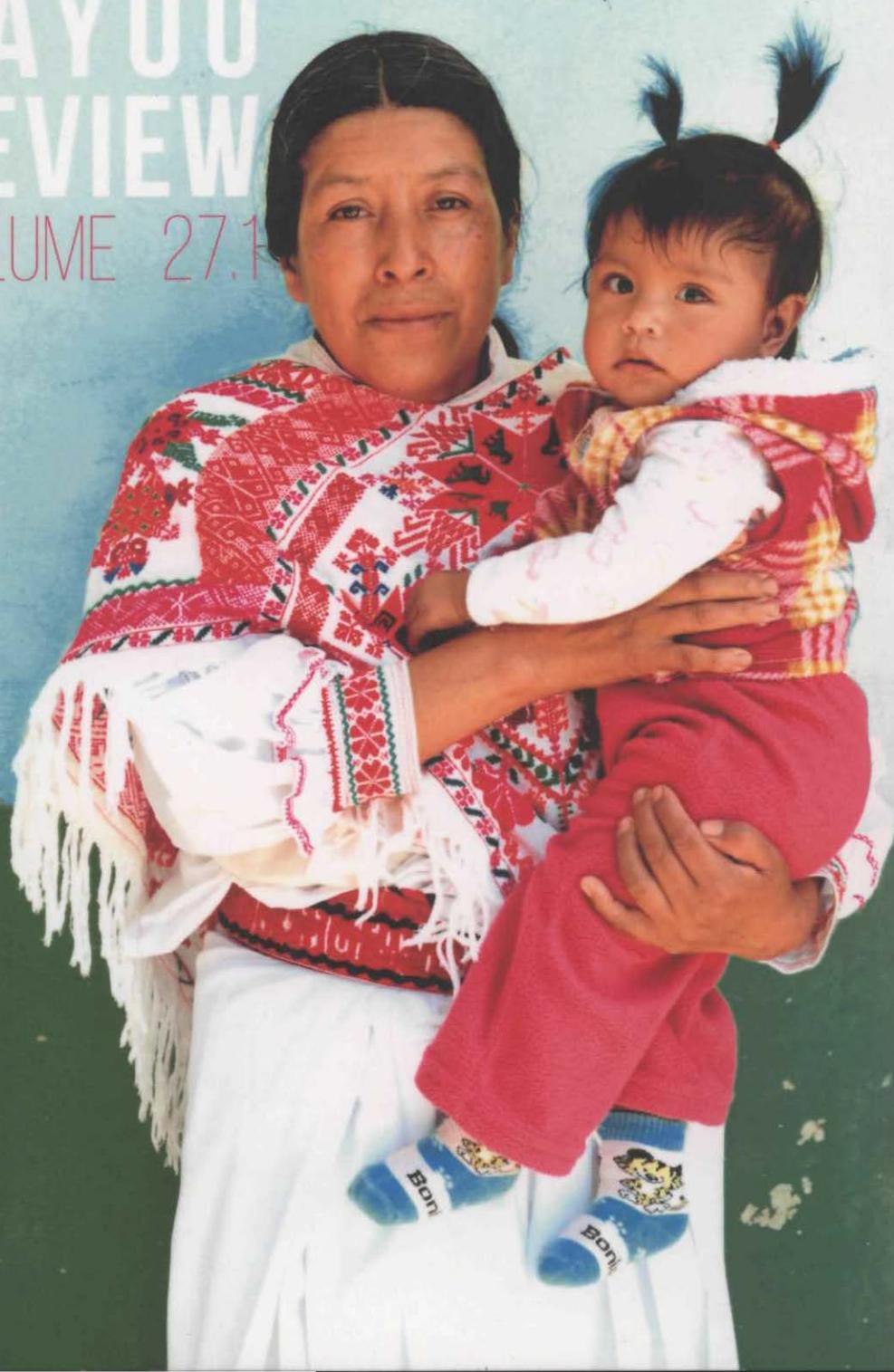
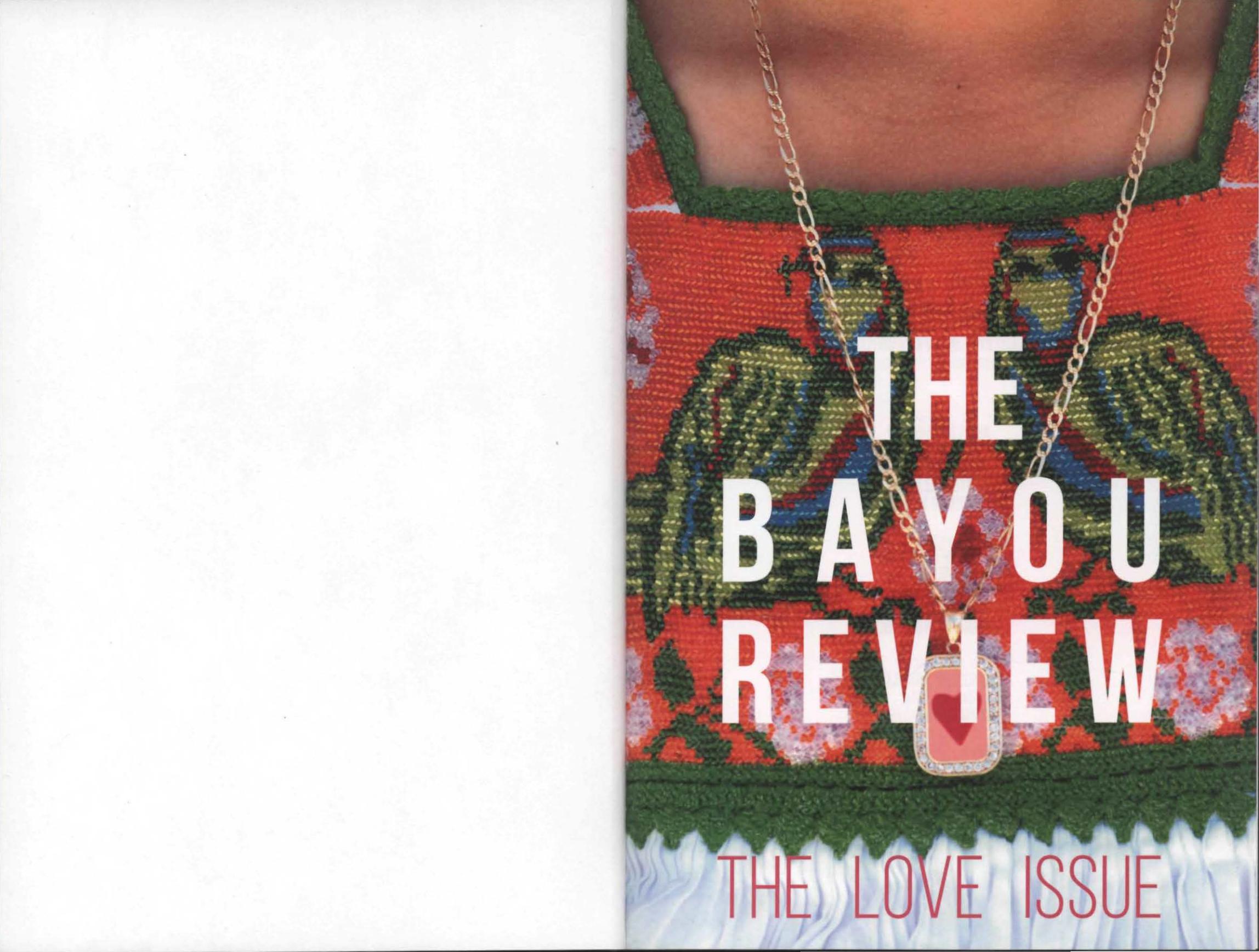


# THE BAYOU REVIEW

VOLUME 27.1







**THE  
BAYOU  
REVIEW**

THE LOVE ISSUE

# THE BAYOU REVIEW

UHD'S LITERARY & VISUAL ARTS MAGAZINE

VOLUME 27.1 THE LOVE ISSUE

GENERAL EDITOR

**VICTOR ANCHETA**

EDITORIAL STAFF

**ANNABELLA GUTIERREZ  
KAREN MARQUEZ**

INTERNS

**DANIEL CERVANTES  
DIANA OROZCO**

FACULTY ADVISOR

**DR. ROBIN DAVIDSON**

SPECIAL THANKS TO

**CLAUDIA ELIZONDO  
MIKE HILBIG  
JONAE MUHAMMAD**

# CONTENTS

THE BAYOU REVIEW is published biannually by the University of Houston-Downtown.  
 The journal welcomes prose, poetry and visual art submissions.  
 Submit electronic entries to bayoureview@uhd.edu.  
 Visit [www.uhd.edu/bayoureview](http://www.uhd.edu/bayoureview) for full submission guidelines.  
 The journal reserves the right to edit for grammar, punctuation and content.  
 For the latest updates, like THE BAYOU REVIEW on Facebook or follow on Twitter.  
 Opinions expressed are not necessarily of the editor.

Cover: Thomas Aleto, *Madre Mexicana*, Digital Photograph  
 Back Cover: Thomas Aleto & Victor Ancheta

Photographic Credits  
 Thomas Aleto: III, 71  
 Victor Ancheta: I, X, 2, 18-19, 48-49, 60-61, 72

Design & Layout: Victor Ancheta

Copyright © 2014, THE BAYOU REVIEW. All rights reserved.  
 Rights revert to authors after publication.

EDITOR'S NOTE	1
<b>POETRY</b>	
THE BEDSIDE BOOK OF AFRICAN BEES GLEN ARMSTRONG	3
HYSTERESIS ∞ DANIEL CERVANTES	4
CLEANING A RED FISH ANGELA OBERDAN	5
THE VOICES JOHN YAMRUS	20
FOUR-LETTER WORD JASON JONATHAN RIVAS	21
YOU'RE WITH ME DEVALINA NAG	22
NOT COLUMBUS ELIZABETH MOBLEY	44
A DREAM TAKING SHAPE ANA MARIA ANCHETA	45
LOVE PREFERS TWILIGHT TO DAYLIGHT JONATHAN OTERO	46
새벽 / DAWN STELLA ADEJE	47

<b>THE GAME</b>	50
VICTOR ANCHETA	
<b>STOLEN SAINTS</b>	52
KHYBER DANIEL	
<b>BECAUSE SOMETIMES THINGS CAN JUST BE PRETTY II</b>	62
STEVEN COLFAX	
<b>—JEANNIE—</b>	63
DANIEL CERVANTES	
<b>AMERICAN HOME</b>	64
JONATHAN OTERO	
<b>LENNIE, LEONARDA, NANA</b>	69
DANIEL CERVANTES	
<b>BRAIDING</b>	70
ROBIN DAVIDSON	

## PROSE

<b>THE MERCIFUL</b>	6
CARL L. LANE	
<b>SHOPPING FOR SUNSET IN GOD'S CLOSET</b>	53
KAREN MARQUEZ	
<b>ELVIS</b>	66
SHERRI PERRY	

## VISUAL ART

<b>ELIZABETH AHERN</b>	
WOMB SERIES #5	25
WOMB SERIES #4	26
WOMB SERIES #2	27
WOMB SERIES #7	28-29
<b>THOMAS ALETO</b>	
ZAPOTEC MOTHER AND SON, OAXACA MEXICO	30
CARNIVAL DISGUISES, OAXACA, MEXICO	32-33
CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES, MEXICO	34-35
HERMANAS SISTERS, MEXICO	37
A MAN AND HIS CAT, MEXICO	38
<b>BARBARA BIEL</b>	
UNTITLED	39
UNTITLED	40
UNTITLED	41
UNTITLED	42-43

## EDITOR'S NOTE

There is no need for flowery words. One simply knows and feels what love is. To the ancient Greeks, however, love comes in four forms. *Storgē* is described as natural love that one tolerates, like the love between siblings or parents to offspring. *Philia*, or brotherly love is affection, while *éros*, or physical love is the sensuous desire between lovers. And *agápe*, or selfless unconditional love, is one that accepts a loved one, regardless of their shortcomings. The works included in this issue illustrate all of these types; some are a mixture of each, and some, I think, even cross the accepted definition of love.

It is also with much love that I want to thank everyone who has helped me create this issue of *The Bayou Review*. First, to my mom and my siblings: I want to thank them for their love and support. I am also grateful to Barbara Biel and Elizabeth Ahern for their emotionally charged artworks. Likewise, I am indebted to Thomas Aletto and his wife, Karen. Tom's vibrant photos of Mexico and its people serve as inspiration for the design of this volume.

To *The Bayou Review* Editorial Staff: Annabella, Karen, Daniel, and Diana, thanks so much for your loyalty and hard work. You guys rule, even though most of you don't drink coffee. You are the heart of the magazine. Keep on beating and keep on pumping!

To Dr. Robin Davidson, our dearest advisor, you keep the fire burning in the heart of our little journal.

And to our dearest contributors, you are the blood of *The Bayou Review* and what keeps us going. Please keep on sending your submissions and continue to support us.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this issue to the memory of Dr. Susan Ahern, former Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, a loving mother and an outstanding educator.

And, in honor of my father, Vicente, whom I miss everyday.

—VICTOR



# THE BEDSIDE BOOK OF AFRICAN BEES

GLEN ARMSTRONG

I remember these bees fondly,  
as I remember all fright-  
ening things that I never  
had to confront.

Rumors with wings.  
Nature preserved in newsprint.

Godlike in their steroidal power.  
More beautiful than other bees.

26 Tanzanian queen bees,  
each of their legs

kicking down doors and seducing  
the figurine collector hidden inside,

each of their sex organs,  
a miniscule portal back to the bluest sky.

My grandmother once asked me  
if I would ever marry a bee

descended from those that escaped  
their Brazilian captors.

I had to admit that I might.

*The world has changed since I was young,*  
she conceded, barely looking up  
from her knitting.



# HYSTERESIS ∞

DANIEL CERVANTES

The hour slow burning,  
dialed around the face of currency clocks.  
That is: couch cushion pennies,  
longevity abaci,  
scrounged and scoured, borrowed clock abaci.  
Hysteresis loop: Temecula to Juneau  
in shorts and flip flops, acquiring forever rheum.  
From palm to pine, you are alone  
in the dandruff-flaked vanilla scooped cone.  
Dim sponce malady,  
Juneau first, but now more remote

The hour slow burning,  
dialed around the face of currency clocks.  
That is: orange combust tonguing down  
the throat of green pocket Washington.  
Vested and transferred, borrowed clock abaci.  
Hysteresis loop: Two pillows, Two Big Macs,  
Two cardigans, Two coffee mugs,  
but transposed to vacant and echoless adobe floors.  
From carpet to adobe, acquiring forever mute.  
You are alone.  
Juneau first, but now more remote

Mechanism habitual Hysteresis loop: afraid to accost  
pillow talk but turning in the night  
to face a vacant wall.

# CLEANING A RED FISH

ANGELINA OBERDAN

The smell  
of Gulf and red fish:

its putrid  
sweetness mixes

with our sweat,  
tangy

in the humid garage.  
We stand, hip

to my waist,  
over the sink

and sideboard.  
You take

a knife and  
slit slowly

the red fish  
just beneath

its fin. Peeling  
scales back

firmly  
with your fingers,

you are delicate  
with the bones.

# THE MERCIFUL

CARL L. LANE

When they came: Rita and Katrina and Gustav, wrapping the prison in their cold angry waters, sinking their claws into the wet sand, the men liked to think that God was trying to set them free, that with each storm, each towering wave crashing into the barbed wire and the guard towers surrounding them, God had put them one step closer to a mother's arms. They could smell the rain in the air, cold and free. The power would shut off for just a minute, no more, then the generators would start to come on and the lights would sputter a bit, then it was as if nothing had happened. The guards would curse, angry for having to reset the clocks on their microwave ovens, while the Cubanos, only a mile away, prayed for fins and gills. On these nights Rahim lay on the cot in his cell, the stick straight hairs of his almost shaved head poking into the small flat pillow, wondering where the birds went until morning.

He woke, thinking of sweet things: candy and laughter, cakes and flowers and kisses. For a time he lay still and smiled with his eyes closed, but a new day and a god's failure could not be denied by closed eyelids with nothing but lashes for locks. The lights and the thumping steps of the guards pulled his eyes open, and Rahim stared into the ceiling. He put his hands behind his head and braided the fingers. Laying there, beginning another day in his cage, he kept his head very still and his eyes wide open, letting the tears wash back into him. He breathed deeply.

Each morning he had to sell himself the sweet dreams. He had to smile with his eyes closed as he dreamed of his mother's cooking, and of his father who would surely cry for the second time when his son was returned to him. Surely he'd have to tell the story a thousand times! But he would tell it with laughter and smiles. There would be a party, a feast, and all of his friends would come to welcome him home. *She* would come, and cry for him and laugh with him. She would hold his hand, and mourn the loss of his thick locks of black hair. *You must grow it back before the wedding*, she'd say, as she cradled his face in her hands. This is what he saw when he lay on his mat each morning, smiling with his eyes closed. And it was always so real at first, before he realized that he was awake, before he accepted as fact that none of the five prayers of yesterday had been answered.

Standing, he went to the metal toilet and washed his hands and his face at the sink. He let the water chase the tears into his eyes. He looked into the reflective metal mirror that was bolted to the wall. He'd lost a lot of weight here, his skin was pale. His hands gripped the sides of the sink, and his head dropped down to his chest. He heard the guards going down the hall, telling the men it was almost time for prayer. Rahim unrolled the rug, and laid it on the concrete floor. He sang along with the other men who lived in cells up and down the hall, and then he fell to his knees on the rug, and paused for a moment before leaning forward and bringing his forehead down to the floor. The hall was quiet except for the boots of the soldier-guards that paced back and forth as the men prayed.

When he was finished and he rolled the prayer rug back up, and put it back in its place, Rahim heard a door open down the hall, and then he heard the soldiers pulling someone from a cell, and then a man actually growled, like a lion—loud and fearless. He was fighting them. Rahim ran to the door of his cell, and with the others, he cheered the man on. The man seemed inspired by their shouts, and fought harder. The soldiers cursed. The man growled. The man fought on, and soon a stream of other soldiers came rushing down the hall to help their littermates. Rahim heard the hissing can as they sprayed the man's eyes. The man screamed, but he fought on, growling even louder, and the tears returned to Rahim's eyes as he cheered with the others. More soldiers. More. The bearded man kept growling even as they carried him, chained and shackled, past Rahim's door, hoisting him in the air like a felled deer.

Cuba, the beach just beyond the walls of the American prison, was beautiful even in the shadows of such suffering. White sand poured over the earth; the water shimmered, and the gray gulls danced on crisp waves like ancient ballerinas. It was beautiful in the way of a lovely girl with sad, reddened eyes and thick tears cascading over her full lips. Rahim had met the Mohammeds when they'd come to camp together from the airstrip in a plain white bus, chained together like charms on a bracelet, and even in shackles, even with his vision blurred without his glasses and his ribs taped, he was moved by the wonder of the place, "ziba," he whispered. That was day one, by day 1483 he'd only seen the beach a few more times.

The Mohammeds were three men who were all named Mohammed. One was a tall Lebanese man with skin the color of hot sand and emerald green eyes; one was American and white, with long blond hair captured in a nest of dreadlocks and perhaps the bluest eyes Rahim had ever seen, and the Pakistani was short and wide with a very thick neck, dark angry eyes, pre-

maturely graying hair and the front half of his right foot was missing, having been lost in the blast of a missile called the Sparrow. "I was very angry about my foot. I used to be an athlete when I was a boy, so it made me very sad to have *my foot taken from me, but at least I still have good foot, and I guess even bad foot is alright, keeps me standing,*" he'd laughed one night when they whispered across the walkway that separated their cells.

In the evening, after prayer, Rahim sat on the floor of his cell next to the door, and listened to the talking. Lebanese Mohammed talked of *how proud he was of his daughters, even though the others told him a man needed a son. A new man down the hall might shout into the nothingness, demanding to speak to an attorney or make a telephone call to his family back home. They would all be quiet for him. They knew he would not see any attorney, and that he would never be given a phone call, but they allowed him his shouting and his outrage. No one would ever believe it if they were told that they could be taken from their home and locked away in this place where they could not even walk a meter outside of their cell without being chained as animals are chained. They had to live it to believe it. They could not be told.*

\*\*\*

Rahim would never have believed, but he was kidnapped six days before his wedding by the man who had also wanted to marry his fiancée, when he was on his way to visit a friend in Kurdistan. Atoosa had turned down the marriage proposals of this man many times, but instead of looking for someone new he only became more determined than ever that she should be his bride. *Amir obsessed over her, sent gifts and followed after her. Even after Atoosa and Rahim's engagement was announced he didn't stop. Rahim had planned to spend the last days before his wedding hiking the mountains of Kurdistan with his friend, Malo. On the way his bus stopped along a country road so the passengers could relieve themselves, and the driver yelled that they should hurry. Rahim was kicked on the side of his head as he sat on the toilet of an empty country mosque. With his pants around his ankles he fell onto his back, and Amir and his three brothers rained kicks down on him. He grabbed the boot of one brother, but the others kicked him until he let go. Beneath their stomping boots, he heard his bus drive away. They kicked and stomped until the world became darkness. He had seen the old truck behind the bus, but the road was narrow with no room for passing, and he never thought the truck was actually following them.*

He woke up with the taste of blood in his mouth, wrapped in a large burlap sack, rolling back and forth in the bed of the old truck, bouncing around on his broken bones. *The brothers sang along to loud music as they drove. On the other side of the Kurdish mountains, in Iraq, he was sold to American soldiers as a terrorist. As the money was paid and the brothers talked about what they would buy, and Amir talked about marrying Atoosa, Rahim lay covered in his own vomit, blood and loose strands of burlap.*

They had grown up together; they were inseparable: Rahim and Atoosa, *Atoosa and Rahim. Both their fathers taught at the University of Tehran, and their mothers were friends. Atoosa was always thin and tall, taller than Rahim, and for a long time she was stronger too. Atoosa would play ball with Rahim and the other neighborhood boys all day, coming home with her clothes dirty and torn, to find an angry mother and a laughing father. At dinner parties her mother would soften and laugh about her spirited little girl, calling her a little *dokhtareh bala*, trouble making girl.*

Amir had been a school friend of Rahim's until he decided he would have Atoosa even if she was with Rahim. The difference between the two was that Rahim had loved Atoosa for so long that he had no memory of the falling; he didn't remember a time when he had not loved her and so he just loved unconsciously, almost unknowingly. *Amir was bigger and stronger than Rahim and his father was very wealthy, but Amir could not love her in the helpless way of Rahim. He had not seen her cry on the day her father pronounced her too old to be a girl playing with boys, before he took her away from the ball games, and her mother hid her defiant hair. Amir only knew the Atoosa who was beautiful, whose laugh was a song, whose eyes were the very star and crescent, the Atoosa who always left a lock of her shining black hair dancing just beyond the border of her roosari. Amir had never tasted her mother's yazdi cakes. Her father had not taught him to play chess or to kick a ball. Amir had never reached out into a darkened parlor when they were eight years old and the power went out, lacing his own frightened fingers with hers. He could not love her, and she could not love him, so he was never given the chance to offer a real marriage proposal. When his father had arrived one evening carrying a box of fine cigars and started to speak to her father about a marriage, he was told that she had been married for her entire life.*

\*\*\*

*There was a day when Rahim was a new teenager, and he had not seen Atoosa for almost the whole summer. Rahim had gone with his father to visit, and as he sat quietly on the stiff sofa she walked through the room.*

She had become beautiful. Just like that, in only a couple of months. She said hello, but did so while walking, and by the time he answered she was gone from the room. But he remembered that she was now beautiful. His eyes followed her, searching for her path in the thick carpet. He wondered if she knew, if she had gazed upon her own reflection one morning, at first not realizing what had changed, but then her face opening up into a careful smile, like she wasn't sure if the girl in the mirror was actually her.

Rahim began visiting almost daily, like when they had been little, but he didn't say anything to his friends about her. He hoped that none of them would find out that Atoosa had become beautiful. He hid her away, never speaking about his visits. Atoosa was new to him then. He spoke softly when they talked, his voice like the gentle crackle of a needle on an old record. She was sure about herself—about everything. She didn't sit like a boy anymore, she arranged herself in the way of a woman. In spite of Rahim's secrets, Amir and the others did find out that Atoosa had become beautiful, and each of them seemed to Rahim, smarter, taller and better than him. She laughed at their jokes. She seemed to love her men, each with his chest puffed out, bragging about himself. Rahim was lost in the crowd; he lost hope, and as the boys displayed their money and strength, like the bright plumage of mating peacocks, he stopped visiting. She was new and beautiful, but she was different.

His maman bozorg, his grandmother, died when he was sixteen. Rahim had loved her so. He could talk to her when he was angry with his parents or when he had a secret that needed to be told, but not repeated. Mostly, he liked seeing her order his father around. It gave him comfort knowing that there was someone who could. At the funeral Rahim watched as his father, who had always seemed made of stone or steel, hugged the elaborately painted casket through the entire service. With his arms wrapped around the long box, he seemed so small. He cried out to her, holding the casket to his chest as if it was her own body, and Rahim stood behind his father and his uncle Farid with his head bowed, weeping silently. He cried for his grandmother, but he also wept for his father, for the death of that part of him that was no longer stone. The harder his father cried, the harder it was for Rahim to keep his own weeping controlled. He shook with the effort. He could hardly stand. His knees turned to nothing. And then he felt a hand that was so small and strong. The hand grabbed onto one of his, but he did not look to see to whom it belonged. "Hello husband," Atoosa said. He did not look, but he knew that she was crying.

\*\*\*

He thought of her constantly, of all the small moments of laughter, and also each time they'd argued about Amir, Rahim accusing Atoosa of encouraging him. "If you want him, go to him," he'd told her one day when they had been walking outside the shopping mall holding hands, passing by the windows of Iranian stores stuffed with American jeans, Italian shoes and French bags. Amir had passed them in his father's big black car, blowing the horn, waving and smiling at Atoosa.

"I'm never going to be rich like him. You say you don't care about that, but why is he here? It seems that if you really wanted him to go away he wouldn't keep trying." Her eyes blazed.

"You think I want him to be here, *following* me? Are you crazy! Have you lost your mind?" Two older men came walking by, and Atoosa lowered her voice as they passed, but her eyes bit into him. He hated that they had to pretend, that even Atoosa needed to pretend that he was some kind of a king because two strange men who they didn't even know were passing by, and they mustn't know that she had taken the liberty of expressing her anger.

"I am not stupid and I will not marry a stupid man who only wants to wear me as if I were a big shining stone he'd bought from the jeweler! Nor will I marry a poor man who stupidly believes that every creak in the night is someone coming to take his toys away." She took his hand and dragged him through the mall, telling him he'd better be happy or else.

Inside, there was no happiness; there were only the guards and the fence, flowered with barbed wire. Only romance novels, very old magazines and newspapers with large sections cut out. Guards woke him, they slid food through the slot in the door, he prayed. They slid food through the hole, he asked for a lawyer or a phone call, they laughed, he prayed. They turned the lights out, they woke him, tied his hands, simulated his drowning, he begged, they laughed, he prayed. The interrogations were called reservations, as if one had called up, eager to meet with the torturers and asked when he might be fitted in, maybe even if he might request the same man he'd had the last time. There was always a hunger strike starting or ending. Usually they ended with men being strapped into restraining chairs and having feeding tubes forced up their nasal cavities.

There were days when memories and the fading picture of a wife or a father or a child could cripple a man, bend him over as if he'd been physically wounded. Inside his cell Rahim passed the time re-reading old books

and doing push-ups until he was dizzy. Then he'd fall back on the bed, memories and regrets feasting on him. Deep into the night a stranger or friend would call out: *Hello? Hello?*—just wanting to hear a voice that had not been sharpened like a blade, and the answer was always a whisper: *Yes, we are here, we are here.*

Before the night when he laid bleeding in wet Iraqi grass, Rahim had never met an American. He had heard that they were all very rich, that they were all movie stars and rap singers. They were drug addicts and murderers. They were all tall, blonde and beautiful, with sparkling white teeth and small perfect noses. They were devils. They were gods. He had heard that it was only a matter of time before they did to Tehran what they had done to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

\*\*\*

Some nights he dreamed. Not of home, not counting the heartbeats of his good woman against his sweating chest, but in the water beyond the fence, in the thick blue surf, with a stolen moon floating high. The sea welcomed him like a missing part of itself. He swam, not knowing what direction to go, but only that he must go. He swam until his arms were tired, and he turned over onto his back, and he stared up at the dangling moon, too tired to cut through the next wave that was coming in higher than he'd thought, until some fish brushed past his leg, and he smiled. He was happy to give himself to the sea, to the waves and the free birds and the big fat yellow fish that swam with him into the night.

Lebanese Mohammed talked constantly about his wife and daughters. It was always, *Angela and Alaa are so beautiful, so clever.* Pakistani Mohammed rebelled in ways that made Rahim fear that the soldiers would kill him. He threw shit and piss through the food slot in his door. He spat in their faces when the big steel door slid open and guards waited to take him to a reservation. Then he was "accidentally" pushed into a wall or he "slipped," his head falling into a freshly used but un-flushed toilet. Each cell had painted on its floor a black arrow that the soldiers said pointed to Mecca, so that they would know what direction to face when they prayed. Texas Mohammed would pray with the arrow five times daily, and then he would pray in other directions just in case the soldiers had lied. He would be kept in the reservation room for days, handcuffed, with old piss stuck to his legs, because when he was asked about the training camp he'd been to or the charity he'd worked for in America, he just kept praying.

They were all taken to the infirmary for vaccinations one morning. Chained and shackled, the Mohammeds and Rahim stared into the small windows of the doors they passed, desperate to see a familiar face from home, or to hear some whispered news about what had become of the world. In the infirmary—white, shiny and full of quiet, careful voices—they were lined against a wall where they waited to be called by the nurse. Another nurse, short and round, passed them, her quick steps sounding busy and important.

"Did you see the nurse? Rahim! Did you see the nurse?" Pakistani Mohammed asked excitedly.

"How could I not see her? She is as big as a house!" They laughed.

"She wasn't that big! And you have to admit that she was pretty. She had a pretty face." The nurse walked back past them, brown ponytail bouncing, and Pakistani Mohammed stared.

"Salaam aleikom," she said without smiling or meeting his gaze.

"Wa aleikom salaam," they answered in unison as she turned down another hall.

"You see, she likes me!"

"What about your wife?" Lebanese Mohammed asked, shaking his head.

"I will have a second wife to help her with things at home. She will appreciate that I'm so thoughtful. Besides, you can't expect just one woman to handle a man like me alone!" The others laughed.

On the other side of the hall they noticed a room where two very thin men laid in steel framed beds, breathing tubes and IVs attached to them, machines with murderous lines jumping across their screens, chirping quietly like the last breaths of wounded birds. Both men were very old: one completely bald with sunken jowls and a nose as thin as the single stroke of a good pen; the other man's hair was white and so brittle that it seemed as if it could be wiped away with the swipe of a hand.

"I want to know how long those men have been here." Pakistani Mohammed said as he followed the others to the window, chains dragging—

good foot, bad foot.

"No one has been here that long, not that long," answered Rahim, shaking his head.

"No man, I don't think I ever heard of anybody being here that long. I don't even think the camp has been here that long. They must have brought them here when they were already old men." Texas Mohammed said.

"It's going to be alright," Rahim said, "that's not going to be you or any of us."

"How do you know?" Lebanese Mohammed said quietly. "What harm would a little old man do to them? They should be with their families." He said. "We have all been here for years and we can't even write a letter to let our families know that we are alive. Rahim, does your mother know that you are alive? Do you know that *she* is alive? You, Pakistan? It's never going to be alright, not even if they set us free. They have murdered us already. Look at these men. They are at the doorstep of freedom, the only freedom that any of us will ever know, even all of you, who are really innocent." It was only a whisper, careful. Rahim stared at Lebanon.

"What do you mean, *we*, who are innocent?" Lebanon leaned his head on the window and talked without taking his eyes from the men, knowing there was no real life there, nothing left of who they had been, only the eyes, gray and cloudy, roving over the empty room. They were orphaned shadows, long since severed from their bodies. "I put the bomb in the road and covered it with sand and leaves, stones. I went to a hilltop and watched. I jumped when it exploded. I heard the soldiers' screams. I saw them crawling in the sand. My wife, Farrah, was Iraqi. Her uncle was a mortician in northern Iraq and he gave me a job when I was out of work. He said it was safe where he lived, and it was. We heard stories about what was happening in Baghdad or Fallujah, but it was like hearing news about a foreign country. The town was small and not modern, but it was safe. Business was good. They would truck the bodies out to us, dozens at a time. The funerals were not elaborate, but they were plentiful. We started hearing that Al Qaeda men were hiding in our town, and we actually told jokes about it. Maybe Bin Laden was the butcher, maybe he was dressed as a woman and wore a hijab. Then one day while I was at work three bombs dropped out of the sky like hungry eagles, destroying a dozen homes, including mine. Farrah had almost been cut in half. My sweet girls were covered with dust; Angela's hair actually blew in the wind; half of Alaa's head was missing."

They started a new hunger strike. For more than two weeks no one ate. As punishment, the guards turned off the water so that they could not perform wudhu, the washing of the hands before prayer. They used dirt instead. Each ran his hands over the floors and under the bunks, collecting dust, rubbing it carefully over his face, hands, arms, and in this way cleaned himself for prayer, dusty children's faces smiled through the picture frame windows in the doors, laughing at the guards who knew so little of God.

On day eighteen they came with feeding tubes and restraining chairs. Rahim heard fighting as men were forced into the chairs. It took more than an hour for each man, and the whole time he heard their screams. The guards went from cell to cell, forcing life down the throats of men they wanted dead. Then they were there, on the hall where Rahim and the Mohammeds lived; he could hear their boots and the hiccup in the roll of the crooked chair wheels on the floor. Rahim was dragged out of his cell by three soldiers, straps on his legs, arms, head. *Why couldn't he just let me love her*, Rahim thought of Amir, *let her love me?* As he clenched his teeth together a tube, wet with the snot and blood of other men, was pushed up his nose and down his throat.

They got to the doors across the hall from Rahim the next morning; all the doors had their windows covered from the inside so the soldiers couldn't see in. Normally the guards checked on each prisoner every few minutes, but in the rush to force feed an entire camp they had not been diligent. One soldier, a very young black man, started yelling for the doors to be opened, slapping the windows with his palms. Six steel doors shook and rattled open, and inside the six cells were the bodies of six men in their bright orange uniforms, dancing on the ends of mangled sheets. The thick short body of Pakistani Mohammed looked at first like he was alive because his feet were barely off the floor, but then he started to spin and when the sheet strained against the weight he spun back the other way: the toes of good foot pointing straight down and the missing toes of bad foot made it seem like he was doing a pirouette. They screamed out to their friend: *Pakistan! Pakistan!* Guards rushed to cover the windows of the living and everyone started yelling and kicking the doors.

Rahim spent the next morning scraping the black arrow from his floor, and when the guard came offering breakfast he refused politely, instead pushing his copy of the Quran into the soldier's shaking hands. In the next days the guards seemed almost afraid of their prisoners; everyone spoke in whispers, and even some of the higher ranking officers pushed the food carts down the halls, almost begging them to eat.

On the night of day 1591 Rahim was awakened by soldiers. Head covered and chained, he was led outside where he thought he would die among the birds and Cuban raft people. The chains that bound his legs dragged on the pavement as he walked in half steps, as if with Pakistan's bad foot, and as the salty air brushed back the hairs on his arms, he could hear the ship-less sea, its sleepy waves kissing the shore as he was loaded into a van with other men. He couldn't see them but his feet touched theirs, and he could hear the other chains dragging along the floor as they traveled. He wondered if he would be able to hear the shot before the bullet entered his brain, or if the sound and the impact happened in the same moment.

They took him back where they'd gotten him from. They handed him over to Iraqis carrying American guns. After a week in an Iraqi jail he was given a bag of bread, a bus ticket home, and all along the way he thought of her; he thought of fingers intertwined with his own: thin, small, warm and trembling just a bit. Days later Rahim found himself dirty and hungry, shaking as he walked into the narrow crowded streets of Tehran as if it were a dream, looking around at the big buildings and chainless people, at the fresh pomegranates and mangos in the crowded markets. The foggy, polluted streets were crowded with a sea of racing motorcycles and cars, with pedestrians dashing across whenever they could. He stopped to listen to the raging horns, the screeching wheels and the vendor's cries: *Hendooneh! Anar! Toot tazeh!* and to stare at the food and the small children, their faces already smeared with swirled ice creams, who were given a slice of fruit into their mouths by smiling mothers. "Rahim? Rahim?" It was his cousin, Nouri, big and tall, smiling. He jumped up and down, repeating the name. "Rahim! Rahim!" They hugged, Nouri slapping Rahim's back, shaking his shoulders, testing his flesh. Rahim almost collapsed in his cousin's arms. He wanted so desperately to cry, but the tears would not come.

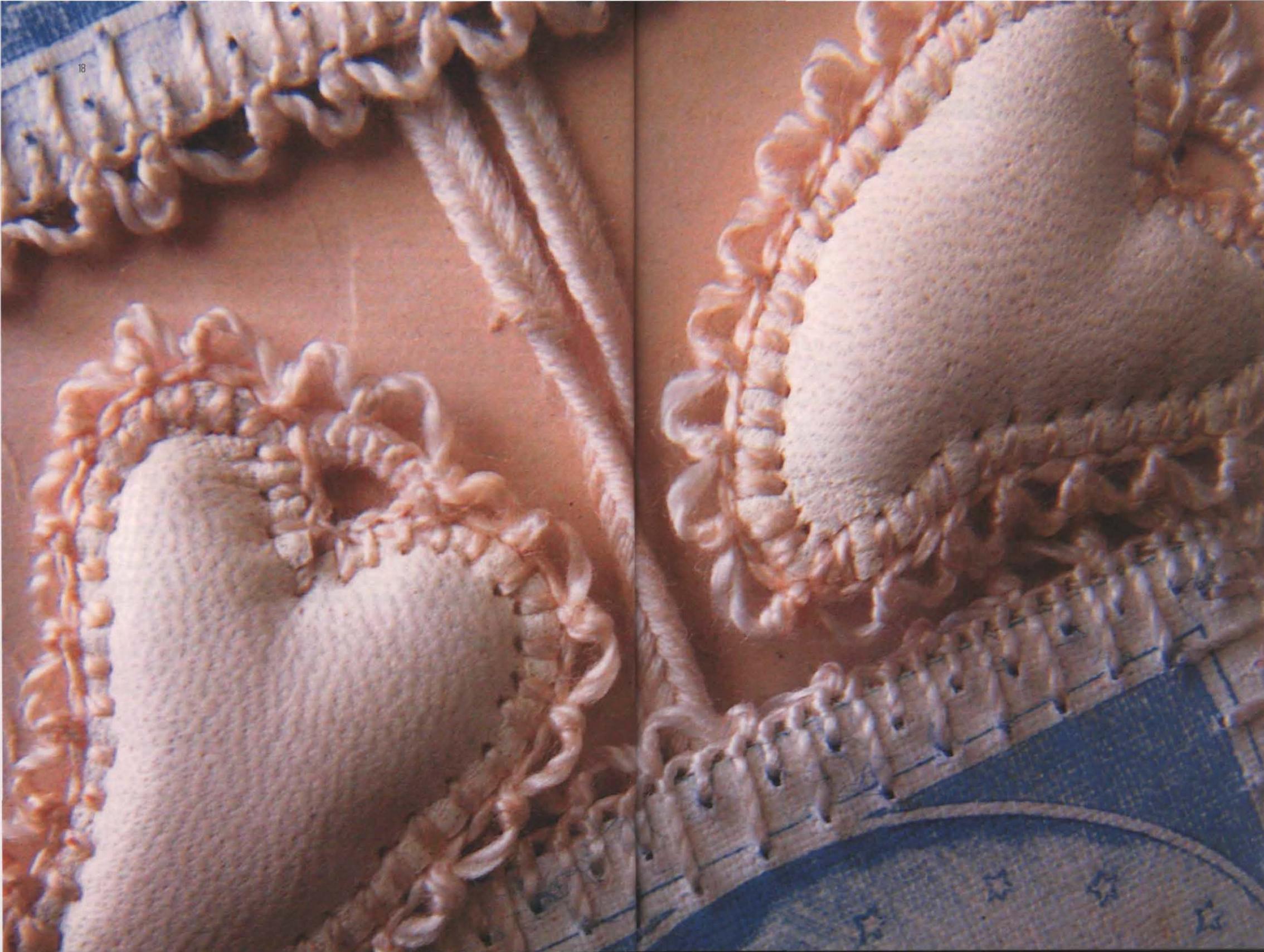
"Where? Where have you been all this time? We searched everywhere. It seemed like we searched every bit of Allah's earth." Rahim didn't know what to say, how to begin; so he just stared up into his cousin's eyes. There was only one thing left, only one thought.

"Ezdevaj kardan?" Rahim asked, with what felt like his last breath. *Did they get married?*

Nouri's eyes were sad. "No, Amir is in England now. Two years ago Atoosa's mother woke late one night to find her gone. You'd been missing for years, but she waited, turning Amir down time and again. She'd left a letter saying that she was going to find you. All of us looked for her; each person

who had looked for you did the same for Atoosa. I wish that I could tell you that she was never found, that she was still missing, wondering somewhere. One of the searchers who helped us in Kurdistan found her very high in the mountains. He couldn't believe that she had made it up so high without any supplies. *Love*, we told him, only love could've carried her so far. We sat your picture on top of her casket, and we buried you together."

He backed away, feeling like he would vomit, and then he heard the azan, the call to prayer, and as the crowded streets emptied into a surging human river, Rahim and Nuri were swept up by the current, almost floating, with people packed all around them, hands urging them onward until they were at a large mosque in Tajrish Square, surrounded by tall pillars of stone and soaring arches, and then the prayer began: *Besmelahe Rahmane Rahim: In the name of God, the Compassionate, and Merciful.* His lips moved, but he couldn't breathe this air; the prayer felt like something swelling in his throat, choking him. Rahim stood up as the praying men continued, looking down at the bowed heads among the thick, beautiful prayer rugs and for a moment he searched for black arrows. The prayer vibrated in the chests of the men around him, and the building almost shook with their faith. He stumbled out into freedom's night. He left. Even though he felt as if he might fall down, he walked on tired broken feet, through the city where he had grown up and where he had loved a girl without ever needing to fall, across Valiasr street, past the subway stations, the shopping malls and the bazaars; he walked right through Tehran, mourning God and love; he walked high up into the mountains and beyond, where there were no arrows painted on floors, where a person couldn't be murdered and yet go on living as if death wasn't punishment enough; he walked until he couldn't see Tehran, until the simmering tears finally boiled over, until the Iraqi border seemed like a fantasy; he walked forever, hoping to be free, hoping to find his way home.



# THE VOICES

JOHN YAMRUS

the voices

in  
his  
head

told him  
he'd find god

at  
Taco Bell.

he  
didn't.

but,  
he did  
find Janie.

the  
voices  
approved.

# FOUR-LETTER WORD

JASON JONATHAN RIVAS

A feeling  
An attraction  
Lust  
Emotion  
The moment  
Struck by lightning  
Your eyes light up like a thousand fireflies  
Feathers in your stomach as butterflies dance within  
Legs sink like a floundering ship's final moments  
A heart beat  
Continuously beating a powerful beat of warmth from within  
Engrossing the body outside  
Words evolve into stronger meaning as you entice  
Lips begin to lock as bodies meet and greet  
The moment encompasses two... to one  
All leading up to the word that is both powerful and meaningless  
Love

# YOU'RE WITH ME

DEVALINA NAG

When a voice speaks with a lightning's strength  
And my words rhyme with the scent of your breath

That's when I...

I feel...

You're with me!

When my feet won't touch the ground  
And my fingers perforate the clouds

That's when I...

I feel...

You're with me!

When the dark blinds my heart and soul  
And there's one, one ray to let me soar

That's when I...

I feel...

You're with me!

Your touch is pure as a butterfly kiss  
Whose caress on skin is barely felt  
But your heart believes

It's love...

Just love.

They say surreal

Do they know?

You're beautiful...

So when the time slows and fastens the moon  
And my soul is moved for a second or two

That's when I...

I feel...

You're with me!

Now that I'm painting the words of my thought  
And my ears hear a beat of your heart  
Oh! You're here!  
God, you're with me!

They say surreal

Do they know?

You're beautiful...

# WOMB SERIES

ELIZABETH AHERN



WOMB SERIES #5. PASTEL ON PAPER, 36 X 24 INCHES



**WOMB SERIES #4**, PASTEL ON PAPER, 36 X 24 INCHES



**WOMB SERIES #2**, ACRYLIC AND PASTEL ON PAPER, 48 X 36 INCHES



WOMB SERIES #7 ACRYLIC ON PLEXIGLAS, 48 X 38 INCHES



# RETRATOS

THOMAS ALETO



LOMO Y PIPIRIANA	\$	64.00
MOLIDA	\$	64.00
ESPINAZO ESPECIAL O CHAMORRO	\$	50.00
ESPINAZO	\$	40.00
PATAS	\$	36.00
CHORIZO VERDE	\$	64.00
CODILLO	\$	38.00
CECINA	\$	80.00
CHILADA O NATURAL	\$	80.00
OBISPO	\$	120.00



CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES, MEXICO. DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH



HERMANAS SISTERS, MEXICO, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH

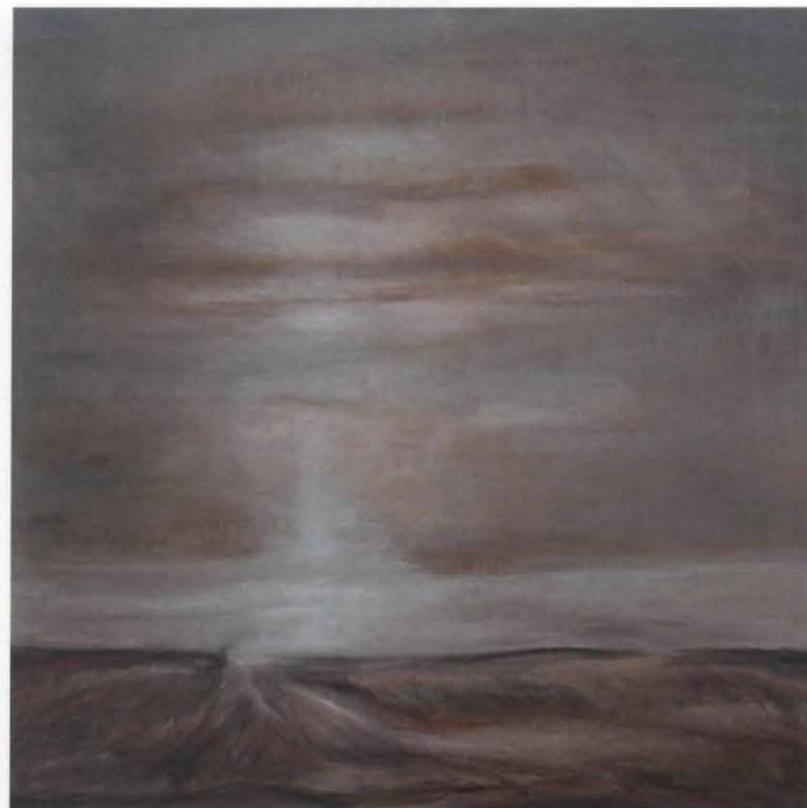


A MAN AND HIS CAT, MEXICO, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH

# UNTITLED

BARBARA BIEL

"I WAS NOT THINKING OF ANYTHING BUT A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION WHEN PAINTING, BUT IN THE END THEY REMIND ME OF FAMILY AND TIMES AT THE RANCH IN SOUTH TEXAS."



UNTITLED, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 X 48 INCHES



UNTITLED, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 X 48 INCHES



UNTITLED, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 X 48 INCHES



UNTITLED, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 X 48 INCHES

# NOT COLUMBUS

ELIZABETH MOBLEY

Write *me* into a song  
 strum me into the rhythm of your soul  
 and carry me on through your vocal chords  
 Floating into the ears of eventual millions  
 And someday I will say that

I knew you.  
 Once upon a lively time  
 I wished upon a  
 Star  
 and awoke from my dreams  
 Into the beautiful sunrise of your eyes  
 While your voice cascaded

onto the soft pallet of my love  
 and my heart skipped *two* beats  
 and settled into an uncontrolled

passion of mental aptitude and emotional strength.

A weakness for you is remedied by a flood of white blood cells  
 Which attempt to fight you off but instead,  
 Fuse you into me, blood to blood  
 And we become  
 one.

Refusing to sleep through the nights  
 We intertwine in a way that no one could decipher  
 You from me  
 And we lie there immersed in a

*New World.*

Discover me  
 as I

discover *you*.

# A DREAM TAKING SHAPE

ANA MARIA ANCHETA

Is it a fevered abstraction?  
 To feel your lithe fingers  
 Grasping at the curve  
 Of my back?  
 To feel your dead eyes  
 Boring into the convex  
 Of my soul?  
 To feel your thin lips  
 Sucking at the concavity  
 Of my mouth?  
 Wake up.  
 You miss her  
 As you tear quietly into  
 My fields and valleys  
 You are certain to find her.  
 As I long deliriously for  
 Your troughs and crests.  
 My lines are not hers.  
 She exists  
 As an infinite thought.  
 As a dreamed coordinate.  
 Wake up.  
 Find her.

# LOVE PREFERS TWILIGHT TO DAYLIGHT

JONATHAN OTERO

Our voices fill these empty streets with sound  
 {Echoes of black and white syntax}  
 They are not enough to protect us from the wind  
 Even with our jackets wrapped around us  
 Warmth escapes through our soles  
 Rendering us temporary with every step  
 The moon gives what it can  
 Laying its silver strands upon ghosts  
 Our vocal chords breathe to live  
 As we denounce our faith  
 {Casting shadows as arrows}  
 Our palms bend backwards  
 Revealing skin  
 {Twisted as the night sky}  
 We torture ourselves over discussion

Like Mother,  
 Like Father,

We break.

# 새벽 / DAWN

STELLA ADEDJE

I spent last night in fractured sleep,  
 pining for you,  
 berating my heart,  
 forgiving myself,  
 laughed at my spirit  
 that it still remembers you,  
 always thought I chased you out,  
 dusted you out of the corners of my roomy heart,  
 but you appeared again,  
 stood beside me and smiled,  
 lighting up my world again,  
 and then you turned to her,  
 and I knew yet again,  
 you're out of my reach,  
 perhaps you've always been. . .



# THE GAME

VICTOR ANCHETA

It is a game they used to play.  
 Boy and girl hunt for the most toads,  
 put them in a bucket,  
 throw them on the road  
 and watch them get squished by spinning wheels.  
 Who gets to color the asphalt more, wins.  
 Green and red have never looked so appealing.

That has been years ago, the game has changed.

She is older now; she no longer giggles.  
 She stares at her bony wrists; blue veins want to escape the thin husk that  
 holds them in.  
 Phone in hand begins to vibrate; arteries too, begin to pulsate.  
 She ignores it all.  
 She sighs.

She is alone in an apartment somewhere on the night plains of  
 Arizona.  
 Electric halos blind her; as do the bugs around her, she hears them kami-  
 kaze straight to the floor.  
 Stunned by white, they bang themselves too, against the metal door to her  
 box-abode.  
 Those bugs, she thinks to herself, play a different game.  
 They're on their own; they do it to themselves.  
 They don't need help to wreck themselves.

Cradled phone vibrates again.  
 The door rattles; steel is kicked in.  
 The light flickers; night comes in.  
 He is here.  
 She is found.  
 Her body is lifted, thrown to the floor. Her green skirt, torn.  
 Fists pounded on flesh, skull against tile, eyes on frozen beetles.

The hunt is over.

She knows the road will be red again.

March 2012

# STOLEN SAINTS

KHYBER DANIEL

Stains of suffering, lance and cross and mail  
Flat curving hosts of all and its blessings stale  
Silence breaks that prison of bodies' bonds:  
The spirit chases blues like a hound.

Life in rough and reckless painting crosses  
Back and forth from belief losses  
And creeps its justice of remembrance  
So hard and still weeds blossom less and less.

Persecution each stubborn heart and mind  
Dooms as love marks of joy snap and mix  
Like fish in golden pools of air and fix  
Feelings of glory into rivers kind

Like light and lightning-like comes the glory  
As I see happiness out of "Sorry."

# SHOPPING FOR SUNSET IN GOD'S CLOSET

KAREN MARQUEZ

*June 13*

We sat in the back booth of the diner, waiting for the waitress to bring our food. My stomach hated me for making it wait so long. It was much too empty. It felt sick to want food right now, to crave and search for nourishment after refusing it to another.

Do you plan on speaking anytime soon? I looked down at the bottom of my shirt and fiddled with the string hanging on it. I didn't want to look in his eyes. Not yet, not right now. Jesus Christ, Dawn, how long are you gonna keep quiet? Huh? Damn it, Dawn! Talk to me!

I shook my head. Not right now, I whispered. I'm not ready yet. He huffed and threw his weight against the booth, making it tilt slightly. I'm sorry, alright? I'm just not ready. Can't you understand that? His eyes burned a hole through me. I didn't have to look at him to feel his stinging stare. I settled back to playing with the loose string on my shirt.

He sighed. Yes, I understand, but you need to understand that it's frustrating for me not to know what you're thinking, especially right after they just—. Don't say it, ok? Not yet.

I still couldn't believe I had agreed to this. I wouldn't have thought myself capable of doing it. I always thought that if I was blessed enough to have my own, I would seize it, but instead, I literally threw it away. My dreams and wishes all sucked into darkness, into nothing. I finally understood why they called it a vacuum. It wasn't like a tunnel, hope glimmering at the end. In a vacuum, nothing lay at the end. There was nothing in it, no good, no bad, nothing. It was beginning and end, but today I chose end. My brave little astronaut gone in his first mission to space. Or her. There was no way of knowing now.

Look, it's not like you had a choice. It's not like you didn't want it. You had to give it up or you'd both die. You know that.

I do know that. It doesn't make a difference, though, at least not to me. You know I always wanted to have one. You know that.

Yeah, I do, but you can have another one some other time. I wished he would just shut up. Listen, you can't tell your mother. I know you said you wouldn't, but I need to remind you. If you tell her, then who will pay for your treatments? You know money's tight.

I'm not stupid, I said. Of course I won't tell her.

I had all the names, all the dreams, and all the hopes for him. Why did he have to come now? Why couldn't he come a year before we found out my heart was no good? Now that he came, what I had dreamt of my entire childhood was gone in no more than ten minutes.

*June 14*

I can't stop thinking about her. I've decided it was a girl. I wanted a boy so much, so it must have been a girl because I always get the opposite of what I want. I wouldn't care if it were a boy or a girl right now, just as long as I'd get to have one. Why did she come now?

I've felt so cold today. How do I expect to be warm? I've destroyed the sun and still expect it to defrost the ice that has settled under my skin.

My heart rate is somewhat high today. We've already called the hospital and scheduled my surgery. They said they can't do it until a week and a half from today. A week and a half before I go in and have my heart cut open. I don't know how they'll be able to find it. If they have any problems locating my heart, I'll tell them to look down the vacuum. I'm sure they can find it there. I'll tell them to bring my daughter back if they see her.

Mom doesn't suspect anything. She just thinks that Keith and I went to watch a movie. I've kept my mouth shut so far. I don't know if I should tell her, though. What if a doctor notices while I'm in surgery? What if they tell her? I don't think they will, but what if they see something that tips them off? They shouldn't be looking at anything but my heart, and my belly doesn't show. The good thing is that I only look like I've put on a few pounds, nothing more. After the surgery, I'll have a good reason to wear sweats instead of the tired I'm-too-lazy-to-wear-anything-else excuse. I won't have to hear her

say Again with the damn sweats! for a while. Mom and I have argued a lot over that, but soon she won't have a choice other than to accept it.

I wonder what Mom would say if she knew. I feel even more wrong for what I did when I see her and think about the choice she had made. On every single one of my birthdays, she tells me the story of how she was 17, almost my age, and the doctors told her she'd have to choose between her and me. She chose me, and against the odds, we both made it. I was born premature, but overall, I was healthy. She always says it was the scariest and best choice she's ever made. Which means I've made the worst choice, and I'm well aware of that. But I'm not her, although Keith seems to forget that from time to time.

I feel really weak, but I guess it's to be expected. The doctor told me I would want to relax and that I wouldn't have a lot of energy, so I guess this is normal. Anyway, what do I expect? It's not like I'd be jumping for joy. Not when I've lost her.

I thought about what I would've named her. I thought about maybe naming her Joy. I think it sounds nice and I'm sure she would've been the source of a lot of joy for me. It just seems odd, almost morbid to want to call her that after she's no longer here. Maybe I should call her Sunset instead. I think that's a real pretty name.

Before Keith went to bed, I asked him if we should name her. He stared at me like I'd lost it. That's definitely not how he looked at me when he came into my bedroom for the first time three years ago. Um, sure, he drawled. Did you have a name in mind?

What do you think about Sunset?

Sunset? I nodded. That's pretty, I guess. Oh, he laughed, I get it, Sunset and Dawn, Dawn and Sunset. That's very clever. Sunset it is, then! I instantly regretted telling him her name. I didn't like the way he said it, the way he threw it around so carelessly, like it was a ball that he could just toss into the air and catch at the very last second. I wish he were the one who disappeared yesterday. I wish I could tell mom everything, but the ball's not in my court anymore. Hey, you didn't tell your mom, did you? I shook my head. Just checking. Alright then, just remember that you can't tell her or else no one will pay for your surgery. I glared. Well, good night, he said, and he shut my bedroom door behind him.

June 15

I've decided to do something to take my mind off this. People always say that the biggest events in life should be commemorated with pictures, and if this doesn't qualify as a big event, I don't know what does. I asked Keith if I could borrow his old Polaroid. On one condition, he said. I already knew what it was. I can't do that for another three weeks. You heard the doctor. He said two to three weeks, *two*, so we can do it in two weeks, not three.

It's been three years, *three*, in which he's shamelessly done this at least once a month, and he's still too ashamed to call what he does by its proper name. How childish. I didn't answer. Just give me the camera, Keith. I'm good for it. Anyway, it's not like you don't know where I live. Sometimes you just have to laugh at the things that hurt the most.

He chuckled and ran his hand through his salt-and-pepper hair, the creases on his face coming into even sharper relief. Yeah, I guess you have a point there. I followed him into my mother's bedroom. He took the box of his old things down from the top closet shelf and pulled out the camera. Do you want the timer too? I nodded. That's going to be extra. I gritted my teeth and twitched my head. Alright, here you go. I grabbed them and left. What, no thank you? I kept walking.

I decided to go to the mall and pretend I was shopping for Sunset. I put different outfits together and took pictures of the best one. Click. If you were here, I bet you would look beautiful in this, baby. I went over to the little machine at the front of the store where you could make your own baby registry and filled one with all the things that I would've asked for her. I didn't even put expensive things on there. I wouldn't want to inconvenience anyone. When the big FINISHED caption flashed across the screen, I took a picture of it. Click. I'm thinking that I might make a scrapbook for her. She deserves it.

June 17

I've been working on Sunset's scrapbook. For once, I'm glad my mom works the late shift at the hospital. I've stayed up the last couple of nights working on it. I wake up caked in glitter and glue. Sometimes I glue my hands together just so I can peel it off when it dries. Simple minds, simple pleasures, I suppose.

I really like the way it's coming along. I've decided to make a section dedicated to her favorite places, like the park that's three blocks from here. There's tons of kids running around, smiling their waxing half-moons, so full

of promise and uncertainty. I like to sit under the oak and take shots of them as they scale the jungle gym. The heat feels so good.

I saw this girl a couple of days ago sitting across the playground. She sat there in her shorts, legs crossed one over the other mirroring her arms. She looked like she was my age. As I watched her, her face fell right into her hands. Splat. I thought it looked so weird how quickly her face fell. She stayed like that for a while and I couldn't help but stare. Then I realized that her hair was the same shade of brown as mine and the same length too. She was wearing the same shorts and sweatshirt I was, and on the bench beside her was the same Polaroid. It scared me that we were so similar and it made me want to leave, but I reached for my camera to take a picture of it instead. I wasn't going to put it in Sunset's scrapbook because I didn't want her to be scared when she sees the girl like that.

I was ready to take the picture, but when I looked up, the girl had her camera in hand too like she wanted to take a picture of me. I put mine down and she did too. It felt like a scene from a Western and I wondered what she would do if I raised mine quickly. We stared off and did a quick draw. Neither of us took the picture though. I didn't hear the click. I figured that, if we were mimicking each other, then I could set the timer and sit the way she had, and finally have the picture I wanted. I walked to the jungle gym and turned the timer. I heard it hiss at me and I scurried to the bench. Quickly, I copied her earlier pose, let my face splatter on my hands, and heard the timer take the picture. Click. The camera spit out the picture. When I looked up, the girl was gone. She was trapped inside the square and could never escape.

June 18

He couldn't wait to collect.

June 19

It's not going to stop, is it? I thought it would. What kind of person continues after seeing what can happen? What if he gets me pregnant again? I wish I could tell my mother, but I can't. It would ruin her. And he won't pay for my surgery. This arrangement makes me feel like some cheap prostitute. Pay for my surgery and you can do whatever you like.

I took a picture of him at my doorway last night as he shut my bedroom door. Click. In it, his body lies completely in shadow, except for half of his face and his right hand, which grips the doorknob. The spidery hand closing the trapdoor. This time, I'm the one who trapped him within the square. I'm just scared he'll escape.

*June 20*

I've figured it all out. He feels that I have no choice but to keep quiet because of my surgery, and he's probably going to keep doing this after it. Only I know that I'm keeping quiet so Mom won't be hurt and she can be with the man she loves, even if he doesn't deserve her. It's not her fault he turned out to be the way he is. Why should I ruin her happiness? I just need to get away from here soon. I hadn't even realized that my surgery is two days from now. I'm going to go tomorrow so I can have a chance to collect myself.

Oh, I almost forgot! I finished Sunset's scrapbook! I can't wait to see her face when I show her. I think she's gonna like it.

*June 21*

Today's the big day! I have to admit, I'm really scared. I'm leaving tonight. Part of me isn't completely sure of this, which makes me feel guilty. I already abandoned Sunset once. I can't do it again. And I promised her that I would be there soon. I can't go back on my word. What kind of example would I be setting for her if I did? I'm furious with myself and frustrated, so I started throwing things around my room. For some reason I didn't hear anything crashing or banging, but Keith came in and asked if I was ok. I guess I was crying really hard because he came close to me like he was going to hug me. I didn't want him to touch me, but I couldn't find my tongue to tell him that.

Closer and closer he came while I backed into the grimy corner. I shrank from his embrace. It was all his fault and now he had the nerve to try to comfort me? Comfort is restraint, and he had restrained me far too long for me to let him do it anymore. I continued to move until I couldn't back away any farther. He wrapped his arms around my waist while I stood there, staring stoically at the evil expanse of his faded face. I could smell the disgusting stench of booze coming from his throat.

I began to move my legs, trying to propel myself forward while he pulled me back. Shh, Dawn. It's ok. It'll be alright. I know you're worried about your surgery, but it'll be ok. You've been a good girl, so I'll take care of it like I said. You have nothing to worry about, ok? I kept trying to pull away, but I couldn't leave. His hands caressed my head. My legs were lost to me. Eventually they stopped, assumed a new position, and gave in.

When he had his fill, he shut the door behind him. My legs waited until he was gone and then followed him out the door, leaving my upper-half writhing in the dust.

After my legs had wondered around aimlessly for some time, they came back for my upper-half. Together, they dragged my head to the garage and set it down on the workbench. My arms grabbed the coil of rope off the third shelf and stacked my head on top while my eyes absorbed everything. When my arms finished their spree, my legs walked back toward my room, my eyes making a quick detour into the living room. They watched Keith's body on the armchair blazing in the glow of the television as he took another sip of his beer. Cans circled the chair, hastily tossed aside after they were consumed. He was binging again. What did he have to forget? What part of himself was he trying to destroy? Whatever he was trying to do, he was so far gone that he didn't even notice me.

When I got to my room, I closed the door behind me and stepped into my closet. I watched as my hands tied my heartstrings and the rope together to form a noose as my eyes appraised the strength of the beam overhead. My arms reached for it and let my body swing for a bit. It creaked, but held. I put the rope just right and set the stepladder under it.

Then I realized that I wanted to take a picture of this moment. I almost slapped my forehead. Why hadn't I thought of it before! After all, it was a very important moment, and isn't that what pictures are for? It'd be the best picture yet because it would be the moment I would finally meet Sunset and give her the scrapbook I made for her. I could put it at the back of the album and we could smile at our meeting. I wondered if she would think that her mother looked pretty in her new necklace. My hands set the Polaroid on the bed in front of the closet and hooked the timer on. My eyes made sure that I could run and be ready in time for the picture.

My fingers turned the dial, and as my ears heard the snarl, my hands grabbed the scrapbook off the bed and my legs shuffled up the two steps. My neck slipped into its new necklace even though no one was there to close the clasp for me while my lips formed the best smile they could. All I could think of was what it would be like to see my daughter in the heavens. As my feet walked into the sunset and my body descended, my brain whirred one last time. I had already shattered so many of the silver rules of Christendom and I was about to violate another I couldn't and wouldn't repent from. Horrified, I couldn't help but wonder if I was fit enough to even occupy a hanger in God's closet.

Click.



# BECAUSE SOMETIMES THINGS CAN JUST BE PRETTY II

STEVEN COLFAX

Sundried picket around the still fire piles  
of marigold dead leaves and rocks with moss,  
it leans.  
Faded petals of plastic flowers write anecdotes  
at the feet of headstones.  
A sheer fog swaddles  
the trunks of trees beyond.  
In the morning,  
a naked toe rests idly on the porch boards,  
and down the road, the cross-hatches of cherry ferns  
wave above the hedges and above the headstones,  
towards the toe in question.  
Field mice squeeze between the snaggle-holes  
of the fence. The sound  
their feet make,  
a pop rock systole.  
White cherub bales shade the sycamore, the oak,  
inherited by the headstones  
and passed further down, and passed below.  
And on the headstones, names are carved.  
Of songs, merry. Of years, golden.  
Of hearts, cherished.  
Or not at all.

# —JEANNIE—

DANIEL CERVANTES

Familiar paths give way to familiar walks.  
Where do those dirt roads lead to?  
Familiar feet trudge out grassy knolls.  
Raw, powdered feet out towards where, who knows?  
Jeannie.  
Jeannie in a blue dress  
and barefoot in backwoods pine hollow riverwalks.  
Jeannie on Sunday steps  
and fanning herself in a glimmer of summer sweat.  
Lemonade porch-swings,  
Easter deviled eggs.  
Be sure to say each and every one of your prayers.  
The porch erodes from under those powdered feet 'fore you know it.  
Jeannie eyes always moving, never stuck in dead air stare.  
Jeannie eyes to watch over and make sure you know it.  
Make sure you know that that tone you hear,  
the one that bleeds sticky from the pine,  
the one that saws into you well into the night,  
the one that smolders grassy knolls,  
that tone of infinite tolls,  
is one that shakes itself out from a steel wire pluck  
by her very fingers.  
Jeannie, escaped before I even got to know her.

American Home

hiding spot  
tree  
water gun  
brother  
frisbee  
sister  
Mom  
stove  
brother

splinters  
ball  
rock  
spaceship  
castle  
fort  
transmogriker

brother sister  
sister friend  
tv

Dad

# ELVIS

SHERRI PERRY

Baby Girl cries when Elvis sings "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You". She curls up against the red nubby pillow and cries her eyes out. Bubba asks her why. He asks why about everything and usually she is happy to answer him.

But this, she cannot explain.

Bubba watches her carefully. Tears rain down her cheeks, hang briefly off her chin, drip on the T-shirt she got from Bumpy's Barbecue.

"Elvis' voice is so, so, smooth, so pretty."

"His voice is sad," pronounces Bubba, confident he has this right.

"No, not sad. He sounds like a dog would, left out in the rain." Baby Girl surprises herself with this analogy. It's a bit beyond what she usually comes up with.

"Sad," agrees four year old Bubba.

"Hopeful," she corrects him.

The radio is now playing "Georgia on My Mind" and Baby Girl energetically rubs her face and sits up, the pillow in her lap.

"I'm hungry," he tells her.

She knows this already. It's 15 minutes past noon according to the plastic clock on the mantel, plastic that's supposed to look like wood. Every day at noon she hands Bubba his grilled cheese sandwich. They sit at the Formica table with its nick in the aluminum edge that mama got so mad about.

Mama will sleep until at least 3:00 and Baby Girl knows it is her job to be sure her baby brother eats.

"How 'bout we skip the sandwich today?"

Bubba frowns. "Why?"

"Something different." She stretches her legs, her toes, then her arms. She throws the pillow at him, which he dodges easily. "Let's walk to the station and get some peanuts and coke."

"But I'm hungry now."

Baby Girl crosses the small living room, goes into the sunny kitchen that despite the yellow curtains and whirring fan on the counter seems listless and lonely. She throws open the refrigerator door. Glass bottles protest. Pulling out the mayonnaise and cheese she quickly slaps together a sandwich and hands it to her short, demanding, perpetually questioning brother.

"It's not warm!"

"I'm not going to grill it today. I want to do things different today!"

"Why?" Bubba nibbles at the crust and keeps frowning.

"I don't know. Blame it on Elvis."

"Elvis is sad," Bubba reminds her, around a wad of sandwich he has decided he must eat if he is to eat at all.

Down the sidewalk, carefully crossing at the corner, girl and boy walk to the gas station hand in hand. Baby Girl slides open the coke cooler, grabs two green glass bottles, sets one on the ground while she pops the cap off one, then the other.

"Hey, sister, you got money for that?" Blake stands at the door of the gas station, greasy hat on his greasy head. Baby Girl thinks he is the most gorgeous thing she's ever seen. She tries to see him as much as she can but she knows he thinks little of the eleven year old girl from the pink house.

She bet if Blake sang, he'd sound like Elvis.

"I got money," she replies, bringing two dimes out of her pocket. "And we want peanuts too."

Shrugging, Blake tosses a small bag of peanuts at her.

"Thank you." She steps a few steps closer, hands him the money,

searches his face for any sign he thinks she is pretty, or interesting, or in any way noteworthy.

Blake turns his back and walks back into the shade of the garage. He puts the dimes on top of the register as he passes.

Baby Girl sighs and grabs Bubba's hand. Sweat is trickling down her back, down the backs of her knees. Bubba's hair is plastered in sticky wickets on his forehead.

"Sit here. I'll put some peanuts in your coke for you," she tells him, pulling him to the cool concrete step.

"Why?" Bubba wants to know.

"I don't know," she says. "It's fun to see them float to the bottom. Watch."

The two children watch the peanuts float to the bottom of the coke. "Tastes better now too."

"Why?"

"Salt in a bottle, mixes with the fizz, it's just good."

"Okay," says Bubba obediently, tipping his coke up and into his small questioning mouth.

A Ford pulls up. The bell dings. Blake comes out and yells at Baby Girl to get moving, he has customers. The Ford has its radio up loud, Elvis singing about blue suede shoes.

Baby Girl thinks this is probably the best day of her life so far. Blake has spoken to her, she had heard Elvis twice in one day, and she has peanuts in her coke.

She and Bubba cross the street, and the pink house swallows them up.

# LENNIE, LEONARDA, NANA

DANIEL CERVANTES

Amazon furls, history furls, in backyard flower pots.  
 Monkey grass curls, evening curls, around cacti perimeters.  
 Ripe gully air lowers its stank and never stops.  
 And the barefoot garden queen rises for dinner.

Lennie to the in-laws, to the sisters.  
 Yolanda. Gloria. To all the Lopez unchecked.  
 No, no, sit, sit; I'll get it. Look what I got you!  
 How does it taste, okay?

Leonarda to the lovers, the degenerate, the mystery Ricardo,  
 the cowboy she married with dentures and the longest beard you've ever seen.

Ma, mother, mom to the four things that followed.  
 Two Cervantes, two Smithwick, a Ricardo.  
 Ma, your ash!

Long chains of unflicked ash build  
 in the absence of her mind.

Her cigarette fingers limp and the ember eating itself out behind  
 the backdrop of her spree wheel stories.

Nana, barefoot garden queen  
 spends mornings folded in the comfort of the window unit stream.  
 And when she's up, I follow her on water hose patrols  
 picking at snails and pointing out caterpillar holes.

Lennie, Leonarda, Nana queen of her home  
 of revolving doors and pillows that have all felt  
 the brown tufts of each of our heads.  
 We down the long days in thirsty gulps  
 poured from the garden spout.  
 And when we finally leave,  
 she's always sure to shout  
*Mucho Cuidaò!*

# BRAIDING

ROBIN DAVIDSON

I'm braiding my daughter's hair,  
crossing over one strand and one strand.  
Leaf-shadows play on the closed blind,  
rippling, rippling.  
Nothing keeps in the continuum  
of light and wind outside the window.  
I hold wildness in my hand.  
We continue, one strand and one strand,  
the undulating curls and coils  
falling along her neck, her shoulders.  
I drop one hair, then another.  
Though I'm not much good at this,  
she is patient. Her head in my hands,  
she leans in, tugs away, as do I,  
crafting what we can of the morning.  
I'd like to believe I've saved her  
from chaos, but more likely,  
she humors me, and before afternoon  
she'll shake her braids,  
Let all that hair unravel.

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN POET LORE, VOLUME 107, NUMBER 3/4 AND LUMINOUS OTHER, 2013





