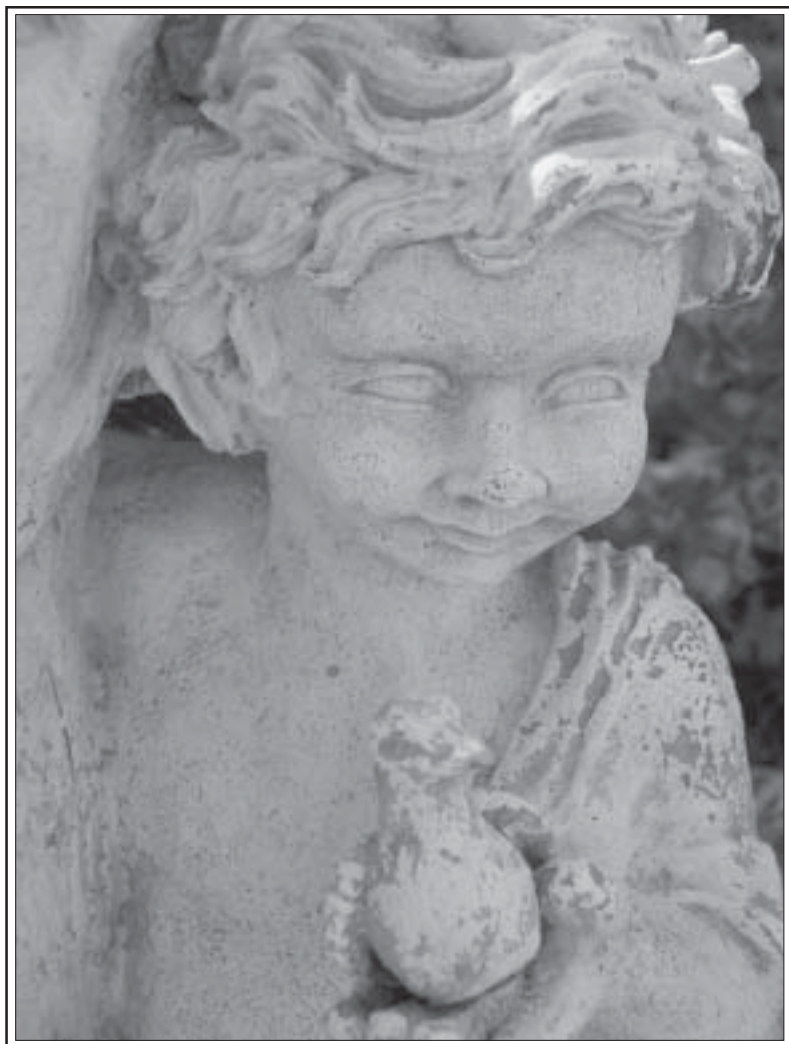


PORTALS



Spring 2005

PORTALS

Literary and Arts Magazine

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All art and photography submitted by CFCC art students.

The Stubborn Nature of Nature

Dustin Orin Talley

Today I built in the rain
Studs slipping on plates
Jacks refusing to hold headers
Top plates toppling
I, Making shapes, forms that stand
Contrasting the glistening, littered sky
With the bones of shelter
Heavy as iron but soft as clay
The dark ancient eyes of wood
Mocking my attempts to conform nature
In the rain, where I built all day

CSI – Reflections on “Woman in a Hotel Room”

M. June Marshall

You were a woman,
And you were alone;
I know a woman, alone
in a hotel room.

Your dark eyes gazed into the tear-stained letter—
The letter dried in your open, trembling hands;
I feel you weep onto the letter now dry
in a hotel room.

You waited in shadow for nightfall—
You looked to the sky and wished on the second star;
I hear you wait for nightfall and wish on the star
in a hotel room.

You drop your silk hose onto the jade carpet,
You cast your coffee-stained suede shoes from your feet;
I smell your silk hose and your coffee-stained shoes
in a hotel room.

You wore white rose cologne;
You had young, baby-powdered breasts;
I taste your white rose cologne and young, powdered
breasts in a hotel room.

You open the window;
You rest your flowered dress in the arms of the
old green chair;
I see you open the window and rest your dress
in the arms of a musty chair in a hotel room.

You were alone, your darkened face weeping
into the letter—

You peeled off your hose and spritzed rose cologne
by the open window

You wished on the second star, left your flowered
dress and powder on the drapes—
in a hotel room.



Bath

Candice Palmeter

Downsizing

Alfreda Nixon

The best part about being an artist is the starvation of it all
Food brings nausea but we're always hungry for life taste
To be outstanding beings,
very many under Representation
People have a tendency to worry ulcers into themselves
when the workplace downsizes
There is something about finding my next job that tickles,
It gives me the chance to meet people
and tell them of my Friends
It gives me plenty time to stare at my notebook
Cross my fingers and think to myself, "Thank You for a
career..."
And when there's no ten to fill my car I can stretch
the Rosary beads out on my floor with as much gratitude
as possible from the skin of a human

I'm not poor
And my favorite character still is Jack Dawson of Titanic,
illustrating an overcoming happiness
He was incredibly smart.



Veil of Secrecy

Matthew Bray



If You Only Knew

Megan Watts

Flight of the Ibis

Jessica Jewels

The tattoo parlor is slow today, but it's still light out. Perched on her stool behind the counter, Steph stares out the plate glass window onto the brick courtyard lined with shops. Last night was strange, Suga visiting and telling his bizarre stories. She thinks she should write it down; there's a blue memo pad on the counter in front of her, but instead she stares out the window. Last night hangs on her like a garment; she can't shake the surreal feeling.

She'd been sitting at home, her new place, on her living room floor, surrounded by blue rug and spilling stacks of spiral notebooks. This was her ritual. When the twinge of being alone was pinching, like yesterday at lunch, she pulls out her journals; any covering her last three years will do. If a joke or song or stranger's gait makes her nostalgic for Ben, she reads them to remind herself of what their life together was really like. She rereads the litany: *"he snuck in the house last night after being gone for three days, looked in on me while I pretended to be asleep, then he actually took the vacuum cleaner and left again.—He came home with half a paycheck two days after payday, not knowing I'd miscarried over the weekend.— He spent hours sitting in front of the television, surfing channels and itching madly, then suddenly jumped up and walked out, taking the TV with him.* Pages of this, three years of this. Nine notebooks full.

Television. Hah. When she finally moved out and into her own place, her brother, Vic, bought her a new one, with the promise that they'd watch The Matrix together like they used to in college. Before she dropped out,

before she was sideswiped by Ben. She had put the journals away, then, stronger again, and decided to make Mom's home fries, put some music on. Got out the cutting board, peeled the potatoes, oil in the pan, a little garlic, with allspice and cayenne, waited for it to start spitting. *Sizzle sizzle. Yum.* She opened a beer, lit a joint, pulled herself together.

She had just finished making the fries when Suga came to the front door. She swung the door open with her foot, wiping her greasy fingers on her jeans. "C'mon in, have some fries," she said, as if he stopped by every day. But she was surprised to see him. She hadn't thought about him since she'd met him last week, outside a hole-in-the-wall jazz bar her brother sometimes played. Vic had been the one to introduce them.

Emerging from the dark cave of the underground club, the streetlights beckoned above her like lightning bugs. The avenue crawled with people, all looking for something to do. She'd felt like part of something by just being out, the first time in months. She'd missed so many of Vic's gigs lately, he'd guilted her into coming. His new sax player was standing under the lamp, hands shoved into his pockets, cigarette hanging precariously from his lip. He bounced in place, and the streams of people flowed around him. A red sweatband circled his head like a halo, and a wild 'fro floated above it. He held himself tautly in the biting air, rocking on the balls of his feet, eyes bleary from smokiness and cold. As Vic and Steph came up the steps, the sax player caught Vic's eye and nodded, pulling a balled-up hand out of his pocket. "Sup?"

"Hot sax." They tapped fists. "This is my sister, Steph. Steph, Suga."

Suga! I believe that, she'd thought. She grinned and he grinned back. "Sup." She took a drag on her cigarette and looked away, feeling Suga still taking her in. As

they'd smoked, they discovered they lived only a few blocks from each other. It was no big deal, really. It was just his wild hair and that name, *Suga*, that stood out. And then, last night, there he was, at her front door, his hair twisted up in tiny braids all around his open, wide-eyed face; her first visitor in her new place.

She'd led Suga into the kitchen, and he sat down while she got a plate from the dish drain and put some fries on it, pushing it across the table to him. He still wore that red sweatband around his forehead, and laugh lines around his eyes. His eyes closed for a moment, as if he was saying grace. Steph stood still and watched him. It was hard to believe he could lie, but that's what Vic had told her after the gig. "He lies. You just need to know that." She'd laughed at him. "Him and everyone else," she threw back. What hadn't she heard, lately? *'I'm just going up to the store to buy smokes.'* *That was a beauty.* But Vic knew what she'd gone through with Ben; maybe that was why he warned her.

Suga reached for the salt, shook it all over his plate and rubbed his hands together. He looked like a little kid; Steph could imagine his face when it was smaller and more innocent. He chewed a fry and tilted his head at her. "My hair looks different, right? You didn't recognize me at first. That's alright though. These are good; you made 'em? Vic said you could cook, girl!"

She nodded and laughed, squeezing some ranch dressing onto her plate; Fiesta ware she inherited from her mother-in-law, one of the few pieces her ex hadn't pawned off. It was amazing, the variety of items that could be traded for crack. "So how are ya?" She said over her shoulder as she walked to the fridge and pulled out two beers, passing one to Suga. *Vic said what?* she'd thought.

"It's all good with me. Lay tile all day, blow sax all night. You?" Suga gave her a sideways look, taking in

the oil-spattered kitchen, the pile of unopened mail on the table, her “Bill the Cat” t-shirt. He stopped chewing for a moment. “For real.” He leaned back in his chair, twisting the cap off his beer. For a moment Steph thought she might be able to explain the murkiness of the three months since the divorce, the feeling of trudging through mud, the panic of making simple decisions, the effort just to *be*... but when she opened her mouth, all that came out was, “Well, things have been a little frustrating lately. I don’t know whether I’m coming or going.” She put some fries in her mouth quick, to shut herself up, forcing her tongue to absorb the salt, then took a deep pull from the cold bottle and looked back at Suga. He pulled gently at the twists in his hair and looked up at where she stood, leaning on the counter. He seemed to be listening to the air, then nodded, swigged his beer, and said, “Can I tell you something?”

Steph nodded and shrugged, squinting as if to say “why not?” She was still surprised he’d actually come over. *This oughtta be good.*

“Word. You’re gonna think I’m crazy, but I just feel like I have to tell you this...well, just listen. Don’t think I’m crazy, please. But this one time, I was working with your brother on a gig out at the beach, and we were on our way home in his jeep, driving down Oceanside Rd., you know where that wooded patch is with no stores? Well we were at that stoplight right about there, and I could smell this burnt marshmallow smell, and it really came at me, right? And we noticed this man, he had a gray ponytail but he was bald on top, and he was pushing a cart, and he was wearing a brown coat, a long coat. Everything got fuzzy, the smell was making me nauseous, and I told Vic to pull over, pull over, but he didn’t want to...but I kept saying to pull over, so finally, he did and...you’re going to think I’m crazy...but I jumped out

of the jeep and ran up behind this man and grabbed the coat off him, and these huge wings sprang out of the coat and he turned around and grabbed me and we started to wrestle; he was trying to fly off, but I was holding him down; we kept crashing into the ground and then lifting again. His wings were flapping, and the edges were stinging my face, and I could hear Vic shouting, but sort of far away, right? But even louder, I could hear *his* voice, inside my head. He was saying, ‘Let go. Hold on. Let go. Hold on; let go; hold on,’ in this whisper inside my head, but loud.

Eventually he shook me off and I fell into the mud, and just like that, he was gone. Not even flew away, just gone. I just sat there in the ditch by Oceanside Road. I was stunned. I was tore up, man. For real. You think that’s crazy?”

As Suga spoke, his small, fine hands touched his mouth, or pulled at the twists sticking out all over his head, as if he were not used to their presence. Steph dipped another bunch of fries in the ranch dressing and waited to hear what would come next.

Suga ate a mouthful of fries and chugged his beer. “I saw him again, a few weeks later down by the waterfront. He was sitting hunched over, the same dirty ponytail, swinging his legs over the water. And my whole head, like, filled up with this sweet smell, that burning scent. I could tell he knew I was behind him because he stood up. I wanted to hit him, man. But I just walked right up to him and jumped him. I didn’t want him to beat me again. But he just took off over the water and I had to hold on.”

Suga paused, his eyes looking out into the empty space of the kitchen, into the air, restless as a hurricane through a forest, then suddenly calm. At first Steph thought she imagined seeing the change in his face as he turned to-

wards her, but then Vic's warning came back. *The eyes of a liar. A shapeshifter. It's always the ones that look you in the eye that hurt you the most.* Steph took a deep breath in, then let it out into the room, focusing on Suga's voice and its cotton candy lightness. She let the pictures of his story settle onto her mind's canvas, and shook her head. *Whatever. It doesn't matter; let him talk if he wants to talk.* She reached for her drink and lifted it encouragingly into the air from which Suga's story seemed to be forming. Suga raised his eyebrows and looked worried, but kept talking.

"I couldn't let go, I was afraid to fall in the river. When we flew under the bridge it was like time stopped. It was so huge, the metal stretching out for eternity. And that voice was deafening, like the roar of the water almost, "Hold on, let go. Hold on, let go" over and over. I thought he was trying to scrape me off on the bridge, make me fall. I just grabbed into his feathers and ducked my head into his neck. My gut was churning, the cars on the bridge careening over our heads, the cold spray of water spitting up at me. This time, it was like I had to make some kind of decision, but I didn't know what. I just knew I had to hold on with everything because I did not want to fall in that water. When we circled around and he put me down, he grabbed by my shoulder and put it out of its socket. I couldn't play my sax for 2 weeks, for real. My hands were cramped up but they were full of feathers. I still have them."

Steph got two more beers out of the fridge and sat at the table across from Suga, her brother's words still whispering at the back of her mind. *He lies. I just think you should know that.* But it was so odd, his showing up at her door out of the blue, odd for Vic to have said anything about Suga at all. Why would Suga tell her all this bullshit and include Vic in it, knowing that she talked to

her brother every day? It was such a small event, that one cigarette outside the club. It all took about seven minutes, *probably the seven minutes that smoking a cig takes off the end of your life*. She'd been curious and amazed that this *Suga* character was sitting at her greasy kitchen table telling her these fantastic stories at all. When she told her brother, she'd find out they never happened. In fact, Vic would probably scold her for even entertaining them. Part of her had wanted to laugh at *Suga*, *yes I think you're crazy*, but good manners and straight-up curiosity kept her sipping her beer and listening intently, realizing that even lies had a purpose in her life these days.

As she sat down, *Suga* continued. She'd felt herself grin. *There's more?* She kicked her feet up on the chair across from her, put her beer on a napkin. *Suga* was animated. "Say word. This one other time, I smelled it, that familiar sweet smell. It got stronger and stronger as I walked down the street. The only person on the street was this bald man, right, walking towards me with an armload of files and paperwork. When I threw my arms around the guy, nothing flew except his papers, all over the street." *Suga* swung his head and laughed. "I just sat there and waited for the cops to come, helped the guy pick up his stuff. I told them the story, everything, what had happened before. They didn't arrest me, though; they sent me to a detox and I had to stay there for two days."

Again, he had implored her, "Hope you don't think I'm crazy."

"I'm not like that," she insisted, "really."

"Well, what are you like?" *Suga* suddenly turned the table on her and she looked away, self-conscious. She frowned at her reflection in the stainless steel napkin holder on the center of the table. She started to speak, stopped herself, started again with a wry laugh, tucking

her hair behind her ears. “That’s an interesting question. I have to think about that one. I guess I don’t know. But I know what I’m not like... I’m NOT like, ‘you’re crazy man, get the hell outta my house’. I’m not like that”. She looked back at him, his dark skin and red sweatband. He raised his eyebrows, and looked innocent and true again.

“I just think you are sensitive to realms that other people aren’t” she’d reassured him. “You can see things other people can’t.” What else could she say? That she still didn’t know what he was doing there? That her brother said he was a liar? If nothing else, these tales were filling her empty evening just as well as watching a movie by herself.

“Hah! What I can see is us, smoking a blunt,” he chuckled. But somehow the laugh had an edge to it, like something being pinched. He stood and stretched, popping his neck sideways and bouncing a few times as he pushed the chair in. “How about I go get us one and you can tell me some of *your* stories?”

Steph stood up too. They walked out the kitchen door onto the sidewalk near his car. Suga turned suddenly and hugged her, a quick breath of a squeeze. “I was meant to come by here tonight, girl. I was meant to tell you what happened to me.” He smiled and climbed into his truck. “Okay, I should be back in about a half-hour and we’ll get high, alright?”

Steph laughed. “Sure, I’ll be here,” then watched him drive off, walked back inside and shut the door behind her. She was baffled, tilted like a sailboat in too much wind. She’d walked through her small apartment shaking her head, her forehead wrinkled. Should she believe these stories? Which look in his eye could she trust? *Both. So what if he is a liar? Who doesn’t have a dark side?* But Vic’s warning stayed in her mind, and

that's the part that seemed meant to be. He lies. *So what. Does it even matter, with stories like that?* She still doesn't know why he told her.

Pictures of his determined look as he told his stories pop up in Steph's mind as she sits at work, trying to write her evening down. *He really believes himself.* Her ex was like that...he really believed himself when he said he'd be right back. Ben could've eaten a steak she'd grilled herself, then tell her how good that *chicken* was, and he'd believe it, and she'd believe him too.

Suga never came back, but it didn't really matter. She knew he wasn't coming back. It was the voluntary assurance of return that she questioned. It reminded her of Ben, who claimed to be running up to the corner store for a pack of smokes, only to be gone in cracktown for days, leaving her alone in a strange town with no car. Why bother lying? *Just do what you're gonna do, let that be the truth.*

She'd locked the door behind her, getting another beer and putting her journals away. Sat down at the table, and stared around her kitchen. The stack of mail slid sideways on the counter into a puddle of spilled oil, which soaked into the paper. The broom relaxed against the wall by the fridge, daring her to try and clean up. She looked away and sighed. *What's the point?* She just sat there with her head on her arms until she was tired enough to go to sleep.

And now, the phone rings and Steph answers it, barely remembering that she's at work. She makes an appointment for the caller and then stares back at the notebook in front of her. She's started writing down her strange dream, but she's out of practice. After she'd roused herself from the kitchen and climbed into bed, she'd dreamed that she was wandering in a cave, with hieroglyphics cov-

ering the cold walls. Above her head a towering figure was carved in the rock, a man with the dark, wise face of some sacred bird, a crescent crown of gold perched on top of its beaked head. Long muscular arms stretched out along the rock surface, with a book in one hand, a quill pen in the other. The dripping walls made the bird's eyes glitter down at her. She stumbled back and fell. The ibis-headed god began to write, slowly turning towards her, its look weighing her worth. Lizards scurried down the slick walls. They circled around her and she woke with a jump. The dream stayed with her through coffee, toast, and into the afternoon, creeping back into her mind as she walked down 2nd St. towards work.

None of this is getting onto the paper, she thinks. A huge cloud passes the sun and shadow brushes the doorway, pulling Steph from her reverie. She gets up from the stool, grabs her cigs and lighter, and steps outside, taking the phone with her. The shadow follows the cloud's path, and drifts to the sidewalk across the street to the window of Kelly's Couture, a clothing store directly across the courtyard. Kelly's has plate glass windows like Inkblot's and Steph can see into the store as if the racks and counter were right out in the street. She stands leaning in Inkblot's doorway, watching people shop. They lift hangers nonchalantly, holding garments in front of them, evaluating. One woman stands before a mirror, measuring the length of some purple pants against her own legs. Steph notices a dark man in a red running suit, moving lightly through the fabrics. He glides past shimmering whites, his hands reaching out to graze sleeves of black and burgundy and silver. His head cocks to one side and another, and then he stands still in front of a rack of gray shirts. Steph squints to get a better look, and her mouth drops open as she recognizes the red headband. It's Suga.

As Steph watches, Suga bolts out the front door of Kelly's and heads up the sidewalk. She shouts, "I'll be right back." over her shoulder and heads out into the brick courtyard, turning left. Suga turns left under some leafy trees and Steph hurries to keep up. The traffic slows her down, but she leans into the street, grabbing the first opening and darting through, waving at the driver. Somehow she's compelled, pulled on as surely as if Suga had grabbed hold of her wrist and kept her beside him.

Steph follows Suga for five blocks. There are less people on the street here, a quiet residential area, with large old watercolor houses. Suga slows down and Steph can see now that he's carrying something under his red jacket. She matches her pace to his and takes deep breaths, staying half a block behind him. Suga slows down and slips through some bushes behind an enormous stone church. The landscaping is wild and ancient, growing together into a leafy fence. There are doorways along the side of the huge stone wall, some hidden by vines. This is where Suga stops, tucked into an archway. He shoulders open the wooden door and steps back. An old man steps out slowly, wearing a long dingy raincoat. His face is unshaven, with a long hooked nose and small, close-set eyes. He stretches in the patchy sunshine and tilts his head at the sky, a gray ponytail swishing on his back. The man's shoulders rustle in the chill wind; he shakes restlessly, like he needs a drink. His hands are in his pockets. One of his pants legs is caught up in the side of his sock, and his knees shift side to side, as if he has a bad leg and can't stand for long.

Suga steps back and in one smooth movement, pulls something from under his red jacket. It falls open like a curtain, and Steph catches her breath from where she's watching. It's a beautiful, flowing shirt, sparkling silver in the light filtering through the trees, like waves on the

ocean; silver, yes, but blue and green and the colors of feathers and water and sky. The breeze catches the fabric and it flutters up from Suga's elegant hands, which hold it out for the old man to see. Through the fence of waxy leaves, Steph can see Suga's eyes; they're bright, feverish. He's still catching his breath, but he's poised, like a dancer. He flexes upwards on his toes, and throws the shirt over the man's shoulders. It settles around him and melts into him, and Steph gasps as Suga leaps at the man's back. She sees wings spread, and a heady, sweet scent rushes at her. And then, they are just...away. Soaring, up above the stone walls and spire, above the clock and into the sky. Spiraling. A huge ibis with a dark head, a long curved beak; gray and white feathers, shimmery as silk, circling the steeple clock and crossing the clouds.

Steph stares upwards, her back being poked by the branches holding her up. She wants to lift off, too, but can only stand and stare upward. *No one will believe this. No one.* Her breath shortens, chest tightens, and then she laughs in one great, relieving exhale, a cosmic Ha! She laughs with exhilarating relief, laughs with more air than she realized she was holding. Laughs, and watches the sky, which is somehow now as open and empty as a new notebook. ■

Big John's Wake

John J. Schulte

Hard as stone as he swung his hammer,
One, two, three, the nail was in,
and then, again, the next, and the next.
The rhythm rings even now in my heart,
while I see his bulging muscles and
tightened fist.

I also see him in the kitchen,
white apron tied around his waist.
Flour on the cutting board,
rolling pin in capable hands.
The cutter defining circles of dough,
puffs of white with each stamp.
Strong hands moving gently,
arranging biscuits in metal pan.
A smile of pride, the scent of caring.

It was the same year the old oak fell;
we never guessed it could.
Strong and solid, always there,
we would swing from the ropes John tied,
and would sit under the protective shade.

But fall it did, and the earth did shake.
We were all stunned, could not believe
the sound.
All the years we were together,
and the years we were distant,
never dreaming he would fall.

Now we dream of sweet, hot biscuits,
and the song of Big John's hammer.

brush stroke

Trent Boswell

brush stroke
swallow
incontrovertible
apostasy
push back the cuticle of spring
something is on the other side
of the door.....
it is quietly waiting to pounce
w/ its ambush
or surprise party,
it is not known, which it is
leaves fall like paratroopers,
honing in on their targets
another brush stroke
circumspect weather
new viabilities
woodpecker filling out his
morning reports
errand runners scurry about
patents are being filed
for new shades of sky
a third stroke of the brush
agoraphobic dust swept out
for not paying its rent
it is a mindless and selfless act
cut the yard in half
assign tasks to the flowers
they have lazed long enough
now, they must be mobilized
four is the number of strength
four walls stand sturdier than three
four seasons, winds, elements, directions

a fourth brush stroke
strengthens the picture
smack the mat w/ the broom
the room is changed, now
paint a new picture
make new decisions



untitled

Heather Inscoe

Broken

M. June Marshall

Because you splattered my breakfast
across the table and chairs and floor
 and my oatmeal spread over the tile,
And I imagined that your exploding nostrils
and whirling tongue were
 spewing bits of brain across the room.
Then I walked to elementary school alone
by the railroad tracks and through rush
hour with pangs in my belly.

Because you pinched my wrist so tight
while I flew in circles around you
 screaming “Why Daddy?”
over and over and over,
But your belt gave the only answers
I got and my tears only gave salt
 to my wounds and your visitors
only watched;
Then I nursed the strap marks in pastels
of purple and green while concealed in an
 upstairs bathroom
 with nothing but wet toilet paper.

Because I didn't eat cheeseburgers and
you knew it - all I wanted were fries and a
 milkshake!
And you didn't care where the tip of your shoe
landed and it hurt to walk
and I hated watching you eat
without me.

Because I went up to bed alone and said
my penitent prayers as if I had something
horrible to repent of.

Because the last time I saw your face
you were sound asleep and I was sixteen
and I was leaving home,
Then you never looked for me while
I lived in that white Toyota Celica with the
broken windshield and a backseat
full of clothes and coupons.
And every day I had to go to the country
store for a charity egg on toast and a hot
bottle of Pepsi.

Because when I looked for the way home
all I saw were the stone knuckles on the
back of your hand and the panes
shaking in the door,
And after that I did whatever I had to do
to survive and when I think about it now all I
can do is stare at the floor!
Because like the windshield of that Celica
I was chipped and I was cracked until I was
broken, and I was broken,
and I was broken.



untitled

Nicole Cannady



Staircase

Candace Palmeter



Well, Hi!

M. June Marshall

Love in an Elevator

Will Ransom

He lived on the seventy-fourth floor of one of the tallest buildings ever built for the purpose of having people live in it. Every day he awoke at exactly six-o'-clock in the morning to the sounds of his alarm clock and the amazing spectacle of the bright orange sun coming up over the city. In his mind, there were only two times a day that the city he both lived and worked in was anything more than a glorified slum. These were each and every day at sunrise, and then again at sunset. When the bright orange sun was climbing through the horizon, either up or down, and the entire sky was afire in hues of red and yellow, that was the only time he could bring himself to think of the city as anything worth experiencing. His favorite days were when the sun just managed to beat out an oncoming storm and the sky would take on that shade of purplish pink that could never be duplicated by any other circumstances. To him, the sunrises and sunsets made it worth the exorbitant rent to live so high above the squalor.

She lived six floors below his and loved the panoramic view of her beloved city. From her living room she would often look down on the tapestry of life all around her. She liked to make careful note of the way the entire landscape was dotted with the red and green of traffic lights for as far as the eye could see. To her, they seemed only to be separated and broken up by the ubiquitous bright yellow taxis that were amongst the avenues below. She often thought that only the idiotic, or the clinically insane, would even bother to own a car in the city. Why would a car even be a consideration when there were buses and subways and all of those taxis available? From her couch she could look out over the park in the center of town, and she would, on occasion, watch the ant-sized week-

end warriors playing softball or football so far below. She wondered from time to time if this was how God felt as he looked down on his children at play.

Being a creature of habit, and more than a little neurotic about his daily routine, he left his apartment (number 7546) every day of the week at exactly quarter-to-seven in the morning. This gave him ample time to walk the three blocks to his subway stop and to pop into the Little Bakery on the way for his daily cup of coffee (black) and muffin (blueberry—heated). Anytime he was even just a few minutes late, he felt that it threw his entire day into a state of disarray. On the few instances when this had happened, he could not shake the feeling that all day long he was running behind. It annoyed him to no end to have his comfortable schedule disrupted by something beyond his control, such as a delay on the subway or a line at the bakery. He knew full well that he should not take responsibility for these things anymore than he could control them. Still, it was always a small monkey wrench in the gears of his daily regimen.

She tried everyday to leave her apartment (number 6836) early enough that she might actually arrive at her desk a few moments before her shift began at eight-o'clock. Much to her credit she had never been late, not even by a minute, in almost six years with the same company. Still, she thought that it might be nice to be able to show up in a timely enough fashion that she wouldn't have to sit down and get right to work immediately upon entering the office. To actually have time to grab a doughnut, a cup of coffee, a banana, or something. Maybe to shmooze with the some of the other women in the office, or even flirt shamelessly with some of the men. The only fault in her plan was the fact that she had always been a notorious night person who could not remember when

she had ever fallen asleep before the very wee hours of the morning. This meant, subsequently, that there was simply no way she was ever getting out of her warm bed any sooner in the morning than was absolutely necessary. She had even given thought recently to switching to a later shift that would begin at ten so she could sleep an extra hour or two.

It was a dismal Thursday morning. He had awakened to the familiar sounds of his alarm cutting into his dreamless sleep. This sorry interruption, however, had not been accompanied by the customary radiant sunrise. No, on this particular Thursday the storm on the horizon had told the sun to just go ahead and stay in bed. Moreover, this was one of those particularly drab rainstorms, too, the kind that don't even have the excitement of a loud blast of thunder or a flashing arc of lightning. It was just a steady, almost foreboding rain. He stood and stared out of his window, incredulous of the sheets of water rushing down the side of his building; he paused for just a moment before he went to jump in the shower. He did not like the prospects of what his day might bring considering how bleakly it was beginning. Maybe breakfast would bring a little ray of hope. For a second, only a scant second, he toyed with the idea of a piece of coffee cake this morning, or perhaps a doughnut. Before the first spray of his shower even touched his body, though, he was resigned to his blueberry muffin—heated.

She found it so much more difficult to wake up when it was raining, and that Thursday should have been no exception. Actually, the day did have a charge of difference to it. For some odd reason, one that she was far too tired to even begin to explain, she sat bolt upright in her bed at exactly six-o'clock and was wide awake. So awake, in fact, that she immediately gave up any thoughts of trying to resume her blissful sleep. It sort of

annoyed her, too, because she could clearly remember the dream she was having about the most perfect man. She could clearly recall what the two of them had been doing together in that dream. Well, she figured since she was awake she would get in the shower and accept the early start to her Thursday that had been placed at her feet. Maybe today she would actually get to work early enough to talk to that cute delivery boy and tell him all about her interrupted dream.

Grabbing his umbrella and tying the strap on his London Fog raincoat, he took his customary last glance around his apartment. Satisfied that all was as it should be and that the oven and all of the lights were off, he stepped out into the hallway at precisely 6:45 a.m. He locked all four of the locks on his oak door and headed down towards the elevator. Although there were two people standing there, he gave into his urge to walk right up and push the already glowing down-arrow. The two people in the hall each looked at him as if to say, “You know, that won’t make the car come any faster. “He ignored them and tried not to pay any attention to any of their polite conversation, while offering a silent prayer that the car would come and hasten an end to his misery. Soon enough the doors opened and the three of them stepped onto an empty elevator. He stood in the back corner while his two neighbors continued with their mindless prattle.

She stood alone in the hallway on sixty-eight, waiting for the elevator as she planned out her conversation with the cute delivery boy. She was pretty sure that his name was Carlos and that he was either from New Mexico or Old Mexico. She had heard once, but could not, for the life of her, remember which one was right. She did know that he was in terrific shape and made his Levi’s 501’s

look the way denim is supposed to look on a man. As the elevator doors opened and one person got off, she quickly took the vacant spot. As she glanced at her watch and proudly realized that she would be extremely early for once, he was standing behind her trying to keep his eyes from popping out of his head.

He was certain that she must have heard his sudden intake of air when she boarded the elevator. He guessed she was either new to the building or she was starting a new job. He had been on this same elevator at the same time everyday for the last three years and had never seen her. In fact, in his entire life he had never seen anyone like her. She was incredible. She stood about five inches shorter than him and her auburn hair was long and straight and looked like woven silk. Her deep brown eyes reflected the overly bright lighting of the smallish compartment. She was wearing very little make-up, but he thought that on her any cosmetics would have been an over-indulgence. Such an amazing beauty had no need for such things. Her skirt, while cut to a respectable height on her thigh, did nothing to hide the fact that she had great legs that were perfectly in tune with the rest of her stunning figure. He tried as hard as he could not to stare, but he knew he was failing terribly in the attempt. He almost laughed at how, just a minute before, he had wanted nothing more than for the elevator to make an express, non-stop run to the ground level. Now he found himself wishing and hoping the damned thing would get stuck between floors. True, that would be a huge setback to his careful agenda, but to hell with that.

She noticed him as soon as the doors opened, immediately noting that he was ruggedly handsome. The tightly tied raincoat indicated that underneath was a very well-built man. His dark hair was radiant and meticulously brushed into place. She doubted if the man had ever had

a single hair not do exactly as he wanted. She couldn't be sure, but she thought he had caught his breath a little in the brief moment their eyes had met. The idea of it filled her with a sudden excitement, and Carlos the Delivery Boy was momentarily forgotten. For a second she thought that she might have to tell this stranger about her dreams, and she laughed inside. This brought a smile to her full, pouty lips, which he caught the reflection of in the shiny, polished interior of the elevator doors. If he hadn't caught his breath before, he did at that sight. She turned and glanced at him quickly, almost flirtatiously. She just wanted to see if she would actually catch him checking her out. He turned his head away almost imperceptibly as she turned to look at him. "Bingo!" she thought.

When the elevator reached the fortieth floor, they were finally alone. He had already decided he would say something to her, and he had spent the last twenty floors trying to figure out what. He had settled on introducing himself and asking if she was new to the building. Just as he summoned up the courage to speak, the elevator stopped on thirty-eight and three more people got on. Following all the precepts of Murphy's Law, the three newcomers now stood between him and her. He resigned himself to silence, deciding he was not going to try to talk through three people, the middle one being rather large at that. He would just wait it out and hope for another chance before they hit the ground.

Damn! He had looked like he was just about to say something when those three got on. She was certain he was about to speak to her. In fact, she had decided if they were still alone by the thirtieth floor, she would strike up the conversation herself. She hadn't exactly been sure how she was going to do that, or what she planned to say, but it now seemed like a moot point. She cursed herself for not saying something as soon as they were

alone. Then the elevator had seemed so spacious and the silence was almost eerie. Now, it seemed to her as if there was precious room to breathe, especially with that big man that had gotten on with the other two at thirty-eight. Still, she could feel his nervousness across the distance, and she knew he was stealing glances at her when he thought she wasn't looking. Since she liked his attention, she did nothing to discourage his gaze. Actually, since she refused to be a hypocrite she couldn't do anything but act as if she didn't feel him looking. Good for the goose, good for the gander, and she was taking quite a gander out of the corner of her eye.

He was beginning to worry now as the floors flew by that they would reach the ground and go their separate ways before he ever got to say anything to her. It didn't appear to him that Manny, Moe, and Jack, who had barred his way since thirty-eight, were planning on disembarking anytime soon. The elevator was cruising past twenty-five and fast approaching twenty. Suddenly as the car reached eighteen, there was a new glimmer of hope. As the car made that familiar dip and raise motion to come to rest on the eighteenth floor, he could not remember if anyone on board had actually pushed the button for this floor or not. Actually, he had been concentrating on the beauty that got on board at sixty-eight so much that the rest of the car sort of faded away. Judging by the speed of the elevator thus far, eighteen floors wouldn't give him much time, but it would give him a good start. He spirits were crushed when the doors opened on eighteen and three more people got on board.

As the doors opened and three more people climbed into the car, she knew they would not speak on this trip. As the passengers shifted and moved in the elevator, she was pleasantly surprised to find that she was not only standing next to him, but that she was standing close. The

girth of the large man from thirty-eight left her no choice but to stand right up against him. As they were momentarily jostled into each other, they both looked into the other's eyes and mumbled, "Excuse me." It would have been perfectly romantic if only it hadn't been so syrupy sweet and polite. It was enough, though, for each to have their suspicions confirmed by the connection their eyes made. Instantly, they both knew that the other had been looking and trying to find a way to make contact. The attraction was definitely there, and definitely mutual. Before either of them could do or say anything more, the car stopped and the doors opened. Everyone on board, including him and her, filed out of the elevator, through the revolving glass door and out into the city. She came out the front door, turned to her left and went on her way. He turned right and headed for the Little Bakery.

He spent the whole day playing the scene over and over again in his head. He laughed as he realized that this mesmerizing stranger had completely wrecked his same old routine. At first he thought it all a silly notion, but try as he might he could not stop thinking about her. His day at work was a total waste of time and he got nothing at all accomplished. He spent most of the day cursing himself for not speaking sooner and taking the risk to maybe bring a little excitement into his drab and scheduled life. He decided right then and there that schedules are a real waste of time and that his life was far too rigidly controlled by them. He promised himself that their paths would not cross in silence again.

She was so dazed and befuddled by what had just happened in the elevator of her own apartment building that she forgot all about stopping for breakfast. Carlos the Delivery Boy had long since disappeared off of the map of her memory. She wandered through the tree-

lined streets of the city for several blocks before she realized she had gone right by her office. She sat down on a bench to play the scene back and collect her thoughts and to try and figure out what to do next. She finally decided that, since they live in the same building, arranging to see him again shouldn't be too difficult. The building had seventy-eight floors and he had already been on it when it reached her floor. This meant he must have gotten on board, and therefore live, somewhere between sixty-nine and seventy-eight. Then the answer came to her. She would just be sure that she rode the same elevator every morning. When she eventually saw him again, she would start a conversation with him, people or no, and see what developed.

That night as the elevator doors were closing and she was making the last leg of her homeward journey for the day a voice called for her to hold the door. A man was running for the elevator and looking rather disheveled. He appeared to be scurrying in out of the thunderstorm, and he looked as if he had forgotten to do something of the utmost importance. As he nimbly turned sideways to scoot through the closing doors just in time, he glanced into her eyes to thank her.

“It's him!” she thought, as he introduced himself to her and smiled. He brought his other hand out from behind his back and handed her a single long-stemmed red rose and boldly told her that he had been thinking about her all day long. ■

After Sex

Dustin Orin Talley

It's like in '92

It was Damie and Nikkie and I

Finding those old playboys

Tattered and perfect

Well, not perfect but we didn't mind

They brought my first feelings of flight

The curves of young ladies caused air to dissipate

Eyebrows opening faces

Infant lust and anticipation gave us wings

And we snacked on clouds all day

Now in this early afternoon

More than a decade later

Your curves against mine

Creating a map of us

I feel sheets slipping

As I rise into a world where we are the landmarks

And every street leads to me

And every avenue leads to you

But who needs streets with wings like these?



Morning Traffic

John Marshall

S. O. B.

M. June Marshall

It was three days before my daddy spoke to my momma again, and that was only to order her outa that stinkin' bed. That accident didn't break her nose *that* bad, after all. The kids was sufferin', the dawgs was sufferin' too, an' all on account o' her laziness. When my daddy was gone an' I peeked my head in at my momma, she was a cussin' my daddy between sobs. She said my daddy was a cottin' pickin' s.o.b., just like *his* daddy, and he would be sorry one day for his mean ways. I went in an' sat on my momma's bed with my head still achin' from the cuncussion I'd suffered in the same car accident what broke my momma's nose, and you'd think she'da let me console her some, but she said she didn't wonta see me no more and to go on 'bout my chores.

Well, I hadn't of said it, but I did. I said, "Daddy tole me to stay put for two days on account of my head bangin' on the car dash."

"Get outa my room!" Momma yelled as she chucked one o' them heavy ole goose pillas at me. I heard her dial up somebody on the telephone as I was goin' out, so I sat down by her door to listen what she had to say. It was my nanny, and she told my nanny that my daddy was bein' a s.o.b. an' she pure hated him. She said that he *and* me could just go suck an egg. I wondered 'bout that, why she wanted me to suck an egg. Well, she kept right on sayin' mean and evil thangs and I got scared. So I ran out the back door and went an' hid myself in the ole chicken coop I made into a clubhouse just for me and select rodents, an' I cried 'till the cows came home. I wished to myself that I'd gone clean through the windshield when my momma hit that ole Buick. Maybe that way I'd be dead an' gone an' my momma would love me just like she started loving my s.o.b. granddaddy after he dropped dead in the middle of Christmas dinner in 1971.



Dead Bird

Nancy Critcher

Blue Balloons

-as they drift into the unknown sky, people look, then walk by-
Mornin Townsend

Kathy lies on the cold concrete floor of Funland Arcade, her face graying, lips slightly open, giving way to her drunken mouth. Her teeth are gone, a result of her poverty stricken life of abuse, neglect, and lack of self-respect. Her blue blouse is slightly tucked into her worn, stone washed, Wrangler jeans and is dirty and torn and splattered with vomit. Consequently, her last meal (maybe it was her favorite) is soaked in a pool of alcohol and now lies on the concrete beside her. There is no breath, and no oxygen to supply her blood, so it stops flowing, turning her a bluish color. Her soul drifts off, up into the sky, like a blue balloon, accidentally unleashed at the circus, slowly drifting from a child's hand, up. The child cries out as both hands reach for the sky, grabbing a moment of attention from everyone around. One and two and... Then, they all go back to their lives, one blue balloon floats away from existence.

Kathy's daughters stand by her lifeless body, waiting... her husband, drunken, confused, stumbling, waiting... waiting for someone to help revive her. Yet, no one responds. Eyes look; heads turn... The sound of skee ball points trigger, making fifties and hundreds, as lights flash and red and orange game winning tickets spill out. A game yells, "roll for gold, hit the value and watch those tickets pay out." The tokens slide endlessly down the machine, starting a new game. I have to ask myself, what is the value of one of those little red and orange arcade game tickets?... Less than one cent! One penny? And Kathy?... still breathless... is she valueless?

Then, a young boy runs to me. His round face and freckled cheeks are bright red... "Can you call an ambu-

lance? My aunt has fallen, and we can't get her to wake up," he asks with tears welling up in his eyes. He speaks to me as though he thinks he is an inconvenience. No one has cared so far about his aunt, as a result, he assumes responsibility. This young boy has just been branded with a scar he will never outgrow.. A permanent impression burns into his heart. A memory of strangers standing, looking, and turning away. I can smell the burn... Valueless?

I run over to Kathy as my co-worker calls 911. The smell of the vomit and alcohol gags me as I double over and have to turn away to catch my breath. The sight of this woman lying on the floor, with no movement, overwhelms me. I can hardly hold down my own dinner. Her husband then tries to administer CPR, blowing his intoxicated breath into her lungs. One and two and three and four and... He doesn't seem to be having any effect on her. Here, his wife lay on the cold concrete floor of the arcade, breathless, helpless, valueless... A floor where people walk by endlessly throughout the day and night, with their bare feet, tassel hanging anklets, and bare souls...

The paramedics arrive in no hurry; it's their answer to staying calm. Their blaring lights and sirens occupy as much attention as Kathy, who is still lifeless. There are four of them: duffel bags draped over their shoulders and dressed in dark blue pants, filled with pockets and straps, and they all wear t-shirts, stating paramedic and EMS. Two of them glove their hands as they walk, while the other two roll the gurney to Kathy's side. Immediately, they all stoop down by her and begin checking for her pulse and any chest movement. There is none.

Then, more paramedics arrive. I step back to give them more room and notice, over my shoulder, the crowd of people that has gathered to watch. My mind fills with rage and I want to scream, "What are you helpless people

looking at?" I want to run through that crowd and knock people out of my way. I want to trample them to that concrete floor and stand over their breathless, helpless bodies and watch them, just as they are doing to Kathy. For that moment something had changed, Kathy was more important than the Funland Arcade ticket. More important than skee ball and tokens and children watching someone as they pass between life and death. The tickets, the crowd... valueless.

I think I am going to puke!

I turn and walk away just as the paramedics open up the defibrillator and lubricate the electrodes. I cannot bear to see any more. My stomach is weak and my hands shake. A consequence of stress, emotion, and shock. I walk away from the scene, just as the electric current travels through her torso; they make an attempt to alter a disturbance in her cardiac rhythm.

After three attempts, the paramedics get a faint pulse and begin CPR again. One paramedic does compressions, another tilts her head, and another holds a mask to her face, forcing air into her lungs when compressed. The other paramedics lift Kathy to the gurney as the people spread back like a parting sea, and she is rolled out of the Funland Arcade, unable to look back on her children, or her husband, as they cry... Or to see all of those people whose lives were worth stopping for the moment, to stare as one slips into the unknown... One blue balloon away from existence... ■



Art Class Outside

Christine Pfohl

A Day in the Country

Veronica Plankers

Screaming Choking Laughing
Finding new ways to stay alive
Like little children we play out
in the street a car ran over my sister
Crowding around together
and talking of plans to
Bury her

We bust out of this place called home
In the morning
That afternoon we go to the zoo
The monkeys look at us
Their eyes penetrate our souls like
stubborn bananas

Mush in our eyelids
Mangled foreheads with our devious
monkey thoughts
Swinging down on us spiteful leaps
Spitting out bananas and shrieking loudly
To breed
In the darkness

Safe
From reality
At last
Subliminal ray of the beast
Yet another carnal display

Camping out
Sitting down
Picking out fleas
We guard ourselves from a new day
Bars and antagonizing customers
Throwing peanuts
In cages
And the smell of sticky sweet bananas



Dad's Walk

Christine Pfohl

Farm Memories

John Schulte

Silence soothes like a gentle comb,
it's untangling my matted soul.
Crusty snow crunches beneath booted feet,
the farm feels like the warm smell of
Grandma's apple pie.
Her name was Lucille Wurslin;
She was the heart of that country house
near Mexico, Missouri.
Sometimes the quiet magnifies the loneliness.
A gaggle of geese walking in tight formation,
Honking, honking,
Stretching their long, downy necks and
hissing like snakes.
After dinner, we would sit around playing
Parcheesi, Because we loved to be close,
and we didn't want to say how we really felt.
"Laugh hard and long," Daddy used to say;
"If you take life too seriously, you'll never
live through it."
The cloudy snapshots of reminiscence
spill from mind's album
Tears fill the heart with glee.
Father smiled broadly after death and
we enjoyed his biscuits with melted stardust.
Hank pitched in Little League and
drank root beer floats;
next week he will be graduating from college.
Forgetful cars look at torn maps,
never asking for directions.
The sooner we get there, we will have
been there before.

Que Sera, Sera.
The pond glides along its own banks
as the moonlight boogies on the trees,
and sparkling snow crunches with
every booted step.



Bridge

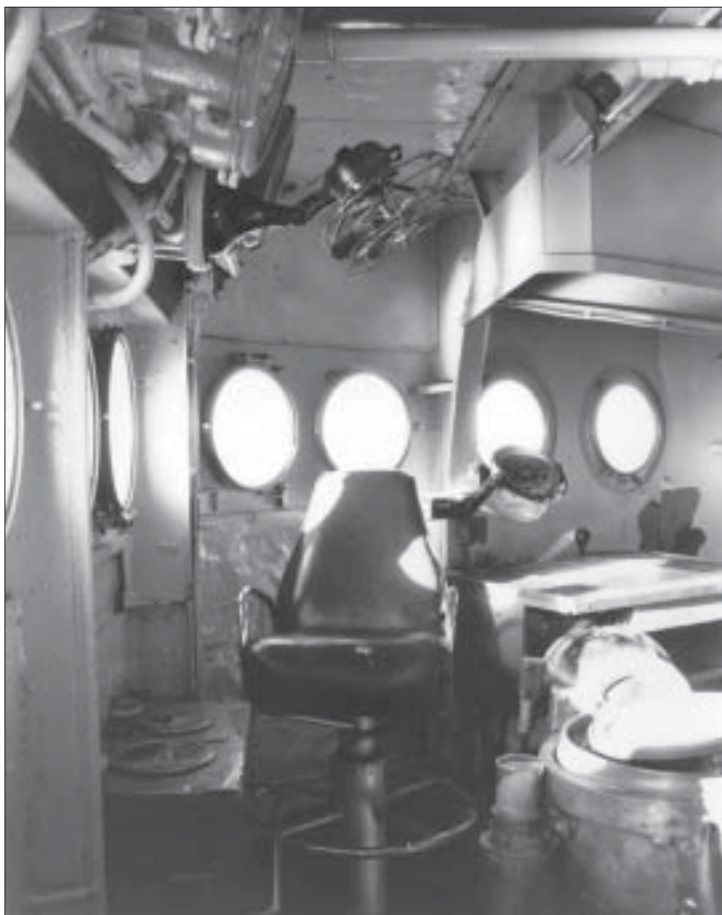
Candice Palmeter

Graduating

Jennifer Nelson

I have to tell you walking down that long hallway with everyone else in their long black robes was unnerving. Unnerving like when you experience a horrific movie with the wolf jumping out at you. Unnerving like when you turn a corner, and while you believe everything will be all right behind that corner you never can be sure. People were talking. People were laughing. People were giving high fives, and hugs and kisses. I was giving myself an ulcer. I was giving myself a panic attack. I could not and would not accept the fate that awaited me at the end of the hall.

Four years of struggle. Four years of tears, sweat, pain and suffering. Four years of papers, essays, tests and quizzes to get one piece of paper in return. That paper says I am smart. That piece of paper claims that I have grown, I have learned, and I am an experienced person in my field. The entire four years I prayed for that piece of paper that meant my struggle would end. And it did, at the end of that long hallway my piece of paper was waiting for me.



Captain's Chair

Ronny Brown

My Life is a Cliché

Katie Classick

I wake up at the crack of dawn
Let the water from a steaming hot shower
Trickle down my spine.
I then brew a cup of coffee
Letting the aroma fill the room.

I walk to work along a dusty old path
Letting the sun beam on my body and the
Wind rustle through my hair.
I whistle a tune on the way to my desk
And lazily stretch above my head.

I type away at the computer contentedly
Until I eat my lunch like a starving man
And guzzle my drink as if returning from the desert.
I work again and clock out at 4:00 on the dot.

At home I let my thoughts wander while
gazing at the TV
Use a razor sharp knife to cut apples for tomorrow's
lunch
And lay my head down on my feather soft pillow,
Sleep as if resting on a cloud,
Dreaming of an original world.



Pressure

Megan Watts

Goodbye Mikey

Jennifer Nelson

You drove from the house
In your big black Yukon
You said that SUV was made for you
And you were right

Strong, powerful
Yet it was easy enough for me to drive
Gentle and comforting
On the inside
While the world was harsh
Outside
Just like you Mikey

I was the last one to see you
From this town
And I smiled when I realized
The significance.

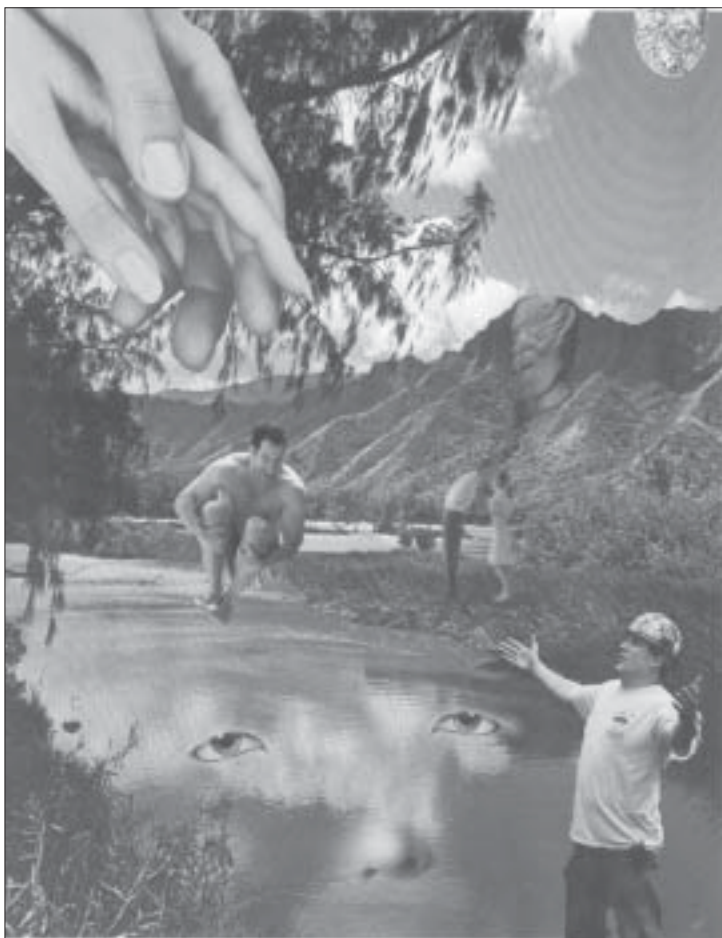
Walking into our house
I glanced at the clean carpet
My heart stopped
Knowing clean carpet meant
No more dogs

No more dogs meant
No more you
No more 2 a.m. waking up to
Hear you coming through the door
No more seeing cheap bean burritos in the freezer
No more corn chips in the dark pantry
No more filtered water, salsa and
Leftover Indian food in

The refrigerator.

No more you.

So what is left of me?



Summer Vacation

Liz Bruenig

Imitation from Natasha Clew's
Treasure Hunting
Carly Goodman

Collecting twigs and stones
in an apron from a play-chest.

Running like young, timeless
through sunbeams and spider webs.

Spiders, bees and raccoons at night
harmless to me and whom I pretended.

I discussed with my girlfriends
characters and storylines.

Where are we now, by the endless blue sea,
singing our love to our husbands ship sailed?

Step turning theatrically
now under starry skies.

Running like young, timeless
through moonbeams and haunted spider webs.



untitled

Jenny Watkins

loose change

Trent Boswell

Not a penny will fall
Table of the king
A liberal sprinkling of dreams
So much left to be unknown
Known in the eyes of God
Those terrible, symmetrical ecstasies
Sinew, muscle and eyes
Flesh, bone and teeth snarling
You will struggle child, and
Know of it not
Loose hairs fall from the
Head of the Tao and
We call them comets
Loose change, spilled in the streets and
We call it children
You are the flower of your father,
Brought to your mother;
Only to be ruined by time,
Sucker punches and cruel jokes
A ladder I tell you to build
Build it in faith, and
If you have no faith, then
Build it in spite, but
Build it in time, and
Use it to traverse time and
Look through heaven's window,
At the emerging menagerie of wonder,
On the table of the king;
At the squandering of
Loose change...
Here,
On the floor

Mirrored Sunset

Ryan Stanfield

To see it born again
through my own eyes

No more searching
No more disguise

you may ask
where the day went

or wonder why
you are so young
and already your whole
life
 feels spent

the community misfit,
looks that say
we can't relate

with slightly opened minds
we see the
reflection of what
we create

(untitled)

Trent Boswell

the centurions are belaboring
the point of chrysalis
many broad surgical incisions of boredom
whet the palate of invention
(steel pancakes + perpetual motion)

as the skin of the great, gray matter beast
is laid back and pinned
by the contractual obligation
of a decidedly inconvenient necessity,
radiant blue caravans of sufficiency
will traverse the untamed, barren tracts of tundra;
the walkways betwixt the hemispheres
of the carnal mind

enough now, of this tired sideshow;
of miserable, blackened attempts at cleverness

there are underdogs
somewhere
under all these
dogs

I will
find two
if you'll find
one
there may
be one
hiding
under
you



Afternoon Violets

Christine Pfohl

The Grandma Tree

Deb Hewitt

I was driving home from work several years back on a late winter evening and my mind was elsewhere, not on the drive. My Grandmother Zelma, a career smoker, was dying of emphysema and she was weighing heavily in my thoughts and in my heart. She was in the hospital, once again, for the myriad of conditions she had. All of a sudden, for a second or two, my attention was diverted to a particular old tree on the side of the road. The tree had been brutalized and scarred by animals, both four legged and two. It was a familiar place for livestock to scratch an itch, safe refuge for a frightened cat, and home to many birds. It was a place for squirrels and other rodents to romp and frolic. It had also been a target, hit many times by vehicles, on this winding, twisting country road. The tree, a great gift from nature, once stood tall, lush, and green with branches waiting to comfort like the outstretched arms of a mother. This was a place to find shade and respite from the harsh sun. Children had often been able to find hours of fun climbing its branches and swinging from the ropes and attached tire swing. Now the ropes were weather beaten and reduced to a mere strand too high for anyone to reach. This tree that once saw youth, vitality, and strength, now seemed close to the end of its usefulness, as shown by its knots, gnarls, and lack of limbs or bark in places. I couldn't help but wonder why the owner of the property had not cut the old nuisance down. It would clearly be for the better. "What could possibly be the reason for it to remain?" I wondered.

I continued my drive home, still thinking about Grandma. She had been ill for so long. As long as I could remember she had health problems. I remember as a child, she had very little stamina for playing outdoors with me. She would become winded and out of breath very easily. Along with

the emphysema she had diabetes, high blood pressure, and congestive heart failure. Grandma was a devout woman that rarely missed mass, and she made sure that all of her children attended parochial school to have the right biblical education. Grandma had long since buried her husband. She had finished raising her children and had helped raise three of her four grandchildren. I remember feeling that God had forgotten this faithful servant. How could he let her suffer so? Her passing on to be with him would be a blessing. It would be for the better if she was relieved of her ills.

Several weeks later I was making my way home, again taking my usual route. Luckily, Grandma had pulled through again and was out of the hospital, but she was on my mind again. I was passing that old familiar tree and there to my amazement at the very end of a single branch was a sprig of green. I could not believe my eyes. I thought to myself, "Well, it still had something it had to give even in the state it was in." Then my thoughts returned to my grandmother. I came to the realization that maybe God had not abandoned her as I had thought. There must have been something she had not yet completed, a task to perform, or something more to give, even in the state she was in. I am not a church going person, but I am a spiritual one. I do believe that signs from God come in whispers. I feel that these messages are all around us. They come unobtrusive in the smallest of circumstances. All we have to do is be willing and open to the possibilities of hearing them.

I feel that my grandmother's "sprig of green" is captured in a picture. In this picture she holds in her arms my only child, a daughter. A daughter I had tried for ten years and six pregnancies to have. The look on her face is complete peace. My grandmother passed away not too long after the picture was taken. I truly feel that this was her reward, the final task that God was saving her for.



untitled

Jenny Watkins

Another Day
Ryan Stanfield

Walk so long
among catastrophe
adapt so fast
 it becomes
a part of me
memories of a life
that should be dead
 but
without it would I
ever have been alive
tears from both sides
falling to the
 ground
the people cry
to a government
that hears no
 sound
depression renewed
 everyday taste
 the same
the art of life
replaced with
a race for
 financial gain
a new toy on
the market
 in essence
we will never change



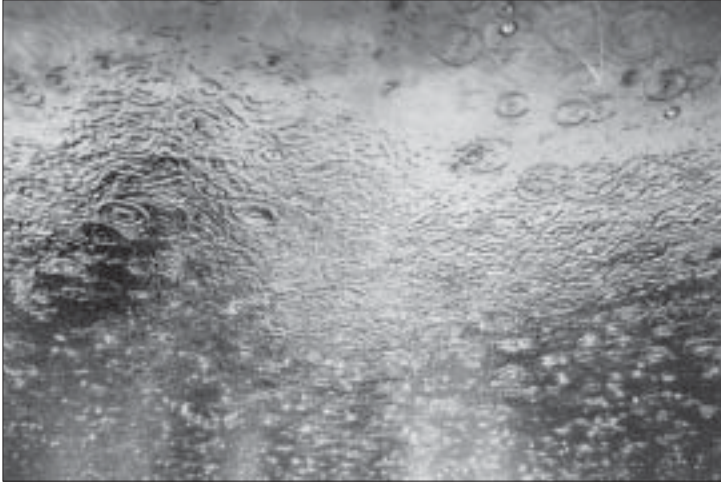
Optical Compatibility

Crystal Priest



untitled

Tonya Robinson



untitled

Heather Inscoe

Imitation of The Seasons by Scott Dias

Carly Goodman

Summer:

She wears bright orange cotton skirts.
I like free time,
With a body I can't afford.

Winter:

The manic cold reminds me that I'm alive.
Running from a chill,
I can't find in Carolina.

Spring:

Dreadful rebirth of beautiful things.
Remind me,
Of things I can't see.

Autumn:

Oh great relief of heart.
When the dirt settles,
And respects time.

Silent Moon

Jackie Gross

Faithlessly
Creeping through the night
Wandering

Temptation
Leading through the dark
Silently

I see you
But do not know you
The unknown

Silently
I feel your shadow
Moving me



untitled

Heather Inscoe



Zebras

Nancy Critcher

Terror in the Eyes of Gingerbread Men

Veronica Plankers

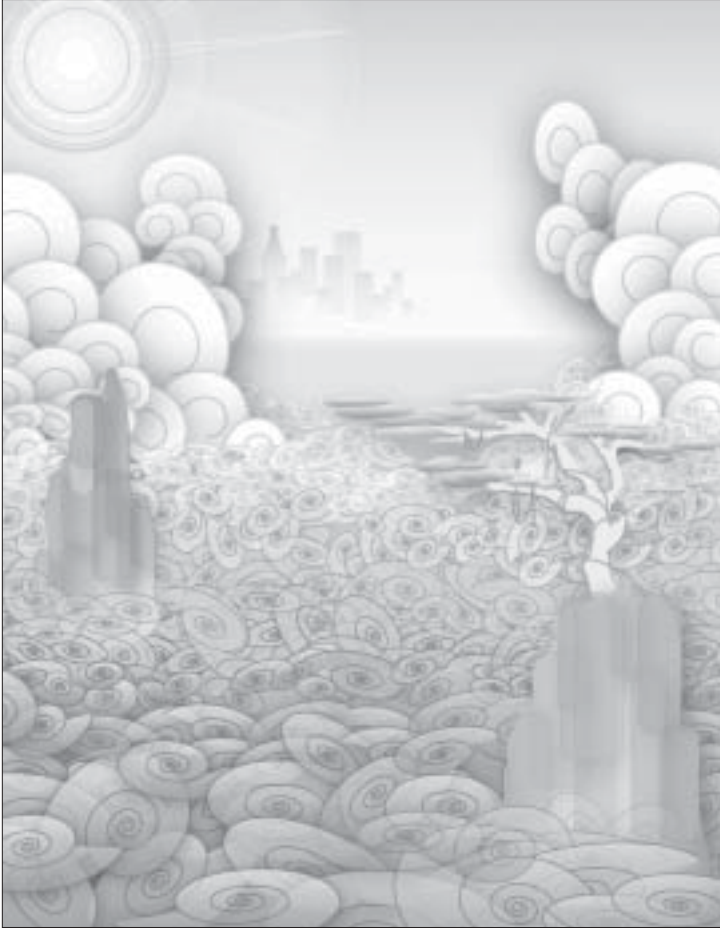
The smell of granny's lips moved in closer, long curly hairs
Surrounding the crackling ooze trap
Filled with Martians from foreign bacteria
And the smell of yesterday's diapers

“Come here little one.”

Says the voice of a thousand violins out of tune
Breathing right on your innocent little forehead
She sinks down
For a kiss

Cradling you in her ancient death grip,
Hugging you with cakes and the rest of the bakery
A gasp for air, you clench your teeth
As your petite ribcage falters like an accordion

“Me Maw,” you say.



Abstract Landscape

Mike Hogan

Promised Me

Antwine D. Simmons

I saw you talking to your boyz.
Our eyes met across the dance floor.
Your smile is what attracted me.
The music allowed our bodies to meet.
You promised me love,
you promised me love forever.
As long as the music kept rolling on.
I tried to see into your soul.
Your touch made me feel so good.
You uttered words I knew you would,
as the music kept allowing our bodies to meet.
You promised me love,
you promised me love forever.
As long as the music kept rolling on.
You dance so close,
I feel your heart next to mine.
Before I knew it your lips were pressed
against mine, your hand explores my outer thigh.
Dance a little closer tonight you're mine.
You promised me love,
you promised me love forever.
As long as the music kept rolling on.
I wanted it to never end.
You and I knew we might never meet again.
Your arms held me till the music stopped.
All too soon our bodies part
For just two hours a stranger stole my heart.
You promised me love,
you promised me love forever.
As long as the music kept rolling on.



Filed Away

Kasey Kiser

For the Forgotten

Dustin Orin Talley

Am I here, bored and reflective?
Left to the memory of flight
Flapping wings birthing wind
The cold collecting like time
On my nimble feathers
Burning the deepest depth of me
Leaving the flames of bonfires on beaches
Flailing in my wake
Having forgotten now
How words give one wings
Taking one to heights that frighten planes
And every other flying thing

Grasp

M. June Marshall

There he lay, cold and still,
Final, you say—
Ashes and dust reclaim their own.

There he lay, still and cold.
Warm him, I say,
with satin and down,
he is pale with chill—
Cover him and let the tired sleep
until he wakes and takes up his flesh,
kept warm by a blanket of green.

There he lay, cold and still.
He is awash in your tears
borne of greed and regret.
You grasp for his hands
woven finger by finger,
not holding yours.

You say he fell;
I say he will rise—
Save him his milk and his honey
for he will return and sup—
Ashes and dust will give up their ghost.

There he lay, still and cold.
You weep and lament
the time that you lost.
I stand quiet and reflect
the time that I had.

You say it is final—
I say it is new.
You turn and you leave him—
I stay and I speak with him.
Good-bye, you say.
See you, I say.



San Fran

Tonya Robinson

Sestina 1

Carly Goodman

I run, lean, to class.
At times too fast on tired limbs.
I sprint to catch up with my words,
my promises that alone can't dance.
At deadlines, we laugh loosely
and hope the others don't hear
our songs.

The others said combine our words
and riddle them to stage with dance.
Our timing has no integrity, too loosely
we laugh fast until our noises ring like songs.
Dark, rainy days strain our limbs
as our hearts get wheeled to class.

Like children accepting and growing out of tiny limbs,
we pride ourselves on this and that's, talking loosely.
Blushing in large rooms with mirrors, we love to dance.
Fumbling with my thumbs in mind's math class,
I breathe deeply and dream to tireless songs.
Remembering as a scolded child, fearing nothing
more than words,

Maggie and Ann tie your ribbons loosely.

In past's small pictures I see colored pencils for class
and in large books, the bold black foreign letters for
songs.
Our side eyes spot glimpses of strong blue bruises on
limbs.
All the time wondering of new meanings for mysterious
words
and visions to be had in moments of dance.

Again, quiet now, I lean ahead towards new and
awkward songs.
I think and pick apart the pieces of my days wrapped
in words,
Unopened jars of memories tapped in creative writing
class.
I look up into the dark and promise to discover loosely,
a spotless body in the innocence of dance.
I pour out into the moment with quivering limbs.

I move pure and weightless to a choreographed dance,
allowing pieces of moments to surface as songs.
In breath, my restlessness relieves loyal limbs
that can only be nurtured with fragrant words.
Delicious admiration grows as I wait upon books
in class and slowing down I soak within stanzas
that weren't spoken loosely.

I tingle, touched from class by learned limbs
and let words on arched feet gracefully dance.
Loosely, I celebrate the beginnings of
unwritten songs.



Abstract Flowers

Crystal Priest

PORTALS *Contributors*

Kevin Trent Boswell was born in Austin, Texas but has called Wilmington his home for over a decade. He is a husband and father of one. He has published in various compendiums, magazines and newspapers, as well as a self-published chapbook entitled *remission*.

Matthew Bray was born in Missouri. When asked about his art, he replied, “I don’t consider myself an artist. I just pretend that I am to impress people.”

Liz Breunig comes from Pearl River, New York. She is in her second year at Cape Fear. She enjoys art, music, sports and just having fun.

Katie Classick, a sophomore at CFCC, is from Maryland. She plans on majoring in Club and Resort Management with a minor in foreign language from UNC-W.

Nancy Critcher has studied many forms of art, but she has recently discovered photography as a “wonderful creative outlet” where she tries to “call attention to the everyday detail lost in the shuffle that is the typical American life.”

Carly Goodman is a college transfer student at CFCC and finds she is drawn to English and Psychology. She enjoys writing poetry, and plans to continue to walk down all roads leading to writing.

Jackie Gross is from Colorado Springs, Colorado and plans on transferring from CFCC to UNC-W to major in History and minor in Native American Studies. She is the mother of a one-year-old son, Kaius.

Michael Hogan was born in Troy, New York. When he mixed his two favorite hobbies, technology and art, he realized his true passion, digital art and graphic design.

Heather Inscocoe grew up in Chapel Hill, and subsequently she is an avid UNC fan. She also loves anything that is creative and artistic.

Kasey Kiser is a filmmaker currently enrolled in the Film and Video Production classes at CFCC, and he is also the assistant for lead instructor Duke Fire.

John Marshall was born and raised in Michigan and continued to travel and live across the country until settling in Wilmington four years ago. His ambitions are to successfully write and produce his own short film or documentary.

M. June Marshall, who has written since the age of eight, uses music and art as a catalyst for her creative writing. She considers her poems to be “mini-diaries of my experiences, alone and interacting with others.”

Jennifer Nelson is a special credit student at CFCC, who earned a BA in Communication Studies from UNC-W and plans to begin graduate school in 2005. She currently works as a legal assistant in a law firm.

Alfreda Nixon, a college transfer student, was raised in Castle Hayne, NC and began writing at the age of twelve. She plans on majoring in Communication-Film Study. She has an interest in poetry and filmmaking.

Pam Patterson was born and raised in Wilmington and then moved to Pender County, where she now lives. She works full time, is a mother and grandmother, and raises pigmy goats, miniature horses, ducks, and chickens. She enjoys reading, writing, and is currently taking classes at CFCC as time permits.

Christine Pfohl began painting seriously two years ago, having retired from a nursing career and twenty-two years in the Army. She has two grown children, a librarian husband and a spoiled three-legged dog.

Veronica Plankers is from Wilmington and writes about dreams, and subtle and illogical ways to obscure reality. She also eats, sleeps, drives and lives in apartments with cats.

Crystal Priest was born and raised in a small town in North Carolina called Tar Heel. She has just recently relocated to

Wilmington where she is working towards her Associate in Art at CFCC. Upon completion, she hopes to transfer to UNC-W.

Will Ransom is the President of the CFCC Writers' Club. He typically writes short stories, mostly fantasy and some poetry reflecting on love. He credits his muses as his wife, Kathy, and their three children Hannah, Zack, and Dylan.

Tonya Robinson is from Whiteville and already has a BA from NC State and a MLIS from UNC-G. She has been interested in photography for four years and considers it a passionate hobby.

John J. Schulte is a Creative Writing student at CFCC and also a full time instructor of Psychology at the college. Originally from St. Louis, he has lived in Wyoming, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Florida. Prior to teaching at CFCC, John taught at Florida Community College, and had a full-time clinical practice. He is currently working on a novel.

Antwine D. Simmons was born to Rev. John H. and Geneva Simmons of Wilmington, NC. Antwine uses writing as a way to capture thoughts, feelings, and epiphanies that come before they fade into a void of forgetfulness.

Ryan Stanfield has lived in Wilmington for twelve years, and enjoys meeting and sharing with other writers. He has previously published in the 2004 edition of *Portals Literary and Arts Magazine*.

Dustin Orin Talley is a full-time college transfer student at CFCC, who serves as the Vice President of the CFCC Writers' Club and is also the founder of the Cape Fear Writers' Guild. When he is not reading he is writing, and when he is not writing he is reading.

Megan Bre Watts was born in Fresno, California. She has been a student-athlete for most of her life, including two years here at Cape Fear Community College, and plans to attend UNC-Asheville to continue with her dream of becoming an art professor.

PORTALS *Literary and Arts Magazine*
Guidelines for Submissions

Writer's Guidelines

- All fiction and non-fiction submissions must be typed and double-spaced, with name, address, and telephone number on the first page of the entry (or on each poem for poetry submissions).
- Poetry must be typographically arranged according to the individual poem's intention.
- The submissions must also be submitted in Microsoft Word (or saved as a .rtf file) on a 3.5" disk. Manuscripts and disks will not be returned.
- Fiction and non-fiction should not exceed 4000 words. Poetry should not exceed 50 lines. Simultaneous submissions are accepted if noted in the cover letter (do not exceed 3 poems or 2 fiction pieces or essays).
- PORTALS acquires First North American Serial Rights. All other rights revert to the author upon publication. Previously unpublished submissions only.
- All submissions must be accompanied by a brief cover letter which includes a short biography.

Artist's and Photographer's Guidelines

- All photos, paintings, and computer art should be digitally prepared. Submit work on a CD as either a JPEG, GIF, or TIFF file at a target dpi of 300. CD's will not be returned.
- Vertical or horizontal work will be considered.
- Color or black and white pieces will be considered; however, PORTALS is printed in black and white only.
- All submissions must be accompanied by a brief cover letter that includes the artist's name, an appropriate title, the medium used in preparation of the piece, a brief biography, an address, and a telephone number.

Send all submissions to:
PORTALS
Cape Fear Community College
411 N. Front St., Office S-305
Wilmington, NC 28401-3993