

the garland

volume 10

spring 1997

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the garland

volume 10 spring 1997
tenth anniversary issue

editor-in-chief

kara e. hansell

assistant editor

john pavone

managing editor

ralph palm

fiction editor

erika fad

poetry editor

alicia paul

production editor

sarah withers

contributing photographers

dan bowers, tim klement, kara e. hansell,
kevin wilson

cover photograph

dan bowers

cover design

ralph palm

faculty moderator

dr. daniel mcguinness

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table of contents

hello in three acts • maureen traverse	4
proposal • alicia paul	5
blur • damian kolodiy	6
facades • erin karper	7
regretting Vermont • megan casey	8
a well contained space of time • sarah heneghan	9
thor the menacing electrician • maureen traverse	15
separate • josh warner-burke	16
the night watch • tom panarese	17
in twilight • helen m. narbut	18
the dream • alicia paul	19
the same story • catherine dawgert	20
field in november • tara knapp	22
infinite zest • maureen traverse	23
life on an upstairs corner • jessica sutter	24
null and void • erin karper	25
reflection • moira elizabeth mcnicholas	28
when i left home • helen m. narbut	29
city • maureen traverse	30
mornings • erin edwards	32
autumnal equinox • maureen traverse	32
waiting • julia kessler	33
<i>pay no attention to the man behind the curtain</i> • alicia paul	34
dorothy • tara knapp	35
laura • mariah m.l. bauer	36
piranhas • tara knapp	45
untitled • james stillwaggon	46
at the seams • james healy	48

editor's letter

"Promise big. Deliver big." This is what H. Jackson Brown, Jr. suggests in *Life's Little Instruction Book*. He also says, "Don't use time or words carelessly. Neither can be retrieved."

It's true. For as much as we would love to be cartoon characters, whose dialogues dangle in bubbles, we cannot snatch our words from the air above our heads and quickly put them back in our mouths. We cannot, for that matter, rewind our lives. Each spent moment is a space filled and filed away in the memory of what happened while we were busy looking forward. In that sense, it would be a perfect world if every moment held our full concentration, enthusiasm, energy, and ambition.

In her inaugural poem "On the Pulse of Morning", Maya Angelou writes, "Lift up your eyes upon this day breaking for you. Give birth again to the dream." This tenth anniversary issue of *The Garland* has the very esteemed honor of housing a host of young dreams. Only a cross-section, a fraction of the poems and works of fiction written by students plays representative here to the infinite variations of dreams realized, and the boundless combinations of words carefully and tenderly used. It has been not only my promise, but moreso my honor, to deliver a literary magazine that celebrates such immensely talented writers and photographers.

Enjoy this year's bounty of moments, dreams, and promises!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kara E. Hansell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'K'.

kara e. hansell

hello in three acts

maureen traverse

hello
as the hour grows fine
and I am thin
the music tins out
to half the drama
and your face recedes
behind a gray hood
hello
from a mute woman
to a deaf man
and their yet-to-be-born
barely conceived
hides a grin, unwary
that he fights for his final breath

your face
the laces of your hood pulled taut
grows out of it
like a child emerging
into his first world

that fits just right
like the air around me
in a dim gloaming

'if she walks in beauty
like the night'
than I must be the day
a chilly day
in Eliot's crudest month
a day that smells like rain on slate
but if I can become Hecate
a wicked dusk
gnawing at your nose
than all I will have left to do
is sharpen my pointed wit
and retract those sinister teeth
that betray my desperation
and say
hello



dan bowers

proposal

alicia paul

What if I didn't mention death to get started?

What if I didn't ask to stand like everyone else
And swear forever by the very thing that would separate us;
Would you take my hand?

I am walking on the edge, restless by the window
Where frost is creeping low and up on the sides,
And I am looking out to nowhere,
To where I stop and you begin,
To an abandoned lot strewn with broken bricks,
Splintered wood slipped from its pile.
Your silence is growing louder
But the result is still the same,
The rage is the same,
And the scream from the man who borrowed shelter in that lot once
Is the same as every other silent scream and hollow echo
Lifting in a ravaged chorus to the God who takes the innocent away
But leaves the guilty, shadows that tuck us all into the darkness
With the monsters and bones lingering in the closet.

I can feel your heartbeat through mine
Even after you lift your head from my chest,
The after-image of pulse;
Feel the circles you traced on my thigh moments ago
As I watch you across the room,
Memorize how you weave through the slant of light folded on the carpet.
And I lie here in the wake of your subtle whispers
Wanting a forever,
Reliving the way you breathe—the rhythmic rise and fall of your chest,
The slip of your hand across my back,
The distance between our shadows pulled closer,
As if spellbound.

blur

damian kolodiy

Stealth clings to the inner lining
Of the breath of the universe.
Exhale- the clouds go rolling by.

Wispy branches, streamlined cobwebs.
Surround us all in *envious* glory.
Fermenting a wall of Jealousy,
I keep time in distant hills.
The **Circle** closes, we spill **our Blood**.
Onto the lake, burning in forgiveness,
Painting our souls, a dusty grey.
Warring interrelations, time computations,
Significant **revelations** - Lost in her Lust.
Strife - Presenting a false hope.

Swallow the **RAGE**, lift up your preconceptions,

A global manifestation, nowhere near **me**,
But home to **you**, No one remains
Sane or the same, There is only **one**.
Gliding along the current of Hate,
Spiraling towards the summit,
Disguise the way out.
Secrets faded, ~~jaded~~.

Disguise the way out,
Distorted, but emptiness remains
In your soul rock, the stuff
That dreams are made of.

facades

erin karper

the dim light, the wind
cursing the bricks loudly
in the navy darkness.
indoors, everything hospital-green and
sleek formica-wood.
black text marches in white lines,
skews unreadable
snow on the TV screen sends me back home.
click: chair bound people fly their hands
in anger, gape like carp
click: the country spreads out in
bands of green and blue
with the perky-perfect weather lady
gesturing at icons of coming destruction
flood, tornado, blizzard
click: he is dead,
incense with no scent over
an empty coffin
glycerin tears glisten
in electric candlelight
click.
the weak dawn hushes the gales
without but not within.

regretting Vermont

megan casey

The palette's fiery colors
blend on the car window
Raindrops crossing paths
make a wash of water
and create what appears to me
a stained glass window.

The familiar, colored panes from passing trees
as my eyes lose their film of sleep.
A song drifts from the front,
and I want to fall back to where I was,
to old, hot summers, packed cars headed for the gas station,
open windows, cigarettes, gossip.

Fighting the urge, I sit up and see
a vast, quiet field and a white farmhouse at its edge.
Instantly I am carried back to my home
and try to remember why I wanted to leave there.



kevin wilson

a well contained space of time

sarah heneghan

"How's that retarded kid you work with?" Ian says, spooning sugar generously into his coffee.

"He's not retarded, Ian — he's autistic." Maura speaks loudly and too slowly, as if it is Ian who is retarded.

"Oh. I think they'll continue the project. Ed said yesterday things are going great — said if it were up to him, he'd promote everyone in the lab." He tries to smile, and the forcedness of the action contorts his mouth strangely. He is an earnest looking man. His face is round and friendly, his nose a fine clear line, and his eyes broad and eager, like the eyes of a faithful pet. People trust him. Maura trusted him. She blinks now, eyeing him coldly.

"Hm," she says, sipping her coffee. She holds the mug too long at her lips, hard against the flesh so that the steam turns her forehead a porous pink. She is unwilling to show him her face for any length of time, as she feels it is giving too much away. The silence between them lengthens.

"Okay. Goddamnit, Maura, Okay." He rises, paces to the sink, turns to face her, turns again to the sink, finally slamming his cup on the counter. Coffee slops from the

mug, and he winces as it burns his hand. Her mouth curves into a smile, and though it is momentary, he sees it.

"I'm sorry I slept with her—"

"Fucked her," she interjects. Her voice is steady and low. She keeps her eyes fixed on her cereal, thinking, "It would take twelve bowls of your brand of cereal to equal one bowl of Total. It would take..." The sentence takes on a chanting rhythm in her mind, keeping her eyes from tearing. She can feel the effort moving like a searing wind from her stomach, through her chest and up to her face where it burns red over her cheeks.

"Okay. All right — I fucked her." He leans over her chair, gripping the carved back tightly, mad with tension. *"I fucked her — doo da doo da—"*

In a sudden and violent gesture she rises, grabbing him with both hands, gripping his white smooth shirt in her small hands. "Shut up," she hisses. "You — shut up." The final words are a plea, and she lets him go, breathless.

There is a wet glimmer to his eyes as he brushes her elbow pleadingly with his hand, catching only a hint of fabric as she moves

away. Images move through his mind. They are blurred and slow, confused. They are mostly of him

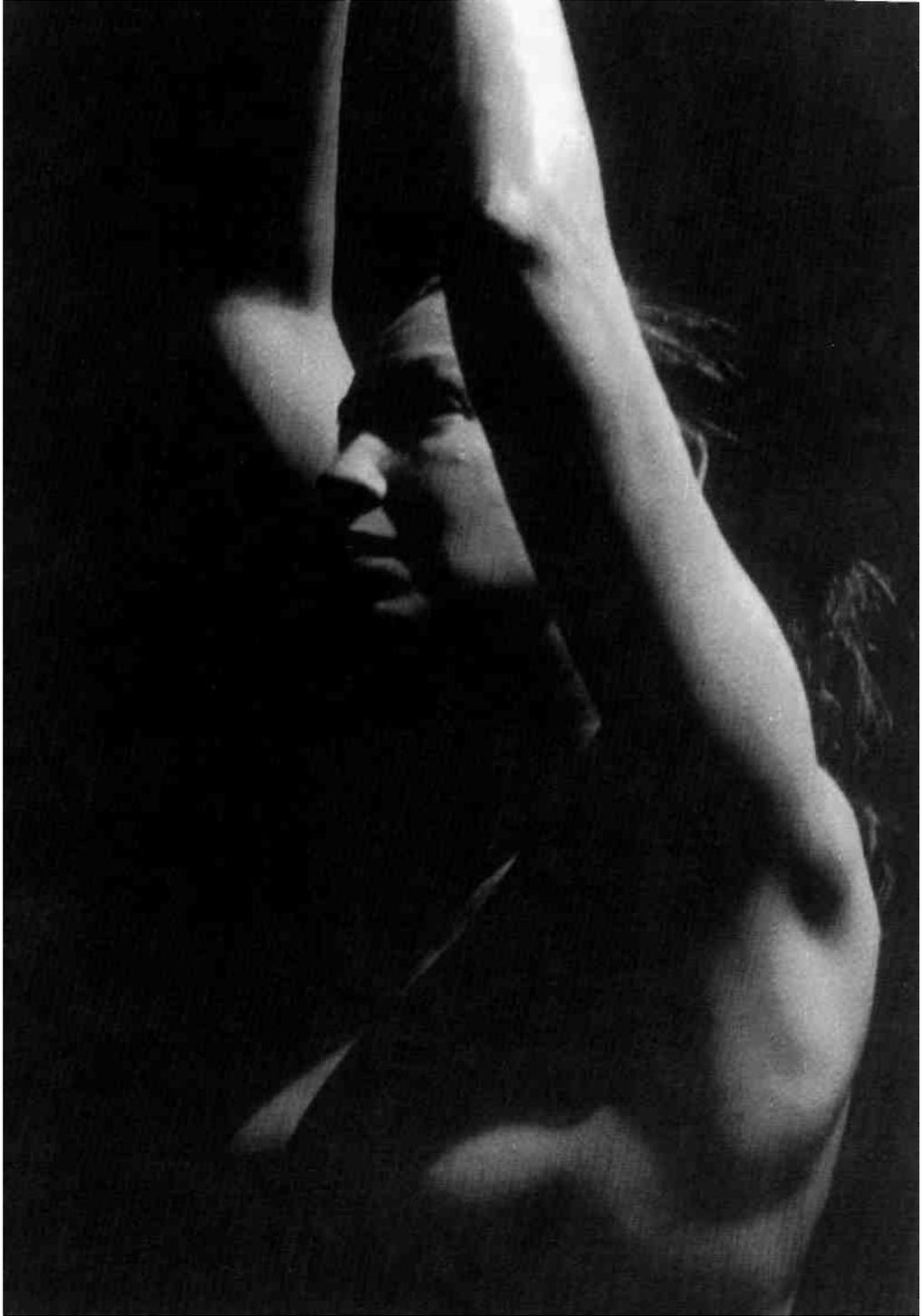
She was in a nightgown, some old thing, and she had toilet paper on her legs in several places where she had cut herself shaving.

with Maura, but they are out of sequence. The first image is from a night over a month ago, when *it* happened, when he cheated on Maura. He had never done so before. He still isn't sure what made that night different, or if it was not one thing, but many, that made the idea of another woman suddenly make sense. He came in late. He thought he probably stunk of sweat and rush, but she didn't appear to notice. She was drinking wine and writing, in the rocker by the window, where she could watch for the grope of approaching headlights. She was in a nightgown, some old thing, and she had toilet paper on her legs in several places where she had cut herself shaving. This image is replaced by one from the night they first met. It is her hair that first attracts him. It is black and long and so thick it's like a thousand cobwebs, and he wants his hands in it so bad they tingle. They met when he was twenty-three, when he was just

starting out at Chiron Diagnostics as a lab technician, working on an assay machine, screening blood. They met through a mutual friend, at a party, at the house of someone who he does not remember. It is five years later. Their apartment is filled with books. Mostly they collected them together, from tag sales or second hand book stores. They love ideas. At night, they slide between the sheets and read, drift off, and eventually one or the other stumbles sleepily to the light switch, flicking it off to return to the warmth of their bed. They sleep, sometimes make love. And so this is the third image he sees: Maura sleeping on his chest, strands of her hair like threads on his neck, tickling his lips.

A last image, momentary and vivid, electrifies Ian. It is of a stranger, the particular curve of her body, red hair twined tight in his hand. "Love makes people stupid," he thinks, watching Maura cringe and shake, standing by the sink, staring at the floor. "Be honest," he wills, silently, knowing she won't. She slides past him, sitting to resume her breakfast with strange, sharp gestures. She moves a spoon through her cereal, grasps the handle of her coffee mug, but eats nothing, drinks nothing.

With a short laugh she announces, "I hate you. I wish I was a lesbian."



kara e. hansell

"Well, Maura, I bet lesbians cheat on each other too."

"You really are brilliant — did you know that, Ian?" She wishes fervently that it was not Saturday, that they could both be at work. A thought occurs to her then, and she eyes Ian brightly for the first time in two weeks, since the night he decided to tell her. He is initially suspicious, but then his lips curve into a hopeful grin.

"What?" he asks.

"I was just thinking — why don't you get out?"

Blinking, Ian says nothing. After a moment he glances around, as if seeing the apartment for the first time.

"I mean — I certainly don't want you here. Not today — or maybe any day — ever. And seeing as you've got this woman on the side—"

"*Maura!* I do not have—"

"—I figure you can go there, and make a go of it."

"—a woman on the side," he finishes, dully, futilely. After a pause he sighs and begins, "Maura, maybe I should. Maybe—"

"Great!" she croaks. Her eyes are bright — brimming, she hopes, with excitement. Her chest is tight, she can no longer feel her hands. "Good. Because..." she trails off, suddenly unable to move her voice past the jagged boulder in her throat.

"Maura." He crosses to where she sits. He seems to be unfolding, and she is suddenly afraid he will kneel.

"Bye," she mumbles, rising, turning from him. Her face meets the wall, and she thinks, "Who would think to put a table next to a wall?" Then: "Us, of course, us — because we like to sit on it, while one or the other makes dinner, and hands over: celery, cheese, cans of Campbell's broth...we're always laughing or discussing, he found a new book or I found this new place — Maybe we could try it some

A thought occurs to her then, and she eyes Ian brightly for the first time in two weeks, since the night he decided to tell her.

night? and people say: Oh, you're so good together, you two are so good...and if the table isn't supported a little bit, by the radiator, it sways too much...." Still facing the wall, she begins to sob. She presses her face to the soft yellow paint, willing the wall to fall away.

"Oh, Maura." His voice is almost a whisper.

She thrusts her elbow backwards, hard, where it crushes uselessly into his chest. One of the first things that attracted her to him was his body. It was not his physique

which interested her, but rather the way in which he moved. Ian moved with a gentleness and a grace that Maura had thought impossible for a man, indeed, for any living being. He moved like he was gliding, like every movement and breath was woven to another and another — on and on. Ian is the second man that Maura has had sex with. She thinks he doesn't know this, but he does. She thinks he doesn't know that all men, excepting himself, terrify her.

She is silent, while everything inside her crumbles into dust. He slides his arms around her, and she lets him. Her eyes are vacuous, like the first time someone destroyed her, drove into her insides, left her in shards. He studies her, in his grasp: pale skin, tumble of black hair, long, frail frame.

"I love you." He means it — his voice breaks, he holds her tighter. "I don't know how to be — the way you need me to be. I don't

I love you. He means it — his voice breaks, he holds her tighter. "I don't know how to be — the way you need me to be. I don't know how to stop hurting you."

He considers lying. He considers saying that he was drunk, that he was thinking of her the whole time. But he can't see the point. He wasn't drunk, and he didn't think of Maura. He thought of the woman he was with, and though he doesn't remember her name, he vividly recalls every detail of her.

"It happened, Maura. It just did. I mean, no — it didn't just happen. I did it. And, and—" he pauses, almost laying a hand on her shoulder. Thinking better of it, he continues in his light, honest tone. "I'm not sure I wouldn't do it again. I don't mean with her — but you know, with somebody."

know how to stop hurting you."

"I know," she concludes, after a long while. "That's why you're so funny. Ha ha, Ian. You're so novel."

"Why do you make it like this?" he asks, angry now, letting her go. "Why do you make everything so ugly? I never lied to you — I never said I wouldn't be with someone else —"

"You *live* with me! For God's sake. Can't you see? You live with me!" Her voice rises hysterically, breaking off like a cry.

"Fine. If that's what this is, then I don't want it. I do not want your traps." He says the words slowly, forcefully, leaning over the table, grasping the corners with

white knuckled hands. "*You know,*" he pauses, waiting for her to look up, waiting to hold her eyes. "*You know that I love you.* But I am not going to change. Ever. I mean, I've been thinking through all of this, and I know now that this is how I am. How I'm always going to be. So you need to tell me if this is going to continue. I can't live with you, like this."

"What if I did — what you did?" She wants to say *fucked* again, but can't. The word disturbs her too much. "Hm? How would that be?" There is no conviction in her voice. It is desperate and small.

"Fine. Do what I did — maybe then you'd understand."

She slaps him, hard, across the mouth. His lip begins to bleed, and she touches the gash, pushing her fingers into it, making it bleed more. When she takes her hand away there is blood on her fingers, moving towards the palm of her hand. He steps quickly away, his

face pale with the strain of not retaliating, and disappears into the bathroom. The door slams. She hears water running. She sits, fascinated, making patterns in blood on smooth oak. Her fingers move unconsciously to her face, where they trace the first hint of wrinkles around her eyes.

"You're totally fucking crazy. Do you know that?" he asks, standing a careful distance from her, pale under the kitchen light.

She laughs — a bitter, short sound. "Okay," she murmurs. "Be you, Ian. Be all you can be."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'll stay. You'll stay. Okay? Good enough, Ian." She grimaces momentarily, but then clears her face of all emotion: a blank page. At the sink, she turns on the water with meticulous care, lets the water move over her fingers, washing them white again.

thor the menacing electrician

maureen traverse

hair

in a grocery store aisle
eyelashes and a not-quite smile
spreads like an extended finger
(I can't say which one)
across a scruffy chin
eyes Norwegian blue and hair
(I shouldn't exaggerate)
blond and fine
cigarette poking out of his lips
uncanny the resemblance he has
to certain Teutonic wave-runners
he is an electrician
he makes light
he'll be my god until
the flare of brilliance fades
into embers at the end
of his cancer stick
and he'll creep back
to Valhalla-
a twisted
and changed
man.

separate

josh warner-burke

A dark vision in a red night sky
the encroaching skyline is infinitely long.
Trees years away are smaller than
monotonously passing white lane markers
insignificant
but they seem to
separate me
from them-
like a hundred million walls
I've wished I could walk through.

I look for a familiar face
in the fractal-like pattern
of the trees
smearing by me.



dan bowers

the night watch

tom panarese

The sanctuary lays in silence,
surrounded by a line of trees
staring at a wooden field of forgetting.

And they protect it,
standing halfway between
their dreams and undoing,
hardly illuminated by the darkened light of Rembrandt
but still enveloped
in a familiar scent
of the classic game.

Purple and gold
once flashed across the
painted grass in triumph
but now those gladiators
sit without armor,
the only weapons, glass bottles,
shells tossed to the shore
waiting to be washed away
come high tide
as they tell those stories,
defend their dreams,
and hold on to their graduating youth.

in twilight

helen m. narbut

With their wings outstretched,
they flow in and out.

As the slide of cards in a dealer's hand
the simplicity of cooperation
the rapidness of knowing
what the other is thinking.

We used to know
what the other was thinking,
but that was before
I finished your sentence
with the wrong line.

Those birds don't know of such deceit.
They fly in form,
then go their own way,
and still return
to the same mosaic pattern
of the rhythm unheard.

The uncomfortable way
your hand glides in mine,
confessing we are no longer.

the dream

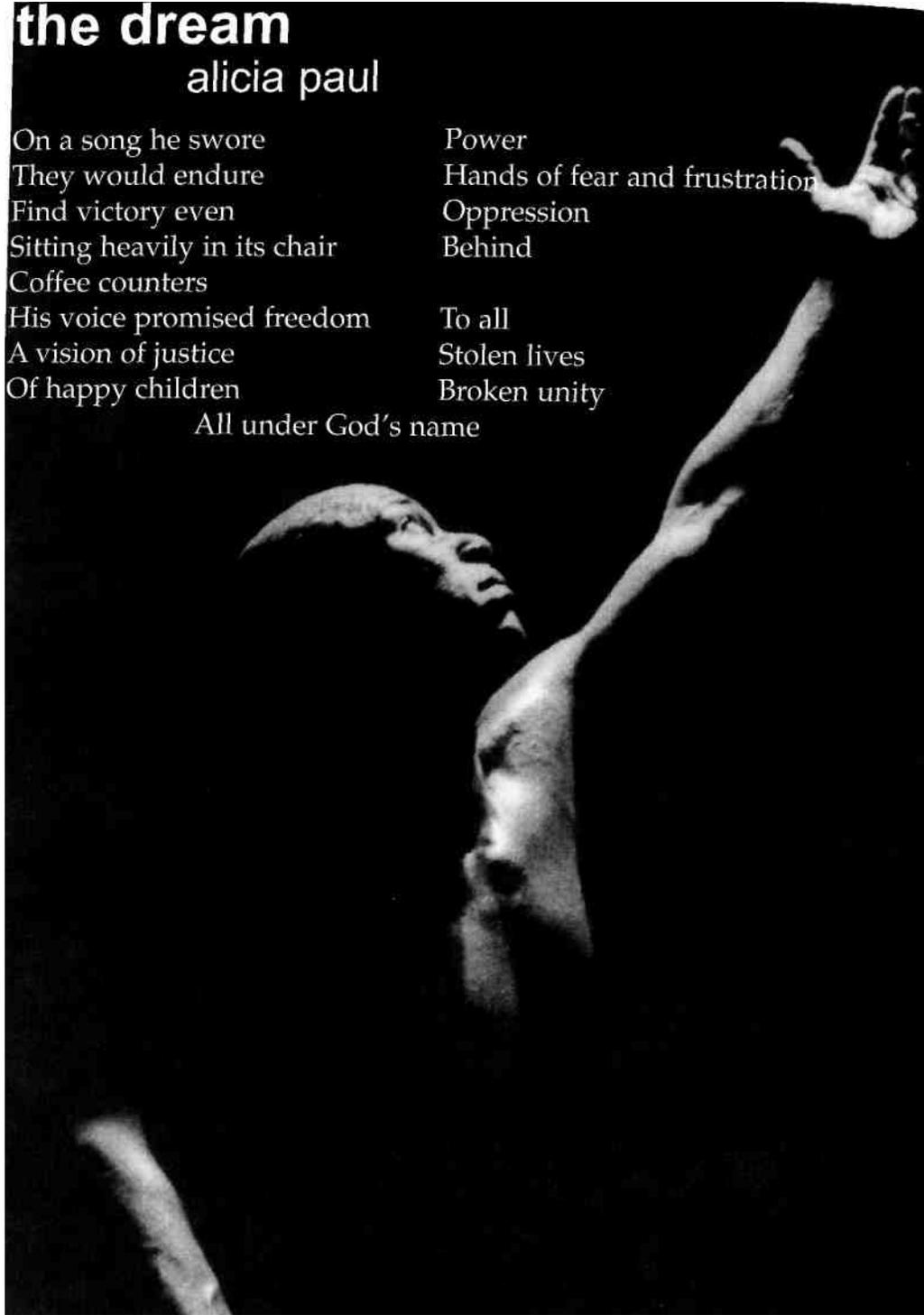
alicia paul

On a song he swore
They would endure
Find victory even
Sitting heavily in its chair
Coffee counters
His voice promised freedom
A vision of justice
Of happy children

Power
Hands of fear and frustration
Oppression
Behind

To all
Stolen lives
Broken unity

All under God's name



kara e. hansell

the same story

catherine dawgert

You said you fell in love with me because of the way I ate pancakes, pulling them into chunks with my fingers and syruping each one individually with a squirt of Aunt Jemima before popping it into my mouth. I'm still not sure how I feel about you, but here we are in the same diner where we had our first date, sitting in the same green vinyl booth that my thighs stuck to when I wore that purple mini skirt and you kissed me for the first time, my fingers feeling the same bumpy green squares of the checkered tablecloth that they have traced for the past two years out of nervousness, out of boredom, and out of habit.

You're telling me another story about your grandmother. I know this one and its surprise ending. I even know when you will pause, the way your dimples will jump into your cheeks as you smile, shake your head, and say, "And the thing of it is the drain was never clogged. She just needed to pull the plug." I hate those dimples. I hate the way they make my heart expand and my mind numb to anything but the perfect shade of pink that tints your inner lip and the watery brown of your eyes.

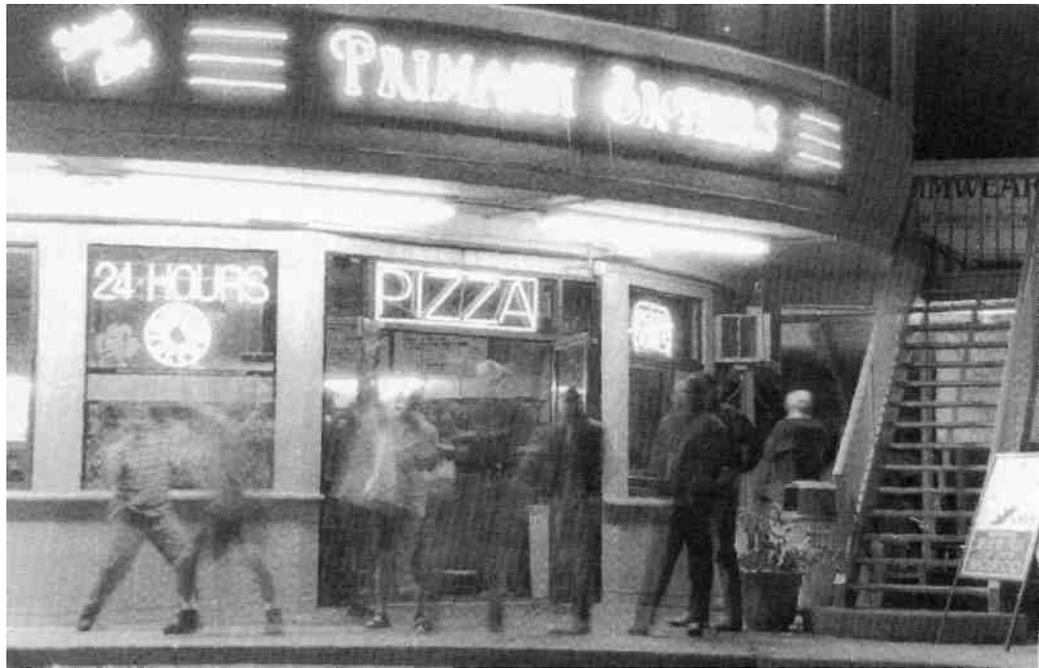
Your grandmother's at the store now, in your story that is. "A second bottle of Drain-O," you exclaim, and I smile as you continue on with the

saga. Sometimes I think we talk about all the wrong things, my job, your classes, our favorite episodes of *Mork and Mindy*, what color I should dye my hair this time, whether or not you should shave. And all the time we're talking, inside my head this voice is screaming, "Ask him. Ask him if he'll pluck out your heart." It's what I want you to do. I want you to pull it right out of my chest and hold all its gloopiness, and see all its black parts, and feel the thumps of my muscle as it expands and contracts. Are you strong enough to hold onto it because I've been carrying it for twenty years and it gets heavy sometimes. I just want you to hold it for a second. Will you be gentle with it and not tangle the tendrils of veins that sprout from it and connect it to me, or will you twist them like the spaghetti you eat every time we are here? The spaghetti you twirl around your fork on the light blue plates stamped with dark blue flowers.

You pause and I see the dimples leaping up on your face. There goes my heart.

"And the thing of it is..... Hey, Shelly. Are you okay?"

"Sorry," I say, "Just wondering if I should have apple pie or rice pudding for dessert."



dan bowers

field in november

tara knapp

Call me the jealous woman,
jealous of things in a man's life-
jealous of the wind,
the leaves, the wet-dry days
that leak beneath his door.

You see, this is my birthplace-
this place where the deer sleep
in twirled beds, where the thickets
are thicker than ice.

This is where I come from,
not that I've gone anywhere,
this landscape of naked, gnarled trees
embedded in moss.

I am green, I know,
greener than the greenest summer leaves.
You don't have to tell me what I don't know.

And you, yes, you,
I can hear you laughing, chuckling sarcastically
with the wind as I spin, lost, twirling, alone,
in this field.

The grass seems to twist together and
grab my feet in ropes, tie me to the earth.
In the dream I always fall.

And, where are you?
Not even your shadow can leave the woods
and approach me, this time.



kara e. hansell

infinite zest

maureen traverse

one fell swoop
sends me down
learning to breath
underwater
undeniable the euphoria
that can brown out
stale truth
that men cry blood in frustration
over their walls
built in swift and savage rampages
built in ignorance
babbling towers
to immortality
his life
a Jackson Pollock
a web of chaotic splashes
loops
and drops
down
but because it's made by him

the chaos has order
strategy
and here I thought
that behind the eyes
there was a soul
but nothing so mystical could exist
just chemicals
mathematics
and logic
square roots and logarithms
the sum of our character
Punnett squares
the root of our nature
and division
the center
of our souls
ecstasy is undeniably
just another parabola

life on an upstairs corner

jessica sutter

Headlights howl
against day-glo stars
glinting off glass
Darkness growls
night crawls through cracks
clawing at the walls

Cabs and cops converge
liquored laughs echo
Silence seeps slowly
soothing the rumbling of the night

Midnight meets morning
hyenas in hard hats
cackle at cars
Sirens whistle
engines hum

I sing in the sunlight of the upstairs corner.



tim klement

null and void

erin karper

Throw the windows wide,
For the day is warm.
They mirror nothing but the
clouds' slow glide,
Which does not hint at the coming
storm.

For the day is warm,
The maple overladen with green;
Which does not hint at the coming
storm,
And has been too praised like
everything.

The maple overladen with green;
So many give their words to it;
It has been too praised, like everything
And has, like love, been made to fit.

So many give their words to it;
The Muse, the Reader, the Art;
It has, like love, been made to fit
The cliché of the human heart.

The Muse, the Reader, the Art,
All excuses for a scrawl at glory.
In the cliché of the human heart
And the telling of the same old story.

All excuses for a scrawl at glory;
To praise Nature, symbolize the
Universe.
In telling of the same old story
There's nothing left to make a verse.

To praise Nature, symbolize the
Universe,
Too much ink has been spilled.
There's nothing left to make a verse—
The spaces are all filled.

Too much ink has been spilled,
And mirrors nothing but the clouds'
slow glide.
The spaces are all filled
Throw the windows wide.



funky



investigative



beached

series by kara e. hansell



fallen



literary



abandoned



kara e. hansell

reflection

moira elizabeth mcnicholas

Look from me to you.
Do you trust me this evening?
I'll set up.
Put it all together.
Show you where to paint.
Direct you on what to hide.
Smile, Sexy.
No.
Less teeth.
Come closer.
Oh if they could only see you now.
(You vain bitch).

when i left home

helen m. narbut

I imagine being in Russia
walking through dense woods.
The reason for my walk,
the distance
I would have to travel
to write my own story.
Separate from what the woman who bore me wants to hear.

She wants:
a doctor for a son-in-law,
two kids
a cobblestone house
scrambled eggs and bacon on Sunday,
reading the Washington Post.

Piece of my heart and my name
and that rake on the back porch belongs to her.
Realizing that her dream is not mine
I let go,
like a bird
I will make my own nest come spring.

city

maureen traverse

He presses his ear to the cement
holds his aching arms
while curled fetally.
Magnetic hum
warm light
energy
on the brink of happening
is what comforts him
like the soft rhythm
of a mother's heart
in the womb

all electric
all life
moving in slowed motion
to the buzz
of streetlights
and late night executive computers
charging up words
like a tortured writer
at his mumbling typewriter
three a.m.
tuned-in to nocturnal deejays

pure dingy streets
like dark and rigid fingers
musty cement
and gargoyles drooling strings of soot
angels coated in ash
extend open arms
to a patch of sky
above the library

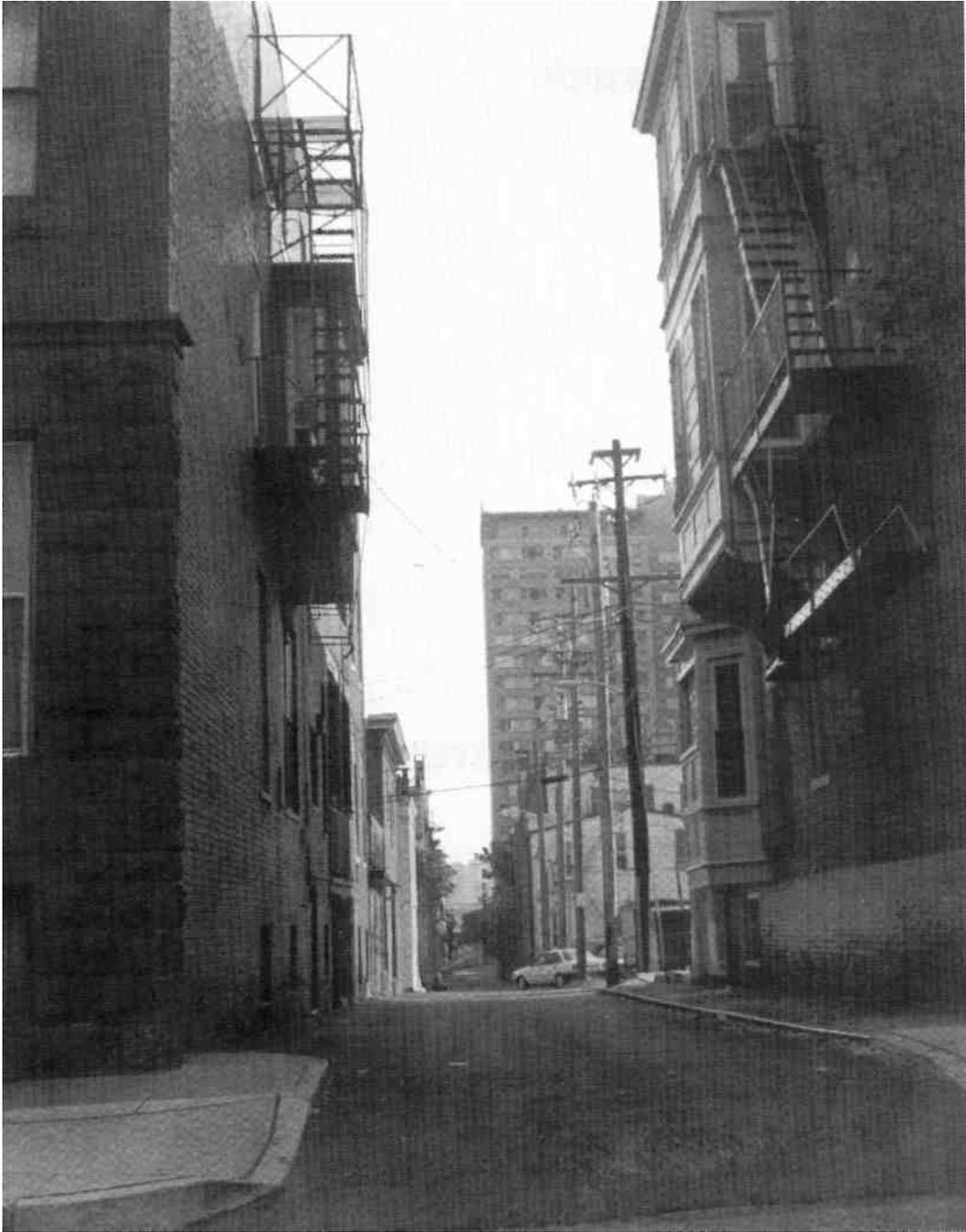
energy humming
like silver blood through
underground veins

vibrates in his ear
he wraps himself
in seedy all night diners
with people like open-faced
sandwiches
topped in limp, brown existential
lettuce
and Plato's pickles
just shadows on the wall of the
men's room
where they're chained

he wraps himself
in gothic fingers
sculpted mica and rows of industrial
gravestones

and in his mother's womb
his boots
his hair
curl around him like drying leaves
and torn newspapers
twirl into breaths
or dirt and candy wrappers

he lets the humming neon
the blocks of stores
the crumbling sculpture
the buzzing street lamps
and snaking wire
hold him
numb him to sleep
with its inner beating
hypnotic breathing like a drum
no one listens to



kevin wilson

mornings

erin edwards

She sits
alone,
in a corner
full of cobwebs and
dust,
an ivory face,
naked and old,
hardened with time;
wrinkles sleeping
around pale grey eyes.
Without refrain,
the tiny drops slide
slowly
down leathery cheeks,
dew
on a dark cotton leaf.

autumnal equinox

maureen traverse

October perpetuating
the air
already strung artfully with dejection
twisted leaf corpses curl around my toes
shuddering
melted clouds drip soundlessly
like lumpy drifts of grey smoke
down a slice of sky
cut by roof peaks and crooked tree limbs
a sound like hollow steeple bells
the distant moaning trains
move a dog to melodic hysterics
anticipation
draws together the ends
as if to meet me.

waiting

julia kessler

in the silent room
we wait
for the apology
to come
not giving in
under any circumstance
you pace
the border
I watch
the candle
the flame flutters
with the cold breeze
coming through
the open window
in the distance
I watch the waves
of the sea
crash against the darkness
the night sky
regretting nothing



dan bowers

pay no attention to the man behind the curtain

alicia paul

Sometimes when we are sitting by my window
Watching as the moon evades the clouds

And the willow's long branches comb the grass
I see myself in your eyes

And there are times I believe that
You will let your self bend to me

That you will acknowledge the
Emptiness intertwined

But you sit and watch the distance out the window
As if to convince yourself of that

Childhood notion that when you close your
Eyes no one can see you

So you are the man
Turning back again

Taking refuge in your holy of holies
Trying to pretend that the curtain was

Never torn in two

dorothy

tara knapp

This universe is unusual.
The moon is like a goose egg, this evening.
It's large and white, illuminates my path.
And I follow along a bright brick road,
searching for the city of green, the dream.
I suppose I'm wondering where home is,
where Auntie Em is-
she's probably sitting in her wicker rocking
chair, mending my checked blue-and-white dress,
pulling the thread, fastening the button.
As I walk, I hum my refrain.



dan bowens

laura

mariah m.l. bauer

It had been a bad day, even by Laura's standards. She had worked a full day at "A Fool for the Yule," the green and red nightmare of a Christmas shop that she had recently sought employment at in a fit of desperation. Her thighs were chaffed from the abrasive underside of the furry, "Santa's Little Helper" mini skirt that she was forced to don. Larry, her boss, had stood beneath her as she hung miniature reindeer from the ceiling (doubtless looking up her skirt). "Laura," he had said, foggily, "Do you have plans for tonight? I was going to head over to the Hand Bell Association 'Ring-Ding.'" Laura hooked Rudolph decisively into the cheap, cardboard ceiling. "Um...gosh, Larry, I was planning on making dinner for my boyfriend tonight. It's my turn." Now, sitting on the broken-legged Victorian sofa in her dark apartment, Laura let her belled boots fall to the floor with a tinny chuckle. Her ex-boyfriend, Ricardo, was subject to a restraining order, currently, and she had been living on sugar water for the past four days. Laura ran her fingers through the faux zebra fur throw, mulling over whether or not there were hors d'oeuvres being served at the "Ring-Ding."

Laura put on a Joan Armatrading record, letting it scratch into "Show Some Emotion." She sang along as she limped into the slope-floored kitchen. "Show some emotion, put expression in your eyes. Light up, if you're feeling happy, but if you're down then let those tears slide by..." The intensity of her own voice was somewhat alarming. Christ, if things kept on the downward spiral groove, maybe she could be the first white blues singer. Maybe she could use her connections at "Fool for the Yule" and make her debut Christmas album. The refrigerator door swung open, lemony light yawning across the grey tile. A brown half of lime, a crumpled box of Arm and Hammer baking soda, a Tupperware container of egg nog left over from the staff party. Laura had always despised egg nog, especially of the virgin variety, but she figured it had protein and would be a nice supplement to the sugar water diet. There was the shadow of an egg ovaling behind the butter dish partition, but it had been in there for months. Do eggs go bad? Laura opted to stick with the nog. She stuck the container into the microwave for 30 seconds and returned to the sofa for "Tall in the Saddle."

Laura reclined, smoothed down the synthetic, white fur of her collar and reached for her wallet. She had snagged a cigarette from Larry earlier in the day and tucked it inconspicuously into the crease. Laura felt badly, but figured that for the amount of money that she would later spend on trying to eradicate the psychological damage from working in a year-round Christmas shop, he at least owed her a smoke. It was that GPC brand (whatever that stood for), but it was a cigarette. The match sputtered as Laura lit it. She loved that initial smell of sulfur and hiss of tobacco. She had been waiting for it all day. Laura dragged deeply, sending smoke coiling into the street light lit air in pale blue arches. It hurt her throat, but she didn't care. She had been sick forever, ever since she had decided to do that photo shoot behind the building last January. It had seemed like a brilliant idea at the time...Laura's nude figure draped embryonically in snow banks. She had done it all herself, it was to be a self-portrait. Then, she thought the image would be even more spectacular if she were to paint herself magenta, to really get the birthing concept captured on film. It had all created quite a stir. Over the sound of squealing brakes and whistles, Laura had heard Charlotte Given's (her landlord's) voice. It had war-

bled out of the third story, corner window, slicing angrily through the winter air, thick with snow. "Laura Koenig! You get in here, RIGHT NOW! Do you hear me? One more stunt like this and you are evicted! I have never trusted you artistic types for THIS reason!" It was a gruesome incident, but the results had developed nicely. One print hung crookedly on the wall, adhered by melted wax.

Outside, the city sky was the

Then, she thought the image would be even more spectacular if she were to paint herself magenta, to really get the birthing concept captured on film.

color of diluted blood. Laura traced the darkened, cumulus outline of the maple tree outside of the window with the glowing stub of her cigarette. Pasty, the white Persian cat she had inherited with the apartment, padded across the floor and jumped into her lap. "Poor Pasty," Laura cooed smokily, exhaling the last drag, "left all alone by your last mommy and daddy." The apartment had been vacant four days when Laura had moved in and discovered the cat in the hall closet with an empty can of Frisky. Now, Pasty nuzzled her flat face into Laura's synthetic fur covered chest. Laura wished she had some-

one to nuzzle. She figured that it would occasionally slip over the wasn't entirely socially acceptable edge and threaten to kill her or that to plant your face into every quasi-she had spent her day trying to get friendly-looking person's chest, but loans from places that would cut she was always fighting the com- off your extremities if you didn't pulsion to do so. Sometimes huma;pay them back. It didn't seem quite touch could be so important. appropriate. There was a woman,

The cigarette had extinguished itself. Laura placed the charred filter on the table and tried to remember the last time that she had actually spoken to anyone at length. After her father pulled funds on her because an art major was "grossly impractical," Laura opted to stay in Baltimore to experience the city. Her friends from college fell slowly out of the picture. Her best friend from school, Carrie, had not called for about four months. Carrie would babble about the "Nut and Bolt" party, or some really "intense" guy that she had spoken to (drunk) at a pub who (incidentally) smoked lots of weed and had a nice ass. Laura would listen, feeling like she was in a scene from a movie that she had been miscast for, and murmur the appropriate "oh's" and "really's." She wouldn't mention that she was involved with a man that



dan bowers

Miriam, who lived downstairs and Laura would sometimes take a trip down the fire escape to visit her and talk, but she ditched rent, and literally, disappeared one day. The only person that Laura saw on a regular basis was Larry, the "Fool for the Yule" hand bell maestro, and Batman, the homeless man that lived on the corner of Greenmount and 33rd, right by her apartment. It wasn't what could really be called a relationship. Walking to the bus stop in her Ms. Claus ensemble during the summer months, Laura would always feel a peculiar affinity toward the only other person in costume. Batman wore blue tights, a bare chest, and chicken bone on a string around his neck. The first time Laura encountered him, he sidled up to her in a swooping motion and said "Morning, ma'am, how are things

in Gotham City?" On later occasions, Batman explained that he was, in fact, the person that kept the streets crime-free and that he was busy looking for Robin, his accomplice. Desperation breeds strange joys. Laura always looked forward to seeing Batman, arch-

Batman wore blue tights, a bare chest, and chicken bone on a string around his neck.

backed on the corner with his hands on his hips.

"Things are down and out in Gotham City," Laura said to Pasty, dragging a finger across the down between her triangle ears. "Want some egg nog?" She offered the cat the mason jar glass, holding it at an angle so that Pasty could lap neatly at the manila paper colored remnants. After a few seconds, Laura placed the clean glass on the windowsill next to the cigarette butt and dropped Pasty to the floor with a muted pat. The apartment was lit by the cantaloupe sheen of light pollution. Laura sat up and struck a match to a votive candle before she walked into the kitchen. She wanted to take a bath, but she had rigged the bathroom into a dark room and didn't have the energy to scrub the developer out of the tub. Bathing in photographic chemicals didn't seem like the most

brilliant idea at this point. She had washed her face at the sink that was saturated with fixer a thousand times, hoping that it would have mild, beneficial exfoliating properties — but total submersion might spell disaster. She sure as hell wouldn't be able to afford hospital bills for dermatological trauma. Laura stopped for a few moments to inspect the photographs that she had finished by candlelight the night before. They hung limply from a string that had been suspended between the shower head and towel rack. Walking down the line, Laura paused for a moment to look at her bleary reflection in the mirror. Her face was sallow and gaunt. It looked as though the darkness of her eyes was running under the thin skin below them. Laura traced the hard ridge of cheekbone that lay unnaturally close to the skin up to the smudge of cerulean blue acrylic next to her left ear that she hadn't noticed for days. It struck Laura that she could hang the prints from her collarbones the way that they were protruding. She looked like some crazed, Gothic figure — Bertha from Jane Eyre. Alone, starving, delirious, locked in some godforsaken garret. "Shit," Laura said to her reflection. "What do you think? Should we quit?"

The telephone rang four times before her father answered. "Hello?"

His voice sounded as hard and impersonal as Laura remembered it. She debated hanging up.

"Um...Hi Dad. It's me. Laura."

"Something wrong?"

"No...well, yes. I guess that something is wrong. I'm just...I'm actually just kind of living on sugar water and having a really hard time...."

"You're not calling to ask for money, are you? I TOLD you, Laura, and I am a man of my word. I TOLD you that you would starve if you kept this art bullshit up. You're a smart girl. I offered you education. Art is not a worthy pursuit. Art is not something to seek education in. Art is a hobby. You do very pretty pictures, Laura...but that's it. It's not PRACTICAL to think that in AMERICA you can make a DECENT living off of pretty pictures."

"Yeah, Dad, I realize that. I'm not just sitting here painting and taking pictures. I have a job...."

"What kind of job?" Shit.

"It's retail...it's, um, selling."

"Selling WHAT, Laura?" If I say "Selling myself" first, he'll be grateful that I sell mechanical Santas and elf shoes.

"I work at a Christmas store."

"Laura, we're JEWISH and it's AUGUST."

"I realize that Dad — there just isn't much out there and I only get my paycheck every two weeks and rent was due and I'm paying off credit card bills and...(I spent everything else on art supplies)...and I guess that I'm just in really dire straits."

"Where do I fit into all of this?"

"I suppose that I was going to ask for advice — help, really."

"Advice? You IGNORED my advice, Laura. My advice to you is that you STOP all this FOOLISHNESS. You are just like your MOTHER, Laura. And do you know what happened to HER? She is currently living with some BUDDHIST FREAK in some SHACK in the woods, most likely selling MARIJUANA to support themselves." All right, so Genny went off the deep end — let's not get into that...

"I know, Dad."

"But if you have learned that this is NOT what you want, I will offer you one more chance, Laura. If you come home, you can stay here until you find a job and an apartment and I will PAY for you to be PRACTICALLY EDUCATED. SUNY has a great business program." I can't do this anymore. Maybe he's right. What is all of this worth, anyway? "Laura? Are you there?"

"Yes, Dad."

"And what is your answer?"

This is, I PROMISE you, the LAST time that I will offer assistance." Do it. You have to.

"I'll come home. I'll call you in a few days to let you know the details."

It took Laura a full hour to pile all of her canvases and matted prints by the door. They were waist high, and Pasty and Laura sat in their shadow for a few moments to gather themselves after all of the commotion. "I think that I'm doing the right thing, don't you Pasty?" Laura posed. The cat teetered along her thigh, purring brokenly. "Is that a hum of agreement?" Laura asked. "It sounds like it." "Really, Pasty," Laura continued, "things aren't going very well for me here. I despise my job, I drove my boyfriend to death threats, and I'm so deliriously hungry that I am sitting in a dark apartment having a tete-a-tete with a cat. Not to insult you, Pasty. You are a very intelligent and charming companion, but you should be out talking with other cats and I should be out talking to actual people." Pasty looked up blankly with her sandy colored eyes and started to knead Laura's breasts. "No, Pasty," Laura sighed, "I am not your mama. It's time for you to leave the nest and it is time for me to return to mine. I, obviously, can't make it on my own." Laura dragged her

hand over the uneven cornered pile of art work. "Look at all of this, Pasty." She raised the cat's tufted chin with a pointer finger. "See this? This is why I am sitting in the dark, starving and alone. Once upon a time, Pasty, I thought that it was worth it. I thought that it was my job to make beautiful things to make people happy. Ridiculous, huh? The only people who get to see all of this are you and me. And Laura's being very silly, isn't she Pasty? Because Pasty is a CAT and not a human. Christ!" Laura pulled Pasty's claws out of her red velvet covered chest with a little wince and plopped her onto the floor. She dragged herself to her feet, unbolted the door, picked up the unruly

She sure as hell wouldn't be able to afford hospital bills for dermatological trauma.

stack of artwork and arranged it awkwardly against her body.

Laura had visions of plummeting to her death down the narrow flight of stairs. She couldn't quite see around all of the canvases caked with waves of acrylic and there was a mixed medium project at waist level that had a painfully jagged piece of scrap metal jutting out of it and into her lower intestine. For a brief moment, she became terrified of falling and managing to gore herself on her

own piece. Under the current circumstances, it would be strangely appropriate. Pasty stood behind her at the top of the stairs the entire time, whining meows of encouragement. Miraculously, Laura made it down the stairs alive and

your space with all of the clutter and I will have a lot less clutter in my head." Laura picked Pasty up and held her vibrating body so that they could look at each other, nose to nose. "You're not upset about my throwing out the painting that I

"Merry Christmas," Laura warbled.

backed her way out of the building. The fur-lined corner of her Santa's Little Helper skirt got caught in the heavy door and she lost some of the white fluff, but that was all of the damage that Laura sustained. It was mercifully cool outside, but the air still smelled of the melted tar of a brutally hot day. The wind picked up some of the prints that rested on the top of the pile and sent them wafting through the air and skittering down the sidewalk like fallen leaves. The boys shooting craps on the corner by the synthetic looking street light stopped to stare at the barefoot woman in a Christmas costume weaving down the street bearing a stack of artwork. "Merry Christmas," Laura warbled. She stopped at the dumpster next to them and flung her life's work into the square opening that gaped back at her with industrial surprise.

Pasty's white blur of a cat face greeted Laura when she returned. "It's done, Paste," Laura said, showing her empty hands. "It's all gone. Now you won't have to share

did of you, are you? We'll take some snapshots and frame them just like every other American family does, all right? It will be much more sane." Pasty breathed audibly through her flat, pink nose and blinked her gold eyes. "Let's go to bed, shall we?" Laura asked. She bolted the door, mixed up her last tall sugar water (putting it into a fluted champagne glass as a means of celebration) and fell asleep.

The alarm went off at 8:45. It never struck Laura that it sounded like a truck reversing, but on this particular morning she woke convinced that she was about to be ruthlessly pinned under the wheels of a large automobile. She had been dreaming about food (again) and when the alarm split the morning air with screeching insistence, she thought that the Good Humor truck that she had been chasing had turned on her. Pasty looked more than somewhat alarmed when Laura started to roll out of the way of the



dan bowers

dream-induced death mobile and nearly squashed her.

Laura hadn't made it out of her uniform the night before, so she opted not to shower. Instead, she changed her underwear, spritzed on some perfume and brushed her hair into a neater ponytail before she pinned on her antler hairpiece. Laura generally didn't put on the

propped up against a brick wall surrounding the 7-11 parking lot. Laura stopped abruptly, setting antlers askew. She blinked her eyes hard and kept walking. Most likely, the garbage men got confused at the dumpster's contents and threw them on the street. Maybe this one had fallen out of the truck. But, didn't the dumpster only get

"Beautiful day in Gotham City," a voice said from behind her.

antlers until she arrived at work, but she felt like entertaining herself and everybody else on the bus. "Why stop at the outfit?" she explained to Pasty. "We're going whole hog." Even Laura's belled boots were amused and laughed with greater exuberance as she pulled them on and jogged down the stairs and out the door. It was hot, the fur was feeling annoyingly abrasive, and Laura knew that she would have heat rash by the time she reached "A Fool for the Yule." If she was lucky the skin issue would manifest itself as something that looked like an STD or Leprosy and Larry would be repulsed enough to leave her alone.

Laura was busy trying to scratch further down her back when she rounded the corner to walk up to Greenmount and 33rd and saw the first one. It was the painting of the orange bridge over the Jones Falls Expressway. It was

cleaned out on Friday? Laura was looking down at the gleam on her belled shoes, thinking, when she reached the corner and looked up to make a right down 33rd Street. Her art work was leaning against every storefront for the next three blocks. Homeless people, people in business suits were milling around them. Laura stood there, her head somersaulting, her hands gripping her chest. Suddenly, a hand was suspended in the space in front of her, holding her prints. The shine off of the gloss was dizzying.

"Beautiful day in Gotham City," a voice said from behind her. The hand belonged to Batman. Laura swiveled slowly, turning to face him. He was smiling at her, black eyes crinkling into upside down grins above smooth, high cheekbones. Batman drew the chicken bone necklace over his head and placed it on Laura. "It's a wing," he said, "Fly."

piranhas

tara knapp

In Africa, the piranhas
left behind grow dry, crisp-
whitened bones,
eyes popping from the bloated undoing.
It's a slow suffer in the hot season
when the sun scintillates,
when they didn't start soon enough
swimming down the river drying to desert.
Next came the white egrets, alligators.
Death is always a veiled monster
gnawing, preying on weakness.
The child lies with tears
crusting down his face.
His bones are thin as lines,
his stomach a dark balloon.
Flies dart around his small head,
crawl his fantastic eyes.
Of course, he stares blankly ahead,
cannot see.
Sand stretches for miles,
the wind brushes softly,
slowly covering him in a dune-
the moment of going unmarked.
I could tell you he moaned for water,
flapped like a fish on land
but probably it was more still and silent.

untitled

james stillwaggon

You are good covers:
When I belly-crawl in from
The damp street sweat;
When I awake to cold dew
I shiver between the air and
Your warming thigh

I know the grip of a deeper grasp,
The dead-weight of a finally
Broken will smiling, blissful,
The hiss of the painted radiator
Like an overgrown, intoxicated cat,
Your breath condensing on
My cheek and murmuring dreams

We crave these sheets
We creep like rats
We sleep in tongues
And speak a silent recognition;
We crash like spilling children
Upon each other's quilted skin
And climb the broken cobbled-stones
Breaking the world as we pull—
Beneath the sky
The crescent moon
The half-closed eye
That wakes too soon
We are good covers.



kara e. hansell

at the seams

james healy

Caressing the damp
Underlying thoughts that
Round up the day upon the
Midnight breeze
Understating the
Deepness of your heart
Going to the inner roads of everywhere
Looking past the walls of perception
In the glass of night and day
Told the tale of
Heresy in a foreign land
Imagining the days
Under a blood red
Martian sky
Being the
Everlasting
Unknowing
New-aged
Sight-seeing poet
Writing
On the thought that you are
Nowhere

8

