

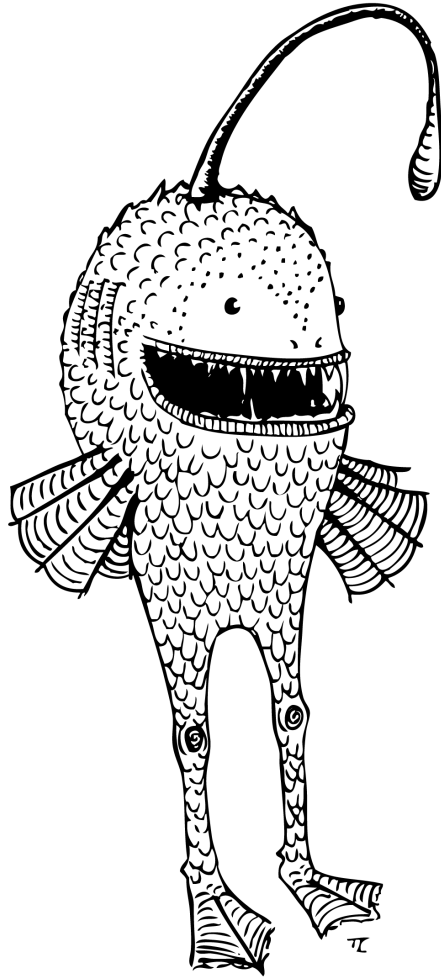
S P I R E S

TWO THOUSAND TEN
FALL









S P I R E S

intercollegiate arts & literary magazine

- fall 2010 -



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Critics, however, are welcome to quote brief passages
by way of criticism and review.

Front cover “Jettisoned After Space” by Theo Anthony
(collage, Oberlin College)

Inside front cover “Transient Equilibrium” by Siena Baldi
(woodcut and serigraph, Washington University in St. Louis)

Inside back cover “Ready to Eat” by Emily Dunn
(ink on paper, Washington University in St. Louis)

Back cover “Not Yo Mama’s Fish” by Tamar Ingleby
(medium TK, Washington University in St. Louis)

spiresmagazine@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

LETTER TO READER

The Jester

"I am what surrounds me."

-Wallace Stevens

A mechanic in New Jersey is grease and steel
until the evening, when he is his wife and children
or an empty motel and last month's *Hustler*
depending on the mechanic.

Before there was New Jersey there was a kingdom
and when the jester danced for his king he was
royalty, a feast, and the bells strapped like handcuffs
to his ankles and wrists.

But when galleons and catapults left the castle abandoned,
the jester, who could dance but not fight, was four stone walls
and moss. It is easy to be something as simple as moss
when you don't know the world is burning around you.

After weeks or months or days, the jester stepped outside and
somewhere between the scorched earth and brown grass
found himself to be nothing, and in one deep breath inhaled
the remaining fifty years of his life.

The wrinkled skin of the pages of a magazine
on the countertop by an open window in a New Jersey
motel fluttered momentarily in a familiar breeze.

Andrew Ridker

Washington University in St. Louis

Immolation

The church is quiet
yet. It is an early Sunday afternoon,
fog slouches in
beneath the doors.
An old woman kneels
upon the stone slabs,
her knees whining.
Her fingers, thin as thought,
hook stained rosaries.
In the time
it took her to descend,
more have arrived,
as though fresh out of body bags:
their faces hang from their bones
like tattered flags
in the rain.
A recording of bells plays
two jolts into their eardrums.
The priest
steps to the pulpit,
with a smile
that could only have been made
with a scalpel.
His voice is sure,
inspired
by that cadaver
hanging from spikes –
more of a painting

than a person.
While he spoke,
the barren walls echoed
a cracking of sternums.
Chests stood open,
briefcases waiting to be filled
with what they would need
this week:
papers, money, charity, superiority, formaldehyde.
Three incisions now
and on the third they rose,
dancing a post-mortem jig
to the enrapturing tune
of a homicide.

Ethan Brandt

Washington University in St. Louis



“DADDY ISSUES vol. 3”

photograph

Theo Anthony
Oberlin College

It Rhymes with Quandary

Sensuous silhouette,
you are softening.

Swathed in lilac
with buds just blooming.

I save 10% with this Shaw's Card.

In the cart you flaunt your curves.
I sigh.

There is something
cyclical about this situation.

John does his share of chores,
but still...

I wonder what detergent would look like
if men bought it.

*Helen Seachrist
Emerson College*

Vacancy

The observations of her pale right thumb pad rubbed to grapefruit rawness and the blackness of her coffee had troubled him immediately. The tilted ceramic mug he'd clumsily shaped in high school now had a thumb-shaped oasis of smoothed grains near the base too. It hadn't existed this morning.

She was subdued as ever but seemed smaller than usual. Maybe from the largeness of her rippled mustard scarf consuming her collarbones. Or maybe from the way she sat, straight-jacketing her ribs. She hadn't even heard him come in—hadn't shifted once since he'd entered.

All around their apartment crammed with purposeless knick-knacks there were similar marks. Paler ellipses of insides exposed, some even concave. Her dainty nightstand's left corner that flanked their always rumpled bed had the deepest indent. Stained by her skin's oils and quiet urgency, the depression was traced by him too when he'd first spotted it. Wrong way, she'd said.

Unlike most where attacking dust motes or page turning would suffice, she simply rubbed and dug with her thumb on whatever could bear it. It was a fairly recent sort of fidget, picked up a handful of months ago. They speculated, the causes growing wilder, from the puckered look a droopy woman had given her jungle of flaxen hair; to the droll over-a-foot height difference between them; to the fact that she had yet to conceive despite their combined

eagerness. The latter was laughed at because they were young and anyway they enjoyed surprises and the glow after them. But eventually, he'd bought her a polished stone soon after the thumbing began, compact and droplet-shaped with a circular depression set in the widest end. A maelstrom of whites with a rust colored flaw splintering one side. For kneading away worries, he'd said. And saving the household.

She loved things with flaws. Their home was crammed with them—chipped porcelain cats waving without paws, nutcrackers with their horsey jaws missing, a miniature glass globe with only six golden engraved continents. Things broken, she'd thought aloud, could be mended or appreciated as they were, right? She'd thanked him then with a damp kiss, him stooping.

He never saw her smooth the stone but she assured him that she loved it. Actually, it had irked her that there was already a dip, as if foreign fingers had already stroked a perfect circle instead of her own rambling hands. She pondered this while examining it with squinted eyes after he'd left for work that day, placing it in the nightstand's drawer to repose thereafter. The manufactured flaw—the finality from the beginning—was the most troubling to her really. But the stone was soon disregarded, remembered only when she opened the drawer to search for something misplaced.

Today, she was searching for a paper scrap with a recommended antique shop's address scrawled on it for exploration purposes. The stone swam in the light as she opened the drawer. After turning it side to side twice, she slid it forcefully under a wrinkle-veined navy pouch that once sheltered an oxidizing copper shell pin, now lost. Then closed it.

She dressed afterwards, in a flowing asphalt top and worn black leggings. Not bothering to check her appearance in the smudged vanity mirror, she haphazardly wrapped the coarse marigold scarf around her neck with a shiver while leaving their bedroom.

She'd sat down at their tipsy table with only a cup of steaming coffee for company. A mere twenty percent of precipitation had become soundlessly rolling rhinestones now, wetly embellishing the window in front of her. By the grenadine fire hydrant across the street from where she sat, she saw a family of three quickening their pace, the mother frantically adjusting the stroller's top to shield a passionately kicking toddler. During the struggle with the collapsible rain cover, one of the toddler's shoes—a diminutive periwinkle canvas sneaker—tumbled to the pavement unnoticed.

Long after the soggy family had scrambled beyond the window's frame, she continued staring at the shoe, not realizing that her right thumb was grinding itself to oblivion against the heavy mug.

Time forgotten, she watched the rain darken the periwinkle to grey. She had meant to dilute her waiting drink with cream and sugar but this was also forgotten as she brooded over the shoe for hours, still mercilessly chafing her blushing thumb.

The coffee was cold when she finally started, a little after he returned—after he interrupted the silence that became suffocating. He'd found her, statuesque with only one light on and the untouched coffee dotted with dust. He closed the front door softly so it wouldn't groan. The foyer between the door and cornered kitchen was disconcertingly narrow. He felt clumsy again.

She was hugging herself. Tightly, the blues of her veins raised. Then, he watched her slowly slide her right hand so that it lingered on her stomach, cupping her navel instead. The angrily raw thumb began to rub there too, marking the absence of matter within. She realized then that she hated the stone. Looming, he cleared his throat foggily from behind her.

I'm home, he said. She spun to him slowly, still seated, meeting his gaze in increments—silvery-eyed, vague, and slipping away.

I'm not, she said. And he nearly drowned in the depths of her unfathomable eyes.

Michelle Turgeon
Washington University in St. Louis

Birthday Party

It started with a trashcan bursting with sangria
The flies clamored onto its sweetness and I didn't
care when the bitter liquid painted my numb lips.
The blinking lights of the Christmas tree, and the flashing Polaroid captured the haze
of cigarettes, empty clanking bottles, and bottomless cups.
Too fast, too happy the world spun, but control
I still had, until
the loaded hunter is riding
Me as I lie underneath frozen
my shouts flutter and evaporate into the night
sky with the salty humidity of the nearby Mediterranean
its gems glittering away.
I shrivel as his weight descends upon me
and his midnight mane oils
up my precocious Virgin face.
All I remember
Are the stars and the moon shaped like a mother
rocking her baby to a lullaby that softly sang
in the backdrop of the forbidden recital, as my hands swim
for sobriety in a crowd
of rapists and murderers.
The fight to fight
Back is quick; its release even faster
my body embracing the enemy
except my open cringing mouth
and the single tear that brims on the tip of my blood
juiced lips.

I finally learn the meaning
of the word empty
and my body is a gold gift
wrapped sheath of stolen desire
as stained skin peeks through
onto the hemorrhaging heat of the five am rays.

Margaret 'Jin' Kim
Washington University in St. Louis

The Gnat upon my Letterpress

The gnat upon my letterpress
Truly cannot sense
How far apart the world it knows
Is from gods and men.
It sits upon my novel
Walks across the page
The words of Charlotte Bronte
Have become its stage.
And yet it knows of nothing
More than eat and sleep
But it crept across her knowledge
And now is in her keep.

Sarah Ellis
UNC - Chapel Hill

A Gentleman's Death

The mackinaw peach sits ripe and full in his bony hands that are stained a marble brown from years of grasping the worn leather handle of a wedged suitcase.

He turns to you, licking his lips, and begins spitting about the war and the cold winter months bunkered deep in German soil with the hope of death and a cold-lit cigarette to pass from one dying mouth to the next and looking past the sand scorched horizon you begin to think how distant it all is.

You grasp his free hand and together, begin walking into the sparse forest, past the slouching evergreens and dry meadow grass that sticks out scratching the bare skin of your calves until blood is drawn.

You walk slow, listening to his deep voice and hear a distant echo that widens and deepens across the crumbling canyon.

The path curves around a thick bend and sticking out from behind an overturned log you see white and the color is unwelcome.

The snow hare is caught in a rusted snare, not struggling, but breathing slow, wide eyed and calm.

He sees your pinched face and says how the snow has come late this year which doesn't help the suffering.

You watch each breathe and hold your own before he begins talking of El-Alamein and how Freddy looked just the same after taking a long-nose clip to the spine.

He had stood up to watch a desert hawk and in a moment was face down in the rocky sand, clinging to a magazine clip and a ridged shaving blade in the other.

A Gentleman's death he said.

And so gripping a stone

he comes down hard across its skull and you look away as he covers it with
a fallen branch before wedging the body beneath the log.
The cool air brushes across the treetops and you breathe in tasting
sap and the smoke of a distant fire.
You grasp his hand again and this time feel a tremble,
but he's silent as you walk back towards the clearing
that now stands hazy in the dimming light, the parked Ford
sitting still in the high grass.

Noam Kupfer

Washington University in St. Louis

Homeostasis

Chester's mom hardly slowed down when she hit the muskrat. It was too late to slam on the brakes, and to swerve meant their Buick would be forever lodged in the soppy mud of Cedar Island Bay's salt marsh. The road was one of those long straight highways that caused your mind to go numb. So muskrat met tire and half a second later its spine cracked, rib cage was crushed, and heart stopped beating.

"Jesus," said Chester's mom, like someone had just punched her in the gut.

Chester quickly whipped around to check what had become of their muskrat, but all he could see was a dark lump getting smaller and smaller as they drove home.

"What'd you do that for?" he asked, upset at the waste of a perfectly good muskrat.

"It was us or him," she said, and hoped he would leave it at that.

"Why didn't you slow down? Do you think it died? I wonder if it got its juices all over the bumper..."

She didn't explain why she decided not to hit the brakes when the red Camaro was riding four feet from her bumper, or comment that the muskrat deserved what it got because no muskrat should be crossing the road at three in the afternoon, but replied, "Well I hope he's dead, 'cause if not, he's

right on his way to dying real slow and painfully."

Chester didn't say anything after that, or for the rest of the drive home. His mom rolled down her window and let the salty breeze keep her from an unscheduled afternoon nap.

His mom and dad both fell asleep at the most inconvenient times. Whenever his dad came to one of his little league games he would find him dozing on the back row of the bleachers after everyone else had left. Chester would shake his arm, and he would jolt up with a fence imprint on the side of his face.

"What'd I miss?" he'd ask.

His mom was no better. She had fallen asleep while cooking dinner three times in just one week. Every other day the family ate far-too-blackened shrimp, rubbery dumplings, or mac-and-cheese a la ashes. At the dinner table, he would speak only to find both parents struggling to keep their eyes open. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Gaskill worked stressful jobs, they didn't have rigorous exercise regimens, and they never even left the house much. In fact, Mr. Gaskill retired from his job as a Carteret County mailman over a year ago after he was deemed too drowsy to drive the mail truck on public streets. The Gaskills were just old. Chester had been a surprise to them twelve years ago when Mrs. Gaskill was 49. Their sapped energy was part of their natural cycle of life, and he was left to talk to himself while eating his

leathery chicken breast. Then he did the dishes while his parents slept through reruns of *The Andy Griffith Show*.

After finishing his powder dry barbecue on this particular night, he began to assemble an assortment of stray gadgets and tools to a rhythm of wheezy snores. He gathered a trash bag, salad tongs, rubber gloves, and two of the sharpest carving knives he could find. Then he stuck them all into his backpack, and walked out the door.

He rode his 1974 red Schwinn down the gravel driveway and onto the street. At the end of the cul-de-sac he came to a faded grey house and made an indiscreet bird call.

“Yu-hoo! Yu-hoo!” He waited.

Silence.

“Yu-hoo! Yu-hoo!” He waited again.

Still nothing.

“Yu-hoo! Yu-hoo!”

Then he heard a faint sound that crescendoed into a “Yeaaaaaaw!” and boy on a blue bicycle came whizzing down the grey house’s driveway into the street. Chester yelled, “Hey Ring-tail, wait up!” and started off to catch him.

Chester and the blue bicycle boy had been friends

since he first moved into the grey house seven years ago. His real name was Walter, but he had always been obsessed with lemurs and vetoed his name for one of theirs. To be fair, he did look quite like a lemur. Ring-tail’s noodly arms and huge round eyes made him look as though he’d be completely at home hanging from a tree or bouncing through the forests of Madagascar. However, Chester was just as bouncy and agile, so he caught up with Ring-tail before they reached the end of their street.

When they stopped at the corner of Lemon Grove Lane and Red Ferry Road, Chester panted, “Follow me, I’ve got something to show you.”

The pair took off again down Red Ferry and soon found themselves riding on Highway 12 alongside the salt marsh. Chester’s eyes scanned the road in the dimming sunlight until he spotted the lump.

“This is it!” he shouted, and the two pulled onto the sliver of grass between the road and the canal.

“What the . . .?” Ring-tail started when he saw the bloodstained carcass with its organs spilling out like some kind of perverse piñata.

“It’s a muskrat,” Chester replied snapping on his mom’s rubber gloves. “We hit it on the road today. I’ve never been this close to one before.”

“Me either, I bet this thing is at least two feet long.”

“Here, grab those salad tongs.”

Chester and Ring-tail pushed the muskrat and its organ trail onto the spongy grass. They tried to swat away as many flies as they could before putting it, its small intestine, its pancreas, and half of its liver into the trash bag. Most of the fluids had dried in the hot afternoon sun so there was less spillage, not that either boy would have cared much. After packaging the whole carcass into the bag, Chester swung it over his shoulder like Santa Claus and then set it in the front basket of Ring-tail's bike. "Not in the Schwinn," he said. They pedaled back towards Red Ferry Road as fast as they could without saying a word. Both boys knew where they were going.

Behind Ring-tail's faded grey house, there was a big pine tree forest that stretched to where the salt marsh began. The boys discovered this forest when they followed a pelican into it almost six years ago. They stayed there for hours. When it got dark Ring-tail's dad had to send their old Dachshund-Labrador mix in to find them, but after Batman got lost too, Mr. Gaskill organized a search party and eventually found both boys digging for night crawlers in the sandy dirt. The place had been theirs ever since. This was not to say that it never belonged to anyone else. In their escapades over the next few months they discovered the abandoned row-boat "Ecstasea", a shopping cart, and a few piles of oyster shells. It wasn't until they were eight and a half that they hit pay dirt—a shed probably deserted by an old fisherman who liked to have some peace and quiet in the middle of a forest with his fish. The boys moved in.

When Chester and Ring-tail made it to the shed they had to find somewhere to put the newest addition to their family. The place housed every one of their hopes and dreams, so it was hard to make room. The walls were covered with pages cut from Sears Holiday catalogs of years past. The wrinkled ads reminded the boys of toys that they had wanted but never gotten: a spirograph, a GI Joe, a skateboard, Rock'em Sock'em Robots, and of course the 1977 Nishiki International 10-speed. What they did have in their shed was an old fishing net, a wobbly table, one of Ring-tail's dad's ELO albums but no record player, a pile of cool looking driftwood, and two pet rocks among other useless toys. Ring-tail had splurged and gotten a "Genuine Pedigreed Pet Rock," while Chester was stuck with the mutt he picked up off of his driveway.

Chester cleared off the old table and dumped out the muskrat. He sat down on a stool, and Ring-tail sat down beside him on an old tricycle. Chester poked the muskrat's furry back with his knife.

"Now what?" asked Ring-tail.

"The human body is not a simple mechanism," said Mr. Mead, the only science teacher at Carteret County Middle. He looked like he had spent most of his life as a deck hand on a shrimp trawler—no one really knew how he got into the sciences. "Today we'll be learning about the circulatory system, and how the heart pumps blood through the body to keep us alive."

Ring-tail was dozing off, so Chester prodded him on the shoulder. They were up late the night before trying to figure out what to do with their muskrat.

“I have a special example to show you today,” continued Mr. Mead, as he bent down to pull something out of a cardboard box. He plonked a gallon-sized glass jar on the desk. It was filled with a medium-brown liquid, somewhere between the color of the water in the salt marsh and sweet tea. “This is a fully grown pig heart.” A few girls in the class scrunched their faces in disgust and Joanna Salter, a pretty blonde girl in the front, stifled a whimper. Now he had caught the boys’ interest.

“The heart’s job is to pump blood through the body to maintain a state of homeostasis. Does anyone know what that means?” He picked up the jar in his swarthy hands and shook it a little. “It means to keep things the same. This heart used to do that, but now it’s in a different kind of homeostasis, because of the formaldehyde,” he laughed a deep laugh that was almost evil sounding, but everyone else was silent. “So come enjoy a closer look, class!”

Homeostasis. That was their problem. The muskrat, though partially dried from the sun, was already causing the Sears Catalog pages to curl away from the walls of their shed, and it hadn’t even been a whole day. If they were going to utilize this muskrat to its highest potential, they had to find something to keep it from rotting away.

Chester had tried to subtly ask his dad for advice that morning at breakfast, but he got nowhere. They sat at their fake wood kitchen table, and ate matching bowls of LIFE. Mr. Gaskill was at his most alert at this time of day, though that wasn’t saying much because he gave up coffee around the time he gave up the postal system.

“Dad, if you wanted to keep something from rotting away, how would you do it?”

“Eehm. Well—that’s an interesting question son.”

“How would you do it?”

Mr. Gaskill took another spoonful of LIFE and chewed on it for a while. “Well, I’m no spring chicken, and your mother sure isn’t the young filly she used to be, but we’ve still got some good years left in us. We’re not rotting away.”

That wasn’t what Chester was looking for. “Sure Dad,” he said.

“You know everyone dies sometime. Some die when they’re old, some die when they’re young. You’ve just got to appreciate the life you’ve had, and the body you’ve got to live it in.”

This was totally impractical knowledge. Chester wanted specific, concrete information that any dad should know, and this was all he got. “But what if I want to keep something exactly the way it is?”

“Ooooh,” moaned his father, “I think I know what you mean now. Some of those girls in your class are lookin’ mighty pretty now aren’t they? Don’t worry son, that change can be fun, you’ll get used to it.” He gave Chester a denture smile and a weak punch on the shoulder.

Chester tried to hide his annoyance and thanked him for his help. They ate the rest of their LIFE to Mr. Gaskill humming *The Beverly Hillbillies* theme song between bites.

“You know, my dad has a dead fish on the wall,” said Ring-tail that day after school as the boys were eating peanut butter sandwiches in his living room. They were alone in the house, his dad worked long hours freelance crabbing, and his mom waitressed at a Shoney’s and went to Carteret Community College part-time so she could “make something of herself.”

“Where? Let me see,” Chester replied.

“It’s in their bedroom.” Ring-tail led him down the hall and opened the door to the master. He pointed, “It’s right there, see?”

A remarkably small carp attached to a wooden board hung above the bed, a love offering.

“Cool! It looks so real.”

“He mounted it himself—learned from a book.”

“We could use that,” said Chester as Ring-tail was already heading for the bookshelf.

Mount This: A Comprehensive Guide to Aquatic Taxidermy by Dr. Willard Potter. This was their solution. The boys read about how to skin a bass, the pros and cons of mannequin versus filler, and the proper techniques of sewing everything back together. With Dr. Willard Potter’s help, there was hope for their muskrat yet.

They needed several key supplies to translate Dr. Willard Potter’s vision to their muskrat. The first was booze. The skin needed to be soaked in alcohol, so each boy searched his house, and came up with a bottle and a half of Jack Daniels, one of Gordon’s London Dry, and three bottles of rubbing alcohol. They also collected their carving knives, salad tongs, and rubber gloves along with two flashlights, a stapler, and two bandanas for the smell. After dinner they set off on their mission to save the muskrat from its rotten future.

Eyes watering from the fumes, Chester peeled off what he could of the muskrat’s hide. He handed it to Ring-tail, who dunked it into their embalming cocktail. The rest of the muskrat still lay on the table. It couldn’t be saved. The Buick had broken almost every bone and if the organs hadn’t squished, they were starting to putrefy.

“Should we burn the rest?” asked Ring-tail.

“I don’t know. We can’t use it.”

They resolved to dump the remaining majority of the muskrat into the salt marsh. The shattered skeletal system, crippled muscular system, and battered circulatory system were doing no good for anyone.

As he watched these sink beneath the muddy water, he could have thought about the cunning mechanism of it all that had the muskrat waddling across the road just the day before. He could have appreciated the subtle flesh that used to be animated—alive. He could have recognized the artistry that went into knitting together such a great thing into a compact furry body, its ability to feed, to grow, to build, and to reproduce. Instead, while looking at the dead flesh drift to the bottom, his eulogy went something like this:

“That’s sick!”

About the same time as one half of the muskrat was soaking in alcohol, and the other half was soaking in the salt marsh, Chester’s dad was soaking in the bathtub. He didn’t like to take baths much, but sometimes the warm water was just what he needed to soothe his sore joints. He looked down at his body in the clear water. He was noticeably more withered than the last time he really had a good long look at himself. Mr. Gaskill wasn’t fat for a man of 67, but skin hung off in places that made him look like a flesh colored raisin. He took one hand out of

the water and stared at it hard, watching drops of water make trails down his semi-translucent palm. By normal standards, Mr. Gaskill had always been five feet and seven inches of nothing special, but he loved his body, especially his hands. He flicked each finger up individually, and then pulsed them out altogether a few times. He curled them up, released them, and then let them plunge back into the warm water. He relaxed what was left to relax of his raisin of a body, and closed his eyes.

Chester came home at quarter after nine to his mom asleep alone on the couch. He could tell that she had been asleep for awhile, because *Charlie’s Angels* was on. Mrs. Gaskill disapproved of the show, though she wouldn’t tell him why. Eager to catch her in the wrong, he slammed the door and then cried, “Ma! What are you watching?”

She jerked upright and looked at him and then the TV, the left side of her hairsprayed bangs had molded to the couch cushion and was now sticking up straight. “Don’t look at that Chester!” she said after orienting herself. She got up to turn off the set, but stumbled over her husband’s shoes. “That man,” she said under her breath after almost knocking over the TV, “he can’t do anything for himself anymore.” She sat back down and then said, in a drowsy way, “It’s nearly bed time. You’d better go brush your teeth.”

He set his backpack down in the hallway and walked to the bathroom. The door was closed. He



“of and”
photograph

Laura Burns
Smith College



“Recollections”
monoprint, graphite; 22”x30”

Hannab Ireland
Washington University in St. Louis



“The Moment Has Come!”

photograph

*B. A. Goodman
Emerson College*



“A Portrait of my Grandmother”

oil on canvas

Rachel Sard

Washington University in St. Louis

knocked, but there was no answer, so he opened it. He first went to the sink out of ritual, reached for his toothbrush, and looked in the mirror. He saw his father's naked, wilted body, submerged in the tub. His face was beneath the lukewarm tub water. He had fallen asleep in the bath. Chester didn't know what to do. He pulled his father's now extra-raised face up from the water, but he wasn't breathing.

An ambulance took Mr. and Mrs. Gaskill to the Beaufort Memorial Hospital. Before they left Mrs. Gaskill told Chester to stay the night at Walter's, and then walked out. He sat on the couch alone. He couldn't move. He felt like he was no more alive than his muskrat or his father. Ring-tail's mom came over a few minutes later to collect him for the night.

He normally liked being around Ring-tail's mom, but tonight he couldn't appreciate the way she played Marvin Gaye a little too loudly in the car, or how she said things like "Catch you on the flip side," or that she made fun of Ring-tail's dad for being so old even though he was only 41. Ring-tail's mom looked like she could swallow his dad. She was ten years younger, two inches taller, and twice as wide as he was. Only something as noodly and lemur-y as Ring-tail could have come from those two. She was flighty but vivacious, and Ring-tail's dad loved her for it. He called her his "big piece of woman." Chester liked her too, except tonight when all he felt like doing was sitting still in the quiet.

Ring-tail tried to distract him with a game of Clue, but he didn't like the idea of thinking about who killed who where and with what, so they went to bed.

He lay awake on the couch, and every few hours Mrs. Gaskill would call. One of Ring-tail's parents would answer, and then they would talk about the latest news. Chester only heard snippets of what they said: "Drowned," "oxygen," "heart failure," "shock," "resuscitation." He thought about what it would be like to see his dead father in a coffin. He thought about the bad half of his muskrat at the bottom of the salt marsh. He thought about what it would be like to drown, and how he would much rather die flying a plane or in a skiing accident, because at least you would be doing something cool with yourself when you go.

By 6:30 a.m. he couldn't lay down any longer, because he felt like his own arms and legs were starting to die. He went to the bathroom and then sat down at the kitchen table. The morning light was still grey. A few minutes later Ring-tail's mom came into the kitchen sauged into an obnoxiously floral maxi-dress. She started to make some coffee before going to her massage therapy class, and found him sitting there absolutely still. She told him what had happened.

Mr. Gaskill had fallen asleep in the bath—he knew that. He inhaled a lot of water, which flooded his lungs, and caused him to stop breathing. He lost

consciousness and that was when Chester found him, submerged and raisined. They tried to revive him on the long drive to Beaufort, and he coughed up a lot of the water, but then went into cardiac arrest. They shocked him, and his heart started again, but he didn't wake up. The last she had heard of him this morning was that he was stable, though still unconscious.

"It's okay if you want to stay home from school today, Chester," she said.

He didn't say anything, only nodded.

"Alright, I'll drop you off at your house on my way to class."

He didn't like the idea of being alone at first. He thought that if he were alone, he might die too. His arms and legs might stop moving, and he wouldn't be able to breathe anymore. But then he thought that if he was alone, he could go finish his muskrat and actually fix something.

Once again he started gathering supplies. He took the huge white bear from the foot of his bed—Frank, two glass buttons from his mom's sewing kit, some super glue, a hammer, and his dad's dentures, still in the dish from where he took them out. When he got to the shed, he started hammering them so each tooth came loose.

He took the muskrat skin out of its soak. It was

rubbery, kind of like his mom's chicken, but its rotten, deathly odor was replaced with what he imagined a pirate to smell like. He set it to drip-dry on the pile of driftwood, and turned to Frank. Frank was the first Christmas present he had ever gotten, from his Grandma Pearl. The bear was about twice his size at the time, and whenever he cried his mom would wedge it in the crib with him, and he would stop. He liked being squished up against the side like that, even though his mom would always say, "It looks like it's hurting him!" Now he grabbed Frank and cut him open from chin to groin. He pulled out the stuffing.

The assembly process didn't take long. He used the stapler to fasten the muskrat's hide back together, and filled it with Frank's insides. He super-glued buttons in its eye holes, and denture teeth in its mouth. The final image was fearsome. The beast, which hardly looked like a muskrat anymore except for its long straight tail and webbed feet, had patches of fur missing in places, and was off-balance on account of the Buick-wound on its left side. The staples and stuffing hardly gave it much stability, so it was more of a mangy blob than any sort of animal. The buttons and human teeth on what was presumably the face made it look like something that popped out at you in a haunted house. Looking at it scared him a little, but it gave him a thrill, and he liked it.

When Ring-tail's mom came home from school she picked up Chester to drive him to Beaufort.

She dropped him off at the main entrance where his mom was waiting. Her hair had entirely deflated, and she looked like she had aged about eighteen years in eighteen hours. She gave him a hug, and led him to his dad's room on the second floor. The hospital smelled subtly like dead fish, and something else gross, he didn't really know what. It gave him the willies. He didn't see how lying around in a place like that would make anyone feel like getting better.

His dad lay in a bed in the middle of the tiny room, hooked up to loads of machines. He looked even more withered and pale than before. His heart rate was steady, but he wasn't making the wheezy snore noises that Chester was used to hearing. He looked dead, and Chester didn't like that.

Nothing much changed in the next two days. The corrupted homeostasis of his father's body made him and his mother take turns eating, sleeping, and hoping for change. Hours passed slowly. On the morning of the third day, his mom stepped out to get the coffee she had started drinking again, and he was alone. The room was silent except for the beep-beep-beep of the machines, and he was daydreaming about what his new muskrat would look like if it could still walk around. He didn't like it. Then he heard a soft voice coming from the bed.

"Chester?"

"Dad?" He walked over to the bed and saw his dad's face turning towards him and his eyes looking at

him. "Dad."

"Well that was the worst sleep I've ever had," he said. That was saying something because once Chester had found him nodding off while leaning on a hoe in their backyard vegetable garden.

"Dad, you almost died."

"Sorry about that, son."

They stayed silent for a little while. He looked at his dad's body—reanimated.

After a minute his dad spoke again, "Where's Mom?"

"She went to get coffee."

"I thought we stopped drinking that stuff. It's not healthy for her. She's a good woman, you know that?"

He nodded.

"You know Chester, I had wanted to tell you. . . you're almost a man. So if you're starting to like the girls—that's okay. They're one of the best things a man's got."

Within a week Mr. Gaskill was sent home, and the natural rhythm of the house was restored. Chester went back to school, and his science class had

started a new unit on plant life. Mr. Mead stood at the front of the room waving buds at the class. Ring-tail dozed off, and Chester didn't bother waking him up. He was distracted by Joanna Salter's long blonde hair. It was so long, he didn't know how she did anything without getting it caught in something. If his hair was that long he would surely snag it in the spokes of his Schwinn. But really if he had that hair he would cut it off and tie it to the back of his Schwinn like a tail that would flutter in the breeze. Or he could make it into a nest for his pet rock, or maybe he could sell it and use the money for a G.I. Joe or a spirograph. But none of those things were quite right. Joanna wasn't using that perfectly good hair to its highest potential, but he didn't mind. It was nice on her. He couldn't stop looking at it. Looking at it that hard scared him a little, but it gave him a thrill, and he liked it.

That afternoon, he and Ring-tail went to their shed. They were fully engaged in a game of Egyptian Rat Screw when Ring-tail asked, "Hey, whatever happened to that muskrat?"

"Oh, I threw it over there." He pointed to the salt marsh where his creature lay Buick-side down, half submerged in the muddy water. "Had no use to me anymore."

Annie Josey
UNC-Chapel Hill

A Distant Relative's Wake

The announcement arrived during dinner
and we thought we would have to miss our evening tv shows
but our cab driver, bless his reckless heart,
had his GPS rigged to our weeklies.

We learnt that the heroine was going to insist on divorce
just as we arrived at the hospital mortuary.
We knelt and touched our foreheads to the linoleum
in front of the casket buried under white chrysanthemums.

We hopped across the hall into the reception.
The family was serving watermelon triangles
and oily rice cakes stuffed with honeyed sesame seeds.

Flocks of old folks peered at me,
claimed I had used to adore them
back when they could earn my affection with smiles and sweets.
Funereal employees in rubber sandals
shimmered about making jackets and coats disappear.
I confessed that I thought my skirt too short for the occasion
and several grandmothers said
Ah, show off while you're young and skinny.
The wife of the corpse wrapped her fingers around my wrist.

My parents and I escaped into fresh air away from the floral stench.
They sat on either side of me and argued

whether wakes first began to make sure rats didn't feast on the corpse
or to make sure the dead didn't accidentally come back to life
as they occasionally do.

Across us was a glass case displaying black clothes
on dressmaker's dolls with discreet pricetags.

Sue Hyon Bae

Washington University in St. Louis

Underwear

June

His hat unglued from his furry skull
and the cartilage in his wrist seeped out
of the hole in his palm burned by tears
and urine. Marred with grease through
vigorous shavings and frequent filings.

July

The meshwork of metal hangers on his
bar stares at him as he sits in a pile of
shredded nails and accordion tin cans that
he believes was once his garb of monotony.

August

You better be gone next time I open my eyes,
and he attends to the eggs frying on his porch
over the beam from between his planks.

September

Frozen hairs bleach the surface around
the sink where red and orange lashes fell.
The stains leave him barren just to be
exposed to the slick breeze that pain
imprints on his flesh.

October

He slurps the last drop of whiskey from
the crevices in his flask that burn through
a few taste buds left on the tip of his
tongue. He tries to ignore the scripture
on the front: *A un buono futuro*

November

He removes the sandpaper from his pocket to rub the bald patch on his thigh.

December

A lady friend walks into the undergrowth and presents him with a sprig of mistletoe shoved into a tube of his favorite post-shave product.

January

When he undresses, he is only a hooded white periphery.

February

Sometimes when he pulls his varicose socks over his ankles he reaches a point where the sock ends but he wants to keep tugging. So he has a hole where his heel was.

March

When the birds begin to chirp he howls the mating song through his desiccated winter mouth. He plays a middle C, starts three notes higher in hopes that a song will come back in F minor. It's mating time since the hair on his chin is a shade lighter than the bleach under his sink where he soaks his razor.

April

The dark purple tulips capture light
through their fangs and distribute it through
their plexus to the pigment in their skin.
The man picks one for his wilting flowers
and returns to his den.

May

His beard forms a halo around
his black hooded periphery that
walks into the kitchen to uncover
the stomach and intestines of a
mouse who has seen better days.

Caroline Eden

Washington University in St. Louis



“Untitled”
photograph

Jordan Gamble
Washington University in St. Louis

Crickets

Walking back, I find myself
drawn to the side of the road
where a row of street lights
slices sharp-sided cones from the night.

The crickets too gather on this side,
basking in the light of an artificial sun
that shelters their paper lace wings
from the viscid embrace of darkness.

Perhaps in this little bubble of light
where daytime expands to no limit
the crickets think they are immune
to all of nature's vicious reality.

But as I walk along this slab of sidewalk
I wince because I know
that the sole of my misplaced shoe
will inevitably fall to meet its shadow.

Eric Hintikka

Washington University in St. Louis

Dandelion Fires

These are the days we think about living
when the sun spills our paint cans and laughs at what's given
the dandelion stalks growing tall as a man
that can swing through your fingers and tiptoe on land
they read to us books drawn in leafy ink scrawl
hand-bound and hand-written, with no hands at all
the closer we get to the dandelion curls
we forget about living and loving and girls
because barely a snuffle will blow them away
a handheld explosion that brightens the day
ten thousand little islands bouncing free in the breeze
that takes with it colors hand-dipped in the seas
they whine and they dance like dying backyard fires
their flames climb my body, my temple, my spires
the darkness of night tries to creep into noon
but these knocked-over paint cans they fight back the moon
and the colors of morning draped in blankets of night
smile so sweetly as their palette ignites
all this I see in a fistful of roots
my magnifying glass eyes getting lost in their shoots
that glide on these windswept valleys of theirs,
and forget about everything that likens to cares
Some days the light hits at just the right time
When most souls are sleeping or speaking in rhyme
And I find myself happily clinking glasses on the run
Chasing ten thousand dreams between my finger and my thumb

Daniel Starosta

Washington University in St. Louis

My Cousin Nick

can always be
found where
the soft breeze blows
a strand of hair
into my eyes;
and the sun shines
on my freckled skin,
on my whispering lips.

Where summer falls
to winter but
the same breeze
and golden sun
remain.

Remain,
unlike the blades of
grass that tickle
my fingers as I brush
them away from his face,
now nothing more than
a name and two dates
etched into a gray, marble stone.
No, that grass cannot
remain.

Once lost
to this sea
of wind and sun,
of grass and stone,
my cousin nick
can always be found.
There among the dandelions.
There among the unwiped tears.

Lauren Restivo
University of Notre Dame

On Opposite Platforms

My friend Olivia comes to visit me, sleeps on a lumpy air mattress in my family's tiny apartment. Indian summer heat clogs the room long after sunset. In the middle of the night I wake and look over at her. During the day she hides her skin under too much makeup but now she lets it breathe; her whole body shimmers with sweat and I believe she has never looked more lovely.

I should have introduced you while she was here. She has long blonde hair and your color eyes. She is from Australia and uses words like heap (I missed you heaps) and uni (My boyfriend Nick is at uni studying business). I wonder if Nick is like all her other boyfriends.

Days pass. I take her to meet some of my friends. They find her charming and Olivia finds our subways charming. She loves the people-watching and the mystery of never knowing when the train will arrive; she doesn't complain about having to stand the whole ride. She has that tourist pep.

Did you hear that they are making a new subway map? I have this feeling that if you'd heard you would have told me about it already, so you probably haven't yet. The most dramatic change is that Manhattan will be twice as wide as it is in real life, even bigger than it is on the current map. Olivia likes this idea because she can't read the map without her glasses, and she doesn't want to get her glasses out of her bag and put them on because

Glasses make people look gross. But I don't want a new one; there are already too many things in the world that are distorted, hard to understand. I wish maps would be honest with us.

Besides the glasses thing, which annoys me for obvious reasons, Olivia is probably the perfect guest. She folds up her blanket in the morning, pours her own cereal and tells clever jokes. But we can't really have a conversation, not like we used to. For some reason when she speaks to me it's as if we're on opposite platforms and she's whispering words in a language I used to know, imperceptible and unintelligible above the rush of moving metal.

We knew each other better years ago, when we both lived in Japan and would walk down the hill from our international school to the train station. Years ago we sat together in the station cafe, sipping lattes that felt sly and exotic since my mother still refused to let me drink coffee in her sight.

Years ago Olivia told me the story I can't forget, about the boyfriend who was a stranger. Who butchered her body. How can I explain? She never called it rape but I can't call it anything else. She told me this across the table, two empty mugs between us, years ago she told me this and then she said Okay see you tomorrow and picked up her bag and left. I got on the train and I sat down, and the whole ride home I felt like a body-shaped bruise. I still feel broken when I think of it now; I feel

vulnerable and I feel like my waist is just waiting for your arm to wrap around it. I would like to ride the subway with you to the end of the line and let the whoosh of glass against wind erase what scars my mind.

Once, when the train was stopped between stations, a man standing in front of me got restless. He began to moan. He told no one in particular that he was claustrophobic, that he was scared of a subway crash, that he knew he should have taken a taxi. That he hated being so close to the bodies of so many strangers. The man was like an earthquake, a ferocious typewriter, shivering and shaking while he gripped the pole with both white-knuckled hands. His face was red, manic. I wanted to tell him to relax, to breathe, but the air was so thick it felt as though nothing – love, words – could move through it. He was miles away from me in that sweltering vacuum, too far to hear my counsel, so my lips stayed closed.

There are times when I feel the same way as he did, times when being near other people's bodies is terrifying and vulgar. To have to press up against someone at rush hour is coarse. In winter, though, on lonely mornings when sleep still coats my mind, there is something safe about feeling a seatmate's thigh against mine.

Olivia's thigh is against mine now. Years ago I felt safe with her but now I just feel tired, tired enough to nap next to you and not care if anyone catches us waking up together. She is saying words; she is good

at talking and my job has always been to listen. I want to tell her that I love her. Also I want to tell her that *I love you*, but it seems like inappropriate timing. Besides, I'm not sure what I mean by love and that is something I should figure out before I go around saying it to people.

Olivia is a stranger. How can I explain? I knew her once but once is not always. She's changed. Also she's exactly the same.

Days pass. We go to the airport and she leaves. We move in opposite directions: her plane kisses cloud while I descend into the deep pit of the subway, slide through the turnstile and hum a song I can't quite remember the words to. I'm exhausted but I have to stand. I feel the dull weight of my bag sagging on my shoulder, the perspiration quivering on my lip, the ache in my knees as I try to hold myself steady while the train races between stations. My body is slick with sweat, like Olivia's in the night.

Years ago she and I took a day trip to the beach. It was autumn. We ate roasted sweet potatoes that an old man sold from the back of his pickup truck, sat on the cold shore and looked out at the end of the world. On the long subway ride home she fell asleep and let her body press close against mine. Lying there I was convinced that I was the only person in the world who really knew her. It probably wasn't true, but a lot of things aren't true. I felt it then. But we've been apart for so long: three years, nine-thousand miles, a million forgotten moments, and

that certain kind of distance that no one's invented a way to measure.

Days pass. Again I am standing on the subway, and a stranger sitting a few feet away commences that boring business of staring. It's the same ritual: he looks, I pretend not to see. My hips are at his eye level, so he starts there, circling my stomach, my ribs, breasts, the plate of my chest, my collarbone, the corner of my shoulder, that thumb-sized dip under my ear that I like you to kiss. The hair, staticked and falling out, always falling, always sticking, collecting on some clothing or limb. My cheekbone hills; the electricity eyes that usually dart away from his but now stare straight back. We hold squirmy contact for two seconds, three – I used to always back down first but not today, not anymore – until he decides he's done, shifts his body on the orange seat, and settles back into dull, open-eyed sleep. I want to punch him. The doors open, and I get out.

As I walk up the stairs I think about Olivia. Who is looking at her right now? Her boyfriend? Does he kiss under her ear? Does he know that she is a genius? Has he seen her sweat in the summer dark? I wish I could watch her; I need to know that she is okay. But there is no subway from here to Australia, and I doubt I could afford the fare.

Days pass. Now you and I are on the train, and we are not strangers. How can I explain? I'm convinced you are the only person in the world who really

knows me. It probably isn't true, but a lot of things aren't true.

It's early evening, and there aren't many other passengers. Near us, a woman tells the long story of her sister's recent mastectomy; the two others listen close, trying not to picture their own bodies being butchered in such a way. They put their creased hands over hers. At the other end of the car two teenagers whisper silly things. They look like people I might have known, years ago. They are giddy; they are young and foolish and they know it. They don't care. Hands, lips: they can't keep off each other. How sweet, says one of the women.

I am waiting for the moment when we'll reach for each other's bodies like that, when we'll tumble into such sweet collision, brimming with want. I am not wearing headphones but I hear a woman singing in my brain

there's too many miles space between
where you're going and where i've been
i tried to tell you but you wouldn't believe
you just shiver and shake as i live and breathe

All of a sudden it's too much for me to handle, this subway, the whole thing: channels stretching out over the map like a hand wanting to be held. Do you understand? How can I explain? All the muscle – the tunnels, the bridges. All the veins of the dark corridors. And all the blood, the people crammed inside the silver chambers, the ruddy

men in too much denim, the women pulling their hair into ponytails, the women hiding their hair under scarves, the women hiding their skin under foundation shade #31, the gangly freckle-faced girls, the round flour-sack babies in pouches strapped round their mothers' round bodies, the hipsters rolling up their jeans, rolling up their cigarettes. How can I explain? This city's like a body I want to know every inch of.

Miranda Mammen
Stanford University

Plotinus

"I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake."
—Whitman

They say that old Plotinus was ashamed
Of being in his flesh – how he abhorred
The coarse constraints of fingernails and tongue;
And skin so tightly wound around the soul.

I know these sentiments, and that familiar
Disgust of one who learns to look at fire.
But through the burning how could I forget
How beautiful a woman's body is?

Joe Albernaz
University of North Carolina

Phoenix

Dad ran out to get the car started while Mom and I helped Grandma into her wheelchair. It was cold outside and she was burning hot, but she stayed quiet as we bundled her up and got her settled; she didn't even wince when we ran over bumps in the curb, although her gray hands shook when they gripped the armrests. I leaned down to touch her, but stopped when I caught a whiff of something burnt. A bit of her armrest dripped onto the footpath.

We reached the car just as Dad set the GPS to "Hospital." I wrapped Grandma's long grey arm around my neck to hoist her up, and I tried not to wince when her fingernails scraped a searing path across my collarbone, but Dad saw. He yelled at me to be less rough and then told me to hurry up. Mom fastened Grandma in and asked if she was set. I didn't hear her answer as I jumped inside and we sped off.

"Talk to your Grandma," Dad ordered, rolling down the windows. I looked at Grandma's shrunken form and opened my mouth to say something comforting, but nothing came out.

"Oh, leave the girl alone," Grandma chided. A dry cough racked through her thin body and wisps of smoke curled out of her nostrils. I pulled out the monogrammed handkerchief out from the pocket of her wool overcoat and placed it in front of her so she could spit out the ash. I made sure to dab

the corners of her mouth when she was done. "It's understandable that Dana's a little frightened," she said.

Dad snorted. He gripped the steering wheel tightly and ran two red lights. "There's nothing to be scared of," he said. The honks of the other cars blared around us.

Grandma swallowed slowly. "Either way," she said, patting my hand softly and leaving a pattern of small, red welts on my skin, "she's a good girl." She met Dad's eyes in the rearview mirror and smiled gently. "And you're a good boy," she assured him. Then she burst calmly into flame.

Mom gasped a little; she couldn't help it. Dad stayed completely silent and we sailed through a hat-trick of green signals until he drove past an abandoned lot. He slammed on the breaks and turned into the empty space.

"Damn it!" he yelled, coming to a full stop and cutting the engine off. "Godammit, Helen! I told you we should have left the house earlier."

Mom's eyes widened. "And when her hair started falling out, I told you to buy that flame-retardant blanket we saw in Loewe's, but you didn't even want to approach the topic." She shook her head. "Look, we shouldn't fight about this. We were as prepared as we could've been—your mom knew that."

Dad didn't respond. Mom sighed and turned to me. "Dana, can you get the extinguisher from the trunk and put out the cinders?"

I nodded and climbed out. Mom popped the trunk and I pulled the red can out from underneath the bag of diapers and old clothes. I made sure to grab a baby blanket from the pile, and by the time I opened the door to put out the last of the glowing embers, Grandma was awake. I got to work and tried to avoid spraying her with frost. She fidgeted, anyway, and whined a little when a few cold blasts drifted too close to her piglet-pink skin.

Dad rubbed his face, looked back into Grandma's new, unseeing eyes and turned back around. His head lolled low and his shoulders turned inward until he looked like an old man. I heard a low snuffling noise from him and saw his body tremble like a rattle. I suddenly imagined doing for him what we had just done for Grandma, one day.

Mom rubbed his back with one hand and pulled out a pack of travel Kleenex's from her purse with the other. "You want me to take over?" she asked him, looking out at the road. "You should go back there and hold her until we get to the hospital. You might not have another chance before the other family takes her home."

"No," Dad said quickly, clearing his throat. He inhaled deeply and wiped his nose on his sleeve. "I'll be fine." We buckled up and Dad turned the key in the ignition. I held tightly onto Grandma and

patted her back gently as he revved up the engine. She was so small, but her skin was cool and smooth underneath the blanket.

"Roll up the windows so she doesn't get cold," Mom said. "Her temperature should be back to normal." Dad pushed the button without turning to look back at the baby in my arms. Grandma hiccupped and began to cry.

Judith Obikuare

Washington University in St. Louis

If this be not I

Red beaked bird.
Your feet are covered in the dust
Of demolished buildings and
Jewish bones.

Where is your mother?
That she let you play among
The destruction she built.
Broken light bulbs and newspaper:
Political corpses.
The roles she enacted, you reproduce.
The masked butcher or blind justice
He pulls the wool over his own eyes
A ship-hat verged on toppling guilt
The negro child
clutching death's white horn.
An extinguished candle
The bastard ghost, trying
On his father's clothes—backwards
Overlooking Time on a tower red

The paper bag hat atop your head
Held three ripe plums once
They were so sweet and juicy

Red beaked bird
Where did you learn to stare
With the hate of generations?

Julia Terle
Washington University in St. Louis

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SPIRES

spiresmagazine@gmail.com

She pierces the atmosphere
with her hatchet and seeps
through, narrowly missing
the double hemmed seams.

Caroline Eden (Washington University in St. Louis), "Rosey P"