

COLLAGE

SPRING

2000

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"30,000"

- Kevin Wimpy

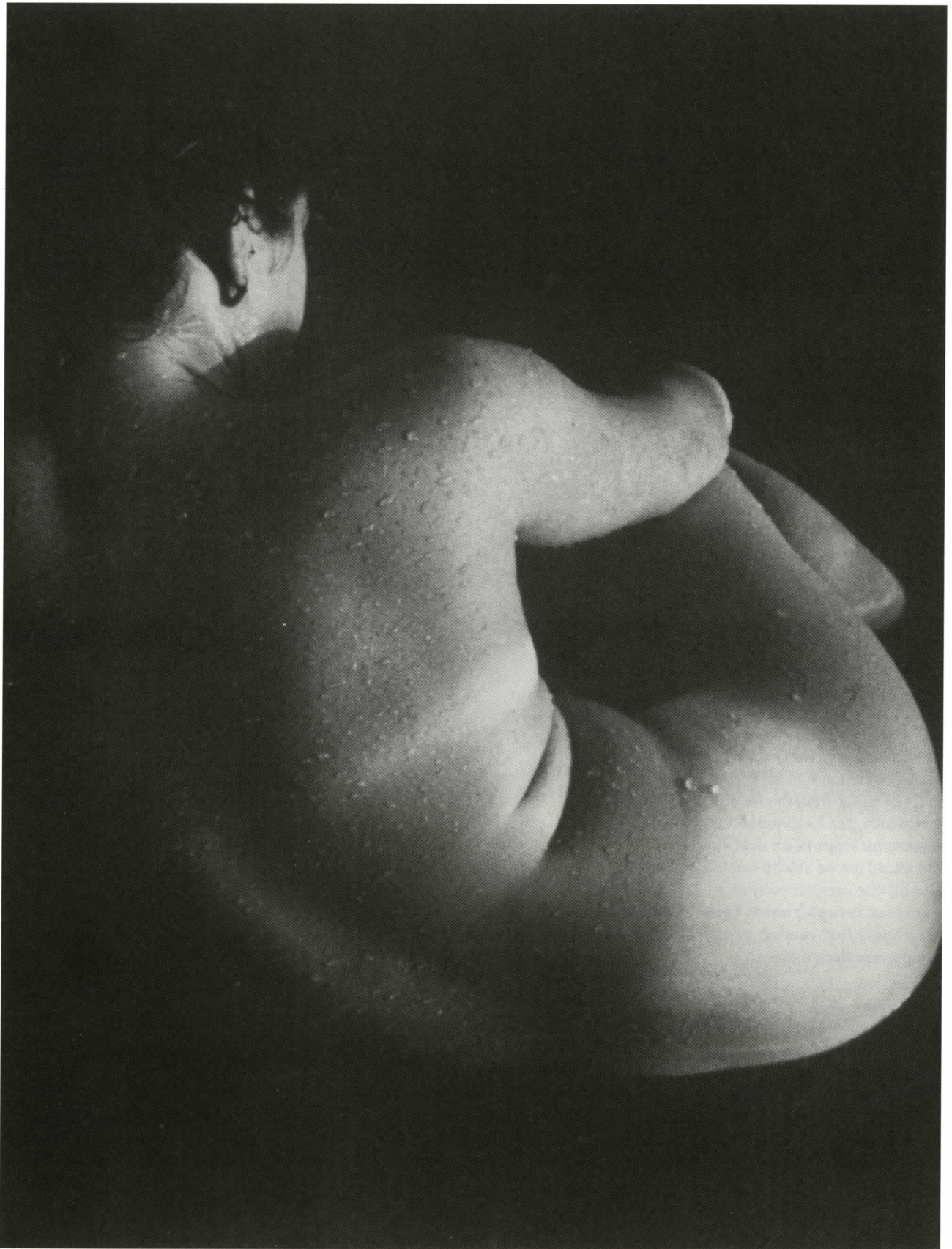
Day One

Starseam gazer,
Looks out from the mountains.
Rolling breath of solar morning
A yawn hugs the hills my breakfast table.
--James Wesley Cobb

in the Deep Maples

When Jimmy squeezed Mary tight,
she bit her lip so hard it bled.
She imagined if she could taste the red sun
that sank into the maple trees at her back,
it would taste like the warm sanguine fluid
that oozed from her lip.
Mary buried her head
deep in Jimmy's chest.
She dreaded his kiss,
knowing that if he tasted the blood
he would know how much she burned for him.
He would climb into his pretty truck
and run as far from the little town as he could.
Eventually, her love would burn him up,
leaving his heart like a cold cinder.
He would not be able to weather her heat.
But on that summer evening,
as the last rays of crimson light ran down their bodies
they would find comfort in each other's arms
lying in the deep maples.
-- Ezra Scott





"Fetal"

- Mitzi Cross

Naked and Breathless

I always should and never could
have saved my mother from her suicides.
Among the ruins of our happiness
I stand alone and I stand naked, breathless.
-- Maya Nitis

The Inhibited

Someone has entered me,
like a house, leaving the door open.
I've been wrung out
like a pair of jeans
soaked after dancing in the storm.
He is suave my daydream taker.
I am the inhibited.

He has placed his words
on all my shelves;
He has filled my living room
with his eyes burning me.
He has fired all the servants.
Reason went first,
sanity frowned and tossed her hair.
I had lived with these women for years
now he is master here.

In the bedroom, he alone sleeps.

He has turned my insides out
leaving the door undone.
I am seeping out
spinning like Dorothy's hut
out of control.

-- Maya Nitis

Dirty Spots

We are called a plague, wetbacks, spics,
we are called poor, dirty, lazy,
and a thousand other things.
Our only mistake was to be born on the other side:
Where the poisoned water runs and the air asphyxiates,
where harsh lack surrounds us day by day,
where our dreams vanish entangled in reality,
dirty spots in the pristine vision of the proper people.
Do they know we are the truth?
The truth of the world.
We are called a plague.
We are humanity.

-- Liliana Humphries

Weightlessness

The feeling of freedom
Gained control. With the
Wind in my hair I could
See for miles around me.
Arms outstretched , heart
Open, carelessness abounded.
The birds are my friends.
When I look down
I see my little house; my
Family looks like ants.
Some birds eat ants,
But that would be gross.

“That’s enough, Leslie,”
Dad warned,
“We do not jump on the
furniture in this house!”

I think I could choke them down
With some ketchup and soda.

-- Lara Parks James

(Haikus Written During a Creative Writing Lecture)

Tiny freckled specks
crawl down the nape of my neck;
colored dripping pool.

Circling my mind
the stairs that lead to nowhere
always see uphill.

prisons of nightmares
groping whenever sleep comes
plead for your release

unaffected by
the narrowness of their dreams,
they live in their box

-- Lara Parks James

Inscriptions Immortal

They immortalized the dead,
and throw the last shovel of dirt
on the living.

They dance furiously on the page,



the sun dance of the Lakota.
Enthralled by the shaman they move,
writhing within their sunburnt skin.

They caress the fallen gods
whose voices resounded
from the oracle at Delphi.

They become shaped and molded,
earthen clay within the hands of an
adept master reflecting vivid colour
that is brought to life by ceaseless
endeavor, hues abounding in rich
azures and violets.

They can keep Titan's immense figure
from immersing itself in wicked blue
for days uncounted, or drape folds of
cloth the color of deepest forest around
the brain and thrust it into sweet pools
of oblivion.

They rain down like acid from the
heavens, devouring ignorance in
a cold hiss of corrosion.

They dart as gracefully and as sleek
as iridescent fish in the murky, heavy
depths of an immense ocean.

If these were the last I would ever construct,
I wish them to fly free as falcons and winged creatures,
change imbued with raw adrenaline,
tame animals turned to wild beasts by sudden freedom,
beasts who no longer vent range
within the confines of a steel-barred cage.

-- Michael C. Amrozowicz

no oilcan crutch

he bleeds oil
if he bleeds at all
reflects like a funhouse mirror
and leaves tracks in the yard
and in the pavement
two hundred years old Thursday
the maker was ahead of his time
but you know how that is
no oil can crutch for me
i'm self-repairing
self-sustaining
self-propelled
i last longer...

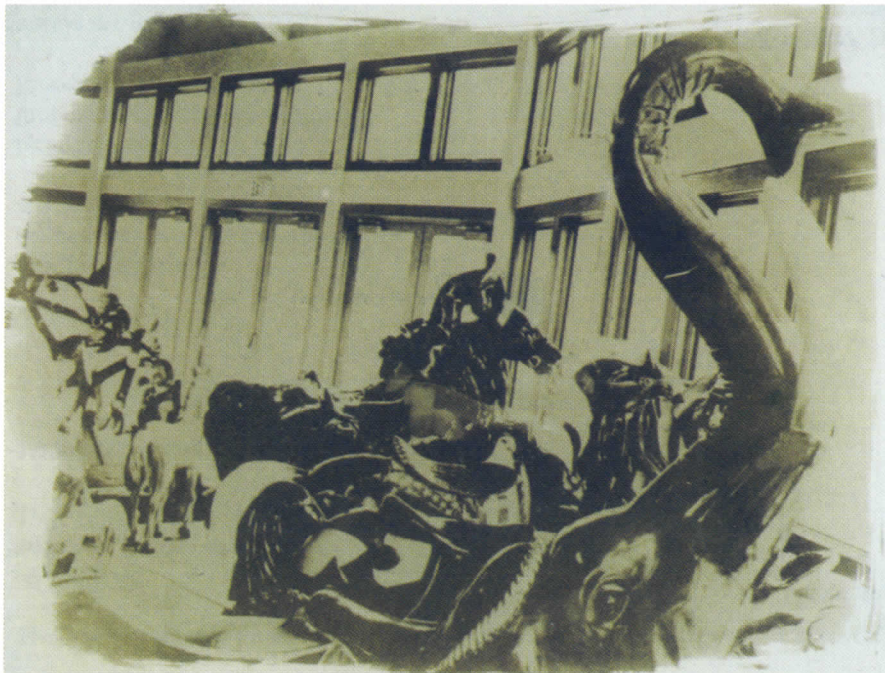
i last alone

-- Tim Enss

babushka

unlucky, this one
in an arbitrary way
and it comes at a time
a tearing time
a rending time
a time for breaking
and hurting
and killing
and it just isn't fair
but the feeling is as valid as any other
it's a feeling i wish i could raise on command
but it's just as arbitrary
waiting on them
at least they're consistent
always handy with the violent muse
ready with the blood red lenses
soundstage set
pathetic local
lines rehearsed
don't hold back now
tell us how you really feel
open up and show us how small you are inside
then throw him out and move on to the next scene
it could be anything
but we all know it will be just the same
typecast by choice

-- Tim Enss



“Awaiting the Rotation”

-- Jonathan Trundle

Red Dress at a Yard Sale

Pearl's house was a lime green cacophony
invaded by bargain seekers
the week after her funeral.
A wayward nephew of the elderly woman
had decided to rid himself of the possessions
of his relatives in an estate sale.
Buy a book,
or grandma's lamp,
things of no use to anyone
except their rightful owner
who poured her soul
into the turning of those pages
or the dusting of that lamp.
How distressed the old woman would have been
to see this crush of humanity
descend upon her home.
To take, for fifty cents or a dollar
things she had kept through a world war;
through her son's passage in southeast Asia
they would not know
that the stain on the red wool dress
was the first food her daughter spilt
and represented her entire life
in a faded gray spot.
All she had worked for;
the pain of her 13 hour labor.
The stain proved her significance in life;
if recalled it would keep her memory animate,
but there were no children left
to know these things.
The nephew did not,
nor would the strangers who bought them:
her impermanence would be remembered
only in the attics and basements of people
whom she had never known.

So as the people moved about
the old house that day
they felt discontent
as they touched an old woolen dress
with a faded stain on the lap
the dress would remain,
as no one wanted to purchase this feeling...
even for fifty cents.

The nephew,
having flown from the house
early that evening
would not hear his aunt's sighs
as she lifted the old garment
to her immaterial bosom and
stained it with her last few spirit tears.
The sun went down on a restless apparition
and the only earthly raiment
she still wished to possess.

-- Ezra Scott



Pretty Ophelia

"I say, we will have no marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are."
-Hamlet

I am Ophelia drowning
in an ocean of black
wings and a burning hope of unspoken promises.
You have been gone from my bed a month.
The sheets have not changed and
I bleed absent passions,
which give me another lifetime's freedom,
exempt from extra madness.
Yet I risk my heart and my life to come
every time
when you call and
lie underneath
on top of
beside you and suckle from your heart,
any kind of love you will give.

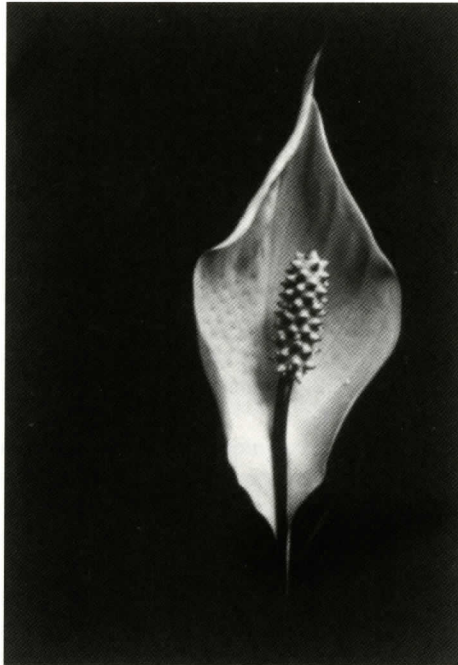
You are tied I your misery,
longing for a California sun,
warm and honest and happy,
perfect.
So you protect yourself against the approaching cruel cold of the Denmark wind,
dressing in black fur of a Midwestern myth,
a longing for freedom and
actively pushing away
from those dying
(in water and by sea captains' knives)
to hold you.

So I open my door.
I give back your letters,
written on soft longings and rough animalistic passions,
not by my father's request, but yours.
But you refuse to take them.
And we yell and argue and cry and
throw our indifference
(which hurts more than your hand),
breaking vases and mirrors and walls,
only to fall exhausted into each other's lovemaking.

What to do, what to do. . .
or even think or feel,
when I have let you go as much as I can and
I am torn apart each time you say your several good-byes.
Now my sickness has stolen my voice and
I am silent in grief with only pansies for my thoughts and a bit of wilting
rosemary for remembering,
pray, love, remember.

-- Christy Underdown





“Exquisiteness”

- Alicia Moore



Did she say "Glowing?"

The worst fate for a poet has to be
That inevitable moment when your latest book
Is re-shelved, right beside "The Best of Jimmy Stewart",
And marked down seventy-five percent.

I told my wife the other day, she was radiant,
And I, with an unshaven stubble of a failed attempt
At a beard, was clue-less, I told her "Marsha, this
One will be the next best seller."

She was cooking eggs in a dirty pan and I
Was eating Corn Flakes from a cracked Melmack
bowl. We looked at each other, smiled our fake smiles,
Then made love like bunnies on the kitchen table.

The book was a failure, of course, with an
"inadequate title and no substance whatsoever"
quoth the publisher, and nevermore will I be welcome
In Hollywood. He was the eloquent rapist of my destiny.

So Marsha and I still sit at home, and she says
To me, "John, we've gotten an invitation to dinner
At Alexander's new house." "What the hell," I say
In retort, and put on my old sneakers and a tie.

-- Ron Fields

Genocide in the Cabbage Patch

About once a week or so I would
Walk down to my grandfather's cabbage patch,
Turning over every leaf, frantically searching
For all the little children that grew there.

I found one, once. She was lying in
A puddle of her own blood, having been
Bitten in half by a gigantic GRANA worm;
And no one else is more the wiser for

Knowing that death, in the cabbage patch,
Is the saddest damn thing that you could
Ever, in your heliocentric world, imagine.
And so I, in my thirties, keep turning over

Leaves in nearby cabbage patches,
Looking for my lost innocence, my sense of wonder,
And the other half of that little girl, bitten
In half by her own maturity.

-- Ron Fields

Fifty-nine Fairlane -- Ron Fields

The light had started to turn yellow as he topped the hill, so far away from the intersection that he could barely see the traffic signal way up there. Yet every driver, no matter how far they are from it, can see that wretched transformation of green light to yellow light that signals the end of a nice cruising speed and an inevitable lengthy delay. Yesterday was no different.

As he stopped the car, the front wheels lining haphazardly against the faded white strip painted onto the asphalt a decade ago, the light had completed its metamorphosis and now shone a bright red. It blared at him, piercing his eyes and telling him — commanding— to dare go no further. It was a barrier to Henry, and to all the other Henrys out there that just wanted to GO, and Henry knew that he couldn't move until It said so. It seemed that Henry always did make a great deal out of absolutely nothing.

But this wasn't nothing. It had to be hundred degrees outside at least. Henry could envision the tires of his 59 Fairlane melting into unrecognizable mounds of rubber, slowly becoming one with the pavement. Those wheels weren't meant to be stationary, waiting to die beneath an unmerciful sun in a hot damned unmerciful city in the middle of Lexington Avenue. Henry eased the car forward a bit, letting it roll just enough to prove to himself that they could still roll. Melted mound of rubber wouldn't roll, he told himself.

Henry knew that his paranoia could get the best of him sometimes. Even when he knew that no one was there, he might have to turn around and take a look in the back seat just to be safe. After all, he would think , it never hurt no one to look and be sure. But if you didn't look... that's when you could run into problems.

Jimmy was making a hell of a racket in the back seat. He did not like being buckled in like that. The seat belt ran too low across his waist , confining him to a small space not quiet to the liking of his eight year old body. He would shuffle to the right, then scoot forward with his sweaty legs sticking to the vinyl seat. Everything was sticking to everything. Henry could feel the insides of his arms sticking to his skin beneath his shirt. He lifted his elbows up a little bit to give his armpits some breathing room. Henry looked in the rear view window and saw that Jimmy was doing the same thing. Everything was sticking together in this damned car. The tires were probably sticking to the asphalt by now...

"My God it's hot as hell, Henry." Mary declared, wiping a bead of sweat from her forehead. Her hair had become matted and disheveled - the heat does that to hair in the summertime - and she could feel the crusted salt water on her legs and arms. There was probably some sand still in her shoes, even though she had beat them ferociously against the pavement after they had left the beach. "Roll down the window, will you baby?"

Henry reached down with his left hand and grasped the forty year old knob, and with a creak the window began to come down. The old car just didn't want to do it anymore. It didn't want to start up on the first try, and it especially didn't want anyone to scoot the seats forward or backward. The car was stubborn—every bit as stubborn as the damned traffic lights that just had to stop Henry, and let everybody else continue on their way. Henry knew that the whole damn world was stubborn.

A wall of hot air pummeled his face as a diesel truck passed by on the other lane. He coughed a little and Mary coughed a lot at that, and so he rolled the window back up again before the second truck could get a chance to spray it coal-black fumes into the car. Henry glanced up. The turning arrow had not yet come on. He looked both ways across the intersection. No one was coming. There didn't seem to be another car in that lane. It would have been the perfect time to turn onto Marion Street, if only he had a turning arrow or a green light or something, anything, except this hated stillness. The Fairlane wanted to move. Mary wanted to move. Jimmy surely wanted to move, and Henry wanted to move as far as he could as fast as he could and not stop until the tires exploded or he ran out of gas or the cops pulled him over and put him in jail and even then he'd want to keep moving and move all the way up death row so his troubles would finally be over.

"They're not expecting it to rain for at least two more weeks," she said , making conversation. "This heat spell may last forever..."

" This damn light takes forever," Henry said, shuffling his hands across the steering wheel.

"Well, baby, it's a busy road this time of day."

A car passed. A single car, and that was all. Busy intersection. Uh huh.

"Maybe it's stuck or something..." Henry shifted his hands again.

"It hasn't been all that long, Henry..."

Time stood still on Lexington Avenue. And there wasn't jack shit on Marion Street either. It had been a bad idea to take this road just to get to the interstate. If they ever turned onto Marion, they would have to make another right turn and merge into the interstate. Then it'd be a half-hour trip back home, and he could pull his shoes off and pull off his pants, then maybe fill the bathtub full of ice cubes and jump right on in. The Ocean wasn't even that cool today. It was hot, just like the sand and just like the inside of his non-airconditioned, rust covered 59 Fairlane piece of junk, with only one brake light working and no hope for salvation.

Henry turned around and glanced inside the car seat at little Frankie, sound asleep. How in the name of God that child could sleep inside this oven he did not know. But there he was, stuffed toy in one hand and sound asleep.

Henry was glad that his old car was plenty big enough for the four of them. Henry and Mary in the front, two kids in the back, and Mary was pretty sure another one on the way. Henry didn't know how she could tell, but evidently she could most of the time. After all, she had been right twice before.

The one that was on the way was definitely Henry's kid. He knew this. The other two had been fathered by someone else. Henry wasn't sure what his name was, or what he did. Mary didn't like to talk about him all that much, and Henry was perfectly fine with this. He didn't really care to know all the details.

Mary saw Henry for the first time when she took a walk past a construction site. Henry was working on laying some bricks - he was a good mason - and he had his shirt off. Mary looked at his muscular, rock-hard body and smiled. She knew that day that she wanted to marry him. Two months later she did.

Henry wasn't sure what to make of Mary at first, but he saw something inside of her that he hadn't seen in anyone else. Maybe it was the way she smiled at him, or maybe it was something indescribable. Whatever it was, Henry fell in love with it. But he was only twenty-two, and she was twenty-three, but she already had two kids. One of them was a newborn at the time, and Henry didn't know if they could make it on his meager salary. After they got married he took a second job as a waiter at McDuff's and thought they'd be able to make it after all.

Henry had tried to be good father to Jimmy. Jimmy's real father didn't want to have anything to do with the kids, and Mary was glad for it for some reason. So Henry tried to fill his shoes the best he could and Jimmy never complained. Henry's dad had taken him ocean fishing off the Alabama coast once, and Henry wanted to do things like that with his kids. One day he brought home a brand new tackle box and two fishing rods. They went fishing and Jimmy landed a pretty good size bass. It wasn't a sea bass or anything, nothing wild and exotic like that. It was just your average run-of-the-mill pond fish, and Jimmy loved it. It would have been nice if they'd had the money to have that fish stuffed, but Jimmy didn't mind just eating it for dinner instead.

The car ahead of them moved forward a little, slowly edging its way closer and closer to the traffic signal. Likewise Henry moved forward, and so did every car behind them in turn. It was a futile step forward for them all. No real ground was gained, and they were still no better off than they were. Henry thought he could relate to that idea. It seemed like no matter what he did in life, he was always right back where he started from. Henry thought about the things he had done in life, all the mistakes he had made. But they were the same mistakes that everyone makes; those little mistakes that add up to one huge mistake and cause people to constantly think about what could have been. In Henry's what-could-have-been, he would in Atlanta working for Gray and Morgan. They had offered him the job about a week before Henry met Mary. It would have been a nice job, too. He would have been making more money than any of his brothers ever tried to make, and he would have enjoyed it, too. It was good clean work, nothing at all like flipping hamburgers or cleaning toilets. Yes, Henry would have been a fine businessman up there with Gray and Morgan, if he hadn't listened to Mary when she begged him not to go.

Henry always did have a big heart. Some said it was his greatest flaw. That's what Lucas Morgan said to him, anyway, when Henry called and turned down the job. So once again, Henry found himself right back where he started from - a sad little job that could barely make ends meet. And he did it all for Mary. And for Jimmy. And for Frankie.

It was so easy to look back on the past with regrets. Henry had regretted a lot over the past year. Once he got really drunk at Larry's Place, so drunk that he actually told Mary exactly what he thought of her. Well, at least he thought the woman he was yelling at was Mary. She was some woman that had had too much too drink as well, and she really could have cared less what this stranger said to her. Henry told her how he was sick to death of taking care of her and her kids, and how he wished that she would just take them and all their trouble and leave him alone forever. He was a child as he said this, tears streaming from his eyes. Mary found him passed out in the streets an hour or so later, and Henry begged her forgiveness. Mary said she forgave him, and that she expected him to never do anything like that again. Henry also begged her forgiveness for what he said to her, but naturally Mary didn't have a clue as to what he was talking about. But somewhere in town a woman was probably just waking up herself, trying to figure out who it was that had been yelling at her, and why.

Henry regretted that night, and he never got drunk like that again. He also never told Mary how badly he wanted his old life back. He put this aside, hidden within the dark recesses of his mind, never allowing it to come to the surface. We all make mistakes, Henry thought to himself, and sometimes we have live with them for the rest of our life.

Then it happened. Henry barely noticed the first one and at first thought he was just seeing things. Then a second one splattered beside the first, and another and another, slowly falling and landing on the windshield right in front of Henry's eyes.

"Mary, I thought you said it wasn't supposed to... we're not supposed to get any rain for three more weeks..." Henry was craning his neck to look upward into the sky. There wasn't a single cloud up there, except for one tiny black one.

"That's what the weather man said... no rain anywhere on the radar."

"Well they must not have their radar pointed up, baby, cause it sho' is rainin'!" Henry rolled his window all the way down, feeling the cool, revitalizing raindrops splash onto his hot skin. A cool breeze came gusting through the car window, instantly cooling everybody in it.

Slowly the rain kept cascading down to earth, giving new life to everything it touched. Henry could feel it in his skin, drinking up the water that landed on him, absorbing it down into his bones. Jimmy and Frankie were laughing in the back seat, rubbing their newly-moist little fingers across each other's noses and giggling like all children should. Henry felt good and fresh, as though his entire world was new. He felt reborn.

Then the light turned green, and Henry left all his troubles behind him there on Lexington Avenue.

The End

The Things My Father Never Told Me

Life is a cardboard box, my son.
Like way back when, when you
Were five or six and you could build
King Arthur's camelot out of cereal boxes
Or sit inside the spaceship of your imagination,
Built from shipping crates.
Take your box, and build the image in your mind
And then your dreams will come true.

Remember that time you left Fort Ticonderoga, or was it
the OK Corral, out in the rain?
What you found waiting when you returned was an
Unrecognizable pile of mushy pulp.
Life is the same, my boy. Don't leave it out
In the wild, unattended. Keep it safe, with you always.
If you forget about what you have, or leave it behind,
It may not be the same when you get back.

-- Ron Fields

Whittle Woman

It was just a piece of my skin
Never mind what it means
Sometimes I even peel it off, myself
Like settin round peelin an apple
Just chips of me lying around on the porch
Crushed under the skis of the rocking chair

Just like a haircut
Or a lobotomy
No pain
Only gain
Loss that feels like gain
Like nothing at all

I am more than meets the eye
I am raw red and wirings
Pulsing an alarm
Smelling of Iron
Attracting dogs sharks
Young men by the turnip truckload
come to see me naked
but I show them even more

In the afternoons
my chair creakcreaks
Imagining
a ribbon furl of drums and flutes
A hot sweet smear
through the wild shaved woods
that I've been told aren't there
I whittle
at this little
figure
with my curt country blade

At my wooden meat
Sawdust brains
Guts tapped and sold
Home that is all but a splinter in my thumb

My petals
Red one side
Pink the other
fall in the foreground
as I watch keen as a schoolteacher
When noses catch the scent
When they recognize it
and when they stumble
Their faces aimed at their feet
Tragic heart-shaped comedies of let down lovers

It is worth the mess and the mending
The laugh I get
The laugh they give me
when they can't walk down the street
and chew their tongues
at the same time.

-- Kelly Pate

My Rose I Found

On the walkway
bright as devil's skin
upon a day of wet newspaper
lies the long lost head
of a perfect rose.

Being stoned by drops of rain
its pride makes it pitiful
With no legs to run for shelter
this is the rose's last stand.

But upon closer inspection
it turns out to be just
a waded up scrap
of red paper

More beautiful for the rose it wants to be
than any rose ever dreamed.

-- Kelly Pate

Your mouth, a lens.

Introduced as your "poet friend."

Had this been a formal meeting,
my tie would bear an anvil print.

You narrowed me to pretense.

I confess:
I graffitied you mirror
"this device eats itself"
with your favorite lipstick.

Don't invite me back,
I have an image to uphold.

-- Andrew K. Trebing

Rejection Letter Number Four

Dear sirs,

I must respectfully decline publication in your reputable journal.

I wrote the piece for a dead friend who still owes me money.

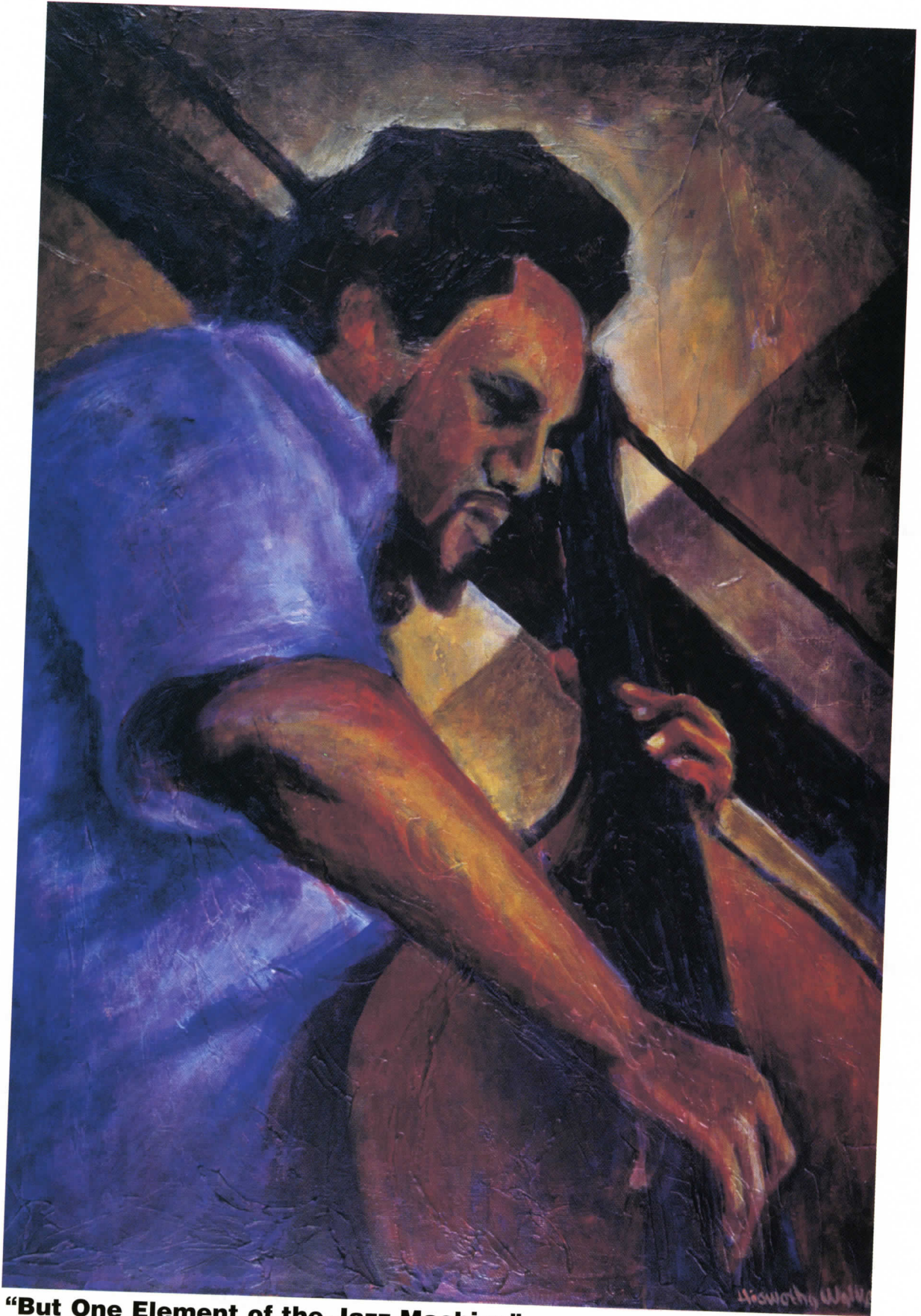
I write everything because I can't read myself to sleep.

I wrote the piece on a bet in a bar.

You may feel free to send any payment to the enclosed address, as I ditched my tab.

Best regards.

Andrew K. Trebing



"But One Element of the Jazz Machine"

- Hiawatha Walker

Great Works

try to make these
wrecked hands work but he
stresses me, screams at me
a little bit louder and i
know it's my fault and i
shiver in cold rooms
working my hands

But why all this hard work?
To what rueful end? -
For the music of dead men
Groaned out on the stage? -
This music is statues
On pedestals high -
Frozen in time
Now that their minds have died -

but i know i have to
work this tired soul as i
work these slack hands and i
feel the real music dying
deep deep within me and i
hope it'll make it

i can just hear it whispering

i'm still alive

-- Kell Coulter

Iris

The irises stand firm tonight
Each one a reminder
Of Grandma's bedcovers
And the smell of her hair in Spring.
The patches of purple there
Next to the road;
Always such a welcome
To those passing by.
I still hear her calls for breakfast;
The bumblebees filled with nectar,
Dew bursting on each leaf.
These were my irises.
She always said so.
Her hair tinged with white even then
Glistened at the door.
I left them still that day,
My irises.
Only 'til the next dawn.
'Til the sun rose heavy against the sky.
My irises,
Casting purple shadows
On my fading youth.

-- Jonathan L. Hawkins

“Why the Boy Cried”

-- Cory Hutcheson

There was once a cat. While that fact in and of itself is extraordinary, given all the possibilities it could have been, this cat was further unique, for his cat could paint. Surely, it is known that many cats paint, but seldom does a cat seem to understand the very nature of his art so well as did this cat. For this cat could, in detail, recreate any image set before him. Not that much ever was, for the cat had chosen to live with a very poor shoeshine. Though provisions were scarce in his residence, love could be found in abundance. The shoeshine had been very lonely until the day the cat had crawled into his basement home through the small street-level window that marked the only passage of sunlight into the dreary little room.

As lonely as he was before, the shoeshine was equally content in the time following the cat's arrival. He was so happy to have the company of the cat, he didn't mind having a little less for dinner in order to feed the cat. The cat comforted him when he needed such attention, gave him a peace of mind that he had not known before. He went to work every day with a smile on his face, often with the cat to accompany him, and never did a sour look possess him, despite the foulness of the city around him. Every evening, he would return him, fix what little dinner he could, and talk to the cat during the hours before he went to bed. The cat was always an attentive listener, and in time, the shoeshine learned to read the cat, and listened to *him* during those evening hours. The two could almost carry on a conversation, and came to regard each other as not only friends, but as equal souls.

And all this was before the shoeshine learned of the cat's gift. When he did learn, it was quite by accident. He had left a can of black polish by the little pile of blank paper the shoeshine kept so he could write the poetry he had become so fond of since meeting the cat. He had finished washing the dishes, and come back into the only other room in the place, which served as a den/living room/bedroom, when he saw the cat dipping its paw into the can of polish. Afraid the cat would poison himself by eating the polish, he rushed to where the cat was. But he stopped before he reached the cat.

His eyes were wide with wonder, for the cat was applying the last touches of shade to a picture. The painting was a portrait of the shoeshine, with his usual smiling face, and was certainly wonderful. The longer the man looked at the portrait, more it seemed to fill him with the impression of warmth and comfort. The shoeshine realized that the cat had painted not only a face, but a feeling. A wide smile warmed over him, and he scooped up his friend, holding him closely. The cat purred contentedly.

The cat made many beautiful paintings over the next few years, so many that it was nearly impossible to find a bare spot on the man's wall for all the pictures hanging there. The man delighted in the cat's beautiful painting skills, for the cat gave him every painting, and the shoeshine was always ready with a hug for his beloved friend. The pair was quite content to keep the beautiful paintings their own, private secret. No one else knew of the cat's extraordinary ability until the day the cat came to work with the shoeshine, creative impulses in tow. As the man shone the shoes of a wealthy man while his rather grumpy wife complained about wasted time as she sat next to her spouse, a beautiful dove landed a few feet away from them. The cat paused, studying the bird in such a way that any casual observer would have been sure that someone was about to have a lunch, and it wasn't the bird. But the cat didn't pounce, but calmly moved to the open can of polish and dipped his paw. A few moments later, a crowd was gathering around a fantastic picture of the dove, who had by this time flown away, while the cat was just finishing the last touches onto the rough sidewalk. The crowd was spellbound, but the shoeshine simply grinned, proud of his friend. When the cat was finished, he stepped back and sat contented with his work. For a moment, all were silent, save the purring cat. Then with a loud shout, the grouchy woman spoke.

“I must have my portrait done by this cat! Name your price!” She yelled at the shoeshine.

He smiled and said softly, “I'm sorry, but you shouldn't ask me. Ask the cat. He is the one who must do the work.”

“Ask the cat?” the woman roared. “That is absurd!”

“I'm sorry,” he said again. “But it is the only way. I do not control the cat. I am merely his friend.”

The woman glared at the shoeshine for a moment, as if she were trying to force him to give up a bluff in poker, but the shoeshine simply smiled back quietly at her. After a few moments more, the woman knew that he was serious. She cast a dark glare over the crowd, to warn them against even entertaining the idea of snickering, letting it end most harshly on her husband. It seemed to make him shrink back into the shoeshine's chair as a baby would into the womb. With a final warning “Humph!”, she turned to the cat.

“Now listen. I have no intention of making a fool of myself, so I'm only going to ask this once. Will you paint my portrait or not?”

The cat stared for a moment, then calmly and evenly blinked his yellow eyes.

“He will do it.” said the shoeshine. And audible sigh of relief escaped from the crowd. The shoeshine brought out several sheets of paper and placed them in front of the cat. The little painter took to the work immediately, paws flying as he painted with passion and fervor. A few moments later, the cat stepped back from the painting.

“It's a monster!” cried a child from the crowd. No one could deny it, even the wealthy woman. On the surface, the features matched the lady's exactly, but as did all of the cat's works, this one had a deeper level to it. As one looked longer on the painting, it seemed to shift in type and form until any person who had braved the sight to that point would be forced to avert their gaze in favor of saving their stomach. The life that this painting had taken on was not the love of the smiling shoeshine or the pristine beauty of the bird, but truly the hideousness of a monster.

The woman roared a loud sound and charged toward the cat, who sat calmly before the painting. With a jagged stumble, she kicked the small creature with great force into the oncoming traffic.

After the beastly woman had huffed away, making sure to spit on the painting as she passed it, the crowd slowly began to disperse. Soon the only ones left were the small boy who had cried out and shoeshine. The child wept. The shoeshine smiled.

"How can you smile?" The child said through his tears.

"Because I loved my friend," said the shoeshine.

"If you loved him, why did you let that horrible old woman do that? Why didn't you stop her?"

"The cat's art was the ability to paint exactly what he saw. To have stopped her would have been to leave my friend's painting unfinished."

"So the cat knew?" sniffed the child.

"The cat . . . my friend . . . always knew." And the shoeshine walked away. The boy picked up the painting, looking at it for a moment, and then smiled. And then laughed. He let the paper fly away into the breeze, and ran down the street to find his friends.

An Entry from Byron's Journal

-- Charles M. Johnson

When Byron exiled himself on the Continent to escape the social malaise and public derision ostensibly caused by his failed marriage (but the reaction to his divorce was more an index of the nascent Victorian mores that would later attempt to obscure his genius), he took with him a young physician named John Polidori. This man was somewhat of a prodigy and had graduated from medical school in his early twenties, but for all his powers of reason, he was entirely barren of imagination. Byron's publisher, John Murray, had bribed Polidori to surreptitiously discern the secrets of Byron's literary success (i.e., read and/or steal private letters and journals). He was essentially Murray's literary spy. This then is one of those stolen journal entries:

Venice. Novr.26th 1816

When angels fall, they are born into this world of mortality and the flesh. The Fall was the natal contraction that populated the world, and so all fallen angels have a birth mark—a physical deformity to remind them of their once consummate state and to reflect the inner corruption of their souls: Hephaestus limps because he was cast from Heaven. His is the archetypal wound which others endure in their fallen state. Cain, Oedipus, et cetera ... myself included. I always limp when I walk. And like a shadow, a sexual malady always accompanies this physical deformity. Hephaestus was cuckolded by his wife Aphrodite and her lover Ares; Oedipus slept with his mother Jocasta. My deformed right foot presaged the incestuous affair with my half-sister Augusta. Even my writing hasn't escaped this handicap. The nouns, verbs, and adjectives move with a gait across the page, and my paragraphs limp with the club foot of my sentences. They don't flow with an even, steady volubility. Instead, they drag with the weight of my body. But maybe all my writing is a physical therapy, as much as a spiritual analgesic. Maybe my words are a poultice, and surely one day they will help me walk without a limp.

Sketches of Mexico

-- Charles M. Johnson

El Sol y La Sombra

Hours are measured not by seconds or minutes in Mexico but by the expanse of shade that offers protection from the sun. The unabated heat punished all: the sinner, the saint, and the atheist—equally. It's as though William Butler Yeats had the noon day sun of Mexico in mind when he wrote the line: "A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun." Yet every living thing is able to find asylum in the shade. During the long hot afternoons, the tired shadows of the day stretch out below the sun to finally rest in the darkness of night. The shadow measures time in Mexico—not the sun or the moon. But perhaps the alchemy of the Mexican sun can change the base metals of the soul into gold.

Sueños

When the shadow of night eclipses the light of the evening sun, the gates of sleep are unbarred to drown the world in dreams. The only time some people experience happiness is in those twilight moments between sleep and life, when the wandering islands of fantasy appear and disappear, capriciously, in the fog of half-consciousness—burned off by the morning light. Somehow dreams seem so real, so powerful, so possible in Mexico. While in the States, they just seem like the transient smoke of a smothered soul buried under the ashes of failure.

Metamorphosis of Narcissus

The depth of our water memories
are carved out across our hands,
golden plains cut
into canyons by the river.

And that long long road is only
another body of a woman,
stretched out and reaching,
while inside her desert stomach,
a traveler digs for flowers.

So, another star maiden falls
from the sky. She is called out of a song,
for you Rairu,
to stand on a snowy hill
and sprinkle stardust onto a glacier.
Melting down the side of a canyons,
she rests her head upon the rock.

Slowly, slowly she is sliding towards
a river she hears inside a mountain,
inside a name chiseled out of granite,
inside a belly lying flat and still.

'Til her bare body vanishes
into foam and water, as she leans
over the rough river's edge.
Looking for a reflection,

a reminder of heaven,
she sees only her devotion,
only her devotion,
only her devotion... to you.

-- Susan Mazaros



"Vaseline"

- Alicia Moore

Prophecies

Indigenous prophecies help us unlock
the truth, The Mayans left us with the Tzolkin calendar.
13 cycles of 400 years will have passed
before the next cycle begins. On
December 27, 2012, the Mayan Calendar ends.

The star of Sirius had a companion
invisible to the human eye, a small
white dwarf moving in a 50-year elliptical
orbit, transforming the path of Sirius A.
Like the pull and push of the tides,
the stars braided into a Double Helix:
the symbol of Human life. The Dogon
legends unveiled these astrological miracles
in 3200 BCE. The Dogons existed
in the Homburi mountains of Timbuktu.
“Po Tolo” is Sirius B, “the Seed Star”,
Dogons credit prophecies to Nommos,
amphibious beings sent to earth from Sirius,
for the benefit of mankind.

Yet we still deny out reptilian ancestry,
the origin in the core of our brain. The idea
of moving a mountain with our mind is a theory
in a science fiction film. So many earthlings
still haunted by creation dreams. The lust and lure
of the sweetest fruit taste. The legend of Eden:
the poisoned stories of Hebrew lore. Eve was
the initiate. The fearless Brave. She was not shamed
as punishment for the knowledge of good and evil.
She was blessed as a creator and a Life bringer.
Planting went by a woman’s menstrual cycle.
Woman is a living calendar of the life-birth,
life-death cycle. A time of goddess worship did exist
and God as creator is one story, one archetype.

Our hearts lie sleeping like crystals buried in the earth.
The aborigine say we live in the Dream-time.
Rejecting industrialization they fine tuned their senses.
I knew an Abo who could hear grub worms
wallowing within a tree. What if our dreams are
reality and we live in the dream. Maybe that’s what
Poe meant when he said “everything we see and seem
is but a dream within a dream.”

-- Mitzi M. Cross

Secrets and Nails

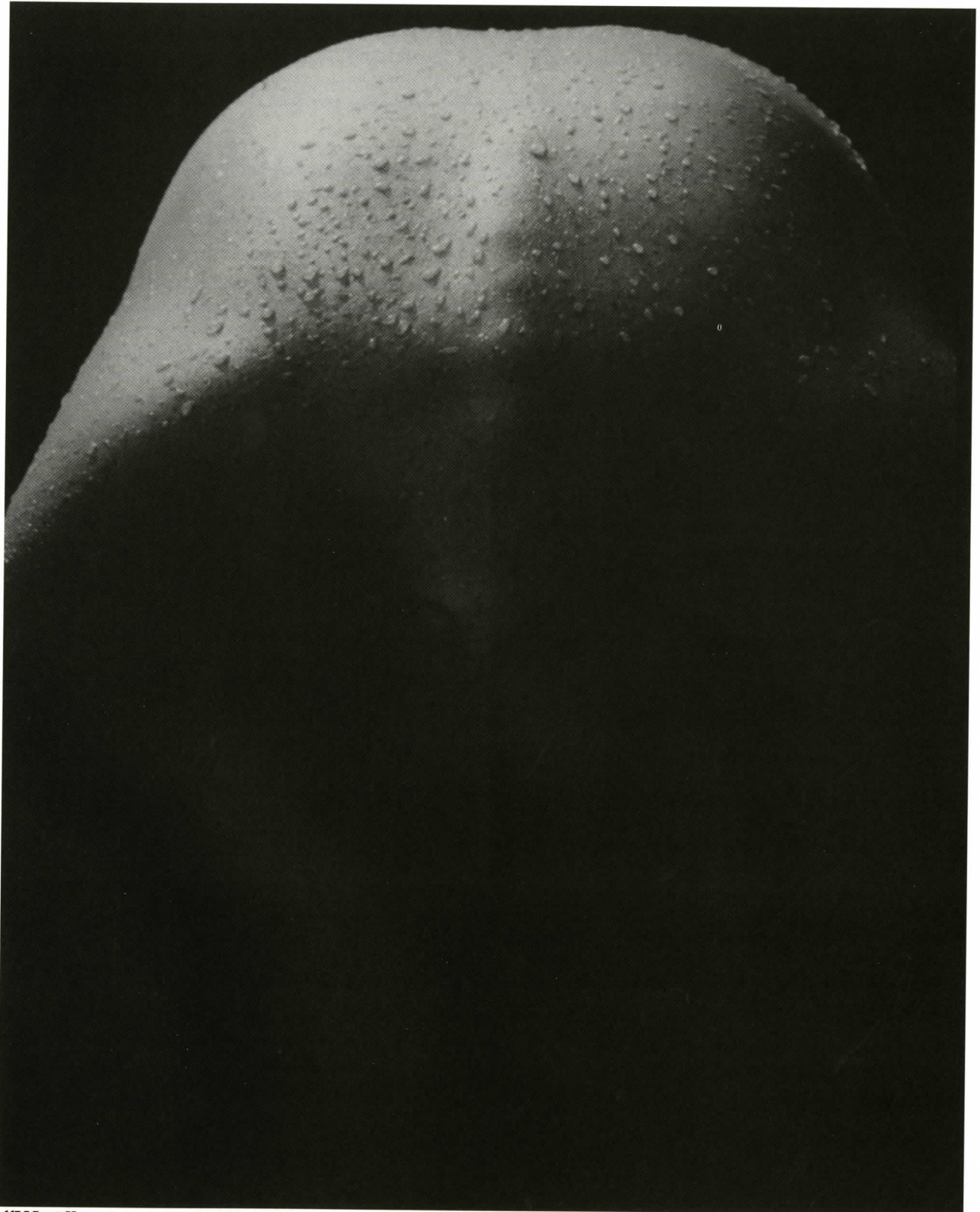
Laurens has been a client for years,
but that is my secret. I am
a priest for Laurens to confess
her volcanic affair with a married
woman named Liddia. Laurens keeps
her nails clipped short, tidy,
rounded on the end like a penis.
She is a gynecologist and wears
a clear base coat.

Taking off the remaining polish
from last week, I listen to Liddia's
fantastic tales of her twenty-something
male lover, his staying power and oral
talents. I drape her nails in a deep
brown color called Brazil Nut. Once
a month, she meets with her real
lover, a girl's weekend rendezvous;
she whispers sisterhood secrets
as I rest fingers in warm
Tea tree oil.

A petite bottle blonde
with a big bust, Jeannie wears
acrylic CLAWS painted T-bird
Red. Her hands are bulb
bronzed, finger flashes
of gold, diamonds and Topaz.
She is a trophy, four times
divorced; two lawyers, one
doctor and a car salesman. She is
single now, supported. Jeannie's
father was convicted of child
molestation back in '72.

Donya, an older woman
plagued by severe rheumatoid
arthritis in her feet, colors
her own hair Clairol # 67,
jet black, blue. She still uses paste
rouge like a Raggedy Ann doll.
Her husband, a retired Postmaster,
lives in the same house, but drifts like
a ghost in the halls, his heart as cold
as the dusty, wood floors of their antebellum
house. For Donny, starved for the warmth
of human touch, I light sandalwood candles
and anoint her feet with Wise Woman oil,
sometimes when I touch her, she weeps like
a mourning wolf. Her pedicure takes two
and a half hours; one hour straight of plunging
muscles massage; the other time is spent
soaking, sanding, sloughing and healing. Donya
pays 80.00 and tips me ten,
she is old money.

-- Mitzi M. Cross



"Wet"

- Mitzi M. Cross

Straw Man

Love is the shine
of silver blade reflected
in his eyes and his blood,
the butcher knife that momma
uses to trim the fat off chicken.
Love is a broken triangle from a blue
glass he shattered against the wall.
Love is a ripped window screen
with razor edges that tear his wrist. He
sawed to the bone, making sure
to disconnect all the phone lines. He
didn't want to be reassembled. Those
scars never fade. Each time like a scarecrow
he loses more filling, feeling less
than before.

-- Mitzi M. Cross

Merrily, Merrily

-- Cory Hutcheson

Characters:

LESLIE, *needs to be very introspective, sedate, and detached from the situation initially.*

ALEX, *Is more excitable and generally more assuming than LESLIE. The character does start to calm down when the gravity of the situation presents itself.*

Both actors should be made to look androgynous.

The stage is essentially a mesh of grays and neutrals. Perhaps a gentle fog or mist covers the floor. Certain props are visible, though probably muted by cloth or fog, on the stage. Nothing seems quite real in appearance. As the story opens, LESLIE stands, staring up, at or near center stage, moving little. This should go on for a minute or so, then, as LESLIE levels his gaze, ALEX enters.

ALEX: Leslie? Leslie, is that you?

LESLIE: Yes, Alex, it's me. What are you doing here?

ALEX: I really don't know. I was hoping you might be able to help me figure that out. Where exactly is *here*?

LESLIE: I wish I knew.

ALEX: You don't? Well, what's the last thing you remember?

LESLIE: I'm not sure. (*light comes up on a carton of milk somewhere on stage, then fades back down*) Something, something about milk.

ALEX: Milk? Anything more specific?

LESLIE: No.

ALEX: No? Come on! You have to remember more than "milk". Think harder.

LESLIE: No. There's nothing. I just have this vague impression of drinking a glass of milk.

ALEX: Well a lot of good that does us!

LESLIE: If you're so concerned, why don't you think about it. I've tried. Not much use. I've been standing here for a while now, and all I've come up with is, well, milk.

ALEX: Okay, give me a sec. I'm thinking, I'm thinking...

LESLIE: Won't do much good.

ALEX: Hang on! I almost had something. Great! Now I've lost it. Thanks a lot, Leslie.

LESLIE: Sorry. Didn't mean to mess you up like that. I'll be quiet this time. *(begins to wander very slowly around the stage while ALEX thinks)*

ALEX: Okay. Here it goes. Come on... come on... Wait. There it is: I see... I see... it looks like Buttons. *(Sound cut to a cat softly meowing and purring, fading in and out as conversation goes on, then disappearing)*

LESLIE: Buttons?

ALEX: My cat. He's... it looks like he's just curled up in a big chair. I think I recognize the chair. It's the really nice wicker one in my living room. Damn that cat! I always tell him to stay off of the furniture. Never listens, though.

LESLIE: Don't get so upset. It's just a cat.

ALEX: Yeah, I guess. That's eerie, though. I think I remember something about trying to get him off of that chair before I go to sleep at night. You know, the wicker one with all the blankets. He always tries to sleep on it, and I always have to throw him off. It's kind of funny, actually. Hm. Does that sound familiar to your ?

LESLIE: I don't know. I've never slept at your place. *(from his location on stage, LESLIE has picked up an old, stuffed bear, looking somewhat haggard, but very lovable for a child's toy)*

ALEX: True. But still, it seems like there's something about it. It is just so *familiar*. Jeez, that's creepy. Hey, what've you got there?

LESLIE: Mr. Runtle.

ALEX: Mr. Runtle?

LESLIE: Yeah. When I was little, I mean like *real* little, my mom got me this huge stuffed bear. Well, I guess it just seemed huge at the time. It's not that big seeing it now. Anyway, I loved that bear. I named it Mr. Runtle, because it was so big, so I thought it needed a name that made it sound little. Little kid logic, I guess. I took it everywhere with me. I mean *everywhere*. It'd get terribly dirty, soaked through with rainwater and all other sorts of filth. My mom had to threaten me with no dessert or else get it from me while I was asleep just to be able to wash it. Then, somewhere along the line, it just, well, disappeared. We looked everywhere for it. There wasn't a cushion, a closet, a bedroom, that wasn't turned this way and that to find him. But no luck. I was sad about it for a long time. I mean, I eventually got over it, but still, seeing it here... *(begins to choke up)*.

ALEX: Hey, Leslie?

LESLIE: Y... yeah?

ALEX: Where are we, really? I have a feeling you know something I don't.

LESLIE: I really don't know where we are, Alex.

ALEX: But you have an idea.

LESLIE: Maybe, but it doesn't make any sense.

ALEX: Well, right now, even something that doesn't make sense is better than not knowing anything.

LESLIE: All right. I think we're in a dream.

ALEX: I could believe that. It almost *does* make sense.

LESLIE: But you see, here's where I'm really confused. At first I thought it was mine. I was almost sure of it. But the harder I tried to remember things, the fuzzier they were. Especially recent things. I can't even remember what I had for dinner. But I could remember every detail, every emotion, connected with Mr. Runtle. Something is just not right about that.

ALEX: I doubt it's your dream. If it was yours, how come I could remember anything? I mean, I clearly remembered Buttons, and how I would always try to get him down from the chair. If it is your dream, how could I do that? You said yourself that you didn't know anything about that, so you couldn't have just made it up from your memory. It has to be my dream.

LESLIE: Then how did *you* remember Mr. Runtle?

ALEX: Dunno. Maybe I made him up for you. Let me try remembering something... I'm getting it... (*light comes up on a small brown box.*) It's box of some sort. Do you see it?

LESLIE: Yeah, a little brown one.

ALEX: That's it. Let me see it... Wow! I forgot about this. I used to keep this under my bed. It's a whole bunch of the letters I wrote to Santa when I was little. I found where mom and dad kept them one time, and took them back to my room. It was the year I found out. You know. You still want to cling to the fantasy of it all, but you can't *really* believe it anymore. I hated finding out, hated my parents for lying. But as long as I had the box, it was like there was no proof that I had been wrong. It was comforting somehow. That's weird, I haven't thought about it for a long time. I wonder why *that's* what I remember?

LESLIE: I have no idea. I can't think of why Mr. Runtle would've been the first thing to come to my mind, either.

ALEX: I still think that I made him up for you.

LESLIE: (*Agitated*) There's no way. I felt every single emotion I've ever had for him, all at once. You can't just make that up for someone.

ALEX: Well, maybe you've told me about him or something, somewhere, just off the cuff, you know? And I remembered it, or my mind did, and put it in the dream for you.

LESLIE: That still doesn't explain why I felt everything I did. Emotions aren't something you can just fabricate, especially not someone else's. There's something more to this. Hang on a second. I'm going to try something. (*In a very trance like state for a moment. Light comes up on a porcelain vase.*) This! This vase. I remembered this vase!

ALEX: So?

LESLIE: I broke this vase when I was 12, playing soccer in the house. My mom loved it. It was my grandma's. I shattered it into a million pieces. She was heartbroken, my mom. I got grounded for a month, and was *really* happy my parents didn't believe in corporal punishment. But I always felt guilty about it, because my mom had always promised me that I'd be able to pass it on to my children one day. It was like any hopes for a future were tied up in the vase. I know that wasn't true, looking back, but I was 12, and it seemed true enough. It's always bothered me. And here it is. Complete and whole, just like it was. And I remembered it into existence. I know you didn't know anything about it, so you couldn't have made it up. (*haughtily*) That proves this has to be my dream.

ALEX: (*quite angry*) Then how is it I remembered Buttons so clearly?!

LESLIE: I don't know. I must have made it up for you in the dream. I mean, I've at least met Buttons. I could have guessed at the rest and you really wouldn't know the difference, it being *my* dream and all.

ALEX: NO, no. I don't buy that. I couldn't *feel* something like that without there being something behind it. It wasn't as simple as you just making this history for me. You can't simply fabricate a past like that.

LESLIE: Well, if neither of us is fabricating this, then something's seriously amiss.

ALEX: Yeah, we're not in a dream, then, right? It's something else.

LESLIE: I don't think so. I can feel that we're in a dream. I'm sure of it. Or dead. Either way, this isn't something that I can

imagine is confined to one or the other of us. I don't understand it, but somehow, we're sharing the dream, or afterlife.

ALEX: Let's try to stick with the positive, go with the dream idea. If this *is* the afterlife, I certainly don't like it. If it's just a dream, well, that I can deal with. But how can we say we're sharing a dream? That's not possible, is it?

LESLIE: Actually, I'm sure I've read about it somewhere. When two people have a close bond, I mean *really* close, sometimes their psyches can merge, cross over one another. I know it sounds impossible, but it happens. We've gotten mixed into that merging. The gray zone that separates the dream world from the waking world unified, at least for us, and here we are.

ALEX: Sharing a dream, eh? At least that would clear up the whole mystery of whose it is. I still think there's something missing though.

LESLIE: What?

ALEX: Look, I know the difference between dreaming and waking. At least I'm pretty sure I do. This *feels* like a dream. But *my* dream. Not yours.

LESLIE: (*Angry*) Really? And why do you think that? You think that because I am not you *I* have to be the one who isn't real?

ALEX: Now I didn't mean that.

LESLIE: Then what *did* you mean? Huh? I have been as patient as I could with you. Finding a little compromise at every step of the way, and you think you can just write it off? (*is coming close to losing it*) Well you can't! *I am* me. I know how I feel. I won't let you take me out of being just because it makes you more comfortable.

ALEX: Now, Leslie, calm down. (*becoming afraid*) I didn't mean to upset you.

LESLIE: Upset me? Who's upset? I just want you to stop hassling me about all of this, but you won't! Where would you even be without me here? Huh? You think you could ever have come up with the idea about this all being a dream? Eh, bright boy?

ALEX: Now there's no need to get insulting.

LESLIE: I'll insult you if I damn well please! You shut up and sit down! (*pushes Alex down*)

ALEX: Leslie, why are you being like this? This isn't *you*.

LESLIE: (*begins to calm down*) Oh, God. What was that?

ALEX: (*standing*) That was you being a frickin' maniac!

LESLIE: Oh, Alex! I'm so sorry. I never... I mean, I didn't...

ALEX: Well you certainly did then? What the hell came over you?

LESLIE: I'm not sure. I just felt, well, different. Angry. Enraged. Oh, God, I'm sorry. (*Goes to the far side of the stage, crying. He ends up standing near an old phonograph.*)

ALEX: Well, you didn't have to... wait, that's odd.

LESLIE: I'm really sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

ALEX: Hey, hey, Leslie. It's okay. I understand. I think I know what happened. We both acted differently. I normally don't just let anyone push me over like that. So I must have lost control, just like you did, in a different way.

LESLIE: (*Moping*) Yeah, I guess. (*Stands, staring at the player, then slowly and deliberately sets the needle on the record, which begins playing either "Life Could Be a Dream Sweetheart" or "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"*)

ALEX: Leslie? You okay?

LESLIE: (*Very calmly. Too calmly, actually.*) Fine. Just fine. (*Begins swaying with the music, smiling very unusually.*)

ALEX: Leslie? Leslie. Yoo-hoo, earth to Leslie? Hey, come on. (*Shakes him by the shoulders a bit, making him snap awake and stare at Alex for a second*) Okay, now you're just being creepy (*Leslie just smiles unusually again, making Alex angry*)... Will you turn that damn thing off! Where'd it come from, anyway?

LESLIE: Sorry... I think I remember it. Something from my grandma's living room. She used to play old records on it whenever the family got together. It warbled all the notes, but there was something comforting to it... oh, well... hey. (*Tries to turn the player off. The music continues over the dialogue.*)

ALEX: What?

LESLIE: It won't turn off. Look.

ALEX: Well, try turning it this way. No, no, like this...

LESLIE: I did! It just won't turn off...

ALEX: Wait a second, the turntable isn't turning.

LESLIE: Then where's the music coming from?

ALEX: I don't know. It's like it's just coming from thin air.

LESLIE: I don't get it. It sounds like it's coming from over here.

ALEX: No, over here. Wait, maybe here.

LESLIE: It's everywhere! What's going on?

ALEX: I don't know!

LESLIE: Hey, Alex, I just thought of something. What if this *is* a dream, but it isn't one of ours.

ALEX: How's that?

LESLIE: Well, what if all of this is just a dream.

ALEX: That's what we've been saying the whole time.

LESLIE: No, I mean the *everything*. Not just this gray place. Our past. Our memories.

ALEX: What? No. That can't be.

LESLIE: It makes sense! Think about it this way: Each memory we have is independent of each of us. It's all part of one distant childhood. Try really hard. Think about Mr. Runtle. See if anything comes up.

ALEX: Okay, but I still think... wait! (*Closing his eyes, then making fists and getting very angry.*) Leslie. Leslie, there is something. Anger. Mom put Mr. Runtle in the top of her closet. She thought you were too old to have such a baby toy. Then she forgot about it. Just forgot. Nobody ever knew, even her, really, until you found it in there a few years later. You were very angry.

LESLIE: *We* were very angry.

ALEX: No. Please don't say that. I don't think I can deal with hearing it.

LESLIE: Even if I don't say it, it could still be true. We're not controlling this anymore. (*With Zen-like sedateness*) I don't know if we ever did control it.

ALEX: One of us has to be! Try that memory thing again. Make something appear.

LESLIE: I... I can't! Nothing will come back! All of this was just made up... Just the dream of someone, something else.

ALEX: That's crazy, Leslie! There's no way in hell that could be true. I mean we *saw* our memories, we *felt* them!

LESLIE: But if neither of us ever existed, how do we know what seeing or feeling are? Those are just someone else's idea of what they would be like. We're just characters in their mind. Figments of their imagination!

ALEX: No, Leslie! Stop that. You keep thinking like that and you'll go crazy.

LESLIE: Think very hard here, Alex. Everything is connected. Whatever, whoever, is dreaming, they started it all out with milk. Each of our memories came from the other memories already found. Milk to Buttons, a cat. A cat to a warm, *fuzzy* bear. The bear, a child's toy, to a child's letters to Santa. The letters, lies, to my lies, and my trouble, with the vase. And finally, my mother's vase to my grandmother's Victrola. We're just the ramblings of some person's uncontrolled subconscious. We've changed personalities, for crissake! People just don't *do* that. But if we're the same person. Two halves of his or her whole. It's the only explanation that makes sense. There's no other way.

ALEX: Yes there is! It's the bad macaroni and cheese I had for dinner. It's the stress of you having a big exam tomorrow. Just our, *our* imaginations, got it Leslie? Tomorrow morning, we'll wake up, the nightmare gone, left in the twilight. We'll take our respective showers, yawn our respective yawns, and go about our respective lives. That's how it is. That's how it always has been.

LESLIE: (*Has accepted the situation and it very calm*) Alex.

ALEX: (*Definitely not calm*) WHAT!?

LESLIE: Alex, if we do wake up...

ALEX: When we wake up.

LESLIE: Okay, okay. When we wake up, promise me something. Write all of this down. Every word. I'll do the same. This nightmare is too real for me. I want something to verify it wasn't just part of my own crazy mind. I need something to verify that. Promise me?

ALEX: Sure. Yeah, tomorrow we'll just get up, grab some paper and a pencil, and jot it all down. Then you'll see. It was all just a strange dream. A mixed up, wild, confusing, and scary dream. But only a dream. Okay?

LESLIE: Okay. I can deal with that... (*A very loud, repetitive buzzing noise is heard, echoing about the stage*) OH, GOD! What is that noise?!?

ALEX: I don't know! It's loud, whatever it is! God, please just let us wake up now! Please!

LESLIE: I don't think *we're* waking up, Alex! That's not just a noise. I recognize it.

ALEX: No, you don't, Leslie!

LESLIE: I'm sure I do. I think...

ALEX: Don't say it Leslie! Leslie, if you say it... (*Threatens to hit Leslie*)

LESLIE: It's gotta be, though! It's too familiar... I know it! It is!

ALEX: Leslie, please! (*Is pleading now*)

LESLIE: An alarm clock! My God, it is! An alarm clock! It's ending Alex! I can tell.

ALEX: Then we're waking up, right? Right, Leslie?

LESLIE: I don't think so. It doesn't feel like that. I think *HE'S* waking up.

ALEX: Don't say that! There is no *HE*. Just us.

LESLIE: No, no. It's true. It was all a dream. All a dream... (*The odd smile returns to Leslie's face*)

ALEX: It was not! IT WAS NOT! Leslie... LESLIE! Talk to me...

LESLIE: The curtain falls on the twilight of one grand, horrific dream. So it ends. (*Giggles*)

ALEX: It's not going to, Leslie. Don't think that.

LESLIE: All a dream... (*begins looking catatonic*)

ALEX: Leslie? Leslie! Please, Leslie...

LESLIE: (*singing*) "Merrily, merrily, merrily life is but a dream..." Life is but a dream...

ALEX: Oh, God. It's true. It's true...

LESLIE: I'm sorry Alex. We've got to go now. It's all ending.

ALEX: I know, Leslie. I know... (*crying*)

(as the scene ends, the lights begin fading in and out, as eyelids flickering at the first light of day. the alarm stays a steady, continuous pulse of sound... under it all, Alex sobs and Leslie is softly singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." when the lights go completely down, their song ends and the voice of a radio DJ is heard doing a morning greeting for a second, then fading out until there is complete silence in the theater).



Editorial Policy

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