



# Point of View

## 1998-1999

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*and the earth holds its breath . . .*

acrylics 30 x 20

Bridget Bartholomae

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# Table of Contents

## Art

**Linda Baldwin**

28 *Inside Out*

**Bridget Bartholomae \*\*\***

cover *and the earth holds its breath . . .*

**Colleen Gentry**

4 *Depth*

36 *Untitled*

**Buddy Hanson**

9 *Figures Emerging From The Clouds  
Represented With Symmetrical Shapes  
And Towers Composed Of Human Hands*

11 *Human Hand Composed Of  
Worms Grasping An Apple*

**Festus L. Johnson**

20 *Old School Player*

**Ed Kowalczyk**

27 *Treppe*

**Guy Landgraff, Jr.**

42 *Dance of Fire*

30 *Figure in Distress*

**Jennifer Lesiak**

1 *untitled*

**Owen Lloyd**

19 *Bubbles*

**Eugenia Makowski**

2 *Arch*

26 *Seven Pointed Star For Jessie*

24 *Twelve Fishermen And A Guide*

**George Voegel**

12 *Emerging Knowledge*

## Literature

**Susan H. Chun \***

13 *Winding Up, Running Down*

**Clinton Harman**

21 *That Damn Smile*

**Allison Herbon**

3 *Peacoat*

**Roya Kashanian**

25 *Glass*

**Steve Kim**

31 *Conversations With Spaceman*

**David J. Marshall \*\***

5 *Heliocentric*

**Debbie Pickup**

37 *Kameraden*

**Shannon Plate**

29 *Untitled*

**Bryan Weiss**

10 *Untitled*

**Winner of the Point of View Award \***

**Winner of the Vivian Steward Award \*\***

**Winner of the Ray Mills Award \*\*\***



untitled  
Photo 8x10  
Jennifer Lesiak

1  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
LIBRARY



**Arch**  
limestone  
Eugenia Makowski

# Peacoat

Allison Herbon

Lost inside its  
navy blue arms,  
two missing buttons,  
where they landed,  
I can only wonder...

The crashing seas of Vietnam,  
rolling green pastures  
of Portugal, through the  
chilly nights of Spain.

I can smell the memories  
in the thick wool,  
trapped within the lining,  
nested in the pockets,  
are stories of times past:

A man lands on the moon,  
while a young sailor dances  
to the Stones, sharing a kiss  
with his would be wife.

The laughs and  
tears weaved  
inside of each  
single thread.

The worn and torn  
cuff that

brushed against their  
clenched hands still  
lies ripped.

The floppy long lapels  
once beaded with sweat  
from a nervous sailor grasping  
a gold ring in his hand.

and now..  
it's my turn.

My chance to  
kiss the foreign air,  
and experience life  
in its immense arms.



**Depth**  
photo 4x6  
Colleen Gentry

# Heliocentric

David J. Marshall

I.

Sitting in his Buick in a bitch of a jam on the 1-90 inbound, Greg Kepler watched the crying jets on approach desperately trying to land at O'Hare International. It was a Bad Sun Day, the four hundred and sixty-third, according to the newsman on the crackling car radio. The angry Sun oscillated, alternating between bright and dim, large and small, pushing and then pulling the sleek metal airships.

The first jet, a small Jetstream 31, Greg watched struggle through what looked like icing conditions. The nose sank too quickly, the left wing skidded and sparked on the cement, igniting the fuel almost instantly. The explosion was anti-climactic, like ripe watermelon dropped by a clumsy grocer, thudding and splashing to a clean floor.

The next, a DC-10, Greg watched vibrate in midair, as an engine and pylon separated from the immense left wing like leaves from a branch. The giant rolled, colliding almost perpendicular with the ground, a stellar flash outshining the Sun, the sonic blast shaking six lanes of cars on the freeway, causing Greg to steady himself on the wheel.

The last, a 747, hummed like a tenor god swooping down over the houses, buildings and cars, trailing misty fuel. Greg closed his eyes as it passed over him, imagining silver metal growing black feathered wings and red eyes, then swallowing itself in fire, flinging one pillar of white smoke, one black.

The burning Sun shook slightly, like a bad comedian holds in laughter born of his own device.

II.

Greg Kepler sat in his corner office, waiting for his boss. Trying to let the

bouncing atoms and ideas in his brain coalesce, he attempted to vertically balance a black pencil on the polished desk, using the sharpened side. Each effort failed, of course. The pink eraser falling one way, then the other, as if it were the bobbing head of someone trying to stay awake. Somewhere in his mind, Greg knew he could do it. If the air conditioning quit for one second, or the Armani dick in the next office stopped talking on the phone, or if gravity surrendered its perpetual struggle for a moment, a brief cease-fire, Greg knew it was possible. He released the pencil. It fell, rolled to the edge of the desk, and then dropped, hitting the hard floor musically, bouncing exactly four times.

Wendel walked into Greg's office without knocking and quickly closed the door. "Where the fuck have you been? My God, what the fuck. Three damn weeks, Greg. What the fuck?"

Greg sat calmly, knowing Wendel needed him. Wendel wiped the sweat from his balding forehead. Greg smiled, remembering Wendel's shaggy brown head of hair back in '67 right out of college at that recruitment seminar for the NTSB.

Wendel sighed, calming himself. "You have to do this one, Greg. This is a big one. You've heard about the Mid-east Commuter crash?"

"Yes," said Greg, "Are they all dead?"

"Yes. Please, Greg. They're one of our biggest clients. You've gotta do it. I don't know where you've been or what the hell is going on with you, but you've just gotta."

"I'll need to see the site," Greg said, standing up and straightening his black jacket.

"Thank God," said Wendel, rising, sighing again. "Thank God."

Greg looked at the floor and said, "But that's it Wendel...I'm out, effective today."

Turning to the door, Greg walked out of his office for the last time.

Wendel stood alone, looking left to right with his hand in his pocket like a man in an empty parking lot gripping his keys, suddenly realizing his car has been stolen.

III.

On the way to the site, Greg sat in dead traffic and his thoughts drifted away from the killing Sun. He thought of the heaven, of the bed in Champaign with Helen. No young women were named Helen anymore, he thought, nor did they launch a thousand ships. Greg tried to leave the bed of the small hotel after a week, getting as far as the front desk. The heavy night auditor looked up from his computer suspiciously, seeing Greg stop and turn around. Greg knew then that the Sun did not matter, and he walked back to room 128. He opened the door without sound, slipped off his shirt and pants quietly, and slid under the sheets like a dolphin into water. Greg palmed her sleeping shoulder. With his index finger, he made small circles around the nub of skin where her left arm used to be.

IV.

As a spokesperson for Mammoth Insurance, Greg Kepler did not really have authority or access to crash sites. But he was a legend.

Now, he just walked like a stiff Jesus through the hot ash, pointing out burn holes to NTSB investigators, telling them to mark the ground where bodies fell. He would tell the others what to look for, and they would pick up and bag electrical wires, scrape blood off of control panels as he talked, write in their notepads.

Greg never had to interview survivors. They all died for him. He used to keep count, until ten years ago when Helen lived. It shouldn't have been surprising, he knew, for there were plenty of instances involving survivors.

The cause of this crash was easy to find. Almost four years ago, the Sun became jealous and angry, periodically increasing and decreasing its gravity: the same exact day that Greg Kepler quit as chief investigator for the NTSB. Greg looked up at the pulsating sphere in the orange sky and squinted. He thought of how hard it was to find causes. Now it just looked at him, at everyone, never blinking.

V. Later at the press conference

Greg left the podium; the reporters' faces were sprinkled with tears. They cried like new hungry birds finally being fed. He answered the "what" and "how," and even the "who is responsible" with the ease of giving a child chocolate. Because he knew the real question was "why." Why were they torn away so quickly? Why does love have to die? Why do things like this happen? Knowing these, Greg appeased and broke the most damaging inquisitors. With each word, he lessened the dollar impact on his client, each surviving family members settling for one million instead of two, perhaps. He controlled the press room like a great conductor, raising his hand, calling up sections to sing their parts, and Greg would set them down, knowing the answers they wanted. Orbiting him like a sun, the reporters asked questions of blame and justice, forgetting in the bare heat of his center.

Backstage, three interns in navy blue suits cried, staring at Greg Kepler, wanting to follow him out the door.

Wendel, helpless as a mustached man in a black hat at high noon, watched Greg leave without saying good-bye.

VI.

Greg Kepler walked through his kitchen, unflinching, as Amanda cried and threw pots and pans at him. Most of them missed, passing harmlessly by like comets. Each one an expression, each one glaring and burning.

He trotted up the stairs and Amanda sat down on the plastic covered couch with her face in her hands screaming about three weeks, cold dinners and falling jets. Her curly black hair wrapped in and out of her fingers as she convulsed.

After grabbing the papers he needed, Greg trotted down the stairs and out the front door. He tried to use his cell phone, but the damn Sun, playing hell, fucked up the signal, throbbing and flashing against the windshield of Greg's car.

Backing out and shifting into first, Greg still felt Amanda's pull, her twenty-year tug over him. The look of her white face buried in her own hands entranced and almost lured him. But Helen's new gravity charmed him. The Champaign bed magnetized and polarized.

VII. ...of the heaven, of the bed in Champaign...

The bed was small for a queen. It was probably just a large single. The hotel was not the best, but it was cleaner than most. Greg did not notice the comforter's nasty green color until the first morning, when the Sun came out. Some mornings they would not move. Greg could feel the world moving all around outside the room, as if it were the center. Greg would stare at the ceiling, smiling and breathing. Then he would look at her pretending to be asleep. He stared at the indentation in her shoulder where the skin sank into the socket. She was so skinny, almost haggard and her remaining arm was only skin and bone. Greg wondered why she did not wear a prosthetic arm, but he was glad she did not. The red scar started on her shoulder and went all the way up to her cheek; he had traced it so many times with his lips. Her light brown hair fell on her pale neck near her jugular, making Greg wonder if the metal had shifted just a little more to the left, where would she be right now.

On Saturday of the third week, Greg Kepler sat on the bed and tried to convince her, and himself, that he must go back for a while. Helen stood smiling, looking down on him. She was not listening, just shining, and he could not hear his own words with her looking this way. So he bowed his head to shade himself from her.

VIII.

Greg remembered a similar moment with Amanda. She wiped his fevered forehead with a cool, damp cloth. Greg Kepler lay delirious, the moist cloth the only feeling, her pale face the only thing he could see.

IX.

Now, ten years after Helen's crash in Chicago, Greg drove to Champaign in the mid-afternoon Sun. He could see many cars stranded on the roadway. Electrical problems, he thought. Sometimes he saw a fire-truck or an ambulance whip by. He tried not to think too much about Helen, but he kept remembering her bloody face as a seven-year old, lying in the bushes, not making a sound, in the rain and darkness beside the burning plane. He came upon her suddenly, nearly an hour after the crash when they had already stopped looking for life among the 155 passengers. She gripped her shoulder where her arm once was, one of her white sneakers missing. She just looked at him, unblinking, and breathed. Greg called for one of the paramedics as he picked her up and started running. He handed her to a very tall man in white and that was it.

It took many months for Greg and his team to find the cause of the crash. It was electrical problems, not caused by an angry Sun, but from miscalculations on a maintenance chart.

Ten years ago she was gone in an ambulance. Now he was on his way back to her.

Three weeks ago, she came up to Greg while he was speaking at a seminar on beginning in the public relations industry at the university in Champaign.

"Do you remember me?" Helen asked.

Do you remember me?  
X.

When Greg Kepler finally arrived at the small hotel it was dark. He turned off the car and sat for a moment. The onslaught of the Sun behind him, he breathed easier as his chest rose with air. He got out of the Buick and locked it. Walking toward the small hotel, Greg saw a figure near the dim blue lights of the pool. Helen called, "Greg...Greg...it's me, Greg." He walked to the gate and raised the latch, swinging it open. Helen's slight body lay spread on a deck chair in the dark, reclined, almost to the point of looking straight up. Greg moved a nearby chair next to her and sat, bending to kiss her cheek. She did not look at him, but smiled, running her only hand through her hair, still looking almost straight up at the light points in the sky. Each one a sun, or a galaxy of suns.

Her textbooks lay toppled next to her chair: Astronomy, Strunk and White, Economics, and Public Relations.

"What were you studying?" he asked. Helen took in a long breath. She let it out slowly before speaking.

"Did you know they used to think Earth was the center of it all...I forget the word for it."

Greg looked at her eyes as she stared up into the sky. His hand slid across her face feeling the scars and red blotches of youth.

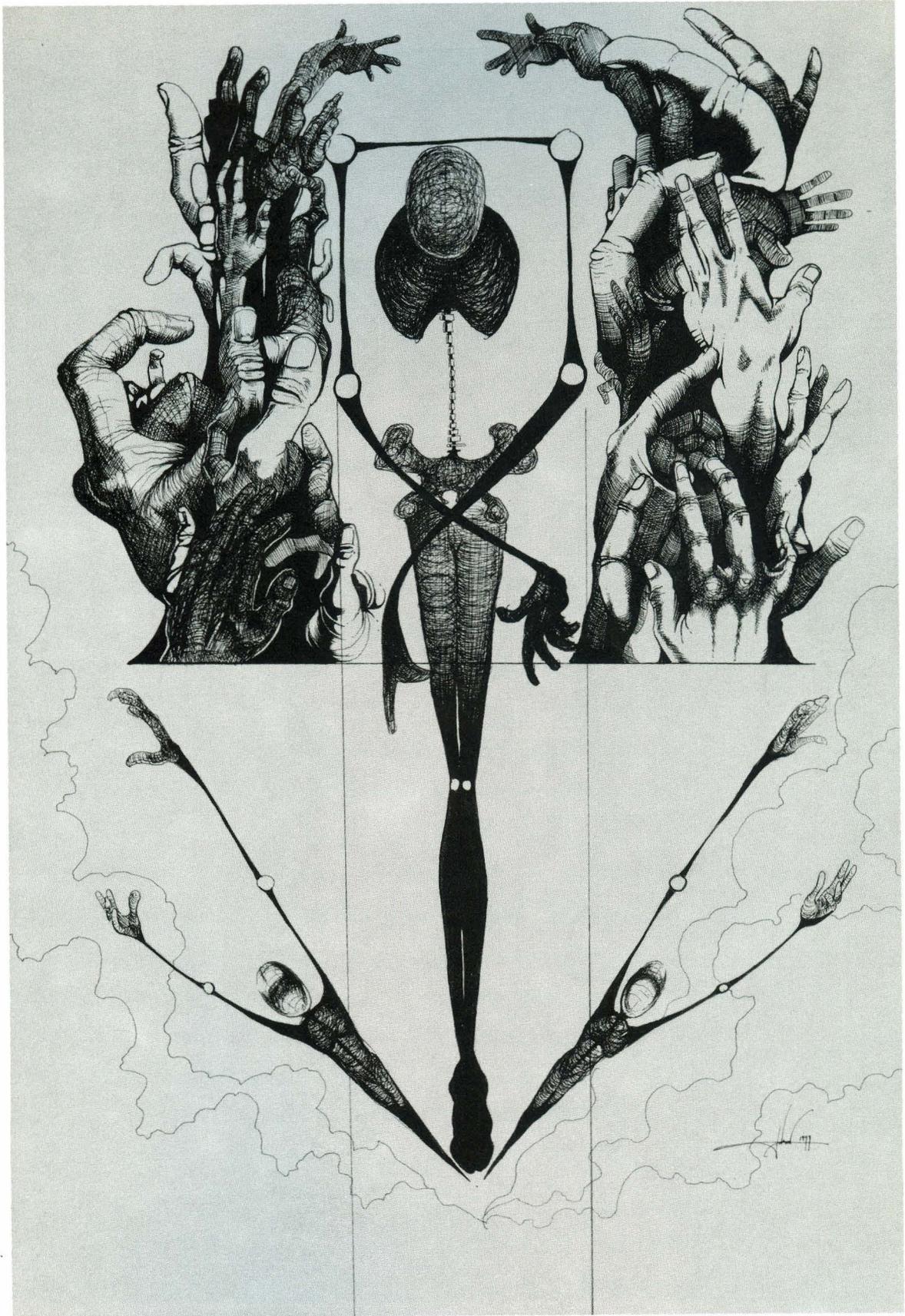
Helen said, "Geocentric, that's it...that's it."

Greg stood up and lifted her easily. As he carried her, she kissed his ear lightly, her breath short and wispy like she was almost talking to him. She clung tight with her arm around his neck. He walked through the gate, leaving it open, up to the heaven, to the bed in Champaign.  
?

On the other side of the Earth, the fluxing Sun just began to rise, as people screamed and fires burned. Jet planes crashed and cell phones malfunctioned. The angry Sun would never surrender its perpetual struggle for a moment, never be intimidated by the green fields, the blue ocean, poetry or the whisper-like kiss of a woman.

***Figures Emerging From The Clouds  
Represented With Symmetrical Shapes And Towers  
Composed Of Human Hands***

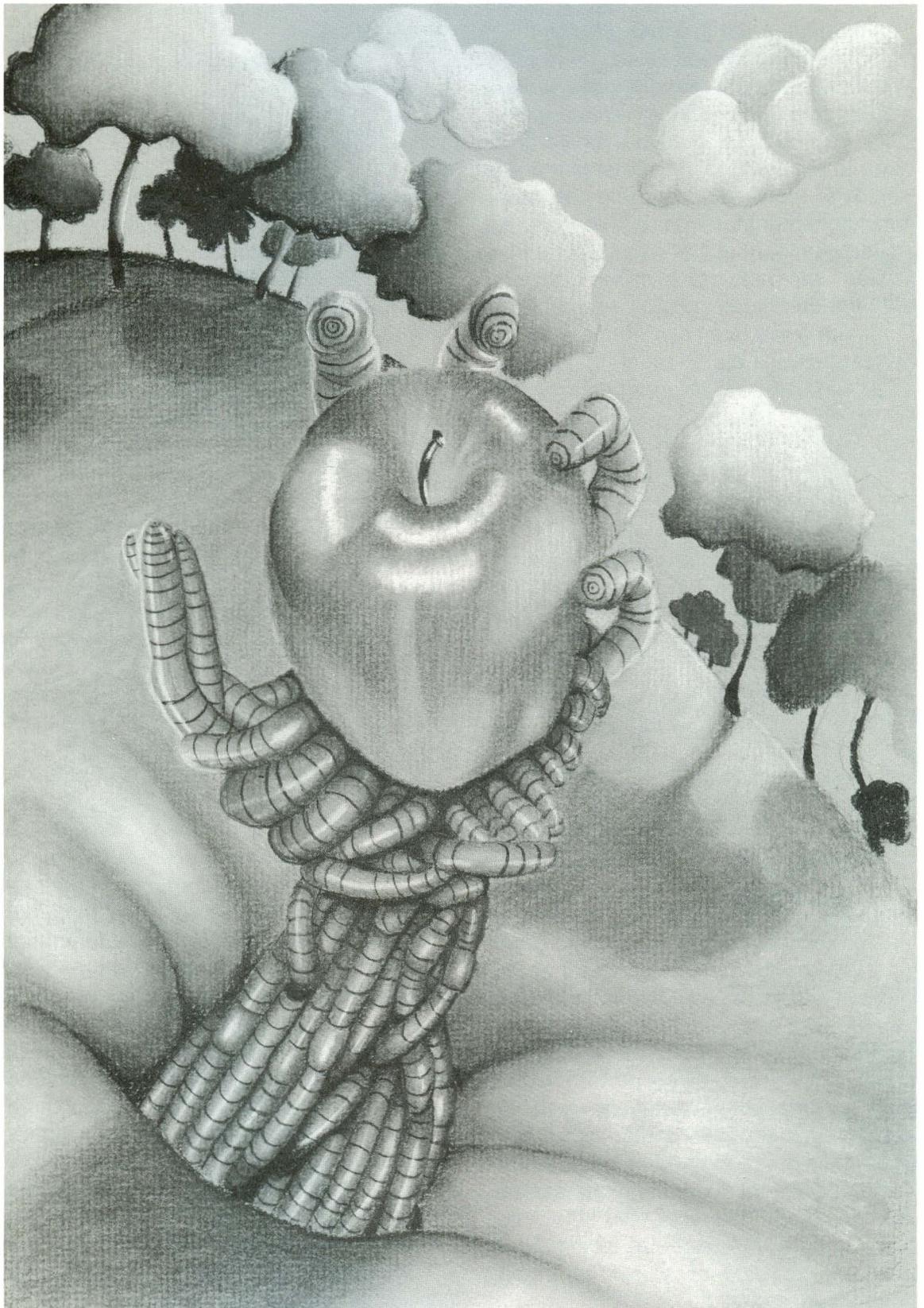
ink 10x15  
Buddy Hanson  
(opposite)

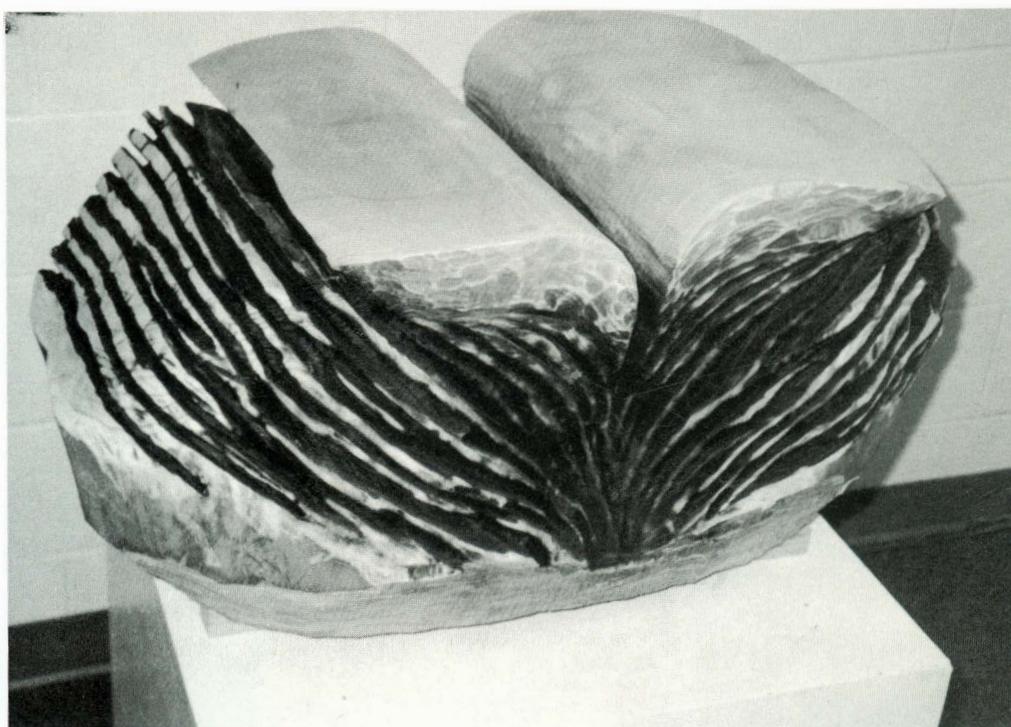


Bryan Weiss

Blisters in the palm of your hand.  
Your strained back is holding on—  
For that last mile, two or three?  
Dust settles at the bottom of your stomach,  
And dry tears vent your frustration.  
Lifting your eyes from the bottom of the lake,  
You peer through the sunset splashed orange, yellow, and red  
And it reminds you of tomorrow.  
The mist from the lake, hot coffee and fire.  
Nothing but a smile.  
...And out from your final hopes and wishes, is the land you've been dying to see.  
It rings like church bells on Sunday morning.

**Human Hand Composed Of  
Worms Grasping An Apple**  
charcoal pencils 8x12  
Buddy Hanson  
(opposite)





*Emerging Knowledge*  
wood log carved 18x37x26  
George Voegel

## Winding Up, Running Down

Susan H. Chun

Carter Higgins loved his wind-up clocks. No digital clocks, no timepieces dependent on electricity or battery-power were allowed in his home. The wind-up clocks were so cheerful, he thought, with their round faces and big, easily readable numbers; they brightened up any room. Most of all, he loved their loud ticking—the louder, the better. The ubiquitous ticking lent to his home the air of some finely crafted, well-oiled network of machinery. In all, there were seven such clocks ticking away among the ultra-modern furnishings and state-of-the-art electronics in their Long Island home. It was a small daily production, the winding of the clocks. The plants went thirsty, the lawn grew into wild jungles of grass and weeds, but the clocks never ran down, never missed a beat—Carter made sure of it.

His wife, Emma, did not share his enthusiasm for the wind-up clocks. She found the loud ticking quite irritating—excruciating even, in that steady, relentless manner of Chinese water torture. She hated how the ticking made the most leisurely of tasks seem desperately urgent; sometimes she felt flustered, rushed. "I feel like a doomed coed in one of those teen slasher movies," Emma grumbled. "The promiscuous twit who gets hacked to bits by a hockey-mask-wearing psychopath simply because her trembling hands can't slide the car key into the lock in time. A simple, quick task normally, but nearly impossible under pressure."

"I thought you never watched horror flicks," Carter teased as he poured for

himself a cup of coffee. "A phobia of yours, isn't it?"

"I saw my share of them during high school—my dates always seemed to choose scary movies," she said while writing out her list of errands for that day. "And it's not a phobia, exactly. It's just that being terrified is not my idea of an entertaining escape. Besides, I have no problem, as it is, envisioning danger and gruesome death—my fearful imagination needs no audiovisual assistance." Her brow furrowed slightly as she opened the refrigerator, her eyes surveying the contents. "Low-fat cream cheese... turkey cold cuts... more juice boxes," she muttered, adding to her list. "Anyway, remind me again. Just what, exactly, do you have against digital clocks?"

Carter put down his coffee cup, splashing a little onto the countertop. "What, those useless things? That display only the hour and minutes? Why, they ignore seconds entirely—as though seconds do not even exist!" he huffed.

"Actually, you just press a button and switch modes when you want the seconds. And I think most digital clocks have a flashing colon that blinks for every second."

"You want me to stare at the clock and count the blinks every time I need to know how many seconds have passed? Really, Emma."

"First of all, just what activity of yours necessitates counting the seconds? Secondly, given your time-sensitive endeavors, wouldn't a stopwatch make the most sense? If time is of the essence, wouldn't you rather have the precision of a stopwatch?"

Although Carter loved his wife a great deal, he sometimes regretted marrying a lawyer. Why do lawyers seem always to preface and number-off their arguments with words like "secondly?" he wondered. And Emma's sentences were often littered with legalese—phrases like "time

is of the essence," for which lawyers have a great affinity.

"You're missing the point, really. Wind-ups are quaint. They're . . . reassuring, don't you think?" he asked.

"Reassuring? How? For puppies, maybe—I've heard that puppies are soothed by the ticking sound. It reminds the puppy of the maternal heartbeat, they say. Is that what you mean by reassuring?" Emma's mouth twisted into a smile. "Is that it? Do you miss Mother Higgins?" Emma was tireless on the subject of quirky Eleanor Higgins, the psychologist who had pioneered the field of gender development and the psychology of sex roles. Carter had had an eccentric, "gender-neutral" upbringing, providing Emma with much material to use at dinner parties and other social occasions ("When Carter was four, his mother gave him both a baseball bat and a pink purse for Christmas," Emma blabbed to friends).

Carter ignored Emma's remark about his mother and tried a different tack. "It's very Zen, is what I mean. Every tick is life affirming: Tick—you are here! Tick—you are still here! A constant reminder to live in the moment." It was Carter's turn to smile sardonically. "You, Miss Yoga-And-Meditation-Every-Morning-At-Five, I would think would appreciate that."

Emma just wrinkled her nose at him and went upstairs to fetch Henry, their five-year-old son. It was Saturday—Henry's social calendar was always full on Saturdays (all Emma's doing) with play-dates and lessons and other miscellaneous activities thought to be good for developing brains.

Is that really why I keep these wind-up clocks? Carter wondered. In principle, he approved of a life lived in the moment. Certainly, he always had been a man who lived for the instant—though he suspected his way was not quite what the Zen masters had in mind. He never was one to savor The Moment

while actually in the moment. It was his way to anticipate a pleasure with great zeal—often to the point of obsession—only to detach himself a second after attainment. Once attained, a pleasure immediately began to lose its hold over him, replaced by a frenzied quest for the next experience, another fleeting sensation. Moments, both great and small, simply did not cling to him. Perhaps, he thought, that explains my affinity for these loudly ticking clocks; it's my attempt to capture and savor each moment. He smiled, first with a puffed-up sense of his philosophical bent, then with the realization that (as with many things during the course of their marriage) his stubborn and extreme fondness for the clocks was more a reaction against Emma's position than a passion genuinely felt on merits. Marriage often had a polarizing effect on his and her opinions, pushing each into rather extreme positions—one of the few hazards, perhaps, of choosing a lawyer for one's spouse.

Carter had to admit (though only to himself, of course) that even he found the loud ticking quite distracting at times. Reading was often difficult, sometimes impossible. But, on those occasions, Carter simply found ways to muffle the ticking—another source of irritation for his wife, for she never knew just where she would find a stashed clock. She had found them buried in her underwear drawer amid the folds of cotton and silk. One clock was hidden in the toe of her black-suede riding boot. Once, while preparing a dinner party, she had pulled from the cupboard a ceramic pitcher and rescued, just in time, a clock nearly drowned in sangria. At some point, Carter's habit stopped irritating Emma and became somewhat amusing instead. Whenever a clock was missing, Emma and Henry made a little game out of finding it. Henry loved rooting out hidden things: games of hide-and-seek,

scavenger hunts, combing the shores of Nantucket for clams—he loved it all.

Shortly after Emma and Henry left, the UPS man dropped off two packages for Carter, both from his favorite online bookstore. He opened the first box, which was filled with unfamiliar titles: *The 7 Habits of Highly Defective People: And How to Avoid Them* (The habits or the defective people? he wondered); *Think Positively and Grow Rich!*; *The Rules, Volume 25: The Lost Rules*. Good Lord, thought Carter. Whose shipment is this? He opened the other box, and breathed a sigh of relief—at least they got his order right. Eagerly, he thumbed through his selections, stopping to peruse *The Dictionary of New Words*, which was full of terms like "stealth bra," "Twinkie defense," "granny dumping," "lipstick lesbian" (his mother would twitch with agitation whenever she heard that term), and "snack abuse" (also "math abuse", "safety abuse" and "satanic abuse"—an epidemic of "abuse" apparently). He could get lost in that dictionary for hours, he realized, though the ticking of the kitchen clock was distracting. He grabbed the clock and gave the kitchen a quick sweep with his eyes before hastily dumping the clock into the box with the abominable titles.

An hour later, he pulled himself away from the dictionary and decided to go for a run. He taped up the box containing the misrouted order and left it on the porch for the UPS pickup-service before heading for the park.

On his way back home from the park, he saw and heard, from two houses away, Emma screaming in front of their house. "Carter! Carter! A bomb! Oh God, a bomb!" she cried hysterically.

"Emma?" Carter called out to her.

She turned at the sound of his voice and ran towards him. "Oh thank God! Run, Carter. Run!" she screamed. "There's a bomb!" she cried, pointing towards a cardboard box sitting on their

porch. The very box of books Carter had put out there for the UPS man. The box into which he had thrown (and forgotten to take back out) the distracting ticking clock.

Emma had spent her entire legal career, eight years, working at the U.S. Attorney's Office prosecuting a RICO case against a garbage collection company run by the Mafia (which explains somewhat the state of the city's streets—no competition in the market). Three prosecution witnesses had mysteriously vanished, and one prosecutor had died in a car accident (freak mechanical failure, supposedly) during the course of those eight years. Emma was understandably wary of things like ticking packages left on her doorstep.

She did not speak to Carter for hours after the incident. He was surprised by her reaction. He would have understood if she had been irritated with him, but Emma did not seem at all angry. She seemed badly shaken, inexplicably haunted. Only after she had picked up Henry, fed him dinner and put him to bed, did she speak again to Carter.

"I've had enough. Please, for me. Get rid of these awful ticking time-bombs." She sounded vulnerable to his ears.

"Look, Emma. I'm sorry my carelessness caused you such a fright. I hate seeing you so shaken." He kneeled next to the brown velvet armchair that she sat in, and rested his forehead against her temple. He loved the smell of her: always delectable and yummy, for she favored scents based on comforting foods—vanilla, peach, even pumpkin. That night, she was wearing something laced with chocolate. "I'll be more careful. It will never happen again, I promise you," he said.

"Please, Carter, get rid of them." Emma rose and walked over to the window, staring out into the dark. "I've been having this... dream—the worst

nightmare," she said in a grave tone. "I keep dreaming that you've ... died. In the dream, I'm sitting in our living room being consoled by people who have just been to your funeral. I don't know how you died, I just know you've died."

Carter was surprised by the seriousness in her tone. Emma had never before taken any interest in dreams. She rarely even remembered them. Those she did recall were very mundane—routine days at the office, cleaning the kitchen, watching Henry play in the park. Even in the chaotic world of dreams she remained practical and logical. "Why are you so spooked? It's just a dream. You know that," he said.

"But the dreams are so vivid... and recurring. They don't feel like dreams." She turned away from the window and looked him in the eye.

"They feel like premonitions," she said.

"What are you saying? Are you saying you're clairvoyant? You don't even believe in such things." A sudden thought occurred to him. "How old were we in this dream? Thirty-three or eighty? Because if we were eighty, well then maybe the dream is just a form of Freudian wish-fulfillment," he said with a slightly wry smile.

"Maybe I'm being silly. Probably. But just humor me then. For whatever reason, these clocks are terribly unsettling to me. They remind me of things I can't bear to think about." She looked so anxious, he thought.

"If it's important to you, of course I'll get rid of them," he said. How good he felt seeing the look of immediate relief on her face. "So... what were people saying about me? At the funeral, I mean. How did they remember me? What were, in their eyes, my greatest moments?"

"I don't remember," she said.

"What did you say? Which of my moments stuck in your head?"

"I'm not going to get into this with you. I'm tired. You coming to bed?" she asked as she headed for the stairs.

"Go on ahead. I'll join you soon," he said.

Whenever Carter's mind was engaged, it was nearly impossible for him to wind down. Emma's dream had raised an interesting question, he thought. What are my finest moments? If I had to pick one, what would it be? He deliberated for awhile, but his mind drew an uncharacteristic blank. There was no shortage of pleasant memories, certainly, but none were vivid; all his past moments seemed like amiable but pale ghosts amid a haze of gray. Nothing stood out.

Perhaps some perspective was needed to answer such a question, he thought to himself. Too bad Emma wouldn't cooperate. What about his parents though? His father was no longer available for consultation (he had passed on two years earlier), but what would his mother say if asked? He remembered the pride in her eyes that one day during his preschool years. He had been taught from the earliest age to equate gender only with anatomical parts, rather than with externalities, such as, dresses and bows (his mother's studies had shown that children get confused when shown pictures of men wearing traditionally feminine things, and vice-versa). One day, Carter had carried his pink purse to class and worn ribbon barrettes in his hair; he was followed around and harassed by a boy in his class who insisted, in a singsong voice, that, "Carter is a girl. Carter is a girl. Only girls wear barrettes and carry purses." In exasperation, Carter finally dropped his pants, and undies, and declared in his best adult voice, "Gender is determined solely by anatomy, not by external cues. Take a look. Do I look like a girl to you now?" His tormentor avoided Carter after that, as one avoids the bum on the subway talking to himself in agitated

tones. When his mother learned of incident, she surged with pride. But that was really more my mother's moment than my own, thought Carter. In that incident she saw her own imprint, a successful extension of herself . . . probably. Maybe it would be that way with Emma too, if he managed to gain a response from her. Maybe she would pick a moment when he had come closest to her ideal of a husband, rather than one that captured his essence as a separate individual.

Carter stretched out on the couch and stared directly into the bright ceiling light, which was so bright that it hurt his eyes a bit. He thought and stared, then thought and stared some more. He still had no answers. His head began to ache so he closed his eyes, which were dazed from staring for so long into the blinding light. Even with his eyes closed, even amid the darkness of his mind, the remnants of that ceiling light seemed to sparkle and glitter festively on the inside of his lids. He lay there for a long time, then finally turned off the downstairs lights and headed up.

He stopped first in Henry's room. When he peeked in he saw that Henry was asleep but clutching onto a bedpost—he must be having that dream again, thought Carter, the one where he's being chased up the oak tree out front by our neighbor's rottweiler. "Henry, it's Dad. You can let go of the tree now," he whispered in his son's ear. Instinctively, Henry released his grip and allowed himself to be tucked back under the flannel Batman sheets. Damp locks of golden hair framed his round face—he reminded his father of a sunflower. When Carter bent down to kiss his son's cheek, he caught a whiff of Henry's smell—equal parts vanilla extract, buttered bread, and talcum powder.

After checking on Henry, he slipped into bed with Emma, fitting his body into the curves of her curled-up figure. He

drifted off to sleep that way, listening to the rhythmic rise and fall of Emma's breathing, inhaling her rich chocolate perfume, and lingering upon the memory of his son's sweet smell.

Carter got rid of the wind-up clocks, as promised—all but one, which he kept hidden in his car, under the driver's seat. Emma didn't mention her dreams again, but Carter could not free his obsessive mind from the question raised by her dreams. It pressed on him constantly.

He found himself running more often that spring; he craved the release a good run always provided. He loved the feeling in his legs during the final few laps. The fatigue seemed to add a reassuring weight and heft to his legs. The rough asphalt seemed to grip the soles of his shoes—a sensation like running on sticky strips of Velcro. It made him feel secured to the ground, aware of gravity and the pull of the earth. Each of his legs acting as a ballast protecting him from floating away like a balloon lost to the heavens. It was Emma, though, who resembled a balloon, a hot-air balloon. Her body was like a triangle balanced precariously on one point. She had a ball of a face, wide shoulders, a thick torso thinning out into the barest suggestion of hips and twin spindles for legs. Although she was the steady one between them, her top-heavy figure made her seem less secure somehow.

Carter also began taking drives very late at night. Sometimes, he would pull out the wind-up clock stashed under his seat and set it on the dashboard, listening to the ticking as he drove. A few times, when he encountered a deserted stretch of road, he closed his eyes—sometimes for only a couple of seconds, other times for as long as ten ticks of the clock. An inexcusably reckless game, he knew, but couldn't resist. He had hoped that fear would bring focus and clarity to his muddled mind, heighten his sense and awareness

of each second. But it didn't. After a close call—he came within inches of hitting the steel rails hugging a sharp curve in the road—he gave up his foolish game and his late night drives. And still, he had no answers, nothing he could articulate.

Every summer, the Higgins family spent a couple weeks at their cabin upstate. They usually drove up together, but this year Carter was delayed at the last minute by some business matters. "I'll just go on ahead and prepare the cabin. It must be a mess after all those storms last winter," Emma said.

"What about Henry? Will you take him, or should I?" Carter asked.

"Since I'm cleaning the cabin, you can deal with Henry trapped in a car for four hours."

"Wait. What if I promise to clean the cabin instead?" he suggested desperately.

Emma smiled wickedly. "Good luck with Henry. You'll need it."

He saw Emma off the next day. The backseat of her car was loaded with boxes of supplies—mostly food and cooking gear (Whenever they stayed in the cabin, Emma insisted upon preparing extravagantly abundant meals that would choke the burliest of lumberjacks). "I packed a few bottles of wine too," she said, with an impish grin.

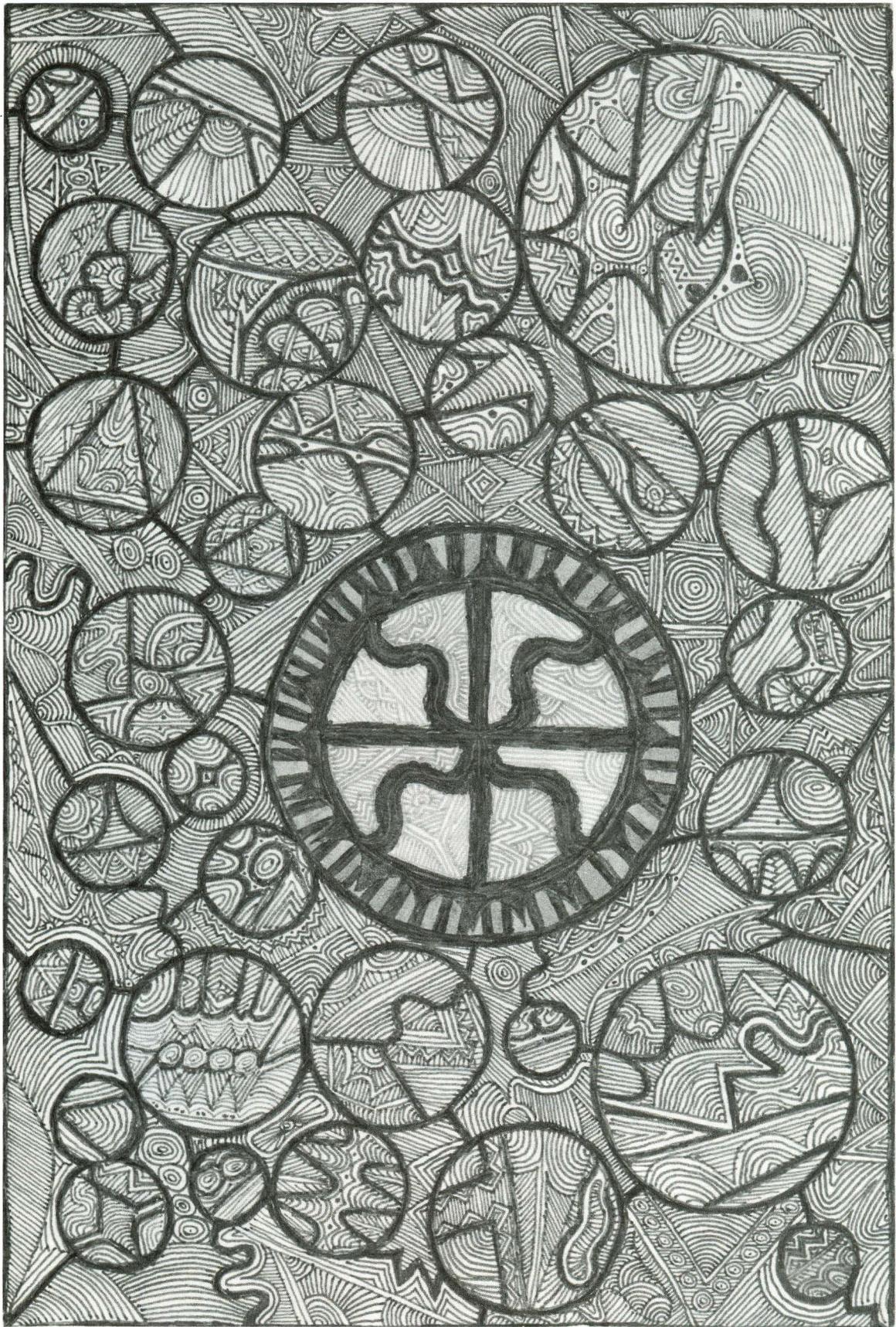
"Did you remember to pack that silk thingie of yours? The one I like so much," he asked.

Emma just smiled and kissed him goodbye before getting into the car. "Take care," she called out as she pulled away from the curb and drove off. She looked straight ahead down the road, but her left hand continued waving to him from the open driver's-side window. He watched her until she turned the corner and disappeared from his view.

Carter was packing things for the trip upstate when the telephone call came. The words coming through the line seemed horribly muffled, and he could only grasp a handful of phrases: ... gas tank explosion at the cabin... completely destroyed... Emma didn't escape... so sorry...

In the first few seconds, he could not think (not yet) about the loss of her. In that first flash, he could do nothing but imagine her last moments, her last sensations. He was trying to picture it—the explosion, the blinding burst of light—when he was struck with a sense of déjà vu. He thought he knew just what such a bright explosion might look like. He told himself there had been no time for thoughts. No time for vain reflection, no time to sift through the mind's inventory of life's moments—he wanted desperately to believe that there had been no time for such things. Just basic sensations in the end. Just that burst of light, followed by a slipping darkness, the last of the light sparkling like confetti in her mind.

**Bubbles**  
ink 6x9  
Owen Lloyd  
(opposite)





**Old School Player**  
acrylic 5x7  
Fetis L. Johnson

# That Damn Smile

Clinton Harman

I was on my third Corona already. I couldn't remember what time the place stopped serving alcohol, but I was determined to get as many beers down as possible before last call.

I knew what I was going to do. I had four hundred dollars in my pocket and a change of clothes in my bag. I had already called the airport shuttle; it would pick me up at 6:00am sharp, four hours from then.

I was checking out the crowd; everyone seemed to be in high spirits—probably just out of the bars. I had finished up many a drunken evening there myself. I liked it better than going to Denny's, no high school kids, no one screaming from one table to the next. People there weren't obnoxious like that. There, I didn't have to keep my temper under control.

My temper had always got me in trouble. When I was a little kid, I was always in the principal's office for fighting. Of course, it was never my fault.

In fact, the older I got, the more I realized nothing was ever my fault, I always did everything right. Everything happened for a reason. The only thing I could be held accountable for was the actions that affected my life. I alone was responsible for my fate.

I couldn't stand all the whiny crybabies that pouted as they told me what a mess their life was. "It's all my parents' fault—if only Father had loved me more; if only Mother had paid more attention to me when I was a kid."

I used to get up in those people's faces and tell them off. "It's not your parents' fault you turned out this way, it's yours. Your dad didn't love you... so what? Your Mom didn't love you... so what? If you know, and can identify the

problem, then do something about it." Do something about it.

I was the master of my own destiny. I had no regrets, no qualms. I was I, and I was I absolutely.

"Another Corona sir?"

"Yes please."

I always liked servers—good ones anyway. I admit I had my fair share of scuffles over poor service, but that was life, nobody's perfect. Servers are one of the few people in life who have a right to gripe. All day long they deal with people's quirks, like, "this coffee's too hot," or "how many grams of fat are in the cottage cheese?" I always watched those people and thought, "thank God I never had that job."

There are people that think the people waiting on them are there to kiss their ass. They sit and boss their server around like a slave, thinking it's okay, because, "they're a good tipper." The servers aren't allowed to say what they really think. They have to take it; it's part of their job. I've known waiters and waitresses who have said differently, but most of them were also out of work. No manager is ever on the server's side; they can't be. If a server is rude, they're gone.

No one ever stops to think, "hey, this is someone's son or daughter." They're just servers, here to wait on you.

"Arlo? Arlo James, is that you?"

Who the hell was this guy? I hated it when I wasn't paying attention; someone was always sneaking up on me, and I hated surprises. I was too wrapped up in my own thoughts and watching this older woman rifle through her purse. I had no idea who this guy was. I didn't know what to do, so I just stared.

The whole time I looked at him, he kept walking closer and closer to me, smiling like he knew some really great secret. Apparently, he did. Because even when he sat down across from me, I still had no idea who he was. We were

having a staring match. Then I looked away. Damn, I was mad. I had looked away first, showing a sign of weakness. So I looked up, and stared him straight in the eye.

"Excuse me sir, but who the hell are you?"

"Don't you remember me?"

I sat there for a second wondering if it was a trick question? "No sir, I don't."

"McKenzie, Jim McKenzie, I was stationed with your father at Fort Bragg."

Ft. Bragg had been ten years ago. I must have been eleven years old when I knew the guy. I had trouble remembering all the people I went to high school with, and I was supposed to remember him? I would have thought he was crazy, but he did know my name, and, he had a airborne tattoo on his forearm. My father rarely made friends with anyone who didn't have a service tattoo.

"So you knew my father then?" I knew it was a stupid question, obviously he did, but I still had no idea what to say.

"I sure did, how is he?"

"Still the same." My father would never change.

"Your father always was a tough one to get along with. Some people get a little skittish when someone speaks their mind all the time, but that's why I liked him. You always knew where you stood with Matthew James."

Damn...sometimes even I forgot Sgt. James's first name. No one ever called him Matthew. Even his better friends still called him Sergeant.

"I tell you, I would never have recognized you if it hadn't been for your eyes. You know rage is a very useless and dangerous emotion. Your father always had that look in his eyes when he was really angry. That look alone was usually enough to make a room of Special Forces troopers clear out."

And people wonder where I got my temper.

"Yep, rage is a very dangerous emotion indeed. It makes you think your seeing everything clear, but in reality, your judgment is clouded."

I was beginning to think that maybe this guy was crazy.

"Yep, your old man was always blunt, but you were always sharp, like a knife."

"Your Corona sir." The waitress chimed in.

"Thank you." I had almost forgot.

"Would you care for anything sir?"

"Yes, just bring me a cup of coffee and a shot of Jim Beam."

He certainly drank like one of my father's friends.

"You see, your father was always blunt. He butted heads with a lot of people. You were always sharp. You cut right through people. No warning, no big collision, you just went right through whoever or whatever was in your way."

That sounded about right to me.

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, if you don't care about how other people feel."

"Why should I care about how other people feel if they're in my way?" I had no problems with the way I led my life, why should it bother this guy? I didn't need any advice. I was doing just fine on my own. Besides this was starting to sound like a Sunday school lesson to me. I was glad when he changed the subject.

"So what are you doing in Indiana?"

"I just graduated from college." Well almost, the only thing left was the ceremony, but I didn't see any point in going into that. I had an internship to get to.

"What college did you go to?"

"Purdue."

"Oh really? What did you get your degree in?"

"Engineering."

"That makes sense, you always were building the damnedest things out of whatever you could get your hands on.

Do you still like building houses out of cards?"

I let a smile slip out on that one. I still couldn't help myself when I got my hands on a deck of cards. "Yes, I still build them from time to time."

"How many decks are you using these days?"

"Two or three. There usually isn't more than that many around." I lied. I had about six at my old apartment. I just didn't want to admit to anyone that I spend that much time building card houses.

"You know it always drove your old man crazy that you would never let him help, but that was you. Always cutting to the chase, never stopping to ask for help."

"I never needed any help." It was true. I never needed anyone's help. I did everything on my own; I put myself through college; I got an internship by myself. What did I need help with? Certainly not building a house of cards. What was this guy getting at?

"Your coffee sir, and here's your shot of Jim Beam."

"Thank you." He gave the waitress a smile and off she went.

My guess was that he hadn't noticed the wedding band on her ring finger. Once she was gone, he proceeded to pour his shot into his coffee and stir it in.

"I never could stand plain coffee, or Jim Beam, but then your father showed me this little trick and I found out when they're mixed together there's nothing better. I love the solid taste of coffee mixed with the crisp kick of alcohol."

"Never tried it."

"You should, you might like it."

"I doubt it." I never mixed anything. I didn't put ketchup on my fries, order mixed drinks, and I sure as hell didn't put a shot of Jim Beam in my coffee.

"You'll never know until you try."

There was that smile again. What was this guy's secret?

We sat there in silence for a while. He drank his coffee 'a la Jim', and I finished my Corona. I was surveying the restaurant again. There were a couple of cute women in the booth kitty corner from us. They both looked a little tipsy to me. One of them must have been talking about a boyfriend; she was using one hand to play with her hair, and the other was flailing away in the sign language that only women understand. Men have their little sign language routine that only they understand—most of them involve sex or sports. I guess every group has their own little group of hand signals. Growing up with my Dad, we had formed a group that used military hand signals. I always kind of enjoyed that.

"Well I have to go."

He had startled me again. Damned if I hadn't been lost in my own thoughts. My father always said women would be my undoing.

"You take care of yourself."

"I always do. It was nice talking to you." I wasn't too sure about that, but why burn bridges?

"Likewise, tell your old man I said hi."

"Will do." He got up, offered me some money for the check and I waved him off.

"Thanks."

I nodded and tipped my beer to him as he turned to walk away. I took a sip from my Corona and glanced over the restaurant one more time. Then I looked back to see Jim McKenzie walk out the door. He turned and waved. I returned his wave. He still had that damn smile on his face.

As I sat there and finished my beer, I thought to myself, I still have a couple of weeks before I start my internship, maybe I should rent a car and drive down to Ft. Worth to see my Dad. I had a layover in Chicago. I could call him from there. I figured it would be a nice surprise for old Matthew.



***Twelve Fishermen And A Guide***

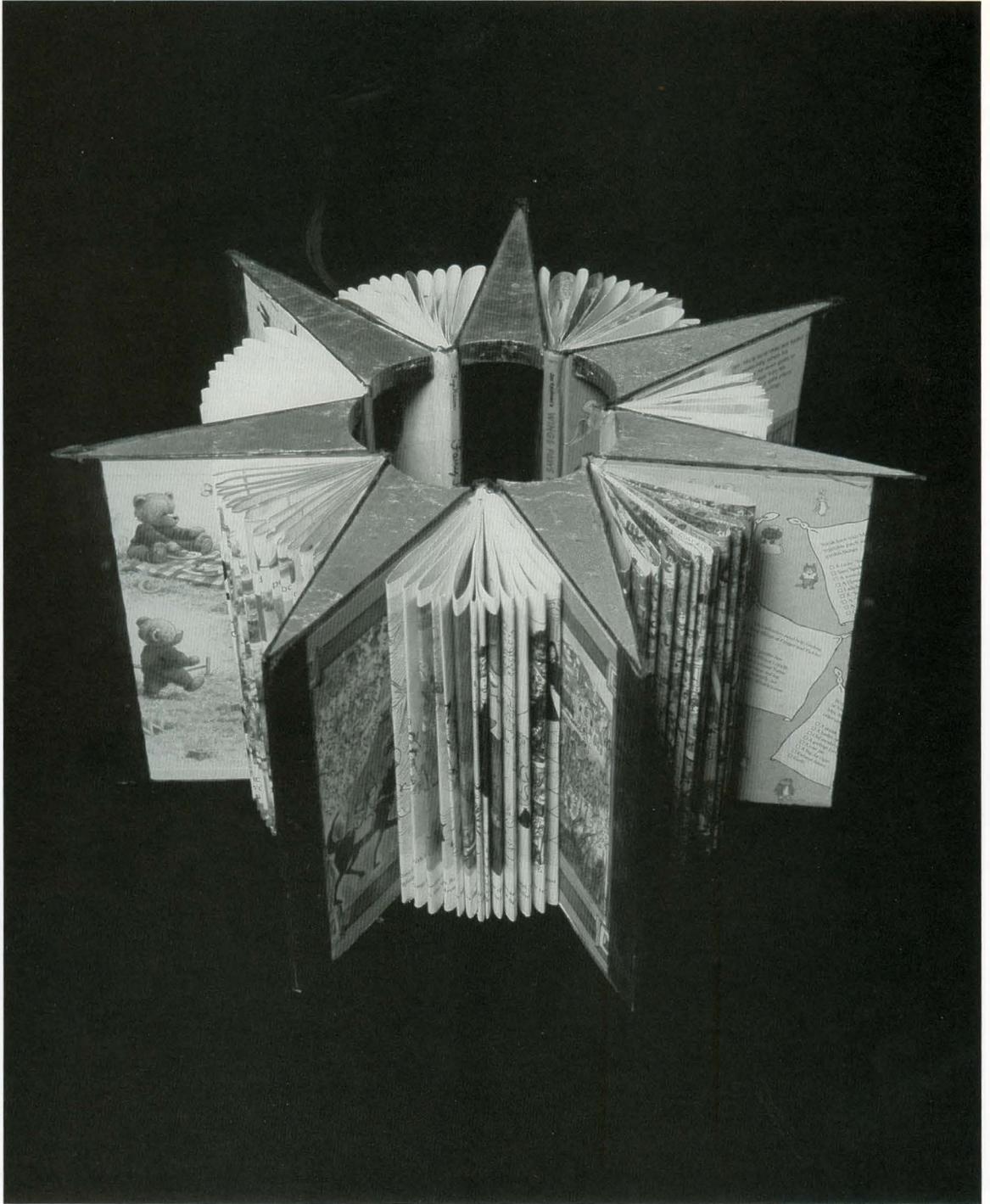
marble

Eugenia Makowski

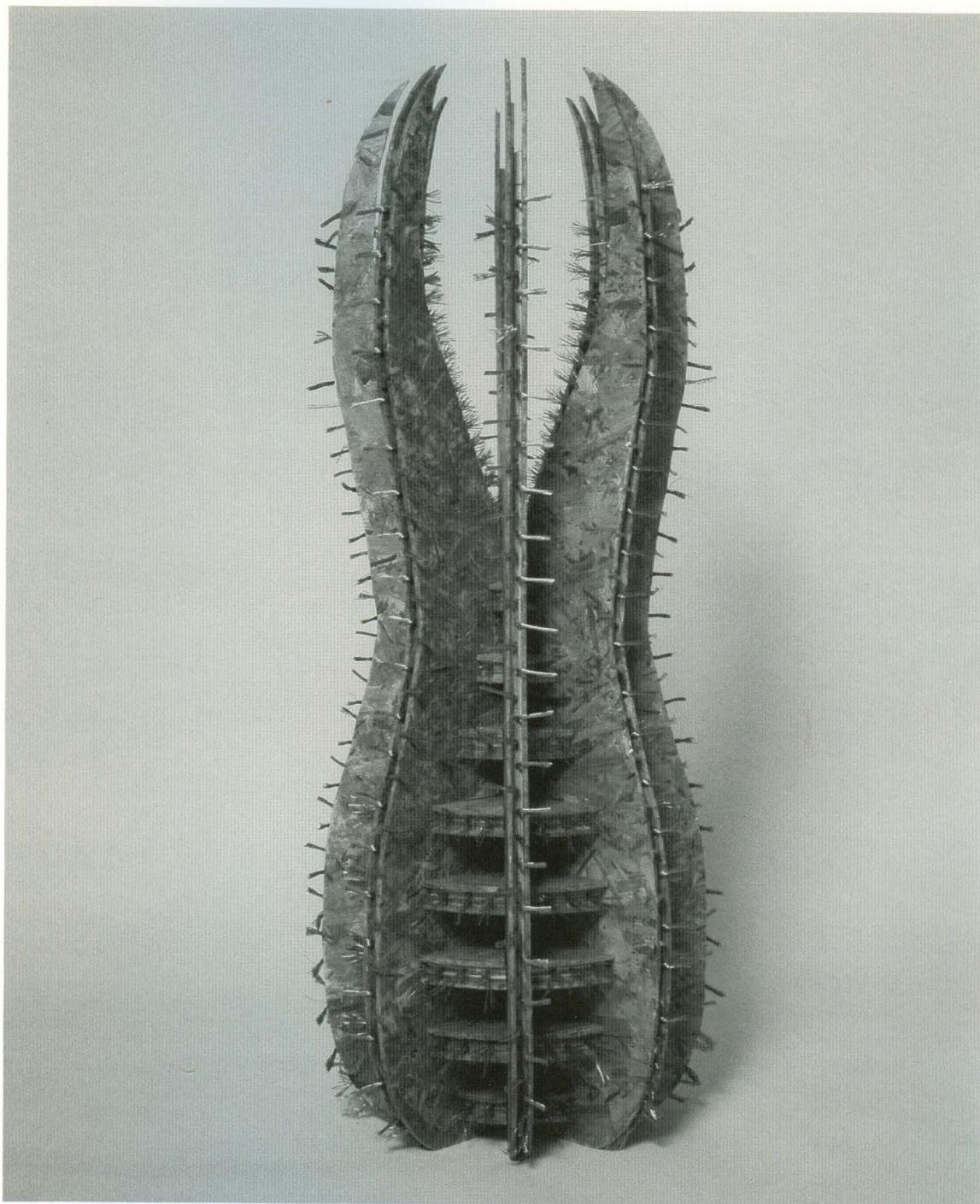
# Glass

Roya Kashanian

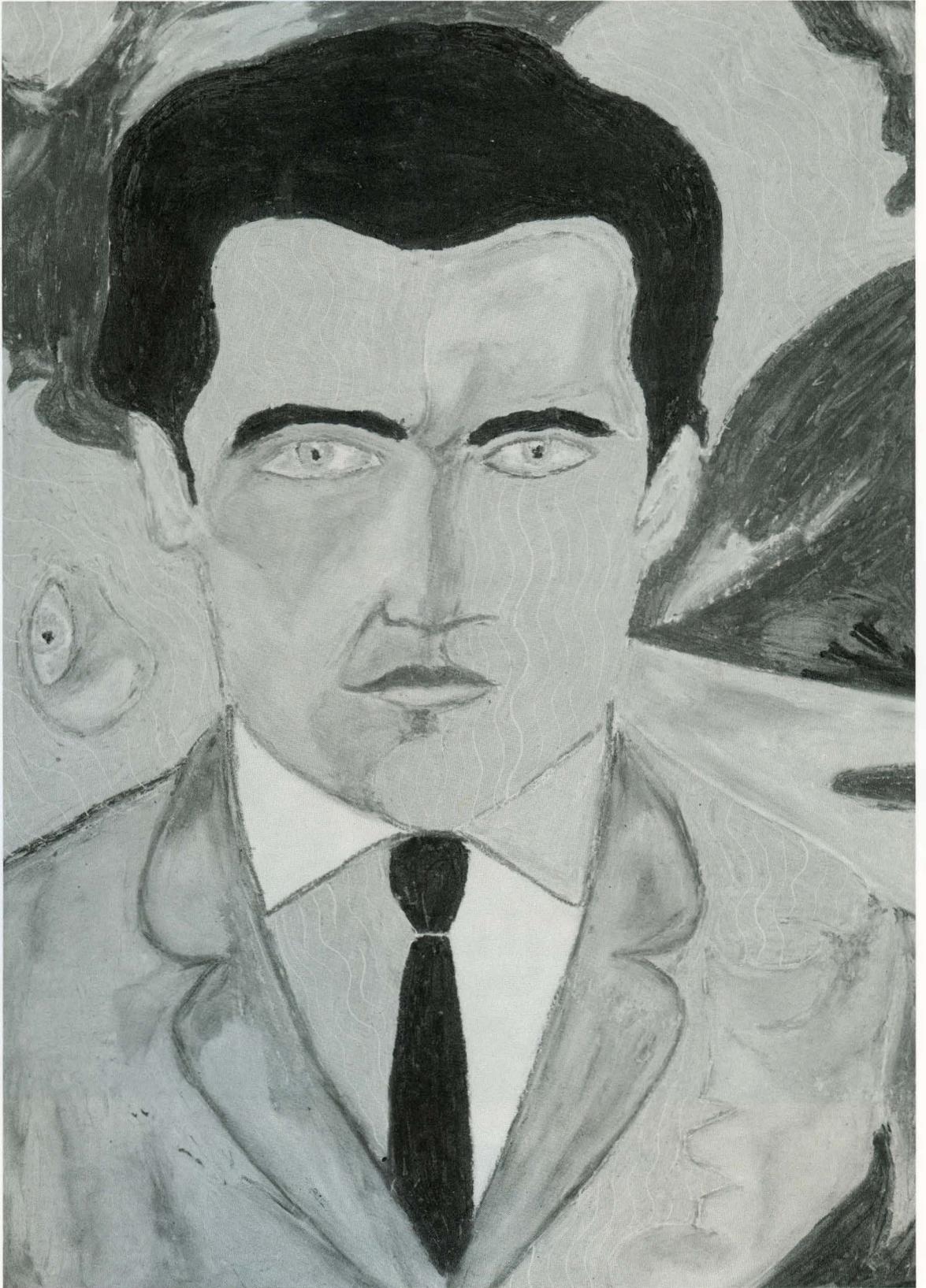
It's crooked outside and  
There's a story brewing in the midst  
of dining hours  
Passing by the guitar strings I'm chirping on  
You reminisce back to the moment when your  
Fingers held the rock star  
Studded microphone; the canopy of your anxieties.  
Stuck in the middle pudding built of wet cement and  
Sandpaper blows rubber nonsense bubbles  
At your face  
There are some honey coated dreams rolling  
In your sugar dough waiting to  
Fall from the  
Glowing end of my  
Greenleaf and simmer down around the red  
Ring of your wineglass  
The realization begins to knock—  
You aren't reaching the final madness of your  
Stages, it's still the beginning.  
Can this piece be cheesy? American and Provolone circular masks  
Laughing at the peyote colored cheeks  
Seared by the icy weather breathing frost in your eyes  
Clouding your vision while you split open and  
Melt  
Is the pressure getting to your head?  
The migraines wiped down  
With baby wipes and glitter handfuls  
Doesn't stop you from eating  
All the green pistachios and the  
Little chocolate Easter eggs wrapped  
In red, yellow, and pink foil.  
Have you lost your way?  
Maybe you should god bless my  
Sneezes and engulf yourself  
In a bottle of salt water and change your name to  
Aerial  
All the while, I'll still be here  
Waiting until you burst into song  
And  
Unwind.



***Seven Pointed Star For Jessie***  
books, gold leaf, wood  
Eugenia Makowski



*Treppe*  
wood and wire  
Ed Kowalczyk

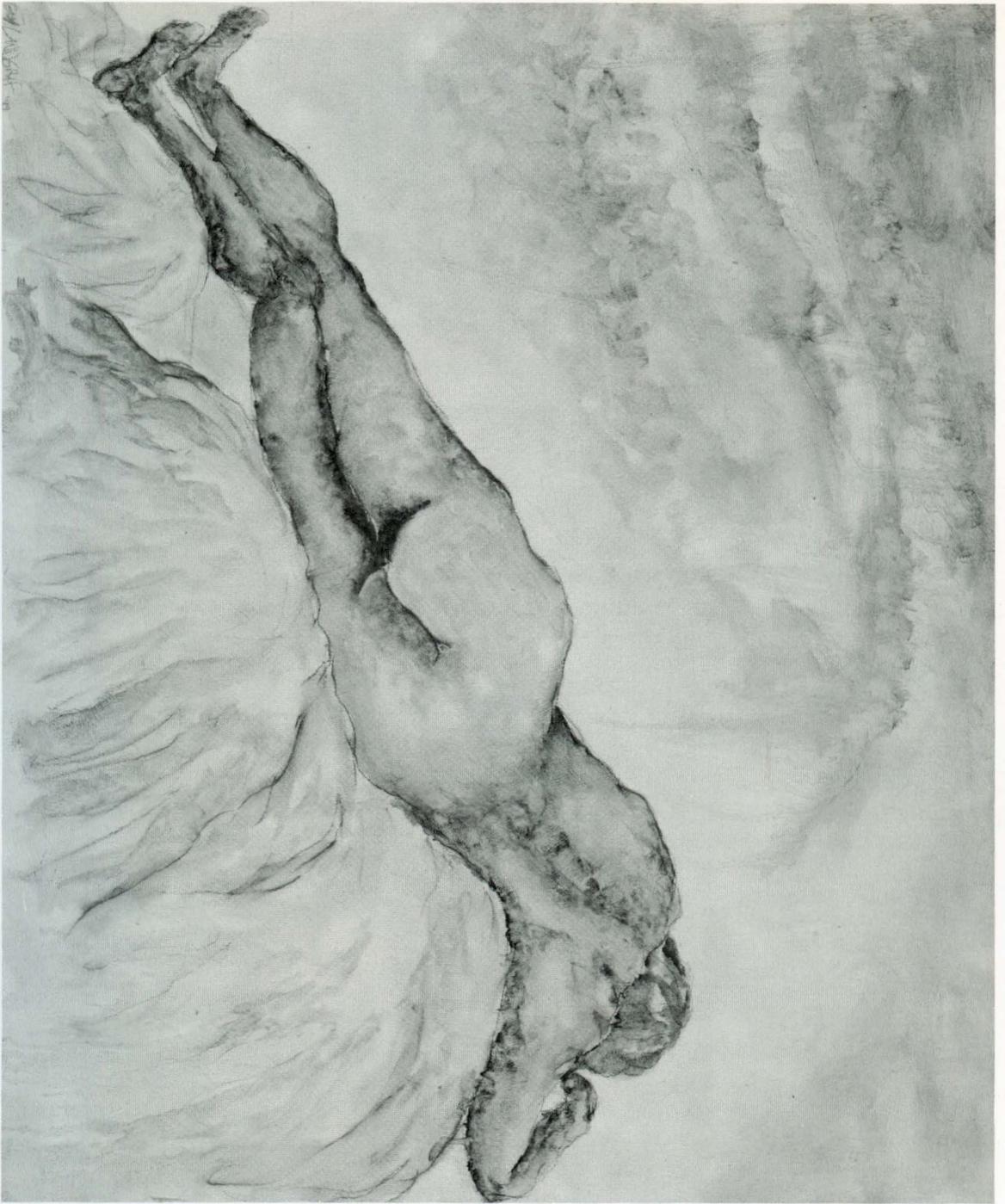


## Shannon Plate

I cannot catch my life. I  
awake moving, my tasks clenched  
in my hand  
so that my time,  
like money managed badly,  
is gone  
before it is truly mine  
and my enemy hisses defeat in my ear because  
it is never done ever.

But, some days it is enough  
to wander sleeveless with the sun,  
and explore myself—  
as intriguing as someone else's garden,  
treasures hidden under quick spreading yarrow  
and thoughts I don't recognize  
digging in, threatening to bloom.

***Inside Out***  
pastel 16x11  
Linda Baldwin  
(opposite)



**Figure In Distress**  
oil on wood 24x20  
Guy Landgraf, Jr.

# Conversations With Spaceman

Steve Kim

There was a time when I could see. I could see all the dark corners and crevasses of life; the inconsistencies, if pulled, would tear apart the fabric of reality. I could thin out existence and see the pure blue flow of life, like rivers of energy, flowing and ebbing between us, through us. I saw everything we knew to be real, everything that held us together, and everything that keeps us on the ground.

Now my vision is gone. The images are forever distorted with shadows, discoloration, and ghost images. Even if I wanted to see again, I cannot. Once lost, that place is lost forever. I have a daughter now. She's more precious than life itself. She will grow up like the other children. I will never tell her. I will never show her.

When I was young and could still see, I lived with a girl, not my wife, but a different girl. Rachel was her name, but I called her Jasper. I called all my girlfriends before her Jasper. The name was taken from a cat I had in my childhood. Jasper was a jigsaw colored tabby I had found when I was eight. I loved that cat. She was an older soul watching over me. One day Jasper was missing, and I cried all day because I knew she was dead. My mother told me that Jasper had run away. A few days later my father tracked a nasty stench into our storage shed in the backyard. He discovered the rotten, maggot infested remains of my cat. Even in death, Jasper tried to protect me. I've called all my girlfriends since then Jasper.

I loved Rachel, and would have married her if things had worked out. I

met her just after high school when I was working the third shift at the gas station. Our love was passionate then. In her third year of college, she decided to change her major to journalism and transfer to NYU. She had planned for me to eventually move in with her. I convinced her that I should move in right away. The situation at my house had become desperate. On the morning we left, my parents were both working. I didn't even leave a note. They found out where I had gone when Rachel phoned them later that week.

A year later our relationship soured a bit. She still went to school and I worked in a liquor store in a beat up neighborhood uptown. I watched hours of television before I went to work, and before Rachel returned from her late afternoon class. I didn't see much of her during the day, and maybe that was for the better. We were like the noodles the chef threw against the wall on my afternoon cooking show. She stuck to walls. I fell to the dirty kitchen floor.

My days were patterned like a well-worn rug. I woke up at noon, and after twenty-seven cold steps down the hallway, I'd try to hit some porcelain in my waking daze. Then, I was on the couch. The 27-inch Toshiba, with picture in picture, received my attention most of the afternoon. The salesman, or sales counselor as they called him, told me I would need a television with Invar Shadow Mask Cones. I have yet to learn how to use my picture in picture, or the Invar Shadow Mask Cones. Every afternoon I watched the same shows: *The Burly Cooking Show* (and I didn't cook), *This Old House* (I don't own a home), and my favorite, *Travels in Europe* (yet my closest experience to Europe was Little Italy).

When the sun was low in the late afternoon, I'd peel my body off the couch and head off to work. My boss gave me a choice of working in the day or the

evening; I consciously picked the evening, knowing I would see less of Jasper. I didn't mean to hurt her, but I had nothing to offer her. The cavity of my body had hollowed, and the pain reminded me of what was once there. I couldn't fight anymore. I chose to hide.

My job gave me consistency. My boss was a big Russian man with a heavy accent. He only showed up in the morning to collect the receipt tapes and the deposit from the night before. I hardly saw him. Everyone that worked there knew that he didn't care what went on in the store as long as we didn't steal. "If you steal, I kill you." Other than that, he was a great man to work for. Igor, we called him, paid us a low salary but gave us extra cash under the table. No questions asked.

One evening I was feeling tired. My face was flat on the counter as I breathed moisture onto its glass top. Someone walked in and said, "How ya doing Rick?"

"O.K.," I said, as I rang him up for two bottles of Colt 45 and a pack of Camel box. "You beat off today?"

"Yeah, and you?" he asked.

"Twice. Victoria's Secret and Cosmopolitan"

"Moving up in the world, huh?"

I didn't mean to be vulgar, but this was the only way I could communicate with these people. The truth was that I didn't want to hear their problems. I didn't want to hear why they were kicked out of their apartment or that their wife or girlfriend called the police on them. I was sick of listening to their reasoning on why they had to smack their girl around. I just wanted to humor them.

The two stock boys were somewhere in back trying to get into the pants of a Puerto Rican girl they had brought in earlier. I was staring at the clock with the Budweiser Logo on it. The dust particles floated in the light all around me. I could see them rising toward the rafters. I

sucked them in with each breath, losing them somewhere inside. I was having one of my moments.

A man came before me. He was an old guy with wild untamed hair and worn skin. He was skinny and horribly cross-eyed. The focal point of his vision must have been four inches in front of him. He had this "X" vision, where his right eye saw the left side and his left eye saw the right.

"What do you want?" I said politely.

"I want paper. Paper, paper, rolling paper," he said while licking his lips. I threw down the rolling paper on the counter trying to keep my distance. He picked it up with his bony fingers and said, "You got Jack, Jacky. Some Jacko Danielio?" Pressed against the back counter, I pointed to the shelf behind him. He retrieved a pint and asked for a pack of Viceroy. He pulled out a roll of bills from his tattered Members Only jacket and said "Thank yooo. Where you from?"

"I don't think I should say."

"I'm not from here. Not around here."

This man started telling me he is from another planet. He told his story with his hand mouthing the words in front of his lips. It was as if his fingers were telling the story. He looked like one of those mythical half-man, half-goat creatures as his wild, white hair danced in the gentle draft of the overhead heaters. His fingers fluttered in front of his mouth like he was playing a magical flute. He wove a tale of utter nonsense into a reality that was of his own.

"The-the thing about red is far away and I miss it. I much like here. Here I re-eally do. Better for your skin, really good, really good, and cheap too. I been here long, good long time. Earth is good. Colors are nice."

He said this while looking to the right of me.

"I not from here you know. I come from there."

He pointed his finger two feet away from his body into an empty space. I couldn't help but stare into that space, that emptiness that lied between us. I stared for seconds, minutes, or maybe even hours. I tried to fill it with thoughts. First, there was nothing. Then, a trickle of thoughts unraveled slowly, carefully, so as not to damage my consciousness. When my mind became accustomed to the thoughts, it flowed faster, growing, like a stream flowing down a mountain. The flow became more forceful and violent. Slowly, it began to uproot my conscious attachment to myself, tearing one root at a time. There was nothing left in me that was untouched. I was engulfed. Every nerve was touched. I couldn't hold on anymore. I flowed with the current to where everything flows. I moved with vicious speed unable to grasp anything real.

"Hey, Rick?"

It was Tony one of the stock boys.

"I'm going to get some smokes."

"Where did he go? Did? Did you see that weird guy standing here?"

"I'm looking at one right now," he said as he stared right at me.

"Never mind."

When I got home that evening Jasper was still up reading something in the kitchen. I tried to walk as straight as possible. She called for me. I pretended not to hear her and walked straight for the bathroom. She followed me to the bathroom door. In the light, I saw that her eyes were redder than mine. She threw a letter in my lap and glared at me with her arms crossed. The letter was from the Secretary of State informing me that my license had been suspended because of a DUI. All I thought was why didn't I check the mail before I left for work.

"Why? Why couldn't you tell me?" she cried as she slid down the doorframe and buried her face on her knees.

I had a perfect explanation, but by the time the thought reached my mouth,

all I could muster was, "I didn't do nothin'."

She grabbed the plastic cup with our toothbrushes in it and whipped it at me. It just missed my head and bounced off the wall cracking into three large pieces. As I braced myself for another attack, she shot up and stomped into the bedroom slamming the door behind her. I sat by the toilet staring at a piece of the plastic cup that bounced into the toilet. It was yellow with part of a picture of Snoopy on his doghouse pretending to be the pilot of a WWI biplane. I knew it wasn't just the DUI she was crying about. It was everything.

She was tired of going to school, working forty hours a week, and sick of mothering me. I didn't need another god damn mother. I just needed a place to crash. Our needs had become different. I was not ready to become what she wanted me to be. She didn't realize that I would sacrifice our relationship to maintain myself as I was. I loved her, but I really just needed a fucking place to stay.

My stomach began to heave. I grabbed on to the sides of the porcelain bowl and placed my face in it. I could hear myself choking up what was inside me. I swore I would never drink again if the pain would pass. I looked in the bowl as if I could find the answers somewhere in the muck of half digested food, alcohol, and blood. I stared at the floating piece of plastic.

When I woke up, I found that Jasper had left a message on the answering machine. That's how we communicated: notes and answering machine messages. She said she wanted to have a talk later.

At work that night, twenty minutes before closing time, I was alone reading *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and looking at pictures from *Just Eighteen*. At first I hadn't noticed, but there he was. His

white hair waved like flames as he stood in the isle. I picked up a tap for a keg.

"Hi ho. Hello. Hello my friend. Ha ha ha."

I clutched the tap harder.

"Today was great day. Much color. Happy air. Do you like dream world? Happy air?" he said clutching a black bag. "Yeah, the flow. Smooth flow."

He popped open the bag. I peered into it carefully so I wouldn't be sucked in. This crazy spaceman had more dope in his bag than I have smoked in my life. There were a number of uncut sheets of acid. My first thought was, "Why does a person this fucked up, need to get more fucked up?"

I realized he wasn't trying to sell me the drugs, but was offering them as a token of friendship. I weighed the options of going home and having "the big talk" against getting high with a man out of his mind. I chose the latter.

I don't know what I expected. We went to his roach infested Grand Royal Hotel. They charged weekly rates. As run down as it was, I admit the hotel was a far better place than the cardboard box I had imagined. The spaceman signed me in as a guest at the front counter. Apparently, the man at the counter was keeping the bums with no money outside away from the bums with a little money inside. I began to think the spaceman was a bit more capable than I had first thought.

The hotel was very quiet. The only noise I heard was the creaking of the floor as we walked down the hallway. No one made a sound. But I could feel the ears listening, fearing the noise from behind their doors. His room was larger than I expected. He walked to the dining room with his black bag. I sat on the couch. The walls were empty, no pictures, nothing to give me an understanding of the spaceman. There were shit loads of JAMA medical journals lying around. He was quiet.

"So you've got a Spam collection," I said looking at the trashcan. The situation was getting too weird for me.

"Hey, hey, here you go." It was comically large. I swear I needed two hands to hold the thing. The craftsmanship was quite impressive. The ends tapered off evenly without any loose paper hanging off. I pulled out a lighter and lit one end while taking a deep drag. The blue smoke slid down my throat smooth. I held my hit while I passed it back to the spaceman. The smoke loosened my joints, limbs, and neck. The room began to spin. My concept of time disappeared. I was free to flow anywhere I wanted. I was in the cracks of reality. I understood the spaceman plain as English. I was the student, and he was the master. He told me not to be afraid, but to embrace the space were in. Everything was one.

Blood flowed down my face. My head was throbbing as I regained consciousness; my vision blurred. I began to focus. There sat a large man. He sat with his legs crossed facing me on a comparatively puny chair. He wore a black leather trench coat and sharply tailored black suit under it.

"Feeling better little girl?"

I had no idea how much time had passed since I was knocked unconscious. The spaceman was not in the room, but his black bag lay at the feet of the man. A noise came from the bathroom. It was a soft whining sound, then a sudden crash of glass. I looked away from the door trying to focus on something else. I picked up a JAMA journal sitting on the table.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm looking at this magazine," I responded, unable to make eye contact.

"What are you doing here?"

"I just uh, came here to, smoke."

"A boy like you can really get hurt around here," he said slowly, letting each word sink in. Another crash echoed from

the bathroom. The man placed his gun on the table between us. He pulled out a cigarette from a metal case and lit it.

"Tell me something. You his friend?" He pointed with his head toward bathroom.

"Yeah. No. I just met him today." My throat dried and my leg shook uncontrollably. He sat in silence. I couldn't stand it. I wished I'd gone home to Jasper.

"You know, if somebody busted in and started bashing my friend's brains out," he said as he leaned back in the chair, "do you know what I'd do?" He took a drag from his cigarette. "I'd kill the motherfucker." He exhaled with his head back.

At this point, the gun was closer to me than it was to him. His eyes closed as he took another deep drag, leaning back. He looks at me and gave a small, knowing laugh. He read me for what I was. I had no part in his world and he had no part in mine. But whose world

was the spaceman from? I stood up still dizzy from the head injury.

"Say nothing to no one," he said without looking up.

As I walked out, I heard the screams in the hallway. No one came out of their rooms. When I walked through the lobby, the man at the counter was reading a newspaper. We all had an understanding. There was nothing for me to do.

The cool rain pelted my jacket as I walk down the street toward the subway. My whole world was uneven and out of place. What was real? I told myself it wasn't real. That made it easier.

I remember when I first noticed. I was sitting in the D train on my way home. The few passengers in the car carefully moved to the other side of the train. They all stared at me. I felt my head and realized it was covered in blood. An uncontrollable laugh came over me as I realized what I had become.



# Kameraden

Debbie Pickup

"March 2nd, 1941—German Troops Enter Bulgaria!" the local post read at the news stand this morning. All of Berlin was buzzing with news of another triumph of the armed forces of the Reich. The soldiers marched through the streets of the city looking as though there was something to be said for being a member of the unstoppable Wermacht. Throughout the morning, the soldiers had been moving in and out of the city preparing for another victorious offensive. Walther looked proudly across the massed ranks of men marching, while the mid-morning sun danced upon their bright steel helmets. Each soldier was his own symbol of victory and honor. In all of Germany there was nothing like being a member of that sacred brotherhood of warriors, as old as Valhalla, and as proud as a race of perfection could allow. The atrocities of the Great War were now being forgotten, as all of Europe once again trembled at the sound of the German war drum. However, this time would be different.

The Fuehrer had brought to Germany a new hope. The people responsible for the disgrace of the Great War had been found and were being punished for what they had done to the Fatherland.

Walther's father had fought in the Great War. He was there when the armies of Germany had been victorious against the heathen Russians. He had also been present when they pushed the French armies back to Paris. Walther loved these stories as a child. He delighted in sitting by his father's side at night listening to him and his comrades discussing the old army and the great campaigns they had fought. But, the conversations always turned to disgust, as the old soldiers spoke of their dead comrades and the unjust armistice that followed. When the depression came, Walther remembered waking up in the night to the sound of a gunshot. He found out later that his father had taken his own life in lieu of facing the disgrace that would come from losing all his worldly possessions. Walther's mother struggled for more than two years before they moved in with her brother's family in Berlin. It was here that Walther witnessed the growth of a new party, a great party, one that claimed it would right all the wrongs of the recent past. Walther's uncle took him more than once to see a man called Hitler speak about Germany and how it had been betrayed from within by a race of inhuman creatures known as the Jews. It was their undermining of his country, with help from the Marxists, that had destroyed Germany.

When Walther turned thirteen Hitler became Chancellor of all Germany, promising the people a more proud and

Untitled  
photo 6x9  
Colleen Gentry  
(opposite)

prosperous country. Within the next five years this appeared to be true. The family moved to a larger apartment in a part of the city that had formerly been occupied by Jewish intellectuals. Walther's uncle was made an officer in the ranks of the new party. He wore a black uniform dominated by a large red, white, and black armband that carried the symbol of the ancient god Thor. Some of the children at school called it a "black spider" and stayed away from the men in the black uniforms. Walther knew better than to run from the men that had saved his country, a country he would serve and defend until his death.

Walther's uncle enrolled him into an organization called the Hitler Jugend. Here, he was with other boys his age learning how to better serve the state. He learned firsthand of the truth behind the Jew. It was this experience he carried into his three years with the Reichsarbeitsdienst. Everyday he marched off to work knowing that he was making a difference for all the Germans.

As Walther stared out across the street, he could see the endless rows of soldiers riding their motorcycles. The hum of their engines blended with the roar of the crowd as they moved in perfect formation through the streets. "One day I will look that good!" Walther said to his mother as he pointed into the street. She smiled, and thought of how proud she was that her son was to be part of this great body of heroes. Because the war came suddenly, and Germany was swept away into the imaginary world of glory and great heroes, it scared her as well. All around her the young men yelled "Seig Heil!" Then, the crowd went into a roar as the Fuehrer passed in his Mercedes. What a beautiful automobile, open-top and not a speck of dust from the road. It was a proud time for Germany, so powerful, more so than before the Great War. Nothing stood in the way of the giant

panzers that were feared on battlefields all across Europe.

Walther's mother looked around for him, calling his name. But a boy of twenty-one would hardly listen for his mother's call when he was caught up in the rapture of such a day. She took one last glimpse at the marching boys and turned back into the house to put her mind at ease.

\* \* \*

The sign on the front of the building read: BARRACKEN der Zweiten Gruppe. After three long days of crawling through the mud fields with little sleep and rations, Walther and his comrades found comfort in the familiar sign. As they approached the path to the barracks, Hauptman Scherer called the troops to a halt and right face. The only thoughts that crossed their minds, as the rain drummed on their steel helmets, were eating a hot meal and falling into a warm, dry bed. They were told to wait for five minutes and then head toward the motor pool for weapons inspection. Walther looked up at the trees and noticed how the rain made them seem so fresh and revived. Somehow the rain seemed to also cleanse the uniforms and spirits of this weary group of soldiers. The orders to march to the motor pool interrupted his thoughts. Once in the motor pool, they lined up and presented their weapons for inspection. Hauptman Scherer walked down the rows, only stopping once in a while to look at a soldier's weapon. After three days in the rain and mud not one weapon could pass such an inspection. When the hauptman reached the last row of men, he turned, and smartly walked front and center with an arrogant smile.

"Well, since none of you has bothered to keep a clean rifle, then none of you is up for mess either." He quickly looked upon the ranks to see if there was any dissension.

"Good, I will see you at 0500 for

exercises. You may return to your barracks." As he scanned the group again, he saw the displeasure on the soldier's faces, but none spoke a word in fear of the hauptman's wrath. As he exited the motor pool, Erwin Sajer, who had the reputation of a troublemaker, said something under his breath. Hauptman Scherer stopped, raised his head, and faced the battalion.

"Because Grenadier Sajer's stomach seems to be grumbling rather loudly, it leads me to believe that you men may be hungry. The mess hall will be open for the next hour for this battalion." Cheers came pouring out of the ranks. Hauptman Scherer immediately raised his hand to halt the excitement. Once there was silence, he lowered his hand and said, "Except for 2nd Gruppe," as he fixed his eyes on Erwin. "Maybe a little bit more exercise will relieve your hunger. I'd say about twenty more laps around the parade ground, wouldn't you?"

Reluctantly, 2nd Gruppe followed their Unteroffizier out through the hanger doors. As they made their way out to the parade ground, the men began to talk quietly to one another. Glances of disgust fell on Erwin, who by now had fallen to the rear of the column and refused to raise his head. Worst of all, as they waded around the parade ground in torrents of rain, they could smell the food the other landsers were enjoying. The men became more vocal, expressing what they would like to do to Sajer if they ever got their hands on him. Erwin now trailed the gruppe by a good twenty meters, not wanting to hear his comrades complain over his recent debacle. Walther did not take part in the insult campaign against Erwin, but kept running through the rain, staring straight ahead. His friend Ernst Villers fell in next to him and inquired as to whether his strength was holding up. Walther, who took pride in keeping himself physically fit, shrugged, and kept running. One thing

that seemed to strike him was the helmet of the man in front of him. He remembered that day in Berlin when he watched the men of the Wehrmacht march triumphantly through the streets proudly wearing their medals. And their helmets—that seemed to defy the reflection of heaven itself—were now nothing more than tarnished, muddy, green, overturned bowls of steel. Was this the fate he was resigned to? To be forever exhausting himself in this reverie of mud. As he rounded the last lap, Walther lowered his head and headed straight for the barracks. Familiar faces and voices, even a pat on the back, all led Walther straight towards the only rewarding part of his life as a grenadier, his bunk. Tired from the ordeal, all forgot how terribly hungry they were, turning down bits of food offered by men from other gruppes. So tired that nobody remembered to lynch Erwin Sajer.

\* \* \*

"Wake up!" No answer. Ernst was in a panic--04:51 and Walther laid motionless. "Wake you dirty bastard, the feldwebel will be here in less than five minutes for the morning inspection!"

Ernst's frantic words brought Walther into a conscience state. He shot out of his bunk and began to dig for a clean shirt and a knife to scrape the mud from his uniform. Practically buried in his own chest, there came a tap on his head. It was his good friend Kurt Helbourg who handed him a bayonet with which he quickly used to scrape the mud from his uniform. Within a few seconds of getting himself together, attention was called, and Feldwebel Schulze entered the hall. He was accompanied by the hauptman and a strange little man who wore the uniform of an oberst, though he was clearly not much of a soldier.

Rather than inspect this morning, the feldwebel stood in the doorway as his two officers paced up and down between the bunks not paying as much attention

to the soldiers as they did their conversations.

Upon returning to the entrance, the hauptman turned and spoke, "We are foregoing exercises this morning gentlemen." Some of the men looked around at each other puzzled. "Pack your rucksacks and prepare to move out! There will be a debriefing for NCOs in forty-five minutes at my headquarters." He headed for the door, following the oberst who had already walked out of the building.

Just before leaving, the hauptman turned once more to his confused men and said in a calm manner, "Our Fuehrer has invaded Mother Russia my boys! And we will go help him!" With that, he left the barracks followed by Feldwebel Shultze.

The men in the room looked at each other in astonishment, but nobody could speak. Walther stared at the ground in front of him. Never in his wildest dreams did he think that he would go this soon. Then came cheers led by Erwin.

"Finally we will be out of this dump! Maybe new uniforms and definitely better officers!" Some of the other men cheered when Erwin shouted these words. But things quickly got quiet as Kurt made his way towards Erwin, who was barely half his size.

"Just remember little one, at the front you can't bitch about your boots being too tight, or your helmet not fitting right." Erwin became annoyed by this obvious challenge to his character, but he dared not say a word for fear of being pummeled by Helbourg.

From a corner, Ernst spoke, "At the front the officers shoot a man for insolence." The other men of 2nd gruppe were suddenly reminded of the folly the previous night had brought. "Here, I think we just teach them a lesson!" Shouts from the surrounding men ensued as Erwin tried to defend

himself. An instant later, Grenedier Helbourg's fist was buried in his jaw.

Walther, who did not get involved in any barracks brawls, sat to the side and wrote a letter to his mother, while Kurt broke young Erwin in two. Moments later, a tap on the back from Ernst reminded him that it was nearing the time they must go.

\* \* \*

The air around them seemed stiff with the stench of rotten eggs. They swayed back and forth, as the halftrack trundled over what used to be a grazing field. So far no one had seen the battle, but for the last three days they heard it, even as they slept. Ernst spoke of having visited the infirmary for stomach cramps, and leaving with horrid visions of blood and screaming soldiers. Nobody had witnessed this other than him, and no one really wanted to believe him. Despite his beating in the barracks just a few weeks ago, Sajer seemed to be in the best mood of anyone, singing songs to himself and bragging about how many Russians he was going to kill. Walther and Kurt sat together in the front near the driver, talking of home and wondering what the next few minutes may hold for 2nd gruppe. It seemed odd to Walther that someone as large and tough as Kurt might be scared of something he had never seen, but rather only heard about from other soldiers. They heard it clearly all around them, the men's voices, and the rumble of tanks going past the flanks of their vehicle. Walther leaned over to take a look out the driver's view port, but smoke made it difficult to see the half-track in front of them carrying the first gruppe. After some maneuvering, track #1 came back in sight only to burst into a ball of oil, scrap metal, and flames throwing men's bodies from the hull. The track came to a screeching halt, throwing most of the men forward.

Then, all at once, Unteroffizier Kuehr gave the order to bail out. All the men clambered out the back of the track to the realization that they were under fire. They ran as fast as they could towards a bank of trees, while hearing bullets ricocheting off the rear of the track. Feeling the heat of an explosion on the back of their legs and neck, they threw themselves into a ditch. Walther managed to turn himself around and peer over the top of the berm, feeling a rumbling underneath him. This wasn't a ditch, but a large shell hole.

Walther could see his track through the smoke, or what was left of it. The right track had been thrown, and the drivers were slumped out of the back doors, shot while trying to escape the demise of their vehicle. He could make out most of his squad, counting eight. Looking back over the field, he tried to find the two missing landsers. About ten meters away, Unteroffizier Kuehr was rolling around in pain with a severe neck wound. Not two meters from the track, bent back on his knees, Walther could see Sajer. He had absorbed most of the fire from the machine gun and was grievously wounded. Walther buried his face into the ground. "He was just singing . . . just before. . . ." Walther was having trouble getting words out when Ernst pulled himself up next to Walther and peered out over the berm.

"So he finally did something for the unit--aren't we proud!" he said as he laughed out loud. Walther couldn't help but laugh a little too; the reality hadn't set in. He expected Sajer to get up and make some smart comment. Then Gefreiter Koppel, who had assumed command, ordered them to rise and move out. The 2nd gruppe climbed out of the ditch and fired into the smoke. The infantry, who had driven them from their vehicles, were falling back. Ernst blasted their pit with his sturmgewehr, and the grenadiers moved ahead. As

they cleared ahead of the smoke, they could hear the rumbling sound getting closer. The largest tank any of them had ever seen stopped on the road in front of them. They dove in all directions for cover. It was Russian by marking, and probably the same vehicle that had destroyed both tracks. The large machine gun on the front of the tank opened up on the grenadiers before they could clear the road. There were some nerve-shattering screams that were completely drowned out by the KV-I's main armament as it blew apart another unsuspecting vehicle.

His task became clear. Walther could see that the leeward hatch was open on the tank. Two seconds later, a blast from the other side of the road caused the tank to lurch to one side. The familiar blast pattern of a panzerfaust echoed from the road.

Walther stopped thinking and sprang from his hiding place, leaping onto the tank with a few short steps. He pulled a grenade from his belt, yanked the wire free, and threw it into the belly of the tank. Diving back into the brush, he almost broke his arm as he fell to the ground. The tank seemed to rise from its road-wheels, smoking from every crevice, as it fell back in place.

All the men rose and rushed further down the road. Walther stayed near the tank, proud of what he had done, avenging the deaths of his comrades. The forward hatch flew open and a Russian soldier, still afire, tried to get out. Walther shot him without remorse, laughing, as he thought of Erwin Sajer and his final duty to the company. He looked back into the clearing. About ten meters down the road was Kurt's broken body. Walther stared at the carnage for a moment, remembering their friendship, plans they made when the war was over, and the promises made to protect each other. Where were the tears for his dear friends whom

he had been through so much with? Was all the pain, suffering, and death worth what the Reich set out to accomplish? Kurt's helmet was lying on the ground nearby, glistening from what little sun was penetrating through the blanket of smoke. He smirked at the

helmet. It somehow reminded him of a far-off past and youthful dreams, remembering those days they thought they were invincible. And then there was only Kurt's smile, in his memory, as he hurried to catch up with the gruppe.



***Dance Of Fire***  
acrylic 19½x15  
Guy Landgraf, Jr.

