

genesis



Fall 2009

genesis—the origin or coming into being of anything;
development into being, especially by growth or evolution;
the process or mode of origin
<the ~ of a book>

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Editor's Note

This issue of *genesis* is an exercise in balance and centeredness. Readers may notice many changes, including a stripped-down layout. Individual attention was paid to each piece, trying to spotlight its strengths and create a seamless flow between the issue's pages.

However we remain committed to selecting quality pieces that illustrate the diverse range of talents and interests of IUPUI students. In this issue, you will experience the bizarre and the beautiful, the masculine and the feminine, the Yin and the Yang.

Tanya Smith
Managing Editor

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Cover: Living in Heaven 02

Jiang Wenting
Photograph

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*Please note, we have changed the volume and issue numbers for greater accuracy. We apologize for any confusion.



genesis

IUPUI

Literary and Arts Magazine

Volume 38 Issue I*

Fall 2009

Santorini

Sarah Sobieski

16 x 20 Acrylic on Canvas

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The Fine Art of Upchuck

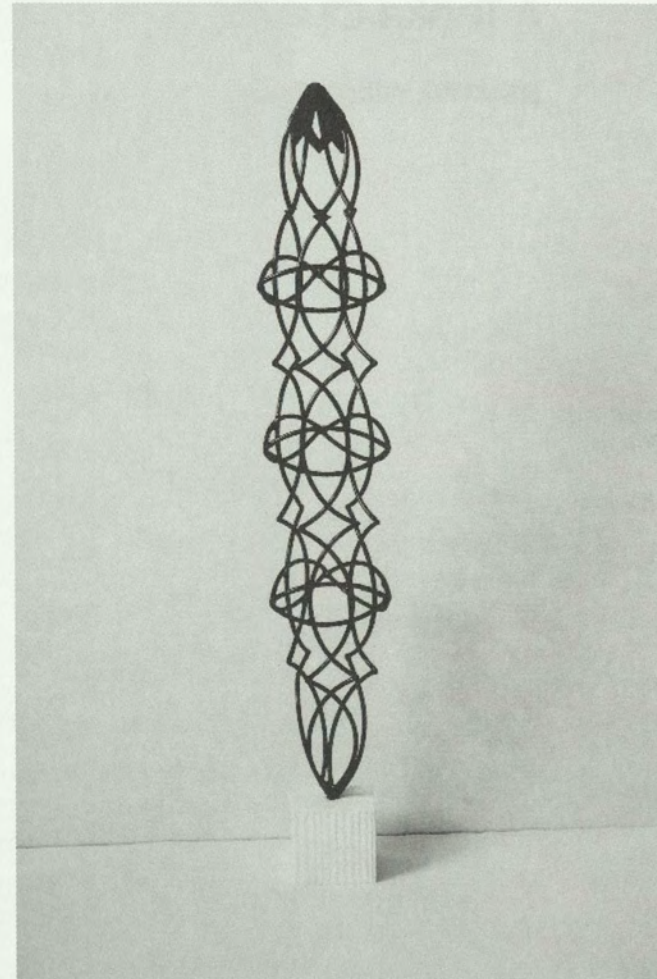
Leeza Ann Finch

Oh, vomit
The colorful mosaic of the ill
It paints the past across a white marble canvas
And inspires others to join in the victual art

Oh, vomit
The spastic dance of the ailing
They sing in guttural tones and kneel
To the floor in a ceremonial salute to the cold moon

Oh, vomit
The gumbo of the infirm
A rich broth of poignant aromas
A delicacy that all must taste

Oh, vomit
Art of the sick
Open your mouths and let it flow
Immerse yourself in the beauty of the past



Heimat

Treva Mitchell
17' 18" Sculpture

Why Was Your Favorite Color Green? A Tanka Cluster

Davinia Yalimawai

Your Funeral

I see green today—
joy song of crickets and leaves,
inconsolable.
But I still reach for her face,
catch her tears before they fall.

Buson's Portrait

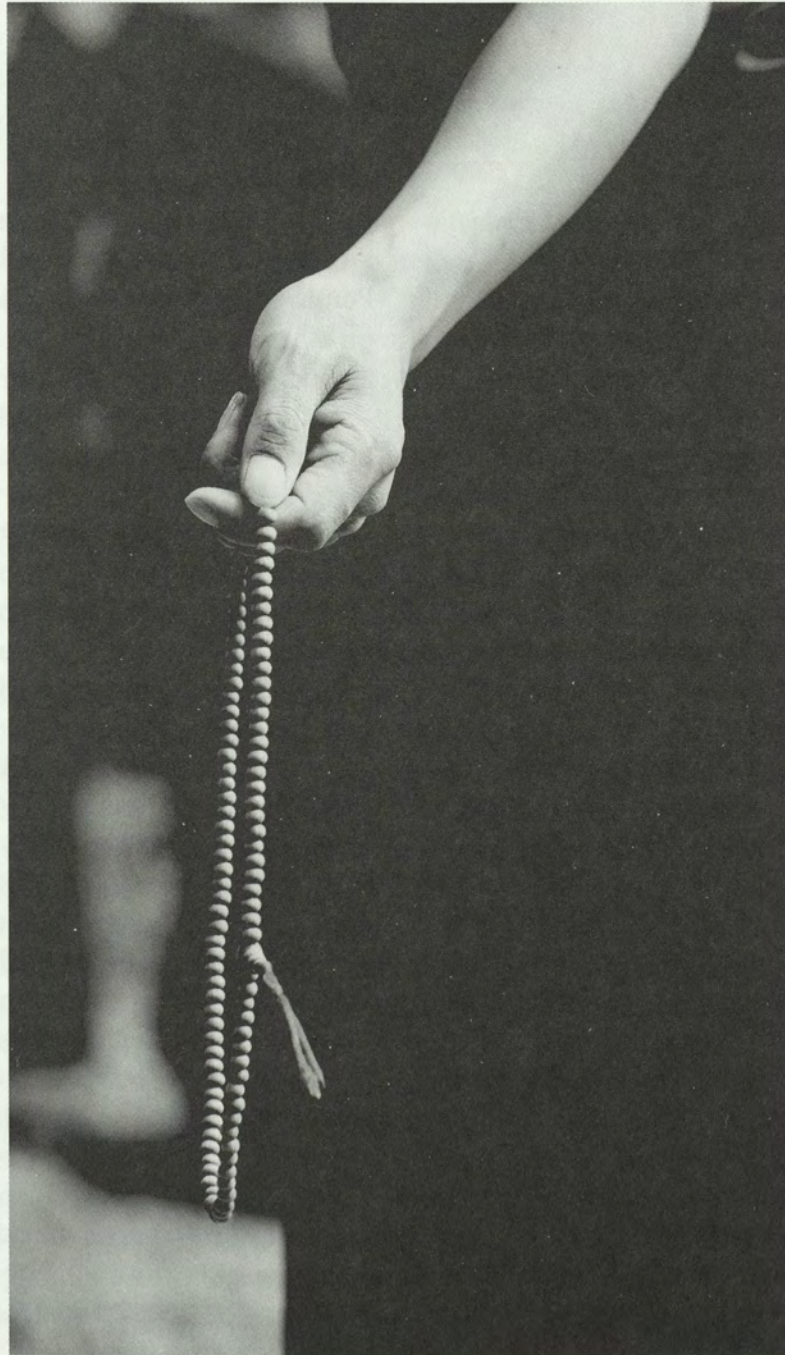
Deep shade of jungle
painted skin without a soul;
I prefer the real
pulsing body of embrace,
cracking ribs, laughter, passion.

Issa's Humor

Earthworm, don't tempt me!
These boots are made for walking
and for squashing you.
Grasshopper, listen up too.
Never mind. You're kind of cute.

Basho's Garden

Grass blades fight for warmth,
point towards the burning sun.
Some of them will die.
Ill-fated ones will live on,
until eventual end.



My Belief 05

Jiang Wenting

Photograph

Twenty-five Below

Eileen Tallman

To the residents of Alexandria Bay, New York, John Starkweather was simply Starkweather. He believed most of the residents to be a little crazy, especially so close to the turn of the millennium. Y2K brought with it suspicions of prophecy, chaos, and ultimately death. Every computer would stop running at midnight. The world would end. Starkweather laughed at such ideas. Computers didn't run everything yet. Most of the people in this town couldn't even afford a computer, but they needed something to take their minds off their dwindling incomes.

Alexandria Bay was once a real-life Neverland. The tourist season made the town enough money to keep going year-round. Celebrities came to stay on the islands in the St. Lawrence River. College kids came from all over to party. A few minor adjustments on tax forms and some under-the-table employees helped the residents and business owners get by. Their luck ran out when the local club owner was arrested for tax fraud, and it didn't take long for an investigation to begin around town. A slew of businesses closed when the truth about Alexandria Bay, leaked. In a last ditch effort to draw elite tourists, the next generation tried to clean up the place. The bars became coffee houses, but small businesses and restaurants closed down. It didn't take long for the town to wither.

Starkweather cruised the downtown strip passing gift shops and a twenty-four-hour arcade closed for winter. He made a U-turn at the end of the street by the boat-tour building. In the summer, all the townies made this U-turn to show off their trucks, blaring loud rock music to impress the tourist

girls. In winter there were no tourists, only townies walking around in the freezing cold. He slowed down his rusty '87 Pontiac 6000, circling the other side of the street. Two teenage girls hovered around a corkboard for town flyers. They pointed and laughed.

Starkweather stopped, rolled down his window, and turned down the radio. "Hey ladies. What's so funny over there?"

"Look at this poster. Someone really hates Julian Staph."

The flyer showed a man wearing a dress on top of a Christmas tree. It read, "Town Star."

"That's so mean," the other girl whined. "I think he's cute."

Starkweather rolled his eyes and moved on. Few secrets existed in a small town like Alexandria Bay. Someone always knew someone, and thanks to Julian Staph, that fraud—that false fortune-teller, not even the end of the world was a mystery. No one would come to town unless there was a gimmick, and Julian planned to save the town with his.

After a car accident no one in the town seemed to recall, Julian made headlines with the psychic powers he acquired. Julian read palms and tarot cards and checked for paranormal activity in houses. Julian told people he could see the future. The locals believed him—believed in him—because the poverty-stricken area needed a little hope. Who better than the man who was attracting crowds to the dying tourist town? Hopeless and confused, they looked to Julian because they didn't know what else to do.

A new breed of tourist arrived, those interested in the burgeoning psychic theme park. New Age trinkets replaced nautical-themed souvenirs. Starkweather even saw a few turbans. This year, no one would starve, thanks to Julian. A few residents even signed off of welfare. Despite his positive impact, Julian stood for everything Starkweather despised.

Starkweather arrived to work at Skipper's Pizza five minutes early and tossed his jacket behind him, strategically covering a pile of flyers on his backseat, each spreading Julian's cross-dressing holiday cheer.

He felt the hairs in his nostrils freeze together, and he coughed a little as crisp, cold air seeped into his lungs. Starkweather studied the piles of plowed snow that lined the parking lot and street. He stared up at the smoke-gray sky that called for more snow to be dumped on northern New York. He stared up at the Skipper's sign that once displayed the cartoon logo of a pizza delivery kid. Now there was a crystal ball.

Inside Skipper's, Julian, a thin man in a black dress shirt with a nametag that read "Owner, Resident Psychic," blocked his entry into the kitchen. Starkweather avoided eye contact and focused on the silver dagger charm with ruby-colored gems in the center of Julian's chest. It hung there from his neck on a long silver chain. Julian had worn that stupid thing for at least a decade. Every time Starkweather saw it, he thought about the time they spent together in high school. And every day he saw Julian, he thought about Lilly.

Julian's psychic career made him enough money to buy a couple of local businesses. His reputation as a business school graduate made the owners all too willing to sell. Starkweather

attempted to convince Skipper's previous hardworking owner that Julian would only corrupt the restaurant's good name with his theatrics. Starkweather knew Julian well. The guy was an import and a military brat, and nine years of living in the area didn't make him a local. His father was a Drummie, an army officer at Fort Drum, and his mother a radiologist. Somehow they sleazed their way into elite status before they moved to Clayton, a richer neighboring town.

His co-worker Travis stood next to Julian. Travis thought a six-month stint at a specialty school and a paper certificate made him a professional wrestler. He told Starkweather about his matches in complete detail, as if Starkweather cared.

"Working until three a.m. on Thursday night really sucks ass, Julian." Travis groaned. "We should close early. I mean, we might be dead at midnight."

"Yes, but you know we're the only store open late tonight. Besides, it's New Year's weekend. A lot of tourists are around," Julian responded in a flat tone.

"So, they get to enjoy New Year's Eve tomorrow, and we get stuck here."

"I'm not fond of it, but I'll be here with you."

"Great, I guess I won't be lonely tonight." Travis giggled. "Nah, it won't ruin my plans. Oh man, I'm supposed to be meeting these chicks after work, Julian. You should come with me. You need to get out, man, take a break."

"Travis, I spend time with many girls at home, out of the sight of locals here."

"What, in Clayton? Those girls are rich snobs."

“No, they have class. This woman I’m seeing now, Melissa, she’s wonderful.”

Julian’s pale face twisted into a toothy grin, and his long dyed black hair was pulled into a low ponytail. Starkweather thought it looked ridiculous beneath a black Skipper’s Pizza visor.

“Johnny, how are you doing today?” Julian stood there for a moment with his arms crossed.

Starkweather motioned for him to budge.

Travis laughed. “He called you Johnny, man.”

Starkweather ignored Travis. “No one calls me that anymore, Julian.”

“But that’s your name. That’s who you were in high school.”

“No.” Starkweather grew impatient, “John is my name. Johnny is a fucking grade school nickname.”

Starkweather made his way to the toppings counter and lifted lids, checking for empty containers. Julian watched him. He always kept this fake calm about him. In high school, Julian was a goth kid before the trend caught on. He passed through the halls in school as though he was a seductive creature of the night, but everyone else just thought he was malnourished and worshipped Satan.

* * *

“He must be malnourished and worship Satan,” Starkweather heard Kallie say as Julian passed by her table in the lunchroom. No one trusted Drummie kids. Starkweather spent most of his time bouncing from one group to the next. He never really had a clique. That day he sat with a couple guys at the table behind Kallie’s. He turned around at their comment.

“So, just because he wears black, he worships Satan?” Starkweather inquired.

“Oh, seriously, John.” Kallie set her pen in the crease

of a textbook. Her clique never ate lunch. “I was just saying, I mean, who does that anyway? He looks like he’s going to a funeral.”

Starkweather looked past Kallie and caught a glimpse of Lilly’s big hazel eyes. Her dark hair was pushed down just above her eyebrows by a colorful knit hat, the kind hippy artists always wear. “Julian’s a new guy, huh? Give him a break. At least get to know him first before you crucify him.” Starkweather checked for Lilly’s approval. She smiled.

“Yeah, you know, Starkweather’s right,” Lilly said. “I talked to him. He’s a nice guy.” Lilly looked over at Julian standing in the lunch line and waved.

Julian looked around and checked to make sure no one else waved. He raised a nervous hand, and his thin lips curled awkwardly.

“You know, he’s been to Japan,” Lilly said.

“Really?” Kallie asked. “That’s awesome. He’s like, traveled.”

“Hey, you’ll be traveled too, Kallie.” Starkweather patted her on the shoulder. “As soon as we all graduate and get the hell out of this town, we’ll all be traveled.”

Lilly smiled. She nodded at Starkweather’s tray. “What are you having?”

“Pizza and chocolate milk, my dear. The lunch of champions,” Starkweather joked.

“Sounds good. I think I’m kinda hungry today.” Lilly rose from her chair. “I’ll be right back.”

Starkweather glanced over at his two friends. They signaled toward the lunch line.

“Hey, let me go with you.” Starkweather followed.

Like Starkweather, Lilly never had a clique in high school. She spent time in each clique and tried to be friends with everyone. He knew of her, but didn’t realize they had so

much in common. They spent most of the period talking to each other instead of the friends they came to visit. It wasn't long before they became high school sweethearts.

* * *

Starkweather grabbed a rag and wiped down the cutting board on the make table.

“Starky will go with me.” Travis interrupted Starkweather’s work. “Hey, John. I’m going out tonight to meet some chicks. You wanna go with?”

Starkweather knew Travis’s reputation with women and had learned that not all physically fit guys get the girl. Travis was about as clueless as they come, which increased Starkweather’s chances. “Yeah, sure, I’ll go.”

Starkweather and Travis arrived at the bar around three thirty in the morning. It was walking distance from the pizza place, so they left their cars parked at the store. Travis ordered a couple of beers and passed one over to Starkweather.

“So, what’s your beef with Julian, man?” Travis unscrewed the top of the brown bottle. “Is it because of some high school shit?”

“Sort of. Lilly.”

“Oh, that chick. Lilly’s hot as hell, and she’s a cool girl. Where the hell is she anymore, anyway?”

Starkweather shrugged.

“Seriously though, man. You and Julian were friends back in the day, right?”

“I guess. Sort of.”

“Bros before hoes, man. Besides, I think he’s sick of your shit.” Travis took a moment to chug on his beer. “Where the hell are those chicks?”

Starkweather had to admit he’d given Julian a bit of a hard time since he took over the store. In his defense, the former owner was a good friend of his father’s.

Fifteen minutes later, the girls showed up, and Starkweather was face-to-face with Sheri, an Amazonian redhead affectionately nicknamed after the drink “Red-headed Slut,” and Daphne, a pint-sized girl with a big nose and pretty eyes. *Damn it*, he thought. *I knew I should never have trusted Travis’s taste.* Travis seemed preoccupied with Sheri, so Starkweather killed some time with Daphne, although he knew he could have gotten Sheri’s attention if he tried.

“So, come here often?” Starkweather joked and took a sip of his beer. Daphne laughed. “No, really, are you a local?”

“To the area, yeah,” Daphne’s voice sounded childlike, and something about it interested Starkweather. “I don’t live in the Bay, though. I live in Hammond.”

“You don’t look like you’re from Hammond.” Hammond was mostly farm area, and most of the girls were as big as the guys. Sheri looked like she was from there, but Daphne was too small. “I’m actually in Redwood, so I’m not far from you.”

“Really? That’s so awesome.” Starkweather hoped she was pretending to be interested, but she seemed sincere.

“I could probably take you ladies home if you and your friend have too much to drink.”

“Aren’t you going to drink more?”

Starkweather shook his head. “I don’t like to drink a lot.”

“Wow, you’re from Alex Bay, and you’re a guy, and you don’t drink a lot?” She scooted her barstool toward his. *Piece of cake*, he thought. When it came to women, Starkweather had no competition in Alexandria Bay. He was smarter than most who stuck around and had a good upbringing. Most of all, he wasn’t an alcoholic. Starkweather jerked when he felt the phone in his pocket vibrate. SARAH flashed on the screen.

Starkweather held out a finger at Daphne. “Would you excuse me for just a minute?”



The Righteous Path

Suzanne Robin

Photograph

Daphne nodded, and Starkweather headed out of the bar.

“What?”

“Starkweather? Isthayou?” Sarah slurred into the receiver. “I was going to call your dad, but I thought he might be asleep.”

Starkweather sighed in disgust. “What do you need, Sarah? Are you drunk?”

“A little bit, I think.” Sarah took a long time to respond. “I need a ride home.”

* * *

“Starkweather, you need to let some of your anger go,” Julian said with his usual lack of emotion. “You might have problems with me, but remember, we’re not in high school anymore. I’m your boss now.”

“You’re ruining our town,” Starkweather said.

“Ruining? I’m saving this place. Besides, what do you care. All you ever talk about is leaving.”

Starkweather walked to the fryers at the other end of the kitchen, but Julian followed.

“For years my family moved around. My father was stationed nearly everywhere. I feared I would never learn stability. At first, people rejected me here, it took some time before they got to know the real me. Now this is my home. I work hard to do anything I can to help these people.”

Starkweather scoffed. “You don’t know what work is. I put in forty hours a week here in a kitchen that doesn’t even have an air conditioner or proper ventilation. I bust my ass. You walk around and predict whether people will enjoy their pizza. You’re a phony. You don’t even have psychic powers. You probably weren’t in any car accident.”

“Really, Starkweather,” Julian said. “I’m just trying to help out someone we both care about.”

“Who? You don’t really care about these people, because you’re not even from here. Your parents have money. You can’t even relate to what they’re going through.”

“I’ve tried to accept you. You work hard, it’s true.” Julian uncrossed his arms and placed his hands on his hips. “But you can’t accept me.”

“Drop the act. You lie about some car accident that never happened just so you can pretend you have fake powers? It’s childish, Julian.”

Travis came around the corner and flexed his muscles a bit. “He did get in an accident. Don’t rehash a bad memory for the guy.”

“Oh bullshit. I never read about it in the paper. And don’t tell me you did, Travis, because you don’t read the paper.”

“John,” Julian said calmly, “I was in a car accident. That’s where this scar on my forehead came from.”

“You got that scar when we got drunk in high school and you fell on your face. If you wrecked your car, everyone in this town would have known.” Starkweather paused to catch his breath. “I accepted you in high school, and you were just trying to get in my girlfriend’s pants.”

Julian fought a smirk. “How do you know I didn’t?”

Starkweather felt his fist tighten but couldn’t follow through.

“I’m afraid you make this a hostile work environment, and I’m going to have to let you go.” Julian placed his hands to Starkweather’s temples and closed his eyes as if in some deep state of meditation. Starkweather clenched his jaw. “You know, with the new millennium approaching, we must all look to the past before the future. And you, Starkweather, are loved in both.”

Starkweather couldn’t let the moment pass, but he only managed to blurt out “You’re an asshole.”

Starkweather walked outside and kicked the snowy ground. He thought he should have punched that self-righteous jerk in the face. The front door to Skipper's opened, and Travis stuck his head out.

"Hey Starkweather?" he called out. Starkweather paused. "Your mom said to pick up toilet paper before you go home tonight."

On the way home, Starkweather stopped at the drugstore. He grabbed a four-pack of toilet paper and walked up and down each aisle, wondering how he was going to tell his parents that Julian had fired him.

A familiar voice caught Starkweather's attention, and he jumped. "Hi, John." Lilly's mother looked at Starkweather. "How are you, dear?"

"I'm great, I just had to get some TP. How are you?"

Starkweather recalled Julian's comment about Lilly. "How do you know I didn't?" he had said. A few elite families in town all stuck together and pretended the rest of the town didn't exist. Lilly's family fell into that group. Her mother was an elementary teacher and her father was a doctor. They spent a lot of time with Julian's parents. Lilly's parents took a liking to Julian, but Starkweather's honesty never really earned their affection.

"I'm fine." She held up a basket full of art supplies for kids. "I'm getting ready for an art project in class."

"That's great." Starkweather humored her, but the art supplies made him think of Lilly. She was going to be a painter. It wasn't an ideal profession to her parents, but they supported her when she told them. Starkweather's father laughed at his artistic pursuits. "Have you heard anything from Lilly?"

Although they dated most of high school, after graduation Lilly disappeared without saying good-bye. After a few calls to the house, Starkweather learned Lilly had been

accepted to an art school in New York City and was staying with a relative near there for the summer to get used to the area.

"Oh, she doesn't really like me to talk about her. She's so modest, you know?" Starkweather sensed her hesitancy. "But she's doing great in art school. She gets offers all the time for her work, and she's trying to get an internship for grad school."

Starkweather thought Lilly's parents were overprotective, but she claimed they had a good relationship. After she left, Lilly's parents dodged questions about her.

"Does she travel a lot?"

Lilly's mother signaled with her basket toward the front of the store. "You know, I really need to get going. It was nice talking to you." Lilly's mother headed to the checkout counter and Starkweather made his way around the aisles. When he rounded the front, he watched Lilly's mother get into a Buick.

* * *

At home, a yellow labrador greeted Starkweather when he pulled into the driveway. He gave the dog a couple pats on the head before it ran back to the front door. Starkweather's boots made muffled crunching sounds with every step, the familiar sounds of a northern New York winter. He trudged along a path shoveled into the snow to the back porch. The distinct smell of marijuana seeped through the screened-in porch, and he called out to his mother. He heard her coughing followed by the click of a lighter. He entered and watched her take a drag off a cigarette, scrunching up his eyes and nose at the sight of her. On her head sat a big purple turban. Her eyes formed crow's feet as her lips curled into a big smile.

"What the hell are you doing with that thing?" Starkweather snarled.

“Oh, Johnny, don’t spoil the fun. It’s New Year’s Eve—almost the twenty-first century—I’m celebrating like everyone else. You know, we could be dead tomorrow.”

“How much money did it cost? Can you take it back?”

“Don’t worry about that, sweetie. You have to live a little.”

“It looks ridiculous. Mom, I thought we weren’t going to live like everyone else in this worthless town.” Starkweather stopped on the porch next to his mother, his cheeks rosy from the cold.

“Hey, if I was living like everyone else, I’d be drinking. You know how boring these damn winters are.” Starkweather’s mother tucked a strand of her long brown hair behind her ear. Starkweather watched smoke curl into the strands, and for a moment they appeared as gray as the sky. “Your father got some pot from Lois and Henry, it was just a little bit. You used to smoke.”

Starkweather rolled his eyes. “I tried it in high school. After I graduated I stopped, remember?”

The back door opened, and a large man stepped out of the house. His tan hands barely peeked out of the sleeves of his plaid flannel shirt, and his black hair was disheveled. He focused on Starkweather through thick lenses and pushed up the bridge of his gold wire glasses.

“Don’t give your mother a hard time. I don’t see you doing much better than anyone else in this town.” He sat down in a green checkered lawn chair and pointed to the ashtray. “Did you put the joint in there?”

“Honey, we should save the rest of it,” his mom said, shivering. “It’s supposed to blizzard tonight, and we’ll be stuck in the house with nothing else to do.”

“You guys barely had enough money to get groceries this week. Now you’re going to have the munchies.”

“Sweetie, your father is one of few people in this town that has a job year-round. If we can’t make it, I’d hate to see this town in a few years.”

His father closed his dark, tired eyes and shook his head slowly. “Why are you home so early, anyway? I thought you had to work?”

“Yeah, well, I got shit canned because of hometown hero.”

“Julian?” His mother leaned forward, and Starkweather shook his head. “Baby, don’t blame him for your job.”

“It’s his fault. The owner thought his scam tactics would bring more business if Julian delivered pizzas and card tricks or something. My boss sold his soul to the devil when he hired Julian.”

His mother gasped. “You and Julian used to be friends in high school. He’s done a lot for this town. He’s the first person to get a key to the city.”

“He makes money by conning people.”

“Since when has this town made honest money? By selling drugs? By getting underage kids drunk so the bartenders can make an extra tip? Or by selling overpriced knickknacks in all our gift shops?” his mother asked.

“If he’s so great, why doesn’t he donate that money to the businesses he couldn’t save? And don’t talk about my town like that. It’s full of hardworking people.”

“It’s *your* town now?” Starkweather’s father folded one oversized hand into the other. “You’ve always talked about how badly you wanted to leave this place. You’ve never tried to sell your art. You’re twenty-five now. Maybe you should try to make up with Sarah. You two were together long enough that I thought she was the one. You’d have an income, and you might not be living at home. You could afford that trailer I saw for sale the other day.”

“I’m not going to crawl back because I need money, and I don’t want to live in a trailer. Mom said it’s fine if live here.”

“And he’s still hung up on Lilly,” his mom chimed in.

“Lilly?” Starkweather’s father growled. “Shit, she hasn’t been around since you graduated high school.”

“Yeah, she actually got out of this place,” Starkweather said.

“Oh, you act like there’s a giant bubble around this town and no one can get out unless they find a magical key.” His father leaned back in his chair. “Why haven’t you gotten out of this place. Why didn’t you just follow Lilly?”

“Lilly left this place to earn an honest living doing what she loved,” Starkweather replied. “Unfortunately, I never made it.”

“You never tried.” His father frowned in shame, a look he often gave Starkweather.

“But I still earn, well, *earned* an honest living, unlike Julian,” Starkweather said.

His father shook his head. “Let the guy have his fifteen minutes. What else does he have to look forward to? Working at Skipper’s? He’s got a good heart, John.”

Upstairs in his room, Starkweather turned on the lights. He opened a drawer and took out a black ski mask.

Nothing in the room had changed since high school. Magazine pictures of rock bands and half-naked women covered the walls. He had thumb-tacked letters Lilly wrote him and a few pictures of her to the back wall. Each time he opened that door, her hazel eyes stared at him. Lilly and Starkweather had similar goals and ambitions, but Starkweather had no plans and lacked the money that Lilly’s parents provided.

* * *

They sat under a tree in the school yard, their meeting place for some time. Lilly took Starkweather to the spot often;

it was where they shared their first kiss. “So what are you going to do after you graduate?” Lilly asked him once.

“I’m going to go to college, far away from this place. For art, of course.” Starkweather played with Lilly’s long hair for a minute while her head rested in his lap.

“Where are you going to go?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“You don’t know? We’re seniors, Starkweather. You should have already applied.”

“Yeah, probably.” Starkweather sighed. “I’ll get in somewhere. I’ve placed in nearly every art show for my sketches. They have to accept me somewhere.”

Lilly sat up. “What state do you want to live in?”

“Well, I’d really like to go somewhere warmer.”

“Ok, that’s every state south of us, which is most of the country.” She grinned. “City or not so much?”

“Umm, city. A smaller city, I think.”

“Ok. Are you going to go visit any schools out of state?” Starkweather looked guilty. “I don’t think my car will make it. I can’t really afford to take the time off of work.”

“Oh.” She looked away. “Why don’t we take a bus? I’ll pay.”

“We?” Starkweather trailed off. “I mean, yeah, that would be fun.”

“We could stay overnight somewhere. It wouldn’t cost too much if we don’t go all the way to the west coast.” Lilly leaned into his neck. “What do you say?”

Starkweather smiled. “Well, yeah, that’s a good idea. You’d really help me do that?”

“Sure. I want to see you succeed. I have faith in you. Us artists have to stick together,” Lilly said, “Pick a school and research the bus schedules.”

* * *

During senior year, Julian and Lilly had dated between one of her break-ups with Starkweather. By then, Julian had become popular. Starkweather, prepared to confront him, bumped into a scrawny freshman, Geoff Green.

“Excuse you?” Starkweather huffed.

“Don’t hate on me because I’m different.” Geoff put his head down and attempted a sinister stare.

“What are you, a gangster vampire?” Starkweather threw his hands into the air. “Where’s your cape?”

At that moment Starkweather realized most of the students that passed wore all black. He even noticed one with fangs poking out of his mouth. It was hard to sort out Julian from the rest.

Starkweather caught up to Julian in front of his locker.

“Is it Halloween or something?” Starkweather asked.

“What the hell is going on? Why even bother, Julian? You know we’re just gonna get back together. You’re going to make this weird on the three of us.”

“Yeah, I guess I didn’t really think of it that way.” Julian pressed his lips together before he continued. “It’s just, you know, her parents told her we should go out.”

“What do you mean?”

“They just think I have a future, a plan, you know? I’ve already been accepted to business school.”

“I’m going to college, too. I’m going to be an artist.”

“Yeah, John, but what college are you going to? Where do you plan on working as an artist; you really can’t do that at home.”

“Home? This isn’t your home. I grew up here. You’re just a back-stabbing jackass.”

Lilly interrupted them. “Hey guys. You aren’t fighting, are you?”

Starkweather hesitated. “No, we aren’t fighting.”

“Well, good. Still friends right?” Lilly smiled.

“Yeah. Sure.”

“Cool. Because I want you to go to the movies with me and Julian this weekend. Just like old times.”

Starkweather fought to control the expression on his face. “Yeah.” *Except I held your hand, not that douche bag.*

A few days later Julian ended his relationship with Lilly.

“It imposes too much on our friendship, Starkweather,” Julian explained. “I mean, I know we kind of have our bad times, but you and Lilly were my first friends here.”

Starkweather stayed quiet.

“I think you’re right. It makes me a back stabber. I don’t want you to think that way. It’s just you and Lilly are always breaking up, and it’s hard not to be interested in your best, girl friend, you know?”

“Yeah, I guess.” Starkweather couldn’t say much. Julian always put him in that position. “Great.” Julian smiled. “Hey man, it might take some time, but I think everything is going to be okay. Besides, she’s crazy about you.”

It didn’t take long before she returned to Starkweather.

* * *

Back downstairs, Starkweather pulled on the ski mask and returned to the porch. His mom screamed, startled.

“Oh, Johnny, don’t wear that thing while I’m high.” She laughed at herself, and Starkweather’s father let out a few chuckles.

“I’m low on gas, so I’m taking the snowmobile and running to Clayton to see if there’s any work. I’ll be back later,” Starkweather announced. He gave his mother a kiss on the cheek and darted off the porch.

While in Clayton, Starkweather collected a few applications from restaurants and a hardware store. Outside, he

stared down the only other road in the town, the path to Julian's house.

Maybe I can graffiti his dog.

By the time he reached Julian's, a rain and snow mixture was pouring down.

He slipped his credit card between the door and the frame and pushed it in further, wiggling it from side to side. Sleet dripped down the collar of his jacket, stinging his neck. He turned the doorknob slowly, the way they did in movies. The door opened easily, and for a moment he felt like a professional.

Inside the house, the curtains were wide open, revealing dim gray light outside and wet beads upon the glass. Starkweather crouched to be certain no one would see him from the outside. He tapped the door shut from his position. He looked around. The living room looked like the cover of a magazine. It appeared as if Julian actually cared for something.

A note on the coffee table read *Baby, call me later*. Starkweather scoffed. "Baby? What kind of dumb broad wants Julian to call?" he wondered. From where he crouched, he caught sight of a still-life painting on the wall. He recognized the star-shaped vase painted in it, a gift he'd given Lilly. It must be her work.

Out of the corner of his eye Starkweather noticed movement and froze. In the kitchen stood a person in a brown jacket and black ski mask, a pair of red panties dangling from thin fingers.

"This isn't what it looks like," Starkweather attempted to explain before the sound of an answering machine tape clicked.

"Hey baby, it's Melissa. Just wondering if you were still coming over tonight before the storm. Give me a call back."

Starkweather looked at the intruder who fidgeted with

their ski mask. A few strands of dark brown hair peeked out of the bottom. Starkweather glanced quickly at the love note. *Baby, call me later. Love L.*

"Save it, things are never what they seem," a female voice said. "Besides, the mask is a dead giveaway."

"You think so, Lilly? I mean, everyone around here wears one, and it's twenty-five below outside." He took off the mask and nodded at the panties. "They aren't yours?"

"They're *Melissa's*," Lilly explained in a mocking voice. "So how do you suggest we handle Mr. Staph?"

Starkweather grinned.

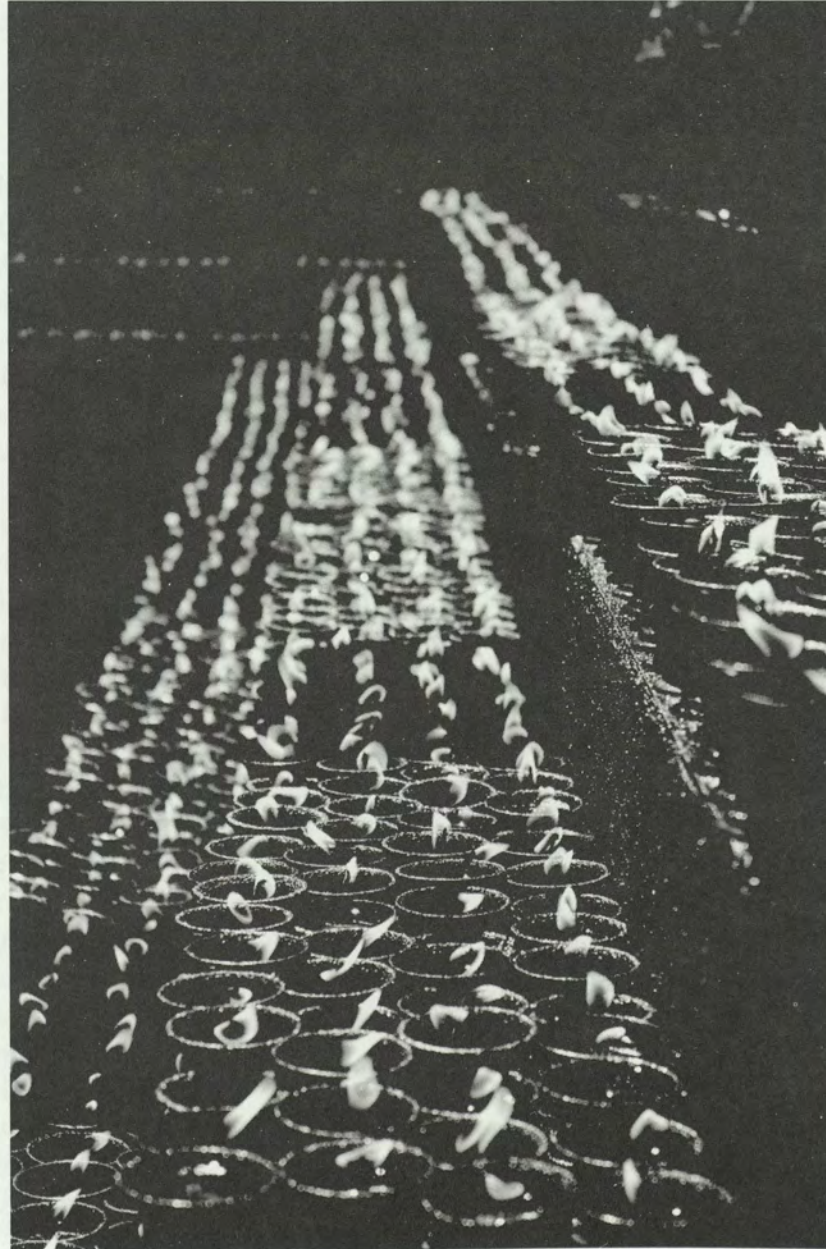


vexatious adoration

Anastasia Morrison

a perfect stencil
drawn by hand
scrawled onto the
blank canvas of my back
the hum of the gun
needle drenched in
a deep sky blue
anxiety flows
until it touches
my skin

a cat scratch
a bad scrape
the pain is nothing
and everything
solidifying the
connection
between me
and my conviction



My Belief 04

Jiang Wenting
Photograph

Unnatural

Amy DeMien

Trapped as young child,
my arms swaying back and forth while
brushing against my lace-lined dress,
pulling it upward, revealing
my scabby knees.

With shoulders slumped and
head tilted up against my back,
I draw in a heavy breath
and expel a loud sigh.

No sermon ever lasted so long.

In an instant I see my
Mother's eyes—stern and piercing—
narrowed into a silent,
“Stop that!”

And in a whisper barely heard
from her lips,
a tender, “Act natural.”

Into adolescence
my hair hangs limp against my face,
a wavy mess of tangles and knots.
The black cord of my headphones
dangles in front of my graphic tee,
and disappears into the pockets of my
torn and faded jeans.
I mouth out the words
of unknown lyrics.
One mud-coated sneaker resting against

the brick wall, the other tapping
ferociously to a rhythm
unheard by the rest of the world,
unheard by the stranger who
passes me by, and gives
me that familiar, accusing
look, as if to say,
“Stop that! Act natural.”

Onto the joys of womanhood.
Hair tamed in a
tight, rigid bun and
hands, interlaced like
the links of iron chains,
gently placed across my lap.
One ankle is lightly tucked
behind the other.
My rose-tinted lips
soft in a smile as to feign
interest in a relentless speaker.
I am observed by familiar
strangers—my dress elegant,
my posture perfect.
How they admire me.
I have gained approval for my
womanly nature.
I have learned that it is
unnatural to be me.

Patiently Wondering. She Waits.

Debbie Cobb

She waits.
Just barely this side of the line,
watching, hoping, praying.
She wears her new dress,
the one with the teal paisley print flowers.
The one her mother picked out

Patiently wondering,
She waits.
Chewing the ends
of her sun-streaked, shoulder-length hair.
She watches an old can,
tumble down the stairs.

She waits.
The mid-afternoon sun
burning her small, exposed shoulders,
heating the rough straps that lie there.
She's dangling an empty sack
from her finger,

Wishing she had saved the crusts of her bread
She waits.
Just *barely* this side of the line,
watching, hoping, praying,
patiently wondering, waiting.
She's wearing her new dress,
the one her mother had picked out.



Chinese Mushroom

Melissa L. Scott

11 x 14 Photoshop Collage



Another Day at the Circus

Beth Zyglowicz

12 x 20 Digital Painting

Fortune Hunter

Autumn L. Stewart

Hurdles

When Bob Barker left *The Price is Right*, it was like having the family preacher retire. Trust for the replacement does not automatically rush from the congregation. A grace period ensues, in which the people doubt the newcomer could ever replace the original. After the initial shock of Bob's retirement and the announcement of Drew Carey as his replacement, the fans began to critique Carey's performance. The faithful compared the two styles and sometimes had negative words to say, but eventually were content that the church was still there—Bob Barker or not.

Maybe it's the flashy lights or the roar from the crowd or the face of the host that catches people's attention. Something has to appeal to those devoted fans who turn on the tube every day at that fateful hour. Maybe those faithful fans don't know the flashy lights are a gimmick, the crowd is prompted, or the host is charming because he's paid to be. Maybe they don't care.

The Race Game

Las Vegas: Sin City, the oasis in the desert. Bally's was one of the oldest hotels on the Strip, and it was where my sister-in-law, Alyssa, would make her dream come true. Our hotel was the castle, Excalibur, a hotel fit for the Renaissance enthusiast, not even Rapunzel's prince would attempt to climb its two monstrous towers. Alyssa didn't care to explore the dungeons of the basement level or to eat at the dinner theatre complete with jousting knights. Nothing inside that mammoth building would compare to what Bally's could bring

Best of Non-Fiction

her. Nothing on the whole Strip, for that matter, would be as climactic as her moment at *The Price is Right*.

We gambled, we drank, and we wandered, but her heart just wasn't in it. I tried to focus her on the moment, but my attempts were met with incessant clock-watching and repeated phrases including, "I can't wait!" The life and culture of Vegas was pushed to the wayside to make room for her one and only goal.

When we left our castle, a pearl saleswoman called out to passersby, "Beautiful pearls for beautiful girls. Come over and see. The price is right!" Alyssa's eyes became saucers. It was an omen. We were headed to that very show! What were the odds? It must have meant good fortune. I couldn't help but play along.

Vegas streets were crowded, and walking side by side was hardly an option. I followed Alyssa, keeping a watchful eye as she gained speed at every crosswalk. Since the prophecy with the saleswoman, Alyssa's expectation to get on stage was high. As we waited at the corner of MGM Way and Rue de Monte Carlo, she exclaimed that, "If I get picked, my dreams will come true."

I felt for her. Twenty-something and her lifelong dream was to be a part of a game show. I shook my head, and we continued on. Anticipation exploded with her every step; we were getting close. Not even the shady men on the sidewalks who wisp and thrust stacks of nudie cards at you could slow her down.

Come On Down

When I walked into my mother-in-law's house one Monday afternoon, Alyssa had assumed her usual position on the couch, the stiff cushions cradling her overly plump body. Wavy potato chips waited by her feet, and her diet soda bubbled on the coffee table next to stacks of mail and journals never written in. She looked at me without having to move her head, and her eyes quickly went back to the other end of the room. The television filled with bright colors, except for the spot on the bottom left corner that looked like a bruise. Maybe it was an age spot or an imperfection from overuse, though I don't remember the television being all that old.

A flare of sound rang out, and I knew it could only be one thing. There they were—the bulbs. They flashed gallantly, interchanging with one another; bursts of yellow light filled the screen with every strobe. The disembodied voice beckoned the woman from the excited congregation. “Come on down!” he called with vigor. The hopeful was separated from the flock. She tore down the aisle like a repentant sinner to the confession rail, shaking and crying as she approached her numerical, color-coded altar. I've never seen Alyssa move faster than a loris, but I imagine that she could, and would, do the wild dance of the possessed if given the opportunity.

Alyssa is quite devoted. Three times a week, she ventured from the house to display a commitment to her faith at the Christian Church of Cicero, but she stays home five days a week to personally commit herself to *The Price is Right* of CBS. I watched her from the adjoining sofa as she calculated the possible cost of the home spa kit. I chuckled when I heard

her yell out the prices of objects she'd never purchased before. My chuckle soon ascended into laughter when an optimistic contestant guessed wrong and Alyssa exploded with, “Are you crazy!? That's not worth \$5.95!”

“Are you excited about going to Las Vegas, Alyssa?” I asked her. I saw her mind whirling, thinking about the chance she might have the next week. “Alyssa?”

“Huh? Yeah, I'm excited,” she replied. “That woman is stupid.”

“Well, maybe next week you can show her up.”

Cliffhangers

Bally's was a new, exotic world to us. Like the Excalibur, coins clinked and clanged into buckets, and the high-pitched-whirling-bell sounds sang out above heavy breathing and stagnant smoke, much like church bells above the mournful hymns of the entranced peasantry. At Bally's, however, a crowd of devout enthusiasts were scattered around the casino waiting for the Jubilee Theatre to allow entrance. When the line began to form, Alyssa rushed to it, ready to tithe to the showcase gods. A group in front of us ironed out strategies for hand signals in case they couldn't hear each other above the audience. Three women behind us—all wearing matching hot pink feather boas—compared the “real” *The Price is Right* to the live Vegas version. “It's no Bob Barker, but the price tags look real,” one woman with pink star-shaped glasses explained.

Our name tags were price tags. I felt as if we were pieces of meat on display waiting for eager hands to pick us up



Coast Guard Pitting at Indy

Aaron Pierce

Photograph

out of the crowd, check our tenderness with their fingertips, and smell us for freshness. But no one else seemed to have that thought. They giggled and pointed out how exciting it was to wear an authentic Price Tag on their shirts! When the red ribbon blocking the entrance dropped, the crowd whipped into a frenzy. We were herded into the theatre, ready to play the money game, a game fit for this city.

Ten Chances

“What I Like About You” played over the loudspeakers as four middle-aged women wearing matching black and pink feathered masquerade masks smiled, and they clapped in unison to the beat. Our table was next to the stage—second row. The lights dimmed, and the crowd went wild.

Bulbs began to flash and run. The theme music cut off the end of the women’s choreographed foursome, but they didn’t seem to care. The show had begun. Ricky West, the Vegas attempt at a host, came out from behind a red velvet curtain. He had the ultimate announcer’s voice. It boomed with character as he explained the rules.

“You’ll pop up when you hear your name like you had three Viagra!” he joked. “I had one last night that got stuck in my throat. I had a stiff neck all night!” Badda-bing from the drums. Welcome to Vegas.

Alyssa, along with the eight others at our table, intently watched every game. Their ears perked for the sound of their names. Even though we were in Las Vegas instead of California, the chosen danced to the altar just the same. One woman in a cowboy hat cried when her boyfriend was selected to “Come on down.” The noise bounced back and forth through my head. I knew I should have brought another drink with me. People shouted at those who made it to the stage. They laughed and got angry more than once at contestants who weren’t

serious enough about the pricing. “HIGHER!” “LOWER!” were common cries from the cacophony of the audience. This was the ultimate materialistic show. Everyone wanted—needed—to get up there.

P-L-I-N-K-O!

Unlike the screaming minions, Alyssa’s tells were silent. The only indications that she was as engrossed as she would have been at home were her rigid posture, the maniacal gleam in her eyes, and the goose bumps that dotted her skin. I glanced around the room, surprised to see our companions were sweating and screaming. About seven rows away, a group of fifteen women stood in unison, thrust their hips rhythmically, and pumped their arms straight into the air. A girl from their party was chosen. As she moved to take her place on stage, her friends gyrated like cats in heat. I looked at Alyssa. She had eyes only for the stage; her face betraying her one minded focus.

Two tables to the right, a group proudly wore Canadian flag shirts. They chanted, “Overbid! Overbid! Overbid!” I assumed the calls were directed at the young woman from the cat clowder. When her boyfriend did not get to the stage by the third round, the crying woman bent in her chair, practically touching her ankles with the brim of her hat.

A contestant guessed that the ground coffee was worth \$1.76. An older woman at our table who reminded me of an elementary school teacher huffed, “Ugh. She’s probably foreign. What is she doing here guessing the price of American products?” Apparently, because we were in the United States, non-citizens should not have been playing.

The games seemed endless: Hole-in-One, PLINKO, Flip Flop, Bonkers, Check Out, Dice Game, It’s in the Bag. I was a vegetarian at a pulled-pork-eating contest. In the Jubilee

Theatre, I was surrounded by those who wholeheartedly paid money for the chance to win a cruise for their keen knowledge of the grocery.

You've Overbid

I suppose the difference between climax and distress is winning. Eager to put on the meat tags in the beginning, the crowd ripped them off when the lights came on. They crumpled them into balls and discarded them with bitter disappointment.

Alyssa and I waited for the crowd to shuffle out before we left our seats. The theatre was an empty shell—no lights, no music, no announcer. Did that right price dissipate with the love of the game, or did the love of the game only exist because of the potential to win? The souvenir table was open for business next to the door. For another dollar in the bucket of American consumerism everyone would still walk away a winner.

As we walked out of the hotel and into the street, some still proudly wore their yellow meat tags. Alyssa's was discarded long ago, replaced by a bag with the game's logo on the side. She couldn't walk away with empty hands. Her heart weighed less than the items in her bag, and she began to cry. We emerged onto the Strip just as the night shows started, yet she wouldn't even look at them. We walked solemnly back to our castle, a defeated knight and her court jester. I felt for her, again.

When we reached our hotel Alyssa took her evening regimen of antipsychotic medication and tranquilizers to prevent her brain from what I can only describe as "hiccupping" in the night.

"Did you have fun, Alyssa?"

"I didn't win anything." She winced and shook her head. "Those people were crazy."

I shut off the light and thought about the irony of her

statement, recalling our night.

The flashy lights were enticing, the crowd intimidating, and the host full of crude jokes. The show managed to upset her again, this time in person. But people will go back to their religion, even if it angers them. I knew Alyssa would, not only from her obsessive condition, but also by the T-shirt she changed into for bed.

It said, "I was at *The Price is Right*."



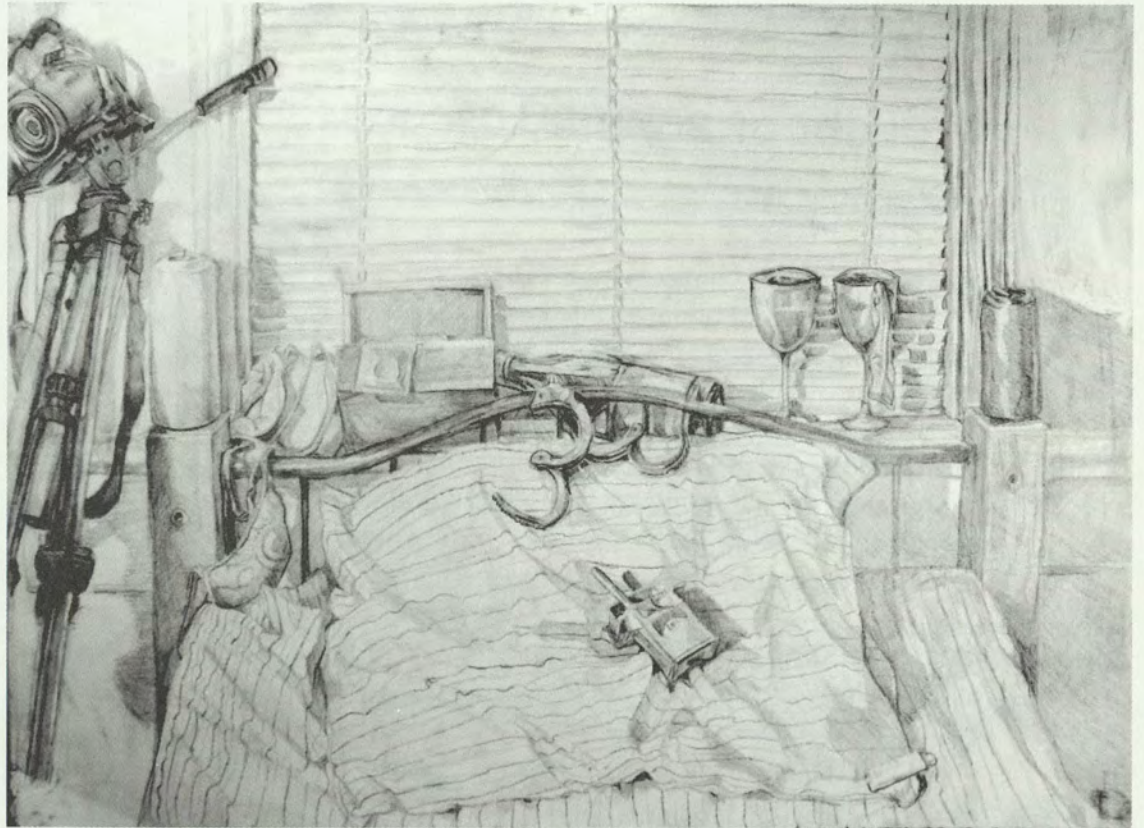
Collard Greens at a Republican Picnic

Kelly Thomas

I am collard greens
at a Republican picnic.
I am please you,
not me. I am
push it down,
let it simmer. I am
the black pepper speck
caught between your
white teeth.

I am collard greens
at a Republican picnic.
I am shoulders back,
head up. I am
eyes wide,
eyebrows arched. I am
cayenne in the veins,
creamy conforming
potato salad to your face.

I am collard greens
at a Republican picnic.
I am blackberry jam
staining white bread. I am
the spicy black sheep
roasting in your pit.



Bed

Jacob Krismanick
30 x 22 Pencil Drawing

Drought of 2052

Michel Collins

The blue light that connects me
to the outside world blinks,
interrupting my brain,
as I try to dull it before bed.

The light dries out the skin,
though they say it does no harm,
desiccating the flow
of ideas that run through the mind.

I toss a wrinkled sweatshirt over it,
extinguishing the unease,
letting my mind swim laps
in the puddle outside my drainpipe.

I Do Not Cry, I Weep for All Beauty Broken

Ather Ahmed

In the coldest moment of the winter,
I'm left with a resonating feeling
that can only be described as disappointment.

A virgin memory of our future
encompasses my lukewarm heart.

As you left the bedroom,
I regressed to my former self—
that timid six-year-old
trying to get out
of a holiday sweater.



Leopard Dance

Leeza Ann Finch

Dance like a leopard
Throw back your haunches
Bare your teeth
Show that pink tactile tongue
Wildness reverberates
Feel the humming drumming through the soil
Pounding like a dying hart
Speeding into nothingness alone and free

A Parrot Party

Beth Zyglowicz

10x20 Watercolor and Ink Drawing

Ghazal for a Friend Still Here

Davinia Yalimaiwai

If my confined mouth was instead a grand cathedral
I would echo warnings to our brothers that end up leaving.

You smile and tell me, "Life's hard, I'm coping."
But I hear you cry at night, dreaming of him leaving.

I do respect your armored bravery. But I would prefer the naked
fury of what you had to go through in watching him leave.

So you pray, wondering if Faith is strong enough to change Fate's
mind and allow eternal rest for a loved one who has already left

this mortal life where not even memories last forever. And we'd be
damned than not hold on to the body whose Spirit has already left.

Perhaps today's regret will evaporate like sweat on a windy day
and tomorrow we could feel the lightness we felt before leaving

his bedside, before his heart collapsed under the weight of disease,
before the doctor unplugged his breathing machine, Life leaving.

All mothers have rivers beneath their breasts, kept at bay by
stone dams of protection until a child unnaturally leaves.

Nothing can hold back these tears of grief. Torrents flow out,
waves search for other children to baptize, but all have left.

And yet we're still here waiting for the waters to subside. Though never
uttered aloud, Time reminds us that he wasn't the one worth leaving.

Ghouljaw

Clint Smith

There came a time, he realized, when the strangeness of everything made it increasingly difficult to realize the strangeness of anything.

—James Hilton

Lost Horizon (1933)

1

I was drowning in the ocean under a bone-toned moon.

Those were the first words I had hastily scrawled on a legal pad, sitting at my kitchen table in the middle of the night. It was my first attempt to capture the details of my dream. Not just a recurring dream, but the only dream which now exists.

I remember that first night, clinging to the dream, lingering in that amniotic place between lucidity and oblivion. I remember being distantly aware of my fiancée's voice calling out for me to wake up, yet I had endured the sensation of drowning, of sinking, because I wanted to know where it took me. I wanted to see the bottom. On this night, however, things were too dark. The black weight of water, the ice-cold suffocation as the moon dimmed and I drifted down, was too much. I began groping, desperate to find the lifeline of her voice.

"Paul," Gretchen said, as if calling after a wandering child. "Paul, wake up." And with a sharp inhale, I did. Gretchen was propped up on her elbow, caressing my chest. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," I said, struggling to catch my breath. "Yeah, I think so."

Best of Fiction

"You had me worried," she said, sinking back onto her pillow.

My vision was beginning to adjust to the dim light in the bedroom. Gretchen's dark eyes were intent. Her skin, the naked slope of her shoulder, looked pale in the baby blue of the moonlight—the sort of soft lambent light reflected off snow.

She yawned and tucked a few ribbons of dark hair behind her ear. "Do you want to talk about it?"

I blinked a few times and stared at the ceiling, listening to the low train-whistle wail of winter wind chattering at the windows. Even then, fresh from resurfacing from the velvet undertow of unconsciousness, the images began to fade—gauzy veils began overlapping, blurring the vividness of the dream. I told Gretchen everything I remembered.

When I finished I turned toward her. Gretchen was frowning; her mouth hung open. "Jesus," she said, "that's awful." She blinked and shivered.

After a while her eyelids softly bobbed shut and her breathing came in gentle exhalations. Carefully, I slipped out of the bed, pulled the blanket closer to Gretchen's neck, and crept out of the bedroom, easing the door closed behind me.

It was February—the icy marrow of Midwest winter. In the dark I found my robe draped over the recliner. The slick-chill hardwood floor creaked under my bare feet as I shuffled into the kitchen. It was three or four in the morning—the small hours, as my father used to call them. I had to get ready for work in a few hours. I had to get ready to be a teacher in a few hours.

I clicked a small lamp on near the counter, pulled a pencil from the drawer, and searched for something to write on. I spotted a yellow legal pad on top of Gretchen's briefcase.

I stared at its red lines for a long time—struggling to retain some clarity before the dream's definition was choked-out, struggling to sharpen the dimming images.

* * *

I see an umber-smudged moon in a starless sky, hanging over a tranquil body of water. The sand on the beach where I'm standing is black and glitters like powdered obsidian. I seem to float toward the water. Up ahead, rocking against the tide, is an old canoe. As I approach I see long, thick threads of seaweed hanging over the sides. There's something inside the boat. Lying along the bottom is a long burlap sack, stained with dark splotches and crudely stitched up along the seams.

The sack begins to move and shift as if something inside is squirming. Now and again, I hear a whimper, vaguely human, from within. I step into the canoe, balance, and push myself into the water, using a splintered oar to paddle into the soft chop of the ocean.

Some time passes. The shore disappears. Whatever is inside the burlap sack is writhing more violently now, and the muffled sounds almost formed themselves into words. Noticing a skinny pickaxe lying along the floorboards, I discard the oar, grip the axe, steady myself and stand. I lift the axe high and pause for a moment before bringing the beak-shaped spike down in vicious arcs—piercing the thing inside and puncturing the canoe's hull.

Then there is water. Night-frigid water. My body sinks, and with no thought of breathing, I give myself to the descent. Lambent shafts of moonlight stream through the black water but begin to fade as I float down. Despite the saltwater sting, my eyes somehow see clearly. As the slender,

twitching fingertips of moonlight fade, they touch the surface of something down in the darkness—on algae-mottled limestone and buttresses, ornate spires and a steeple. It is, I see, a cathedral. Shadowy things move behind the shattered stained glass. The moonlight disappears completely, and as I sink toward the structure, there is the echo-gurgle eruption of a pipe organ. That's when I start drowning.

* * *

I scooted my chair closer to the kitchen table, pressed the pencil to the legal pad and wrote: *I was drowning in the ocean under a bone-toned moon.*

I only caught a glimpse of it, some gray shaky movement on the other side of the kitchen window. As I straightened in my chair the hazy thing slipped away like a piece of soot-stained fabric yanked from a clothesline. Still gripping the pencil, I stepped toward the frost-framed window and scanned the yard. Nothing. Nothing but swirling snow shaping itself into snake-shaped drifts. The neighbors' houses were dark. I glanced up at the moon, glowing crisp and bright behind black tendrils of winter-thin tree limbs, before pulling back from the glass to inspect my reflection. My eyes looked dark and puffy. My slim face looked drawn and pale. I was beginning to lose some intangible quality of youthfulness. I attempted to bring some dignity to my appearance by smoothing my disheveled brown hair.

I did not write much more that first night, but I did scribble down one thing. A name. I still have no intelligent explanation for its origin, only that it whisper-drifted into my mind that night, and now serves as a private, nonsensical moniker for the presence inside that sunken church: Ghouljaw.

2

What follows is something I recently remembered. For what it's worth, it has provided insight into what later happened

to me. To Gretchen and me.

My father, after the separation and shortly before the divorce, moved out to the country. By that time, Mom (who'd given up trying to keep it a secret) had moved in with her boyfriend, who lived just a few counties over. I was young, ten or eleven at the time, so I split weekends between my parents.

In my innocence, and with my limited adolescent perceptions, I was only vaguely aware of how truly haunted my father was. And to what lengths he'd go to distract himself from his phantoms.

Dad's cottage-style house, a Grimm brothers cobblestone affair, was pleasant at first, but it soon fell under disrepair, reflecting Dad's disorganization and disorderly tendencies. He filled the house with things he claimed he could fix: old radios, appliances, clocks. Every other weekend he had something new scattered out on the dining room table, which had become more of an autopsy slab for debris than a communal eating space.

One weekend Dad had been working on the upstairs bathroom, and the shower was torn apart—one of his "projects." I had to use the utility shower in the basement.

Similar to the upstairs, the basement at Dad's house was a wreck—a dusty obstacle course of boxes and sheeted clusters of junk, meagerly lit by a few bare bulbs on pull chains. The shower stall was in the back of the basement.

Clutching my towel and clean clothes to my chest, I weaved through the cluttered maze, clicking on the hanging low-watts which merely gave me enough light to get to the next bulb.

Once in the back room, where the shower was, I saw that the filmy shower curtain was shut, and I hesitated a second before gripping the mildew-stained curtain and yanking it aside. It was dark there. With the exception of a couple cobwebs

in the upper corner, the space was shadowy but safe.

I twisted the knobs; water coughed and sputtered from the calcified shower head. I undressed and waited. The concrete slab was slick and frigid under my feet. Eventually, steam began rising from the stall. Pulling the curtain closed behind me, I wasted no time lathering up and washing my body, my hair, my face.

Over the hiss of the shower I heard a warbling, phlegmy giggle, like a pneumonia-stricken kid laughing softly on the other side of the curtain. I jerked my head toward the sound, squinting through soap suds; thin sheets of steam swirled around me.

"Dad?" I called out. Of course, no response. Just another congested chuckle.

I frantically rinsed the soap from my face and drew back the curtain. The lights blinked a few times and went out. My heart cranked up to a drumming throb. I remember not hesitating at all in my panic, but simply stepping out thoughtlessly—almost confidently—into the dark and reaching out for the pull chain in the middle of the room. My slick feet made it perhaps three steps before I slipped, pitching sideways and catching the back of my head on the corner of a shelf before my small body smacked down on the concrete. Wavering. That's all I recall: wavering in the darkness before going to sleep.

When I opened my eyes the lights were on. Pain, acute and intense, had sewn itself into a thousand fissures along my skull. I made the silly mistake of trying to raise myself onto one elbow before world-spinning nausea spilled into me. I twisted my body and vomited. Blood was on the floor. I was shivering badly.

Just as I was about to cry out for my father, it came. It seemed to pour out from the darkest parts of the room—black



All Tangled Up
Anthony Deak
Photograph

things collecting into one single, corporeal shape which rose over me, blocking out the light and covered my body with its shadow.

It took me nearly two decades, but I remember all of it now. It had been a black, undulating sheet before slowly gaining hideous definition. And from that diaphanous blackness emerged a pallid, gray face; its translucent skin was marbled beneath by faint purple veins. A noble shock of white hair was swept back from a widow's peak. It—*he*—was smiling a greedy, goblin grin composed of thick crooked teeth. His large unblinking eyes were bloodshot and rheumy, set in bruise-shaded sockets.

Through the shock and shivering I discerned some sort of black cape or robe. Only now can I describe it as a two-tiered, pilgrim-style cloak.

Its dark lips twisted to an impossibly wide smile as it began to lower towards me; two corpse-pale hands slipped out from inside the cloak, and long fingers reached out as he glided down. I shut my eyes.

"Paul?" said a voice from far away. "Paul—you alright down there?"

I opened my eyes. As if viewing a video being rewound at high speed, I watched the black mass pull back, swirling apart in shadowy pieces and rejoining the dark corners of the basement.

Dad was with me seconds later, covering me with a towel and performing a trinity of cursing, crying, and apologizing.

At the hospital and after the stitches, the doctor explained that I had a substantial, but not critical, concussion.

I could not forget the slender scar on the back of my head, but I allowed the post-accident shower encounter to fade from my consciousness. Repressed is the more appropriate

term—a term a therapist used in one of my sessions recently.

That day at the hospital was the last time I saw my parents speaking civilly to each other. Later, as a teenager, I told myself that if I ever got married that I'd never do what my parents did to each other. *Never*.

3

I met Gretchen a few years ago, shortly after moving to New Bethel to accept a teaching position at the elementary school. Back then, before being promoted to branch manager, she was an associate at the bank down on Main Street. I went in one afternoon to open a new account. Things happened fast after that.

(Despite her exotic beauty, unapologetic ambition, and attraction to ostentatious displays of success, she seemed satisfied with our placid town and with the meager income of a school teacher. She seemed satisfied with me.) I proposed three months after our first date.

We played house for less than a year before getting married. And we took our honeymoon in the Caribbean.

* * *

On our second night at the resort, Gretchen and I had wandered out onto our beachfront terrace. I held my new wife close as I surveyed the chalky shoreline and star-scattered sky. I peered out over the silver-rippled surface of the ocean. Far off were tiny green and red lights of some ship or barge moving slowly across the dark horizon. I inhaled the salty air and tightened my arms around Gretchen. I glanced down and saw her fondling her wedding ring.

"I wish I could afford more," I said, a confession I'd expressed before.

She tilted her face and smirked. "It's perfect, Paul." She inched up on her toes and kissed me. "Besides," she said,

resting her head on my shoulder. “I can always upgrade for our anniversary.”

We discussed Gretchen’s recent promotion; whether or not my students missed me at school; and when we should think about starting a family. Eventually we grew silent. I was content listening to the gentle cadence of the tide. Rearranging my embrace, I pulled my wife closer and caressed her arms. We told each other, *I love you*, before making our way back to the bed.

I woke to the sound of Gretchen’s peaceful breathing—a rise and fall that mingled with the soft sussurance of the surf outside. We’d left the French doors open after coming back inside, the long delicate drapes drifted languidly. The room was still and washed with pale blue moonlight. As I made a drowsy movement to get up and close the doors I registered the figure standing on Gretchen’s side of the bed. In one jerky shift I rose up midway and went rigid.

Recognition of a thing I’d forgotten for twenty years spilled into me: the high cheekboned, cadaver-gray face, the jagged rows of broken-porcelain teeth glittering between a rictus and lecherous, grin. Its moist unblinking eyes were fixed on me. The long pilgrim-style cloak hung loose over its shoulders.

In a slick flash its eyes darted down to Gretchen. My stomach knotted and soured as it extended one of its purple-veined hands, fingering a few strands of hair from her forehead before making a single stroke across her clavicle.

I twisted and lurched up, leaping over Gretchen and grabbing the thing by its collar, yanking him away from the bed. His smile widened as he clasped his hands over my upper arms. We tangled up in the middle of the room. Gritting my teeth, I swung my body around and shoved him toward the terrace, knocking over lamps and furniture. We burst through

the doors and pitched over the rail, landing on the beach and kicking up sand as I tried to gain some control.

And very quickly, my bare feet sank into the soggy shoreline. With all the strength and leverage I could summon, I clawed into his cloak, shifted my weight, and tugged him down into the water, pressing a knee into his chest as a wave rushed over his face.

“Goddamn it,” I grunted through my teeth. “My wife... fucking touched my wife.” I saw a burst of bubbles stream from his beaky nose, as if he’d laughed. I tilted forward, pressing harder, driving him down. *Touched my wife*.

His arm, as if he’d not exerted an ounce of energy, shot up through the water, a slick hand latching over my throat; his slender, disproportionate fingers wriggled and worked and tightened. His arm began dragging me down.

Flailing, I drove my fists against his face. Then, holding what little breath I had left, my face was submerged. Everything went black and silent. I opened my eyes and stopped struggling.

In the underwater hum I heard, dimly at first, a distant echo. I heard the sonorous wail of a pipe organ, a single drawn-out note rising, sustaining, and fading. And as if that resonating note blended into a whisper, I heard, “Let go.” That whisper poured through my mind with the ease of a serene tide washing away impressions in the sand. The twitching fingers loosened around my neck as, once more, I heard the words. *Let go*. And I did.

Hands grasped my shoulders and arms, and my face broke the surface. There were frantic voices, a woman crying for help. I was being hauled onto the beach. I remember seeing wide-eyed people rushing from their beachfront rooms. Gretchen was there. Her face was tear-streaked and she held a hand over her mouth as someone settled me on my back. She

knelt down next to me, pleading to know what had happened and why I had done this. Eventually her voice was drowned out as the sound of the ocean grew louder, and night rushed on, closing in around me.

4

Things got worse after the honeymoon. The dream got worse. Our marriage lasted about as long as our courtship, less than a year.

I'd always imagined myself being inconsolable—perhaps even physically violent—were I to be confronted with my wife's infidelity in my marriage. But in Gretchen's case, and considering the circumstances, I can't blame her. Lately, I've learned to let go.

I'd been sitting at the kitchen table one evening, staring at scratched-out words on a piece of paper, trying to scribble down an unsatisfying version of what you are now reading. I heard Gretchen's car pull into the driveway. It was late.

I can't remember what I tried arguing with her about when she walked into the kitchen, but I stopped when I saw her. Her eyes were puffy. She simply dropped her keys on the table and sank down in a chair across from me. She'd been seeing someone for months, some finance manager from another bank.

"Please, Paul," she said, sobbing, reaching out for my hand. "It's not your fault." I did not believe that then, nor do I believe it now. Several days later I moved out. In November, I received divorce papers.

Three weeks ago, the administration did my students, the school, and myself a favor when they fired me. My behavior had become too erratic and cruel to be considered acceptable conduct by an educator.

* * *

Two nights ago I was standing in the shower, leaning against the ceramic-tiled wall with my eyes closed, dozing. The door didn't open. It didn't have to. I knew what was waiting for me on the other side of the vinyl—what had been waiting all along. I opened my eyes and hesitated before drawing the curtain aside.

The black figure was slightly obscured by rolling clouds of steam. It was smiling, of course. Water streaming from the showerhead spluttered and changed color, turning black. Rivulets of inky liquid poured over me, branching down across my skin and collecting in a dark pool at my feet. The static hiss from the shower head grew louder. For the first time he spoke, and his voice was my voice:

I was drowning in the ocean under a bone-toned moon.

●



Light Wing

Erika Yasuno

Digital Art

Sewing Room

Deanna Morris

In honor of Elizabeth Bishop's "Filling Station"

It is cluttered
my mother's sewing room,
fabric-filled, clothed in paisleys
and plaid cloth as if the room
were her mannequin. Colors
textures, shapes combine
to drape the floor in art.

My mother wears my father's
golf shirt—she sticks straight pins
in it—a pincushion coat of arms

She is in the room alone
(it is not the family room).

A cigarette on the ironing board
emits its toxic odor in air—on cloth.
The iron heats up for demanding duty—
conquering the creases my mother abhors.
The Singer machine keeps time
stitch after stitch after stitch.

Best of Poetry

Paper patterns, thimbles and thread
peek through the portals—the few
empty spaces left in the room. Artifacts,
remnants of the artist's life—a tailor's tools
tossed aside as they were used. Servants to
the design.

My mother sews all day long
and often into the night
or into an exhausted peace, perhaps.
The room remains in chaos,
but the needles are all in a row,
at attention and accounted for.

My mother falls asleep
on the fabric, on the floor.

Contributors' Notes

Aaron Pierce, 20, is a sophomore at IUPUI and is majoring in English. Outside of school, he volunteers with the Indiana Air Search and Rescue. He is currently exploring his options for a 2024 presidential campaign. A Nikon N80 is his weapon of choice.

Amy DeMien is a sophomore undergraduate student majoring in Psychology and minoring in Creative Writing. For her, writing has always been a mental release, but she has found that she enjoys writing more for other people than herself.

Anastasia Morrison is a senior majoring in English with a minor in Anthropology. She has been a writer since the age of 12. Upon graduation, she hopes to find a career in editing and publishing, and hopefully write a couple of books of her own in the future.

Anthony Deak is attending the Herron School of Art and Design, where he is pursuing a degree in Photography and Furniture Design.

Ather Ahmed sees himself as a postmodern Renaissance man. His eclectic interests range from spelunking to bending spoons with his mind to lying about himself in the biography section of student publications to appear more interesting than he is.

Autumn L. Stewart is a Writing and Literacy major in the English department. She is 26, has three children, and is finally going to graduate in the spring! Also, in the age old debate between pirates and ninjas, she sides with pirates.

Beth Zyglowicz is in her final year at Herron School of Art and Design, studying Illustration. She plans to continue work in freelance illustration and children's book illustration.

Clint Smith is an honors graduate of the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, Le Cordon Bleu, and is a two-time recipient of the "Best Of Issue" award in the poetry category for *genesis*. Clint lives on the southeast corner of Marion County, along with his wife and stepson.

Davinia Yalimalwai moved to Indianapolis in 2007. Although she misses her island home of Hawaii, she's grown to love the Midwest in more ways than she could have expected. She's not looking forward to completing her degree this academic year. She still has more to learn, and even more to write.

Deanna Morris is a Creative Writing major, applying for an MFA in poetry. She also enjoys writing flash fiction.

Debbie Cobb, a twenty-something majoring in Philosophy, wishes she'd gone into Creative Writing after all. She tends bar locally and confides her thoughts on life, love, and birds to her most trusted friend, her journal.

Eileen Tallman is a strikingly attractive IUPUI graduate who enjoys long walks on the beach, comics, and writing fiction and screenplays. She is pursuing her PhD in some area of psychology and hopes to eventually become a research scientist.

Erika Yasuno is an alumna of the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology. She received college credit in high school for AP studio art and has been recognized as an outstanding upper-class student in Computer Graphics Technology. She loves both traditional and digital art.

Jacob Krismanick is originally from Munster, IN and is currently studying at Herron School of Art and Design where he majors in painting. He once had a girlfriend who juggled topless. It looked like she was doing five, but it was an optical illusion, of course.

Jiang Wenting grew up in eastern China and came to America in the Spring of 2009. His major is marketing, but he loves photography. "To find anything beautiful by your heart, you will be an artist whatever, whoever you are, just like me!"

Kelly Thomas was a graduate nondegree student at IUPUI this past school year. She will be pursuing her Master of Fine Arts in poetry at Butler University.

Leeza Ann Finch writes down her odd thoughts while sequestered in her tower with only her loyal steed (or chihuahua) Orli for company. One day she will free herself from her screwed up fairy tale with words, words, and more words. No prince is necessary.

Melissa Scott is attending her fourth year of college at Herron School of Art and Design in Indianapolis. Her major is General Fine Arts with an emphasis on illustration and drawing. She hopes to someday work in the film industry as an artist and animator.

Michel Collins is a geography major, fond of history and the smell of an old book.

Sarah Sobleski is currently a junior at IUPUI. In addition to painting, she enjoys riding horses and is hoping to one day move to Europe.

Suzanne Robin is a senior English major. She was born four days after Valentine's Day. It sure was cold and snowy then.

Treva Mitchell's "Heimat" will be installed at Ms. Christel DeHaan's private residence in early November 2009. Standing over 17' tall, this steel structure will weigh approximately 800 pounds, is lit from within, and at five specific times during the evening, will emit the words "So G'Sell So", a Bavarian goodnight.

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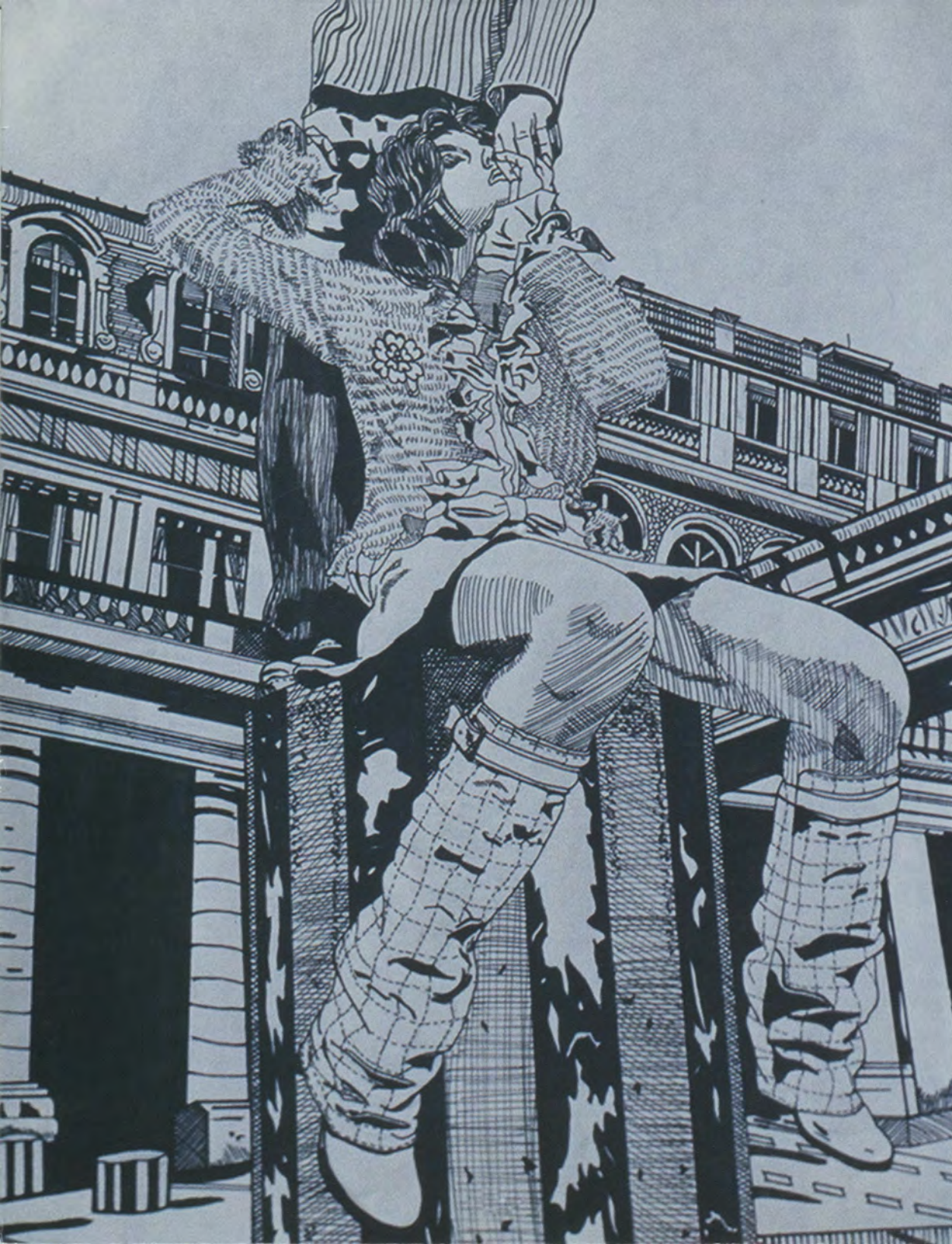
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Thank you.

**Back Cover:
Paris Affection**

Erika Yasuno
8 x 10 Pen and Ink Drawing



Ather Ahmed
Debbie Cobb
Michel Collins
Anthony Deak
Amy DeMien
Leeza Ann Finch
Jacob Krismanick
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