

SHORELINE

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Shoreline

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The Outing

GINNY DREW HER BATH AS HOT AS she could take it, and tasted the salt beading on her upper lip. She scrubbed briskly with a pink washcloth that her little sister had bought her for a bridal shower gift six years ago. She scoured her arms and legs the same way she would a greasy pot of spaghetti sauce in her Uncle Larry's diner, yet she couldn't feel the bristles of the bath brush or the heat of the bath water. She thought about something she read in a magazine once about how compulsive people do things like this. Scrub themselves until they bleed, or wash their hands a thousand times a day.

Josh and Mickey watched pre-season Sunday Night Football in the basement with the sound off while Josh's wife took a bath upstairs. Since high school, they always watched football together, drinking Ballentine Ale from cans and providing each other with play by play. As kids, they would snatch Mickey's dad's beers from the extra fridge in their basement. Now Josh always made sure his own home was well stocked, especially once the playoff season approached. Josh's wife Ginny had been busy working all day and he didn't want to disturb her as she unwound in the tub.

Flecks of dried skin floated on the surface of the filmy bath water. A layer of tub steam rose and drifted towards the vanity, attaching itself to the mirror, fogging the view, preparing to reduce Ginny's face into nothing more than a moist blur when she finally stepped out. She flipped over in the tub, laying face down. Slowly she lowered her face into the water, blowing little bubbles with her and stayed there a moment, the pressure of the hot mouth, then

with her nose. She held her breath, water penetrating her skin, causing her body to pulsate rapidly and deeply so that every beat surrounded her. The underwater bathtub world was quiet, murky. She envisioned the soap scum floating towards her body and attaching itself. She could stay this way. Just breathe out, all the way. Then let the dirty bath water seep deep into her lungs.

Ginny popped her head up and knelt in the tub. She stared at the yellow tile noticing the onset of some mildew spots. Too much upkeep in this house. Spencer had a woman come in and go over his whole house at least once a week. His white marble bathtub was immaculate.

Showering off the suds and soap scum still left her skin a little slick, but all traces of her day with Spencer were removed from her body. The smell of his cologne and soap and after shave lotion, which he told her that he regularly purchased whenever he was in Paris visiting clients. She threw a towel around her and tossed her dirty clothes into the hamper. Opening the hamper again she decided to throw her jeans, her sweater, her underwear, especially her underwear, into the washing machine before Josh could pick up another man's scent at the top of the laundry heap.

At half-time, the volume was turned back up on the set. Mickey crunched on pretzels and washed them down with beer.

"Can you believe it's already time for the outing? I swear, every year the time just keeps moving faster. This fall Amy'll be in kindergarten. Kindergarten, can you stand it?"

"Makes you feel like an old man, doesn't it?" said Josh. "Supposed to be pretty nice out tomorrow though, perfect Labor Day weather. Ginny'll love it, she's been working so damn many hours,



she needs a break."

"Well, Pallie, that's what big shot lady executives do. Work their asses off. And yours does charity work on the side."

"I wish she'd tell Larry to get another sap to bail him out. That diner's going nowhere. But that's my wife. Doesn't want to make waves."

"Meanwhile, you get stuck washing the dishes at night, right?" Mickey punched his chest and let out a salami, pretzel and beer burp. The game was back from half. Josh pressed the mute button.

She still felt cold after the scalding bath. Shivering, she pulled on her robe, and tied it as tight as she could, no speck of flesh left to peek out. In the bedroom, she rubbed mint lotion over her arms and legs. A small bruise was starting to take shape on her left breast under the nipple. Spencer always left her sore, but he was usually careful not to leave marks. Josh was almost too gentle in comparison. Today Spencer had tied her hands to the bedpost with handkerchiefs, something she'd never imagined enjoying. Just tight enough so that she couldn't escape while he slammed into her.

She lay on the bed with her robe open and thought about the places where Spencer had grabbed her. The thought of his tongue on her body made her insides flutter and her mind drift into a sleepy satisfaction. But a sharp spasm to her belly startled her out of her fantasy. A panic, the sensation of worms boring their way through her stomach to her intestines took over her body. Josh could not discover the bruise. She jumped off the bed and to the dresser, flinging through the drawers until she found a baggy gray tee shirt with a worn out Mickey Mouse laughing on the front, sweat pants and a thick

pair of socks. She tucked the shirt neatly into the pants, kept her robe on and crawled under the well worn comforter Josh's parents gave them for an engagement gift. Maybe tomorrow night, after she and Spencer spent the day on his boat sailing around the Newport harbor, when she made the final decision that life with him was incomparable to life with Josh, then she'd announce to her husband that she was leaving.

Josh and Mickey continued watching the game after the half-time show.

"No, she's coming, she's an old die hard. Plus she's been through it before, you know. I talked to everyone this week and we're meeting at the campgrounds noonish."

"Seems like Ginny and I are the only ones not bringing our own little troupe of campfire boys and girls with us." Josh popped open another beer. "I thought by now we'd at least be ready for one."

"You don't know what you're missing," Mickey said, rolling his eyes to the top of his head until they almost disappeared. Packing everyone up, sending everyone to the bathroom, re-packing everyone, going to the car, loading everyone in, driving three blocks down the road, finding you forgot to go to the bathroom yourself, then deciding whether to break the speed limit to get where you're going or turn around and go back. Fun."

"You love it and you know it. Ginny and I would love it too, I'm sure."

"So what's the hold up? Go for it." Mickey reached over the empty beer cans for another handful of pretzels.

"It isn't that easy."

"Oh, man, hey, I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking like that."

"No, I don't think that's the problem," Josh slapped his buddy on the arm. "I just don't know if Ginny's ready. Her career at the bank is really taking off and I don't want her to sacrifice that right now."

Ginny lay tightly wrapped and clenching her pillow. She wished it was Spencer, and she was sprawled out on his king-size bed on the Ralph Lauren mahogany and emerald patterned bedspread gazing up at the antique Victorian light fixtures. The fireplace would be just flickering as she drifted to sleep in his arms. In the morning he would tell her he loved her, and she would come to live with him and go to the theater and learn about opera and walk arm and arm with him into wine tasting parties.

Ginny had accepted Spencer's invitation to go sailing tomorrow on *The Krugerrand*. It was his boat, which was really a yacht, but he simply referred to it by its given name.

She had read books and listened to tapes about getting what you want. She was taught by many seminar leaders that reaching your goals was easier if you actually imagined yourself having already achieved them. Visualizing is what they called it. See yourself doing the thing that you want to do, and doing it successfully. Ginny imagined herself out on Spencer's yacht, maybe meeting, no definitely meeting some of his friends, important people. People who would offer her twice her salary to work for their Fortune 500 firms. On Monday she would give her notice at Security Bank and Savings and become a Wall Street trader. Uncle Larry would have to fend for himself and find someone else to do the books and help in the kitchen on Thursday nights.

Ginny heard the stairs creak as Josh climbed up to bed. She closed her eyes tightly and

curled into the fetal position.

"Sweetheart, are you up?" Josh whispered and touched her shoulder. She didn't want to answer, but forced a grunt to keep him from prodding her.

"Sorry Honey, goodnight. I just wanted to remind you about tomorrow," Josh sat on the end of the bed and pulled off his sneakers.

"What? What tomorrow?" She broke immediately from her caterpillar coma.

"Honey, our outing. It's tomorrow. You know, Labor Day?" Josh crawled into bed and curled up behind his wife. She sat up and turned on the light.

"I'm not sure about tomorrow," She blurted it out and closely watched her husband's response. She knew it was important not to start an argument about this.

"What do you mean? Don't tell me Larry needs help again."

"No, not Larry." She searched her mind for an excuse. Now was definitely the wrong time for the truth. And she did forget about the outing. The annual hang out with all of the old friends from high school and college. People she ran out of conversation with five years ago. People who were fun to party with in school, but who now love living in a small town where the cultural highlight is the town Autumn Apple Fest, a country pumpkin spectacle where mothers look at the craft tables and declare that they can do better. Fathers chase their toddlers and stuff them full of caramel apples to keep them from screaming. The town square swarms with kids with goo smeared all over their faces and with empty caramel apple sticks in their gummy hands, crying because the rest of the apple fell on the ground and someone stepped on it. The

outing was just as stimulating to Ginny, just take away the crafts and the clowns painting children's faces.

The outing used to be fun, when they were younger. Before everyone declared breeding as the ultimate expression of their coming of age. Ginny knew there was so much more to do. Working at SBS changed her perspective. The thrill of international trade, the gambles and risks, the way that things happening in Japan could affect the stability of her clients. Of course they were really Spencer's clients; she worked in the mortgage division. But international trading was on the same floor. And she was determined to get her foot in.

"Well, what then? Is it something else? Don't you want to go?" Josh's whole day would be ruined tomorrow without his wife there. They hadn't been able to share a cup of coffee together since she started working late nights and helping her uncle with the books, trying to save him from Chapter nine or eleven or whatever chapter it was that said you were bankrupt. Josh left the finances to his wife, preferring to work on his history textbooks instead of balancing her accounts.

Ginny felt the worms gnawing at her intestines again, this time working their way up her innards and into her esophagus. What to say without letting out some clue, some detail that Josh could later piece together while roasting dogs with his friends tomorrow, causing him to flee the party to find his wife drinking mimosas and banging her brains out with the most exciting man that anyone ever met.

"I just don't know, Josh. I haven't really been feeling well." Ginny rubbed her belly and tried to look convincing, as if the worms were

really just a good old fashioned case of the flu.

"That's because that uncle of yours has you working too hard." Josh felt the knots in his wife's shoulders. "Look at you, you're all tensed up. You probably need a day to unwind."

Josh rubbed her so softly that it only added to Ginny's nausea. She felt all of his weakness drip out of his fingertips and onto her shoulders. Ginny needed passion, not drippy sentiment. She sat up.

"No, Josh. It's more than that. I just feel like I've got some kind of flu or something. I felt really faint today and haven't been able to keep anything down. I've felt like this for a while."

"Well, what do you think it is? Shouldn't you see a doctor?" Josh stopped rubbing and placed his hand to Ginny's forehead.

"It's probably just an exaggerated case of PMS for all I know. You know how sick I get before my period. I'm just a little late is all. But tomorrow's the first day I can just stay in bed all day and rest."

Josh patted Ginny's stomach lightly. "Maybe there's a little somebody in there. Do you think?" He kissed the top of her head and she returned his affection with a deer in the headlights look.

He'll never get it, she's thought. She visualized them in divorce court, her with one of Spencer's high power attorneys, he sitting with his silly friend Mickey the public defender. He'd be smiling a sappy smile at her, saying, "Sure, Ginny. You take the house and the cars and half my salary. As long as you're sure that's enough to make you happy." She'd spit on him and he'd think it was raining.

Now he thinks she's pregnant because she's

sickened by the thought of spending another Labor Day weekend with him and his suburbanized friends and their sticky cranky children. She almost laughed out loud, but caught herself in time. Okay, she thought, I'll go along with that. Maybe it'll get him off my back for the day.

Ginny wasn't especially good at lying, but she found it getting easier and easier with Josh. Being with Spencer always made her feel guilty, because she knew that none of it was really Josh's fault. For all of his interest in the great events of history, she knew it pleased Josh to be a gentle observer, temperately judging the actions of charismatic people as they revolutionized the world. His fairness, his intelligence and the quiet strength inside him had always made her feel secure and loved. She blamed herself for being bored with it all. But she had a taste of something that she felt compelled to be a part of; and she didn't need him to feel secure anymore. She could conjure up her own power, with Spencer's help. This all made lying less difficult.

"Well, Josh," she faked the best puppy eyes she could. "Actually, that what I was thinking." She continued to rub her tummy. "But I didn't want to say anything until I was really sure." She thought about how she must really love Spencer to throw her whole marriage away.

Josh watched his wife rub her tummy. She looked more beautiful than she did when they first met in chemistry class, or at the Senior Prom, or on their wedding day. Her eyes glistened, she seemed to look away from him in a bashful, timid sort of way. It was this kind of intimacy that Josh lived for. It was a moment when all he could do was hold Ginny's hand,

because anything he said would sound too corny, and he didn't want to disturb the feelings that he knew they both shared.

"So you don't mind, if I stay home this time?"

"I can stay with you Ginny. I don't have to go."

"No, Josh. You've been looking forward to this. I won't be much fun anyway. I'll just be lying around here, maybe read a little." She tried to sound calm and sleepy but the worms were making her heart race. She visualized him at the outing.

"I don't mind really." Josh pushed her hair back from her face.

"No, really. Go have fun. I insist. Now go to sleep." She took his hand away and gave it a quick kiss before she placed it on his lap. Goodnight."

Warren mixed a pitcher of Bloody Mary's while Spencer and Monica lay sleeping. The three had spent the night on *The Krugerrand*, starting at the wharf hitting the surrounding bars, and taverns, and crawling back onto the yacht to where they drank until sunrise. They found a girl, Lisa, with dark brown hair and darker eyes that was out with her girlfriends on their weekly bar hop husband hunt. By the time she staggered off the *Krugerrand* the next morning she had slept with all of them. She held her bunched black stockings in her fist as she crawled into a cab. Her dress was ripped enough to look intentional. Her panties were stuffed into her purse.

"Wake up sleepy heads," Warren squeezed a lemon over Spencer and Monica. "C'mon its getting late."

"What the fuck," were Spencer's waking.

words, "Jesus, can you be any more ignorant?" Monica didn't wake.

"I'm just thinking of you two. Don't want your new piece to see you with your old piece.

"What piece? You mean what's her name, that little dark one? Where is she?"

"You're lucky I manage your personal engagements, Spencer. Where would you be without me?" Warren poured two drinks and gave one to his boss.

"Three-fifty richer after last night. At least." Spencer hit Monica on the head with a pillow. "We must have killed her. Where did that little girl go?"

"Gone Spencer. I was talking about your lady friend from the mortgage department. I think you're spending too much time slumming, you can't even keep track. Ginny, isn't that it?"

"Oh, her. She's meeting me here around noon." Spencer stretched and rubbed the heavy black growth on his face. "What time is it anyway?"

"Noonish."

Spencer got up and slapped Monica's bare butt, finally getting a grunt out of her.

"That a girl. Come on love, got to make room for the next victim."

Josh was going to be a daddy. He was bursting to tell everyone, anyone, but Ginny had sworn him to secrecy until she was sure. He would keep quiet today at the picnic. Maybe just clue Mickey in, since they were just discussing it and all. Josh was going to be the daddy of a sweet little child with auburn curls and sweet hazel eyes, just like her mommy. A little girl with long eyelashes and an impish grin. Boys would fall in love with her. She'd

break hearts. There was so much to think about, but he couldn't concentrate on one thought, they kept swirling around in his brain, stopping for a moment to allow him some specific anxiety, then blurring together and twisting about again.

Ginny parked at the wharf and set the alarm on her car, even though she knew no one would want it. She spotted The *Kruggerand* right away, she and Spencer had strolled by it one night when she was supposed to be at her Uncle Larry's. She was too afraid to board that night.

The boat seemed deserted, so she waited next to it for a few minutes. She began to think that someone might see her. Someone from work, or her in-laws on one of their retirement day trips. She decided to board, and look for Spencer down below. Or maybe she could hide there until he arrived. She had never been on a yacht before.

The outing just wasn't the same without Ginny there. Josh brought burgers and a cooler full of Budweiser. Mickey and Sam got the coals going, and Mickey's wife Carol was soliciting help to get the volleyball net up. Eight months pregnant, Veronica wobbled across the campsite with one of the other women who were delegated to baby sitting duty for the first hour, at which time they would switch with two others. Josh would take the 2PM to 3PM shift with Carol.

"Hey Pallie, where ya heading?" Mickey yelled above the sizzle of the grill.

"To the pay phone down by the Mini Mart. I need to make sure Ginny's okay."

"Okay, Papa." Mickey sang back at Josh, but no one noticed. Josh glared back, but couldn't help grinning.

Ginny didn't like what she saw when she stepped down to the lower deck. She didn't

notice the glistening polish from the dark pine interior, or the tasteful tapestry rugs that covered the deck. The tan leather cushioned benches and the round bed went right past her.

All she saw was a naked woman. A young, firm woman with long dirty blond curls holding onto some grungy guy that looked like Spencer.

"Baby, I'll be good. I won't make any trouble." The woman rubbed the man's open chest and played with the black curly hair. "Just let me stay down here and sleep awhile. If you get bored with her, just slip down and keep me company."

The woman and the man kissed. Then the man pushed her on the bed. "No, Monica, I told you before, it's time to go. You know I despise whining." Ginny recognized the voice. And another voice behind her.

"Hey, how'd you get here?" She turned around and recognized Warren Andrews, Spencer's assistant. The couple turned and looked at her with disgust for intruding.

"I have to go," was all Ginny could manage to utter. She pushed past Warren and ran off the boat. She knew Spencer wouldn't follow after her. She could hear them all laughing.

No answer. No machine. She must be sleeping. Josh thought. I shouldn't disturb her. Why doesn't she just put the machine on? How can she sleep with the phone ringing twenty times? Maybe she took it off the hook. Then it wouldn't be ringing. I'm sure she's fine. So where is she? Maybe she's in the bathroom, taking a bath. She's taking a bath and heard the phone and slipped trying to get up. Now she's lying on the floor and she's hurt. And it's all my fault, he decided. Why doesn't she answer?

Ginny started to cry. She forgot to disarm the

car and the alarm went off; making her feel like more like an amateur, an idiot. She struggled with the remote and finally shut the car off. She refused to peel out off the docks. She would carefully pull the car out, look both ways and safely enter the oncoming traffic. Only the crying made it tough to see through the windshield. Ginny felt so sorry for herself, she was supposed to be smarter than all this. All she wanted to do was get home and drive back under the covers. She envisioned getting home safely and crawling into bed until Josh got home.

Josh raced, swerving around the winding wooded road that led from the campgrounds to the interstate. Two squirrels almost suffered concussions from standing too close to the road. A group of blackbirds scattered and squawked as Josh plowed into the road kill they were quietly picking over. Josh wasn't watching the road. All he could see was Ginny lying on the bathroom floor, a trail of blood seeping onto the yellow tile, turning it a dead crusty orange. His whole new family gone before it started. And all because he couldn't stay home with his wife, had to play with his friends. Would he ever learn?

Ginny found Josh's car in the driveway. The worms were at it again, gnawing a hole in her gut. She raked through her purse and the glove compartment and found a crumpled tissue. She smudged her face trying to scrape The salty tears off her cheeks. Facing Josh didn't scare her. She felt sorry because she knew he'd be frantic, not finding her there, thinking something happened to their imaginary child. Her eyes started to well up again, thinking of how scared her husband was at that moment, and knowing she was the cause of his pain.

Josh came running out of the house when he heard the car pull up. It relieved him to see that his wife could walk and was not being carried.

"What happened? Why are you crying?"

"I'm not crying," she's said as tears streamed down her face.

"Oh. So what are you not crying about?"

Josh helped her out of the car and walked her up the drive. Ginny walked with him and held onto his clammy hand with her clammy hand.

"Nothing. I'm just feeling a little blue. I thought a ride might do me good. Josh?"

"What is it?" They walked into the house and Ginny closed the door.

"Josh, I don't think there's any baby."

"Are you sure?"

"Pretty sure."

"That's okay, Sweetie. I still have you."

Josh hugged her gently, letting his body flow softly over her. She hugged him back tightly, passionately. She couldn't visualize anything more than holding onto him that very moment.

"Why don't you head upstairs. I'll make you some tea."

"Cinnamon Apple?"

"Sure" said Josh. "Cinnamon Apple."

Pat Testa

Salt Crystals



acrylic on paper

Val Alviti

THE WHITE

A pretty spring blossom
blowing gently in the breeze,
and glistening with morning dew,
shows its innocence in petals of snow white.

Hypocrite flower.
Do you not bear bloated green pricks
and take in the soil's sperm
with erect greedy limbs?

Do you not shed creamy petals
and open wide for the sun
stabbing flesh with sharp thorns
and eating up the blood?

The tainted spring blossom,
its purity and innocence a disguise
sways gently in the breeze
in its rich color of deceit.

Desoree Brennan

My Dear Aylmer

I am thinking of Aylmer.
How he tried to perfect his lovely young wife's face.
The wispy, ethereal Georgiana
blessed by an angel's hand.
I know that I would let you scrape off
any part of me that you found displeasing.
Just like Georgiana did.

I would give you my arm, if you thought you could love me more.
I would sacrifice my tongue, if you suddenly wished for quiet.
I would offer up my child, if you found it distracting.
I can hear my brittle bones crackling
as I try to squeeze myself into Divinity's corset.
Would I sell my soul for you,
surrender my spirit for you?

Probably not, I whisper,
Fooling myself.
Knowing that I'd kiss the foot of Judas if you but asked.
You never would, of course.
You never do.
You never ask me to be less than myself.
(it should be simple.)

But I am Aylmer.
I see his unforgiving eye reflected in my mirror.
I feel his bony, gloved finger plunge down my throat.
I smell his hot, rancid breath in my purging.
I hate for you to be the casualty.
A scapegoat for my self-hatred.
You see Georgiana, I never do.

I am a case study for all my feminist teachers.
Lock me in a box with Hedda Nussbaum and Nicole Brown.
The only difference is I was never seduced by an evil love. Lucky.
Terribly trusting. I believe you don't want me to change.
You beg to see my inner self.
But when I search for her, I find a chimney child.
Stripped of every pleasure, love-starved, somehow unacceptable.

I am too needy. You should run.
Social obligation.
Financial burden.
Delirious responsibility.
Unconditional love.
I need a parent, a lover, a teacher, best friend.
Why bother?

So mold me into what pleases your eye and tongue.
I am a very good actress if you provide the lines.

Sex kitten. Sister. Angel. Whore. Poetess. Lovely young wife.
I have all the costumes.
Maybe you'll pick a woman I like.
Wouldn't that be a lovely surprise?
God is gracious that way, my dear Aylmer.

Amy Lamoureux

Untitled



Missy Desmond

oil on painting

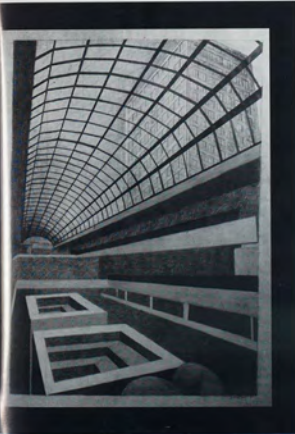
inspired by
Hawthorne's
story,
The Birthmark

Untitled



graphite on paper

Jen Zamboreno



B

argain Hunting

this is a woman-
small,
shallow,
never too deep,
never too used,
and trim-
trimmed. Always
just Your size
for
just Your Size.
this is a woman.

And anytime she sees You
Heading.
Cocking, full force
her way-
her thick puffy lips
will moisten,
part,
and close on
for dear life
upon Your Arrival.
And because,
this IS the woman-
she will always be glad
that You Came.

Sound like a bargain?
most men agree that it is.

Robin Razza

Untitled

black and white photograph



Adam Troy Paradiso

Flies

My shrink doctor wants to give me something—it's something, I think it starts with an "L", it's salty and he says that it will balance me but I'm not sure what it is because when he was telling me I was looking at his wooden bookcase. It was tall with six shelves and it looked like coffee pudding with cinnamon because it was smooth with lots of swirls in it and I wondered how many books were in it and if he really knew all that he was supposed to and then I thought how easy it would be for me to lift that case off of the ground and rattle it like it were my brain on an average day of thinking. I don't think he likes it that I can't sit tight and listen to all that he has to tell me and he hates that my feet keep twitching and bouncing off the floor even though I'm in a chair and I know this because he keeps looking at my shoes like they're buzzy little flies that he wants to squish. I guess he wants to stop them and stop me from springing off the walls and the floors and the ceilings because maybe he's afraid that I may break something in his neat little office, maybe even that big bookcase full of thoughts, probably the only thoughts he's ever had. I bet he's afraid because I think so fast and he has no control over that or me or even my shoes that could at any time fly off of the floor and kick him in his face. I told him, I explained it all on a level that a still man could understand. I told him that I wasn't crazy but just a little quick and that I was like a faulty immune system that can't filter properly so I end up seeing, and hearing, and smelling, and feeling everything I ever meet. I told him I was an exposed nerve and the world was constantly pinching at me, and that I was a slit on a wrist and the shakes and grains of life are salts that sting me. I think that's why I'm afraid to take his "L," stuff that is also a salt because I have enough pain to deal with and if it gets inside my body it might hurt, but maybe I'll try it because I could really use a change and maybe it will bring me some excitement.

I'm back in his office.
I took his Big "L".
I rest in his chair.
Feet flat on his ground.
His book shelf is tall.
And stands very still.
there's a pile of flies.
Squished dead on his sill.

Robin Razza

PLAYING THROUGH

"You know why they call it golf, don't you?"

"No. Why?"

"Because 'shit' was already taken."

Joey thought he saw a trace of a smile come to Nap's lips. "Well it's better than nothing," he said to himself.

They had now played through four holes and Nap had not failed to lose at least two balls on each one. Joey felt entirely responsible. He'd thought a round would relax his friend, get him away from home and take his mind off all the troubles he was having there. But Nap had never even been on a golf course and the clubs Joey had lent him were far too long for his five-foot-three-inch body. Joe had more than earned his nickname, "Joey Divot," golfing at school, but Nap was sending more dirt airborne than even he had ever seen. So instead of relaxing, Nap was growing frustrated and his right temple was pulsating noticeably. On top of that, Joey was running out of jokes—and balls.

"Now remember to keep your head down this time Nap."

"Yeah, yeah."

"And keep your left arm straight."

"All right Joey."

"And just..."

"Would ya shut the fuck up and let me swing already! Goddamn yappin'."

"Sorry," apologized Joey. He hated to get that look from Nap.

"Izzat all they fuckin teach ya in college to golf and yep like a fuckin girl? Now just shut up." Nap turned back to his ball on the tee.

Joey didn't even look. He didn't have to. The "squelch-puff" of one-wood striking turf, the light rustling of grass a few yards away and the enraged "SHIIIT!" gave him a pretty good picture. When he did look up, he saw something he probably should have expected, but that nonetheless left him standing in half-shocked, half-amused silence.

Nap had run after the ball, and instead of setting up for another shot, he just swung the club from over his head through the ball in mid-run. As he continued in this manner down the fairway, he looked like some deranged polo-jockey who had fallen off his horse.

Joey ran to catch up after a few seconds, and as he cleared the mid-fairway rise, he could see Nap flying over the green, still whomping the ball one-handed. He was heading for the next tee.

Nap cracked one, and his ball skid-hopped right into the ankle of another golfer who was just about to tee-up the sixth. The inflicted man howled in pain as he dropped his club and grabbed the bottom of his leg. His partner stopped washing his ball and stepped right up to Nap, towering at least a full foot over Joey's friend.

"Just what in the hell do you think you're doing!?" cried the older man in a sickeningly butter-rich tone that Joey knew meant trouble.

"I'm playin through, asshole," snapped Nap.

The man refused to let him pass, though, and when Nap leapt up and jabbed him right in the nose, the "tap-crack" sound reminded

Joey of a perfect golf swing. The man bent in agony, which suited Nap just fine. He didn't have to jump to follow with a left hook that sent the tall golfer to the grass. Just then, the other man recovered from the initial pain of the golf ball to the ankle and ran at Nap.

"Hey, nice socks Argyle," Nap laughed as he used his driver to cross check the Payne Stewart dress-alike hockey-style.

After Nap had left several boot-prints on the fallen man's Izod and deposited his Ralph Lauren bag and Taylor-Mades into the small (yet surprisingly swift) stream to the left of the hole, Joey convinced his friend to head, quickly, towards the parking lot, which was thankfully just beyond the seventh green. Joey fumbled with the keys as the pair dodged their way through the cars in the lot.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" exclaimed Nap, halting in his tracks. "How much did you say this game cost you?"

"Thirty a piece—sixty dollars. Why?" Joey asked, puzzled and desperate to get to his station wagon. "We gotta get out of here, man."

"No way. I'm always doin' this to you—ruining your plans." Nap had taken on a determined look. "Not this time. Come on."

"Where the hell are you going?" Joey questioned. "They throw people off golf courses like this for whistling. Nap, whistling—you just attacked two men! I don't think it'd be a good idea to stick around!"

"Aaah, they both had it comin'. Forget about 'em. We're not leaving until we finish this ridiculously expensive game."

"You've gone completely insane. I thought that stunt with the ice sculpture last winter was bad, but this time you've really lost it."

"Not at all," Nap said much too calmly for Joey. "I told that lady I was only borrowin' her

poodle. Come on, we'll skip over a couple a holes—they'll never find us."

"Nap, don't be ridiculous, you don't even like the game."

"What, are you kiddin'?" I love it out here on the links!" Nap said and trudged up the hill towards the back nine.

Joey couldn't obey his common sense and leave him there, and there was obviously no convincing Nap to change his mind, but he was nonetheless shocked that he found himself teeing-off the tenth hole a few minutes later.

"This is stupid, man. Real stupid," he said to Nap.

"Yeah, but doesn't it make you all tingly inside?" Nap laughed.

"I don't find a damn thing funny about this Nap. I'm only doing this to get you out of here as soon as possible." Joey hit his shot. It was ruler-straight and landed about two-hundred sixty yards away—easily the best tee shot of his life. "Wow."

"Yeah, nice shot man," said Nap. "See, aren't you glad we stayed now?"

Joey didn't answer for a second, but then shook off his awe. "No, I'm not. Now tee the hell up. If we're gonna do this we'd better do it fast."

"You're absolutely right," Nap said, bending down and pushing his tee into the turf. "Hey, we might even start a new game. We could call it...uh...speed golf. Yeah! Like speed chess, only with grass."

"What are you talking about?" Joey asked. But Nap seemed genuinely excited about hitting now, and didn't answer.

He choked up a bit on the shaft, went through his backswing with care, and then swung with all his might. But despite all the effort put into it, the shot would not behave

and sliced violently towards the forest lining the course. Then, as if by divine providence, the ball careened into a tree and rocketed back onto the fairway. It landed just thirty yards behind Joey's.

"All right!" exclaimed Nap, jumping with his fist raised, "I'm in bounds, baby! Let's play some speed golf!"

"NO. Wait—Nap!"

But the little man was off again, sprinting after his ball. Joey took off after him, but was slowed by the two bags he was carrying. Nap ran like a mad man until he reached his ball. Joey was afraid to look, but Nap didn't turn back into the polo player. He instead stopped, set up and hit his second shot. It landed at least fifty yards to the right of the green, but when Joey thought about it, it was the best approach shot he had ever seen made with a driver. The thought made him laugh, but he quickly forgot it as Nap took off again.

"Ha ha! The first one in the cup wins in speed golf—and I'm kickin' your ass, Joey! Come on, college boy, run!"

Joey did indeed run to keep up with his friend, and that's all he did. Hitting his own ball didn't even occur to him any more. He just wanted to keep Nap out of further trouble. The inventor of speed golf was having too much fun with his creation to care about anything else at the moment. When he finally got onto the green, he began using the one-wood as a hockey stick again, maneuvering the ball back and forth with it all the way to the cup. After he sunk the "puck," Nap picked up his ball and continued to sprint on to the next hole, all the while taunting his friend in the voice of Howard Cosell.

"And the young new-comeer draws first blood! Joey Divot is well behind and in dire trouble. Come on caddie shack, pick it up, son!"

It was then that Joey realized with dread that a foursome was playing on the next hole. They were only on the fairway, but Nap seemed not to notice or care. He dropped his ball on the teeing surface and crushed it right towards one of the four other golfers. Even from a distance, Joey could tell the man was astounded to see a golf ball roll up right next to his from behind. That shock was nothing, though, to the one he got when he saw Nap running at him full speed.

"How are ya?" Nap said stopping in front of the speechless golfer. "Beautiful day, huh?"

"What...?" was the only thing the golfer could manage.

"Just be a sec, here, if you'll excuse me," Nap told him as he kicked the other ball out of his way and fired his second right at the green. "You don't talk much, do ya? Well, later, Smiley."

As his friend took off again, the realization that Nap had hit four, solid, straight shots in a row and the fact that he was about to hit his third shot on a par five thirty yards from the green dawned on Joey. Nap was playing better golf than Joey ever had—his putting needed work, but whose didn't? With an extra burst of speed, Joey caught up to his friend just as he was about to swing again.

"Wait, Nap. Wait," Joey cried with what little breath he could muster. "I want you to try something."

"Hey, I love ya Joe, but I'm not that kind a guy."

"No, I'm serious. Here," Joey handed him an iron.

"What's this?" asked a curious Nap.

"It's a pinching wedge. Use it to hit your shot to the green. And don't think, just hit," was all the advice Joey gave.

"All right. I'll give it a shot."

And what a shot it was. Joey knew it and smiled as soon as he heard the metallic "plink" accompanied only by the whishing of air being whipped apart. Nap didn't realize it until the ball landed a scant ten or twelve yards from the flag-stick.

"H-hey, did you see..."

"Yeah, I did," Joey cut off his stammering.

"Try it again."

He dropped another ball on to the fairway, which Nap deposited even closer to the cup, then a third and a fourth, all landing with similar results.

"God damn Nap," Joey said, shaking his head, "those are golf shots."

But in their awe of Nap's new-found talent, the two hadn't noticed that a certain golfer had just come limping across the fairway accompanied by two rather serious looking fellows in blue uniforms.

"Yeah, just call me Lee Tre-fuckin-vino lauged Nap, unaware.

"We'd like to have a word with you Mr. Trevino," remarked one of the officers.

"All right, I give up Joe. Don't talk to me then."

Joey hadn't said a single thing to Nap since the police surprised them at the course. He was humiliated by being arrested and Nap was to blame. His friend had been pleading with him for the last two hours or so, but Joey remained furious, or had tried to anyway. He had actually cooled down quite a bit. His parents were on their way down to the station right now and the police were only charging him with reckless public behavior. With his spotless record, he'd get off with light community service. Nap was in much worse trouble. He'd be lucky to see his parents in the next week, ol' hop-along Argyle

was charging him with two counts of assault and battery, and this was far from his first offense. It didn't look like Nap would be getting out to the golf course again any time soon. It occurred to Joey that a lot of the trouble he and his friend had gotten into together had ended in a similar fashion and it made him want to talk to Nap now.

"Hey, Hey Nap," he stammered.

Nap turned to the unconscious elderly man slumped in the corner next to him, "Didn't I just tell him not to talk to me?"

"Look, I'm sorry Nap," Joey said, "I uh, I was just wondering if you remember that time back in the neighborhood, when we were about twelve and we snuck into the back of Louie's Bar."

"Yeah, so what about it?" Nap offered.

"Well, if you remember, while you were drinking the beers, I started smashing the bottles against the wall. I must've smashed a hundred beer bottles."

"Yeah, that's why we got caught."

"I know, I know, but when Fat Louie came in, you took the blame for the whole thing—never said a word to your folks about me being there either. Do you remember that?"

"Remember it? Hell, Pop had to pay for every last one of those beers. I still got the welts."

"Doesn't seem fair, does it? Kind of like today. I get us into the situation and you take the fall."

"Oh, Jesus. Stop it," Nap said getting up.

"What? What do mean," exclaimed Joey, "Stop what?"

"Stop talkin' outta your ass."

"What are you talkin' about? I'm tryin' to apologize."

"Look, Joey, I know you feel bad about the

fact that you're goin' home soon and I'm spendin' a few nights here, but most of the things I took the fall for, I did. Drinkin' Fat Louie's beer ain't exactly my worst crime."

"Yeah, but I'm the one who took you out on that course today, thinking it would help you out a bit and look how it turns out! It could be more than just a few nights this time Nap!"

"Joey, maybe it's for the best. I mean, we come from the same neighborhood, but we live in different worlds. Prison may be my best shot of eating every day. Think about it. I went out there today and learned two things. One—I can fuckin' golf. Two—I have no fuckin' business being on a golf course. I'd have to say it was a pretty informative day for the both of us. Besides, Knee-socks and his buddy Bean Pole there both got the beatings they so richly deserved, and that alone makes it worth it. Yeah, I'd have to say it was a good day."

"But Nap..."

"But nothin'," Nap cut him off, pointing to the guard who had just come to the cell door. "I think this is you," he said.

"Divozi, Joseph. Let's go, your bail's been posted," said the obese guard.

Joey couldn't move, couldn't even look away from Nap. He felt a terrible sense of finality.

"What the hell are ya staring at. What are you, in love?" Nap snapped. "Get the hell outta here! I'm not goin' to the fuckin' moon. Goddam college boy."

At that, Joey smiled, turned and walked out of the cell. He could see his father waiting for him and as he walked over to him he could hear Nap, conversing with the guard.

"Hey tubbo, I was just wondering, did your parents have any kids that lived or did you eat them all? Seriously. Spanky, cut down on them pork rinds. You could scare the dark out of a closet lookin' like this..."

raku vessel (12" high)



Justine Princkard

ALONG CAME THE SPIDER

The dewy morning finds me working hard, touching up my furnishings, sparse but quaint, the strands of web a stained glass window frame, with sheeted water drops forming their panes. My legs, eight tools in tandem, work while wind blows lightly, slightly hampering my craft.

I feel a foreign presence drawing near; the balance shifts; sharp tingles dart and surge through my lair, my legs, into my round body. My senses spring alive, and then one eye detects the large intrusion, and my others shift to follow. A girl, bowl and spoon in hand, seats herself far below my tree.

I perch intently as I watch her feed. Her head sprouts silken web strands, flowing out over a dress of woven rainbow shades; she resembles a splashy flower from up here. I guess about the face concealed beneath; I hope it holds a brand new world for me.

Would you like some company, Little Miss? Thinking yes, I slowly lower myself, connected by my swelling abdomen, bringing my highest quality line with me. Alighting by her side, I settle in and quietly wait for our words to commence.

She spots me, and her two eyes come alive; I expected more pleasure than she displays. She springs up quickly, footstool knocked aside, her mouth widens into an enameled abyss, suspended, then her screams start pouring out.

Her bowl upends; the gruel spills everywhere. Its stickiness crawls heavily down my face. She runs off, arms and legs a spinning blur, her dress shredding on outreached, grasping branches, thin ribbons of reminder, woven by the angry breeze into a shoddy, cruelly colored web of rags, obscuring her retreat.

I sit there, trying to guess my faulty move. Perhaps I might have dropped a hint or two, not glide in like an owl hunting for prey. Would a suit have helped? I should have woven one. She left too soon; she'll never know my special qualities, my patience, my devotion to my art. Did she know I meant no harm?

Perhaps she mistook me for one of my deadlier cousins. I'll forgive her slight; some kinder soul shall someday come my way. I pull myself together, and back up to my home, center myself, then I wait for lunchtime to approach, wings, legs, and all.



Raajiv Schoumaker

profile on paper

of the couple who will raise my baby, of the sandy-haired woman and the salt and pepper man who will have my baby, their ancestry and a brief description of the education.

between the lines, their maturity, which I have not; their plainfulness, which I have not, and I understand their intent, to love.

the fine print I must trust to the social worker who has many papers on her desk and knows how to read them.



Septia and white chalk on gray paper

Natalie Markward

Computer manipulation
by:
Anne Butler

one moment please
while I pause to pretend
I'm reading it,
while my heart stops
just for a moment

and then, on automatic pilot
I sign it, her obligatory speech
running in my head, do I understand;
never will see, yes, yes I understand,
and my January perspiration
cools on contact
with the atmosphere of the sensible.

Pheobe Martone

Photograph by Daniel J. Venditelli, Jr.



Birmelin

Interview by Tracey Ingle

Robert

In April 1996, the paintings of Robert Birmelin were on display at Rhode Island College's Bannister Gallery. Robert Birmelin is an internationally recognized contemporary American artist, with over thirty solo exhibitions, and at least twice as many group exhibitions to his credit.

On a recent visit to Birmelin's New York studio, I had the opportunity to speak with the artist about some of the works that will be shown at the Bannister Gallery. The included works span a period of about fifteen years, from the early 1980's to the present. The paintings included in April's show are representative of three different stylistic groupings. Chronologically, the first grouping focuses on urban movement, and the chaotic juxtaposition of humans in that environment. The second moves away from the urban scene and into the personal sphere of the subjects; individuals juxtaposed with time and memories. The most recent theme of the artist has been somewhat of a culmination of the two previous trends with a twist; these paintings are reversible.

The day we spoke, the weather in New York City was gray and damp. The sky wouldn't open, it just drizzled incessantly. This weather perfectly prepared me for the experience of the interview. The combination of the melancholy skies and the wonderance of whether or not Spring would ever break, put me right in tune with the resonating uneasiness inherent in Birmelin's paintings.

Robert Birmelin Interview

Shoreline: When did you first become interested in art?

Birmelin: My father worked in a shipyard on the Hudson River. I grew up in New Jersey. I just always loved to draw as a kid. My grandfather used to collect sheets of unprinted newspaper, and he would give me these big sheets of cardboard and tell me to draw on them. I just always loved to draw. I had a wonderful teacher in high school, Dorothy Fisher, who really encouraged me. She told me to apply to Cooper Union, and I got in. I was the first in my family to go to college. I was the first even to finish high school. After that I went to Yale. I wasn't so happy. I got drafted into the Army, then I went back to Yale.

Shoreline: When did you start painting?

Birmelin: I was in England on a Fulbright Scholarship. It wasn't until then that I felt at ease to just paint things the color they were. Then I went to Rome for three years, to the American Academy, and I worked a lot in paint. I was very much effected by the things I saw there. What is interesting to me in painting is the delving into the self, not really the stylistic issues. Trying to find the language for these thoughts and feelings.

Shoreline: When you are working on a painting, what are you inspired by and what are you envisioning?

Birmelin: In the case of this painting (*The Overpass*), it came from a childhood memory, the experience of being on an overpass and being overwhelmed with what was going on around me. This is a fiction that I have created, a combination of several different memories. It's a kind of continuity of your own space, and there's a

potential for being in some kind of relationship to these fictions that are put on the canvas. The thing is, if you work from nature, work from something in front of you, you're always making a correlation between what's out there and what's in front of you. And here, I'm basically pulling it out of my head. An artist is in a situation where you have to almost convince yourself that this fiction could be. You convince yourself that this space, this place, this event could happen, that it could be happening. In your imagination you plant yourself in some kind of proximity to that space.

This is a kind of summing up of the whole-series of city images. What happens is that being in a place with lots going on, your eye will often catch a secondary element or detail. There are some things you see with a clarity, intensity, and interest, and other things you don't, in any kind of complex whole. This is a painting, not of an overpass, but of a certain kind of experience. What you do is find the equivalent and paint it, with paint as the means for that subjective state.

Shoreline: Do you ever use models?

Birmelin: I've drawn a lot from the model. Lately I don't use too many. People help me out with clothes sometimes...I'll use myself...hands, feet...I go out and draw on the street, and do sketches that remind me of something.

People who are really into cars say that my cars are all wrong. They're somewhat identifiable, but they're not really right you know, because they're memory cars. They're memory cars, just as this whole thing is a fiction. It's not reportage, it's not a report on a place. It's as fictional as Alice In Wonderland...The focal points are subjective and eccentric.

Shoreline: How long does it take you to paint one of these? Does it vary completely?

Birmelin: It varies a lot. This one was a follow up on another painting I mentioned (one featured in the show) so that I had roughly the scene in mind. It's different when you're pulling everything out of your hat. It's a matter of thinking about variation. I wanted to make this one with more intensive color, so it is a clash, it is undigestible.

Shoreline: In many of the more recent paintings, beginning with *The Room* series, I felt as if I was picking up elements of longing, sadness, and melancholy. Especially the images with suicides.

Birmelin: Several years ago, around the time that I painted *The Overpass*, I was beginning to feel that there was a part of my own imagination, my own mind, that I had put aside. I had been very involved with the city streets and the crowds, and I wanted to change. I didn't know how to go forward. I was at that time, thinking as I had not done, of many years ago. Of places lived, of my life in earlier periods. And trying to bring up imagery out of that time. I had a hard time. For about two years I was trying to do things, but they never worked out. When you've been working in a pictive way for a long time, to just leave it is sometimes hard. Because you've invested in a certain way of doing things.

Shoreline: You had been working on *The Cityscapes* for 15 years, was it?

Birmelin: Well since the early 1980's. And everything I did looked wrong. It looked like something I didn't do, the kind of painting I

didn't do. I started many, and I just junked them. In the first of this series (there are six in the series, of which three will be in the show), I was trying to take my mind back to certain places and states, and trying to find some imagery, which evoked, not so much specifics as states of mind.

Shoreline: These are very evocative. It was in these images that I picked up the sense of longing. And also a sense of timelessness, or meshing of times and spaces. This I think, is enhanced by the ghostlike figures that float in and out.

Birmelin: Painting is like a waking dream. These figures that are there or half there or half gone, or whatever, really come out of working on the picture, and working it over and letting it change itself at a certain point. I wanted to leave traces of earlier moments in that waking dream. I didn't want to ever close the pictures up in the way of giving them a uniform definition. In a sense, the pictures own past should leak out. The remnants of the past experience of making it should be persistent, there should not be a sense of closure in these images, so that you're coming upon it at a certain moment in its evolution.

In following the principles of the Abstract Expressionists, you can somehow keep working over the picture endlessly. You should always be ready to make big changes, even up until the last moment. When you are working on a picture like this, it takes you a while to do, and your state of mind changes. It is like a waking dream, except it is a waking dream you can alter; a dream you can alter over the course of a couple weeks, and a dream you can return to each day. I wanted that sense of fluidity that is evoked with dreams and with memory.

Shoreline: What I'm puzzled about is this one (*Defaced*)?

Birmelin: The smear?

Shoreline: Yes.

Birmelin: This is one of the first (of the series). I did a series of small heads, which I wasn't too happy with. I began this with a large head. Sometimes a picture closes up very quickly. And it's not good, it hasn't snapped, it hasn't quite happened yet. It's like you closed the box already. In this one I got so irritated, I took some yellow and just obliterated the head, with a half idea that I would come back to it and work on it again; destroy it in order to start again. Then I just didn't do anything with it, it's kind of a literal defacing—it is a face that has been defaced!

It's a kind of wound that's in the middle of this neatly defined world. It's a superimposed destruction; a destruction of something that was unbearable. It's about loss and denying...

Shoreline: The defacement of a memory?

Birmelin: I don't know what they are about. I just make them. you know I'm more interested actually, in any reading or interpretation you (the viewer) might find in it. I hope it has resonance for other people because what I feel is what everybody else feels about their past experience in one way or another. The images don't come out because you want to demonstrate a particular point, they come up from someplace else. You have to make them, and live them through, and have them change under your hand.

Your work can tell you things about your life

Leaving the Court – The Photographer

Robert Birmelin



Acrylic, 72" x 108"

sometimes, and you don't know it. Often you are not concerned with it directly as you're working on it. Though you can, you can paint pictures that tell stories. In my case I don't. But the story is inherent. You don't know quite what it is, often until long after you're done with it. In a certain way the reactions of others to it, and their interpretations are often surprising. They seem like something you should have thought of—or I should have thought of! I think that in images that have a kind of integrity, and a genuine visionary character, the meaning sticks to it. It catches hold. The image itself is genuine vision. It's magnetic.

Shoreline: *The complexity of the reversible paintings is almost overwhelming. How do you approach them?*

Birmelin: The formal task is to try to work out something where the reading is equally strong from either direction, and that is not like collage, but it is a real continuous space. I'd like to think the viewer/observer tends to pick out things that are rightly oriented. It's as if it should work. Then of course, there is that moment later when it can't work because it is betraying itself. The work betrays itself by its very structure, and the wrongness of it can never be corrected. Basically there is a restlessness in making a judgement about the image, and that is inherent in the structure. The paintings about the city are about people moving. This is about things more than motion, but in a sense the motion here is contained in the restlessness of the mind and in trying to find the right adjustment.

I did recall, at one time, talking with my sister about something that happened a long time ago. I'm sure everyone has had this experience; you talk to a friend or a family member about a past

event and you don't remember it the same. When I talked to my sister, I realized that her interpretation of what had happened was not only different, but it was almost completely contrary. So what really did happen? You can't reach it. Each person has his truth, the memory is elusive, and it is bent on the subjective experience, and other things as well. It is the reason why I went to this work which initially seems quite complete, finished, and so forth, but is continually at war with itself and contradicting itself.

Shoreline: *Is this how you felt about your image making at the time? Do you feel like you were contradicting yourself, or at war with yourself? Trying to break away?*

Birmelin: Well, that's very good. [He then begins talking about an image—the one with a large suitcase and a couple at a table having a discussion]...This one interests me. This orientation, the weight of this thing (the suitcase seen upside-down). The way the yellowness of the shirt is staining the whole environment. The unbearable weight of this thing in this space. I don't know why I started to do all of these suitcases, I have no fervor for suitcases. I did do a couple of things years ago, but I never know what to do with it. Now they just keep popping up!

Shoreline: *Nothing very obvious? Like your father traveling constantly?*

Birmelin: He didn't. See here it's very different, it's like the bow of a ship pushing; it's aggressive, kind of spilling forward.

I went and bought a suitcase on 14th St., a big suitcase for \$7.99. What I call immigrant suitcases. They're very large and hard to carry, and they're really meant for one trip. I wanted to be very specific,

so in this case I used a model.

Getting back to your question...It's not all autobiographical. In the sense that a novelist draws on their experiences—it doesn't necessarily mean that they're drawing in a direct way. Because you're also projecting in some cases, a persona, the way a novelist or a poet would project. Whoever the speaker is here is a projection, not necessarily yourself in a direct way. Though obviously the fiction of the speaker draws heavily out of your own life because that is all you have to draw out of.

Shoreline: *Which way do you prefer this painting to be seen?*

Birmelin: Well, I always say in theory, either way. But you finally do tend to favor it one way or the other...I tend to favor this one the other way (suitcase upside-down).

Shoreline: *Is your most recent set of works (1995–1996) an attempt to get back to the city-scape you were doing before?*

Birmelin: Well, they kind of came up again—it's true. This is a more removed thing, it has no figures in it, that's one aspect. Many, many years ago, a friend of mine had a round table. We'd eat at the table, play checkers at the table—just be around the table, it was the center of the apartment. I made a bunch of drawings at it, of the people around it at the time. It sort of came up again. The table is a kind of domestic, intimate, interior thing, and the city is the city—the public realm. What interested me was to find a way that would sufficiently make the transition between the two. It is an irrational combination, obviously. Where they meet is hard to find; the table is in front, the table is

behind, it melts into the city, it goes into depth. It is a peculiar kind of indeterminate relationship of size.

The smoke is lingering, it is the human presence. The detail, the part, stands for the whole. Going back to some of the paintings we talked about earlier, where part of the painting still made itself felt, even though it had been partially obliterated; that is part of this painting too. Initially it should look quite definitely stated everywhere. But in fact, because it is an impossible juxtaposition, much of the painting in the center is left very open. Half way between just the way the subject is half way between. The painting itself is in the mid-point, and has been left hanging, almost calling for something else to happen with it. But it can't be defined further, further definition would break it apart. It has to have a realm of indefiniteness to make the other definiteness believable.

...I always loved to make up these cities. You put smudges of color, they become boxes. Then with more detail, they take on dimensions. It's like making a tinkler toy. It is very relaxing.



Welcome to *wavefront*

Throughout *Shoreline's* history, the majority of our submissions have come from English and Art majors. It has always been our desire to see a broader spectrum of student work in this, our very own, Rhode Island College Magazine. We sincerely hope that *wavefront* will bring us closer to achieving this goal.

Experts from the RIC physics department told us that "wave front" is the technical term applied to the rippling phenomenon that occurs when a pebble is dropped into a pool of water. In this section we will publish student responses to a selected subject or subjects. The intent is to provide cross-campus communication and a forum for student expression.

The editorial staff plans to publish a new and exciting *wavefront* section in every future issue of *Shoreline*.

This year, students were asked to view the work of artist Robert Birmelin. They were then asked to submit to Shoreline something that they had created in response to this viewing. Following are the selected pieces. We apologize for the limitations of the printed medium. All of the original art in this section was submitted in glorious full-color.

Untitled

Paul Moore



pastel on paper

Robert Birmelin and Identity

by Melissa Guillet

Robert Birmelin's work asks the viewer to let go of their perceptions of a recognizable world and see it through the eyes of a new beholder: Technology. His work portrays the concept of identity in a post-modernist world. What makes up a person's identity in this world are the subtle and not so subtle connections with it. He emphasizes the mundane and de-emphasizes the individual to show how everyday objects have come to form people's identities and even replace them.

His clock series alludes to the major influence of time in everyday life, and how this melds the individual. In the *Clock-Airplane*, a human hand, disembodied by the end of the canvas, tries to hold back the hands of time; man over machine. There is a struggle here, and perhaps the coins lend a sense of the consumerism that works "hand in hand," so to speak, with time. Simply the huge size of these clocks states their importance in the daily routine. In *Clock-Night*, the hands are mangled at a time of human rest. But is the mug off the end of the painting an allusion to a relaxing pastime or society's need to stay awake in a constantly shifting world? Are these broken clocks a symbol of how society no longer wants to be ruled under the heavy hands of time? *The Gunman and the Clock* humorously shows society's battle against time and how society has become controlled by the very mechanisms it created.

The room series deal more with society's connection with the concrete rather than the abstract (meaning time) in forming or expressing an identity. *Dad's Place* may illustrate the old-fashioned placement of male and female, the man in a suit hanging between the kitchen

and a traveling suitcase, the woman assumed to be somewhere behind him. As he leans into the room with this very large suitcase, he shares the space with a telephone on the wall. This suggests that he, the man, is the connection to the outside world, but is still tied to the inner world of the kitchen (presumably his wife).

Objects stand for people's connections to the world and symbolize the process by which they adopt their identities—through "things." Without these things we do not exist. *Telephone Ring* portrays this relationship. The telephone here is the most dominant part of the painting with its uncanny size and bold contrast to its surroundings. Indeed, the rest of the items in the painting appear to be grouped around this worshipped object. People fade from gray to nothing and objects such as the suitcase and its contents, a shelf of books, the telephone book and the newspaper are accentuated and colorized. These accentuated objects are all connections to the outside world and identity-forming tools and take on more importance than the individual. *The Abandoned Concept* emphasizes this point, as people appear to be leaving a staff meeting where a huge gray head lies visually disembodied by the door frame and apparently dead. This suggests that as a concept, human beings in society have died. Who needs them, it questions? The clocks and suits and phone books can take over, because without them, people are nothing in this world.

Birmelin insinuates a sense of displacement of the individual. People in his world have become used to identifying themselves by how they connect with the outside realm. When society changes faster than people can adapt to its changes, it becomes difficult to find an identity

to cling to. The relative concept of time has mechanized the human being, but as an organic creature, it can't adapt fast enough to keep up.

It seems as though the new, technological world makes human beings obsolete. Birmelin's work shows how the human as physical presence is becoming obsolete by the very technolo-

gy it created. The objects he chooses to depict in his paintings are not accidents, but what people cling to have a place in the world, an identity to cling to. Whether humans adapt to these changes, abandon their body, or become obsolete remains to be seen.

Untitled



Fred Tyndall

black, white, and red chalk on paper

Sarah McConnell

The collection of paintings by Robert Birmelin reflects the fact that our world has been taken over by "stuff." Although humans have created this "world full of stuff" out of a perceived need for ever more and ever bigger things, the people themselves have become secondary, almost transparent, next to all this "stuff." Everyday life in this world can deface and dehumanize people. When they stop to reflect on life, as Birmelin seems to have done in his works, they realize that they are a tiny speck in a large, messy, ugly, chaotic world. The only way for them to reclaim themselves is to unload all of the *Intellectual Baggage* created by a world such as this. We as humans have to face our feelings and passions, leave material goods behind, in order to get through to what is really important in life. We must leave this world of *Usual Disorder* and find our real home, a place in our minds where we are reality.

introduction

Tara Constanzo

When we have a chance to escape from our fast-paced lives, we are sometimes led to have a curiosity about people and situations — why things fall into place as they do. On occasion, we take the time to stop and become aware of things in our environment on a conscious level. Then we see that all people are different. If we look hard enough, we can see that people differ because of the ideals they live their lives by. Some people express their ideals in a stressful way, and others have a more carefree technique.

On an individual level, with the perspective of any one person, we can see how our attention is taken over by many things at any given moment. When we are alone, we reflect on our lives and our ideals. This is when we sort our ideals into two categories; stable and unstable. And then we live.



art by Robert Birmelin

Clock – Night

The clock is broken...
Time has stopped...

The days ever present do not pass with the speed I long for.
Shadows with geometric patterns across the room seem to take an agonizing length of time to reach their destiny;
Their final resting place.

I wait. Longing for the peace of a painless breath in my own resting place.

But time stands still...

The clock is broken.

The walls are my only friends now. Nobody sees me. Lying here alone I am convinced my world as it was has ended. The horns blaring from the traffic and noises from the life outside these walls penetrates through my senses like a slap.

I have for one brief moment the belief that what is beyond the walls waits for me. Maybe there is a world which I fit into. Then the reality hits and I settle to believe that hope is gone and no one waits.

So I watch in agony each day, as my shapes dance across the room once again.

"Take me with you," my mind screams. They too ignore me...

Is that the ticking of the clock I hear?

Now the clock is broken.

poetry by
Maria Marzocchi

P·E·R·S·P·E·C·T·I·V·E

I have come to the US from Yugoslavia to participate in a student exchange program here. I was eighteen when I came over in 1991 and remember well the war that was tearing my country apart for so long. Being pro-peace, I was part of many demonstrations and resented all the people who spurred up hatred for the sake of hatred. The horrors of war make time a relative concept. While the war with all its *Intellectual Baggage* seems far away and a thing of the past, I feel the scars it left very vividly. "Time heals all wounds" they say, but how can something as eternal as hatred and ignorance ever heal? It seems that hatred and ignorance were always part of wo/mankind and that people will always look for an opportunity to wage wars. Where I come from, wars have always been a part of the national heritage, part of the milieu that seems ingrained in my nation.

Being far away from home has made my life easier and harder. Easier, because I did not have to deal with many of the disgusting aspects of war on a daily basis, and harder because I could not handle the question: "What is actually going on in your country," which had become part of every day trivia. All that has been part of me, a part of me that is irrational, incomprehensible. How can I find an answer when I do not understand the question? So many questions, sometimes I feel like I am a thousand years old.

Maja Knezevic

Interplay

Willie Plante & Chris Manso



acrylic and oil stick on paper

Losing The Grasp

"I saw time in the paintings."

The Green Stage—first movement

I have lost the touch of reality
I find myself in a world of dreams
My body, my soul, and heart, complete insanity
And to come back, I see no means.

The sky is not blue, nor the sun yellow
The stars are not stars, but my eyes
My mood is not stable, not happy nor mellow
My blindness, between the water lies.

Like the first phase of intoxication
I've lost track of time and its measures
It's peaceful here, with no organization
Like the song I sang as a child.

*"...the contrast of white on white
to the powerful red on red."*

The White stage—second movement

I see the snow fall; yet I'm not cold
I cannot see the sky through the thick cotton
feast
I cannot hear the music, the white absorbs it.
I don't find my silhouette, someone hides it
I don't want to cry, I fake a smile
I see the blanket in front being folded.

What is truth? What is reality?
What is yesterday? What is tomorrow?
What is life? What is joy?
I'm a child, let me play, give me a toy.
I'm a bridge that connects life
I'm an absence of colors, I am white!

The Red Stage—third movement

My heart in love, full of emotions
My body naked, full of motions
My soul speaks, full of notions
My mind leaves, full of cautions
In my dreams I love her
In my dreams I draw her.

I hear her voice in other people's lips
from all the pain and through my conscience strips
My arms reach a thousand miles
She doesn't want me, but I have denials.

I know I'm dreaming because she is not mine
Yet I feel her with me.
I open my eyes and feel fine
I realize I'm colorblind.

Untitled

Russel Esposito



chalk on paper



*"Leaving and staying. Going
away and going crazy."*

BARRY THE LIMO DRIVER

Ditch this job.

Anything to ditch this job.

Good morning, Miss Taylor.

Yes, good morning.

Fine day for a ride, no?

Don't even answer; save your lip.

Always the same routine, Friday morns,

9:00 sharp, schlepping her to the beauty shop.

She was an actress; used to be something
maybe fifty years past.

She claims she's sixty,
probably's really seventy,
looks about ninety.

Her wrinkles are starting to resemble
those TV pictures of highways,
after a California quake. At least,
they partly obscure her age blemishes.
Plus she smokes like a dampened campfire;
I can almost see her blackened lungs
silhouetted beneath that stale blouse.

I prefer the sound of unpaved back roads
to that corroded hacking of hers.

I hope Denise can fix this.

I pay her a fortune.

Some faint little lines are forming,
right around my eyes.

My throat has a slight itch.

Swallowing doesn't help.

Driver, where's some water?

In the dark cabinet

by your feet, Miss Taylor.

Right where it always is, Miss Forgetful.

Guess the wrinkles of her brain

have smoothed out and magically reformed

in that ancient face. Just remember

my rates, Miss, and adjust for inflation.

It isn't 1940, you know.

About time we're here.

Denise's tits sure look tasty
through that streaked, taped-up window.
Makes my business worthwhile.

Have a good day, Miss Taylor.
Now, who's left for this merry day?

Just the adulterous stuffed-suit
who I convey to his sex partner,
and some pimply kids headed for the prom.
First, some chow and a refill
I've almost run out of gas.

Don't I have a check-up later today?

Someone will call and remind me.

I forgot to tip the driver, or thank him.
Wish I could recall his name;
He's one of the few constants I have left.

Raajiv Schoumaker

Happy Poem

CHARLES

We drove to the Cape this weekend, my girlfriend and

I, while the happy sun worked well and elephant clouds

chased airplanes. Oddly hung trees reached for electric wires

like artists' hands grip paint brushes. Some trees drank deep

a fluorescent red-orange, yet most kept their country green.

At night, the moon dragged the ocean to our feet as wind

blew against my chattering teeth. The waters sang a sweet

lullaby and a pillow of sand ate my dreams.

BIBEAULT

Of curious nature...

By: Amy Lamoureux

In my mind's eye, I am willowy.
A paperwing fairy lifted by a breeze
or perched upon Miss Havisham's bouquet—
Deathly white, crisp, ashen,
Perfect in neglect.

Dizzy and mean
with a voice of quick clear bells.
I laugh at women's pain—irreverent.
The folly of loss and misery is

A joke for my sharp, pointy disposition.
The looking glass reflects a clearer image
of pendulous motherly breasts and voluptuous swinging hips.
Strong ass rounding out peasant skirts.
My heaving body, a home.

A family reclining in my belly button.
My juices run warm like soup.
Flowing over with merry mercy and
a hearty laugh that bursts and colors the air
like October cedar smoke.
Concerned with baths and blessed thistle.

In the space in between,
I am,
More phantom than workhorse.
More midwife than princess.
A hurricane of riotous clap, a flurry of tremulous pirouette.

Bleaker street on Sunday

(Funeral)

Grave diggers smoking Parliaments,
smashing out butts on the hard packed mound
watch the little black bodies become little black blurs
winging rosary beads around wrists.
The gray marble monsters grow like elegies
in a row of concrete teeth.
Our Beloved Eternally Missed.
From The Book he reads and rolls away,
with the shadow of a sermon chasing his cadillac
and curving up his fat, pink lips.

(Visitors)

NO PARKING, barking dogs
chained to a shifty bent rail. Reading
cardboard signs FOR RENT (No Pets).
Cast iron bars crawl away from the walls
and across a face in the
a tiny stone angel in a garden of gods,
FOR RENT (Inquire Within).

(Train Dog)

Riding the train, we descend like fleas
into the skin of the city,
looking for bones in the barrel of flesh
which barks in the smoky bar room.
At dawn I walk across the park,
tired and pricked by an angel
to return to my room and scratch at the fur
which has grown on the white of my eyes.
The apple of Eden fell from the tree
and feeds a million sinners.

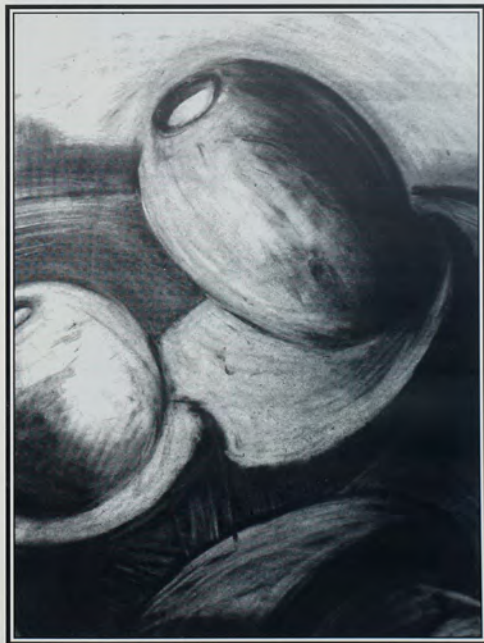
(Leaving)

The jersey pike reaches out
with veins escaped from the arm.
The bridges and bilge pumps dump waste into Trenton
sucking little bugs in, spitting little bugs out
while buses at tollbooths beep at God,
sending tail light prayers and asphalt wafers.

Melissa Lawrence

Madonna and Child

David Parkerson



charcoal on sized paper

Whiskey breath
Not the sweet smell it once was
Watching the clock turn, as I remember the past
Till death do us part

Coming Home

Anticipating pain, without eagerness
Too tired to sleep
Too tired to scream
Still, I wait

On my knees, praying
But my church can't help me anymore
My Savior? Who blessed the day we walked down the aisle?
Now I only wish I could walk away

And it's two a.m.
Lights out at the town tavern
As my husband leaves his watering hole
My cold skin fades to pale

Rob Greene



black and white chalk on gray paper

DEFENESTRATION

MONDAY

Twenty-one. Twenty. Seventeen. Twelve. *nine thirteen seventy-four.* Dear Dad, what good is a word if the code is closed to the meaning? If myth is my only friend then I am Princess Leia and you are not really God.

It's really not all that funny, but you can't help but laugh when you *have* been invited to the party, when in fact, you are the party and all the nights wicked fun is waiting on you, I, the omnipotent I.

Where is the story when the author is the player, the player is the plot and the word is a sinking ship?

Day One: I am wonderfully sick.

Mary had a little lamb whose fleece made her itch and sneeze. How dreadfully silly it seems to me, that all these people spend days and dragging days searching for soul. The myth makers, *The lollipop guild.* See the signs and the soul comes home.

TUESDAY

A bad bee day: A good strong wind blew the screen from the window in room 251. A bee flew in and tried to drown itself in a half empty can of coke. Or was the can half full? I can't remember. Dangerous Dick was brave enough to squash her with his book when she paused in the window sill for a second thought. No time for second thoughts. I

heard her buzzing, so excited by all the commotion. I wonder if she could smell the sugary crystals on the aluminum or if some other plan tracked her into the room, like luck or stupidity. I wanted to look at her guts, but Dick wiped them off with a piece of paper and her wings flew out the window.

Today I caught the bookcase getting rowdy again. The hard covers were squishing my poor baby paperbacks. It's a good thing books learned to talk and hate so brilliantly! I once had a lover who used to like to do it standing up. For balance, I would hold tight to a shelf of the case until he was done. One night, I pulled it over on top of me. It really didn't hurt, but he thought it was too dangerous to let things collapse. He never did it there again.

Gravity is the gayest sport of all.



Lupo's HeartbreakHotel

Paul Moore

pasted on paper

WEDNESDAY

Dear Professor Peculiar,

Oh! How I adore your lectures. It is so refreshing to sit in class and listen to you speak Greek. I am excited for the droning days ahead which stretch out before us seeing as the semester has just begun. And you were so clever, so generous to choose room 251. Did you know that there is no screen in the window, or is this just my luck, or lack thereof?

Your Humble Student,

xx

Blessed be that god in the highest who is thankfully still below me. In the name of my father for the protection of his son and in the name of the holy spirit who left us all in the dark.

I forget no one in my prayers. Some people don't know how lucky they are. My mother would often sing me to sleep, even when I did not deserve it.

Rock a bye baby on the tree top, you think you're so smart but you're really not. When the bough breaks, the cradle gets fun and up comes the baby and the beast all in one.

"Poetry is the great bird flown away," he tells me. "Write for liberation," he concludes. Professor, to find my voice suggests it exists. That is generous of you. Poetry is the bird dead on the side of the road.

Slippery slippery, the foggy glass, an obstructed view of a wall. Piggly Wiggly eating cake and puking into a bag. Oh how funny, puking into a bag!

THURSDAY

Dear Johnny Buck,

It was sure nice of you to buy me that drink last night. I'm sorry that I wouldn't let you shove your fist up my skirt, but I haven't been feeling quite myself lately. Perhaps when hell freezes over, I'll give you a call and we can go at it again. Never truly yours forever.

The window. Professor Peculiar, there you go again. How lovely you look in your new tweed blazer. If only I'd had the time to learn Greek. It is hard to accept yourself when the signals no longer make the sign. I have tried to look closer, to reconstruct the pieces left behind me, but what good is a symbol if it doesn't make any sense? But sir, I do love my new seat by the window. I can see the old buildings and the greener grass on the other side of the fence. There are enough holes to give you a good view of the lawn, but I sometimes wonder about the things kept tight and close to the boards, well beyond the windows and the gate. Even if I hate it, they won't let me back over? Right?

Promise.

post script: Your Greek is no worse than theirs, sir. In fact, I rather like the shallow pitch of it.

Test: In 150 words or less discuss the significance of everything I made you copy off the board. Use specific examples from your notes.

one hundred-fifty words discussing the insignificance of all the shit you said and more of what you didn't. that laws are lions crouched in the grass waiting for you to rest.

devouring you because rape is not wrong if there is no blue blood spilled on the pavement, that is the law that is the lion and you sir have been mistaken, wisdom only comes with age because age makes you bitter and then you can stop looking because looking makes you sick so there is more time for listening to yourself, say it fast a hundred times if it will make you remember, this life is only part for me because I was a sponge but I am full and god has not forgiven me for it, I can do in one word what has been hidden behind one hundred and fifty and tell you that it sucks.

Wake up your sleepy head.

FRIDAY

They asked me today to tell them about my dream. To tell them truly and safely so that they would understand. Doctors in white coats, but not in the right coats.

My dream is that there would be no screens. Whatever that was out would be welcomed in, and whatever that was in would be welcomed out. And they would mix and mingle like the musical notes in the middle of Beethoven's fourth. When you sat next to the window during class, you would be able to see clear out *when* the window was finally opened. In my dream, your eyes never tire from the tiny stitch of screens, because there is no struggle to see through, if you know what you are staring at.

Rm. 251: The breeze from the window cools me down. It must not be a bad bee day because there are bees buzzing in this

room, only the scrape and erase of twenty one pencils scrambling to write themselves. I wish I could bring all the bees who have been killed here back into the room. Then even Dangerous Dick and Courageous Cathy couldn't kill them all. They haven't even noticed that the screen has been pushed out. They begin to cure only when the bees try to come in and buzz or suck sugar from their lips. But now there are no bees coming in. The bees have flown back to the hive.

—It's not right, she tells me. You can't be angry at everything. No one comes looking to hurt you, sometimes it just happens that way.

—It's all wrong, she tells me. The way that I act when people are trying to help me. You are a coward, she says. A coward who tries to destroy everything by stripping away the beauty and the fun.

—Catherine, I tell her, I am not angry at everyone, only someone. Cathy, if you are so courageous and I am so wrong, then why are you scared of me?

And by the way, this is not fun.

I know that outside there is no welcoming bank playing or courtesy calls, but there must be greener grass on the other side. If there weren't, people would have stopped begging to jump over a long time ago. It is good that I remember these things, things like my phone number, my anger and that life is only a hop, a skip and a jump away.

THE END

Melissa Lawrence

drowning

you unclose in me revolutions,
losing me in your color, your slight movement,
my color (for I also have that in me which moves and loses)

like the sun turning flowers, silently,
you embrace me, and I, also like the sun
(though more like water), embrace you, too.

Untitled



Mark Pedini

so we together hold in perfect circles,
in waves and fingers and hands and spindrift,
all shedding the shapes that have kept them (always containing)
moving in slow dark stains
(like spilled water) into one blue space
(like green beginnings) into open-mouthed movements

because we do not need motion or speech, because
we let things take us, because the colors are what matter most,
we open, and that is what I hope we have (this that we hold here together).

Jason Peters

The Man I Killed

If we had met in the fields
Nurtured by the sperms of the sky
We could have marveled at the gaits of plants
Thrusting their arms into the sky

If we had met in the forest
Armed with polished spears
We could have hunted the graceful deer
And returned home filled with smiles

We could have learned the secrets of numbers
And the solemn whispers of distant stars
If we had met in mystic schools



Untitled

Heather Richardson

various patches on paper

But:

We met on the battle field
Where corpses were the signs of victory
Where the vultures yearned for their harvest
And where my clean sword longed for a stain
And the sheep in me craved to be lion
So I tore his bowels
And was strengthened by the scent of his blood
And now by the heritage of steel
I fearlessly tread forbidden paths.

Silas Obadiah

I WORE A HAT

I wore a hat
and hated everybody.
Man.
Twitch, Twitchboy, Twitch!
Like a roomful
of ballerinas
badly beaten bloody
under setting sun on
Halloween.
Like a roomful
of ballerinas
badly beaten bloody
under setting sun on
Halloween
And she never wore
a bra.
Creaking futon under
dimpled ass
And quietly, I knew what love meant.

Bob Sanka



Untitled
chalk on paper, 3-D art
by
Trina Amber

Playing Barbies

We dig them out a little wistfully tonight,
 full of margaritas and nostalgia,
 sitting cross-legged on your bedroom floor
 remembering long-ago afternoons
 spent playing Barbies,
 talking about movies and boys
 and what we would do when we got older.
 (A little drunk.
 You say that you want to go to Los Angeles
 and stalk Quentin Tarantino
 until he falls madly in love with you—
 or at least casts you in one of his movies—
 and I reply that I would like to be
 a cultural icon,
 someone unconventional and intriguing;
 an enigmatic poet searching endlessly
 for the real-life hero of her fictions,
 a man modeled at various times after
 Captain Kangaroo
 Michael Stipe,
 Atticus Finch,
 and lately Rick,
 although he never speaks my dialogue
 the way that it's written,
 and he refuses to follow
 the plots that I've constructed.)
 Our Barbies are identical
 except for the color of their hair,
 a remark that has often been made
 about the two of us,
 although we could never see the similarity,
 and unlike the dolls,
 we're certainly not stamped from the same mold.
 Our Barbies are successful,
 beautiful and strong—
 all the things that we wish to be,

for Dawn...

and perhaps are,
 although we'll never be able to see it;
 existing always in the shadow of her perfection,
 envying the self assurance
 that allowed her to be
 an astronaut,
 a cow girl,
 a cordon bleu chef.
 And perhaps that's why
 we've held on to her all these years,
 even after the rest of our childhoods
 had been packed away into storage,
 or sold off at yard sales
 a quarter at a time;
 even though we are adults now
 and our games have become more complex.
 Both of us twenty-something
 playing at being grown-ups
 with apartments of our own
 and jobs that we swear are only temporary,
 plans for the futures we are still uncertain of
 although they have already begun.
 Both of us leading lives so different
 from *T.V. sitcoms*
 or stories told to us by our parents,
 bored over photo albums
 at anniversaries and retirement parties.
 Lives so different from what
 we were promised they would be.
 Facing decisions we are unprepared for
 in spite of years of Sunday School
 and college philosophy classes.
 If the museum were burning
 would you save the old woman
 or the priceless painting?
 And how do you apply that to

growing regrets,
 families dissolving,
 or friends with AIDS?
 Expectations that lessen daily,
 and relationships that bear little resemblance
 to playing house with teddy bear husbands,
 or kisses given on a dare in the school yard.
 "Timmy Davis likes you" and "Do you like him?"
 whispered behind reference books in the library,
 and longing looks
 exchanged across lunchtime cafeterias
 in the seventh grade.
 Afternoons after school
 spent hanging around the band room,
 sighing over Jay Berndt and Matt Ryan,
 crying on the floor of the girl's locker room,
 or making out in the balcony of the auditorium
 after high school talent shows,
 drunk on Midori
 snuck from your parent's liquor cabinet
 and the euphoria of first love.
 It amazes us sometimes how different our lives are
 from the way that we imagined they would be
 as children.
 Remembering scenarios
 enacted by Barbie and Ken
 on rainy Saturday afternoons,
 or daydreamed over the pages
 of Judy Blume novels,
 watching jealously
 as the older girls in our families
 picked out prom dresses,
 and later china patterns,
 impatient for the day
 when we would finally become them.
 Late at night in familiar places,

imagining lives we'd rather be living,
 or alone at dawn
 facing the choice we've made
 and the people that we've become,
 we try to pinpoint the exact moment
 when we changed our minds
 about it all,
 mourning dreams abandoned along the way,
 and wondering, sometimes,
 if we made the right decisions.

Rosilind Sibielski

Black Fairytale

Last night I dreamed of us buried in a cathedral of trees
Overgrown with grasses and wild honeysuckle.
We were a work of art, entwined and delicate like Klimt's kiss.
You were warm and swollen and lovely,
I was a rainforest, expectant.
It was our moment, perfect in lust.
The man in black robes shoveled the dirt into the hole
that filled our mouths and noses.
You clutched my hand and we faded together breathing earth.
People watched with mired eyes as we returned to the womb
Watering us with regretful tears.
From our corpses, malevolent fertilizer, a tree grew.
Black twisted knotty with leaves sprung slick and scarlet.
No birds nested in this tree,
For its fire dripping branches gave off a heat
that singed the air around them.
It was a nightmare of nature.
Our connection had birthed this freak that children came
in dare to see.
Priests and prophets winced in horror and disbelief
And poets' pens were struck dumb.
Wasn't this what we had always wanted,
To be feared and revered and eternal?
You clutched my hand in morbid faith
and I bled from your barbed wire embrace.
Thoughts clawed at my brain—
Our desire, our death, our unholy love.
My blood bubbled cold in my veins.
With fists full of dust, I tore at the roots.
Simply you smiled the sweet sadistic smile of tyrants and madmen.
When I woke from this oracle
Gasping for clear morning air,
My sheets were damp and you had gone.

Amy Lamoureux



charcoal on paper

Untitled



Billy Ray

black and white photograph

THE FIVE YEAR GAP BETWEEN my sister and I always felt insurmountable, as though she were a cool, junior version of Ma, while I never seemed to progress past that awkward stage. I'm short, like Dad, with his thick untamable curls and stubby legs that look heavier than they feel. Marie had Ma's same straight, shiny chestnut hair, her long thin fingers, her deep-set, charcoal-colored eyes. Marie and Ma didn't think alike, though.

We weren't blessed with the kind of "Mod" parents who attached themselves to their children's lives while witnessing the passing of

I reaped some profit from having a Bohemian sister. I was the first kid in third grade with a "Meet the Beatles" lunchbox. Marie selected it over the plaid one my mother suggested. And I could sing all the words to *Tambourine Man*, among many other Pop and Folk songs, on request. Without Marie, I would have ended up missing the cultural revolution altogether.

Marie leaving the door open in her room, even a crack, was taken as an open invitation. I was allowed access to her stuffed animals when she wasn't there, and when she was

THREE PURPLE ROSES

their own conventions. Our parents stopped acknowledging social and cultural trends sometime around the end of McCarthyism. Maybe that caused Marie to slip further, deeper than most, past where any of us could reach.

My parents didn't come to this country to make a stand, just to make a living and pass on sound, moral family traditions. Nothing more. Marie's request at twelve years old to become a British exchange student after seeing the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, or her petition the following summer that we abandon our annual trek to Aunt Lena's beach cabin in Jersey for a two week excursion on an Indian Reservation in Wyoming startled my parents; though they found her mildly entertaining. A kid with a big imagination. I'm sure they thought she'd meet someone who would whisk her around the world.

there I got to sit and listen in as she and her girlfriends chattered and teased one another — from Rolling Stones concerts they pretended to go to, to high school quarterbacks they fantasized about dating, to Mr. Bennet, the new English teacher they denied being infatuated with. I learned things my parents were oblivious to, like how to make a psychedelic chain out of braided gum wrappers, or how to wear eyeliner, or how to get a Ouija board to tell you what boy you would end up with. Marie granted me permission to absorb all of this great adolescent sophistication. I took it all in greedily, more than anything offered in either catechism or my ongoing Saturday afternoon cooking apprenticeship with Ma. I listened, I repeated, but at the time I was too young to understand most of it.

Marie and I weren't close forever. Something about high school changed her. I became

more of a nuisance than a mascot playmate. Suddenly an older crowd held more appeal than a runt. Since I didn't know how to be cool without her, I lost my link to self-actualization and popularity. More than that, something truly changed about Marie. She was moving further away from me and Ma and Dad, to the point that there was no reaching her.

It began in August, the last week, when my mother took us both into the city for our annual school shopping spree. Each of us would get new shoes, usually patent leather, one or two nice dresses, a few pleated wool skirts, and some blouses and sweaters which my mother carefully chose so that we would look like the ideal American princesses, instead of the two mousy offspring of an immigrant mechanic. We got to choose our favorite color or print, but Ma chose the styles every year based upon fashion hints she found in *McCall's*.

This year Marie didn't like any clothes that Ma picked out for her, said they weren't really her. Now I had no idea what this meant, because you always buy school clothes that aren't necessarily you. You get clothes that show the teachers and the principals and the popular kids what you're supposed to be. Even I knew that. The clothes that were you were the denims and baggy tee shirts you wore around the house on Saturdays or outside playing.

Ma would hear nothing of it, and bought the necessary fall selections for her anyway. As I walked by my mother's side on the way home, she asked me why Marie didn't like the clothes she picked out. Marie walked a block ahead of us carrying the packages of clothes which she would never wear.

I didn't know how to answer, mainly because I truly didn't understand my sister's sudden distrust for our mother's fashion sense, conserva-

tive as it was. Or why my mother would ask me rather than confront the source of her discontent. Such questions would continue well into the school year and beyond.

"Nah, Marie doesn't feel like talking to me today, I can tell. Why aggravate her? I just thought that you might know. Sisters share things together that they don't always share with their mother."

Maybe in some families, not in this one. Not any more. The five years that separated us had now categorized me as a pest of a baby sister, not to be trusted. The days of Marie letting me into her room while she listened to records and did her homework were over. Color coordinating my hair ribbons to match my outfits was of no interest to her. She was happier talking to her friends on the telephone than sharing her insides with me. I accepted it. I had no choice but to be left out as though I were forever stuck in a pew between my parents, while she escaped to a folk mass in the church basement.

For as far back as I can remember, I've never really been a calm person. Even as a child, there was always some shield of anxiety that separated me from my environment. Watching everyone and everything too closely, waiting for an explosion and being the only one who could hear the bomb ticking.

I was right there when it went off. Children have an extraordinary perception of underlying negative currents in their environment is what my analyst says. I didn't realize that's what it was then. I just thought that my family was on the verge of blowing up, leaving me to watch.

Marie flowed with the social upheaval of 1968. Sixteen and ready to be embraced by the flower power movement. My sister feared nothing. She grew tall and leggy and walked with

the confidence I longed for. She wasn't tied to the confines of our tiny Brooklyn apartment. She knew that there was more to life than Lawrence Welk on Saturday night and Mass on Sunday.

That pull, Marie adamantly wearing long wavy bellbottoms and me being forced to shove my plump little butt into leotards and plaid skirts, kept me uneasy. It threw me into the role of diplomatic representative in a battleground comparable to the most gut-grIPPING fear and devastation that any Vietnam vet could recall in his wildest flashbacks, at Apartment 3A on East 105th.

The Old Regime, my parents, lived up to every Roman Catholic expectation concerning the institutions of marriage and parenthood each and every day of their every day lives without so much as one complaint. Dad never missed a day at the garage, except for the time when he had bronchial pneumonia and the doctor forced him to stay home for three days straight in 1971. For all the rest of those thirty-five years of work, my mother made sure that every night at 5:30 sharp dinner was on the table. Not the kind of casserole and frozen vegetable dinners I make for my husband and boys during the week. Preparation began early in the afternoon so as to perfectly synchronize the finish of the meal with my father's arrival. The pungent bite of roasted peppers and parmesan cheese scraped at the roof of my mouth, greeting me at the end of each school day. Bags of pork parts sat on the counter waiting for my mother to grind them and stuff them into intestinal casings. Fat coagulated in swine blood sent shock waves of disgust and disappointment through me each time that I looked into the wrong bag for cookies.

My father arrived home each night at 5:15, washed his hands, changed out of his mechan-

ic's jumper and sat down to eat with all of his family. My mother's major responsibility of the day had been fulfilled, usually without objection. If the meal was defective in any way, though, the eggplant too thick and green inside, the sauce with too much oregano, then there was potential for problems. Those were the nights that my father excused himself from the table, took his hat and coat and went to my Uncle Tommy's restaurant for dinner. Indeed a rarity, but each time humiliation gripped at my throat, causing dinner to squeeze down my esophagus in unchewed chunks. Mom never mentioned it, just quietly continued with her meal.

My sister apparently didn't want to inherit this Old Regime structure, didn't want any structure at all. Living every moment, that was the way she explained it. Like when she'd leave each morning for school, but never really get there. It was impossible for me to know all the details, since I was still in sixth grade, but I knew she was making discoveries well outside of the realm of her classes.

Marie changed from being my big sister who loved to French braid my hair on Sundays for church, into some mysterious shadow who sometimes forgot I even existed.

Her bedroom changed. I inherited all of her stuffed animals without even asking, a collection I had been coveting since the beginning of time. She used her birthday money to buy a big woolly, ugly Indian print blanket to cover her bed and shoved the white eyelet one into the closet. It was brown, very brown. Every brown under the Indian sun was reflected on that wool blanket. With oranges, burnt sienna, tangerine, striped across the prism of brown, weighed down by thick brown and golden fringes. It made my poor mother cringe, but

somewhat she allowed it. Perhaps Marie told her that all the other Americanized kids had them.

And of course there was other weird paraphernalia around her bedroom which my middle age parents and I were oblivious to. Clips, bottles and pipes that I saw as mere Indian accessories to match the God-awful bedspread-compensation for the trip to Wyoming denied to her in eighth grade. And there were the secret poems and letters scribbled in flowery handwriting, carefully tucked away in a drawer full of panty girdles that Ma would buy her and she would refuse to wear. Messages which I knew unlocked some mystery, and which I made great attempts at deciphering whenever opportunity presented itself. But before I could truly make progress, all of the boxes and drawers which I pried into on a regular basis as part of my little sisterhood were suddenly locked or empty. Marie wasn't up to sharing anymore.

Above all else, the biggest clue I picked up on was Eric. No last name, just Eric. "Why be confined? My surname is the flowers in Central Park, the sunshine stretching to reach over these prisons of concrete to give nourishment to a hungry people." That was Eric.

Eric was older than Marie, looked about thirty, but I think that the dirt and hair aged him beyond his earthly years. I saw him outside on our stoop for the first time waiting for Marie to come home. He had sandals, hairy toes and a beat up guitar case. I assumed my mother was too busy stuffing porkchops or washing the sand out of the escarole to notice this creature perched upon her doorstep. Or maybe she was chopping garlic and the cloves were keeping him at bay. My first impression was that of immediate and total fear for my life. The big bad wolf was here.

"Hey Small Fry, you live here?" Eric

strummed no apparent tune on the beat up folk guitar.

"Why?" I wasn't stupid. We saw movies about wayward strangers in school.

"Well," his voice strummed along with the music. "I was looking for Beautiful Marie, the Goddess of Love and Temperance. Do you know her?"

The way he looked through me with those round dark blue glasses, I thought he was blind. Then I thought he must be, along with deaf and really dumb if he thought Marie was a Goddess. "Yeah, I know her. Who are you?"

"An admirer. Who are you?" He smiled but not at me.

"Angela, Marie's my sister. Wait here." I bolted past him and almost slammed the door with my sweater in it.

I knew my mother would call the police if she saw some furry animal looking for Marie. I ran upstairs, nudged the bolt, peeking out through the living room lace curtains to see if he left. He was still there, strumming away.

Eric was not exactly the kind of character that you brought upstairs to the third floor apartment of Henry and Dorena Compagno. Not in a house where Mario Lanza still ruled the hi-fi, and Dean Martin was considered the ultimate in cool.

That afternoon I watched Eric sit on the stoop waiting for my sister. I was petrified that my sister would be kidnapped, or worse, that my father would get home first and be accosted by this hobo. I knelt, the wool carpet pinching my knees, peering out the living room window. The black rotary phone remained at arms length on the endtable, as I waited for him to make a move. One more inch towards my door or my innocent family, and I was calling the police. I would protect my mother as she hummed softly

to herself and diced the potatoes and cagates for the frittata.

That afternoon of defending my family soil was the same day I learned that something was wrong with my big sister. She got off the bus from what we thought at the time was a full day of schooling and rushed into the arms of this d'oula, or demon, as my father would later refer to him. Then they took off together hand in hand, one of his paws holding his greasy guitar case and one around my sister's slender waist. I was dumbfounded. She really couldn't find him appealing, could she? She used to like Davy Jones.

I lived an anxious, quiet existence during the weeks that followed, each day fearing that Eric and Marie would run away together, over the border and forgotten forever. Or worse, I would be home when she decided the time was right to introduce him to Ma and Dad.

I saw him several times on our stoop in the upcoming weeks, and although I strained with all of my heart to trust my sister's choice of boyfriend, or very much older man friend, I couldn't quite grasp what she saw that made her hug his musky smelling body and be close to his prickly brownish red beard. No matter that I hardly understood a word he said. Poetry was my favorite subject at school, but the sonnets of Shakespeare and the poetic happenings of Eric were two totally different things.

Eric was never mean to me, or any living creature, as I'm sure was part of his credo of existence. Why didn't I like him? Because he looked different and acted different and smelled different from every other human being I knew? I should have practiced my Monday afternoon catechism lessons, that we're all God's children, all brothers and sisters, but I wasn't ready to admit to Eric's equal existence with the rest of

humanity.

So while my mother cooked and butchered and fried in blissful ignorance upstairs, and my father busted his ass to put that beautiful food on the table in the first place, which he felt was even more important than Ma cooking it, Eric and Marie traipsed around the city day and night. When she started missing dinner altogether, my parents took notice.

My father considered a child's missing dinner a slap in the face to the parents who raised her. One night early in October when Marie didn't get home for the 5:30 tribute, my father decided to question the remaining family members, to investigate this disrespect from his eldest child. He immediately blamed my mother.

"Why can't you keep track of that girl? This isn't the first time she hasn't shown up for supper. What kind of trouble is she getting herself into, that's what I want to know." I sank down at the table, lowered my head and chopped my veal into tiny pieces so that it wouldn't get stuck in my throat once the arguing started.

"I told you I don't know where she is. She may be with a girlfriend, studying. Maybe lost track of the time...."

"Dorena, it's six-thirty! She's an hour late. Her dinner is ruined, it's dark outside, and no one's heard from her. Such disrespect I have never seen before." My father rarely yelled. Normally if he was angry he just stared you down, burnt a hole through your skull, and walked away. You always knew what those looks meant. The "How could you disappoint your mother and me?" look. The "I already told you what to do and you did the opposite" look, or the "These meatballs are as hard as rocks, I'll eat with my brother Tommy who knows how to cook" stare that he held especially for my mother.

er. Actual yelling meant he was out of control.

I knew it was only a matter of moments before the questions turned to me. I was the link to the world of children. I understood how the younger generation thought, but I was still young enough, still under their thumb enough to fear for my life if I disobeyed.

"Angie, where's your sister?" I heard the words from my mother's mouth this time, a surprise since my father was acting as interrogator. I simply shrugged my shoulders and stuffed three mouthfuls of veal and peppers into me. Not polite to talk with a mouthful.

"Why should she not even call?" My father never let the possibility enter his mind that she was in danger. Her absence was caused by her own lack of respect for her father and mother and her baby sister upon whom she was making a lousy impression.

After dinner my father had stopped talking and announced he was going to Tommy's for a beer. Ma and I cleared the table and did the dishes. She let me wash because I hated drying. I was tempted to tell her about Eric. They needed to know about this man who talked in iambic pentameter and was monopolizing all of Marie's time. It was my duty to live up to my past performances as fink, like when Marie took two dollars out of Ma's purse that time to buy a valentine for Freddy Gizzarelli. I took great joy in turning her in, mostly because the robbery had left less for my valentine treats.

I rehearsed what I would say while sudsy water filled the sink. It caused me great anxiety, this particular finking. Ma wouldn't just yell or spank or send her to her room. Marie was almost an adult. How do you punish a grown person?

I could sense my mother's distance as we cleaned up. Normally she would ask me ques-

tions about school or explain something she saw on television that day. But tonight she quietly stroked the dishrag over what I washed and put everything away, which would have been Marie's job if she was there. Her silence ate at me because I knew she was scared, that she had noticed a change in her Marie but didn't know how to approach it. And I couldn't help her.

"I wonder if Marie's got a boyfriend, Ma. Maybe she's on a date." I looked down and wiped my hands on the tomato-gravy stained apron wrapped around me twice. In this way I tested the waters of my mother's temper.

"Well she had better not be. Not without your father and I knowing about it. Girls out with boys all night, no telling where they've been. What kind of girl does that?" My mother's hands were on her hips and I could see the steam inside her bubbling to the surface. "What do you know about a boy?"

"Nothing, Ma, nothing." It was either retreat or risk being trampled. Knowing my mother as the calmer of the pair, I concluded that my parents were definitely not ready for Eric. Hell, they weren't ready for Pat Boone when it came to dating their daughter. I would have to be careful. Maybe eventually, over a long period of time, I could help them figure it out. Tatting was one thing, causing bodily injury was another.

Marie strolled in around 8:30, luckily before Dad got back from Uncle Tommy's. Actually, it was less of a stroll and more of a slither, past the living room where my mother watched *The Lucy Show* and embroidered part of her Norman Rockwell Four Freedoms embroidery kit that she sent away for in the back of *Good Housekeeping*.

Maybe my mother didn't notice or maybe she felt too hurt that her daughter just sneaked

past her. Either way, she didn't call after her or anything.

She wasn't getting by me though. I planned my strategy carefully as I wrapped up my algebra homework at the kitchen table. I knew my job. To find out what exactly I was covering up for her sake at the dinner table. I followed her quietly and stuck my head between the cascades of beads lining her doorway.

I was immediately shocked at what I saw. Not so much as her undressing, pulling her indigo poncho over her head to reveal her smooth olive skin, not even caring that she left that day without a bra on, which everyone here would kill her about if they knew it. The vine with three purple roses growing out of her navel and up through her chest, that's what I couldn't believe.

"Oh my God." The words came out of my mouth and my cover was blown as Marie was just getting the poncho over her head. She pulled it back over her and crossed her arms.

"Get out of here, you little sneak!" She was aware of her projection, and snarled in a whisper to me: "Since when do you go sneaking up on people undressing, you little pervert?"

"Since when do you go doing that?" I snapped right back. Go ahead make a scene so Ma can come in here and murder you, I thought. "Shut up and get in here. Close the door." I hesitated.

"Now."

I jumped into what was now transformed into her happy hunting ground playroom and sat on an overstuffed pillow on the floor. I waited for a rational explanation.

"You cannot tell anybody about this. Do you hear me, not Ma or Dad, no one." She was bending over me and holding her hands to my shoulders.

"But why did you do that to yourself?" I was waiting to hear how Eric persuaded her into turning her belly into a wild rose garden.

"Because I needed to enhance my physical elegance. Because it's beautiful to look at, it makes me feel special inside. They're wild roses, like the ones that grow on the beach shore." Marie turned away from me and rubbed the flowers on her belly.

"But no one can even see them but you." The silence after that naive remark of the year pounded the reality into my skull that my sister and Eric the human hairball were doing it, enough for my sister to paint a picture on herself to better his view.

"I won't tell," came out of me with dejection. "You don't trust me at all and I never said anything about Eric to anyone. And they'd kill you if they ever took a look at him." I got up and slowly moped out of the room. My sister didn't trust me. I was one of them.

"Angie, I'm sorry." Her long thin arm reached out to grab at my ponytail. She looked really sad, sadder than I felt. "It's just that I have to have some privacy sometimes, I'm practically an adult. Ma and Dad live in a different time. They have no idea what life is all about. I can't be like them."

"What about me?" I wanted to cry so badly but I just choked it back, causing a phony gasping for air sound. Why couldn't she tell me these secrets of life that my parents were oblivious to? Why did I have to get left behind?

Marie hugged me hard and her hair fell from her shoulders to mine. "Don't worry Sweetie. You're way smarter than I am. You'll find your own way."

I wiped my nose on her bare arm and noticed a few red marks on the crease inside her elbow. "What are those?"

"Nothing, just pimples."
 "I have Clearasil in my drawer if you need it."
 "Nah, they'll dry up. Now let me change up. Alone."

I dried my face and went back to the kitchen to get my books and go to bed in what used to be the spare room before I was born. My mother called out to me from the sofa.

"Angie, come here."
 Time for debriefing. I was sure of it.
 "Yes, Ma?" I sat next to her on the couch, careful not to disturb her needlework.

"Angie, was that your sister? Is she okay?"
 "Yeah, Ma. She's okay. She was just out with Laura and lost track of time. You know how things are when you're in high school."
 "Did she say where she was?"
 "Why don't you ask her? You should talk to her, Ma."

"She'll only yell at me. I'm an old woman to her. She thinks I nag. I just don't want her to get mixed up in anything bad. You know."

I kissed my mother on the forehead. You're not an old woman." I went to bed and hoped that my mother would have the courage to confront my sister before there was a big explosion.

"Why can't I educate myself? Out in the world where real people live and real things happen?" She tried to convince my mother that appearing at school was the Establishment's attempt at mind control.

"Because you're a little girl, with a big imagination, and you don't want to be with the wrong bunch of people teaching you the wrong things, that's why. Now don't let your father hear any of this or I don't know what will happen." My mother's panic drained her cheeks of the color gained from standing over her boiling

macaroni water.

"Please Maria. Be a good girl for a few more years. Then you can marry someone nice and learn whatever you want." My mother always called her Maria when she was impassioned. Just like she called me Angelina or my father Enrico. The ethnicity would slip out of her no matter how hard she tried to act like an American housewife.

"Ma, I can't wait for some man to teach me about life. I'm my own person, not somebody's possession. Life is more than giving some guy a good meal and an obligatory lay for the sake of tradition."

The snap of my mother's dishpan hand against Marie's cheek sent me out from my hiding place behind the kitchen doors and to the safety of my room. I couldn't bear to see my sister cry. But it was my mother's pain that I heard as Marie stomped down the stairs and out of the apartment.

This was my mother's attempt at reasoning with her eldest daughter.

All through October and the beginning of November Marie was home less and less. It was too cold for even the Woolly Mammoth to hang around outside. Instead of going to school, she met him in the mornings. Ma got a call telling her that her daughter had missed thirty of the last forty-five school days. Was she dropping out? My mother had enough, and her one and only attempt at confrontation was mediocre at best.

Dad didn't mention the absence of his daughter from the dinner table much anymore. He'd ask my mother about Thanksgiving dinner, what we were having, who was coming over. Our typical Thanksgiving started with antipasto, then the chicken soup with the little meatballs which to this day I still don't know

the name of, then a lasagna, then the turkey. Weeks of preparation went into this meal, it was almost bigger than Christmas. Christmas had more sweets and gift buying to occupy the women's time than planning the actual meal.

After a few more weeks of missing dinner, and a few more weeks of Marie sneaking in and away from our parents questions, and when they could get her to sit still long enough, a few more fruitless arguments, my parents stopped asking. As far as they were concerned the three of us were ignorant to what was going on. Most of Marie's girlfriends stopped calling. Some new people, people I had never met, called from time to time, but she was hardly ever around to take the calls. Someone named Heather whose voice was so soft and slow that you could barely understand her. My father never had the patience and would just say she's not here call later really fast and hang up. There were the Zodiac Twins, Gemini and Aquarius, who had taken on their sun signs as their first names. That's what Marie explained to me when I asked her one of the rare nights that she let me into her room.

"What do their parents think?"
 "About what?"
 "About them not having real names." I began to sneak a peek at some of the sheet music lying on the floor while Marie lay face down across her bed.

"The parents probably don't know. Probably don't care either." Her voice was muffled into the Indian blanket.

"Ours do." I hoped she would readily agree. And she cared too, she would say, and we were all happy together as a family. All this confusion was just a stage, and we would go back to before when she and I would sit on her bed with the white eyelet comforter and play monopoly

after school, and I would not really understand all the rules and end up making patterns of houses and hotels between the candlewick knots on the spread. And then Tammy or Laura would call and she would go talk and I'd be left moving the puppy piece around the board, eventually playing with myself and winning by my own imaginary rules. I could live with that, with being left for Laura Mitchell. I couldn't stand being left for Eric and the Zodiac Twins, and all the other weird things that kept digging a trench between my sister and my parents, trenches that I could crawl through now, for a while, but which were getting longer and muddier and more slippery every day. Pretty soon I wouldn't be able to reach her at all.

"Maybe they care about you. You're still young enough to be manipulated. But not about me. I'm past the point of no return."

These were not the words I was hoping for. Marie rolled to the end of the bed and springing up. I had left the sheet music and was staring listlessly into her aqua lava lamp. Blobs of blue bubbled and swirled around in what would look like the start of a new pattern, but all ended up the same. My stomach felt like one of those blue blobs, sinking, to the bottom of the lamp. I didn't want to answer her. I didn't want to fight with her because then I might lose her.

"Pretty cool isn't it?" she sat at the end of the bed and watched my amazement with the lamp. "Eric's got one that's the most intense green. It's about five feet high. It just draws you in, makes you stare at it until you're actually inside it. You know what I mean?"

I didn't want to live in a lava lamp. "Sounds cool," I answered, pretending to understand. I got up to leave. I knew I didn't belong in there.

"Just so you know, I don't think you're past

the point of no return."

"I know."

Her answer made my nose tingle, but I was determined not to be too emotional. Tears were for babies, for people who couldn't keep their head. Our parents always taught us that the only time it made sense to cry was if you were hurt, or if someone died.

If by chance Marie did make it in for an occasional meal, no one acknowledged her. Far be it from them to meddle. She was almost seventeen now. If she didn't care about her parents, they would pretend they didn't care, too. That's what they would say after she left the table.

So our family of four became a family of three. I was now the oldest, the youngest and an only child. An interesting position, almost enviable. My parents went to great lengths to make sure I was happy, well-adjusted and obedient. That also meant, unfortunately, that they watched me like two vultures, waiting for me to step over the line of parental authority. A lot of pressure for an eleven year old who was already too anxious about puberty to do much about the degenerating mass that was becoming her big sister.

Marie looked like hell, there was no other way to describe her. That creamy skin that was olive in the winter and chocolate in the summer now was just greenish yellow. Her eyes looked hungry, so did her body. But she rarely ate anything when we saw her. All she needed was short blond hair and she could have passed for Twiggy. A mean, cranky Twiggy.

Everything about us made Marie angrier and angrier. Our apartment was too small, there was no privacy. The food we ate was made of dead animals, which made us barbarians. The TV shows we watched were dulling our minds.

Nothing was sacred. If my parents tried to defend themselves, she would just growl at them and walk away. Sometimes I think they put up with her insults just to hear her voice.

I truly didn't understand her anymore, and she rarely even looked at me except to call me a little robot of the Establishment. Thanks, I thought. See if I'm lying to cover your butt anymore. And most importantly, I thought, who are you and what did you do with my big sister.

Our household strife couldn't get in the way of the much anticipated holiday celebration. It would be me, Ma, Dad, Uncle Tommy and Aunt Theresa, my cousins Tony, Bobby and Sarah, Grandma and her sister, Aunt Frannie and maybe, hopefully, Marie.

The night before, I helped my mother with all of the cleaning; dusting, vacuuming, making the house look presentable. And it was, until the guests started parading in. Uncle Tommy along with his family and a fifteen pound pon of lasagna, Dad with Grandma and Aunt Frannie, walking each one separately up the three flights of stairs, slowly so that they could rest their rubber tipped canes on each ascending step. Cheeks were pinched, dollar bills were stuffed into little hands. Just like every holiday. Except no Marie.

With all the family and all the confusion, everyone talking at the same time and who's fighting about sitting at the kiddie table and who can't chew no one really noticed Marie and Eric's entrance. Then Uncle Tommy dropped a big chunk of provolone which was meant for his mouth onto the floor. No one in our family had ever seen real live hippies before, just on the news or in *Life* magazine. I, of course, was a veteran to this type of sighting, so partly to ease the shroud of silence that draped over the room,

and partly to show I was cool in front of my cousins, I said, "Hey Eric. What's happening?"

Of course my parents looked at me as if I were a Communist spy. She knows him? This, this beastly version of a human being? This man standing in their home, holding their daughter's hand and wearing sunglasses on a dreary November afternoon? And little Angie knows all about him. They're pals even. I am sure those were the pervading thoughts crossing everyone's minds at the dinner table.

Grandma and Aunt Frannie got up and hobbled into the kitchen, bringing immediate embarrassment to my mother's face.

"Hi, everyone. This is my best friend, Eric. Eric this is everyone." Marie giggled, hiding her head behind Eric's wrinkled khaki sleeve. Eric looked around the room with his glasses on and said, "Hey, everyone. Hey, Small Fry." He looked my way and I imagined he winked at me.

Marie looked at Ma, straight in the eye, defiantly. "Is there room at your table for two hungry strangers?"

"Well, of course there is. Sit down, both of you. Enrico, introduce everyone. I'll go look in after Grandma and Aunt Frannie."

"I'll go too," I jumped up with excitement to see if the two old ladies were going to perform the ancient ritual in the kitchen. I had never gotten to watch them before, and I knew my mother disapproved. Normally she would have shooed me away, but today it was the least of her worries.

Grandma and Aunt Frannie were in the pantry huddled over a bowl of water. Very carefully they poured a few drops of olive oil in and starting praying in Italian. My mother stopped in her tracks, hating the tradition of the mal'occhi, but curious to see the result.

The two old women jumped back from the bowl and chattered rapidly.

"What is it? Did they see the Evil Eye?"

"I don't know. But you belong back at the table Angela. Get back there before I have the whole family in here. Now."

I obeyed out of respect for my mother's vanishing composure. I watched her guide the old women back to the table, much to their dismay. Apparently our guest made the Evil Eye, the Mal'occhi, show up in the bowl of water and oil. The old women performed this rite anytime a stranger entered the house, to see if he or she was full of the Evil Spirit. Eric was brimming with it. They watched him very closely throughout the meal and murmured to each other in their native tongue. My mother found the whole display humiliating, and tried to talk over them, asking people if they wanted more of everything.

For a while that was the extent of the dinner conversation, murmuring old women and my mother making sure all of our plates were full. Eric ate like he never saw food before, even the dead animal food went into his plate. My sister just picked at some cheese and olives and a slice of bread, like she used to when she sat at the kiddie table with me. My father kept his head down and concentrated on his brother's lasagna. The cousins peered over from the kiddie table and stared at the man with the long frizzy hair and necklace who sat next to their mother.

I hated the silence. It was so unlike all of us not to be laughing and teasing each other while we ate. Why had Marie brought him here? Surely she wasn't thinking of marrying him. That was the only time you brought a boy home to eat holiday dinner with you.

Eric finally broke the silence. "I'd really like

to thank you all for allowing me to share your bounty of good food and good spirit today. Marie and I had no where else to go."

"Marie has a place to go." My father finally spoke. "She has her family right here who were expecting her at home to eat dinner." He tried to poke a hole through Eric's face with what I considered his strongest glare ever. The sunglasses acted as reflectors though, making penetration difficult.

"I certainly didn't mean to offend. It's just that since Marie has been with child we have both been shunned by most of established society. I'm glad we have a place here to call home."

My father jumped to his feet. "You're what? Marie you're what? Look at me girl!" He grabbed his daughter's face from across the table, sending his plate shattering to the ground. Uncle Tommy jumped up and tried to restrain him, but he was too late.

My father fell across the table, pulling my sister's face into her plate of food. My uncle and my mother tried to hold him back before he beat his daughter senseless in front of the whole family. Aunt Theresa prodded the children and the old women into the kitchen with their plates and I went to Marie's side and wiped the bread and butter off of her face.

"I told you no one here would understand, Eric. Let's go."

Eric was already on his way to the door. "Grab your things, Babe. We don't need this uptight bullshit."

My father broke free and made a rush towards Eric. "You son of a bitch! Get out of my Goddamn house now!" He chased Eric down three flights of stairs and two blocks, until he was out of sight.

Marie went after them both with a bag of her

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belongings. She met up with Dad half a block from home. He grabbed at her, tried to keep her from following him.

"Don't touch me, I hate you," she screamed and cried at the same time. He held her tight and yelled back at her.

"Where's your boyfriend now, eh? Where is he? He couldn't face an old man for you could he?" Dad began to cry and shake her. "Could he? Could he?"

Eventually they both ended up hugging on the sidewalk, while God knows how many neighbors stuck their heads out of windows on that crisp November afternoon to sneak a peek at our version of domestic violence. Marie was hysterically crying into Dad's shirt, and he guided her back into the house, without her even watching as she stepped along with him. Ma put her to bed and Doctor Burns came over Friday to take a look at her. Everyone got doggie bags to take home, and we never saw Eric at the house again.

Doctor Burns said Marie was probably two months pregnant and suffering from anemia. He insisted on her getting bedrest for the next week. She would need to go to the hospital Monday, to have blood taken. Unfortunately she was gone before Monday. I thought maybe she was just too much in love to stay. I remember those three days she was with us as being heavenly.

I sat with her in her room and fixed her hair for her. She let me comb it into one long braid in the back of her head. We didn't talk a lot about the baby or Eric or anything. We just sat and listened to my transistor radio and sang a little. Marie said she would teach me how to play the guitar if I wanted. I asked my mother for a folk guitar for Christmas.

I'm not really sure now, but for those three

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days we all seemed to get along. I helped Ma decorate for Christmas. We got the nativity, out *Forever Evergreen* genuine artificial scotch pine, and all its trimmings up from our storage space in the basement. We brought turkey soup to Marie in bed. Sometimes I sat and ate with her to keep her company and make sure she ate everything for Ma. Dad was real quiet and back in control of himself. No one mentioned Thanksgiving dinner, and we all looked forward to Christmas.

That Monday morning, Marie was taken away. I was sure she was kidnapped by Eric, because she never would have made it out there in the cold by herself. And she was happy for those three days with us, I know it. Her eyes were clear again, and her brow wasn't constantly curled like before. She even showed Ma her tattoo of the rose vine and they both laughed. I can't even imagine that in my wildest dreams, but it happened.

When my mother found Marie's bed empty that morning, she called the police. I stayed home from school. Dad went to work, but called us every half hour to see if she had turned up. My mother described every detail of Eric to the officer who came to the apartment to ask questions and get a picture of Marie. I gave him one of her from last summer, but it didn't look like her at all.

My mother took some aspirin and lay on the sofa with the TV off. She rested, and I sat on the floor beside her in case she needed me. Each time Dad would call I would say sorry nothing yet to him. My mother never got up to talk.

That night my father brought home dinner from Uncle Tommy's, but we weren't hungry. He wasn't even hungry, and he placed the chicken cacciatore in the oven to keep warm in

case we changed our minds. He was ready to go out looking himself when the phone rang to tell us they found my big sister laying frozen in Central Park. I answered the phone, but the officer wouldn't tell me. He spoke to my father, told him everything. What my father told us is that the police found her in her pajamas, with her blue poncho on and a pair of Keds. A small fringed bag gripped in her frozen hand contained some records, sheet music, a hairbrush and a change of underwear.

From the coroner's report that came later, we found out that she had been dead for twelve hours before someone found her. The police that came to the house said that junkies didn't care how cold it was or what time of day or night, if they needed a fix they would do anything. My father answered by telling him thank you, and that our family would like to be alone now.

It's impossible to describe what it was like to lose my sister. The closest and least heartbreaking comparison is the surprise when someone pulls the plug out of a radio while it's still on, in the middle of a song you love. Or being at a party and losing the power. One minute everyone is laughing and eating, singing and acting silly, or even arguing passionately about something that doesn't mean anything. Then silence. No light, no sound, no voices. That gasp, when everyone is caught off guard and everything shuts down at once, that was what it was like to lose Marie. Except it was more than a moment.

I can't explain what it's like to bury a seventeen year old girl with a fetus inside her. The sweetness of roses and lilies that becomes a stench that you can't blow out of your nostrils or wash out of your clothes. Greeting the people

who came down that line to see us as we were arranged in black velvet chairs with the arms worn out from being clenched. People I knew and didn't know, all crying and hugging and rubbing comfort into my parents' hands. Facing me at the end of the line and just patting my hair down or kissing my forehead and calling me a brave little angel.

Far from it. Thoughts of murder and execution were treated to the full reign of my imagination. This was Eric's fault, he would pay. I would be the one to bring justice to my sisters' death. I would be the one to feel his neck strangled in my own chubby little hands—to wring the life out of his body the way he had stolen it from Marie. He robbed her of her future, he robbed us. He broke in to our family and stole her and lost her.

I knew he would be too scared to show up at the wake or the funeral. He was lucky to have escaped one angry mob; with another opportunity there would be no stopping my father from finishing him off, pulverizing him. My parents never mentioned him, my father throwing a hurtful stare at Uncle Tommy whenever he deduced out loud that the crazy boy with the shaggy hair probably had something to do with all of this.

I don't think my parents ever truly healed. They probably never figured out what broken rule, what sin caused them to lose their little girl with the big imagination. As eternal penance, they denied themselves any pleasure to atone for whatever they must have done which caused Marie to perish.

Of course all the routines, the dinner rituals, the big family celebrations continued. Life continues, my mother told me in a robotic tone whenever she caught me acting like a zombie. It goes on, true. The numbness eventually

left my brain. Slowly I would find myself wrapped up in some mechanical behavior like eating or sleeping or talking without actually thinking. Thinking about how I should have blown the whistle the first day I saw that cockroach sprawled on our front stoop. If I had, would it have changed anything? Would the questions all go away and stop swirling around in my brain like the lava lamp blobs? Or would there be other questions?

It's funny how you get what you wish for sometimes. For years I dreamed of meeting up with Eric. At first I wanted him dead. Time passed, and I fantasized about telling him off, humiliating him, blaming him. Still later, I found myself longing to find out the answers from the only one who knew.

Three years ago, last Easter, I got my wish. I drove from Avon to Brooklyn where the baby lay buried inside her, and she inside the ground. A man with salt and pepper hair pulled back into a small slick ponytail stood over them all, head bent. Drizzling mist beaded on his mahogany trench coat, protecting his silk suit from the elements.

When he looked up to see me standing with a pot of white lilies, he took off his glasses.

"Angie, hi." He recognized me. When I played his voice over I knew it was Eric. His tone was still laid back and comfortable, even twenty-one years later at a gravesite.

"Eric?" I pretended to guess his identity. My heart splattered for a split second. I was caught off guard and had nothing clever to say to the man who killed my sister and her baby.

"Angie how are you? You look absolutely wonderful, really."

"So do you." I smiled as I complimented the man who hooked my sister on dope. His eyes

that I had never seen behind the round blue specs were clear and green and tranquil. The Caribbean turquoise only found within the thick glossy pages of exclusive travel brochures. He had a strong jaw and a cleft in his chin. Too many years of therapy must have drained all the rage out of me I guess, because I thought that this child molester who kidnapped my sister was enchanting. It was immediately clear to me how she could have fallen in love with him. How she saw this under that fifth I'll never know.

"Angie, I've got so many questions." He walked away from the stone so that the corpses lying beneath the earth couldn't hear. "If there's anything you can tell me, anything."

You don't understand, I thought. My questions, you're supposed to answer my questions. I must be suspicious of this comely figure. He's trying to fake me out. Deny responsibility. Or maybe he was just as confused as I was.

It took me a moment to reply, while in the meantime I'm sure my mouth must have been hanging open catching raindrops.

"How much do you know?"

"Unfortunately, not a lot." He walked further away from the gravesite. The drizzle began to turn to rain, but I couldn't feel it, only see it trickling from the top of his forehead and down the slope of his nose.

"I always thought that she was trying to catch up with me. After the explosion at your house I split for the West Coast. I planned to send for her once I settled, but she didn't know it. I just couldn't take all that hostility.

I figured she would be taken care of."

"So you think it was her idea then?" I couldn't believe he abandoned her. Some of the rage was filtering back into my system.

"We had a lot of friends that lived in the

park." Eric wrung his hands as he spoke, but the rest of him looked calm, almost relieved to finally confess to another survivor.

"There were times I wanted to pick the phone up, come by, just find out. But I didn't know what to expect." The calm in his eyes began to get stormy, cloud over with tears. As he stood there crying very softly and politely, I did the unthinkable. I placed the plant on the ground and I reached out and held him. We stood there in the raw air, both sobbing, my tears staining his lapel along with the rest of the rainfall. I felt the heaviness of his face on my shoulder.

We eventually parted, both looking towards the ground. The shame I felt breaking down in front of a stranger was balanced with the relief of knowing that he hurt as much as we all did.

"Look at us." I grinned weakly, trying to break the moment and help us regain our composure. How different he seemed to me from those days on the stoop. But except for a good scrub and a haircut, here was the same man who considered my sister a Goddess.

His eyes piercing the top of my head forced me to meet them. He wasn't through with me, I could tell. After all, I hadn't really told him anything.

"How about we get out of this weather and get some coffee?" He looked at me thoughtfully, as though maybe he was searching for some fragment of Marie, some resemblance. Unfortunately, he probably saw more of the man who chased him down the street twenty-one years ago.

"I really need to get back home. Sorry."

"That's fine, Angie, really. I know." He stared down at my diamond anniversary band.

"Right." I bent over and scooped up the dripping pot of lilies. Small streaks of muddy water

ran down my arm and into my sleeve. I thought about the one question I knew my parents wondered about. I may never see him again.

"Eric, this may sound strange, but one thing the police said when they found her," I clutched the pot tightly against my chest as I deliberated over each word. "That she was looking for a fix." There I said it. Okay, Ma? I said it for all of us.

Eric's face changed. He squinted a little and bit his lip, like he either couldn't believe I would ask such a ridiculous question, or he couldn't believe I found out the truth.

"Okay, I'm sorry I asked." I guess I would never know or understand. I wasn't part of their generation, after all.

"No. It's a logical assumption, considering. Drugs didn't do it, make her want to escape. You were just too young to see it."

"I guess so." All I had seen was that I had to do what I was told and finish high school, go to college, get married and survive past my seventeenth birthday.

"Here's my card. Maybe we could talk again sometime." He handed me a card that said Duhammel Rogers and Saversten, Attorneys at Law, Eric Matteson Associate.

He does have a last name, I thought. "Thanks." I stood back to prevent more hugging.

"Bye, Angie. We'll talk again soon."

We never did talk again. His card is still there, in my wallet, strategically hidden between two credit cards that I'm weaning myself off of. Seeing him again would force me to think about things which I spent too much energy learning how not to think about.

I never told my parents about Eric. I knew they wouldn't understand, even if they had been there. I still felt the need to edit information for

the sake of family harmony. I hadn't learned anything. What I told them instead was that I ran into some old friends of Marie and they said she never did drugs.

Neither of them looked relieved. My mother looked away, and continued to chop onions and garlic for the sausages she was packing. Dad answered with nothing more than a puzzled look, a "What's the difference she's still dead" look that made me realize that my parents understood more than Marie gave them credit for.

Pat Testa

