



Black Rock & Sage

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Idaho State University

Black Rock & Sage is a journal of creative works published annually through the Department of English and Philosophy at Idaho State University with assistance from the Art and Music Departments. All artistic contributions, from design to literature to music, have been produced by graduate and undergraduate students in departments from across the university. Submissions are received from September through February. For more information about the journal, see our website at www.isu.edu/blackrock.

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Cover: Detail of "In the Beginning" by Stacey Barker

Black Rock & Sage

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Musical Selection—available at isu.edu/blackrock

Emma Doupé, Soprano, Senior Bachelor of Arts in Voice Major.

Trent Clegg, Piano, BM in Vocal Performance from ISU, 2007

Ruhe sanft, mein holdes Leben, from *Zaide*, by Wolfgang
Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791).

Prose

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Editor's Note

From my kitchen table where I write, a gloomy afternoon becomes a spring snowfall. Just a week ago it actually felt like spring, and a single cluster of blooms appeared. Yellow daffodils. The blooms stand out against the dim colors from an overcast sky. After five years in Pocatello, I've become all too familiar with the weather's unpredictability. Lifetime residents of the area have told me, through various colloquialisms, how to deal with weather like this: "If you don't like the weather in Pocatello, just wait longer." Upon reflection, it seems to me that just such an insight might be useful for an editor of *Black Rock* ☺ *Sage*.

It's January 14th, one month from submissions deadline, and I can easily count on my fingers everything we've received until now. Just wait longer. April is here, just one week before we send the file to the publisher, and our funding hasn't dropped into our local account yet. Just wait longer. It's all fine; we're going to make our deadline. Just wait longer.

Despite the annual uncertainties, the journal always manages to come together. And in the end, it's all worth it. Because it's all about the art. Students featured in this year's edition have utilized their artistic talents to explore a delightful assortment of ideas, themes, and topics. I hope you'll find their pieces as complex, inviting, and engaging as I have.

Kelly V. Ricken's "My Guardian Dear" is a lovely tangle between the high-level syntax of the parentheticals and the childish but startling moments involving the "wrath of God" and a "child heretic." Before anything else, it's Drue Ngauamo's word play in "All that Clamor" that catches the reader's attention. But somewhere in

the background, bold images lurk—a wedding, lavish ladies, clammy hands, irritation (including a wandering comma that the editing staff deliberated over for days before leaving it untouched). This year’s *BR&S* Prose Contest Winner, “Strangers in Rows,” by Taylor Kensel, while framed in some ways as a war story, is really about the everyday. Her short story illustrates how traumatic gender expectations can be, drawing an analogy between cultural conventions and the rules and regulations of the military. Through a mother’s dilemma to save her children or herself in a post-apocalyptic world, Mike Nichols’ emotional short story, “Her Brave Face,” exposes a fascinating tension between the human desire to survive and empathy so strong it can provide the gift of life. We’re delighted again this year to have such a variety of dynamic art.

Turning back to my now snow-laden daffodils, I’m struck that this is my first spring in this house, and I am enjoying these blooms thanks to the efforts of someone unknown to me. So it feels appropriate to thank all those people I do know that make *BR&S* possible each year: Professor Kori Bond from the Music Department; Professor Joanna Cleveland from the Art Department who took the reins from Professor Angie Zielinski this year (a smooth and effortless transition); Professor Susan Goslee (faculty advisor to *BR&S*) from the Department of English and Philosophy.

Please enjoy this year’s edition of *Black Rock & Sage*. It is the result of countless hours of work from editors, faculty, and interns; and certainly many more hours from our contributors while working in their various forms and genres. I hope you will be rewarded with the pieces published here and pick up the journal often. Perhaps you will read it cover to cover. Or, perhaps with a few minutes of spare time, you’ll sit and read one or two poems, or a single short story. And if you’re not in the mood, just wait longer.

Beautiful. Hungry. Universe.

Your favorite color is
blood drawn into the clouding syringe.

I was putting on lipstick in your reflection. As the
needle slides past air into skin, my eyes hit ceiling.

You, Asphodel, are the moment I'm passing
the semi in the storm. Blind. I crash. And,
what colors your small wilted life runs
down my arms ticking.

If we had made it, we could have driven
to a place where your worries could quiet down some.

Because here, even when we drown them,
they bubble up screaming.

And we.

Come
down. Crashing. With bumping regrets
after us like stringed tin cans.

It is our hope, though,
that as we dig new holes, some dirt will fall into old ones.

Our holes.

red wells my dark sucking cave finger holes your open mouth the
holes in my bones that you've sucked into flutes that play a tune the

capuchin dances to, singing:

“hey hey, my my
what a beautiful.
Hungry. Universe.”

Kelly V. Ricken

My Guardian Dear

My teacher
(a nebulous memory, a fusion
of religious schoolmarms
recalled in peripheral vision)
hoped for iridescent wings, white robes,
holy glow.

I wielded a Rockin' Raspberry crayon
like the wrath of God.

Ensuing contusion
(poor asymmetrical thing,
neon monochrome, more hair
than hollow bones),
I named her Adrianna after a friend
with a trampoline.

Angel of God, My Guardian Dear—
They consigned you to the flames.

I might have cried

but fire is just sparkle for a child
heretic, and I always loved
a show.

Through the Looking-Glass

I'm dreaming something savory, but it's being pulled away from me and The Gray is replacing it. Dandy dream world drains away and I'm left to try and palate The Gray—gray pillow, gray tile floor, gray walls, gray smock.

Dr. Dole is in the room, standing over me. He's got his cart and his greasy side-part, and his gray trays stamped with "Danvers State." They have conspicuously left off the "Hospital" on their property stamps. As if we don't know.

"Up and at 'em," he says in a voice as greasy as his hair. "First breakfast."

Dr. Dole nicknames the medicine dispersals "first breakfast" or "third lunch" or whatever because he likes to reference Tolkien whenever he can.

Mary Ann rolls over in the bed across from me and puts her pillow over her face, growling swear words into it.

"Hey now," Dole chastises her.

He tells me to stand up, then looks me over and runs his hands over my body to make sure I haven't been beaten, bruised, or broken by my sleeping beauty self. His hands are clinically warm. Tepid. They linger more than is strictly necessary. He examines Mary Ann in the same way and then finds our fry-sauce pill cup on his cart. Mary Ann gets red, white, and blue, the pasty-faced patriot. I get only yellow: the color of insane wallpaper. He pours us a glass of water to take them with and says, "Here you go," like he's doing us some big favor being such a thoughtful Aquarius, a patron god of the healing arts.

Later in the morning the nurses herd us all downstairs. Mary

Ann and I linger in the hall outside our room; we aren't much for breakfast, but Nurse Caleb sees us and barks at us, nipping our heels all the way downstairs to the mess hall.

"What's on the menu?" I ask a kitchen worker as we go in. He ignores me. Turns out it's toast and orange marmalade. No pig and pepper. Damn.

Mary Ann and I get our food and sit down at one of the long bench-style tables, walking past a guy with skin the color of English toffee who is screaming something about cream and coffee. The nurses prowl among us and along the mess hall's walls. Two of the tables are for Barbies and two are for Kens, but if we "behave ourselves like ladies and gentlemen" we can sit together, so we plant our seats next to David and Brandt. David smiles at Mary Ann. He stares at her while he brings his toast to his mouth, missing it a few times because he refuses to look away from her for even a second. Mary Ann doesn't notice. She doesn't notice anything. Not the rat's nest in her hair, not the white gravy splattered around her mouth, not David's eyes doing that triangle dance around her face.

I like Brandt, though.

"I've got a velvet Elvis," he tells me.

"I'm sorry," I say. "Are you taking something for it?"

He blinks at me.

"Can they cure it?" I try instead.

"No, it's not a disease. It's a picture. To hang on the wall. A velvet portrait of Elvis."

"Oh."

"Yeah, well, I tell you because I know you like art. You're always looking for magazine pictures of paintings to hang on your wall, so I thought you might like to see it."

"I would like to see it," I tell him. "Maybe even touch it, too."

David de-Velcros his eyes from Mary Ann long enough to look from Brandt to me and say, “Are you telling me that you want to see and touch his velvet Elvis?”

“Yes.”

He starts snickering, probably about some unrelated thing yo-yoing in his brain.

But I don’t care because I see him. Dr. Cooley. Caspar to his friends. He walks in, pauses, sweeps eyes that are red with tired around the mess hall. He finds who he’s sniffing for—an intemperate nurse—and talks with her—conservatively, quietly—the way he does everything. I like looking from the nurse’s skin to his. Hers is tan, spotted with sun, and too many lines are cut into it. His looks like the field behind Danvers State in winter. Smooth, white, untouched. When he walks away, all I can see is the pallid back of his lab coat, bounding away in a zigzag pattern.

7:00-8:00 Awake and shake the sleep from thy eyes.

8:00-9:00 Take breakfast and advice.

9:00-1:00 Shirk work. Ditch pitching in.

1:00-2:00 Lunch, midday drug deal.

2:00-4:00 Therapy.

4:00-6:00 Intellectual and artistic pursuits.

6:00-7:00 Dinner, dying day drug deal.

7:00-9:00 Anything within reason and without sharp objects.

9:00 Nighty-night. Don’t let the brain bugs bite.

Therapy is co-ed. That is, with Ed. Edward Dole. The first hour is group and if you’re lucky, like I am, you spend another hour with him one-on-one immediately afterwards. Fifteen of us go into a room abnormally infested with Gray and sit in a circle which

symbolizes the sun and the moon and perception and the circle of life and open communication and the vagina and eternity.

"Afternoon ladies," Dr. Dole says, pulling himself up a chair.

"Dole's an asshole," says Rebecca. Everyone ignores her.

"What's on your mind?" he asks us.

No one says anything. Mildred cries but this is nothing new.

"Let's talk about the flies," he decides.

"What flies?" someone asks.

"What flies?! Why, this subject should come as no surprise.

The nurses tell me your section—" He stops to check his notes.

"Yes, East Wing, fourth floor, end block—has been eating them like spiders."

He stares at us with a dippy little smile on his hobbit face.

"Well," he huffs. "I can't imagine they taste very good."

"Bet your wife thinks the same thing about you," says Mary Ann.

Dr. Dole looks at me as if I'm responsible for what Mary Ann has said.

"Dole's an asshole," Rebecca puts in.

"Winter's coming. The flies will die. What will you eat then?"

"The mess hall's pecan pies. They taste about the same," I say.

The circle jiggles. Titters and jitters.

Dole is not ruffled, and neither are his slicked-down hair strands.

"Do you think what you're doing is funny?" he asks, probably trying to be like Sour-Ron or whoever the dangerous one is.

Everyone shuts up. Cue thick, dramatic silence.

"Are you doing it to get even more attention than you already do? Would you like attention in the form of a visit to the surgical ward?"

The surgical ward. He wasn't screwing around now. The equivalent of the back room in the pound. Even Mildred squelches her cries to hear this.

"No," I say.

He looks at me, and for the first time I break eye contact first.

He clicks open his plastic pen and scratch-scratches on his clipboard. Click-clack. Retract. "Well," he says, smiling like he hasn't taken his laxative for a while, "let's move on to something more . . . worthwhile."

"Dole's an asshole," Rebecca says unnecessarily.

Dr. Dole ignores me for the rest of the group session and then cancels our personal rendezvous, so I walk back to my room with Mary Ann.

"Humpty Dumpty. Sat on a wall," she says. "Humpty Dumpty. Had a great fall."

"Shut up."

When we get back to our room, I flop down on my bed and look at my bulletin board. My precious paintings. Pearly, opalescent, silvery-sheen, thunder cloud-colored paint on the one of a Chrysler. Not Gray. Never Gray. This is different. Then on to one of the bitterroot flower, which is pink. Transparent. There are no bitterroots in Massachusetts, and why would there be? They are not a Puritan flower. Monet. London. Holland. Lady with Green Umbrella. Water Lilies. The same small, arced bridge over and over again. There are more. Too many to look at in one sitting.

Eventually the candy cart comes around and we swallow our savory sweets without ever really tasting them.

"Lights out!" they shout, and the buzz is cut off. But fluorescence never really goes away. It just hides behind the bulbs in the wires. Vibrating. Waiting.

I wait too.

I make sure Mary Ann is asleep and I step out into the hall. I go to Brandt's room—West Wing, second floor, middle block. It's a miracle I am not found and shepherded back. I guess the wolves need a sacrifice once in a while.

I find Brandt's door and tap at it. David flings it wide but doesn't invite me inside.

"I came to see Brandt's velvet Elvis."

"He's sleeping."

"Elvis is?"

"No, dipshit. Brandt."

"I don't need to see Brandt. Just the picture."

David sighs and motions me in. "Right there," he says. "The hair, the flare"

I stare.

I want it. I move towards it and finger the frame, lifting gently to take it off its nail.

"Hey! Stop it! That's not yours," David says.

"I don't care."

He comes at me then, wrenching me away. "You get out or I'll hit you."

"You wouldn't dare."

His fist comes faster than I have time to move. I vaguely feel myself hit the floor. David nudges my legs out of the room with his feet.

"Stupid whore," he says, and slams the door.

I get up and my head is throbbing. It's all I can do to think of how to get back to my section. I lean against the walls for support and drag myself along. But the pain is getting worse and my vision is going Gray. My body is a long ways off but I still feel it fold into the corner

where the wall meets the floor.

And suddenly I feel everything.

Small things.

The phone buttons at the lobby desk. Someone is punching them. But they bounce back. A pile of brittle leaves is scratching against the windows on the first floor. They want in. Winter's coming and they'll die. Even more than they already did. They'll crack and become powder. Dirt. Nothing wants to be dirt. And dirt still lingers on things in the kitchen pantry. Things that pushed their way out of it. The vegetables. I feel them. Potatoeyes sprout curly lashes. I can hear them growing, pushing across the floor. They're hunching up into spirals as they go. Reaching.

Someone is touching me with cold hands. It feels like the water in Middleton pond. Transparent as bitterroot petals. I open my eyes.

"Miss Alice," Dr. Cooley says. "What are you doing out here?"

"I—I'm sorry."

"It's alright. But what happened? It looks like you've got the start of a pretty good shiner."

I blink at him and shake my head. I can't think of anything to say.

"Here," he says, and lifts me up. "Let's get you back to bed." He walks with me, one hand on the small of my back. Nothing inappropriate, unfortunately, but still nice.

When we get to my room, he tells me to lay down. I do, but I'm still shaking. He must see this because he stops and stares, then sits down, very gently on the end of my bed. It doesn't even feel like there's more than a couple extra pounds on the mattress. He shakes a capsule out of a pill bottle in his coat pocket. It's striped two obnoxious shades of purple and isn't one I've ever seen given to anybody. "This will

help you sleep,” he tells me. I expect him to just hand me the pill but instead he reaches one arm out and fits a hand snugly under my jaw. With the other he brings the pill right up to my lips and then before I know it, past them, two fingers in my mouth pushing the pill to the back of my throat. I gag—just for a second, and Mary Ann rustles her blanket in her sleep. Cooley pulls out, then, fast enough for both of us to understand it never happened. I want him to stay but I am already closing my eyes and he is shutting the door.

It is blessedly silent for a while and then something changes. Nothing makes noise but the room is no longer benign. I can feel it. It’s not even the Gray this time. Whatever this is, is much worse. I open my eyes and sit up in the bed. Across the room Mary Ann is sitting up, too. Looking straight at me.

“You left me here,” she says. “Why didn’t you wake me up? Why didn’t I get to come?”

“I just wanted to see Brandt’s painting.”

“You think I didn’t want to?”

I say nothing.

“Well, I did.”

Suddenly I feel something I didn’t feel when Dr. Cooley was here. It’s one of the small things, and it’s been slashed. Scratched. Torn. I feel the dripping of its blood running down the wall. Silver metallic, lavender, goldenrod, sea foam, bitterroot pink. Thick and running. Running out too fast to ever put it back in. I look at my bulletin board of paintings. They’ve been turned into confetti, and the worst part is that all of the confetti is Gray.

I’m out of my bed and across the room in less than a second. Mary Ann rises up to meet me but I pin her down and start scratching her face.

“I hate you!” I scream. “I’ll kill you!” I grab her hair and

yank as hard as I can and at the same time she's kneeling me in the stomach. We stand up together and dance toward the wall. She flips me around and slams me into it. I claw her arms and bite her shoulder, but she has the upper hand and we both know it. She grabs my hair, pulls my head toward her and then throws it back as hard as she can. I smash into the mirror and then the floor. I already hurt all over but the funny thing is that all I can think of is how the stupid mirror didn't shatter like it should have. It just rippled, bouncing around the ever-so-slightly blurred reflections inside of it.

A nurse, Dr. Dole, and Dr. Cooley rush into the room. The fluorescence, waiting behind the gates for so long, is finally released, and it gallops through the wires and bursts out the bulbs in the ceiling.

"She ruined them," I tell them. "All of them. Look."

But they don't. They just look from Mary Ann to me and then to each other.

"We need to separate them, at least temporarily," Cooley says. "Mary Ann can stay here and let's take Alice to my examination room. I want to do a re-evaluation."

Dole crouches down to pick me up and as he does it, he's smiling. Not his constipated grimace but something else, something almost obscene in its pleasure. Once I'm on my feet, Mary Ann steps forward.

The nurse stiffens. "Watch her," she says.

"She's fine," Cooley says. I stare at him, open-mouthed, but he's not looking at me; he's watching Mary Ann come closer and closer to me until she's hugging me with her hard shoulders. I don't respond, but as she's pulling away I hear her whisper something, or at least hear the brush of her clothes or her hair whisper something. A quiet ghost of "Off with her head."

Cooley leads the procession, the nurse at his side, and me and my escort, Dole, in the back. We're almost to the end of the hall when I twist out of Dole's grip enough to look back. I see Mary Ann hanging out our doorway into the hall, watching.

All That Clamor

Can you imagine
how that clam would feel,
knowing its life work
was crushed, ground to dust,
made into makeup,
for the furthering
of someone else's
daily deception,
knowing its baby,
iridescent, was
lodged, fused, trapped into
a golden setting,
to be stylishly
lugged around on hands
of lavish ladies?

I bet that clam wanted to cherish its pearl on its mantle,
rather than know it is tightly stitched to a white wedding dress
only worn once, one day, a short day that was frigid and bright,
not the happiest day of anyone's life, a day that was,
instead, to be seen through, only to gratify The Day and to
prove doubt-in-laws wrong and squelch judgments mantled on
suspicions.

Certainly a pearl
there rolling and grinding and mulling and turning and forming,
is kept snug inside.

It only takes one
grain of relentless
sand, something so small
,irritating to
turn on the pit of
its muscular fret.

Maybe the clams are relieved when we take
away that bothersome irritant, not
having to mull it over anymore.
On the other hand, perhaps we take more.
Never will clams know of closure? Or peace?
Will clams know what they have done all along?
They've turned invasive, petty, maddening
grains of sand into pearlescent resolve.

Could clammy hands
produce a pearl?
Will unspoken
words of mine pearl?
Rare pearls. Black pearls.
An Ulcer pearl,
abundant with.
Leave them their pearls.

Mixture

Father is working above the sink,
folding himself into pills,
leaving whatever bits
that won't fit beside the leftover
toothpaste, lost hair, to be rinsed
into the septic tank.

They are sitting on the bottom
bunk. Four girls evenly spaced
waiting for the time to rise. They anticipate
the temperature to be just right
in the kitchen

their mother is baking.
Her hands pour sugar. There's flour
across her head, cracking
the eggs leaves bits of shell and adds
texture. In the basement

the water is rising, backed up

septic tank seeps into the Christmas
decorations, Great Grandma's journals.

Their mother is done with the beaters.
Come lick off the batter.

They rise. The youngest puts on a bathing suit
she inherited, loose in several places
not filled with body parts she hasn't inherited yet.
She's heading down the only three
stairs left to the basement.

Now she swims
mixing with the belongings of her family.
Homemade ornaments, father's right hand,
food particles rinsed from dirty dishes, pills,
what was flushed. She rises with it.

Her Brave Face

On that cold morning before the sun broke free from the eastern hills, we three sisters stood in a second-floor motel room and watched two men in dark and bulky clothing pedal bicycles down the road as if they labored under water. I had seldom seen anyone ride bicycles, and it had been long ago, so the sight was odd to me. The men's hunched backs were to us, and we ducked to peer over the bare and splintered window sill through the broken pane of glass at them. I remember I glanced down and flicked away the dried husk of a ladybug, its spots faded.

Light from the unseen sun shaped and colored the clouds that streaked the sky. The men pushed the pedals. As they swung their bicycles into the plaza in front of the court building, a breeze swept up, but the men seemed untouched by it as neither their dark coats nor their dark pants ruffled at all. The men circled around a leafless tree caged by a low metal fence and stopped and stepped off of the bicycles. The larger of the two unzipped his dark coat, and inside it rested a large and shapeless bundle.

The bundle reminded me of a picture of a baby carrier in a faded and torn magazine from the days when money had still held value before the politicians and the powerful had boarded themselves up in their cities, in their citadels. In the picture, the carrier was worn by a sleek and healthy-looking woman. She strolled through a park while her baby slept snug against her chest. I remember hoping it was not a baby in the bundle in that dark man's coat.

My daddy had taught me many things. He had taught me to read from tattered books that he carried in his pack, books by men named Faulkner and McCarthy. My daddy had taught me to write, and

once he'd come out of a looted store with two packs of paper, upon which he'd let me write stories of my own which he carried with his books. He also taught me to hide from men such as the ones in the square. We had hidden and listened while he protected us from men like these, men who roamed the country preying on the weak to take from them everything they had. My daddy had been killed by men like these and so he could no longer teach or protect me.

My mother had not allowed me to go back to get his books, though I fought her to do so. For many days after my daddy was killed, I awoke believing his death had been a dream. Then reality reshaped itself and his absence would smother me.

Clara's breathing sounded loud to me as the smaller man positioned himself by the empty, concrete flower bed to the left of the court building's doors. Maria's stomach growled and we three jumped at the sound. She moaned and winced, and my stomach rumbled in sympathy but I glared at her. The thin corn meal we'd eaten the night before had only prodded and inflamed our hunger. Sleep had not come easy, and the dull ache in our bellies was what had woken us to witness the men in the plaza.

I had a vague wish to wake my mother from her uneasy sleep on the pile of rags in the corner of the motel room, but I was transfixed by the men and their bicycles. So I stayed there, peering over the dirty sill with my sisters on either side of me, to see what these men would do next.

The larger man stood with the bicycles, the rusted metal fence at his feet. With his right hand, he lifted the dark hump at his belly and rolled his right shoulder up and back as if to adjust an unseen strap supporting the weight of that bundle across his shoulder. Then they stood, unmoving and silent, a set of deviant statuary set down under the rills of ever-lightening and motionless clouds.

We three crouched there gripping the window sill until my thighs ached, and still those dark men stood motionless below. We sank to our knees and watched until pain clawed where they pressed into the stained carpeting. Pins and needles stabbed at my feet. My mother in her sleep muttered and railed and batted her hand at something unseen.

The sun had just topped the hills but was still blocked by the ridges of clouds when two other men, disheveled and filthy, shuffled out from around either side of the court building. Clara gasped and shifted. I elbowed her hard in her shoulder. The new men came on cautiously, one from the right and one from the left, and walked towards the big man and the bicycles. Then two more men, their clothing no less filthy and patched, came straight out from under the window where we watched. These two strode toward the bicycle men and the others.

My heart hammered and my bowels weakened as I watched the newcomers walk toward the plaza. So palpable was my sisters' panic that I feared they would cry out and alert the men. The larger of the bicycle men turned a half step towards the newcomers, and as he did I saw what it was that he carried. It was a dingy green backpack slung wrong-ways across the front of him. Its contents sagged heavy to one side, and the image of a huddled baby flashed into my mind. Then my mother was there behind us on her knees and elbows. Her eyes were wide and sheared through me as she grabbed my sisters, pulling them down and to her, one in each arm. At that sudden sight of her with the image of a baby in the backpack still in my mind, a squeaking sound escaped my mouth. One of the newcomers swung his head toward the window that we cowered under.

Clara shivered and moaned. The familiar sound and smell of her shitting herself came to me. I pictured that thin green stream I'd

so often wiped from her bottom while marking how her bones had started to jut at angles unnatural to her small body. Maria gripped my hand and stared into my eyes to keep her brave face, like Daddy had taught us.

I looked over at my mother and mouthed, "I think one heard me."

Her eyes grew large and her face went taut, as if small and hidden hands beneath her hair were pulling back her skin. She motioned with a jerk of her head toward our bedding and crawled with Clara over to it. Maria and I followed close behind on our bellies, our hands still clasped together. My mother snatched up several of the rags we'd slept on while she motioned for us to put on our extra coats. She put on her coat and slipped the backpack with our supplies and the maggoty sack of corn meal in it over her shoulders and marched out into the hallway. She turned toward the stairs, and I followed her, holding tight to my sisters' hands. We hurried down the dank stairwell to the first floor. My mother opened a maid's closet and knelt to look at each of us in turn. Then to me she said, "Remember. Get in and keep silent. I will be back. Do not come out no matter what you hear." I nodded at her and she stood and handed me a rag. Then she was gone.

I looked at my sisters who were both staring where my mother had gone. Clara was crying quietly and terror had stripped the brave look from Maria's face.

"Come on, inside. Clara. Stop it. You must be silent like Mother said."

We entered the closet, and I dropped Clara's too-big jeans to the floor and cleaned her bottom and wiped out the inside of her jeans and pulled them back up. I tossed the rag as far down the hallway as I could. Then I shut the door. We shuffled into a corner and sat with

our knees pulled tight to our chests. My sisters nudged into me and huddled under my arms in the dark. The memory of our leaving the last town uncoiled in my mind as if it had waited for that thin crack of light from the closing door as its signal to arise.

We could not sneak away that day but had to lie under a porch in the dirt. My mother had whispered, “Don’t watch,” while the stinking and cursing men had done what they’d done to the two women in the yard across the road. I had done what my mother told me and had not looked until one of the women had screamed and one of the men had slapped her. After that, I had not been able to look away again. I blinked quick tears until the men were done and had dragged the women away.

Clara’s stink, mixed with the moldering stench of the closet, brought me back to that present. The closet was black and silent except for our breathing. I understood that my mother had gone to see that it was safe for us to get away. If the men had heard me and were coming, then she would be a decoy for us.

After the men killed Daddy, my mother had told us that mother birds flew out from their nests to lead cats away from the baby birds. She told me this was what she would do if ever we were in danger. If men were coming, she would run and let them see her run, to lead them away from us. So while we sat in the closet, I knew that she would run. I also knew that the men would catch her. She had told me that she would come back for us, but that if a night went by and she had not returned, then I was to wait for the next night and take my sisters and go on to the next town, as we always had. I was to travel only at night and I was to look for a woman with a kind face and ask her to help us. I was to stay away from the cities of the powerful, for they would shoot beggars on sight.

I had not wanted to say I would do it, but I knew she would hit

me and make me promise. So I promised. Then she made me repeat it to her again and again until she was satisfied. I had told her I would look for her too, and she was quiet and finally had said yes, I should do that.

The longer we sat there in the dark, the more I wanted to run after her. But I did not. I had promised. My daddy had told me a promise was a powerful thing and a day might come when the keeping of a promise would be all I had of value. I realized that I was whispering, "I promise," over and over again and had to stop myself.

Then I heard a rustling. I stared at the blackness where the door stood and willed it to stay closed. But it opened, and my mother was standing there. I blinked at her and Clara began to cry. My mother shushed her and grabbed her and said, "Come on."

I took Maria's hand and looked down at her. She was putting on her brave face again. I remember I was angry with her for doing that. Why could she only have a brave face when mother was there, but when she was not, I had to have the brave face for all three of us? Right off, I was sorry to have thought that. I don't know why I should still be sorry for it, because she never knew of it.

My mother paused at the door to the outside, looked back at me, and said, "Stay close. Stay quiet," and opened the door. The dull light hurt my eyes. Then we were running. We circled around a blackened swimming pool to the back of the lot and through a section of a chain link fence that had been cut open. The clouds had thickened and the wind impelled them, sinister and fuming, toward us. We ran along a path by the river and I heard shouts and fighting from the direction of the court building. The wind bore trash along, and the larger pieces of it stuck tight to the trunks of the bare trees. We had to cross an open lot before we got to the bridge that would take us out of that town, and as we ran I looked back.

Down an alleyway along my jiggling line of sight, I saw the others had taken that green backpack from the big man and were killing him with their clubs and knives. I saw the big man was not easily killed. I thought the green and filthy backpack shifted and rocked independent of the man who held it. I heard the small cry of a baby. Then we were over the bridge and into the trees to hide until dark.

A few months after that day, I lay in sodden leaves under a fallen tree and held my sisters' hands and watched my mother play the decoy. She did not run far. I was glad those men drug her away so that we did not have to see what they would do because there was no one but me to tell us not to watch. She did not look back to where we lay. I never did look for her like I had told her I would because I knew we could not help her, nor her us.

We could find no food. We chewed the bark from trees. Once we ate four baby mice we plucked from their nest of trash. The mother skittered away so fast I could not catch her. We avoided all men. Clara weakened and shrank, and I saw no women, kind-faced or otherwise. When Clara died, Maria and I tried to bury her but we could not dig the hole with our hands or with sticks. Instead, we covered her with a great mound of leaves and left her in the grove where we'd slept. Not long after that, I woke up in the dark and Maria was cold lying next to me under our blankets. I did not cover her with leaves. I left her there under our thickest patchwork blanket. I wandered down the road and no longer cared who might see me.

That is how your mother found me, those many years ago, and brought me here to live where the men are kind, and there is food to eat. Now you are my little sisters. Now, all of you go to sleep. And remember your promise. Do not tell your mother these things that I have told to you. A promise is a powerful thing.

Drinking Summers

Whiskey Sours in damp adolescent hands
and fifty-cent banana popsicles, trailing
slick lines of sweetness down our brown arms.
Faded blue jeans cut
into Daisy Dukes and the sharp bark
of the screen door as we ran in and out,
in and outside.

Our mothers pushed sunscreen like
they pushed religion,
and the boys stood outside
our windows in the heavy night, smoking the cheap cigs
they stole from their fathers.

We'd follow them to the river
but always keep our shirts on,
embarrassed by our newly budding bodies.
But the boys would strip naked
and dive, long and lean,
into the sweet tea of that southern river,
calling to each other in half-broken altos.

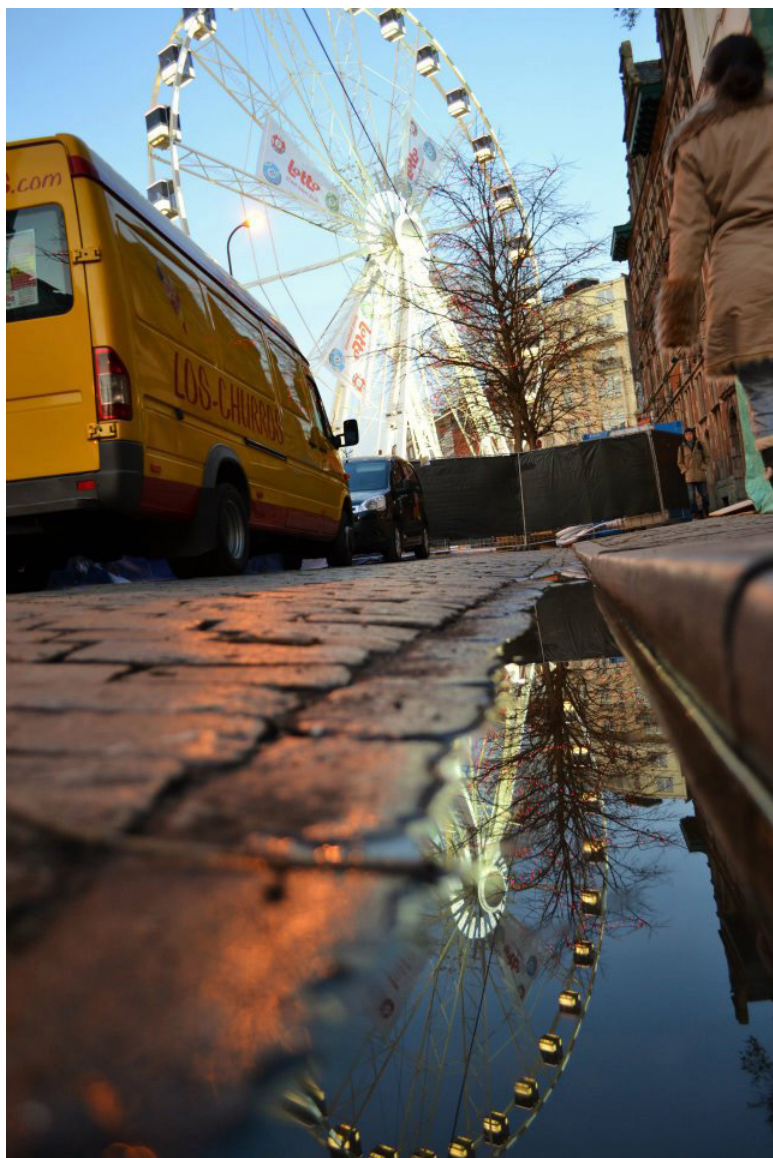
As the sun rose, our skin dried tight and saccharine
and we would loll together on the bristled grass
like spit-out hard candies, abandoned butterscotch
on dampened riverbanks,
until morning broke the clammy quiet

and we would sway home
lust-drunk and syrupy.

Our mothers would wake us up
with bony fingers, prodding
our river-sweat skin,
hissing where were you?
And the boys wouldn't look
at any of us
the next day.

Mireya Martinez

Belgium Christmas Market, Dec. 2011



Digital photography

Tracy Eastman

American Traditional



Etching

Lauren Borgholthaus

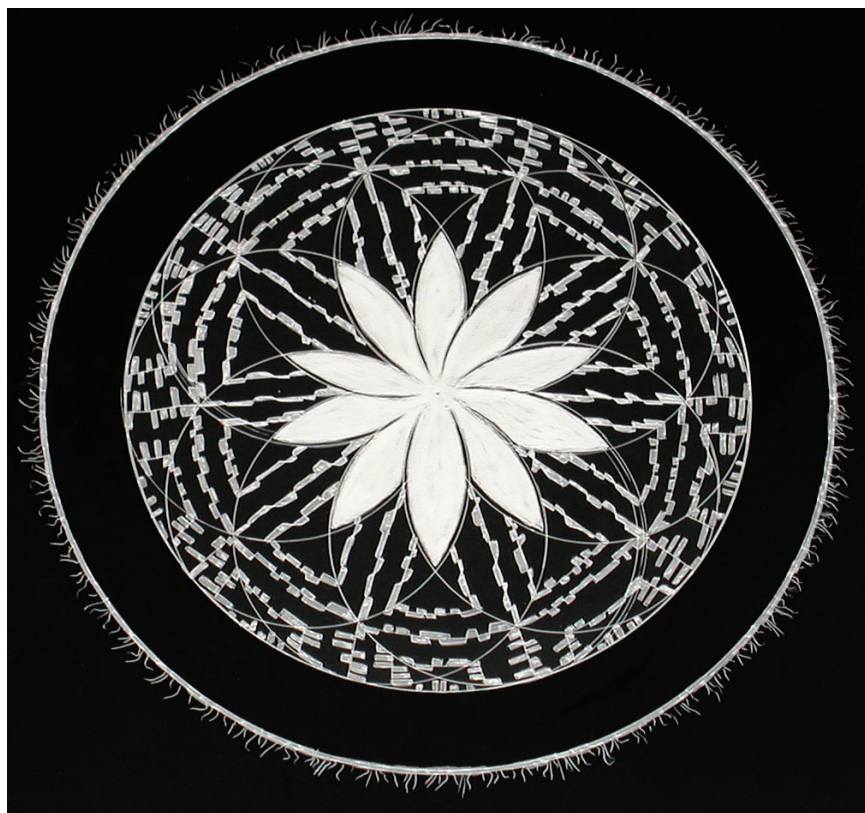
Bathmophobia II



Acrylic on canvas

Glenn Konklin

Mandala Number 1



Clayboard

Stacey Barker

In the Beginning



Intaglio print

Kami Spence

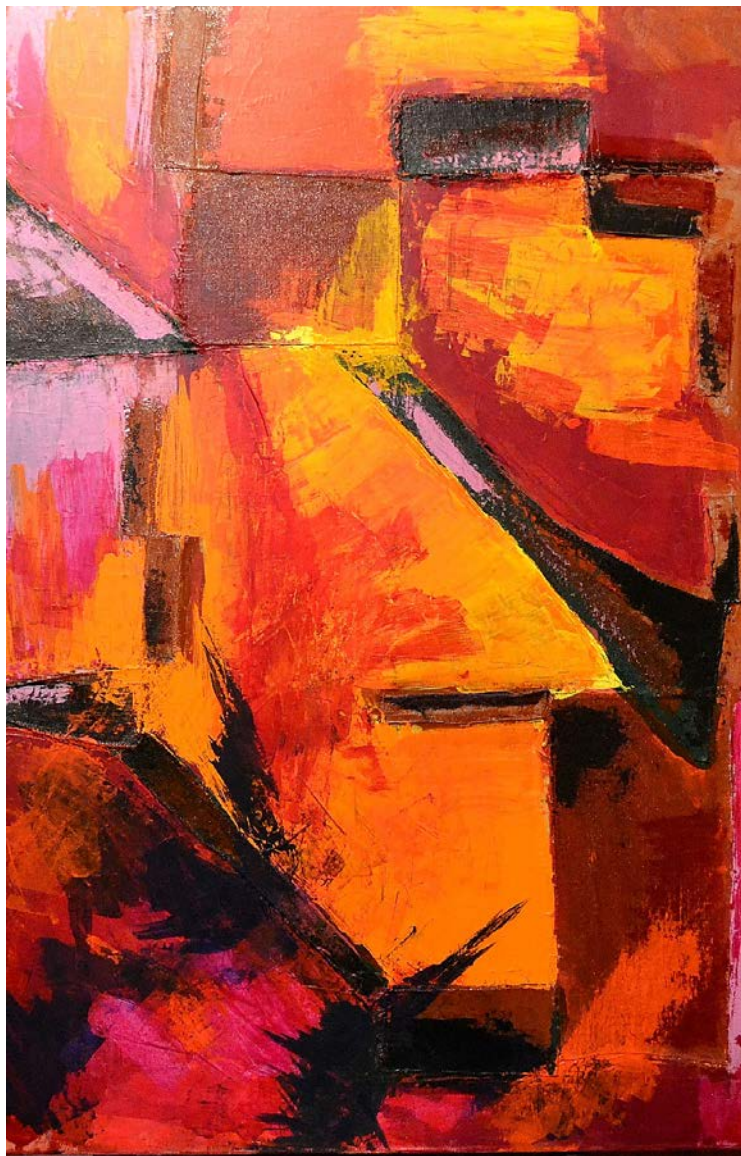
Swallowing the Sun



Digital photography

Stacey Barker

Sunset in Sedona



Acrylic

Tracy Eastman

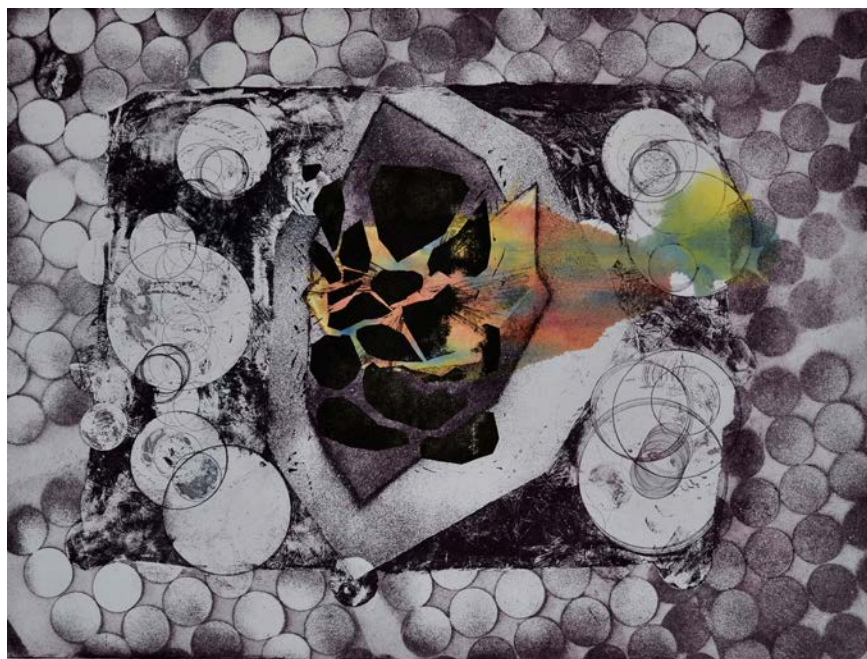
The King of I



Screen print

Stacey Barker

The Return of Mankind



Monoprint

Lori A. McPherson

Submerged 1



Trace mono-type print

Fermi's Paradox

At a thousand miles per hour,
dizzy telescopes have a shoot
out shouting out single sound
signals a second; incoming: a
calling card from Sol, cosmic
capsules packed with teenage
texts and classy compositions
representing the best we have
to offer, but no one will listen
as it passes by Polaris, Gliese
581 A, B, and C, and Messier
13 - the list goes on - because
they know what to expect: all
we will do is ask them where
they are and where they have
been and if they will bring us
souvenirs next time they visit.

Like Mother, Like Daughter

It was white: his four-door Dodge pickup—reflecting the same untainted color as his polo shirt and piano key-straight teeth. Jovi had waited in the parking lot of her apartment building, no sense in making him hike the three floors to her front door. She imagined chivalry as dying, not quite dead, just being smothered under someone's pillow, somewhere. He opened the door for her. Her knees breezed each other in preparation for the modest half slide/half hop that comes with pencil skirts, pumps, and getting into trucks. This move she thought she had mastered from the many years of idolizing Audrey Hepburn and heaving herself into her father's six-inch lifted pickup. But the angle her slight hips needed to take was lower than expected and her face almost came into full contact with the grayness of cool leather interior. It was clean, giving off subtle notes of Windex and pine tree air fresheners. The floor was clear of the anticipated 7-11 debris, and lines indented the mat-covered floor. The kind that result from compulsive vacuuming. She quickly straightened up and pulled down the visor mirror. Her fingers twitched as she tugged at her paper bag-colored curls and tried to imagine what she'd look like as a redhead. As the boy effortlessly slid into the driver's seat, his shoulders dominating the space offered by the back rest, suppressed memories of Molly Ringwald rushed at her, and she wondered if this was how Sam felt in *Sixteen Candles*.

• • •

Jovi and her father used to drink Slurpees together. Her father would ask about crushes while he plucked gray hairs out of his blond mustache. After a long list of hair styles, Nike shoes, and the smile descriptions that compose little girl infatuations, he replied,

as would her ninth grade best friend and high school gym teacher, with the same line, “You know . . . boys are only after one thing,” a line that, post-high school, would be blamed for the nonexistence of relationships and many early nights of solo masturbation. But at fourteen, she still fantasized about dirty dancing with Patrick Swayze and the worries of her father delivered on long car rides seemed a long ways off. Instead, her ears turned to the radio waiting for the twang of a ukulele, Van Morrison’s voice, and the words of “Brown Eyed Girl” to bounce through the speakers, making her father promise with every “la la la la” that this would be the Daddy-Daughter Dance at her wedding. Her father’s lips curved in a quarter-side smile, the type of smile which results from pity and mouthing a pinch of dip, showing only a bottom line of tobacco stained teeth.

• • •

They didn’t have a wedding—her parents. Not a real one at least. Rather, they had a four year engagement and two bastard children. Jovi’s father had proposed on one knee in her mother’s office with grocery store roses and ¼ carat diamond ring. She liked to imagine him a blond Humphrey Bogart, spotlighted in contrast to a dark cubicle noir scene. Her mother murmured a yes under her breath and the welling eyes of romantic coworkers. She then stowed the ring away in her desk filing cabinet, waiting. Waiting for a better job to come along, a better credit score, another unexpected pregnancy. Jovi’s mother didn’t wear white. She wore black, faded dress pants with her chestnut curls pulled back tight. They signed the papers on a Wednesday, not standing at an altar, but sitting in a stuffy, smoke-tarnished room of the city council building. Two close friends in Levi’s stood behind them as witnesses—no family.

• • •

Cross-legged in the passenger seat of the family SUV, Jovi

flipped through CD cases and ate sunflower seeds. She'd switch one foot for the other, as the prickles that come with lack of blood circulation emerged under her skin. Each time, Jovi noticed her newly brushed pink toes. The flecked paint job seemed to resemble a pedicure given by a five-year-old. Suddenly her chest filled, she hated herself and longed for socks. Behind the wheel, her mother's face stared forward toward the oncoming road, two fingers rested lightly on the bottom of the circle as she reached for her plastic cup of watered-down coffee.

"Have you ever loved him?" Jovi asked, turning her whisper toward her mother. The slight bend in her mother's neck and comfortable fixture of her mother's face atop her stern body made Jovi wonder if she was physically capable of seeing in any direction other than forward.

"It was either marry your father or have an abortion." Her mother's matter-of-fact words slapped the dashboard, so sharply they could have left letter indentations in the smooth black vinyl. The words of Rod Stewart's "Maggie May" trembled through the speakers, creating a soft undercurrent for the heavy syllables. Jovi didn't speak, and her mother's voice lingered, vibrating between guitar solos.

• • •

They danced once in the kitchen. Their toes glided across the squares of flowered linoleum. Their hips touched and swayed, together—more together than they had ever been. Their hands clasped and they'd pull away from each other only to be pulled back with greater force. Jovi sat on the counter and banged her fork to her spaghetti bowl, trying to keep the beats of their rhythm. They looked like a couple from the *American Bandstand* reruns she watched when she couldn't sleep. Some band that Jovi didn't recognize threw saxophones and jazz from the TV to the background of her

parents' silhouette. Her father's hands moved effortlessly to spin her mother's figure. It was the first time Jovi's mother had ever appeared weightless.

• • •

Jovi always had to climb, holding on to the door frame and reaching for the handle extended from the ceiling, to be seated in her father's lifted, Bronco-blue Chevy. Heaving herself into the front seat, her feet kicked at Slurpee cups and Copenhagen cans that lined the floor. Once in the truck, she heard the automatic doors lock, a habit of her father's since a five-year-old experience of hard right turns and Jovi's passenger door flying open. Regardless, she didn't reach for her seat belt. Instead, she rolled the windows down and turned up their favorite classic rock station. Before "Tainted Love" even finished, a large rough hand with cracked dry knuckles turned the black knob hard to the left. Her father's unexpected words cut the silence:

"Never fuck a boy on the first date."

• • •

The boy had taken Jovi to dinner, an attempt at the archaic exchange of food for sex. They parked, once again in front of her run-down apartment building. She had made out often in cars. Multiple doors made for an effortless escape, and the stick shifts and cup holders kept the action from sliding anywhere close to third base. She recalled scenes from *American Graffiti* and doubted seriously that anyone could have sex in a car. Her fingertips swept the polyester of his white polo; she could feel the rippled body underneath the woven fabric and became conscious of her fingers smudging its whiteness. Jovi worried about birth control and felt like a slightly cheaper version of Esther Greenwood. They moved to the back seat, entangling legs and coming close to banging heads. Jovi was impressed at the space the back of the cab provided, and as the boy kissed her thighs and

pushed up her pencil skirt, she didn't doubt it was something her father would appreciate.

Jovi was grateful for her pencil skirt that night and its versatility; maybe Audrey had felt the same way. She didn't have to rummage around the back seat for strewn clothing. She made her exit quietly without a goodnight kiss or plans to meet up again. It had hurt more than she expected, and the time she had spent in the mirror practicing an orgasm face had proven worthless. She counted the steps of every level to the third floor, trying to keep her mind off her aching hips that had nearly been crushed in the back seat transaction. She walked into her one-bedroom apartment. The princess clock that her mother had bought for her at age six blinked 11:58 from her milk-crate side table. Immediately, images of Julia Roberts and *Pretty Woman* flashed in her head—Home before midnight, exactly the same as “Cinder-fucking-rella.”

Grave Children

See the child grown. Lonely,
in a pasture empty. He wavers.
He wears his snowman sweater,

not warm, itchy. He knows the cold
is gnawing past his edges but he doesn't feel
that. The anger sometimes ambushes him

while he stands shivering to breathe lilacs
on the almost summer lawn where she is
buried—untouchable—fifty feet below.

He knows what the cold does. Shrunken scrotum,
sticking eyelashes, nose froze in snot-sicles.
He should go. Nothing here to hold but memory.

And on January's squeaking snow
memory's mouth ch-ch-chatters, shatters teeth.

• • •

They told him, "She has gone. Don't worry."
Lethal, like Martin Riggs you'll see her again.
Later—much later. For now stand and suffer

the little children to come unto you.
Their memories like road-squirrels' bellies
squashed by fatly pulsing vacancies.

Cracking bone. Oozing marrow.
When you forget, the absence blind-sides you.
Better to remember then, and smile silly.

Tamp down your erupting rage.
Swallow that curdled milk of malice.
Her aspect now an emptiness. Death is distance,

and a nice shearing will strip away scratchy sweaters,
exposing the poorly mended wounds of these—
witnesses, of lambs led to slaughter.

And most can't recall—nor would they say
what arose expired in fields of winter gray.

Ford Swetnam Poetry Prize Winner

This year's poetry contest judge, Susan Swetnam, is a professor of English at ISU and the wife of poet Ford Swetnam, who endowed this prize. Her creative nonfiction has appeared in many national magazines, regional little magazines, and anthologies. She is the author of six books.

She writes about the winning selection:

"Blooming" is a poem that manages to be at once powerful and beautiful. It's distinguished technically by the tensile strength of its lines and the powerful flow of its enjambment; by the metaphors, imagery, and allusions that unify it; and by its lovely closure. The poet knows how to leave gaps for the reader, how to create a complex narrator. This is an elegant, deeply moving poem that richly deserves the Ford Swetnam Poetry Prize.

Blooming

I stand, slanted, bare feet
press uneven on
squared squares of
black and white tile, leaning
against the bathroom sink
I wait for the magic wand
to whisper its first word
faced to wait. One or
the other, either or
in precession
sex sex sex

I wonder how many women
denied themselves daughters?
If Ophelia felt it at conception
or forward six weeks
to fingernails, scratching
the insides of open flowers.
Her mouth mouthing
Rosemary, Pansy, and Rue.

The lilies of the field so
beautiful in between, even
before Georgia O'Keeffe
picked her brush to speak her
Aquilegia vulgaris, spreading
petals so small into

a bitch-slap, spelled
in hard yellow.

He came, standing out
on the porch. At the point
where language falls away
from hot bones, hot legs,
legs spread, power stance.
His stance became a mouth.
Hands knotted like fennel root into
fists shoved inside silk pockets
of a black leather jacket
embracing his broad shoulders,
seeding, sunk, so full
of shame.

Ophelia knew, even unwritten
a poem is not a child, a child
is never a poem, unplanned
and inked lines
on a face of a soon to be
still unwed mother.
Was Hamlet good in bed?
That Great Dane, that
Fine Fuck, doggy style.
Don't worry, you'll keep
your virgin rites.
Your unvirgin suicide.

Pressed flowers fall from

books penned by the unmothering Virginia
Woolf. Did she feel the lack of,
held down in the River Ouse?
Its violent violet blues.
She was the Viola Tricolor,
smothered. No room to conceive
In between and amongst the sheets
of paper.

However,
a word after a word after
a word is power says
Maggie Atwood, believing
we can birth both or abort either.
Poor Ophelia, *Bellis perennis*.
Would Judith have written you different
on account of your madness
Redon will paint you and your Rue,
stroke by stroke, countlessly
and with purpose you'll slip
again into something pretty.

Him and Me,
we strangled words
on top and underneath
satin sheets. Thighs tied
together closed inside rooms
budding. The birds and the bees.
Tops of fingertips touching
the width of his back

the blues and the pink
lines or plus signs.
We were never really
beautiful, just
blooming.

Strangers in Rows

BR&S Prose Contest Winner

The call meant that he was coming home. A call over the intercom meant it was safe to unbuckle your seat belts and move about the cabin.

The small, blonde elderly woman had just finally fallen asleep, so Guy reached up over her to turn off the cold air that was blowing on his shaved head. The cold air should be a refreshing change from the Kuwait sun that had been beating so ruthlessly on his naked head for months, but it wasn't. After all the hours spent on planes, the air had dried out his eyes.

The call had been the first he'd received after leaving the states after boot camp. The only other call he received was from his younger brother, Ricky. The boys were only sixteen months apart, but Guy was five inches taller and almost a half of a person broader. Manlier. During their call, he pictured his brother's small frame, his soft blue eyes not looking up from the cracked lines of their father's old wooden floor, his soft hand turning white from gripping the phone and even then, somehow, he knew that the "take care" quietly coming over the speaker meant that the two of them would never see each other again.

He couldn't believe the number of people that left on their reading lights during red-eye flights. Who would possibly want to read a magazine at 2 AM? In the light, he could see the outline of twenty or thirty heads, some stooped over or resting to the side, but all of them bobbing in sync to turbulence. Up and down. Up and down. Would

you like a beverage, sir? He wanted whiskey but took a Coke instead. The whiskey could make him drowsy enough to sleep, and he couldn't dream in front of all these people, knowing that the other sides of the backs of their heads held eyes that would turn and stare. Because maybe he did have nightmares. Maybe he did have things to hide. Die. Die. Die.

The flight attendant was beautiful. She had heavy makeup around her light eyes. He imagined himself sleeping with her. He had been laid while in the army, but not to anything beautiful. Her name was Private Sarah Guthrie. Her face could have been anyone's, but he remembered her running her fingers over the divots and pit marks on his uneven scalp and over the scar on his forehead. Her fingers were small and cold and he felt everywhere they went, tracing and scouting. As he came, she grabbed his head with both hands as he moved up and down inside her. He thought about those hands when he saw her in formation the day after. It was only the back of her hands he recognized. It could have been anyone's head since her hair was tucked up tight inside her cap, but it was definitely her hands.

Outside the aircraft was flawless October gray, and they were flying thirty thousand feet somewhere over New York and just a few hours away from Kansas City where Guy would rent a car and drive an hour to Tuckersville, past the old market and the church house, past the O'Reiley's and the Henry's places, past the rope swing and stretch of forest where he and Ricky used to play war, past the rows and rows of white stone at the cemetery until he reached the house he grew up in. The one his father still occupied where he would be waiting for him in his worn blue chair. The chair where he would have picked up the phone to reach Guy on another continent. As he told him, his

father may have held his head in his hands or stared out the window or wrung his hands but most likely didn't cry.

The rules of war were simple. If a BB hit you and left a welt, you lost. It didn't matter the scenario—Guy always ended up chasing Ricky to the end of the trees, Ricky's blond head moving up and down while his face would occasionally turn around to search for his brother's face. It was probably fun, but Guy could only remember Ricky's face pleading, his blond head ducking under branches, Guy aiming as if he were shooting a buck. He would pump through the forest, gun ready, over rocky holes and stumps. Their small feet would pound the dirt, tracing hard circles around trees, bobbing and swaying, drawing a map over the uneven ground. They would reach the end of the trees where Guy would shoot for the victory. A BB would fly through the gray air and land somewhere soft, like a naked calf or the back of his arm, and Ricky would go down. Guy would catch up to him, and while he was lying on his back in surrender, Guy would put a foot and the nose of his gun to Ricky's chest and say Die.

Over the intercom, a voice says to stay in your seats. A thousand miles away, a voice yells over sand and gunshots to stay down. Some days before, a voice told Guy he had a call from his father, and over the scratchy line, he heard there had been some rough weather.

As an adult, Guy thought he might have earned the right to put his coat where he wanted. He could put it across his lap if he wanted or under his feet or beneath his head, but the beautiful flight attendant reached out her polished hand and told him it had to be stowed for take off. He was told where to put his belongings.

He was told where things didn't belong. Sit still. Face forward. Stand here. Come when I call you. Do as you're told. Look away. Turn your back. Walk away. It's Ricky's fault. Don't protect him. Mind your own goddamn business. He needs it. Pussy. Baby. Girl. I'll beat it out of him. And the rules of war say that even though it's your brother dying right in front of you, there is some small part inside your head that says at least it wasn't me.

Guy was behind twenty heads on an airplane to Kansas City. The heads' details were concealed by the dim lighting or hair or a hood with all their divots hidden inside somewhere where fingers couldn't reach to study them. All their small bumps and holes hidden under cloth and hair and skin. Maybe hidden in the same secret place where Ricky's testicles were tucked away with pubic hair and his Adam's apple. And if his manhood weren't so cruel, it would have showed itself and given him a fighting chance. What the rules of war don't tell you is that sometimes faulty equipment means the end of a life. Freak. It. Sideshow. You're no son of mine. And finally, unforgivingly, Ricky had to surrender. Die.

What Guy's father would never say is that it really wasn't Ricky's own bullet that ended it, but that it was over so long ago that no one could have said when it began. What the call said was your brother off and shot himself so you better come home. What the voice said was please put your trays in the upright and locked position because it's over. And what the rules of war don't say is that you can even lose a brother at home.

What the rules of war don't say is maybe all those heads marching beside you aren't really your brothers. And maybe you

should care as much about them as you do the heads under the reading lights at 2 AM on a flight to Kansas City. And maybe alive those empty faceless heads will mean as much to you sitting on an airplane as they will lying in a cemetery. What the rules don't say is that the rules are fucking unfair. But maybe a voice tells you that you landed and made it and you can be grateful that someone held your head in their cold fingers one time if even just for a moment.

Contributors' Notes

Stacey Barker is an artist with a passion for creating work through painting and printmaking. He loves spending time in the outdoors with his fiancée Christina and their two dogs, Marley and Obi. Stacey will graduate this December with a Bachelor of Fine Arts.

Lauren Borgholthaus is originally from Pocatello, where she presently resides with her husband while attending ISU. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in art with a minor in art history and an emphasis in painting. She plans to graduate in May 2013.

Trent Clegg has been a part of the music community at ISU and in Pocatello for many years as a singer, actor, and collaborative pianist. He received a Bachelor of Music degree in vocal performance from ISU in 2007.

Emma Doupé is a student of Dr. Diana Livingston Friedley and a member of ISU's elite Chamber Choir. Last spring she was featured as the witch in ISU's performance of *Into the Woods*, and was also the vocal winner of the Idaho Federation Competition. She serves as an ASISU senator for the College of Arts and Letters.

Tracy Eastman is currently seeking a Bachelor in Fine Arts. After graduation he plans to pursue a Master of Fine Arts. In addition to being a full-time student, he is also a husband and father, and works full time as a body modification specialist. More of his work is available at tracyeastman.com.

Rachel Hammes is an English major at ISU with an emphasis in creative writing. After five years of university schooling—with an unfortunately lengthy stint as an art major—she is preparing to graduate. Future plans include a law degree and dreams of recreational reading.

Natalie Homer's poetry and short stories are featured or forthcoming in various trash cans and recycling bins across the Snake River Plain. She has too many cats, too few matching socks, and just the right amount of movie quote knowledge.

Taylor Kensel is a senior at ISU and will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in English, with an emphasis in creative writing, and a minor in anthropology.

Glenn Konklin is a self-taught artist and has always been interested in the power of basic shapes. “Mandala Number 1” is the first of a series of nine mandalas representing the numbers 1-9. Number 1 represents how he perceives that number in a radial format. More of Glenn's work can be found at his website, alientreehouse.com.

Mireya Martinez spent the Fall 2011 semester studying abroad in Valencia, Spain. During the Christmas season, she was invited to visit the fabulous capital of the European Union: Brussels, Belgium. She will never forget the smell of the city or her time there.

Lori A. McPherson is from New England, and her work has its roots in the ocean she grew up next to. She attended the University of Denver and became a Westerner, but she has never lost her yearning for the ocean. She has a Master of Arts degree in art education and is

now at ISU in the Master of Fine Arts program.

Drue Ngauamo is currently in the last few arduous steps of the collegiate climb, with only two more semesters remaining prior to graduating from the College of Education. After graduating, she will embark on the much-anticipated, and fulfilling, career of being a high school English teacher.

Mike Nichols is an undergraduate at ISU, nearing completion of his Bachelor of Arts in English (emphasis in creative writing). He hails from Idaho Falls where he lives, and he works at a bookstore (of course), indulging his lust for fiction and poetry. Some of Mike's first fiction may be found at undergroundvoices.com and bewilderingstories.com.

Patrick Perry has been studying English at ISU for what feels like a century. He loves to write poetry and is always hopeful that his poems may inspire others to think about the unknown and the “what-ifs” in life—as he likes to do.

Kelly V. Ricken has been teaching in the Department of English and Philosophy for four years now, and has just begun her PhD studies. Her writing has been published in *The Columbus Dispatch*, *The Idaho State Journal*, and *Black Rock & Sage*. She is a die-hard Minnesota Vikings fan and hopes to meet Jared Allen one day (shameless plea!).

Kami Spence is an avid hiker, and thus much of her photography is of what she finds along the way. Needless to say, her hikes end up being half photography and half actual hiking. Much of her photography also comes from her travels to Central and South

America, as well as outdoor adventure trips she has taken. She will do whatever it takes to get the shot she's looking for, which can put her in precarious positions at times.

Michon Vanderpoel is from Salt Lake City but came to ISU through the guidance of some amazing professors. She is a creative writing major. She loves shoes, her dog Franklin, and trips to the grocery store. She is graduating.

Kaity Williams did most of her growing up in Chester, Idaho, and moved to Pocatello in 2009. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. When she is not at school or work, she is spending time with her husband, two dogs, and beautiful red-headed toddler.

Colophon

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