

# The Garland



Spring 1995



∞ The Garland ∞  
Spring 1995

# ~ The Garland ~ Staff

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## *A Note from the Editor:*

"Fool," said my muse to me, "Look in thy heart and write." Sir Philip Sidney seems to have a touching relationship with his muse--one that I aspire to. I believe in muses, of whispers of inspiration, and sprinklings of fairy dust. It is the magic of words and images that captivates us, and keeps us searching for more. I think *The Garland* has captured some of that magic.

I congratulate all of the writers and photographers for submitting, and letting us hear your voices and see glimpses of your take on the world. I know I'll look forward to the contributions that will make next year's *Garland* even more exciting. I like to think of this year's *Garland* as a step in a new direction--so that it may evolve to be a place that highlights the varied (and perhaps avant-garde) artwork at Loyola.

I'd like to thank Dr. Dan McGuinness for luring me into this job. Oh, did that sound too sarcastic? I rephrase, "I'd like to thank Dr. McGuinness for this wonderful opportunity, and for his unending moral support."

My staff deserves thanks as well, they've done a wonderful job. I'd particularly like to thank Andrea for hanging in there, even after hours in the computer lab with disk-eating hard drives and broken printers. It's been great to work with all of you.

Finally, I'd like to take this chance to dedicate this edition of *The Garland* to Beth Fedick.

Enjoy this year's issue!

Stephanie H. Fedick



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# This Fleeting Moment

by Dan O'Meara

Yesterday is lost.  
I stand here, unassured in the twilight,  
counting the few remaining remnants of days gone by.  
As I walk upon the ice-paved street, I question  
life, change, and the precariousness of the damn weather.  
Stepping on a sheet of ice  
I feel it crack beneath my feet,  
only to look back and see it crush and turn  
suddenly to water.  
I hear a voice cry out desperately from a darkened  
alley; a man begs for money.

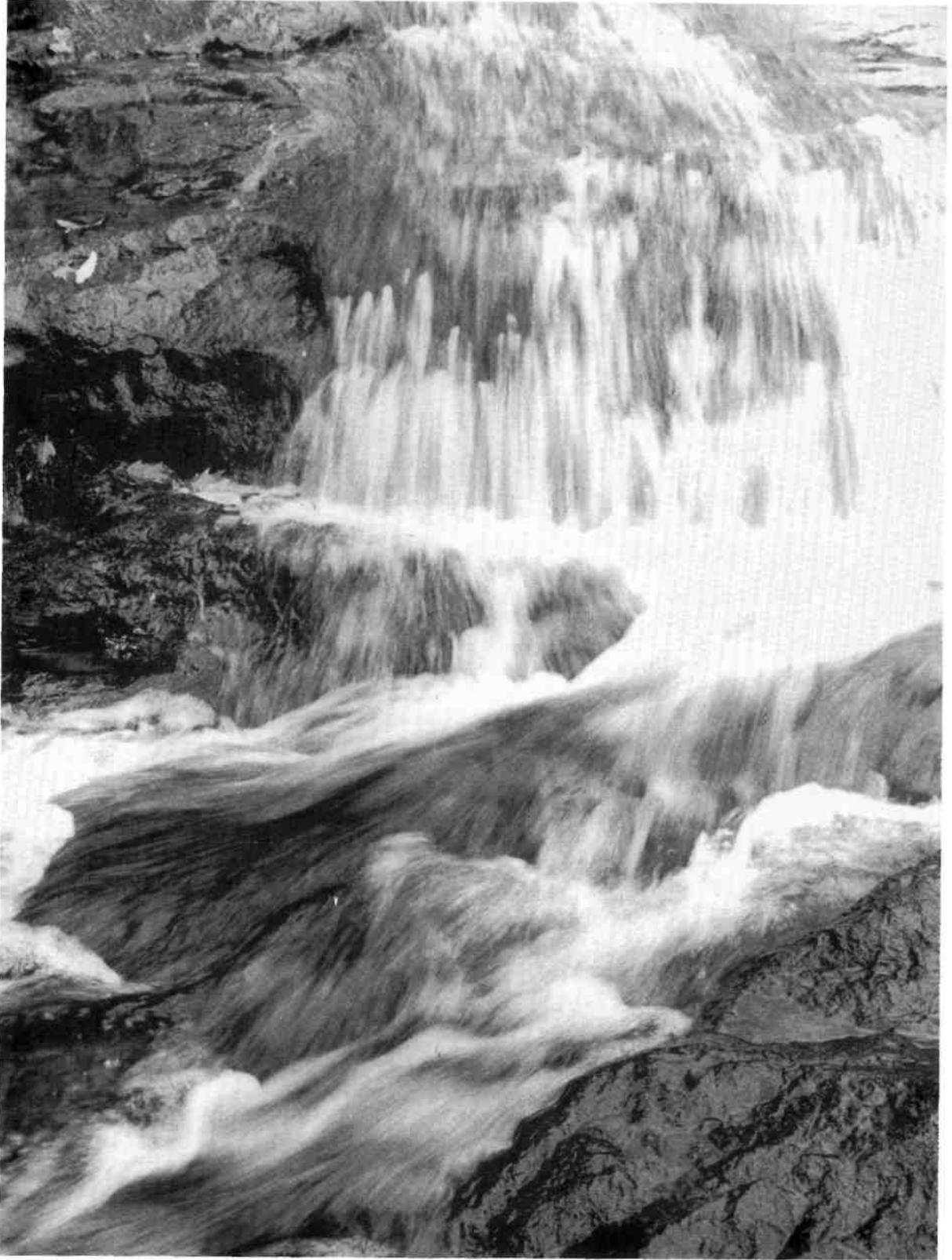
This sad, pathetic voice is familiar to me.

This same voice I had heard months before;  
accented and distinguished however,  
from a man who walked carelessly over the homes of  
these beggars, not even bothering to reply to  
their cries.

Finally, there you stand in the doorway of your  
new, uptown apartment.  
Who are you now? I can hardly tell from the  
fickle look on your face.  
Hair, still golden brown, face, still white as  
snow.  
But a different look appears in your eyes,  
a different smile forms on your face.

I know now I must walk on,  
across an empty school yard,  
beneath the vast construction,  
and deep into the heart of the barren graveyard.  
Now, my destiny is sealed.  
In this fleeting moment, I'm again merely  
a stranger,  
a passive character in a grand scheme of color.  
Without destination, reason, or purpose,  
I lie upon the dampened leaves of this timeless  
season,  
a shape-shifter,  
a dream chaser,  
a tracer of shadows.





# Somehow Other than America

by Robert LaPointe

I. It was the coffee that did it.  
All night, sometimes hoping, sometimes daring myself.  
sometimes loathing  
seeing

in her for-other-people person, I knew she'd be.  
I thought once she might present herself so to me.  
once?  
Flirt, that is.  
With pretense of innocence that  
we both knew  
was only  
so the game could start  
getting past the incidentals  
glancing  
brushing  
our hands hitting gently as we walk  
side by side  
foreshadowing intimacy  
of  
her  
hand gently outlining the edge of my ear  
with the touch that means so much.  
because  
it can only come after.  
something.  
has left a tingling from  
us to us  
the corner of her mouth to the tip of my nose.  
she steals my reason.

she wondering if I'm only in it for the sex,  
like the Tom Cruise Americans of the movies.  
she (maybe) wondering if she's only in it for the sex,  
hoping to hook an American like in the movies,  
But predicating her transgressions  
on the pretense of  
being nice, and maybe  
she feeling a bit of the loneliness that  
I'd so openly implied.

II. Feeling something lost now without

, I weep,  
in  
me(.)  
confused (.)  
by  
dancing eyes  
laughing.  
lips  
and  
out-of-sight-out-of-mind  
loneliness.  
pulling  
the road out from under me  
the sand from der Strand  
the water  
quickly  
from my bathtub,  
leaving my cold skin to find some other way  
of knowing  
What it is  
what is it  
like to fall asleep next to you.  
Under a sheet,  
between your arms.  
naked.  
Stealing you from Germany,  
the Fatherland.  
marveling in the human delicacy of expressing  
Human.

No, we didn't have sex.  
We respected each other too much for that.  
Beautiful, though-  
If only you'd found me,  
sitting, waiting to be found sitting,  
eating a calzone.  
drinking Chianti  
alone at the Altstadtfest  
missing you.  
Missing the fuck out of you.

III. If I were only 16 it might have been easier.

## art poem

by Cathy Esposito

Salvador Dali, *Couple aux tetes pleins de nuages*

Couple with their heads full of clouds

*these two bodies, swimming in the shadows  
reveal their uncharted wildernesses,  
their clouds and earths-  
how they perceive life, all inclusive  
with a fortress for loves past,  
a private asylum for memories,  
the two, open and naked,  
one shyly bending towards the other  
maybe this is a nod of consent  
Dali calls this love-*

*how did we see each other then?*

*looking into the shadows,  
our legs seemingly long and thin,  
our bodies—blurs of elegance-  
animalistic and pretty,  
and we focused all our attentions  
on these reflections—the loose  
frames of us, believing the mimicking  
sun, its fun house mirror prank--  
when the sun sank,  
the shadows dies and  
through the blinds of night  
we danced to the music,  
nodding in agreement or to cadence of jazz rhythms--  
we sought truth, ourselves, the link  
in some other artist's construct--  
thinking it was our own ecstasy.*



## **Eyes of Emerald**

by Dana Lanzafame

Purged from his emerald eye  
one tear starts down the intricate paths  
that life has worn.  
Exploring the labyrinth of wrinkles,  
Languidly rolling towards the mountainous nose,  
branching into tiny tributaries  
leaving stained, jeweled cheeks.  
Lips pressed tightly together  
stifled sobs escape with every breath,  
saltwater filling the chasm.  
Making its final descent  
over clenched teeth and chiseled marble-like jaw  
it clings to the edge, uncertain of its future,  
trembling on the brink of destruction it can no longer hold  
gliding unwillingly through cleft chin  
falling, falling into the pool of wasted tears  
purged by the emerald from which it came.

# Lost

by Jennifer McNamee

i have lost  
and they have gained  
the paupers are the  
pallbearers

it is silence that  
breaks your heart,  
not a boy, just  
turned man,  
forgotten.

when cold finds  
its way up through  
my sleeves  
and past the thickness  
of my coat, that is  
when i remember  
how much the winter meant  
and the spring  
and the damp sand of  
an empty beach  
where friends become  
lovers as moonbeams dance  
over angry waves

i cry at night when the  
sky has fallen  
and the eyes of those  
who care are blind.  
they can not hear my  
silent tears, that  
scream as they hit  
bedsheets and pillows.  
for their screams are  
swallowed deep into my heart,  
and only i can hear.

i have lost  
and will search for always  
for postcards from heaven  
and Colorado  
for guatemala is too far away,  
and as i said winter scenes  
are more important.  
so, Colorado it is.  
that is where love has gone.

not to hell and back again,  
as once was promised, but to  
a mountain far away to await  
the return of friends,  
he waits for me there,  
and in a lagoon where i have  
never swum, although, i have  
heard stories, and seen boats  
that i will never have the chance  
to navigate.

my riches come and go with the  
tides and mix with the foam  
that traces the edges of the sea  
and every time i raise my head  
to gaze at the moon  
a face fills my mind and  
a whipser tickles my ear  
although i am alone  
although i am lacking  
and i look away and  
swallow sobs and think  
of how much easier it will  
all get as time passes.

how much easier it will all  
get when my heart grows strong  
once again.  
when my eyes grow weary of  
searching through crowds for a  
face that is no longer there.  
there will come a time when i  
stop talking to myself  
when i stop asking the heavens  
why

i am waiting,  
patiently,  
but not patiently enough  
i have lost but have not forgotten  
what i once possessed.

# Blue Fire-To My Father

by Janice C. C. Lepore

I remember  
Staring up, mesmerized,  
As your hands drew forth from the violin  
That stream of sound which  
Wound its way through my heart, illuminated my soul.  
And in the briefest moment of lingering silence, I knew,  
What is magic.

That melody still echoes through me,  
And as the music swells  
It drives my steps forward,  
Each adding one more note to the harmony of generations,  
Ever changing and constant,  
Binding me to all the dreams and loves of the past,  
Calling mine to reality.

I am warmed on the darkest of days,  
By the blue streak of fire in my soul,  
Which you ignited years ago,  
And it sings to me.

One day it will be kindled again,  
When my child stares up at me while I sing to her  
And I will know what is happening in her soul  
As I stare into her heart and mind  
And respond in kind,  
Yes, my child,  
Dreams alter and illusions fade,  
But this is magic.

# Occupations

by Liz Ryan-Sax

My uniformed pants never get in much of a bunch if the mail's late. But most of these guys — as soon as they hear the helicopter, they're off and running, then back just as rushed to pour over their letters again and again until the paper goes limp.

These racks are so damn close together that you can't even sit on them to read or anything. It's horizontal or nothing. Around here, there's much more than your average amount of standing and leaning, in narrow grey corridors and against cold metal stairs. But Mitchell, a first year cadet, still manages to pray to his Almighty all the time, no matter where he is or what position he's in. It's my personal opinion that he cracked somewhere between New York and Scotland, but I'm no professional shrink. It's beyond my limited ability to understand why some of these kids, who are in no way cut out for life on a ship, even apply to SUNY Maritime. A lot are from military families; kids who didn't quite make it to Annapolis or West Point. A lot are those nerdy little psychopath-types who fantasize about Rambo and Apocalypse Now. Then there is the lot of us, who simply don't have any where else to go.

But maybe I don't think of it like that. My family has always lived on the waterfront, in a horseshoe cove on a lake in New Jersey. Yes, New Jersey has lakes of fresh water, not sulfuric acid. In high school, I worked summers at a place in the marina called Hockinjo's where we rented out sunfish and jet-skis and schmoozed the migrant summer crowds. I liked it like that. A new batch every summer who left every fall. Kind of like having a woman in every port — except same port, different women. But there was nowhere to go at Hock's — Mr. Hockinjo had only just hit forty—so I figured the Marines to be the next best thing. Where else could I get an all-expenses-paid cruise to Europe and North Africa? Sometimes, I admit to still dreaming of Hock's as my own, after my service.

Right now, Mitchell, our resident zealot, has his maroon leather-bound Bible open on the ladder, and he's standing first on one leg, then the other, reading out loud. From Revelation. Tell me the guy who wrote that wasn't on acid. It makes Mitchell even worse — which sucks for me. He's one of mine.

By my fourth and final year at Maritime, I had learned how to study. I had found my brain. They offered me a position as instructor which begins next term. I don't know how long I'll stay there, at Fort Schuyler in Throgg's Neck — a career as a full-time Marine is still appealing. You can be gone for years.

Anyway, I got another letter from Jill today. Her second — the first was sent to Spain and now this one to Greece, the port we left this morning. I think I still have grape rinds stuck in my toenails. We smashed and crushed bloody red grapes into wine all night long and then made purple footprints on the white sidewalks with our bare feet. Three girls led Barton, another instructor, and me through the maze of simple stucco houses perched in the mountain side to the one where they lived. Two were American, spending the summer with their cousin, a native of Athens — something I found remarkably sexual.

And she was the last girl who I slept with. I feel bad enough that I haven't talked to her since, but by the grace of Mitchell's merciful God, I never will. Lyris was taller than me by at least an inch anyway, which may not sound so bad except for the fact that I'm a razor's edge shy of six-foot-two, and that makes the otherwise perfect Grecian goddess just too tall. But, like I already said, I left Greece and Lyris practically eight hours ago, so why am I still thinking about her?

Jill. I started calling my best friend Punkinhead when we were fourteen. She laughed every time I used it, so I used it a lot. Then — maybe it was a year later — we were renting a video, and she found out that Pumpkin Head was a really cheap horror movie, and that's where I'd gotten it from. Gullible does not even begin to describe her. Well — gullible, yes. Stupid, no.

We went to high school together for about two and a half years. Too many private schools sprung up where we lived, and they all funneled into a handful of high schools. That's where I met Jill, or re-met her, or something like that.

On the first day of freshman year, our Earth Science teacher decided to seat us boy-girl. Everyone remembers a time when that's a dreaded concept, but at the ripening age of fourteen, I pretty much welcomed the

idea. We were sitting on stools with uneven legs at long black lab tables covered with some waxy film that you could scratch at and get under your fingernails. I smoothly checked my port and starboard sides.

I didn't completely luck out with this boy-girl arrangement. The troll on my left had escaped from some bridge, but the chick on my right... She was mint. We're talking longish dark hair and longish dark eyelashes. Big blue eyes. Actually, I'm pretty sure her eyelashes were blue too— she used blue mascara that came in some pink and green bottle. Those eyes were a sweet, heavy blue.

Not that I was staring or anything.

I was, however, experiencing some difficulty with the attitude detector where this girl was concerned.

"You have a fuzzy thing in your hair," she said to me.

Curly black hair like mine has its negatives. Catching white fuzz is up there in the top five — somewhere before or after resembling pubic hair. Even my eyebrows and lashes curl.

"Thanks." I felt around then pulled the lint out.

Our teacher took roll again to reassess her seating chart. "Casey Slattery?"

"Here," I answered.

The mint chick was watching me, smiling. "Casey Slattery from Lake Hopatcong?"

"Yeah?" She'd heard of me, huh? My ego grinned.

"Jill Thayer?" The teacher called.

"Here," she chanted.

"Wait a minute." It was coming back to me. "I know you, don't I?" She nodded, her smile growing. "You're dad was my peewee football coach!"

She was laughing. "I haven't seen you since we were nine."

Jill and I were in the same homeroom, too, and we were only three lockers away from each other. We shared gym and lunch periods, but we didn't have any other classes together. Jill was a card-carrying member of the geek squad, albeit their best looking member, but a member all the same. I wasn't even close. We didn't really have any of the same friends either. Well, we had a lot of the same guy friends. That was because Jill was a student trainer for the football team, and I played center before my knee blew out on me. The guys all liked her. She had a way of making you feel like Schwarzenegger just by saying you had great ankles

when wrapping them with figure-eights of medical tape. Believe me when I tell you that fifteen- and sixteen-year-old guys need to hear they have good ankles. Only Jill knew that, I think.

But she didn't flirt. She didn't tell you about great ankles unless it was the truth. She didn't flip her hair or giggle. She didn't bat those blue eyelashes or roll up the waist of her uniform plaid skirt, although that actually wouldn't have been so bad. She was just Jill.

"What's goin' on, Casey? Knee again? Stand up on the table. Nice shave, you girl," she laughed, sliding the tips of her fingers over my smooth knee. We had to shave our legs so the skin wouldn't rip when the tape was cut off. By mid-season, the trainers' room was packed with barely-functioning bodies and whining infants who, on Saturdays, passed as football players. "You have the worst legs, you know that, Slattery? They're like tooth-picks."

"I could say the same about — Ow!"

She was squeezing the side of my knee. "Is there any cartilage left in there? Christ, did you ever hear of that new science — I think it's called orthopedic medicine." Cold, sticky aerosol sprayed on to my swollen knee. The room reeked of it, like acrid soap, if you can imagine it. Soap and cold mud. Old padded tables, complete with torn vinyl, had been donated from medical offices and now lined three concrete walls while a dark grey curtain hid the fourth. Pulled groins went behind that curtain. Only the official trainer, a certified, paid employee, was lucky enough for that job.

"If I'm late onto the field, you're doing laps with me, Thayer."

"If I'm so slow, why don't you ever go to one of the other trainers?"

I grinned down to where she was knee-level with me. "Cause I love to be that special pain in your ass."

The truth was that Jill and the other girl, Kerry, were the only two trainers beside the official who were any good. But now that I think about it, even when we were mad at each other, Jill was still my only choice.

"They're trying to grow cartilage in petri dishes now, did you know that? It hasn't worked yet though." In short, quick movements, my knee was wrapped in a cast of white tape. "Did I tell you? Kerry and I decided if we could take your upper body and put it on Wiznowsky's legs, we'd have the perfect guy."

I failed to tell you she was somewhat of a freak,

didn't I?

"You hear that Wiz?" I yelled to the other side of the room. "The Doctor Frankenstein over here wants your sexy legs."

"They're available," came his reply. More than a couple raw words sprang from various tables. Everybody knew Wiz was crushed on Jill.

"What about my feet at least?" I asked her, jumping down from the table "Wiz pisses in the shower. You don't want his. He's got shit growing in his toes."

"Slattery, God! Don't be tellin' her that!" A flying ace bandage barely missed my jewels.

Jill pushed me towards the door. "Get outta here, Casey. Who's next?"

But otherwise, as far as any common girl friends went, there were none. I had a penchant for cheerleaders. Jill did not. Being a guy, I didn't know that somewhere out there in the land of feminine psychosis, there was an unwritten law that all the trainers had to hate all the cheerleaders. This, I also learned, was a mutual female loathing. The whole shabang amused me for the most part, except for certain instances when I felt like a yoyo between all these girls.

A perfect example for you: Stacey Collini had this huge Halloween party our freshman year, and Jill was repulsed that I'd even offered her a ride to it. She was dating this new guy, a soccer player, no less, who went to public. I was trying to make up for some of the original thoughts I'd voiced on the boy by inviting those two to come with me and whoever I was with then, but no way —

She was throwing books into her locker. "I can't believe that you would even think to ask me! That I would lower myself!"

Jill never seemed to notice that in the process of spurning the bitchiness of the cheerleaders, she'd joined the club herself.

A new wing had been added to the school — a whole hallway — that smelled of fresh paint and new carpeting with bright fluorescent lights. The lockers were new, too, with a clean coat of buttery beige. Geek Squad Captain or not, Jill could never remember her combination. Our school wasn't very big, but a walk to the office even once a week was annoying. As soon as the secretary saw us, she'd smile and pull out her plastic little recipe box and look for the index card of "Thayer, Jill."

The brain child could never remember her damn

locker combination which blew my small mind. Finally, I had to convince her righteous self to write it on the door of my locker so at least one of us knew how to open hers.

In the fall of our sophomore year, Jill went out with this overgrown junior. She dumped him after two weeks, but that day at football practice, I could tell she wanted to cry. Her eyes were a really shiny bright blue, and she wouldn't look anywhere near my face.

As soon as things started to happen with this guy, I had told her he was a dick, even though he was on the team, but Jill refused to listen and retaliated by rattling off a list of the STD incubators — her words — that I'd been with.

"What's your problem?" I asked her when we were the only two left in the trainers' room. I couldn't do anything at practice that day — the knees — but I had to be there anyway. Coach elected me to mop the floor.

So there we were.

"Mike's telling everyone that he broke up with me." I hopped up onto one of the tables. "So?"

She turned away from me. "Forget it."

"Why d'ya gotta be so female?"

She was yanking at the top of a new box of tape and barely looked at me over her shoulder. "Have you checked my chromosomes, asshole? That might have something to do with it."

"Then why d'ya gotta be so chromosomal?"

She tried not to, but laughed anyway. I slid down off the table, knowing it was safe then, and gave her a hug.

Jill and me, we never dated or anything like that. We never even practiced random sex, but everyone was convinced that we did. Jill wasn't like that. Maybe I was, but she definitely wasn't. So we walked to homeroom together every morning. So we waited every afternoon out by the seniors' circle for our buses — almost always the last two. So we beat each other up in phys. ed. and ate each other's food at lunch. So what?

"Casey, man, just admit it already!"

I was so glad the worst Jill ever saw was the trainers' room. The knowledge of Wiz pissing in the shower was nothing compared to the actual locker room itself.

"There is nothing to admit."

"I'd be proud to say I fucked Jill Thayer."

"I would be, too. But, man, listen to me." I was finally forced to say, "You couldn't pop that baby with a pin."



I'd never seen Jill so upset after I told her how I'd valiantly defended her honor.

"You are vile."

Vile? Intestine juice, right? I hated when she did that. "What the hell did you want me to say?"

"Not that, for God's sake!" She held her books tight to her chest and leaned against the locker, chewing her lower lip. "You couldn't pop me with a pin'? That's a beautiful piece of poetry, Casey. Exquisite."

We walked — she marched, I strolled — across the parking lot to the picnic tables where we sat to wait for our buses when there was no practice.

"Got a lotta work for tonight?" I tugged at the books she carried, trying to get us back to normal, but instead, I knocked them loose and struggled to catch the plummeting hard-covered books. Jill stood with one hand on her hip, the other extended for her stuff, obviously waiting for me to pick it all up.

"Why don't you have a backpack, Thayer?"

"Are the bindings broken?"

"Uh, no." I examined them closely, not knowing what a broken binding even looked like. Catching the large blue letters of the top text, I continued to display my ignorance. "Flannery O'Connor? Who's he?"

Jill grabbed it out of my hands and wiped the dust. "She is an award-winning author. God, what're you reading in Durlin's class? Sports Illustrated?" Mr. Durlin was the baseball coach at our school who happened to teach English on the sly.

"Her name's cool and Irish, just like mine."

"Yeah, and her characters are cool, just like you, too."

I knew that had to be a type-A insult and educated myself to the fact a few years later. I looked past Jill to the emptying parking lot and sighed loudly for her, muttering, "I could've said you were a frigid prude."

She stopped at an empty picnic table. I sat on top of it, trying to avoid the receiving end of the splintering wood. "What's the difference?"

"There's plenty of difference."

"Erin told me that you smoke pot every afternoon when you get off the bus."

"What?" I felt the skin on my neck tighten.

"Do you?"

"I thought we were talking about Jill the Prude."

"Well, now it's Casey the Pothead."

I was quiet for too long. "Who told you that? Erin?"

"Yeah, your girlfriend. Erin. Maybe you know her?"

"You and Erin don't talk to each other."

"I know you enjoy making your little girlfriends hate me, so I finally decided to prove one of them wrong."

"Erin?"

"Yep. She's kind of cool actually. You could walk her to her homeroom, you know. She hates how you always wait for me to walk to the library." That's where Jill and I had to go for homeroom. It was in a separate building.

"She told you that?"

"She didn't really have to. So do you smoke pot or what?"

"Why do you want to know?" Why did I have to tell her?

Jill was looking me straight in the eye. She already knew. "Just say it."

There is a distinct difference between secrets and lies. Jill, one way or the other, always discovered my lies.

Jill's family had been having money problems for a while. Her parents owned a Mom 'n Pop style deli, but then one of those huge, everything-under-one-roof grocery store chains opened up in their town. The downfall of the small businessman in the land of opportunity. It makes me think about Hock's and the Marina.

Right before Christmas our junior year, the Thayer's filed Chapter 11, and Jill had to transfer to public. She didn't want anyone to know, but she told me. And I didn't believe her. How could she leave? In the middle of the school week? Couldn't somebody talk to the principal? The board of whoever was the board? Couldn't somebody pay her tuition? Sponsor her or something? She was in the top ten of our class. How could they let her go? In one fucking day she was gone.

At least that soccer guy she used to date went to this new high school. At least she knew somebody who went there. I tried to tell her this, but Jill did not want to leave our school. The same day she'd told me about it all, my phone rang late, and Jill got out a "Hi," before the whole blubbery thing started. It was the only time she'd ever been like this and the only time since. She cried so hard, I was afraid she'd puke because I'd done that once when my first dog died. So I knew it could happen.

"Please tell me you're not pregnant," I said.

"Casey!"

"Well, I don't know. I can't understand a fuckin' word you say."

"I'm not pregnant, you idiot! Me? The frigid prude?"



"What's the deal then?"

"I said I don't want to go. I don't want to leave."

"Transfer, you mean?"

"Yes. Casey! What else do you think I meant?"

"All right. All right. Well, what if I said that I wanted you to leave? So don't be so damn selfish, girl. Just think, I won't be late to homeroom anymore. My name won't be on the list for detention anymore. "

"I hate you," she laughed, hiccupping on her tears.

"Good, that's more like it."

On the last Wednesday in November, in the middle of the week, Jill just disappeared.

I told everybody she had lost it and gone after her parents with a pair of scissors, and that now she was in an institution. You wouldn't believe how many people bought it. The cash register overflowed.

Obviously, Jill and I didn't see each other at school anymore, and the driving age of seventeen wouldn't happen to either of us for another five months. She had started back with that soccer kid — like a 1-900 psychic hotline couldn't have predicted that. I was with someone again too, but she and I still hung out sometimes. Jill, being the genius, figured out that I could take her old bus and get off at her old stop where she would meet me. We only did this once, because I felt like an idiot when I got off the bus and everybody on it saw Jill waiting there for me. That was the end of that.

Jill, for the first time in as long as I'd known her, including those years of peewee football practices, became a really quiet girl. She still called but more to listen to my stories than to say anything herself. I introduced her to Zeppelin because she was miserable. She had these three foot speakers and would sit Indian style between them, facing the wall. This impressed me. This was a new Jill. I taped my entire collection onto blanks, and that was her Christmas present. She got me a tequila lollipop — with the worm.

"It was the best I could do," she smiled, leaning into me for a sideways hug. "Merry Christmas, my favorite alcoholic."

"I can't believe it's got a dead worm in it." I stared at its clay-colored body, entombed in hard candy. That was definitely the shit, we'd all decided. I was with two of my friends from grammar school who now went away to military academies. They were home for the holidays. Darren had his mom's old Wagoneer and had driven me, him, and Kyle to Jill's.

At least the Thayer's hadn't lost their house, I thought. It was a white cape with the low red roof, black shutters, and a red front door. A Christmas house with blinking lights that framed the windows and a huge green and gold wreath that hung on the door. Her house, her whole neighborhood was set into the side of a cliff—the end of the Pocono Mountains. There were no sidewalks, no street lamps, just breaths of burning wood and alpine needles.

But inside the house was a different scent story.

"It evens smells like tequila," Kyle, my other friend, held the lollipop up to his nose.

"You mean like puke?" Jill wrinkled her nose. "I used to think margaritas were romantic, but now I know better."

I smacked her up side the head. "Only you would think margaritas were romantic, Thayer."

"Well, you know, you think margarita, you think Mexico, tropical — you think pink little umbrellas and soft white sand."

"No, you don't."

"Have I told you yet today how much I hate you?"

Jill's soccer boy got a job working weekends at the banquet place in their town so she was actually free to go out and have some fun. He'd started out washing dishes and now was chopping vegetables and stuff for the head chef making beaucoup bucks. Maybe he made a lot of money, but he never seemed to have any time to spend it.

We went to get Katy, one of Jill's new friends who she was hooking me up with. Apparently, this girl lived in an area of the county that they called BFE; translation: Butt-Fuck Egypt. Where the connection between the farmlands of northern New Jersey and King Tut's Egypt lies, I have no idea. Katy lived on a road Jill said was characteristic of BFE: basically gravel-covered, marked with a wooden sign, and missing double yellow lines.

So we picked up this happenin' blonde and blue-eyed chick and were heading out in the direction of the highway which, Katy assured us, was indeed accessible from BFE.

"There are two really bad turns up here," Katy said from the back of the Wagoneer. I was up front with Darren. Jill, Katy, and Kyle were in the back together. Katy and Kyle seemed to have more in common than their cute little names. My seat in the front, I discovered,



was not very strategic.

There'd been a snowstorm earlier in the week, but at least two and a half, maybe three feet of snow still shrouded the surrounding farmland and had been ploughed into ice-hardened rocks on the roadside.

"Casey?" Jill put her hand on my shoulder from behind. "I can't find a seat belt."

"If your car's old enough," Darren told her, "you can get away without having them at inspection."

"Hey driver, when was your birthday?" She asked. "Did I miss it?"

"This turn is really sharp," Katy said again as we passed one of those yellow metal signs that show a sharp turn and recommend a slower speed. I was surprised someone had even bothered out here in BFE. The warning read 15 MPH, next to a boomerang.

"Relax, relax," Darren said, letting off the gas and palming the wheel. "See?"

"So when did you get your license?" Jill asked again from the back.

He laughed, so I said, "They've both got military licenses."

I pulled down the visor and played with the mirror, just in time to see Kyle put his arm around Katy. Great.

"You should really slow down. This one's worse, Darren." Katy said.

Kyle can have her. She's a whiner, anyway, I was thinking when we broke through the wooden cow fence and flew away. A dry winter sky, its bright purple light shimmering on the blue snow, hiding in the shadowed dips and crevices. I saw Darren, his hands still holding the wheel as if to steer the landing. Jill's face, excited, but not frightened, was suddenly staring into mine as if I'd woken into a dream. Then we hit the snowy field nose first, and Jill was gone. The twisted peace didn't last.

"Holy shit." Darren said, his hands melded to the steering wheel. "Is everybody alive?" We were.

"I hit my nose on something." I pivoted to see Jill, miraculously returned to her seat behind the driver, her hand feeling a non-bloody nose. Kyle had both arms around a bug-eyed Katy who was looking at the nails of her outstretched fingers. Darren continued to stare straight ahead as if we were still in flight.

"Hey, Case?" Jill looked at me for a moment and tilted her head. Then she asked, "Was I in the front seat?"

I nodded. Her smile came slowly but came with

understanding.

We had climbed out of the woodie Wagoneer and sank our cold feet into the snow to check out the damage. One missing license plate. One flat tire. One dead engine.

A pair of car lights caught us like deer, and we stood frozen in the snow. Five teenagers. Reckless driving. Their parents' car. That is what those people saw.

"This is bad," Darren grumbled.

Katy and Jill began to wave and walk heavily towards the car. "Maybe they can help us."

"We don't want their help," I said. "Jill, don't."

She turned to look at me, confused. "Katy, wait." She pulled at her friend's jacket. "Why not, Case? What's going on?"

"We're fine, thanks! Thanks anyway! Everything's all right!" The three of us, Darren, Kyle, and me, waved and smiled and politely shooed the Samaritans away.

At that point, Jill figured out that Darren hadn't had his seventeenth birthday yet. She hadn't missed it after all. I had to tell her how we'd convinced Darren's mother that his military ID, which she'd seen for the last three years, was suddenly his military drivers' license. I didn't need to tell Jill what was in the glove compartment. Certainly not gloves... not a AAA card, not flares, not maps of BFE.

I open my mother's letter after Jill's. The dutiful mom, she still misses me. My father bought a new sailboat. She wants to know if Jill has sent me an invitation yet. Surely that's why she'd asked for my address. Will I be able to get leave for the wedding?

For my twentieth birthday, Stacey—the one who'd had the Halloween party — broke up with me after nearly two years of what was most definitely physical bliss. I was crushed. Jill was crushed. She and Stacey had actually defied the odds and liked each other. When they were away at school, they wrote letters on sheets of pink stationery that they'd given each other as end-of-summer presents. Me and the soccer boy had even found a way past sports, and the four of us used to do things like play board games and make dinner together. Never in a million did I expect to be at a stove boiling water for pasta with soccer boy.

But at this point, he and Jill were on hiatus, again, so she was alone for her birthday too. And even though Maritime is a Marine Academy, weekends were ours if we didn't get into trouble. So I spent that weekend at

Jill's.

I brought her a little birthday present from Throgg's Neck, more to piss her off than anything else, because I did so enjoy pissing off Little Miss Just-Say-No. To my complete and absolute shock, she didn't throw me or mary jane out the window.

All right, so we got totally polluted and hooked up. Finally.

I know, I know. You don't have to say it.

Allow me: What A Fucking Idiot. Yes, thank you. That was me.

I got my innocent, naive, trusting — I need to stop here or commit suicide out of guilt — best friend completely stoned, and she jumped me in her own bed. I'd been offering her fine herbs for years, but it'd never been serious. Christ, she'd always 'just said no.' I had brought her beanie once too — you know, eucalyptus leaves — from the Village so that she could relax and study better, but she said they tasted like petrol and gave them to the guys who lived across the hall from her. That she'd even tried them got me.

But I digress.

Here's how it went.

"I love you." Casey is the fool who said that.

"I know," she answered. "I love you, too. I really do. Happy Birt-day. "

We only kissed for about seven seconds, and I didn't even try anything else. No clothes-shedding, no hand-wandering, no grinding. Impressive, but not surprising. Then she passed out.

Another horrible thing to add to this scenario was that her roommate, who I now remember doesn't even drink so probably heard the entire incident, had a polaroid camera that we abused that weekend. So there was actual evidence that this unfortunate event ever took place. I found the bent pictures in the back pocket of my jeans when I pulled them on the following weekend.

There she sat in the square of this picture, cross-legged and permagrinned. Her eyes were like the flag—red, white, blue, and full of stars. Ever light a polaroid picture on fire? They don't burn like paper. They melt like wax, distorting and smearing and ruining everything.

She wrote me a letter. No, not Dear John. This was real. She told me it was bound to happen and now it had and now it was over. She still meant everything she'd

said. She hoped nothing had changed.

Yeah.

Did she really think I was that stupid?

I was. I drove all the way to Trenton from the Bronx and back up to Sussex County because she wanted to go home for the weekend, and her mom couldn't come to get her. How ironic is it that the only reason she wanted to go home was because a girl who lived next door to her was tripping on something and screaming that Jill was an undercover cop, a narc who was going to arrest everybody?

She never asked me to come get her. Never even implied that she wanted to use me to drive her home. I insisted even when she made it clear that she wouldn't be able to see me at all during the weekend...

The weekend Jill and soccer boy reunited. Again. She didn't tell me that until two months later. On the phone.

My response: "Yeah, well, Katy kept saying that you're such a bitch."

"Casey, I really don't care what she says about me."

After Kyle, Katy had come to me the next day. Within the month, we'd had sex, and Jill was furious with me because it was Katy's first time, and she knew it wouldn't be my last. But Katy didn't know that. She only knew the date of her next hair appointment. Besides, the girl was in love with me. Why was that my fault, I ask you?

But Katy started talking about Jill, typical bitchy girl stuff, because, as my new girlfriend, she didn't like how close I was to my best friend. She said Jill was a prude because she was still a virgin and that soccer fag had to be gay because he didn't force her to. I offered to dump Katy when Jill called me hyperventilating about it, but she said no. She knew it would devastate Katy. How sweet.

But then I started with Stacey—Halloween girl — a little while after this mess so I had to break up with Katy sooner than later anyway. But that changed nothing between her and Jill.

Katy has never gotten over me so we still hang out together whenever we happen to be home at the same time. And she seems to have more time for me than Jill could ever spare.

"She was going on and on about how much she hates you," I continued to be an ass. "She was over last night, and we were so baked..."



"Good for you." Jill sounded hurt.

"Yeah, we're going into the city tonight. I got Katy this great fake." I didn't get Jill one, so she couldn't come with us even if I'd asked. But who am I kidding? She would've said no anyway.

"Really? Andy got me his cousin's license. A real one."

Andy was soccer boy.

"You look like his cousin? Incest, inbreeding, what?"

"Casey," she sighed, giving up. "Enough already. I'm gonna go. I've got things to do."

"With the soccer fag?"

"Your maturity astounds me. You'll never pass for twenty-one. Never."

"Well, no one's as perfect as you, Kate."

"My name is Jill."

Then she hung up on me.

Jill had always been huge on phone etiquette. I used to hang up as soon as I said 'Bye' without waiting for the other person to say it, too, but it rubbed Jill so badly that she'd been hell bent on breaking my habit. Mission accomplished. And then she hung up on me.

That's the last time I talked to her. Over two years ago. We played some phone tag, successful in our failure. She sent me a congratulations last spring for my graduation and my new post, but I never wrote back. I don't even remember what the card looked like. At the end of my cruise that summer, when I saw my parents with all the others, waiting on the dock, Jill wasn't there. But I knew that she wouldn't be. I knew that. I'd known all along.

In the Istanbul of crumbling cement, brown air, and littered streets, my mother, not so surprisingly, sends another letter. There is also a cream colored envelope with black calligraphy addressing it to me. We all know it is the invitation. To the screams of gulls and haggling peddlers, I open Mom's. She is so excited about Jill's wedding — my parents are invited, too — even though she still wishes I was the groom. She has drawn her trademark smiley-face next to that statement. She loves Jill. Mom has sent her birthday cards and Christmas presents ever since Earth Science. My mother needed a daughter, but I was her only son.

I never clarified, but soccer boy is two years older than me, and apparently he is well on his way to becoming Dr. Soccer Boy. Something with genetics I

can't decipher, but he gets paid to get his Ph.D. at this fuckin' fancy dancy school in North Carolina. They pay him to go to school. Unreal.

That's where Jill lives now. In North Carolina. I hadn't even looked at the return address on either of her letters. I read on to discover that Jill is studying sports medicine at the same university as her man — which shouldn't surprise me as much as it does. I can see the plaque hanging over their office door. Their names etched into the wood, sealed by layers over layers of shellac: The Doctors — what? Smith? Jones? Hafnagel? This is when I realize that I don't know Andy's last name. That I never have, and as I throw the invite away, that I never will.

I am an instructor at Maritime. I travel the world, and they pay me to do it, to live in the fragments of other people's lives.

This is what I want. For both of us.

I open the manila envelope that protects my mother's letters. Sifting through, I find Jill's latest. After reading it again, I ball it and aim for the trash chute.

*Casey,*

*Hello! I'm not sure if I sent the first letter out on time for you to have received it in Spain, but your mother gave me your next address in Greece. I didn't even know how extensively you travel. I'm quite jealous! I know you hate when I sound like a girl, but I've discovered that I am one. It was a shock to me, too! And I just want to say to you I think that whatever is going on between us - we can change it. I love you. I really do. You have to know that. We were friends for so long. Are we still? I want to be friends again. That is what I want for us. Do you realize how long it has been since we've spoken? Let's start over again. Please write me or call as soon as you return to the States. I've missed you.*

*Love Always,*

*Punkinhead*

I climb the metal ladder with echoing footsteps to the sunlight that burns my eyes and makes the world a bright white place from which I am forced to turn away.

# Ecuador in August

by Lynn Davies

The sun  
hauls itself up  
to its highest point  
in a sky  
drained of color,  
stretched and worn  
like a wide strip  
of paling grey cloth  
that's been scrubbed  
and wrung  
by calloused palms  
too often.

A woman nears  
the edge of the water;  
its surface  
of dipping shadows,  
pockets of cool murky  
darkness,  
it's threaded diagonally  
with specks of silvery  
liquid light.

Letting the damp weight  
of her second skin  
drop  
to a crumpled heap  
around her ankles  
she thrusts forward,  
ripping a hole  
in the delicate gleaming  
web.

Thousands of  
startled strands scatter  
in shivering broken arcs  
as she tunnels downward  
towards the sloping bottom.  
The rush  
of the water  
throbs  
like a muffled sob,  
and the swimmer tears  
through the surface again,  
breathless heat  
lifting from her skin,  
lifting light steam.

## Balancing

by William Cannon III

The brown-haired  
boy stood waiting  
for his bus by himself,  
amusing himself  
by trying to stand  
on the tips of his  
new-white sneakers  
without falling  
off the curb.  
One hand held  
his glasses and  
the other waved  
wildly as he fought,  
like all of us,  
to balance.





## My Father

by Tara Knapp

I have watched him grow older —  
Graying temples,  
Duller eyes —  
His smiles are my treasure;  
My gold is almost spent.  
His bronze skin, rough with wrinkles  
Smooth when he speaks,  
When his wisdom pours out  
Like sweet water from bitter rocks.  
My father,  
As he stood upon the fallen tree,  
Spoke to me of nature's beauty,  
Taught me how the poets saw,  
How the poets wrote.  
And now as my life  
Leads me away  
His shadow guides me quietly  
As it always has.

## Behind the Eyes

By Michelle Moore

You were the one with the blue eyes  
You have changed a lot since then,  
But the blue eyes remain.  
Then when you were a scruffy little school boy  
with tousled hair and dirty palms,  
The eyes were always there as evidence  
that the fist of a drunken father hurts more  
than the pavement when you fall off your bike  
And the bruise from your father's rage is a more permanent wound  
than the scraped knees of the other playground kids.  
I knew your secret then and I know it now, eight years later  
those blue eyes still cry their invisible tears.  
Now in your Megadeath T-shirt and your black jeans  
with your long hair, earrings and tattoos  
and your precious assortment of drugs,  
You are the type of guy who would scare me normally,  
But I know your secret and I know that you are the one who is scared.  
The eyes give it away.



## Brotherly Love

by Doug Young

Unable to get my father's staff clean,  
I scrub the stains harder in frustration.  
Realizing it is forever marked,  
I hurl the cudgel down the mountainside.  
Tired from such an eventful morning,  
I recline on the high rock on the hill.  
Hungrily, I began breaking some bread  
on his lips, I placed my brother's half.

The sheep look at me with innocent eyes,  
and lick my brother's kind outstretched hand.  
All of the creatures stare at me silently,  
someday they will know what I have done.  
Watching the valley for any warning,  
I wait, waiting for something to happen.



## It

by John Thomas Pavone, Jr.

does It go here,  
does It go there,  
boy I'm really scared.  
(I don't know where!)

okay, I'll stop shaking,  
I will get it right.  
I think this is It!  
(whoops! maybe we should turn on the lights!)

I think It goes here,  
or maybe over there,  
why don't you help me out?  
(Instead of just lying there?)

I want this to work too  
really, I know what to do.  
come on I managed to get this far.  
(really, I can —)

neverknewthiscouldbesocomplexItseemstobemoreworkthanpleasure  
staystillIgotItthistimeIknowit-OhYes- H E R E W E G O!

## Untitled

By Tara Knapp

I shiver from the heat.  
The fire's fingers are frozen-  
Cold, cold blades  
That reach and stretch and pull,  
Pull me up from the earth  
Where I lie.  
Wild grasses speak to me,  
Breathe in unison-  
Wild flowers dance  
And twist and turn,  
Warning me, warning--  
Oh, seize my soul  
And murder it--  
For without it  
What am I?  
What am I in this place?  
This beautiful place.  
What am I without--without--  
Life?  
And as I scream this  
To the empty universe,  
Summer  
Seizes my body  
And lifts it above  
The dormant seeds--  
And dust  
Like dust in an ancient tomb  
Shifts lightly  
In the lazy sunlight,  
The silken wind.  
Insects cry for me,  
They cry, they weep, they mourn,  
And they slowly bury me  
Beneath their tears,  
As my soul,  
My murdered soul,  
Flies free.





## Extremadura

by Magdalene Szuszkiewicz

I want to make love to you  
Where the Roman gods left their dice

Big white rocks  
abandoned between gables  
spell two with  
the dots of our bodies

Forsaken  
with the shadows of their presence  
but the presence of their  
absence

They rose and deserted  
their stools of knolls  
and their dice of boulders

And dragging their feet  
They follow the commanders  
of Caesar

Or maybe the legions relinquish  
As the gods got up and left

## Untitled

by Tara Knapp

Wanna hear my poem  
She asks him like a child-  
He brutally refuses.  
No.  
I don't like poems.  
Why, she shyly asks.  
Because, he says.  
Because they're all flowers and love.  
I hate flowers and love.  
And, she stares down at the paper,  
Crumpled and stained  
With her scratches.  
Tears form.  
Besides, he says,  
You shouldn't waste your time  
On poetry.  
You should work.  
Clean.  
Cook.  
She backs away from him,  
Silently floating  
From the room  
As if riding a falling star.  
And, as she stands by the garbage,  
Tearing up her words  
She never realizes  
That she just threw a part of herself  
Away.



## Underwater Nude

by Rebecca Kerins

a woman submerged,  
you are alien  
like no creature ever seen.

top to bottom  
headless  
with faint tendrils hinted by dark unsettled outline  
stream-lined  
silvery black-and-white  
satin-breasted, a phantom warrior  
now decked with light:  
1000 watts rippling over your curled limbs  
electrically reaching far into unrecognition

I do not know you  
because here  
I do not know anything  
except the pressure in my lungs  
and the pain of my chest.

my surroundings insist  
upon the sharp knowledge of caught breath,  
but when I tear the surface of the water  
you will be real again—

not strange beneath the blackened lip of the sun.

## Nude In the Sunlight

*after a painting by Auguste Renoir*  
by Jenny Rowe

Young maiden  
composed of oils,  
so rightly posed  
upon the wet grass,  
pondering lavender.  
There is perhaps  
a dish of strawberries  
at your feet.

Undraped sheets  
reveal your pink breast  
and subtle belly-  
Smooth lustre of sun  
plays upon chestnut hair  
as you sit complacently  
in the garden, reclining.  
Arms fallen upon your lap.

Your head, slightly tilted,  
a canvas for  
your vacant gaze.  
Softly the breeze cries-  
Behold chaotic spring-  
dancing in the morning!  
Yet you notice not the dew  
beneath your body.

Beware young lover  
for what your artist  
does not render hides hidden  
in the trees behind.  
High above you  
Wild birds are watching.





# WOMANhood

by Helenia Walker

Run away child  
Always running from you  
Run away child  
Always sad and confused

Run away girl  
Running here, running there  
Run away girl  
Running out, running scared

But run away  
Woman  
Stopped running this time  
Because run away Woman has found her find  
She has realized Her place and picked up Her face

With self-esteem strapped to Her back  
Tucked will and skill into Her tact sack

Has set Her mind on a journey through life  
Where reality is harsh and women thrice struck

Because they are women  
Because they aren't men  
Because they are strong and determined to win

She has pushed up Her goals and pushed out her breast  
Guillotined shame  
Sentenced pity to death

She runs no more  
She dares not hide  
She whisks off Her masks  
She reveals Her pride

And basks in Her glory  
Defying male domination  
Yes! Leaving him to fight  
With his own  
ego deflation

Once a run away child  
scared run away girl  
Now a Strong, Proud Woman  
Standing Up Against The world.

Truth.  
"Helluva"

# Tangers

by Cathy Esposito

people here live in a great grey stone wall with many doors  
where the women stand watching millions of children  
run around the old city, dirty feet and optimistic eyes play  
in the shadows of daylight until  
the men come home and it is time for sleeping.

the royal blue waters of the Atlantic  
and the turquoise of the Mediterranean meet  
right beyond the beach where camels  
graze under palm trees,  
and where brown skinned locals sell live  
fish and chickens and sheep's eyes and brains —  
at the bazaars Berber women with red hands  
smile as you pass by and say "shook-a-run"  
they tell me it means please, thank-you and every  
polite word in the english language  
life here must be easy — i say "shook-a-run" often.

an old Roman grave yard overlooking a cliff  
and the twin oceans is just beyond the city —  
you can sit and smoke on the outlines of stone graves —  
no one is in them now.

where the old religious men poke out their own eyeballs  
after seeing Mecca, sit on stools with one leg,  
begging for food and preparing idly for death —  
to meet their creator who tells them — death is the anesthetic for life,  
who commands women to cover their flesh with shawls,  
like chameleons, blending into the streets,  
while the men sit colorfully in bars, exclusively for them,  
sipping mint tea.

in the day, snake charmers entice poisonous snakes with music  
while tourists cheer on the steps of the Casbah,  
at night the young muslims come here to watch the moon,  
entranced by the fullness of it, the silence of the city  
and the smell of hashish lingering over the walls  
beyond the brown dust and sweet smoke  
of this almost preserved city.

# The Caretaker

by Doug Young

A Mexican man waters a lonely  
rose, starving in the unforgivingly  
feeble hillside. Left with only a few  
petals, it lies drooping in depression.  
The sun sets like a plane crash,  
spider webs of flame reflect on old clothes,  
broken beds, abandoned tires, and other  
trash.

Water pressure down, he jostles the hose.

His serape a white linen shroud,  
his hat tight around his temples,

the aged man labors with withered proud  
hands, gardening La Virgen madre's temples.  
His father and his grandfather before  
all sharing markings from the Aztec sun.  
Like the timeless rocks in Tecote lore,  
Their palms copper season after season.

Wiping soiled fingers on sun baked grass,  
the caretaker pulls out a creased letter.  
He left his son's check and the Astros pass  
at home. Moving his lips like in a prayer  
he murmurs: "the dome is lit internally,  
and the poly-grass requires no upkeep."



## Joe

-for J.P

by William Cannon III

I sat in front of him  
on the yellow school bus  
that took us to Buckeystown.  
I sat in my green seat,  
looking out, watching  
the Potomac River water  
ripple gently toward the  
thing called the Monument.

He leaned quietly to me,  
his South Sea skin reflecting  
on the grimy window,  
and whispered,  
"It looks so nice."  
I nodded in silent  
agreement and smiled.  
He leaned back and  
went on gazing  
with his deep brown eyes,  
as if making someone's  
day was something  
he did everyday.





## I Once Knew Her

by Anthony Fabricatore

A dragonfly lands on the palm of my hand  
And in an instant  
Is gone.  
I lose sight of her in the trees above.  
But for a moment I knew her,  
And she trusted me —  
Even enough to let me hold her.  
Then she felt the warmth of my hand  
and it frightened her away,

Leaving my palm empty. Embarrassed,  
I wait, hoping to feel her delicate play again.  
My outstretched arm sinks slowly to my side.  
She has found comfort among the grey limbs,  
and is  
At home, over my head, beyond my reach.  
And I find no consolation in thinking that  
For a moment,  
I knew her.



# Overtime

by Shelly Geatty

It was a week-long story that happened one night and should have ended with my life, but didn't. Everyone at the shop still talks about what happened and they really rag on Rick because he just hauled ass and left me on the roof with four convicted criminals. Damn right I left, Rick says, someone would have to be alive to identify the body.

It had been one hell of a week between leaving at four in the morning to work on a busted front-end loader in Fredricksburg and running all the way back to Glen Burnie by noon to try and put the crane back together that was supposed to be done last week. I couldn't sleep for figuring how it'd all get done, not that I had much time to sleep anyway. By Friday, I was so tired I couldn't find my ass with both hands and by six o'clock that night the last thing I wanted to hear was that something else was busted. I had just walked into the office to tell Al that I was packing up for the day when he tells me he'd gotten an emergency call from the prison warden who's panicked because the routine service check showed that one of their generators was down. Rick and I were the last ones dumb enough to still be around the shop past quitting time and sure enough, the next thing we knew, we had loaded up the truck, cranked up the AC and headed down 95, nursing two jumbo 7-11 coffees and fighting rush hour traffic.

My luck, I thought, Friday night at a maximum security prison. There was a Bud Light with my name on it at the bar across the river and I could almost taste it, but tonight was looking like all I'd be drinking was coffee, black, and lots of it. I could understand why the warden wanted us down there, though, because if the prison goes dark with no generator, I sure as hell wouldn't want to be there. The clouds were looking a little too dark for comfort and in mid-July you never know when a storm could turn into one of those unreasonable hurricane-type things that are usually named after women. Of course, only a government institution would pick a Friday afternoon to check their generators, so just in case one's broken there'd be nobody around to

do repairs. I was working up to a real bad mood, and knew Rick was going to start about our prospects for the evening, and he didn't disappoint me. He lit a Marlboro Light and squinted at me.

"You know, this is the second week in a row Al's pulled this on me." He shook his head and flicked an ash out the window. "I'm in for a reamin' when I get home." He was probably right, I knew from experience. There was nothing like being caught between your job and your wife — either way you went one of them was going to dump you.

"You call her yet?"

"Na, haven't worked up the nerve."

I didn't blame him for not wanting to face Donna. Things wouldn't have been so bad if he didn't work days while she worked nights. This was the second Friday night she had gotten somebody to stand in for her, only to get stood up again and Rick could bet even money he was sleeping on the couch that night. He took another drag of the cigarette and I rolled down my window to get some air. I was trying to quit, trying real hard. My daughter Audrey, in all her eight years, had never seen me drink a beer or smoke a cigarette but Heather had gone and told her that I smoked, so I promised I'd quit. I'd do anything for that girl, and even if she didn't know it, this was one of the most difficult ways I'd ever try to prove it.

"Hey," Rick said, noticing that I was daydreaming and giving me a sideways glance, "you taking Ginny to the company picnic? She's dying for you to ask her."

Oh no, I thought, dangerous ground. There are three things I don't like talking about — Unions, politics, and women. Personally, I'd given up on women, and some of them had already returned the favor. "No," I said, as disinterested as possible, "she's not my type."

Rick snorted and rolled his eyes at me. "What is your type?"

I figured he wasn't going to give this up, so the only way around a sore subject was my usual asshole attitude. "A nymphomaniac who owns a liquor store."

Rick shook his head and took another drag of his cigarette. "Why don't you just take her to the picnic. It's not like getting married again or anything. Just get out some, get away from the goddamn shop."

"Yeah," I said, checking my rearviews to switch lanes, "Get away from the shop to go to a company picnic with the boss's secretary. What a treat."

"Beats spending the day with a transmission."

"Not really, at least you can make some sense out of a tranny."

He flicked the remains of the cigarette out the window and scowled at me. "Not every woman is out to screw you over, you know."

"I said I would think about it."

My best plan was changing the subject or turning up the radio. Rick meant well, but I didn't need more hassle in my life, and I certainly didn't need another woman complicating things, especially one I worked with. It had only been a year since the separation, and dating seemed too much like being unfaithful. During the week, when I wasn't working for L&S, I'd take side jobs so I didn't have to go home and have time to think about things like women or lawyer bills. The guys I shared the apartment with hardly ever saw me during the week, because I usually got home around nine or ten and left again at five or six. The only time I didn't work was Saturdays when I picked up Audrey. Heather leaving really had made me realize just how important my time was with my daughter, and I guess if anything good came out of this whole separation thing, I'm really putting everything into being a good dad.

Traffic through the tunnel wasn't moving and Rick and I were both pricked out about taking half an hour to get somewhere fifteen minutes away. Al, exercising his usual patience, had already called on the truck phone to ask why the hell we weren't there yet. They were getting white knuckles at the prison, and security had called the shop to make sure we were double timing. Much as we were in a hurry, when we pulled up at the main gate we stopped for a minute just to take it all in. Absolutely creepy. The prison sprawled across seven or eight acres, surrounded by two ten foot fences coiled with razor wire. Several low brick buildings butted against each other

and in the cells you could make out the prisoners moving back and forth behind the bars. A few guards stood sentry in the gun towers, and about a dozen or more were standing around the main entrance. Another paced between the fences with a German Shepherd. Nothing about the place was particularly inviting, and the way the sky was looking meaner didn't help matters any.

"Shit," Rick drawled, giving the gun tower a sideways glance, "Nobody's getting out of here fast."

I laughed because I figured Rick didn't quite know where we were. This wasn't jail, this was prison and there's a big difference. "Nobody's getting out of here ever, man. This place is maximum security — Lifers."

"Beat," he observed, squinting at a sign posted near the gate, "Caution, drug sniffing dogs patrolling the premises. I tell you what, no dog's sniffin' me. I hate dogs. They can just take my word for it." He eyed the Shepherd again, this time looking a little more anxiously. Rick was pretty short and a little round, so the way he kind of shrunk down in the seat reminded me of the Pillsbury Doughboy with a beard.

"They won't take your word on anything," I said, trying not to laugh, cause I knew he really was afraid of dogs, "They'll count the number of screwdrivers we have in this truck and we better come out with fifteen if we went in with fifteen, or the whole place is locked down tight till they find it."

I guess if I weren't so tired I'd of been a little more upset about being at the prison, at night, with a storm coming in, but the only thing really concerning me was where I was going to fill my tanker sized coffee cup before I passed out. Right then I was about twenty hours short on sleep for the week, so I tried to keep awake by watching the entrance exam for the prison. In front of us was a laundry truck being searched while the driver was emptying out his pockets inside the security booth. One guard was walking the edge of the truck with a mirror suspended on a long pole, scanning the undercarriage for weapons, drugs or unwanted passengers, while a second guard was itemizing the contents of the cab and checking his count against the list on his clipboard. I knew exactly what we were in for, so I figured maybe I



could take a nap while they counted the eleventeen hundred odd tools I had rolling around in the bins of my service truck.

"Man, they take this shit serious," Rick said, digging into the pound bag of M&M's he kept as a co-pilot on the road, and watching the driver replace his wallet and leave the security booth.

"Well, after last month I guess so. A prisoner got killed in a fight down here with a t-wrench some contractor left. They knew it was missing, searched every cell but they didn't find it till some guy planted it in another guy's lung." Truth, too, but I figured I should quit while Rick was still with me. He was starting to crack his knuckles, a sure sign he was getting nervous, and a sure way to irritate the hell out of me. I took the last swig of my coffee, dying for a cigarette and hoping the caffeine would kick in soon. The guard was waving us into what they affectionately called the cage just as the laundry truck pulled past us. The driver leaned out his window, eyed up my truck and laughed, "Good luck, pal."

"Thanks man," I said, pulling past the gate and rolling down the window for the guard who came over with his clipboard. The cage was about fifteen feet high, completely enclosed — top, too — with a chain link fence. On our left was the guard station, a long, low brick building with bullet proof glass looking out into the cage. Most of the guards were sitting around, patronizing the snack machines, and looking generally useless. On our other side was nothing but concrete, but if you look up you got a great view of the three guys in the gun tower with their shot guns trained on you. Before the guard could speak the gate slammed shut behind us and Rick and I both just about jumped out of our skins because it sounded like a basketball slammed against the chain link fence right next to our heads.

"Evenin' sir, state your name and business please," the guard mumbled, obviously having built up a tolerance to the noise of the cage. His gut was pushing against the buttons on his uniform, and I was thinking I hope he doesn't have to apprehend any quick-moving criminals, because he wouldn't have a Honda's chance at a Harley convention of catching any. "Jeff," I said, "L&S Diesel. We're here to fix the generator. Supposed

to meet the electrical engineer and the Warden."

"Oh, you guys. What took you so damn long? Warden's been checking in every five minutes looking for you."

That's gratitude for you — Friday night, stuck in traffic, not even on call, and I get this raft of shit from a police academy reject. My patience was wearing thin. "Well, Sir, it's rush hour on a Friday. Traffic was backed up from here to the hinges of Hell. We got here fast as we could."

"Hold on a minute here, son." He fiddled with his radio, got the warden and told him we were here. Son. Damn, that pissed me off. Thirty-four, a beard, a few crow's feet I'm right proud of and he calls me son. You got to love what a badge can do for a man, or to him, in this case.

"Listen here, boy," he said, looking around for anybody waiting outside the cage, "this did not happen. Warden says he needed you a half hour ago. You got any drugs, explosives, or weapons on your person?"

Boy .....this guy was definitely pushing his luck. "No sir, nothing on my person," I answered, gritting my teeth while Rick nodded in his agreement.

"All right, get your ass in there. There's an Administrative Building to your left. Courtyard, E Wing. Can't miss it. Lee and the Warden are waiting in the office." He pointed past the first gun tower. "Straight through the gate and a hard left. Hope you work right fast, son." He glanced at the gathering clouds and hitched his pants around what used to be his waist.

"Fast as we can without getting fried....son." Okay, I can be an asshole when I want to, and I'm pretty good at it, but this guy was asking for it. I tipped my L&S hat to him and tried real hard to wipe the smirk off my face. As we pulled out of the cage and through the main entrance, the gate slammed shut behind us and there was no doubt we were on the inside looking out.

"That was what they call maximum security?" Rick asked, looking back toward the guards milling around the cage. "I thought we were going to get the third degree."

"No, that was maximum security scared shitless that their backup generator isn't going to be able to back

them up," I said, thinking of a hundred and one interesting ways to get killed by a sufficiently armed convict. "They must want us in here real bad, 'cause you know that should have never happened."

"I heard that," Rick grumbled, looking around like this was the last place he wanted to be right then. This wasn't exactly my first choice for Friday night either, but the responsibilities that came with this job didn't always fit into 9 to 5. Of course, wives didn't always understand that, and most of the guys at the shop had found out the hard way, including me. I needed the challenge I got here, though, guess now I was almost addicted to it. Always under the gun, either on a Coast Guard ship, an Amtrak train, or a quarry crane, there was a rush that went with the emergencies we got thrown into.

When we pulled up Lee, the electrical engineer, was busy pacing around outside the Administrative building. "Bout time, you sorry excuse for an emergency service. What the hell did you do, stop for a little dinner and dancing on the way down here?"

I couldn't decide if he was looking angry or scared. "Well Lee, what's it been, about two weeks since we worked on the last piece of shit you guys busted? I figured you wouldn't want to see me so soon."

"Yeah, well, this is not a clogged fuel filter. This generator is dead." Lee was a tall guy, black hair with a lot of gray creeping in, and he looked a lot like Ward Cleaver in overalls. When he got fired up he turned bright red and all I could do was laugh, which didn't help matters any. But Lee wasn't my main concern. The warden, a real big irate looking black guy in a suit and tie, was stomping down the stairs and taking up more of my attention.

"If you two are through with the cordialities, maybe we can take a look at this generator. I got a prison to run here, you know." He had a permanent scowl and looked about two years overdue for a vacation. Definitely not someone you want to tangle with, so, of course, I couldn't resist. I mean, he didn't have to get in my face when I was here to help him.

"From what I heard, you're going to be running a convict roundup if we don't get you some backup power.

I thought you'd be real glad to see us."

"Real glad," he growled, "But your goddamn Union, foul mouthed attitude I can do without."

"If I were Union, I'd be busy holding down a bar stool and you'd be sweating it out alone ..... Sir."

I knew I was getting in too deep, but I had never been known for thinking before speaking. This guy was pissing me off. But, I figured this was a bad time to be making enemies, so I tried to smooth things over a little. "Regardless, I'm here to help you out. Lee and I were just reminiscing."

The warden put a little more effort into his scowl. "You're lucky I'm too busy to get into it right now, pal." Loosening his tie, he stalked off, not stopping to check if we were following him. I was counting off the reasons why I shouldn't just slug him, when Rick shot me a look like - don't even think about it. I took a deep breath and we followed Lee and the warden into E-Wing. Just before the main entrance we stopped and rang the bell to the gate, and waited while Barney Fife's twin took out this big old skeleton key about the size of my fist to let us in. Through the gate, we walked up to a door that looked a lot like it should be on the front of the Adams Family's house. All I could think was - If Lurch answers the door I'm out of here, job or no job. We went down a long corridor and out into the courtyard. Once we were outside, the big steel double doors slammed shut behind us and we were completely enclosed by E-Wing's four corridors. All around us barred windows looked out onto this ten by ten patch of grass with nothing but a big gray hunk of steel for landscaping. It took me about ten minutes to look into the jungle of wires and the main engine to diagnose the problem. Twelve years on every kind of engine you can think of had made me pretty fast and pretty damn good at what I did, and as I saw the hole in the side of the engine block, I knew this was going to be one hell of a night.

"You're right, Lee. DOA - Dead on her ass. You know, maybe you should put your maintenance people in charge of executions. They're so damned efficient." I was getting tired of coming in here to clean up after the incompetent bastards that were home with their families not giving a damn about what happened once they



punched out while I was stuck here — on salary, mind you, we don't get overtime pay — trying to fix some catastrophe basic maintenance procedures could have prevented. I was hot, and I really didn't mean to take the whole thing out on Lee, so I took a deep breath and switched to my most professional demeanor.

"Crankshaft's busted," I said, shaking my head over the tangle of fried wires I had pulled out to get to the engine, "There is not a thing you can do. Money'd be better spent to get a whole new generator than to replace the engine in this dinosaur." I hated to break it to them, and I hated even worse that I couldn't fix the thing, mostly because this was going to be an all-nighter getting a rental in here to back them up. Audrey had a 9 o'clock soccer game tomorrow morning, and it was looking like I wasn't going to be there.

"Nothing?" the warden asked, looking at me like I was the dumb son of a bitch who had broken the thing.

"Nada. What's this hooked up to?" I figured since they had three or four generators, there was a shot that maybe this one was wired to the cafeteria or the laundry room or something insignificant like that, maybe the warden's personal entertainment center.

"The entire E-Wing. Both corridors. The main lock down. Any more questions?"

"None except how fast can you get a P. O.?" This was getting serious. Rick looked at me like - this can't get any worse, right? I looked back at him just as I felt the first couple of drops of rain and thought, somebody tell me that's a bird going over. The warden glanced up at the gray and black clouds cruising in from the West and bearing down pretty fast, then he looked back at me.

"Got the scenario now? We got a bad storm coming through here. Get your guys on the job and don't worry about the Purchase Order. I'll have one by the time you bring the rental in here."

I studied him real hard, weighing his situation against mine. If I brought a rental in here with no P.O. and the warden's bureaucratic tap dance didn't work, the bill was coming out of my paycheck - if I still had a job. "I can't do that and you know it," I said, "We've been screwed on this before. No P.O. no go. I'm sorry, I can't." I didn't want to let him down but I wasn't putting my ass

on a 7,000 dollar line. No way, for nobody. I was going to put Audrey through the best college in the country so that she wouldn't have to put up with this kind of crap, and I wasn't risking my paycheck for any reason. Thunder growled off in the distance and the sky was getting dark so they threw the flood lights on in the courtyard. The warden's radio spat and crackled out something about a disturbance in the building to our right, and he swore a blue streak I had to admire. He ran his hand through the remainder of his hair and squeezed his eyes tight.

"Look, I'll get the money if I have to pay for it myself," he grumbled. There was something in his voice, maybe in the way he looked about ten years older than when we had walked in, that much as I didn't like the guy, I believed he wouldn't screw me on this one. Still, this was a field decision and either way I went, I was probably going to lose. Al would fire me if I went ahead without a P.O., but then again he'd fire me if I didn't get them a backup. I glanced up at the clouds that looked about ready to break, then over at the shadows of prisoners pacing back and forth behind the bars like animals in a zoo.

"God bless it," I sighed, shaking my head, "All right, but I'm really taking a chance here. We got to get you wired to the rental. Seems your government engineers built this building around the generator, so that just in case it goes down, you'll need the mother of all cranes to get it out. We don't have that kind of time for that and I'd have to guess you don't want me running cable through the main doors and leaving 'em open for a day or two. The only other way to go is up." I squinted through the drizzle at the top of E-Wing. "Can you get me up on that roof?"

"Whatever you have to do. I can get you clearance. I can get you anything you need." Anything I need? How about a life, I thought, can he get me one of those? The warden shot a look at Lee, who was chewing on his lip and contemplating the guts of the generator. "Lee, don't let smart ass and his buddy here out of your sight."

The three of us watched the Warden stomp off to tend to his disturbance and kiss ass for a P.O. "Who pissed in his Wheaties this morning?" I asked Lee,

hoping to lighten things up a little. Somebody had to. Lee sighed and shook his head. "That's just his usual congenial self. What part of the roof do you want?"

"No part," Rick piped up, looking like he was shocked I had even considered the idea, "I don't do roofs."

"You do now," I said, giving him a friendly push toward the building.

"Hold up, now." Lee was jogging to keep up with us. "We can't just go strolling around on the top of building here. I got to get clearance."

"Well, do your thing," I said, not slowing up. When there was a job to do, I wanted to get it done and I figured Lee could walk and talk at the same time. We made our way through the corridors of the E-Wing while Lee got on his radio. "Gun Tower one, report please." The radio hissed and spat before the voice came over.

"Gun Tower one, reporting."

"I've got two contractors and a supervisor on E-Wing roof, east side. Repeat, please."

"Gun Tower one - two contractors and a supervisor on E-Wing roof, east side, confirmed."

"Gun Tower two, repeat and confirm please."

"Gun Tower two - two contractors and a supervisor on E-Wing roof, east side, confirmed."

Lee was still calling into the towers when Rick, who had been busy peering past the main corridor and down the halls that were made up of long lines of cells, started paying attention to the security process. "Talk about your formalities. Can't he just call to all of them once?"

"Sure, he could. One of them could hear wrong, too. If the gun towers don't think we should be up there they're going to shoot first and worry about who it was later."

Rick's eyes got about the size of the hubcaps on my truck. "You sure they all heard right?"

"Not my job. Ask Lee."

We got to the end of the east corridor of E-Wing and climbed up the steel staircase to the roof. By the time we got up there I was convinced I needed a new job. From where we stood, we had a bird's eye view of the dead hunk of steel in the middle of the courtyard, about a hundred feet from the roof, and it was pretty clear there was absolutely no other way to wire them back up than

to pull cable from the other side of the building up over the roof. That was if we could get the flatbed towing the rental generator onto the prison grounds. Right behind E-Wing and directly below us was an old maintenance gate that looked big enough to fit the truck through, but it was also two days older than God, had a coating of vines about a foot deep, and was planted smack in the middle of a mud farm because of all the rain we'd been having. But, that was our only shot at getting a working generator in close enough, so it was a plan. After we climbed down off the roof, Lee wandered off to break the news to the Warden, and Rick and I walked over to my truck to call in the flatbed driver. Halfway across the parking lot, Rick just cracked.

"You aren't serious, right? I mean, you're whacked if you think we're going to pull half a ton of cable over that roof. That's two stories. Count 'em, two!" He pointed toward the roof, evidently waiting for the height of the building to hit me, then I'd suddenly change my mind, go home, prop my feet up and watch reruns of MASH. "Not to mention a hundred feet across the roof and another hundred across the yard," he continued, his first attempt to shake me was failing, "That's if we can even get those gates open. Last time those things were used, Colonel Sanders was a Lieutenant. You're a fry short of a happy meal, man, you've lost it." Rick was rambling, the way he always did when he got all worked up. When he finally realized I wasn't changing my mind he shut up, stuffed his hands in his pockets and shook his head.

"You've always known I needed a check up from the neck up," I took my hat, pulled my comb from my back pocket, ran it through my hair which was steadily working past my shoulders. "All I know is, we got to get this done."

Rick stopped walking and gawked at me. "On our time, all we have to do is pay taxes and die. Personally I'd rather not do either of them tonight. I'm not on call and by my watch, this is my time. Tell the Warden we'll have a crew by morning."

"Haven't you figured it out by now? Al's time is Monday through Monday." I wasn't going to let Rick cut out on me now, and I had to let him know how it was.



"Look, we're here. I'm not taking the chance on this place going down. We got a storm coming though and if I can't get a crew, I'll pull the damn cable myself."

"Jeff, you need a reality check. You need to chill. You're asking me to make like a lightning rod on a roof or be a pin cushion for some pissed off convict whose lawyer may have looked kind of like you. You're just plain asking for it, man." He looked at me from under the brim of his crumpled L&S Diesel hat, scrunching up his face and trying to figure me. Finally he came up with his verdict. "You are not normal."

"I never claimed to be normal." I was starting to feel the past couple of days catching up to me then, and I wasn't in the mood to argue. "Look, this job is just about all I have left in life, and I'm not going to screw it up. Just relax and eat your M&M's."

We got in the truck and I paged PC from the truck phone, because he, much like me, didn't have a life and I knew he was the only one in my crew who would call back on a Friday night. Good old Pork Chop, he'd always call back unless you caught him at dinner. After I made sure PC could get the 2500 pounds of cable up on the flatbed with the fork lift, I pulled my hat down over my eyes and tried to get some sleep. I wasn't going to get into it with Rick right then. When I get tired, my defenses start breaking down. I mean, how do you defend something you love but you downright hate, that eats away at you like this goddamn job. I couldn't work on cars in some hick town gas station. The engines I worked on were generally bigger than cars, and I got called in for emergency jobs four or five states away because I knew my shit. In fact, I had just gotten another job offer from a trucking company I did moonlighting for. Better pay, less hours, even overtime pay. Trouble was, I'd just be doing engine work, nothing like the emergency calls I was used to. I know what Heather would say, that I didn't know when to call it quits. Maybe she was right, but I just didn't want to take a chance on another job. At that point, L&S was about the only thing that was really stable in my life.

I woke up from my nap ten minutes later when Lee and the warden came over to tell us they had gotten the go-ahead for our plan. The warden was starting to look

a little less stressed, at least the vein in his temple wasn't pumping anymore. I figured this was a good time to tell him we were never going to get the generator wired without some more man power, since we had about 2500 pounds of cable to pull.

"Manpower?" He tilted his head toward the cell blocks: "We got men here with nothing but time. I'm sure I can convince them that they'd be glad to help you. What'd you need?" Loaded question. A life, a vacation, a raise, definitely a cigarette..... but I decided to keep my professional demeanor with this guy, who was far from my biggest fan. "I already have one guy coming in too off load the flatbed. I need another to help with that, four more to hump it up on the roof."

"Not a problem. I'll have some guys sent out to you."

Walking off toward the administration building, he left Lee, Rick and me to wait it out in the drizzle that was just starting working up to a decent rain. I told Rick to start getting PC checked in at the cage to save us some time. He grumbled something about not having eaten supper yet so Lee took him over to security with the promise of going to the cafeteria afterwards. Meanwhile, I was about ready to pass out. I stretched out in the front seat and was just about unconscious when I heard the rain start pelting the roof of the truck which wasn't so bad because the rain would wash the sweat off. It was the thunder that worried me, though, because a roof is not the best place to be in a lightning storm.

I sat up to see how the sky was looking just as the double doors swung open. Light flooded the parking lot, then it took me a minute to make out what all of a sudden blocked the doorway. It was actually a man shouldering through the door jams, and my next thought was, Good God, what did they convict Paul Bunyan for? This guy was huge, I mean, If you want to talk about the genetic pool, he was definitely swimming in the deep end. His bicep was about the size of my head, and when he walked out of the building I had to wonder why he didn't just pick up his guard and toss him into the next county. The guard left his charge standing under the awning and walked over to me.

"I take it you're the contractor who needs help?"

"Yes sir," I said pushing up the brim of my hat, "I



definitely need help."

"Good, I got four more coming down in a little while."

"Thank you, kindly." The guard went back to get the rest of his crew and I sat there just staring at the prisoner he had left behind. Funny how they'd take a half hour to search a laundry truck, but they leave a prisoner standing not three feet from me. Then again, the only guns were up in the gun towers, so the guards were useless as sliding glass doors on a submarine. No wonder they couldn't get good help around here. My truck wasn't three feet from the awning, so the prisoner nodded and stepped toward me. "Guard said I'm supposed to be helping you. What'd you have in mind?"

"Well, got some cable to pull up over that roof there."

Squinting up at the roof he said, "No problem." He nodded and stepped back, like it wasn't his place to be talking to me. Somehow, I didn't think the cable would be a problem for him. The guy could probably toss me and my truck up on the roof, but he didn't seem like the type to throw his weight around. He was just standing there with his arms crossed in front of his chest—which was about three feet across — getting rained on, his t-shirt looking like it could double for a car cover. He didn't make another move, didn't say another word. Now me, I've always been the talkative type. We'd been on a lot of jobs where they bring in grunt labor to help us. I would always bullshit with them, just to be friendly. I figured, what could happen? At least with someone to talk to I'd stay awake.

"Why don't you go ahead and pull some truck up under you, pal? Tad bit drier in here."

He looked at me for a second, like he wasn't sure why I was asking. Finally he said, "Don't mind if I do." He came around to the other side and when he passed in front of the headlights and all I could think was hope the truck holds up under his weight. He was nothing but solid muscle. When he got in I could see his face pretty well. He couldn't have been over twenty-five or twenty-six, real good looking kid, sandy blonde, clean cut, clean shaven.

"Thanks a lot, man." He put out his hand, which was as calloused as mine. I chalked that up to the lifting

he must be doing.

"No problem. I'm Jeff." His grip turned out to be strong but not the crunch I had expected.

"Mark. Good to meet you."

"Same." And I really was glad to have someone to talk to besides Rick and the warden. Both of them were starting to wear on the one nerve I had left. There wasn't much that leaped right out as conversation, so I started with the obvious. "You ever pull cable?"

He shook his head, occasionally glancing toward the double doors where he had been standing. "Laid some underground cable. Don't know if that's the same or not. I worked for a contractor up in Columbia for almost a year."

"Right church, wrong pew. This cable's just as heavy, though. Who'd you work for in Columbia?"

"Henkles and McCoy. We did a lot of office buildings." He cocked his head to the side and knotted up his brow like an old man trying to remember the details of a story from a long time ago. "Town was starting to build up and we had more work than we knew what to do with. In fact, we put bids on that Marley Station place they were going to build in Glen Burnie. Did they ever finish that?"

"Finish it?" He floored me with that one. Marley Station had been one of the biggest malls in Maryland for over six years now and he was talking about just putting in bids? This guy had been on the inside for a while.

"Yeah, it's pretty well finished." I paused, groping for something to say. "Real big place, beautiful too. You ought to go see it when you get outta here."

Mark's voice dropped a couple octaves deeper and he didn't look right at me when he said, "I'm not getting out of here." His hands were resting on his knees and he was looking down at the black prison issue shoes that had to be a size thirteen. I was just then aware that this wasn't some guy they sent down from maintenance to work with us on a job. He was in here for a reason. What was I thinking? For Christ sake, I was the one who had told Rick when we pulled in - Lifers - nobody you'd want to meet in a dark alley, probably nobody you'd want to sit in a truck with. But there was nothing about Mark

that if I met him on the outside I'd peg him for a criminal. He was super polite, nice to meet you, and all. It was like, to make up for all that muscle, he made a point of being quiet, standing with his arms crossed, staying in the shadows like he didn't really want to be noticed or single out. Meanwhile, I had just managed to make a royal ass of myself. I forgot, I just flat out forgot.

"I'm sorry, man. I really didn't mean to say anything that would...."

"Hey, don't sweat it." He looked up at me and smiled like he was glad we had gotten the obvious out and done with. "If you go trying to think about everything you say like that we'll never get anything said." The cars passing on the road outside the prison caught his attention and he was quiet for a minute. Finally he said, "You know, I've been in here for eight years, and it's like the world just freezes like you remember it. You forget everything's all going on out there." He turned to look at me, and I could only see half his face because of the shadows. "I used to hunt in those woods with my dad, every Thanksgiving, right there where they wanted to clear for the mall."

I made sure I kept up his gaze. "No woods there anymore. Whole area is pretty built up now. Columbia too, nothing but office buildings and yuppie complexes."

"Figures. We used to bow hunt back there. Beautiful land."

Eying up the size of his biceps, I couldn't resist saying something. "I bet you don't have any problems drawing back a compound bow." He laughed and looked down at his arm that was bulging against the seams of his t-shirt. "Well, I can lift a pound or two. But there isn't much to do around here but lift. Works out the frustration."

The doors creaked open in front of us and four more guys walked out with the guard. Three of them didn't look much older than Mark, but by their permanent scowls and the three inch scar across the one guy's face they looked downright nasty. They were lean, but built up like they lifted, and one guy curled up his lip in almost a snarl when he asked the guard, "What the hell we doing here?" The last prisoner looked to be about 40, rode hard and put up wet. Standing a little away from

the other three, his mouth was pressed into a thin line, his hands at his sides rolling into fists, flattening, then rolling back into fists. He fit more the role of a hardened criminal than Mark did, more like a guy I wouldn't trust as far as I could throw. Not that I could have thrown Mark very far, or even picked him up for that matter, but I pretty much liked him. What I didn't like was the thunder rolling around sounding like it was just getting warmed up.

Mark looked up at the other prisoners. "That's the rest of the crew. I better get over there."

"No, stay here where it's dry. Rentalk won't be here for a couple more minutes yet, and there's no use getting a head start on getting rained on. Greaseman show's coming on in a few minutes."

"Greaseman? I used to listen to him every night. I thought they'd have kicked him off the air waves by now."

He shot another glance toward the guard, who didn't seem too worried by the absence of a prisoner. Odds were, he hadn't even noticed. "Jeff, I'd like to stay, man, but it's probably not a good idea to be in here. I better go stand with the other guys where the guard can keep an eye on me."

"Well, I guess I'll see you enough up on the roof."

"Yeah, man. Thanks for the sit down."

We shook hands again before he left. As Mark walked over to join his crew, I could see PC coming through the cage with the flatbed full of cable and towing the rental so I figured I'd better get myself in gear and do something useful. When he drove up, I filled him in on the grand scheme to get this place wired up and thanked him for the foot long barker and jumbo coffee he had brought me from 7-11. Pork Chop knew me and he knew I wouldn't have gotten around to eating yet. Not that a chili dog was going to do anything but kick up my ulcer, but I guess I wasn't quite through making myself suffer yet. We were crowding time, so when Lee and Rick came back we rounded up the prisoners and started to get set up for work. Lee called in a guard to escort us to the roof, and this guy looked too much like Rosco P. Coltraine from the Dukes of Hazard, but with a bigger beer gut and about ten years past his retirement. The

guard went through the whole fun tower routine again, this time with two contractors, one guard, and four prisoners, repeat and confirm towers one through four.

After a few tries and some assurances from me that he couldn't drive a hot nail through a snow bank, PC finally managed to fit the flatbed, generator in tow, through the rusted old maintenance gate and backed up to the building. PC and the remaining prisoner started by knotting a rope around one end of the cable and throwing the other end up to us while a guard sat there and watched them work. On the roof, we teamed up, two at a time pulling while the others rested. After about two hours of hauling hundred and fifty, two hundred pounds of cable at a time straight up onto the roof, we were all ready to fall over soaking wet, and still sweating to death because the July heat wasn't going to let up just for a thunderstorm. I had some quality pain working in the knee I had busted up last year—busted three times because I kept going back to work before it had healed, but who's really counting—and I was close to admitting that I might be dragging a little. We had a couple of good lightning strikes off to the east and the best part of the storm looked like it was yet to come. With all the work, Mark and I didn't have time to talk much, but I was glad he was on my team. The guy didn't quit, and he pulled like an elephant, unlike the other three 'volunteers', who grumbled and complained the whole time. They weren't exactly the kind of guys you wanted to piss off too bad, so we kept our mouths shut and put up with them. The other thing holding us up was PC and his damned knots on the end of the cable that we couldn't get untied. Of course, he wasn't real patient with us either.

"What the hell are you doing up there? I want to get home before tomorrow, you know!" He was shouting up at me from the flatbed, looking ridiculous in the rain gear we had all put on because we finally got sick of being drenched.

"Don't count on it....and if you would quit tying your damn girl scout knots maybe I could get the rope back down to you," I shouted through the rain, wrestling with another impossible knot.

"Well, pulling a rope straight up from a roof in the

rain will tend to tightened a knot. Deal with it."

"Thanks a heap, asshole." I could always count on Pork Chop for support. I threw back the hood that was blocking my light and laid into the knot again while the rain flattened my hair down into my eyes. By then, I was cursing that granny-knot and its whole knot family. I was crowding thirty hours without sleep and didn't have much left to give. My vote was for the most efficient way to get something done and get some sleep. I yanked at the rope a few more times, then got down on one knee — the one that was left — and started giving it hell. The rain was beatin' on us pretty good, not a downpour but enough to soak you through. The lightning kept getting closer, and I couldn't get a decent grip on the rope, so I took the next logical step. Without even thinking what I was doing, I reached under my rain gear, unsnapped my Buck knife and flipped out the blade. The second the blade clicked, everyone just froze. Even in the rain, everybody on that roof could hear the sound of a six inch Buck locking in, and it meant different things to different people. It meant I was dead, I knew that much without thinking.

You dumb son of a bitch, I thought, you just used up the last of your nine lives. I mean, I had been teetering on the edge of a hundred foot drop into a quarry when a dump truck almost flipped, my knee exploded when I was caught under a generator, and I've almost been crushed by a crane, but this time, I was sure my number was up. Every other time, there had been machinery failure or an operator error. This time I was the operator and this was my error. I had screwed up royally and it looked like it was time to pay the price. I was about to become one of those statistics about guys who take cold medicine or go to work drunk or drowsy so they fall off a sky scraper or get caught in machinery. At least I would be one of the most original — Contractor bludgeoned and kidnapped by four convicts who later stab him repeatedly and toss his remains in a ditch somewhere off 95. Maybe I'd get a movie of the week.

The two younger prisoners looked up at the sound of the knife and dropped the cable they were pulling. Rick was standing next to the guard and the older prisoner, who quickly stepped out of the guard's reach

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and moved toward me. The younger guys assessed the situation and moved toward the guard, knowing that he didn't have a gun or a chance against both of them. They didn't move quickly, but were very deliberate and calculated. If the older prisoner could get to me before the gun towers noticed anything unusual, they would have a weapon, at least one hostage, and a perfect ticket out of there. What did they have to lose? This was probably the only chance anyone of them would ever have of getting through those gates. I looked down hoping to find some way to ditch the knife. Right below me, PC, the other prisoner, and the guard were standing waiting for the rope to come back down, completely unaware of what was going on up here. If I tossed the knife, odds were the prisoner would get to it before PC and the guard. There was no way I could move fast enough to get to the ladder, or to the other side of the roof to toss the knife in the courtyard. The older prisoner was closer, fists clenched like two big ol'boulders. From where I was kneeling on the edge of the roof, I could see the younger prisoners moving in on the guard who was backing away. He was yelling something at me as he stepped back.

"Drop it, son, goddamn it — throw it!"

Of course, he forgot to mention exactly where I should throw it. The older prisoner was only a few steps away from me, his eyes glued to the knife. Even though I could run faster scared than he could angry, my knee had me convinced I didn't even have a long shot of standing up fast, much less running. Besides, Mark was somewhere close and I wasn't sure he could pass up such a good opportunity. There wasn't much I could do and this was about the closest I'd ever been to panicking on the job.

I thought about Audrey, who when I worked late used to stay up until nine or ten, until Daddy came home, and even if I had to leave at five the next morning she'd wake up and wave out the window to me. She'd been through enough with me not being home now and being eight she was old enough to understand why. But, she knew Daddy was always there on Saturdays, and if I had anything to stay alive for, it was her. Kneeling, absolutely defenseless, I started wondering how much

of it would hurt if I jumped right then. I was about to start praying when I noticed the shadow from something very large spreading in from of me. Perfect, I thought, even if the gun tower has been noticed, I'm in between the two main targets. I looked up at Mark who was hulking over me, his hands fisted at his sides. He could have knocked me flat as soon as looked at me. The older prisoner took another step and I knew he could reach me from where he stood. Mark inched forward and I could hear his breath over the rain. They stood over me for a moment, and I watched the other prisoner's mouth tighten, flatten into a snarl, his fist cocked slightly not a foot from my face.

You've done it now, asshole, was all I could think, you have done it now.

The prisoner crouched, his eyes fixing first on me, then on the knife. I took the only chance I had and stood as fast as I could. I felt more than saw him lunge at me, and leaning to the side to avoid him my leg buckled and I went down on my bad knee. Pain shot up my back and flinching I dropped the knife. It tumbled handle over blade across the slick surface of the roof. Groaning and trying to move, I squinted up to see Rick hauling ass down the ladder like one of those cartoon characters who didn't have to deal with gravity. The other prisoners saw the knife sliding across the roof, now fair game, and took their chance at the guard who stopped backing up and turned to follow the hot trail Rick had burned down the ladder. I struggled to stand, expecting to feel a blade at my back. Turning, I saw Mark standing between my knife and the prisoner who had tried to jump me. He kicked the Buck back towards me, the wooden handle stopping with a thump against my steel-tipped boot.

"Put your knife away."

I looked up at Mark in disbelief. He stood rigid, his arms crossed, facing off with the other prisoner. He had every chance in the world to get on the right side of those gates, to get out of the hell he was living. I knew he had nothing to lose and I couldn't move, just couldn't. Without taking his eyes off the other prisoner, Mark said, "If I'd have wanted your knife, I'd have taken it while we were sitting in the truck. Put it away and do your work. These guys won't bother you any."

The younger two prisoners had moved back and stood near the ladder. The older man took a few steps back, his eyes still fixed on my knife as if he would try getting through Mark if he had half a chance. I reached down, unlocked the blade, and snapped the buck back into its sheath on my belt. One of the guards who had been left to watch the gate was just scaling the ladder, his radio in hand, followed by PC, who had more heart than he had brains. From where we were on the roof I could see the Warden storming across the courtyard, gesturing wildly toward the roof, his tie trailing loosely from his neck. My knees were shaking and I hadn't really figured out that I wasn't dead, but I was glad that what ever happened hadn't hurt too bad.

When everything quieted down, Rick, PC and I finished pulling what little cable was left and hooked up the generator. I was working in a kind of daze, not even feeling my knee anymore, just doing what had to be done. I couldn't keep my mind off what had happened, and I kept hearing my knife locking in, seeing Mark standing over me in the rain. I wasn't really sure how to thank him, I mean, how do you say, "Hey, thanks for not killing me, man. That was mighty nice of you." Mark had just stood there like nothing had happened. Last I saw him, he was walking in a line with the other

prisoners, flanked by three guards who were escorting them back to their cells. I never did ask him why he was there.

I know there was no excuse for getting on the roof with my knife. I could put it up to lack of sleep, fatigue, but the truth is--I just flat out forgot where I was. I was at work and that's all that was on my mind right then. Like I've always said, when a man makes a mistake like that, you can judge him by the quality of the lesson he's learned or the quality of his eulogy. Luckily, I got the lesson this time. It's something I think about driving past Marley Station on the way to the shop, thinking it's funny how the world passes Mark by because he's a prisoner of the state, and passing me by because I'm prisoner of a state of mind. It's something I think about on Friday nights, sitting at the bar across the river, out of the shop but still on call, and I think, I finally got that life I've been asking for, now what the hell am I going to do with it? I think about it when I pick up Audrey and she's at the window, 8:30 sharp every Saturday morning, and I think how some things aren't worth losing. I think about it when there's no workmen and it's just me, and I think how we don't always take the chances we're given.







## Dream #2

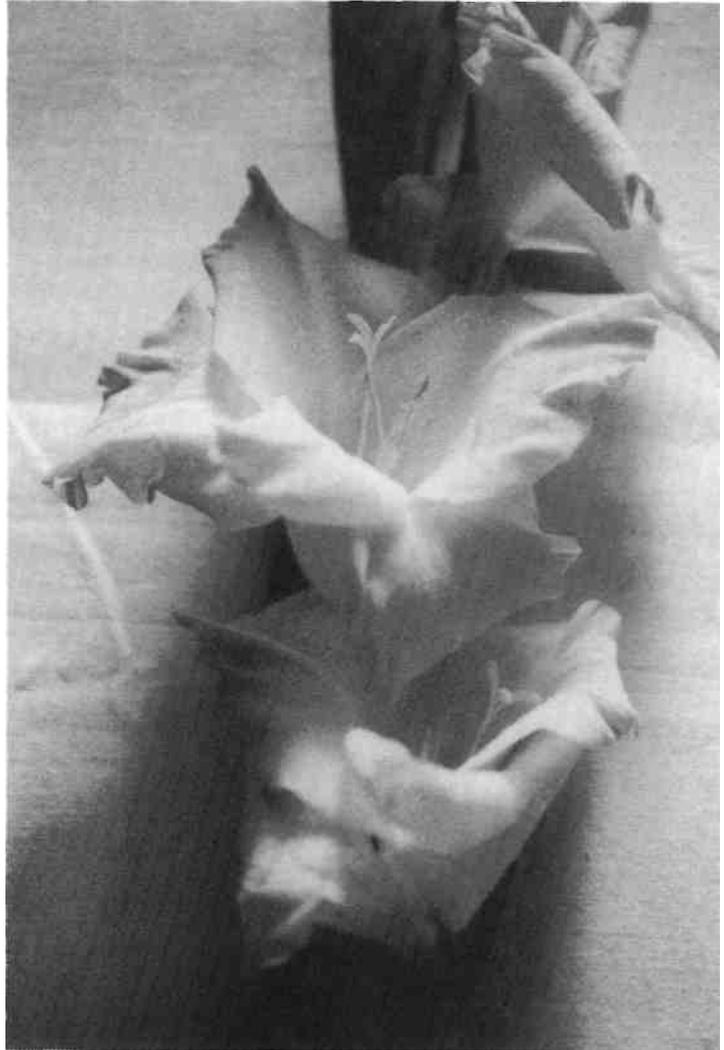
by Jen Brennan

Eileen sits  
on the edge  
of the steps  
in a black and white  
photograph  
I have taken  
that day —

white tank top,  
red mesh shorts,  
chin resting in hand,  
knees, slightly apart,  
feet, bare —

she looks far ahead,  
fades from color  
to black and white,  
grows smaller,  
curls up.

A paper cut-out  
now,  
she floats from  
the photograph  
and to the ground.



In memory of Eileen P. Hickey  
1973-1993





