

UNBOUND

ONLINE LITERARY MAGAZINE FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

SPRING 2009
VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

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editor's letter

Dear Readers,

This was a year of exceptional growth for our fledgling magazine. The publication has come out of its adolescence and is now entering adulthood by leaps and *bounds*, if you will. What started as a musing brought about by a lecture from Professor John Witte during the University's Literary Editing Course became six individuals who truly believed in the strength of student art and literature on campus. Now, it is so much more.

The *Unbound* staff now has sixteen students who want nothing more than to find those pieces of student art and literature that come alive on the page. *Unbound's* growth is also in large part thanks to its readers and contributors. Over the past year, our submission pool has grown from a mere handful of submissions to around thirty per genre, making the competition for publication tough and allowing some exceptional talent to come through. The submission pool ranges from students studying English and Art to Environmental Studies and Political Science. This gives the magazine a fantastic variety of unique voices. To keep up with the influx of submissions, you may have noticed the magazine overhauled its image over the past year. We now approach each issue by trying to design something visually interesting that maintains and increases the integrity of the piece itself. The *Unbound* layout staff is constantly experimenting with layout, attempting to create best publication we can!

I would like to give special thanks to the ASUO, who approved the magazine as an ASUO-recognized group. The *Unbound* staff hopes that this newfound "legitimacy" will allow us to do more for student artists and writers on campus. From book swaps, to art shows and readings, the staff wants to bring together the artistic community at Oregon.

One of the best ways to serve students is to produce a quality publication some of the most promising work on campus. Historically, literary magazines provide space for the new up-and-comers in the artistic world, publishing the likes of William Carlos Williams and Ernest Hemingway. To join the ranks of these brilliant publications, the *Unbound* staff needed a method to ensure student art is evaluated and appreciated. For this reason, the staff participates in the consensus method. When a piece of art or literature arrives in our email, it receives thorough review and discussion by members of its respective genre (poetry, fiction/creative non-fiction, or art). During this time, everyone's opinion has equal weight. The catch? Nothing gets published unless each section member agrees. Although this might cause some headaches, ultimately it serves the needs of the artistic community by setting the bar high. In the end, the pieces you will find between these pages all have something special. They might excite you, teach you something, or make you wonder why you didn't see the world that way before.

It is difficult to imagine that one year ago there wasn't a stable publication like this on campus. *Unbound* is a magazine dedicated to the perpetuation of student art and literature. It is our mission to break through the creative boundaries of the classroom and give students a chance to have their work evaluated and appreciated by their peers. *Unbound* could not exist without the artistic talent and passion of the students at the University of Oregon. As I graduate and pass the baton of editor-in-chief to two well-qualified individuals, I am excited to see where the magazine will go, and most of all the up-and-coming artists and writers it will publish.

Enjoy our first anniversary issue, and get ready to submit for the Fall 2009 Issue!

Kelsey Connell,
Editor-in-Chief



minotaur
amy l. chan
woodcut print
12 in. x 14 in.

Amy Chan is a junior majoring in Studio Art.

what up, sun?

*Satchel Bennett is a sophomore
English major.*

What up, Sun?
Long time no see.
While you was around the block
I was watching your spot.
Whether you come back or not,
somebody needs to stop
kids from walking into wailing walls
puking in bathroom stalls
and shooting up shopping malls.
What up, Sun?
Glad you could make it back.
Yeah, your secret's safe with me.
You clock the day shift
and I work nights for free.
What? You got some other place to be
when you're needed here
damn near constantly?
What up, Sun?

So maybe I'm being a little hard on you.
Being a single parent from outer space
ain't no small thing to do,
cuz the moon's just a surrogate light source.
They still don't believe me
when I tell em it's you.

Hey Sun,
I think I wanna start a family,
something between you and me,
If you be the bird
I'll be the bee.
Can we keep it a secret, please?
I'm happy sharing custody.
This world's no place for my baby.
I'll visit on weekends,
teach it to walk, teach it to read.
Think it'll shine like you?
Dance like me?
What'll it sound like?
The sigh of the ocean,
the wind in the trees?
Will it have what it needs
to live and believe
in the beauty it sees?
It might if I stay here,
and you come back
when you leave.

listless

RYAN McCONNELL

What I'm thinking about as I lie in bed tonight: my wife, Melonie, who lies next to me, and how even though her eyes are shut, I am convinced that she's awake. How she's probably waiting for me to fall asleep so that she can sneak out. How, since she's going on an all-expense paid business trip to Barbados next week with her boss, Bill, I need to buy the following at Safeway: NesQuik (it's cheaper than buying chocolate milk by the gallon), Pepto Bismol, Pop Tarts (I don't cook breakfast), celery (I'm on a diet), Smarties (I will need something to munch when I'm rereading *Anna Karenina* this weekend), bananas (for the diet).

Tomorrow at work I will: write lists of potential clients for the company's latest project (individual tooth replacement instead of full mouth dentures), issue memoranda to my subordinates, write employee schedules for next month, attend lunch with the department heads to ask again about a promotion, complain to my secretary Tilda about my boss, ask myself why I do this, and remember that I have to make money, get ahead, and keep myself from thinking.

Why I don't want to think: I got off early from work today and found Melonie already at home. I had to pee, so I ran to the bathroom before I could say hello. As I dried my hands, I realized that the burgundy bath towel was sopping wet. I asked her about it.

"I took a shower," she said. She looked past me, her eyes fixed, and her lips taut. Her long, carefully combed chestnut hair was dry.

"Oh," I said, "Okay."

Why I didn't push her: I just don't want to know. I mean, I already know. Three weeks ago at Applebee's while I was out for lunch with my bosses, I spied Melonie having lunch with Bill. Since Bill is married to Sandra, a lovely red-haired woman, I didn't think anything of it until I saw her kiss him on the cheek. But that was it; a kiss on the cheek. She didn't tell me about it. And until she does, there's this infinitesimal percentage of doubt. Because of that, I can still believe she loves me.

As I turn over in bed, I try to think positive: my job is well-paid and secure, even in this economic turmoil; though my wife may be sleeping with Bill, she still wants to take me to Newport for our anniversary next week; the doctor called today and said that intracytoplasmic sperm injection would be our best bet if Mel and I are still serious about having a child, which is the best news I've had in over three years.

Why I haven't told Mel yet: if she really is cheating on me, I want to know if it's because I can't give her a child. If that's the reason, then our problems are solved.

Why I haven't confronted her about it yet: she gets upset every time I ask her what's wrong. She refuses to smile anymore around me. The last time in vitro fertilization failed, she swore up and down she would never do it again. I am terrified that even with this great news she still won't come back to me.

When I look in the mirror, these are the things I see that I don't like about myself: rapidly receding hairline, big nose, excessively dry lips, hairless chin, long neck, flabby arms, round gut, bubble butt, no ankles.

Things I do to distract myself: read literature, surf the Internet, watch porn and sitcoms, play Tetris, take long walks through rough neighborhoods for perspective about how good I really have it, entertain thoughts of suicide, make lists in my head. I love lists. They take something chaotic and give it order. They help me to see things more clearly. They give me meaning.

Books I have read lately: *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, *Beer Cans in the Rio de la Plata*, *The Awakening*. Movies I watch: *Double Indemnity*, *Body Heat*, *Blood Simple*, *Closer*, *Match Point*. What I watch to forget the movies and books: *I Love Lucy*, *Happy Days*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Cheers*, *Leave It to Beaver*.

Why things have gone so badly: after three long years of trying for a child, Melonie seemed to give up on me. She stopped eating dinner at the same time as me, going on dates to concerts and movies with me, even making love to me. She just stopped. When I ask her, she always snaps at me. I remember that she had always wanted children, that she couldn't wait to be a mother. And I couldn't give that to her.

How the conversation will go:

"Mel," I'll say, "I have great news."

"Hmm," she'll reply.

"The doctors say they have a way for us to get you pregnant."

And I don't know what her response will be.

Maybe: "That's great! Let's go do it!" and everything will be back to the way it was.

Or maybe: "Well, it's too late now. Besides, it probably won't work anyway," and everything will stay the same.

Worst case scenario: "Well that's too bad. See, Bill is leaving his wife for me, and we're going to have the children I've always wanted," and I'll be divorced within a year.

What I could do if I find hard evidence that she's been cheating on me: confront her and hope that she still loves me enough to repent; run away and keep running until my soles wear off and my money runs out; murder Bill (but that's a big damn thing to have on my conscience); start an affair with Sandra to get back at both Bill and Mel; kill myself (that's a bit macabre and little extreme, but it's been done before).

What I'm going to do: stay awake as long as I can so that Mel doesn't leave; pray that I can convince Mel to give me another chance; tell her the good news first thing tomorrow morning.

God help me, I'll tell her.

Ryan McConnell is a senior majoring in English. This piece was written during his research on self-reflexive literature for the Kidd Tutorial Program.

s e r i o u s i n q u i r i e s o n l y

Timid white male seeks kind and gentle friend in times of need
or

Timid white male seeks shell of a person
no personality required
call me shallow
but must be miss america beautiful

but then

White male seeks friend to take advantage of
money a plus
not interested in : intellectual conversations
only interested in : eating junk food
watching you shower
watching you leave after having watched
you shower

PERHAPS

Old man seeks young soul to rejuvenate sense of worth
A little bit about me:
Scientific advancements have placed
80 year old brain
in 22 year old body,
Most geriatrics look how I feel
but there is something to be gained from this youthful appearance,
most notably:
people step around me, but not hurriedly
you can talk to me without worrying about
a forgetful glance or
a vacant eyeful
and I will die leaving a great looking corpse.

Please inquire below.

– JOHN ZOLLER

blue jay

And here:

This is my room, this is my place that I have carved out,
that other people built for themselves.
Maybe they have died by now.

Out of the world and disconnected from the heat,
from the beating sun, from the grass erupting
quietly, like rain; raining on top of itself
and jumping up two inches, all across a flat surface.
This is outside; out of the summer in my bluejay room.

And now:

There is the sense that I have started somewhere after the beginning;
I was set down in a rapid, and everything is moving
past and around me (I would watercolor and lick my thumb)
and that everything hurts, just a little

(and smudge my house
with my mom and my dad and my sister
and my dog and my chimney and the smiling sun
into a river of saliva and pigment,
(because I was unhappy with my work)).

And:

And out of doors solitude is big,
and solitude is pressed up against solitude
(I would inhale and fondle my open mouth on the glass
and exhale to balloon my lips),
Oh God, I can see its teeth!

I can hear the syrup drizzling down its throat,
I can feel the heat of being alone,
I can see where its food would go.
(Suffer to touch me, please;
blanket my room with your thumb
and smear me,
and my room, and my bed, and my house
and the people who built it
and the grass and the sun and the picture I drew
—exhale,
Because I am unhappy with my work.

— KYLE MANGAN

Kyle Mangan is a Junior majoring in English. His work has been published in Oregon State University's Prism, Lane Community College's Denali, and a variety of independent publications.



niño
kelly edyburn
digital photograph

Kelly Edyburn is a freshman double-majoring in English and Spanish. She has had work published in the literary arts magazine Out of the Blue.

four shots in the dark

The clouds passed and I laid on my back thinking about the man who rode by on his bike staring at the boy terrified by the dog who only wanted to play. The dog got bored, the kid quieted, the biker passed and I laid on my back looking at the sky.

Balloon, sun, Great
water evaporate; shapes like
people and rabbits.

I met a man in the writing lab one day who came in looking for help with his grammar. Two years ago he'd been in the Army and his truck was blown up by this bomb that involved water and a car battery. It exploded just as the truck rolled over it. Two people died and some, including this guy, were left injured. He had lots of trouble with basic math and writing for about a year. He still can't handle punctuation.

He's a nice boy with
no scars, only a jumbled
brain and no commas.

I stepped into an elevator yesterday. Nobody else was in there, so I pushed the button myself. The colors of the buttons were a polished black material. Then the cord snapped that held up the elevator. It fell and I fell and we hit the bottom at about the same time. I didn't die, obviously, but my head is quite shaken.

The birds flutter, when
the car starts, the alarm sounds,
and rustle the leaves.

The sky is grey today and the branches of the barren bush outside the window reach inward and outward. So instead I look at the ceiling and see a lion on its hind legs trying to look tough. I turn off the lamp and the grey seeps in. Everything is tinted a smoky-blue so that when the gun goes off the room lights up for a split second. In that moment I see the faded plastic flowers on the corner of my desk.

Balloons pop, suns set
and rains fall; and the bunnies
all die, I suppose.

– CASIMIR COVERT-KEEFE

Casimir Covert-Keefe is a junior majoring in English.

the long mile

BRENNA CROTTY

When I step out of my air-conditioned house, the Texas humidity is thicker than a wall and just as painful to walk into. I take the front steps at a jog, but then slow my pace almost immediately. It's more than twenty blocks to the Huntsville prison, and I've got time. I tried to sleep in today, but the sun kept getting in my eyes. I'm not used to sleeping in so late, and already the day is half over. The sun is particularly merciless today, and I know I'll have pit stains by the time I get to work, but I'm kind of glad. This way if I start sweating later, in that little air-conditioned room, no one will notice. There's already sweat in my moustache, and I wipe it away with the back of my hand. I pick up my pace, feeling the strain of my muscles and trying to calm the key-ring jangle in my gut.

Maybe I feel weird because I didn't do drills first thing this morning. Usually I'm up with all the inmates, leading them through breakfast and herding them outside for recreation. Routine puts me in a good place, a more accepting mood. If I'm honest, what's really drilling a hole in my brain is the email Lucy sent me. It was just a forward, no personal note or anything, so I thought maybe it was a joke or a survey. Lucy loves pointless crap like that. But then I saw the header, one of those online articles, and it said, "Lethal Injection—Humane or Not?" Lucy is always sending me articles with melodramatic titles that make me want to follow them with "Dun dun duuun!" in a loud voice. I used to, too, before she left and there was no one in the house

to hear it.

I don't think she knew I had an execution today, and if I hadn't, it probably wouldn't have bothered me. But instead of enjoying the bits of breeze that make it through the row of pines along the walk, there's a clenching in my gut that won't go away. When I opened the email this morning, I expected another rant about how killing people who kill people is hypocritical and wrong. I was surprised to see descriptions of the drugs we use at Huntsville Prison during lethal injections, drugs that I myself order and load from tiny clear bottles into the syringes: Sodium thiopental, Pancuronium, and Potassium chloride.

I scrolled down and read the names that were clinical, sterile, yet somehow infused with the melodrama of journalistic outrage. "The sodium thiopental is a barbiturate that quickly brings unconsciousness, the Pancuronium causes paralysis, and the Potassium chloride stops the heart, inducing cardiac arrest. The drugs are given in quick succession—but is it quick enough? Opponents argue that the thiopental may wear off and lead to consciousness and an excruciatingly painful death wherein the inmate is unable to express his pain because he has been rendered paralyzed by the paralytic agent."

I didn't read anything else after that line. I closed the window and pushed my chair away. I've never seen anything on any prisoner's face to suggest the slightest pain. And how the hell can anyone tell? Lucy really buys into this stuff as though it's the God's honest truth. She believes anything that makes me out like I'm some sort of monster. If you listened to her for half a second, she would tell you that's why our marriage

failed, but it's not true. Our marriage failed because she loved to argue, and because she paid way more attention to that Shih Tzu, "Woo-Woo" than she ever did to me.

One of our last fights was about my work, though. I had been a C.O. for over a year at the prison, but I had just gone through the training to make me secondary technician during executions. It meant a pay raise and mornings off on execution days since they're always at six in the evening. Lucy didn't like that at all. I came home and found the classifieds taped to the fridge, a million random job postings circled in neon green Sharpie. You'd think I was some unemployed bum who needed the encouragement. You'd think I wasn't pulling in over 30K a year while she was making barely twenty being the office bitch down at Staples, filing customer complaints in the back.

I tore the newspaper down and went looking for her. She was in the hallway, squatting over Woo-Woo's food dish—a piece of porcelain shaped like a bone, real classy. She was using one perfectly manicured nail to scrape the beef chunks out of a dog food can. I threw the paper in front of her, let it splatter in the food dish. "I'm not getting a new job, Luce."

She stood unsteadily, reaching out to the wall for balance. She didn't look upset that flecks of dog food were now on her jeans. If she wasn't worked into a boil, yet it was only because she had a carefully prepared offensive planned.

"Jared, when we met, you wanted to be a soccer player. The prison thing was a temp job."

"Yeah, well, when we met I was

still young and in shape,” I reminded her. “I’m thirty-two. I need a good, steady career.” I picked up the newspaper and turned toward the kitchen to throw it away. She followed me in and propped her hip against the stove, arms crossed.

“Can’t you find something else, something that isn’t going to send you to hell?”

It made me want to hit her, wipe that nonchalant smirk off her face. But I’m not like that. I’m not a violent man. I stayed in a squat near the trash can and didn’t look at her.

“Judge not,” I reminded her, keeping my tone even.

She knew she was getting to me. “I just think you’d want a job where you don’t murder people on a regular basis,” she said.

“I don’t murder people! Jesus.” I stood up and took a breath, turned to face her. She looked serious now, angry even. “Look, maybe I administer the drugs, but it has to go through a bunch of other people first. Judges and juries and administrations. Like how in soccer the offense has to get the ball past the midfielders, the defense, and the sweep to score on the goalie. That doesn’t make it the goalie’s fault.”

Lucy turned away, brushing her hands against her jeans in disgust. “Well, you can still keep that shot from going in and you don’t.” I heard a peppy little jingle, and in skittered Woo-Woo on his insanely stubby legs, panting like he had just been doing something extremely aerobic instead of licking his crotch all day. Lucy bent to pick him up, and he started using that soiled tongue to slobber all over her mouth. One reason why I stopped kissing her.

“Okay,” I said, seizing upon her moment of inattention. I gestured to Woo-Woo. “I’m like a vet. Sometimes vets have to put dogs down because of disease or something. They don’t like it, but they have to. Well, these people are severely diseased, and they have to be put down.”

It was a pretty good argument I think, since I don’t think about the politics of it when I’m doing my job. It’s like any other task, and mostly I just think about being steady, quick, and accurate. If I don’t do it, somebody else will. But Lucy was purposely not reacting to me, holding the dog up to her face and whispering affectionate nonsense. Finally, once she figured she was fully in control again, she tucked Woo-Woo under her arm and gave me a condescending look, eyebrows raised, lips pursed.

“You can rationalize however you want, but people aren’t dogs, Jared.” A bit of spite crept into her voice and tripped up her parting remark. “And besides, dogs are living, feeling creatures too, you know!” And she stalked away.

“Which one of those was your point?” I called after her.

If she had just broken down a little, turned red and cried like she used to do when we were first married, I would have followed her to the bedroom, apologized, promised to look for a new job. But she always had to be a bitch, right about everything. So when she moved out I let her, and when she forwarded emails about the evils of lethal injection, I laughed them off.

After fifteen blocks or so I’m feeling better, looser. It’s nice to be outside in the sun. Huntsville Prison itself isn’t all that threatening from the front—it

kind of looks like a school. It's a brick job, with a big clock over the front doors. If the walls weren't topped with barbed wire, you might never know otherwise. Inside, though, I'm constantly searching inmates, looking for warning signs, ready for shanks, wires, broken glass.

Everyone's already in the break room when I come in—Warren Peterson is just back from delivering the last meal. Grace Whitaker, our venipuncture technician and the one who actually administers the drugs, is sitting on the busted couch by the coffee machine. My stomach seizes up like I've had bad chili when I see who our third person will be for the night—Jake Cook. Jake is one of those douchebags who makes a hard job harder just because of his enthusiasm. He's the kind of guy who likes to make noise and tell stories in the break room instead of shutting up and drinking his coffee. "Cook's gonna cook some bad guys tonight!" is his catchphrase.

At the moment he's sitting on the armrest of the couch, talking about his most memorable execution to Grace, his wiry frame expanding as he makes large, explanatory gestures with his hands. Warren, older than all of us by a good twenty years, is weighing down the other armrest, sipping coffee and staring into space.

Jake smiles at Grace. "He was like something out of a Mafia movie, real cool and composed. He never said anything to us, didn't say a word to the guys down in Polunsky either. For his last meal, he asked for fucking Kraft macaroni and cheese. I asked him why, and he gave me this look, this up-down. Then he said it was like his mother used to make. I couldn't tell if he was bullshitting me or not."

"What'd he do?" Grace asks. Jake shrugs. When you work death row, you've heard it all. "He was in a gang, killed a cop. His name was Saldano, he was a Mexican."

"Mestizo," Warren interrupts in his slow, gravelly voice, apparently not spacing out at all. "Argentinian, I think." He shifts his heavy frame around and gives me half a salute with two fingers. "Afternoon, Jared."

The other two turn to where I'm leaning against the door and nod briefly. "Doesn't matter, they're all Mexicans essentially," Jake insists. "Anyway, we walk him down the mile and he's totally cool, looking straight ahead the whole time. Climbed up on the gurney first thing. When they opened the curtain to let him make his statement, he just looked all the witnesses in the face, one by one, real quiet. Then he said, 'I'm going out with my boots on. Just like John Wayne.'" Jake stops for a moment to let that sink in, then spreads his hands wide, a grin moving simultaneously across his face. "That was it. Jesus H. The guy had class."

Grace turns and puts one freckled arm on the back of the couch, trying to invite me in. "What about you, Jared?" she asks with a smile. "Which one stuck out the most for you?"

I take a few steps further into the room, head for the coffee. I only drink decaf so I won't be too wired or shaky later. "I dunno. I've only walked the guy twice. You know, I hold the guy's arm as he walks down the mile, I help him onto the gurney, I go back and load up the drugs and don't see him again until...after." I finish lamely, knowing it's nondescript. I try to keep it that way. I've only done men, and I try hard not

to look at them during the process. I try and keep my duties in mind instead, the actions I need to complete to get the job done. A few years ago all death row inmates got transferred to the Polunsky Unit in Livingston anyway, so they aren't my usual guys. They hardly have names to me, much less faces.

One man I can't help remembering. He was Hispanic, like the rest of mine have been, and he had a cross tattooed on his breastbone. He had kept both hands pressed against it until we strapped him down, and with his arms spread out and bound he looked like a crucifix himself. He never addressed the witnesses, muttered to himself in Spanish the whole time, glancing up at the ceiling and then shutting his eyes tightly until we released the drugs. The only word I recognized was *Dios*. God.

Warren pulls his whole girth up from the armrest with a grunt, runs a sweaty hand across his balding head, and glances at the clock. Five o'clock. Time to get moving.

"Grace, go set up the IV in the back room." He pauses and glances at Jake. "Jake, you better go too. Jared and I will walk the guy."

We split up. Warren and I head for the death row holding cell. It's a nice room, bigger than most cells, and it has a window. The guy gets it all to himself, and I've always wondered if he can appreciate any of it, the wide space, the big window looking out at the summer evening.

When we open the cell, it's to find the guy puking up his last meal into the john. I give a look to Warren, and I know he feels it too. There's a cloud of animal despair charging the air that settles on my skin like a thin layer of

grease. Warren is in no hurry. We stand in the corner, hands in pockets, like we have all the time in the world. Better that the guy does this now than on the gurney. When he lifts his head to wipe his mouth, I'm shocked by the ghostly whiteness of it, the sharp youth in his cheekbones.

"Warren," I mouth, "That's Harrison Shear!" Of all the people I expected, it wasn't Harrison, and not just because whites almost never end up on death row here. Harrison came from money, and when he was arrested three years ago, he was only nineteen years old. He robbed a bank with a friend, and when the security guard pulled his gun, Harrison shot him. Well, that's a capital offense in Texas, but no one thought it would stick, even after he panicked on the stand and blurted out that he wasn't trying to hurt anyone, he was just having *fun*.

Warren leans in and whispers in my ear. "You know the guy he shot and killed? Well, his grandfather was a state senator. He got Shear put on death row. It would have been postponed, but apparently the man has prostate cancer and wants to see justice done before he dies." Usually people are on death row five or ten years before anything happens. Harrison's been on less than three.

Harrison is momentarily spent. He holds himself over the toilet with arms that shake so violently, I can see it across the room. After a moment of feeble spitting he slumps down into a sitting position and turns to face us. His eyes are set deeply into his skull and encircled with black smudges. His head is shaved, but instead of making him look tough, he just looks frail, like

a chemo patient. From his eyes and the paleness of his lips I can tell that last meal was his first in days. He puts his hands between his knees and begins to rock on the concrete floor.

"Harrison," I say, moving forward slowly. "It's almost time to go." I use the gentle, encouraging tone my mother used to use to wake me when she said, "Jared, it's almost time for school." Harrison's head jerks up, and when his eyes fix on me, his pupils are pinpricks.

"Please." His voice is hoarse. "Please don't do this to me. Oh my God, I can't do this. I'm gonna be sick." His lips quiver. I smile and pat his shoulder. The bone juts out to meet my hand.

"That's what the john's there for."

He laughs shakily. "Most expensive meal I've had in two years, and it goes right down the f-f-fucking toilet." His eyes flick away from me and unfocus rapidly. His fingernails dig into his knees as he rocks. "I was just thinking about this meal and how it was still going to be in my stomach and it was just going to stay there and...and rot along with my b-body and I just..." He starts to nod towards the john and tips over instead. He lets his head rest against the seat. Just like that, tears start coming, so fast and thick that they're soaking the collar of his uniform before he lifts a hand to wipe at them. When he does, I hook my hand under his arm and lift him slowly to his feet. He staggers, but stays standing.

"It's okay, kid. Better out than in. You didn't even make a mess." Out the corner of my eye, I can see Warren nodding with great exaggeration along with me, trying to be encouraging without being too cheerful. Every sense I have is focused on this guy, trying to gauge

what will keep him from going off. We have to make him forget that he has nothing left to lose, no dignity to keep. He stinks of sweat and old urine. I wonder if maybe he wet the bed last night and if he even noticed.

"Here we go." I start to lead him to the door, and he recoils in a full-body spasm, collapses against my shoulder, letting out one quick, high-pitched "No!" in a voice like a child's. I grip his shoulders and hold him up. Warren comes up behind me for support. I look Harrison in the eye, trying to reach his sensibility.

"Kid, you can do this. We're counting on you. You're gonna be fine." I'm bullshitting, saying stuff my parents and coaches used to say to me before games, in the locker rooms, on the sidelines. The sour-chili feeling creeps back into my stomach, though, freezes up my insides. I can't help seeing how young he is. If he had more time, ten years to sit on this sentence, he could make a strong case to a judge that he had been stupid and reckless and just a panicky kid.

We've reached him for the moment. He lets us put on the handcuffs and leg chains. Warren takes one arm and I take the other, and we half-drag him out of the cell. The cell is never that bad with these guys. Usually they've prepared themselves somewhat at the beginning. After they're in the gurney it's easy, too, because they're strapped down. It's the mile that takes the longest and is the hardest. They have the time to realize they're carrying themselves to their own deaths. It's that point where you know what kind of guy you got. Sometimes you see them get mad, get mean, force themselves to put one foot in front of

the other. Sometimes they go limp, and you have to do all the work for them. Warren had a guy who wet himself once, but kept walking.

We start the walk, and he does okay for a little while, and we keep whispering to him, “Left foot...good...now the right foot...good...” Just step by step by step, trying to fill his brain with nothing but our words. The walls and ceiling are narrow, made of blank white tile, and it almost feels like we’re not moving at all, that we’ll just keep walking through the tunnel and suddenly end up on the other side of the world. As we get closer to the door, though, he starts to whimper, this strangled little noise in the back of his throat. I adjust my grip to make sure I have a good firm hold and just in time. He explodes backwards like a sprinter at the starting line, not trying to fight us off, just trying to keep himself away from the door. I feel the urge to let go, let him run, but where?

“Easy, now,” Warren says, and we don’t break pace, we just keep dragging him so that the heels on his cheap rubber sneakers leave black smudges on the floor. “It’s okay. Almost there.” That gets him through the door, into the death chamber which actually just looks like a bathroom. It’s small and has teal square tiles that cover everything, the ceiling, the floor, the walls, everything except for the separated glass windows where witnesses sit behind heavy black curtains. The gurney itself looks more like the chair at the dentist, reclined almost all the way back.

Maybe Harrison was brave up until now because he thought he would have a stay of execution. But now he’s here in this little box of a room, and he knows he’s going to die, he can taste it

in the air, and it’s a sterile taste, strong and sharp like ammonia. As we uncuff him, I think he’s going to take a swing at me, his eyes are so wide I can see the red veins on all sides. Instead he stands there, perfectly still, looking right at me like I’m Hitler, or Pilate, or the fucking boogeyman, and he starts to just scream. Not like in the movies either, where a man gets shot and gives a manly groan. This is like an infant, without regard for pitch or volume. There are no words at first, just this terrified shriek. Then he’s stumbling backwards—Warren and I grabbing out, reaching for him, trying to keep him from tripping over the heart monitor—still screaming. When he hits the wall, he slumps hard, into a ball on the ground, and I can’t go near him. I can’t pick him up, it would be too mean, too much, it would be pulling the wings off a butterfly.

Warren hitches up his pants and takes slow, careful steps toward Harrison, wincing against that awful scream that fills up the room and then just bounces around, redoubling. The scream becomes words as he claws at the walls, “Please don’t kill me! Please! Oh my God, help! Please, I’m begging you, please God don’t kill me!”

The other men I walked made it easy for me. They practically lay down in their graves. I can’t do this, not when he begs. I let Warren drag him to the chair. I strap him down, too easily, he’s too weak to fight back. We secure him at the waist first, then the chest, then the legs, and then each arm—one strap around the bicep, one at the bottom of the forearm. He thrashes his head around, the only thing left to move. I stroke his forehead on an impulse, making quiet shushing noises. It feels like

something you would do to a child going to sleep.

Warren's calm voice slowly quiets the screaming. "Son, settle down." His eyes cut to me, stern, examining me carefully. I feel hot and there's sweat in the folds of my stomach and running down the backs of my knees. "Jared, go help Grace with the IV. I'll set up the heart monitor."

I stumble away from the chair toward the back room where the drugs are administered. Behind the large blue curtain is a smaller room, where Grace and Jake wait to inject the drugs into the IV line. Remembering this, I secure the tube as I go in little hooks along the wall so it doesn't get pulled free accidentally. Before I duck behind the curtain, I look back. The windows are uncovered now, five little booths. Two are filled with press people, documenting the case, looking detached, almost bored. One booth has a bunched up little old man, the victim's grandfather presumably. He sits at the chair with his eyes fixed on Harrison, but I see no hatred there. He looks withered and weary around the mouth, but there's nothing to be read in his eyes. The other two slots are empty. Harrison's screams change as he sees the people, but not toward the quiet dignity we hoped for, but more pleading, and it's sick really. I push the big blue curtain aside and step into the back room.

"What. The Fuck. Is going on out there." Jake is animated by the racket, peeking out into the main room only to turn right back to me, looking for the story. Grace is pale beneath her freckles.

"Jared?" she murmurs.

I shrug and shake my head, not meet-

ing her eye. "Let's get started. Warren swabbed him, you can start the saline drip in a second." Grace starts the drip and looks to me to prepare the drugs.

"Jesus, do it quick," Jake mutters. "Let's get him unconscious so he'll shut the hell up."

My hands go to work, filling a syringe with the thiopental, but all I can think about is that stupid email. We'll knock him out, but he might wake up in the next minute, paralyzed, and we won't hear the screaming anymore, but it will go on and on in his head, filling up his last minutes. I hand the thiopental to Grace, and she takes it with a nod.

"Okay, I'm starting this in fifteen seconds, so get the Pancuronium ready, we'll do this fast and get out of here." My fingers close around the little bottle, its clear poison waiting like rattlesnake venom. My hands are shaking; they won't get the needle in.

"Okay, I've started the saline. Give me the needle." She looks up, and I stare at her, the bottle and syringe still frozen in my hand. "Jesus, Jared, right now. Come on!" But I can't, and now it's too late, if I do it now he'll definitely be conscious by the time the Potassium chloride hits. I close my fist around the bottle and hold it to my chest. "Jared!"

Jake swings into my vision. "Jared, what the fuck are you doing, quit dick-ing around!" Harrison isn't screaming anymore, but it isn't for lack of trying. I spin away from both of them. The curtain lifts, and Warren's flat features are before me.

"What's going on back here?" His rumbling voice is tinged with anger. Grace points at me wordlessly, but I shake my head and back away. Warren

lowers his chin and stares at me for a moment in silence. I can feel the silence leaking under the curtain; outside they're waiting, wondering why it's taking so long.

"Come on, Jared," Warren murmurs. "This isn't the time."

My voice comes to me all at once, leaps into my throat. "He begged me, Warren," I whisper, closing my eyes. "He asked me not to kill him. Aren't you supposed to spare people when they beg you like that? Isn't that the decent thing to do?"

"Jared, this is not your decision." He sounds patient, but I know time is important. Even now they'll have to start the process over. Ten more minutes of life for Harrison Shear. I can still feel the sweat from his brow on my fingertips. In ten minutes it will be the sweat of a dead kid, a sick and grotesque thing. "You can't stop this. You are only making it harder for Harrison. Give me the bottle."

I keep my eyes shut tight, but I let him pry the bottle out of my hand. He sighs, deeply. "Let's try this again, Grace." I feel his hand on my shoulder, and I open my eyes. He looks tired, but not angry, his eyes creased almost shut by his crow's feet, the skin around his mouth sagging toward his chin. I don't know what to feel. "Go home, Jared. Get some sleep. We'll talk about this tomorrow."

And I know I can't stay here a second longer, can't watch the process go smoothly as if I hadn't tried to help Harrison at all. I stumble out from behind the curtain, trying to unfocus my eyes, not looking at Harrison stretched out in the dentist chair or the people behind the glass.

The hall outside the door is narrow and cool and silent. I want to run, but I make myself take slow, measured steps, just putting one foot after the other. Even though I know I'm headed in the opposite direction, the mile seems just as long.

Brenna Crotty is a junior English major. She has had her work published in the Winter 2009 issue of Unbound.



portrait at 20th and emerald
matthew ribkoff
photographic negative
6 cm. x 6 cm.

Matthew Ribkoff is a junior majoring in Political Science.

coy is the word

we chased coy under tulip trees
while reserve slurred our blushing words
your giddy hands just reach for flesh
so I hold my lusty tongue
but all curious fingers touch
coy is an easy battle lost
for right now I can't see past you

is all that my eyes can find *sex*?
then leave me missing
it's no love, but
I'll find me in the morning

– CHESTER CARMER



beauty-bearing shoulders

Near, the stretch of sidewalk bans all strollers,
Cracking, snapping, stone-chunked slabs of peril;
How though she walks! traipsing through this rubble
Lovely, perched on pencil heels, my poisèd muse.

Beauty-bearing shoulders teeter on the
Fulcrum of her neck, tilting lusty angles;
Nearly slipping off its edge upon each
Stride, her shoulder bag sweeps wide in ticking arcs.

Whipping back in gusts, her scarf tails capture,
Bend me to her lithesome fleeing figure;
Close behind I grasp—scarcely miss her
Coat—and off she glides to other avenues.

— CHRIS BRADLEY

Chris Bradley is a senior English major, whose work has appeared in the Oregon Voice, Chapman Journal, and Unbound. He has just completed a collection of short stories for his senior thesis.

more than keats

KATHERINE VETRANO

*I have always been in love with literature.
In fact, I once fell in love with a librarian.
I thought she loved me more than she loved Keats.*

“**T**here’s a reason why they have that saying, *it’s just like riding a bike*,” Sabina shouted to Arthur from the path. “Idiom, it’s an idiom,” he said, not loud enough for her to hear.

He sat with his feet hanging out the door of Sabina’s Volvo, looking down on his loafers. He remembered his poem back at his apartment, decidedly too insipid to share with Sabina. That morning, he had just tucked it in his cookbook, along with all of his other failures from the past. Some of the pages were now stuck together, years of attempted lasagnas, stews, and cakes long gone. When his first wife Madeline died, he began to order in. No recipes had servings for one, and he hated leftovers. Now the book served no purpose but a holder for his own attempts at poetry. His work was nothing like the master poets he loved so much. He stuck them with the recipes he didn’t make so no one would come across them.

Finally breaking his stare, he looked up at Sabina. She was coming quickly towards him now, leading a bike alongside her body. He had a hard time looking at her without feeling joy.

He had realized this for the first time when she approached him in the Rutgers Library, asking if he needed help finding anything. His face grew warm at such a young and attractive woman helping him. Usually it was the other way around on campus.

He also became aware of her hold when she took him to his first party, an event he had put far too much thought into. He didn’t sleep for more than fifteen minutes the night before. But when she arrived at his apartment, a grin emerged on his face, and it didn’t go away un-

til she left him at the cheese table, conversing with graduate students too young for him to understand.

Arthur Bradford had always taken himself very, very seriously, until Sabina showed him it wasn't always necessary. Like Arthur, Sabina had also delved into literature and poetry all her life. But somehow she had found a way to be accepted and admired along the way, something Arthur knew nothing about.

"It's really easy. You're going to laugh when you realize how easy it is."

Arthur nodded and let her grab his hand. For five months she had been grabbing his hand with spontaneity, but it still caught him off guard every time. He held a breath in his chest this time, and didn't release it until he heard the car door slam behind them. Sabina kept walking forward without even considering locking it. His eyes scanned the park for any individuals who might make him caution her otherwise, but there was no one, just leaves the color of paprika and tangerines spread across the abandoned grass.

"And after you just nail this, I'm going to take you out to a celebratory dinner. What's that place we went for Lindy's birthday?"

"Big Daddy's BBQ," he said.

"Man! I love BBQ. I wish we lived in a place where fried food and collard greens were a requirement." Sabina took his hand and laughed. He smiled back, thinking her hair looked much nicer like it was today. Waves the color of blackbirds fell every which way over her shoulders. Whenever she styled it straight, he thought she just looked like every other graduate student at her work-study job in the library. But the curls were different. And so was she.

"Let's move somewhere like that after we retire. We can roll each other around after becoming big balls of fat," she said.

"Ha." Arthur thought maybe he wanted squeeze *her* hand now, but before he could, she let go quickly.

"Hold on a minute!" she shouted, running towards the Volvo.

Arthur was left alone with the bike. He studied it closely, as if it were a poem he was dissecting. Its silver hue was faded now, and across its long limbs it had once read, *Action Rider*. But time had rubbed away some of the letters, so today it said, *Ac Rdr*. He felt his hands trembling on his khakis, so he stuffed them into his pockets. He took one more look at the bike and then watched Sabina running closer. She was now wearing a corduroy jacket over her turtleneck. The October wind had grown brisk. She was out of breath.

"Alright, much better. I don't know how you could be warm in that cardigan, Arthur. It feels like winter today!"

Arthur shrugged, keeping his hands buried. He remembered that jacket. Once she had left it on the back of his chair, a simple error.

But Arthur remembered wondering if it was more. Their first time together, and she leaves her jacket at his apartment? Intentional or not, Arthur had avoided it for many hours before he let his fingers touch the ridges of the sleeves, the back, the lapel.

“So, are you ready?” Sabina asked. Arthur let out a laugh too loud for a question so serious.

Arthur placed his feet on the pedals like they had practiced the night before. Sabina held the handlebars with force and leaned into him, urging Arthur to push. He felt his feet turn in circles, making him feel dizzy like the carousel had when he was a child. They both moved forward together--him, slightly teetering, and her, with small, confident strides. He straightened his back and gripped the handlebars with intensity. He felt a mixture of calm and confidence with Sabina's small hands cupped on his.

“Okay, keep pedaling,” she told him.

He breathed heavily as the bike moved forward, inch by inch, as Sabina's footsteps became a jog. The speed of the bike and the warmth of Sabina made him feel secure, like he had been riding a bike all his life instead of just this past week. He focused straight ahead with a furrowed brow. After a few more strides forward together, she called out, “Okay, I'm letting go! You got it!”

And then he was moving forward, alone. Now that he was moving by himself, he really did feel the cold, the breeze creating an army of goose bumps on his forearms. He kept his focus on the playground ahead.

The monkey bars, the slide, the jungle gym, everything was metal. It was clearly an older structure. Next to the slide were a few empty swings hanging over the sawdust, swings of primary colors in plastic blue, yellow, and red. They stood out drastically from the aged parts of the playground.

He tried to pull his attention away from the distraction, but he felt his concentration dwindle even more when he heard the sound. The crunch of the gravel below him became background music for his breath, short and shuddering, like Sabina's little steps. But he couldn't hear her feet any more.

He looked back to see if she was still smiling like she had that morning, but he couldn't see her. He felt himself lose his balance. Under him he felt the bike waver a little, and he tried to shift his feet to make it surge forward. But it was too late. The bike leaned to the side, hitting the ground with force. And as it fell, so did Arthur, the metal of the bike entangled in his long legs.

He blinked at the blur of the park as the once-beautiful shades of autumn spread into one wash of color. He realized his glasses had fallen under the wheel, but didn't bother reaching for them. He just slowly pulled his pant leg from the spokes and shoved the bike aside,

angry at his own incompetence.

When Sabina arrived, she was laughing. Not a malicious laugh, but a clean, crisp one that rang sharply in his ears. But when she saw Arthur's face, she stopped. Her smile faded, and he thought she looked like a different person with such a solemn expression.

"You okay?"

"You let go." He was blinking back tears.

"You seemed ready. I didn't think it was a problem."

"Well, I wasn't."

"I'm sorry, Arthur. I didn't know."

"And you thought you could become a professor?" he said angrily, "You can't even teach a grown man to ride a bike!"

"Excuse me?"

"You won't be able to teach anyone!"

Sabina opened her mouth and closed it again. She picked up the bike from the ground and gently brushed a few stray pieces of gravel from its frame. He wished she would help him remove the rocks from his elbows like she had the night before. He thought of how much they laughed when they both fell, but now it was just him among the rocks.

As he attempted to put his glasses back together, he listened. He heard her feet on the gravel and the spokes of the bike turning. Then it was the sound of the Volvo starting in the distance. He sat on the ground, staring at his stained pants. Maybe he wasn't ready after all.

I never learned to ride a bike.

I once knew a librarian who tried to help me.

I thought I could change.

Katherine Vetrano recently graduated with a degree in English and will be attending the MFA program at Portland State University in the Fall 2009. She has been previously published in Unbound as well as Ethos Magazine.

the
coital
rose

I decided to give up the ghost,
call it quits on the rose
of romanticized hearts on fire,
just like cigarettes forever pre-coital,
I miss them in pangs like scarlet
rivers running South of the border

gather steam, roll over a border
town, the diminished and dim ghost
of desire. Spring unrolls like scarlet
runways for the few that smell of rose
petals in the dead littered coital
fan covering beds, begging fire

to spark its red dryness, fire
falling back like petals at bed's border
of blanket and body and in coital
margins wandering like young ghost
writers, scaling the hills that rose
as the morning band of scarlet

frosted the tree tops in scarlet
rims like the forest caught fire
in a ring dilating, like a rose
slowly blooming sunlight borders,
a wreath lit by the holy ghost
that burns as hot as coital

fevers fueled by the lack of coital
exchange, cheeks burn scarlet
like a Southern bell's ghost,
and immaterial as fire.
Creased lines denote the borders
I've crossed in retreat. A rose

has thorns complicating the rose,
barbs to mimic the coital
pain of mortality, it's borders
clear after acts of scarlet
life propagating like stolen fire
of god's-become cultural ghosts.

I court ghosts with the holy rose
of spiritual fire, approach coital
acts of rich scarlet, forming, everywhere, borders.

– TYLER LANE WELTY



jhih - wun yang
tzu - en huang
from the series foreign land
steve wu
gelatin silver print
28 in. x 40 in.



wan - hsuan lin
hen - jui chang
from the series foreign land
steve wu
gelatin silver print
28 in. x 40 in.

Steve Wu recently completed his BFA in Photography this spring, and has shown in the Aperture Gallery and the LaVerne Krause Gallery.

i 'll bring my kids to church

I'll bring my kids to church
despite me not being
close to the Lord

I was turned off of the idea
by my mother
who told me (not a joke)
that God wanted her
to leave my dad
and live in Hawaii
(not a joke)

I wonder if I'd still go
sometimes
if that hadn't happened.
My friends in high school
or a few of them
went to Church
for fun.

Driving into the gravel laid parking lot, with chalk dust for spaces, I drop off my two to three theoretical future children. The year is Tenfromnow. "Have fun!" I say, subtly, sarcastically, they are too young to know. This is my "Calvin's Dad" way of building character because at this age, shoveling snow is kind of a pass time for me. It's gratifying, knowing my kids are counting on me to get rid of all that snow, so they can go to school. Right now I'm building character, sitting in the backseat of my 20(tenfromnow) Honda minivan, playing with the toy from my oldest daughter's Happy Meal, smoking "medical" marijuana, listening to The Magical Mystery Tour, and watching fight scenes from a new Spider-man Cartoon I bought for my son. Well to be fair and honest, the TV in the van was a gift to myself. So was Spider-man.

I'll bring my kids to church
because I want them to understand
what is right and wrong
beyond the comic book ethics
I've been teaching them

Besides, at the age of
Three to Sevenfromnow,
if they are moral "grayists"
and people (as I see it)
only get grayer...

I'd rather not think about it
Or can't.
Because I stopped going to church
and here I am
smoking *medical* marijuana
playing with a Simba toy
from Lion King 3.14159265

Licking up the grains of salt in my children's Happy Meal boxes, I'm reminded how sickened I should feel in bribing my kids to go to church. Hours earlier, as my wife wets and combs down my son's morning hair, I playfully argue the merits of religion to my daughter. She makes the same arguments I made to my parents when I was her age, and it tickles me. Instead of offering a well-thought argument for church, I chase her down and tickle her sides until she breaks down and agrees to go. I tell her that if she gets ready super fast, we might have time to stop by a fast food restaurant of her choice for a quick lunch before service. She lights up at the sound of this, just like I did, and scurries upstairs to get her nice shoes. Now, unsatisfied with my dollar menu selections, I check the time to make sure I do not leave my kids waiting on the curb because Daddy is on a burger run.

I'll bring my kids to church
because even after
driving back to McDonald's
eating two Big Macs
a ten piece chicken nugget meal
and a diet coke
I still feel empty
and crave coleslaw

Wouldn't it be nice
if kids could have an appreciation
for hope, actually have some
faith, before the world...
does "the world" to them?

Is it better to have hoped and lost
than to never hoped at all?
Just imagining them
sitting in the hard cold pews
drawing tornadoes, bank robberies and unicorns on the donation cards or
skimming through the hymnal book for a song they might have heard or
pretending Spider-man and Doc Ock are having a fight on the bell tower
(that's me...)
Overall, not listening to a word Reverend Diddy Chang is saying
it gives me hope all over again

As the late morning becomes high noon, I fill the time by grading some essays on the functionality of grammar in today's TwitterWidget-i-Tech.my.Space society (Think Internet 2). Future me is always worried that I'll be so burnt out on teaching other kids, that when I get home, it's the last thing I'd want to do for my own. I became a teacher because when I was in high school, my English teachers were a bunch of pretentious underpaid drunks who mistook tenure for a giant cock. It's what drove me to English in the first place. If having a crummy teacher inspired me to teach, then I owe it to the next generation to be exactly that. As I air out the minivan and go to town with a bottle of Febreeze, I watch as the congregation files out of the tall white building. Churches always smelled the same to me, in every town, and I start to wonder if the scent comes in a can. My theoretical future wife reminds me via text to pick up some dog food for the pugs, and I make a mental note to see if Febreeze has a "New-Church-Scent" air freshener or spray.

I'll bring my kids to church
because tonight during
family dinner
when my wife asks little
Hank Pym Wong
and
Wanda Maximoff Wong
and (maybe, I haven't thought enough about it)
Charlotte/Peter Parker Wong (sex pending)
"what did you learn in church today?"

Hank will not hear because he's playing
Game MAN DS under the table
and just mumble
Wanda will stir her peas around
and complain how daddy makes them go
but doesn't have to

And little Charlotte/Peter Parker
existence pending
will drink the tall glass of milk
I'm also forcing on my kids
and say
"I don't know."

Exactly.

– ERIC WONG

Eric Wong is a junior majoring in English.

ten - cent pistol

I'm hunting El Dorado, the Gilded Man.
When I catch him. I'll cut him up.
I'll start with his feet
and give them to you to wear as earrings.
Talk to me.

From "The Gilded Man" by Ai

You have cut off his head and boiled it
until it dissolved,
a liquid that could be shot.
I want nothing of him,
not his feet, not his hands,
not his torso, heart, nor stomach.

I want just one cell of you, so I can understand.

My Achilles,
all you want is to feel.
Your white remedy has since made you numb, deaf.
Your waking world,
a hallucination.

If I were part of your dream,
I could talk to you.
I could eat the bark off those pine trees
falling from your sky,
spit out the splinters in words that you could hear.
But I can't see anything you see.

When you shoot,
I am but ashes to you.
I rest in your hands,
now let me blow across the sea.

— ALYCIA SMITH

Alycia Smith recently graduated with a degree in Philosophy and will be starting her MFA in Creative Writing at Emerson College in the Fall. She has had work published in her high school journal, The Kaleidoscope.



ancient cats
jenny kroik
etching
9 in. x 12 in.

Jenny Kroik is a second-year graduate student in the painting department. She has shown at the LaVerne Krause Gallery and the Washburn Gallery at the University of Oregon, as well as at the Brookline Village Gallery, the main gallery of the Art Institute of Boston, and in the Boston University All-College exhibit.

creatures of love

MARINA DOERING

Dear Garrett,

By now you certainly know I wasn't at our wedding. Maybe you're reading this after all your relatives have left. They probably stayed late so you didn't have to be alone. Or maybe they're still downstairs, and you've come up to your bedroom to get away for a few minutes (knowing your relatives, I can see why). How you must have felt seeing this letter sitting on top of your pillow, I don't know. Frankly, if I'd thought about it enough, I probably wouldn't have been able to give this to you. And if I'd thought about what you'd feel like standing at the altar, waiting for someone who wasn't coming, I wouldn't have been able to go through with that either. So, yes, you are right to think that I am being inconsiderate of your feelings.

I need to be clear. "Cold feet" was not the reason I left you at the altar. There isn't someone else. I'm not becoming a nun or a lesbian. It's because I don't love you enough. I'm sorry to tell you that, and to tell you this way, and to not have told you sooner. This was something I've always known, but haven't had the courage to say. It's not because you use my special crossword pencil to scratch inside your ears, or because you sing Barry Manilow songs in the shower. It's not even because of that horrible fight we had last month over where to go on our honeymoon (I still think it was a better idea to go to Palm Springs than the Catskills). I had an epiphany the other day, Garrett. It's hard to explain, but I will try. I guess if you have to attribute it to something, it's because of the Shinglebacked Skink.

I'll explain. I was over at your sister's house, and we were making the wedding favors out of our personalized pillow mints (which Amy thought were frivolous and didn't hesitate to say so). Your interesting little nephew insisted on showing me his new book on lizards, and

I obliged because I wanted to get on your sister's good side. Peter is obsessed with reptiles and dinosaurs, remember? The other day he was sucking on blue candy because the Shinglebacked Skink has a blue tongue, and he wanted one, too. The Shinglebacked Skink, Peter informed me, is a large, heavily armored lizard. He also told me a bunch of other facts I could care less about. But as Peter recited the Shinglebacked Skink section from his book, he mentioned that though this lizard may stray, they find their way back to their nest each season and reunite with their mate (we know the reason why, but Peter does not). They are one of those rare monogamous creatures.

Remember when you thought you might get that promotion where you'd have to move to Phoenix for a year? And I would have been stuck here in Ann Arbor with my job. You were so optimistic about making it work long-distance. It would make our love even stronger, you said. To be honest, I didn't agree. I thought about calling it quits if you got the job, so I was glad when you didn't. I don't think I could have been as loyal as the Shinglebacked Skink. If you had been waddling around the hot desert for months, doing what a lizard does, I don't think I would remember your scent when you came home.

When I got home from your sister's that night, I started researching monogamous animals on the Internet. I found out that a lot of the animals we say are monogamous and mate-for-life-ers actually aren't. Lobsters don't mate for life. Neither do emperor penguins. Swans and gibbons cheat on one another all the time. And, okay, I was drinking a bottle of wine by myself, so maybe that had something to do with it, but this news depressed me. If penguins don't mate for life, what chance in hell or the jungle do we have?

But I kept looking. Just when I thought that every goddamned bird and ape out there is worse at relationships than I am, I found my first glimpse of hope. The anglerfish. Do you know what an anglerfish looks like? They're terrifying. But they're monogamous! The male searches at the bottom of the ocean for a mate. Can you imagine how dark it is down there? It's something we cannot comprehend. But when he finds his mate, they actually *fuse* together. When we humans kiss or make love, we are joining the most delicate parts of our bodies. But it ends, and we separate. Well the anglerfish embrace and don't let go. The flesh between them dissolves, and they become one entity, they pump the same blood. Now, the anglerfish is ugly, but that is beautiful.

Of course, the male eventually shrivels up into nothing more than a pair of gonads, but that's beside the point. This gave me hope! I kept scouring the Internet for more good news, finished my bottle of red, and started on a bottle of champagne to celebrate (it was left over from the bridal shower). I found an article written by a man who grew

up on a farm. Among other things, his family raised geese, and it was his unfortunate job to slaughter them. And geese *do* mate for life. The ex-farmer boy described what happened when he had to kill the geese. He would pile them all into the barn and kill them one by one. The rest of the geese, dozens and dozens, would form a mass of feathers and webbed feet in a dark, musty corner. They knew what was happening. But while one was on the chopping block, rather often their mate would emerge from the fold and walk up to the boy. Though the lover-geese was visibly frightened, it would not leave. Maybe it was pleading for him to stop. Maybe it just wanted to comfort its lover as it was scared and suffering.

These are birds that shit everywhere and make horrible noises and bite the fingers off small children. But they do this incredibly romantic, pitiful, yet noble thing. When people do this sort of thing (*if* they do this sort of thing), we always attribute it to the part of ourselves that's most human, elevated, and pure. But could it be the part of us that's most like an animal? And then I realized something. Love—the part of it that is physical and lustful, but also the part of it that is good, righteous, and uncomplicated—it comes from our gut, it comes from the animal within.

And then I realized something else. The human part of me can rationalize my love for you, and why we should get married and have kids and spend the rest of our lives together. But I don't have that love for you that inhabits my body, me as an animal. It doesn't make my heart beat faster. It doesn't crawl up my spine, make the hair on the back of my neck prickle, and seep into my stupid little brain, where it controls me like an impulse, an instinct. It's just not there. I mean, I remember when you proposed. In a very rational way, I sensed it was coming. We'd been dating for two and a half years, met each other's families (and even *that* wasn't a deal-breaker), exchanged keys, gone on vacation together, etc. All the things you do to know if you can marry someone. And when you set up that special Valentine's Day date, I just knew. "He's going to propose tonight," I remember thinking so calmly. "And I will say yes." And I did. Because I thought that's what you're supposed to do. When you meet someone who you can easily see yourself making a comfortable life with, and in two and a half years they don't do anything crazy like steal your dirty underwear and sell it on Craig's List, you go through with it. You get married.

Plus, you did pick out a very nice ring.

I'm very sorry, Garrett. But I just couldn't go through with the wedding. I shouldn't have accepted your proposal. I know now that my heart wasn't in it, but I didn't know that then. Clarity always comes a bit too late, at least for me. I hope you understand someday. I only want us to be happy, and I don't think we would have been if we'd got-

ten married. Even if it had been comfortable, there always would have been something missing.

I have hope for us. I know there is someone out there for me, my goose, my anglerfish. Well, I hope someone more attractive than an anglerfish. And I know, Garrett, that there is someone out there for you, too. Someone who adores Barry Manilow. I really do want that for you. Go out there and find your Shinglebacked Skink.

Best,

Me

Marina Doering recently graduated with a degree in English and a minor in Religious Studies. This is her first published piece.

m o a n i n '

The whole damned city is burning down next door so that all you hear is traffic and sirens masked with jazz. This sound, though, it can't be covered with sax or drum or trumpet. It's a sound that drops through your body like a rock through water, breaking not just the meniscus but every layer it encounters until it makes ripples in the marrow of your bones. You start shivering and a rivulet of sweat, disguised as a tear, beads on your bottom lip.

Jazz beats, bursting red
fire. Boiler room goes boom.
Boy sleeping upstairs.

– CASIMIR COVERT-KEEFE

Casimir Covert-Keefe is a junior majoring in English.

the physics of spherical

I am a bag of bones
With empty pockets,
A head full of hair,
And a handful of breast
And a heart that goes vrrroooooom.

You are two ripe arms in a clean shirt,
A pocket watch.
You have a noble jaw.
Your heart has been playing piano
Since the third grade.

We are eating lunch-
Well, *you* are eating.
I am dissecting a piece of lettuce
Into the shape of Texas
While you fill me in on work.

I think the service light behind my eyes
Is only partially hidden
By heavy mascara.
Note to self: resist the urge to say
Excuse me, sir, you have bought a lemon!

and rectangular cohesion

Laughing at your joke
That I did not understand,
I telepathically confess my love.
I can tell you understand because
You have the waitress bring me

Another lemonade
And don't even bother to look
At her silky mile legs
As she tucks away the bill.
Instead, you are smiling at me.

Note to self: resist the urge
To turn around and look for
Who you are smiling at.
Your fancy pager sounds.
Some boy has hit a car

And you have to go back
To the hospital to save him.
You offer to drive me home first.
This is all wrong of course.
This is the highlight of my week.

– LAUREN HOELLE

Lauren Hoelle is a junior majoring in Journalism. Her work has appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of Unbound, as well as various independent literary journals.

i n t h e
n a m e o f
s c i e n c e

Atop the mount there sits
no god,

a triton rests
buried beneath sea.

And somewhere very far
east of here

a staff slumbers, abandoned,
by a people's king.

The relics of our past lie
dormant as words,

with no heroes,
fiction or fact.

No longer condemned
by His ruling fist,

we can no longer be saved.

– RACHEL RASMUSSEN

*Rachel Rasmussen is a junior Philosophy major, and has had work published
in Bad Light.*



freedom
shauna chun-hatch
digital photograph
6 in. x 8 in.

Shauna Chun-Hatch is a sophomore majoring in English. She exhibited her photographs in 2007 during the Crow High School graduation.

then i'll be a tree

That's what Halley told me.
(She read it in a book.)
At first I didn't always believe Halley,
because I didn't know her, but now
I know her because she is always there
when Mom and Dad are hating each other.
(But they say that's not why they yell at each other,
but Halley knows it is.)
And she is there when I walk home from Mr.
Humboldt's after school.
When she's with me we talk and
she gets mad at the other kids and Mr. Humboldt and
says I should become a tree.
But usually I don't want to become a tree.
Usually it is fine and I can play by myself,
and sit in the grass, and think.
But sometimes kids come up to me
because I am alone
and hurt me.
So I hurt things too.
And then that is the worst, and then
Halley comes, and then I want to be a tree.

She says that when I am a tree
all the badness will stop being at me.
Because you can't be at a tree.
Because you can tug a tree's branches, or
chop a tree down and make it fall, but
you can't move it.
And people are only at to move.
And she says that when I am a tree
I can't hurt anything
because I can't be at anything either.
And animals only live in trees.
And children only play in trees.

And when Mr. Humboldt is there, in that place,
but I'm not there anymore, but I still know,
that won't happen anymore.
Because I will be a tree.
(And there isn't there for a tree.)

Because trees can't think about becoming trees.
Because trees can't think.
So them thinking can't get in the way of them being.

— JEROME HIRSCH

the perfect housewife

CHRIS BRADLEY

Luke pressed the buzzer for Ellen's fourth-floor apartment, then stepped back into a slice of afternoon sun that lingered in the narrow cobblestone street. He had been warming himself on a bench in the piazza and was sorry to have to come inside with an hour of daylight remaining. When a low grumble around the corner announced the approach of a Fiat 500, Luke retreated to the building's shady stoop to allow its passing. After the car zipped by and disappeared around the next bend, the entryway finally clicked open.

Luke was relieved to find the lobby bare when he entered. A few days ago, Luke had had to tip-toe through at least two dozen flower baskets that covered the floor; several of the Mediterranean blooms were similar to those at his uncle's flower shop back home in Vermont. Apparently, a long-standing tenant and revered professor of Dante had died the day before. Ellen had been watching a dubbed Stallone movie, and just as a thunderous explosion collapsed the Holland Tunnel, an elderly man knocked at her door. Giuseppe Torrellini had just gone away, the man said—Ellen was specific about this; undoubtedly she liked how he'd used the Italian phrase "gone away" instead of "died"—and would she please keep the noise down? Ellen finished the movie on mute.

The building's owners, a family of noble ancestry, had some years ago retrofitted it with an elevator. It barely accommodated Luke, though he was only 5'8", and it groaned with each trip, so he climbed the stairs. Each stair was solid marble, white speckled with black, with smooth dips in the middle where two hundred years of feet had worn them away. Still, this building was not nearly the oldest in Macerata. The city dated to 1320, a span difficult to fathom even for Luke, who could trace his roots to New Amsterdam. Such history had compelled Luke to apply for this graduate architecture program. He admired the immortality of Italy, the permanence of place that would allow him and Ellen to bring their children to the same sites in twenty years.

Surely by then he would have settled down into the role of husband and father.

Luke passed a few small, bent Italian women going about their daily shopping. They invariably lifted their heads from drab overcoats to study him, and he quickened his pace. He wanted to be able to chat with these world-wise women, to be a part of their community, but every broken syllable he uttered worked against him. Instead, he marveled at these coats he had seen everyone over fifty wearing since his arrival a month ago on Labor Day. The broad array of colors the younger generations wore, even the men, seemed no less peculiar. But Luke received curious looks, too, when he strode through town in cargo shorts and a t-shirt. These glances held no animosity—far from it—but clearly few Americans found their way to this little town.

On an ordinary day, the younger women wore strange and alluring combinations of purples and yellows, the likes of which Luke had only seen on theater majors in the U.S. Linen and silk replaced the usual American cottons and plaid wool. Ellen had embraced this fashion change wholeheartedly. Every Wednesday before class, she searched for deals along the winding streets of downtown, and she rarely touched her American wardrobe. Luke considered this overhaul a plus.

Luke thought himself lucky to have come overseas with an evolving Italian fashionista because, in a way, he felt he had been tricked. Other students, family friends, guide books—each had said that all the women in Italy were surpassingly beautiful. Such uniform beauty, though tantalizing, hadn't seemed

possible, but he had heard it so many times that he began to believe it. But he had seen only normal people thus far—some pretty, some ugly, but most in-between. This should not have surprised him, but he felt compelled to turn to the consistent beauty of art and architecture. Although Ellen never wanted to come on his extended walking tours, he sometimes insisted; he wanted them to experience this beauty together.

On the fourth floor, Luke approached the sturdy oak doors to his left, paused a moment to catch his breath, and pressed the button under “ROSSETTI.” A tinny buzzing came through the tall, narrow double doors and filled the landing. It was a much more irritating and impatient sound than American doorbells.

Two other apartments completed this floor, each with high sets of doors as imperious as Ellen's. Luke had never seen anyone come in or out. He tried in vain to read the brass nameplates from where he stood. The outer wall's one thick pane of crown glass cast a perpetual dusk upon the landing. He tapped his foot on the ground and combed down his curly hair with his fingers.

“*Chi è?*” Ellen said from the other side.

“It's me,” Luke said. “You just buzzed me up.”

She often used Italian with him, thinking he needed the practice. And he did, but felt baffled enough dealing with old ladies and market vendors without having to decipher his girlfriend, too.

Bolts slid up from the floor and down from the ceiling, and the door on the right swung partially open. Ellen had already disappeared somewhere, leaving Luke to the burgundy entryway. The landlord was a man of thirty

or so, but perhaps his mother had died here and left him the apartment. If so, he had not disturbed her old upholstery and carpets, out of respect or indifference. The apartment's best feature was at the end of the long central hallway: a series of hexagonal windows in Ellen's bedroom, overlooking Piazza della Libertà and the rolling hills of the countryside a mile away.

"Luke, come into the kitchen! Dinner's almost ready."

Luke lingered for a moment, wishing he could watch the approaching sunset. The sun was not yet visible, but Ellen's white dresser and bedspread glowed orange under its light. A painting of a knight mounted on his steed hung above the headboard, framed in matte-black. His visor was lifted, but no face showed behind; it seemed to be Italo Calvino's *Nonexistent Knight*. A pastel damsel on the wall opposite outstretched a white-gloved hand in greeting, but her attentions were not reciprocated. Luke feared she would soon turn her gaze on him, and he looked away.

If he had brought the ring with him, he might have chosen to propose here. The sea lay in the opposite direction, but beneath this bank of windows spread seemingly the whole of the Marche wine country. It promised an infinity equal to that of the diamond he had chosen for Ellen back home.

He had picked the ring out at the mall before they left, assisted by a twenty-something woman in a violet pantsuit. She had graduated from a fashion design and merchandising school in San Francisco, and although she was slightly overweight, she had still made herself attractive, so he trusted her advice on a ring. Luke had also asked Ellen's

father for her hand, something that embarrassed him. But it had seemed something that Ellen would want to know he'd done. Her dad had listened politely but judiciously in his armchair as Luke explained how much he loved Ellen and how he would always provide for her. After ten minutes, they shook on it, both of their hands slightly sweaty. In the end, though, Luke had left the ring in its display under the care of the woman in the pantsuit. He hadn't wanted to worry about it while traveling or to have the pressure of having to evaluate the romantic potential of every place they went.

He returned to the kitchen and leaned against the doorframe. The TV was on now, blaring Italian music videos. Ellen stood by the stove at the near end of the room, a long, narrow rectangle with a table hidden in a niche at the far end.

The room smelled heavily of onions and garlic, two of his favorite foods. Sometimes it was hard not to take Ellen for granted. He should have gone with her last night to the wine tasting in Montepulciano, rather than stay at home to do his homework; he should have spent last night with her.

Ellen wore one of her market outfits tonight: her favorite pants—a tight pair of midnight blue jeans she boasted felt like linen—and a thirty-euro royal blue "Italia" sweatshirt that Luke had seen elsewhere selling for five.

"Maddy's joining us for dinner, if that's all right." Ellen nodded her head toward the opposite corner of the room. "Her plans with Justine fell through."

A jolt moved through Luke, a series of chilling tingles that ran to the ends of his limbs. "What?"

A silky voice came from the far end of the kitchen. "Is that okay?"

Luke entered the kitchen proper and peered into the alcove at the end: there sat Maddy, whom he had hoped he might avoid for two more months until they all returned to the U.S., where she would be three time zones away in Gig Harbor, Washington. But here she was, dun-eyed, her Italian textbook open before her.

His stomach tightened as Maddy—six feet, tall even in her chair—watched him. Those same eyes had penetrated his apartment's peephole the previous night, slightly glazed but wide open.

"Yeah," Luke said. "Sure."

* * *

"Where's Josh," Maddy had stated in slurred, quiet words on the other side of the peephole. Her wavy auburn hair lay about her shoulders.

Josh, Luke's roommate, was gone, but Luke opened the door. Maddy walked calmly toward him, murmured, "Josh," and lowered her head to kiss him. He held still a moment, then lifted his chin to meet her mouth, and Maddy's tongue left a trail of saliva across his upper lip. It tasted of Fernet-Branca. Luke knew the responsible thing to do: put her to bed in Josh's room. But Maddy was so drunk that she might vomit, maybe even suffocate from it. Her eyelids were drooping now, her narrow nose flaring slightly as she breathed, her weight collapsing onto him. He put his arm through Maddy's and led her down the hall to his bed, laying her on top of his covers. She reached toward him, clutching at the air with her fingers, then let her arms drop. Her eyes fluttered open and closed. He settled into his chair across from her with a glass

of red wine and a chapter on Ghiberti's bronze doors. He had finished two pages when Maddy's bra landed on his laptop keyboard. For a moment he stared at its cups, as deep as his wine glass and darker than its contents, then he swiveled around. Maddy was sprawled naked on his turquoise comforter.

The only woman Luke had ever seen naked before was Ellen, and she would only undress with the lights off, leaving Luke to see her with his hands. Then she would come alive, call his name, and hold him tight.

Maddy said nothing now, but fixed her eyes upon him. His hands craved to explore this great beauty, manifested from *The Birth of Venus* and lying as if Botticelli had arranged her. Atop her long, slender neck, her head cocked ten degrees, and thick locks of her auburn hair outspread on his pillow as if blown. Her expression was serene—steady brown eyes, lips lightly met—a conscious calm that promised all of her body, in time. Her hands, meanwhile, apologized ambivalently; her right placed ineffectually across her breasts, her left fanning over her groin. Between, the dips and curves of her stomach rippled with every short, shallow breath. No woman so beautiful would come to him like this again. He ached to make love to her, to touch her, to shape her on his bed as Botticelli did on canvas. This was the beauty he had come to Italy for. This moment. He stripped to his Jockey shorts and laid beside her, wanting and not wanting to move her hands. Wanting her to remain Venus. He moved the hand from her breast, but left the other. They kissed, slowly and deeply, quietly, until Maddy raised her head to Luke's ear. "Luke."

Luke saw anew the drunk girl beneath him. Had she moaned or called him Josh, he could have gone on, sculpting her until she and he had crumbled. But now he thought of Ellen whispering his name; he smelled and tasted once more the alcohol on Maddy and rose to put on his pants.

Maddy sat at Ellen's kitchen table, her gaze returned to the Italian textbook spread before her. She had passed out soon after she spoke his name. By the time Josh returned from the disco near sunrise, Luke had moved her to his bed—where she had thrown up, not on Josh's comforter, but into a pair of tennis shoes on the floor alongside. Luke shuddered. The smell of vomit in the small room had been acrid. He went to Ellen and placed his hand on the small of her back as she stirred a pot of tomato sauce. Her chest fit snugly into his side.

"Smells good," he said.

"*Bene*. It needs to be good if I'm going to be making it for you for the rest of our lives."

When she turned to Luke and winked, it felt like a slap. But she often spoke of their future like that.

"Just another minute," she said.

But even with Ellen's gaze on her saucepan, and Maddy's on her textbook, Luke knew he had the better part of each girl's attention. The narrow kitchen felt claustrophobic. He could nearly touch both walls simultaneously, and the stovetop's rising steam turned opaque the thin windows looking onto the alley below. Only a dozen strides away he could be in Ellen's room, tracking the arc of the falling sun across the clear bedroom windows. The final minutes of

daylight on the piazza below were always beautiful; the sun's rays painted the pavement scarlet. Someone surely admired the scene now from the bench where Luke had been not half an hour ago.

The legs of Maddy's chair scraped across the floor. She approached Ellen at the stove, her slight hips swaying beneath her pastel skirt, and held out her book.

"Not now, Maddy," Ellen said. "I'm just about to take the sauce off."

"Just a quick question." She extended her arm farther. "How do you conjugate—"

"Maddy, just wait 'til after dinner." Ellen's voice deepened slightly.

Briefly, Luke hoped that Ellen might turn on Maddy, push her away. Ellen had always been stronger than Luke. But she only waved Maddy away with her stirring hand; a few spots of sauce spattered Maddy's lined pages.

Maddy turned to Luke with raised eyebrows, then returned to her chair. Perhaps she didn't remember much. Or anything at all. He felt a strum of excitement in his hands keeping the memory for himself. Despite his weakness and shame, for the rest of his life he would be able to recall Maddy's finely crafted body and his passion for it. As she returned to her book and her face relaxed, Luke once more saw the striking lines and silent beauty of Venus, and he wanted to lay her out upon the white linoleum.

Ellen's hand rested on his biceps. "Honey, would you grab the plates from the cupboard?"

"Of course, honey."

Ellen smiled. She loved pet names, although they felt empty to Luke; they

were what TV actors said when they pretended to love each other. He used one now only to distance himself from Maddy. Maybe when he and Ellen married, he would devise his own pet name for her, something simple but unique, something he could believe in. *Linen*, maybe, like her pants. He watched as she stirred her sauce. *Ladle*. Yes, she would be his ladle, scooping him up.

He should have brought the ring. Its three-quarter carat, princess-cut diamond gleamed right now from the center of its dark purple cushion, an ocean away. He could almost feel the ring box against his thigh. Were it there, he would lead Ellen away from the stove and Maddy and the old ladies and out to the piazza, where, just as the sun sunk behind the clock tower, he would sit Ellen on the bench, kneel, and pledge himself to her.

Luke carried the plates to the table and set them out, placing one across Maddy's notebook. She smiled; she seemed to think he was being playful.

"What was it that happened to your dinner plans?" Luke asked.

"Justine cancelled." Maddy thumped her pencil's pink eraser top on the tablecloth.

"Just like that, huh?"

Maddy shrugged her shoulders, smiling still. Luke noted for the first time a chip on one of her front teeth. "Just like that," she said.

Luke wondered how long ago Justine had cancelled—if the girls had ever had such plans—and how much time Maddy had spent alone with Ellen before he arrived. How far beyond pleasantries their conversation had gone. Some day, at least, perhaps when he had the ring, Ellen would have to know.

"Good thing Ellen always makes a lot."

"Yes, good thing," Ellen said, walking up with the pasta and sauce. "The perfect housewife."

A few weeks ago they had been studying pictures of the abbey in Tolentino, and she had stopped him midway through his explanation of its rose window. "You know I'm only studying this stuff because of you, right?" she'd asked.

The question took him aback, and she continued before he could think of what to say.

"Don't get me wrong," she said, placing a hand on his forearm, "it's interesting—but I'll be just as happy to stay at home while you go off to be the professor."

Luke's mother had stayed home until he was out of middle school, but he had been surprised to hear Ellen share this preference, especially given her excitement to be in Italy. A tidy house and a hot dinner every night would be lovely. But her world would be so small; he would live and grow, and she would languish. What would they talk about?

Now Ellen served each of them with her wooden spoon—not really a ladle, Luke realized—then set the dishes in the sink to soak.

The square table barely fit inside its niche; one of its sides was flush against the wall. Maddy and Ellen sat opposite each other, Luke in-between. A bare bulb layered with dust extended from the wall above. Luke let the girls take the first bites. Ellen had embellished her sauce with zucchini and eggplant, a recipe similar to something they had ordered at a restaurant the week before. He ate and sipped red wine for several

minutes without looking up, half-listening as the girls discussed bits of Italian grammar.

"The pasta is wonderful," he said. "Don't you think so, Maddy?" But then he noticed that her plate was still nearly full.

"I don't like eggplant," she said. "It's too spongy."

"So eat around it."

"Ellen chopped it too small."

Luke leaned back in his chair and laughed. He had been foolish last night. Now, in the washed-out light of the alcove, she lacked glamour: her hair lay lifeless, and her face appeared slightly yellow.

Ellen raised her eyebrows. "If she doesn't like it, she doesn't have to eat it," she said.

"Good," Maddy said. "I won't."

They both turned to Luke.

"Maddy." He leaned forward. "Ellen probably spent four hours cooking this sauce."

"Two hours," Ellen said.

"Two hours!" Luke said. "And you're not going to eat it."

"It's not a big deal," Ellen said in the even tone she used when explaining a grammatical rule. "She just doesn't like eggplant."

"Well, I love it," he said. "Here." He pulled Maddy's plate over and cocooned his fork in spaghetti.

"What are you doing." Ellen's voice did not rise into a question.

"Not letting your pasta go to waste."

"Maddy was eating from that plate. That's gross."

"Why is that gross?" Maddy asked. "Do I have cooties?" Her smile seemed painted on—not the subtle, entrancing

smile of Botticelli's Venus, but a grotesque rictus from a Goya canvas. Luke wished the ages to whisk by and wash away her crimson lips.

"Luke."

He looked at Ellen. "What?"

"Stop."

"Stop what?"

Ellen's cheeks were sucked in slightly. "Stop staring at her."

His eye had lingered too long. But he deserved her reproach, desired it even, and so he did not protest. He twirled more pasta around his fork.

"Luke, stop." Ellen pushed her chair back a foot, preparing to rise—

"One more bite."

Ellen leaned forward and placed her hand on his wrist; her fingertips settled lightly on the back of his hand, with her knuckles arched. She pressed her lips together and squared her chin, and a slight horizontal line ran across her forehead. Her eyes were wide palettes of green. Just a gentle admonition.

Luke's hand lay tense under her touch. He wanted Ellen to press her flesh to his, to raise her voice. He wanted her to be angry. *I spent last night with Maddy*, he wanted to say.

But Ellen lifted her hand from his and began to eat in silence.

Chris Bradley is a senior English major, whose work has appeared in the Oregon Voice, Chapman Journal, and Unbound. He has just completed a collection of short stories for his senior thesis.

b a n g

She reaches for the metal, thin scarred master hands,
fierce unchallenged forward motion

a He unlocks the black action, white reflects, dusting over brown irises,
tongue pressing upper teeth, unsteady smile on cracked lips

She sets it between them, charred convex balancing on linoleum floor
black hair trips in front of her eyes, pushed aside with pale fingers

n He fills the silver mouth, unsolidified bullet waiting,
golden eyes focused on pure white hunger

She readies the alloy, submerging powder with drops,
sinking to the floor where he waits

g He flicks the lighter, searching the scent of the boiling fumes,
flame ignites orange and blue inside a closed hand

She tears the cloth, drowning white in muddied ash,
sweat rivers down bruised and punctured skin

He removes the fire and fills the chamber through, twice,
places two loaded guns at their feet, caulked

She takes the leather, he takes the rope, tied on trembling flesh
The barrels bear fangs, puncture smooth, bang bang

– ALYCIA SMITH

Alycia Smith recently graduated with a degree in Philosophy and will be starting her MFA in Creative Writing at Emerson College in the Fall. She has had work published in her high school journal, The Kaleidoscope.

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