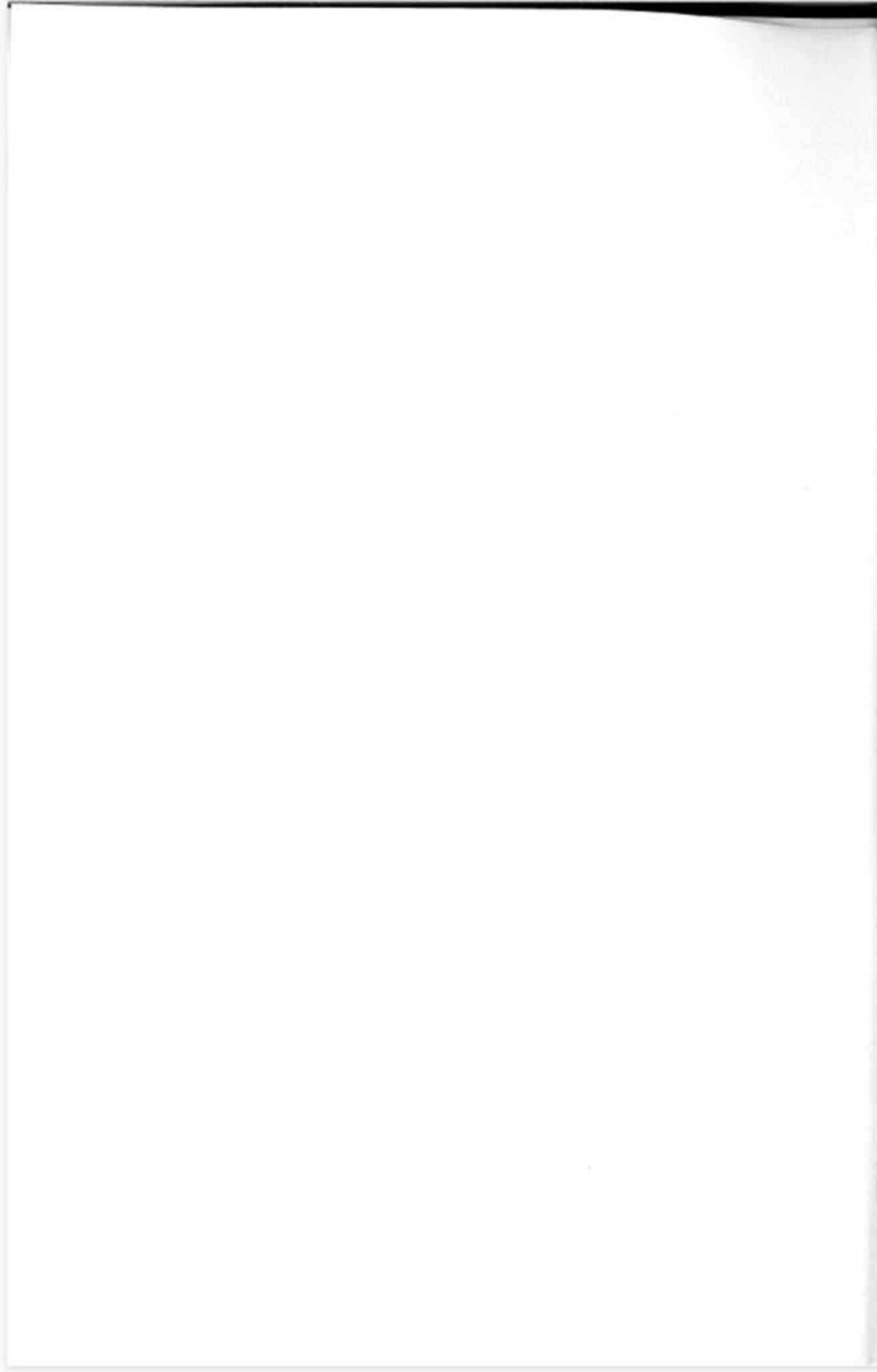


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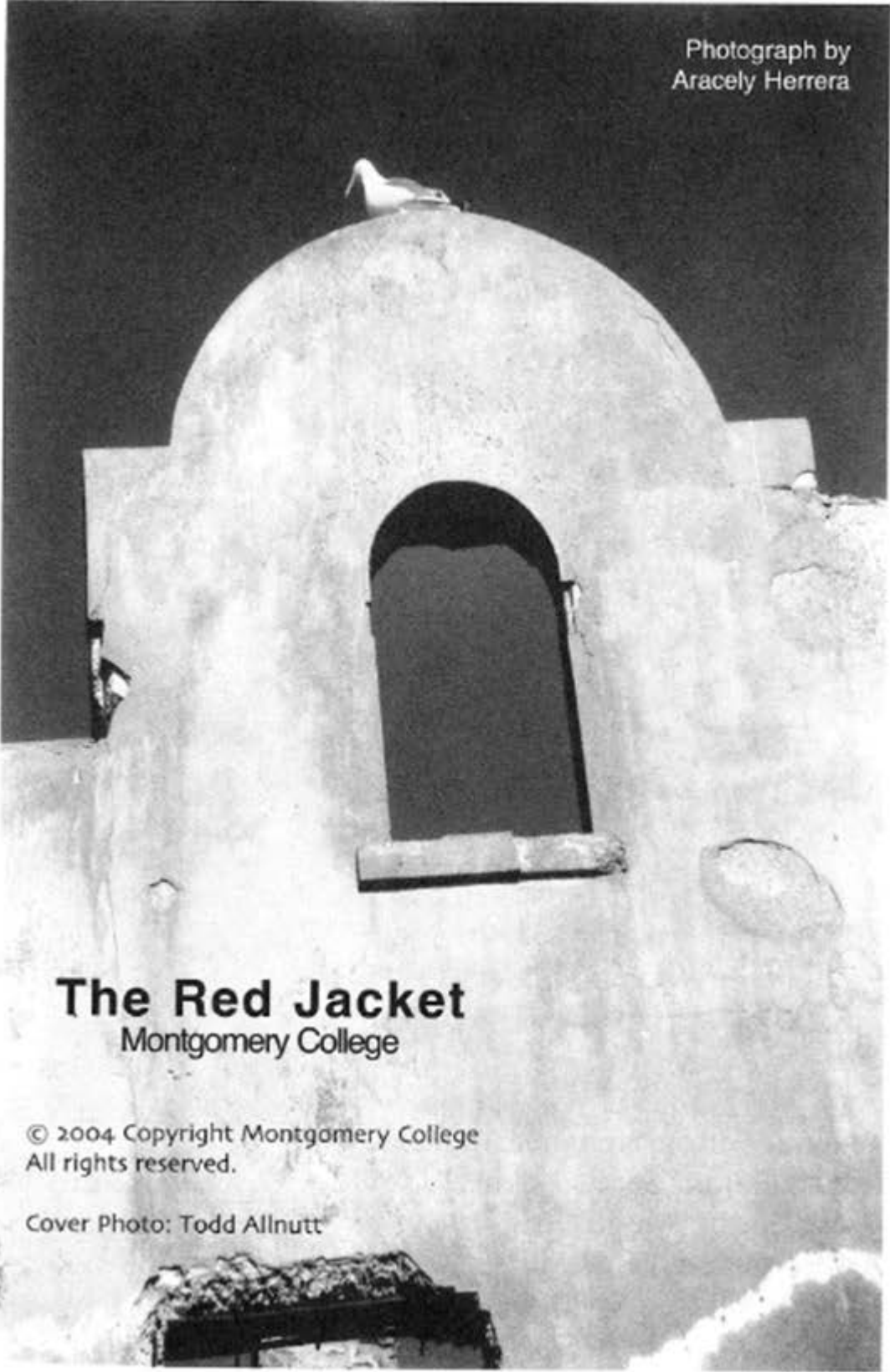
2004



The Red
Jacket



Photograph by
Aracely Herrera



The Red Jacket
Montgomery College

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*The mission of **The Red Jacket**
is to encourage and accurately represent
the diverse creative talents of the Montgomery College
student community.*

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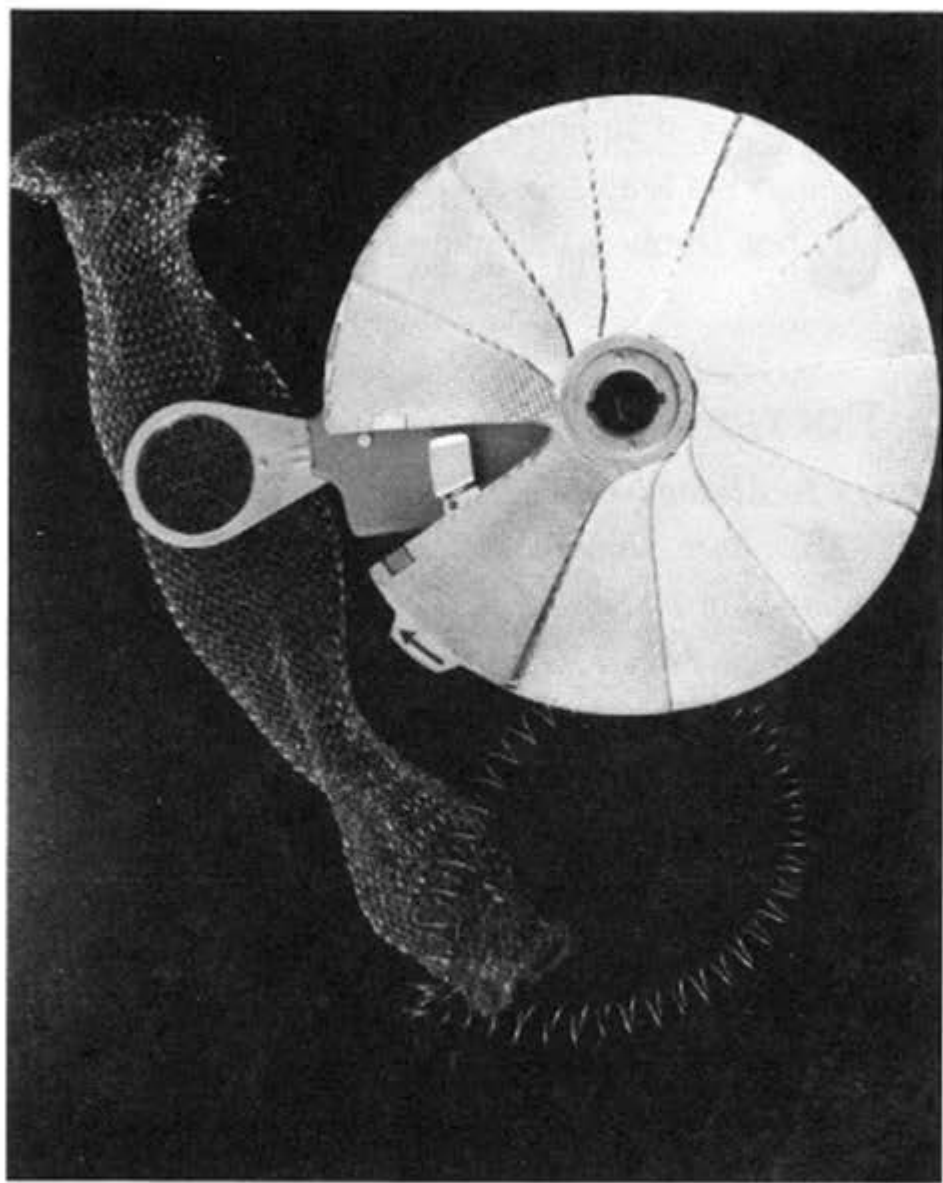
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Aracely Herrera

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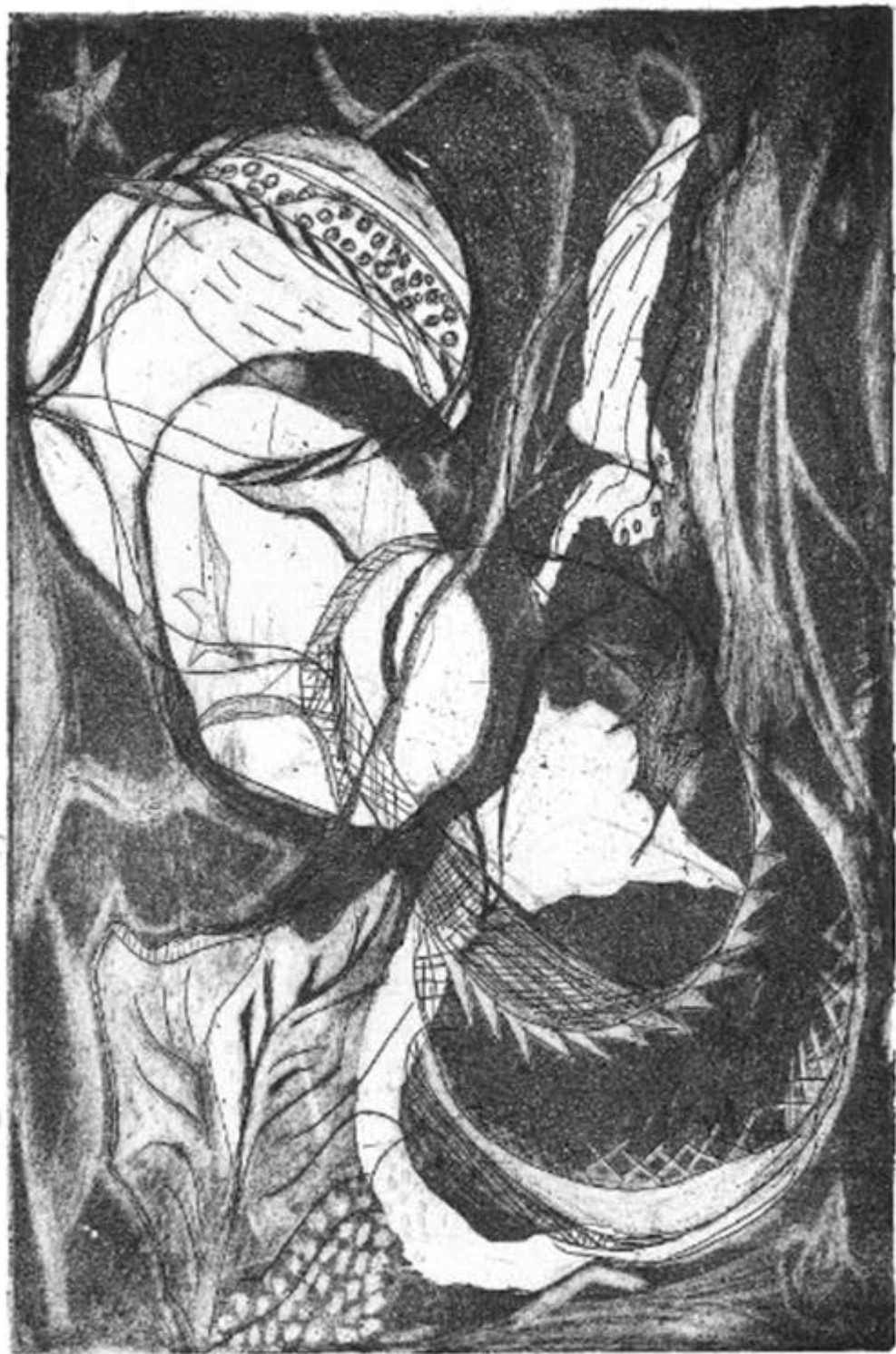
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Acorn Abstracts
Myra M. Patner

Journeys

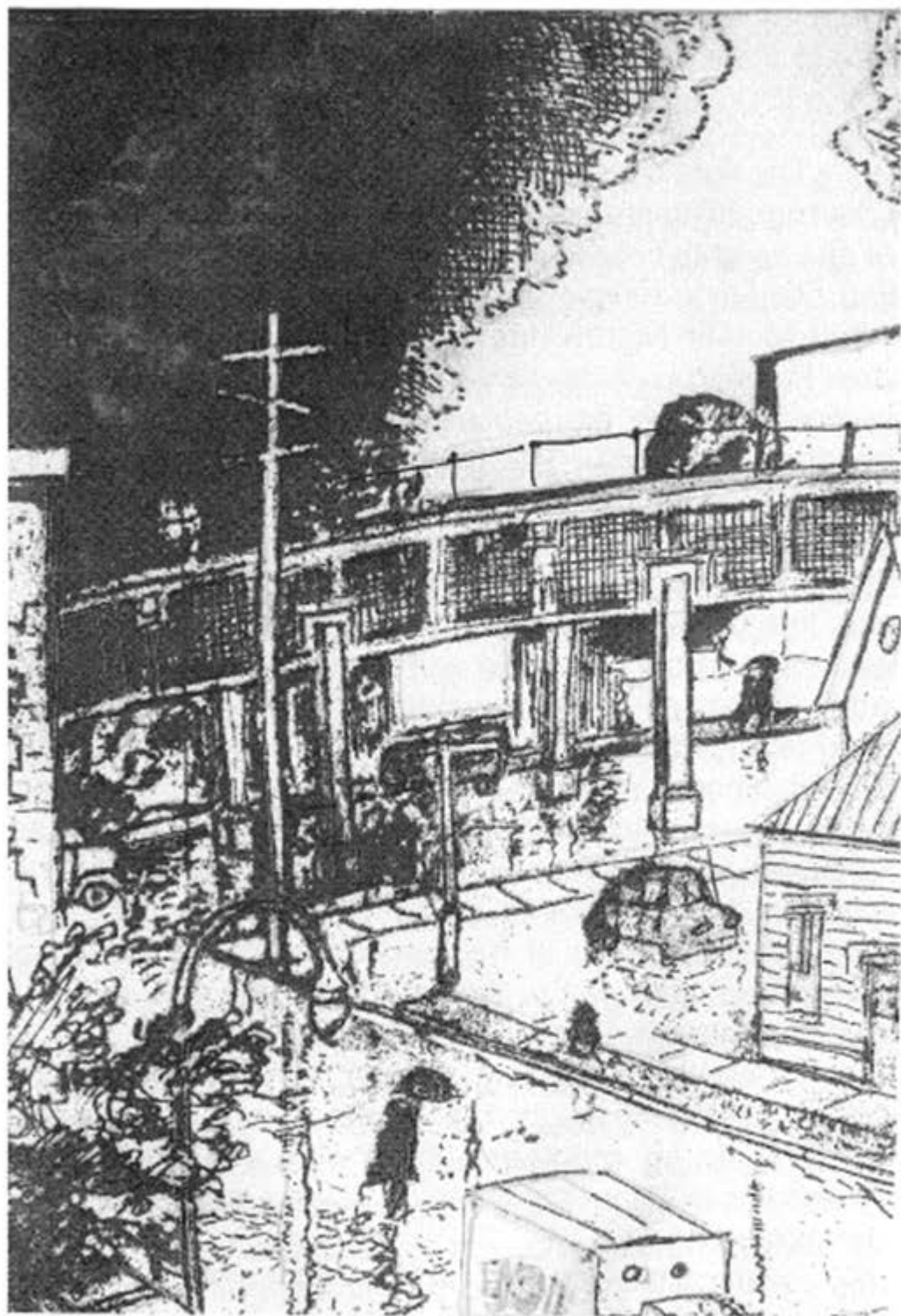
JO ALEXANDER

Together, we are both on a Journey.
We walk together.
Eat and sleep together.
Together, we are on our Journeys
But going in opposite directions.

You journeyed back from your worldly work,
And clasped the doorknob with great relief
Seeking nurturing, peace, and calm.
I left the door unlocked. I'm on my way out.
On my Journey to explore the outside World.

Still we meet together, eat together, and visit friends
See our daughters, tend the garden, and trim the lawn
Moving together, sometimes hostile,
sometimes lonely and cold.
Sometimes yearning for the comfortable ways of old.

But we have chosen our Journeys.
Standing together on our threshold
Knowing that when we meet again at the unlocked door
with full hearts, full minds, and full souls
We are prepared to continue our Journeys.
TOGETHER.



Untitled
Harvey Topper

The Expressions of Running

RICHARD HAN

The light thud of running shoes hitting the pavement, or the crumbling crunch from the dead leaves on a dirt path are all I need to hear to communicate with the earth and my mind. As I lace up my running shoes, I observe the weather that Mother Nature has provided for me that morning. While I stretch outside, I try to warm up my muscles while the cold autumn air causes goose bumps to emerge throughout my body. The fresh, pungent aroma of falling leaves stimulates my senses, relaxing my mind and soothing my body for the morning adventure that I am about to embark on. As I begin running I take in the fresh air that pours into my lungs as I accelerate. Running allows me to take a break from the world as I communicate with Mother Nature, who acts as my personal shrink, taking my thoughts, moods, and worries and absorbing them into her vast existence. Whether I am in a bad mood or a good mood, my running reflects my emotions, which are expressed upon my body and the earth. Everything is accounted for, the rhythm of my steps, the length of my strides, the breathing of my lungs, and the conversation between the quiet part of the world and me, who does not argue, complain, or respond, but just listens.

When I begin running, I start to open my mind to the world, exposing my thoughts and expressions of that particular moment. My mood sets the rhythm and tempo of my run, and this is where my meaning of language is portrayed through running.

Running provides me with an alternative to express myself within my own body through physical exertion. Whenever I am angry or in a rage, I run faster and faster until I feel like my lungs are about to burst. As I beat the

pavement with my feet faster and harder, the earth absorbs my anger, and leaves me exhausted, yet relieved of all negative emotions that I had unleashed upon the ground. The fast and articulate movements of my feet are my way of communicating to the earth that I am angry and disturbed. The earth acts as a punching bag for my pounding feet, yet it does not react to my emotions but just absorbs the beating undisturbed and unscathed.

My favorite time to run is when I am in a good mood. Whether I am happy, excited or neutral, running with these positive emotions allows my mind to relax as I become absorbed with myself and nature. Running with a positive feeling allows me to listen to what the earth has for me to hear and see. My senses become more acute and attentive as I slow down to enjoy my heightened sense of the beauty that mother earth has presented to me. The earth boasts her beautiful features to me as I run; every detail, the shape of her trees, the angle of her terrains, fascinates my wandering eyes as I become refreshed with the scenery. Whether it is the smell of the morning mist or the crisp odor of fallen leaves, the scent allows me to relax and enjoy the refreshing feeling of my environment. As I breathe in her fresh clean air into my lungs, my sense of awareness sharpens, as if she offered me a strong cup of coffee. The cheerful conversation between me and mother earth is like a pleasant innate language as if I was visiting her home and she was entertaining me as her guest.

I run every morning right after I wake up, or whenever I feel the need to be alone. Running isolates me from the world and the harsh realities that affect my emotions. There is no better feeling than being all by myself, away from all the negative hardships of living in today's society. Every morning it is just Mother Earth and me having our own innate conversation with each other. I can never get lonely

running by myself because her beauty relaxes my mind,
and I become engulfed within my own little world where no
one else is invited, leaving me in my own personal ecstasy.

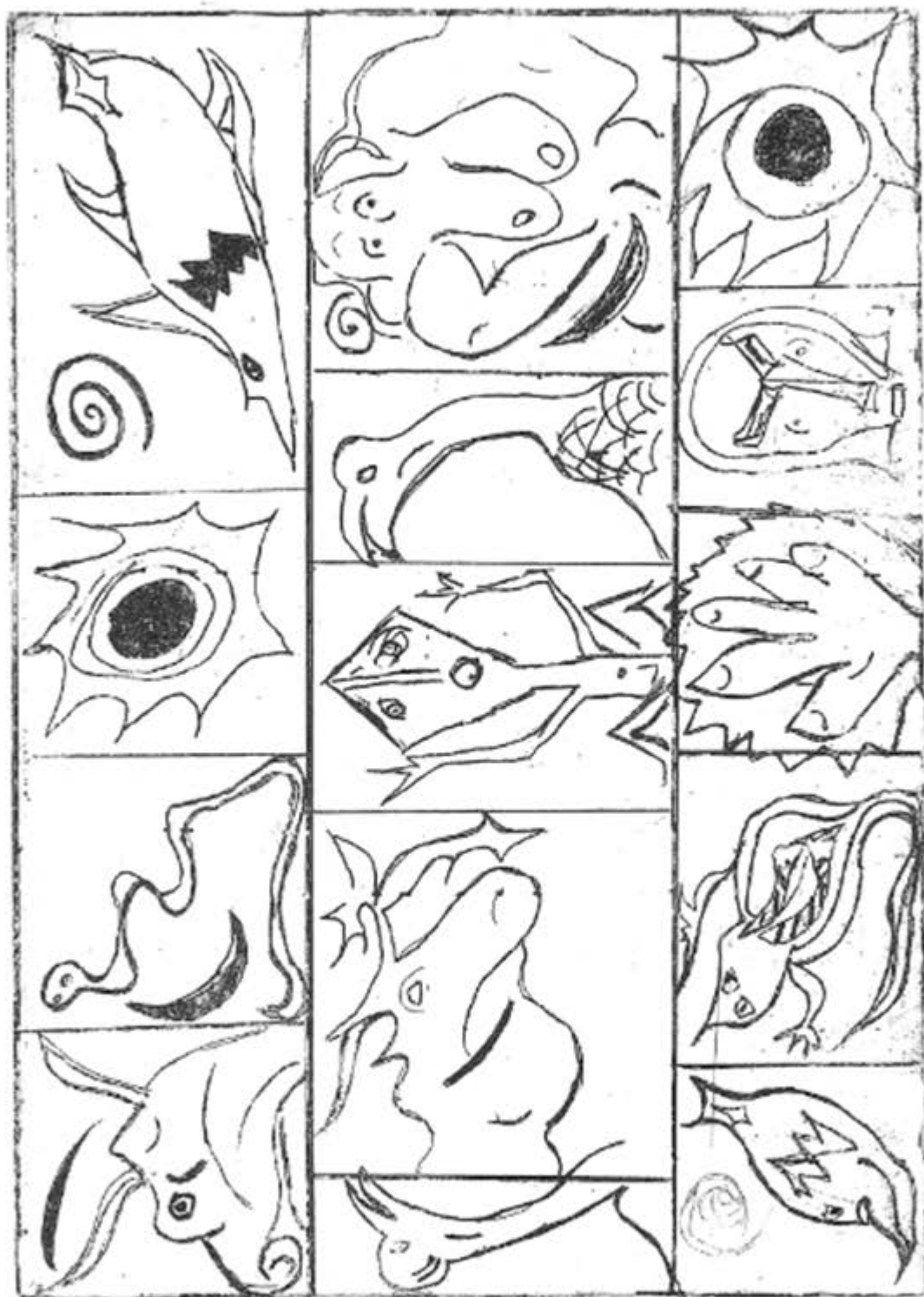
The Dawn

CHRISTOPHER MANNINO

As silver moon slid gently out of sight,
Morning's greyness felt a tinge of fire;
For sun was softly climbing higher,
Sweeping aside the remnants of the night.

Sweeping with fingers of orange-white,
The Sun was a wonder to behold;
Up She rose, robed in fire and gold,
Kindling the sky, and setting it alight.

And as She dawned, the Sun swept clouds away;
To blue the hue of Heaven,
And start a lovely day.



Cave Paintings
Myra M. Patner

Soul Ripper

MATT PULLEN

He's the one
That you see
When you suffer from your wound
Staring into your sins
Swings his wrath
Slays the kin
Beware of yourself
Sin is what summons him
Practitioner of torture
The pain;the sin; feeds you to your death

Invisible, immune to the eye
See him and it's already too late
This reality seems so unreal
Soul Ripper
Your fate it will seal
Soul Ripper

Now its time to descend
Falling fast, never stop
Cutting on the walls
Wounding deep on the bone
Crushing all that it touches
Killing all that it crushes

Night Raindrops

ROBERT SWENSEN

The raindrops that fall softly on my roof
At night are soothing me. They are proof
That all is well, that order,
And beauty and calm and truth,
Have not vanished from the earth
Despite the cynicism, the dearth
Of love in this cold and faithless age, mirth
Still has a place and will survive.

Vastness of The Sea

ALISON SMITH

Staring into open sea,
The burden of her decision is apparent.

A choice limiting the mind and spirit

One love in replace of another,
One love may be enough.

A man incapable of change,
A woman's wandering eye will strain,
Under a cast shadow.

She stares at the waves crashing into rocks sealing her
fate.

The love she longs to be near appears
As a ghostly shadow on the water.

Beaconing her with open arms,
"Words are not enough," he whispers,
As she plunges into the thrashing sea.



Untitled
Harvey Topper

Another Day

JOYCE YARINGTON

Night's darkness fades while the sun slowly rises
As we begin another day.
The dawn gives way the pleasant slumber
Our dreams are now, but memories that give way
As we begin another day,
We stretch and yawn our bodies awake
Much lies ahead and we must partake
As we begin another day
Quick we are not to take on the chores
For slumber and dreams make better a choice
As we begin another day
Safe in our dreams quiet and content
I shall not awake my choice is to lament
As we begin another day
As I hold you now you dream still
Your pain not always evident but very real
As we begin another day
Kiss it away I cannot
Hold you the whole day long I will
You are in my heart and will stay
So let us begin another day.

THE SEPARATE SEASON

DONNA BRACKMAN

The sun eases closer to that mystical passage
marking rejuvenation of the northerly realms.
Plants will pull stuff of life from softer ground;
creatures will stir, be stirred to procreation.
We are moving to the end of the dead time
but not without losses.

Earliest days of March bring this interstice,
separate season with dual faces, opposing masks:
a surge of new sap - dregs of tapped out strength,
promise of food to come - truth of used up stores.
For some, hibernation shelters have become sepulchers.
Thawing soil yields to spades for seeding and for graves.

Vernal celebrants, dance with thanks for your survival
but remember to sing the names of the lost.

THE JUNGLE
(Dedicated to New York City)

KENYA L. PRESIDENT

The jungle calls me
Beneath
The darkness
Its rhythm
Commanding my heart's tempo

As if some hypnotic aroma
It drags me
Like a powerful iron chain
Dragging my desire
Towards its melody
Images of unlit shadows
Of a murderous past
Caress my thoughts

Yet I run
Those corrupted cells run
To that fleshy paradise
To the exotic brick wonders
To those lost souls
Grasping for an internal completeness

Out of its focus
I wander
Blindly
Climbing through cold wetness
Hiking steep mountains of
Crazed emotions
Battling slithering serpents
That prey on my tattered being
That prey on the zombie amazons
Of the jungle

Until the bloody reality
Flows through
My inner eye's vision
Leaving me
Suspended
Between the soothing evil pleasures
That over take me
Hand and hand
Strolling with death
Through the jungle



Untitled
Patricia Perez

Queen of Fables

TAMER RIFAI

Hello my Queen of Fables
You seem to be the moon reshaped
Holding myths in a whirlpool in a jar just in case.
Will you pour new colors into my blood and holes?
I seem to have lost my passion down the crossroads
And Red doesn't know me anymore.

What Came in the Mail

ERIN JONES

Dixie's eyes rested on the clock as she opened the office door. It was five minutes until 8. She sighed contentedly and continued to her desk. Her friendly blonde hair, flipped out at the ends, bounced slightly as she padded to her desk and sat down. She began to unzip her sweater, and then, realizing it was still slightly chilly, zipped it back up again. Her eyes darted across the familiar photos of family and friends that lay neatly smiling at her in various locations. There were quotes too, that inspired her, and several certificates certifying that she had completed the Boston Marathon twice. Finally they rested on a rubber band which lay ostentatiously out of place on the broad flat of the desk. She took it in her delicate fingers, stretched it out and in playfully several times before returning it to its place in the drawer with the others. She sighed again, and smoothed her hand over her hair.

Now it was time to face the work of the day. After standing at the copy machine for several minutes, she returned to her desk, a stack of papers in hand. She was rounding a corner briskly when a figure stormed into her nearly knocking the papers out of her hand.

"Dixie!" The figure, also known as the boss's assistant, Brigid, burst out, flustered.

"I'm sorry." Dixie called out with softly, as she gathered herself together. Brigid stormed purposefully down the hall, her head bent as if she were facing into the wind. Her eyebrows hung down heavily, and her spiked hair formed a jagged crown around her regal face.

The office had slowly begun to come alive when Dixie returned to her desk. The once desolate catacomb of

cubicles had become a place populated with people who would liked each other a lot and would be friendly in about 20 minutes, once their coffee kicked in. Dixie was very fond of her desk. She was close enough to her boss that she would be there for him when he needed his secretary, but it was open enough that she could see most everyone as they passed by and could chat pleasantly with anyone. She sat down. She didn't have any work just then, and so she pulled out a text book from under her desk. She lay it down in front of her, reading until the faint sound of singing caught her attention as it came down the hall, and stopped right before the office door.

"I wish I was in the land of cotton, old times there are not forgotten—look away, look away, look away—Dixieland!" Here the, nasally voice made a big finish, emphasizing the word "Dixie".

"Lyle!" Dixie, looking up, sang out gently, in her sweet Texas drawl. "Good morning."

Lyle's hair fell boyishly about his eyes and his face broke into a crooked grin. He had no time to answer because the door behind Dixie opened and behind her stood Mr. DeVries, the boss. Even though he was short, he was an imposing figure by his very respectability. His hair was silvered and had receded slightly. His face was stern and his glasses rested on his owl-like nose, giving him an air of wisdom.

"Mr. Evens," he called out in a commanding tone.

The grin grew sheepish on Lyle's face, and he looked to Dixie for support.

"Mr. Evens, what time is it?"

"Time to work hard, sir." Lyle chuckled, but could not break the tension.

Mr. DeVries, not nearly as amused with Lyle as Lyle was with himself, answered his own question "8:20."

Lyle tucked his lips together in a combination of a grimace and a smirk and nodded remorsefully.

"Twenty minutes past the hour." Mr. DeVries continued. "I trust you know what that means."

Lyle nodded, babbling good-naturedly as he dropped to the floor, "I know, I know—although I find it funny that you don't make any other employees do this--"

"Don't talk. Just do it," Mr. DeVries snapped. To ensure he was absolutely obeyed he came out from behind Dixie's desk and rested a foot on Lyle's back as he pushed up and down. He addressed Dixie who sat in silent amusement behind the desk watching the spectacle. "Miss Bloom, I'm going out for a meeting this morning, and I'll be back after lunch." He removed his foot from Lyle's back.

Lyle, now red in the face sat up. "20 push ups to atone for 20 minutes of tardiness." He announced.

The corners of Mr. DeVries mouth hesitated, and then broke into a repressed smile. He offered his hand to Lyle, helped him to his feet and then patted him on the back. "Don't let it happen again...at least not until tomorrow." He rolled his eyes with a martyred glance towards Dixie, and exited.

Lyle and Dixie turned to each other. "I'd say the day's off to a good start!" He announced.

Dixie laughed, turning a strand of hair behind her ear. "You'd better get to work."

Lyle cringed guiltily, saluted her and then turned towards the direction of his office. As Dixie watched Lyle turn the corner, she heard a smack: an angry Brigid-sounding voice burst out, "god, Lyle!", and a stream of attempts by Lyle to amend the situation. Brigid stormed around the corner, face taut, and intense. Lyle followed, his face suppressing laughter.

She didn't say anything to Dixie as she marched out

the door, barely avoiding a collision with the delivery man who was just coming through the door.

"Hey, it's the man in the brown uniform!" Lyle called out.

"What's up?" The man greeted sheepishly. This delivery man was unique in that he found everything Lyle said to be funny. He giggled as he placed several piles of assorted packages on Dixie's desk, and was still chuckling as he exited.

As Dixie began to sort through the various envelopes and packages, Lyle came and draped his arms over the counter of her desk. He watched her working intently for a moment before reaching down and pulling up a small picture frame.

"Hey, this one's new!" He exclaimed. "It's your sister's baby, right?"

Dixie tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "That's right."

"What's her name again?"

"Abby."

"Abby, that's right. She's a cutie." He replaced it.

His eyes rested on the History text book. "Its history today, is it?"

Dixie flushed and put it below her desk. "I didn't realize it was still there. I hope nobody saw."

"It's nothing to be ashamed of." He assured her. "Keep working hard. You'll be able to get to college again. You certainly smart enough."

"It's not about smarts though. It's about money, or lack thereof. Dad needed me to work, so here I am. This is a good job!" She sounded more as though she were trying to convince herself. "Anyway, it's probably a waste of time, but I try to keep learning just in case I ever do go back...but that's just silly."

"No..." He smiled at her, this time without a hint of humor or teasing. "I want to see you back in college." He stood up dramatically, "Even if I die trying!"

"What's this?" Brigid's voice demanded. They turned towards her. She was pointing at a large white box addressed to Mr. Devries.

Dixie picked it up. "I don't know," she answered pleasantly, "I haven't opened it yet."

"I can see that, but who's it from?"

Dixie turned it over. "Hmm... no return address. I guess we'll find out." She started to open it.

"Don't open it!" Brigid snapped. Lyle stood up straight, and Dixie looked up to her for an explanation. "If we don't know where it's coming from, it's suspicious."

"Suspicious as in...a bomb?" Lyle's face was grave, but his eyes were twinkling with amusement.

"Yes. That's exactly what I mean." She shot him a look that was meant to kill.

"What do you suggest we do with it, call a Hazmat? Or maybe the FBI would be better." Lyle found this very funny.

"We should at least call security. At any rate Dixie should not open it." Brigid's brow rested resolutely.

"That's the most ridiculous, paranoid, thing I've ever heard." The humor had left Lyle's voice, and his eyes contained an intensity that was rare for him.

"No, it's protocol." Brigid's voice was cool and condescending.

"You know what your problem is?" Here Lyle slapped the palm of his hand on the top of Dixie's desk. "You just want to control everything! Stop over-reacting and let the woman do her job!"

The pause that ensued was pregnant with a mixture of triumph, outrage and tension. Lyle stood tall, breathing

fiercely. Brigid's eyes were concentrated like a gathering storm. Dixie stood in their midst, her finger tips clenching and releasing the green emerald she wore around her neck, her eyes darting back and forth. Brigid was about to strike again. Dixie, laying a trembling hand on Lyle's arm spoke up.

"Lyle, please. It's not a big deal. I don't have to open it now. We can wait..." She pleaded.

"No." His voice was gentle, but his eyes were still fixed intently on Brigid. "This goes beyond the package."

"Not as I see it." Brigid snapped. "The buck stops here. You won't see me stand by while Dixie opens something that could be a bomb. Here she lifted her diet Coke and turned the cap. There was a violent hissing and the floodgates of fizzy Coke burst forth in steady stream all over Brigid's face and sweater. She sputtered as she turned and cranked the cap closed again. Dixie glanced at Lyle. Their eyes met, but she quickly turned away when she caught sight of the amusement in his eye, and twitching in the corner of his mouth. Her stomach lurched painfully as she tried to stifle the laughter. Although she kept a straight face, nothing had gone unnoticed by Brigid.

"I'm higher than you and my word has more weight that you could ever dream. Therefore I'm going to call the police." She turned on her heel and stormed down the hall.

"Brigid—" Lyle began, weakly, but his face was still struggling to conceal the amusement.

"Don't try to stop me, copy boy." She hollered, taking tissue out of her pocket and rubbing it across her face violently. When she had disappeared, the laughter poured forth freely.

"What a character..." Lyle muttered his head wagging good naturedly. The nervous anger was gone from his voice.

"Poor Brigid," Dixie sighed, her face still glowing with a smile. "It would be hard to live in so much fear that you call the police over such a little thing."

Lyle rested a thoughtful gaze on her as she spoke, and then, running his hand through his hair, smirked again. "You don't think she's serious do you?"

"Oh definitely," Dixie assured him earnestly. "I would imagine she's calling them right now."

Lyle straightened.

"Did you think she wasn't serious?" Dixie persisted, wondering at his reaction.

"I just thought she was trying to get the last word in." Lyle turned distractedly towards the hall way.

"Lyle," Dixie called, "does it really matter so much? Please don't go. You'll just get yelled at some more."

"I need to stop her from calling the police." His voice was resolute.

"Let me go." Dixie rose, placing her hand on his arm. Then, with a twinkle in her eye, "You'd better get to work; you're in enough trouble already today."

Lyle hesitated, and then grinned. "Okay, but be careful." He turned towards his office.

As Dixie turned the corner, she called out softly, "Brigid wait!" and then quickened her pace.

"Nothing doing!" She heard Brigid's voice bursting out like a whip in the civil office air.

Mustering courage, Dixie took a deep breath, and then grabbed for Brigid's arm. "I said, wait!" She commanded.

"Get out of the way you dumb Texan!" Brigid's voice grew in intensity with each word, as she violently shook herself free.

Dixie was forward and then back. She felt fingers grasping the back of her head and jerking her back. She saw the wall coming closer and closer until she heard a loud

thud. Her head throbbed and seemed like it would explode. Her head was jerked back again and a second time she saw the wall careening towards her, and felt it slam into her forehead. The room was blurry and everything seeming to be rocking back and forth. She heard a muffled sound of people yelling and the clutching fingers released from her head. Her hair tingled in freedom, but she felt herself falling. Warm, strong arms, folded around her, supporting her. She smelled the minty artificial freshness of Lyle's cologne. She sank back, guided by the arms, into a chair.

When the scene before her came into focus, she saw Mr. DeVries holding Brigid up against the wall. She realized that she was sitting in a chair, although Lyle's arm draped over her, and her head limply on his shoulder.

Although she would have wanted to stay there, it didn't seem proper so she tried to sit up. Lyle, removed his arm so that she could sit up straight but rested a firm hand on her arm.

"Are you alright?" He stared into her face searching wildly.

"I think so..." She muttered feebly. She felt a warm liquid running down her face, and reached up to touch it. When she looked at her finger tips they were stained with blood.

"Brigid, I ask that you leave the premises immediately. Any failure to comply and I will be obliged to call security." Mr. DeVries released his hold on Brigid. Brigid's voice was still full of its usual intensity and fury, but now it contained embarrassment, even humility. Her eyes were downcast, as she muttered a submissive reply.

Now Mr. DeVries turned his attention to Lyle and Dixie. He knelt down to their level. His eyes still flashed with a fading outrage, but they were also warm with concern. "Dixie, are you okay?"

At this moment, one of the other employees, a round, rosy woman, fluttered over, with several neatly folded paper towels, and applied them in a motherly manner, to Dixie's forehead.

Dixie, wincing slightly at the damp pressure applied to the gash, smiled gratefully at the woman, and then, turning towards the grave face of Mr. DeVries, replied, "I'm alright."

Mr. DeVries shook his head. "What you saw there was a clear cut case of unchecked temper. I've seen her lose it before but never that badly. She'll be released of course." After this commentary, made more to himself than anyone else, he turned back to Dixie. "Do you know where the nurse's office is?"

Dixie shook her head.

"I can take her there, I've been there before." Lyle spoke up.

Mr. DeVries gave him a questioning glance.

"When we got new automatic stapler and I stapled my finger, remember?" Lyle spoke with boyish pride at his wounds.

"Ah yes. How could I forget?" Mr. DeVries muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose and squinting his eyes wearily. "Yes, you can go ahead and take her."

Dixie felt shakiness in her legs as she rose, but she was stronger than she thought she would be. Still she took hold of Lyle's arm holding it as tightly as would be proper, and together they waded through the jostling crowd of coworkers who had gathered to see this momentous occasion: the sweet, gentle secretary viciously attacked, and the evil office tyrant humbled in one morning! The excitement was almost too much to handle.

"Are you sure you don't want to go home?" Lyle asked some time later as they walked together back up the

hall to the office from the nurses station.

"I'm sure," Dixie answered sighing contentedly. The bleeding had stopped and a bandage was hugging her forehead. "I've caused enough trouble for one day."

Lyle shook his head painfully. "Dixie, you are the last person who has caused trouble today. If anyone has, (well, beside Brigid) it's been me." A brief silence ensued.

"You? Why you?"

"Well..." Lyle grimaced. "the package was from me."

"From you?"

"For you."

"For me?"

Lyle nodded. "What can I say? You open Devries' mail everyday. I thought it would be cool if you opened something you thought was for him but it was really for you." Simultaneously the flush rose in his face and his words slurred rapidly together. "That's why I didn't want Brigid to tell the police."

"Lyle...that's so thoughtful." Dixie could not suppress a smile. "Well, I suppose that clears everything up. I'll open it up when we get there and I'll pretend I don't know it's from you."

They entered the office and Lyle rested his arms on her desktop while Dixie began the search.

"Did Brigid take it with her when she went to call the police?"

"I didn't see—" he began.

"Lyle!" Mr. Devries voice resounded like a fierce and vengeful gunshot. He stood in his doorway making himself as tall as 5'6 could possibly be. "Step into my office." he commanded. "Dixie, you may accompany him. Either he or I may need moral support in a few minutes.

Dixie followed Lyle into the office, her heart pounding. Just when it seemed that everything was normal and

peaceful again this happened. On Mr. Devries desk was a bunch of roses, a box of chocolate and a sheet of pink paper.

Color drained from Lyle's face as he tried to speak. A look from Mr. Devries silenced him.

"While you slipped out I took it upon my self to open some of my mail. This package was among them, an oddly shaped one I thought. What was inside was even odder. A dozed silk roses, a box of chocolates and the following letter. He picked up the pick piece of paper and read the following out loud.

"From the moment I saw you I wanted to know you more. As time passed I watched you, admiring your gentle grace and loveliness. Then came the time when I could call you my friend...and how dear a friend you have been! Now, however, I hope to be more than your friend. I love you. I love you with all my heart and I would be the luckiest man on earth if there was some chance you could love me in return.

Love,
Lyle"

He folded the paper and then folded his hands. "What is this, Lyle? I admit I am surprised by this declaration."

"You—" here Lyle's voice cracked, "You weren't suppose to open that."

"Why not? It's addressed to me." He held up the package address.

"Yes, but Dixie opens your mail every morning and so naturally I thought that she would..." His voice trailed off. He eyes fell humiliated to the ground. Dixie, moving closer to him slipped her hand into his and squeezed it. He lifted his head with fresh confidence.

"So this," Mr. Devries continued, gathering up the

flowers, chocolates and paper, and handing it to her, "belongs to you Dixie."

"That's exactly right." Lyle had found his voice again.

"Well, Lyle," Here, Mr. Devries coughed. "That certainly does bring relief to my mind."

Lyle said nothing, but chuckled and squeezed Dixie's hand.

"And now," said Mr. Devries, turning his eyes to the clock, "it's 12:55. I'd say it's time to start work."

"Stranger"

PATRICIA ROGERS

What's your name,

 This boy who speaks

 I speak

 I see

 Everyday

 Quietly sitting,

 Resting

 Frowning

 Waiting

What are you waiting for...?

 Is it for me to finally ask,

 "what is your name,

 You whom I speak to everyday"?



Untilted
Patricia Rogers

Catastrophe

AMIR FATEMI

Call the day down into night,
Take the stars from the sky,
Tear the heavens from their spheres
Pull the angels from their flight
Make the air fill with the innocent's cry
And fill all of Creation with the truth of fear

Things are lurking in your mind
Thoughts that can't be left behind
Creatures calling out for you
In the darkness you're running to
Mark the words and hear the sounds
Losing life and crumbling ground

Anyway that you see light
Fleeing down into the night
Creature of darkest misery
Trying hard to run from me
Seek you out and bring you down
A demon's soul an angry crown

Anything to get away
Not to feel another day
Try to steal my peace of mind
Try to take what you can't find
Calling down into the pit
Anything that makes you fit

"Jump" you say

MEGAN SMITH

your prize baboon:
i display your tricks on
a dusty street that parallels the
littered dock where
rank odors swim in my nostrils and
invisible fears
jeer me on
i slip and i stumble through
the not-quite-learned routine
"none of the others did this" you
call to the callous
crowd—jaded tricks
"jump" you say
but i need to sit
"you're like shit" you spit
i need to yell
so i yell
and they wonder why i don't
jump

Confused

RENEE FORDE

When I close my eyes,
 It's like
I don't know,
I don't know y
I can't explain
Have u ever worried
But didn't really know what about?
 Have u...
 Have u...
Felt lost,
Trying to find ur way
 But don't know how?
It's like cleaning up a messy room,
"Where do I start?"
Don't ask me,
I never know,
But it always seems to finish.
Is that what counts?



Untitled
Aracely Herrera

The Immigrant

ANAREL OLIVEIRA

I am the man who works the soil

My wife is the one who puts the seeds in it

And my sons and daughters are the ones who water the offspring

And still you look at us as if we were dirty

Let me tell you what I do for you

I wake up when the sun is still sleeping

I toddle in the dark looking for my tools to start my day

When the sun decides to come out,

my wife brings me water so I can sip from it and continue

the excruciating daily journey of preparing the soil.

I sleep when the darkness disables me to work

There is no Saturday or Sunday to rest.

The field is my church and I pray every day that God

makes my crops appealing

So I can sell it to you and feed my family.

The sun makes scars on my body

The dirty lives impregnated in my skin

And that smell of sadness, anger, and regret inside of me
that no one smells makes me grow older faster.

And you look at me as the uninvited immigrant

The one who is supposed to be beneath you,

Not allowed to go to school,

not able to work and not allowed to be equal

I am hunted to go back to my country's misery

Can you see that I had a dream of going to the perfect world

Where my family could benefit from better life opportunities?

Today the dream is to be caught since I can pay my way back

Still, I wake up one more day

So my sons and daughters can one day live better to serve you.

I am Mexican. I am Latino. I am Asian. And I am African.

I came from all the nations of the world. Just to serve you.

Dimension Ether

MATT PULLEN

Time, curse of life taking away Everything I like
A year, yesterday, today, cursed with immense pain
A face pursuing me, screaming at me
Only a forgotten memory
My heart and mind locked on numb
The voice echoing in my soul
Cursed seventeen years gone from the day
Sitting alone, in a better place

My heart opened wide
To let her see inside
All the care, agony for the loss
Looking how much she meant
Ooh, I know, Ooh I know,
I see her looking out for me
Screaming, calling for me

Given something that I never had
Friendship in a different time and space
Together climbing the walls of steel
Hard to believe she was even real
Often thinking back on those days
I don't know, why should I feel this way
I know she rests not, I know she's relieved now
Resting behind the doors of Heaven

I just wanna scream, Shout wide
I just wanna kill the one that took you away
I wanna hold onto you and never let go
It gets me mad, It gets me sad
My actions don't mean a thing
I cannot reach you, farewell.

In loving memory of Christine Hegar (1985-2003)



Cricket on Bamboo
Howard Kaplan



Cain and Abel Throw a Valentine Party

JEWEL BRADSTREET HELDMAN

James Cooper didn't notice the noise in his car at first – after all, it was just a faint rustling from the backseat. He never liked driving alone at night anyway, with the headlights glaring and the signs dark and shadowy, familiar places taking on a sinister feeling, like strangers watching through a distorted lens.

Spending all day at elementary school Valentine's Day parties only heightened the contrast. He sometimes found it a strain to be cheery all day in such a brightly lit environment, all construction paper hearts and sugary excitement, disposable cards promising eternal friendship. The school, in its festive excitement, also lacked a bit of its usual control, which always made him a little cranky. He liked the school best at its most orderly, children in their seats, eyes front, quietly waiting.

Something about a roomful of children writing "I luv you" with sparkly ink always filled him with the deepest despair. At 30 and still single, he knew the truth – no matter how beautiful, all those brave paper hearts and lacey doilies end up wadded into little balls in the trash with old chewing gum and tissues.

So it was at about 7 p.m. on Friday the 13th, the day before the actual Valentine's Day holiday, when he pulled up toward railroad bridge. He realized he had not yet changed out of his authoritarian principal clothes, a pleasing contrast of threatening dark suit (you'd better behave!) with a cheery Valentine's tie (I'm really your friend!) and tidy, orderly, shiny shoes.

He always hated this bridge. Once, turning the corner too closely, he gashed the side of his car open. Imperfectly repaired, the rip in his otherwise perfect BMW cost him a premium both on his insurance and his image of himself as a fine driver.

Suddenly, as he sat there, picking at the glitter glue on his otherwise impeccable suit, thinking about the scandal of auto insurance and the hopelessness of Valentine's Day, he heard the rustling of newspapers from the back seat and felt the cold steel on the back of his head.

"Who are you?" he cried out, thinking suddenly of death. He froze, waiting for the gunman to speak.

He smelled the passenger's boozy breath on the back of his neck, hot and sour. He saw the faded blue top of the stranger's baseball cap in the rear view mirror. Seconds stretched into eternity. In his mind, scientists eliminated polio, tanks rolled through Baghdad, men landed on Mars. He sweated through his shirt and jacket. Nothing happened.

The car in back of him started to honk, but his hands remained frozen in place. Finally a voice spoke. It was strangely familiar.

"Jimbo," said the voice, cracking, a trembling hand shaking the gun slightly against the other man's neck, "I got some of the wrong people pissed off. It really wasn't my fault. In fact, I really didn't do it. But they're blaming me. I know we never got along, but you've gotta hide me for a while. I'm serious, Jimbo."

His little brother, a 28-year-old man with both a day-old stubble and matching day-old smell, dissolved into great choking sobs in the vast darkness of the BMW's leather interior.

James hit the gas, found a wide patch by the side of the road approaching the bridge and pulled over. His hands

trembled on the wheel. Just one whiff of trouble could be enough for people to boot him out of the happy universe of the school system forever. He pictured himself as a Wal-Mart greeter, his tenuous hold on middle class contentment broken, a smiley face button pinned to his NASCAR T-shirt. The knot in his stomach tightened.

"Pete! How am I going to help you? I can't have a scandal – people entrust their children to me. They don't let felons run schools. They don't let felons mop the floors in schools. The PTA probably has my house bugged. They're probably watching me now."

Pete mumbled something unintelligible. James turned, looked hard into the back seat and frowned. He was sure there would be permanent greasy stains there from his brother's dirty coveralls. Pete's boyish face, remembered from 10 years ago, had turned into a blotchy bloated mess.

Pete scrunched down defensively, staring back with bleary, red-rimmed eyes from under the bill of a well-worn Red Sox cap. He quickly yanked his hand away, hiding the metal object.

"You don't even have a gun, do you?" James said.

"I do too," said Pete, slurring a little. "I just forgot the bullets. Are you going to help me or not?"

James suddenly shivered at what it would be like to no longer be principal of Pine Grove Elementary School, or to not even to be a Wal-Mart greeter, which was, after all, a happy job, but to work in a job he often used as a cautionary lesson for school children. He saw himself sorting bottles at the recycling center, rolling out of the house each day at an early hour with his heavy rubber gloves and ear protectors, ready to separate the green plastic from the clear and the stench of garbage clinging faintly but permanently to his clothes.

Then Pete tilted his head and shook it slightly, and

for a moment, James saw the face of the lonely little kid brother he knew in grade school.

He cleared his throat. "Well, I guess we should go back to my house and get something to eat."

When James woke up the next day to Pete's distinctive, raspy, off-key singing, a choking stench of stale beer, and the acrid smell of garlic, he knew right away he had made a mistake. A yeasty odor permeated the entire condo, as though the carpets had been shampooed with Schlitz. Old cartons of Chinese food littered every surface while the television blared obscenely. Somehow, Pete had found "Gilligan's Island" on an obscure nostalgia channel specializing in bad programming.

The show never had much of a plot – six people trapped on an island with an idiot named Gilligan. His brother loved it. When the theme song came on, Pete sang along lustily.

James found Pete sitting downstairs in his underwear, grinning, surrounded by the previous night's devastation – shiny green bottles and empty cartons. For a man on the lam, he looked elatedly happy. "The guy I share the trailer with – he won't let me watch his cable," he said. "I get the TV with the rabbit ears."

James suddenly felt like the girl he'd read about in the newspaper, born in the Dominican Republic with an undeveloped second head. *Craniopagus parasiticus*, the condition was called. Parasitic twins. He looked at Pete a little like that – as though he were some undeveloped extra body part James needed to have removed. But the question was, could the girl live without the parasitic twin? Could the two be separated? Doctors didn't know.

James spent years trying to distance himself from his troubled brother, immersing himself in work, hiding in the suburbs, but here he was, trapped back on the island with

Gilligan. James wondered what kind of mess Pete had made of his own life, back in upstate New York. Really, anything seemed possible.

"Pete," James said, sitting next to him in front of the television. He wondered if the Skipper ever tried sneaking off the island alone. "Tell me – exactly what kind of trouble are you in?"

"Well, it's a long story," he said, shaking his head slowly in the way James remembered from boyhood. "Maybe I'll tell you later."

"No, how about now," the older brother pressed suspiciously. "Is it drugs? Girls? Money? Let's get specific."

"It's hard to explain," he said, watching the professor build something out of bamboo (a nuclear reactor? weapons of mass destruction?) "Hey, do you remember this episode? We watched this every day after school."

"Maybe a little less Gilligan's Island and you would have actually graduated from vocational school," James said. "All those wasted hours."

"You watched it too, you know, and you seem outwardly normal. I really am in a lot of trouble," said Pete, shifting on the fold-out couch.

"You really should give this place more personality," he added, looking around the bare white living room, emptiness punctuated with manly leather chairs. "Maybe you should collect something. I collect car air fresheners. This looks like a furniture showroom, not somebody's house."

"Car air fresheners? Do you even own a car?"

"No, but a guy can dream." His eyes never left the screen, flickering involuntarily as the plot line set off electrical charges in his fuzzy brain. "I might need some money to pay some guys off," Pete said after sitting silent for a minute. "Big guys in a gang."

"What kind of big guys in a gang?"

At that moment, Pete's face started to involuntarily twitch. A lie was coming on, and it looked like a whopper. Pete shifted uncomfortably, head tilting from side to side. He pulled down his hat, shading his eyes.

James had seen this many times before, generally after money had disappeared in a mysterious fashion.

"They needed somebody to be a mule. My ex-wife, she said if I did it, it would help her brother, who's doing time. He had a chance to get in with a gang in prison and it would help protect him. They gave me a package to move, but I lost it."

Pete looked straight at him. The twitching stopped. Parasitic twin, James thought. The only true part would be about the money. "Are they coming after you here?"

"Who knows? Maybe we should get out of here for a while, in case they come around."

"The first place they'll look for you is here, dummy," James said, mirroring the Skipper, who was animatedly chewing out Gilligan on the big screen. "This was the dumbest possible place to come. Maybe you should have gone straight to Fantasyland."

"Fantasyland? Isn't that in California?" said Pete, puzzled. He sat up and flicked off the big screen television, which now reflected his scary unshaven face across the alien landscape of James' living room.

"Hey, Jimbo, it's Saturday. You have keys to the school, right? Let's go hide there for a while, you know, talk. And we can be bad, do all the stuff in school we always wanted to do. Drink beer, shoot hoops, smoke dope, make black marks on the floor."

He jumped up and started getting dressed, so fast he put his arm in the wrong sleeve.

"You know the school is not my personal club," James said, a hard knot developing in the pit of his stom-

ach. Pete peered into the fridge, grabbed another six-pack.

Then he noticed James' key ring on the table and deftly snatched it up

"I'm driving," he announced, holding the keys aloft. "Loan me some sweatpants, willya?"

An hour later, they sat on the hard gym floor, waiting for the big halogen lights to fully power up. "You really are some kind of dumb bastard," said James angrily, taking a long pull on a Molson. "You wonder why I haven't seen you in 10 years. First, you never have a phone. Next, you never have a reliable car. And third, you're always living with some deadbeat out in the sticks, renting a room or sleeping on somebody's couch. And now this."

"Well, you were never Mr. Warmth and Personality," said Pete. "You used to beat me up when no one was around until I got bigger than you. Always such a know-it-all. Mr. Perfect."

"What about all that stuff you did when we got older?" James said. "Taking dad's new tools back to Sears and getting the refund money. Becoming a juvenile delinquent and then just a delinquent. You've only been able to hold one job in your whole life, at that gas station, the last one in America with actual live people pumping gas. I hear they're making it a roadside attraction."

Pete, Red Sox hat pulled low, busied himself rolling a joint and avoiding eye contact. "How else could I turn out, dickbrain? You were the favorite," he said. "The main thing is, you got a better bike. Remember?"

"I worked all summer and bought that bike!"

"Mine was cheap and crappy. You got everything. Now look at you – a wage slave in the middle of nowhere, empty house, paying bills. Hey, at least I'm free. You always just wanted to be the teacher's pet. The American dream, according to James."

"Shut up! Just shut up! Take it back! Take it back now!"

"Oh, are you going to give me detention? You'll have to beat me at hoops first, sissy boy. And you'll never do that."

"You're on, loser."

The two men rose heavily to their feet. Pete snubbed out the joint on the gym floor, carefully saving it for later. He grabbed the basketball and swung aggressively out onto the court. James reached for it. They sparred like gladiators, serious, sweating, moving in and out with surprising lightness. James shot from the three-point line, sank it, gave out a whoop.

"Just lucky," Pete shouted, throwing himself into the game with more vigor. "You know, when I was 16, they kicked me out of the house. Where were you for me then?"

James flushed with anger. "I was already gone! I had nothing to do with it!" They played for blood now, faster, more physical, bumping and bruising. The game took on a more desperate, sloppy tone as the two men, operating on adrenaline, started to tire. Pete took an elbow to the head. Blood streamed from his ear as he threw a punch at James. They rolled on the floor, elbows flying, fists alternately making contact and missing wildly. James nursed a cut under his eye and pushed Pete away, retreating back to the end of the gym near the ball closet.

His eye started to close up, becoming puffy and bruised. He peered at Pete through the raw slit.

"You're crazy!" he shouted. "You've always been crazy! If you were in school now, they'd have you on so much Ritalin and Prozac you wouldn't be able to walk!"

"Oh yeah!" Pete shouted back. "Well, I'm glad I never have to see your stupid face any more, Mr. School Principal. If we were in school now, I'd wipe the gym floor with you all

over again, sissy man."

They sat, panting, side by side, faces red, breath still heavy with booze.

"It really was an awful town to grow up in, don't you think?" said James finally, regarding his sibling. Maybe a toxic environment helped produce the mutant, he thought. "Remember how you couldn't get on a Little League team unless you were buddies with the coach's son? We tried out for years and years, and always ended up in the rec league. You always had to know the right people."

"Yeah, everybody into everybody else's business. I bet this town's just like it."

"Well, thanks to technology, people can get some of their reality from television. So where did you learn to break into cars?"

"Oh, vocational school. That's about the main thing I learned there. Automotive sciences."

"So tell me, did you really lose that package?"

Pete started to talk, and then twitched and tugged at his hat. He shifted uncomfortably. Then he pulled the joint out of his pocket, fit it into a roach clip and lit up. "A lot's happened since we were kids," he said. "Let's not talk about that."

James, face rough with stubble, leaned back against the wall, hands deep in his ragged sweatpants. He looked up at the silver lights, twinkling and humming a million miles away in the sky of the gym ceiling. "OK. Let's take a tally. How many school rules did we break so far?"

"Well, we were drinking beer. That's at least one, probably more," Pete said as James held up a finger.

"Well, we were drinking it in the gym. So that's another one." James held up another finger. He felt comfortable, familiar with quantifying badness with numbers and statistics.



Sunflowers
Myra M. Patner

"I lit a match and I smoked some pot. That's two more," Pete contributed proudly, lying back on the floor.

"We got in a fight. That's one, and you're wearing a hat inside. That makes six so far." James extended fingers on both hands now and wiggled them dramatically.

"We used bad language, and we played basketball too roughly," Pete added.

"We're up to eight. You also disobeyed the principal. That's nine. In fact, you gave the principal a pretty good shiner," said James.

"How many of these would land us in your office?" Pete asked, gesturing in the general direction of the inner sanctum, the sacred principal's office, off-limits to most people. James liked people to think he sat in there reading serious doctoral educational theories, but he usually just hid from all the complaining parents, mischievous children and obsequious staff members, and read the newspaper comics and on more stressful days, ate chocolates.

"Oh, all of them. I'd make you sit on the floor all day until your mother came, and then I'd suspend your sorry arse for at least a year. Maybe two," said James.

"Maybe we should take our clothes off and run around in the halls. Remember – like we used to do to drive Mom crazy, in the '70's? That should be good for at least a half dozen rules."

"C'mon, Pete, we had to be about nine years old," said James, exasperated and alarmed. He felt his self-control slipping away, the unaccustomed mid-day beer making his head spin. "That's so juvenile I can't believe you would even suggest it."

Pete started to poke James. "Chicken! Chicken!" he taunted. "I dare you. I double dare you. I triple dare you. Snotty Mr. Crossing Guard chickenhearted pussylips. What bazinga too small, big brother? Embarrassed for me to see

your weenie?"

Pete wouldn't let up. He tried to grab his brother's head, knuckles ready to deliver a noogie, but James wrenched away.

"Stand back, you freak!" James shouted, staring at Pete like a dazed Megalon regarding a mentally impaired Godzilla, and pointing his finger like a gun. He couldn't deny it – the idea appealed to him, a touch of crazy anarchy in a place he associated with order. Chemicals swirled through his confused brain like a second grade science experiment. He could no longer remember his exact age or grade level. He just wanted to play.

"If I race you, you'll leave me alone, right?" he asked slowly.

"Sure I will," said Pete, winking, pulling off his socks.

They hastily stripped, stained, sweaty t-shirts, thin, gray underwear, damp, cotton gym shorts and sweatshirts flung into a heap, shed like the skin of adulthood, until they stood naked, pure, renewed, skin gleaming, under the bright fluorescent lights.

James led the way out into the shiny, hard hall, still gaudily decorated for the holiday, the heady optimism of red and pink hearts surrounding them, innocent, hopeful, child-like, transient. Next week, all the hearts and cupids would be replaced by shamrocks and leprechauns.

James gestured down the hallway, explaining the floor plan to Pete. "It's just a big square," he said. "Straight, then left, then left again. Then around a second time."

They shook hands and placed their bare, cracked feet along the lines in the floor tile. James counted to three. Droplets of sweat trailing on the air, they raced past the first grade classrooms, sliding around the corner, James leading slightly into the upper grades hallway, legs stretching, elastic sinews expanding and then snapping back, lungs filled to

capacity, arms moving in perfect rhythm, flying faster, faster. Pete, always the better athlete, pulled up from behind, determined either to win or give James a fatal heart attack, not really caring which.

As they neared the big hall entrance at the end of the first lap, the door suddenly opened, blinding them with mid-morning sunlight.

A tall man, framed in the blinding glow, stood in the doorway as the naked principal squinted dumbly through the hazy sunshine. Confused, he thought at first it might be his father, but as his eyes adjusted to the light, he recognized the shaggy figure of the school janitor.

"Mr. Cooper! Is that you? What are you doing!" Mr. K. looked at the runners with an expression of fear and disgust, eyes wide, arms before his reddening face, shocked, embarrassed, and James thought, maybe a little amused.

James imagined what they must look like to a stranger – pale, naked, insane grown men, huffing and puffing, near asphyxiation, and he looked back at Mr. K with an oxygen-deprived expression, peering through a purple slit, and then he did the only thing left to do.

He laughed.

Pete started to laugh too, and they stood there, weak-kneed, doubled over and bursting into aching, tumbling, rolling thunderclaps of laughter, convulsing, gasping, breathless.

When James finally caught his breath, he straightened back up into his principal self, although minus the suit, and said, with the straightest face he could muster, "Mr. K, meet my brother. I was just showing him around the school."

Pete just stood there snickering.

James could see Mr. K watching the whole scene, searching for clues to decipher the madness as he backed slowly toward the door. "You know we have a dress code

here," he said stiffly as he disappeared.

"So why'd you really come here?" asked James as they stood in the bus station waiting in the late afternoon drizzle for the bus back to Albany. He handed Pete the ticket with his left hand, wallet in his right. He also handed him a roll of bills.

"Not sure," said Pete. "I'm just so sick of the guy I live with, always bossing me around, telling me what to do, my ex-wife bugging me for money." said Pete. He paused. "I guess I just wanted to see what you'd do if I was really in trouble, you know. How soon do you need this money back?"

James ignored this remark. "We really don't have much in common any more," said James. "But this was a lot of fun, wasn't it? It reminds me of those tricks we used to play on the neighbors at Halloween."

He was no longer thinking of Pete so much as a parasitic twin, but more like a childhood photograph, someone remembered dimly from the faded past, living in a different time.

Pete looked away out the rain-streaked bus station window. "That was the most fun I've ever had in school," he said. "If we forgot some rules, I'll come back to break them." Then the bus to Albany pulled up.

James sheepishly reached in his pocket and handed him a paper sack. "You probably got me in a lot of trouble," he said. "But it's still Valentine's Day, you know."

Pete reached into the sack, pulled out a Sponge Bob valentine. "Happy Valentine's Day to Mr. Cooper," scrawled in childish hand, decorated the card.

"I'll try to remember to write," Pete said, adding, "But you know me. I'll probably forget. Well, unless I need money." Then he got on the bus. He watched James from behind the glass, like a science specimen preserved in an

airless void of the past, as the bus pulled out and moved forward.

James waved until the bus was gone, then turned away and opened the day's paper. There it was. The headline he'd been looking for. "Dominican girl dies after operation to remove extra head," it read.

The girl had been fated from the start, the flaw hers all along in the very fabric of her being. It answered his question.

Sparrow

AMIR FATEMI

Bold little sparrow
Perched precariously, defiantly on the sign
Directly in front of the path I walk
Why do you sit with ruffled feathers
Head to the side
While your chirp challenges at me as I pass?

The Mill-landscape Painting

ERICA ROBERTSON

Out on the boat
Lazy days on the river
Nowhere to go
Just sailing away
Windmill an easy breeze
Over the casting sun
Lazy days on the river
Just sailing away

Questions in Roam

LOKI KOWALSKI

Walking in a world
Through shadows and unknown
Wondering is this my path
Or lifetime left to roam
The questions along this path
Leave questions all in time
Spiraling through the universe
In hopes for the divine
I raise my head and try to smile
Tears blinding my own eyes
Worrying of the pain I may cause
Or of possible loving demise
Yet I keep on wandering
Hoping for truth to unfold
These questions keep me roaming
Until my path is told

After Winter
DEVON WATKINS

Slippery slimy green growing gook
Paints the old elm tree's time-withered roots
Tiny tufts of fuzz on bunnies' bottoms in the fern
Bouncing, round-and-rounding over spring's sudden return

Fragile fawns in flowers nestle
Hurrying scurrying chipmunks wrestle
Brimming brooks fresh rained and teeming to the creek's
high neck
Leaves rustling in west winds fussing over sweeping up
winter's mess

Spring brings life into the forest
Sweetly singing nature's chorus
Resurrection raining, stains-green everything once dead
Puffy sky-pillows billow, silent, knowing what's ahead

Warmth wraps her arms around the woodland
Sunshine spreads through trees' every hand
Perfumed prairies raise their pansies, poppies, purple violets
Again the land reclaims its color, a masterpiece from
Heaven

HOPE (For Black History month)

KARRELL ADOU

Hope, I say hope

Hope of black people

For all these moments

When we cease believing

Because of difficulties and tests

And all vexations

If in me I feel hatred, I pertinently know that it is useless

I want to remain in peace with myself

And forget any source of problems

Cherishing the marvelous dream that one day we will sym-
bolize deep value

For we are strong and worth

My people rise

We will keep freedom and dignity of which we have always
been deprived

My color of skin raises angers

Yet, I am black and I am proud

We will keep freedom and dignity of which we have always
been deprived

Hope

Hope, I say hope

My purpose is not to attain to gain your compassion

My spirit is sad and you must know it

My peace depends on your good will

If in me I feel the sorrow I know pertinently that it is use-
less

I want to remain in peace with myself

And forget all sources of problems.

Children

TAMER RIFAI

In sea-tossed moons,
On sunlit dunes,
While we were small enough to stand on spoons
And just fresh enough out of the womb
That the world's intensity caused us random swoons,
We played like gods
Lost in the realms of greater divinity
And every moment the world, for all we knew,
Was at stake.
Children. Such beautiful, terrible children
Running across the desert we were raised in
Swirling long silk scarves behind us
And finding rocks to make new kingdoms.



Castle Guardian Matsue
Howard Kaplan

Winter Woods

YUQING LIU

Winter woods

Transparent woods

Sparse, forthright

Lake-blue sky

Fairy-tale sky

Clouds quiet

Clumps and clumps

Fallen leaves

Crisp, curl

Hide it well

Hide it well

a witty secret

Who is it
Concealing behind
mountains and critters
Seeing your smile
Hearing your breath
Sharing the slight delight
In your mind

Winter sunlight
Penetrates woods
Shines on blinking lashes
Straight and warm

All are witness
All are witness
of boundless whispers.

This Man's Hands

SARCIA ADKINS

This man's hands were massive. They looked like they had gone through the fires of hell, the coldest of the coldest winter without gloves, and had lifted the heaviest things on earth. Still they looked as gentle as silk. Soft to the touch, clammy and moist. These hands were hands of unadulterated power. The palms were as white as the cotton his ancestors used to pick, and on the flipside his skin and fingers were as black as midnight. His fingers were long and elongated like the stems of roses, and his fingernails were filed low and had no traces of dirt. As I watched his hands they were very active. Flagging down cars, dap-ping up his boys, and fondling and touching women. But when I looked closer I saw that these hands were distributing that rock. That erb. That flave. That heroin. All of the things that ruin my neighborhood. How could beautiful hands be part of a devilish scheme by the government? The black man hands his people their own fates. Hands them their existence. Hands them their sentence into hell. Why? Our surroundings were like the cold cells of Riker's Island prison. The air was stale and moldy like an old basement and the scenery was as gray as an old photograph. "Man why you let those beautiful hands deal such bad cards." "Girl what you talking about. Why you in a grown man's business. Anyways, I'm just trying to make that money . . . I'm their Jesus and they are my disciples."



Untitled
Patricia Perez

Native Tongue

AMELIA ALVARADO

My shame is not what I have done in my past
My shame is not that I've told my life to people who bash me
With every word that comes out of their mouth
My shame lies in not knowing my native tongue.
The vocabulary is limited and can fit in a small box
The syllables come out like drops of water;
Not like the river that flows when I speak English.
My culture is lost here in Maryland, but thrives as always
In my native homeland.
I hear the drumbeats in the distance, whispering my name
And asking me remember;
To remember the time when I only knew her and spoke of her
When English was the stranger I haven't met,
And Spanish was the breast and milk that suckled me.
Spanish held me in her arms,
Wrapped me around like a tortilla
And English stayed at arms length.
Spanish knew every curve of my body,
And English only had the privilege to look from afar.
Spanish praised my hips and legs,
Then English came and said, "you're much too curvy,
you're better off dead!"
With each passing year, as the cactus sun rose and fell,
English came out ahead, and held my native tongue in
chains.
"Don't speak Spanish in the classroom,"
It would say.

Kept her in a tower and had the intention to take my attention,
Away from her in order to get to forget about her,
But she kept on singing my name,
Asking me not to forget her
To speak of her and learn what we lost.
To remember the days when my friends were only mis
amigas.

And my mom was mi madre
To remember the days when I would stay up late
And watch Sabado Gigante on the Spanish channel
And make comments like a grown-up, cuz I knew what I
was talking about.

When my language was considered beautiful and not
something to hide,
Not something to despise.

When café con leche was enough, not that pinche so
called coffee from Starbucks

Back in the days when my name was Amelia Cristina
Alvarado,

Not "oh, like Ameila Earnhart!"
No, Amelia like my grandmother.

I remember my Native Tongue
Me recuerdo de ti.

On the Outside Looking In

JAYNEA MUSE

She stood at the top of the escalator
For the task that would await her
Getting prepared to walk down the stairs
She encouraged her son who was two or three
"Come on little man, walk down in front of me"
She grabbed her stroller
Be careful
A man told her
She carried the weight
That single mother's bear
As she moved slowly coming down the stair
A strong grip on the stroller, she handled with care
Behind her smile
I saw worry and despair
But, her strength and determination
To none I can compare
I did not know
Where
She had been or
Where
She was going
Her ability to survive is what she was showing
From that moment, my mind wandered
To the number
Of men that owe child support
Yet women are slowly losing our right to abort
Daycare funding being cut
Job opportunity, door shut!
The question then, is now what?

Still, she survives
Through impoverishment
Her life
No one knows, how hard it's been
So today I give tribute to single mothers
For they are mothers and fathers
Teachers and doctors.



Untitled
Patricia Rogers

Destiny
ANA WEIDER-BLANK

I sweat,
water droplets glistening on my crimson skin,
the tropical sun burning my breasts,
beating at my soul,
fantastical mirages of friends, family, love intoxicating my
water starved body, hallucinating mind, and love squeezed
soul, here in color drenched India, in the sultry and color
soaked Sahara.

I drink my own magical elixir of blood tears and dreams.
I am my own Shaman, trying desperately to plead the spir-
its to heal me.
But I am all alone.

I dance,
Swinging and twirling through jewels and spices, faster
and faster.
I stay in one place for no measurable period of time; a
second, a month, a year.
But never long enough to settle,
Never long enough to grow comfortable in my own skin.

So I freeze,
shivering in the frozen tundra of Alaska.
I taste the icy sweetness of the snow.
I run with the caribou, I swim with the seals, but there is
no love, no human contact- only the wild breath of rene-
gade wolves.

So I morph and I change beyond recognition,
and I leave my friends behind,
and I go alone to meet my destiny; one place after another,
one school after another,
one friend leaving after another.

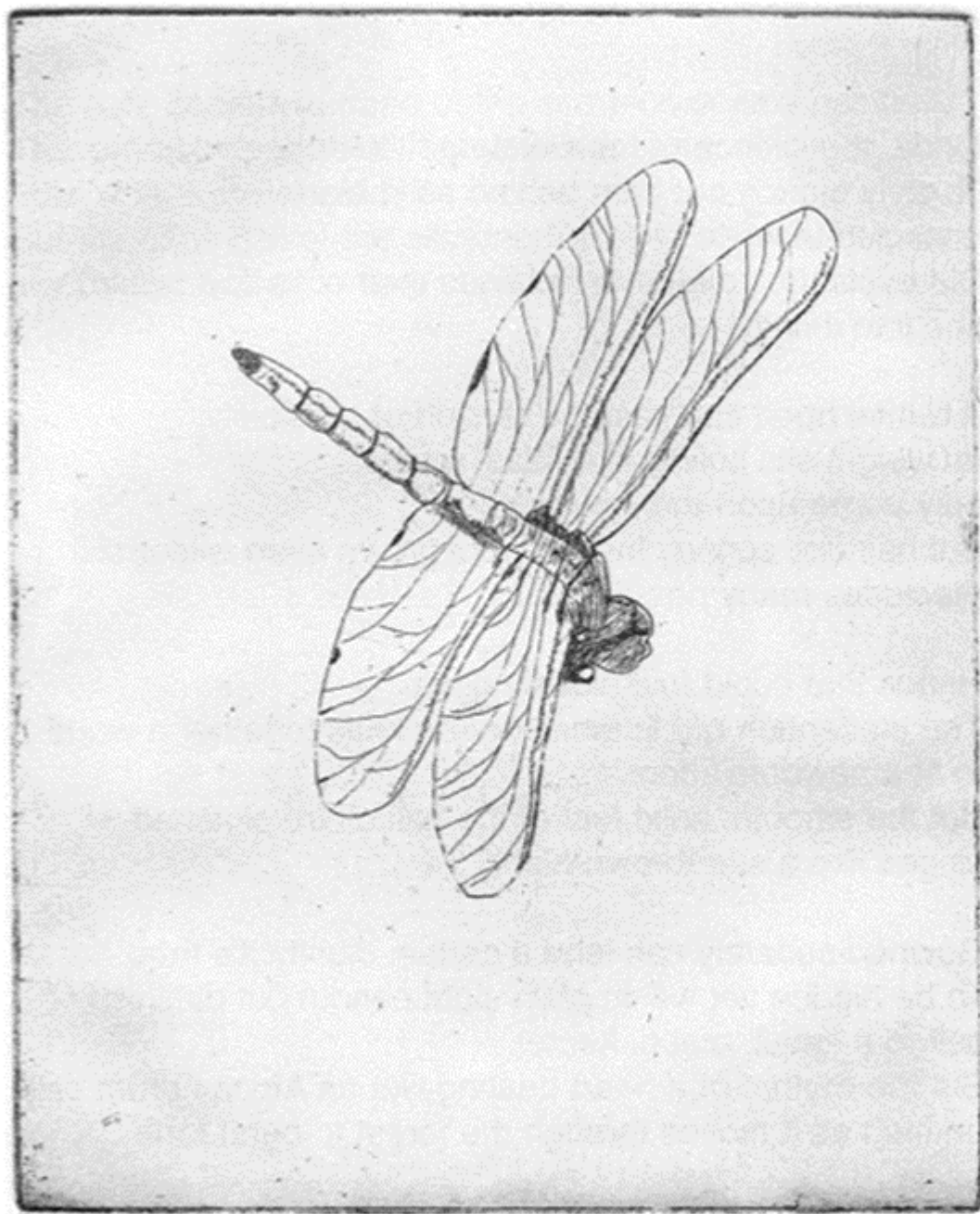
I feel the ghosts of memory touch my soul- memories of
loves, friends, and dreams, flushing me in wet sensuousness.
For a second I am what I once was; stable and confident.
And for a moment time stands still.

At the Pond
ALEX ROGOLSKY

I sat down and stared at the pretty pond,
with fish and mallards all gathered around,
writing this poem, they thought I'd food
to give, but there was none to be found.

They mostly went away, but two ducks stayed near,
along with a black carp, who had forgotten fear;
I spoke to those three, of feelings and such,
but as for food, they were out of luck.

The ducks then went to the center of the pool
drinking water now, and watching the fool
who was making all of the funny sounds
but offering no food to be found.



Dragonfly
Howard Kaplan

Or, Why I Didn't Become a Nun

AVIS JONES-PETLANE

Once, the silence of the cloistered life appealed to me.
To slyly glance out from behind solid black
encircled in white has its moments.
But eyelashes make weak blinds over orbs that would
see into infinity.

A furtive hood can cast the illusion of invisibility.
Its weight sits solidly like Atlas' world
only borne upon the crown.
But hair like springy lamb's wool grown even wilder still
precludes many possibilities.

Hands that could fold piously don't.
The inattention but to small details knits together a world
to fit a newborn's foot.
But the smooth, solid feel of the ball of fire clutched
singes like a sun thrown high.

Gowned sedately can lend a certain dignity it's true.
To be hidden yet within plain sight cannot but diminish
self to a small, mean, kernel.
But the rhythm of a heart beating like an African drum calls
on high as it moves through the forest to burst forth.

The soft, secretive, tread of the scorpion seems hesitant.
The venomous tail held high and wavering
from side to delicious side.
But the siren call of the eagle in flight circling the far blue
sky beckons like the very hand of an impetuous God.

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For more information or to contact *The Red Jacket*, stop by the English Department office at 526 Macklin Tower, call (301) 251-7409, or write to the following address:

The Red Jacket
English Department
Montgomery College--Rockville
51 Mannakee Street
Rockville, MD 20850

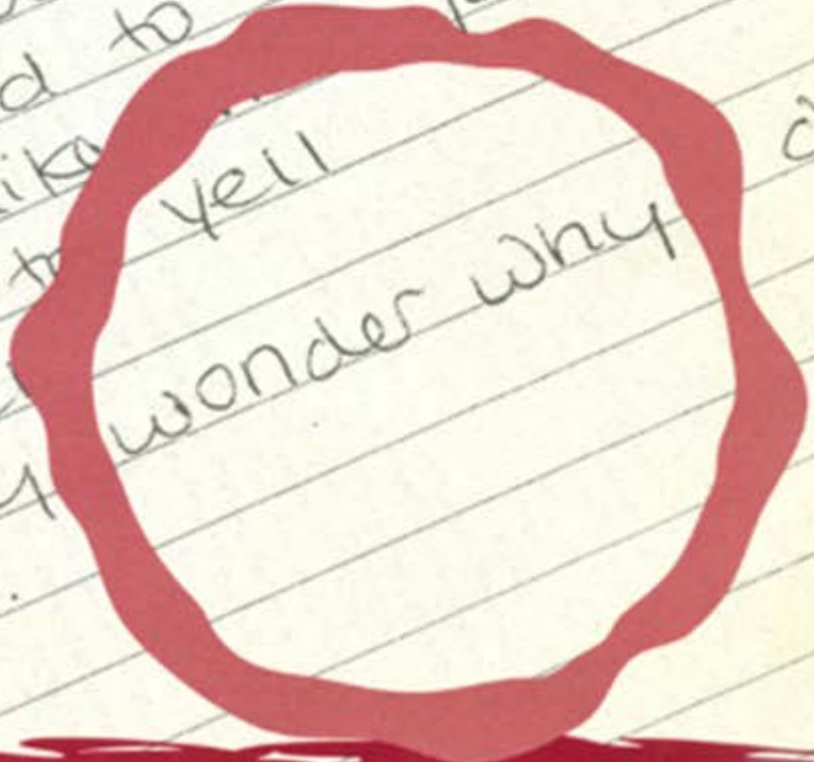


Untitled
Harvey Topper

stumble through
learned routine
the others did this"
to the callous

tricks-
"you say
need to sit
you spit

are like
need to yell
they wonder why
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