

Volume IV

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THREE RIVERS REVIEW
OF UNDERGRADUATE LITERATURE

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THREE RIVERS REVIEW

Volume IV Number 1 Fall 1999

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Sharon Dilworth, this semester's Fiction Contest Judge, for sharing her time and expertise with the undergraduate writing community.

Our publisher, Lordan Printing, and our contact Lisa Guza, for their professional guidance and many helpful suggestions.

To all of you, a monster hug and a cup of coffee.

The Editors and Staff of *Three Rivers Review*

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FEATURED WRITER

WINNER OF THE THREE RIVERS REVIEW
SECOND ANNUAL FICTION CONTEST

JUDGED BY SHARON DILWORTH

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PHOTOGRAPHY

COVER PHOTO:	David Serotkin “Flight”
POETRY PHOTO:	Alison Farinacci
FICTION PHOTO:	Alison Farinacci
CONTEST PHOTO:	David Serotkin “El Mundo en Barcelona”

publish a more diverse group of writers than ever before, and we would like to give writers from other institutions the recognition they are due. There is a huge literary voice in the city of rivers and steel that is aching to be heard, and we would love to provide a forum where many undergraduates can not only be heard, but where they can flourish and their voices can grow through the sharing of ideas.

There has been more than a sharing of ideas within the staff this term; we have grown in leaps and bounds with the wisdom of two amazing and dedicated people, both of whom are new to their respective positions this year. Ian Douglas, Poetry Editor, and Sarah Malach, Fiction Editor, have made this magazine much more cohesive in the last few months, and their friendship and dedication are truly cherished.

I wish you the best in your own writing as the winds and ice of winter settle in. Take advantage of the cold -- wrap up in a blanket and pick up pen and paper, or sit down to computer and keyboard and write a few lines. You never know -- the words just might evolve into next semester's winning manuscript.

All the best,

Catherine R. Hodorowicz
Editor-in-Chief

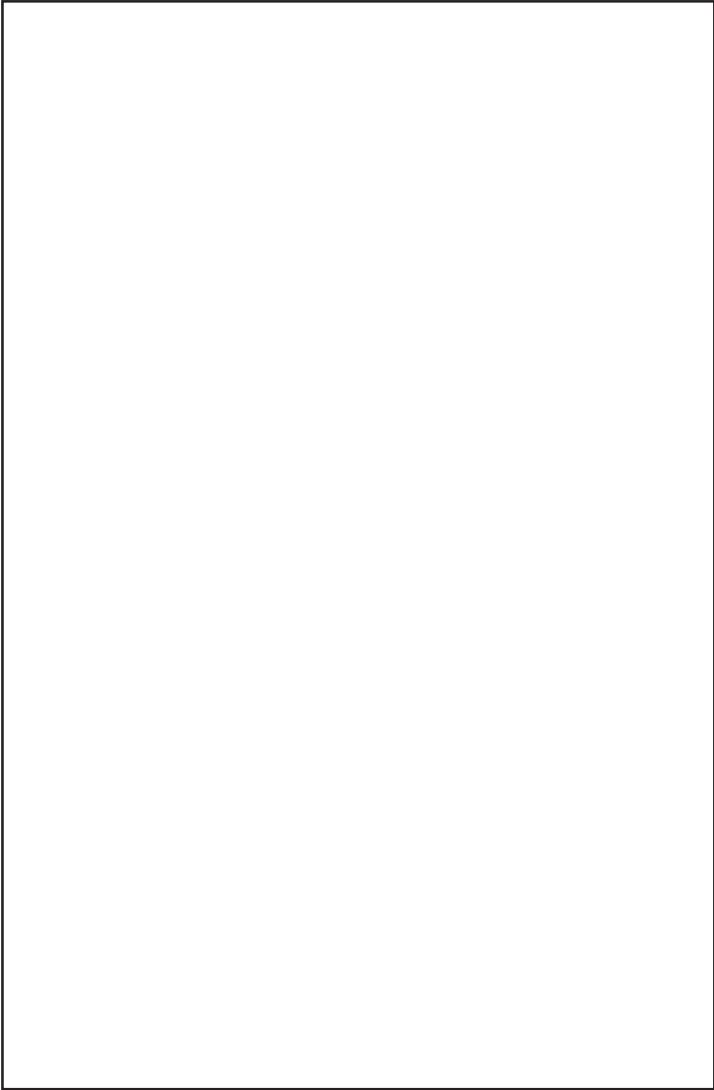
EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the Fall 1999 issue of *Three Rivers Review*! As always, the editors and staff are proud to bring you the best undergraduate writing to be found in the city of Pittsburgh, and we've had a wonderful time reading all the submissions we received this past semester. Without these literary contributions, this magazine could not exist, so thank you to all those writers who took the time to send their work to *Three Rivers Review*. The editorial process is a long and laborious one filled with caffeine, laughter, debates, and even a few tears, but it is the love of the literature we receive and read which keeps us pushing through many late nights.

Many of those late nights were devoted to the organization of our Second Annual Fiction Contest, as we received double the amount of submissions than we did for the inaugural contest last fall. Our judge this year was Sharon Dilworth, a professor of English at Carnegie Mellon University. She chose as the winning piece "Drowning" by Christy Leonardo, a senior at the University of Pittsburgh. Of Mr. Leonardo's work, Dr. Dilworth commented, "This story accomplished what it set out to do . . . the play on dream and reality was wonderfully reflected in the strange happenings and the language and the character's determination . . . The story was reminiscent of early Tom McGuane, the kind of wonderfully dizzy prose told steadfastly from this character's point of view. A wonderful, strong new voice." For his efforts, Mr. Leonardo received a \$100 prize and manuscript publication in this issue.

Next semester we plan to hold our annual Poetry Contest, with a prize similar to that of our Fiction Contest. We're especially looking for submissions from colleges and universities other than the University of Pittsburgh. It is our goal this next issue to

THREE RIVERS REVIEW



POETRY

JENNIFER HUXTA

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

TAPPING INTO

Tapping into
 an orange,
 sinews stretching,
 a prickly and foreign orange
 on a roughly hewn wooden crate
 painted with geishas, cracking,
 splintering.

A severe orange,
 each segment falling out from the taut axis -
 curving upward like fingers from a palm.

An orange
 fleshed out of its acid suit
 like wheat from its blond sheaths
 like a woman from a girl.

The navel,
 sunkissed and severed
 from all other oranges
 an orange,
 a solo and musical orange
 bitten and bitter,
 a loose fruit, fallen.

A burnt orange
 that bit its own stem.

ELEGY

I am sizzled by the Fall.
I welcome the blisters.

The Chinese characters for Autumn
translate into *heart over fire*.

Nothing could convey more accurately the smell of
melancholy,
which is red.

It is Sunday evening. My uterus crunches
and rolls in lunar tides.

Pitchforks dangle and spear the candleflames
in the Troubadour Cafe, where Debussy plays on repeat.

The window glass is spider cracked, but there exists
a comfort at the bottom of a cup,

in the knees drawn up to my chin,
and the circle of my arms.

I spend my last three pounds twenty on coffee
and a basket of baguette slices with French butter.

Trochi mochi teapots on levelled shelves crowd the window,
pouring into one another.

The contact point of chair and floor casts a strange shadow,

ignited by the window light. Outside

the air is smudgy.

Yardsmen are burning leaves in the gray light of Brompton
Cemetery.

Collecting my raincoat from the horned coatrack, I join them
near the smoking metal drum,

in the lee of the mausoleum,
opposite where the wind scrapes around the rock,

eroding it. My chapped hands are full
of old letters on stained and gorgeous paper.

To you who taught me the meaning of *Autumn*,
I am sorry that when you kissed me,

I ran away. Into the cauldron one by one, the ricepaper
letters'
litany, *heart over fire*

heart over fire
heart over fire

at the Laundromat on Albany Avenue.

Said: I got
love for you that's bigga

than Yankee Stadium
and that made me
smile.

I want to wake him and tell
him about those days.
and about the Hathaway record

I got for four dollars, but
he'd start
talking about his boys at the bar and how

Smitty got kicked out by his wife and
how black
women be always bitchin'. Drifin' again:

I remember when Montgomery parked
his Buick
in back of Concetta's pizza House/

His kisses tasted
better than linguine
and garlic bread

UNTITLED

on a Saturday
go to portabello market
and wander around the vendors
find a woman
who looks as if she's
eighty and twelve
all at once
ask about her hats
or her sweaters if you'd like
and see if she's not
the first person in london to smile
she'll tell you that the crepes
a few stands down are wonderful
but the man with the persian rugs
will rob you blind
she has a story about
all ten of her daughters
although she talks as if it didn't hurt
leaving her behind
to watch her adjust her sweater
and finger your coins as if
to memorize their raised pictures.

MONTGOMERY

Kitchen smells of scrambled eggs
& cigarettes.

I sit in the dark. On the kitchen

chair. Olive leather -- peeling,
scratchin' & diggin'
into my black thighs.

Montgomery sits on the floor,
his head on my leg --
face round & glossy like a wet plum --

he tries to sleep off the heat.
My hands play in his
corn rowed hair. I want to tell him

that he reminds me of Stevie Wonder
cos of the way his hair
is braided. if only he had the beads.

Thinkin' back: we met in Copaco.
In the fruit &
vegetable aisle. He followed me, told me

his name: Montgomery. Darker
than Cola/
voice thick with Bronx/he worked

UNTITLED

“this might hurt a little bit”
he said as he tucked and pulled
her skin away from the year
and she mechanically encouraged
his ambitious hands to continue
as they moved like- and moved when

he told her to look the other way
she should pretend that she was-
that she was a lioness with her
fur on fire from friction
with the dark earth on her back
smelling like a coat of incense

“you’ll be beautiful once I’m done”
-all the while she mutely screamed
she couldn’t feel her bones

are trapped w/i
 the yellow tentacles
 of Mrs. Octopus
 & are yelling to be unyoked from such a vertigo as
 this--

Ackshav; immediately; now,
 if not sooner--right NOW!

--Splendid! A hero I shall become!
 But how can *I* possibly tackle such a synthetic task as *this*?
 --Well, enjoyably, I'll just have to have a little fun w/ it
 & tickle the pits of Mrs. Octopus,
 giggling her tentacles & thereby,
 releasing the yelping shells
 who desperately need
 my help.

(O my--it's slippery, like the wet, yellow leaves of autumn,
 --O my)

& she's surprised, she says,
 to see such purpose in my eyes.

So I ask'd
 if she
 enjoyed
 her
 illusion--
 'cause tonight, we dine on sushi!

PAUL SIEGELL

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

EPIcUREANS PAY FOR FEELINGS

This? Healthy?

This is highly unhealthy,
so no more fiending

for those alluding quails --

“O

K.,” Molly said. “Mess clean’d.

I’ll crack & marry Juan, the great
needle ass of an id,

& pay Odie, my ex,

off w/ spoonfuls of tasty mush, Nick Half the Teen,
my hero inside the wingless method room
sold to me for the fire stone at the still end of the Al Co. Hall -

Loosely, this Nation

rolls its dilated eyes & atlas-axis joints w/ the warning
angelic,

yet appears needy

in dusty coat & walking cane -

while sensation seeking, be careful

not to trip over children.

I once overheard a little girl say, “*witalin.*”

ELISABETH HARVEY

CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

MR. UNIVERSE

he had that bulldog face complete with rather small ears and that upturned quality in the eyes that gave away the touchy secret that he had been a squealing pup that he had not long ago been a squirming licking pup in the arms of a dirty child happy and dumb and hungry for love it was the arm-curl effort to be a man that had aged him at all I could see it was the bench that had pulled him down the path slowly at first (one hundred) and smooth but soon faster and faster and out in the sun over rocks (one hundred and eighty) ignoring the tightening jaw and the swirling pigment and the knee pain until he skidded (two hundred and twelve), palms and pate akimbo, into the arena of life and slammed up against the side, a confused and angry bull (four hundred)

restaurant
by the jukebox was our reception;
us two, a large cheese pizza, onion rings, cheesecake New York
style and
a gang of Italian men from Boston packed like roaches
in the booth behind us, cutting of their R's -- but
if we sleep this close, my fingers will creep up your spine
unhurried
until you move, curl up like our baby boy;
that's when I will pull my fingers quickly away;
let you think it is a corner of sheet;
a fly.
But if we sleep this close tangled in our Saturday morning
lavender
sheets, my big toe will linger too long against the soles
of your feet
and I may have to turn
over on my back,
split my legs.
Wait.

UN-HUH

Faison is a poet (self-proclaimed) --
 he lives on Kenyon Street
 in Northwest D.C. behind Banneker High,
 but he attends the Duke Ellington School of the Arts where
 he met this half-Chicano/half-Black
 big bottom lipped chick named Sophia/ who turned him on
 to cigarettes & liquor & chess.

She nicknamed him *Geronimo* - the way he leaped
 off the roof of Le Droit projects -
 half-awake/half-drunk when he did it.
 Once in the parking lot of Le Droit, Faison & Sophia
 they climbed into the backseat of her auntie's 1979 Chevrolet
 Nova -

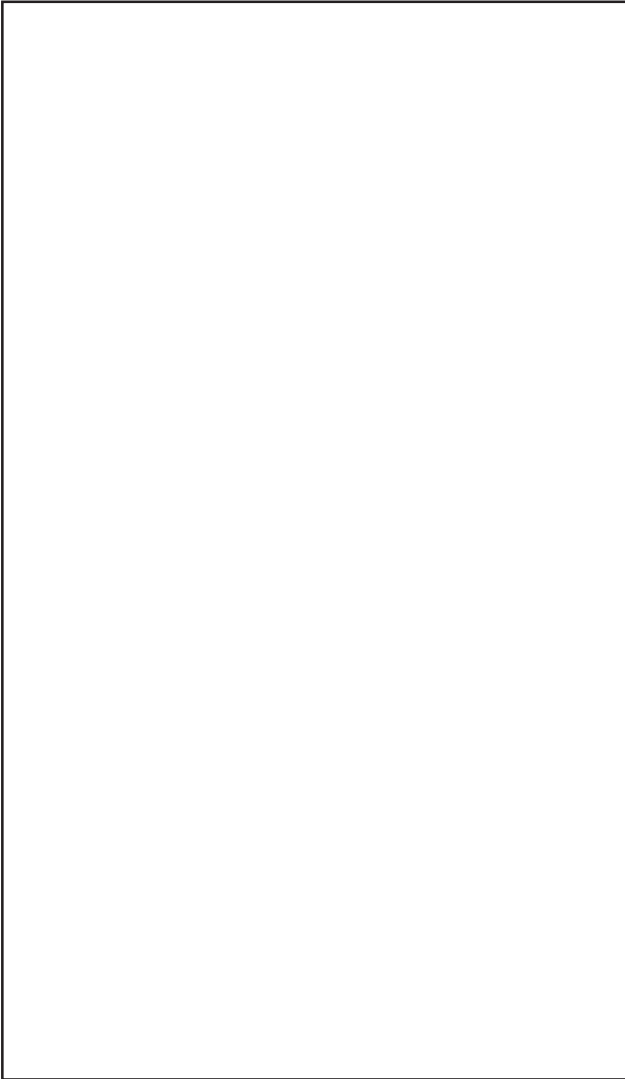
Sophia, she had to un-tuck, unbutton, unzip
 to get to him - however,
 all he had to do was lift up her dress
 & she let him
 kiss her breasts belly toes; and though she was
 bigger than he was, he let her be on top.

If this night was a song, it would go:
 poet man Faison (un-huh) beneath thick-thighed Sophia
 (un-huh)
 in the back of a Chevrolet (un-huh) cigaretted (un-huh)
 & half-drunk (un-huh)
 (un-huh)
 (un-huh).

CLOSE SLEEPING

--But if we sleep this close tangled in our Friday night
 lavender
 sheets, our cold ashy black feet will meet
 and I will turn over on my back, split my legs like scissors--
 but if we sleep this close, the sharp bones of our ankles will
 hit
 in that tapping-a-penny-against-a-window kind of way,
 reminding me of that afternoon
 when we first met
 at that CBT bank on Wintonbury Avenue - cashing in our
 pennies;
 our we-need-bread-&-eggs-&-milk-pennies --
 but if we sleep this close, that *Murray's Superior Hair*
Dressing Pomade
 will push full into the cool blacks of my nostrils
 and it will get me to thinking back to our wedding day
 and how my two year old black dress from G. Fox and your
 wrinkled suit from Sage's didn't matter
 and how that pomade all caked in your hair made it wavy
 overnight
 and how my rounding belly poked loudly through
 my 99 cent nylons.
 My dress.
 And the heavier my breasts became and the rounder my belly
 got,
 the more your: you-know-I-care-'bout-you-Thomasina kind
 of love grew.
 In that beer stained booth in the northeast corner of Moe's

THREE RIVERS REVIEW



FICTION

BRIAN WATSON

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

THE WATER GLASS

The couple in the front of the restaurant is sitting directly in front of a large pane glass window. They giggle into each others' faces. They intertwine their fingers playfully, full of affected innocence and enthusiasm. He has brown hair and she has blonde hair, and they both like games. They play Scattergories and Taboo. They drink their tea with honey and each thinks the other is sweet. They have not been together long. When silence falls between them they still look at each other, waiting for something to be said. When nothing happens they break the stalemate by laughing, as though inability to communicate is a great joke. He wears an off-white sweater with a pattern of brown, gray, and black squares. He shampoos with Pert Plus. They keep smiling although the green metal chairs are uncomfortable. They continually shift positions as indistinctly as possible.

Once they pause and look at each other quietly. They stare into the eyes across from their own. Hers are green and his are olive. They aren't sure what they're looking for but they'll know when they find it. They wear half-cocked smiles in case this is a joke, because they are afraid. They don't want their thoughts to be divined through their eyes. They are thinking about the men and women before, and the perils of trust. They are wondering if they are capable of anything more than smiles any more.

He aborts the gaze and watches out the window. The sky and street are gray, the clouds low like rippled white smoke flowing quickly along a flat ceiling. The muted purple flowers in the simple vase on the table fall into his peripheral vision. He

antics of squirrels besieging their bird feeders, quibble over the upcoming elections. They discuss a book they have all read that one has recently dusted off and appreciated anew. They joke pensively. At their age humor is a matter of mind frame. They have heard all the punch lines. They divulge the details of conversations with their children, and note the failing frequency of the calls, feel the distance inflating between themselves and everything. They feel themselves set adrift on a raft equipped with lawn chairs and umbrellas, gently wobbling away from the dock on still waters, the lips of wind whispering “hush.”

They sag in repose. The one with the round face, smile lines showing through her foundation, has just spoken. She said, during a lull (and thinking of her roses), that finally she feels a peace in growing old. In the moment the glass is falling the concept hovers over their heads like a Christmas bulb. They lean back and close their eyes, trying to visualize it exactly.

A lone man sits against the wall under a potted plant, across the room from the checkout counter and the round windows stocked with desserts. He wears a clean lavender gray button-up shirt with a white t-shirt underneath. His skin is the color of mashed green olives. His stubble pricks at his neck every time he turns his head, which he does occasionally so he doesn't appear to be morose. His eyes have darkened in the last year as the color has sapped out of his hair and eyebrows, as though the darkness was filtering inside, trickling down along the concave of his forehead. He has been drinking coffee and picking crumbs from a bagel for an hour.

On the table, on the side of his cup closest to the wall, lies a marble with a chip in it. It was clear milky blue, with one luscious indigo fleck in it, but it is dimmed by the layer of dust coating it. The fleck looks black to him. It is the first thing he

found after receiving the letter from his wife. The roundness caught his eye as he emerged from the post office; it was stomped into a rut a foot from the sidewalk. She'd said that maybe she'd be coming home. In the moment the glass is falling, he fingers the marble, rolling it back and forth the length of his calloused pointer on the very edge of the table as he stares at the stone floor.

In the city outside people go back and forth, home and work, errands, appointments, emergencies. They honk their horns at each other, leave their empty containers resting on the lids of trashcans, the benches at the bus stop. They think of each other as they drive, think about the overcast sky. Red lights flash up and down the pallid streets. Exhaust slips into lungs.

On the corner outside the cafe a man sits with one leg stretched out in front, one knee up. He rests an arm across it, holding a golden fast food cup. He asks passersby to drop in whatever they can spare. Beside him a broad shouldered boy stands with his feet steadily apart. He wears sunglasses and a leather coat. In his left hand he carries a plastic bag containing his purchases. He talks on a cellular phone as he waits for the "walk" light to flash. He doesn't hear the man on his right "hey partner"ing him for change. Besides, his hands are full. He smiles while he talks. In the moment the glass is falling, the man on the ground rattles the change in his cup, faster and faster, the coins centrifuging closer and closer to the rim.

It explodes against the slate floor. Fragments skitter under all the tables, splatter back and catch on her shoelaces. She stumbles, pawing at her chest, gasping. She is 24. The glass had been half full. Men in white fly from the kitchen to her side and catch her arms. She sinks into them, her whole weight slackening. They ease her back, drag her heels out of the shards a lit-

glances down, draws a short stem of violets from the vase. In the moment the glass is falling he turns back to her and they stare piously. They let their fingertips drift together very, very lightly, the flowers delicately propped between them. Perhaps this is love.

The young man from the table in the middle of the restaurant has just put down his napkin. He thrusts himself back from the table, standing and striding away in one smooth motion, 8 steps to the door on his long legs. His girlfriend stares at his back as he goes. Her father beside her reddens obviously beneath his white hair, his pale complexion prone to sunburn and blushing. Father and Daughter cannot look at each other. He begins to fidget with his fork, rolling it in limp circles like the wrist-loosening exercises he performs before golfing. She grips the tablecloth and twists it, trying not to bite her lip bloody in trying not to cry. She had not yet informed the young man that her father would be joining them for lunch. After she had told him everything, her father wanted to at least *meet* the boy. In the moment the glass is falling the boy is disappearing through the doorway with restraint; he does not slam it open. He does not punch the wall. His brown shag sweater, tan pants, yellow-brown shoes, straight shoulder-length hair, blue collar, are vanishing. She watches his fingers catch the door so it doesn't bang shut. He freezes there in the entryway. The envelope containing the check lies beside his plate, neatly torn in two.

At the table across the aisle from the three a quartet of retired women sips tea. They insist upon cubed sugar. Two of the women nibble bran muffins, one with sliced almonds on top, while the most incorrigible of the group savors vanilla cake and black coffee, and the last eats nothing. They discuss the odd things they have seen on television in the last week, recount the

tle. Her head lolls on her long neck. She mutters, her eyes thinly parted, incomprehensible words. One man is on the phone in the back to the paramedics, pacing and winding the cord over his knuckles, talking fast, repeating himself. The others crowd around close, knotting thier foreheads, willing her to recover. “What is it, what is it?” they say. She digs at her heart with the nails of her left hand, curls the other hand into a fist. The men kneel in the pieces of glass, water, and ice. She shudders, she stutters. “I thought I had it,” she says. “I’d swear I had it.”

rooms, big basements, and large interweaving yards, perfect for young children.

“Ah huh,” Johnny whispers back.

School - Part Two

It’s a Thursday. Three days after Johnny went to play kick the can after school. Also three days after he got his butt whipped for coming home from school at six. It’s early evening, Ms. Jones’ schoolroom; no artists are in the chairs. Also, it’s parent-teacher conference night. In walk Johnny and his mother; her boyfriend stayed at home. This would be the last time she would ever visit Johnny’s school voluntarily.

Ms. Jones smiles as she sees Johnny turn the corner. She rises to greet. Before Ms. Jones gets to say anything, Johnny’s mom says, “So what’d the little shit do wrong?”

Ms. Jones gasps and stiffens, her grin is gone, she glances down at Johnny who is frowning. She says, “Well now, he hasn’t done anything wrong. In fact, he’s a pleasure to have in class.”

“You sure? He ain’t ate no glue or thrown no scissors, nothing like that?”

“No ma’am.”

“Well I’ll be goddamned.”

Bills

Let’s see, there are:

Electric and water and rent. Which will get paid. The sanitation and life insurance and fire insurance and car insurance and doctors’ bills which may or may not get paid.

Instance

“Don’t you get dirty you little sonofabitch you know those are your school clothes.” She is twenty-nine years old, bleached blond hair, cellulite and yellow teeth. She doesn’t smile anymore - even when she laughs.

The young boy - short and skinny for his age, dirty blond hair and cute cheeks - shrugs his shoulders, but not with angst, he shrugged because he didn’t understand. He didn’t understand this pervasive motherly instinct for cleanliness. What’s wrong with dirt, he wondered.

“Don’t give me that shit. I’m your mother. That’s the problem with you. You’re a little prick with no respect.”

His eyes became watery as he stood there in a gray Bugs Bunny T-shirt and thin shorts with a wild, crazy kaleidoscope of colors that is the design. The once shiny print Bugs Bunny that resides there on the faded gray with a big bunny grin and a speech balloon filled with the joyousness that is “What’s up, Doc?” Bugs Bunny sits there, his left eye has flaked off, along with some teeth, and most of the pink from his ears. So now he looks more like a bunny zombie, a twisted result of a maniacal experiment which had the aim of creating a crazy, desolate bunny zombie who has twisted the pleasant phrase, “What’s up, Doc?” from a pop anthem to this bunny zombie’s ‘bonzai’ call, his catch-phrase of death, which he utters just after busting down a thin, cheap door - witnessing squalor and before killing young children.

The boy is standing in the dirt. Eyes watery, he’s looking up at his mother.

“I’ll never understand how you got like this! If you got dirt on those pants when you get home I’m gonna kick your ass, and then your daddy’s gonna kick your ass because I’m gonna make him.”

WILTED**Good Job Johnny**

“Good job Johnny. You know you always do stay in the lines.”

Johnny smiles, big and goofy. He looks around his kindergarten classroom, the morning class, all the kids coming from the same 8,600 person town. It’s rural, in that it’s certainly not “urban.” They have a McDonalds, and a Wendy’s, 2 pizza joints: no bagel shops, no cafes, so conversation. In the hills there are either farms or upper middle classers and lean, big dogs with no fences. Nothing in between. He looks around his classroom of sixteen, the other three kids sitting at his table are looking at him, jealous of the attention. The rest of the class is paying no mind. Their heads are down, industrious, cheap crayons gripped, some with their tongues sticking out a bit, all of them busy envisioning the masterpiece that Ms. Jones or their parents will hopefully admire. Some are realists with the flesh of their families scrawled peach, hair red or brown or yellow. Others are surrealists with faces colored purple, hair intentionally left uncolored. Johnny’s family protrait has his mom, yellow teeth and all, with a male figure half on the page and half off, her boyfriend, and amongst the clouds, beside the bright sun and the v-shaped birds, is his old dog Shadow.

“Hey Johnny,” the boy, Mike, beside him whispers. “You wanna play kick the can after school?” Mike lives on Fourth Street, a well-paved, wide street with big oaks by the road so that it’s always shady until fall and homes that have three bed-

The little boy doesn't cry, he's 'strong,' though he doesn't know why. He does know, however, that he better not cry in front of his mom, she'd just yell.

He never makes it to his friend's house that night. He drags his feet halfway up the dusty gravel alley and sits behind a half-dead bush in front of a crumbling stone wall. He sits there and he sobs, and stops sobbing for a bit and thinks, then sobs some more and thinks some more and hates some.

Darkness

Only until payday.

School - Part Three

It's 7th grade now and John hates going to school. He's too ashamed. His clothes are dirty and his mom rarely buys shampoo for him. He is skinny, 5' 10" and dirty blond hair.

He walks unsteadily, uncomfortably because he has to carry all of his books in his hands; he takes most of them home every night.

His first class is math, he sits in the back left corner, as with the rest of his classes because less people will see him, even though he has to squint at the board.

He's bad at math, he wishes he wasn't, he tries real hard. Again, he never asks questions in class and he never ever gets help at home.

The bell rings, he hates it when this class ends because whenever he leaves there's always this g . . .

"Hey dirtball! Get the hell out of the way." John wasn't in the way. Some basketball player shoves him. John spills his books and papers all over the ground. No one helps him. One

Gifts (J's Mother's Boyfriend doesn't know he gave)

Free weights, Busch, Playboy, Marlboro, Weed, Disrespect, Bigotry, Intolerance.

The Last Bell

“J! Hey, what’s your problem? Quit staring at those fucking yuppies and give me a light.”

J whips out his lighter with the naked woman on it and hands it to one of his many friends. They stand in an alley near the high school, which they just started attending. Many of his friends aren’t there with him. They are probably at home asleep. You see, they have reached that illustrious age of 16. Legal drop out age. The more ambitious ones don’t even wait that long.

J had been staring at a group of 11th graders, some male, some female, all from the surrounding hills. None of them farm hands or farm girls. After handing his lighter off, he goes back to staring at them, his eyes squinting. He is thinking. Without saying a word to his friends he gets up and starts walking over to the group he was staring at.

“J, what the hell are you doing?” one of his friends yells, as he realizes J is walking away.

J doesn’t answer. When he gets to the group, he is trotting, he punches a boy that is smiling and laughing. He punches him right in his teeth. He knocks him over and steps on his chest, then uses his boot to kick in the temple. The friends of the boy on the ground stand back, eyes wide, hands shaking. One runs inside. J kicks the boy in the groin and then the ribs and then the arms, and then the back because the boy is curled up in the fetal position. Right then, J gets hit in the back of the head. He falls to the ground, sprawled out, the same way you would be if you were making a snow angel.

ECHOES

When you slap me it echoes in my head like the slam of a car door in an empty parking garage. And I hate the sound. Both sounds. Even more than I hate those slaps.

You hate the sun, and I love it. But you always hit me when it's beautiful outside. So sometimes I long for the clouds to block out the light and the sky and the beauty.

I steal cars. I drive far away from you. But not too far. I drive and watch the street lamps pass, and the streets and the other cars and I keep moving. I smoke their cigarettes and their cigars. Then I park their cars in empty lots in deserted garages and take the bus back to you. And I pray that it's cloudy.

I pray someday it'll be a Greyhound I take back to you. Greyhound rather than the city bus. I hope someday I'll get that far.

person accidentally steps on his hand. John's first reaction is to cower, he hopes they don't want to beat him up for it.

Later, at lunch, he sits with his two friends.

It is Friday night. There's a dance. He won't be going.

He will, however, be outside walking around with his two friends. Sad and jealous while they make fun of the other kids who are getting dropped off by minivans and walking nervously with their girlfriends. John just walks.

Christmas

The family walks across the small town to a cheap department store. You know the kind, the kind where nothing in the ad is ever in stock and you always get what you pay for, including the stigma.

Santa comes each year in the form of a barked order, "You get twenty bucks and hurry the hell up."

Johnny marches onward.

Bills

"Didn't we just pay them?" This is followed by sighs and scratches, which later fuels screaming and beating.

Faceless

Throughout our great land: males and females and children and households and pets and ignorance and abuse and hatred and desperation and madness and quiet.

MICHAELANGELO MONTELEONE
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

STRAWBERRY JAM

The noonday sun was high over the circled wagons of *Julio's traveling circus especial*. Most of the performers were asleep, but Don Pedro sat in the kitchen of his wagon on one of the two blue wooden folding chairs that were set up at a little checkered table which was attached to the wall. The kitchen also doubled as a bedroom and living room, but now the bunks were folded up; his wife hated leaving them down during the day. Don Pedro could care have cared less about whether they were up or down, but Rosita invariably folded them up every morning, rousing him out of bed and leaving him there, grumpy, sitting at the table with nothing to do.

Today he just sat there, head groggy from the previous night's activities, staring at a deck of cards, without even the will to shuffle them. His mouth was dry, as if someone had stuffed it with balls of cotton while he had slept, and his head ached. It was a dull, pounding headache. It felt like Gila monsters were dancing on his temples. Recounting last night in his mind, he seemed to remember actually *seeing* Gila monsters dancing, but further thought on the matter made him realize that it must have been the midgets, and they had only *looked* like Gila monsters from across the wagon circle. He made a mental note to incorporate dancing Gila monsters into an upcoming performance. Satisfied with the morning's work, Don Pedro picked up the cards and started dealing himself a hand of solitaire.

Diego, the tightrope walker, came over for a visit. Don Pedro received him with open arms. "Diego, my friend, it is always

he started. "I had gone into the village to get some rice for Lolita. On my way back from shopping, I noticed a bottle sitting by an open window at a deserted house. I was going to leave it there, but then I started to thinking. What if this bottle of fine Agave Tequila were to sit there in this abandoned house and go to waste? It would be a sin for such a thing to happen. This bottle is being neglected. It needs a friendly hand to take care of it. It does not want to be lonely all by itself in a house where it is obviously unloved. I will take the bottle and give it a good home. I will show it tenderness and affection. And I will share it. I will not be selfish with this bottle. I will not be like its former owner, showing it off in his window like some sort of prize. No - this bottle deserves better. So I hopped over the fence and slipped the bottle into my rice bag. I also got us a loaf of freshly baked bread."

Don Pedro was beside himself with joy. "Diego, my brother, you are indeed a compassionate and honorable fellow. I would like to say that I too would have saved that bottle from certain oblivion, delivering it from the hand of oppression much like yourself, had I been in your shoes. Now where is that bread? I have not eaten since yesterday and I am as hungry as a coyote."

Diego reached into the sack and pulled out the loaf. It was still warm and its aroma filled the small wagon as he set it on the table between the two of them. Don Pedro eyed it greedily, licking his lips. He reached for the loaf but Diego's hand shot out before he could grab the bread. He rationalized with Don Pedro, "Let us be civilized, amigo. We must not go tearing into this bread like a pair of hungry wolves. Perhaps you might have a knife and two plates, and maybe a little of Rosita's strawberry jam? A fine loaf such as this can only be made better by sweet Rosita's strawberry jam."

Don Pedro answered him, somewhat absent-mindedly, "Ahhh - yes, perhaps there is a little bit of jam lying around here some-

where, but I am not certain; it has been a long time since Rosita has had a chance to get strawberries.” He finished off his glass of Tequila and got up, a little put off by the brazenness of Diego’s request. He knew that Rosita’s strawberry jam was famous throughout the circus, and he knew how Diego had a passion for sweets, especially the jam. It had been the cause of some unpleasantness in the past. “I can’t believe that Diego, coming over here with that rotgut tequila and stale bread, trying to buy me off and to get at my precious jam, that low down, dirty mestizo dog,” he muttered to himself as he peered into the cabinet.

“What was that, amigo? Did you say that you needed help looking for the jam? Hurry, Don Pedro, the bread is getting cold!” Diego called from the table in a sing-song voice. He was already halfway through his second glass of Tequila, and he could almost taste the jam, its syrupy sugared strawberries spread all over the warm bread. He smiled to himself as he remembered the time last summer when he had swiped three jars of the stuff after he found Don Pedro passed out underneath his wagon, empty bottle in hand. Diego had tried to be tight-lipped about the theft, but nothing remains a secret for long in the traveling circus, and Don Pedro eventually found out. By then all the jam had been used up, and it was a long time and many lonely bottles of tequila before he started talking with Diego again.

Don Pedro called out from insided the cabinet, “Ahh, here it is, my friend, sweet Rosita’s strawberry jam. However, it is the last jar and there is only a small amount of jam in it. However, you are welcome to it. I will gladly share what I have with you.” He brought the mostly empty jam jar over to the table. Don Pedro did, in fact, have several full jars of the jam stashed away underneath the floorboards of his wagon, but he did not want to reveal his hiding place to Diego. Besides, he thought to himself,

good to see you. What brings you all the way over here from your side of the wagon circle?"

"Today I have a surprise. You see, I have come across an exceptionally fine bottle of Tequila and wanted to share my good fortune with someone who would appreciate such a fine thing. Some one who has sampled many fine liquors, not just some ordinary gringo, but someone with exceptional taste and a fine wit to match," Diego explained.

Don Pedro was flattered. "Then you have come to the right wagon, my friend. For I am all of those things and more. And I know that someone with such exceedingly fine character as yourself would only associate with those of the highest quality. I am indeed honored."

Diego reached into a large paper sack and pulled out a three-quarters-full bottle of Tequila. He popped off the cork and set it on the table in front of Don Pedro. Don Pedro picked up the bottle. Cradling it in his hands, he held it in front of his face, scrutinizing the liquid inside. Putting it to his ear, he swirled around the Tequila, listening to the sound that it made. Satisfied, he wafted the bottle under his nose, simultaneously giving a little sniff. Raising his eyebrows, he glanced at Diego. "This is pretty high quality stuff, especially for Diego," he thought to himself. He got up, took a couple of steps to a small cabinet and produced two glasses. Sitting down again, he poured a bit of Tequila into one of the glasses. Holding up the glass to Diego, he gave him a salutatory nod, and drank. After swallowing the liquor, Don Pedro bobbed his head in affirmation. "This *is* some good tequila, my friend. Where did you get it?"

"I will tell you, but first I need to wet my whistle. Story telling is hard work," said Diego.

"This is true, my friend," agreed Don Pedro. He filled the two glasses to the top and handed one to Diego.

Diego accepted the glass and took a good-sized sip before

it had better uses than Diego's loaf of bread.

He sat down and refilled his glass. "The plates, *senor*," Diego reminded him in a sober voice. Don Pedro apologized, "Forgive me, *amigo*, I was thinking about the jam, how forgetful. I will go and get some plates."

Taking another large sip of Tequila, Don Pedro got up. Returning with two plates and a couple of butter knives, they set to work on the bread. Diego cut the loaf in half, and they each grabbed a hunk. He looked into the jam jar and saw that it was nearly empty. "That sneaky little Chihuahua," he thought to himself bitterly. "I know that he has some more jam hidden around here somewhere; he is hoarding it, that dirty, greedy, selfish gringo dog." He cornered the jar and jabbed his knife inside violently.

"*Madre de Dios!* There is hardly enough jam in here for a mouse!" he exclaimed, his knife making a hollow scraping sound on the glass as he tried to collect every last bit of the delicious preserve. Diego continued scraping his knife on the insides of the jam jar for a minute to illustrate his point. Finally, he smeared the miniscule amount of jam he had collected on to his bread. Bread in hand, he gazed at it fondly. "Ahh, such a pity to have so much freshly baked bread so fortuitously gained, only to be tempted and tantalized by a speck of so delicious a spread as Rosita's strawberry jam. It is a shame that you do not have some more hidden away somewhere. It really does compliment that bread that *I* am sharing *with you*."

Diego licked his lips and bit into the bread. He chewed it well, making sure to extract as much flavor as possible from the small amount of jam that Don Pedro had allotted him. Swallowing the bread passionately, he spoke. "Delicious! The warmth of the bread spreads to the jam and makes it even sweeter than it would normally be. You are lucky to have such a woman as Rosita, who is so accomplished in the kitchen, Don Pedro."

step outside while you go and get it, and then we will feast together!”

He refilled his glass and stepped outside the wagon. Don Pedro was touched by his friend’s sympathy and understanding. “Ahh, good old Diego, I am lucky to have such a friend.” Lost in thought, he did not notice Diego’s probing eye peering in through a knothole.

Don Pedro got up and took a few steps towards the rear of the wagon. Courching down near the folded-up bunk bed, he pried up a floor board with his butter knife, revealing a half-dozen large jars of Rosita’s special jam. He pulled one out, then replaced the floorboard and walked slowly back to the table before sitting down.

“OK, amigo, it is safe now. Come in so that we can enjoy the rest of this wonderful feast together!” Diego came in at once and they resumed their attack on the bread and tequila.

They sat for a while, not talking, just spreading jam on bread and savoring the sweetness of strawberries combined with the warmth of the freshly baked loaf, now and then washing it down with a shot of tequila. When they had both finished their respective hunks, they leaned back in their chairs and loosened their belts, well satisfied. There was enough liquor left for one more round, and Diego refilled both glasses.

After taking a deliberate sip, he spoke. “You are a lucky fellow, Don Pedro. You have a wonderful life here in the traveling circus. Who would have thought that they would make you ringmaster, eh? With your very own wagon and a beautiful woman at your side. Yes, that Rosita, she is something else. I must confess that even though I am quite happy with my Lolita, my head turns whenever Rosita walks by. And she is so easy to talk to, not to mention her strawberry jam!”

A dreamy glazed-over look came to Don Pedro’s eyes. “Yes, Rosita is quite a woman. And you know what, amigo?” His

voice got deep and low and he leaned towards Diego. “She’s a demon in the sack!” he said with a wink and a smile. They shared a chuckle, and they both took another drink. Don Pedro continued, “Hmm, I wonder where she is now? I think it might be time to find my little Rosita. I think that I am feeling a tad bit lonely.” Don Pedro drained his glass for the last time.

“Mmmm,” said Diego, cocking his ear towards the door of the wagon. “What is that I hear? Is that my Lolita, calling me from across the wagon circle? It would be a shame to leave her there, all by herself, when she could be in the company of the man she loves.” Finishing off his glass, he started to get up, then stopped and eyed the half-filled jar of jam on the table. He remembered the time last summer when he had stolen the jam. What fun he and Lolita had had! A wave of desire flooded over him. In a wistfully soft, respectful tone, Diego addressed Don Pedro. “Amigo -- do you think that it would be possible for me to borrow a little more of your strawberry jam? My Lolita, you see, she has a bit of a sweet tooth.”

Don Pedro looked down at this glass thoughtfully. Then he looked at Diego, who was smiling hopefully. He looked at the jam, resting his eyes there for a moment, and then he looked back at Diego. He angled his head to the side and was silent. His eyelids got heavy, the room swam out of focus for a second and then came back, deep inside his belly he could feel the warmth of the tequila radiating throughout his body. He was feeling verry good.

Don Pedro smiled and spoke in an easy tone. “Yes, I think that I could loan my good friend Diego some of Rosita’s special strawberry jam. I have more than enough here for myself, so please, my friend, take the rest of this jar back to your Lolita. I know that she will appreciate it.”

Diego’s face lit up. “Thank you, Don Pedro! You are truly a friend’s friend. I will remember this, amigo,” he said emphati-

Don Pedro emptied his glass. "Yes, I *am* lucky," he replied, kind of dreamily, munching on his jamless bread. He knew about warm jam. How it became so much more delectable and delicious after it had been spread on sweet Rosita's smooth skin, softened by her scent and warmed by her body. Don Pedro had a sudden, overpowering urge for the jam.

"Yes . . . warm jam is good, amigo." He hesitated for a moment, then spoke. "You know, I think that there might be some extra jam hiding here somewhere, but you must promise me that you will cover your eyes and not look while I am finding it."

Diego appeared to be shocked. "I am a little bit offended, amigo, that you do not trust so good a friend as I with the secret of your jam hiding spot. You know that I would not steal such a precious commodity from the very friend who is generous enough to share it with me. Don Pedro, if you cannot trust Diego -- your amigo since childhood, the friend with whom you had your first taste of tequila, the friend who has valiantly stood by your side in countless fights and scuffles, the friend who has gotten you out of jail each and every time that you've been taken away, the very friend who suggested that you run off to join the traveling circus with him -- than who, my good amigo, can you trust?"

Don Pedro stared into the bottom of his glass, his face somber, deep in contemplation of Diego's words. He mulled over what his friend had just said. His face took on an introspective expression. After a minute of such reflection, he spoke. "You are right, amigo, I was wrong to doubt your trustworthiness; you are indeed a kind and compassionate friend. I will show you where I hide the jam."

He started to get up, but Diego held up his hand. "No, amigo. I do not want to know your hiding spot, it is merely enough for me to know that you would have showed me. I will

cally. Standing up, he took a second to catch his balance and then snatched the jam and put it into his paper sack.

Don Pedro spoke up. "Do not mention it. I am glad that you were generous enough to share your good fortune with an old friend. But now, it is time for Rosita! Good-bye, amigo."

"Good-bye, my friend," Diego said and waved goodbye. He stepped down off the wagon, walked the twenty yards to his own wagon and went inside. Lolita was sitting at the stove, stirring a large pot full of rice and beans with a wooden ladle, her back to the door. He called to her, making his voice low and musical. "Lolita honey . . . I have a present for you . . ." She turned and saw Diego standing there smiling, jar of jam in hand. Her eyes brightened, a blush appeared in her cheeks and a smile spread slowly across her face. The ladle clattered to the floor.

Across the wagon circle, Don Pedro was leaning back in his chair, his mind in a haze of tequila-fired amour. He was day-dreaming. "Ahh, Rosita, what a fine woman," he mused. "So beautiful, so charming, so pleasant to talk to, and she never complains. Even when the wagon is going over the rough trails she always has a smile on her face and a kind word to say, and she can cook, as well. Yes, my Rosita, she is something special. She is a delicate rose on a warm summer day, she is a passionate kiss during a desert sunset, she is a sweet candy on the tip of my tongue, she is . . . coming into the wagon!"

Rosita entered the wagon. Looking into Don Pedro's face, she noticed that it had a dreamlike quality to it, as if he was gazing off into the distance. She spoke to him gently. "What are you thinking of, my love? There is bliss in your face."

Don Pedro replied slowly, contentedly, "Ahh, my darling Rosita, I was only thinking of how lucky I am to have you, here,

now.” Her cheeks flushed as her body grew warm. She sat on his lap, gazed into his eyes, and talked tenderly into his ear.

“And I am lucky, too. I have the best ringmaster in all of Mexico, so smart, so funny and handsome.”

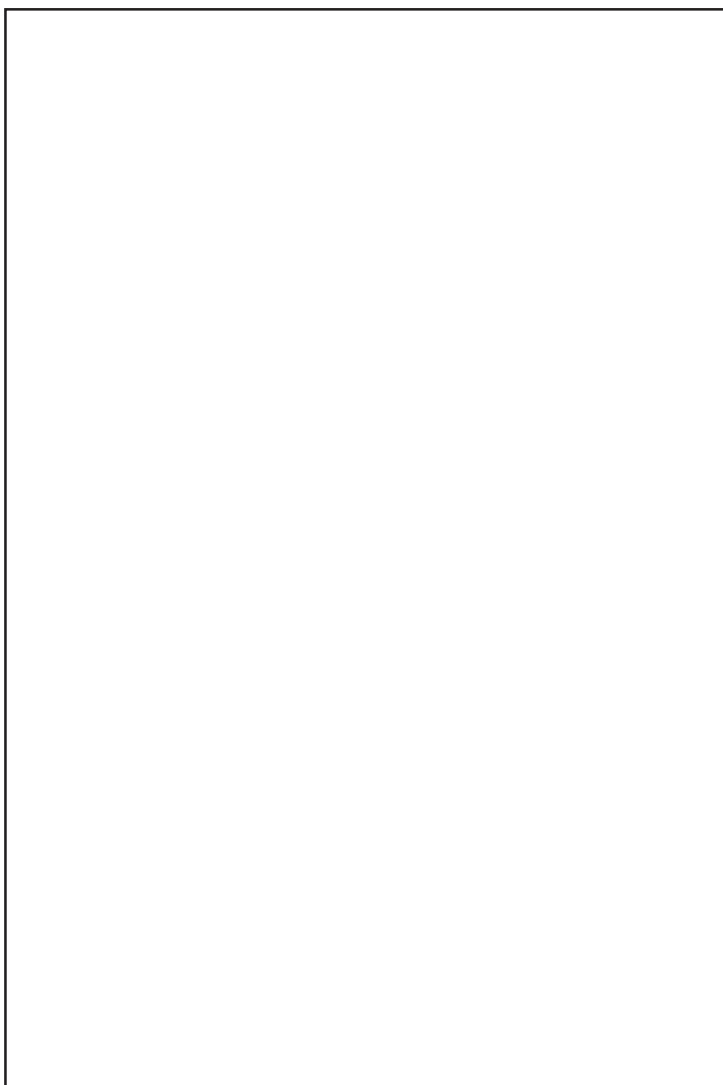
“Yes, yes. I am all of that, and more . . . “

“But señor, do you know what I like most about you?”

“No, what do you like most about me?”

“I like the way that you kiss,” Rosita answered sensuously, and gave the lobe of his ear a little nibble. Don Pedro looked at her and noticed her staring at him hungrily. “I think,” he said, as he slowly unbuttoned her blouse, “that there is some jam left under the bed.”

THREE RIVERS REVIEW
SECOND ANNUAL FICTION CONTEST



JUDGED BY SHARON DILWORTH

THREE RIVERS REVIEW
BIOGRAPHIES

CONTEST WINNER

CHRISTY LEONARDO is a senior attending the University of Pittsburgh. In addition to being a student, he works at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church where he is an intern in their middle school ministry. He hopes to one day become a secondary school educator, publishing editor, or bail bondsman. Mr. Leonardo also enjoys reading, karate, and hunting with his dog, Gaia. He lives in Sewickley, PA.

CONTEST JUDGE

SHARON DILWORTH is the author of two collections of short stories, *Women Drinking Benedictine* and *The Long White*, which was awarded the Iowa Award in Short Fiction. She is a professor of

CHRISTY LEONARDO

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DROWNING

I have this two-alarm system but I didn't set it up because of this long week I've been having, so I woke up at about 2:00. My face is hot from the dream I had. Can't remember it -- never can when I sleep in. Too late for classes today. I throw myself down in the lounge, in front of the TV. They're repeating Regis, he's talking to some international floral arranger. I'm dwelling on how red and shiny her face is when Victor comes in through the hallway door. Dude, brought some, he says, waves a bag by the zip-loc. Sure, I say, indicating the coffee table. We do three lines in silence. The camera's moving around now -- the audience, Regis, Florist, Kath, Audience. Victor starts about his intramural basketball team again. Dude, this guy we just got? Tommy? Six foot nine. White, six foot fucking nine and sits bench for Pitt, he says. Look, I gotta go, Vic, but thanks, I say. I get dressed. Cashmere turtleneck with ice-white vest and khakis. The vest is a women's medium but it's pretty big and I pulled the tag when I got it.

There's an overturned Fed Ex truck on the parking lot curb, half in the road and half in the lot. This kid from down the street is pinned in the gutter, under the axle and gearshaft, limp from trauma. I go around and lift the back corner. I can reach him under the shaft with my foot, and I push him out by the shoulder as the beams groan. I drop the truck, walk over to him. He's unconscious, bruised but otherwise O.K. I sling him across my shoulder. The guys at the Indian grocery are staring at me through the windows. I can't remember which building is his, but as I'm

out in the hall and reminds me that tonight was the night we agreed on. Jesus, Tim, I say. Sorry. I'll put this girl on ice and we'll do this. Come on, man! Tim says. We're doing this for you! I know, I know, give me five minutes to suit up, I say. And I'm thinking damn, but I'm *doing* this here.

We roll up to her house in the van. It's 10:43 -- *everybody* is watching "e.r." Tim uses the ram once and the door buckles down (like I always imagined it would), and we go in. Coordination goes well. Justin herds all my ex-girlfriend's roommates out back, crying and stumbling. She's in the chair, looking sort of stunned. I stand in front of her, aim, check the safety once, twice. I hear a girl hit the sidewalk outside. A dog is barking. Jake makes this see-saw motion with his head as if to say, do it, c'mon, let's do it. I put my gun in the holster and walk outside. We roll, in silence. The van turns slowly onto my street. Not a fucking word, I say.

The girl is sitting, legs crossed, on the lounge, watching some weird video that's got an oscillating tone in the background. I tear off my coverall, and her eyes shift up. Did you miss me? I ask. We meet halfway on the couch. My tongue is in her ear; I take the Glock anti-terrorist knife out of my boot and cut her grey Japanese decal shirt down the cleavage. It's on. About twelve minutes in, I'm holding her down with my foot, and she's strangling me with my own belt, the one from Structure. Staring at her heaving mouth, I remember part of the dream I had last night: I'm swimming in the cove, drowning, which is odd. It's really dark. I'm reaching up for a cleft in the rock but the water keeps knocking me back and forth against the rocks, back and forth.

I wake up early, look at her for a little while and then tap her

on the head. She finds the kimonos, so we put them on. She's making eggs in the kitchen, listening to Sly and the Family Stone, waving her head to the music. I catch a glance in her purse: pharmaceutical-grade morphine, compact, coupon book, telescoping police baton. How are you? she asks, suddenly in the bedroom. I want to say woozy, but it comes out "shrimpy." She rubs the hair on the back of my neck as we talk. Her name is Meredith.

Let me finish up in here, she says. I step out on the loggia, to check the weather. Out front there's two guys with football lids on, apparently fresh from last night. They're pretty much identical, with dull hatchet faces and gelled hair. Snickering, they ask: what's up, dude? Nothing. Hey, what's up? They repeat. We'll kick your ass, dude, the other one says. They look at me wolfishly. I jump alongside the wall and hit both of them at the same time. The one on the left gets up. I leg-sweep him back down, throw a kneeling punch and finish by thrusting my thumbs into his sockets. I stand up, gasping. I rub the fluid between my thumb and fingers. And I think: this -- what's happening -- can't be real. Meanwhile, I'm remembering the rest of the dream. It's horrible: I can't find a handhold on the cleft rock. I'm getting weaker in the water. And I can see myself drop down, plunge, my frozen rictus shrouded by the murk. But the vision cuts out. She's coming through the screen door in my Old Navy blend sweater, cotton shirt and kilt. Smiling. She has the Ice-house I got off the kids down the street in her freshly manicured hands. We'll stay in today, O.K.? she asks. I say sure.

pacing, his housemate comes out. He gestures inside the door; a few seconds later another kid comes out with a case of beer.

I keep going, up past the Cathedral. I see this girl. I start talking her up, saying shit. She looks at me, nervous, but keeps walking. I follow her down South Craig. Her boyfriend starts it up: leave us alone, he says, then he pushes me with both hands on the shoulder. The air is thick with his Perry Ellis. I kill him with a single crescent kick to the head. I don't say anything, just take her by the arm and grasp her hand. We go into the photo exhibit. I told Jon I might go. He's there, with some art guys. They got new Maplethorpes. Jon's friend shows me the craziest one, like I couldn't find it myself. Juxtaposition of umbra and anima? (he suggests something like this) I tell him it looks like two people fucking the living shit out of each other. Not going to talk to Jon much under these conditions. We step out.

Manny catches us not a minute up the street. He got his new Aston-Martin. The girl's eyes light up, and we hop in. Where'd you find this peach? Manny asks. Leisure miles up and down Forbes and Fifth. Everything is coming up Manny, my friend tells me. The bass is off the hook -- Manny explains the super subwoofer he got Isomech Sound Technologies to make for him. The readout is like a video game, with soft, marine colors and a weird design. He drops us off at the apartment. I show her around. She's sort of impressed. She likes the Moebius "For a Muse of Fire" prints in the hall. It's dinnertime. I run downstairs and steal four Hot Pockets from Dave's lie-down freezer. She only has one -- I feign alarm at her eating habits. A knock at the door. The special ops team walks in, uniformed and masked. Everybody's confused, even me: Tim takes me

SUBMISSION POLICY

LITERATURE

All undergraduates enrolled at a university or college in the city of Pittsburgh, or any of the University of Pittsburgh branch campuses, are eligible to submit to *Three Rivers Review*. Please send a maximum of five original works of poetry/and or prose to *Three Rivers Review*, University Honors College, 3500 Cathedral of Learning, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

All submissions must be type-written, single-sided, and accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (S.A.S.E.). Name, permanent and campus addresses, phone, university attending and email should only appear on a separate cover sheet.

All submissions are reviewed anonymously. No simultaneous submissions will be considered for publication and no revisions will be accepted. All writers will be notified as to the status of their work.

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