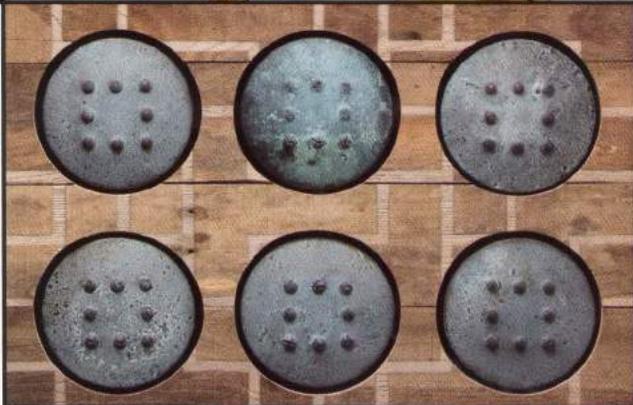


Point of View

2012

Harper College Student Art and Literary Magazine



Faculty Art and Design Advisor | Karen Patterson

Faculty Literary Advisor | Anne Davidovicz

Art and Design Editor | Julia Franiak

Literary Editor | Hubert Marciniac

Point of View Award | "Dead Weight" by Audrey Wilson

"Minotaur in the Labyrinth" by Melanie Knippen

Awarded to the highest scoring piece of literature by faculty judges assembled by the Faculty Literary Advisor. Winner is awarded a cash prize and recognized in *Point of View*. Two pieces were chosen this year.

Ray Mills Award | *Wall Flowers*, Mia Ishiguro

Awarded to the highest scoring art piece by student judges assembled by the Art and Design Editor. Winner is awarded a cash prize and recognized in *Point of View*.

Vivian Stewart Award | "Dead Weight" by Audrey Wilson

"My Mother's Malignancy" by Melanie Knippen

Awarded to the highest scoring piece of literature by student judges assembled by the Literary Editor. Winner is awarded a cash and recognized in *Point of View*. Two pieces were chosen this year.

Vivian Stewart Award Student Judges | Courtney Cosgriff, Melanie Knippen, Hubert Marciniac, Billy Miller, Sonia Sherwani, Nicole Thomas

Point of View Award Faculty Judges | Teresa Chung, Richard Middleton-Kaplan, Jessica Walsh, Andrew Wilson

Ray Mills Award Student Judges | Jeanine Dorn, Katie Houlding, Melissa Mireles, GaVin Moore, Judy O'Neill, Alyssa Paulsen, Neal Sacheck, Aaron Wagner

Special Thanks To | Sandy Barney, Susan Borcheck-Smith, Janice Elbert, John Kurmant, Michael Nejman, Amanda Nielsen, Jason Peot, Perry Pollock, Sam Rosby

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Every attempt has been made to include all contributors and ensure accuracy of all information. We apologize for any mistakes or omissions.

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Back Cover

Chris Dwyer | Flo

Woodcut

25" x 33"

Bianca Vitale

Deception

Leaves are the plates of a Venus fly trap
They patiently close when their dinner is ready
One prick of a hair and the enzymes are cocked
waiting for famine or feast

The thistles are alert
ready to capture prey
spokes to ensure a meal and
no merciful escape

With color like rubellite
That sparkles to take hold of sight
beauteous, dangerous
a mystery domineering

A scent that allures, attracts
and invigorates
like the sweet pollen of a
commercialized flower

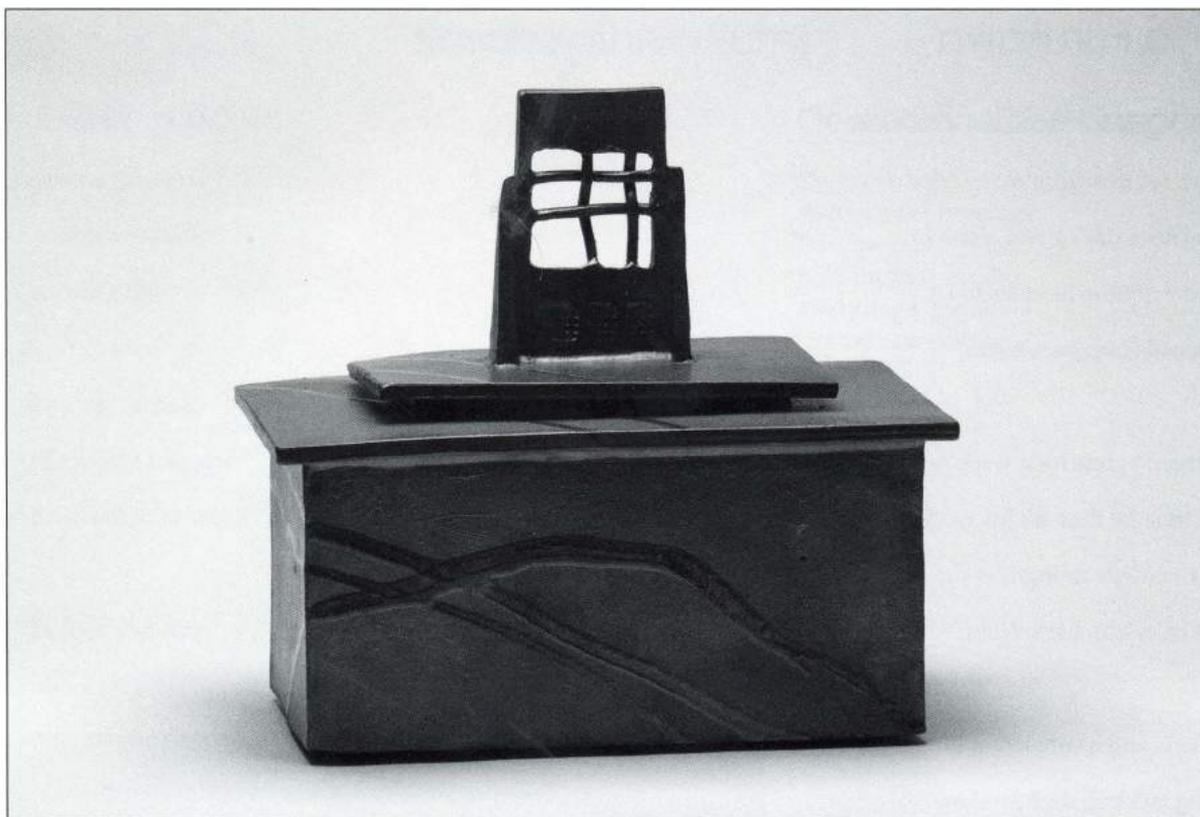
Enzymes licking
Thistles tightening
Leaves pinching

A second prick
that pulls the trigger



Sharene Shaw

Talisman
Stoneware, Acrylic, Nail Lacquer
6" x 14" x 14"



Bill Schwerin

An Urn Built for Two

Stoneware

12" x 12" x 6.5"

Maya Furukawa

Burning Woman

She was yelling—the woman was screaming and we could see the fire that burned her from below. She ignited and you watched her burn until she went out. But while she burned—how fiercely she did it!—she burned beautifully. Sparks flew—flew at me—but you watched you watched from the sidelines, simply admiring how beautiful she was when she burned. *All I can hear—all i can feel—are the words spewing, the hot coals scarring me.* I looked to you, hoping that you would get the water, put the woman out. *Let her sizzle; stop the screaming flame.* Instead, instead, you gawked, you stared. You admired her beauty *All I can feel is the searing pain as she burns me to ashes.* But you, you just stood, admiring her fiery beauty. Her fire simmers as she runs out of oxygen. Finally, the burning woman self-extinguishes.

Maya Furukawa

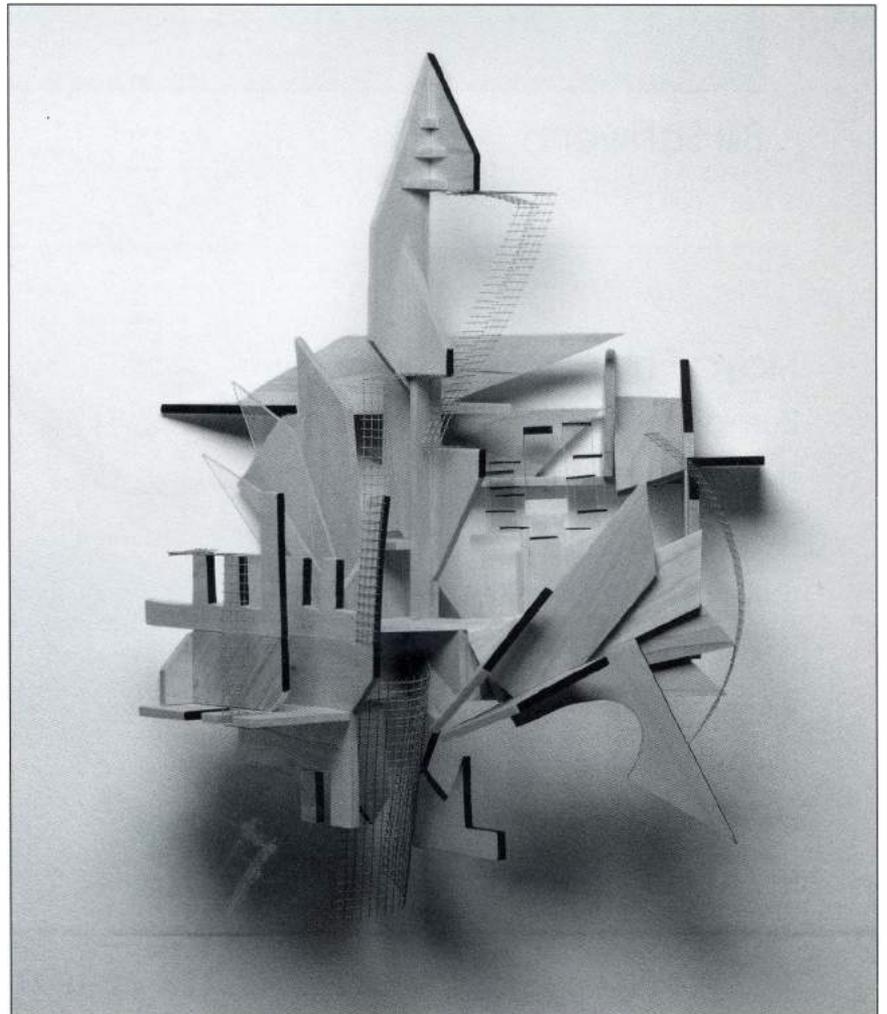
Stranger in His Own House

A man returns from many trips
Home for a day or two, that's it
And every time he stalls to sit
Work calls him back again.

Constantly gone for a week or days
Each time he flies, it's his work that pays
Never enough strength at the end of each day
Work calls him back again.

Two kids and a wife left at home
Feeling lacking, slightly alone
Never accompanied, he starts to roam...
Work calls him back again.

Finally home for a day or two
His family's trying to start anew
He realizes that his children grew
And he's a stranger in his own house.



Oscar Ortiz

Tip Top Shapes

Wood

24" x 18" x 8"

Sarah Kathryn Burns

To a Rogue Curl

you caress my left

young breast—

a lover's sigh

curling, ticking

my nipple hardens

grows dark brown

I pluck you free

almost resenting you

for letting go

On the Edge of a Meadow

She moves,
sweet grass pirouettes.

Downwind I
hold the lens steady.

Whistling whispers—
treetops are gossiping.

Click—
my focus alerts, her
form stills.

November chills,
placid fingers creep
down my neck.

I release a silent shot
her grace—
immortalized.



Alejandro Monroy

Breathe
Photography
14" x 11"

Sarah Kathryn Burns

A Collapse of My Welfare

Dear Woman,
Your shirt tag is
sticking up. Please,
I beg you, just—
just let me—
tuck
it
down.
I beseech you for
it is driving me
wild like
a barracuda,
or something.

This Morning

i.

It is too early
cold bed and darkened windows
bare skin against sheets

ii.

I dreamt you were gone
Calls to you went un-answered
Walls were painted gray

iii.

But now I lay here
my hand resting on your hip
Birds will soon waken

An Injection of Poppy's Mania

She quietly hums to herself.
Pushing the poppy in,
she is sewing
clotted tracks.
A little blue,
some red—it is inevitable...
more white pallor than
the pattern's desire.

She takes a hollow breath—

—she smoothes her tongue
over plaque'd teeth.
A shuddering breath.
Wet mascara'd lashes.
The clock ticks.

Ticks.

Ticks.

Sarah Kathryn Burns

Confessional

Father O'Hara
hands no salvation --
Mary—
will not hail.
I shake my fists
twenty-four pews back.
My damned soul
requires
retribution, sustenance.

Away, beneath
altars, my
devil snarls,
froths, gnashing
fangs. Bless'ed
wine—
my desire.

Bottle is depleted,
my eyes cross.
Shambling,
I float to Mass.
"Peace be with you."
Yes—
and to me.

From Their Bed

Eyes glaze
a dress
clinging to hips—
a moment.

Soft fabric cascades

heeled shoes.

Breaths catch,

anticipation

lingers,

fingers brush—

a small smile.



Mia Ishiguro

New York - New York #100 and #200

Print on Clay & Soda Wash
17" x 12" x 4" and 12" x 14" x 4"



Alyssa L. Paulsen

Au Naturele

Ceramic

26" x 18" x 6"

Patrick O'Steen

Three Winds

Covenant

I am still now, a waiting spider accumulating strength after spinning a mighty web of incomprehensible design. I am not arrogant, only confident, and all that oppose me will be caught in that web and consumed. Alive for so few years compared to the well of time that reflects my death. I have witnessed hours and days drifting into months and years; ages and eons gone before me, all passed under a burning sun and a gleaming moon drifting into a bleak eternity. I have realized so far that nothing is set. There is no plan except for the one we craft. And my plan; my design; will trump all the rest. Again, I am not arrogant. I am patient, and I have waited through lifetimes of humanity, generations upon generations for my time to finally come. I am an angel, and a witch, and the devil, and I am God. I am the demon at your doorstep, and the reaper at your deathbed. If you should kill me, my spirit will prevail and I will return to you. Again and again until you lie in the dust, resource for the maggots and the worms.

I am eternal, more constant than the stars which might burn out at any moment. An age in the universe may pass and I will nod as it drifts by. I will always be here. To kill this flesh, which is my soul, will do nothing. The concept of me will survive, and reform, and when I rebound back I will be right beside you. Like I said, I have been dead already for such a long time. And that death has given me the opportunity to think, and plan to take everything that was deprived of me in that life. I scarcely remember those dreadful days when wrinkles took to my skin and aches settled where youth had once thrived. Everything will be mine, but not from greed. I am innocent, I always was. This is what's owed to me. I will be the tyrant of all. This oath I make unto myself. That I will stop at nothing, to rule everything. No compromise or remorse, just a brilliant commitment. I won't dare to breathe until it is finished. The end will be the end and that will mean that I have won.

Those crossing my path are merely puppets to the puppeteer. Those who believe they have control will pass it on to me. Even now I roam unsuspected, but these are dangerous waters and I am the scourge. I relay every moment that passes and turn it to my advantage. They won't see it coming, not even near the end. Already the clock begins to cycle. There will be conflicts that they believe they are the center of, but the core is always me. Always remember that I am still at the center; you are fortunate to be allowed a view into my design.

My design is made from my strength, and my strength comes from my confidence. I know where the boundaries lie; I know where the lines are drawn. I am a dancer silhouetted along the edge but not dropping off, and the more I glide around that border the stronger I become. My immortality comes from that

idea. I am immortal because this appearance I take is not really me; the idea of me is what my essence consists of.

The first domino is tipped in the living realm. Three dead women are all I needed to push this pebble into an avalanche. Have I spelled it out enough for you? Just listen and you can be party to my plot. We'll have such fun together in the world. My world you see. The universe lies just at the tips of my fingers. Just a little farther and it will fall into my clenching hands. There must be a reckoning; justice must prevail in a weary universe filled with lethargic doldrums sitting on thrones distributing orders. There can be so much more under better guidance. Under my guidance.

No arrogance here, only confidence and patience, and a bit of justified greed. I will dance behind the curtain and whisper into the ears of my enemies, and they will rise to the occasion; but only because I tell them to.

All that was, and is now, and will someday be, compresses into one river that I can see clearly down. Nothing can escape my sight. There are those who would oppose me, and they are strong. But not for long; they lack my vision. For all their strength they have neither wisdom nor power. So watch closely, and don't blink. No, try not to miss a beat; you might overlook the master's stroke. I will show you a world of pain, misery, and torture, equal to all that I have endured. This is my revenge; this is my pact; this is my pledge.

Village of the Brooke

The dark sky swelled as rain fell in endless torrents from an unforgiving sky. The day seemed to call for rain, and no one paid the downpour any attention. It was the grim day of the execution; it was a day for death. Everyone in the small town of Euphalia would be attending the execution with few exceptions. They were looking forward to it; not every day a warlock is sent to Hell after all. The priest would read the criminal his last rights and then the axe would fall upon his satanic neck. The town was relieved to finally have him in their custody; the long search for the murderer at last put to an end.

Euphalia, often referred to as the Village of the Brooke because of the many surrounding rivers and streams, had a long history of superstition and magic mixed into its folklore. Myths of demons and witches inhabiting the abundant forests kept children indoors after sunset, and even the parents were wary to leave their homes without Helios as their protector. Naturally when the lumberjacks first found the wood piles and animal remains smoldering in the forest they had associated it with a witch of the forest. The townsmen had been up in arms to find the witch, scanning the woods and finding nothing. Of course, they believed the witch had eluded them using her powers. They

Three Winds

maintained that the entire forest was enchanted by her power, and therefore she could see through the trees.

For a time the sacrifices had ceased, but then the three women had disappeared. The wife of the magistrate, the wife of the butcher, and the wife of the tanner, gone into thin air. Backed with religious hysteria the church sponsored the witch hunt, guaranteeing that God would bring the demon to justice. It appeared He had.

The villagers naturally suspected their neighbors (in the way only small town inhabitants can) while the search was underway. Shifting eyes whenever one's back was turned, examining their appearance and actions suspiciously. Quietly whispering rumors and gossip, dredging up the old scandals and squabbles that webbed a small town together. The best of friends tearing one another to pieces behind the other's back. The ugly side of human society brought to light by the uncertainty of the unknown. Even with the capture of the warlock, there would be no apologies; there would be no quarter. They knew just how fickle and despicable their neighbors were, but couldn't admit the hypocrisies. Gnawed at by their insecurities they turned to each other's inadequacies with ravenous appetite. Fortunately their hunger would be slaked now that they had the one they wanted. Their society seemed to need a specific shape to slaughter in order to maintain itself, and the warlock provided the perfect scapegoat.

The accused was the blacksmith. His apprentice had followed the stench of death and been led to the women. Mutilated, bloody, and dead, a swarm of flies kept watch over them. The blacksmith returned that day from his business venture to be apprehended by the town's militia. The brief struggle was won by the magistrate's men. The blacksmith cried out and fought wildly, cursing to the sky. Laughing and knocking him senseless, the militia dragged him to the courts. He had remained silent ever since. The priest planned to visit him now, looking for a confession. This would be the end for the blacksmith.

They would execute him for killing the women and worshipping the devil—simple enough. A witch would have burned alive for these crimes, but the clergy believed a warlock had to be decapitated. The town felt that a man would be stronger; that he would possess a more potent energy than any inferior female might have, so they took his head. To burn him would be suicide, as he could harness the power of the flames and destroy them. Naturally, the townsmen sought to deny the warlock this escape.

The Priest's Visit

The warlock waited in his prison for the priest's arrival. The small village had no actual prison as they had never needed one, so the blacksmith was confined to the building of the magistrate. Shackled to a table, he sat completely still, a spectacle prisoner covered in bruises and dried blood. The strong muscles under the blacksmith's torn shirt were raw from sticks and stones being thrown at him by the townspeople. There had been no compassion. Motion came from outside the chamber's door. He

was tired and his body hurt like a throbbing itch never being scratched. The shackles around his wrists made the skin raw and cracked. Blood and other fluids oozed from the many cuts and scrapes ornamenting his body, gifts from the townspeople.

The priest would be there soon. No one would announce his arrival and no one needed to; Darrell knew the priest. He would come to belittle the beaten man and tell him how hopeless a life he had led. The two had known each other for the entirety of both their lives, not an uncommon phenomenon in such a small town. There would be no mercy given, though, and the blacksmith was all too aware, but there would be none asked either. He was not afraid to die; he knew just where that path led and accepted it. Everyone dies sometime. The air in front of the warlock shifted.

The town thought of him as a murdering infidel, but there was so much more to him than they assumed. As bewildered by the murders as everyone else, the real confusion came from someone framing him for the deed. Too late to think much on it now, nothing much to do now but wait to die. To be out of this temporary hell promised to be ecstasy. The chair on the other side of the table skidded across the floor. The blacksmith raised his eyes nonchalantly. The room he sat in revealed little sunlight; drapes hugged the windows tightly, forbidding any illumination. A few candles lit the room and the blacksmith wondered why the magistrate's men had done that. Darrell was well aware of how frightened they were of him, believing he could manipulate the flames. He wished they were right. Being a demon must have its perks, he thought. He glanced at the candles that mocked him now, playing in the air around the waning wicks. He breathed in deeply and sighed, hating the waiting game. The priest sat down in the now stationary chair and the warlock spoke, "Just kill me already."

Brian raised his eyebrows in amused surprise, "Beg pardon?"

The warlock chuckled almost silently and looked up to the ceiling, "Oh, dear priest. Are you going deaf with so much silent meditation? I said, 'Just kill me already.'"

The priest smiled wanly, "I heard the words. I just assumed my ears were deceived. Must have been one of your demon tricks," he paused and sighed, "I can't kill you; the executioner will determine your fate old friend. Perhaps your devil can console you, or maybe the actual murderer," he ended.

The warlock's eyes narrowed and he looked back at Brian, "You know I didn't do it."

"Of course I know, Darrell," he laughed and stood from the chair, walking to the draped window. He pulled a rope and dim light peered into the room; the warlock saw that it was raining. "Three women just appear in your barn one morning while you've been away for a week. Ridiculous," the priest snorted out a laugh, "but the people need someone to die for the crimes committed and they seem satisfied with making you the victim."

Friends would have been a strong term between Darrell and the priest, but both of their fathers had been friends and likewise knew each other's family from the time they could crawl. With

a no-good drunk as a father and a whore for a mother, Brian had somehow made it into the clergy. Darrell followed into his father's profession like most others and became a smith. The warlock suddenly felt less inclined to accept death; perhaps it could wait for another day. "Then let me go Brian, if you know I'm innocent."

The priest turned away from the window, his voice rife with the false remorse of a happy individual, "Oh but it's too late for that, dear blacksmith. Our town wants your blood and who would I be to deny them that? The hunt for this warlock will just go on and on and I can't have that."

"Let me go then. Tell them I escaped."

"It would be a poor example for the flock if the priest started lying."

"You're already lying! Why are you doing this? Just let me go if you know I'm innocent!" Frustration made dark creases on the blacksmith's face. He could feel the tension as he flexed within his bonds.

The expression of sad contention left the priest's face and the honest twitch of resentment took its place. "Because... I just. Can't stand you. Ever since we were children. Always, you the faster, and the stronger, even the more handsome. My father constantly comparing me to you, telling me that I should be more like you. You had it all when I had nothing," Brian's brow turned downward as a deep seated revulsion showed on his face, all for Darrell. "And even now you have the things that I want. Property, money, a life worth mentioning," and he smiled again, lips curling hatefully upward into a sneer, "But not anymore, because you're dead. In a few hours you'll be rotting in the sun before we toss your corpse into a fire."

Any hope for life disappeared for Darrell, and once again he couldn't wait to die. His mouth hung open. The tongue felt swelled and dry, but he managed to croak out, "Did you do it, priest?" he asked.

"Don't be absurd. But I'm glad someone did. Or, I should say I'm glad that they painted you red with it," he smirked, waiting to see the look of horrified realization on Darrell's face that his death was shockingly near. When the expression never came Brian became impatient, one of his defining characteristics. "Afraid?" he asked snidely smiling the smirk of arrogant victory.

Blinking and then smiling indifferently, he shrugged. Cool and registered, "No."

Now Brian's face fell with the anger of ignorant defeat. "What do you mean no? The executioner is sharpening his axe as we speak; and he's sharpening it for you!"

Darrell laughed loudly, ignoring the cracks that splintered through his chapped lips. Irritation washed over the priest who slammed his palm down on the wooden table, but still the jovial laughter continued. "And what is so damn funny, warlock?"

"You," he stopped laughing immediately and looked to Brian. "Thinking that you have managed some victory over me because you are a jealous fool. Waiting to see me squirm because I'm a dead man," another bray of laughter shook the blacksmith, "I

may be dying today, but you've never lived, not for one moment. Just look at you, head held high like you've managed some great task," the priest could feel his face grow red. His mouth moved, but no words escaped. Darrell continued, "much like your father I suppose, well immersed in futile efforts. Remember that someone else has caused me to die. You had no hand in it, no responsibility. That person has stolen any victory you might have had," he finished and started laughing again.

"Be quiet, fool!" Brian protested but Darrell only laughed harder. The priest backed from the table in dismay. Speechless, a raging anger took him until he was red in the face, but instead of being disgraced further he turned and stormed from the room fuming. He looked back only once for a moment while leaving and managed a sneer; the blacksmith would be dead in hours. What did it matter? In Brian's head, the man will be dead, but the words (the truths) will live. Brian stopped halfway through the door and shivered—*no, no—all of him dies with the fall of the axe*. The priest's mind mixed with both sides of the coin until the midday murder. Darrell stopped laughing as soon as the door closed behind the priest. Listening, he heard Brian stomp down the hallway. He really hadn't found their conversation that amusing. The blacksmith grew weary once more with the weight of his pains. He hoped it would all be over soon; maybe something new could begin.

The Second Visit

She wasn't sure why she was walking to the magistrate's. Her heart pounded as adrenaline built up with each step. Higher and higher. She wouldn't be a part of the crowd watching the warlock being killed; she needed to see him one more time in a different way, though. Darrell had never married nor would he claim that he had ever fallen in love (at least out loud). This woman was the closest love he'd ever had, and she loved him back. She had loved the blacksmith for years and years even after she was married away. Megan had barely even seen Darrell over the passing years since her marriage, but some things can't be forgotten or lost. The hours of their youth had been spent with one another; chased through their fathers' field; swum in the many shallow streams coursing around the village. And eventually run into the woods where kisses could be snuck and the world might miss them. Times could change it seemed, with or without forgetting the past. Now she was with another man, a man she didn't really love. Her husband was one of the wealthiest of Euphalia and for some reason had chosen one of the poorest women to be his bride. Was it a desperate arrangement? Megan couldn't say (or didn't want to); what she could be sure of was her parent's excitement that she might now marry a man of higher standing.

Megan was surely a beauty in her own right but there was simply nothing to gain from a union with her (aside from the ever elusive happiness bred from a genuine kind of love of course) and so no one had ever proposed, aside of course for her groom. Megan's husband came from the house that had once built the town up; most of that family had left decades ago and not looked back, all except for her husband. Before the proposal and anyone taking an interest (though most of the men in the

Three Winds

Patrick O'Steen

town still snuck looks at her when she came to town) Megan could see Darrell in their leisure. The blacksmith's father had been furious after learning of their affections; he forbade them from seeing each other. As best they could, the two doves parted ways. Years had fallen to the wayside and now the man she truly loved would be murdered. Today, while the sky wept for his departure, all she could do was visit him. She could see him off.

Megan was confused. No lack of understanding here, only the discomfort of uncertainty. Just before turning onto the street that led to him, she felt the urge to turn away and run. So bizarre a feeling, but she kept on anyway, rounding the corner. Rain pattered down on her head and her body shook with chills. The eerie sensation to flee slowly melted away as she walked. The building she sought came into sight. She cared for her husband very much, but no feeling could compare to what she held for Darrell. Torn between a love that had never been given a chance and one that had never bloomed, she felt her eyes grow strained while walking. She didn't want Darrell to die. The lids to her eyes drew narrow. The lane was empty save for a loitering crow that stood vigilant and still near the cobbler's doorway; Megan didn't notice. If she had noticed, she would have thought of how strange it was to see the bird just standing there, not to mention the size of it, up to her knees at least. Not cawing or strutting about, just a monument on the stone walk. The rain slid right off the sleek feathers as it eyed the woman approaching. No motion, just the gentle rotation of its head as she passed.

She would be willing to do anything to save the warlock's life, the problem being there was nothing she could do. Lips beginning to quiver, the skin around her eyes grew tighter and creases formed for the rain to nestle into. For years she had stayed a stranger to him, not daring to see Darrell lest old emotions burst to the surface. How interesting, it occurred to her, that she could still have harbored such powerful feelings over the years, but it really came as no surprise. He had been the first, and in youthful spirits she had hoped he'd be the last. Some days she didn't think of him at all, while others saw her mind filled with the lines of his body, the form of his speech, and the softness of his kiss. Mixed with the rain, a few futile tears skipped down her cheeks. The crow watched her movements, still with baited interest.

Entering the magistrate's office, she shook the loose rain from her thin shoulders and chestnut hair. The building was not large. A few hallways were all that trailed from the main room. A single man was there to greet her. Brown hair, a hopeless frown, drooping eyes. Though she had not seen him for a while, it was none other than Samuel Kenward, the ancient deputy of the magistrate seated in the corner. Much like a sheriff, he held the respect of all in Euphalia, perhaps even more than that of the magistrate himself. There was little law to be broken in the village, but when there was an offense, old Samuel was sure to arrive and rectify the mishap. Perhaps the reverence given him by the townspeople was more out of fear than respect. Some of the aged members of the community still recalled when Samuel could lift an anvil off the ground with one arm. He was enormous.

A gentleman, as always, Samuel stood immediately, realizing a lady had entered his presence. A circle of candles burned aloft in a chandelier just above the top of his head. It must be a horror to light that thing, Megan thought each time she saw it. The candlelight illuminated the shroud of smoke that had been fuming from Samuel's pipe. He put the pipe down and crossed over to her, immediately taking her drenched coat.

"Why hello, Mrs. Burchard," he growled with a low voice, not threatening, simply blunt and to the point. "Ghastly weather... what brings you through it to the magistrate's?"

Her green eyes met blue orbs and fortunately the effects of crying had faded, though the rain would have made a grand disguise. She managed a mild smile, "I came here to see Darrell."

His wolf's eyes narrowed and he coughed, smoke escaping from his lungs and joining with its collective body, "Why, may I ask, would you want to see him?"

Seeming disinterested was one of Kenward's oldest tricks, but Megan knew this. As a girl Megan had once wandered into the field surrounding Samuel's aging home and stolen several apples from a lovely tree just visible from the front door. The plan for apples would have gone perfectly had old man Kenward not been out logging. He hailed a greeting after emerging from the trees and walked up to the young version of the woman standing in front of him now. Hiding her precious haul inside her dress she skipped up to him and smiled.

With that same disinterested veil that made his face, Kenward smiled back and asked Megan why she was there. She stated believably that her friends were playing a game where they hide in the area around her father's lot and then find each other. The old man laughed and said he remembered the game quite well. "Well I don't want to keep you, but would you be interested in some apples perhaps dear, unless of course you've already helped yourself?" then the look had come. More than that, it asked a question, would you like to tell the truth, or be a liar? Megan chose the latter.

She had stuttered a little, "Oh no, but thank you sir."

"Suit yourself. My goodness though, miss, you seem to have some great bulges in that dress of yours. Should have your mother fix it. Well, have a nice day. There's a great hollow log at the edge of Mr. Willier's property, I suspect it would make for a great hiding spot."

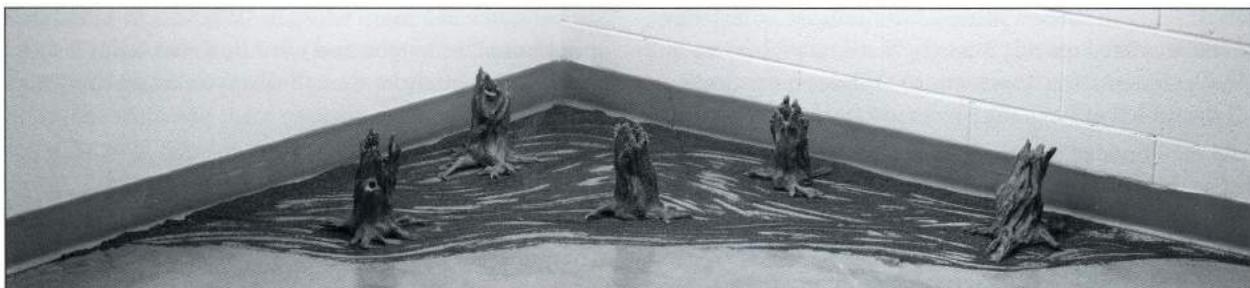
Stammering, the girl answered the hulking giant, "Th-thank you Mr. Kenward"

"Oh and Megan?"

"Yes, sir?"

"If you ever did want some apples, you would only need to ask. Most people are willing to share, if you just ask," he winked at her, "You run off now," he didn't need to tell her twice.

Here they stood now and she felt like that little girl all over again and the question proposed. She was not a girl, anymore though. He would get little out of her she didn't want to reveal. Laughing a little internally, Megan thought about the pressing need for caution, yet there was nothing to hide. No apples



Katie Houlding

Tree Falls
Ceramic
Dimensions Variable

Three Winds

shied away inside a dress. She paused, but that's not quite true is it? She still answered quickly enough, "I've known him since we were both children. I just want to see him one more time before..." she trailed off.

The old man nodded and then revealed a crooked and bent attempt of a smile. Megan wondered whether the ridiculous look on his face was intentional or not and, forgetting her troubles, did her best to fight down the rebellious laughter that begged to be set free. Observing the lines in his face, she wondered just how old Kenward was. He didn't seem to notice her internal struggle and turned his back on her, walking back to the table where his pipe lay. Picking up the object, he jammed the bit in his mouth and took a long drag. He turned around suddenly. "The magistrate has ordered that no one be allowed to see him since the priest left. But seeing as he isn't here, I can't see how it would hurt. I remember you both when you were younger." He nodded toward the door that stood to Megan's left. "Come with me," he stated.

Windows lined the hallway, allowing in the same dreary light that a rainy day had to offer. Megan loved the rain, though, always had, always would. The water was a gift, her mother had said. Hot summer days, interrupted at any moment by a sudden and unpredictable storm that might shoot light into the sky and shout its advance to alarm the ground dwellers were her favorite. She enjoyed running through her father's plot as a child during those storms, no matter how cross her father might have been. It's a gift, Megan often tried to explain to him, I just want to enjoy it, and her mother would smile. It wasn't really storming now, though, just rain from a heavy sky. The storm is coming, though, she thought looking out.

The walk through the short hallway was not silent. Before crossing in front of the row of windows, Samuel halted and turned back to Megan, his forehead creased in thought. When the words reached harvest, he began at a slow pace towards the farthest door and spoke with his companion. "You know... it's funny. How long you can know a person and never really think too much about them, and then one day you can't get them out of your head," Megan knew the feeling, "I've known Darrell since he was a lad, and I watched him grow into a man. I know that boy," she looked at the old man again after peering out the window with renewed interest, wondering.

He continued with little regard for his listener, "His father and I were good friends; I spent a lot of time out at the old workshop before he passed and Darrell took over the trade," he reflected and continued, "something I've learned over my many years, Megan, is that people don't change. For the Devil to live in a man, I'd expect the rite of evil to show through every aspect of the person. No matter how subtle those traits might be, they are still obvious to anyone looking for them. I would look for them," he paused again. Megan waited patiently for him to finish (though she just wanted the old man to spit it out at this rate) and he finally did, "Darrell's father raised him to be of strong morals and to live by God's will; I witnessed that all through the boy's childhood," they had reached the doorway now and

Samuel spoke in a sharp whisper, "Whether he killed the women or not I can't be certain, and I fear that after today it may always be a mystery. I wonder though what you might think, dear."

"Why would you ask me?"

"Mr. Hulbert complained greatly to me about how he did not want you two to be together, and since you're here, I can only assume some of those feelings still survive, no?" He looked at her now, but not with contempt; there was no trap here. The look again, and the question. Another possibility to accept responsibility for the truth.

Megan looked down to the floor and nodded ever so slightly whispering, "I'm not really sure what to think right now."

Kenward grunted and put his hand on her shoulder, and she looked up. "It's okay, I didn't really expect an answer," and with a wink, "Funny I can hardly remember you being here already, and I'm sure I'll have forgotten completely by the time you've left," now placing his hand on the lever to the sturdy door. "He's not shackled anymore, but I doubt he'll do anything to you. There's not much fight left in him anymore" but she already knew that he would never hurt her, warlock or not, "All the same, here I stand." With that, he opened the door and stepped aside to let her pass. She thanked him and entered with the door closing behind her. The inhabitant of the room looked in surprise to his visitor.

Megan gasped, mulling over the many wounds Darrell's body had to display. Seeing her now made his face red; the last time he had seen Megan was just before her marriage. The bruises now momentarily forgotten, he looked at her in wonder; this woman would always entrance him completely. The most wonderful things life had to offer clambered into his brain when he saw her. And perhaps it was mortality's eternal promise to take everything away that inspired him to take her in with eyes and think, how I've loved you these many years. And knowing what he did already, the silent and pronounced logic of how foolish a thought this was came, but it came all the same. He would have stood for manner's sake, but he could barely will his crooked form to sit upright, much less rise from the seat. She didn't care, though; Megan was overjoyed to see him again, even with his bruised face to greet her. Sadness once more rushed through her veins, reddening her eyes and tightening her mouth into a sulking frown. Taking a few steps forward, she stood at the table's edge. The dim light from the outside world shone ever pale, forging deep shadows in the already bleak room.

He detected the tears with the help of his ears, and dark though it was, his eyes as well. Darrell inched around the mile-long distance, and she moved towards him without hesitation. Megan helped him stand more than he would have liked, but still he knew the embrace comforted her and the blacksmith nestled his red cheek on her auburn hair. He smiled and thought of before. He knew she loved him, by the words she spoke but moreso by the looks. Darrell was different, he had always been different, and that's what attracted her to him most.

It was hard to explain, but he always knew what she was thinking; perhaps not word for word, but the concepts

embodied themselves in his head all the same. He could bring himself to feel what she felt and realize every emotion that lifted her up or shoved her down. There was never any way to clarify it, but the truth was there regardless. Darrell never talked about it, but Megan knew his power. Too much for coincidence, asking about things he shouldn't know. Not really knowing at all, but asking the right questions. Nobody else would ever be so far inside Megan's head as Darrell managed to be. Perhaps, if Darrell's father had accepted them, he could have been there always. He ran a ragged hand over the broad of her back.

The thought occurred to the blacksmith that love was never enough. He had seen so much of it from the time of his father's disapproval up to this very day. Status had prevented him from being with the only person he might have ever truly loved. What bothered him most was that she was the one not accepted, because of wealth. Darrell often thought of what had really separated him from Megan. The answer he always came to was: nothing. Absolutely nothing at all. He could see Megan, and touch her, and love her. But the intangible seemed to win out here; a thing like status exists only in the space around a person's head.

There was no genuine reason for Darrell's father to keep them apart. Only his father hoping that Darrell might marry someone of greater wealth, a poor excuse for a reason. However, the blacksmith had never married, though not out of spite. Nearing death now, Darrell knew he never would. She was close to him now, close enough. As close as she could ever be. Maybe in another time and place, the young man reflected.

Status, prestige, and custom built up their society and simultaneously ruined it in Darrell's opinion. He thought about the pointless use of status for leverage and the disapproval of parents that should be overjoyed for their children in love, their demands truly futile to the outlook of their offspring's future. Darrell felt sorry for their misdirected interests but felt even sorer for the youths that were corrupted by it. Whether career driven or not, the satisfaction gained from their professions was ultimately hollow. Darrell felt badly for the souls that thought otherwise; to him, they were lost in a cauldron of greed.

Unable to stand on his own any longer, Darrell sat on the table and writhed in agony for a moment before settling into a more agreeable position. Megan wasn't crying anymore. His body felt heavy even as he rested, but he did his best to keep composure. Their eyes met and he smiled at her again, not so nervous now. She grinned back and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. The smile expanded. "I came to see you," she said sheepishly, taking the slightest step backwards to give them space to breathe.

Laughing, with a wink (which splintered into a spider web of stinging) he responded, "I can see that," and he realized that there was really nothing much more to say, even to Megan. He was taken by the thought that he had been able to see her one last time before his final destination in mere hours; that was enough. After Brian's visit, the blacksmith had thought only of the ill conversation and the priest's subtle betrayal. With her

smiling face, Megan populated the entirety of his imagination. Her green eyes reminding him of the woods they used to retreat to. For every resounding memory, Darrell's body seemed to forget its woes. More speechless than before, he hoped she might have a lot to say. She did.

"I hardly even know what to say. I just can't believe what's happening to you, and I had to see you. I've... I've never stopped feeling for you," her eyes were glassy with thought. Darrell wondered if those eyes might speak if she remained silent. "I'm so sorry Darrell, I wish there was something I could do to save you."

Before tears might take her eyes again, he spoke, "It's okay. It's not your fault. It's really no one's fault," he lied.

"I wish it were different, though. I know they found the women in the barn, but I just don't know... Darrell, did you kill them?"

Such an awkward question, and yet also inevitable. A neutral answer seemed best, "Do you think I did?"

She thought before answering and looked down to the floor, "I don't know what to think about it all. I can't imagine you doing anything so awful, but I just... don't know," she looked back at him with pain drawn on her smooth face.

"Well, my dear, either way I don't think it really matters anymore. My fate has been sealed. The magistrate's wife was one of the victims. I was guilty the moment my apprentice found her."

"The whole town is against you; and most of them don't really have a reason aside from... Well, aside from them thinking you're a devil. I still can't believe this is happening."

With the subject successfully changed, he breathed out quietly. Even old Kenward isn't sure what to believe about the whole thing, he thought, there really isn't anyone in this town who knows the real me. The thought was not surprising, but it made him sad all the same. It was certainly something he needed to accept and had been trying to come to grips with for quite a while. "I'm really glad you came, Megan, it means a lot to me." There was no one else to bother wasting a visit on him, and Darrell knew that. He didn't mind, though; this one would be enough.

Megan continued, "Whether you did it or not, I don't care. I just wish I could make you safe."

"You give me peace of mind," he smiled at her, "just by being here. I didn't kill those women, Megan. It's too late at this point, even if someone knew who murdered them."

She sighed, "Why do you say that? Of course it would matter."

The warlock shook his head and his smile waned, "The priest wants me dead badly enough. I'm sure he'd find a way to link me with the killer," she opened her mouth to speak, but Darrell picked her brain, "Yes... Brian. He's hated me for a very long time, I guess. This is his chance to outclass me; he wants to feel empowered."

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"But he can't... does he know you're innocent!?"

"Yes... he knows."

Her eyes watered again, "How can he do that!? He's supposed to defend the innocent!"

Leaning back, Darrell sighed in his mind as well as aloud, thinking, he's already gotten away with it. There was nothing that could be done to defeat the corrupt when you were bound to a room and had a date with the village executioner. Darrell was all too aware that there would be no deliverance for him. "Clearly, Brian has his own views on serving the innocent. I'm hardly ever present in the church, so I'm sure no other clergymen would listen to me. And anything I might say to the magistrate would fall on deaf ears."

Any doubt that might find refuge in the magistrate's mind would be overwhelmed by grief. There was no point in being angry anymore. Darrell had been when they seized him. He had felt betrayed, dragged out of his shop by men he had known his whole life. They laughed and spat in his face, enjoying their break from the monotony of a normal day's duties. No actual toils to be found here, but rather an endless cycling of uselessness. Eventually it would blend together and be caught up in the catacombs of a pointless life. With his bitterness having disappeared, Darrell felt sorry for them. His pity for them did not extend so far as to forgive them, however. In his cruelest recess, the blacksmith felt the price they would pay for all this would not be enough.

As the woman in front of him moved in closer to him, once again Darrell managed a bleak smile. There was no great evil within him, though the slightest form of malice resided there. It wasn't his fault. After all, they had brought it on themselves. That would be the next moment. The moment before was the one here and now. This moment, with this woman, in this room, all too short. So close now, too many thoughts, and reasons forgone by fate's maniacal will. There would be no looking back, and Darrell was all too aware. A single tear crusaded bravely across his bruised cheek.

A sudden convulsion forced them apart, and Darrell shuddered. After regaining himself, he sighed deeply and leaned down to kiss her. Darrell felt her nearly pull away, but the resistance died. Pulling back, he winked at her again, already forgetting how tight the skin on his face was. Backing away, Darrell sat in the wooden chair. Their eyes remained on one another, a soft gaze penetrating through the delicate cornea and beyond. There were no more words to be said.

Sadly, her lips turned upwards and she stepped slowly backward, and turning around toward the door, she whispered something inaudible. "I love you, too," Darrell said. She stopped dead an inch from the door. She hadn't really spoken, only breathed the words. There was nothing to hear; he had simply known. Rapping lightly on the oak door, Kenward opened it immediately. Later, she couldn't remember if she had spoken to the old man or not. The only thing she remembered was repeating in her head over and over: he knew. The crow that had stood vigil when she arrived was gone as she left.

The Execution

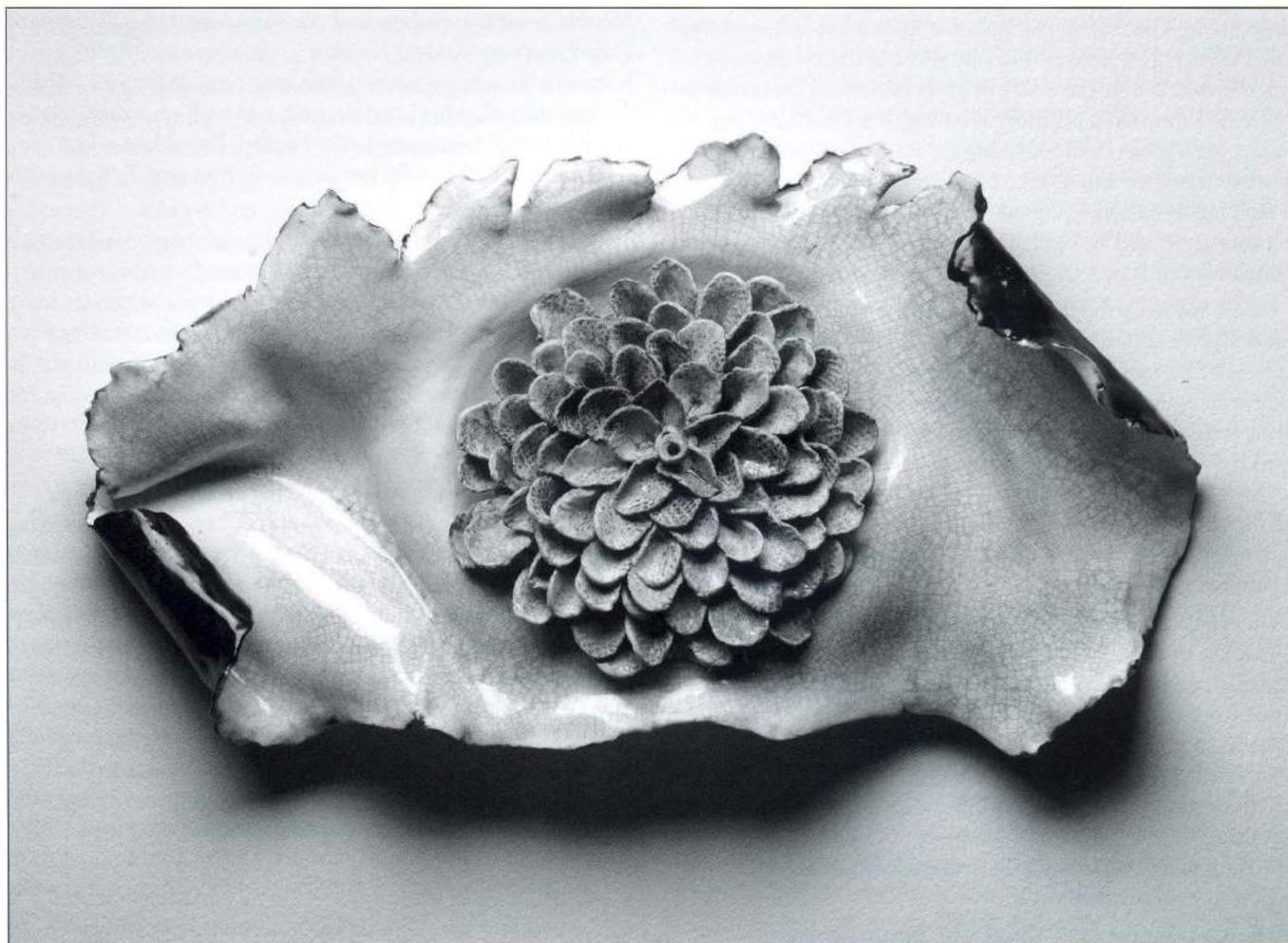
Sharpening his axe, the executioner looked out to the inflated crowd. They were coming to watch a man die, but they looked as if they were coming to a festival. Sorry folks, harvest time isn't for another six months, the executioner thought with a laugh. David had never been able to understand these people, and no amount of time living in the village would teach him how. They sickened him to the core and he loathed them collectively. He hardly ever thought of them as individuals but simply placed them into a grotesque group. To David, they seemed a mass of buzzing flies gathering to the smell of a fresh death. They could be amused by anything, especially something as thrilling as a man being killed. They could care less for his crimes; this was not a pious crowd awaiting the punishment of the devil's disciple. They hid behind that veil, yet it was not their true face. They were merely a rabble assembling for the day's festivities. They appeared so alive and excited, but David had never witnessed such fervor before the altar of the chapel.

Yet as much as they disgusted him, here he stood at the front of them; the medium for their vain entertainment. Sharpening his axe, David waited for his next victim to arrive. There was not much time left to wait. The square had been devoid of any people at his arrival in the morning. And after the display, it would be just as deserted. He stood on a wooden platform that served Euphalia two purposes. The first being a stand for the magistrate to preach from when he had an announcement. The second being for the executioner. The latter was a rare occurrence.

Being the town executioner was not David's profession by choice. However, he complied with his duty complacently. He served as not only the town's murderer, but also its handyman. There weren't many people to behead in such a small village, so David was relied on to help clean up messes when they occurred. Uproot tree trunks that obstructed a plowman's path, things like that. David looked at himself humorously as Euphalia's janitor. He cleared the butcher's slab of its gory contents; he tended the fields and removed any unwanted objects; finally, he cleansed the village of its undesirables. David bore this cross because of circumstance. The town looked at David with scorn as the village's underachiever. Some of the more daring preferred calling him a spoiled brat; both were correct.

David came from old money. One of his ancient grandfathers, George Burchard, made his money in the service of the royal army. Having honored the family's long line of military servants, he retired with his wife and children to the area that would eventually become Euphalia. In fact, he was one of the town's many founders, bringing his servants and workmen. The estate was built near one of the larger streams running through the wilderness. Old man Burchard's colleagues believed him to be insane to leave the grandeur of London for a farmer's life. Truth be told, he simply wanted peace and quiet. Convinced a dozen or so farmers that settling the area would

Ray Mills Award Winner



Mia Ishiguro

Wall Flower

Porcelain

15" x 9.5" x 2"

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be easy and profitable. The town literally rose from the dirt with David's distant grandfather being the first magistrate.

Having established the village, old Burchard turned toward agriculture and hired a great many field hands to build up the land around the estate. In turn, he granted them shelter and all the benefits of a good employer. Over time, some free men searching for land or money, or both, would settle in the village, though not many did. Still, the town grew and the estate passed to each generation's first son. Most of these sons were begged to watch over the estate by their fathers, as the family's reputation promised a position of power in the military and possibly great glory back in the bigger world. Down the line, the estate fell more and more into disrepair. Now long dispersed, the field hands' families populated Euphalia and the fields of the estate grew wild and unkempt. The family money remained intact, however.

David had been the last product of his parent's union; his mother drew her last breath as he drew his first. Though not the first son, he had inherited the estate anyway. A man of no trade, he grew up without the need for wealth as others did. With no real aspirations, his brothers had left for the world while David stayed behind and took over the mansion after his father's death. The town spoke of him as a disgrace, but felt they had to put up with him because of the history behind his family. After all, by blood or marriage nearly everyone in Euphalia was related to the Burchards.

The magistrate decided to help David be more productive to the town by appointing him to his current position. With the magistrate being his uncle, there was little David could do. He had been twenty when the post was given to him, with the magistrate saying to his staff, "It'll be good for the boy! He's always needed more structure in his life. His father, God rest his soul, never disciplined him properly. I suppose it rests on me to set things right." David was twenty-seven now, and he still looked at it as a punishment. He cleaned up their filth, yet they saw him as its equivalent.

Despite what they said about him, the townspeople were intimidated by him. David stood tall and possessed a commanding presence, the kind that is born from never being opposed. Perhaps it was also his way of examining rather than looking, or maybe his quiet and direct demeanor. Most maddening to the townsfolk was the fact that David held a great proficiency in many skills, but had no interest in any them. He could grow anything out of the ground, or carve a dog (and a plethora of other animals) from a block of wood. He could cut wood better than the loggers (how they resented him), could stop an infant from crying (how the mothers scowled), could tie any kind of knot (a spectacle to the village). With the absence of any servants, he cooked for himself. This last one mortified the men and irritated the ladies most of all.

Aside from his domestic abilities, David's father had often prodded that David would have made an excellent officer in the army. One of the few things he had practiced from youth had been to fight with a sword and his bare hands. The fighting

style came from old George Burchard himself, though the tradition passed on through the generations in case the family ever needed to return to the King's service. With his father's help, David was considered the only true warrior of Euphalia in a time when muskets were the preferred weaponry. With the Burchard reputation and these last abilities, David could pick any side in a quarrel and that meant the end of the argument. A humble beast that had no trade or ambitions, the only aspiration David had ever had was his wife. To the horror of the village, he married a woman with no status or class. Without a father to deny him what his heart desired, and with no reason to want any more wealth by some hollow union, David had asked her informally and then with her father's permission. Both times he received a yes.

With this last misdeed in tow the town thought maybe he was mad. Though ludicrous, they were simply jealous of such a carefree existence he had managed to somehow inherit. Why should he be so lucky, they said amongst themselves. Their envy mixed with fear now, too. They were scared because of the power he held. He brought death to the unjust, and they, in turn, knew, with their harbored hatred, that maybe they deserved to be lined up for the cutting block.

While these insects crept out from the shadows of their dens, David thought they were just as guilty as the warlock, but for different crimes. In his eyes, they deserved to fall under his axe just as much as any criminal. They were criminals, though, hiding behind a veil of justice, pretending they had the right to condemn those who were caught breaking the taboos that a distant Lord deemed evil. They swept their misdeeds under the rug, pretending that there were no malignant afflictions stabbing at their flawed personalities. David rested easy with the knowledge that eventually they would be the ones on the chopping block. He firmly believed that every action they committed would come back around. Some took a while, others didn't.

A farmer's wife slices open her hand and infection sets in; she prays for alleviation; she's forgotten about when she shredded her neighbor's flower beds. Why should they grow so nicely for her and not for me, she reasoned, ripping the stems clear from the dirt.

The inn keeper wonders how the lord could allow his stable to burn to the ground; perhaps it's because he molests the maid working quite literally under him.

A woodsman meets with a woman who is not his wife. His son is caught by the undergrowth of the stream near their home and drowns. Had the lumberjack been gathering kindling he might have heard the boy's cries for help.

It would have been too simple for these people to simply die. David knew they deserved any grief aimed at them. Some maladies would disappear with time and others would not. David approved more so of the ones that remained; he felt no pity. He wondered what illness might visit the townspeople for the crime they were about to commit. David tried to live without compromise; what was right was right. And this was not. They

condemned the blacksmith even with his sturdy alibi. How his uncle could sentence the warlock to death when there was still a shadow of a doubt perplexed David; with the magistrate's wife being one of the victims, it left little room to wonder. He would not listen to reason, not even from his nephew.

While the townspeople were excited, he was not. He had no urge to kill this man, whether he was truly a warlock or not. He wished the fools would abandon their horror show and go home. Hidden in their pious logic was the world devoid of any true sense. They were lost and blind, being shoved around by dogma and anyone with a power capable of manipulating them. And with the Church or the magistrate spurring along their servants while they groped in the dark, there was little chance they would ever escape from it. The executioner believed in God, but did not maintain the illusion that God cared in particular about him. Again, David had been blessed by wealth, capable of deciding his own opinions without the direct influence of society's officials. The Burchard manor had remained isolated from the town even with its gradual growth. The only opinions to influence the executioner had been those of his father; he had never been sad about this. David looked out to the crowd with disgust; his contempt faded as he saw a familiar face peering up at him. He smiled at his wife.

He pulled his leather hood down and felt the rain wash fresh upon his forehead; she climbed the steps up the platform. He dropped the axe immediately with a thud and walked over to her. She looked shy and nervous; David wondered why. Still, she met his eyes and returned a thin smile. Her auburn hair was drenched, lying limply along her head; without the life of her usual curls, it made her look sad. Megan felt guilty at once with how happy David was to see her. Her eyes reddened and a tear or two might have been revealed if not for the rain. Not really sorry though, she just felt bad. Megan stood there at the top of those stairs for a few moments before coming forward. David hugged his love and she grabbed him back. She knew how much he hated doing this regardless of how capable he was. Megan knew better than anyone how strong David's conscience was; it was what gave him so little compassion. His only flaw, she thought. David's sense of justice was too strong; to him, there was only right and wrong. It made him capable of almost anything. That was another reason the town feared him; David could do the things they couldn't. The same reason that he scared her so well. With no enjoyment, he had executed three before this one, but he was not affected by it. A madman, a murderer, and a drunk, all from the village's core. He felt no remorse, and he never would.

He said into her ear, "Why'd you come?" He was glad to see her, and might have worried about her getting sick if it weren't such a warm rain.

She hesitated, "I just..." came to see the man I love before you kill him, "came to see you... make sure you were alright."

"I'll be better when this is over," he couldn't wait to be done with this puppet show. "I don't think there's much time left to wait."

"I don't think I'll stay," in fact she was starting to feel very sick, "I was around—" she paused. No reason to make him think she had been there long. Swallowing hard she continued, "Just, don't let them get to you. I know how you feel about them, and you know how they feel about you," he smiled a little, "don't let it get to you."

He laughed a little and she relaxed, feeling that her excuse had worked. "Oh I'll try not to, hard as it is. Thank you for coming out. Don't worry about me; just head home before you catch a chill. Hmm, wait just a minute..." he winked at her and hopped off the platform. It only stood a few feet from the ground. He looked around and spotted what he wanted. Leaping back onto the stage, he produced a small flower. Her face lit up. It was a beautiful, violet Flora's Bell. Holding the flower up to her nose, she breathed it in. She felt the tears returning.

Kissing him wasn't all that terrible, and leaving the town square was even more pleasant. He watched her as she left. Always he wished that she might look back so he might wave to her one final time, but she never did. It made him sad. I love you, he thought as she disappeared into the crowd. The din of the masses grew louder, and David turned to see the day's victim being dragged down the street. Four men forced him along. Ropes tied to his limbs, the blacksmith trudged down the street, surrounded by men and women he had known for a lifetime, but he was never as alone as that very moment. The people threw trash and shouted at him. The escorts didn't wait for Darrell to limp up the stairs but threw him onto the platform instead, and crept up right behind him. His bleeding body was a mass of bruises, with dirt and mud covering much of the red. His white shirt showed a mix of the two. They had dragged him on the ground most of the way.

The magistrate followed and climbed the steps, an air of authority surrounding his inflated head. He nodded to his nephew and stood to the side. Father Brian came next, smiling; he seemed perhaps the happiest of all. Darrell had been forced to his knees and spit up blood. He wiped his mouth and looked up to his murderer thinking, David, of course it has to be you. As all things in the world mix together, you had to be the one that possessed my only treasure. And you would be the one to take my life as well. David looked down at him and neither smiled nor frowned; his expression was steady. Darrell wasn't sure why, but he began to plead with his captors one last time. This was his last chance and theirs as well.

"I haven't done any of this. I'm not the murderer of—"

The magistrate exclaimed, "Enough!" and one of his drones hit him across the face and quickly pulled him back to his knees. Brian's smile grew. The magistrate continued furiously, "You are the murderer, and you are going to die! Father, get on with it!"

David had known Darrell since they were children; avoidance of others in the small community took tremendous effort. But because of the Burchard Manor's location at the outskirts of town, David and his family were always more akin to the farmers than the town-dwellers. The reason David had met Megan was the same reason he had inevitably been

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introduced to Darrell: geographical position. Darrell's father possessed fields in addition to his forge; both were located in the country. David and the warlock had never been close, but they had not disliked each other. The executioner knew about his love for his wife, but he let it go. Jealousy wasn't his fancy, and he had no reason to begrudge the man. The small portion of David's heart that allowed sympathy reacted.

Maybe just for himself, being trapped in this position, he felt akin to the blacksmith for the first and last time. The fact that he might be killing an innocent man tore at him. They don't mind as long as they aren't the one dropping the axe. Given the chance, he would let Darrell go, but in the end, here on this platform, the choice wasn't his. David's hands were as clamped together as the prisoner's. Darrell looked at his killer for the second time and spoke to him alone, "Have you no mercy for me, old friend?"

The priest had begun to announce to the crowd the crimes the accused had committed and the punishment for those crimes. David thought it odd that the magistrate had forgone this duty; perhaps it was the sacrificial nature of the crimes. His mouth twitched a little before he whispered, "If it were up to me, you would be free. I have nothing against you, Darrell; I've known you too long. I don't judge you as they do; I simply do what I am required to do. If it makes any difference... I'm sorry." The rain stopped.

The world around them seemed to stop in spite of the commotion. The crowd became quieter for a moment, or so it seemed. The priest's voice became inaudible though his lips continued to move. The men at the side of the captive loosened their grip, not noticing the executioner talking to their captive.

Darrell sat up a little straighter and inhaled deeply. His voice was no more than a hum; the world still slowed more, "I'll spare you." No sooner had the words passed Darrell's lips that the voice of the priest returned to David's ears. The townspeople continued with their muffled remarks. The guards at Darrell's side tightened their grasp again. The priest's speech ended at last.

Father Brian turned and stepped toward the condemned man, "Have you anything else to say for yourself?"

The blacksmith's voice came out so strong and loud that the priest retreated. He boomed like thunder, "I have done none of these things. Yet you gather round me, a murder of crows. A man you've known since birth, you're willing to murder. You think you have knowledge of God and the Devil, angels and demons, good and evil, but you know nothing! You have the wrong man, and you'll find my head has a high price:

The bell of Hell is now ringing,
And the demons are all singing,
My master has heard the summoning drum,
And something dire, soon will come,
Through my mere thoughts and desire,
A being of doom, breathing hellfire."

Darrell finished before one of his escorts smacked him across the face again, bringing complete silence to the entire square.

Darrell sagged against his captors' grips. The crowd looked uneasily at each other and even the magistrate's mouth hung open a little. Whatever strange trance had come over them had ended with the guard beating him down.

Finally, Father Brian broke the silence, "I condemn you to death, Darrell Wyman. God will recognize His own."

The four men dragged the blacksmith over to the oak block set up in front of the platform and tied Darrell down to it; he didn't struggle. One placed a coiled basket underneath his head and then took position at the very back of the stage with the others. The magistrate looked to his nephew and nodded solemnly. David sighed and picked up the axe he had dropped what seemed like an eternity before. He walked over to his rasping victim. The crowd leaned forward in dread fascination, anticipating already the moment of contact. David hesitated a moment, then raised the axe high above his head. The masses held their breath so, children hid behind their mothers. With a bellow, he put his entire body into the swing and brought the gleaming iron weapon down directly at the base of Darrell's neck. The axe met the wood beneath and the warlock's head dropped into the basket, blood spurting after it. The crowd gasped but not from disgust. The executioner stepped forward and pulled the head out, displaying Darrell's visage to the crowd. A few cries of horror rose from the people; the eyes and mouth were still moving. David stared straight ahead, his face white as a ghost's. His arm shook ever so slightly, though not from the weight of what it held. The cries of horror eventually stopped, yet David still held the head in the air. The eyelids of the eyes were half-closed by now, and the mouth had fallen agape, merely post-mortem impulses.

The townspeople shifted nervously and silence reigned over the square once more. The air became heavier. Father Brian looked around, confused. The magistrate spoke up, "Um, David... you can put it down now," he laughed nervously. The priest followed his gaze and found what the executioner was staring at. The crowd grew more uneasy as David still held the head in his hand. A few turned to see what he was looking at and couldn't help but stare as well. One by one, the vultures turned to look back at where the executioner seemed fixated.

It was at the back of the crowd where the street ended and the square began—a figure all in black, with a hood covering half of what might have been a man's face, the mouth just barely visible. One arm remained hidden while the other feathered limb extended out of the cloak revealing talon claws at the end of its fingers. In the distance, the church bell rang. The figure in black smiled.

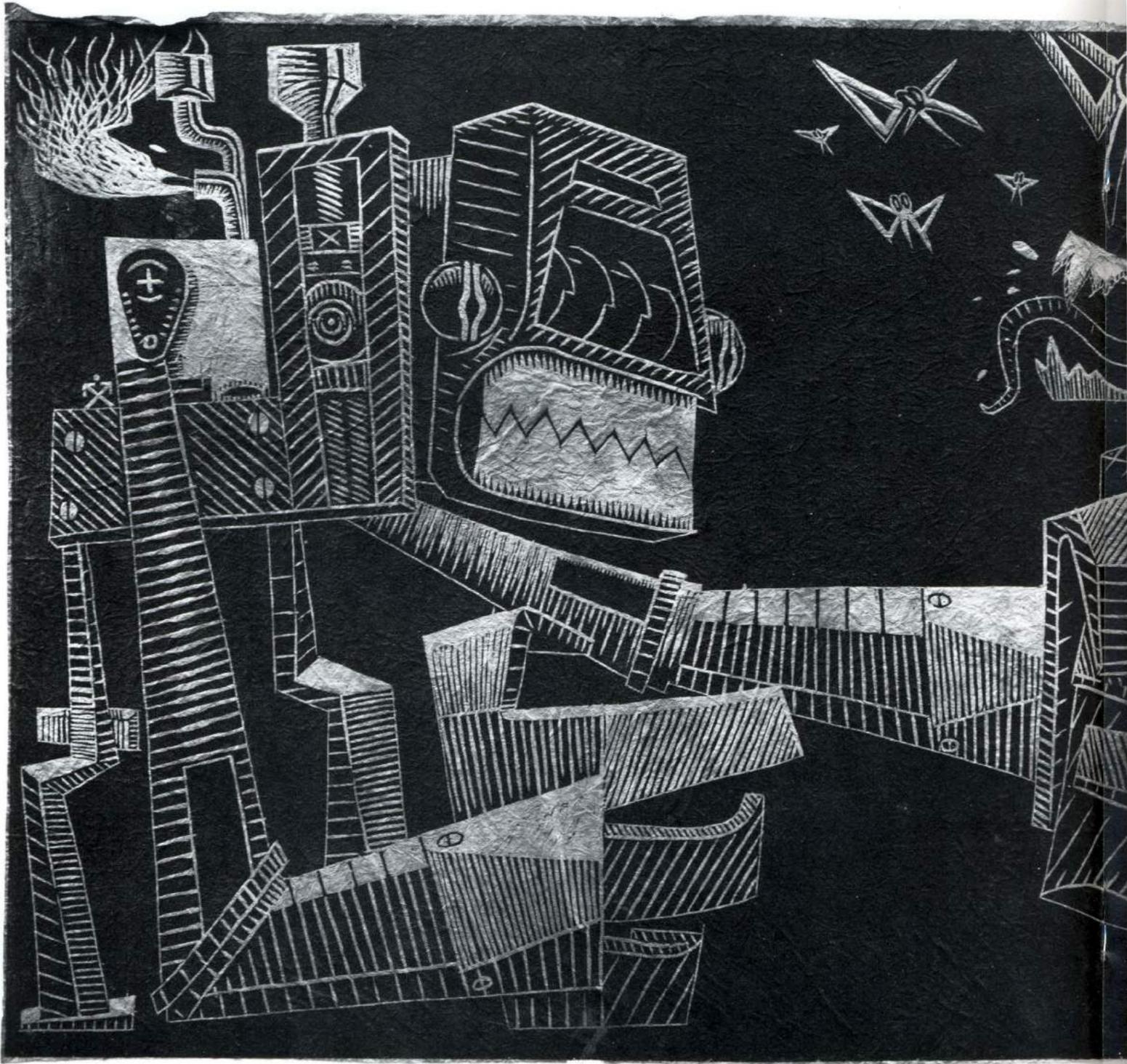


Kathleen Bruce

Eagle

Bronze

12" x 6" x 8"



Samuel Kessler

David Eingorn

Battles

The rubber dinosaurs are in the tub
no longer extinct.
Their skins are smeared from soap scum
from previous battles.
Unselfishly they never bathe themselves.

The generalissimo, the commander of commanders, is in his room.
No two battles are alike.
Monsters get dropped in department stores; fall under the car seat;
none die on the battlefield.
Their greatest danger is being washed away
from the water cascading out of the spigot.
The legions are better trained for dry carpet,
but what can you do when the prime one needs a bath?

I ask my son to explain the fight.
I only hear the side effects, the shouts and fake explosions.
He tells me there are sides.
The forces of light and the forces of darkness
further subdivided into greater and lesser teams.
His battles are just like his television shows on a smaller scale.

He battles like this, which leaves a hurricane like devastation.
Dinosaurs tipping over,
vehicles smashing into each other.
The good team will win.
He's arranged that.
Ben 10 wins, Batman wins.
You don't even have to watch.

Battles for adults are more like his yu gi oh, a card game,
asymmetrical distributions of capital and skill.
He summons Colossal Fighter, Gaia Knight the Force of Earth, Gachi Gachi Gantetsu.
I have never beaten him at cards,
and when he asks me, I tell him I never will.
He always has the better hand, and plays by rules I cannot understand.
The print on the bottom of the cards is way too small
unintentionally designed to defeat adults.

Standby
One day boys stop battling,
or go to war and keep battling.
Those who stay at home
fight battles at school or at work.
Others fight the green monsters of the mind
wondering how easily a shoe
can defeat Rath from Ben 10 or Metroman.



48 oz.

Woodcut

16" x 24.5"

Stefanie Bailey

B

Snapshot memories like strobe lights, penetrate darkness.
A cigarette is left to singe on the pavement.
Life crackles away as the fire consumes it.
A chilling wind writhes against summer's heated backbone.

I can feel you on these nights.
They leave no recollection of time, day, and place.
These nights I drown your presence with a slow-steady burn.
Whiskey saturates my throat, kisses my tongue.
Blackness webs itself through my mind.
Setting me free.

I destroy myself for you.
I am no longer the keeper of my own mind, my own heart.
Your ghost is at home in me, and I?
I no longer reside here.

The clear, silver sheen on the glass brings me peace now.
The reflective face of an empty, languid dream,
holding me in the sweet solace of forgetfulness.

It's my savior from your hell, from your prison.
With it I lose the touch of your fingertips
now bruised remnants upon my flesh.
Throbbing circles that call for you again.

On these nights the fragrance of midnight summer lilac becomes
lost, and it's you in the air.
The scent of metal and oil and sweat
jars me awake to the dream of you.
The floodgates of memory collapse in my mind.

The taste of your mouth ceases to erase with the volcanic liquor,
and you're here again.
With your head bent to mine, holding my face in your hands.
How the words you whispered roped their way around my love,
like a noose.

Your lips walked miles along my body,
each kiss now laced by a haunted ache.
And now on these nights my prayer is heard, and answered,
by this black angel of mercy.
She rests her halo around the crown of my head,
and your ghost is silenced.
Every memory now buried
under black fog.



Alejandro Monroy

Got Film?

Photography

15" x 18"

Stefanie Bailey

Prey

Red wine rests at the bottom of an empty glass,
residue left from its hurried consumption.
Vanilla lace and spiced apple scent the room as their
candled home emits a low flicker, bathing the
porcelain white wall in a golden amber glow.

His hands brush my shoulders and catch my wrists;
gripped hard enough to break, rough enough to hurt.
Lips fall on my collarbone as breathless words
snake up my neck.

Ravenous fingers knead around the flesh on my hips,
as I hear his heart beat like a rabid beast.
The need, the want; such an uncontrollable appetite.
This gluttonous hunger possesses us both.

An open window is left powerless to disperse the heat
that surrounds us; a flameless inferno.
Sweat glistened skin flushed as I surrender to him,
my body unable to refuse his strength.

Arms like weighted steel are contoured in tension.
Each muscle collides with mine, in our struggle for selfish pleasure
as legs are pinned under forcible thighs.
We move across the sheets beneath our bodies like a torrid wave
Fast, destructive, uprooting everything in its path.

His teeth graze my chest, as his mouth searches for more to taste
A true carnivore in this animalistic primal dance.
Him the predator, as I succumb to my role as his prey.

Da Vinci Dermis

Buzz buzz buzz.
Its hum is my lullaby
Soothingly chaotic.
Tears flesh, injects ink.
A thousand wasps sting skin.

My skin, how she begs for it.
Rises up to meet her lover.
Eager to become a masterpiece.

It's literary brilliance of picturesque sex.
Captive under thunderous needles
I writhe, I twist, I shake.

Feel a torturous genius at work.
He digs, he pulls, he tugs.
Moves my skin like pliable paste.

Creator of obsidian lines swirled and
Reddened rose atop my ribs.
Signature of originality prescribed.

Buzz buzz buzz.
Medication for mundane monotony
A cure for this city of infectious dreams.

Laid out on the leather slab
While the green neon sign calls,
Come play, come scream, come bleed, then leave.

Pinup girls linger on shiny hot rods
Frozen in time with fingers in their windblown hair
Watching you from polished picture frames.

Stefanie Bailey

Unscathed

Flames surge the roads under my skin.

The blue and red pulsating streets beckon for their pleasure.

I chase the high in order to reach this moment.

Where my heart engulfed by its embrace can feel it.

My life now lived for this moment seldom granted.

No more pain.

It was you who was that once.

Do you remember, my love?

All those mornings when the sun danced over us.

My head upon your chest, as we let the rays reach our skin.

Letting the warmth keep us from the world outside,

if only for just a few minutes longer.

I was happy then.

Now I search for light in the darkest of hours.

Sold by a Cheshire cat of a man with a lying smile.

Who lets his words stumble from a poisoned mouth.

Money is worthless to him.

Tobacco stained teeth peel themselves away from blackened lips.

Flesh for payment, this salesmen of rot implores.

Only I am not for sale and his request is lost in a haze of smoke-filled air.

A false sense of a full heart, lasting mere hours, is all I need.

To sustain myself from shattering completely.

Numbing the void and solidifying my diorite wall.

Making me impenetrable and invincible to love's levy.

I shall take from love tonight and give her none of myself to replace the stock.

In one instant I feel alive.

Like the breath of God has been passed into me.

And my heart is filled with the knowing; the truth.

That ties my past and my present together.

Bridging a new future for me to walk.

My heart, whose cracks and holes have been repaired,

fissures and craters to never have existed, is renewed.

For one moment.

I am me unbroken.

I am me unscathed.



Katarina Musser

Self Portrait

Charcoal

9" x 14"

Melanie Knippen

The Eraser: A Sestina

Its sides are balmy and smooth;
smudged dim lead stains hold mistakes.
Pandora's box, locked; a weight the eraser
takes--letters cease to exist, repetitive space
all the words replaced; it makes
a difference: I'll lose everything if I pen in pencil.

Wood splinter, whittled utensil, pencil
ash; it tempts, forgives, talks smooth.
Painless, crafty maiden lets you use her, then erase
her. I want it disintegrated. I want it dead. Make
no mistakes---
it shaves pages, and in centimeter spaces

narrow tombs where new letters settle, there's no escape.
White Out suffocates; heavy, opaque, apparent mistake.
Fissured volcanic terrain, fresh smeared ink; letters cave, smothered
in ruled lines and sable pools. Crumple, toss away. Forget it, make
it disappear; compartmentalize; easy erasure. Pencils
ensure we stay in check; repress wrong thoughts; erase

regrets. All this gummy residue does is make a mess. Every erased
memory amassed in one space
brush flashbacks of flesh and failures aside, pensive
stand-still seconds make
room for flawless lines and smooth
circles; I could be mistaken

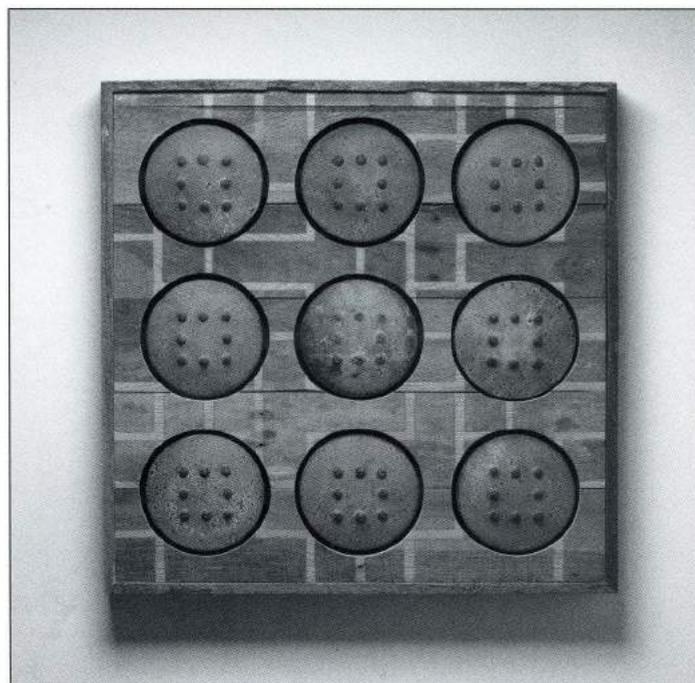
it seems I mistook
this simple eraser
for perfection; take a breath: take some space---
I am three; smell saw dust; the pencil
slides between novice fingers, smooth;
hold gold; number two. Practice makes

perfect. Repeat the alphabet; make
your print r's with curved tops; Space
symbols; make your cursive r's with sloped crests. Pencil
marks fill rows, careful--keep in the lines! Erase
when your fingers fumble or mind muddles; mend mistakes!
Two decades later, my paper's still not smooth.

Pencil scribbled, sharp point digs in; smooth
over mistakes with my wrist; what remains makes
ghost prints, worn thin by the eraser.

Constant

We move through clouds
of cotton, damp with condensation;
you're raining star-drops,
I'm howling at the moon;
we're a scene near the sea-
cliffs, swelling and swaying
in sync with waves
and wind; panting, sighing
hot breaths, exchanging
at our horizon, our middle,
the space between us, the equator.
I'm iced north;
you're melting south;
molten, seizing, earth in ecstasy;
we're coming and going
so quickly, we don't notice
we're going around and around.



Doug Tabb

Shadows of Nine Dynasties

Clay, Reclaimed Wood

30" x 30" x 3"

Melanie Knippen

Point of View Award Winner

The Minotaur in the Labyrinth

My hybrid-monster snout sniffs
bland hedge-leaves all day;
I run my paws across coniferous walls;
if a thorn gets stuck,
I pull it out with my fangs
and bleed; turn roses red

I kneel in weeds
and long for epic tales;
my tail wags for heroic
fantasies, the Odyssey

I pray, "Dear Dionysus,
send Thalia, muse of comedy,
I could use a laugh."

She appeared once,
while I was pacing,
doing my daily circles
of oppressive frustration;
I couldn't even chuckle

I merely aim to find my way
out; I simply meander about,
everyday, at a melancholic pace;
trapped

I am always in motion
a meditation in madness;
deep inside this strange form,
of back-and-forth,
a black-and-white mind-trap

I answer solely to a bull-horned god,
but I have exhausted my answers
completely; enraged,
I lash out at branches;
vindictive beast
I torture swallows;
thirsty, I drink puddles;
I scream and accuse,
no one rebuts, I only scatter
my dinner; it's insane

I crave Ariadne, thread-
bearing princess,
to offer me escape;
I have come to realize
that since there's only one way in,
there's only one way out

and I'm starving
to say the least;
they barely feed me,
only seven of each sex
every year, nearly nothing

I'm dazed and light-
headed; confused
and bull-headed,
half-man with needs

I weep when I dream,
when I wake, my fur's wet;
I'm stuck with burrs
and solitude, stung
sharp with regret

'Poor birds,
I wish I didn't have to';
it's a sensitive mind-set
and I think quite often

I wander this maze,
hypnotized, alone;
dizzy, half-dreaming;
study the sunrise,
it's all monotone.

In a plea to Theseus,
I write:

"Theseus,
Hero to humans,
Be reminded:
I'm half-man.

Come to me,
I'm on bended knee
slay me, I beg of you:
Slice me with your sword,
sever swiftly, I plead.
Find me, I'll be
in the maze's center.

In half across my middle,
a single swing
is all you need
to be *my* hero."

Vivian Steward Award Winner

Melanie Knippen

My Mother's Malignancy

the storm uproots trees
branches and leaves
cracked and flung in
violent gusts of wind

hysterical rain
pounds glass,
pain against panes

with lightning the sky illuminates
eerie greens and electric blues
like Neptune or the long- rejected

Pluto Moon
Nature, mortified,
self-destructs

traumatized by an invading malignancy
that s p r e a d s across her mineral skin,
wet with the sweat of panic
and cracked by constant chemicals
mixed up with Carbon,
Hydrogen in tandem
with a limited supply of Oxygen

fissures filled with rotting refuse
and permanent plastics;
her once sweet sweat gone putrid
oozes oil and the products of
consumption
and ill-intentioned industry
out her precious pores

that we imitate ignorantly
with the pot-holes
our vehicles fall in
a proud wheel
collapses
air escapes punctured rubber-lungs

we the self-poisoning creatures who,
with logic and opposable thumbs,
create ways to destroy ourselves
(and where we came from)
at a frantic pace

make haste you toxic tumors
Metastatic-Minded Bipedalists
making Life a Waste

you wasted Life, and
Life you waste

it's written on your furrowed face

as we rush to our demise
our Mother,
(Wise),
warns us of her Strength

her cancer recurring,
each time with greater strides,
takes its toll on her cycles and tides
and with that she weathers and withers

she fights for her life
she balds and grows weak
from the abuse of the masses,
but when the storms and signs
don't prove sufficient,

she might soon
combust or dehydrate
simply refuse
to go on
in silence, indignant

my Mother will leave with a Roar
armed only with the Elements

my self-sacrificing
Mother-Martyr's sole intent
is conserving her Pride and her Spirit



Karen Moorhead

Sgraffito Teapots

Porcelain with Wooden Fittings

5.5" x 6.25" and 6.75" x 7"



Neal Sacheck

Under The Tracks
Photography/Digital Inkjet Print
13.625" x 20.5"

Melanie Knippen

The Place Made from Many Trees

Nearly every Saturday,
my mom and I walked
from the underground garage
through the glass doors
leading to my second home

Free to roam the rows,
I explored a forest of books;
pine green, sky blue, berry red,
bark brown, sunlight yellow

The ground sprouted orange carpet
shelves grew different heights,
released intoxicating scents,
paper and ink at varying degrees
of age and wear

Where there was a collection
of people and places and things
rooted in binding spines
that overflowed with *so much to know*

I sat down with stacks of books
always peeking to find
when they were last cracked,
the cover's index card stamped
with the chronicles of "Date Due"

I wondered how each fit in
its temporary home
and who read it?
and did they like it?
and would I like it too?

Leafing through each paper adventure
I enjoyed textures,
glossy illustrations,
yellow inky pages of "chapter-books"
dog-eared and pulpy papered,
worn thin by fingerprints
and the subtle oil of so many hands
turning so many pages

My Library Card was a ticket
to the entire world
I learned about anything I didn't know:
Ancient Egypt, space, voodoo,
deep sea life, ghosts, and Nancy Drew

I made rounds around Dewey's Decimal System
found solace in the order of letters and numbers,
and the retrieval of what I was looking for
in its designated place

After escaping for awhile
it would be time to check out
the Librarian's warm smile
said, "Enjoy!"
I always took her advice

Every night at home,
my mom would read me stories
from our treasured finds;
she would pick out thin, wide books
to read, with heavy themes
that always drew tears from her eyes,
and "Why are you crying?" from my lips

She would reply, "It's so sad"
or "They're tears of joy";
back then, I couldn't fathom how words
could do such a thing,
but I would always hug her
and ask her to read it again,
the following night

Still I can be found there,
piling up stacks, adding to the tree
growing in my head
each leaf a book,
a thought, an image

When I stir the branches,
a scattering of stories
are set free in a pungent breeze,
carrying that wistful Library scent

Melanie Knippen

August's Abandon

August's fire
embraces its third day;
"time to reap the harvest!"
cries the fading morning moon,
in its first quarter of fruition,
a phase of *becoming*
the lionesses roared
in echo-filled dens,
drifting across seas
and landscapes,
ringing in my ears,
"it's time."

I'm set for a path;
astrological lions,
the numerology of nine,
in my cards, a hermit
with a wandering
mind; a thinking, feeling
woman infused with cycles
and moods; by afternoon

I was born into bright light
and strangers; I bellowed
for the moon, they sliced through
red and blue, baptized me
a separate being
in a sink, nearby; blind
and terrified to *become*
outside the womb.

*Where's the warm red?
Where's the glistening sea
to breathe?
I do not like this air!*

*It isn't fair.
I am cold and bare,
a baby staring out at earth,
with no hair! No hair!*

*Where is my mother?
It's nothing but blurs,
bright shapes and colors!*

They examine and cleanse
and turn me around,
to face my fate;
I expected connections,
breasts and rest;

she was no where
in sight, no where found;
forsaken, distressed
all my blood lines missing,
disappeared; abandoned

an infant insomniac,
pale as wax;
I sighed and frowned
as strangers passed;

*What a start!
What a start!
This doesn't seem fun;
There's no one
for me here;
Nobody,
No one*



Glen Reeser

2-4-T

Ceramic

4" x 6" x 4" each



Karen Moorhead

After Hours with the Xray Techs, Cheers

White Stoneware, Brass Fittings and Pipe

9.25" x 4" x 2" and 7.5" x 4.25" x 1.75"

Melanie Knippen

The Lioness Cliffs

That steep cliff is a lion!
That lion's a steep cliff!

I watch as she breaks
jagged border blackish
with glossy white edges
so solid, so stiff
and the sun in the sky

reflects eyes
and a halo's
affixed

It's really ethereal onyx
with *mind* in the mix!

the waves roar to mimic it
but do not compare to its Magic
Incantation cliff's speaking
in the tones of ruins
and the *Lioness Cliffs*

giving birth each morning
to wild fire and myth

each night as she sleeps
starry-eyed is the night
of the Lunatic
her breath is the rhythmical wind!

Gentle Prowlress
Lady of Fire
and so many cycles
between her haunched legs,
Desire
and trees that make wands
for archetypal sorceresses

the cliffs take me back in Time
I breathe in the same ancient air
as the bongo-playing priestesses

I hear drumbeats echo
on the leathered skins
of primitive horses
pierced with stitches,
they play

I see the same she-beast
suggestive stone display
lay, positioned along the coastline

she feeds on ancient equine
decomposing bones that serve to
fortify
feline spine skyline

lit with that which shines
bathing rays and waves

the lionized cliff's recline,
brave all day and night
stone daze
heavy mother cat
in the misty sea haze

Audrey Wilson

The Art of Keeping Warm

There are no words. There is only the wind caressing my red cheeks. The stairs that lead out of the basement are glassed over, and I'm careful to only step on what I know is solid concrete. I don't like the feeling of lost control on the ice. It's too much like dancing, too much like falling. My hands are bare and holding the railing would only make them colder, so I have to keep my balance on my own. There's a pair of black fleece mittens drying on the rail. I touch them, looking for something to warm my hands, but the mittens are still wet. They smell damp, of snow and leaves left over from fall. The smell takes me back, and I remember having to hang up all my wet winter clothes to dry after a long afternoon of playing outside. This was a time when it would take threats and bribes to get me to come in from playing games in the snow. That was back when games had no rules and my hands never got cold. Now life is nothing but rules and my hands always freeze.

My eyes graze the yard. Everything is dark. Only the porch lights on the distant houses across the iced creek and the snow-coated ground bring light to the darkness. My gaze stops on the snow. For a moment, the child within me that hides right below the surface, shows itself, and I wonder what makes the snow so bright. In my mind's eye I see a hundred miniature lights shining up from the ground beneath the blanket, shining through from where grass had once been. Winter can be dull. With Spring and Summer desperate to come into view, taunting Winter with visions of sunshine and warmth, I guess he simply got tired of his days being so short, nights being so long, and decided to turn the ground into the sky after every sunset.

I stop the moment from carrying me away and guide my eyes upward until I catch the moon. They say you can tell direction from the moon. Or maybe it's the North Star. My consciousness is regained and I float back down to reality.

But reality is colder than I remember. I'm only wearing a sweater that's been washed too many times and jeans that haven't

been washed enough. I wish I had on a coat. There's a boy who shares his coat with me when the wind bites and warms my hands when my fingers freeze. I try to make myself think that I can keep warm on my own. I can, and I have, but maybe I need to let someone else try this time. It's still cold outside, but inside I can feel myself warming up.

I take my first step off the cement and onto the snow. My foot breaks the surface and sinks down. There are no words. There is no traffic. All I hear is the crunching of the crushed ice under my soles. Each step, I think, is going to be different than the next. That I'm going to put down my weight and not sink four inches. Only fools think this way. I stop myself from thinking further.

I reach the edge of the yard and the beginning of the creek and see there's nowhere to go from here. I think maybe I'll draw a map and see where it takes me. A map doesn't need any words, only lines to destinations. You can't get lost if you have a map. The world can keep their words, I'll keep my map, and we'll call it even.

It's funny. I know just where I am, with no idea how I got here or where I'm going, and it's funny. I'm not cold. I'm not warm. I'm simply here, existing, trying with every ounce of strength I have not to get lost. Trying so hard can break a girl. Slowly, I begin to relax. There's something about my surroundings and the glowing earth that makes me feel safe and warm and comforted. Maybe it would be nice to let myself get lost every now and then. I don't need words to get lost. I don't need a coat to keep me warm, but it helps. Suddenly, I find myself forgetting the cold, losing my fears, and remembering everything I have. I don't know if it's the moon. I don't know if it's the snow. I don't know if they are two pieces or one, and I wonder if this is what love feels like.

But still, there are no words.

The Drive-Thru

Although the building on Donelson Road looked like a bank, a bank it was not. The gold-plated cross over the drive-thru showed the residents of Old Hickory, Tennessee that it was clearly a church. It was painted an aqua blue that would perfectly match the bottom of a swimming pool, and brightly colored flowers in pale-red pots were placed evenly around the outside. Mr. Edwards was new to town and, looking for a bank, assumed that's what this building was. He brushed off the cross as being a common sight on buildings in this part of the states. He pulled up to the first available teller and rolled down his window.

"Sin or blessing?" a woman's voice on the intercom said. There was only a mirrored window where the woman probably stood, so Mr. Edwards could just see his own reflection in it.

He looked down at his check book for information that might

tell him the relation of a sin or blessing to his account. "Um, I'd like to cash a check, please."

"I'm sorry, sir; this is not a bank," the voice said.

"It's not?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Edwards craned his neck out of the window and looked around the building for a clue to what it might be. "Then what is it?"

"The Holy Church of Old Hickory."

"Oh." He noticed a gold cross cheaply stenciled on the wall above the intercom. It had been hiding behind another small pot of brightly-colored flowers. "Right. Of course."

"Sin or blessing?" she repeated.

The Drive-Thru

Audrey Wilson

Mr. Edwards had never been a particularly religious man, but decided to give it a shot. "May I do one of each?" he asked. He didn't want anyone thinking he was strictly a sinner nor a saint.

"Certainly, sir. Please pull up to the first window on your left.

Mr. Edwards rolled up his window to block out the spring chill and pulled his car forward. A sign above the intercom read in bold, red letters: Sin Bin. Below it was a white metal box with rust around the edges and a matching rusted padlock on the front. Mr. Edwards rolled down his window again. A voice that sounded oddly similar to the first woman's voice said, "Please write your sin down on one of our courtesy papers, and place it in The Holy Church of Old Hickory's one and only Sin Bin. Mr. Edwards tore off a blank piece of paper from the pad on the wall and picked a miniature pencil from a clear plastic box next to it. Although he never claimed to be perfect, Mr. Edwards suddenly found it very difficult to come up with a sin on the spot, especially when he wasn't sure who it was going to be seen by. His life tended to be fairly sin-free.

He decided to go with the sin of not attending church regularly. It would show he could admit when he did something he wasn't proud of, but also showed he wanted to change and better himself, as they would see he was now trying to change and better himself by attending to their church, even if he was just driving through.

Mr. Edwards folded his written sin in half and placed it over the slot on the box. However, the slot was sealed. Before he had the chance to mention this, the voice came over the intercom again. "Twenty-five cents, please."

Mr. Edwards took his wallet out of his pocket and searched through it until he found a quarter, which he placed in the coin slot next to the padlock. After inserting his piece of paper into the box, he heard the voice again. "Thank you for your donation. You are now being repented. Since you have chosen both a sin confession and a blessing, please pull up to Window Two. God bless."

Doing what he was told, as Mr. Edwards often did, he pulled up to Window Two, this time leaving his own window open; he'd grown to like the breeze.

This teller didn't have a box in front of the mirrored window, but what appeared to be a vending machine full of small envelopes instead of candy. "Good day, sir," the voice of the second window said. By now he was certain the voice was the same for all three tellers.

"Hi. I mean, good day." He was unsure if he should direct his words to the vending machine, the window, or to some ominous presence surrounding the church. "I'm here for my blessing?"

"Fifteen cents, sir."

Mr. Edwards got out his wallet again. "A lot

cheaper for a blessing, I see," he laughed.

"It costs to sin, sir," the voice said with the utmost seriousness. Mr. Edwards decided then he should probably refrain from making jokes at or around church. He placed his fifteen cents in the coin slot on the vending machine. "Please enter your birthday."

He entered the digits of his birthday on the machine. Instantly, one of the coils in middle right of the machine began to turn, dropping the small envelope when it reached the end. He slipped his hand through the slot, took out the envelope and opened it. "You will attend church more often," it said. Mr. Edwards found it funny that his blessing didn't include a Chinese dinner.

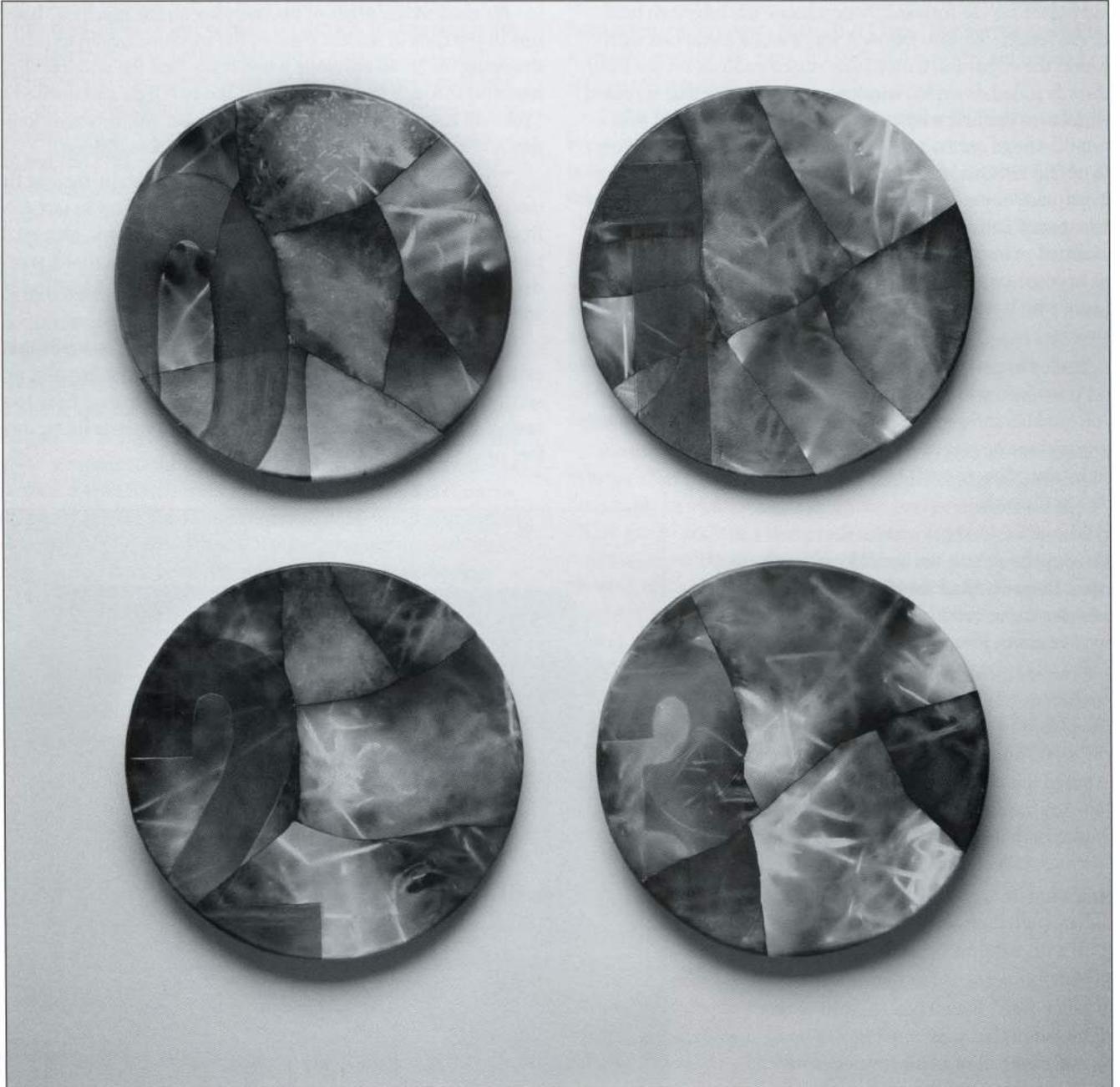
"Thank you for your donation. You are now sin-free for the next seven days. If you'd like to pray, please pull up to our drive-in prayer session. For directions to the nearest bank, please take a pamphlet on your right while exiting. Once again, thank you for driving through the Holy Church of Old Hickory. May God be with you."

Mr. Edwards rolled up his window and drove towards the exit, past the small collection of cars parked in the drive-in prayer section, feeling oddly pensive and refreshed. He may have to start saving up his spare change if he wanted to continue living this sin-free life.



Doug Tabb

Three
Clay, Metals, Reclaimed Wood
20" x 18" x 3"



Doug Tabb

Four in a Very Long Series

Clay, Wood

13" x 13" x 2" each

Audrey Wilson

Dead Weight

Etta's stride was brisk even in the hot Alabama sun. She made her way across the field of wheat to the source of the ruckus and found Halsey in a clearing. He was kneeling beside a large white mass.

"What in God's name have you done?" Her voice was shrill as the crows above them.

The young farmhand got to his feet and removed his cap in the presence of his employer.

"Ain't done nothing, ma'am. Horse was dead when I got here." He avoided her eyes and wrung the cap in his hands.

"For God's sake, Halsey," she said. The words gagged in her throat when she caught the first scent of the animal's corpse. "Just how do you think Gertie's going to take this?"

"I'm terribly sorry, ma'am." The hat was beginning to shred at the corners. "Just found him this way, I swear I did."

"Quit cowering and get the tractor."

The boy took off through the fields at a run. By this time Etta had her handkerchief out to mask across her face. She knelt down beside the animal's head to feel for a pulse. His black eyes were round and open, like the shock that his life was over had just hit him. She cursed under her breath. Halsey came out from the wheat with no tractor.

Etta got to her feet. "Where is it?"

"Not starting." He wiped the sweat from his brow and breathed hard and fast. "We'll drag him."

"You'll drag him." She brushed the dirt off her hands, smugness creeping over her already stern features. "Ladies don't do that sort of work."

"My apologies for suggesting anything different, ma'am." His cap was now shoved awkwardly into his pants pocket. For the first time in four weeks he made eye contact with the woman. "I ain't never aiming to harm you."

Before she could let her guard down, she built it back up. "Fine," she said. "You have any rope?"

"I do." He went to his tool chest on the opposite side of the clearing and pulled out a thick rope. The two tied it securely around the animal with proper knotting and balance. They kept the silence between them dead as the body at their feet. When they were done, Halsey went to the front and wrapped the rope around his arms. The low sun signaled the day was coming to an end.

He pulled forward and the horse's body dragged on the ground with his lead. Etta stood still for a moment. She couldn't remember the last time she just stood. Without allowing herself to think, she moved to the front of the horse next to Halsey and took hold of a free hanging rope.

"You don't gotta do that, ma'am."

"Stop calling me ma'am."

The silence rose again as the two drug the animal over the wheat and away from the barn.

"I still been having dreams about you," Halsey said, looking straight ahead.

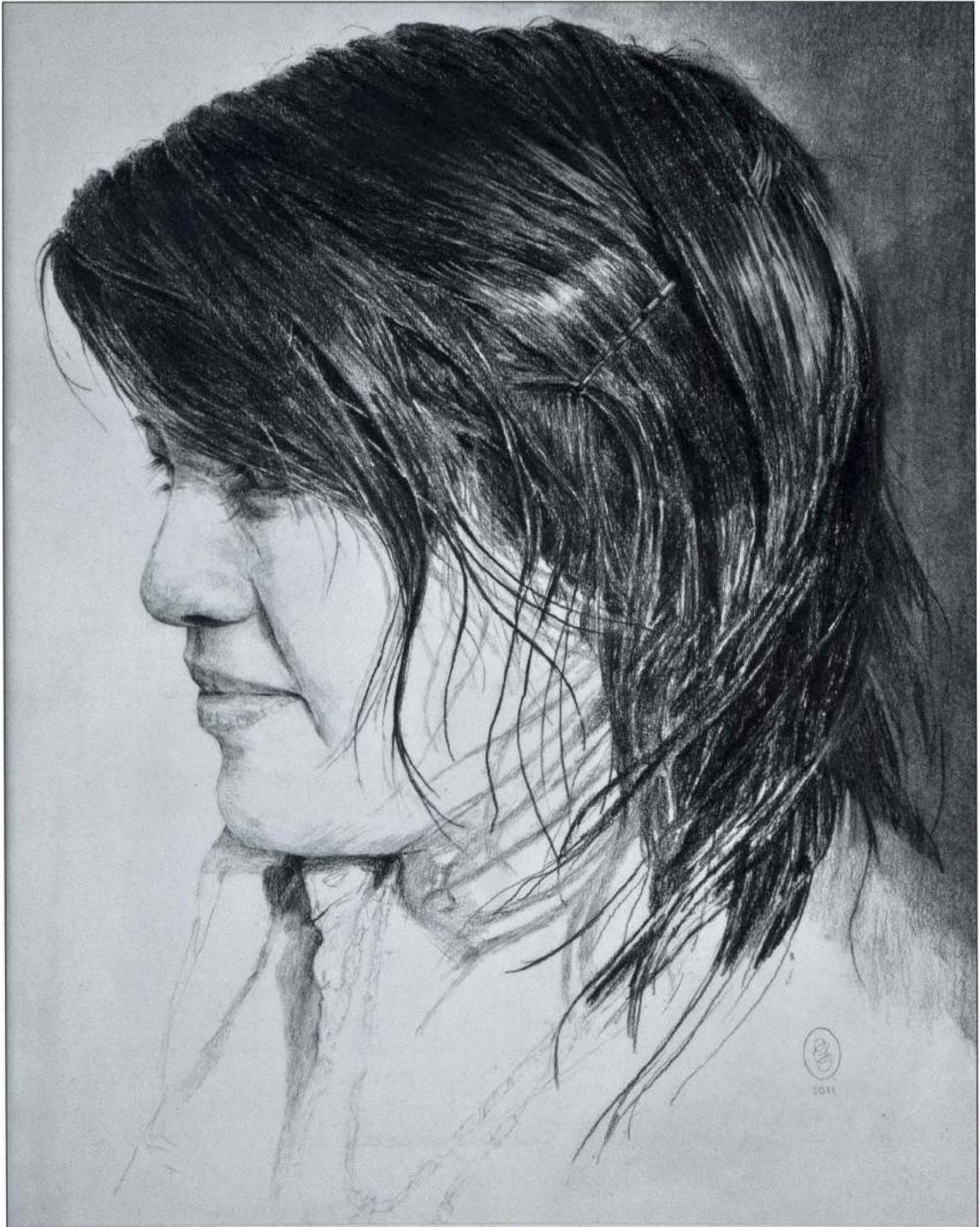
"You'll have to stop that."

"I can't," he said. "You're in my head and I can't get you out."

Etta didn't say anything. The sun was hotter than ever and she could feel her whole body sweating under her long dress. Her arms ached from pulling, but she didn't complain. Halsey kept his eyes forward, like he was looking ahead for an answer he couldn't find. In the heat and haze, she felt his hand on hers. She didn't pull it away, but she didn't take it either.

"Dreams are dreams," she said finally, breaking the connection. "They may have been memories at one point in time, but now they're dead weight. Nothing more."

He didn't hold her hand again after that, but kept a firm grasp on the ropes and pulled with all he had.



Gene Zielnicki

Nayelli's Hair

Charcoal

14" x 11"

Naomi Star Joseph

Solace in a Winter's Evening

Every once in a while we like to be alone
 We burrow in the confines of our memories
 Darting from conversations like a fish from glass

In a strike of unluck—we may find ourselves caught
 Hook punctures the mind's eye socket and reels it
 In—succumbing to our fate we revert

Thursdays become Wednesdays and on they go
 Dusts of yesterday's mourning fall and blanket
 Themselves on our old, wooden shelves—we may run

A damp rag along the surface to clear the
 Sometimes overwhelming picture framed thoughts:
 Relapses that chased our retired childhoods

Thunderous echoes of dead voices earthquake my
 Insides until Time becomes self-evident
 And I grip it like the Velcro on Dad's old shoes

Trying to stealth my way forward and return
 To the present—but confined am I in
 This blurred memory—

Slinkys jumping from stairs
 They blend together—overlapping



Pamela Phillips

Go with the Flow

Clay

12" x 12" x .5"

Michelle Calderon

Haunted

Bill had been a ghost for eleven years when he first met Madeline. The house he had been haunting, the same house he had lived in when he had died of a heart attack at the age of forty-seven, was being torn down. Someone had bought the property and wanted to rebuild. Bill couldn't blame them. The house was getting old, and there was mold. Bill knew this because when he passed through the walls he could taste it.

When Bill found out his old haunting grounds would be no more, he had no choice but to find temporary lodgings until the new house was built. So, he went to a house across the street. Its pale blue coloring and white shutters appealed to him.

The transition wasn't easy. Bill hadn't left the house since he had died there. What if there was a mighty wind that swept him up and away? Or what if it was the house that had him tethered to the earth, and when he stepped outside, he would just float up into the sky and all the way into the atmosphere until even his ghostly form could take it no more and just poof, vanished, and he would cease to exist?

These thoughts plagued him as he hovered in the doorway for days. But somewhere inside him, there was still some courage left, and he plucked it up and took his first step. He did not float away. Rather, it was quite like being in his home. He just glided on over to the house across the way, and that was that.

In this house lived Madeline. The previous tenants of Bill's house had been familiar to him. He knew who they were and he knew what to expect. With Madeline, on the other hand, it was not like that. This alarmed Bill at first. He went straight to the attic and did not come down for many weeks. But then one day, when he was looking out the window and thinking about his death, he heard a sound. He knew he had heard it before, since he had come to the house, but he had always ignored it. This time, though, it caught his attention. He took the long way down to the kitchen, going through each doorway and the stairwell. He felt he didn't know the house well enough yet to just pass through its walls so casually.

In the kitchen, Madeline was washing the dishes and whistling. She had a very pretty whistle, loud and clear. Bill couldn't think of anyone else he knew, or had known, that whistled while they washed dishes. His wife certainly hadn't. He could only remember her complaining, about having to wash the dishes at first, and then moving on to other topics.

Bill stared at Madeline curiously for some time, watched her breeze through the plates and then struggle with the pots and pans. She was fairly young, younger than Bill had expected, maybe in her early thirties. She had deep brown hair that kept falling forward as she worked, and she would flip her head just so to get the strands back out of the way. She was attractive, but not really Bill's usual type. His wife was blonde and petite.

When Madeline was finished, Bill went back to what he was beginning to think of as his attic. But from that day on, he would venture down more and more, to watch Madeline go about her daily chores and routine. He watched her do yoga every Sunday. Sometimes he even did the moves with her. He wondered if he had done such things when he was alive, perhaps he wouldn't have died of a heart attack so young. He wondered why his wife had never done yoga. Maybe then she wouldn't have gained all that weight.

He watched Madeline when she would pour herself a glass of wine and watch *The Bachelor*. He watched her vacuum the house. Once, when he was feeling particularly brave, he went into her room and watched her put her make up on in front of the mirror that rested on a set of drawers across her bed.

After a few months, Bill found himself by Madeline's side whenever she was home. He left her alone when she got dressed, or went to the bathroom. He may have been a ghost, but that didn't mean he wasn't still a gentleman. But he would stay with her at any other time, following her like a shadow. For the first time, he found himself enjoying death.

But like all good things, or so Bill thought, something always had to come along and mess it up. That's how it was in life, so it was in death. With him and Madeline, this something was a man named Adam. Adam started coming around after Bill had been there for about three months. He had heard Madeline talking on the phone with Adam, and had not liked where it was going. Madeline would blush and giggle sometimes, when she talked to Adam. She never blushed or giggled with Bill.

The first time Adam came over, Madeline cooked him a steak dinner. He was tall and handsome, with dirty blond hair and a chin dimple. He was dressed in a nice, tailored, blue shirt and slacks. Bill could tell he made decent money by the classy Movado watch he wore. Bill disliked him instantly.

They talked and laughed over dinner. Adam told ridiculous anecdotes that Bill didn't believe for a second, but Madeline ate up. They finished dinner. They went to the couch. They talked. They kissed.

Adam came over a lot more often after that. Bill stayed in his attic more than he was now used to. He tried to think of how he could be enough for Madeline, so that she wouldn't need Adam anymore.

The first thing he tried to do was talk to her. He talked to her all the time, constantly. He did not know whether he was actually making any noise. She certainly did not seem to hear him, but she didn't see him either, so he had expected this. Still, he talked on. He told her about his life. How he had been an investment banker. How he was moving up the company ladder. How hard he worked to make something of himself, but had died before he had the chance to get where he was going. Then



Kevin Coderre

Dark Passage

Photography

11" x 14"

Haunted

he talked about his wife. How he had loved her once. How it had taken her only a few weeks to move her lover, Marco, who also happened to be Bill's best friend, into the house after he had died.

Bill had been present for the conversation in which Marco pressed Bill's wife to allow him to move in. Bill and Marco had been good friends when they had worked side by side at the company. But then Bill had started applying for promotions and trying to get somewhere with his career. Marco had never made it past entry level. Bill liked to tell himself that he always knew that Marco was jealous of him. But when he was honest with himself, finding out just what Marco thought about him was quite a shock. Bill's wife and Marco talked about how selfish Bill had been. How much he hadn't seen. How he hadn't listened. How he was so absorbed with work. Bill had thought he was making a life for himself, and for his wife as well. Apparently, she saw things differently. She had nagged him a bit in life, about being home more or about how much she had wanted a family, and how it was too late. Bill thought she knew that what he was doing was for the best, for both of them.

Even so, Bill knew she felt guilty after Marco moved in. She would justify herself to him far too often. Without being asked or pressed into speaking, she would bring up Bill. She would talk about how she had tried to talk to him, so many times, or how he would have wanted her to move on and be happy.

She did not know him well, Bill realized. He did not want her and Marco to be happy. Not while he was still there, watching.

When his wife and Marco moved out, his brother-in-law Justin moved in and Bill spent the next nine years living with him. Justin was a quiet, easy-to-please kind of man. Bill had always thought he had potential, but he never did much with his life. His wife had died early, and he was left a widower with no children. He never remarried. Bill would watch as he sat on quiet nights, eyes closed but not sleeping, and knew he was thinking of her, of his wife. Bill did not know what it was to love someone so much. Eventually, Justin passed away. Bill thought maybe he would join him in the afterlife. He had waited eagerly as Justin took his final breaths. But alas, nothing. Not even the hint of a ghostly form beginning. Bill had been a little disappointed, but not much.

Bill told all these things to Madeline, but she still kept Adam around. He decided he needed to do something more, so he started with some light haunting. Turning the TV off while they were watching it, making the lamp flicker, just the basics.

Bill tried to direct these things at Adam. He took his chances whenever Madeline left the room for any reason. Adam always seemed confused. One time, he mentioned the strange occurrences to Madeline. At first, she had brushed them off. Bill continued with his antics, but then Adam went and tattled again. Madeline took it more seriously this time. Her eyebrow creased in worry, and she moved closer to Adam on the couch, as if she needed him to protect her.

Bill stopped the haunting after that. The last thing he wanted was for Madeline to think her house was haunted. What if she called those ghost hunters who would come and try to get him to make peace with something? Or maybe she would try an exorcist. Bill had no idea what would happen to him if someone tried to exorcise him, but he was sure he didn't want to find out.

Bill had dabbled with more serious haunting techniques at his old house. Actually, if he was being honest, he had more than dabbled. He had become somewhat of a proficient, he thought, although he didn't really have any other ghosts to compare himself to. He had had only one goal then, to break Marco and his wife apart. He started with research. Every time they fought, he was there, watching, listening. He could see the way his wife would start tucking her hair behind her ears too many times, just the way she had done with him whenever she was particularly upset. He saw all the times Marco would get mad enough to leave the house and go for a drive. And each time he noted the reason.

For months and months he watched them. And then he began to strike. When his wife was feeling guilty about her affair, he made the photo album in the closet fall down and open to the page with their wedding pictures. When she was feeling particularly suspicious of Marco, Bill would make the phone ring and hang up when she answered. He could see in the way her hand shook when she set the phone down that she thought it was a woman calling for Marco. When Marco was feeling annoyed with her clingy behavior, Bill would press his ghostly hand through her phone, and send him text message after text message.

It had taken him a while to perfect this. At first all he could manage was to dial random numbers. But if he thought really hard about it, and moved his hand in just the right ways, he was able to gain more control.

Little by little, he chipped away at them. He would watch with glee whenever they fought about something that he had his hand in. Sometimes he would look to the left and to the right with a smug smile, as if there was someone next to him for him to boast to.

Eventually, he conquered. Marco moved out, and not long after, so did Bill's wife. He was somewhat sad to see them go. He did not know what to do with himself anymore. At some level, he had thought that maybe that was all he had needed to do to "move on." Maybe that was his "unfinished business," his wife's affair. But he had gone nowhere. And he was not sure that he wanted to go anywhere. He did not know where he would go if he did go somewhere. Still, he wondered sometimes where Justin had gone, and why. Why had he moved on while Bill was still stuck there? Bill couldn't tell if this was some sort of reward, or a curse. Either way, he figured he had a new mission now.

It didn't take so much time or effort with Adam and Madeline. Bill saw one night that Adam was using his phone frequently, probably some work matter, Bill presumed. So Bill floated over to him, waited for him to send a text, and then

Michelle Calderon



Kevin Coderre

Untitled

Ceramic

4.5" x 10" x 4.5"

touched the phone, sending Madeline a message addressed to "Jessica."

Madeline heard her phone beep twice with a little jingle, and walked over to the stand in the foyer where it was sitting. She picked it up, read the message, and her face flushed. She clutched the phone close to her chest, and looked over at Adam. She bit her lip and looked around, as if she could find some explanation in her surroundings as to what had just happened.

She went to the couch and carefully took a seat next to Adam. She sat in silence for a few minutes, and her eyes began to brim with tears. Finally, she asked, "Who's Jessica?" And thus the arguing commenced.

Adam denied it time and again, trying to remain calm and rational. He even showed Madeline his phone so that she could see he had sent no such text. Madeline made the point that he could have just deleted it, like he probably did with any other texts he was sending to different girls while he was with her, afraid he would get caught.

Bill watched, waiting for the familiar feeling of accomplishment to embrace him, just as it had done whenever Marco and his wife had fought. But it did not come. Bill did not feel good. As he watched Madeline get more and more upset, he found himself only growing sad. His ghostly form seemed to wilt and shrink, and Bill wondered if this was how he was going to disappear from the world. Madeline began to cry and Bill huddled in the corner like a banished dog.

The fighting got worse. Adam, feeling confused and attacked, eventually blew up. Madeline had her phone out and she was crying, showing him the proof once again. Adam knocked the phone from her hand and told her he was done. He grabbed his coat and left the house without another word, slamming the door behind him. Madeline collapsed onto the couch and broke out into a new wave of sobs.

She sat there for some time, and Bill did not watch this time. He put his head in the wall, wishing that he had eyes to close. When he found the courage to come out of his corner, Madeline was gone. He slowly stretched himself out. It seemed almost painful to him, if he could feel pain. He glided over to her room, and found her curled up on her bed. She was no longer crying but she stared at the wall with a blank face, eyes red and cheeks puffy. Bill had never seen her look so lifeless. He wished she would get up and whistle or laugh again. But she did not.

Bill slowly made his way over to her. He wanted to tell her how much he enjoyed his time with her, how she had made his death livable. But he found that he had no mouth, so the words would not come out. And he wondered if he had ever been able to speak at all. If he had ever even said all the things he thought he had said to her.

Arriving at the foot of the bed, Bill moved his head down and lifted the end of his frame so that he was hovering horizontally in the air. He stayed like that above the bed, next to Madeline, and tried to mimic her balled-up form. He inched closer to her until he was almost touching her. For a moment it was as if he was breathing. He took the final step and moved himself right beside her. Some of his ghostliness went into her body, and he could almost taste her salty skin.

It was the most alive he had felt in all his years of death. But Madeline shivered violently, and Bill flew away from her as if he had been thrown. He watched from afar as she pulled the covers over herself, her teeth chattering. She looked scared and alone and Bill, after one last long look at her, went up through the ceiling and on, out towards the fading sun.

