

Spring 1991

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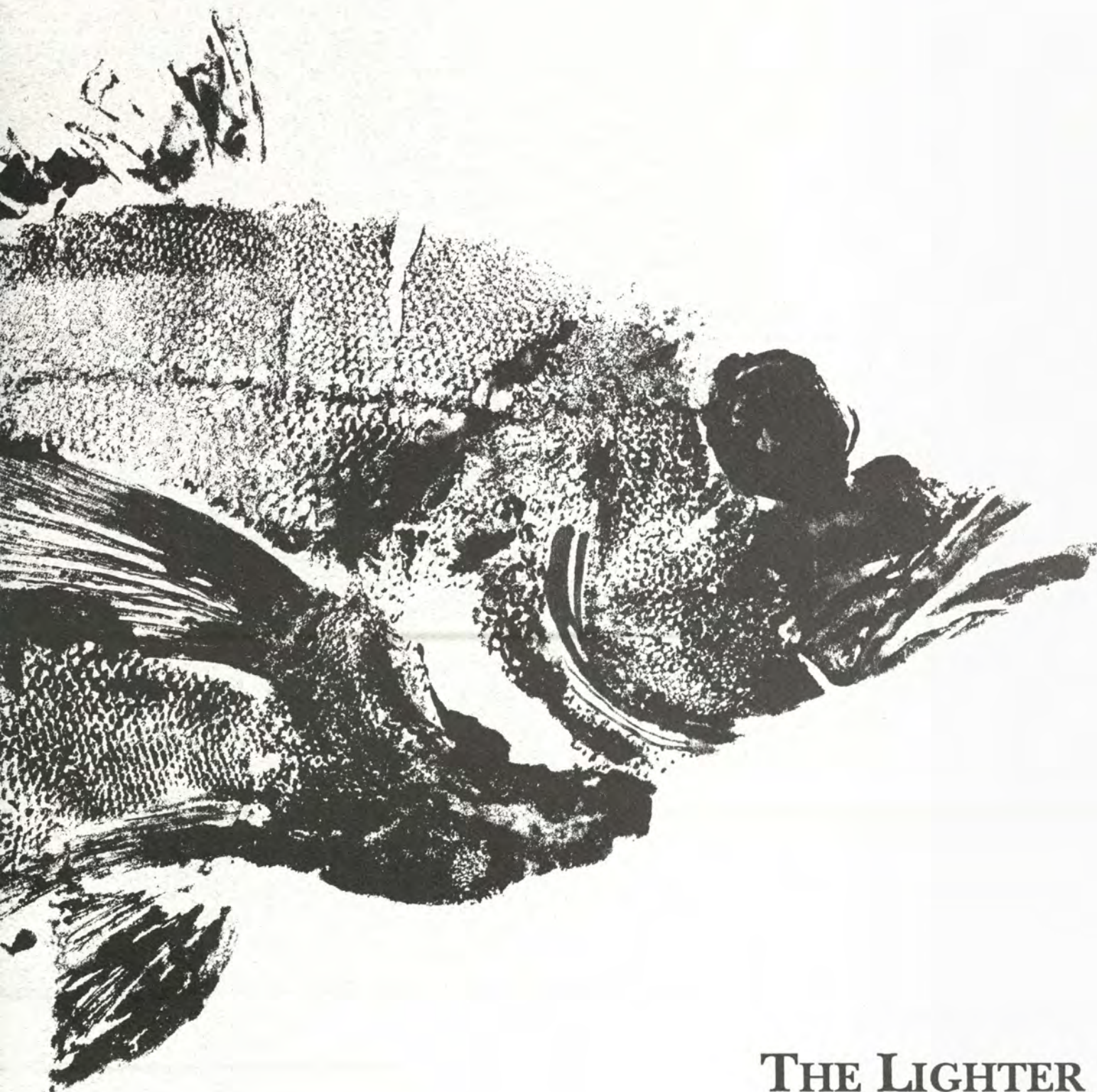


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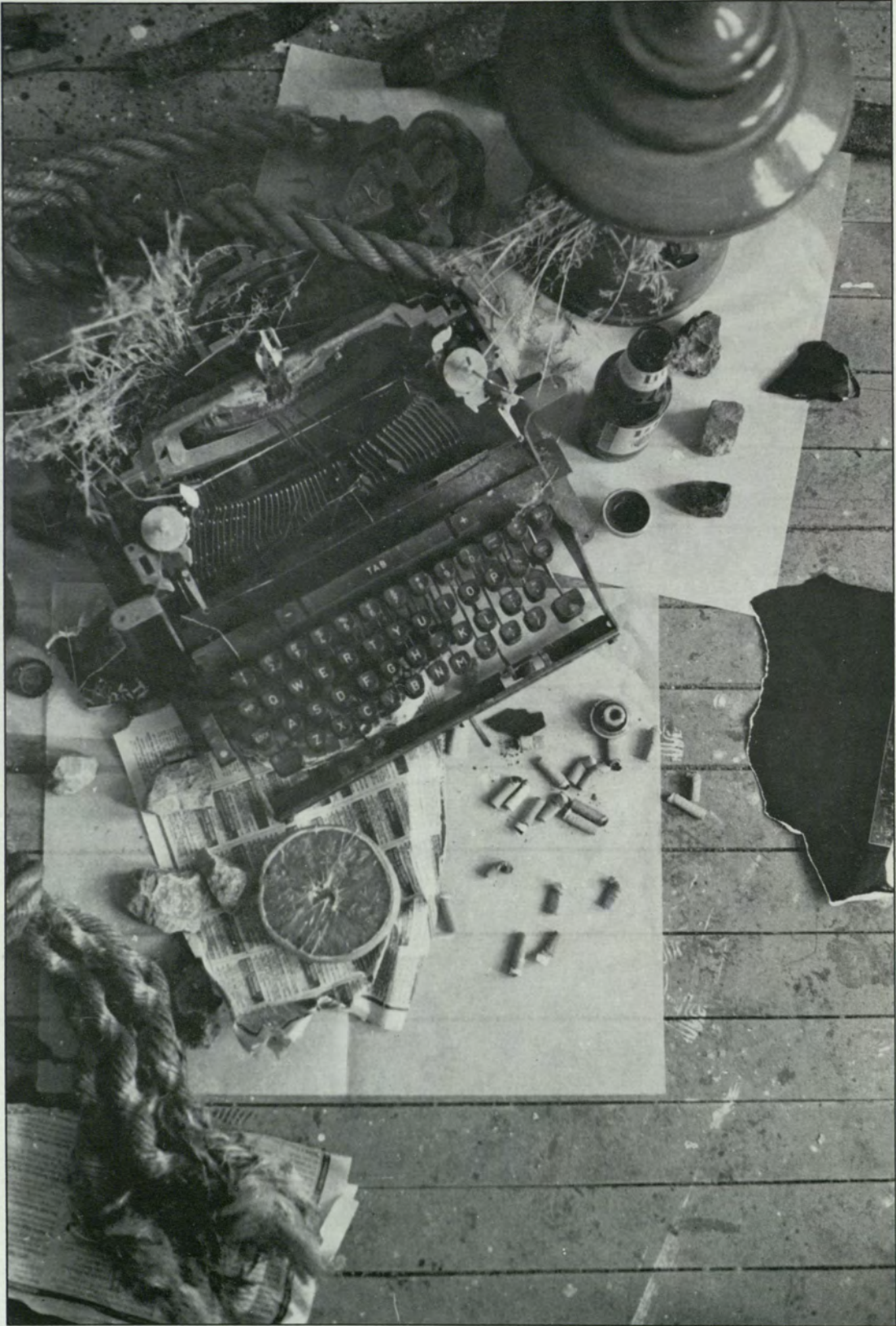
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THE LIGHTER

Table Of Contents

QWERTY	2	In The Bazaar	22
<i>Kevin Loza</i>		<i>Lisa M. Montelpasse</i>	
Foreword	3	Simsun	22
<i>Staff</i>		<i>Annie Niermann</i>	
A Hill Of Wild Horses	4	At The Arthritis Rehab Center	23
<i>John Delagrang</i>		<i>Meridith Brand</i>	
Killdeer (for mother)	5	Summer Evenings	24
<i>John Delagrang</i>		<i>Meridith Brand</i>	
Craggle	5	Grasping	24
<i>Annie Niermann</i>		<i>Jen Gillis</i>	
Notes From My Brother	6	Untitled	25
<i>Nancy Bernardo</i>		<i>A. Shepler</i>	
Happy Surprise	7	Waiting For Pizza	26
<i>Keith Nipper</i>		<i>John Schaefer</i>	
Galvanized Rendez-vous	7	Biscuits And Gravy	27
<i>Todd Cox</i>		<i>Jana Gill</i>	
The Digital	8	Stone Heroes	28
<i>Keith Nipper</i>		<i>S. Steinbrueck</i>	
Locust Kinder	8	Serendipity In Summer	28
<i>Gretchen Beck</i>		<i>Todd Cox</i>	
City Walking	9	Cloaked In Jest	29
<i>Keith Nipper</i>		<i>Nancy Pica</i>	
Mal Asia Movement	10	...Toward Ever After	29
<i>Jonathan Gillaspie</i>		<i>Angela D. Taraskiewicz</i>	
Imago	10	Lust And An Arkansas Marsh	30
<i>Jana Gill</i>		<i>Marjorie Thomas</i>	
Breathe	11	Halcyon Triptych	31
<i>Paul Ignacio</i>		<i>Phil Potempa</i>	
Hesitancy	13	Whale Watching	32
<i>Karen Jensen</i>		<i>Marjorie Thomas</i>	
For Jacob	14	Apology	37
<i>Christopher Hanson</i>		<i>Michael Chasar</i>	
Two Japanese Women Standing On A Bridge (a sketch)	15	Turning	38
<i>Christine Rueter</i>		<i>Michael Chasar</i>	
Mirrored Morning	15	Mi Falis	38
<i>Stacy Burnham</i>		<i>Annie Niermann</i>	
Singing At The National Cathedral, Reformation Sunday	16	Metamorphosis (for John Balaban)	39
<i>Christine Rueter</i>		<i>Michael Chasar</i>	
New Gothic	16	Sweaty Knee Creases	40
<i>Erin Twiss</i>		<i>Phil Rickus</i>	
Nude Combing Her Hair, Giovanni Bellini (c. 1475)	17	Notes On Contributors	41
<i>Christine Rueter</i>		<i>Staff</i>	
Interview With Frederick Barton	18	End	42
<i>Staff</i>		<i>Staff</i>	
		Poisson Empreinte	Cover
		<i>Gretchen Beck</i>	



QWERTY—Kevin Loza

Foreword

What is art? It is, perhaps, one of the hardest terms to define. Each generation declares certain works part of the Canon, and at the same turn, disowns others. Our job as members of a literature and art staff is to find pieces that transcend the individual works themselves, voices that can touch readers and viewers, whether they be part of a small group or a larger community. As fellow students and hobbyists of art and literature, we know how easy it is to dismiss other people's works as unimportant or unsuccessful, but within each of the published works, we have heard voices that speak about places familiar to our souls, as well as places we have not focused on in ourselves.

The literary selections claim attention to thought and craft; they speak about people and situations we can all relate to or at least understand within the realm of the human spirit. Listen for rhythm in the lines, look for skilled line breaks, watch for depth in character and plot. In "Mal Asia Movement," we are transported to a primal world; in "Breathe," we see the hopelessness of youth, the urgency for self-clarification and identity. "For Jacob" studies a relationship between a mother and

her son. All the works demand a second reading—careful attention. "At The Arthritis Rehab Center" illustrates the difficulty of illness using language equal to the subject matter. "Whale Watching" peers into a family's instantaneous demise.

In conjunction with the literature, the artwork reflects similar emotions while drawing on issues that relate to and step beyond the authors' themes. Light and shadow contrast in the photographs, interacting with the environment captured in the individual pieces; the drawings move with life. By entering "Simsun," we move with the blurred crowd past a sidewalk art display; in "Grasping," we reach for the fireflies, want to capture them in jars. The lines of trees in "Serendipity In Summer" are live heroes, paralleling the stone columns of the matched poem. "Imago" juxtaposes spirit-like dancers with a moon-enconced night.

Stepping into this world, readers and viewers will travel to distant lands and meet new, yet somehow familiar, faces. Each of these works lures you into an enchantment of a kind. We hope they imprint meaningful and lasting images in the greater sphere of your existence.

A Hill Of Wild Horses

John Delagrang

A stranger and I happened upon them—
Statued (but for their breech-pendant sweeping);
They stood in confident contrapposto and
Indifferent in their crane-necked reaping.

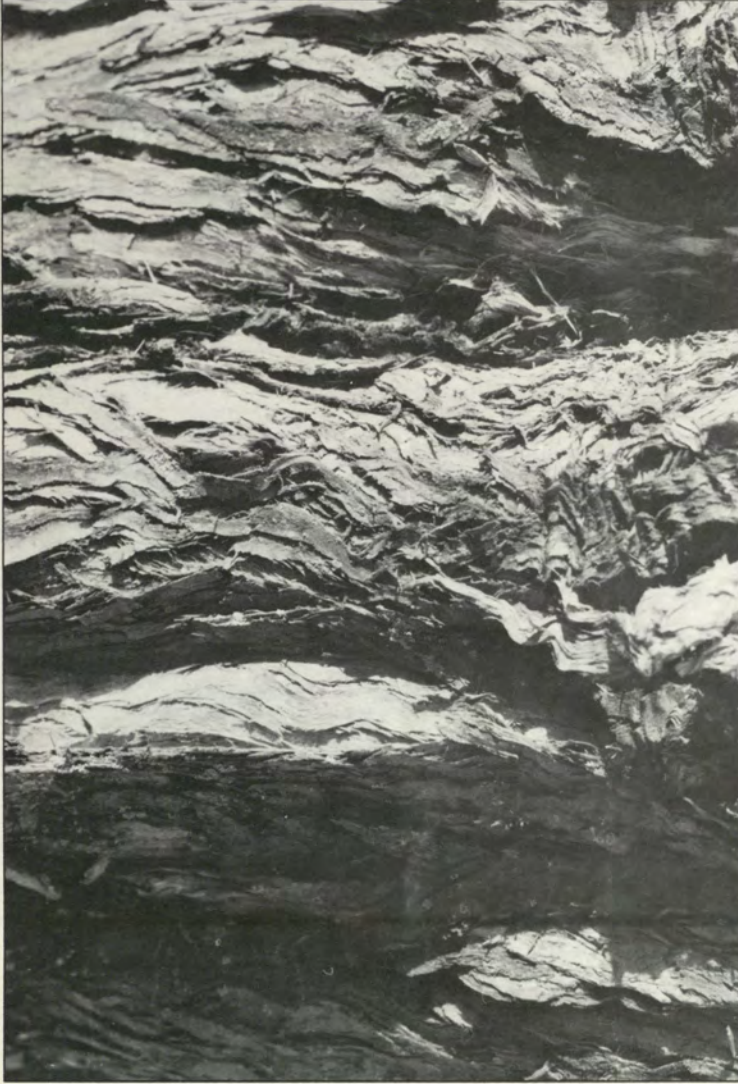
I marveled at their fell of polished glass—
Hilled and valleyed by supple adamant
And motley (of mottled ivory and ash,
A tranquil brown, or sable vehemence).

Echoing were their unbridled bellows
And boundlessly naked their scudding shapes;
I thrived as they writhed gently, in the blow
Of mountain breath, donned with the billowing napes.

Strange he should eye (partial) the wan, gaping one
Sleeping fly-befriended (bloating in the sun).

Killdeer (for mother)

John Delagrang



Craggle—Annie Niermann

Your infancy son was as a precious bloom
With fragrantly fragile petals of down;
I sunned you with joinder and delicate groom
And watered your roots with assuaging sounds.

You sprouted to fledgling (teemed with green mischief)
And from under my wing came your prying peers;
But I pinioned your ardor and fended with
My impotent cry calling "Killdeer, Killdeer!"

Maturity's color soon loomed on your breast
Beneath bestowed necklaces—harnessed in place;
I no longer hear puling or hungry frets
And directioned is your once stray-eyed face.

My plumes are thick mother (over blossoms dried)
Please quell your feint and watch my pinions fly.

Notes From My Brother

Nancy Bernardo

Sitting cross-legged in the damp basement
we would talk
of things that made us happy.
Intently I would watch
your cigarette resting
neatly between two slender fingers,
attached to the hand of a musician.
Sometimes,
you would light
a joint and gingerly
savour each puff,
a new thought
to share,
while your eyes danced
and drew me closer to you.

The music emanated through your body,
out your fingertips
into notes which became your sullen
song.
I struggled to listen
to your advice
about cold people
who could hurt me,
I tried to understand,
I still do.

We have since moved apart
and now I hear your strong voice
over the wires,
asking me questions about the mid-terrain,
wishing that you could remove
yourself from the city
to experience some of my simple joys.
I ask you of life,
your answers
have become things that I would rather not hear....

It's cold and hard
when loving comes
once in a while.
Your cigarette is extinguished
before you place the receiver precariously
back into its cradle,
while I listen
to the music of the dial tone.

Happy Surprise

Keith Nipper

The smell
of our time together
last night
remains on me
all day today.
No matter
how many times
I wash my hands,
I am happy
to think of you
every time I,
absent minded,
put my hands
to my face.



Galvanized Rendez-vous—Todd Cox

When the microwave blew a fuse
and the power went out
yesterday morning,
I was so angry at you.
You made me feel bad,
saying

“How could you talk like that
in front of our children?”

I hit you hard,
that whole morning
left a bitter taste
in my mouth.
Here now in this empty house,
I have not set the microwave
digital clock,
it has been keeping track
of the minutes
since our argument.
It is strange
looking at 27:04 blinking,
waiting to be reset.
It is a cold indicator
of my hours of suffering
and fear since you left
for work hating me
and our children.



Locust Kinder—Gretchen Beck

The black iron ball above your walking
wrecks a mass
of brick, steel, and wood,
and you glance aside to see workers
in greasy overalls.
Then you stand,
and if you stay long enough
it becomes a game,
and your face beams with a grin
as you anticipate
how much rubble the next blow
will add to the pile.
Later, you realize that you were walking
in the city, deliberately avoiding
everyone's gaze
before you stepped outside
the momentum to play.
You enter again
with eyes and a frown
impossible to penetrate.

Mal Asia Movement

Jonathan Gillaspie

Slipping off into the sheets of the dark, humid night
not sleeping just wandering about no direction
damp tropical sod soaking into my hindquarters
clouds intermittently passing beneath green moon
nocturnal spirits floating along on jungle currents
using their primal sense of direction

Strange chants and night rhythms very far off
the sounds are not created from living beings
the sounds have never been conceived by human mind
my eardrums quiver with the incoming movements
not the remote sounds of night danger
spirit language nonsensical communication

Opening one eye very slowly and deliberately
I escape to nothing and never existed



Imago—Jana Gill

The two of us sit in the collected dark of the early morning, bathed in the pale violet light cast out from the aquarium standing before us. The rest of my house is quiet and still; my parents and little sisters are upstairs, enfolded in their bedcovers and their contented, unassuming sleep, and Gabriel and I are doing nothing to disturb the gathering silence. We just sit there in front of my dank, muddled aquarium, not speaking to each other or even facing one another. Instead we watch the lone grey fish in my tank glide back and forth. I had other fish in the tank before - myriad colorful fish - but this beast had eaten them all, one by one.

Gabriel and I don't know what we should say to one another, or even what we could say to each other. I haven't seen him too much in the past few years since he left here to go to college out east. Gabriel never looked back, returning for no more than three days at a time, appearing from out of nowhere once or twice every six months in his hulking, powerful, graceless red GTO. None of the guys saw much of him during these visits, and when we did he seemed genial and earnest enough, but he was so much more reserved and guarded. Changed. Gone were Gabriel's mildly frantic hand motions which punctured the air before him and punctuated the words which tumbled end over end out of his mouth. The last that any of us had heard, Gabriel had dropped out a semester and a half before graduation, staying with whomever he was sleeping with at the time, or living out of the back seat of his car. Gabriel's family refused to talk about or even acknowledge him then, and he dropped out of all of our lives.

But Gabriel came back when he heard.

Now he's trying to light his cigarette, his face tightly drawn as he holds his lighter up to his mouth, his whole head cocked at an angle, but the lighter has trouble catching. I watch Gabriel throw sparks out onto the dark, flickering intermittently. He curses under his breath.

I can respect him for this, for declining to break the silence that has accumulated around the two of us, settling down upon us like a shroud. At least Gabriel doesn't try to insinuate himself into my head for his own gratification, like those doctors in that place they took me, that place where I stayed for the longest time until I learned the secret to get out: since all they do is smile and smile and smile at you, all I had to do was simper and

grin back at them and they let me go . . . Gabriel's lighter keeps flashing in the still night . . . and once I got out, the doctors told my family to accommodate my moodiness, to indulge me like a spoiled child. So I ignore them, because they should fucking well know better.

I clutch at the long sleeves of my black turtleneck, gathering up the fabric in my palms with my fingers. The lighter finally catches, and the flame illuminates Gabriel's face, tracing his hollow cheekbones and marking the faint stubble clinging to his chin as he draws on his cigarette, and lets out a thin stream of smoke.

Gabriel looks at me. He says, "That is one ugly fish."

I let out this little breath, and attempt to grin. "How long have you had him?"

"Dunno," I say, "year and a half. I've had him since he was small, a few inches long. He's got to be a foot and a half now."

"Christ. So how long have you had this tank? This is a huge aquarium."

I manage to smile this time. Gabriel was right. The aquarium was immense, awkwardly large. It took up the better part of the living room; when I re-arranged the room, I put the tank where the television was. An algae-encrusted centerpiece to the house - it was repulsive, hideous. My parents let me do it.

"Yeah, I've had tanks and fish and all for the past few years now. Forever. When you went out East to that university, and the rest of the guys went to the state school or trade schools, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't know what I wanted. God, I just didn't know."

Gabriel nods.

"So I didn't do anything. I read a little bit, tried to keep drawing, but I haven't picked up my sketch-pad in months. Actually, I just sat around more than anything. It's so easy. It's so easy to withdraw from everything, to disappear."

"Yeah. . ."

"Every once in a while, though, I'd pick up some mindless, menial job to keep myself occupied. To break up the monotony. Pumping gas, busboy, messenger, whatever. And most of that money went into the damn aquarium. More fish, more gravel, better filters, real plants . . . then I'd want a bigger tank and start all over again. Damn, I put so much into this fish tank, so much of myself."

"So what happened?" Gabriel asks. "Why'd you let the tank decay like this? All you have left is that ugly, grey torpedo of a fish."

"I know, I know . . ." my voice trails off. "I had all of these vivid, brilliant fish in my room, you know? I created this complete little world where these fish lived and breathed."

"Then I stopped. Stopped buying them feeder fish, even stopped cleaning the tank. So the aquarium got dirty and foul, and the fish started eating one another."

"And you just let this happen?"

"Yeah. I even watched. Jesus, Gabriel, this tank was all I had. All I had to show for myself was this stupid, empty waste."

I cross my arms, rubbing my forearms with cupped hands as though I was cold, feeling the uneven, ragged crosses carved there beneath my sleeves, and say, "I just didn't know any other way to say it." I pause for a long time. "Gabriel . . . the last three years of my life are swimming around in that tank. I didn't know anything more. I didn't know what else to do."

And in his quiet, indrawn voice he quickly answers, "Then let me show you," as he rises up from his chair and swiftly kicks - once, twice - the cords leading from the aquarium out of the sockets in the wall. The air filters still abruptly. The fluorescent lights cut off, leaving only the faint rays of the dawning sky outside to light the room. I remain motionless, transfixed, as I watch Gabriel stride to the fish tank, swat the cover and lights off the top, and with a cry topple the aquarium off of its stand onto the floor.

It shatters in a discordant chorus of breaking glass as the water surges and flows onto the floor, leaving gravel and plants and algae and jagged shards strewn everywhere, reducing the shag carpet to a fetid pool of marsh and mire beneath our feet. Lying between us, the fish wriggles and twitches and lurches in desperate spasms, frantically heaving itself off of the ground. Its gills pulse back and forth, its mouth gapes open, and I start to laugh quietly and freely as I get up and stand over my fish and say, soothingly, "Yes, yes . . . breathe deeply, now. Breathe deeply. Breathe . . ."

Then I look up at Gabriel and ask, "So what can we do now?"

He smiles as he says, "We can ride."

We burst out the door, leaving all and everything behind us: the dying fish, the swamp of a living room, the

plaintive calls of my awakened parents, everything. Gabriel and I hurl ourselves into the stiff chill of the grey February morning, and our overcoats billow out behind us as we escape to Gabriel's massive, daunting red car.

As we climb in, I stop to ask with a grin, "So where the hell are we going?"

He pauses only to answer my grin with another and rev the car's huge engine before answering, "We're going nowhere fast."

We tear through the desolate roads like madmen, fishtailing around corners and swerving through icy side streets. The comfortable streets of our old neighborhood seem blurred and unfamiliar as we flash past, ever-accelerating, and when Gabriel and I ascend the on-ramp to the deserted highway he opens up full throttle, gunning the car towards ninety, ninety-five, one hundred, beyond.

Gabriel grasps the wheel at an arm's length, with his shoulders thrown back, his head tilted forward, and his eyes narrowed in concentration in contrast to the crooked smile drawn on his face. I open the window and stick my head into the onrushing gales outside. "Faster!" I scream noiselessly into the swirling, blinding wind. "Faster!"

I pull myself into the car. The roar within is deafening, cacophonous, as the engine argues and pleads with Gabriel as he insistently presses down on the accelerator. We both look ahead at the road before us and see the brilliant red of converging taillights beaming back at us: bottleneck traffic even at this early hour.

"Faster," I whisper.

Hesitancy

Karen Jensen

Sitting in this room with you,
feeling the comfort of compatibility and the uneasiness of anticipation,
your eyes intimidate me.

Intimidate, yet fascinate.

When I look into them, I am not sure if I am seeing answers
or observing mirrored questions.
Would it be too bold for me to lean over and kiss you?
Or would the kiss merely be my avoidance of what I do not understand
in your eyes?

Please forgive me—I am not yet able to synchronize my wants
with my needs.

Too many faces lately have been handsome outside but plain within.
Too many bodies have been stimulating, yet few have been soothing,
calming, caring.

I am tired of processed people who are nothing more than hybrid, showy
blossoms dwelling in condominium flower boxes;
I cannot find a wildflower. I cannot even find the prairie in which to look.

So, again—forgive me. Your eyes fascinate me.
I do not know if I am seeing what I want,
or wanting what I see.

But, may I kiss you?

For Jacob

Christopher Hanson

Jacob ascended the first rung
And the land spread out before him
Like the plush rugs that rose up to meet
The spaces between his toes
On cold mornings.

He stepped into the folds of his mother's smock
And explored the baubles and jewels
That she had saved as gifts for her son.

Jacob traversed the creation
Through the folds, into the pockets
Each a new stitch, a new jewel
Which he stored away
In his inner purse,
But didn't knot the thinning drawstring.

Mother turned her skirt with the wind
And Jacob tumbled off the ladder
The drawstring snapped,
The verdant jewels and stitches
Poured out
In his speech.

Two Japanese Women Standing On A Bridge *(a sketch)*

Christine Rueter

The women stop mid-way on the bridge,
stoop their frames against the walkway
in a reverent bow.

Their white faces mimic death
against a garden of green leaves
which stretches across water,
and one woman in a blue dress
points to one bundle of pink petals,
opened like lips about to sing.
They do not care that the sky is darker
and soon will be black as hair.
They only stand on the bridge
staring into the strong-veined leaves
which are cupped hands
longing to caress the sky.



Mirrored Morning—Stacy Burnham

Singing At The National Cathedral, Reformation Sunday

Christine Rueter

Into the main aisle, we children pass
in white robes that scrape our ankles.
What amaze me are the kaleidoscope
windows which catch light and send it out
in different colors. It is a dream,
I think, to sing so loudly,
voices skimming across pews.
It is a song,
catching in the grooved concrete arms,
which twinges like a string, then dies.
When I sing so loudly,
it is not for the fleshless statues
that line side aisles with their stares.
I sing to feel thick sound
rolling over open space in its cloud.
I do not think of God or the words.
I dream the wide-eyed windows
splashing their red across my lips.
It is the ceiling, carved with thick ribs,
which inhales the song
and breathes it back,
something cold.



New Gothic—Erin Twiss

Nude Combing Her Hair, Giovanni Bellini (c. 1475)

Christine Rueter

What linger in the mirror are her eyes,
thick caverns which bring dreams,
those eyes she does not know.
It is a brush strumming the hair
brings a trance, the thick cords
weeping in rhythm against her spine.
She sleeps a dream which folds out the room,
her flushed face whitens, letting go.
Out her window, the clouds
fan into a thin breath.
What brings her back is the wind,
a foreign voice sobbing
wo-man, wo-man
across her warm skin.

Interview With Frederick Barton

On October 2nd, novelist and VU alumnus, Frederick Barton visited campus to participate in the weekend's Homecoming festivities and to read from his third novel, Black and White On the Rocks, due out in the spring. His two novels currently in print, The El Cholo Feeling Passes and Courting Pandemonium, received both critical and popular success and established Barton as a writer with promise of strong work in the future.

As Director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of New Orleans, Barton is familiar with the changes in the literary world; as a professional writer, he understands the difficulties young writers experience as they make choices about their future and the fears that partner those decisions. His own choice to become a writer occurred in graduate school where, instead of completing his doctoral dissertation, Barton wrote what would become his first novel, The El Cholo Feeling Passes.

The Lighter took the opportunity to talk with Barton, questioning him about writing and his experiences within that field.

L: Why did you decide to begin a novel in place of your doctoral dissertation?

FB: I had always wanted to be a writer, that had always been my secret, and sometimes not so secret ambition. I was talking to Arlin Meyer last night after the reading, because he brought up that I had written those two short stories in his Advanced Comp. class which I'm absolutely shocked that he remembers. He only had twenty students that semester and twenty every semester since then. I remember saying to Arlin, he didn't remember this, but I remember saying to him "this is what I'd really like to do." But I didn't pursue that in any way, and continued to march along toward a life that was safer. I mean, get a PhD, and get a job teaching in a university, getting married, and raise a family—those are all real worthwhile things. Those are things I wanted for myself. Really trying to write was very scary for me. But I got to a place where I was going to have to write a book, which is what a doctoral dissertation is. And I realized that if I wrote that book, the book that I was supposed to write in order to get my PhD, that I was going to be doing that for the rest of my life. The notion that I would ever after that time turn around and write novels was just a fiction. That I've come to the crossroad of my life and I had to choose who I was going to be. And so with an awful lot

of fear and an awful lot of dismay on the part of my parents and my teachers—not to say that my parents and teachers weren't supportive, they were, but I also knew that they were dismayed—I finally decided to do what I really wanted to do. And I'm glad I did.

L: Did you write when you were younger, I mean you said it was a secret, or a more secretive thing?

FB: Well, I wrote when I was in high school. In English classes there was an occasional assignment where you could write a short story, and I wrote short stories whenever there was the opportunity. And that experience was good, but I also remember it as being somewhat frustrating too, frustrating to me. This is not true for everybody perhaps, but it's true for me: I would invest that piece of work with so much more of everything I cared about than in a paper I would write, the thousands of papers that you write as you go through school. And I remember always being disappointed when my teachers responded to those few efforts in a way that never discouraged me—never ugly, never mean, never judgmental—but somehow I ached for a kind of affirmation that didn't happen. Arlin Meyer gave me that sort of affirmation here, but I didn't have the courage at that time to say "hey, I'm really going to try to write." I'm not sure I was ready. I'm not sure that if I tried to do that at twenty-two, rather than twenty, however old I was, twenty-eight, I could have started. I think I just wasn't ready. Maybe you need to be, maybe I needed to be, older.

L: You mentioned Professor Meyer, was there any other person you would call your mentor?

FB: Oh absolutely. Dr. Will Boyd. History. And I sort of wouldn't want to short change a whole bunch of people. Meaning in the English department, definitely Arlin Meyer. In the History department, Will Boyd, and Wes Burn were mentors, friends insofar as you can be friends with professors. They were always tremendously kind to me.

L: Do you see this as necessary to young writers? I mean is it necessary to find someone who is kind to you, who is willing to show you that extra time, even if it's really a slight thing?

FB: I don't guess I think it's necessary. I'm always

hesitant to say there's a rule about anything. But it sure is helpful. The people here at VU were instrumental in helping me to become whoever it is I've become. Anything good I've become, they deserve the credit. I have to take the responsibility for all the bad stuff.

L: When you started your first novel, did you structure it as far as writing periods? Did you discipline yourself, or was it more like a germination?

FB: I very much tried to discipline myself, to write every day. And produce everyday, to have something to show progress every day. To be at some point A or point L at the end of one day, then at point B or point M the next day.

L: Did that have an effect on your later novels? Did that set a pattern?

FB: Yes. I still work the same way. I'm not able to write every day in my life because of my teaching responsibilities and other kinds of things. But every summer, from the time that school is out in May until we go back to school in August, I do once again try to write fiction every day. Feel some progress. And when I'm working well, I can really feel the power and sense of momentum from asking myself to do that every day. That's always my goal. During the nine months of the school year, it's a more haphazard thing. It's not something I can get to every day. I just don't have the time.

L: Do you ever feel your teaching responsibilities—when you have to change gears like that—do you ever feel it infringing on the creative side at all?

FB: Only in time. I feel it in time. I don't feel that it gets in the way spiritually and emotionally. I've heard other writers say that. But I feel tremendous personal rewards from my teaching and am glad that I've had the opportunity to earn my living in this way. Other aspects of university life, committees, I suppose being a prime example, just the kind of routine a college professor is in—there are many many activities and responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of university professors that are not specifically those of preparing classes, teaching classes and meeting with students—those things I feel *do* very much get in the way of what I'd prefer to be doing. But it's a matter of time, and they depress me too, I'll admit.

But I never felt that that unhappiness means that when I sit down to do my work I'm inhibited.

L: There is a delicate balance between nurturing your creative side and nurturing a relationship and someone else. Some writers find their own needs to be so important that they wish to call all the shots. When they write they want to write, then they want someone to be there for them. Do you experience this in your life? What are your thoughts on the issue?

FB: I think that's a real good question. I'm tremendously impatient with the notion that those people who choose as their life's work an artistic calling, whether that calling be writing fiction, writing poetry, or painting, film-making, or acting, I'm tremendously impatient with that attitude—that that calling privileges them to be treated special by either the man or woman in their lives or anyone else. That's a self-indulgent and really detestable attitude. I've indeed known people who think "I am a poet. Therefore, that privileges me not to have to relate to the world and other people in the same way as a candlestick-maker or a teacher." I'm impatient with that. I'm really hostile to it.

L: Out of the three novels that you've written, which one do you like the most and why?

FB: They're all different and they're all my children. I couldn't say that I loved any one of them more than the others. But only that I recognize that they're different. They presented different problems and different senses of accomplishment. The joys of making a novel are mostly very private joys. You have the sense for that one moment, "I can't do that any better."

L: What do you find most enjoyable about writing novels as opposed to any other genre?

FB: For me, I think it's purely a matter of calling. I absolutely am not a poet. My few attempts at writing poetry were unsatisfying in terms of what I was able to accomplish. I haven't written more than ten poems in my life. I've never tried to do anything with those poems. I have shown them to a very small number of friends, but that's the extent of it. I just am not a poet. So, I'm not even tempted to try to express myself in that medium. It's a medium I have profound regard for, but it's not my medium. In terms of the choice between short fiction

and the novel—it is really one of the stories that come to me. I have written short fiction, not nearly as much as many of my contemporaries, not nearly as much as, for instance, the people I went to Writer's Workshop with at University of Iowa. It's just a matter of the stories that come to me. For reasons that are impossible to explain, they're just long stories. It's just my medium.

L: How aware are you of choice? There's that emotional side of writing and there's that editorial side.

FB: The process of writing a novel for me is a process of discovery. No novel that I've written yet has turned out exactly the way I thought it would turn out when I got started. Characters suggest themselves in the process of creation and will become very important characters when the concept I had when I began might not have included their presence at all. In *Courting Pandemonium*, when I began, I had the characters, Mac and Sheila and Barbara Jeanne, in my head. The character of Edith came to me in the process of writing the book, and became an ever more important character, one who would not leave the book. When she first made her very first appearance, I thought of her as a character who would make one appearance, and go away. But she wouldn't go away. The business of discovery is very important. The novelist Don DeLillo says that writing a novel is like driving down a country road at midnight with the lights on. I think that captures the process very well. You can only see a short distance and it's very scary. You don't know where that road is leading until you get there.

L: Truth-telling is a major concern for writers. How do you as a writer distinguish between what you were certain of at the beginning and, when you go back to rewrite, what suddenly seems to be a false truth? When you change something intentionally, is it hard to let that situation or character go, or does it make sense at the time?

FB: I suppose it varies. Sometimes the process is very painful. You've created a scene or a character or perhaps you've written a passage that you are very pleased with—that you like the language of. And you come to understand that as the work matures, grows closer to its finished self, that that passage, or that character, or that scene is no longer serving the work itself. And so you have to get rid of it. There are certainly occasions where that can be painful. You have to be willing in the service

of the finished work to strike lines through things that you struggled to give birth to.

L: There are people who champion your work for dealing with women's issues. Do you think that's a fair estimate? Are you proud of that fact, or do you see that as more narrow-minded because they are clamoring for the feminist issue and ignoring the fact that you deal with human truths?

FB: I wouldn't want to claim that these books are satisfactory on women's issues, though it would be my desire that they would achieve that. I'd be even more loath to claim that any kind of universal anything has been achieved. Of course, it would be my desire to write something that would be a positive reflection on the human condition. In these two books, women's issues are centrally involved, not exclusively involved. Richard Janus' whole struggle with who he is is certainly equally as important.

L: Going back to the autobiography issue, do you recommend to young writers to look at their own life and use their own stories? Is it particular to each individual?

FB: I think the key is whatever works. I tell my students, particularly those that are struggling with certain aspects of story-telling, to write close to the bone. It doesn't necessarily mean write a story about you, but it does mean write a story that is close to your heart.

L: How important do you believe the writer's community to be?

FB: Writ small, very important. I think that a writer needs a small group of friends from which he or she can draw emotional, creative, and crafty sustenance. Those friends need to be people that the writer knows are rooting for him or her.

L: So you're not just talking about other writers, you're talking about your own self-created community?

FB: New Orleans is experiencing what New Orleans critics call a literary renaissance. There's a number of young-ish writers who are moving into their second, third, sometimes fourth novels, and we most all know each other. To say that we have a literary community, that we go to same bar, that we meet and talk about

writing all the time, is not true. Our relations are cordial and friendly, and I think we all root for each other. Some of these writers are part of my own small group.

L: Do you suggest to young writers that they seek something like this out?

FB: I suggest that they seek it out in one way. I don't think by any means that it's necessary to go to a graduate program in writing. If we do, I guess we'd have to get rid of all the 19th century books. But I do think that that's one place a writer can find community. And I think that's good, and I think that in the formative stage in one's career that having the opportunity to place his or her writing as a first element of importance in one's life is good for a young writer. And out of that, frequently a writers' community grows.

L: There are so many people writing today, so many first time novelists, do you see the expanse market as a disadvantage or an advantage to both young and accomplished writers?

FB: The question is one of market. And writers are notoriously ignorant about the marketability of their own work. All of us on some level think somebody out to read this. And in the real world, if you sell 8000 copies of your novel, that novel did pretty well. I can comment on what I see as disturbing series of trends. There are fewer readers—more people get their narrative entertainment, hear their stories through TV and film, than they do novels or any kind of written literature. There's not going to be any reversing that; we're not going to go back. The other trend has to do with the change in the way the national publishing industry is being run. In the last fifteen years or so, most of the publishing companies have been bought out by conglomerates. There's an ever greater emphasis on the bottom line that puts an ever greater pressure on the writer to be commercially successful. And the definition of commercial success is an increasing ante. A lot of writers, in other words, a lot of very *capable* writers, are being squeezed out of the literary marketplace. Part of that is being addressed through university presses which are starting to publish novels; not that they are starting now, they've been starting for at least a decade. And that's filling some of the need that writers have to find ways to get their work into print. But that's not adequate. And I think this is a very distressing trend. It used to be that if a writer

published a first work, and that work was critically well-received, that he or she could count on that publisher for a very long time. I'm not concerned with there being a lot of first novelists—I'm happy for them. What I'm concerned with is what's going to happen to their next novel and the one after that.

L: Pursuing graduate study in writing is very scary—the competition, the fear of failure, the uncertainty about specific programs. Do you recommend attending a graduate program in writing? Should individuals apply immediately after undergraduate school, or would it be wiser to wait?

FB: I think that writing programs are good for young writers. I don't think they're necessary. I don't think that if you're trying to do it a different way that you're crazy. You don't have to do it right away. When I was at Iowa, the average age of a student in the workshop was thirty years old. There were as many people who were over thirty as there were who were under thirty. I don't think if you don't do it this year, you can't do it next year or the year after. I think they are wholesome places. They have their downsides—it doesn't mean they can't be scary. Writing is not a competitive sport. I believe that, by and large, once a person arrives at a graduate writing program one's fellow students are supportive.

In The Bazaar

Lisa M. Montelpasse



Simsun—Annie Niermann

In the bazaar the vendors try
to persuade you that you can't
possibly live without a rusting
string of copper bells, held together on a
ratty cord, decorated with a few cheap beads,
an ashtray made from a skull or a necklace of shells.
The cloying sweet, sour and foul smells
and the press of humanity,
a swaying motley.
The hands, tongues and bodies
forming a different language, a
poetic, hypnotizing sound, even as
they haggle over the price of a chicken.
The Western curiosity, at first opposed,
and then mesmerized by the intelligent life of it all.

No one comes in alone.
This world is a different
Place. Always a hand to hold,
Always a shoulder to lean
On. Someone always behind you,
Willing to push

You in the chair. You rustle ancient
Pages to avoid weaknesses
Not your own. Every affliction
Prescribes your future. Every whimper,
Sighs of children
You should never bear.
Sitting, thinking wears you down.
Time has almost stopped

Here. Every gesture is in slow
Motion. The aging is unnatural.
Agonizing seconds eat
At you, multiply in your body
As you struggle to stand
On your own two feet.

We ran out into the daylight
left after dinner, summer grass
tickling the bottoms of our feet,
orchestrated a primitive dance
in the warm air. Together we chased
the golden guardians
of that season,

fireflies,
and set glowing jars-full
on the windowsill at bedtime.
Tucking dirty feet under the covers,
we said our prayers
(O-Lord-Bless-And-Keep-Me)
and fell asleep—
sweaty charges kept
by the reassuring presence
of the staccato flashings.



Crasping—Jen Gillis

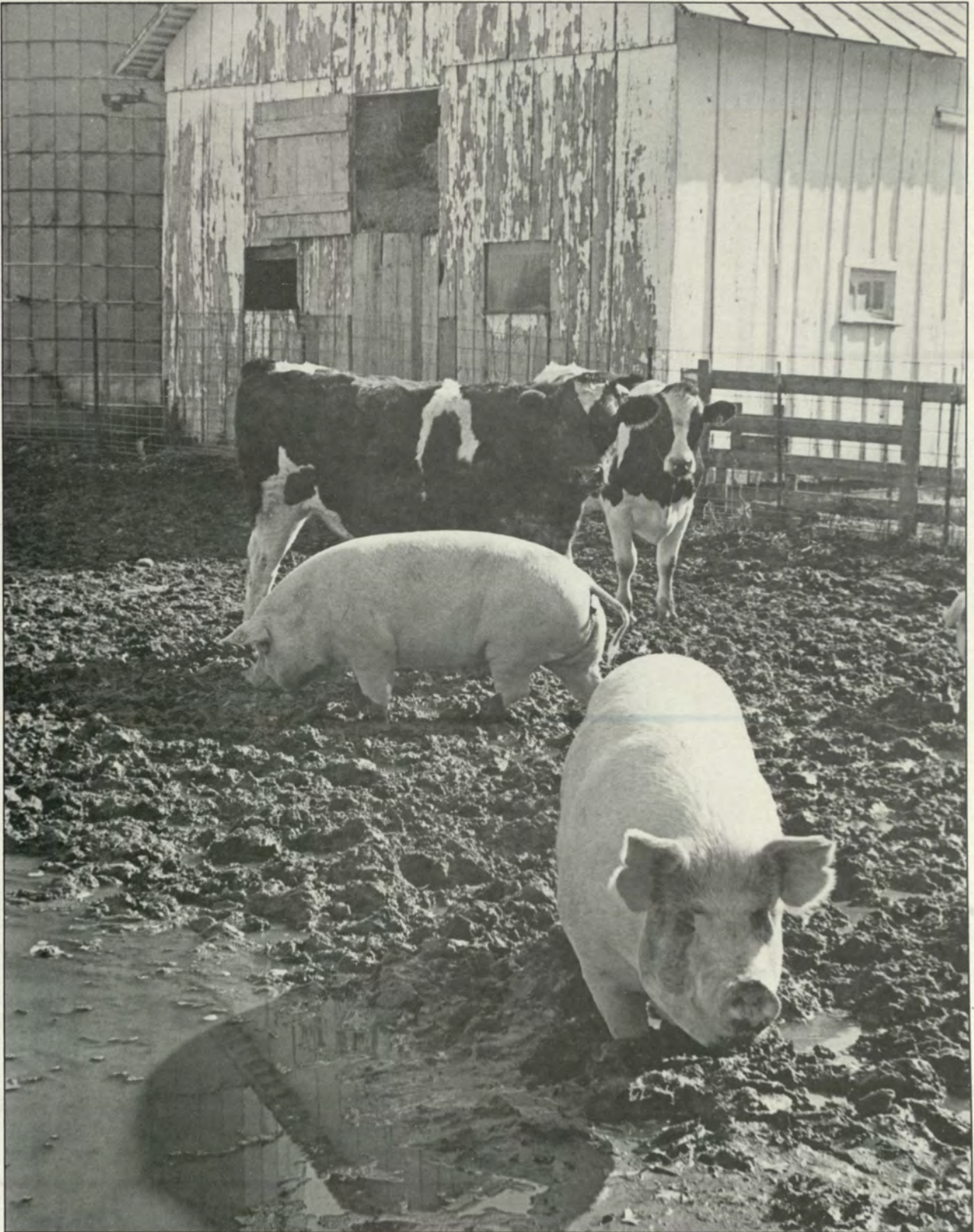
an angry ride
to the weigh station
down this week
and she'll fuel up on water
and stand bloated
with stones in her pocket
and report that she's seen the light
the beauty of carbohydrates
sullenly listen
to the doctors talk
of golf courses and schoolwork
and the meaning of life
the pale princess
gets the highest marks
(of course) and eventually
translates survival
to success in life
she'll fatten up
and thank them one day
for making her
the best and brightest
in other ways
but she leans over and whispers (to me)
that she's not afraid to die an old maid
My God! my best friend:

a fat old maid

Waiting For Pizza

John Schaefer

with chalky eyes
I've been travelling for days
along the rails
where caterpillars roar
late at night,
heard in bedroom windows
between the trees.
long nights rumbling in seats
of deserted chevys
where heat lightning breath
on vinyl seats leaves sweat pooling.
Now I stop to graze,
not far from the grassy tracks.
but with every
waitress that passes
I grow older,
and now it occurs to me
that I should be
in another place.
The question is,
if I have
enough dead men in my wallet
to get there.
as I turn the corner,
I grab the falling sun
with my eyes,
more beautiful now in the
coughs and wheezes of
some far off factories
across the working fields,
the pitter patter of tires on the highway
can be heard, until now
drown in the labor of the day.
Now I don my pack
and slip sideways
through the eyes
of this unknown
midwestern town.
there is a better place
for me,
just over the hill
where the speckled cattle
stand staring at the stumps
of a land where shade
was easy.
but that's not where
I'm going.



Biscuits And Gravy—Jana Gill



Serendipity In Summer—Todd Cox

Surrounded by bare, frozen trees,
Shrouded in a January fog,
The stones are white upon white.
Names that were once carved clear
Are now worn down by generations of abandon.
Remembering your sacrifice, forgetting your face.
And the rows flow by without much change,
Patterns shifting to the eye,
Much like the river by which you are sleeping...

Cloaked In Jest

Nancy Pica

to broaden my perspective,
I had been dumped into this realm.
so, I explored it through naive
perceptions;
carefully nestled on a wall of
insecurities:
quite strong unlike brittle Humpty
Dumpty;
yet, fragile to the rebuff of a dragon.
the neutrality of the appalling beast
blighted my already wilting sense
of security.

yet the sting of the dismissal
deserves me,
have I not dealt out a similar hand?
like the Queen of Hearts I have shouted
“off with their heads”
as I blew each one off like soap
bubbles from a wand.
but, I did not lead onto where I
knew they could never follow.
what would one expect by searching
for love in a Cracker Jack box,
except the darkened shades of mistaken
euphoria.

I awoke myself to the splash of
cold water;
confronted another pair of
bloodshot eyes;
wanting to put out the fiery dragon
with the back of my hand.
But, collecting myself and calming
the storm
of the tempest brewing within me,
I became like a statue.
Poised and with dignity upheld,
I did not see the lowly dragon
beneath the pedestal pass me by
whom I had mistaken for a shining-
armored knight.

I give no regards to the dragon,
not even a gleam of malevolence.
I only laugh at my folly—
so much for Prince Charming: I'll
settle for the frog.



...Toward Ever After—Angela D. Taraskiewicz

Lust And An Arkansas Marsh

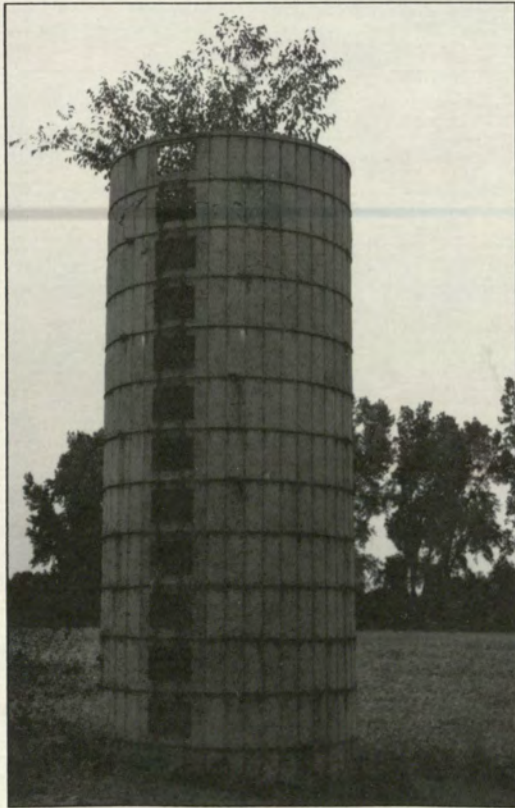
Marjorie Thomas

We moved
to the Hotel Densmore,
a two story one star
once visited by families of four
and middle class dignitaries,
when I turned fifteen.
The windows don't open
in Room 21, though they stretch
tall, yawning free from the yellowed floor,
and the lamp's base screws
clamped on its nightstand, pictures
nailed into the paint-chipped walls.
Rusted spring coils jut
through the twin mattress
shared, piercing
our old, woolen blanket burrow—
two lives crushed
in a gray, sagging room,
cold and must combatting
traded heat. You speak
a language I have yet to master,
each morning, bring me
a sweet roll purchased with pennies
scrimped at the bar. Knowing cars,
you work as a mechanic,
while I try school and beg
tips off fat, drunk customers.

On Saturdays, we drive to the country,
laughing in your rusted El Camino.
On the banks of the soiled river,
thick with black mud
and thoughtless trash, down
among the towering reeds
and willows, one leg bends
over two, a left hand tenses,
fingering rigid nipples
embarrassed at the chill in the wind.
Warm breath spills on to my face
assuring, "We'll always be together,"
small hands meet, clasped
across a smooth back,
long arms lock at elbows,
hold steady and firm.

The murky water pushes
into a dense pool that courts
the highway for a good five hundred yards.
Black trees mummified by moss
poke through the marsh surface,
reaching, like stiff, slick fingers
of a drowning man. When the weather
is hot, we explore the flooded forest,
rubber knee boots protecting
from leeches and other submerged
dangers, as if we were still kids, splashing
each other and wading in adventure—
mimes of high sea pirates or lost pioneers
now extinct.

Today, the air crisp, the sky,
a brilliant blue,
I can feel your mouth
travel over my skin,
speaking the words of your private speech.
Thoughts of sex keep you busy,
but I think of other things:
my mother miles away, worried
at my absence, or how I don't know
what to do with my life, or whether or not
we will have enough money
for the next rent check. And I stare
up at the cottoned clouds
strewn in pieces and sewn together,
misty traces of mountain magic
forever changing shapes—
the body parts of animals
breaking apart
and moving on.



Halcyon Triptych—Phil Potempa

Whale Watching

Marjorie Thomas

I

The day the Kelly family piled into their station wagon and headed down to the wharf on the south side of the neighboring beach town promised a chill. It also sported gray skies, the perfect setting to view the great beasts from the deep. Mr. Kelly had kept busy thinking up Sunday activities ever since his mother, Catherine Kelly, had moved in with the family. A native of Wisconsin, she had never been to California, not even when the wedding had taken place eighteen years before—it had been held in Virginia, where he and his wife, Annabelle, had first met. After travelling to every sight and amusement park within a reasonable distance, Mr. Kelly had run out of resources and the last thing he wanted was for the family to sit around on a perfectly fine Sunday afternoon with Grandma. He knew that after a time, his son and daughter, Carmen and Cassandra, would grow tired of sharing the house with their grandmother, grow weary of listening to her stories, and would begin to tell stories of their own, about how they had made plans with friends or had a big school project that they had to work on, and would escape the house. That was Mr. Kelly's only self-realized fear. He had worked so hard to enclose his children and keep them, tied to the family unit. When he had been a child, his mother had floated through four husbands and half the states in America—he had never known the workings of a family except through an occasional friend, and then he could only watch and brood in envy at the love and support he was missing in his life. To make up for his lack, Mr. Kelly swore that his children would experience what he had so badly wanted.

The children were, after all, his greatest source of joy. They sat in the back of the station wagon, Grandma between them. Annabelle sat tall in the passenger seat. She was still a beautiful woman; her gray eyes stared through the windshield at the road in front of them. Mr. Kelly figured she was planning a quick throw-together dinner—one of her responsibilities. He hoped that she would enjoy the boat ride—they never went out anymore as a couple.

"Annie, did you remember the bag of lemons? We don't want the kids to get seasick. Grandma neither."

Hearing her title, Grandma piped up, "Eh?"

"Nothing Grandma. Yes dear, I brought the lemons."

The children were silent. It was unusual not to hear their unimportant bickerings or their small tales about life in high school. As they neared the wharf, Mr. Kelly began to tremble—he had always wanted to go whale watching.

"Cass? Carm? Are you excited about the boat?" He hated to think the trip would be wasted on them.

They answered in unison, as they often did, "Yes, Dad." He could tell them apart: Carmen's words gruff, hung by adolescence, Cass's voice softer, lilting out of her pale mouth. Mr. Kelly did not have to look to see her face—he had always known she would grow up to be as beautiful as her mother, like that poem by Poe he used to read long ago, something about the beautiful Annabel Lee by the sea. He knew his daughter, already an incredible young woman, had little chance of escaping beauty.

And then there was Carmen, his son, his first born—the children were only a year apart. Mr. Kelly had watched him grow with pride; Carmen was strong, smart, and able-bodied. Considering his children, Mr. Kelly could in no way complain about his fate. He had been granted gifts.

As the station wagon pulled into the driveway next to the port, Mr. Kelly glowed with his wife beside him and his children in the back. Even Grandma was a treasure: they were a family.

II

And so after all his father's harassing, Carmen was finally going to see a whale—a California Gray whale at that. He stopped and bent down to tie the shoelaces of his new "boat shoes" Mr. Kelly had insisted on buying the entire family. Ridiculous, Carmen thought, such a waste of money. He could think of better ways to spend some cash. Carmen watched his sister take the hand of a crew member on the boat's ramp and get help moving upward. Wanting to call to her, he bit his tongue, thinking it wise to catch her later in private. God, but she was beautiful. He could not so much see it on her as he could see it lurk in the eyes of the sailor who presently watched her swing away. He did not want to think of Cass.

Instead, he went to help his grandmother shuffle up the ramp. Carmen heard his mother's little feet pad behind him and listened to see if the old man was going to make a fool of himself by starting up with some damned Moby Dick jokes. In the silence he hoped would endure, Carmen submerged his consciousness into the sounds of the sea: the gulls cawing and quivering at the same time, the surf lapping against anchored boats, the hint of the isolation found underwater. The wonder of it all was skinned from his awareness as Mr. Kelly began his jokes.

"Hey sailor, how about a ride? Hahahahah. Just kidding son. I have a joke for you. What magazine does Ahab read in his spare time?" Mr. Kelly tried to stifle his laugh.

"I don't know," spoke the sorry crewmen.

"National Harpoon." The only laughter heard burst from Mr. Kelly's mouth in great guffaws.

"Have you heard about the sea captain who lost his left leg?"

"No sir."

"He's all right now. Hahahaha."

"Dad. There are people waiting to get through," Carmen whispered in angry embarrassment. It was a popular thing, this whale watching, and people had begun to line up in anticipation.

"OK Carm, no harm in tellin' a few jokes is there?"

Carm shrugged and stomped off, leaving Grandma with Mr. Kelly and Annabelle. He had no desire to spend any extended period of time with his father; it was too much to handle.

III

Cassie leaned against the railing and felt free of the land and glad to be at the mercy of the ocean. The boat finally managed to liberate itself from its anchored state, despite its laden weight; the deck teemed with people. Cassie tasted salt on her tongue and sensed sand between her toes, though she had not walked on the beach. From her position on the right side of the boat, she stared after her parents as they strolled inside the covered glass-walled lounge, followed by Grandma. Probably off to the bathroom, she thought to herself. For some reason the old woman insisted on eating prunes everyday, despite protest, and as a consequence, spent half of the time on these outings in the bathroom.

"Hello again." The tall sailor was suddenly at her side.

Cassie arched one shoulder, turning to face him. "Aren't you on duty?"

"Yes. And right now, I see it as my duty to take you on a tour of this fine vessel."

"Well thanks, but no thanks."

"Aw, come on. You know you want to."

Cassie shook her head and stared at him hard, raising an eyebrow.

"Don't be difficult. Just say yes...um...what was your name?"
"It's Cassie, if you must know."
"Cassandra. Mmmm. That's a lovely name."
"That's Cassie or Cass, to you." The dark auburn haired girl tossed her head defiantly.
"Aren't you the coy one? And to think I came all the way over here just to keep you company. You aren't that special you know."

"I'm as special as you make me, Leon." She caressed his name tag. "That is your name, right, Leon?"
"That's my name, all right."
"Well, Leon. What if I told you that I know why you've come over here to speak to me. And...wait..." Cassie put her slender fingers up to his lips that were in earnest to protest, "what if I told you I was prepared to give you what you wanted—for a price."

"A price?"
"Don't worry, whatever I ask will be worth it. I don't suppose you can unlock someplace...beneath the deck would be good." She watched as his left hand reached into his pocket and fished out a ring of keys. Grinning, Leon held them up to her, and Cassie noticed the band of gold around his ring finger. She smiled.

IV

Under the shade inside the lounge area, Mr. Kelly sat with his wife and his mother, who periodically stole her hand into her purse to grab, one by one, pistachio nuts she had hidden inside.

"Mother, this isn't a movie house. You are allowed to have food of your own."

"Don't want to attract the birds." She hunched over her bag. Mr. Kelly sighed and turned to watch the big white birds dance over the near motionless sea. After a short time, Annabelle said, "Leave her alone, dear, it's only nuts."

"What?" he demanded, not knowing what she meant. Annabelle raised her voice. "Let Grandma eat her pistachios in peace."

"Eh?"
"Never mind, Mother!" Turning to face his wife, Mr. Kelly continued, "Bit of a latent reaction dear."

"I was thinking."
"What were you thinking?"
"Nothing."

"Well, I think that I could use a little fresh air. No use being on a boat if you're just going to sit around." Mr. Kelly got up from his seat and walked outside. He thought how much nicer it would be if the sky was blue, yet the grayness seemed fitting for this particular adventure. A distance away, he saw Cassie standing with her back to the water, her elbows resting on the railing. Engaged in conversation with the young crewman to whom he had been telling jokes, she seemed far away. He wondered if the crewman remembered his bit of comedy; he wondered why his daughter was not looking for any signs of whales—after all, she owned the tape of whale songs. She listened to it so often, Carm always teased her, saying it would soon wear out.

Looking around the boat, Mr. Kelly noted that Carmen had climbed to the lookout station above the lounge. Built like a mast, the structure's trunk grew out of the lounge, through the roof, and slightly above it. Mr. Kelly re-entered the lounge and climbed up to join his son.

"Quite a view up here, eh Carm?"
Carm spun around, so lost in thought he had not heard his father approach.
"Pop. What are you up to?"
"Thought I'd come up and spend some time one on one-like

with my boy. Seen any whale spray yet?"
"No. Not a blow. I thought they'd be letting us know if they spot one."

"Oh they will. That's part of the deal. If there's whales to be seen, we'll see them."

But the sea surface remained relatively still; the only creatures about were the birds and they were not parts of the water. The ocean moved with empty life, using the wonders of the universe to set it frothing back and forth, to and fro. The motion of the boat was smooth, but the craft had seen rougher days when an uncaring fate caused the ocean to jerk about unforgivably. If it had been one of those days, Mr. Kelly could have understood the absence of the whales. But his anticipation was still strong, as was his faith, and he slung a casual, confident arm around Carmen's shoulder.

V

The face in the mirror worried her. Somehow, it had procured shallow creases, despite the cream. To enhance matters, tender folds of skin shadowed her eyes. Ever since Grandma had come to live with them, Annabelle had been tired.

There was a banging on the small bathroom door. "Yes, yes, just a minute, would you?" she called.

Hurrying the drying process she wiped her hands on her print skirt and then unlocked the door. The woman was about to bang loudly again, and nearly struck Annabelle's face as she raised her hand.

"Excuse me," the little woman spit haughtily, "but there is only one bathroom for all of us."

"There is one for the men, too." Annabelle's adversary did not take kindly to the remark and answered by brushing past and slamming the door. Annabelle rolled her eyes wearily and wondered, why do we persist in these misguided adventures?

Seeing Grandma still sitting at her seat, Annabelle walked back over. Then she yelled loudly, "I'm going for a stroll, OK?" Grandma did not answer as she often did not when they were alone together, but Annabelle was accustomed to it. She left her mother-in-law alone, not caring whether Mr. Kelly returned to his mother soon or not.

Slipping off her clogs, Annabelle slid her bare feet over the worn wood. The planks were incredibly smooth and she moved to the back of the ship, hoping to escape people. There were a few chairs set up on that side of the boat and couples sparsely occupied them in an intimate fashion, obviously not concerned with the whale hunt. Virtually alone, she could finally collect her thoughts. The salt was stronger outside and flowed to her head. Not worried about Carm or Cass—they had their own lives and she suspected that there were things that belonged to them about which she did not want to know—Annabelle stared out at the horizon she would never reach. *And this maiden she lived with no other thought*, Annabelle recited Poe's line in her mind. But she believed that that Annabel had to have had more thoughts than those of love, for not enough or too much was built on love — there was never an in-between. She had married Mr. Kelly because since their first meeting, he had always been busy loving her, and when that faded, he was always busy not loving her and trying to hide the fact.

Annabelle brushed her blond hair out of her eyes. The wind had begun to pick up slightly and the water responded. Their conversation affected the boat's movement, and it began to loll indifferently side to side. Fearless, she did not clutch at the railing, but held her ground, ever watching and waiting for something more than whales to appear.

VI

Inside the belly of the boat, Cassie and her crewman grappled each other in a sweaty clinch. Cassie's cotton dress lifted up past her hips and she knew that the small of her back would be raw the next day for all the scraping on the wood wall of the ship. To make matters worse, he grunted like a stuck pig, attempting speech in a most repulsive manner. She could make out words like "there," repeated several times, and "come on," and of course her name that she suddenly wished she had either lied about or refrained from revealing.

At one point, the moment barely seized her, briefly—just a taste of it—and she clenched her white arm underneath his, bringing her hand to her mouth, and biting on her fist without mercy. Blood surfaced near her knuckles and smeared across her lips once he was done, hanging on her like a wet towel. Cassie touched the sweet redness with the tip of her tongue and glared out into the darkness thinking, this is for you Carmen, for you.

VII

Furious, he had watched his sister and the sailor disappear from view, and though his father retained him, showing him the parts of the boat and pointing out the spray he saw from time to time, imagining it to be a whale, Carmen determined to get to the couple. He knew where Cassie had led them and he intended to stop her, planned to take a heavy swing at the bastard who was going along for the ride—a swing that would make up for all the ones he had missed over the past year and a half. He began to sneak away from his father, who discovered him.

"Carm, where are you going?"

"To check on Mom, Pop."

"I can see her from here. Look, she's fine." Mr. Kelly swung an arm out past Carmen's face and pointed at Annabelle.

"Maybe she's lonely. Besides, I haven't seen Grandma for awhile."

"Oh, I get it, Carm. There's some girl you spotted. I understand, it was like that for me with your mother. Of course, I was older then, but things are different now. Go on, son."

"It's not some girl, Pop..."

Mr. Kelly waved him away, "No need to be embarrassed, Carm. Just go make your move."

"For Christ's sake, Pop!" Carmen husked under his breath and then escaped down the stairs. Bastard, he thought, and began searching for his sister's trail. In the lounge, next to the bathrooms, he saw a door marked 'Employees Only.' Praying it would not be locked, Carmen strode over, hoping that no one would pay attention to or stop him. It was open; he entered and climbed down a dimly lit, creaking staircase. Mostly, the downstairs made up the engine room, and he heard voices in the darkness that spoke to each other, trading nautical vocabulary. He placed one foot after the other and repeated the process, until he spotted a door. He glided over to it and listened, his right ear pressed hard to its wood. But he could not discern his sister's voice, though he knew she was inside with the crewman. Twisting the knob, he shoved the door and then closed it behind him, seeing his sister in the gray light smoothing her dress. The crewman stood stupidly beside her, stroking her hair.

"You slimy son of a bitch!" Yelling, Carmen rushed at the tall man. Cassie moved back and let her brother tackle her partner, caught unaware. Carmen pounded the man's face with no trace of pity, until Cassie started to pull him away and protest.

"Carm, stop, please, for God's sake."

Carmen stood up and smacked her pleading face with his hand, sending her reeling backwards. "Slut!"

Though she lay crumpled against the wall, Cassie still cried out, "He wasn't the first, Carm. Not the first."

This truth sent him to his knees, though he had known all along of the many times she had gone behind his back.

The crewman got up. Sneering because he had been beaten so badly, he said, "Glad I came on board today. Otherwise, I'd be home with the old lady, spending quality time with my kid. Guess this was just my lucky voyage."

Carmen flipped his head up, ready for another bout when Cassie spoke, "You forgot the watch. It's mine."

"No way, babe, my wife gave it to me..."

"Pay what you owe." Carmen's voice held hatred in it.

The crewman, apparently unwilling to fight Carmen again or at least worried that Cassie and Carmen would say something to other personnel, tossed the watch to Cassie who snatched it from the air. No longer interested in the crewman, Cassie and Carmen only heard him slam the door and leave them alone together.

"Why the watch, Cassandra?"

"I liked it. It's pretty. Besides, I had to ask him for something."

"Why?"

"Because I knew he wouldn't part with his wedding ring and the watch meant something to him. I had to get something in return."

"God, why?"

"Because I wasn't going to get love." Cassie walked over to her brother and knelt down in front of him. She put her damp hand on his face. "Because you'll never love me."

Flashing brown eyes met her green ones. "I do love you, Cassandra."

"Yes, but it's not the same thing. It's not what I want."

"We've been through this too many times. It's not right the way we feel. So we're going to abstain—remember—our vow of celibacy."

"Your vow of celibacy. I refused. Don't you remember crying at my feet? I told you that I wouldn't do it. I swore to myself that I would do anything to drive you the other way—other men, other women, I didn't care. I still don't."

"You've succeeded in making me jealous. It drives me insane knowing what you're doing—watching, knowing that you'd do anything for me, enduring Mom and Dad play sham parenthood and sham marriage. It's all just a bad joke."

Cassie tried to hold him in her arms, but he pushed her away, refusing to falter. Carmen felt her brush against his legs as she stood up abruptly, tired of him. "I'm so sick of your rejections. You may think I'm a whore, but you're an impotent fool. It's our life. We can do what we want, but you're too afraid to take any step. I used to think we were like the whales on my tape calling to each other and singing—searching. I would pretend that you and I lived in the ocean and couldn't see anything, but our love. But you don't care about me, just what you think is right." Finished, she ran from the room to get away from him at last, to be consoled in the salty air.

"Cassandra!" Carmen shouted after her. She heard him, but he knew she would not come back. His head bent lower to the ground and his wet hair fell at the sides of his face as he cried. It would not be the last time.

VIII

But our love it was stronger by far than the love of those who were older than we / of those many far wiser than we. Those lines ran through her head and Annabelle tried to figure out why that particular poem had come to her on a day like this. She concentrated on the obvious

parallel to her name and the name of the beloved. Annabelle thought about Mr. Kelly and their life together. Marriage had not been what she expected. It was mostly hard work, and that had come as a harsh reality to her. There were the kids, and the house, the dog, her part-time job, and now Grandma—now after things had finally started to slack off. Annabelle had made plans: Carm and Cassie would soon go to college and lead their own lives and Mr. Kelly would make time for them and they would go off together, fall in love again, and add a rejuvenated spark to their union. But then Mrs. Catherine Kelly had moved in, and Annabelle knew that she would soon be taking care of another baby. It was worse, because this baby was regressing, becoming more and more dependent on her with time. What had her husband been thinking? He hadn't been, of course.

Having only moved to pace up and down along the railing, Annabelle had seen little of her family since the voyage had begun. There had been no sign of whales and an announcement had recently been made that the boat would be turning back, calling it a day and giving up. Annabelle's thoughts were clouded with pictures of Grandma drawing more into herself daily. Already, she refused to answer Annabelle though she was usually the only one who would shout loud enough for Grandma to hear. The kids hated dealing with her and she rarely acknowledged them—the only person that she seemed interested in was Mr. Kelly. It made sense, he was her son after all. While she focused on the gloomy future, Annabelle froze, unable to keep from recalling: *But we loved with a love that was more than love.* She shook her head, attempting to wrest the memory or purpose from its hiding place. Love. That word over and over, and yet she knew that love was in a sense over for her—her time had been spent. She could not remember if she had loved Mr. Kelly in the beginning—as he had her—or how much, but that feeling, if it had existed, was separate from the workings of their relationship. And yet, she knew that in a way she did love him: an old, tired love. She knew that Mr. Kelly loved his mother which was why she now lived in their home, having no where else to go; while they had never had an even close-to-perfect family, Grandma Kelly loved her son. Of this, Annabelle was sure. So why this poem? What could it possibly mean?

And then it hit her—an ancient feeling that she had never experienced, except in dreams—a crawling shadow that dragged itself across her heart, past the borders of her lungs and into those cavities, eating away at her breath until she was gasping for air. Oh God and oh no! *She was a child and I was a child*—not that, anything but that. The woman's intuition sped rapidly throughout her body and Annabelle cringed with despair. She had never been close to her children, never took much interest in their lives nor how peculiar they might have seemed had she compared them to others their age. Mr. Kelly had always played the father, not well, but to his satisfaction, and had fooled himself into believing that he always knew what was going on. And what was going on? Annabelle guessed, but her realization was wiped away by another pang of horror—something is wrong, something has happened. With that final thought, she tore herself from the railing and ran to the other end of the boat.

IX

Mr Kelly's hope had deflated after the announcement had boomed over the PA that the boat would be turning back though there had not been one sighting of a whale. He was not so full of himself now to bemoan that his family had missed the chance; he had wanted to see the creatures, likening himself to a harmless Ahab. Grandma was most likely still down in the lounge eating her nuts, or possibly, she was in the bathroom.

However, he did wonder where Annabelle was—they had not spent any time together on the boat, which was a fair assessment of the

amount of time they spent together at home. It crossed his mind that maybe, Annie knew that he did not love her like he had at first. She was still beautiful, and a decent wife, but he had loved her so fiercely—he supposed it had not stood the test of time.

Fresh out of college, he had met her, and never before had there been anyone who filled his thoughts or haunted his movements like Annabelle. *For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams/of the beautiful Annabel Lee;/And the stars never rise but I see the bright eyes/of the beautiful Annabel Lee*—Mr. Kelly had copied those lines down over and over in his notepad at work; he could not get her out of his mind. Asking her out, he brought her flowers and candy, and they went to amusement parks and fancy restaurants: he had been an amazing suitor. And when they were finally married, a year after it had all began, he could not believe he had taken full possession. But the relationship was difficult—Mr. Kelly had never been sure that Annabelle had loved him and in the beginning that had not bothered him. Over time, the knowledge had dissolved his heart. *But we loved ...no, he thought to himself... But I loved with a love that was more than love.*

Yet, she had stuck around, through good times and bad, and never complained. In her own way, she might have loved him, but it had been forever since he had thought of the poem or recited her those special lines. Mr. Kelly decided that he would begin a concerted effort to reach his wife, so deeply withdrawn from him. It would be complicated with Grandma living with them, but he would make it work. God, I never even asked her about Mom, he thought to himself. And at that moment, when there was a ray of sunlight boring its way in through the gray clouds, and the little ship brightened under its warm caress, Mr. Kelly saw Cassie begin to pull herself up and over the rail. She had been standing at the front of the boat contemplating the sea, but he had failed to register that the slim figure was his daughter, he had been so lost in thought. "NO Cassie! Somebody stop her!" He did not wait to see if anyone heeded his call. He charged downstairs to save his child.

X

Nobody would understand, not even Carm, and Cassie had had enough of her brother to last a lifetime. He had begun it all, saying that he loved her and that there would not be another for him. Like that poem, he would repeat, like that poem. But Cassie knew that Carmen had not the first inkling of what it meant to love. She had tried to show him herself, but he rebuked her, so she continued to show him, while he tried to shut his eyes and make it go away. Ignoring it won't make it disappear, Carm, she scoffed inside her head. He had wanted her love, yet was not prepared to accept it. I can't give you any more than this—what more is there? He was ashamed of her, she knew. Cassie's reputation at school had swelled too large for Carmen to shut out, but he could not stop her, nor did he try at first.

She remembered the first time she had given herself up. The clumsy boy was an ox and had hurt her quite badly; during the entire act, she prayed for Carmen to come save her, please, please she begged, and was left unanswered. After that, Cassie had grown addicted to the pain—she deserved it—and would tear at her hands or the inside of her mouth or she would insist that the rendezvous take place in an uncomfortable setting. She became quite overt in her relations with various men, tempting Carmen to step in, but he refused, guessing her game.

And now this. A year and a half's work, playing Carmen cruelly, kneading him into a frenzy, and still he remained invincible. Cassie had called him a impotent fool, pathetic, but he proved the strong one. Not only had she failed, but she was weak—weaker than her mother who never once confronted Mr. Kelly on any single issue, merely took his decisions and helped implement them. At least her mother had not betrayed herself, sold her soul, as she had done.

There was something so powerful about silent strength or martyrdom, whichever of the two applied to her mother. Cassie was sick of it all and the day that was waiting for her promised nothing better. She hated school and what was expected of her there, she could not be in the same house with Carmen. She could not go to her mother. Cassie's only solace was the songs of the whales. At home, she would immerse herself in the bathtub and blast the tape, imagining that she was with them, one of them, calling and crying, but never finding, even forgetting what had driven them and wrenched such mournful melodies from their beings. The water always soothed her; it was so quiet beneath the surface—soundproof, but for the songs. Cassie began to understand that she was one of them, and belonged to their throng. Yet she would have to search for them on her own because the ship had failed to meet with any whales that day. She would have to sing to them underwater, announcing her wish to join them.

Pulling herself up from the deck, Cassie heaved her body up onto the rail and balanced precariously, squatting, for a mere second. She thought she could hear her mother running up the deck and her father yell for someone to stop her, but she was alone. Her brother was not around, and again, would not save her. Our love is stronger than this, stronger even than you. Those were the words that circulated throughout her body as she gracefully jumped into the ocean and did not surface: she swam down and down, a never-ending spiral in search of that which the earth and sky could not give her.

XI

Mr. Kelly and Annabelle reached Cassie's empty spot at the same time, nearly colliding. Leaning over the railing, heads juttering with voices yelling "man overboard," they watched as their daughter spread the water with her body and the apathetic sea consumed her. People were running, prodded by the commotion brewing, and the boat became alive with excitement and fear. Even Grandma Kelly had stirred from her nesting place and stood amid the chaos. Mr. Kelly waved his arms wildly above his head, as if he were flagging a taxi or an unresponsive waitress, when he noticed his mother standing at his side. "Where are the birds, son?" As usual she addressed only her child.

Mr. Kelly spun around and spewed, "Birds?! It's Cassie. She's fallen off the boat." He did not notice that the sea gulls had disappeared and were not flying above or around the boat.

The engines had stopped and the ship became a bobbing tourist attraction. Mr. Kelly had little faith even when he saw that two lifeboats had been dispelled onto the ocean and crewman were poring over the water to find the missing passenger. He knew that his daughter would not be found. She was where she wanted to be.

Mr. Kelly's face streamed with tears. His beloved daughter gone, gone—he had seen her jump. But that would be the last time he would recall that memory, except in nightmares. For posterity, Cassie had fallen into the engulfing sea; it had been an accident. He turned to face his wife. He had never seen her weep so; it frightened him, and he was sure then that his decision to conceal the truth was the right one.

"They'll find her, Annie." It was only one more lie, but he saw the flicker of distrust in his wife's features—then it was gone.

He turned to his mother, needing something, a word, anything to know that she understood. She was old, and in society, she was a burden, but she had seen so much during her occupation of the planet that Mr. Kelly believed that she may have, if not an explanation, then a response to fate for taking his child away. "Mom?"

"Birds never stay in one place. They migrate." He looked at her in disbelief. She had no comprehension of his pain; his body

numbed itself and his senses grew dull.

Mr. Kelly turned to face the water and saw that one of the lifeboats was making its way back to the ship. They had not saved Cassie. He stiffened his shoulders and let the wind whip strands of hair across his face. Reaching out, he placed a hand on Annabelle's shoulder.

XII

She felt his hand clamp her shoulder. Annabelle wanted to get through this together, but she knew. Graced with a new found perception, she saw that her husband had watched Cassie go over board, witnessing her suicide. She had felt it coming in that one instant of insight where she absorbed a flash of everything: the relationship between her daughter and son, the feelings that had hidden, and the pain they caused one another. But she could ignore that now, she could ignore that forever, because Cassie was gone—she had saved them all that grief.

Annabelle turned to her husband and stared at him as he glared vengefully out at the sea. He has talked himself out of it, she thought; she knew him so well, it surprised her. I love you, but I'll never forgive you, this. They had come so far in a short time, but it had only been wishful thinking.

XIII

Carmen felt pounding of feet above him on deck. There were other noises too, men yelling, the clanking of bells, and then the engines had stopped. The helpless floating motion made him sick, and seeking escape from the claustrophobia, he looked for his exit. Getting up to the lounge, Carmen noticed that no one was about—he had not been imagining things. He ran outside and saw the crowd. Grabbing the first man he bumped into, Carmen demanded to know what was going on.

Leon put his hand on Carmen's arm, his voice straining. "It's your sister. She went overboard."

Dumbfounded, Carmen would not let his face change for this man or his news. Frozen in his stance, he let the pain overtake him.

"I didn't wish her dead." Lines of concern actually etched Leon's forehead.

"Maybe I did." Carmen twisted away from the crewman. He looked up and saw, at the front of the boat, his mother crying and his father gyrating madly. Rushing to the side of the boat, he looked down at the remaining members of the search party. For the second time, he yelled, "Cassandra!" He wanted to dive in, to find her, to give her what she wanted—anything to bring her back, but some nearby people restrained him. Tearing away from his protectors, his thoughts whirled, featuring various scenes where he would burst in on Cassie and save her. Carmen knew that she had always blamed him for that first time—he had heard the rumors at school of her "dates," but had not taken them seriously. He had refused to listen, to let her win. And now he had lost at Cassie's expense.

His parents would recover, Grandma would not notice any change in their lives, and no one would know of his pain. He bent over the rail, wishing he had the strength to join her, but instead, he peered beyond the green blueness, trying to see her face. For what seemed like hours, past the time when the motors of the boat started up and his parents pulled him from his first site of mourning, Carmen stood motionless—searching—until he saw her. Her face blurred by the water, she drifted between a pair of whales like a sunken buoy. *In her sepulchre there by the sea-/In her tomb by the side of the sea.*

Please forgive me, dear.
I know I'm just a visitor
in this handmade home of yours
so I shouldn't take such liberties.

I'm sitting on your couch,
not a new one by any means.
In fact,
I think I remember you telling me
the day you pulled it from the trash.
Someone had thrown it
off the upstairs balcony
three or four places down.
You built new legs
and fixed the rips and tears
and missing buttons.
Now we call it quaint.

Tiny beads of sweat
checker beneath your eyes
and in the ridges of your forehead
as you smoothly bring the vacuum
back and forth,
back and forth
across the eggshell carpet
you bought on sale at Kmart.
The vacuum knows this too,
growling its frustration
at being dragged across
the lowly blue-light special.

Your overalls are slightly smudged,
and as you even out their straps,
you say you're sorry
for cleaning while I'm here.
I think that I'm the one
who must apologize,
for as you bend
to save a safety pin
from the sweeper's wrath,
I'm conscious of my eyes
that lightly slip between
the two soft scoops
of your vanilla breasts.

Turning

Michael Chasar

Some trees retire in a gentle wash of autumn leaves.
Quickly, unsuspected, like an uncalled-for lover
knocking at your front porch door
in the middle of the day, the fall turns leaves
to cartwheel, landing them in brittle waves
that lap against the trees in circular affection.
You can see the crests of semi-hidden waves
knifing through the snow on winter days,
looking for a tree to hug.

Other trees, the evergreens,
prefer to hold their leaves throughout the year.
Needles, polished smooth like toothpick gems,
stand in ordered lengths, cut like hair,
buzzed and spiked on end,
smooth as fur when rubbed in the right direction.
Something plucks these needles every month,
places them to gather in pools of criss-crossed fir.

Autumn is the poet's favorite season.
Lament the dying, the giving up of summer's foliage.
Learn to bask in the spectacle of death,
the kaleidoscopic return to lifeless black and white.
Act the part of the little neighbor girl,
just come from her first full haircut in two years,
clutching a souvenir braid in one hand,
shuffling through the waves of rusty leaves,
kicking them to fly in the breeze,
celebrating short-haired freedom, celebrating the change.



Mi Falis—Annie Niemann

Metamorphosis *(for John Balaban)*

Michael Chasar

I almost always think in greens.
Perspective grows, like a broad-bladed field of grass,
or solitary like an onion's waxy shoot.

You, the poet, stand at the podium
and whisper as if you seek to hush
the echo of the microphone.
The words roll off your tongue
and slide between the rows of chairs,
curls of soft blue smoke that wind
around my arms and legs, disturbing verse,
yet strangely calming in your poet's voice.

I close my eyes and watch you slice
the murky belly of that female deer
and wince in the steam that rises
when the animal's living
seeps into the sparkling cold.
I shiver when the blood turns
into frantic cries of a child
diced in the stream of machine gun fire
or trapped in the scream of shrapnel.

But cries soon dissipate
like smoke across a frosted mountain-side,
swept away in rippled streams
that snake between the evening's trees.

Even so, I start to think in browns,
like an Alabama chigger
or a Pennsylvania cockleburr
that burrows beneath the skin.



Sweaty Knee Creases—Phil Rickus

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All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process and are chosen by an unbiased and educated group of interested university students. Each semester *The Lighter* welcomes contributors and staff members from all faculties of the university community regardless of race, creed, gender, or orientation. The deadline for the Spring 1992 issue is Tuesday, March 17th at midnight.

The Lighter staff assumes all responsibility for the contents of this magazine. Views manifested in the contained works do not represent an official stance of Valparaiso University.

If you have any questions, recommendations, or would like to become part of the Spring 1992 staff, please call *The Lighter* office at 464-5058.

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Wordfest

Valparaiso University's Wordfest series features a distinguished entourage of established writers to campus each academic year. In the fall and spring semesters, a sequence of published authors are invited to read from their works and discuss literature and the arts with students and faculty. Fall 1991 hosted novelist Frederick Barton, poet and translator Heather McHugh, scholar and translator Niko Boris, and novelist James Welch. Scheduled to appear in Spring 1992 are poet Bohdan Rubchak and essayist Scott Sanders.

Another facet of this series is the Wordfest Literary Contest, an annual awards event designed to promote the cultivation of literature on the Valparaiso University campus. The contest brings in a select panel of accomplished and esteemed writers from various parts of the nation to judge the entries. Representing three literary genres, Wordfest awards prizes in four categories: Poetry, Short Fiction, Non-Fiction Prose, and the Academy of American Poets Prize, a separate nation-wide competition. Another award given at this time is the Zink-Springsteen prize, an award honoring a senior student who has helped generate and promote the creation of poetry over his or her four years at Valparaiso.

In order to recognize the contest and the efforts of those responsible for organizing it, as well as the students who participated, The Lighter is pleased to announce the winners and first runners-up of the spring 1991 Wordfest Literary Contest.

Poetry

First Place awarded to Christine Rueter for "Fever (*for Isak Dineson*)."

First Runner-up awarded to Marjorie Thomas for "Lust and an Arkansas Marsh."

Short Fiction

First Place awarded to Roberta Petusky for "On Being Good."

First Runner-up awarded to Gregory S. Petrie for "Dutiful Confusion."

Non-Fiction Prose

First Place awarded to Hala Al-Rifai for "Untitled."

First Runner-up awarded to Marjorie Thomas for "Every Crackpot's on the Payroll."

Academy of American Poets Prize

First Place awarded to Michael Chasar for "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte."

Announcing the 1992 Wordfest Literary Prizes

Poetry—————\$50

Short Fiction—————\$50

Non-Fiction Prose—————\$50

Academy of American Poets Prize—————\$100

All Valparaiso University students are invited to compete.

Submit one copy of your work (short story, essay, poem, or group of poems) without your name; attach a cover sheet containing your name and the title(s) of your work(s). Poems will be considered for both contests.

Bring or send your work to the English Department Office, Huegli 224, Friday, April 3, 1992, by 5:00p.m.

Prizes will be announced at a reading and reception on Wednesday, April 29, 1992 in the Lumina Room, Huegli Hall from 8-9:30p.m.

