

the
torch

2005

A LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE

We live in a world of color—golden birch leaves, the indigo and emerald tones of a painted wall, red tulips against bark mulch. Artists, writers, and lovers of art find another kind of color in a carefully chosen adjective, a handcrafted vase, and the symmetry of a digital design. Just as a tulip begins with a brown bulb patted into the cold dirt in the fall and a decorated room begins with buckets of paint, the artist must begin with an idea, wet clay, or a keyboard. Every shade and thought must be nurtured to its final intensity with painstaking care to ensure the correct tint and nuance.

This magazine you hold in your hand is the result of long hours of work, too many Diet Cokes—and a few crashed computers. By blending and contrasting our ideas—and arguing occasionally—the whole is better than any one of us could have achieved alone. We hope you will appreciate the variety and color in this work of art even more than we enjoyed choosing the best mix of hues.

—Mariann Martin

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I've Learned from a Green Lizard

Rhacodactylus ciliatus strolls wrong side up
on the underside of a tree branch,
his three-inch tail curling up (down?) behind him.
Little green toes sticking to rough layers of brown bark—
not because his feet are covered in the same substance of cereal box jelly toys
that roll down walls like tumbling spiders.
The atoms on the cilia on his tiny, five-toed feet
change polarity now and then, and he clings, a blue dryer sheet on a white t-shirt.
Thank you, Mr. van der Waals. And—
isn't God something?

Once when we were one continent spread over a single ocean
(a paper island in an indigo ink spill, Pangaea inscribed upon it),
the divergent plate boundaries lay like a chiromancer's clues, the life line
separating the southern mound of Venus from Africa while
between the head and heart of the earth,
the mountains of Jupiter and Saturn and Germany
predicted the onslaught of science
over a pale God who watches children cry and does nothing,
a science that can not explain or medicate ever-aching souls,
but tells us we are only vibrations in the cosmos.
The explanation for those who are not quantum physicists:
We are music, composed among the stars,
a song in the empyrean for the ears of an ostensible God.



Bound Towers
Rob Alsobrook
Steel
8' x 4' x 1'

I went home to my parents' place one April weekend, one of those warm Tennessee weekends when the leaves seem to grow from tiny buds to green shadows in one breath and the purple irises open overnight. It rained almost the entire weekend, water dripping down from the leaves and running in streams through the green grass blades. And I stared out of my bedroom window, trying hard not to cry as I remembered running across the lawn as a child...wondering if I had made the right decision.

I went home to Finger, Tennessee to tell my parents I had decided to go to college, something no good Mennonite girl ever dreams of doing. But instead of breaking the news, I watched the rain drip from the lemony-lime elm leaves the size of squirrels' paws (my dad always said it would never freeze after the leaves were as big as squirrels' paws) and I played chess with my younger brother, who ate my queen and bishop and four pawns, lining them up behind his mighty white army. I filled the old green pitcher with the first daffodils, the yellow ones with white centers, not the old-fashioned kind, and set them on the sewing machine. And I read *For Whom the Bell Tolls* until my father's collection of clocks struck three times in the darkness—one after another and several of them at the same time—and the gray mockingbird started singing from the top of the white oak...trying to forget I had decided to leave all this.

Telling the two people who created you, who heard your first cries, who rocked you to sleep, who led you by the hand as you took your first steps, and who taught you the best they knew how, never gets any easier no matter how long you wait. So on my last afternoon at home, I found my mom in the dining room, folding the laundry she had just brought in from the clothesline, smoothing my brothers' blue jeans and shaking the wrinkles out of my dad's shirts like she had done for all the years of our childhood. Her hair, mixed strands of gray and black, was neatly tucked under that old white kerchief, and the paths of wrinkles across her face had slowly spread from sleepless nights of rocking her babies and long days in the sun.

The word career was as foreign to my mom as make-up and permed hair; she did not know how to drive a car or ride a bike. Even though my dad supported nine children on little more than the minimum wage, they never discussed whether she should get a job. She was in the kitchen every morning when we stumbled out of bed, rubbing our eyes and looking forward to cornmeal mush, pancakes, or scrambled eggs. Every moment of the day, we always knew if we wanted her she would be outside hanging laundry on the line, sewing clothes for us in the living room, or working in the garden.

That day in the kitchen, I tried to break the news as gently as I knew how, to mask it in promises that I was not leaving the Mennonite faith, that going to college was something I had to do, but that things would be alright. Yeah, right. My parents had finally gotten me through those rebellious teenage years, all my unreachable silences, and the frustrating walls I built around myself. And just when they thought I had safely grown up and was turning into a responsible, half-decent adult, I showed up and announced that I was doing the unthinkable—going to college.

I went to bed early that evening and pulled a book from the shelf to read myself to sleep, trying to block out the image of my mom shaking my sister's skirt long after the wrinkles were gone. The blue walls of the room—my room for so many years—had changed shades with several fresh coats of paint, but the blue floral pattern on the linoleum was still the same. I had spent so many hours sitting at that white desk, writing and sometimes just staring out the window into the warm Tennessee night, listening to the crickets and cicadas. The dark walnut bookshelf my dad built was still lined with my

favorite books—Steinbeck, Tolstoy, Twain—the volumes that had opened worlds beyond my imagination and made me dream of someday writing with that same heart-rending beauty.

Now, the knock on the door made me sigh in frustration; I laid *East of Eden* on the pillow beside me and said, “Come in.” As I already knew, it was my mom, and her red eyes brimming with tears made me wish I could just wipe away the words I had said that afternoon. But why should a simple thing like going to college be this impossible?

I reassured my mom that I would not try to persuade my sister and brothers to follow in my footsteps; this decision was right for me, but not one that I thought everyone should make. I tried to reassure because I knew that any attempts to convince or to present my side of the argument were useless. From a Mennonite standpoint, what I was doing was wrong and crazy and dangerous, and there was no getting around that fact. But, young and naïve, I was sure I could remain the person that I wanted to be.

That is what I tried to tell my mom as she sat on the edge of the bed, twisting and smoothing the hand-quilted, blue bedspread with her work-roughened hands, stopping occasionally to wipe tears from her dark brown eyes, the same eyes I saw every morning when I looked in the mirror. I had been thinking about this decision for months but to my parents it was still shockingly fresh, and I saw the disbelief in my mom’s face.

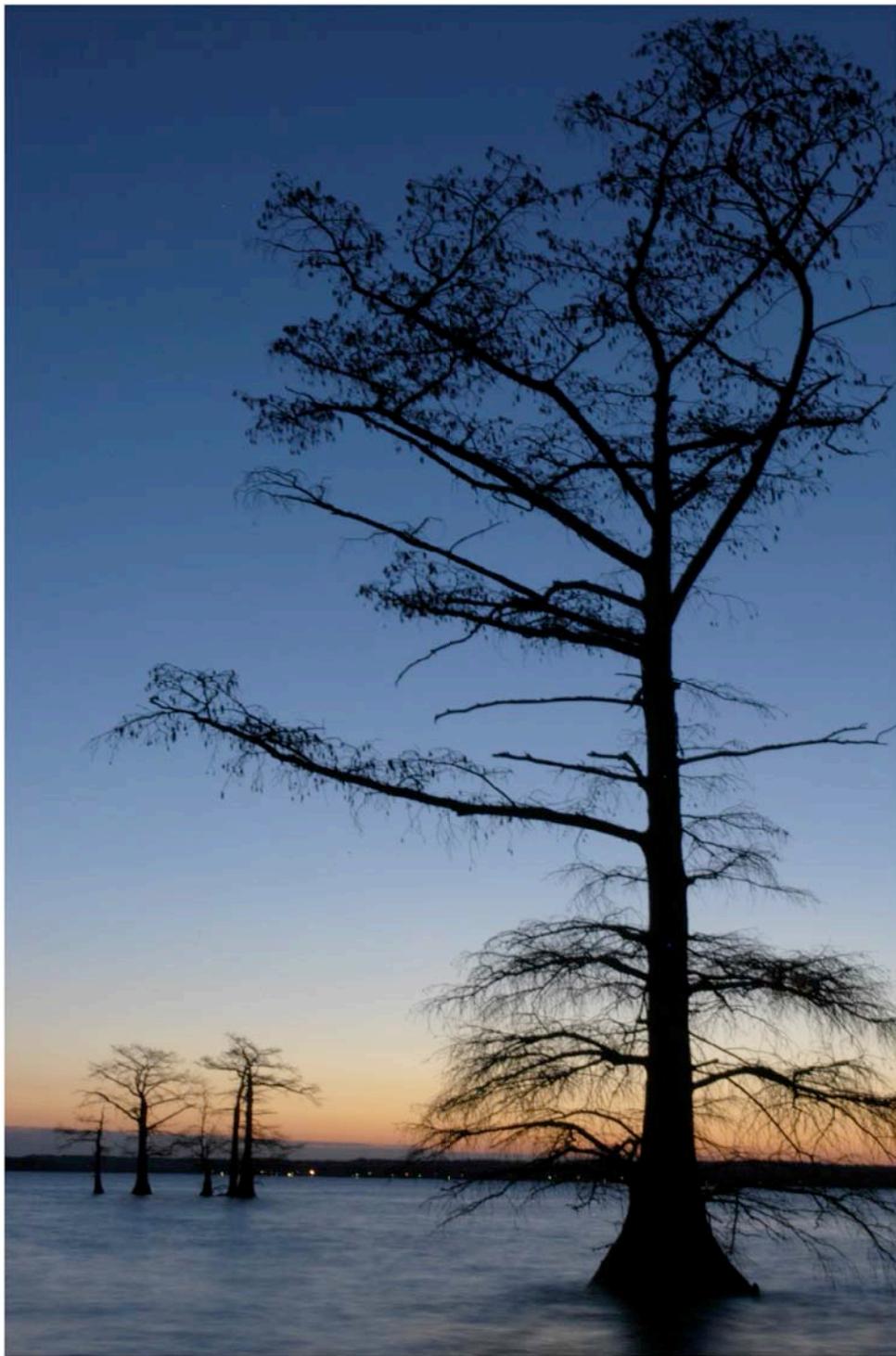
Then she said something that shook me worse than any argument she could ever come up with. She had told my dad that afternoon, just as I knew she would. Several hours later, he had come back and asked her, “Do you really think Mariann is serious?”

I could handle the arguments and pleading, but the pain behind that question was almost more than I could take. I had always been a daddy’s girl, sitting in his lap as he played chess with my older brothers, riding on his shoulders when we hiked the mountains close to our Pennsylvania home, and throwing the dice for him long before I was old enough to play Monopoly but sure that the victory was as much mine as his when we won.

But why should a simple thing like going to college be this impossible?

He taught me to be a good loser when my older brothers beat me in a game or race, and he taught me to be brave and resolute in the face of opposition and difficulty. I always knew that he believed in me, and the proud look on his face when I succeeded in a daunting challenge always meant more than any words of praise he could have given me.

The next day I watched as he bent over the innards of an old cuckoo clock, carefully lifting the pendulum out and laying it besides the cogs and springs on the checkered tablecloth. He perched two pairs of reading glasses on his nose, as he peered into the shadowy interior of the clock, trying to figure out exactly why it no longer kept accurate time. I knew he would never talk to me about my decision to go to college, that day as I propped my elbows on the table. I also knew that I had let him down and he would never again be proud of me in the same way. For many months, I would think of his pain, that brief hope that maybe I was not serious—and I would almost falter in my decision.



Dawn
Kathleen Murray
Digital Image
7.5" x 11"

And Still

JULIE
LAUGHERTY

1. With the windows open on a summer night

When I was a little girl,
I would help my grandfather
dissolve sugar into water
to feed the hummingbirds.
He would reach up

to where the hummingbird feeder hung
from a nail. We would fill it up with the mixture.
But at night, when I would lie awake,
I could not hear the birds—cooing contentedly
with now-full stomachs. I would hear the crickets,
chirping at each other from across

the field. They spoke of things I could not,
and still don't, understand.

2. As my family drove down the Oklahoma Highways

I was convinced for several years of my life
that I could see the American Flag
the astronauts put on the moon.
On long car trips, I would watch the moon
from the window and try to count the stars on
the flag. The moon seemed to move with
the car, even though it would have made more sense
for the moon to keep still, as though it were sleeping.
I could keep watching the moon,
if I leaned my head back, just so.
Just so.

What is Important

When he opened the parsonage door, he heard the clear, clean sound of the faucet. The domestic sound, issuing from the kitchen. In the foyer the wooden coat rack was missing, and he paused there a moment before he hung his stained blazer from the closet doorknob. His shirt was disheveled and there were damp, soiled spots on the knees and butt of his slacks. Without turning on the light, Drew went down the hall and stopped in the entryway to the kitchen.

There was the heavy smell of fresh peaches in the room. A dozen of them had already been peeled and cut into slices; they were piled in a large bowl, glistening. In a second bowl peach skins were curled about the pits, which were grooved and wet, dark red like animal hearts exposed to the air. Another handful of peaches, still in their skin, were lined on a paper towel. Laura stood to the right at the sink, surrounded on three sides by linoleum countertop. She had not heard him come in over the noise of the faucet and Drew felt almost that he should go away again and not disturb her.

Because the parsonage had been originally furnished with the church's money, when Pastor and Mrs. Bethel moved with their children to a larger, four-bedroom house a few miles down the highway, they had left most of the furniture where it was, and for the first few weeks that Drew and Laura lived there the whole building had the smell of Mrs. Bethel's clothes. He could still smell it sometimes in the master bedroom, soaked into the mattress like a stain.

Since their wedding, and since Drew began in June as the Minister of Music, Laura had occupied the free summer months with the redecorating of the place. Stripping the floral wallpaper and painting the living room. Building flower boxes for the front windows. For Drew, it was exciting to see her quietly annex each part of the house into her own territory, but in the evening when he came home from his office at the church he often felt that nothing in the house was his own, and he would spend the rest of the night trying to claim something.

Laura moved her thumbs over a peach, rinsing it off in the tap water. She picked up the pairing knife from behind the sink, and Drew went up behind her and put his hands on her hips, his chin on the back of her head.

She flinched, then leaned back into him. "We'll have to make this quick," she said. "My husband will be coming home any minute now." She set the peach and the knife on the counter again and turned off the faucet. Dried her hands on the dishcloth.

"What happened to the coat rack?" he asked her.

"I put it in the garage. There is no point in having it out there taking up space and looking ridiculous when we've got a closet two feet away." She turned around to face him. "Do you care?" she asked.

"No, I don't care," he said. He looked over her shoulder, out the square, mullioned window above the sink at the last part of the sun going down behind the line of conifers and the church. "A deer ran into me just now," he said.

"On the way home? Are you alright? Did it mess up the car?"

"I'm fine. It shattered the headlight. And it dented the panel a little on the driver's side. It's not bad."

She put her hand on his arm. "What's on your shirt? Is that blood?" She scratched at the spot on his torso with her fingernail.

"It's the deer's blood. I'm fine," he told her.

The air conditioning was set high and it was hot in the kitchen. Laura had been sweating while she worked with the peaches and several strands of her hair were out of place and curling up at the ends. "Well, I'm glad you are alright," she

said. “The car isn’t what’s important.” She put her arms around him and rested her head on his chest. “What about the deer?” she asked. “Was the deer alright?”

“No,” he said. “The deer wasn’t alright.” A hair found its way into his mouth and he moved away from her to scratch it off his tongue. He went to the kitchen table and sat down. “Why do you have it so dark in here?” he asked her.

“It was light outside until the minute before you got here,” she said. She leaned against the counter and they looked at each other; neither of them moved to turn on the light.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” she asked, taking the peach and the knife back up in her hands. She slipped the tip of the knife beneath the peach’s skin and moved the fruit against the blade, undressing it. The peaches were ripe and the skin came off easily in long strips. Drew sat at the table and watched. After sitting there in silence for a moment, he told her what had happened with the deer.

Drew had left Pastor Bethel’s house on Raintree Lane and driven west toward the church and the parsonage. Passing Grass Creek Elementary, set far back from the highway on the left, he approached the small bridge over the ribbon of water that lent its name to the school. The creek bed was all but dry at the end of August. It followed the length of the playground’s chain-link fence and angled across the empty field of weeds and wild flowers before passing under the bridge. It disappeared fifty yards across the road in a grove of pine trees behind a barbwire fence. Uncut at that point on either side of the highway, the grass grew knee high and a species of yellow flowers flourished there in the summertime right up to the edge of the shoulder. The sun was low enough to be out of Drew’s eyes and only slats of carotene light filtered through the trees in front of him.

She leaned against the counter and they looked at each other; neither of them moved to turn on the light.

He never saw the deer concretely and never touched the brakes. It bolted up like a shadow from under the bridge and across his periphery, striking the car violently about the driver’s side bumper. The impact was enough to snap Drew’s arm against the door and his head against the window. He jerked the car off the road, over the shoulder, and brought it to rest at an angle in the tall grass.

Even though school was out for the summer and it was after seven in the evening, his first thought was that it was a child, that he had hit some stupid child running across the road. Lying in the grass near the culvert where the creek ran,

there was a heap of vague brown. Drew left the car running and hurried back to where what was left of the thing was tucked into itself on the ground. He was within ten yards of the animal before he realized what he had hit.

She was a big doe with eyes like worn half dollars that locked on him as he came toward her, and dilated until they were all pupil, wet and black. It was as if there was a well with no bottom in those eyes. On their surface, like the dusty sheen occluding a still pond, there were cataracts that covered the pupil, and what iris there was, in film.

The deer breathed heavily in and out; her body rose and fell at the ribs. Because she was lying on the side that had struck the car, Drew couldn’t see the wound, but thick blood was beginning to discolor the grass around her hind legs. It was the closest he had ever been to a deer or any animal of that size in the wild. He saw her like that, with one hoof scratching the air, her eyes dilated, and her face looking more confused than anything else, and he knelt down beside



Exposed
Cynthia Keegan
Sculpture
1.5' x 3'

her. She bristled. He could see a wave of electricity spark up from her croup to her forehead and face, where her nostrils flared. Whispering, “There girl, there now, there now,” he put out his hand and touched her at the withers. She exploded. She twisted violently, brought her head around, and snapped at him even as he jerked his hand away. She snorted loudly, twisted again, and dug her back hooves into the ground. Then suddenly she was up and racing toward the barbwire fence and the trees beyond it.

She rushed toward the shadows of the trees quicker than Drew could turn his body to watch her go. When she was still five yards away she vaulted, flung herself at the woods. But as she planted her hind legs, they faltered and buckled. She came down on the barbwire with the barrel of her stomach and slid forward on the uppermost wire until it caught between her loins and stifles. She hung there with her front legs barely touching the ground. Drew felt his gut tighten. She began kicking with her hind parts, trying to free herself from the rusty barbs holding on to her. As she struggled, the cannon of one leg flailed its way between the second and third wire. And it seemed each movement worked her further into the fence. Ground the barbs further into her body. Then she became frantic and launched her front half back, butting the fence itself as though she would knock it off her.

Drew still knelt at the culvert, watching as she tangled her legs hopelessly in the wire. He could see her hip then. Where she had first struck the car, the fur was torn off, and the bare muscle of her thigh was exposed to the air. He saw it fist into a lump and then stretch out long as she kicked. She kicked and kicked, and without warning she stopped and went limp, draped like that over the fence. But she was not dead; her ribs moved in and out in a regular, anguished pattern. Drew ran to the fence and kicked furiously at the nearest post. When it didn’t move, he set his hands between barbs and pulled on the wire with his whole strength. He tried to shake her loose, but there was no budging her. Trickles of blood ran jagged, backward over her upturned legs and down the length of her body. When he yanked the wire, her hind parts snapped back with it grotesquely. And it occurred to him that if he kept jerking it, he might rip her in half.

She was still. This was the compromise she had reached with the pain that threatened to squeeze up her body and push her viscera out through her mouth: she vowed to lie still and let it eat her whole, if only it would not tear her body any further apart.

He turned and hurried back to the car where he began looking for anything that could cut the wire. But there was nothing in the glove compartment except napkins and the owner’s manual. There was nothing on the backseat but a Bible and sheet music, trash on the floorboard; in the trunk only the spare tire and the jack.

A quarter mile past the elementary school a pickup rounded the turn and came toward him. He shuffled out into the road and waved his arms above his head. While he was waving, the sick feeling Drew had felt at seeing the deer almost went away. He felt exhilarated to be saving something real, and he felt honorable, almost as if he were the first person at the scene of a crash and it was a child he was working to bring out of the wreckage.

The pickup was piloted by a tall man in a gray T-shirt. As he stopped, Drew ran the rest of the way to him and shouted over the noise of both their engines, “The deer’s caught in the barbwire, over there by the trees.” The man in the pickup rolled the window down halfway. He was older than Drew and wore a netted ball cap with VOTE FOR ME in white cursive letters printed across it. Beneath the hat, the man’s features were crowded toward the center of his long face and he hadn’t shaved. Relaxed, it was a face like the blunt edge of a knife.

Beneath the hat, the man’s features were crowded toward the center of his long face and he hadn’t shaved.

“What’s wrong?” he said.

“A deer ran into my car, and now it’s caught in the barbwire. Do you have anything I could use to cut her down?”

The man looked at him and raised his eyebrows.

“Over there under the trees. In the shadow,” Drew said, pointing.

The man scowled, and it was as though the knife of his face was turned sharp side around. “Can’t see it,” he said.

“It’s not moving right now.”

“Maybe it’s dead.”

“No,” Drew said, louder. “It’s not dead, but it’s exhausted and it’s in a lot of pain. It is dying, and we have to get it off that barbwire.”

The man said nothing.

“Can’t you see where it hit my car?” Drew asked him.

“I see the car, but no deer. Is the vehicle drivable?”

“Yes, it’s running. I’m fine, but I’ve got to cut down that deer. Don’t you care that it is caught on the barbwire?”

The man looked again toward the trees. He squinted. “Sorry,” he said. He put the truck in gear and rolled up the window as he drove off.

Drew went back to the deer with the jack from the trunk of his car. Her ribs were still rising and falling, but not as quickly as before. Blood had run down the length of her flanks and stained the patch of white hair on her chest. Drew looked at her face again. Her eyes followed him, swollen in their sockets, blaming him. And blood had come from her eyes and her mouth also. Thin streaks of it went from her eyes down her snout, from her mouth over her chin. The sick feeling came back again, only stronger. He went to the post on her right, and with the end of the jack, he beat the spot where the top wire was nailed to the wood. He beat it like that for moment, and then he pulled with one foot braced against the post. The post moved in the ground and Drew pushed the other direction. He pulled again and then the whole post came out and Drew fell backward on the ground. The deer’s body slumped down in the grass and the dirt. He had thought she would jolt upright again and run into the woods. That she would find a place in the secret elbow of some fallen tree to lick her wounds and die with all the dignity God affords an animal. But she never moved. He touched her again, put his hand on her back and said “There girl.” For a while her ribs expanded and emptied in succession.

Drew watched her. And then there was nothing else he could do. He walked back to the car and drove home.

But when Drew told it to Laura in the kitchen, while she was putting sugar on the peach slices and zipping them up in air-tight plastic bags, he told her that the doe had struggled to her feet and moved off slowly into the woods.

“So maybe you saved it,” she said. “Animals are resilient like that.”

“You never know,” he told her. He got up from the table and took a glass from the cabinet. He poured himself a Coke and went into the den where he turned on the television and began flipping through the channels.

It occurred to him a little later that the reason he lied to her was not to keep her from feeling bad for the deer. Laura came into the den and sat on the arm of his chair. She took his shirt from him so that it could be washed and as she went back to the kitchen, she put her hand in his hair. He felt then that the chair, the old recliner upholstered in corduroy, belonged to him completely. And he would never give it up.

CHRISTY
RISCH

How to Pick a Tomato

This is a good tomato.
Smell it...it's sweet,
isn't it? Look at that red
color. So even all over.

Look closer
and see the tiny orange
pinpricks making up the color
of its skin—like looking at a
television screen, except
this is better.

That yellow spot
on the leaf won't hurt
just as long as the rest
of the tomato isn't damaged.

Look for brown spots, cuts,
or bruises—any discoloration
is bad. The ones you got
for lunch were bad. Don't
bring those in again. Now

look at this, I'll peel
some of the skin off.

There's the fresh red
meat. See how

the pores let out the moisture...
it's running all down
my hand. Well, here,

you can go inside
and eat it, now that you
know how to pick
a good tomato.

It looks like a fighting conch,
or an alphabet cone, or maybe a banded tulip—
the names for small jewels picked out of the sea,
warm brown tones of russet and coffee,
their surfaces washed smooth and clean
by the waves that roll across Bar Harbor
where the sand changes to gravel on the Maine beach.
We found it—Bret and I—at the edge
of the cliffs rising out of the ocean,
the salty spray catching the light
from the first sun staining the horizon above the water,
light pink and pale mauve
like the inside of the shell, so delicately
colored that it might fade into nothing.
But that was last summer, and now
I am here alone, here
trying to decide if it is
a fighting conch or a banded tulip.

MARIANN
MARTIN

Beachcombing





Sunrise
Heather Couch
Acrylic
24" x 18"

Grapple

LESLIE
KING

Grapple? What in heaven could a grapple be? Intrigued, I scanned the eco-friendly container's label. (How do they make clear, plastic-like boxes out of corn?) I learned in the middle of the vegetable section at Kroger that a grapple is an apple somehow infused with grape flavor. I placed the science project in the baby cage at the top of my shopping cart and continued to the more mundane varieties of fruit. I love grocery shopping. I hate the driving to the store. The minute and twenty-seven seconds it takes to get to the store from my home is a dangerous minute and twenty-seven seconds. Cars swerve in and out of Walgreens, BP, and the new drive-through espresso place, without a thought to the vehicles slowing for the red light or turning across the intersection. For the same reason, I hate driving back home. And loading and unloading the groceries, pulling them out of clingy, plastic sacks, and reorganizing the cabinets, fridge, and freezer just enough to shove the new things in and shut the door. Not my idea of fun. While I am wandering the slick, reflective floors, though, I am calm and centered. I usually stroll through the aisles looking for fun alternatives to the standard fare (hence, grapples instead of Granny Smiths), dance and sing along with the light rock favorites playing over the speakers, pout

when a friendly female voice announces a two-for-one special on all Coke products during the chorus to “Jack and Diane,” and skim through the magazines that I may or may not end up buying.

God blessed me with an exceptional retention of what I read. I also, thanks to Mom, possess what I would like to believe are advanced cooking skills. So instead of purchasing *Cooking Light*, I can just look at the picture for cheesy spinach soufflé and glance over the ingredient list, and be fully prepared to fix my own soufflé from memory, ingenuity, and culinary intuition. On grapple day, I threw *Oxygen* into the cart. It’s a women’s fitness magazine catering more toward the female bodybuilders than the skinny *Cosmo* type. It is an improbable, secret desire of mine to be a fitness model. I’m not tall enough to be a runway model, but too tall to model petite fashions. And did I mention too fat?

A girl stood to the left of me browsing through one of those fifty pound bridal ’zines. As I do with all members of the same sex, I examined her to see if she were prettier than I. Burnt sienna hair (I always used that Crayola color for the Native Americans in my Thanksgiving drawings in kindergarten) fell past her shoulders, very smooth, very shiny. She had heavy thighs but a slender waist for her proportions, probably a size nine. She was normal model tall and gifted in the “double D” sense of the word. Just a couple of inches taller and just a smidge bigger than me, she was attractive but not competition. We could be friends, I decided. Then I looked at her face.

“Hi, this is Leslie, your illegitimate daughter. Do you have time for a chat?”

I’d seen her before. I’d seen her nose in the mirror a hundred thousand times. I knew her blue eyes from the Polaroid of Mary F. Bretschneider, a woman I had recognized as my birth mother without having to read Mom’s print on the wide white end of the photo. Tiffany.

If I had to make a list of all the reasons I feel blessed as an adopted child, not being named by a woman who would name any daughter of hers Tiffany would definitely make that list. Insulting my biological half-sister’s first name isn’t very nice, is it?

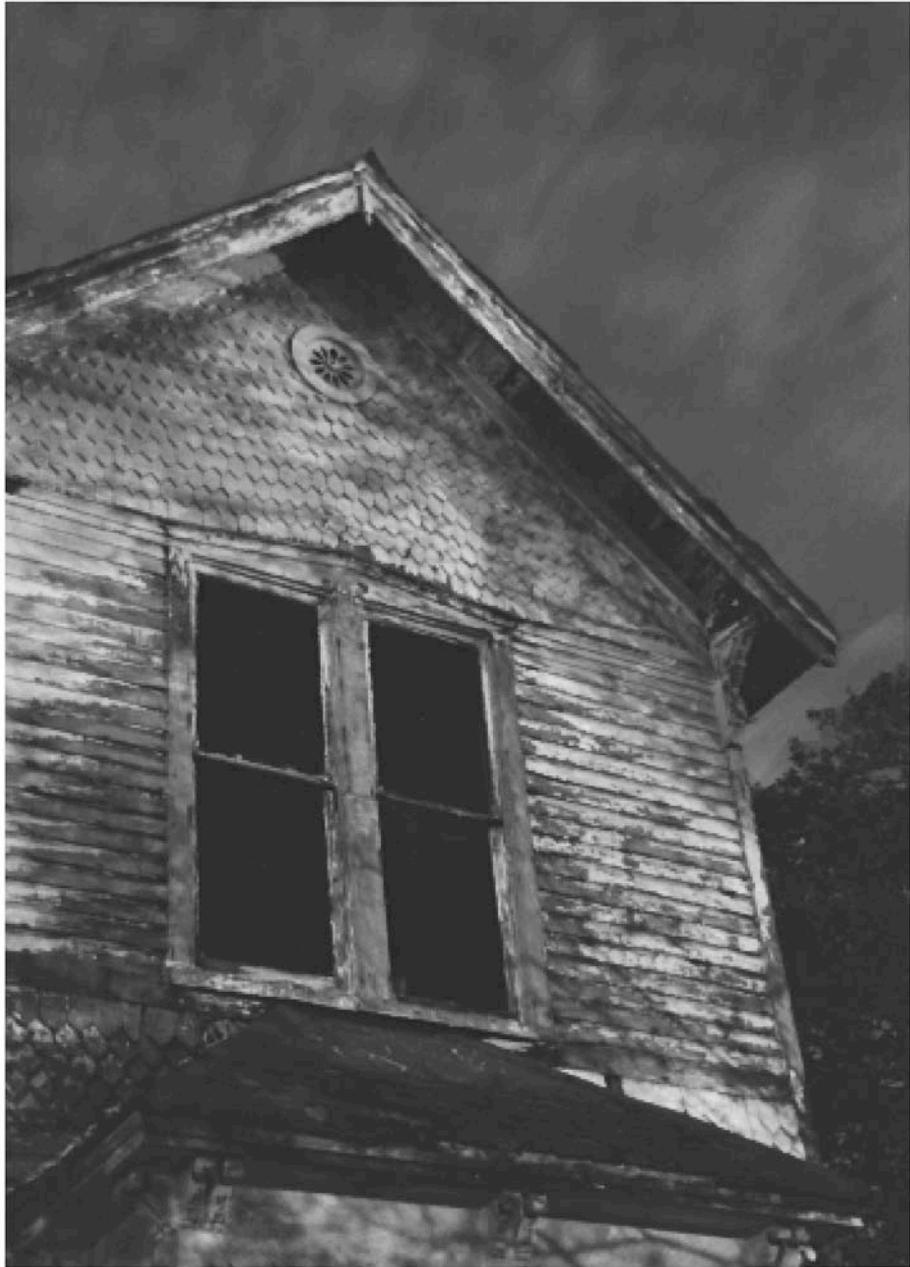
I knew about Tiffany from my mother and from snooping around in my parents’ closet. I wanted to tell her I knew her or at least freak her out by saying her name, but I didn’t. She would never have believed me. She might not have even remembered her mother giving up a baby for adoption way back in ’83 when she was only three years old. I’ll wait, I thought. I’ll wait until I turn twenty-one and find Mary B. She’ll call my sister to the front door, and Tiff will say I look so familiar and ask if she’s seen me before? Then we will be best friends, and she’ll play maid of honor at my wedding even if I missed hers.

I see them everywhere. For years, I have wondered about the forty-something woman in the bookstore and the silky voice of the receptionist at Adiago spa. Tiffany could be the intern at Southern Hills Hospital where I was born and my accident-prone father ends up about once a year. I wonder if one of them passes me on I-40. I Google their names over and over.

It would be easy enough to find them, but what then? Do I just interrupt their lives with a phone call? “Hi, this is Leslie, your illegitimate daughter. Do you have time for a chat?”

I say this at the risk of sounding like a crunchy-granola hippie feminist: even after I find Mary and my half-sister, I will still love them all, the thousands of women like the girl in the grocery store, every one my mother or my sister.

I left her in Kroger and cried for almost two minutes on my way home.



Untitled
Tyler Malone
Photograph
8" x 10"

LAURA
JACKSON

Buenos Días

I stepped outside today and for the first time in years I was drowned in it.

That pale sort of washed-out sunlight that I used to wake up to see so many years ago, a muted light, mild enough on your eyes in the morning, but always carrying with it a promise of intense, unveiled sunlight to come later in the afternoon. Later, later it would beat down relentlessly, but now it softly wakes the city, filling the deep cracks in the pavement in front of the convenience stores and *tiendas* where women have been cooking tortillas since before the light was even thought of.

Sometimes you wake only for the sake of seeing that light, as if somehow, if you wake early enough, you can hold on to it for the whole day. Outside, on a crumbling curb, you sit, knees pulled in to your chest, your bare legs saturated in it. No one notices a small child picking at the weeds in the pavement, and most don't seem to notice that this pale light is quickly fading—almost gone. If only you can get the courage, you rush into the little store behind you with the nickels and quarters you found on the pavement and buy a small glass bottle full of Coca-Cola or Topo Chico. Counting change never took so long. Perhaps a glimpse is still left; perhaps you can catch one last ray of that faint sunlight before it fades completely into the bright noonday sun that beats down, relentlessly waking the city. Yet that pale morning light always disappears the second before you are ready to let it go.

Raising a Son

DREW
HOLLADAY

We once talked of children, of a real child,
broken and wise when we taught him
to lie. At the age of eleven he would understand
Jews crammed between our walls,
our Bibles hidden below the stairs,
the acrid dryness inside his nostrils—
a blizzard of ashes, breathing in our ghetto neighbors.

Last night I had a dream.
While I stood on the street,
encircled by a twilight fog,
a Jewish elder greeted
me with an unfeeling face
and an elegant beard.
There were no words.
When he turned back toward
the alley, a mouth screamed
from the back of his head,
rotting teeth and green
tongue. I gasped myself
awake and prayed. I told
God I didn't understand.

*The boy, eyes open and watching,
lies pensive under a worn blue blanket.
Quick resounding footsteps, fourteen strong,
awaken his familiar stifled terror, which he calls
curiosity, so he walks slowly toward
the door, left almost closed, and peeks
through the skinny open space, a blade
of light coloring the left side of his face.
They have stopped yelling; his body is still,
tense. In the silence a Nazi stethoscope detects
a nervous breath between the kitchen wall
and the living room. Two young soldiers
raise their weapons, cut through the wall
in flashing clamor of gunfire, Father,
at the table, weeping. Exposed to the black
cloud of rifle smoke, the boy's eyes
begin to water.*

To Sleep in Stone

LESLIE
KING

*Dear to me is sleep,
still more to sleep in stone while harm and shame persist,
not to see, not to feel, I am content.
Speak softly, do not wake me, do not weep.*

—Michelangelo Buonarroti

Use your chisel, sculptor.
Bring me forth from this rough form, refine me.
Then my veined body will resemble real flesh, a pall over a collar of bones,
and my eyes will follow you.

See visions in your slumber of your work in the great chapels,
reclining on tombs of statesmen and clergy,
looking toward the door,
four hundred years from your own entombment,
their bodies rubbed clean of days spent bent, busy over the nuances of interphalangeal joints,
those that stretch two fingers out for blessing and those that curl the hand into a fist.
Echoing whispers filtering in like the sunlight through skinny glass windows,
the movement of people through the sanctuary,
plastic Kodak cameras flashing,
the nicotine hair of old translators, translucent on their scalps, bright stars
among circles of tall, young students burdened with backpacks full of
compact disc players, hair wax, condoms, credit cards, and journals.
Their palms sliding against a cold, stone breast for luck, shy pilgrim's kisses
on the feet of austere saints.

As you lay on the canvas below me,
hair graying from the hours of soft marble flying from the edge of your tools,
I wish for sleep, as well.
Plait my hair, rest my head on my wrist and grow poppy flowers around me.
Let me dream for these doleful years ahead.
Wars and the peaces that come between wars will all pass by me silently.
Pink-mouthed children, sun-beaten men, and you, will die.
Happy me, never to know the bone-twist of sorrow, only the nectar of dreams.
I will rise with the sound of your footsteps on the silent graves of the church.

LAURA
JACKSON

Esperanza—Hope

My older sister has been gone for days. She has been gone for six days and tomorrow will make one week. My mother prays each night to Santa Teresa that she would come back soon. I tried to pray once, but the prayers were long to remember, and I did not know if I should pray in Spanish or English. My mother said that the *Santos* would hear me best if I spoke to them in my language, but I am never sure which language to pick. My sister, my only sister, for the other three are boys, she had said once that if anyone was going to take us seriously then we had to speak English. Of course I wanted the *Santos* to take me seriously—so I did not pray. I wish for her to come back. She had gone Tuesday night

My mother said that the *Santos* would hear me best if I spoke to them in my language, but I am never sure which language to pick.

to get some tortillas since I had eaten the last ones before dinner. José, my older brother, asked her to get some *helado* too, but she said no. José said that she had run away because she was mad at me for eating the last tortillas, but my tío said no, she did not run away. My tío said that if a sixteen-year-old girl was gone for more than a day on the streets of Los Angeles then we should tell the police. My mother said that if any of us goes to the police that they would send everyone but my baby brother Miguel back to Nuevo León. My tío says that would be better than what could happen to my sister on the street. My mother says that whoever tells about my sister will also get a spanking. I continue to wish for her to come back.

For seven long years, my mother prayed for my sister to come back. For awhile, I could imagine what had happened to her. I always thought she had finally found a boyfriend, and together they had gone back to Nuevo León, only they had forgotten to tell us. Then I wondered how my sister, who remembered everyone's birthday and the exact price of tortillas, beans, rice, and flour at the *Tienda Lupita* could possibly forget to call. I soon stopped imagining. My mother returned to Nuevo León last year, taking with her my baby brother. I now live with my older brothers in the same apartment with the same faded picture of *Nuestra Señora de los Guadalupe Angeles* hanging above the sink in the kitchen. And tonight, Thursday night, I am preparing *huevos rancheros*. I drop the egg carton.

“Mija, when is dinner?” I clean up the mess in a mass of paper towels, quickly throwing the carton of destroyed eggs into the trash bin. Grabbing \$3.78, I cross myself and step into the Los Angeles street light.



*My Shameful
Deeds...*

(Psalm 51:3)

Allison D. Steele

Mixed Media

18" x 24"



Late for School
Jonathan Blair
Digital Photograph
8" x 10"

Rhea's hands tightly grip the steering wheel, revealing pale yellow skin on the top of her knuckles. She leans forward in her seat so she can see from every angle and so the cool air from the air conditioner blows on her sticky face and underarms. Her mother, Carol, talks beside her about yielding to other traffic while turning left at a green light. She just messed up on that. She almost hit a red Mustang, or got hit by one, because she didn't know to yield to the oncoming traffic before turning. Her mother screamed. Rhea slammed on the brakes. The Mustang slowed. The guy inside lifted his middle finger in a shoving motion up to heaven. That is why she is sweating.

"I'm just glad we had our seatbelts on," Carol says. "We both might have gone through the windshield the way you stopped so abruptly."

"I said I'm sorry, Mom. I just didn't know," Rhea says quietly.

"You passed that book test like it was nothing. How could you not know?"

They both shut their mouths, and Rhea drives along in anxiety. She told her mom that she wasn't ready for Memphis traffic. It is three-fifteen on a Thursday afternoon. Her grip tightens with the thought of getting into an accident in the middle of Memphis.

"Okay, you need to turn right up here," Carol says.

"Up where?"

"Right there on Mt. Moriah. Hurry, you're going to miss it!"

"Mom, I can't turn! I'm in the left lane. I can't get over there." The right lane is two lanes over.

"Well, that's our turn, so you'd better find a way."

Rhea turns her head almost all the way around. There is about half-a-car length's space to her right, so she nudges in.

"Turn on your blinker, Rhea!"

She fiddles with the knobs, and the windshield wipers thud across the glass. They need to be changed. Her mom gets impatient and leans across Rhea, pulling the turn signal to the right. Rhea looks back again and sees that an SUV is almost on top of her, so she nudges the car all the way in, just as the light up ahead turns green. Rhea keeps her right blinker on, hoping that some kind Memphian will let her in. The SUV behind her lays on his horn.

"Just get in there!" her mom yells.

Rhea presses on the gas and the car starts with a jolt straight down the road in the center lane. "I'll just have to turn around."

"Dammit, Rhea, now we're going to be late."

"Well," Rhea says. She decides to give up the argument. Her mother had probably just forgotten which way to turn. She is very bad with directions.

"I'll drive on the way home," Carol says.

The cool air of the hospital pierces through Rhea's sweat. She extends her arms from her body and then lifts her hair up off her neck. They both get inside an elevator, and Carol pushes the button for the sixth floor. Carol begins to bite her nails, which Rhea just painted Wood Violet Crème the night before.

"Mom, stop it," Rhea says, slapping at her mother's hand.

"I'm just nervous, Rhea."

Rhea looks at her mother. She stares directly in front of her, into the shiny reflection from the elevator doors. She begins to take deep breaths and exhale them slowly through chapped lips that she continually licks.

“You want some of my chapstick, Mom?” Rhea asks, offering a warm tube from her jeans pocket. Carol looks at Rhea and smiles. She uses the chapstick and holds her daughter’s hand.

The quiet streets of their suburban hometown are a welcome relief compared to the city. Rhea keeps quiet, staring out the window. Then her mom pulls into the TCBY parking lot. “I think we both deserve it,” she says.

Carol orders her usual: a waffle cone with white chocolate mousse yogurt. Rhea orders a white chocolate mousse parfait with M&Ms and whipped cream on top.

Her mom drives to the nearest playground while Rhea holds her cone and saves the upholstery by licking up the melting yogurt. Carol pulls into a parking spot, and they eat and watch the children swing.

“So, what did the doctor say?” Rhea asks after a few moments.

Carol takes a long lick around the cone and up the sides of the mound of yogurt on top. “It’s malignant,” she says.

Rhea lowers her parfait and looks out the window.

“I have to go to St. Francis on Monday for surgery. They’re going to take the lumps out. I thought I could stay with Grandpa and he can take me. You can stay with Karen if you want.”

Rhea looks up at her mother. “No, I want to come, if that’s okay with you.”

“Of course it is,” Carol says.

Rhea looks out the window again. She watches two girls swinging back and forth, higher and higher. One jumps out of the swing. She waves her arms in a circular motion and falls to the ground. She motions for the other girl to follow. The girl lets go but closes her eyes. She hits the ground and rolls twice and begins to cry.

“Mom,” says Rhea. She looks to her mother who is staring directly back into her eyes. “Mom...”

Carol puts her arms around Rhea who begins to cry quietly. “Baby, I’m gonna be fine. We’re going to be just fine.” She rubs Rhea’s back for a few moments until the strong breaths subside. “Are you okay?” Carol asks. Rhea nods.

“Are you?”

“Yeah.”

“Can you just promise me one thing?” Rhea asks, “Can you just make your doctor appointments earlier in the day from now on?” Carol laughs. “I’m serious,” Rhea says, laughing.

Carol leans into Rhea’s face, cupping her hand around Rhea’s head and pulling it onto her shoulder. “I’m gonna buy you a mockingbird, baby.” Rhea remembers the song her mother sang to her as a child, smiling. She begins to hum the tune softly to her mother, fading in and fading out as she takes the last bite of her mother’s waffle cone.



Under My Mask
April Wright
Ceramic
12" x 12"

The Rules

DAVID
CLARK

When the rules are relaxed, in the small hours,
she unburies herself
from the ground and turns down the familiar hill

to the house. Last night, I woke to find her
body in the room,
going through the motions of live women,

preparing herself for bed. Already, she had
removed her clothes
and draped the pale wreck of them over

the high-backed chair. Pausing at the vanity,
her long, bare back
to me, she lifted the fine-toothed comb

and began to run it through her hair. Dust
collected at her feet.
There was no sound but the sound of the house

sleeping. She looked younger, cleaner, nearly alive.
As scared and lost
as the moonlight slinking in the window, swelling

the white hood of curtain, seeking out a quiet
shadow to hide in.
She came over to the bed, drew back the covers,

and bent to slide her body between the sheets.
But I stopped her.
Without a word, I took her hand, rose, and led her

back to the upset plot of ground. I slid my hand
to the old, comfortable
spot on her back, guided her down the smooth

steps of her grave. I tucked her into the deep
pocket of her casket
and covered her up again with handfuls of soft earth.

BIOS

Last year, CHRISTY RISCH'S bio was too long. When not late for school, JONATHAN BLAIR enjoys helping the Union Mafia take over the school slowly and secretly. ROB ALSOBROOK agrees with Voltaire that "Love shows signs that cannot be mistaken." LESLIE KING, junior English major, is always late. Always. JULIE LAUGHERTY never manages to have an umbrella when it rains. MARIANN MARTIN'S brother thinks she should join the CIA, but she would rather play skullduggery with words. DAVID CLARK, senior English major, is not getting any younger. LAURA JACKSON, freshman TESL major, grew up speaking Spanglish. AMY CHEEK, sophomore DMS major, is a Texan who does not put two spaces between a period and the next sentence. BETH PIERCE, junior graphic design major, rescues goldfish from the jaws of death. DREW HOLLADAY loathes the poetry section at Books-A-Million. TYLER MALONE, senior DMS major, hopes to have a rendezvous with destiny sometime in the near future. HEATHER COUCH, junior art major, collects cardboard and balloons. A junior sociology major, KATHLEEN MURRAY denies being affiliated with the Union Mafia. She lies. APRIL WRIGHT knows her artwork is finished when it is five minutes after class has started. CYNTHIA KEEGAN, junior art major, is currently outside building a sculpture. ALLISON D. STEELE, sophomore ceramics major, is an effervescent artist.