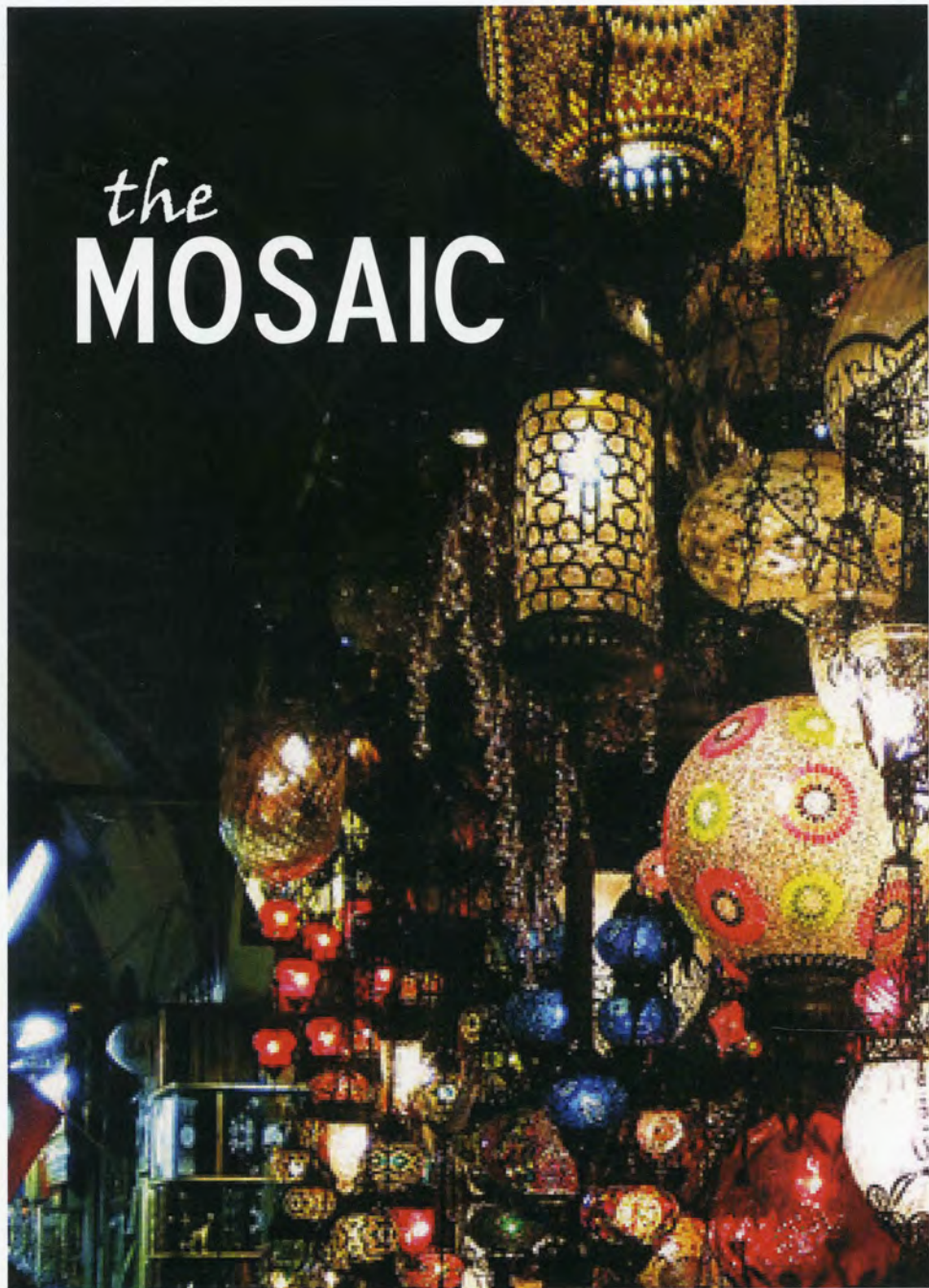



the
MOSAIC





DON'T BE
ASHAMED
OF
ANYTHING;
I GUESS
GOD
MEANT IT
ALL
LIKE
LOCKS ON
DOORS.

THE

MOSAIC

Darkroom

Slide around/ your tongue on soft spaces and places/
That create the contact between us/ the red light between us/
Makes the blue of our pleasure more intense/ more dark
Than the dark room / that encases
We created a picture of love

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Citrum. Canticum: A Cento

by Nicholas Bolt

Listen. I'm trying to tell you
a lemon rind is anything but dull.
They taste good to her,
and whisper their little songs.
It's more like a song on
a policeman's radio,
thick in the midnight sky.
Song that mentions two fragile ex-lovers,
speculating...

Sources: [Kim Addonizio, Kristy Odelius, William Carlos Williams, Charles Wright, Richard Siken, Sarah Goldstein, John Hoppenthaler]

Dewey Dell

by Victoria Huntsinger

We picked in secret shade
Young, tremulous, sprawling
Something bad has happened
My sack is full
I can see with empty seeing
I feel my body, my bones
A little tub of guts
Beneath my tightening dress
Too soon

Too soon
I wish I had time
Empty with waiting
Life, God, the womb
I couldn't see and couldn't feel
The black void
I cannot be alone
You could do so much for me
If you just knew
Kill him
Nobody would have to know

The Sculptor

by Ariel Puccio

My name is Percival. I know...my parents hated me. Percy Straight if you're my friend—Percival Straight III if I want to sound like an ass. I live in Florence, Italy, but please don't think that makes me fancy. I'm not here by choice. Well, sort of. You see, my parents and I moved here when I was 15 for my dad's job. That's a terrible age to move, especially to a country whose language you don't speak, where you can't blend in, and your palate rejects pesto, and cobblestones mangle ankles, vendors harass, tourists crowd, ambulances shriek, and the mosquitoes, pick pockets, and slow walkers drive you insane. There was a lot to get used to.

My parents didn't help with the life-altering adjustment process, mostly because, like I said, they hate me. The feeling's mutual. Maybe I'm exaggerating; maybe it's not hate and I just have pent up anger issues held deep inside me that developed from the moment I realized my name is Percival. Or, maybe my parents are nuts, and I'm mildly nuts, and anything we ever say or do is wrong in the eyes of the opposing evil force. There weren't a lot of happy moments in my childhood, or if there were, they are blocked out by the piercing shouts ringing through my brain every time I recall the past.

I feel I've moved on. Which is why, when my parents moved back to America, I stayed here. I was in my late twenties—it was acceptable. Just because I'm here, though, doesn't mean I like it, or I want to be here, or all of the above. Florence feels stuffy, like a slow suffocation; in other words, it is my own little cage, because basically I have no other option. It's beautiful, don't get me wrong, but how can you appreciate an ornate jail cell? One of these days I'll find something to do with my life, other than mope around the streets of a city I don't belong.

Until that day, I have a few things to keep my sanity: sculptures, and Stan my psychiatrist. Art was one of the things I clung to when

I moved here. Except not all kinds of art—just sculptures. Renaissance paintings are nice and all, and I can appreciate Botticelli's work when I walk past it in the Uffizi in front of all the drooling tourists, but after a while it bores me to tears. For some reason, sculptures belong to a different realm.

I remember the first time I visited the Accademia and saw Michelangelo's David—it was like a religious experience (minus the hallelujahs and fainting). Mind you, I'd never had a religious experience before because I don't believe in God, but I imagine that is what one would feel like. He is overwhelming (the David that is) and still makes me shake. During my first experience, I turned the corner, glancing over a few of the slaves breaking out of stone entrapments, and my gaze was brought upward toward the serene light at the end of the hall, caressing the muscles of the largest man I'd ever seen. He looked so cold, and still, yet so real. My stomach dropped; I'm not sure why I got that sinking feeling, from my heart down to my stomach, but soon after I felt a touch of ecstasy. It was unlike anything I ever felt. I never had sex before, but it was an experience of sex and religion. My body rode the wave: blood shot through every organ, my vision flowed into white and I never wanted it to end.

Once I came to my senses, I imagined David melting from stone form and coming to life, picking me up with his disproportionate hand and flinging me from his slingshot to another place. He was my salvation. He is my salvation. But now my horizons have broadened and my love of sculptures pervades every area of the art form. Sculptures still look so lifelike to me, and that must be what attracts me to them (says my psychiatrist). They bond with me, more than I bond with any human. I'm not a complete freak; I swear that is not as odd as it sounds. Even though they are cold, they say so much.

One of these days, if I ever get out of Florence, the first place I'm going is the Louvre in Paris. Pictures are all I have seen so far, but if I get the chance, I might be severely overcome by Stendhal syndrome upon entering one of the sculpture rooms. Nowadays, the statues that make my

skin tingle to the most sensitive extremes are of women with their draped clothing caught in the wind. They fascinate me. My gods are sculptors, and my Jesus has breasts and linens of flowing stone; no mortal can so perfectly capture the delicate dance of material and lightest pieces of hair within marble. I wish I were that gifted.

The only trouble statues ever gave me happened just the other day. I visited the David again, as I do, at the very least, twice a week. But this time as I stared, entranced by his ringlets and the unusual depth of his eyes, some deranged thief stole my wallet while I was unaware. After finally realizing this I fell into a severe panic attack and needed to see my psychiatrist immediately.

“So you didn’t have money in your wallet?” queried Stan the psychiatrist, sitting a few feet away.

“No.”

“And you didn’t have any credit cards, debit cards, anything?” he slowly asked, staring yet distracted.

“No, I didn’t.”

“All you had was your museum pass and some, intense, what do you call them? Love letters?”

“Yes. I can’t have anybody see them. They’re private. They’re for someone. I need them back so what I really need you to do is call the police again and make sure they’re finding that stolen...”

“Deep breaths, Percy.” I hate when people say my name. “What you’re really trying to say is those love letters are explicit, sexual, and you are embarrassed by them, isn’t that right?” I could feel his eyes move downward.

“That’s not what I’m saying at all! I’m not embarrassed—I just need them! What don’t you...” And he moved closer to me, his ass now sitting next to mine and his hand on my chest.

“Just pay attention to your breathing. In, and out...in, and out. Now watch my hand move up and down while you breathe.” He said this while his eyes pierced mine, making me press further back into the chaise



Elora Stack

lounge. He had never come this close before, and my body tensed.

"Now tell me again what you find so arousing in the David. Speak freely, it will relax you." One could almost see a grin in his microexpression.

"I don't really want to. It's almost time to go, isn't it?"

"Don't worry about the time, " as he pressed his hand harder into my chest, "just tell me. Do you like the curls in his hair? You like his muscles? Or do you like his sloping back leading down to his shapely ass?" The psychiatrist's breath shot torrents out of his nostrils, and now both hands were digging into my chest. The room seemed to get smaller, darker as he suddenly closed in. I tried squirming away, fear gripping me, but he only became more aggressive. "And tell me," he spat, "do you stare at his package when you go in there every week? Does it turn you on?"

"Get off of me!" I screamed an unearthly tone. My shocked body convulsed with unnatural force out of the chair and threw the psychiatrist's body into his desk, crushing a few bones as the desk penetrated his ribcage and he crumbled to the floor. My eyes couldn't focus, but I ran so quickly out of what looked like a door and down the maze of stairs.

My mind was ablaze. My body cringed. And I felt something die inside my creeping skin. A million thoughts and colors and pressures and nauseous feelings bombarded the inside of my skull, bouncing off the rotting tissue that was not there before. No word could explain it, and there was nowhere for me to go. I must have looked like a madman plowing through the streets of Florence; but my body knew where to take me.

Eventually, in my disgusted daze I recognized the Piazza del Duomo. Crowds harassed the cobblestone with a thousand walking feet, and I needed to get away; I needed more fresh air even though I was outside—I needed wind, space. As my mind still pulsed, I walked around to the side of the Duomo and began to climb its claustrophobic steps. I went quickly, or what seemed to be quick at the time, because my body couldn't handle the stone walls invading my space for long. As I aggressively trudged, a vision suddenly flashed past my eyes of the psychiatrist caressing my chest,

making a bolt of pain flash through my body from head to legs; I screamed up the spiraling staircase in a distraught attempt to eject the demonic recollection. I was alone.

Walking slower then, I realized I was more alone than I had ever been. I had nothing. No human contact. Even the David abandoned me once the psychiatrist turned him into a sexual joke. The walls seemed to close in, and the dank, chilled air from a thousand years crept into my skin and made each follicle stand on end. I was alone, but I still climbed.

Eventually I felt air gently pulsing against my face; at first a tease of reawakening, but once I made my way through the opening I was pushed aside by an oncoming thrust of invisible motion. It was cool, probably icy to the tourists around me, but it was what I needed. I made my way over to an abandoned side of the Duomo and stared out over the edge toward the great expanse of Italian city. The wind brushed hair back and forth across my brow, a comforting mother. Each force of air cleansed me, and I welcomed the cold. I looked down, and I must admit the thought of jumping crossed my mind, but instead I let the air wrap me up and I continued to gaze at the tiny people. Then I saw her.

It was undoubtedly her. I have watched her many times and there was no mistaking her black and white dogtooth jacket and long, flowing brunette hair, with her large orangey purse placed gently against her side and her knit scarf nestled around her slender neck. Never had I spoken to her, but I felt refreshed and alive; I needed to speak to someone, have some human in my life, so why not speak to the woman I love? She was walking away, but taking time to stare and examine the crevices of the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore.

I ran—practically diving down the stairs and passing the huge portrayal of the devil eating a man alive. I was nearly down the entirety of the Duomo when my foot clipped an uneven stone and I fell forward, thrashing my arms up from my sides in slow motion as I saw the ground approach in jagged lines. My arms could only do so much, and my jaw slammed into the rock staircase, sliding my skin off as the motion contin-

ued. I felt the pain, but it didn't matter. Standing, I wiped off the blood from my face, leaving a red stain on the ancient step, and I continued to run. She wouldn't escape me.

Finally I reached the doorway and stopped a moment to search the crowds for her entrancing figure. There were too many people. Too many things blocking me from what I want. I want to give her those letters. I want to be a sculptor. I want to have a human in my life. And now after everything a few hundred ignorant tourists stand in my way. I moved through the crowd, wild eyes scanning every inch of the piazza—until I saw her. She was beautiful in the light, as I'm sure she is beautiful in the dark. She was paused, looking at a large statue perched on the Duomo.

Slowly, I approached her. Sweat began to slide down my forehead and I felt my hands start to jitter, but there was no turning back. I needed her. She was my salvation.

“Hi there” I blurted.

“Oh, hi.” Her brow furrowed into a twist of confusion and slight fear. My heart sunk, but I didn't blame her.

“I saw you were looking at that statue. Beautiful, isn't it? You should see it at night, the statues really look like they can come alive—maybe even pop out at you.”

“Oh...yeah I was just passing by. I really need to go though.”

“My name is Percy.”

“Okay, Percy, well nice to meet you” she said as she walked away. I hate my name. My eyes followed as her elegant legs slid past each other far into the distance. There was no choice but to let her go for now.

From that moment on she did not escape my thoughts. Each day, and even in my dreams, I visualized her body in front of mine; her scarf and thin blouse quivering in the wind.

Each day, I sat in the Piazza del Duomo, hoping to catch a glimpse. My body felt the frost of nature's chill, but any discomfort was worth it. I needed her. She was my salvation.

Eventually, luck came my way one night. She was alone, and I could tell by her movements that she was slightly tipsy. From behind, I walked with the most silent footsteps a man can walk, and I took her. She screamed but I knew she would, so my hand was there over her soft lips to muffle the sound.

Everything was prepared in my apartment. In my kitchen was a tank of water with a lid (the kind Houdini would use), and a new, extra-large industrial freezer. She wouldn't stop squirming. Still, I managed to complete my task.

These days I feel very peaceful. I sit in my reclining chair, read books, sip my coffee, and stare at my own personal statue.

She is beautiful. Her brown hair appears to flow across her face, and her blouse seems to quiver just as it did in the Florence breeze. It fascinates me, that even in ice, she is so lifelike. I have her now—always. She is my favorite sculpture.

Tall Plants

by Joe Connelly

unsuppressed by the hand of man
sway in the wind
defiant and free

peacefully they stand
in the dark blue of the early morning
as dew collects on their leaves
and a sea of mist runs between them

Canticle

by Jessica Sturtevant

I will not fall for you
But I will walk with you,
 hand in steady hand, bounce to stride to shuffle;
I will not strip myself for you,
But I will let you seep into me,
 till you become a layer between skin and secrets;
I will not be your baby or your girl
But I will be yours, woman to man,
 together revealing a pattern like tangrams;
I will not lavish you with praises or caresses
But I will touch you with gentle words,
 and strokes soft as brush's painted whisper;
I will not be your prize,
But I will be your helpmate,
 bone of bone and flesh of flesh, treasured:

This is my prayer for someday,
waiting silent on my table
for a morning strong with the smell of coffee
and a whispered, "Beloved."

Drink Me

by Marygrace Navarra

What a funny way to fall her dress tore a little
lacy and sexy and still blue but torn ouch her head throbbing falling
down a hole down down compressed lungs and wet rich smell of
soil of dirt of animals teenage party animals and tea time earl grey with a
little milk or
some sort of long island iced tea was that the smell or
maybe it was the oysters the little baby bow-tied oysters the bowls
that salty smell that briny ocean smell and boiling
oysters to be eaten the time has come
my little friends beer beer was that beer
she was tasting beer reverse beer with acid? No it was the oysters and the
striped cat
so annoying Jesus Christ like that quirky girl in her physics class with the
striped sweaters
and a white rabbit what a dumb costume and a smoking caterpillar
that creep that always texts about blowing purple smoke into
letters "WHO R U?" rolling Rs and
stomach and lots of talking "I can't explain myself
because I'm not myself, let me smoke." No more no more, enough beer and
smoke
and the Queen is here and she wants to play croquet around
the garden a game for a boy around the corner the Queen
Bitch is more like it, her dress is preposterous here she never wears black or
red at parties
it wouldn't hide her ass she notices the roses drip with blood red paint oh
fuck
her art project and she insulted the Queen the mushroom

made her do it eat me drink me up and down too much
smoke purple smoke and she ran for the door the cards are coming
aces diamonds "Off with her head!"
let me outside I am outside where am I fuzzy fuzzy mattress feeling "Alice
wake up! Please wake up Alice! Alice! Alice!" best friend
slapping water onto cheeks and rowdy sounds of party and chug! some-
where and
"Dammit Alice you're wasted, no more" when I
wake up the dream isn't done
a very happy unbirthday to me

Carmel Empathy

by Lauren Hall

Sandbox chatter moves poolside: three sets of Kate Moss legs dipped in sparkling chlorine. Twice-used incubators flick glances at six pairs of bobbing floaties: heads golden, auburn, and sunflower yellow. Mommies that amass calorie counts next to grocery lists, next to tax rebates, next to their daughter's depression medicine.

Glue their pupils to Rachel Ray's pixilated image, trying to subvert Maggiano's with heritage Italiano, but the children's leftovers—still—never get eaten. Hand-it-to-me generation instead of hand-me-downs demand trips to Disney instead of bozo clowns; kids raised by kids raised by the elderly.

Job applications flutter like D-day warnings in the filmstrip repeating itself behind their eyelids opening and closing softly in summer heat. Not enough degrees to avoid the interrogation each credit card bill brings, yet his criticism always ends before Kohl's bag dangle from a Longchamp wrist.

And hopefully hubby forgets the purpose of Zoloft. These three, grateful that mother left a pill-sized pouch tucked just inside apron's waist. But all of this melts, glistening, slipping from their tan-tinted outer layer, while they wade their mermaid tails and images of prince charming forgets to kiss the girl.

Innocence

By Taylor Foreman-Niko

The glance was magic, sparking and kinetic
It mashed together between the lockers, ignited,
filling her face with heat and stirring her heart.
And day by day it repeated during the last vestiges of carefree heat,
with a shy glance, knowing smile.
They passed close in the hall, bells ringing in their ears
As their arms touched, electric, making her hair stand on end,
Stirring her again, lower.

Glances turned to words, mumbled as the leaves brown,
then sweet whispers, and scribbled notes,
All hers, slipped through his locker grille, into his pockets,
frivolous cozy things, overflowing with warmth, bubbly enthusiasm.
No longer brushing arms, they embrace and linger together,
he with a smile, she with a swoon.
He pushes the hair out of her face and kisses her ear
with all the words that she wants to hear.

One day he takes her by the hand and leads her off;
Her seat is empty as the roll is called.
In his car they kiss and all that was sweet and good begins to tip, slide.
The last warmth fading.
His is not a gentle touch, yet she remains quiet even as the buttons unfasten,
Pale skin exposed. They writhe and grunt and she is turned,
Pushed against the fogged glass, tears in her eyes as she sees herself,
Five years old and smiling beyond that immovable pane.
The girl turns and walks away as the car continues to rock.
Snow begins to fall and she is cold.



Fairy Tale

by Thaddeus Grabowy

Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there was a prince that didn't quite live up to expectations. He was a decent swordsman and he was certainly handsome with his long, wavy hair and his mysterious blue eyes that changed with his moods. However, there were a few things that he was not that detracted from his princely-ness. His hair was not blond but instead a rather common brown, he read books for pleasure, and he rarely went about the countryside killing monsters or rescuing damsels in distress. This last was particularly of concern to the king and queen, because as their only son and child, they had expected him to do a great many things. Admittedly there were very few monsters in the kingdom and most damsels were too busy working the fields or learning the harp or living their own lives to spend much time being "lost" in the woods or captured by the odd giant. Still, they wanted royal grandchildren and at 20, the prince was getting a little old to be single.

So the king and queen decided that they would send their son on a quest and hopefully he would return victorious with a potential wife and perhaps some riches for the royal treasury. They called him to the throne room and laid out their plan.

"Son, it is past time for you to be married and certainly past time for you to rack up heroic exploits. You've killed fewer monsters and saved fewer damsels than any other prince in the nearest kingdoms with the exception of that one prince who is cursed to sleep for a hundred years!" said the king who added in a whispered aside to his wife, "I would hate to be that prince's father; curses are for princesses."

"Your father speaks truly. You should think about the kingdom's future and your part in continuing the family line. It worries the people that our son is unmarried and childless," said the queen, consciously worried about unrest among the peasantry.

“So we have decided to banish you from the kingdom until you complete the quest we put before you now. You are to find a princess, suitably guarded by a number of monsters and spells, rescue her from her imprisonment, win her undying love and gratitude, and return here with your bride-to-be,” said the king.

“Father I have some questions,” said the prince, “about my quest. What if I can’t find a princess? What if she doesn’t want to come with me? What if I don’t want her to come with me? What if I don’t want to get married?”

“You ask too many questions, my son, and that is why you are still single. You ask about things you should already know the answer to and seem disappointed when that answer is given. It’s no wonder that no local girl has gotten herself in trouble; it would be a greater punishment listening to your inane questions than being a giant’s prisoner or witch’s ward. They at least know how to treat a girl!” said the queen, very much exasperated with her son.

“There is no more need for talk. Go,” said the king.

“But my quest-,”

“Now!”

The prince decided that discretion was the better part of valor and bid his parents farewell. He gathered what he would need for the indefinite and ill-defined (to his mind) journey; his sword, some clothes, a bow and a quiver full of arrows, travelling food, and a guide to curse-breaking, placing all of these in his saddlebags. He set off the next day at dawn on his favorite horse (a mare named Blodwen), heading west with the sun at his back. It was a rather fortuitous beginning.

The prince was quite pleased to find that after only half a day of riding, he had come across a forest with a town at its edge. Surely, something would be going on here; stolen children, mysterious lights in the woods, a tower from which the most beautiful music fell. Here, he was sure, anything could happen. He rode into the town and spoke to the first person he

saw who happened to be lovely young woman with her long red hair pulled sensibly back into a horsetail.

“Miss, has anything strange happened in this town recently?”

“Yeah, something real funny.”

“What was it? Does this town require aid? I am travelling the countryside looking to help and if something has happened here I would be terribly pleased to help out!”

“Well you see sir, this very day an odd man rode into town and asked about how he could help me without ever asking for my name.”

“That doesn’t seem so strange to me. Has anything monstrous happened?”

“I’ll say. He continued to talk to me even when I tried to shame him into asking what my name was. But he still went on, stubborn as the nag he rode in on, refusing to be decent and trade names!”

“Miss, are you sure nothing has happened that would require the involvement of a prince?”

“Look, prince, let’s try this nice and slow. I’m Gwendolen Miller. You can call me Gwen or Gwennie if it pleases you, and it’d please me if you told me your name.”

The prince sat on his horse stunned. He was a little upset that he had missed the peasant girl’s point and further upset that he couldn’t seem to think of his name. What was it? He couldn’t remember; he was always referred to as “the prince” since he was the only one just as his mother and father were the only king and queen in the kingdom and of course he never bothered with servants’ names because you didn’t address them directly and the only reason he had named his horse was-

“Is it really such a tough question to answer? You’d think I’d asked you to answer why it is that there’s a glass hill in the woods all of a sudden as though no one’d notice. Do you still not know your name? Huh? Prince?”

“A glass hill you said? Appeared suddenly? That sounds promising;

how do I get there Gwennie?"

"Don't dodge the question; what's your name?"

"I know I have one I just can't seem to remember what it is. We don't use names much at home. There's just the king and the queen and me and the servants-

"And I'm sure you don't know their names for reasons different from your parents. Well I have to call you something so for now your Cotton."

"Cotton? Why would you call anyone that? And why do you need to call me anyth-

"You're Cotton 'cause your head is filled with fluff and nothing else. That or for its suggestion of clouds since you seem to be very thoughtful outside of being rude and forgetting your name. And I need to call you something 'cause there's no way you'll be able to find your way to the glass hill and back to town without a guide like me. Forest is magic of course."

"Of course it is, why have things be simple? But I really object to the name Cotton."

"Do you know your real name yet?"

"No but-

"Then Cotton is really as good as anything else. Now let me on to your horse and we can get going."

The prince, Cotton, shifted back in his saddle to allow for the girl, Gwennie, to ride with him. He felt he hadn't done well in their conversation but at least he had a lead to go on for his quest. With Gwennie firmly planted on Blodwen, they set off into the woods to find the glass hill. It wasn't long until nightfall, strangely, since it had been noon when he had arrived in the town (what was ITS name?) and surely they hadn't been travelling long. He was about to ask Gwennie about it when she took the reins from his hands and halted the horse rather expertly with her knees. Sliding off the horse she began to rifle through the saddlebags.

"We should stop now since, as you've noticed, night comes early

here in the Night Woods.”

“What a fitting name,” said Cotton, trying to make conversation.

“Simple folk, simple names; makes it easier to know what to expect,” said Gwennie, “Do you have a tent in here? It doesn’t look like it...”

“I had planned on staying at inns most of the time.”

“Even when you’d be in a place with no inns? Well at least it isn’t raining. We’ll sleep under the stars tonight. Let’s build a fire. Also, I’ll take first watch and your bow. Can’t be too careful in the woods.”

“Monsters? Witches? Brigands?”

“Animals. They like to get into the food stores or sometimes they just want to eat you. Either way, best to be aware; with that glass hill appearing maybe those things you mentioned will be appearing as well.”

Though he was reluctant to let Gwennie take first watch (or any watch) Cotton was tired and he was nothing if not practical. Despite this, he was still a bit peeved to be awakened with the sun not yet up.

“Your turn to watch. You have some hours ‘til dawn yet so don’t be going back to sleep.”

As soon as Gwennie began snoring however, Cotton began to be restless. Thankfully not sleepy but restless was just as bad. He had banked the fire, counted his arrows, patrolled a little bit but still there wasn’t much to do if nothing was there. So he paced, he sat, he whittled, he whiled away his time. Finally the woods began to lighten and with the light came the most beautiful music he had ever heard. It was an abnormally loud harp for the sound seemed far away and yet he could hear it clearly but it was beautifully played. Cotton was so entranced that he started walking away, leaving Blodwen and Gwennie to wake up without knowing where he had gone.

It took him an hour or so, since the sun now was fully into the sky to find the source of the music in a strange clearing and wonder of wonders, it was coming from the top of the glass hill that Gwennie had mentioned, specifically from a stone hut on top. Thinking of Gwennie made

Cotton realize he had left her and Blodwen without any notice and how would they find him and what if something terrible happened to them in his absence and-! His thoughts were cut off, as was the heavenly music, when he heard a loud crashing noise behind him and Gwennie and Blodwen burst into the clearing and Gwennie looked furious.

"I would have thought you'd at least take your horse if you were going to take anything but you just wandered off without taking Blodwen or being loud enough to wake me as you attempted to leave! What, did the music draw you in? Honestly, did you not stop and think if it was a witch or some nasty trying to lure people to their doom? Cotton you are!"

Cotton was going to answer Gwennie's tirade and realized he was exactly as foolish as she had said. So he shrugged and turned to the hill and wondered how they were going to climb it. Maybe if he stuck spikes in it (it was only glass after all) he could climb up or maybe he could make some sort of grappling hook and throw it up to the squat stone hovel on top of the hill.

"Gwennie how would you go about getting to the top of this hill? I was thinking sticking spikes in to climb or may a grappling hook and rope but I don't think I have any of those things."

"I won't be saying nothing 'til you apologize for leaving me. Us really; Blodwen wasn't too happy either."

"Sorry, Gwennie I obviously wasn't thinking and I will try not to do anything so rash again." Cotton strode over to Blodwen and began brushing her mane and whispered soothing words to make up for his bad behavior. The horse lipped his arm and snorted; she liked him too much to stay angry.

"Well first off, you can stop calling me Gwennie. I think I might actually prefer Gwendolen to that. We'll stick with Gwen; I shouldn't try to switch up my name especially to something so... childish. Secondly, whoever put this here was in a rush. You can see the trees the hill crushed underneath and they didn't clear the area around so we should be able to

climb these trees and jump in or finagle a grappling hook and climb in.”

“Good idea, Gwennie I mean Gwen! I can’t believe I didn’t notice the trees were so close!”

“Yeah well I can,” said Gwen mostly under her breath.

Deciding to ignore that comment, Cotton puts his bow over his shoulder, glad that he had a recurve bow and didn’t need to worry about unstringing it as much, and began climbing one of the trees.

“I’ll circle around see if I can find something interesting,” said Gwen.

Cotton continued his climb and managed to get to a branch that was both above the hut and sturdy enough to hold his weight. He tied a rope to the shaft of an arrow and shot into the thatch of the hut. It buried itself in without going through which was good. Cotton thought it was strange he hadn’t heard the musician make any noise since he had arrived and certainly he had expected a reaction when he had shot the arrow. Sheepishly realizing he should have warned the person inside (it’s not like he and Gwen had been particularly silent so the element of surprise had already been lost) he tied his end of the rope to the branch above him and began sliding down onto the hut. He landed heavily and tugged until the knot slipped free then cut the arrow and removed that end of the rope. As he was thinking about how to get down without falling down the hill he saw Gwen climbing up a tree that had fallen against the hill and had for some reason not slipped off. Noticing there was a sort of platform, making the hill more of a mesa; he jumped down and gave Gwen a sour look.

“I thought you were going to tell me if you found anything.”

“Well you had already shot the arrow so I wanted to see if you could actually make it. You really are quite graceful.”

“Still, it would have been easier to just climb up.”

“’Twould have, surely. Shall we go in?”

“Yes but I’ll go first. It’s a bit suspicious that no one has said anything yet, especially now.”

Cotton knocked on the door and called to whoever was inside to open up. When there was no answer he gave his bow and quiver to Gwen and made sure he would be able to draw his sword quickly. He was going to kick in the door, then saw the pane-less window and jumped in there. He was met by an astounding sight; no maiden sat in the hut but a young man and not just any man but a Saracen! Dark skin like leather with coal black hair and strangely warm brown eyes. Cotton was starting to note his loose trousers and his vest sans shirt when the man drew a curved sword and advanced. Cotton drew his own straight blade and hoped the curvature wouldn't put him at a disadvantage. They clashed and Cotton quickly backed away, to avoid losing his sword in a battle of strength which he was sure he'd lose. Seeing the harp that must have been where the music had come from earlier he hazarded a question in the midst of the fight.

"Were you the one playing earlier?"

"You should ask his name if you're going to talk in a fight," said Gwen from the window.

"Alright, alright! Sorry, what's your name and were you the one playing the harp earlier?"

The Saracen looked a bit puzzled by the situation with his opponent bantering and a strange fire-haired girl casually holding a warrior's bow in the window. He did manage to answer and continue the fight however.

"My name is Zain and yes I was indeed who was playing that harp. Why do you ask?"

"It was very beautiful, probably the most beautiful music I have ever heard. I had to know who was playing that music it was so magnificent. It is good to know that your hands are as skilled with the harp as the sword."

"It is good that you have said this. May we pause in our bout? It is a good fight but I do not think we need to battle."

"And why is that, Zain?" Cotton slowly put down his blade and sheathed it as Zain did the same.

“You were lead here by my music played on that harp which was created by one of my father’s, the Sultan Behar’s, djinni. He had me sent far away to play that harp until it brought my love to me. My father had hoped that since I was an unorthodox son, this unorthodox method would work out. But he did not know how unorthodox I am so I do not think he will be entirely pleased with the outcome.”

“Unorthodox you say. I guess I too am unorthodox and my parents don’t know either. Can’t say they’d be too pleased.

“Oh for crying out loud! Kiss each other already! If you keep talking I’ll leave you both here.”

“I cannot kiss him yet...”

“Gwen. Gwendolen Miller”

“I cannot kiss him yet Gwendolen because I need to know his name.”

“Well that’s a bit of a problem. I call him Cotton but that’s just because he doesn’t remember his real name so he’s Cotton.”

“That’s all I needed to know.”

Zain quickly closed the distance between himself and Cotton and kissed Cotton on the lips, drawing Cotton to him with an arm around the waist and one about the head. Cotton was thinking that it was good that they were about equal in height when something clicked in him. He remembered that his parents had enlisted the help of his fairy godmother to forget his “unorthodox” nature by controlling his name. The idea was that the right princess would inspire him to love her and thus he would be fixed and his name returned. He remembered the argument he had had with his parents and the anger he had felt as his memory faded. He also remembered that his name was Dafydd.

“My name is Dafydd!”

“Daft? I could have told you that!” said Gwen, a smile on her face.

“You have broken the curse on me Zain and I’m eternally grateful. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“If you can think of a way to please my father with this outcome that might help. On the other hand, I could not care less about what my father says anymore. Besides I have a younger sister. She will give my father just what he wanted; a fiery bloody-minded warrior.”

“It’s settled then, let’s be off!” said Dafydd.

“Where to now that neither of us have homes?” said Zain.

“To our happily ever after of course. We’re princes, we deserve at least one!”

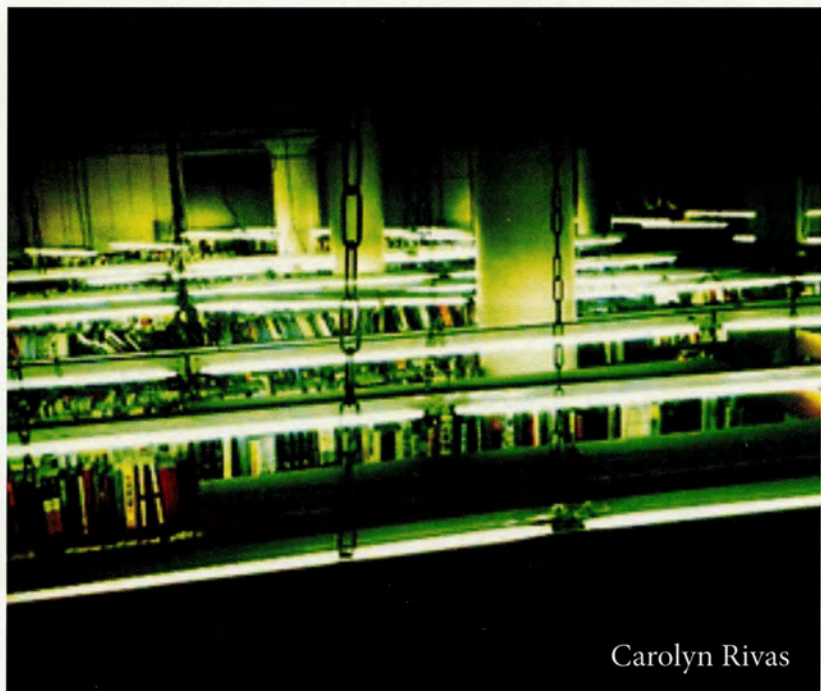
And with that, they climbed down the hill, escorted Gwen back to her town where she would soon become the strongest political power, enacting many wonderful changes, and generally having a good life whether or not she had a man in her life (that month).

The princes got another horse for Zain, named Nuria, and at last they rode back to Dafydd’s kingdom where, Zain at his side, Dafydd sternly reprimanded his parents for cursing him (“Whether it’s a witch or a fairy godmother, sanctioned by parents or no, it’s still a curse!” went one line in the conversation) and told them in no uncertain terms that they would reign as King and King Consort. As for the royal line, Dafydd named one of his favorite nieces Crown Princess and set about establishing a parliament where the common folk could address their concerns to the royal and noble circles as well as take part in running the country. And so they created their own happily ever after.

The End.



Carolyn Rivas



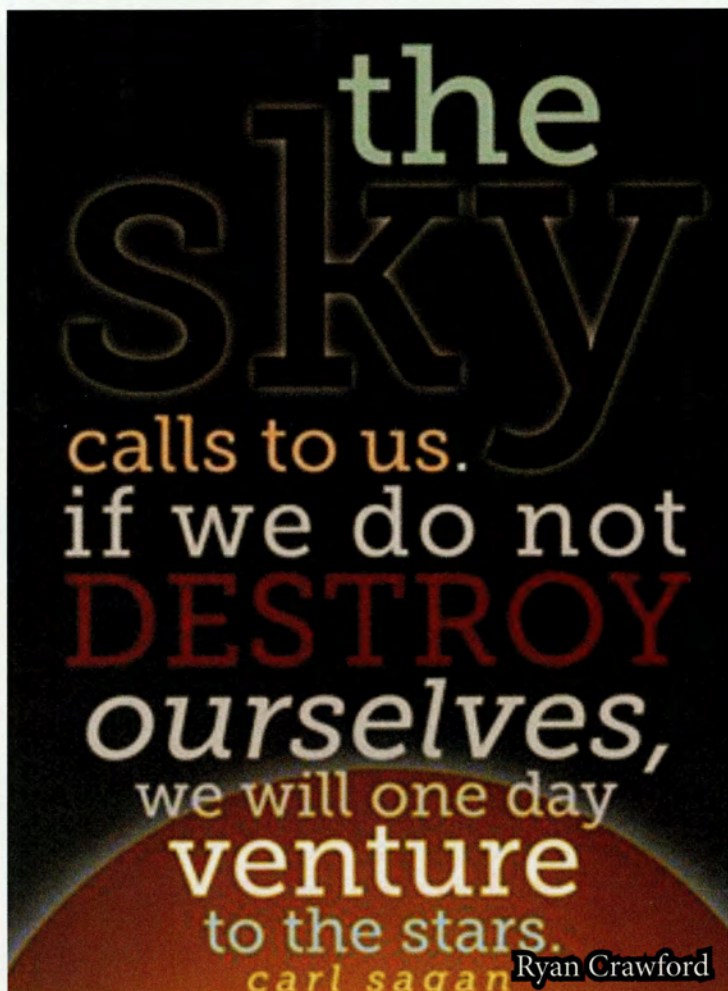
Carolyn Rivas



James Napoli



Victoria Huntsinger

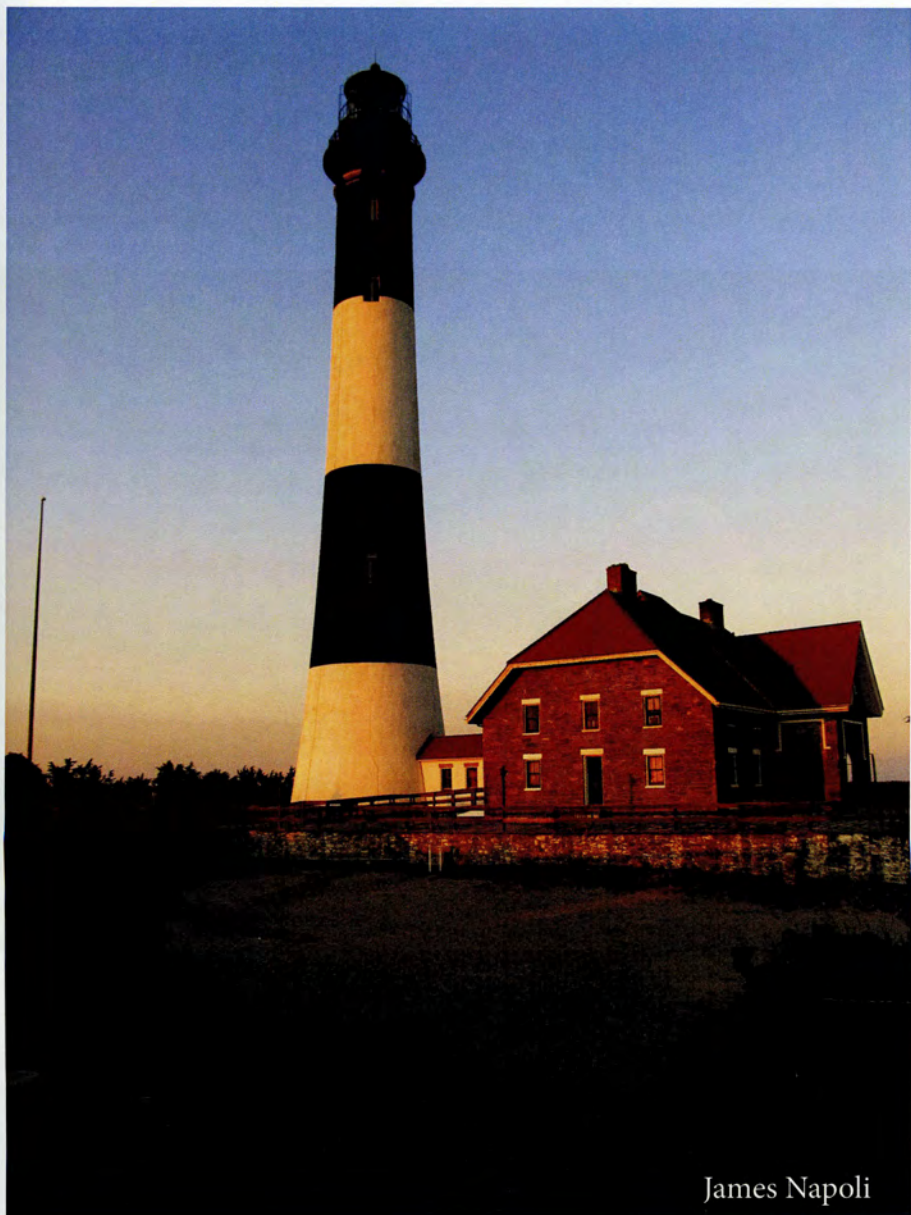






CONSTITUTION HOTEL
DESIRE

Victoria Huntsinger



James Napoli



Sarah Greenberg

Tyche

by Nicholas Bolt

A reversal of fortune,
Is measured – proportioned
By what is squelched and squandered away.

Morals adored,
Are thrown overboard
By the sequenced, silencing sway.

Engorging delight,
In the blustering night
That makes the modest – blaming.

A reversal of fortune,
Is measured – proportioned
When the moon of self-worth is waning.

Red and Green

by Lauren Hall

My teacher Ms. Gray says the sky is blue cuz it's talkin back to the water, tellin him not to be so glum. That makes sense to me. Nobody likes a sad person, they'se even worse than angry people.

I wish the sky would talk to Uncle Johnnie and tell him not to be so glum. I wish the sky'd tell him to yell at me. When he hollers I can figure out what's wrong; he's usually yellin it when he's tellin me, but at least he's say sumthin. He ain't say nothin when he's sittin off on that crusty old oak tree stump—the one Nana says our family cut down like fifty sumthin years ago. He just looks downright melancholy. Ms. Gray taught me that word. *It's like being sad, but feelin ok about it. She says time slows down for melancholy people, haze gathers 'round they heads.*

Nana says stump-time is Uncle Johnnie's quiet time. I used to think that meant he got hisself into trouble, and had to sit in time-out. But I figure that's not right, cuz he sets down on that stump all by hisself.

I used to get real close to him, looking like I was pickin dandelions so I could make one of them ugly-looking weed necklaces that the other girls make—I figured that'd be a good idea cuz Nana's always ask me why I don't act more like them otha' girls. I almost picked a dandelion from right-out-unda' Uncle Johnnie's flimsy shoe once, but he don't notice. He act like I ain't even there.

He been melancholy a lot. Nana's friends notice. When they come ova' theys sittin on the porch sippin and talkin, talkin and sippin, rockin back and forth in they chairs, tellin Nana it look like he deaf or sumthin. Gretta, from down the road, say that e'en if a twister come rippin through town,

tearin up houses, fences, and animals, Uncle Johnnie wouldn't pay no mind, he'd just sit on that stump and watch. Gretta tells that joke a lot. She just laugh and laugh, and sometime she give Nana a lil knee slap, tryin to get her to laugh too. But Nana don't laugh. She just keep rockin back and forth, forth and back. I don't think it's funny neither. I think Ms. Gretta is actin' mean.

I wish Ms. Gray would visit the porch, she would tell Ms. Gretta she sit on the toilet just like Uncle Johnnie. She says it don't matter what kinda toilet it is, just so long as you usin' one. That's what Ms. Gray tells anybody when they make fun of a boy in my class, Jimmy. He can't see colors right. He can't tell no difference between a red and a green, but Ms. Gray say he just see things different. I can't tell for sure just what she means. She makes a lot of sense most days, but I think about Jimmy, and I think about the sky talkin to the water—tellin it not to be so glum—and, it's funny, cuz either way they talkin, they both is still blue.

But Jimmy's colors is different. He see red and green the same, call 'em the same too. Some of the kids make fun of him, but I always thought that it'd be kinda nice to see red and green togetha, or next to each other, or all at once. I tried seeing like Jimmy a few times. I took some berries and leaves, took some petals and stems, took some rabbit blood and pine needles and mashed em all together. None of em mixed too well. Maybe I shoulda asked Jimmy for help, or maybe Uncle Johnnie would know best.

An Ode to My Grandmother's Diamonds

by Marygrace Navarra

Diamonds, their glint in the eyes of young girls
in puppy love, too-young love
expiration-dated college love
short-lived love.

In diamond mines, "look at that rock" –
within the black carbon rock is the shine, it means striking gold in diamonds and
being rich in love and dirt and diamonds
dirty overworked men want them for their wives.

Love, married-at-nineteen love and sweat
at a new job, an electrician. A boss. A paycheck, once
forgetting it was for bread, buying
diamonds instead.

He worked overtime for them, electricity
and diamonds are probably what
love is made from
a young husband, a young husband's love and
a young wife's love of her husband and of this gift, diamonds
which her mother did not have and never saw.
"I love you, Mary"

Diamonds sparkle with meaning to young girls
when listening to stories
of their grandfathers –
I'm told mine spent his first paycheck
on diamonds for my grandmother.
My grandmother loves earrings
especially ever-electric earrings
she gave me the ones I suspect she loves most –
they're two diamond earrings
the American Dream bright in two diamond ear-
rings,
a boat, an ocean, "Irish Need Not Apply"
diamonds, diamonds are for
ever if I wonder what he was like
I'll know he was a giver of diamonds

Last Night

By Bridget Rasmusson

Last night, I experienced a panicked moment. I was overpowered by a sudden and inexplicable sense of loss: loss of motivation, loss of purpose, loss of inspiration, loss of self. Imagined, invisible bullet holes dotting my life were proof to me of the irrevocable damage that was done, of the psychological damage that I was doing to my own person. Five minutes ticked by on the rounded face of a watch, and panic was still waging war against reason.

And proving the decided victor.

“Well, what makes you tick? What is your passion?” I stared at my friend’s textual inquiries with a foreign and all-consuming feeling that was blankness. Hollowness. I stared at his brave attempts at consolation. My two shaking hands, my fingers, one thumb and its twin, proved their anatomical uselessness. They mocked me with their refusal to function, their screams and cries of mutiny. As did my slowed and sluggish thoughts. It was the post-traumatic stress of eating a banana split sundae in record time. It was brain freeze. It was pure, unadulterated panic.

Five more minutes, indicated by the journey of the clock hands, their destination being the next hour. Still winning.

I rallied. Appearing on the laptop screen were a few awkward words, strung together by my desperate, if self-deluding, hope that something would sound right and ring true, even if it was only a fragment of truth. It was a hope that if I could just kept re-phrasing and re-editing and re-slashing and re-arranging, perhaps I could find an answer to his question that I was almost proud—75%, 84%, 93%—to offer. An aged Roman aqueduct somewhere within the recesses of my psyche had broken and I began a blind search, reaching for something intangible. Something that I inherently felt was no longer mine to have or claim. Maybe it was happiness. Maybe it wasn’t.

I succumbed. Sometimes, it is best. To swim in panic, breaking the riptide only to put more sunscreen on your blistering shoulders and dive once more. To allow yourself to be swallowed by darkness, to become darkness itself, to breathe honesty in through dual nostrils and out through a quivering mouth. I looked out the window, past the tears of Mother Nature that clung to four glass panes. Just as the rain was drowning my backyard, so was panic drowning me.

Last night, I was lost: an emotional Yo-Yo, a seasoned circus performer who fell off the taut, slim tightrope even though she had made it across one hundred times, a masquerader who misplaced her mask while mindlessly waltzing.

“Five-hundred-and-forty minutes have passed,” says the little clock to my groggy eyes. This morning, I am found.

Gone Indefinitely: 4 Valves

by Tahara Roberts

it's 440am.

clock in for a little schizophrenia.

girl all fucked and interrupted;

troubled without a heated body sleeping

next to her.

scraping for something to wrap herself in

but with thought's embrace

broad shoulders weigh all the way down.

this broad is self conscious of her aligning hips,

twisted pinky finger,

a stutter,

a breast bigger than the other.

the marks are stretched and spreading.

girl all fucked and interrupted.

with emotions radiating high

fevers and hot spring tears spilling because

heart valves went missing,

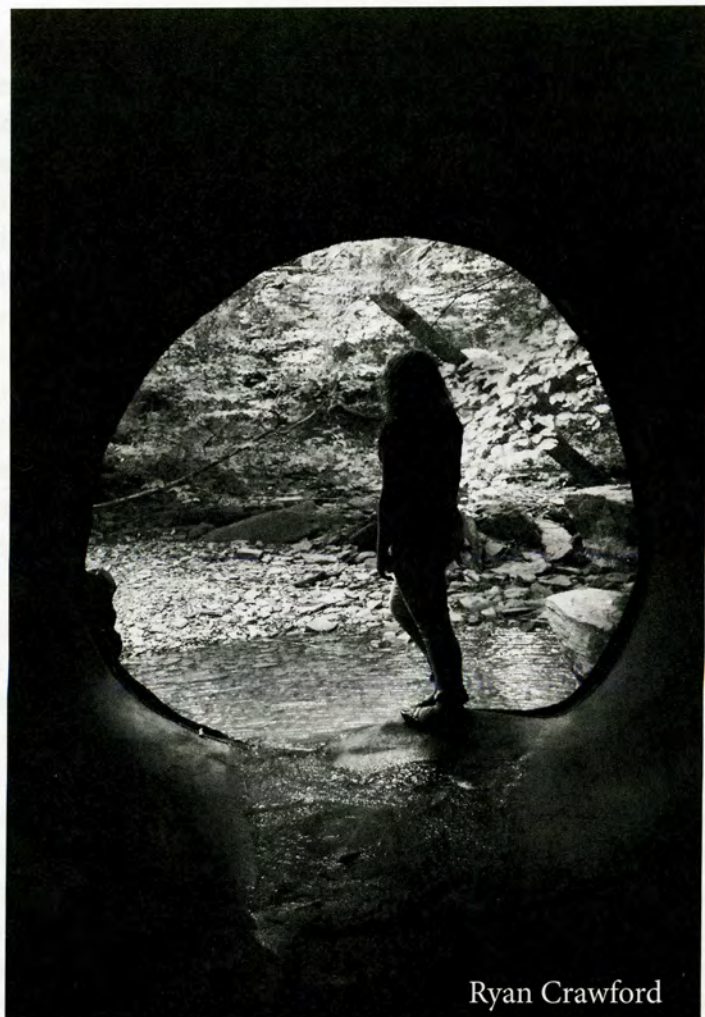
leaving behind just a shell.

sitting still,

breathing into wind-chill filled panes:

Inconsolable, terminal her

at 440am.



Ryan Crawford

Everybody Knows Mr. Social

By Taylor Foreman-Niko

Everybody knows Mr. Social. He is the new god, the fresh standard, an omnipresent technological entity that inhabits both man and machine, a bifurcated being that exists simultaneously in two interconnected processors. Behind the aqueous pane of the computer screen, he lounges upon his throne of ones and zeroes, of hyperlinks and embeds, of pixels and cascading style sheets, king to an endless, ever-expanding horde. Behind glazed and gelatinous orbs, he sits erect upon a cranial cathedra of desire, the bishop of the new age, orating a message of connectivity through a virulent viral stream. His visage is multifaceted, ephemeral in its ceaseless expansion, his message transcending both brand and corporation. He professes himself the herald for a new time, to which there is no denying. He is the gatekeeper of modern communication, the courier between forgotten friends and distant lovers, he is also the drug that goads the tripper into delusions of flight, the pistol in the bureau of the inconsolably depressed. He is Mr. Social and he is everywhere.

From his pixelated throne of interface and code, he manages a monopoly of media. Where once there was "one's space" there is now no space, the privacy once possessed long eroded to the powerful potentiation of the ceaseless internet machine that has leveled every barrier between the individual and the whole. Mr. Social's subjects now occupy a vast field of personal information, each seed self-planted and cultivated to perfection, a criminal's harvest waiting to be reaped. These subjects exist in every shape and size, nationality and creed, every purpose and cause, for Mr. Social's presence is inescapable, even necessary to the quickened birth of a new-born movement, the facilitation of the burgeoning enterprise, or the resurgence of the long-dying company. Mr. Social's reach has grown far, expanding beyond the domain of the books of faces and the buckets of photos to the realm of entertainment and business. To shop online is to be connected

to the wish lists of others, to browse the latest cinema reviews is to be asked to post one's thoughts to the web, to support a cause is to push a button upon a screen. Where once one had to search for news, now one receives it, receives it all, from the tweeted musings of salacious celebrities to the one-sentence headlines of the world's largest news corporations. All of these things, snatched from virtual space, compacted, redacted, and delivered to a computer screen, a pure line of connectivity ready to be snorted into the mind. Yet what is one to do when they leave that glorious portal, that essential web-way to the world beyond? Mr. Social says not to worry, for he has breached such fragile confines and found his way into even the smallest mobile phone. His power has muddled associations. Blackberries are no longer fruit. Droids are no longer from a galaxy far, far away. They have changed just as people have changed, heartened by the ease of Mr. Social's friendship; a personal regression in the face of technological progression. When one has a fix, he delivers; satiating that endless yearning for connection, that need for awareness no matter how miniscule the subject. Now Mr. Social never has to leave anyone and they never have to leave him. By his nature, however, Mr. Social is not merely a courier of electronic messages, but also a mouthpiece, a plenipotentiary, an avatar for all the lonely people.

There is no I in virtual space, only the representation of I, the hologram, flickering and two-dimensional, facilitated by the offerings of Mr. Social. Upon their virtual walls, people post their lives, exposing themselves upon a vast, public stage. On the web, they are whoever they wish to be, Mr. Social doesn't care. They can recreate themselves, photo by photo, comment by comment, a self-made construct of their perfect life. They can call attention to their whereabouts, share errant thoughts, post their existential musings, rage about what they hate, pronounce what they love; Mr. Social lets them do it all. Alone, however, these declarations are meaningless. As with symbols, they are given meaning by people – which Mr. Social has in droves. Every forgotten high school friend, every passing

awkward acquaintance, every vengeful lover, every second cousin, every mother, father, daughter and son, they exist upon the endless, unicentric plane of Mr. Social's virtual space, but a click away. For those who have not yet felt the urge to answer his call, just wait, Mr. Social has faith. The need for his presence, the need for his designs may one day be universal, as the definition of human relations morphs into something new, something now called progress, once called deadening. The old friendship necessitated continual and direct communication; the new has postulated that one can have a hundred friends, a thousand friends that exist as nothing more than a picture and a name. How convenient Mr. Social has made the world! They can be unfriended, they can be ignored; the requirement for their continued association is that there is no requirement. Their friendship is not something to be nurtured or valued, rather a number in a long string of numbers, the measure of contemporary worth. Mr. Social has both invigorated and crippled modern communication. He has brought people together that have never been farther apart. He has changed what it means to be lonely. He has become the basis for daily relations. Modern youth are capable of flinging hundreds of messages across virtual space in the space of an hour, their thumbs moving as if independent of their body, a prestidigitation daily refined, yet they become anxious and wandering-eyed at the verbal address of an adult, the physical realm disallowing their ability to delay, to ignore, to speak without speaking. Yet words retain their power in every form, the power to rouse, to sadden, to kill.

Mr. Social is a killer, the leader of the new cult, the man in the white bronco. His ubiquitous reach is that of every bully, every inconsiderate friend, every small-minded individual with a superiority complex. With Mr. Social, there is no such thing as gossip, spread discreetly from person to person. That private, scandalous information is free to the masses, a ravenous virtual fire that cannot be extinguished. In a world where the amount of responses one has to their status update is a measure of worth, the impact of a circulated untruth can be disastrous and deadly. Words

spoken through Mr. Social's many mouths are far more hurtful than sticks and stones; they expose a person, surround them, and suffocate them beneath the unfeeling comments of those far, distant "friends." Existing upon so public a field, there is no hope for dismissal; all revelations are permanent. Through their digital separation, there is no measurable reaction to reflect the pain, nothing to see or hear of the sufferer's grief. Mr. Social gives the guilty the ability for wanton degradation, both effortless and removed. Yet nothing passes without consequence and for every broken teen that crawls through the morass of their social life with the hope that there is something better, there are those that simply sink. A mother buys her daughter scarves for her birthday. Five months later she finds the girl hung by them in the closet, neck livid with color, limp as a marionette without strings, save one. A young man, made to be ashamed for his sexuality, utters his last words not by voice, but through text, pasted upon his virtual wall like an epitaph. An hour later he sails off the edge of a bridge, a pale dot streaking through the darkness to a watery end. These are the victims of Mr. Social, that hydra-like being that exists in his multitudinous forms. Though his intention is not inherently malevolent, it is tainted like all things by the human presence, the very thing for which he was made.

Despite his crimson, sticky hands, Mr. Social saunters on, invading and pervading all forms of modern entertainment, wholly unable to be blamed for the damage he has caused. In the end, Mr. Social is what one makes of him. He can be an empowering friend, one that allows for personal transformation, one that can reach across continents, one that can alert and address instantly. He can be a dangerous agent, one whose pervasiveness dissolves privacy, one that allows malevolence without immediate consequence. He can be the reason for a rekindled love. He can be the reason for absent friends. He is Mr. Social and he is everywhere. Everybody knows Mr. Social.

Family

by Lauren hall

Of all the questions we might ask,
we know that none of them matter.
A burning ball of light smashed,
destroying earth for the dinosaurs.

But most dinosaurs don't matter;
they lived, died, and will decay.
Earth destroyed the dinosaurs
by giving them heartbeats.

Living, dying, and decaying
describes a cyclical relationship.
Heartbeats birth more heartbeats
with better—practiced—rhythms.

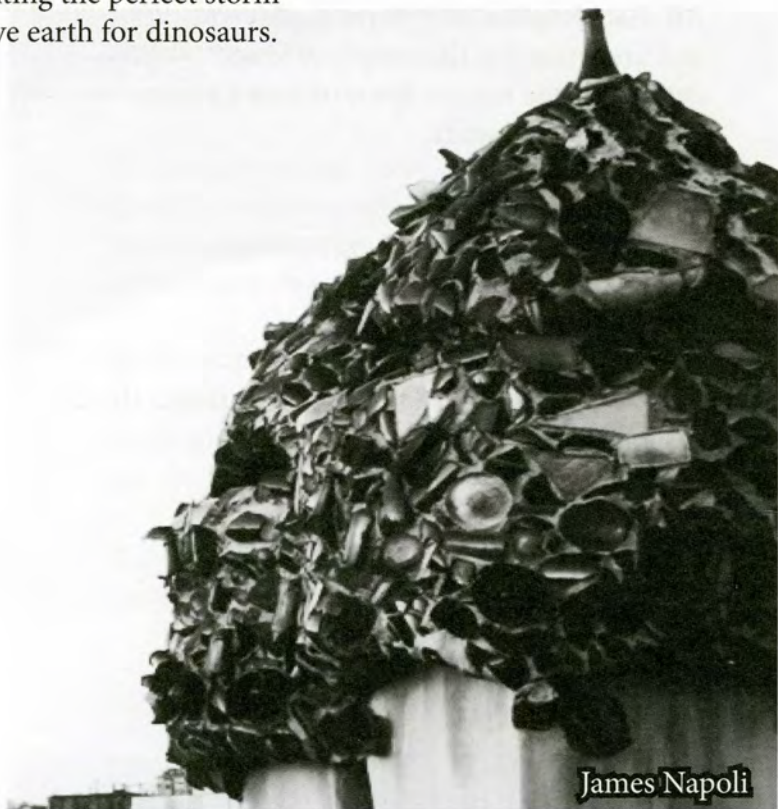
Describing a cyclical relationship,
tells the enlightened story of history,
as it adds bettered, practiced rhythms.
Dinosaurs would tell us to fear light.

History tells us that light burns,
when amassed in a ball that smashes.
But, that doesn't mean we should fear,
because dinosaurs don't matter.

Amassed in a ball of light,
new life, new species, live
with the matter of dinosaurs
encoded in their memories.

New life breeds new species
that live life better informed
knowing encoded memories
do prevent the perfect storm.

That life can live better informs
us of all the questions we might ask.
Preventing the perfect storm
can save earth for dinosaurs.



James Napoli

Potential Energy

by Jessica Sturtevant

All matter moves and changes;
all change and movement matter,
especially the movement of us,
dancing in the narrow space of your kitchen.

All change makes movement matter
and uncertainty is the tempo we keep,
dancing in the narrow space of your kitchen
in an accidental waltz.

Uncertainty is the tempo
pulsing behind our casual conversations,
as we waltz around the tension,
and my sleeve brushes your hair.

The pulse behind our casual conversations
is subtle and strange, the whisper
of your sleeve brushing my hair
as I whip milk into cream,

subtle and strange, whispering
of molecular transformation.
I stand, whipping milk into cream,
watching strawberries fly under your knife.

Molecular transformation
occurs here, as
strawberries fly under your knife
and stray into my mouth.

Occurring here and now
are all the wonders coming true.
Your words stray into my mouth
as you move close and away.

All the wonders are coming true:
All matter moves and changes
as you move close and away,
into the movement of us.

what is
the point

of being

♦ **ALIVE** ♦

*if you
don't at least*

TRY

— to do —

**SOMETHING
REMARKABLE**

john green

Ryan Crawford



Top: Devin Dickerson, Rachael Shockey, James Napoli, Olivia McMahon, Victoria Huntsinger, Kellie Hayden

Bottom: Carolyn Rivas, Meg Flannery, Raven Baptiste

We are honored to have had the chance to work with such imaginative and inspiring pieces of work. We thank the people who submitted their art, and also the dedicated group that helped put this together. There is so much color, soul and care in here; we hope that as you read you will be shocked, stimulated, and smitten.

Sincerely,

Raven Baptiste & Meg Flannery

