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### The Mockingbird

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# MOCKINGBIRD



...rvi  
...low  
...age  
s : i  
in se  
crāw  
k 2  
b : e  
cock 2

n : an iron or s  
for use as a pry or lever  
\krō-,ber-ē\ n 1 : any of several hea  
an undershrub (*Empetrum nigrum*) of arcti  
an insipid black berry b : BEARBERRY 1 c .  
: the fruit of a crowberry  
ūd\ vb [ME *crouden*, fr. OE *crūdan*; akin  
pōw, OE *croð* multitude, Mīr *gruth* curds] v  
CARRY b : to press close 2 : to collect i  
to fill by pressing or thronging together r  
into a small space 2 : PUSH, FORCE 3 ?  
) in excess of the usual for greater spe  
PRONG, JOSTLE 6 : to press clos  
ber of persons esp. whe  
out order • TH

The cover features a large, dark blue, textured speech bubble shape in the center. To its left is a smaller, red speech bubble. Below the blue bubble is a light-colored, textured circular area. The background consists of vertical wooden planks and a grid pattern.

# **MOCKINGBIRD**

**2007**

**A PUBLICATION AWARDING  
THE LITERATURE AND ARTWORK  
OF STUDENTS ATTENDING  
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY**

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All artwork photography is courtesy of the artist, Meranda Burd & M. Wayne Dyer.

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**UNTITLED**  
Samira Daniels  
C-print  
First Place Artwork

# LAYOVER

KATHY PARKER  
FIRST PLACE FICTION



THE PLANE LANDED AT GATWICK, and we had eight hours to make our way to Heathrow for the final leg of our journey to Dubai. We had been instructed to travel in groups, and Jonesy and his group chose me as their token female. We gathered our bags and boarded the National Express Coach that shuttled travelers between Gatwick and Heathrow. I slept through most of the hour trip. We made our way to check-in, only to be informed that we wouldn't be able to do so until three hours prior to our departure time. That left a little more than six hours to kill before we could check in and wait some more. Because we were sailors, we naturally looked for a pub.

It was too early to have a beer, but I was the only one who thought so. I ordered a sandwich and nibbled around the edges of it. The guys launched into lewd tales that turned into some sort of bawdy song contest. I tuned them out, knowing that they didn't mean any harm. Since the Tailhook scandal, the chiefs and officers had gotten almost fanatical about anything that even hinted of sexual harassment. Perhaps had I been a different woman, the guys wouldn't have been so free with their talk. I'd proven myself to them that I was willing to work just as hard as any of them, so they no longer saw me as a woman, but as "one of the guys." I was safe. They were free to joke and laugh and I would sometimes join in with stories of my own. Their games were harmless.

I pulled my semi-crushed box of Marlboro Lights out of my pants pocket, flipped the top up and picked a cigarette that wasn't bent too badly. One of the guys flicked open his Zippo and lit my cigarette. I had actually quit smoking a few months ago, but one week of sitting through military bullshit was more than enough to get me started again. That's probably why I got fat. In the military, you either worked off your stress by exercising or you smoked. I smoked. I took a long drag and watched the smoke twirl up towards the ceiling. I still couldn't believe that I was actually on my way to Dubai. It was barely a month since the 9/11 attacks, and I was terrified about what could happen to us out in the desert. I wasn't even supposed to be here. I was too fat and I couldn't do enough sit-ups in two minutes to save my life. The Ops Boss had told me that I wasn't going to go unless I could retake the PT test and pass with flying colors. I knew that no matter how many sit-ups I did each day, there was no way I was going to pass. I passed the run and the push-ups with no problems at all. I just couldn't do sit-ups. I blamed my boobs.

Because he told me that I wasn't on the Go-list, I had registered for classes at the local community college. We were a week into the session when the phone rang.



"Hello?"

"May I please speak to Petty Officer Weber?"

"Speaking."

"Hey, this is Petty Officer Blanchett. I need you to bring me your passport as soon as possible."

"My passport? Why do you need my passport?"

"Well, I need to have them all together for when we leave at the end of the month."

"But I'm not going."

"Yes you are."

"No, Commander Jenson called me from the field last weekend and told me that I was going to do some two-week AT in Europe."

"You mean he didn't tell you that you got put on the Go-list?"

"No."

"Well, you're going and you need to bring me your passport ASAP."

"Is there any way to get out of this?"

"No, but I can give you the XO's number if you want to try to talk to her."

"Well, I'll try that."

"Okay, but I still need your passport."

After I hung up with her, I called the Executive Officer of the unit. She was sympathetic to my cause, but she wouldn't budge. In eleven days, I would be leaving with the rest of my unit to the Middle East for a year. I had eleven days to withdraw from classes, pack enough clothes and toiletries to last for a year yet still fit into two large duffle bags, and figure out how to explain to my husband that I was leaving.

The waitress had brought another round of beers to the table for the guys. They flirted with her, and she smiled at them, maybe hoping for a good tip. I listened to her voice with its lilting accent. I wasn't as obsessive as an Anglophile, but I'd always loved to hear British accents. Back before we had cable, my husband and I used to spend Saturday nights watching all those old British sitcoms that the public television station aired. We would dream about visiting England one day for our second honeymoon and discuss all of the sights we would see and things we would do.

We sat on the couch, wrapped around each other like newlyweds often are. We didn't have a coffee table, so David propped his feet up on an old milk crate. My feet were tucked underneath me. *Keeping Up Appearances* was on the television, and we laughed and shook our heads at Hyacinth's antics. It may have been a British sitcom, but take away the accent and they could be anyone from anywhere. "You know, David," I said, "that Hyacinth could be your mother."

"No, she has much better fashion sense than my mother."

"Hyacinth has no fashion sense."

"Exactly."

We laughed and I snuggled in closer to him.

"I think we should go to England some day, maybe for a second honeymoon."

David turned his head to look at me for a moment. One eyebrow raised sharply.

"You only want to go to England so that some British guy with a sexy accent can sweep you off your feet and away from me."

"That's not true!"

"Oh yes it is. I can almost see the drool forming on your lips whenever some British guy starts talking on the TV."

I stared at him, my mouth open like a fish. I sputtered a few words of nonsense until he finally took pity on me and grinned. I jumped into his lap and began tickling him. Much foolishness ensued, along with a lot of laughter and kissing. Eventually we settled down and returned to watching the television.

"So David, do you think we should rent a car while we're there or should we book one of those sightseeing tours where they drive you around on the bus?"

"I'd like to rent a car. That way we wouldn't be tied down with schedules and we could go where we wanted without being herded like cattle."

"But what about having to drive on the wrong side of the road?"

"I don't think it'll be too difficult to figure out."

"Well you'll probably pick it up, no problem. But I don't think I'll be able to figure it out."

"I think you'll be just fine. You're smart. I'm sure you'll pick it up faster than me."

"I don't think so. I guess I'll just let you drive when we're there."

"Honey, you're a good driver. You'll have no problems."

We had never resolved that small argument. England seemed to be such a strange and faraway place that I wondered whether we would ever really go there. Now here I was in London with seventy-four of my best Navy pals. This was definitely not the way I had envisioned my first foray to Europe. The guys had moved on from their silly songs and were now arguing about sports or something or other. I hadn't been paying attention, and the few small snippets I'd heard of their conversation didn't interest me. I ordered a Coke from the waitress as she brought yet another round of beers to the table.

David worked nights, so he was still in bed sleeping when I had received the initial call from the unit. After my fruitless plea to the XO, I climbed into the bed next to him.

“David?” I gingerly jiggled his shoulder. When he didn’t respond, I began poking him. “David, David, David. Wake up.” Poke, poke, poke.

He arched away and pulled the pillow protectively over his head. “What?”

“Petty Officer Blanchett from the unit just called.”

“So?”

“I’m going.”

“Going where?”

“To Dubai. We leave in eleven days.”

“Okay, get me some Powerbars while you’re gone.”

I grabbed the pillow from his head and smacked him with it. “Wake up so I can talk to you.”

“What is it then? Don’t you know that I didn’t get to sleep ’til late?” He sat up and leaned against the headboard.

“My unit called. I’m leaving for Dubai in eleven days.”

David’s eyes had been drooping shut, but they flew open. He was awake now. “They said you couldn’t go before.”

“I know, but now they say I have to go.”

“Eleven days?”

“Eleven days.”

Those eleven days were filled with arguments. I don’t think there was anything we didn’t argue about, from the shampoo that I bought to the way I packed my duffel bags. We argued so much that I didn’t tell him I wasn’t required to stay at the hotel during indoctrination—that I could have stayed at home until the night of my actual flight. We left each other with perfunctory hugs and kisses. I thought now how childish I had been. With every deployment I had ever made, there had always been arguments that had preceded it. Every time I told him that he was lazy or an asshole, I was really saying that I loved him and didn’t want to leave. Every time he called me a bitch or slammed the door, he was telling me how much he loved me and that he didn’t want me to leave. I sighed. I wasn’t going to see him for a year, and I didn’t even tell him that I loved him.

I decided to walk around and stretch my legs, since we still had another long flight ahead of us. I walked past the phone booths and stopped. We weren’t supposed to contact our families until we arrived at our final destination. I pulled my phone card out from my wallet and tried to figure out the instructions for making an international call. I dialed and listened to the phone ring on the other end.

“Hello?”

“Hi, honey. It’s me.”

“Suzie?”

“Yeah. Did I wake you?”

“No, I just got home from work. Are you there already?”

“No, we’re waiting on our next flight.”

“What time is it over there?”

“About 10:30 am.”

“So that’s about 6 hours ahead, huh?”

“I guess. You know I hate math.”

Silence.

“Well, I guess I better let you go so you can get some sleep.”

“Yeah,” he said. “This phone call is probably costing you a fortune.”

More silence.

“Um, you know that week we had to stay in the hotel?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, uh, I, uh, could have stayed at home.”

“I know. Petty Officer Blanchett told me when she called to get some legal information.”

“You mean you knew?”

“Yeah, but I understand.”

“But aren’t you angry?”

“I was, a little, and I was sad, but I could see how much it hurt you to have to say goodbye. It hurt me to say goodbye, and I figured maybe this way it’d be like you’d come home sooner.”

“I love you, David.”

“I love you, too.”

I hung up the phone and headed back to the pub. The guys were still in the midst of their fun and I sat down and pulled out another cigarette. When the waitress walked by, I asked her to bring me a beer. I lit my cigarette and took a drag. I thought about David and how he was probably going to sleep now. The waitress returned and placed a beer in front of me. I looked around the pub and promised to myself that the next time I came here, it would be with David. I might even let him convince me to give driving on the wrong side a try.



# DEATH, BE PROUD

LORI ANN MANIS

FIRST PLACE NONFICTION



A PLACE OF THE DEAD will never seem gruesome to me—will never inspire fear, foreboding or morbidity, but rather a sense of tranquility, filialness, and continuity. For more years than I have lived, my paternal kin have celebrated the annual reunion in our family graveyard. It has never been referred to as a “cemetery”—Poor-Whites not being especially exploitive of euphemisms—except by a few: those who feel above attending the event in the first place. It is, as it has always been, a graveyard.

Leaving the security and mundane civilization of Hwy 11-W, our journey becomes an extensive, winding, spectacular expedition into a different dimension, where the faded-gray road hugs the mountain on one side like a suckling child (logically, inexorably), and, on the other, offers an awe- and fear-inspiring view of a miles-long drop, which could, in one careless (or simply unlucky) moment, determine death. This is the land of my ancestors, of my father’s People, and no matter how many times I take the trip “across The Mountain,” as we say, it never fails to afford me the singular sensation of heart-thumping trepidation married to concrete resolution.

At several points, Clinch Mountain has been mercilessly sliced for the construction of the highway. It rises up inapprehensive, however, with an almost perfect perpendicularity, patient and silently ruthless, like a god deliberating the most convenient season in which to take back its own. As no vegetation can achieve fruition at this angle, these sections

of rock remain vast expanses of natural nudity, leaving the margins indiscernible simultaneously, and so soaring that my weak eyes must strain to distinguish the top. Generations of vandals have used the stone as a canvas on which to spray-paint messages of affection, identity, and salvation to the motorists below. JESUS SAVES; MIKE LOVES AMY; RANDY B WUZ HERE; OBEY ACTS 2:38. I consistently contemplate the tenderness, or the devotion (or the many quarts of Pabst Blue Ribbon) that have motivated individuals to hazard the perilous climb, even to its pinnacle, in order to immortalize themselves and their inspirations in graffiti.

After cresting the summit of the mountain, the slight, gradual descent begins; a few houses appear. A seemingly insignificant makeshift road, all but hidden by surrounding and overhanging foliage, rises vertically to our final destination, its conclusion completely concealed until the moment of its achievement. The ride up this passageway unfailingly inspires a prayer for courage. The narrow, hard-packed dirt-and-gravel path edges a sudden plunge into a verdurous ravine of unknown depth and danger. The sharply up-cutting curves swerve over numerous deep ruts and surprises of immovable stone. I have traveled this trail at least once a year for as long as I can remember, but I still close my eyes on the way up; I still hold my breath.

The road has been “improved” since my childhood; a four-wheel-drive or wholly expendable vehicle is no longer required to brave the rocks, slides, and furrows. Somehow, ironically, the ride now lacks the inexplicable security I felt, as a child, standing among my many cousins (first and second and who-knows-in the familial tangle) in the back of my Uncle Charlie’s pickup with the nailed-on wooden cattle rack. In those days, it was still safe and prudent to leave most cars at the bottom of the path, and to ride communally to the top in the conveyances most fit for the task. The eternally novel and fright-free trek in Charlie’s farm truck represented one of the most delightful treats of the occasion.

Where the trail ends, a small, grassy area has now been cleared for parking. Still dizzy from the drive up, we unload our Colemans and covered dishes and collapsible chairs and open the gate to the Manis Family Graveyard. I was middle-school age, or maybe even old enough for junior high (I attended a K-8 school unencumbered by such distinctions) before I realized that, to others, there might be something odd about picnicking among the graves of one’s late relatives. Having practiced the rite for more years than I can recall, it was and is, for me, simply a matter of course, and I still fail (and refuse) to acknowledge any defect in the hypothetical abnormality of the ritual.

The place itself is stunning. Near the entrance, to the right, a grouping of graves distinguishes itself with craggy, mossy rocks, from the days when the purchase of an engraved tombstone was a luxury as unheard-of as a seaside vacation or meat at every meal. Nature’s resourceful patina has adorned the jutting, crooked, deeply-rooted rocks into dignified,

handsome memorials to my unnamed ancestors, or perhaps, as is rumored, to unknown Civil War soldiers, or maybe just to strangers who expired before they could properly introduce themselves. The remainder of the grounds displays a more orderly—perhaps some would say a more *civilized*—vista of interment.

While quite a few of the very old graves remain marked with flat, cheap-metal emblems of identity, smaller than license plates and no doubt provided by the overseeing mortuary, most boast the more customary rectangular slabs of granite carved with names, dates, adornments, and optimistic commentary. Between the old and the new stands a stone commemorating a certain Reverend Maness, the only relative here from a branch of the family that broke from the main tree, after a (now forgotten) quarrel between brothers, which concluded in the spelling alteration. The most imposing, darkest, and by far least attractive stone, erected by the Army in exchange for his National Guard membership, belongs to a cousin of my own generation who was killed in a somewhat suspect auto accident.

The deepest, most valuable beauty of this sanctuary exists in the absolute lack of uneasiness or taboo. Our children, not admonished to suppress their innate natures into stillness or to refrain from treading upon the graves, are suffered to run about liberally in their play and chatter. Thus the newest generation becomes acclimated to the Manises’ unconventional method of celebrating Family, learning their legacy of a gathering inclusive of the living and the dead. This attitude, routine from my infancy, enables me to survey the graves of my father’s parents, who died long before I was born, without reflecting “here are buried the corpses of those who would have been my grandparents,” but rather, “here are my grandparents.” Cessation of physical function does not obliterate Fact, and I belong to these two in the same way I belong to the “quick” sitting and chatting in lawn chairs or on blankets spread on the grass. Beyond the racket of conversation there exists a silence too deep to be drowned by the human voice. Certainly not the silence of doom, or even of sadness, it envelops the graveyard relentlessly and permanently. It is the resonance of serenity; it is the reverberation of stasis.

Nearby my grandparents, but not *too* close, a smaller, less obtrusive stone identifies my father’s great-grandmother, Nancy, the last of the clan known to be a “full-blood” Cherokee. Although she died when my father was a child, she lives vividly in his memory and he has passed on an admiring (and admirable) history of her life-work as a “granny woman”—an herbalist, apothecary, and mid-wife—along with her zest of spirit and unquenchable energy, which permitted her to live vigorously into her nineties, still sitting Indian-style on the floor, expertly hand-stitching quilt tops. Nearly every year, I take a little soil from her grave, compelled to do so for reasons unknown even to myself. I have long felt an affinity with this historical figure, but acknowledge that the intuition most likely springs from my

own imagination—a detail that does not lessen, in the least, the validity of my compulsion. I collect the earth covertly, not because any of my family would object—one of the loveliest essentials of the graveyard is that it belongs to me as much as to any other—but because I do not wish to discomfit any of them with speculations of my motives or to have my queerness talked over later.

When most of the throng has arrived, sometime between noon and one, long, cleanly-covered tables are set up at the back, “uninhabited” clearance and quickly filled with dishes of food (prepared, of course, by the Wives, although a Brother invariably “blesses” the fare prior to the mad scramble for consumption). My favorite accommodation for the leisurely meal is the backside of a tombstone belonging to Jesse James Manis. Its base, wide enough to provide a comfortable seat, supports a broad plumb stone, a comfortable lounge on which to recline while balancing a paper plate of fried chicken, biscuits, ham, and banana pudding. This slab, planted underneath the biggest oak, offers comfort as cool as a mother’s hand on a fevered forehead and security as solidly rooted as a father’s final decision. The prospect from my seat provides a panorama of the neighbor’s budding tobacco plants and of our relatively new outhouse. In earlier years, when the physiological pressures of the living were made manifest, we had to hike downhill to the abandoned barn of the Old Home Place. Our present accommodation is fresher and more sanitary than any other of its type I’ve seen, probably because it is used only once a year. Moreover, it reminds us of the ancestors who once owned the surrounding land, and the land surrounding that land, and the land beyond, who yet would have considered our clean little hut something of opulence. It reminds us, also, that we still have this bit of territory, and sons and daughters disposed to build and maintain a facility for at least quasi-comfortable relief.

When I was a little girl, the reunion, or “The Decoration” as we called it then, was a day to anticipate with pleasure for weeks beforehand. My parents, sister, and I looked forward to congregating with relatives we saw usually only on that occasion, along with those whom we met more often. But, oddly (or is it?) we consistently gravitated toward the latter. Members of the family from Ohio “came in” the night, or sometimes the week, before, and acquaintances were renewed. Recent additions were passed around, admired, and classified; news was caught up, and rivalries were reckoned. My sister and I got new “outfits” for the occasion—usually shorts and tee shirts, as the festivity always takes place on the third Sunday of June: Father’s Day. This was one of the few Sundays on which skipping church was permitted, owing to the extensive drive and the protracted preparation.

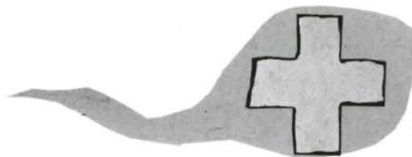
A large group of children, including my sister and I, seized rare pleasure in gathering the delicate, thorn-encrusted wild pink roses that grew along the enclosing fence. Though the collection produced numerous stings and scratches, and though the blossoms invariably wilted by sunset, the sacra-

ment endured gleefully each year. Unmolested wild strawberries also flourished in abundance, and were harvested with the joy of a landowner discovering oil. Their crisp-sweet flavor far surpassed any fruit bought in a supermarket. Someone has since indicated to me an identical plant, which she calls “snake berries” and claims that the fruit, according to her mother, is poisonous. However, we Manis youths devoured the produce annually and as abundantly as the earth vouchsafed, and most of us are still alive.

Back in the day, as we say, the graveyard was visited by as many as two hundred. Now, our number has dwindled to fifty or fewer. People got busy; some scattered. Dissension among the ranks caused a split between those who wish to maintain the tradition and those who, spurning aesthetics and exceptionality, prefer to gather in a public park, or in a nondescript, sterile, rented building. We arrive later than we used to. We depart earlier. We look at each other, and woven within our smiling prattle is our silent acknowledgement that we are most likely the last. The graveyard is almost full now, and by the time the final plot is claimed, will anyone remain to visit it? Will any brave the inconvenience of the roads and subtract from their agendas the hours to make the trip? And does it really matter anyway?

The Graveyard Era is coming to a close. No wild strawberries grow there now. The newer chain link fence obliterated the roses and it now encloses even the Lone Grave of my father’s great uncle, the family’s only admitted Republican, who, on his deathbed, ordered his descendants not to bury him “with all them damn’ Democrats.” A few of my generation will continue the vigil for as long as we can. There still exists a handful of Manises who recognize its meaning. And for as long as I live (I hope and believe) there will be a little dot of Clinch Mountain that is mine, a place to which I can come at any time I choose and feel welcome and at home.

The ride down the hill, and afterwards down the mountain, does not arouse the apprehension experienced in the upward journey. Perhaps fatigue calms the nerves; perhaps the contentment that comes with a day pleasantly passed relaxes the senses. I am only certain that, after visiting the graveyard, the hazards of the road hold little threat. Death is as definite as the ink on this page, for both humans and customs, but it need not be a dreaded phantom, nor an absolute ending.



**IN ENTROPY**

Mary Nees  
Monotype with collage and encaustic  
Third Place Artwork



# GIRL IN THE STORM

KATHLEEN LIBBY  
FIRST PLACE POETRY

"It's like sex, Kat," you say,  
You try to teach me how to drive  
a stick shift. You place your hand over mine  
and make me move between gears.  
"You need to make a smooth transition."  
I don't learn how to drive your car. I probably  
never will. What I do learn is how your  
hand is warm, your nails clean, how your skin  
forms soft, fragile lines.

In the basement,  
you smoke cigarettes, sometimes  
only one, sometimes half the pack.  
Your lower lip forms the bottom  
of a small ship, the upper lip the mast,  
the sail. You read my favorite line of  
my favorite book,  
and I am floating.

Later, in bed, your hands trace patterns  
of small buildings on my skin—  
places you're going,  
places you've been.  
You construct them slowly,  
deliberately. You leave behind  
the scaffolding,  
so I can scale them.

She is downstairs.  
Your lips, no longer a small ship,  
form fragile flood gates—bursting,  
spilling words into me like the way our  
bodies are spilled together:  
I love you I love you shh.

Sometimes, we leave the house.  
We stand in line for some club.  
The boys are drawn to you.  
Your bottom lip is huge in the false-light,  
The glittering red-blue-red of cop cars.  
"Isn't she a cute one?" The boys ask each other.  
You are commanding—a wall-cloud  
in a summer storm.  
You stand, one hip cocked out (I love  
the way you stand).  
"You're not a lesbian, are you?" one boy asks,  
his face spread out, long and boring, like a history lecture.  
You throw your head back and laugh.

At home, you are soft.  
Your hair forms a small curtain at the nape  
of your neck as you mop the kitchen floor,  
mopping it twice, as if that will  
make it stay cleaner, longer.  
You teach me how to properly fold  
a button-down shirt.  
"You have to make sure the sleeves are even.  
Line them up here—like this."  
In these moments, my body swells for you, like  
oceans, like breaths.

Small frame spread out like a wall-cloud,  
clouds so frequently seen in Minnesota summers  
(the place where I grew up).  
You swell and grow and spiral through fields,  
through cities—  
crashing through houses, through the buildings you  
constructed on my skin, tracing always, everywhere,  
with delicate fingers, and eyes blue tornadoes.



# THE SPHERE

CIPRIAN BEGU  
SECOND PLACE FICTION



VIEWS FROM THE HARBOR, Breasal Oncology Centre, on the edge of Carrick's Bluff, seemed a fortress right out of the Dark Ages. The thick, crenellated walls looked as if they had been bombarded with ivy and swallows' nests. You could hardly imagine this as one of the most modern equipped facilities south of Dublin. Inside the old mansion, with its medieval clothing, thousands of yards of cables were weaving through like tentacles of an electrical octopus.

Day in and day out, people of Wicklow, a town on the rugged Eastern coast of Ireland, were climbing the rocky slope to Breasal, most of them not very happy with their destination. Among them, Susan Kelly, a doctor at the Centre. That morning, Susan had woken up frustrated after a night spent in the cold sweat of bad dreams. As she passed by the newsstand, she slowed down a little. A glance at the headlines was enough for her to realize this was just an ordinary Wednesday, on the endless string of Wednesdays at Breasal, the place where she had begun working right after graduating from Dublin Medical Academy, some fifteen years ago.

Up the snaky brick road and in through the automatic door and there it was: "the Cave," another name for the hallway where patients would be stirring about like cattle at the slaughterhouse. Some of them were just about to receive the usual bad news one would receive at an Oncology cabinet: "You've got cancer," or "You have to continue with chemotherapy." Their faces were wrinkled with worry and their bodies seemed crippled under the burden of possibility. She knew they were wondering about how much longer they would actually live, but so was she. Mrs. O'Ceallaigh, one of her late patients, had once told her she would have given anything to know her exact time of death and stick to the schedule and thus end her tormenting tribulations. She was one of the most down-to-earth and balanced people Susan had ever met, but death had still caught her by surprise.

Her cabinet was on the ground floor and when she opened the window she could both hear and smell the waves carving into the cliffs right beneath her, at the bottom of Carrick's Bluff. Carrick House, once home of the medieval O'Cullen clan, had been built on the edge of this bluff, providing good defense in case of an attack. Nowadays, though, the only enemies charging on the building were the stud farms of waves the sea was sending to undermine it.

After she finished with the morning visits, Susan buried herself into the armchair. She hated the hallway outside her office. Every time she crossed it, it gave her an eerie feeling, as though she were interrupting an open-casket funeral on a daily basis. She could almost smell the formol going through the crowd in the large waiting room. The patients were all pretending nothing was wrong and their small talk sounded quite out of tune, especially for her, who was more than aware most of them were in serious conditions. She fought hard to keep her edge with all the suffering going on around her. After all, if you found out you have cancer, you wouldn't want your doctor, the person you put all your faith in, to already start shedding tears of compassion, would you?

Sometimes Susan doubted her classical approach to giving bad news. She felt that white lies such as "You're going to be fine," "I won't let anything happen to you," or "Chemotherapy should take care of it," were quite hypocritical and could sometimes do more harm than a plain "You may die." No matter how much she stumbled upon words of comfort or compassion, at the end of the day she would always have that bitter taste in her mouth. Because she of all people knew that only a miracle could have saved some of the patients. Why give people the illusion of life when death will cut through it with the ease of a hot knife through butter? Shouldn't she try to prepare them for the end somehow? Sure, but how? A friend gave her a book once called *The Tibetan Book of the Living and Dying*, with great insights into how to care for the dying, to help them feel more comfortable with the idea, but she had found it very difficult to put into practice. First, you had to see death in a totally different way than Susan did in order to help someone pass away peacefully. You had to be

able to cope with death yourself, to think of it every time you got the chance, to bathe in the idea of it at a snap of a finger. But whenever Susan came to think about death she would put it out like a small fire. She would then throw a bucket of ignorance over the embers and that was that. And every morning, at work, when she crossed the Cave to reach her cabinet she would pick up her pace, slaloming through the people there as if they were contagious.

Sitting there, looking out the window, with an ear to the roar of the sea, glimpses of her dreams from the previous night began to enter her thoughts. She felt them more than she saw them. Her body was being overrun by termites eating her inside out. The veins were now myriads of tunnels channeling out the insects into the very heart of her cells. The body itself was now just a hollow hive, pulsing with munching insects. Hungry little monsters.

She snapped out of it when the door opened, and Dunellen, her nurse, came in asking for an early lunch break. As Dunellen went out Susan turned the easy chair to the window, letting the waves wash out the nightmares. "Be brave," she told herself, taking a big breath of salty vapors to scare off the monsters. On a little table by her side her daughter was encouraging her from an ivory-framed picture. Every time she had bad thoughts, the picture acted like a magic wand, giving her wings, enabling her to fly over the marshes of anguish. "I hate this place," she cried. Although Susan was a respected doctor in the Wicklow community, she didn't actually want to become a practicing oncologist. It was the only choice she had left after Erin was born. With a child to raise and no husband by her side, isolating herself in a laboratory in Northern Scotland to do top research suddenly didn't seem such a good idea anymore. So she settled with Erin in the gardens of Wicklow, a nice coast city with lush green parks and salty sea air. The job at Breasal was easy to obtain, as old Dr. Casey was just retiring early due to illness. Ever since then she had been fighting off her fear of suffering, especially after Brian, her fiancée from Dublin, had left her to be both mother and father to Erin. Although her old wounds had almost healed, now she would bathe in other people's pain every day.

Erin had grown into a fine teenager and, unlike other girls her age she had no issues to settle with her mum. Susan would come home every afternoon to have her daughter greet her with a big smile and a hug. After lunch they would both sit at the teen-style desk by the window and do some homework together until Susan would get up and let Erin study by herself. The evening was for entertainment and they would often catch a movie at the cinema just down the street. Yes, she loved her daughter and the possibility of losing her made her head spin.

Susan Kelly had cancer. She didn't want to recognize it to herself, but she felt it just the same. She never had the nerve to analyze the mammography herself for fear of what she might find and because she also doubted her judgment at that

time. Instead she had sent it to Beatson Oncology Centre in Glasgow, the best cancer treatment and diagnosis clinic in Europe; Susan had some old college friends working there and she trusted they would conduct the analysis with extra care. But the professional in her, with fifteen years of experience, knew that the bad cells were there, spreading like locusts after a draught. She touched her chest, feeling her breasts, praying nothing would be there. "This is the only time in my life when I wish I were a bad doctor," she whispered as she stood, leaning against the window, looking down into the waves 70 yards below. The thought of having to subject herself to Chemotherapy made her want to vomit. She had even done so a few times, since first considering the option. That reminded her of Mrs. O'Ceallaigh and the pains Susan had put her through "to kill the bad cells." She had never told the lady that, together with cancerous cells, the toxic aldehyde was washing out healthy ones, too. Susan will never forget the woman's face at seeing her doctor putting on surgical gloves every time she was injecting her dose.

"Why? Is it...the chemical?" she asked.

"Just our policy, that's all, Peggy," Susan lied, trying her best not to throw up.

Now, Mrs. O'Ceallaigh was dead and buried and suddenly the waves turned to aldehyde and were eating into the cliffs, as though attempting to reach her. The hissing sound of the chemicals burning into the bluff startled her and she closed the window, almost breaking the glass.

"What's happening to me? I'm a doctor, damn it!" she protested, returning to her easy chair.

The following nights were one nightmare after another. One of them scared her like no others had before. She was walking quickly through the Cave when suddenly she heard a cry. She turned to the left and right there on a bench was Mrs. O'Ceallaigh, alive, holding something in her arms. She ran to greet her and when she got to the bench the woman unveiled a baby girl all covered in termites. It was Erin. The face was unrecognizable, but she knew it was her daughter.

She got up and went to Erin's room, staring at her sleeping child for hours on end, until the tears and the fatigue wore her out.

The next day Susan decided she would not let anything part her from her daughter. First and most important was to raise her own morale. No more bad thoughts, no more anguish. She was going to create only favorable contexts and not give in to the fears. After all, she didn't know for sure she was sick. Maybe the same fears were playing her out. She decided to wait for the results and to go on with her life as it had been before. In a matter of days Susan started to feel the change. No more nightmares, no more vomiting sensations, no more waves of chemicals hissing at her office window. She was back into shape, realizing it had all been in her head. She had the power over her mental states. The secret was "thought

screening." It sounded silly, Susan admitted, but it was a good term for what she'd been doing to relieve herself of the bad thoughts. Sitting at her desk, at the hospital, reading about self-motivation, Susan had a revelation: if stress and emotional trauma are caused by too much awareness, then maybe if you pull down the throttle on awareness you could also get rid of some suffering. It was like building a shield of positive thinking around yourself so that all the negative thoughts will bounce off it.

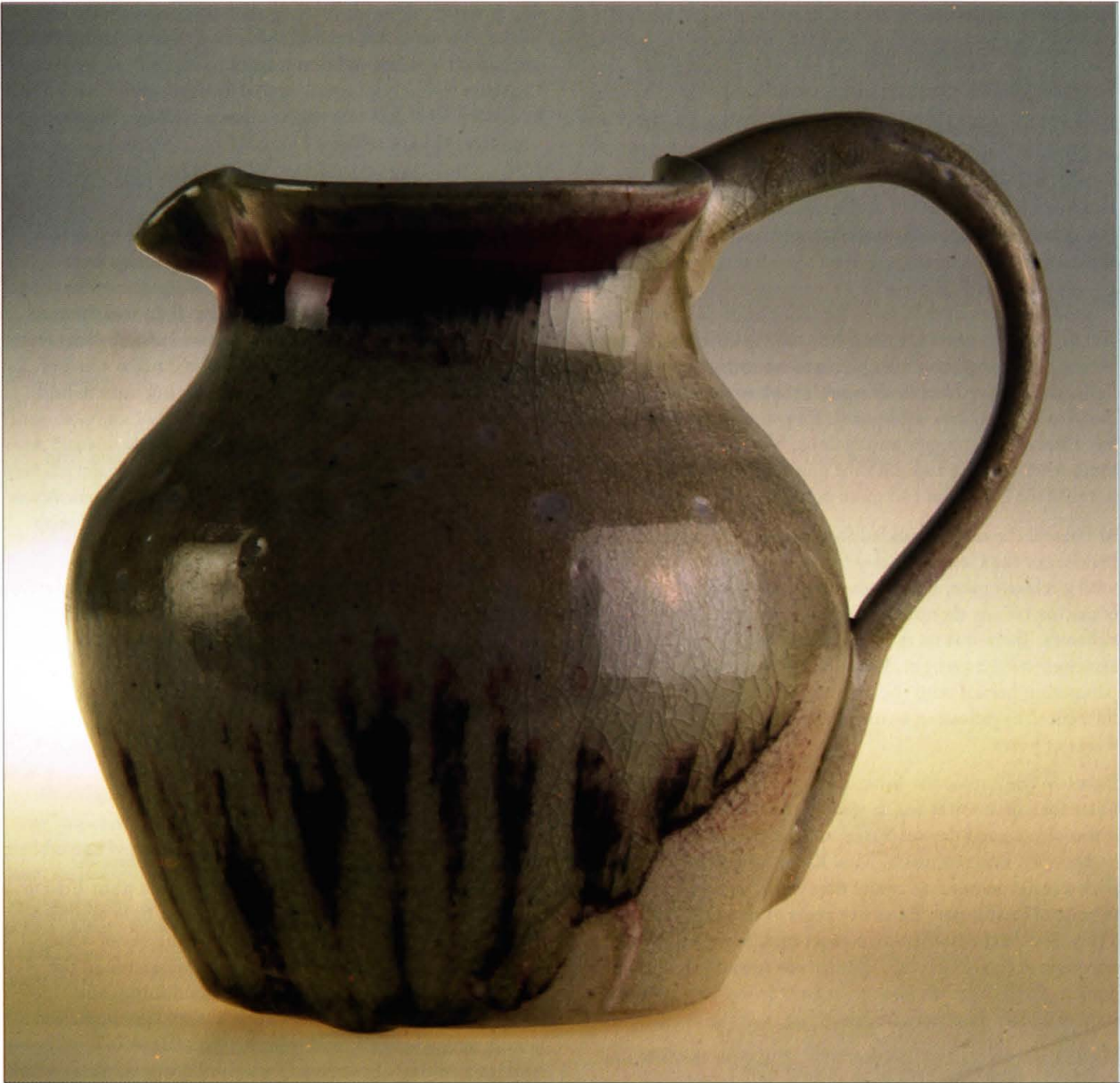
At first it was hard for her to concentrate only on the positive side of things with all those cancer patients who had to be consulted. Every time she had to break some bad news to one of them she saw herself. Only she had no one to cushion the fall for her. She couldn't just lie to the mirror and say, "We'll do some chemo and you'll be up and running again." But with a little help from *Power of the Mind*, one of the books she'd bought, Susan was making progress. She'd worked up a system: every time a bad thing happened around her she'd recite to herself the following text she'd found in the book: "I am a sphere of energy and the bad thoughts are projectiles that try to penetrate the sphere. They all come from outside. Only good thoughts are produced inside of the sphere. All the energy that the sphere has comes from my brain. As long as my brain has fuel, the shield of energy will deflect all bad thoughts and I will find only peaceful thoughts inside the sphere in which I will bathe every day from now on." It, too, was like magic. As soon as she said that to herself a tide of peace flooded her perceptions and there was no more fear. The exercise was so effective that often she would even forget what bad thing had troubled her in the first place.

With her buttocks uncovered, Mrs. O'Brian, a new patient, was waiting for her first dose of aldehyde. Mechanically, Susan put on her surgical gloves and picked up the injection syringe, filling it up with the yellowish chemical. Looking into the cylinder Susan suddenly developed an incredible urge for a lemonade. She could almost taste it.

"Mrs. Kelly, why did you put on the gloves?"

"Oh...it's nothing. Just the hospital policy," Susan answered, anxiously awaiting to fix herself a lemonade as soon as she'd finished with her patient.

Erin also benefited from her mother's change. Until now, Susan had never let her go to high school parties before, only to birthday parties. But now, after Susan had gotten rid of the paranoia mantle she'd been wearing, she realized that it was okay to let her daughter do what she wanted. After all, Erin was a big girl and Susan had taught her better than to get herself in with the wrong crowd. One day, as they were shopping, Susan surprised Erin by buying her the dress she had been longing for for months, but when she had asked her mother if she could have it two weeks ago, Susan argued that it was too short and that she would look too vulgar in it. Yet now it was Susan herself who picked up the dress and urged Erin to try it on.



**PITCHER**  
Joshua Burd  
Ceramic  
Fourth Place Artwork

"You look beautiful, my dear."

"You don't think it shows too much of my legs anymore?"

"So what? You have beautiful legs, darling."

As Erin was gloating in front of the mirror, Susan was admiring her. She'd only ever looked at her as one looks at a child. But now, especially with the crimson dress on, Erin reminded Susan of herself at the same age, an ivory-skinned young lady, with hips of a ballerina and breasts as ripe as apples.

"You're going to have men eating out of your palm, my dear."

The days passed peacefully as Susan divided her time between her job, spending time with Erin and her new set of books. *Self-motivation to Heal the Wounds*, *Power of the Mind*, and *Building Blocks of Neuro Linguistic Programming* were only a few titles of Susan's new acquisitions. She would read from them whenever she had the time and after every chapter she felt that she had more and more power over her fears.

At Breasal the same wrinkled faces were sweating on the benches of the Cave. That day Susan went through the crowd with a relaxed pace, her impenetrable shield of optimism bouncing off any threats of invasion from the neighboring sufferers. There was no more pain burying her into the armchair with its weight. When she looked out the window, pampering herself with the salty vapors, her chest, once tormented by pulsating termites, was now being flooded with waves of peace.

Down in the harbor the fishermen were setting off with their boats for a new day at sea. It was a good day for fishing and it was also a good day for Susan. One of her patients' cancer had entered into remission. Mrs. Kirby, a 63-year-old woman with a smile on her face at any time of the day, had managed to control the disease. After five years of struggle, with only a tiny dose of chemotherapy, a strict diet, based exclusively on whole grains, and a positive attitude towards life, she had done it. Susan had rarely seen a patient in such an advanced state of cancer go into remission.

She remembered when she met Mrs. Kirby for the first time. Susan had been moved by her attitude towards life and death. There was nothing she could say that could scare the woman. This intrigued Susan. It was like someone was laughing while her plane was crashing. Her fear of suffering had stopped her then from understanding Mrs. Kirby's behavior in the face of a possible death. But now she could see that people could do anything if they reprogram their brain properly, changing their inner representations of any given situation. She asked the woman how she dealt with stressful situations.

"Darling Susan, there is no such thing as a stressful situation. There are only events that just happen. It is our interpretation of the events that produces stress and pain. Take my husband's death for instance. I was in the middle of my battle with the disease when Kenneth died in a car accident. At

first it was hard for me to grasp the idea that the love of my life was no more, but then I understood that if I let his death get to me I would also be consumed by it. So I just looked the other way. It was not as easy as it sounds, but I managed to survive, and that's the most important thing. The most important thing I tell you!"

Walking down the alley in front of her little house, Susan saw the mailbox handle was lifted up. Picking up the letter, the words after "from" made her tremble a little—it read Liam McDuff, Glasgow. "All right, this is it. You were expecting this. You're prepared for it." She put the letter into her pocket and went into the house. Erin was there as usual, on the sofa, with the garden's door open, reading from a chemistry book. "How she studies! She'll make a hell of a woman someday," Susan told herself, trying hard to find good things to hang on to.

"Mum, will you help me put my make-up on?" asked Erin.

It was another party at the high school tonight. Maybe it was for the best, as Susan needed some time alone to deal with the news.

Later on, while helping Erin put on the crimson dress they both loved so much, Susan suddenly grabbed hold of her daughter and hugged her, holding her tight until Erin pushed her away.

"OK, mum, I love you too, but you're killing me here."

"I'm sorry dear. I just love you so much and..."

"And what?"

"Oh...nothing. Have fun!"

Susan didn't want her daughter to be around when she opened the letter, especially because she didn't want Erin to suspect something. She felt she was ready to fight anything, but not with her daughter around reminding her of what she could lose. At least not for now. She wandered in the garden for almost an hour imagining good things and hanging on to them. She went back to the kitchen, poured herself some lemonade and went back on the terrace in the garden. Looking up, she could see the Centre on the edge of Carrick's Bluff, barely hanging on to it. Her house was down by the harbor and she could also see the fishermen's boats returning home full of fish, after a productive day at sea. In the twilight of sunset, Susan sat down at the little coffee table, took a breath of salty air and cut the envelope.

After reading only a few sentences, she crumpled the piece of paper and threw it away. "I am a sphere of energy and the bad thoughts are projectiles that try to penetrate it. They all come from outside. Only good thoughts are produced inside of the sphere. All the energy that the sphere has comes from my brain. As long as my brain has fuel, the shield of energy will deflect all bad thoughts and I will find only peaceful thoughts inside the sphere in which I will bathe every day from now on." After repeating this aloud a few times and after a few

breaths of air, Susan started to feel a little better. "One hundred and twenty-three. One hundred and twenty-three..." She kept repeating this number until the words lost their evil significance. They were no longer the proof that her tumor was malignant and was developing with incredible speed. Now it was just a number like so many others, say fifty-four or two thousand and five. Closing her eyes, she felt the shield of energy building up around her, protecting her from the anguish that was knocking at the door.

But there actually was someone at the door and whoever was on the other side was almost knocking it down. Susan rushed to open it. Two policemen stood before her. One of them announced that Erin was in the hospital.

"What happened?"

"Your daughter may have been raped, but we don't know for sure. She's in shock. She doesn't want anybody touching her and she keeps calling for her mother. Come on, we'll take you there."

In the car she remembered Mrs. Kirby's story. "That's it...I'll just look the other way. That way I could survive and that's the most important thing. That way Erin would still have a mom. For a while..."

"Stop the car," she shouted to the driver.

"But, Mrs. Kelly...your daughter, she..."

"Stop the bloody car!"

She got out and started to run up the slope. Repeating her mantra a few times built up the shield again. Her "happy zone" was her office. One of the books she'd been reading had helped her set up a space which would charge her positive energy shield. It was all about anchors in the past. While she had induced a state of peace she materialized it on an object and whenever she would see it the state of peace would wash her bad thoughts away. And did she ever need a bath now.

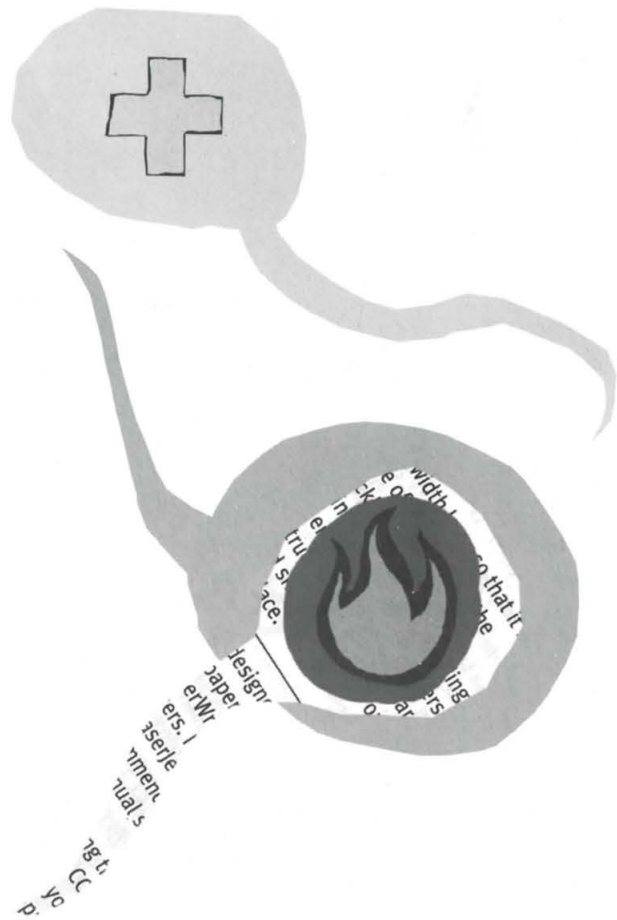
Dr. Delaney, who was on the night shift, asked her if she was all right, but Susan passed by him, picking up her pace. She wasn't able to communicate right now as she was trying to keep her concentration. She opened the cabinet door and entered the room. She went straight to the window and, after opening it, began to stare into the waves. She couldn't make out much of them as it was dark, but their foam was enough. Repeating the energy mantra a few times and taking deep breaths, Susan managed to relax to the point where one hundred and twenty-three was just a number again. She just stood there, eyes closed, smiling like a junkie on the dose, letting the waves clean out the bad cells, until she finally fell asleep.

The bells of the nearby church woke her up. It was noon already. The hospital was awfully quiet for this time of day. Then she remembered that it was Saturday and that Erin must be worried sick that she hadn't found her home when

she'd come back from the party. Susan rushed to the door. She passed through the hallway, now as empty as a pillaged tomb. But it didn't scare her anymore. Maybe it was because the people were gone or perhaps she'd made a lot of progress lately. After the struggle from the previous night she realized she was ready to fight the disease as long as she managed to keep an optimistic attitude. So what if she'll lose her hair from the Chemotherapy? It'll grow back.

Passing by the newsstand she took a peek at the day's headlines. Just an ordinary Saturday, like all the others. No catastrophes, no government falls, nothing. She has been doing this since childhood. Never would she read an entire paper. Only the headlines. But then she froze. Her mouth started mumbling out something that sounded like a mantra. She rushed closer and picked up the local newspaper. It was the noon edition.

The bold headline read: "Abandoned by Mother in Emergency Clinic, Raped 18-year-old Attempts Suicide."





**DROWNING**

Reese Chamness

Bronze, copper, brass, feathers, fur, and egg

Honorable Mention Artwork



**MORALITY**

David Mazure

Pen, ink, and marker

Honorable Mention Artwork



# RELUCTANT AUBADE

KATHY PARKER

SECOND PLACE POETRY

I watch the numbers on the digital clock,  
their lurid glow an ever-changing reminder  
that this moment—  
your breath on my shoulder  
caressing me softly, regularly,  
soothing flushed skin where fingers  
and lips  
so recently grazed—  
is only temporary.

2:40 a.m.

This is sex, not love.

Your hand cups my breast as if it were  
staking territory,  
claiming it as yours alone,  
and not something that had to be  
shared.

2:41 a.m.

Sex, not love.

I gently move your arm and  
ease out of bed.

2:42 a.m.

Not love.

I curl up in the corner chair,  
dig a crumpled cigarette from my purse,  
light up, and watch you sleep—  
your red hair mussed and rumped—  
and I sigh.

2:43 a.m.

If I tell myself often enough I might believe...

Love.

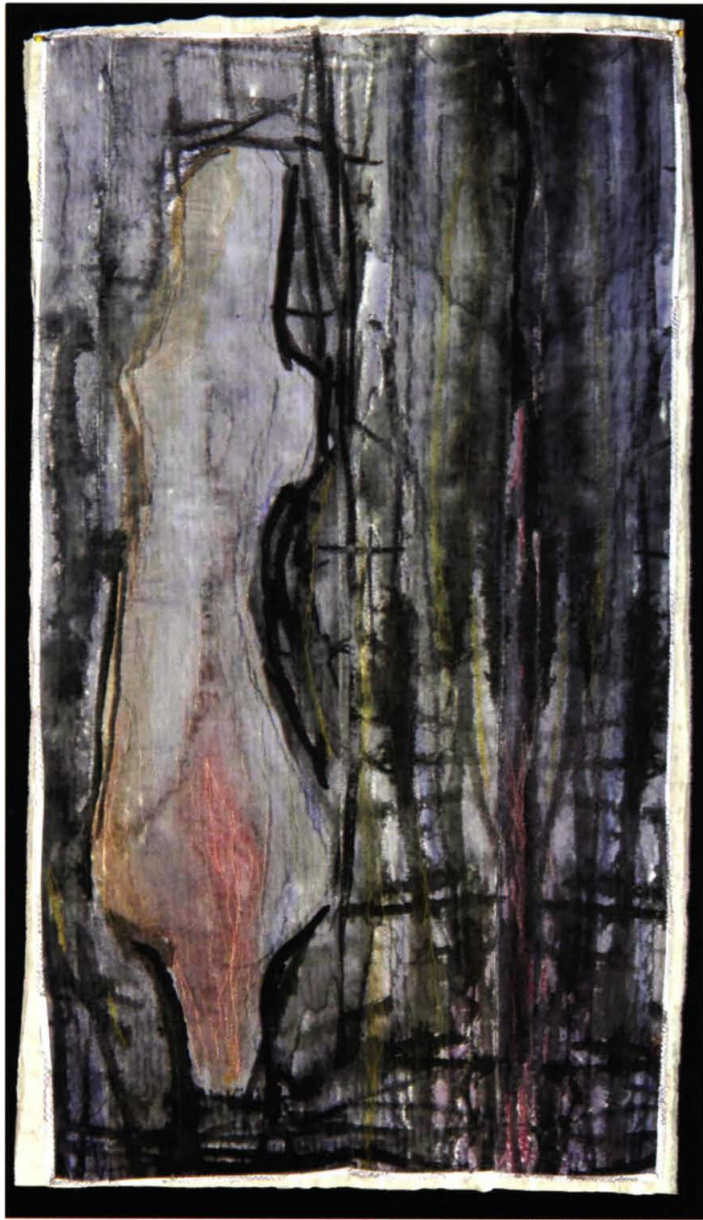


# BIRTHDAY

KATHY PARKER  
SECOND PLACE NONFICTION

TODAY WAS MY SIXTEENTH BIRTHDAY, and in my wildest dreams and nightmares, I never would have imagined that I'd be standing in the bathroom that I shared with my sister, holding a positive pregnancy test in my hands. I stared at it and stared at it, numbly thinking that perhaps if I only stared at it long enough the results would change. I squinted my eyes and turned the test every which way so that the light would shine on it differently, but there was no escaping those two blue lines. They followed me no matter which way I looked, and even when I shut my eyes they were there, inside my eyelids. I sat on the toilet lid in shock. I didn't cry. I would cry a lot in the days to come, but for now, there were no tears.

It's not like I was completely surprised. I knew how babies were made, and I had been engaging in that particularly activity quite often in the past few months with my boyfriend. I suppose that knowing something is possible is quite different from having it happen to you. Maybe it was that weird sense of invulnerability that all teenagers seem to feel, or maybe there was a small part of me that really wanted to have a baby. Whatever it was, the fact of the positive pregnancy test made it all moot. I was pregnant, and now I had to figure out what I was going to do about it. There were only two options available to me. I could have the baby or not.



**LONE FIGURE IN A DARK  
LANDSCAPE**

Stephanie Bowman  
Digitally printed satin  
Honorable Mention Artwork

I had never really thought about abortion except in an abstract sense. *Roe v. Wade* was something we discussed in history class. There were a few staunch feminists who wore little buttons on their handbags with pictures of twisted wire hangers and some slogan about not taking away the rights of women. I didn't pay much attention as I assumed it was nothing to do with me. And besides, I agreed with the popular thought that women (and men) should have the right to make the decisions about their own bodies. I never worried about when life began or what the moral and ethical implications of abortion were. I remember once, in eighth grade, there were whispers in the class about one of the girls who had not only gotten pregnant, but had also had an abortion. I think the shock was mostly because most of us had not even begun to think about having sex, and here was evidence that one of us had.

Of course, here I was, almost three years later, having moved past the abstract thought of sex into the actuality of it. I wondered if that girl had reacted like this when she found out she was pregnant, or if she cried. Did she take another test, and another test after that, hoping that the answer would change? Did she know that she would have an abortion before the test came up positive, or was that something she agonized over for days and maybe even weeks? I sat there for a few moments and thought about that girl. Did she regret her decision? Was she happy now? Did she even really exist, or was she just some specter that we invented after one too many health science lectures about the evils of premarital sex? I sighed as I realized that it didn't matter. I was here, and now it was something I would have to decide.

I remember the first time I met him. I had just been hired on at the restaurant and the manager was introducing me to the staff. He was sitting in one of the booths, head bent over a drawing. He barely seemed to register the manager's introduction as he laboriously added one detail and then another. I glanced down at the paper and gasped. Distracted by my attention and my gasp of surprise, he looked up at me.

"That's such a beautiful drawing. It looks so real that I almost want to reach down and pluck it from the page."

He smiled and his eyes shifted away a bit, embarrassed by my praise. "It's just a simple picture. Nothing great about it."

"Oh, but it's really good. You should be like a professional or something."

"You think so?"

"Definitely."

And so began our relationship. He was eighteen and working as a cook in a restaurant. He was still in high school and not even close to graduating, and being young and dumb, I chose to overlook this glaring warning sign because he could draw flowers. He told me over and over how smart I was and how much he loved me. I suppose it was something I needed to hear. The only things I heard at home were that my music

was too loud or that I needed to set the table. Most of the time I just sat on my bed in my room, reading and dreaming about some guy who would rescue me from my dull life and take me away to be a princess. Well, the guy who did show up wasn't a knight in shining armor and he didn't take me very far away—usually just to his house or to the drive-in. And I didn't become a princess, just a sixteen year old girl who had gotten pregnant by a boy who probably couldn't even spell the word.

I began to cry now, silent tears that ran down my face. The enormity of the situation seemed to swell up and swallow me whole. When I had told him this afternoon that I was two weeks late, he stared at me incomprehensively.

"Two weeks late for what?"

"My period is two weeks late."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I might be pregnant."

"But that can't happen. I was using rubbers."

"We need to get a pregnancy test."

"I don't have any money for that. You can't be pregnant."

"I could be. I need a test."

He drove us to a nearby drug store. He went in and I stayed in the car. There was no way that I would have been able to stand in line while the cashier rang us up. I didn't want to face eyes that would bore into me with scorn, judging me. In all likelihood, the cashier wouldn't have even noticed what we were buying, but I just couldn't go in. He ran out, clutching his jacket closed and hopped into the car. Before I could say anything, he started the car and headed for my house.

"Did you get it?"

"Yeah." He pulled a rectangular box from inside his jacket.

"How much did it cost?"

"Don't worry about it."

"But I thought you didn't have any money."

"I said don't worry about it. I got you your test."

I was silent the rest of the way home. I knew that he hadn't paid for it. Sometimes it was just easier to pretend that I didn't know when he did things like that. When we got to my house, I opened the car door and promised to call him when I found out. I shut the door and watched him speed away. I stood there for a few minutes, and then stuck the test into my purse before I walked into the house.

My dad was sitting in the living room, watching TV when I walked in. He called out to me when he heard the door shut.

"Karyn, is that you?"

"Yes, Daddy."

“Come in here for a minute.”

“Okay.”

I walked into the living room and stood beside my dad’s recliner. I don’t think he ever sat anywhere else. He picked up a card from the end table and handed it to me.

“Happy birthday. Try not to spend it all at once.”

I took the card.

“Thanks, Daddy.”

He was already back to watching his television show, so I walked upstairs to the bathroom that my sister and I shared. I locked the door and placed the card on the sink. I took the pregnancy test out of my purse and opened the box. I read the instructions four times. Then I took the test.

I looked down at the test and shook my head as I finally realized that the answer was not going to somehow miraculously change. I shoved the test back into its box and hid the box in the trash so that no one could know what I had done. As I stood up, I saw the card on the sink that I hadn’t opened yet. I pulled the card out of the envelope and read the front. It was the typical flowery ‘Happy Birthday’ crap that parents buy for their daughters when they don’t really know what their daughters like. I opened the card and two bills fell onto the floor. As I picked them off the floor, I realized that they were two very large bills—hundreds.

With something akin to shock, I realized that, with the money I had saved from working as a waitress, I now had enough money to pay for an abortion, if that’s what I wanted. I still hadn’t decided what to do yet, but the money was there if that’s what I chose. I wouldn’t decide for weeks yet, but it was finally becoming real to me that I had to make a choice. It wasn’t some theoretical discussion. It was real, and it was me. I wasn’t ready yet to make a decision about this tiny thing inside my body, but there was something that I could decide, and something that I could do.

I unlocked the bathroom door and walked to my room. I closed the door, sat down on my bed and picked up the phone. I called my boyfriend’s cell phone number and listened to it ring. Once, twice, three times, until he finally picked up on the fourth ring.

“Hello?”

“Hey, it’s me.”

“So, uh, did you do it yet?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“And?”

“It’s negative. I’m not pregnant.”

His whoosh of relief was so evident that I felt the hair around my ears move. “That’s great! I knew you couldn’t be pregnant.”

“Yeah, I guess you were right.”

“So you want to go to the fair tonight?”

“No, I have to spend the evening with my family, since it’s my birthday and all.”

“Oh yeah. I forgot it was your birthday.”

“It’s okay.”

“Well, happy birthday.”

“Thanks.”

“What do you want?”

“I don’t want anything really.”

“I guess not being pregnant is a good enough gift, huh?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“So I’ll see you later?”

“Okay, see you.”

I hung up the phone and curled up on my bed. Bradley Bubblebutt, my much-favored and oft-abused teddy bear, glared at me from the side of my bed. I reached over and turned him towards the wall, then rolled over to use him as a pillow. His fur was matted from years of hugs and cuddles, but it was still soft against my face. I wrapped my arms around him and cried, my tears making his fur damp and salty. After a while, I began to hum quietly to myself the soft refrain of “Happy Birthday.”





# CALL

BY THOMAS CANTRELL  
THIRD PLACE FICTION

YOU HEAR THE SOFT SOUND of breaking waves.

Ring.

The rhythm of the moon pulling the water higher is enchanting.

Ring.

The rocks are wet. You stumble.

Ring.

The foam hits your feet, and still you run toward the ocean.

Click.

“Hello?”

“Angela?”

“John. What can I do for you?”

The tone of her delicate voice leaves him momentarily speechless. He takes a nervous breath. “I was wondering if we could talk?”

“About what? I’m busy right now.”

He sits still, trying to remember why he ever thought it was a good idea to call her in the first place. After a period of uncomfortable silence he replies, “I just want to talk. About anything. Could you spare a moment?” He sits up in his bed with the phone from his bedside table in hand.

“I don’t know, John. I don’t think we should be talking anymore.”

“But why not? I mean, we haven’t talked in two years.”

“Of course we haven’t! And I wish you’d stop thinking about me so much.”

“Why can’t I? We were married, for God’s sake. We never talk anymore, Ange...” When his voice drifts off, everything is quiet before she responds.

“Because I’m dead, John.”

“I know that!” he shouts, followed by another breath. “I know...” His eyes travel around the room. The digital clock on the night-stand reads 9:35. The windows are dark and the only light in the room comes from a little lamp in the corner. Laundry lies unwashed on the floor next to the bed.

“So why are you calling me?”

“Cause I love you, Ange.”

“I know.”

A pause. “I had a dream.” He stops for a moment to collect his thoughts. “It was one of those dreams inside a dream.”

“You mean with a false awakening?”

“Yeah. That’s it.”

“I thought I was the only one who had those.”

“I guess they wore off on me. You always used to talk about how you hated them.” He sighs and readjusts the phone to his ear. “That’s why I called you. Because of that dream, I mean.”

“What was it about?”

“In the dream, the one inside the dream...” For a moment he tries to think of how to phrase it. “It was like...like I couldn’t see anything. I couldn’t touch, taste, smell. Anything. And I sat there like that for a long time. I became afraid. I got that feeling in my stomach like when you stand on a cliff. I thought I’d never leave that place.”

“Huh...”

"But then I heard this voice. Well, heard isn't really the right word. I felt something. A tingling in the back of my neck, kinda. It told me to look down." John pauses, waiting for a response.

"What did you see?" Angela asks after a moment.

"Everything."

"Everything?"

"I saw everything at once." His voice is quietly filled with awe. "I could go anywhere, do anything. It all became so clear."

The line remains silent.

"You still there?"

"Yes."

"Well...you know what I did? In this dream I could do whatever I wanted, and you know what I did? I went to see you, Ange. I flew down this road that looked like it went forever, and I went to your new house." Each word comes out faster than the last. "It was a big place, with this great garden in the front. It had all these blooming dogwoods and roses and honeysuckles. I remember how you used to love that smell."

"John..."

"I always think about you when I smell them now."

"Now's really not a good time—"

"Yeah, but it'll never be a good time! I want to talk to you now." A humid breeze washes over his face, pulling at his hair. He takes a moment to breathe before adding, "Please, let me have that."

She returns to being quiet. John sighs and continues.

"After that wonderful dream, I woke up. I woke up in my bed, lying with the phone in my hand. I realized that even while I was asleep I had picked it up so I could call you. I wanted so badly to tell you about what I saw." As he speaks his eyes shut tight. He then slowly opens them to look the room over again. The window curtains gently flutter; the smell of salt water fills the room. The clock displays 4:19.

"And I needed to call you. I've wanted to call you for so long." John shudders—the room has grown cold.

"What for?" Angela asks. Her voice is quiet. A faint noise comes from the line.

"Because I needed to tell you something, Ange." He pulls the blankets up close to his chin. "Something important. I can't live 'cause I couldn't say it."

"Nothing's that important." The noise grows louder, more distinct.

"Yeah it is."

"What is it?" She is hard to hear.

"I'm sorry, Ange."

"About what?" A pulse, crashing.

"What do you mean! It's my fault you ran away that night." His shaky breath crystallizes in the air in front of him.

"You didn't kill me. You aren't a murderer, John." Waves beat on the rocky shore.

"But it's my fault! I yelled something stupid, and you got upset. I didn't see how much I hurt you, and you went outside." His words stream out fast, frozen. "I shoulda gone after you, but I was an idiot. It was cold and raining, and you were crying. I thought you just needed time to yourself. But I was an idiot."

She repeats his name, but the tempo of the water is greater, louder.

"I shoulda gone after you, Angela."

Her voice drowns in the surge.

"I'm sorry, Ange."

Crashing. Cutting.

\*\*\*

John jerks awake, instinctively feeling to the right, though no one is there. His body is covered in sweat, and the room is stifling. The clock reads 3:05. The moon is the only illumination through the thin curtains, but it is enough to see the stack of dirty jeans on the floor. He stands and walks to the window beside his bed to pull it open. He hears the soft sound of breaking waves.





**ROAN MOUNTAIN**  
Travis Brown  
Gelatin silver print  
Honorable Mention Artwork



# ROCK IT, MAN: confessions of a music pirate

BETSY ALLEN

THIRD PLACE NONFICTION

MOCKINGBIRD



## YES, I AM A PIRATE

“WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED downloading music online,” I asked my boyfriend one summer night, “did you ever feel ashamed to have the title of ‘music pirate?’”

I tend to start off conversations with such random questions on those nights when the two of us are sitting around, having a peaceful evening at home. Accustomed to my behavior, Aaron shrugged as a response. “Not really. Why do you ask?”

“I never understood why the music industry referred to us as ‘pirates.’ I mean, they believe that we’re stealing, so why not just call us ‘thieves’ or something?”

“You mean ‘pirate’ isn’t the same thing?”

I paused. “Well yeah, essentially it is. But there’s not so much negative association with being a ‘pirate.’ In a way, it’s really kind of cool. I mean, when the industry first coined it, I wanted to put it on a shirt or something.”

“So you think being labeled as a pirate might actually attract people to downloading music for free?” Aaron asked.

“Sure it does.” I thought for a moment. “Now, if the industry is really serious about stopping file sharing, they’ll start using something else to describe us.”

“Like what?”

I sighed. “I don’t know, Aar. If they started calling us ‘music republicans,’ I’d drop it pretty quick and go back to buying overpriced CDs every time I wanted to hear a song.”

Over the course of the conversation, Aaron and I searched online for various songs using a file-sharing program I found a few years ago. He wanted to track down William Shatner’s interpretive monologue of “Rocket Man” from the 1970s,

while I searched for bootlegs of my favorite rock opera. Our genre preferences usually clashed, but the love of free music brought us together in beautiful harmony.

“Do you ever wonder where these files come from?” I asked. “I mean, it’s kind of wild to think of how many people this program interconnects.”

So long as the files aren’t viruses from the recording industry, I don’t care,” he responded. “Speaking of, I heard that they’re sending out fake files again to catch file sharers.”

I shrugged. “So what if they are? Everyone I know downloads and shares music. What are the chances that we’d get caught?”

Aaron and I had this conversation once every few months, debating whether or not it was time to stop downloading while we were ahead. He was more concerned than I, but I had over six years of successful “pirating” under my belt. I saw myself as a modern-day Robin Hood figure: bringing free music to the masses. At the time, I couldn’t foresee that only a few months later, one indirect event would shake my six years of confidence to the very core.

## PARANOIA THE DESTROYER

I started my life of petty crime around the same time that everyone dances with the law: during high school. Napster, the main music file-sharing program at that time, had just taken off in mainstream society. CD prices were on the rise, but the price of CD writers and blank CDs was becoming more affordable. I didn’t make a conscious decision to rebel against the anti-piracy stickers on my CD cases. It just seemed logical to spend five minutes downloading a program that would connect me to years of music history.

Even though my friends and I knew it was “illegal,” music file sharing wasn’t something that anyone of local authority seemed to care about. I was open with my parents about my file-sharing habits, and, while my father expressed apprehension, my mother made lists of “oldies” she wanted me to find. When I asked for a CD writer that Christmas, Dad gently expressed his concern of lawful arrest.

“You know, they’re starting to crack down on that kind of thing,” he said. “I think the music industry’s getting serious about file sharing.”

He was right. This was December, 1999. At that moment, the major concern was whether or not the human race would still be alive on January first of the new millennium, but slowly, file sharing was coming under attack. The music industry began investigating Napster, rendering it inactive for a few days at a time. Although other, similar versions of peer-to-peer sharing programs were becoming available, they still paled in comparison to the Napster community.

During the Napster investigation, the major members of community started to suffer legal attacks, hence the term “music pirates.” As protection, Napster users began to encrypt the song titles in their files. When I browsed for a song, I might have to intentionally misspell a word or name in order to find it. Searching for songs, especially anything that was ever in the Top 40, turned into an obsessive, encrypted hunt which continued until Napster permanently shut down during the next year.

## ON THE HUNT

After Christmas, my high school English teacher asked my class if we had heard the new song “Follow Me” by Uncle Kracker. Normally, my peers and I would feel appalled that an adult was trying to communicate with us through pop culture, but in our world, this teacher was “cool.” We nodded in response.

“It reminds me of how I met my husband,” she confessed with a smile. “If anyone can find it online and bring it to class, I’ll give them extra credit.”

In the end, my best friend Crystal and I were the last students searching for the song. Crystal taught me everything I needed to know about file sharing, creating CDs, and searching for a Top 40 hit. Despite my efforts, I never found the song and gave up. Meanwhile, Crystal came to class victorious.

“How’d you find it?” I asked her, visibly impressed. “I tried everything—I took out all of the vowels in the song title, spelled Uncle Kracker’s name with a ‘C,’ and even searched under his legal name!”

She shrugged. “I just spelled ‘Follow Me’ backwards.”

These were the good times, when we music pirates had one community. But after Napster’s shutdown, the members broke into other peer-to-peer groups. I followed, taking and sharing files as I went. Before long, I had a decent-sized folder of music files for sharing with whatever temporary community I found. I honestly never worried about sharing or downloading music, because most of what I had wasn’t exactly popular. Certainly that fact alone was enough to keep me out of any real trouble, or so I told myself.

## THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED... ALMOST

Coming home from class last fall, I saw a note attached to the front door of my apartment building. At a closer glance, I noticed my apartment number listed, followed by the phrase “A subpoena has been issued in your name.” Following this was all the information I needed in order to contact the sheriff, lest the police arrive at my home or place of work to “serve” me my papers.

**MAN**

Tyrone LaRue  
Wood, copper, and steel  
Honorable Mention Artwork

What the hell? I ran inside to my apartment, bolted the door, and sat down on the couch. My first instinct was that this couldn't possibly be correct. I never broke the law—I rarely drove above the speed limit. I sat there, trying to think of any reason anyone would have to serve me papers, and then (oh shit) I remembered the six years of file sharing. This was how it went down, wasn't it? They didn't arrest you for sharing music—they just issued a hefty fine that no college student could ever pay.

What was I supposed to do in this situation? Six years ago, Crystal had taught me everything about file sharing—everything, that is, except what to do when I got caught. For a moment I remembered another friend studying law at a nearby university. Maybe I could call her? Then I remembered how she spent a weekend downloading a bootleg concert by Dave Matthews. No one could save me; we were all petty criminals hiding behind a computer monitor, just as we had been since high school.

I stopped to think—what was I currently sharing? An audio recording of the musical *Rent* in Dutch, a few indie band concerts, and William Shatner's interpretive monologue of "Rocket Man." I took a moment to realize what those files said about my personality. Did the police really care about this kind of thing?

Finally, I dialed the precinct number and explained the situation to the operator.

"Are you Frank?" asked the woman on the other end.

"No," I replied, thinking that my feminine voice probably guaranteed my honesty on this issue.

"Does Frank live with you?"

It began to dawn on me that I was probably a victim of mistaken identity. "I think he lived here before me," I replied, probably sounding suspiciously enthusiastic. "I keep getting his mail—his bills and stuff."

The operator didn't sound impressed. "Well, we're looking for a 'Frank.' If you're not Frank, then the subpoena wasn't meant for you."

Moments later I hung up the phone, weak with relief; even though I knew that everyone in my building had probably seen the notice and assumed that I was in legal trouble. I could only imagine what my fellow tenants probably thought: "I know her—she's got all of those stickers all over her car, and she hangs out with that long-haired boy." I'm not completely sure whom I share a building with, but in my mind, they sounded just like the condemning voices on those anti-piracy television commercials.

I turned on my computer just in time to see Shatner's "Rocket Man" file transfer from my hard drive to someone I'll never know. I wondered if they ever had bouts of paranoia like me, wondering whom the file actually came from.

My hands still trembling from the event, I shut down the file-sharing program. This was what they called "scared straight" on daytime TV. I had evaded legal trouble for six years, so maybe it really was time to finally call it quits. I uninstalled the program, vowing to change my ways.

In reality, I made it until dinner before reinstalling the program: it was a noble effort.

## BACK IN THE SADDLE

A few weeks after my "brush with the law," my dad called.

"I just watched the news," he said. "They had a story about a woman who was arrested because her teenaged daughters used her computer to download music. You do know that they arrest the person who owns the computer, not the person using it, right?"

"Nobody gets arrested, Dad," I responded. "And besides, I thought Santa gave me the computer."

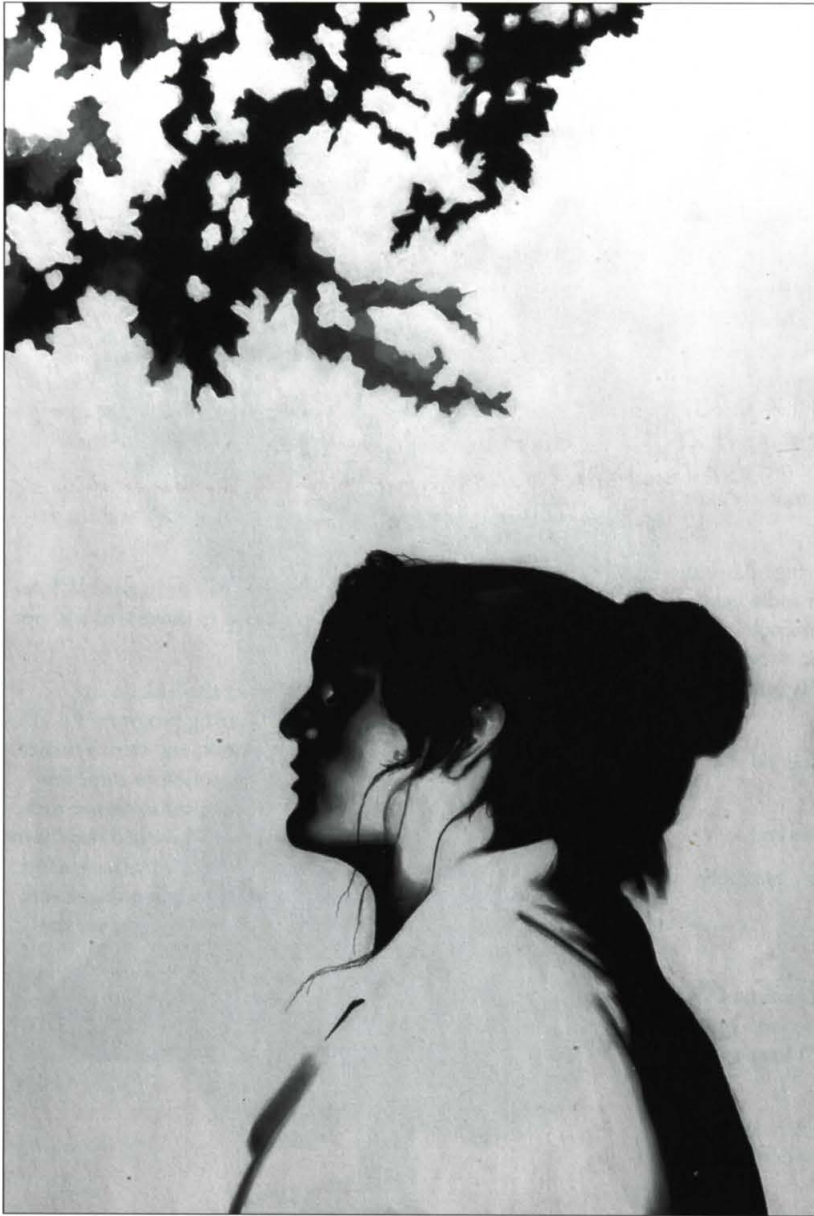
My mom got on the line. "Hey, would you get a pen? While you're on, I have a few songs I want you to download and put on a CD for me...."

Afterwards, I sat in my chair, staring at the link on my computer screen to my inactive file-sharing program. I looked at the subpoena notice on my desk, and then I turned the program on. Before me lay the connection to some few hundred years of music history, from classical to classic rock, anti-war 1968 to anti-war 2004, groups who rocked the charts for decades to groups who just rocked out in their basements. Even the former Captain Kirk's interpretive monologue was out there, waiting to be found by music pirates all over the world.

It was all there...only one click away.

Rock it, man.



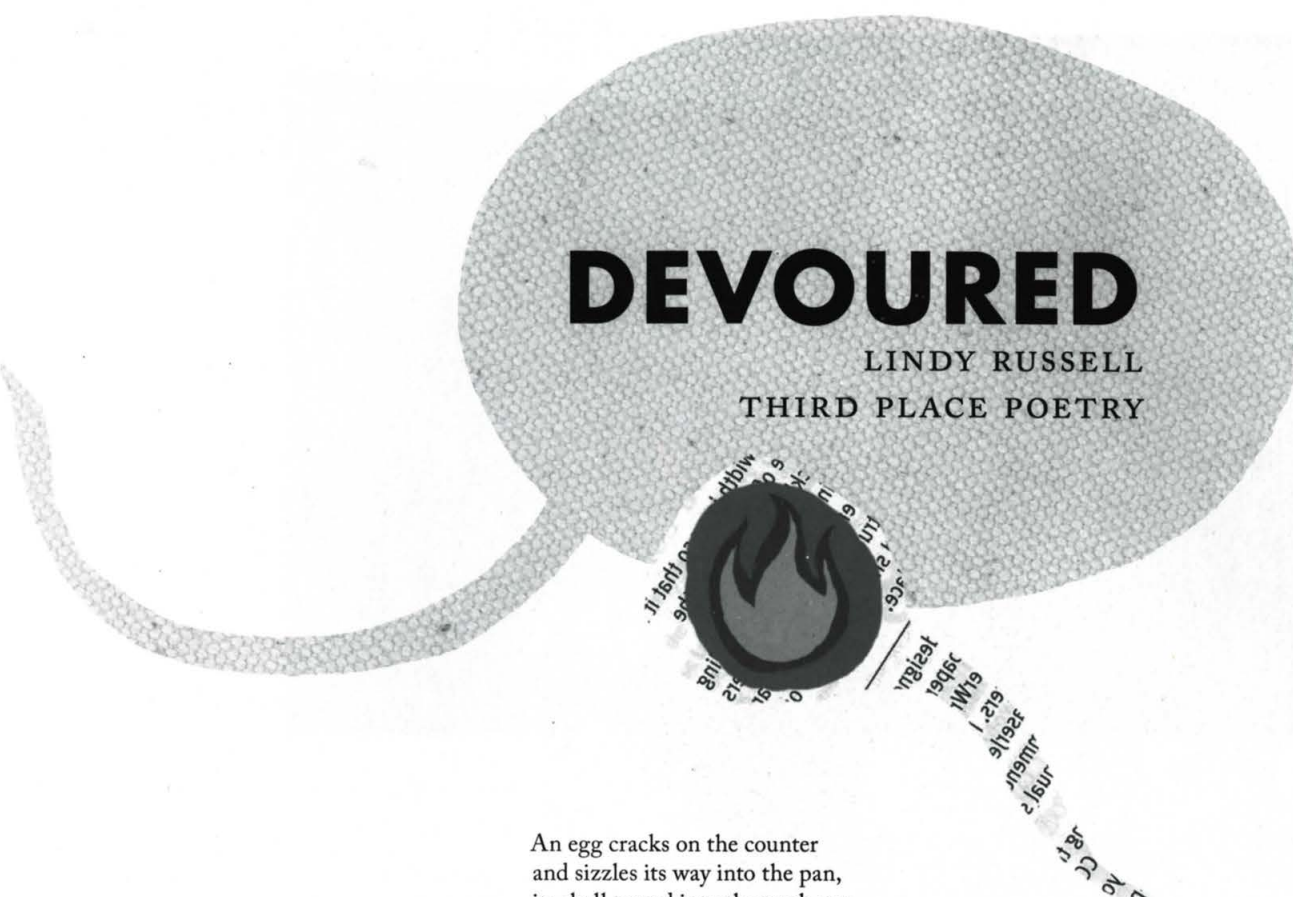


**GINA**

Christine Buchanan  
Charcoal and gesso  
Runner-up Artwork

# DEVOURED

LINDY RUSSELL  
THIRD PLACE POETRY

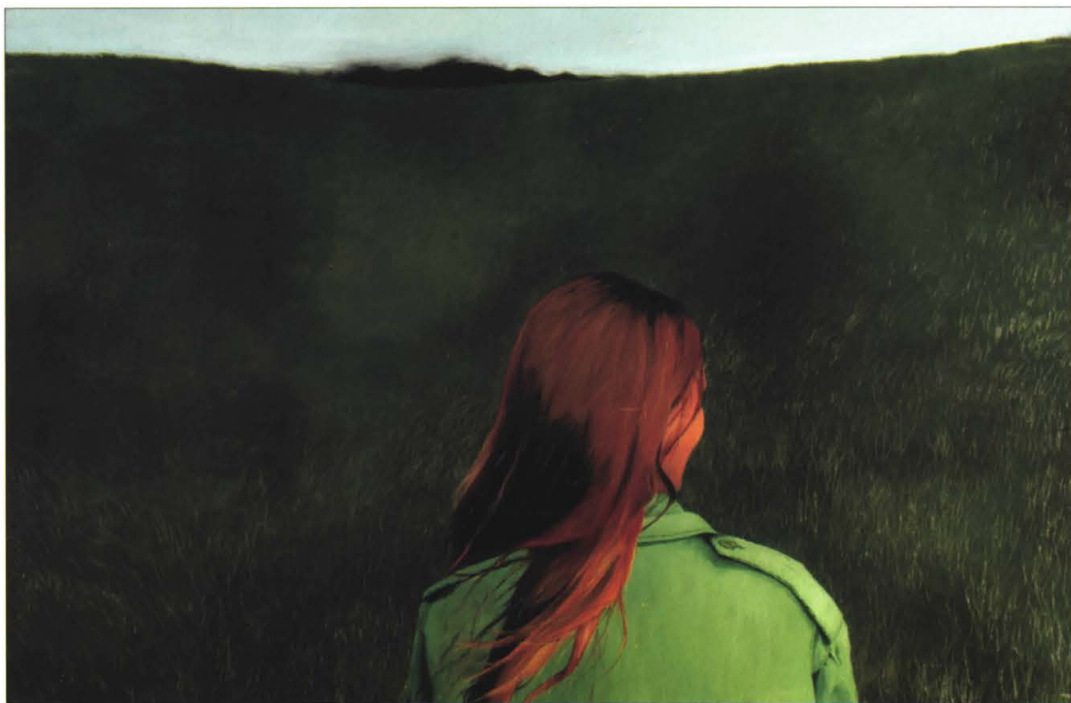


An egg cracks on the counter  
and sizzles its way into the pan,  
its shell tossed into the trash can  
along with all the other victims  
of hunger's bitter wrath.

Cracked hands chop celery,  
onion, green pepper  
finely slicing each piece  
with the blade of a kitchen knife.  
Cutlery can be so cruel.

Shredded cheese is placed  
ever so delicately  
on the crackling, sizzling  
as a shower of salt rains down on the remains  
of what never might have been:

Aborted hopes of a mother hen  
(who never could get laid)  
find their sanctuary in an empty stomach  
that never quite feels full.



Above:  
**DANA**  
Tyrone LaRue  
Oil on canvas  
Runner-up Artwork



Left:  
**A VEHEMENT EAST WIND**  
Mary Nees  
Intaglio with relief roll  
Runner-up Artwork

Right:  
**THEIR LINE GOES OUT**  
Mary Nees  
Monotype with encaustic  
Runner-up Artwork



Below:  
**HALLOWED PLASTIC**  
Natasha Conner  
C-print  
Runner-up Artwork





# notes

## EDITOR'S NOTE

AS AN UNDERGRADUATE I often found myself taking walks through campus, usually in the evening, sometimes to escape the taunting computer screen that displayed only the blinking cursor known to many of us as “writer’s block.” During these walks, I would occasionally glance up toward the dorm-room windows, wondering if any of the students within those tiny spaces was in the middle of the creative process. Were they merely studying for a history test or reluctantly typing an essay for a composition course? Was the guy sitting under the tree only copying missed class notes? Surely some of these students were writing stories, personal narratives, and poems, weren’t they? Soon I discovered the *Mockingbird*, which to me was tangible evidence that students at ETSU do express themselves creatively.

The transition from writer to editor is not an easy one. Writing is far more personal and involves communicating one’s understanding of the world as effectively as possible. Editing, on the other hand, is the process of, well, making sure the writer has accomplished this task. Editing is not proofreading but rather reading and appreciating a work with a critical eye. While the responsibilities of the two are vastly different, there is also a common ground between them: the writer and editor understand each other and are working together toward the same goal. As an avid reader, I enjoyed the experience of sitting down with the students’ submissions; as a writer, I understood where many of the authors were going, what they were trying to do; and as an editor, I was able to offer suggestions to some of the writers to make their work a more “polished” piece.

It is not solely the editor’s job, however, to bring the writing to the audience; this was a team effort. Therefore, I would like to extend gratitude to the many people involved in making the 2007 edition of the magazine what it is. First, to the art team and art director, Ben Hamm, for their patience and understanding and for capturing the essence of what a literary/art magazine should be. To Karlota Contreras-Koterbay, David Dixon, and Wayne Dyer for their dedication to the process. To Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes for entrusting me with the privilege as editor, for guiding me along the way, and for truly believing in this magazine. And finally, to all students who submitted for their hard work and contributions. The *Mockingbird* has always been very special to me, both as a writer and now as an editor. It provides students with a medium for expressing themselves and is a solid starting point for those wishing to continue their art and writing throughout their lives. Enjoy.

*Jonathan Snellings*

## ART DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I WAS EXCITED, EAGER, and maybe even a bit intimidated when I found out that I would be Art Director for this year’s *Mockingbird*. Which is to say that I would be an illustrator and a graphic designer, as well as an editor of sorts. While trying to create the cover design that earned me this position, I went through and rejected a multitude of ideas. In the end it was one of the simplest concepts that stood out: a figure sitting in the belly of a silhouetted mockingbird, crying his ideas, thoughts, and concerns to the world through the bird’s beak—a metaphor for the primary function of the *Mockingbird*, a vehicle of expression for students.

I put together a small collage from scraps and random objects that I had lying around the house, then added some hand-drawn elements and typography. The intent of this method is multi-faceted; it visually reinforces the crafted aspect of the submitted artwork and literature, while simultaneously being a rejection of the nearly completely computer-generated designs of previous issues. This approach also presents a highly personal connection between the viewer and the content, and will hopefully avoid making this year’s issue easily dated in a visual sense. This issue is decorated sparsely and simply, in an effort to ensure that the winning pieces are accented by the design, rather than being forced to compete with it. After all, the purpose of the *Mockingbird*, in my thinking, is to be a piece of artwork in itself that displays, enhances, and makes a visual connection with the contained literature and artwork, but does not overwhelm it. It’s a delicate balance I’ve struggled with sorely for the past few weeks, but it’s definitely been a labor of love.

I want to personally thank a few very deserving people. To Karlota Contreras-Koterbay, who has been tremendously helpful in coordinating the efforts of everyone involved. To David Dixon, who has offered tons of insightful advice, usually before I even knew I needed it. To Geoff Pratt, for being there to bounce ideas off of, as well as being an extremely inspiring artist. To Jonathan Snellings, a devoted and accommodating editor. To my design team, Brandy Pannell and Stephanie Parker, who have done a simply awesome job helping me design this year’s edition. And finally, to the students who submitted their artwork and writings, I can’t even begin to imagine what a difficult task it was to jury the entries. Congratulations to all of this year’s winners.



## ART JUROR'S NOTE

BY ITS VERY NATURE, the jurying of art is blind, and consequently biased. Its blindness results from it being exclusively composed of one set of opinions and one definition of taste from only one perspective source. This is, however, certainly obvious and expected as such. But there is another type of blindness an outside juror experiences that is not as apparent. When a juror first begins to view and even judge the caliber of work that is set before him or her, the juror sets into motion a more superficial process than what has been chosen by the artists themselves. In other words, the jurying process actually begins at the onset of an artist's creativity. Ask any artist, young or old, accomplished or amateur, and they will admit what they can about their process in terms of decisions, choices, and juries. Creativity is, as most things, methodical and its methodology is almost utterly dependant on the choices made by an artist; beginning with what an artist chooses to form or convey then ultimately ending with what he or she has chosen to be the vehicle for that initial idea. A chain of judgments made by the artist forms every detail of an artwork, no matter how minute or unconscious. This series of juried decisions ends when the finished product, or artwork, exists autonomously, founded only on the combination of its creator's decisions. As Wassily Kandinsky keenly noted, "The composition is the organized sum of the interior functions of every part of the work."

This makes apparent that the jurying process actually begins with what we cannot see as an audience. For this process is only truly initiated in the presence of the artist, be it in a studio or in a classroom. Because an exhibition may be juried, or better yet judged, by an outside source, it has no relevancy in the act of creation, which is the most important element. As the juror for this issue of *Mockingbird*, I gladly and honorably accept a position most secondary to each and every submitting artist and admit with great emphasis that my decisions as a juror are certainly not as important or consequential as their own by virtue of their creativity. Please keep in mind that in my position as juror and not creator, my decisions made here reflect only a minor role when compared to the process through which these initially unseen ideas were given shape. The choices I have made here as juror reflect only an outside aesthetic taste, not to be taken as a final say in the degree of quality, craftsmanship, or beauty. For, as we all may know, art is victorious in the sense that it is universal and that it reaches us all in very different ways.

With this said, I would like to congratulate all of the artists from East Tennessee State University who submitted work for this issue of *Mockingbird*. Cliché as it may sound, being a juror is never an easy task, and through their work, all of these artists kept this very apparent to me as I struggled with my decisions. I would like to thank you all very much for allowing me this opportunity and, again, congratulations to you all.

*Adam Justice*

# judge bios

## FICTION JUDGE

Janet Burroway is the author of seven novels including *The Buzzards*, *Raw Silk* (runner-up for the national Book award), *Opening Nights*, and *Cutting Stone*; a volume of poetry, *Material Goods*; a collection of essays, *Embalming Mom*; and two children's books, *The Truck on the Track* and *The Giant Jam Sandwich*. Her most recent plays, *Medea With Child*, *Sweepstakes*, *Division of Property*, and *Parts of Speech*, have received readings and productions in New York, London, San Francisco, Hollywood, and various regional theatres. Her *Writing Fiction* is the most widely used creative writing text in America, and a multi-genre textbook, *Imaginative Writing*, appeared in 2002. A B.A. from Barnard College and M.A. from Cambridge University, England, she was Yale School of Drama RCA-NBC Fellow 1960–61, and is Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor Emerita at the Florida State University in Tallahassee.

## NONFICTION JUDGE

Doris Musick was born in Meadowview, Virginia, and spent her early years near Abingdon. After many years spent in a lakeside home called Brandermill, near Richmond, Virginia, she and her husband, Larry Musick, opted for early retirement and a return to the beautiful mountains in Southwest Virginia. They reside in a secluded part of Russell County where they share their home with their numerous pets. Besides the two novels to her credit, *Up the Water Spout* and *The Starched Apron*. Doris is also Field Editor for *Country* magazine.

## POETRY JUDGE

Edward Francisco is the author of the novels *Till Shadows Flee* and *The Dealmaker*, along with two highly acclaimed books of poetry, *L(i)fe Boat* and *Death, Child, and Love: Poems 1980–2000*. He is also principal editor of *The South in Perspective*, an anthology of Southern literature from 1585 to the present. Francisco lives, writes, and teaches in Knoxville, Tennessee.

## ART JUROR

Adam Justice is a native of Russell County, Virginia. In 2002, he received his Bachelor's of Arts degree in Art History/Museum Studies from Radford University which also included studio training in the arts. He later received his Master's of Arts degree in Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond upon the defense of his thesis *Pop Art: A Case for Hyperreality and Revised Semiotics*. While in Richmond, he taught art history at Rappahannock Community College and served as the Gallery Associate for VCU's Anderson Gallery. He now resides in Glade Spring, Virginia and is the Curator of Fine Art at William King Regional Arts Center in Abingdon.



MOCK  
yEAH!

ING  
yEAH!

BIRD  
yEAH!

yEAH!

YEAH,



EXIT.  
→



2007