



Point of View 1997-1998

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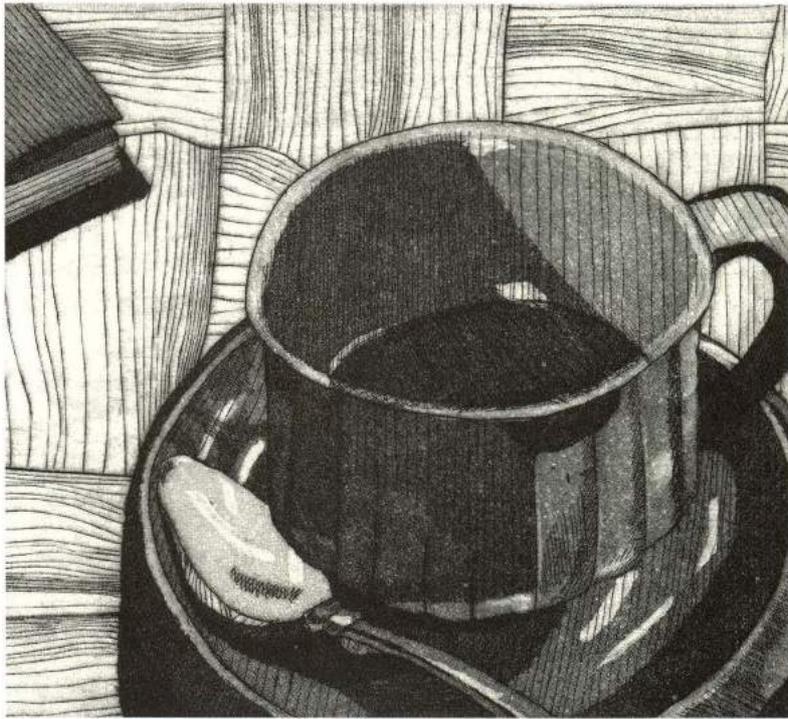
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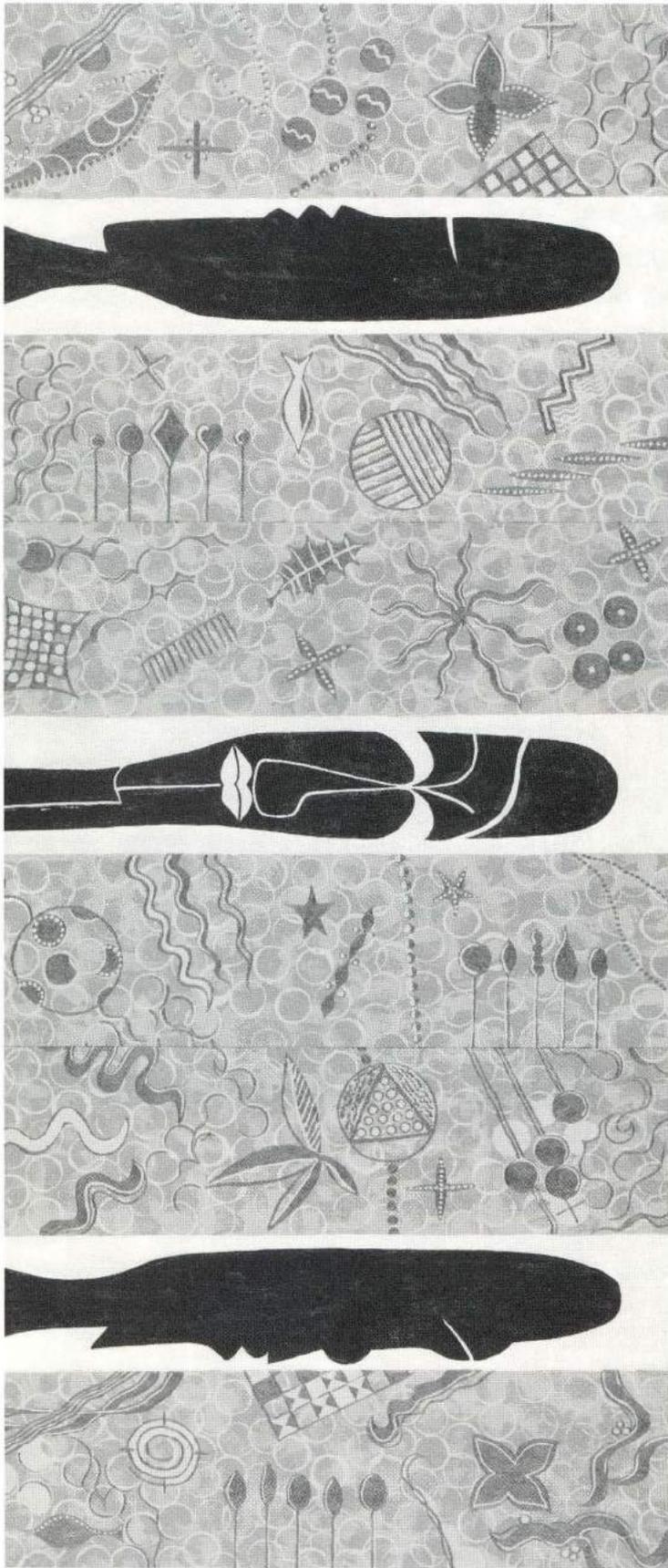
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Breaking the News

Beth Browning Jacobs

I was sixteen when my father first tried to strangle me. Heaven knows why he waited that long, with all the things that were wrong with me. Ah, but that's of no consequence now... I'm forty-three and successful, independent enough to be in no danger of strangulation from anyone. More independent, after this week.

I pull into my parents' drive with the same sense of time-warp I always have when I come here. The house is still the same—slightly more decrepit because Mom and Dad don't keep it up.

Half-dead petunias surround the porch, on which an old couch sits abandoned like an unloved elderly relative. The only sign of life comes from the back the house where the dogs set up a ferocious-sounding commotion at my arrival. I ignore them; they won't bite me or, I suspect, anyone else. Like Mom and Dad, they make a noise which dwindles into mute subjection at a challenge.

The back door opens and Mom flies out. "Thank goodness you're here safely—those terrible highways—I hope you didn't stop at any rest areas—Dorothy Stevens told me last week that some terrible man waited in those rest areas for women and mugged them—and then all the accidents—and I..."

"Mom!"

"Well, at least you're here. But why are you here? Something funny is going on and..."

"Mom, could I please get into the house? I'm okay—everything is all right. No one has mugged me or run over me."

Giving ground just a little, my mother lets me push past her into the kitchen. Though I pretend to ignore her—answering is always a mistake—I can hear her behind me as she follows me through the kitchen and on into the hall... "Your father has been beside himself since you called and just announced that you were coming to talk to us about something—and with his heart—and now he's got bronchitis and an ear infection and his gout is acting up..."

Finally, I just turn and look at her. It is enough; she subsides like a whipped puppy. I've been able to do that to my mother since I was about twelve, and though I've always hated the way it makes her look, it's really the only option.

Dad's in the living room, in The Chair. Since he cannot work due to his various ailments, he spends sixteen hours a day in that chair. Reading. Always. Up to sixty-two books in a month at last count—and believe me, he counts. He's Reading now, and I suddenly wish he'd keep on reading. Then I wouldn't have to break the news I've come to give him—the news that my husband and I are divorcing after twenty years of marriage. That I am leaving this man whom he's always treated with more respect than he ever treated me, and losing the married status that is the only thing that has ever bought me any respite from my father's harassment. I almost hope he'll scream and try to strangle me again—it's better than the quiescent, moribund helplessness he's taken on in recent years.

He doesn't acknowledge my presence—but then, he never did. He is, after all, Reading. My mother having been temporarily cowed into silence, I take the few moments of quiet to study my father. My attention is drawn first to his hands. Like everything else about him they are very large, almost

bear-paws, an effect heightened by the black hairs on their backs. Yet their flabby character and stubby fingers give them an oddly vulnerable look. The wedding ring on the left hand is sunk deeply into the flesh like the foundation of an old house settling into the ground. They are in their accustomed position, curled around a book and hanging onto it—his only contact with the outside world—like a lifeline. Two fingers are dark brown from pipe-tobacco stains, ugly discolorations to some but worn by him as the badge of honor of the thinking man.

It's hard to imagine, now, that the strength they once had around my neck, powered by the impotent rage of an intelligent man self-trapped in an unintelligent life, was enough to make me leave this place forever.

I mightn't have left, in spite of the strangling and all the rest of it, if it hadn't been for The Kiss. I hadn't, after all, anywhere to go. I learned my emotional ABC's at my father's knee: A is for Absolute Aloneness, B is for Books are the Answer, ...M is for Mortal Pain if you dare love... It was not an alphabet to inspire a sixteen-year-old with confidence to take on the world.

But then there was The Kiss. I don't quite know how matters got to that stage, since I had existed in a state of the most extreme trepidation with regard to the opposite sex since the age of thirteen. But I had to date boys—if I hadn't, there would have been something else Wrong With Me. Since I'd already mispronounced the word "equator" (the accent belongs on the middle syllable—did you know that?), come in only second in the state in the spelling contest, and gone to church once with a spot on my shoe, there were quite enough things Wrong With Me already. I didn't need my mother wringing her hands that I'd never marry

and my father screaming or worse about what was Wrong With Me that I couldn't land a man. In fact, I didn't need anything at all added to my catalogue of sins. So when Bob asked me out, I went.

He was, as I know only in retrospect, not a bit less terrified than I. Since both of us seemingly had to complete these required courses (The Opposite Sex 101, Going Steady, Prom 1, and Prom 11), it just seemed easier once we got started to complete them all together. Along the way we kept two sets of parents busy making noises about our growing up—thus fulfilling our objective— and became pretty good friends too. I don't think there was ever more to it than that, until The Kiss.

Whether we decided that we would kiss because we thought that was another required social course or because hormones will out no matter what the emotional damage, I still don't know. But I remember quite clearly knowing that we would Do It (this was 1967—it was a bigger deal then), and wondering when it would happen. The air became charged with the intensity of our anticipation of the great event.

We finally kissed the night of the Junior Prom. We were standing outside the building in some trees, with cars honking and people laughing all around us, but we might as well have been on the moon. We were as alone as it is ever possible to be.

My memory is of a great, great stillness. The cars quit moving, the people quit talking—for all I know, the world quit—as I waited for that kiss. I don't know how I knew that he would kiss me then, but I did know. A presence came floating through that stillness—to both of us, I like to think—and moved us as automatons toward each other. It was absolute suspension of will, pure sense experience. Then, of course, since we

might as well have been three years old for all the sexual experience we had, we did it all wrong. The actual kissing was sandpapery and uncoordinated, with all the wrong parts in all the wrong places. But it didn't matter, for it wasn't the kiss that had held the magic. It was that great moment of stillness in which we both saw—I, at least, for the first time—the real force and impact that happen when two humans decide to join.

Several letters got added to my emotional alphabet in that moment; letters, like T for Together, that I hadn't had before. And so, of course, I drew the only logical conclusion (for I had had a very logical childhood): I fell in love.

The world changed then, for both of us. Having seen that there were possibilities in the world of which we had been entirely unaware, we thought there might be even more. Too young to sense the dangers of such a course, we simply put aside all we had been taught and determined that the right attitude was to be hopeful, optimistic, and adventurous. At eighteen, with this as a goal, we left home together, to see the world until Bob's savings ran out. Almost anything would have seemed new to us, growing up in our town of 1200. We made a list. First, we went to see Nature. Parks, forests, rivers, oceans, mountains, fields... We saw it all. I particularly remember the day we decided to explore some farmer's wheat field in Kansas.

We had determined that we would start at one side and walk straight through to the other, a distance of about a third of a mile, an uninterrupted sea of wheat. To this day I cannot say how it happened that we became separated and I lost my sense of direction. Suddenly I was alone—a thing I had planned on never, ever being again. It was ominous to be lost in something taller than I was. From the edges, the

soft and silent waving of the tall grasses had looked like invitation; I thought it would be downy feathers brushing and caressing me as I walked. Once inside and alone, though, the caresses turned to whips as the tall grass scratched my face and bit my ankles. The seeming fragility of an individual stalk of wheat was turned to the severe mien of a row of soldiers standing guard and surrounding me. There were too many soldiers, all six and seven feet tall, and all faceless. I could not get my bearings, for the meadow had swallowed me up. I began to be really, physically afraid that the grasses would eat me and make me one of themselves, remove the foreigner from their midst. I would never emerge. In those moments of panic, I began to wonder if Bob would look for me at all, or if he'd just go off and explore with someone else. It was certain to me that others of my gender would make more stimulating partners in exploration than I.

Naturally, I escaped. Of course I did; as my father would say, "People don't really believe that wheat fields will swallow them up unless there's something Wrong With Them". Bob was there, waiting. I was trembling, and I craved his comfort. He said, "That was silly of you, going off the wrong way like that and getting lost. What's wrong with you?"

It began to end then, of course. I wasn't tough then; the wounds on my spirit were still open, running sores, and he'd just poured salt into the biggest one. I can remember thinking, "Well, I've had three months of happiness, and perhaps that's all anyone ever gets if they have as many things Wrong With Them as I do." But I had determined to be optimistic, and optimistic I would be. So I turned the emotion off and, resolutely, was Happy. In that way we stuck together for a little while longer, as much for lack of knowing what else to

do as anything else. But the relationship now was like an old car patched together with duct tape and wire it never ran smoothly after that day. We both knew it, I think, but it was never spoken.

Bob decided next that we should see the seamy side of life, so we caught a Greyhound into Chicago and paid a visit to a West Side ghetto. Looking back on that time, I marvel at my own passivity. The world had become once again the sort of place it had been in growing up a place where any joy I might find in love had to be tempered with the knowledge that it couldn't last because of all my failings, a place where I waited for the next blow. And I knew that blow would come from Bob. Yet, even knowing it, I followed him absolutely without question. I guess I knew, even then, how few choices there are.

The blow—and the end—came the day we saw the wino. Growing up as I had, I hadn't known of street people. All our pains had been decorously hidden in the home. Yet here, lying in a filthy, wet corner of a shell of burned up building, was a man. Obviously, he lived there; two garbage bags of his possessions were heaped beside him. I stopped to stare. He was covered with a crust of various soils, and the effect was not unlike that of mold on food that has been allowed to dry and harden. His smell reminded me of being in a closed room full of overripe cantaloupe on a hot summer's day. And he Jay absolutely still, just staring at us. One was not even aware, at first, that he was alive. Yet as I stared on, completely oblivious of my rudeness, it became quite clear to me that he was thoroughly alive. What struck me were his eyes. They were a bright, feverish blue—that color only seen on clear October days when the lake and the sky match exactly. The sun shone on him, and its

reflection made his eyes gleam like star sapphires, a demented glint. One imagines such a glitter of madness in the eyes of demons or of those whom they possess. Intuitively, as a child does, I knew it to be the look of someone who had seen hell. I also knew I'd seen it before. I turned to Bob.

"Did you see the look in his eyes?" I asked.

"Yeah, he looked kinda crazy to me."

"Looked to me," I said, "like he's seen something so awful it drove him right over the edge." I paused, struggling to capture a new idea. "I think his eyes look just like my father's eyes when he hurts me—like there's just so much pain he's turned wild with it and can't control himself."

"You're so unreal! How could you imagine that that wino is anything like your father?! I've met your father—he's a normal human being!" Bob was impatient.

I was getting angry. "What does 'normal' mean? Does it mean you can't be crazed with pain? I am sometimes!" I could feel the dreaded tears gathering, the familiar feeling in my stomach that meant I was about to be the victim of a never-to-be-understood attack.

"You're 18 years old and nothing has ever happened to you—what makes you think you're an expert on pain?" Bob shouted.

"I didn't say I was an expert—I just said it makes me crazy sometimes and I want to know what it's about!"

"What do you care what it's about? Just forget it and let's go do something else."

"I care because it's part of me—part you obviously aren't able to understand," I said. I took a deep breath and fought for a few more precious moments of control. "My life has been full of pain and so"—pointing at the wino—"has his and so has my

Dad's and I want to understand where it comes from and I want to stop hurting!" Those were all the rational words I had left; I just sat down on the ground and sobbed.

Bob just looked at me for a long moment. "Something's wrong with you that you want to spend all this time and energy thinking about pain and stuff that hurts," he finally said. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do about your pain, but I do know I want to get out of here and find a place to sleep tonight."

A great hollowness came over me then; a sense that something in the very center of me had died. The world, bright and large an hour ago with the possibility of new learning, had shrunk to a tiny gray place in which there were no options and the only thing I could do was defend against further attacks. Bob was a stranger to me now—just one more in the long list of people who thought something was wrong with me. I wanted only to be away from him as far away as I could get, and as quickly as I could get there, to stop the hurting.

"I'll go now," I said. "You may go and have your great adventure—I am obviously unworthy of it. I need someone who can care, and you certainly don't."

He argued a little, but it was a formality—he really didn't want to have to deal with my irrational, silly fixation on what was wrong. He didn't, after all, love me—I had just expected too much. But then, hadn't I always?

We took the el back to downtown Chicago, with few words. I have never, before or since, been more alone. We found a hotel, got separate rooms, said goodbye. He gave me twenty dollars to get home on. We didn't even shake hands. I never saw him again.

It was a long and mostly sleepless night. I knew what I was going to have to do in the morning, and it was

the most dreadful thing imaginable. But having no alternatives at all is a great motivator, so in the morning I called my father from a public phone booth to ask him to come and get me. It was hot in the booth and the phone rang and rang. My mother would be at work, and my father either is deaf or pretends to be. It was getting hotter and hotter in that phone booth. My clothes were soaked with sweat, and I knew the first thing my father would say when he saw me was what a mess I looked. I tried to prop the phone booth door open, but it swung shut with a clack. I felt locked in a glass coffin, just big enough to hold me, and I thought I might scream, or explode. A trickle of sweat went in my eye and I could not see to dial. I hit the wrong numbers and got a loud "buzz-buzz-buzz", like a very large and very disapproving bee. I began to have visions of fainting, of being found by the police cooked and unconscious in this dreadful glass box. I got the door open and dialed again. The door started to drift closed and I kicked it viciously, hurting my foot. It slammed closed. I was in a trap with nowhere to go and no one would answer the phone. I began to panic. The glass walls were fogged with humidity and my perspiration, and I couldn't see out. I wanted out of this trap, but I dared not leave. I had seventeen dollars and no one to love me, so I had to stay in the phone booth. At last, another kick forced the door to open its jaws—and let in a blast of truck exhaust. Finally, my father answered the phone.

He came to get me, of course. He may have been all sorts of crazy, but he was my father. I went back home and tried not to think. My parents never spoke of my going away with Bob—and I knew better than to bring it up. I kept busy trying to act normal, stayed out of my father's way, went to college, married Michael...

I am brought back to the present by the sound of my father's book closing. I have to think for a moment to remember why I am here. Oh, yes—the divorce. I have to tell them I'm getting a divorce. My father looks at me.

"I had to finish my chapter," he says. "Your mother said you had something to tell us. Is something Wrong With You?"

I open my mouth to start telling him, and then I see his eyes. They are a deep, deep blue, and full of absolute terror. They are the eyes of that wino of twenty-five years ago, eyes that have looked into hell. With great acuity of vision, my father's eyes have looked into me and seen that I am about to hurt myself and him. They are the eyes of a parent who knows exactly how horrible evil can be, and exactly how powerless he is to protect his child from it. They are eyes of impotent rage and infinite pain.

They are the eyes of someone who loves me so much it has almost driven him mad. And they have a very familiar look right now—they are Michael's eyes a few days ago when I told him I wanted a divorce. I told him that no one who loved me could make me hurt so much, and that I just wanted to be alone in the world so that no one would have a chance to hurt me again.

I look across the room at my father, and put on my biggest smile.

"No, Dad, nothing is wrong with me—nothing at all. What I had to tell you was that in all of my forty-three years I don't think I ever told you I loved you—and it suddenly became very important to me to tell you that. And I hope you love me too."

My mother interjects "You drove all the way here and had your father worried to death just to say that???", but I ignore her. I am watching my father. Slowly, the terror is fading from his old, worried eyes.

"Of course we love you, child—you're our daughter, aren't you? What's wrong with you that you wouldn't think we'd love our own daughter? Of course," he continues, his voice getting growly and gruff, "you certainly haven't always shown that you love us, with some of your antics. I hope you treat that husband of yours better than you've treated us."

I smile. "I hope so, too, Dad. Now can I use the phone in the other room to call Michael? I have some good news for him."

Considering the conversation finished—and, in every important way, it is—my father opens his book to the place he's been marking with his finger. As I leave the room, I hear him say to my mother, "There's something wrong with that child—imagine driving 500 miles to say you love someone."

PoW

untitled acrylic 30x24

Festus L. Johnson, Jr.

(opposite)



Untitled

Amber D. Lucas

I've tried so hard Daddy,
to remember you the way I should;
Strong and well.

But dammit Daddy, I keep seeing you
sickly, weak, so frail and thin.

I know you were a brave man,
but I keep seeing your fearful face
lying in that degrading hospital bed.

A child of eleven I was.

I wanted so badly to take it all away,
to make the pain diminish when
I kissed your forehead, just as you've
done for my pain countless times.

But I couldn't Daddy,
I didn't have the magic you had.

So, I helplessly watched you suffer,
I suffered too.

Everything's a blur now Daddy,
as I struggle to remember you for
the strong man I know you once were.

Untitled

Amber D. Lucas

Hearing her name, like thick fingernails
slowly dancing down a blackboard.

Tearing at my heart like a freshly
sharpened blade.

Carving out my stomach,
leaving it hollow and empty.

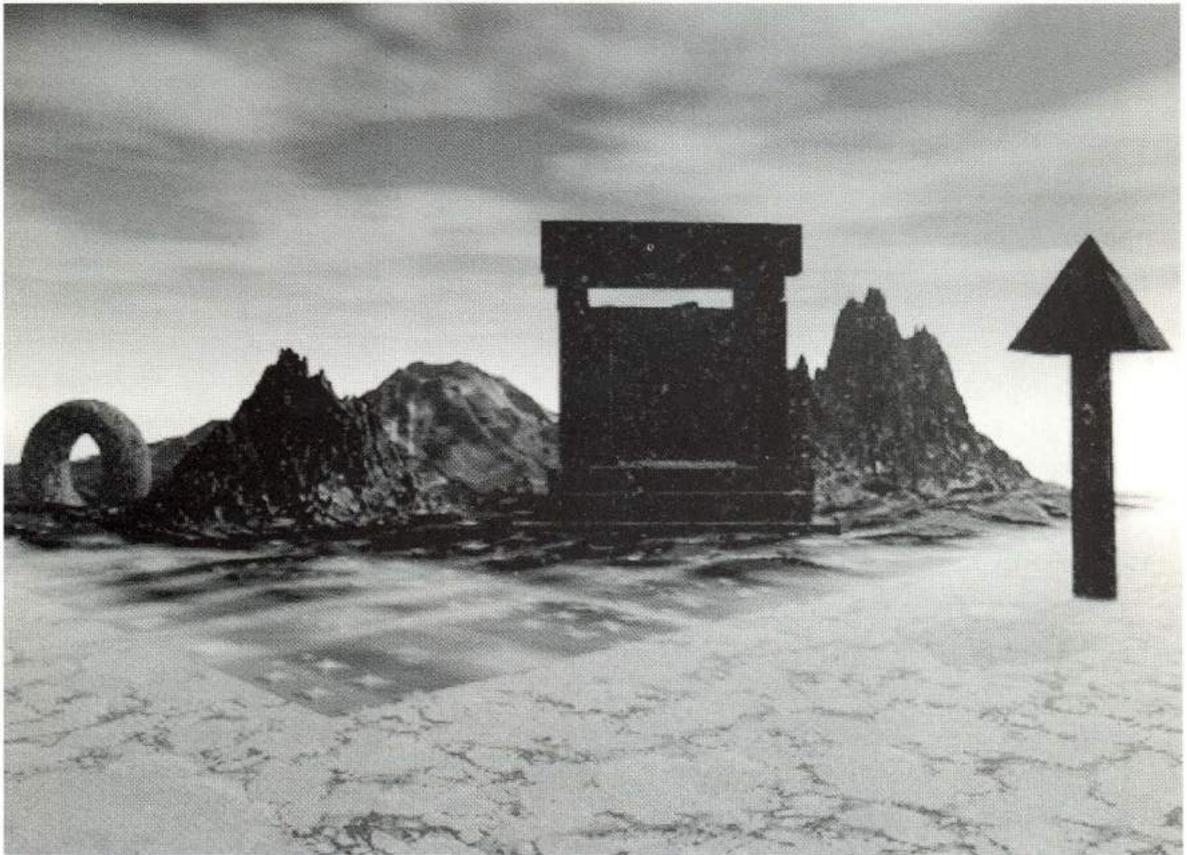
A thick rock caught,
trapped in my throat.

Her name spoken,
setting hot, fiery flames upon the
flesh of my face.

Needles and pins pricking and stabbing
my spine.

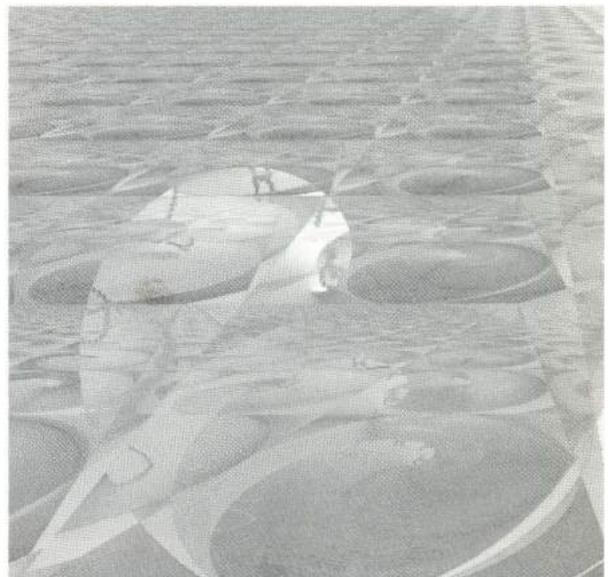
All this pain.

All in a name.



Athena's Temple 2050 computer graphics 10½x11

Jaime Sandoval



Insomnia computer graphics 10½x11



Trip Down the Indus oil 21x14½
Arusha Noorani

The Dreamer

William B. McGhee IV

September 8

Four days ago I received a journal under strange circumstances. Usually I don't think much about such things because after being on the force for fifteen years, I've learned to block all this crap out. But every once in a while, something gets through. This was one of those times.

It was an easy open and shut case. We found everything we needed to figure it all out. The whole thing seemed a simple suicide. The gun was in his hands. There was powder all over them. His head was on the wall. The neighbors didn't even know what he looked like because he seldom left his room since he moved there. Then, when I got home that night, there was a book at my door. No note. Nothing. Just some fucking book. When I went inside I took off my coat and hat, poured myself a drink, and then began to read the journal. It changed everything.

Dream Journal:

July 28

I don't normally keep any kind of journal, but with what is happening in my dreams I need some way to make sense of it all. I can't tell my friends, or anyone else. I am not going to write down every dream. Only the ones that I think will help my understanding or the ones that are different from all the others. Things in my life are falling apart and I need to find a way to stop it all. Maybe the dreams I keep having are the key. My name is Tyler Parker and inside these pages is what is happening in my dreams.

The dreams keep getting more

real every night. Last night I know that I died. Waking up was the greatest relief I have ever had. This time I know it was the same person who shot me. I just see that image of a man in darkness. I didn't wake up at the sound of the shot. I died. I saw the gun fire. I felt the pain. I died. All the life left my body. Everything began to become clouded. First the corners of my vision faded like an old photo. Next, all sound began to get heavy and sink into the background. The last thing that happened was that everything went black. Beyond that, there was nothing.

When I woke up, it wasn't the normal sweat-covered jolt. It was more like I just opened my eyes and was awake. I felt as if I never actually slept. After seven hours of lying and dreaming my body still hurt. My mind was in shock because I was still alive. I miss the hot steamy sex fantasies of old. Back then I used to love to dream, now I fear going to sleep. I haven't had a solid night's rest in weeks.

The man in my dreams is covered in darkness. He stands about ten feet away and slowly raises his gun towards me. I try to move, but my body is frozen. I try to talk, to scream, but nothing comes out of my mouth. My mind becomes transfixed with his light blue eyes right before he shoots me. I can feel them on my body as he looks into my soul. And he always shoots me, but never in the same spot. Most of the time I am shot in my chest, but as of late he has been shooting me in my head. I still die the same way, I just feel the pain in a different part of my body. Every time I close my eyes I'm afraid that he might come to me. I don't want to sleep anymore.

August 4

I woke up in the middle of the night and could not go back to sleep. He is still there. Every night he gets

closer to me before he shoots. I almost screamed this time. The bullet took the air out of my lungs before I could cry. I think next time I can do it. His light blue eyes fill the room with a glow. Everything is illuminated by his eyes except for his face. That is still covered in shadows that have no origin. I don't know how he does it, but he never makes a sound. The only thing I hear before the shot is my own heart beat. It beats so loud that I hear an echo from the pounding. There was a certain smell about him but I just can't be sure.

August 10

I could almost touch him tonight. He was little more than an arm's reach away. The light from his eyes is blinding. His eyes are now the only light in the room while the rest of the room is covered in the shadows from nowhere. I was able to speak finally. I asked him who he was. He did not say a word. He just put the gun in my face and slowly pulled the trigger.

I can almost move my arms in the dream now. Nothing seems to be in my way from touching him. I think next time I might be able to stop him. The biggest change in this dream from the others was the mirror on the wall, it has never been there before. The reflection in it was neither mine nor his. I was someone else. I was inside of someone else's body. Nothing makes sense anymore. I just want to make sense of this or stop it. I don't care which one.

August 26

Tonight I was some black lady. He shot me in the leg first. Then he walked up to me and shot me in the head. I tried to run, but he was too fast. I began to turn around and then he fired. I know it's the same man again because of those damn eyes and the smell of the cheap aftershave. He came so close to me. I can feel him even if I don't touch him. If I wasn't on the ground in pain, I

might somehow have been able to stop him.

August 27

It's never been this strange. I haven't had two noteworthy dreams in a row before. Don't get me wrong, all the dreams are intense. However, this is the first time that they have altered so much in such a short time span. This time I fought with him. I did whatever I could to stop him. I kicked him. I punched him. I bit him. When I was done, he stabbed me in the throat. Then, as I bleed to death, he put the knife in my hand. After that I died. The last thing that I saw was his eyes as I heard my heart slowly stop pounding. By the way, I was a short, fat, bald guy. Same smell, cheap aftershave.

September 4

Tonight's dream was really messed up. I was in the body of my best friend, Joe. I was inside his body when I was killed. The killer walked in the room and just looked at me. There wasn't a mirror this time; I just knew that I was Joe. The killer walked up to me and put the gun to my head. He pulled the trigger. I died. Then I woke up screaming out Joe's name.

I can't take it anymore. I bought a gun this morning from this guy down the street. I can't do anything anymore. This is the only time I've left my house in weeks. This paranoia has me scared of everything. I can't sleep. I can't eat. Hell, I can't even close my eyes without being terrified of how I'll be killed. If I can't sleep tonight then I am just going to end it all. It will be the best thing for everyone. My friends haven't heard from me since I started dying, six weeks ago. My mania is the last thing that Joe needs with the anniversary of his wife's death coming up soon. I think it's best to save everyone more pain and end it all. I can't get the smell of that damn aftershave to go away. All I think about is death.

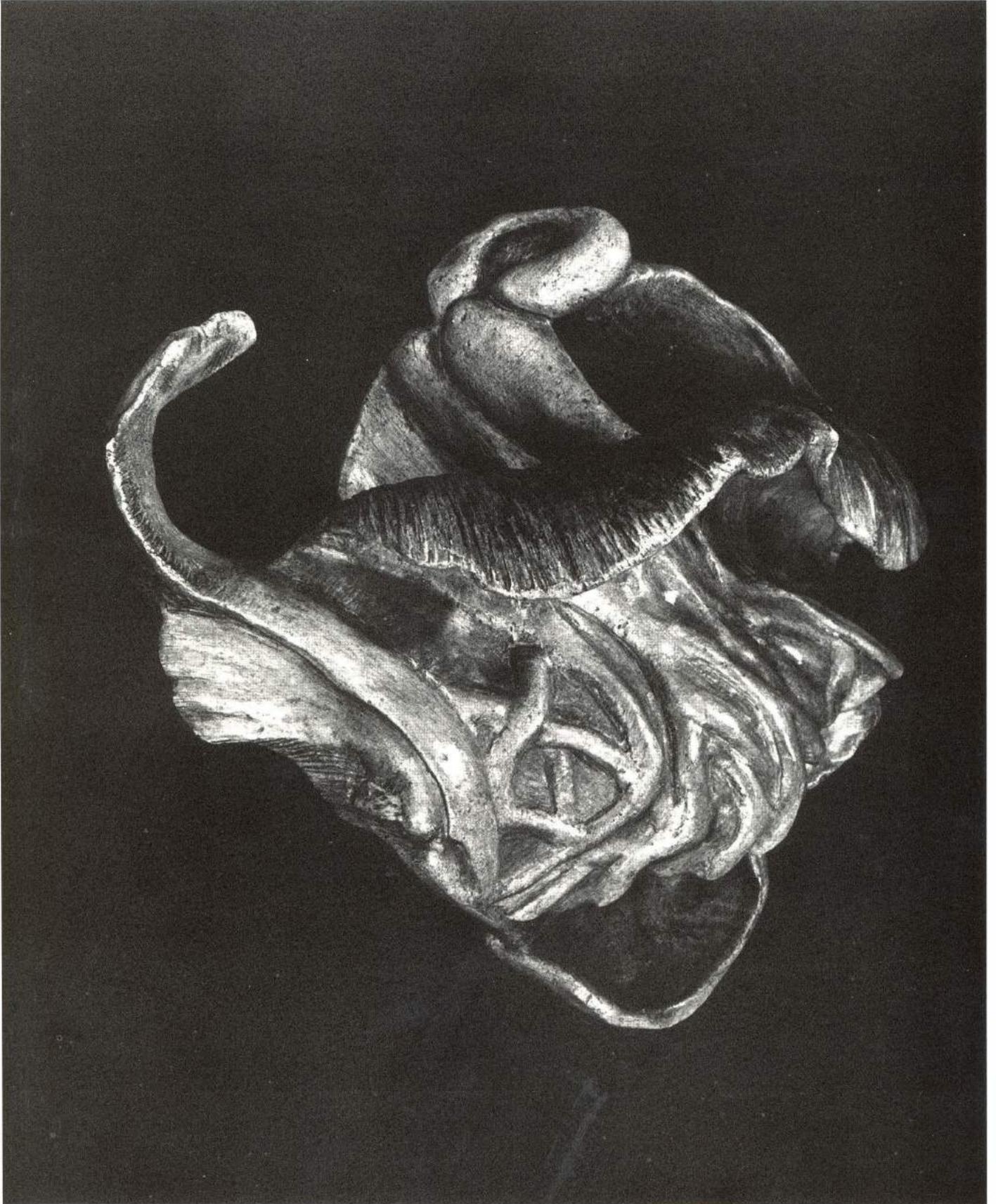
In the dream last night, the killer was wearing a long tan coat with a matching hat. The bright blue eyes in his face lit up the room. I could see almost everything. I still couldn't see his face. However, if I don't kill myself tomorrow night I might just go looking for this guy and kill him. All I need to do is find the eyes. I think I'll sleep with the gun so I won't have to get out of my warm bed if I am destined to die. I feel like I am already dead. There is nothing left in the world that seems more important than the blue eyes of death. If

anyone ever reads this, know that I loved life and I only wanted to end my pain.

September 8

That was the entire journal. Everything in the case was fine until that fucking book came to me. Now I am filled with questions. I want to know who this Tyler Parker is. I also want to know how this book got placed at my door. I want to know how he knows about Joe's death. And most of all I want to know how he knows that I have blue eyes.

PoV



The Scourge of Years

Steven Lorch

Time,
Like melting icicles,
Seeps into secret crevices.
The endless morrow
Waters our hopes;
Our tears, we wear but for a moment.
Wisdom is sometimes known
As a dream is known:
Its beginning and ending
Are as days in the darkness,
Leading the traveler
He knows not where,
Leaving him, at the last,
A beggar in his rags,
And hiding his tracks forever.

Darwins's Orphan III fired clay and watercolor

Denise Beck
(opposite)

Poetic Justice

Steven Lorch

This Poem stands before me on this, the first day
of the rest of its life, having been found guilty
by an impartial jury of noteworthy critics, and is
convicted of the following:

- One (1) count of comma splicing.
- One (1) count of premeditated ambition.
- Two (2) counts of armed snobbery.
- Murdering the English language.
- Contributing to the delinquency of a poet.
- Writing while under the influence of great minds.
- Practicing eloquence without poetic license.

And this poem is in violation of moral principles.

Also, this poem has been found by a court-appointed
psychiatrist to lack insight of any kind.
This poem does not care if you hold it in contempt.
This poem feels no remorse.

Does this poem have anything to say?
Not a damn thing.

Therefore, this poem is to be confined for not less
than forever between the covers of a book.

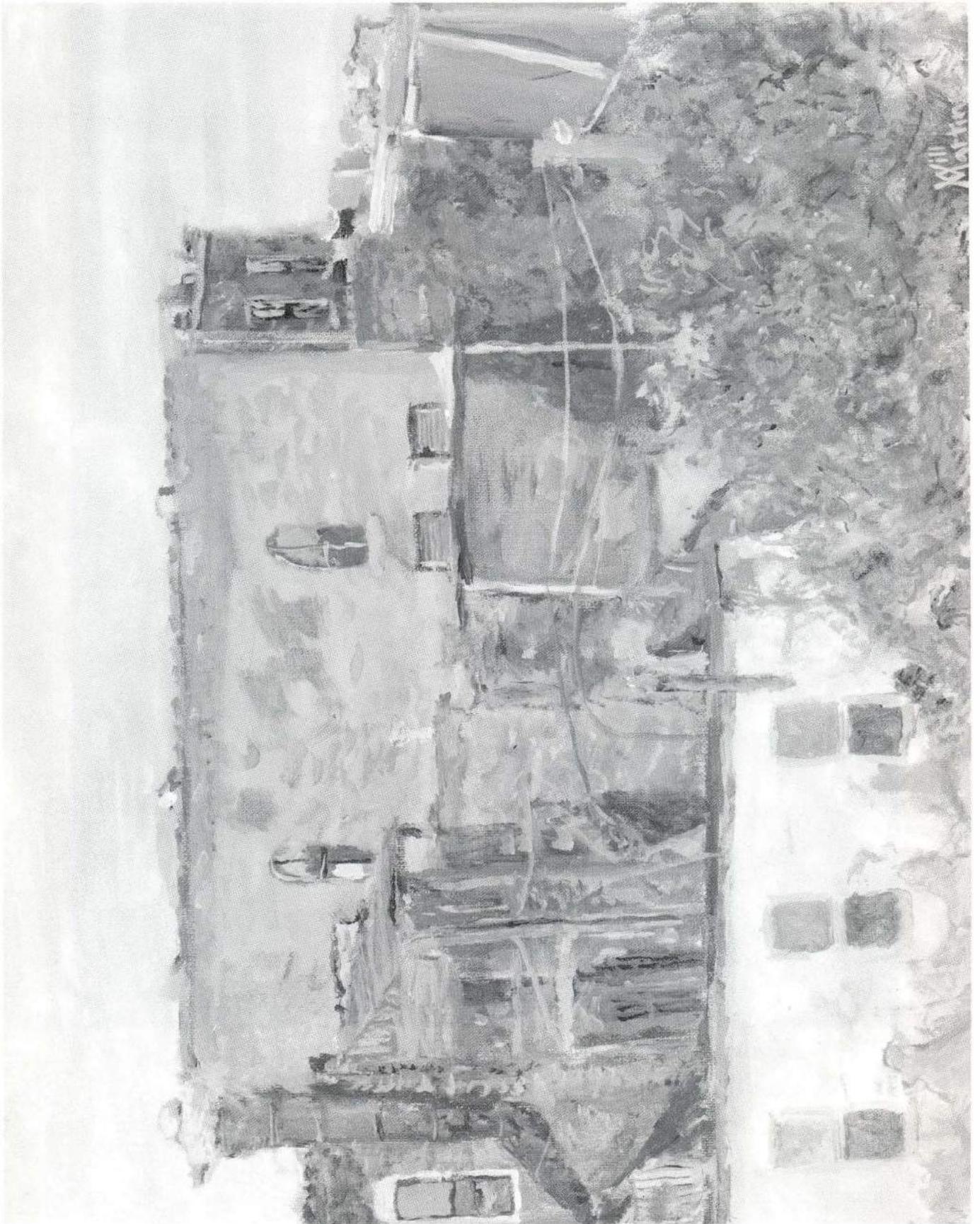
However, since it has no previous record,
And as our libraries are already overcrowded,
By the power vested in me by this writing instrument,
I hereby sentence this poem to
"Wander ceaselessly the corridors of time,"
Thereby serving as an example to others who would live
By the pen.

May God have mercy on our souls.

Overlook across Fox River (East Dundee) acrylic 14x18

William D. Martinez

(opposite)





That for which I Should Have Done, I Did Not Do ceramic
Robert Ferrera

Tamponade Tango

Alexander Garibashvili

And she's peeling her nakedness
Off of an orange
And right into a full color of autumn death
Spring spins in circles
Of a dog
Chasing its tale
In a dark red Mardi Gras dress
Taste of tanned taunted tangy tangerine skin
Stapled to another annual summer
That crumbles between the fingers of a dry caterpillar's wing.
While the infamous undead cast four legged shadows
On the circling skies
And she's peeling of her shamelessness
Into a daring verse
That just complicates things

Marie Lowenthal

untitled colored pencil 19x25



My Papa

Christina Khadivar

I went to my father's house last week, and as soon as I walked in I braced myself for the eminent chill. Papa always keeps his bid, marble, almost sterile house freezing. I took off my shoes at the door, like I always do, and walked through the kitchen, sliding, across the slippery floor in my sock-covered feet, trying to move fast and quietly to get to my dad's room. His is usually the warmest and has the nicest, mushiest bed, and a big TV with cable. I knew he wouldn't be in there; he's not one for watching, television. I hit the dining room and had to slow my pace, as the marble floor there was even more slick. I slid to the hallway and was about to make my way to Papa's bedroom. As I thought about jumping into the down comforter and grabbing the remote, I was stopped in my tracks by my father's voice.

"Princess? You're here?"

"Yes, Papa. I'm going to your room for a while." I replied.

"OK, Pretty."

He was in his library. I turned around and decided that I would go see what he was doing. I walked quietly with slow, deliberate steps to the front room, into the dark, over a Persian rug, past the couches and to the opposite wall that led to the room Papa was in. I stopped just short of entering and stepped to the side so that I could see my father but was still partly hiding behind the wall.

He was sitting in his big chair with his feet on the ottoman. A white china cup of tea sat on the table next to him. We never really go into the library, except when we are told we have to

"talk," which usually means my sister or I have done something wrong and must sit together, silently enduring a lecture where we are choked with his pearls of wisdom. Even then we sit on the couch or the older blue swivel chair. I don't think that either of us has ever sat in his chair. It looked comfortable, though, on closer inspection. It was wide, with a broad back and it looked thick. The cushions seemed to be deep enough to hold my father, but as though they might swallow someone smaller, like me, alive.

He was reading a book written in Persian and he had his bearskin blanket draped over his lap, covering his legs and spilling onto the floor. I love that bearskin blanket. It has kept me warm in this freezing house many a night and I made Papa promise I could have it one day, though I could never imagine it belonging to anyone but him. I wanted to know what he was reading about—history, fiction perhaps, maybe some kind of novel. He didn't see me staring, at him. I was tempted to go in, to make my presence known, but I was held there, just looking at him as though I never knew him and was evaluating a stranger.

Papa and I don't always get along. We seem to disagree about many subjects how I spend my time, how I spend my money, political issues . . . the list goes on and on. We have very different views, but I always respected him.

There he sat, this man that used to tell us stories when we were little. His stories were beyond compare. My sister Jenny and I used to lie next to him, one of us on either side of him while he began.

"Do You want to hear a scary story? Or do you want to hear a funny story?"

It always began this way. This is when the giggling started.

"Maybe you want to hear a sad story? No? Maybe you want to hear a happy story."

We would pick our story by yelling out in our little girl voices the type we were in the mood for that night.

"Are you sure you want a happy story?" he would tease us. We screamed dying with anticipation for the adventure to begin. Tales would then be woven, night after night, about flying horses, princesses named Christina and Jenny, or talking animals that had beautiful, Persian names, and his tales would teach us a lesson, and were always a little bit bizarre and foreign, just like Papa. His adventures took us away from our real lives, where he and my mom were separated and waiting for the divorce to finalize. He told stories with rhythm, and Jenny, only three, would drift off to sleep listening to his deep, melodic voice. But I was five and I struggled to stay awake for the endings.

Now in his library he sits and reads, and the beautiful, faraway lands and people and animals he reads about are stories that unfold silently in the privacy of his own mind. I suddenly felt sad and jealous that those stories weren't mine anymore. I felt a lump in my throat.

He turned the page of his book and I hid even further around the corner, so that only my eyes and the finders of one hand were beyond the edge of the wall. I looked at his hands, his arms and shoulders. My father is a solid man. He is the strongest person I know. Even in his late fifties he runs ten miles every other day and I've seen him sickly only once. He never takes medicine and can bear the cold in the dead of winter without a coat. I adore him.

I Remember being six years old and asking him if he would ever die. He

promised me that he wouldn't, and I believe him.

I looked at his face . . . thick eyebrows over deep, dark eyes. Eyes that have seen life, love, hate, disappointment, pride and death. Eyes that have seen many different countries, many different people. Eyes that have shown me love and anger, and eyes that have seen my emotions reflecting back into them. They are now eyes that require the help of reading glasses. I saw his nose, his mouth and chin. I saw his skin, a shade darker than mine, needing to be shaved. His hair, thick, it used to be jet black but is graying now. I thought about what he must have looked like when my mother met him.

He turned the page of his book again. I wanted to know what he was reading about. I wanted to know if it was about the mountains or the villages of his homeland. I wondered if he was thinking back to when he lived in Persia and used to ride horses and listen to the Gypsies play music.

I thought about when we were young and my father owned horses. There was one that no one would ride because it bucked. He held it by the reins, jumped on its bare back, grabbed its mane and yelled, "Hayaahh!" This animal and my father took off as everyone watched in awe. He rode it into a field, and it galloped so fast up a hill that it looked as though it would take off in flight, but instead they went down the other side and disappeared from our sight.

Papa took a careful sip of his tea. He only drinks Chinese herbal teas that need to be brewed a special way. He is very adamant about nature's powers to calm and heal the spirit and body. He loves to be surrounded by nature and takes long walks and runs through the forest preserve. Now we are very busy with our lives and don't

have time to join him, but when we were younger he used to take us along.

I remember when I was seven years old. Papa took Jenny and me for a long walk in the forest preserve. We cut through the trees along the path and walked down a hill until we stopped at a stream.

"Girls, you see this river? There is a troll that lives on the other side, under that rock, can you see?"

We strained to find the creature. We listened to Papa tell us that he and the troll were enemies.

"The troll knows that I am a king, and he is very jealous, so one day he got a whole army together on the other side of this river. They all lined up and started shooting rocks at me, but I made a slingshot from sticks and I hit all the trolls. One by one they fell into the river. Now, the troll is sleeping so I can take you over there, but you must shut your eyes because the way to the other side is by flying and if you open your eyes we will fall."

With that, he scooped us up, one in each arm, and we shut our eyes tightly and buried our faces into his shoulders and wrapped our little arms around his neck. He leaped from one side of the stream to the other by way of rocks and shallow water between the two banks. Once on the other side, we hid in the trees and waited silently, motionless for any sign of the troll or his soldiers. My father suddenly spotted one coming from behind us. We were glad that he was looking in that direction because we wouldn't have seen it! Papa grabbed branches of willow trees and gave us each one, explaining with great urgency that they were our horses, and the stick end was the head and the flowing willowy end was the tail. So we mounted our stick horses and grabbed our stick swords and galloped away, trying to keep up with Papa. He was our general, and we were his brave soldiers.

Other children saw us from across a clearing, and became very interested in our game. Soon Papa had a huge army of children on willow branch horses looking for trolls in the trees. When the game was over, Papa sat on a picnic bench and all the children came and sat around him. Jenny and I got seats in his lap. We were so proud to be the lucky ones.

I can remember staring, at him with adoration so many times when I was a little girl. Once when I was eight years old he took us to his company late at night. He told us that we had to stay in his office while he went into the warehouse to check on something. Naturally we started to protest and wanted to know why we couldn't go with him instead of sitting, in his boring office.

He said, "You can't go in there because there is a dragon that lives in the warehouse and he comes out at night. I have seen him."

I reminded him that I was eight, and that I was a little too old to be believing in dragons. He accepted that challenge, and took us to the warehouse door. We cracked the door a little and peered into the darkness. Papa whispered that we had to be careful. He pointed to the right and sure enough, two red eyes peered right back at us. They were two lights signaling that the alarm system was on, but to us, they were the evil eyes of a dragon. That was enough for me. I ran, screaming, back to his office, with Jenny right behind me. We hid under his desk until he returned. When we asked him why the dragon didn't get him, he laughed as though we should have known the answer.

"Ha! Because, he knows Papa will kick his butt!"

We did know the answer all along. As I returned my focus to my father, the slayer of trolls and dragons,

sitting in his chair, I noticed that he looked tired. I couldn't figure out why but I felt sad. I missed his stories and the days that we spent playing together and I missed sitting in his lap. Yes, I've caused him pain, and yes, I've made his life stressful at times, and I felt bad about ever arguing with him or making him wait up when I went out, or doing other characteristically adolescent things that every parent hates. Looking at my dad, my father, my Papa, I am so proud to be his daughter, and I know he has given me so much. So much to remember, so much to think about, so much grief and so much pride in myself

and in my background. He is still invincible in my eyes, just as he was when I was little. I realized then that I missed my father, and that I was too busy trying to grow up to appreciate being his little girl. We would no longer search the forest for trolls, nor would we lie in our pajamas next to him.

I couldn't hold back anymore, and as one tear drop hit the floor and I swiped a second off my cheek, I passed through the doorway and hurried into my father's lap. He was surprised.

"Hey, baby, are you all right?"

"I am now," I replied.

POV

Trapped mixed media 14x10½

Tomasz Podejko

(opposite)

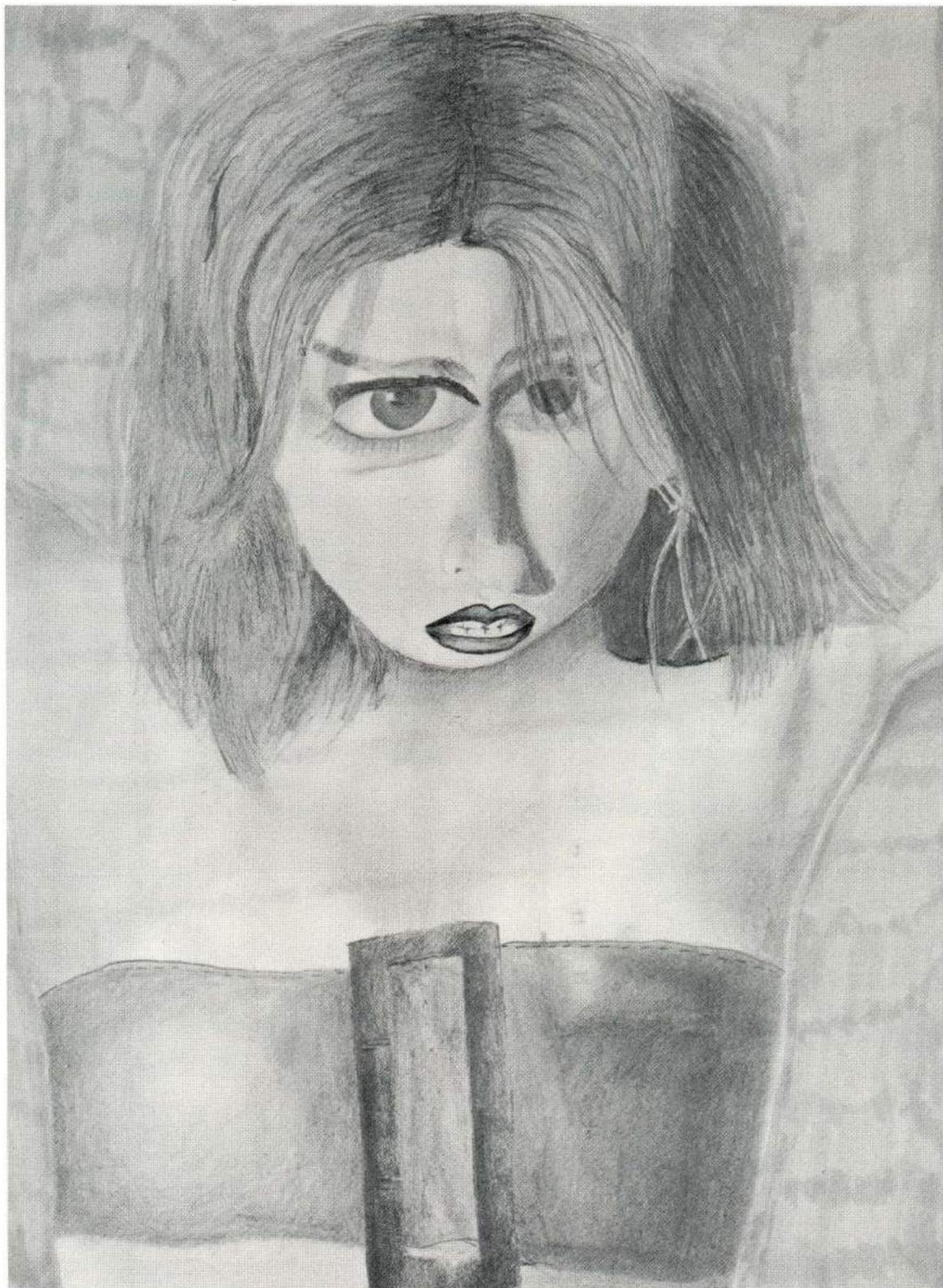


Tomasz Podejko



Obscured etching 11x12½

Tomasz Podejko



Twisted High pencil & marker 11x15

Ashes, Ashes

Barbara Howard

The ashes have been buried now
So white, the white of bone;
A talcum powder in my hands
to feel him on my palms.

So tall and strong the birch tree blows
some here, some on the lake;
a far off thunder joins the mood
no smiling in this place.

Three poems and a small book are shared
the giving brings the tears;
a voice, a smile, those grey-blue eyes
my father's spirit's here.

The lightning threat grows closer still
more ash beneath the tree?
The thought takes voice; some smiles fought
then laughter joins the grief.
He would have laughed if he were here
he was not one to mourn;
this husband, father, doctor, man,
a force quite like this storm.

The skies have opened as we race
back to our car so safe.
The trepidation that was felt
is gone replaced by peace.

I glance back as we pull away
the birch stands tall with grace;
the water lights up the lake
my father's in this place.

Unexpectedly Expecting

Barbara Howard

An unexpected reaction to the paint fumes
A box of tampons wait idly on the hallway table
Shaking with bewilderment as she followed the directions;
a piece of paper turned blue as a mother was born.

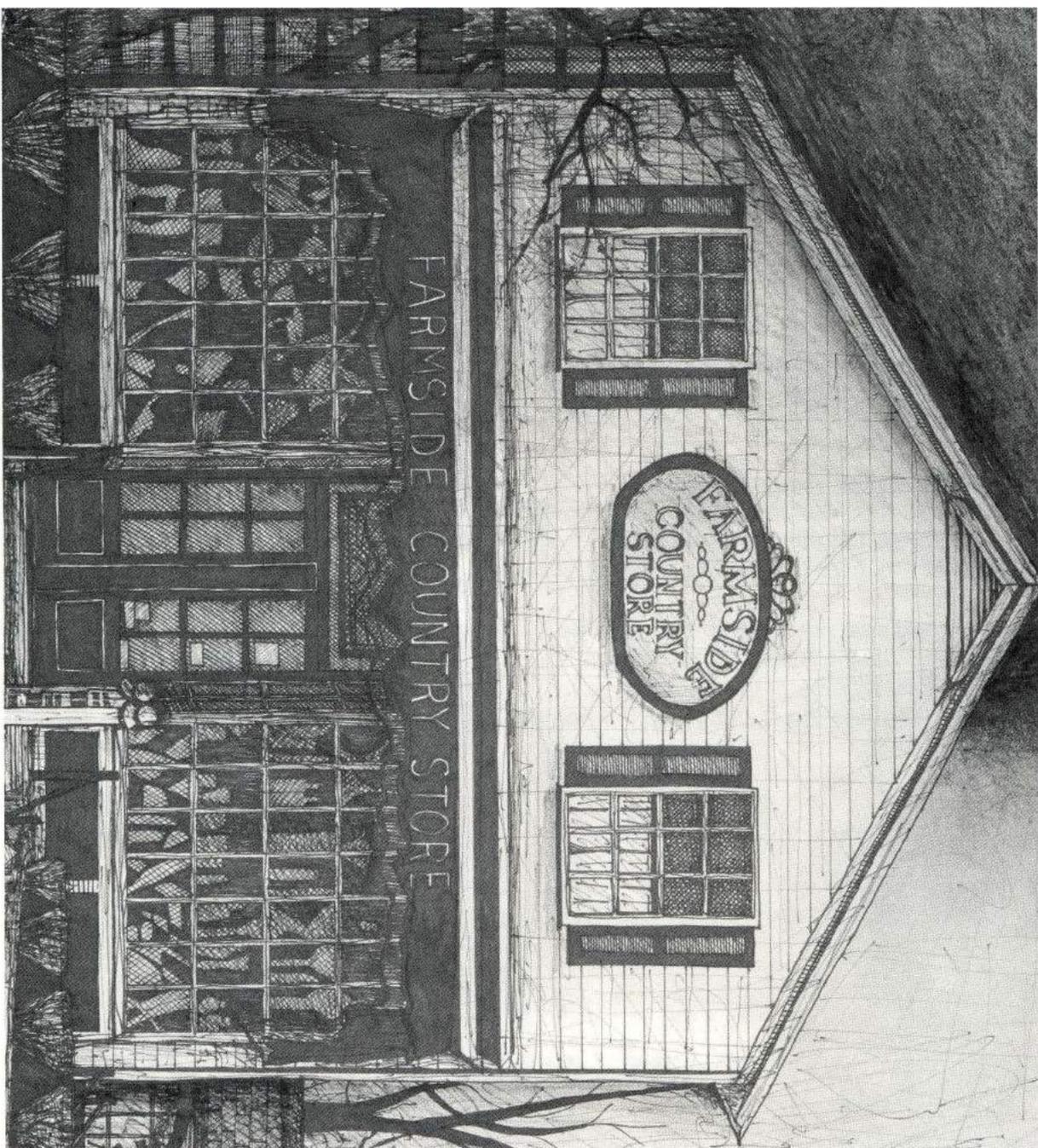
His reaction was expected but his flight was not.
The loss rose with the vomit in her mouth,
and the bathroom floor grew colder
as she heard the front door close.

Alone she shuddered and felt the fool
while she nailed the windows shut.
The daylight brought dancing shadows
and the silence smelled of stale crackers.

Paralyzed in the sky high house;
Searching for strength to rise from the wilted bed.
A big orange cat purrs a rhythm cross her belly.
Three hearts beat together to the beat of his song.

Misery and ecstasy battle the days away.
A wakeful wailing Sarah arrived in May.
Resuscitation came in the steady rhythm
of the loving and the nursing and the purring.

Carol Adams



untitled charcoal and ink 13x14

Homeless

Soni Sangha

Sitting alone,
cradling himself in the garbage filled, lonely alley
wearing a torn, gray hat
creased downward
over tangly, unwashed hair
wrinkly, dirt stripped face
hidden
arms folded
over layers of clothing
back against his few belongings
used to this life, he sits
sheltering himself
from the cold, December weather
too tired to walk
on old newspaper scraps
and freshly formed icicles
lies his wind blistered,
frost bitten body.

Flaca (skinny girl)

Kristie Reiprich

You, a tree
ebony
ever growing from
the bush that you were
when I was sown by your side

Our environment was nature's first bite,
planted into a badland of gadgets growing wild.
Walls of lockers locked us in,
teachers taunting us like tigers,
books if touched turned into fire,
hall monitor hunters huddled by the exits,
the wolf's howl, a shrill bell
shot into the air like a flame,
beginning this big game

Wanderers of all kinds
grew like dandelions in spring,
turned into hail and multiplied
hitting us from the sky.
So we sprouted skin,
layers upon layers of flesh
to protect us from the freeze,
as we grew cold ourselves

Big shot pine trees tried to prick us,
but their poison was not glorious.
You tricked them and they tripped.
From fallen branches we created
our own venom, magnificent

Vast and mighty
our branches broadened,
but only in our minds

We had fun, but we were fools
Flaca, my skinny friend
my ransack had to end
I was robbing only myself

Now we are trees
separate,
in the same forest,
your branches frail and wild,
I stand rerooted.

Dear Blues Man

Stacey Friend

a 15 minute drive
sitting shotgun
Camels riding your left thigh,
nothing but \$5 in your pocket,
Wild Turkey burning in your throat,
and something like a smile slashed across your lips.
What did you think when she opened the door,
brushed her lips on your cheek,
and grabbed your hand?
Were you thinking of the girl you lost
and missing her?
Or wishing you hadn't come?
When she took your photograph
did you think she was asking for too much,
a piece of you forever?
You sat, slouched on the couch,,
burgundy pick in hand
guitar across your lap
blues music flowing from
your fingertips and lips.
Stare at the shutter,
unblinking,
your face an empty slate,
just a blues man playing guitar.

The Police: "Don't Stand So Close to Me"

Audrey Schumacher

Soft Man
Hard brow
Wet pink torturing red mouth
Torturing me
Warmth below my waist
Wet from the movement of your jaw
Spittering beautiful
Angry
Words
Across space
And the crisp eyes
Blinking past
White supernova
Flashes of starlight
Coming from your mouth
Deep guttural utterance
The surface of my skin
Tingles
with every
Contorted flash

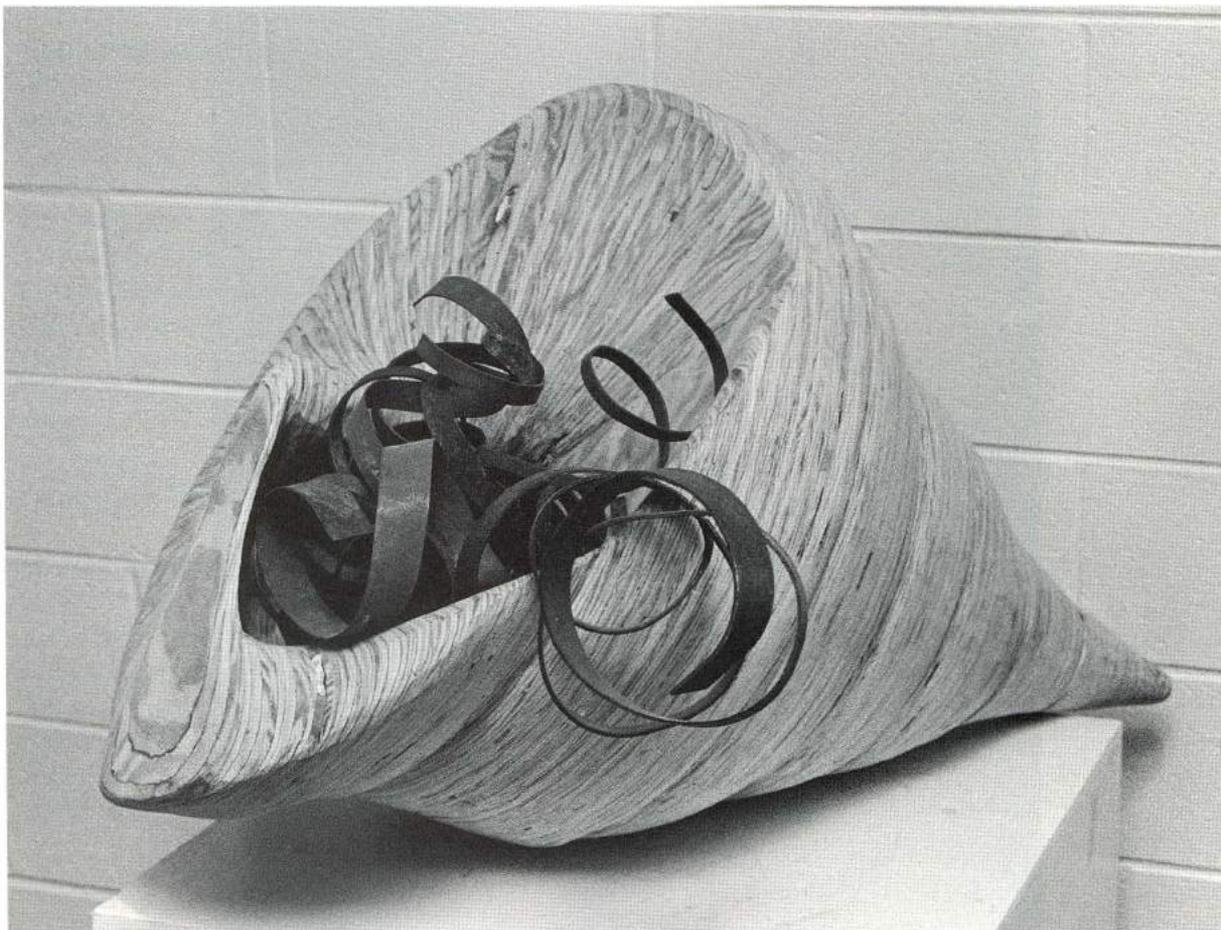
of your lecturing face
Which I see
Slide across my belly
Below my belly
Between my legs
Strong face
Soft man
Don't Stand So Close To Me.

Jennifer Lesiak



untitled photo 6x9½

Misha Harshavat



Shell wood

Salt

F. Richard Pelanek

Strength in rage,
Pride in hate,
To protect and avenge,
Under the night's steely air.
Heed the warning I have offered,
Or the fresh morn's dew
Will be salted . . .
With your family's tears.

A red moon rises,
With the rage in my eyes,
Sacred blood had been spilt,
And so you shall be hunted,
Beaten and shaped into an
Essay of pain, until
Salt from your own tears
Stings your wounds,
One for every time you touched her.

Stand

F. Richard Pelanek

When I stand in a crowd,
You see, a sea of faces, mine as individual
As a grain of sand on a beach,
And you say, "You're nothing special."

When I stand in a group,
You see, my height, my long hair,
I am the departure,
And you say, "You're a freak."

When I stand alone,
You see, me for the first time,

Who I am without comparison, I am the challenger,
And you say, "I Love you."

But I heard you the first time.

Patrick A. Munoz

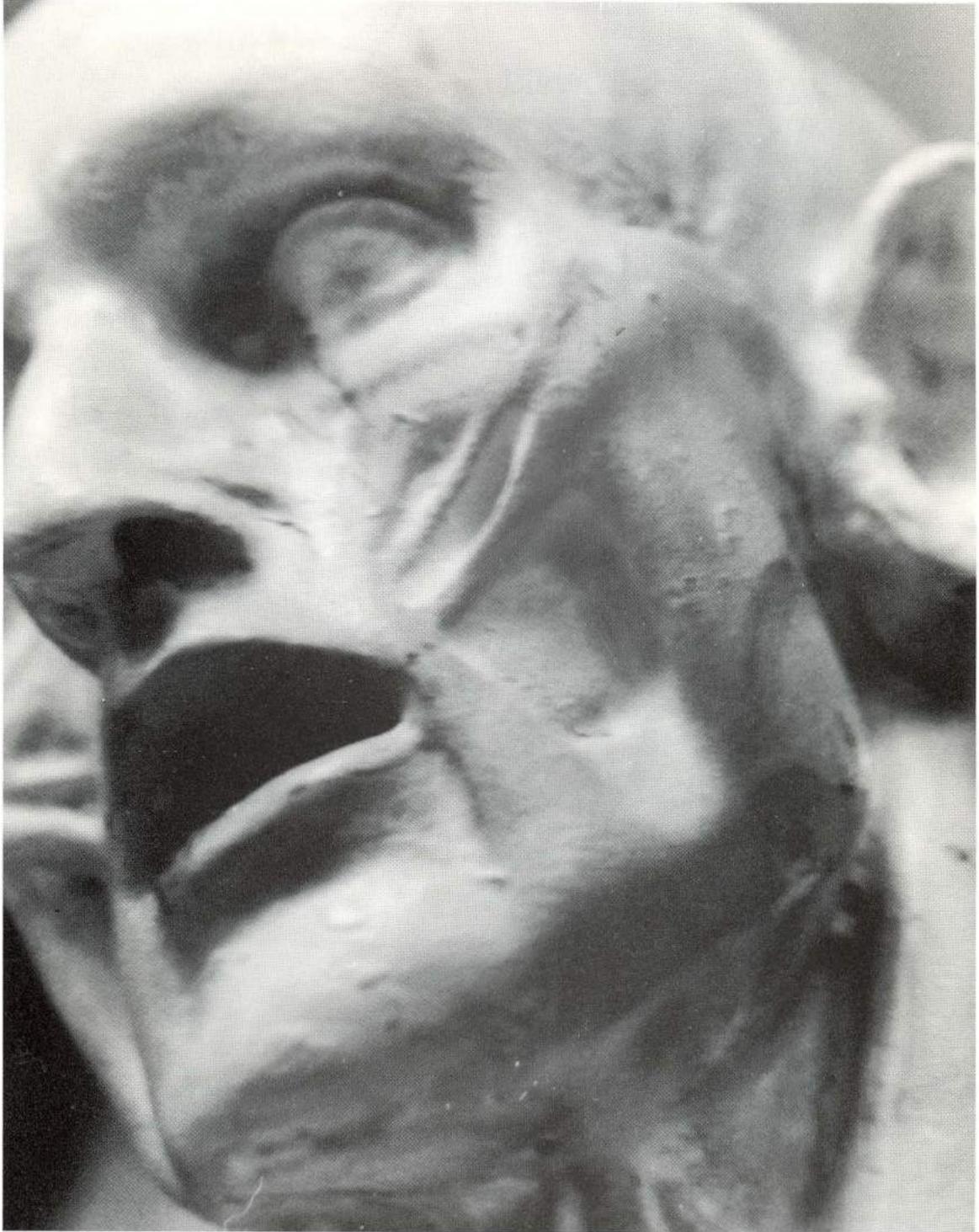


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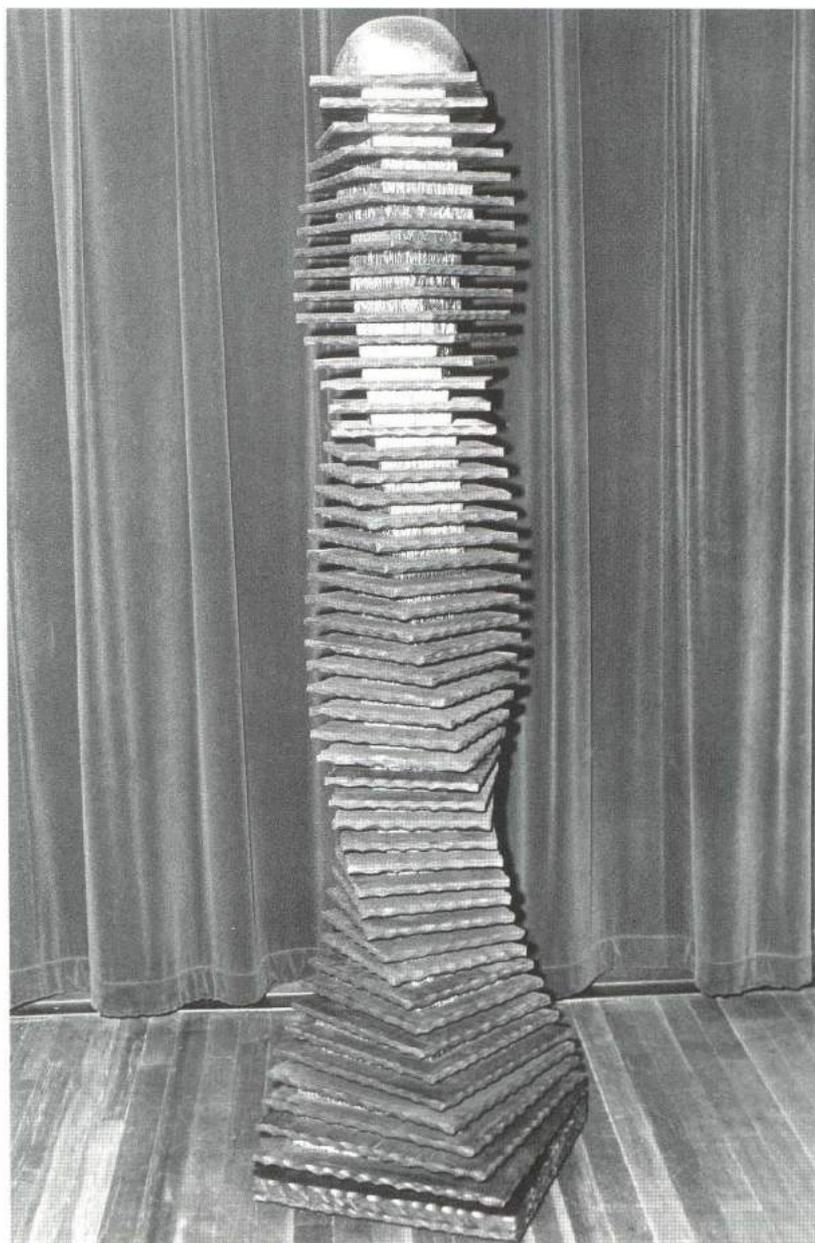
untitled photo 9¼x7¼

Patrick A. Munoz



untitled photo 6x9½

Eugenia Makowski



Pirouette wood, copper foil and graphite 84x12

