

Towers

2002, Number 82



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The editors congratulate the winners of the 2002 Towers Prizes

Mike Pearson
Towers Award in Fiction

Mark Dickson
Towers Award in Poetry

Kimberly S. Bosslet
Towers Award in Creative Nonfiction

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MARK DICKSON

Destination

If you say a word too many times,
it loses all meaning.

Somewhere, soapy water and a child's
breath consummate their liberation
as a bubble, which, for a moment
or two, swallows the dim pastoral,
bends it and bursts, like clapping
hands or a shallow gasp.

A patient mother shrugs
and that's the whole of it.

The Earth pulses and shudders
beneath the Camera's pensive eye.
A strand of hair frames a landscape,
wrestles with the breeze, and makes
a theater of the stoic hills.
A stream descends lazily to the left
of the lock, and to the right,
translucent like a quiet passion.

If you shut your eyes, it blinks
out of existence, still murmuring
a syllable, endlessly leering, breathlessly

vocal. Your silence speaks volumes.

MARK DICKSON

Minor Religion on a Fall Day

Peripheral angel, perpetually lodged
in the corner of my eye
felt-tip wings paint landscapes autumnal
a cloud

I cannot escape the possibility
of rain (a shadow hovers hungrily
a listless dance of droplets looms
heavy on my dream-decked eyelids

like the pitter-patter
pitter-patter
of equilibrists' footsteps)

on this parade Main St. is lined perennially
with the same barren trees and smiles, tugging
gingerly at the backs of both wind-beaten ears

and wind-beaten years breathing landscapes
autumnal

this wind is an angel taking flight

You will haunt these streets endlessly under my gaze.

PETER J. SARTORI

The Dump

Down the alley about a half block from my house sat the dump. It was actually Pat Reilly's back yard, where a garage, or something, once stood—the foundation still visible in places. The dump was a great ground swell of earth and junk: rotting wood, a rusted dryer, a wood-burning stove, cast-iron tub, porcelain sink, rusty mattress springs, pipes, bicycle parts. Weeds swallowed everything. Crab grass swayed in wind-like waves, the white edges of a bathtub jutting frozen, rising out of the earth; half-buried shells of cabinets appeared buoyant on the wind-swept grass; weeds wrapped around stiff rusty mattress springs; and clops of mud were packed in flaking lead pipes. There was a hedge of rusted barbed wire bordering the alley, strangle vines curling and tangling around it. Scavenging through the dump was entering another world; it was a treasure trove of twisted nails, glass doorknobs, rusted barrel rings—a paradise.

I loved the dump, but it was teeming with snakes. They swam through tall grass and hid under rocks. Sometimes during the summer, Pat and some of the others would go into the dump and hunt for them. I loathed snakes, but I went with them. And I never acted scared of the snakes, not in front of Pat. He sensed fear like a dog and was relentless. He would inevitably catch one and torment some poor fool, usually his sister Annie.

It was mid-summer, before seventh grade, the last time we went snake hunting. The morning was hot and nobody wanted to come out. We usually played baseball, but that day there were only three of us. We hauled ourselves over to the school yard anyway and sat around throwing stones and swearing. Pat Reilly was a pro at swearing, a natural, and Junior Hernandez could swear in Spanish, which we thought cool. About a hour of hanging on the monkey bars cursing—if our mothers could have heard us—Patty decided that we ought to do something exciting. Earlier that spring Pat and Junior found excitement in throwing rocks at cars on the highway. They said they shattered a couple of windshields. I was hoping he didn't want to do that. I would have had to lie and say Mom wanted me home for something—my dad would have killed me. Instead, Pat said we ought to hunt for snakes in the dump. I was all for going to the dump.

We crossed the street to Pat's house. Annie must have been watching us for she flew out of the house as we approached and joined us.

"Hey!" she piped, jumping off the porch, "Mom said I can play with you."

"I don't care."

"What are we doing?" she asked.

"Hunting for snakes."

She didn't say anything, glad to be with us. She liked the dump too, but not to hunt for snakes. We walked down the gravel drive that ended behind the house and faded into patches of dirt and grass. We webbed out over the dump like spreading fingers, reaching. I grew giddy and wanted to frolic through it, but didn't; Annie did though. Within, the weeds undulated, rising here around my ankles, now around my knees. The mere brush against my legs sent shivers over me, and I wiped me calves with my hands. Pat and Junior turned over rocks and upset anything they thought a snake would slither under. I found some cracked flower pots. I liked these, the way they felt rough and sandy. I plopped down on my knees to dig them out.

"Patty!" Annie called.

Pat's head popped up over the half-buried tub. "What?"

"Come here!"

He leapt over the tub and bounded through the weeds. His eyes scanned the ground for snakes. "Where is it?"

"Look," she said, pointing to pieces of green glass.

I quickly stood up and looked around as if hunting.

Pat fingered a piece of glass out of the mud. He flicked off a chunk of dirt, examined the glass, holding it up to the sun; then he flung in against a stone, shattering it into shards. Annie picked up the broken glass, while Pat hurdled back and pulled out an old bike wheel along the way, pumping it in the air, whooping like a baboon. He hurled it into the alley, almost hitting Junior. "Watch out!" he called, laughing.

I squatted, trying to disappear, the weeds tickling my thighs. I rubbed a hand over them. Annie and the others were off searching. I sat in the grass near an outcropping of flagstones, legs outstretched, wanting to be alone. I picked up a stick and was brushing it over the weeds, then poked around a large slab. Weeds flicked and rustled near my feet. I curled in my legs and rose on my knees. More stirring and I heard the slick hiss of something moving over dried grass. I peered into the weeds. It was sleek and iron-black with dull yellow stripes running down its back. It glistened in the sun.

I almost screamed.

With the stick I poked at it. It coiled and drew back its head, opening its mouth wide and red, revealing its pale-green underside, so smooth. I froze. It held me in its sight for a moment, its tongue flickering the air. I jiggled the stick and it struck it and recoiled. I felt the strike, a living thump, and dropped the stick. The snake reared its head. I leaped up and was about to move away from it when Annie shrieked, "Patty!"

His head popped up, and he and Junior bolted over to us. The snake slithered into the weeds.

They rushed to where I was standing.

"Where'd it go?"

I pretended to search. "Over here," I said and timidly poked the weeds with my stick.

"They're not poisonous," sneered Annie.

"I know," I snarled.

Pat looked, but it was gone. I was glad, I did not want to hunt for snakes and was hoping they'd go away. However, he continued to poke around and, suddenly, he began to lift the flagstone that lay strewn about us. Junior joined him, and I helped, though hesitantly. Pat moved about, hunched over, arms swinging loosely at his sides. He kicked at a flagstone with his foot, reached under a corner and heaved. Black beetles and centipedes scurried into the weeds, and silvery leaches clung to the rock. He loosened and lifted another. After a third stone we saw it slithering into the weeds. He tossed the stone aside and stomped on its tail. "Gottcha!" he shouted. He placed his other foot closer to its head. The snake snapped and bit at his shoe. Annie yelped. He inched his foot up the snake and pinched its neck just below its head with his forefinger and thumb and lifted it. It stiffened in his grip.

Its jaw opened, its tongue flickering. It was thick and fat. Pat said it was one of the biggest he'd ever seen in the dump, or anywhere. I stepped back. He eyed each of us, then whipped it straight up into the air. "Flying snake!" he yelled.

Annie scream and we stepped back. It looked like a stick twirling in the air, then bending S-like. It bounced when it hit the ground and froze. It was about an inch thick and all of two and a half feet. Jolting to, the snake coiled and lunged forward.

"Get it!" Pat cried.

We went wild, and I was almost giddy with excitement. My breaths came quick. Pat snatched a rock and threw it down on the snake. It coiled and froze, then tried to slither into the dump, to get away. It moved laboriously. In a wild frenzy Junior and I grabbed rocks. We cried and hurled rocks at it, as if some game. Stones fell onto the middle of the snake with dead thuds. It crouched, both ends curling inward. I picked

up another stone and smashed it against the snake. It jerked, and as the stone crushed its midsection, nearly splitting it in two, I saw its jaw open white and wide and lock. Its tail twitched and curled tighter. We were relentless, smashing it, crushing its head, the black and yellow skin tearing open, scarlet blood and filmy stomach lining running together. We battered it until even its tail ceased to twitch.

We stopped.

A stone lay on it. Pat pushed aside the stone with his foot. The snake lay smashed, shredded, torn black and red. It wasn't coiled but mangled, no flicking tongue. Where it split, the white filmy plasma and stringy intestines, oozing, were lifeless little worms.

"Christ," Junior said, "are those babies?"

A stone fell with a thud.

"Don't snakes lay eggs?"

"They're like little worms."

"No," Pat said. "Garters lay 'em alive." He was hunched in a frosty silence, his hands clutching a large stone.

A long time I stared at the snake, at the little worms. I thought I saw them move. And for a moment I fooled myself, thinking they would be all right. I waited for something to happen, for someone to speak. We said nothing. Pat kicked the rock back over it. We stood for some time, unsure. I don't remember turning to leave. All I know is I left; I ran home, not for any reason but to be there...and not here.

MIKE PEARSON

Cellophane

Maybe it is possible
to purchase beauty
in a bottle
wrapped in clear, tight
cellophane
like packaged plastic surgery—
epidermis yanked across skulls
like the thin skin of a snare drum.

Maybe, you can buy it
at Wal-Mart
tucked between canned hams,
tunas, oil filters, and chainsaws.

Maybe, rugged individualism and
independence have been
killed off by packaging.
(*The Stones of Venice* bleed.)
And maybe, flag-waving, patriotic,
good Christian-Americans
were the first ones
to embrace capitalistic socialism.
Damn Pinko Commie Bastards!
(Ahem.)

Here it is. A box marked
*Home Face Lift Kit, made by
Kraco* (as seen on T.V.),
shrinkwrapped
in clear plastic

containing a beautiful woman
with high cheekbones,
full lips, and tight eyes
staring out from beneath the cellophane.

MIKE PEARSON

Diner Semanti-Phonics

She stretches
a rubber band
snaps it
between thumb and forefinger.
(The tepid coffee struggles
to fulfill itself--
fails.)

Her uvula wiggles
ecstatically
as
her tongue rolls
around
pesky morphemes
(Hardening residue of
yellow yolk
glazes
the porcelain plate.)

Gnawed
to the quick,
fingernails
drum
tiny paradiddles
(The yellowed fluorescent
hums--
Bb sine waves.)
"We are wind instruments,
essentially . . ."
(Lungs push air

vibrate larynx.)

“ . . . and verbalization is volume,
pitch, timbre”
(klangfarbenmelodie)

“ . . . not that it matters,” she says, “but
language forces insularity. . .”
(bilabial, alveolar, labiodental)

“I can say more with my body than with words.”
(Ssssibilance)

“ . . . some words stay
draped over hangers
like Sunday clothes . . .”
(liquid, nasal, fricative)

“ . . . or maybe, like the interview suit that hangs
shamelessly out of sight.”
(decibel, Hz, frequency)

“ . . . words cause
misunderstandings . . .”
(Voiced)

” . . . if we could link our minds”
(Voiceless.)

CARYN TALTY

Journey to Freedom: A Lithuanian Story

Barbora Šernašaitė made her way out of the forest and into the clearing. Above her, still a few hundred yards in the distance, was the hill. She sighed deeply at it, whispering “Kryžių kalnas,” *The Hill of Crosses*.

She had always come here with Motina, just to pray for Papa, Pranas Šernas. As a child, she remembered clutching a fistful of Motina’s dress, trudging what seemed like hours, just to reach the hill. Papa wasn’t up there, but Motina would always go there to say her prayers for him.

It had been four summers already since she had been there with Motina. Back then the hill was littered with yellow rue, and they seemed to carefully weave themselves among those crosses. Little Dora had pranced around Barbora, waving her bouquet. *Mommy and I will make you a wreath! Surely that Jonas will want to marry you then!* This made Barbora angry, but she held her tongue. Back then Jonas Steponaitis was only a village boy she hardly knew, but he was handsome—and so she’d begun to watch him, from her sitting room window, as he walked passed their cottage every afternoon. He’d glance her way, tipping his cap, then he’d continue down that slim dirt road towards Radviliškis. Barbora may have been angry at Dora’s boldness, but she was secretly hopeful. When they had finally reached the top, Barbora bent her head and prayed those suspicions would come true, and they did.

Life seemed so simple then, even though it was never easy. She knew it was because Motina was always with her. Barbora held a tight lip this morning when she left home, but by afternoon she realized her foolishness. The baby inside her was making her tired, and her feet were sore. One of her sisters should have joined her. Even Dora would have been good company today. *No*, she eventually reasoned, *they’d have too many questions, and some things are better left unsaid*. She was a married woman now, and her troubles were her own, not Motina’s or her sisters’. Without God’s protection she was going to lose Jonas. The Russians would take him. Send him away. She knew that much, although Jonas said little else. Weeks ago he

told her he'd take care of everything, not to worry. He had a plan and promised to be careful.

So last night Barbora tidied the back end of their little cottage after Jonas's Mama and Father had gone to sleep. She swept the stone floor, folded the old, worn coverlet, and then rested it on a wooden chair. She wasn't going to leave a speck of dust. Barbora knew Motina and Mama would divide their belongings, what little was left. She could not give reason for talk. Everything must be in order. They would move as the dead move, carrying nothing.

Soon darkness forced her to stop. Barbora turned the wick down to the last, and waited in the dark for Jonas. This she did for Vytautas, and because of Motina. She remembered how she carried him up that embankment years ago. *Ne*. No one could be trusted, and she could take no chances. She hated waiting, hated being alone, and worse of all, hated the darkness. But flickering lights in cottage windows could make soldiers think about secret meetings, make them break open the doors and walk in. The darkness was safer because they just didn't bother sleeping houses. Only once, that she knew of, did they do this to a family in Zarasai. The Russians caught the deserter and brought him home. Then they shot him between the eyes in front of his wife and son.

So she sat and worried, lost in these thoughts, until the tiny cottage door softly clicked. Jonas was finally home; it was all set. *We're leaving tomorrow after dark*, was all he said. She understood. Then the two slipped under the covers for a long sleepless night. The Šernai family was going to get very bad news, and Barbora wasn't sure how they would take it. Radviliškis had been her home for 22 years, and now, because of the Russians, she was forced to leave with no hope of returning.

She thought all this as she bowed before the hill. Rosary beads rattled against wooden crosses, playing a soft melody. Barbora came mainly for God's help, but walked up that hill with her eyes fixed on the ground. She knew those old superstitious women, heard them tell their stories about those birds. They were storks—white, long-legged birds with narrow, pointed beaks. The women claimed these storks could tell the future. All it took was just one look. Barbora was scared, so she carefully avoided any chance of a sighting until after Dievas had heard her plea. She secretly hoped her petitions would persuade the heavenly Father to open her eyes at the right moment. She wanted to see two happy birds lingering on that hill.

The old Jurgaičiai mound had heard many broken-hearted prayers since those first crosses were laid sometime during the first uprising in the 1830s. That's what the old women said. Those first crosses had rotted into the earth, but new ones rose up like

bad weeds, to spite the Russian enemy. The old women claimed that there was never a time when the hill was without crosses. It was a sacred place; villagers went there to pray for God's help. They prayed, from atop the hills, for children, for freedom, for the safe return of missing relatives, for the ones who left never to return, just as she would be leaving.

Soon Motina would come and pray for her too, and not just for Papa and the others. The crosses on these hills were mostly fresh and orange like the one Barbora had planned to leave. Some were gray and worn, however, from time. Barbora reached into her pocket and pulled out a small wooden cross, draped it over the old one her mother had planted and crossed herself. That's why Barbora came—to share her hopes and fears with God, to stop the sickening pain in her heart.

Barbora got down on one knee and crossed herself. Dievas would listen to her here. After all, she had come a long way for help.

Quietly, she rose to her feet and looked at the cloudy sky. A lone bird slowly circled the mound. Barbora gasped, then lowered her head in fear. A lone bird meant only one thing: she would travel, but what about Jonas? Would something happen?

Her heart thumped loudly, tremendously. She climbed to the top of the taller hill, the most holy ground, knelt beside the brick chapel, and gazed at the surroundings. Hundreds of crosses decorated these hills, marking the secret burials of those Lithuanian rebels and the prayerful pilgrimages of people just like her. Each cross was carefully carved, and left on Kryžių kalnas believing Dievas would answer.

With a soft rhythm that matched the tapping beads, she prayed: "Sveika Marija, malones pilnoji, Viešpats su Tavimi. Tu pagirta tarp moterų ir pagirtas tavo sūnus Jėzus. Šventoji Marija, Dievo motina, melsk už mus nusidėjėlius dabar ir mūsų mirties valandą. Amen."

The prayer was silenced by her tears. This journey, the details of it, was easier to think about than the leaving. Her strength and resolve was beginning to melt away. This is why she often chose not to pray. Her words just sounded like a child's begging. Motina had always taught her that God was more pleased with deeds than words. So Barbora knelt in silence; she needed to let the grief out, but didn't know how. Then finally, she wept, not exactly willingly but uncontrollably, like a child. She cried for Motina, for Jonas, and for Lietuva, soiling her freshly pressed handkerchief with foolish tears. Thinking she should have more control, she wiped her tears in anger, but her grief was long lasting and exhaustive. It drained her, but gave her strength.

Perhaps she was no longer alone now. She felt it in her heart, it was a warmth, and it moved over her shoulders, as if it were there to share her burdens. She understood.

The rebels. They fluttered, softly and gently, caressing her damp cheeks in a careful rhythm. With her eyes closed and her ears toward the earth, she listened. From beneath the soil the winds blew up: "Išlaisvink mus."

"Taip." *Free us too,* she prayed. The rebels stopped a moment, then changed directions. *The winds of time are pushing us away.* Remaining here meant captivity. Nothing had changed since the rebellion, and the men-folk talked as if nothing would ever change. *Maybe Jonas is right. We must go.* She descended the mound with a resolute mind but would not forget that lone bird above Kryžių kalnas. He, too, was a warning.

Those voices remained on Barbora's mind when their ship set sail in Hamburg. She had packed what little she and Jonas could carry in two small bags. They had journeyed by wagon and foot, through forests and fields at night, to the port town of Klaipeda, a safe harbor, where they waited several days, just outside the city center, for their boat to Hamburg. If caught, Jonas would have been imprisoned for desertion, and Barbora interrogated. So they waited, breathlessly, for a small fishing vessel to dock off the coast in the middle of the night. There were others. None dared speak by day or sleep by night; instead, they tucked themselves away in a remote farmer's hay barn, a kilometer from the sea.

Then God sent the fog. It came in the early morning hours of Palm Sunday, as the Russian troops approached Klaipeda.

Barbora shuddered at the memory of it all—the frightened run through the fields, the crowded boat, the cold dense air, and the long passage through the dark to Kiel. Their journey had been many miles by sea. No one spoke a word until midmorning, when the crew announced a safe entry into German waters. Barbora clutched the railing, lifted Motina's cloth to her nostrils and sighed. It was over, the leaving. Behind her now was home, to be left in her mind. She looked forward but her heart pulled her back, toward the east, toward Lietuva.

With the back of her hand, Barbora wiped the useless tears staining her face. *The sickness.* Ocean air stung her cheeks, dampened them. When she lifted the cloth to her head, Motina's stern voice echoed through the darkness.

"*Šernai women do not cry.*" She nodded, as if Motina could see it, lowered her arm, and let the wind wipe her cheeks instead.

Barbora longed for Motina again. She missed her short, plump mama with red cheeks and callused hands, all from the hard work. Marta Šernašienė worked harder than most men. When Papa died, it had been a terrible shock, but little Vytautas and Barbora's second Daddy were a terrible blow as well. Through it all, Motina never

stopped working. She had too many children to rear, and the farm still had to be worked. Motina toiled night and day, like the others, to pay those taxes. She hated the Tsar and taught Barbora to feel the same. They were slaves only, because their land, like most of the land, was controlled by him and his soldiers. When there wasn't enough food for all of them, she'd often say, "We farm to feed our family, but we feed the Russian pocket instead."

By day she and the boys toiled, while Barbora looked after the little ones, but at night Motina worked in hurried silence. Without their lantern, she went into the fields and scythed as much wheat as she could, threshed it, and then ground it into flour. With her bare hands, Motina scooped each measure of flour into an old burlap sack, and then used her nimble fingers to sew it shut. It was dangerous work, this silent labor, but it had to be done. When finished, Motina buried each sack beside their old shed and covered it with peat. Only then would she sleep, and only until sunrise. Motina always feared discovery, not just by the Russians, but by their nosy neighbors too. Getting caught meant months, years in jail. It was better the others did not know. No one could be trusted in Radviliškis, aside from the priest.

Although Motina was fond of Jonas, Barbora knew she felt he was too tender. Motina wanted her to be strong, so she often treated Barbora with a harsh tone and a stiffened back whenever Jonas was too soft. The night they left for Amerika, Barbora cried openly. Jonas consoled her, but it only caused more tears. He asked Motina for a cloth, but she just straightened her back in the chair where she sat, lifted her chin, and looked away. *Not good to cry*, she said coldly. Barbora was in the room, but she felt as if she weren't. This was very painful, but always the way with Motina. Eventually she sighed, slowly wagged her head, and rose from the chair.

Motina knelt over her chest awhile before choosing her very best cloth, a wedding gift from Papa's mother. Folded, pressed, untouched since her wedding day, it opened like silk in her rough hands. The edges were still made of perfectly starched embroidered lace. Motina carefully laid the cloth in Barbora's lap. Š was on it, stitched in blue, the old letter, the one the Russians burned had forbidden. It was cherished for its defiance, inherent in the stitching. Why would Motina give such a gift? Barbora could not cry into this precious cloth. It would disgrace Motina's good intentions.

Motina stood a moment looking almost as if she might cry herself. Then she swished across the floor, maybe to deny the stinging in her own eyes. In a stern voice she firmly ordered the tears to stop, *Šernai women do not cry*. Motina was harsh, but she had spoken out of love. Barbora couldn't understand this. Motina was always this way. She was only twenty-one when Papa took ill with the blinding fever that killed

him. At that time she had already lost a baby, and was left to raise Barbora and two of the others, so maybe there was just no room for comfort or grief. Barbora was seven when Motina married again; it was expected. It was no good for a woman to live by herself. And in ten years' time she lost two more babies. They were too small, perhaps, too weak to live.

Life got better, until the Russians finally came to their village. It was only a matter of time, really. There were accusations, made by a neighbor, probably to save his own skin. Lies. But it did not matter to the soldiers. They came at night and took Barbora's second Papa just the same. Young Vytautas had run off to find him. Only a small boy, but he was too quick for Motina or the others to catch, but not quick enough for the rising waters. He drowned that night, but Motina did not cry. She would not let the neighbors see her tears. There was a traitor in Radviliškis, who she was certain would live with the image of her in that soaked dress, carrying Vytautas's limp body up the muddy embankment. Motina had looked into all their astonished stares, one by one. She looked for the guilt, but only found suspicion. So she held her head high and slowly walked home. This kind of strength, this determination, this is what Barbora must know. She would take this quality of Šernai women with her to Amerika and teach her daughters to be the same way.

Maybe Motina just wanted to stop the tears, but was afraid to get too close. Now Barbora wished she had said more, done more, that last night at home. The family had learned that emotions were dangerous, to be kept at bay, so it was no surprise, that Motina had only bent down a moment and stiffly extended her arm to pat Barbora's soft belly. Hardly a bump yet, but inside was the Šernai future, and Motina was never going to see it; she gazed at Barbora, made unlike herself. Did she think her to be too small, too thin, not strong at all? Barbora hoped she'd always remember this moment, Motina's determination. She needed to be this way in Amerike.

The ship made a sudden lurch forward, jarring Barbora's thoughts. Tightening her grip on the rails, she was afraid of all its sounds. Darkness settled on her mind with each foreign shout, gesture, hurried response...The sailors did not speak her language; something to get used to from now on.

At times Barbora was certain her journey would end here, on the stern of this tired old ship. Ships went down; even great ships. She had heard the stories about the wreck. Several accounts circulated throughout their village. A great ship went under only one month ago, the greatest ship ever built, on its way to Amerike. Wasn't it larger than the village? Didn't it just break in two and get swallowed by the sea? *Too big for its own good*, the villagers had whispered. If that ship was so great, how is it

that it could sink in just a few hours? Barbora sighed. This ship was big too, and it was old, tarnished, and worn.

A German began to shout: "Frau! Halt!" Barbora knew what this man was saying, even without his words, but still her heart pounded with fear. It was as if she knew nothing now. How were they going to survive at all? She obediently stepped back, but couldn't let go of the rails.

Jonas had encouraged her to avoid those rails too. He told her about those horrible burial practices in the early morning hours. Passengers lost during the night got tossed over this very railing: mostly old men and delicate women. Barbora rubbed her hand along it and thought about that bird. Would her Jonas get tossed over before the ship reached Amerikê? *Ne! Impossible*. She put her hand on her belly. The tiny bump was barely visible now, but in less than six months she and Jonas would no longer be alone. He couldn't die; Jonas was the stronger of them.

The first night was restless. Barbora lay awake with her head on her traveling bag, frequently wiping her sleeves, not daring enough to touch her head. The lice were everywhere, it would only be a matter of time. The next morning she discovered the open faucet in the north end of the ship's bowels had only frigid salt water. She cleansed her face, hands, and neck anyway. It was all pointless, really. The lice would soon cover her body as it had already begun to cover the others'.



Jonas searched the belly of the ship for Barbora, muddling through the hundreds of steerage passengers camped there. The ship was just too big; he'd never find her here. This section alone was the size of Marta's allotment, and there were three more tiers above. The belly had no portholes, so only a clever clothesline of blankets marked the passage from day to night. After about a week many families had come together, hovering around each other, singing songs, reciting prayers, telling stories... Most were Lithuanian, but some were German and Polish; others he couldn't tell. He and Barbora had come alone only because Vytas, his brother, said it would be best. He had been in America for almost sixteen years already. Barbora had wanted to take Dora, but on this advice alone they acted. America turned back anyone in bad health. If she fell ill, as children often do, they all could be forced to go back.

The belly's stench was unbearable, so maybe she had gone above, for some fresh air and a bit of a reprieve, Jonas thought. He was annoyed by the slight tickle in his throat and relieved it with a hearty cough. Although he was a farmer's son and used

to the scent of livestock, Jonas had never been forced to live this way. He had spent the night on a bed of hay once, to mind a cow in calf, but this place was much worse. *This is a cattle ship, not a passenger ship.* There were hundreds of metal beds stacked in threes and arranged in rows. They had no more space than a cow in her stall, and they were thrown together by the hundreds. Even worse, beneath this room was the propeller-driven engines with their noisy churning night and day. Steerage class was more than unpleasant; it was downright dangerous. If they weren't careful it could cost them America, or worse yet, their lives.

The Germans had already come and served the first meal: sliced bread with potato soup. The rations were small, and Barbora especially needed them. "Where could she be?" he wondered. She was easily depressed. Maybe he was a fool to think he'd save their lives by escaping the Russian draft. Those goddamn Russians. In the fall of Port Arthur eight years ago, they took two of his brothers as well. Then they took Marta's second husband. Now they wanted him.

Jonas saw the boys go off to fight a war that was not theirs, for a country that did not respect his people, and yet both brothers died bravely and heroically. Lithuania did not want war, but in the end, they had paid more heavily for it than their Russian rulers. Jonas remembered the stories of soldiers lacking ammunition, of the government supplying them with religious icons rather than bullets, and of the Tsarist generals choosing to transport stolen Japanese treasures on trains rather than the thousands of wounded men at Port Arthur. His brothers lost their lives waiting for such a train to take their wounded bodies back to Moscow. It never came.

His only surviving brother, Vytas, chose America when the draft papers came. Perhaps he was the wisest of the Steponaitis clan. And now Jonas certainly owed him their lives. Without the Yankee dollars he had sent, the two wouldn't have made it this far. Jonas knew this was the only choice. They had barely enough money, even with the generous amount Vytas had sent, to make the month-long journey from their village to Chicago. Vytas had paid for the tickets; it was "a peasant's space for a peasant's fare," but it was all he could spare. Still, the thought of his brother troubled him.

Vytas hadn't always been so generous as to send money home. Jonas was only seven when he left, and he knew full well that Vytas stole the family's meager savings to do it. The theft enraged his father, but Vytas could always see a way to justifying anything. He wanted different than his brothers got, so he took what little they had to get away. After the boys' deaths, the family reconciled again. They kept in distant

contact with Vytas through specially printed letters with hand-written messages. Jonas knew his brother could not read and write. Someone close to Vytas had sent them; perhaps it was a woman. This reunion was going to be odd. Would they know each other, or would they pass each other as strangers?

Jonas had been the last, and by the time he had come of age his parents had already lost three grown sons. They didn't show as much devotion for Jonas as the others, and he was strongly aware of this. But Marta had been the same with Barbora, even though Jonas knew she loved her daughter deeply. It was just the old people's way. Love was never spoken with words in Radviliškis. It was a stiff understanding that wasn't explained.

Unlike Jonas, Barbora had been very close to her kin. She helped Marta raise the others, offering them more tenderness, because she was much softer. Jonas considered this softness as he ascended the stairs. He stopped to think, then continued. Maybe it wasn't her heart that troubled her. This morning an old man said something disturbing to them; *I will probably die on this journey, and the Germans will pitch my body over the rails*. Jonas had shuddered at the thought. He felt that tickle in his throat, but he was young and robust. Maybe she felt one too. Barbora had gasped, but was it the old man's words, or the cough? Of course, it could have just been the sickness. His sister had warned him—told him it happens in the early morning hours. She said there was no cure but a tender husband. *Yes*, he suddenly realized, *she must be at those rails*.

And there she was, poised, leaning slightly, clutching Marta's cloth. "Barbora! Barbora!" he shouted. She turned and smiled serenely, her hand cradling her belly as a mother cradles a child. "You frightened me!" he exclaimed. "I nearly thought you'd heave yourself over."



Barbora shook her head. This man cared for her, and he was strong. She'd be strong as well; they would not survive with the strength of just one man. In a hardy, even tone she replied, "Don't be silly. I came for some air. To feel what it must be like—breathing free. I wanted to remind myself why we left—and tell our baby, too." Barbora gently rubbed her belly again. She would endure.

"You are Marta talking to me."

"Maybe I am."

Barbora smiled as her amused husband put his arm around her, and they stood there, overlooking the growing landscape of sea and sky.



Barbora's heart pounded fiercely when she caught her first glimpse of the American statue. They had survived the travel, despite the ominous bird, the lice, and threat of contagious disease. *It must have been Jonas's good humor*, she told herself. *He seems to laugh at the notion of getting sick.* She knew, though, that this was not a logical reason for his good health. She desperately wanted to feel relief, but instead, she was sick with worry. The fortune-telling bird didn't lie. Something would happen. She was sure.

Beyond Miss Liberty stood rows and rows of piers, nearly twenty. From the bow, Jonas and Barbora counted smoke stacks. Each pier had several, and they marveled at the notion. Another traveler said the harbor was a sight in itself, but it was only one small port in the belly of New York City. This was already ten times the size of their village. Ships with two, three, and sometimes four smoke stacks, painted the sky with their gray steam as they pumped in and out of the harbor, carrying more people than supplies. From the sea, the piers looked like they floated on water. From the coast they must have looked like long man-made fingers extending from America's welcoming hand. Each pier boasted a tall brick building, at least four stories high.

Barbora rubbed her belly. Only a small bump. Perhaps no one would notice. But what if they did? Is it wrong to enter Amerike this way? Would they send her home? Would they test for worms? Or was there some other disease skinny women with round tummies often suffered from? Barbora trusted no one, so she kept her silence. To hide her condition, she decided she would layer her clothes, but she feared much more than just the growing bump. Many travelers had gotten red, watery eyes. She and Jonas were told that this meant deportation. It was an eye sickness that caused blindness, and a simple eye rubbing would spread the infection. Barbora took notice of the women who surrounded her. They, too, looked terribly concerned about this serious threat. Some fretted over their families; others strongly scolded their crying youngsters. They would take no chances with red, puffy eyes. Crying was not an option. These women, like Barbora, would rather be blind in Amerika than be sent back with good eyesight.

Barbora mentally re-examined Jonas's eyes from where she stood.

"I could rub for redness," he said in jest, aware of her worry.

"What if you *do* get the blind eye?"

"Never. We've *made it*, Barbora. Look!" He pointed to the harbor. "God isn't cruel, he won't let the Devil hurt us."

They did land, but the ship was docked for nearly three full days before the government gave the okay to disembark. So Barbora meticulously cleaned their clothing with a piece of soap and the salt-water tap, hung them to dry over the blanketed rope, and waited for the privilege of stepping on American soil. Many passengers scoffed at her efforts, but others attempted to do the same for themselves. She pressed and pulled the fabrics as they dried, padded and picked any loose thread or unwanted fleck, and in the end, was quite pleased with the results. If impressions mattered at all to the officials, Barbora was determined to give her best. She was not a dirty, diseased peasant. She was a well-groomed dignified woman from Lithuania, and she was both healthy and robust. She would disembark as if she had traveled first class, not steerage. Her proud husband would have her on his arm, despite what the bird had said.

BROOKE FRAZER DAWSON

Empathy To Hope

Life offers us a perplexing paradox: the world is made up of more than we can see, yet what we consider invisible cannot be so because it affects the visible. Sometimes when a person feels misunderstood and the mind is convinced that its emotions are unique and helpless, solace is found in inflicting physical pain or harm upon the body. While wounding one's body, one is healing the mind, regardless of how temporal the fix may be. The link between mind and body is elusive. Many times we like to think of body and mind as two separate entities, but often the physical body becomes a vehicle, a release, a victim of the inner emotional intellect. We are trained from birth to hide ourselves. What we do not realize, however, is that in hiding ourselves we are hiding from relief, sentencing ourselves by way of denial to a life spent waiting only for death.

Etched in my memory is a bitter night driving home from a mall decorated with sparkling Christmas lights. As our car cut through the fog, haphazardly hugging the ice-covered unmarked country road, my friend confessed her long-term secret. We were discussing heartache and breaking up—innocent enough—until she mumbled that she had been anorexic all through high school. It's not that the concept was a new one—after all, my friends and I had seen her body waste away, her hair go limp, her mood become defensive—but we had ignored it because she had denied it. Even the seizure that sent her convulsing to the dirt behind the rickety bandstand of our hidebound high school went unacknowledged. Nobody questioned the pink release slip she clutched within weak fingers before every gym class. In essence, what she wanted to be invisible became invisible. I flashed back to that day in a Marshall Field's dressing room when she stood crying behind a peach curtain after trying on a number of bathing suits. I decided, as most of us do, that her problem rested in society's expectation of the ideal body and her inability to perfectly fill every criteria. I was wrong. We have painted our masks so richly, so thickly, that even a trained eye cannot always discern the pain we try so hard to hide. Still, telling moments exist—it's being receptive to these moments that can be difficult.

Many people think that anorexia is society's fault—that somehow our image of the perfect body equates to the perfect woman. Psychologists believe that women

manipulate their eating habits to transform their bodies into perfection, but too often the emotional impetus behind the physical disease is overlooked. Many times the concern lies not in the victim's body image but in her emotional dilemmas. For my friend, starving herself allowed her to gain control over something. Her emotions were frantic, and she became too depressed to see a way out of her uncontrollable sadness. While nearly every woman feels the pressure of society to look perfect, my friend's anorexia was not concerned with fulfilling this image. Instead, her body became a victim of the emotional turmoil within her mind. Because she could not control her thoughts, she groped for a malady that is universally recognized—a way to solidify her pain in terms society would understand.

Sadly this problem extends to far more people than I would have been willing to admit. My neighbor's surface problem was highly visible, but I was not prepared for her 2 a.m. phone call, her voice muttering incoherently through blind tears, fumbling for clarity within a haze of intoxication. She had received a DUI, and ever since that night in May she has been forced to attend AA meetings and private counseling. I had always assumed that her drinking was linked to her background, so I attributed it to genetics and the search for a good time and left the answer at that. Needless to say I was shocked when she plopped down across from me at my kitchen table and told me it was all based on depression—a revelation that shattered my avoidance and shamed my search for an easy answer. My neighbor is the most independent, outspoken, self-sufficient person I know. Her moment of truth left me awestruck, and the only solution I could offer was an in-depth analysis of the dog-eaten table leg and the crust forming on my cheap microwave macaroni. Why did I avoid it? Why was I scared? How dare she let her invisible become visible? In the past I have always been able to roll my eyes cynically at the nameless faces that indulged in heavy alcohol consumption with the claim that they were all childishly wasting time, telling myself that the reason for their indulgence was solely that their intellects were deprived of deeper thought capabilities. Certainly this remains true for some, but there is a deeper secret to it—a darker side. When a person I cared for fell victim to alcohol, I was no longer able to take the moral high ground against nameless faces. The disease had a face, a name, and a heart, and my moral principles and broad generalizations were trite and empty when applied to her reality. More than just drowning problems in a substance, alcohol was her tool to conquer her mind, to overrun her emotions that become strong and confusing and out of control. Alcohol is a triumph, an army certain to destroy thoughts that cannot be controlled otherwise. A tool used to overcome plaguing emotions also functions as a self-inflicted punishment.

Alcoholism and anorexia can often be mistaken as cries for help because it is nearly impossible to seamlessly hide their effects. Self-mutilation, on the other hand, offers indisputable proof—puckered flesh and faded white lines tell a story that remains sheltered beneath a protective veil of clothing. But how can a scarlet trickle of blood bring freedom? I learned the secret from my friend Natalie. She is the perfect Catholic girl: raised by an intact family, strong in her moral principles, beautiful in her physical appearance. At fifteen, even her skin is perfect—a trait I can't help envying for all my college maturity. I have been friends with her a while, for after her mother died last year she has spent every other weekend with my roommate's family. I have been lucky enough to be a part of her visits, which have become a bright spot in my life. For me Natalie has always represented composure, fortitude, and strength. Her ability to cope so well with immensely challenging issues at such a young age makes me cringe when I see my own courage fade in comparison with hers. She has become an inspiration for me. I have always been open and honest with her, so when she asked me if I had been depressed in the face of my own hardships, I described to her my past emotional ordeals. After my disclosure she conceded her own weakness: cutting. After her mother's death she was left at a critical age as the only female in a house full of men. Her father, managing the lives of six children and keeping his own grief at bay, was unwilling—perhaps incapable—to see his daughter's pain. She hid it well, but the overwhelming emotions she faced eventually needed release. Cutting through the first and second layers of skin brought her that much closer to the truth her family was reluctant or unable to recognize.

It was a short-lived behavior for Natalie, but the comfort it offered her was undeniable. Some people, upon catching sight of an invisible becoming visible, cringe with disdain or disgust at the scars of a trial overcome. The only justified disgust is in their own demeanor, for there is nothing worthy of shame in the scars of life. Far from evoking my disgust, Natalie's cutting allows me to respect her as an emotional human being even more. She is not perfect, but she is human, and there is immense beauty in that.

They had no intention of dying or even seriously hurting themselves. They felt ashamed of their behavior, and made certain that the cuts, the hangovers, and the emaciation were well concealed—invisible. But during those moments when the world was caving in around them, threatening to crush all hope, mockingly cackling at the solitude and emptiness around them, it was a release, a triumph. While the pain that torments the mind and spirit is nebulous, physical pain is an unambiguous sting that all humans experience on the same level. The heartache caused by the death of

a loved one is multifaceted and entirely dependent upon the countless variety of personality types the sufferer may exhibit; the dull throbbing of a broken bone is unambiguous and universally recognizable.

In this world of instant gratification, double-booked appointment calendars, and twelve-hour workdays, society has imposed an even greater evil on its citizens; however, this evil lies not in the constant barraging of our eyes with physical images we must aspire to become, but simply in a lack of emotional support. We are encouraged to distance ourselves from each other, to operate as if our lives were complete—but nothing is complete without human compassion. We become convinced that everyone else is happy and that nobody else can possibly understand what we are battling within ourselves. We are certain that there is something inherently wrong with us, that it's unique to us, and that we cannot overcome something so suffocating. What's worse, we are forced to feel ashamed of our worries and our hearts—we are forced to avoid empathy for fear of shame.

The greatest tragedy cannot be solved with any amount of psychological help, Prozac tablets, or self-help books; surprisingly, it requires much less drastic measures. The greatest tragedy needs an ear, a companion. Only when we can truly stop feeling alone in our struggle can we overcome it. Empathy is the first step to a solution involving many different factors. While I do not claim to know the answer, I do know that compassion must come first. Of course I was unwilling to acknowledge the invisible beneath the visible in the lives of my friends, but the unwanted realization is valuable. My own scars, while not self-inflicted products of emotion, nevertheless follow the pattern. The visible traintracks along my hip, the potholed terrain of my leg, and the precise slices crossing my chest have an invisible effect all their own. They are my battle scars, my proof of existence and strength. They are not society's ideal, but they are mine, and I am theirs. I am not ashamed, for my visible scars are my invisible strength. My only hope is that the empathy I have learned to have with the pain of others becomes the norm and not the exception. Fear of the invisible must not overcome our compassion, for only with compassion are we able to see hope.

MARK DICKSON

Insert Black and White Photo: Sunset Against a Field of White Noise

Insert

black and white photo: me after the apocalypse

Drip

Drip

The words pour—no, dribble—from my fingertips. Errant thoughts trickling through random capillaries, condensing in belligerent pockets of blue, spreading along the backs of my skinny hands and around my knuckles. *That last one needed an adjective*, I think. *It's not paralleled properly, doesn't parallel properly*. There's some sort of symmetry I'm looking for, or would like to be looking for. Something, anything to give these thoughts some purpose. To thrust them entirely outside myself, to keep them there. At times I feel if I'm not forceful enough, if I can't command the words to have meaning, they will crawl back inside me. I will type and they will pulse angrily back through my fingers. Something about that scares me.

If I die, they will all be trapped inside me. A millenium of ephemera, a tiny collection of syllables, colliding against each other, ebbing toward my listless fingers. It's tidal now; I can feel them surging against me, but I don't let them out. They are mine. If I release them, I will have nothing. I will be empty. The fabric of space will tear inside me, behind my ribs, behind my eyes, beneath my throat. There will be a vacuum, soundless. If I die, I will be empty.

They know this. I know this. I know they know. We are at a standstill. They move like glaciers through my limbs. They creep slowly across the nape of my neck. They are a shudder down my spine. But still I try to hold them, ineffective, as they drip drip trickle or dribble or ooze from my stubborn fingertips.

Insert

black and white photo: me, after the apocalypse

Inhale

Exhale

Repeat

A cigarette to start this, maybe just half. A couple of slow drags for effect. For affect. I'm not a smoker, of course; the writer is. He doesn't give a shit about his body like I do. My body that is, not his. Well, ours—his and mine. One more quick one and it's down to business.

<Enter>

<Tab>

I'm the organizer, the order. He's all madness, though not the kind you're thinking. No, he's the more ethereal sort, shallow and wispy. He is a breath. I suck in, pull reality out of the dense air in my stuffy little office, swallow a space large enough for him to work in, to almost-breathe in. The air is too sticky in here, not nearly enough for the both of us. *A cigarette might help*, he thinks I think.

They'll give me cancer. I've seen photos of lungs. Emaciated like raisins or wadded underwear. The words aren't coming though. They're emaciated too, like raisins or underwear or supermodels. It's the cancer he's after, maybe. The concept. He's just a chaos of words though. I can feel him clamoring against and around my lungs, still pink I hope.

My heart skips a beat every now and again—thump THUMP thumpthump. Up-beat, down-beat. Up-beat, pause, up-beat. It's always the coming back in that gets me. It's the little beat, returning like that, so...anticlimactically. Like I missed the epiphany, like I skipped clean over it. It's his epiphany, he thinks. *Your heart will beat a finite number of times before you die*, he tells me. That is his epiphany—

He reminds me endlessly, but he's just words. He is emaciated like raisins or models or hands in bath-water. A deflated balloon, perhaps, or worn-out lungs.

Insert

black and white photo: me after, the apocalypse

I am saturated. My head and chest are filled with words, stuffed full, bursting at the seams with them. They are poundingpulsingthrobbing all throughout me, what others probably perceive as shaking. I try to exude calm. It's always in the starlight hours, and the occasional twilight, that the words come like this. Not one by one, orderly, like obedient children filing in from recess, single-file, but all at once, hurried and insistent. There is a keyhole in my ribcage; they clamor their way in, relentless. I can feel them pounding, in and out, out and in. Some pass through almost unheeded; others though, have nested, have clawed their way up my spine, lie sleeping or screaming or stammering in my brain. They are the ones I worry about.

Words like *Death* and *Nothingness*. Ugly, frightened words, clinging to my heart and brain like newborn babies to a zealous mother. I type them. *Death*. *Nothingness*. *Stasis*. I command them outside of me. I urge them with every inch of my being down the narrow passages in my arms, down warm blue waterways, winding about my skinny shaking fists, out through tentative, uncertain fingers. *Solitude*. *Determinism*. If I can just get them out long enough, hold them there on the screen where they are provisional, I can change them maybe. Before they get back in, before they recede back through my trembling limbs, before they wrest their way back through my ribcagekeyhole, I might be able to change them.

Death is the mother of beauty.

Stasis is stillness, calm, serene.

I need more words. I feel them pressing against the back of my skull, omnipresent, oppressive. I need them to remove the ugliness, the fear. I only want *Beauty* to enter, renovate and trace life. Not fear. Not *The Fear*. Not *Disorder*.

They are patient, there on the screen. They are like tiny dabs of paint on a canvas. I can paint over them all I want, can cover them completely, pour layers upon layers of bright viscous words over them, but they will still be there. I might make a painting, something like daffodils or lilacs, but in the end I would title it "The Grave." It would title itself. The words are not mine to command.

Insert

black and white photo: me after the apocalypse

|: Inhale. Exhale. :|

|: Expand. Contract. :|

|: If you stare at the sun, your pupils dilate to pinpricks; the world blinks out of existence. If you keep your eyes shut tight, your pupils expand to engulf galaxies; worlds blink into existence. :|

I lay silent, watching the machine push lukewarm air into and out of my lungs. Expand. Contract. Inhale. Expand. Contract. Inhale. Where does the bad air go when I am finished with it? When am I finished with it? The television murmurs, *There are plants dying somewhere that could use your life-giving carbon dioxide! Please act now! Here is Theresa, an emaciated defenbachia, for just a couple lungs-full a day she could have all the nourishment she needs...* then trails off again.

I need a machine now, to force the words in and out. Neutral words. Safe words. It sputters for a moment, then expandcontracts a sentence or two beneath my ribcage. It struggles to find the perfect sentence, vacuous perhaps, but indubitable, indisputable. The type of sentence that can't be negated or contradicted or questioned or pokedproddedissected in any way. The kind of sentence that builds confidence, security. If it can fill my lungs with enough of these sentences, I will be well.

They are devoid of meaning, these sentences, the words that make them, the dull oxygen that forces its insipid Truth through the lifeless passageways in my still-pink (I hope) lungs. They are a lullaby, singing softly, *words are words upon words are words upon words are words upon words are words...*

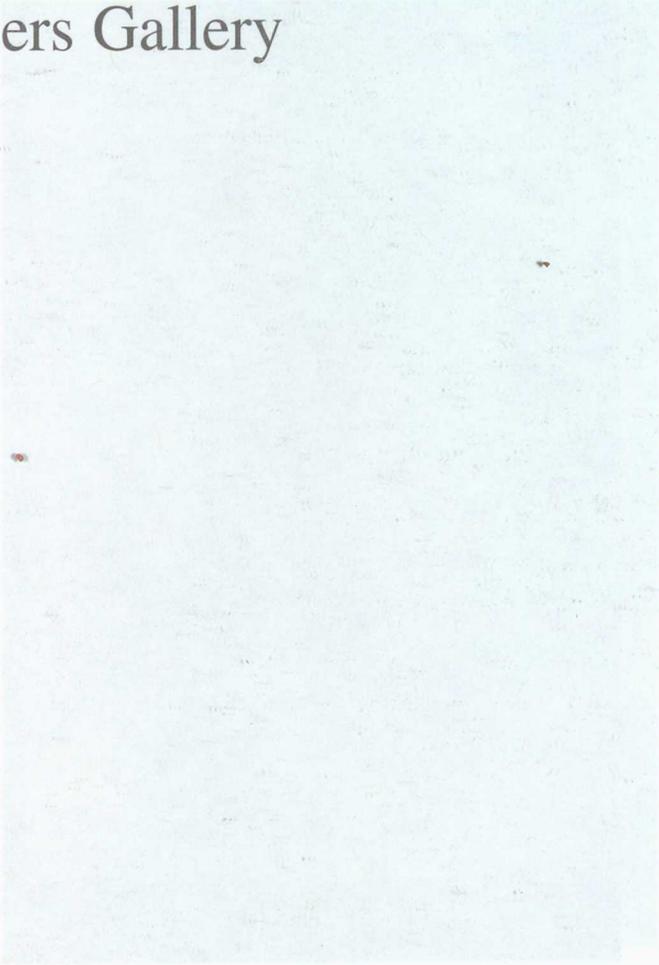
If they sing me to sleep, I will not dream.

If I die, I will be empty.

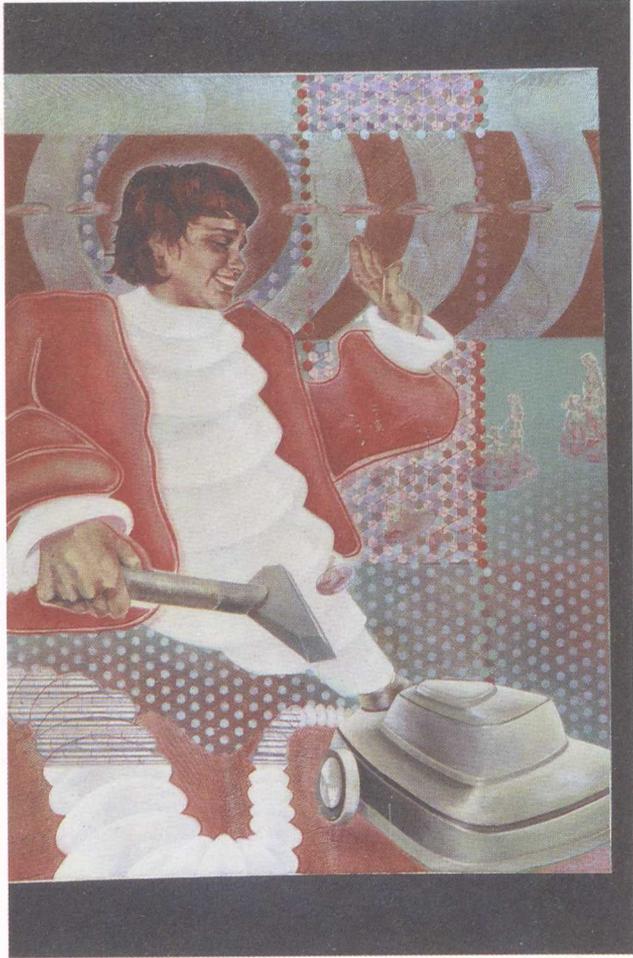
The words are not mine to command.

If I die, they will all be trapped inside me.

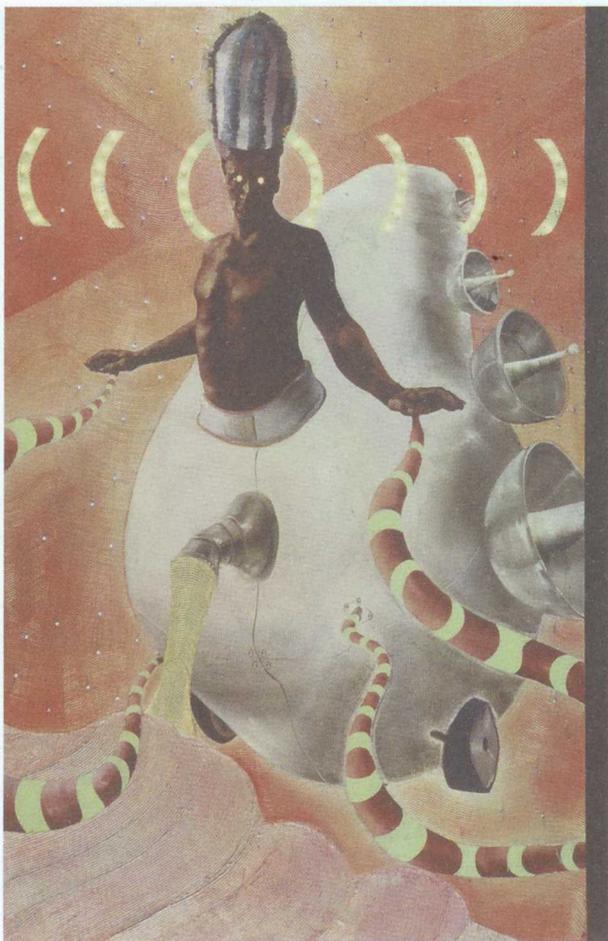
Towers Gallery



A selection from student artists at Northern Illinois University



Susan Smolinski. *Vacusapier*. Mixed media.



Susan Smolinski. *Miercoles*. Mixed media.



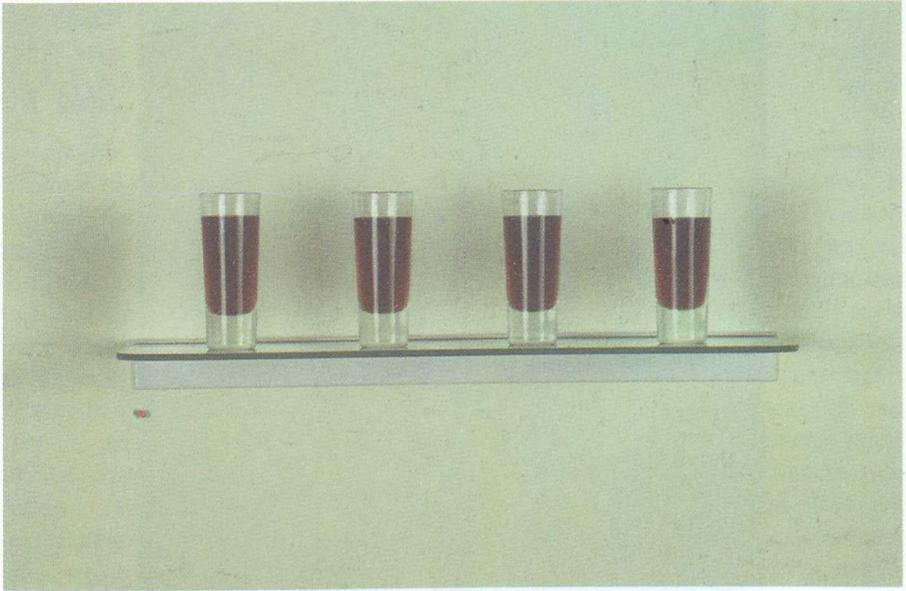
Katy Fitzgerald. *Lisa*. Black and white photograph.



Katy Fitzgerald. *A Caress and a Giggle*. Lithograph with color pencil.

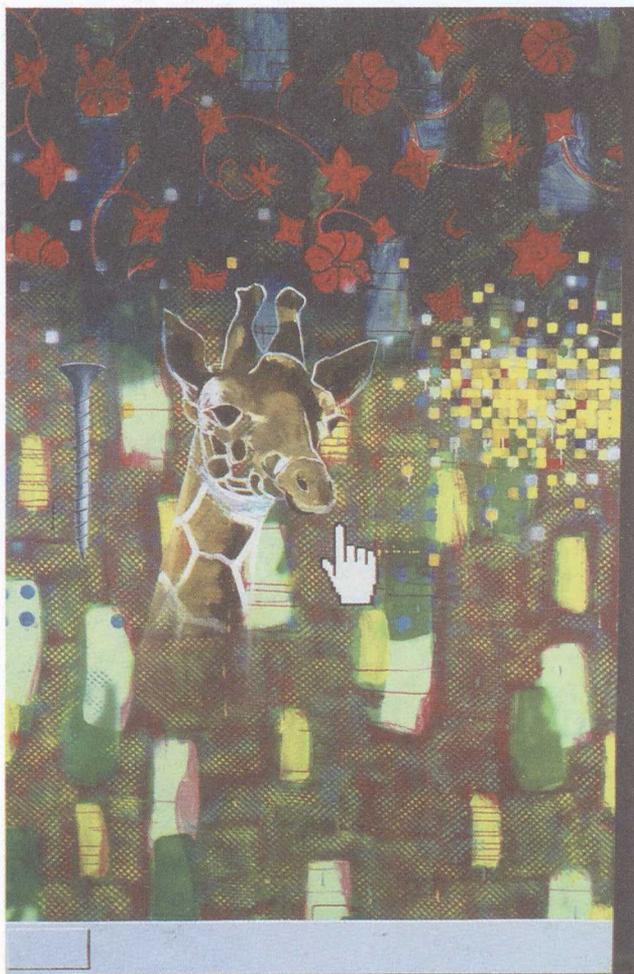


William S. Townill. *Numeral Infestation*. Lithograph.



William S. Townill. *Good and Plenty*. Mixed Media.





Michael McSherry. *Double Click*. Mixed Media.

GARY L. MCDOWELL

Yes, Mr. Copperfield

When a young man enters adulthood, he expects to be an active and significant member of society. He expects life to be filled with excitement, but when that man has Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), his life is anything but. His mind becomes cloudy; he is befuddled by simple tasks, not to mention his body's response to physical exertion. Each footstep drags on forever, as if plunging deeper into the concrete, like walking through wet sand in socks. We, the sufferers of CFS, all search for the cause of our disease and wish to condemn it – kill it – before it takes anyone else's livelihood; a simple, direct cause is a myth that someone perpetuates continually, saying that God or modern life is responsible, when in fact, the body is the only one that has the answer. Clueless and naïve – that is what the doctors are, though rarely do they admit it. CFS sufferers cannot comprehend our illness any better than the next person. From the outside we are normal, but within we transgress from one explanation to another, never satisfied or resolved by what we learn. We do not look sick, we do not act sick, especially to those who are not aware of our illness, and yet we feel so incredibly different, are in so much agony. We feel sick, are sick, even if there is not a test or a doctor that can prove us to be correct. We cry for help but only hear the echoes of our own tears through the webs of disbelief.



Yesterday, I walked on the treadmill for ten minutes. I am still intact physically, but mentally and emotionally I am exhausted. Wait . . . now my body hurts. The fatigue weighs on my frame; the weight is monstrous; it is a burning tingle that runs from my eyes to the nerve endings on my toes. A relentless exhaustion like a guerilla army pushing through a jungle attacks my body. CFS does not allow me to have energy for life.



David Copperfield stands and watches a crowd of people hungry for the illusions that are the perfection of his every day life. He steps forward into the light. A sparkle of pink, blue, and metallic silver radiate off his denim shirt. He is spinning slowly in circles underneath a blossoming cloud of snow that falls from the rafters and coils

from his hands. Stopping on the extension, only five feet from the front row of the theatre, he puts his empty palms together again and forms them into a cup. Suddenly, flakes of snow form on the top of his hands; then, in spurts reminiscent of a water fountain, flakes soar from his palms and cover the audience. The flakes shine in the bouncing rays of light, then miraculously flutter to the ground. The snowstorm sprays some twenty feet straight into the silence above him, filling the auditorium with magic, the magic of snow, the allure for natural occurrences. The audience erupts into an applause that matches the intensity of the saxophone solo blaring in the background. Copperfield brings his hands to his sides and bows; then the sax crescendos and more snow falls from the ceiling covering the patrons with a wintry delight.



Copperfield shows you an uncanny array of impressive, yet elemental, and overwhelmingly impossible illusions. Phantasmagoria.



I have been sick for nearly three years now, and the doctors are clueless as ever. I have seen over twenty specialists, thirty separate doctors, and traveled to four states searching for relief from my fatigue. Last year, I went to MAYO Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, to no avail. The doctors, supposedly the best in the world, took brain scans, blood tests, liver biopsies, ECGs, psychiatric evaluations, behavioral experiments, layered heart scans, more blood tests (panels, CBCs, liver counts, triglycerides, etc.), and MRIs of my entire body and came up with nothing. My diagnosis remained questionable at best. They said that I probably had CFS, but they weren't sure. Seek other opinions. But their opinion was the last one that I had left. However, I am one of the fortunate. Others travel further and search longer and receive fewer answers than I (i.e. my body is not hiding some kind of cancer, but some people do, sometimes for years).

I accept my illness now, but it remains mysterious. CFS has baffled the best medical researchers in all fields. The cause, the cure, even the basic biology of CFS are shrouded in a physiological enigma. The flesh and blood of the disease bothers me because I cannot understand it. I confess to being ignorant of the social beliefs behind my condition, but I tend to blame others for their indiscretion or misunderstanding of the way I feel. I get tired of explaining it to them. So, for the record – no, it is not

contagious, and yes, it probably will never go away. Sometimes I can barely get out of bed in the morning; other times I do not get out of bed; and other days I spring from a dream and hop out of bed only to grasp the reality the instant I hit the ground. I do not expect a cure or even a truly therapeutic remedy, but I do wish for a comforting situation – possibly a therapy or change in lifestyle to help with energy levels – where I will be allowed to live my life comfortably, normally.



David Copperfield's magic has captivated audiences worldwide with illusions that imitate life's intricacies. Even in illusions where life is not immediately evident in the theme, he can create life from inanimate objects, bringing to them the characteristics of humanity. One effect in particular springs into my mind when I think of magic imitating life, art imitating life. Copperfield and I are sitting at a table in a cafe in Rosemont, Illinois, about five years ago – I met him through his stage manager who I just happened to be friends with. We are sitting in the back corner. David pulls out a blue 15" by 18" felt pad and sets it on the floor. He gets off his chair and kneels on the carpet next to the close-up pad. I look at him and laugh to myself; only I could be in this situation, sitting with DC at a cafe about to watch him perform a trick he shows only to other magicians. He pulls four silver dollars from his front pants pocket and hands them to me to examine.

They check out; they are normal silver coins from the turn of the 20th century, beautiful, rare coins. He places one in each corner of the close-up pad. He rolls up his sleeves and displays the palms of his hands - empty. He says to me with a passion only he possesses, Gary, now keep your eyes on these coins, for I will cast a shadow over each one individually with my hands and you will watch as they move mysteriously around the floor. He moves his elegant, thin fingers over the top left coin and wiggles them over it, casting a shadow and causing the coin to vanish inexplicably from beneath his hand and reappear with a clink on the bottom right coin. He looks up at me and smiles, then covers another coin with his right hand and does the same to the one opposite it with his left hand; just a wave six inches above the coins causes them to scamper invisibly across to the left side of the mat. This continues for more than thirty seconds, his hands moving gracefully, covering each coin in a seemingly random sequence and causing the silver dollars to materialize from underneath the shadow of his hands. They leap like living beings, escaping the laws of physics by traveling through a dimension with which only he is familiar. At the end of the

illusion, all four coins lay in the top left corner, and my mouth hangs open at the hinges. He picks up the coins one at a time and drops them into my open palm. They are normal coins; his hands, his magical hands, are not.



I learned how to perform 'Shadow Coins' several weeks after my lunch with David. It still amazes me every time I do it. The coins move under the power of the shadows, like a silhouette of a wind-blown tree branch on silk drapes.



My life is not normal. CFS takes up most of my time. I am constantly concerned with my health. I must pay attention to every detail, must give my self entirely to the ups and downs of my condition, for I never know when a bad spell is right around the corner. Of course, the fatigue is the major symptom, but sufferers complain of a massive array of symptoms: stomach pain, fever, sore joints, nervousness, depression, anxiety, nausea, and many more that are too numerous to list. We all fight these separate issues at the same time that our bodies are battling against the overwhelming malaise that plagues us daily. The fatigue can cause severe headaches, anxiety attacks worthy of hospitalization for fear of suicidal tendencies – trust me, it happens – and fear of being too exhausted to participate in daily activities.

The fear that accompanies CFS is evident in every patient. One time I was talking with a friend – a nice lady, about 35 years old that lives on the West Coast – who also has CFS, and she told me that upon her initial onset of CFS, she was afraid to leave her house because she did not think that she could make it back. She could barely walk, let alone drive and work and function normally.

CFS ruins lives. But my friend conquered her fears, and miraculously she also triumphed over the disease. She has been more or less symptom free – except for the occasional tired spell – for nearly six months now. Congratulations and thank God! May we all be so fortunate some day.



On stage rests a table, a dinner table, covered with a white drapery. Next to the table is an elevator suspended from the ceiling by steel cables. The elevator car is draped with silk and ribbons. A romantic ballad plays in the background. Copperfield and his assistant dance at the front of the stage. The lights rotate, spilling coils of color

and blinding cones of photons into the audience. They sit transfixed by the setup; what are they expecting?

Copperfield steps onto the table with the girl. She hugs him; he pulls away, but in time with the music. She falls to her knees and grabs his leg as he defiantly stares skyward taking three steps backward as she drags across the whiteness. He leaves her on the table and jumps over to the elevator car. A gap of at least five feet separates the car from the ground, the table, and any other possible interference. He closes the door and the car fills with smoke. A hissing sound is heard throughout the crowd as the smoke machine pumps its gaseous fumes into the elevator. The girl picks up a bed sheet and steps to the front of the table. She positions herself on the edge and pulls the sheet over her head. In an instant the sheet falls, and Copperfield is standing on the table where the girl stood no less than a microsecond before. At the exact same time, the elevator car door opens, and the smoke pours from underneath the silk and ribbons. The girl is standing in the elevator.

Copperfield smiles deftly and jumps from the table. He steps underneath the elevator and the girl swings down to his shoulders like a figure skater in preparation for a throw in couples skating. He takes a step, lets her down, then moves his face to within inches from hers. The lights all snap to the stage, then cut, focusing only a faint yellow beam on David and the girl holding each other in the center of the stage. The music ends. The applause is deafening. And after several bows, the curtain closes and the show is over.



I am tired. Fearful and mysterious. Copperfield shakes my hand and gets into his limo. As I go to call my mom on the pay phone for a ride, David rolls down his window and yells, hey kid, want a ride?

RICHARD TONY THOMPSON

Temperature of a Bird

what is not here is
a furnace, cold afternoon
nightline breath approaches
the bird must not die

its body is so new in this box
of atmosphere, it's uncertain
how the lines of his feathers
communicate so beautifully

what is not here is
a body, brittle-boned
sex falls on the tongue
the salt will not survive

the bird is spoken in this room
of pencil marks, so temporary
the silence asks for erasure
pronunciation warms the air

what is not here is
a desire, weak heart
muscle fibers form
the twitch must not speak

ah, the spasm *warmer*

what is not here is
a feather, tickle-coat
snow from the ceiling
the white must not land

officials are met to whether
this bird securely, a string
shall hold his foot
existence undecided

a whisper:
in industrial time
machines weave twine

MIKE PEARSON

The Sour Mash of Math and Love

Neither physical nature nor life can be understood unless we fuse them together as essential factors in the composition of really real things whose interconnections and individual characters constitute the universe.

—Alfred North Whitehead

While sitting at a park bench, she crossed her legs and then smoothed her green checkered dress against her thighs. From her purse she pulled out a plain brown sack from which she extracted one fluorescent-yellow lemon. Her pudgy hands gripped the lemon and squeezed it gently several times. Satisfied with the lemon's firmness, she again reached into her purse, produced a paring knife, and cut the lemon into quarters. She arranged them on a napkin next to her and admired the geometric simplicity of the triangular slices.

Diagonally from her bench sat a man. He stared ahead blankly and wore a blue suit. His face floated above his necktie, and the only noticeable expression was a slight furrow of his eyebrows. The man had been trying to remember how to count hexadecimally on his hands.

The woman reached for a lemon wedge. The man turned his flat face towards the woman as she brought the largest wedge to her lips. He noticed that she wore a nametag that said, "Hello, My name is" and underneath was "Cozy" written in blue magic marker. His eyes blinked. They looked liked marbles as they rolled her lips into focus. She bit down into the sour pulp.

Cozy puckered. A drip of lemon juice ran down her chin as she peeled the flesh away from the rind. She smiled as she chewed. Her top teeth were crowded together fighting for a position in the front of her mouth. The man thought, "She's snaggletoothed."

Distractedly, he began fidgeting. His face contained no expression, but his hands in a flurry began to count.

Cozy noticed the flustered communication of the man's hands. In fact, she stopped chewing on the lemon and stared at him.

Embarrassed, the man looked up. The sky was overcast and a slight breeze bent the tops of the trees. His hands kept counting. She continued chewing and staring. He sat on his hands. "I was counting," he mumbled.

"What?" she said as she ate the second lemon wedge.

"Counting."

She continued to stare at him. "What are you counting?"

"Hexadecimally," he stated.

"Not how, what?"

"Nothing. I'm counting nothing. I was trying to remember how to count hexadecimally on my fingers."

"You were trying to remember how to count hexidecimally?" Cozy eyed the man's suit. It was big. She thought that the coat must be at least a size fifty. His legs shot out into a large pair of scuffed black leather shoes. His socks sagged. They looked as if they were tired and had decided to rest on the man's ankles. She bit into another wedge. The man cleared his throat and shifted his weight uncomfortably. Cozy noticed that when the man moved the suit didn't. Cozy giggled, "Do you want a wedge?"

"No." His face flushed. For the man, Cozy embodied roundness. There were no straight lines in Cozy. She defied them. Round face, round body, and her legs, her legs, he thought, are perfect ellipses. "You know," the man started. "You're a point."

"A what?" Cozy's left eyebrow stood at attention. Cozy's eyebrows were very well trained. She could move them individually. She liked to think that that made her ambidextrous.

"A point, you know, like a dot. And we're sitting on a grid." The man spoke through his teeth causing his S's to whistle. "We're always on a grid," he stated tersely, "and I'm a line." Cozy stared at the man. "Well, I'm not really a line. I'm" The man looked at Cozy. Her curly hair had an unnatural redness to it—it looked like fire he thought. Cozy's right eyebrow quivered and then formed itself into an arch. The man began again, "I'm not a line, I'm more of a ray."

Cozy started to giggle. "I don't want to be a ray," the man said. "I would rather be a point." Cozy smiled and then her ellipses began to shake, and soon Cozy's entire body erupted into spasms of bubbly laughter. Her double chin waggled like a sail at tack. The man looked down at his shoes. A lock of black hair fell across his forehead. He didn't think he said anything funny. "Oh, don't worry, honey," Cozy soothed. "You just sound like my father. All he ever talks about is math."

The man licked his forefinger, pasted the stray hair back in place, and looked back up at Cozy. “What kind of math?”

Cozy remembered her father reading her bedtime stories in binary—they were all so logical. “Mostly number theory.”

The man leaned back. He raised his head so that his jaw pointed up slightly. “Are you a mathematician?”

Cozy paused. She thought about flowers. She thought about pink one-petalled lilies, puce two-petalled euphorbias, burgundy three-petalled trilliums, yellow five-petalled buttercups, white eight-petalled blood roots, thirteen-petalled black-eyed susans, and finally, she thought about field daisies and each of their thirty-four petals. Cozy swooned. She tried to imagine herself as a flower and wished that the sun was shining so she could turn her face towards it. Cozy wondered how many petals she would have as she tried to dig her heels into the ground. “No,” Cozy answered, “I’m a florist. I’m here attending the 10th Annual National Florists Convention.”

“Oh.” The man withdrew into his suit.

Cozy recalled that once, a long time ago, she collected a bouquet of wildflowers, put them in a vase, and brought them to her father in his office. She thought the arrangement would bring life into the room that was wallpapered with graphs and spheroids. She set them down on a pile of papers containing strings of digits, right next to a scientific calculator. Her father stopped working, removed the flowers from the base, and then spread them out over his desk. Cozy remembered thinking how the flowers didn’t fit with the scattered equations, but she watched as her father divided the different flowers into five groups. He asked Cozy what she saw. She recalled that she said that she saw five groups of flowers. He asked her to look closer. Cozy then saw that he divided the flowers up according to the number of petals, and she told her father so. He smiled at his daughter and began telling her about a man named Fibonacci and the Fibonacci sequence. He showed her how her flowers fit into this man’s sequence.

That was her father, Cozy thought, a man who, she used to think, just sat at his desk and tried to qualify the world with numbers. She remembered that on the day she brought him wildflowers she was trying to bring him beauty—she thought he was without. She knows now that he found beauty in numbers, and she also knows that her father accidentally showed her that beauty is in the relationship between numbers and nature. And for her, flowers linked nature to math.

“You know . . .” Cozy began.

“What?” He mumbled as his shoe kicked a pebble.

“One of the speakers at the conference talked about Fibonacci’s sequence and its relationship to flowers.”

“Really?” he said quietly.

“Yeah, I was a little bored.”

“You were bored?”

“One-petal flowers, two-petal flowers, three-petal, five petal . . . golden mean this, golden mean that. I don’t know. For me, it was old news.”

“You’re a florist?”

“Yeah.”

“And you know the Fibonacci sequence?”

Cozy’s eyebrows flattened.

“And you found it boring?” He asked.

Cozy looked away from the man.

The man began talking to his shoes. “I mean . . . I was just wondering why a florist would know, well, why would a florist need to know the Fibonacci sequence?”

Cozy ignored the man’s question. “10011101111,” she stated.

“Binary!” His head snapped back.

“1.”

“1?” He stared at Cozy.

“Um-hmm.”

He paused. “Well, 0101110110010010.”

Cozy laughed at his joke.

“My name’s Cozy Pascal.” Her name slithered out of her mouth. The man’s lips tightened into a thin line as he looked at Cozy. “Mathias,” his lips hummed, “I’m Mathias Tack.” Cozy’s curls sparked.

She looked at the man and tried to visualize him without his big suit. She imagined his head was a point, and if his head were a point, then all of his extremities were rays. She looked at his hands. His fingers were sharp—like little arrows. He did look like a ray she thought

“What’s wrong with being a ray?” Cozy asked Mathias. She bit into her last wedge.

“What?”

“You said earlier that you were a ray and I was a point and that you didn’t like being a ray?” Cozy eyed Mathias. “So what’s wrong with being a ray?”

“Oh, nothing, really. It’s just that I feel like I never have a destination. I would like a destination. A ray goes on forever. You’re lucky.”

“Because I’m a point?”

“Yeah.”

“But a point never gets to go anywhere.”

“A point is always home.”

“It just sits.”

“But a point defines a place. It’s like . . . it’s like it has roots. It’s like a tree.”

“Or maybe, a flower?” Cozy’s eyelashes flickered.

“Yeah, maybe a flower. A ray just goes and goes and goes, but everything begins at a point and everything ends at a point, and two points can contain infinity. It’s far worse to be a ray—I can’t even change directions. I can’t . . .” His voice trailed off. Cozy lowered her eyes to the ground. “That’s sad,” she said.

It began to rain soft drops that speckled the earth. Cozy unfolded her arms, turned her palms up, and began catching the drops. Mathias stood up and looked at the tops of the trees. A raindrop slid down his nose. “Which way are you going?” he asked.

“That way.” Cozy pointed.

“Me too.”

The two began to walk down the path that led through the woods, across the bridge, and over the lawn. He leaned into the wind at an angle of 10° , and she rolled along next to him. The rain patterned Monet lilies on Descartes’ coordinate system. They were moving directly on top of $40^\circ 47' N$. The wind whispered Debussy melodies. Moving east, they crossed $73^\circ 58' W$ and then $73^\circ 57' W$ As they walked, the clouds rumbled, the trees stretched, raindrops splattered, and the flowers opened up and sighed.

CARYN TALTY

Lunch Break

Martin skidded down the dirt road in his old Ford F150. The back bumper had sagged toward the right, and the left-hand indicator had long given out, but the motor still hummed when the mercury dipped below -30° . So Martin saw no reason to junk it. He liked to hang on to things, just in case. Martin was an optimist—he often worked through tough spots, hung in there, buckled down.

He pushed in the lighter, and then he turned on the heat. The road wasn't that bad, but without a morning coffee Martin needed toothpicks for his lids. He had a hard time staying focused as early as six o'clock—so when another pothole made the radio kick up again, he was not surprised. "She don't know she's beautiful..." *Shit. I'm gonna pull the whole front-end out of line*, he thought to himself. Martin slowed down. "A girl like her, she just can't see what the fuss is all about..." *This goddamn thing is rattlin' now.*

Living in the Midwest meant dealing with late winter road hazards. And this winter had been a bit of a wet one. The unexpected December ice storm forced a lot of homeowners to file claims. Came just in time for him and Sally. It kept them going until just before Christmas. He had made it a good one—for Sally. She had been so depressed over the last six months, so he got her that necklace she'd always wanted, with the piece that opened on the charm. She'd piped up when she laid her pretty little eyes on it. Sally found little Martie's birthday photo, the one taken at the hospital, and trimmed the edges of it. *Her baby boy.*

Yeah, Christmas was nice, but then Martin was out of work again for nearly two full months. So when this O'Neill fella called him last night he jumped at the chance. The guy needed an extra man with his crew up in Frankfort, and Martin needed to pay his landlord. O'Neill said they were tuckpointing an old brick church. It was a four-week job, and he'd have a steady check until mid April. The pay sounded great—at least 20 bucks an hour. After the church, the foreman said he'd see what he could do.

If Martin played his cards right, he knew he'd be swimming in dough six months from now. Tuckpointing was a good gig if a guy could land a steady job of it. The fast ones could get near around 32 bucks an hour, and the days were good and long. Until now, Martin had been a rough framer, a job that only offered 17 bucks an hour to start,

and 21 after he had been working for eight years at it full time. It wasn't much more than unskilled labor. Any kid could do it right out of high school.

Martin had done the math; 25 bucks an hour meant \$1,000 a week, not including over-time. Lord knew he needed it. Little Martie was sick, and this dough was going to get him some help.

The lighter popped out. Martin lit the Marlboro Light dangling from his lips, took a long drag, and indicated. He knew the church was up ahead, a few blocks down on the right-hand side. He laughed. The last time he'd been in a church was just before little Martie got diagnosed. They had all been praying for some goddamn miracle. Then the doctors come out with the truth; ain't nothing gonna fix this kid. So now here Martin was, about to fortify the bricks on God's house while his kid's disease continued ripping down the bricks of his own.

Another pothole rattled his thoughts, blaring "But for the Grace of God go I..." from the left-side speaker. *Shit. I've got to pay attention to these goddamn holes.*

Then the cell phone rang. It was the one necessary expense Martin and Sally had to have. Martin hoped it wasn't O'Neill. He knew it was a bad job to show up late on the first day. And he'd heard from Flynn that the old Irishman, nicknamed "the captain" by his crew, could be as much of a pistol as any man.

"Yeah."

"Martin? I was just thinking, should I bring you your lunch? You've left it on the table. Little Martie and I could drive out there."

Martin paused, ran his hand back and forth across the steering wheel. "That's all right, Sal."

"I don't mind, really." There was begging in her voice, and Martin heard it, despite the radio and the rattling exhaust. He knew what the woman was really saying. Two years ago Martie Jr. was diagnosed, and that ended Sally's carefree life. She was once pretty lively. Martin used to take her line dancing, and she'd kick up her high-heeled boots all over the floor. Now they were full of dust, because Sally just didn't get out now, and worse yet, she couldn't have any more kids. What Martie got was genetic.

"Yeah, sure. Bring my lunch."

"Okay, sweetie. Just call me later if you change your mind."

Sally piped up, and this made Martin happy. He hoped it wouldn't cause any trouble, her coming out halfway through his first day. Martin set down the phone and turned into the lot. It was a huge church, had stained glass windows, a steeple, and a long, narrow pitched roof. The entrance was a bit odd, too. One wrong turn and a fella

could wind up taking a side drive that curved around back and hooked up with the rectory, a small building behind the church. It was an old set-up, built within a small forest of trees. *Was probably built in the '30s or '40s*, Martin thought. *They just did things like that back then.*

O'Neill approached the truck before Martin finished parking.

"Conway, how's it goin'?" The man looked like he was nearly sixty; he had wrinkled skin, a freckled complexion, and a thin line of whitish hair. He rested his massive frame of concrete arms, legs, and hands against the side of Martin's hood. O'Neill's only soft spot appeared to be the small pouch that hung over his belt. O'Neill lifted his cap and scratched his head. It was barely March, but the old fella already had a ruddy complexion. *Must be the wind*, thought Martin. *It cuts a man's face like a chainsaw hitting a trunk. The man's probably only fifty, if that.*

"I'm flyin' it."

"Grand, then we'll put ye up on th' steeple." He had a crew of about three there, and they all chuckled. It was a rough bunch, likely to give a newcomer hell—just for the hell of it. Martin chuckled too. He was sure this crowd had had its share of pints after working all them days mixing cement together. They were tight, and he'd have to fit in if he was going to stay on after this church got finished.

"Got yer number from Flynn. Th' man said, 'Conway 'twas no good for carpentry.' But yer a fine lad, so we th'aut y' cud try yer hand at tuckpointin'."

Flynn was the old boss all right, but O'Neill's comments were harmless, and Martin knew it. The old Irish fellas always liked to take the piss. It was all a part of the game. And this was only the start; it was going to be a long day of hazing, so Martin figured he ought to just buckle down and hang in there.

Tuckpointing turned out to be dirty work. After only two hours of mixing, Martin already had cracked, dry hands. *In a week they'll be bloody, for sure, especially in this goddamn weather*, thought Martin. He didn't care, though; bloody hands were a small price to pay.

O'Neill gave Martin the grunt work. He was slinging mortar, stacking bricks, and delivering materials to the three men as they scraped and filled the grooves in the brick from up on the scaffold. The wind was brutal. It came from the west, rattled the steel cages they stood on, and swept up under their skin. *Goddamn it, I should have brought my gloves*, Martin thought.

The morning hours trickled past until O'Neill hollered. "Nearly an hour for th' lunch, lads," at half past eleven. The crew was making great time, so the old fella had relaxed a bit. He began whistling *The Fields of Athan Rye* as he worked. Quinn, a

Galway man himself, joined in. O'Neill gave a wink to Gill. Then he spoke as if he were talking to Quinn when he said, "Well now, young Conway. Ya've made yerself a fine start. Let's see if ya kin keep yerself goin' until lunch. Ya do have a lunch?"

"Yeah, and I could eat, let me tell ya!" said Martin. He thought about Sally. *She's probably packing it right now.* All of a sudden he was glad she had offered, glad he accepted.

"Couldn't we all!" said Gill, a young American fella. *He's probably O'Neill's nephew,* thought Martin. The old Irish lads didn't like to hire somebody they didn't know. There was a high chance this kid was related somehow.

"'Twill be good," said O'Neill. "Only if Quinn's wife packs a big one, and th' comes around t' us."

"Yeah, and only if she doesn't eat half it first!" said Gill.

"Quinn-'twill th' fat wife be bringin' lunch?"

Quinn said nothing.

Martin felt a throb inside his shirt. Then O'Neill gave him a wink.

"Dat lass of yers is a fat one, Quinn. Jaysus, lad! 'Twood cost me a bomb ta' feed dat one."

"For Chrissake, I couldn't do it," said Gill.

Quinn smiled, but said nothing.

"Conway!" O'Neill hollered. "Git m' a wee bit of th' tarp. 'Tis a bit of th' mortar on th' colored windows."

Martin approached with the tarp.

"'Twood be tough to have an ugly wife, Conway."

"Yeah, Quinn-ya've got it rough, man," said Gill.

"I hold me own," said Quinn.

Martin felt tightness in his chest. He was certain the crew would be at him the whole day, but the Quinn fella seemed to be taking the rap instead.

"Take no notice," Martin said to Quinn, on the side. It was an old Irish saying his father had often used.

"'Tis all a part of th' job," said Quinn; then he smiled. *There's a tough man,* thought Martin.

The attitudes sickened him, but he said nothing—new laborers were always guaranteed a rough start with any crew. And Martin was doing it for the money, for Sally and the kid.

"Yer woman is so fat," said Gill to Quinn, "that she'd collapse this goddamn scaffold if she stepped on it!"

“Awe, now—Gill, dat’s not nice, lad. ’Tisn’t true. I tell you what is, now, lads. ’Tis the God’s-honest truth, now. Missus Quinn come over t’ th’ house for supper th’ other night. ’Twas quite a meal, so I was told. Sure ’twas none left for m’self and the wife after Missus Quinn sat down. She feckin’ starved the lot of us—ate a whole bird on her own!”

“What’s the matter, Conway—ya feeling sorry for ol’ Quinn?” asked Gill in something of an Irish twang. *Typical for a first generation kid hanging around with the ol’ lads every day*, thought Martin. *He not only acts the part, but almost sounds it too.*

“Somethin’ like that,” said Martin. He was tired of the shenanigans, sick of the jokes. “Sure, a man can’t help it if he’s got a fat wife,” he said loud enough for the whole crew to hear him, loud enough to make his goddamn point.

Just then Martin spotted a green sedan on the main entrance drive. It’s not Sally, Martin thought. He began to wonder if she would find the right entrance. *She’s already late*, thought Martin. One wrong turn and he could be eating lunch a half-hour after the lads.

“Quinn! Get down off th’ scaffold—yer fat wife is here,” hollered O’Neill when the green vehicle came into full view. Martin was amazed. *This asshole just doesn’t know when to quit.* Martin secretly prayed that Mrs. Quinn wouldn’t hear from inside her Chrysler. Then the car door opened and a long, shapely leg stepped out. The woman was quite a looker, tight jeans, tight ass, small tits.

The whole thing was a joke, a harmless joke—on him. Martin was relieved. With all the hazing he had forgotten about Sally until just that moment. He was anxiously waiting for her to come.

But Mrs. Conway had already arrived, with little Martie in tow. They had managed to slip around the back with a small lunch pail for Martin. Shocked by the talk, she dropped the pail, spilling its contents on the ground beneath her: two ham sandwiches, a bag of Doritos, a can of Pepsi, a Hostess cupcake, and a pair of men’s work gloves. The men didn’t seem to notice, not even when the Pepsi rolled down the slanted driveway to rest under the scaffolding beneath O’Neill’s stone face. She continued to watch, disgusted, as the men all gazed at the strange woman getting out of that green Chrysler. Sally saw Martin looking at the woman. So she just stood there, pressing little Martie against her ample bosom, hoping the pressure would numb the pain of all she’d heard.

Her husband couldn’t help it that he had a fat wife.

SARA NEVILLE

Loss of a Plum

Every time I hold a plum in my hands I am reminded of just how precious life really is. Is this plum hard and soft enough at the same time? Perfect. I put them in the clear produce bag that I can never seem to open at the right side on the first try and continue on with my shopping.

It is September of 1985 and I am six. When my older sister Suzanne and I come home from school we are greeted with a familiar voice, but at the same time unfamiliar because it was not my Mom. My Mom's friend Kathy seems to be extremely overjoyed to see us both she also looks tired. She has a couple of bags packed and tells us that we are going to be staying at our Dad's because Mom was sick.

It is not until I enter the hospital that I realize her sickness is in her hair. This conclusion is made because the only difference I see in my Mom is that she is bald. My Mom is unrecognizable to what I know her to be. This is when a new word becomes part of my limited six-year-old vocabulary—aneurysm. "Honey, your Mom had an aneurysm in her brain," says Dad. My Mom cannot speak to us but her eyes radiate more love than any words or touch. But, I do miss her touch and embrace. Who will tuck me in before bed and give me a kiss goodnight until she gets home?

I try to put myself in my Dad's shoes to fully understand how he seemed to push me over to the side. Did he possibly think I was too young to fully understand? I remember sitting next to my stepmother at the kitchen table later that night. The light over the kitchen table is real bright, almost too bright. On the opposite side are Suz and Dad crying into each other's arms. "Your Mom is probably going to die," he says. After that they hold each other and weep. I don't cry. I just sit there half shocked and half pretending I didn't understand. I don't want my Dad to know that my little soul is breaking because I too need to be held. Later in life I would pretend to fall asleep in the car just so that I could know what it felt like to be held in my Dad's arms. Even then I would pretend.

Two weeks later we visit my Mom in the hospital and she is doing much better. My Dad tells us everything is going to be okay; however, I continue to fear the loss of my Mom. As we walk in the room my Mom is sitting up in front of her untouched lunch tray and her newly born hair is growing into a spike. I eye her untouched plum

on the tray the whole time. My Mom notices my eyes and motions for me to take it with me when we leave. "Go ahead honey, you can have it," I imagine her saying. It is so strange how something left behind as trash in my Mom's eyes was my greatest gift. I held on to that plum so tight—but not too tight—I didn't want to squash it! Then it might die!

As we are walking out towards the car I feel the plum break through my tiny fingers. The whole scene felt like slow motion as the plum fell to the ground. It begins to roll and roll on the black tar as it too began a new life. I quickly ran after it as my heart beat so hard that I thought I might die. Oh no, it is headed for the street! Finally, I catch up to it and as I bent down to pick it up I hear my Dad shout, "NO!" "Don't pick it up, it is dirty, you can't eat it anymore!" I silently obey my Dad and turn to get my last glimpse. It was so hard to leave the plum because I felt that plum to be the last connection I had with my Mom.

I still remember the parking lot in which I lost my plum. Sometimes I drive past the hospital just to see the parking lot and be grateful, grateful that I don't have my Mom's embrace again. September 1985 was my loss of innocence. My loss of innocence might be a good lesson because I will forever experience my life and others to the fullest and always live in the moment. On the other hand, my loss of innocence might have been a lesson not to be learned at such a young age. The inner me was not yet established at six and now I live much of my life in fear and worry.

I still feel a connection to my Mom when I hold a plum in my hand. I am older now and I buy my own plums. Plums are the only fruit I don't allow to go bad before eating. I only buy how many I know I'll eat. Because I won't allow myself to see a plum turn wrinkly, soft, and die.

KIMBERLY S. BOSSLET

Purging the Impersonal Personal Idea—Space

blank *adj.* Empty, voided, bare, (absence) inexpressive, stupid, vacant (dulness); confounded, dazed surprise; absolute, utter (completeness), hidden, unmarked (blindness), closure, impassable (closure).

Attempt to Progress. Heavy head with vacant thoughts and apparently dormant ideas. Write just to write. Interact with aspiring kindling grimacing its confounding smile. Look at other artists with the “gift” whose drafts and ideas are anthologized and criticized because they invoked a change. How did they pass the impassable cloud? Stare blankly at wood grain panel, its inconsistencies the background for condiments and faux plants—inspiring commodities.

idea *n.* 1. That which exists in the mind potentially or actually as a product of mental activity, such as a thought or knowledge; a thought; conception: *many good ideas*. 2. An opinion, conviction, or principle: *upon what do you base your political ideas?* 3. A plan, scheme or method. 4. The gist of a specific action or situation. 5. A notation; fancy. 6. *obsolete*. A mental image of something remembered. 7. *music*. A theme or motif. 8. *Philosophy*. See Kant and Hegel's discussions of idea.

Remembering the past requires space in the usable 6% of your mind from the pressures of the future. Release. What about a history, a period of change, a love story or one of abuse. Personal, I will keep those stories in the file entitled *mine*. Look back, what have I written, space, what about space? Ideas can't exist in space, they can only exist in the mind. Is the mind a space? What about the commodity of idea, or space—or commodity in general of things that can't be bought: love, friendship, family, memories, ideas. Space has a language that surrounds it, language takes up space but ideas are fogged by language. Webster's says an idea is purely a mental activity which would make it uncommodifiable and immune to form.

A concept is the intermediary between ideas and form. The dictionary sees it as an idea, but in art its different. One can have many ideas that all relate to the same concept. The concept is essentially what the goal is.

I. Space: air, area, location, zone, time, object and occupancy. EPHEMERAL.
natural, created, mine, yours, black or luminous, ENVELOPING

II. Idea as space, idea in space, space negates the idea, mental space is personal, the
purging of the mind is catharsis. This page is a space, what happens if my ideas

Fall
From
The
Space
Of
My
Mind?

It would no longer be mine, it would be susceptible to blurry language and interpretation.

III. The page as a metaphor for me. Tree, saw, bleach, plastic, open, it waits: a
beginning, a history, and a desire for a future.
A clouded mind feels like a blank space. How do I transmit my idea to a form
without blurring the concept?

Form *n.* . . . 3. The essence of something as distinguished from its matter. 4. The mode in which a thing exists, acts, or manifests itself; kind; type; variety: *a form of animal life.* . . . 10. A document with blanks for insertion of details or information. 11. Style or manner of presenting ideas or concepts in literary or musical composition. 12. The design, structure, or pattern for a work of art. . . .

Language *n.* **language**, speech, parlance, tongue, mother tongue, native tongue, prose, parent language, *urspache* (*ger.*), Kings English, secret language, cryptology, flowery language, sillabub, rhetoric, poetry, babel, polygot.

Form and language are essentially the same here because the only way to have someone understand an idea is to show it through pictures. Pictographic/ ideomatic language.

A picture denotes a set of ideas that relate to some object. As well, they are multi-lingual.

When we first percieve things our mind takes a picture of the thing, and then translates it into a language that it can understand (this is simple maybe like binary code 01010100001 100010011100 11110011110011).

A picture reflects something larger, invokes memory brings idea into "other" space (other person, some language, any music, any other picture—this all depends on how it is easiest for someone to perceive a thing); once again the picture is translated and the idea or memory becomes new in the other space.

punctuation *n.* 1. The use of standard marks and signs in writing to separate words into sentences, clauses, and phrases in order to clarify meaning. 2. The marks so used. 3. An act or instance of punctuating.

Because of the form and language of the spacial idea is pictographic when signifying the concept there is no need for punctuation.
Because ideas, space, language, time, memories, and commodity are continuous and endless there is no need for punctuation.

End *n.* 1. Either extremity of something that has length. 2. The outside or extreme edge or limit of a space, form, or area, a boundary. 3. The point in time at which an action, event or phenomenon ceases or is completed; conclusion. 4. A result; outcome. 5. The termination of life or existence; death. 6. An ultimate extent; a limit: *the end of one's patience*. 7. a goal. 8. *usually plural*. A remainder or remnant. . . *v.* **ended, ending, ends.**—*tr.* 1. To bring to an end; finish; conclude. To form the end or concluding part of. 3. To bring about the extinction of; destroy.—*intr.* 1. To come to an end; cease. 2. To die.

While writing this I thought of seeing my mother, of graduation, of moving, of buying a car. I thought about other things I have written about and stories I like. I sat on my lumpy chair cushioned with a daisy pillow, and on my blue plaid foam couch. I stared endlessly at a picture of a unicorn that was given to me. I took my empty head and brought it to find food to feed it. I guess it was thinking on its own because I didn't even know I was hungry. While eating I stared at condiments and thought about advertising and how I probably don't even have my own ideas anymore because I live in a public space. I thought about sleep and how coffee doesn't always seem to wake me up, and the philosophy of Hindu art and circular versus linear ideas.

While reading this you had your own thoughts, and sat in your own space. And now you are probably thinking about what I have just given you to think about.

The idea is gone now, no longer mine. It is universal and communal. I am blank and able start new ideas in my own space that I will communicate to you in the future only through e.s.p.

MIKE PEARSON

The Myth of 12-Tone Equal Temperament, Rock Music, and Being in Tune:

*The Unwritten Fallacy of Being a Rock and Roll Guitar
Player*

“Tho what!” Viola lisped. “It’th not like I wanna know where.” She stopped as a tiny bead of sweat rolled down her upper lip leaving a trail of moistened lip fuzz. It perched precariously as her lips quivered tiny S.O.S. messages. “You and that fuckin’ band . . . Wendel Whirl the rock and roll guitar player. Pbbfft,” her lips vibrated discontent, and the bead catapulted into oblivion. “Iconoclatht, my ath!”

Wendel believed in the virtue of playing guitar in a rock band. This made him a societal outcast: a rebel, an artist, a non-conformist. Nobody understood individuality as well as Wendel for he believed that he was the embodiment of individuality. Even the way he dressed was a statement of his own uniqueness. These thoughts empowered him. He would seethe whenever he thought about conformity. Rock music, especially loud, angry, noisy rock music, in Wendel’s fingers was a manifestation of his beliefs.

“It was in Ithaca,” Wendel began.

“Tho what! It doethn’t matter. Ithaca, Olympia, Chicago, Birmingham. I can alwayth tell. I can thmell her or them or whoever it wath on you. You even look different.”

Wendell looked around the kitchen. In the sink were stacks of dirty plates, mugs, and bowls bathing in stagnant water. The sink couldn’t contain the filthy dishes. Every flat surface in the kitchen supported the weight of crusted dinnerware.

Viola first saw Wendel at the Empty Bottle in Chicago. He was tall and thin as a string on his guitar. He looked like most of the other hipster Chicago musicians. She

used to call them “horn-rimmed Jims” because they all wore those geeky horn-rimmed glasses—well, she thought they looked geeky. She didn’t remember noticing him until he was on stage. He was in the first band—the opener’s opener. But as they began their emo/jazz/math-core, she stood transfixed as Wendel pummeled his guitar with sweeping Pete Townshend windmills. He wore his guitar low, way down by his knees. His arms were blurs. Viola was dizzy.

“Why am I with you? Why am I here? Why do you come back?” Viola accented each hypothetical with increased volume. She chopped each word into incendiary morphemes—they may as well have been blanks fired from a .45. He stood staring during her verbal barrage. They bounced off his coat of indifference.

“I pay rent,” Wendel stated.

“You pay rent?” Viola grabbed a bowl from the counter and launched it at Wendel. She missed. It bounced off the wall next to him and dropped to the floor.

Wendel reached into his back pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. He unfolded it and then tried to smooth the creases. He attached it to the fridge with a magnet. The piece of paper was a flyer from New Orleans. It said:

Live at the Voodoo Hall of Music and Magic
Rosco’s Fantastic Plasmatics

(Record Release Party)

Vulva and the Lips

and from Chicago
Wendel Whirl and the

Wonderfuls

LIve, LIve, LIvE

Tonight!!!

Doors 8:00

Playing with Rosco’s Fantastic Plasmatics had been the highlight of the Wonderfuls’ tour. Rosco’s Fantastic Plasmatics were a band that could only be found in obscure record stores. Their records were either vinyl picture discs or CDs that contained one track: one track for 75 minutes. Wendel had listened to them since his freshman year in college, ten years ago. He worshipped them.

Wendel remembered being on stage. The Wonderfuls resonated throughout the concrete room. The cymbals, the vocals, and the guitar screamed slapbacked feedback and distortion for 45 minutes. They were deafening. Wendel had cranked

his amp to its maximum and sustained glorious glissandos with a slide and his violent windmills. His bass player screeched sub-harmonics, and his drummer pounded till his kit screamed. The Wonderfals filled the room with the sound of jet planes and dentist drills. Nobody noticed.

During the Wonderfals' set, Rosco's Fantastic Plasmatics turned the club into a carnival. Rosco himself entered the club on stilts and baptized the audience in showers of tossed sparkly confetti. He wore a long black cape that cascaded to the floor, and on top of his head was a mirrored stovepipe hat. His face was painted iridescent green. While the Wonderfals played, Rosco Plasmatic entertained the audience with parlor tricks. Rosco could snap fire with his fingertips.

Wendel whirled harder. His pick sliced his strings, his amp groaned, his chords bent. Wendel catapulted himself into the air. His feet tap-danced dissonance and fury. His toes kissed the floor.

"I don't give a shit about your thtupid thowth!" Viola spat.

"But it's Rosco's Fantastic Plasmatics. Rosco's Fantastic fucking Plasmatics!" Wendel stared at Viola. "They're my favorite band."

At the New Orleans's show, Rosco Plasmatic fronted a trio: Hammond B-3, drums, and electric accordion. Rosco wore a slick pompadour, red velour bell-bottomed pants and a white frilled tuxedo shirt. His tweaked and greasy dark moustache wrapped around his upper lip in a thin line beneath his pointed nose. This moustache along with his black goatee and plucked triangular eyebrows sucked the color from his face like a black hole. His Hammond swirled cacophonous kaleidoscope tones in shades of dark purple, muted oranges, and mustard yellows. The accordion spoke in tongues of drones, and the drummers kit, made from gas tanks, oil drums, and thunder sheets, churned like a steel factory in WW II. Wendel's ears rang as he thought about it.

"Who'th the thlut thith time? Whadya do with her?"

"Aren't you happy for me . . . I played a show with . . ."

"Wath she blonde? Young?"

". . . we got offered to do some dates with Rosco's Fantastic Plasmatics!"

"I don't care. Wath it thome college chick? Thome punk rock girl? You athhole!" *Wendel remembered meeting Viola four years ago. It was at the Empty Bottle. He saw her from stage. He first noticed that she was staring at The Wonderfals from the back of the club. Halfway through their set, she moved to a spot directly in front of Wendel. She smiled and swayed her hips while staring directly at him. Every*

time Wendel climbed up on the monitor and held his guitar between his legs she cheered.

After their show, Wendel sat at his band's T-shirt booth. Viola stumbled up with a beer in each hand. He admired the vinyl maid's outfit that she wore, her sleeves of tattoos, and the fishnets that covered her legs. He even liked her hair. She had dyed it red like a fire truck. Her hair screamed. It was straight until it hit her shoulders and then reversed itself in a curlicue. Her bangs were cut in a severe straight line directly above her eyebrows. The bangs never moved—they seemed glued to her forehead. She said, "I love your band. You guyth fuckin' rocked! Ya wanna beer?" She offered him an Old Style can. He took the can from her and read the letters tattooed across the knuckles of her right hand: *f r e e*. "What's free?" Wendell asked. Viola shifted her can of beer to her right hand, made a fist with her left, and then held her fist in front of Wendel. The letters were: *c u n t*. She smiled, and her tongue slid between the gap in her two front teeth. It flickered like a worm. Wendel was hooked. "I don't believe in thex. I believe in fuckin'," Viola stated.

"Anyone? Everyone?" Wendel laughed.

"Mmm. Only nithe boyth . . . who I choothe," Viola cooed.

She sat down next to him in the merchandise booth and introduced herself. She told him about the porn store she worked at, and later that night, she looked him directly in the eyes and said, "I have a pair of handcuffth and thome other toyth we could play with." Wendel went home with her. "No, she wasn't blonde. She wasn't punk rock. She looked like some kind of secretary."

"What! You fuck around on me with thome bimbo thecretary . . ."

"She's an intern at Sony records."

"An intern? What, did you go home with her after getting drunk? Tell me you weren't thober. I can thmell her goddamn perfume! Oh, God. You thellout. You thlime." Viola pushed Wendel away from the fridge. "Where'th the rent?"

"What?"

"Gimme the rent money. You thaid you came back becauthe you pay rent. Where'th it at?"

"I don't have it. We didn't make very much money this tour, but I'm going to send a demo to . . ." Wendel's voice trailed off.

A couple of years ago, Wendel's and Viola's mutual friend—a former musician turned tarot card reader/psychic, who now worked days in the porn shop with Viola—told the couple that Wendel was a fifth and Viola a third. "What?" Viola had said. "Let me explain," began the friend. "Wendel plays guitar, or rather, the guitar plays

Wendel. *Guitarists always fantasize that they are mastering their instrument or expressing themselves but really, the guitar masters them and defines their life. Now, listen to how Wendel plays. Everything he does is based on huge rock-n-roll power chords . . . ya know like Sabbath, AC/DC, . . . uh, cock rock. All he's done is dress it up in a different uniform.*" The friend stopped as she noticed that Wendel looked offended. "Hang on a second, Wendel, ya know I'm psychic, and I do have a point. I'm not insulting your artistic vision." She giggled as she said artistic vision. "Wendel, you're a fifth because all of the power chords you use are fifths, musically speaking, of course. You gravitate towards that interval (fifths) because they are indifferent . . . solid . . . like you. Fifths have no mood or emotion. Viola, you're a third," the friend stated. Viola looked puzzled. "What'th a third?" she said. The friend answered, "A third defines whether a chord is major or minor. It determines the mood of a chord: happy or sad. Now, both of you together make a chord—well, technically, a diad—but if you include your relationship with each other, then you have a base. So the base is the root note; you're the third, Viola, and Wendel is the fifth. A chord." The friend looked at Wendel and Viola. "What are you talking about?" asked Wendel. The friend sighed. "It's simple. The instrument you play is tuned to 12-Tone Equal Temperament which means that if the fifths are in tune, then the thirds are always out of tune, well, most of the time. In some keys the thirds are in tune. Right now, you two are in that key. You are in tune. Occasionally, Viola changes the mood of the relationship just like the third does in a chord. For you, Wendel, Viola's moods don't really affect you. I mean, honestly, Wendel, nothing phases you. You don't give a shit about anything except music. So this relationship with Viola is fine with you because so far you both have been in tune with each other. But some day you're going to find that you are in one of those keys where the third is always out of tune with the fifth and you're going to fight. And it's going to drive you crazy, Wendel. Crazy because you don't know how to understand, deal with, or resolve the out-of-tuneness."

"You don't have rent, again? Again?" Viola screamed. "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you."

Wendel turned from the kitchen, walked into the front room, and pulled his guitar out of his gig bag.

Viola's eyebrows narrowed. Her cheek twitched.

Wendel plugged in his pedals and his guitar and then turned on his amp. He began to strum.

Viola's lips tightened. She whispered, "You asshole!"

Wendel turned his back towards Viola.

“Wendel,” Viola said between her teeth.

Wendel began adjusting his pedals.

“Wendel,” she said louder.

He increased the distortion, he twisted his delay knob. He

“Wendel, Wendel, Wendel!” she screamed.

. . . . adjusted the phaser until the sound of his guitar resembled the sound of a vacuum cleaner.

“Fuckin’ bathtard,” she said.

Wendel began to whirl.

Viola began to chant, “Wendel Whirl the wonderful. You athhole, fucker, bastard.” She then began to accompany herself by stamping her feet and by banging a metal spoon and a skillet on top of the oven. It sounded like this:

Boo-Ka-Crash Boo-Ka-Crash Boo-Ka-Crash

Wen-del-Whirl You Ath-Hole-Fuck-er Bath——tard

Wendel closed his eyes and hunched over his guitar. His arm became a flesh colored disk as he windmilled with increasing speed and fury. Power chords sprang from the strings like demons escaping from hell: they hissed, they spat, they screamed, they morphed, and they molested Viola’s eardrums.

She chanted louder until her faced turned red, and the veins in her neck bulged like cords of taut rope. She accented her song with cymbal crashes coaxed from the mis-matched set of wine and juice glasses that she threw against the walls and the floor.

Wendel imagined he was on stage opening for Rosco’s Fantastic Plasmatics.

She attacked the piles of plates and bowls with her skillet scattering fragments of porcelain in popcorn tangents. She kicked over the two chairs at the table, and then she saw Wendel, his back still turned, framed by the kitchen door. She stared at him for a moment. Her face relaxed. Her body breathed. She tightened her grip on the skillet, ran three steps towards Wendel, and threw the skillet with every ounce of frustration.

Wendel saw stars.

Contributor's Notes

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Katie Fitzgerald will graduate in December 2002 with a double major in painting and Spanish.

Gary L. McDowell is a junior English major. After receiving his B.A., he hopes to continue his education by pursuing his MFA degree in fiction writing. He enjoys reading contemporary fiction and practicing magic. He one day hopes to write literary novels of his own much like his favorite authors Kevin Canty, Michael Chabon, and Marilynne Robinson. He is originally from Cary, Illinois.

Michael McSherry is a junior art major with an emphasis in drawing. His interests span many mediums: video, music, photography.

Sara Neville is a senior English major. She plans to attend graduate school next fall.

Mike Pearson is currently student teaching at Dundee-Crown High School. Prior to pursuing his English degree, he performed and toured with Chicago's punk/ska act, the Blue Meanies.

Peter Sartori, a graduate of NIU, is a middle school teacher in the southwest suburbs. He lives on a quiet street in Joliet and enjoys writing in the wee hours of the morning before work.

Caryn Talty is a second-year graduate student in the English department. She earned a B.S. degree from NIU, and spent 6 years teaching in the public school system before returning to her roots: reading and writing without the arithmetic.

Richard Tony Thompson is a graduate student of linguistics at NIU. He lives in DeKalb, has a son named Noah, and is a writer of plays and poetry.



Submit your poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction to *Towers* for its Year 2003 issue.

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Submit two (2) copies of your work. No staples please; paper clips acceptable.

The first copy must have, in the upper right hand corner of the first page: your name, address (include email if you have it), phone number, social security number, title of the piece, and its genre (poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction).

The second copy **must be** anonymous: author's name (and personal information) cannot appear anywhere on this manuscript.

Turn submissions in to the *Towers* mailbox located at the English Department in Reavis Hall. Manuscripts cannot be returned. Notification of publication will be in February 2002. Due to the high volume of submissions, only those whose work is published in the magazine will be notified.

Deadline for submissions is December 1, 2002.

Inquiries should be directed to Dr. Amy Newman at anewman@niu.edu or 815.753.6651.



BENJAMIN BELICK

Unconscious Caren

Seems farewell would be forgotten at a time

not like this at all, things seem, rather

timid and tame like the calm of

rain...ninety degree departure...soft summer aftermath

(fresh cut grass) (the smell)

I'll meet you there...your hair

never changes.