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Point of View, a publication of student literary and visual creative works, is edited, selected and produced by students. Sponsored by Student Activities, William Rainey Harper College in cooperation with the Liberal Arts Division.

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*Robb Miles Recipient of the Ray Mills Art Award*
“Come on, Ginny, stand up straight and please get that damn hair out of your eyes,” said the woman as she maneuvered herself and the baby-faced girl through the other shoppers. “And don’t give me that I-don’t-want-to-go routine. You should be thrilled to be going to your first dance,” she added just before the girl dropped one of her packages and two low-heeled pink sandals tumbled into the middle of the aisle.

The girl, dressed in baggy sweat shirt and pants which did not hide her lumpy figure, stooped to put the shoes back in their box and stood back up with a reddened face. She glared at the back of the woman’s head as it wound its way through the store.

The woman was smaller than the girl, and ordinarily she would have been hard to find in a crowd of larger people. But the girl just had to look for the turning heads of the men whose gazes followed the woman appreciatively.

The woman finally stopped before a shiny counter lit with pink-bulbed fluorescent lights. Panting, the girl came up next to her and dropped all her packages, this time deliberately, for they had reached their destination. The girl sighed with a look of resignation.

The counter was all glass. Under and behind its sparkling facade were bottles and boxes and brushes all in a muted surgical green. Above the counter was a sign announcing “Signs of Spring” with pastel colors arrayed on it like a painter’s palette. The girl had to tilt her head back to take in all the colors. As she stared, her only distraction was the rat-a-tat drumming of the woman’s red-lacquered right hand nails on the glass top. Her left hand rested calmly on the glass, fingers slightly parted, as if to better show off her raised diamonds, as big as a plump pea.

The woman stopped drumming, looked at the girl, and gently pulled away two strands of fine blond hair that were tangled in the girl’s soft brown lashes. She smiled at the girl, and opened her mouth to speak when a young woman approached them from the other side of the counter.

“May I help you ladies?” The woman wore a surgical green smock, and a small rectangular button labeled “Miss Smith/Technician” was pinned on the smock’s smooth front. She was pretty, with the look of one who has sternly studied the art of cosmetology.

The woman looked away from the girl to the technician, looked back at the girl, and with a sense of collaboration among all three of them, said, “Yes, we’re here to make someone beautiful for her first dance. First date, too!” She winked at the technician, and both of the women looked at the girl and beamed. The girl caught their beams and quickly looked down, focusing on her own cuticles and bitten nails. She curled her fingers into her palms.

“Have we picked out our dress yet?” the technician asked the woman in the manner of one who is an expert at coordinating all aspects of a look. “The color’s important, you know.”

“The dress is right here, in one of these boxes. Here, let me show you.” The woman placed a big broad box on the counter, lifted the lid and rustled the tissue until the hem of a pink satin skirt fell onto the glass. “It’s soft pink, just perfect for her with her coloring and all.”

“Exquisite!” exclaimed the technician. “Here, honey, let me hold it up to your face,” she said as she rustled the rest of the dress out of the box.

The girl lifted her head and, unsmiling, looked to her right and left, as if to ensure herself that no one else knew she was standing nearby. She felt the soft material graze against her cheek, and pulled back with a grimace.

“Let her look, Gin,” said the woman; “she needs to get a feel for what the dress will look like when it’s on so she’ll know what colors to do you in. That’s right. Now smile, sweetheart. That’s a girl!”

“A real beauty,” the technician agreed. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll bring over some samples. You want foundation, blush, shadow and lip tint, right?”

“Yes, all that, plus maybe a nice cucumber masque to put on in the afternoon — the tingly kind. I always love a masque myself. It makes my skin feel so fresh and alive and young!” The woman smiled as she said this, her even white teeth a sharp contrast to her red glossy lips. Her eyes shone clear and blue, and she appeared for an instant to be thinking of herself at another time.

“Wonderful idea,” said the technician, “I’ll be right back, then.”

The woman insisted, because she still had a faraway expression on her face. Her eyes suddenly became focused on the “Signs of Spring” sign, and she turned to the girl. The girl was now leaning her back against the counter, ankles crossed, both elbows resting on the glass.

“Ginny, turn around, dear. And try to smile. You look like a cranky little baby!”

The girl turned around in slow motion and began studying the bottles and jars under the glass: revitalizing lotions, exfoliators, toners, pore minimizers, under-eye creams and wrinkle reducers.
The girl was shaking her head, "No," when the technician turned her chin again and began wiping off the color with a tissue. "Well, how about 'Blooming Cherry,' then," she said as, with the girl's chin still in her hand, she painted the new color on her lips.

"That's much better," said the woman. "I think we'll go with that. What do you think, Gin?" she asked as she watched the technician now deftly wiping off the foundation, blush, shadow and lip color from the girl's face. The girl didn't answer, and couldn't because the technician was still working on her with cold cream and tissue.

"Ginny, can you think of anything else, dear, that you might like?" The girl shook her head, her face finally cleared of colors and creams. The woman sighed, then opened her purse and reached in for her packet of charge cards. "I guess that's it, then, Miss Smith, except for that cucumber masque."

The technician gathered up her samples and told the woman she'd be right back with their purchases. She looked at the girl, who had turned her back to the counter again, then at the woman. Silently she mouthed to the woman, "She's so shy!"

The woman lifted her chin slightly, smiled, and nodded her head.

When they were settled in the car, with all the packages in the back seat, the woman put the key in the ignition and turned to the girl. "Well, you're all set, honey," she said.

The girl was turning the radio dial from one station to another, her head tilted to one side to better hear what was playing. The woman backed the car out of the parking space, and headed for the exit. She stopped at the intersection, looked both ways, then looked at her daughter and said, "Yes, you're really growing up now, aren't you?"

The girl didn't say anything. She was keeping time to the music by drumming her knee while staring out the window as if at something far away.
“Untitled,” 16” x 22” Pencil Drawing

Mary Swenson
Beirut Requiem

Nancy Bartels

For the 24th Marine Amphibious Unit, USMC

It started with Isaac’s kids, I guess. Spoiled sons of an old Semitic shepherd, squabbling over who daddy loved best and...

The Inheritance.

Now millenia later — Their seed is at it still.

To the sulphurous stew of hate they add bombs and bullets to thicken more the turgid soup already brimful with the blood and bodies of forty generations of children.

And the question is the same. Who does Daddy love best? Who gets...

The Inheritance.

These days the blood feud spills over the boundaries of the little desert states — a family quarrel tumbling from the yard into the street.

Among the latest victims are now numbered the sons of a new Chosen People — the virile, cocksure, arrogant young princes whose fathers long ago ripped from Isaac’s sons...

The Inheritance.

(Row upon row of barf green body bags, the latest sacrifice on the bloody altar.

Isaac himself was the last one who got lucky, his father apparently the last one to know that The Inheritance is not purchased by the blood of mortal sons.)

And the irony is this: In a blood feud over such questions the issue has long been settled. Forty generations and two hundred thirty barf-colored body bags each have earned an equal share of the only possible...

inheritance.

The Rising Flame

Mike O’Connor

In gripping darkness crickets sing their song To lull and hypnotize my sleepy mind.

One hundred billion brilliant stars emerge To glance upon the silvered mountain tops, And while away the night with gleaming cold.

A penetrating haze of wispy blue, That starts the day — before the sun ascends To burn its arc across the blazing sky.

A dancing wind that sighs in heads of trees Like distant swells upon a foaming shore

The dripping drops of dew reflect the reeds — A running green beneath the rising flame — And melt into a silent, hidden pool.

The algal blue of water thick with life.

A speckled frog that leaps on lily pads To send a rippling wave across the pond. He jumps, to meet a fly, to eat his food. His tongue he lashes, like a whip it snaps To catch elusive prey; the fly is dead.
SINGLE SETS OF TEN

A. L. Wanderer

... six ... seven ... eight ... nine ... ten counted Abby to herself as David brought his heavily weighted dumbbells overhead and back down again. Before she even opened her eyes, she could join in the count of the metal slipping and slapping. Each number was separated by a sharp forced exhale of deeply inhaled air. One peek at David, and she could know what routine he would go into next and exactly which set of noises to expect.

She did not remember how long ago the silver bars and the cold black discs had become a part of the bedroom. Now, because it suited David, they were a part of every morning.

Abby's eyes found the source of the numbers one through ten. "You know," she said, "weights are like coat hangers."

She waited a few seconds for David to respond, but he was on a four and would not speak until he had reached a ten. So she continued, "They have the ability to multiply. It's not scientific, so I don't expect you to understand this, but, when you close a closet door on a few coat hangers, there will be from forty to sixty of them when you open the closet door. Well, since you have uprooted the Metallic Tabernacle Choir from the basement, they've multiplied. Look at all of them."

David placed the dumbbells on the floor and paced around in circles to keep from tightening up: "I need more weight," he said. "I'm starting to get lines defining my biceps," and offered Abby proof of his discovery by tracing a line through his upper arm with his index finger.

Amazing, Abby thought, as she rolled over on her side and pulled the blankets in around her. How can a person make all that noise at this hour? Goddamn amazing, she said to herself, then sneezed. Reaching for some tissues she walked into the bathroom to get lines defining my biceps, and every two years the walls were painted "more weathered beige" to keep up.

The curtains were selected from Sears on the same principle. Ivory sheers hung from the rods which barely stayed in the walls. Not being able to find the correct mollies, or David, Abby screwed the curtain-rod hardware directly into the plasterboard and waited for the inevitable rejection factor to take place.

Three large pieces of furniture, the long dresser, David's oversized armoire and the small chest of drawers, were dark and richly carved in Queen-Anne fashion. All three were purchased after it had been decided that Abby's childhood bedroom furniture was too brittle to withstand any more nails or staples. David had hated to spend the money; Abby had loved it.

She recalled what the finisher had said to her when he came to touch up the scratches on the furniture. He was a short, dark and very round man. He was excited to work on the pieces and with his European accent, he had told her to never give them up. "Heirlooms," he had called them. "Something for your children," he had said. Abby sunk down into bed again as she thought about her children... no, tubular steel and glass.

From the bathroom she could hear David popping dental floss. When he finished with his teeth, there were a few silent minutes of contact lens adjustments, and the decision making process of whether to clean or not to clean his continuous wear lenses. The technique was to roll up the bathroom window shade and place the right hand over the right eye and squint out the window with the left eye. David then covered the left eye and squinted right-eyed. Abby enjoyed thinking that David did this in single sets of ten, too, because she knew that he never realized the bathroom window faced east and the glare prevented his
seeing anything. The drone of the shower lulled her back to sleep.

A noise caused Abby to drop through miles of black space. Opening her eyes ended the anxious flight. Catching her breath, she realized that she had been startled by the spin of a door knob. David had returned to the bedroom to dress. She had once demonstrated the skill of door knob turning to him. Clenching her teeth she explained how to keep a grip on the brass bulb while the metal fittings completed their rotation, but it proved useless; David just gave Abby his YOU-GOTTA-BE-NUTS look.

What the hell am I doing here? Abby sighed. It was more of a feeling than a question, and it hung around her as if the aroma of a gardenia wafted through the room, sightless and thick and unforgettable.

David sat at the edge of the bed and pulled on his socks. Next, Abby watched as he glided from his walk-in closet to the mirror, one trip for his tapered-bodied shirt, another for his reedy slacks, and a final trip for his designer sports coat. He maneuvered himself into his shoes as he walked around the bed. He leaned over Abby and kissed her good-bye.

"Are you going to play golf today?" Abby asked.

"If I can get out of the hospital early enough," David answered as he left the room.

"I'll meet you for lunch," Abby suggested, but it was too late. David slammed the bedroom door, then the door to the garage, finally the car door. The room was full of the fragrance of Paco Rabanne, David's favorite cologne. The telephone hammered at Abby's ears. David picked it up... no, Frances, you can't speak to Abby; she died two months ago — killed herself. He firmly placed the telephone down. He's mad at me, Abby thought. I probably overdosed on a great day for golf. I wonder where I'm buried. The Jewish cemeteries wouldn't have taken me; suicides aren't kosher. Under the ninth hole would be okay. She imagined how David's face would appear to her as she watched him tee-off, then his cleats pressed into her face and blocked the sunlight. At least I'd get something out of the country club membership. And they shouldn't mind, either; a Jewish country club that serves shrimp and lobster and celebrates Valentine's Day can't object to a Jewish suicide.

Grasping the navy-blue sheet, she extended her arms straight up and then over head. She let go; the soft air held her before the sheet settled over her thin contour... buried... she rolled away from the direction of David's image, coiling the sheet around her. The telephone rang. She hated telephones. Struggling from the sheet she crawled across "David's hall," causing the mattress to shimmy and slosh.

"Please," she said to the ceiling, "don't let that be my mother."

"Hello." The ceiling had betrayed her. "What do you mean if the mountain will not come to Mohammad, Mohammad must go to the mountain? I was going to call."

"Believe me, if you dropped dead I'd know about it." Abby pulled back the ivory sheers, wondering if the sun actually had gotten brighter at that moment, or if she was merely being prophetic.

"The kids are fine. They'll be home in a few weeks. Listen, if you want to send them packages you ought to learn how to spell our last name. It is C-O-H-E-N not C-O-H-N not K-A-H-N not C-O-W-E-N, and not C-O-N-E, or anything else you've come up with over the years."

"Yes, David is well... How is my father making you crazy?... You did! You said he's making you crazy... No, I haven't thought about what I'm getting him for his birthday yet — a new winter jacket, maybe. Look, I was just on my way out the door. I have some stops to make before I go to school."

Abby grabbed the pillow next to her and bit the corner of it. "A car! You think I should buy him a car? Mom, I really have to go now. Say hello for me."

"Do you believe it?" she howled at the ceiling. "I don't believe it," she repeated as she nodded her head. "Nobody would believe it," she said to convince herself. "What am I saying? Anybody who knows her would believe it. That substantiates it, only my mother!"

"A car! For THEM! Christ, I thought that when I came up with the idea for a jacket, it was a good idea. But what's a jacket going to mean to someone who is expecting a car?"

Abby stepped onto the tiled bathroom floor; the cold sensation spread through her and mingled with the feeling of guilt that was beginning to strangle her.

Looking in the mirror, she stroked her dark brown hair away from her face. The mirror held an attractive image which escaped Abby's awareness as she scanned her likeness. She felt their disapproval radiating back at her. How do they do it? How can they still make me feel this way, she wondered. She inspected the image for evidence proving that she was forty-two years old, not five, or six. Pointing her toothbrush at her solo audience, she declared that it was not exclusively her. Her whole damn generation had done something wrong, for they were the victims of guilt, not only of their parents, but of their children as well.

"Where have you been all day?" asked David, as he approached Abby.

"What day is this, David?" Abby answered back.

"Thursday, it's Thursday. Where have you been?"
“Can you see that I am standing here with my arms full of groceries? Would you either help or get out of my way, please?” Abby slid past David and went to the kitchen. David followed her.

“Every Thursday, David, I go to work, I’m teaching two classes this summer, remember? Then I go to my racquetball game, and I go to choir rehearsal.”

“That’s right,” sighed David.

A coffee can fell from Abby’s hand and rolled across the kitchen floor. Abby took after it and scooped it up before it nestled itself under the oak table, amid the jungle of chair legs. She returned with it to the pantry and placed it on a shelf. Finally, she folded up the grocery bag and put it with the others, between the wall and the refrigerator. “I talked to my mother today,” Abby needed to change the tension level. “She asked about you, even get your first name right.”

David laughed his sinister laugh, then asked, “What did you and what’s-her-name talk about?”

“First, there was the when’s-the-last-time-you-called-your-mother nonsense. That was the prelude to “we could be sick and dying and you wouldn’t even know it.” Next, was the claim that my father is making her crazy, but it seems that was merely the segue to the subject of his birthday.”

“What does she want now?”

“Oh, you know, just a small token of appreciation for all that they have done for me: the braces on my teeth, shoes on my feet, a year’s worth of piano lessons with a child molester. She wants something to measure up to all of that.”

“Abb, just tell me what she said.”

“I am telling you. You have to remember that they don’t deal in abstracts. They want the down payment on nineteen-thousand meals.”

“I got it! Your mother wants to give your father a microwave oven for his birthday.”

Abby picked up a piece of mail from the table and held it against her forehead. “Wrong, Karnac. She wants a car.”

“A car!” He choked with laughter. “What did you tell her?” he gasped.

“I didn’t tell her anything. I said that I had to get to work. I said good-bye, maybe, I don’t know.” Abby could feel the squeeze of the vise that was one part Mother, one part David. She fumbled with the salt shaker; the quiet was so heavy that it made her uneasy.

“We are not going to buy them a car, so relax. What they really want I don’t have to give them. Have you had dinner?”

“Did you win?”

“Are you kidding? I played like such a klutz. I kept telling her that my single interest in being there was to run around and sweat. I’m only here for comic relief, I told her.” Abby shuddered.

“What is the thermostat set at? God, I’m cold.”

“Same as always,” said David. “Tell me, what was the score?”

“She had forty-five; I had nineteen. Choir rehearsal was unusual. We didn’t sing at all. Everyone sat in a circle and waited for our turn to tell each other off. Some people were vicious; I wonder where they get their nerve.”

David grinned. “So, who did you tell off?”

“Me? I didn’t tell anybody off; I explained my theory regarding the choir.”

“You have choir theories?”

“It’s not a theory — I was just protecting my flanks. Or maybe I marshaled my forces. When it was my turn I explained that I have a lot of music in me, but I wasn’t about to harm anyone in order to get a solo, because I never know how well that music will come out. But since it is a volunteer choir, they have to let me sing.”

“They — have to let you sing? You told them that?”

“Absolutely. I’m a volunteer; you take what you can get when you ask for volunteers.”

“Very good point.” David began to play with the pen in his shirt pocket. Abby took this as a sign that David was planning his departure. “I’m going back to the hospital now; I have a large stack of films to look at before tomorrow.”

Abby tossed her head back in an effort to shake her hair from her face. “You’ve got to go back to the hospital?” she asked, as if questioning David could have changed the situation.

“Uncle Marty is coming by for a short visit, and I had hoped that we could spend the time together.”

David, noticing Abby’s disappointment, shrugged his shoulders and said, “Maybe I’ll get home in time to say hello to your Uncle Marty. I’ll try.”

Abby watched as David left the kitchen. That’s right, David, she thought, go and look inside all those people. Find the source of their pain. The garage door rumbled. “Go help strangers,” she whispered. Abby went to the refrigerator and removed all the fresh fruit that she could carry.

At the sink, she ran the water, washed the fruit and placed it in a bowl retrieved from the lower cabinets. Having saved the strawberries for last, she pulled off the rubber band and the cellophane from the pint container. The strawberries were spoiled. They look as good as I feel, Abby thought.

She tried to salvage something to give to her uncle. If David were here, he would insist that the strawberries be put out to eat. Although they were not intended for the serving bowl, Abby rinsed each one before dropping it down the garbage disposal. “Say good-bye to all of this,” and the
Abby hummed a song and imagined David rushing home one day to tell her that he had found a soul in a patient's x-ray.

Abby looked at the clock. It was eight-thirty. Uncle Marty had not said what time she should expect him. He had so many people to see when he came into town that she did not mind being on hold.

She opened one of the kitchen's junk drawers and fished around for a pen, then looked in the cabinets for paper. The stationery box that was kept wedged between the cookbooks was empty. Abby had been about to write a letter to Julie or to Scott, but changed her mind at the thought of running upstairs to find some paper. She put on her shoes and went, instead, to the garage. From the front seat of the car she removed her purse and from the trunk her gym bag. Back in the house she put her purse on the stairs and brought the sports bag to the laundry room. She emptied the contents of the bag into the washing machine and added the few clothes that were in the laundry chute. She set the dials, poured the soap, closed the lid and pulled the knob that started the wash cycle.

Abby sat in the kitchen reading a paperback edition of The Plague and waited for Uncle Marty. When the doorbell rang, she put the book down and ran to the door. Abby welcomed Uncle Marty, who looked at her adoringly and hugged her ruggedly. It was a complete contrast to the way her father would have greeted her. His manner consisted of stiff words and an awkward kiss on the cheek.

"Oh, Abby, how good it feels to look at you," Uncle Marty said. "Florida may have sunshine, but I miss you. Here," he said, handing her a shopping bag, "these are for you.

"What have you got in here?" laughed Abby.

"Look, look, look," teased Uncle Marty, raising his voice an octave.

"How in the world did you grow these in a condominium? Come into the kitchen. I’ll put this down." She placed the bag on the counter top at the back of the kitchen so it would not get in the way. They sat at the table, next to each other.

"How are you, Uncle Marty?" Abby asked.

"I’m wonderful. Why not? I’m getting old, and I like it. I have time to think about what I would like to do, and I do it." And Abby knew that he did.

In the light Uncle Marty stared at his brother’s daughter. "Abby," he said, "do you remember the victory garden Aunt Sarah and I had when we had the house on Pine Avenue? Or are you too young?"

"Young!" Abby protested. "I think I’m older than you are, Uncle Marty. Of course, I remember. It was wonderful. I remember all the kids hiding between the corn stalks. How are my cousins? Tell them I said thanks for sharing you for a few hours. How was your trip?"

Uncle Marty told Abby that his children were well, that his trip had been fine and that he would never come to town and not take the time to see her. "And," he said, "you should see the baby, kayn aynhoreh, what a doll."

"That’s what I hear, Mazel tov! Uncle Marty," and she gave his hand a squeeze. His hand was warm, his fingers worn and cracked. "You travel all this way to see them," she remarked. "You know that Mom and Dad won’t even drive twenty-five minutes to see their grandchildren. They have this principle they live by; their children have to go to them. I can’t understand how that makes them happy."

"Ah, my brother! Al is Pa all over again. Why do you think I come here? Because, my little Abigail, when you were growing up I saw a child that was frightened of everything. I had no doubt that my brother had provided for you with the sweat of his brow, but who was going to take the fear from your eyes? I should have tried to spend more time with you." The old man spoke with his shoulders swaying, and his voice davening.

"Uncle Marty, you make things sound terrible. Nothing was so terrible."

"I understand, Abby; I even understand your need to protect them." Uncle Marty ran his tough fingers over his mouth and stopped at his chin.

"So, where’s your husband the doctor? Where’s your David?" he asked as he surveyed the bowl of fruit.

"He’s at the hospital," Abby answered. "He should be back soon."

"Then, tell me, how have you been?" He put his hand on Abby’s arm.

"There’s not much to tell. Julie and Scott are working at a summer camp. David works or plays golf. It’s been quiet around the house."

Uncle Marty picked up Abby’s hand and held it in his. "Abby, I asked about you, and you told me about the children, the house and the doctor. What can you tell me about you?"

Abby gasped at her uncle, and marked how his hair had changed from deep gray to a dull gray and white. "Can I get you something to eat or drink? Would you like some coffee?" Uncle Marty shook his head. "I..." Abby inserted into the silence. She looked away from him and studied the grain in the wood table.

"Tell me what is disturbing you," Uncle Marty persisted. "Why do you feel as if you’re older than me?"

She flipped the corners of the pages of her paperback again and again. The anxiety that was building caused her to take a deep breath. Pressured by the quiet, Abby spoke. "I’m not anything to anybody. David exists in another place. He sees me for twenty minutes, then, he disappears. I can hold his attention for as long as it takes to make him laugh." Abby unconsciously scratched the nail polish from her fingernails.

"I’m tired of what we have."

Uncle Marty asked, "What do you have, Abigail? What do you want?"
"I have expectations; therefore, I'm lonely. I've got a lousy marriage, but I'm married to a man that has a great marriage. I have things, but they don't cause me to be less lonely. David thinks all he has to do in life is acquire things and more things. I don't know what I want. I want the answers to be easy."

"Now," Uncle Marty said softly, "you listen to me. What you have is a husband, and two children. We've all shared bad times; believe me! But you don't walk away from family. That's your answer. Abby, time will take care of everything."

"Time? Time is a problem. You see, I don't want to say years from now that I should have started a new life years ago."

"Look at you." Abby turned away, but Uncle Marty turned her face toward his by touching her chin gently with his tough fingers. "You know, you haven't changed. I look at you now and I remember how my mother loved you. You were the apple of her eye. In your pinafores or your dungarees she always said you were the prettiest. She loved to watch your curious looks every time she pulled out those old photographs of hers. She liked to tell you stories."

Abby looked down onto the table rejecting his words. Poor Uncle Marty, she thought, he must be thinking of one of the other kids. I wasn't anything to anybody.

Uncle Marty saw Abby's reaction to what he had told her. "You think that I don't know what I'm talking about, nu, it's all right. But I'm telling you that your grandmother cared. She used to make us all crazy; she wanted everyone to explain to her why you never talked. I bet you don't even remember that, do you, Mrs. Cohen, teacher? You never said a word." He smiled as he spoke of his mother. "You think things over. Think about what I've said. Tell David I'm sorry I missed him." He stood and turned to leave. "Abby, you'll be all right?"

"I'm okay, Uncle Marty. Thank you for everything; have a safe trip. Come back soon, please."

They shared a vigorous hug, then Uncle Marty left.

One step below the hum of the running water, Abby heard an echo impersonate Uncle Marty... you never talked... never said a word. That was me. Abby nodded, not my cousins, but me. The memory of being so terribly shy caused a biting twinge in Abby's chest. She drew up her shoulders and folded her arms across her waist; she even curled her toes so tightly that they ached. Abby still lived within reach of that world. Survival taught her to change her exterior; she created a veneer out of her good looks and by arranging her life into a design that left her no time to contemplate her existence.

A warm jellied feeling replaced Abby's chest biting ache for one moment. "She loved — me?" Abby whispered. Staring at her vague reflection on the blackened kitchen window she wondered if it was true, or if it made any difference.

From the bag that Uncle Marty had brought, Abby removed tomatoes, carrots, onions, cucumbers and radishes and carried them to the sink. Washing the dried earth from the radishes, she thought of her grandmother. There had never been a time when the woman hadn't seemed ancient.

Her grandmother had soft, shiny, deeply etched skin. She used to tilt back her head, and with her mouth opened slightly, look through the bottom of her eye glasses and out over her cheek bones and brush the hair from Abby's forehead with a satiny touch. Grandma had loved to bring out bowls of chicken soup from the white enameled pot that eternally sat on the kitchen stove. The same old woman controlled everybody in her home by hissing, "Shaaa! the kinder!" She had always wanted to learn how to drive the "machine" but never did.

Gradually, Abby accepted Grandma's love.

The garage door opened. Abby rinsed off the last tomato. "Abb?" David called. "My God, where did you get that tomato? I don't think I've ever seen a tomato that size. These are from your uncle, aren't they? Sorry I missed him."

"Me too. It was good to see him. He said to say hello."

"Did he sit around and tell you stories of yesteryear? You love that mishegoss, don't you?"

"It's not mishegoss. Yes, I do love it. Yes, he told me one story from yesteryear."

"Which one?" David wanted to know. "The one about how poor they were, about the envelopes for their money, an envelope for the rent, and an envelope for the groceries, etcetera."

"No, he told me a new, old story. He told me that my grandmother loved me. How about that?"

"How about that, Abb? I don't get it, of course she loved you."

"Of course she loved you," Abby mimicked David, "but I never knew it. I didn't know that anyone ever loved me without expecting something from me. Now I find out someone cared about me and I didn't even have to give her words." Abby turned off the running water.

"Mind if I slice one of these open?" asked David.

Abby took a slicing knife from the drawer in front of her and passed it across the counter top to him. "David," she said, "that's how you solve everything, isn't it?"

"What?"

"You look inside it."

"Well, yes."

"You look inside it and see what's good, and what's not. It's all physiological, a growth here, a strangulation there. You have all the answers you want in those translucent-gray works of art you study."

"Are you looking for a fight, Abby?" David wanted to know.

"Yes, I am," replied Abby, "because I just realized... I married my mother."
"That's a dirty thing to say."

"Doctor Cohen, I have a pain. It starts here," Abby traced a line starting at the side of her head and stopped over her heart, "and radiates to here."

"Well, you've got the head part right. You're acting nuts."

"That's very professional," Abby shot back. "Why don't you ask me if I have any idea what the cause might be."

"Jesus! Okay," this time David mimicked Abby, "any idea what the cause might be?"

"Indifference."

"Listen, I've had enough of this. I'm going upstairs. When you come up bring some of those strawberries, please," David's voice trailed off.

In the morning David felt Abby stir next to him. "Abb," he said, "I waited a long time for you to come upstairs." He moved closer to Abby and put his arm around her waist.

"It took me a long time to decide to come upstairs."

"We're not terminal, you know. You just have to tell me where it hurts," David said. "What happened to those strawberries?"

"Uncle Marty and I ate them," Abby told David, "What happened to the count?"

"What Count? What were you doing, dreaming of Dracula?"

"No, what happened to the weights? Why aren't you pumping iron?" Abby asked.

"Oh, I thought I'd let you sleep," said David.

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1Kayn aynhoreh (kane-a-HAW-reh) phrase said to protect a child or show honest praise

2Mazel tov — congratulations

3Davening — chanting voice, as in devout prayer

4mishegoss — nonsense

"Untitled,"

9" x 44" Photograph

Robbin Hampson
Blue Roses Grow on Brother's Grave

Beverly Rose Enright

The coffin concaves down to drop
into the freshly dug concave up
and this meagre mourning family set
watches as one golden maple leaf
slowly drifts its head on your lid.

We were schoolchildren once
and teacher's pets, I always first
and you but one year behind me
best in the class too.
We slipped a little in Jr. High.
I flirted with Elvis and rock,
and you dreamed of motor bikes and cars.
But still we clung to school and the Baptist church.
In ninth grade you decided to fail and turn delinquent,
and all your life since has been
the rotting away dance with death.
What a beautiful boy you were, brother,
practicing the family violin,
or making up comic routines with me
with our exaggerated laughs and grins.
The stories we made up about our stuffed toys,
and the books we shared as we grew,
the Laurel and Hardy movies,
and old radio shows, could not have foretold
how tragic and fatal your fumbling with crime
and the madness, drinking and debauch of your decline.
Justice concaves down like a coffin,
and mercy concaves up like a grave,
but you were a long time adying
and hope hung many times on your cross.
What a sad stinkweed life to live, brother,
blessed with all that beauty and brain.
What a hard heartbreaker you were, brother,
as you killed me again and again.

But if death is a spiraling function
that spins through the fires of love
burning away all but the beauty
that beats in birth and rebirth,
then you will reach heaven as handsome
as the shy boy that once graced the earth.

freeform

Kristen J. (Katia) Rojek

your life's a mess
your mother says
too much runnin'
in small circles
clean up your act
your dad demands
why do they think
you need a change

why not explain to them
as nicely as you can
that life's a circle, square
and lines to be reviewed
and you're a freeform in
a world tightly braided

the world is strict
not much for room
the freeform lost
in all the rush
you're not a bum
but a free shape
your spirit lies
in lines and forms

a ghostly shape of lines
and circles, squares appears
and shows that you, freeform
are a brother of life
that life is circles, squares
and shapes of lines itself

spiral thoughts of great intensity
find the corners of your mind
you are not the only freeform lost
in tightly braided silence

the world is running in
circles near the freeform
traveling around you
drawing lines, circles, squares
braiding you into the
tight uniformity

the world is strict
not much for room
the freeform trapped
in closed off minds
you're not shut off
but a free shape
in a world of
straight lines and squares
“Untitled,” 8½” x 11” Photograph

Robbin Hampson
The Tigers

Jean Kealy

Tigers play, hidden
in wild grasses,
friendly furry paws in air,
rolling, purring, scratching,
leaping out of touch.
Gentleness and strength combine
to tease,
til scent weaves through the air
and
warns of khaki poised and prone.
Muscles tighten and
grip the skin
Hairs moisten, ears
flick and turn . . .
Tall grasses are bent.
a lick on limp paws.
Then wind whips the thighs
as life again engages.

A Weak Gaze at Week Days

Marilou Arnold

MONDAY is never my funday,
It's an Attila the Hunday, no time for a punday
it's usually a runday

Tuesday

TUESDAY is a full of the bluesday
a nothing to lose day, a not really good newday
a time to pay my duesday

Wednesday

WEDNESDAY is my sews and mendsday,
a writing with pensday, a look through a lensday
a see my fender get the bendsday

Thursday

THURSDAY is a warm fursday,
a little kitten's purrsday, a stick to my socks burrsday
a small and sad-eyed cursday

Friday

FRIDAY is a rather wryday,
a sunny, bright dryday, a get up and tryday
you won't see me cryday

Saturday

SATURDAY is my really doesn't matterday
my clothes are in a tatterday, a time to mix the batterday
an cat and get fatterday

Sunday

SUNDAY is made for a nunday,
a cowboy who shoots his gunday, on Easter a hot cross bunday
for God it's His oneday
“Scissors and Squiggles,” 15" x 14" Mixed Media Drawing

Robb Miles
Daki walked along the ruins. It was one of her favorite places to be. She knew that it was wrong to be out at self-hour, but the Chicago ruins seemed to call to her. She was beginning to really understand this terrible world. All of the slogans about, “Do for the self and the self will serve,” were all wrong. Daki knew she was showing a terrible emotion — caring — but somehow she liked this ancient feeling.

Upon the second tomorrow, Daki had stopped taking her self-pills. Self-pills made her think only of herself. She hoped that her mother wouldn’t find out. The Old One had died recently ... he had been disintegrated. She had done something very dangerous for him: she cared. The Old One had told her of things his old friend had passed on to him. Reminiscing was very dangerous and bad for the “now self.” “Mother” would have given a re-education for this. The Old One’s suggestion for not taking self-pills had been followed, only to show Daki that all he’d said was true.

Daki jumped. Someself had followed her to the ruins. Her only hope was that it was not her mother. Mothers could read bad thoughts. It was Ramea’s mother. It flashed its hollow smile and told Daki she must report to her compartment for self-hour at once.

Daki thought about their hollow, uncaring society. Had Everyself once been like she’d just become in the last seven tomorrows?

Upon returning home, Daki went to her compartment to feign self-contemplation. Daki felt extremely isolated, even at self-sharing hour, when everyone held hands and hollowly smiled at eachself, chanting.

Daki had reached her decision early on the eleventh tomorrow. She would have to set out to destroy this world’s lack of feeling, and the only way to accomplish this was to, somehow, end the distribution of self-pills; that had to be the key.

The Old One had told Daki of a man called Shan, who had been off of self-pills half of his time. He lived in the city of Good Selves. Daki had to break into the room of knowledge somehow, and find out how to get to the city. She had heard, in self-education, of “bad ones” who had tried to steal the forbidden knowledge. Daki read a little, and she knew that therein was the knowledge she sought. She decided that the best time for this was self-hour.

So on the fifteenth of tomorrow, she acted. She made her way out of “home” inconspicuously. She reached the outside of home and did something totally forbidden. Daki ran. It was difficult at first, for her breath came jaggedly, and her chest heaved and burned, but Daki concentrated. She reached the room of knowledge shortly. She was surprised at how fast her body could carry her.

The room of knowledge was bolted and locked. Daki thought that it was very hard to remember things; she’d never had any reason to remember before. She remembered something the Old One had told her about rocks.

Violence was a new feeling, and Daki felt a strange exhilaration when she tossed the rock through the room’s window. She quickly entered and scanned the area for mothers. Seeing none, Daki looked among the cobwebbed “writings.” She found a large writing with “Chicago” printed on it in strange, even letters. Opening this writing took great courage, as it was like self-unconditioning. She opened it, and felt an emulsion of freedom never felt before.

Some of the words in the writings were unfamiliar. Cars seemed to be the past civilization of Chicago. She wasn’t sure what they looked like. Turning page after page, not sure she would find what she was looking for, Daki found a picture which seemed to portray a miniature Chicago. It showed many other places near Chicago. She quickly stuck it in her self-clothing and hurried back to “home,” before her mother missed her.

Daki saw that mother was being repaired by other mothers in the corridor. Now she would have to be extra careful. A repaired mother was a ways sharp in finding unself and caring thoughts. She walked nonchalantly to her compartment. She stored the book in her dream window.

Soon it was self-education hour. The selves entered the room and sat in their specified chairs. The Educator addressed them in the usual manner, “A good self is an educated one.”

“My goal is selfism,” was the answer. It was so simple! Everyself was out of contact with reality. They probably didn’t even know that they were capable of caring about other selves.

Daki didn’t realize how loudly she said, “Oh!”

The Educator looked at her. “Daki, did you concentrate on your words?” The question was more accusing than inquisitive.

“Yes, Educator, of course.” Daki thought she would have to be more careful around other selves from now on. Late on this tomorrow, she would venture once more into the room of knowledge, and she needed non suspicions aroused.

Upon the self-hour, Daki prepared to slip out of her self-room. She would have to find out more information to locate Shan.

She read more writings and came across the idea of “books.” She also read about maps, and now understood their idea.

Daki tiptoed out of her room and made her way to the room of knowledge, and was shocked to find that the window had been repaired. She found a rock and sent it crashing through the new window.
She was in the process of finding the newest map book when she heard the scuffle of a mother's feet. She panicked, then darted under a bookcase shelf. She knew that it was hopeless... a mother could detect any self alive... but she felt a little hope of escape in her position.

The mother entered, unlocking the door with her scanners. She scuffled around the room, scanning Daki. Daki saw that it was Leato's mother. The mother leaned down and shone a light beam under the bookcase. Daki felt her heart race, just as when she'd committed running. She gasped as the mother's hand pulled her to her feet.

The selves went off to self-education... Daki smiled, "A good self is an educated one."

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**Schroedinger's* Cat**

Nancy Bartels

Schroedinger's cat's a peculiar beast.
   He laps quirts and quarks from an
   N-dimensional bowl
And sits in the lap of Einstein's ghost,
   relative and enigmatic.

He's neither here nor there —
   nor anywhere —
Except, of course, in Herr Doktor's
   famous box,
Whence he can be called into being
   by the wave of a theory...

Or not, depending...

At night, when Herr Doktor goes home
   to his pipe and his fire
   and his three-dimensional cat —
The one with fur and fleas and feline concerns,
   birdlust and mousedreams —

Does Schroedinger's cat jump from the box,
   leap from wave form to wave form,
   pick delicately amid universes on
   silent, padded feet and,
   grinning like his Cheshire cousin,
   howl at the moon?

*Erwin Schroedinger, German physicist, developed the wave form theory of sub-atomic physics. The cat is one in his famous riddle used to explain parts of quantum mechanics. When the box is opened, the cat is either alive or dead, depending on its position on the wave function at the instant the box is opened. It can also be both alive and dead in parallel universes having no knowledge of one another.

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Daylight for Sixty Seconds

Mike O'Connor

Gossamer rain veils the darkling sky.
Anticipatory faces gaze
At floodlit steel and aluminum.
They stir, nervously awaiting fire
To flash before binoculars.
A rocket aimed for orbit.
Velvet, cumulus curtains drawn;
The silver moonlight revealed.
   Towers of hydrogen
   Thrusting unsparingly,
   Flames of volcanic force;
   Exploding — billowing.
Daylight for sixty seconds;
Distorted, reflected across
Torpid, unwholesome water.
Delayed avalanche of thunder.
Rising slowly against gravity,
A coiling snake of smoke groans moonward.
Memories forever frozen on
Blurry photos of flaming dragons.
Shell and Coil Pitcher
Sandra Reading

Hanging Piece
Sandra Reading

Japanese Woman
Pat Rotello
Rape of a Continent

Paul P. Sipiera

Yellow snow on blue ice
   a sure sign that man has arrived
For so long it remained pure
   the virgin of the southern oce a
Its beauty hidden beneath a white shroud
   with harsh climate and distance its only protectors
Where mankind cannot flourish
   its existence was secure.

Penetration by man
   has brought about an irreversible fate
For millenia to come
   what we have done will remain
From the equipment that brought us
   to the food that sustained us
Future generations will know us
   by the rubbish left behind us.

Revlon Enamel No. 3

Mendy Sears

Inspired by some light feeling of Spring
She painted her toes
Tried on some summer clothes
Set her eyes on diffuse
   and modeling for the mirror,
Spiked the world with her heel.

Thinking, None of this is real,
She kicked aside the shoes
Then dropped the sultry clothes
a d she didn’t have wished
   to wash her pantyhose.
She brushed her hair fifty strokes
   and rubbed the corns on her feet
before she feel asleep.

She awoke in a land she’d never known,
made of light and precious stone.
Her dress was blazing white and swirled about her feet;
Stepping back to look around,
She tripped on the clumsy gown
And all the holy heads turned to see
shining on her toes, Revlon’s Latest
Enamel No. 3.
“Ashes to Ashes, Lust to Dust,” 20” x 30” Oil Painting

Thomas Billings
“Cross Section,” 12" x 14" Ink Drawing

Robb Miles
Grand Canyon — May 1984

Nancy Bartels

The canyon is old.
Older than memory
Or comprehension.

And vast.
More vast than imagination
or dreams.

You cannot grasp it whole — only in pieces.
A lizard in the sun.
A jewel-like fall of water.
Rock in red and black, bearing scars
of the birth agony of a planet.

And always the river.
Clear sea green at first,
then silty brown,
running fast and hard for the sea.

To midwestern eyes, used to broad lumbering streams
dumping rich black loam, ripe for planting,
it is a fearsome, alien thing,
a killer.
It takes no prisoners, but dashes boat and
body against the rock with equal abandon.

We’ve tamed it now, they say.
Put a dam at each end,
and we play on it in the
warm season, laughing and splashing
through the rapids.

But at night, lying on the sandy beaches,
watched by stars,
Or stretched across the rubber pods,
adrift through quiet stretches,
One always hears the river rushing,
Waiting.

The Seder

A. L. Wanderer

Time never seemed to enter that fortress.
Sheltered within was their apartment,
Up so many steps the faded halls
Echoed, “Slow down. Don’t look down.”
Down was easy, shiny smooth bannisters
Wound round and around worn stair
And indistinguishable landing.
Sunset darts hit us at every turn.

Pa stood to lead the Seder.
With words I did not understand
He chanted from the small book.
Reader of pictures, my eyes — jumped from the page
As unexpected, “Amen’s,” surrounded me.
A young trembling voice, rising, falling,
Questioned us all, “Mah Nishtannah . .
Why is this night different from all other nights?”

Parents became restless, insisting,
“It’s enough, Pa! Sit! The kids gotta cat!”
Until Pa shot them the Look:
That shamed them to silence.
Sovereign was the guardian of observance.
By candlelight we experienced our freedom
As we waited for the stranger
Amid our unleavened bread crumbs.
"Mary," 4\frac{1}{4}" x 3\frac{3}{4}" Soft Ground Etching

Veronica Potter
“Jungle,” 17” x 11½” Etching

Yvette Levita
"Reflections," 5½" x 6" Pen and Ink

Chris Wilson
“Untitled,” 8½" x 11" Photograph

Robbin Hampson
"Still Life," 18" x 24" Oil Painting

Sue Schultz
“Angels Fear Crows that Burn in Flight,”

15” x 36” Linocut Print

Thomas Billings
“Shells,” 8” x 6” Pencil Drawing

Leslyn Coombs
Nebraska
Kirsten Franzen

Just at dawn, bare trees silhouette themselves against autumn's morning sky. Together, the bare trees make a beautifully intricate pattern against spectrum colors of the sky. When I'm here, I don't feel the pain of everyday urban life. All my problems and fears seem to disappear, if only for a while. Friendly people are all around. When I'm mad at home, there's not much I can do except endure it. Here, I race through the fields, chase the cows, and run with the dog until I can't breathe anymore. I am all alone ... just me. No one to see me cry. No one to ask me why. I just bury myself in the hay, wishing it would all be in my backyard.

Depression
Kim Payne

Some call it anger turned inward, I call it fear of a consuming helplessness. Nothing helps; everything hurts. Talking only heightens the flame burning me inside and out. Thinking only kills the lone fireman trying to save me from the blaze. Sleep is close to death, but not as comforting. Hope is the microfine lifeline on which I balance — the fireman grasping one hand the flame burning the other.

The Arms of Someone New
Gena Parkhurst

The Arms of Someone New
Don't feel right.
The Arms of Someone Old were wonderful!
What to do?
The kiss of someone new all wrong.
The kiss of someone old Gone.

Old Testament Trinity
Beverly Rose Enright

If I peel away with knowledge, skill, and care, each of the blackened varnished layers of centuries of repaintings on the icon of my faith, Rublev, O beloved Andrei Rublev, will I at last find you? Or have the Kommissars taken over my hands and axed it into pieces and burned it in the fires of their blasphemy? Wherever you are, painting still in glory, in the communion of saints, reach down your arms to me and make my hands your hands again.

Three men seated at a round table, and I at a table nearby, trying to do homework as I recite the twenty-third psalm, falling deep in the cave of shadows, and I overhear the mocking words, to become a creature of the shadows, a cornered animal that trapped strikes! O why did I remain? Why did I not leave immediately when they came? Three men came in, sat down together, and I saw the shadow world, the negative, the crumminess, and heard the mock of Satan, and I laughed his laugh, even as I read the twenty-third psalm. Three angels seated round a table in your window into heaven, Rublev, and I can see it now. But not then ... not then.

O icon master, I am now but your broken egg yolk. Use me, use me, to paint again the Holy Mother of sorrows on this Mother's Day of 1984, her sacred heart ringed with roses, and the blessed child at her cheek. I am only your poor broken golden egg yolk, beloved hand, into which you dip your brush, pour your holy water, mix your finely powdered colors to make the paint to paint the icon of this great Christian faith forever.
"Arm," 21" x 22" Graphite Drawing

Jim Hildebrandt
"Gas Mask," 29" x 34" Oil Painting

Jim Hildebrandt
“Bottle and Spoon Reflection,” 5 ¼" x 6" Pen and Ink Drawing

Leslyn Coombs
"Help My People," 13" x 17" Lithograph

Robert Luening
“Untitled,” 10” x 12” Pencil Drawing

Chris Wilson
“Flight of Socrates,” 18" x 24" Etching, Engraving

Thomas Billings
“Intimate,” 4” x 6” Soft Ground Etching

Veronica Potter
"Still Life with Red Chairs," 22" x 30" Oil Painting

Geri Caravello
“Untitled,” 13” x 14½” Pencil Drawing

Sue Chon
The Witch

Ana Lee

Coming out of an abyss of abandonment and consternation
My lifetime drowsiness
My imprisonment nightmare
With the rest of my strength, carrying my disoriented, uneven being
Confusedly, exasperated, fascinated I went to her hallucinating session.
A long-awaited event,
My heart filled with fear,
A prodigious experience, a phenomenon.
My fantastic speculations,
My fabulous wonders,
The interminable wait.
Tormented I take the risk,
Uncomprehendingly I witness the abnormal spectacle,
Contaminated by her unusual apparatus, her ways, her means, her infinite secrets,
Her intuitions, her predictions.
She is an earthquake, a herald of a supernatural echo.
She mixes the herbs, recites an incantation,
She boils the potion,
She pleases her various gods,
She exercises her clairvoyance.
She wraps me in her frightful look.
I am in panic, livid, full of affliction.
My sorrows, my fate
The candle I light.
She makes the tea,
She washes my soul,
She strips it of its old patina.
Enchanted, overwhelmed by exhaustion, having deciphered the labyrinth of my spirit,
Full of spontaneous enthusiasm, exalted, rejuvenated,
I became her miracle
I am her magic.

Untitled

Lori Delzer

Loneliness is
an empty room
and a full bottle
of chilled wine.

Reality is
finding a piece
of gum
stuck to the bottom
of your glass slipper.
“Fat Women Are the Best,” 18” x 24” Conte Drawing

Thomas Billings
“Midnight Hour,” 15" x 15½" Drawing

Jenny Smith
“Untitled,” 15" x 12" Pastel

Mary Swenson