

Collage

Middle Tennessee State University
Spring 2004

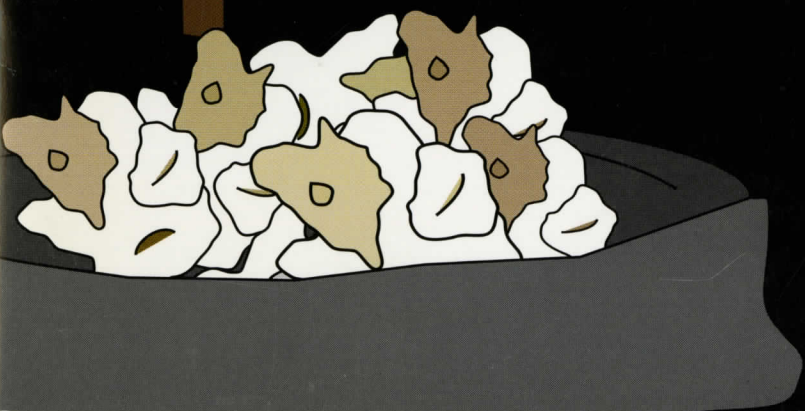


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Old Brown Horizon

James Wesley Cobb

The whiskey line in this tipping bottle
has become my horizon.
I love it.
I can turn it up and turn the world down,
soothe my eyes when the sun's too bright.
My liquor turns the sun's rays brown and funnels
them down into my inside places.
That's where the burn becomes a balm.
The hot static in my gut creeps like dawn
on sunset days and floats my cares away.
It takes a lot to get solid drunk,
but it can be done.
Perseverance and nothing else to do.
Eventually the bottle becomes you.
Eventually the sun sets all day and night.
You never have to stray, never have to search.
Your horizon is with you right there all the time,
tilted and double and blurry. You don't care.
There's no hurry to get where you're going.
That's why I don't worry about it.
The only way to get there is to go
real slow. I have to creep up on it.
But I know if I move myself slow enough,
one day I'll reach out and touch the
edge keeping two worlds apart.

Consumer Karma

James Wesley Cobb

August 2nd – Albuquerque, New Mexico

Mark was sitting alone in his bathroom; his wife had left him for their marriage counselor. Mark stood facing the mirror, red-eyed and bleary. He picked up his toothbrush. He knew he could make a weapon with a plastic handle and a razor blade. He'd seen it in a prison movie. He picked up his new tube of Crest™ brand toothpaste. His wife had always bought the crummy store brand, the cheap bitch. Mark squeezed a daub of Crest™ brand toothpaste on the bristles and vehemently began scrubbing his teeth. Afterwards, his mouth felt fresh and his outlook on life was much improved. Then the phone rang; it was his wife. Their marriage counselor had been attacked by a pit bull and was not only hospitalized, but permanently disfigured. Mark and his wife happily renewed their wedding vows two weeks later.

September 14th – Fresno, California

Suzanne left the clinic. If only she could remember the sunavabitch's name from Friday night. That bastard had given her the clap. She decided to drop by the supermarket on the way home; strawberries with whipped cream and a hot bath might make her feel a little better. The store was out of her usual brand of whipped cream, so she bought a tub of Miracle Whip™ brand whipped cream. At home in the tub she proceeded to indulge in her special treat. She did indeed feel a little better. A dollop of Miracle Whip™ brand whipped cream fell off of a strawberry and onto Suzanne's genital area. After drying off from her bath she noticed that the nasty rash was completely gone. Later, on the eleven o'clock news, the reporter held up a picture that looked familiar. It was the man who had given her the clap. He was hospitalized with minor brain trauma obtained while playing handball. Later that night Suzanne found twenty dollars that had been left at an ATM.

October 25th – Paducah, Kentucky

Robert had no friends or family left. His coworkers hated him and he made the lowest wage at the small town printing company where he worked. He decided to do himself in. Taking the day off, he went to the hardware store and bought the biggest fucking bottle of Mr. Clean™ brand tile and bathroom cleaner they had. He went straight home and ceremoniously poured a tall glass of golden liquid with an ice cube, for kicks. Just as the first drop touched his lips he had a better idea. He slowly set the glass down. He went to the bathroom and took his shaving cream and razor from the medicine cabinet. After his head was shaven clean, he got out his late wife's jewelry box, removing a long, sharp hat pin and two gold hoop earrings. No one ever found out who forced twenty-seven people at Robert's place of employment to drink a fatal amount of Mr. Clean™ brand tile and bathroom cleaner. No one ever found out how that many people could be forced, apparently one-by-one, to drink it up after watching those who went before them die horribly, convulsing in piles of vomit. No one would ever know because there were no survivors. Lucky for Robert that he had taken the day off, the cops said. Robert eventually got a well-paying job as an assistant manager at a Kinko's and married his late wife's younger sister.

Untitled

Tommy Taylor



Medium: Acrylic

Untitled

Kevin Lane



Medium: 35mm slide print

Poem #65

Jarvis T. Griffin

Often times in mental minds
Thoughts get lost in purgatory
Cells-

Where memory fades as light
From days of no sleep
And transcendental paths
To eternity's gate
Provide means of escape
From tortured pasts that is
Torn between what seems
And what deems reality
Malice once twice vested
In the souls of men -

Off current sass & molds
Of ash accumulated in depths
Unknown-passage from place
To place saves wisdom wisest
Tone now grown into shallow
Winds of knolled forgetfulness
Wielding time markers of indefinite
Domains defining the yoke of
Forgiveness jazz -

A salute to those hosts so bold
Under minded vessels
Pressed by light of sun
And cooled in nights of rum,
The usual moments-the moon
Full bloom in eastern star
Joined in ceremony for the
Gods - but where to show
Needles of lore so pure

To eyes enflamed with blame
And lucent tears pierced and priced
Divined device-to quite the nice
Unforgettable vestige known now
At rested state mused and freight
And forgotten.

When Sirens Sing

Stan Williams

Pass us not by, weary travelers.
Abide here and rest.
Take solace in our song.

Why smite the foam with weathered oar?
Pause, and bring your black ship near,
For close by a peaceful harbor lies
Deep and still and clear.
Come closer to our song.

Heed not the wrecks you pass –
The broken keel, the splintered mast,
The bleached bones of men who sleep.
Be not fearful for fate calls all mortals.
Truth is in our song.

Bold Ulysses, captain of men,
King and soldier, Ilium's bane.
Why come you not? Strain your cords,
Tear free the fetters from your mast.
Come. We offer more than Ithaca holds
In the secrets of our song.

Wealth you have, and lordly grace.
The might of mortal men is in your blood.

Glory you have, and honored are of gods
And men. Yet we have gifts befitting kings
Who yearn for neither gold nor flesh
In the deeps of our song.

For mysterious are through our song
Revealed; we hear immortal secrets
Murmured deep within the hearts of gods
And see through the starry bounded-
firmament
Into the void beyond. Come nearer
To the secrets of our song.

Flee then with your pack of curs.
Churn the white waves in your haste,
Cowardly Ulysses. But you have heard
Our song and will forever long to hear again
Our music. Cursed are you to wander,
Restless as our song.

Pass us not by, weary travelers.
Abide here and rest.
Eternal is our song.

Looking Up

Julie Madewell



Medium: Gelatin Silver Print

Road Work Next 7 Miles

Jill Elizabeth Townsend

Streetlights play keep-away in the distance
The trees stand like toy soldiers
My insides are rattling from the rhythm of the music
I rest my head upon the cold window
And look up at the night sky with which I have become so enamored
I imagine it as one big, black dome
Holding us captive
And these things we call stars
They're just places where
Jaded prisoners have managed to scratch through
In hopes of discovering an outside world
I feel secure in the beat of the music
The only thing that stays constant
The only thing I can count on
So I exhale on the window
And draw tiny hearts with my unsteady finger
Holding them in my mind a few moments
Before they fade away
And each one I form
Seems more perfect than the last

Cigarettes

Jason Manley

You
hand-rolled in light
paper
smoking on one end
wet from lips on the other.

You
who are my sweet slap into reality
who fills my brain with
quiet,
my heart with calm,
dried, shredded, tight
and burning.

You
come into—
become—
my
lungsbloodbodyworld;
a fix,
never filtered
(the cotton keeps
a piece of
you
from
me.)

gelatinous

Leslie Carol Boehms

gelatinous
and no matter how long you search
or pretend to search
(or pretend not to search)
it all still comes down to a
matter of perchance
and happenstance
and the fact of free will

(and circumstance)
it's just a thought -
but there are some things
that will never change
no matter how much you try to force them into
another mold
to maneuver
like Jell-o

Mamma's Hands

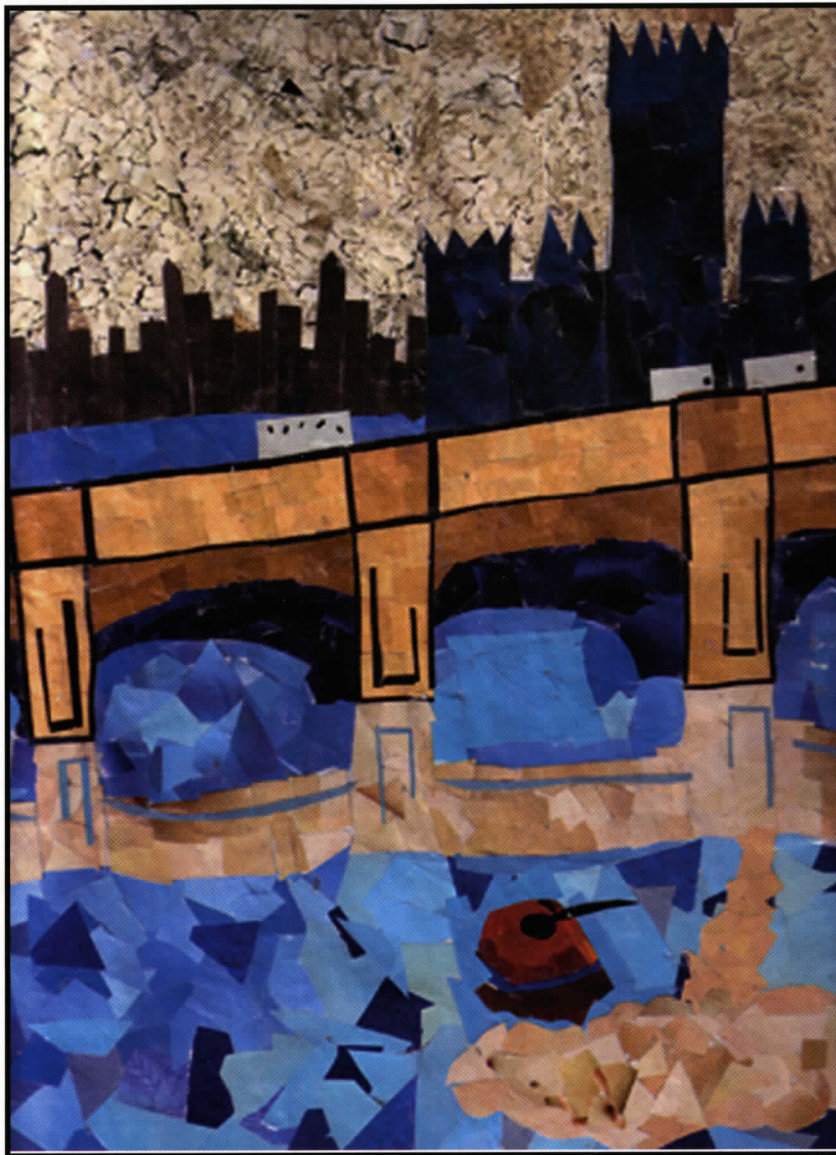
Amy Jones-Foster



Medium: Slide

Castle on the Water

Tabitha Taylor



Medium: Mosaic Paper

Four Pale Children Climbing

Jasmin Kaset

four pale children climbing
entirely naked
over roadside appliances
a dinged and rusted washing machine
dull metal ignored by a rising sun
becomes a pedestal
for a squatting boy
sneering with spare teeth
at the sparse five a.m. traffic

a girl poised, peach
flat face
protruding white ribcage
sipping from a jar
milk
fooding warm into her throat
she looks like a statue

from there only tops of heads
short bangs bead eyes
thin fingers
behind a cluster of stray machines
there were four of them
maybe five

the purest morning exhibitionism i've ever seen

The Homosexual Agenda

B.J. Chaplin

—For Immediate Release—

White House Correspondent

The following are two excerpts from a highly classified document codenamed Project P.A.N.S.Y. (Pandemic Annihilation of Natural Sexual Yearnings) that was intercepted via facsimile thanks to the Patriot Act. The document – more appropriately called the Homosexual Agenda – is being described by officials as “the gay equivalent of the Holy Grail.” The correspondence was being secretly transmitted to gay bars, clubs, bathhouses, bookstores, and other businesses across the nation from the San Francisco international GLBT headquarters (the Pink Palace). A band of male CIA agents, met by muscled lesbians and ninja drag queens, struggled to subdue the feisty bunch, eventually succeeding after threatening to cancel an upcoming Margaret Cho tour. Preliminary tests have indicated that no gayness has infected the brave agents as of yet, but, for precautionary reasons, the agents have been quarantined and are receiving a steady diet of sirloin steak, beer, and Clint Eastwood movies.

Section 486D-539

Marriage Infiltration

Mission Objective: Forcefully redefine marriage

Methodology: Coerce liberal states into passing legislation and then gradually work through the courts until fully equal marital rights are obtained

Synopsis: In order to get the legislative wheels turning, a list of high-ranking government officials (refer to Section 121B-712, Chart 3.2) must be targeted and tranquilized. Once an official is unconscious, inject into her or his bloodstream a microscopic nanobot – the Homoneurolizer 3XL – which will interfere with the host’s ability to reason. Note that the list is full of liberal extremists (Democrats) so that no one will draw suspicions. The Homoneurolizer 3XL will force the official to make ridiculous public claims such as, “Homosexuals should have equal protection under the law,” and, “The love that exists between a heterosexual couple is the same as the love that exists between a homosexual couple.” Be warned, however, that the Homoneurolizer 3XL may malfunction if certain bible passages are read aloud; the nanobot may be shown the error of its unholy ways and subsequently shut down. This phenomenon of the Homoneurolizer 3XL being suddenly “saved” is still being investigated by our Queer Department of Mechanical Thingsies.

The next action that must be taken is to work our way through the courts using pretend couples as testaments to our abilities to fall in love and become parents. Android children will make model youngsters and reflect positively on us as parents. Although we predict that the opposition will use such ironclad arguments as a need to protect the abstract “sanctity of marriage” and prevent the “moral decay of society,” we have confidence that we will eventually

prevail, thanks to the nanobots. We suspect that the cases will eventually go to the Supreme Court. If necessary, Supreme Court Justices can be replaced with clones (a technology we developed to answer the questions of reproduction; see Section 794A-889) and they will then rule as we see fit.

Once gay marriage is obtained, we will be able to use the powerful legal precedent to exact our next marital goals. Since allowing gay marriage logically opens the door to any kind of love, we plan to use the same process to legally provide for state-recognized incest, bestiality, necrophilia, and cyber-sex. The institution of marriage – which initially was perfect – will be essentially destroyed. Heterosexuals will be powerless as they witness the downfall of civilization.

Section 851E-961

Child Recruitment

Mission Objective: Create more homosexuals

Methodology: Expose children to homosexuality and gay situations early on and hope they turn

Synopsis: Despite our methods, heterosexual families keep spurting out homosexuals at a rate we cannot come close to matching. We raise our children and tell them the truth about our orientations, yet they continue to gravitate toward whichever sex they desire. It's almost as if their sexual orientation was genetic – but we all know this can't be true.

We've developed a two-tier plan for turning kids away from heterosexuality. The processes for turning females and males – called "dykification" and "sissification," respectively – are currently being tested for their effectiveness.

Dykification entails leading young girls away from their traditional, rightful roles as mothers and housewives. We will instill a feminist mentality in them, and naturally they will grow to hate men and become lesbians. We will encourage girls to play sports, join the military, and become gym teachers. Research shows that these activities increase levels of the natural chemical lesbopin being released into the brain. Unnaturally high levels of lesbopin cause hair to grow in the shape of a mullet and make lesbian legs ultra-sensitive to light, forcing them to always wear pants.

For sissification, young boys will be encouraged to disregard natural male superiority and treat women as equals. We suspect that this is a surefire way to make them gay. We've already infiltrated the Boy Scouts (by using a public lawsuit to distract from our covert plan) and have boys sewing badges and wearing fabulously stylish scarves. Joining the military will be vehemently discouraged (because there are no gays in the military) and instead boys will be pointed toward gymnastics, figure skating, and nursing. Boys will be taught skills outside their traditional spheres, such as childcare, cooking, cleaning, and expressing emotions other than anger.

Although the experiment is still in its infancy, we expect scores of straight boys and girls to be batting for our team in no time.

Important Notice:

The U.S. government advises that the general public refrain from approaching or feeding any homosexuals, as they may be dangerous and/or contagious. Do not make eye contact or any sudden movements. A new terror level, color-coded level "pink," has now been adopted and denotes the highest level of threat to homeland security. As of today, the country is operating at this level.

In order to safeguard against possible homo-exposure, the government insists that males refrain from listening to any trance, house, or techno music; similarly, females must not listen to heavy metal or bands led by or including women. When played backwards, the government has discovered, songs in these genres have been found to cause laboratory animals to temporarily cease mating.

Furthermore, using data collected from the intercepted communication in conjunction with an extensive, tax-payer funded, \$87 billion investigation into the matter conducted over the past four years, the government has confirmed that the following cartoon characters are gay: The Pink Panther, Yogi Bear and his boytoy Boo-Boo, Buttercup of the Powerpuff Girls, Milhouse VanHouten, Walon Smithers, Peppermint Patty and her on-again, off-again girlfriend Marcie Johnson, Jem's foes The Misfits, Snagglepuss (notorious for saying, "Heavens to mergatroid!" and, "Exit stage left!"), the 1980s incarnation of He-Man (the 2002 version is now a spokesman for the anti-gay movement), She-Ra, Miss Piggy (female impersonator), the Amazonian princess Wonder Woman, Vanity Smurf, Piglet, Aquaman, Batman and his "life partner" Robin, Garfield, Mickey Mouse, Foghorn Leghorn, Pepe Le Pew (whose homosexuality is evident through his heterosexual compensation), Velma "Jinkies" Dinkley, and the ringleaders from Bikini Bottom – Sandy Cheeks and SpongeBob Squarepants. Only by shielding children from the subliminal messages of these evildoers can we hope to contain this imminent threat.

If a gay or lesbian is spotted, contact your local authorities immediately. The government is counting on you. Without your help, the world as we know it will cease to exist.

Edward

Jill Elizabeth Townsend

I saw you today
 You were behind your thin frames
 Just beyond your speckled green eyes
 Both intriguing and frightening

Your skin was dotted
 Your lips were chapped
 And I suddenly realized
 That you're not merely a fantasy

You are a man
 With blood running through your veins
 With lines mapping an adventure across your face
 With tobacco stains on your fingertips

And it's not fair
 That I can reach out and touch you
 Because what dreams do I have left
 If there is no intangible?

Untitled

Lindzi Croy



Medium: Clayboard

Ache

Lindsey Turner

The thick throb that defined my night
Has gone
And left the strange dust of
A dark encounter gritty in my teeth.
Dreams contain no names.
A shuddering hand
Slides down a hungry thigh
And a nervous breath
In a stranger's ear
Melt over flesh
And pool on sweat-soaked sheets.
Poppies bloom in cheeks,
Intoxicating-nauseating.
A rise and fall
Lit by obscurity and friction,
Cooled by moonlight.

One dizzy wet night and I'm jolted back into the realm of the living
And the lusting,
Raising my eyes under my
Stringy brown veil,
Trying to catch your irises like insects
Obscured by anonymity.

Exchange Student

Jill Elizabeth Townsend

She sat in front of me
With her pumpkin-colored hair
And her blue eyeliner
And her ragged sweaters that covered her hands

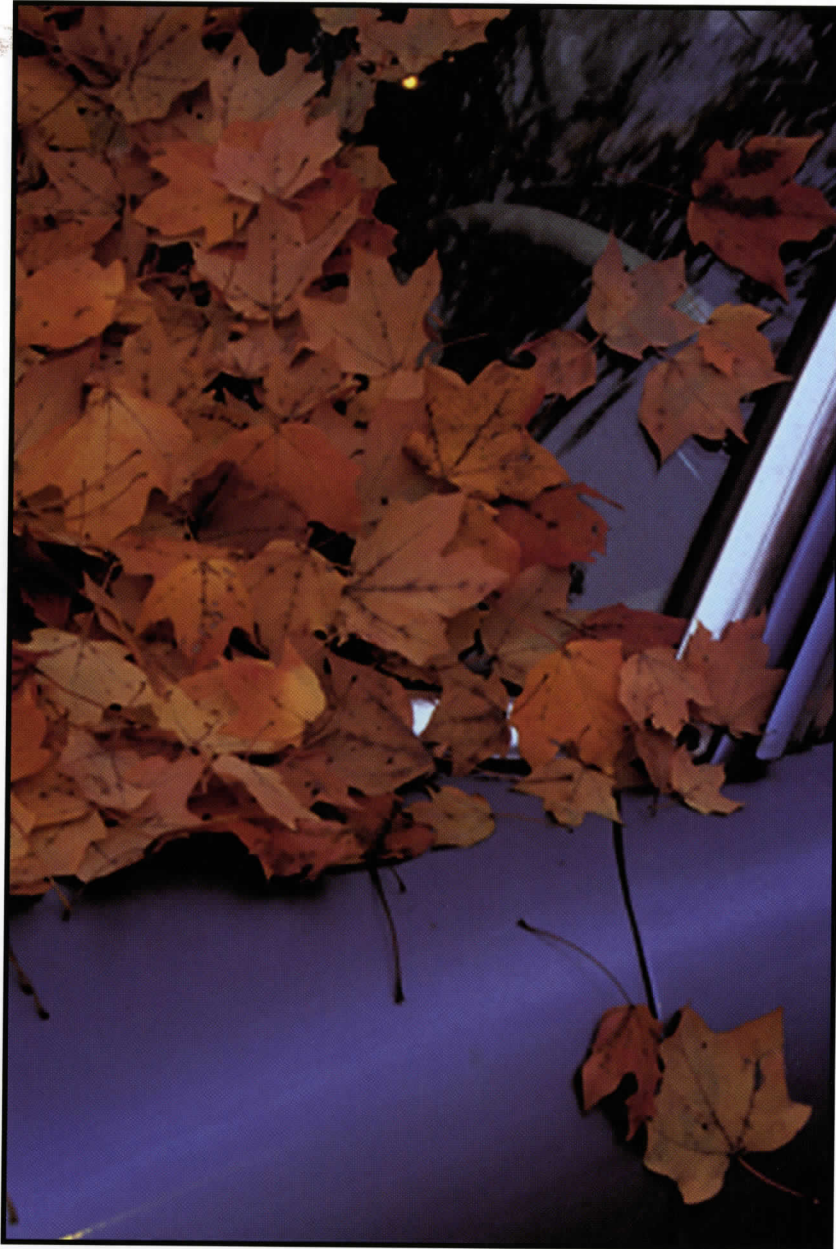
*We called her Caffeine
Because it sounded like her name*

She wrote very small
And showed us pictures of her military boyfriend
And always complained
In that beautiful accent
About needing a cigarette

She makes me want to start drinking coffee

Vanishing

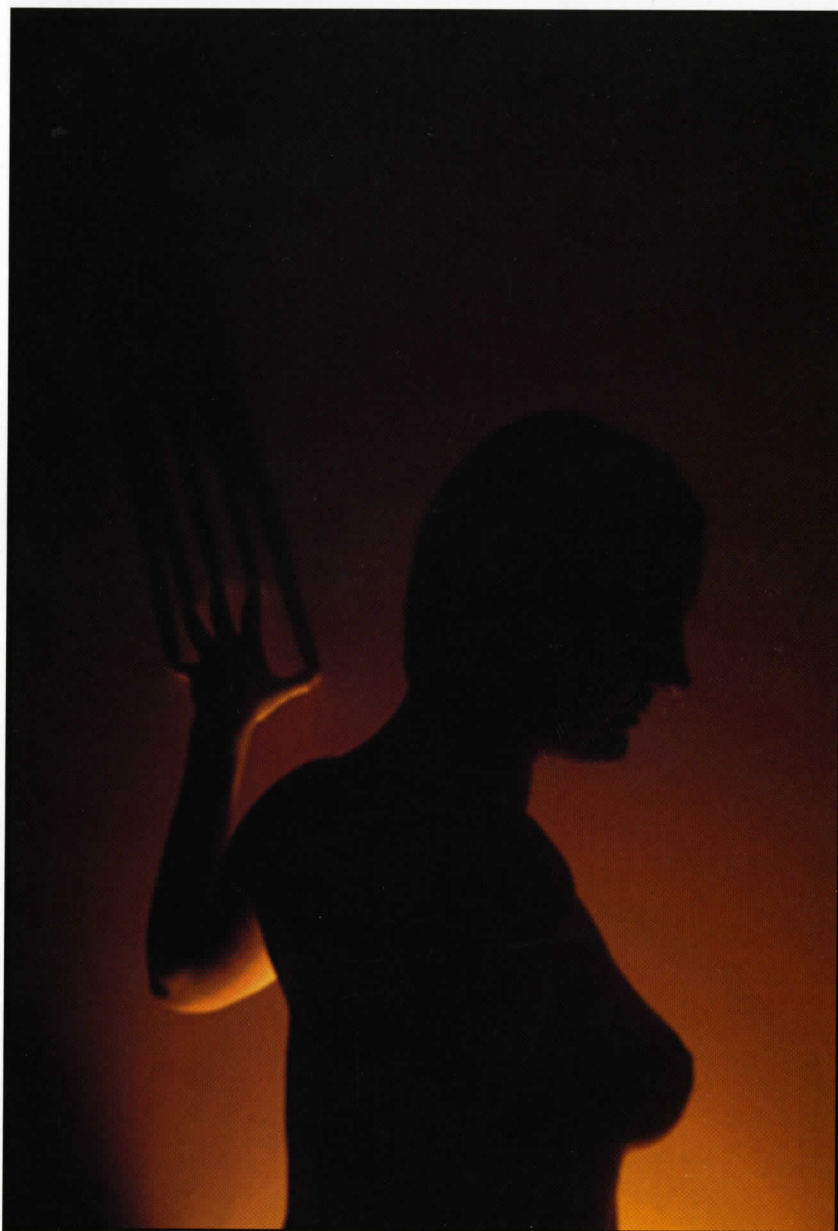
Laura Beth Childers



Medium: Color Slide

Untitled

Brandon Dill



Medium: Color Slide

A Story About Joan

Andrew Dick

I sit in the kitchen sink and ponder my existence with my eyes open, which is hard to do because I keep getting distracted by the knobs on the stove and the fork in my ass. I wonder whether it's worth it all. They say it's the little things that count. But are the little things worth the heartbreak and embarrassment and the pain of living? Are the triangular-shaped hash browns worth a lifetime of break-ups with girls you don't know, but think you do anyway? Maybe it's not the hash browns; maybe it's a baby's laughter. But that doesn't last long. And then it starts crying, which seems much more annoying than the laughter seems soothing. But maybe that's because I haven't taken my pills today. But that's not what I came to talk about. This is a story about Joan. She had this sister named Melissa. Melissa was the kind of girl every man wants. 5'7", 36-24-36, 120 lbs. Body of a porn star. Face of an angel. Lips like the petals of a budding rose. But that's not all. She had brains and personality to match. She had all the traits of one of those girls in those horribly predictable teen pop romantic comedies. Everybody wanted her. I had her. I'd had her since the 4th grade. We were now in the 10th. Sweethearts for six years. Plenty of time to "get to know each other." Everybody thought we had. But we hadn't. I hadn't even the balls to kiss her yet. I felt like an idiot. But this Saturday was going to be our day. Her parents were out of town, and her sister was sleeping over at some guy's apartment. I had it all planned out. I even talked to her about it. She was getting more excited everyday. Saturday came and our date went terrific. We got back to her house and sat down on the couch. My hands were incredibly sweaty. I wasn't sure where to put them when I kissed her. If I touched her cheek, like in the movies, would the sweaty hands be a turn-off? Would she ask me to stop? She broke the awkward silence by asking me if I wanted something to drink. I said that a Coke would be nice, and she trotted off to the kitchen. She came back with an ice-cold can of Coke. I opened it and chugged. (Not very sexy, I admit. But my mouth felt like I'd been licking dust off the mantle. I couldn't kiss her like that.) As I chugged, I thought, "It's now or never." I set the empty can on the coffee table and scooted next to her. She closed her eyes as I moved nearer. Our lips met. Those lips! Oh! Those lips! How many nights I'd spent thinking about those lips. They were even more wonderful than I'd imagined, so soft and tender. My tongue got curious and began to explore the inside of her mouth. She gladly accepted it, pulling it, sucking it in. it was just like in the movies. Our hands were as curious as our tongues. One arm was wrapped around her waist, the other on a large, firm breast. She gave a small moan as I squeezed. And then... and then the reality of why chugging a can of Coke isn't sexy came to me. The demon gas welled up inside, and I burped right into her mouth.

We broke up a week later. But that's not what I came here to talk about. This story is about Joan. She was a slut. I screwed her on the kitchen counter.

Conversation

Marie Brown

My phone rings
like a firehouse bell
your midnight siren.

At the beep your broadcast
demand is preserved on tape.
Hey this is Troy. Call me.

He listens, eyes narrowed
voice waivers, but asks
Who is that?

Backed into a corner,
forgot to mention don't
call after 5:00 p.m.

I cast around
Try *Some kid from class*
act puzzled, he bites.

Tomorrow from across the table
I watch you, your elbow propped
fingers resting on my hand.

With averted eyes you mumble
Thanks for dinner and the shirt
Say let me repay you.

I have read your words
I glance towards the window
Whisper: Write something for me

Your message, an e-mail this time
Cast in shadow
Subject: A warning, a thank you, and Johnny Cash:

You will soon find
I am empty
My hope, among my doubts,

Is that you'll stay.
The words I speak are as air.
I will make you hurt.

The glow fades
my screen turns black.
All thanks forgotten.

The Great Refusal

Stacie A. Moore



Medium: Digital

Love Letter From My Pre-Adolescent Self

Wendy French

Get out of that bed when I call you.
Stop being afraid
of the blank page. I want you to stop telling me to
shut up at the dinner table.
I want you to act like I'm worth the flesh.
Stop worrying about how the world doesn't need
another self-examining girl reading
her journal entries in public conversation.

The earth's rotation gets faster everyday.
It's like when you're about to be car sick,
you have to focus on one thing,
one aspect of the sky or interior of the car,
to keep from throwing up. Hinge yourself on me
& we'll watch the world fall away easily.
Laugh at its funny flailing dance like loose ends
of your hair, mimicking expression. I want you to stop
treating people like objects:
sedimentary figurines in a fish bowl that
you swim around, in & out of,
with no concept of their pretty reflecting colors.

I want you to be happy sleeping with me.
Stop fearing their fists, pink slips, & red ink,
start sending those valentines to me.
Quit giving me a hard time when I order dessert
or wanna take a nap.
Be comfortable in silence.
Stop letting levels of guilt decide what you do everyday.
If you'd turn the noise down, we could hear each other.

I want you to search a crowded room for me
with the same fervor & intensity that you look for Jesus.
Because, without me, your notions of holiness and fragility
are images, refusing to circulate.

Stop worrying about how much time I demand.
You've time for those peasants in the closet,
laying them out the night before,
smoothing their creases.
Stop blaming that sickness on me.
You could let them go so easily.
What's time ever done for you anyway?
It mocks you behind your back, you know,
until you confront it at work –
in front of everyone.
Don't package your
day off into tiny increments,
working on wobbling models of efficiency.
It's just one less language to unlearn.

Let's take our body and leave.
Start accepting the confusion; without it there is nothing
to wake up to but white noise. Put down the
crossword puzzle and write that
song you've been meaning to.

& I know you think this all Bohemian nonsense;
I'd have us walking on endless beaches barefoot,
all in metaphor, of course. It's not
for real people, I've heard you say. What are real people?
What about their empirical logic makes them realer than us?
I know you enough to say that you wouldn't
be happy with their easy-bake happiness.

The phallic nails, hammered into our wrists, are
of the same substance as those metaphorical beaches.
Make the most of the metaphor; it's softer than nails.

Stop trying to put your name on everything,
just to have it called out. I call you
by your name more than enough.
Accept that those words aren't yours.
& those ideas aren't your own.
You aren't as unique as you think you are,
but that's all right, darlin'.
I know your number by heart.
I've memorized your face.
I can't breathe until you accept me.
Stop assuming I'm wrong.
I don't want you to spend your life in an unmade bed –
I don't want you to stop looking for a Big Bang.
One day neither I nor the traffic will wake you.

Wrinkles

Marianne Beard

For I am not ashamed of these wrinkles on my face.
They glow and shine for all to admire.
Each one tells a story from my life.
Each one has grown with time.
And with every wrinkle, attached, is a moment.
A memory of all that I am and have accomplished.
Though a little faded.
Imprints on my face with time.
A quiet symbol of a well-lived life.
Mysteries, if you will, for speculators to wonder.
Just my emotions trapped on a human canvas.
With sincerity and purpose.
Of all my successes, tragedies, and pains.
Of all my loves.
What my life had to offer.
Displaying patience and all that I've learned on this adventure.
And if there's anyone who understands:
Wrinkles don't come and go.
Just permanent marks.
From the moments.
Lived. In time.

Leaves in Puddle

Steve Cross



Medium: Gelatin Silver Print,
Selenium Toned

Life/Red Poppy

Kim Huff



Medium: Polaroid, 5x70/
Time Zero Manipulation

I am My Beloved
and My Beloved is Mine

Jessica Dinkins



Medium: Acrylic

Sphinx

Sara Smith

You find yourself pacing
It seems like you have never heard all the chatter so clearly
From the hum of the kitchen light
To the constant steel train racing through your gut
Off track in amber fields of purple memory again
Posed like Cary Grant
With elbow up and hand down
Gripping the white plastic lawn chair
On grey linoleum floors

How badly you want her with every thing you have
Wavering drunk yet pleasantly and smirking knowingly in amber fields and grey skies
Teetering between white mimes with red triangles around their eyes
And men in three piece suits
Cezanne is painting in the neighboring orchard I say
Gorillas on motorcycles
Still carouse our streets you reply.

Tasks at hand require constant concentration
Munching steel tabletops while listening for every bell
Of the next phone call.
It will bring merriment to your soul and peace to your heart
Chips fall where they may
Shit on your shoulder
Honey on your lips
S&P on your blue table
You conclude that loving her more has the greatest appeal
Your heart beats like the sensation of flight
Such lovely gongs sound in your head

See the Light

Rachelle Morvant



Medium: Gelatin Silver Print

Good Ole Rusty

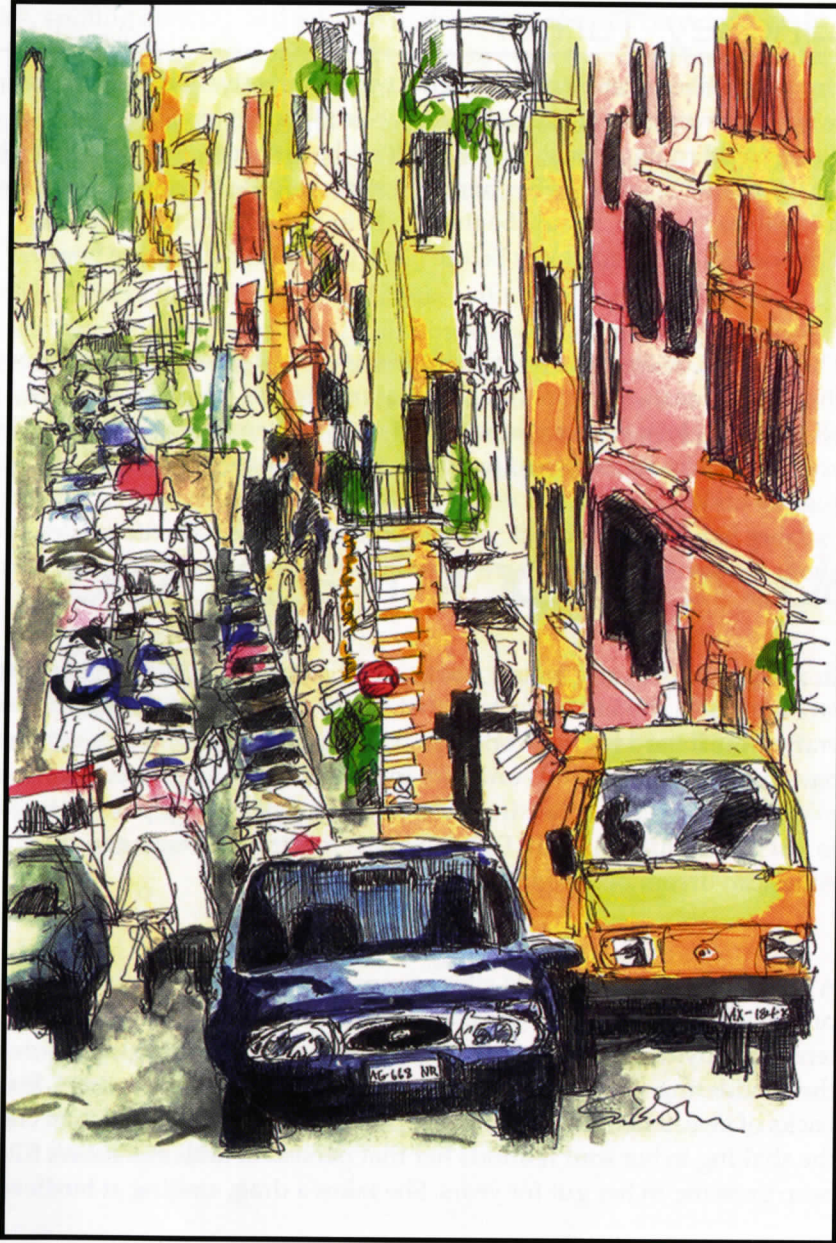
Megan Allender



Medium: Black/White Print
with Watercolor

Rowan Street

Sara B. Smith



Medium: Ink, Water Color

Glimpses of a Family (Or, Why I Worry)

Lindsey Turner

Her hands like parchment, blue veins wrap themselves around shriveling muscles. We have watched her shrink for years, her back rounding out, pushing her head toward the grave. Toes like gnarled roots, it must hurt to walk in those shoes, even with holes cut out to make way for the bunions. I can see her hands in mine, middle fingers twisting toward the outside. Nails still painted mauve. I won't be there to help her cross or to say it's okay. Chances are it will be a phone call and a quick cry before black slacks hit the ironing board.

There's glint of silver between those More-stained pearls. She smiles coyly and squints through trifocals at the monitor. Miniature hiccups erupt through the speakers as chatters all over the globe hit her motherboard with conversational requests. Silver and wood clacks and clanks like shackles around those wrists, thinned by osteoporosis and worn by a million slightly off keystrokes. Her voice, provocative gravel, massages the ears of a lover on the other end, her hand making quick work of an e-mail splashed with smileys and color and messages about the saving graces of an electronic Jesus. Don't throw this forward away.

In an age of pixels and mouse pads and fat asses in ergonomic chairs, my father drips with sweat inside a shoddy tin factory that belches smoke and sludge and sends out machine crafted cardboard for the world's packaging convenience. Years of repetition and odd hours have broken his back and sunk him into a state of constant near-consciousness. Sixteen hours in overalls, earplugs collecting wax, safety goggles barely putting up a fight, hard hat resting in jest on his thinning hair. Driving home in a trance. Dozing in front of the TV. Living the American dream between doctor's visits.

A desk and a bookshelf hold silver-rimmed snapshots of a family huddled together in its prime, when youthful naiveté and faithful optimism soaked the sheets. Now, prayers are uttered silently while walking down antiseptic halls, cleaning up old-man waste, and clutching the shuddering shoulders of new orphans, widows, and widowers. Five cups of coffee – two packs of sweetener, two heaping spoons of creamer – and a pack of cheap cigarettes later, the shaking in her soul reminds her that persistent faith still hasn't filled that void that's been growing in her gut for years. She takes a drag, smiling at birdfeeders.

Unsure, she drapes yards of cloth, inches of rouge and blue and black, covering the parts she hates (everything). But a gruff voice in her ear and beard burn on her neck and thighs lines her thoughts with hope and inflates her furrowed brow. The weight seems to slide off and

everyone one around her nods in approval. A sassy haircut and an emboldened tongue equal empowerment when dependence is still a way of life and children still need their mothers. She swallows the thick resentment that gathers in her throat at night and vomits up everything else.

I am full of obtuse angles, spilling over my bed into the night, across stained carpet lumps of soiled laundry waiting for their turn in the wash. I'll get to them someday. Until then I'll chase dizziness as it attacks me in the shower, and slip a wrinkled foot onto the pale linoleum in anticipation of the brightness outside. Touch the window and assume the day's destiny. Perform the first shoe-tying of the day, even if it's in vain. Lock the door and enter reality. Wake from the slumber of contentment. Sometimes I live days without knowing I'm there.

A baby while his sisters hit puberty and ransacked the house with their hormones, he is pensive and peeking, uncertain of the aging couple in his house and the shadows that frame him. There are no posters of creamy flesh on his walls or ceiling, but his mattress and VCR could hold teen secrets real enough to base movies on. He hides under chassis and ball caps, angry at numbers and homework and chores and hygiene and hopeless futures that have to be carved out of remnants of a reality handed down to him by a family tired of itself.

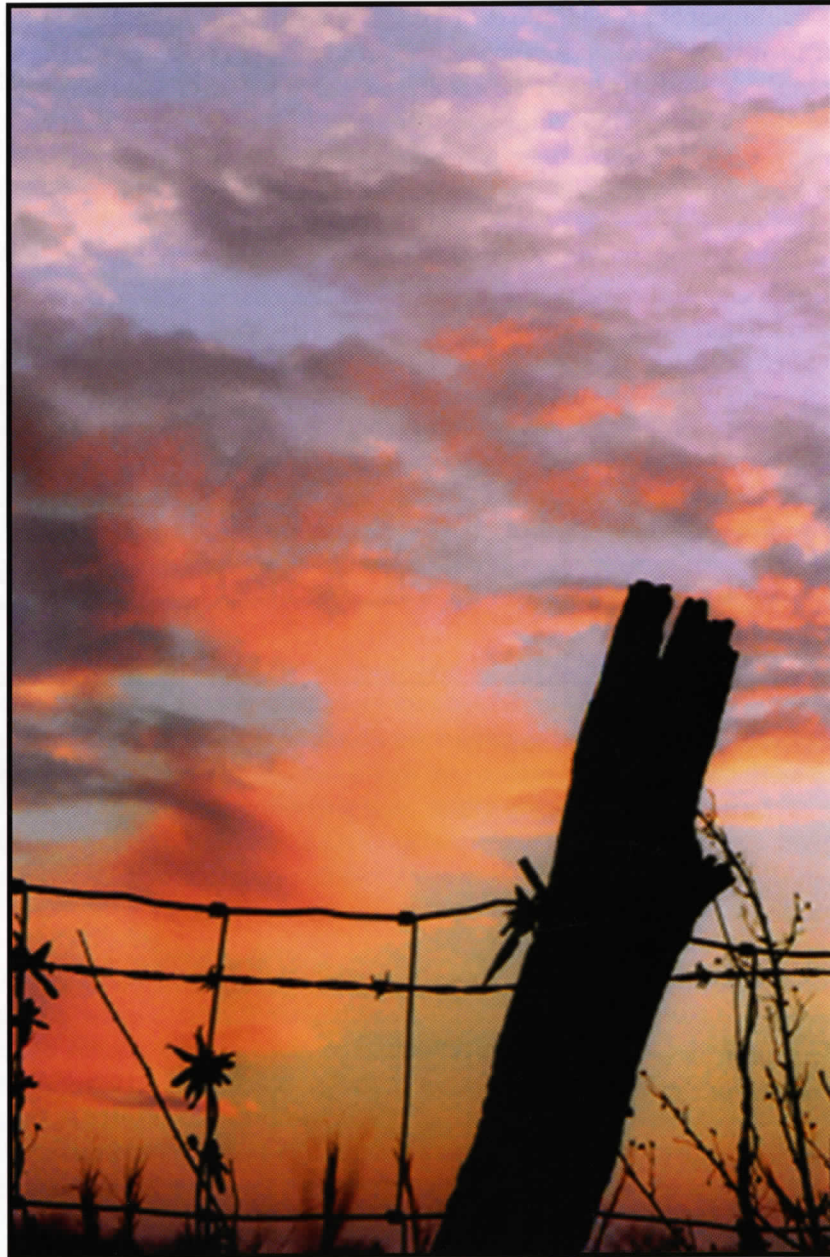
Some Words About War

J. Sullivan

It is the creepy, powdery hands of women
weak backed, thin wristed, broiling in the white sun
bleeding out nutrients and teeth
that tend to the true work of the world,
creating babies, creating food, creating comfort
elbow deep in shit and vomit
of the ill, dumb, and nearly dead
and the next batch of soldiers.
Patting, milking, feeding, holding
screaming throbbing, expelling
while the boys run off swinging sticks and yelping
playing at their little war games
that make milk scarce
like fresh scrubbed sons in the backyard.

Untitled

Kevin Lane



Medium: 35mm Color Print

The Devil

Lori Leigh



Medium: Color Print

The Wonderment of Lust

Leslie Carol Boehms

violent chills of aspiration
always streaked down her back
she had so many wishes
and dreams that would soon become artifacts

there is no museum to catch her treasure
to her there is no net for fireflies
it's simply a new space of air a new place to land
another location to be lost and/or found

like dust your memory fought to leave her eyes
and when it all ended she shouldn't have seemed so surprised
to hear him say that he was leaving
to hear him say it was all a disguise
he didn't have to be so heavy handed
she didn't have to leave her whole world behind

there's a blank canvas somewhere
at which she'll go and find
the man who meant something finally
to a girl whose mask was hard to hide

Dialing Yesterday

Callie Elizabeth Butler

He missed the sounds
of the old black
rotary dial telephone,
a small part
of his life left behind; an existence marked only
by the dust of an unpaved country road
leading, as most said,
to nowhere.

There was a sense of security,
he said,
in firmly placed fingers,
large numbers,
the rhythmic ticking.

He equated its heavy frame
with dependability,
its familiar sounds
with constancy.

He hasn't found that here
among tattoo parlors,
tall buildings,
and family restaurants.
He feels lost
in this push-button world –
so big,
large,
monstrous.
He feels so small.

He is left to stumble
in this place where
faces gather along sidewalks
like swirling dust and the old black telephone
has lost its character.

It's all buttons now,
and he's tired of the pushing.

Untitled

Martina Michalova



Medium: B/W Slide



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