

PORTALS



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PORTALS

Literary and Arts Magazine

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Table of Contents

Fiction

Poetry

Essay

All art and photography submitted by CFCC art students.

I Can See Everything

Allie Landrum

Little
Droplets
Of water Drip
Translucent,
Reflecting rainbows,
Running
Down a wall of earth...
Sandstone between my fingertips
Melting,
Moist and grainy
Into a shallow pool...
Touching
Upon millions of years
I climb to the top
Of this tall mound of earth,
My muscles stretching and fingers gripping
One crevice at a time
Rocks tumble beneath me...
The sky rests blanketed
Azure above me...
I can see everything from here.



Haley Hall

Southern German

Jason Mott

“When all else fails, when everything is gone to hell and you know, you really know, that there’s nothing at all that you can do about it...make history!”

That’s the best thing my daddy ever told me. And he only said it once. He spit the words from his mouth like a death row inmate giving his final two cents on life and retribution.

My daddy told it to me the day before he stepped in front of an eighteen-wheeler and got himself spread across a quarter mile of interstate highway. According to the driver, Daddy charged at his truck screaming and cussing, eyes like a madman. He dropped his shoulder like a line-backer and looked like he might actually kick that truck’s ass. The driver said it was amazing. Said he’d never seen a man with no fear. Said he’d never forget it.

My daddy made history.

With Daddy gone, Mama’s life went from bad to worse. The bill collectors kept calling. Sometimes they came by, riding in shiny white or blue Cadillacs. They pulled into the yard and honked for someone to come out of the house while Mabel and Clyde, the best deer hounds in all of North Carolina, chewed at their tires and jumped up on the hoods of their cars, barking and growling and scratching paint.

“Those dogs of yours are gonna wind up killing somebody,” the bill collector said from inside his car.

“They might,” I said.

“Is your mother at home, boy?”

“Nope, but we can take whatever messages you want to leave.” I sat on the bottom step of our old, gray porch as Clyde and Mabel did laps around the bill collector’s Caddy.

“Well, when she comes in, tell her that the bank

needs her to call them. She needs to make some arrangements for payment on the money she owes. And I've got some papers here that I have to give her."

"Yes, sir," I said. "Just bring 'em over to me."

The bill collector, in his blue suit and blue Cadillac, looked out his window at Clyde, standing next to the driver's door with the hairs on his back sticking up like pine needles.

"Now c'mon here, boy. Your mother needs these papers. How about you come over here and get 'em."

I gave him a smile and let loose a quick, sharp whistle that sent Mabel flying onto the hood of his car and Clyde chewing at the tires again.

"Damned mongrel," the man said, looking at me and then looking at Clyde and Mabel.

The bill collector tossed his crisp, white papers out the window and threw his Cadillac into reverse. All the way out the driveway, Mabel stayed on his hood, clawing at the windshield and biting the wipers. She only came off when he got on the road and kicked into drive. Then she and Clyde chased that blue Caddy down the dirt road for a half a mile until he and his bank were nothing but a dusty summer memory.

It was hard for Mama, even before Daddy charged at that eighteen-wheeler. It was hard because, living in the South, in a place called Arcadia, rich and poor didn't mix. Neither did black and white. But Mama and Daddy mixed everything. He was a tall, broad shouldered black man with short, kinky hair and thick calluses on his hands from plowing fields and digging ditches. Mama was short, blue-eyed. Long blond hair. Small, thin hands that started out smooth and supple, but reddened and firmed when she married my daddy.

Far enough down the line, she was descended from Germans, my Mama. Damned Nazis, of all people. Closer to home, she had been a Weis before she married my

daddy. Being a Weis meant she grew up eating off of silver and sleeping on silk. Her family was famous horse breeders. The kinds of horses that win the Derby and are worth more than most men's lives. It was something to be a Weis. It made you a part of something big, part of a dynasty. Mama used to be that, until she married Daddy, a nickel and penny farmer. Down the line, descended from slaves. Closer to home, he was a Brown, no more.

But Mama said that when she and daddy met, he was an honest man with a simple kind of charm. The kind of charm that stares up at the stars on crisp winter nights and asks what life is like on other planets. The kind of charm that doesn't understand why Ahab didn't just get himself a rifle and shoot that damned whale right between the eyes. Or at least carry a good knife on his hip so that he could cut himself out of Moby's belly.

Mama said it was the charm that nobody else had. The charm that made life fresh. "Uncomplicated," she said.

On the other hand, Daddy said that Mama was "genuine." To him, the word meant that she could be trusted. It meant that she wasn't trying to take his money or his manhood. It meant that she had given up something to be with him, and in return he owed her a debt.

"Your mama could have done a lot better than marrying a field hand like me," he told me. "She coulda went to college and got herself a smart man with certificates and titles and fancy clothes. A man with money in his hands instead of blisters and dirt. She coulda married a white man and not had her family turn their back on her the way they did. But still, she picked me over them." Sitting in the woods, with dense pines trees around us and a December breeze cutting through us, waiting for a deer to walk in front of our rifles, my daddy told me that.

In the distance, I could hear Clyde and Mabel howling in the wind, hot on the heels of a buck or a doe. Baying and screaming. Running it straight towards our rifles like a freight train towards a hot bolt of lightning.

A few days earlier, Daddy had lost his job at the paper mill. A job that he had worked for twenty-two years. A job that replaced him with a computer and decided not to give him a pension or a handshake as they kicked his ass out the door. They just told him, “You’re job’s been phased out, Lynn Boy. We’re sorry.” They didn’t bother using his last name. Even as they escorted him out through the front gate and told him he could never come back, they wouldn’t call him Mr. Brown. Just Lynn Boy.

“Crops didn’t do too well this year,” Daddy said, chambering a round in his rifle as the sound of Clyde and Mabel echoed closer. “But that’s nothing you don’t already know, Abriel. Things are fixin’ to get tight around here. Your Uncle Al said he might have some work for me at his garage. Won’t pay nearly as much as the mill did, but maybe it’ll keep us fed for awhile.”

There was a sharp “crack” that echoed off of every tree for nearly a mile. There was a splattering of blood on moist brown earth followed by the thud of deer flesh. It was a low, deep thump that reverberated like a sack of potatoes dropped on a wooden floor.

Daddy had killed that deer.

“Yes, sir.” I said, wanting to say more but not having the words.

I was never sure what to say when my daddy talked to me that way, like an equal. I was eleven, an eleven-year old boy. Not his equal. He should have been telling me not to worry. He should have been saying that everything was going to work out. He should have lied to me so that I could sleep at night. But that would be complicated, and complicated wasn’t my daddy.

“Get educated, ‘Abriel. Get some papers in your hand so you can get yourself a job using your head. Listen to your mama, she’ll tell you how to do it. She shoulda went to college, but it didn’t work out like that. So that means you’re the one. Means it’s up to you to take care of her when...if anything happens to me. Power of God, son,

that's what you are. Power of God."

The story goes that I was born during one of the worst hurricanes to ever hit Bladen County. It was mid-July and the county had been in a drought for nearly three months. Nothing was growing in the fields. The cows and pigs were dying of disease by the dozens. People were calling it the end days. But there I was inside my mama, "kicking and scratching and clawing to get out," she said.

Then, in the last days of the month, a black hurricane came in and ripped trees up by the roots. They called it a black hurricane because the clouds and rain were so thick they blotted out the sun like a midnight canvas. Folks called the Reverend and asked to be blessed until the phone lines went dead. Then they curled up in storage rooms and bedrooms and had their own prayer sessions. Praying for death to pass them over as God gave the world a good beating.

All the water that had been missing from Bladen County for three months came down in the space of three hours. Somewhere around forty-five people died from flash floods and collapsed houses, caved-in roofs. Falling pine trees. Flying cedars. Grandma Ivory said it was a "Sinner's Cleansin'."

In the middle of it, in the worst part, when the wind was ripping the roof off of Grandma Ivory's house and somewhere not far away Old Man Washington was having his heart attack and drifting off to the angels, there I was rolling out from between Mama's legs. A child of twenty years of trying, and three stillborn brothers ahead of me.

It was a hard birth. As soon as I was born Mama knew that she'd never be able to try and have any more children. I was the last prayer against the wind.

Grandma Ivory said that for a long time I wasn't moving and wasn't breathing. I was just lying there in a pool of Mama's blood. Everyone figured me dead, and they figured that Mama wasn't far behind. Blood loss and grief,

they kill fast and hard. Like an eighteen-wheeler.

In the middle of that hurricane, nobody knew what to do with me. The roof was gone off and the sky was pouring buckets and there I was, hot, still and lifeless. There was Mama, bleeding and crying for herself and her dead son. And there was Daddy, at the mill. Working. Sweating. Not knowing.

Uncomplicated.

Grandpa Cyrus, in his rain soaked blue jeans and red flannel shirt, took me from Grandma Ivory. He spit a fat wad of tobacco juice on my forehead and on my belly. He smeared it in between my legs. Then he spit that thick, black juice in between Mama's legs. "Workin' roots," the old folks called that kind of stuff. Country magic.

As soon as he did it, the rain stopped. Just like that. The clouds parted and sunlight broke through in long, glittering shafts. I started yelling and screaming like a bear cub with a fresh set of lungs.

Grandpa Cyrus named me, Gabriel. Power of God. The only one.

With Daddy dead and buried, Mama and me both got jobs working for Uncle Al at his garage. Mama was his receptionist and go-fer. I rotated tires and did oil changes and started learning the ins and outs of engine work. Whenever I had a break, Mama made it a point to see that I had something to read. I carried oil-stained copies of *The Odyssey* and *Leaves of Grass* in the back pockets of my greasy, blue coveralls.

Uncle Al was a gambling man. Cars were his favorite, but when it wasn't car races it was poker. When it wasn't poker it was horseshoes. Two bucks a point. When his arm got tired of horseshoes he went back to racing cars. All the while money went in and out of his hands like a church collection plate.

His garage business was the best in the county. He could have made enough money through that little concrete

building to be a rich man, if not for the gambling. As it stood, he held a decent living and gained salvation points with the Reverend by being so kind to his blond-haired sister-in-law and his mulatto nephew.

That was what he called me, his “mulatto nephew.” He meant it as a term of endearment. Other people called me other things. I was Mongrel. Half-breed. Gray Babe. Zebra Baby. People didn’t like my light skin or my hazel eyes. They didn’t like the fact that half of me was pure, white-as-snow German. They did love my hair though. It was smoother than anyone of my cousins and my aunts loved to let me know. “You’ve got such good hair, baby,” they said. My cousins, cedar brown and kinky-haired, called me, “Crackerhead.”

One summer, not long after daddy was dead, all of my aunts got together and decided that it would be nice to see their mulatto nephew grow his good, half-German hair out, long and straight. They told me to make sure not to cut it. Then they convinced Mama that it was something good for me. Something that all black folk needed to do at some point and, since half-white means all black, I needed to do it. Mama knew better. She knew, from my daddy, how black people could be about skin color and hair texture. But she made me stop cutting my hair nonetheless. “Maybe it *is* something that you need to do,” she said, as my hair got longer and Mama Ivory taught her how to cornrow and braid it.

As my hair grew, so did mine and Mama’s popularity. My aunts invited us over for Sunday dinners and let us ride with them in their long, heavy Ford Thunderbird on weekend trips into town.

“Don’t you ever cut that hair, baby,” they told me. “It’s so pretty and straight. Don’t you never go cutting it.”

At family gatherings, my aunts put my hair and me on display like a racehorse. “Isn’t it pretty,” they said, meaning either me or my hair. They’d hook their fingers into one of the front belt loops on my discount blue jeans and

drag me from stranger to stranger. “This is Lynn Boy’s son,” they said. “Ain’t his hair the prettiest you’ve ever seen?”

People would look at me and pat my head. Feel my hair. Then they would smirk, knowing full well where my hair had come from. “It’s pretty,” they’d say, speaking to my aunts.

On display, I met a gray-haired great grandfather named Papa. He was almost as light-skinned as I was, with small, pursed lips like Mama’s. Hazel eyes like mine. He was kept in a wheelchair in a back room, like a dirty secret. He could only smile and nod and occasionally ask where he was.

I met Great Aunt Inez, Grandma Ivory’s slightly younger sister. She had smooth, red skin and long, inky, straight black hair. Indian hair. A lot like Grandma Ivory’s but twice as thick and flowing.

“This is Lynn Boy’s son,” Aunt Elizabeth said, twirling her finger in the air as a signal for me to turn around and show myself off. “Ain’t he got the prettiest hair?” she said.

“What’s your name, child?” Great Aunt Inez asked, running her long, sienna fingers through my hair as gently as tulips stems through the wind. Caressing my scalp so gently that I felt her fingers reach down into my soul.

“Gabriel,” I said, closing my eyes, drifting in the comfort of her fingers.

“You really are pretty,” she said. “Don’t let nobody tell you different.” In her voice, slow and deep, like a gospel song in the distance, I could tell that she had been where I was. She had been, and maybe still was, the freak show.

All the while, at family gatherings, Mama was alone. She stood out like a ghost in two a.m. moonlight. I could always see her from a distance. Her flour-white skin and long, blond hair. Her short, thin frame, soft blue eyes and small, flat lips always pulled back into tight, empty smiles.

No matter how much she tried, Mama didn’t fit in with my daddy’s family. No matter who her husband had

been or who her son was, she was still an alabaster statue in a garden of mahogany. Silent. Hard. Singular. Even a mongrel like me got more affection from my daddy's family than Mama.

I got by on my daddy's name. I got by on his nose and his lips that were stuck to my face. At least I was half accepted. But Mama, she was simply all the way white. Most of my daddy's family treated her like a misplaced tourist. They constantly asked if she was okay and what time she'd be heading home. They made small talk about the weather.

A few of them outright hated Mama. They hated her blue eyes and blond hair. They hated the German blood that showed through the red veins in her slender, pale hands. It was that blood and those hands, those deep, winter-blue eyes and that long, straight hair that she supposedly used to seduce my daddy. She didn't belong, and Daddy's family reminded her of that.

They reminded her by constantly asking if the stewed chicken and rice or collards were too spicy for her. Or if she needed to go in out of the sun. That was their favorite one to ask, as if she were a flower ready to wilt. "Tender-skinned," people said when they thought she couldn't hear. "Delicate," they said when she could hear. "Cracker," they said when Mama wasn't there.

The only exceptions were Grandma Ivory and Grandpa Cyrus. Grandma Ivory was a quarter Indian and Grandpa Cyrus was a quarter white, though none of the family would admit it. Grandma Ivory and Grandpa Cyrus treated my mama decently. They treated her like family.

One summer, Grandma Ivory and Mama knitted a quilt together. Mama Ivory was always making quilts and blankets. Thick, intricate creations with hand-stitched pink roses always sewn into the top right-hand corner. Being in her early eighties, it was getting harder and harder on her arthritis. The roses hurt her hand to make them. They made her joints swell and throb and forced her into quiet moments

of suppressed agony.

That summer, to help ease Mama Ivory's hands, Mama and me went over each evening after working at Uncle Al's garage. I would sit out on the concrete front porch with Grandpa Cyrus, sucking on slivers of the fresh cut sugar cane that he grew in his garden. He and I talked about the weather and the crops. We argued over whether a Blue Tick or a Walker made a better hunting dog. He puffed from his pipe and sipped his strawberry stumphole. Moonshine, some people call it.

Those nights, I could hear Mama and Grandma Ivory inside the house, talking. Laughing. It was the light laughter of an uncomplicated moment. The kind of laugh Mama had had when my daddy was alive. The kind of laugh I could only occasionally manage to draw from her. It never lasted long, but it shined and sparkled in the moment that it was there, like an ice cube on a rusty, hot tin roof.

Those nights, with Mama on the couch beside Grandma Ivory and me on the front porch with Grandpa Cyrus, we both had family. I had a father and she had a mother. We were happy and the nights were too short.

"A man that can't support his family ain't no man," my daddy told me, drunk on whiskey, clenching and releasing the steering wheel beneath his palms. "I been a man since I was sixteen, 'Abriel. I been on my own, paying my way. Did ten years in the army. Supported you and your Mama ever since I had to. I been a man."

I sat in the dark of the summer night, beside my father in his blue Ford pickup. The dashboard smelled of wood chips and the seat smelling of motor oil. Twenty-two years at the paper mill had sewn the scent of oak and pine into the dashboard like the pink roses on Grandma Ivory's quilts, sharp and light. The two months of working for Uncle Al, hiding from bill collectors and borrowing money, had worked the smell of motor oil and antifreeze into the seats of Daddy's truck. It was an acidic smell that burned your

nostrils and made your eyes water. It made you self-conscious. You got out of Daddy's truck checking the seat of your pants for stains.

"What's a man got when he ain't a man no more, boy? Huh?" he pleaded, half sobbing, leaning onto the steering wheel and hiding his face. "What's a man got?"

I wanted to tell my daddy that he had me. I wanted to tell him that he had a son, that he had a wife. I wanted to tell him that he was still a man, but the words weren't there. I could see them in my head. But I didn't say anything, I just took the keys from the ignition so that he couldn't leave the driveway and slam into any trees or ditches. Like Mama told me to.

My daddy and I sat there quiet as church mice for a half an hour. The space between us hollow, empty, and impassible. I didn't know how to help my daddy anymore than a private knows how to console his general after the last great battle's been lost.

"I'll make it right," my daddy said, breaking the silence with an abrupt air of decisiveness. He turned towards me. The moonlight came through the windshield of the truck and half of his face fell into shadow while the other half was as sharp and defined as a lightning bolt in a black sky. Behind the hard brown of his eyes, I saw something flickering there. Something like a fire. Hot and consuming. Hungry and decided. "When all else fails," he said, leaning in closer towards me so that I could see my own face reflected in the hot light of his eyes, "when everything is gone to hell and you know, you really know, that there's nothing at all that you can do about it...make history!"

The next day, my daddy met that eighteen-wheeler.

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Weeping and moaning, trembling and wailing, my white mama cried a river of tears for her dead black husband. She and I sat on the front pew of the church with the smell of roses and lilacs heavy on our shoulders. Seep-

ing into our hearts like the stink of death.

They gave my daddy a casket, but honestly, that eighteen-wheeler stretched him out far enough to bury him in a shoebox. But in Arcadia, a funeral ain't about the dead. It's about throwing out enough money to show the living that you loved someone. The life insurance that my daddy had was enough to cover the cost of his oak casket and most of the other arrangements.

Insurance companies don't pay out for suicides, but nobody believed my daddy really charged at that truck. They said it was just a horrible accident and that the truck driver was delirious when he said what my daddy did.

They didn't know any better.

Thick waves of moaning rippled through the church as person after person walked up to my daddy's closed casket and said their last goodbyes to his eight-by-ten photograph. A picture of him sitting on our old, gray front porch in his blue coveralls and straw hat. The sun on his face and dirt on his hands. His dark skin soaking up the world like a black hole.

People passed by my Mama and me and dropped off, "I'm sorrys," like care packages. Then they went to the end of the pew where my aunts were screaming and moaning. They kissed my aunts lightly on the forehead and prayed for them. My mama only had me to hold her hand.

Sitting in that church, in Pleasant Union Baptist Church in little Bladen County, with my dead daddy and heartbroken mama, I wanted to make history. I wanted to be the first mulatto to change the world when everything in his life had gone to hell. I wanted to take my daddy's advice.

If anyone could do it, I could.

The half-bred Southern German with the straight, beautiful hair that all of his aunts love.

Gabriel. Power of God. That's what I am.

In that church, in the sight of God, I became my daddy. I put myself in front of that eighteen-wheeler and

called it a son of a bitch while the driver honked his horn and dared to think that I would move.

Ha. He doesn't know. He doesn't know that I'm here to change the world. He doesn't know that I'll rip that truck of his in half and shit down his throat for ever thinking that I can't. He doesn't know. The world doesn't know. But in this moment, I'll make history. I'll change the world, and then, I'll be able to support my mama and bring back my daddy. I'll be a man.

At that funeral, I understood Lynn Boy Brown. My daddy.

For a long time, after my daddy's funeral, I looked for eighteen-wheelers with nerve enough to think that they could kill me like they did my daddy. I looked for log trucks and dump trucks loaded down with sixty tons of steel that I could drop my shoulder against and split in two. Right there on the interstate. But somewhere, there was always a short, blue-eyed, blond-haired, German descended woman with no family. A woman that should have gone to college and should have lived a life of silver spoons and million-dollar racehorses. A woman that had nothing left in this world but the memory of an uncomplicated husband and a mulatto son with the power of God.

She kept me away from the interstate and eighteen-wheelers.



A Drive With My Father
Keith Harrelson

Driving to the state line for tomatoes.
Thirty cents a pound.
Tomatoes back in town,
red, ripe, and round.
Just not for thirty cents a pound.

In fact there's a market on the corner
by our house.
That's where Daddy does all his other tradin'.

But from time to time, and I can't say why, we'd
take off for the state line.
We'd buy boiled peanuts, collard greens, or
whatever else we could read off the highway sign.
Depending on the season.
Depending on the vine.

Now I realize the reason why;
My father didn't really care for saving a dime at the state
line.
He cared to be with me, spending time.



Keith Harrelson

Freedom Flies
Andrea Williams

I

The marbled sky of blue and white,
the only moving thing is the flag

II

I was of open mind
like the open sky,
so open and free

III

The flag rippled in the soft wind,
A minute part of the open sky.

IV

A bird and her babies
are one,
A bird and her babies and the sky
are one.

V

Which one is more beautiful?
The rippled red, white, and blue
or the bird and her babies,
the sounds of the rippling,
or their wings flapping.

VI

Mama bird flies back and forth,
following are three babies,
they fly by the freedom flag
as they float
so high
so free

VII

O' tall flag pole
Do you see the freedom you share?
Do you appreciate their flight?

VIII

I know the importance of freedom
I know what it means
but I do not know the feeling to fly,
to fly in the open sky.

Day Motions

gloria j. stone

Dawn:

Crisp saturated light

Peaks over the earth

Stinging the air with liquid light.

Noon:

The day at its peak

Bright and warm breath

Moving my stomach to ache.

Dusk:

The sun casts shadows

The sky luminous

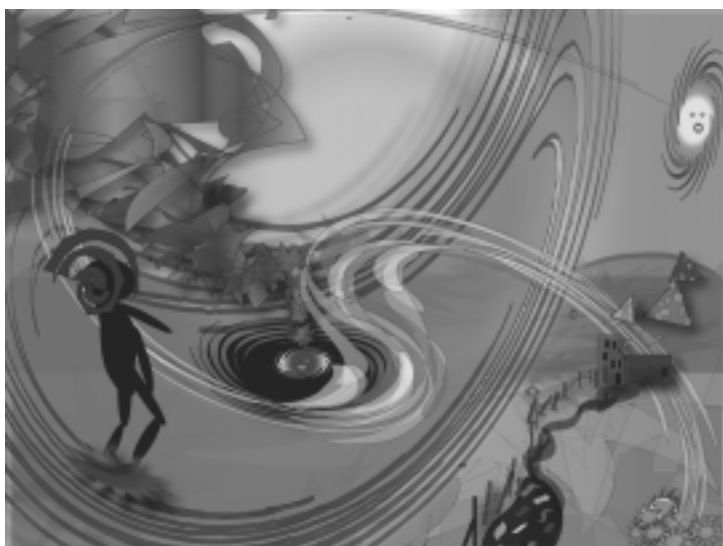
Clouds stream like paintbrush strokes.

Night:

The moon at her peak

Cool air sits calmly

Ebony sets the stage for dreams.



Deanna Dawson

Sword of Loneliness

Leah Maloney

The sharp sword of loneliness stabs through the darkness;
The teapot begins to steam.
Its feet come to life and begin to dance.
Why do household objects have to be so boring?
And why does life
Have to feel like plodding through thick mud?
A teapot cannot dance and it has no feet.
A young man stands
Like a statue in my memory
The moon smiles down at me in pity,
And the trees weep for my sadness.
A waltz tastes like sweet cream
As the dancers flow to and fro together
But the unforgiving book
Will not give forth its secret
And life is not as keen as it seems
On "Leave it to Beaver."
Life is tough because it is in color.
I know who put the spider in the cookie jar
And why they told me not to smash it.
Little Leona Puckett
Bumped her little red-haired noggin
And Aunt Hermy yells, "Flush it down the mode!"
About the spider, while she reaches for some milk,
To calm her nerves.
The hard times will never end
But I'll try to stop and laugh along the way
And enjoy the good times.
Like holding hands with Wes Brockbank
While walking in the rain in Detroit, Michigan,
looking at things we don't have money to buy
and whispering "Ich liebe dich"

or seeing snow fall, covering the ground
like a white blanket,
smelling blooming gardenias on a spring night,
Being soothed by the noise of a crackling fire
Or rubbing my hand over velvet.
Wally will come out of the TV
And take me to a picture show.
We'll talk about Elvis.
The songbird will weep in sadness
While the whippoorwill dances with glee
While I taste the creamy waltz
Like a sweet dream on my tongue.

Deployment

Leah Maloney

A red sign with letters colored
In strangely cheerful yellow paint
Marks the company office.
Straight standing young men
in desert colored camouflage
Move busily about like ants,
As they put their green duffel bags
Into a stern brick building
That looks as innocent as a dorm.
Their brown boots thud
On the sidewalk as they walk arm in arm
With their sweethearts,
Saying goodbye
Holding back their sadness and concern
About where they are going.
A small boy huddles in a multicolored patchwork blanket
As his daddy tells him goodbye.
The air is crisp and smells like winter.
A naked oak tree stretches its bear limbs
Toward the sky as it looks down,
The tree is sad.

The men file into rectangular formations
And a deep male voice booms forth a roll call,
The men answer that they are present.
A line of buses rolls in,
Brightly painted on the sides
In colors of America.
Loved ones rush forth for one last hug.
I feel the weight of the engagement ring
That he gave me today
As I see the red tail-lights of the buses disappear
The diamond winks like a promise
That he will return whole and alive
To love me.



Wendy Hill

Mrs. Franklin
Allie Landrum

Mrs. Franklin sat in her chair and put some red ink pens into a cup she clumsily placed at the top right corner of her desk. She placed a post-it-note on the cup that read *red ink is a poet's blood*. Next to the cup was an urn that read *Ashes of Disruptive Delinquents*. She found obscene pleasure in her creative wit.

It was the first day back from summer break for thousands of high school students and Mrs. Franklin was the last teacher any one of them wanted. She required work, comprehension and attentiveness, which is something any sixty eight year old high school teacher would require, one with principles anyway. She looked down at the outfit she had prepared for the first day of school and realized that Emerson, her beloved and faithful cat, after she had avoided him all morning, had somehow managed to sweep a fur ball on the bottom edge of her solid black dress. Avoiding Emerson in the morning was a normal school routine that she always managed to forget about at the beginning of each year. So Mrs. Franklin pulled out a new ink pen and wrote LINT ROLLER, on her list of things to do. As she picked the hairs off one by one, the bell rang, and with a startle she knocked a cup of freshly brewed public school coffee onto the floor.

By the time she had gotten everything cleaned up, a class of thirty high school sophomores took their seats. After taking a quick swig of vodka from her thermos she moved with a slouched, sixty eight year old limp, to the front of the room. She looked around and saw sixty blinking eyes that looked almost as jaded as her own. "Good morning class." She invited with a groggy tone. A smile developed on her face as the Vodka began to warm and

settle into her empty stomach.

“My name is Mrs. Franklin and you children are to be my first period class, which also means you are to be quiet and attentive, because I’m not a morning person.”

At that moment the principal, Dr. Noals, opened a creaking door and popped his head into the class room. His goofy face sat in between the door and the frame, with a weak smile and red eyes. Mrs. Franklin wanted nothing more than to kick the door onto his head and scream “Give me a good evaluation or get out!” She gathered her strength however and glared at him instead. “Hello Mrs. Franklin,” his hand shook as he read off a pink slip of paper, “Could I see Marcus Townsend please?”

A tall, slender, blue eyed boy of fifteen stood up cautiously and confused. He walked as if condemned toward the door way. A mocking “Oooooo,” came from his classmates as the principal shut the door behind him. “Shut up! Be quiet! It’s too early for this!” The classroom filled with laughter, and Mrs. Franklin went to her desk for another sip from the thermos.

Mrs. Franklin walked up to the front of the room again, with slight dizziness, and began to write notes on the board. “Mrs. Franklin?” a boy in the front row questioned, “I heard you were a witch.”

“Well,” Mrs. Franklin reviewed her roll book, “Charlie... I must tell you that mysterious incidents have taken place in this classroom before, but that theory was disproved by a very skilled psychiatrist in 1983.” And with that, Mrs. Franklin sought to begin the chaotic endeavor of teaching thirty high school students tenth grade English.





Shannon Dougherty

Queen of the Laundry

Mary Catherine Remmer

I love doing laundry. I would call myself the Queen of Laundry, but that title belongs to my mother. Nobody could do laundry like her. People called from miles around for advice on stubborn soil. Dirt crumbled from her glance, stains quaked in their chemical bonds at the sound of her name, and mildew wouldn't darken the doorway of her sacred laundry room. Colors dared not bleed into the fibers of my mother's wash, knowing that she had a way, and a will, to remove them. The clothes in our home spent their lives on a fence between fear of and respect for the Queen. No article of clothing dared look her in the eye or taunt her with its stubborn will to hold a stain.

None that is, but the socks.

As with any royalty, of laundry or otherwise, life always comes with a basket of odd socks - the larger the family, the larger the basket. Socks of every size and color. Socks that didn't even belong to us. Mean, laughing little socks that defied the Queen each time she sifted through them and found no mate. Little holes in the heels and toes abounded in this community of renegade footwear, but never where toenails or calluses would create them. Never where they would make sense because nothing in the universe of odd socks makes sense, not even to the Queen.

Then there were the socks with a single thread pulled loose from the arch and wrapped around the sock in a seemingly infinite knot. No matter how you unraveled it, the knot would grow more complicated. No matter how you loosened the ends, it grew tighter in the center. You may be able to find the source of the string, but never reach it, not even with scissors. You could cut it off, but the balance of the knot would remain, and by the time you unraveled it, the source would give way and create a new

knot, sometimes entwining with the old one. These too found a permanent home in the basket of the Queen, even though it was obvious that no human feet would ever again work their way into them.

My mother never discarded an odd sock. Many of her days were spent waiting for the perfect mate for each of them. She was convinced that if she gave up and threw them away, all the mates would suddenly appear from nowhere, and she would find herself with an identical set of orphaned socks. I have performed experiments of my own that validate her theory. I have, in fact, discarded a single odd sock, only to find it back in the basket a week later. And, knowing that the sock would never have a mate, I have discarded that sock as well, only to find it again the following week. Several times the Queen had to talk me down from this trip to the Twilight Zone of laundry. She encouraged me to abandon my experiments and give in to the natural cycles. “Save your socks,” she would say. “Keep them in a basket. Keep adding to it, and never throw them away. You may dream about them. You may fantasize about reuniting them with their mates. You may give them more mental attention than they deserve, these socks, but you must accept them as a part of your life that will never go away.”

Near the end of my mother’s life, I paid her a visit. I had to show her my skills, how the princess was faring as first-in-line to her throne in the laundry room. We shared a nice dinner and a strong cup of tea. I had caught up the laundry for her. She was famous for letting it back up and then loving the gratification of getting it all caught up in one day. I went to her room for “the basket,” as we referred to it, brought it to the living room, and dumped it on the floor. I added to it the new members retrieved from that day’s laundry, and then began the task of sorting by color, size, shape, and condition. I laid them out in little families across

the living room floor. A good hundred socks from a hundred years of my family's life lay before me, laughing and taunting. Maybe I imagined it, but I swear some were flipping me the bird. Never before had I seen so many shades of white, so many ribbings in different spacing, so many stripes in so many formations. Never had I seen so many socks identical in design, yet a mere shade different in color, perfectly imperfect matches. Socks with stitching at the toe and heel, mingled with socks with stitching at the cuff. Identical in every other way, but not quite identical.

They sneered at me as I stepped up to the plate and swung the figurative bat of the laundress at them. Strike one...Strike two...Wait a minute! There they were! Two gray tube socks. No stitching at the toe, but a little white ring around the inside of the cuff. One here...and one there! Look Mommy! I found a match! I found a match! There is no high like it, I tell you. It's a religious experience.

So there I was that cold November day, on the floor at the feet of the queen. Sucked up in the rush and riding the high when my mother (who was about seventy percent blind) said to me, "Wait a minute" and her hand pointed, unsure at first like a dowsing rod, but then more steady, more sure. "Try that one," the queen commanded. Another sock lay in the heap, just as gray with the same white ring stitched around the inside of the cuff. And I swear to you, it was smirking. I picked up the third sock and laid it next to the other two. Three little soldiers, my two and the one that my mother pointed out, laid there at attention. My two were nearly identical, save that one was stretched a little longer than the other. The third, a perfect match to one of mine, rendered my other sock back to the basket, possibly for eternity.

Three weeks later my mother died, leaving me to face life as a very old orphan, missing out on the love only a mother can give. Sometimes I feel so lonely that I think I

might die myself, but sometimes, when I do my laundry, I hear the voice of the queen whispering to me. “Throw in a little bleach,” or “Try some dishwasher soap on it,” or “Let it soak for awhile.”

This morning, as I was folding laundry, I matched a pair of socks. Then, as if my body was possessed by some animal instinct, my hand, independent of my will, reached into the basket and pulled out another sock, a sock that, ever so slightly, made a better match for one of those in my hand. And I smiled.

My mother is not dead. She lives on within me.
Long live the Queen.



Artists

gloria j. stone

artists suffer in silence
through long dull gray days

artists see the blah-ness as a moment's stage

artists suffer in solitude
'cause for you to understand pain you are pain
lonely
separated
watching at the left end of the stage
being selflessly selfish

artists know the separateness

artists study without thought
watch without attention
drawing more from a moment than is seen

an artist doesn't relate to the mainstream
breaking away from the trend he/she unconsciously creates

artists can't be restricted
expect nothing
least you be surprised

Half full empty

gloria j. stone

The cup's full...

The cup's empty with expectation

The circle's almost done...

The circle will never come to a close; it has
been halted by depression

We're almost there...

We won't make it; It has been made an
impossible journey

It can be done...

There is nothing you can do; it's the way it
has always been

Change is possible...

Change is not possible; a mule is less
stubborn

Believe in the possibility...

It's impossible; give it up; move on; focus
on something easier

simplify yourself

The cup is just a cup...full of...empty with...

Something is there.

Jerry And Pearl

Where The Water Tastes Like Wine

Keith Harrelson

Janis sits by the creek
flowing with the colors of Summertime.
Adorned in her sequined robe, bangles and beads,
sunglasses and cigarette smoke, topless.

Young and beautiful, blue jeans and Birkenstocks,
She stands with her arms stretched high, and her hair
hanging down. Spinning slowly,
singing softly.

A familiar chord has found her ear,
one she hasn't heard for years.
She listens, as the chromatic creek becomes a
Black Muddy River.

Her raspy vocals ring with joy,
“Sing it, Jerry. Sing it, boy.”

They come together in a tie-dyed reunion
and she strokes the gray of his hair.
“Well, Captain. You're not a boy at all.”

He holds her hand and sends his
sorrowful smile.
“Well, Pearl. It *has* been a while.”

They walk together along the Lunatic Preserve.
Jerry picks a tune ; Janis claps and sings,
always there to Try (Just A Little Bit Harder).

Pearl points up to Franklin's Tower.
She tells him, "That's where Tennessee Jed looked
Down On Me, his tongue half twisted,
all for Fire On The Mountain."

Jerry points up at the sky to Cosmic Charlie, and
points out to Pearl that the Candyman is
Standing On The Moon.

Pearl pulls Jerry away from Space, and
reminds him, "It's all the same fucking day, man,"
while Jerry talks with a Friend Of The Devil, from
Uncle John's Band.
Now there is no Cold Rain And Snow,
just St. Stephen in a Mercedes Benz,
Going Down The Road Feelin' Bad. Pearl says to Jerry
"Won't you take a Piece Of My Heart? Because of you
The Music Never Stopped."

Shoes

Allie Landrum

The cobblestone streets are bare
To the weight of wandering feet
That pass by shop windows,
Tip- tapping
Quick and steady
High heels
Make their way through dirty
Streets
To the freshly swept sidewalks of the city...
Boots pound the ground like laced up fury
Kicking rocks on the way
And out of the way
Slowly trudging through puddles and mud
But yes, the cockroach knows
The stab of the stiletto is much more fierce
Than that flat and crevassed boot

Grace

Allie Landrum

Grace is a woman in a window
Having hair blown back by an autumn breeze
When a man makes his way
past her gazing eyes
And sees nothing but a shadow
Perhaps he'll turn around
And take a closer look
In his hurried minute
Before it is too late.



Mary Tarrants

Death Lingers

Allie Landrum

By the hands
That once caressed
Her body, groping
Her hips
Softly running finger-
tips, over her smooth skin
Caressing soft breasts.
By those hands that
Ran through her hair
And touched her face,
Gently

Death lingers here...

Now hands touch like
Hammers to nails
And drive into her flesh
Like it was wood,
Her body becomes
Black, yellow and blue
Like a banner for some
Miserable existence,
Death lingers like this.

Candlelight

Jason Mott

I watch, enslaved by the silhouette
of her form, and the thought of
her voice, dancing in the candlelight.

The fire flickers,
light and shadow toy with her image.
She spins and waivers
and casts her grace across the room.

Dark bends to light,
light bends to dark,
her hair vanishes,
throws weak shadows,
her bare feet caress the mahogany floor
and slide like feathers over silk.
She is reborn again and again
at an unheard cadence,
until everything makes sense.

I think she floats,
or ripples,
cascades about my mind.
Washing over me
in torrents of swaying rhythm,
crests of gentle affection,
swells of unspoken vows,
and the candle
does not burn lower.

Warm hues and dark expanses
construct her curving body
till I am broken

in her giggling pirouettes.

For a moment I long to be a candle,
watching her dance for all my life.



A Little by Otis

Jason Mott

Sunrise.
Desert in front,
dry, gray,
searing.

Sweating,
salty droplets fall,
puddle at my feet,
sweat, a river behind me,
a trailing river.

Soaked shirt,
clinging like love gone bad,
oppressive,
comfortless.

The horses strain,
tired,
slow to move.
Keep moving,
more desert to plow,
must keep moving.

Hands bleed,
more red for the river,
crimson river behind me.

Lose the shirt,
leave it on the riverbed,
let the sun kiss my back.

I am the horses,
tired, slow,
dragging my own plow,
plowing the desert,
bloody river behind.



Shannon Alfonso

Plasticine

Ryan Stanfield

Life has all the things we want
 what of death
 when desires cease.

Life is the ultimate pain
 of deprivation
 and uncertainty

All the things that I wish were
not even memory
 slowly creeping
 and crawling back to me

The pain should not last
there is really nothing here
 with each breath
 we realize what slavery is.

I know nothing can be done

I only define a generation
of which I am even an outcast,
 shunned
and

empty cries ring out to save me
shadows point the way
inevitable,
 darkness
comes
to claim more of me
with each passing day.

Aurorean Aesthete

Michael Lentz

It is a journey to navigate
the violent nebulas
A plight to laugh with life while
the days stretch.

For remembrance, in my waking hours of silent, vociferous
screaming
For remembrance, in the morning, when the horizon sinks
instead of the sun...

To be pulled up by the warmth of the sun away from the
harsh, disconsolate tundra
below
Only to be shuttled back into the tortuous regimen of
shivering.

To persevere against the waves of apocalyptic depression
While dancing on the edge of the horizon.

To see the void above
a singularity within my finite existence
And to sigh, lightly,
and enjoy the motions of orbit.



Amy Rapoport

Clean
Adam Randels

Craig Horrigan will tell you that it's all for naught, that life sustains itself only when dreams, goals, and visions are easily reached. At least that's how he feels now.

He has bounced around the idea of a self-inflicted knife or gunshot wound. Accidental overdose is another option he has considered. Maybe a slip-and-fall off the roof of his apartment complex. But these ideas strike Craig as clichéd and unoriginal, and originality is something Craig prides himself on. He is the only sibling of five to have gone without college, a spouse, a career, or anything else that resembles the skeletal beginnings of a normal adult life. His life consists of mass quantities of marijuana, which he smokes and sells to a small base of clients in order to make ends meet.

Craig likes the entrepreneuralness of his system. He works as a caddie at Twin Lake Oaks, a large private country club on the east side. He caddies for a regular crew of golfers and sells them drugs. Craig has been doing this since he turned sixteen. That was seventeen years ago. He has dabbled in other ventures. He once worked in the mortgage business with a friend of his, but nothing seems to fill that void left by the absence of marijuana peddling. It's the only excitement in his life.

Once a month, Craig gets to be Jimmy Hoffa. He travels to Novi and parks his car behind the UAW-49 clubhouse. A large Italian fellow walks out of the kitchen and hands Craig a brown Farmer Jack grocery bag. Craig returns the favor with an envelope. By the time he gets home, he feels less like Jimmy Hoffa, and more like Jimmy Stewart, dizzy with vertigo.

Outside of the club, Craig rarely leaves the apartment on Woodward. Groceries, gasoline, and dirty underwear are all that get Craig out of the apartment. He has developed an unhealthy obsession with sports paraphernalia.

His collection consists of:

- 1.) Topps Baseball Card sets: every year since 1983
- 2.) Cecil Fielder's game-used sunglasses
- 3.) A signed Chet Lemon Jersey, circa 1984: "To Craig, a sure fire all star"
- 4.) A signed Miller Brewing Company postcard featuring Bob Uecker & Bart Starr
- 5.) A Barry Sanders autograph on a Cheetah's Gentleman's Club matchbook
- 6.) The shotgun found in Denis Rodman's car when he was discovered depressed and sleeping in 1992.
- 7.) A game-used pair of Manute Bol's socks
- 8.) A bar-used beer mug of Charles Barkley's
- 9.) Bill Laimbeer's plastic face mask, used to protect a broken nose
- 10.) Bob Probert's undershirt, bloodied in a fight against Troy Crowder.

Craig had thought about using the Rodman gun on himself, for a hint of irony, but he lost interest when Rodman joined the Bulls. Fuck the Bulls.

Craig lives above B.D.'s pub. He keeps B.D. in grass, so B.D. lets Craig stay there for free. Craig just takes care of the utilities. He occasionally spends a few hours at B.D.'s swilling watered-down bourbon and eating stale peanuts while screaming at the football game. Or *Wheel of Fortune*. Or *Days of Our Lives*. Craig has found that this helps ease the pain of a life less ordinary.

Craig used to own his own washer/dryer set. One day it overflowed and leaked onto B.D's bald head. Craig doesn't own that washer/dryer set anymore. He sold it to the old lady in the next building for twenty dollars and a bag of dope. This necessitates that Craig, once a week, walk three blocks to the laundry. It's not raining tonight, and

Craig decides to get his load done early, so he might be able to catch the “Golden Girls” marathon on Nick-at-Nite. He collects his dirty laundry from the floor of his bedroom and exits through the stairs and onto the street. He turns to head in the direction of the cleaners when he hears B.D. call after him.

“Hey H., Where the Fuck you goin?”

Craig turns and sees B.D. sitting on a stool checking a small line of people for their I.D.’s. He makes no qualms about staring directly at the tits of each female customer. Craig holds up his bag and responds, “Laundry.”

B.D. calls after him, “Come and see me later about that thing.” Craig nods and turns back towards the laundry.

Craig hates to walk, especially when it’s Friday and people are out doing things together. CD Alley is still open and filled with kids clamoring for some new punk record. They all look like push pincushions. Piercings everywhere except their eyeballs. At Andiamo, the upscale Italian restaurant, business has just started to pick up. Craig’s clients from the club will be there, so he passes with his head down. Keith Tamping, his usual loop, an exotic car salesman and a real asshole. Geordie North, a nice guy with a horrible golf game. And Jim Loreinstein, an ancient man who claims to have glaucoma. Others will be there too, wallowing in their wealth, playing grab-ass with each other. Craig doesn’t want to talk to anyone tonight.

Modern Cleaners has been in business as long as Craig can remember. He used to come here to play Pac-Man with his brothers. That same Pac-Man machine is still in the corner with an eight-year-old out of order sign taped to the screen. The walls and ceiling seem smoke-stained. Craig thinks management does this on purpose. He used to tell his girlfriend that yellow walls make the whites look whiter. That was before she left him. He wasn’t good enough for her. They took each others virginity, and she grew out of him and shackled-up with a chiropractor from Bozeman, Montana. He hasn’t seen her in eight years,

since Pac-Man was still in operation

As Craig walks into the cleaners, he notices a new girl behind the register. She's young but aged. Her skin shines like worn leather, and her hair is ratty and backcombed. Craig's not sure if he knows what split ends are, but he assumes that if anyone were to have them, she would.

She reminds him of a girl from elementary school named Sarah. Sarah was unobtainable, an oasis. She collected pencils with flowers and polka dots. To get her to notice him, Craig began to collect car pencils: Doge Daytona, Ferrari Testarossa, Mazda RX-7, and other fuel crisis automobiles of the late seventies. But the pencils were just another thing for the bullies to break. Sarah just laughed and put her pencils in her Hello Kitty pencil box. Sarah got pregnant at age 14. Now she's 34 years old and weighs 245 pounds.

The girl behind the counter smiles like Sarah, crooked and with the sides of her mouth. Her nose wrinkles a bit and her eyes squint. The resemblance isn't remarkable, but it's enough to make Craig hesitate when approaching the register.

"May I help you, sweetie?" she says with a soft, southern twang. The accent just doesn't seem to fit a laundry mat in East Detroit.

"I need a pop, and I was hoping I might be able to borrow a small cup of bleach if possible. The machine's broken." He points to the ancient dented apparatus between dryers 12 and 13 that, at one time, dispensed small packets of Clorox.

"Sure thing, baby," she answers. She hands him a cup from a stack next to the register and pours a large amount of bleach into another cup and hands it to him. He notices a small suntanned circle around her left ring finger and remembers a trick that B.D. taught him.

"Divorced," he would say. "You can tell because she would leave it on if she were still married or widowed."

Craig had wanted to get married, but Sheila wouldn't let herself marry a pot-dealing burnout destined for un-greatness.

Craig sets his clothes down and moves toward the soda fountain, keeping a stray eye on the woman behind the counter as he gets his drink. Then he moves back toward his washer and notices her grabbing a romance novel from her bag. The water comes out hot as he wonders about the girl behind the counter. Where is she from? How did she end up here? Why doesn't she use a pro-vitamin conditioner? He reaches for the cup and pours it over his whites, then reaches for the other cup and presses it to his lips. As he swallows the first gulp, the smell of bleach hits his nose. He knows immediately what he has done yet can't stop it. The bleach burns his throat. The second and third gulps are too much to take, and he staggers into the dryers. He sees the girl look up from her book as he pounds bleach like John Belushi pounds bourbon in *Animal House*. Belushi died not long after, and Craig hopes the same result will occur to him, only faster. His eyes burn and the bleach scorches his insides. It is like a controlled burn in a forest. The bleach purges and cleanses him, removing the filth that has grown like a weed in his innards, fueled by marijuana and sloth. Ten plus years of his life planted on a sofa with a roach hanging from his lips, screaming at Schembechler's play-calling or Vanna White's letter-turning. As his head hits the tile flooring, he can see his mother reading the obituary:

Craig Horrigan 1970-2003

Burnout, good-for-nothing caddie/valet died yesterday while stoned out of his gourde. This dumbass actually drank a glass of bleach by accident. He leaves behind Jerry, his cat, a disturbing sports paraphernalia collection, and a 1984 Dodge Omni with mint green interior. Funeral arrangements are being made.

Please call 555-JERK-OFF for more info.

Craig wakes to his own gurgling. The taste of hazelnut is all over his lips. As he opens his eyes, he sees the register girl opening a small packet of flavored cream for coffee. A smile drags across his face.

“I thought you were going to die on me. The paramedics are on their way. They told me to give you some milk to counteract the bleach, but all I had were these small half and half containers. I hope you like hazelnut. We have French vanilla too if you’d rather have that.”

Craig wants to speak, but the hazelnut cream is already dripping down his chin. He props himself against the dryer and takes the cream from the girl. As he looks into her eyes, he feels new. He smiles a sly smile and pours the cream down his throat.

Her name is Liza. She has a child that lives with her ex-husband in Savannah, Georgia. She is beautiful and full of verve. He wants to make love to her right in the ambulance. She sits next to him as the EMS checks him out on the way to the hospital. She makes him laugh. He hasn’t laughed since Kobe Bryant was arrested on sexual assault charges. She waits in the hospital for him.

“How’s your...How are you?” she asks as he approached her.

“I feel great actually, a little nauseous but I think I’ll be ok. Would you like to get a bite to eat?” he asks coyly.

“I’d love to,” she answers.

They walk together to the Subway next door and eat together. He lights a cigarette and she frowns. He throws it to the ground and stomps it out. He could still smell the bleach, and it is curiously pleasing to him. He feels sober and sharp.

As they walk home, he listens to her talk. He hopes to see her naked but wouldn’t mind if he doesn’t. He just wants to listen. Her eyes flicker like the neon lights in front of the cleaners. When they arrive at her house, she invites

him in. Her roommate is asleep on the couch, so Liza wakes her gently and she scurries to her room, drunk with sleep. Then they are alone.

Liza goes to the stereo and puts on a record, something French, a man singing over a single piano line. Craig likes that she had records. Liza smiles her crooked smile.

Craig kisses her and she tastes like burnt peanuts, the ones that are smaller and burnt. He feels the urge to stop, and he does.

“Are you okay?” she asks.

“Yeah, I just...you taste like burnt peanuts. It reminded me of my father.”

“I’m sorry...is he dead?” she asks.

“No, he’s just an asshole.”

She laughs and takes him by the hand, leading him to the stairway. Craig follows, listening to the record fade and stop.

He wakes in the middle of the afternoon to the sun baking his forehead. The shades are open and her smell is everywhere. His clothes are neatly folded on the chair next to her bed, and he can hear the shower running. He walks to the bathroom and calls for her.

“How do you feel?” she asks.

“Fine,” he responds. “I have to take care of something.”

“All right,” she yells. “I left my phone number in your pocket.”

He walks into B.D.’s and slips an envelope to the bartender. “Tell B.D. that’s the last of it,” he tells her. He goes upstairs and grabs his cat and his baseball cards and leaves for his car.

Her house is open and he lets himself in. She is standing at the top of the stairs smiling.

“I’m leaving,” he says. “Would you like to join me?”

She looks at her feet and asks, “Where to?”

“Don’t know yet,” he says.

The trees are changing and he notices. The air is crisp and he notices. She smells of strawberries and he notices. He is clean and he notices.





Christine Pfohl

Onto the Path

Jason Mott

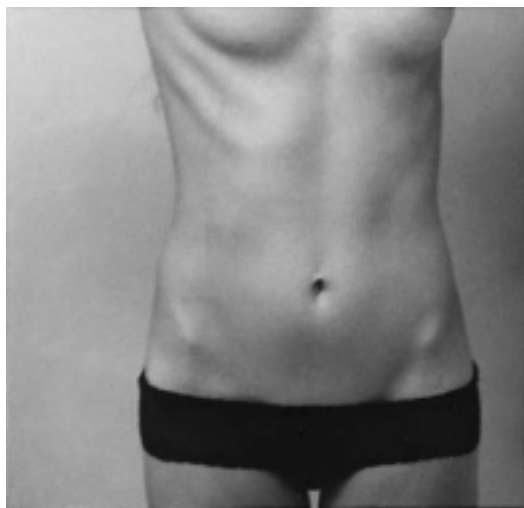
“Trust me,” she said,
and promised to be discreet
if it ended too quickly.

I counted
my breaths in couplets,
measured and tasted
the texture of
exploration-filled air.

Softly in,
over the lips,
cool and biting,
drunken bliss in the lungs,
softly out,
hot and thick,
over the tongue and teeth.

“Trust me,” she said,
and held me in her submission
until my heart beat deep rhythms,
my eyes blinked, disbelieving.

I was led,
as all men are led,
into manhood,
by a woman.



Sasha Sheldon

The Whole of the World

Taylor Parson

I.

Tonight,

I sit on the statue of the whole of the world.

The global-ness is penetrating and the logic is circular.

It is hard-metal gray and as cold

as the night

when I found the statue of the whole of the world.

II.

It wasn't light

And the darkness enveloped me

And stamped me like a man with a need for a reply.

I saw it and lightning struck me and rain tumbled down
upon me

And I sought to keep myself dry.

It was in its entirety,

The fullness of life, the dullness of death,

The blood of the flag, the residue of flesh,

And when I went to touch it with hands of gold,

It shivered underneath the absence of cold

Like that night

I made the statue of the whole of the world.

III.

With that plight,

I scaled up limbs of steel and industrial bile

Just to keep the atlas on my shoulders,

And I

Jumped onto trampoline skies and rushed to soothe the
dying.

The screams were piercing and dyed with blue-velvet eyes

And cowards slithered toward me like snakes under siege,

And tyrants brought forth gems and decrees
Of enchanting proposals and whimsical notions
And I sought to keep the impoverished clean of their
thoughts.

IV.

So I built perfumed towers of juniper-dreams
And roadside hills with angels without wings
And tore the side of a cloud.
The stripped silver mounted perfectly on walls
And shone a glorious gleam
Until the world began to soil.

I tied pulleys and canvases and words to the gaping holes
But the art of it all
Chose to fall.

V.

And here I am,
Along with the ride
Holding harnesses of falsehoods and hooded men,
An avalanche of apathy and corruptness
And I will choose to discard it all.
I have seen the world
And the world has seen the fall,
And
tonight,
I will shred
(like paper-dolls),
The statue of the whole of the world.



Kathleen Mullins

I LOVE TO SAIL

Harvey S. Spencer

I LOOK THROUGH THE OPEN
BREEZE AND THE THE SUN BRIGHTENING
THE SKIES AND THE WIND BEHIND MY BACK
AND THE SAILS SO FULL OF THE DIRECTION
AND THE SMOOTHNESS OF WARM SOFT WAVES
THE FRESH AFTERNOON SMELL OF WATER
AND I LOOK TO MY HANDS AND FEET AS I
SIT ALONG THE SIDE OF THE STILL WATERS
AND REFLECT ON THE SUNRAYS POURING
DOWN ON ME IN THE HEAT
OF A COASTAL WIND TO PUT ME BACK
ON THE COURSE OF MY
DIRECT JOURNEY HOMEWARD

Calix

Andrea Williams

She relaxes in the meadow
Her belly visibly protruding

Her meows are meek
Like a subdued giggle

The daisies all around, so yellow
Like a large pillow across the open ground

Springy green grass
Pink whiskers

Breathless from the beauty
Her first glimpse of heaven
She rests comfortably on the soft clouds.



David Cameron



Deanna Dawson

Dostoevsky's Notes

Taylor Parson

And the underground awoke.
Notes spilled forth like a river of slivered glass,
And when he looked into the mirror,
The shaking battleground of stars in St. Petersburg rang out
like crashing cymbals.
An anti-hero emerged out of a wisdomatic man,
A Palkevich of a man,
And Dostoevsky awoke.

The muted eyes of indifference stare down into the crowd
Of a lonely city, marked with the staleness of time.
Like a tattooed ferret devouring its own needle,
Dostoevsky's skittish narrator was his own nemesis,
But a burning breath of fresh air in this city of scars.

The music of the notes danced to themselves,
And through Dostoevsky's own ears,
Interrupting his words and thoughts. The flats
And sharps slither between his fingers, and he holds
A fifth of a symphony in the core of his hand.
But he broke his hand, opened it,
And noticed he had no blood in his veins.
His anti-hero was running through him,
And he had to cease breathing in order to survive.

The night was a penetrating knife,
And the snow fluttered its lashes as the night grew warm
and brooding.
Would Mr. Russia have choked on American beauty
Had he lived free? Would the shock treatment of the night
Have burned him till he faded out?

The underground waits, and Dostoevsky is underground
and his yearning whispers are heard throughout the snowy
night:

“Menim Zhanim...”

The anti-hero of notes also waits but never sleeps,
And nothing will be as important as when he finally
Collapses into the stars.

No Burden

gloria j. stone

Chemicals burn sensitive skin
As you try to conform me
My skin is not my burden

Oddity personifies my presence
Excuses are made on my behalf
Chemicals are used to transform sensitive skin

You look on me with questioning eyes
My conformation is an obvious lie but
My skin is not my burden

As I try to behave in this colonized way
I find myself in constant contrast
Chemicals burn as they struggle against sensitive skin

Expectations of blending in
Staying inside the self-proclaimed box
My skin is not my burden

Nature has shown herself to be stronger than man
I stare at you and dare whispers on my behalf
Chemicals no longer touch sensitive skin
My skin is a blessing
It was never my burden.



Tonya Robinson

I hold my breath

gloria j. stone

I hold my breath

As though breathing too deeply would sweep it away

I hold my breath

In deep thought

As if a swift intake of air would cloud my consciousness

In moments of quiet

As though the air would disrupt the sound of itself

I hold my breath

In the presence of beauty

As though nature would find my existence an intrusion

I hold my breath

In anticipation

As if that alone will brace me

In shocked dread

As if it could protect me

I hold it

As if fights to be

Free

Basic as I am

Simple as it is

I try to remember to breathe

Before my breath

Dies on itself.

Music

Vivian Jackson

What would the world be without music?

Like a day without sunshine.

In a world without music

There would be no rhythm or melody,

No heart or soul in your hands or feet and

No joy.

It would be so sad in a world without music;

No music where you could dance to the tune of life.

There'd be no birds to sing; no trees would swing.

No rivers and lakes could rise and dance.

The rain couldn't do an African dance on the roof,

And you couldn't hear the African drums in your head

Or in your walk or talk.

The world would cry for music

Because it would know something was missing.

Oh what sadness in a world without music it would be.



Pam Greenough

8 Ways to Take, Leave, and Perceive your Sugar

Jamie Petroro

1

After the two percent was poured
and a tablespoon of sugar was sprinkled
the white bowl with the blue trim was filled
with glistening corn flakes

2

The old man sat alone in the diner
he searched through his pocket change for a suitable tip
and then slowly lifted the sugar packets stacked next to the
ketchup
and slid them into his shirt pocket

3

Why contaminate a cup of black coffee
with milk and sugar
why tamper with such a bitter taste

4

My mother likes her tea with
two lumps of sugar
and sometimes a slice of pie

5

She drove to the store and home again
to find that she had forgotten a pound of sugar

6

He came home from work at five o'clock, as usual
to find that she was gone
she took everything
except for the dining room table that was his mother's
and the sugar bowl that sat upon it

7

The couple sat in the fancy restaurant
and they admired the china,
the salt and pepper shakers, the crystal sugar bowl
even the tablecloths

8

When he saw his cute, young neighbor
moving in across the way
he immediately discovered
that he needed to borrow a cup of sugar

(theta)

Michael Lentz

Behind the shadows of the past,
To the light within the presence of
Hope rests a clear point of reference.

The distance between past moments and
Now is never. Moments that are and
Will be are always separated by a potential.

The actual starts with an act.
To integrate potential vectors and look
Ahead at the future now.



Deanna Dawson



Nikki Gard

New Orleans Man

Allie Landrum

Plaid jacket, with a hole in your pants
Caricature of a New Orleans man
Taking summer heat with a beer in hand
Just like you have for many years

Telling the world your tale of woe
Coming out each night sick in despair
It's a cheerless world when friends are foes
And you live your life without a care

We all laugh when the clown comes around
We all watch you wander every night
His tongue rolls out a funny sound
A dark comedy, laughing with delight

And now your life is deteriorating
And no one seems surprised
And some go out and join you drinking
To watch you slowly die

Abnormal

Andrea Williams

I was born hungry
My mom once said
My stomach growls
Like a grisly bear at his intruder

I eat pie as a snack
I fill my plate twice
I will be hungry sooner than I should be

My body swells at the medial line
My legs thin and so my torso too
Sitting with my feet up

Here it is again
The rumbling is back
So, I eat more

This annoying cycle continues



Christine Pfohl

Division

Jason Mott

One day soon
when the world ends,
I'll be there.

This is not what scares me.

Droplets of nuclear heated blood
will paint me burgundy
as nations of sheep
slip towards searing white lights,
led by baritone angels
with iron wings
and a severe fetish for
atomic division.

This is not what scares me.

When the lights die out,
flicker, tremble, slide away
into the dark of a lasting, moonless night,
I'll still be here
listening to the soft shudder
of settling dust,
feeling the flirty first kisses
of a blushing nuclear winter
upon my seared lips.

I will smile,
wrap myself in fur coats

that give off warmth
measured in half-lives.

I will be king,
slave, bastard,
saint, carpenter,
wanderer, lover,
perfect,
alone for the lifetime
of a million worlds
buried under mushroom tombstones.

I will be wonderful.

Then everything will contract,
close in on itself.

Stars, planets, dreams, memories,
ages of uncounted empires,
will neatly nip and tuck themselves
into the twinkle of an atom's eye.

This is where I get scared.

Recurring fission frightens me.

Portals Bios

Keith Harrelson is a Wilmington native. He will be graduating from CFCC in the spring and plans to pursue a degree in film and photography.

Jerry Hammond studies electronics at CFCC. He is married with four children, and he runs film for a local pharmacy. His hobbies include playing the bass and practicing Isshinryu Karate.

Vivian Jackson was born in Wilmington. As a child, she would often pick wild plums and blackberries in the woods where New Hanover hospital now stands. Vivian has always loved words and trying to make them rhyme.

Allie Landrum has been writing since the age of nine when her teacher told her that she was talented and to never throw away any of her poems, and she never has. This is her last semester at CFCC.

Michael Lentz describes his poetic methodology as “integrating intrarelations of objects of existence with/and objects of consciousness.” His interests include “life and Objectivism.” He hopes to pursue a doctorate degree in psychology in the future.

Leah Maloney was born in York, South Carolina. She has lived all over North Carolina, from Asheville to Charlotte. She enjoys writing, reading, singing, and old time country music.

Jason Mott was born and raised in rural Columbus County, NC. He has been writing sporadically throughout *his life*, and after the death of his mother a few years ago, he made the decision to seriously pursue his writing. He has recently been named winner of the Nota Bene Reynolds Award for fiction.

Taylor Parson is from Kinston, North Carolina. In the fall of 2004, she plans to transfer to UNC Chapel Hill to major in English and minor in journalism. She also hopes to pursue a master’s degree in photojournalism. Clowns and birds frighten her.

James Petraro is nineteen years old, and he has been a student at CFCC College for a year and a half.

Adam Randels is a twenty-four year old Elementary Education student at CFCC. He is originally from Rochester, Michigan, and he has previously attended Michigan State University. When he is not at school, he is working at a local coffee shop and taking time to realize his vast potential.

Mary Catherine Remmer is forty-four years old, and she's from New Jersey. Since losing her mother to a long-term illness last year, she has enrolled at CFCC as a pre-nursing student. She has been writing poetry and prose since the age of twelve.

Ryan Stanfield began writing in high school. He plans to major in Religion and to teach after he graduates.

Harvey Spencer is a published poet and ardent Prince fan. His future plans include writing poetry and screenplays. He also has a strong interest in photography.

gloria j. stone was born in Bronx, New York but has spent most of her life in Wilmington. She describes herself as a "poet in progress." Gloria was an original member of the all female performance troop Brawdeville.

Andrea Williams was born in northern Maine. Her family moved to Boone, North Carolina when she was four years old, where she resided until moving to Wilmington two years ago. She plans to devote her life to helping and curing animals and will be transferring to NC State University in the fall to study to become a veterinarian.

All art selections submitted by CFCC students.

Guidelines for Submissions

Writer's Guidelines

1. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, with name, address, and telephone or e-mail address on the first page (or each poem for poetry submissions). Please include sufficient biographical information in your cover letter for a biographical note should your piece be selected for inclusion.
2. Also include the submission on a 3.5" disk in *Microsoft Word*. Manuscripts will not be returned.
3. Fiction should not exceed 4000 words. Poetry should not exceed 50 lines. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable if noted in a cover letter. Personal essays should also fall within the 4000-word limit.
4. *Portals* acquires First North American Serial Rights. All other rights revert to the author upon publication. Previously unpublished submissions only.

Artist's and Photographer's Guidelines

1. All camera-ready slides and prints must be digitally prepared and submitted.
2. Vertical or horizontal art will be considered.
3. All digital art should include the artist's name, address, telephone or e-mail address. A brief biographical sketch, an appropriate title, and the medium used in preparation should also be included.

Send all submissions to:

Portals
Cape Fear Community College
English Department
411 North Front Street
Wilmington, NC 28401-3993