

Department: The Promethean, Revelation (2007-2008)

# THE PROMETHEAN

THE LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL  
OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY-PORTLAND



2007/2008 ISSUE

**REVELATION**

# THE PROMETHEAN

The Literary Arts Journal of  
Concordia University-Portland



*Tree of Gondor* © 2008 Sarah Grace Shewbert

The 2007/2008 Issue:

**REVELATION**

I know death will come upon me quick.  
A door slammed by the wind,  
a photograph taken in the moment  
I half-blink.  
As the starry bull  
turned to the arrow it didn't realize was shot,  
the way we never do  
when confusion mixes with the pitch dark  
as the switch turns and the  
light bulb cracks  
its last filament broken  
inside me  
the universe, collapsed.

-DEATH WILL COME UPON ME QUICK  
*Alexandra Woolner*

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## INVITATION TO REVELATION: NOTES ON THE 2007/2008 ISSUE:

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations.

-- Revelation 22:2

Minor things can become moments of great revelation when encountered for the first time.

-- Margot Fonteyn

This year, *The Promethean* staff wanted a bold theme to complement last year's theme of *Genesis*. After much consideration, we felt *Revelation* would bring in a variety of submissions exploring the nature of endings and epiphanies. To our delight, this proved true, and we could not be more pleased with the journal this year.

*The Promethean* has seen great changes and growth over time; the 2007-2008 academic year has been no different. The fall and spring semesters brought in a plethora of new artists, fresh writing, and vivid photography. Submissions came from as far away as the East Coast and from as close as the Concordia community.

This issue has also been bittersweet for me personally. It is with reluctance and regret that I leave Concordia and *The Promethean* after graduation; three years on the staff, two of those as Managing Editor, have given me a sense of deep satisfaction, pride, and belonging. I will dearly miss the staff and working with them to compose an annual mosaic of Concordia's creative community. Therefore, it is with extreme pride that I and *The Promethean* staff present this year's *Revelation* issue to you.

Johanna Stephens  
Managing Editor

## CONTENTS

### POETRY

2	Alexandra Woolner	Death Will Come Upon Me Quick
8	Jess Bouchard	13 February
9	Bill Lynch	Untitled
10	Kristine Pugsley	The Paradox
20	Jeremy Richards	Skylake
21	Johanna Stephens	Incomprehensible
22	Jess Bouchard	Venomous Words
23	Jeremy Richards	Dallas
24	Alexandra Woolner	Still
25	Jeremy Richards	Wind
27	Jennifer Allen	Present Tense
28	Christina Busby	He Asked What My Sigh Meant
36	Bill Lynch	Whatever Happened to Rich
38	Jennifer Allen	Instructions for the Cast
39	Adam Leyrer	After the First Frost
40	Daniel Cameron	Expert Opinions
42	Amanda Overcash	The Broken Umbrella
64	Rachel Steiner	Soldier's Song
66	Theresa Todd	"Bye Baby"
67	Johanna Stephens	Corndog of Death
69	Donnie Drobny	Unacquainted
78	Samuel Irving	In My Own Words
79	Adam Leyrer	Young Prometheus



**13 FEBRUARY**

*Jess Bouchard*

Warm skin,  
pale pink ripening peach  
like newborns –  
head covered  
in the beginning yolk  
that winter morning  
where frost lingered down my  
delicate spine.  
She wanted to mesmerize  
the snow; I wanted to love nothing,  
just the cold bitter night that  
chose us.  
I started to believe  
in survival, in unity of  
communal existence.  
I wanted to share, only briefly,  
our mouths that held  
nature's best recipes of life.  
She waits patiently, I have  
heard, in months passing –  
the wind echoing, luxuriously chanting,  
a secret so divine  
that our continual shifts  
will in time fill  
the bodies of love  
destined in womb days.

*Bill Lynch*

She wants to hustle to New York City, New York  
to the bowery to hang out  
with Chuck Close when he was thirty-three.  
She's in love with his self-portrait,  
all six feet, every blown dandelion detail,  
every hair fine enough to float gauges.  
Even the smoke that no machine can capture  
all signal to her the need to thumb back east.

We came out on the last cut of my uncle's blood money,  
buying a Volvo, trading for a hot air balloon  
stored in a farm house in Oregon City, Oregon.  
Below us, the grapevines were wired taut over the hills,  
the concentric circles of a surveyor's map,  
and as she tugged and torched the air, we took to the wind,  
hoping to avoid the black of I-5 asphalt.  
Before dark we amateurs dropped our basket on a hill,  
broke down in the grass,  
tangled like Gulliver in the lines, let the balloon deflate  
the way our baby had leaked out her legs,  
the fingers miraculously detailed  
right down to the whorls of the painstaking tips,  
the shoots of follicles sown lovingly in the lids.

## THE PARADOX

Kristine Pugsley

My sister would be embarrassed for me to say this:

She has a *great* body.

I mean, she's only 15, but she looks like she walked out of a magazine:  
all legs and eyes and brown skin.

Sometimes, she gets 'That Look' more than I do.

She wears baggy sweatpants at home and long sleeves when we  
go out, and

There isn't much to look at *that* way, but still.

I want to walk up to people and shake my finger in their face and  
say, "Don't you dare do that to her!" but I don't.

We walk on and ignore it, but her ears burn and my face does too.

Part of me mortified for *her*

Part of me sad for *me*.

I am ashamed of myself, after.

You don't hear many people complain about being little.

If I were to do so, I would say that it's a terrible paradox;

You want to be healthy, first. Second, you want to be pretty...

Part of me will always wish for long legs that look good in  
shorts, like hers.

Understanding the 'system' doesn't make living in it much easier.

America's Next Top Model

Seventeen Magazine

The newest diet fad: Don't eat! You'll lose weight.

Absurd, yes.

Yet there we are...young, attractive. Maybe not models, but girls...

Maybe that's all it is, after all.

Maybe, it will be like this forever.

I hope not.

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Someday, and this is what I hope for her,

We will walk through the mall,

Not falling out of our clothes or anything, just two girls.

Two sisters out for a day.

Maybe...and who knows when that will be,

We will be older then, maybe mothers

Our bodies changed from childbirth

Women, in a woman's form.

Two sisters, who will walk through the mall

Or down the street in the city,

And there will be no whistles

Or catcalls.

No more lingering stares and leers that go on for days...

I can not hope that the world will be so different then

That this won't ever happen.

But I would like to think that when we have daughters

(Whatever they look like)

They will not feel pulled in two directions.

36, 29, 38

Who cares? The only way I hope they are pulled

On an outing like ours

Is whether or not to go get lunch *first*.

Holly Goodrich

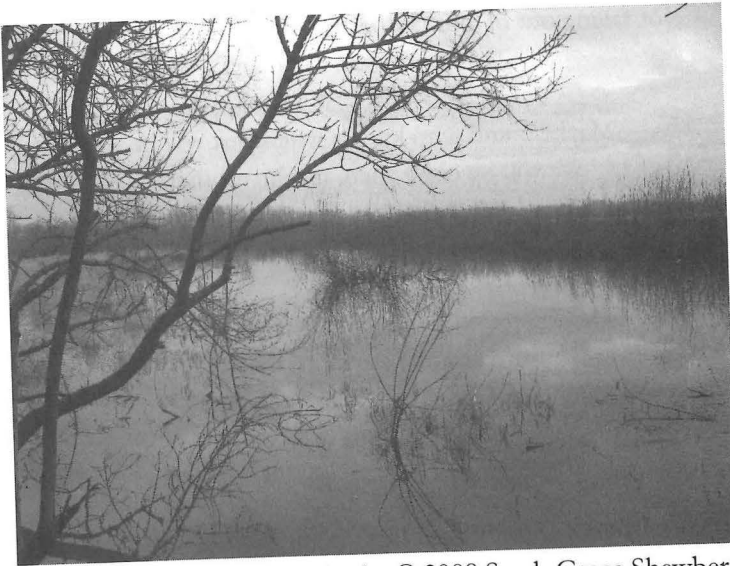
She's crying again and I hate her for it. "You're stronger than this," I hiss at my red-eyed twin. She replies with tears. Silently cursing her, I press my body against the counter, leaning down so my forehead rests against the mirror. Shutting my eyes dissolves her face into nothing. I wish I could shut my mind as easily and obliterate her forever.

"Wow, someone forgot to take their Prozac this morning," my sarcastic inner critic comments in response. I am about to tell this voice where to put its sentiments when the mirror vanishes and I find myself falling through ink. It fills my eyes, my nose, my throat. I'm drowning in a sea of invisible sand. The shock of finding myself hurling through the dark innards of my mirror plus the absence of oxygen quickly equals a lack of consciousness.

I wake in a fog, the variety that materializes on cold December days just before sunrise. Mornings like this always make me wish I could be a squirrel because then I would be in deep hibernation until spring instead of dragging my lead self out of a warm bed to wait for a bus in the cold depression of clouds. Lucky squirrels.

"Stop being jealous of small-brained, short-lived mammals and figure out where you are," I silently admonish myself. I glance down and see only gravel. My peripheral vision vaguely traces the dark silhouettes of withered trees. I expect to hear a crow or at least a seagull, but the barren landscape seems to have vanquished even these ubiquitous scavengers. The fog quickly penetrates my wonderfully absorbent cotton sweatshirt. The clammy, clinginess of the damp shirt is made even more enjoyable by the almost arctic climate. It is almost a relief to see a figure moving towards me through the fog.

"Where the hell am I?" I shout as soon as she is within conversational distance. It's not much of a greeting, but gray icy mist doesn't exactly fill my being with joy. Her gray eyes flicker with something that vaguely resembles amusement.



*Passage through the Marshes* © 2008 Sarah Grace Shewbert



*Looking-Glass* © 2008 Sarah Grace Shewbert



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“You must see this place to know what it is.”  
sibylline answer to my curse flavored inquiry. Just what I was looking for.

She is disturbingly calm and anemic. She could obviously use a blood transfusion or at least more leafy, green vegetables in her diet. She is a portrait that’s been through the washing machine a few too many times. All her colors have been leached away, leaving various concentrations of pale ash to form her eyes, face and almost white blond hair. A dark gray cloak envelopes her thin form, obscuring the rest of her.

“Well, I see it’s a fog shrouded wasteland apparently devoid of life which I reached by falling through a mirror. Based on these observations I can only conclude that I’ve spent far too much time watching anime and been turned into a character in an allegory as punishment. I’m not saying I don’t deserve this, but if the author of this bizarre piece could get to the point before I die of either hypothermia or boredom I would really appreciate it.”

“Sarcasm isn’t going to help you find your way. I suggest you pay more attention to your surroundings.” She gestures to her right.

My eyes instinctively follow this helpful hint and its accompanying hand sign. In response, the fog oddly lifts to reveal a small pool of water. It is a perfect mirror of silver gray.

*The mist should be thicker around the water, not thinner,* I think. Maybe that crack about being in an allegory was closer to the truth than I thought. Clearly, I am in a place where trivia such as logic and scientific laws no longer apply.

“What is this place?”

The too high voice responds, “Lethe.”

Of course, Lethe. I always knew I was headed for the Greek underworld.

“Nice to meet you. Persephone, queen of the dead I presume? A little far from Hades, aren’t we?” My attempt at humor does not go over well.

“My name is Mara, actually.” She seems slightly offended.

Of all the Greek myths I could have stumbled into I had to pick this one. Lethe, the spring where the dead drink to forget

their previous lives. But where is the three-headed dog? Crap, I always knew my fascination with Greek mythology would be my downfall. That nonsensical thought makes as much sense as this place. Only a few conclusions are possible, either I am dead and the Greeks were right all along, or I’m dreaming, or I’ve finally lost it. I lean towards the latter of these three options.

Mara’s cold laugh breaks through my thoughts. “The answer is none of the above. You are here because you issued an invitation and I graciously accepted. Wish hard enough for forgetfulness and it’s not too hard to find this place.”

“Well thanks, but I think this place is disorienting enough without deleting all my memories. This doesn’t strike me as a good place to be helpless in.”

“You’re already helpless; there is no escaping once you come here. Isn’t this what you’ve wished for? To forget?”

“No. Why would I want to forget who I am?”

That hideous laugh again. She squats down and runs her skeletal hand over the water; this creates a small channel for a moment, then swirling ripples.

“Look and remember why you wish to forget.”

More like look if you ever want this story to end. Whatever, there isn’t anything else to do. I lean over and stare into the gray. The ripples coalesce into a mirror; I see my face first and then bits of my life dance across its surface.

I sit in my living room on an old brown couch and listen to the chattering engine of my Dad’s pickup. In the past, my brother and I would scream, “Dad’s home,” and rush to the garage to welcome him. But this time he is departing, not arriving; he won’t ever come home again. I can still hear the hollow thunk and the rustle of the brown paper bag as he packed up his hand lotion and shaving cream. I do not cry. It isn’t worth crying over, they said. Nothing is really changing because no one is really leaving. It’s selfish to cry over a non-event. But I still hear the garage door open and close and the truck pulling away.

Ripples, a new mirror, scene two.

“WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING, SIR!?”

My step-dad screams like an ancient Roman in the Coliseum; he wants blood. He throws my brother against the wall, pins him there and keeps yelling. My brother is fear personified. His face

is wrinkled and taut with it. His blue eyes are wide and his body ridged with it. He clasps his hands together and draws himself in for protection like a turtle without a shell. Every molecule of him asks, "What did I do?" He tries to tuck his face away from the shouts but that just makes my step-dad scream louder, push harder. His striped shirt tears, unable to support him and the scene plays on. I stand by, gorgonized into a solitary audience.

Ripples again, a new mirror, scene three.

My step-dad grips my leg so I can't get away. He tickles the bottoms of my feet. I'm in agony in seconds. My foot cramps into knots and burns. I instinctively try to kick myself free from this hot iron; I am not in control of my body. Even if I was, what chance does an eleven year old girl have against a fifty year old man twice her weight? I beg him to stop. My eyes tear, I can barely breathe for the fire in my feet. His hand moves up my leg.

Ripples, a new mirror, scene four.

"No! Stop it!" I scream. Unable to bear the cataract of memories from eight to sixteen pouring into my mind after a just a few water projected home movies, I seize a handful of Lethe's gravel and squeeze it with all my might. The sharp rocks dig into my skin, binding me to the present reality. Pain abolishes the innumerable scenes for one precious moment.

"I'm sorry I had to do that." Pity, disgust and amusement dance in her voice.

Like hell she is. So sorry to exploit me, just like all of them. I fling the handful of gravel at her. She takes it all in the face and laughs.

"Oh no, my darling; it's not that easy."

A thin trickle of blood runs down her face. She catches the drops on her tongue. But the cut is on my cheek and it's my mouth that tastes like metal.

"We are one, you and I."

I shake my head.

Her voice is softer now.

"I'm sorry, but it's true. They all fight at first, but in the end I always win. You see, I can not live without consuming something alive and I must survive." She contorts her ashen face into a hungry caricature of a smile.

"Just drink and you won't feel a thing when I devour you," she promises soothingly, like a mother humming a lullaby. "You'll forget and then you will cease to be. Isn't that what you want anyway? You've never had the strength to endure this; you've just pretended all these years. It can all end now, no more nightmares, no more memories, no more false facades of smiles while you scream inside. I'll see to it that you don't suffer anymore."

Lethargy overtakes me. I'm so tired of fighting the Hydra of memory, of yelling at the girl in the mirror and screaming at the sarcastic critic in my head. Tired of the cheerful receptionist persona I create to hide from the world. I'm almost nothing; why not take this final step and blot out my worthless existence? What a relief to succumb at last, to let all the demons rush in and tear me to pieces. She drapes her skeletal arms around me and helps me to my knees as I collapse. I cup my hands and fill them with the water; it must be icy but I'm so numb by now that it feels warm.

A sudden blast of wind cuts through the numbness and fog, it is so piercingly cold I feel naked; a shudder goes through me and I spill the water with a groan. As the wind caresses my hair, I feel a sudden burst of life fill me.

A silent whisper, soft as an embrace and strong as diamond, "Daughter, live!"

"No!" I stare into her lifeless eyes and defy her. "No."

I am terrified because someone wants me to live. Terrified and comforted. Neither emotion makes sense. Drowning in a pool of memory, I have been thrust up from the bottom long enough to snatch a mouthful of air; my escape is suddenly clear. Somehow, I know that I must embrace Mara; it's the only thing that can save us both.

I wrap my arms around her and find myself in a skeleton's grip. Screams fill my ears, mine and hers as we merge into one. There is a horrible crack and she becomes a thousand shards of mirror which rush into me. I spit blood onto the gravel. I try to breathe but my throat has been transmuted into a swollen river of liquid iron. My heart pulsates erratically; life is gushing out of all the holes gouged into me. There are too many wounds. I'm caught in the undertow of a red ocean which

quickly deepens to black.

I awake; someone is cradling me on a hillside surrounded by grass bright with its youth. The air smells of buds and water. The dawn horizon is a bash where lavender and rose salsa with tangerine and gold; these brash publicists of the sun mingle with the more restrained navy profiles of mountains and the deep emerald outlines of evergreens. The river below mirrors all the color-filled steps of their dance. Mara and Lethe have vanished though my heart is still on adrenaline's treadmill for a few breathless seconds. It's as if I have stepped from a pitch black room into full sunlight; the vivid shock of spring and sunrise forces my overwhelmed eyes to close. I drift towards sleep.

"Drink." The voice of the wind speaks again.

A cup is pressed to my lips; I take a small sip and recoil from the bitter taste of red wine. I attempt something like a shake of my head which must look comical given the state I'm in.

"Drink; you need this," the voice urges.

I don't have the strength to fight. I sip slowly. The bitter tang of the wine fades as its warmth fills me. Still nestled in his arms I am almost completely limp.

He hands me bread.

"Eat."

I sit up enough to tear off a piece. If I focus on the brown of the bread I can bear to keep my eyes open. A gnawing hunger seasons the food. I taste every grain of salt and the nutty earthiness of every kernel of wheat. At some point, I must see him since he is so close. But later, I will not be able to describe him. All that exists in my memory is a vague impression of tan skin and a beauty that makes all my words seem like the ramblings of a monkey with a broken pencil trying to explain physics.

"Who are you?" I ask.

I feel him smile. "I will be telling you all your life. You are mine now, not Mara's."

"Why did all this happen?"

His embrace tightens slightly. "The time for that answer has not yet come."

None of this makes any sense at all. I have tumbled

through a mirror, wound up in Hades with a vampire, died in a hail of glass shards and been reborn in a spring wilderness. All I know for sure is that I live and I am held. This is strangely comforting.

"So I have to go back then?"

"Yes."

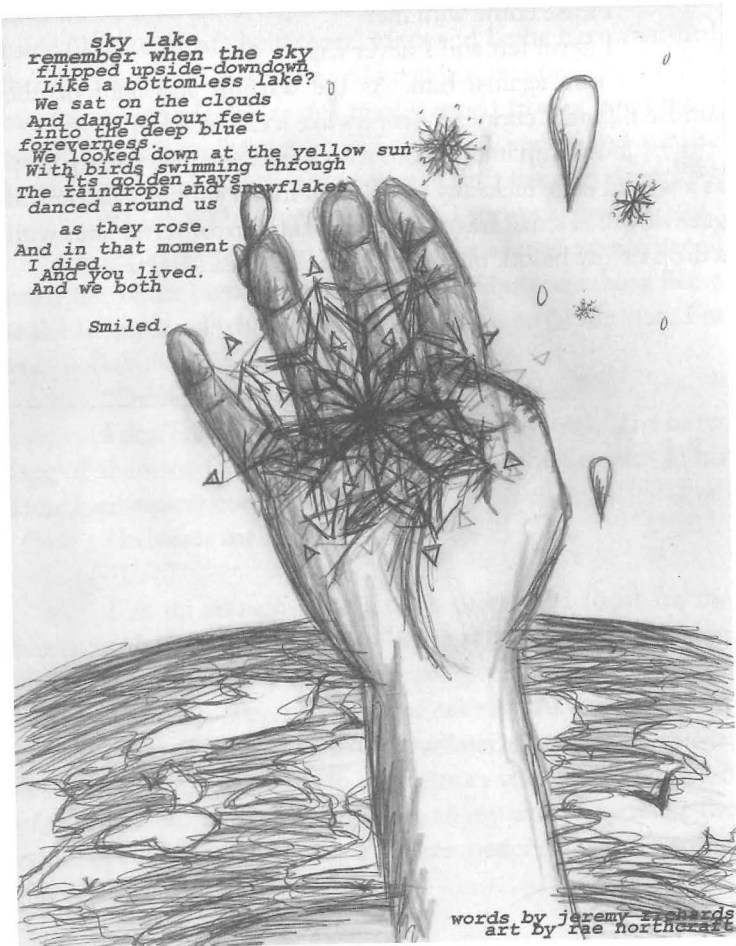
"Please come with me?"

"I never left and I never will."

I lean against him. As the warmth and light of the sunrise fill me, I curl up in its rays like a cat and sleep.

I wake up in my room with a start and give a sharp gasp as a jagged edge nicks my palm. I jolt into a sitting position and gaze down. A small fragment of broken mirror terminates with a drop of my blood; my breath tastes of bread and wine.

Johanna Stephens



Skylake © 2008 Jeremy Richards and Rae Northcraft

Never the way it could have been  
Words and worlds with you all penned  
With ink on paper - never rots  
Tears and shards and heavy blots  
Broken thoughts but hearts are true  
Even when I think of you  
Lost in heaven - spent in hell  
Left to wonder at your spell  
Truth be told and sun goes down  
Letters ever turning brown  
With the dusk comes purple dawn  
Throats and tongues with searing yawn  
Language fails and type is worse  
Songs too cheap with sordid verse  
At your grave I bow in shame  
Undeserving of your name



## STILL

*Alexandra Woolner*

Broken down  
on the road,  
the car in the sun--  
my back arched,  
still.  
I am this car  
doing what I do,  
going. Where?  
Until one day  
my belts tear  
my metal flesh is pierced  
my block cracks  
my body rots  
too much to fix  
too little to work with, and I sit  
broken in the sun, and  
still.

## WIND

*Jeremy Richards*

Wind.  
Why did you waft away  
At the simple statement of  
"Let me explain"?  
Now you are gone to bed  
And I am sitting here,  
In the middle of the ocean.  
Going nowhere  
Without you.

**PRESENT TENSE**

*Jennifer Allen*

Small words mesmerize.

*Hello.*

*Oh.*

slip from our lips  
smooth and impenetrable  
as chestnuts.

Under formica,  
twenty digits curve inward,  
spelling out suppositions  
on our palms. Then:

*because,*

*goodbye,*

and our fingers unfurl  
from their fiddlehead grips.

Our arms slide up like levers to wave,  
then fall with the weight of woodcuts,  
hands pressing scenes into silence  
on the flats of our thighs.



*Fleur* © 2008 Samantha Billups



*Off the Map* © 2008 Samantha Billups

## HE ASKED WHAT MY SIGH MEANT

Christina Busby

my love is  
ovular,  
a succulent fruit  
dangling within.  
my fingers

tear at the skin.  
fruit falls,  
juices and seeds  
bleed.

i was ripe,  
ready to be picked and  
devoured by his lips.

he said  
*no*

i rotted instead.

## APOCALYPSE PLEASE

Beth Holian

*It is the year 3008. The government has become a corrupt state, ruled by a band of radicals formed from a merge of the Democratic and Republican parties in 2056. The states were dissolved and formed into republics, based on time zones. New laws were passed which required the removal of ovaries from a woman in favor of periodical shots to guarantee "normal development." Eggs were taken from the ovaries and placed inside incubators until they were mature enough to be fertilized from a general sperm supply provided by monthly drives in which all males are required to participate. Children produced from this method were more docile and simple minded, allowing them to follow direction and order without question.*

*In 2078, a small group of rebels broke into and destroyed the lab, creating chaos throughout the republic. The rebels then created a generation of children that had free will, who were carefully integrated into the system of non-thinkers. This generation became known by association with several violent movements that were led against the government, which led to a war in 2089. Most of the rebels were killed in the war, but those that survived formed an underground association of bounty hunters called EVAs, dedicated to restoring order to the former United States. This is their story.*

May rolled over, brushed her long blond hair out of her face, and stared at the small red numbers on the clock next to her bed. She had another three minutes before the police chief came into the barracks and woke them up. Rolling back over on her other side, she reached carefully under the bed and grasped her shoes. Feeling around inside she touched a piece of paper and pulled it out, sliding it carefully into the waistband on the lower half of her sleeping tunic. May managed to do all of this before a very large, tall woman entered at the far end of the room, swinging the doors open violently, sending small pieces of plaster in a spray onto the beds near the door. A smaller but equally intimidating woman stood a few feet behind the first, hands clasped behind her.



“UP, ladies. We have a big day today,” she boomed. May swore there were people in China that could have heard her and wondered why she needed to be so loud when her entry had no doubt awakened everyone in the sleeping quarters, but kept these comments to herself. The chief began to walk slowly down the aisle between the beds, the assistant behind her, glancing first towards the girls on her right and then those on her left. As the assistant passed May, the two women glared daggers at each other. May was constantly at odds with her, and May had to wonder if for some reason the assistant felt threatened by her. The assistant would never know, but she did have a reason to fear May, because unknown to her, May was not like the other women in the room – May still had her ovaries and May had also been assigned to kill her.

After the chief had made her way around the room and satisfied herself that no one had escaped in the night, she ordered the women out of their beds and to the showers. Each woman dutifully grabbed her towel and government issued soap, fell into an orderly line, and was led to the shower room. The shower room resembled a Nazi gas chamber: there were a few large lights hanging from the ceiling and shower spigots along the walls and above them with the lights. The only way that it did not resemble a Nazi gas chamber was that water always came out of the spigots, since gassing had been outlawed some years ago after the war. The women were ushered into the shower chamber like cattle and the doors were closed behind them. A few minutes after the doors were closed, a stiff spray of very cold water rained on them from the spigots. Working quickly, they scrubbed themselves with the soap, which smelled heavily of lye, the coarse texture of which made their skin red and raw, and then rinsed before the water was turned off five minutes after they entered. The women were then herded into the preparation room, where their sleeping tunics had been replaced with their long sleeved, short skirted, red work tunics and knee length black boots. No one talked as they dressed. May found her towel labeled with her serial number, dried herself off, and put on the clean tunic. Making sure no one was looking, she took the paper (previously stashed in the waistband of her sleeping tunic and then transferred quickly to her soap container

before entering the showers) and moved it from the soap holder and placed it under her breasts before zipping up her work tunic. After everyone was dressed, the women were then taken to the medical clinic next to the shower chamber for shots. This is what May had been waiting three weeks for. Not the hormone injections, but a chance to meet with her contact.

When her number was called, May got up out of the white plastic chairs and followed a warden through a white door into the examining room. May went behind a white curtain and changed into a hospital gown, careful to remove the paper and put it somewhere the contact would find it. She came back from behind the curtain and sat stiffly on the small examining table. The warden stood next to the door, supervising the entire check-up. The doctor entered the room, pulling a clean set of gloves on as he came. He showed no expression as he sat on a small stool in front of her and asked her to spread her legs and put her feet up on the table. The session was all business; no small talk was made as the doctor carefully examined her lower regions, taking the paper out and slipping it carefully into his sleeve as he turned to his tray. He turned back around with a long needle with which he gave her a shot, enabling her period to be suspended. May took a deep breath as the doctor delivered the shot and then relaxed as he pulled back, got up, and removed his gloves as he exited the exam room. May closed her legs, slid off the exam table, and returned behind the white curtain to put back on her work tunic.

May followed the other women in front of her as each in turn took various plates of food at the first meal. None of it looked very appetizing, but it was supposedly giving them nutrients that their bodies no longer provided for them. At the end of the food line, there were small cups of pills and vitamins that the women were required to take also. Regardless of the fact that she did not need them, May took them anyway and had to hope that she didn't come down sick from having too much of something or nothing in her body. After taking a cup of vitamins, May moved to the dining hall and sat down at one of the far tables and was joined shortly by a slim woman with long brown hair that she had knotted to keep out of her face. May

was jealous of her in this respect; the most she could do to keep her hair out of her face was to tuck it behind her ears.

"Looking forward to target practice today?" the brunette asked.

"Not particularly."

"You're the best at it. I thought you would enjoy it more."

"I do it too much, if the truth be told. I've been handling a gun for years."

"Is that why you joined the force?"

"You could say that. I joined the force to put my talent to use."

The brunette paused and ate some of the meal in front of her, swallowed a couple of the vitamins, and then looked back up at May. "You're different from the other women here."

"Why do you think that?" May asked between bites.

"You seem different. You don't ask as many questions. You know what is going on."

"I don't know any more than you do."

"You just seem to know more; that is all."

May shrugged and went back to her food and her vitamins. The two women continued to eat in silence until the bell rang for them to turn in their trays and proceed to the target practice range.

Boom, boom, boom.

Boom, boom.

Boom, boom, boom.

Boom, boom.

Guns went off in sequence, muffled only by the thick headphones each of them wore in addition to the protective glasses. May shot bull's-eyes most of the time, much to her boredom and everyone else's satisfaction. Though she tried to hide her natural talent with a gun, there was no real way around it. She had shot through the ranks and was just short of taking the trials to get her badge and becoming an officer, just because she could handle a gun. In May's opinion, the new government had an extremely warped sense of priorities. She felt hot breath on the back of her neck as she reached down to grab another

cartridge and fire another set of rounds. From the reflection in her glasses, she was able to see the outline of the chief and her assistant. The chief watched as May fired off another perfect set of bull's-eye rounds and then moved onto the next cubicle. The assistant watched as she reached for another cartridge and then leaned forward, took the headphone from her ear, and whispered to her.

"Meet me in the coliseum at midnight. Bring a gun."

"Why?" asked May quietly as she reloaded.

"Unfinished business," she spat, replacing the earpiece roughly and following the chief to the next cubicle. May stared blankly ahead at her target for a moment before she finished her rounds. She then removed her headphones and glasses and set them on the shelf to her right as she exited the cubicle. Before she left, she quickly swept a few extra cartridges into her work bag, along with the gun, hoping and praying that no one would notice they were missing. Otherwise, almost a year of undercover work would be completely wasted.

May walked quietly through the shadows between the barracks as she made her way to the church. Even if you were meeting with a commanding officer, it was forbidden to be out of bed after seven o'clock at night. The entire camp shut down about an hour later, at which time all lights in the barracks were to be out and all recruits in their bunks. After May was sure that everyone had dozed off around nine, she carefully put back on her work tunic and black boots, took the gun and extra cartridges out from her work bag and slipped quietly out of the barracks. She first decided to go to the church, since it was early. Waiting until the searchlight passed over her hiding place, she ran quietly towards the church. She made it inside just as the searchlight made another pass over the yard and shut the door behind her. May took a deep breath and turned around slowly. In such an age where the government was permitted to perform the ludicrous acts that it did, it surprised May that there were still churches left. Before her were spread out at least fifty pews on either side of the main aisle, leading to a grand altar, behind which was erected a statue of the Virgin Mother holding her child, both framed in light. She made her way slowly towards the front of the church and knelt at the steps of the altar. Bowing

her head, she spoke softly to the darkness:

“Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death.”

May crossed herself and stood up slowly. From outside, there came the faint wail of sirens, which meant that the rest of the camp knew there were recruits out of bed. May swore under her breath, drew her gun, and quietly made her way out of the church.

May managed to get away from the church before the camp security officers got there, and made her way towards the far end of the camp towards the coliseum. She entered through the spectators's entrance near the top and made her way down slowly towards the fighting ring. Upon stepping into the ring, the stadium lights came on, giving her the impression that it was day and not the middle of the night. She looked around carefully and made note of all of the various pillars and walls behind which she could hide if she got in a tight spot. Finishing her visual circle around the ring, she spotted the assistant in the center of the ring. May ejected her empty cartridge, put in a fresh one, aimed her gun, and walked purposefully towards the center of the ring.

“I see you avoided the welcoming committee.” The assistant smiled, bemused. May said nothing and continued to stare her down.

“I find it interesting that you think that even if you are the best, you can stop death.”

“I said nothing of stopping death, merely skillfully avoiding it.”

“You cannot avoid it forever. We are born, thus we are destined to die.”

“In this day and age, there are few who are born, yet many are created. Regardless, yes, we are all destined to die, whether we be born or created.”

“Are you ready to die?”

“I'm looking forward to it.”

The assistant's eyes narrowed as she drew her gun. She fired at a point just past May's head, the bullet taking some of

Department: The Promethean, Revelation (2007-2008).  
May's hair as it flew past her.

“Another one bites the dust.”

“Not if the dust bites first.” May smiled.

Both women fired simultaneously, the assistant's bullet grazing May's shoulder and May's grazing the assistant's leg. May ran to the right and took shelter behind a large wall. Shots rang behind her as she ran and chipped the wall. She pulled the hammer and moving out briefly from behind the wall, made a pass at the assistant, who returned fire. May dodged bullets as she ran towards her, firing one bullet for every third the assistant fired. When May got close enough to fire a killing shot, the assistant swung her gun and connected with May's, throwing her sideways on top of her bad shoulder. The assistant got up quickly and ran towards her, delivering a swift kick into May's gut, which sent her rolling further away. She stopped on her back, her gun up, the assistant standing over her with the gun pointed down at her. She smiled down at her, ignoring the blood dribbling steadily down her leg.

“Hail May, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among gunners, and blessed are the bullets of your gun, stolen. Holy May, Mother of Justice,” the assistant began.

“Pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death,” May finished.

Click, the assistant cocked the hammer.

Click, May cocked her hammer.

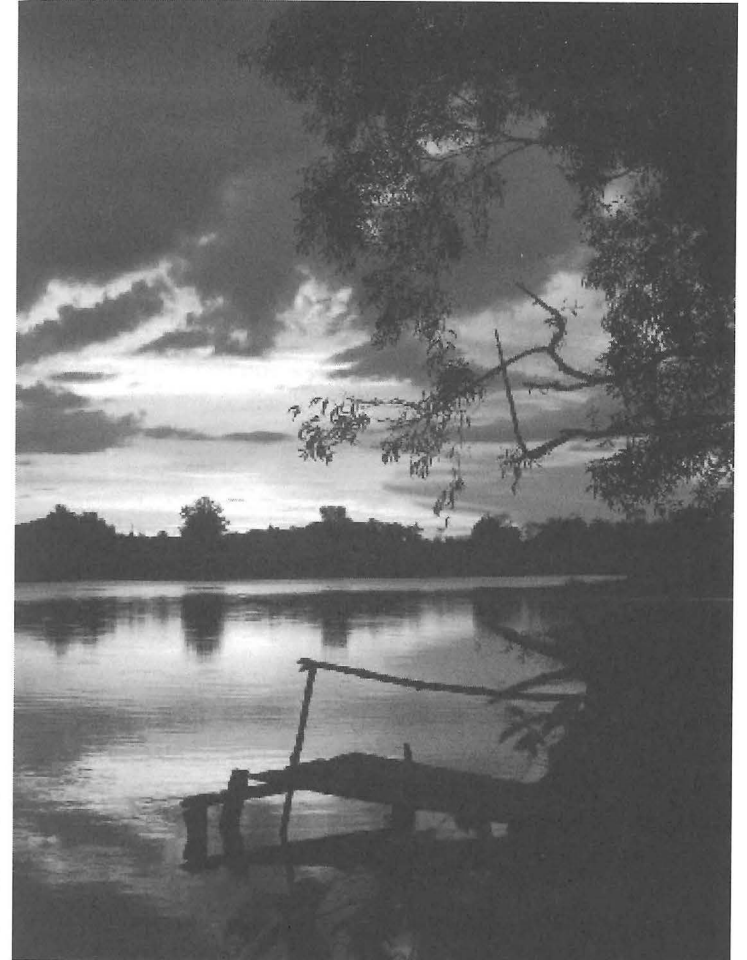
Boom.

## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO RICH

Bill Lynch

His yellow swing against spring grass  
was lauded as “regenerative”  
and he left the graveyard shift  
to toil in his own darkroom.  
We held his slides up to a bar lamp  
and drank to his future health,  
lost touch and moved away—

only to find he had taken up  
with the San Bernardino Sheriff,  
turning his eye to a circus  
of suffering riddled out on corpses.  
Blue faces in spasm,  
or lips limp with surrender,  
and—surprise—never any one  
from a natural cause.  
His work took root in the  
prosecutor’s syllogism,  
gained favor with the shiftless jury.  
He was trusted up to the point  
of disappearing and  
no one has heard of him since.



*Displaced Optimism* © 2008 Brooke Sahlstrom

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CAST

*Jennifer Allen*

*Begin at the end and work your way back.*

I.

Step back.

The scene dissolves  
into smooth  
grey stone.

II.

Close your eyes.  
What's absent  
burns shadows on the backs  
of your eyelids.

III.

Stare hard.  
Under each other's gaze,  
slowly fall apart—broken rusting  
tractors in a tidy field.

IV.

Walk the fence line. Pretend it's a tightrope.  
At the edges, the soil maps  
its memory of water, a brown puzzle  
as cracked as our conversation.

V.

Use your fingers. Can you feel the fractures?  
What seeps through them is carnal,  
invisible—a shining junction of shards  
under a microscope of sky.

## AFTER THE FIRST FROST

*Adam Leyrer*

entrapped, a forgotten summer's rain  
at the fire's greedy touch burst forth  
from the crackling pine branch, reeling  
in a fog beneath unfamiliar sky.

a hermit thrush sings like smoke  
perched with the harvest moon  
on the shoulder of a red alder; his notes  
grasp the night to stave  
this ashen relic, this wound I bound  
to the touch that never lingered,  
until your absence comes  
flooding over the coals.

far from the city's lights,  
carousing darkness drinks  
the remembered rain,  
in drops of wine the shy sweetness  
of cranberries after the first frost.

dear one, our hearth was sown beneath this sky,  
in this red clay, and shallow rocks  
from the creekbed strangled by the cold.  
your steady hands cradled the callow flame  
like a worried father; these hills are  
the weeping mother  
of a stillborn wind.

## EXPERT OPINIONS

*Daniel Cameron*

Mostly now a day is judged by its losses of time,  
like garments on a clothesline, its worth  
is assessed by how riddled it is with holes.  
Tug the fabric, pull it down – Can you get away with wearing it  
once more?

Through the tears, what glimpses  
will they see, of what skin, and how many opinions is that?

Same number as gentlemen's bets  
made on whether it will be sooner  
or later that you slip and expose yourself  
while trying to start again,  
from the edge of the bed,  
to the pantry,  
to the whirring chrysalis of the shower.  
Where could it have gone – the day, your day?  
Awoken in a wrong home perchance,  
not where it is supposed to be,  
fallen into a hundred holes, small and shameful,  
each one persistently life-proofed,  
quality tested by a professional crackup.

It has landed you, naked, in a superstitious  
place.

Call up customer service from that other world.  
Answer, though you were the one to ring.

Hey! Hello – are you studying one thought?  
Or racing to keep up with a flurry?  
Just tell me: Is anyone else – panic – is anyone  
else going to count themselves off?  
Yes. Your characters, they will survive you  
though they are embittered:  
keys, telephone, mirror.

Bus window. They will pay  
their respects like you did  
always, prematurely.

Even if mercy is a terrible thing to have tested.  
Even if you met them, chided them  
when you did not understand  
that you have yet to exhaust the ability to find  
meaning in anything, that you are only on the brink  
of the overwhelming  
innervation that is life.

## THE BROKEN UMBRELLA

*Amanda Overcash*

Slim and sleek, big and strong  
Let me protect you.  
A handsome pair you and I.

Through rain and sleet and snow  
I will be your constant companion.

Seasons gone and seasons come,  
I have sheltered you.  
But one night, in darkness  
The storm lashed out.  
I fought hard but was defeated.  
And you  
You unfaithful one  
Abandoned me, left me wounded  
By the side of the road.  
Without remorse you left me  
Broken, crumpled, dying in the wet grass.  
My pride is dust.  
No longer strong.  
I give comfort to no one.  
I give shelter to nothing.

## THE ATARA-ORN

*Kaithyn Montague*

(Author's Note: This piece contains Elven vocabulary that may require definition. "Atara" translates into mother, "Atara-Orn" into Mother-Tree, "Atar" into father, "tinu" into daughter, "Losse" is snow-white, and "Amin mela lle" is "I love you.")

"*Atara?*" the girl cried. Her large ice-blue eyes searched through the dark trees, frantically shifting from one area of dense underbrush to another. "Mother?" Her heart pounded, sounding out like a large drum in her elongated ears. She forcibly willed away the tears welling up in her eyes. *It's no use getting upset*, she told herself, *Atar says that the calm helps more than human-like impatience*. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and held it, intent on listening to her surroundings.

Beyond the ambiance created by the nightlife of the indigenous creatures among her, she heard small, tinny voices whispering in a dialect she could not quite make out. Her eyes snapped open. *The faeries! Of course!* She secured her bow to her back and ran for the large withered willow tree to the North. The Mother-tree, the Elven *Atara-Orn*, would have answers.

As the girl neared the tree, she noticed several balls of glowing blue fire following her approach. She slipped a smile, despite her increasing anxiety in her search. She stopped and leaned down to stare at one. Inside the circle of floating blue light hovered not fire at all, but rather a tiny humanoid figure, smiling while its small wings fluttered like a hummingbird.

"*Ask the Mother,*" it whispered in a strange language that the girl had to slowly translate as she mentally sifted through the languages her father had taught her. *Sylvan*, she thought, *it's the language of the forest, why wouldn't the pixie speak it?*

"But how did you..."

The pixie grinned at her and flew up higher to meet the girl on eye-level. "Childe, the Mother knows all that happens in her forest," it explained in Elvish. "She will know of the one you seek." The blue pixie giggled, emitting a sound like dropping coins into a pool of water, deep and yet incredibly sharp. It

buzzed in a loop around the girl's head once and flew off toward the willow tree.

The girl nodded her thanks and continued forward. The *Atara-Orn* sat upon a short incline, barely enough to be a hill, roots covered in tall deep-green grass. The dirt path the girl followed soon turned into an elaborate walkway with smoothed down ground lined with river-polished rocks. Her feet crunched on the dry earth as she continued. The withered face of the tree was gnarled with holes in the pattern of a very rudimentary and old face. The tree's smile sent a shiver down the girl's spine. *Is this really going to tell me what I need to bear?*

She kneeled into a reverent bow and waited for the *Atara-Orn* to acknowledge her. A great rumble sounded from in front of her and a husky voice, in the same strange woodland dialect as the pixie, called out: "*What seems to be troubling you, Childe?*"

The girl took a heavy breath before beginning to speak. "Mother of my father...of all," she replied in the tree's dialect with a slow but carefully imitated tongue, "I seek those who disturb your Elven children. Those who would wish to control your forest..."

"Is that...what you truly seek, Saffron?"

The girl's head flew up and she faced the withered tree.

"I..."

"Childe, I see and hear all in this forest..."

"They took my mother," Saffron replied, cutting off the willow's long-winded speech. She did not have much time.

The air around her grew frigid and the gnarled face of the tree seemed to frown. "To the East," it whispered. "Tread lightly and run quickly, daughter of Sunbow. Anoron's time grows faint."

Saffron's ice-blue eyes grew wide as she sat for a moment, stunned.

"Now!" The ground underneath her gave a slight shake, and she wasted no time jumping to her feet and running to the East. Saffron's long, wavy blonde hair flew behind her as she dodged around one tree and jumped over the low branches of another. She took no notice when the locks found themselves entangled in small branches. She kept running, taking the foliage with her.

Saffron neared a small clearing in the darkened wood and slowed her pace. As she slowed her breathing, she detected faint voices, and the creak of a bowstring. She unfastened her own from her back and slid an arrow out of its quiver and aimed toward the noise. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the voices.

"This is where we finally say goodbye, Anoron," a deep, delicate voice spoke in Elvish. *Mother? What is going on?* she wondered. Saffron heard the bowstring draw tighter.

Furrowing her brow, she released her arrow. Its dull wet thud was received with a startled scream. Saffron's eyes fluttered open and she ran forward. Upon entering the small clearing, ground glowing silver from reflected moonlight, her jaw dropped and she fought back tears. On the ground lay a sputtering elf, gasping for his last breaths, sucking in air to fill the void around his pierced heart. A heavy amount of blood had begun to pool around the wound. Saffron's face scrunched and she quickly looked away. On the other side of the clearing she spotted two dark figures running into the wood for cover. Her fingers on her bow twitched, but a cough from the nearby ground distracted her. Looking further to her side, she recognized the prone body of a short female elf, her dark hair splayed on the ground haphazardly. The woman lay on her side, clutching a large gaping wound in her groin. Blood pooled and had begun to congeal on the ground beside her. Anoron Sunbow lay, seized into a fetal position, skin growing pale from anemia.

Ignoring the male elf's hacking death rattle, she rushed to the bleeding form of her mother. She kneeled down and took her mother's body into her arms. "*Atara, you're bleeding,*" she whispered.

The older elf in her arms smirked before her face contorted momentarily with a light groan. Her eyes slowly opened, and Saffron noticed that they had started to glaze over. *Can she even see me? Does she know who came for her?* Saffron pondered.

"Saffron, I never intended this for you," Anoron said with a weak sigh.

"Intended what?" Saffron asked off-handedly as she searched for her mother's wound. She found her mother's hand clutching at a puckered hole from what she assumed was a



carelessly ripped out arrow in the elf's lower stomach. She gently brushed her mother's hand away and replaced it with firm pressure from her own, hoping to stop the flow of crimson liquid.

A hand lightly stroking the side of her face distracted her for a moment and she looked back at her mother's face.

"Saffron, you cannot save everyone. Death is a natural part of life, my darling *tinu*, and it is simply my time to face the opposite gift."

Saffron stopped trying to hold back her tears. "Atara, who did this?"

Anoron smiled at the question and shook her head. "Concern yourself not with revenge, Saffron. It does not become our kind."

"Anoron?" a voice cried in the distance. Saffron instantly recognized it as that of her father.

"This way, *Atar!*" Saffron called back. She heard footsteps through the dense underbrush of the West. A few moments later, a tall blond elf emerged; although he looked older than his daughter, his face revealed no age.

The elf's eyes widened at the sight of his mate in his daughter's seemingly frail arms. He knelt down in the same fashion as Saffron on the opposite side of his dying lover. Worry was etched around his large blue eyes as he stared in mute horror. "Anoron...what happened?"

The female coughed and reached up to her husband's face. Her right hand, the one formerly clutching her own side until Saffron had dutifully replaced it, left a deep red stain upon his cheek, but he noticed not and reached out to grasp it in his own as it fell back down to the moonlit grass. "The anger we thought we left behind when I ran away from my family never ceased, Faran."

Saffron sat back, holding her mother until her father nodded and took Anoron into his own arms. Salty tears left trails down her face as she watched, helpless, her mother fade. "Anoron, they can never be forgiven for this," Faran replied, hugging the female's increasingly limp body to his own.

"They must be," she gasped. "No more fighting. There has been enough blood spilt tonight."

Faran looked up from his wife to Saffron, almost

pleading for a different answer. Saffron's eyes never left the ground. "Anoron, you cannot mean that..."

Her free hand rose and she pressed a finger to his lips. "Stop. I love you both far too much to see this continue," she answered with a forcible cough. A light smatter of blood graced her paling lips. She clenched her face in pain and Faran pulled her closer. Saffron sat silent.

A heavy sigh escaped Anoron's lips and her body went cold. Saffron stood as her father placed the body lightly to the ground. A tear fell as he whispered, "*Amin mela lle*," and rose.

"*Atar...*" Saffron whispered, "I couldn't...she..."

Faran Sunbow's head rose as he directed attention from his mate to his daughter. He walked over to her and clutched her into a tight hug. "*Tinu*, this was not your fault."

"Then why does it hurt so much?" she asked, muffled by the embrace.

Faran's gaze rose from the crest of his daughter's head to the body of the male elf that lay at the edge of the clearing, arrow still protruding from his heart. "You did what you could, Saffron. That is all anyone could ever ask of you."

My mother died forty years ago. Over half of a human lifespan. The pain never really healed, but I suppose things like that hardly ever do. I had been too young to understand at the time, what my mother's death really meant...what death itself meant. My father took it much harder than I did. He, unlike his sapling of a daughter, understood the finality of death, and the mortality it represented. Faran Sunbow, son of the hunters of the Swallowed Oak Forest, and his family were supposed to live in the halls of his ancestors for ages beyond recognition, untouched by such human emotion. But his plan had been ruined by one thing he did not intend.

Safety was never a guarantee.

This had been assured by my mother Anoron, daughter of Snake Forest elves, and her uncharacteristic impetus to escape with my father to his homeland. She was "safer" there, away from the crime, the disease, the poverty, and the squalor caused by men who dared to call themselves elves—men who gave up their immortality and ethereal roots for greed and power. Elves do not care for power; we care about peace.

At least, that's what my father had always taught me.

Bloodshed is not appealing. There is life in everything, and life itself is to be cherished. This I understood forty years ago. However, my life had never been touched by death, except in the necessity of the hunt. And that was all that hunting was: a necessity. Death of intelligent life, humans, and especially elves, seems to hit harder. The food chain only reaches up so high on a very rare occasion. My father, however, had witnessed the death of his own sire, though under more natural circumstances than my dear mother. He knew that with the hunt, the prey would fight back. And the predator was not always the victor.

My mother told me once that she could hear my father's voice on the wind. I told her that he wasn't dead and that couldn't be possible, but she simply smiled and told me that I would understand with time. He whispered tales of love, longevity, and family... everything my mother had always wanted and never had witnessed. I understood why my mother adored her husband. But what had attracted him to her—the daughter of elves no longer caring for the roots he so firmly believed in and fought for—still continues to perplex me. I never have asked. I understand that he still pines over her, and he wanders his forest, forever lonely, gripped evermore by the pain of losing nearly everything he loved. Perhaps it had been her beauty and innocence among such squalid conditions, but only in part. I think it was more likely that he wanted to save her, like he strove (and still does) to save everything.

My mother told me that night that I couldn't save everything. There in that one moment lay her contrast to my father's everlasting wish. Had they ever had the same conversation? Undoubtedly. But I also doubt that Faran had seriously listened. He longed for ideals and Anoron represented the discouraging fact that his visions were simply that. Ideal.

My father's beautiful, ethereal face forever hardened that night, some 40 years ago, and he never truly recovered. The glow waned. He played the role well, but I suppose that if life is to be everlasting in his forest, so will the grief that follows his ideal's antithesis. Anoron had been Faran's brilliant dawn. He was her hunter, the protector of his personal sunrise—her Sunbow.

And Saffron, well, she represented the golden glow that

linked them together eternally, through dawn and setting sun. As long as his link still lives, his love will never die. I cannot take that away from him, nor from his memories. My mother told me that revenge is not becoming of elves, and I'm positive that my father would agree.

However, that does not stop the fact that their link is the one to deal justice, not the protectorate or the dawn. It was... *is*... my duty to set things right, and if it takes me an eternity to do so, fine. Mortality holds a grim fear for me, but men who steal immortality do not deserve to keep it. If the necessity of the hunt ceased to affect me, as it did when I was very young, I do not see why seeking out the monsters that killed my mother should be any different. My father had never wanted me to be connected with death, and this paranoia still resides. I still cherish the life of everything: the elves, the humans, the trees, the wildlife... everything... even the hunted.

But justice is necessary. And my father had always said that hunting was also a necessity. Do the two go hand-in-hand? Is it really worth the effort to hunt those who have already forfeited their immortality for the greed represented only by the worst of humanity?

They executed the dawn. There is no going back to the beginning. My mother had always represented beginnings. That is usually where the happiest part of any story lies, and for my family this had been no different.

I believe my father realizes this too.

After the death of his beloved, he took about a month to himself, and mourned in solitude. I could have told him in many different ways that he would not be consoled by lone memories, but rather those who could remember with him and help him move on, but I let it pass knowing that he would come to this conclusion on his own. I know my father well enough for that.

And he did.

Instead of forever languidly lying in mourning, he came back to his daughter and, likewise, to what he loved: his forest and the hunt. Of course, by this time he had already instructed me on the use of the bow, and the life of the forest. Hunting by necessity and not necessarily pleasure.

He instead decided to instruct me in communing with

Department: The Promethean, Revelation (2007-2008)

the forest itself, finding ways in which to hide more efficiently, track more carefully and accurately, and finally when all else failed, to seek the advice from the trees themselves.

His jaw nearly fell to the ground when I told him about the *Atara-Orn*.

Apparently, as he told me that day when I informed him of this, speaking that immediately to so powerful an entity was a rare gift. "Blessed" is what he called it.

"Saffron, you need to calm your breathing more before you take a shot. It's throwing your arrows off center," Faran lectured, standing behind his daughter as she drew her bow.

She gave a slight nod before taking a deep breath and slowly releasing it. She released the arrow. About fifty yards ahead hung a makeshift target in a large oak tree. The force of the arrow sent it swinging wildly back and forth, but one thing was apparent to Faran. Saffron's arrow pierced the center.

He smiled and squeezed her shoulder as she exhaled and lowered the bow. "Better. Remember to take your time with your targets when you can. Patience is what separates us from the hasty lives of mortals."

"*Atar?*" Saffron asked, turning around and staring her father in the face. His thin aquiline face was etched with puzzlement.

Faran raised an eyebrow. "Yes, Saffron?"

"What happens when I don't have time for patience?"

He smirked. "Then you make real use of those eyes I gave you."

She looked up at the elf whose features resembled hers in a nearly identical manner. "But what if..."

Faran laughed. "So many 'what ifs!' *Tinnu*, trust your instincts, that's what they're for."

Saffron smiled slightly, but the look of confusion remained. "But what do I do when eyes, and ears, and nose alone are not useful?"

"Saffron, they're always useful."

She nodded. "I understand that, *Atar*, but the senses can be betrayed."

He smiled. "You're picking up quickly, *Tinnu*. What you should hope then is that you're not fighting alone."

"Why wouldn't I be?"

Faran sat down on a large rock next to his daughter.

"For ages it had been the duty of our family to protect those who may not be able to protect themselves, Saffron..."

"Lot of good that did..."

Silence was held in the stagnant air for a moment before Faran replied. "Saffron, that was not anyone's fault. Your *atara* died because of the malicious intent of men posing as elves. We did what we could. One event should not skew your morals so. I know you wish you could have saved her, just as I do, but the past is unchangeable. Hold her in your memories, but do not let this overshadow you."

Saffron nodded. "Yes, *Atar*."

Faran nudged his head back to the now still target hanging in front of the pair. "Now I want you to try it again."

Saffron nodded and turned around, drawing her bow.

My father taught me a valuable lesson that day. One does not have to fight alone, but I should always be capable to do so. And if there are not other people around, I could always rely on nature. Because of the longevity of elves, it was not uncommon for children to be put out on their own to complete the learning process of their trade, if this was necessary. There must have been an incredible amount of trust between my parents to have my father gone on so many quests as he was when I was very young.

It wasn't long before my father sent me out on my own. He told me that I had learned all I could from him and our city for the time being, and that he thought it more beneficial to send me out alone for a few years. Upon the eve of my leaving, I walked into my bedroom and found his bow laid gracefully on my bed with a note.

"Saffron, my darling *tinnu*, this is the hardest time for any parent, but I know that with this gift you'll be much safer than with your trainer. The bow belonged to my father, and his father before him. This has been a tradition in the Sunbow family for centuries. It comes from a branch of the *Atara-Orn* and has been cherished among her children as a weapon against oppression. I trust you will use it well, Saffron, and that it will bring you home safely."

That had been only thirty years ago, though it seems like an eternity since I've seen home. I hope *Atar* isn't too worried. Is he doing all right alone?

For years I wandered my own forest, living on my own hunting skills, and having conversations with the faeries. I kept hoping they would bring news of the same men, or cohorts of, who had been responsible for my mother's death. Despite my mother's chiding that day, my bow fingers itched at the thought of final vengeance. I couldn't ever call it lonely, *per se*, but I do miss the sunlit halls of my family home. I lived alone like this until one day (I suppose it was about five years ago) the faeries alerted me of a poaching expedition in the nearby wood of Firesbane. My father had told me it was my duty to protect those who could not protect themselves.

I was on a mission.

The bitter cold nipped at Saffron's skin through the gaps in her armor as she trekked through the frostbitten forest of Firesbane. She had run across a group of dead explorers that she could only assume to be the poachers that she had heard about from the faeries. Strung around the camp had been large amounts of strangely colored gray bark that Saffron recognized as matching the surrounding trees.

Was that what they had been looking for?

The bodies, Saffron noticed upon further inspection, had been torn apart at the neck, but were otherwise unmarred. She salvaged the unused arrows from their equipment and followed the light footprints they had made in the snow.

Several yards ahead, she saw a sawed down tree with much of its bark stripped. She nodded to herself, noting she had gone in the right direction. However, she noticed a second set of footprints that were too small to belong to a human. Paw prints. They soon met up with the long human strides, and followed the trail she had just come from.

Deciding to follow the paw prints instead, she changed direction. She ambled through the snowy wood and the bitter cold, finding it hard, even with her enhanced eyesight to make out much of her surroundings through an increasing white fog.

Saffron heard a low growl in front of her and she stopped. She dropped down on her knees, and through the fog,

saw a feral gray wolf stalking up to her, still growling and baring its long white teeth, still dripping with fresh blood.

Saffron stared the wolf in the eyes. "Easy boy, I'm not here to hurt anything," she whispered as it neared. She took a cautious half-step forward. The wolf backed away. Saffron frowned. Had it understood her? Remembering that Elvish may still have sounded foreign to the creature, she tried to recall the words in Sylvan, the language of the wood creatures, which might calm the creature down. "I'm not like the men," she said. "I'm not trying to hurt anything." The wolf cocked its head slightly and whimpered. It took a step closer.

Saffron smirked. "What's your name?" she asked the wolf. It took another step forward and buried its nose in the snow. Saffron reached out and petted it on the snout. It snuggled into her warm hand and she moved up to between its ears.

"Snow?" she asked it. The wolf didn't respond and only encouraged more of her coddling. Saffron sat down and continued to pet it. "How about 'Losse?'"

Losse shrugged off Saffron's hand and began to sniff around, and led her further into the forest. She assumed the wolf approved.

My father had been right. I didn't have to fight alone. Losse has accompanied me for the last five years, and does still, even now as I sit in this rented room in the port town of Stillwater. I arrived yesterday, traveling away from my beloved forests on a random tip that there may be elves here that could direct me to my mother's vengeance. Though, I'm coming to an increasing awareness in the last thirty years since leaving home that my father's "duty" to punishing the oppressive is far more appealing than hunting. But if I come across those pseudo-elves, I do not think that my morals will get the best of me. Mother's warning or not.



*White Lace* © 2008 Cassandra Shaw



*Ladybug* © 2008 Cassandra Shaw

*Letter from Johanna Stephens, Managing Editor*

During the fall semester of 2007, *The Promethean* staff decided to stage a writing contest for all students, faculty, and staff. We posed two pieces of art as muses. Contestants were asked to write about one of the muses using their choice of poetry or prose.

Former *Promethean* advisor Anna Dzirkalis agreed to judge the entries and award them first, second, and third places. We are extremely grateful to her not only for her expertise in judging our contest, but also for her leadership in expanding and improving *The Promethean*, an already remarkable publication, during the 2005-2006 academic year.

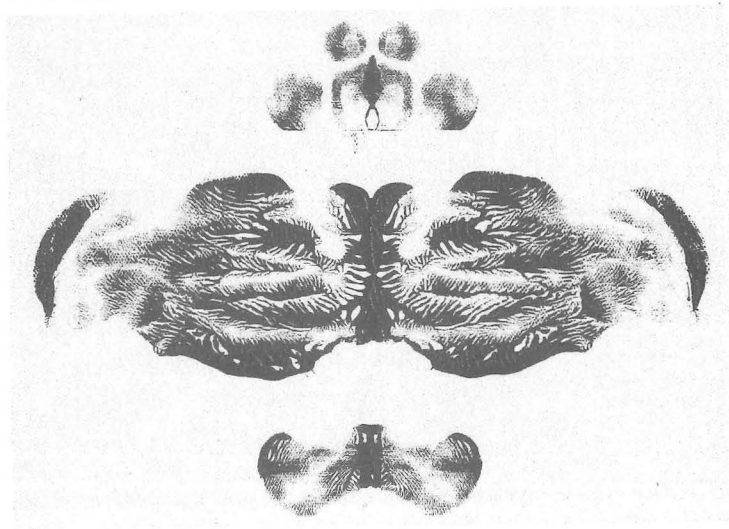
On the following pages of this section, you will see Anna's impressions of the top three finalists, an image of the muse the writer chose, and the winning contest entries.

## FLY THE NIGHT

The imagery in this poem is memorable because it manages to be both fresh and more conventionally romantic: “newborns/ clothed by the warm breath/ of the growing tides/ as the moon’s soft light/ sets in our hands.” The tenderness of these images, when juxtaposed with the energy expressed elsewhere in the poem, presents us with interesting contrasts; there is both a quietness and restlessness about this poem conveyed through its images and rhythms.

A. Dzirkalis

*First Muse*



*Sabara* © 2008 Johanna Stephens

*Adam Leyrer*

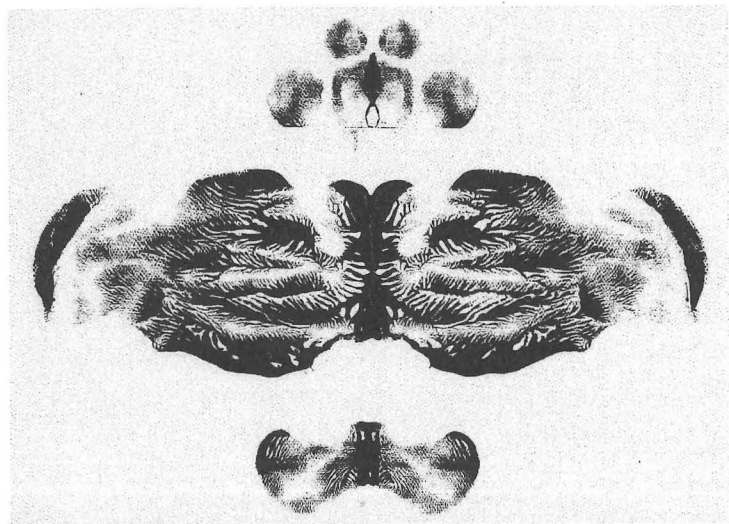
a restless touch  
 enfolds this moment in its beaten wings  
 to tarry awhile, a faithful sigh  
 shattering the haste of sunrise  
 stilled like glass, trapped in  
 shadows the night lingers on into the morning,  
 unashamed and unafraid,  
 whispering dreams that tremble in their bareness  
 upon the white sands, newborns  
 clothed by the warm breath  
 of the growing tides  
 as the moon’s soft light  
 sets in our hands

## HANDS

The poem charts the arc of a love relationship. When trying to point to a milestone in the relationship ("I know that once long ago we held hands for the first/Time"), the speaker finds it impossible to identify the exact moment when love took hold—memories "blur into one overall joyous portrait." The poem underscores the persistence, yet surprising incompleteness of these memories. While exploring this difficulty, the speaker admits perplexity: the speaker cannot tell how love took hold, but can only acknowledge, by the poem's end, the "truth" of this love.

A. Dzirkalis

*First Muse*



*Sabara* © 2008 Johanna Stephens

## HANDS

*Benjamin J. Miller*

When was the first time we held hands? Was it a timid and cutesy  
experience or a passionate strangle? My memory is so full of  
times of togethernesses that they begin to  
blur into one overall joyous portrait.

Our first times together - they almost seem lost now, almost nonexistent.

Almost.

I can't recall what we were like, how deeply we felt for one  
another. But I remember it happened at one time or another. I  
know that once long ago we held hands for the first  
Time.

Knowing that is like a permanent ink blot etched onto my brain.

I can see it; so it must be there. The feeling *must* be real.  
From such a generically bland and commonplace life, you are  
one of my very few truths.

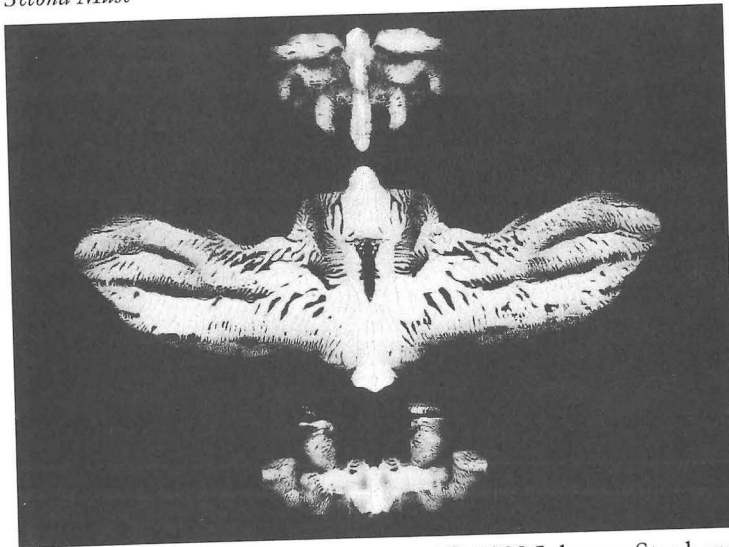
THIRD PLACE

SO LOVELY THE COLORS OF GREY

This poem, as its title suggests, explores the positive potential of dwelling in ambivalence. It shows us that we should embrace what is difficult—even though the easy answers may seem appealing, or might appear to offer a kind of refuge, these answers ultimately may not be the most satisfying or true. Resisting this too pat resolution, the poem shows us that we can learn to appreciate ambiguity: “white and black both lack the language to say/How lovely they are in the colors of grey.”

A. Dzirkalis

Second Muse



Serengeti © 2008 Johanna Stephens

Katy Lawson

There on the page it always does seem  
There are ten thousand eyes but not one to see  
That that which you pride when the lights are on  
Is the same thing you covet when everyone’s gone.

In your black and white you’ve found some protection  
From the forces that weigh on your grey imperfections  
And they give you the space in which you may run  
Until your heart beats still and your soul is numb.

Turning back the clocks which govern both time and space  
You segregate purity from sins until you’ve no face  
Your indeterminate shades will soon be no more  
As you push all your shadows to the tar colored shore.

Indeed you’re no prisoner for this is clearly your choice  
To sit on your page and pretend there’s no noise  
But neither are you free from that which you’ve fled  
For the presence of beauty is now haunting your head.

So you desperately search for ways to simplify life  
And you’ll bleed all your colors until you’re just white  
And you’ll stand in these shadows where you may keep guard  
Over all the dark suffering which made your life hard.

But soon you will find that these colors you drained  
Were not only your challenges, heartaches, and pains  
For these are the events that have made your life tough  
But are also the mothers of joy, peace, wisdom and love.

Be brave dear soul and embrace this imperfect life  
For living in contrast is no way to thrive  
And white and black both lack the language to say  
How lovely they are in the colors of grey.



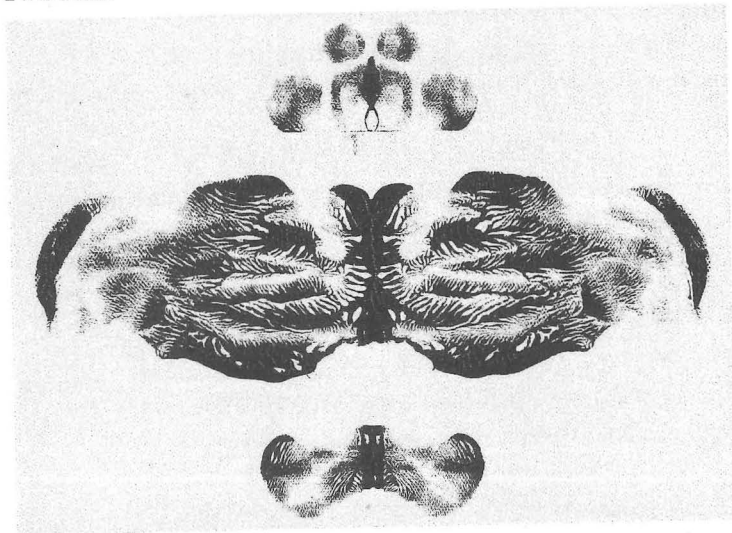
## RUNNER UP

### DARKNESS IN LIGHT

After the three winners, the staff felt there was one more poem that deserved recognition. This poem's imagery stood out to us, particularly the fifth stanza: "I can smell the burning death/ Waiting inside me with bated breath/I exhale and it escapes/ Taking on demonic shapes." The writer has a solid command of language and rhyme, weaving black voids with stark white and presenting hope amidst despair. The theme of a bloody inner battle to vanquish darkness is well matched to our theme of *Revelation*.

J. Stephens

*First Muse*



*Sabara* © 2008 Johanna Stephens

### DARKNESS IN LIGHT

*Donnie Drobny*

I can feel the darkness in the light  
The ever present blackness amidst the white  
There's an evil dwelling inside  
Way down deep it tries hide

I can see the blood behind my eyes  
Watch the fury destroying lives  
A sea of red consuming me  
Desperately vying to be free

I can hear the voiceless screams  
Devastating souls and innocent dreams  
Echoing inside my head  
Filling me with raucous dread

I can taste the crimson rage  
Breaking down the walls of its cage  
The shadow bubbles over my lips  
Tasting like one cent copper chips

I can smell the burning death  
Waiting inside me with bated breath  
I exhale and it escapes  
Taking on demonic shapes

The battle rages inside my soul  
Darkness struggling to gain control  
I alone stand and fight  
Hoping darkness succumbs to light

## SOLDIER'S SONG

Rachel Steiner

He traveled east into the war zone  
Belching bullets metal lead  
Sphere unlike the sea blue Neptune planet  
Not a journey of Ulysses sailing twenty years  
Sand dunes drift in wind, transition quickly  
Next day you'd never see the soldier's message  
Printed by his leather combat boot in sand  
Nameless faces weep his absence secretly despair  
Eyes glaze over change the channel of their lives  
Trade in nacho cheese for mourning white noise  
For their silent sobbing yesterday you'd never think  
Today would crumble, dripping to the ground  
Pool in soft pink puddles at your wrinkled feet  
Never thought the fragile flicker of the altar candle  
Might snuff out to leave you numb and frozen—blind.



*I Don't Really Want to Talk About It* © 2008 Danae Tueling

**“BYE BABY”***Theresa Todd*

Like all young boys of the day, you are  
 Rowdy, brash and cool as Cousin Curtis.  
 Long walks on the dusty roads on a hot Mississippi  
 Summer afternoon, swearing, daring and playing cool.

Long days spent laughing, joking,  
 Making bets and taking dares.  
 You are young, wide-eyed, and round-faced.  
 A man in the making.

Many days spent escaping the heat in the small,  
 Crowded corner store where you buy your nickel candy,  
 Drink pop and talk about girls you've had and will have.  
 Spotting the white woman in the corner, Curtis dares you to:

“Talk to that white woman over there. Bet you won't.”  
 Brave bold boys made more bold and brave in  
 The presence of other boys. Taking cocky strides you walk  
 By the white woman and say, “Bye Baby.”

Long confident strides lead you out of earshot so the  
 Laughs, shouts, and told-you-so's could ensue.  
 Young and black in 1955 leaves you unaware  
 Your words will leave you battered and broken.

You soon make your way home in a brown wooden crate.  
 Received by a mother stricken by grief, vengeful,  
 Ready to make known the brutality that parted  
 A mother from her only son.

Casket open, allowing the world to see white men's  
 Rage displayed on the 14 year-old face once belonging  
 To a smart dressing, smooth talking boy, like all boys his age.  
 Such hatred displayed on such a young face draws spectators.

Crowds die down, broken mother  
 Leans close to broken son and  
 Through a mother's tears says one last time:  
 “Bye Baby.”

**CORNDOG OF DEATH***Johanna Stephens*

My corndog of death  
 Pops and detonates in the microwave.

Ash splatters plastic walls:  
 Unwanted aneurysm.

I was comfortably wrapped,  
 Buttered, and deep-fried,

But you left the tinfoil on.  
 Sparks fly, and I burn.

*Donnie Drobny*

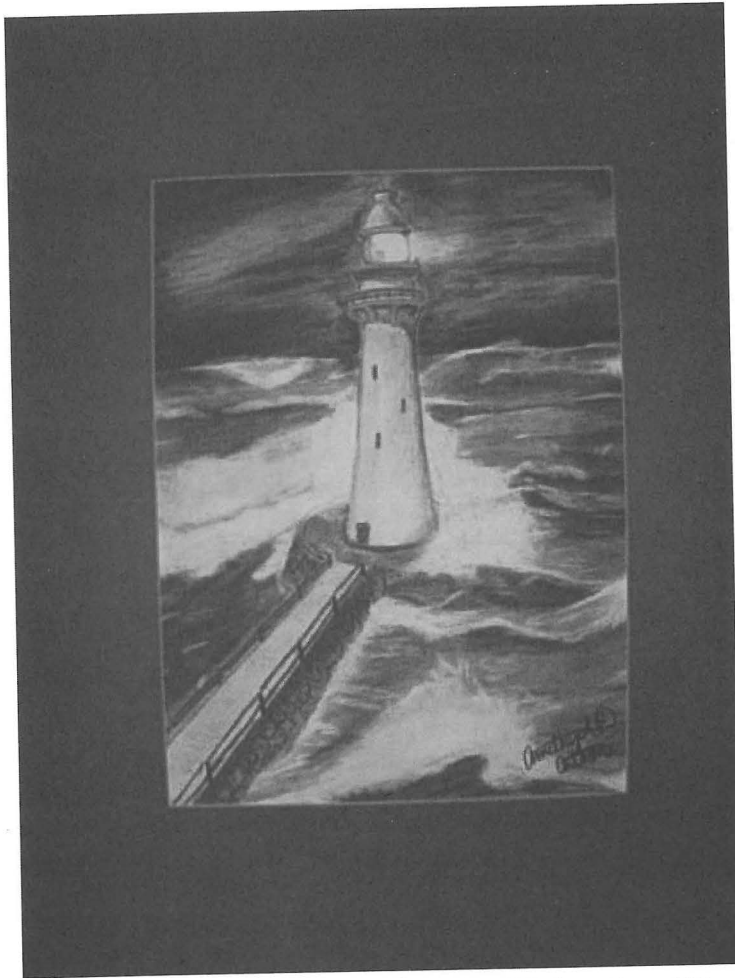
I used to be acquainted with the night  
Embraced the dark as a friendly face  
But lately something isn't right

The darkness taunts me out of spite  
Whispers untold horrors and dark disgrace  
I used to be acquainted with the night

I'd watch the bats, their eyes burning bright  
Fly on silent wings from their resting place  
But lately something isn't right

Now alone I wait for the light  
And pray for daylight's grace  
I used to be acquainted with the night

The cold wet air keeps getting tight  
Smuggling me in its dark embrace  
I used to be acquainted with the night  
But lately something isn't right



*Lighthouse* © 2008 Amethyst Aitken

## CONNECTIONS

Rachel Steiner

“Daddy come *hoooooome!*”

Jacob held the portable phone to his ear with both hands.

“I’ll come home soon squirt; I love you little hulk! Give me to Momma now.”

“Otay.”

“Hey, give me a kiss little dude.”

Three year old Jacob made a spitting sound into the speaker before he handed the phone to his mom and ran to find his action figures.

She gazed out of the picture window at the rose garden below. They had planted it together last August, before he left. The wind blew through the bare, thorny garden and ruffled the flag bearing stars stitched on a blue field, followed by stripes of red and white.

“Hey baby...” Oh, his voice, it had been so long since she’d heard it—so deep and soothing. She listened to him talk of the desert, of the dry 130 degree August heat and the occasional friendly fire from the National Guard unit that he met with on patrol.

In her hand she held the latest letter, written two weeks ago. The envelope was crispy and dirt stained. She rubbed her thumb over the address, something he had touched, she thought. It was a way of holding his hand though mountains and oceans lay between them.

“Oh, the guys and I adopted a mutt...yeah, they have a lot of stray dogs around here...huh?...yeah, he’s got a little box outside to sleep in; I named him Jacob...Oh man, we got this new body armor that actually withstands more than one direct hit before it shatters, it’s pretty cool, I mean they’re made of ceramic, so we have to be careful not to drop them too many times either or else they’ll break...yeah, it’s pretty heavy too, at least forty-five pounds by itself...yeah, I gotta go fer now...love ya babe...”

“Talk to ya later babe.” She put her hand on her hip

and grinned into the phone, one last teasing comment before she hung up. “Hey babe, ya know that cute blue dress I picked up on Thursday? I think I’ve got plans for it in a couple weeks, I don’t know, maybe September 2nd when your ship pulls into port?” The response on the other end was barely discernable but she giggled a bit like a seventeen-year-old. They hung up and her face turned to a pout of frustration and annoyance. She had been talking half the time but couldn’t remember a word she had said. She stooped to pick up some stray Cheerios and a banana string. Tossing the phone onto the living room couch which held the unfolded laundry of white booty socks and Batman decorated training underpants, she walked down the hall to glance into Jacob’s room. He sat in a patch of sunlight; his blond high ‘n tight haircut made him look like a little Marine, but his blue, perceptive eyes were bright with childish innocence.

“Jacob, buddy, what’re you up to big guy?”

He looked up, a serious expression on his face.

“Momma, *play* with me!”

He stood and grabbed her hand to pull down into his play world of sunshine and imagination. He handed her a Santa Claus doll and resumed his play. He held a small GI Joe in one hand, a Batman doll in the other. Batman was dictating something in a fatherly tone to the Joe.

“No son, go to bed...”

The Joe began to weep, “Daddy, Daddy...” Joe obediently ran off to bed, still crying.

Andi looked at the Santa doll in her hand, then attempted to comfort the Joe doll with it. Jacob didn’t seem to like this very much. He grabbed Santa and made him frighten the sleeping, weeping Joe.

“Rarh, rarh, rarh!” Joe jumped out of bed and ran to Batman.

“Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!” This time Batman was protective.

“Oh, son, don’t cry.”

Batman, after comforting the terrified Joe, marched over to Santa, delivered a lecture on his impropriety, and promptly beat up Santa. This accomplished, little Jacob went on to create more scenes in which the father-son figures represented by

Batman and GI Joe acted as a team and destroyed opposing forces, built houses, cleaned the house, and raced cars. So absorbed in deciphering his world and trying to make sense of it, she felt like forgiving his frequent boundary pushing temper tantrums and refusals to conform to any guidance. That afternoon had been a gooey orange battle over the lunch of Spaghettios. The walk to the library was even worse. After wiping tomato sauce off the blue and white striped walls, she thought, *He's too old to be throwing his food everywhere like a little baby, isn't he? He can speak just fine, why is he acting out all the time?* He had refused to leave the library after they had found his favorite superhero books, had sat down on the sidewalk every chance he got.

"NO!!! I don't like our house!"

When they were at the library he had proclaimed he didn't like the library so he didn't want to go there. Mr. Contrary.

As she leaned her head against the wall in his room, her eyes caught a glimpse of scarlet by the bunk bed. Pictures from the past several years hung crooked by thin fish line string. There was a family portrait of the relatives down by the lake, the dogs, the in-laws, the punkish cousins. Another picture showed a close up of a dark-haired eighteen-year-old girl, curls swept back from a lacy, pearled wedding dress. One next to it showed the same young gal holding the gloved hands of a Marine in dress blues. She wore a silky scarlet dress. The reflection of herself and her husband grinned at her from inside the frame. "Look," they seemed to say, "We're together here, you'll be back together soon, life will be normal again."

Her eyes smiled this time as she returned her gaze to the patch of sunlight, shimmering around Jacob's hunched over, moody silhouette. Oh, she rubbed her hand across her lower back, no time for a frothy, sugary bubble bath, not much time to spend on the girly part of herself. Her forehead was sweaty in the South Carolina humidity but the strawberry cream scent reached her memory as she brought her arm up to her face to massage her left temple. Deep breath. Ah yes; it was the perfume Dan had given her for her birthday. *It smells like love*, she thought.

Jacob broke out of his world for a moment and demanded her attention.

"Mo—omm, hold Twansformer Bumblebee..." Taking

the blue-eyed robot figure from his hand, she held it, then pointed to a 3x5 unframed, peanut butter smudged portrait of her Dan by the light switch. It was taped up at Jacob's eye level. It was the standard boot camp mug shot.

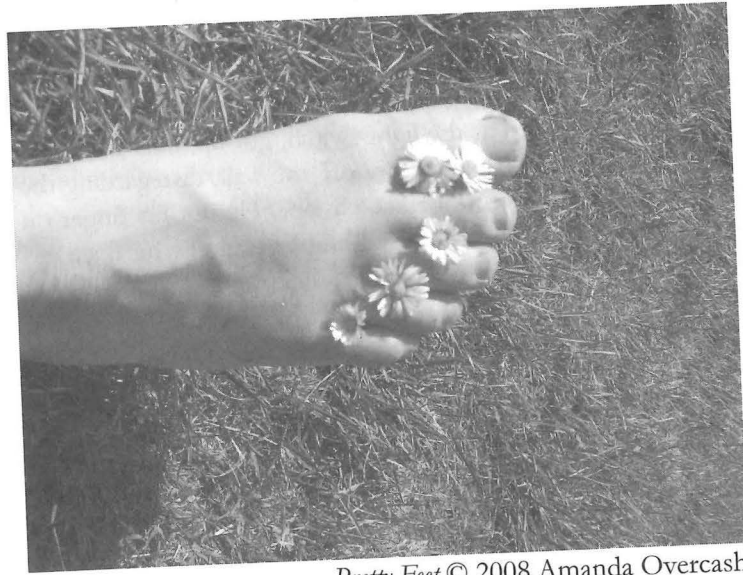
"Who is that guy, Jacob?"

Jacob stared at the light switch, got up, hurried across the room, and pulled the picture off the wall, disregarding the two finger printed pieces of scotch tape. He put his finger on Dan's nose. His eyebrows raised emphatically as he fixed his green eyes on his mom's.

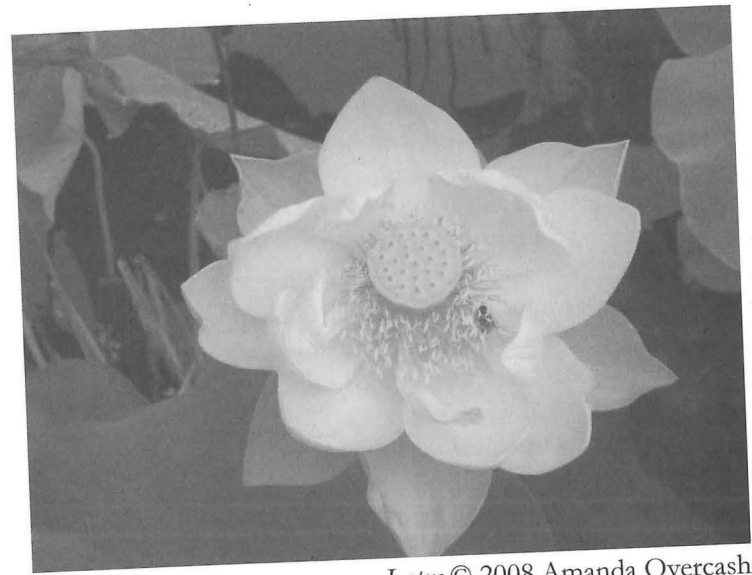
"That's my Daddy."

He repeated this several times to make sure all was clear, then replaced the picture sideways on the wall. He sat back down, content, preoccupied in his sunlit square; tears edged around her unpainted eyelashes...she hadn't worn mascara for days now.

"I know, big guy," she whispered, "that's your Daddy."



Pretty Feet © 2008 Amanda Overcash



Lotus © 2008 Amanda Overcash

Rebecca Andersen

I'm running endlessly, in no particular direction, with a racing heart and burning lungs that tempt me to stop, but I don't stop. I'm free to run forever if I choose. I'm a woman afraid of nothing and everything. If I stop running, will I have the motivation to run back? The muscles in my legs weigh me down as I trudge up the hill. I can't stop. If I do I've failed, which means I'm a failure. I long for a field of daisies to lie in, as if I'm Alice, whose freedom of imagination brought her to a Wonderland. If only I could live within my imagination, within the pages that I write in my journals, a place of safety. I seek comfort through conformity, but didn't God create me in a separate womb from everyone else? "You see, our true places as women in God's Story are as diverse and unique as wildflowers in a field. No two look quite the same" (Eldredge 209). It's hard to live like a daisy next to a rose.

A daisy says, "Thank you for your friendship, your endless encouragements and love. Thank you for your honesty, care, and genuineness." A daisy left on a person's desk will be accepted with nothing less than a smile, no matter the events of the day. It is the friendliest of flowers that holds no judgment or expectations of a favor in return. When a petal falls from the bud it remains beautiful, although imperfect. Its white petals do not intimidate; it is for the imagination to choose what color it will represent today. While a rose may be confined by perfection, a daisy is free—a freedom that I feel as a child of God and a woman of God.

Am I willing to sacrifice the image I have created of myself for the masterpiece that God has created for my life?

*Why do I want her body? Her personality, her confidence? I don't know this person, but I want so badly to be her. The glamour of Hollywood is too bright for my eyes, but maybe if I put my sunglasses on I can attempt to live in that world. Is this living truly? Copying other people and in the process becoming lost in my own identity? I am beautiful in God's eyes because He does not judge, but He's not here to say to my face, "Rebecca, you are*

beautiful.” So where do I find a confidence in myself? How am I supposed to ignore the world when I live smack dab in the middle of it? I can’t escape! I tell myself to push on! I can make it! Don’t give up—just keep breathing.

We’re pulled into this world, not by choice, and living in it is going to be the hardest attempt at life that we’ll ever have to go through. Yes, this is temporary. This pain. These expectations. This pressure. This constant exhaustion. These worries. God intended life to be simple and beautiful, like a Garden of Eden. However, this world is corrupted and selfish. We’re constantly comparing ourselves or putting undue pressure on who we think we should be. Who does God want me to be? I don’t even know. I’m so confused by what the world wants me to be that I’ve forgotten about the One who created me. The One who knows me better than I know myself. Who does He desire me to be? And do I want to be this person?

My belief goes beyond the controversy of creation and evolution. It goes beyond the issue of heaven and hell. My belief recognizes the evil in the world but remains optimistic and hopeful. My belief allows me to believe in peace. I believe in a being that is supernatural, beyond my comprehension, a miracle maker, and loves me without the comparison of others. I believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, an intricate trinity that is not physically seen, and yet I believe. I believe in what I feel. I believe that when there is no music in front of me that my violin sings not with my own talent, but by the inspiration and intervention of the Holy Spirit. I know at that moment that He is real and I’m reassured that I’m not alone. I fall to my knees in prayer and cry out to the empty space in front of me, and I feel Him. I can feel Him! I can’t deny this feeling. This is essentially my conscience, the voice inside of me that understands morals but wants to shout at the top of its lungs that there is something good amidst all the bad. This voice tells me that I can choose to be a good or bad person, but that being a good person is not out of an obligation. I choose to act on my morals and I want to share His love with every person I meet. This voice tells me that there is power in one voice, a voice that wants to act. If I didn’t believe, I would be lost. Who would I turn to in silence? How would I know that I was created for a purpose? How

*The Promethean*, Vol. 16 [2008], Iss. 1, Art. 1  
would I fall asleep at night without knowing that He has picked out a soul mate for me? My belief humbles me. I don’t care to answer whether God has chosen heaven or hell for believers and nonbelievers. I do not worry about being friends with a lesbian. I understand love, therefore I understand God. I understand that in the end He wants to be with me; He will not give up so easily. Should I take the Bible literally? I don’t think so, but some do. Who is to say which is the right one? I don’t care. My belief is authentic. It’s original and is fitted and molded to the person I am today. I believe in hope. I believe that things happen for a reason and that we may not see the ending of these happenings before we die, but I do believe in a better place where we won’t have to worry about the end. My belief is why I am so happy. I believe because I choose to. I believe because, why not?

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## IN MY OWN WORDS

*Samuel Irving*

In my own time

ALARM CLOCK, sun light, 7:15 AM, back spasm,  
stretch,

Local news, Injection, 10 pills, water  
Prayers, shower, lotion, left leg brace, right leg brace,  
Pants, shirt, cross, blessed oil, cologne,  
Morning devotion, meditation, scriptures, music

Oatmeal, toast, vitamins, head ache, aspirin,  
10 pills, water, phone calls, writing  
Leg spasm, tiger balm, Prayers, nap time...

Yawn, tired, lunch, 10 pills, juice, deep breath  
Leg drag, STRETCH, exercise, smoothie,  
Dinner, video games, TV shows, laughter, some tears,  
Relaxation

Evening tea, sleeping pills, prayers, scriptures, meditation,  
STRETCH  
Back spasm, tiger balm, water, local news, moonlight,  
silence  
REWIND

## YOUNG PROMETHEUS

*Adam Leyrer*

but not one truly listened

as she fell headlong through  
evening's sigh, a final breath  
rising to be heard  
above the yawning of a great distance

with each cry every part of her,  
embers cast by flailing arms  
of a gasping flame,  
glaring but a moment in a rush of air before  
drowning in stillness

and she dreamt into  
waiting darkness, the horizon  
clutching jagged peaks like a dagger,  
bleeding silver and scarlet into the heavens  
to conceal her rapture  
beneath the furrowed night

and not one truly spoke

until he came, dancing,  
a child traipsing barefoot through puddles of  
her tears, his laughter  
running on the wind to strike the cinders

when, his footfalls dripping light,  
he sang her morning with  
each and every step, his dance  
weaving the sun  
into the fabric of the earth

## THE DAY MY WEATHER CHANGED

Erika Doremus

July 27th, 1999, was one of those typical, hot July days. One that would have been perfect for taking the boat out on the Sound, or riding the ferry over to Seattle. I woke up that morning with the sun peeking through my window. I felt the gentle warmth of it splashing across my face, as if to welcome me back to the waking world. Opening my eyes slowly to adjust to the light, I suddenly remembered what I had to do. I had been dreading it all week. I didn't even understand the need for it.

Finally, I willed myself to get out of bed and headed down to the kitchen. Mom happened to pass me going up the stairs. I tried to greet her cheerfully saying, "Morning Mom, did you already eat breakfast?" She looked at me blankly and tried to say something, but just could not get anything out. She walked away in silence. Accepting defeat I continued my trek to the kitchen. There I wasn't met with any better of a mood. I sat down next to my brother and waited patiently for my dad to pour me a bowl of cereal. Turning to my brother I asked, "Did you see Mom this morning yet?"

"Yeah, but she wouldn't talk or eat anything," he replied. About a minute later my dad came over with two blue bowls half filled with granola. As he sat down to eat with us he let out a heavy sigh. My brother and I both knew without words that this was going to be hard on all of us. In silent agreement we looked down and continued eating our granola.

When I finished eating I went back up to my room. My window was open and I could hear the robins chirping outside in the pear trees. Since it was late July, the ripe pears had turned that old gold shade and were weighing down its branches. I sat there on my sill for a moment, just smelling the sweet air and taking in what was going to be a beautiful day. Then I felt ugly for thinking about beauty. There was not going to be anything beautiful about today. Today everyone would be dressed in black. I could see them walking slowly and hear them speaking somberly. Trying to

shake off this foul feeling, I stood up and went to grab my long-sleeved navy dress from the closet. I looked at it for a second. I am usually thrilled with new clothes. Even as a little girl I can remember being excited to go shopping. However, this article of clothing brought me no joy. I pulled it on reluctantly and stared in the mirror. I definitely had grown since last winter, when Grandma first got sick. She made me this dress when she first knew. I think we all held out hope that the chemotherapy would work; even the specialists sounded optimistic. And when it didn't we thought one of those experimental drugs would certainly be our magic wand. But Grandma knew, she knew as soon as Doctor Nelson asked her to meet with him in his office. Yes, she did everything the professionals had suggested. Although, I think she went through all of that painful radiation and chemotherapy just to appease us. She didn't want people to fuss over her. But that was always the way Char was. Always trying to please everyone, and not stir the pot.

"Dying isn't that bad, Erika," I remember her telling me one particularly crisp February afternoon. We sat out on the back porch bundled up in the heavy Icelandic quilts that they had brought with them so many years ago. Mom was inside making lunch. This was when Grandma could still eat. She went on, "Dying is just a transition." I nodded, wondering where this conversation was going. "God created my spirit in heaven before he sent me to live here on earth. Death is just my spirit leaving my body and returning home to him."

"But I won't be able to talk to you," I almost cried out.

"No, Miss America (my family always calls me Erika Miss America, because it's the only thing that rhymes), I will always be here for you, just not in my body," she tried to explain to my disconcerted twelve-year-old self. I have seen photographs of my grandmother when she was a young woman; she was classically angelic with high cheek bones, porcelain skin and carmine red lips. Even then, in her cancer riddled body, she still had a kind of Audrey Hepburn aura about her. I thought about all of this as I stared at the dress that was now two inches too short, exposing my skinny ankles.

The half hour ride in the car was somber. What few words that were said hung in the air like a fog that wouldn't lift.

Once we pulled into the parking lot, I saw that many people had already arrived. There seemed to be row after row of cars. I didn't even think that I knew that many people. Inside the church there were twice as many people as there were cars outside. I don't know why I was so surprised by that. St. Charles was not a huge parish. There were no formidable gargoyles guarding the entrance, or high gothic spires. It was simply the single bell tower, white-washed church of my childhood. Once inside, my family and I had to walk past all of the apologetic faces and pretend to be fully composed. The aisle was probably twenty yards long, but that day it could have been twenty miles for all I knew. After what seemed like an eternity, we finally took our place at the reserved pews at the front of the nave.

Mass started out as it normally did. The organ sounded, we said the "Our Father," and then we crossed ourselves, stood, sat, and knelt. When Father Thomas started to talk, I reached out to hold my mother's hand. It was ice cold. I looked over and she was staring vacantly ahead. She was so thin that her cheekbones were protruding out of her face very dramatically. I honestly don't remember the last time I saw her really eat. As hard as this was for me, it was one hundred times more difficult for my mother. She and her mother rarely went a day without calling or seeing each other. Father Thomas was talking about Jonah on a ship for some reason, and I started daydreaming about last summer on my grandparents's yacht. One day Dad was pulling overtime, so Mom drove my brother and me out to Penrose Point, where we met Grandma and Grandpa on their boat, Molly. On the way there Mom sang to Shania Twain with the windows rolled down. She smiled and laughed, letting her hand move up and down with the passing wind. I can't believe that the sunny, loving mother I was used to was now reduced to the person sitting beside me.

When mass was over, we all walked across the cemetery to lower the casket. The cemetery had winding pathways that led to different sections of perfectly manicured lawns and other forms of shrubbery that you would expect at a cemetery. Grandma's plot was on the edge of the grounds, shaded by a line of century-old trees. I stood under a massive oak holding onto a dozen yellow roses that I had picked from her garden, because

yellow roses were her favorite flowers. I watched my father and all of my uncles carry the casket from the hearse to the burial plot. The sky was cloudless, and a slight breeze rustled the leaves of the tree I was under. As I was taking in the reeling sea of green lawns and the amorous sun above, I felt my face getting hot. This isn't right. Why did she have to get lung cancer in the first place? The day should be dark and stormy. My grandmother was the most pure, most loving, most devout Catholic that I knew. And she still got dealt the short end of the straw. So what is the point in being a good person? Why go to Mass? Why pray to God, when he takes away the one person who deserved to live the most? Damn it, why couldn't it have rained? Why couldn't it have been bitter cold, because that's the way I felt inside? Why did God have to make this day beautiful? I was so angry; I threw down the roses and sprinted as far away from that oak tree as I could.

"Come back here!" my father yelled at me. But I didn't hear him; I did not want to hear him. All I knew was I wanted to get away as fast as I could. I ran and ran until my chest was heaving. Then I just fell to the ground and lost it. I hadn't allowed myself to show any emotion until that moment. I always had to be the strong one who comforted everybody else, but the weight of what was happening suddenly crashed down on me. I couldn't handle pretending to be fine anymore. I couldn't tell myself that *this too shall pass*, because it wouldn't. Reality just kept coming up and hitting me in the gut. That was the day that I lost my faith.

## SOMETIMES YOU ARE *NOT* SUPPOSED TO PICK UP THE PIECES

La Toya Hampton

Sometimes when we go through disappointments, we feel as though we lose a piece of ourselves, as if we are being broken down. Instead, look at it as being built up.

When an artist creates his masterpiece, he carefully crafts and slowly makes changes to his work, at times so much so that to outsiders he seems to be overly cautious and dragging the sometimes painstaking process out unnecessarily too long. Observers and others in anticipation want to see the end product now.

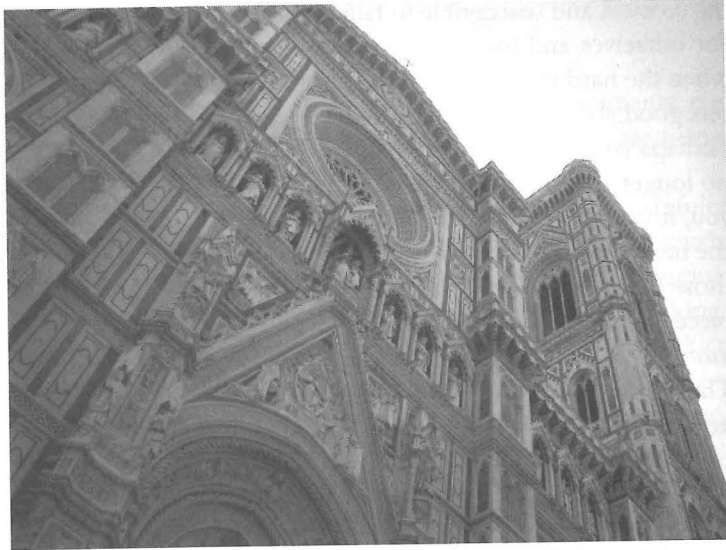
Take a statue, for instance. It starts out as generic, unformed matter - smooth and untouched. As the artist starts out his work, the material may seem to the untrained or impatient eye chipped, damaged and ugly, having no likeness to anything of beauty. Maybe even in its early stages it appears that the artist has made quite a few mistakes, that he has ruined the material beyond help and now it is of no use or value. However, remember, that is the view of the person not included in on his master plan. He could take the easy route and quickly churn out something uncomplicated and ordinary, but in his heart and mind he knows exactly what he wants even if no one else understands. Instead of rushing through his work to see something beautiful and valuable to others, he moves one step at a time, stops and then examines his work from all angles and in different lights. He constantly reviews his plans, weighing the pros and cons of his next intended change he has accomplished so far, not caring what others see, always keeping in his mind the bigger picture. Carefully he places his chisel to well-calculated points and chips away at what he knows will be his greatest work-to-date. Every purposeful chip, dent and scrape is breaking down what some might have viewed as an already perfect form, to erect something he feels is not just good enough, but awesome. Once finished, it is precious to its creator and perhaps will be of great worth to others.

This process can be likened to God's plan for prepping and molding us for His will. Yes, at times we feel great pain and

loss. It may even feel like it will never end. Some of us let these experiences take from us, chipping away at our foundation, making us weak and susceptible to failing the next test. We feel sorry for ourselves and lose self-esteem and self-worth. We wonder when the hard times will end and when we will again be able to feel good about what we see when we catch our own reflection. Perhaps you did lose a piece of yourself, a part of you that you no longer require, that if you continued to carry it around with you, it would weigh you down and prevent you from going into the next phase of your life that God has planned for you. When those pieces start to fall, leave them where they lay. Maybe that piece was the way you *used to* think; that other piece the way you *used to* look and those others, the way you *used to* walk and talk. These are parts of you that no longer serve you well. You do not need them anymore. They do not fit you anymore; you are a new creature, a new and improved human being and child of God.

It may be hard to believe, but God did not bring hurt and strife to this world for the purpose of eternal punishment. He has a purpose for your life not just for your benefit, but also for the world. Those hard times are meant to be lessons for different reasons not to weaken you, but to build you up, to make you strong and wise, in turn making you beautiful, powerful and a testament to the existence of God. View each chip, disappointment or challenge in your life as the Creator carefully designing His masterpiece to be used as an awesome example for all to marvel. You are a wonderful display of careful and meticulous planning, hard work, perseverance, and achievement.

Stand tall and proud that God is using you.



*Cathedral in Florence, Italy* © 2008 Rachel Steiner



*Whimsical Thoughts in Suburbia* © 2008 Brooke Sahlstrom

*Cassandra Shaw*

Five pounds of pre-formed steel swung in an arc above my head. Muscles down my back quivered with effort; the axe in my hands chewed the ground below my feet into gravel fit for any rock garden. I was digging through what our site leader called compact limestone, gravel and dust mixed by the light breezes characteristic of early morning combined with water from the last rainy season and dried by the same June sun baking every piece of skin exposed to its rays. Trenches ran from below four trailers placed on the left side of the main road into the park; twenty other trailers sat facing them across the dusty strip of land. Connecting the last four trailers to running water and sewer lines was one step in the process of making them ready for several families that would move into each three-bedroom, one-bath trailer.

I would count ten forceful swings that sent small pieces of rock flying and hand the pick to my friend Chris Anderson, who would then take ten swings and send entire rocks flying. At 215 pounds and able to bench press 345 pounds, he kept up with me. The five yard trench ran a foot deep and took us five hours to carve from the ground.

I was in Immokalee, Florida. The Southwest part of Florida has been hit by many hurricanes in the past four years: Charley, Francis, Ivan, Jeanne, Dennis, Henry, Wilma, and most widely recognized Katrina. In Florida, where Mickey and the sun reign supreme, where grandparents retire to rest their joints, there are people who have been devastated. Brightly colored single-wides painted pink and yellow and green decorated a dilapidated trailer park. Steaming tin roofs let in the sun and torrents of rain through gaping holes. Vehicles outside the homes showed little sign of misuse or maltreatment; the people cared lovingly for the only thing that would help their family to escape from the next hurricane: their car.

When the entire length of our trench had been dug out, we rested; the tongue of the nearest trailer in the shade was

our favorite spot. In the Florida sun we were carefully watched by our friends and supervisors alike, each drinking around two gallons of water a day. At the house where we were sleeping, we bought filtered water and drank it cold in the air-conditioned atmosphere. In the field, we drank sulfur, hot and stale. It was the best water I have ever had.

I learned how to improvise; our tool supply was limited. We were short on shovels so we used the claw ends of hammers to dig. I would go down the line we had to dig for timber placement and loosen the soil with a pick-axe for the crew handling hammers. I learned that the natural shape of a pickaxe is perfect for carving lines in the rock, but the amount of work Chris and I had done with our pickaxe bent it out of shape. The pick side had been bent beyond straight and was impossible to use; the blade side was useable for the other trenches we dug that day beneath the back of each of the four trailers in somewhat softer dirt. The next day our site leader showed up with a Cheshire grin; he had bought us two more brand new, shiny picks for the day's work.

One day I had the privilege of meeting the night security guard for the trailer park. The Hispanic man had come by in his sapphire blue Ford to see the crew putting the trailers together. While his wife sat in the front seat, not understanding a word we said, he explained to several of us how he and his very large dog sat in the park at night with a shotgun to protect the trailers from looters. Dishonest contractors had made copies of the door and padlock keys. Five trailers had been broken into; their microwaves and fridges, dining tables and mattresses, were stolen. Several of them had been completely stripped and would have to be refurbished before a family could move in.

The guard thanked us too many times to count during his story. We heard of people who gave up their time to provide wiring and plumbing services to install the trailers when they could have been working privately and earning a profit. One man was an electrician who lived in a shed on the foundation where his house used to be while he volunteered his time to fix other peoples' homes. Even while we heard many stories like this one, there was a surprising amount of ignorance in the community about the damage that has yet to be repaired and the work that volunteers were doing to aid the residents.

Immokalee is the type of community where a person can drive down one street and see a brand new three-bedroom home with palm trees outside, then turn the corner into a trailer park full of single-wide trailers housing multiple families. "It's been two years, yet dozens of families in Immokalee wait for Hurricane Wilma relief" (Miguel, "Two Years"). The \$26,184 difference between the county average family income and Immokalee's average family income was palpable (United States). The average working class citizen does not own or rent a house with a foundation and painted walls; he or she lives in a small rectangular tin box with holes punched in the ceiling by Hurricane Francis, part of a floorboard ripped out by Hurricane Jeanne, and water-damaged walls from the temper tantrums of Hurricane Wilma.

The damage that occurs is not the result of increased hurricane strength; the residents of the Gulf Coast cannot blame a swirling oceanic weather system for injury done to their homes. Hurricanes flooded land and knocked out trees way before contractors built houses on beach sand in Florida. It is simply that we, as a society, are building in places that are more vulnerable to natural disaster, and "it is along the nation's hurricane coasts where the increasing vulnerability is most apparent" (Cutter, "The U.S." 1). Since 1970, the population of Collier County, which includes Immokalee, has grown more than 500 percent, a number that seems to explain why the housing density for the county was 71 units per square mile in Collier County in 2000 (United States). I suppose that statistic isn't that shocking considering that in Fairview, Oregon, housing density is 972.9 units per square mile, but I saw what the average of 618 housing units per square mile in Immokalee means (United States). The people who live in these tin boxes step out of their front door into their neighbor's backyard. Immokalee has fifteen percent more children than nearby Naples; they play in the dust and gravel instead of on manicured lawns under shady palm trees.

The hunger that Americans seem to have developed for living in the coastal regions has driven more people into harm's way. This "demand for second homes - vacation or retirement-fueled development in the coastal counties and, with

improvements in access (such as interstate highways and bridges to barrier islands) and infrastructure (water, sewers, and electrical power), contributed to the current coastal crisis by exposing many more people and infrastructure to natural disasters than ever before" (Cutter, "The U.S." 2).

One of the areas that most clearly exposes the change in demand for coastal dwelling is the housing market. In the last thirty years along the hurricane coast, including Florida, the median value of houses has doubled, and since housing costs are so high, more people are living in the only housing they can afford: mobile homes. (Cutter, "The U.S." 3) This housing phenomenon is apparent in the example of Immokalee and Naples, two cities in the same county with vastly different economic standings. The median family income in Naples is \$83,831 whereas the median family income in Immokalee is \$22, 628 (United States). An article in *Environment* explains it well: "There is a considerable geographic variability within each county; for example, the affluent might live right on the shoreline in beachfront property, but further inland there is a more diverse population (racially and economically)" (Cutter, "The U.S." 3). Naples is on the coast and Immokalee is about twenty miles inland. These two cities and their populations are a perfect example of racial and economic difference.

The population make-up was present in the congregation of the Baptist church where we attended service one Sunday morning in Immokalee. We went to Sunday school with the high school kids and found out that their group is small not because they have trouble attracting people, but because as the population began to age, "there was a dramatic decrease in the percentage of children in the Hurricane coastal counties from 1970 to 2000" (Cutter, "The U.S." 3). While the general population of children decreased there is a higher concentration of children in Immokalee. There is much evidence to show that "the two demographics groups most affected by disasters [are] children and the elderly," which leaves Immokalee, with their many children and elderly, and the whole of Florida at a disadvantage (Cutter, "Social" 251). While I talked to adults and teenagers who lived in Immokalee, I found some prime examples of the aging population and the gap between the two

demographic groups: children and the elderly.

Marla, one of my companions on this trip, was part of a crew that went out into the community to patch the roofs of mobile homes. Marla smiled constantly and was willing to let people talk to her. No matter where they lived, people knew she could be trusted based on the compassion present in her eyes and actions. One of the houses this team worked on was that of Beverly Frias. When the roof patching crew reached Raulerson Road and pulled into a dusty driveway, they steeled themselves to climb onto yet another hot metal sheet with the sun and its heat reflecting back at them. I am sure they laughed and joked as they worked, replacing their exhaustion with humor and reminding each other in the process that their effort was for God and the people they were helping.

Frias' roof had "remained damaged since [Hurricane] Wilma and leak[ed] constantly into the bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchen and living and dining rooms" (Miguel, "Oregon" 1). At 54 years-old, Frias was an asthmatic living in a home with water damaged walls, stagnant water buckets under the drips, and she had no way to fund repairs to the home. This is the situation of many low-wage working class residents of Immokalee.

Each of the five days we worked we put in eight solid hours of sweating. We met at seven to beat the Florida sun, took a break at noon for an hour lunch, and paused for the day at three in the afternoon, no earlier. We would then load the pick-axes, hammers, screwdrivers, shovels, and circular saws into the secure padlocked and bolted trailer on the worksite. The house our group stayed at was next door to a Baptist church. The house's purpose was to provide a place to run their Sunday school program and to give lodging to volunteer groups. There were three showers that ran constantly from 3:15 to 4:00 in the afternoon. Once twenty sweaty bodies were through the showers and a few of the adults were back from housing elsewhere, there were usually jobs to do during our afternoon free time. Sort the laundry, help the kitchen crew with dinner, play card games, have the master masseuse of the group work on tired muscles.

On several occasions our group had the opportunity to go out into the community during our afternoon free time. On one such occasion I went with a group to the local grocery

store. It was a chain store, a Safeway, and every head turned as a group of very Caucasian teenagers walked through the sliding glass doors into a veritable sea of ethnicities. Not only is the community in Immokalee aging, growing, and earning low wages, it is also minimally white. No matter how much it is argued that there is now racial equality, the racial make-up of Immokalee puts the population at a disadvantage. In the whole of Collier County in 2005, the percentage of those classified as white was 92 percent. In the same census, Immokalee's percentage of those classified as white was 38.5 percent. This stunning contrast shows the concentration of the Hispanic or Latino race, at 71 percent in Immokalee (United States). On each outing I had the opportunity to meet the inhabitants, wild life, or plain old plants that occupy Florida.

Another outing I had the opportunity to join in with the rest of group was an afternoon trek through Corkscrew Swamp. Under my feet was a path created out of wood, a several mile long bridge through the muck to keep visitors from going trekking through alligators and mud. The boards supporting me and the rails to my side were dotted with lichen a sky blue color. The two tones blended well together and were only interrupted by the occasional dark chocolate knot in the wood. My friends and I had the chance to see a prime example of the Everglades, and why people want to live in Florida. There were gargantuan spiders, hissing bugs, multicolored lizards, large locusts, and screeching birds. The foliage was oversized and green, but the pattern was broken every so often by a splash of white or red exploding from some species of vegetation.

This scene put into perspective, for me, why people are so attracted to Florida. It is truly a unique environment.

The last day I worked with my team in the trailer park was just as hot as the other four. The humidity threatened to weigh down our sore and tired arms and the lack of shade during the middle of the day seemed daunting. The very last step before the professional crew could come in and put skirting around the bottom of the trailers was to dig in landscaping timbers, for them to attach the plastic sheets that would hide the plumbing, just inside the rain line below the trailers. Digging under the edge was a challenge when there were only a couple

shovels to be found and the long handles made the work tedious and frustrating. To keep our lines level and straight a crew sunk stakes at the four corners of each trailer and string was looped around each to create a rectangle. I then went around the trailers with my pick axe and loosened the compacted limestone for the crews of diggers that followed me at a safe distance. Using the claw ends of our large supply of hammers each crew sunk about nine eight-foot timbers around every trailer. The holes that ran the perimeter of the trailer were about five inches wide and four inches deep. Once all the timbers were set, shorter pieces were crudely measured and cut to fill small gaps in the corners. We had no table or saw horses to use so we improvised. The wood was placed on top of the triangular metal tongue of a trailer and the two ends hung over the sides. Someone cut with the saw on one end and a second person sat on the other to stabilize the piece of wood. Once all of the gaps were filled and the timbers leveled, sand was filled in around them and the string taken on to the next trailer where the process started all over again.

One week after my team was there, a crew was scheduled to come put the skirting on the trailers. Once that was completed, the inspectors could come and clear each trailer so the families could move in. I can imagine exactly the way that the home is set up in those trailers. Up the makeshift ladder and over the threshold, to the right are two bedrooms, to the left the great room which is a kitchen, a living room and a dining room all combined into one. Beyond this to the left is the one bathroom and the master suite. The master bedroom is slightly larger than the other two and has a bigger window. Each room contains a metal bed frame, box spring, mattress, two small end tables, a bureau, and blinds on the windows. The living/dining room is decorated with a dark walnut dining table and six chairs topped with white cushions still covered in plastic. In the living room portion, there is a small oval coffee table and two skinny square couch tables in matching stains. The sofa color is called golden nugget on the tags that include the dreaded "do not remove" warning. The microwave, range, and refrigerator are all white; we even assembled the inside shelves in preparation for groceries to feed families of six.

These families, the ones who live in the FEMA trailers



my team assembled, have been directly affected by our action. The physical motion of swinging a pick axe is something I will never forget. The looks on the faces of Immokalee residents as they walked into church on that Sunday morning faced by a group of teenagers clad in neon green t-shirts that said "Disaster Relief" will be forever emblazoned in my memory. While "the Federal Government [was] doing everything [they could] to help" we were finishing the trailers that were supposed to be done months earlier (Bush 1). Something must be done for the residents of communities so small they don't show up on the national radar for disaster assistance. This is a cry out for all those who can't get the message across themselves: Help us.

♦♦♦ ♦ ♦♦ ♦♦ ♦♦ ♦♦ ♦♦

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Selby © 2008 Erika Schmid



Sea Oat © 2008 Erika Schmid

## REMEMBER CHICAGO

Bill Lynch

Remember Chicago:  
cracked steps and broken bricks?  
Plastic signs above darkened windows,  
tape on the windows, tape on the mufflers.  
Picking up Jim Carroll's poetry  
and a hardcover Rimbaud,  
losing my car in the narrow streets  
where your friend used to squat  
before becoming a ghost writer  
for a self-help millionaire?  
Remember, I found some new clothes  
in those thrift stores of broken vases  
and empty frames. Your friend  
kept her pipe in the sugar  
and had never heard the first side  
of *Exile on Main Street*. Remember.  
We brushed by Rushmore to get there,  
drove past Little Big Horn in the dark,  
windows down, listening to Red Red Meat,  
breathing in the damp air  
that flushed through the Honda.  
Your friend listened to us  
laugh ourselves to sleep, her books  
stacked tight and neat above our heads.  
Chicago was rows of brick  
and the law school kid who explained  
that there was no Chicago pizza.  
In her darkened apartment  
we generously pried open  
the shell of her computer,  
drunk and fumbling,  
the solder dabs like the lampposts  
of a city far below,  
muted under dust.

In the end we figured  
it was static from our hands,  
yours and mine, that shorted  
out a chip, leaving her saved work  
lost in a dead end circuit.

Why we couldn't have stayed I don't recall.  
We scarfed burritos with green sauce,  
drank bottled lager from Prague,  
slept on a clean sheet in the spare room  
of a lonely artist in waiting.  
Yes, I suppose we wanted to go home,  
to Los Angeles, Russian mobsters  
above you, to the neighbor woman  
inside out with Tourette's,  
to the Armenian prostitute  
who leaned against the corner mailbox.

But couldn't we have tried to stay,  
to remember too well the heat,  
and the on-ramps and taco stands,  
that we lost track of time  
and broke down for a while  
in the dusty brick room in Chicago?

## COFFEETIME

*Jeremy Richards*

old you  
 tell me.            please.  
 what is the winding road of dirt&gravel&loneliness&tears&  
 laughter&concrete&belonging&sand&forever&never  
 that brought you here.  
 what whispering-quiet-morning sunrises have your weary eyes heard?  
 and what bright-brilliant-glowing wisdom has your tired ear seen?  
 where did life take your  
 frail and weathered body  
 before time stole you  
 and dumped you out  
 on the couch  
 right in front of  
 young me?

*Alexandra Woolner*

I remember the summer I fell  
 asleep to your music  
 lying on the bare bed  
 I got there late, I was waiting  
 before I put the sheets on  
 and my skin  
 stuck to the plastic cot  
 even with the window  
 open to the east  
 and you sang  
 and I listened, the background  
 hum of bees,  
 and I heard you through  
 the words  
 as I was slipping into  
 sleep as I am going there  
 now too  
 though it is winter, I  
 want to hear your summer  
 song, please  
 I am listening  
 I am going there now

Tabitha Jensen

The Nordstrom shoe department is nirvana on any given day. The variety of sumptuous footwear (or functional, if you're into that kind of trash), the men in tailored suits on their knees before you, the pretty boxes emblazoned with our favorite names in signature script—but during the Nordstrom Anniversary Sale, you can actually feel the divine presence of a merciful God. Steve Madden, Kate Spade, Roberto Cavalli, Michael Kors... go ahead, touch it. Pluck it from its perch on yonder unworthy clear plastic pedestal without trepidation. The Comcast bill and student loan payment equivalent cost is slashed—MASSACRED! by red ink, revealing the special price that is an undeniable steal, a reward for pre-planning the fall. Still expensive, yes. But now you're in the Macy's Price Zone, a place where justification can live and breathe as carefree as a card swipe.

Of course, during this two-week midsummer solstice, the shoes aren't the only things on sale. Sure, you could go upstairs and buy a coat. A Victorian-style lace blouse and a pencil skirt for work, maybe. Yoga pants. But unlike that bulky coat that makes you look like a tent, or the blouse that gaps in the buttons where you dare sprout more than a B cup, or the spandex Yoga pants you'll end up skipping the gym and eating ice cream in, there is not a single shoe on that entire floor that will make you feel bad about yourself. Nobody has to complain, "I'm so fat, I'm a nine," or, "that anorexic size five bitch! Eat a sandwich!" Feet don't have breasts, or hips, or thighs, or freakishly knobby elbows. They're *feet*, and no matter what your style is in your heart, you can express it without being afraid with shoes. Whether you're a loud lipstick-red platform, a classic Coach kitten heel, or even just want to tool around your garden in your Crocs, we're absolutely free to be you and me.

In my wardrobe, my shoes make the outfit. I don't worry about what I'm going to wear with a lime-green pair of faux alligator skin stilettos, or brown pinstriped low heels with contrasting silk detail. After I pick out my footwear, I go out

and buy a couple coordinating pieces, more subdued so that the shoes soak up the spotlight. I relish nothing more than the random coworker, waitress, guy on the Max train or snotty Pretty Woman-esque boutique girl bursting out with, "Oh my god, I love your shoes!" I love your shoes! You're so sophisticated, so stylish, so beautiful, so unique! I covet you, oh goddess of soleful couture!

It goes without saying that the Nordstrom Anniversary Sale is a special time for me. Ever since I was a little kid, when my mom packed me and my little sister and brother up for Back to School Shopping, where I would pick out pink and purple loudly-laced tennis shoes. When we got home, exhausted, full from the especially-chic-for-an-eleven-year-old Nordstrom Café lunch, we would ravenously separate our wares and retreat to our rooms, where the shoes would remain preserved in thick tissue and graphic-heavy cardboard. There they would patiently wait until early September, when, on our triumphant return to school, they would be unleashed in all their newness and blister-producing prowess. Nowadays I've grown impatient—I can't save leather boots for fall! I will wear them out of the store and into the muggy July heat! However, tradition endures. Just as it did yesterday, Sunday of the first weekend of this year's sale. Sure, I couldn't actually afford even the most mercilessly marked-down shoes. My fiancé Matt and I were in the throes of putting together a wedding, and the ambitious money-saving plan I was kicking off was getting off to a rocky start—covering all non-essential expenses on \$80 a week doesn't make it far past happy hour. But as soon as we stepped through the gaping entrance, into the hive of permascowling middle-aged housewives, Dolce and Gabanna cell phone toting high school girls teetering on trend overdosage and sales girls with microphones quite unafraid to talk shit about the lot of us in between runs to the mysterious backroom, I couldn't resist. Especially when I wrapped my trembling hand around a luscious Linea Paolo blood-red patent leather pump with black ruffles and bow around the toes, skyscraping at five inches lofted by a pencil-thin black heel.

"Ooooooh," I breathed, twirling it between my fingers, around my palms, careful not to smudge its pristine glossy veneer. I must have looked like a pristine catch, because one of the guys caught me right away.

"Can I bring that out for you?" he asked, his tone hinting at pleasures unseen. His eyes, sincere.

"Yes, in a nine and a half, and a ten, please... and those, those on the end? The brown heels? And these knee-high boots!"

As he obligingly ran off to do my bidding, I scanned the department for a seat. It wasn't looking good until my eyes caught the void of a set of chairs not far from the register. No coat, no purse, no convenient little kid marking the spot as Taken, just a few cluttered shoeboxes amidst the chaos. Assuming the former occupant had moved on, I sat down and awaited the sales guy's return, and the wonderful gifts he would bring along.

A few moments later, a woman talking in a million directions returned. "Okay, I think I'm done. How much did these cost? Oh, no, I'm getting ready to go, you don't need to leave. Do you like working here?"

"Oh I'm sorry," I said, gathering my purse up in my arms to leave.

"No, it's fine, don't worry! I worked at Fred Meyer for seventeen years, never had a formal education."

The girl repacking the shoes, evidently not bound for purchase, looked just as confused as I was. "Yeah, I like working here," she finally shrugged.

Along the walkway between the showcase floor and the cash register, I spotted Matt rounding about, searching for my fake red hair and thick-rimmed glasses as he happily pressed a bright pink smoothie against his lips. He towered above most everyone around him, his neatly-shaven shining bald head a beacon in the bedlam. I stretched and waved my arms several times trying to catch his attention without looking too spastic, until he finally saw me and headed over.

"What're you waiting for?" he asked, offering me a sip of the sweet strawberry banana smoothie.

"They're bringing me *shoes*," I breathed. He nodded and stood, refraining from any of that *don't you have enough shoes* bullshit or the dreaded *you know you can't afford those*. Good, good man.

"I can't believe we were crazy to come out on a day like this," he did offer up in a resigned sort of way.

"My husband told me I had to get out of the house today before he threw me out," the funny lady in the seat next door cut in with a deranged smile. How do you quite answer that? Relate? "Oh yeah, I get kicked out of my home all the time, too." Refer her to a domestic abuse hotline? I opted for my favorite, the old Smile 'n Nod, which required the least amount of verbal exchange and wouldn't encourage further random thoughts meandering away from her odd mind.

"So," she said, clasping her hands in her lap and smiling serenely at me, "are you expecting?"

Matt's eyeballs almost exploded out of his skull. I could scarcely even comprehend the audacity, it was so brazen and... there. "What?!"

"Oh," she said quietly, her face falling down, down, down as livid insanity and strangling hurt burned behind my stunned gaze. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked if I wasn't sure..."

"WHAT?!"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'll leave now." I saw the shoe guy slowly walking out of the backroom toward us, four boxes teetering in his arms.

"I'm sorry, I have to go. I'm sorry," I said sincerely to the poor guy who was now on the floor, about ready to unwrap my first delicious morsel as Matt jumped to my side to half-carry me out of the store as pleas of "I'm sorry" followed me out of the department, across the gridlocked Clinique and MAC counters to the warm solace of the parking lot sidewalk, where I immediately burst into tears on his cotton-covered shoulder.

"It's just your shirt," he insisted, referring to my empire waist, flowing top that had jumped from maternity stores everywhere into this spring and summer's pop fashion rotation. It may have been true—I hope to God it was to this very moment—but nothing could save me from this pit of a feeling that I was a dead ringer for Queen Latifah. "Stupid meth-head bitch. She was crazy, you know that. Fucking crazy. You're beautiful."

"I'm...nnot fat?" I sniffled.

"No!" Yeah right. As if that meant anything true.

That night, after trudging through the rest of the day in a foul-ass mood and passing off several self-deprecating cracks

The Promethean, Vol. 16 [2008], Iss. 1, Art. 1

I almost fell over trying to pick through the hill of fabric, my feet stumbling over my first pair of leather boots, Nordstrom Anniversary Sale Circa 2004. Shoes spilled everywhere, unabashedly, from middle school and high school and college and an entire range of moods and styles and sizes I'd gone through since. Only the most beloved, beragged soldiers that couldn't possibly be worn at all had been discarded. There were no piles designating the ones that made my calves look killer from those that gave me cankles. I loved them all, I loved them on me... my shoes are unconditional.

"Are you doing okay, honey?" Matt's shadow stood over me, rare notes of concern in his usually carefree voice.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"I just don't want what that lady said to bother you. You know she's a fucking crackhead."

Unconditional. After two and a quarter years, it was then that I finally saw past all my insecurity, my past-boy-baggage and neurotic bullshit that I had found a living, breathing person who would never put me in an On Hold Until Thinner pile. In the most trivial of terms, just like a beloved pair of Blahniks, I was not going to get tossed away because I was in a bad mood, or got in a fight over something stupid, or cried when I should have just been a grown-up, or ate a cupcake after dinner. Someone who will really be there forever, like Saltwater Sandals.

"Thanks," I smiled, grabbing my Nike running shoes out of the corner. "What's for dinner tonight? Remember, I'm eating for two now."

## CONDENSATION

*Alexandra Woolner*

After you've wound the dial down  
and the steam is clearing,  
the paint chips flake and fall.  
When you push back the curtain,  
the clogged drain gurgles low.  
Half lost and thinking of survival  
you washed off  
all the stains of childhood and  
stand in silty puddles  
of everything you wish you were.  
You towel off the lingering drips,  
like tears you didn't own  
comb out the tangles,  
and let the last eyelash fall  
this time without asking  
to be anybody else.

## (MIS)CARRIED AWAY

*Christina Busby*

I

Ten years  
she could not bear  
the sight of her  
flat belly

In the secret times  
of darkness  
on her knees  
she prayed

Saying,  
O God,  
please,  
fill me with life.

II

The day of sowing  
a single seed is  
planted, deeply  
rooted

In morning sun  
her womb creaks,  
blooms, scatters  
stillness within

A fruit growing,  
a tender delicacy  
to be treasured  
through grateful lips.

In wicked night  
a serpent came,  
slithered beside her,  
crept silently inside

The shower water  
stained, crimson  
flowing, life fleeting  
through the drain

God whispered,  
but she clawed at  
her ears, drowned  
in bloody streams

IV

For ten years  
she could not bear  
the sight of her  
emptied belly

When I was born  
she cradled herself  
around me, lips  
breathing life into me

Laughing,  
Dear God,  
You'll never take  
Her away from Me.

## TRANSCENDENCE

Kaitlyn Montague

Dewdrops fell upon the stiff parchment like the last rain upon desert dust as the girl sat down at her wooden desk, pen in hand. Her grip shook and her fingers quivered, but she set the ink to paper despite her nervous physical handicap. The contents of the letter were far more revealing than the spark igniting the small pitiful flame still miraculously burning inside her lethargic veins.

“To whomever may read this:

“This environment has become too harsh for me to handle, let alone comprehend. While some have told me that everything in life is due and subject to change, my meager experience tells me different.

“The cycle of seasons never changes, bringing forth both life and death, year after year. Life’s circumstances never change. *People* never change.

“Even when they claim a want to.

“I hate knowing everything. Anything. I hate knowing what they know. Knowing what they think I know. Especially knowing the secrets they believe to have hidden in the shoebox on the top closet shelf.

“They never change, though they know they should. I know they should. Hypocrisy has become the fundamental human truth. They promote peace, and yet they shatter it time and again. They detest being lied to, yet they never stop lying to themselves.

“Life has become nothing but an over-glorified masquerade. The most beautiful costumes always conceal the worst of human beings. We now shun those who deign to wear a heart on their sleeve, bleeding profusely and begging to be mended though it may be.

“Honesty is passé.

“Morality has been discarded.

“Virtue is dead.

“All life is a lie.

“So why is it that we continue, knowing that humanity has lost its struggle for beauty? All art has become pain, all storytelling

a form of deception. Yet we continue to exist, knowing that we cannot change the world or ourselves. Why?

“We’re all spiraling downward into a dark labyrinth of broken hearts and suffocating senses. And nothing can change that fate.

“Not you. Not me. Not God. Nor the Devil.

“Humanity is all the same moth drawn toward an ever-brightening flame. No escape. Human truth is irrefutable. Absolute. Tyrannical.

“Can we ever hope to revolt against this oppression of Forms?

“...Not while we’re human.”

The pen fell down on the desk with a clatter as it dropped from her shaking hand. The writer sighed heavily, as her forehead followed the pen, banging against the desk with a dull hollow thud against the wood. Wavy white hair splayed across the surface as she fell, covering her face like a makeshift fort of blankets. Makeshift security would not do. She sniffled once as she took in a large breath, letting it out slowly—it seemed calmer than she. *Shit!* The curse reverberated against the walls of her skull, making her very innards shake from the echo. The roommates would be home soon. Would they understand? Could they? Or would they only add to the problem they had created?

An outer door slammed shut. “Annabelle?” The high-pitched voice reminded her of ice cream tainted with too much salt. Appearances always had the best of intentions.

Annabelle’s head shot up as she quickly peered around the room. She stood, slipped the letter under her door and into the hallway, and dashed to her window. Forcing her grunts into a barely audible whimper, she forced the heavy glass upward. She kicked the screen out and watched it fall into the bushes a few stories below with a light swish as it jostled the leaves of the bushes lining the building. She would survive the fall, wouldn’t she? Then she could start anew, in a different place, and perhaps she’d meet someone who endeavored to transcend humanity with her. She looked back down, swallowed loudly, and fell forward.

Perhaps she would meet that one person that could change her perspective. If, of course, she hadn’t broken her neck on the way out the window.



## BARE BONES

*Christina Busby*

The 27 bones  
in this delicate hand  
whisper 27 ways  
I'd like to die:

Aspirin O.D.  
Belt loop from closet  
Bullet through brain  
15th story window  
Exsanguination of carotid  
Carbon monoxide bliss

I scratch, tear, shred  
the endless layers of skin  
hiding these 27 bones  
from my hungry eyes.

My lips moving,  
my bones, my bones,  
tell me how I should die:

Bottle of bleach  
Air bubbles in veins  
Deep breaths of sea water  
Sharp railroad tracks  
Petroleum and matches  
Nitro-glycerin explosion

The skin is unraveling,  
my insides trickling  
down my arm and still,  
no bones, no bones.

Where are my bones?  
Nurse, where are  
my bones?

Bring me my bones,  
my beautiful, fragile  
skeletal companions.

Nurse, where are  
my bones? Do I have any?  
Please

My bones, my bones,  
answer me this:

Does anyone even care  
whether I die  
or live?

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

*The Promethean*, Vol. 16 [2008], Iss. 1, Art. 1

**Amethyst Aitken** is a freshman biology major with an art minor.

**Jennifer Allen** grew up in southern Oregon and has lived in Portland for the last ten years. She earned her B.A. at Mount Holyoke College and her M.A. at Portland State University. She was a longtime volunteer with Write Around Portland (WRAP), a Portland nonprofit that seeks to build community through providing free writing workshops to low-income and socially isolated adults and youth.

**Rebecca Andersen** is graduating this spring with a degree in English. Her future includes a masters degree in education and a career as a high school English teacher. She seeks to serve God in all that she does and is anxious to see how God uses her in the mission field. She recognizes the true blessing of a friend, loves to experience God while running, and enjoys the occasional peanut butter, honey, and banana sandwich.

**Samantha Billups** is a freshman honors English major.

**Jess Bouchard** is a senior English major and member of *The Promethean* staff. She is currently looking at MFA programs and would like to teach poetry at the college level. Her poems include themes of birth and death to make portraits of nature and souls uniting. Nature ultimately becomes the authoritative universal seed in her writing. She is most inspired by Mary Oliver, Lucille Clifton, and Sylvia Plath. "Venomous Words" is a tribute to Plath.

**Christina Busby** is a 19-year-old English major born and raised in Hawaii. She enjoys drinking non-coffee at coffee shops, playing her acoustic guitar, writing poetry and short stories, eating sushi, swinging on swings, and embracing diversity ))<>((.

**Daniel Cameron** is a senior English major and history minor.

**Erika Doremus** is currently a freshman student-athlete at Concordia University from Port Orchard, WA where she graduated from South Kitsap High School in 2007. She is majoring in humanities and after earning her bachelor's degree plans to attend law school and study environmental law. Along with writing, her passions include volleyball, German, and politics.

**Donnie Drobny** is an alumnus of Concordia University with a bachelor's degree in English and minors in both history and biology. He is currently working towards his masters in teaching at Concordia's MATE program. He can also be spotted working late nights on the Concordia Public Safety staff. Currently he is living with his girlfriend, Amber, and his puppy, Astrid, and could not be happier.

**Holly Goodrich** is a Concordia alumna. She received her BA in English last spring and dreams of the day she will return to school. Her writing is inspired by myth, fantasy and life. She would like to thank Brandon Shewbert for critiquing an early draft of her story. She would also like to thank Sarah Shewbert and Josie Stephens for encouraging her to locate her temperamental Muse.

**La Toya Hampton** is a senior in Concordia's Social Work program and is slated to graduate in May 2008. Mostly a closet poet, she uses her writing as a way to vent frustrations, seek answers to difficult questions and as her personal mirror. Many times her writings serve as affirmations, self-encouragement and reminders to herself of the kind of person she would like to be. La Toya hopes that others will be inspired by her piece.

**Beth Holian** is a junior English major with a minor in history. She enjoys reading, writing, foreign films, long walks down Alberta, and hot bubble baths. She can usually be found watching anime, reading for pleasure and for class, or cleaning her apartment. "Apocalypse Please" is the first chapter of an eight-part novella called "Algernon," inspired by film noir and the music of Yoko Kanno.

Department: The Promethean, Revelation (Krisanne) Pugsley, a junior English major, loves to write short fiction and poetry and is getting ready to tackle her senior thesis. During her time at Concordia, she has enjoyed being a member of the choir (and working on the choir council), and pursuing minors in music and history. She would love to work as a travel journalist, an editor for a book company, teach ESL, or be involved with literacy based missions.

**Samuel Irving** is a junior interdisciplinary studies major with concentrations in social science and sociology.

**Tabitha Jensen** graduated from Concordia in 2007 with a degree in English and a minor in marketing.

**Katy Lawson**, a junior biology major and English literature minor, has considered writing a form of communication, therapy, and enjoyment since the age of six, when she finally figured out that screaming was not an effective way to get her point across. Also, Ms. Lawson prefers to write in graphite which allows her to hear the scratching of the mineral against the paper and feel more connected to the words.

**Adam Leyrer** is a senior interdisciplinary studies major with a concentration in theology and history.

**Bill Lynch** grew up in the San Joaquin Valley and currently lives with his family in the Concordia neighborhood. He teaches English at a Portland high school.

**Benjamin Miller** is a freshman English major and music minor.

**Kaitlyn Montague** is a junior English major and Editor of the *Concordia Chronicles*. She's a self-proclaimed elitist geek of many persuasions who spends too much time contemplating who would win in a fight between Boy George and Dr. Frank-N-Furter, the deeper meaning of *The Sandman*, and *Hellsing* as a Reconstructionist World War II manga. She writes to a pretentious indie soundtrack, and her writing is inspired largely by Neil Gaiman, H.P. Lovecraft, and random pop-culture.

**Rae Northcraft** is a former Concordia University student.

**Amanda Elizabeth Overcash** (also known by the *nom de plume* "Vincent Valkyrie") is a lesser-known artist, writer, bibliophile and lurker. Amanda is a psychology major in her senior year at Concordia. After graduation, she plans to go into research on brain aging, cognition and brain plasticity.

**Kristine Pugsley**, a junior English major, loves to write short fiction and poetry and is getting ready to tackle her senior thesis. During her time at Concordia, she has enjoyed being a member of the choir (and working on the choir council), and pursuing minors in music and history. She would love to work as a travel journalist, an editor for a book company, teach ESL, or be involved with literacy based missions.

**Jeremy Richards** is a sophomore honors English major.

**Brooke Sahlstrom**, a sociology major pursuing a career in photojournalism, transferred to Concordia from Chester College of New England where she studied photography and sculpture. After driving "the Northern Route" in three days between Washington and New Hampshire, she returned via "the Southern Route" in seven days and nearly 7,000 miles. Last fall, Brooke taught English and computer skills to indigenous youth in Cambodia and is returning this summer to do so again.

**Erika Schmid**, a junior environmental management major and history minor, has enjoyed photography since her mother first gave her a point-and-shoot at age five. Travel photography is of great interest to her. She has spent time in Kenya, Belize, and Mexico and has literally thousands of photos to show for it. After graduation, she plans to pay back her loans, travel the globe, fight for the environment, and play with her dog, Jacque.

**Cassandra Shaw** is a freshman honors English major with a minor in music.

**Sarah Grace Shewbert** is a 2001 alumna of Concordia University (English/theatre). She returned to Concordia in 2003 as Assistant Director of Theology, Performing & Visual Arts, & Humanities. She is also the director of the MADE for Kids program which offers low-cost theatre arts camps for local elementary children. The photos included in this issue were taken last spring at the Columbia Slough and reflect her love of nature as well as British fantasy literature.

**Rachel Steiner** is a senior English major with a minor in psychology.

**Johanna (Josie) Stephens** is a senior English major with an art minor, and Managing Editor of *The Promethean*. Her poems and artwork included in this issue are representative of her struggles with clinical depression, a constant enemy and sinister companion. After graduation, she plans to go into full-time publishing, as her work on *The Promethean* has left her with a sense of satisfaction and purpose. In 2009, she will marry Brad Dobrinski.

**Theresa Todd** graduated from Concordia in 2005 with a major in English and a minor in education. Her poem, "Bye Baby," is a tribute to Emmet Till. Her work has been published in three previous issues of *The Promethean*.

**Danae Tueling** is a sophomore theology major.

**Alexandra Woolner** is a recent alumna of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, where she studied English and creative writing. Currently spending her first year out of school as a foreign language English teacher at Hebei University in Baoding, China, Alex is enjoying the adventure of expat life. In the indeterminable future, she hopes to return to the States and seek attractive post-grad programs in English.

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