

East Tennessee State University

Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University

The Mockingbird

Magazines and Newsletters

2004

The Mockingbird

Department of Art and Design, East Tennessee State University

Department of Literature and Language, East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/mockingbird>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Department of Art and Design, East Tennessee State University and Department of Literature and Language, East Tennessee State University. 2004. The Mockingbird. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University. <https://dc.etsu.edu/mockingbird/12>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Magazines and Newsletters at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mockingbird by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

2004

the student arts & literature publication of east tennessee state university

mocking.bird





1974



1975



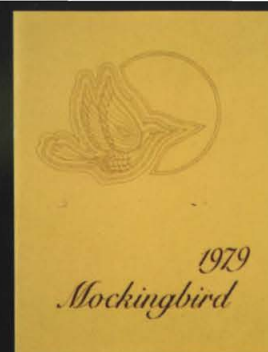
1976



1977



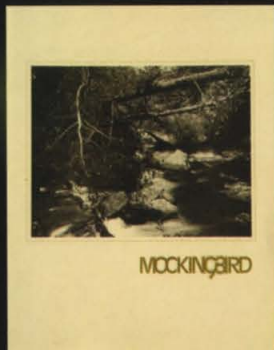
1978



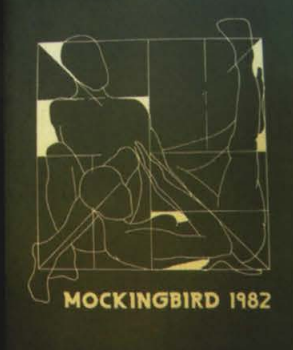
1979



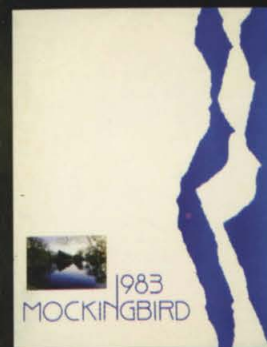
1980



1981



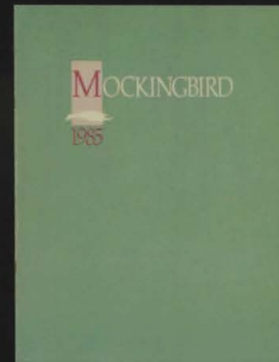
1982



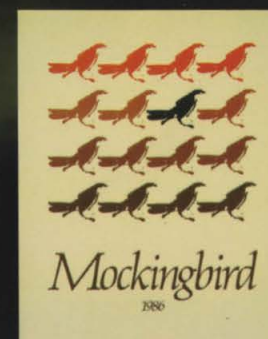
1983



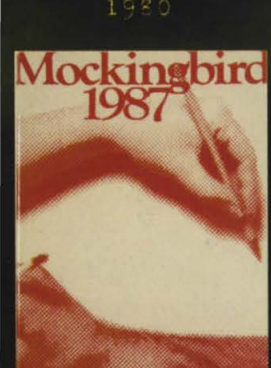
1984



1985



1986



1987



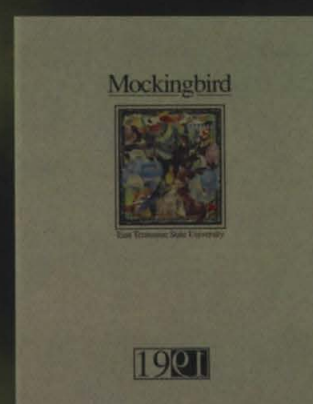
1988



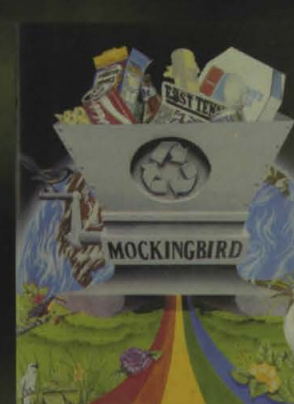
1989



1990



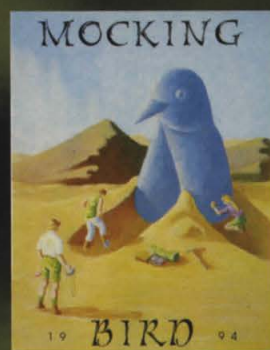
1991



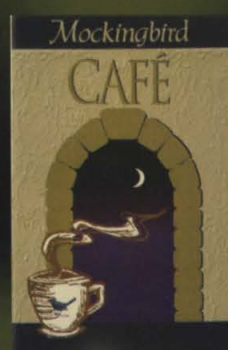
1992



1993



1994



1995



1996



1997



1998



1999



2000



2001



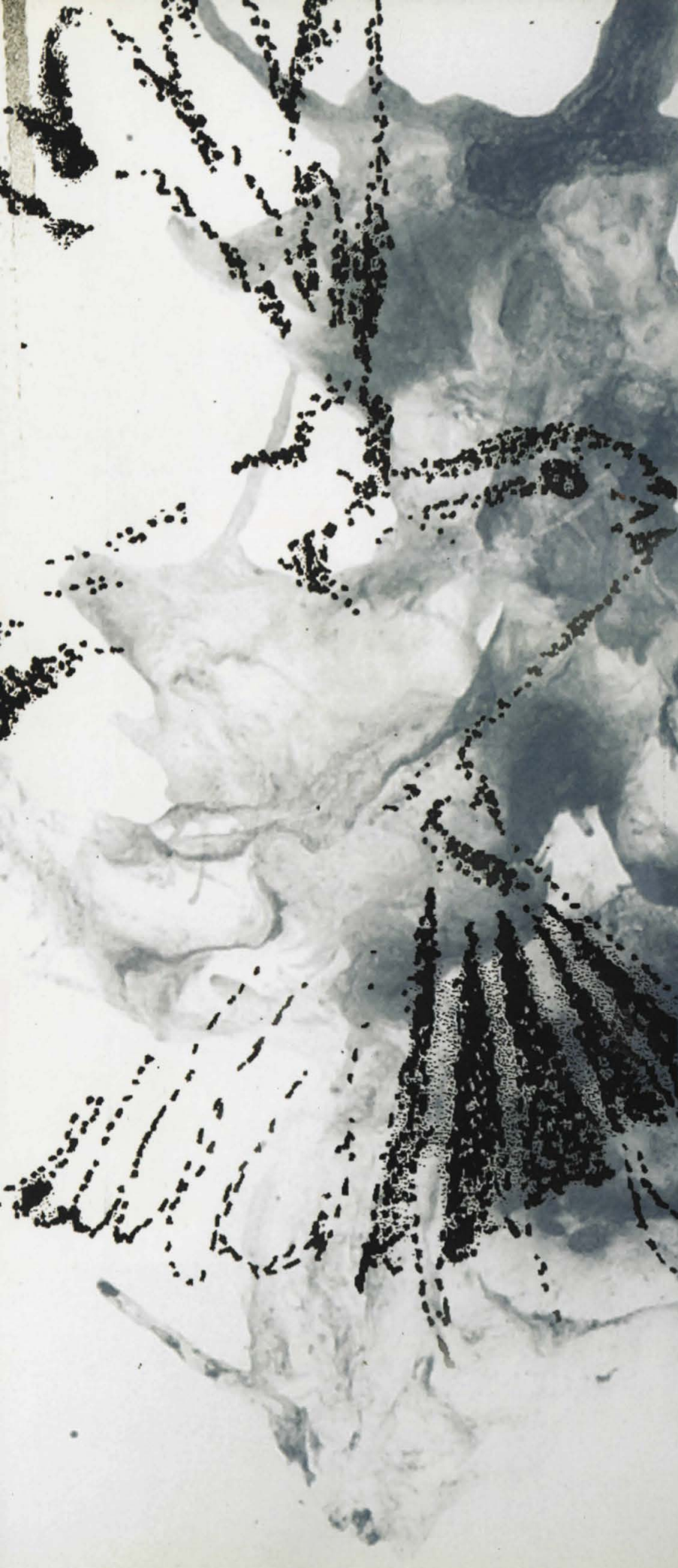
2002



2003

thirtieth anniversary edition

- Former Editors
- 1974 Kay H. Gregory
 - 1975 Patty Stewart
 - 1976 Greg Dykes
 - 1977 Weldon P. Barker
 - 1978 Weldon P. Barker
 - 1979 Rick A. Davies
 - 1980 Rick A. Davies
 - 1981 Ginger Renner
 - 1982 Ginger Renner
 - 1983 Deborah Scaperola
 - 1984 Rita Quillen
 - 1985 Donnie Collette
 - 1986 Joyce Duncan
 - 1987 Roger Stanley
 - 1988 Marc A. Thompson
 - 1989 Marc A. Thompson
 - 1990 Todd Norris & Cathy Whaley
 - 1991 Jeff Keelings & Cathy Whaley
 - 1992 Tami Fenley & Kevin Martens
 - 1993 Scott Keeton & Scott Vaughn
 - 1994 Steve Simmerman
 - 1995 Matthew Lane
 - 1996 Jason P. Johnson & Nona Shepherd
 - 1997 Lisa Rogers
 - 1998 Brad Owens & Scott Braswell
 - 1999 Leslie Wright
 - 2000 Ryan S. Otto
 - 2001 Cate Strain
 - 2002 Cate Strain
 - 2003 Shanda Miller



- Former Editors
- 1974 Kay H. Gregory
- 1975 Patty Stewart
- 1976 Greg Dykes
- 1977 Weldon P. Barker
- 1978 Weldon P. Barker
- 1979 Rick A. Davies
- 1980 Rick A. Davies
- 1981 Ginger Renner
- 1982 Ginger Renner
- 1983 Deborah Scaperola
- 1984 Rita Quillen
- 1985 Donnie Collette
- 1986 Joyce Duncan
- 1987 Roger Stanley
- 1988 Marc A. Thompson
- 1989 Marc A. Thompson
- 1990 Todd Norris
& Cathy Whaley
- 1991 Jeff Keeling
& Cathy Whaley
- 1992 Tami Penley
& Kevin Martens
- 1993 Scott Keeton
& Scott Vaughn
- 1994 Steve Simmerman
- 1995 Matthew Lane
- 1996 Jason P. Johnson
& Nona Shepherd
- 1997 Lisa Rogers
- 1998 Brad Owens
& Scott Braswell
- 1999 Leslie Wright
- 2000 Ryan S. Otto
- 2001 Cate Strain
- 2002 Cate Strain
- 2003 Shanda Miller

mockingbird

mockingbird

2004

2004

2004



Literary Editor

Melissa Greenwood

Literary Staff

Erin Hogshead

Ben Fowler

Nina Williamson

Jessica Notgrass

Chrissy Reiswig

Heather Gilreath

Creative Team

B. Baker, Art Director

Sara Przybyszewski

Dereck Shipley

Amanda Blankenship

Advisors

M. Wayne Dyer, Graphic Design Workshop Advisor, Dept. of Art and Design

Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes, Literary Advisor, Dept. of English

Valarie Lyle, Art Advisor, Dept. of Art and Design

Art Juror

Kelly Muse

Literary Judges

Kathleen Driskell, Poetry

Mike Magnuson, Fiction

Angelyn Debord, Non-Fiction

Special Thanks

Friends of the Carroll Reece Museum

Carroll Reece Museum

University Press

Student Activities Allocation Committee

January Mullins

Tim Kondas, digital photography

Subscription Information

To receive an additional copy of *Mockingbird* 2004 please send a request including a mailing address and a check or money order for \$7.00 (\$5.00 for the cost of the magazine, plus \$2.00 for postage and handling) to Mockingbird, c/o Dept. of English, Box 70683, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN 37614-1709. Because of limited staffing during the summer, please allow ten to twelve weeks for delivery.



Page 2	first place fiction Plate Face	LiaPun-Chuen
Page 10	first place artwork Saggar Bowl with Concave Lip	Jeff Kise
Page 11	first place non-fiction Spending an Afternoon with the Dead: Our Trek through the Parisian Catacombs	Katherine Schram
Page 14	second place artwork Shade	Penny Willis
Page 15	first place poetry I Was Still Awake in Time for Church	Kathleen Libby
Page 16	third place artwork Bubbles	Laura Koehl
Page 17	runner-up artwork Googly	Aleta Chandler Cooper
Page 18	second place fiction Tears for Anthony	Jonathan Snellings
Page 25	fourth place artwork Torn	Larry Rogers
Page 26	second place non-fiction And Hold the Mustard	Kari Hancock
Page 28	honorable mention artwork 1021 Railroad Ties	Randall Green
Page 29	second place poetry Vituperation	Daryl Herron
Page 30	honorable mention artwork Self Portrait of a Librarian	Jacqueline King
Page 31	third place fiction Fingers off the Home Keys	Michelle Martini
Page 37	honorable mention artwork Waiting	Travis Eisenbise
Page 38	honorable mention artwork Foxglove	Gabriel Zimmer
Page 39	third place non-fiction Chrome vs. Steel	Michelle Martini
Page 42	honorable mention artwork Fly Away	Angelique Lynch
Page 43	third place poetry My Mother's Memory	Beth Steffey
Page 44	runner-up artwork Form Study #1	Tommy Williams

Plate Face

Lin-mei could not take the N train at the 49th Street station to Queensboro Plaza today. She could not take the transfer from the N line to the number 7 local train to 33rd Street in Queens either. It was Friday afternoon and Lin-mei had one more hour to complete for her weeklong detention sentence at St. Ignatius High School. As she sat in the top row of rickety bleachers in the school's gym among her dimwitted and undisciplined classmates, she monitored her wristwatch, making sure the minute hand would not try to stop if she looked away. Sometimes the second hand seemed to halt in place, and it would take an intense stare from Lin-mei's small brown eyes to get it moving again. She could be working on calculus homework while she waited, but it was Friday and Fridays were not meant for derivatives. She should be at the museum right now, wandering through the exhibit of paintings on loan from the Pompidou Center in Paris, critiquing composition and color balance, commenting on the genius of Andre Masson and Pablo Picasso, and arguing with Roy about whether Salvador Dali was the devil or if Kandinsky ever tripped on mushrooms. But she was not at the museum. Instead, Lin-mei was being forced to sit in a gymnasium that reeked of puberty and deodorant, solids and gels, a sour mixture of pheromones from the school dances, and sugar cookies from the service clubs bake sale this morning.

Three rows in front of her sat a brown-haired freshman girl who was in trouble for cursing at Sister Jeanine because Sister said that divorce was a form of adultery and anyone who committed adultery was going to Hell. Apparently this girl's parents were divorced and Hell bound. Five rows in front of Lin-mei were the Three Stooges of St. Ignatius: Ian, Mark, and Mike. Who knows what they did to get detention for today. They were

seniors like Lin-mei and regulars in all the school punishments--after-school detention, Saturday Work Crew, in-school suspension, and out-of-school suspension, but they were never expelled because their fathers had donated large sums of money to add stained glass to the school chapel and were sponsors in renovating the science wing, installing extra eyewashes in the chemistry lab and donating compound microscopes to the biology classrooms.

Lin-mei hated the Three Stooges. During her freshman year at St. Ignatius, Ian thought it would be funny to splatter leftover lo mien noodles on her locker and write "Me suck you long time" in permanent marker next to the metal handle. In her sophomore year, all three boys decided to amuse themselves by stealing her World History notebook and taking turns peeing on it. And last year, the boys took paper plates, drew terrible caricatures of Lin-mei's head on them and scotch taped them throughout the halls of St. Ignatius with the words "Plate Face" written along the curve of the plates. Everybody calls her Plate Face now.

Lin-mei tapped her foot to an imaginary tune in her head. She rested her elbows on her knees and kept blowing at a fussy black strand of hair that had fallen in front of her left eye, getting tangled in her thin eyelashes. She checked her wristwatch again and noticed that it was almost time to go home. Suddenly, one of the gym doors swung open and Sister Jeanine floated in front of the bleachers, her feet covered by her long black habit which allowed her to hover an inch from the ground. Sister cleared her throat with a gurgle that made Lin-mei frown, and began speaking to the five oxford-clad reprobates that sat distractedly on the creaking wooden bleachers. The elderly nun told them that as children of God, they should all should behave themselves better, and that it was important to think before acting because not-thinking has consequences. She stared at the Three Stooges during most of her speech, and said that she expected an attitude change next Monday, and let the students go.

The brown-haired girl stomped down the bleachers, rolled her eyes at Sister, and slammed open the gym doors to leave; the Three Stooges got

up together and snickered as they exited, perhaps planning their next crimes against St. Ignatius; and Lin-mei rushed through the door, her face red with embarrassment, trying not to look at Sister Jeanine who was the one that had found her last Thursday, crouched in the corner of the handicapped stall in the girls' restroom, clumsily sucking on a Pall Mall cigarette that she had stolen from her dad.

As Lin-mei left the school building, the street was growing full with cabs, cars, and bikes, all trying to get home for dinner. A sea of businessmen flooded the sidewalks, and women on cell phones weaved their way through the crowd, as retailers stood outside their stores attempting to lure potential customers to buy their clothes, perfume, knicks, and knacks. Lin-mei passed a deli that smelled of freshly baked bread, which made her mouth water and walked down to the corner of the street, waiting for a break in the traffic so that she could cross. As soon as there was a clear passage, she scampered across the four lanes of vehicles, disregarding the "don't walk" sign flashing on the corner of the bustling boulevard. Nobody in New York ever pays attention to the "walk" and "don't walk" signs anyway. Besides, Lin-mei could not be late for dinner. She was already in trouble at home.

The Chan family lived in a two-bedroom apartment on Broadway in Chinatown. St. Ignatius was two streets away on Sixth Avenue, and on Madison, which was four streets away, was Mount Sinai Medical Center where Lin-mei worked after school as a food service aide, creating and delivering patient meals. As Lin-mei zigzagged between the diverse crowds of the city, she thought about how much she hated her job and how the smell of puréed turkey made her want to gag. She thought about how she was glad that she did not have to go to work this past week because of detention and then she thought about how she must have disappointed her teachers and family with the whole smoking incident, and how her father was a hypocrite for telling her she could not smoke even though he smoked all the time. She thought about how the Three Stooges kept making faces at her during detention, and how they managed to ruin her life by

getting everyone at school to call her Plate Face. And then she thought about how she was upset for not getting to go to the museum today.

For the past three months, Lin-mei had been secretly visiting the Museum of Modern Art on Fridays. Under the guise of going to work at the hospital until 8 in the evening, Lin-mei would hop on the N train after school and take it to Queensboro Plaza where she would switch to the number 7 train. The original museum building in Manhattan was being renovated, so all the collections had been moved to a site in Queens, and on Fridays the admission was pay-what-you-will from 4 o'clock until close. Lin-mei usually offered her lunch money for an entrance fee, and for three and a half hours, she would wander around the museum's halls, mesmerized by the creativity that surrounded her.

Two months ago, she met Roy, who worked as a museum docent in the visiting and temporary exhibits. Lin-mei had gotten so involved with a John Miro painting, that when she stuck her hand out to try and feel the texture of the paint, he suddenly appeared and stepped in front of the artwork in an effort to protect it from being debauched by adolescent fingers. She apologized for getting lost in the sea of blue on the canvas, and as Roy fiddled with his museum badge that lay on his chest, which marked him as a sentry for modern art, he told her he was just trying to protect "Miro's baby" and introduced himself to a timid Lin-mei. After exchanging the usual introductions, Roy mentioned that he had seen Lin-mei come in every Friday for the past month, and when he asked if she was an art student at one of the universities, she shrugged her shoulders and said "I wish" with a faint ache in her voice that suggested a genuine desire to be an artist. Lin-mei told him that she had "never even held a paintbrush before," which made Roy frown with condolences. She continued to tell him how she wanted to learn about painters and sculptors and color and photographs, and after a desperate plea for artistic knowledge, Roy had agreed to teach her what he knew about all those things, having been an art aficionado during his college years. Following the terms of this agreement, they began to meet every Friday for an hour to discuss and critique

selected paintings, but this Friday, Roy's protégé was absent from her lesson on fat versus lean layers in Renoir's *The Luncheon of the Boating Party*.

Lin-mei arrived at home. The entire apartment building was populated by Chinese-American families, first and second generations, that all seemed to know each other's business. News had floated around the hallways about the anti-social Chan daughter who had stolen a pack of cigarettes and was caught smoking them at the Catholic school nearby. The gossip had traveled through several stories and by the time it reached the rooftop, almost all of Chinatown heard about the rebellious Chinese teenager that refused her heritage and took up the American customs of smoking pot, cursing, and disrespecting elders. As Lin-mei walked up the stairway to her apartment, the smell of dumplings and steamed rice filled her nostrils. The stairwell and halls had the fragrance of an Oriental food store, so Lin-mei, knowing her clothes had the same aroma, usually carried a bottle of freesia body spray in her backpack to cover up the scent of grease and soy sauce on her body. When she reached her apartment, she could hear her mother yelling loudly at her father from outside the door. They argued about everything. She shook her head and breathed in deeply, knowing that it would be her turn to get yelled at as soon as she got in the apartment. It was always like this.

"Hi, mom, dad," said Lin-mei as she tossed her backpack on the worn carpet next to the floral sofa that was bought from a thrift store. Her entrance caused her parents to cease fire for a few moments.

"Oh, Lin-mei, you're here now. Set the table, okay? You have homework?" All her mother ever asked about was homework. "So, you finish with detention, eh? Lin-mei, please promise that you will not get in trouble at school anymore? Your father and I have been so disappointed. We raise you to be proper and respectable girl. We not teach you disrespect."

"Sorry, mother."

Lin-mei pulled three plates from the cabinet by the refrigerator. The living and dining areas were in the same room, and the table was more like a slab of stained wood that sat in the corner of the

apartment with three chairs around it and covered with a plastic floral tablecloth. In the middle of the table was a crocheted doily topped by a fake crystal vase with plastic carnations inside. Lin-mei placed the dishes on the table and laid the silverware on paper napkins next to the plates. She caught her reflection in the flat piece of dishware, and shuddered at how well it fit within the circle of porcelain. *Plate Face*, she thought. *Plate Face*.

Her mother brought out a bowl of rice and a plate of sliced beef covered with vegetables in a brown sauce, and the Chan family sat around the table, blessed the food, and began to dine. For a minute, there was an unusual silence around the dining area that let the noise from the street below echo in through the windows, but after swallowing a thick piece of beef and a spoonful of white rice, Mrs. Chan began delivering her litany of reprimands for Lin-mei.

"We know you finish your school punishment, but you are still in trouble here," said Lin-mei's mother with a wrinkled brow and sharp tongue that still had trouble speaking English words. "Lin-mei, we work so hard to give you a good education. We teach you religion. We teach you good from bad. You smart girl, Lin, but lately you not think right." Her mother had completely put down her fork and spoon. "Do you want to smoke like the other American girls? You want to be trouble-maker all the time? You just like those boys at the school when you do stupid things like that. We think that you are being too influenced by your American friends."

"Mom, I don't even have friends."

"Lin-mei, you are becoming too sarcastic to me."

"But if I don't even have friends how am I being influenced all the time?"

"Lin-mei, enough!" her father said as he put down his utensils. "Listen to yourself. You are being influenced all the time. The MTV, the shopping mall. The other children at school do not have Chinese values. You have them. Your mother and I are just trying to protect you. You are still so young, Lin, you need to just focus on your studies right now. Please don't let this happen again, Lin-

mei. You know we're worried about you. Were your parents. It is because we love you, Lin."

The rest of the dinner was eaten in silence. Lin-mei helped clear the table and stayed in her room for the rest of the evening. Her parents emphasized their want to protect her, but she did not want to be protected. She wanted them to not worry about her so much; she wished they didn't care about her. But that was the problem with Chinese parents. They care too much-so much that their attention and concern were like fingers that gripped tightly around Lin-mei's neck, suffocating her, refusing to let her breathe. If they really loved her, they would let her be who she wanted to be: a woman who wanted to spend her life in the presence of imagination and ingenuity. If they loved her, they would let her paint. They would not force her to eat rice everyday. They would not tell the other Chinese families that Lin-mei was going to be a doctor. They would let her go to the mall with friends, American girls, and let her pick out clothes that she wanted to wear. They would not care what she did.

Lin-mei lay in her bed with a discomfort that made her chest feel heavy. As much as she wanted her circumstances to change, they could not. She was trapped in between two cultures that could not fully understand one another. As much as she tried to act American, it was impossible. It was because of her face. Her eyes were clearly Chinese, small slits that barely revealed the white around tiny brown dots, and her nose was flat and lacked the prominence that made many women beautiful. Lin-mei placed her hand over her face and was saddened when she noticed that she did not need to cup her hand where her nose was. Her face was truly flat like a plate.

The teasing at school had intensified since the smoking episode. More students began to laugh behind Lin-mei's back and began to joke that Plate Face's smoking fiasco was an attempt to be cool, to be a bad-ass, to be one of them. They laughed because they knew Plate Face did not know how to smoke, and they were amused at her choice of unusual cigarettes. This week after school, the Three Stooges began to follow Lin-mei as she

walked to work, yelling "Plate Face" as they skipped behind her, laughing loudly, offering her smokes and asking her if she liked sucking egg rolls. As people stared disapprovingly at the immaturity traveling down the sidewalks, Lin-mei grew hot with anger and humiliation, and wished she was back in detention again.

At the hospital, after having found out why she had missed the previous week, some of Lin-mei's coworkers began to mock her in the assembly line where they arranged patient trays. A few of them would hold out carrot and celery sticks and asked her if she wanted to go on a smoke break, while others would simply chuckle at the thought of their quiet Chinese associate puffing away at a cigarette with all the peculiarities of an inexperienced smoker. And in the evening, as she walked home from the hospital, wearing turquoise scrubs that smelled of bleach and chicken noodle soup, Lin-mei asked herself why she even wanted to smoke that day.

She had seen it on the television and in the movies. She had watched her father do it for seventeen years. Everyone smoked to feel calm. Couples needed cigarettes after sex; her father needed a cigarette after arguing with her mother; celebrities smoked to ease them from the pressures of the fame; Lin-mei needed a cigarette to relieve her from the anxiety of being different.

Early in the morning before her father went to work at the subway station, and before her mother got ready to head to the dry cleaners, Lin-mei crept into the living room and took two Pall Mall cigarettes from the side table next to her father's armchair and a pack of matches from one of the kitchen cabinets. She had been having a terrible week at school and the Three Stooges had not left her alone for one minute. In between classes they found ways to harass her, either through obnoxious name-calling or shameless teasing. At lunch, they had spit on her food and smashed her ham sandwich with their fists, but Lin-mei could not stop them. She had gone to her teachers before and her parents even had a conference with the principal, but nothing could be done to the boys except give them detention. Her situation was hopeless. The Three Stooges had rallied together an army of mean-

spirited students and encouraged them to join in the battle against the China girl.

That Thursday afternoon, when Lin-mei could stand the bantering no longer, she skipped her calculus class and headed to the bathroom with the two cigarettes tucked in the front pocket of her backpack. As she entered the bathroom, she stood at the sink and pretended to wash her hands as she waited for the other girls to leave. When the last girl had finished her business, Lin-mei retreated to the handicapped stall where she sat down on the cold tile floor and pulled out the matches that read "Golden Wok" on the flap, ignited one of the matches, and lit the cigarette.

She held it in between her fingers but wasn't quite sure what to do with it. She wrapped her lips loosely on the end, breathed in a little too deeply, and started to cough. Her father made it seem effortless. She tried it again, this time with a little more success and a little less cough. She tried to blow it out her nose, but it stung, so she decided that was not a good idea. As she inhaled, Lin-mei started to feel calm. Now she understood why all the nurses at Mount Sinai stood outside smoking half the time; now she knew why her dad needed this to relieve him from the constant nagging of a frustrating Chinese wife.

She smiled when she finished her first cigarette. She didn't even like the smell or taste so much, but the smoke that surrounded her head gave her a temporary halo that relaxed her. She thought to herself, *This could easily turn into a habit.* And as the flushed cigarette swirled around in the toilet, Lin-mei decided to go ahead and smoke the second one. With each breath she took, she felt her head tingle. She closed her eyes and imagined that her face was developing a profile, losing its flatness, growing a more pointed nose, rounded eyes, and soft cheekbones. Her hair began to acquire a bounce; it had volume, and changed from a dull black to red with bronze highlights. Her lips became plump and pink, and her jaw grew square and strong. Her face was no longer round and flat, but had curves and lines and the profile of a Hollywood actress. Lin-mei imagined that she did not look Chinese anymore, and it made her happy. She smiled to herself again and took a long puff that lasted for seconds.

But as she exhaled, Sister Jeanine had walked in to the restroom and threw open the stall door, holding her chest as she gasped in shock, "Lin-mei Chan!" and nearly fainted from the sight of the dutiful Plate Face spread out on the floor with a cigarette to her lips.

It seemed to take years for Friday to get here. The week had turned out to be a disaster as usual, both at school and at work, where she had hot beef broth spill all over her clothes, and after having missed an art lesson with Roy due to last week's confinement in the St. Ignatius gymnasium, she was eager to get back to the museum. As she left school, Lin-mei tried to get lost in between groups of students that rushed to the school exits so that the Three Stooges could not follow her. When she reached the 49th Street subway station, she hopped on the N train and found a seat next to an old lady in the corner carrying plastic grocery bags that were about to burst and spill their contents. As she sat in the torn subway seat, the rattling of the wheels against the tracks shook the floor with such a force, that the strong vibrations tickled her feet. Lin-mei enjoyed this feeling, and smiled to herself and to the woman by her side, who did not smile back but instead pulled her grocery bags closer to chest. *She thinks I'm going to steal her food,* Lin-mei thought. This made her giggle and cause the woman to look at her with suspicion and irritation.

There was something about taking the N train to the museum. She loved the way it had a distinguishing rhythm as it rode along the rough track, making the train bounce and dance as if she was riding a carousel. She liked to watch the graffiti on the dark walls of the subway tunnels flash by her window like a picture show. The N train was her co-conspirator in the secret visits to the art museum.

The train was nearing the transfer point at Queensboro and Lin-mei had a feeling that Roy was going to ask her about where she was last week, but she did not want to tell him the truth. She was afraid that he would laugh at her just like everyone else, or disappoint him the way she did her parents and teachers. It would almost be a betrayal. She had presented herself to him as an intelligent and

enthusiastic individual with a desire to understand everything about the art world; if he ever found out that she was a lonely and confused girl who couldn't even understand her own self, Roy might feel that he had wasted his wisdom on her. He was hardly thirty years old, but Lin-mei found that he possessed the knowledge of a man who had lived through centuries of revolutions and innovations. Roy was the smartest person Lin-mei had ever known, and was probably the only friend she had ever had.

After switching to the local train in Queens, it was only a matter of minutes before she would see the MoMA sign come up from behind a large blue building to her right. Every time she caught a glimpse of the sign, her heart would flutter for a few moments and Lin-mei would release a sigh of relief, a signal that marked the start of her liberation on Fridays. When she finally reached the museum, she took out the wadded up dollar bill she had in her shirt pocket, skipped inside, and paid her admission fee for today. Two weeks ago, she had given them a five, but this time she only had three dollars and needed to save some money for the trip home.

Lin-mei walked over to the temporary collection where the Pompidou Center paintings from Paris had only one week left until their exhibit ended. To her left was a wild painting by Francis Picabia called *The Sphinx* that had naked male torsos and faint white waves at the bottom of the canvas and to her right was Frank Kupka's *Plans Verticaux* which was a done in a sea-blue oil background, layered with red and black rectangles. Lin-mei felt overwhelmed and excited. There were too many imaginative pieces to absorb in one afternoon, so she decided to look for Roy who had probably already picked out the most significant and inspiring paintings for Lin-mei to see and examine.

"Lin, I've been looking for you," Roy said after Lin-mei had finally found him strolling past Picasso's *Minotaur* following a pair of spiky-haired teens. He liked to call her "Lin" for short. "Where the hell have you been? You know this is the last week for the Pompidou. Jesus, Lin, I don't know how we're gonna fit all this in an hour, so maybe you won't mind if I just take my time today and try

to cover as much material as possible. Got it? Follow me."

Lin-mei's eyes seemed to twinkle as she agreed to the long class period for today, and Roy seemed eager to teach. She followed his steps as he walked through the collection, listening and observing every detail that he pointed out. Here was Matisse's *La Tristesse du Roi*, which was a colorful collage that had falling leaves and faceless people that seemed to represent a loneliness that contradicted with the boldness of the reds and blues in the background. There was a cubist piece by Jean Helion of a figure that had fallen in a two-dimensional desert of burgundy and gray. Note the highlights are painted only on the limbs of the figure. To the left was another Picasso in which a musician appeared to be playing a melody to a naked woman on a bed. Pay attention to the blues used to represent the separation of the musician from the bright apricot of the woman.

For nearly three hours, Lin-mei shadowed Roy as he explained art theories and techniques. She made mental notes in her head and every few minutes she would try to impress him by repeating what he had just said and following his comments with an "Oh, I get it now." She asked few questions because she liked listening to Roy talk. She admired and envied his genius, and was grateful for being in such clever company. The time was passing quickly and Lin-mei kept wishing that her wristwatch would stop ticking just this once. There were still many more pieces of Pompidou paintings left to explore, but their time together was soon to expire.

"So, notice how the brush tip dabs along the canvas excitedly, almost chaotically, in pointillism. Here, it's not the strokes or any precise movements that create the figures so much, but it's simply the grouping of dots of colors that combine to add shadows to this woman's leg, or highlights to the gentleman's hat."

Lin-mei's mouth opened in awe and nodded her head in amazement of Roy's commentary.

"Well, my young Pompidou learner," he said jokingly, "I'm gonna have to call it a day. We've pretty much covered the more significant paintings,

but do you have anything to ask? You've been pretty quiet this whole time?"

"Not really. Everything you've shown me is great," Lin-mei said, "and I'm still kinda overwhelmed by all the thinking that goes into painting. You know, techniques and methods. There seem to be formulas too, but they don't have numbers, they're formulas for colors."

And with that statement Roy shook his head from side to side; his mouth formed a slight scowl of disbelief.

"Lin. Formulas? I don't think you've even been *really* listening to me this whole time."

"What d'ya mean?" she asked, suddenly worried that she had upset Roy.

"Of course there are ways to manipulate colors to create particular moods in paintings, but Lin, the whole point in art is to abandon the formula. Art is totally free, and yes, each artist has his or her distinct style, and yes, people try to copy those styles, but each piece is an expression. It is an expression of the artist's feelings, thoughts, senses, desires. It's not just technique. Hell. If I ever saw Basquiat's paintings before he got famous, I probably wouldn't even have liked them. I'd probably think he was a messed up son of bitch. He didn't follow a formula, but he had a style. His pieces had innocence that made people uneasy, but that's also why they're so beautiful. They are unique. Distinct."

Lin-mei didn't know what to say. She had always loved learning about artists and their work, but she had failed to realize that the reason for their talent was not because of some ability to move a paintbrush in perfect circles; it was because they were able to be themselves and communicate their feelings on canvas.

"Let me show you one more painting before you go, Lin, and maybe you'll see the 'raw expression' that I'm talking about."

Roy led her down the hall to an enormous canvas covered with a dark, forest green background, and on the foreground was painted a red, Oriental face, complete with narrow eyes, a small mouth, straight black hair, and a flat nose. The painting was appropriately called *Tete Rouge* and was created in 1915 by Amedeo Modigliani. The face carried a

serious expression and no smile, but the corner of the Asian woman's little mouth had a slight curve, which was rather curious.

"This reminded me of you," said Roy, "Just look."

"It's because she's Asian. I know."

"No," Roy said uneasily, "No, it's not that. It's because she's unique. It's because her expression is unique, just like you are. It's the differences that make us beautiful, isn't it?"

"But I can't be beautiful — my face is flat," Lin-mei blurted out defensively.

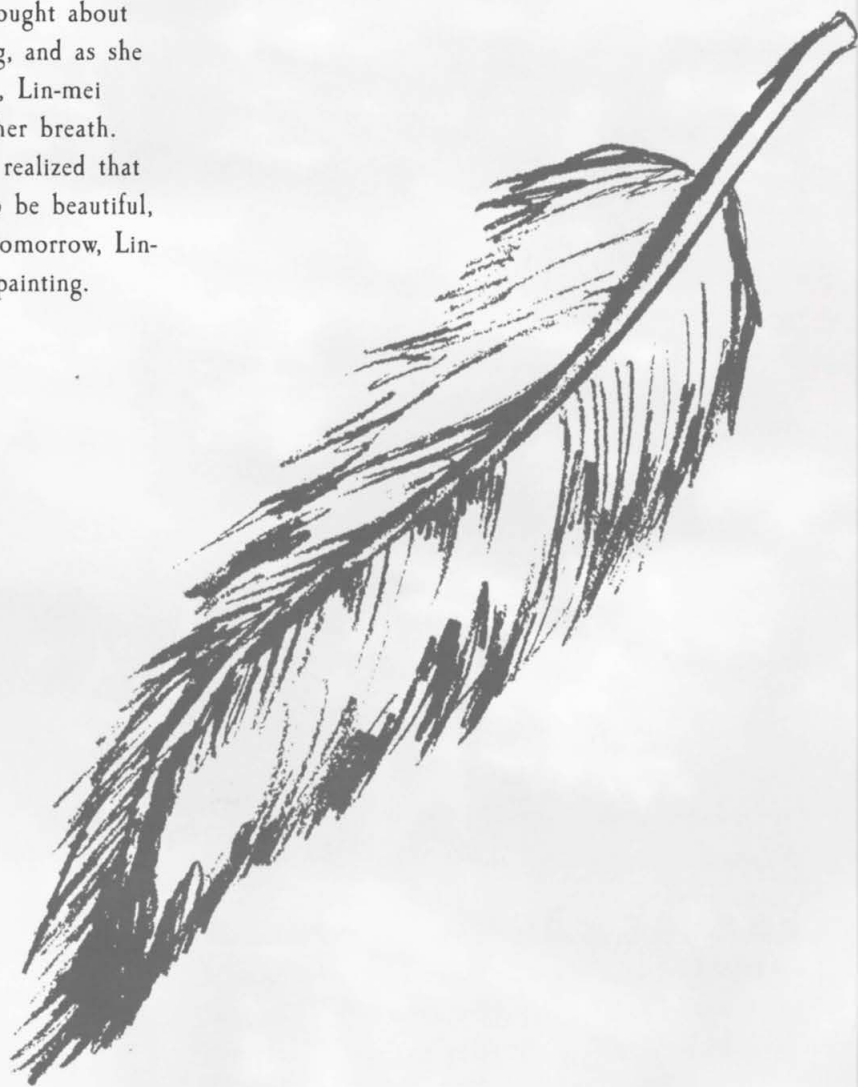
Roy stood looking at Lin-mei unable to respond. She knew he was starting to feel awkward.

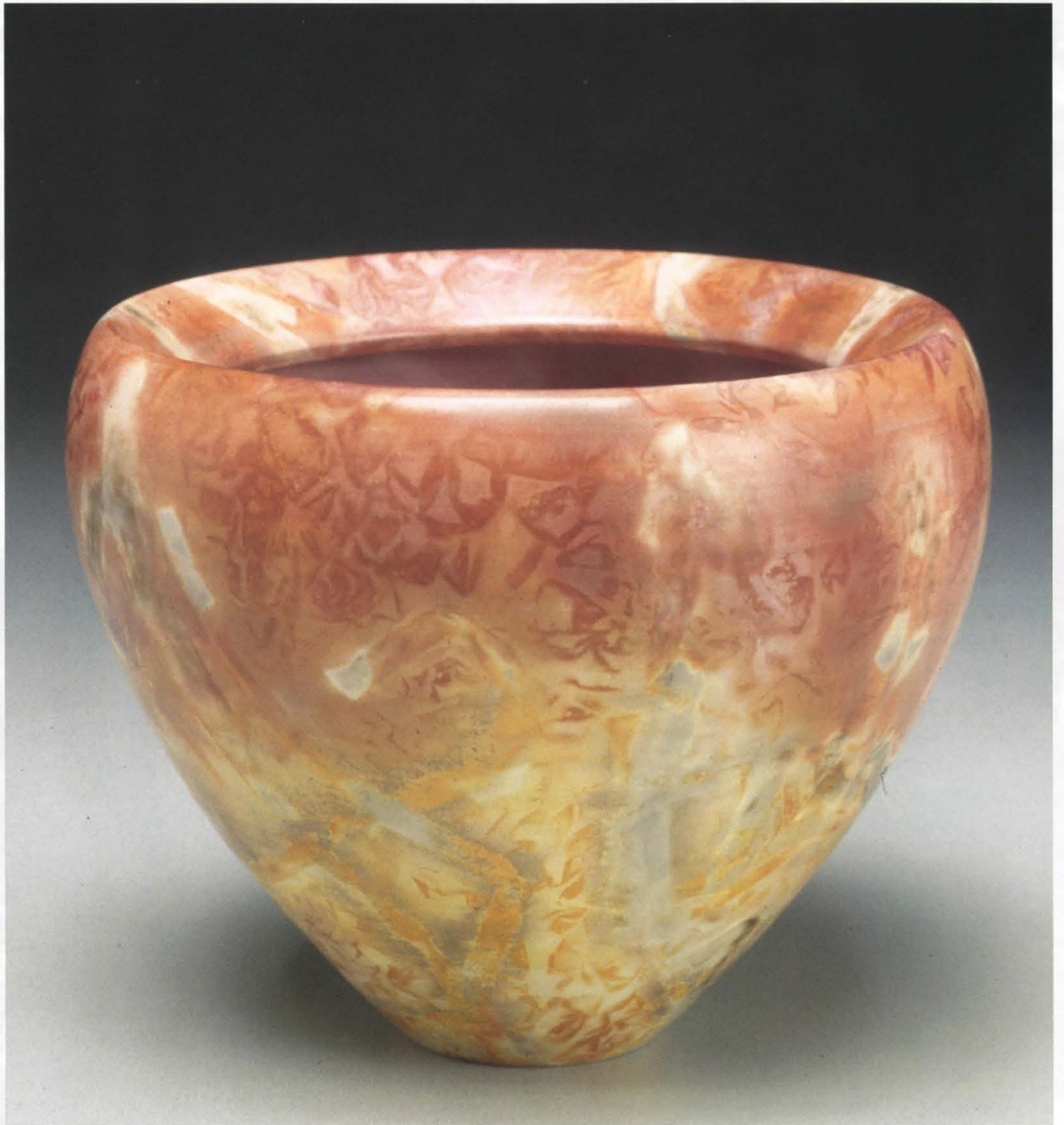
"But Lin, the canvas is flat," said Roy, "and it doesn't reduce the splendor of any of these paintings. The canvas *is* a flat face that can frown, smile, laugh, cry. It is a stunning face, don't you think?"

Lin-mei agreed and wondered why she had never drawn the parallel before in her months visiting the museum. And then for some reason her eyes began to well up with water. She told Roy that she had to go and that she would see him next week. He thanked her for the company and said that he couldn't wait for next Friday and that she still needed to tell him what kept her from the museum last time. Lin-mei rushed toward the exit, rubbing her eyes to keep them from spilling the complexity of emotions that had surfaced in the past few minutes, and made her way back to the subway station so that she could take the number 7 to the N train to home. As she rode back to Chinatown, Lin-mei thought about what Roy had said, and how it had suddenly made her chest feel less heavy and her head feel light. Could it be possible for a Plate Face to be beautiful? Roy seemed to think so, and Lin-mei was starting to believe it too. Perhaps profiles were overrated. Perhaps what counted were the expressions. Perhaps she had felt isolated because she never used her face to really communicate her feelings, thoughts, senses, desires. She had always just blamed it. She placed her hands over her face and felt the warmth of cheeks on her palms. She looked at her reflection in the subway window, and decided that she could accept her nose and her eyes. The Chinese would always be there though, in

her dark hair, in the slant of her eyes; in her flattened nose, in her light skin, in her blood. Lin-mei knew she could never change that and admitted to herself that it would be difficult. But could a Plate Face be a canvas? They were both flat anyway. Yes, *I suppose I could*, she thought.

When she had finally reached Broadway, Lin-mei could hear the stringed instruments plucking out Chinese folk songs. The streetlights illuminated the red flags, lanterns, and dragons that lined the sidewalks, which were mainly on display for tourist satisfaction. The smell of steamed rice, sautéed vegetables, and Kikoman soy sauce filled the neighborhood, making Lin-mei hungry for dinner. As she approached her building, she thought about the Three Stooges at St. Ignatius. She decided that they would never understand her and that she would never understand their immaturity. She thought about her job and decided that it would be in her best interest to quit. She thought about her parents, and forgave them for caring, and as she climbed the staircase to the apartment, Lin-mei muttered a "thank you" to Roy under her breath. By the time she reached the door, she realized that it was very possible for a Plate Face to be beautiful, that her face was a blank canvas, and tomorrow, Lin-mei decided she was going to take up painting.





Saggar Bowl with Concave Lip
Ceramic

Spending an Afternoon with the Dead: Our Trek through the Parisian Catacombs

The raindrops were fat and steady that day in Paris, defying patches of sunshine that threatened to break through. Parisian women, elegant despite the "bad hair" weather, clutched their purses and darted into shops and cafés for shelter. We stood out as Americans. Ignoring the rain, we walked slowly to Gare de Lyon, our metro station. The entrance of that station was predictable and always seemed like the portal to a darker world. We'd see the old man sitting there on the steps-red-faced, bleary eyed, and dirty. He'd grunt something at us in coarse French, and we'd walk by him as always. The Gypsy children would be playing just inside, and if we weren't careful, they'd steal from us. The narrow hallways would smell like piss and sweat and maybe worse. That was the ugly side of Paris, the one that existed far beneath the slick, wet streets and the bright cafés.

It was the summer of 2002, and a handful of French students from ETSU had chosen to study in France for five weeks. Our classes were held at a travel center rather than a college or university, but they were taught by honest-to-God French people. Much to our delight, most classes required little studying. For one of them we were each only expected to give the other students in the class a tour of a Parisian landmark or attraction. We formed groups of two for the project and chose our destinations. My partner, Amber, was my Johnson City roommate and close friend. We decided to give everyone a tour of the Catacombs, an underground bone depository.

Amber and I knew little about the Catacombs when we started to pull our tour together. I remembered from French history classes that Paris had an extensive network of underground tunnels dating back to 60 BC when the Romans had used them for rock quarries. Amber and I both knew

that bones had been deposited in those underground tunnels sometime in the mid-1700s, but we didn't fully understand why. We only knew that the tunnels were haunted. Rumor had it that an explorer once went down into the depths of a tunnel that was not opened to the general public. He journeyed alone and was never seen again. Because we had heard more scary stories than factual information, we decided to buy a guidebook.

The book proved informative. Apparently le Cimetière des Saints-Innocents, a large cemetery in Paris, began to overflow with human remains in the late 1750s. It had been filled past capacity for many years because for decades nearly all of Paris's dead were buried at that single location. Though the exact number of bodies was impossible to know, researchers estimated that number to be more than two million-approximately one-fourth the current population of New York City.

The guidebook was enthralling and grotesque in its descriptions. It appealed to the basest human curiosities, leading me to question the veracity of its claims. Rotting bodies spilled out into the street, it said. The grounds of the cemetery were elevated more than ten feet above the surrounding land, and any significant rain would dissolve a new layer of soil, exposing its vile contents. Millions of bodies, literally millions, were rising to the surface, threatening the living like something out of a horror film. The stench grew so bad that wine turned to vinegar and sweet milk soured in a day. People were getting sick, and officials declared the situation a public health hazard. Something had to be done; the "innocents" were causing too much trouble.

It was a rainy afternoon when Amber and I visited the Catacombs for the first time. Our tour was days away, and we couldn't very well guide people through the ossuary if we hadn't been there ourselves, even if we did have a map. I was nervous as we entered the metro station that day, unsure what to expect and frightened at the possibilities. We heard the metro coming and hurried to board it, hoping we would be able to snag seats for the long ride to Denfert-Rochereau, the stop where we could purchase tickets and enter the mouth of the Cata-

combs. We chatted as the metro made its way to our destination.

We felt disoriented upon our arrival. The metro station wasn't like Gare-de Lyon, and we weren't sure how to get out of it. We finally made our way to street level, but our confusion didn't end. The entrance to the Catacombs was supposed to be right across the street, but we didn't see anything. We walked around the station twice, hoping to find a map. We finally came upon a little brick building with a green metal roof. It was the entrance we had been looking for. We stood in a small line to buy tickets before being guided to the strangest stairwell we had ever seen.

The stairwell looked ancient and was very dark. It was so narrow and tight that my shoulders almost touched the walls on both sides. It was a spiral staircase, and the stairs themselves were wide on one end and inconceivably narrow on the other. The stairs were hard stone, and there were no handrails. Tripping would have caused serious injury. The staircase went on forever, winding down and down and down until we were so dizzy that whatever awaited us at the bottom would have been a welcomed sight.

Though we expected to step right into a bone-filled tunnel, the stairs actually led us into a small, white room with a brief pictorial history of the Catacombs. We walked right through it into what felt like a cave. The floor, walls, and ceiling were made of stone and dirt. It was spooky enough, but there were no skeletons in sight. We walked almost in silence for several minutes until we came upon an old sign: "Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here."

We gasped when we finally came to the entrance of the ossuary itself. The bones were much closer to the walkway than we had anticipated, and they seemed to extend as far as the eye could see. We hesitated for a moment. I don't remember now which one of us was the brave leader, but within a few minutes we were making our way through the abode of the dead. We walked straight down the middle of the tunnel, knowing that if we weren't careful we would brush up against skulls and forearms. Just as I was beginning to regret choosing destination for our tour, the walkway

mercifully widened.

From that point on Amber and I walked side by side as much as we could, not wanting to get separated for even a second. We initially moved quickly, pausing only to read the occasional inscriptions on plaques and markers. Some of these inscriptions dated back to the mid-1700s, and they shocked us with their macabre and troubling words. The only plaque that still rings clear in my mind warned, "If you have ever watched a man die, remember that one day the same fate awaits you." I wondered what possible comfort anyone could take from such a plaque, but immediately realized that comfort wasn't its purpose.

Our pace slowed as some of our nervousness melted away. We noticed a few isolated grave-stones on the walkway, probably the markers for rich and important people who were buried instead of being thrown into the gigantic piles. Some of them were war heroes. Others were political figures. Someone had found it important to keep those great men separate, as if to ensure that their earthly bodies would rise higher and faster to claim the finest luxuries of Heaven.

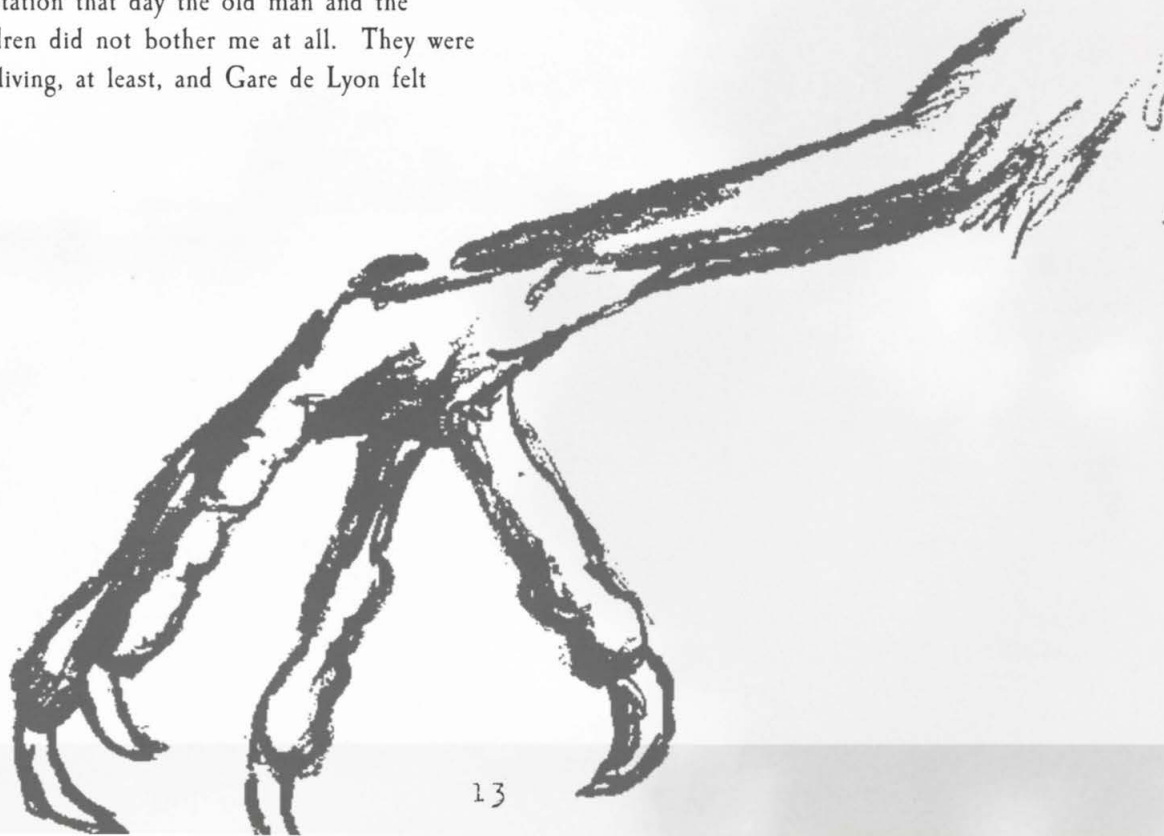
The skeletons of the more common folk formed massive bone walls that stood on both sides of our path. The symmetrical piles of bone seemed to be about six feet high and twenty feet deep. The skulls that made up the front surface of each wall had often been strategically placed to form designs. On some, the skulls formed an arch with a small cross at the top, representing a church. On others they formed large crosses. One particularly elaborate picture looked like a crown, and I paused in front of it for a better look.

My eyes suddenly focused on a gap in the design. A perfect, round hole announced the absence of a skull. Someone had taken a ghastly souvenir. As we marched on through the ossuary, we noticed more conspicuous gaps. Amber was appalled. I acted disgusted, but in truth, I wasn't even surprised. I could see how darkness and easy access to bones would provide ample temptation for a kid looking for bragging rights. The thieves were mostly young men, I decided. American and German, not French. I tried to imagine those skulls sitting on shelves in Tuscaloosa frat houses and

Munich apartments. In my mind they wore sunglasses, party hats, and toothless grins. They suddenly seemed like lucky chosen ones, kidnapped from that dark grave to rejoin the living and share in a good joke.

I had had enough of the dead for one day and was ready for the path to lead us up the stairs and back into the light. Soon enough, it did. When we emerged from the long staircase, I was dizzy again and my legs were tired. When we exited the building the rain had stopped and the sky was bright. I squinted my eyes. We were moles, climbing out of the damp earth into the hazy sunlight. I looked around and realized that we weren't back at the same entrance. We had exited from an entirely different building and I hadn't even noticed. Lost again.

Purely by accident and good fortune we stumbled back onto the Denfert-Rochereau station. We crossed the street and stopped at a small stand for cheese crepes and soda before boarding the metro that would take us back into our world of familiarity. We sat on a bench to eat. Amber suggested that we visit the Catacombs one more time before our tour, and I agreed. On the metro ride back I thought about where we had been and where we were going. I was thankful for my youth and health and strength, but at the same time felt it all threatened. When we stepped off the train into our metro station that day the old man and the Gypsy children did not bother me at all. They were among the living, at least, and Gare de Lyon felt like home.





Shade
Photography

i was still awake in time for church

i found jesus that night in my bed
your arms stretched out, forming the crosspiece
the post and lintel of your body
a holy architecture

i feel like-
like seven years old again, home
from sunday school,
dropping my bible onto my bed,
its tissue pages crumpling open and exposed
on wrinkled and unmade sheets.

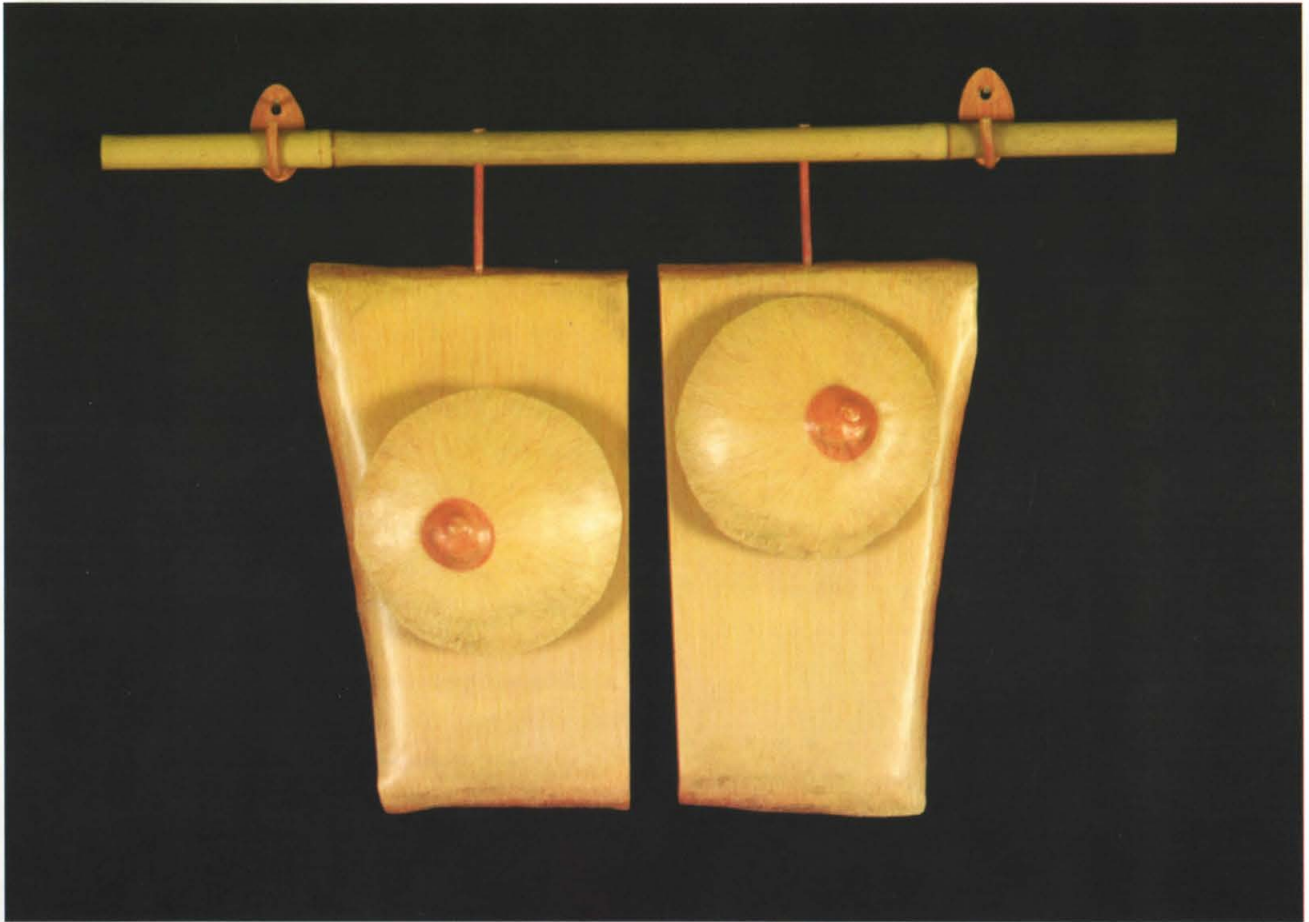
this is how you lie, your tissue pages
folded open but illegible.
this is how you lie,
sunday sermons and after-church lunches
laid out one upon one upon one.

save me, save me, let me worship you;
please say you'll be here in the morning.
stay with me and tomorrow,
we can go to church together
and confess tonight's sins.

third place artwork
Laura Roehl



Bubbles
Fibers



Googly
Mixed Media

Funner-up artwork
Aleta Chandler Cooper

Tears for Anthony

I'm not one of those writer-guys, so don't expect this to be too great. The only reason I'm writing this down in the first place is because Anthony Dalis can't do it. Not that he could even if he was alive, but so what? The point is he's not alive anymore and everybody around here knows why and nobody cares. Except me.

I almost hate everybody for what they did to him, those stupid ba-scoundrels. I'd call them bastards but I don't use that word anymore. Not since I got saved. I got saved a few years ago, and I've been pretty good about my language and everything. At least until I start thinking about Anthony. Then I just can't help it. It's like the words are just sitting there in the back of my mind like a cat waiting to pounce. Or like those helium balloons that float away when you let them go, only they never disappear completely. They just linger, sort of. Until somebody pops them. Well, that's what pops me.

Them.

I tried to get Anthony to be saved with me once. But he just couldn't understand what I was trying to tell him. That's the way it was with Anthony. He couldn't hardly understand you a lot of the time. He could, though, when it was something he wanted to understand. And I still believe to this day, more than I believe a lot of things, that Anthony wanted to be saved. He just didn't get it.

Exactly how I met Anthony I don't quite remember. He was just always around, I guess. In a neighborhood like mine, see, people always talk about everybody, especially if someone is different, so when you finally see them or talk to them up close, you feel like you already knew them or something. Anthony was certainly different, so of course they talked about *him*. It was mostly the women, though. I can hear them now at all their nightly gatherings: "There goes that Anthony Dalis fella. He's crazy. That's that crazy Anthony."

Ah, what do they know anyway? I think people who learn about the world from their front

porches or their yards don't know much about anything if you ask me. They just sit around and sip coffee and talk about how nice the breeze feels, waiting for something to happen. Well, I guess what happened to Anthony will give them something to talk about until they see heaven or hell. Probably hell for most of them since all they do is sit around and gossip about everybody. But as long as the devil has a good front porch, I don't guess they'll care one way or the other.

I was about nine the first time I ever saw Anthony. Sure, I'd seen him around the neighborhood plenty of times, usually riding his antique bicycle or just walking around the block, but I'd never spoken to him or seen him up close. I remember that night so clearly. I was walking from my house to my Nan's, and a dark figure started coming toward me. I was a little nervous, but then he walked under the orange glow of one of our streetlights and I could see who it was. I saw the long, sandy locks of hair coming out from beneath his old, beat-up black hat. His "cowboy" hat, he called it, though it didn't look anything like one. I would find out later that that didn't matter to him, and regret ever thinking otherwise.

His long-sleeved button-up shirt was black, too, but it was faded quite a bit. He walked closer and closer, down the sidewalk. I was walking up. I stopped a few seconds before Anthony did, just to see what *he* was going to do. Or maybe I was just scared.

He always looked at the ground when he walked, as he was doing that night. But when he stopped he looked up slowly. The first thing I noticed: his eyes. He didn't look directly at me, but just past my left ear, as if he never even saw me. But, God, those eyes! They were completely flooded with the most unstained blue I had ever seen. It was like there were no whites in his eyes. Only blue. Like water, but not the way water really looks. The way it should look.

We both stood there for a minute or so. I wanted to say something. Finally I did.

"Hey, Anthony," I said. Some icebreaker.

"Hey, bud. Wha ya say?" he replied, a little slurred.

I was pretty sure that's what he said to

everybody when he first saw them, considering he responded almost before I was finished. I felt like he didn't even know who he was talking to.

"Not much," I said. "Just headin' to my Nana's."

"Yeah. Yeah," he said, as if he already knew where I was going or something.

I didn't know what else to say. I just stood there and looked at him. I knew it was impolite to stare at people, but he didn't seem to notice anyway. He had a pretty thick beard that was just a little darker than his hair, and his face was quite round, and it was dark, too, making his eyes seem even more piercing. He looked a lot like Jesus, only fatter.

"Well, Anthony, I guess I'd better get to my Nana's before it gets too late." He laughed a little. So did I, just to be polite.

"I guess I'll see ya, then," I said.

"Yeah." He started laughing again. "Guess I'll see ya, he says," Anthony echoed as he kicked a small rock into the grass. "Yeah."

I walked past him and continued up the sidewalk. Something inside me made me not want to leave him. Maybe it was because I knew he would just stand there. It seemed like he never had any place to go. Come to think of it, he never came from anywhere, either. Like I said, he was just always around.

As I rounded the corner to switch sidewalks, I looked back once more, to see if he was still there. He was. To tell you the truth he hadn't even moved much. The real truth? I think he was still talking to me, but, as much as I wanted to run back there and jump back in the conversation, like I'd heard everything he said, it was getting late.

As hard as it was leave, I could already smell my Nana's house a few yards away. She always had something in the oven. I guess with six grandkids that lived in the same neighborhood, she didn't want to be caught off guard. As I jumped up onto the porch I could see her through the screen, moving around the kitchen and humming an old hymn. Opening the old screen door—I never knocked because "knockin's for strangers," Nana always said—I tried to sneak up behind her, but she was just turning around to where I was. "Ohh!" she

squealed. "There's my number one grandbaby!"

My grandmother always acted so excited when she saw me, like it was somebody important. I know I was important to her, but what I mean is somebody she doesn't see everyday. She always made me feel like the Prodigal Son every time I came to visit, which was almost on a daily basis. I just never could do that. Get excited about the same old people, I mean. But she was different that way. She loved everybody. For real, too. Not the way most church people do, especially preachers. They always say, "Love one another; love one another," and then, especially when you're a little kid, you go up to them after the service and tug at their suit coat and they say, "Not now, son," and brush you off like you're some little flea or something.

To my grandmother, every person was equal. It was almost like she couldn't ever see anybody's matted hair, or torn up clothes, or crooked teeth. On the other hand, she never seemed to notice shiny jewelry, or expensive dresses or nice cars, either. She knew how to see hearts. She knew the sound of sadness. She could make anybody who was sure they were nobody feel like somebody. And the best part about it was she never learned it from her parents or in Sunday school or anywhere. It just felt right, so she did it.

"Hey, Nana," I said. I always called her "Nana" to her face, or to my relatives. I had to. She said she wasn't old enough to be called "grandma" or anything like that, and she was right considering she was only forty when I was born. That's twenty years older than Mama, who's twenty years older than me. So I had to call her Nana, or she was liable to pick a switch or something. I always call her grandmother to everybody else, because "Nana" sounds too sissy.

"What smells so good?" I asked.

"Nothin' if you don't give me some sugar."

I walked over to her. Her arms were stretched out like a soft blanket you could just fall into. She kissed me about eight hundred times, and I flinched a little. She stopped all of a sudden, and looked at me the way she did when she would try to read something without her glasses.

"You too good to kiss your Nan?" she asked. "Too big?"

The biggest part of me was thinking that I

was. And one of my worst problems is saying what I'm thinking a lot of times, even before I decide whether or not I'm going to say it.

"Well, I am almost ten—"

"Aww, bull's puss!" she said.

I never understood what she meant when she said that. Still don't really, to be quite honest. But I always knew to change or take back what I said. Fast.

"I know, I know. Geez. I was just kiddin'. Couldn't you tell?"

"I guess so." She really knew better. "And don't say that!"

"What?"

"Geez.' It's just a short way of sayin' 'Jesus!' Same as takin' the Lord's name in vain. Right? Now come on in here and set down. Got hot brownies comin' right out-a-the oven."

I sat down at the table, the chair next to the end, and started pressing my finger down on the salt shaker, picking up hundreds of grains of salt like I was magnetized or something. Nana set the brownies on the sink and started humming again. She could really sing, too, so it was nice. I wasn't sure what song it was, but I knew it was a hymn. I always hated hymns, but it was different when she sang them. I could hear her pouring a glass of milk behind me. Putting the milk down along with a small plate of brownies, she sat next to me at the end of the table.

"So, what's on your mind?" she asked.

"Nothin," I lied. "It's just. . . Well, on the way over here I ran into that guy, you know, Anthony Dalis. It was dark, but I know it was him."

"And?" She was cutting my brownie into four pieces. But she didn't look at me.

"We didn't say much. He just sorta kep' repeatin' me."

"Mm-hmm," she said as she put the brownie on my plate, still not looking at me. You'd think she was uncomfortable even talking about the whole thing.

"Nana," I said, "Is there sun'fm wrong with him. I mean is he retarded or sunt'm?"

She was about to put a bite up to her mouth, but she stopped, like she saw a hair on it or something. After she put the brownie back down on

her plate, she looked over at me. I started feeling guilty, but it was more because of her look, not what I said. I really didn't think I said anything wrong.

"Child, do you even know what that word means? I mean what it really means."

"I don't guess so. Just the way ever'body uses it at school."

"Well, the way ever'body uses it at school ain't what I'm talkin' about. I want you to go home tonight and look that word up. Y'all've still got that dictionary, don'tcha?"

"Yeah, it's in Mama's closet."

"Good. Now, I know what ever'body around here says about him, but that don't make it right. Especially when they don't know the half of it! They all sit around here like God built the world up around them and...."

She stopped herself and looked up at me.

"I don't wanna get too heated now, son. I'll end up like them. And we're different, you and me, always remember that. And remember somethin' else for me, okay? God has a plan for ever'body. You, me, and even people like Anthony Dalis. We just gotta make sure we don't stand in the way of it. Right?"

"Yeah," I said.

She patted my hand and smiled, acting the same as she did when I first got there.

"Nana? What is it that everybody doesn't know?"

"Some other time, baby. Okay? You've gotta get on home now. Your mam'all have a fit."

She was right. Mama would have a fit. She wasn't like Nana. I mean, Mama's nice and all, but sometimes you wouldn't think they were in the same family.

When I got home, Mama was sitting in a chair next to the window, reading one of her magazines. She never even looked up as I walked past, but I heard her say, "It's late," when I was in the hallway. I went straight to her room and opened her closet door. I looked over my shoulder because I wasn't supposed to touch Mama's stuff without asking. But I didn't want to tell her about what I was doing. She would just think it was weird or something.

After digging through a mountain of shoes, I saw the old dictionary in the corner. It was faded and all the corners were bent, but I didn't think that had anything to do with what was inside.

I ran and kissed Mama goodnight, then hurried back to my room. I flipped to the R's and found the word almost right away. It said, "retard: make slow or slower; obstruct." That wasn't at all what I thought it would say. Did that mean something *made* Anthony the way he was? Is that what Nana was wanting me to see? The other thing I noticed had to do with the word itself. They had been teaching us in school about how to look up words and stresses and syllables and all that stuff. The little stress mark was on the second syllable, so the way we always used it at school wasn't even the right way. Ours sounded like REE-tard, while the dictionary said it was supposed to be re-TARD. Man, did we have it all wrong.

I went to bed that night knowing what I had to do. I couldn't take back every time I ever called somebody that name, but I had a good place to start.

It would be a few days before I would see Anthony again, and the way it happened seemed planned. But not by either of us, or anybody really. God, maybe. It was at our family's Fourth of July cookout, which took place every year at Nana's. Sometime in the middle of everything—the games, the screaming, the eating—somebody said, "Hey, isn't that Anthony over there?" pointing to a picnic table where the old hospital used to be (before our town had more than one doctor). "It's kinda sad," someone else said. A female voice. I couldn't tell you who said what because I was focused on Anthony. He was there all alone, on a day everybody else spent with family. He just sat there looking at his hands. No food. No games. Nobody. I suggested taking him a plate of food. Everybody else had already gone back to what they were doing, so no one heard me. Except for Nana. She already had a plate fixed, loaded with everything we had. I asked if I could be the one to take it. Mama said "I don't know," as she folded her arms. I said, "Please, I won't drop it." Nana looked at her and nodded. I ran to Nana, grabbed the plate, and started, carefully, toward where Anthony was sitting. He didn't look

up until I put the plate on the table. But once he did, I felt it. A connection. And this time he looked right at me, his eyes filling up with tears. It was the beginning of something beyond us both.

Our camping trip was set for early August, sometime before school would start back. We'd spent nearly every day together since the Fourth, Anthony and me. Went exploring mostly. I taught him about nature, like different kinds of flowers and trees I'd learned about from Nana and from school. Anthony held branches out of the way for me and knocked down spider webs with an old broomstick he found near the sewer plant. It seemed like his sole purpose was to look out for me. His round face would light up when he felt like he helped me in any way.

I couldn't openly talk about the camping trip. Mama wouldn't have approved. Nana might've, but I wasn't about to take any chances. We set out just before dark on August 2. Nobody saw us leave, or so we thought. It just seemed like too much of a coincidence that we ran into Stormy Blackwell and her two sidekicks as we approached the old bridge just outside the neighborhood. One of the two was Halsey Weaver, a big curly-headed boy who wore his denim overalls with no shirt underneath. I never saw him in anything else; it's kind of funny and sad at the same time.

They popped out from under the bridge like a bunch of trolls, Stormy leading the pack of course. Her real name was Storm, which I always thought was sort of pretty, but everybody else started calling her Stormy and it stuck, I guess. There was nothing nice about it, but it suited her much better.

"Well, well," she said with her hands on her hips. "If it ain't sissy boy and the RE-tard!" She looked at the other boy, who I'd never seen before, and he started laughing. Halsey just stood there like a big dumb animal. I scrunched up my nose and tried my best not to cry.

"Runnin' away fellas?" Stormy asked.

"No, we're going camp..." the rest of my sentence trailed off, as I turned my head away.

"What?"

I said we're goin' camping!"

Stormy drew back, I guessed because no one had ever raised their voice at her before. She half-closed her eyes at me, the way people do when you know they're screaming inside. She always wore her hair pulled back in a tight ponytail, and her elbows were scabbed over, just like all the boys. She sort of looked like a boy too, except for the fact that the front of her shirt was starting to poke out a bit.

Surprisingly, she didn't try to punch me or anything. Instead, she pushed me aside with her shoulder and marched toward Anthony. Stormy circled him, looking him over like she was inspecting him or something. She leaned close to his chest, sniffed, then stepped back holding her nose. "Your re-tard friend here smells like a damn wet dog!" she said to me. I felt my face turning redder and I wanted to punch her so bad, but I could hear Big Halsey and the other boy shuffling and breathing behind me. Anthony just stood there looking around and laughing nervously.

"He's got a name, ya know," I said to her, gritting my teeth.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" She turned toward him. "I'm sorry, An'ny!" (That's what most of the people in the neighborhood called him, as if that was really how he said his name).

He laughed again, then took a step toward me. But Stormy cut him off. And started again. "What's a matter, An'ny? Did I offend you?" She pushed him in the chest. "Huh, An'ny? Are you offended? You probly don't even know what that word means, do ya, stupid!"

She kept pushing him and poking him until he tripped on a rock and fell into a sitting position against the bridge. Something inside me exploded. I ran toward her, forgetting everything around me, and pushed her as hard as I could. She went face first into the gravels and slid a few feet. I didn't know if it was wrong to want the rocks to tear her skin open. I didn't care, either.

I turned to see the other boys coming at me, ready to kill me. I picked up Anthony's stick and smacked Halsey in the side of the face with it. After he fell to the ground with a thud, I raised the stick to hit him again. The other boy begged me to stop, so I held off. The sound of my breathing alone probably scared him a little. He told Big Halsey to

get up and they went over to help Stormy. The three of them took off toward home, Halsey holding his chubby red face, and Stormy picking pieces of gravel from her palms. She turned back just before they disappeared behind the trees and screamed, "You're gonna pay for this! You and your re-tard boyfriend!" I ignored her and went to help Anthony.

We climbed down below the bridge and started walking along the creek bank, to where we would camp. As it got darker, Anthony's eyes got worse. He could see okay during the day, but at night I had to hold his arm—and knock the tree branches out of *his* way for a change.

We set up the tent first. Then came the fire. Anthony said he'd go collect some wood, but I couldn't let him go off by himself. We sat around the fire when the sky turned black, and talked. I did most of the talking, actually. Anthony was a good listener. It was silent for a while, and I sat watching the fireflies as they blinked in the trees. Oh, how I wished Anthony could have seen them! He would've gotten so excited. I hated thinking that he didn't even know about the fireflies. Or a lot of things in the world. I told myself that maybe he had a memory of them from when he was a child. When his eyes were better. But I didn't ask him about it.

Sometime in the middle of the night a noise woke me up. I rolled over and heard Anthony whimpering. I thought he might have been having a nightmare. I touched his arm to try to wake him up, but he started screaming. "Don't! Please!" it sounded like. He brought his hands up like he was shielding his face or something. "Anthony!" I whispered. "Anthony, it's me!" His eyes opened but he never moved. I felt his body shake, real slowly, like he had the hiccups. Then I heard him crying. Not sure what to do, I unzipped my sleeping bag and rolled him over toward me. The rest of that night, and on into morning, I, a seventy-something-pound, nine-year-old boy, held Anthony, a man in his thirties, a man who weighed close to 200 pounds, a man who was my best friend, in my arms until the sun and the birds brought us back to life.

When we made it back to the bridge, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was still a little foggy, so Anthony couldn't see them: my mother and two

men I recognized from the neighborhood waiting for us on the bridge. As we climbed the hill, Mama grabbed me and the two men grabbed Anthony and threw him to the ground. I tried to scream at them but Mama already had ahold of my face. She dropped to her knees, to my level, and started saying something awful. "I don't care that you didn't tell me where you were going, son! Just tell me if he touched you! He touched you, didn't he? Somebody who lives across the creek said it sounded like a child was crying in that tent. Oh, my baby!"

I didn't say anything. I turned just in time to see one of the men kick Anthony in the stomach. But this time, there was nothing I could do.

Two weeks went by, and I still wasn't allowed to see Anthony. I was afraid I never would again. Sometimes I stood at the screen door, hoping to see him walk by, or at least hear the squeaking of his old bike. I never did. My heart couldn't forget him, but my mind, like all little kids' minds, moved on to other things. I might have forgotten him, I'm afraid, had he not shown up on our porch one night, looking for me. I'd had a birthday three days before, and I wanted him to be there. But I knew it wasn't possible. And I knew it wasn't his fault.

"Can you come outside?" he asked. There was only a screen between us, but it felt like miles.

"I don't know," I said, looking behind me to make sure Mama wasn't close enough to hear. "I turned ten the other day," I said, just to have something to say, not to make him feel guilty. He merely responded by being his same old self.

"Happy...Birthday, the other day," he said. Then his face lit up. "Happy Other-Day Birthday," he said, clapping his hands and laughing his high-pitched laugh.

I managed to smile and say thanks before I was almost knocked down. Mama was already screaming as she pushed open the front door, which hit Anthony in the head and knocked him off the porch.

"You stay away from my kid, you son of a bitch!" she screamed, pointing her finger at him. A finger he never even saw, I'm sure. "I'm callin' the police right n—"

Just then a patrol car was coming down the street. (The cops patrolled our neighborhood five

or six times a day because we were all considered troublemakers). Mama flagged them down and they came and took Anthony away. While they were putting him in the car, Mama was so caught up in telling the police to keep him away that I managed to sneak out the back door and head for Nana's. I assumed nobody would find me there, at least for a while. When things go wrong, most parents think kids won't run to the most obvious places. They would probably look in Cooper's Woods or up on the hill. Then they'd search the creek bank near where we camped. Finally, they'd call Nana's. I nearly jerked her screen door off the hinges when I got there, but she didn't seem to care. I was out of breath when I tried to tell her what was wrong.

"Nana...took...Anthony...Mama..."

"Calm down, baby," she said, pulling me close. "Shh."

"Nana," I said, finally able to breathe again. "You have to tell me what everybody doesn't know about him. I gotta know."

"Okay. When I was a teenager I used to baby-sit Anthony and his brother and sister. Their daddy was a drunk who didn't care anything about them. He came home some nights very upset...and very drunk. He would line them up and...". She stopped and pursed her lips together. "...he would hit them in the head with pots and pans; or whatever he could find. Their cryin' didn't stop him. Nothin' could've stopped him. They just laid there, cryin' and hopin' to God he would pass out drunk or at least get dizzy and set down."

She said this as if she had confessed her very own sin. Then she broke down crying, and so did I. "So that's why he's the way he is," I said. "I knew it wasn't his fault! I knew it!" She shook her head.

"But why, Nana? Why?"

"God knows, child," she said, rocking me gently. "God knows."

It happened when I was out for a walk one evening, right before dark, as I was rounding what we in the neighborhood called Third Street. So many kids were always playing and screaming outside that I didn't think anything of it at first. It's funny sometimes how things look different when

we think back on them. The grass smelled the same, that just-cut smell that will be part of summers forever to come. Everything that chirps and buzzes on summer nights was chirping and buzzing. Yet, something wasn't right. I had this feeling in my chest, like I was going to be sick. Then I heard the screaming again, a sound that still keeps me up some nights.

"An'ny! Hey, An'ny! Over here, stupid!" It was a girl's voice. Then two other voices. "No, this way! Over here!" I walked as fast as my ten-year-old legs could go, almost jogging. After a few seconds I could see them, Big Halsey, Stormy, and a few kids who had gathered to watch, I guessed. They were standing next to the water, screaming and laughing. It had rained all day the day before, and the three storm drains that emptied into the same ditch had formed a sort of mini-lake. We always played there when it was dry, but when it rained hardly any of us was allowed because it could get up to eight feet deep.

I started running when I saw Anthony on the opposite side of the water, looking dizzy and lost. And helpless. They kept screaming for him, knowing he couldn't see them. He followed their voices, until he stepped out over the edge and disappeared below the muddy water. They all started laughing and pointing. I ran faster and faster as the tears poured down my cheeks. It seemed like I could never get there. By the time I got close enough to see, I wished I was blind. Or that it was a bad dream and I would wake up any second. I saw Anthony's hand reach up for the branches of the willow tree that hung over the water. The branches weren't strong enough. I couldn't swim, so I started screaming at them: "Help him! Please!" They all just stood still, looking shocked like it wasn't their fault. Anthony Dalis never came back up. His old black hat floated on top of the water like in one of those dumb cartoons. Only this was real. I looked over at Stormy, who actually looked sorry for the first time in her life.

I turned and ran right into Nana, who must've seen what was happening from her kitchen window and came rushing down. She told her neighbor, Ruth, to call the ambulance, and soon the whole neighborhood was outside to see what was

going on. Me and Nana stood there, crying and praying together, until help came almost a half hour later.

It's been almost four years since that day. A lot of things have happened in my life—junior high came and went, girls have come and gone—but I haven't forgotten my best friend. I couldn't make myself go to the funeral; Mama wouldn't have let me anyway. I did ride my bike by the funeral home, just to have my heart broken even more: I only saw four people come outside after it was over. Two were his brother and sister. One was the preacher. The other was Nana. I still pray for him all the time, usually the same prayer:

Dear God,

My heart hurts. Everything hurts. I don't understand why you took Anthony. Maybe I'm not supposed to. Nana says it was your will. Mama doesn't care. I think maybe you had something else planned, but Stormy and them just got in the way. But for whatever reason, I just wanted to ask you something. If Anthony is there with you, could you please take care of him? Will you make sure he's okay, and that he's happy? From what I know about you, I know you don't overlook anyone. But he was overlooked his whole life down here. Maybe you could especially look out for him. You know, give him a special place and everything. He's the one who's quiet, and he looks a lot like you...just a little bit fatter.

Amen.

I've said that prayer at least a hundred times since his death. It makes me feel better. I've heard some people say that if you pray for something more than once, then you don't have enough faith that God will handle it. To me, it just means you actually care about what it is you're praying for. And sometimes, after I pray, I just like to sit back and think. I usually take my hat from its hanger—one of my old baseball trophies—put it on, and just remember the good things. It's a black cowboy hat. It doesn't look much like one, but that's okay. Because underneath there's something only the heart's eye can see.



fourth place artwork
LARRY ROGERS

Torn
Photography

And Hold the Mustard

When I was four, my little sister Jenna was two, and that was the very least of her problems. At that age, God couldn't have pried me from my mom's side, but Jenna was different. She was that very special breed of child that needed to be bridled with the child bungee-leashes that Velcroed around the wrist to ensure that the sacred sphere of one would never too closely intersect with another. My parents bought it, tore it out of the plastic blister, and I had only assumed that they purchased it so my stuffed white tiger, Nigel, wouldn't terrorize the household anymore by drinking all the half-and-half in the refrigerator or stealing the Children's Secrets throat lozenges that tasted like Jolly Ranchers. Now he would finally be under control. I took the leash, strapped one end around his neck and led him proudly down the hall. He took to the leash surprisingly well, considering what a beast he was—all fifteen inches of white plush.

"Kari, that's not *for* you," Mom scolded promptly, amusedly, unfastening Nigel and handing him back to me.

When the family took a trip to the mall the next day, I found out what it was for. Jenna took to the leash quite well, considering what a beast she was—all 30 pounds of bumbling roly-poly. She could look into whatever window she chose, but only for a brief time before she was pulled along, on down the walkway. It was a conclusion Mom and Dad had reached after having a close call when Jenna picked up a toy bracelet and struck out to find Mom and show off her new treasure. Two hours later, after the mall had been sealed and the security guards' ranks had been exhausted, she emerged from seemingly nowhere, grinning, bracelet clutched tightly in her chubby hand. I had gotten loose from my mother only once, and I regretted it bitterly

when the story was relayed of the treasure Jenna had collected. I looted the "Employee's Only" section of Proffitt's when I was three, and gleaned only the silly pencil-toppers and cheap pens, and not even the department store shut down. My stint on the lam hadn't quite paid off.

This day was the beginning of a whole new era though, an era where Jenna had only a certain radius to which she could extend. She wasn't thrilled about being held back in such a way, but could manage just enough to entertain herself, as always. Jenna ran as fast as she could until the cord could stretch no more and peered into the window she ended up in front of. Then she would turn and with her mouth shaped into a tight little "O" of surprised glee and her brows arched up as far as they would go, she'd wait until we caught up to her to show us what new fortunes she had discovered. Then, she would ask for it.

Jenna asking for things was a much different experience than another child asking for things. Kids ask, parents say "No," kids kick and scream, parents say, "Yes." Jenna asked. Parents said "No." Jenna asked until she saw a brand new thing to ask for, usually about ten or fifteen minutes later. She woke up in the morning with a new thing to want. She went to bed at night asking for a great thing she had *just* thought of. It was a relentless cycle of want and denial, of want and acquiring, and then denial again, and it didn't matter if she had just gotten a candy bar or just had a birthday or if Christmas was tomorrow—she would ask, just in case. When we went on an outing and took Jenna along, the duty was usually divided. One parent would take me to go looking for clothes or what was needed, and the other was placed on Want Duty with Jenna. Their job was to, in effect, pull a Wanting Rope-A-Dope on my sister, wearing her out by showing her all the things she could ask for without actually letting her get in a Tantrum-Grade state of want. If it were effective, she would conk out on the drive home.

My mom had me, so dad was placed on active duty for the afternoon and given the leash. When it was time to go home, we would meet in the Food Court, maybe grab an ice cream, and head out. It was a good plan. But the mall was very crowded

that day, I remember, and through the legs and waving paper trays of fries and pizzas, I could barely make out my little sister's form as she wove her way through the bodies. She saw me too; she looked right at me. Dad was falling far behind, and craning his neck to make sure he didn't fall too far behind. God knows what could happen.

Scientists say that the average person is not aware of eighty-five percent of their surroundings. It's what makes eyewitnesses to crimes such a dubious source. Eighty-five percent is a lot of the world to miss, and while some people would argue that statistic, I wholeheartedly believe it for adults. Kids, though, they see everything. Jenna was grinning her irrepressible toothy grin and toddling along just fine, until out of the corner of one eye, she spotted something. Her eyes swung off to the far left, and her course, ever so slightly, changed along with it. Dad didn't notice, but he still watched. People moved out of her way as she plodded on, fixated on something across the Food Court of the mall. A look crossed Dad's face for a brief second, and suddenly he thrust forward in the crowd. Jenna extended a toddler finger into the air and kept walking.

And then came a moment I remember so vividly that if I saw the man today, I would shake his hand and thank him profusely for what he had given to me, my sister, and my entire family for generations to come. A moment that my father would mull over, reconstruct in his mind, and even write poems about in order to make sense of it. We all saw now what Jenna had seen moments earlier; a single stripe of bright yellow mustard down the golden-brown side of a corndog, almost completely indiscernible in the buzz of the mall, attracted my sister like ill-fated Eve.

Time slowed to near stopping. My mother held her breath, frozen in place and too far away to stop the inevitable. I watched on with a four-year-old's eyes.

And then, for reasons still debated in our family (my father says providence, my mother says angels), every person within a ten-table sweep that could have seen turned the opposite direction. The man holding the corndog let it droop over to her exact finger-level as he casually chatted with

friends. Jenna, her eyes never darting, left only a small wake in the mustard as she dragged her two-year-old finger that had been God-only-knew-where across the man's corndog. Dad surged forward and swooped her up, leash and all, as she passed her mustardy finger into her mouth and smiled, bright as sunshine, happy as a little bird.

Should he buy the guy a new dip-dog? Should he apologize? Should he make Jenna apologize? Dad settled on a plan, tried and true in the Hancock family and carried on by at least one daughter to this day--*run* and no one would be the wiser. We didn't look back as we retreated.

Life is big, and it offers so many things. Sometimes we are fortunate enough to have it dangled in our faces. Sometimes, we have to barely catch it out of the corners of our eye and hunt it down. Perhaps to the chagrin of others, perhaps to their laud and admiration. Maybe the man ate the corndog without noticing. Maybe he looked down and saw that there was a tiny finger track through his mustard. I don't know. Maybe my sister will remember and write her own story someday, or maybe she'll forget it in the hum of the rest of her life. Maybe I'll write the Great American Novel, or maybe I just can't. I will take advice from my sister for once, and not let the leash hold me back.



1021 Railroad Ties
Photography

honorable mention artwork
Randall Green

Vituperation

We would speak of love, wishes, cabbages and
kings,
and whether they are here to stay,
but pray, let us talk of happier things.

As time advances, the clock bell rings,
signifying another dream birthed and fallen by
the way.
We would speak of love, wishes, cabbages and
kings,

not the sound of the Loon as it sings.
Is it a cry for help, or a defiant scream? Either
way, I pray -
But pray, let us talk of happier things.

It would be better for us to sing
about the various ties that bind. Although, this
is the game we'd play:
We would speak of love, wishes, cabbages and
kings,

to ease us of such a burden-of strings
bound around our terracotta hearts of clay.
But pray, let us talk of happier things.

Such a desire carries a peculiar sting,
for our night consumes the day.
We should speak of love, wishes, cabbages and
kings,
But pray, let us talk of happier things.



Self Portrait of a Librarian

Charcoal

honorabile
mention artwork
Jacqueline King

Fingers off the Home Keys

Her mother had told Laura she was crazy when she confessed she wanted to be a reporter. Liza Jane Stallings had told her mom the same thing, but she had heard all through her childhood, "You've got a pretty face made for TV." Even though Laura had never been in a beauty pageant and was cursed with a face for radio, she knew she could tell a story. After two years in the business she had learned that anyone could wear makeup and look nice, which is crucial, but not anyone can tell a good story.

"There are plenty of good jobs at the factory with me," her mother had said when Laura came home from school in junior high and professed her destiny. A reporter from the local TV station had spoken to their English class that day and Laura had soaked it in like rain in the desert. The reporter had stood before the class in a purple suit; Laura remembered because it was her favorite color. She wore matching violet-tinted lipstick and earrings with different colored stones that glittered when her head moved. The disorder of the classroom didn't frazzle the reporter at all. She kept on talking through Jess's fart noises and even caught a wad of paper Billy threw across the room. All the chaos seemed to make her more focused on her speech to the hellions. "I'm meant to be a reporter, a famous Network reporter," Laura had insisted to her mother. The TV reporter who had talked to them told them how the "Network" was the big time. "Well, then. You'd better learn how to dress," her mother had responded, donning her "dressed up" outfit of faded Lee jeans and a Bud Light t-shirt.

Laura had started watching every newscast she could on the family's second-hand console TV, memorizing each detail. She had stood in front of the mirror of their trailer's bathroom mocking the anchors down to every nod, gesture, and nuance.

She reported live from Mockingbird Lane on fires, wars, and murders. Her hairbrush was the microphone that amplified the insightful things she had to say so that viewers around the world turned off the TV a little bit smarter. She would climb into the bunk bed she shared with her little brother and dream of a world full of money, exotic places, beautiful people, and fame. In her dream TV-world, packing tape didn't hold up disintegrating wallboard in a mobile home and smoky alcohol fumes didn't waft in under the door mixing with screaming and crying all hours of the night.

Of course, no one in her hometown knew that TV news was anything but easy, glamorous, and exciting. In the four years she'd spent at the State University, attending classes while working full-time at the mall where the high school kids hung out, she'd only gone home twice. Once she hitched a ride with a classmate to be there after her mother's emergency hysterectomy. And once she'd saved up the Greyhound fare and rode home for the holidays.

That Christmas, instead of using her employee discount for her own new clothes, as most of her co-workers had, Laura bought her little brother a brown wool dress coat that her manager said looked just like the ones boys were wearing in Milan and Paris. Her mother and brother had gathered around the tree Christmas morning, ignoring the bad breath and crusty eyes, just as they had every year since Laura could remember. She handed Josh the package wrapped in cartoon characters, beaming with pride thinking of how he would look in the nicest coat in school. Josh's uninterested reaction hadn't surprised her; she knew a 10-year-old couldn't appreciate any gifts that weren't wrapped in cellophane, promising destruction.

"Now where is he supposed to wear that?" her mother had asked, even before she'd finished opening the tiny pearl earrings Laura had wrapped in delicate pink foil for her.

"What do you mean? This winter, when it gets cold..." Laura had begun to explain.

"No, Laura. I mean he doesn't have a suit, or even need one, so what's he supposed to do with a dress coat? You think he can wear that to school?" Her mother's hands were shaking and she sounded like she was gargling water through her words.

"It's okay if it gets dirty," Laura had said as she pulled the coat out of the box for Josh to try on.

"Laura, we don't need you trying to help us out of the hole you think we're in. Josh and I are perfectly happy. Can't you see that?"

"I just thought it'd be nice to have a coat that didn't come from Goodwill for once."

At that point Josh had run out of the room in tears, scared the stomping feet and loud words would make the Christmas tree come crashing down on him. Laura's mother had asked her to leave and not come back if she thought she was too good for them. Since then, through phone calls to her brother and older sister, Laura had made damn sure her mother knew how perfect her life was without them.

No one knew she was living in a one-bedroom apartment in the part of town where drive-by shootings were as common as must-cover Humane Society events. No one knew how tough it was to sleep at night because the neighbors fought like city commissioners and the peeling, yellowed walls were as thin as the paper in her Reporter's Notebook. No one knew Laura had to fix her own hair and apply her own makeup. And no one knew she wasn't a reporter.

It will happen, she insisted to herself as she pulled into the station's parking lot and wedged her car in between the advertising manager's BMW and the general manager's Lexus. Every day began with the possibility of covering the story of a lifetime by being in the right place at the right time and having it all fall together just perfectly. That would be her ticket out of the shag-carpeted, triple-bolted, one-room apartment and into a bigger market that would lead her to Network.

"Laura Lovell. Just the woman I've been looking for," the six-o'clock show's producer sang as soon as she walked in the door. Samantha was Laura's best friend. Actually, she was Laura's only friend. In the two years Laura had worked at the station she had managed to keep a strictly professional relationship with almost everyone there. She wasn't interested in sharing her dreams with others so they could snicker behind her back and tell her she was out of her league. Sam knew about Laura's

past and her goal to be a famous reporter someday, and she never once told her it was impossible. Being a producer in a medium-sized market was Sam's dream, and she was living it very successfully. Awards didn't interest her, but everyone at the station respected her news judgment and thought her an excellent writer. Sam had a family that still gathered every Sunday for dinner and took a vacation together every summer in Pensacola. To Sam, she had it all and didn't need to aspire to a bigger place.

"I need a VO for the show about this stupid flu vaccine all the old people are getting. Hey, do you want to go out tonight?" Sam had asked Laura the same question her first day at the station.

"Not tonight. There's a Barbara Walter's special on I'm dying to see. Do you have the video for the VO?"

Laura's job was editing tapes. She spent most of her days editing voice-overs, or VO's. Technically she was called a "Production Assistant," but the other reporters liked to call her "Pee On" behind her back. She heard them giggle about how a tape editor like her wore suits to work when only the on-air people needed them. Other editors wore jeans and sweatshirts. Her face would flush and she'd be as ticked as a scooped competitor, but she still dressed the part everyday. The reporter from junior high told them to dress for the job they wanted, not the one they had. She wanted to be a famous award-winning reporter.

"Hey, good job today," Sam said after the newscast was over and folks started trickling back into the newsroom.

"Thanks. You, too." Laura knew she was the best editor they had, even if no one except Sam thought to acknowledge it. She had been there longer than all the other editors and was often called on to train new "green" ones.

"You sure you don't want those drinks?" Every time they went out their conversations revolved mostly around work. Sam would give Laura all the dish on the anchors and reporters. Most importantly, she'd give Laura examples of what she thought they did right and wrong. They could drink in anonymity because they weren't on-air and no one recognized their faces.

"Maybe tomorrow." The show had been full of video and Laura's legs felt like spaghetti from all the editing and running around gathering tapes.

"Hot date?" Sam teased.

Laura rolled her eyes. Sam knew she had only dated one guy in the last two years, another tape editor named Cy. He'd dumped her the minute she told him she was saving herself for marriage. If there was one thing her mother had taught her, if only by example, it was to wait until you're legally bound to a man before you risk bearing his children. Three kids by three different men was her mother's way to figure that out, but not Laura. Thankfully Cy had moved to another city shortly after the breakup.

When Laura arrived home and reached her front door, she carefully unlocked the deadbolts, looking around to make sure no one was lurking in the shadows waiting to pounce. They'd had a story a while back where a woman had been attacked entering her apartment. She walked in and unloaded her shoulder bag onto the floor.

"Jesus Christ! What the hell are you doing here?" She had to take a few deep breaths to calm the heart that had just leaped pretty close to the stained ceiling. Her mother was sitting on her sofa and smoking a cigarette.

"What, no 'Hey mom! It's great to see you!'" Her hair was bleached blonde now. The red lipstick she'd worn for 20 years was beginning to bleed into the skin around her mouth. She wasn't wearing much makeup, and the lines around her eyes looked deeper than Laura had remembered.

"How did you get in here?"

"I told the manager I was your mamma and hadn't seen you in three years, and he let me right in," her mother said as she waved her hand and scattered ashes on the floor.

"Mother, I don't smoke in my house and you're dropping ashes on the rug." The avocado shag suddenly seemed much dirtier than it had when she'd left for work that morning.

"Oh, sorry," she said as she dropped the unfinished cigarette into the clear plastic fast food cup she was holding. "I wanted to see how my baby's doing, so I hopped on the bus and came all the

way to the city."

"Who's keeping Josh?" Her head was pounding and the smoke was making it hard for her to breathe. As much as Laura wanted to believe her mother was there to check on her well-being, she knew it was more likely because of money. Laura began inwardly counting the bills she had hoarded in the cedar box in her closet.

"Jim's watching him for me. Look, Laura..." her mom started.

"It's okay, mom. I don't have much, but I can loan you a little." Laura still stood in the doorway, but she started to move toward the bedroom.

"You think I came here to borrow money?" She could see color rise to her mother's cheeks.

"Well, I just assumed..." Laura's words trailed off as she watched her mother's head twitch back and forth.

"You know, that's fine. I don't know why I'm here," her mother said, gathering up her oversized shoulder bag.

"Mom, wait," Laura reached out to touch her sleeve, but it was too late.

Her mother rushed out the front door, leaving a trailing scent of menthol cigarettes and Lady Stetson. Laura bolted all three locks and leaned her head against the door. Her ears felt like they were on fire and her knees were shaking so badly she could hardly stand. She knew she wouldn't see her mother again for a long time. But, the twice-annual phone calls to her brother and older sister had become enough of family attachment for Laura. Of course, she always shipped birthday and Christmas presents that cost her a week's pay, which meant more bullion-cube-flavored noodle meals. She took pleasure in giving them things she knew they expected a TV-star sister should be able to give, even after the episode with the wool coat. Now her mother would go back and tell them all she wasn't living so perfectly after all. She wondered if they would bask in the story and "tsk tsk" what happens when someone leaves Smithtown.

Laura wished she could take a long, hot bubble bath to ease the tension that had formed in her neck. She could imagine the water spreading

over her and dissipating the concentrated heat burning her face. But she couldn't take a bubble bath. In fact, she'd never taken a bubble bath. The bathtub in the trailer she'd grown up in had been too small and too dirty most of the time. And the one she had now was rusting where the porcelain had chipped away and stained from years of dirty feet.

Instead she lay on her bed and turned on CNN. She had missed the Barbara Walters special, but she could still catch the latest on the SARS outbreak. The sound of the anchors' voices drifted through her head as she fell asleep, trying not to think about how her mother would break the news to everyone back home of their disastrous visit.

The next morning she put on an especially nice suit before heading to work. It was olive green with big gold buttons, and she knew it would look good on camera. She'd bought this one from the Jones New York section of the department store, and it wasn't even on the sale rack. She'd almost cried as she slipped the credit card across the counter to the lady with the black smock and prim smile. The cashier had no idea that the suit meant Laura would have to pay her phone bill late that month, if at all. The phone was the first thing to be sacrificed; she hardly ever used it and it was much better than risking cable.

Once at work she found out from Sam what tapes needed to be cut for the show. She headed into an edit bay, ignoring the smirk the young blonde reporter from somewhere up north gave her. Laura knew she was smirking at the suit, which was much nicer than the skinny blondes. I bet your mom and dad told you over and over how you could be anything you wanted, Laura thought bitterly.

"Laura?" Jeff, the news director, peeked his head into the door of the edit bay.

"Sir?" Laura could count on one hand the number of times the news director had spoken to her in the past two years.

"I have three reporters out sick today. That damn flu thing going around. All I've got is Jill and a shitload to cover. You up for a package?"

Her stomach dropped to her patent-leather boots and she could already feel the heat rise to her face.

"Of course!" she said a little too eagerly. A package. That meant her face and voice would be on TV instead of someone else's voice over tape she edited!

"Great. There was a fire out in Taylor County. I need a package at five and a live shot at six." Before she could respond he had already shut the door and headed back into the newsroom.

She left the edit bay and followed behind him. She held her breath as the assignment editor picked up a red marker from the silver tray and wrote her name up beside the story on the dry erase board for everyone to see. She turned to see Jill, the skinny blonde's, reaction. She looked Laura up and down with another disgusted smirk and walked away.

"No kidding? He's letting you do a live shot and everything!" Sam's incredulous reaction echoed her own disbelief. Laura had known this moment would come; their main anchor started out as a tape editor and worked her way up. Still, today was the day the two years of working hard to make sure her video never had jump cuts or flash frames would pay off. Today she would get to show she could do more than match video to a script down to the second.

"Let's go," Phil, the chief photographer, said as he pulled together his gear. They climbed into the live truck and moved toward the remnants of the fire. In two years Laura had never sat in the live truck, and she spent the trip becoming familiar with what she knew she'd see again. There was the two-way she'd heard reporters and photographers talk on hundreds of times, the cell phone and its cradle, and the airplane suction cupped to the windshield. She picked up the smooth, black plastic hand piece for the radio and held it in her hands. "KMB438 Mobile 1 to Newsroom," she imagined herself speaking into the dotted surface.

"Where are we going again?" Laura asked Phil. She knew Phil was a good photographer, though a bit pushy at times. She'd heard him arguing with the assignment editor about having to cover stories he thought were pointless.

"Taylor County. Smithtown. That place we like to call 'Smut-town.'"

"You're kidding. That's almost two hours

away." Shéd moved two hours and a lifetime away and didn't think shéd be returning. There had never been a story in Smithtown before. In fact, she didn't even realize their viewing area reached that far. She asked Phil about it, ignoring his last comment.

"Yeah, it's on the very, very far fringe. But, we've got the extra photographers shooting a bunch of local VO's since they don't have reporters to work with. Jill's local, so that leaves us on the fringe. Plus, we've got plenty of time."

She was glad it was cold enough to wear a turtleneck with her suit this morning because she could already feel the hives creeping up her chest. She only hoped they wouldn't make it to her cheeks before the live shot.

They pulled into Smithtown and Laura didn't feel the least bit nostalgic. She despised this town along with everything it represented. She found herself scowling as they passed the boarded-up hardware store that used to be a hangout for kids on Friday nights. Phil turned the wheel and she suddenly realized they were driving away from downtown, which consisted of a Dollar General and the town's only bank. They were heading right toward the trailer park she grew up in.

"Um, where exactly was this fire?" she asked Phil.

"Grab the address out of the console. You should have gotten all this information before we left the station. That's the reporter's job, you know," Phil scolded. As much as shéd paid attention, there were little details she wasn't sure of.

She looked at the address and suddenly felt as if shéd been punched in the gut with an iron fist. She couldn't tell Phil shéd grown up here. She couldn't tell him the address on the paper was the trailer across the street from her mother's.

They pulled the truck in front of the black hole that had been someone's home just hours before. Laura saw an oozing, waterlogged, crib-sized mattress in the front yard and imagined a child must've been sleeping there when the smoke started rising.

"Ready?" Phil asked. "We'll start with those people gathered over there. God, they look like they haven't showered in weeks."

Laura walked up to the group, thankfully no one she knew, and began asking questions about who had lived there and if anyone had been injured. She soon elicited an interview with the young woman who owned the mobile home. Everyone had escaped, but the woman and her children had lost absolutely everything except the singed pajamas they were wearing.

Phil and Laura gathered video of things littering the lawn--scorched family pictures, blackened building block toys, piles of ruined clothes, and an unrecognizable piece of furniture. They edited the video and interview, taking care to include the woman's tearful, "That was my home. I worked to buy that." Laura still hadn't seen anyone she knew, but it was the middle of the afternoon. As far as she knew her mother was the only one left from her past still living in the park, and she worked days at the toy factory.

They fed the video back to the station via microwave signal since the station owned a tower in the next county over. She refreshed her makeup in the truck's visor, making sure her eyeliner wasn't smudged. Laura was ready for her first live shot. Sam, the producer's, voice came through the ear-piece shéd borrowed from Phil and told her it was time to standby.

She had rehearsed the introduction to her piece all afternoon. Instead of a hairbrush she was holding a real metal microphone with a blue plastic square bearing the station's logo. Her hands were tingling and she was conscious of the stares of onlookers. She heard the anchor toss to her with, "Laura Lovell is standing by live with the story. Laura?"

The words flowed from her lips effortlessly as she walked toward the mobile home and showed folks at home what had happened. She followed the same path the fire's victims had taken, letting the viewers know just how narrowly the woman and children had escaped death. Phil trailed her moves with the camera as though they were intertwined in an intricate dance. Just as suddenly as it began, it was over. She heard Sam say, "You're clear. Good job, Laura," into her ear. She felt like a deflated balloon and shook her hands so that the feeling would return to them.

"That went well. I wouldn't be surprised if you get to do this more often," Phil said as he patted her on the back. She beamed beneath his praise.

When she saw the Buick pull into the driveway across the street the smile quickly disappeared. Her mother was home from work. She turned off the ignition and climbed out of the car, turning to gawk at the awkward truck and antenna sticking high into the air. Then she saw Laura. The look on her face was one of astonishment, then embarrassment. Laura felt her entire body tense as her mother ambled over to the truck.

"What happened here?" She directed her question at Phil but was looking straight at Laura.

"Well, I'd say it's pretty obvious someone should've put the cigarette out before they went to sleep," Phil quipped. Laura could tell he'd pegged her mother as another person that was a part of the scene. Of course, the grease-stained grey sweatshirt and eggplant sweatpants didn't help dispel the perception.

"Miss Lovell. It's so nice to see you again." Her mother was speaking to her the same way she'd spoken to the lady whose house she'd cleaned when Laura was a child. Laura had to make an effort to keep her eyebrows from drawing together in a confused frown. After a little too long of a pause, she responded.

"Thank you. You, too."

"You two know each other?" Phil asked as he looked down at her mother's third-hand Reeboks then back up to her teased hair. Laura held her breath.

"We met last year at a church retreat." Neither she nor her mother had ever been to a church retreat, and Laura couldn't figure out what made her feel guiltier, the lie or the fact that she was going along with it.

"I'd love to catch up," Laura said, suddenly noticing the small cream pearl earrings in her mother's ears, "but we're in a hurry to get back."

"Sure, sure. You take care now," she said before crossing the street to her own home.

While Phil and Laura packed up the equipment, her mother seemed rooted at the end of the driveway. Laura was disconcerted that her mother

stood and watched with arms crossed, hugging herself even though the temperature had warmed considerably and she was wearing a thick sweatshirt. As they made their way out of the neighborhood, Laura didn't make eye contact with the red-lipped woman.

Phil turned up the radio, making it obvious he wasn't interested in idle chit chat. Laura was busy thinking about what her mother would say to people now. She had to be confused; Laura lived in a bad apartment in a worse part of town but was a "TV star." She had pretended not to know Laura. How would she explain it to all the people who had been standing around, watching and wondering? Would she proudly boast to everyone that the glitzy reporter was her daughter? Would they even believe her? She knew she should be ashamed, but Laura was relieved that no one at work would find out she'd grown up in Smithtown.

They got back to the station while most everyone was at dinner. Sam had waited for her.

"You're a natural," Sam said as she walked into the newsroom.

"You mean it?" Laura asked her. She'd always believed it, but never had the chance to prove it.

"Absolutely. You should have seen Jeff's face! Ready for those drinks?" Sam asked.

"Definitely. Just let me run home and change."

Laura thanked Phil one more time before heading home. When she arrived at her apartment safely and the deadbolts were locked behind her, she went to her bedroom and changed into jeans and a sweater. She sat down on the bed and picked up the green plastic phone she hardly ever used. The dial tone was soothing as Laura held the phone near her ear, moving her fingers over the buttons in a familiar pattern without depressing the numbers. Slowly she replaced the receiver, making sure the answering machine was turned on and the phone was securely in its cradle.

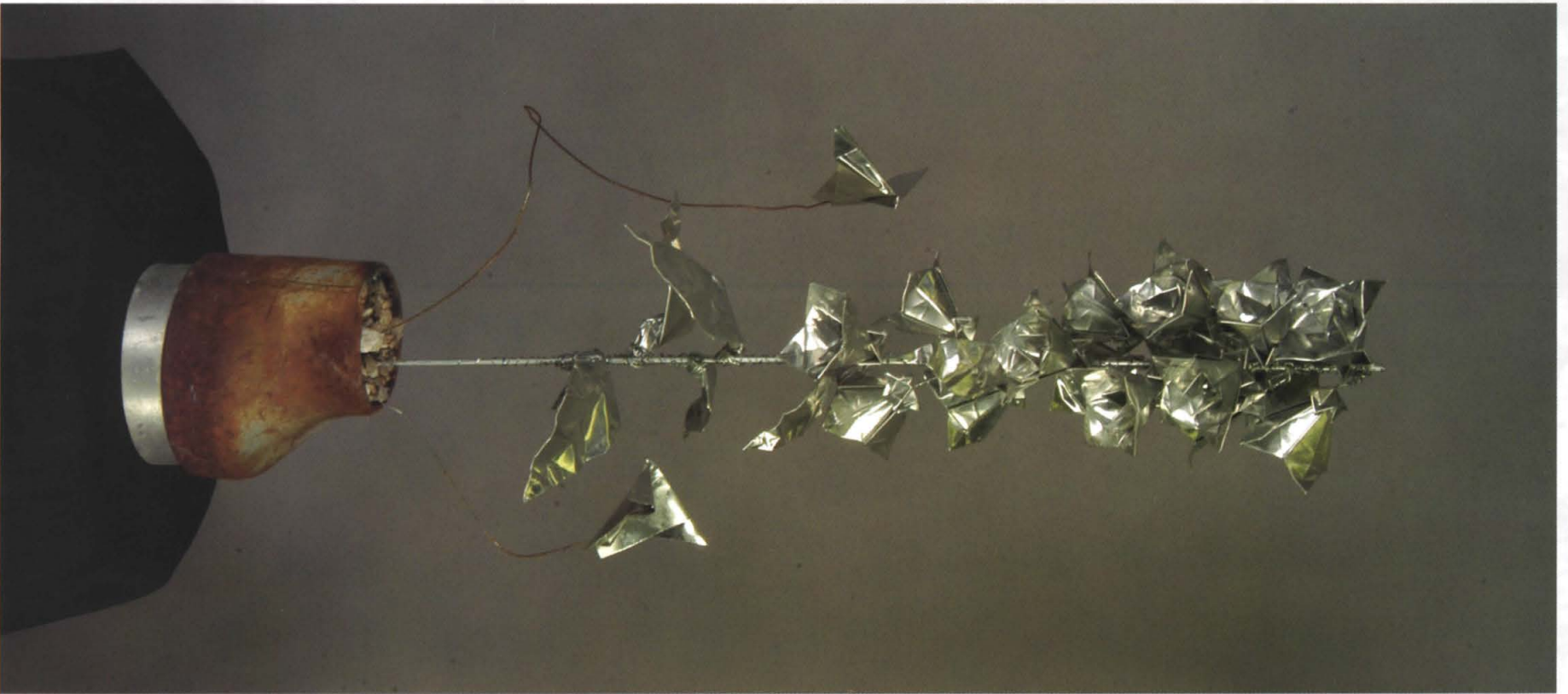
It will happen, Laura thought, dead bolting the door behind her on the way out. Maybe someone at the restaurant would recognize her face from TV.



Waiting
Photography

honorable mention artwork
Travis Eisenbise

FOXGLOVE
Sculpture



Chrome vs. Steel

It's late October and the leaves haven't completely changed yet. The red dogwood betrays the season, but the warmth of the sun makes the sandals I'm wearing seem appropriate. Since I live five hours north of here, the tights I'd brought made sense. I wish I'd planned for the warmer temperature and packed pantyhose. Isn't it a fashion faux pas to wear sandals in the fall? No matter, my best friend knows I have zero fashion sense. And her baby, who's being baptized today, won't care.

The church is familiar; it's almost like coming home. The dozen or so cement steps in the front bring back memories of my childhood when Amy and I came here with her family. Every Sunday we'd bid farewell to the Pastor with a hug on the way out the front doors, skip down the steps, and wait at the bottom for her parents to join us. Only now Amy's father has passed away and we won't be going to Burger King after the service to get a kid's chicken meal. I ascend the steps, already knowing what awaits me inside—blood red carpet, red velvet-covered wooden pews, and stained glass windows depicting the Crucifixion. Amy had been married in this church, and now Sidney will be baptized here.

As I trudge up the steps, carefully maneuvering in my heeled sandals, I look off to the right where the handicap parking places are. We used to hold the jump rope for the VBS kids there, and before that, when we were VBS kids ourselves, we played on the cedar-chipped playground beyond. The equipment looks older now—the yellow plastic slide is the color of a faded mustard Volvo instead of a fresh lemon. The cement in the handicap spots is cracked, forming jagged barriers for a possible game of four-square.

I open the heavy wooden doors and step into the red-carpeted lobby. To the left and in front

of me is the stand where visitors are supposed to sign in, but never do. Today the book on the stand is a pearly white, opened to a page bearing the fancy cursive names of those here to witness the baptism. To the left the carpet ends and the cement stairs, which are steep and narrow, lead to the basement fellowship hall. As a seven-year-old those steps seemed like Jacob's ladder ascending into the sanctuary, and I had tripped many times on the way up. There's a bathroom in the basement that has a sitting area with leather couches and a big mirror. That's where Amy and her bridesmaids, me included, had dressed for her wedding.

Amy is holding Sidney just inside the doorway. I hug them and apologize for being late and my Kramer-like, frazzled entrance. "It's okay," she says. Amy expects me to be slightly spastic. She asked me to be godmother for my heart, not for my togetherness.

Then, by the sign-in book, I see him. My stomach and heart settle somewhere around the sandals I'm suddenly ashamed of wearing. Why didn't my mother tell me that sandals look stupid in the fall? The woman standing next to Scott is impeccably dressed in black with every blonde hair perfectly placed. She's taken care with her makeup and it shows; it's both flattering and natural-looking. She seems entirely at ease and confident, not at all like me. I'm fidgeting and turning all shades of red and purple. That must be his new wife. I make eye contact with both of them, hoping the hives that I feel forming haven't crept up to my neck yet.

The last time I saw him he was standing shirtless in the doorway of his townhouse, pitifully shivering in the February cold. I remember it was early February because the old man at the bar we'd visited earlier that night had asked what he was getting me for Valentine's Day. Scott had smiled in response, fully expecting we'd be together on Valentine's Day. "Don't go," he'd pleaded later as I walked out the front door of the townhouse. "I have to," I'd explained through confused tears. Of course Scott would be here; Amy's husband is his best friend. But the thought of seeing him today hadn't crossed my mind. He'd had time to prepare for this encounter; he knew I'd be here to accept the responsibility of Sidney's spiritual development. I

had wrongly assumed this was a family event. No wonder his wife--isn't her name Marcia--looks so well put-together. This is the first time I've seen her and she appears to be my opposite: cool, calm, and classy. I fidget, reaching up to straighten untamed curls that have become frizzy in the southern humidity.

I can't get the nerve to muster anything more than a slight head-tilt, which I intend to be aloofly friendly, but which appears more as a nervous tick. We enter the sanctuary and prepare for the ceremony.

I settle in next to Amy on the padded pew as the service begins. Listening to the preacher's monotonous voice that used to cause me to drift in and out of sleep as a child, I wonder what is going through Scott's head as he sits two rows behind me. Like me, is he thinking about the tumultuous time we'd spent getting to know each other and falling in love? I'd had a boyfriend and he'd bet his friends twenty dollars at Amy's wedding, in which he was a groomsman, that he could get me to break up the relationship. Scott claimed in the process he'd fallen in love, and most of our conversations throughout the short, long-distance romance we'd shared centered on whether I was ready to end one relationship and start another. We had talked every day for three months and shared countless emails, learning about things we had in common. We liked the same type of music and both loved football. He thought it was charming that I was a blazing liberal unconcerned with appearances and wealth. I thought I'd be able to change his "keep-up-with-the-Joneses" emphasis on facades and financial success. Scott was already out of college and working as an accountant with a big company. He made me laugh, and I melted when he courted me in a non-college way--flowers, poetry, and promises of the future.

Scott lived here, and I was going to college three hours away. My family threatened to disown me when I broke up with my college boyfriend of three years in order to "clear my head." In oscillating between Door Number 1 and Door Number 2, I found it was suddenly hard to imagine trying to rearrange the plans I'd made in order to displease my family and move home to be with Scott. It was much simpler to stay where I was and with what I'd

become comfortable. In the end I chose the safety, stability, and sincerity of my college beau and left Scott standing half-clothed in the doorway of the townhouse, supposedly broken hearted. At the time, the fortune cookie message his roommate had dropped into my purse that night which read "Happiness is right before your eyes" had meant my boyfriend, not Scott.

Amy and her husband told me that while I fell back into the arms of routine and reconciled with the college beau, Scott had grieved and even considered accepting a transfer 15 hours away from here just so he wouldn't be constantly reminded of the few places we'd shared and the callous act that brought love to an end. It wasn't long, not long enough, before he rekindled an old flame with Marcia, dismissing my memory like an old man shoos a dog off a front porch. I had often imagined revenge for my kicked ego, mostly in the form of seeing Scott again and being so gracefully beautiful that he would regret not fighting harder to get me back. He married Marcia a year after our pseudo-relationship ended.

At this moment, repeating the prompt the preacher chants to me, I'm more self-aware of my bare, skinny legs than I've ever been. If only I'd packed pantyhose. I stand in front of the altar, ironically in the same place we'd first felt the initial spark of attraction at Amy's wedding rehearsal, and attempt to focus on the ceremony and baby.

After the baptism I greet Amy's family and brace myself for the moment I know hangs like an ornament on a Christmas tree, precariously placed and in danger of being destroyed. I walk up to Scott and his perfectly charming (much to my disgust) wife. It's the first time I've seen him in almost two years, but my memory has been piercingly accurate. I take it all in--the blue eyes flecked with grey hidden behind brand-named, horn-rimmed glasses and observing me with no emotion, the slightly pointed yet down-turned nose, the jet black hair carefully gelled to one side, and the cologne that pierces my nose and heart like a rusty nail. "Nice to see you," I say. "This is Marcia," Scott says, "my wife." "Of course," I reply, trying to glide over the swollen feeling in my throat, "Nice to meet you." She slides her tastefully-manicured hand forward

into mine. I take it, feeling the coolness mingle with the moistness that's forming in my palms. "Congratulations," I tell them, mustering up the sincerity I don't feel. "I'm happy for you both." I smile to disguise the severe pain that's cutting off my breath. I wonder if he's happy with this woman who is nothing like me. I want to ask him if he's ever considered reversing time and letting me rethink my decision. I want to ask him how he spent the twenty he earned shaking my life up.

"Take care," I say instead, pivoting on my unsteady heel and heading toward the door.

I see a little boy running down the aisle in front of me, leaping into his father's arms. The father picks the little boy up and puts his arm around his wife, leaning down to kiss her cheek. I turn around and look back at Scott's lacquered hair and spotless suit. He's laughing with a friend about something while Marcia stands behind him and smiles. One of Amy's cousins, a little boy, is tugging on Scott's coat to get his attention, which Scott is unwilling to divert from the masculine banter.

I walk through the lobby, push open the wooden doors, and step into the sunlight. Maybe I'll go get some chicken at Burger King before I call my fiancé.



honorable mention artwork
Angelique Lynch



Fly Away
Sculpture

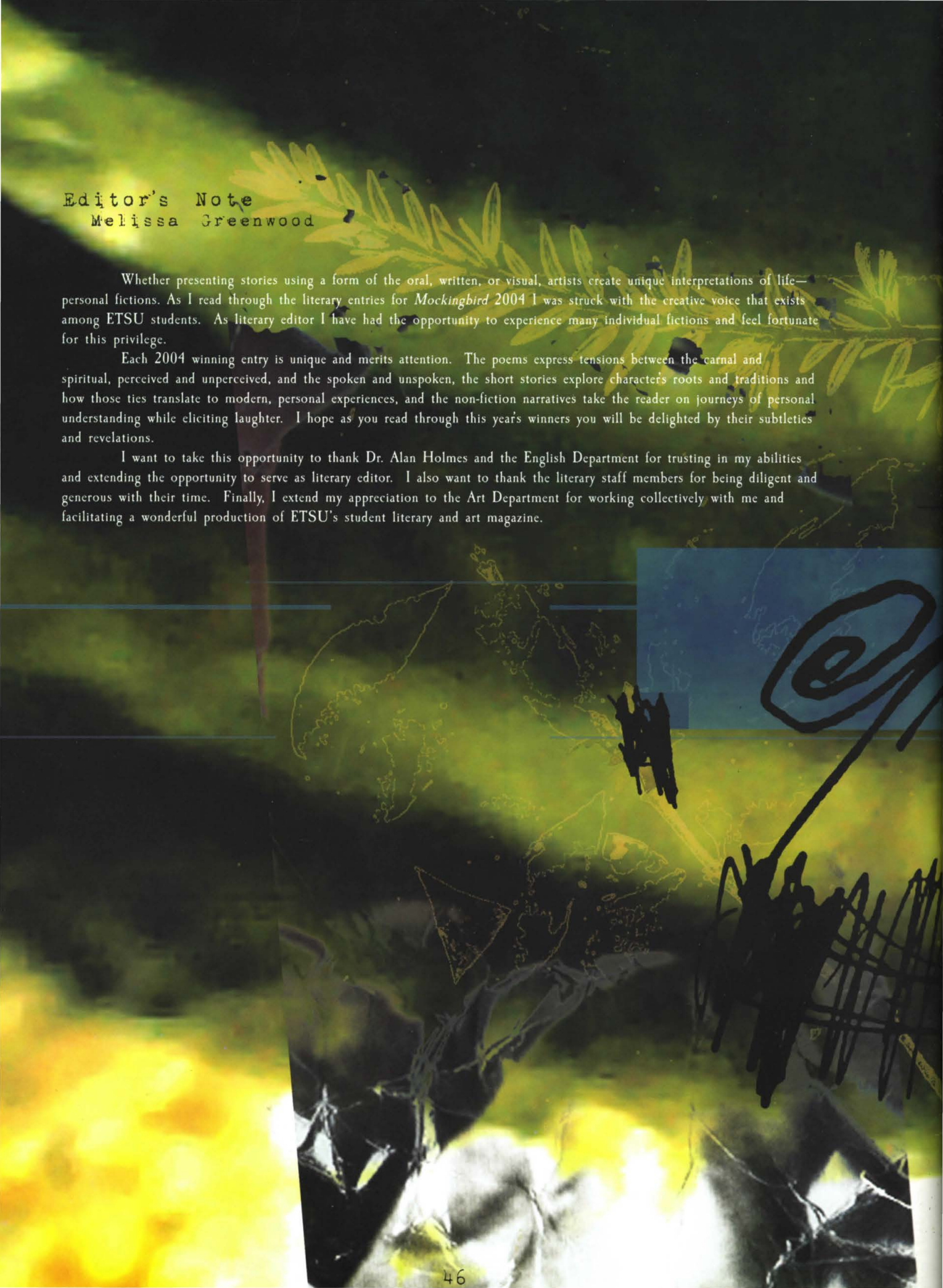
My Mother's Memory

In her cotton dress
Buttercup yellow flowers
Ready for the dance.

Young man, so handsome
Starched, white shirt, dark slacks, pressed
She ironed all day.

Spring evening air bites.
Tiny teeth, tempers hidden below
Set loose with a word.

The hand flies with force.
Surprised, she staggers and falls.
Mud will hide the tears.



Editor's Note
Melissa Greenwood

Whether presenting stories using a form of the oral, written, or visual, artists create unique interpretations of life—personal fictions. As I read through the literary entries for *Mockingbird* 2004 I was struck with the creative voice that exists among ETSU students. As literary editor I have had the opportunity to experience many individual fictions and feel fortunate for this privilege.

Each 2004 winning entry is unique and merits attention. The poems express tensions between the carnal and spiritual, perceived and unperceived, and the spoken and unspoken, the short stories explore character's roots and traditions and how those ties translate to modern, personal experiences, and the non-fiction narratives take the reader on journeys of personal understanding while eliciting laughter. I hope as you read through this year's winners you will be delighted by their subtleties and revelations.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Alan Holmes and the English Department for trusting in my abilities and extending the opportunity to serve as literary editor. I also want to thank the literary staff members for being diligent and generous with their time. Finally, I extend my appreciation to the Art Department for working collectively with me and facilitating a wonderful production of ETSU's student literary and art magazine.



Mockingbird

Art Director's Note
B. Baker

Wanting to create a new image for the *Mockingbird* was my thinking behind the entire creation of this year's publication. I wanted the magazine to have a juxtaposed, naturalistic but manufactured impression, almost like a polystyrene forest. Recently I have grown tired of conventional publications, perfected computer images and fonts are so manmade and diluted. I really wanted to bring this publication out of a conservative image and into a post-modern image, turning the *Mockingbird* from a publication into a mix-media piece. Gracias: God, my family, snowflake, gingerbread cookie, pretty flower, dinki, the dog, Melissa Greenwood, Val Lyle, Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes, K. Scott Jenkins, M. Wayne Dyer, David Dixon, University Press, ETSU and intuition.

the student arts & literature

publication of

east tennessee state university

© ETSU