a complicated, apologetic story about her cat throwing up, her tape player breaking and the toilet overflowing at approximately ten of nine. There's no comfortable place to sit in my apartment anymore -- my kitchen chairs are notorious, straight, rickety -- so I lie down on the floor and Carrie hoists herself up onto the counter, wedging her lanky body in the space between the microwave and refrigerator.

"You want to talk about this right now?" she asks softly.

"No." I muffle my face in the carpet.

"Ok." She pauses. "You want some water?"

"Yes," I sniff. She pours me a glass.

"Feeling better?"

"Yes," I lie. "I'm not drunk anymore." Which is physically impossible.

"Are you going to be all right?"

"Yeah. You can go if you want."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah."

"I'll call you tomorrow, ok, hon?"

"All right." I stay sprawled on the carpet, watching the bottom of the door open, click shut.

I want to fall asleep in my melodramatic pose, but I can't. I'm not tired. Next to the lamp a nameless orange blur is circling the bottom of a Mason jar. I forgot to show Carrie my fish. He's finally attacking the food I left him, bits of flake dribbling from his tiny puckered mouth. I lean close to the glass, illuminated by the glow of a streetlamp outside, suck in my cheeks and make kissing noises. Puck puck puck. He's frightened and tries to dart away, but is trapped. "There's no escape," I yell.

I fumble my way into the kitchen and fill my glass again. Glug glug. The answering machine is blinking and blipping.

The first is a hang-up. The next is James.

9:05 p.m. Beep. Breathing, a deep voice. "Hello, this is God. No, hi, it's James." Odd voice, nervous joke, slightly panicked. "I need to talk to you. Are you there? Pick up the phone. ...hello? All right, I guess you're not there. Ok. When you get this, please call me back. I haven't changed my mind but you're a beautiful person and I

love you and we need to talk about this. Call me back."

A beautiful person? Yuck. It sounds like something a priest would say to a homely person who volunteers too much. I scrunch up my face in tears again; I want to talk to him too but I can't call him drunk. You can't telephone even pre-priests if you are wasted, thinking the thoughts I am thinking. I curse not seducing James sooner, giving him something concrete, like a breast or thigh to miss or ponder. But no; I was patient this time, saintly patient, and look what it got me -- a guy who thinks too much.

I know any young priest, who's for real, who isn't gay, wants to go to some godforsaken village in South America somewhere, where the rats are large as cats, or worse, and the air is filled with a permanent dusty cloud. They want to teach school, say mass, administer food and water- and maybe that's where James belongs.

With aspirations like that, how can he be bothered with misplaced couches? My mind is dizzy. I can't picture James's neck in a collar, but maybe him as a middle-aged man who wears one, maybe that I can see. I replay the message. "Hello, this is God. No, hi, it's James." I smile a little. Stop, click, rewind. "Hello, this is God." This is God. God, some amalgamation of Jesus. Isn't Jesus love? God! -- haven't I seen those bumper stickers?

# Insomnia

My eyes adjust to twilight,  
body suspended between  
blanket and sheet-  
heart shaped water spots on the ceiling, and I 'm  
faintly conscious of the furnace sputtering in  
the pre-dawn chill.  
Insomnia is marginal.  
It exists on the edge of obscurity-  
broken fence posts, enervated beneath week-old snow,  
mindful of the forest beyond,  
where trees sag beneath the scrubbed sky.  
Outside, rain tumbles.  
The sun creeps beyond the horizon.  
Somewhere in Africa,  
bodies fill a shallow grave.  
Heavy-limbed, boarding the train,  
I am aware of my fingertips, stained sooty with newsprint.  
Headlines, shallow graves, nations with maleficent borders.  
Half-awake, awkward angles of skyscrapers  
bobbing up and down like headless bodies,  
as the train hovers low above the cityscape-  
an afterworld of billboards and bottle caps,  
a woman's hem caught in her briefcase.  
I step off the, train into the overstuffed station - passing  
the magazine pagoda, like a concrete walled island on the expressway,  
signifying nothing, but made real by blades and shoots of grass.

**Kara Candito**

57

## raw umber

Sitting on the crushed cushion on the bus beside my brother  
Under the Southern Cross hidden behind daylight hours,  
We wind around an illegible rock path drawn along side  
The kind of mountains that never cry.  
Beaten and battered by lashing winds and scarring glacial routes,  
They endure despite snow-capped weights on rounded shoulders.  
Water the color of the meaning of love seeps through  
Narrow passages and finds itself growing and swirling below  
In cycles of some life I've never known.

It seems too much -- the sight.  
I feel like it should be shown to me one huge, raw mountain at a time.  
Like a dessert.  
All at once it's overwhelming and I begin to feel sick with  
The inability to fully comprehend it all.

I notice we stop not because of the jerking, screeching motion,  
But because of the silence left in the absence of expression  
As cows fumble out of the way back to the not so distant rules of the wild.

Raft guides joke with the routine, standing fearlessly close to the insecure door  
Near the insecure ledge and its misplaced guardrail.  
Tiny singular shacks shadowed by dense, dark colors surprise me with the  
truth  
That someone must actually live here,

In this magical place with no obvious way of coming or going  
But seemingly the perfect place to be.  
We, my brother and I, don't speak for fear of making it all real,  
Committing it to some standard of capability within our own lives.

It's a deep breath of time in the chatter of the day  
When we see something and know it will be more than a moment  
Lost to the next.  
Perhaps a memory  
Or even a suggestion of what is possible beyond this day that is  
Different from the others, or not so different at all.  
Like the man who lives in the middle of nowhere amidst everything.

**Jessica Anderson**

## In White Aprons

The lead food preparer aimed the lobster at me,  
its head toward my abdomen and its body upside down.  
The antennae rolled in opposing circles,  
keeping some final, dawdling time.  
The kitchen stink of raw seafood  
was punctuated by the low moan  
of the Hobart, scorching  
bits of tartar sauce from ostentatious stoneware.

He sat me down in a high metal stool  
beside the counter:

it was initiation time.

My eyes swollen and legs screaming  
from insomnia and standing too long,  
a chunk of fish meal stuck  
and crusting like a dry dandelion marking  
my left cheek,  
I knew I was being patronized.

Through hair nets and rubber gloves  
I was the ultimate irony:  
a vegetarian-leaning fish breeder  
and raw-stock girl.

He was leering at me, toothless and rotten,  
grinning, the belly-up lobster clawing  
uselessly at the air from his left hand.  
This was all about my daily refusals  
to throw one in the steaming pot and hear  
that decrescendoed howl at the hands  
of the kitchen help.

From behind his back, a glistening knife and its plunging  
downward to the center of that creeping, straight  
into the meat, and all moving legs, feelers shocked straight  
like emery boards as the knife dragged  
through the body's center.  
And he dumped the rigid thing in my lap.

**Rebecca Burrett**

## Haiku-phobic

Haiku is five seven five.  
This is not Haiku.  
It is seven five seven.

**Tom McAndrew**



**Stacy Judice**







