ORACLE
FINE ARTS REVIEW

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EDITOR'S NOTE

When I imagined what *Oracle* 2017 would be, I saw a book brave enough to explore our deepest fears. I saw a book that featured all kinds of horror—anxieties stemming from sexuality, uncertainty, or even the contemporary "horror movie" jolt of adrenaline. I wanted this book to be a unique concentration of dark and dreary nightmares transformed into enlightening and beautiful ideas that spark change within ourselves in the process of artistry, and more importantly, inspire the same transformation in our readers.

You will notice on the side of each page, there is a note that pairs certain works with other work in the book. As we evaluated our content, we noticed that so much of the work spoke with other pieces. These works are, of course, strong on their own, but if you choose to read them along with their pairings, I think you'll see two different sides to what is being discussed. They might challenge each other, compliment each other, or be entirely different from each other but they create a conversation that we wanted to share with you.

What we have created with *Oracle* 2017 exceeds all of my expectations. Our contributors, both artists and writers, were generous enough to trust us with their most personal work, and to me, that means everything. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we've enjoyed making it.

Best,
Micaela Walley
Editor-in-Chief

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OCEAN FUGUE

TINA SCHUMANN

The memory is beginning to fade.

The repetitive replaying has lessened, psychic fracture

nearly healed. For many years if someone said fear

that California coastline would appear.

My father's wet chest, his arms clamped tight around my six-year-old body.

His final fed-up insistence that I stop fearing water.

I clung to his neck, screaming out in breathless bursts

as he walked us into the ocean. His forward gaze did not falter.

He did not whisper soothing words of reassurance, or try to make me laugh.

His clinched jaw, his silent exasperation

at my senseless dread ricocheted off the crescendo of white caps

rolling their way toward us.

TINA SCHUMANN | PAIRS WITH PAGE 88



MERMAID
PAIGE GARCIA
digital illustration

CARNIVAL GLASS

LAUREN JOHNSON

Doris stood on the side of State Road 50 and swatted mosquitoes with a fan made of palmetto fronds. “It’s as hot as the dickens,” she said. “I can’t wait to get back in that water.”

Polly held her finger to her mouth and whispered, “I think I hear one.”

Doris and Juanita heard nothing—not even the rustling breeze. Then an engine rumbled down the road. Juanita looked at Polly.

“Jeepers, you’re good at this,” she said.

Doris, Juanita and Polly grabbed hands, cut through the trees and ran out into the road as a red Buick convertible approached. Polly lifted her skirt above her thighs, and Juanita released a shrill whistle.

“Welcome to Weeki Wachee Springs,” they said, forming a blockade as the car slowed. “Home of the Only Live Mermaid Show on Earth!”

Victor held his foot over the gas. You could never be too sure out here on the backroads. He wasn’t sure he liked the looks of those girls; they had a curious way of smiling at him and eying his car, running their fingers over the chrome.

“Good afternoon, ladies, do you need a lift?” said the young man, idling his car.

“No silly, we’re mermaids,” said Doris.

“Mermaids? Well, you’re mighty far from the water,” he said.

“Why not at all,” said Juanita, pressing her elbows against the passenger side, offering a glimpse of her décolletage, “the freshwater springs are just up thattaway.”

“Say, you’re not from around here, are you?” said the sandy blonde, her southern drawl a purr.

Victor looked at them and felt self-conscious in his new summer clothing. He had gone shopping with his mother before moving to Florida, and she and the Sears salesmen had convinced him to buy a bright yellow suit and a collection of colorful silk ties. The jacket was draped across the passenger seat.

“No, as a matter of fact, I’m from Massachusetts,” he said. “My uncle owns the Citrus Experiment Station. I just moved down here to work for him.”

“You ought to be careful on these Florida backroads, sir,” said Doris.

LAUREN JOHNSON | PAIRS WITH PAGE 86

PAIRS WITH PAGE 86 | LAUREN JOHNSON

"There's more than just mermaids in these woods. They say, there's an old man out here who's half deer. He runs around at night looking for folks with broken down cars."

Juanita snorted and Polly swatted her sister on the back of her head.

"Oh, stop that, Doris." Polly said. "Please ignore my sister, she loves to make up these silly stories. The mermaid show is world-renowned. And, it's only a mile down the road."

He hesitated, then sighed and looked at his gold watch.

"I'm heading to Tampa," he said. Since he arrived in Florida, he had heard nothing but talk about the Cuban beauties on the coast. And now he had earned a little bit of spending money.

"I'm from Tampa," said the tallest one. She had a long torso and long black hair that clung to her bare shoulders. She was the prettiest of the three, Victor decided, and her accent was the least pronounced.

"It's just an hour and a half from here," she said. "You could come to our show then make it to Tampa just in time to catch the sunset."

"We have a gas station too," said Doris. "You don't want to drive to Tampa with a low tank. All these Florida highways were built over old pioneer and Indian gravesites. You don't want to run out of gas at night."

Polly kicked her in the shin.

"Well, I'm not afraid of deer men and ghosts," said Victor. "I'll go see your show."

The girls gave him the directions. In just a mile, he would see the signs for Weeki Wachee Springs. He'd have to be a fathead to miss it.

"Now Doris, why did you have to try to scare him?" said Juanita as they ran back down the dirt path.

"Because I didn't like the looks of him," she said.

Dry pine needles scratched at their thighs and calves. Overhead, a huge spider web glistened in the sunlight; the light shone on its black and red body like the paint on Victor's car.

"Would you look at her," said Juanita. "She's a beauty."

In 1948, a little girl could grow up to become a teacher or a nurse, but, if she was lucky enough to live in central Florida, she could become a mermaid. If a young lady was at least eighteen-years-old, strong minded and able-bodied, and, of course, a looker, she could perform at Weeki Wachee.

The springs used to be a dump. People threw out old refrigerators, tires and even trash here. But Mr. Newton, a former Navy-sailor, recognized the beauty of the springs, cleaned them up and created an underwater theater.

LAUREN JOHNSON | PAIRS WITH PAGE 86

Doris could see all the way through the water to the very bottom of the springs. Sometimes, there were turtles and fish. Growing up in Georgia, she and Polly used to swim in the lakes and rivers, so they weren't scared of a little current. She learned to let the water guide her, let it lead her somersaults and spins. It was hard at first, hard to surrender to the currents rather than kick against them. But in time, she learned to swim.

Juanita was just a little older than Doris, twenty-one or twenty-two, perhaps. Her job title was secretary but she was really an accountant and she kept those shows running year round. She was the most experienced mermaid, and when she performed solo acts, she wore a shimmering nylon tail. Why, she had the kind of golden tail Ann Blythe wore in *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*.

Doris and Polly were only summer acts so they didn't get tails. Doris swam with her legs intertwined, her feet spread out like a fin. She could hold her breath for just one minute before inhaling air from the long black tubes installed at the bottom of the springs.

It didn't matter who was watching Doris on the other side of the glass. She performed for herself.

In the water, she was no longer the young nursing student from Dahlonega. She was another woman—no, she wasn't quite woman. She was a being from the springs, something that had always lived there.

As Doris performed, she swam close to the glass, put her palms against it. How long could she hold her breath?

—

Victor saw the pastel sign rising over State Road 50.

Welcome to Weeki Wachee Springs, home of the world's only live mermaid show!

He pulled a comb out of his shirt pocket. The humidity hadn't gotten to his hair yet, and he slicked it back neat into place. He popped a couple of mints in his mouth, then turned to see if anyone was in the parking lot. He gave his armpits a sniff. Better dab on more cologne, he thought.

As he entered the park, he felt a crunch under foot; it went right through the soles of his leather shoes. When he lifted his foot, he saw a crushed roach, the wings still flickering. He hadn't gotten used to this yet, though he'd never admit it. He never wrote about this when he sent letters to his parents in Massachusetts. He didn't tell them about the cockroaches in his uncle's house, how he sometimes woke in the middle of the night and saw shadows crawling up the walls. He didn't tell them how he screamed the night he saw a spider dart across his pillow as he drifted off to sleep.

But that didn't compare to the heebie-jeebies the lizards gave him. Snakes with legs. There was one now: a big fat one, likely a male, sunning itself on the broad, waxy surface of an elephant leaf. He kneeled, and from the underside of the leaf,

flicked the lizard in the belly. It sailed off the leaf and into the bushes.

"Well, hi-de-ho."

Victor jumped and turned around. There was the brunette. The one that had been eyeing his car, running her fingers over the paint. The girl with the man in the woods with antlers that would come after him. She stood above him, her chin slightly tilted up, and with a smile that made him think she was judging him. She was rather unremarkable. She squatted next to him on the ground and he saw she was slightly cross-eyed. Somehow, that made her more attractive. She smelled like sweat and sunscreen, and the odor of decaying plant life rising from the ground. It was a pleasing smell—the minerals of the earth and sweet crush of leaves.

"Do you like lizards?" Doris asked.

His faced turned red, but she continued.

"Now, Juanita—you remember Juanita, don't you? The gorgeous dark-haired girl? Now, Juanita's a real nerd about critters. She could tell you the names of every living creature in this park."

The big brown lizard ran out from under the bushes and darted past Victor's shoe. He held his breath. If she could see how reptiles disgusted him, she kept it to herself. The brown lizard bobbed up and down. Then a translucent red flap extended through its neck and caught the sun's light.

"Jeepers!"

"That's called a dewlap," Doris said laughing. "It's for the sole purpose of attracting a mate."

The lizard bobbed up and down, its eyes flickering in its wedge-like skull. It had a confident, secure little face. A face that said yes, sir, I've been here since time immemorial. I belong here.

Doris stood up and brushed dirt from her thighs.

"See you at the show," she said.

—

Victor made his way to the limestone amphitheater and descended the steps. It was a dank cinema with a glass wall instead of a movie screen. There was a big, stone castle in the center of the water surrounded by alabaster seahorses. Sculpted seashells lined the floor.

The handful of families he saw walking along the boardwalk filled the theater. The mothers in breezy skirts and floppy hats took their children here to enjoy the fading days of summer. The mothers looked at him, realizing he was alone. No wife or girlfriend. 'This isn't one of those kinds of shows,' their eyes seemed to say. He turned his face away.

Strains of recorded music filled the theater. "The mermaids have traveled so far just to see you. For, they were lonely in the dark, cavernous halls of Atlantis: the only living mermaids on earth."

Behind the glass, the brunette lifted her arms and somersaulted through the water. From either side of her came a spray of bubbles as the two other girls joined her. The three formed a pinwheel, flipping over and under each other like an underwater Ferris wheel. How long could they go without surfacing for air? When the brunette brought a black tube to her mouth, Victor realized they were breathing underwater; the tubes connected to tanks of compressed air. A whole fifteen minutes slipped by and not once did the mermaids surface.

When the music reached its crescendo, the three mermaids sat next to each other in the reeds, waving goodbye. Tilt of the elbow, flick of the wrist.

—

Doris brought all her little trinkets to Florida: the amber deer, the carnival glass. Growing up, she had been poor but hadn't realized it. Her family had a farm with chickens and fresh eggs. After school, Doris and Polly stayed indoors and helped their mother with the mending.

One day, a fair came through town. It appeared in the night with a big tent, carousel and Ferris wheel.

It cost one nickel to enter the fair, and each person who paid the admission fee got a pretty piece of handmade glass. Carnival glass it was called, and it was cheap. But it was a lot for a poor family that couldn't afford to buy new plates and glassware. The woman at the gate took Doris' nickel and gave her an amber-colored deer in return.

In the night, Doris awoke. She wanted to join the ring of fire-breathing boys and dance with the snake charmers with gold coins at their hips. It didn't matter that she was only ten; she had seen plenty of children at the carnival. She snuck from the bed she shared with Polly and crept towards the door. The floor creaked beneath her and Polly sighed in her sleep. No one thought anything of her getting up in the middle of the night. When duty called, the commode was outside. She slipped on her cotton robe and stepped out into the cool night air. From the moon's position in the sky, she knew her family would be up soon. The carnival was five miles down the road, and she could reach it before dawn. She walked to the gate, careful not to disturb the dogs that guarded her house. Sheathed in darkness, from branches high above, an owl hooted into the void.

Everyone knew that in pitch black, a barn owl could sound like a person—especially to children's ears. But a small part of her was certain, even years later, the owl had spoken. She ran back across the moonlit field, toward her warm room, and snuggled down in the cotton blankets next to Polly.

After school that afternoon, Doris tread the familiar dirt path to the fairgrounds, her amber deer safe in her pack for good luck. But, when she got there, everything was gone. The track marks where the Ferris wheel once stood remained.

Doris rolled a cigarette made of Georgia tobacco, inhaled and blew smoke into

the air. The late afternoon sun was beginning to settle beneath the springs and she and Victor walked together along the dock. He was working up the courage to invite her to dinner in Tampa, to the little linguini with clams place by the sea.

The light made a silhouette of Victor's even profile and reluctant mouth. He looked so very much like her brother who had gone to war. Edward had been a couple of years older than she. He had turned eighteen just in time to join the Navy. How smart he looked in his sailor suit, so proud with the metal eagle pinned to his cap.

Edward sent her letters from island outposts in the Pacific. The last time she heard from him, he had written about the women who, goodness to gracious, had no sense of modesty. They walked about with breasts exposed as if that was nothing and long, black hair as pretty as the dickens that hung down their backs. The old women with lots of grandchildren had long breasts that hung past their waists. Honest to goodness, they could flop a boob right over their shoulder.

On May 11, 1945, two kamikaze pilots struck the USS Bunker Hill, and the letters stopped altogether. Doris believed, years later, that her brother was a castaway. He was out there, all right, on one of those islands with those nice women with long breasts. Doris just knew it. He would have a big dark beard and skin worn taught and brown by the sun.

Victor was too young to fight when the war began, so he watched his brothers parade into glory and wondered what a man could do if not fight for his country.

"A nice girl like you shouldn't smoke," he told Doris. "It's not becoming on you."

"Now listen, here," she said. "I want you to know that I'm a career girl and in two weeks' time, I'll pack up and go back to Dahlonega. Then, I'll go back to school."

"But I thought you were a mermaid."

"Only for the summer." She smiled and touched the tip of his nose. "So don't you go falling in love with me, you hear?"

She pursed her lips and blew three perfect smoke rings.

"Fall in love? You'd have to catch me first!" he said, and dove into the springs.

Cold water filled his leather shoes and flooded his nostrils. His eyes stung. The currents twisted him, turned him over, flipped him upside down in the dark water.

He thrashed towards the surface and reached up, thinking he would breach the air, but there was only more water above and below. He kicked off the shoes and the sports coat, shimmied out of his belt. Clothing was expensive—all of it—but more could be acquired. He propelled his body upwards and hit his forehead against the limestone castle.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 86 | LAUREN JOHNSON

Doris watched red tendrils bloom on the water's surface, red hibiscus petals floating in the current. At once, she dove under. When they surfaced, he wanted to kiss her, wanted to suck the oxygen from her throat. Instead, he let Polly and Juanita pull them both up onto the dock. He curled up in the mud.

—

He awoke in a twin bed, stripped and covered in piles of cotton blankets. There was a bandage wrapped tight about his forehead. For a spell, he thought he was in his own bed at his uncle's house. Then he switched on the lamp. From another room, a grandfather clock struck nine times, and laughter and the scent of tobacco filtered in from outside.

It hurt to stand, but he pulled himself up and leaned against the windowsill. There they were, the three of them, lolling in the grass just as they were when he met them. Doris sat straight up and looked back over her shoulder. Beneath the muted lamplight her profile cast strange shadows. He reached for a sheet to wrap around his waist as Doris waved at him. No, this girl wasn't a lost princess from Atlantis. She was of these woods, of these springs and marshes. She had every right to be here and she knew it. She was walking towards him, open-mouthed, moonlight on her little teeth, arms outstretched.

LAUREN JOHNSON | PAIRS WITH PAGE 86

MISSISSIPPI MANORS

MARIE DOYLE

Your mother didn't come to the wedding.
Something about too early,
my roots going brown
or maybe the little bump. I tried
to cover it with your old wrestling sweatshirt.
She hasn't come to the trailer either,
Vinyl cracking, weeds, I think the lock is broken,
cigarette smoke, paint peeling
Like the oranges you forgot to buy last week.

Again.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 52 | MARIE DOYLE

Your freckles scarred into his skin,
your hitchhiker thumbs, crooked,
and a liking for tomatoes.

But I'm not the kind of girl to make trouble.
My mama raised me right.

But you can't see peeling paint at midnight,
blurry vision won't notice those carpet stains.
The smell of shots is stronger than the smoke.
A pack of cigs is on the table. Your table,
just like your chair and your busted up
old TV and your couch and your Barney's sandpaper
tongue. He likes me better anyway.
This t-shirt is yours too, probably.
Holes in the hem, just like the ones in the back
window of your truck.

His face isn't even mine.

MARIE DOYLE | PAIRS WITH PAGE 52



MARBLES AND MIRRORS
PAIGE GARLAND
watercolor

IN KNOWLEDGE WHAT

MEREDITH TREDE

They want her boy to read.

She is reading as fast as she can.

Homer, Virgil, Thucydides, Anon
The Killing of Crazy Horse

to see into the spin of war
unravel the pull of peril

The Art of *War*
The Fog of
The Good
The Long
Undertones of

and Peace
Poems
time Practice
Poetry

The Oxford Book of
To End All *(s)*

MEREDITH TREDE | PAIRS WITH PAGE 83

SHARONS AND SHIT-STAINED WALLS

KARIE FUGETT

PAIRS WITH PAGE 80 | KARIE FUGETT

I'd totally spaced on the ticket, as if throwing it into the glove compartment then a year later throwing the court summons into the trash erased it and the fact that I had to deal with it from existence. In the back of the cruiser, hands cuffed, I cried into my infinity scarf like a bitch all the way to jail. When we arrived, the cop moved my cuffed hands to the front of my body and gave me a cigarette. He told me Escambia County was particularly rough, advising me to watch my ass. He obviously pitied me.

Inside, the guard, or whatever she was, handed me a threadbare towel and bar of thin, waxy soap. She dropped a pair of rubber shower shoes on the floor in front of me and crossed her arms, waiting for me to strip. She handed me a couple of mesh bags. "Underwear goes in here, everything else goes in here." Apparently, everyone admitted had to be sprayed with lice spray before joining general population. Mortified, I hesitated, staring at the drain and holding the towel in front of me as if I were already nude. The bottom of the shower was caked in what I can only guess was green mold, the drain clogged with hair, a browned Q-tip, and a fake nail with pink flowers painted on it. "I'm sorry, I'm just not really a naked person," I said. She was apathetic. "It's not fun for me either. The sooner you do it, the sooner it's over with."

The next 24 hours were reminiscent of an episode of *Orange is the New Black*. The orange jumpsuit I was given rode my ass and the buttons threatened to pop open at my braless chest. The pant legs hovered above my ankles, and written on the thigh in permanent marker were the words "Jane's Bitch." It felt appropriate; I felt like someone's bitch. Initially, I was kept in a holding cell for hours without explanation. I would later find out that it was for two reasons: because a girl had snuck in Xanax and overdosed—she probably died—and because another girl clogged a toilet, allowing her shit to overflow into her cell.

With her own feces, she wrote the word "nigger" on the wall, earning her a spot in an isolated cell where she would scream through the night for everyone to hear.

I was given a top bunk, the one above where the girl may or may not have died hours earlier, and in a room with florescent lights that never turned off, even at night. The bunk was made of metal, but we were issued pads to sleep on. The only one they had left was half-stuffed, so some women helped me fold it under so that at least the top half of my body would be comfortable. They also taught me to wrap my towel around my roll of toilet paper for a pillow. My legs on cold metal, my head on toilet paper, I didn't sleep that night.

The next morning a woman named Sharon, who had taken an interest in me, climbed onto my bunk uninvited and asked me what I was in for. When I told her I was pulled over for speeding then arrested for an unpaid ticket I got for a bum taillight, she laughed. She was in for crack and prostitution.

The girl in the corner wearing the black jumpsuit, she said, was waiting to go to trial for killing her son. Sharon was also the one who told me about the overdose. And the racist shit on the wall—that was over the color of Sharon's skin.

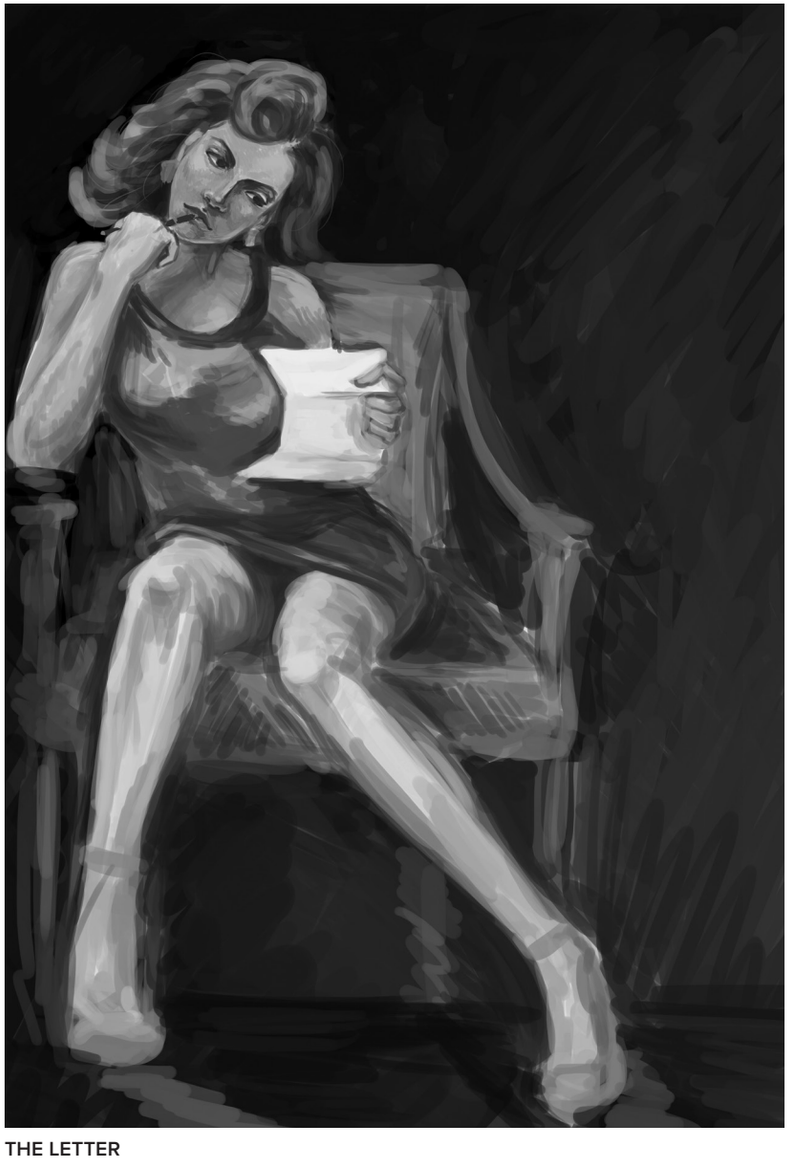
I spent the last few hours of my time in jail chatting with Sharon and writing a letter to her probation officer, asking him to please give her another chance, to please not send her to prison. In that time, she taught me how to make a tampon with toilet paper and a pen and how to use the elastic in panties to tie hair. She told me she'd grown up in a bad neighborhood with very little money and no father; said she fell into prostitution as a young teen; gave no further explanation.

The crack followed and she quickly became addicted, perpetuating the need to sell her body.

It's a vicious cycle, she said. Now in her forties, she wishes she could choose another life, but she no longer sees a way out.

When my ride showed up, I felt unexpected sadness about having to say goodbye to my new friend. She gave me a hug, thanking me for the letter. To this day, I wonder if it worked; if she was given another chance. I sometimes think about the cop's warning. It saddens me that, often, when we think of those in jail, we forget about the circumstances that landed them there, concluding that they are simply others, somehow innately inferior or bad or immoral compared to the rest of us. We forget that they are human, too, and that all of us are born equally vulnerable. Some of us are simply luckier than others. In that forgetfulness, the Sharons end up overshadowed by ignorant labels and erroneous assumptions, by overdoses and shit-stained walls.

KARIE FUGETT | PAIRS WITH PAGE 80



THE LETTER
PAIGE GARCIA
digital illustration

YELLOW MAMA

DONNA ORCHARD

I open the drawer to find my will and add a request: “Please do not bury me 100 yards from where I am left for dead.”

I pick up my cup of coffee and the morning paper, the Press-Register in Mobile, Alabama, on November 14, 1977. I am tired, always tired. I will soon feel the 6 a.m. burst of cold air. The first students will be dropped off early so workers can get to the shipyard. The principal has got to be there. I hope I have a few years before I’m dead to sleep in.

Under the big news about Auburn beating Alabama in the Iron Bowl, the headlines are striking: “Pritchard Man Charged Shortly After Finding Nun Dead.” The details were all there for a week since the murder of Sister Ann Hogan, a native of Keokuk, Iowa, a member of the order of the Daughters of Charity. Sister Ann left Providence Hospital, where she worked about a week ago, to go to Catholic Cemetery in Pritchard to pray for her dead sisters. She loved to walk. The report continues, “Walking was her favorite pastime, so it was not unusual for her to make the one-mile trek from the hospital to the cemetery.”

Someone remembered Sister Ann entering the cemetery about 2:30 p.m. so she made it there in thirty minutes. Tomorrow I am going to try to walk that route since it is in my neighborhood. I want to know where she walked, what streets she had to cross.

She was expected back at the hospital at 5 p.m. to help another nun cook for a party. It was unusual for Sister Ann, who was always punctual, to be late for the birthday party that afternoon at the hospital.

The article continues, “When she fails to return to Providence by 5 p.m., Providence officials launch a search and later notified the Mobile Police Department.”

A teenager? Nobody would worry about her for a couple of days. Just figured she had found a more exciting party. But Sister Ann—in a graveyard praying for dead people? The police waste no time.

As they walk near the swamp next to the cemetery at about 6:30 p.m., a policeman sees something light blue, a shawl among some of the gravestones. More officers are called in. At around 7:30 p.m., Sister Ann Hogan’s body is found lying under a pile of logs, stones and bricks.

The newspaper says Sister Ann will be buried in that same cemetery where she was strangled with a towel and tied down with her own shoestrings.

My mind goes to a macabre scene in which I see her body being pulled a short distance, then thrown into the nearest hole for convenience. Her spirit gets an icy chill.

DONNA ORCHARD | PAIRS WITH PAGE 78

Two years ago, I opened the door for an interview and saw Grace Bolden, a tall, stout African American woman, who walked in with shoulders back, dress freshly pressed, and claiming immediate respect. In her dark eyes was an infectious love and a spiritual calm.

Grace was to be the caregiver for my two boys, hired to get my six-year-old off to school an hour after I leave for a long commute. She would also care for the newborn. No cooking or cleaning—just rocking the baby.

Grace and I became firm friends. We were both large women so I went to my closet and held up a blouse, giggling, "This will look better on you than me!" But I could get only so close. She had a far-away look about her.

—

It is a week later, and already police arrested Cornelius Singleton and charged him with the murder of Sister Ann. The biggest piece of evidence they found was the nun's watch at his grandfather's house.

When Grace steps through the screen door at the back, I know something is wrong, bad wrong. Her eyes are swollen, and her hair that is always in a tight, neat bun is spiraling out of control all over her head. I wonder if somebody is dead. I hear a moan before she says, "I can't come to work today, Miss Donna. They've arrested my baby, Neil, for killing that nun."

"Oh, no. I just read about it. But the man is a Singleton."

"I'm Grace Singleton Bolden. I was married to a Singleton."

"Let me get a cool rag for your head. Sit down, Grace. Sit down. Don't worry about anything around here. Tell me what happened. Why do they think your son would do such a thing?"

"I love the Lord, Miss Donna. Taught all my children to love the Lord."

"Oh, I know you do, Grace."

"I know Neil wouldn't do anything like that. He doesn't even know any nuns. Why would he do something like that? He's slow. He's always been slow in school. He stutters. But, he wouldn't go and kill somebody dead."

"Of course not. Of course not."

"He must have heard they were looking for him. They found him hiding under a house right over here on North Ann. He told them to throw him the handcuffs. He knew if he crawled out, he would be shot dead."

"Why do they think he did it? Oh, Grace, you have to get a lawyer."

"They went to his granddaddy's house and found the dead nun's watch. That's all they got. That's all they got on him. But anybody could have given him that watch. He's like a child. If it was bright and shiny he would have took it. That don't mean nothing. Somebody could have passed it off on him."

"Of course, you don't have to work today. Can I do anything? I don't have any money, but can I vouch for you? Can't anybody do anything? They probably had pressure to find somebody because a nun is dead.

They'll probably figure things out and let him go. Give me a hug, Grace. The police had to come up with somebody. They'll get it all worked out. You don't worry about Al and Benjamin. I'll go next door and pay Darlene to keep them. You take off as long as you need to. What can I do?"

"I'm gonna need lots of prayers—to God, to the Saints. Just pray for Neil real hard."

I watch Grace go out of the front door and onto the porch of the little mission-style brick cottage, under the archway, and down the walk. She turns around. "He's slow, Miss Donna, but he's not a killer. Not my boy. I know my boy. No, not a killer. I'm going to walk down to Metro (jail) and find out if they've let him out. They won't let him call me. He would have called me."

"Oh, I'll take you, Grace. Come on, Sweetheart."

"No, I'd rather walk. I need to get some peace about me before I get there."

Grace turns around one more time on the walk and mumbles "Not my son. Not that mean. Dead."

That was the last time I saw Grace except for the day when she came by to pick up some dressy clothes I thought she could wear to the courthouse. I had to respect her wish to grieve in private during the trial.

—

The wooden electric chair in Alabama was ironically built by an inmate, a London cabinetmaker, in Kilby Prison, in 1923.

It was named "Yellow Mama" by the inmates because of its garish mustard color.

Even though there was a confession and overwhelming evidence, Neil had a strong defense—his IQ was 67, a 6th grade reading level. Mild retardation implies an inability to connect actions to consequences.

After fifteen years, his appeals ran out.

A 36-year-old man by now, his mother, Grace, was not on the list of those to view his execution. He refused his last meal.

"Cornelius Singleton was electrocuted at 12:20 a.m. on Friday, November 13, 1992, at Holman Prison."

UNRAVELED MOTHER

KASY LONG

After Jennifer Bevill's "Undersea"

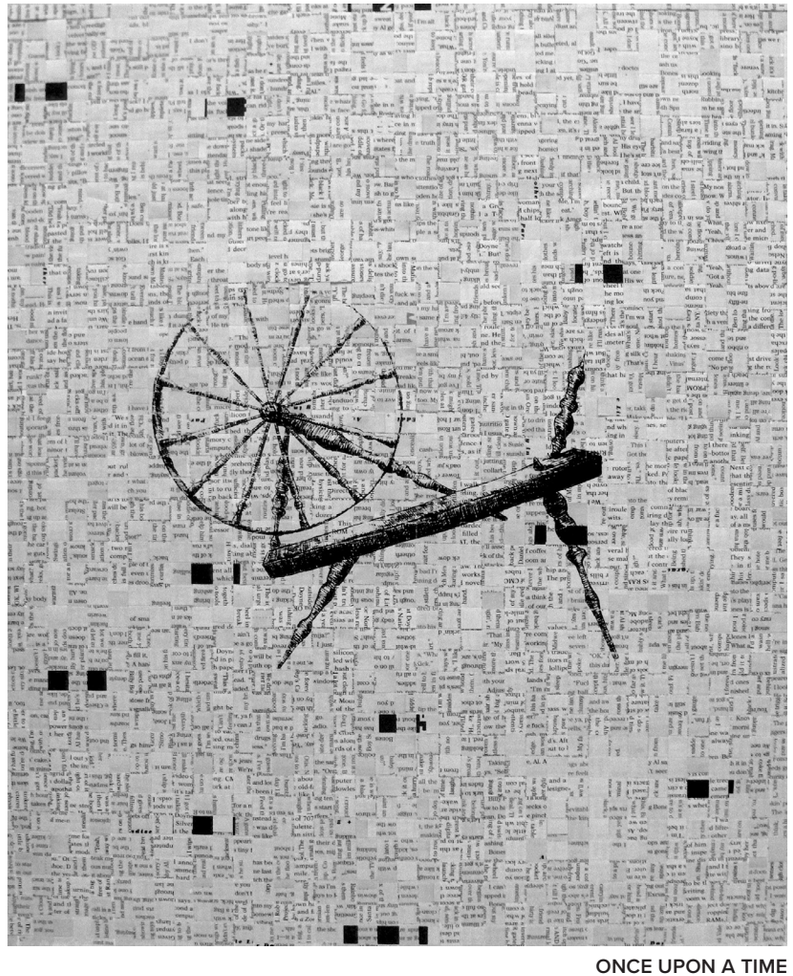
His is the one without a mouth.
Tranquil eyes reveal secrets; if you listen closely,
you can hear an invisible pair of gray lips sucking
on a wrinkled thumb.

Vines mark his body, stitched fabric presses
him forward to a line of bent jade twine.
He decides to live in the wallpaper; it's quiet there.

He prefers to write in ancient Arabic; the message
tells the yarn not to worry, the thread unravels anyway.
Arms frame his head, a moan penetrates a calcified throat.

He moans for a mother—the line of twisting string.
She never responds, instead sews a new quilt
with her own unraveling sleeve.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 75 | KASY LONG



ONCE UPON A TIME
ELAINA MASTRILLI
printmaking

PAIRS WITH PAGE 72 | BRON TREANOR

THEY MET IN AMSTERDAM

BRON TREANOR

He asked her if she wanted a cheese sandwich.
She said yes.
She wore her father's hiking boots.
She was shocked at the amount of salt he shook onto his eggs.
"I like salt," he told her.
There were other people at the table—travelers? friends?—but they were phantom.
The cheese sandwich. The salted eggs. The cracked boots.
She called him Tex and he thought he loved her.

BRON TREANOR | PAIRS WITH PAGE 72

PAIRS WITH PAGE 66 | MYKAELA ARMSTRONG

SHE

MYKAELA ARMSTRONG

We work like clockwork. Tick, tick, tick, one leg in front of the other. We are a perfect machine, never ending, never changing. That's the way they like it. Not necessarily all of us agree, but they have deemed it to be the most efficient, so it is law. We obey the law. She says fear is staying in line. No, fear is being different, being unique. Fear is stepping out of line. They'll come for you. If you mess up. You can't mess up.

I wake up every morning at seven, and I'm at work at eight. I'm a doctor. I see the pain and misery that comes from stepping out of line. Every morning, I check on my patients, then I go to lunch at twelve. I eat a ham sandwich. That's when I see her; she's always there. She sneaks into the side door of a convenience store and steals some food, hoping no one will catch her. They haven't yet. But I have. I haven't told. She gives the food to the people sent to the Unknown. They don't have much food. They were kicked out because they didn't do what they were told. They stepped out of line. She fights for them secretly. She knows I've seen her. She knows I haven't told. She knows I stepped out of line. I should have told immediately, but when I chased after her, I saw her give the food to a five year old girl, and my heart broke. So I stepped out of line. I have been for two years now, and she knows it. She saw me, she begged me not to tell, and now if I do, I'll get in trouble too. I have to protect her now to protect myself. I don't control myself anymore. She does.

I finish lunch, go back to work, and fix up the others who stepped out of line. They didn't do enough to get kicked out, just enough to be warned. I go home at six. I eat dinner, dinner varies, but I usually eat spaghetti. I like spaghetti. No dessert, sweets are unhealthy. I like sweets too. Then I see her again, this is different. This isn't right, this is out of line. They don't like it when we are out of line. She comes toward my house. I lock my doors. She knocks on the door. I ignore it. She says she knows I'm here. I know. I don't want to open it, but she knows I've stepped out of line. She can tell on me. They will get me. I can't fight her. I open the door.

"They're after me," she says, "help me."

Her eyes beg me to let her in. I say no.

"Please,"she says, "If they get me, those people will starve. We have to fight them, what they're doing is cruel."

She's right. They force us into this robotic life, living how they tell us to, not given any room for mistakes. We are slaves, that's all we'll ever be. If we fight them, we are punished or sent to the Unknown or worse. I can't fight them. I may not be happy, but I'm comfortable. I tell her no again, but she shoves her way in. I close the door and panic right as a patrol car passes the door.

"Get out," I say, "I have a schedule, you're messing up my schedule. Please, you're messing up my schedule."

I have to follow the schedule. I can't step out of line.

"If I leave now, they'll get me," she says, "this is only for tonight, please don't fight it. I know you're scared, but this is for a good reason."

"A-a-a good reason," I ask, "A good reason? No. All of this. It's people like you that have caused all of this. If you would just do what they say, i-i-if you would just follow the rules, there wouldn't be people in the Unknown, people wouldn't be punished."

I'm panicking. My heart is racing. I don't know what to do. She's messing up my schedule. She keeps pushing me out of line.

"If we all just stay in line, then we are nothing," she says, "and I don't accept that. Neither do any of those that were punished or sent to the Unknown. I'm just going to stay here for the night, then I'll be gone when you wake up." She goes to my couch and lays down, covering up with a blanket I had left there. I get cold easy.

I pace my bedroom. This isn't right. I can't go to sleep. I can't abide by my schedule. I'm scared they'll find her here. I'll be punished. They'll strip me of my title and send me to the Unknown. I've only seen a glimpse of the place, but I know I don't like it. The people are starving, covered in dirt, cold, afraid. I don't like being afraid. That's why I stay in line.

Sometimes I feel like this is her story, not mine.

Morning comes and she's gone, but I'm tired. I didn't sleep all night. I go to work. I can barely function. There she is at lunch, like clockwork. She doesn't get it. Even though she's disobeying the rules, her schedule is still holding her captive. She's part of the machine as well, she's just the part that's a little broken. Or is she the part that's fixed? I don't know. Everything seems wrong to me, every day, but I follow the rules. We all do. Most of us do. Most of us are afraid.

Two police officers come in the room. My heart stops. The guilt has to be on my face. They come to me and show me a picture of her. They ask if I've seen her before, and I say no. Lie. They know it. They arrest me. They send me to jail. I go to court. They say I'll be sent to the Unknown. That was fast; I wasn't expecting it. I'm shaking all the time. I'm scared, no one will even look at me anymore. I stepped out of line and I'm a monster.

I arrive at the Unknown, and I'm thrown out in the cold. Not even a jacket is given to me. I'm greeted by a swarm of people, dirty and cold. They grab at me, rip at what's left of my clothes, taking anything that hadn't yet been taken from me. They took the picture of my sister. She's still out there, stealing from convenience stores. She might never be caught. I'm part of her machine now.

MYKAELA ARMSTRONG | PAIRS WITH PAGE 66

LAVENDER MAN

JUDI RYPMA

We met on a rotary phone
exhaling greetings between
mysterious dial tones
of a secret “beep line”—
a number changed monthly
yet spread teen to teen
faster than any Internet legend.

It sputtered in a sixties Morse code:
my beep name beep
is beep what’s yours
beep

yet somehow we extracted
crucial information:
age, school, sun sign, best band
later addresses, potential times
to face one another.

It didn’t happen
though for a year this guy mailed
reams of psychedelic poems
in cramped writing
with purple ink, violet stationery

and once a graveyard snapshot of him
posing in pea coat and bell bottoms.
He was my Edgar Allen Poe.
I wanted to be his dark lady.

We became cross-town pen pals
exchanging poems, suggesting
meetings downtown
where hippies strung beads,
aging vets aimed corn at pigeons,
the museum replicated the Thirties

but we didn’t.

Eventually poems dwindled
in line count, then frequency
until gradually I forgot
his real name. Couldn’t recall why
he called himself Lavender Man.

His poems disappeared
when I left for college
or maybe some later move
though in the purple haze
of these last years I’ve started to wonder:

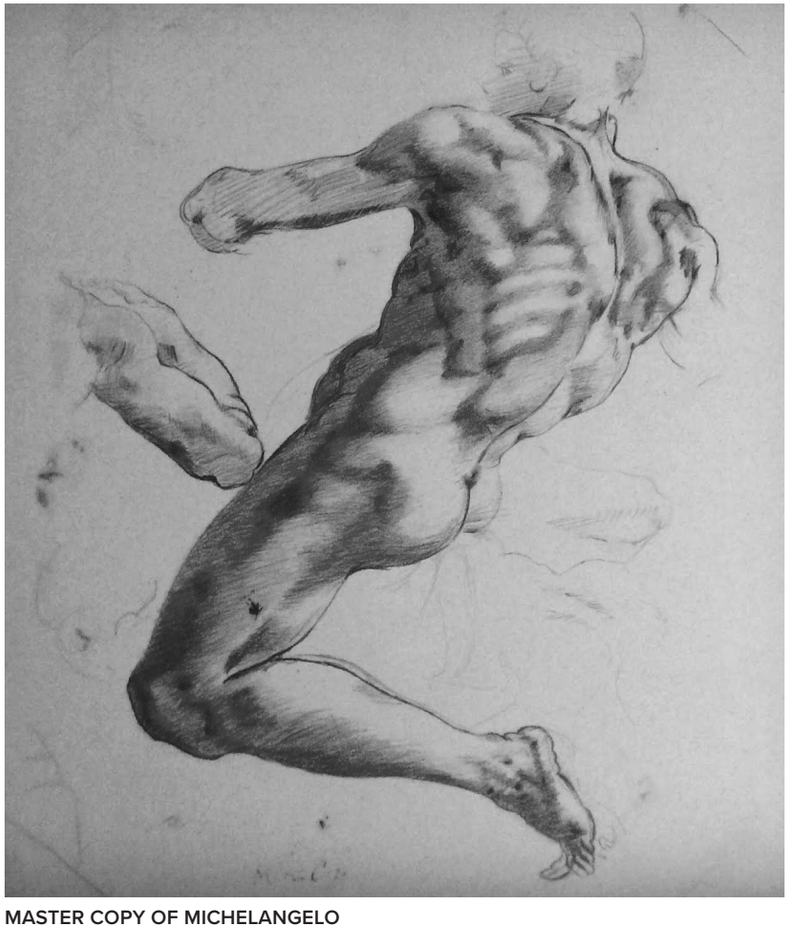
does he still dress in black? Did he
fall in love with Pink Woman?
Become a famous writer? Die
in Vietnam? End it all?

Somehow
he became just
a smudge of color
in the past’s rainbow swirl

slipping out of my life
so easily I never felt the loss
until decades and decades later
when you feel
each and every one.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 63 | JUDI RYPMA

JUDI RYPMA | PAIRS WITH PAGE 63



MASTER COPY OF MICHELANGELO
JARROD REED
drawing

PRETEND I WAS HERE

MICHAEL CARROLL

I sat alone one afternoon in a dark back bar side-eyeing the different porns playing overhead, drinking beer, which is about fifty percent of what I do in Key West. A sexy restaurant owner I know came in and stopped near me:

“Michael.”

“Garth.”

We kissed casually.

“So what are you up to?”

“Just taking a break.”

“Yeah? You having a good time in Key West?”

“As always. I make my afternoon rounds, the garden bar, Island House, here.”

“How’s Ed?”

“Fine.”

“You look good, man. You never get older.”

“Why thank you.”

“So you want to go back here?”

“I do.”

We went behind the curtain and undressed, kissing and groping. We’d never done it before but at the restaurant had looked each other up and down, even in front of his boyfriend—Garth’s business partner, chirpier, more nervous, greeting each table’s party in the dining room as Garth stands behind the bar and pours for the servers’ tickets. Looking, watching—all eye contact and meaty hands in the video-winking half dark now. He yanks down my jeans and underwear, turns me around, gets his cock out, covers it and my anus with spit, sits on the wooden ledge and pulls me down on to him, gliding bigly in, and fucks me quickly.

“You like that ass?”

“I love your ass.”

“You like my pussy?”

MICHAEL CARROLL | PAIRS WITH PAGE 60

"That's a tight pussy."

In the middle of it, an older face pushes through the parted curtains, only for a moment.

He comes firmly, bucking up into me, drains himself, about which I don't have any regrets, only a little occasional nervousness later, and then we stand and pull up our jeans and underwear. One more quick kiss. He pushes through the curtain ahead of me, heading out. I step back up to the bar, vaguely near the other lone patron, the owner of that peeking-in face, and I order a beer.

In a honking hillbilly plaint game but indignant, I hear: "Get your ass fucked, son?"

"I got my ass fucked."

The crack of my ass is wet and I feel sweat and whatever starting to run down one thigh.

"Was it good, kid?"

"It was great."

"Well all right then, nobody got hurt!"

But nothing so dangerously enticing happens this year. I need to stay closer to the cottage and watch after Ed, not be gone for such long periods at a time. I'm a Florence Nightingale. The uniform chafes. We're a year out from Ed's open-heart surgery.

—

With my husband Ed I'm in an open relationship, which may sound enticing on the surface but as anyone gay or straight could predict is fraught with complications, more an understanding between us than a declaration of any alternate lifestyle. To us it's no big deal. Physical affection is an important acid test of self-worth. With Ed, I've never lacked that proof. Many would call us codependent (what Ed would simply call the definition of love).

Recently I met someone age-inappropriate for me, by which I mean someone further apart in age with me than usual. I've fallen in love, that is to say, with a younger man who sometimes thinks he's ugly and looks fat and sometimes thinks every older gay man wants to rape him.

As a kid I'd lusted not only after boys my age but also older ones who I imagined could take me away, and with their greater admirable maturity validate my desires and show me I was no freak. Now as an adult in my fifties, I look back to that time when I was very romantic. I think I just want to recall what it was like to hold someone close in age to me and feel that skin. I am twenty-five years younger than Ed. But I am twenty-five years older than Jason, the one I can't stop thinking about even though I already have a husband I love.

But if I could go back, would I? No way, not unless it meant I could have more sex, freer sex, meaning sex where I did not fear infection, slow death, even though I was almost always safe. It wasn't the act, it turned out; it wasn't God. It was all mental. Jason must be largely mental. But if not Jason, then someone else. Always some new object of affection. It does not make me love Ed less. Unreturned affections for others, especially recently, have made me more empathetic, I feel.

What's happened is this: I'm too old to be young, and too young to be old.

—

For the first time in the twenty years that Ed and I have been going to Key West together I don't care if we ever return. Other tourists will report crying in the departures lounge of the tiny island airport, and in the past I've often felt like doing that, too. This year has shaped up differently.

Waiting with me for our flight to be called, Ed says, "Are you sick of it suddenly?"

"No," I say, although it's tainted—the way my birth town of Memphis has been tainted by the deaths of my relatives and how these have scattered and ruined my best, oldest memories.

—

I see Jason the next day in the Barracuda lounge and we hug long and hard.

"Don't ever do that again," he says with heavy breath, and releases me.

"Do what."

"Leave me for a whole month like that," he says and laughs.

"You know I'm supposed to be going to Rome for five weeks in May."

"I know but that doesn't mean I have to like it."

"Well, you can come if you want. Would you like to come to Rome and stay with me?"

"That's something we can talk about. Yes, I'd love to. It's been pretty bad, pretty lonely."

All this, what else would I want to hear? My generic escape narrative, as my shrink called it, is lighting out alone for Berlin when the time suits. I was always the first with another person to feel the dread of romance and want to own it, because it provided drama. This takes me back. I need to think what he's saying is that he needs me, and in that way that I always dreadfully desired, dreadfully because it might, must, end in rejection.

His hand is cold when it takes mine. He trusts me to warm it, I think.

We're on the couch in the back of the bar and we're both working. I'm writing new stories begun in Key West, set in Key West, about the night's utopia, my escape hatch. Key West in January was rainy and cloudy. I'm trying to figure out the rest of my life so I'm writing about it. The stories are all dark but I think funny—sex and death.

Jason will peek over at my Mac screen and say, "I love your sentences."

"Thank you."

"Like that one there," he says and points. "So amazing. I so, so love your titles."

I peep at his screen, wondering when he'll show me something. From his sentence style, I am getting Fitzgerald from *The Beautiful and Damned*. He likes big words and fancy syntax, has air-tight concentration. Only occasionally picks up his drink to sip. Types, staring. Turns to me occasionally and smiles that pretty smile. I like my new stories and now I have something to live up to. I've made an impression in a literary sense on someone younger—what I always wanted.

And Jason has quit his job because from waiting tables he's saved up enough to get by for a few months, and from all evidence he's going at the writing full-steam at home, in his coffeeshop in Long Island City, and here at the bar. I can only write at night.

—

Back in December during our first dinner, after our first writing session together at the bar, I asked him something about sex, what he liked. We had ordered our Chinese and were into our soups. Jason set down his plastic spoon, wiped his mouth on the cloth napkin, set that down and very composedly said, "I'm going to tell you what I should've told Joe from the start. That there will never, ever be anything physical or sexual between us."

"Okay. Good to know."

From here on out we laughingly call this Jason reading me the riot act. I feel like I escaped that potential embarrassment. I let the sexual subject pass, saving myself, but only just.

—

Jason and I work side by side for a couple hours and when he gets up to go to the restroom then comes back, he dances to the music getting me in his sights.

He's spindly, his large hands splaying about in the air well clear of his long lanky body, his little eyes closing, his lips comically pursing for effect, and he always knows the comic effect he has on me, and I'm never not delighted. This unpredictable, apparently unpremeditated mirth of his gives me joy and he knows that. He turns and reels. I probably take this wrong. I'm back in junior high or senior high, reading another boy's friendliness for a sexual notation—an indication of *Yeah, that's right*. I was sexually precocious knowing what I wanted and at times I almost got my nose bloodied or my groin kicked. Or a rumor would have it the next day in school, I was a faggot.

He approaches me, still vamping, pointing his pointer finger, then sneers acidly to dissolve the previous syrupy gestures. Over a couple of months we develop this exchange. He sits down and sips his drink, watching me steadily. He closes his eyes, shakes his head at me, *No, Michael, no,* and I mimic that in return. He goes back to work on his laptop. He touch-types flutteringly, gracefully, and I notice his hands, his tapered fingers.

—

We go home to eat. Jason's all ears, fried voice, intelligence, memory, theory, providing conversation for Ed as I work and so I'm grateful: I say toward the end of the evening, "How often do you talk to your parents?"

At the head of the table, he composes himself. His eyelashes flutter nervously, femininely.

"I haven't spoken to my parents in three and a half years."

Ed and I look at each other while Jason concentrates on chewing, messy loud chewing.

Sometimes he sleeps on the couch. I get a pillow, a blanket. Sometimes we have a fire because it's cold and the windows in our apartment are poorly insulated. Ed has gone to bed, yawning suddenly and saying, "Okay boys, I'll leave you alone together."

I don't try to hug or kiss Jason. Something tells me.

But sometimes he wants to touch, sometimes he wants to be touched, gratifying me.

"Are you okay?" I say.

"I'm okay."

Nothing too physical, nothing at all erotic.

Later, I go to my single bed, drink beer and smoke in the dark. I get up, pass through the living room on my way to the kitchen and leave the beer bottle on the counter and I take another from the fridge. Jason never stirs. He sleeps quietly or else he's trying to give me the impression he's asleep. I see his calm, composed face in the firelight giving him a warm color.

If there's no fire there's only cool winter light from the street. His cream complexion absorbs the watercolor light like three-hundred-pound paper: feline face, sturdy neck, naked shoulders, chest-
clasped hands.

In the morning he's gotten up and made instant oatmeal, eaten it, left his clean bowl in the dish strainer. On a strict writing schedule, he goes home and texts me a thank you.

Ed, still healing his traumatized and operated-on heart, gets up later. I'm up taking care of things, worrying. I shop and run errands, and suddenly wonder what's happening to my writing.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 60 | MICHAEL CARROLL

Ed says, “How did it go last night?”

“Oh, fine, all right.”

“Did you guys sit on the couch and kiss? Did you fool around any?”

“That’s never going to happen. Jason’s not attracted to me. So no, knows what he wants.”

“I’ve seen the way he looks at you, with these big bright saucer eyes.”

“He just needs somebody to pay him attention, and I’m glad to do that.”

I know, but don’t want to think, that Jason just needs optimism, and for now I’m his source.

“I predict that when you go to Rome to teach he’ll pine for you and miss you and when you get back after all that time he’ll make this great declaration of love. He’ll wilt in your arms.”

“Good one.”

“Oh, sweetie. You’re eaten up with it. You’ve been bitten, you’re smitten, poor angel!”

—

Every once in a while Jason has a date, nothing spontaneous, always announced ahead of time.

Or he says his Turkish roommates are having a Sunday barbecue and he says he can’t see me that night. But we’ll see each other the next night, he says. Already I am becoming avuncular, a role that itches as much as the mentor one. But he needs his space, I realize, and I can see he needs more friends, dates his own age—and so he goes on Grindr looking for one. We discuss them.

“How was your Grindr date?”

“Disgusting.”

“Disgusting, why?”

“I don’t want to go into it. Guys my age are too impatient. Or they’re disgusting.”

“Okay. Like did you guys fool around? Or he tried and you didn’t want to?”

“I don’t want to go into it!”

“Was he at least attractive?”

“Moderately attractive, but a pig, such an asshole. Guys my age are all assholes.”

I tell myself not to say anything “wise,” so I hold off. Invading Jason’s head space with so-called wisdom would be like prying, imposing—and worse, making myself look too desperate. I don’t hear from him for a day and I ask myself what I did or said. I know, I pried. *Don’t pry, it’s his life.* I know, but it’s mean. *But don’t pry.* I know. *So don’t pry.*

I try to learn this lesson.

—

With Jason I am beginning to understand who I was and should want to be, and it’s humbling, sometimes humiliating.

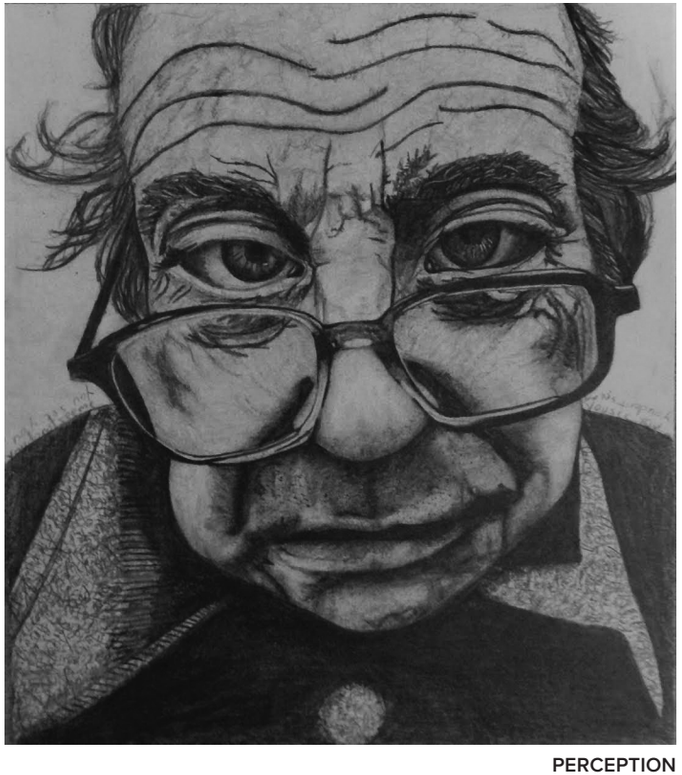
Humility makes a good primer for the eventualities of illness and death.

Still there’s this idea of youth I keep dangling in front of myself—a stand-in imaginary lover, more palimpsest of past wants, even disappointments, a portrait of my Jason coating a series of the old portraits I’ve painted of previous beloveds, not a carnal reality. I love so I’m a lover. With men I’ve known or not known carnally I’ve become a hypothetical lover, the one who makes myself care, in some cases been made to care by a turn of events. And love in this stage of my life, active with respect to displaying care is about being there for others, just that, there to coo and to talk tenderly in the dark, in a sense alone—love is about loneliness.

MICHAEL CARROLL | PAIRS WITH PAGE 60



PORTRAIT OF A BUST
JARROD REED
charcoal



PERCEPTION
NICOLE MOORE
graphite

IMITATIONS

ANNA VAN DERWOOD

PAIRS WITH PAGE 56 | ANNA VAN DERWOOD

i'm friends with some mixed kids who can't dance.

we wiggle awkwardly amidst laughter and silently scream at our own incompetence—some kind of light in our eyes: kind of shame, kind of wistfulness, because abuela could dance more than the goddamn Macarena. we imagine her locking eyes with all the latino boys in the room saying, see me, see me—my body in its freedom, sashaying rhyme.

but she's fulfilling that thing they say about ashes to ashes, and we're just grateful we can keep a beat and appear to sing along, mouthing syllables we can't reason into words, trying on our family's accents—which fit clumsily over our american tongues—shedding them hastily.

instead, singing canta y no llores, which it took us three years to translate into the native tongue that never was or never should have been.

we're wandering around the family tree from one race to another on trembling legs and aching feet, panting, trying to keep up with who said what, and in which language, and in which country, if any of them are even ours.

we have family who never had to think about this, brothers and cousins and uncles and aunts and grandparents who got to be one thing, that were whole; brand name latinos and estadounidenses intermingling, creating us knockoffs who beg to be taken seriously: listen, we are quality, we are worthy, we are a bargain, two for one, buy one get one free—as long as you can stomach our constant confusion.

we starve ourselves thinking about physiognomy/hoping that maybe if we lose enough weight our nasal structure will prove itself more irish or any other white-looking ethnicity than latin american. maybe we can be what sterling quotes from some dumb youtube video that we've all picked up on—maybe we can be "just like a caucasian," maybe someday we won't be afraid that fixing our personalities won't be enough to make people like us, maybe someday we can feel like we are loved innocently for the brown and yellow tints in our flesh and not despite them and not while fetishizing them, maybe someday brown eyes will be beautiful too, maybe someday white men won't have to accompany their brown fathers-in-law to the car dealership to protect them from discrimination in the parking lots, under the sun that only makes them darker and more susceptible to being treated like some kind of inconvenience—one to be manipulated into profit in every imaginable context.

maybe someday we can purchase knickknacks made in the homeland without thinking about capitalism and all the people who will touch atoms that have touched nuestra patria, which they do without feeling any of the significance or urgency that we would feel, maybe someday we won't feel the impulse to buy out every item that has our country's name (or the north american equivalent) on the tag, to save it from being misunderstood like our immigrant predecessors.

we feel this pain in our, well, everything now when we hear the word foreign, because we've grown up knowing that it's always an insult—there's always this horrible little drop of pitch and this certain way that people emphasize the syllables that says we should know better than to be that, or associate with that, or share blood with that, or break bread with that; we should stop endorsing that by refusing to hate rolling our r's.

every pang of shame, every urge to deny our textured hair, is a victory for erasure and a toast to the efficacy of casual racism.

we feel this loss like "to my brother miguel" by césar vallejos (which ironically we must place here in english):

"I'm sitting here on the old patio beside your absence. It is a black well. We'd be playing, now... I can hear Mama yell 'Boys! Calm down!' We'd laugh, and off I'd go to hide where you'd never look... under the stairs, in the hall, the attic... Then you'd do the same. Miguel, we were too good at that game. Everything would always end in tears.

No one was laughing on that August night you went to hide away again, so late it was almost dawn. But now your brother's through with this hunting and hunting and never finding you. The shadows crowd him. Miguel, will you hurry and show yourself? Mama will only worry."

we could replace a few words of that elegy, and it would be about our forefathers in the midst of the ache of death and continued life. or it would be about us—

being brown in this country is a fucking crime, and when you're mixed with white, your immediate family will sometimes look at you and say what equates to: you should try not to act so brown or care so much about your other heritage, only one of them is valid and if you don't grow up to be white, you won't be any child of ours. we have forgiven your trespasses and have never trespassed against you, it is not a violation to crawl into your bones and say, this is white, this is white, you are white and nothing else—it is not a form of assault to take away the most inherent and fundamental identities you have. we are not allowed to mouth off or go outside to tan cancer into our cells to feel real, because blood is thicker than water and maybe water can't wash out your melanin, but blood is damned sure to try.

we are so intricately familiar with what john lewis means by, "centuries of conditioning ensured our compliance," but it doesn't honestly take that long, though we've had it. all it really takes is a few measly years of being shouted down at family reunions, elementary schools, gas stations, and maybe once or twice being made to feel so unwelcome in a crowd that we just went the fuck home to feel what, in the end, was only slightly less unwelcome, but still it was better.

ANNA VAN DERWOOD | PAIRS WITH PAGE 56

PAIRS WITH PAGE 56 | ANNA VAN DERWOOD

pablo neruda said “tengo hambre
de tu boca, de tu voz, de tu pelo
/ y por las calles voy sin nutrirme,
callado, / no me sostiene el pan,
el alba me desquicia, / busco el
sonido líquido de tus pies en el
día,” and reading the shitty english
translation online, we felt in our
bones his romantic hunger, only we
felt it as jealousy for our mother’s
dark hair and skin, for our grandfa-
ther’s full lips and wide nose, for our
sisters’ blonde hair, their light, light
eyes and ignorance of what really
it feels like to be called a dirty spic
and know you don’t even deserve
that much racial validation, to be the
child everyone can tell is somehow
wrong, somehow out of place, but
really it means nothing to us.

it’s a collection of vocabulary, words
we’ll type into our search engines
one by one because we know how
unreliable those sites are for sen-
tences, but we still can’t speak our
ancestral tongue well enough to tell
each other what “desquicia” means
off the top of our heads. if a gringo
asked us, we wouldn’t be able to
answer. usually we offset this prob-
lem by pronouncing words correctly
to them until they recognize the
fools they’ve made of themselves
and retreat. but this is a kind of dis-
honesty that secretly we know we
won’t always get away with.

it’s in the moment when we say pal-
abras castellanos with united states
accents that we feel most painfully
our detachment from our cultures.
the full-blooded among us always
cock their heads—and by the way,
what’s with them always trying to
speak spanish with us when they
find out we’re latinos? can’t they
see the his-panic (haha) scattered
like powder onto our flushed
cheeks? don’t they know the en-
glish word for not begging familiarity
and broken spanish from us: mercy?
anyway, we swing between being
ashamed by intentionally mispronounc-
ing words so we don’t get looked at by
non-latinos and being ashamed of pro-
nouncing them correctly with our clumsy
mouths where the words are clearly
immigrants, naturalized too late in life to
lose the accent of the outsider, our own
language and culture a cheaply-made
costume caricature that will never quite
fit amongst our grinding teeth.

coincidentally, our white friends said
to us that they liked “that sabora place”
last night and we were like, what?
sabora isn’t a word, y’all, and if it was
you’d be pronouncing it wrong. their
insistent voices kept clamoring over the
spanish speakers in the room until finally
we said, sabor and a are both words
individually, and the restaurant they
thought was named “something mexico”
is actually called something more like
“flavor of mexico,” but the bitterness of
tamales still rose in our throats knowing
we couldn’t take for granted that they
would listen to us. not in the way their
grandparents could take for granted that
ours would smile and nod at any conde-
scending educational moment. knowing
that even our most intimate platonic
relationships would always hold that tiny
breath of resentment: the words unsaid
inside our hands when we press them
together in some kind of desperate
attempt to feel like interracial doesn’t
always mean unempathetic, because
life is still like this and—

speaking spanish in front of them is a
trial like no other. there’s always this
sudden heaviness in the air around
us. we’re being stared down with
something like anger, and something
like distrust, and something like the
accusation of sin.

when we come out as mixed, everyone
always—and we mean literally always, or
at least every time that we can remem-
ber—says “i could tell you were something”
and they laugh like that’s okay, like that
isn’t objectifying, like it doesn’t say that
all people of color fall into the category
of “other” or “secondary,” like it doesn’t
enforce how we are always what is being
denoted by the phrase “et cetera” and
never what comes before the comma.

if we don’t forgive the racism, it’s always us
who are the assholes; we shouldn’t be so
goddamn serious, it’s just a joke, and it’s
so funny to everyone else, and can’t we
just lighten up for once?

for once, we’d like to be the ones with
that power. with the self-assuredness of
unclouded privilege to purify our muddled
blood into something else.

can we distill out the mestizx genes? not
because we want to be white but because
we are not strong like our tíos, or our
abuelos, or our tíos abuelos.

**we are afraid: of hate
crimes, and speaking
spanish in public, and
our facial features,
and unemployment,
and we are not yet
ready to die.**

ANNA VAN DERWOOD | PAIRS WITH PAGE 56

MEET ME IN THE WOODS

ANNA MAXYMIW

No matter how much you feed the wolf,
he keeps looking at the forest.
—Russian proverb

If a woman keeps her red hair unbraided and her door unlocked, she has to know that the wolf will come to eat. It goes against all the bone-rich wisdom of victims come and gone: don't invite him over your threshold; don't give him the meat of your hips and thighs; don't wait for him naked. Don't let him mark you.

But by the first blow, I'm his. The bruises? The better to understand him by: the way he tastes my cunt from downwind, from across a crowded room, from the hair around his mouth; the way he weaves my fingers like branches through his teeth and snarls alpha love songs, crooning *of course I own you, I'll always own you, my bitch, always.*

I'll learn to love the darkness even more than we've already gnawed at its sticky edges; I want the heat and the richness of his guts, the rusty veil of my hair mixed with his viscera—the dark, slippery comfort of being lost in the insides, the smash-mouth timbre of his howl at the moment of orgasm, the big, bad, beautiful rubescence of pain like the quiet woods clasping me in.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 55 | ANNA MAXYMIW



WHEN WOMEN WERE BIRDS
BLAKELYN GARTMAN
mixed media

PAIRS WITH PAGE 49 | GREGORY D. BROWN

GREGORY D. BROWN | PAIRS WITH PAGE 49

STORMS

GREGORY D. BROWN

An iron cloud comforter
keeps your cozy feet
in mismatched stockings
as raindrops' snare taps
on the dirtied windowpane
send you dancing
on the edge of sleep,
leave me clinging
to alprazolam dreams
from the mat
stained in cats' blood
across our bedroom floor.

DEAR EMMA

HANNAH KIDDER

Waking up every day to that goddamn shrilling tea kettle shooting steam into our kitchen, adding to the ever-growing smear on the ceiling that we might paint over if we feel like it. You're always there, rushing to grab the handle and turn off the stove before it wakes me, but you're never quick enough. You see me and smile apologetically, offering me a cup of green herbal that I never refuse, and also never drink. I pour it down the sink when you leave. I wash my mug and yours, and listen to the gravel crunching beneath the tires as you pull away from the curb.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow I'll do it, I decide.

Morning. That goddamn shrilling. Your trusting smile, your shitty tea, your car rolling out of the driveway. I left a note on your passenger seat: "Emma, I'm really sorry for telling you this way. But this isn't working out. I'm so sorry. I love you."

That's how I summarized and severed six years of our lives. I packed my bags, cleaned the bathroom, and walked your dog before the phone rang.

I'll always wonder if you read the note before your car careened off of Highway 90. It burned with you.

Maybe it's why you didn't see the semi with the sleeping driver drift into your lane. Did it fall from your hands as your Camry flipped the first time? Or did you crush it in your palm through the second, third, fourth, and fifth rotation?

PAIRS WITH PAGE 47 | HANNAH KIDDER

LA PETITE MADEMOISELLE

LANA BELLA

The photograph turned white,
her face skinned cool and
turned whiter, like raindrops
on winter snow. Primrose lips
galloped speech of still, wild-
abandoned eyes cast tensile
strength through orchid easel
frame. Glissando of mandolin
rotted between shades of sepia
and mulberry, Nao Me Toques
strutted at the smooth where
her fingers twitched downwards
the calm of hymn-bundled grist.
Small and shifting, she stepped
back to the hushed gray, into
a parable of erstwhile neverland,
pouring out of that very world.

LANA BELLA | PAIRS WITH PAGE 46



MOMENTO DA MORTE POR TRÊS SETAS
ELIZABETH HANCOCK
woodblock

BIRDING

DON NOEL

"Oh, Charles—may I call you Charles?" said Betty Morgan. "I've admired your work for years! It's wonderful to know you're here at Melody Acres."

Betty Morgan–they were all wearing name tags–was a handsome woman. Surely on the short side of sixty, blond bobbed hair, age not yet withering a high-cheekboned face. A figure she had not let go. Reminded him of Henrietta in her prime. Maybe he'd be glad he chose this place. Already glad he'd worn the flowing shirt, open down to chest hair, that he'd had tailored after his costume as Henry V. A little touch of Harry in the night.

"My husband Oswald–he's over at that other table–has never been a Shakespeare fan, but even he admired your Othello. Magnificent! I dragged him to see you again when they brought it to Hartford. We must have you do a reading here."

So, not single. But Oswald looked at least a decade older than his wife; he had a cane tucked under his seat. There were perhaps a dozen tables for this "mixer dinner," in a spacious, well-appointed room, residents served attentively by young waiters and waitresses, probably college students.

Charles had been looking forward to the advertised programs to help newcomers meet others in "the community." He'd decided to move here when his manor house became unbearably lonely after Henrietta's death.

The other two at his table looked eightyish, and apparently weren't theater devotees. "You were an actor?" one asked. Melissa Taylor, by her name tag.

"Not just an actor," Betty Morgan answered before he could. "A Broadway luminary. Charles Livingston. A legend! Shakespeare, Ibsen, Tennessee Williams, Inge..."

"You are too kind," he interrupted.
"Yes, Mrs. Taylor, I was an actor. I'll bet you and your husband had interesting careers, too."

Hardly so, it turned out. Mr. Taylor had been a mid-level insurance executive, she a mother and club member. Golfers, bridge players. Nonetheless he prompted for details, and listened politely.

Betty Morgan couldn't wait to get back into the conversation. "When our kids were old enough, I went to work for the United Way, chaired committees, did community stuff, never had time for bridge." She leaned closer.

"Poor Oswald spent his life wondering where I was. Now that we're retired, he'll hardly let me out of his sight. Look at him now."

Indeed her husband, ignoring the conversation at that table, was staring. Charles gave him his best stage smile, and turned back to her. "We must find occasions to stay in touch."

"Oh, yes! Why don't you come to our apartment for a glass of wine tomorrow and then up to dinner? That may keep Oswald from having a jealous fit."

DON NOEL | PAIRS WITH PAGE 45

PAIRS WITH PAGE 45 | DON NOEL

That next evening went well. He wore a jacket tailored after one he'd worn as Henry Higgins, a grey that set off his still-thick thatch of white hair. Betty Morgan had invited another couple to join them, pleasant company. He heaped attentiveness on Oswald, who had been a chemistry professor but had trouble remembering detail.

"I try to stay fit," Oswald said. Despite a bad knee, he managed long walks. "There are trails. That path outside our door leads to a state park, you know. Meadows, forests. And birds."

"He used to know all the birds," Betty broke in. "He could tell them by their songs. Nowadays he sometimes wanders off the trails trying to see who's singing. I worry about him."

She was even prettier than he'd remembered her. Vivacious, smiled readily, a really good figure. Insisted on telling her other guests about his acting career. Charles scrutinized her moves around the room, offering cheese and crackers. When he realized Oswald was watching him watch her, he turned to chat with the bridge-playing couple.

Melody Acres had provided a map of the adjoining state park. He studied it that night, and set out at dawn to explore, wearing jeans, map in hand.

It was indeed a very large park. Despite well-marked trails, one could imagine getting lost. Evergreen forests, hardwoods, meadows. Not far in from the Melody Acres gateway was a pond drying into a huge swamp, classic eutrophication. Charles shouldered through the reeds, stepping carefully on spongy ground, and almost stumbled into a section of the bog that looked like quicksand. He picked his way out carefully.

Almost back to home he met Oswald, binoculars around his neck. "Good morning!" Charles greeted. "I've had a long walk; you just starting out?"

"As regular as clockwork. Seven every morning." He limped off on his cane.

There was a bench a hundred yards from his door where the groomed path led toward the simpler state forest trails. Charles got *The Times* from his room and went back to read in the warming sunshine. Oswald reappeared at eight. One hour exactly. "Good morning again," Charles said. "You've had a good walk."

"You're that actor fellow, aren't you? Did I see you earlier today, or was it last night?"

"Both, thank you. Charles Livingston. Enjoy your morning." He went back to his paper, letting the older man hobble back to the complex alone.

The Morgans' apartment was down the hall. Charles, nearer the outside door, could keep an eye on the hallway from his kitchenette. Oswald set out next morning at precisely seven. Charles had chosen an open-necked shirt he'd worn as Stanley Kowalski, a design borrowed from Brando. He took a measuring cup and hurried down the hall to knock on the door.

"Sorry to bother you so early. I wondered if I might borrow a cup of sugar?" She was wearing a frilly peignoir.

"Oh, of course. Come in for a moment."

The little apartment was redolent of coffee. She must have seen him sniffing it. "I'd offer you a cup, but if Oswald saw signs that someone had been here, he'd go crazy." She made a face. "As his memory slips, he's become more fiercely possessive. Wait now." She took his measuring cup, and was back in a moment, standing close and looking up as she handed to him. "Here you are. Enjoy whatever it is you're making for breakfast."

He'd have sworn she considered offering him a kiss but thought better of it.

"Feel free to come any time," she said cheerfully.

"Thank you," he said, and went back to his room.

He spent the afternoon in the forest, becoming familiar with the pond and swamp. The reeds and high-bush blueberries were dense enough that anyone who managed to wander into the quagmire and fell wouldn't been seen from the dry land. Nearby, at the intersection of the path from the complex and the trails leading deeper into the park, there was a rustic bench where one might read one's newspaper and see another morning walker who came into the forest.

Back at his apartment, he did an Internet search for "rare water birds Connecticut" and found a snowy plover.

In a few minutes—an actor's skill—he could mimic the rattling, drawn-out quir-eee call.

Next morning, after seeing Oswald leave for his walk, he put on the Brando shirt again and went to return Betty's cup of sugar. She was in a dressing gown even more diaphanous than the one the first morning.

"I thought you might be back," she said.

"I do wish I could invite you in. Wait here."

He watched while she went to her kitchenette and emptied the sugar into a large container. She walked with an easy grace, and came back to stand again very close, looking up invitingly, as she handed him the cup.

He kissed her.

She kissed him back, lips parted, and then abruptly pushed him away. "Go now. I'll have to put on fresh lipstick. Oswald would notice. He's insanely insecure."

The next three mornings, Charles read his *Times* on the pathway bench. Oswald came and went punctually. Several other residents passed on morning constitutionals, but none ventured toward the forest. Each morning, toward the end of his reading hour, a security guard said hello on what appeared to be morning rounds.

On the fourth morning, Charles changed his routine, taking his newspaper to the bench at the intersection of the forest trails, near the swamp. Each morning, after greeting Oswald there, he folded his newspaper and walked back to the Melody Acres bench, read for another half-hour until the security fellow came by, then went in to breakfast.

A week later, Oswald failed to come home from his morning walk. Charles was able to confirm that he'd seen the older man set out. The security guard hadn't seen Oswald, but remembered seeing Charles, absorbed in his newspaper as usual.

A search was mounted.

Oswald was not found.

Charles was sure Betty would grieve, but would welcome solace.

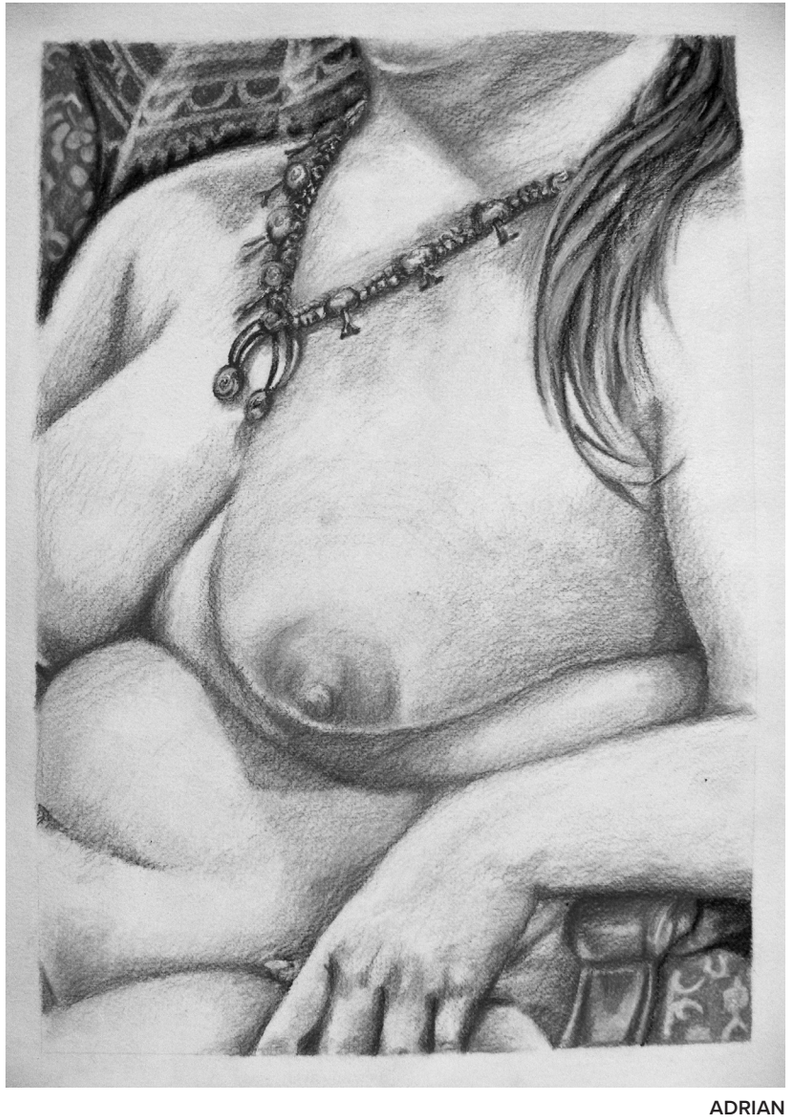
DON NOEL | PAIRS WITH PAGE 45

MULBERRY TREE

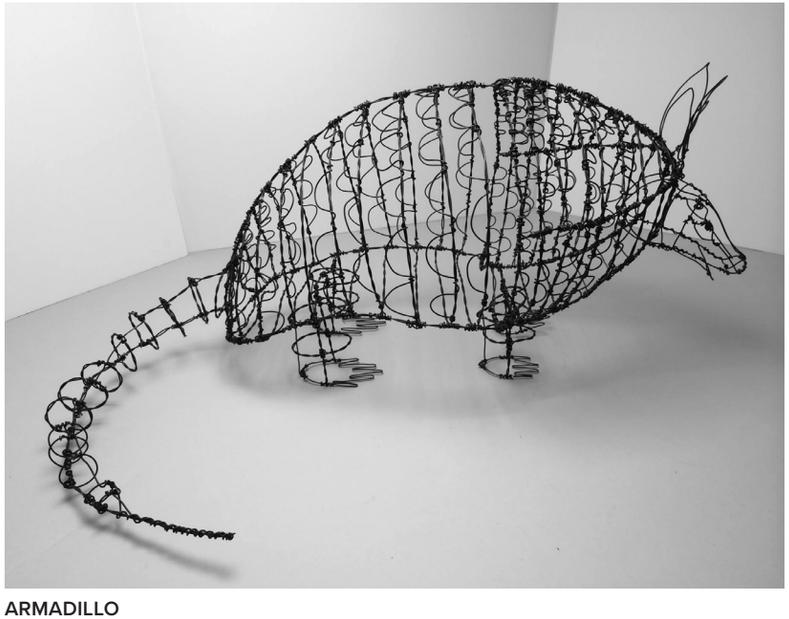
MARY BUCHINGER

tender wet fruit cloud
of purple velvet dewy
dripping how to turn it off oh
drunk trunk pumping
plumping messy sprawl
across my fence NIMBY! I
say NIMBY! still
innumerable here we go
round! tiny toe giant watch-
crown twisting twisting melty
mashy indigogo jam and pies
how much how many
countless countless teach that
tree temperance abstinence
hardship drought cut it off
all those crazed young berries
exquisite soaked sweet violet
sopping soft so much much

PAIRS WITH PAGE 10 | MARY BUCHINGER



ADRIAN
PAIGE GARLAND
conte



ARMADILLO
DARCEY MCKINNEY
wire sculpture

SWAMP FEVER

JOHN GREY

It's where the living
get to look dead.
Not just the sun-dew, the bladderwort,
the bald cypress,
but the green frog
stuck to its lily-pad
and the 'gator scales,
a stalled log
in a clog of pitcher-plant.

The air is thick and low
like a funeral home curtain,
the surface baked brown
and rippling with turtle creep.

And the sounds are scattered,
a dollop from below
and then a shrill cry overhead.
Even in a quagmire,
lust and hunger must be heard.

A snake slithers across
the little land on offer.
The sheen of its scales
is muted by green-algae.
No need for it to bite.
The look of the thing
is venomous enough.

The swamp's a disease
masquerading as a landscape.
Natural chills, instinctive tremor—
I've caught it well enough.

JOHN GREY | PAIRS WITH PAGE 42

GROWING UP

ARYN SOJUNG BRADLEY

When I was growing up, I didn't get spanked or put in time out or switched like the kids at school did. I got *meh meh*. The concept is simple—mom would get her stick (or a ruler) and make me put my hands out in front of me as though I were begging for soup. Then I'd get slapped across my palms. If I was really bad, I would get it across the back of my calves.

I was born in Pensacola, Florida to a Korean woman and a past-middle-aged American man. I remember being four years old, playing with my brother inside. It was a sunny and damp afternoon, like they all are in Florida. We were in a small gray room with gray carpet. My little brother, Nate, was two at the time. With the exception of the bowl cut he had for the first eight years of his life, he and I looked extremely similar. We both had the expected straight, jet black, wiry hair our mother had given us. Our cheeks were full and hung over our jawlines, as though we had just gotten our wisdom teeth out.

I don't remember why my mother had to give me *meh meh* that afternoon, telling me to behave better. But what I do remember—distinctly—is the look on her face when I stood up, threw my plastic purple car across the room, and yelled, "Go back to where you're from!"

My palms were still stinging from the sharp edges of the ruler. My oversized cheeks were hot but the rest of my body broke into a cold sweat when I realized what I had done. My mom's face turned pale and slouched back quickly, like a puppet that had been quickly released by a distracted puppeteer. I was so angry at my mom, thinking, *"Why did she have to look and act so differently from all the other moms?"*

I wanted a White mom, and I wanted the Korean out and away from me.

—

Since that afternoon, my sentiments towards my heritage didn't change much over the years, even though I did. Growing up, I could always tell who was the most famous Asian woman in America because I would frequently be compared to her. In the 90s, while at ballet practice, the other mothers would swoon over me and say I looked just like Michelle Kwan, the Chinese-American figure skater. In the early 2000s, someone told me that if I dressed better I could be just like Brenda Song, the actress from Hmong and Thai descent. In the past three years, I have been compared to Olivia Munn, the Vietnamese-American actress, seven times. She's obviously been very successful. Not once did anyone ever tell me that I looked Korean. I don't imagine that it's a "look" people in the Florida Panhandle have a really good grasp on anyway.

In many ways, I have lived the traditional and expected patterns of a girl from the American South. I spoke less and less Korean at home, ate less kimchi, and changed my hair. All my friends were White. All the boys I had a crush on were White. I went to predominantly White public schools and didn't really interact with anyone else. I checked "White" on the ethnicity portions of college entrance exams. I grew up camping, fishing, horseback riding, and wearing overalls. I swam year round. I was a lifeguard in the summertime.

No matter how I felt, I still wore an Asian face, and so my accomplishments were never my own. If I came home and announced I had made the A honor roll, my mother would quip, "Well, of course you did. Do you know how easy schools are here?" If someone in my class found out I was on the A honor roll, all I heard was, "Well, of course you did. You're Asian." My dad, always the support, would fall somewhere in between: "There is truth to what your mom says, but I'm proud of you anyway." Over the years, my accomplishments dissolved into nothing more than facts. Achievements were always expected and rarely celebrated.

I graduated college with double bachelor's degrees in three years (because duh, I'm Asian and school is easy) and went on to get my Masters in English (a feat my mother to this day brags about to her friends, ignoring the fact that English is the first and only language I can speak). After I was hired as a high school English teacher, someone told me that "schools love diversity hires."

When I started teaching these high schoolers, I got the same look I always get when I walk into the front of a classroom, the look that says How is this Asian bitch going to teach me English? Is she in the right place? The routine is always the same. Students are leery about me being their English teacher, but they act politely for the first week or so. In the second phase, one student will be brave enough to ask the question: What kind of Asian are you? This time around, when my dewy-eyed 14-year-olds got to that point, I told them to guess. It took a few minutes, but they eventually decided that I was most likely a 35-year old Vietnamese woman. I am currently 23. And definitely not Vietnamese.

At home, I listened to my dad voice his support (until very, very recently) for Donald Trump and his stance on immigration. I guess he forgot that he was married to and had children with an immigrant. In fact, I have spent a lifetime of sitting at various dinner tables listening to people tell me how immigrants come to the states, steal jobs and opportunities from "real" Americans, and plant babies so they can stay here. They never remember to acknowledge that half of my DNA is what they are openly against.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 38 | ARYN SOJUNG BRADLEY

ARYN SOJUNG BRADLEY | PAIRS WITH PAGE 38

PAIRS WITH PAGE 38 | ARYN SOJUNG BRADLEY

Sometimes, so did I.

—

Recently, I was sitting at dinner one night with some girlfriends. Janie, Karen, and I were sharing mahi tacos, margarita pitchers, and bad stories. After a few minutes of catching up, Karen said, "I'm texting Val and telling her to meet us here. Is that ok with you guys?"

"Val..." started Janie. "That's the one who just got back from teaching in Korea?"

I looked over at Karen, interested.

"Yeah," she said, not looking up from her phone. "She fucking hated it."

I looked down at my margarita and stirred the melting green frosty-like goodness.

An hour later, Val had arrived and it was as if the four of us had known each other for years. We had a few margaritas, to be sure—and the conversation eventually steered toward Val's experiences overseas.

She realized as soon as she sat down that I was Korean.

The typical conversation about Korean culture commenced. *Yes, I ate Kimchi. Yes, I have family in Seoul and Pusan. Yes, I can speak Korean OK—but I can't write or read in it. Yes, I have visited Korea twice and it was beautiful. Did you know they have four full seasons there?*

Later on—two or three more margaritas later—Val casually asked the table, "What do you guys think about this shirt? I just got it from Goodwill, but don't know if I really like it."

Without thinking, I answered.

"It's cute, I guess. It fits you well enough but looks a little yuppie-ish. Like an athletic yuppie. It'd probably look a lot better in a different color scheme."

The table was silent as she stared blankly at me for a second. Karen looked from me to Val several times. Janie slurped her margarita and said flatly, "That's why I'm friends with you."

Val burst out laughing. "That honesty! Girl, you know something?"

I waited.

"That's the Korean in you."



GENERATIONS
JOSHUA PARKER
digital collage

WHAT THE BLIND SEE

DEVON BALWIT

"Some preacher has left his mark on you," the blind man said with a kind of snicker. "Did you follow for me to take it off or give you another one?"
Wise Blood, Flannery O'Connor

People you don't know will lay claim to you. They will take you over, inhabiting even your shadows. When you stammer in protest, you will not recognize your voice. You will wave a stranger's arms, your heart beating in unfamiliar rhythm. They will insist they know you better than you know yourself. Refuse to believe, even if they borrow your own lips, your own raised eyebrow. Don't trust their mirror. Fight for yourself, coward that you are, kick these impostors to the ground and draw blood. Once you fatten your own lip, purple your own eye, they will know you are serious. From one exhale to the next, they will flee, dropping you like shed clothing. Perform your own miracle, lift yourself by your own strings. You will be wiser, scarred by your own hand.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 29 | DEVON BALWIT



ORACLE
ALLISHA YOUNG
photography



THE FAVORITE
ALLIE TONEY
photography

SLEEPING NEXT TO HER

ACE BOGGESS

I feel a weight lift
out of her
through her back
as light goes

she empties of day &
other days
that lie
like oaks
against her chest

she dreams without anger
as though her enemies
fled the field

what she feels
in private
in a locked room
inside her
I feel it too
tonight—too night
to bear more

I wait
like a messenger
to accept her reply
a serenade of sighing

this is why
night exists &
we within it

she sleeps
while I watch

she forgets &
I remember all

ACE BOGGESS | PAIRS WITH PAGE 26



RAW
KIMBERLY LOVVORN
photography

ORACLE 2017



SINISTER SMILE
ALLISHA YOUNG
photography

IN A BINARY WORLD

TERRY SANVILLE

Russ hustled down the sidewalk, his skinny forearms lifted and moving back and forth like the side rods on an old steam locomotive. Passing motorists probably thought something must be chasing him. His few friends knew he power-walked to push back against seventy years of aging. Both groups were right.

Russ walked past the Odd Fellows Cemetery just south of the Elks Lodge. Ahead, a transient shouldering a massive backpack staggered toward him. Russ moved to the right side of the walkway. The drifter moved into his path and stopped.

What's with this guy? Russ thought and maintained his twice-normal walking speed.

The transient slipped out of his pack and glared at him, his arms covered with homemade tattoos. "What the fuck do ya think you're doin'?" he yelled. "Tryin' to run me the fuck over?"

Russ moved to his left, intent on passing the man. But the creep shifted once more into his path.

"You touch me and I'll kick your fuckin' ass. You hear me?" The man rotated his muscled arms like a windmill. "I'll kick your ass from here to Fresno." His voice had morphed into a scream.

Russ felt the back of his neck go numb. The drifter stood a head taller than he, with tufts of curly beard checkerboarding his face, as if he'd pulled mounds of it out by the roots. Drool covered his chin and stained the front of his T-shirt. As Russ drew near, the man's rancid smell hit him. The drifter looked at him with twitching black eyes that showed no irises, arms drawn up in front of his chest, fists clenched.

Russ pulled hard right and passed the man, clipping his backpack but not slowing.

"Come back here you son-of-a-bitch. You touched my stuff. I'm gonna kick your fuckin' ass."

Russ throttled back the urge to run; the arthritis in his knees and hips had already made them burn. He picked up speed and focused on the sidewalk ahead while listening for sounds from behind. Not hearing any, he slowed and turned. The drifter watched him, then strode toward him, as if in pursuit.

Stupid meth head Russ thought and regained speed. *What am I worried about? No wacked out druggie is gonna catch me.*

In less than ten minutes he turned down his cross street. The transient hadn't followed him. Russ forced his shoulders to relax and pushed hard for the last half mile to his home, an old farmhouse buried in the center of a warehouse district. His wife sat on the porch, reading.

"Who's chasing you?" Anna asked, smiling.

He rested his hands on his knees and sucked in deep breaths. "Nobody. Just trying to give the ole ticker a good workout."

"You sure? You look pale. Come sit and tell me about your walk."

"Nothing much to tell. Everything's still in the same place."

"Come on, Russell. Something's going on."

"Jeez, let me rest a minute before you give me the third degree?"

Anna stared at the open book in her lap, her lips pressed into a tight line. Russ groaned to himself and slumped into the chair next to her.

"I'm sorry I snapped at you. I had a run-in with a homeless guy. I guess it freaked me out a bit."

She turned to him. "Tell me."

He recounted the incident. Anna listened to the details, taking it all into her sensible mind. He could almost hear the rational plan being hatched and dreaded the ensuing debate.

"You should call the police," Anna said. "That man could do the same thing to somebody else, could hurt them, could hurt you."

"I know, I know. I'll keep an eye out for the creep. If I see him again, I'll phone the cops. But I never saw him before. He's probably just passing through."

"Do you have your cell phone with you?"

"You know I hate carrying that thing. Can't think straight with the phone buzzing away."

"Well, carry it from now on. I don't feel safe with you out there mixing with the crazies."

He grinned. "Some people think I'm one of them."

PAIRS WITH PAGE 24 | TERRY SANVILLE

TERRY SANVILLE | PAIRS WITH PAGE 24

She frowned and shoved at his arm before rising and going inside. He let out a deep breath, knowing that he would carry the cell phone but take no further action. *Live and let live,* he thought. *That guy didn't touch me... it was all just bravado... he likes scaring people... does a good job of it...*

—

Russ continued his daily five-mile walks along various routes around San Luis Obispo. The July heat baked him. He loved the summer because most of the University students had left and the tourists seldom used the streets he walked.

But he noticed a gradual change, a growing sense of unease, something he kept to himself, not telling Anna or any of his friends.

In the downtown commercial district, while passing along crowded sidewalks, he stared at the faces of approaching people, his body tense, mouth dry. *Which one of them will step in front of me and collide? I know they see me. They always expect me to move, to give ground, to retreat. I've been doing it most of my life, just never realized...*

At first, Russ shook himself and grinned sheepishly for having such thoughts. *I'm not paranoid. I'm not. But are they doing it on purpose?* He studied the oncoming perpetrators of his fears. *There is only a binary solution. Either they step in front of me and we crash, or they don't... nothing but zeros and ones.*

I hate being a zero.

As the weeks passed he avoided places where people walked. But even on quiet streets, he heard footsteps behind him and moved faster and faster until the blood thundered in his head and drowned out the noises, all except his cell phone. Anna called him daily, "Just checking in," she'd say.

At night he'd dream of shadowy figures charging toward him, flowing around his body, or through him like smoke through an open window.

He'd awaken, wound tight as a guitar string, breathing hard, with Anna's hand on his shoulder, shaking him, "Wake up, wake up, you're dreaming. It's only a dream."

He stopped eating lunches at downtown restaurants, instead finding isolated cafes on the outskirts where few pedestrians could confront him. But come autumn and the crush of college students, even those more remote places didn't feel safe.

Russ told Anna that his arthritis made his daily trek painful and he'd have to stop his power-walking routine. He dragged their stationary exercise bike onto the front porch and spent an hour each day spinning the pedals, eyes closed, envisioning streets free of everyone, a utopian world without confrontation, without fear.

"Why don't we drive into town for a movie?" Anna asked one afternoon. "We can take in a matinee then have dinner afterward."

"I don't know if anything good is showing."

"That French film got great reviews."

"Ah, jeez, reading subtitles is a pain. I miss half the action with those foreign films."

"Russ, what's wrong? We haven't gone anywhere for weeks. I've been running all the errands and... and you hardly speak to me."

"Look, I'm not ready to... to talk about it yet. When I am, you'll be the first."

"If I didn't know better, I'd think you're becoming agoraphobic."

"That's crazy. I love the outside."

"Well, what's keeping you from walking? And don't tell me it's your sore hips. We both know they work just fine." She grinned at him. He bowed his head and pretended to read. After a few minutes of silence she left the room.

On a late Friday night after a lasagna with Cabernet meal, more wine than pasta, he and Anna slumped onto the sofa and stared at the flickering TV.

She grabbed the remote and shut it off. "We need to talk... and if you don't want to talk with me, then I can help you find... find a counselor."

"Relax, I'm not crazy. Just drop it."

"I can't. I'm worried about you. You're not getting enough sleep, losing weight, seem distracted."

"Yeah, I know. But I can afford to shed a few pounds."

"It's not good for you. Look, you'll feel better if you tell me, tell someone."

"Oh all right, I'll tell you... if you promise not to jump in with one of your solutions."

Anna smiled. "You know that's hard for me to do but... but I promise."

Russ told her his story, revisiting all of his fears, dreams, and mental wanderings. Anna listened without interrupting.

When he finished, the silence built between them.

"So it all started with that... that homeless guy? What you need to do is..." She grinned and stopped talking.

"I think that drifter was just a flash point that let me see my... my problems."

Anna stayed quiet.

"I didn't know how paranoid I could be. Sometimes I shake myself for thinking people are actually out to get me, to taunt me, to play an eternal game of 'chicken.' But then I think how I've always avoided... confrontation, and let sleeping dogs lie."

"Not a bad assessment for a retired engineer," Anna cracked.

He laughed. "Yah, Papa Freud would be proud."

"Do you think it could be PTSD?"

Russ drew away from her. "From what? That stupid incident with the homeless guy? That's a pretty extreme response, don't you think?"

"You tell me."

"I've actually been thinking about that. Maybe..."

"Maybe what?"

Russ didn't answer and stared straight ahead at the dark television.

"Well... thanks for talking with me. When you're ready for more, I'm here for you, honey."

"Thanks, Anna."

—

The rains came early that year. Russ stayed close to home, watched TV, played music, and surfed the Internet. But as spring came on, the coastal California hills turned green and the weather warmed. He began to take short forays into the surrounding neighborhood, walking quiet streets and biting down hard on his emotions whenever he passed a pedestrian. With time, he relaxed, picked up his pace, and regained his appetite.

"Ya look skinny," Pam said as she wiped down the counter at Louisa's Downtown Café. "Haven't seen ya for a while. Y'all been sick?"

"No... well maybe. I feel better now."

"Good. I missed seein' ya."

"Thank you. That's kind."

Russ finished his three-egg omelet, left Pam a twenty-percent tip, and headed home. He combed his long white hair back with his fingers then checked his wristwatch. *Three miles in thirty minutes... I can do this, no sweat.* He chose the most direct route, the one that passed the Elks Lodge and the cemetery.

As he approached the spot of his past confrontation, his breathing quickened and he found himself power-walking at top speed. But in a minute he was past and slowed to a more comfortable pace. He stopped staring at the sidewalk and instead studied the trees, the puffs of low fog rolling in off the Pacific, the crows on the telephone wires, cawing loudly. He smiled and let out a deep breath.

A tall man carrying a huge rucksack came out of a driveway and shambled toward him. "Hey mother fucker, give me some damn money, will ya?" The man stopped and glared at him.

Ice water shot down Russ's spine. He slowed to a stop.

"Come on, mother fucker, give me somethin' or I'll kick your ass." The man dropped his pack onto the sidewalk, blocking passage. He stood wavering in the afternoon breeze, his face burnt sienna by the sun. He swiped at watery blue eyes. "Come on, asshole, hand it over."

Russ felt his cheeks burn. He pocketed his sunglasses and focused on the man's face while walking toward him, picking up speed, his breaths coming at the same pace as his swinging arms. The drifter's eyes grew large, hands balled into fists, lips wrinkled into a sneer.

"Get out of my way," Russ roared and pumped his legs as hard as he could until he broke into a high-stepping run. *I'm not a zero this time... not a zero.*

FIREFLIES

KRYSTAL DEAN

Her red sundress swirls past me. With her shoes in her hand, she dances across the grass. The edges of night are fraying above the trees in the distance and the sun is climbing over the canopy of leaves. Fireflies dart around her, disturbed by her impromptu recital. She's laughing at something I said, but somehow I don't remember what it is.

Something wet smacks my cheek. I look up just as the first drops fall. I expect her to run, to seek shelter. Instead, she looks up, turning her hands toward the sky. Soon her dress is completely soaked and her hair is plastered to her face and she laughs again, lifting her arms high.

She's beautiful. And I want to kiss her.

But I stay where I am. I keep my hands in my jacket pockets. I don't speak. I just watch. The rain drags my clothes down. My breath turns to fog. And still I just watch.

She beckons, her hand flicking raindrops at me.

I don't want to dance with her. I may never let go if I do. But she doesn't wait for me. She comes to me and wraps her arms around my neck. And I move with her as she sways to the music in her head. I don't know the beat, so I let her lead. Her shoes plop into the grass somewhere behind me. Her cold hands touch my neck.

And her red dress drips on my shoes, her body shivers against mine, her laugh mists across my cheek.

"This reminds me of a song," she says.

"Going to sing to me now?" I spin her and she laughs.

She comes back to my arms, pressing closer, like she doesn't want to be away from me. Maybe she doesn't. "No. I don't remember the whole thing. But it starts about the girl dancing in the rain and fireflies. Something about kissing the grass."

I push her soaked hair away from her face. "Doesn't sound very appealing."

"Shut up," she laughs. "But it says, 'All that I know about us is that beautiful things never last. That's why fireflies flash.'"

"You saying we won't last?" I try to make it sound like a joke.

She just smiles and kisses me.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 22 | KRYSTAL DEAN

Her lips are too wet. Her arms just feel like water, not skin. I focus on my shoes filling with rain, instead of her lips playing with mine.

And it is fucking cold.

We don't kiss for long because every time I try to breathe through my nose I get a snort of liquid and I feel like I'm drowning for a second. What happened to those perfect kisses in the rain I saw on TV? Where's the Kenny Loggins music? Why didn't I realize that being soaking wet means your underwear are wet too?

She leaves me down the road from her house and I watch her walk away. Her red dress no longer swings, but instead sticks to her legs and backside. And it's just not as sexy as I feel it should be. I turn the other direction and start back toward home, but I think of all those movies where the lovers turn and look back at each other as they part ways, so I look back and I expect a moment like that. A moment that I can hold onto that turns out better than our wet, freezing kiss in the rain.

But she's not looking at me. She's not even walking slow, as if she wishes she doesn't have to go. I watch her round the corner and she's gone. No glance over her shoulder. No hesitation. Nothing at all. Just gone.

So I leave, crossing the firefly field alone this time. I thought the rain would have driven them away, but here they are, winking through the grass for just a few moments before fading and blinking out. I focus on the other end of the field and walk faster as the silent fire of morning drives away the flashing fireflies.

KRYSTAL DEAN | PAIRS WITH PAGE 22



COURTNEY BARNETT
DARCEY MCKINNEY
experimental typography

NOT JUST CHAMPAGNE, NOT JUST COFFEE

KAYLEE DUFF

Day One:

I knew next to nothing about art and I was still learning how to love myself.

She was all blonde hair and rosy cheeks and white teeth. I felt like I was living in a scene from a romance novel, where the modern-day princess floats down from her castle to grace us with her ethereal presence. She made my veins buzz like I belonged in another world, a world where someone like her would look at someone like me. Her blue dress flowed around her and her smile pierced through me from across the room. I was surrounded by so much art and yet all I could look at was her.

We were at a gallery downtown owned by a mutual friend. Maybe he was trying to set us up, but he didn't have to ask me to go over to her. I was drawn to her, to her laugh, to her glow. Her art surrounded us on the walls; her smile was more dazzling than any masterpiece I'd ever seen. It deserved a museum dedicated solely to it, solely to the way it made my heart beat rapidly. I wanted to drown in her blue eyes. I wanted her to annihilate my entire existence with those lips if it meant I'd get a kiss.

Maybe it was the champagne talking or maybe I was falling in love at first sight.

She came up to me and I thought I'd died and ascended to a strange, earth-like Heaven where Angels spoke to Sinners and everything was upside-down. "I love your shoes." Her voice sounded like honey tastes.

"I got them from my mom's closet."

"That's my favorite place to shop." She laughed and I knew no music would ever top that sound, would never even come close.

"Your paintings are beautiful." But none so beautiful as the artist herself.

"Thank you. I know." I was spinning and I was falling and I'd never catch my breath if she didn't stop stepping closer to me. She turned to a nearby waiter and grabbed two more glasses of champagne. Handing me one, she said, "Let's go out."

"Yeah."

KAYLEE DUFF | PAIRS WITH PAGE 20

Day Four Hundred and Fifty-Seven:

I sat in a blue armchair facing a blank white wall. My eyes were closed, not because I was tired but because I was exhausted and I was only halfway done with the day. My phone sat in my lap. After a few minutes of deliberation, I gave in and decided to listen to the voicemail my mom had left me about an hour ago. "How did your date with that guy go? Call me back." I started counting the cracks in the wall. "I'm just really excited to hear about this! He sounds very promising." One. Two. Three. "Just let me know, okay, darling?"

Four. Five. Click.

We'd lived in that apartment together for three months at that point and still hadn't begun to decorate.

I needed to call my mom back.

I pressed the phone against my ear and prayed for her voicemail. "Hey, sweetie."

"Hey, Mom."

"How are you?"

"The date didn't happen." Sharp intake of breath on both sides of the conversation. Her trying to make sense of what I said and my trying to make sense of what I wanted to say next. I settled on: "He was very weird."

"Did he cancel on you? Oh, I'm not surprised actually. I always knew Martha's son was a flake. Just wait until I tell her."

"Mom. He didn't cancel on me. I cancelled on him, because I don't want to go on a date."

With a boy. I just couldn't will myself to say it. I couldn't breathe, and then the door was opening and I could hear footsteps coming up the hallway.

Panic. Why was she home so early? "Babe, can I have some coffee?" She was standing in front of me, blonde waves cropped close to her head, lithe frame covered in paint, a smile bright enough to illuminate the room.

I put the phone down. "I thought you were at work?"

"I worked until one, but headed home early, because I wanted to spend some time with you."

"Coffee and cigarettes later? Let me finish this call first." I didn't bother mentioning I'd already had three cups earlier.

I picked the phone back up with shaky hands. Commanded myself: stare blankly at white walls, erase my mind, don't think about her hands on my body, don't think about my mother's face when she saw my cousin Blake hold his boyfriend's hand, don't think. White walls. "Hey, sorry."

"Was that your roommate talking to you? She's very loud." She'd heard.

"Yeah. Mom..." I couldn't say: She's not just my roommate. I couldn't bring myself to say anything.

"Erin, why did you cancel your date with him?"

"I didn't want to go."

"And why not?" I didn't want to say it out loud, not like this. But then I could hear Alexa in the room next to me. I imagined her undressing, smiling at her reflection in the mirror while she slowly unbuttoned her shirt, putting her rings back on scrubbed-raw fingers. She'd finish and then hold me while I shook, until I stopped thinking about hiding. She deserved more than that. I deserved more than that.

I was so cold but not nearly as cold as the silence in my ears. "Mom. Alexa isn't just my roommate."

"I know. She's your friend, too."

"She's my *girl*friend." It rushed out of my mouth before I had a chance to think and I could feel my whole universe tilting on its axis.

"Your... girlfriend?"

"We're together. I don't go on dates with Martha's son or anyone else's son, because I go on dates with her."

"Oh." Not even a full word, just a nondescript syllable. And I knew that I was lost to her.

"I'm in love with her. I have been, for a long time. I just... Mom?"

"Let me call you back, sweetheart, okay? I promise I'll call you tomorrow."

Alexa had told me my mom would need time and I didn't know who I needed more, my mom or Alexa, but there was no turning back. I blinked, once, twice. "Alexa?" I needed her, my ethereal goddess. The walls were so white, so clean, so cracked and so blindingly empty.

She stopped in the doorway to our little living room with two mugs of steaming coffee, saw my face, and knew. She simply knew. "I have an idea." Handing me my drink, she turned around and walked away but returned a minute later with a photo in her hand and a roll of tape in the other. It was a picture of us, taken the night I first heard the name Alexa and understood what it meant to meet someone who made you want to put stars in the sky just to see her smile. She taped it up and my heart started racing.

The coffee was perfect. Alexa always made my coffee exactly how I liked it: scalding hot and mostly cream.

She kissed my cheek and whispered, "It's going to be okay."

"Yeah."

PAIRS WITH PAGE 20 | KAYLEE DUFF

KAYLEE DUFF | PAIRS WITH PAGE 20

GODFATHER

MEGAN GUINN

The television kept playing the same movie
over and over again.

A marathon
(of sorts).

"I'll make him an offer he can't refuse."
"Leave the gun. Take the cannoli."

Repeat,
repeat,
repeat.

He told me to go home,
said it wasn't his time yet
and that I should sleep.

I held his hand anyway,
leathery and limp,
like something wilting

but not like a plant
this hand was too thick

and too pale
to be like a plant.

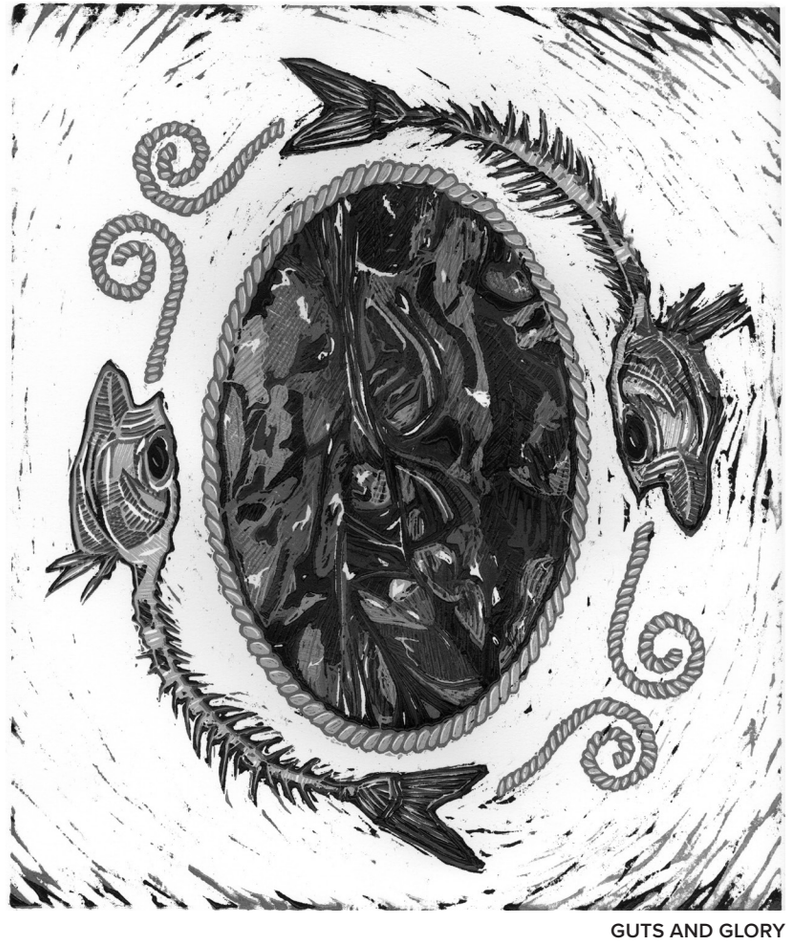
He coughed.

Then he stared,
stared,
stared,
stared.

Then I was underwater.

And he was sleeping with the fishes.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 17 | MEGAN GUINN



GUTS AND GLORY
AMANDA YOUNGBLOOD
printmaking

THUNDERCELL

LAURINDA LIND

I was the only one I knew
who grew up below a bowling
alley, surprising in itself and
for the threnody of thunder
suspended overhead and
laying down its sudden thuds
and drumrolls to dramatize
our days. I hid beneath that
loud heaven and invented
myself out of stories that
sighed from the stone
cellar walls, just audible
under the rumble, and when
I wore those whispers out
into the world they weren't
enough and it took me
another lifetime, years after
that place was leveled, to
figure that what I needed
was to go back under till
I could be thunder as well.



GESTALT
PAIGE GARCIA
digital illustration

W: AN INDEX, AN APPENDIX, WHATEVER

SUE WALKER

The Willies

that creepy feeling, not fear exactly, but a sense of unease. But if we're going to talk about the willies before we talk about wine, waftage, wagtails, or wyrd, let us put some historical—or not—perspective on it: ancestry, genetics, paternity, whatever brings you to that state of dis-ease, nervousness, with all due consideration of historical consequence:

William, The Conqueror

Whatever? He was William the Bastard before he was ever Conqueror. When his papa, Robert I, Duke of Normandy, had an out-of-wedlock affair with a woman named Herleva, William, their offspring became "William the Bastard," said largely behind his back, and only after the Battle of Hastings, was he upgraded to "William the Conqueror."

Wherefore his marriage caused the willies as well. Matilda said she didn't want to marry William, but he refused to take "no" for an answer—and when she set forth one day on her horse, he grabbed her by her braids, and yanked her off her beast. Whatever next—would you ever believe it except for wherefore, she succumbed and married the bastard—and gave him ten children. Well, then, he acquired a case of the willies that resulted in severe depression.

Willie waddled then and his weight weighed heavily upon him. King Philip lightened him to a pregnant woman soon to give birth. God wot! The "willies" indeed. He devised his own diet—a specified time that he would drink only spirits and wine. Said diet was unsuccessful.

Whilom—Willie went to war—and it was during a battle in 1087 that he was thrown against his saddle so forcefully that it ruptured his intestines. Whoa! An infection set in and then he died shortly for there were was no penicillin. Priests tried to stuff him, too roundly, too roughly, into a stone coffin too small for his heft, and when they pushed and shoved on his abdomen, he split wide open—like "pop goes the weasel!" Whew! Phew! The mourners ran west and east, and ran as if their worth depended on it! The stench! The smell!

William Tell

> Come away, come away with William Tell,
> Come away to the land he loved so well
> Fit a bolt to your bow, and away we go
> For Te-e-e-ell, and...

and yes, do; do tell...

SUE WALKER | PAIRS WITH PAGE 13

If you don't think shooting an apple off a son's head would give you the willies, I don't know what...

Tell's given name was Wilhelm,

but what is and what isn't in a name—not who, necessarily—or what or when and now... Whosoever, whomsoever, whenever listening to the "William Tell Overture."

Willie Lane Craig, indeed, Richard Dawkins said, "Don't feel embarrassed if you haven't heard of him; he parades himself as though he were a philosopher, but which professors (for what their opinion is worth) had ever, had never heard his name?"

Willie Shakespeare—peerless William:

Oh to know what we are, but not what we may be... or not.

Wordsworth—Willie worth words—what words?

Wisdom is oftentimes nearer when we stoop than when we soar.
What we need is not the will to believe, but the wish to find out.

Find what?

William Saroyan said everybody has to die... but believed an exception might be made in his case.

William Falkner—aka Faulkner (depending on how much gin)

"Civilization begins with distillation," does it not?

But the past is never dead, is it Willie? For your illusions are a part of you like your bones and flesh and memory.

(William Faulkner was partial to a Mint Julep, serving it with whiskey, sugar, ice and some crushed mint, all in a metal cup. The recipe was left at his Rowan Oak estate.)

My word! What's the Word?

Take W, for example.

W (Dubya)

Dubya Dubya Dubya America has been rallying behind its president since war began in Afghanistan.

"I know how hard it is for you to put food on your family."
(Greater Nashua, N.H., Chamber of Commerce, Jan. 27, 2000)

"Rarely is the question asked: Is our children learning?"
(Florence, S.C., Jan. 11, 2000)

"Too many good docs are getting out of the business. Too many OB/GYNs aren't able to practice their love with women all across the country."
(Poplar Bluff, Mo., Sept. 6, 2000)

"One of the great things about books is sometimes there are some fantastic pictures."
(U.S. News & World Report, Jan. 3, 2000)

"We ought to make the pie higher."
(South Carolina Republican debate, Feb. 15, 2000)

Or else make Walnut cookies.

WHY?

WHY NOT?

CAPTAIN RILEY SETS SAIL

MICHELLE GARCIA

Captain Riley's screams were muffled by the raging sea. His crew could hardly hear him barking orders over the crashing waves and the thunderous roar coming from the sky. The only time the crew could see through the darkness around them was when the sky lit up with lightning. They were caught in the biggest storm Captain Riley has ever seen in his life.

"Captain, she can't hold much longer!" his best mate, Sir Arrow, called from behind him.

"She'll hold! *The Serpent* has lasted this long! She won't give up on me now! Take the helm!" Captain Riley said, pushing off the wheel and making his way to the main deck. He watched as his crewmates slipped and slid with rain pouring down on their backs. They were panicking.

"Avast Ye, scallywags!" he yelled with all his might. The crew stopped what they were doing and stood as still as they could on the swaying ship.

"We've been through worse storms than this!" Captain Riley stated, looking to each of his crewmates. "Pull yer selves together, and let us live to find the sea calm once more!"

The crew cheered when a distant voice was heard from the crow's nest.

"Cap'n! The beast! She lives!" the lookout yelled from above. Captain Riley looked toward the sea and couldn't believe his eyes. There, in the distance, was the beast, the Kraken, heading right for them.

The crew went berserk, praying to Poseidon for mercy, but Captain Riley only smiled.

"Lads, this is it! The legend we've been waiting for! We will defeat this beast and the crew of *The Serpent* will live for all eternity. There will be stories of us forever. We will be immortal! Now, keep a weathered eye open mateys, unless you want to end up in Davy Jones' Locker, savvy?"

"Aye Aye!" The crew rang out.

"Come about, Sir Arrow! Turn me ship around!" he called to his best mate, who turned the helm all the way around. "Ready the cannons!"

Everyone got into position, ready for the fight of their lives. Captain Riley was laughing wholeheartedly. He'd never been so happy in his life. To see the beast itself was unheard of, but to fight it was a whole different level of crazy. And there's nowhere he would rather be than on his ship with his crew.

"Cannons ready, Sir!" he heard from somewhere around him.

"Fire!" Captain Riley yelled. Cannons went off and hit the beast, causing it to sway, but it started towards them even faster.

"Hit the deck!" someone called.

The Serpent's crew braced themselves as the beast crashed into the ship, its long tentacle-like arms knocking into masts and pulling up boards.

"To arms!" Captain Riley yelled, unsheathing his sword. His crew followed suit, raising their blades in the air with grins on every face.

"Let's send this beast back where it—"

"Riley!"

The voice of Riley's mother snapped him back into reality. She knocked on the bathroom door. "Riley, are you finished? It's almost bedtime," she called from outside.

"Yes ma'am!" the little boy said. "I just gotta dry off!"

"Okay, hurry up, sweetie!"

Riley looked back to his bubble bath when his mother's footsteps got softer. The plastic boat, rubber duck, and little green army men were floating at the top of the water, surrounded by bubbles. Riley grabbed the rubber duck and grinned.

"Arr!" Captain Riley yelled, getting back to his battle with the beast.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 3 | MICHELLE GARCIA

MICHELLE GARCIA | PAIRS WITH PAGE 3

REELING

KRISTI CARTER

Ask the riverbed why
I peeled the calluses off my fingertips.

Your eyes unfold
like two rose blooms—spiraling into my lap:
a cloven foot coated in black eiderdown.

Someone underwater
severs the leash from my neck.

You mirror my inertia with drool and groping,
mistaken.

Go ahead, cling to me,
but the floor groans, ravenous.

Ask the riverbed why
I choose you over drowning.

To rake the throat in its swallowing.
To trace the pitch, clouding over.

PAIRS WITH PAGE 1 | KRISTI CARTER



BE HERE
JENNIFER LOTHRIGEL
photography



GLASS DRIPS
JESSE LUNDY
kiln form

REACHING UP
ADORABLE MONIQUE
clay

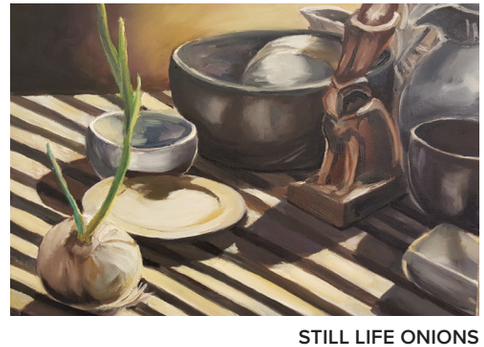


BAKERY BEAR
EMILY CARLIN
digital illustration



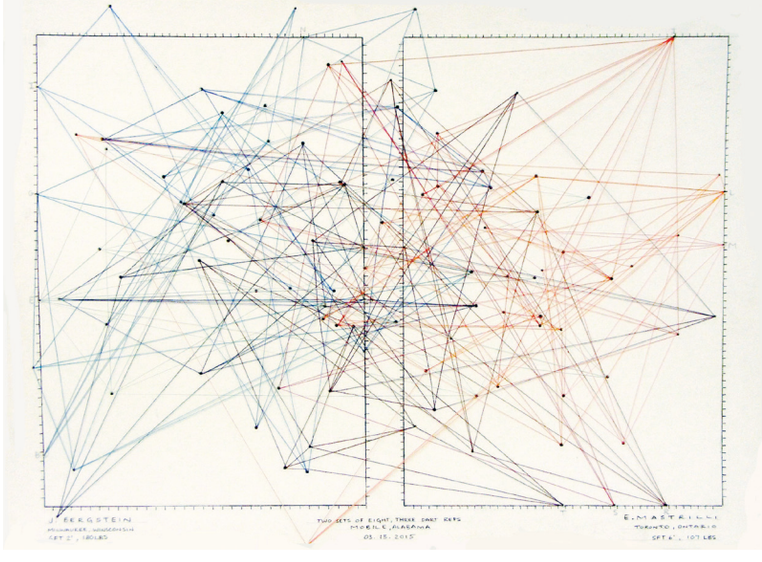


TEAPOT
JENNIFER WILLIAMS
ceramics



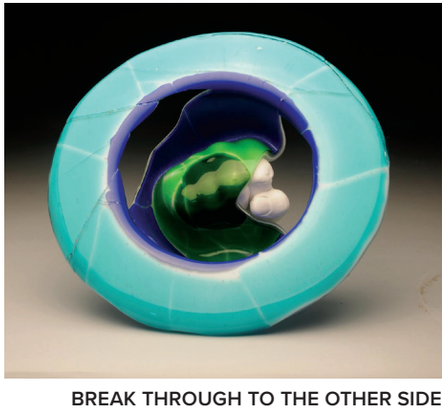
STILL LIFE ONIONS
KEVIN MAYER
oil on canvas

TWO SETS OF EIGHT, THREE DART REPS
ELAINA MASTRILLI
mixed media





BORN TO FLY
AMANDA YOUNGBLOOD
woodcut



BREAK THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE
ANNA WHEELER
glass

FLOW
CHRISTINE LAGRASSA
glass





FELIPE EL CHIVO
RAMON DEANDA
ceramics



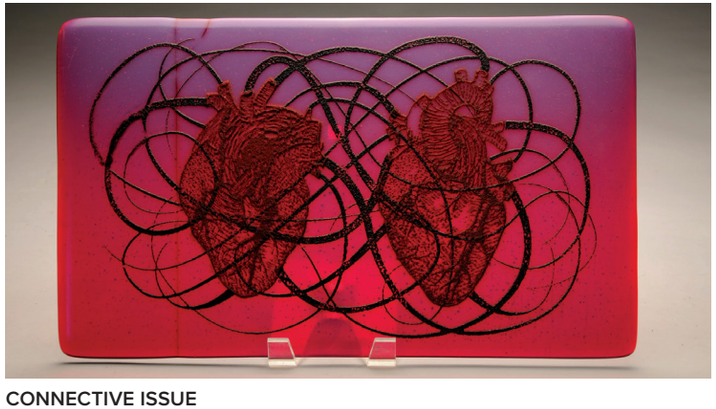
CHEF
FREDERICK BLACHE
sculpture

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MOM
JORDAN WRIGHT
glass



FALL STILL LIFE
AMANDA YOUNGBLOOD
oil on wood





CONNECTIVE ISSUE
CHRISTINA LEGRASSA
glass

STILL LIFE IN PLANES
KEVIN MAYER
oil on canvas

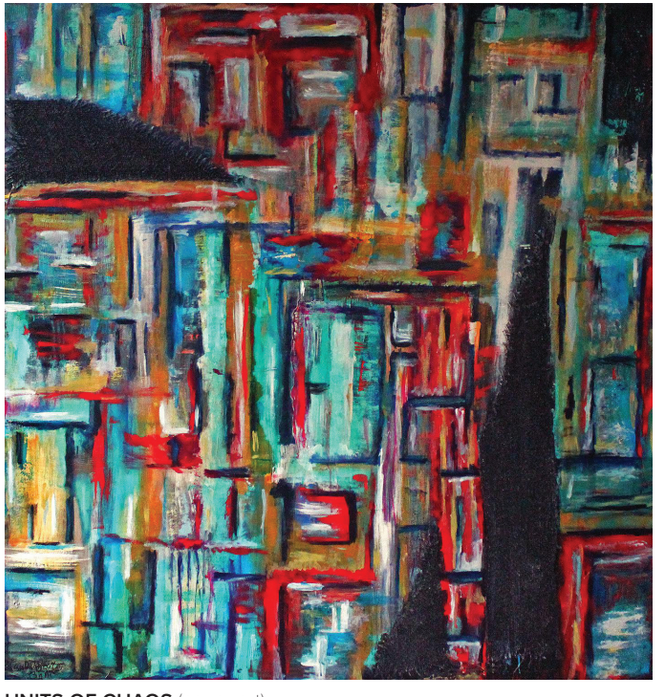




EMERALD VORTEX
EMILY CARLIN
glass



LIONFISH RELIQUARY
DENVER CARTWRIGHT
ceramics



UNITS OF CHAOS (cover art)
LAURA SCOTT BELL
painting

SPECIAL THANKS

The staff would like thank all of the contributors that submitted work to us. We cherish the opportunity to read and showcase your work each year.

We would also like to thank our faculty advisors, Ellen Harrington and diane gibbs for their continuous dedication to *Oracle* and their guidance in making this book the best it can be, this year and every year.

We are also grateful to the past editors, Karie Fugett and Aryn Bradley, for their support and encouragement throughout the production of this book.

Last, but certainly not least, we are thankful for our art directors, Allie Toney and Joshua Parker, for designing and creating this beautiful book out of the pile of submissions that it was.

Additionally, *Oracle* 2017 continues to remember Bobby Holmes who was a poet, a writer, and a student at the University of South Alabama. In his memory, Dr. Larry Holmes, Bobby's father and history professor at USA, established the Bobby Holmes Scholarship, which is awarded each year to the editor-in-chief of *Oracle Fine Arts Review*.

Other thanks:

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USA College of Arts and Sciences
Andrzej Wierzbicki, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Steven Trout, Chair, English Department

TINA SCHUMANN
OCEAN FUGUE
1

Tina Schumann holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Pacific Lutheran University. Her full-length poetry collection *Praising the Paradox* is forthcoming from Red Hen Press in 2019. Her collection *As If* (Parlor City Press) was awarded the Stephen Dunn Poetry Prize for 2010. She is the recipient of the American Poet Prize from *The American Poetry Journal* and her work placed as a finalist in the National Poetry Series, New Issues Poetry Prize and the Four Way Books Intro Prize. She is a Pushcart nominee and editor of the forthcoming anthology *Two-Countries: U.S. Daughters and Sons of Immigrant Parents* (Red Hen Press, 2017).

LAUREN JOHNSON
CARNIVAL GLASS
3

Lauren Johnson is a DC-based writer and independent journalist. She's a third year MFA candidate in creative writing at American University, and an Emerson College alumni. Her writing has appeared in Cafemfa.com, Playbill.com, Earth Island Journal blog, and the Boston Globe. She's at work on her first novella which she describes as a "gothic fairytale."

MARIE DOYLE
MISSISSIPPI MANORS
10

Marie Doyle is a senior who currently attends the Alabama School of Math and Science. She enjoys running, reading, playing rugby, and not filling out her college applications. When not doing schoolwork, she can be found building blanket forts with her roommate and wasting time on the internet.

MEREDITH TREDE
IN KNOWLEDGE WHAT
13

Meredith Trede's serves on the Advisory Committee of Slapering Hol Press. Her new collection, *Tenement Threnody* (2016), is from Main Street Rag Press. A Toadlily Press founder, her chapbook, *Out of the Book*, was in *Desire Path*. Her many journal publications include *Barrow Street*, *Cortland Review*, *Friends Journal*, *Gargoyle*, and *The Paris Review.*

KARIE FUGETT
SHARONS AND SHIT-STAINED WALLS
14

Karie Fugett is an MFA candidate in nonfiction at Oregon State University. She is the nonfiction editor of *45th Parallel* and a managing editor of *Random Sample Review*. A Pushcart Prize nominee, her work can be found in *Hermeneutic Chaos Literary Journal*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Deep South Magazine,* and elsewhere.

DONNA ORCHARD
YELLOW MAMA
17

Donna Orchard has worked as a teacher and administrator in public middle schools and high schools in the South. Her work has included teaching in county facilities and juvenile halls. She has a children's book coming out this year: *Nanners for Nana.*

KASY LONG
UNRAVELED MOTHER
20

Kasy Long is a senior creative writing major at Ohio Northern University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle*, *The Sucarnochee Review, Glass Mountain*, *The RavensPerch*, and *Polaris Literary Magazine*. In her free time, she watches *I Love Lucy*, reads Emily Dickinson's poetry, and dreams about the beautiful Lake Chautauqua in western New York. After graduation, she hopes to work in communications for a thriving cultural museum.

BRON TREANOR
THEY MET IN AMSTERDAM
22

Bron Treanor lives in Washington D.C. and is pursuing a degree in Creative Writing from American University. She is currently working on a novel and a collection of short stories.

MYKAELA ARMSTRONG
SHE
24

Mykaela Armstrong is a freshman biomedical sciences major at the University of South Alabama. She is striving toward medical school, but also enjoys writing fiction in her spare time.

JUDI RYPMA
LAVENDER MAN
26

Judi Rypma is addicted to traveling, gardening, and raising basset hounds. Her favorite place is Russia, where she has made over 20 trips. She teaches literature at Western Michigan University. Her poems have appeared most recently in *Whale Road Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Concho River Review*, and *California Quarterly*. She has published seven chapbooks, including *Rapunzel's Hair* (winner of the All Nations Press Chapbook Contest), as well as three full-length collections. Her most recent book is *Amber Notes* (FutureCycle Press, 2015).

MICHAEL CARROLL
PRETEND I WAS HERE
29

Michael Carroll won the 2015 Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, for his collection *Little Reef and Other Stories*. His stories have appeared in *The Yale Review* and *Open City* among many other journals, as well as a number of anthologies. He is at work on a memoir, from which "Pretend I Was Here" was taken. A related essay will appear this spring in the inaugural print edition of *The New Engagement*.

ANNA VAN DERWOOD
IMITATIONS
38

Anna Van Derwood is a Mobile native studying Creative Writing at the University of South Alabama. They are a proud queer and mixed-race person of color. Their primary interests include poetry, social justice advocacy, musical performance, and long hugs.

ANNA MAXYMIW
MEET ME IN THE WOODS
42

Anna Maxymiw lives in Toronto. Her writing has been featured in such publications as *The Globe* and *Mail*, *Hazlitt*, and *Maisonneuve*, and has won a National Magazine Award.

GREGORY D. BROWN
STORMS
45

Gregory D. Brown has spent time as an editor and four-time award-winning newswriter for the Oral Roberts University *Oracle*, a nationally-renowned, student-run newspaper in which he also wrote a column for three years before graduating with a degree in writing. His writing has appeared in *Promethia Literary Magazine*, *Down in the Dirt Magazine*, *Dead Snakes*, and *Scars Publications*, among others. He currently works as a digital content producer for a local news station in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

HANNAH KIDDER
DEAR EMMA
46

Hannah Kidder is a senior creative writing student at Nicholls State University from Patterson, Louisiana. Her work can be found in *Sucarnochee Review* and *Mosaic*. Her short story, "What Remains," won first place for the Albert Davis Fiction award.

LANA BELLA
LA PETITE MADEMOISELLE
47

Lana Bella is a Pushcart nominee, and an author of two chapbooks, *Under My Dark* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2016) and *Adagio* (Finishing Line Press, forthcoming). Her poetry and fiction are featured in over 290 journals, including *2River*, *California Quarterly*, *Chiron Review*, *Columbia Journal*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and elsewhere.

DON NOEL
BIRDING
49

Don Noel received his MFA in Creative Writing from Fairfield University in 2013. Retired after four decades of prizewinning print and broadcast journalism in Hartford, CT, his work has so far been chosen for publication by *Calliope*, *Shark Reef*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *The Tau*, *Indian River Review*, and *Midnight Circus*, among others.

MARY BUCHINGER
MULBERRY TREE
52

Mary Buchinger is the author of *Aerialist* (Gold Wake, 2015) and *Roomful of Sparrows*, (Finishing Line, 2008). Her poems have appeared in *AGNI*, *DIAGRAM*, *Nimrod*, *PANK*, *Salamander*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and elsewhere; she was invited to read at the Library of Congress, received the Varoujan and Houghton Awards, two Pushcart Prize nominations, and placed first for the 2016 Charter Oak Award for Best Historical poem.

JOHN GREY
SWAMP FEVER
55

John Grey is an Australian poet and a US resident. His work was recently published in *New Plains Review*, *Stillwater Review,* and *Big Muddy Review*. His work is upcoming in *Louisiana Review*, *Cape Rock,* and *Spoon River Poetry Review.*

ARYN SOJUNG BRADLEY
GROWING UP
56

Aryn Sojung Bradley was born and raised in Pensacola, Florida. She attended Florida State University and received a double bachelor's degree in English Literature and Biological Anthropology. She pursued her Masters in English at the University of South Alabama and was Editor in Chief of *Oracle Fine Arts Review* in 2016.

DEVON BALWIT
WHAT THE BLIND SEE
60

Devon Balwit is a poet and educator working in Portland, Oregon. Her recent poetry has found many homes, among them: *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Free State Review*, *Journal of Applied Poetics*, *Lalitamba*, *Red Paint Hill Publishing*, *The Cape Rock*, *The Prick of the Spindle*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Timberline Review*.

ACE BOGGESS
SLEEPING NEXT TO HER
63

Ace Boggess is the author of two books of poetry: *The Prisoners* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2014) and *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled* (Highwire Press, 2003). Forthcoming are his novel, *A Song Without a Melody* (Hyperborea Publishing), and a third poetry collection, *Ultra-Deep Field* (Brick Road). His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *RATTLE*, *River Styx*, *North Dakota Quarterly,* and many other journals. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

TERRY SANVILLE
IN A BINARY WORLD
66

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and one skittery cat (his in-house critic). He writes full time, producing short stories, essays, poems, and novels. Since 2005, his short stories have been accepted by more than 230 literary and commercial journals, magazines, and anthologies including *The Potomac Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Shenandoah*, and *Conclave: A Journal of Character*. He was nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize for his stories "The Sweeper," and "The Garage." Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist—who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.

KRYSTAL DEAN
FIREFLIES
72

Krystal Dean was born in Mississippi, but grew up in Houma, Louisiana where she pursues a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing at Nicholls State University. She worked as Head Editor for the school's literary magazine for two years and served as Assistant Editor for one year before that. Krystal has been writing since she was very young, developing and honing her abilities in prose. In 2015, a poetry seminar opened the door for her to branch into more poetic writing, and she has been cultivating that skill ever since. Krystal's ultimate dream is to be a novelist.

KAYLEE DUFF
NOT JUST CHAMPAGNE, NOT JUST COFFEE
75

Kaylee Duff is a junior at Bowling Green State University, where she is working towards a BFA in Creative Writing with a minor in English. Her work has previously appeared in The *Sucarnochee Review*.

MEGAN GUINN
GODFATHER
78

Megan Guinn graduated from the University of South Alabama in 2013 with a M.Ed. in secondary education in English language arts. She has a B.A. in English literature from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. She currently lives in Henderson, Tennessee, with her husband and daughter.

LAURINDA LIND
THUNDERCELL
80

Laurinda Lind tries to hike it off in northern New York. Her work can be found in *Antithesis*, *Ascent*, *Barbaric Yawp*, *Chiron Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Constellations*, *Liminality*, *Moonsick*, *Ship of Fools*, and *Triggerfish*.

SUE WALKER
W: AN INDEX, AN APPENDIX, WHATEVER
83

Sue Brannan Walker is Professor Emerita at the University of South Alabama. She served as the Stokes Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing and as Chair of the English Department during her tenure at USA. She was the Poet Laureate of Alabama from 2003-2012.

MICHELLE GARCIA
CAPTAIN RILEY SETS SAIL
86

Michelle Garcia is a student at the University of South Alabama. Working towards an English Major with a minor in History, she loves to read and write. When she's not doing homework or another Disney College Program, you can find Michelle in a dimly lit room, furiously typing away on her new, backlight laptop.

KRISTI CARTER
REELING
88

Kristi Carter has poems published or forthcoming in journals such as *Spillway Magazine*, *So to Speak*, *CALYX Journal*, and *Hawai'i Review*. She is originally from the foothills of North Carolina. She currently lives in Nebraska.

PAIGE GARCIA

MERMAID, 1
THE LETTER, 10
GESTALT, 82

Paige Garcia is a student at South Alabama and will be receiving her BFA in May 2017 with a concentration in Graphic Design and Painting. She has settled into a style over the years that is a cross between realistic and illustrative. Paige plans on moving to Orlando post graduation and working for the Walt Disney Company. She is inspired by western animation and video game design. In her free time, she plays video games and illustrates.

PAIGE GARLAND

MARBLES AND MIRRORS, 3
ADRIAN, 53

Paige Garland is a graduating senior obtaining a BFA with a primary concentration in graphic design and an interdisciplinary secondary concentration. Upon graduation, Paige hopes to obtain a job that always keeps her engaged and allows her to travel the world. In her spare time, she enjoys writing, watching TV, playing video games, and having philosophical conversations about nerdy stuff.

ELAINA MASTRILLI

ONCE UPON A TIME, 21
TWO SETS OF EIGHT,
THREE DART REPS, 92

Elaina Mastrilli is a student of Graphic Design currently in her senior year at the University of South Alabama. Elaina has a great interest in the exploration and experimentation of a wide variety of art mediums and techniques.

JARROD REED

MASTER COPY OF
MICHELANGELO, 28
PORTRAIT OF A BUST, 36

Jarrod Reed is a senior Graphic Design and Painting major. With an eye for detail, Jarrod loves to create realistic style drawings and painterly realism in his paintings.

NICOLE MOORE

PERCEPTION, 37

Nicole Moore was born in San Diego, California. She is currently a senior at the University of South Alabama. Nicole is an English major and minoring in studio art. She has always been drawn to the mystery and authenticity that comes from the use of black and white mediums. One day, she hopes to travel and teach English or art.

ELIZABETH HANCOCK

MOMENTO DA MORTE
POR TRÊS SETAS, 48

S. Elizabeth Hancock is a Mobile native and will be graduating this December with a BFA in Printmaking. Elizabeth is primarily focused on trying to convey emotions and psychological themes through her art.

DARCEY MCKINNEY

ARMADILLO, 54
COURTNEY BARNETT, 74

Darcey McKinney is currently a graphic design undergrad at the University of South Alabama. While graphic design is her concentration, she is also passionate about other art mediums.

ALLISHA YOUNG

ORACLE, 61
SINISTER SMILE, 65

Allisha Young is a BFA candidate at the University of South Alabama. Her primary concentration is in Fine Art Photography. She graduates in the Spring of 2017. After that, she plans to attend graduate school to further her career as an artist.

KIMBERLY LOVVORN
RAW, 64

Kim Lovvorn is a Gulf Coast photographer and designer pursuing an MFA in Creative Technologies and Practice at the University of South Alabama. Her current photography work focuses on the evolution of family with a special interest in birth and infants.

AMANDA YOUNGBLOOD
GUTS AND GLORY, 79
BORN TO FLY, 92
FALL STILL LIFE, 94

Amanda Youngblood graduated from South in May 2013 with a BFA in Painting. She is currently pursuing an Alternative Master's in Art Education. She looks forward to sharing her creative passion with her future students. She hopes to inspire and be inspired by her students as well as helping them become better people.

JENNIFER LOTHRIGEL
BE HERE, 89

Jennifer Lothrigel is an artist and poet residing in the San Francisco Bay area. Her work has been published in *Trivia—Voices of Feminism*, *Narrative Northeast*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Bitter Oleander*, *The Tishman Review*, *Cicatrix Publishing,* and elsewhere.

JESSE LUNDY
GLASS DRIPS, 90

Jesse Lundy is a freshman majoring in glass blowing. He decided to start a new path in life and make a career doing something that he is passionate about. He intends to gain experience in as many fields of glass as he can. After graduating from USA, Jesse is considering the pursuit of scientific glassblowing.

EMILY CARLIN
BAKERY BEAR, 91
EMERALD VORTEX, 95

Emily Carlin is a Senior graphic design major. She loves digital illustration and always incorporates color into her work. Her inspiration comes from modern animation, Art Nouveau, and Pop Art.

ADORABLE MONIQUE
REACHING UP, 91

Adorable Monique is a U.S. based artist brought up abroad. She received art instruction in fine arts at La Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, La Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán, and has had the good fortune to be mentored by a renown Central American artist, which has helped enrich her artistic vision. She is continuously pursuing success in personal, professional, and artistic endeavors as well in the artistic experience itself.

JENNIFER WILLIAMS
TEAPOT, 91

Jennifer Williams has been doing ceramics for over five years. She is a South Alabama graduate with a bachelor's degree in Sociology and a minor in ceramics. She hopes to start working in the social services field while continuing art on the side.

ANNA WHEELER
BREAK THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE, 92

Anna Wheeler is currently pursuing a degree in business at the University of South Alabama. Despite her professional pursuits, Anna has a love for kiln form glass. Her work is inspired by the balance of light and dark in our world. She hopes to own her own funeral home in the coming years.

CHRISTINE LAGRASSA
FLOW, 93
CONNECTIVE ISSUE, 94

Christine is a Midwestern girl, hailing from northern Illinois and did a fair amount of traveling throughout the U.S. before she settled in Mobile to finish her BFA at University of South Alabama. Her major concentration was in graphic design with a minor in interdisciplinary studies.

RAMON DEANDA
FELIPE EL CHIVO, 93

Ramon is a printmaker currently pursuing his MFA at the University of South Alabama. His work is influenced by his origins at a ranch in north Mexico. Aside from his art, Ramon is a musician with a love for traditional Mexican folk music.

FREDDIE BLACHE
CHEF, 93

Freddie Blache is in his senior year, pursuing a BFA in glass with a secondary in sculpting. As a Mobile native, a love for the outdoors can be seen throughout his work. This piece won “Best Repurposed Art” in the 2016 University of South Alabama Sustainably Council’s Earth Day Recycled Art Contest.

KEVIN MAYER
STILL LIFE ONIONS, 91
STILL LIFE IN PLANES, 95

Cartoon and Halloween fanatic, Kevin Mayer, loves to draw the spooky and abnormal. His passion lies in creating stories and illustrations with supernatural themes and comedy. In his art, he uses dynamic poses, bright saturated colors, and energetic lines to illustrate expressive characters and creative scenes.

JORDAN WRIGHT
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MOM, 94

Jordan Wright is a native of Mobile, Alabama who lives in Saraland with her family and is a senior at the University of South Alabama. She is majoring in Communication and minoring in Art. Wright loves working with many kinds of mediums in the fine arts including perceptual drawing, painting, music, photography, and kiln form glass.

DENVER CARTWRIGHT
LIONFISH RELIQUARY, 95

Denver Cartwright is a student at the University of South Alabama majoring in Arts and Sciences General in pursuit of his second bachelor’s degree.

LAURA SCOTT BELL
UNITS OF CHAOS, 96
cover image

The main themes in Laura’s art are abstraction, form, movement, as well as representational work. She enjoys utilizing color harmonies and multiple surface textures and layers to visually stimulate the viewer. Laura is deeply inspired by modernist works, as well as the great outdoors.