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Exile Vol. XL No. 2

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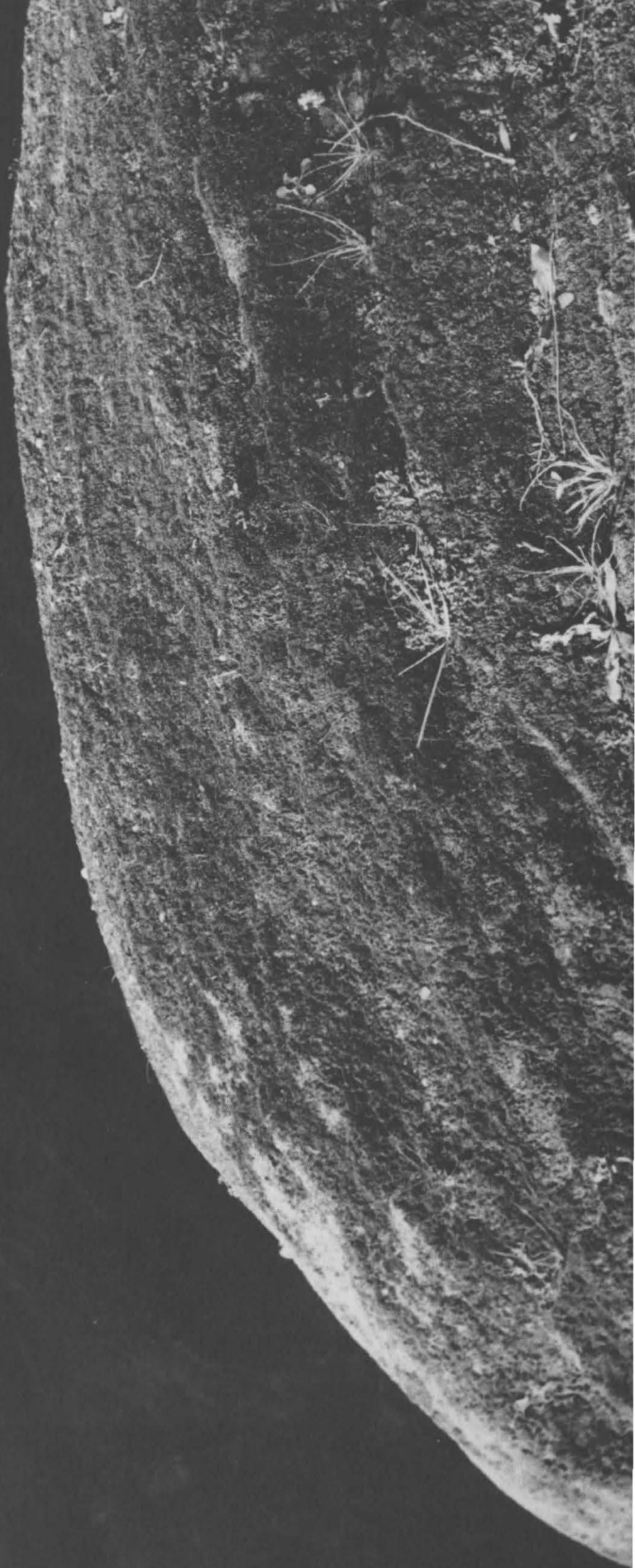
Exile Vol. XL No. 2

Authors

Allison Lemieux, Craig J. McDonough, Lelei Jennings, Kirstin Rogers, Kevin Nix, Jen Hanysh, Katherine Anne Campo, Tricia B. Swearingen, Erin Lott, Christopher Harnish, Joel Husenits, Carey Christie, Chris Iven, Morgan Roper, Paul Rinkes, Hope Layne Morgan, Jeremy Aufrance, Carl Jeffrey Boon, Leslie Dana Wells, Kirstin Rogers, Julie McDonald, Adrienne Fair, Lisa Marie Antonille, Matt Wanat, and Ezra Pound

EXILE

Spring 1994



EXILE

**Denison University's
Literary and Art Magazine**

38th Year



Carrie Horner '97

Spring Edition 1994

EXILE
Denison University's
Library and Art Magazine
38th Year

You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

Ezra Pound

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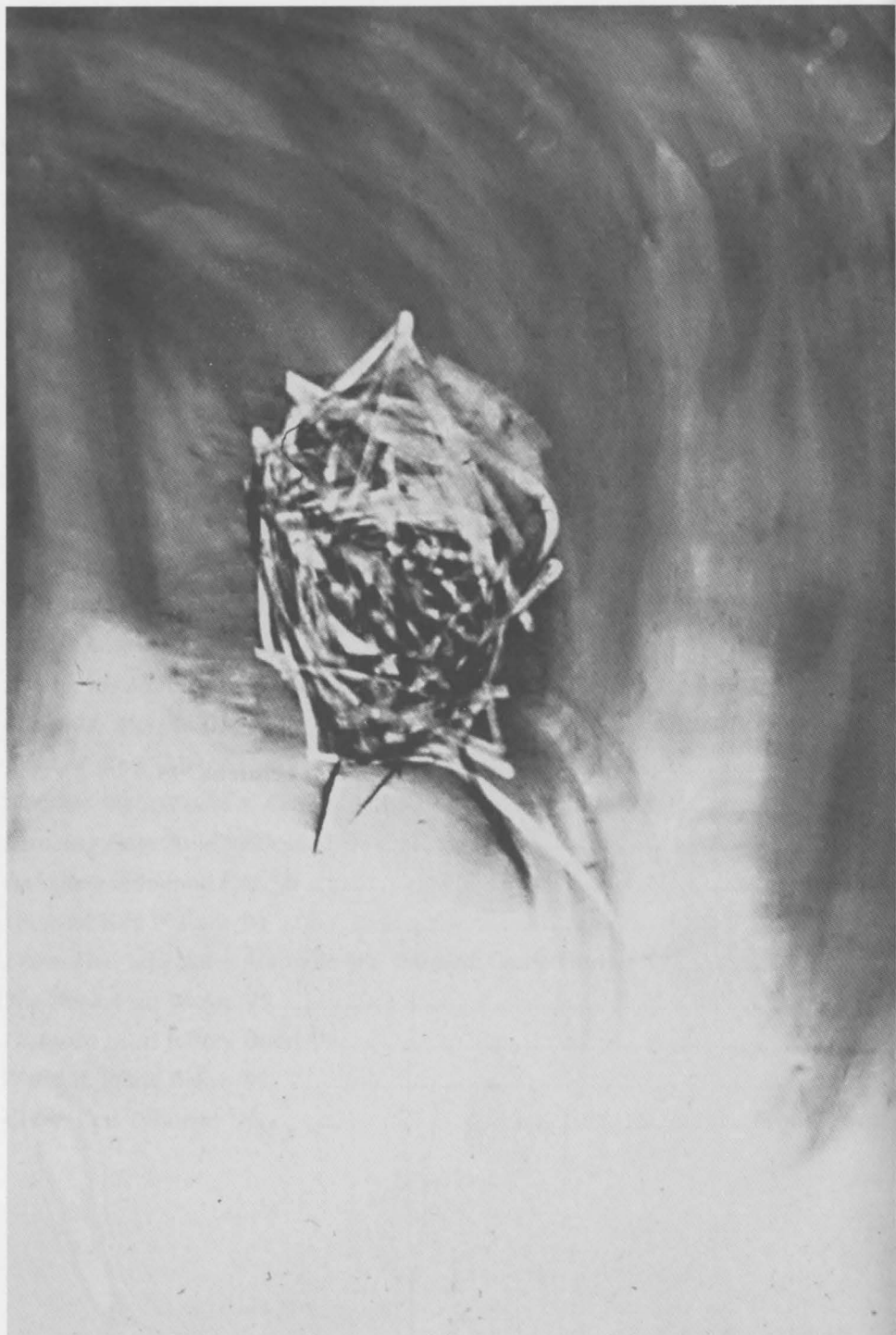
Remembering Sundays

The sweet flesh of the summer peach
Stood firm, then recoiled
Between lips and teeth.
The sun on the veranda
Cast heat onto our bodies,
Reflected off the worn windowpanes
And spread over fields
Of wheat stalks and wildflowers
And daisies.

He loves me, he loves me not . . .

The words swell and overflow
From a lost childhood's pages
And fall recklessly
Between the wooden slats of the porch.
You heave a tattered peach pit through the air
And watch it disappear into the overgrowth.
With our bare thighs touching
Carelessly on the swing,
He loves me, he loves me not,
As church bells softly ring.

—Allison Lemieux '95



- *Untitled*, James Oliver '94

'78 Beige Chevy Malibu

It's so late the nocturnal guitar player upstairs has gone to bed. Even "Horse With No Name" and "The Weight" and "Ziggy Stardust," played over and over and over again, lose all meaning after three hours. It's just me now.

I know I should forget about it and get some sleep like the guitar player. That would be the sensible thing to do. I turned off the heat hours ago and it's under 60 degrees in the apartment now. My hands are shaking and I don't want to drink any more coffee. Hazelnut, your favorite. Just set the alarm for eight. Get a few hours of sleep before you arrive and I see you for the first time since you walked through the doors at Gate 12 and left for Belize with your friend Mark. No reason to wait around for six months, you said. Things will be different afterwards, you said.

In the morning I'll have just enough time to make a strong pot of coffee and take a steaming shower. When my hair is almost dry—just about the time I begin to feel cold again—there will be a knock on my door as I'm sitting in the kitchen finishing *In Watermelon Sugar* once more.

For a few seconds, as I walk over the creaky floorboard near the coffee table, I will delude myself into thinking the landlord has come looking for his rent, but it will be you. Standing there before me. Stretching your long, toned arms behind your head. Your fingers caught in your unbrushed hair. Your breasts pushed forward. The straps of your backpack pressing into your tanned shoulders.

You will be yawning when I open the door. You will brush your chestnut hair away from your face. You will open wide your water-gray eyes and stick out your tongue with relief and exhaustion after driving all night from Wilkes-Barre to get here.

I'll say that I hope I-90 and 71 South weren't too congested through Cleveland. I'll say that I hope you remembered to bring enough Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young to last the ten hour drive. And then I'll say other such things that try to keep you on the other side of the doorway for just a little longer while I try to notice what's different about you.

But I won't notice anything. Sandals in the winter. Loose-fitting Levi's. Faded t-shirt. Even your smile will seem the same.

I won't be able to prevent you from putting your arms around me—your fingertips cold on my neck—and telling me how good it is to see me again. Teardrops will collect in the corners of your eyes for reasons I'm not sure of. I won't want to guess and instead I'll be remembering how nice it was to have you hold me.

"When did you buy the car?" you'll ask, referring to the shiny old car parked in front of the apartment. It won't occur to you that it could be someone else's. I'll try very hard to laugh, but even considering, it won't seem very funny.

"I'll tell you about it," I'll say.

A lot can happen in six months, sure. My hair has grown longer and I bought some furniture, a desk chair and a new kitchen table. I published a few stories and my grandfather died and I got a car. Two months ago now. Grandpa Duggan.

A few weeks after you left, he had a stroke. We thought we had lost him right then, but he hung on, tubes and IV's and machines and all, longer than anyone, especially the doctor, was willing to hope.

"Tell your Bronwyn to come on in and say hello," Grandpa said, when I

visited him on one of his more lucid days.

"She's not here right now," I said.

"Sure," he said. "That's her out in the hallway. He lifted his right hand slightly and curled four fingers under his index finger. I turned and looked. Don't ask me why. He didn't have his glasses at the hospital and his vision was so poor they took his driver's license away from him eight years ago. The '78 beige Chevy Malibu hadn't left his garage since.

"No, I don't think so, Grandpa."

He closed his eyes for a few minutes. I thought he was asleep. Or maybe even dead. But he opened his eyes wide and stared at me. Against his pale skin, his eyes never looked more blue. Tubes came out of his nose and he couldn't move his neck very well.

"Where did you say she was?" he asked.

"She's away now," I said. "In Belize."

"Belize?" he said softly. "Where on earth is that?"

"Central America."

He rolled his eyes and tried to whistle, but no sound came out.

"She hasn't left you, has she?"

"No," I said. "She'll be back. To see you soon, Grandpa." He always used to say how pretty you are and what a smart woman you are and other such things which never quite got at what went right or what went wrong between you and me.

"That's good," he said. His lips curved into a tenuous smile and he grabbed my hand. His hand was cold and shaky and I wanted to leave.

Three weeks later, he died. The doctors think it was another stroke, but they couldn't be sure. It happened very early in the morning and no one was there, except for a nurse on night rounds.

At the reading of the will, he left my mother and father his house in Worthington. To Uncle Gerald he left his bank assets. Then he came to me. "To my grandson Richard and his wife Bronwyn, I leave . . ." I don't know why he thought you and I were married, but his attorney never questioned it.

Grandpa Duggan left you and I his '78 beige Chevy Malibu. Twenty thousand miles. New all-weather tires. Not a spot of rust. I took our car in for a tune-up and it runs just fine. That attorney said that there would be no problem having the title changed to list my name only since you aren't, of course! my wife, but I told him not to bother.

When we have sat down at the kitchen table for coffee, I'll say that I guess you didn't get the birthday card that I sent, what with the mail system in Central America being so unreliable, but you'll nod your head and say that Mark picked it up for you. I'll say that I hope everything is going okay with you and Mark and you'll say yes.

We will fall silent for a few minutes. Sipping hot coffee hesitantly. Re-adjusting our legs under the table. Counting crumbs on the tablecloth.

Then the nocturnal guitar player will awaken and play something like "City of New Orleans" or "The Waiting," and I'll ask you if you'd like to take a drive in our '78 beige Chevy Malibu. You'll say that you'd rather get some sleep. You've been driving all night to get her you'll say.

- Craig J. McDonough '94

Brushtown Road

I watch from the far side of the road the stone farmhouse
with its tired ivy still crawling up the ancient walls,
and the childless swings peeking around from the back yard
worn from neglect and absence, standing as a monument for
what no longer is.

I see my history tied among the vines of ivy, old weathered leaves
clinging still to the foundation of the house that remembers me, as I was,
small, ignorant. My child figure still remains planted among their roots.
But new growth, tall and green climb further, documenting the history of someone else,
some new tenant huddled between the stone.

I look to the second floor expecting my own image to appear
in the third window from the left, small toothless face, white hair
wondering what I will look like when I turn sixteen, oblivious to the decay
of my own family, or that I will no longer live between the stone of the farmhouse
when summer ends.

Tuppence, Tigger, Charcoal and Tatters are all buried under
the spring Dandelions near the big oak tree, left in the ground
as sold property, now belonging to strangers that never knew their names.
I wonder if the Dandelions will come up when the spring comes,
or if they too died when we left, no longer with purpose.

I sit even farther it seems and watch images of fireflies and bare feet dance,
of fathers, mothers and dandelions. I see what once belonged to me, no longer my
possession, no longer alive. The winter wind reminds me of my loss and I quietly look
in the rear view mirror to answer the question I had asked years before from my
window. I think I see her image appear from behind the glass looking at me, a form of
myself, her question answered,
here I am, here I am.

– Lelei Jennings '95

In Memoriam: River Phoenix, 1970-1993

There's something poetic in vampirism
and everything vampiric in poetry.
And we're sick of pasty, silent Nosferatu's
sliding across our screen between adverts
for Garden Weasels. Images of blood
and fangs in black and white stir no terrors
in our living rooms, bi-dimensional.
But the stretching shadows of hungry souls
crouched in the darkness of doorways make us
shiver, scream, as they die, minute-by-minute
aching for needles and dust. We shudder
at the arms of our lovers, white and bare,
as they reach across the cypher of the sheets,
touch-possessed, shadow-clad, and ravenous.

-Kirstin Rogers '94



-Untitled, Kira Pollack '94

Checkmate

I was in a bar in Breckenridge
Drinking with my friends.
And he came along.
He sat down at the bar next to me.
He was worn and gray
With an unkept beard.
He was also carrying a small briefcase.
We got to talking.
Eventually we did a shot of Tequila
That one of my friends
Had bought on his Dad's Mastercard.
The man sitting next to me
Had come West twenty years earlier.
He was leaving the war behind.
We talked of skiing and fishing.
And then I brought up shooting.
I said I learned to shoot
On an old Italian over under gun.
He didn't shoot.
Why not? I asked.
He told me.
Whenever he hears a gun shot
He has to kill somebody.
He made it very clear.
Gunshots meant he had to kill
Because of what he saw
In the jungles of Southeast Asia.
He opened the briefcase and pulled out a chess set
Which he gingerly set up on the bar.
He grabbed my shoulder.
Then he asked me a question.
"How many knives are you carrying?"
"None", I said.
"I thought so," he said back.
Then he organized the chess pieces
And the game began.

— Kevin Nix '94

Anywhere In Ohio

Your only protection,
A tin box on wheels
Encased by endless foliage,
The blur of green passes
your lightly tinted windshield.

Spacing cigarettes,
Smoking every ten minutes.
Your only interesting prospect
is whether the faded yellow
line will be straight or dotted.

Primitive gas stations, barns
dive-bars, and a never-ending
stream of cows and transformers,
Heading West on Rt 36.
The speed is usually 55.

Beware of the cowboy cop traps,
Speed limit's 25 and they're waiting
for those out of town license plates.
The radio offers no relief.
Rev. Bob's show is static free.

Trapped into singing some song,
any normal person would be
embarrassed listening to it
in a McDonald's drive-thru,
Oldies with a country twist.

Stuck behind a professional
Sunday driver. Passing him
provides a temporary relief.
Smoking Camels. Alone singing
dreadful music. You hardly notice
the deer darting in front of your car.
Colliding metal and flesh propels
you towards the windshield and off
the road. You get out and pray
for the Sunday driver you passed.

The car and the deer are crushed
Smoking a cigarette. Sitting
against the curb. That's
the only thing that strikes
you that afternoon.

-Jen Hanysh '95



-Untitled, Nicky Taylor '94

Under Your Influence

Standing under the old porch light
Our silhouettes and gestures
Showed tensions as
Sharp words broke the precious silence
We made sure the neighbors heard.

You walked away
I walked inside
I heard the rev of your engine
Peeking from behind the curtains
Hoping. . . not to see your tail lights drive away.

Same old thing,
Feel my eyes begin to cry
I lay alone in my bedroom
And let the tears soak my pillowcase
And I know the neighbors heard.

It's not as easy as it seems
More than a high school crush
Your ring burns hot around my finger
I try to squeeze all meaning from it-
I just wish you hadn't gone

But then, the silence is broken, once again
Smelling burning rubber and gasoline
A cloud of dust rises from the gravel driveway
Hope. . . Happiness. . .
The door swings wide open
The smell of Tennessee Whiskey
Hanging like that same cloud
I see the rage
I feel the anger in your eyes
I scream
God, I wish the neighbors could hear.

– Katherine Anne Campo '94

Tulips

"I always said I was sorry, but it never did any good. He would just throw another empty beer can in my face and tell me to shut up. Sometimes he would just slap me really hard. Then he would jump into his truck and drive off all crazy and not come home for hours. It happens every time I come home late from work. I tried to explain that I can't always get off on time; if someone is late, then I'm expected to stay, and if we get really busy, then they won't let me leave either. He said he expects me home on time, that's all. He ruined my tulips last year; drove right into them because I wanted out of the truck once. He was really sorry afterward, he said that damned boss of his just works him to death and he can only relax with a couple beers at home. But then he got fired. I told him it was ok, that I could get more hours at work until he found something else. But, it has been eight months, and he hasn't found anything yet. He's out all day looking. I guess that's the best he can do. Those tulips were really pretty, though. It's a shame he had to ruin them."

– **Tricia B. Swearingen '94**



–*Untitled*, **Keith Chapman '95**

December Storm

Underneath my bulky coat I twist my shoulders, struggling against the itch of the wool sweater. It bothers me almost as much as the wind, which slaps against my face, like the back side of my mother's hand when I had mouthed off to her from the back seat of the car when I was little. This isn't a pain I can choose to ignore—to push back into the recesses of my mind—it lingers long.

After ringing out a hollow rendition of "Silent Night", the bells from a distant church chime five, just as the sun begins to slip into the river. The sun reaches up with fingers of pink and orange over the river. I walk toward the sun, not wanting to help it because its death is so beautiful. But along with the sun's beauty, the river pulls down a world of darkness. In the north, dark, low clouds are slithering in. It is a race to see who can devour the sun first; the river or the clouds. I stand on the sidelines as a spectator. The river wins and pulls the sun over the edge. It spreads those fingers into the water. It gets darker so much faster now.

With darkness comes snow, simple, soundless crystals that fall into my world. The wind whips them back and forth into a tumble that accosts my face. In a few short months the snow will melt away and be forgotten. People will rejoice in the mortality of each flake because once the drifts of snow become puddles of water, spring will dawn. Then men and women will be able to shed their coats and sweaters. But not me; I want—no I need!—to huddle in the wool of my sweater, to hide behind the bulk of my coat. It is safe here. I welcome the irritation of the sweater. The incessant scratch means that winter is still here.

Last winter my father and I took a walk like this one that I am taking tonight. He put my hand in his while we were tramping through knee deep snow in the field in the back of his house. It wasn't my house anymore. I had moved out when I was 14 to go to boarding school after my parents' divorce. Any place would be quieter than home while they went through the proceedings. But while walking in my father's field, I could remember back when I was 8 and I used to pretend I was the snow princess. I used to take the clothesline that held the two rusting poles together that stood in the center of the backyard right before the field. My father used to hang his clean underwear and t-shirts on that wire to dry during the summer after my mother left. But when I was eight, I would hold the wire between my mittened hands and run and run and run as fast I could, chanting my own secret language of songs and rhymes that transformed me into the snow princess. Then I would dance and play out in the fields, ignoring the cold for hours because I was pretending that I had a prince; one who was tall and strong and took my hand in his, like my father did. And I believed back then, that if anyone would have looked out the back window and searched for me in the field they wouldn't have been able to see me.

Last year I remembered all this with my father's hand in mine crunching snow beneath our boots. We had just finished having dinner with my aunt who had flown in to see us. She had taken a book from my father's shelf and shooed me and my father out of the house claiming she needed quiet time to read. She knew we were the ones who needed the quiet time to talk. So I had put on my warm

coat—the one I am wearing right now—and asked my father to take a walk with me in the field.

“It’s been a long time, Holly.” He squeezed my hand.

“I know, Daddy. How’s work?” I asked, not really caring, but wanting him to think that I did. I sniffled from the cold.

“Oh, the same old same old.” But I didn’t know what the same old same old was anymore, so I just smiled and nodded. “How has school been?” he asked.

“Oh, the same old same old.” I said, and he nodded looking out into the dark field. I studied him from the side; His large frame was covered in layers of wool and cotton. He was almost a foot taller than me; I had always wished I had gotten my height from him.

“So how is your mother?” I had driven from Florida up to Illinois from my mother’s house and had gotten in that day. He pushed his hat further back on his head and looked up at some of the clouds that covered the stars.

“She likes the sun. She’s happy with Jack.” I brushed back a piece of hair that was blowing across my face.

“Is she ever going to marry him?” He squinted to try to see Orion.

“She has, Daddy. Last summer, don’t you remember?”

“Oh yeah.” He nodded again. He didn’t remember. He never remembered. Of course, since the divorce, it was hard to keep track of whom my mother was married to. But I always remembered. It had only been seven years and five different husbands; I remember all their names.

“Did you have a nice time with your mother this past week?”

“She’s still mad that I am living with Aric.” I blew into the mitten of my free hand to warm up my numb fingers.

“Why is she so mad?” Daddy stopped looking at the sky and looked at me.

“She thinks that her daughter should hold a higher moral standing in the neighborhood. When I tell her that no one really cares about that much anymore, and the people live together all the time, she scowls and says—I screwed up my face into my mother’s pious all-knowing look—“I didn’t raise you to go along with the flow. Would you jump off a bridge if all your friends did?” I laughed a laugh that carried over the field. My mother always asked me that question. And I never answered her.

“Did you let it bother you?” He stopped walking.

“Yes, you know I did. That’s why I left a day early.” I stuffed my free hand in my coat pocket. It was too cold to leave it out in the air.

“You shouldn’t let her bother you.”

“Easier said than done.” And I pulled his arm to start walking again. We finished the rest of the walk in a comfortable silence.

Tonight it’s still silent, except the Christmas decorated streetlight that begins to whirl and hum as the bulb inside flickers. A shadowy circle materializes on the pavement below me. The now steady snowflakes stream through the ray of light from the bulb. The flakes look like moths headed in the wrong direction. But enough light filters through the snow to illuminate the cracks in the sidewalk. The light reveals the dead, brown grass creeping through.

I wander on the cement path, oblivious to where it's taking me and what I will discover along the way. I am still thinking about my father and my mother. Their relationship lasted for 15 years. They had one trophy from the whole ordeal—me. It kept them bound together after all these years even after they have severed every other bond but this one. This year, instead of listening to my mother bitch about Aric and whine about how dumb my father was, and instead of trying to explain the same thing over and over to my father, I decided not to come and visit either of them. I took my Aunt Glenda up on the offer to watch her house while she went to Illinois. Besides, I wanted the company of Klein, her cat. All he did was meow. It was simple. Besides I didn't want to tell them the news about Aric.

I notice on my walk that everywhere I look, there are no people. I am alone—alone with the blades of grass. I guess they are all inside eating a warm Christmas Eve dinner with their families. Besides this is a residential section of town. Not many people would be out anyway. A small feeling of loneliness settles into me, but I let it. I accept this feeling because I know that I cannot command people to join me on the sidewalk, and if I could, would I really want them here? I question if they could have anything to offer me.

When I return from my aunt's back to my own apartment, I am going to pack and leave again. This time for good. I am setting out on my own. And I will leave so many people behind. But these people—my mother, my father, my aunt, Aric, even the cat, Klein—have given me all that they can. Or at least all that I can take. They have served their purposes. It is time to move on. But I have to question. Then are relationships and people meaningless because there comes a point when they can no longer show me the infinite? Is there a point after which I can no longer grow? Have I reached this? Do I care? Do I even want to continue to try to grow, to try to share, to try to live with these people with whom I have reached this limit? Are all relationships finite? And if they are, will I want to ever even start a new one?

My mother has a tendency to start new relationships—all the time. The last time I saw my mother, she had started yet another one. I knew though that this one wouldn't result in marriage. He was too old for her. Hell, he couldn't even remember my name. He kept calling me Heather.

"How old is Hank, Mom?" We were standing in her air conditioned kitchen in Florida cutting vegetables for a salad. Hank was coming over that night to meet me and have dinner with us.

"I don't think that this is an appropriate question. That was plain rude, Holly." She chopped her green peppers harder.

"Mom, I was just asking. Does he have a son my age is all I wanted to know?" I turned to the sink to scrub my tomato.

"I thought you were with that Adam boy." She moved her pile of green peppers to the end of the cutting board and took the tomato from my hand to scrub it harder. I guess I wasn't doing a good enough job.

"Aric, Mom. I was just asking though. Aric and I are free to date others." This was last summer, before Aric and I had gotten serious.

"I will not have my daughter dating freely. You should stick to one man. People will think you are a slut." She handed me the scrubbed tomato, and picked up a peeled onion for herself in her left hand.

I stood there in silence for a full 30 seconds. I wondered if I had the guts to say the next sentence. Somewhere inside of me, I did; "Mom *you* date a lot."

"Are you calling me a slut?" My mother slammed her knife through the onion. "My own daughter calling me a slut? To my face? I cannot believe you." She whacked the edge of the onion so hard I was afraid that she would have sliced off her finger had it been in the way. "What do they teach you in college? I never would have dared to say something like that to the most promiscuous lady I knew in college, let alone my *mother*."

"No, Mom, I'm not calling you a slut." I muttered, and I wished I could have taken the earlier statement back. But she didn't even hear me try to apologize. She cut her onion into perfect squares, deposited them in her Waterford salad serving dish, and turned to glare at me.

"When you have spent 15 years with someone as amazingly stupid and trying as your father and produce one daughter and manage to make something out of yourself like I have, then, young lady, you can make judgements about me. But I don't see that happening with you. So don't you get all high and mighty on me and try to tell me now to live my life. I am still your mother." She took my tomato from me and began to slice it. "Now will you please set the table. Hank will be here any minute and I will *not* have this dinner ruined."

I don't think I want to start many new relationships. Not if they will leave me bitter and ultimately alone like my mother. If relationships do have a limit, then I have used people. I have used others for my own personal gain—for my own growth—and once they have served their purposes, they have been cast aside, used and drained. I alienate them from me. They no longer connect with me. And it's my fault because I think like this.

But all the while I was using them, they were using me. I am then cast aside, too. It becomes a race to see who can reach the limit of a relationship first because *no one* wants to be used. Everyone would rather do the using. And this cycle continues and it always will.

Stop it! I have to push these thoughts to the back of my mind. I can feel the top of my stomach itch as I try to stop my thoughts. I don't want these thoughts to be real. I don't like them. Maybe I shouldn't leave. If I hide these thoughts, then maybe they will never resurface. I hope no one else has had these thoughts. Because what if. . . what if everyone thinks like this. . . ? What if. . . What then?

NO! I must concentrate on something else. My surroundings. Where am I? I look around. I have drifted off the sidewalk and onto the frozen ground. It is littered with decaying leaves from the now barren sycamores. It is hard to discern where the trees end and the river bank begins. There are no definite edges set anymore; everything has become fuzzy. I have moved past the streetlights. I wonder where they all went. I don't really know how long ago it was that the first streetlight lit up. It's been a long time. I think. There is nothing but blackness and cold—a cold that chokes me, hurting me to breathe. I sniffle a little and move on, taking shallower breaths. The snow continues to pour down around me.

Aric and I haven't been getting along for some time now. I don't really

remember when it started that he stopped taking my hand in his, and I stopped listening to him tell me how his day was. But somewhere it stopped. I have to leave our apartment. I am done with school, but I haven't left the town. Hell, I graduated six months ago, but it doesn't look like it from the outside. I haven't found a "real" job yet. I haven't decided what I want to do with my life. I haven't thought about graduate school. I am just living in a silent apartment going to work as the front desk attendant at the inn three blocks from home.

The past few months, I don't remember how long, Aric and I have passed each other in the kitchen without a word, rolled over after sex without a smile, and left the apartment without a sentence concerning when we were to return.

Before I left to drive to Aunt Glenda's last night, I asked Aric to come into the living room.

"I won't be here for Christmas," I told him as I looked up from my book.

"Oh, neither will I." He sat down in the armchair across from me and picked up the *People* from the coffee table.

"I see." I looked back down at my book wondering where he was going this year, but I had forgotten how to ask.

"So, when are you leaving?" He has his eye glued on a current picture of Cindy Crawford and Richard Gere.

"Tomorrow." I flipped a page, not really reading the words written on it.

"Hmm. Be careful." He put the magazine back on the table and left the room to brush his teeth and get in bed.

I think about this past conversation as I kick pebbles from the riverbank into the water. Darkness and the snow hug me in coldness even when I try to wrap my own arms around myself. I can't make out the opposite banks of the river. I crave to know that the proverbial other side is greener, but I can't see it. Maybe there is no other side.

I don't want to leave him. Aric looks like my father—tall and protective. And he isn't anything like my mother—he doesn't bitch about morality and conformity. I want to stay behind with him where it is warm and safe.

I am cold; I shiver, I am tired – no exhausted. The cold is sapping all of my energy. I cannot keep my arms curled around myself any longer. I reach down with a mittened hand and pick up some of the sharp rocks on the ground that are poking into my thinly soled shoes. I let the stones plunk into the water. But I can't make out the sound very well because the wind is still whipping tonight. I can't even see the ripples in the water, and I can't distinguish the bottom.

Is it because there is no end to the depths of the water? Or is it only too dark to see? Or am I looking too hard? There must be a bottom to the river. There must be a riverbank on the other side. There is an end to everything—even riverbanks. Because everything is finite, isn't it? Right? Because if it is, then so are relationships.

I have to leave him. It will be hard to leave him. But I can't stay—just as I couldn't visit either of my parents this year. I didn't want to tell them that I had been considering for weeks the possibility of moving out of my apartment with Aric. I didn't want to tell them that they didn't offer me anything else anymore

either. I didn't want them to know that I knew that I had kept them together for the last couple of years. And that I knew I had ultimately failed in keeping them there.

I stop throwing rocks in the river and I turn around and move back through the cold and the snow back to Aunt Glenda's apartment. I unlock the front door and feel the whoosh of warm air slam against my body. It welcomes me into the foyer. I shut the door quickly to make sure the heat and Klein don't escape. He meows at me telling me that he needs to be fed. I pick him up, but he struggles against the cold of my coat, which is littered with snowflakes.

Throwing Klein on the floor, I peel my coat off and rub my sleeves. Although the house is warm, my clothes are still so cold. I guess I have forgotten how to be the snow princess and ignore the cold for hours. I look at the clock to find I have been gone 45 minutes. It seems so much longer.

There is only one message on the machine, my father, to wish me a Merry Christmas. He's a day early, but he probably forgot which day it was. I forgive him. Tonight his early Christmas cheer warms me a little more than the heat of the house. He always does know how to make me feel good.

After I had graduated from school, he walked with me from the academic quad, where they held the ceremony, down the hill to my apartment. My mother drove ahead so as not to have to talk to my father. Her current boyfriend, Lance I think, sat beside her blankly wondering how many years his junior I was (not very many). But my father walked with me. We saw my mother speed by in her new BMW, and she honked and waved at me.

"You're not happy." He, of course, had my sweaty hand in his soft dry one.

"I am happy, Daddy. I am just sad that it's all over. I don't know what I am going to do with the rest of my life." I notice all of the other parents and siblings streaming by with their recent graduates. Everyone looks so happy—so ready to face the future.

"Take your time."

"That's not what Mom says to do."

"She says that because she knows I am going to say the opposite." He nodded to himself, watching a elfish girl carrying her cap and gown race by us.

"Well, you are." Sometimes Daddy doesn't see the obvious.

"Because I mean for you to be happy. She means for you to be productive and look good in front of everyone else."

"I know, but isn't that important?"

"Only if that's important to you." He squeezed my hand.

"But Daddy, I want her to love me as much as I love her, and the only way is to be productive." I didn't mean to start whining but I could never please her. She wasn't happy that I had graduated *cum laude*. She wanted more. She still wasn't happy with Aric and didn't want to meet him, even though his family was there for his graduation, too. She wasn't happy with my apartment, she said it wasn't decorated tastefully. People would think that I had bad taste.

"Honey, when are you going to love you as much as I do?"

"Boy Daddy, I don't know," I said. "I really wish I knew. Maybe when Mom

stops pressuring me to make enough money to drive a car like hers and capture a man like hers and go to a graduate school like hers and . . .”

“Maybe it’s time that you wanted to do something that you wanted to do. Maybe it’s time you did something on your own,” Daddy paused beneath a sycamore tree beside the sidewalk. “Maybe it’s time to make your own decisions.” He squeezed my hand. “It sure was a nice ceremony. Too bad your mother had to sit in the aisle two rows ahead of me. She was much too close. I could smell her awful perfume. What is that? Channel No. 5?” He continued to walk and gave my arm a little tug.

I think about what he said as I undress and step into a steaming shower. The warm water runs down my back. It’s safe and warm here. But I know that I have to step back out into the chilly bathroom where the mirrors are fogged up and the air is heavy. I know this. I know this.

Is now the time to move on? Yes. Yes. I know this, too. I have to leave Aric. I have to leave my mother. I have to find out what makes me happy. I smile as I soap up a wash cloth with Irish Spring. And I am going to take my time, I think to myself. My own sweet time.

– Erin Lott '96

On Meeting Phil Levine After a Reading at Denison University, April 6, 1993

I am there first, and stare blankly at a white
tiled wall. White dominoes with no spots, piled
on end, viewed by the two of us.
I hear the door open and instinctively look
to my right, to Phil Levine and to
the useable urinal beside me.

The man walks in, brown hair with
gray arrows darting his mustache.
He smiles, uncomfortably recognizing me;
and watching me fear watching him as his
hand falls from his belt, then into his
brown pants. I am the man with the blue jeans
and Detroit Tiger baseball cap, worn for the
man from Hamtramac, in hopes of his notice.

Trying not to look down and right at the same time,
I change hands, now holding what seems like
my inadequacy in my right hand, and turning left
to face the white dominoes above the porcelain sink.
What do you say to a man who's pissing?
A man who knows connections, beauty, the majesty
of words. There was no profound meeting of the minds,
our connection was basic, two men pissing.

We shake unwashed hands and he shows me
the Tiger baseball schedule, torn, the paper turning
to something like frail cotton. 1984, 162 games, the
Tigers won 106, and there is a W beside each win
He gave it to me, and to him I give a picture of my brother
and I shaking hands with Sparky Anderson.
We joke about running into each other at Tiger stadium,
before the hero leaves, returning the people wanting
autographs that make their books, fresh and unworked,
valuable coffee table pieces.

– Christopher Harnish '94

The 422 Bypass

Bombs fall under us, we can see the bridge fall
through the trees below. Will we ever leave,
or will we live here wondering if ends
are as far as we can go, if we are only statues,
standing bombers in a row.
There are so many things that we could be, we'll break
our backs before we bend
our knees.

West Pennsylvania, once loading on baggage,
chewing the fat of the coal underground,
threw up a bridge in between bony
piles. It now looms incomplete,
a monument waiting for the passage
of me.

And at night, stretched
towards eternity, I could feel its weight, crushing
me like a man who speaks between the raindrops,
like a god-damned talking sheet.
But our minutes are still
miles, and we still could see all the scenery.

See that man under the bridge? In his face
it's you and me. He knows about potential lost,
and in years that's where we might be-
to feel like trash
left on the street,
to feel like someone's memory.
And he says he wishes he were me,
but that's just something
I cannot see.

Men fill the gully with miles of pillars
and roofers then cap it with road,
like sore fingers soothing
the shoulders of regions
that are waiting to let their potential unload.
And surely you've noticed the pendulum swinging,
(it's showing us sides of the road), as our minutes count wishes,
ambitions that nobody owns.

As a region makes ready to finish a highway, and bury
the traces deep in the road, our fortune falls
slowly, around and around
it goes. And as innocence crawls inside the machinery,
"summer shall see the birds
backwards return".

— Joel Husenits '95



- *Untitled*, Ken Tyburski '94

Shakespeare's Foreskin

So Marvin lifted up his head
and begged that it be time to go
the hill was crusty with his stench
his doughy skin and Harvard tie.
And Angel lifted up her skirt
to show him how his life began
his slow mind trickled greedily up her thigh
into the purple bruise of her profession.

Then Ducky jumped into the ring
with acne speed and firehose force
and overcame the rotten fruit
and peeled eyelashes of his sport.

As pillowcase moans popped in his face
and hallelujahs bid him grace
Old Marvin dove into the Oyster
fishing for his bit o' bile
Sally scraped links on the bedpost
feeling spent by goldfish fins
and paper pencils dug the chalkboard
of their college wonderings.

Then Ducky hopped out of his Ford
both overweight and very bored
and whopped Lex Luther in the chin
as he unleashed a vicious snort.

So Angel, fearing a repeal
let loose her pet cadaver boy
and they announced the royal annual
beheading game to be held on
the forehead of the afternoon.
And Marvin horked a holy squeal
from Sally's toolbelt
and King Lear.

– Carey Christie '95

The Thaw

She blows in the room. Sits
in the last row back desk,

A winter maple
covered in bark but

Light drips like sap
from hidden cracks

March ends slow
Twigs sprout buds

April
leaves green

May
now

Hiding
looking away

Only
open to me

Waiting
she feels me stare

Sadness
glowing she turns

And smiles
into me

Her eyes yes eyes
push air through me –

shaking my limbs.
blowing me away.

– Chris Iven '94

The Rockbridge County Fair

Main street is blocked off before sunrise
to get ready for the chew spit
chocolate ice cream drippings
and broken plastic forks useless for pies.

Wooden booths and card tables rub shoulders
holding ten pound belt buckles,
honey sweet as honeysuckle
and the first prize melon, big as a boulder.

Farm hands emerge from every John Deere
to try their bronze arm at dropping
the Mayor deep into a tin tub, sopping
wet, his toupee swimming clear from his ears.

Bluegrass rules the day and shuts down the night,
when even the drunkards can't stop
their toe tapping to unscrew the top
off the first bottle of Jack Daniels in sight.

Dirty little hands squeeze the life out of hotdogs
and hamburgers dripping with sweat
from the grill, where the men won't let
no one near what they're poking in the charcoal smog.

Feet start to get tired and wallets real empty
that's when the lawn chairs fold
the blacktop turns hot to cold
and all of Rockbridge County heads home in a Chevy.

The sun sets orange-red to the west of a front porch
settled in a valley of fresh air
moonshine and old men who swear
to seeing unidentified flying objects steal a horse.

– Morgan Roper '94

Let it Drop Through

Let it drop through,
the rain through your voice,
as we sing to each other
outside on the grass
the water smacking between our skins
splashing like juice from a bitten orange
slice.

The storm has limpened the city, no cars
or even pigeons brave the rain
like we do in a park by the river
July afternoon in Downtown Columbus.

So let it drop through,
the rain through your voice,
the light through the sky
a bright white ink drips quickly down
a hate-me-gray slate with a shattering crack
that makes me think someone has broken the sun
with the tool people use to destroy lobster-claws.

But the raindrops fall through,
through the thunder and your voice,
through the lightning and our hair.
The rain drops, like my eyes,
to the curve of your wrist where it meets your hand
pushed too tightly into my hip and the ground,
so that the angle is fierce and alarming
and then I can hear the sun cracking again,
and your voice is like residue
dusting the air above my head
between the raindrops.

I spend that moment in Greek mythology,
wondering if I'll turn into a tree
like the one standing back up the hill thirty feet.
When I press the top of my head against
the ground and toss my throat into
the dark sky I can see
the branches of that tree
batting their crazy arms to drive away the rain.
But it drops through the spaces they leave or
crashes into the bark and bounces
into new drops that continue down.

You don't mean anything.
I mean your words
are nothing to the breaking of the sun.
Your eyes, even when open,
are nothing like the lightening in the sky
and the rain rolls off your body
like it was made of glass,
except,
except for the curve between your wrist
and your hand, where you have trapped
something wonderful
just like you've always wanted to.

The water there seems not to mind,
so keep it, but let the rest
drop through.
Let all the other things drop through.
The way the rain drops through your voice
let fall my body through your thoughts.

– Carey Christie '95

Aladdin's

I should write more, she said.

I should write more things more often, she said at breakfast that morning. No, she said, really I should, because I can do it well. Of course, she looked at her tomato juice as she said it, because that's just the way she does things. But she did say I should write more.

"I do write," I said. "I write on my computer."

No that's not enough, she said, looking now at the swirls of cream in her coffee. That's not what I mean. I mean write things that are ...

"More creative?" I said, as I usually did, finishing up her sentence for her.

Yeah, you know and a quick glance up at me - surprise! - and then back to the tomato juice. Yeah, write things like that. 'Cause you are good at it, obviously, so you really oughta do it more often.

Very interesting, all this. She usually didn't tell me the things that I did well. That's probably because she doesn't think she does things well at all - the only two things she ever told me she could do better than other people are to drive a car and kiss. Those were the two things that for her were her strong points. Driving and kissing. Kissing and driving. I didn't ask her if these were equally good when done at the same time.

I can't say much about her driving. The only time I ever noticed it was the day we took the keg back to the distributor after her party before graduation. I actually feared for my life that day. Driving in Europe must be something different altogether. I could just see the headlines: "Local Student Killed in Accident on 16 with Keg in Trunk." What a way to die, in a gray 1984 Chrysler LeBaron with air conditioning that froze your leghairs off and a pet rock that watched her drive from the dashboard. That damn thing had this smile on his face that seemed to say "Yeah. She can drive. By the way, is your insurance paid up?"

As for the other one, well ... all I can say is yes, she was right. She sure could kiss. But I don't know what in her long and confusing past made her think that the ability to drive a car and drive a man was all that she could claim over your average person. She had no idea at all that just being HER was more than most people could accomplish, just as she had no idea that others did, in fact, try to do just that. She couldn't see past her own shortcomings to see what others did because of her.

Being her was a full-time job, let me tell you. And being her meant, at least in her eyes, always being consistent and constant and solid and foolproof and alert and awake and aware and prepared and teflon and "this is the answer" and all that. Academically on her toes and socially making all the right moves to get her where she needed to go. Always in the books and at the meetings and in the middle of the right parties and at the table of all the important dinners. It was quite a job, and frankly I began to get sick of it pretty quick. But it was what she did. Sometimes it became too much for her and she shut down and went into what might be called a momentary hibernation. She shut down and turned off the lights that made her shine for so many.

It's odd that she never realized that shutting down was just another part of being her - no great crisis, just part of the day-to-day that made her who she was. I guess she never really got to that page in her owner's manual, if she even looked at it at all. You know what I mean, the way that we question ourselves just after we turn out the light, running through events in our mind, having conversations that will never occur with people who will never care, finding out about what really goes on inside us. We all do it, or so I thought until I met her. All she could do was curl up on my couch and cry, calling out for her mommy with a voice that allowed the little girl inside to say what the consistent and constant and solid woman outside would never dream of uttering.

You can never really be inside someone's head, and maybe my amateur psychoanalysis is completely off base. But I think she never took the time to sit and reflect on what had happened to her in her life. She never stopped to think about the day after the lights went out - she just went to sleep and woke up the next day expecting things to be okay and all right and just fine. When they weren't - and, toward the end, they frequently weren't - she didn't know how to handle it.

But maybe that was it! Maybe she looked away each time she talked about me and what I should do or can do or do better than others because it was just another time the adulthood took over and made her deny that she too could do those things that I could do with such ease. Maybe this was just her way of not setting herself up for the inevitable fall that comes along with anything risky. I mean, Lord knows I've fallen before. But she never had - at least, not that I know about.

Well, all this was coming at me at once, and it didn't take much time. When you love someone, you spend all your waking hours trying to figure them out - it's that mysterious part of your lover that keeps you coming back. So there I was, with the missing piece to the puzzle, in Alladin's on a Monday morning when we weren't even supposed to be there in the first place. But I don't really care where it came from. That was the page of the manual that had been missing. I had it.

And so did she, it suddenly seemed. It all made sense! She had it, too, and she knew all about it, and she just chose to forget about it. She often told me that she didn't want to finish the race any slower than she had started it. I told her that was just silly, that nobody could do that, that it was okay to let yourself limp across the finish line, or even slow down. You owe it to yourself, I told her. But she was smart enough to forget about that. She was SMART! Damn! Who was SHE to be so intelligent and cunning and ... consistent and constant and solid and alert and awake and aware and teflon and "this is the answer" and ready for anything! She prepared herself for these things. She wasn't just reacting, but rather acting on her best interests and knowing what she was doing all the time. Damn her! I could feel my face getting all red. Right there in Alladin's!

Here comes our breakfast. She had scrambled eggs and home fries, as usual, and I had the manhole pancakes and sausage. The smell of the grease woke me from my thoughts long enough to thank the waitress for her help. I reached over to her side of the booth and grabbed the butter.

"You know, I love you sometimes," I said, looking into my coffee.

-Paul Rinkes '94



- *Untitled*, Aileen Jones '94

The Tango

The ruby red dress
saunters in and out
of slender black legs.

The dim lit cafe
searches for her olive neck,
sensual beneath
a bun of dark earth,
pinned low at the nape.

Their patent heels
tap the rhythm
upon the uneven
squares of stone.

The rim of his tilted
top hat casts
a silver shadow
over their fallen lids.

He guides her arched feet,
pressing gentle fingers
into the curve
of her bare back.

She rests her forehead
on his shaven cheek,
apple red lips touching
the white ruffles
of his chiffon blouse.

Gripping her outstretched hand,
he pulls her closer.

—Hope Layne Morgan '94

Icarus

Icarus
sucked into the sun
by pride until his
class struggle until his
wax-built wings
were suddenly a sin which means
he didn't get to heaven but
if flying too close to the sun
melts a person into hell
then maybe hell is not
less bad than sex, a transportation
which Cleopatra knows and tells
is much more useful than wax feathers,
not to mention just as warm.
"poured out in looseness on the ground"
pride pride pride
which is beautiful and real
flaking into a fresco
golden music lifted
to slippery thirsty lips
Cleopatra again would kiss the snake
not to be paraded through the mocking
streets of Rome
spitting citizens
who never sought the grail,
ruled Egypt or the Sun
would they love Cleopatra?
or catch the blazing son of gods
as he fell to their rock-filled arms?
then poison her with a phallus
then burn the skin from his stretching arm
for giving up minivans

Folgers coffee and the home-shopping network
citizens of Rome
reject them the way they rejected your family
photographs locked between plastic and paper
mashed into albums,
mortality books
you pick up at K-Mart for 6.99
citizens of Rome
learn humility
citizens of Rome
learn the principles of home equity
citizens of Rome
learn the pages of your TV guide
to see that you don't miss your favorite movie.
citizens of Rome
all learn your Icarus.
As Icarus has learned all of you.

– Carey Christie '95

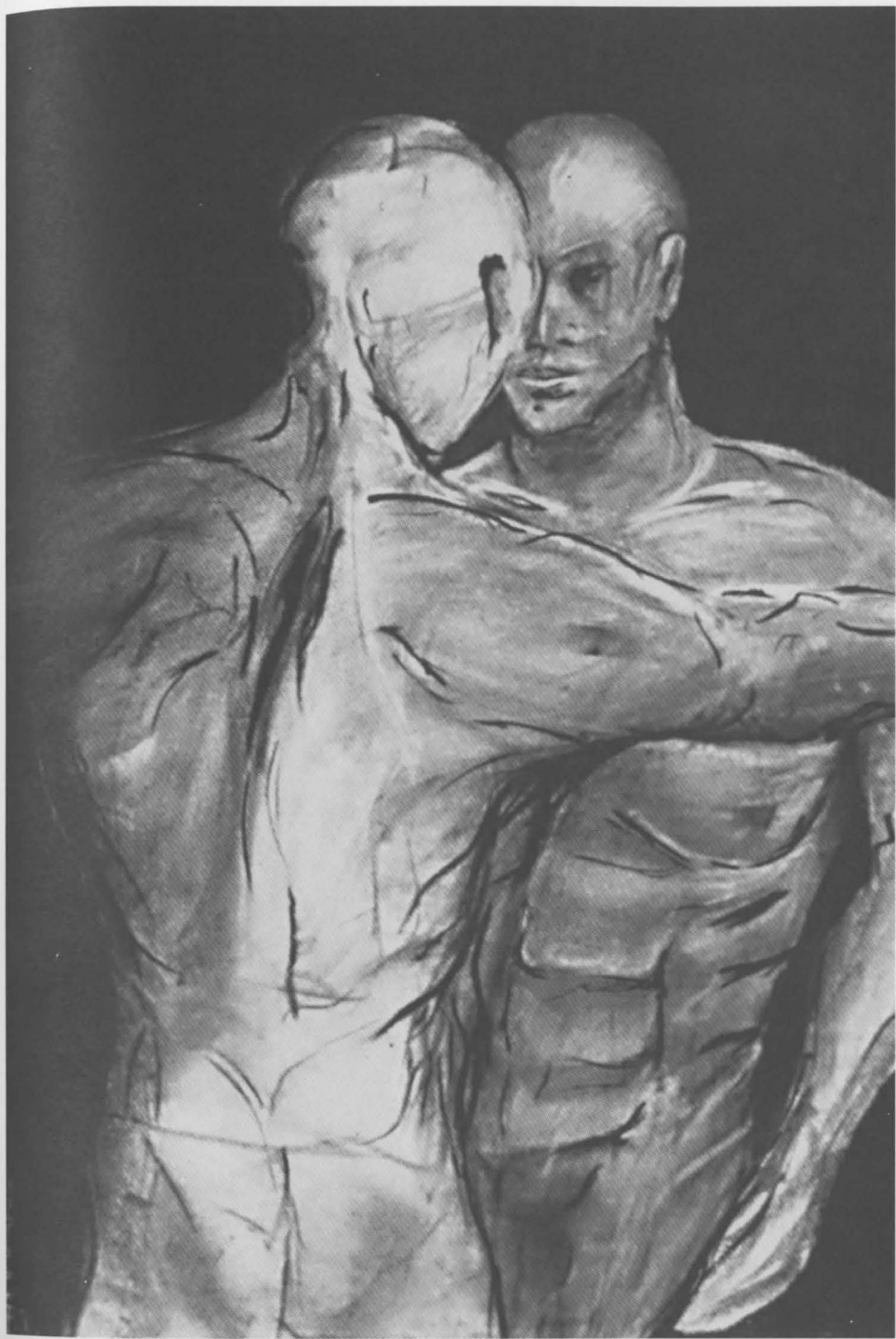
fad

there is a city
beyond the horizon
where it rains
day and night
no Shangri-la
for the helpless
a hiding place
for the eccentric
where coffee is cheap
and cars are new
and colors are fresh
and lights shine bright

there is a man
who hides in that city
his eyes puffed
from the tears that choke
him from the inside out
and the naked girls
smile at him nightly
as he rolls over in bed
to look out into
the red-light district
where the young and old
fondle each other happily

there is a thought
deep within this man
that he should go back home
to where the heart
is and where the heat is
where his mother
and father take him
with their notes
and calls and pleas
that he will not answer
and the naked girls
dance before him again

– Jeremy Aufrance '95



-Untitled, James Oliver '94

Desert Villanelle

The calls of drums and banjos ring the tune
as the enchanted danced in the night air,
by the white light of an undisguised moon.

The toils of the autumn's harvest soon
turn to howls in the wild night where
the calls of drums and banjos ring the tune.

But now we sit in our windowless rooms.
With streetlights we flood the nature's night air.
By the white light of an undisguised moon,

we now only sleep, the morning comes soon.
Over the factory's noise, how can you hear
the calls of drums and banjos ring the tune?

On that wild night, our spirits can bloom.
But will you howl with me, will you be there
by the white light of an undisguised moon?

The aged do still dance on that great dune,
but will you come to the dance without fear?
The calls of drums and banjos ring the tune,
by the white light of an undisguised moon.

– Christopher Harnish '94



— *The Skull*, Nicky Taylor '94

Rodeo Bar

(when Elvis demanded "Spring Tomorrow," they laughed the laugh
of lime-capped Corona while our sweet gone waitress
served up bottles to Brooklyn's gringos and Broadway's gauchos.)

her mind so removed and dark concrete eyes
were swallowed quick by the screeching guitar.
the rowdy crowd glazed over winter's last triumph-
another 4th Street sunset gleaming orange,
just one shade paler than her citrus striped top
wrapping breasts and waist of youth rushed.

too slowly our night paced forward, cracked
by the sting of sweaty glass, stalled by the whine
of ugly chords—our waitress forced to leap
alongside. she whispered in and out of focus,
she now shouts in memory. I long to take in
the color harmony of what she is, but all I get
are visions of hurried footsteps.

a Persian influx of bittersweet adrenaline
mimicked our matching faded jeans.
hers smooth glorious thighs of too many
Friday nights and silhouette ankles innocent
to the core. layers of decay dirty and black
as the leather hiding sleepy feet have caged
the angry angel. nobody knows who's
got the key. check the savage pockets
of the run away city.

finally the band breaks off and the beer
grows mad. I slouch inside my chair
and hear applause emerging from the smoke.
disappeared behind the bar, our waitress
slumps weary on a stool. sweat shines upon
a child's face. . . I wipe my own forehead dry
and cross the bridge connecting rage, regret
and distant love.

— Carl Jeffrey Boon '96

I, Mordred

How splendid of you to take interest in the affairs of your young, thin-blooded son. I received your letter early yesterday and was literally quite thrilled by the energy and feeling you expressed, in fact, one might go so far as to call your tone desperate. I shall write soon enough of the goings-on at Camelot, but first I should like to inquire after your own health. Are you aging well? Have the wrinkles now conquered every corner of the gorgeous realm of your skin? Do your monstrous boobs yet drag across the marble floor and are your liver-spots as dark and vile as ever?

Yes, Mother, very kind of you to inquire of me the reason that your son is not yet King, to scribble madly on the page your hatred and your thirst for blood. You wonder if I waver in my dark resolve? Frightened that I might have been won over by my father's wholesome tenderness and all of the flowering beauty and love which blooms daily here at Camelot? You may breathe easy my dear wind-bag, there is no love for me at Camelot, and I will tear this place apart with nothing else but a wink and a nod, if my mouth, my hands and feet be gagged. Camelot will fall like a murdered child when I am through with her, and I myself will drag her down to hell.

I saw a father once carrying his young dead son in his sobbing arms. The little corpse was wrapped loosely in a piece of gorgeous soft red velvet, and I remember wondering from whom the man had stolen the cloth to wrap up his dead child. Tears were spurting from the knave's red face and snot was running down into his open, howling mouth. He was a commoner, a baker probably or more likely a blacksmith of some sort. The street was busy with carts and commerce, and not a soul but me was turned to watch the big fool's weaving, wet procession through the traffic. He wailed and moaned as if he'd lost an arm, or an entire kingdom full of gold and cloth and horses, but he'd only lost a son. The stupid brute. He must have had more, all these insipid dopes breed like the plague and fill the gutters with the rotting flesh of their unwanted children. Infant beggars are daily set to street by women who hadn't the sense to cross their bloody thighs (no offense to you, dear mother). And still, the father cried and moaned, and honored his crusty little snot with a snatch of royal velvet, lifted from a nobleman's coach.

He wrapped him in velvet, Mother! Do you understand what I'm telling you? The poorest wretch in all the kingdom breaks his scrawny neck while loosening his bowels, and his father picks him up into his strong, red arms, and wraps him in a piece of heavenly velvet, because he knows that he has lost his son. His son. Angrily I stormed up to the man and ripped the velvet off of his dead child. The impudence! I, the King's own son, will be wrapped in a heap of dung when I am wormsmeat, and yet his snot-faced brat would go to dirt in a luscious pile of England's finest cloth! I ripped the velvet off of his young corpse and burned it in the nearest blacksmith's forge.

I won't be wrapped in velvet when I die, my father will not weep and carry

me. Whether I die on the pot or in the field, my father, the King, will have me tightly wrapped in maggot-skins and toss my cracked bones fast into the horses' piles. My father, dear, sweet father, almost spoke to me today. I sat near him this morning at the joust. He looked at me and then he looked away. Oh, yes, he loves me dearly I daresay. He cannot even bear to see my face. Oh, Mother, not because I look like you (although that might have similar effect) but because I am a bastard, just like him, and I am far too honest for this court. He really is a bastard, is he not? When hoary old Uther bedded down my only grandmere from behind, tangled in a web of matted magic, was not the illegitimate product our bright King? Who shines so golden from the turrets of this sinking pile of stones? Oh yes, and grandpere Gorlois was yet warm, and breathing when the dragon pierced his wife. And thus our fair King Arthur was conceived. And thus is he a bastard like myself. Although Igerna and Uther had not blood so thick and close as you and he, yet still, a bastard he, I think, like me.

Wasn't that lovely? Oh, by the way, "Her Highness the Queen" sends her royal regards, or would, if she condescended to speak to me or thought you more than a vicious slut. She's looking marvelous, all that physical activity keeps both her and Sir Lancelot looking quite young. Really, you must hand it to Guenevere, here she is, fast approaching forty, and yet still she bangs her bed each night into the floor with Lancelot. Each night the country howls with their obscenities, as my father, the bastard, lies silent in bed with his eyes frozen open, his toothy mouth a thin blue line set hard between his cheek and chin.

I don't imagine the poor old toad can sleep a wink, no matter what his silence says. And yet, I find myself wondering, who gives a damn? Who cares if the best and brightest of Camelot rip off their vows to Arthur on royal sheets? Come to think of it, I like their constant fucking very well, for who better to care and feed for the long, thick horns on Arthur's head than the King's own wetnurse, Lancelot. Yes, I think a set of horns should always be on Arthur's head, it's really a family tradition, you know. Very like the horns that my grandpere wore, and ones that were given King Lot of Orkney by his dear wife.

"Yes, yes Mordred, this is all lovely and well," you are thinking in your numb and calculating way, "But when, darling, will you leave off your boyish whining and conquer Camelot?" When will the country be mine? When will I finally clutch this rotting hulk of land you bought me with your flesh? The horns which rode Lot's frosty brow were no more noble than the rest. Happily, I hate him too, or did, until he bit the sword. How did you purchase that kingdom mother? Now that your flesh is old and grim? A magic spell, perhaps? I hear a fine enchantment can work wonders on an unsuspecting victim. Oh, all the lovely people in our family simply can't seem to keep their claws off one another. Thank you, mother, for the other night, I'd send flowers to you now, but my allowance here simply won't allow. A bit of humor, just for you, my sweet, sweet mother, who (luckily for me and all my kin) is ages past the point of fertility.

Do you want to know why I'm not yet King? Yes, of course you do you grubbing hag. You have waited twenty years to slide me into Arthur's golden throne, preparing me to set my scepter in your hands so you can yank and bend it as you please. Well, let me tell you, I will not be King. I, Mordred, do not care

for this green hole. "Not all that glitters is golden" someone once said, and it might have been in Camelot. All of the ninnies in this bloody castle are perfect examples of fabulously ornate, and glaringly empty jewelry boxes. When father asked me if I hoped to join The Round Table, I almost giggled right in his hairy face. They're all a pack of clanking, clinging church bells, who ring themselves too loudly through the day, and change their tune to darker songs come evening.

The lovely Guenevere walks splayed all day in glowing silver gowns and wears a shining golden cross upon her perfect breast to show the world her saintliness, as Lancelot rides next to her, brandishing his sword and swearing that he will carve up any man who dares to look upon the Queen and say that she is not a breathing angel. Oh, Lancelot. He is a man to be reckoned with, a full-blown knight with a light French twist. Hobbling about in his fine, bejeweled armour, swearing off women and wine "for God and Arthur" one would think him seated in the dais 'tween heaven and Earth. Must drive him buggy though, swearing abstinence and chastity during the day, then swearing it off during the night. Galahad, his pious young son, shrinks away from him as though Sir Lancelot were a demon and makes his hands into a cross each time the lovely pair rides by. Of course, the Brave Sir Galahad hasn't the sense to dress himself in the morning and sobs if his unspeckled helmet is fixed too tight upon his precious skull. My loving brothers, Gawain and Aggravaine, have decided that my presence here is less than welcome, and Gawain has all but challenged me to single combat on the field. He is old, mother, and he is angry, angry with me, with the King, and with himself.

Do you remember when Gawain was seventeen and I was four? I used to follow him about the castle, polishing his sword and fetching him whatever tools he needed handy. He hated me even then of course, although at the time I was too young and dull to understand his thick contempt. I only knew that you loved me best, and I suppose that in my innocence I wished Gawain could come and share in your love. I will not trifle with the silly details, but I do remember a particular instance when you had tucked me into bed and touched me goodnight and I crept quickly out of bed to see my brothers "being men."

"Well the little worm will have to go to court someday I suppose." Aggravaine was sitting on a sofa across the room from Gawain's bed. He was already pale and out of shape, I suppose he was about fifteen then and he liked me even less than did Gawain. The poor sod must have missed his childhood journeys through your sheets.

"I hope he never does," Gawain replied, and suddenly I became very interested in the conversation. In my diseased young mind the words of Gawain were as gospel and by the harsh, hushed tone the two were using I gathered that the subject was important.

"What do you mean you hope he doesn't? With Mordred out of the castle we could once again be men of honor, men who need not cringe at every commoner's dark glance. We have a name and heritage, Gawain, yet all of England figures us for swine."

"Oh, honestly Aggravaine, you've conjured all this on your own. Besides, even if the birth of Mordred is a womanly blemish on our household, sending him

to the King would only make matters worse, and you're not a man yet, Aggravaine, much less a "man of honor." Mother's infidelity need not destroy your name and value. I myself intend to go to Arthur's court and join my sword with his on the Round Table."

"Well, I for one would feel much safer if the little turd were to have a fatal accident. He's always playing with your weapons, don't you think you could arrange . . ."

Suddenly Gawain was on his feet. In one swift burst he'd crossed the room and cut off all of Aggravaine's last words. The younger boy let out a muffled moan that sounded like a drugged and dying cat.

"Hush now Aggravaine, unless you crave our mother's claws more tightly round your neck. You think our younger brother is a problem, and yet you've made it very clear just how little you really comprehend. Do not you know that if Mordred were to die your neck and mine would prove no thicker than a crisp spring air? That brat is Mother's key to all the kingdom and if you think, if thinking's what one calls your dim and feeble reasoning, that she would care a fig for any flesh but his, your final breath is soon and will be painful."

That lovely moment's frozen in my mind, just as a rock or chip of bone becomes frozen in in a bed of ice and hangs malignantly, stacked in crystal, so that image hangs inside my skull: my two brothers, one choking the other, frightened both of me and of my mother. I went back to my room that night and gave myself to you completely. I suppose that in the case of a four-year-old stupidity and simple awe erase completely fear and loathing. We had them, Mummy, right in our tiny fists, these two big, silvery men were frightened to the teeth of you and me.

Well dear, they are not frightened anymore. Else Gawain cares no further for his neck than he does for the fiddler's ass. He all but shits on me at Arthur's court, and he'd do that as well were I not fast enough to dodge his rheumatic squats. Aggravaine, however, loves you still, in some way deep and perverse as my own, and though he loves me no more than before, we've hatched a plot to topple the divinity, the Queen, her French Knight and the Holy Goat. We've only got to catch them in the act, then Arthur will be forced to burn them both. Hell, Mother, if they are not naked, joined and sweating this very night I am a mug of ale. It's far too simple to be any fun, and I am losing interest in this game. The reverend trio's old and I am young, and Arthur's horse could hatch a plot this quick. I barely have the heart to even finish.

And probably I would just leave this. Leave you and your snagged nets, leave Arthur and his holy horns, leave all this heap of rotten dung and sail to the edge, to the end of everything and everywhere, over the edge. In fact, I'd like that better than having Arthur's steaming innards on a golden platter, served to me with a silver spoon. And I would sail tomorrow, wave my little hanky at the cast of Camelot who would all stand cheering on the dock together, crowding around to make sure that little Orkney bastard was really leaving. And all the while they'd hurl boulders and toss lances at my boat, tossing me gifts to remember them by. Still, I would forget them all, I could forget them all, if not for that dead beggar boy I once saw wrapped with love in velvet.

For that piece of velvet this kingdom will burn. For that father's tears this country will be smeared with blood and shit. I, Mordred, son of Arthur and Margause, will hold the burning, stinking nation in my own arms, wrapped in hatred and in velvet, and I will not weep, no, I will laugh, and my voice will carry to their sinner God and rouse out all the devils who snap bones and feathers in the hollowed bowels of Hell. And I will toss this rotten corpse, this blackening child down to those devils in a fit of father's love, as I dive after, forging hell-ward with screams and laughter, waving my hanky at nothing but air. And you will come with us, Mother, won't you? Hell just wouldn't be the same without you there to rub the salt into all of the wounds. Yes Mother, you too can go to Hell. And we will take brandings and lashings together. Together we'll laugh as they rip out our minds and feed them to Cerebus. Oh, Mother, we'll lie in Hell together, you and I, and Gawain and Aggravaine can finally join us, in scorched sheets together, unfolding in screams.

And so now you know why I am not yet King. The time is not right yet to drag down the angels, and you are not ready to join me in Hell. You will be, my darling, and I will grind your sick bones in my fingers. Do not be frightened, and don't bother with your magic. You may not hold my scepter.

Your loving, devoted son,
Mordred

– Carey Christie '95

Between Centuries

Hours from Rome,
miles to the South of France,
their train ceases without reason.
Rain spatters the glass.
Weary from the change of stations
her eyes close over dreams
of fountains overflowing
with lovers roaming monuments.
Outdoor cafes bordered by
a Kline blue night.
Sinking in the warm froth,
steam rises.

II. The Dream

Winding streets find her arm linked
in his along the boulevards.
Parades of mink and carnations.
A backdropped Colloseum
cuts out sky windows
to the crescendo of a pasted moon.
As ristorantes mix oregano
with arias, his fingers shape
her lips into a language
that speaks with its hands.

Motioning to the stairs
he pulls her
against the railing.
She laughs. Full
knowing he wants more
than an enchanted evening.

III. The Promise

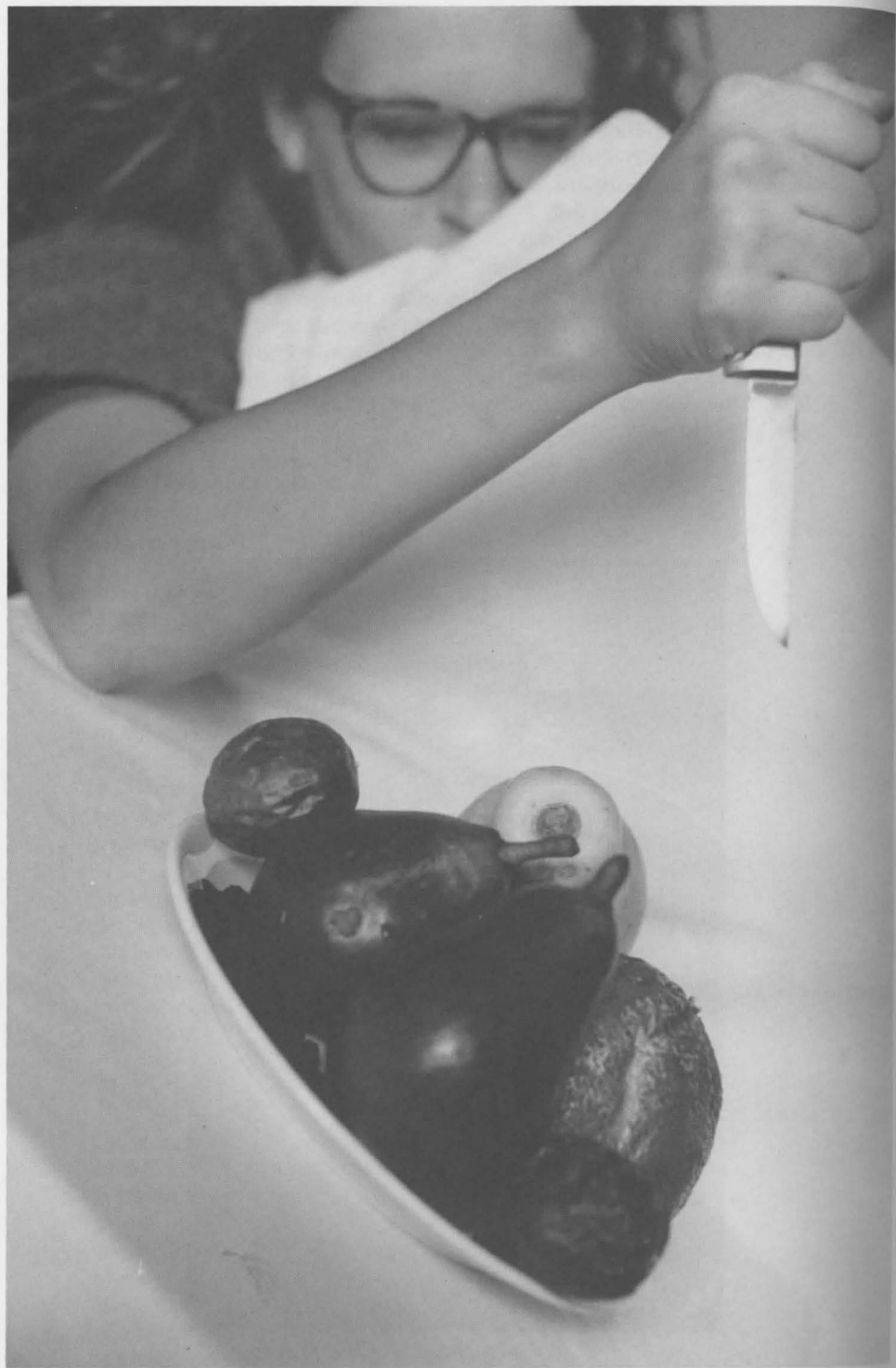
On the corner between Italy
and Reality she saw herself leaving,
walking back under Roman arches
to the place where she had found
her heart only to give it away.
She can no longer look at him.
Her glance falls to the randomly strewn
colors of confetti before her feet.
Without words he feels her leave.

That night he parks on the highest
hill to look down at the marble city
illuminated by fountains.
He gave her this last gift,
a momento of the centuries
clasping her hand as if it might
vanish into mist.
There, under the deepest sky
his hands unfold her letter
written in broken Italian.
It was the only ending
she knew how to write.

-Leslie Dana Wells '94



-Untitled, Carrie Horner '97



—Untitled, Alex Emmons '96

Coleridge's Curse

I cannot tell you what is lost.
I watched the castle of Kubla Khan
Fall before my eyes.
The doors opened out to me,
Inviting me in, and the dome
Came crashing down
On all it struggled to contain.
Through the torrents of the sea
I heard a muffled cry
As the damsel, robed in white,
Choked on her song.

The dome fallen, the earth set free,
I was whirled into a dream.
My eyes have never ached in my head
As they did then. I saw him,
Still as a corpse, but his eyes
Met mine, and his lips strained
To whisper the word "Xanadu."
The poet's voice echoed in that chasm.
I could not find the words to ask
If he alone had built his castle,
or to tell him it no longer stood.

I awoke to find countless pages
With a hundred lines scrawled
In a stranger's hand. I could not think
Clearly. I searched all that day
For broken remains of a lost castle,
But found nothing. The sea had dried,
The damsel's body disappeared.
That night with the door locked
I burned the lines, page by page.
I have not slept since the last page
Curled to ash in the flames.

It is best this way.

— Allison Lemieux '95



—Untitled, Jenny Baker '94

five

As you sleep with your husband, wake suddenly eerie early morning, you can see the red and blue/shadows dancing on the ceiling, so you drudge to the blind to pull down the shades, the police car parked in the driveway, your daughter bleeding in the front seat of her upside down automobile.

And as you sleep with your wife, you feel her leave the bed to close the drapes, so you go back to sleep only to wake to her screams, on the other side of the prairie.

The blood runs between the seats, through the seat belt, out the broken window, across the street and into the gutter with the leaves and the Wendy's cup that you had been meaning to throw in the can.

The next time you got the chance.

And now you watch as blood fills that cup, each drop magnified a thousand times, each magnification holding a million DNA particles, each particle a picture of your once unbroken daughter.

And you see each step that the cop takes around the car, him uncaring, him impartial, him going home to eat breakfast with his small twin daughters and youthful wife.

He has the world before him, and does not care for your plight.

Dinner is in the oven, waiting for him.

Wait, wait for me.

And you see her on the playground, barely five, beautiful child with skinned knees and oversized tennis shoes.

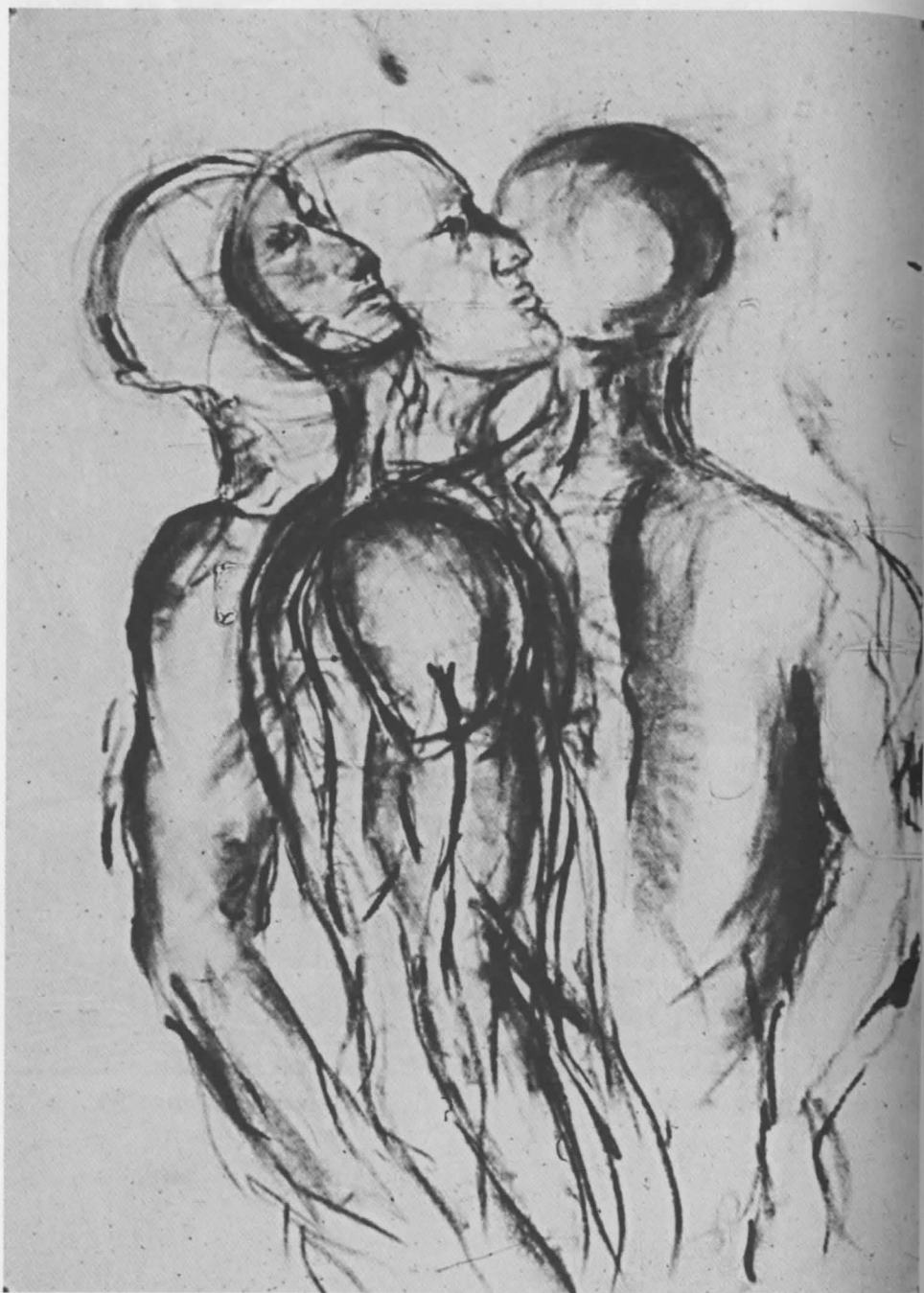
She hugs your leg, you pick her up and toss her high in the air.

She shrieks.

Not now, but then, then you could pick her up and protect her from the bad things floating around her, the boogeymen of the late 1970' s.

The doorbell goes unanswered as you remember, never said goodbye.

– Jeremy Aufrance '95



-Untitled, James Oliver '94

Lobster Boy

Your eyespots are the inner sanctum
in a nest of Chinese boxes lacquered one within the next,
right-angled against the vector of my gaze.

Like a lobster from an ocean crevasse,
with slow words and fish-chum, I lure you out
to speak to me, claws and tentacles shaking.

Strange shelly thing: I begin
to believe you are a creature from outer space.
I cannot speak that bubbling language.

In the vacuum of the Milky Way
syllables fall weightless, astray from the launch
pad of your mandibles, crisscrossing.

If I should slip my silver knife into
the plexus of your nerves, I would not hear you scream
when in the boiling pot you'd turn

into a cherry red, just ripe for garlic
butter and claw-crackers. I would not venture
to taste your liver, shiny and green—

who knows what atoms alien organs
absorb in their journeys from place to place,
shut in boxes on boxes of imperial red.

— Kirstin Rogers '94

Fire on the Mountain

Buck and I came upon the old wooden mountain cabin and found my grandfather sitting against the sunbaked wall facing west. We both knew what had to be done. Not far behind us were the military men from Flagstaff, slowly making their way up the logging road we were able to avoid with our horses. We found him in his refuge. His place of meditation since the death of his wife 20 years ago.

My parents let me spend three weeks with him each summer. He would drive me through the small town of Page, AZ, across the long desert plain, 10 minutes to the ranch. The 260 acres of ranch, cattle and horses, feeding at the stream. Once a symbol of freedom, his ranch stood alone in the wilderness. The mountains behind the pastures were his as well, we would go to the cabin in the hills on hunting trips each weekend.

Now, "for the sake of progress", and "the good of the whole", my grandfather's ranch, and his horses and mountains were taken. Taken by the government under the precept of *E Pluribus Unum*. The men in suits told him he should feel proud, he was helping the U.S. Government fight off the evil empires of the world by giving up the ranch that was his, and his fathers before him. "It's a perfect location, really." Said the man from Flagstaff. Trying to make small talk with a 15-year-old. Underestimating my rage, he wasn't ready for the "fuck off" that was my response.

He didn't go without a fight. Covering the windows with planks, only sunlight and a shotgun barrel could seep in and out of our home. I knew how to use a gun, and they hadn't yet shot at me. We would shoot out the lights of the cars that carried the men in suits. Soon the suits changed to uniforms, the cars to dull olive jeeps, the government brought force to take him from "their" ranch. We fought, but he was old and tired, Buck too, and I was young. So Buck and I returned to the woods for one last time. Not to hunt, or fish or look for stray cattle, but to find my grandfather and what he found at the cabin—to live and not die without living.

We went inside the cabin, smelling the dry wood burning in the stove—seeing on the wall the medal of honor, signed by Harry Truman. I saw the pictures of my grandmother, hugging the man in uniform.

I found my keepsake, his worn saddle & side pouch, canteen half-full, and I took it from the cabin. Buck piled the old wooden chairs beneath the large rectangle table that always gave me splinters. He took the oil-burning lamp from the nightstand and poured the golden oil across the pile that I added to with the pictures.

Outside the sunset, we sat beside the dead old man one last time. He was just too tired of fighting, we all were. And knowing he had fought his last battle, he returned to his mountain cabin, to watch the sun fall one last time behind the ancient mountains. We knew the time had come, as the men drove towards us in those military jeeps. Buck jumped up, and I followed behind him, preparing ourselves for the final act of rebellion.

Hurriedly, Buck slid his arms under the old man's powerful shoulders, as I grasped the worn leather of his dirty cowboy boots and walked towards the pile of history. Inside, we laid his body on the table; Buck struck the match. The golden oil lit softly, and filled the cabin with a glow like a scarlet sun setting in the mountain air. We walked out of his cabin, eyes filled with tears as the cabin burned with the smell of the campfire he built for me years before. The government officials watched in disbelief as Buck stood with his arm around my shoulder. The hot sun baking my neck, the snapping of the fire filling the air, and the feel of the golden smoke in my lungs and eyes as I watched the fire on the mountain.

— Christopher Harnish '94

Yosemite

We forgot about the bear
warning signs as we sat on our rock
and cut open the smoked salmon.
The mountains numbed our common sense.
Hypnotized by sweet starlight,
we could taste our solitude
in the autumn air. The secret to life
moved closer to us in the deep forest
darkness each time our chapped lips
touched the bottle. When the Yosemite
fog began to breathe down our necks, we
crawled back to our hiding spot
singing love songs off tune
like drunk Alaskan fishermen.
The night was mere blackness. Unaware of the
eyes peering, blinking, staring around us,
we told stories in spinning circles.

– Morgan Roper '94



– *Untitled*, Carrie Horner '97



-Untitled, Ken Tyburski '94

Sleepless Night Fades to Credits

When I'm on the roof
At half past three
In the morning,
Cigarette smoke streaming
Over my right shoulder,
I'm not myself. Instead
I'm a director in my lofty chair
Manoeuvring people
Through a phony night's set
That can be dismantled
And replaced by a scene
In a bedroom
Where no one sleeps
But their eyes are shut,
Players in a dream
I create for them
With a word as negligible
As "action".

– Allison Lemieux '94

Dancing Days

I remember when I was little my father seemed so big
that his hands could wrap around mine
and envelop them, holding on so tightly.
My shiny patent leather shoes placed square on top of his sturdy feet
as he guided me across the asphalt driveway.
With my head tilted towards the sky,
I could only see the silhouette of his head,
tilted down at me, his marionette,
as the sun illuminated his hair like thin strands of fire.

Now fifteen years later, and three feet higher
his hands are the same size as mine
and I look at him eye to eye, as we waltz across the floor.
I can read his expression with every half step we make,
and for the life of me I cannot remember
what he looked like when I was his little girl.

— Julie McDonald '94

Immobile

I have a fascination with trailer courts.
fifties' styles, pinks and blues, Jetsons shapes, rotting,
modern double-wides that might have hot tubs inside,
boarded doors and windows, graham cracker wood additions,
junked cars in too-small yards, chickens sometimes,
always a television moving light in the windows, the heart,
cats and dogs underneath, litters and litters in the underbelly.
Inside, the feeling that you're not safe:
the floor is hollow, the ceiling too low, the rooms small.
In one, the grandma had fallen getting out of the bathtub.
She weighed over 200 pounds and made a hole in the floor—
Darren showed it to me under a board under the bathmat.
Next to the toilet, a giant terrarium full of cigarette butts.
On the john, smoking and shitting her days away
until she died of lung cancer, the grandma.
A Buddha. A Priestess. *This is how it's done.*
Then the time I crashed my car, over the drop-off,
into the space below, between trailer and telephone pole.
I wonder if I wasn't sucked in, pulled by curiosity.
When the car turned over, I was two feet from his front door.
He let me use the phone.
A morbid collage of family photos coated the walls:
frumpy married couples and high school seniors in poses,
lying on the grass, leaning on souped-up trucks, holding pompoms,
and tons of grinning children like the picture from the tabloid:
"Boy Pokes out his Eye while Picking his Nose"
And then there was Tina's trailer;
her mom worked at the truckstop and had porno magazines.
Tina's arms had rows of cigarette burns,
in their living room the TV had been kicked open,
dead and busted, the heart of the hive.
In Missouri, there may be more trailers than houses.
We're all hoping for a big tornado
to gut out all of our accumulated trash
to take us the hell out of this fucking dump.
*My house is on wheels, I know I'll roll out soon,
in a few years. When the kids are grown...*
Some towns are nothing but trailers...
as though nothing is touching the earth, just poised
and waiting. Prathersville is all mobile
except for the massage parlors and the diner:
"Sunnie's," "Scorpio's," "Al's." Everything else on wheels.

Crystal's aunt was so far she never went outside:
she babysat us in her trailer after school.
We perched on top of her jigglely side
and watched Lost in Space, The Beverly Hillbillies,
Gilligan's Island, bouncing up and down on her.
Another Buddha. The result of years of training,
of giving up everything. Nirvana. *This is how it's done.*
Now Crystal's dropped out and drinks all day:
Aristocrat vodka from a plastic bottle, playing Sega.
She lives with Wayne who pisses on her when they have sex.
Tammy and I used to play prostitutes in the fourth grade.
She got married when we were fifteen:
I cried at the wedding because there was a coffee stain
on her dress, the dress from some woman,
dug out of a trailer's closet.
I haven't seen Tammy's new trailer or her two kids;
I heard it's a double wide with a hot tub
and a big oak console TV. Her husband sells vacuum cleaners
and sleeps with other women.
Maybe after the kids are grown. . .
My bus route went through three parks:
"Candlelight Court" "Rustic Estates" "Crescent Meadows"
the streetsigns were homemade, paint peels read:
"Tammy" "Winston" "Wild Turkey"
I stared out the window at potholes, lawn ornaments, car parts,
(my parents never bought us twinkies)
and sometimes a grandma would be out in her housedress
cigarette hanging from her lip, or old guys
whose pants didn't fit wearing tractor caps and spitting chew.
Angel sat in front of me. She had teased hair and hated my guts:
"Who do you think you are? You ain't better than the rest of us."
One foot. Even in college one foot is planted
in the shag carpet of a trailer. I can always
enjoy swigging my Southern Comfort a little too much
or spend a little too much time watching daytime TV;
I love talkshows and infomercials, Family Feud—
I could sink back on velveteen couch cushions
with a Virginia Slim and a can of Diet Pepsi
or steer a little to the right and crash down the hillside,
the trailers drawing me.
I could never talk back to her.
You ain't better than us.

—Adrienne Fair '96



- *Untitled*, Kira Pollack '94

Dorm Fire

The officer held her gently
By the elbow, as if, had he let her
Go, she would melt
Like the pictures on her wall.
Which now, evaporating,
Sent strands of devil's hair
Drifting through the smoke, lingering
Above trinket boxes, once silly and pink,
Which her aunt sent when she was sick.
Inside, letters from teenage boyfriends
Who openly and naively gushed
With adolescent desire, became the dust
Which slipped through her fingers as she
Clenched them in her little girl palm.

— Lisa Marie Antonille '95



— *Untitled*, Carrie Horner '97

The Book

"Your cheatin' heart. . ." bleating
in cracked vinyl booths—
Ox Bridge Bar & Family Restaurant—
accompanies wads of paper, fallen
from the grace of the walls of
dead letter & clerk post office.

I fall, but then everybody falls.
In bitter plywood stalls they tell
me you will come in the burnt-neck
town of Paradise, West Virginia,
where the wolf man with a booger
in his mustache talks about libbers.

I find you in the dumpster
with gravy under your fingernails.
The XENOPHOBE is out of order;
MS. PAC-MAN waits for the sonic
freight train to spill her pot
of quarters. Outside a wind-blown

sailor steps in a puddle. A
hemlock plume rolls from the coffee;
the fry-cook smells like rain &
doom & gasoline. A guy with a tiny
little head says, "It ain't safe
to hitchhike unless you have no

place to go." Out front some guy's
peeing in a pay phone. The woman with
the rude kid buttons her collar.
Perfume rolls out the red carpet
for the girl with the coke
bottle glasses. Then she rolls up

in it & disappears. I write, "*Truth
is just five letters bluffing like a
band of poker.*" Then I erase it & lie.
Suddenly, I'm eating a grilled cheese
sandwich with a stain on top from a
ruffled pickle. "Let me take you

upstairs to the hole above the bar.
You load the gun & I'll sleep
in the car." The scientist says to
mushroom soup that the wind on
Neptune blows a thousand miles an hour.
I fall asleep in my book, thinking
you are that metaphor, wanting to
hide in the MEN room. Some fella
hears second hand that his poof-haired
girlfriend is a liar, he turns purple
& falls off his stool. I read
your résumé written with a Barlow

knife. They said you were coming to
loosen up this joint. I
didn't recognize you, not even
when you told me about the bed;
you didn't ring a bell. I never
would have known you by your name.

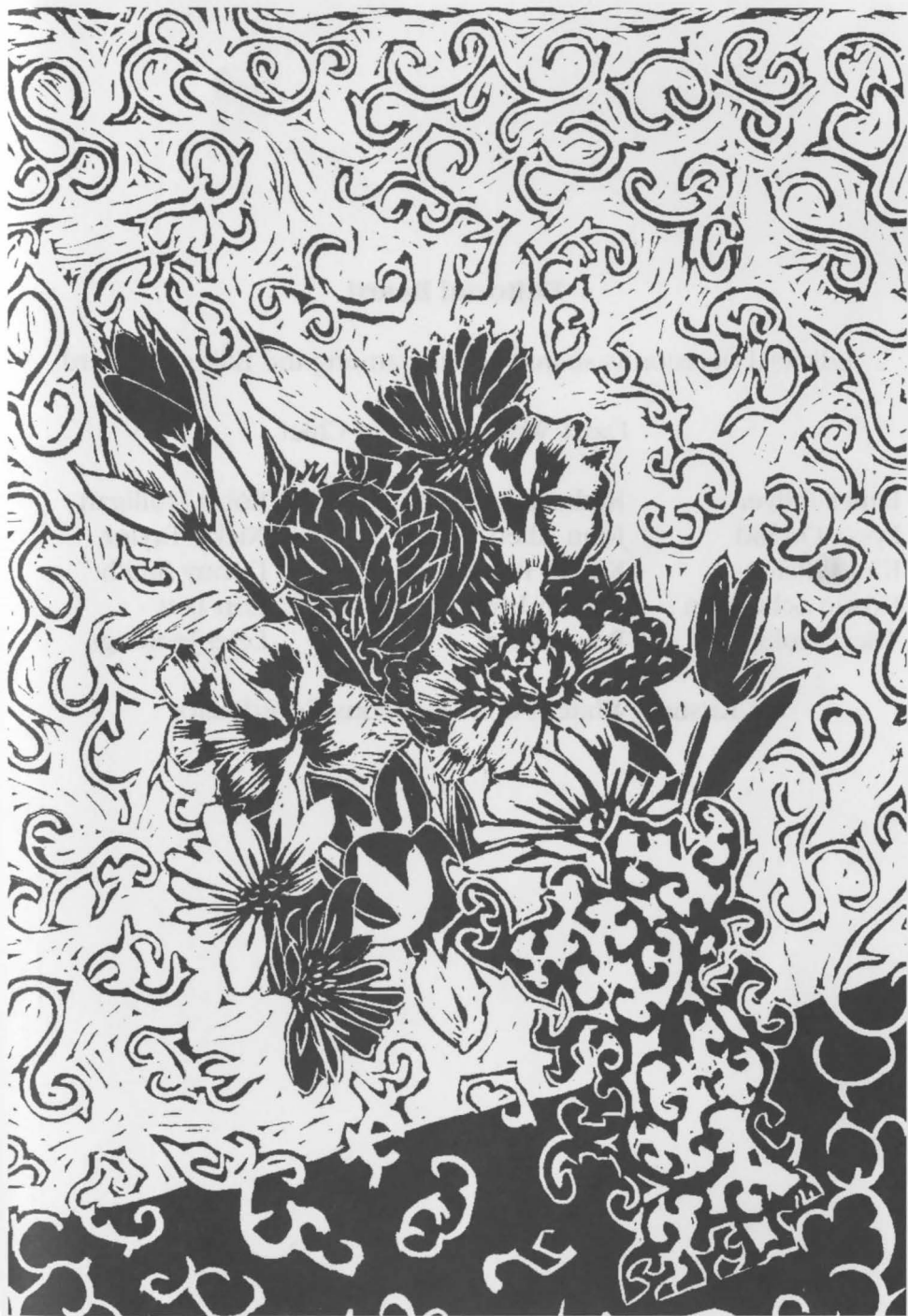
I'm told you left the moment that you came

-Matt Wanat '95

Distance

sitting thoughtfully
 on the feathery edge
 of your cozy red comforter,
staring absently
 at the heavenly trees
 brushing against your window,
remembering how
 you looked so sexy
 in tight white jeans last night,
blushing sweetly
 knowing that you were
 the heartbeat of a funeral dance,
resting back
 on rosy pillow to escape
 the hawk eyes' penetration,
slowly twirling
 a tear-stained banner
 in the curl of your fingertips,
reaching forth
 to lock the hopeless fear
 a friend might come a-knocking,
contemplating
 a steamy midnight shower
 as Sadducees burns the horizon,
strolling softly
 toward the silver mirror
 to slip free your virgin pearls,
gliding angel palms
 gently past the curve
 of God's most graceful hips,
sighing peacefully
 as you loosen the buttons
 of your silky scarlet blouse,
closing safe
 the ivory shield curtain
 of your rain-swept windowsill.

– Carl Jeffrey Boon '96



-Untitled, Jenny Baker'94

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