

Unbound

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five years time
vivian noller
digital photograph
3072 px. x 2048 px.

Vivian Noller is a freshman majoring in Journalism. She has shown at the Judy Vogland Gallery and the Glenn Viola Walters Cultural Arts Center in Hillsboro, Oregon.

recollection of the death of sylvia plath

I was the happy house of birthday cakes and pot roasts
for seven years, but now my heat chokes this scullery
'til it's sicklied over with toxic sweetness.
The fan sucks weakly for air at the bottoms of insulated portals,
and still she tightens my knobs until they morph into strangling tourniquets.

She hums the song of Shakespeare's unhinged heroine
while she tidies the towels calmly,
just as if she'll do it again tomorrow.
Fumes dissolve her fear of what dreams may come.

Pink cyclamen forged behind her ear,
she rests her head inside my warm womb
and breathes in the scent of relief.

She traces words no one will ever see
in the glass fogged by her breath.

A spoon clatters as her hands melt into the floor.

— ALLISE PENNING

Allise Penning is a junior English major at the UO.

they died for us

T. J. CARTER

After the worst lightning storm West Texas had seen in fifty years, the people of Marion woke up to the phrase *Ruby is fucking Jesus* spray-painted above the door of the town church. The dust in the air had been pinned down by the rainfall, exposing miles more of desert in every direction; long swathes of water lay in the streets, and cars made wakes as they swam through, but the June sun hung in the blue sky, poised to bring everything back to the way it was.

Nothing seemed terribly damaged—even the old church, which had lost a few more flecks of paint, but endured the night as it had endured every night since 1841. In spite of the storm, nothing was too out of the ordinary, and the message above the church door soon dominated conversation.

It was eight in the morning. People had come, scratched their heads for a few minutes and moved on, but Blake, an old-timer with sweat stains on his baseball cap, had been squinting at the message since six and scouring the street for people to help him make sense of it.

“*Hey Susan!*” he yelled across the street. “*Linda!*”

The mother and daughter, about to enter the general store, stopped and whipped their heads at Blake.

“*You seen this?*” he said, pointing above the door of the church.

They squinted at the church door and started across the street to get a closer look. Susan, a middle-aged woman with a straw hat and a beige button-up dress, stepped around the ponds in the street. Linda, a teenager with freckles on her arms and galoshes on her feet, trudged straight through.

“Look,” said Blake. He was still pointing at the message.

“Oh, my,” said Susan. “Oh, Lord, no.” She took off her hat and read the message over and over. “Who would do this to our church?”

“Jack Brewster,” said Blake, “that little punk bastard.” His frown accentuated the wrinkles around his mouth. He turned to Linda. “Do

you understand this?"

Linda cast her eyes downward. "I don't know," she said.

Blake lowered his voice. "What about Ruby? What do you know about her?" Linda opened her mouth to speak.

"Oh, leave her be, Blake," said Susan, wiping tears from her eyes. "How do you know Jack did this, anyway?"

"C'mon," said Blake. "Of course the little bastard did it. He's the only one who *could've*." He snorted, as if to spit, but thought the better of it and swallowed. "In any case, I talked to Sheriff Halsey this morning. He arrested him early, when it was still dark. He caught him in the act."

"Where is the sheriff?" asked Susan.

"He went out to Jack's place, to chat with his Pa."

They looked up at the message. *Ruby is Fucking Jesus.*

"He swears too much," Linda said.

"Who?" roared Blake.

Linda swallowed. "Jack."

"I heard that," said Susan. "At the diner he once told me that my hash browns were—'*effing*'—good. I enjoy compliments, but is that necessary?"

"That's because your hash browns are really fuckin' good," said Blake, smiling.

Susan frowned at him.

"Still, though. That doesn't excuse what he wrote on our church."

"What do you think it means?" asked Susan.

"It's pretty clear what it *means*," said Blake.

"I suppose," said Susan. "But why would he write it?"

Linda cleared her throat. "I think he's trying to say something about Ruby sleepin' around."

"Makes sense," said Blake. "The black whore."

"*Blake*," said Susan with a sharp look.

"I meant 'prostitute.'"

Linda opened her mouth to speak, but closed it without a word.

"She is," said Blake. "I saw her get picked up by some guy, right over there." He pointed across the street to the general store. "It was another black fella."

"Was it her pa? Or her brother?" asked Susan.

"Hell, I don't know," said Blake.

"That still doesn't tell us why Jack would write—" Susan took a breath "—that," She pointed to the message.

Linda looked up from the ground. "Well, Jack and Ruby were together for awhile,"

"Huh," said Blake. "Really?"

"I never liked them together," said Linda. "They didn't look right."

"Didn't Ruby drop out?" asked Susan.

"Doesn't surprise me," said Blake.

* * *

"What are you doing tonight?" asked Jack. Third period was about to begin, and a handful of kids were shuffling toward their classes. Jack had leaned on the lockers, eyes and smile locked on Ruby.

"Nothin'," she said. "Probably just playin' cards with Pa and Gary." A tall, strong-armed boy in a baseball cap walked by. He stuck out his tongue and undulated it at her.

"We should do something," said Jack.

"If you think of something we can do in this town, then we can do it."

Jack's smile broadened.

"I ain't a whore," she said, "despite what everyone's been sayin'."

"I know," he said. "I know that."

A boy with a toothpick in his mouth came up and puckered his lips at them.

"Get the hell out of here," said Jack, pushing the boy away. The boy walked away backwards with his middle finger extended.

"Where could we go?" she asked. "Your place?"

"I don't think you want to come over. My Pa would probably think you were a thief. Sometimes he thinks I'm a thief. Sometimes he thinks he's thief."

"What then? Wherever we go, we're gonna run into trouble. You know that." The boy with the toothpick was still flipping the bird.

"I'll play cards with your folks," he said boldly. "I feel like I should meet 'em."

She took a deep breath. "Well, maybe not tonight. Your pa needs you anyway."

"Ha. Too bad I don't come in a flask."

"Your baby brother, too."

Jack stuck out his lower lip to make a cartoony, exaggerated frown.

"I'll tell you what," she lowered her voice. "You can watch me undress in my room. From your window."

"I was gonna do that anyway," he said. "But I'll take it. You're fuckin' Marilyn Monroe."

"What does that mean?"

Jack turned pink. "You're sexy."

"Marilyn Monroe? Shoot, I'm the wrong color," she said. "But I'll take it." She kissed him and skipped for a few steps down the hall, but walked normally after someone opened a door and came into the hallway.

* * *

"He came by and chatted to her between classes," said Linda. "He

wouldn't stop looking at her. Always, he would only look at her." She looked down, and chewed on a fingernail.

Blake furrowed his brow. "That must have been *before* she was a whore."

"Are they still dating?" asked Susan.

"Yes," said Linda. "Maybe."

"Not after last night," said Blake, looking at the message

"Maybe she cheated on him," said Susan.

"Oh really?" said Blake. "Wow, you think?" He scoffed.

"With Jesus?" asked Linda, giggling.

"No honey," said Susan sincerely. "With someone else."

"Could it be someone named *Hey-zeus*, like, a Mexican fella?" asked Linda.

"Hell," said Blake. "There are about seven *Hey-zeuses* here. This town's crawlin' with 'em. I wouldn't be surprised if she were sleepin' with all of 'em."

The three of them looked at the message. *Ruby is fucking Jesus.*

"It's pretty clear that Jack doesn't care much for this town or anyone in it," said Susan.

"That's damn right," said Blake. "Once, at the store, Jeff Reynolds and I were talking about cleaning a 12-gauge, and Jack was behind us in line. I swear the little bastard called us 'faggots' under his breath. Does that make sense to you?"

"He knows how important the church is to this town," said Susan.

"The Mexicans almost burned it down in 1846," said Linda, "but the rain stopped it. Mr. Capshaw talks about it all the time in History class."

"Maybe he was lookin' for a way to insult all of us and Ruby at the same time," said Susan.

"I don't understand what made him so angry," said Blake.

"What's he got to be angry about?"

"His mother died just a few months ago, Blake," said Susan.

"So he writes on our church now?" said Blake.

"I guess he doesn't like any of us," said Linda "But what does he have against the Lord?"

"I reckon Jack is just one of those folks who don't quite see straight," said Susan.

"I ain't never seen him in church," said Blake. "Maybe once, ten years ago."

"I haven't seen him *in* church," said Susan. "But I saw him *outside* the church once."

"He must have come here sometime, in order to leave that message," said Blake.

"I mean a few weeks back," said Susan. "Passing through, I saw

him right there, on that bottom step, playing a guitar and singing along. He sang the “s” word. Blake, *you* know how much that kind of language bothers me.”

* * *

“What?” Jack had asked. He muted the guitar strings with his hand.

“Oh, nothing,” said Susan. “How are you today?”

“It’s Bob Dylan,” he said.

“Sure,” she said. “I like Bob Dylan.”

“Then what’s your problem?”

She smiled. “Jack, honey, do you have to sing that song right in front of the church?”

“It’s a building.”

“It’s a little more than a building, Jack.” She sighed. “This church has been standing for a long, long time—longer than it should—because the Lord has willed it to stand.”

“Naw, I think it just has pretty solid foundations. *And* it’s made of Apache oak from the Guadalupes,” he said, as if reciting something.

“You don’t understand,” she said. “This church is blessed.”

“Oh, of course it is,” he said with a fake smile. “Lightning struck the steeple in 1887, and the cross on top glowed for a month.”

Susan scoffed. “You seem to know a lot about the church for someone who never goes.”

“I’m here, aren’t I?”

Susan took a deep breath and straightened her posture. “You may not realize it now, but someday, after you’ve lived for awhile, after you’ve seen enough things, you’ll actually understand how and why the Lord died for you. He died for you, your baby brother, your father, and your mothe—” she stopped herself.

Jack looked down at his guitar and played a few notes. “Do you know how my ma died?”

“Jack, I’m sorry.”

He stopped playing and looked at her. “It’s funny you mention her, Suze. She gave birth to my baby brother in our house, y’know. The car broke down, so the doctor came up to our place. I was told to leave the house, and I did, but I could still hear her screaming. That’s not a bad thing—I know mothers are supposed to scream during childbirth—but it went on for hours.”

“Jack, I only meant—”

“At last,” he interrupted, “the baby was born, and I could go inside. Only the doctor sat me and Pa down and told us she’d lost a lot of blood, and blood clots and infections made it look like she might be with God soon. He said a helicopter could get there in about 30 minutes with blood for an emergency transfusion and then take her to a hospital.”

“Look—”

“I asked the doctor, ‘*Why haven’t you called for one already?*’ but he just looked at my pa. With a blank face, my pa went in to see my ma and whispered something to her. She was too weak to respond. I don’t even think she knew what he was saying. Her eyes were open, and I could see her breathing, but the amount of blood on the bed looked unnatural.”

“You don’t unders—”

“He pulled out a Bible and started reading the fucking book of Matthew out loud. ‘*What the fuck are you doing?*’ I asked. I screamed at them, but Pa and the doctor shoved me out and locked the door. I tried to call for a helicopter, but no one took me seriously. I knocked and screamed, but he just kept reading until she died, after about twenty minutes. You say Jesus died for her?”

“Jack—”

“I say she died for *Him*.”

* * *

“We argued a little, and he told me that he doesn’t believe in God,” said Susan.

“Of course he doesn’t,” said Blake. “The little bastar—”

“Shhh,” said Susan. “Do you hear that?”

“I don’t hear a god-damned thing,” said Blake.

A distant siren whispered and became louder as the patrol car approached and halted. The Sheriff got out, started walking toward the church, realized the siren was still on, and walked back to the patrol car to turn it off. His eyes were wet and red and looked as if they couldn’t focus on anything. He tapped his fingers on the top of the squad car. Linda, Blake, Susan, and the Sheriff stood in silence.

“What happened?” asked Linda, almost a whisper.

The Sheriff didn’t hear her and continued to tap his fingers on the top of the car.

“What happened?” asked Blake, much louder.

The Sheriff opened his mouth and took a few deep breaths.

“I just came from the Brewster’s house,” he said finally. His eyes stayed still. “The storm got ‘em real bad.”

* * *

The lightning and thunder had seemed like it was miles away. Jack and Ruby were trying to sleep, but the booming tear of thunder and the sound of galloping horses in the rain gutters kept them awake. In their own rooms, in their own houses, Jack and Ruby had heard a humming on their window sills. The humming grew louder and louder, then stopped. Ruby got up and looked out her window at Jack’s house. Jack lay still in his bed. The baby cried.

There came a light brighter than the Second Coming and a sound louder than war. Ruby was blinded, and it took her several seconds to

blink away the light. She flew out her door, relying mostly on memory to guide her down the steps and to the front door. Jack crept outside the door, expecting to see an intruder. Jack's father still slept soundly. The baby cried.

Ruby ran into her father and brother in the hall.

"*What's going on?*" her brother asked.

"*Call someone,*" she said.

She ran to Jack's house, 100 feet away, rain pounding against her body, flashbulbs of God's camera capturing the moment with heart-stopping booms.

Jack came into the living room, where he saw flames flitting across the drapes, and smoke clasping to the ceiling. His father was coming to on the easy chair.

"*Someone's in the house,*" he muttered. A spilled bottle of whiskey was on the floor next to him, a revolver in his hand.

"*Dad!*" screamed Jack. "*Fuck! Get up!*" His father tried, unsuccessfully, to open his eyes. Jack eased an arm over his shoulder and heaved his father to his feet. Jack tried to take the gun "*Let go! Let the fuck go!*" His father grunted angrily and held the weapon tight. Jack lumbered as fast as he could to the front door, his father's arms around his neck like a dying soldier. The baby cried.

Ruby opened the front door and ran to Jack.

"*Get out of here!*" he yelled.

"*Where's the baby?*"

"*Oh no. Oh fucking Christ,*" he said. "*Upstairs.*" Jack continued his march out the front door, and Ruby flew up the stairs. She could hear the baby crying before she got to his door.

Jack dumped his father on the ground. Looking down at him, he watched the heavy water attack his eyes, which finally opened, and he propped himself on his elbows, muttering. Ruby snatched the wailing child, shushed into his little ear, and ran back down the stairs.

Jack turned toward the house and froze. All over, the fire whipped its flames against the night, laughing, relishing in its victory over the rain. "*Ruby!*" he screamed. She appeared in the doorway, panting, the child crying at her breast.

"*Thank God,*" whispered Jack, his tears hiding amongst the rain on his cheeks.

Another crash, but this one was different, closer. Jack looked over at his father, who held the revolver aloft. Ruby's eyes grew wide, and she tried to keep walking, but she wasn't breathing. As her last act, she twisted her body and fell on her back, still clutching the crying child.

Jack ran to them. "*Ruby!*" he screamed, shaking her. "*Ruby!*"

Her face remained still. There was a bullet wound over her heart. Jack curled himself over Ruby and the baby, unable to breathe. He

raised his head and looked at his father, still holding the gun—his mouth and eyelids drooping, his face unforgivably blank. Jack pried himself from Ruby and the baby and ran to his father. He kicked his face and kept kicking until Ruby's father tore him away. Jack stood for a few moments, watching the dark rivers tear down Ruby's father's face. Jack embraced him. "*I'm so sorry*," he whispered. He walked over to Ruby, put his hand to her cheek, and grabbed the child before disappearing into the falling sea.

* * *

"Mr. Brewster killed her," said the Sheriff. "The house was on fire, he was drunk, and he killed Ruby. She was trying to help. Early this morning, around five, Jack came knocking at my door, woke me up. When I answered the door, he was soaked through. He was holding his baby brother, who was covered in mud, crying." The Sheriff tried to still his quivering lower lip. "By the time I woke up Beth to take care of the baby, got dressed, and gone to find Jack, he had broken into the store and was spray-painting the church, so I took him in. I thought he was just acting out. All he said was 'she died for you.' Over and over. '*She died for you.*' I thought he'd gone insane."

Linda, Susan, and Blake looked again at the message. *Ruby is fucking Jesus*. Blake took off his hat and looked at the ground. "Jesus."

"Oh, Ruby," said Linda.

Susan sat on the bottom step of the church.

"They died for us," she said.

T. J. Carter is an English major in his junior year.

branches

i loved to climb trees as a young girl
hair webbed in a french braid
though not especially athletic
i could maneuver up an oak
or a maple with surprising agility
spindly limbs reaching pulling pushing
finding footholds at a rapid rate
fingers dexterously grasping and gripping
the sunlight drawing me up
toward the leafy pinnacle

bones and branches lengthen and weary
skin creases into leathery bark
tastebuds evolve and then dull
as flowers bud into bloom then wither and fall
blood thickens and coagulates like cooling sap
roots underground and in the past
once providing nourishment
now limit mobility

the peak makes me dizzy nauseous now
the middle suits me better
less hurt if i fall from here
i climb to forget now
the grit of the ground
whose hidden stones and dips
seek to trip me trap me
to forget the distance to the crown

where sunlight lures and taunts
too far above a false dream
my hands not quite so able
my lungs not equipped for speed
i sit among the emerald sheets
if i dissolved into the bark
i would never have to hit the ground again
or recall the heights i used to command
no longer in my reach

– ALLISE PENNING

Allise Penning is a junior English major at the UO.





alternative energy
eric schultz
cedar and encyclopedia britannica
30 in. x 12 in. x 8 in.

Eric Schultz is a senior Sculpture major. He will be showing at the Jacob's Gallery at the Hult Center in May of 2009

a p a r t _ m e n t

three : forty-two a.m. and
sounds of
freedom or
loneliness
swell in my
stomach.

midwest light and
downtown air
swallow
the skies.

skies i
save myself from
with locks and
windowpanes.

chest rising
next to mine
breathes sour
indifference of
lost love.

sheets are
all
that cling to
me.

– TARA COOK

the book my father gave me

The book my father gave me on my eighteenth birthday
when my suitcase was shut up tightly and
was crammed with extras socks, packed with his stoic guidance
held only the words THOU SHALT NOT over and over in bold type.

The last page, though, flimsy and delicate
like a soft feather was faded away, except
where he had scribbled all his own
desperate tortured
doubts, loves,
alone in the margins.

– BRENNA CROTTY

Brenna Crotty is a junior English major at the UO.



the one who wears chalk
vivian noller
digital photograph
3072 px. x 2048 px.

Vivian Noller is a freshman majoring in Journalism. She has shown at the Judy Vogland Gallery and the Glenn Viola Walters Cultural Arts Center in Hillsboro, Oregon.

since hannah left

MORGAINE HALL

“I filled out your application for you,” Hannah says. “The registrar thinks it’s a done deal.”

That’s great, I say as we walk toward the movie theater.

Hannah slumps against the theater’s glass door, a wave of air conditioning curling into the day’s dry heat.

Hannah breathes a hearty exhale. She says, “Fuck my diet. Let’s get some calories.”

Her laughter echoes in the near-empty lobby. A sluggish usher stirs at the sound, tracing Hannah’s path toward the concessions stand.

Hannah left six months ago for college in Maine—now she’s back for Christmas break. She jokes about how small our trees are, about how people in Maine can walk into their backyards and cut down an eight foot Balsam fir. She says she wants me to come with her for spring semester. I say I don’t think our trees are that small.

There’s a couple in front of us, waiting for their popcorn to finish cooking. Masked by the sound of exploding kernels, Hannah cups her hand around my ear.

“Wow,” she says. “How do you think she got her hair like that?”

I say I’m not sure. It’s a six inch mohawk, a tower of fire against the lobby’s neutral tones.

Hannah pulls on a military-style jacket. We found that coat together, looking through catalogues before she left. It was routine, after school, to pour over glossy images of women in the real world—no dust on their shoes, no stains on their jeans. Anything we ordered required deliberation worthy of the United Nations; the nearest mall was four hours away, a veritable Eden for the desert’s downtrodden youth.

I still get the catalogues—they’re in a withering pile on my floor. After work, I slip into bed, knowing they’re there, waiting for me.

There are no traces of dirt on Hannah’s coat, its brass buttons catching shine on their round edges. I remembered how much prettier it would have looked in red.

"I also convinced the school to let you share my dorm room, even though you're a transfer student," Hannah says. She's wearing green eye shadow, a color we used to share before she left.

The mohawk girl reaches for a bag of skittles, not checking the label before she places the bag on the counter. Her boyfriend is a local—faded jeans, work boots, messy hair; he doesn't seem to fit with a girl like that.

"Let me tell you, it wasn't easy wrangling with the housing department," Hannah says, checking her phone. "I nearly failed my anthropology midterm—but it'll all be worth it to get my friend out of this desolate place."

The problem with the desert is that it leaves everything to the imagination. Hannah and I played pretend in crackling brambles and oppressive heat, marveling as towers and skyscrapers sprung from the hollow earth. I told her stories; let her be a princess or an astronaut as rough winds flickered against the hems of our dresses. I wonder if Hannah remembers how we played barefoot in the hot sand.

"Besides, anything would be better than having to work at that awful diner. Do they make you wear that frilly apron?"

Yes, I say. I got a job at Carla's Roadside Diner on Highway 12 after Hannah left. The aprons were frilly, but the diner's walls were long windows. Everywhere I looked, the desert was there, pounded flat by the feet of invisible giants.

The mohawk girl gets her skittles and a soda while the local boy picks up his jumbo bucket of popcorn. He glances my way, and I wonder if he thinks his girlfriend is as strange as everybody else does.

Hannah moves to the counter—I'm a step behind her. She asks for a small popcorn, no butter, and a diet coke.

The concession stand girl (her nametag reads Sheila) looks at me. I'm touching a bag of skittles, but I drop my hand and shake my head. Sheila shrugs, her dyed-red ponytail bobbing as she turns to the popcorn machine. I imagine she has desert sand in her crow's feet.

Hannah leans close again, whispering in my ear. "I know her."

I grab the popcorn and soda while Hannah pays Sheila, who doesn't look at her customer's face. We walk back across the lobby, to the usher taking tickets.

"Sheila went to high school with my mom. She never went to college." Hannah's lips twist and her eyes roll toward her forehead. "Just think—someday all this could be yours."

While Hannah lets her manicured fingertips brush the usher's hand as she takes our stubs, I wonder if Sheila could hear Hannah's voice across the lobby.

Hannah leads me down the narrow hall to theater six. She chooses our places in the back row, middle seats. As she gets situated, Hannah

says: “I also went to see the head of the English department. He said you’d be a shoo-in for their honors program. I know how much you love to read, so I put in a good word for you.”

I thank her, then eat a piece of dry popcorn. I haven’t done much reading since Hannah left—I work at the diner full-time, staying late to watch blood and bruises appear in the fading daylight.

Hannah sighs, but it’s too short, too sharp to be real. “You’ve gotten quiet since I left, Lauren.”

Yes, I say. As the lights dim, I imagine tall trees blotting out the sun. Ice-laden branches swaying in a light breeze, unable to obscure houses scalloped with snow in the distance. The desert came unheeded despite my imagining, trees and houses fading into wispy mirages under the sun’s insistent light. I want to hold my arms out and welcome that endless plain. It does nothing but wait for me.

o u r f u n e r a l

I fell into that hole with you
and tumbled through the shadows.
You shut your eyes and never knew
the echoes of your coffin's close.

I tumbled through the shadows
into a gruesome Wonderland
resounding with your coffin's close
as your hushed head turned into sand.

While in that gruesome Wonderland,
I looked for you with fevered eyes.
I saw my hands turn into sand
your death was mine but in disguise.

Come look for me with fevered eyes
and whisper to me that you knew:
my death is yours but in disguise.
Within that hole I'll be with you.

– ALLISE PENNING

Allise Penning is a junior English major at the UO.



critique
courtney beau christianson
manipulated digital photograph
36 in. x 36 in.

Courtney Beau Christianson is a senior Digital Arts major.

h o w c a n a b o d y

for e.e. cummings

how can a body
built so flawlessly—
to fit yours and mine ever so clean
and tight (like a fishhook
and eye)
—die
to be reborn

a body so flawed.

each hole with its own binding
yet each hole has its own point
for breaking
undersea of a bathtub or a sink
of ice cold water
seeking refuge
safety
buoy
anything

inbathinbedinsleepinstead,
in midair planes
ears pop as the elevation
drops

or waking up with my nose
yearning to fall off
into an abyss of independence day
reds and white
each drop falling to a pool in ripples
of crimson

fireworks.
lovemakingthrillseekingvomitingbreathtaking
so much so i am wheezing
gasping
gaping for my life inside your mouth (minesodry).

and lover
i'd die inside you
if you'd let me

a body so flawed.

built so flawlessly
for yours and night and only then
i am a house
founded on poplars and alders,
concrete laymen and dove's feathers
to break and be rebuilt
by the sympathy of your body's will
your lake
of solace, effortless.

– STACEY TRAN

Stacey Tran is a freshmen English major whose work has appeared in The Oregon Voice.

in defense of the ostrich

Oh I am an opulent ostrich
And my neck is as long as they come
And I must now protest the preposterous claim
That my kind is unthinkably dumb.

Though it's true that at times we bend over
And bury our heads in the ground
Rest assured that the reason for such strange behavior
Is clever and logically sound.

For if the position one sleeps in
Is the basis on which others judge
Observe the quiescently upside-down bat
Who hangs there with nary a nudge.

If not fully convinced, please consider
The flamingo who stands on one leg
And whose balancing act never meets ridicule
Why then insult the ostrich, I beg?

It's true our position of choice
Is with ostrich-y head buried deep
But it's warm and it's dark and it's ever so quiet
And that's simply the way we sleep.

– SHARAYAH DUTTON

Sharaya Dutton is a second-year English major at the UO.

repairs

KATHERINE VETRANO

Iris Locke was not your typical victim. The Spin City Laundromat, where she parked her Honda, was located on the west side of town, a neighborhood most of her newspaper colleagues had never even seen, let alone spent time in. Far from her own residence, these streets were littered with trash and people who slept in trash. She didn't want to make eye contact with the patrons of the Laundromat, let alone talk to them. But that wasn't a problem for Iris. She sat up straight, with her car doors locked, and watched the time on her stereo clock change. Just because her current neighborhood lacked drug dealers and squatters didn't mean she had forgotten what living here was like.

The air, sticky with Midwestern heat, filled up her car like a hot air balloon. She rolled up the sleeves of her business shirt, still crisp from ironing that morning, and stared straight ahead. Like the residents here, Spin City's façade was poorly cared for. The paint was peeling, and red graffiti spread like streaks of blood across the walls. The windows were caked with dust from what seemed like decades of neglect.

She tried not to think about last night. She had argued with Adam. They didn't have fights often. Not because they were one of those coconut cake type couples. That wasn't it at all. Their arguments, like her life, were just more controlled than most couples. Their two-year marriage wasn't perfect by any means. At least not to Iris.

Iris's life was neatly lined out in her leather-bound planner. From her workout regime to the details of the story she was working on at the newspaper, everything was meticulously planned. This was how she liked it. Without her job, her life could revert back to what it was without Adam, a time where her apartment had no heat, and, depending on the month, no water either.

But she was far from those times. Last night after dinner, she had taken the time to appreciate her husband as he cleaned up the kitchen. She had let herself study everything about him, even down to the

movement of his walk. His pace was slow, rhythmic, and controlled. She was overwhelmed with the urge to touch him, be near him. When Adam left the room, she followed him coyly, as if she had just spotted an attractive stranger for the first time.

She strolled into the room, mocking his steady stride, but with an extra sway of her hips. Flirtatiously, she sat at the edge of the bed, crossing her bare legs, letting her skirt inch up ever so slightly. She looked over to see him already scribbling in his sketchbook, his nightly ritual. Iris slipped into bed next to him, pulling the blue duvet over her now naked legs. She laid her head on his shoulder and her hand on his stomach. He smiled at her for a moment and then focused his attention back on the page. His pen swirled and sketched across the blank space. His eyes blinked as he tried to find words.

Iris smirked to herself, knowing she had caught him. His heart was probably pounding, and soon that sketchbook would be long gone. She left her hand in its new position, looking up at him innocently. Adam caught her wrist gently.

“Iris. I can’t, okay?”

She sat up and took back her hand, retreating to her side of the bed.

“I’m just really stressed out about this story book. My mind has been blank all day, and Daniel wants final sketches by Monday.” In what seemed like an afterthought he added, “I’m sorry, I love you.”

Iris pulled away, quickly shaking off his arm, and walked to their bathroom.

She stirred up a cacophony as she began slamming objects—the clank of her brush against the countertop, the slam of a cabinet, the shove of a drawer. She pushed her toothbrush forcefully from one side to the other in her mouth.

What right did he have to reject her, anyway? *Her* job was stressful. Finding a story to please her boss, getting a good interview, chopping the word count, polishing it, and revising it all by a midnight deadline.

Iris stood in the doorway and glared at Adam, who was still drawing.

“You know what? You’re ridiculous! I can’t believe you lost your sexual attraction to me and forgot to mention it.”

“Iris, I-“

“Please, don’t give me this bullshit. This isn’t even the first time you’ve pulled this.”

“Iris, “ he began.

“And job stress, really? You do children’s books, Adam. You’re not exactly going to be reviewed in the New York Times. You don’t even have to write the story!”

“You know this has been stressful for me. I’m not going to take the

way you're acting personally. I know this isn't you."

He got up to touch her. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean--"

Nothing was working, not their washer, their dryer, her marriage, even her own articles at the paper. She slept in the spare room and wondered if a marriage could become stale after only two short years.

She had always despised laundromats. When she had started living in places with their own washing machines and dryers, she felt a world of change from her old life. Spin City Laundromat had nowhere to sit except for a few broken plastic chairs scattered across the linoleum. Like a punishment, the lack of seats forced her to endure the August humidity from her car.

Finally done, she loaded the wash into the backseat of the car, and recalled the emotional mess left at home. She had smoked a half pack of Camels, and the overexposure to the summer heat was making her even more irritable. She was ready to retreat to her couch, even indulge in some reality television. She knew Adam wouldn't be home, and maybe by the time he returned, she would have collected herself enough to let him apologize.

But when Iris attempted to start her car, a 1995 Honda, it only hacked a cough. She smacked her hand against the steering wheel and attempted to start it again. Nothing. Her dysfunctional Honda was an aspect of life she had grown used to, but this was not a good day for car troubles. Iris reached into her purse for her cell phone, but felt only the basics beneath her fingers: wallet, planner, cigarettes, and lighter. Her phone was likely far away on her kitchen counter, far too distant from where she needed it to be.

She looked around at her options for a savior. A college student not so inconspicuously smoked pot in his front seat. An elderly woman, possibly triple Iris's age, nodded off into the steering wheel of her Buick. A man, tattooed from his wrists to his neck, encouraged his pit bull to bark every time someone walked by.

Iris winced at the barking, she had always hated dogs, and looked toward the deteriorating laundromat building. A man emerged carrying a wicker basket, and he stopped for a moment to pick up a fallen dress sock. He wore a collared shirt, the sleeves neatly folded and rolled up revealed a leather watch. His slacks stopped at the ankle, just skimming his loafers. She decided if anyone would help her, this man would be her best bet. He had money; that was for sure. Perhaps he was even in the same situation as her, doing his laundry on his lunch break, punished by a broken machine at home. It also didn't hurt that the man was striking. His cheeks were splashed with a boyish flush that made him appear younger, though his attire made her unsure how old he actually was.

Gingerly, she approached his car, but before she could speak, her eyes were drawn to her own reflection. The car was newly washed, shining as if it were made of black mirrors. She saw her workpants were tight, more so than she would have liked. She scrutinized her hips, pushing slightly over her belt. Suddenly she realized he was looking at her and felt her face heat up. His eyes were dark and distractingly beautiful.

"Hi there," Iris cleared her throat, "this is not something I would usually do, but my car won't start. Is there any possibility that you could have a look at it for me?"

The man's gaze darted from Iris's legs to her face and then to his hands on the steering wheel. He didn't speak for a moment, and then he said, "If you open the hood, I can take a look."

After peering under the hood, he said, "It's just your battery. I need to get my jumper cables from my house though." Iris nodded solemnly and wished she had her own. Shouldn't she know better at this point?

"Great. Thank you so much. I'm deeply sorry about this. I'll just wait here," she said, motioning to her car, but the man shook his head.

"Dicey neighborhood, why don't you come with me?" Iris stopped for a moment and thought, should she? It was a nice car. She imagined herself lounging on the sleek black leather, perhaps placing her hand on his muscled arm. She had never been in a car like that. She shook her head,

"No, really. I'll just wait here. It's fine."

"I'd like some company. It's a little bit of a long drive. I live out past Elkwood." Iris looked at the man, at his business attire, and his styled haircut.

"Alright then."

She walked over to the passenger side and decided she was being too careful. This was just a man, with a job just like hers, who simply wanted to help. She buckled the seat belt around her waist and looked at him again. He hadn't made eye contact with her since the moment she walked up to the car.

"Thank you so much for doing this. My husband isn't home. Normally I'd call him and make him do it!" she laughed too loudly, and when he didn't join in, said, "I'm Iris."

"James," he said, starting the car. His eyes focused on the road ahead. She shrugged, assuming he wasn't much of a talker, and pressed her back into the leather seat. She gazed out the window as they traveled through a more suburban neighborhood than the location of the laundromat. Each house looked exactly the same, varying only in color, and Iris smiled, thinking these were what Adam liked to call "little boxes of boredom." She watched as a few children played with a ball

on the sidewalk, giggling.

They drove together without conversation for a long time, with the hum of the car wheels on the freeway the only sound between them. She studied him every once and awhile, wondering what he did for a living, if he had a family, if he had other cars like this, but decided to hold back. She couldn't stand when people were overly chatty with her, so she rationalized his silence. He was just a respectable man who had decided to be generous with someone who needed help.

They had been on the freeway a long time, or it felt like it, when James pulled onto a two-lane highway. The winding road was lined with trees that blocked their surroundings, and Iris no longer knew where she was. "Where do you live, the Boonies?" she laughed, and once again it went unacknowledged. She nodded; she guessed so. This was not at all the way she took to Elkwood. In fact, she remembered it being the opposite direction. After fifteen more minutes on the two-lane highway, he pulled off onto a dirt road. The tires crunched the rocks and uneven terrain below, causing the car to shake a little. The pavement had stopped, and, for a moment, so did her breath.

She looked at him for recognition, something to tell her he wasn't headed where she thought. Then she noticed streams of sweat on his forehead, and one steady line rolled down his flushed cheek, the same cheek she thought had looked so innocent just an hour before.

Once again, Iris felt for her cell phone in her purse, but only found emptiness. She tried to take note of her surroundings, something she could tell the police if she could get out of the car. There wasn't much to be noted: tall trees towered over scattered farmhouses, most of them looked abandoned. James' eyes were stones, barely blinking and never looking to her side of the car. She watched his jaw tense up as he pushed the gas for more power. Was he taking her someplace to kill her? Or just rob her? Could she fight back if she unlocked the door first? Her eyes scanned the car for heavy objects to throw, but the only big object was her own purse. She began to fiddle with her car keys, trying to find the sharpest one to place between her fingers if he chose to attack.

Attack? Maybe she was being unreasonable. After all, she didn't know this man. Maybe his house really was far away. But as the jingle of her keys became louder, each one falling against the next, she saw James twitch slightly. Still looking forward, he placed one large hand on Iris's, stopping the sound and all of her hopes of safety.

As he drove deeper into the emerald mantle of the shrubbery and farther from any buildings, something inside her brought forth a survival instinct.

"If you bring me back to the city, I will do anything. Do you need a girlfriend? Money? I have a checkbook here, how much do you need?"

He began to drive faster, clouds of dust spinning around the car.

The trees around them no longer looked like trees, but blots of color—greens, browns, all colors she usually associated with calm. Iris looked down at his huge hand grasping hers and was disgusted. When she felt herself begin to shake, he eased his grasp a little, and then his hand slid back to his own lap. She noticed more sweat on his skin, and she spoke up again,

“Can you take me to a restroom? I really need to use one. Please?” James was breathing heavier, and Iris was beginning to wonder if she would ever see Adam again. She was so angry with him when she left the house, furious even, for something so stupid. She realized if she died today, they would have never had the chance to bring a child into the world. Adam would have no one.

Oddly, she thought of her clothes, miles away now, probably still warm from the dryer. She longed for their warmth against her skin, even in all the humidity of the afternoon. She wanted to bring the laundry back to Adam, to tell him everything was okay, and she would fix the machine herself.

The tightness in her throat grew from holding back the tears. Then she felt the car slowing. She watched the speedometer fall from fifty down to thirty, then all the way to fifteen. James put the car in reverse and slowly turned it back to the direction the highway. She didn’t dare say a word and wondered if he had changed his mind or was now planning to take her somewhere else. Maybe he had believed her about the restroom.

Once again, they were on the highway, and the buzz of asphalt below them was an old familiar friend. He was still sweating, and she noticed his hands were shaking.

When he pulled into a gas station and turned off the engine, Iris slipped her leather purse over her shoulder. This was her chance to escape, given he would let her leave the car. She looked at him one last time, but his eyes were still avoiding her. With ease, she opened the car door, letting the humidity float against her skin.

She walked quickly to the restroom behind the station’s convenience store and didn’t look back to see what James was doing. She locked the door behind her and let her back slide down it, pressing against the wood for support. She rubbed her palms against her eyes and cried. No one was here to judge her, but, for once, she didn’t care if anyone did.

She thought of Adam, who would be home by now, likely asleep on the couch with a book fanned out on his chest. Iris took a few deep breaths. Under the door, she noticed that the sliver of sunlight that had originally crept in was gone. She flicked on the light in the bathroom, wiped her face with a paper towel, and put her hand on the doorknob. Of course James would be gone, but her heart still pounded as she opened the door. There was nothing. A single fluorescent light

shone over the station, and a country song played over the speakers.

She walked out onto an empty street, found a phone and did what she should have done in the first place. She called a tow truck. She laughed now, thinking how little she cared about spending the money. Back at her broken car, she knew it could be fixed, and so could a couple of other things.

The tow truck driver agreed to let her off at home. The house was dark and still. Iris dropped her basket on the tile of the kitchen and called out.

“Adam?”

Silence. She nodded. She knew she had made a mistake last night. While she may have narrowly escaped her fate today, her relationship would not automatically heal. She walked into each room of the house, flashing the lights on and off. She finally came to the laundry room, cramped and dim, just big enough for the washer, dryer, and a basket. When she switched on the light, she saw a post-it stuck to the dryer.

Iris,

Finally fixed this damn thing. I wish you'd have brought your phone with you. Hope you had a good day. I'll be in my studio for the rest of the night, come over if you want to talk.

Love, Adam

Iris folded the note and placed it in her front pocket. She walked towards Adam's studio in the backyard, ready to deliver the only apology she had ever given him.

Katherine Vetrano is Senior majoring in English. She has previously published in Ethos Magazine (formerly KD Magazine). This story was written at the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, and is based on an actual event that happened to her mother in Berkeley, California.



caddy 56
lizzy myers
film print

Lizzy Myers is a freshman majoring in Women's and Gender Studies.

the smell of fireworks

The smell of fireworks floods my nose
like the world's in ashes but nobody knows.
I breathe deep as heartbreak becomes a part of my vocabulary,
but no matter how lonely I get,
no kind of love can make cigarettes taste sweet.
What was once a pilgrimage
has turned into a forced march on broken feet
while serrated smoke pours through the streets.
Where I should see rage and light and heat
all I see are cracks in the sidewalks,
those conveyer belts of the daily grind
full of people silently keeping their places,
no expressions, just the faces.

Despair tastes like fast food
and crawls on your skin like daytime television,
and while you're sittin' channel surfen' for the easy decision
you're bein' robbed of your knowledge
by billboards and products
magazines and dollars
commercials and pop culture.
Inside your skull sits a mind picked clean by Vultures™
who want you to think of nothing
but what you don't own
so they can sell it to you.

Never mind your innocence
you just want your bike back,
but the bully on the stoop says
*It don't work like that. You gonna follow the rules
or are you gonna act?*
So make him a deal with the business end of a bat
then run from the police
for there will be no peace
without some understanding.

We've been burnin' our bridge at both ends
with the masses in the middle making no friends.
It's the Liberals and the G.O.P.,
one half spits while the other half speaks
with troop supporters and bumper sticking geeks
who keep saying freedom isn't free like it's a fucking commodity.
The dream is toted on a pedestal
like a slave can win the lottery,
but no amount of money can fake patriotism
or the patterns of a risen perspective.
Life is elective.
You gotta perfect it like a discipline.
It's not about giving in or committing no sins,
it's about knowing your oath and aiding your growth.
Don't choke.
You need all the sad and all the anger you had to build yourself.
The feelings you felt remind you you're human.
You find that there's truth in a purpose,
but under the surface it's like a mother without a hug,
an excuse to do drugs.
It's fatal,
but so is being born.
so stop being torn between the black and the white
when the wrong and the right
shared gene pools like husband and wife
long ago when the first cave man ever asked
WHY?

He sold his soul for knowledge.
Today the offer sounds fair,
but when God found out Satan made that purchase
that snake wound up in a wheelchair.
You can say it ain't so,
but the Devil taught you everything you know.
Free will isn't just for show.
God didn't want us tasting the Tree
so who would be the one most concerned with your interests?
You can ask forgiveness
or you can defend yourself,
enlighten and mend yourself.
Stop and smell the fireworks;
they're blooming for your every word.
They want to hear you speak
just like I want to hear you speak.
Your silence is the only thing you'll ever regret.

Every crack in the sidewalk screams
The world is a canvas!
So why the hell aren't you painting yet?

– SACHEL BENNETT

Satchel Bennett is a sophomore English major at the UO.

the beginning

BRENNA CROTTY

Sam met Del after he had already resigned himself to slow, withering bachelorhood. He had a well-established life, had already written several books to general acclaim. General acclaim, he learned, wasn't the way it had sounded when he was young and unpublished. For you to be a household name you had to have written a book "to rave reviews" or one that had spent "twenty-three weeks on the bestseller list," and you had to be on Oprah at some point. "General acclaim" was what they meant when you only sold your soul a little in order to get published. When you said, well no, I guess I wouldn't call religion *essential* to the plot, but you also made them change the title when the film version finally aired. Sometimes now he wishes he had just gone the whole way and changed everything they asked because he thinks perhaps it feels about the same.

He was thirty-eight years old and on a mad, published high the day he met her. His latest work, *Soliloquy*, had been accepted, nay, snapped up by the same company that had dismissed his unique strength of wry, poetic prose twelve years prior. Oh, but they were penitent and eager this time around. He had spent the better part of the year writing the story of the old bachelor who dies alone, and the worst part staring in impotent rage at a blank screen. He hadn't even known the month when he emerged bear-like from his study, a messy, scrawling, beautiful manuscript in hand.

He decided to go out. Why not? A night on the town. Abandon the pastoral for an hour and glut on the neon, the obscene, the supremely unsubtle. *God*, he thought as he strolled along the sidewalk, drinking in the gritty, noisy wind of packed traffic, the warm bricks of towering buildings, the broken bottles and condom wrappers pushed up against the curb. *The poetry that goes unwritten only because it stares you so wantonly in the face!*

The red glow of the Cinemark advertisement was pleasant to him like a warm, alcoholic drink. A drink would be best in this city; a drink, but not in a bar with all the men who failed themselves. Not

when he himself had succeeded so *succinctly*. What a marvelous word, succinct. Like a small swallow of wine. Like a woman with two rounded curves who draws in a deep breath for that hard, quick thinning effect: *succinctly*.

A club, then. There was one down the block, its bass thrumming so low he could already feel it in his feet. See the teenagers in their remarkable lack of clothing, the gay men, the Ecstasy, and manufactured goodwill toward sloppy, stupid people who could never love each other through natural means.

He felt old the moment he stepped in; old and overdressed and out of place. The club was small and the dancing was packed in tightly, like the print in old tiny pocket books. Like those miniature manuals, though, everyone seemed to have their place, no space in between: hip to hip, groins and asses packed together like magnets pulling the rest of the body along. It did not invite a frumpled man in brown pants and sandals.

The word of the day in this room was *throb*. The music *throbbed* like a banged elbow, red and raw, with that sole beat at the center, over and over, the way you can feel your pulse anywhere in your body so long as you injure it first. The lights *throbbed*—shades of red and pink and obscene flushes of green and orange, throbbing like a seizure in his optical nerves. And the people, dear God—mindless pulses from whole beings that all appeared like stiff and aching erections. It was like being inside a vagina during an alarmingly violent bout of copulation.

He felt strengthened by the amusing image he had crafted for himself, and so moved his way with considerably more ease to the bar itself. The lighting over the drinks was of a normal white hue, perhaps so customers could discern what they were drinking. He was not comforted by this, as the drinks also followed the general neon décor of the place. He had a strong urge, as he sank onto a sparkling, pink-cushioned stool, to order a Bud.

He hated Bud.

What am I doing here?

A young man who looked as though he spent most of his time leaning shirtless against charmingly brick walls asked him what he wanted.

“My youth again, and tenure at Princeton!” he shouted over the din.

“You want that on the rocks?” the bartender shot back.

He sank lower and grinned, wondering if the boy was a smartass or if he had actually just ordered one of those strange, new-age drinks that were always called long, terrible things. *Weird Sex Positions on a Coastal Pier or Flammable Buttery Testicle Fur*. These names, the

same as long movie titles like *They Shoot Horses Don't They*, leeches all the meaning out of words until people said the whole thing in a flat, monotone string, thinking of the drink itself instead of each connotation of its infernally obscene name.

It was strange the way she came to him. She was not the prettiest girl there, or the flashiest dancer. If she had been, he would have spotted her on the floor and nailed her to it immediately with *slut* or *young piece* or just a bitter, lusting, *little girl*. She was not the wallflower either, whom he could have dismissed just as easily as a girl more egotistical than the slut, because the wallflower always secretly expected men to just notice her and desperately invite her into their lives.

Instead she sat next to him and turned her whole body on the stool to face him, smiling openly.

"Hi," she said. She was flushed, and her dark curls were damp and pressed against her temples. She wore a pale blue tube top, but it was pulled up to sufficiently cover her cleavage.

He stared purposely up and away at a shelf of bottles, more of which seemed to be syrup rather than alcohol. "Hi."

"Ugh, I'm sweating all over the place." He looked over at her, startled. She spoke as though they were close and personal friends. She peeled her hair up off the nape of her neck and draped it in a heavy coil over one shoulder so that he had a full view of her bare back and the curve of her neck. She leaned over and nudged him with her elbow. "You dancing tonight?"

He eyed her uneasily, unsure if she was teasing him or flirting. "Actually, I'm celebrating." A drink came for him. He cupped it in his hands and examined it, feeling her curious eyes still on him.

"Ah. Big promotion?"

"Of a sort."

"What's that mean?"

He turned to her now, fascinated by her interest. Her head was tilted and her thin, whip-like body was bent at the waist in a question mark.

"You ever hear of Sam Heraldson?" He sized her up and was not surprised when she answered.

"Nope. What'd he do?"

"Wrote a few books. I don't suppose you've read *False Paradise*?"

She yanked the top of her shirt a little higher under her arms, then reached up in the same movement to touch the hair near her temple. "Doesn't ring a bell."

He wasn't really surprised, even though most people had at least heard of the novella—it had even been turned into a movie, albeit by a different name. That had been his decision, to make a separation

between the reality of his book and its bastardized, Hollywood twin. He hadn't even written the screenplay; why should he let them have the title? He wanted to ask the girl if she'd seen the movie, but the thought depressed him. If she didn't know who he was, well, who did? Authors are unrecognizable, hiding on book jackets in thoughtful poses. Posters and interviews are for rock stars and actors.

"I guess you're a magazine kind of girl, aren't you?" He smiled into his drink.

"Yeah, I suppose. That's right." Slow, confused, almost indignant pride. "But I guess you've read it, then?"

"I wrote it."

"Oh."

She ordered a drink with a long name very fast without stressing enunciation. It sounded very much like Flaming Swedish Massage. The bartender brought it in a martini glass, and she began to drink it quickly, facing forward. When she was finished, she set it down hard and then pushed her stool back in an effort to step down.

"I'm sorry," he said. He was. She was so beautiful and wild, a pulse still going like mad under the tender skin of her neck, fast and out of sync with the beat of the music. She kept facing forward and shrugged in marvelous ineloquence. *Yeah, so?*

"I've never been to one of these before." He dropped his tone, and she leaned in a bit involuntarily, trying to catch his words. "It makes me feel old."

She glanced over at him now, sideways. "That's what I thought, when I came over. That you looked new here, I mean. You're the only original dresser here, so I had to ask." She laughed, not at his brown pants and sandals, but maybe at the fact that out of all the Mohawks and eight inch heels *he* had been the one she noticed. "And you're not *old*," she added quickly, giving him a shy smile. "I don't think. It's just that you're not *dancing*."

"Is *that* it?" He raised an eyebrow at her in purposeful exaggeration. Her smile was kind and encouraging, but her whole body was another kind of invitation, as though dancing itself had transformed her into light and sweat and sweet breath, and could do the same for him.

"Come on." She pushed his shoulder playfully, her laugh louder than the music. "You're like, thirty."

"And if you're over twenty-one then I'll..." He couldn't think of anything to finish that sentence with and closed his eyes, his fingers twitching about his glass in search of a pen. He wanted to say something suave and clever, but more than that he wanted to capture her on paper, silhouette her in words as soft and primal as her skin.

"You'll what?"

"Nothing. Never mind. Sorry."

She propped her elbows on the bar and raised her glass to eye level, examining it with exaggerated concentration. Her nails were exquisite—long, like the claws of a carnal feline, but soft and white, as though she would only hook them into you in order to knead with innocent affection. He placed one finger on a napkin and wished once more for a pen.

She turned abruptly. “I’m twenty-three, honest to God. Is that old enough for you to dance with me?”

He wanted to tell her she was a poem. Not a sonnet, but a villanelle, where the most emphatic aspects of her body repeated themselves over and over in his mind to the slamming in his chest.

“I guess,” he said. He wiped his hand on his pants and offered it to her.

“I’m Sam.”

“Call me Del.”

As opposed to what?

“Delighted,” he said, with only the slightest emphasis on the first syllable. She gave him a quick, tight smile, as if to say, *I’ve given up even getting annoyed at people who say shit like that to me.*

“So,” he said, raising his voice over the din. She looked him in the eye as though fascinated at the thought of what he might say. He fumbled for words. “What are you doing in the city tonight? Do you have class or anything tomorrow?” He reached up and flattened his bangs down to hide his receding hairline.

“My morning is entirely free tomorrow,” she said with a business-like shake of her head.

“What?” He laughed uncertainly.

“Isn’t that what you’re asking?” When he just stared uncertainly at her, she smiled and shrugged. “Okay, no, I’m not in school. I graduated from undergrad with a degree in Psych, but I’m working in retail at Mervyn’s because Psych is a useless major.”

She gave this information as a canned speech that she must have said a hundred times before to a hundred different guys. He was losing her to indifference. She turned away from him and surveyed the cesspool of writhing bodies as though searching for an entry point.

“Well, it’s got to be good for something or you wouldn’t have taken it, right?” He leaned forward, craning his neck to catch her eye. She turned back around, her hands fidgety again, straightening her short black skirt and swinging her hair back over her shoulder. She looked intently into his eyes while she did so then gave him a sly smile.

“Oh, I took it for a good reason.” She leaned into him and put her hand boldly on his thigh. He felt heat spread across his leg as though she had just spilled her drink all over his lap. “It means I can read your mind.”

God, she had him at every turn. He felt fantastically disoriented,

led by the nose by a girl more than ten years his junior. What a better life he could have than a cold study where he turned the heat off to save money and kept the white walls bare to keep from distracting himself. He wanted to be hot and overwhelmed and mindless for once.

"Oh?" He covered her hand with his own, pushed it up a few inches.

She squeezed her eyes shut tightly for a moment and bit her lip as if in teetering indecision. Then she took a deep breath, licked her lips, leaned forward and whispered, "Come dance with me and I'll let you take me home."

She had hopped off the bar stool and threaded her way back toward the dance floor by the time he registered the offer. He watched her move and imagined laying her out on his bed as he wrote down a fiery ode to her body, transforming her into his Muse with the power of his blazon, a chaste goddess draped in white linen.

Her outline faded into a blur under the neon lights, and a tired gray depression threatened to overwhelm the pulse that beat where her hand had rested. Certainly it had been ten years since he had taken a twenty-three year old girl home with him, but he could imagine the way it would go. He'd leave her in his bed in the middle of the night to pad drearily into his study. He'd close the door and stay in the white room and try to think of metaphors for her legs until suddenly it was evening and she had taken a cab home, leaving only a post-it note on his door saying *Thanks for nothing!* Wasn't that how it always went?

As Sam stood up and paid his tab, he did not know yet that Delilah Barrington was a light sleeper and that she would knock boldly at his study door at 2:00 a.m. and barge in before he could tell her *I'll be there in a minute*. That she would be draped in a white sheet, but only around the waist, her breasts bared unashamedly as she stood behind him at his desk. That when he told her he was working, she would ask to hear what he wrote.

He knew only that as he watched her move quickly and gracefully away from him, he could think of nothing poetic to compare to her long, tanned legs, and that that blankness of mind freed his limbs for once.

He flattened his hair once more and followed her into the crowd.

Brenna Crotty is Junior majoring in English. This is her first published piece.

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She sips, atop the corner stool perched,
A beauty beyond those where I have searched.
From her hidden vertex spread, at angle right,
Such wonders natural as grip my sight:
Two legs that taper to two dainty knees.
Shall I unite these legs isosceles?—
I might do well as her hypotenuse,
Yet would that her two sides slanted obtuse!
Equidistant from her nose, acute,
Her eyes descend to my midpoint, the root
Of my love for her lush geometry;
Perhaps she loves me to a like degree?
Inflamed, I join our lines inside my head
And glimpse our wondrous scalene shape abed.

— CHRISTOPHER BRADLEY

Christopher Bradley is a senior English major, whose work has appeared in the Oregon Voice, Chapman Journal, and Unbound Literary Magazine.



it's just what i wanted!
eric schultz
collected and dyed clothes, laundry basket

Eric Schultz is a senior Sculpture major. He will be showing at the Jacob's Gallery at the Hult Center in May of 2009

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I dreamt I had daughters,
Two beautiful, beautiful daughters.
I carried Lillian in my arm
As I walked Elizabeth to school.
Little Lillian was still too young;
She rested her head against my chest
And listened to my heartbeat.
Elizabeth hopped over cracks in the sidewalk,
Jumping two steps ahead,
Then waiting,
Then two steps again.
They were as perfect as the spring air
We walked in.
The mild breeze brought bees
And the sticky pollen they stole
From freshly fertilized flowers.
Everything in bloom and growing,
My daughters including.
When we stopped at the school
I knelt down and kissed Elizabeth,
And Lillian wanted one, too.
I thought to myself, at that moment,
Let me stay in this wishful dream
And never return to reality,
To a life alone and sterility.

– MARSHALL PETRYNI

a lullaby on a tin-pan

I. Telemachus

I ate a green apple. My mother gave me a rose and said never to do it again. I walked down to the basement, black with a white window. I set the rose and the apple core on the windowsill and licked my sticky fingers. My fingers tasted like the day my grandfather died and I smiled. Sometimes grandfather yelled at Cordelia. His white beard whipped forward like fire turning in the nighttime. Sometimes he read me a poem about falling into a marsh of white flowers. I never told, but I imagined the flowers were blue like the sea. I walked out of the basement and into the light. I would never do it again.

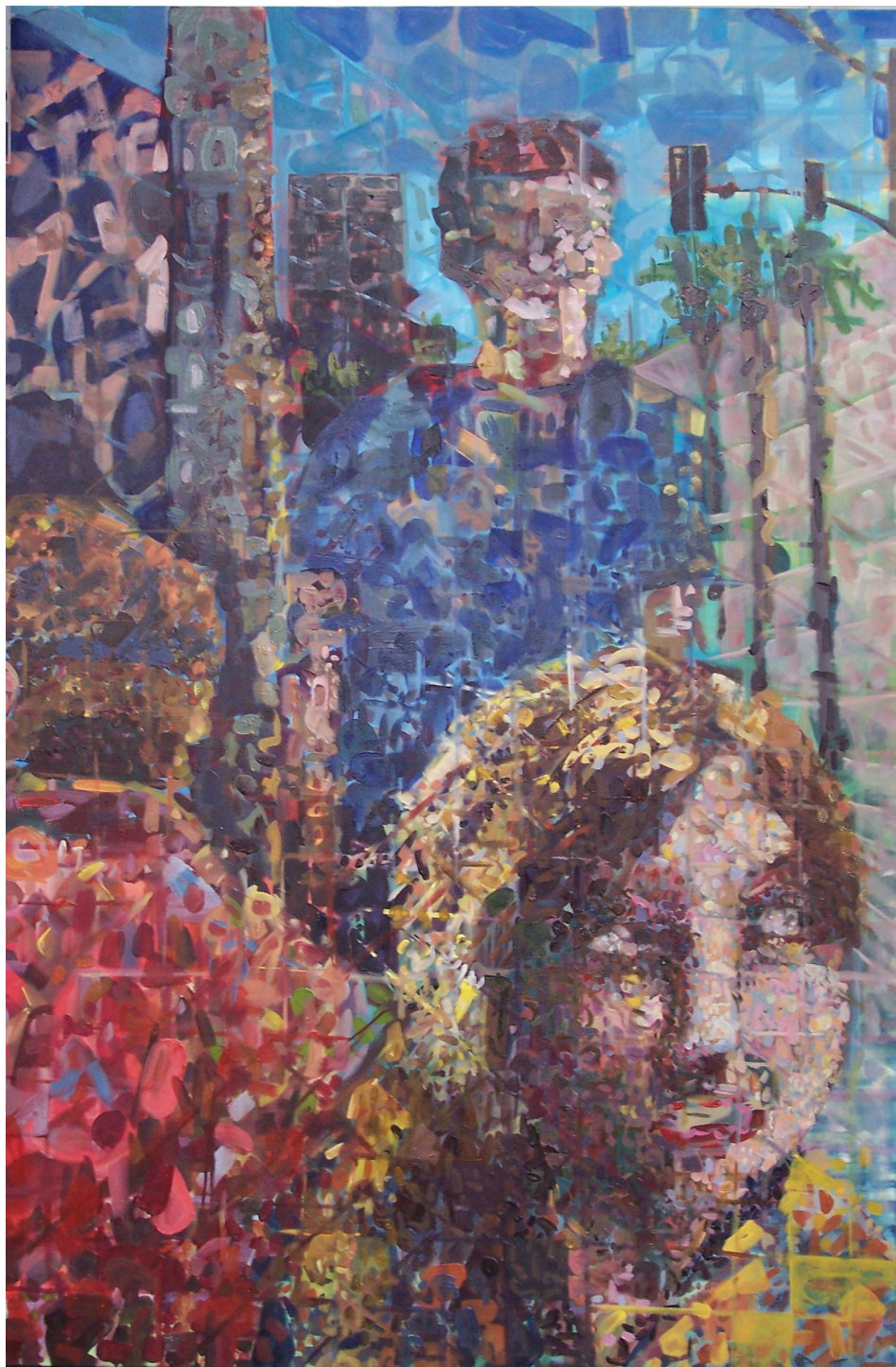
II. Proteus

Grandfather came into the mirror. He picked up the razor. I had a beard like grandfather and he slid the razor up my neck toward my chin. I could see Cordelia in the mirror, giggling with a violet bow in her hair. Grandfather said Rosalind was a bad girl and I thought about the roses and the creek and the high trees. Her hair was black like mother's. My face was coming back and I thought I saw Rosalind where my face was. Cordelia grabbed grandfather's hand. Red came like the roses. Cordelia cried and ran away.

– AMBROSE WILLIAMS

Ambrose Williams is a senior English major at the UO whose work has appeared in No-mad: A Collection of Undergraduate Essays





modern pointillism
brooke borcharding
6 ft. x 4 ft.

Brooke Borcharding is a senior Painting major. Her work is currently on display at Café Roma, Emerald Art Center, and Palace Bakery in Eugene. She has previously shown work at Diablo's Downtown Lounge in Eugene, and Novel Café and Unurban Café in Santa Monica.

vacation

LESLEE CHAN

We split up, but Mary still sends me postcards every week. This time it's a four-by-six rectangle of green Japanese grass and combed white sand. Sarah snaps on her seat-belt in the front seat of the red pickup truck, singing her ABC's as she waits for me to take her to school. I've never shown her the postcards because she'll ask about Mary, why her mother is "on vacation" when she's really just staying in the hospital across town. Through the icy windshield, I can see Sarah's chapped nose drip, but the pickup's heater broke down yesterday.

Every Monday after the cannery work whistle blows, I pause on the front porch to shake the dirt off my boots and shuffle through bills to find another postcard from Mary. They're always the same—pictures of cruel desert landscapes, stark black and white photos of European cities, diagrams of extinct fish done in pale color pencil—things she likes, places she'd like to see once she gets better again.

But unlike the others, this postcard of a Zen garden in Kyoto has no postmark, no stamp. Left here, slipped under the doormat, my guess, in the middle of the night. A green edge peeking out, like a leaf blown off a nearby tree. Mary in a backless hospital gown, bare feet on the front porch, the moon un-anchoring itself.

She must be getting better if they let her out, but I doubt it. I shove the postcard into my pocket, my breath coming out like slow, hot bursts in the cool weather. Frost casts the front yard white, but Mary's flowers died a long time ago. This past spring, when she began pouring her pills down the trash disposal behind my back, Mary planted row after row of scarlet begonias late one night. Just back from the bar, I leapt out of the truck and watched her stab the earth over and over again. She kneeled in the dirt, the spade she held slashing at the sky as if it were a knife, packet after packet of seed being emptied every which way. Then, Sarah ran screaming out of the house. The kitchen curtains were on fire. A pot of boiling water left unattended burned dry, the copper bottom fusing with the stove top's

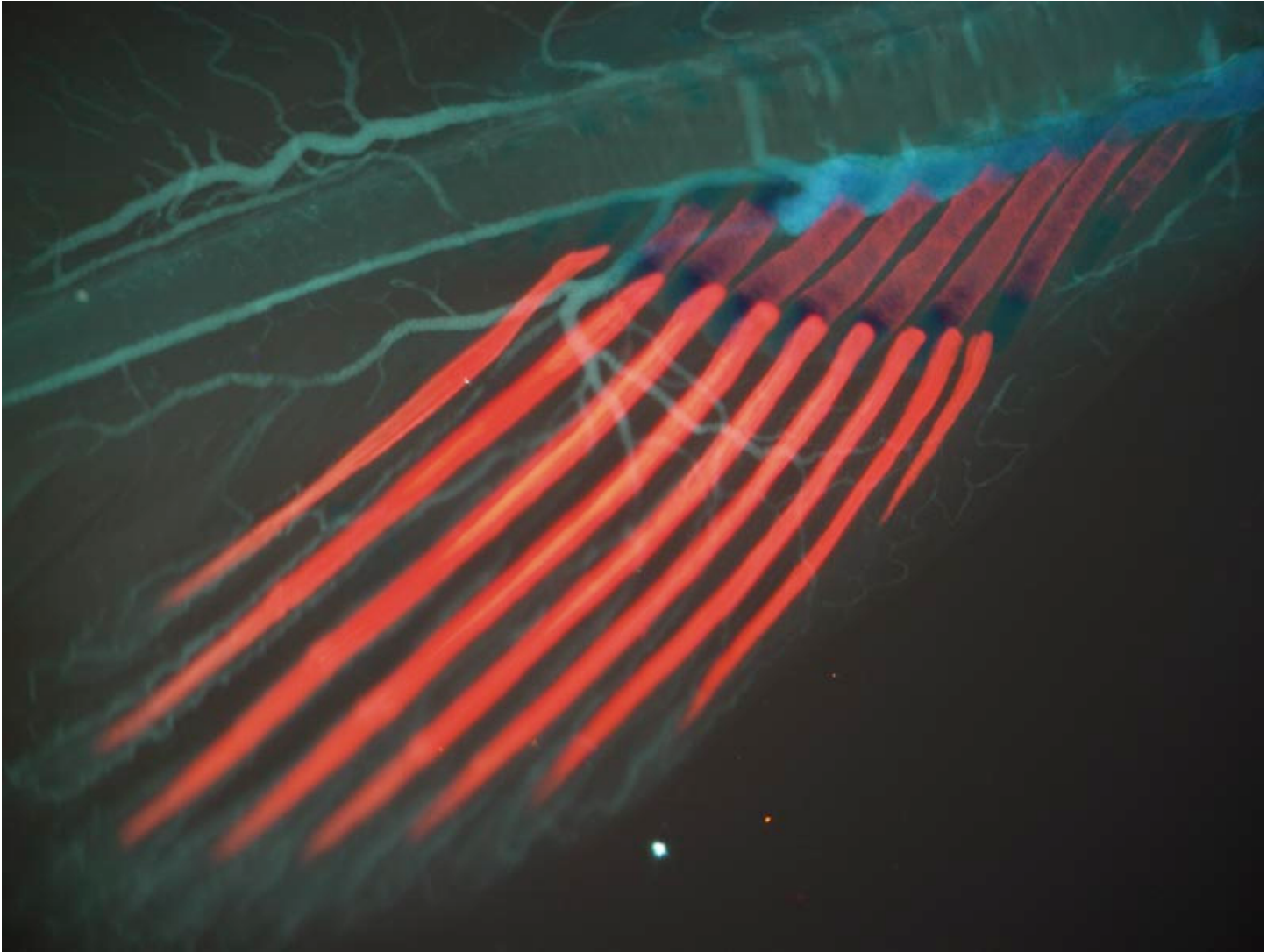
glowing orange coils.

I climb back into the pickup and try to keep my hands steady on the wheel. Once the blue school building down the block appears in sight, the damn busted heater roars alive before it quits for good. Sarah hums the alphabet song between sniffles, stopping only to puff up her cheeks and blow air onto the window pane. On the foggy glass, she draws a cat and immediately erases it with her sleeve. After I drop her off, I plan on visiting the law office downtown to get divorce papers drawn up. We got married five years ago, right after high school graduation, but that was way before I knew the truth about Mary—how she's crazy. I don't want to go see her, but maybe then she'll stop sending postcards. I'm always afraid Sarah will ask about her mother, but this morning she doesn't. Next week, she announces, all the first graders are going to a pumpkin patch.

Leslee Chan is a senior majoring in English and Humanities, with a minor in Comparative Literature.



odontode #4
mark c. currey
digital image
800 px. x 600 px.



garrrr
mark c. currey
digital image
800 px. x 600 px.

Marc C. Currey is the faculty feature for the Winter 2009 issue. He is a Senior Research Technician at the Cresko Lab for the Center for Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. This series is currently on display at the University's Knight Library

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