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# 2009 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

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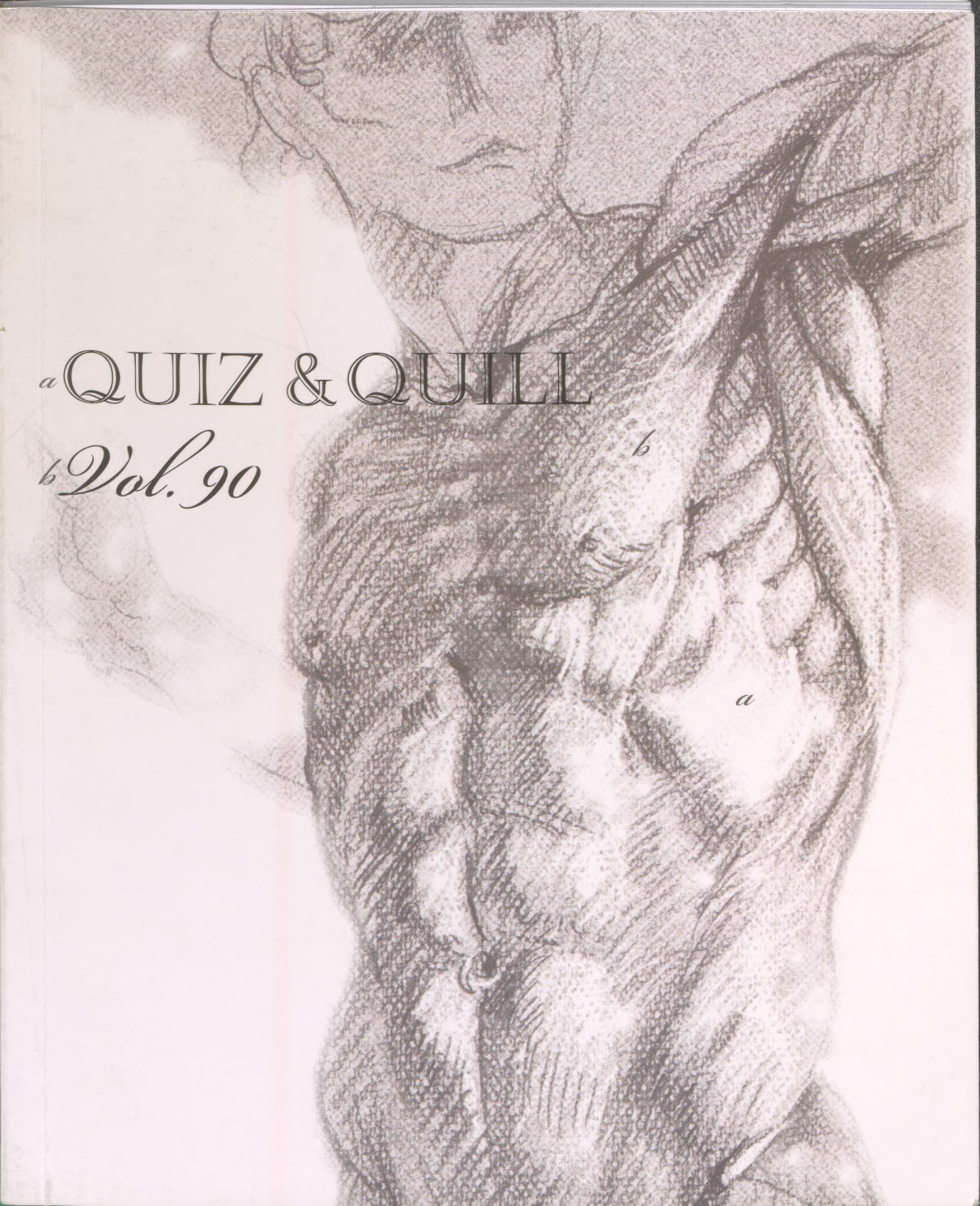
a QUIZ & QUILL
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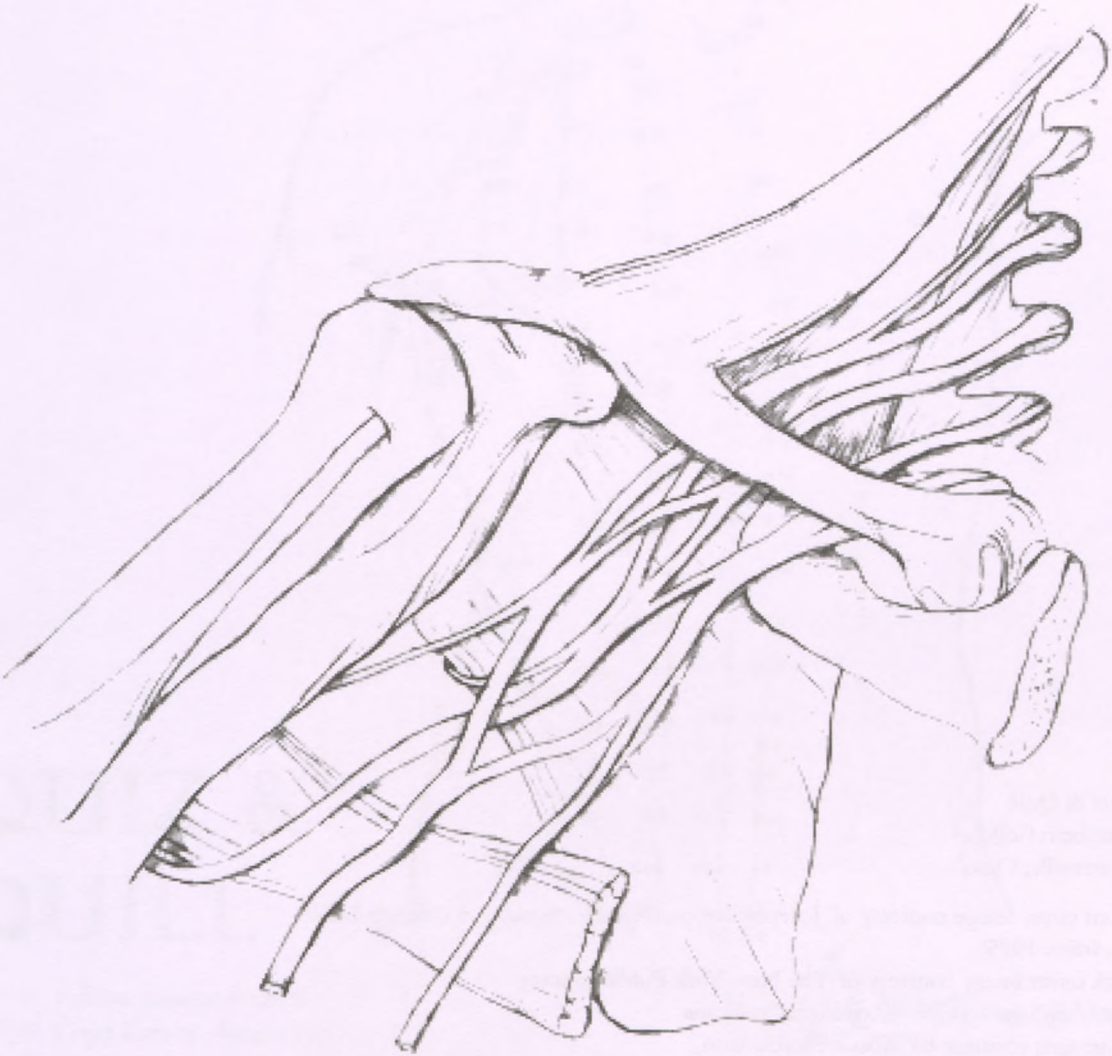

# QUIZ&QUILL

*Spring Magazine 2009*

*Volume 90*

Quiz & Quill
Otterbein College
Westerville, Ohio

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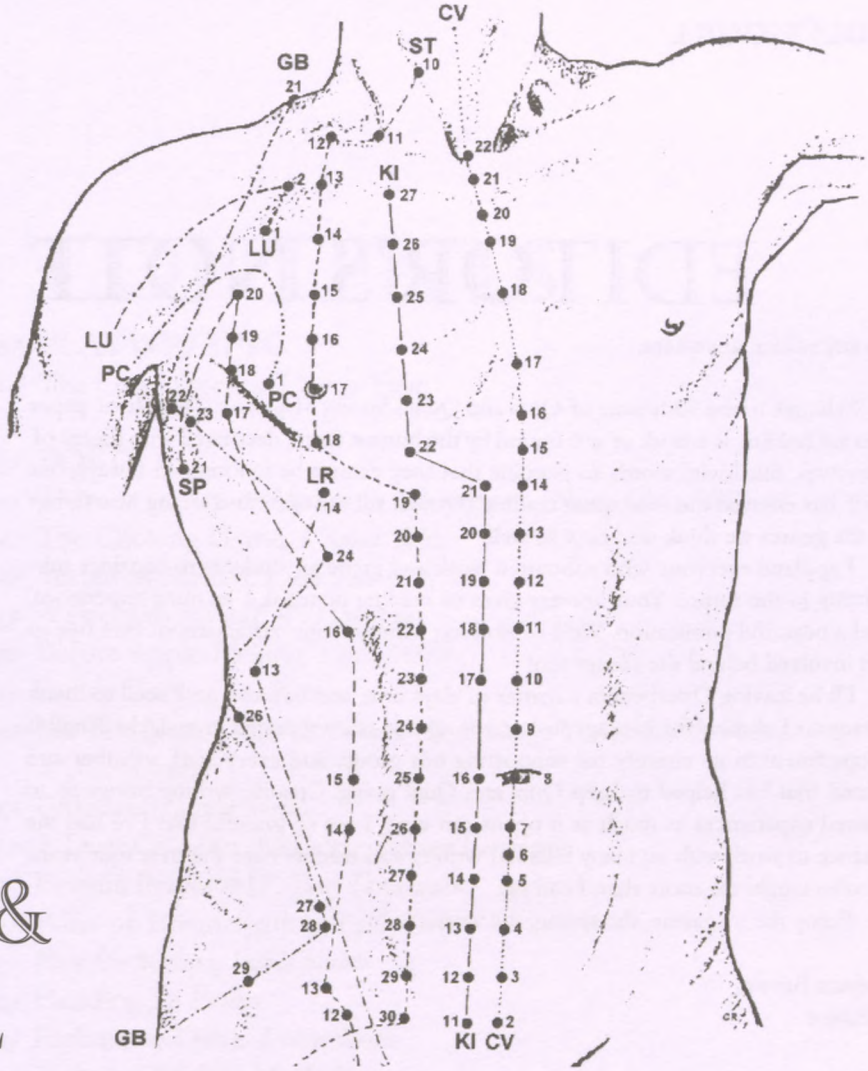


# QUIZ & QUILL

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

To any reader, anywhere,

Welcome to the 90th issue of Quiz and Quill's Spring Magazine. The pile of paper you are holding is a work of art: bound by the human form, decorated with pieces of ourselves, filled with words so genuine that they cannot be ignored. As always, our staff has enjoyed the time spent reading through submissions and seeing new things in the genres we think we know so well.

I applaud everyone who submitted work and invite all students to consider submitting in the future. Your bravery gives us reading material, a learning experience, and a beautiful publication. We'd be nothing without your participation. Feel free to get involved behind the scenes too!

I'll be leaving Otterbein in a matter of days now, and before I go I need to thank Shannon Lakanen for courageously advising our scatterbrained crowd, the English Department in its entirety for supporting our group, and every staff member and friend that has helped to keep Quiz and Quill going. Creative writing brings us to shared experiences as much as it opens our eyes; I am so grateful that I've had the chance to work with so many talented writers and readers over the past four years. You've taught me more than I can say.

Enjoy the magazine, the spring, the world…

Joanna Brown,
Editor

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# [a] THE CONNOISSEURS

[b] Vianca Yohn

Setting: The patio of a small, privately-owned café. Mid-afternoon. Present-day.

Characters: DONAHUE, a commissioned artist. He is technically prolific, but his artistic drive is strictly financial; he lacks any sort of emotional attachment to his—or anyone else's—art. Although clean-cut and sharply dressed, he is irritable and haggard. He also does not take well to criticism and is fairly close-minded in regards to others' opinions.

LUCIANO, a freelancing artist. Although financially unstable, he is perfectly happy with his "starving artist" lifestyle, which is made evident by his relatively worn clothing and overall scruffiness. He is calm, phlegmatic, and friendly.

DHARMA, dear friend and muse of LUCIANO and owner of the café at which the scene takes place. She is a young, vivacious, beautiful woman.

(Lights up on the front patio of a small café. There are three or four round, wrought iron tables, each with two matching chairs. Two of the tables are occupied: one by DONAHUE and another by LUCIANO. DONAHUE is simultaneously on his cell phone and his laptop, speaking to a potential client and typing up notes as he picks at a generous slice of cheesecake; in an unoccupied chair beside him he has placed his leather laptop bag. In contrast, LUCIANO'S table is bare, and his inexpensive art portfolio is on the ground, leaning against the side of his seat. He is stretched out, arms folded loosely across his chest, contentedly watching the comings and goings of the people on the street.)

DONAHUE: Uh-huh…yes, here it is. Okay, let me make sure my notes are correct: you want a Monet-esque watercolor of this photograph, treated and framed, by the fourteenth of November? (pause) Oh, yes, ma'am; that's plenty of time. Now, does twelve hundred sound reasonable? (pause) Well, of course, ma'am, you don't have to pay until I deliver the painting to you, but I like to make a point of establishing the price ahead of time—the term "starving artist" exists for a reason, after all. (laughs) Yes, even we artists have bills to pay. All right…yes, ma'am…absolutely, ma'am…all right. I'll get right on it. (pause) No, ma'am—thank you.

(About halfway through the above monologue, LUCIANO diverts his attention to DONAHUE, innocently listening in to the remainder of the negotiations. DONAHUE ends the call, sets the phone on the table, and focuses on his cheesecake. After a moment he notices that LUCIANO is unabashedly watching him and immediately becomes uncomfortable.)

DONAHUE: Can I help you?

LUCIANO: Just keep doing what you're doing.

DONAHUE: And that would be…?

LUCIANO: Arranging commissions, making a living. Eating your cheesecake.

DONAHUE: What's so fascinating about my eating a slice of cheesecake?

LUCIANO: Everything.

(Silence. DONAHUE is clearly still uncomfortable, but—despite himself—he is intrigued by LUCIANO. Still aware that he is being watched, he makes to take another bite out of his cheesecake, then slowly sets down his fork.)

DONAHUE: So do you commission, too?

LUCIANO: Something like that. How could you tell?

DONAHUE: Just a guess. (slowly and without genuine interest) I couldn't help but notice your portfolio.

LUCIANO: (without regard to DONAHUE'S condescending tone) Well, it isn't much, but it's my everything.

(DONAHUE takes a moment to absorb LUCIANO'S statement. Before he can make some sort of reply, DHARMA enters. She addresses both men simultaneously, even though she knows that they are not fully acquainted.)

DHARMA: Hey, fellas. Sorry about the delay; I got distracted on my way out.

LUCIANO: By that handsome suitor of yours who has been stopping in every Tuesday for the past three months?

DHARMA: (laughing) That's the one…but enough about me. (to LUCIANO, chidingly) So are you getting something or what?

LUCINAO: (good-naturedly) I'm sorry, Dharma, but I'm afraid I can only loiter today; I'm a little on the poor side right now.

DHARMA: All the more reason I should feed you. C'mon, order something—my treat.

LUCIANO: Really, Dharma, it's okay—

DHARMA: One Blondie with an iced tea coming up. (She smiles, then turns to

DONAHUE) Do you need anything else, sir?

DONAHUE: I'd like a cappuccino.

DHARMA: Sure thing. (Exits.)

LUCIANO: (after a short silence) Sure is a nice lady, Dharma.

DONAHUE: Do you know her personally?

LUCIANO: Yeah.

DONAHUE: (after another short silence) And…?

LUCIANO: Oh…sorry. (frankly, but not accusingly) I didn't know you wanted me to elaborate; you didn't seem so interested in having a conversation with me.

DONAHUE: (subtly insincere) Oh…did I not? I apologize; I was preoccupied.

LUCIANO: That's understandable. Like you said—"even we artists have bills to pay." (pause) Would you mind terribly if I came to join you at your table? Talking like this feels so... impersonal.

DONAHUE: Oh…of course.

(DONAHUE puts away his laptop as LUCIANO takes his portfolio and pulls up a chair at DONAHUE'S table.)

LUCIANO: Thanks.

DONAHUE: …you're welcome.

LUCIANO: Now, about Dharma and me. Yeah, we know each other personally, but purely platonically. You see, for many, many years she's modeled for my work. In fact, she's been my muse ever since we first met….which is a pretty long time, let me tell you. It helps that she doesn't stay the same woman for very long, if you know what I mean. (laughs) Well, I guess that doesn't make a whole lot of sense to anyone who doesn't know her. You see, every month she's…well…a new woman, you know? Like last month she was a goddess, with golden locks and porcelain complexion…and the month before she was like an orphaned child, with doleful eyes and a solemn smile. And this month she's a…a…a sort of femme fatale, I guess. Wouldn't you agree?

DONAHUE: I suppose so….

LUCIANO: (as though he had not heard DONAHUE) You know, I have entire sketchbooks dedicated to her different likenesses. Every time she changes, I have to find time to sketch her. And you know what else? I'm pretty sure she hasn't repeated any yet. That's actually why I'm here today—to arrange an appointment with her so I can sketch the…what did I say? "Femme fatale"?

DONAHUE: Uh…sure.

LUCIANO: (still speaking mostly to himself) It really is a wonderful thing, capturing a person's essence in something visible, something tangible, something…eternal! That's it: eternal. Or so we like to hope, anyway, right? (laughs) And I just can't get over how particularly multifaceted and dynamic Dharma is.

DONAHUE: …indeed.

LUCIANO: What really gets me, though, is that she wasn't that into art when I first met her. In fact, for the longest time she thought I was nuts for being an artist in general, let alone one in freelance. It certainly doesn't always put bread on the table…am I right? (nudges DONAHUE, who glares distastefully at him) But she warmed up to my lifestyle after she saw my artwork. She said it "inspired her to see the beauty in everything." What a compliment, right? And now she's a sort-of unofficial…gah. What's the word? Like "art buff," but fancier…

DONAHUE: (darkly) "Dilettante"?

LUCIANO: Yeah! But not the negative connotation…the positive one. She likes art for the beauty and expression in it, not the technique or the money…thank goodness. (laughs) Art isn't really a profession you wanna go into if you wanna make big bucks, am I right?

(Awkward silence.)

LUCIANO: Uh…anyway. What kind of stuff do you do?

DONAHUE: Whatever I'm asked to do.

LUCIANO: (mildly surprised) Really?

DONAHUE: Didn't you say that you commission, too?

LUCIANO: Something like that.

DONAHUE: And what is that supposed to mean?

LUCIANO: Well…okay. When I hear the word "commissioning," I think of artists

who are told what to create and exactly how to create it. But see, I consider myself to be involved in freelance, which means I can create whatever I want, then find a venue of people who like my art for what it is, not what it could be.

DONAHUE: (offended) My apologies; I didn't realize there was a difference.

LUCIANO: Maybe there isn't; that's just how I see it.

DONAHUE: …I see.

LUCIANO: Well, to each his own, right? So are you working on anything right now?

DONAHUE: Yes.

(Brief pause.)

LUCIANO: What is it?

DONAHUE: A recreation of a photograph.

LUCIANO: Of…?

DONAHUE: (impatiently) Why do you want to know?

LUCIANO: Just curious. You know…making small talk, artist-to-artist.

(DHARMA enters.)

DHARMA: Dang, boys, I am so sorry. That dang guy—

LUCIANO: It's all right, Dharma. (accepting Blondie and tea) I owe you another one.

DHARMA: Don't worry about it, Sugar. (sets cappuccino in front of DONAHUE, who nods but does not speak) Can I get anything else for ya'?

LUCIANO: Actually, I was wondering when you're getting off work today.

DHARMA: Uh-oh. Am I in for another night of sitting?

LUCIANO: If you're up to it.

DHARMA: Oh, Sugar, you know I'm always up to posing for your drawings. I should be getting off in a few minutes, actually. You gonna wait for me here?

LUCIANO: Of course.

DHARMA: All righty, then. I should probably head back in; just wave through the window if you need anything.

LUCIANO: Will do.

(DHARMA exits. Brief silence.)

DONAHUE: (somewhat smugly) "Your place"? Is that your studio or your home?

LUCIANO: Both.

DONAHUE: (sharply, accusingly) You really aren't much of an artist, are you?

(LUCIANO, unfazed, takes a moment to consider this.)

LUCIANO: …that depends.

DONAHUE: (frustrated) Does it, now? I suppose you're going to launch into another nonsensical rant about how art is about capturing emotion and life and the human condition and all that drivel? About how artists should live to create for the sake of the soul or mankind or oneself, not for money or fame or superiority? Or maybe you're just going to sum it all up with a cryptic little epigram that makes sense to nobody but you?

LUCIANO: …something like that.

(DONAHUE scowls, stands, and gathers his things.)

DONAHUE: Well, if all of that works out for you, I would be positively astonished. You can pour all of yourself into your artwork, but what good will it do you if you can't sell it? Maybe it's enlightening and therapeutic to do so, but all it ultimately does is leave you penniless and exhausted. You are wasting your life, your resources, and your time on things that won't matter because nobody knows them; nobody will know them because they don't want them; and they don't want them because you are catering not to their wishes, but yours. Do you know what you are? You are selfish.

LUCIANO: Whoa, man…calm down. I didn't mean to offend you—

DONAHUE: You "didn't mean to offend" me? Really? Is that why you've been sitting here, making a mockery of my career, insinuating that I am a dilettante, an amateur…a fake?

LUCIANO: C'mon, man, I didn't mean—

DONAHUE: Don't you talk to me as though you know me! You know nothing about me or my work!

LUCIANO: Touché. So just sit down and tell me more about—

DONAHUE: Oh, shut up.

(DONAHUE pulls his wallet out of his pocket, removes a wad of cash without regard to the amount, throws it on the table, and exits. A moment later, DHARMA enters.)

DHARMA: So. Did you make a new friend today?

LUCIANO: Something like that. He's certainly an interesting character.

DHARMA: Most of the people around here are.

LUCIANO: (laughs) I concur. You ready to go?

DHARMA: Just about. Just let me clean all this up, and then we can go.

(DHARMA clears tables and exits. In the silence, LUCIANO gazes in the direction in which DONAHUE left and slowly shakes his head, smiling. He then takes his portfolio in one hand and waits for DHARMA, who promptly re-enters.)

DHARMA: By the way, I had quite a few customers ask about you and your work, and they were throwing a lot of zeroes around. Interested?

LUCIANO: Of course I am, as long as they are.

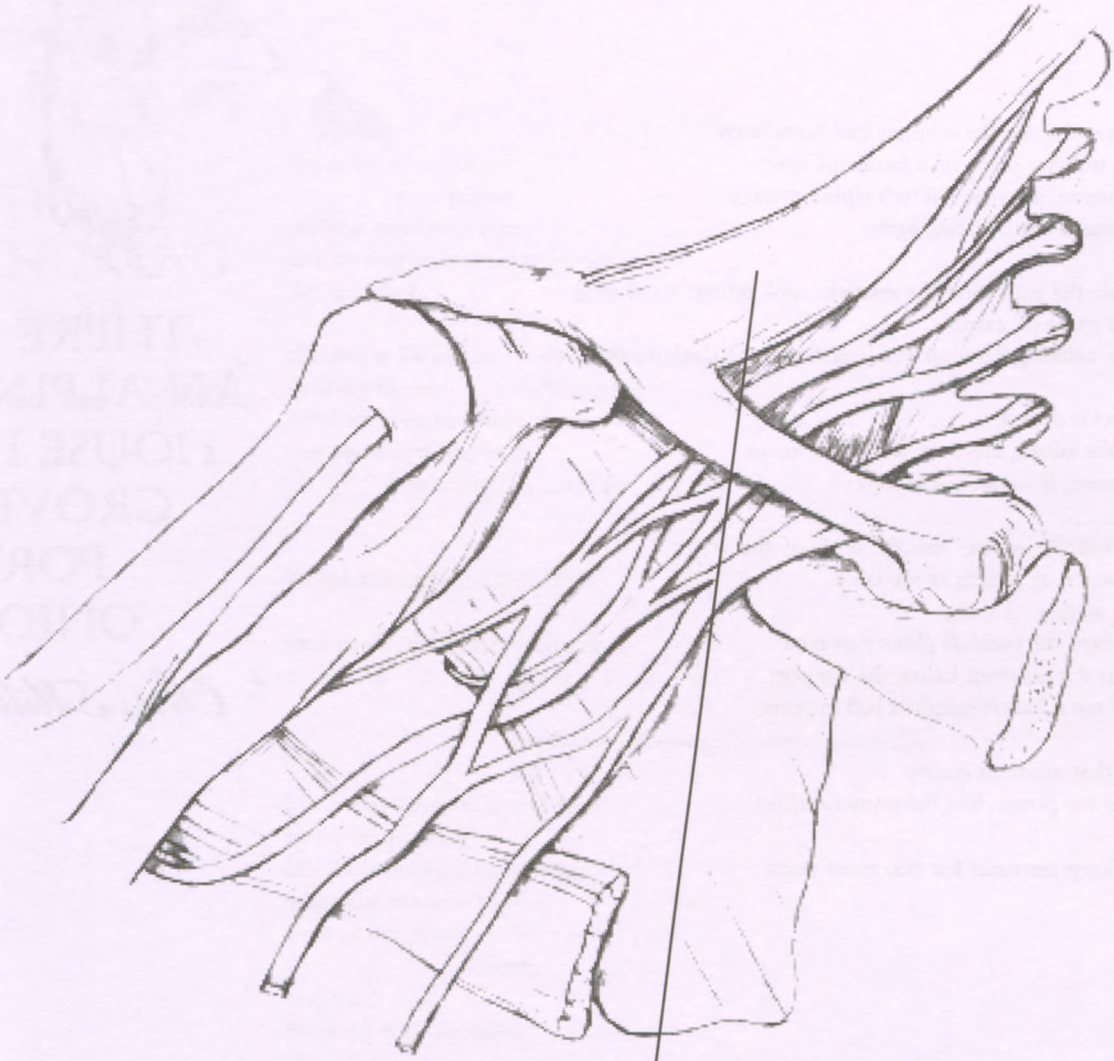
DHARMA: Sugar, they loved the drawings in the café. They're definitely interested.

LUCIANO: Then that's good enough for me.

DHARMA: Good. Now—(kisses LUCIANO on the cheek and links her arm through his)—let's go make some art.

(They share a look and a smile, then exit.)

(Blackout.)



# POETRY

It was the day the country had been born
the walking seeds of a family of four
gathered, at uncle Andre's alpine cottage
to watch the bursting lights

After the explosion the relatives took refuge
in a game of cards
The calming flame of the hearth and the duck decorations

quickly dulled
to the adults, eye-level with their knees
I asked, *What are you playing?*

*"It's not for you son,"* was the reply of the
absence of a chair at the table

I heard the baseball glove that rests
near the entrance below the car port
tell me it hadn't caught a ball in years

In that moment *Euchre*
had the power, like the mystery of *sex*

to keep me quiet for two more years

a THERE IS
AN ALPINE
HOUSE IN
GROVE-
PORT
OHIO..

b *Chris Mille*

# THE CHOKING GAME

*Vianca Yohn*

life is like screaming
into a pillow
pressed onto your face
smothering on cotton-polyester
dry-mouthed, light-headed

clawing at the fabric, flesh
drawing blood, shedding tears
adrenaline, endorphins, sweat
one second, riding high
next second, falling fast

*I'll kill him*

kickpunchscratchlaughtugflail

*unless He kills me first*

pray for fresh air, free movement,
r e d e m p t i o n

*ohmyGodohmyGodohmyGodohmyGodohmyGod*

life is that burst of empty light
heavy air, pouring
like molasses into your lungs
when the pressure's gone,
even as the pillow
looms
overhead
mocking with promises
of

*I'm not done yet.*

Her words
fall from her mouth
like I imagine
her pink watermelon ice cream
used to melt.

She fondly dreams
and shares
of smaller times,
when one day
seemed like ten
and a fifteen minute car ride
took all day.

# [a] YESTERDAY MELTED

[b] *Lillie Teeter*

# A POEM TO MYSELF

*Wes Jamison*

Now as I lay my
pen to paper, I am impaling him,
leaving him recumbent on a spike.
Crucifying him.
Thumbtacks hold down his loose skin.
I gut him now. For you.
Each line,
each *o*,
an incision.

I want you to know:
I named him Thomas because
you admired the "Love Song" so much.

Weeks now I've spent coddling him
and reading his books.
I had practically turned myself into a vagrant.
All for you.

I had delusions that if I brushed my teeth
with him and kept him alive –
I would get back,
back to you – after all,
truth in circuit lies.

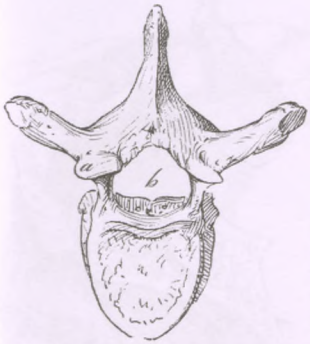
You are every part of me,
and this is my attempt to scratch my
way back: each word
a staple or a stitch;
each word –
each word a bit of glass
resting under his eyelids.

Each word I write is another
transcribed from Prufrock's song –
hoping that in doing this, I
will bring you back –
put you back
inside of me.

# BEFORE APPLE-PICKING

*Chris Mille*

We sway like two twines of the spider's silk
touching in the softness of the calm
And there are hushed bales of hay
Around us, maybe several pails of milk
that I didn't fill upon some giving
But I am off to apple picking now
Foggy undertones of light appeal the dawn
Some crescent moon: A shoveled peach.
Hurry the nestling owl and wakened fawn.
I cannot undress your presence from my skin
I got from dreaming on that tranquil reach
in that Rivendell of urchins
where our bodies went to sleep
But we revived
on the other side of oceans
And I could feel
What form of spirit I would breathe.
In that new existence somewhere
reaching into my body
picking my most delicious pear
consuming, all except its seed
I forget the apples of my working
and attend to those of subtle tip
Two seas to tame the tempest
rising up between our thighs
The weathering of conquest
asserts no claim
For we have had all
of apple-picking: of death
In the spans
of breath
and long awaited winters
to the harvest we tended in fall
Warm in my hands, graceful
Covering
Sweet nectar of our budding
the suckling of spring
Were he not to be seen,
The ghost of the hummingbird might say
The picking is good here, where there are no seasons
and ripe apples, when picked in sleeping,
create Eden



# FACING FORTY

*Claire Parson*

Man facing forty
Sets down his coffee cup
Advertising a muffler shop
Next to last night's beer bottles
And an overflowing ashtray
Squinting he thinks, "I need to quit drinking"
"It is starting to show around your eyes"
His mother just last week mentioned
He was thinking it only showed around his waist
While he sucked in his breath

Across from the kitchen
A woman with smeared makeup and a wrinkled shirt
Sits on a plaid couch
Jeans curled up like a dog
Lying at her feet
"I need to get going" says she
"It was nice to meet you" says he
"Nice to meet you too" comes her reply
As she zips and snaps the once discarded jeans
"I'll call you" he chokes
As she leaves, her shoes in hand

I took another one of your boyfriend's apples from the fridge and stabbed it with my pen… So I could smoke weed out of it.

You like me when I'm stoned and funny,
and I could spend the rest of my life
trying to make you smile and look at me
The way you do.

But that friend of yours—that fiancé,
He follows you with his spine of insecurities, bent crooked with his warped love.
If he were not your boy, he would be your stalker.
And we rarely get time to be alone together, because he is my roommate, and
You are his.
I think he knows, and I think
Everyone else does, too.

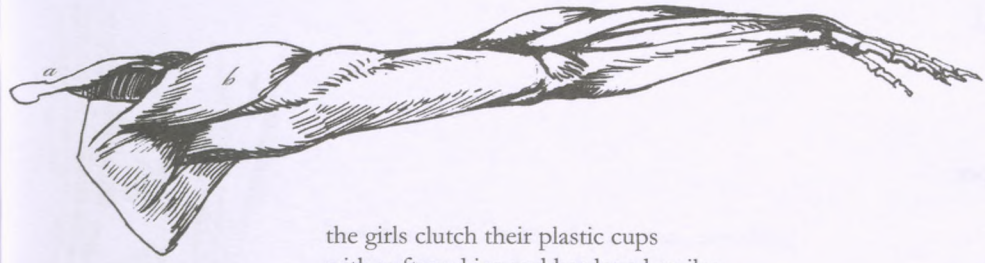
And I can't ask you to help me hook up with your best friend anymore,
because I might betray you.
But I can hear you having sex with that boy of yours. And when I was drunk and belligerent, I said, 'fuck you' for moaning during sex. And I got in my car and drove half way across the country, because I heard you having sex with
The boy you love and will marry.
But halfway across the country in Kansas there is nothing for me

Girl, you make me manic.
You make me neurotic.

I read a story where this guy,
he has an affair with another guy
and he is about to marry a woman.
If I loved men like I do women,
I would be insane always.

[a] P.S. NEXT TIME YOU FUCK HIM KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT

[b] *Greg Dennis*



# UNHINGED

*Jackie Smith*

the girls clutch their plastic cups
with softened ice and hardened smiles
swaying on the incline
waving to the false
rhythm those deaf ears pick up.
they're the ones
with rings on their fingers now.
the ones who hang
themselves upon their
own knitted scarves. who
feel the need to prove
their golden
scales, announcing
"i'm beautiful. i'm interesting."

your aesthetics are overrated, darling.

the wolves lift the red lace veils
and i'd rather watch
the trees
strip
themselves down.
rather strip
myself down
for you. rather find some
sincerity from a new pair of eyes
in this plastic coated world.

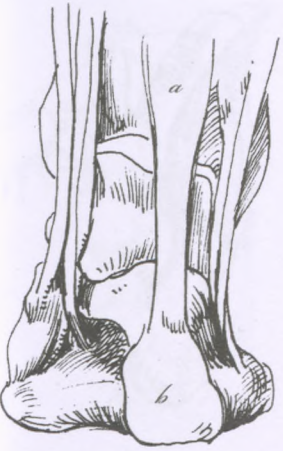
i may not be the most beautiful
with petals melting from my hands
red wax caked in
the crevices under uneven fingernails.
i may not be the kind of girl
who is considered interesting.
dandelion seeds planted in
the sharpness of your clavicle.
but I have more passion
more fire
in this aching heart of mine

than most do in
their entire bodies.

i breathe a little deeper.
laugh a little louder.
and if you can't see
that then your blindness
is astounding. blindfolded
by boulders, sandpaper between
your teeth.

i'm shameless and tangled
threadbare stained frayed at my seams
announcing my arrival with candy wrappers
spilling from my shoes. stumbling
and murky with liquor on my breath.
but if you explore the setting skies
with that rusting creaking telescope
you'll never find one as honest
as true to the beating of her pulse
as this little bird.

these knees are stinging
skinned and bruised
but i'll get it right eventually.




# A DEER CAME TO THE DOOR

*Juliana Farrington*

At 4:30 AM I stood in the doorway, searching
the darkness for what I thought I saw
My eyes followed the back drive freshly layered with
rock from the old Route 40, road recycled and reused,
toward the barn surrounded by the skeletons
of ancient cars, bare bones, broken glass, and carburetors
Between the house and the tree I had seen him
his antlers stretching like fingers to silence a spiteful moon
because he was trying to pass as a shadow in the dark
like a blue fish in the sea
He was a faint reflection drawn in black oil, a silhouette,
a stain that was there
and disappeared

I shut the door to conceal his presence
and looked down at my quiet brother
asleep on the couch
who would have pierced the night's skin with an arrow,
startled it awake with the quick snap of his bow
the sharp tip tearing through the thick blanket of black
searching for his form in the night
but I curled the deer around my tongue like a secret
let his proximity pass like a dream
as though looking at your own hand in a dark room
you know it's there but you can't see it

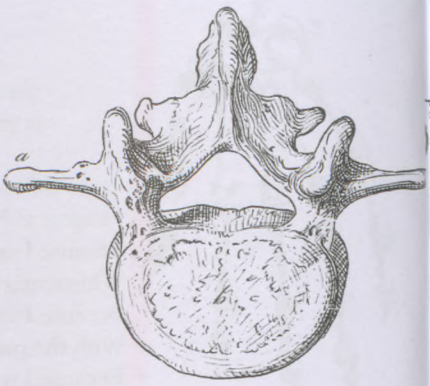
The kind that sweeps over the hurt and broken pieces of me, the kind of music
that sings me to sleep, not just any sleep, but the hard sleep like after a full day at
the fair.
Today I ride on merry-go-rounds of security and when I make the decision to have sex,
it is just that, a decision, one that has nothing to do with my father or any other fathers.
I stand erect and know that all of this, my life, my body, my love is all mine.
For me that dark place that used to lay in wait is no longer a shadow.

For sacred music and perseverance have triumphed over shadow.
What once seemed to be unfair in this muddled life, simply, is mine.
Whatever I think about, whether it is sex or something else, is no longer a belonging of my father's.

# PLAY FOR KEEPS

*Jackie Smith*

Because I can feel the storm
Whispering my name in the smoking summer air
Because I lay on the bed hyperventilating
With the pressure cracking my ribs
Because I wear my defeat like
Brass rings on every finger
Because a boy with heavy blue lids
Drunkenly smiled and said my eyes were relentless
Because I took eight steps too far
And now can't find the breadcrumb trail home
Because my heart is left in cardboard boxes
I don't know where I'm supposed to sleep at night
Because my mouth should have grabbed yours
That night we jumped fully clothed into a child's pool
Because maybe then I would find myself locked
In a stranger's bathroom while others laughed outside
Because I wake up in the morning and can't breathe
When the future is a black tumor inside my stomach
Because I can't ever find the words to ground me
I'm left floating in the sunset while my ship sinks
Because I am not whole enough, I am glued together
And I can't stop breaking off my limbs
Because he spreads her legs just a little wider
and I can't get that painting, that message, out of my eyes
Because what, dear heart, is the point
If you aren't playing for keeps.



# [a] HANDLEF

[b] *Jen Power*

Your primitive pristine
slender darling arms
Beckon with your waving fingers

I linger only
to see them shift
The drips of flickered pinpoints

I could drift
forever
A wake in the sea of memory

I could lay
Quivering
at the shore

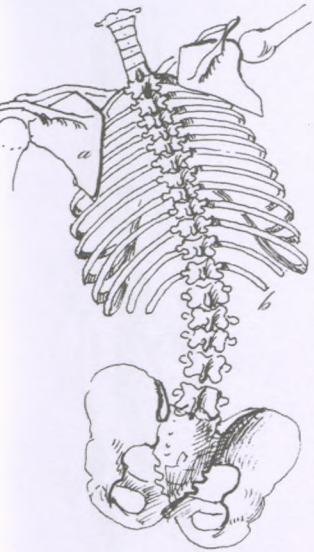
A shapeless breath against
the horizon

Your light is holding tightly
I could speak of nothing else

I am here
because
you believed
I would be

But you need only to
neglect to listen
and

Dreaming
I will go out with
the moment



# FAYBURROW DRIVE

*Jackie Smith*

the watertower with its peeling paint
swallowed the love from our breaths
swallowed it whole.
we pedaled our skinned
knees untied
tennis shoes
through the trees thorns
stuck inside
our tongues.

we ventured to the tower
broke our bones like
wildflowers crickets
cicadas shaking
our constellations

there was no love hidden there

the stars sing
ballads of earthworms
of kaleidoscopes
that drowned in cement
glued themselves
to the walls

fossilized seashells outside
my own yard. a crab
buried in a ziplock bag
beneath the tree where ghosts
fled - ate their dessert.
vanilla ice cream
dripping on the cross
of twigs below.

we lost our way on hills
of dirt, of pebbles that smelled
like clove and sugared cereal.
hills where the raccoons
bathed, cracked their teeth
on snail shells.

the steps echo against
the identical children
their roofs
slick with slime

of divorce
of deceit
of nothing ever whole.

nothing remains.
the fields were torn
apart, queen anne's lace
beheaded. made into
a cake topped with poppies.

the watertower ate that too.

the branch we broke
sprouts winding roads
where my feet no longer echo.
you can't hear anything but
the doorbells screaming for beauty
dogs howling for their diamond rings
campaign bubbling in the gutters
choking in the cracks.

you can't hear.

# TARKAN

*Christalea McMullin*

On a day where children frolicked and played,
one little girl made a wheelchair of paper
and went through the day collecting all the things that she wanted to understand.

On a day where children frolicked and played,
one little boy wove clothing of blue
and went through the day understanding everything that his young friend
- whose favorite color had been blue -
had always wanted to.

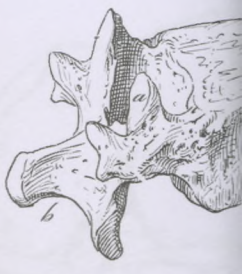
When the day came to its close the little girl with her paper wheelchair,
hid her treasures under a fort she had found
hoping beyond hope that next year,
on the day children were free to do as they pleased,
she could sit and look at all the things she had found.

When the day came to its close the little boy with his blue clothes,
hid in a fort and cried for the loss of his friend
hoping beyond hope that next year,
on the day that children were free to do as they pleased,
that he could have a friend to enjoy and protect,
one that would live to play another day.

As the night rolled in with its clouds,
the rains and its winds beat down upon the treasures of the paper wheelchair,
the paper chair sagged beneath the pressure of the rains
leaving it nothing but a sad pile of mush upon the ground,
and the rivers of rain carried them off as no one cared about the little treasures.

As the night rolled in with its clouds,
its rains and its winds beat down upon the blue clothes, and
body wrapped in them, for his heart had already sagged beneath the weight of
his tears, leaving him nothing but a sad pile of mush upon the ground,
and the rivers of rain carried him off as if no one cared about him.

The morning sun shone off the stone of the little girl,
who had been sleeping for a little more than one year,
and the people sighed, exclaiming how she had always questioned everything
even when she had no business to do it,
but how sad it was to lose a life so young.



# [a]WHIPPI MOUNTAI MARIETT 20[illegible]

[b]Julia Farringto[illegible]

In July we had expected the creek to look like a calloused hand, dry and full of cracks,
but it was too wet for the county fireworks, and you didn't worry about poison ivy
because the rain made you resistant to its oily leaves.

We lost footing coming down the hill and, like farmers, plowed
long stretching streaks down the mountain side in parallel rows
with our boots.

We left muddy handprints on branches trying to find balance,
and by the time we got to the place where the rock breaks off and the water spills over into
the quarry from fifteen feet up
we were stripping from our dirt caked clothes to rinse them in the fall.

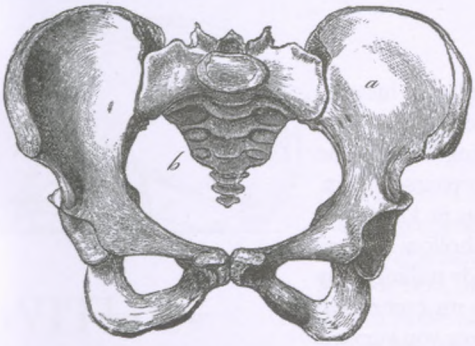
There's a nook beneath the rock
where we sat to dry and looked out at the wet trees through the waterfall veil.

You complained about the red soil, the tiny grains and pebbles that were sneaking into your
shorts
and said you were going to paint your house according to nature's palette, according to that
rock right there, you said, pointing to slate embedded in the red clay earth
quilted with patches of moss.

I heard you but I'd been drawing lines in the dirt
and could only think of the holocaust in black and white and the image of the finger trails
left in the sand,
how scraps of rag were tied around corpse ankles to pull the bodies, arms extended over
their heads as if in surrender, dragging their hands,
fingers leaving marks in vertical rows like a sheet of music turned sideways, narrow paths
leading to mass graves.

Body after body followed these trails and blurred
the lines, but always, there were two hands, ten fingers, relining a map they didn't really need.

You leaned over, twisted your fingers into mine and wiped my marks away like chalk,
"Are you listening to me?"




# FISHERMAN, FISHERMAN

*Manuel Melendez*

Fisherman
Your arms carry a rat basket of wasted bait
Your eyes trail teal sea, searching for just one to bring back
Feel the night music swift, swirling grey wind in your hair
Hunger refuses you to turn—this is it.

If only you heard the first wish
Incantation solemn, its eagerness to be unheard
But the ivory bones through his peeling flesh
And your carvings, which you keep tucked against your heart
Reminders that you aren't alone, your impossible wife must eat
Must not be silenced anymore

Here, fisherman, hear
He calls to you again, 'Put me back, put me back'
But you cannot listen to whispers of reason
You must kill another, and another, to survive tomorrow's wrath
Dig deep, fisherman, dig deep
Bring the dead to the wooden table—bring the dead to the broken bread
Quiet him, and the songs your own hurt allow.

Flounder, fisherman, flounder
Shrug the seaweed away, tug the net tightly round your wrist
You have it, the magic catch—the golden tailed
And this one, this one speaks
'Don't do it, don't do it'
Even to you, wearisome body, he's colored in loneliness
And he survives the biting embrace of January
To murmur against your silky ribs.

Impeccable timing, you think
This the instant you no longer saw twilight
Saw only an endless eye of black
And mother to a child, you find the fish cradled against you
Whimpering in the ink night, following the droplets of stars
Knowing only it does not want to die
But plead, fisherman, plead, 'You must, you must, you must live too'
And the net follows, crashing to earthy ground
Sighing lastly—you've passed his test.

'Thank you, fisherman, thank you'

And he tries a smile, tries to light the candles in his eyes
But too far away, too long gone in this voyage
And leaving joy at home
'Fisherman, you have won me, I am yours to keep'
And this he understands, this he kneels for
A prayer in his hollow shadow
Already trailing away
'Anything you wish is my command'
Yes, fisherman, yes—this is how you survive.

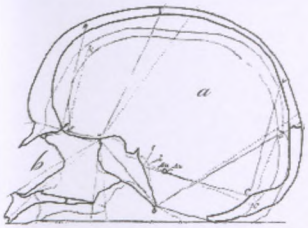
As a black curled boy you learned to beg
For pretty coins, for words of consolation, for fast love, for easy death
But this sanctuary, your final rest
'Please, golden one, give me something to eat'
Is the moment you forget that face.

'Of course, fisherman, of course'
And your golden haired fish shines
Forcing you a blink until the air chimes
And the net weighs down unexpectedly
With the fish you couldn't catch
All the fish your jagged fingers couldn't hold tight.

No more speaking, to speak petty, to speak less
And you swear—the fish brightly shines again as it leaps through invisible tears
Rain, the magic rain, coming to whisk it away
'Come tomorrow, fisherman, come tomorrow'
But no, fisherman, no more
You must satisfy your hunger
Not your fill.

She is sure, on the way back
Holding her broken waist to yours
That you have chosen right, you have made her complete
Setting the torn, satin mantle for two
Asking, 'How, how did you do it?'

Miles away
You want to kiss her curiosity
Where the golden haired fish sings for those who know—no.



# WITHIN THE IRON GATES

*Stephanie Freas*

A letter left at the iron-peaked gates.
Her fingers grasp its weathered edges,
Smoothing darkened crinkles to make it straight
Make it hers, like the empty brick house
Which peeks beneath a layer of the old oak's leaves
Saving her, imprisoning her,waiting for her heart to beat.

At breakfast, they whipped butter and let the eggs beat
As syrup flooded waffles shaped like fences and gates
Father kissed their freckled cheeks before he would leave
And stole their sausage—greasy logs with rounded edges
As sisters, they ate their meal eagerly before playing house
Cooking meals, scrubbing floors, cleaning it straight

Life happened. Soon they no longer kept anything straight
Adolescence, friendships, education, they rarely missed beat
When mother died, everything changed but the ivy-covered house.
Father, soulless, faceless, and as cold as their iron gate
Dismal and empty, he crumbled from the edges
His skin wrinkled, darkened with age like the old oak's leaves.

When the eldest married and left like the dying summer's leaves,
Father also departed, leaving her only the house to keep straight
She cared for it, trimming bushes, washing windows, shaving edges
The house lived through her, a skeleton with a heart beat
Holding her, protecting her within its wrought iron gates.
And she stayed safe, and alone, living with only her house.

There is an aura there, a sort of life within the house—
It sways and hums a silent farewell. As each day leaves,
the presence begins—and ends—with the rusting iron gate.
She watches her home breathe and smile standing nearly straight
A home to contain her soul, her heart, with each pumping beat
Life simmers at the banks from around the aging edges

She waited for that letter with crinkled edges
Not her mother's, her father's, but her sisters to the house
Telling of new experiences, new travels, new obstacles she beat
Suddenly she smiled, as the wind carried away more leaves
The house was hers—her only living companion kept straight
That held her secure, safe from death, from life in that iron gate.
Her safety's edges contained in the old, broken gate
The barren sister, straight and solitary in the once-filled house
As the others all left, to live, as her heart ceased to beat.

# NONFICTION

# [a]CAVALIER

[b]Wes Jamison

I

Perhaps it is my duty as an American to write something that would be inevitably considered American.

I came to my computer from the lighted couch, through the darkened kitchen and hallway. Walking into my unlit room, I stepped on a belt with a Last Supper buckle and pieces of fabric that I've been meaning to hang in the hallway, but I have yet to muster the gumption to do so. I came to the bedroom from reading – I've done only a little bit today; the rest of the day was spent cleaning and baking, and sleeping, because it was my day off – until 2, lay in bed until 3. And at this very moment, sitting at my computer – and since the moments I sat down to read, previously – I've been fighting this urge to leave.

Perhaps this is because I've been reading *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*; perhaps it is because I am still trying to get over my ex-boyfriend; perhaps it is because I say that I want to spend time in San Bernardino, like Didion. Regardless, I want to go. The thought came to me that I could go to a bar or club – under-aged – in Columbus and watch bodies thrash and (don't say gyrate) gyrate (don't say under the strobe or in the strobe or anything like that) within the strobe-light's glare, which would seem menacing to me, for sure; knowing that, why would I want to? How could I bear the noise and the people and the sweat and the smells and the effort and money? Perhaps I couldn't; or perhaps I could because, for the first time, I have the desire to; perhaps I am no longer so heavily influenced by my panic and fear. Perhaps I don't want to bear at all.

The stronger urge, though, is to leave – not visit a club or bar with loud music and people that would surely be too close to me – but to leave, to drive to a location that I've never visited. I wouldn't be able to make it to San Bernardino. Not with this amount of money; nor this early in the morning, 12:51, without falling asleep at the wheel; nor in my car. And maybe that is the reason that I want to: every one knows that one's Desire is for things he cannot have or cannot do. Is my life really that text-book? Ah – perhaps that is the reason I want to leave: to avoid prescription and mundane-ity.

The logical side of me says that if I did get in my car to drive anywhere, it'd be to Brimfield to see my boyfriend: he is far enough away that the trek is worthy of being called a trek, and the destination is one of the most rewarding I can think of.

I consider traveling to be cathartic.

> I definitely just took a two day road trip. I totally, just…disappeared. For two days. Didn't take phone calls, was really far away from campus, honestly didn't know where I was. Saw a mega-creepy laundromat and an awe-

some motel (and by awesome, I mean it was crazy-ghetto). I left emotionally unstable and return with…I don't know – a new found becoming or something.

I told you, Suzanne, this, but not the others of you – though, Tammy, I am sure you know: Elliott is no more. It is good – not bad. He avoided me like the plague all weekend until I flat-out asked him about it. He called me and was very short – was just like, "Did a lot of thinking and some talking to some friends: despite whatever I may have said to give you hope, I do not want a relationship with you. Also, I acknowledge that what we have functions as a relationship; I know that this is how you perceive it. Since I don't want a relationship, we have to stop doing what we are doing." And that was that. I said, "Yeah – duh. That is why I was so confused all the time." I cried and I don't know why. I wasn't upset. I handled it very well. I, however, feel as though I lost a friend. A close friend. An amazing, amazingly close friend. We haven't talked since. Just a short text.

If nothing else, I got one good poem out of it (though it has yet to be finished…Claire, you saw what I was working on…I'm halfway through another draft. It is going splendidly).

Apparently the Goodyear World Headquarters…or something along those lines…is in Ohio. Who knew?

Never drive on 76.

It was a quite peculiar thing – on 71 North, the land becomes quite like it is back home: hilly – very hilly – and rugged. A lot of farm houses, a lot of animals, the smell of manure, the smell of not-city-infested nature. North of Columbus was a lot of land that reminded me so much of my home – Logan County – but with different trees. It was so peculiar – I could place the images of my home over my windshield, and it would have aligned perfectly, but the trees were a different kind.

I didn't tell them that Elliott offered, and would have liked, to continue to have sex with me, like it was a favor he could be doing me; I didn't tell them that I took the trip the day after he told me those things to see another boy: a boy that I met online; a boy that I found very attractive; a boy with foreskin; a boy that I was planning on having sex with; a boy that wasn't Elliott; a boy that I was scared to have sex with because he wasn't Elliott; a boy that I was nervous to meet because I thought sounded too effeminate over the phone and may have been a queen; a boy that was to become my current boyfriend; a boy that I would grow to love too much and too soon (perhaps).

Traveling was cathartic that day: the music (don't say) pulsed through me and vibrated all the negative nerve endings in me. That is a lie. The bass was just really high, and the music was just really loud. I remember that I was listening to Jewel, where the "Becoming" shit came from. Driving that far, for that long, alone, going to a place I'd never been, and worrying about my car dying forced me to think a lot – again, I am predictable psychologically: I was alone, so I thought about recently passed events and my near future.

But there were the trees; though, with more trips to and from Brimfield, they have

become common. Perhaps they are not different; perhaps I only wanted them to be, or perhaps I wanted to keep my home safe: similar yet exceptional.

I also didn't tell *him* that I was there the day after Elliott broke up with me.

Brimfield I imagine is a bit like San Bernardino, or the picture Didion paints of it: muu muus and wife-beaters; teased hair; where the highlight of life is Homecoming; everyone waits for marriage, for that is when life truly begins. Trailer parks. Deaths. The American Dream (though I have yet to see any of the last three in Brimfield). I go there and, though I spend most of my time in Matt's bed, I often wonder what else is going on in that city, what happens in the three hundred and sixty degrees of the Circle. *You guys gay?* What was that man thinking? Was he what I suspected – a closeted homo? Why did he end with *I'm just kiddin' ya.* And why was I the one, instead of Matt, to carry a conversation with him? I paint pictures of those people and those encounters. I bet the woman at the café is abused. While I was getting gasoline at the Circle K, the men in the truck that pulled up were staring at me, thinking something about how I am a fairy; did they have a tire iron?

Brimfield is my pathetic attempt to be (like) Joan Didion.

*6*

Another morning, and still I find myself to be fighting the urge to flee.
That is something I didn't account for while writing last: perhaps I am *fleeing.* From roommates? From solitude? From any and all financial responsibilities?

Why do I have such a strong desire to leave?

Perhaps more reading will answer my questions.

*6*

*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* has come and gone by this point; they found what they were searching for: The American Dream. Perhaps I am not an astute enough reader, but I can't figure out what it is, and perhaps that is the point: there is no physical manifestation of the Dream. *Take that, Didion*, Thompson seemed to be saying. Frontier – it is merely a location, merely a place for the action, really no different than the east or the south.

Regardless, after finishing the novel, the desire was still present: go to San Bernardino, or North Vegas, or Seattle – hell, go to New Orleans, like you've wanted; I (have) want(ed) to get out of Ohio – and the desire is infectious, apparently.

On somebody else's money (their parents'), my roommates were planning a trip to LA, and upon finding out this was their plan, I felt immediately betrayed. *We are going to go see relatives,* they told me. *We just want to go to get drunk on others' money in another city. A bigger city. A better city.* (What they really said was hardly half as interesting; they just babbled about how they could *afford* it and how they've no responsibilities keeping them here.) I felt betrayed because I'd wanted to go for longer than they, and I've reasons to go – legitimate ones, ones that will benefit some part or aspect

of humanity. There is the possibility that I never felt betrayed by them, but perhaps only by Fate for having constantly denied me the opportunity for travel, for there have been other dates and other locations.

I wanted to go to Italy once; now the desire has almost left entirely. I can pin my not going on one person who gave me misinformation. I wanted to follow the footsteps of the literati who had traveled there before me, sit on the same steps upon which they sat when they were first inspired for their pieces, lounge in the same buildings in which they talked to each other about writing. Through osmosis, perhaps, I desired to obtain a fragment of their skill; now, though, I am merely stepping on Didion's footsteps.

*b*

Elliott frequently had a desire for pizza, one that would require me to personally deliver to him about once a week, and we'd order or go out for some a time or two during a week. He used to ask me to bring a frozen pizza to cook when I went over to his apartment; I did. He was horribly inept in the kitchen, so much so that he couldn't make a pizza (that is, he was so dominant of a personality, that he made me cook the pizza, never offered to do so himself; it wasn't about the cooking, but instead about subservience). Cooking one of those frozen pizzas, I burnt myself, though now I cannot remember how: just below my thumb and barely above my left wrist lies a tiny scar that blends in with the creases of skin there. Dark and teardrop-shaped. It bubbled up and scarred over. I see it every day. He never knew about it.

I hate to make the comparison, because they are nothing alike, but Matt, my current boyfriend, also enjoys pizza – though we rarely have the money for it. We walk to the Wal-Mart near him, and we walk back with a feast, including a frozen pizza. Matt is inept in the kitchen, like another was, so I've done the cooking. I often feel the heat of the pan or the oven racks on my fingers or hand, but once, I felt it too long, and I burnt myself retrieving the pizza from the oven. Right hand; between forefinger and thumb; large; next to another, much smaller scar. It is long and rough; a different color than the one on my left; it bubbled up and hurt for several weeks, until the skin fell off and then scarred over. I see it every day. When it happened, he immediately kissed my hand and hugged me, asking me to be more careful.

(Perhaps) I cannot cook frozen pizzas, no matter who it is for.

In traveling, (perhaps) there are common landscapes with differing trees.

*b*

> *It is easy to see the beginnings of things, and harder to see the ends…. Nothing was irrevocable; everything was within reach….temporary exiles…. That is what it was all about, wasn't it? Promises? ...it is distinctly possible to stay too long at the Fair.*

I like to read personal essays while I write them – comforted to know that I am not repeating ideas or entire paragraphs; comforted to know what it is I could (or should) be doing. I opened what non-fiction I had next to me, Lopate's *The Art of the Personal*

*Essay*; as I looked at the pages, I noticed that two were dog-eared: "The Death of the Moth," which I wrote about at length in my Virginia Woolf class, and the other was Annie Dillard. Though I appreciate Dillard, I simply wasn't in the mood for her; I flipped pages, and saw that just before her was Joan Didion: I found that I had written all over the margins of her "Goodbye to All That" but couldn't remember the essay itself, so I reread it, and I was struck by how she speaks from my very soul – her words are mine, or mine hers.

> *[T]o those of us who came from places where no one had heard of Lester Lanin and Grand Central Station was a Saturday radio program, where Wall Street and Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue were not places at all but abstractions ("Money," and "High Fashion," and "The Hucksters"), New York was no mere city. It was instead an infinitely romantic notion, the mysterious nexus of all love and money and power, the shining and perishable dream itself. To think of "living" there was to reduce the miraculous to the mundane.*

Regardless of whether it came from me or Didion, was about New York or San Bernardino, or where I come from – though I assure you I fit this mold that Didion has cast, as far as New York being some sort of romantic notion instead of a place for people to live – I told myself that she just explained it to me – what San Bernardino, New York, North Vegas, Seattle, and New Orleans, what they are to me.

In her essay, Didion grows too old for New York; she says she spent too much time there. *It is distinctly possible to stay too long at the Fair.* I found, in reading those words, the reason for my desire for travel – I've simply stayed here too long, and it is okay if the explanation doesn't go further than that.

*6*

This is just me trying to be (like) Joan Didion again.

Perhaps.

**II**

Banks close before I get off work, so I had to go on my lunch break. I took my Cavalier to the Kroger down the road only a few minutes away; with the lunchtime traffic, though, I was granted a few more minutes with my CD player – listening to what had prior to then become my roving music, *Velocifero*. I was finishing a cigarette by the time I had parked and gotten out of the car and begun to walk into the store. When I looked above and to my right, I saw a seagull swooping and whipping around in the air while others were perched on streetlamps.

The sound of seagulls has always been to me a sort of stimulant – their calls seem to excite something buried in me – and I am not frequently reminded of that part of me, buried for any of various reasons, but today I was when I heard their calls again for the first time in what seems to me my entire life; as cliché as it is, their calls today, catching the wind and brushing past me, were somehow new. But of course

I've heard them before: when I went to Lake Eerie with my father, they were always present; I cannot specifically recall their sound then and there, but I admit they must have been, if for no other reason than the presence of the washed-up fish, fleshless; or when I went to the nearer lake with my mother, they were there too, I am sure.

I know their sound from movies, largely, and gulls sometimes appear in samples in music I enjoy. Today is the only time I can recall actually hearing them, though not accompanied by the sound of waves, like they are in that music and in those movies. Or maybe it is not the sound of waves under the seagulls but of the wind around them, and it was that wind that I felt today howling around me.

*6*

Looking again at what has been written, I am stuck pondering over that last line: *Or maybe it is not the sound of waves under the seagulls but of the wind around them, and it was that wind that I felt today howling around me.* I know that I only meant that the day was windy – noting that I feel the wind upon which I think gulls are dependent; but upon revisiting the sentence, I find something more. So I ask myself if I am not also dependent on those squalls. I ask myself how similar gulls and I are.

# [a]SEMIS PASSING BEHIND ME, *or, My Consuming Beverages with Friends*

[b]*Wes Jamison*

The day was surprisingly cold for the season. The clouds covered the sky from one horizon to opposite, and the wind bent everything a few degrees southward. When the sun did break, however, black shadows beautifully danced over cement sidewalks and brick roads. Semis passed frequently on the nearest road which was often crossed by pedestrians – lights of green, white, red and yellow changing incessantly. We sat in the shade from a building at a black wrought-iron table – the three of us – with the semis at my back.

Sylvia Plath was there with me – in all her blonde-bombshell and pierced beauty. And Nick was with me.

I arrived late, purchased a latte, and sat there with my Muses – the inspiration from whom I adore the most. A kiss for Miss Plath and a simple salutation for Nicholas. And with that, we spoke about what we usually do – literature and relationships – all the while smiling and laughing, speaking of future plans and our dreams and frustrations. Speaking of communes and carnivals. Fiji.

The literature of which we spoke took an unusual turn, however. We spoke of existentialists and of theorists. We began with satirists; no, Wilde was not mentioned. Bertrand Russel was spoken of. We talked about philosophy. We wanted to chop down a tree, but to do so, we first needed to invent a saw or an axe. I brought up one's Essence, and I, with no surprise, mentioned my homosexuality.

And we talked of god.

We want to believe but can't, or we believe and don't want to. The choice isn't ours to be made, but choices are born within us inherently. Our college education is working splendidly, turning a Catholic into an Atheist. And I believe in nothing other than the divine power of Nature.

The wind pushed our empty cups over on the wrought-iron table and pushed our hair this way and that. We had to speak loudly – which I am sure was mistaken as arguing by passersby – in order to speak over the loud trucks. And goose bumps grew over our flesh – the supplest belonging to Sylvia – as the sun was constantly blocked from us by the tall buildings.

And we talked of god.

We talked of god and how we must leave impressions on the world. How we will not live for naught.

I read to my company a passage from Joan Didion's *The White Album*. We discussed sin. We are born sinners – or not – but have the choice to not sin. *I cannot believe that god would create persons as sinners and then punish them for sinning.* I cannot believe that I am fundamentally hated.

And the latte was good; the company was better. We sat in the silence of each other only long enough for a truck to pass before we continued our sentences. No disagreeing, only sharing between our three beautiful minds. And when I had to leave – the last to arrive as well as the first to leave – I walked upon the sidewalk with

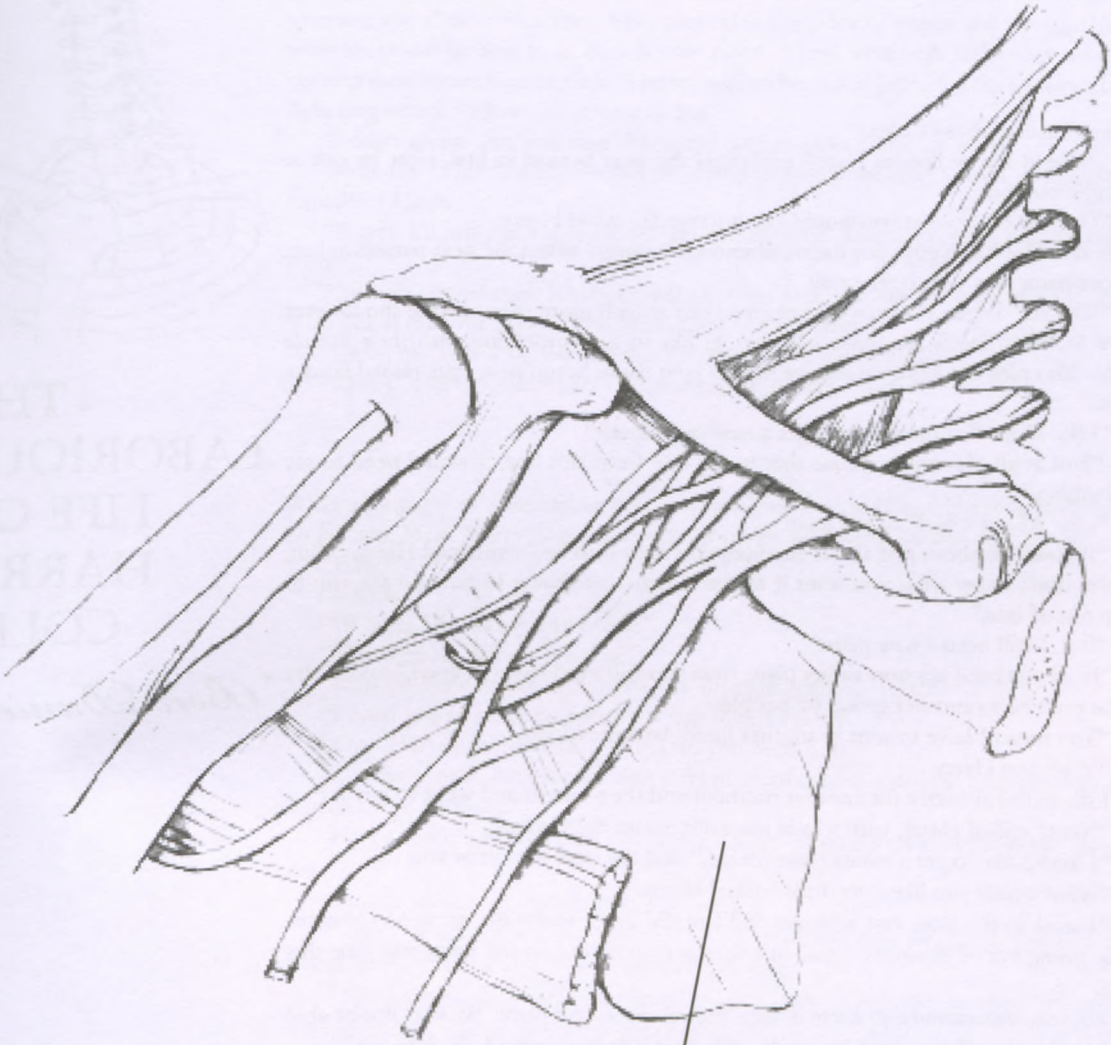
the dancing shadows and the dead leaves and the heat from the sun finally hitting me, thinking only about god. Or Nature.

I walked back to my domicile at a quick pace – stretching my legs as far as they could go while stretching my lungs to their capacity with smoke and the scent of dead leaves. Or Nature.

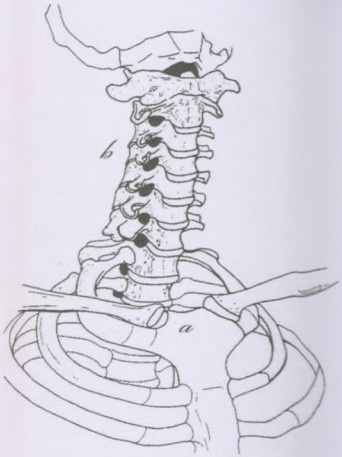
My mind was a torrent of ideas and of dreams. The night before I contemplated my suicide, but at that moment, I thought only of tomorrow and the prospect of leaving an impression on future lives. And the future conversations with future Muses. And future loves. And passions. And stories to be told.

*No, my life will not be for naught. I cannot waste it.*

*Believe in yourself*, Nick said – though not to me.



# FICTION



# [a] THE LABORIOUS LIFE OF HARRY COLES

[b] *Ben Daniels*

"Next!" called Harry Coles.

"I need a new license plate," explained the next person in line, after he got to Harry's window.

"Do you know what you would like it to read?" asked Harry.

"Uh, no. Don't you guys put the number on the plate?" asked the next person in line, whose name was Josh by the way.

"Well sir," began Harry, who had given this speech more than anyone should ever have to, "this line is for those who would like to say something with their license plate. You pick out a phrase and we fit it to your shiny, brand new, state issued license plate."

"Oh. Does that mean I can't get a new plate then?"

"Not at all. It simply means that to get one from this line, it would need to say something."

"Oh. About what?" asked Josh.

"It could be about just about anything you want it to be," explained Harry. "But, if you don't know what you want it to read, then I am going to have to ask you to step out of line."

"But, I still need a new plate."

"If all you need is a non-vanity plate, then you will need to go to line J," said Harry as he pointed to another group of people.

"You mean I have to wait in another line?" lamented Josh.

"Yes," said Harry.

Josh stared at Harry for another moment and then turned and went to line J.

"Next," called Harry, with a little less enthusiasm than before.

"I would like to get a vanity plate please," said the next person in line.

"What would you like it to read?" asked Harry.

"I work in the close-out business and I would like it to say the name of my company 'going out of business'," said this next person in line, whose name was Eric this time.

"Sir, you understand that there is very limited space on a plate. We may not be able to get all that on there. Is there maybe something else you would like it to read?"

"I was under the impression that I could get whatever I wanted on my vanity plate."

"Within reason," explained Harry. "It may just be too many words. Do you have any suggestions how you might like to shorten it sir?"

Eric thought for a moment, then looked Harry in the eye and asked, "Isn't that what you are here for?"

"Well, yes and no. I am here to help you get what you want on your plate. But, as I said it just may too many letters to put on the plate."

Eric looked blankly at Harry, "Could I see your supervisor, please?"

Harry squirmed on his stool, "Sir, I really don't think that is necessary. I am sure

we can figure this out without involving my supervisor." Harry pulled out a piece of paper and wrote down 'Going out of business.' The next people in line began to grumble and shuffle their feet. Harry stared at the piece of paper and struggled with what he would be able to fit on a license plate. There were only eight spaces on the current state issued license plate. Harry's addled brain struggled for the answer. Then lightning struck, "How about 'gon ot bus'?"

"I don't know. Are you sure that is the best you can come up with?"

"Yes sir. This would be what we could put on your state issued vanity plate," explained Harry.

"Maybe I'll just put a sign on the driver side door. Can I just get a regular license plate?"

Through gritted teeth Harry answered, "You can, but you will have to go to line J. This line is only for people who are getting vanity plates."

"I was, but now I've decided that I want to get a normal plate."

"Line J." Harry looked past Eric and called meekly, "Next."

*6*

After a long day of simplifying words for people's license plates, Harry headed home to his wife Meg. Harry nearly jumped out of his skin when his cell phone rang.

"Hello?"

"It's me."

"Hi Meg, I'm on my way home."

"That's good. Where are you?"

"I am on Main Street in front of the shopping center. Why?"

"I need you to stop and pick up a few things for me."

"Ok," Harry said hesitantly,"What do you need dear?"

"We need, milk, eggs, bread, some fresh ground beef, a couple Hershey bars and I need some tampons."

Harry nearly swerved into oncoming traffic when his wife finished her grocery list.

"Honey, please, do you really need me to…"

"I do not ask that much Harry. If it is too difficult for you to do this one little thing, then I guess you just don't love me, do you?"

"No, I mean, yes. I mean, of course I love you. I will stop at the store and get your thingies. I'll be home in a little while."

"Hurry Harry, I really need those Hershey bars."

"Yes dear, I will hurry. Love you."

Click

Harry turned into the grocery store parking lot and searched for a parking space. Just as he found one near the front and tried to maneuver his car in, a car (with the license number ME-FIRST) came from the other direction and stole it. Harry grumbled at the other driver, who had bought that plate from Harry six to eight weeks ago, and began searching for another spot. He found a space about a mile from the store, and began his trek to the entrance. Derelict carts were scattered around the parking lot. The tall lights blinked on and off. Harry stared directly ahead a moved quickly

towards his goal. Warm air flew over Harry as the automatic doors finally opened.

"Welcome to Oakmart," said the greeter. "Can I help you find something today?"

"Uh, no, thanks. I can find everything. Thanks."

"Ok. Enjoy your shopping experience," said the greeter.

"Thanks, you too," said Harry awkwardly as he rushed towards the aisles. The milk, eggs, bread and beef were easy, and the chocolate was at the check out. The hard part was the thingies. He had seen his wife buy those tons of times. Why couldn't he remember where they were? It seemed like everyone working in the store was a guy. Harry wandered around aimlessly hoping to stumble onto what he needed. Fortune did not smile upon him. He searched what he thought was every aisle. They must have them in a special room that only wives know about.

"Sir, you look lost. Can I help you find something?" asked a sweet voice.

"I'm looking…" as Harry turned to find the owner of the voice, "for female thingies." Harry suddenly realized that the sweet voice came from a young boy who looked as if this was his first job.

"For what, sir? I don't know where to find that, but I can call my supervisor and he might be able to help us?"

"No, no, that won't be necessary. I can find…"

Harry didn't get a chance finish before the young boy pushed the button on his radio a spoke into the microphone, "Mr. Neundorf, I have a customer trying to find female thingies and I don't know where to send him. Can you tell where they are?"

A voice came crackling through the speaker, "I have no idea what you are talking about. I'll have to ask the manager."

Mr. Neundorf picked up the phone in the check out lane he was in and called the office. "Miss Perdue, I have a customer who says he trying to find female thingies and we don't know where to send him." The customers in the check out lane could hear the laughing through the ear piece.

Mr. Neundorf called the stock boy on the radio, "Ronny, you twit, Miss Perdue says to send him to the health beauty aisle and don't ask such stupid questions anymore." Ronny stared in disbelief at the cause of his grief, "Aisle fourteen," he finally said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be a problem," said Harry.

"Is there anything else you need help finding tonight?" Ronny said as he turned away. Over his shoulder he said, "Have a good night, sir."

Harry crept towards aisle fourteen and his freedom. Only the female thingies and he could check out and go home. He got to aisle fourteen and searched for the ones his wife used. The selection was fantastic – Harry never realized how much variety there was in the vast world of feminine hygiene. A rainbow of colors and virtual thesaurus of absorbencies confronted him in the form of neatly stacked boxes. He found a small blue and green box that seemed familiar and headed for the check out. Mr. Neundorf was at the check out lane that Harry found open.

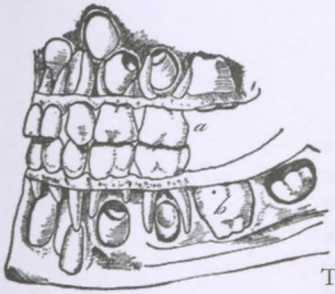
"Did you find everything alright, sir?"

"Yes," answered Harry.

"Very good. Would you like paper or plastic?"

"Plastic."

Mr. Neundorf scanned Harry's items until he came to the small blue and green box. Mr. Neundorf reached for the phone next to the register punched in two numbers and said, "I need a price check on female thingies!"



# MUSIC FOR THE HOPELESS ROMANTIC

Greg Dennie

Track 1. Notorious B.I.G. *One More Chance*

You're a pimp and people should recognize this more often. Girls normally don't realize your talents like the time you won the cake eating contest at your little brother's birthday party; they only remember the images of you playing right field wearing your baseball mit like a mask while the ball soared over your head. And they never compliment your dick size, but like Biggie, you're "in thirteens, know what I mean?"

This song's for all the hoes in your life, from the girl in seventh grade who scared you shitless when she kissed you in the stairwell to the middle aged woman who was interesting at best—and that was when you were drunk. But most importantly, this song's for the girl of your dreams, the one you can't stop thinking about. The one girl in the world you want to tell your deepest secrets; the girl you want to expose your vulnerability to, but only under the right circumstances. You want to tell her things you've told no one else and you believe that things will be okay if only she'd listen. And when the time comes, inspired by the big black motherfucker with G's, you tell her you've got the cleanest, meanest, penis/ you've never seen this, stroke of genius.

But she, like everyone else in the world, is miffed by the lyrical genius you quoted and you think, maybe it was the circumstances, but most importantly, you don't give up, not even when you realize the last song on The Notorious B.I.G.'s album is titled, Suicidal Thoughts.

Track 2. Elliott Smith. *Southern Belle*

In high school you were taught that getting over a relationship takes roughly half the time you were involved with that heartless, bitch—that love of your life that could do no wrong. And as you listen to the hopeless, timeless beauty in Elliott Smith's voice you are taken away, lost in your thoughts where your lover is a southern belle and you have built a house with your bare hands in the middle of a field where no one can touch you. And suddenly you recognize the chorus shouting to you, speaking directly to you, "you're killing a southern belle…" and in your thoughts you are slamming her head against the walls of your beautiful home in the timeless, elysian fields of your mind and realize that, hey, maybe you're over her. Besides, you think, you couldn't really understand the abstract lyrics and you were never technically involved—or so claims she—and by the end of the song your heart is mended, though you are shaken and ready to cry for reasons you cannot admit to yourself. Instead, you believe you are still in mourning for your dead goldfish. You never had a goldfish.

Track 3. Hackensaw Boys. *Sun's Work Undone*

Yes, what you want her to know is how much you love her. And as you listen to a melody so uniquely comforting, you wish for things to be undone. In fact, you regret ever washing your hands after holding hers in the movie theatre. There was never more comfort than her hand in a dark theatre and you could sit in a dark theatre for days now, waiting for her and it would be worth all the waiting. You realize now that there are few things you wouldn't do for the simple pleasure of holding a girl's hand while watching a movie, or even just walking down the street, because after all, it's not simple pleasure; nothing you'd give yourself for is simple. Besides, you have to show your mom you're doing fine because she just emailed you trying to set you up with another girl who she claims is, "in love with you," and she signs the email,

> Don't be complaining about cold, lonely nights.
> love,
> mama

Track 4. Al Green. *How Can You Mend a Broken Heart?*

Plans rarely work out the way they're meant to. You journey out to places so far from comfort in hopes to come home and be missed—to be welcomed back. But you come home and find that things will never be the same and you hurt, a deep burning hurt similar to the time you chugged hot sauce on a dare, but without the acid reflux, vomiting and sixty dollars. Oh, and without the friends, too.

Track 5. Elliott Smith. *Bottle Up and Explode*

You realize two things: you are very close to acceptance at this point, but acceptance is realizing she will never come back. Fuck that. There are other things to consider now, like not making your love life into a playlist of Elliott Smith because half your friends will think you are a depressive and the other half will think you are gay, which you totally aren't. So you get angry, you explode. And deep inside you find something you thought you'd lost long ago: your testicles, and damn it, this time you're gonna use them.

Track 6. Built to Spill. *Else*

Things are upbeat. The snow is melting away, revealing the same grass that has always been there, the same grass that just yesterday you thought you'd never see again. The change of season resembles a change of heart, but it's your heart, not hers and you drink lots of coffee and smile as you sit at the table next to the window. The days become longer and you realize the same forgotten thought you realize every spring: you must lose fifteen pounds before the pools open up. Jesus, you really let yourself go this winter.

Track 7. Patty Griffin. *You Never Get What You Want*

Hearing the heartbreak in a woman's voice is your consolation these days, but she puts it in a different light; a crisp, harmonic, beautiful light that you could never recreate, not even in the basement when no one is home and you could scream and no one would hear you. But still, it's good, and maybe just part of the rebound. Yeah, it'd probably be better if you could do the crazy things with your voice that Patty Griffin has somehow managed to do, but fame and fortune, you reckon, wouldn't make things right. You buy a box of condoms and set out to get what you want, somewhat conscious of the fact that you have no idea what you want.

Track 8. Nada Surf. *Happy Kid*

A happy kid—that's exactly what you thought you'd be after a week of promiscuous sex with marginally attractive college girls. You are, however, proud in the sense that you always wanted to be drunk and sexed up, and you just aren't ready to let this dream die. So yeah, you smile and think of how happy you are, you even listen to teenage music, but at night, you still dream of her and know that you'll do damn near anything to get her back. You'd even learn advanced calculus, but then you realize that calculus will in no way get her back. You start to wonder what will get her back and vaguely recall her saying something about her fondness of guys who are sweet and gentle; thoughtful and intelligent. You have it: you'll put a gay guy in a dog cage and mail it to her. That's the kind of guy you are; sweet and caring enough to pay the postage on a gay guy in a dog cage. But right before you club the sharply dressed 100 pound man on the street, it occurs to you that maybe she just wanted flowers or a poem.

Track 9. Alison Krauss. *Stay*

There's a dream I…er…you have and in it you ask her to stay, you try every thing you can to be physically close, but all fails and she simply drifts away. The sex with other girls was for nothing and you change your phone number and start everything over. But this time you know what you want: her. To stay, you know, you want her to stay.

But you need to change your tactics to make her stay—you need to change who you are, or you need to let her know who you really are; the man she never knew. You promise yourself that you'll speak openly and honestly to her, even if she asks how long you breast fed off mommy; even if she asks about your club, dog cage and the assault charges brought against you by a hundred pound gay man.

Track 10. Bob Dylan. *Don't Think Twice It's Alright*

You saw her at the coffee shop and she noticed you. She smiled and let you sit at her table. You talked as she listened and you didn't whine. She couldn't even sense the desperation, but that's because you know what you're doing and you covered it up with cologne. You are the MacGyver of love. You have turned the table on her

and think of how this would play out in a movie. The camera would cycle from one side of you to the other, moving behind her head to show the change of pace, the trickery you have devised and set in motion. You stare off into nirvana the way Bob Dylan does in his old age. You sense she is about to apologize for every thing, but you stop her and give the old adage, "don't think twice, it's alright." It could mean anything and she is clearly bewildered by your premeditated wisdom. You lay down five dollars for your coffee and gently walk away without looking back, knowing full well the coffee only cost $1.79.

Unbeknownst to you, she was not going to apologize, rather she was going to tell you about her new boyfriend. You are oblivious, though, and happy. You are the MacGyver of love.

Track 11. Moxy Fruvous. *Gord's Gold*

On your way home from the coffee shop, you plan the rest of your life with your love. You listen to Gord's Gold in your car and sing along, repeating the last line over and over, "make a child with me."

6 BEN DANIELS
10 TONY DEGENARO
11 GREG DENNIE
12 JULIANA FARRINGTON
13 STEPHANIE FREAS
14 WES JAMISON
19 CHRISTALEA MCMULLIN
21 MANUEL MELENDEZ
25 CHRIS MILLER
26 CLAIRE PARSON
28 JEN POWERS
30 JACKIE SMITH
34 LILLIE TEETERS
41 VIANCA YOHN