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Crosscurrents: Spring 2012

Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound

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Crosscurrents would like to thank Jessica Spring and Chandler O’Leary for contributing incisive and energetic works, the professors who donated their time to review our Select Works, the English Department, the Art Department, the Humanities Program, Collins Memorial Library and the Office of Admissions for making this issue possible, and photo services for helping out with our Art Photoshoot.

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Every semester a theme emerges from the mountains of submissions we receive, pushing and pulling the magazine into the form it takes. This time however one is hard pressed to identify what defines this semester of submissions; there is no real theme. What binds these works together is the creativity, talent, and passion of the writers and artists from our campus community. So, though as always, the process of whittling down submissions enough to fit them on the following pages was no easy task, I am excited to present you with the Spring 2012 edition of Crosscurrents.

Amber Catford-Robinson
Jessica Spring was recently named the winner of the fourth annual Foundation of Art Award given by the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation (http://www.gtcf.org). Spring has exhibited in many local and regional gallery shows, collaborated with other artists, founded the letterpress/book Wayzgoose event at King’s Bookstore. She has an MFA from Columbia College Chicago Center for Book & Paper and teaches book arts at Pacific Lutheran University. Her books are part of many collections including the British Library, Northwestern, University of Washington, Yale, the Ringling School of Art & Design, and the Collins Memorial Library.

Chandler O’Leary is the proprietor of Anagram Press, specializing in illustration, design, printmaking, artist books and hand-drawn typography. Chandler received her BFA in Illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design, and teaches at the School of Visual Concepts in Seattle. Recently she was the recipient of an Artist Initiative Grant from the City of Tacoma Arts Commission. Her work is exhibited and collected internationally.

Jessica Spring & Chandler O’Leary
I will write on your wings, and you will fly all over the world.

Peace unfolds.

There are so many things left to do.
Interview with Jessica Spring & Chandler O’Leary

How and why did you two first begin collaborating?

We started the series soon after Chandler moved to Tacoma. I found out she was a crack illustrator and like me, politically progressive. I wanted to do some sort of poster for the 2008 election, and asked Chandler to draw a pair of glasses to go with a terrific Elizabeth Cady Stanton quote. Her response was to draw a whole broadside – glasses, quote and all. The small edition of 44 (for the 44th president) sold out quickly. We realized we could embark on a collaborative series that would honor women, the term “feminist”, and connect with printing history and broadsides too. We’ve completed 14 broadsides so far, and we choose the women to profile alongside current issues we want to highlight.

Where did you get the inspiration for the Dead Feminist series? Where do you continue to find inspiration for it?

Our inspiration often comes from the current political and social issues that we tie in with each quote. We’ve focused on healthcare, the economy, the 99%, the environment, and racism in collaboration with women throughout history, some very famous and others virtually unknown. The challenge is making that connection between the social issue and finding a quote that works. We also find inspiration in the historical era in which each Dead Feminist lived – that often helps us put together a design that matches the quote and the person we’re featuring.

What are the challenges of a collaboration?

We tend to work very well together, and so far we haven’t butted heads much as we collaborate; I know that’s not true for everyone, though, and it all depends on the relationship between each collaborator in a given project. Our personal styles are very different, so sometimes it’s challenging to create a design or concept that resonates with both of us. It can be difficult when one person pictures an idea very clearly, but the other one has trouble visualizing it – staying on the same page can be tricky. That said, we often come up with a better result just by the fact that we each come at a concept from different directions.

The benefits?

When you work solo, you have to be your own resource for everything. What’s nice about collaborating is that you always have someone ready to help you critique the work and solve what isn’t going well. We have a good yin / yang relationship, too, since we have different personalities and work styles – we complement each other well. Above all, it’s just way more fun to work with a friend than to do everything alone all the time.

There is something so delicately beautiful about this style of imagery. Can you describe your individual styles, processes, and/or techniques and why you think that they work so well together?

Jessica: Typically our process is very collaborative, from the idea stage to completed broadsides. So far, I’ve been responsible for the researching, writing and printing while Chandler is the illustrator and marketing and distribution maven. All those responsibilities are fluid, but, since I don’t draw, I can only make outrageous requests that Chandler fulfills cheerfully. (“Add an octopus!”)

Chandler: We’re both very interested in history, and especially historical design, so we’re often on the same page when it comes to building a concept around each Dead Feminist. I’m good at bringing together lots of different historical sources and inspiration materials together when designing each piece, and Jessica is really excellent with tricky and experimental printing techniques. She always handles every challenge I throw at her (like crazy color registration, or things that push the envelope of what you can do with letterpress printing) with amazing skill, without batting an eye.

How does the imagery you create contribute to the memories or themes surrounding these women that you want to promote?

We kind of answered this already, but our imagery ties in with both the historical period in which each Feminist lived, and with the sociopolitical issues we deal with in each piece. For example, in “Victory Garden,” we designed the lettering in an early 20th-century style, because that’s the era in which Eleanor Roosevelt was active, and it contains lots of plant imagery and organic patterns to reinforce the idea of the garden that goes with the quote. And in “Drill, Baby, Drill,” we used the issue of the Gulf Oil Spill as an excuse to cram the design full of threatened and endangered wildlife.

What advice do you have for Puget Sound students working collaboratively?

Communication is really important when you’re collaborating. Remember that since you’re not alone on a collaborative project, you need to make sure your partner knows what you’re thinking. Letting each other know when you have an idea, or you don’t like where something is going, helps avoid misunderstandings, and allows for better results. Also, it can help to play to the strengths of each person involved. If one collaborator is a better writer, utilize that talent; if the other has a good eye for color, maybe he or she takes the reins on that part. It can take some trial and error to find out what works and what doesn’t in any collaboration; have patience while you figure that out, and have fun!
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They are vibrations, tendrils of clarity and understanding, resonating deep with the map of the mind.
Their bodies crafted with a graceful determination, softly sewn on page or stone.
They are sentinels of a deeper meaning, capable of forging place, scent, memory.

They bend light to the truth; they are storytellers enveloped in the passion of the moment.
They create worlds, homes, and faces.
Their sweet splendor can deconstruct relationships into moving, loving bits; cogs and gears that set in place the fashions of the heart.
They are lovers in waiting, channels of the unsolved and harbingers to a braver spirit.

They are electrical symphonies, a hum or murmur spoke; and I bleed them as a breath.

A faint scent, the vapor of a forgotten place, they beg for a private name, an intimate mantra with which to taste color.
They chant the joy of a mysterious life and
the sacrifice of a cautious breath;
they burn with the sun and the moon,
they take root and dig down deep; they soar,
reach far and never falter
they are ripples in the sand,
a silver river,
creek beds in a wild gospel

their forms barely limned in speech,
it is their sweet subtle passion I taste,
that I utter forth with intimacy,
and having known them, I marvel.
I drive from the crematorium to my father’s house. My house, now. I need to do some cleaning before the ceremony. My Aunt Beth flew in from out of town, has been through and done the really heartbreaking things that I could not, moving the book he was reading from his bedside table to the bookshelf, taking the note off the fridge that reminded him to buy a new toothbrush, changing things so it does not seem that he was in the middle of being alive.

I pick up the mail as I unlock the door, mechanically sorting through the bills, the coupons, an offer to renew a subscription to The Economist, when my hand stops on a cream colored envelope addressed to me. The return address is from Cecilia Vargas, Charlotte, North Carolina.

My father’s wife.

My mother.

The bills whisper past my fingers as I drop them on the coffee table, and I move numbly to the kitchen table, the cool wood of the Shaker chair materializing suddenly beneath me.

The paper is rough beneath my fingers in a way that shows quality, probably picked from hundreds of others in an overpriced paper store, and charged with delivering her message.

Taking a deep breath, I slide a finger beneath the flap, and rip. I unfold the matching thick cream paper, and a picture falls out.

There is an odd pull in my stomach as I look at the visual proof of one of only a handful of memories I have of her.

I am four. It is my birthday, and we’re at the zoo, in front of the tiger exhibit, which smelled strongly of cat urine. A stranger has taken the picture for us, so my father could be included, and the tiger prowls in the background. One of her hands is resting on my shoulder, and I remember how her cool and smooth the inside of her arm was against my neck. The other is wrapped around my father’s waist. My hair is dark and curly even then, my skin pale like my father’s. She is young and beautiful, with her long blond hair and ever-so-slightly tanned skin. We are smiling. We have the same green eyes.

I slide it into my coat pocket without thinking, and look at the constrained loops of my mother’s handwriting, so foreign there in front of me. I do not want to read her letter. I do not want to know what she has to say to me after almost twenty years.

But I have to know. Some deep, twisted part of me has to know.

Dear Marianne, I read, and I am hooked. She tells me she is sorry, so sorry to hear about my father, how she wants a chance to say goodbye, how she knows she has never been a mother to me, but wishes she could be there for me, how she will come at a moments notice to Vermont to be there for me, but only if I want her to.

I do not want her to.

The picture is to remind us of better times, she says, when we were a family. She wants to meet me, see who I have become. She wants me to know that she never stopped loving me, never stopped loving my father.

She signed it Your Mother, Cecilia, as if she was unsure which one she was, and left me a number to call.
I leave the letter on the table, unable to think about it yet. Who does she think she is, trying to worm her way back into my life now, trying to take advantage of my grief?

I lift the red kettle with a jerk and fill it with water from the tap. The gas stove clicks for a moment before exploding in a firework of blue flame.

My father didn’t like to talk about her, so I pieced the story together from slips of drunken relatives, sitting at the top of the stairs and straining to hear when they thought I was in bed.

She had a drug problem. She had been clean for several years before they married, but shortly before I turned five, she had a relapse. A bad one. There had been rehab, lots of rehab, back and forth from home and rehab for the better part of two years. I only vaguely remember not understanding where she was, all the fighting, but once, I do remember, there were sirens. Finally, my father spirited me away, back to his hometown where we could be safe, and filed for divorce.

I want to go home, go to bed and pull the covers up to my chin, and pretend my father is still alive, that his car did not twist and rip on the freeway, that we will still have dinner together this Saturday at his favorite restaurant. I want to pretend that his body is not turning to ash right at this moment, that he is still a real person, not just a memory. I want –

The kettle screams.

I grab my father’s (my?) mug, the one with the evolutionary chain of man, where the homo sapiens has turned around to yell, “Stop following me!” I think of him drinking his coffee with a smug grin, waiting for me to notice it and get the joke. It is smooth in my hand, but it doesn’t feel right there. I put it back and take the yellow one with the chipped rim instead.

I put a tea bag in the hot water and wait as it steeps, fresh and herbal. Walking back to the kitchen table, I stare down the letter, maintaining my distance as if it might leap up and bite me. Looking across the room at one of my father’s paintings, the one of the little yellow house on the lake, I imagine calling the number, hearing her voice with its southern twang, soft like honey. I imagine our reunion at the airport – we spot each other immediately out of the crowd – “I’ve missed you so much,” she’ll say, her voice shaking. “Me too, Mom,” I’ll say. I’ll call her Mom, like no time has passed.

Her cool arms will wrap around me, her hand will squeeze mine as we go to scatter my father’s ashes, and I realize I do not want her there. I do not want her green eyes that are mine glistening with sympathy, with pity.

I can’t think about it now. I need to call the caterer, need to plan my father’s funeral. I need to get out of this house. I only came to do some quick cleaning, to make things ready for the ceremony, and after that, the estate sale. I want to be rid of the house and its things, too many things with too many memories. I don’t want them, don’t want to be haunted by them. My father would understand. My father has cut ties before.

The house is suddenly too stuffy. I need to go home to my little apartment. I need to go. This house is too empty, too full.

I leave the letter on the table and lock the door on the way out.

I sip my orange juice, and read a book I lost interest in several chapters ago. I cannot get comfortable on my couch. It’s a good couch, a little old, bought at a thrift store. To the unassuming eye, it’s white, but if you turn the cushions over, it becomes apparent it has faded from a sort of mint green color. I like it better white.

I give up on the book and decide I need a walk. It is not quite
dark yet, and the cool air will help. I hope it will help.
I find my jacket, and look in the pocket for my keys. The keys are not there, but the picture from the zoo is. I cringe. I forgot about it. I don't know what to do with it, so I hide it on top of the bookshelf where I won't see it. I don't want to see her perfect white smile, don't want to think about how she is my mother.

The door shuts behind me, and I walk six blocks to the grocery store. I buy a pomegranate because I don't know what else to do. I will not eat it, and it will turn to mush on the white tiles of my kitchen counter.

My mind drifts back to her, and I wonder who she is, exactly, this woman I begrudge without knowing.

Sometimes it would have been nice to have a mother, at least to avoid some uncomfortable moments with my father, who was unsure of what, exactly, one is supposed to do with a pubescent daughter. Like when I was in the sixth grade and asked him how I was supposed to shave. Or when I was twelve and got my period and was too embarrassed to tell him, even though I was scared to death I was dying, because I had not yet had Sex-Ed, and he, not being a mother, had forgotten to mention it. I had locked myself in my room and refused to go to school. He finally figured out what the problem was.

“Oh,” I heard him say. “Oh.”

We awkwardly avoided each other for the next couple of days, neither of us wanting to think about it.

But we got along all right without her, for the most part.

I want to forget her, but her letter burns in my mind, a red-hot ember that smokes and smolders.

She has no right. Why now? She has never been there before.

She did not drive me to the emergency room when I was eight and flew off a swing and split my chin, and had to get six stitches. She did not stick my 100% tests with the little gold stars to the fridge, eyes brimming with pride. She was not there to hug me after my high school graduation, or to tell me not to rent an apartment on the first floor, or to make pumpkin pie cheesecake every Thanksgiving, and again at Christmas. She never even sent me a birthday card.

I want it gone. I want it destroyed. I will drive back to my father’s house and burn it. I will roast it on his gas stove top, I decide, watch the paper curl and blacken, watch the loops of her handwriting turn to smoke. I have to do this. I do not want her letter. I do not want her.

I twist my hair around my finger and secure it with a bobby pin. It’s short, so there’s not much to pin back, maybe a fistful or so. It is too short in the front to stay, so little wisps of curls slide out and tickle my face.

I put on my black dress that I have bought especially for this occasion. I don’t like it. It’s not a bad dress, but it’s a funeral dress. Not only that, but it’s a father’s funeral dress. I will wear it with pantyhose, because I can’t decide if it is disrespectful to go bare legged, and I would rather err on the side of respect.

Beth picks me up at quarter to one. My father is in the back seat.

This is an informal gathering, this scattering of his ashes. The formalities will take place back at his house starting at five. We will have speeches. We will have dinner. We will have too much to drink.

There are only four of us. We wanted it to be private. My Uncle Nick brings my grandmother, and we walk out in the field, where the last of the summer flowers are turning brown. It is a lovely place. My father used to come out here and paint when he
was younger, my age maybe, and when we moved back, he brought me here on the weekends, and sometimes we had picnics, sometimes just walks.

My father is light in his urn. I thought he would be much heavier, but he hardly weighs anything.

We say a few things. We cannot talk for long, our throats are all thick with tears.

I open his urn; we gently take handfuls of him, and, carefully checking the wind, let him go.

“Are you sure you want to sell it? He left it to you. There’s no reason you shouldn’t live here. Not right away, that would be too hard, but…” Beth is helping me get ready for the estate sale.

We are throwing out junk that was not in his will, that no one will want, things he didn’t use, and probably forgot he had. Newspaper clippings of baseball victories, a broken vase he must have meant to glue back together, the instruction manual to a TV we got rid of years ago. Most of it is in boxes in his closet, some of it is in the garage. Much of it is now in black garbage bags on the curb.

“No,” I say, “I can’t.” I have offered to give the house to Beth or Nick, or even my grandmother, but they don’t want it. It’s mine, they tell me. I can choose to keep it or sell it, but it’s mine. I don’t want it either.

Beth sighs.

I pull out one of the few remaining boxes from the closet. It is unmarked, and the flaps at the top are frayed. Inside I find envelopes, journals, folded pieces of paper. I take one out. It is addressed to me, with a return address of Cecilia Vargas, Charlotte, North Carolina. I feel bile rising in my throat. I want to throw up.

“Beth?”

“Yeah?”

“You can go back to the hotel if you want. We’re pretty much done here.”

She looks conflicted. “Are you sure? What about you?”

“Yeah, we’ve been at it all day. I’m just going to do this last box and go home.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, it’s fine.” I want her to leave. She doesn’t need to be here for this, doesn’t need to see it, watch me burn it all.

“Ok honey. Is nine good for tomorrow?”

“It’s fine.” I am not listening, I am not paying attention to her. I am looking at this box. It is full of my mother.

“Ok.” She dusts her hands. “I’ll see you at nine.” She looks like she wants to say something else, kiss my cheek maybe, or ruffle my hair, but she doesn’t.

The envelope is unopened. Why did he keep it? I should just throw it all away now, before it tunnels its way into my brain like an insect, before it lays eggs that hatch and infest my mind, and I can’t get rid of it because its too deep.

I open the envelope from my mother.

It is a card in the shape of a cow with round holes cut in irregular places. Inside, it reads, *Holy Cow! It’s your birthday!* It is filled with warm wishes and love, written in neat loops. Happy 15th, she says.

My head is floating toward the ceiling. My hands are numb. My stomach is cramping. I cannot breathe.

I open another.

There are birthday cards to me, to my father. There are letters, God, so many letters. There are letters from him, too, that I suppose he never sent, that I should not be reading, this is private, but I want to know, I want to peel back this scab and bleed.

I find one that he never sent, one about a fight we had, where
I told him I wanted to leave, and live with her. I remember this fight. I remember screaming at him, deep in the throes of some teenage injustice, that I would rather live with my drug addict mother than spend another day with him. I didn't know where she was, or even how to reach her; I just wanted to say something biting. I don't know what I expected back, maybe, “Fine! See if I care!” or “Great! You'll be perfect for each other!” or something equally nasty, but he didn't. He just looked at me sadly, and his shoulders seemed to grow heavy, and he looked at me for a long time, as if it was the first time he was ever really seeing me, until that look became too much to bear, and I went and hid in my room.

Later, he came and knocked on the door. He looked tired, older, almost, and crossed the room as if to sit down next to me on the bed, but stopped halfway.

“I'm sorry, Marianne. I know… I know I'm not the best father, but I've always tried to do what's best for you.” He stood for a moment, hands dangling useless at his sides, and I knew I had hurt him. I wanted to tell him it was ok, that I didn't mind living with him, and he was a good dad, and I loved him, but nothing would come out. I felt ill. I had changed something, shifted it so slightly that it would hardly be visible, like a fingerprint left on glass. I couldn't look at him, couldn't watch the hurt in his black eyes, so I looked instead at my fingers, which of their own accord had begun plucking a loose thread on my comforter, twisting and twisting it until it was nothing but a lump of hard blue knots, and finally, my father left.

I read them all. I read his journals about her relapse, about wanting so badly not to leave her, how he wanted to give her a second chance, but how it would be better if we left now, while I was young, and had a chance to start over, how he could not let me grow up in a home where my mother could not stay clean.

I read the letters she writes about how she is clean again, won't he please come back, she wants to see her baby, please, please let her be part of my life, and I read the ones of how ashamed she is of what she has done, what she is still doing. I read letters he never sent about how beautiful I am and how well I'm doing in school, and I read letters of how proud she is of me, how she wants to be there and see me grow, and be a part of my life, and she's so sorry she can't.

He signed his letters, With all my love, Martin.

I walk to my father's bathroom and kneel over the toilet, thinking I will vomit, but nothing happens. I lean for a moment, elbows on the seat, hands curled to fists in my hair. Finally, I get up and walk back into the bedroom. The red numbers of his alarm clock read 4:47. It is mostly dark, the only light is from the single bulb in his closet, where I have spread twenty years worth of correspondence between my parents.

Now I know.

I shiver. I crawl into my father's bed, and wrap his sheets around me. I breathe in the clean, dry scent of his deodorant, the bite of his shampoo on the pillows, and try to remember what my mother smelled like. Lemon soap, I think, and baby powder.
When ballads tell of brown-eyed girls
falling for blue-eyed boys,
I throw my shoe at the radio
and glare at it with onyx eyes.

When ballads tell of fingers running through
cascading waves of flaxen hair,
I throw my pick at the radio
and grab fistfuls of my afro in frustration.

When ballads tell of soft lips
red and blossoming like rose petals,
I turn off the radio
and tell it to shut up
with lips full and dark like wild blackberries.
Shannon’s palms were sweaty. Men didn’t usually have this effect on her, but there was something in those eyes, those stunning hazel eyes, that struck her in a way she didn’t quite understand. This must be what that “love-at-first-sight” thing was about. One glance at a predestined face, and suddenly your soul is no longer your own.

He was an outdoorsy person. He must be, to be here. On his feet rested a pair of worn-in hiking boots, caked with mud. She liked hiking too. Sort of. Well, maybe she could learn to like it. Something told her she could love anything so long as he was there to do it with her.

She studied the rest of his face, loving the effect that the dappled sunlight created, smoothing his skin, softening the stubble. Was it even possible for a human being to be this perfect? The stunning face must have been hiding a hoarding problem or a personality disorder.

A glint caught her eye. The sun had moved beyond a tree branch and landed upon his backpack. A silver keychain dangled there bearing the logo of her favorite local coffee shop. She wondered how he took his coffee. He looked like a cream-no-sugar kind of person too. Her concerns vanished. Someone who shared her coffee preferences couldn’t possibly be psychologically disturbed.

What could his name be, she wondered. Matt? No, Matt was
too common a name for someone so distinctly uncommon. Steven? Maybe. But the kind of Steven who only goes by Steven. Never Steve. Shouldn’t she be able to guess? She wrinkled her nose in annoyance. John Doe was just so…cold. She would call him Steven.

Someone clapped a hand against her shoulder and she started. Captain Peterson apparently thought this was a comforting gesture.

“Pretty gruesome, huh?”

She nodded, more out of habit than agreement. “Has anyone come forward to claim him? A spouse maybe?” Please, please don’t let him be married.

“Negative,” said Peterson. “It’s only been a couple of hours, though. There’s a good chance any family he has doesn’t even know he’s missing yet.” He shook his head. “I’ll never understand why guys his age seem to think basic safety procedures don’t apply to them. Hiking alone, off trail, when a bear alert has been issued… Well, come on then.”

He trudged ahead. She didn’t move. She heard the squelch of dirt soaked with something other than rainwater, watched as Patterson’s boots kicked up clumps of scarlet sodden leaves. Her boss crouched over the exposed intestines of Steven’s torso. She cocked her head to one side, gazing upon the shredded remains of her one true love, and smiled.

He was beautiful inside and out.
more airplane reflections
like the mouth of a prince
wrought wide with the glory of wishes
but the knowledge of nothing.

bleached white palms holding a storied prince
regurgitating and unearthing
    reality without reality
    and truth without truth
this mouth is now filled with the trickling scream of language
the greatest villain of them all.
the portal to airplane flight.
the power to anything.

language is the true villain.

the one who grabs the
two sides of prince mouths and stretches them wide
breaking roots and bones like wooden chopsticks
splintering out onto your hand.

the villain who left your window curtain mangled in the drowning wind
the villain of all humanity.
It isn’t that I’ve stopped loving you.

I just can’t love me enough for the both of us.
That yellow dress, burnt deep into my irises. Our fingers knotted together in dread of slipping away too soon, our bodies lie on saturated 2x4s. The marsh bridge removed from existence, a black sky boasts its enormity. The stars, our melting candles, burn too fast into morning. Her eyes watch the wax streak across its canvas.

“We can do this. We’ll be fine.”

Four months of luggage, the minivan’s dispiriting dusky paint job. The car drives too fast to the airport. Cheeks permanently moistened, my eyes clinging to her fleeting face. Our interwoven hands tease us with their semi-permanence. Coiling lines of inauspicious faces, the walls and the floors a palette of homogeneous off-white. Her eyes, the pale green of well-worn sea glass, batter my heart.
Thick velvet curtains clothed
That big bay window
Tucked right next to her mother’s bed,
Looking out at purple dusted
Mountains and drab, gray fields.

In the falling twilight each night,
As her mother would look through
The curtains – just her head –
And call her to bed,
That window shone a dyed crimson yellow.

And the shadows of the moon
Sketched its breath into each pane
When her father read her bedtime stories
In his soothing baritone.

And when she ran through the sprinklers
In her lilac bathing suit,
It dazzled in the quiet afternoon,
The sun’s fingers creeping along
The satin glass surface.

How those thick curtains
Tried to close the lids of that glass eye,
To hide the secrets sleeping
In that dark bedroom.

But she still saw,
Sitting on the lawn below,
The naked bodies of her parents
As they mounted one another
Like animals.

Her Broken Glass Eye
brenna cameron
Inspired by Gary LaTurner’s painting “Improvisation”

Yellow-green watchful trees, salmon-orange arcs of light: We wear the colors of all that has passed through. Frustrated blues abound. We are vast, purgatory, overcast.

If you look at us just right, you can see every angle, every sunset, the occasional young girl’s pink dress, the plush grays of rainstorms past, bundles of forgotten sticks, artfully indolent blotches – the overlap of life and entropy.

Everything exists at once.
Nothing ever really leaves this place.

Your childhood reflection still flecks my surface; you can see it if you look hard enough, lean in very close.

You’ve changed since you were last here; I have, too:
We are now mutually polluted – bloody scarlet browns of loss blur across the both of us; we bear scratch-scratches all over: Scarification, mortification, necrosis. Your face is as placid as mine.
White patches of snow, residual energy, plum-purple bruises, black raven feathers, smudges bearing vestiges of all things extinct. Silence stifles the birdsong, and green is no longer dominant here.

Come, now. Swim into my center, and find your first memory, down among the murky depths of me. Stay forever. Give in, and know: You were always part of this history, this collage, this mosaic, this barrage.

“The Lake Speaks” is an Ekphrastic poem – a form old as the ancient Greeks – that responds or “speaks” to an art form different from itself, in this case a painting called “Improvisation.” In this lyrical and imagistic poem with its “arcs of light,” the poet is inspired to move beyond description to a more personal narrative response, a way to enter and to transform the visual experience of this painting. The poet’s job is to imagine and to elucidate what the painting is saying, to give voice to the emotions that arise from a literal viewing. As readers, we cannot see what the poet has perhaps eliminated, only what has been included in vibrant and changing colors in this vulnerable natural world that includes a self who also changes with the seasons and the passing of years. Improvisation itself depends, literally, on being in the moment, and so we are in this poem until we are not. The painting is not mute and speaks to the poet of the emotional nuances of memory and change. And yet despite the dark feathers and bruises of loss, the mutual pollutions, still the deep well of memory offers consolation. Birdsong may be silenced, but the poet is not.

Beverly Conner’s work appears in Nine by Three: Stories, published by Collins Press. She is also the author of “Search and Rescue,” Private Voices, Public Lives (University of North Texas Press), and she has been awarded two residencies at the Hedgebrook International Writing Retreat for Women. Conner teaches creative writing, rhetoric, and literature at Puget Sound.
Pattern Is More than Eye Candy

The screenprint “Untitled” by art senior Morgana Hardy at first glance is an image of beautiful delicacy, suggestive with its three vertical bands of repeated undulating patterns perhaps Victorian floral wallpaper or lace fabric designs. But what may look as fragile as diamond necklaces is edgy, it has teeth, not just figuratively speaking but also literally. On closer look, the patterns reveal they have been assembled from impressions of actual human teeth.

What are we to make of them? Associations will vary, depending on each viewer’s experience. An archaeologist may think of unearthed human remains from a distant past, but someone suffering from dental damage may call up a different experience. Or perhaps a biologist may prefer to focus on the undulations themselves, reminiscent of marine or microscopic life rhythms. The variety of possible associations give depth to the print, and like its edginess prevents any mistaken reading of it as just surface daintiness. We two reviewers, though our expertise lie at opposite sides of the globe, East Asia and Western Europe, can share an appreciation of late 19th century aesthetics, which Morgana says inspired her. For it is then that East and West came together with an intense mutual study of each other's art, giving a fresh vitality to pattern.

Dr. Zaixin Hong & Dr. Wallace Weston from the Art Department have teamed together before, to teach HUM 335 Japan and the Dutch: a cross-culture visual dialogue 1600-2000, which will be offered again in the spring of 2013. Wallace’s area of expertise is Northern European art, while Zaixin’s is modern Sino-Japanese art and cultural relations.
Karen Carpenter and I hang out at the old elementary school on weeknights. We lean against the chain link fence, hitting our feet against it until we can hear dogs start to bark. We walk around the baseball diamond counter-clockwise, tracing crop circles in the dirt. She says she used to be a hell of a pitcher when she was a kid.

“I really was something,” she says.

I tell her she still is Something, and she grins in the dark, but I don’t think she knows what I mean. I don’t think I know what I mean. I’ve seen her name in my parents’ CD collection, which is never a good sign. I know she must have been pretty famous at one point, because when we met, she introduced herself in that carefully humble, apologetic way of people who never have to say their own names. Sometimes I think about digging up her records and listening to them, but I am too worried that I won’t like her music. I couldn’t stand to be disappointed in her. I get along with Karen Carpenter better than anyone I’ve ever known. We are great friends.

We met in the summer. My high school band was playing for the elementary school’s fundraiser, bleating out football-game songs from the hot folding chairs we had set up on the field, and she was in the crowd of middle-aged parents. I play the trumpet, so I could see her tapping her foot and nodding the whole time from where I sat, dead center, behind the French horns. She was wearing one of those 1950’s dresses buttoned up to the neck, white with enormous sleeves.

She came up to me when we were packing up to leave. I was folding up my music stand when she tapped me on the shoulder.

“Excuse me,” she said, a wide smile eating up half her face. “I want to tell you how much I enjoyed your playing.”

I stopped what I was doing. “My playing?”

“Yes,” she said. “I think you are a very good trumpet player.”

“Well thanks,” I said. “But it must have been Jimmy that you heard. I’m only second chair.”

“No no no!” She shook her head and laid a hand on my arm. “I heard you. What’s your name?”

“Richard.”

Her smile widened benevolently. “Richard. Another Richard, huh.”

We looked at each other without moving for some time, like two pictures, until I stuck out my hand and asked who she was. Her mouth opened in surprise.


That was the only time I saw her in the daylight. I thought about her for days after. I live in a small suburb, and I had never heard of a Karen Carpenter before. No one has moved here for years, and she is too old to be boarding at the private school across the river. And who buys tickets to high school band charity concerts? I thought that maybe she had been visiting; maybe she was someone’s cousin or aunt. I figured I would never see her again. But one night, I was walking home past the old elementary school and she was standing on the jungle gym, waving her hand at me. The skirt of her dress fell down to her ankles. It billowed like a sail.
“Richard!” she yelled, her voice sharp and bright like a knife. “How is your trumpet playing?”

Whenever I pass the old elementary school, Karen Carpenter is there, and we hang out almost every night now. Sometimes I steal a bottle of whiskey and we sit on the monkey bars and pass it back and forth. The night blooms big above us. Our legs dangle and swim in the air. Karen Carpenter laughs like a grandfather clock; every hush of her breath is the clear sound of a bell. When she smiles, her face is like a tambourine. Her teeth glint in the yellow streetlight. When I look at her, I feel as though I’ve struck gold.

I don’t know if she is a ghost or what. I don’t know if ghosts can get drunk on whiskey. I find out from my mother that Karen Carpenter was born in 1950 and that she is most certainly and definitely dead. I try not to let it matter.

We never talk about her strange situation, but she seems to have realized that she is no longer in her time. She accepts that I had never heard of her before our meeting, that I don’t own vinyl records. We ignore our differences. We talk about things that are timeless.

We talk about The Beatles. My favorite is John, and her favorite is Paul, but she will always have a soft spot for Ringo. She tells me that this is because she is also a drummer – even though she is mostly known as a singer. She talks about her band, proudly and shyly. I ask her how hard it really is to play the drums and sing at the same time. She laughs and says, “Very hard!”

We break into a classroom one night and find a tiny xylophone behind the teacher’s desk. We sit cross-legged with it on the floor.

“I always hated these,” she says, hitting the tiny keys with her fingernail. “They tried to make me play the glockenspiel in high school.” She picks up the mallets anyway, as if she can’t help it, and taps out a rhythm on the side of the box. Her face, so familiar to me now, seems to melt. Her eyebrows go up, making ripples in her forehead, and I imagine that this is what she must look like when she sings. I wait, oddly still, expecting her to launch into a song, but she stops completely instead, and talks to me.

“I hate the piano too, hate playing it at least. My brother – my older brother – he plays the piano.”

“In your band?”

“That’s right.” She grins at me in that classic Karen Carpenter way, grinning with her whole face. “His name is Richard,” she says, “Just like you.”

There is something sad in Karen Carpenter’s voice, even when she is smiling with all her teeth showing, even when she is talking about Christmas in California or playing softball with her grade school friends. It is in the low tones, something deep in her throat that colors everything she says. Her voice is the sound of being alone. Her voice is the sound of the night – infinite and timeless and cold. Listening to Karen Carpenter speak is like lying under the bed and listening to yourself breathe. It is like hearing someone laughing underwater.

I wonder if her voice is the same way singing. I wonder what it is that makes her so sad. I have been meeting Karen Carpenter at the elementary school for three months now and she seems to have aged. When we met in the summer, she looked about twenty-three. Now the nights are colder and darker and she must be close to thirty. The nights seem inconsolably long. I worry that she is growing smaller, thinner. Her skin stretches tight over her face, like
that of a drum.

I start to wonder how long I can keep seeing her like this, walking around the elementary school for hours. I worry that I am in love with Karen Carpenter, with her tambourine face, her Christmas-tree way of smiling, and I worry that she is not real, that she will leave one night, disappear the way she came, back to nowhere, thin air, nothing.

I do my best to cheer her up, although I have never been good at being a friend. I make snow angels for her in the sandbox. I bring my trumpet and play her every cheap line I know. Sometimes she recognizes the song and hums along. More often, she shuts her eyes and turns away from me. Every movement she makes seems to cause her great pain. One night, she stops me with a raised finger.

“Richard,” she asks, “Have you ever felt that no matter how good you become at one thing, you will never be Enough?”

“Sure,” I say slowly. “I feel like that all the time. Except I don’t think I’ve ever been good enough at anything to know what you mean.”

“You’re a good trumpet player,” she says, rapping her knuckles on my knee.

“No I’m not,” I tell her honestly. “I’m not even a trumpet player really. I’ve never actually cared about a piece of music my entire life.”

“I don’t believe that,” she laughs weakly. “Not for a second.”

“It’s the truth, Karen Carpenter.” I shrug.

We are quiet for some time. She looks at me intently, her cheekbones high enough to cast shadows. It is getting close to midnight, the time I usually leave her.

I don’t know why, but I suddenly decide that this is our last night together. I’m not going to stick around to see Karen Carpenter waste away into nothing. Maybe it finally occurs to me that she is just as hollow as a drum. Maybe I am afraid of being that kind of empty myself. Maybe I figure that if she really is dead, then she’s gone through this process already, and should have learned from it first time around. People are always complaining about never being good enough for themselves. It seems a stupid thing to die for, and she’s already died for it. I should never have worried so much about trying to preserve my high opinion of her. She is already, and has long been, inherently disappointing.

More than anything, I am sorry for Karen Carpenter. I am sorry that she is dying while already dead. I am sorry that she is dead at all.

I look at the ground. “You are more than enough, Karen Carpenter,” I tell her. “I don’t know anything, but I know that you are more than enough.”

She inclines her head gently, as if receiving applause. I put down my trumpet. I pull her close to me, hold her bird-wing’s frame as if it were a delicate instrument, a rice-paper kite. She is warm and breathing. Her heart is so loud I can feel it through her dress. I can tell from her face that she will start to cry soon, but instead of comforting her, I grab my trumpet, hook my free hand into the chain-link fence, and climb over it. I leave her there, the streetlight casting diamonds over her face. I run all the way home, and I do not go to back to the elementary school at night.

I don’t sleep on weeknights anymore. I stay up drinking pots of coffee and give myself throbbing headaches. I lie awake listening to my heart pumping in my temples, and I think about Karen Carpenter’s heart, so loud in her small ribcage, too fast. I think about her sitting cross-legged in the classroom, tapping out rhythms on the floor. How she stood on the pitcher’s mound as a girl, proud and young, wound up, ready to deliver.
It is December now, and my high school band is getting ready to play another charity concert for the elementary school. The director throws up his hands at our version of “Merry Christmas Darling.”

“I’m going to play you a song,” he says one rehearsal, stepping off the podium and flipping on the stereo. “I want you to listen to this woman’s voice.”

I know even before the singing starts that it’s her. Karen Carpenter fills the entire room. Her voice is strong, warm, swelling clean and thick and perfect. It is a golden voice, deep and velvet, the sound of her habit of smiling with all of her face. I hear that same sadness, that deep tone in her throat that I loved in her speaking voice. I see her teeth glinting in the night. I see her reflection in open mouths of the French horns in front of me.

My heart breaks for Karen Carpenter. It cracks open like an egg and leaks all over my face, long after the director has shut off the stereo. He raises his baton, and I come in a hair before everyone else. I play my trumpet as I have never played before, with all the warmth she must have heard that day at the old elementary school. I play as if every note is a word she spoke to me, as if every phrase was a line as fragile as her skeleton. I spend all my breath, push every line up from my diaphragm, from my heart – and even though I still know nothing, I know I have absorbed some piece of Karen Carpenter. I can feel her here drumming out through my pores, and I try to keep up with her. I hold my memory of her like a bird’s nest. I play my trumpet as though I am blowing glass, and I feel as though I’ve struck gold.
Why do girls think that Ben and Jerry are the best men to have in times of despair?

You are the tan in a black and white world healthy and bright you are like a home cooked meal wholesome and real.

You were the familiar face in my lunch box and the joke that never gets old.

So many girls fall for Ben and Jerry’s gooey charm and fail to see how fake and cold they can be.

You know how to blend sweet and salty; you know when to be nutty and pungent and when to be nice and plain.
O mother of the grain and field hear now,
Your daughter’s reign below you must allow
a choice was giv’n in quick still of pale morn
graceful liquid, blood red, her lips adorn.

Love laws, innocent deity well knew,
I appeared not as Swan, my body true.
Our lives intertwined, our meeting not chance,
Fate need not bind, she came free to the dance.

Endless winter’s embrace, the gentle shroud,
Crops fall down limp, thirsty fields need be plow’d.
Battle ought not be upon mortal plain,
Death from slow ills, they meet Charon in vain.

O fertile Demeter, and brother Zeus,
Call not upon king, but queen to seek truths:
True theft was done long ago at the start,
In glance Persephone stole Hades’ heart.

Partaking fruit she ascended to Hell,
Accepted offering from one who fell,
Thy daughter rules, would thou prefer she serve?
Grant blessing, allow us what we deserve.
As he began to fall
he thought of life before death,
to moments he was alone.
Memories now faded
began to be exposed
through cracks and a lie.

This lie
he had held onto like nature’s grasp on fall
was only exposed
to keep him from death,
instead it faded
til he felt alone.

There was once a time he never felt alone,
this came with a lie
circling constancy, faded
from truth, cast to fall
onto death
whose true colors were never exposed.
When exposed
to light a negative becomes alone,
faces the very nature of death,
hopes that if it were to lie
that its fall
could be avoided. But once it has faded
into black, faded
from eyes of exposed
men and women whose fall
was only temporary, it is alone
in insecurity, unless a lie
is cast. But what of death
whose life was never worthy? What of death
whose only blindness came from faded
opinion, as pure as a lie,
as exposed
as the person who feels alone,
and who is beginning to fall?

This lie that they sold to you has finally been exposed,
your death will signal the fact that hope has finally faded,
as you are alone, we are too, debating if we should quietly fall.
Rage pent up
Like the mad eyes of a savage horse
Anxiety rearranged and changed
Into the manifestation of aggravation
No remorse
My throat so coarse
As I run teeming and steaming
Emotions breaking
Like the waves I dart past
Fast and thrusting
Ever rushing
Never stopping
Sometimes calm, withdrawn
But then
The storm emerges
Purges and preys
On all those caught in the middle
Not so simple
To pinpoint the emotion
An ocean of possibility
Agility
In full
Physical force
He’s all pumped-up and suavey in his beer-brown suit and argyle tie. His big fat cigar swings from his bottom lip like a nightstick. His moustache is rock-hard from all the shitty store-brand gel he applied in the morning. Now driving down a shady road, he sly-buggerly seeks entertainment. But nothing good: no homeless men preaching the coming-of-the-end, no stray dogs to return to their owners for spare gambling cash, not even any garbage to pick up. But wait, there is a girl…

This girl is hobbling weakly along the road and her skirt is very short. Her legs are pinky and clean. Her hair is long and luscious-looking. He thinks she’d look more normal walking naked out of a big giant clam shell. Essentially, this girl is very extremely pretty and he is immediately interested.

He pulls over.

“Ehh, hey there, lady. Where you headed?”

She is caught off-guard and mighty startled.

“Um, nowhere. Just walking.”

“I hope you do not think this too forward of me, ma’am, but you appear to me to be a damn masterpiece. You are the nicest thing I’ve ever seen.”

She blushes. She clearly hasn’t gotten this kind of compliment in a LONG time, if ever – an idea that this man can’t comprehend, based on the beauty he sees.

“Might I give you a ride?” he asks. “I’m just wandering about, drifting at sea, as it were. Then again, aren’t we all? Anyhow, that’s neither here nor there, and it’s so decades ago to think that one man’s story is allegorical to another. Or to even think that a man’s life constitutes a coherent, overarching narrative…”

The girl is humdrum confused.

He returns to the point: “You in or out, gorgeous?”

“Um, okay…”

“Cheers, then!”

She slinks uneasily into the passenger’s seat. She must be new at this, he assumes.

“Feel free to adjust the air conditioning,” he remarks smoothly.

This girl, it’s worth noting, is kind of like a Rorschach test: People see different things when they look at her; she’s a matter of interpretation, not that this guy would it. Some refer to her as “unknowable.” She’s very mysterious.

Bucks, along with most of his generation, doesn’t believe in metanarrative.

It may be worth noting that Bucks has a bad habit of excessively using pet-names for women.
He steers the car left, and away they go. There is a dimwit 1950s pop song on the radio about candy and women [8]. At the stoplight, he looks over at her and smiles. This seems to perk her up slightly.

“What’s your name, sugar?” he wants to know.

All naïve and easygoing, she replies, “Art.”

“Like Art Garfunkel?” he muses.

“No! Like paintings and stuff. Silly.”

An awkward pause.

“What’s your name?” Art asks shyly.

He takes a big puff of his cigar and mulls it over. To tell her or not to tell her. He decides it couldn’t hurt.

“The name’s Capitalism. Multinational Capitalism. You can just call me Bucks. All my chums do.”[9]

“Alright. Bucks.” She slowly rolls the name around in her mouth like a toffee.

Bucks takes Art out shopping. He buys her a new dress [10] and some sparkly jewelry [11]. She looks like a princess, which is the look that he thinks best suits her features. While they’re out on the town, people keep approaching them. These people all seem to know Bucks and want to take pictures of him and her together, which he allows them to do superfluously. They seem to find Art, who they refer to as Bucks’s “new girlfriend,” very appealing. But they don’t say that outright. They only say that she and Bucks look very nice together. They ask him where he got his new suit, his fatty cigars [12]. Some of them start emulating his strange sort of step as they walk away. Art finds out that Bucks sells expensive but cheaply-made watches for a living [13]. She doesn’t think much of this at the time, being blissfully unaware of anything even close to pop culture. Poverty has made her “ignorant.”

When the sun begins to set, Bucks takes Art out to a fancy schmancy dinner [14]. He orders for her, something fishy and garlic-ridden, accompanied by a salad and bread-sticks and a bubbly beverage [15]. Art is flabbergasted: no one has paid this much attention to her since she was a child. No one’s spent this much money on her in years. Also, she can’t remember the last time she had so much food in one sitting. She gets full quickly, but she keeps eating: She knows starvation.

Over dinner, they talk, but not about much. Bucks tells Art all about himself. Apparently he was once very downtrodden. He has an inspiring rags-to-riches story. He was born an orphan in the ghetto and worked his way up, self-determined. He knows martial arts and how to cook and went to Harvard, or was it Cambridge? [16] Anyway, then he wants to know a little bit about Art, but he doesn’t give her much talking time. All she manages to tell him is that she leads a very lonely life, and she once had parents that loved her very much. Apparently no one understands her anymore. Her story is the opposite of his: it’s a riches-to-rags story. Once, she was

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[8] These clues weren’t narrow enough for us to determine which song exactly, as you might imagine.
[9] We have tracked down some of these so-called “chums,” and they have confirmed this nickname.
[10] From Mars Luna’s current collection, titled “Stroke of Midnight.”
[14] At Rare Bird in New York, turns out.
[15] We can’t confirm exactly what this all was.
[16] Our research on this end is startlingly inconclusive.
from a very wealthy family and lived in a mansion. There was a tragic bit about this mansion getting ransacked and all her loved ones being killed and / or kidnapped. Presently, she is couch-surfing and gradually losing all her dignity.

After a while, Bucks and Art are driving around again. Soon, they pull up to a tall squat building gilded with expensive nude statues. Bucks whispers to the lady at the front desk, his left hand always on the small of Art’s back. He then guides her physically into the elevator, in which he pushes several strands of hair from her face.

Once in the tidy hotel room, things get messy. Art daintily drops off her shoes just inside the door, while Bucks throws his jacket on the chair, loosens his tie, and puts out his cigar on a gaudy hotel ashtray.

“Would you like anything from the minibar?” he asks.

“No, thank you.”

He can tell she’s a bit scared. Whiskey in hand, he strides back over to her.

Bucks begins to disrobe Art. He peels off all her layers, all the different versions of her. He takes off the version of her that she presents to the world daily. Then the version that her mother thinks she gave birth to. Then the version that people see in her high school photographs. And so on and so forth. He stops when he finally gets to the version of her he saw in his head when he first laid his hungry eyes on her. Then he takes off her clothes.

The whole time this is happening, they are both silent. Art slowly submits to his touch.

He begins to masticate her. She still seems nervous, but she isn’t pushing him away. She’s kissing him back and such. Alright! he thinks. He shoves her against the wall and asks her to calm down; she’s still a little shaky. She acquiesces.

“Would you mind if I turned out the lights?” he asks.

“Why?”

“So I can experience your beauty anew, purely through the sense of touch, my love.”

She is flattered by this and lets him go turn off the lights. He also fumbles with something by the television set, but she isn’t particularly worried about this. He lights some candles, takes off all his clothes, puts on a condom, and then walks back over to her.

“Where were we?” he asks.

He places his hands on her skin and pushes her to the bed with a thrust before she can answer, not that she has enough wits about her to say much of anything.

He pins her to the bed and forces himself inside her. Foreplay doesn’t occur to him, though he had been trying to be at least a tidbit of a gentleman. He churns and twists and uncurls. He mouths her all over and spins his fingers around her nipples. He turns back and forth like a key in a keyhole. She whimpers with pleasure and seems to relish every minute of it. He’s glad.

When he’s done, he pulls out and rolls over.

“That was great,” he plainly states.

Attempting to exit her speechlessness, she simply asks, “Really?”

“What? Did you not enjoy it?”

[17] No such story can be found in the New York archives; she must be from elsewhere.
“Oh! Oh, oh!” She backs up. “No, I really did. That was, believe me, AMAZING. I just wasn’t sure if I did a good job or not.” She’s blushing again.

“Get some self-confidence. You were fine. Fine Art, one might say.” He is lighting a fresh cigarette, and she can see him winking at her against the light from the lighter. She giggles grimly.

He gets up and turns the lights back on.

She rises from the bed, groping towards her clothes. At this moment, Bucks absentmindedly glances at the bed and notices a red smear on the pure white sheets. He wasn’t expecting this. He’s inwardly startled. He feels kind of bad, now.

“Shit, girl. I didn’t know you were a virgin. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Huh?” She’s still a bit out-of-it from the ordeal.

“Well, here you go,” he says, pulling out some dollar bills and setting them on the bed next to her. “I didn’t know you were a virgin. If I would’ve known, I would’ve had more ready. This is all I’ve got.”

“What? What’s that for?” Art is confused.

“Payment. Your payment. You did a great job, you deserve it. Maybe I’ll come find you again sometime, if you’re into it.” Bucks is very matter-of-fact.

She leans forward and looks at the money. It’s at least a couple thousand dollars.

“I think you’re just dandy. But this is a business transaction, is it not?”

“A business transaction?! I thought you LOVED me!” Art is frantic. She doesn’t understand.

“I make it a point to not fall in love with prostitutes. I don’t like things I have to share.”

Art completely loses her cool at this statement. She won’t stand for it.

“I’M NOT A PROSTITUTE.”

“What? Oh. Oh my.”

“You said I was a masterpiece! I thought you loved me! Nobody ever noticed me quite like you did. You came and –”

“Please, please. I’m sorry. Oh dear lord, this is just terrible.” He’s flustered. He doesn’t know what to do about this. This is a problem. He feels indebted to her, now. Like he needs to save her or something. This is exactly the sort of thing he had been trying to avoid in the act of picking out a prostitute. Her not being an actual prostitute was officially ruining his day.

She’s crying, now.

“How can I make it up to you?” he asks. He’s grasping at straws.

“Are you going to call the cops?” he asks. “Would this be considered rape? You seemed… willing. But surely it’s a bit too weighty to be considered merely a simple misunderstanding.”

“I – I just… Just let me go. I want to go, now.”

[23] Bucks is married, but it’s an “arrangement,” as he puts it. His wife is deaf and mute. Apparently he cheats on her pretty consistently. He likes the lack of commitment the prostitute-client relationship offers.
“Sure, sure. Just let me give you my number, in case you need to talk or something?” He scrawls out his digits on a scrap of hotel paper and closes her hands over it. Once she is dressed and exiting the door, he kisses her on the cheek. He doesn’t know why [24].

Over the next few days, Art learns things. For one, she learns that Bucks is kind of famous. There are pictures of him and her all over the tabloids. In the more hypercritical ones, there are poorly-constructed tables and diagrams, showing how his watch company’s stocks and profits are suddenly rising [25]. Apparently their night out is a considerable scandal, and apparently it is the type of scandal that makes people’s wallets copulate at the sight of shiny watches. Lucky for Art, her face always appears a little blurry in the pictures. Her idiosyncratic twitches saved her ass this time. Nobody recognizes her, which is good. She doesn’t want to be known as a prostitute, a vocation she still doesn’t practice, though the articles say otherwise. The photos seem to be dated at least a couple days before the actual occurrence, and she doesn’t know what to make of this, because she can tell for sure it’s her in them [26].

Weeks later, Art decides to give Bucks a call. She wants to talk to him about all this stuff and hopes he’ll make up for what he’s put her through. Also, though she won’t admit it, even to herself, she kind of misses him. Misunderstandings aside, he had treated her alright enough, she thinks. And she’d given consent to the sex, there was that. One can’t blame her for these thoughts; he was her sexual awakening, after all. But she can’t read the writing on the scrap of hotel paper, and lots of people are waiting after her in line at the payphone. So she tucks the paper back into her pocket and heads to a café, to drown her sorrows in a coffee mixture with too long of a name. She has his $2,500 and feels compelled to squander it, due to her distraught. On her way there, she walks past a window display of new TVs, which are all playing the same show. It’s a soap opera where two twin brothers are looking at each other through a two-way mirror. One complains that he can’t see so well, so the other tells him to try MostCertainlyClean!® [27]. Art sympathizes with the hard-of-seeing brother but continues on her way, so as not to loiter long enough to attract the salesman’s attention.

Inside the café, there is a buzz about. Three frat boys are gathered around a laptop at a table in the back. While she would rather avoid people entirely, she has to head around that direction to take a detour to the bathroom.

“Look at her! She’s so…diminutive! I mean, not literally. Like, she’s hardly there. It’s weird…and hot,” one of them is saying as she starts walking over. Then, as she nears, they all lower their voices to a whisper and start glancing at her every now and then. She wonders what is going on, though, as a rule, she tends not to care about what people chat about amongst themselves. She doesn’t like eavesdropping. Then, she notices what they’re watching on the laptop. Before she can look away, it hits her that she recognizes the people on the screen.

In the video, a plump business-type man is having sex with a meek young girl. It’s really dim and the video is in night-vision, very grainy. It seems to be extra-pixelated, as if the camera had been across the room from them and was functioning on “zoom.” When

[24] Upon further reflection, he decides that it’s because she reminds him of his mother in this moment, oddly enough.
[26] Of course, what came first? The chicken or the egg? Disneyland or America? Read Jean Baudrillard for more.
[27] The latest glass-friendly bleach-based bathroom cleaning solution from Hansen and Sons: “Leaves things obscenely clean!”
the sex part is over, the man offers the girl cash, but she refuses it, and so on and so forth.

The frat boys only realize that she is hovering behind them and watching by the time the video’s all over. When they do notice her, they slam the laptop shut, give her a strange look, and head for the door. One of them, though, deliberately brushes her arm with his hand as he leaves, seemingly half out of morbid lusty curiosity, half as an apology.

If Art had felt used before, she REALLY feels used, now. Bucks had apparently only been using her to make his dick seem bigger. And to make a lot of money. She tries to consult with the police about what her rights are, but they come to the over-cited conclusion that she had been “asking for it.”
The demons may come
With their fearless aggression and unforgiving affliction,
But still you are.
You stand with undeniable strength
Against the changing walls of my youth.
Your gaze shields me always.

God may come and go, but on my wall you remain.
You need no book of prayer, no communion, no congregation,
Your presence is enough.

Like a guard protecting his territory,
You protect my slumbering silence.
Still as you are, you hush them away.

I speak, but you do not return my sentiments
And I expect nothing less
For you are not a friend.
You are a mysterious monument
of my mind and sanity,
A weary traveler beside my path.

You are the baby blanket dragged across the floor,
the understanding of a mother’s eyes,
the comfort of knowledge unhidden.

You do not blink or shy from your duty,
You stare ahead and scare away.
Grateful is the lonely listener to your song.
Her breath on my morning eyes, littered with sleep.
A tepid, stale, overnight scent. Her skin is flush, warmed with
energy in hiding. Unknowingly she pulls me close,
a little girl until the alarm reminds her otherwise.

Work’s desk compels me to abandon the warmth of her back.

I place my lips to her eyes, cocoons that spill open
with a flicker of her lashes. Her mouth
lost in pillows I can only just hear her,

“Five more minutes.”

I crave more time, but the morning’s
drying grass tells me no. That queer shape we make
in the sheets is fractured with my ascent. She looks like
a whole person again; I feel halved.

Outside the bed,
Outside the room,
Outside the house,
Outside myself.

I’m still there, just somewhere else.
under your eyes

two sharp
kitchen knives