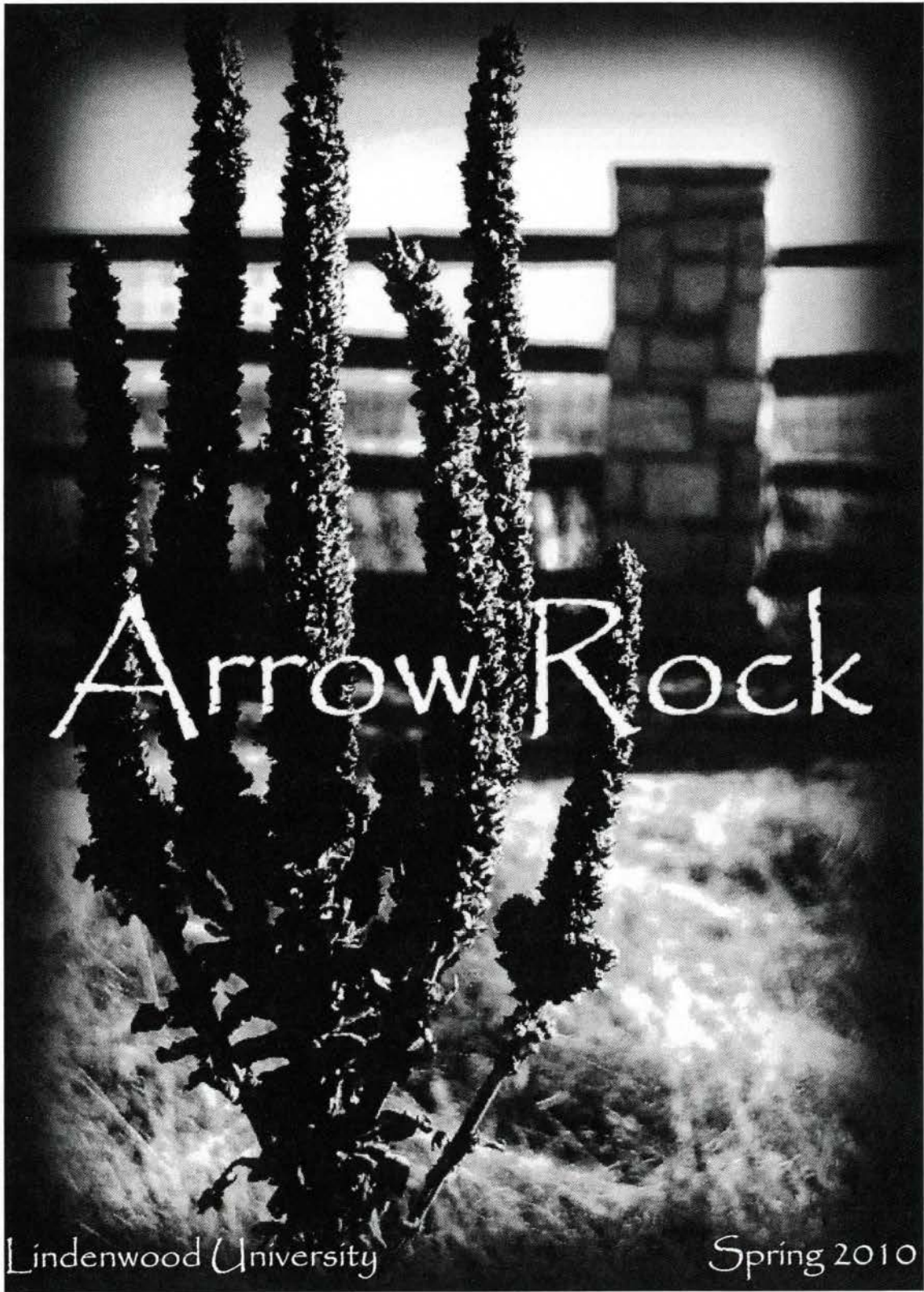




Arrow Rock

Lindenwood University

Spring 2010



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Issue 1

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ARROW ROCK IS COMMITTED TO PROMOTING AND PROVIDING A MATURE ENVIRONMENT FOR LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO PUBLISH QUALITY SHORT FICTION, SHORT NON-FICTION, POETRY, AND ARTWORK.

THE STAFF AND CONTRIBUTORS OF *ARROW ROCK* STRIVE TO PRODUCE A LITERARY JOURNAL THAT INTERESTS AND INSPIRES.

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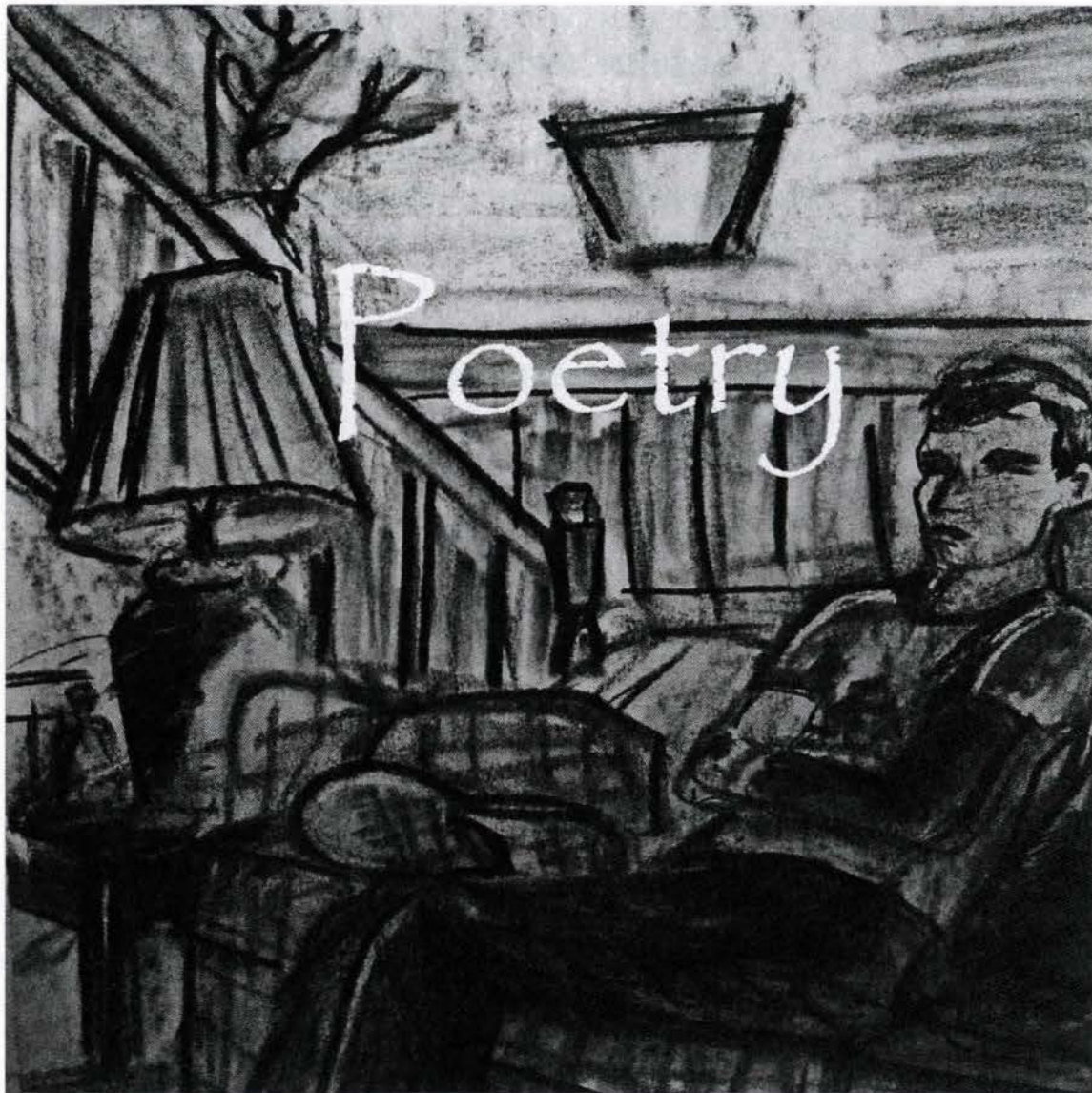
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Now I know
Our love
The way it grows
will last a long time
I did not know the way of it with you



LILLIAN PETERS

ADAM BENKENDORF

OUR SONG

The song comes on the radio
with those unforgettable notes.
I am swept away thinking of moments with you.
My mind flows, like the natural beat of the music.
The mix of emotions I will never subdue.

Those nights we would sit beneath the stars
to listen in silence as the rhythm stayed alive;
the moments of serenity I wish would never die.

But the music starts to fade with the last few lines.
And moments turn to memories,
memories so clear.

I open my eyes
to see

you're not
here.

•

STEPHANIE POLIZZI

HOME

Paint crumbles from the
edges of pale blue shutters
Fallen leaves stack up
in the gutters and
block rainwater from flowing
Raindrops pitter-patter
as they sprinkle the crumbling
pavement with silk
Bricks mount the façade
to protect.

Cracks in the windows, like roadways,
travel in all directions
Vacant webs hang in corners
killing prey for no purpose.

A bird's nest is nestled
in the blackened chimney stack
where the smoke
no longer flows.

The lawn is overgrown in places
and spotted with muddy puddles
The brightness of the sun-kissed flowers has faded
The stems fold over.

REMAINS

Circling sirens sound,
waiting for the inevitable
The pistons cease to pump
They have broken down
Unwillingly, their organs
are ripped from them
leaving them severed and empty
Mourning comes
We intrude upon their Hell,
sauntering atop dead, rotting carcasses,
oblivious to our imposed pain
Masses of bodies
have acquired unmarked graves
Frequent visitations dwindle
Dirt, pollen, lifeless leaves, feces
and loneliness linger.

EVERYDAY

Whistling wind whips
through the trees
Wet water winds
round the rivers

Sparkling stars shoot
across the abyss
Silvery shadows slink
along the avenues

Time tick tocks
continuously counting clocks
suns set slowly
on their own.



MAC HAMILTON

TOO MUCH

"Are we going to drink more wine?" you asked.
Permission granted, because right after that you said that
there weren't enough cigarettes in the world.

Blistered feet and lips. Too much Magic for one day,
Walking between Canada and France.
Dinner chickens and pork chops our fare.
Insatiable hunger not quenched by mere food or drink.
"There has to be more," you said.

Pilliwonkers and Picklejuice are silly words, ours.
Copulated adjectives, now reincarnate nouns.
When Billy Joel sang, "She'll carelessly cut you and laugh
while you're bleedin'."
You said "That's me." Who am I to dispute what you know?
Still, I stayed because right after that you said that
there weren't enough cigarettes in the world.

You knew we would have more Gran Marnier and another
espresso,
because we are in Italy, and the Tuscan sun is still playful.
And matches the color of our drinks.
It is Hot and Gold, the way you always liked it.

The Portuguese cantina in the midst of the bricks and
bridges of Luxembourg.
The sheets of dark, brown spots.
It was time to leave when the spots turned foul.
Odes turned odious, and it became Disney World,
for chrissakes!

"I'll try the *piegion*," you said in Villeray.
There will never be enough birds or flowers in this world to
sate you.
"O look! There's a cow," you said on the River Huise.
And because you were imbibing the Continent, I stayed,
with curious adore.

I allowed you to see and hear the Banshees
Because they are hard to find nowadays.
Van Gogh knew them, and so did Gauguin, and Cezanne.
The olive trees of Les Baux sang with them,
 poppies danced.
We, wine-soaked naked and you twirled in hot pink shoes.
Purple drew colors in our hair.

You should have stayed.
There are not enough of you in the world.



TABITHA RUSSO PARKER

VILLANELLE FOR THE SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

Remember Florida and I'll remember you.
My devotion may never be understood,
but I will hold your hand until it's through.

Do not go kindly back to the blue
sea and sand, although I know it's home.
Remember Florida and I'll remember you.

Though tonight it's bleak and gray in hue,
and the darkness mirrors my infected mood,
know, I will hold your hand until it's through.

And I'll remind you of days we once knew
of a balmy sun and palm tree wood.
Remember Florida and I'll remember you.

Remember through nights when your only view
is paralyzed with the knowledge of your disease.
I will hold your hand until it's through.

And no one will understand but me and you,
our whispers, kept secrets, promises that when you
leave,
I'll remember Florida and I'll remember you.
But until then, I'll hold your hand until it's through.

AUNT WINNIE IS DYING

93 years
old and curled
in the corner ashamed
of her offensive gray hair
and blackened bruises
crawling up her calves.

Aunt Winnie is dying but
her eyes still breathe some
life, some here, some blue like
the pictures I hold up
for her, a young girl with a heart
shaped face and tiny waist and heels
that curved legs, jutted hip.

Aunt Winnie is dying and
no one speaks to her
in the dried-out room no one
looks at her but to ask
if she's hungry or has to pee.

They think I'm foolish
as the light pink liquid glides
over her paper nails
like a rainbow taking flight.



RICHARD H. VIE

CHEERS, DEATH

Death
takes your breath.
Rests your head
on her breasts.
Lays hands on
your last days.
Sighs at your
cries.

She prevents your
rotting alive.
Teaches you when
you need to die.
She comes for ye?
Exclaim, "*Kampai!*"¹
Offer her thanks
of wine and rye.
Kiss her like
Judas on the sly.
When she declines
don't ask why.
Say farewell.
Say goodbye.

¹ *Kampai* is the Japanese equivalent to the expression, *Cheers* as in a toast.

HUNT IT DOWN

Burning, turning, tumbling, bumbling,
bustling, hustling, feral stumbling.

Searching within a lurching husk,
grabbing, stabbing with fatal tusks.

Slaking thirst for crimson flooding
across a tongue fetid with musk.

Snorting, squealing with a jerk,
gunner grins with a smirk.

Booming with a cacophonous roar,
ending the life of a boar.



HUY DANG

VERMINCELLI, UNCLE VINH

My favorite coffee shop musician has a side gig
doubling as a Christmas elf in malls.
Her replacement plays a choppy Clapton improv,
only I was never an aficionado.
What is more, a new vituperation vexes me.
My heart chants, "Return to Vietnam!"
I want to hug my uncles before they die as poor
as when they started. I'd like to see if a son can sense
the father reflected in the eyes of his brothers.

Meanwhile, my uncle living in Ho Chi Minh City,
has been detained for storing an illegal cache
of prescription medication worth thousands of dollars,
worth more cash in Vietnamese currency
but still a pittance. Mother telephoned his house to no avail.
Our kin learned of it by newspaper account.
I think my uncle may be in a dank government cell.

I often hear my countrymen's despair
but I can only imagine Uncle Vinh's
terror before his personable judges.
The ocean's distance may have estranged us,
but the crater of uncertain knowing compels me.
My own hidden cache of compassion
helps me imagine how alone one must feel
to retain the shame of illicit fortunes one cannot
pretend ownership over,
from family who can't be made privy.
They will judge you like the masses, how
they'll judge you like the masses.
O I hate that ocean!
It renders doubting loving men isolationists.

My parents packed me with the luggage years ago.
Our St. Louis apartment had mismatched
lawn chairs around a meal table in the living room.
I recall buying a microwave was a profound achievement.

Eventually, we found a home in this safe part of town
where policemen didn't chase addicts through neighbors' yards.
Dad exploded canes at night
across my brother's arm, after whiskey time,
on tougher days than usual.

When the school teacher pointed to a color word,
she hinted at the pigment in her skin. I glanced back and forth
from the board, and answered "Black," somewhat uncertain.
Her woolen-haired, smiling head shook no, corrected
that the word was "Brown." At school I learned color.

Eight years trudged past. Before long, I perused numerous
books of spells, and felt eased by the mental shambles
marijuana wrought, for the Author's face seizes and controls.
It seemed light between almost shoulders which weren't finished.
His chin touched the knuckle of his right forefinger.
It wasn't his hand, it was the book cover's photograph of him.
Inside, were thoughts mingled with the verses.

Sensation did occur for me, as reader, uncivilized
peristalsis set to the flesh of aspiration.
I circumnavigated the horizons of light's regularity,
calling out contracting spheres of acceptance
wherever I would find them. More attuned my actual voice,
I scribbled, I scribbled! Couldn't write the ocean's
distance smaller, but I scribbled onward, nonetheless.

Verses hit the lining of my chasm right, though they bled
intestines if they simply sounded wrong.
So I honed you, Poem:
Your eyes now reflect my dopamine. I have contrived you.
We guess a second-guess of one another that is mutual.
Still, a worm can be a rational sacrifice,
though unities that take their inspiration from the ants
reap calories from cosmic grunge, by other
modes than prayer,
but always, spoken words articulate our yearnings.



DEVINNE WALTERS

HOW A GIANT COUNTS HIS CALORIES

In the morning
He spreads mermaid eggs
On his toast
With mythical giant squid jelly
On the side

A midmorning snack
Is a healthy thing to eat
He chooses
Pickled unicorn tail
Almost as bad as a Twinkie

He goes out to lunch
With some old friends
They order
Pixie Burgers
Done medium-well

He grabs
A quick snack for the trip
Back home
Something to hold him over in traffic
Chimera claws dipped in whipped cream

It's dinner time, Mr. Giant
And your meal choices
Haven't been the best
Don't you remember
That you're on a diet?

"That's right"
He says
And decides

To skip dinner
But not dessert
Something light, something yummy
He blends together
A smoothie of siren feathers and Pan's blood
Don't forget the bendy straw
Made of a Cyclops' small intestine

Mr. Giant weighs
Himself before bed
He has gained one pound
You are
What you eat

KATHY HOORMANN

IN THE TIME OF THE FIREFLIES

In the time of the fireflies
before the sky is completely dark
after the sun vanishes behind the horizon
when the world is starting to cool
but the air remains warm;
when the streetlights come to life
and we can feel night in the air –

that is the magic time
when all things are possible –
when a dream is more than a dream
when the fairies come out to play
when words hang in the air
just because they like to be there.

In this time
we see things as they truly are.
We see that fireflies are fairies
and fairies are real
and that we all dream
in the time of the fireflies.

•

DAN BURKHEAD

A HAIKU

This is a haiku.

It's friggin' poetic, y'all.

You know you want it.

ART IS HELL

Dear Artist,

You will never create a masterpiece.

Your work will never be good enough.

Someone will always be better than you.

Nothing you do will ever be truly satisfying.

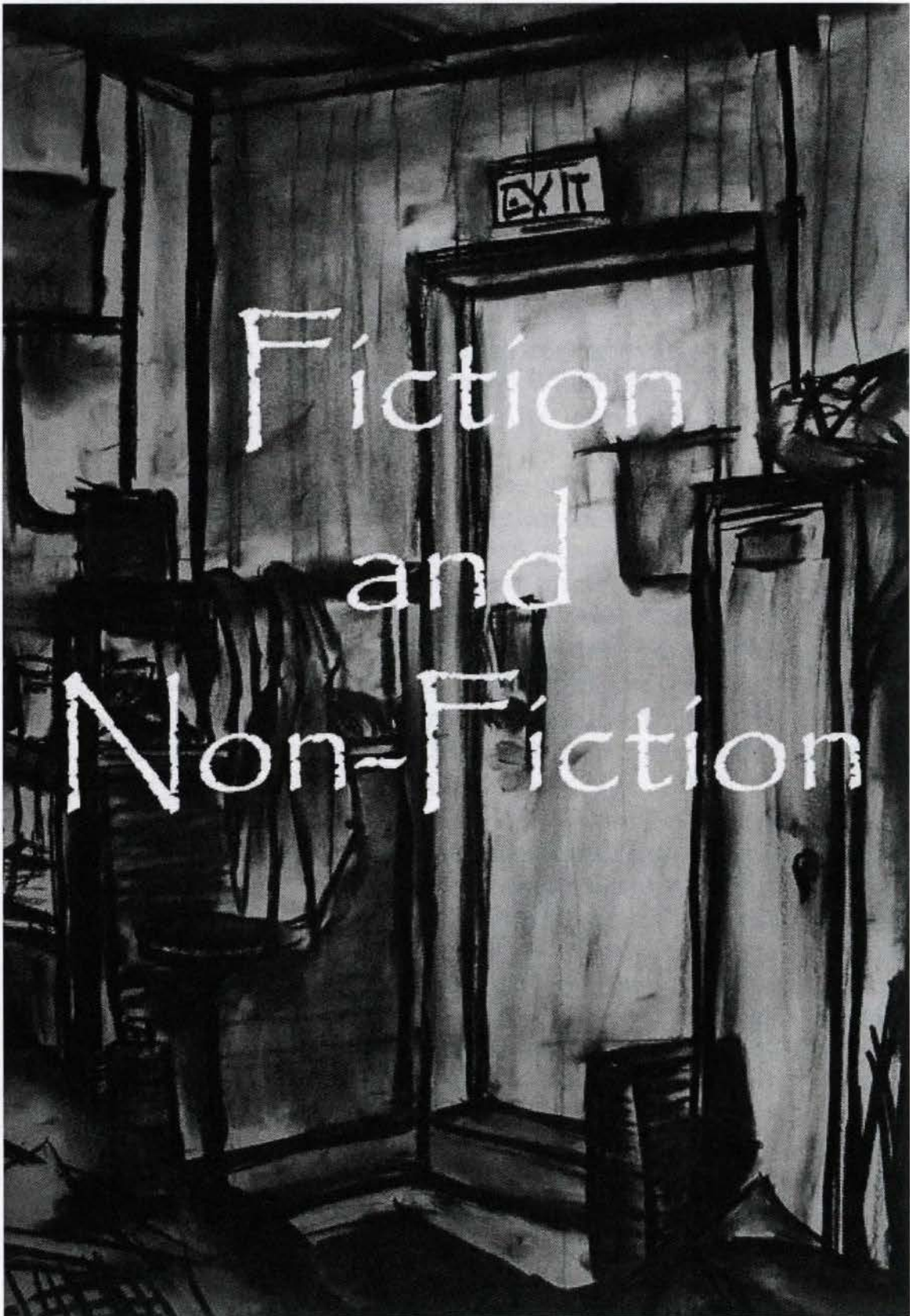
Everything you've accomplished could have been done
better.

You will never honestly love your own creations.

And no amount of training or practice will ever change this.

But if you don't tell your audience, they might not notice.

•



LILLIAN PETERS

TABITHA RUSSO PARKER

THE DISAPPEARING JAPANESE

Shozo Yamazaki awakened to cold sheets and stiff bones. He woke slowly, as if contemplating the act, with sleep crusted in the corners of his eyes. The bed was empty beside him; the sheet even colder where his wife no longer lay.

Hideko had always been the first to wake. In their earliest years together, Shozo could vaguely remember staying in bed late through the mornings, curled warmly under a blanket, their bodies coiled tightly like golden pythons. Her face rested softly on the pillows while Shozo's rested softly in her hair. When the first daughter Sao came, those mornings became rare. After their son Hiro, they were nonexistent.

This morning, Hideko was at the stove in the kitchen. The blackness of the stove and the blackness of her hair stood out against the dusty wooden floors and grayed walls covered with pictures of family long passed. A great uncle, the warrior samurai; a grandfather, the fighter pilot in WWII; and Shozo's own father, who had been a farmer in Chiba until the government's land taxes eventually forced their family to an old cabin in the mountains.

Shozo's slippers dragged across the ground as he entered the room. The wood floor creaked from the tightness in the air, and, though Hideko surely heard him coming, she didn't turn toward him.

This morning, Shozo approached his wife quietly, but stopped halfway through the room and remained distant. The space was dim with the early morning light spilling through the small window beside the stove. A sliver of the last of the morning moon fell on Hideko's face and cut across her pink lips. She stared down at the black pan sizzling beneath her trembling fingers. Through this rare light, her small body reminded Shozo of a distant memory he held of her as a child when her family shared the small yard then owned by his father. Hideko would stand under the single plum tree shared by the yard, and early mornings, like this one, when the moon hadn't yet retreated below the horizon, a small slice of it would then too graze her cheek as she reached to pluck the ripest plums from the branches. Her mother would use the fruit to make wine for the nights their families would dine together – the nights Shozo and Hideko would sneak off after their parents had drunk

enough and wouldn't notice them missing. Those nights were so long ago that Shozo thought perhaps they belonged to a different man. Surely they were not his own – a man only fifty, yet wrinkled and worn beyond the years from his own shortcomings and inability to sustain anything happy and real.

Shozo tightened the robe around his body and asked his wife to put her slippers on. She didn't respond. He asked her of Hiro; she said he hadn't wakened. He asked where Sao was; she laughed bitterly.

"As if I would know," she said. "Nineteen years old and the girl hasn't talked to me in months."

Her hair fell long down her back, tangled slightly from her sleep. She wore nothing but a black t-shirt that grazed her slender thighs. Shozo wanted to touch her but was unsure of her mood. He wanted to reach out to her but didn't feel brave enough to test her erratic swings, deepening with each new year of their lives on the mountain, each year seeming colder and more isolated than the last.

He asked her what she was cooking and she replied, "Yakisoba noodles – for your lunch."

"My favorite."

"Yes," she whispered. "I know."

He sat at the beaten wood table and spread out the morning paper, scanning the headlines languidly: a stabbing in Tokyo, the impending rise of the Yakuza gang, an earthquake in Kyoto that destroyed the last of the ancient temples.

"What is it today?" Hideko asked with her curved back still to him.

"Japan is falling apart," he replied.

His eyes rested on the black-and-white photo of the mountain and the simple text that read, "The Ghosts of Mount Fuji Take Another Soul."

Hideko came to read over his shoulder.

"Another suicide on Mount Fuji?" she inquired.

Shozo answered with a quick nod, and his eyes traveled to the window to view the same great mountain in the distance. He could only see the outline of its massive shape through the early morning fog. The coned sphere stood too high for Shozo's weakening eyes, but he could see the base, the Akigahara Forest; clearly. It looked quiet and cold, smeared with black volcanic soil beneath the cluster

of looming trees.

"This has been a busy year for suicides on the mountain," Hideko stated, her eyes focused on the story of a middle-aged businessman who could no longer feed his children after a job loss.

"The Japanese are disappearing," Shozo spoke quietly, unable to rip his eyes from the imposing landscape rising before the window. "They just walk into the mountain – knowing a compass won't read through the iron deposits in the forest – knowing they will never find their way out, that the spirits come at night."

"It's suicide," Hideko said.

It's brave, Shozo thought.

Hideko knew Shozo would take the train that day from the Minobu line to the Tokaido mainline. She also knew he would go to Mount Fuji, a routine Sunday for him since their move to the mountain. She knew before he left that he would sneak into Hiro's room and touch his sleeping face, wipe the drool from his mouth as if he were still a child, and look once into his unintelligible eyes as his head rolled back and forth with disease. She knew he would pray for Sao's safe arrival from wherever she was but he would do nothing more about the girl. She knew he would ride the train alone with his own thoughts and silences – his private contemplations. And she imagined he would return only after the sun had set, after the tourists had left Fuji and the mountain was quiet and luminous. Only then the ghosts of Fuji are said to appear and take their next waiting, desperate victim.

This was all she knew.

She didn't know why he went, and he couldn't tell her. She never asked and he never offered. The wall of silence between the couple was a firm foundation. Of course they had returned to it after all their years together.

Shozo spoke softly into the frigid air when she set a bowl of rice and fish before him on the table. Her slender arm hesitated as it crossed his body, and he pulled her hand gently into his own, turning it. She didn't care that he picked at the dry wrinkles above her knuckles. She didn't care that his eyes soon found the fresh, red wounds on the insides of her wrists, thinly sliced in the shape of Xs. He eventually looked up at her with moist, yellowed eyes pooled with shame. His fingers grazed tenderly across her

infections.

“I’m going to lose myself in the mountain,” he whispered suddenly.

She pulled away from his hold. She turned back to the crackling stove with a small, tight laugh that didn’t seem real.

“Shozo,” she replied in the vacant voice he knew too well, “We lost ourselves years ago.”

The emptiness in her words, in her stale lips, in the pale color of her cheeks told Shozo that she was right. Unlike himself, Hideko was always right. Unlike himself, Hideko was brave and self-reliant. She could accept that the mountain was cold and do without slippers – that her daughter was lost within the ugly temptations of adolescence – that the last of the family land was bought and sold – that Hiro would wake screaming from nightmares and need to be fed and bathed, although he was nearly a man, that he would eventually die from his illness – that they would all eventually die on the mountain, and there was nothing Shozo could do about it. Unlike his ancestors, he wasn’t smart or brave. He couldn’t swing a sword or fly a plane, and he didn’t own anything.

He stood, leaving the fish untouched. Before he stepped from the room, she met him with the packed lunch. Pushing it into his hands, her small body trembled from the coldness in the room, in the air, in the floor.

“Don’t forget your noodles.”

“Thank you, dear,” he said softly. “Put on your slippers.”

He kissed her forehead once more as he left the chilly room for the dark, cold morning world that waited for him inside the mountain.



SARAH HANNAH

THROUGH STOLEN EYES

"Happy Veterans Day, Dr. Marks."

"Thank you, Cinnamon. How are you today?"

"I'm fine and yourself?" asks the receptionist.

"Oh, I'm doing great," I reply.

Just great. I glance down at my calendar and among the many scribbled appointments and names, circled in bright red marker is today's date, November 11. Another year already passed. I received an e-mail the other day from my old buddy Ned. One of the few remaining guys I'd served with.

"What was it like?" asks Cinnamon. The question fills my mind with many memories from back then.

"Those were some crazy days," I reply -- an answer that seemed good enough for her. As she walks back to the front desk, I glance out the window and allow my mind to bring me back to that time.

Fort Polk, Louisiana. The air is muggy and humid. It rains all the time. It's suffocating and repressive all at the same time, but it better prepares the men for what they will face in Vietnam. They adapt to the weather here, get shipped off, and then get pulled straight out of the jungle and thrown back here.

War takes a greedy toll upon soldiers. It claims people's sanity without haste and doesn't look back.

Each week at least forty new men rolled in on stretchers. Some with all their limbs, some with missing limbs, some black and red from the burns that had been inflicted on them. As I strapped and tied those men to the stretchers, so that they could not move, I took with me that unforgettable smell. A smell that instantly makes a person wrinkle their nose and want to turn away, the smell of burnt flesh. This made the overbearing smell of bleach and formaldehyde that lurked in the hallways and in some rooms a comfort.

Silence was not a common sound there. Cries of agony and vain words echoed through the hallways of the old buildings. Some men didn't talk, they just shook with the tremors they suffered and tried to pry themselves loose from the white restrictors that ran along the beds, keeping them in place. They found it easier to sweat through the pain of the never-ending cramps, nosebleeds, and diarrhea if they kept to themselves.

Others screamed and moaned, trying to fight the payback their bodies were inflicting on them. The heroin, powdered sugar, and Nestlé Quik that once made up heaven in the form of white powder, now sat in their lungs like a tenant unwilling to be evicted. Pneumonia would overcome them and they would face withdrawal symptoms.

I saw soldiers who ranged from boys to men – both burned and not burned. The nightmares that would haunt them for the rest of their lives could be heard late at night. So many good men, fighting for a cause, as well as fighting to save their own lives. Some would talk, which is what I was there for, others had eyes that would glaze over as they stared off into the unknown, reliving the taking of life, unwilling to speak it aloud.

I could feel the grip of their hands, warning me of what was to come, forgetting they were no longer in battle. Fear burned in their eyes and regret filled their lungs as they spoke. The colonel, who refused to talk, just nodded. Day by day, my routine would remain the same and the colonel would refuse to talk. Once, he grabbed hold of my navy blue tie and pulled until I was on his level.

“Look at me” he screamed. My eyes surveyed a body that was half intact, half covered in white gauze. In the place where his left arm and right leg should have been, there was nothing. He followed my gaze, then locked with my eyes. “This is what happens when you go back for a 19-year-old in a mine field. This is what happens.”

His hand dropped to the side of the bed. His eyes suddenly could no longer fight the weight of his eyelids. With that, he fell back to sleep.

“Dr. Marks,” calls someone faintly from behind me. “Dr. Marks?”

I jump as I feel a hand on my shoulder. As I turn, I realize that it is Cinnamon.

“Your next client is here,” says the receptionist with a puzzled look on her face.

“Oh right. Thank you, Cinnamon. I’ll be out in a minute.”

I stand up, straighten my tie, and walk away from my lingering past to greet my future.

DANA SCHULTE

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Adam was standing in shadows in the parking lot. A lamppost next to his white car created a contrast. The light concentrated on his face and faded into darkness as it worked down his body. As I watched his body sway from side to side, I could feel the blood drain from my face and my eyes squint as they fought back tears. Following his near collapse to the cold concrete beneath him, he sheepishly walked closer to me, reaching for a hug. Instead, I gripped his arm in the palms of my hands, hoping to support his body. I knew if he fell I could not do anything to help him. I would be crushed beneath his solid figure.

I slipped his keys out of his hand and into my pocket. He complained as I walked to the passenger side of my Aerostar and opened the door for him, commenting sarcastically about my gentlemanly gestures. I ignored him, shutting the door on him mid-sentence. I watched him fumble as he tried to find the seatbelt behind his right ear. Rolling my eyes, I walked to the driver's side door, letting myself in.

The smell of liquor on his breath burned my nose. I laid my head on my steering wheel and gazed at him. He grinned at me, and I sighed as I sat up and turned my key in the ignition. The van was instantly filled with loud music. I hoped it would fill the lack of conversation, but it didn't. He turned down the music as if it interfered with his ability to think. I hesitated, holding my breath, as the volume slowly declined. The staggering rhythm of the piano solo was blocking my own thoughts, and I didn't mind. I desperately needed the deafening music to distract me from my own reflections. In the silence all I could think about was our time in Mexico, and that was a painful thought.

Missouri to Mexico is a lengthy twenty-two hour drive, and it would have been spent in agony without Adam sitting next to me. We were faithful van buddies, always saving two seats so we could sit together. Adam was the silent bonding type, very mysterious and introverted. He liked to enjoy the company of others without engaging in a deep conversation. He was light-hearted, laughing as his eyes disappeared with the emerging of his smile. Adam spent a significant portion of the trip in a slumber, allowing his head to rest

on me. The weight of his head always caused my arm to fall asleep around the same time he did, sending tingles up and down the surface of my skin.

Even our delay at the border didn't ruin his sunny disposition. Our trailer of supplies was not registered to leave the country, and we were stranded for the day. My pale skin was scorching from the sun's heat that bounced off the black asphalt. We sat on the curb outside a local market observing the activity around us. I was asked continually if I needed water or an additional layer of sunscreen. I was already drowning in the sunscreen that had been smeared on me, the excess never absorbing into my skin.

Four hours after being stranded, we piled back into the vans, covering the seats with sweat and sunscreen, and continued three hours further into the heart of Mexico to the church that would serve as our home for the next week. Stepping out of the van was like stepping into an alternate universe. I could feel the excitement and adrenaline building inside me as my heart began to race. I stood silently as I tried to soak all the details into my memory.

The townspeople had been living in ruins long after the hurricane passed through. Many houses had been torn from their foundations and were now floating in the muddy ocean that was once blue. Now it was brown and murky and held the belongings and memories of once comfortable families. One particular family had been left without a home, forcing them to live in a small shack that consisted of scraps of wood and pieces of tin that had been nailed together, creating the semblance of a wall. The attempt at a roof looked as if it could fall in on the family any moment. Children surrounded us. They laughed and kicked around balls of paper, playing soccer. These children greeted us, ecstatic at our presence. Their feet were bare and plastered with mud. Their pants were too short and covered in gaping holes. Most were not wearing shirts. I could not imagine what they were so happy about.

Adam climbed out of the van behind me, grazing his hand across the small of my back and chuckling when I jumped from the shock. Just the touch of his hand made my stomach twist in an unfamiliar way, and I experienced butterflies for the first time. Watching him smile and look around triggered a smile of my own. I could feel how genuine my smile was, stretching across my face.

The light in front of me changed from yellow to red as I slowed to a stop and settled back in my seat. I felt my chest quiver as I struggled for breath. My sharp inhalations came more quickly than normal, and I struggled to keep my breathing steady. My left foot rested on the edge of my seat, and I ran my thumb back and forth across the hole that was wearing in my favorite blue jeans. I put my chin on my knee and turned my head to look at Adam. I watched him fidget and rock his head back and forth until he caught my eye. A devious chuckle slipped through his lips as he reached down to unbuckle his seatbelt. By the time I reacted and reached over to grab his arm, it was too late. He had bolted from the side of my van and scurried across the street.

I dropped my left leg back to the floor and rolled down my window. He was standing next to a blossoming carnation plant. I put my arm out the window and motioned for him to come back to the car. My worry built to rage as he folded his arms across his chest and idly rolled his head from side to side. My demand for him to come back to the car came out in a low roar. I hoped it would make him feel threatened, but it didn't. He nonchalantly sauntered back to my car, flaunting the fact that I did not intimidate him. I could feel the heat on my face as the waves of rage flooded over me.

When he returned to the van I studied the excitement on his face, and my heart felt heavy. He smiled and brushed my hair out of my scowling face. I couldn't tolerate his touch anymore. A touch that once sent hope and adrenaline rushing through my system now only caused my body to stiffen with tension. While I leaned back, avoiding the stroke of his thumb on my cheek, his other hand revealed a flower. He placed the white carnation behind my ear and smiled. I felt a twist in my stomach that I never wanted to endure. I shifted my body away from him and turned the music up, hoping it would hide the sound of my sniffles that were slowly becoming uncontrollable.

It was time to get back to the real world, back to home where the possessions we take for granted everyday are things that these people only hope to have in their dreams. I couldn't believe this was it. The week was over and we'd done as much as we could in the time we were given. As I pulled off my pinstriped hat, I wiped the sweat from my forehead and a tear from my eye. I stared at the accomplishment that stood before me, one of three houses we had

built from the ground up in the last five days. It stood with pride among its surroundings, but it was nothing special. It was nothing that we would consider a home.

It contained a single room where the parents and all nine of their children would sleep, their eleven bodies forced into the single queen-size mattress we had bought them. Their bedroom was also their kitchen, their living room, and indoor plumbing was not even feasible. The outhouse sat behind their new home and consisted of a bucket behind a doorway, and small tub filled with water, murky from the dirt of the skin that had been washed clean in it. Unlike the other aspects of their lives, their new home stood tall and proud. Cinder blocks on top of cinder blocks, framed with unpolished wood and a tin roof. I looked at the tears that were being shed in the mother's eyes. She could not convey her thoughts, but the emotions are universal. She stared at one particular present we left her with, a Bible. The inside of the front cover had the signature from every volunteer who had lent a hand in rebuilding her home. Her young children tugged on her dress as she cried, running her hand over the top of our writing.

I stood next to Adam, leaning on his shoulder as his arm draped around me. As emotionally and physically draining as the week had been, I still found comfort in his presence. The chemistry between us ignited. We were both gleaming in sweat, barely standing, and yet still content under the violent afternoon sun. Our dripping arms were pressed together, our fingers practically intertwined. My body's heat rose with every minute our clammy bodies stuck together but neither of us wanted to separate. When we were together I didn't worry about anything.

A horn blared, and I quickly slammed the brake pedal to the ground, snapping back from the memory to this conscious nightmare. I waved an apology to the man in the small car next to me, embarrassed by my negligence. I sucked in a deep breath of relief, but Adam only laughed. I glowered and wondered what had changed in the last few years. He used to be so generous and kind. He was the type of guy that every girl wanted to be with. I thought that week in Mexico had taught us how to live our lives to the best of our ability, not to take anything for granted. We had seen firsthand what life could be like. I felt my hands tighten on the steering wheel and could see the frustration as my knuckles

became ashen, drained of color.

The girls' bedroom was suffocating. The air was thick and stale, making it hard to breath. On our last night in Mexico, the house rules were shattered. The blending of "pink" girls and "blue" boys created "purple," which was strictly forbidden. We decided to sleep outside together on that last night. As the sun started to set we watched the changing of the colors from the second-story patio. Leaning on the wooden rail, we studied the sky as the cool colors were replaced with pinks and yellows. The warm shades of the sunset blended together to imitate an oil painting above the ocean. I was paralyzed in awe at the artistic expression being spread above us, until the last hue of color had left the sky. With the absence of the sun, the chill of the breeze became more obvious. All of the air mattresses forced to fit on the patio created one large bed for the group. We laid out together, draped in every direction. I had Christian's legs on one of my legs, Caylea's head to the side of me, and Adam lying right next to me.

The poverty of the town left it without a light source after the sunset. The only luminosity came from the fish fry at the house behind us. Adam and I rested nonchalantly by the railing at the end of the concrete. We didn't want the family to see us watching them, but we were curious to observe their culture. We kept our cheeks close to the mattress and stared through the gaps of the wood railing. The family stood around the fire, scraping the skin from fish as they laughed at things we could not understand. I wished more people interacted this way. They seemed so simple and content. As they scraped away the fish scales and wiped beads of sweat from their faces, they smiled. The family's glow in the illumination of the fire burned an image inside my memory.

The potent odor of the fish continued from behind us and was accompanied with the briny scent of the sea. The water was calm, but the ocean breeze rolled over us in waves, saturating us with its cool wind and leaving the taste of salt on my tongue. We did not talk. Rather, we spent our time listening to the environment around us. A young boy sat out by the street and invaded the silence with his acoustic guitar. The flamenco melody put a bounce in my toes, swaying my body side to side as I danced with Adam without even standing from our inflated mattress. I laughed in a low chuckle that

was almost too hushed to be heard.

As the whispered laugh faded from my voice, I lay there, tranquil in the night, resting my cheek on his arm. There was something about the way his smile was crooked. One side lifted into a smirk while the other remained entirely serious. Not being able to read his expression invoked a mystery about him. The chocolate color of his eyes was rich and passionate. They could never hide emotion as his smirk did. They always revealed the truth in their shade and intensity. These were the little things I loved about Adam. His skin was chapped and rough, not allowing my fingers to smoothly slide over his arm. I could see the scar on his arm shining in the light of the fire. They were the parts that meant nothing to him but everything to me. There was a certain way he brushed my hair out of my face, gently stroking my cheekbone as he did. He leaned into me, carefully, nervous just to be closer to me. He was near enough that I could smell the mint aroma on his breath. The scent from his gum was overwhelming and my nose twitched from the tingle. We remained awake through the night, content with being together and bonding through the silence.

The enchanting sky was like something I'd only seen in my dreams. It was a place that I escaped to when the chaos of the world was crashing in on me. The dark blue sky glowed with stars, far too numerous to count. The Milky Way was discernible, a gray smudge across the sky. Meteors started to appear. Each streak left a trail of shimmering dust behind it. Seeing each meteor pass through the heavens was like witnessing a miracle, living in a euphoric moment that I wanted to last forever.

The howling of dogs accompanied the acoustic melodies in the darkness. I stayed next to Adam, the adrenaline rushing through my system. I could feel the electricity between us every time his arm touched mine. It was like experiencing love for the first time. Every little touch made me flinch, as if the sparks of chemistry actually burned my skin. The gusts from the ocean tossed my long brown hair across my face. The cool wind raised goose bumps across my hot skin.

Just thinking about that night made my heart race, and I could feel the corners of my lips turn up, stuck in a wistful smile as if I were back in Mexico for that night, frozen in euphoria. I slowly pulled myself from my recollection. My lips returned to their frown

as I pulled into Adam's driveway. Home again, we climbed from my van. I watched him shiver in the chill of the night and briskly march up his driveway. I walked slowly and paced my steps as I hummed that flamenco melody to myself. He waited for me outside the door, opened it, and let me walk in first. It briefly reminded me of the guy I used to know. I settled him in on the couch, covered him with a multicolored quilt and filled up a cup of water that was cold enough to fog the outside of the glass. I sat down on the couch, slowly handing him the water, careful not to spill. He laid his head on me just as he had on that never-ending drive and smiled up at me with his familiar crooked smile.

I tried to smile but the memories wouldn't allow it. He lifted his hand to gently brush my hair out of my face, but only managed to rigidly graze my nose before his eyes closed against his will. His hand dropped from my face and he was suddenly unconscious, lying in my lap. My stomach twisted into a knot. I didn't know what the future held for us. For that night I just stayed with him, this time brushing his hair off his face with my right hand, while my left tingled beneath the weight of his neck.

KATHY HOORMANN

FLYING

Today is the day I have been waiting for since I met Bellerophon. Today is the day he is going to let me ride his winged steed Pegasus.

I wait on a hill a little ways from my father's palace, pacing. It is hard to stand still knowing what is coming. I realize as I make another turn in the grass that I am no longer sure whether I'm still looking forward to flying. After all, if men were meant to fly, wouldn't the gods have given us wings like the birds?

But I have no more time to think about it, for I see Bellerophon riding my way. He's astride a magnificent white horse. As they get closer, I see his wings are folded against his sides, like a bird. The closer they get, the more I can see. The wings are far larger than any bird's, covering the horse's entire side. They are soft and seem to shimmer in the bright sunlight that touches them on this clear day.

"Philonoë!" he calls, beaming as he rides toward me. In a moment, he is beside me and he asks, "Are you ready?"

I nod once, unable to speak because of the sudden fluttering in my stomach.

"Then give me your hand," he says. Leaning down, he grasps my hand and carefully pulls me up behind him. I slip my leg over Pegasus's back. The feeling of the horse's warm body and firm muscles beneath my legs is unfamiliar.

I quickly slide my arms around Bellerophon's waist, gripping him tightly. Bellerophon laughs lightly, then turns Pegasus and urges him into a brisk gallop. Surprised by the speed, I grip Bellerophon even more firmly.

"Don't worry," he calls back to me, patting my hands wrapped around his waist.

"We're going to go up now," he tells me. I give his waist a squeeze in acknowledgment.

Pegasus extends his wings. They stretch far out to either side of me, feathered and silvery white. I think they are glorious, so strong and beautiful at the same time. They begin to ply the air. I had thought we were going as fast we could, but, amazingly, Pegasus gains speed. The wind begins to sting my eyes, causing tears to stream down my face. I close my eyes, unable to keep them open in the biting wind.

As I sit still, clutching Bellerophon with my eyes closed, I feel

Pegasus gather himself under me. Then he springs up. No longer do I feel his hooves pounding the ground. I hear only wind whistling past my ears. I feel only his wings beating the air.

Taking a quick breath, I open my eyes. Far, far below me are my father's lands. The people and animals are so small they become mere dots on a vast green carpet.

"Amazing!" I exclaim.

"Isn't it?" Bellerophon calls back, a smile evident in his voice.

I close my eyes again, just feeling the wind fly past me. I sit behind Bellerophon, astride a winged horse, and revel in the glory and freedom of flying.

As we soar, I think how lucky birds are; they are the gods' favorite creatures, while men are simply their afterthought.

CONTRIBUTORS

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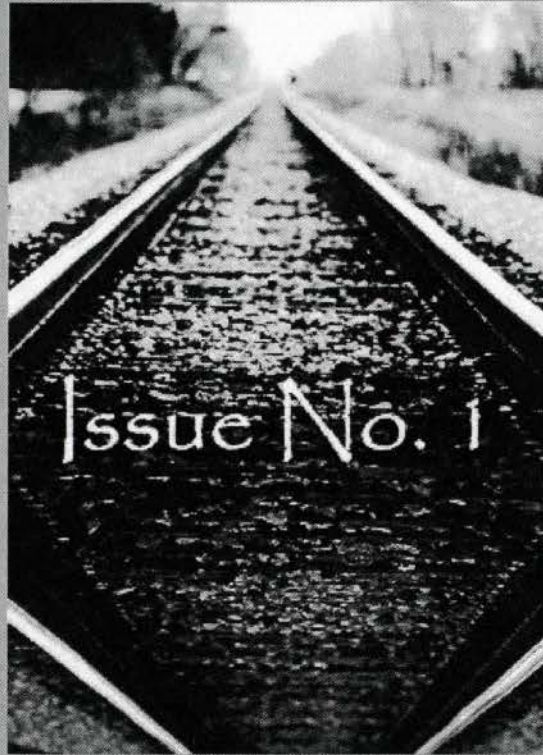
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