Crosscurrents: Fall 2009
Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound

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editor’s note

THE FIRST TWO WORDS in this book (unintentionally on our part) are “I accept,” an opening that fits so well with Crosscurrents and all the power packed into these 80 pages. The artists in this publication have taken a positive stand on art. They have not only had the courage to submit their works for review by our staff, but have accepted the challenge to create them in the first place—a far more difficult step, in my opinion. However, in an equally fitting fashion, the first two words of the final piece in the book are “I reject.”

While this juxtaposition might seem contradictory, I would argue that both stances actually form a cohesive argument. Through the initial act of creation, there is an understanding and acceptance of the way things are in the world. Yet at the same time, by creating a piece of art there is also a refusal to comply with the passive connotation of the word “accept.” Within each work lies its creator’s own personal rebellion against that knowledge of a perceived status quo, and the continued drive to challenge and change it. No art is stable, emotionless, or complacent. It rejects stasis in favor of demonstration, and this—in my opinion—is the importance of each word in each piece.

That’s why Crosscurrents exists, to get those words out there; to let you, the reader, experience in whatever small way is possible, the message each artist is casting out into the void, hoping maybe, someone out there will hear it, and understand.

So thank you to everyone who has contributed to this publication in any way, though it might only be by reading these words. Even now, that void is a little bit smaller.

GREAT LINDQUIST
editor in chief
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The 516, Northbound</td>
<td>Becca Rosenberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Curves (Upper Antelope Canyon, Page, Arizona)</td>
<td>KC Huizinga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Running of the Bulls</td>
<td>Selma Kettwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shino Glaze on Stoneware</td>
<td>Ben Hulet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Twenty Years Without the Wall</td>
<td>Amy McDonell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spit and Shake</td>
<td>Kyle Nunes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Safe Inside</td>
<td>Kelsey Wilburn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“If These Walls Could Talk...”</td>
<td>Jamie Fletcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A Year Away From Alaska</td>
<td>Melissa Lettis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Carrie Eidsness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lotus Flower</td>
<td>Ari Georgakopoulos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Jeremy’s Crane</td>
<td>Andrew Fink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Tacoma</td>
<td>Kelly Drummond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Nude in the Style of Egon Schiele</td>
<td>Lauren Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Forgetting</td>
<td>Kelsey Wilburn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Select Works and Reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Alex Greene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>review</td>
<td>Mita Mahato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>You Don’t Know How to be a Real Indian</td>
<td>Kendra Iringan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>review</td>
<td>Elise Richman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Malorie Spreen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>review</td>
<td>Lynn Sokei</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

29 Names ------------------------------- Leah Vendl
30 The Four Horsemen: War --------------- Elle Vargas
31 Lovers and Other Strangers ---------- Ally Lever
34 Eternal Summer ---------------------- Isabelle Chiosso
35 Formula Ford ------------------------ Andrei Kozlov
36 When I Met Henrietta Lacks ---------- Hudson Hongo
37 Against All Odds --------------------- Jasmine Herrick
38 The Blind Shall See When The Son Comes -- Jeff Winograd
48 Lenses --------------------------------- Grace Dyer
49 Eliza ---------------------------------- Hannah Calkins
52 Cloudy Skies ------------------------- Michael Gordon
53 Bicycle Weather ---------------------- Jessica Baloun
54 January in the Boundary Waters ------ Adam Colton
55 Threaded Gradience ------------------- Paige Reitz
56 Best Friends Trio --------------------- Amelia Vance
58 Untitled ----------------------------- Sam Bourdon
59 Response to My Editor or Adultery In Verse-------------------------------- Nick Schwarzenberger
62 Socks -------------------------------- Colin Wallace
63 Early Frost --------------------------- Kelly Wyman
64 Soloist ------------------------------- Lauren Sanford
65 Showbiz ----------------------------- David Tveite
68 Division ------------------------------ Andrew Sheridan
69 Open ---------------------------------- James Gaines

/ / / / / / / / /
(Voice of Scar face)
You think you know me
You don’t really know man
You look at me and you say, aye look at hing
Well say hello to Antonio

You see I’m Newyoricam
That’s a Puerto Rican from the city of New York

I am African, I am Arawak, I am Dutch, I am Tiano, the Indigenous
I am Puerto Rico

I am rice and beans with plátanos on the side
I am leche de coco and Bacardi Rum
I am Puerto Rico

I am Salsa,
The kind I eat, the kind I listen to, the kind I play, the kind I dance to
I am Puerto Rico

I am bilingual
a Latino who speaks fluent Spanglish
Mi apellido
My last name is Edwards
which comes from my Jamaican Grandfather
who taught my Dad to sing; Day O day ay ay O
Daylight come and me wanna go home
to Puerto Rico

I am Pasteles and Quenepas
Rellenos de Papa y Alcapurrias
I am Puerto Rico

I am Reggeton, like Tego Calderon
Willie Bobo, Miguel Pinero, Y Tito Puente
Esos son mi hente
You see my culture’s intact
Statehood is an American act
So don’t tread on me, we already raise your flag, so I vote No
I am Puerto Rico

To mi abuela y abuelito
Si no me puede entender de lo siento
Yo soy Puerto Rico

From the top of my cabellio
To the bottom of my feet
The food I eat, the words I speak
I am Puerto Rico

Well Antonio, do you consider yourself Puerto Rican or Black
Cause you seem to identify with Blacks

What I say to that is
Freedom of the mind is seldom traveled by the multitudes
You must open your mind as well as your eyes
Only in America are we asked to choose sides

Achale semillia la maraca pa que suena cha coo cha
You see I am Puerto Rico

I idea of my being is much larger than the color of my skin
You must inquire within

We come lily white to blue black
Put some folks in Puerto Rico and they don’t even know how to act

So from Catano to Ponce and Bayamon
Puerto Rico is always home

ANTONIO EDWARDS HAS BEEN PERFORMING SPOKEN WORD FOR OVER 10 YEARS, BRINGING HIS UNIQUE INSIGHT TO LOCAL ISSUES, OUR HUMAN LEGACY, AND MATTERS OF FAITH. GAINING THE TITLE OF THE 2009 SOUL OF THE CITY TACOMA POET LAUREATE, ANTONIO PLANS ON RAISING POETRY TO HEIGHTS AND POPULARITY ENJOYED BY OTHER MAJOR CITIES.
I accept the raspy grating, 
the loose whistle of steel

clicking air. I anticipate the pitch 
of each bend, capture the motion

in my kneecaps, and clench my thighs 
to keep it there. In the whirr of bodies and voices,

her shoulder hangs in the aisle; her chin 
bobs in sleep. I envy the calm

weight of her carriage.
CURVES (Upper Antelope Canyon, Page, Arizona)

kc HUIZINGA
LEGS DANGLING, I sit in the window with my head crouched beneath the pane. Papá stands in the alleyway far below my white flowery sandals, his arms reaching to me like tree branches.

“Papá, will you catch me?”

The door pulses from the beating on the other side, in sync with my pounding heart and throbbing fingertips. It’s the man who just served us tacos verdes. Somehow Papá made him mad. The faucet is still running, and I jump.

“Papá, why is the policía chasing us?”

Like the discoteca glimmer where Papá would order me a Cola and set me on a comfy couch, red and blue lights flash against the blurry Tiendita sign we past. Arm outstretched, my body follows my hand that Papá grips and pulls through the passerby maze down the streets of Tlacotalpan. The people in front of Papá split to make way for our dash as if we are famous actors and they are our paparazzi alongside the red carpet. Sweaty, teary rain mixes on my skin and chills from the sand-filled wind batting my face. We miss the turn home where I’m sure Mama has sweet empanadas waiting, Papa’s favorite. I look back. Four men, all in black, are only a block away and running strong.

“Papá, I’m running as fast as I can.”

I can fly. Arms ascended, losing no speed, my feet lift from the grimy street. My chest against Papá, he holds me tight during this bumpy ride, heads bonking. The shiny blue car at our side speaks to Papá. It warns him to stop, but Papá runs faster. I keep my eye on the men behind us until my vision spins to face the street, then the sky. The fall didn’t hurt. The sunlight stings my eye as it breaks through the orange rainclouds past the volcano horizon. Papá is down.

“Papá, don’t go.”

One man in black holds each of Papá’s muscular brown shoul-
ders. They yank his arms back and Papá’s chest shoots forward. His neck spins to me, his dark chocolate eyes anchor to my own. Tía Maria always told me, ‘You look just like Alejandro, mi Hita, such a spitting image of your Papá.’ He falls to his side, they tie his feet together. Centered like the sun, with his body flailing around him like a jumbled planet rotation, his eyes hold mine. I hug my knees and begin to rock on the sidewalk.

“Papá, tell me a bedtime story before you go.”

*Mira la luna*

*Comiendo su tuna;*

*Echando las cáscaras*

*En la laguna.*

I whisper what Grandpapa sang to me when Papá wasn’t home and I couldn’t fall asleep to the screaming fiesta in the streets. They carry him to the shiny blue car while he struggles like our new Pit puppy, Poquito, who hates being picked up. Disco lights reflect off the teary tracks whizzing down my face while I sway to the beat of my pulse and Grandpapa’s lullaby. Papá swears at the men and I lose the beat in my head. His head is shoved down inside the car and I find his eyes looking back at me between the tinted lines of the back window.

I rock over the sidewalk crack that I usually tried to avoid when walking home from school so I don’t ‘break Mama’s back.’ Daddy did that before, but I think his favorite was bending her ribs so her cocoa colored tummy would glow like the turquoise rings set on blankets alongside Avenida Del Sol. I walked up and down the same avenue I sprinted with Papá, always keeping Mama’s back straight, many times before I saw him again.

*    *    *

“Papá is a superhero. Look, Mama, he’s Spider-Man outside.” I wave to Papá climbing up the apartment wall towards our window, knife between his teeth. Mama scoops me up. Her long black braid slaps my cheeks and I hold on for the bumpy ride.
TWENTY YEARS WITHOUT THE WALL

amy MCDONELL

woodcut print
SPIT AND SHAKE

kyle NUNES

Each time you ring me,
I give the Devil another
pound of my flesh.

Because I bet
that once you had
returned to your
spirited village, with the others,
my love would be forgotten.

Please,
write a letter instead.
It is hard to speak on the
phone without hands,
or an upper lip.
The rustling in the walls never stopped not for years and after a while the tenants at the corner grew used to the mystery of tiny footsteps and the music of whiskers that brushed against the pipes like a familiar breath on the back of your neck because what else was there to do when the building was so old and they were so busy with so many lives at once. Every day they built their love affairs from scratch and baked cake from boxes and Mrs. Litzenberg in 2G before she went blind swore she’d seen a dozen mice scurry across her floor like a parade of dusty tumbleweed but then you know the scratching against plaster started before all that. Before Mr. Behren’s children took him first to the Home and then to the Parlor and before the unmentionable happened in 3C there was still a tiny alabaster blur collecting the broken pearls from the floor and snatching the stories that bled through the wallpaper to the places that no one could rent even if they tried. Ms. Seigler who never married will wander the shadowed hallways forever and mutter her if these walls could talk’s while beady eyes that saw what she keeps in her closet will watch quietly from beneath the banister, counting her footsteps to the beat of war drums and waiting for silence to break since silence is the only thing really safe, after all, for small creatures in these big and spinning worlds.
Fireweed burns slowly into colder days
catching sparks from neighbors
until snowfall quenches
lust-red leaves.

Glitter litters the moon-speckled ground
and traps the sun behind the horizon
until each sparkle drips and
returns to the sea.

Tentacles swim through the melting earth
seeking feasts below and light above
from which they weave green hats
to cover their roots.

Rays grasp each stem and pull at tug-of-war
until stalks sweat flowers on their brows,
each petal splashing to the ground
to make room for berries.

Fire again climbs the weeds, which spread
their ash through the air while butter-
flowers disappear in a wish
and a puff of smoke.
LOTUS FLOWER

ari GEORGAKOPOULOS

steel and plexiglass
I SAW magic for the first time when I was eight, on the day Jeremy Chendo showed me that paper cranes can fly. He was not a remarkable child in any physical way, with a slight frame, a bristle of black hair stuck on top, and small, slanted eyes that always smiled. He was special because he was a boy who did not try to look up my dress on the playground, and I liked him in ways I wouldn’t understand until I was older, when he was gone.

We were seated in the back corner of the room, where, if you were careful to position yourself so that the head of the child in front of you covered Ms. Bergman at her desk, you could do anything you wanted. She was not a teacher who believed in active learning, but one who preferred to lecture from her desk in a high flurry. I would imagine that her voice was actually coming from the flock of songbirds stringing the power lines outside, or that she was not really there at all. That day, I was watching Jeremy fiddle with a paper square, folding it this way and that, creasing and uncreasing, smaller and smaller until he held in his hand a crane no larger than a spinning quarter. The crane’s body was still flat and pointed, and though it was too
small to push your breath into, he placed the bottom against his lips and blew anyway.

From where I sat, it looked like the body expanded at an alarmingly slow rate, as though it took every ounce of breath from his lungs to fill the small cavity to capacity. The sides popped apart, the top flattened and rounded up, and when it was nearly bursting, he held it in his hands and blew the crane through the air towards me.

The crane’s trajectory was far too even-keeled, and as it crossed the space between us I could almost hear it flutter, though it might just have been the wings outside. I caught it, and was surprised to find myself holding something which should not have been alive. It looked up at me, fully aware of my shock, and almost as though my disbelief had injured it, it looked away and placed its tiny head beneath its wing. I looked back towards Jeremy, but he was staring out the window, where the birds were unmoved by his mimicry. I asked him how, but he did not answer. The small crane pecked at my hands, and I did not know what to do with it. I did not know what to do with an act of magic. I did not know what to make of Jeremy Chendo and his miraculous breath. So I kept it, and the crane still sits on my mantle, frozen and breathless now, my reminder that nothing magical lasts forever.
TACOMA
found wood and acrylic

kelly DRUMMOND
NUDE IN THE STYLE OF EGON SCHIELE
oil on canvas

lauran FAULKNER
FORGETTING

kelsey WILBURN

Young reminders of my grandmother’s dementia—
the pottery wheel at Lanikai,
underneath thin, yellowed cut-outs from the Sunday news,
slicings of birthday cards addressed to Duke
or Barbara,
and the smell of drying clays.

My grandfather sits in the background,
rocking chair against the hardwood and
cane against his dented knees,
his age spots mimic my grandmother’s
Pollack-phase.

He hobbles toward the Arizona memorial
as if he has not yet seen the gray blue of the Pacific
under churning steel,
as if he has not known the air spilled with black smoke.

While, she stands alone and argumentative in the kitchen
unable to remember her middle name,
watering the flowers for the hundredth time
and forgetting, too often, to sleep.
Day’s grey mouth yawns to a close as
the petals of the flowers on my orange sheets
open and shut quietly keeping pace with
my thoughts. Doors creak and empty jars
stand pregnant with opacity wondering about
water and singing soft silicate songs of the sea.
There are people here but I do not see them,
there are people all around me pouring out of books
and speakers, pushing heads through my sweaters and
rubbing their eyes saying ‘turn on the light!’
and I say ‘the light is on’ but do it anyway, and the
room flickers into darkness.
Outside it’s black and blue and something’s stretching
out of millions of sidewalk cracks and nostrils and stomata
grinning a little grin to itself.
And there’s a buzzing in my ears that never stops
but forgetting again, I throw my pen,
ruffle my feathers and look to the clock.
IN A LETTER to his brother Thomas, poet John Keats extols the virtues of negative capability—that is “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” Keats argues that poetry should manifest this negative capability; language reaches its greatest potential when it illuminates and defines even as it obscures and hesitates.

Alex Greene is negatively capable. In his untitled poem, Greene effortlessly spins a series of gorgeous images that embody anxious rest and silent cacophony. For instance, the image of empty jars that “stand pregnant with opacity” delicately weaves impotence with imagination. Greene’s firm grasp on the uncertain allows him to conjure spellbinding images of flowers on sheets that “open and shut quietly keeping pace with/my thoughts” or of people “pouring out of books/and speakers.” The poem, whatever its inspiration, captures the commotion of the poet’s mind at rest—a record spinning while the player’s needle sits securely in its dock.

There is a turn outward as the poem stumbles confidently to its close. Outside, “something’s stretching/out of millions of sidewalk cracks.” I’m reminded of the playful, yet polluting image of Eliot’s catlike yellow fog in the “Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Like Eliot in that poem, Greene gestures toward a rejection of poetry (“I throw my pen”) and yet sedulously places the gesture within the contours of a very skilled and methodical poem. And though the final action of the poem, a “look to the clock,” has us turn our backs on all that preceded, there’s a sense that the restful anxiety was the thing. The poet-bird ruffles his feathers (as if some relative of Keats’s nightingale), signaling a triumphant giving up. After all, the poem has been written. Negatively capable. Lovely. Impressive.

MITA MAHATO is an Assistant Professor of English at Puget Sound, where she teaches courses in the writing, rhetoric, and culture and literature emphases of the major. She completed her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Oregon. Her current research concentrates on the rhetoric of illness, visual rhetoric, and (increasingly) the mad ramblings of Roland Barthes.
YOU DON’T KNOW HOW TO BE A REAL INDIAN

oil on canvas, feathers, beads, rabbit fur, buckskin
WHAT DOES IT MEAN to be a real Indian? Kendra Iri Ingan’s painting, “You Don’t Know How to be a Real Indian” is more a visual ques tion than an assertion. Her mixed media, synthetic process involving oil paint, feathers, Navajo beadwork, and tin can tassels embodies the hybrid, problematic nature of identity. Through her distinct yet integrated methods and materials Kendra conjures a visual inquiry that combines humor and devotion to critique ugly stereotypes and explore the power of tradition.

The sky in Kendra’s painting stretches into the horizon, vibrant as hope and deep as the long arc of history. In stark contrast to the light and depth of her background rests a suitcase, loaded with baggage and in a space as shallow as the nature of stereotypes. Between the open land and clasped luggage are three figures waiting at the 1492 bus stop, a highly charged cross road.

Each figure’s posture reflects the ways in which the past becomes a legacy, part of the present that shapes the future. The figure perched on the edge of the bench is a self-portrait. Kendra faces the viewer, confronting each of us with a knowing almost mischievous gaze as we internalize her work in this present moment. To her left sits a male figure bent in despair. His regal headdress seemingly bears the weight of history. Flanking him on the left side of the picture plane stands a woman, her head aloft, proud in replete regalia. She faces west the direction of new frontiers, the future that holds the promise of hope that may open into vast horizons or jerk to a halt at the next bus stop.

ELISE RICHMAN IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART AND A PAINTER. SHE RECEIVED HER BFA FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON AND HER MFA FROM AMERICAN UNIVERSITY. HER PAINTINGS EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGAGING IN AN ARTISTIC PROCESS, EVOKING A SENSE OF PLACE, AND EXPRESSING TIME’S PASSAGE. SHE HAS EXHIBITED HER WORK NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY AT A WIDE RANGE OF COMMERCIAL AND NON-COMMERCIAL SPACES INCLUDING THE FULCRUM GALLERY AND KITTREDGE GALLERY IN TACOMA AS WELL AS SOIL AND THE GALLERY4CULTURE IN SEATTLE.
“JUST TAKE IT EASY and let it out slow, Bud.” I speak in a tone that I reserve for calming animals. My younger brother lets the clutch out on my car and causes it to shake violently and die for the fifth time coming down our half-mile driveway. Dust clouds around us in the midsummer sun and it’s hotter this evening than either of us could have anticipated. My 1985 beat up BMW seems to be taking the abuse pretty well. It hasn’t been clean since the last time it rained and the heat isn’t helping. It’s the same car my dad taught me to drive stick on and my brother Pat decided that before he goes into the Marines in January he wants to learn too. I think it’s just a way to get one on one time with me, but I won’t tell him that; he hasn’t asked me to teach him anything in over three years. It’s funny how the older sibling notices the loss of the younger, pestering one to the confusion of adolescence.

We sit in the car for a second and let it cool down; even having the windows and sun roof open does no good. Pat bangs on the steering wheel with the heel of his left hand and swears at the
road we have traveled with parents, walked, rode bikes down, ran, and where we are now attempting to teach him the basics of driving manual. Its dusty existence lies between the two halves of our cattle fields surrounded by alder trees and blackberry bushes fed by a small creek running through the middle of everything, our world. It’s strange to think about how many of our battle scars come from rocks that litter this gravel path. I ask him if he remembers the days when we would wait for the rain just so we could put on our rain gear and run out to play in the muddy fields. His head goes back in easy concentration and I notice the stubble around his chin and upper lip that hadn’t even been a possibility a few years ago.

“You told me that if we waited long enough, we’d see a rainbow. So every time it rained, out we ran,” he remembers this quietly, eyes closed. “We were determined to find that pot of gold. Or at least I was. You were probably laughing at my enthusiasm.” I examine this boy who is turning into a man before my eyes. I remember our whole childhood, can recount its entirety for anyone who asked but at this moment, I realize I don’t know my younger brother at all. The way he speaks isn’t full of the livelihood of youth but the conspiratorial tones of a teenager. When was the last time that I asked him about girls or his senior project for high school?
Who is this stubbly stranger that is planning on leaving me devastated in a few months without my little brother, my shadow?

“I miss you.” The words come out effortlessly, as they will when you’re with someone you will know for the rest of your life, for better or for worse. I study this person who had changed from a curious little boy into this cynical young man. He looks at me a bit shocked and asks me why. “I don’t know you,” is my honest and only reply. It’s when he pulls me into one of his crushing hugs that I realize all I need to do is reach out to him. Tears sting my eyes and the gearshift jabs into my left side as he holds me and says in a light tone, not unlike that of his younger self, but still different and full of mischief, “It’s never too late to get to know me.” He pulls away with a grin on his face and gets out of the car. I follow suit and he leads me around to my trunk. He takes pleasure in hopping onto the back end effortlessly, all 190 pounds of him, a crooked grin spread across his face. I slide onto the flat back end as he pulls out a pack of cigarettes and offers me one. The sun shines dustily over the field that has been our sanctuary and into our eyes, distorting our view of the future. Smoke curls skyward and the lazy words of siblings roll into the sunset for the first time unhindered by the fact that he is my baby brother and aided by this new idea that he can be my friend.
MALORIE SPREEN’S “BROTHER” provides a study of transitional time. It is nearing the end of a mid-summer day as an older sister teaches her younger brother how to shift gears in her trusty car. He is between high school and the Marines. She is between holding on and letting go of him. They are waiting in the middle of their family’s cattle fields, in the middle of their “world,” on the long and familiar driveway leading them home. But the story’s beautiful tension lies in these siblings’ faith that they will not reach home unchanged. From here on out, the narrator will always miss her younger brother as she remembers him and as he continues to transform out of sight. The younger brother now takes the lead, lights a cigarette, and offers one. They sit smoking atop the trunk of the old car. The sun is about to set, and what can they do but watch? Spreen captures the unease and promise of this transitional moment. At the end of “Brother,” there is an unclear leader and follower, teacher and student. The siblings are shifting gears. They are stepping away from family hierarchy. They are learning to let each other grow.

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Lander went swimming in the new pool. I said,  
*mon petit poisson*  
into the white sink  
while waiting for the water to warm.  

Tucking me into petals  
of sheets yelling yellow  
you said,  
*ma petite jonquille*  
into the prayer-pressed pillow.  

With fingers in a mane streaked  
whisk wind into holy whispers,  
you said,  
*mon petit cheval*  
and kissed the nose’s bone bridge.  

I watched him, a Liliputian  
grasping handhold moles.  
Lander was climbing,  
small on my computer screen.  
*Ma petite rainette,*  
I said  
through pixel-filtered proximity.
THE FOUR HORSEMEN: WAR

elle VARGAS  litho ink and paper, acrylic paint, invisible base
I.

I learned about life
from the produce aisle of the grocery store.
The apples touted all-American values
in red, yellow, green,
and a mixture of all three.
I found out how many lemons were needed
for lemonade-stand capitalism,
and saw the blackberries that used to run wild and free
finally tamed into small plastic cartons.
But I learned the most from mangoes.
They spoke in Portuguese, sometimes Sanskrit,
told me stories about their Philippine homeland
and the lovers they were taken from.
They listened to the primal rhythms
beating through the bones in our bodies
the way the cliffs listen to the sea
sing out its sorrow.
They acknowledged the mysteries of love,
but did not try to solve them.
II.

It was only at college, in Washington, where mangoes are rare,
I remembered there’s a reason they’re shaped like human hearts.
Mi amor, if you laughed hard enough to make the scar on your chest
turn into a zipper I could undo,
I’m sure that cradled within your ribcage,
there would be a mango,
slightly bruised, but still perfectly juicy and ripe.
If so, I would paint my house light orange in honor of you.
I couldn’t live on love alone,
but would live a long life if your love was all things mango.
You are that new mango-flavored vodka and I am part Russian.

III.

Even though this is about produce, don’t even think of the phrase “fruit of thy womb.”
You didn’t conceive of it, so don’t try to push it on me.
I know full well what I am getting into.
The mangoes from Latin America do not taste the same as the ones from India or the Philippines and I am only trying to find my favorite one.
You may think that you’re calling the shots, that I am the willing consolation prize you’ve finally tamed into your bed, but fruits are actually ovaries.
You, good sir, are lacking.
IV.

The mangoes do not know about science, but they know about passion. I’ve never understood Physics, but I understand gravity and how bodies fit together. The way your smile makes friction with my own mango-shaped heart, and how your electrons spark fireworks in my cells, are mysteries even Stephen Hawking couldn’t solve. In my search for the elusive thing called love, the mangoes have never judged. They know that love is everything you make it, from the way mango juice tastes on your sun-warmed skin, to the way a dream of Chile makes you feel, running your fingers along my spine like my vertebrae were the Andes.

*Ni la noche, ni el sueño*  
*pudieron separarnos.*

V.

In a tree deep within a forest in the Philippines, two mangoes quietly bump against each other as our own hearts beat louder than the storm around us.
ETERNAL SUMMER

isabelle CHIOSSO
An ancient radio, tuned to dust,
And a Redskins calendar from ‘82 rest on a shelf above
The dead remains of your baby, a Formula Ford
With its guts spilled out on the floor.

Your denim work shirts,
The padded jumpsuit with your blood type stitched beneath your name
Hang near the door,
Next to sepia photos of races at Lime Rock, Summit Point,
And Polaroids of this thing

Who could barely throw a football
Who didn’t like the smell of motor oil
Whose sneakers couldn’t quite reach the clutch

Who sometimes got you to leave your cave
And walk on all fours,
Pushing around Hot Wheels.
WHEN I MET HENRIETTA LACKS

hudson HONGO

Her name nearly made me laugh;
She wanted children most of all,
But her womb was ours to have
(One cell staging a mass revolt,
Resulting in a mass).

I kept a culture as a joke
To show my cocktail party,
But host-less it refused to die,
Doubled for the company.

Now I lay a prolific man,
The father of a lab, a prize,
But slowing as HeLa never will—
Larger than I, and growing.
AGAINST ALL ODDS

jasmine HERRICK
LIKE THE CROSS upon Golgotha did the church rise out of the red dust of Cobb, Georgia. The sky was white and stoic. The air sat thick and heavy upon the farms and roads and dust and trees. The church needed maintenance, and its white oak panels were peeling and dirty with soot. Inside the church, the congregants sat in their suits and floral dresses, attempting to fan away the summer air that promised to consume them. The wooden pews gave way to a simple wooden pulpit. Above this pulpit hung the golden cross: about the height that the savior would have been and polished so that the congregants could see themselves in the body of the Lord.

Reflected in the cross was Mrs. Hatfield, the widow. She was seated in the second row back wearing a flowing ocean blue dress with small yellow flowers all over. It was her showpiece dress, and it hid her figure rather well; not that ladies need be ashamed of their figure. On her graying hair sat her new green hat. It was a birthday present from Mrs. Kingsley. Mrs. Hatfield sat fanning herself while the minister stood beneath the cross and gave his sermon.

“And let us not forget what was said in John 6:37,” said the fresh-faced preacher Davis. “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” Davis paused and looked upon the twenty-three congregants who came that Sunday. “I shall leave you all with a request. To trust and to aid whomever may come across you. Stranger or friend, as a fellow Christian it is your duty to aid them in their time of need. Accept the stranger that comes to
you and you will be rewarded, because the Lord has a way of returning favors. Amen.”

“Amen,” the congregants responded from the pews.

Mrs. Hatfield thought on her predicament while the sweat ran down her alabaster skin. Mr. Hatfield had given comfort to a stranger once a long time ago, and that stranger had killed him. Took his car as well. Mrs. Hatfield didn’t know what this new priest was running on about, but strangers weren’t any good. Maybe if he’d known of her experiences with strangers, he wouldn’t go about preaching these things. Next thing you know he’d be preaching about how the negroes and the whites ought to learn in the same schools.

Leaving the church, the congregants were hit again by the heat and humidity. Many complained upon exiting, many gossiped, someone in the crowd mentioned a jailbreak at the county prison. The sky was still blank and the farms to the north rolled on for some miles, possibly to infinity—the woods to the south implied the same interval. The crowd kicked up dust as they walked out of the church.

“That Davis, I don’t know how to figure him.” Mrs. Hatfield said to Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley. The Kingsleys owned a farm some distance away. But when the Hatfields had owned a farm, they had been neighbors. They lived miles from each other now but in the same direction from church, and the Kingsleys always gave Mrs. Hatfield a ride to the fork in the road. The Kingsleys were much younger than the Hatfields, but they were good people of respectable lineage. “You get a fresh-faced city boy, and he comes in a’preachin’ his political i-de-als and all that. The church ain’t a soapbox.” They got into the car and drove off, with Mrs. Hatfield sitting in the back.
“I get what you mean, Lilith,” Mrs. Kingsley said, not facing Mrs. Hatfield from the front seat, “Some of his sermons are a bit political, but he’s a young idealist. Certainly naïve, but he’s righteous and of good heart. I actually thought his sermon today was well thoughtful.”

“Today was one of the worst sermons I heard from that man’s mouth,” Mrs. Hatfield shot back. “Since when does following Jesus been about takin’ risks with strangers. There’s charity, but that’s a differn’t story. That’s how Perkins died, you know. Accepting a stranger.”

“It’s not just strangers,” Mrs. Kingsley began. “It’s whoever needs help, or whatever comes to you. It’s all part of God’s plan. But to aid a stranger who comes to you is one of the commandments: Treat your neighbor as you would treat thyself.”

“Neighbor. Neighbor. Not stranger. Are you sayin’ that if a negro came to your house in the middle of the night, you would give him a pallet?”

“Well, it depends. If he’s respectable looking, then yes. This ain’t antebellum, Lilith. Blacks in the South aren’t just runaway slaves. Things have changed.” Mrs. Kingsley spoke like she was talking to a child. Mr. Kingsley paid no attention, and kept his eyes on the road. The fork was coming up. Mrs. Hatfield folded her arms and scrunched her mouth.

“Ain’t nothin’ changed, Annie. Strangers is bad, but negroes is just as,” Mrs. Hatfield said to the window, and Mrs. Kingsley

“To each their own, I suppose,” Mrs. Kingsley said, and looked out the window. Nobody said anything for about a min-
ute until the car came to the fork and Mrs. Hatfield got out and they said their goodbyes. Trees, some with branches reaching out for alms, walled the half-mile to Mrs. Hatfield’s house. On sunny afternoons the trees shaded the walk, but there was no protection from the choking in the air.

Mrs. Hatfield walked past the graveyard where Perkins lay. He was husband for thirty-seven years. And then three years ago, he picked up a hitchhiker, who killed him and stole their car. The killer was in Cobb County Prison now. Thank the lord. He’d be frying up in a short time. But she’d never get back Perkins, and that’s all she cared about. The small gray stones sat scattered across the green pasture, flanked by columns of forests on either side. Beyond the graveyard was the Kingsley’s farm, and beyond lay what was her family’s old plantation. The house wasn’t standing anymore and some Yankees from Vermont owned it now. They let the land lie fallow. They were strangers once too, came by some eight years and said that they would pay loads for the land. They cheated the Hatfields out of half their promised payment by saying the ground wasn’t arable, or something or other. Thank goodness little Ronald was grown and off fighting in Europe, otherwise they wouldn’t have been able to pay off their debts. Mrs. Hatfield thought about how lucky she was sometimes, even in the face of misfortune. ‘Always see the good in things’, her mama used to say. But even then, Ronald was killed in Europe—shot by most definitely a stranger.

By the time Mrs. Hatfield got home the sky had darkened from white to the color of the gravestones. The humidity only became heavier and weighed down on Mrs. Hatfield. There was a rainstorm due. Her home was the only house for a good quarter mile. It wasn’t a plantation, but a humble house that she and Perkins had bought after the plantation. It was a
rather humble and unassuming two-story house with a porch. Its blue paint was peeling some and the wood was dirty from the red dust that covered the roads. She opened the door and huddled inside, as the sky gave its warning rumbles to all who could hear. Over the staircase that greeted the door was a crucifix nailed into the wall, to bless all who entered. It was just like the one in the church, except this one was adorned by the corpus—a very rare sight in the house of a non-Catholic. This crucifix was also much older than the one in the church and had a haze to it. Mrs. Hatfield had tried time and time again to give the metal a blessed shine, but it simply would not clean. Mrs. Hatfield passed under the cross on her way up the stairs to refresh herself and change into something clean and proper for an evening at home.

The darkened day turned to night, and the rain began to fall fast. Mrs. Hatfield sat on the couch in her living room, knitting a beautiful something for someone. She was in her white nightgown and her pink floral robe, and she had made her hair into a tidy little bun. The dark brown paneling in the house gave her comfort when she was alone on stormy nights; nights when Armageddon seemed to be drawing near. Her red plug nose scrunched around as she focused on her piece, which would make a great gift someday. The grandfather clock across the room from her said it was thirty-four past eight when there were four loud knocks at the door. Mrs. Hatfield put down her knitting and stared at the door, making sure her mind wasn’t playing tricks on her. After a minute of silence, the four knocks turned into five knocks. Mrs. Hatfield got up and tied her robe tight so as to appear modest to this unknown guest. She opened the door and there stood a negro. He was of small build but stood proudly. He was wearing a black suit and blue tie. His hat stayed evenly on his head, and he was fairly dry except for the
bottom of his pants and shoes, for he was holding an umbrella. He looked young and almost could have been Father Davis’s twin, if this man were white.

“Good Evening Ma’am,” the negro said, bowing while holding his hat to his chest. “My name is Reverend Thomas Franklin, and I was passing through these parts on my way to Savannah. Now my car got caught in a ditch some two hundred feet down the road, and no truck will be able to get it outta there ‘till this rain stops. I was hoping if you could, out of the goodness of your heart, give a man shelter for the night? I can pay you for any troubles.” Reverend Franklin looked softly at the woman, not expecting much.

Mrs. Hatfield looked at this Reverend Franklin. Looked at him from his wet brown shoes to his cropped black hair. With a closed mouth she slid her tongue across her upper teeth, and across what remained of her lower teeth. Mrs. Hatfield tried to pinpoint this self-proclaimed man of God. She figured all negroes were the same, but this one seemed better than the rest of them, somehow.

“You say you’re a Reverend? Then what’cha doin’ in Cobb on a Sunday, when you should be in services?” She asked.

“My mother’s brother lives in Alapalcha and is dying of lupus. I was out here to pay my last respects to my uncle, but I must be getting back now to my family in Savannah.” He said. Mrs. Hatfield kept squinting her eyes at him. “I see you are a fellow Christian,” he said, motioning with his chin to the crucifix that overhung the staircase. She looked at the Jesus and then back down at the Reverend.
“That I am,” she acknowledged, “but that don’t mean I must accept you. ‘specially if you escaped from jail.” She said. The Reverend readjusted his stance.

“Pardon me, ma’am, but I have never been to any prison, or escaped from any for that matter. It is your choice, ma’am. You don’t have to accept me into your house, but please do not accuse me of wrongdoing.”

“Oh, you lying n—!” Mrs. Hatfield yelled. The Reverend’s eyes widened at this exclamation. “You probably stole that car and those clothes and killed their real owners! You beast! I’m ‘a call the sheriff immediately and it’d be best for you to git! You might talk educated, and call yourself a Christian, but you’re just a murderin’ criminal—and Christ don’t forgive killers or heathens!” She slammed the door in the Reverend’s face and waited until she heard the footsteps grow quieter.

She regained her composure easily. She wasn’t going to call the sheriff; she knew he wasn’t a criminal, or at least the escaped one. She would sooner be caught naked in church than let a negro stay in her house. Even if he didn’t steal anything, if word got out that a negro man stayed over, she’d have to move. She sat back down on her pastel green couch and continued knitting. The rain continued to fall and the occasional gust of wind caused the branches of the birch tree to scratch at the windows, begging to be let in.

A large crash coming from the downstairs awoke Mrs. Hatfield the next morning. She looked at the clock on her bedside table and it read six thirty-seven. It sounded like a window was broken and she was awoken with a fright. It could be a break-in. Probably that Reverend. Mrs. Hatfield got out of bed,
put on her robe, and picked up her black umbrella. She opened the door and tiptoed down the stairs as quietly as she could, one stair at a time. Regardless of her stealth, the staircase creaked with each step.

“I know it’s you, reverend n—. Get out of my house or you shall pay the fine!” She yelled at the bottom of the staircase. The front of the house was undisturbed, and the rain had stopped. The early morning sunlight poured through the white curtains of her front windows, as if the shining gates of Saint Peter stood right outside her door. Mrs. Hatfield descended the last stair. “How dare you break into an old and defenseless woman’s house like you are. Your hide’ll be hanging’ when I’m done with you!”

From the living room came a dark force that knocked her on the head. The house went spinning and Mrs. Hatfield fell to the ground. She opened her eyes and the darkness receded. She was looking into the scarred and pale face of a man.

“Morning Mrs. Hatfield. ‘Member me?” Said the man. She did remember. This was Felix Jolson, the hitchhiker who killed her husband. It seems Cobb County only made Felix more ugly and demon-like. He was a well-built man, with his torso in the shape of an upside-down triangle. His head was tall and round and with his shaved head looked like a potato. His deep-set blue eyes matched the shirt he stole—blue with yellow parrots on it.

Mrs. Hatfield called Felix the worst she knew as she writhed under his weight that had her shoulders pinned. “You shall burn in Hell for all you’ve done!”
“That may be, Miss. But I reckon it’s better off that I know I’m ‘a going there. As opposed to someone who lies to herself about getting into heaven.” Felix grinned. Mrs. Hatfield spat into his right eye, and Felix wiped it off without so much as a look of surprise. “You must take what the Lord has given you, Mrs. Hatfield. If he gives you me, you must accept me. Your spitting’ don’t alter the greater plan none.” Mrs. Hatfield’s eyes began to lose focus, and Felix became a ghostly blur. Felix took out a pocketknife and was about to open it when there was a click.

“Get off that woman!” It was Reverend Franklin, standing in the doorway holding a tire iron. The light showered in from the doorway and to Mrs. Hatfield, the Reverend Franklin appeared a featureless shadow figure. Felix turned around and squinted. He stood up to face the Reverend.

“Well, if you’re to hit me, hit me. I must oblige,” said Felix. He dropped his knife and closed his eyes, waiting. The Reverend stood in the doorway for a moment. “Well c’mon, do it! You yellow-hearted jungle devil!” The Reverend walked up to Felix and raised the iron. The right hand came down with such mighty force that the iron cracked the skull of Felix, who dropped to the ground with a quake. Mrs. Hatfield bent her neck to looked at the blurred figure who seemed to meld into the light.

“W-w-why me?” she asked the figure.

“I was awake in my car and I saw him creeping past. I figured he was looking for a house to rob. I had recognized him as the escaped con from the newspapers. Even though you threatened to have me arrested last night, I have to do the right
thing. You are forgiven, but not forgotten, Ma’am.” He looked at Mrs. Hatfield—who was still in lost in a daze—and then at the unconscious Felix, whose face was awash in serenity.

“I’ll take care of this fellow.” The Reverend grabbed Felix by the leg and began dragging him out. But he stopped at the door and turned back toward Mrs. Hatfield, raising his right index finger upwards. “Before I go, I want you to ponder something for me.” He shook his finger as he spoke. “Should The Lord cast you out, as you have so many others?” The Reverend Franklin walked out the door, dragging the lifeless body of Felix Jolson behind him.

Mrs. Hatfield laid on the ground at the base the stairs. She hadn’t caught much of what the figure said. She only saw him walk into the light. She wanted to follow him, but she couldn’t get up. She rested her head to the floor and looked directly up. All she saw was darkness and the bottom of the crucifix. It had an inexplicable shine and was looking out towards the light.
LENSES

grace DYER

fiberglass and
monofilament
YOU WOULD HAVE LOOKED at me once. Not just looked at me—you would’ve wanted me. You wouldn’t have been able to take your eyes off me. Men like you never could. Men like you used to go to great lengths just to stand next to me. Used to chase me, fight over me, love me. Used to buy me drinks, write me songs, leave their wives. I was a bit of a flirt, sure. But I had those pretty blonde curls and these long legs and big brown eyes. I still have nice eyes.

Thirty years ago, twenty even, if we were in the same room like this you’d have noticed the curls and the legs and the eyes and other things, too. You’d have grinned. Men like you—smart, cocky, older than me—might pretend not to notice for a little bit but I could always see it in that first grin. You’d tell me your name and ask for mine. I’d smile, so sweet and coy, and tell you to call me Eliza. Eliza, they’d always say back, like they could taste each letter. Eliza.

But you haven’t so much as glanced up from over your notes since you walked in here. You haven’t even shaken my hand, introduced yourself, explained where my usual doctor is. You’re asking questions about my symptoms, about my dosages, and directing them to my son Jimmy at my bedside. You two are carrying on like I’m not even here. I might as well unhook myself from these machines and needles and hoist myself out of this bed and leave the room. But I’m hooked up and tied down and too tired and medicated to get up, anyhow. It’s probably best
that Jimmy answers.

“Yeah. Mm-hmm,” you say to Jimmy. You come up to my bedside and now you’re finally looking at me. Well, you’re seeing me here but you’re not really looking at me. You’d have been honored to look at me lying here on a bed like this once, when I was young and shapely and smooth-skinned. Now I’m old and sick and my skin is dull but I want to smile up at you anyway, like I would’ve once, show you my papery skin and yellowed teeth and dry mouth just to make you see what you missed, make you see what happened to me. Make you see that it’s men like you who made me this way.

You’re what, thirty-five? Forty? The older ones always liked me best and I liked them, too. I scared the young ones off and they bored me, anyhow. But no, you, you would’ve been just my type and I would’ve been yours. We would’ve known it right off. You wouldn’t be checking your watch like you did just now, or looking right through me as you poke around, asking me if this hurts or that and not listening to my answers. You would’ve tried to make me laugh, would’ve asked me to dinner. You would’ve guided me out the door with your hand on my back and I would’ve pretended like I hadn’t decided if I was going to go to bed with you.

“Her liver has sustained significant damage,” you say to Jimmy. “She isn’t recovering at the rate she should be. I’m going to have to run some more tests.”

I wonder if your other patients ever mistake that annoyed tone in your voice for concern. I want to tell you not to bother.

You leave and Jimmy stays. “You want the shades
up, Ma?” he asks, and goes to the window before I answer because he knows I like to let the light in.

“That’s nice, Jimmy,” I say. He’s been so good to me, my boy.

He comes and sits by my side and I want to tell him, I want to let him know that he’s the best man that ever happened to me. But I am just so tired, bone tired, too tired to say a word. It’s these drugs. It’s always been these drugs, the liquor and the men and whatever’s pumping through my veins now.

I’m fading fast. When you come back, if you come back, I’ll be out for sure. When you come back I won’t see you, either. I’m going to leave you before you can leave me. I’m going to leave you before you even know I’m here.
That girl-woman
with careless sunburn lines
and curls that tangle in her wake
has never been within
touching distance of love,
yet her cheeks seem cupid-blazed.

She aligns her course,
eyes, lips & shoulders,
as if on a rail. She has been
too often jostled,
known to wobble. Fall.
Known by those who chose
to leave her, one way or another.

Now, she coasts through warm custard air
and relishes the passing patches of shade.
They become her breathing.
The sun and leaves flicker
in time with her spokes.

The daily sequence of yards,
cars & crushing leaves,
she knows better than any face.
Her calves are smeared with chain oil.
The winter wind whips through the chute of pine-lined Burntside Lake. It’s ten below and two men struggle with the knee-deep snow, no mind to frostbite riddled feet. Hawks circle. Blue sky rises high behind their fragile wings, eyes scanning snow for buried squirrels to taste the first warm blood in days. John stops and flings his pack upon snow padded ice, pain laced within his right foot’s toes. Boot off, he curls his now numb foot inside the lukewarm folds of fleece and Gore-Tex. Windblown snow still swirls, but his thoughts rest on blooming marigolds. The warmth preventing amputation, smiles sneak on their faces for the last two miles.
THREADED GRADIENCE

paige REITZ

steel and sewing thread
UNTITLED

sam BOURDON  acrylic on canvas
RESPONSE TO MY EDITOR  
OR ADULTERY IN VERSE  

nick SCHWARZENBERGER  

Your words don’t make sense  
She once chastised me.  
You can’t be undetected  
By a creaky wood floor,  
It’s not on watch.  

I nodded,  
Head bobbing like a swimmer at sea,  
(Happy?)  
Dutifully, I changed most of what you suggested  
But left some of those I really liked.  
I was in love with the way  
You dominated my language,  
The way you grabbed my syntax  
By the hair  
And dunked it in a bucket of icy criticism,  
The way your hot breath berated me  
For my overuse of metaphors.  

But honey, I’ve been cheating on you.  
I’m a poet.  

I roll around grassy hills with all sorts  
Of dirty, radical and mangy similes  
I climb mountains with metaphors  
And steal a kiss at the summit.
I stroll silently down sultry
Streets sweaty hands slipped together
With seductive alliterations
And enjoy sopapias
With onomatopoeias.

Kid, I’m going to compare
Whichever things I damn please.
I’ll sit in opium dens
Languishing like an early fog
If I want
And the sound of my ringing telephone
Will trapse across the room.
And if the clouds part from the moon
Like sleep from a dreamer’s eye,
What’s it to you?

Dear, I’m a felon,
Leaving syntax strewn like corpses,
Words de capitated with spaces
I’m wanted across all fifty
For a fleeting respect
For grammar,
I stole the tools
From the sentence mechanics
And I’m on the terrorist watch list
For forgetting the ‘B’ in God Bless the USA.

Honey, I have sex with poems
—unpunctuated—
Dear, I’m in love with symbols
And they inevitably come up in conversations
(I know how much this irritates you)
So get me drunk on your finest red ink
Dispensed generously from your pen
(Worry not if we spill, it won’t stain my words)
And so, amusedly intoxicated
—is amusedly even a word—
I’ll just smile when you ask how a window keeps guard
when you ask how her blonde hair is copper wire
How her skin is like static
And her eyes are like capacitors.

And when, smiling, I don’t answer,
You call me shallow and perverse,
But I’ll continue to commit this adultery in verse.
This is my horizontal day.
I’m awake somewhere in these lazy limbs and flesh
swaddled in Sears cotton sheets
this Sunday morning
noon
afternoon.

I won’t dance on the ceiling
above the heady fog,
bump my head on my desk
coming out of pirouettes.

And I’m hungry and sad
alive and missing time

just, stuck
in morning.
EARLY FROST

Kelly Wyman
SOLOIST

lauren SANFORD

silver gelatin print
HE STARES STRIGHT AHEAD in blank resignation, hands folded limply on his lap as the priest finishes administering the Last Rites, crosses himself theatrically and stands to leave. The door opens with a metallic rattle and the priest strides rigidly off down the cellblock, shaking his head in dignified mock-pity.

The camera captures all this and then pans back over the star in his improvised green room, taking special note of the discarded rosary beads and the plate of half-eaten scraps of prime rib alongside him on the bench. A guard comes in to carry off the food. The camera is shut off.

Hair and Make-Up enter the cell with their leather snap-cases, flanked by a pair of guards. They experiment with different combinations of products on his disheveled mane, trying for “that Charlie Manson look.” They use a variety of powders to bring out his sharp cheekbones, to darken the bags under his eyes and the two days’ growth of beard on his chin. They exit.

The camera is switched back on. The guards urge him to his feet, fit him with handcuffs and lead him out of the cell. He takes slow, shambling steps, slouching vacantly down the cellblock. The double doors ahead are closed, white light only just peeking around the edges. A man wearing a headset and a white polo shirt stands next to the doors examining a clipboard.

He can hear the crowd now. They stand there in silence while an amplified voice rumbles indistinctly from the next room. The crowd has grown noisier. The man in the headset says: “Showtime.” The guards push open the doors.
They lead him in. The room is massive; floor, walls and ceiling painted solid white. To his left the range of the blinding overhead lights ends abruptly, Mason-Dixon black-and-white on the sterile tile. Fevered applause emanates from the darkness beyond. Center-stage is a box made of clear Plexiglas about the size of a closet, lit from the inside and containing a single metal chair. A flashing applause sign is mounted on the front.

The guards lead him to the box while a man in a pin-stripe suit with black hair like a waxed bicycle helmet grins immaculate white teeth and reads his introduction off a teleprompter.

“Tyrone Hearst was a” (hammy wink) “retired auto mechanic from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In his spare time, he enjoyed...”

Date of birth, height, weight, hobbies, criminal charges and so on and so forth are projected on the upstage wall in an easy visual arrangement like the back of a baseball card. He is seated in the chair and strapped in, the door in front of him closed and locked. He tunes out the host’s ensuing spiel, squeezing his eyes shut against the bright lights. He relaxes his muscles and slides as low in his seat as the straps will allow.

“Stay tuned and we’ll be right back after a word from our sponsors.”

The applause sign on the front of the chamber is shut off, the lights dim and the crowd dies down, at least momentarily. The host makes small talk with the people in the front row while more men in headsets scurry about the room, making last-minute adjustments.

He takes deep breaths and stares emptily into the maw of the shadowy mob in front of him. After some small eternity it’s “on in five, four, three” and the lights come back up. The host has returned to his podium.
“Well folks, we’re approaching the big moment and you can really feel the excitement in the air here!”

The applause sign blinks a few times, prompting another moment of frenetic cheering from the void. The host raises a hand and flashes his well-practiced dazzling smile.

“All right Tyrone, it’s time. Got anything to say to the folks here tonight?”

A hush falls over the crowd and the lights go down to leave a single spotlight cast over the Plexiglas chamber. Dramatic music is being piped in from somewhere. He can’t see it, but his face is projected enormous on the wall behind him, underlined with a colorful graphic: *Last words brought to you by Old Spice.*

He says something he thinks is clever and punchy, an exit line he settled on last week, after great deliberation.

Here it is: “Hi, mom.”

The crowd jeers deafeningly and the host laughs—a good, clean laugh.

“Well if that’s all, then let’s get this show on the road!”

The vents next to his feet slide open. Poisonous gas (chemically colored toxic green for the benefit of the home audience) begins to fill the chamber. He tilts his head back and closes his eyes.

Roll credits.
I reject that idea that

in order to win

you have to play the game.

But I get lonely,

waiting under Boddhi trees.