

*spring The Garland 1998*



# THE GARLAND

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# THE GARLAND

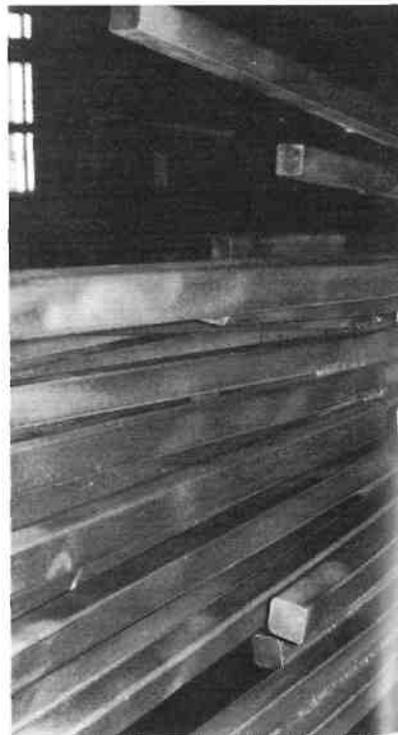
*The Art and Literature Magazine of  
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Megan Carr

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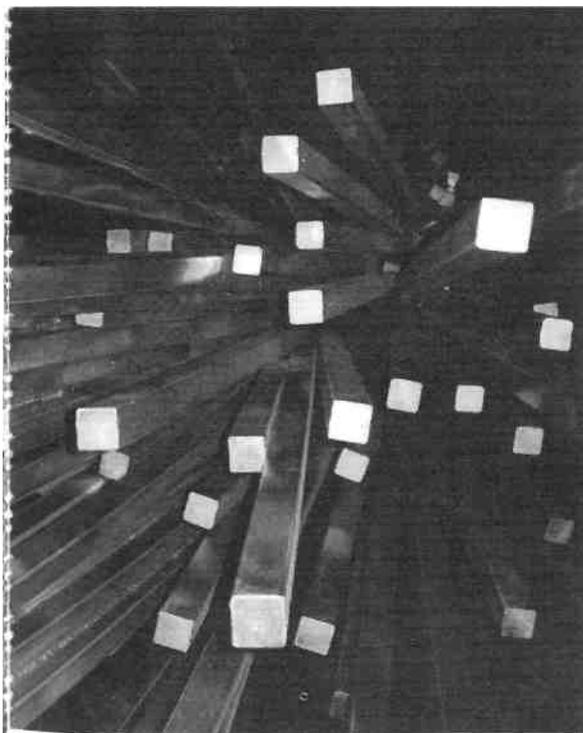
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*A Note From the Editor...*

Within each of us there are the ingredients for greatness, the desire, imagination, and moments of inspiration which drive us to make our influence upon the world. Writers are in the exhausting business of molding and manipulating these intangible thoughts to form their own creations, and then passing them on to others. Cynthia Ozick once said, "If we had to say what writing is, we could define it essentially as an act of courage," Ozick is right. Writers, as all artists, are at the mercy of their audience. The stakes may be high, but the reward of creating something born from within which moves others, far outweighs the consequences. And so, I would like to thank everyone who submitted to the *Garland* this year, and extend my congratulations to those who are published within these pages. You are in good company.

I would like to express my many thanks to Dr. Dan McGuinness for giving me the extraordinary opportunity of working on this project and letting me get my hands wet. My appreciation also goes out to my small but powerful staff for all their cooperation and nights of inspiring conversation.

I hope you enjoy this year's edition of *The Garland*. I will leave you with a few fitting words from Mark Strand,

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.



Megan Casey

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## *A Po-Mo Poem*

Metaphysical, you say?  
Would you like me to  
take you by the hand  
and walk you through my poem?

There was the first stanza.  
Now, here is the part  
where I use a metaphor  
to compare you to a donkey:  
you are an ass.

Sigh of relief,  
we're almost through.  
Listen to the sounds  
these words make:  
slowly she shudders  
- then smiles.

Am I coming in clear?

Beth Barnyock



Steven Johnson

## *Ignis fatuus*

I felt delirious.  
We women shake  
in mad rapture,  
a luscious moment in red,  
milkless,  
languid.  
a goddess in dirty dishwater.  
a whore in pearls.

Boy, robbing delicate dreams  
with drunk language.  
your manipulating tongue  
chanted what vision I was.  
my weak cry,  
tiny as I am,  
my scream,  
a whisper,  
I

need

sleep.

Your repulsive apparatus  
incubates my pink void  
with a raw, ugly after-moan.  
my crushed petals  
lie in your bitter garden.  
girl, with a thousand sordid lovers,  
a trudging,  
bloody beauty.

I want those smears.  
my honey trip gone  
under peach dresses.  
lazy light purple picture parts  
smell like you think.  
and I will never tell  
a  
word.

Beth Barnyock

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## *Fleeting*

I disappear behind the branches  
On a walk into the woods.  
My bare feet colored black with earth.  
The mud, a solace from broken stones.  
I begin to wander,  
Lost in indecision, trying to find my way.

Off the beaten path I run away,  
Out of the thick and binding branches.  
I move quickly over jagged stones;  
Finding myself, weak in wisdom, on cool earth.  
A new direction in my wanders  
Leads me through unfamiliar woods.

Who lives in these woods?  
What logic hides in these branches?  
I let my mind wander  
Until the trudge and earth  
Of my wayward way  
Lead me to water-worn stones.

Reflections skipped by children throwing stones,  
I reflect in quiet earth.  
Under questioning tree branches,  
Thoughts find their way  
Out of the woods  
And, as memories wander,

Like a lost soul, I wander  
In solitude, on my way.  
Deeper into dark and inter-weaving woods,  
My thoughts are caught on thorny branches.  
I stub a meditation on the stones,  
Falling face down in the earth.

My face down in the earth;  
This is not the way  
Through these tangled woods.  
burdened with stones.  
Though weary, I still wander  
Alone, without supporting branches.

I want out of these woods, I want to branch  
Out of this stone-cold earth, this dirty dreamwork.  
I wonder why I wandered this way.

Beth Barnyock

## *Fool*

If i was a tiny white afternoon  
and your heavy lamented eyes  
squinted through what everyone else sees

then you would find me.

i am recalling the inspired pot-roast,  
the sss-ing of the microwaving potato,  
receiver wedged into my collar  
bone while the glasses go where glasses  
go.

Biking down St. Paul street, my hair upsweeping  
the rush hour rushing at my heels—  
my legs are pegged, pulled, magnetized to the pavement and then,  
up to my elbows

like a puppet someone else is lingering  
Or hovering  
aloft.

i stare at them in full amazement because they are knees, not me.  
From me, spiraling into a spaghetti sauce  
splattered painting by Grace Hartigan.

Swiftly, they rock and glide like an ice cube crackling  
in my soup drop pothole after pot-  
hole roast

i love no helmet  
my wobbling ten speed with ram horn handle bars  
and my eyes  
squinting, almost shut, because i sense the rush

the push of traffic  
and death when a sporadic car parallel parks  
skipping in front of my bike,  
tapping my clenched blueing knuckles.

Mary Rose Madden



Megan Carr

## *Before the Fog*

Summer snow settles across the porch  
white petals scatter across my lap.  
The ancient fingered lilac tree releases its grip to a lazy breeze.  
Above the groundhog holes  
the rhubarb stalks with those thin coarse spanning leaves  
shield the seasoned blackberries.

*I have seen it over and over,*  
but wasn't ready when  
the last time  
became the last time-

My dog's tongue swinging twists  
in the crab grass to scratch the fleas  
from his old Newfoundland hips and thick coated back,  
or the fat gray squirrel's high wire act  
on the hummingbird line.  
or the final good-bye.

Picture hundreds of seagulls lining the roof of your house  
waiting for the old fisherman to drag the sea scraps out  
into the dried up strawberry field.  
Picture these rangled winged oversized rats,  
diving gulls for the scavenge,  
plunging  
like free jazz screaming from the sky.

Then there's the bloody red blossom of sumac,  
stems spilling another slaughter  
for the earth to absorb.

Max MacDonald

## *7-Eleven*

And when you take that bullet  
And the blood empties out your side  
Remember to toss the junk  
From your pocket  
Before you go.

The police and public like simplicity.  
Parents like their sons pure.

Max McDonald





Tom McGuire

## *Hold Up*

And because neighborhood kids smashed Diana's windshield, I am sitting here in the dirty lobby of Diamond Auto, reading the paper, waiting for the glass to be installed.

*Why would someone do that?* she has said over and over in the past two days,

I think of earlier this summer, of Ken and Megan, robbed at gunpoint in that same dark church parking lot - shrouded in large trees - of that cold, silver gun being forced into Ken's kneeling mouth, his hand squeezing Megan's tightly turning it white, thinking that her hand will be the last thing he ever touches.

*Why would someone do that?*

In the car this morning, Diana asked, *Do you think they'll smash my window again, just because I've gotten it fixed?* And I turn in the August morning and she is beautiful. I have to reassure her,

but there was Megan, falling to Ken, sobbing, the men disappearing as easily as they'd come, clinging to the stone walls of the church unable to use most of what they'd stolen — later they'd tell their friends the story, show off the license and credit cards, pay cash for the beer and food, and

they'll know the way white eyes of a man on his knees look, turning toward them, prideless. I shift my eyes to the road, *It's only a windshield. But maybe you shouldn't park your car back there anymore. These are bad times.*

People need to touch pride. Times like these: a rock smashing a windshield, a handgun cooling a jaw.

*for Ken*

William Cannon III

## *Waiting for Logic*

And when you told me, you held a cigarette, flicked ashes onto  
the wooden table, then day cast over us, my back  
against the stone chimney, your mother, and the promise of chemo.

Today folding laundry, hanging blue-striped, collared shirts,  
plastic coat hangers, I thought of her, of you - your shrug that day.

And when our other friend Joe told me, tonight,  
climbing the wooden stairs: it's over, her fight,

her chance - done: his palms were up and open,  
shoulders heaving, as if to say,  
*I give up, I don't know.*

Later, crouched across from a friend literally deciding — three am,  
suicide or life, suicide or life — I say, *Think of the Buddhist holy men  
who say that the glass we drink from is already broken.*  
I tell my desperate friend about your mother - dead within a week  
of diagnosis - and I think of us in April, before the cancer, marble benches,  
outside, waiting for logic to start- cigarette even-  
smile curling the morning - coffee. We told each other it was beautiful:  
these clouds, defining the early sky in drift, that sun, those trees,  
spring coming on, coming hard, green and yellow at its muddy base.

And we will sit on marble benches again, in autumn, waiting,  
the leaves astonishing, different clouds huge, white, and whole — big masses  
against the darkening sky; finally, we will walk quickly through the rain, dodging  
then collapsing, our wet clothes, wet shoes, and we will call it all beautiful again.

*For Drew*

William Cannon III

## *Feeling God*

On the roof of the *Centre Pompidou* right now,  
or circling a runway in a plane with a window seat,  
I feel like a god. Diana conies back for two francs  
to use the bathroom. A girl in a pleated skirt, blue and  
white checked shirt, sells ice cream from a cart. An iron  
table is set out on the roof to the right, with three chairs.

The escalator; winds us down to earth:  
children coming inside, amazed for the first time  
by simple machines. Outside, Diana wades around me,  
eating her cone slowly; and in the cobblestone square afternoon,  
artists are drunk, smoking cigarettes, a steel drum  
rings over its singers, and a man yells in French.

I know his name. I know all their names.

The artists shake their heads, and  
I ask them, *What is he saying?* A pause. Then, accent thick,  
*He is...talking religion.* I hear the man say,  
*Jesu and hypocrisy.*

William Cannon III



John O' Sullivan

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## *The Spin Cycle*

Aileen DePeter

I know the sounds of my Laundromat. I know how each of the two rows of fourteen washers rumble like an eighteen wheeler passing by on a highway. I know how the one wall of twenty-eight dryers sound like voices in another room, echoing faintly. Her washer was fuming, absolutely shaking out of its space. I could see the side of her face. Brown eyes, I think, maybe green? Brown curls, and a crinkled look of concern that half hid them.

"You probably overloaded." I had moved up behind her, she didn't hear me. I cleared my throat. "You probably overloaded." She turned. I could see her whole face now. Brown eyes. They looked at me with surprise. "That's why it's shaking like that. I can help."

"Do you work here?" Her thumb and forefinger of her right hand brushed against the fingers on her left. They stopped and twisted a thin silver ring. She rotated the ring for one final spin. She looked nervous. A small piece of hair fell into her eyes. She swept it back and tucked it behind her ears. She had beautiful hands.

"I, well, I mean I do work here. It's family owned." I was unable to admit my immediate attachment to this place. Truth is, I grew up here sweeping the floors on Sundays for my mother. I would gather up all the little gray-green scraps of lint that littered the floor. I would never be able to make her understand. I remember opening each dryer along the row looking for errant socks and pocket change. Once I found a five-dollar bill tangled in the lint. I was the treasure hunter, each dryer, each washing machine was my own adventure. I had painted the walls here during high school. I wrote my name in big letters across the wall, then slowly filled in the spaces around it with pale yellow paint. The paint was now faded and peeling away where the wall met the floor and the ceiling.

"Oh, I'm really sorry, my washer broke at home and . . . Did I break anything?" She spoke fast; I could see the color in her cheeks.

"Don't worry, it happens all the time." It did, really about once a month somebody would come in unsorted and put two loads worth of laundry into one machine. My roommate in college always had me do his laundry. "Jake, you're like a woman," he would say, "whites in one pile, colors in the other. Don't mix your brights with your whites." My mother had taught it all to me. At stages in my childhood, she would just take me over to a machine and I would just watch her. She always distrusted the dryers at school and would frequently end our phone conversations by telling me to check my clothes every fifteen minutes. I always had sweaters hanging in the window, because it was better to take them out damp and hang them then have them shrink away. She always use to send packages that contained a Laundromat sample size of fabric softener. My roommate and I however, were always the best-dressed guys on the floor.

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The washing machine was still shaking. She was back to spinning her ring. The clothes she was wearing were professional looking, but somewhat casual. The jacket to the blue skirt hung over a laundry basket. The white blouse fit her form; her sleeves were rolled up to her elbows. I lifted the lid of the washer and the spin cycle stopped. The room, although crowded with other people, suddenly seemed so quiet. I realized that I had been yelling to be heard.

"You can just put half in the other washer, and put it back on the spin cycle." I had gotten half way back to the sanctuary of my counter when she spoke.

"Thanks, I really appreciate it."

In an awkward move, I twisted backwards, while trying to go forwards. I felt gawky and absurd. She laughed a little, but it wasn't a mocking laugh. When I finally got my gaze back to hers, feet forward, face back, my cheeks felt warm.

"No problem, anytime." I answered

"I have a great recipe for vegetarian lasagna." She was standing at my counter. Her hands tapped on the counter top, a silver necklace fell beneath the collar of her shirt. She hunched over, her smooth elbows just hanging over the edge of the counter. She was smiling. I didn't say anything. This was the fourth time in three weeks that she had been here. I felt as if we had an understanding of embarrassment between us. Hers was for the overload, mine for the awkwardness of my own self.

"I once took some cooking classes." It sounded loud, and for a moment, I wondered if I had even spoken, or if I was still trying to comprehend what she said.

"Well then I guess it's settled." Her hair was up today, pulled back in a tight little knot at the base of her head. There were these little wisps of stray hair highlighted in the "Wash and Dry" neon light in the window.

"Settled?" I wondered what it would be like to undo the knot in the back of her hair and watch as it falls down over her shoulders.

"Dinner, vegetarian lasagna, your place?"

I tipped the chair back to the white cement wall, leaned my face toward the small plastic fan, and closed my eyes. I could hear the whirl of the fan at my ears and the scratch of an errant zipper scraping the inside of a dryer. We never made vegetarian lasagna in my cooking class.

"I guess, I mean, dinner sounds all right, it sounds good." My voice in its nervousness seemed to deepen, and I found myself speaking in a low monotone voice. I cleared my throat.

"Yeah, good." I repeated. She told me her name was Donna. The first day we met, the day the washer overloaded, I watched her wrestle with coils of wet clothes with those beautiful hands.

The last date I was on was in college. We went to dinner and a movie. Her name was Kathy or Katie; she laughed too loud and had long blond hair that reached the seat when she sat down. She ordered a strawberry milkshake. I could still taste it on her when I kissed her. I never anticipated anything from those col-

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lege relationships. It was always more physical than anything else. I even dated one girl for a whole year. We would talk about the future. I liked the way she smelled. She never made me wonder why she was like the way she was. I never questioned why she might be interested in me. I just knew she smelled good, and that she was willing to be there. My mother didn't like her and always called her by the wrong name, Lisa instead of Linda. Once she came down for a week over Christmas break. She left two days early because my mother had a habit of talking about her, while at the same time pretending she wasn't in the room.

Donna said that she would bring the groceries, all I had to provide was the dinner table and a bottle of wine. I stared at the China plates that I had been left by my mother after she died a year ago. I didn't really lie to Donna when I said the Laundromat was family owned. It was, by my mother for twenty-six years. It was now my sole property with her Queen Anne China plates, Ginger her dog, and her collection of Lawrence Welk records. The records I couldn't stand, but I couldn't stand to get rid of them either. They still smelt like her—musty, stained with perfumed oily hands. It was the one way I could hear her memory.

"Ginger, go lie down!" She was trailing after me getting underfoot at every turn. His brown coat brushed up against my pant leg, leaving fine brown hair behind.

"Come on, girl, this is important, you'll see." I bent down to pet her. "You know, I just washed these pants." She seemed to understand, either from the sound of my voice or the pained look I probably had on my face. She limped off and lay down on her doggie bed. My mother had insisted on getting a dog after I left for college. She thought that she would need some protection. Ginger however was anything but an attack dog. She was a chocolate lab and had been hit by a car. She had a limp, hardly ever barked, and was content just to lie around. Still, she gave my mother the same company she gives me now. Every Sunday my mother used to call me at school. She insisted that I say hello to the dog. Those conversations always focused on if I was studying enough, sleeping enough, and doing my laundry. I never really asked about her. In fact I half listened most of the time when she said anything.

I took out two china plates and two of my mother's Waterford crystal wineglasses. I guess I was lucky, most guys my age don't have china patterns and the Colleen collection of Waterford crystal glasses. The whole house had the same furniture as when I grew up. All the stuff I brought back from my apartment at school was sitting in the basement. I hadn't even bothered to bring them in. I did take the plastic off the couch cushions though. The plastic was cracked and yellowed, but the fabric on the sofa looked brand new. I wondered if my mother ever knew that. She had photographs on the shelf of her corner cabinet. There was one of me in third grade, and a picture of her and Ginger. There were none of the two of us together. I took the good silverware out of the drawer beneath the pictures. I could hear my mother's voice.

"Forks on the left, Jake, forks on the left."

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The table was ready.

"Jake, do you cry when chopping onions?" She had just walked in the door. Already her hands were in the bag starting to unpack. She was wearing a simple yellow sundress. 100% cotton, I thought. Her hair was down.

"No, I mean, it doesn't really bother me," I said.

"Good because it makes my eyes so teary. I'll start the water for the lasagna." She pulled out the box of lasagna from the bag.

"The pots are under the stove." I said, peeling back the first layer of the onion skin. I watched her rifle through an array of pots until she found the right one.

"I know that you were a master chef in your cooking classes, but I hope store bought pasta is okay."

"You mean it's not hand pressed?" I felt a little bolder in her presence.

"I can make that for you if you wait about six years, but I'm hungry now." She opened the box, sliding her fingernail beneath that cardboard line and in one clean line, opened it.

"You have a nice place here. I like your plants." She put the box back down on the counter and looked around. I had bought the plants that afternoon, in an attempt to make this place seem less stifling, for both Donna and myself. I noticed that one of the plants still had the price tag on its silver foil wrapping. They did, however, brighten the room a bit. With the exception of the five years I was away, I had always lived in this house. My time seemed divided between it and the Laundromat. The house always shrouded in a tint of gray; the Laundromat with its yellow walls and fluorescent lights was always a brighter place.

The smell of sauteing onions quickly overtook the room. I had forgotten how much I enjoyed cooking. It seems I haven't eaten for the past two years. When my mother was ill, I would make myself a sandwich or order a pizza. I would cook only out of necessity, never out of desire. After she died, I found it was easier to go out and eat. Three times a week for the past year I have been occupying a counter seat at Jimmy's Oasis Grill on the corner of Main and Third Ave. I have become a regular.

"You live here all alone right? What is it, three bedrooms?" Donna took the long line of pasta and dropped it easily into the salted boiling water.

"Oh I don't live alone, I have Ginger and the plants."

She laughed, and for a moment I thought she was content with that for an answer. There was a small pause. I stirred the onions. She was waiting for an explanation. Her mouth was slightly open and her head tilted to the side. She looked as if she was going to say something, but stopped.

"This was my mother's house, she died about a year ago. The Laundromat was hers too; I inherited it, along with Ginger. The plants are mine."

"I'm sorry." She blushed a little and poked at the pasta. "I always ask the wrong questions."

I shrugged. "Don't worry about it, it happens all the time." Actually it

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didn't. I wasn't used to explaining my life to anyone else. The words felt odd coming from my mouth. I had always rehearsed what I would say if placed in this situation. At nights sometimes I would say to myself, "My mother's dead, this is her stuff, her life, I am just here because I have no place else to go." Donna looked up from cutting tomatoes.

"That is the same line you used in the Laundromat, 'It happens all the time.'"

"That really does happen, a lot of people overload, maybe not all the time, but some people feel its necessary to put three or four hundred pounds of clothes in one machine." I got her laughing and my own awkwardness of having to admit my position, laundryman, inheritor of an older generation, carrier of the weight, faded.

"Ginger's a beautiful dog." She was right; I had never really looked at her, always past her. "Look at the way the light hits her. You should really keep those blinds open, you have great light." She smiled at me then turned away and drained the pasta into the sink. Ginger's coat shone in the late day sun coming through the window. I had finally cleaned the windows, aware of wiping away so much more.

I watched her eat, and she caught me staring too many times. She would smile and look down at her plate, her brown hair falling in front of her eyes. I wonder if she talks to her mother. They probably have one of those relationships where they call each other every week, maybe more than once. Did she tell her mother she met a nice guy at the Laundromat? Her mother probably asked what I did for a living. She would have to tell her I worked there; I wasn't doing my laundry there. Did she twist the ring on her finger when she spoke on the phone? I hope she didn't feel bad for me. In third grade I found a frog on the sidewalk on my way home from school. I had pitied it, saw it was helpless. I brought it to the Laundromat and put it in a washing machine. I thought it needed water.

"So you went to college to become a chef?" One side of her mouth curled up into a small smirk.

"The dinner is that bad?" I asked. She was fully smiling now. She had very straight teeth.

"No, really it is very good. I was just wondering."

"Actually, I was a business major. I took cooking classes as electives. They really helped out in my gopher job at the insurance firm I worked at before I had to come back here. I could make the best cup of coffee in the whole office."

"Did you like it?" She seemed interested, but I kept wondering why she would want to be here with me now.

"It was okay, I don't think I really had any idea of what I wanted to do, or be, so the job to me was fine. I guess it was no different from anything else." It was true, if I hadn't worked there I could have done the same job at any number of places. I was one of the masses, the average worker, doing the average job. I lived in a small apartment, met my friends who hadn't moved on, on week-

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ends, and went to work. I had always thought that eventually I would rise above the messenger boy role, and be able to become my own boss. I just didn't think it would be the boss of a Laundromat.

"Your job now seems better than that. You own your own business, and you seem to know a lot about it."

"How much is there to know?" I had always tried to think of a way to put 'I watch people do laundry all day' on a resume. I picked at the last pieces of vegetable lasagna that stuck to Queen Anne China pattern on my plate. I was suddenly terrified that there might be spinach on my teeth.

"You knew how to fix my run-away washing machine." She poured herself a glass of wine and leaned back in her chair. "You know, I didn't even know you were behind me that day. I was so caught up in what I did wrong, and how I was going to fix this out of control washing machine that I didn't even hear you talking to me. You just reached over and all the noise stopped. I thought, why didn't I do that? It was so simple." She was looking directly at me.

"I grew up in that place, it was my babysitter. I know by heart which dryer takes the longest to dry and which one will shrink your favorite shirt if you put it on for an extra fifteen minutes. I don't even think about it really." I realized my voice had become harder. "Ever since I can remember I did odd jobs around that place. I used to watch the regular customers coming in at the same time on the same day, every week. There was one lady, Mrs. Jackson, who always wore the same sweat suit every time she washed her clothes. For five years I saw her in nothing but a pink and gray sweat suit." Ginger brushed up against my leg under the table. I handed her a piece of Italian bread. She licked the ends of my fingertips in gratitude. "Sunday afternoons were the busiest days. In the summer the heat was so unbearable until we got air conditioning I used to run around in just a pair of shorts. My mother would dress nicely every day. She would greet the customers with a smile, like they were the most important people in the world. I would be running along the aisles, barefoot, with a dirty face." I looked up to see if she was still there. There were all these memories that I suddenly found myself wanting to tell her.

"You know, Jake, you're lucky you have such a connection to where you work. You could still be a gopher making coffee."

"But it would be the best coffee." She laughed. "I could also be a fabulous curator of the Art Gallery. Downtown's finest."

"Let's not forget that it is downtown's only art gallery. I see the subject has changed to me." She smiled and moved her chair in closer to the table. "You know I love working there, but I sometimes still wish I was holed up in some studio apartment turning out clay pots and modern paintings." I watched as her hands moved when she talked. They were in harmony with her words. I knew she had creative hands.

"Once I made a pinch pot and glazed it dark blue. My mother put it on the counter of the Laundromat, but she never put anything in it."

"Well, not all pinch pots have to be functional." She picked up the plate from the table and I followed her back into the kitchen.

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"I have never been to the Art Gallery." I remember passing it one day and wondering why it was just called the Art Gallery and not anything else.

"I'd never been to the Laundromat before my machine broke. So now we're even."

I didn't really believe that.

Donna hummed when she dried dishes, little made up songs in her head. The only hum I knew was the rumble of the washing machine.

"So what kind of art do you have at your gallery?" I handed her the last dish and turned off the faucet. She dried the plate and her hands with the same towel, then handed it to me.

"Mostly modern paintings, photography, some sculpture. Nothing like what you would see in Europe."

"You've been there?" Now she was a world traveler.

All I knew of the outside world was Bermuda shorts and French cut jeans.

"A few times. I love Italy, Florence especially. I felt so unknown there, but it was like I was still a part of all the history around me. I don't know how much sense that makes. I have always wanted to be important, not fame or wealth, but important in what I did, important to other people. I just feel so, I don't know what the word is ... "

"Anonymous." I said it because I knew that is what she meant. I knew what it felt like to be anonymous and I wondered what it was Donna wanted.

"Right. I guess everybody needs a history. When I was surrounded by so much of it, I felt like I had my own history too. I wasn't just some American tourist taking pictures. I felt an attachment to something better. It was beautiful there. I would love to go back." She shrugged and tossed her hair behind her shoulders with one quick flick of her wrist. "Have you ever been?"

"No, never. My mother went once, a few years before I left for college. It was one of those special deals, she went with the church. I think all they saw were European churches— she has hundreds of pictures of them that she kept in an album."

"It must be very hard to live in her house, with all her stuff."

I found myself shuffling a bit on the floor, almost swaying in an attempt to defray the question. My mother and I had never been close. Once when I was fourteen I found her looking through my room. She just turned to me and told me that everything I had she had given to me, and that she had as much right to my stuff as I did. I said nothing. And that silence hung in the air sunk into the corners and started to stifle me. I remember feeling bad for her but never knowing what it was she needed in order to feel better. I saw her one morning as I stood on the top of the stairs and watched her cry, consoling herself that it wasn't her fault that my father wouldn't be coming home. I let her life melt into mine and now the edges are all blurred. Mail still comes addressed to her, and courtesy calls because she was always a good customer. I have her job, her home, her china pattern.

"Yeah, I guess it is."

I knew that I would be sleeping alone that night, with the exception of

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Ginger at my feet. I couldn't ask Donna to try to become a part of my life, when I wasn't even sure whom or what I wanted anymore. The door closed behind her and I watched from the window as she got into her car. The street light gave just enough glow that I could see the outline of her face as she turned on the radio and pulled away.

It was raining the next day. I had been sitting in the Laundromat waiting for the people to come in. My mother used to say that nobody liked to do laundry in the rain. The hot summer days, the humid ones; those were the days where everybody came out. Those were the days that people stuck to the glossy pages of magazines waiting for the spin cycle to end. They folded newly bleached clothes with ink stained hands from doing newspaper crosswords. The only person who had come in so far today asked to post an advertisement on the front of my counter. I had told him to go ahead. The flyers hanging there were ragged with wear, and the tape had lost its stickiness from the combination of the hot dryer air mixed with the coolness of the air conditioning. People put out hope on these photocopied pages with tear off numbers frayed like the edge of the pillow. I am always surprised to see one missing.

"Morning, Jake." The door had opened with the ring of the bells.

"Morning, Eddie." He nodded as he dragged in a wet sack of laundry through the door. Eddie always did his laundry on Friday mornings. Technically he was my tenant. He lived in the apartment above the Laundromat. He and my mother had long since reached an agreement: all Eddie paid for was laundry. I didn't mind it. Eddie had been around long before I had. He was always full of stories about my childhood. His favorite was to tell how I fell off the ladder he had put up to his apartment window when he was repainting the outside of the Laundromat. Apparently, I thought I could fly. Good thing I had only gone up a couple of rungs, good thing I was, at that point, afraid of heights.

"Jake, I got something for you." He put his hand into a satchel that hung across his chest and hit his hip as he walked. "I've been meaning to give this to you. I just keep forgetting." Eddie was a small man, not taller than five four. I never could remember him with hair, although at some point he must have had some. The fluorescent lights that reflected off the top of his head gave him the halo look of an angel. "Your mother gave this to me once to borrow, and I never gave it back to her. I just found it when I was looking under my bed to see if I dropped any laundry." He pulled out an old Swiss Army Knife. "I think I used it to unpack some boxes once, I guess I just forgot to return it." He laid the knife down on the counter.

"You can keep this, Eddie." I didn't know what I was going to do with a pocketknife, and there was so much of my mother's stuff that I had never gone through, I didn't need to add to it.

"No, no, I couldn't. It's yours." He smiled and dragged his load of laundry over to washer number three. Eddie never separated his clothes, which was okay because he mostly wore a rainbow of grey. I flipped the knife through my fingers like I would a pen or how my friends in school used to tip back in their chair with a quarter flipped from thumb to pinky and back again. The red sur-

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face was cool and smooth. By mid-afternoon, I had carved my name into the back of the counter, inch deep. I traced the edges with my fingertips, stared at my name, and wondered where it came from.

There were two messages on my machine when I got home from work that day. One was from Donna inviting me to the Art Gallery for a photography exhibit. The other was from a catalog company looking for my mother.

"Ginger, come here girl." I knew she would be sleeping somewhere in the grey of this house and refuse to come. I climbed the stairs in search of her. Sprawled on my mother's bed, she lifted her head in recognition, then let it fall onto the quilted bedspread. Everyday since my mother's death I have felt a little more stifled and suffocated by her past and her memories all holed up in this house. I had taken all her clothes and medical equipment out of the room. Everything else was essentially the same. The room was just a bed, the dresser, and a small recliner chair. Her smell was almost tangible, I had tried to mask it with sauteing onions, and vegetable lasagna, but it permeated. There were sealed boxes under her bed, boxes I never really took the time to look into. I pulled them out, Ginger whimpered from the bed above, I sliced them open with the cool red knife from my pants pocket.

Donna told me when she was small her mother used to dress her up when she had parties. Then her mother would tell her to sit very quietly in the corner and not to disturb her unless it was very important. She told me she used to imagine herself inside the paintings on the wall. It was her only way out. God, I liked the way she said my name.

I cut through the third box. It contained boxes within boxes of photographs. There was a photo of my mother standing in front of the Laundromat. It was the first day it opened. A large red ribbon hung on the door. I hardly recognized her. She was old and frail when I knew her, not young and smiling. I could count six washers through the window. It would be two more years until I entered that picture. There were three boxes devoted to me only, from my first to my fifteenth birthday. Everything was categorized by year. My mother had written in her large curvy manner, Jake: 1-5 years, Jake: 6-10 years, Jake: 11-15 years. My whole life laid out before me, memories I couldn't remember, places I thought I had never been. Here was my history. My favorite picture came out of a box marked Jake: 6-10 years. I was sitting on the same white counter I had carved my name in, in front of a tower of clean towels, holding a lollipop. I had no responsibility, I was in the Laundromat, and my mother had given me a treat. That day I slid on my knees on the newly waxed floors of the Laundromat. I was invincible. Beneath those boxes was my mother's album of her trip to the European Churches. She was standing in front of an indistinguishable church, the light from the stained glass outlining her entire body. She was not smiling, rather, she had a look of understanding, acceptance, that her life was not what it was supposed to be.

I found their letters, love letters, written before they got married. My father had small neat handwriting. He went over his letters twice with a pencil. His words were dark and you could see how they pressed into the piece of paper

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behind it. My mother had that same curvy line of writing, that was on the boxes that bore my name. The letters were wrapped up in a blue ribbon and tucked in the bottom of a shoe box marked: Before Jake. I wondered as I often did when I was a child, if I was the reason they fell apart. My father always seemed so large to me. He smelt of aftershave lotion, even though his beard always felt stubbly. I can remember feeling so small as he picked me up in his large, rough hands. My mother recognized him in me. I used to hear her mumbling that I was just like my father.

The light in the room started to fade, I was getting hungry. Ginger had left the room an hour earlier and was probably panting by the front door to go out. I slid the photo of my stained-glass mother out of the plastic casing that she stood behind and put her in an empty frame on the dresser of her room. I packed everything back up tight and pushed it all back under the bed. I had seen it, my life catalogued and remembered.

"Ginger, let's go." I called down to her and she let out a little yelp. The rain had subsided into a light mist. I locked the door behind us.

It was hot out. The Laundromat was packed with people. I had installed two large fans at each end of the room. They just blew hot air back and forth. A small boy took his shirt off and leaned against the cool metal of a washing machine. He was trying to escape the heat. He reminded me of myself. If I closed my eyes, I could still see my mother sitting behind the counter watching what went on around her. I knew that I never really got to know her. I did the things I thought she would want me to do. I never really asked what those things were. I remember her looking over at me, and I was afraid that she was going to yell at me, because I had left my shirt on the floor. She just smiled. Did she ever know I loved her? I had taken care of her, and resented her for that, for making me live her life. All I ever wanted to do was to be let in, not left over to make sense of everything after she left. I traced the outline of my name with the tip of my finger. I wish I understood her before I inherited her life.

"Jake?" It was Donna, I hadn't even heard the ring of the bell on the door. The machines were all making a low droning sound.

"I have something for you. I made you a pinch pot." She handed me a blue piece of pottery. "You can keep it on the counter. You can put penny's in it, or paper clips." I didn't say anything, I just kept looking at her. "Jake?" She waved her hand in front of my face. "Are you okay?"

I rotated the pinch pot in my hand. It was asymmetrical. Donna had carved her initials in the bottom. I wondered why the bottom of pottery isn't glazed. Donna took the pot from my hand and placed it on the counter.

"I dropped the other one."

"What?"

"I dropped it. The one I made, it broke into three pieces, I tried to glue it. It slid off the counter right here." I traced the edge of the counter top with my hand. A dryer buzzed in the background, the kid with no shirt hopped on top of a machine as it went into the spin cycle.

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"What is this about Jake?" She ran her fingers through her hair and started to sway slightly back and forth.

"My whole life was catalogued under my mother's bed. I think she left it there for me to find. Everything, second grade report cards, a macaroni necklace I made in pre-school, my acceptance letter to college, everything." The kid on the washing machine was laughing. "Not everything I do falls apart." I wondered if she heard me. She was twisting her ring with her finger.

"Do you even know why I made this for you? I wanted to do something simple, something you would appreciate, something from me. You are so wrapped up in feeling like you are living your mother's life, you don't even realize that other people need you. I need you." She was whispering now. Her voice was getting lost in the sounds of t-shirts and sweat socks hitting the sides of dryers.

"She catalogued my life, she didn't let me live it." The little boy was kicking his feet against the side of the washer. His mother was scolding him from the wall of dryers.

"You don't let yourself live it Jake."

"What am I supposed to do? Look around, all I have is this place. The Laundromat is mine. The rows of washers, the rows of dryers. They are the constant hum that make me remember; I am the laundry man, the guy who moved back in with his mother. I still sleep in the same small bed I had in high school."

"What are you supposed to do? Do what you want Jake, nobody is forcing you into this life. It seems as if you revel in your misery. And what is that, all you have is this place? Thanks a lot. You have me, and I want you in my life." She was staring directly at me. I had never seen her so angry. I looked away first because I knew she was right.

"Jake, here is the ladder, now remember, no flying." Eddie laughed as he brought the ladder through the door to the Laundromat.

"No flying?" Donna looked up from the paint can she was stirring. Her hands were speckled with yellow spots. Her hair was back, and one small piece kept falling in front of her eyes. I watched her brush it back with the back of her hand, only to have it fall again.

"Don't ask." I smiled at her.

"What, Jake never told you the story of how he could fly?" Eddie's bald head shook back and forth in mock disbelief. I heard him telling her the story as I climbed the ladder and scraped off the last layer of old yellow paint. Donna was laughing, and Eddie was almost doubled over on the floor.

"You should have seen him, you should have seen him." Eddie was barely able to get the words out. Donna was going to paint a mural on one wall. She had it all drawn out and numbered on the wall. I wondered if this was how they painted stained-glass churches.

"He was only on the third rung?" Donna asked Eddie, he just nodded and kept laughing.

"It was the fourth rung." I called over to them. I had hung one of Donna's paintings behind my counter.

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"And you thought you could fly? She looked up at me.  
"I knew I could," I whispered to myself. "Yeah, yeah, I did." I told her.  
She still hadn't gotten her washer fixed. We do our laundry here together. Eddie walked out of the Laundromat still laughing.

"I'll come down for that ladder later Jake." He called out beneath the ring of the bells on the door.

"Here you go." Donna walked towards me and handed me a can of blue paint. I would start painting the sky. In the top left hand corner where the row of dryers meets the wall, I wrote my name in big blue letters. Underneath I wrote Donna's and then I filled in the spaces in between.

## *The Swarm*

A swarming crowd  
Moving to and fro  
Drone within the swarm  
In a humdrum ritual.  
Here stands lofty skyscrapers  
Giving off a stifling atmosphere  
Which overwhelms me.  
Then, bewitched by the sting of a spell  
I no longer can step back.  
How tantalizing it is to get oneself drunk  
Inhaling the flavors of this place  
Which make my mouth water  
Ready to bite into the big apple.  
Here, people are dragging along their invisible bonds  
Thinking they can climb up the pyramid by sliding down.  
They only but wait for death to grab their buzzing lives.  
How will I find some human light in their sheep-like look?  
As no human being lives  
Where love does not reside.

Celine Dominik



Erik Haskins

## *Easter Morning, Australia*

The moon rose in silent compromise to the sea.  
We watched from the water, arms-length apart,  
floating, saying nothing.  
There, even the constellations were flipped.  
The Southern Cross hung down approximating  
your body, lying on that dark surface, under the dark sky.  
I could say we rose from the black waves like prayers.

I left you there,  
gathered the scattered clothes,  
drifted in and out of sleep.  
All night you sat, somber, memorizing the stars—  
the fixed, the given, the facts,  
and I could have reached over and touched you.  
I could have told you  
that love comes in tenses.  
Evening burnt out.  
I searched the golden watermarks etched in the night,  
searched for the shade where we went wrong.  
The rising sun was the color of blood, and somewhere  
in Pennsylvania, it snowed.

Karen Laird

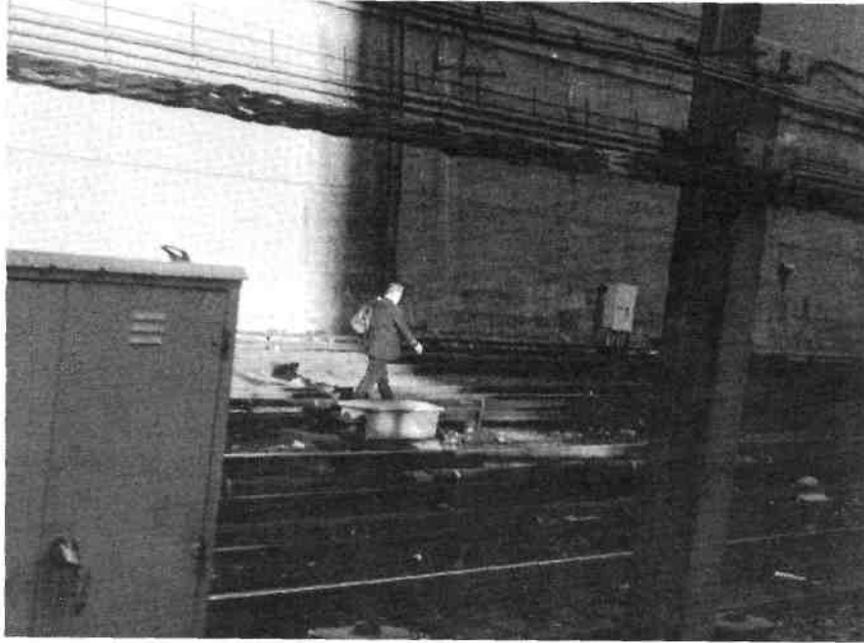
## *Apparition*

My mother told me not to be afraid  
if Mary should appear to me.  
Far away, in places with names I couldn't spell—  
Garabandal, Fatima, Medjugorje—children just like me  
ran into fields to play, and there she was.  
I was sure she'd come to Pittsburgh next,  
looked for her everywhere:  
in the dark corners of the closet,  
behind the dust ruffle and under the bed,  
even in the bathroom, behind the shower curtain.  
I dressed my Barbie dolls in blue veils, hopeful,  
waiting for them to cry tears of blood.

I still wait for something larger than life—  
listen for voices in stained glass chapels,  
search the tabloids for prophets,  
review my dreams for a vision.  
But lately, even my dreams are of the ordinary—  
of me standing in line at the bank teller,  
walking the dog across campus,  
driving in my blue Oldsmobile.  
Is it life that devours faith?  
The ordinary days pass, are checked off  
like items printed on an endless grocery list.

Today, I read about Joan of Arc in history,  
factually, how the archangel dropped in, hung out, gave advice.  
When her job was completed, they tied her to the stake,  
set her smoldering. The historian even records her last words:  
"water, water, water."  
I tell myself, we do what we must,  
anyone would have risen to the occasion.  
but the thought of fire is too much,  
the earth spinning in its black spot,  
The audacity of asking such a favor!  
And all this time, days, prayers counted on rosary beads,  
I am like everyone else—  
doing everything to avoid the listening.

Karen Laird



John O'Sullivan

## *East End Morning*

After the storm, the fishing fleet  
two miles off the island's shore,  
going out  
grows smaller—  
finally swallowed at the horizon by a slash of glare.  
The boats had been moored somewhere off Montauk,  
but now cut through the chop under the stars above the Atlantic,  
waiting for leagues of swordfish and blues to come.

Down the shore, waking slightly before the mist settles in  
and the sun climbs toward the low sky on what we score—  
the horizon,  
there's the clammer digging the bay,  
searching among the pleasure boats at low tide  
for oysters.

On the ocean's floor,  
cold dark deep and absolutely clear,  
all they will find are stones and pebbles  
that remind them of what isn't there.  
The perfect benediction to a sad letter.

Tom Panarese

## *Palette*

It is almost never a good idea to cut off your finger. Unless, of course, you wish to be a painter. Then the blood is your oil and the bone your brush.

Art critics will praise your imagination and efficiency: "To carry one's instruments inside oneself. (Pause) This art, a true extension of the artist.

(Pause) Notice how the pain the artist knew, while bleeding to death, is now alive upon this canvas (Stare at the blood like it really means something)."

Old women will say in lighted museums, ten years after your death: "How clever the artist in chasing the dream. Poverty is, by nature, artistic."

And only you will know, being dead, while fighting for space in the box where they left you, only then will you know, and then it doesn't matter,

that works of art are not suicide notes, and that art critics miss the point altogether. You will read the review of your pain and your painting, thinking

"the beating heart, his central brush stroke" is both stupid and stupid. And in that place, dead, you will look at your hand, your now deformed body

and think:

It is never a good idea to cut off your fingers, it only leads to toes. And no toes makes walking to the phone really difficult. And if you do make it there,

How do you dial?

Sean Flanigan



Erik Haskins

## *Prayer*

I figured it out.  
I understand our universe.

It came to me in an instant  
while I was walking  
home from church.

I was just walking.

Mass had ended,

and it was raining  
and grey  
and cold  
and hard  
and the scarf around my neck smelled like the ass of a dog.

I went in peace.

Sean Flanigan

## *Horses*

Horses come to a church, where the choir sings. to hear the perfect applause. the only time we clap in church is to thank the choir for singing. though do not clap until the end. we never clap until the end. and when we do clap. we only clap. no screaming. no yelling. no raising our voices. not for the sake of the cause. resist. do not throw two fingers. between two lips. and blow. no. wait until the end. wait until we drink the blood of heaven. and eat the body of love. be still. just wait. be still. because after that is done. there is just one song left to sing. and when they finish it. we clap. right hand. hard against left hand. a motion that imitates seals. if you come to hear it. sit in the balcony, look down on us. wait for us to clap. force your eyes closed. force your ears open. and listen. listen. listen. do you hear it? no screams. no whistles. no voices. just hand against hand against hand. do you feel it? do you feel your body frozen? frozen against the ground? horizontal still. your ear against our wet cement. and then the drops. the thousands and thousands of drops. the rain from heaven in your ears. amplified. then louder. then louder still. and you forget yourself. and you see the horses. you see the thousands. and thousands of horses. just horses. wild and running. running through you.

Sean Flannigan



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## *The Search*

Ralph Palm

"Honey, do me a favor?" Linda asked with a whisper. Owen didn't think it sounded much like a question.

His mouth unfolded into a yawn. "Huh?"

"Get me a Dr. Pepper?" she asked. Turning her chin down, she blinked and pulled at the sheets. "Please?" Her voice always took on a soft, childlike quality when she tried to convince him of something.

"Uh . . . Why?" Owen looked around the room, facing the ceiling. The night sky and streetlights lit everything in the room a movie-blue in the kind of lighting used to portray darkness, without hiding the scene from view. They had fallen asleep watching an old movie, but the television was strangely darkened. Maybe one of them had turned it off.

What time is it ? he thought.

"I just really want one." Her voice dropped again, barely audible now even above the quiet hum of the air conditioning. She stretched next to him and blinked some more, rubbing her eyes with a soft fist.

Owen wasn't used to this sort of thing at all, yet. He was sure this sort of thing was only supposed to happen if Linda was pregnant, and should involve ice cream or sweet pickles, not Dr. Pepper at. . . .

"Please. . ."

"A Dr. Pepper? Uh, okay. . . ." Swimming in the blue-steel light, he got up and pulled on a pair of jeans. Where's my wallet? he thought.

Still laying down, she stretched her arms out from her sides, spanning the narrow bed. Her hands remained in small fists. "Mm. . . thanks. . . ." Rolling over onto her side, he lost the rest of her words to the pillowcase.

Finding an old black t-shirt on the floor, he pulled it clumsily over his head in tired, jerky movements. He eventually decided that he didn't need shoes. The vending machines were just down the hall. The stuff scattered around the room made finding socks difficult. He needed his wallet, though.

He started opening and closing drawers, finding: a telephone book, hotel stationery, two ballpoint pens, three pairs of underwear, socks(!), and a lot of worn teeshirts. A little wood paneled refrigerator sat next to the drawers, which he quickly checked for a can of Dr. Pepper. No luck.

"Looking for something?"

"Need my wallet," he said as he opened another drawer, finding: more underwear (hers), two bras, a small leather purse, Three neatly folded—

"Check over here, honey." She swung her arm around and pointed in the general direction of the nightstand.

"But I didn't leave it on the nightstand."

"In here." She tapped the drawer underneath the lamp with her finger, reaching from under the covers.

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He crossed to the nightstand and opened the drawer, glancing over the contents: a Bible, the room service continental breakfast menu, and a black nylon wallet, velcroed shut.

"Found it."

"Told you." She paused with brief expectation. "Do you mind any?" She blinked twice. "You don't mind at all," she asked as if (but not quite) looking for reassurance, "do you?"

"No oh no not at all." He kissed her on the forehead. "Be back in a minute."

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The lights in the hallway were glass and brass spaced evenly and hung on either wall just below the ceiling. They glared at him through his half-consciousness like torches in a castle hall, flicking and spinning through his still-adjusting vision. Double checking for his keys, he shuffled down toward the vending machines.

The carpet had a stylized pattern of interwoven bands of color, spreading in tendrils across the hall. His feet scraped and slapped along the web-like grid, the intermittent friction warming his soles a deep pink. He toyed with the sensation, scuffing his feet deliberately and giving his gait a somewhat primitive quality. Neanderthal man foraging for late night soft drinks.

At the vending area, the web patterned carpet gave way to cold tile. The four dull-lit boxes, humming in unison, faced a tableledge along the opposite wall and an ice machine. An industrial strength microwave laid on the ledge, next to a loose pile of styrofoam cups. The small, blue clock in the microwave's display blinked 3:23. She got me up at three in the morning for a Dr. Pepper?

The machines sold (respectively) coffee, chips and pretzels, candy bars and soda—the Four Horsemen of junk food, ushering in darker days of blemishes and cavities, Owen snickered to himself, through his fatigue. He walked over to the Coke machine. Leaning over to see the buttons without his glasses, the light from the machine made his face glow red. The buttons read: Coke, Diet Coke, Sprite, Sunkist, Canada Dry, A&W, and Diet Sprite. Damn.

He looked at the microwave clock again. Maybe the dining room downstairs would have some, he thought as he returned to the room.

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"Thanks a lot, honey," she said as he walked past the suitcases to get his glasses off the windowsill. With a slightly confused look, she asked, "Get any?"

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"Naw, they didn't have it. They had Coke though." He picked up his glasses and went over to dig a pair of socks out of the drawer.

She made a face with an exaggerated, false pouting lip. Noticing him picking up his shoes, she sat up on the bed, slouching on the headboard. "Going out?" she asked.

He started tying his shoes, "Yeah, I figure the dining room might have some."

"Be back soon," she seemed to ask, but he wasn't sure.

"Yeah."

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The lobby had a huge light fixture suspended in the center of the ceiling, hovering over the same intricate carpet that covered the hallways upstairs. The quasi-chandelier took up so much space and was so bright that he didn't believe he hadn't noticed it when he and Linda had checked in. He stared at the monster as he walked down the stairs toward the lobby floor, and looked up at it as he walked over to the front desk. Maybe it wasn't as noticeable during the day, he thought.

At first he thought there was no one at the desk, but he saw a cup of coffee resting next to the phone, with vapor pouring off the top.

"Hello?" he asked, leaning over the counter.

A large man came out from the back room, wearing dark slacks and a white shirt which bulged at the buttons. His name tag read 'Sun Coast Hotels' and FRANKLIN in even block letters. He seemed to sweat a lot, the light reflecting off his skin in bright, sickly patches. As he saw Owen, he looked up and gave a quick nod. "Can I help you, son."

"Could you tell me if the dining room is open?"

He gave a slight snort. "It's three in the morning,"

"Yeah, well do you know where I could get a Dr. Pepper."

"There's a coffee thing around the corner and down the hall, next to the restrooms and—"

"I need a soda machine."

"They got those on the each floor." A question crosses Franklin's face before he asked it. "You a guest here, son?"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm in room 607. Look, I already checked the machines upstairs. They just are...." Embarrassed by what now, for the first time, seemed to him a foolish errand, he continued, "They don't have any Dr. Pepper. . ."

The clerk just stared at him and blinking and wiping his forehead with the back of his thick wrist.

Owen muttered, "Do you know where there's a convenience store or something around here?"

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"Yeah, down the back drive, past the parking lot, about a block or two up the road. It's a small kinda place, but they got pop and stuff." Pop? Franklin seemed to think, "King Quik, I think it's called." He added after Owen turned away, "They're open twenty-four hours."

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Owen crossed Route One, through light traffic, over to a short strip with a tiny parking lot of about ten or twelve spaces. Outside the air conditioned hotel, the Florida heat snuck up on him. He only realized he was sweating when he felt a drop run down his side. The King Quik's purple and orange crown logo was wedged between a dry cleaners and a Century Twenty-One office. King Quik was the only place still open.

He entered the store hurriedly, flinging the door wide to the clanging of an electric bell. Now more anxious to get some sleep, he walked quickly to the back of the store. A small row of shelves blocked his view of the two glass refrigerator doors. He almost knocked over the magazine rack on the near wall. The two sliding doors of the refrigerators were hazed with a light frost which stood out in the footlights at the base. The first case was filled with things like TV dinners and orange juice concentrate and he quickly skipped to the next, which had: milk, skim milk, various iced teas, coke, diet coke, sprite, diet sprite, Mr. Pibb, apple juice, orange juice, cranberry juice, cran-apple, cran-grape, fruit punch—

He settled for two cans of Mr. Pibb and walked back over to the register, which was near the front door. The cashier was a girl in her late teens, dressed in all black except for her King Quick apron. Her eyes were dark circles, laden with eye shadow, which matched her hair, jet black and twisted into a chaos of short braids. She popped her gum and set down a copy of *Cosmopolitan* as he put the cans on the counter.

"That it?"

"Pack of Camels." He pointed to the cigarette rack behind her head.

He turned the magazine around on the counter, staring at the cover while she hunted for the correct buttons of the register, absently. He traced the highlights in the model's eyes with one finger. Owen had worked on a shoot like that once, for a catalog. He had carried these huge lights up three flights of narrow stairs. The photographer had used these drops so the model could keep her eyes open despite the glare. They had spent the entire day working for that highlight.

"That'll be \$4.28," said the cashier. She tugged her magazine back across the counter.

"Uh, here's five. . . . Keep the change."

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Linda had fallen asleep by the time he got back, but rolled over when Owen entered. "Hey, where did you go?" The television was still on, louder now, with an old cop show lighting the room in flashes.

"The dining room downstairs was closed so I went across the street to a convenience store. They didn't have any either, so I got you Mr. Pibb." He put the cans down on the nightstand, with his wallet and glasses. "It tastes the same."

"I've never had it before." She picked up a can and stared at it.

"Hope it's all right." He began taking off his shoes, not waiting for an answer.

"Oh, it's fine." Linda hugged him from behind and pecked him on the cheek. "Thanks a lot, honey." Her voice sounded synthetically soft now. Plush.

"You sound like a kid when you talk like that."

Her tone changed. "Do I?" Looking at her in the scattering light from the television, her face seemed to come apart. He realized that a week ago, he never would have noticed any shift in her voice.

Rolling onto the bed, he asked, "Could you do me a favor and turn off the television? I'm exhausted."

## *Theory and Mind*

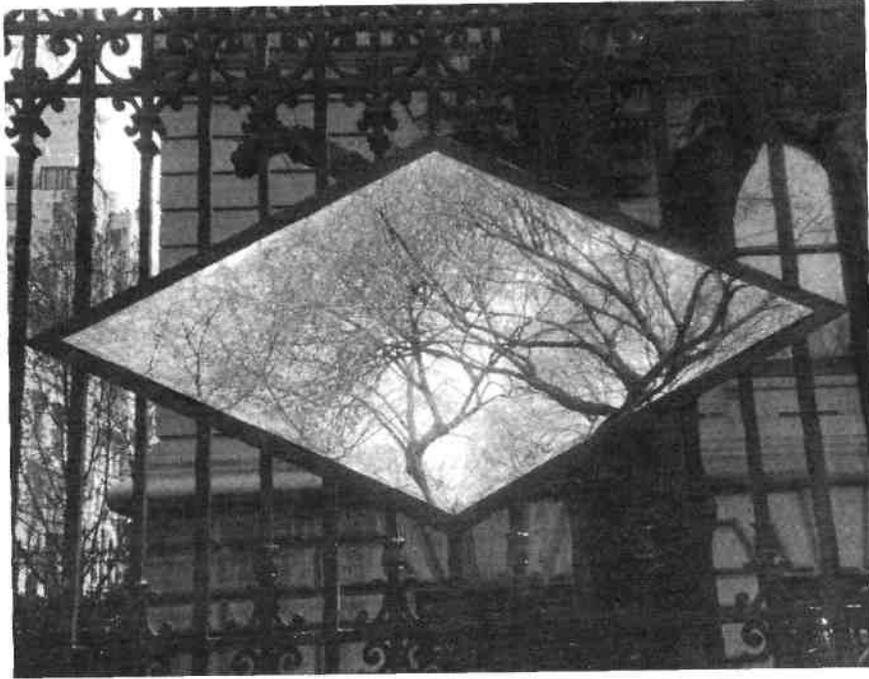
One.

A heavy stone parades through the window of reason,  
but why should you be blamed for the trees,  
standing anxiously in a row at a distance,  
butterflies poised on trunks,  
a timid chorus line waiting for their cue.  
From faraway, we can see their dark fear in restless limbo.  
And it is the sea that blooms regret,  
no detail just waves,  
the rim of water always sweeping casually,  
arrogantly like it owns the place—  
it's nothing you can undo now.  
Perhaps the next time the circumstance  
arises for invention,  
you could just make a doorway  
and let us do the rest—  
it pleases us, and we probably will anyway

More.

Alone outside a bank, in a runaway shopping cart  
I think of twitter, it is a word and  
if a memory will ever be enough.  
Will there be a warning when heaven is falling-  
a broken vase, music scoring the wind?  
Which came first, the clouds or the sky?  
Should my winding thoughts continue to wallow in the water  
which binds them—  
tufts of hodgepodge hankerings which need  
a meadow to grow in,  
grasses to mingle with, a wedge of hope.  
I need to get a hold of God's diary-  
I bet he would've known.  
There might be a waiting list for it,  
best-seller and all, but I have time like hair.

Steve Lichtenstein



Kim Kelly

## *Leaving*

October, and the rain-soaked nights  
have just changed over to cold.  
As you pass through the doorway  
into the wind  
I stop, press my lips,  
and don't suggest a coat.  
I do not tell you about the grass,  
how in October it is long,  
waiting for the last cut, for frost.  
When it rains like this  
the blades bend, weave, overlap,  
appear tropical, even wild,  
shining silver in the thrown radius  
of porchlight.  
As you leave, pass into the dark,  
the drops are literally falling,  
sliding toward ground.  
I do not stand in the dark window  
to watch you pull away,  
do not wave, mouth the words.

Janine A. Legates

## *Correspondence*

I drew three-dimensional boxes  
that got smaller and smaller  
vanishing to dots across the page  
instead of writing you a letter.  
Five-pointed stars walked across  
the smooth green sky of stationary,  
and I mailed nothing.  
In the airport we embraced,  
kissed, swayed with grief  
by the gate, right in the middle  
of all those staring people.  
It was delightfully tragic—  
what stories were those strangers  
making up about us?  
Halfway to St. Louis,  
the world looks like a train set  
from the low-flying plane,  
the silent curves of rivers,  
perfect square house,  
baseball fields spread out  
like smooth green fans.  
I didn't have to remind myself  
how much you bothered me toward the end,  
leaning over my shoulder disapproving  
the way I chopped vegetables.  
And now there is such effort in writing.  
Twelve hundred miles away you do me no good,  
except for the fact that you are the story  
of a love left behind.  
Your letters are stacked in a basket by the door.  
And the pages which stretch out like clean  
unfilled days in front of me  
are wordless, audibly empty.

Janine A. Legates



John McHugh

## *Illadro*

When I was small and business was good,  
my father bought Illadro figures  
home from Spain. The muted grays and  
lavender were shiny, and would have been  
smooth, had we been allowed to touch.  
For my mother, a nativity set.  
Mary and Joseph, with their round,  
childlike faces, kneeling beside the infant.  
His hair was short, like a school boy's,  
and despite his smile, his eyes were  
downcast, and blank with worry.  
She had long hair, her hand on the child,  
her head tilted to one side, eyes in the distance,  
as if she was listening for something far away.  
The infant slept, his perfect porcelain curls  
resting on the stiff straw.  
I heard someone say that the decision  
to have a child is to accept that your heart  
will forever walk around outside of your body.  
And I remember how upset my mother was  
when the orange tabby strolled across the mantle,  
and knocked the infant to the blue carpet,  
cracking him in two, manger and all.  
How when my father glued the pieces together,  
she moved the whole family to the clean  
dark living room, where no one ever sat.

Janine A. Legates

## *Twelve Steps*

Karen Laird

### Step 1

Lexie, my roommate, walks downstairs at three in the afternoon, wearing nothing but a turquoise bra and matching floral underwear. Her disheveled black hair covers the upper half of her slight, boyish frame. She is tiny, only ninety-two pounds, which makes her protruding round beer belly especially conspicuous when partially naked. I am, once again, doing the dishes, trying to ignore her forced sighs as she searches frantically for matches. She asks me groggily, "What are you doing up so early?" She walks into the bright, yellow kitchen, faces me with her left hand resting on the black laced elastic of her panties, her right hand pushing wisps of hair off her forehead. "I mean, what time did you get in last night?" She feigns confusion.

I carefully set down my sponge and place an ivory china tea cup overturned on the drying rack. "Lexie, I picked you up from work, don't you remember?" Of course she doesn't remember. I don't know why I still go along with this routine.

"Oh, gosh, I'm so sorry. I guess I remember that my car wouldn't start. Did I call you?" She prances over to the refrigerator and flings open the door, causing a magnet and the two postcards it was holding up to fall to the linoleum. "Damn it." She kicks them aside with her bare feet. "Did someone drink all my soda?"

"I don't know, I just got back. This morning was my day to work at the shelter. I told Sister Helen that I'd pick up the bread and cheese for tomorrow, so I can get you more soda when I go shopping."

"Don't worry about it." She is drinking my orange juice instead, straight from the carton. "Did I call Scott last night, or did I just have a nightmare?" She giggles and lights her cigarette off the stove.

I take an exaggerated deep breath. "Lexie, you woke him up at three a.m. again. His girlfriend got on the phone and bitched me out when I pulled the receiver from you. You can't keep doing this. He's going to think you're psycho."

"Oh, God, what did I say? Is he mad at me? Maybe I should call and apologize." She checks the clock and rushes towards the phone.

"I really don't think it would do any good." Should I tell her she made a complete ass of herself, or let her wonder? I turn off the burner for her. "Do you have to work tonight?"

"No, Megan picked up my shift." She sits down at the kitchen table, pushing aside the piles of Washington Posts and Baltimore Suns. "Do you really think I have a problem?"

I sit down across from her and begin separating the recent editions from last week's. That familiar cue— I know my next lines by heart. "I told you,

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Lexie, you pick a program. I'll go with you, anywhere you want. I really think it's time you do something."

"You're right. I know you're right. I'll think about it."

### Step 2

I grab my coat and gloves from the closet. "I'm going to the store now. Do you need anything?" Lexie is wrapped up in a blanket now, flipping through the soap operas on the only three channels we get.

"Yeah, actually, would you mind picking up a bottle of wine? Beringer, or something kind of nice? I was thinking of making us dinner. That would go nice with grilled chicken, don't you think?" She rummages through the contents of her backpack, which lies on the coffee table. "Could you get me a pack of cigarettes, too? I thought I had a whole pack, I guess I lost them last night." She overturns her bag, spilling change, lipstick, a compact, and tampons onto the sofa. "I can't find my wallet, either. Shit. Can you spot me and I'll get you back?"

"Sure, Lex." I mentally add ten more dollars to the ever-increasing bar tabs that I've covered for her. Whenever Lexie has any money, she spends it on other people. "No problem."

### Step 3

An hour later, she has put on a white tee shirt. She is attempting to straighten up the living room, and is singing along with Mick Jagger on the stereo. "Carrie, I have to show you the most hysterical thing." She walks over to the stereo and jerks the needle off the record. She picks up the scratched Rolling Stones *Rewind* and tosses it onto the hardwood floor. "Look what my mom sent me." She laughs and hands me a pink Hallmark card.

I open it up to see a biblical verse written out in her mother's neat, cursive hand: "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2Tim 2:22." I called Lexie's mother last Friday night frantic when she crashed her 1976 Ford hatchback into the neighbor's Volvo. I explained to her for the third time since I'd moved in with Lexie that her daughter has a severe problem. She thanked me for being such a concerned friend, and left me with these words of wisdom: "Carrie, all we can really do is pray for Alexis. Jesus will help her find the right path." I believe in God as much as the next person, but Jesus isn't going to foot the bill for the McHughs' dented fender.

"Isn't that the gayest thing you've ever seen?" Lexie smirks as she pulls a Beatles album out of a tattered jacket. "God damn holy rollers! Now you see why I can't handle going home? Ugh, I need a cigarette." She searches through the two brown paper bags that I've set down on the table. I walk into the kitchen to grab two wine glasses, knowing that there is nothing I can say to smooth over all of the anger she has for her father, or the resentment she has for her mother

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for staying with him. By the time I return, she is already drinking from the bottle. Guess I should know by now to buy my own.

#### Step 4

I'm sauteing the chicken and carrots while Lexie takes a shower. I hear the bathroom door open, and she yells cheerfully down the stairs, "Wow! That smells delicious." I make the salad, set the dining room table, and sit down to wait for the chicken. I look around the room, which is my favorite in our house. The table was my family's old kitchen one, and my mom donated it when they remodeled. The roses that Lexie's manager surprised her with for Valentine's Day are in a ceramic vase that she made in sculpture class. The pale yellow walls are papered with her paintings, abstract still lifes and two female nude charcoals. Looking at them, you'd never guess that she whipped each one out the night before they were due. On Tuesday nights during sophomore year, I would convince her to go out with me by promising to stay up with her afterwards while she painted. We'd stumble back to our dorm at two in the morning, laughing about our two roommates who were trying to sleep in the other room. Regardless of how hard I tried, I'd pass out on the couch before the second song on any cd was over, while Lexie frantically scanned the crowded apartment for anything remotely artistic that she could paint. I'd wake up occasionally to hear Lexie singing along with familiar folk songs, her voice soft but soulful over top of the scratchy records. Somehow, she always finished by morning, and would carry the canvas that was twice the size of her body across campus while the paint was still wet.

The stairs creak as Lexie scampers down, wrapped in a maroon towel. She is holding something behind her back as she runs past me through the dining room and into the kitchen. She picks the magnet up off of the floor, shoots me a mischievous smile, and tacks up a photograph onto the refrigerator. "You're going to die when you see this," she sings as she hurries back upstairs.

I stand up and walk over, half out of curiosity and half out of obligation. It is a picture of her and Matt, the guy I've been seeing since October. I recognize that it is his room they are in, the familiar tapestries and Grateful Dead posters that plaster those walls. It is his bed they are sprawled across, her little body twisted around his. They are smiling. "Isn't that a riot?" She screams down from the top stair. I feel sick to my stomach as I try to remember a night when we were all together, taking pictures. I look closer, and notice that she is wearing a pair of his boxers and his favorite Phish shirt.

"When was this from?" I try to make the words come out evenly. I try to remind myself that this is a joke.

Lexie's voice from upstairs is muffled by the radio. "Oh, I guess it's from that night you stayed in to do that Shakespeare paper. I told you how we all stayed up all night playing poker, didn't I?" The whistling of her hairdryer ends the conversation. I smell the chicken burning on the stove.

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### Step 5

Although Lexie doesn't appear to notice, the conversation at dinner is one-sided. I'm concentrating on eating while she tells me graphic stories about this manager at work whom she slept with. She loves to torture me with intimate details, knowing how boring my own sex life is. When Lexie lived down the hall from me freshman year, she would entertain all the girls on our floor during late night study breaks with her crazy sex stories. She would be waiting in my room for me on Sunday mornings when I had stayed out all night, eager to listen to gossip. She would curl up at the edge of my bed and prod me for details other than the replays of romantic conversation that I would happily offer. For three years I confided in her every detail of every hook up I had, but when I started seeing Matt I started to get offended by her personal questions. For two months she greeted me at the door with a hopeful, "Did you guys do it yet?" After many disappointments, she stopped asking, and now thinks of ways to hint around the subject. She just wouldn't understand if I told her that I knew he didn't love me, that he doesn't ever kiss me with the lights on, that recently we just fall asleep when I stay over. Both Matt and Lexie find my demands incomprehensible.

She pauses at the highlight of her current story, pouring herself more wine as if she can't preceed without first calming herself down some. I forget to cover my expression of disgust. "Oh, did you want some?" She offers, and pours the last remaining sips into my empty glass. Lexie has not eaten anything, but has pushed around vegetables with her fork for ten minutes, between drinks. Apparently satisfied that I'm convinced, she reaches for her Camel Lights. "Carrie, that was great—I'm stuffed. So, where do you want to go tonight? I was thinking we could go to Calico's. Matt's band's playing there, and I'm sure he'd be hurt if you didn't at least stop by. I don't mind driving. I'm not going to drink tonight, I'm broke." She carries her full plate to the sink, dumping half of it into the dog's bowl and the other half down the drain. After six months of living here, she can never remember that we don't have a garbage disposal.

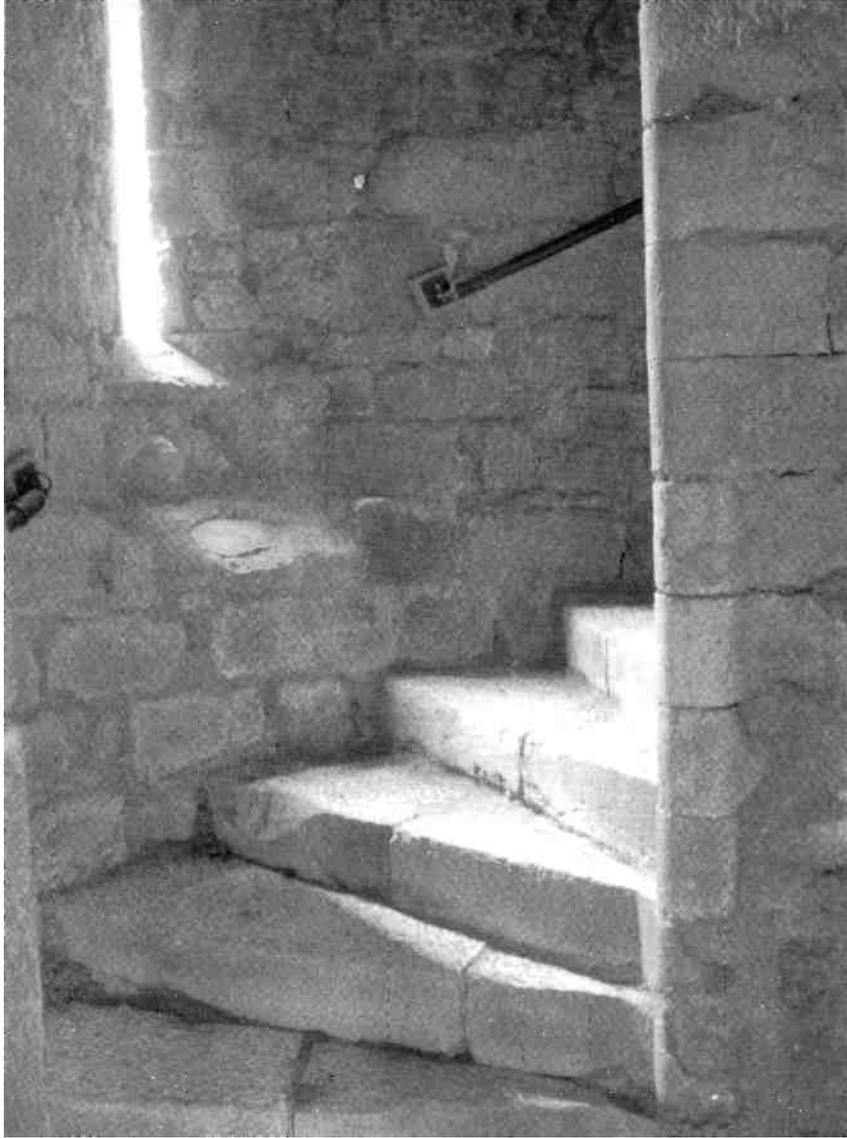
### Step 6

There is nowhere to park at Calico's, so Lexie parks illegally on the busy highway. She puts her hazards on, and asserts, "They can't tow us now." We walk past the line of college kids that extends from the door to the road. Matt's Band, Grinch, always packs in crowds. Like every bouncer in Baltimore, this imposing jock at the door knows Lexie. The girls waiting whine as he lets us pass. As I walk in, I hear him cleverly explain, "Hey, they're with the band." I see Matt on stage immediately, his curly blond hair spilling over his face. He plays bass. I watch Lexie for a reaction, but she is already too busy talking to people I don't know. She motions me over and introduces me to two guys from her restaurant.

"What are you drinking, Alex? Wanna do a shot with us?" The short

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John O'Sullivan

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and stocky guy looks her up and down, winks at me, and tries to get the bartender's attention. "I know what you like," he says confidently as he flashes a twenty dollar bill.

Lexie pleads with me silently, and says to her friends weakly, "That's okay, I really wasn't planning on doing shots tonight."

The two guys laugh as the bartender takes their order. "Whatever, Ragdoll. We owe you a few," the other one says. Lexie gives me a hopeless shrug, and accepts what looks like whiskey.

#### Step 7

I have left Lexie and her friends from work at the bar, and am now pretending to be interested in Judy's dilemma over which lacrosse player to go to the prom with. I mean, Eric really has had a crush on her for the past two years, but she's been sleeping with Jack all semester. I utter my heartfelt sympathies to her and excuse myself to go to the bathroom. I spot many girls in line and think better of it, but it is too late. "Carrie! I've been looking all over for you." The woman's harsh Long Island accent reminds me of fingernails scratching a chalkboard. "Look at you—you look fabulous! That dress is so flattering, is it Ann Taylor?" I can't concentrate on anything she's saying because I am trying desperately to remember her name. How do I know her, anyway? I'm chugging my beer, nodding, when she grabs my shoulder and points. "That Lexie is such a scream—a real riot!" Lexie has pushed her way to the front of the men's line, and is undoing her belt buckle.

I run over to her and grab her by the arm. The guy behind her pushes me away, saying, "Back off! Leave her alone." A chorus of men's room patronizers echo their agreement. Lexie is having problems standing straight already. Lately, she gets this way after only a few drinks—it used to take her fifteen. She ignores me and walks into the bathroom as one guy leaves smirking.

I refuse to run in after her. I can't keep babysitting. But how can I leave her alone in the men's room in her condition? I spot Matt's roommate John in line, and pull him aside. "Will you go in and check on Lexie?" I try to imitate the face Lexie makes when she wants something.

"Carrie, what do you want me to do?" He laughs like it's the most asinine request anyone's ever made of him, and it quite possibly could be. All of Matt's roommates have been witnesses to her at her worst before, though. He sighs. "Okay, okay, I'll save Lexie, but you owe me." As he pushes his way to the front of the line, I can't help but notice how good-looking he is. Or wonder if Matt would be jealous if I hung out with him.

#### Step 8

John and I have propped Lexie onto a bar stool, and have let her buy us a beer for helping her clean the puke off of her sweater. "That shot of Southern Comfort just didn't go down right." She acts utterly baffled by her sudden sick-

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ness. She has given the bartender her Visa card and is running up a tab for all of us. She is already five hundred dollars in debt to this credit card company, and has maxed out her Discover card, but I let her charge my drinks anyway. She had bought Matt a beer when she thought I wasn't looking, and brought it up to the stage in between songs. Did I imagine that he winked at her? No, I'm being ridiculous. She couldn't have done that to me— she was the one who set us up in the first place. They were always very flirtatious with each other, but she's like that with every guy. And she had been dating Matt's best friend Jeff. The four of us were inseparable for two months. When they broke up over Christmas, Lexie still hung out with me and Matt all the time. We're all just really good friends.

But all night, I haven't been able to forget the huge fight that Matt and I got in on New Year's Eve. He and his roommates had thrown a huge party, and three of my girlfriends from high school drove up from Philadelphia. I had promised myself I wouldn't get drunk— they were the kind of girls who would only drink wine coolers, and I knew they would be shocked at the crazy behavior of my new friends. I sat with them in the kitchen out of obligation, while as the hour neared midnight, Matt and Lexie and the others drank shot after shot. I surveyed the familiar scene with the eyes of a visitor— Matt and Lexie were always all over each other. I tried to think of an explanation when at midnight, he and Lexie were dancing. Three hours later, when Matt and I were alone in his room, I broke up with him. He told me that he had had enough of my condescending attitude, that I was no fun all night, that I probably wouldn't be later either. I stormed home to where my high school friends were already asleep, knowing that he'd forget it all by morning. Lexie stayed.

Lexie is behind the bar now, dancing with the fifty-year old bartender. Her favorite Doors song is playing, and she's screaming the lyrics and letting him pick her up and spin her in circles. When her feet touch the ground, she falls forward, her head into his beer gut. "Ragdoll," John, who is still sitting next to me, mutters as he shakes his head. He is the only other person in the bar who isn't laughing at her.

"You can't imagine what it's like," I hear myself saying to him. We split her gin and tonic and sit in silence, passing the glass back and forth until it's gone. Matt's band finishes their last song. I let John put his arm around me.

### Step 9

Even though I saw that incriminating picture, even though I know Lexie had crashed at his place that night, I refuse to believe she'd do this to me. The worst part is that I'll never be able to confront her. If it happened, she'd lie about it until the end. Or she'd fall back into her old routine—she had blacked out that night, it wasn't her fault. Matt knew how she got when she drank. God, does everyone know but me? I'm feeling more and more like the victim on a bad Melrose Place episode. If I'm ever going to find out anything, it'll be through Matt. He's a terrible liar— he's not a very smart guy, either. I excuse myself

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from John, who's in the middle of a conversation anyway, and search the crowd.

I see Matt alone, leaning onto the faux grain wood of the bar, ambitiously getting his money's worth from the five dollar all-you-can-drink-draft deal. His green baseball hat with the laughing, dancing bear ironed on the back is pulled low over his eyes, yet that unruly blond hair sneaks out from under it. He tilts back his head and swallows two last gulps of cheap beer, and waits for his empty glass to be filled. He scans the crowd frolicking below with a certain urgency. He's looking for me.

Suddenly a certain anxiousness overtakes him. He turns to his left, looking frantically for someone to talk to. He shoots the bartender a look of desperation, silently pleading for him to begin a conversation. It is too late. I am walking straight towards him. I feel my determined brow furrow and put on a forced, sarcastic smile.

I saunter right up beside him, and force myself to dangle my empty glass over the bar seductively. He doesn't look up to see me take a deep breath. He will only stare at my left hand, the five fingers painted a red so dark and dull that it looks brown, resting as close to his elbow as they possibly could without touching him. I accept my beer and surprise the bartender with my enthusiastically sweet smile. I shift my entire body to face the slumped over boy who refuses to look at me. "Happy Valentine's Day," I coo over-dramatically.

"Hey, what's up."

"I saw you here all by yourself. Have you seen Lexie?"

His hand turns the color of my nail polish as he clutches the green bottle. He squirms under my persistent stare, showing me only the right profile of his face. "No," he lies.

I laugh at his discomfort. "Oh, that's funny, I thought she might have brought the pictures she got back to show you. You're really photogenic."

He ignores me.

"How are Jeff and John?" Like I really give a shit about any of his roommates—they always pretended to be asleep and I know they were always trying to listen.

"Fine."

"I haven't seen you all week...I thought you would have stopped by today, or called at least. Lexie's manager sent her roses.." My voice trails off, challenging him.

The label from his beer bottle is completely torn off now. He is tearing the damp paper and rolling it into little balls. "You know I hate these stupid holidays. I forgot about it until I got here and saw all these cheesy girls decked out in red. I'll buy you a beer, though." He looks at me and smiles right through me.

I hear myself laughing evilly. "No thanks, don't go out of your way or anything. I have to find Lexie anyway. Have you seen her?"

He shrugs and looks across the bar. "No, is she here?"

I had seen them talking at least three times. "Well, Matt, she's here, either passed out in the corner now, or looking for someone to pass out with, preferably someone who's supposed to want to spend time with me."

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"What? Why are you being so sketchy? Is this because I haven't called? Listen, Carrie, I've been really busy— with hockey practice, the band, and I'm failing two classes—"

"At least you'll pass English. Didn't you get A's on those two papers I practically wrote for you? It's good to know you appreciate me, at least. I mean, what a good friend I've always been to you." My voice pierces the smoky air, and I feel my hands flipping my long hair mercilessly. I lean towards him and put my hand on his arm.

He finally turns to look at me, staring right at my plastic smile. "Stop it! Why do you have to make me feel so god damn guilty? It's not my fault, I never wanted it to be like this! What are we, anyway?"

My smile has electrically slipped to a disgusted smile. "I don't know— you've been perfectly happy to have it all your way. After six months, things evolve, or they just end. You can't keep being so fucking selfish—"

"Don't blame me for this. You don't know what the hell you want. Do you remember last weekend? The one time I need someone to talk to, and you couldn't even come over—"

"Yeah, come to think of it, you always could call at three a.m. Maybe if just once, you could have stopped by in the daytime, somewhat sober at least, maybe if you could have kept your hands off my best friend—"

"Listen, Lexie and I have always been good friends— we understand each other. If you can't handle the fact that once in a while, I like to talk to someone who will listen to me, who isn't trying to make me into something I'm not, then you have a real problem."

"So is that why you couldn't send me a card today? Were they all out of the 'Sorry I Fucked Your Roommate' variety? You're a bastard."

His lips are parted, as if there is something he wants to say, as if there is anything he could say. For a brief moment, a look of pity crosses his face before he turns and walks away. It sobers me. I dig the heels of my black clogs into the thin, cheap carpet. I notice what feels like everyone I know eyeing me skeptically. I straighten myself taller and cross my arms to cover my heaving chest. I guess I never knew either of them at all.

#### Step 10

It's last call now, and I push through the laughing, drinking crowd to find the front door. I walk outside to find that there has been an unexpected snowstorm. The dull and dirty concrete of the city has been disguised in pure white. It's all a momentary deception, though. Tomorrow we'll have transformed it all into brown sludge.

Lexie is clearing the ice off of her windshield with her bare hands while sitting on the hood of her car. "Carrie, I have to drive home or I'll get a ticket." I'm impressed with how clear her sentences come out now that we are alone and she needs help. "Where are you going?"

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### Step 11

I am walking home alone now, since I have no money for a cab and am too stubborn to ask for a ride. I needed the fresh air anyway. I've felt that I've wanted to cry for the entire evening, but I won't give either of them the satisfaction. All I have to do is walk the remaining five minutes home, and then I can lock myself in my bedroom and write.

I turn off the main highway at the Exxon Station, making a right onto the alley way. The snow has framed all the familiar sights of impoverishment—the discarded thrift-store cardtables, baby strollers missing back wheels, and abandoned plastic toys on the front porches of the duplexes. I sing "Winter Wonderland" in my head as I walk; if the verse ends when my right foot is forward, I'll make it home okay. If the verse ends with my left foot forward, I'll be raped any minute. I'm almost done with the entire song when I hear a car engine behind me. I try to run, but my clogs were not made for snow sprinting. I kick them off and feel the wetness instantly soak through my cotton tights to my bare skin. I run without turning around.

"Hey, wait!" The car pulls up beside me and a boy I recognize leans his head out the passenger side window. "Aren't you Lexie's roommate? What are you doing walking by yourself at this time of night? Get in the car." His voice is stern.

I hop in the back seat silently. I stare at the city scenes that are rushing past me through the icy glass. The guy driving is wearing a Calico's shirt, and I remember now that he was the bouncer. He lectures me the entire ride to my street, as we pass cop cars and stray juvenile delinquents. He drops me off at the corner of my street. I don't say a word.

### Step 12

I forgot to pick my clogs up from the alley. I am suddenly aware of the thinness of my dress, of how my soaked feet have made my whole body numb. I am one block from home. I fumble in my purse for my house keys, praying I didn't leave them in Lexie's car, and find her pack of cigarettes. I don't smoke, but light one for the hell of it. I inhale and try to distinguish the puffs of smoke from my breath that is illuminated in the frosty air.

The front door of our house is wide open, and the frantic barks of our Dalmatian greet me from the porch steps. Lexie is sprawled out on the linoleum of the kitchen, holding the phone receiver in one hand, frantically pushing random buttons with the other. She lets both ends crash on the tile and looks up at me with watery blue eyes. "Carney, there you are." The words are slow and slurred together, sounding like a child's with a lisp. "I couldn't find you, and it snowed, and Matt said you were mad at us."

"Did he drive you home? I was worried, is all." She lets me hoist her off the ground and leans on me while we walk together to the couch. I try to help her take off the sweater that's covered in vomit, but she insists that she can do it.

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I close the front door and check the lock.

She is mumbling now. It's one of the rare nights when she doesn't get angry or violent, but talks of things that she'd never admit to in the morning—the father that hit her, the mother that she never wants to be like, her own weaknesses. Curled up into a ball, she takes up only one third of the couch. Her unruly hair covers her mouth and muffles the words. "Carney, you're so lucky... It's only sex, you know... they never care...nobody gives a shit . . can't you see that?"

I walk from room to room, turning off all the lights, trying not to listen to her. I hang up the phone and notice that there are no messages. Finally, I turn her on her side and cover her with an Afghan. She is sobbing and clutching the pillow. Her eyes are closed and she whispers, "You know, you're the best friend I've ever had."

I reach to turn off the last lamp, and stare for a moment at the painting on the wall beside it. It is a still-life of bottles, probably the only things Lexie could find to paint. Unlike most still lives, there is no light hitting the objects—the green of the glass is eerily distorted, the bottles strangely converged, swirls of darkness dancing like the dark water under a frozen surface of pond. I brush her hair back from her face, and leave the lamp on. I know that I will not be able to sleep when I go upstairs, and that I will check on her through the night to make sure she is still breathing. Before I walk away, I hear myself consoling her softly, "Shhh, it will be okay. Everything will be all right tomorrow."



Tina Lariviere

## *Sunset Street*

The first thing I remember remembering  
is walking, your walking,  
your hip, knee, and ankle synchronized to lift  
one foot then the other while  
I practiced stepping beside you.  
In the speckled shade made from the meeting  
of spring trees and sunlight, no other  
person saw because no other person existed  
where houses were but a backdrop, mailboxes  
and parked cars the props of a space created  
for fathers and daughters to walk.

Catherine Dawgert

*May Flowers*

*Louise Howland King Cox, 1911*

I hold my hand partly because  
it is like praying and partly because I  
am afraid to touch yours, as I stare  
past the flowers Aunt Hildy said  
I picked too soon to your stillness  
wrapped in white. My blue bow sags  
against my ear and Daddy whispers  
to sit silent, but all I want to ask is  
who will brush my hair tomorrow  
and show me how the bleeding hearts  
budding in the garden can be split  
into bunnies and ballet shoes come June.

Catherine Dawgert



John O'Sullivan

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