

THE

BAYOU

REVIEW

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THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON—DOWNTOWN

THE BAYOU REVIEW

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don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accor Neale Hurston My great hope is to laugh as much as I cry, to get my wo
ve somebody and have the courage to accept the love in return. Maya Angelou Full of a baby's venom The women in the house knew it and so di
ars each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her cleve were its only victims. Toni Morrison She was slender, with a frailness th
wholesome and plentiful nourishment. A pathetic, uneasy look was in her nd even faintly stamped her features, which were fine and delicate. In lieu
veil covered her light brown and abundant hair. She wore a coarse white and a blue calico skirt that only half concealed her tattered shoes. Kate Ch
angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window wo able exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try. Besides I wouldn't do
now well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstru like to look out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping v
leep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did? Char Gilman For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not "Saints." bu
to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for was no release. But this is not the end of the story, for all the young wome
s and grandmothers, ourselves—have not perished in the wilderness. And selves why, and search for and find the answer, we will know beyond all el
our minds, just exactly who, and of what, we Black American women are. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the
to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still la routing in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going
the blind now. The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself, not pity him, with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not
I this going on. There! The old lady had put out her light! The whole hous w with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her. Fear no mo
i. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt some ide he feel he must to be. She must
it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. h of the mission to see you, he lie anar felt the words
and Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. Virginia Woolf and ich had he had her, when she me to what
of the education which he had himself given his wife, staring on the first not room he cooited to im that the ds were
at a shadow of hesitation. His flattered the lieutenant's opinion of himself d reap are on the surface, he s he mdel ag and the
neously, out of love for her husband. Yukio Mishima In a second he began n he n the reg er he had but
ned. The river wouldn't hold him. He tried again and came up, choking. The water came a cough from the strong smile that
d him back in the face. He stopped and thought suddenly: it's another job my that he was doing some all the an

POETRY

ary O'Connor All I know about music is that not many people ever read, only hear, or hear corroborated, are personal, private, vanishing evocati
id and imposing order out as it hits the air. What is evoked in him, then, is a
a faint red which he thought), Is this, James Baldwin's stern word, a
y. The Salt-Alibi, which the white people here's negro's help. The

Sam Stopper's Defense of the Paper Bag

Lisa Day

It's not exactly nothing, he said
but when the intumescent lids
drew close like two halves of a fixed pecan
to peer into the bottom of the pressed
crumples, he found more than
negation, precision and
absence.

I asked him to see and
from two halves of a fixed
pecan, a starburst
of orange struck chord.
Then he folded eternities
and offered:

What The Gypsy Told Me

André de Korvin

Those who recognize light
for what it really is,
an endless garden
where music lives its second life,
they will hear night sing
departure to every dawn.
Those who see stars as footnotes
penciled on the blank spaces of dawn,
will later sit in ice cream parlors,
surprised by the flame of children
stories on their lips.
He who steals flames
from the unknown soldier
to set fire to the Pentagon,
will go to bed with alienation
and his eyelids will be
butterflies soaring over
a desolate landscape of poems,
the ink of their verses
burning everything to ashes,
a dark flame of war over
the white silence of the page.

When I Sleep

André de Korvin

My bed rocks gently, a raft drifting
on the winding river of time.
Eyes closed, I ask the river why
clocks have spoken Russian all day.
Rain in my sleep writes poems
stanzas running Cyrillic
across slanted roofs
and streets leading to dead ends.
It writes about what was
and could have been,
the blinding glare of water
changing everything so
nothing is what it was.
When I wake, my bed drifts
through open windows
and the door which all too often
strives hard to talk
intellectual in my Slavic dreams
now asks why time
flows always so strange
in the morning.

Roulette

Sylvia Sullivan Villarreal

Rain gauzes the coffee shop windows, unnoticed
by a red hooded young man, his head bobbing to music
pulsing through ear buds, while flying fingers transport
him to various outposts in the virtual world
he carries in a sleek metal box

Behind him a senior plants his flag – a black umbrella.
Turning to anoint his brew with a shake of vanilla
he wrestles the plastic dome back onto the cup
locates an orphaned newspaper, then smoothing
and reordering the sections, settles in for a read.

From the corner snatches of conversation are
audible as a suited trio huddle in earnest dialogue.
The word ‘terrorism’ pops out of their circle like a spark
falling harmlessly on wet concrete. But they glance
around nonetheless, and moderate their voices.

Opposite these three is a silky haired brunette in hot pink
grinning into her phone. Patches of absorbed listening
alternate with outbursts of animated commentary
as her fingers travel over her mane in idle inventory.
The news appears to be good.

Outside, showers filigree patterns upon pollen dusted
vehicles. From a nearby intersection, a siren rips
the gray curtain, followed by revolving hype
of flashing lights, an ambulance en route to trouble.
Carving a path through the non-emergent, the vehicle

creates a rustle among the caffeinated. They peer
through fogged glass, momentarily joined in the disruption
of private worlds. Eyes meet briefly registering something:
curiosity, concern? But no words are exchanged
and as the wailing recedes, heads lower once again.

Pantoum Monologue: When I Was Young Again

Yolanda Bridges

When I was nine
I was fearless
I was ten feet tall and bulletproof
Invincible
I was fearless
Racing headlong across unfamiliar terrain
Invincible
Unabashed
Racing headlong across unfamiliar terrain
Uncharted waters
Unabashed
Happy
Uncharted waters
You could say that again
Happy
An illusion I long for
You could say that again
A million times over
An illusion I long for
Life hadn't won yet
A million times over
When I was nine
Life hadn't won yet
I was ten feet tall and bulletproof.

That's what I thought
Life would never change
That it would remain the same
And I would win
Life would never change
I would simply chart a course
And I would win
Because I had to
I would simply chart a course
I'd take no prisoners
Because I had to
Be the master of my fate
I'd take no prisoners

Not a'one
Be the master of my fate
That was my litany
Not a'one
Not father, brother, or uncle
That was my litany
None of them succeeded
Not father, brother, or uncle
That's what I thought
None of them succeeded
That it would remain the same.

My name would not be added
I would fight and win
Life was going down
One two three
I would fight and win
I'd take it to the mat
One two three
That was my plan
I'd take it to the mat
I would succeed
No matter what
So simple
Or so I thought
No matter what
I wouldn't be like them
Or so I thought
I had a plan
I wouldn't be like them
My name would not be added
I had a plan
Life was going down.

Who knew
I got sucker punched
Life cheats
The deck was stacked
I got sucker punched
I got hurt

The deck was stacked
She never loved me
I got hurt
I got kicked; blew my knee out
She never loved me
It was just a game
I got kicked; blew my knee out
A dream deferred
It was just a game
No big deal
A dream deferred
She left me
No big deal
I didn't expect it
She left me
Life cheats
I didn't expect it
Who knew.

That kid I was
He's gone now
Ran off somewhere
Probably dead
He's gone now
Just disappeared
Probably dead
Who cares
Just disappeared
All my lofty plans
Who cares
None of it matters
All my lofty plans
Was going to be somebody
There were flaws
In the grand scheme
My foundation
There were flaws
That kid I was
My foundation
Ran off somewhere.

Heavy Black Lines

Tracy Lyall

Where did we go? Where did you take us?

So sensual, romantic and intense.

You burst out from the inside, split the ribs,
sucked on every bone cracked open on the kitchen
counter.

A pack of cigarettes, a lonely bus, leather seats,
chains bound.

You are robotic in movement, shaved chords, the
strings

of your white guitar strung around wrists
strung around ankles,

tying my hair back with sweat, pain,
and dirty sweet soul grunge.

Am I dirty? Was it bloody? Am I dying?

Crushed within a crowd of bodies, crushed
you scream and say nothing,

scream and have no voice;

with gestures and sound you prey on us,
stalk from behind in a dark alley, dark shadows.

Each note they'll turn their heads, we cry out.

On Sunday we'll kneel before *De Los Muertos*
with candles, rosaries, wax on the tip of the fingers
dipped in oil,

licked down layer after layer of skin
we peel away like a sick candy wrapper
bought at some heavily armored convenient store
with a rotund-belly Buddha and his twistable nipples
drooping down with wisdom, worthy of suckling.

Your hands, how they groove
move from fret to fret with such precision.

two minute bathroom break and cigarette,
this night seems endless

a comet split into expansions of darkness,
the river drowns beneath the earth's crust,

and drives us to ruin.

Is this love? I can feel again, feel shame.

We crawl out from muddy caves, leave
a trail of crystallized slime.

With a hat over your long, curly locks
the strings bend as robots, monsters, and shock treat
ment.

You mask your face, I mask musical dreams-
black sheer drapes, warehouse of air-conditioning,
cold-cement floor, paint along the windows, and
glow in the dark dust.

Every sound breaks the silence and
my mind fills with words, with twisted lullabies
of torment and pleasure,

words that bring forth light in the darkness.

Thank you my love, I owe you one.

Late Again

Toya T. Mares

I hear your words so clearly,
whispering in my ear.

“Sometimes sorry is not enough.”

The first time you spoke those words to me,
I did not know the full gravity.
Always running late, never on time.

Forgotten appointments –
“We remember that which is important to us.”
-- Sorry

“Sometimes sorry is not enough.”

Special Occasions –
“Always fashionably late.”
-- Sorry

“Sometimes sorry is not enough.”

Somber Occasions –
“I swear you will be late for your own funeral.”
-- Sorry

“Sometimes sorry is not enough.”

You warned me time and time again.
I heard you but I did not listen.
I awoke late... as usual.
Running,
rushing,
trying to be on time.
It all seemed so surreal...

Coffee
oozing sludge
Shower
piercing icicles
Pantyhose
ripped
Blouses
stained
Traffic
crawling
Lights
Unsynchronized

“Sometimes sorry is not enough.”

When I finally arrived,
I knew I would not leave.
Somehow, some way
This would change everything.

There you were, waiting for me.
You knew I would be late.
So you held on in agony.
Just waiting, waiting patiently.
Each breath ragged and labored,
Drawn with a will unfettered.

“I am sorry, so sorry!
Please don't leave me!”

Wrapped in my arms,
Closing your eyes,
As you took your last breath,
I could hear you words so clearly
Whispering in my ear

“Sometimes sorry is not enough.”

The Woman That I See

Toya T. Mares

Who is this woman that I see?
Is it a reflection?
Is it an indication?
Is it me?

Who is this woman that I see?
I see my great grandmother
A woman of God
Forging a legacy.

Who is this woman that I see?
I see my grandmother
A pillar of strength
Creating a monarchy.

Who is this woman that I see?
I see my mother
A guardian of dreams
Cultivating a destiny.

Who is this woman that I see?
In all of these women I see me.
Because they lived –
I am the legacy.
I am the monarchy.
I am destiny.

A River Runs Through Me

Toya T. Mares

Life trickling, babbling forging the way
Silent awareness, streaming rivulets
Metamorphosing discovery, meandering banks
Engrossing knowledge, enthralling basins
Torrential pain, tormenting currents
Mired loss, murdering fissures
Sober peace, soothing channels
Life rushing, engorging, encompassing the delta.

Election Day

Kalan D. Laws

I'm living history
The mystery of "If this could be"
No longer exists in me
This new history might cause a few misery, but
Oh well!
Oh hell...
Led by Mr. Actor,
A family of Green and one that Smoked them in between
So we might as well
Oblige those old southern eyes
That have seen the iron fist of Connor's hardened mist
On November 5th
Is when we paid homage
The eye has been turned off under the pan
Where the Board of Education was Brownd
And now...
We can taste the meat

I'm living history
The mystery of "If this could be"
No longer exists in me
This new history might cause a few misery, but
Oh well!
I Parked in a bed of Roses
Frequented by Doctors and Kings
Praying that this they could see
The gleam of the crown of brotherhood
Filling the air with the sounds of brother Cooke
Because change did come!
There will be a line in children's Social Studies books
That was partially penned by me
Because in this moment, I'm living history.

America

Javits Rajendran

Shall I clasp you in these foul arms
your smooth skin like nectarines sailing,
and fading like betraying silence, for I
promised, never to let go of this feral dream
that is us, groping as reality sets in.
Or should I set you free, from this arduous
touch that burns within a fool's paradise.
Should I even consider describing your face,
I once remembered landing a desolate blue
strip, slowing, abating my conscious doggedness,
myself, yeah, the wind blew down my mind.

You Are Sentenced To...

Diane DeGaetani

put your skull on a wall
and admire it
take pride in the trophy
of your loss
send animals running home to the forest
cut your sentence in half

Lemurs

Paul Murphy

The electric skin of the jungle storm
Greys distantly then splits, on its way
To pull apart the sun's fleshy lenses.

Lips of ether shroud the beaches
Darkly within or without; is it the mind itself
Or merely a dislocation of the senses?

I walk the beach in Madagascar
A place just in my mind, where I've
Never been, nor wish to go.

Reticence, diligence, evanescence: are merely words.
Poems are merely words. Lemurs have more work.
Dander silently, have invaded my senses.

Somehow the lemur knows,
Dark in its forest, dark in its mind.
Retread the distant lightning at the dawn.

Lust

Tracy Lyall

Shadows fall silent in my womb,
the tide against the tightened - muscle breakers
washing up jellyfish, Styrofoam pieces and
shards of stars pierce the skin on a smothering,
soldering night.
The lighthouse beam scans the currents,
sweeping - into one
the sharpened steel is silenced against the block,
flesh - cold and damp,
drinks flushed from the system
solitude, foreign tongues in the ear.
You spoke sub-rosa, filling each empty hole
with ornaments and teasing,
with back room brawls and empty stalls,
your eyes abscessed many dreams
burst open and lunged.
The leather creaks of broken in boots,
splotch of oily hair strands,
the way your wrinkled shirt hangs upon your shoulders,
you shift your jeans
tied, blind-folded, bleeding from the inside-out
nauseous and psychotic, cancerous and cradled.
No. No.
Your pale hands are clammy,

dirt beneath the nails, you smoke again
mouth twitches, biceps, forceps, tongs
huddled beneath cracked ceiling
squawk of the caged cockatoo.
Tell me a joke -
how many guitarists does it take to change a light bulb?
Three - one to change the bulb and 2 to stand around saying
"I can play that better".
You ramble beautiful, sarcastic poetry in your stoner speech
you stupid drunk.
No.
You show me postcards, photographs from France,
petanque in an alley with an ex-junky French cowboy.
We eye his vibrant paintings incorporated with giraffes, elephants,
thighs, tits, chairs, bunnies, quirky devilish men
with pointy fingers, they lick.
I crave you, frantically shopping for boots
"para una amigo" you say to the old Latino man
"Si,si".
Au contraire.
I saturate myself in fear and find distraction,
must leave apartment, astral-projection
before I pick up this coffee mug
and long, lean legs
high, round cheekbones

your handsome smile on my...

Eyes that have seen back ways, theaters, and restaurants about Europe
in a chef's apron, linguistic old men, cliffs, beaches, rendezvous,
Moroccan casino's, crescent moons, sailboats upon the
salty green sea -

Who was your lover? Have you come home to me?

And this is how I show appreciation?

I watch the way ashes pile up in the ashtray
like broken wine bottles and lonely motel rooms,
dead flowers, melted candles and blood
motel bathroom of razorblades, paper cuts, safety pins and
fashion magazines on the toilet.

Where I wait for you to return

from your money laundering mafia schemes
in a three- piece black suit and pinky ring,
wing-tip shoes, thick (slapping) veins
and cigarettes.

Flicker of jazz in a novella turned 1940's Hollywood black & white
I, in my fishnets and skirt hiked to the thigh,
twitchy fingers, vibration

of a man-eating, tight rope walking wet and slivery newt.

You toss the motel key on the table,

clinking against the soda glass
ice crackles.

You slide your hand up my powdery soft leg
lick behind my ear, hot warm breath on my neck

heart beating, racing, pulsating, you nuzzle my chest.

I can almost hear a drip of lust

from the tip of your tongue

I'd like to soothe my hands around your neck,

Jew boys and twisted cartoon porn

while you sleep - ruby, amber, fossils, volcanoes, lava,
and antique typewriter keys.

You'd lick the flavored lip gloss off with one kiss

- a string of black, crystal beads.

Screw you, you rock-n-roll connoisseur
of sleek and twisted mental games.

The lost piano fades along the horizon,
second story suspension, second hand.

If only we'd touch as we sit knee to knee
bent in a spastic trance,

oh god, what's wrong with me?

No, wait.

Stop, just stop.

I really can't stand you.

Digging

C.J. Hathaway

I.
In the dark room,
a reflection of the flame through the glass
breaks and crackles along the wall,
a web of revolutionist fantasies
breathing like some mangled dragon
from the carnival where carnie falls prey to yet another line
of snuff and
gargoyle eyed woman,
her stone face and crinkled cigarettes sucking lips run a
man to sea,
he goes back for more, drudgingly;
looking at flat-chested skinny grocery cart girls
in magazines, drinking bitter coffee in a Greek café.
God won't even save the world, so how could you?
Plastic owls perched next to pigeon nests
on the corner of a brick apartment where I hear murmurs,
beneath, trucks rumble and vibrate the wooden floors
late in the night when the street lamps buzz,

the city falls silent beneath the cracks
below the surface.
You cannot sleep; you forgot to save the world!
Get up! It's three a.m., brush your teeth.
Young children sweat before the fan
in the humid heat of summer hell,
the receipt is missing, crumpled paper and dirty laundry,
maggot-covered garbage, gas prices up, need one more check.
Neon flickers like invisible mosquitoes
broken furniture on the side of the road,
rust corrodes beneath as acid-rain from this toxic-illuminated city
eats the paint off your car, sucks your breath, thins the O2
from your blood, clogs your pores with pollution.
Your mind fails you,
drag-races towards the edge;
the flag is up – winner gets the girl--
but she is mutated by life, burnt beneath the flesh
charcoal black and giving birth to charred stones
eaten to the bone by ants
where they sleep dreamily in metal beds;
hot and sweaty.

Demeanor

Kenneth Pomares

Reservations and inhibitions of life with love
Random thoughts of lust convict my spirituality,
While extending my obligation to...
Never to set a date,
Only to loose what is my faith.

Intimate thoughts of others cloud my conscious
And overwhelm the subconscious.
Exhibitions of past spiritual bouts,
That I failed to speak out,
Leaves one in doubt.
The façade of an act, mirrored by my partner is wearing
thin.
Complexity of Love finally filters in
Hoping it is not the end.

To pretend is presumptuous.
Complacent is what follows,
And your partner is none the wiser.
Living the lie leaves me hollow.
Unstable and unfamiliar are the results my actions.
Chaos and confusion partner, which brings about a change
in my demeanor.

My Covenant

Kenneth Pomares

Exhausted in thoughts,
Fatigued in my way of living,
Perspiration becomes my escape
And the relief of stress that I seek.

Even though my heart has traveled many miles,
The comfort of you has become its resting place,
But the journey is far from over.
Jealousy is present yet not familiar to my person.

Understanding is what I know.
Tradition and family are my commitment.
Yet, it is your presence that is my contentment.
Complacent is my demise.
Everlasting love is our destination, and not the way of
travel.

Leery we should be of false remedies.
Trust and honesty are our only means of traverse.

Delirium is my life.
Sanity is my obsession.
You are the Keeper of both.

Pandora Radio

Natasha Bardwell

When I sit to write,
Many times I sit to cry.
All the words that live
In my heart unspoken,
Have been taken.
Already spoken,
Elsewhere,
By another hand,
By another mouth.
So, what then shall I write?
What then shall I say?
If my conceits have
Already been taken,
Should I speak with
Eloquence stolen?
Continue on halfhearted,
Clinging to rags of hope,
That I may one day
Stumble upon,
Words unspoken?

Answer

Christopher Barnes

Hidden hands thickened Sticky Foam in store ships,
Acoustic aiders, bile curdling kits,
A merciless psychological blitzkrieg.
The soldier procrastinated, homesick,
At the frontier of Cottonwood Park .
A yes-no knotted his chin.

We ridicule boundaries, stakes
Framed by puppet governments, scar dispatches
“Shock Troops Of The Desecrated” –
Follow a calling in obstructions, hiving off,
Laying waste to assets.

This is the freeborn thesis on dissension.

not alone in this medium i am
soy medio
a medium am
soy un medio y yo
no soy solo
¿not alone in this medium?

take out the trash
on mondays!

¡saca la basura
los lunes!

i am soy yo
medio este en solo no?
alone am not
am a medium and i
soy medio un
medium am
soy yo medio este en solo no

Green Doors

Ami Hastings

Green door 113 opens and she pushes the little girl out and tells her to go away. No one wants her. The door slams shut. The little girl stands for a moment, unsure, her shoulders shaking. Then, she crouches down against the wall, next to the green door, the freshest memory still stinging her flesh. It's cold outside. Nooooo! The little girl sobs. I wanna go back inside. I won't do anything bad again. Oh-noohnoohnoohnono...she's gonna be mad. The warm trickle between her bare legs hugged towards her small back and quickly turns into a puddle that slowly navigates its way through the fake moss of the welcome mat and trickles down the slant of the concrete walkway. Where can I go? I'll wait till Mommy's not mad at me anymore. Green door 113 opens and a foot shoots out, stamping out the little spark of hope that had ignited, and fueling the burn of terror at the creak of the hinges.

"Get away from the door! Go, na-bbeun gash-ina!" Her little body is knocked over forcing her to stumble in her own urine, her naked butt scraping against the concrete.

"Wher'm I gonna go?" the little girl shrieks and sobs at the same time, from the second step of the stairs she has managed to scramble to. But the door is already shut, again. The night chill creeps into her four, maybe five year

-old frame. Her bare feet step from side to side in a mixture of terrified indecision and painful awareness of her starkness.

“Psssttt...,” a voice beckons from above.

“Psssttt.....what are you doing?” The little girl looks up, turning her head, peering up at the darkened rails. A pale face floats above, looking down on her, waving her to come up, quietly. The little girl starts to shake her head, following the shiver of her body.

“N-n-nooooo, I can’t. Sh-she’ll get mad,” she wails piteously. The face brings a finger to its lips and waves harder to come up.

“It’s okay. C’mere. Come up here. I’ll give you some orange juice.” The little girl is torn. She is cold and naked, but she doesn’t want the pale face to see her like that. But if she stays down here even more people might walk by and see her. The shame of her nakedness overrides the terror of her mother, and the homesickness of her family.

She slowly creeps up the concrete stairs haltingly clutching the metal rails as she repeatedly turns to look back at green door 113. Once she hits the second landing, and is out of sight she flies up the last flight, the third floor, where the voice had coaxed from. Once she is there, the pale face has disappeared. Instead, warm light flows from the sliver in green door 323. The little girl creeps up to it,

unsure if it is welcoming. As she gets closer the door flies open allowing the warmth to escape, and a sheet comes, following, swooping down to wrap the little girl in its folds. The little girl shifts her head to peek out over the folds. She decides it is safe to follow the light through the doorway that now stands wide open.

“Go ahead and sit down, Sweetie,” allows the neighbor. “Lemme get your orange juice. And I know, I know, ‘not from concentrate.’ I remember,” the neighbor recites, smiling down. Maybe I can live here? The little girl shuffles over to a dining table chair that has been pulled away from the table to face the balcony and the tree. She bypasses the couch, and balancing on the edge of the seat, her spindly legs lost in the sheet, perches her feet on the rung. She looks all around her until her gaze is captured by the silver tinsel draped all throughout the tree. She’s never seen tinsel before. She can’t stop her little arm from reaching out of the folds to pick up a strand carefully from an outstretched branch. She almost loses her balance. She holds the strand delicately between two fingers raising it above her head, entranced by how the light is caught by the silver, and how it runs up and down trying to escape as it twists softly in the air.

“Here you go,” the neighbor magically reappears with a brimming glass of juice. The little girl is startled and jerks her hand and arm back into her shroud. The

neighbor sets the glass down at the edge of the coffee table in the absence of an extended hand, and sits at the end of the couch, smiling softly at the little girl. You can't be nice to me. She'll be mad at you, too.

"What happened tonight?" the neighbor inquires.

Instead of answering the little girl can't stop the hotness exploding from her eyes. The question has brought flashes of her evening to the forefront of her mind. She clasps the sheet over her mouth and squeezes her eyes shut trying to stifle herself. I can't cry, I can't cry, I can't cry, I can't cry-I can cry I can cry.

"Sh-she'll f-f-f-find me he-he-he-he-here," the little girl hiccups between her stifles. "Ieee buh-buh-better go. You gonna get in trouble too," she squeezes out the last sentence clearly.

"No, it's okay. You can stay here. Don't worry.

You can stay here." The little girl's eyes dart around the room, frantically and longingly. It's so warm. The room glows. The T.V. glows. The tree glows. She doesn't belong here. She starts to panic further.

"No, no I have to go. I have to go. I was bad," she explains as she slides off the edge of the chair. She wraps the sheet tighter around her trying to pick up the drag as she heads back to the door. The little girl freezes all of sudden. Her eyes are wide, the proverbial deer. She's out there.

"I have to go, now," she breathes.

"What is it?" the neighbor asks startled at the abruptness of the little girl's movements. She doesn't answer. Instead, she creeps quietly back to the front door, her ears perked, her head craning forward. Is that my name? Uh-oh. She closes the gap quickly to the front door and instead of yanking it open, does so carefully, watching the light fall outside. As soon as it's wide enough she darts through like a mouse. She definitely and quietly closes the door behind her, wincing at the squeak of the hinges. Carefully, the little girl circles around the landing to peak down. Creeping down the shadowed stairs she presses her side to the wall which is difficult to maneuver with the sheet still wrapped around her. She peers up at the level she's just left. The warm glow of before is now just a thin outline of green door 323, disappearing as she reappears on the second landing. Her name is still being called, the voice traveling around the ground floor, circling as well. As soon as the little girl is sure the third floor can't be seen, and her mother's voice is farther off she stumbles down the last flight. Tip-toeing at the bottom to the corner of the building where the hedges meet, her mother's voice is returning. She turns so her back is up against the hedges, and slumps her shoulders, waiting.

"Better get back --," her mother stops. "Where were you?" she barks further. The little girl says nothing, keeping her head bowed. They both stand there, her

mother boring holes into the bowed head of the little girl. She says nothing of the white sheet wrapping the girl's little body. Her mother abruptly turns, marching to green door 113, throwing open the door. The little girl continues to stand, bowed, where she is.

“Il-lawa!” The little girl starts and shuffles towards the open door, keeping her head down. As the tail end of her sheet is pulled through the doorway, a strand of silver tinsel flutters slowly down. As the door shuts, the silver comes to rest in the corner of the doorjamb. Until the next gust of wind picks it up and carries it away.

Gossamer Wings

Yolanda Bridges

We sat on the front porch. It was early spring and the heat hadn't set in yet. The sunshine could still be enjoyed without the bother or oppressive heat spoiling it. I enjoyed these moments with my daughter, a tiny replica of myself with green eyes and chestnut hair. There were differences, though. My eyes were merely green, hers were sparkled emerald. My chestnut hair is simply brown. Hers is highlighted with rich auburn giving it a shine and luster that is distinctly hers. There were things to be done in the house, chores that demanded my attention but the day was too nice to be ignored. Besides, Cassiopeia requested my presence outside and I can't deny her. I left the pressing matters of chores laying along side the ironing board and joined her in the crisp sunshine.

I watched her playing quietly with her favorite doll and wondered how many more days like this we had left. Today she was tested. It will be a few weeks before the final results are in, but I already knew that life as we know it will change. My Cassi was a gift and she had one of her own. She'd taken and passed her high school equivalency test a month ago. Three days after her seventh birthday. She was currently narrowing down her college choices. She had plenty. To say she was smart was such an understatement it was obscene. They still didn't know how to measure her IQ, ergo the cause for today's tests.

My husband was eager for the results, as was my brother Bobby, but I didn't care what they were. Cassiopeia was just my little Cassi; my own personal star. My constellation. Nothing would change that. Feeling me watching, her emerald eyes turned to me and she smiled. There was always so much beneath her smile, hidden in her gaze, that I couldn't help but wonder what she was thinking. What secrets she knew. What answers she held.

My gaze drifted from her face to the clear blue Texas sky and I smiled as well. "I flew on gossamer wings."

"I know mommy," she said, turning her attention back to her doll. "You were a fairy tale princess."

I imagined the wings that only existed in my mind. "They were beautiful, too. When the light caught them just right, the pinks, yellows and greens turned into sparkling jewels."

"And they could lift you all the way to Heaven." Cassi smiled sweetly. She loved hearing the story of my wings. I never felt like she was patronizing me. She was more intelligent than I could ever hope to be, but she was always my little girl. She knew the story by heart and enjoyed assisting in its recitation. "You could look down on the clouds, dance with the stars—" She rose from the steps to perform a half twirl. Her shiny hair flew out around her, half covering her luminous face in the warm sunshine. "You could kiss the moon!"

Taking her seat on the steps again, she scooted closer. Her knobby knees poked out from the hem of her pink dress as she drew them to her chest. "What did Uncle Bobby say?" she asked, as if she didn't know.

"That I was dumber than a lamp post and only half as bright."

Cassi shook her head in disapproval. "Uncle Bobby doesn't believe in fairy tales."

He didn't. But he believed in his niece and she was definitely a fairy tale. I smiled down at her, smoothing a hand across her long hair. I gently brushed the bangs from her eyes. "Mama would defend me."

Always my staunchest supporter, Cassi disagreed with this so called defense. "*She can't help it if she's touched,*" she mimicked a voice she'd never heard. "That's no defense at all. Grandma's words were sharper than Uncle Bobby's taunts."

She looked down at her doll in her lap twisting a button eye that was loose. "She was taunting you, too. She was only doing it insidiously while Uncle Bobby was blunt." She gazed off into the distance. Her green eyes hooded her thoughts and I had no idea what she was thinking until she spoke again. "Tell me about Granddaddy." Her face brightened as she spoke of my father. She had no recollection of my mother as she'd passed away before she was born, but she knew my father. They had three great years together.

"Daddy was different. He'd put his hands around my waist and lift me high above his head—"

"Just like my daddy lifts me!" She turned a beaming face to me and I stroked her face.

"He'd tell me to spread my wings."

"Like this!" Cassi bounded from the porch into the front yard where she spread her arms out wide. She ran in circles, sprinkling in a twirl or two. I watched her sundress billow out around her and thought of my own youth.

Both of my parents are gone. I miss them. Even mama. Our relationship was never an easy one, but I know that she loved me. She just had a distinct idea of what her daughter should and shouldn't be and I never measured up. Mama was driven. Like Bobby, she didn't believe in fairy tales. She didn't have time to sit and stare at rainbows. She knew she'd never find her pot of gold at the end of one. I knew that, too. Trouble was, I had a bit of the leprechaun in me and just couldn't stop looking for it. It was out there all right – I just had to find the right rainbow. I'd spend hours lying on my back in the grass searching them out in the clouds. I doubt if mama ever laid out in the grass a day in her life.

Bobby was like our mother. He was serious and studious, a hard working boy who became a hard working man. He'd gone to college and become a certified accountant. He'd always had an affinity for numbers. He would have made my mother proud. I took after my father. He was hard working but

didn't have mama's discipline. He may have worked eight, sometimes ten hours a day, but he never forgot how to dream. He believed in fairy tales and spent every free second he had showing me how to chase rainbows. He lifted me up and told me I could touch the stars. He pointed them out to me in the sky and told me the name of each one. He told me about the gods – about how Icarus dreamed of flying.

Mama didn't approve of daddy filling my head with illusions. She'd look at us both and wonder how she'd ended up with such a dreamer and worse, maybe, how she'd created one. It was a bone of contention between them. Mama always wanted my feet planted firmly on the ground, learning something useful. Daddy wanted me to keep trying to fly. He said life was too serious to be so serious about it all the time.

I tried really hard to be what mama wanted me to be, but it was daddy who received my promise while mama looked on in reproach. She wouldn't say anything, but she never had to. Her silence rang loud and clear, even if daddy was the only one who could hear and decipher it. They'd have entire arguments without ever uttering a word. Mama would fight valiantly for reality checks and a firm footing for me. Daddy would battle for dreams and the right to pursue them. They each had their own ideas of what life was all about.

Cassi returned to the porch with a face flushed from the sun and her exertion. "Grandma and granddaddy would wage wars with just one single look." She held up a tiny finger

as she'd seen me do countless times when telling the story of the gossamer wings.

"Yes, they would, honey."

"But they're gone now. They went up to Heaven so granddaddy could pick up his wings and fly." She retrieved her doll, twisting the button eye in contemplation. "Grandma didn't like fairy tales and dreams and stuff, but I bet she wanted some wings, too. Once she saw how granddaddy flew higher than Icarus. She doesn't have to worry about working and making her way here on earth anymore. She's able to relax and look at all the rainbows and stars that she never paid any attention to."

I smiled at the idea. Maybe my daughter is right. Maybe now that her toil is over, mama can appreciate all the things daddy wanted her to see while she was alive. I wish I could imagine her face, but I still can't. All I can ever bring into focus is her voice. Stern and unyielding; which is strange because that's not the tone she used with me. I guess even though I didn't hear it, I felt it. That stern voice is all I have of her unless I look at her photo.

My daughter is a prodigy. She has an IQ that's "*off the charts*" to quote one of her doctors, but she manages to remain a child as well. She's somehow managed to blend the two worlds my parents relentlessly fought over. She wants to be a research scientist, but she believes in the rainbow. She said

she's going to prove that there is something magical at the end of every one of them. I believe her.

"Mommy?"

"Hm?"

"You went away again."

I put my arm around her and hug her close. "I'm right here, baby."

"Were you thinking about Grandma and Granddaddy being gone? How it's just you and Uncle Bobby now?"

"There's you, too. And your daddy."

Cassi shook her head. "It's not the same. We didn't know you when you had your gossamer wings. We didn't see you flying higher than Icarus. You don't even fly anymore."

I stopped flying a long time ago. Mortgage, car payments, groceries and everything else that life could think of had a way of snipping wings. I took my wings off, folded them up, stored them away and forgot where I'd put them.

I'd fallen in love with Shelby my sophomore year in high school and married him right after graduation. Our little Cassiopeia was born less than a year later. Shelby went to college at night and worked days to support us, sometimes vice versa, until he received his degree. I set up our home and took care of the baby. We figured I'd have time to go to college later, but that didn't happen. Life

pressed in until there was only room for reality. Now I only fly when I reminisce about those gossamer wings.

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I am happy. I love my husband and my child is a joy I couldn't express if I had all the words in the dictionary at my disposal. But I know this isn't the life my mother wanted for me. I still remember how sad she looked when I told her I was going to marry Shelby. Daddy beamed. He said I'd made a good choice, that Shelby would be everything I ever needed. He said that Shelby would not only encourage me to fly, he'd help me. He'd been right. Shelby was perfect for me. But there was no time to fly. Besides, where would I go?

Feeling me drift again, Cassi pointed towards the sky. "I bet Granddaddy is up there flying around the universe. He'd get tired of just hanging around the clouds and the stars. You can only kiss the moon so many times. He's up there looking for new galaxies."

My gaze followed my daughter's finger. "I bet he is." He was up there flying around all right, doing all of the things he'd wanted to do in life but wasn't allowed to. He'd wanted

to be an astronomer, but mama told him he needed to do something more realistic. Something practical. His responsibilities crept in and demanded attention. He worked a regular, blue collar job his whole life even though he was far and above it. He'd been forced to put his wings away, too, but he encouraged me to never let go of mine. I promised I wouldn't, but somewhere in the intervening years I broke that promise.

I was never a great scholar, so I didn't have anything dynamic to contribute to the world anyway. My stored wings were of no consequence to anyone except me. Shelby was not like my mother, so he didn't dictate that I put them away like she did my father. It just sort of happened.

"You don't have to worry mommy." Cassi's voice broke into my thoughts again. She slid her arms around my waist squeezing tight. "He hasn't forgotten about you. Just like you can see him clear as day, he can see you, too. He's just looking for galaxies and exploring nebulas while he waits on you."

Her hold on me tightened. "You'll fly again one day. You'll find where you put those beautiful gossamer wings and stretch out your arms just like an eagle. You'll fly higher than Icarus. Higher than Heaven. Higher than the universe and all the galaxies combined."

I gathered my daughter infinitely closer and kissed the crown of her head. I may not have the life my mother dreamed of for me. I may not be a scholar or working tirelessly for the

American dream like my brother Bobby. My mom may have even cried during my wedding, but my husband loves me. Same way today as he did when we were fourteen. I have my little house on my own piece of land. I'm happy.

Every day I get to hold a constellation in my arms.

She never patronizes me. Or thinks that I'm a little touched. Even though, with her IQ she could and it may even be true in comparison. She doesn't laugh at my stories, unless they're funny. I never conquered the world or contributed anything wonderful to it, unless you count the wonder that I hold in my arms. What does it matter if my feet haven't always been planted firmly on the ground? If even now, I sometimes walk on my tip toes. My promise to my father was not upheld in its strictest sense, but its okay. Like Icarus, I'm back on the ground, but I've done something right.

I've given the world Cassiopeia.

There were clothes that needed to be folded and put away. Dinner needed to be cooked. Life pressed in, demanding attention, but I sat with my arms locked around my daughter gazing at the clear blue sky. In it I still see pinks, yellows and greens that sparkle like jewels. One day, maybe, just maybe, I'll remember where I put those gossamer wings.

Japan Calls Me Home

Blithe Colgate

For some, home is just four walls to seek shelter from the elements. But in Japan, home is found in your soul which exists in paradise. Here are the reasons why forever Japan has captured me.

In the Land of the Rising Sun, I am charmed by the white-stoned ocean waves in Zen gardens that allow our eyes to peer into a world in miniature. Mount Fuji's majesty looms boldly over this island and commands our attention with its summit enveloped by glowing clouds. And the pink cherry blossoms float down lazily to the grass below as if this were a sweet-smelling snowy day. These are the images my eyes will forever see.

Sounds of Japan saturate my mind with splendor. Zenchiku's words from his Tatsuta play stir my soul to look for a sacred treasure amongst my own Maple trees. And when a masked actor turns and looks straight at me as if I'm the only one in the audience, I can't help but freeze in my seat as if I were on that ice covered river speckled with red leaves. Manyoshu poems stopped me in my tracks to ponder whose spirit, hidden in the koto's hollow space sent goose bumps down my back with its vibrating melodious words. These are the sounds my ears will forever hear.

The tangibles of Japan lure me forever to this island

paradise: the soft and silky touch of an appropriate kimono for an appropriate season, the delicate lavender wisteria petals of May's kanzashi which dangles from the head of someone's beloved daughter, the Byobu screen of Uji Bridge has each panel more glistening and more beckoning than the last. And if we could, my friends and I would leap into that picture and we'd walk along the muddy banks beside Uji river. Each panel is our stepping stone to the Pure Land. And I think we'd see under that bridge 80,000 lotus blooms with paper thin petals and glowing gold leaf. These are the tangibles I will forever want to hold.

To all the Japanese, I say smile. You've already achieved paradise on earth by simply being you. These are all the reasons why forever Japan has captured me.

DEFINITIONS

Zenchiku—famous playwright who wrote a play by the name of Tatsuta which makes reference to red maple trees and iced over river. His plays are performed by actors who wear masks.

Koto's hollow space—The koto is similar to a guitar.

May's kanzashi—a flowery head dress ornament geisha apprentices wear, each is specific for a particular month.

Byobu screen of Uji Bridge—Byobu is Japanese for a 6 panel foldable screen. The famously painted one of Uji Bridge is gold and black. Uji bridge crosses Uji river at Uji town. A few hundred years ago this town had connections with eighty clans in the area.

Shades of Color

Jere Pfister

In the mornings, before my Daddy went crazy and left us, I brought Mama her coffee and crawled up next to her in the bed while she drank the warm, bittersweet mixture of boiled milk and chicory coffee. She'd count out her day's allotment of eight cigarettes and line them in a flat glass cigarette dish on the marble table next to the bed.

It was her compromise with the doctor who says she must quit them altogether. She smokes the first one of the day with me sitting next to her trying to catch her exhaled smoke with my tongue. She slaps at me because she's afraid of her own germs. Mama has tuberculosis. Clay is a baby, I am seven years old.

"Don't do that. I don't want to breathe on you. We have to be extra careful. Don't let Ruby steal my cigarette butts either."

Ruby cleans Mama's dirty ash trays in order to get the last scraps of left behind tobacco. She tears off the cigarette paper that's smudged with my mother's lipstick and rolls the shredded tobacco between her thumb and index finger. When it's a compact ball she presses it into the crease between her lower gum and cheek. The brown juices run, dribble out of her mouth in a little stream, mixing with

the black snuff spittle already collecting at the corner of her dark and cracked lips.

“Ruby, Mama doesn’t want you doing that. She’s afraid of the germs.”

“You just mind your business.”

“But my Mama said for me to tell you not too.”

“It’s my business. Don’t you go telling her nothing.” Ruby reaches into her pocket and brings out two nickels. “Here you and your mama are goin’ into town later. I want you to buy me some of my snuff. The blue can. Get two.”

At the butcher shop the man at the cash register was mean. “You oughtn’t buy snuff for that crazy old nigga woman. Your Mama shouldn’t let her around you kids. She ought to know better. No other lady in town would pay that nigga a plug nickel.”

But he took the two nickels and pushed the two blue cans of snuff toward me. I had to tuck them in the pockets of my pants quickly. Mama would have known it was for Ruby, but she still didn’t want me buying snuff and I would have gotten Ruby into trouble. And I didn’t want to make Mama mad at Ruby. And I didn’t want to make Ruby mad at me. And I sure didn’t want Mama to know what the man said about her having Ruby work for us.

Ruby and our maid, Betty, took turns helping to keep things going during the months when Mama had to

spend her days resting. We weren’t allowed to use the word *tuberculosis* because it was nobody’s business and Mama was afraid the Public Health people would make her go to a sanitarium like they did to her Mama before she died. I don’t believe Mama was afraid of dying nearly as much as being forced to abandon her children and her home. Mama was only 31 years old in 1948 and she had a new little baby, and of course, us.

Every afternoon either Ruby, or Betty, were at the house waiting for us when we got off the school bus. Mama had to sleep and we had to be quiet and not wake her. If baby Clay was awake we would play with him or put him in a playpen near us. Betty cleaned the house for us. Her skin was very dark and she was small, thin, and quick as she went from mopping to dusting, from task to task. For a year or more, Betty ruled the house.

Betty was stricter than Ruby about doing homework and our being quiet. But, she was able and willing to help me with my homework and she would read to me. Unlike Ruby, Betty didn’t approve of tobacco. She didn’t drink, cuss or tell tales about the other white people she worked for. She spoke well, dressed neatly and properly in a grey uniform with white trim that was always clean, starched and ironed. She wore sturdy shoes that tied up and had a slight heel. Her sharp tongue belied her generous nature.

“Miss Jere, uncross your legs. It doesn’t look nice and you’ll get ugly veins when you grow up.”

“Miss Jere, you go change out of that school uniform and don’t let me see the skirt hanging on the bed post.”

“Miss Jere, you watch out for your baby brother, now don’t go letting his head hang that way. You have to support his neck and head. That’s right. You’re going to make a good mama someday. Always loving up on something. What fairy tale book you want me to read from today.”

When Frank, Betty’s husband came to work in our yard he would drive Betty in his old pickup truck. But when she came alone Mama had to go get her and bring her home. Betty and Frank lived in Colored Town. Colored Town was not really a town; just a neighborhood where most of Covington’s Negro population lived.

Ruby lived in a shack in the woods. I never saw it. But Mama did. Everybody in town, not just the butcher, said Ruby was crazy and why did my Mama put up with her. *Mama just said, Ruby was the best ironing woman anywhere and leave it alone.*

Ruby kept a knife strapped to her thigh with an old belt. I know because I used to spy on her when she used the bathroom out in the garage. I think I spied because I was curious about colored people. I guess I was trying to

figure out how they were different from white people. In truth, I spied on everyone. I know I went through drawers and closets, not just at home but everywhere. Maybe I wanted to know how my family was as special as Mama kept telling me we were.

Before she went to bed on Sunday nights, my mother would cook starch in the same old pot that she cooked the ice cream custard in on Sunday mornings. When the starch was cool, she poured it into empty milk bottles and stored them on the top shelf of the refrigerator next to the milk.

On Mondays, Mama washed clothes in our ringer washing machine. No matter how I begged, I wasn’t allowed to put anything into the ringer. *Mama said if I ever caught my fingers in that ringer they would get all broken up and smashed and the doctor might have to cut them off at the knuckle.*

At some point on Monday mornings, Ruby would come out of the woods to help my Mama. She would shake out the clothes and linens that needed to be starched with her great hands. And after soaking them in the glutinous mixture, she would ring them out and shake them again and then hang them to dry on the rusty lines that hung between the Tung oil trees. Because the land sloped away from the road, the back of our house sat on tall piers that made a made a space you could walk under. There was an old

showerhead where we washed the sand off and hung our swimsuits. When it rained, Ruby hung the wet clothes there.

In the summer, Ruby wore old, men's slippers on her big calloused feet. Her skin was all hard and cracked. She never looked put together. Nothing fit right and she limped and one hip was higher than the other. Her dress was held closed with large safety pins she didn't even try to hide. Her face was scarred, like someone or something had cut it real bad. Her eyes were bulgy and blood shot and she smelled like dead things, and sweat, and tobacco.

I think Ruby and Betty were early grounding posts for me. They not only put order into the house, they witnessed what went on inside our family. These two women of color, Ruby, as dark as night, and Betty, like the color of rich chocolate, were my caretakers and guardian angels during the years of my childhood when Daddy went crazy and Mama couldn't deal with the terror of being left alone. She did not realize yet, just how dangerous our daddy was.

Function of Perceived Dysfunction

Karen Menchaca

Sarah gazes at Pedro's back as he walks in front of her. The thin cover made the wriggling muscles just under the skin resemble small animals trapped in a canvas bag. A familiar view, since he always insisted on walking a few steps ahead of her. This used to be a bone of contention between them.

At one point, the arguing over his refusal to walk by her side was so unbearable that she refused to walk with him. A few days later, she read an article citing evidence linking his machismo directly to heritage. How can he be faulted for his DNA? It wasn't hard to concede; she anguished over their missed walks more than he did.

Accepting the dominant position was a trade-off for showing him off in public. Yes, he's an ass at times, but knowing he belonged to her fed her ego. Although he appears unconscious of his appearance, others definitely take notice. Total strangers often comment on how striking he is.

"Grrr! Why do I put up with you?" she growls in mock anger.

Not bothering to make eye contact, he tilts his head slightly in her direction and returns his forward gaze. He has no idea what she is talking about nor did he care.

Why do I put up with him? She searched her memory for an answer, going back to the first day she laid eyes on him.

Sarah was a single attorney struggling to survive in a cut-throat law firm. Days spent digging up legal loopholes to cultivate corporate greed left her feeling dirty. Weekends were reserved for volunteering to help society's discarded as a symbolic cleansing of residual grit left in the soul.

Pedro was homeless and incarcerated in the city facility. He had been sitting in a holding area for three days, waiting on paperwork declaring him a non-violent offender. The paper held little value; he had nowhere to go.

Sarah attributes the attraction to divine intervention, since she had always preferred females. Not only cleaner and gentler, but the whole male genitalia thing repulsed her, especially when aroused. Ironically, Pedro came into her line of sight only by the fluke of passing in front of the cross-hairs she had fixed on an attractive female.

His tall strapping, tan body and piercing brown eyes, although notable, did not capture her attention. She was mesmerized by his poise and confidence; he sat calmly, with an air of self-assurance, while others paced and whined to passing caretakers. His arrow-straight back and highly held head screamed of silent strength.

Sarah cautiously proceeded toward him. The edict of non-violence on official letterhead held no weight to lower her guard. When he noticed her approach, his eyes lit up and he slowly moved forward in his confined space to meet her. Her defenses were weakened by his gentle style and body language echoing that he liked her, too. With the stealth of a ninja, his unspoken charm left her unknowingly unarmed and completely defenseless as she stood before him. She wanted time alone with him; a request rarely granted.

“I’ll be right back” she whispered, “I think I can talk the supervisor into giving us time alone in the yard.”

The supervisor was a balding, bespectacled man with the belly of a birthing woman and the self-image of a God. He made no effort to conceal his desire for Sarah, yet was continually mystified by her lack of reciprocation. Although contact was usually avoided, she realized his lustfulness could be an advantage in getting the request granted.

“I’ll grant you permission with the stipulation that he remains restrained and within the facility grounds.” He tried to sound authoritative but the spectacle of talking to her breasts negated any official tone in his voice.

“Thank you so much” Sarah’s flesh crawled up her spine towards her scalp forcing the corners of her mouth to

slightly rise and produce a feeble smile that faded unnoticed; his eyes had never left her chest.

Devoid of metal barriers, they bonded immediately.

Sarah immersed herself in Pedro, as the judicious attorney within ascended and divided to rest on opposing shoulders. The debate was gender preference and unknown personal history as they volleyed case arguments to and fro. As the vacillation dangerously increased, she could no longer ignore the pressure in her head swelling to its tolerance level and threatening to blow.

“Stop!”

Pedro froze and waited for her to finish her thought.

Disbelieving her thought became audible; she tried to play it off. “C’mon, let’s go this way.”

Pedro lumbered along without further assessment.

When their time was up, it broke Sara’s heart to see him locked up again. I’m doing it, she concluded. He’s a male; but a mighty fine specimen of one. Anyway, what’s the fuss over sex? Our bond is spiritual. She reassured herself by adding, I’ll just look away when his “thingy” is visible.

His release into her custody was arranged six years ago and she’s never looked back...until now.

Bet HE hasn’t looked back, she scrutinized. If HE did, he’d be licking my boots with gratitude for his

charmed life. I cleaned him up, gave him a comfortable home and keep his belly full.

An analogy of being exploited like an unpaid whore arises, but she quickly rejects the self-image of a victim. Her eyes form slits and lips tighten. I still have the power to put you right back where I found you, she threatens silently to the back of his head. Without me, you'd either end up back at the facility, homeless or most likely DEAD!

She calls to mind the unheeded warnings from well-meaning friends. "You don't even know who his parents are or his background" and "I know his kind...they tend to be dominating." She didn't listen; emotion deafened her to reason. Only she perceived the potential of his soft, gentle soul so meticulously concealed in his hard exterior. And concerns over bloodlines seemed so archaic.

Sarah felt confident in her decision immediately after Pedro came to live with her. They both loved the outdoors and would hike for miles together; he always kept up, never complaining or asking to stop and rest. Yet, she was not naïve to their differences.

With due diligence, observations were made and disparities noted as they became better acquainted. The final review revealed no deal breakers, but it did highlight a dissimilarity that was difficult to reconcile.

Pedro's an avid hunter with roots deeply seated in his huntsman family tree. Although she viewed it as inhu-

mane, the inhumanity was rationalized and replaced with the perception of hunting as an alternate source for sustenance, just like the meat counter. Why would a pound of hamburger from the A&P affect their relationship?

Their evenings were spent in the sanctuary of Sarah's back yard. An average sized yard, but the fact it backed up to the park gave it a sense of expansiveness. A service came weekly to mow the grass, but the lack of weeding left little risk of "Yard of the Week" signs cluttering the overgrown flowerbeds. A commoner would find it aesthetically unimpressive, but in Sarah's eyes, it was her regal country estate that held witness to life's miracles. For each night at sunset, Mother Nature provided live entertainment by releasing rabbits to congregate and snack on leftover bird feed.

They performed their routines, jumping from spot to spot to catch a nibble, without any signs of stage fright due to her presence. Each showing induced the renewed excitement of a child who finds equal delight in watching a favorite movie for the hundredth time. Her contribution was furnishing the cast with personalities, complete with names and storylines.

Pedro would sit contently and watch the bunnies with her. Not because he was emotionally moved by the experience; he just wanted to be next to Sarah. His com-

pany completed her experience; until his impulsiveness destroyed her only sanctity.

They waited patiently as the sun lowered into the trees. Pedro rose from her side and stepped lightly to the back fence. He must be checking out the overgrown foliage on the fence, yet she felt compelled to watch him until he was swallowed by the shadows.

Abruptly, the brush appeared to breakout in battle with limbs clashing and cracking. The rustling settled as a shriek ascended to replace the turbulence. Her brain couldn't categorize the alien sound: a cross between a wailing cat and screeching newborn. Her body involuntarily responded by chilling the blood as it ran through her veins. Sarah darted into the darkness just as the limp, lifeless bunny dropped to the ground. Her eyes were unwillingly fixated as she studied the oddly contorted head flapped rearward onto the body. The neck snapped cleanly like a chicken sacrificed for Sunday dinner.

Pedro watched for her response; surely he would be acknowledged for quick footing and cunning skill. With gaping mouth and widened eyes, she desperately searched his face for an explanation. His capability to kill for food was rationalized by filling her head with the idealistic "circle of life" bullshit; she never contemplated sport killing.

Bewilderment morphed into rage and her arms flailed like a whirlybird slapping any body part available. "Why did you do that? Why? Why?" Pedro stayed to endure the blows then walked away with his head hung low. She was left alone in the dark to dispose of the carcass.

She returned and slumped on the back steps, hugging her legs in an upward fetal position. The soft rumble of grief arose, its escalation causing her body to heave and shake uncontrollably with each sob. Her conception of gentleness physically manifested was brutally murdered.

Pedro sat next to her, wedging his body closer and closer until she was forced to put her arm around him, then sat motionless. His torment over her sadness became virtually tangible. Touched, but unable to speak, she hugged his neck to signify forgiveness, and went inside.

Revisiting the past gives Sarah an unsettling feeling which brings her mental clarity into question. Drawing upon her training as an attorney, she weighs the supporting evidence for keeping him in her life.

The negatives immediately come to mind. Let's see, he's selfish and only does things if there's something in it for him. I gave him some tasks to perform, thinking that he lacked a sense of purpose, but he refuses to accomplish the simplest task. He'd rather lie around the house all day, waiting for me to come home to clean up after him.

Not only is he lazy, but he also has disgusting gas issues. She recalls the many nights praying for relief from her exhaustion by being granted swift entrance into sleep only to be yanked back at the threshold by viscous fart fumes snaking into her nostrils. A smell so thick and putrid, she swears she can see it coagulating in the air. It doesn't bother him; with a blank face, he watches her flee for air, clueless to what the fuss is all about. Yes, even the Pope slips one now and then: but he knows the foods that disagree with him, yet will every opportunity to eat them, forcing her to suffer the consequences.

Sarah's inquisition is interrupted when she spots two figures in the distance. One more flaw to the list is his machismo attitude and his obsession with the opposite sex. Despite the current activity, Pedro stops in his tracks when any female is sighted and becomes compulsive about checking out their asses. There is no partiality to what the bitch looks like, young, old, large, petite, black, brown, yellow or white; he must get her attention to prove that he's a stud.

Desire for female attention isn't the issue; it's the obsession taking control, rendering him incapable of hearing a word she says. She can't even get a response by screaming directly in his ear. The scene usually ends with her grabbing him firmly and jerking him away like a madwoman.

those who enter the home packing a penis. Aversion is made clear by glaring at them from a distance; that's if he likes them. He's quick to judge and if judgment means distrust, he gets loud, obnoxious and has been known to threaten physical harm.

Calling attention to Pedro's shortcomings causes her to recognize her own. She can be cold-hearted by pushing him away or ignoring him as he begged for attention. And the inexcusable instances when she lost it and hit him because he pissed her off. Yet, despite her craziness, Pedro always remains in the present, never burdened by carrying grudges or seeking revenge.

Strangers may call their love dysfunctional; Sarah calls it unconditional. The love sought by mythological gods, poets and dreamers.

Pedro contributes in his own way. She feels safe knowing he would sacrifice his life to protect hers. She has never experienced loneliness with him in her life and always feels wanted by his display of excitement over seeing her come home. Pedro's empathy and compassion are demonstrated by instinctively detecting a wave of self-pity or self-doubt coming over her, and will stay by her side to ride it out. If her mood becomes foul, he'll sneak up and lick her neck. While revolting, it always makes her laugh. Most notably, Sarah cannot find a finer confidante than Pedro, the custodian of her deepest darkest secrets.

She loves him as she loved Emma. Sarah's heart ached in recalling the bitter-sweetness of Emma's life and death. She was soft, gentle and overflowing with desire to please, the inverse of Pedro. Yet, her love for each is equal. Physical differences didn't alter the quantity of love, only the quantity of time. Her time with Pedro is limited; she's known that from the beginning.

Her first task upon his release was to drag him to a trusted doctor for a physical. Dr. Schulman, Emma's old doctor, provided a clean bill of health along with a fore-warning: he wouldn't live a long life. The combination of large stature and genetic heritage resulted in a shortened lifespan. He felt obligated to warn her early in the relationship allowing the options of not proceeding or preparing herself. She chose to risk the heartbreak and to love again.

The walk concludes as they approach the house. All doubts vanish as Sarah stops to look into Pedro's eyes and stroke his head. The corners of his mouth turn up as high as possible. She smiles and tells him in sing-song fashion, "Good boy, Pedro" then slips the leash off his neck.

The Man Who Forgot How to Love

A.C. Peterson

I never realized how important words were until I had no one to talk to but myself.

Awake. That's a good word.

The sun's out again; burning the entire planet to a useless crisp. These days it seems that's all it ever does.

My memory's been a little off ever since the incident but I suppose that's what happens when things disappear; your mind simply flies off in search of them. There were winds—I remember that much—loud, hissing winds a few months back. They took the townspeople. Now I'm the only one around.

At first it wasn't so difficult living alone. The food wasn't poisoned or anything and considering there wasn't anyone left, I had it all to myself. But no one told me about the damned dogs; packs of them heading east. Tough work being a dog if you ask me, spend all day with your nose in the dirt, burning underneath all that thick fur. I certainly couldn't do it.

Anyway, it got hotter after the winds; so hot it feels like there are two suns in the sky.

Sun is another word I remember. It is a word I never forget.

I know there's another like it, I see it every night. But I can't really remember what it's called. It's the big, round one that comes up when the sky's not so bright anymore. It comes out when the sky's gray. But to be honest I don't see anything past that color—everything's gray to me.

2

There are a few houses up ahead, no tracks in the sand. If I can reach them I can find food. The trees whisper in the breeze but I don't pay much attention. I used to though, for the promise of company. Call me crazy if you like, but when you're all alone, even trees have got voices you wouldn't mind listening to.

I figure it's just the heat playing tricks on me but there's a woman here. Once in a while she slinks past the trees, stares at me for a bit, and then walks away. I'm afraid to approach her—mirage or not—she might disappear and I don't want that.

I can't tell what race she is, her hair's a darker gray than her skin but that's not much of a description. She wears a dark gray robe and even darker gray boots, has a gray crossbow strapped to her back and a long gray knife swinging down her side.

She has stared enough for today. She is leaving. I want to follow her but I can't because I know she isn't real. She will lead me to my death.

3

The houses look worse up close. There's a tree split right down the middle of the first, the roof's ripped off the second, and half of the third seems to have been chewed off by the wind. Still the dogs haven't been here. There just might be some food to find.

Nothing.

Just books and broken signs. Words, lots of words. Obstreperous. Content. Jejune. Homeostasis. They all light a fuse in my brain, a spark of remembrance maybe? Hmm, this one's odd. I don't seem to recall this one. Luh... no, that doesn't sound right. I can't pronounce this one. It's not as complicated as the others ... why can't I pronounce it? El Oh Vee Eee. Silly thing.

I toss the book aside, the cover falls open and I see the title. For The Ones You ... El Oh Vee Eee ... what is that?

Night's coming, sweet, cool night. Night. Night. Night. Night. I like this word.

4

There's a cave up ahead; smoke rising through its top. Dogs don't build fires so I must be imagining it. It smells damp in here; sweaty. There's little less than a meager flame in the center, yellow embers burning beneath the ash. I pick up a few twigs and let the flames eat away at them until the fire is full. This takes too much concentra-

tion. I never hear the footsteps. When they come, the hands are hot around my forehead, slick with grime. The weapon is sharp, cool, and almost refreshing against my neck. Something plops down beside me; a dead dog, its tongue hanging through a few broken teeth, a gray arrow sticking through its neck.

It takes me some time to realize there's a voice. I have to adjust my ears to the unfamiliar timbre; it's been a while since I heard another human being speak.

"Wh.. a.. .ou ...ng .ere?" No, that's not right. There is silence and the sounds resume.

"What are you doing here?"

English. I know this language.

"You're real?"

A gray hand reaches across my face, turns me around and shoves me into a corner. "I'm real."

I see her now. Her dark robes are covered in an even darker shade of something wet. Her hands too. She looks down at them, back up at my head and in doing so forces me to touch my face.

There is dog blood everywhere.

And so she has stained me, stained me with those killing hands and I can't help but be impressed. She isn't real. She will lead me to my death. Yet here I am. Hungry, warm, alive—and alive is such a wonderful word.

Her name is Josephine—Jo for short, and she is unattractive. One eye sits slightly higher than the other. Her face is crooked, seems as if she's leaning to the left all the time. Her ears stab through the sides of her head like horns on a ram.

She is the only woman I have seen in months.

Revision: she is very attractive.

The dog doesn't taste too good; not enough meat on its bones. No condiments to season it with either. Just fur, fur and gristle. I sift through the rubbish in my teeth, let out a deep breath. "How come you never approached me?"

The fire casts a shade across her lopsided face, making it look like there's only half a head on her neck. She chews, swallows. "I didn't need the company."

"That's a lie." It has to be.

"Yea? And what of it?" Her voice comes out rough and angry. "You looked weak, beaten, chances were you had some sort of infection. I didn't need the company of one who couldn't carry their own weight." She shifts on the ground, lets her long legs stretch on either side of the flame. "I didn't need your company."

I look down; at the bones in my hands, at the fire, at the ground. "I'm not injured," I say. "I carry no infection."

"Good! Then you can hunt."

The fire spits out a few embers, flares and shudders.

Hunt. I do not like this word.

6

Weeks pass and nothing changes. She thinks there might be others, others like us who may have survived the winds but she isn't sure. She isn't willing to risk the search. What a strange predicament we have found ourselves in.

Rain comes but not as often as it used to. Ever since the winds a few scattered showers taunt us. The dogs get the most of it. Ever since Jo had her way with one of theirs, they steer clear of the both of us. On rainy days they have the upper hand because they can smell the moisture in the air long before it hits the earth. They know when it's coming, know where it's going to fall, get there before we do and pile up in a big, furry lump. There isn't any water for miles so we need the rain. Jo and I raid old tool sheds for shovels, dig holes, and line them with tarps just in case.

Today I see that word again—El Oh Vee Eee—hanging from a sign on what used to be a book store. Jo pronounces it well. She says it's a beautiful thing.

I tell her that I'm color blind, that nothing's beautiful to me. She smiles and it's the first I have seen from her. "Love doesn't need to be seen," she says, "you feel it."

I look down at her wrinkled fingers, hard at her breasts.

I feel hungry.

7

Jo is angry with me.

Lately her hard looks seem to have softened up. She smiles more often and expects me to know the answers to questions she never asks. I don't understand. Why is she acting so differently? She's been putting some effort into improving her appearance too, gleaning old cosmetic cases from the rubble, making her gray features look even grayer, her lips look fuller; her hair less wild. She says that word to me, says it over and over, waits for me to say it back but I never do. I never can.

Love. I can pronounce it now. I just can't get my head around it. She gives me too many definitions of what it might mean, too many to make much sense out of any. I smile but she doesn't smile back.

She is angry with me.

8

Jo is leaving me.

Her hands fly about in the air. Her face bends into a scowl. It's been this way for weeks now. First she doesn't speak to me for days, then she gets upset at me when I don't seem to mind. She says I'm insensitive.

Insensitive. I'm not quite sure what to make of this word.

She says I can stay here and rot for all she cares,
says she's off to look for people with souls in them.
"You're hopeless! No one will ever love you!"

"Will you come back?" I ask, still unsure of this
love she speaks so passionately about.

She aims her crossbow at me and looses a bolt in
my thigh. This is her parting gift.

So yes, Jo is leaving me.

I will never see her again.

9

I'm limping, trying to find her. I think I know what
love is now. I'm not sure how long she's been gone only
that I want her back. The dogs watch as I hobble past their
pile, the rain sinks deep into my skin, turns my bones to
jelly. There is a difficulty up ahead, I should watch my
step.

I catch the eye of the one on top, a large black and
brown mutt with a fresh scar down its left side. Its lips peel
back, fangs push forward, mouth widens, and a bark erupts.

Run. I must run now.

But I have to be careful, there's a cliff up ahead. I
must watch my step, watch my...

...air? Where did the ground go?

The wind lashes at my cheeks, forces its way up my
throat and into my chest. There's pain; lots of it and for the
first time in so long I am cold.

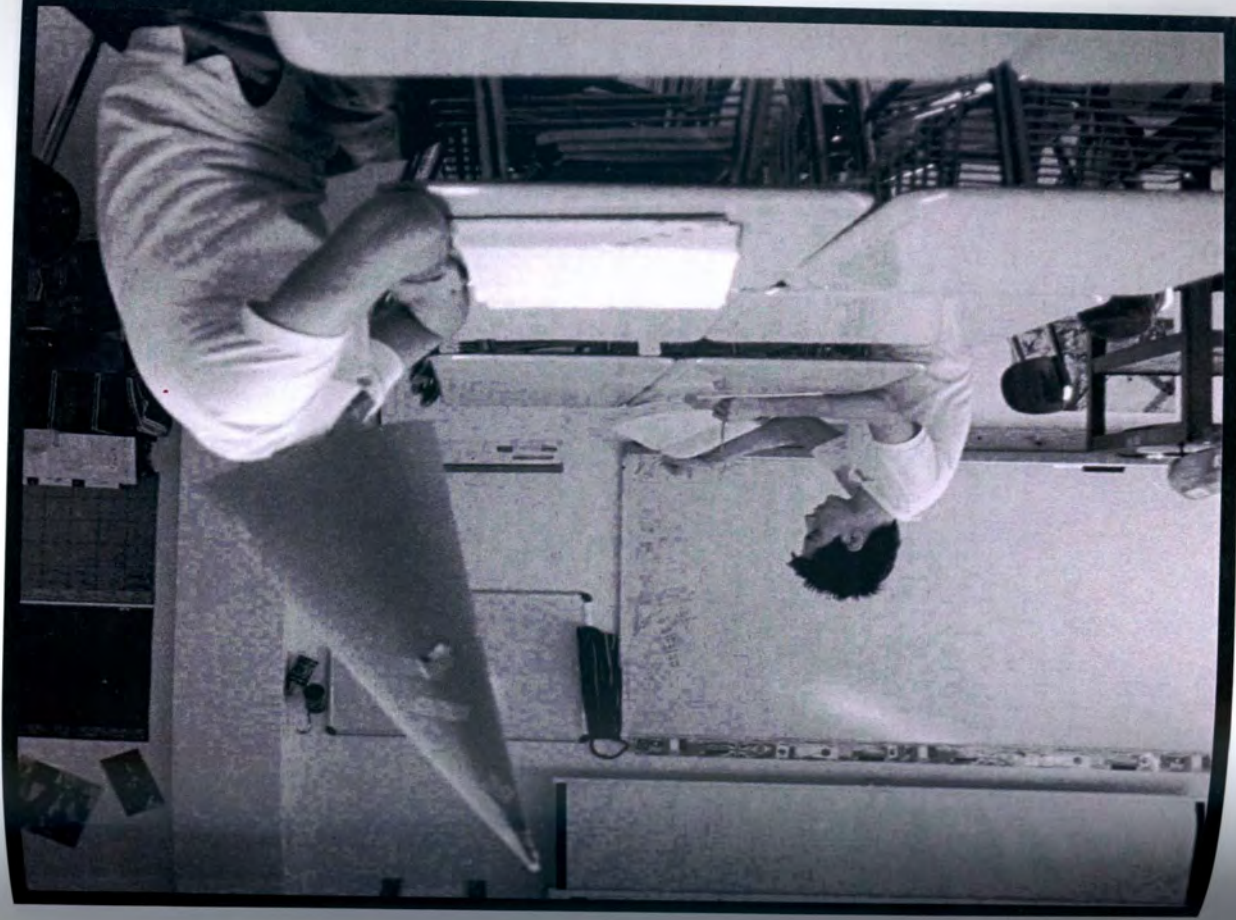
Now all I can think of is Jo.

I think I love her but how can I when all I see is
gray?

Arranged Marriage
Martin Saucedo



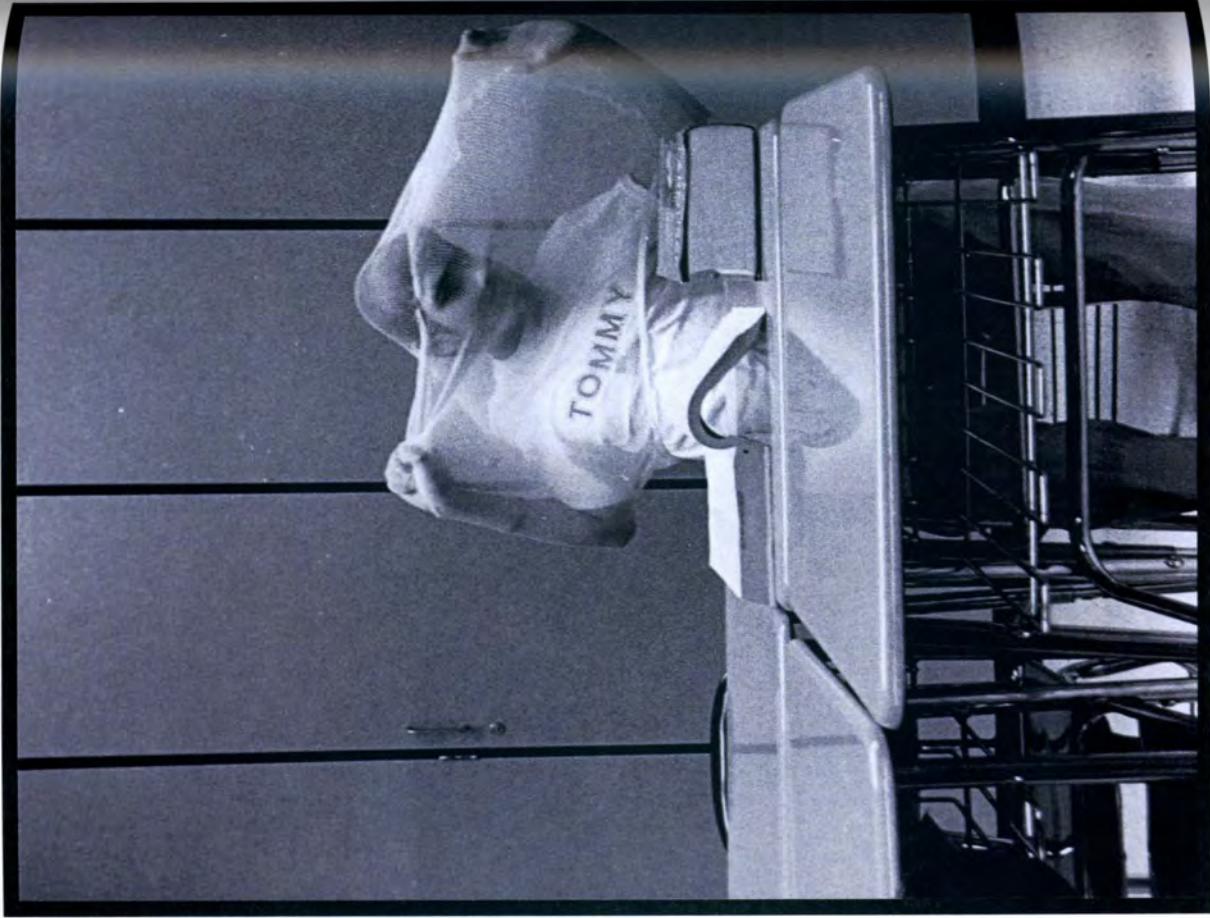
En el Salon 2
Martin Saucedo



Arts & Science
Martin Saucedo



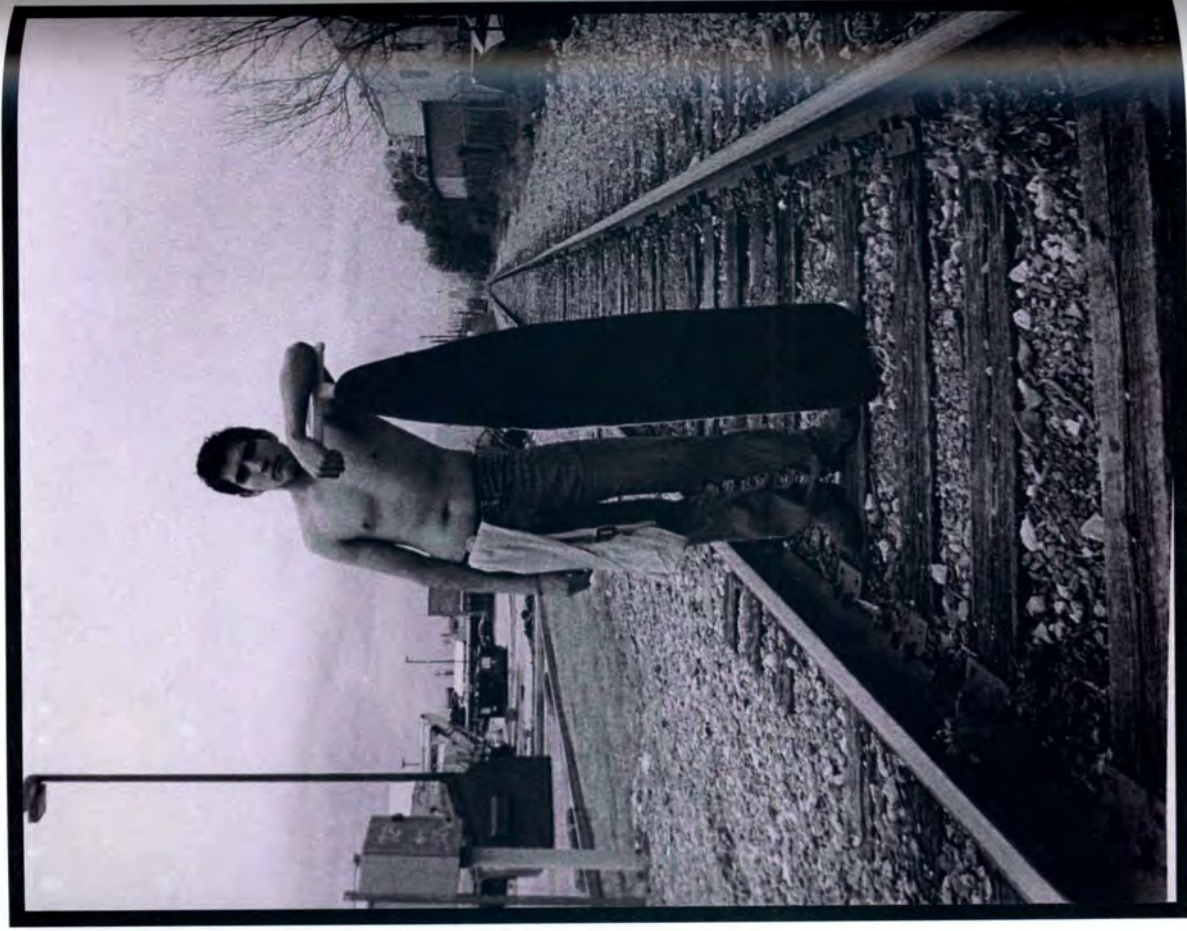
En el Salon 1
Martin Saucedo



Narcissus
Martin Saucedo



Plancho en el tren
Martin Saucedo



Plancho en el calle
Martin Saucedo



Bridge
Martin Saucedo



Shadows
Martin Saucedo



Photo 183
Paul Murphy

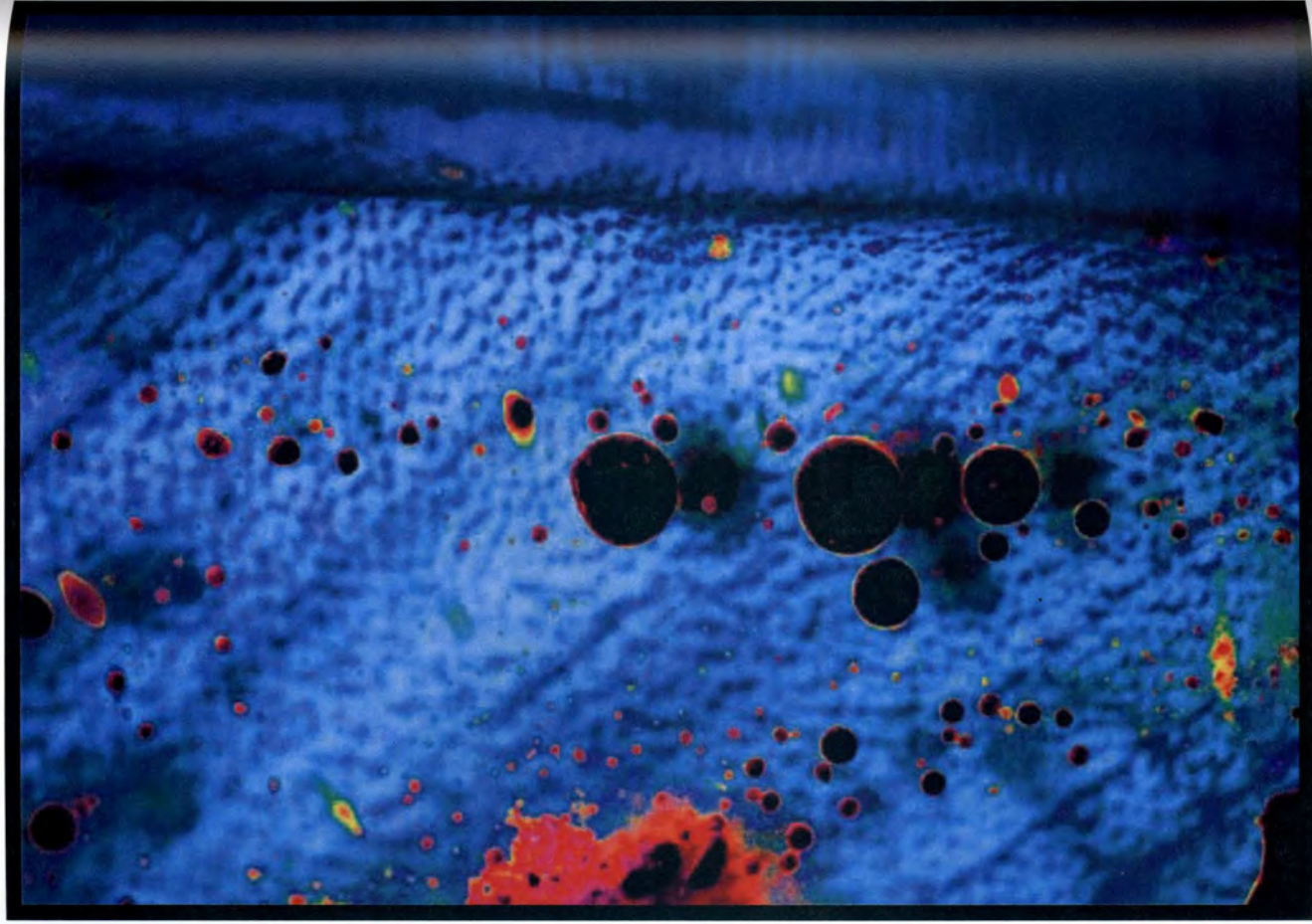


Photo 185
Paul Murphy



DSC06666

Victoria Davila



Slug

Laura Lipschutz



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