

the **SLIGGO**
Journal
of Arts & Letters

Montgomery College

7600 Takoma Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

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ISBN 13: (978-1-928589-81-5)

Cover artwork by Abby Squire
Cover design by Franck Senaya

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Fall 2012

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Acknowledgments:

The staff would like to thank our deans: Dr. Tony Hawkins and Ms. Monica Trent; art faculty: Joyce Jewell, Wil Brunner, and Andrea Adams; our student interns Franck, Jillian and Madona for their help with this issue, and the generosity of Gival Press in helping to make this publication possible.

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Poetry

Spring for Poetry in Takoma Park

Roscoe Magnus

Behold me here imprisoned now in bronze
Where once I held command of this great street –
Cock of the Walk who strode with Rooster gods.

“O Roscoe you’re the One, just like the Fonz
Was once,” they’d cry and gather at my feet.
Behold me now imprisoned here in bronze.

I strutted all about just like the Lords,
My cockcomb high – I was among the great:
Cock of the Walk who strode with Rooster gods.

I had an eye for Chicks – with fowl glands
I took the measure of their tender meat.
And now? Look at me fettered here in bronze.

Oh! I’d rather be a lonely Hen who plods
Each day and has to beg the smallest treat.
Aiee! Me, Roscoe who strode with Rooster gods.

So go you Passersby and Common Clods –
Know that you too will leave in lone defeat.
Gaze on me now imprisoned here in bronze
Cock of the Walk who strode with Rooster gods.

Anonymous, 2nd century BCE
Trans. from Latin by Merrill Leffler

Spring for Poetry in Takoma Park, an urban poetry walk, is sponsored by the Friends of the Takoma Park Maryland Library with assistance from the Takoma Park Department of Public Works. Designs of the poetry posters are by the students at the School of Art and Design at Montgomery College. For more information about the Friends, visit www.FTPWL.org

Lisa Thompson, designer

Mi Ciudad

Khine “Bonner” Johnson

Winner of the 2012 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Award

Mi amor
Lleso
Y vivo
Que abarca callejones
Su rosa hormigón
el anochecer de un amanecer
Mi amor
Encendio un fuego
Mi amor
Mi corazón
Una sombra gris
Persiste la noche
calles abarrotadas
ojos angustiados
sueños robados
edificios destrozados
Mi amor
Mi corazón
Mi ciudad

Silver Dust

Joseph Baldi Acosta

Silver dust

covers a glossy matrix,
records, immortalizes
in white and black,
all that the metal eye seizes
in its path.

An explosion of light –
a bride framed by an iconic steel tower;
school children, hands joined,
standing in a pristine snow;
lovers embracing, lips locked in a death grip.

A flash in the darkness –
soldiers in black uniforms;
a lifeless man lying by the Seine,
face frozen in horror.

Song for Humanity

Nicholas Leonard

Winner of the 2012 Ventura Valdez English Poetry Award

Tonight the gathered crowd is mourning,
in remembrance crying out,
for those forgotten – unimportant,
speaking for the voiceless.

Following the sun,
the light is always visible,
even at the darkest moment
revealing what is hidden.

Bodies trampled over and burned,
hushed and anxious whispers.
Nagging warnings unheeded,
tragic ruin the only result.

Following the sun,
for the light never dies.
The strength of joining, fusion
much stronger than separation.

The mass grave is a harvest,
a careless space in time,
with all respect abolished,
we desecrate the past.

Following the sun,
nourishing all life.
Enshrouded in distortion,
still shines in reflection.

A bitter tear for the lost,
those untouched by corruption.
Innocence like a delicate leaf,
untarnished by vile acts.

Following the sun,
unbending to conditions.
A churning mass of elements,
that never wavers in might.

The smoldering desert before us,
Sears pangs of remorse in our chests.
With full knowledge of what we do,
forced to watch, unable to stop.

Father

Sydney March

I was a fragment that fell
from the sadness of your eyes
on that distant blue morning
I am the fate you would
gladly have changed
only it was far too late
and the gloom of my star
had already echoed your flame

I inhabited your shadow
as if it were a walled city
how easy it is to forget
those days when
your laughter shook me
with its splintered heat
and I burned with hope
from the rays of your crazy sun
(was that all I needed
to keep me going?)

You told me once that twilight
brings perils and regrets
but I feed upon
your reckless gaze
from the mirror of my eyes
and I can't resist the urge
to dance up to the edge
and sway to the music
of your dying laughter.

Hurricane

Sydney March

I clung tightly to my father's neck
And we stumbled into the swirling chaos
The wind howled and lashed the rain
Into sharp daggers, lacerating our skins.
My father stumbled and swore
And my mother prayed loudly
As god unleashed his fury around us
Her prayers distressed me
More than the night's wild anger
The coconut trees too were praying
Genuflecting helplessly against the fury
Of the unforgiving wind
The roof was blown from our house
And came to rest in a mango tree,
Like a massive wounded bird.
With each flash of lightning
I could see the restless wreckage
All mingled with the dancing whirl
Of water, light and wood

My father cursed and shouted
Can you make out the neighbor's house?
"It looks like a ship Dada" I yelled
Above the mournful wail of the wind
His foot got caught on a fallen branch
And I held on more tightly
He cursed the black night
And swore he'd skin us alive
If he ever caught us playing with the
Flashlight again

My brother started to cry and my mother
Continued her praying, unabated
Against the counterpoint
Of my father's loud swearing
The lightning cracked like a bullwhip
Flashing our neighbor's house

Into view
Like a whitewashed ocean liner
Marooned on the beach

Writing

Yvette Jones

I write so my teeth and fingers
have something to know
the etching escape still isn't far enough
I write because I'm sure of what I want
and erase the words
cause they think they all know what I ought

Southern Appreciation

Yvette Jones

My days would be filled with slick, sultry laughs
they slid from my throat to my toes
I loved to sing in sweet thick air
with moss and shades of thickness overgrown
my feet stood firm
Planted, there on that land where I smiled and shed tears
exchanging words for words and comfort for fear
scents of black eyed peas and Creole spice simmer and shake the pot
the vision of girls and ivory teeth shine in brilliance toward the sky
my ears would gather the sounds of how it used
To be
and in the comfort of an aged chair
I was rocked and nestled
Falling into that thick, black, delta

Through These Doors

Don Berger

Nowhere on earth does it say
I have to do what I tell myself.
As a manager I blow but as a person
I'm better than what they could replace me with.

The stupid dog made out of flowers
That everyone thought was so cute last summer,
The bulbs that've twinkled for ten minutes every hour
From dusk until 1 a.m. all over the edifice...

Everything has to be grand,
Everything has to be great,
Nobody can be average.

I'd like to have a self that's really strong, and really me.
I need time though.
I need to find the blood.

Confusion and Failure

Don Berger

My people worked in the courts for hundreds of years,
And I could trace my ancestry back to the 14th century,
Not to mention, I was insured,
I had insurance, and nothing could happen to me.

Then I met for the second time
The man from Perfection and the woman Kindness
By candlelight near the Over Tree Gate,
Transforming everything into narrative.
They let me stay into Sunday.
I took the last train back
To where I am, still green and still great.

"Stick to form," I heard myself say, remembering
Her peanuts, the skin of which caught in my throat
And remembering
His way, too, at the midpoint
Of the sitting area
And the bread she brought
To keep me from choking,
Gagging, coughing. Agreed, those days

Are really one
Crammed into past
Of an evening.
Excited and jangled both, I see it,
Their two faces, wine-soaked,
Dabbing at my expectations,
Stinging my hair.
And if it couldn't be
Repeated I might still
Repeat it. It goes, it stays.
I was someone I wasn't, that now
I am, bending,
By nature looking for sun.

The Silence After the Performance

Yvette Neisser Moreno

for Julian Wachner, conductor of The Washington Chorus

When the conductor lowers his hands
from crescendo
down

to utter silence
arms tensed
fingers towards the floor

When the singer is motionless
neck arched with the tilt
of her last note

an orchestra in still life
so many bodies
straining against the instinct
to shiver or shudder

this is when the conductor's reach
extends from his fingertips
to the very last row of seats
and the audience obeys
this unmistakable gesture
this ultimate un-notated rest
this convergence of chorus and audience
when two silences meet

Gravity

Yvette Neisser Moreno

Somewhere on the outskirts
of San Francisco, down a side road
heading out of town,
gravity is reversed.

I'm not making this up.

In someone's backyard,
all that we knew to be true
was turned upside down:
if you put a metal ball
at the bottom of a ramp,
it would roll up.

What magnets had they hung
in the air—or magic—
to make every object keen upwards,
gravity now pulling everything
toward the sky?

I believed it all
and still do.

Like the way every road home
somehow bent toward Lombard Street,
the red snake curve,
where our father suddenly
had to comb his hair
and took his hands off the wheel

and the world opened up, didn't it,
as the wheels rolled over each brick—
sunshine, baskets of flowers
pouring out their colors
at every turn,
the road twisting and twisting.

Disappearing Act

Saundra R. Maley

A quick wind shaking green
Sunlight and leaves framed
And quartered beyond glass panes

Indescribable and green
Among seasons I cannot repeat
Made to stand for something—

A flash between fall and winter
A meaning suggested and gone
Already shadow eats its way

Up the trunk and swallows the branches

Stone Promise

Saundra R. Maley

—for Herschel Shosteck, who loved the Negev

Too late this labor comes—I am old
Can walk no more through Cades and Pharan
With a bony camel and a crooked rod.
I am lost.

Six thousand trail behind,
Point fingers, mock my stuttering tongue.
O Shepherd of the Midbar lead me on
To the tent of final meeting.

Exodus

Without end—I am no nomad. Mad
With manna, I lack strength to go on,
And send my soul before me to ask God
If my work is done.

When you see Him face to face
Bring back word of an oasis. I thirst,
My doubt grows wide as the desert.
I am a middle man who kept my part—
At this last turn, no marker for my bones.

Purification

Tranetta Franklin

Under the shower head
It's cracked, peeling yellow paint;
Aged and hollow.
Cool droplets, soft and kind, ripe with lucidity.
An honest intention I could never condemn,
Fall upon my cinnamon-tinted skin.

Descending upon the black smudges,
Trickling upon the ash, cinder and grime.
Chill me,
Freezing the marrow in my bones.
I stand between these dusty tiles,
Aligned with fissures, as scared,
Naked, bare and vulnerable as I was,
Only a few hours ago.
Defenseless,

When my mother,
Bent, crippled—
Filled with avarice; emptied by lust,
Crawled away into the dark of a barbaric snowstorm.
Its limbs black and pallid,
Its eyes a pitiless ice gray,
With a heart of cobalt.

Wondering if she'd ever come back again.
Wondering if--
Or when
My heart would ever mend.

Fiction

Their Forbidden Embroidery

Lavinia Rizvi

The tent loomed large and white in the spring night, the floor layered with patterned rugs. Jureyah finished hanging the paper lantern lights for her wedding, evading the gaze of her fiancé. His eyes glittered darkly as he watched her, admiring her curves and voluptuous lips. “He’s very dashing, you know,” her mother had tutted the night he had proposed. But Jureyah found him predatory; even when he smiled, his teeth were large and sharp and blindingly white.

“He doesn’t really love me,” she had said to her parents, eyes lowered.

“And how could he yet?” her father had said, and then added, “All he knows is your beauty. But we need to get you married right away, and thank God he doesn’t know the shame you’ve brought us.” As Jureyah recalled her father’s remarks, she blushed with shame and anger.

The fiancé strolled over, his pajama swishing, stiff with embroidery. He smiled and exposed crow’s feet, etched with sun. Jureyah shuddered slightly.

“Jureyah, I see you are finished! I don’t know why you insist upon working like the servants,” he said, sweeping a hand to motion towards the people toiling around them, preparing for the next day.

“I like working,” she said, thinking to herself that it helped to keep busy.

“Ha! We’ll train you out of that soon enough. It reflects badly on a husband to let his pretty little wife work.”

He looked her up and down, and Jureyah felt exposed. His gaze made her feel as if he were pulling away her sari, and when they made eye contact, he bared something much deeper. She was selfishly thankful when he turned to yell at a cook who had burned the curry.

Jureyah took the opportunity to slip through the tent flaps. She breathed deeply the air fragrant with jasmine and admired the deep wet greens of spring. Flowers had blossomed in rainbow colors, the trees were alive with

birds, monkeys, and insects.

Suddenly, Jureyah heard a rustling from a nearby patch of trees. She froze, thinking it might be a creature that bit. Out stepped Salemah, her eyes an uncommon deep green and her hair blacker than the night. She was wearing an uncharacteristically simple sari, black to better hide her in the shadows. Jureyah’s heart leapt and she covered her mouth with her hand. Her mind raced with images. Their meeting at the river, where Jureyah couldn’t help but notice the way her wet clothing clung to Salemah’s body. The long dreamy nights they’d spent talking, opening their souls to each other, safe from scandal as only two women could be. The more Jureyah had learned of Salemah’s powerful but kind personality, her drive to get what she wanted, the more Jureyah felt the attraction. Jureyah had always hated the way she herself couldn’t speak up, not even to the merchants who cheated her. Salemah was strength, gentled only by Jureyah’s lost-looking eyes. Their first kiss had been flavored with cardamom, cloves, and almond sweets, and had surprised them both. The softness of Salemah’s body and her spicy scent lingered in Jureyah’s heart, though she hadn’t seen her in months.

“Salemah...” Jureyah sighed, and tasted the longing on the word.

“I heard you are getting married.” Salemah didn’t say the words with anger or spite, but they slapped Jureyah into reality all the same.

“...Yes. Tomorrow.” Jureyah could feel her eyes become wet and her vision blur.

“No, don’t cry. Please. I have a plan.” Salemah cupped Jureyah’s face in her hands, forcing eye contact.

“A ...plan? Salemah, I don’t think--“

“No, listen to me. I have found someone who can send us to America. We can leave tomorrow.” Jureyah looked at Salemah in wonder. She always was the strong one.

“But, I can’t afford--“

“I may not be rich,” Salemah said, with a meaningful glance at the extravagant tent, “but I can find a way.” Jureyah looked into Salemah’s eyes and

knew that she could. But she still pulled away.

“Let me think about it.”

“What is there to think about?” Salemah looked hurt.

“You are asking me to leave more than the wedding. My parents, my brother and sisters, my country...”

Salemah looked down and chewed her lower lip. “I know. But Allah will guide us through a new course.” Jureyah walked a few steps and leaned against a tree, facing away from those intoxicating green eyes. She remembered the night that had changed everything.

Jureyah and Salemah had met that fateful evening under a mango tree on Jureyah’s family’s land, far from the house. They whispered affectionate words and names to each other, punctuated by deep kisses. Their hands explored the curves they knew from their own bodies, the gem-like fabrics of their saris shimmering in the dim moonlight. They lay on the lush greenery that carpeted the ground, providing each other the warmth that can only be found in another’s arms. Suddenly, from a few feet away, they heard a voice.

“What the hell is this?!” The voice hissed, and their hearts stopped. They recognized that voice.

“Abba jaan!” Jureyah croaked, her voice cracking with horror. Her father took a few steps towards the couple, who were scrambling away from each other. His eyes burned ferociously. He reached down to Jureyah and slapped her across the face, hard. Salemah whimpered and stretched out her hand towards Jureyah, which only made things worse.

“Oh, you feel bad for her? You think I’m doing something wrong? Rundi! Behshaam! Shameless slut! I give you everything and you go and become a--” He stopped and spit on her. Hot tears from both girls spilled to the ground.

“Go,” Jureyah whispered to Salemah. Salemah shook her head. “Go!” she screamed, dropping her eyes from her father’s raging glare. Salemah had no choice; there was nothing she could do. She ran, but not before she heard the sound of fists hitting soft flesh and cries of pain.

* * *

Jureyah glanced at the looming tent, checking for eavesdroppers. “You are so optimistic, even now.” Jureyah turned towards Salemah, whose eyes were strong but slightly pleading. “You think we can still get away and do what we both want. But I am not sure that what we are, and what we want, are right in the eyes of Allah.”

“You don’t believe that it’s wrong,” Salemah said, but her tone was unsure. She examined Jureyah’s face for a few seconds, then moved towards her and took her into her arms. “I love you, and that must be right...insh’Allah,” she added, somewhat ironically.

“I love you, too,” Jureyah sighed, “but I can’t come with you.” She nestled her face into Salemah’s shoulder, which had stiffened.

The large house was filled with mosaics and tapestries. In the courtyard a large fountain let sheets of water flow, catching the light. Jureyah finished her embroidery with trembling fingers, her glasses resting near the tip of her nose. She pulled the fabric up to admire her work; an intricate design of flower blossoms and their leaves, with animals moving through the foliage.

“Is that what you’ve been working on?” Jureyah spun around and saw her husband examining her work. She nodded. “It’s nice. We can hang it on the wall if you like.” Jureyah shrugged her delicate shoulders.

“Thank you, but it is not good enough. When I have embroidered something good enough, you will know.” The husband guffawed.

“Good enough? For what? You want to enter a contest? My wife doesn’t need to display herself for other people’s eyes.” Jureyah looked at her wrinkled hands, the nails yellowing.

“I understand,” she said. A servant came in and told them the tea was ready. The husband got up and went to his study. Jureyah recollected the night of their marriage. Her parents had displayed closed-mouth smiles as they waved to the departing couple, her mother’s face shiny with tears. Jureyah had watched them disappear through the gossamer cloth of the palanquin, her vision obstructed by the raining flower petals tossed by guests. When they were too far away to see, she turned to her husband. Tears moistened her cheeks and her lips trembled, but he mistook this for traditional bridal bashfulness.

When they arrived at the house, after his family welcomed them, the couple was ushered into the bedroom, his relations shoving her in and closing the door with laughter and raucous innuendo. Her bridegroom's carnivorous smile widened and his teeth flashed. Jureyah shut her eyes.

As Jureyah remembered this now, the emotions that had built up behind a wall of composure flooded her. Salemah had left wordlessly after Jureyah went through with the marriage, and she knew she would never see her again. Her mother, though loving, stayed oblivious to the needs of her daughter. Her father, despite her attempts to be a dutiful daughter and an obedient wife, had never been able to forgive her for what she was. He had never proudly kissed her head and blessed her, as she had hoped he would. All the reasons she had given herself for not leaving with Salemah, abandoning everything she knew, seemed pointless now.

Jureyah began a new embroidery. She took all her personal savings and went to the market, choosing the most beautiful materials she could find: fabric that glowed and shimmered like a stream at night, thread that sparkled in colors like the richest jewels. She worked tirelessly, angering her husband with her sudden single-mindedness. She stitched tiny stitches that could barely be seen, and melded colors as naturally as if she were painting in oils. The tapestry she made looked like sunlight shining through fruit trees, like the sands of the tropics and the feathers of a peacock. When she finally finished, in the dead of night, she held it up and examined it.

"It is finally perfect," she said. She clutched the tapestry to her, shaking with all her weakness and age.

The following morning, the servants began stirring, gossiping and making preparations for the day. And then there was a scream.

"SAHIB!" a young servant screamed, eyes widened in horror. The man awoke with a start, and ran to see what was causing the commotion.

In the courtyard, on a hammock stretched between flowering trees, was Jureyah. She was wrapped in the tapestry, now stained with blood. On the tapestry were delicate, entwined scenes: A river, a mango tree, flowers and their drifting petals, monkeys, and two women, one with jeweled green eyes, holding each other, smiling with closed eyes.

Underneath her lay a pair of bloodied scissors.

Fine Lines and Drugstore Lipstick

Ellie Webster

Many times Miranda sat at the desk in her office boxed off by walls of gray carpet-covered cork and fought the urgency to walk out, get onto the first bus heading anywhere and never return. She daydreamed of this moment more than she actually worked. Or maybe it was that she had daydreamed so much or that she had worked in the same cubicle and did the same thing in it for so long that she began to do them both subconsciously and simultaneously. At the end of the day, though, Miranda could never recall the phone calls she had made, or the topic of discussion at the floor meetings, or even what her boss commended her for. But in vivid detail, she could explain the (almost) fool proof plan she had devised for traveling the world on the income of odd jobs alone, or the escapades she would go on with her new European friends. They would laugh drunk in cafes at 2 p.m. on Tuesdays and not care because life in Europe is easy. On days she was feeling a bit more practical, she daydreamt of the wildly successful sculptor she would make fall in love with her. She dreamt of becoming his muse and being the subject of an entire exhibit at the MET. He would buy her the kind of jewelry people see in *Vogue* with captions that read, “bracelet, Oscar de La Renta, \$950,” and don’t think actually exist. Miranda would be the one to prove they existed.

On this one day in particular, Miranda held on to the sides of her chair with all her might. Her arms stiff as prison bars beside her, fingers curled around the base of the seat. She swiveled right to left countless times trying to convince herself that practicality is what keeps people stable and that stability is what brings happiness. She was not successful.

“Your calls alone raised more than five thousand bucks this week. We are that much closer to opening up the Midtown center. Miranda, your dedication never fails me.”

Miranda was wearing a red silk dress that touched the marble flooring of the MET. Everything around her was pristine white except for the rich colored gowns and suits of the incredibly important guests who were given incredibly coveted tickets to the event. Her sculptor boyfriend said that she could debut the centerpiece work of his exhibit. She was the inspiration for it after

all. Her fingers pulled taut the black cloth but as she yanked, the entire scene cracked like shattered glass and fell to the wall to wall carpeted floor of her office.

Miranda jumped startled, looked up at her boss, smiled scantily, and spoke without her usual mental mull over, “The orange chicken from that new place down the street is kind of not working too well for me right now.”

“You know, I thought the same thing last week. Miranda, take the rest of the day off. You certainly deserve it.” Miranda’s boss winked and left her to her strange newfound freedom.

Miranda felt a surge of brilliant nervousness. Four hours remained until the end of the work day. Four hours that had dropped from the heavens. It was a vacuum in the day that did not exist in the reality of her actual life and she could do with it whatever she wanted. She walked past that new Chinese place and wondered whether or not the orange chicken would have made her feel funny. She had never eaten there before. Next to the Chinese restaurant was a designer makeup store that sold 30 dollar lipstick. This was the kind of place that let you try on the makeup before you bought it and Miranda thought it would be fitting to wear makeup more expensive than her own to begin her ever so fortunate afternoon. After sampling every shade of the most costly brand, she decided on one that almost exactly matched the one she already owned and wore every day. But this tube of deep red was wilder to Miranda. It was daring. Every application must be worth at least 50 cents. That was luxury. Miranda caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror as she walked out of the store and for less than a second had the dreadful thought that she looked no different than she had this morning. The half-second past, she glanced again and was a new woman.

Miranda stepped into Merlin’s, an adult bar, she passed often. She would always belabor her boyfriend, Sean, on how places like these were degrading to women. How she sees so many women come to the shelter that used to work at places like these. It was the mistreatment of women in particular that made Miranda want to work for the safe home, she would tell Sean. She was flawless at exuding her disgust and masquerading as the die hard feminist she always wished she was. What she never mentioned to him, however, was how intrigued she was by places like these. A deeply hidden bit of her thought of how wonderful it must be to dance in nothing but glitter, while others leave things that are important to them: their jobs, their wives, their daughters’

piano recitals, to ogle over the magnificence of your body. This was another daydream of hers.

Merlin's was dark and smoky. The only women there were the two that danced on suspended platforms that hung from a single pole attached to the center of its floor. They swung slightly. What a sturdy structure it must be, Miranda thought. What brave women they must be. She admired them even more. At the bar, Miranda ordered two drinks at once and shot them back one right after the next.

"That's impressive for a pretty lady who wears yellow shoes."

Miranda looked down to the other end of the counter of the bar, where a man sat. He was smiling a good-hearted smile. He was wearing a rather flimsy looking gray work jacket with brown leather patches on the elbows. His tie was undone and hung sloppily against his slightly wrinkled white button down. He was a graying blonde, easily twice Miranda's age, but his strong jaw and the way his sturdy build filled his shirt made him one of those men middle aged women would find attractive. Four empty glasses sat in front of him.

"Don't let the yellow shoes fool you," Miranda replied with a playful grin. She could feel herself morphing into her daydreamed character.

"I hope you got some gum on you. You don't want them getting a whiff of that back at your office. I got some that works wonders if you'd like."

Miranda forgot she was at work at all that day, that she had a job at all. "Oh, I'm done for the day." She turned to the bartender and asked for another whiskey.

"That's funny, 'cuz so am I," the man said in his oddly trusting warm friendly voice.

They spent the next hour getting drunk. He spoke in lengthy depth of his awful job and two daughters. Miranda responded only with witty charming remarks that divulged nothing of her actual life. When she was drunk enough to let the man's hand graze farther up her thigh, she commented on how she had always admired dancers at places like these. She was quite the dancer herself, she added. The man mentioned his apartment was only minutes away by foot. Miranda, in all her foggy drunken stupor, wanted nothing more than

to be watched by this kind unhappy man.

Miranda's arms brushed against her bare sides as they rose and swirled around in the air. The man whose name she could barely conjure up sat on his bed, hands behind his head, eyes full of sad hunger. Her hips moved in a way they only knew when whiskey burned in her stomach and the bun that was pinned so carefully that morning fell loose. The ends of her thick black hair draped over her shoulders, covering her exposed body. Miranda swept it behind her and let her hands run over herself. She effortlessly slipped into the fine line between what we think will make us happy and what happiness really is. Thoughts of reality flickered only briefly behind her inebriation.

Miranda traced her mouth in blood red before making towards the door. He was fast asleep, sprawled across the bed, his mouth smeared with the color she had just reapplied. A brimming ashtray waited to be tipped over by his careless arm hanging off the bed as he lay diagonally across it. Sitting slightly higher, behind the ashtray, on top of the clock glowing 5:30 PM, was his favorite photograph: two tiny blondes smashing their lips onto both cheeks of the man she had just slept with. Miranda knew that it was his favorite because he told her about it an hour earlier, when she laid on the thick curls of his chest. Miranda stared at his daughters and wondered how close in age the oldest must be to her now.

"I'm leaving," Miranda said with little assertion.

The man groaned, rolled over, opened his eyes and smiled a genuine smile. "I had a nice time," he said.

Miranda hesitated. "Me too. I'll text you." She smiled without showing teeth and left.

Miranda turned the keys to her apartment door. Sean lay, curled up in our blanket, like a child. His beard looked untamed but familiar and safe. She resisted the urge to rest her face in his neck. His feet exposed, toenails uncut. Miranda wanted to crawl onto their mattress and tangle her limbs with his, but instead she tasted the cigarette smoke in her saliva. She walked to the curtains and drew them with a shrill causing force.

Sean's eyes were pure and good, with the haziness of sleep. "Babe, how was work?"

Miranda suddenly felt sick. “You slept all day again, didn’t you?”

“No. I looked online. Sent some resumes out. I finished a painting today too, babe.” Sean’s head gestured towards the corner of the room. Miranda stared back at herself. The canvas showed her eyes to be more alive than she had ever known them to be.

“And get this,” Sean went on. “I couldn’t get the paint to match your lips quite right so I went to the drugstore and picked up that lipstick you always wear.”

Miranda’s heart broke. “What is wrong with you, Sean? You will never get a job sitting here, painting with makeup, emailing every entry level craigslist ad. God, just do something.”

Sean, though diminished agreed with his girlfriend, “I can’t do what you do. Get up and go to work so diligently like you do, but I will try harder, babe. I will.”

All Miranda wanted to do was wash that godawful lipstick off. It felt impossibly and disgustingly cheap now. She headed towards the bathroom. Sean followed behind but she slammed the door behind her. She ferociously scrubbed at her lips with a rag and shouted, “For fuck sake, Sean, you make me sick.” Miranda crawled out from that fine line she had slipped into earlier. She had no idea what she wanted anymore, no idea what happiness really meant. She was scared. The way a very young child is in the dark, no sense of time or space, only aware of the darkness.

Sean shouted through the door, “Babe, I’m sorry. Can we talk over Chinese? There is a new place near your job.”

Miranda did not reply. She kicked her yellow heels off and peeled the dress from her skin just as she had done earlier, only she did not welcome the air against her nakedness this time. She turned the bathtub faucet on to the hottest setting.

“Babe. Come on. Don’t do this now. Let me in.”

She let the water fill.

“Babe....Babe...come on.”

Miranda stood perfectly still with one foot just above the water and waited in silence for Sean to walk away.

On Contemplating Winslow Homer's Watercolors

Carol Joan Haney McVey

The white-washed duplex that quartered our family during the summer of 1969 was set back on a road lined with prickly greenbrier and blackberry shrubs. The blackberry bushes thickened at the end of the road, barely obscuring a narrow footpath that led to the blinding white sands of the tranquil bay. Sometimes, I would sneak down that path to the beach to meet Charlie, who was going into my eighth grade class that September at St. Augustine. Charlie and I would sketch the sailboats floating by like clouds, and sometimes I'd sketch Charlie wearing his dad's Panama hat. For miles in every direction, the landscape resembled Winslow Homer's *Watercolors*, prints of which hung on our dining room wall. It was my private ambition to turn my sad little sketches into masterpieces like Winslow Homer's *Fishing Boats* or his *Key West: Hauling Anchor*.

On the way back from my private escape, I would stop to pick blackberries for a rich dessert of blackberries and crème to share with my family. I supposed that this made up for keeping my activities secret. Not that anything was terribly wrong with meeting Charlie. We held hands. That was all we did. It never went even a little too far, except for that one day in July when my younger brother Patrick had his accident.

Patrick and I waited in silence at the bus stop that warm and cloudy morning in September of 1969. It was the first day of the school year. We did not speak of Patrick's eye patch or the accident that caused him to lose his left eye. We did not speak about how the weight at the end of his friend's fishing line accidentally struck him in such a way that his left eye had to be removed to spare him from total blindness. We did not speak of the fact that I was supposed to be babysitting him that day. He had begged me to let him go, and I had refused to let him go. He went upstairs to get a baseball cap I had borrowed and found the sketches I had drawn of Charlie in his swimsuit on the beach. Then he waved the sketchbook in front of me saying, "Who is this? You're not supposed to be meeting boys alone at the beach. I'm telling Mom and Dad about this if you don't let me go fishing." I almost hated him for blackmailing me, but I hated myself more for letting him go that day.

Breaking the silence as we waited at the bus stop, I mentioned the heat wave and the possibility of a hurricane. We talked about who among our friends had the worst body odor and who was growing whiskers. We both agreed that in the whisker contest, Sister Sarah Ann won, hands down.

"She is just old," said Patrick, "old as one of those cypress trees down in the swamp."

"Old as Old Ironsides," I said.

"Old as a dinosaur bone," he said.

"I heard she's coming back to teach your class for the month of September. Mrs. Honeycutt had to go on maternity leave; so you better be careful, Patrick."

"I know, Mom told me. Remember when she got me kicked off the softball team because of one little bet? Remember when she poked at the hole in the knee of my uniform pants in front of everyone?"

"Patrick, you're wearing the same pants from last year." I started to laugh.

After pausing for a long time, Patrick said, "Don't tell anyone it's a glass eye. Just for today. I'm thinking of a plan, just in case Sister Sarah Ann pushes me over the edge. Swear?"

I thought of him lying in the hospital bed with both of his eyes bandaged for nearly a week while doctors consulted on decisions to remove the left eye. I remembered the hushed tones of the doctors when they said he could go totally blind if they didn't bandage both eyes temporarily. It had something to do with permanently damaged nerve endings, and clotting blood vessels, and sympathetic reactions that caused an exposed good eye to imitate the reactions of the injured eye. I had visited every day after school as we listened on the radio to the news about the Apollo moon landing when he wasn't listening to the baseball games. He asked me to describe what I saw on television. I remembered visiting just before the doctors performed the surgery and could not forget watching his small body twisting to the sound of my footsteps when I visited as he turned his head around the room to ask, "Is that you, Joan? Tell me how it looks up there on the moon."

The hot winds picked up force while we waited. “The doctors said that I shouldn’t get into a crowd or get jostled for the first weeks back at school. So just say I have poison ivy to keep people away today.” said Patrick.

“Okay, I guess I’ll go along with your plan,” I said. I began to worry about what I might be getting into. But I knew that he was still small for his age and vulnerable, and he shouldn’t be roughhoused, so I started thinking of what to tell people to keep them away.

Mother thought it was Patrick’s gift for math and the laws of probability that got him into trouble with Sister Sarah Ann in fifth grade. Patrick had started a gambling ring by pooling bets on who would win his softball games at school. Then the little gang had become more specialized in pooling wagers about classroom activities. Who would flunk the religion quiz? How long did it take Pokey Pinkham to finish his sentences? Then Sister Sarah Ann intercepted a note soliciting the ante for a bet on how many fifth grade girls were already wearing bras. And that was the end of the fifth-grade gambling syndicate.

The bus was late. The sky turned a deep shade of lavender and a thin vein of lightning pierced the horizon. Several willows and palms in the distance bent in obedience to the wind. I opened my umbrella and offered to share it with Patrick, but he refused. The first drops of rain in a shower began to pelt his thick mass of blond hair. He began pacing about the bus stop, and I knew he was hatching one of his plots. Finally, we saw the bus appear in the distance. He stepped under the umbrella and said, “Promise you won’t tell anyone. Mom was going to call the school this morning and tell them about my new glass eye, but I begged her to let me tell people first. Promise?”

Perhaps because he looked like a drowning puppy, I nodded my agreement as we boarded and moved to the back of the bus. As soon as the bus started filling up, each little uniformed passenger got on the bus and stared at Patrick’s eye patch. Some of the kids started to wander to the back of the bus out of curiosity. I cringed to hear them asking, “Why is he dressed like a pirate?” Patrick began shifting in his seat.

“He has a contagious eye infection. He also has poison ivy and possibly malaria from hunting giant tortoises in the swamp,” I said. That seemed to satisfy most of the nosiest passengers, but I knew it would not be long before someone told Patrick to remove his eye patch. I trusted that my lies

would hold them all off for a while.

As soon as we arrived at school, I hurried to tell Sister Sarah Ann the same lie I had started on the bus, adding something about a nasty strain of flu and a sty in his eye. I told Sister to come and get me out of the eighth grade class if she saw Patrick beginning to scratch too much at the poison ivy. I hated starting the first day of school on such a deceptive note, but each time I remembered him in the hospital, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for him.

As soon as classes started in my eighth grade classroom, I began to feel small. I looked over at Charlie and winced when he smiled at me. Why did I ever meet with him at the beach? I remembered how cute I thought he was during the summer and the excitement I had felt holding hands. The last time we met, we waded out in the water together where Charlie kissed me. It was my first kiss. Then, the lifeguard told us to get out of the water, and I ran home in embarrassment. When I got home my mother called from her job on the military base, and she was crying and screaming about Patrick getting rushed to the hospital after a fishing accident.

When the lunch bell rang, I was resolved to end the lying game about Patrick. We all filed into the cafeteria. Patrick was sitting alone with Pokey Pinkham several seats away at the far end of a lunch table. Apparently, the lie had worked. Patrick was sitting still as stone when I approached him. “Don’t sit down with me, Joan. I need you to do me a favor. Go get me the container of ketchup over by the hotdogs” Hating to see him all alone, I brought him the ketchup without questioning him. Then he squeezed a little ketchup onto his baloney sandwich and told me to sit down next to him. I watched him put the ketchup in his lunchbox.

“Patrick, you’re stealing.”

“No. I’m borrowing,” he said. “We ran out at home, and I don’t want to bother mom about it. Will you please give these notes to Brian and Alex?”

“Please Patrick, I don’t want to be responsible for any more trouble,” I said.

“I heard you were going steady with Charlie Sunderland,” said Patrick. “So that’s who you were meeting on the beach!”

“I’m breaking up with him,” I said with my head down.

“Come on, Joan. My good eye is starting to feel swollen.” said Patrick.

“This is the last time, Patrick,” I whispered. “If you don’t tell the truth soon, I will.”

Patrick looked like he was about to cry. By this time, Pokey had moved over a little closer, so I started a conversation about Patrick saving baby alligators in the swamp. Then I got up and handed off the folded notes to Alex and Brian, and hurried back to my classroom.

The afternoon classes had just begun. It was so quiet you could hear catfish spawning in the Mississippi River. The clock ticked away each heavy second. My uniform blouse was soaked with sweat. I couldn’t bear to even look at Charlie again. His smile made me nauseous. Then the door opened with a loud squeak. It was Sister Sarah Ann. All five feet of her meager body, anchored by her heavy rosary beads, lunged toward me. “Quick, Joan. Come get your brother,” she cried. “He’s going mad.”

“What happened?” I asked as we scampered down the hall toward the sixth-grade classroom.

“I don’t know. I simply pointed to that hole in the knee of his pants and he started crying. He won’t stop. I’m worried about his eye infection,” said Sister Sarah Ann.

When I got to the classroom, I heard Patrick sobbing from his desk in the back of the classroom. His head was nestled in his arms. Just as I began to suspect what he was up to, Patrick let out a wail and bolted upright in his desk to expose his face. I held my breath. His face appeared to be smeared with blood. Patrick let out a theatrical sob as pens, pencils, and books dropped to the floor. Some began to stand and cover their mouths. Gasps erupted and echoed throughout the room. Patrick had removed his patch and plucked out his glass eye. Then, holding the removable fake blue eye pinched between his thumb and forefinger for all the class to see he said, “Now look what you’ve made me do, Sister Sarah Ann. I’ve put out my eye.” Then he pried open his eye socket and exposed the pink membrane between the eye socket and his brain. He stood up and turned around in the room so everyone could see.

Sister Sarah Ann let out a screech that sounded like a dying seagull. Then,

panting to catch her breath, she yelled, “Christina O’Conner, tell the front office to call an ambulance.”

Angelina Luggerio began to throw up and ran to the bathroom.

Patrick looked around the room at his posse and said, “I told you she would be the first to get sick. I win. Alex and Brian, pay up. You owe me two dollars each for the bet and five for taking the dare.

At last Pokey was the first to proclaim, “It’s all very.... kind of scary.... but true.... It’s a glass eye....it’s a sick prank. So that’s..... what you were up to....with the ketchup.. during lunch...good one.... Patrick, old boy.”

“It’s just my new glass eye. I was only joking. I’m fine, really. It’s not a real eye. I had a fishing accident and the doctors took out my real eye over the summer.” Patrick looked contrite.

Sister Sarah Ann stood frozen while the entire class watched her next move. As soon as a few giggles began rippling through the room, she clutched at the rosary beads hanging from her waist and began her march toward Patrick. She spied the ketchup in Patrick’s open lunch box on his desk. Then shaking her head in disbelief, she turned toward me, and said, “Joan, take your brother down to the principal’s office. Call your mother to pick the both of you up. You’re both going to be suspended. I am very sorry for your accident young man, but that’s no excuse to behave like a hooligan. Now clean up your desk and your brazen face.”

When we got home, I found my brother’s uniform pants in the laundry and I began to repair the small hole in his pant leg. Then I took some blackberries out of the refrigerator and made a huge blackberry pie for dessert.

At the dinner table, mother announced our two-week suspension and relayed the news of our prank to my father. My father shook his head in disappointment while my mother looked at my father with sorrow. I felt stupid and ashamed. My tears kept falling until they trickled down to soak my blackberry pie. I tried to stop them, but they kept steaming up my face. Then I looked through the blur of tears and realized that I had not once looked Patrick in the eye since his accident. I guess I was afraid to really see him. Like everyone else, I just stared at the patch. Finally, I looked in his one blue eye without looking at the patch. His eye appeared to be shaded with every hue of blue in the Winslow Homer watercolors that hung on

the wall. I saw in his eye the sparkle of the Caribbean, the powerful sapphire crests of the Gulf, and the mesmerizing aqua of the water that was all around us. I knew that I was out of my depth. Entirely lost. Drowning.

“I’m sorry I let you go fishing that day, Patrick,” I whispered.

“I would have gone anyway, “ said Patrick.

“I should have followed you that day,” I said, “instead of going to meet Charlie. Nothing bad happened with him. Mom and Dad, I swear, nothing happened. He kissed me once, and the lifeguard made us leave.” I did not tell them that Patrick had threatened to tell them that I was meeting Charlie at the beach. My parents left the table and hurried up to their room as Mom was choking back tears. I knew that they were going to discuss our punishments.

After sitting in silence for some time at the table alone with my little brother, he finally announced the terms for my atonement. “The World Series is coming up,” said Patrick. “I’m betting on the Mets all the way. You can manage the eighth grade pool for the series. If they win, I’ll give you a percentage.”

I declined Patrick’s offer, but he made a small fortune anyway because that was the year that the New York Mets earned the title, “The Miracle Mets” when they beat the Orioles four out of the five games of the World Series.

Many years later, Patrick made a larger fortune in a brokerage firm on Wall Street. As for me, Charlie’s kiss was my first and last until I met my future husband two years later. We opened a bakery in Pensacola, and we make the best blackberry pies in the region. And sometimes I paint watercolors at Pensacola beach in the style of Winslow Homer.

ART

Wedding Day
Hannah Baldwin



Antiquities & Old Lace
Hannah Baldwin



Towel
Rrezart Beqa



Monoprint 1
Niki Bramante



Monoprint 2
Niki Bramante



Purple
Niki Bramante

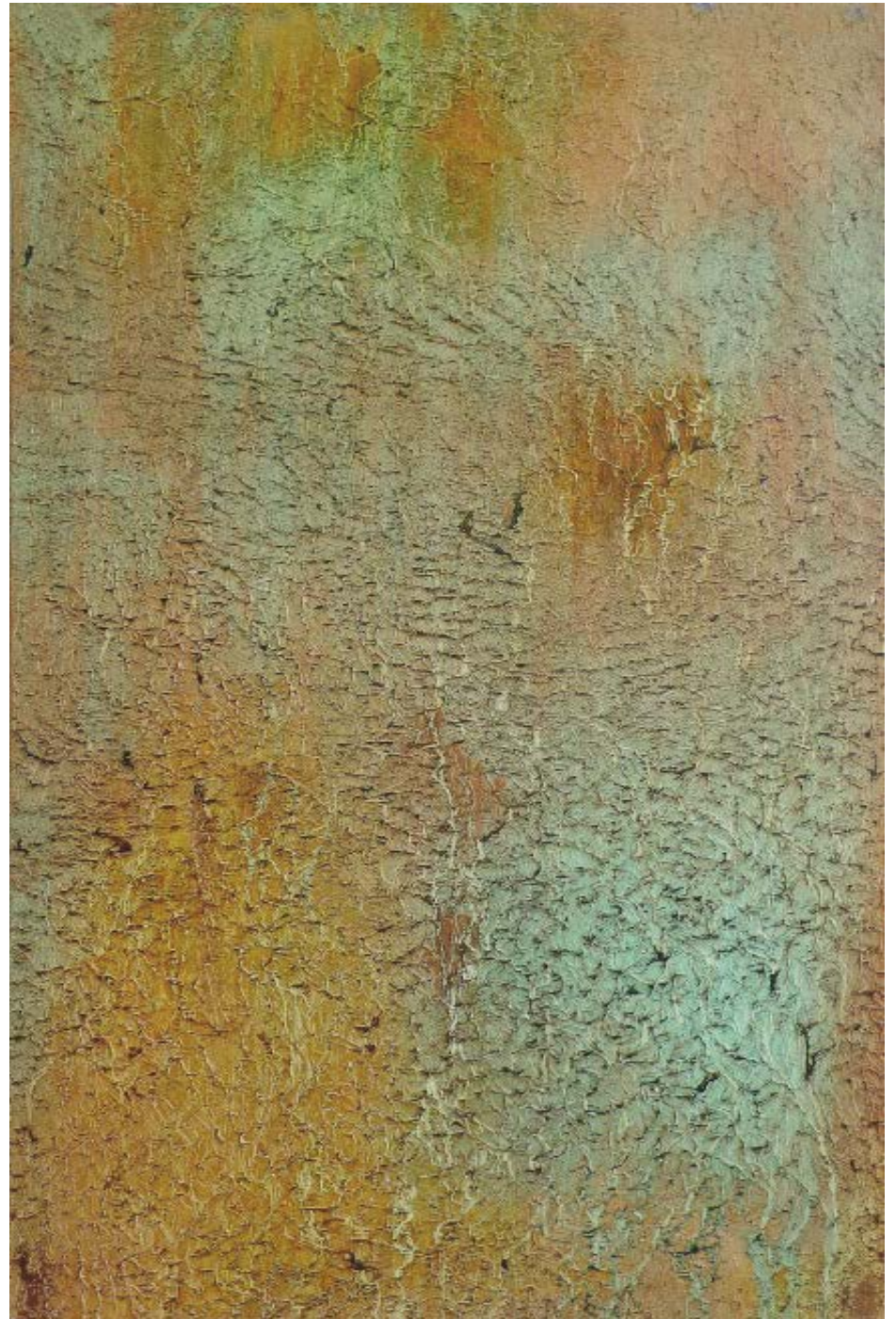


Dylan Dreaming on the Rocks
Edelweiss "Picasso" Calcagno



11

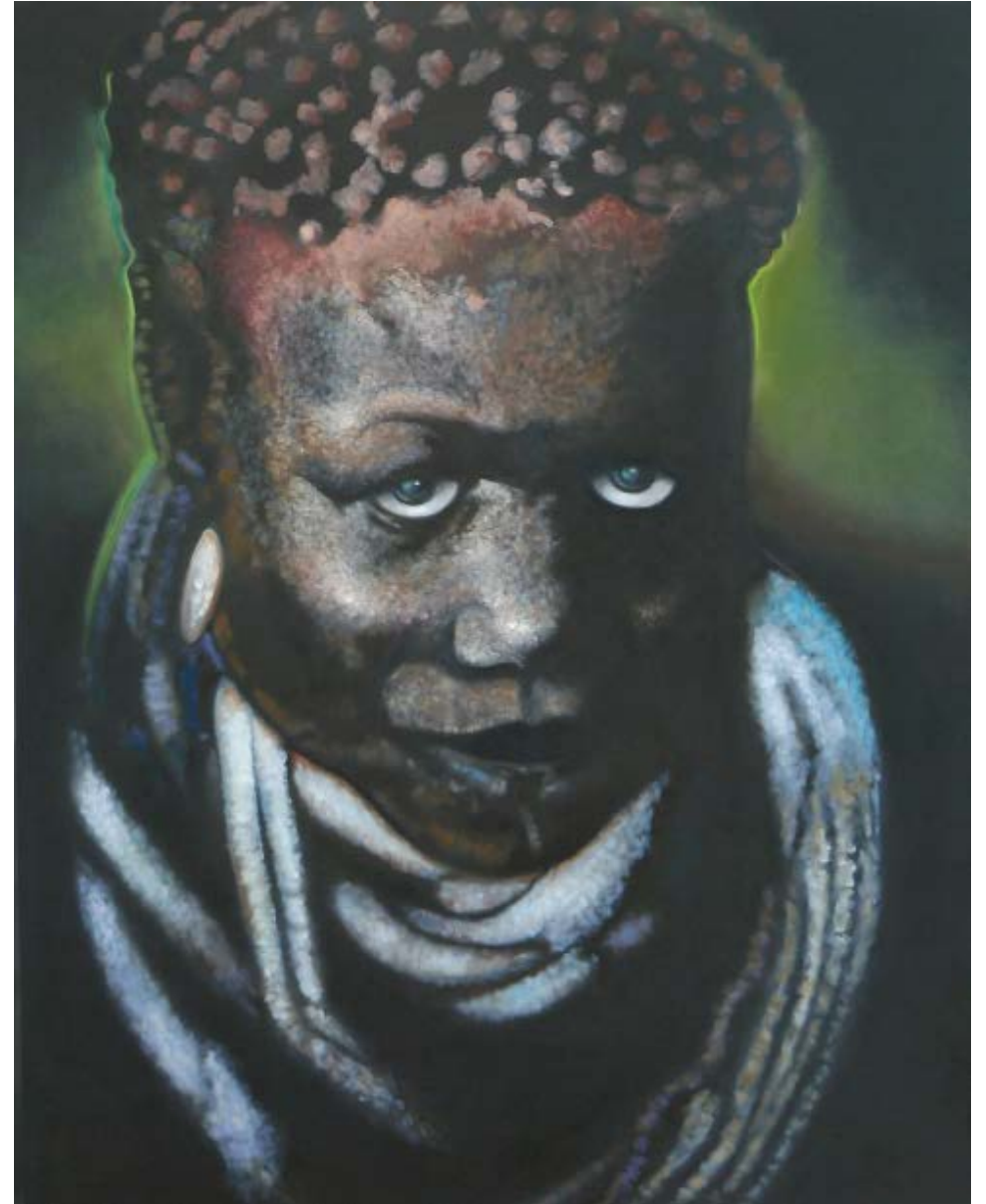
Otoño
Pablo Callejo



Quiet Sunrise
Claudia C. Gomez



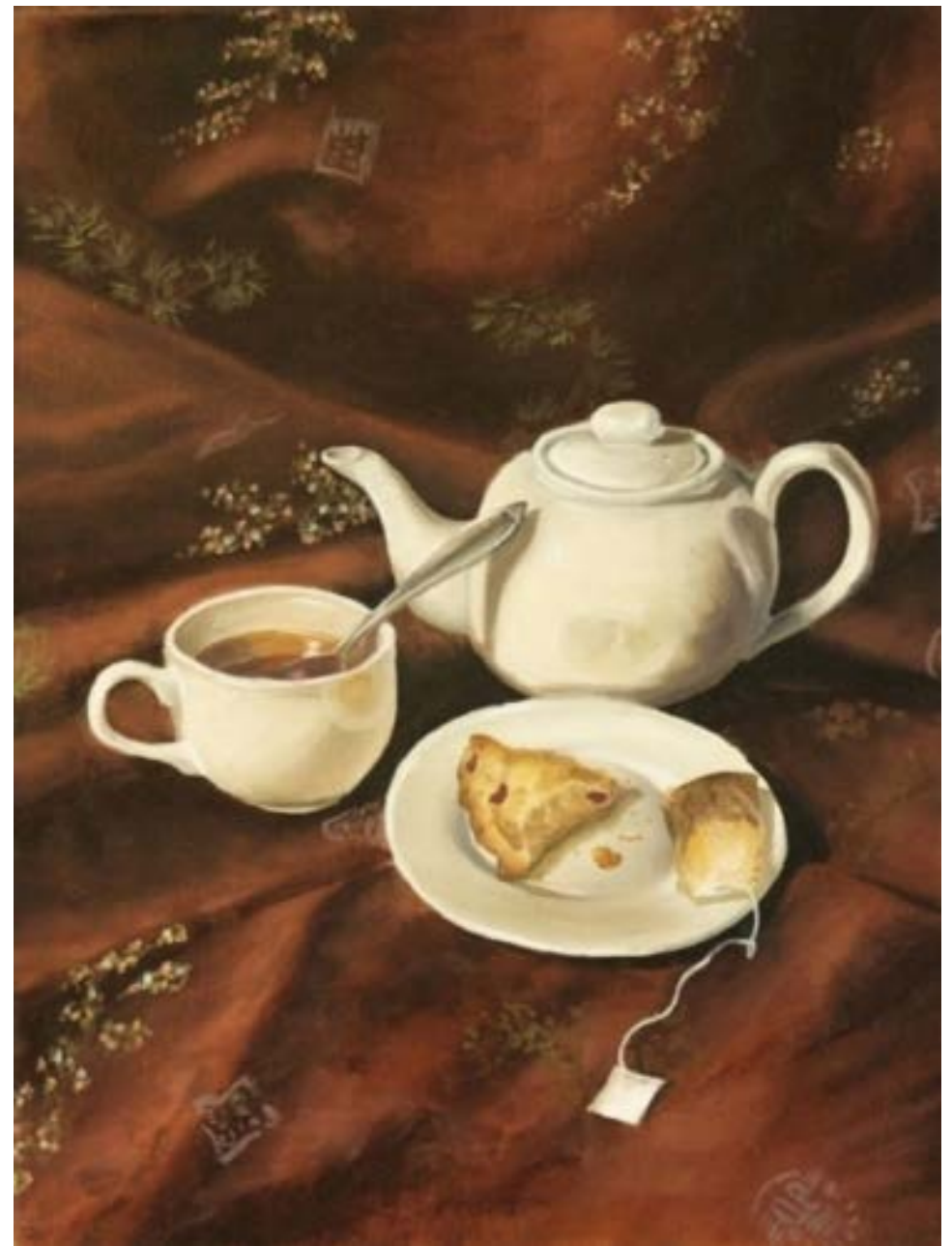
Femme Africaine
Larry S. Gray



Mec
Larry S. Gray



Tea and Sympathy
AnnMarie Kirby



Energy
Peter Lewis



Absence
Ronald Mayorga



Untitled
Hussein Saidi



Contributors

Joseph Baldi Acosta received an Honorary Mention in the 2012 Ventura Valdez Poetry Contest and previously won the English Poetry Award.

Hannah Baldwin, who worked in international development, gender and democracy promotion over a 35 year career with USAID and Peace Corps, has taken painting classes in Guinea, printmaking in Mali, and pastels in Namibia. She participated in several group shows in Guinea and Mali before returning to the US in 2010, and is now taking classes at Montgomery College.

Rrezart (Arti) Beqa, who was born in Kosovo, eventually fled the Slobodan Millosevic regime. He is currently a Nursing major student at Montgomery College.

Donald Berger, author of *Quality Hill* and *The Creme-Filled Muse*, is the first Poet Laureate of Takoma Park. He teaches at Montgomery College Takoma Park and the University of Maryland. His work has appeared in publications including *Slate*, *Conjunctions*, *Tri-Quarterly*, and *The Iowa Review*.

Niki Bramante is a printmaker and is attending Maryland Institute College of Art for a Master's of Teaching in Art Education. She plans to continue to develop her own artwork while teaching children.

Edelweiss "Picasso" Calcagno, originally from Rome, is an internationally recognized visual artist. Her dynamic, award-winning works are cubist, expressionist and abstract in style. She not only won the First Place, and received an Oscar for Visual Art from Castrocaro Terme, Italy in February 2003 but she also is an Official Restorer of Paintings on Canvas, Wood and Sculpture from the School of Rome, Italy.

Pablo Callejo is a nursing student at Takoma Park/Silver Spring and plans to focus on art therapy.

Tranetta Franklin is a Renaissance Scholar, vice president of the Writing Club and a member of Student Council. She is currently a sophomore at Montgomery, majoring in English and Psychology with a minor in Creative Writing.

Claudia C. Gomez is an Art student at Montgomery College.

Larry S. Gray has over 40 years of Graphic Design Studios' experience. His work exemplifies the works of John Singer Sargent and Andrew Wyeth, and modern documentary photographers such as Walker Evans and Sally Mann.

Khine (Bonner) Johnson won the 2012 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Award.

Yvette Jones, currently a Takoma DC resident, is attending Montgomery College where she will complete her associate's degree in the fall. She plans to transfer to the University of Maryland to major in English-Education.

AnnMarie Kirby is an Art student at Montgomery College.

Merrill Leffler is the author most recently of a book of poetry, *Mark the Music*. Currently Takoma Park's Poet Laureate, he has been active in the literary life of the Washington area as a publisher and teacher for more than forty years.

Nicholas Leonard, an Art major, recently won the 2012 Ventura Valdez English Poetry Award.

Peter Lewis is a recent graduate of the Visual Arts Program at Montgomery College, TP/SS.

Sandra Rose Maley is co-editor of *A Wild Perfection: The Selected Letters of James Wright and of Solitary Apprenticeship: James Wright and German Poetry*. She teaches at Montgomery College in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Sydney March, a Jamaican poet, essayist, musician and journalist, who resides in Washington teaches at Montgomery College. He has been a panelist for the DC Art Commission's Individual Grants for Literature and judge for the Larry Neil writer's competition and *Poetry Out Loud*. His publications include *Dark Warriors of the Spanish Main*, *Smithsonian New World*, 1992, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, *Stealing Mangoes*, and work in numerous anthologies and journals.

Ronal Mayorga is a fine arts student who became interested in the Graphic Design field and is enrolled in the Graphic Design Photography Program to

get an associate's degree at Montgomery College.

Carol Joan Haney McVey's first published poem appeared with poetry by Marge Piercy in an issue of *Kalliope: a Journal for Women in the Arts in Jacksonville, Florida*. The story in this issue is her first published short story and has inspired a collection of short stories; she has had brief essays published in blogs for the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

Yvette Neisser Moreno is the author of *Grip* (2011 Gival Press Poetry Award), co-translator of *South Pole/Polo Sur* by María Teresa Ogliastrì, and editor of *Difficult Beauty: Selected Poems by Luis Alberto Ambroggio*. She is the founder of the DC-Area Literary Translators Network (DC-ALT), a member of Split This Rock Poetry Festival's planning committee, an instructor at The Writer's Center, and a resident of Silver Spring.

Lavinia Rizvi, who is half-Indian, enjoys writing and reading a wide range of genres. She sings rock, jazz, and classical music, belly dances, and is going to College of Wooster to study Neuroscience.

Hussein Saidi, a contemporary African artist originally from Tanga, Tanzania, combines traditional African themes with modern style. Saidi's work is highly acclaimed internationally and has been on display at various locations including in Washington, New York and Poland. Saidi has received many awards and honors, including the most recent: Award of Recognition - African American Museum of New Orleans exhibition, "Tribute to MLK," New Orleans in January 2010.

Franck Senaya is a recent MC graduate and designed the cover of this and the last issue of *The Sligo Journal*.

Abby Squire is a recent graduate of Oberlin College with a degree in Art History. Abby still marvels at all things natural and draws all she can, loves stories of all kinds, and dreams of writing and illustrating literature for children.

Lisa Thompson currently has two AFAs in Studio Art and Graphic Design from MC and is now studying Animation and Interactive Media. She is an aspiring storyteller who would like to work as an animator specializing in comedy and children's entertainment.

Ellie Webster who grew up in Washington is currently a student of literature

at Montgomery College. She aspires to attain a bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland and eventually a Master's in Creative Writing.

