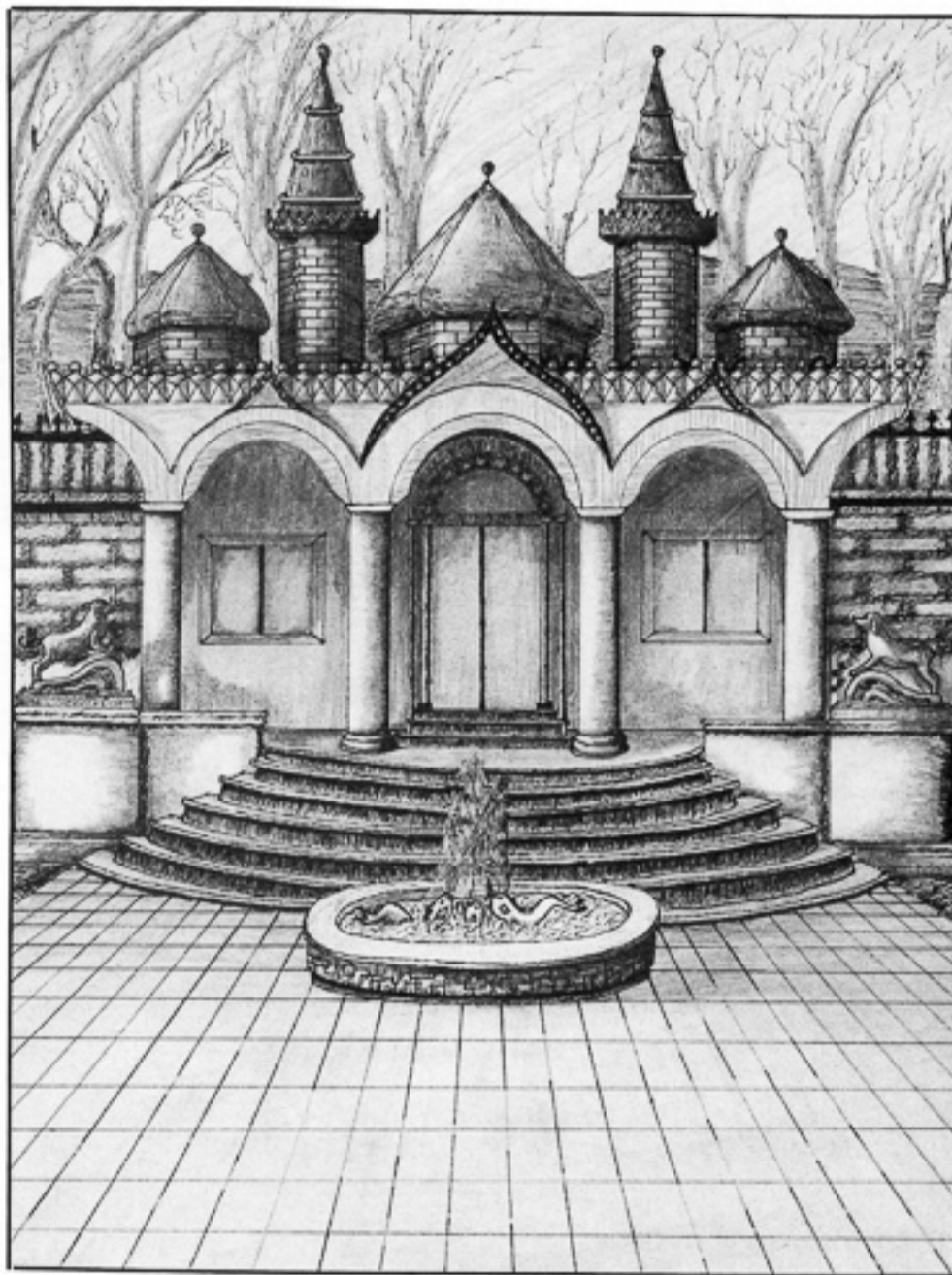


LABYRINTH

Labyrinth

1990



T.C. Williams High School
Alexandria, Virginia

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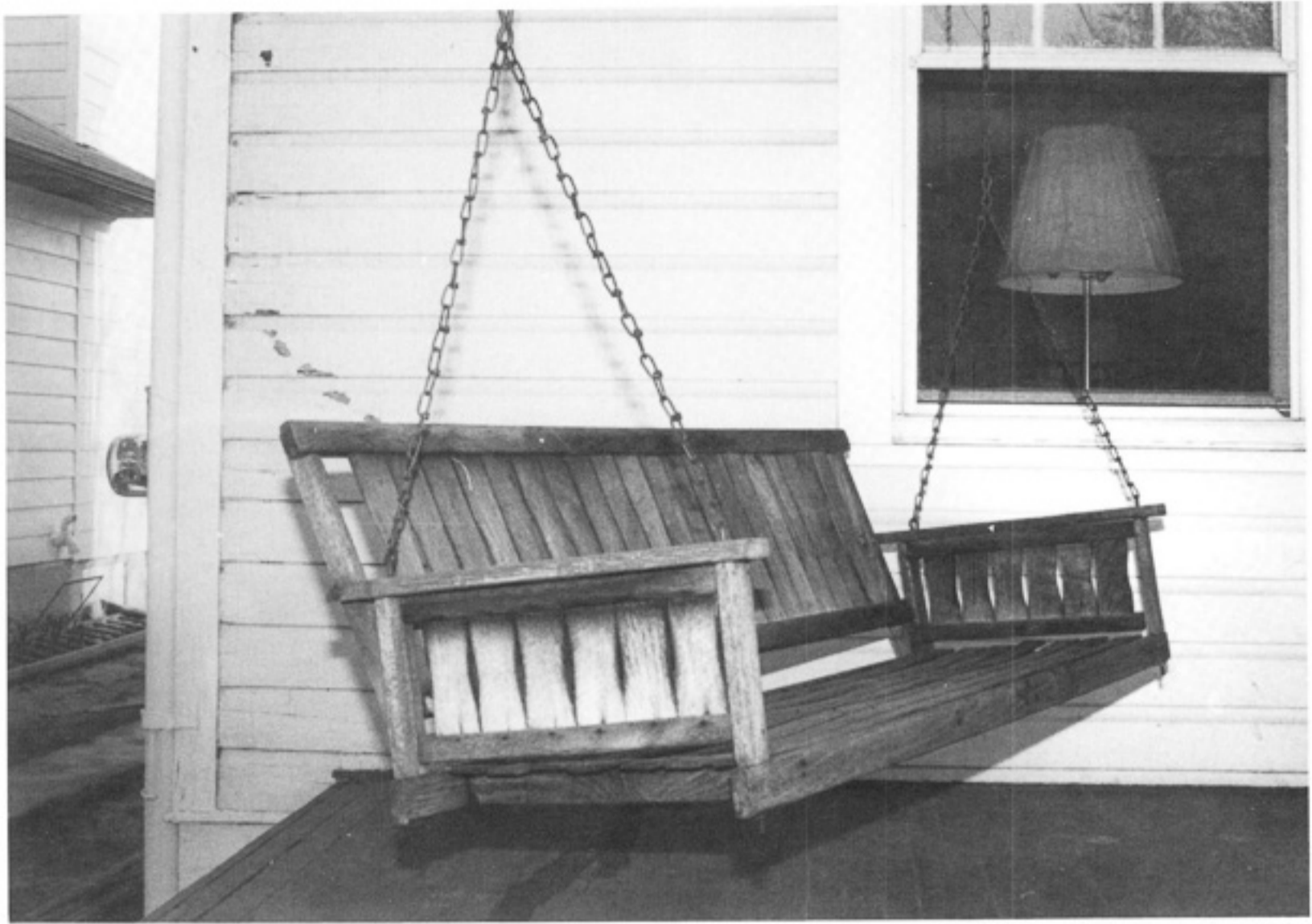
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Cover by Yasser El-Ebiary



Todd Seligman

Ode to a Mauve Porch Swing

*O ye lonely porch swing,
painted mauve on a Spring afternoon,
you blow ever so slightly in the twilight breeze,
that with each arc my heart remembers
a warm summer night.*

*You have seen, and helped me,
with everything: my first kiss, my first
love and all the decisions that were
important at the time.*

*Now looking at you, my mauve porch swing,
I remember, and I know, and I thank
you.*

*For you are peace, you are steady,
and I know I can rely on you.*

—Todd Seligman

Those Things Forgotten

*The rotting wooden boards creaked as I climbed,
having been untredd for centuries,
this forgotten attic calling out for a visitor.
In a corner, laced with cobwebs, an old friend rested.
My beautiful, young doll turned antique
since last we played,
layers of dust greying her hair.
Through the small, cracked window pane
were sent the last rays of light,
the sunset growing over the world.
A strong wind rattled my window
and tore the leaves off the old, once-strong
trees in my backyard.
With those leaves, that night, I saw
my childhood fleeting.*

—Katie Dixon



Rob Calvert

Dewey Beach, Delaware

*Inside, warmth—the feel of my wool skirt under me
Voices mingling together—polite conversation—
children's giggles
Ice clinking in fragile glass globes—beads of moisture,
forming
Soft music—*

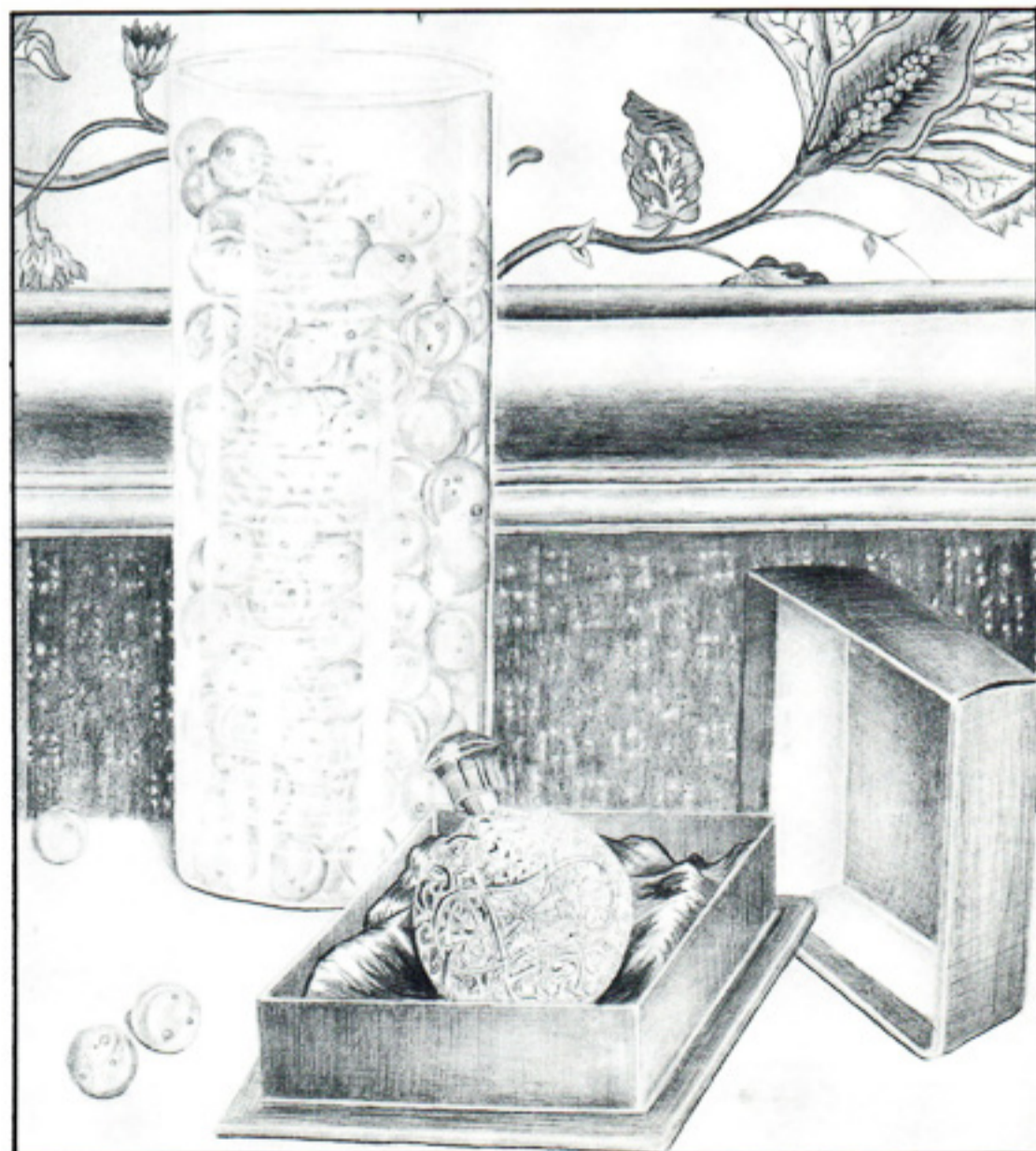
*Climbing up steep stairs overlooking the vast living
room
Bursts of laughter drifting up
I reach the top, the door, I open it...
Outside—cold, breezy, misty, hazy.
Rain hits my glasses
Looking into the distance—water grey
Black specks fly
Swooping wind currents
White waves breaking on the beach
The urge
to run
away*

*Outside, coldness—shrill screech of seagulls
Warmth inside of me—
My fragile glass globe filled with a numbing concoction
The dare—
I'll beat
you to
the dunes''*

*Cold sand between my toes—
Shells scattered on the beach—
Footprints left behind—washed away
Wind howls—
The
race
back
Breathless—we reach our destination*

Fall of 1987

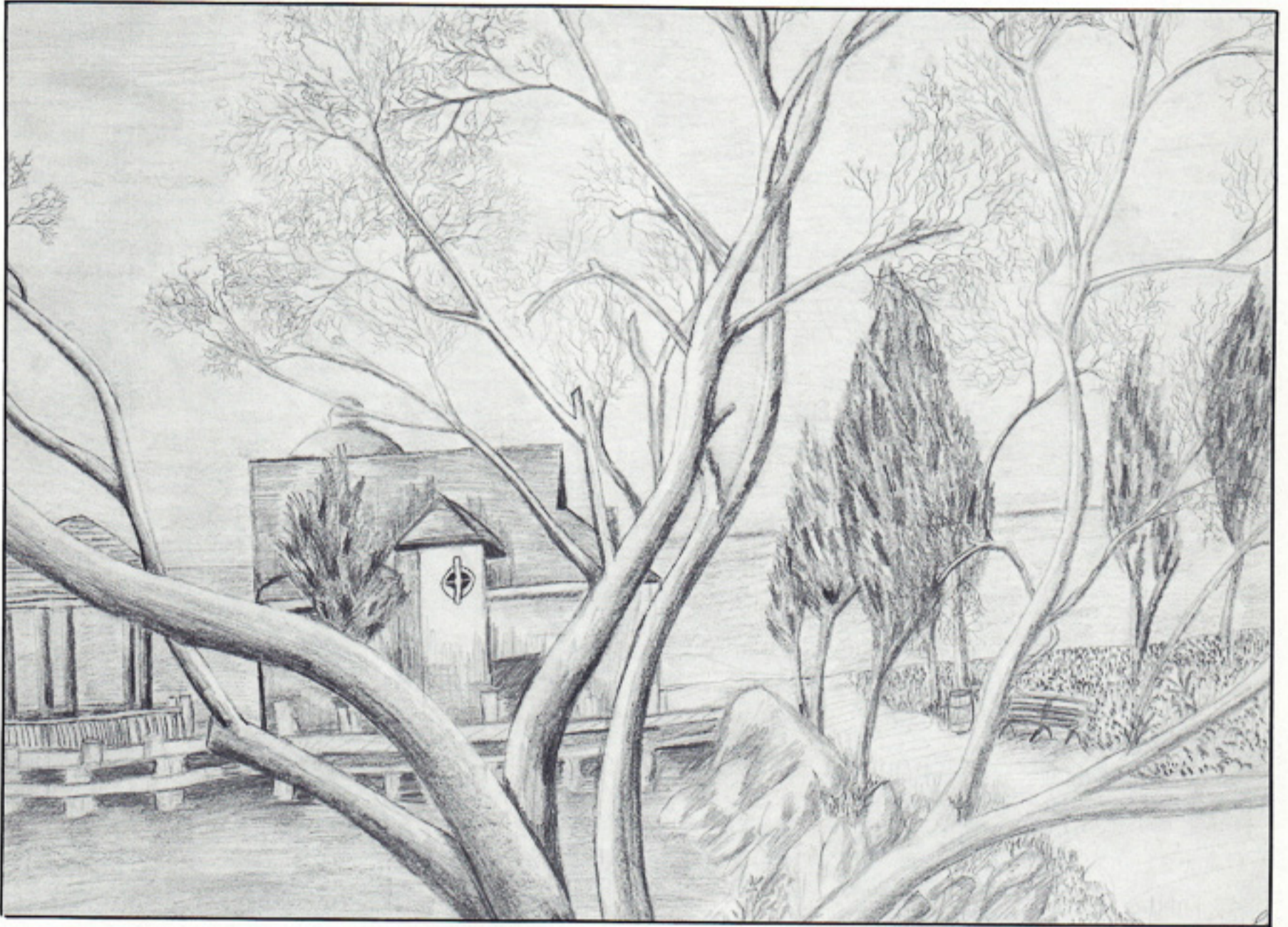
—Magin Batson



Weeping Willow Tree

*Weeping willow tree,
branches hanging long and low,
leaves like crying tears.*

—C. Paulin



A Memory

Yasser El-Ebiary

*As brown grains of sand dance
with the force of the wind,
laughing echoes of children
dissolve into the mist.
White, fluffy seagulls glide
over the black sea,
while a hermit crab glances into the sun
and struggles back into his shell.
An old man sits quietly on a bench
and squints,
trying to clear
a blurry vision
of the crashing waves, as he remembers
her.*

—Sandy Shih

Some Time Blues

Morning mists give the sandstone facades of Tupelo's poorest neighborhood an almost violet hue. A train yard on the edge of town is buzzing with men dressed in the dirty uniforms of fruit handlers. The dark eyes of the workers squint with the coming of the haloed sun as they toss the crates of oranges into the battered vermilion freight cars covered with rust; bound for the tables of rich northerners.

As Ivory Davis loaded the crates he began to think of all the golden cities this tired skeleton of a train would go to. Ivory thought about Chicago, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker and a rhythmic sound known only to him by the sound of records on his grandmother's phonograph. Crates disappeared as the sun climbed higher; work was done. At the sound of the bell Ivory bolted out of the depot's gate and headed for the small grille that was only a few blocks from his grandmother's house. He could always count on the quality of the food to be as warm as the owner's smile. The owner had been a friend of Ivory's father. After ferociously devouring a hot pork chop sandwich, Ivory thanked the owner and ran home.

"As Ivory Davis loaded the crates he began to think of all the golden cities this tired skeleton of a train would go to."

Ivory smiled at the familiar sound of his foot on the smooth ancient floorboards on the front porch of his grandmother's house. The slam of the screen door announced his arrival. Walking through the thin hall of the shotgun house, Ivory could see the slightly stooped silhouette of his grandmother hanging clothes on the line that ran from the house to the decrepit chain link fence. She called to Ivory to help her hang the laundry. Thick glasses hid ebony eyes that stared out from pools of cream. Her wrinkled face allowed a smile when Ivory appeared. Ivory kissed his grandmother's leathery cheek and went back to the house. Fluttering sheets shrouded his grandmother as her voice rose to tell him that today he was to go to Bill Dixon's farm. He had forgotten his grandmother had told "Crazy" Bill, this was the name that the children called the hermit farmer, that Ivory would use his masonry skills to fix Bill's brick walk.

Ivory sullenly crept out of the house with a bag full of masonry tools on his shoulder and his trumpet in his hand. Kicking open the screen door he slowly headed down the magnolia lined lane to the edge of town, passed the rail yard, to the farm of Bill Dixon. Ivory stomped out a slow staccato beat with his boots on the sidewalk and began to play his trumpet. The battered trumpet yawned at first then began to screech at the touch of his fingers. Ivory's father had left him the trumpet when he left to find work in the steel mills of the north. Missing a key on the tarnished scratched trumpet made every note two or three octaves lower than a new trumpet.

“The door this time slowly swung and Bill was standing there, his white hair illuminated by the noon day sun. In his calloused hand Bill held an oblong black case.”

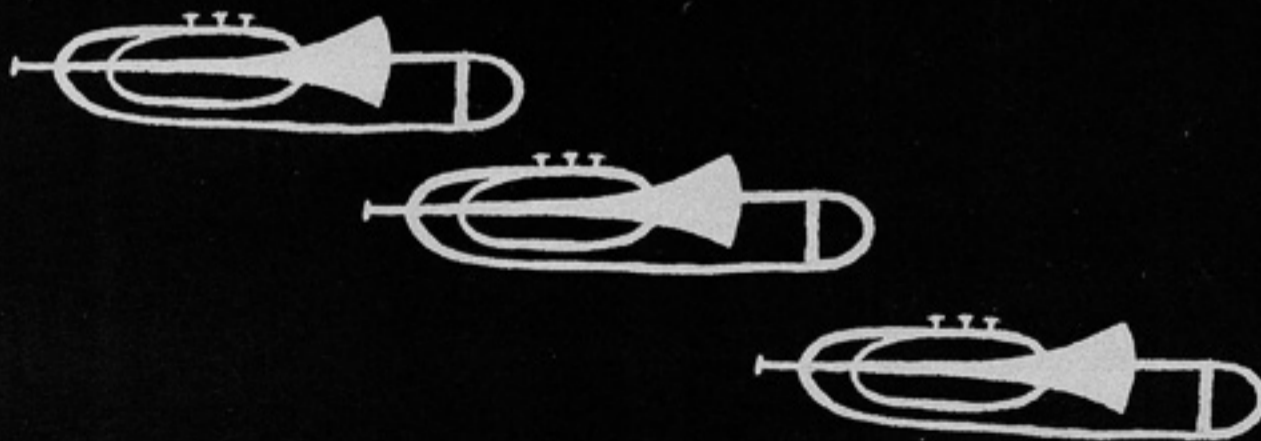
Ivory saw no activity around the house so he knocked on the door. Within a matter of seconds the door flew open and Bill Dixon was standing there. “Crazy” Bill was a huge man with stark white hair. A pair of faded blue overalls covered Bill’s body. Ivory timidly explained to Bill that he was here to fix the walk. In acknowledgement Bill grunted and slammed the door in Ivory’s face.

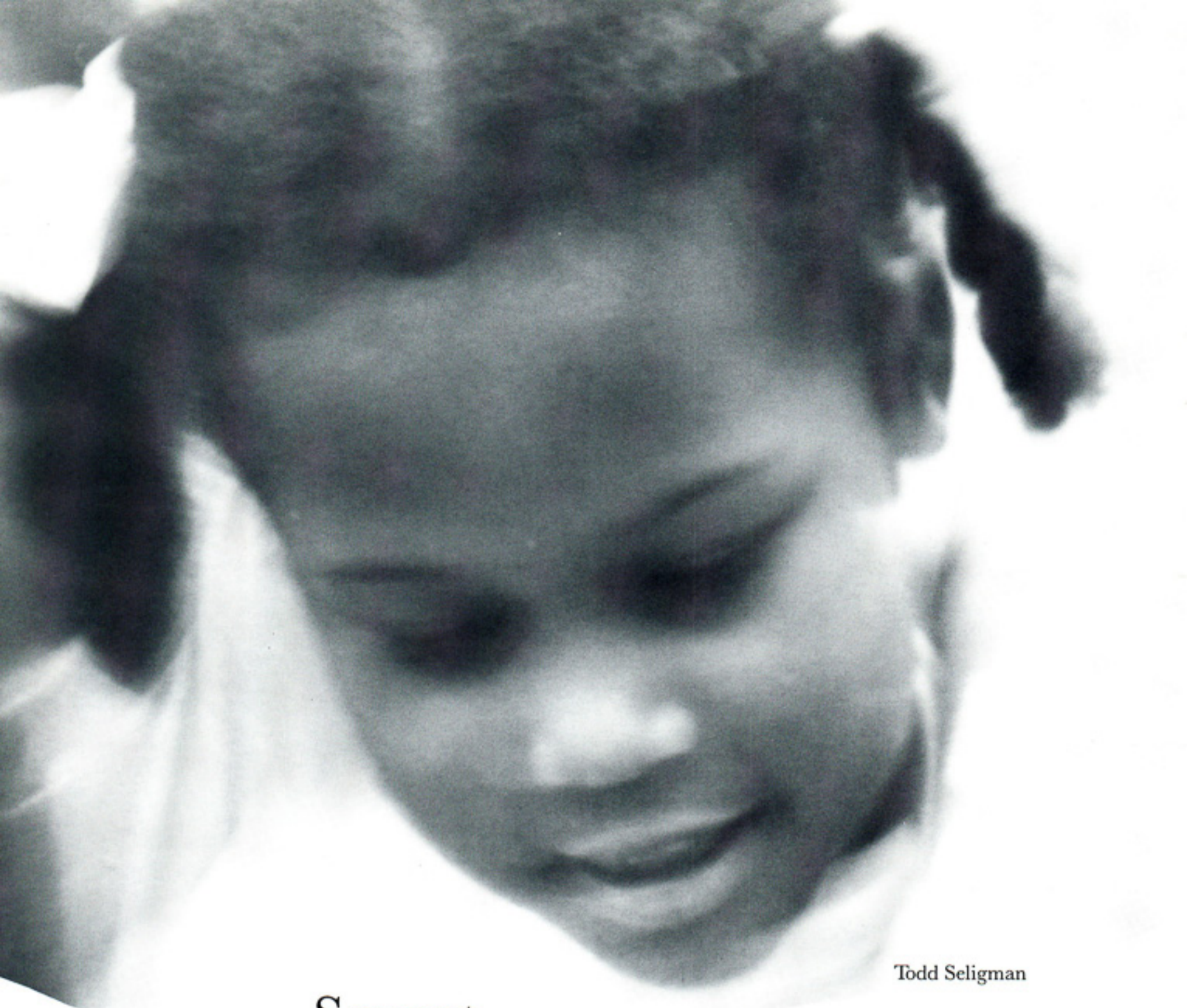
Ivory took out his tools and prepared to mix the mortar, all the while thinking of the mad man that lurked inside the small white house. By noon Ivory’s sweat had darkened his shirt and it dripped off his brow, the walk was almost completed. A large pine in the front yard was shade enough to eat his lunch under. Under the cool whispering branches of the pine, Ivory played his horn. As he played he could see the gigantic outline of Bill at the window, at the sight of him Ivory decided to get back to work.

The sun was still high, pouring molten rays upon Ivory’s head, when he finished the walk. Ivory inched toward the house to tell Bill he had completed the walk. The door this time slowly swung and Bill was standing there, his white hair illuminated by the noon day sun. In his calloused hand Bill held an oblong black case. He solemnly handed the case to Ivory without a word uttered. The reptilian skin of the case was worn to a fine sheen the handle also had the same warm quality. Ivory set the case down and opened it. The shine of the object blinded him as he inspected it. He reached down with his hands, his fingers traced the smooth tubular familiarity of a trumpet. The tattered softness of the sanguinary crimson of the cases inside was invitingly warm. With his eyes skyward, he thanked Bill and noticed a tear roll down the giant’s cheek. Bill nodded and left Ivory with one word, “Play!” He then abruptly closed the door shaking the small house.

Ivory gently eased in the mouthpiece, licked his dry lips and began to play the horn. Breezes carried his vibrant melodious message over the dancing pines. He left his old trumpet under the tree and headed home. Like Jehovah’s choir, his music had ethereal grace and, like the music of his hero’s, it had churning improvisation. Upon reaching the end of the dirt lane, Ivory raised his arms in thanks for the trumpet and the rejuvenation of his inner most dreams.

—Ned Flint





Todd Seligman

Sonnet

When the gifts of youth are wrung and rotten,
And lines are carved in weathered skin,
The joys of children are not forgotten,
But remembered in the younger kin.

The babies laugh and sing and play,
While sharp but sunken eyes blink on.
The freedom of the years long past,
Are resurrected in a child's song.

Jumping, shouting, stamping, wheeling.
No one reprimands or scolds,
For they appreciate this reckless feeling,
Though not inclined since they got old.

If careless joy through life was fixed,
Then youth itself would not exist.

—Aimee Saulnier

Stand Up

“Stand up!” the man bellowed to cowering Jim
Who was wearing thick glasses taped at the rim
“Stand up, my boy, and prove you’re a man!”
“I’m standing sir, really dad, fast as I can.”
“Come on Jim, I’ll teach you to shoot.”
He kicked the boy forcibly right in the boot.
“I love the animals,” poor Jimmy Jim said.
“I don’t care boy, they’re better off dead.”
“I won’t do it dad,” and he put the gun down.
The man’s menacing grim turned into a frown.
With his feet on the ground young Jimmy stood fast,
Cowering no more, a man to the last.

—Elizabeth O’Brien



Ana Yazdi

Missed

The room was crowded and sweaty. Lola, seated behind the front desk at the clinic, was feeling exceptionally trapped. It was always crowded by ten a.m., but for some reason she was sweating and fidgety. She needed to get out. So after Mr. Graham checked in with stomach pains, she slipped out the door of the waiting room and onto the noisy street. The engine caught quickly, for a change, and she sped towards the freeway. By the time she reached it, Lola was doing sixty-five and the wind was whistling around her. She should have felt relieved and refreshed, but instead the smell of rubber and vinyl made her nauseous. She slowed onto the exit and instinctively wound through the woody neighborhood until she saw the farm. There was a road next to the field where she could park.

“When his feet touched the ground, Chris felt the rush of childhood. The grass had the presence of a cool, clear water and he dove.”

The sunlight fell through the shelter of the leaves above and splashed onto the hood of the car in a random pattern. The sound of rubber and gravel grumbled beneath her and the air was drenched with honeysuckle. Lola turned off the engine and got out of her car. She followed a path through the trees and looked upon the empty field. The grass was thick and green with wildflowers. Slowly she removed her shoes, one at a time, never moving her eyes from the meadow.

The breeze made ripples in the grass and distant trees. It was so inviting. She took off her clothes and walked out into the sunlight. In the distance was a small farm. Lola lay on the dewy grass and let herself melt in the glowing warmth. A figure wandered from the stable and slowly approached the field.

Even through his boot sole, Chris could feel that the dirt was warm from baking in the sun. It was no longer dark and loose, but golden and sandy. The dust he kicked up glittered and swarmed around him. He longed to reach the thirst-quenching sea of green, to be rid of the dry, choking presence of the stables. He removed his shirt and wiped it across his face. When he reached the field, he removed his boots, grinning to himself as he leaned on the wooden post. His bare feet wriggled and stretched to reach the lush blades. Suddenly his jeans rubbed painfully at his waist and ankles. He removed all of his clothes, vaguely aware of the fact that some farm hand could arrive at any time and have him fired. The trees that once formed a wall around the field cowered next to the infinite sky.





Sergio Rojas

When his feet touched the ground, Chris felt the rush of childhood. The grass suggested the presence of cool, clear water and he dove. Bathing in the green pool, he rolled wildly across the meadow, oblivious to, and consequently abandoning, his awkward build. The broad shoulders that once knocked down everything in sight, the long legs and pointed elbows, all bended into a form that fit the flat earth perfectly. But his chaotic motions were not accompanied by a single grunt, hoot, or giggle. The noise in the field was only that of the crickets and the two bodies co-existing by themselves.

Lola had not even noticed the man in the field. She was lying on her back, knees slightly bent and toes touching the ground. She was breathing in the sun, the dirt, the grass, the dew, the invisible stars and their flesh. A breeze tickled the two bodies, now only feet away from each other.

Lola stood up and silently put her clothes on. She watched a brown caterpillar slither down a rough tree trunk, and wondered if it hurt. She wanted to stay, but the possibility was not even worth considering. She slipped one shoe on after the other.

Chris, too, was waking up from his trance. He felt refreshed, as though the grass he swam in was really a cool liquid. He looked out beyond the fence at the stables. It did not seem quite as hot and gritty from his spot on the grass. He stood up and walked to where his clothes lay. He put them on and when his foot was inside the dry boot, he knew there was no way that he could go back to the field.

“A breeze tickled the two bodies, now only feet away from each other.”

Lola stumbled down the path and hesitated before the gravel. When she finally walked across it and to her car, she was back in the real world. What had been unnecessarily modern and artificial minutes ago, was now real and durable. She got into her car and backed out of the road. She left the neighborhood quickly, making sure she did not learn the street signs.

Chris jumped into his mud-spattered pick-up and sped away from the farm. The tires screeched as he turned corners, but he could not have been more relaxed. As he was leaving the maze for the highway, he passed a woman in an old compact. The two vehicles paused next to each other and for a moment, their eyes met. Lola and Chris were on the same mental wavelength, feeling both equal and on top of the world. For a second, two people could not have been more alike. ‘Hick’, she thought. ‘Tight bitch’, he muttered. And they drove off into the noonday sun.

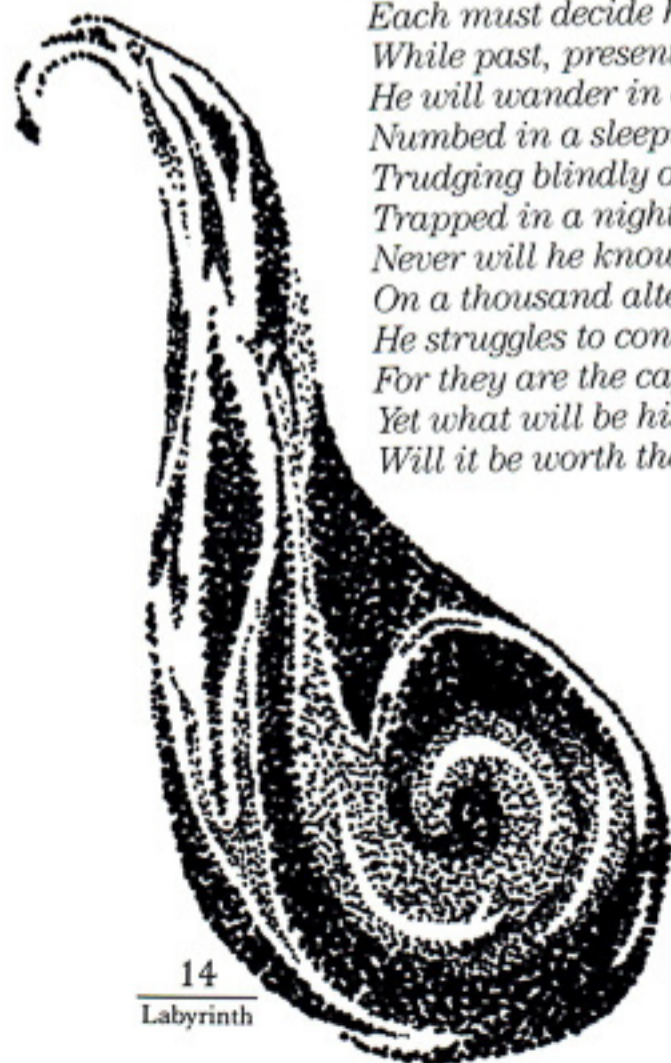
—Maya Shetreat

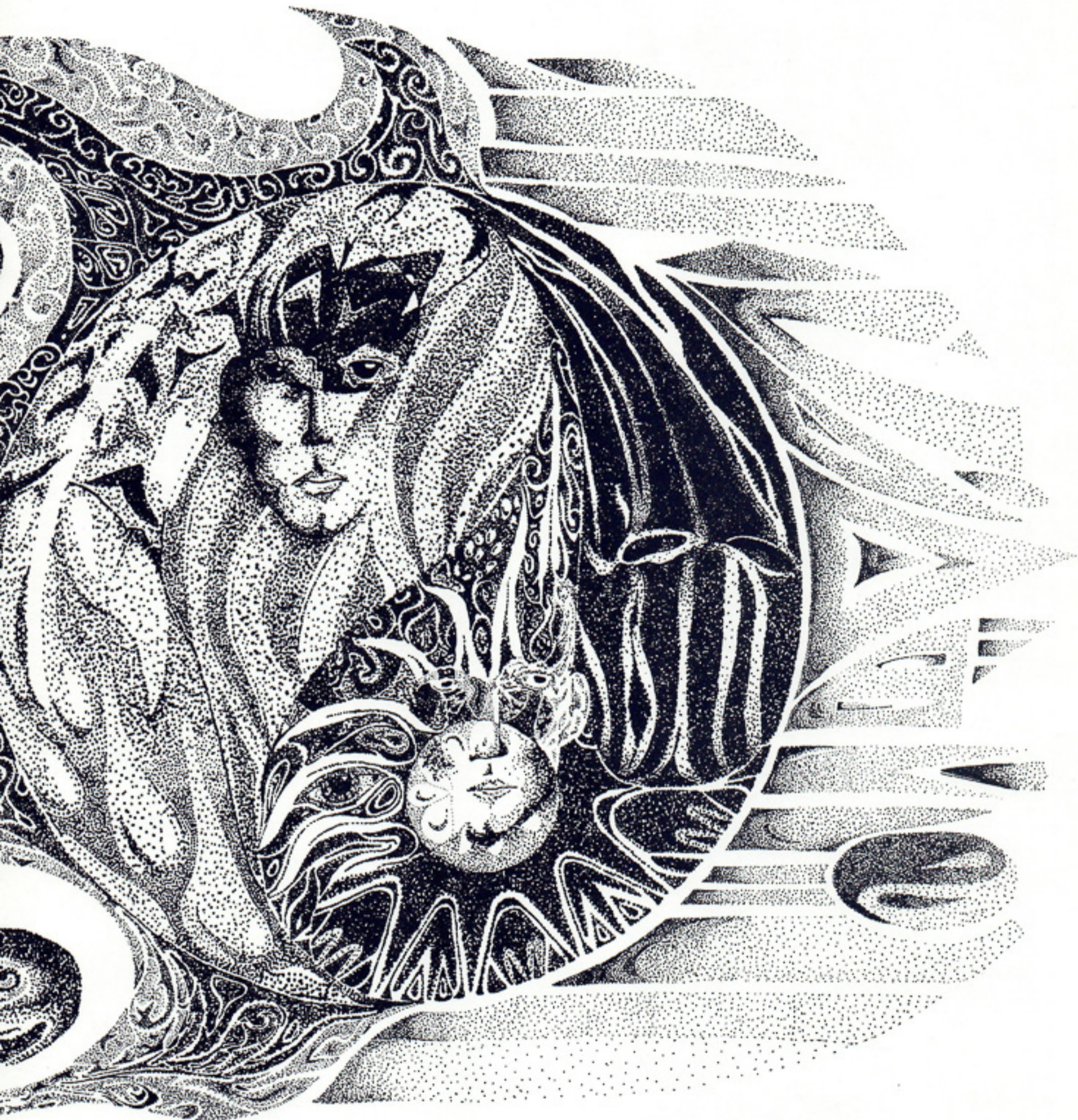


Obsession Obsession Obsession

*Halfway between Heaven and Hell
There is a long hallway I know all too well.
Enclosed by two doors, there is but one key,
The first door allows all to enter freely.
There are no windows, only bare walls,
Nothing to see but the long, empty hall.
Each man has one exit, on his own floor,
But all in one vast hall and through that one door.
For some it is death, for others, sleep,
And all are held prisoner by the secrets they keep.
Each must decide his best path for escape,
While past, present, and future slip by as he waits.
He will wander in circles by day and through night,
Numbed in a sleepwalk with no end in sight.
Trudging blindly on till he can't think or feel,
Trapped in a nightmare too hopelessly real.
Never will he know what lay ahead or behind
On a thousand alternate routes he won't find.
He struggles to conquer his fears and his doubts,
For they are the captors that won't let him out.
Yet what will be his reward in the end?
Will it be worth the price that he paid to get in?*

—Barbera Bell





Matt Distefano



Jimise Winston

FEED ME...

WORDS

NOT THE WORDS OF WHITE MEN
BUT BLACK TENDER, SUN RIPENED WORDS DRIPPING WITH THE SYRUP OF LIFE
YES, FAULKNER IS NICE
BUT GIVE ME HUGHES

HOW CAN A MAN GIVE AS THE PRODUCT OF HIS LIVING SOMETHING HE CAN NOT
TOUCH
GIFT OR BURDEN NOT HIS TO BEAR

FEED ME

BOOKS

I WILL CONSUME THEM AND MAKE THEM MINE
THEIR BREATH, THEIR BLOOD, THEIR LIFE, MY LIFE
THEIR PAST MY PAST
BUT ONLY SOME
FOR, NOW MY TASTES LEAN MORE TO PEPPER THAN TO SALT
TO THE HEAT OF THE SUDAN TO THE CHILL OF NEW ENGLAND

GIVE ME BLACK

FEED ME MORE

BLACK CRAYONS TO THE CONGO AND RAGING STORMY SKIES AND BRAWD RIPPLING
SHOULDERS BAKING UNDER SUMMER SUN, GLAZED WITH THE BASIS OF LIFE
GIVE ME THAT HIGH ARROGANT ASS, THE THICK SOFT LIPS AND THE VOICE THAT
RUMBLES FROM THE GUT AND REEKS OF IT'S ROOTS

GIVE ME BLACK, BLACKER THAN PITCH, THAN ANY NIGHT GOD EVER CREATED

GIVE ME THE HAND CLAPPIN KNEE SLAPPIN FOOT STOMPIN HYMN SINGIN PEACE
MAKIN BLUES WAILIN SHIP SAILIN FIST POUNDIN SWEET SOUNDIN HIP HOPPIN
BEE BOBBIN HARD WORKIN TEAR JERKIN BLACK OF IT

FEED ME WORLDS

BLACK WORLDS

DARK RICH CHOCOLATE SWEET JUICY BLACK CHERRY WORLDS WHERE VANILLA
WOULD NEVER SURVIVE

AND I CRAVE NAMES

NOT SARAH OR JOHNATHON OR SMITH
BUT NITANJU AND KONDOWANI AND BIKO
GIVE ME MANDELA AND STILL I WILL HUNGER ONLY FOR MORE
(WHO IS KIESHA AND LEROY, WHO IS SHIELA, I DON'T KNOW ONE)

WHITE MAN

DON'T STAND BEFORE ME WITH YOUR TRI-COLOR CROWN
TELLING ME MY PEOPLE WERE GOOD
MY PEOPLE ARE MIGHTY
AND YOUR WORDS ARE BITTER WINE FROM YOUR HEIRLOOM PRESS OF GUILT
THEY DO NOT CLEAN YOUR HANDS AND YOUR HEART IS SURLY TAINTED BY THE
CRACK OF YOUR FATHER'S WHIP

YOU SEE YOUR LIBERAL MAN HEADRESS AS THORNS OF RED GOLD AND GREEN
BUT YOU ARE MISSING THE BLACK OF IT
NOT THE MOCHA OR CARMEL, NOT THE HONEY ALMOND OR COFFEE
NOT THE ZEBRA, BUT THE PANTHER
THE HOT RICH BLACK OF IT

YOU WEAR ON YOUR HEAD NOT THORNS BUT ROSE PETALS
NO MATTER HOW BLACK YOUR TALK IS IT AIN'T IT UNLESS YOU DONE WALKED
THAT WALK

SO, IF YOU REALLY FEEL THE NEED TO SEE ME GROW, EDUCATED, NOURISHED,
EXPAND AND EVEN CIVILIZED

THEN FEED ME

WORDS, NAMES, BOOKS, WORLDS

NOT THOSE OF THE WHITE MAN

I'VE HAD MY FILL

FEED ME THE REAL SWEATY ACHIN SMILIN CRYIN JUST PLAIN TIRED DETERMINED
FRIGHTENIN LOVIN FIGHTIN LIVIN LONG DEAD BLOOD BOILIN BLACK OF IT.

—LaSean Pinkney



Darcio Arruda

A Patriot's Last Moments

The sky had become a mass of ominous clouds covering an ebbing sun. Leafless trees surrounded a man lying on the ground, partly hiding his view of the eminent storm. Cold, hard dirt was his only companion, and a chilling breeze blew through the air. Yet the man was oblivious to the bleak scene around him, as a far worse knowledge filled his mind. The wound was fatal. He lacked the power to move, but he knew that he would never be able to reach the end of the barren wood even if movement were possible. He would die here, alone. He wondered if the rain would begin soon, then considered that it might snow. It was completely insignificant—he could feel nothing other than the intense pain in his side. A beetle crawled onto his arm, and he followed it with his eyes, realizing that it might be the last living creature he would ever see. The rain began, and he felt a cold, stinging sensation. A branch snapped from a tree and fell beside him, and for a moment he was startled. He wondered why he was frightened, but then was happy to be feeling, feeling anything at all. He wanted to cry out, but repressed his desire. He would never allow himself to show such weakness, especially in his final moments. He lay on his back and held himself as stiffly as he could, hoping that whoever found him would know that he had died bravely. Icy rain continued to fall, but now no human senses felt its sting. The beetle had returned to the ground for shelter, and all was silent in the wood.

—Michelle Lacey

The Storm

An ominous feeling surrounds the earth.
The sky holds its breath.
All is still.
The dark clouds quietly gather forces
And wait, looming over the sky
They grumble impatiently from time to time.
The earth is waiting expectantly
Dreading what will soon come.
Suddenly the clouds give their battle call:
Deafening thunder roars out,
And light flashes from their bright weapons.
The winds howl at one another
As they seek to destroy everything in their way.
Arrows of rain fly from all directions
Pelting the ground violently.
There are casualties all around
But neither army is hurt.
The wind cuts down trees
And levels flowers.
The rain drowns the earth
And sends all tumbling before its rushing path
The clouds strike the earth with their swords of fire
And burn everything they touch.
Soon both sides are exhausted and die down
The clouds grumble a bit
The arrows of rain fall less frequently
Until finally it is still again.
The sky breathes a sigh of relief
And the earth nurses its wounds
And starts to heal itself
Before the next battle.

—Marcia MacNeil



Todd Seligman



Flos
dulcis, pulcher
floret, caedit, corrugat
deformis, iniucundus
herba mutilis

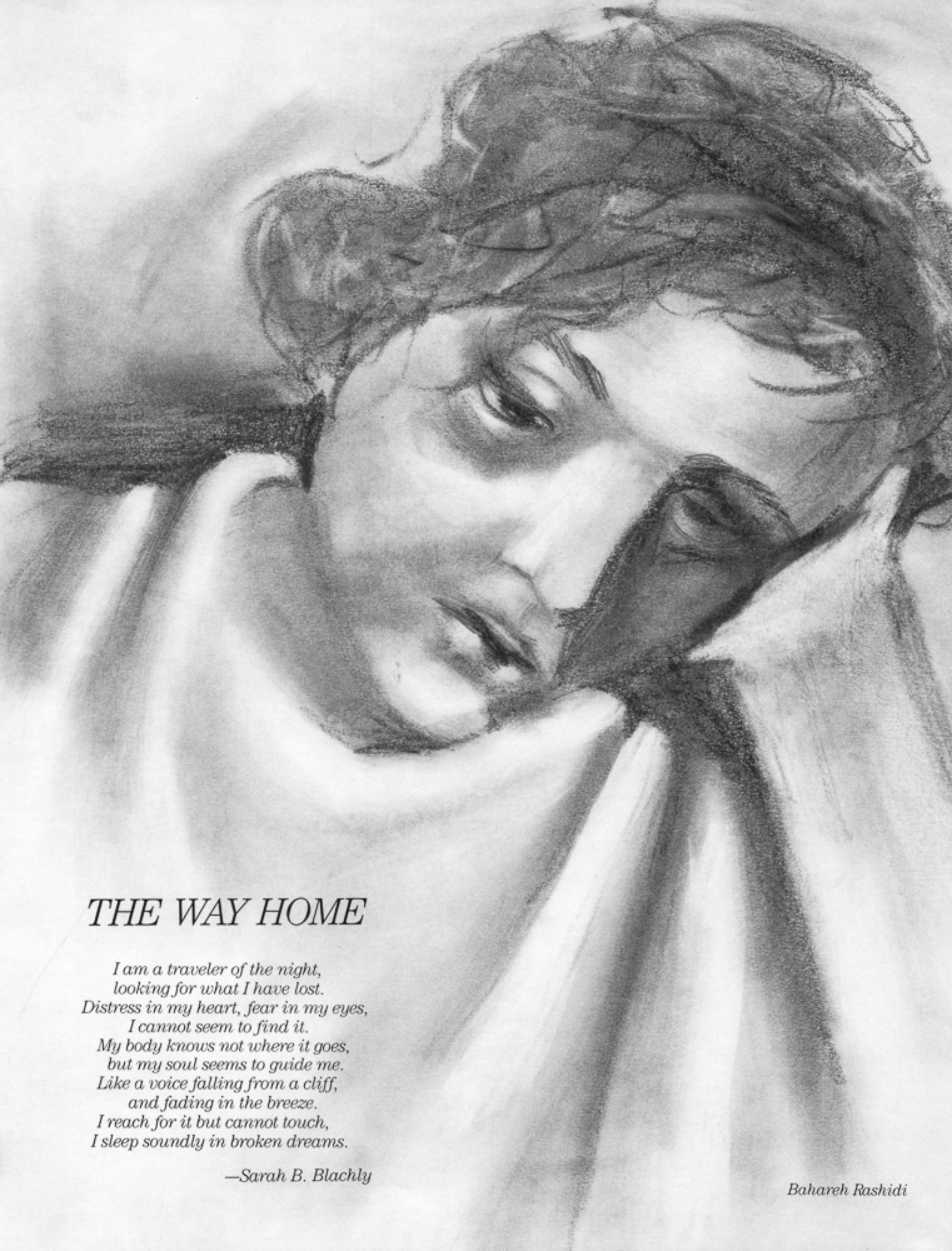
Flower
sweet, beautiful
it blossoms, it kills, it shrivels
ugly, unpleasant
weed

—Angela Davis

Iris
purus pigmentum
surgere, coruscare; habetari, cadere
pravus opacus
Hades

Iris
pure colorful
to rise, to gleam; to be dull, to fall
evil dark
Hades

—Chad Artz



THE WAY HOME

*I am a traveler of the night,
looking for what I have lost.
Distress in my heart, fear in my eyes,
I cannot seem to find it.
My body knows not where it goes,
but my soul seems to guide me.
Like a voice falling from a cliff,
and fading in the breeze.
I reach for it but cannot touch,
I sleep soundly in broken dreams.*

—Sarah B. Blachly

Bahareh Rashidi



The Eye of God

*falling, falling, falling
into the eye of God*

down

down

down

*wind swirling around me
around my unbelieving heart
wind blowing through my sinning body
blowing me quickly down...*

down

down

down

*Into the colored iris of glory—
the black pupil of faith
and I realize a moment too late,
too late to change anything
that I'm falling, falling, falling
into the eye of God.*

And in the last moment

before I hit the surface, I scream,

"I believe!"

—Kathryn O'Kane



*Ignoti**

*Lost am I amid thousands
of writhing fish, jumbling,
incessantly spewing ever-long outbursts
of bubbling air that flee only upwards.
I seek one who does not live
by ignorance and forth pouring blather,
yet in vain is such an effort,
for every creature in this sea
speaks but in light bubbles that grasp nothing
as they shoot, squirming, to the surface.*

**Latin, "the unknowing ones"*

—Josh Levey

FUTILITY

I see my thumbprint on your nose
a geometric plane never ends,
but it does have another side

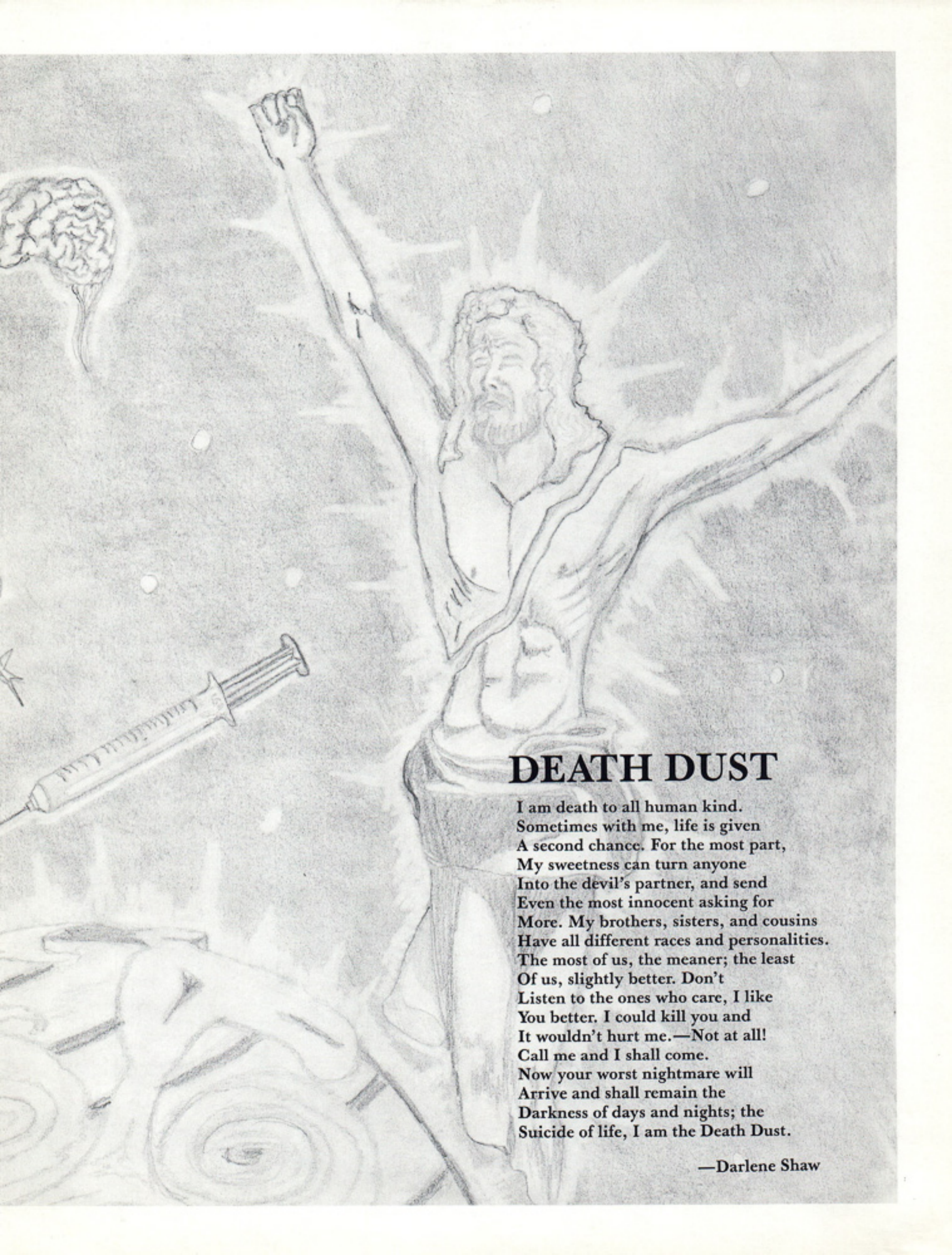
it's hard to sit back, think, relax, when you're running
running after the train, the train of life

life is too fast-paced, your rapid footfalls have no chance
to echo before the next footfall slams down
so you keep running, stop and, well, you get runover
the man behind you is running faster
backstabber, long knife raised high
backstabber, coming after you
who is this man behind you, traveling faster, coming closer
stealthy subordinate solemnly sifting
through thoughts of treachery, treason and triumph

backstabber, ass-kisser, pseudo associate
a rat in the rat race, you are the bait
running running running
thru the cold metal labyrinth, heartless scientists' laboratory
running running running

look up, brick wall
thought flies by—where is the time that flew
faster than this thought—there is no time
what is time, what is pain
body crumples, neck snaps, knees cave in, head hurts
this is pain, look up, nothing there
didn't even leave a dent
It's always been said
it's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game
tried my hardest, ran my fastest—I played the game
didn't even leave a dent

—Evan H. Smith



DEATH DUST

I am death to all human kind.
Sometimes with me, life is given
A second chance. For the most part,
My sweetness can turn anyone
Into the devil's partner, and send
Even the most innocent asking for
More. My brothers, sisters, and cousins
Have all different races and personalities.
The most of us, the meaner; the least
Of us, slightly better. Don't
Listen to the ones who care, I like
You better. I could kill you and
It wouldn't hurt me.—Not at all!
Call me and I shall come.
Now your worst nightmare will
Arrive and shall remain the
Darkness of days and nights; the
Suicide of life, I am the Death Dust.

—Darlene Shaw



Jeff Nesmith

Die Erinnerungen

Die Erinnerungen des Krieges sind immer da.
Krieg tötet alles:
Liebe
Hoffnungen
Träume.
Deutschland hat immer für den Krieg bezahlt.
Die Erlebnisse leben in meinem Gehirn,
sie sind meine einzige Realität.
Meine Brüder sind tot,
ich weiss nicht warum.
Mein Land ist tot,
Mein Heim ist zerstört
und ich sterbe.
Aber der Tod hat nicht gewonnen—
Ich baue mich wieder auf, ich lebe.

Memories

The memories of the war are always there.
War kills everything:
Love
Hope
Dreams.
Germany has always paid for the war.
The experiences live in my mind,
they are my only reality.
My brothers are dead,
I do not know why.
My land is dead,
My home is destroyed
and I am dying.
But death has not won—
I am building myself again, I am living.

—Desiree Rammon



Taylor Reese

The Last Water

Fall from the sky
call your brothers
lying in caves, quiet
call your sisters
crying for love, lost
who did you see
when did you know
How can you tell
Take after this well traveled friend
He's crossed the last water
I have not
let it never be said:
I didn't do the least I could do.

—P. West Lavan



Darcio Arruda

Hidden Genius

As she sat before the open window, her favorite spot for writing, the wind blew in tiny droplets of the lightly falling rain, dampening her journal and causing the black ink to smear. It had to be black ink, though. Blue ink, or heaven forbid, peneil would simply not do. It was just that the black ink against the white journal pages was so decisive, so pronounced. Everything about this woman was decisive and pronounced. Her hair, spilling down her back, past her bottom, past her thighs, stopped finally at her knees. Her necklace, consisting of heavy braids of gold chain with a crystal sphere as big as an egg dangling off it, fell down her chest to her bellybutton. Her small, round, tortoise-shell framed glasses were perched directly on the end of her nose. Yes, her appearance screamed for recognition, for shocked stares.

All the other patients in St. Marks Institution for the Correction of Mental Deficiencies (what a grand name to describe their pathetic cause!) thought that Marie was queer. Of course, having their own problems, they would not ordinarily qualify to pass judgment on the peculiarity of another person. However, Marie made it excruciatingly obvious that she was different, much more eccentric than the other patients. For one thing, she rarely spoke. Hand gestures or nods were her frequently used modes of communication. She was not at all social, her case reports describing her as "the paragon of an introvert." She spent all of her time, besides sitting silently in the dining hall, at her desk next to the window, writing. And her journal, when it was rarely not being utilized, was kept locked carefully in the desk drawer, the key hidden in the bottom of her tall, cracked, brown leather boots.

Marie's once a week session with the doctors and nurses at St. Marks was the only time she was faced with reality. The bright white, sterile room that held her appointments seemed her reckoning with the world, and the time she spent hidden in her room, scribbling with frenzied speed into her journal, her refuge. At these appointments, the doctors tried to work with her to overcome her mental deficiency, which was her inability to communicate. They knew that her journal was the only outlet for her poor, troubled soul, and the fact that she hid this as well from them seemed to make the doctors even more convinced of the severity of her case. When they tried to get her to write for them in her sessions, she wrote a series of X's on the paper, which only added to the air of mystery that surrounded her.

"Marie's once a week session with the doctors and nurses at St. Marks was the only time she was faced with reality."

Then suddenly, the mystery was solved. A nurse, performing the late night rounds, noticed a light coming from Marie's room. She strode in, with the intent of reprimanding Marie for staying up to the wee hours of the night, and saw her lying asleep at her desk, with—yes, miraculously, the journal lying open beside her. A quick investigation led to a horrifying conclusion. Marie, despite her masquerade of hidden grandeur, could not write. The nurse found a series of those all too familiar X's lying upon each page, black ink against bright white.

—Corinna Vallianatos





Ashley Billingsley

REMNANTS

*There he lay
In an endless sleep
And rested,
Though, for a moment, his body writhed in pain
In unison with my heart.*

*There he lay
My father
Blew himself out of a hollow in the dying earth
Which was meant to protect us from the inevitable—
Death.*

*I remember our closeness
Wanting to be with him again
And envy burned inside of me
Why was he so lucky to be rid of life
Whose power was so meaningless to us?*

*All we had was each other
And I could not forgive him
For leaving me standing alone.
So I turned away
And pushed his memory and love
Into the black cobwebs
Of my marred mind.*

*If I let myself remember,
I may catch the
Remnants
Of laughter
Of love
Of life.*

—Maya Shetreat

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